

# MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

A quarterly journal dealing mainly  
with the divine life and sayings of  
Sri Anandamayi Ma

---

Vol.-2

October, 1998

No.4

---

## BOARD OF EDITORS

- Km. Chitra Ghosh
- Dr. Bithika Mukerji
- Dr. Krishna Banerjee
- Km. Guneeta

MANAGING EDITOR  
Sri Panu Brahmachari

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION (POSTAGE FREE)  
INLAND—RS. 60/-  
FOREIGN—US \$ 12/- OR RS. 400/-  
SINGLE COPY—RS. 20/-

## CONTENTS

1.	Matri Vani	...	1
2.	The Seed of Bliss —"Shobha"	...	3
3.	Conversation with Western devotees —Vijayananda	...	5
4.	From the diary of a European —Melita Maschmann	...	12
5.	The performance of Lilas in Sri Ma's presence —Dr. Bithika Mukerji	...	17
6.	I Love You, Always Forever ..... You are so Beautiful	...	20
7.	Incidents of Ma's Grace —Swami Bhagavatananda	...	21
8.	Forever Flowers —Devayani H. Desai	...	24
9.	Old Diary Leaves —Atmananda	...	25
10.	Impressions of Anandamayi Ma —Richard Lannoy	...	30
11.	Who is a Hindu : A viewpoint —Lt. Gen. J.C. Chatterji	...	33
12.	"A Bird on the Wing"	...	36



Ma during Navaratra Durga Puja with Sri Padmanava in her hands.

## MATRI-VANI

Moment means time, but not what you call time. Time (*samaya*) means *Sva-Maya*, the state where everything is seen as the Self alone, where nothing whatsoever can exist beside the Self.

\*

\*

\*

By doing work for its own sake is engaging in *Karmayoga*. As long as a desire to distinguish one is lurking, it is *Karmavoga* (working for one's own satisfaction). One does the work and enjoys its fruit, because of the sense of prestige it brings; whereas, by relinquishing the fruit, it becomes *Karmayoga*.

\*

\*

\*

Merely to assume the robes of a sadhu while the spirit of renunciation is lacking will not do. Taking *samnyasa* and becoming a *samnyasi* spontaneously are certainly not one and the same thing.

How can one be a human being without fortitude? To attain to Truth one has to endure all hardships, ever abiding in patience. It is the obstacle that gives birth to patience.

\*

\*

\*

Learn by heart hymns and verses in praise of God and repeat them whilest you move about. Never allow your mind to be idle. Keep engaged in the repetition of a mantra of God's name, of sacred hymns and the like, or else in pure Remembrance.

\*

\*

\*

When you have surrendered yourself to the Guru, he may do anything, subject you to no matter what trials, yet you still regard yourself as a tool in His hands. You will then have reached a stage, where in spite of all difficulties, you persist with the work, knowing it to be the Guru's order. Keep in mind that by this attitude you will grow steady in endurance, patience and perseverance, and your energy and capacity will be enhanced.

\*

\*

\*

**Let His Name be ever with you; imperceptibly, relentlessly. Time is creeping away.**

\*

\*

\*

**A man's belief is greatly influenced by his environment. Therefore choose the company of the holy and the wise.**

\*

\*

\*

**Belief means to believe in ones' own Self, disbelief means to mistake the non-self for one's Self.**

\*

\*

\*

**I belong everywhere and to everybody! So this is my only request to you to make a place for me in your heart.**

## **THE SEED OF BLISS**

—"Shobha"

"Where God is not?" So says MA.....Assures, "As a child calls out for mother in despair, the mother comes running and picks the child in her lap."

These assurances of Shree Anandamayi Ma consoles, gives strength and hope to move forward and make this journey of life meaningful in the search of God-Realization. In the knowing of one's own self.

"To know oneself is to know God"! Constant awareness of Shree Ma's subtle presence helps in the awareness of one's conscious and spontaneous actions, thoughts, reaction and interaction with one's environment and situation of the present moment. This conscious awareness is not only confined to the waking environment but also pertains to the sleeping world of dreams. Is not the sleeping world as real as the waking world ?

"Have faith in this body. One day it will make you realize the Supreme Self. It is MA's Name only that dispels darkness from our lives, our momentary situations. The thought of MA, the pronouncement of HER Name, engulfs one with the fragrance of HER purity, joy, beauty, laughter and compassion. People come and go. The death of a beloved relation leaves us as a total wreck. Who then consoles ? Not even your own thoughts of consolation can console. As a desolate you hold HER Name to your heart just like a little crying baby suddenly stops crying no sooner the child is cuddled near the bosom of the mother. So does HER Name, HER shelter brings solace, enlightens the self and gently awakens the hurting spirits from the agony of despair and sorrow. SHE shows the path, guides to face the truth of our own situation, our own environment. Helps us to deal with the reality of one's own self.

"You feel lonely because you have kept GOD away from your life". The frightening silence of loneliness can only turn into the calmness of solitude when we constantly engage ourselves in the activity of MA's Kriya. Being involved with HER Kriya is being constantly involved with the Supreme. I question myself so often time and time again. Can any one heal or give joy to our within as MA gives ? None ! HER words spoken in the midst of laughter or in the gravity of depth all have a significant meaning in our lives some time or other. We have not seen GOD but we have seen HER. HER nearness, HER thoughts have never made us lonely but have made us enjoy the bliss of Solitude.

"This body is never away from you. It is always with you. You answer Pitaji when your name is called. Will God not answer when called ?" So assures MA. The yearning of being with Shree MA's saints and sages, being in the midst of HER ashram, breathing in the environment of HER satsang many a times grips the mind and heart to great intensity. This intensity only dissolves into the melody of HER aroma when one hears HER assurance in the midst of one's heart ..... "This body is never away from you ....." Oh MA! The Celestial Being. The comforter of despair, the remover of darkness. So simple, so beautiful are your ways to lead us to know our own self.

"God has given you these hands to perform the worship. The eyes are there to see the vision, the ears to hear the praise of the Lord, the feet to do rounds of the temples (pradakshina), the mouth to sing the praises. You have been granted with all the tools of God-Realization. Still you complain." Praise, O Praise to the glory of Shree Shree Anandamayi MA! There is no help beyond this point for us for our complaints.

"Serve your children as Gopal; your husband as Narayana." Ma consoles the householders who cry in despair that they get no time to do sadhana as the chores of household take all their time. Serving becomes a sadhana and tapas when conducted with this aforesaid attitude. How many a times my tired spirits and irritation has found consolation in these words of wisdom. The Name of MA is Blissful-Joy. Once a devotee of MA was narrating her experiences of having darshan of Shree MA on different different occasion, to one of the most elite Brahmacharis of Shree MA's order. "What happened then ?" was the question of Swamiji. The devotee had no answer. The answer to Swamiji's question always laid dormant in my within. To-day engulfed in the vision and aroma of HER thoughts I managed to express in parts what happens when the hymn of HER NAME constantly chimes in the environment of one's being. This environment of joy, peace, calmness, harmony can only blossom when the Seed of HER Name is well implanted in the soil of one's within. Hear my prayer O' my Lord. May my thoughts gently touch the Lotus Feet of Shree Ma.

## CONVERSATION WITH WESTERN DEVOTEES

(Two)

—Vijayananda

Q. What can the guru give, some techniques or a power?

V: The guru gives a power, he can facilitate the awakening of Kundalini, but that is just one stage of sadhana. He cannot give us realisation, but he can help remove the obstacles which veil this realisation already present in us.

Q. What is the meaning of surrendering to the guru?

V: With Ma, I used to always answer immediately any of her suggestions. If we did that, we could be freed from certain consequences of our previous acts. If we did not obey Ma would say, 'Yes, it's OK, do as you like,' but at that time we became subjected to the karmic consequences of our actions. There was in fact no question of obedience towards Ma, since obedience implies more or less fear. I felt love, veneration towards Ma, never fear; because of that, I could follow her practical advice, even if it was not really adapted to the situation, from time to time, for she had not very well visualised it. However, I never surrendered to her my freedom of mind. The 'surrender of the mind' was not for me. What was looking for in Ma was a direct transmission of power to help me in my sadhana and she gave it to me in abundance.

Q. Some only see in Vedanta dry intellectualism. In which way are Vedanta and love tied together?

V: It is a problem which has often been associated with those who practice exclusively the path of Knowledge. In this path, the intellectual element is utilised as much as possible by practising discrimination between what is transitory and what is real, by observing the mind and returning to its source, our I, and also by the quest for 'Who am I?', as the great sage Ramana Maharshi used to teach it. But limiting oneself only to the intellectual element is false Vedanta. It is trying to fly with only one wing; one needs two wings to fly, and the second wing is the emotional element which is bhakti.



The practitioner of Vedanta usually does not adore a personal God, although there is no interdiction to do so.

**Q.** We could easily interpret certain words of Ma as if nothing had to be done. Is this a balanced vision of her teachings ?

**V:** The teachings of a sadguru are not authoritarian teachings; they are adapted to each individual, to his intellectual level and his spiritual development, and even for a given individual, the teaching offered by the sage will vary along with the disciple's progression on the spiritual ladder. Most often, the words of the sage are like road signs on the way. These signs are useful, not to say vital for those who are travelling on that road; but distributing leaflets or copies of these indications will not be so useful.

Therefore, Ma's words should be placed back in the correct context. Otherwise, they could seem contradictory. For example, to some individuals, she would advice to renounce the world; to others, she recommended to live a householder's life. All that depended of the level of the individual who asked the question. It is true that in the end, there is nothing to be done to reach the Supreme, since it is always there, present within us, but there are many things to be undone, that is to say the impurity, the complexes, the false beliefs which hide the Real. 'To do nothing' right away for an ordinary being is an impossible task; simply ask Mr. Such and Such to stay five minutes in a chair without moving any finger, and not even the eyes. And I do not even mention the incapacity to stop the flow of thoughts. Thus it is necessary to learn not to do anything, starting by efforts to slow down the movement, and that is what we call a sadhana which must finally lead us towards the perfect stage of Non-Action.

**Q.** It is said that Ma's path was that of purification, *vishuddha marga*; can you be more precise ?

**V:** Ma used to say that the path she was teaching was that indicated by the Rishis and the Munis of ancient times, that is to say the Sanatana Dharma, the classical path of India which was transmitted by the Vedas and the Upanishads.

That is also what we call *vishuddha marga*, the path of purification of the mind. The mind is the veil which masks the Real. This veil is made of three *gunas*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. When the *tamas* predominates, the veil becomes very thick. It is like black clouds

which mask completely the sky; the rajas is activity, frantic agitation, it is like the waves which prevent one to see the bottom of the lake; as for sattva, it is purity, a state of contentment, etc ..... the mind is not yet dissolved but the veil which masks it is transparent. The *vishuddha marga* consists in increasing the sattva guna while decreasing the rajas and the tamas. Sattva is purity. Purity starts with cleanliness of the body, that is a daily bath, and of the food: vegetarian food which is less spicy ..... and then follows the purity of the mind with the five *yamas* (rules) as they are told by Patanjali in the Yoga-sutra: brahmacharya, that is chastity; satya, (truth), asteya, (honesty), ahimsa (non-violence) and aparigraha (absence of greed). In addition to this, it is good to occupy the mind with divine thoughts, meditation, etc.....

When the mind is filled with the sattva guna and the rajas and the tamas have almost disappeared, it dissolves spontaneously into the Supreme.

- Q. What is the function of long solitary phases in the life of a sadhaka ?
- V. Complete solitude is good for an intensive sadhana, but it is temporary. For example, when you prepare an exam, you lock yourself up in your room until you have finished it, then you can go out. But complete solitude which is extended to very long period of time is not good. To cut yourself off from others and to close yourself off in your ivory tower, gives false realisation. You create a tension, and because of that you cannot find peace of mind. Wherever you might be, there are surroundings. Even in my hermitage in Dhaulchina, there were the cowboys, the visitors, village people : I was in very good terms with them. They considered me as a member of the family, We must always be in harmony with our surroundings, even if this only consists of trees or crows, that is very essential. We should try not to create a barrier made of conflicts. People at the ashram ask me if they must observe complete solitude, complete silence: I advice them against it. Of course, for those who are working, who are constantly surrounded by people who ask them hundreds of questions, who speak to them, that is a distraction, and it is better to stay away as much as possible.

**Q.** As we are observing Ma's centenary, how do you see the future of the ashrams and of the Sangha which have been established around her? How do you see the development of her teachings in India on one side, and in the West on the other side?

**V:** The organisation called 'Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha' is relatively new (around 1950) compared to the long established organisations like Ramakrishna Mission for example. As long as Ma was physically present, nothing was done without her consent and her advice or suggestions: she never gave orders. These suggestions were always obeyed without discussion by her close devotees and were accepted as coming from a divine source.

She had a series of temples constructed, at least one in each ashram. Since these temples must be taken care of daily without interruption by a qualified brahmin and as much as possible by a brahmachari belonging to the organisation, she has created in this way a solid infrastructure which ties the disciples to their ashram. This infrastructure is somehow the skeleton which gives its solidity to the organisation.

Since Ma left her body in August, 1982, the administration of the Sangha takes place according to democratic principles. That is to say that decisions are made by the Governing body according to the opinion of the majority of its members. This committee has forty two members of both sexes. Half of them are lay members, which are elected by secret ballot by the assembly of the Sangha. The other half of the body is made of the ascetic members, that is brahmacharis and monks of both sexes living in the ashrams. These are appointed, and not elected, by the Governing body. This Committee is now the supreme authority and its decisions cannot be revoked only in very special circumstances and with a complicated procedure.

For religious and spiritual questions, we have a Sadhu Committee, composed of nine members, recently augmented by two, chosen among the most eminent monks and brahmacharis of the organisation. This committee, however, does not have executive power. It presents its conclusions to the Governing Body which makes the final decisions.

From the financial point of view, the Sangha is firmly established, although its income comes mainly from donations. One can then say

that the Sangha is in good hands and that it will continue for a long time to function to spread the message of Ma.

Regarding the development of the teachings of Ma, it is wholly based on the ancient tradition of the Vedas and on Hinduism, or rather the sanatana dharma, the eternal religion, as Hindus call their own religion, in its traditional and orthodox aspects. The structure of the ashrams and temples creates a sort of fortress destined to protect these teachings. The culminating point of this teaching, its living centre, is Vedanta, and it is this part of sanatana dharma which is destined to Western disciples.

- Q. : Does not the attachment to the physical form of Ma constitute a veil shadowing the light that Ma gives us ?
- V. : The attachment to the physical form of a perfect sage or sadguru is very different from the one we can have for an ordinary being. The sadguru is called *jnana murti*, the embodiment of knowledge. His very form is in some way a crystallisation of the omnipresent consciousness-bliss. A relation of devotion to this form leads sooner or later to the omnipresent it stands for. For those who are capable to meditate directly on the omnipresent, the attachment to a form is not necessary. But to those who have experienced the wonderful love for the guru, the transition from personal to impersonal takes place very naturally. Personal love towards the guru will only disappear when there is a total fusion with what the guru symbolises. The love for the sadguru can never be erased. Ma herself used to say : 'Those who have loved this body (speaking of herself) even once will never be able to forget it, however hard they may try to eradicate it from their hearts.'
- Q. : You have said that what Ma would most like during this year of centenary would be for each one of his disciple to choose a *yama* and to agree to observe it perfectly during the whole year. Can you develop this point ?
- V. : The five *yamas* represent the first steps in astanga yoga, the yoga in eight steps as described by Patanjali in the yoga-sutras. These are the foundations of spiritual life. They are non-violence, truth, honesty (*asteya*), absence of avarice and chastity. These *yamas* lead to moral perfection because they must be observed all the way to the most

subtle level. For example, saying mean words to someone is an act of violence, or a simple expression on the face which tries consciously to hide truth can be considered as a subtle lie.

Patanjali states that, apart from the purification of the mind, the observation of each *yama* brings psychic powers. Then, if we observe truth perfectly for twelve years at least, we attain what is called *vak-siddhi*: each word we pronounce becomes true. If ahimsa, non-violence, is strictly observed, no one will be able to harm us and ferocious beasts will be like sheep in front of us. The five *yamas*, if perfectly observed, can by themselves lead to Realisation, because of the mental purification they produce. To Ma, the strict observance of these moral rules was very important, and I thought that if some of her close disciples could make the vow to observe perfectly at least one of these *yamas*, it would be the best proof of love and veneration one could give Ma for this centenary.

Q.: Do the five *yamas* make one, being interrelated ?

V. : The *yamas* are moral rules, of course, but they are part of the sattvic personality, that is to say a person whose mind is very sattvic will spontaneously follow the *yamas* without any effort. In this sense, they are related. Always telling the truth can bring a conflict with the vow of ahimsa, because certain truths may sometimes create a great deal of harm. In the Ordinances of Manu it is said that one should always tell the truth but it is better to refrain from talking, than to tell someone harsh words. Moreover, to be honest, to refrain from lying is necessary, since a dishonest person will automatically have to lie to hide his robbery. And stealing is harming someone, therefore it is an act of *himsa*.

Q. : In the last issue of 'Jai Ma' you said that the culmination of the teachings of Ma is Vedanta. Can You develop on this more specifically ?

V. : The teachings of Ma can be summarised in one sentence she often repeated : "To find Bhagavan (God)" is to find your own self, and to discover your own self is to find Bhagavan." That is to say, if you start your quest for the divine by the path of devotion, you will end by finding that this divine resides in your own heart, and that it is of the same nature as the omnipresent. If you start the quest with, "Who am

I ?" which is the path of knowledge, the divine will reveal itself as being your true nature. To reach this knowledge there are numerous paths, and that is what we call sadhana. And Ma used to guide each and every one on the path which was best suited to him or her. She did not impose a particular line of sadhana. But the final goal was the discovery of the fact that the individual soul is no different from the divine omnipresent. And that is the essence of Vedanta.

**Q. :** What is more or less the action of a sage ?

**V. :** Thousands of people came to meet sages like Ramana Maharshi or Ma Anandamayee with their personal problems. In their presence, all these problems were resolved, at least temporarily. The action of a sage is like a flash in darkness which allows you to take a photo of what lies inside you and to understand it exactly. There is no good or bad guru. There are only true gurus and those who are not. An artificial tree, made from paper, is not a tree. It does not have the good effects and vital force of a tree.

**Q. :** Did Ma easily give her time to visitors and disciples ?

**V. :** Once, after I had talked with Ma, I told her, "Now you can go and get some rest", and she answered, "but right now, I am already getting some rest."

## FROM THE DIARY OF A EUROPEAN

— Melita Maschmann

(Translated from German)

(VI)

Varanasi, November, 1963.

By the end of this week we are to go to Bombay. This must have become known to Mataji's devotees, for the rush of those who are asking for private interviews is growing from day to day. I cannot imagine how Mataji is able to cope with it. When I leave the Ashram late at night, so many are still waiting that she cannot possibly attend to them all, even if she does not rest for a minute. And when I arrive early morning, thirty or fifty are sitting there again.

Moreover, Mataji's health seems to be anything but stable. One should like to save her from exertion. But though there be a hundred people who are ready to put back their own wishes, there are still more demanding her attention. I do not believe that Mataji is immune against suffering, at least not against physical pain. Some people declare that she is—but so many things are said about her. Perhaps she does not suffer in the sense that no suffering can interrupt her consciousness of absolute Oneness with Supreme Reality. Once she told me : "There is only one evil, and that also is not real but an illusion of *māyā* : to be without God." Thus she is convinced that nobody and nothing can in point of fact be without God. Yet our ignorance makes us think that we are apart from Him and this is how we suffer from the only existing evil : presumed absence of God. This suffering Mataji certainly does not share with us. But we see her body grow older and some times in pain.

Today at *darśana* time Mataji was in an inward turned mood and did not speak. In such moods she appeals to me more than ever, which may possibly be due to the fact that I do not understand her language. Two *pūjārīs* were sitting near her, facing the temple and praying in an undertone. An old, tattered woman forced her way to the front and squatted on the floor close to Mataji. Although it was obvious that Mataji wanted to listen to the *pūjārī's* prayers, the old woman talked loudly to Mataji for nearly twenty minutes, gesticulating with hands and feet. It was

impossible for Mataji to move away even two inches and one could see that the complete lack of consideration on the part of the old woman was irksome to Mataji. Nevertheless she did nothing, or at least nothing effective to get rid of the intruder. She listened to her and smiled indulgently. A few times she raised her folded hands in supplication : Namaste, go now ! But the old woman showed no inclination to leave Mataji alone. Her voice became ever louder and livelier, and Mataji smiled with ever more kindness. The scene was annoying as well as moving and funny. Once Mataji's glance fell on me. It seemed to say : "Look, this is how they are—like children, are they not ? Thinking only of themselves. But one has to love them !"

On the two last evenings at Varanasi, one of the Swamis is good enough to reply to some of my questions. He is a learned man with a sense of humour and his piety does not prevent him from being friendly to everyone. He explains to me with a considerable display of scholarly erudition that why Mataji does not sleep the way we sleep. Her body, so he says, does of course rest, but her consciousness is ever fully awake. His argument was so complicated that I am unable to reproduce it. Consciousness here meant, not what we usually call consciousness, but rather a state of illumination. I wanted to know how this could be proved. The Swami related to me of a sceptic with whom he had a similar discussion a few years ago. On three successive nights the gentleman suddenly noiselessly approached Mataji's bed in order to find out how she was sleeping. Every time she would raise her head from apparently deep sleep and greet him with "Namaskar."

The second thesis of the Swami : Mataji is all-knowing. I ask : how ? Reply : Where the oneness of the *Ātman* and *Brahman* is realized, there is also the omniscience of the *Brahman*.

If Mataji is all-knowing, she must for instance be able to develop the formulae of the theory of Relativity ?

Mataji knows whatever she *wants* to know. I guess that those formulae belong to the things she does not care to know. Why should she ?

I am eager to have a proof for the declaration that some one who lives in our midst in a human body can be all-knowing ! The Swami says : "You might think of Christ. He is a good example. But I remember the following story : A Raja was sailing on the Ganges. At that time a famous mahatma lived on the banks of the



holy river. He was a very fat man who used to swim for hours. He liked to lie on his back in '*śavāsana*' (the so called 'dead pose') and let himself be driven by the current. One day the swimming mahatma passed close to the Raja's boat. The Raja was under the impression that it was necessary to save the 'drowning' man. With great difficulty the mahatma was dragged into the boat. It amused him to play the role of a drowning person until he felt the planks under his feet. Then he jumped up and laughed. The Raja liked the joke and made friends with the mahatma. He showed him his costly, jewel-beset sword, which the mahatma cold-bloodedly threw into the river. When the Raja screamed with rage, the mahatma dived into the water and soon returned with two swords minutely resembling one another. "Which of them is yours ?" he asked. But the Raja was unable to recognize his own sword. "Here", said the mahatma laughing, do you see this tiny fissure ? Ask your armourer ! This is your sword."

So far the story. The interesting thing is that it was related to me to prove the Swami's thesis of the omniscience of an Enlightened Being.

I questioned the Swami about the traditional paths to Enlightenment and he explained to me the various types of *yoga*. A remark by the way : It usually happens that persons who set out on their spiritual pilgrimage under the guidance of a Master or Saint, first of all have the impression of getting worse ethically instead of improving. This experience is a necessary part of the process of their inner purification.

In connection with *bhakti yoga* the Swami tells me the following story : 'A King was being tyrannized by a powerful poisonous snake. When finally he despaired of being able to defend himself, he appealed to Sri Krishna for help. Sri Krishna stepped on the snake and trod about on it so violently that it very nearly swooned away. But the snake begged for mercy : 'Do not kill me. The Creator of the Universe has brought into being also me. It is not my mistake that I can produce nothing but poison. I surrender to thee unconditionally', No sooner did Sri Krishna hear this, than he transformed the snake into a lovely bird which did no harm to anyone'. The Swami interprets the story as follows : "The King is yourself. The snake is your ego with which you are unable to cope by yourself. Sri Krishna is your *Iṣṭa* (Beloved Deity) who helps you to conquer the ego. As soon as it has surrendered to Him, He changes it into a gentle and beautiful being."

Incredible, how certain processes in the human soul have remained the same during the last five thousand years. Or, incredible, with what precision and plasticity the *Rishis* translated their realizations about the human psyche into poetic language.

Today I came late at *darśana* time. Mataji was already seated on her stool in front of the temples. I found a place from where I could see only her back. But I had a clear view of the people who sat at her feet. Amongst them were two Europeans, Svedes, I am told. An elderly man and a young one. Impressive to watch their eyes. To compare the expression of their eyes with that of the other people. Somethink that I have often noticed : the Indian look is receptive, the western look active. The Asiatic look takes in, the European one grasps at the world.

The two Svedes were naturally 'inquisitive'. They wanted to penetrate—to them very likely unknown—the phenomenon of the Indian saint, tried to examine it with their eyes. The other people present had no such intention. They desired to open themselves to holiness in order to partake of it. Even when disregarding these different suppositions, in the way of looking the essential difference of East and West is revealed. Indians often fluctuate between the two types of eye expressions. I noticed this especially while coming by boat from Europe. On the other hand, some apparently completely westernized Indians have nevertheless the "Indian look". Their eyes on occasions acquire the western scientific attitude of focussing on a particular object, but in their background the Asiatic visionary gaze is preserved.

I am afraid of hasty generalizations and crude simplifications. What I note are only my preliminary impressions. We Europeans seize the world with our look, we use our eyes as tools to discriminate, to examine and arrange. We concentrate on particulars because only the particular allows of minute investigation. The world is full of objects for our inquisitive eyes that carry out the preparatory work for our brains and hands.

The people among whom I am living here do not experience the world in this subject-object relationship. Their thinking is based on the idea that all is one—namely the One Brahman. This does not permit of a distinction between subject and object. What the eyes of these people perceive is not the particular object which they

want to grasp and master and therefore regard enquiringly. If all is Brahman, it can only be illusion to believe we have a separate I. And where no I is there is also no subject that faces the objects of the world.

The gaze of the Asiatic Sage sees nothing but the Brahman. His eyes are windows through which the light penetrates to his soul. They are not 'hands' to grasp at the world. Even the unenlightened Indian has this manner of looking, which does not grasp but takes in. The world is felt to be a surging whole. It flows into his vision. The Indian optic is focussed on the forest and not on particular trees. One can do this consciously with one's own eyes, make them receptive (physically) by eliminating their 'piercing' through the particular object. In certain situations this takes place automatically. I believe, whenever we forget our I.

It seems to me that Mataji's glance is on occasions not receptive; namely whenever she puts on the 'search-light.' But then she just makes the light flow, it flows through her, issuing from the mysterious source that is behind her.

## THE PERFORMANCE OF LILAS IN SRI MA'S PRESENCE

—Dr. Bithika Mukerji

For many consecutive years, Sri Ma used to come to Varanasi Ashram to attend the festival of Jhoolan and Janmashtami during the months of July/August. The Savitri Mahayagna had begun from January 14, 1947. The daily oblations consisted of ghee and several grains and other specific items. The grains were all washed and dried in the sun. They were packed and stored neatly. The daily supply was measured out meticulously every morning. We quickly became used to the sound of the *Gayatri* Mantra every morning for almost three hours and the sight of the leaping flames from the *Kunda* (receptacle).

Ganga didi, the in-charge of the Kanyapeeth, belonged to the Nimbarka Ashram in Vrindaban; she was related to the then current head, Dhananjayadasji Maharaj. She was a Vaisnava and brought her own images of Radha and Krishna to the Ashram. During her regime, the festivals of Jhoolan and Janmashtami acquired some importance in the Kanyapeeth. The devotees of Gujarat had presented Sri Ma with a typical *jhoola* (swing) which is to be found there in every household. This *jhoola* was given to the Kanyapeeth. It used to be put up on these occasions and decorated with fruits, flowers and garlands. Sri Ma was prevailed upon to sit on it for a little while on the Purnima (full moon) of Sravana, that is sometime in July. The Janmashtami came on the eighth day after this Purnima (full moon night).

Sri Ma was invited by Gangadidi to come to the Kanyapeeth hall every evening; a stage was put up at one end of the hall where the girls enacted small plays or other musical programmes. A curtain separated the stage side of the hall from the auditorium. Sri Ma sat surrounded by women devotees of the town and those residing in the Ashram. On a few occasion some men especially invited by Sri Ma came on to the verandah from where they could see the plays. Among these were Dr. Pannalal, Patalda, Manmohanda, Amulya da and one or two others.

Renudi, my elder sister, used to read up suitable books and dramatise their stories with a view to the available girls who could learn the various parts. We had come to know that Sri Ma did not approve of elaborate dresses. Whatever we could assemble easily in the ashram was used; so much was left to the imagination of the audience. Renudi directed and produced dozens of plays, all meriting praise and acclaim from the audience. I shall write about a few only; the few which have

lingered in my memory for some reason or other. Once the girls enacted the life of Sri Ramanujacarya. It was an abbreviated version of his biography written out in dramatic form by Renudi. At that time, we had a girl called Rama with us. She truly was superb in the role of the young ascetic who became the great Ramanujacarya, the author of Sri Bhasya. Next year Sri Ma asked if we could do a repeat performance of the play. Since this had to be done almost extempore, the older girls were commandeered into the cast by Renudi. I became the guru who would die before the arrival of the disciple. Sati was one of the messengers. The star role was given to Bishuddha, because she alone could memorize the part within a day.

Many untoward things happened as usual in amateur theatricals. Sati had rehearsed to speak the lines in classical ornate Bengali. Actually, when she came in she spoke in the everyday colloquial language, which sounded absurd. I was obliged to bend my head to hide an involuntary grin. As Yamunacarya, I was sitting in a yogic posture preparatory to leaving the body. I could not keep the head up as I should have done. May be the audience thought it a more natural posture of death. The story was that the three fingers of the guru's hand were seen to be curled inside the palm. When Ramanujacarya arrived, he lamented his misfortune, but interpreted the guru's message to him. As he made his promises to do as directed, the fingers opened out one by one and the hands remained normal and still. Sri Ma sometimes referred to this play by mentioning the incident of the curled-in fingers.

Another play which was enacted by teachers and students was the story of Naciketa from Kathopanisad. Renudi had some trouble with the rehearsals because Kshamadi who had the part of the father could not bring herself to say her lines "Go to the abode of death" to Naciketa, that is, Bishuddha. Kshamadi, however promised solemnly to say the words on the final night. I remember we engineered some light effects to give dramatic force to the scene of enlightenment. Sarajudidi, another teacher, in the role of Yama, drew a lot of applause.

One year Renudi wrote out a short play on the life of Christ. The scene of crucifixion was so powerful that Blancaji who was in the audience, unable to watch it just went out of the room. The actor Pavitra, a very talented girl, had played the role of Christ. She stood on her crossed toes like a ballerina with outstretched arms and looked very realistic. We did not have stage props. It was all done by acting and postures. After the *lilas* were over, it was seen that there was a drop of blood on Sri Ma's tongue where it had got bitten by her tooth. Dr. Pannalal thought that this slight trace of blood was seen because Sri Ma had merged into Christ for the time being.

In this connection, another incident should be recorded which somewhat helps us to understand Sri Ma's attitude toward this world of play-acting. Dr. Pannalal had been reading the biography of Milarepa, the Tibetan ascetic of great repute. He used to tell Sri Ma about the hardships endured by Milarepa in search of Enlightenment, how his guru tested him severely again and again before he was ready to consider him worthy of discipleship. Renudi borrowed this book from him and wrote out a dramatic version in consultation with Sri Ma. Sri Ma was keenly interested; she would suggest scenes and dialogues: Renudi would carry her notebook and pencil all the time. Whenever Sri Ma had opportunity she would speak a few words regarding the play. The time came for rehearsals. Renudi came with her notebook to Sri Ma's room. Sri Ma while talking about the attitude of a disciple slipped down to a kneeling posture in front of Renudi who was standing in the role of the Guru near her chowki. Sri Ma's whole aspect underwent a change; she was in tears of supplication and almost bowing to Renudi's feet, who hurriedly stepped back out of Sri Ma's reach. Didi quickly spoke in ordinary tones about the play and helped Sri Ma on to her chowki, where she lay down in an obvious ecstatic state of identification and submission to the Guru, the repository of grace as demonstrated by Sri Ma.

On other occasions also we came to realize that there were no lines of demarcation between appearance and reality for Sri Ma. Whatever was presented to her was true; there was no lie, make believe or evil. Everything was a divine manifestation of Him, who alone is everywhere and for ever.

*Milarepa* was enacted a few times in the Kanyapeeth by different casts as it was very pleasing to Sri Ma. Once even Didi and Gangadidi were prevailed upon to take parts. Since clothes were not changed, it was easy for a spectator to become an actor for a while. We had learnt the unimportance of props and accoutrements from watching Haribabaji's villagers perform elaborate lilas without any at their command. A fiercely moustachiod villager would cover his head and face with an *angoccha*, the indigenous red toweling cloth and convincingly enact the role of Radha or a Sakhi in Vrindaban. One of the best performances I have seen is that by a boy dressed in an ordinary red-bordered sari, playing the role of Vishnupriya. He moved the entire audience to tears by his deportment of anguish at the separation and his quiet acceptance of a life of asceticism.

## **I LOVE YOU, ALWAYS FOREVER**

[Popular devotional songs sung by devotees to Ma in Ma's temple in Hawaai, U.S.A.]

I LOVE YOU, ALWAYS FOREVER  
NEAR AND FAR, CLOSER TOGETHER  
EVERYWHERE, I WILL BE WITH YOU  
EVERYTHING, I WILL DO FOR YOU  
I KNOW YOU'LL LOVE, LOVE ME FOREVER  
NEVER STOP, NEVER WHATEVER  
NEAR AND FAR AND ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE & EVERYTHING.

(Instrumental)

## **YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL**

YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL TO ME.  
YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL TO ME.  
CAN 'T YOU SEE...

YOU' RE EVERYTHING I HOPED FOR;  
YOU' RE EVERYTHING I NEED.  
YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL, TO ME.

SUCH JOY AND HAPPINESS YOU BRING.  
SUCH JOY AND HAPPINESS YOU BRING.  
LIKE A DREAM...

A GUIDING LIGHT, THAT SHINES IN THE NIGHT;  
YOU' RE HEAVEN'S GIFT TO ME.  
YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL, TO ME.

## INCIDENTS OF MA'S GRACE

—Swami Bhagavanand

Since 1951, the celebration of the *Bhagavata Jayanti* every September, from the 7th day of *Bhadrapad Sukla* to the full moon, had become a regular feature of the Varanasi Ashram. It is said that during this period Sukdeva expounded the *Bhagavata* to King Parikshit in ancient times.

In 1954, the well-known Pandit Srinath Shastri of Vrindaban officiated at the *Bhagavata Jayanti*. For three days everything proceeded without a hitch. On the fourth day, the pandit unfortunately developed high fever. In spite of his precarious health, he continued both the Sanskrit reading in the morning and the Hindi explanation in the afternoon. After that he was unable to proceed, his energy was spent. Who was to continue the reading ? The problem was discussed in Mataji's presence. Only one who has gone through a special rite at the beginning of the *Bhagavata Saptaha* is entitled to officiate as the reader. I was acting as the chief listener on this occasion and had therefore gone through the rite. At night Mataji called me. "Kanti, can you not take the pandit's place ?" "Ma", I replied, "so far I have never conducted a *Bhāgavata Saptaha*. But if you give the order, it will certainly be carried out. You are the doer, none else." Mataji said : "Very well. From to-morrow morning occupy the seat of the pandit and perform his work."

Until I had left home to join the Ashram, I did not even know what the *Srimad Bhāgavata* was. I attended a *Bhāgavata Saptaha* for the first time in 1948 in Delhi in Mataji's presence. Besides my Sanskrit was not at all good, since I had taken science after my first year in college. To make matters worse I was suffering from a bad cold. In spite of all these handicaps I had complete faith that I would be successful, since the assignment had been given by Mataji. I felt I was only an instrument and Mataji the real actor behind the scene. Mataji is all-powerful and can make the dumb talk. She had entrusted this difficult task to an ignorant person like myself. I knew in my heart of hearts that Mataji would be with me all along and guide me. By her grace I was able to perform my duty to everybody's satisfaction.

At the end of the function, to my utter surprise, an old devotee of Mataji approached me and did obeisance to me again and again. I said : "What is the matter ? Why are you doing *pranāma* ?" "Kantibhai," he replied, "while you were sitting on the reader's *āsana* and expounding the *Bhāgavata*, I had a most extra-



ordinary vision. I saw Mataji's head instead of yours. The body was no doubt yours, but the head was Mataji's and it was she who read."

When at the conclusion of the *Saptaha*, I fell at Mataji's feet, she said, "You have done very well. Now you have gained self-confidence that you can officiate at a *Bhāgavata Saptaha*." I said : "Ma, by your grace everything can be achieved." For Mataji, nothing is impossible. She is our very own, she is the real doer. This body of mine was merely a tool in her hand.

\*

\*

\*

Once a year a gathering called *Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata* is held by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. A large number of devotees assemble from different parts of the country to participate in this concentrated week of *sādhana*, which includes collective meditation in Mataji's presence and discourses by well-known Mahatmas, besides *kīrtana* and so forth.

In November, 1959 the *Samyam Mahavrata* took place in our Calcutta Ashram in Agarpara. Under Mataji's instruction, I was, as in previous years, in charge of the programme in the pandal. When the function started in the early morning on November 8th, I noticed that electric current was leaking from the microphone. I informed the technician and asked him to change the mike. He promised to do so. I took it for granted that the mike had been replaced. When the evening gathering started Sri Tripurari Chakravarti was to deliver a lecture on the Mahabharata but was unable to come due to indisposition. In his place Brahmachari Tapan (now Nirmalananda) talked for half an hour. After him the famous musician, Sri Dhananjaya Bhattacharya was to give a recital. I was about to introduce him. Touching the microphone in order to raise it, I received a powerful electric shock. I was unable to withdraw my hand. A sharp pain shot through my whole body. The current was strong enough to cause instantaneous death. But our compassionate Mataji was sitting on the dais. Death was powerless in her presence. A brilliant white light flashed in front of my eyes and I knew that my life had been saved by Mataji's divine mercy. I fell flat on the ground almost unconscious. To divert my attention from the shock and the severe pain and to cheer up the whole congregation, Mataji broke out into ringing laughter and all present joined in. Mataji said to me : "It is nothing. Forget all about it." But I felt quite dazed and not at all in a mood to laugh. Mataji laughed again and said : "This reminds me of a very funny story. Shall I relate it ? Pitaji, what do you say ? It is awfully funny, really !" But I was lying motionless with my eyes shut. Mataji said : "Alas ! whom am I telling the story ? Kanti is lying with closed eyes." I immediately opened my eyes and Mataji,

fixing her gaze on me, started narrating the story, interrupting herself again and again by peals of laughter. She said: "At a wedding celebration a band was playing on their instruments. In the midst of their performance, an inexperienced drummer suddenly fell flat on his back with his drum. His colleagues felt greatly embarrassed and were at a loss how to save their faces. But the intelligent leader of the band had a brilliant idea: 'Oh my dear boy,' he exclaimed, 'this marriage is being performed at a minimum expense. Why are you starting to play '*chitrang*' here?' The owner of the house, who was a simpleton, thought to himself: "What a pity! Had I spent a few rupees more, how wonderful the function would have been with *chitrang* added to it."

Laughing heartily Mataji said to me: 'O Baba, you also have shown us *chitrang* today'. The entire assembly was simply rocking with laughter. Mataji's fascinating joyousness acted as a healing balm on my piteous condition. Mataji made me lie down near her at the back of the stage and I was given some homeopathic medicine. By Mataji's divine grace and compassion I had escaped from the clutches of death and very soon became quite fit again. The next morning, when I offered the usual garland and sandal paste to Mataji on her entering the pandal, she put the garland round my neck with great affection. "Your life has been saved!" With these words she placed both her hands on my head in blessing.

Jai Ma ! Jai Ma ! Jai, Jai Ma !

## **FOREVER FLOWERS**

—Devayani H. Desai

Flowers blessed by God  
Are Flowers forever,  
An eternal  
Unchanging  
Fragrance  
That lives on,  
After death dies,  
Nobody weeps  
At the funeral  
Because  
Forever flowers  
Never die,  
Remaining accessible  
Always  
Beyond time  
Space  
Reality  
At Gods Feet.  
Truth  
Purity  
Peace  
Bliss  
Independence,  
Freedom from bondage,  
Arising out of  
Attachment  
Emotions  
Antagonism  
Despair,  
Are Forever Flowers,  
All hidden somewhere  
Deep within  
Waiting  
For the tide to change,  
To swallow them,  
Transporting them to  
Their righteous place,  
At the feet of God,  
Where they cannot wilt,  
Because God waters his  
Flowers FOREVER.

\*\*\*

## OLD DIARY LEAVES

—Atmanananda

Again and again one can hear Mataji point out that most of the difficulties people experience throughout their lives and much of the chaos in the world today are due to lack of right education. If the first of the four ashramas, namely the brahmacharya ashrama, is observed as it should be, man can face life without the fear of being crushed by adversity, for the sublime purpose of human existence will have been firmly fixed in his mind.

If the growing child, the adolescent thoroughly understands that man's true vocation is to find himself, if he realizes that all knowledge is only a preparation for *Brahmavidyā*, the Knowledge of Reality; if at the same time he is taught how to control body and mind by living the simple, frugal and disciplined life of a brahmachari, so that all his energies may be available for the Quest, that alone is worthy of man, he will have learnt the art of living. Whether he chooses the shortcut, and renouncing all worldly attachment straight away, takes *sannyāsa* or whether he first passes through the stages of the householder (*grihastha*) and of the anchorite (*vānaprastha*);—the path to Self-realization and Immortality is open to him.

Just as we are bound to inhale the air about us, we constantly absorb the subtle influences from our surroundings. No man can remain entirely unaffected by the contacts he makes. A child is far more sensitive than an adult. It is therefore important that the young should be in the company of men and women who have dedicated their lives to the Supreme Quest, that their pliable minds should be moulded by books of wisdom rather than by cinemas and light novels. A boy or a girl who has once deeply felt the necessity of aspiring after Truth and Enlightenment, who has been made to feel how treacherous and comparatively unimportant are wealth, name, fame, brilliant career, etc. will come back to the ideals that in youth have been engrained in him or her even though he or she should deviate from them for a time.

\*

\*

\*

A young boy asked Mataji, "If one speaks the truth one cannot get on in the world; if one tells lies one cannot find God. So what is one to do?"

"Always try to speak the truth and see what happens," replied Mataji. "Will you listen to a story?"

"A notorious thief sought the company of a sādhu. At first the holy man took no notice of him, but when the thief came day after day, begging to be given instruction the sādhu finally responded. 'First of all,' he said, 'you must give up stealing and telling lies. When you have succeeded in this for some days, you may come again.' The thief fell at his feet and went home. After several days he returned, looking thin and miserable. 'Well', asked the sādhu, 'how have you been faring ?' 'Maharaj' said the thief, 'I have faithfully obeyed your orders, but I can't go on like this much longer. My whole family is starving. I am well-known as a thief and no one will give me work. If I don't steal, how are we to keep alive ?' 'Very well,' said the sādhu, 'you may steal again, but under no circumstances tell any lies, keep strictly to the truth !' The face of the thief lit up. He promised to abide by his Guru's instructions.

'After so much fasting,' he thought, 'we need to break into the treasury at the royal palace.'

"As fate would have it the King could not sleep that night. Hearing a strange noise, he put on the old clothes of a servant and went downstairs. When he found that a burglar was busy removing valuables, he pretended to be a thief himself and said, 'Look here, brother, I am of your trade, only I am a beginner. Couldn't I help you and in return you might let me have a small share of the booty ?' 'Not a bad idea' agreed the old thief, 'breaking these heavy locks has been a tough job and it will soon be dawn. If you see whether the night-watch is coming this side, give me a sign in good time; I will let you have one fourth of what I get.' 'That's settled,' assented the King, 'but let me have your name and address.' Mindful of his Guru's bidding, the thief gave the correct information. With the help of the disguised King he succeeded in safely removing his loot, leaving one fourth for his accomplice.

"In the morning there was great commotion in the palace. The theft was reported to the King. Investigations were carried on, but no trace could be found of the culprit. The King did not disclose his secret, but when the case was to be discussed in his darbar, he sent for the thief. 'Do you know anything about the theft ?' the King asked straight out. 'I do,' replied the thief. 'Let us have all the details,' commanded the Monarch. The thief related with great precision what had happened. The King could hardly believe his ears. 'How can one who is so completely truthful become guilty of stealing ?' he exclaimed. The thief explained that he was acting in obedience to his Guru's order and that it was only to save himself and his family from dire poverty that he was obliged to continue to steal. 'How much a month do you require for the upkeep of your family ?' asked the

King. The man stated a modest sum. 'You won't have to steal any longer', said the King, 'I shall provide for all of you for the rest of your lives.'

"You see," commented Mataji, "by being strictly truthful the thief was enabled to lead an honest life. It is very important to speak the truth. God is Truth. By being truthful one draws nearer to Him. The other lesson this story illustrates is that carrying out the Guru's orders to the letter without using one's own judgement not only leads to the highest good, but also brings about the solution of one's daily problems."

\*

\*

\*

A lady from Australia, who was feeling rather bewildered at the very great difference between the Hindu conception of purity and that of the West, begged an explanation from Mataji.

The following is the gist of what Mataji said : Purity is an attitude of mind. Some people think if everything is spotlessly clean, looks clean, it is also pure. But take for instance germs. A place may look perfectly clean and yet be full of germs. Germs, although invisible to the naked eye, cause illness. Qualities cannot be seen, yet it is a man's qualities that make him pure or impure. I was told of a mother who had a violent quarrel with someone, which deeply upset her. The quarrel occurred just before her baby's feeding time. The child drank his mother's milk and died on the spot. The doctor who was consulted declared that by her excessive anger the woman's whole system had been affected, so that her milk became poisonous.

Whatever a man touches takes on some of his characteristics. The ancient Rishis devised the caste system, in order that each of the four castes might develop certain special qualities and capacities. The members of the different castes were therefore required to observe strict rules when mixing with anyone belonging to another caste. A thing is called pure when it is without mixture, without alloy, entirely true to itself; when mixed with another substance it is said to be impure. Suppose someone brings you water from the tap in a perfectly clean vessel. Although the water is itself clean, it carries something of the quality of the person who fetched it. Brahmins were asked not to drink water touched by anyone belonging to another caste. A Brahmin's duty is to seek *Brahmavidyā*, the knowledge of the Absolute. For this reason he should not mix with those who are engaged in other pursuits. This is how the question of untouchability arose.

Now concerning service : If you serve human beings or animals as such, it is not pure service. But if you serve them with the thought that there is only the ONE, that by serving whomsoever, you are serving God in that particular guise, then and

then only does it become real service. Since nothing exists really but the Supreme Being, one should serve THAT alone. Purity means Truth, that which IS. Essentially, whatever aids towards the realization of Truth may be called pure and whatever is apt to retard it, impure.

A very learned professor, who had travelled widely in India and Europe, remarked : "The Ganges is said to be pure, but on visiting Varanasi I found the drains emptying themselves into the river, and a few yards away someone drinking the water; I was disgusted. I can't bathe in the Ganges, it makes me feel sick."

*Mataji* : The very nature of the Ganges is to purify. Whatever is immersed in the Ganges becomes absorbed by its purity, just as fire purifies. No matter what you throw into it, it will be burnt to ashes. You think tap-water is cleaner than Ganges-water, but tap-water at Varanasi also comes from the Ganges. It is a matter of point of view. From your angle of vision you are right. Yet, fundamentally purity and impurity are of the mind. There is only one *Ātmā*. Filth and sandalpaste are both the ONE, there is neither purity nor impurity. The pure food you eat today will by tomorrow have turned into excrement, into filth. Nevertheless, some creatures feed on it. A dead body which is putrid floats on the Ganges. Vultures swoop down and eat of its flesh. It is the vulture's natural food, the bird thrives on it. Life is one. What is dirt to one creature, may be sustenance to another. We must reach the state where we know the ONE alone and everything as His forms. There is only One Brahman, without a second.

\*

\*

\*

A lady from Australia came last summer to Almora to see Mataji. One of the questions she asked was, since illnesses are the results of our actions in this or in former lives, was it advisable to consult doctors and take medicines ? Rather was it not more appropriate to bear whatever came to us without interfering with its natural course ? Mataji replied that it was right to do everything in our power to keep our bodies fit and healthy, for an ailing person could hardly expect to engage in *sādhana*. All the same it was certainly necessary to learn how to endure pain, since suffering cannot always be avoided. In such cases, we should accept it as one of the ways in which He manifests.

Several months later, the same lady badly fractured her ankle. This happened in the mountains, miles away from a doctor. To make things worse, heavy rain set in and she had to wait for three days till she could be carried down in a dandy. The pain was acute. The lady kept awake all night, but remembering what Mataji had told her, she concentrated on Divine Love in the form of Christ and of Mataji. To

her own amazement she forgot all about her pain and felt well and refreshed the next morning. She remained in a state of bliss throughout those three days. She later declared that she would not have missed this experience for anything in the world. Was this what Mataji meant, when She said we had to learn to endure suffering when it came ?

Since then, whenever she felt any pain, the lady tried to concentrate in a similar manner, but she was never able to get again into that elevated state of mind. On meeting Mataji this year, she wanted the cause of her failure explained. "Your pain was not severe enough," said Mataji with a smile.



## IMPRESSIONS OF ANANDAMAYI MA\*

(One)

—Richard Lannoy

The person herself, divine or not, offers concrete evidence, at a time when our world-view is dominated by scientific rationalism that spiritual perfection or at least spiritual perfectibility, remains as much within our reach as it ever did in the past. In the face of what this woman visibly manifests I can only play with words. Although both words and photographs can lie, the photograph does have a certain workday varacity. I only hope that my combination of words and pictures honours the reality of this remarkable woman.

I first met Anandamayi Ma in 1954, on my first visit to Varanasi. I was a freelance photographer specializing in magazine reportage. I was always in lookout for fresh feature material. I was 26, travelling rough, and hard pressed to locate marketable themes in a notoriously competitive field. I heard of Anandamayi Ma through a remarkable Austrian pianist and school teacher, Blanca Schlam, who had been a follower of Krishnamurthy for 30 years. She was then in the process of readjusting her whole life to the new perspective opened up for her by Anandamayi Ma. She already had considerable experience of Mataji's teaching and devoted scrupulous care to the translation of her words into English for the Ashram magazine, under the name of Atmananda. Moreover due to her linguistic abilities, Atmananda was frequently called upon to act as an interpreter, not only for foreigners in private talks with Mataji, but also for many Indians who understood neither Bengali nor Hindi, the two languages in which Mataji conversed.

My first glimpse of Anandamayi Ma was inadvertently preceded by a solecism. Standing by the roadside awaiting for her car as she drove into Varanasi, I was nervously holding a small bunch of roses with which to greet the great lady. Time passed and, as I fretted, I took a deep sniff at the flowers in my hand.

"Now you have polluted them with your sniff ! You can't offer polluted flowers !"

I must have looked mortified as I glanced at the innocent blooms, aghast at my accidental crudity.

---

\* Extracts from the Introduction to the famous book containing many beautiful photographs of Ma by the renowned writer & photographer Mr. Richard Lannoy of England — "Anandamayi — Her Life & Wisdom" (Published by Element Books, England).

"Oh well, because you didn't know, you mustn't sniff an offering, it won't matter !"

The car eventually came into sight, heading towards the beautiful Varanasi river front. An impressive party of women scrutinized me as I signed out Anandamayi Ma and offered my roses. I found myself peering in at this handsome woman bundled into the back seat, smiling encouragingly at me. The car swept on into the city.

My professional curiosity had been aroused. No photographer had yet covered her for the Western media. If Henri Cartier Bresson had recently photographed Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramana Maharshi, then Anandamayi Ma, their successor in stature, as I was given to understand—might provide me with a scoop. I therefore set out on a visit to her riverside Ashram the next day. My glib cameraman's nose for a story might pollute a rose with a sniff, but I resolved to improve my manners and get down to some serious work.

This humdrum beginning to my acquaintance with Anandamayi Ma would lead me to an entirely fresh phase of apprenticeship. Until then, I had sought to record, among many other themes, the spiritual life of India as and when I found it, consistently from an outsider's point of view. Indeed I went to much effort to maintain this outsider's point of view as a positive factor in my work. At that time reportage photographers consciously accepted a role as detached-yet-sympathetic observers, using a kind of built-in secularism as a means to achieve candid, anonymous, non-judgemental records of things as they are. Now out of courtsey for the feelings of a cloistered group of people under the scrutiny of my lens, I would have to learn an altogether new approach, besides my ignorance of my subject. First, impressions of Anandamayi Ma as I sat in the ashram hall watching her, were of a woman truly impressive in stature and intelligence, and of great psychological complexity. Here was a woman of high prestige, of most striking appearance, displaying a diversity of eloquent facial expressions, moving about with superb grace and surrounded by a congenial multitude of staunchly individual, highly evolved followers.

However, this was no more than a minimal starting point. It was not long before I discovered a very striking visual effect. These around her all seemed to a coverage upon her figure in spontaneous, often fast-changing, unconsciously felicitous compositions. The graceful plasticity with which they took up their places in a single configuration at once recalled to me visual art traditions that I assumed belonged irretrievably to the past. No sooner had I noticed this than I was struck by something I was naive enough to believe impossible : events and experiences

essentially inner in nature could best be portrayed in action. I had assumed that it would be impossible to take high-speed action photographs of movement expressing inner, spiritual love of one person for another until, that is I saw someone prostrate at Anandamayi Ma's feet. In that instant Rembrandt's great painting of his old age, of the Prodigal Son falling at his father's feet, which I had hitherto regarded as a parable, became a living reality. Similarly, when I saw the retinue of women disposed around Anandamayi Ma, I recalled a similar disposition of figures in Poussin's great series of Painting of Seven Sacraments. Here was a throwback to the past occurring in the here and now, with a certain gritty actuality that was unmistakably 20th century in character. I suppose I fancied myself as an ultra-modern photographer extending the possibilities of visual instaniety. The last thing I wanted to do, however, and on this I was adamant, was to imitate the old masters. Equipped with a light-weight camera and fast film, engaging with a peaceable community where stillness & timelessness were of the essence, I would focus upon the fugitive & fleeting instant. But I had a feeling that I was looked on as if I were doing something tantamount to blasphemy. Whereas, from my point of view my approach would result in revelation of a hidden mystery. The freezing action of the fast shutter does have the power to uncover events which the human eye can scarcely register, but which intuition knows to exist, as it were, in a state of latency, what Anandamayi Ma's retinue feared might reduce pure moments of true spiritual feelings to pictorial crudity, could, I was sure, enhance them. It was considered indelicate to portray a revered figure as subject to ageing without recourse to retouching. Preferably, the face of the holy, even in a photograph, should be depicted like an icon, transubstantiated. Whereas, as in the Zen precedent of the famous Ten Ox-Herding pictures, which represent sequent steps on the path to enlightenment, I would portray the highest attainable state of grace not as a quasi-divine being, but as someone who is nothing special.

Here, in fact, was my solution : I would adopt the methods of contemporary photo journalism for purposes of visual antihagiography. I would proceed with as much tact and patience as I could muster, seeking the revelatory moment when the quality of nothing special was revealed in the split second of my open shutter. Pure paradox ! This would be a project made possible by a combination of Anandamayi Ma's quick silver grace and the cheeky efficiency of a good camera. From the start I noticed how fast was the tempo of her movements, how rapid her changes in facial expression, how swift her gestures, how quick her power of observation. The camera seemed to me a thoroughly sympathetic instrument for registering the subtle interplay between the fleeting and that which never changes.

## WHO IS A HINDU : A VIEWPOINT

—Lt. Gen. J.C. Chatterji

In the olden days we were taught about our religion from childhood. In the recent past too, the primers had in their texts some of the teachings, which in no way were in conflict with other religions. An average Hindu, including myself, hardly reads the books available, as a matter of fact sometimes even avoids them as too abstract.

Who therefore is a Hindu ?

I asked several people the question in a slightly different way :

Q. What is your religion ?

A. Hindu(ism).

Q. Why do you call yourself a Hindu ?

A. Because I was born in a Hindu family.

Q. Have you no other reasons to call yourself a Hindu ?

A. I cannot think of anything else.

These kinds of questions and answers are my personal experience. Some may say—I consider myself a Hindu, because I follow the Hindu way of life, worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses, carry out the rituals prescribed.

Some other people have gone a bit deeper. Since my sample (not statistical), was confined to average Hindus I met in everyday life, I did not put this question to the knowledgeable and neither have I the knowledge to discuss such a matter with them. I have not questioned any of those who are diffident to call themselves Hindus or those who deny professing any religion, though they can be defined as Hindus according to the criteria put forward in the answers received above.

So, whom shall we call a Hindu from the average point of view ? Shall we call those people Hindus who accept the Vedas and the Upanishads and try to follow their precepts in their worldly lives ?

If Hinduism is based on the precepts of the Vedas and the Upanishads, then a Hindu should know and follow the Shrimad Bhagawat Gita enunciated by Lord Shri Krishna, Mahapuram Shrimad Bhagawat as told by Mahamuni Shri Narayan and as written by Maharshi Vedavyasa and similar scriptures received as a result of the sayings and realisations of the great munis and rishis. The Vedas and the Upanishads are venerated all over the world. But do we, who call ourselves Hindus

have any, not to speak of a proper knowledge, of them ? Very few have. Do we follow their precepts ? Very few do.

Hindus believe in God. His attributes are indescribable and incomparable. He is unperturbable, but blissful and conscious of everything. He is eternal, infinite, indivisible, and immutable, all pervading, all powerful and all knowing. Actually He is beyond attributes. He is incomprehensible and unmanifest, beyond mind and words. But He can be realised if He decides to reveal Himself. Though indivisible, He reveals Himself in parts. He is whole and His manifestation is also whole.

The Supreme had a wish to create. Living beings were created. Man evolved. But the Creator pervades all his creation and the creation is contained in Him. There is no uniformity in His creation. That is His '*Lila*'—otherwise how will 'the play' go on ?

In the cycle of births and deaths a creature, once born as a human being, has the realisation of God as his only goal. For this one need not abdicate from worldly life. How can man achieve this goal ?

One has to prepare himself for this. How ? By leading a clean and pure life, by adhering to the truth and truthful way of life, by not resorting to falsehood, by abstaining from deeds that harm others, even from thoughts of harming others. One has to respect the elders in the family and behave with others in and outside the family with respect due to them. Charity should be devoid of egotism and condescension. One has to control his desire, anger, greed, attachment and ultimately be free from them.

Can one do this by his own effort ? Man's duty is to try. He gets a Guru by the Grace of God. Some people have a condescending attitude towards Gurus, probably out of lack of proper appreciation. The Guru has to be a '*Sad Guru*'. One's effort has to be sincere to get a '*Sad Guru*'. Sincere effort will not be fruitless. *Japa, tapa, dhyana* and *dhāranā* under the direction of the Guru and obeying without question the instructions laid down by the Guru will help in preparing one self for achieving the goal. All virtues described earlier will then manifest themselves in the aspirant. He will realise that there is no difference between the creation and the Creator and feel himself one with the Creator. In that state all the qualities like kindness to all creatures, service to the needy, correct behaviour, irrespective of high and low, caste and creed, race and religion, such and other qualities for which all are ordinarily advised to strive for, will automatically be manifest in them.

Then, where is the place for pujas, yagnas and other rituals of the Hindu religion ? Hindus do worship Gods and Goddesses. They are part manifestations of the indivisible Supreme but whole by themselves. Their worship with the background knowledge and with a view to realisation of the Supreme is no idolatry. Worship of Gods and Goddesses, ignoring the Supreme, is not the goal of Hinduism—it is a perversion. Even the prescribed rituals have their places. They prepare one for progressing towards the ultimate goal of Realisation. The Vedas have prescribed certain 'yagnas' and rituals. On a superficial plane they are for acquiring something. One will get what one is aspiring for, but will not realise the Supreme. One has to look deep into their meanings which has been interpreted by many great minds. Even if their deeper meanings are not understood, they help to 'purify' one self and motivate him to follow the path of realisation.

This is a very brief presentation for one who does not claim to have full knowledge and understanding of Hinduism. This is a viewpoint. Others may have theirs. That is Hindu liberalism which should be appreciated properly by those who mock and denigrate Hinduism and profess all types of 'isms' including 'secularism'.

## "A BIRD ON THE WING"

A new biography of Ma Anandamayi has been written by Dr. Bithika Mukerji to mark the year of the centenary celebrations. It is entitled : **A BIRD ON THE WING : Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi.**

(Published by Indian Books Centre, 40/5 Sakti Nagar, Delhi—110007)

The following appreciation is written by Richard Lannoy of England, who is himself an author of distinction and has published a pictorial book on Sri Ma entitled : **Anandamayi— Her Life and Wisdom** (Element Books, England)

"I have been deeply moved by the book and in a way "taken by surprise." I had not expected it to present both a radiant and a somewhat sombre (in the best sense) picture. Surprised, because I had a built-in expectation that the writer, as a devoted *Indian* disciple, might evade the tragic aspects of Ma's life. On the whole, it has been my experience that Indians who have been closely associated with her tend to take a determinedly up-beat approach to the problematic elements, like suffering, pain, illness and death. But then I realise that this is ridiculous, and that if anybody fights shy of dealing with these matters, it is some western followers whose engagement has been briefer and probably, more shallow.

I attained a more vivid 3-dimensional impression of Ma (and everything connected) from the book than from anything else I have ever read about her. I was more convincingly precipitated into the actuality of what it was like to be in Ma's presence than hitherto. There is a lot of material which is completely new to me, and of great value and importance. But in certain respects I think the account is distinctive, fresh, truthful and very very welcome. I think the writer has managed to an extraordinary degree to evoke the extraordinary blend of the divine and the very human, the exalting, uplifting heights alongwith an emerging degree of practicality, directness of human insight, a commonsensical dimension in a being of unfathomable differentness, otherworldliness and sublime stature. She brings home to one the active, involving, guiding daily engagement of the "person" and the vast (even immeasurable) expanse and depth of experience she encompasses, the enormous quality of people she engaged with, the huge body of knowledge she was tapped into.

At the same time, the writer devotes loving care and attention to the generally neglected and estimable Bholanath (whose true stature is only made visible here for the first time in any account. She brings home the frequency and gravity of various

crises, illnesses, deaths and griefs without morbidity or melodrama. The way she handles issues of mortality and the paradox of divine life in a human body commands my total loving respect, for the dignity with which she ennobles many suffering and heroic souls. She lays bare, also, the paradox of Ma's cool distance from grief and from death, but at the same time, her response to the deaths of, for instance, Bhairji, Bholanath, Didima and Didi, which I had not seen touched upon in other accounts. She faces up to the changes that occurred in the pattern of Ma's daily life in later years, the problem of the time she spent with the high-ups, the sadhus and the wealthy, seemingly at the expense of humbler devotees, yet without whom the vast crowds of darshan-seekers would have remained disappointed. There is pathos, but no mawkishness, high feeling, but no sentimentality. Everybody gets their due in these pages. It is a truly remarkable achievement and I for one feel a sense of warm gratitude and relief. For this account has the unmistakable ring of truth. It is wholly and utterly believable, yet in the end deeply mysterious, and also uniquely in any account of Ma, disturbing. In the way that life truly lived, and death truly faced, always has something disturbing, frightening and challenging to offer. Her is a solid achievement and its worth will give substance and weight where these are most needed in the second century of Ma's story .....

—Richard Lannoy, Bath, U.K.

### **URGENT CIRCULAR**

All subscribers are requested to note that those who have not yet paid their subscriptions for the current year should send the same at the earliest. Subscriptions for the year 1999 should also reach our office in advance.

—Managing Editor