

MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

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with the divine life and sayings of
Sri Anandamayi Ma

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MATRI-VANI

I am only a child and do not know how to lecture or give discourses, Just as a child, when it finds something sweet and good takes it to its mother and father, so do I place before you what is swcet and good. You take whatever pleases you.

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This body has lived with father, mother, husband and all. This body has served the husband, so you may call it a wife. It has prepared dishes for all, so you may call it a cook. It has done all sorts of scrubbing and menial work, so you may call it a maid. But if you look at the thing from another standpoint you will realize that this body has served none but God. For when I served my father, mother, husband and others, I simply considered them as different manifestations of the Almighty and served them as such. When I sat for God whatever I did I did in a spirit of Divine service. Hence I was not quite worldly, though engaged in household affairs. I had but one ideal, viz , to serve all as God, to do everything for the sake of God.

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The sentiment with which you marry, no vibrations of that sentiment ever existed in this body.

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In order to attain to a particular stage along one of those lines of sadhana an ordinary individual may have to be born again and again, but in the case of this body it was a matter of a few seconds.

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Your strong desire to see this body in states of samadhi causes its symptoms to manifest at times. Whenever any thought reaches its full intensity, its physical expression will invariably follow. If one loses one's being in the contemplation of the Divine Name, one can merge oneself in the ocean of Heavenly Beauty. God and His symbolic names are one and the same... as soon as the consciousness of the out-side world disappears the self-revealing Power of the Name inevitably finds it's objective expression.

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The universe is a Divine play, you have a desire to play and hence in all the play-ful activities of this body, in its smiles and frolics you interpret its ways according to your own light. Had it assumed a grave motionless posture, you would have stayed away from me. Learn to merge yourselves in Divine Joy in all its manifestations and you will reach the final goal of all play. Do you understand ?

* * *

Q:- If you have no mission to fulfill or message to give, why do you tell us to worship god?"

Ma:- If you do not ask, then I have nothing to say: but if you ask, and if it is my *Kheyala*, then certainly I shall tell you about the better way of life.

* * *

The intense desire for God realization is itself the way to it.

* * *

It is by seeking to know oneself that the Great Mother of all may be found.

* * *

Do you want deliverance from the bonds of the world ? Then, weeping profusely, you will have to cry out from the bottom of your heart, "Deliver me, Great Mother of the world, deliver me !" To obtain Her grace you will have to shed tears much more abundantly than when you desire things of the world. When by the flood of your tears the inner and the outer have fused into one, you will find Her whom you sought with such anguish; nearer than the nearest, the very breath of life, the very core of every heart.

* * *

I never say - "I will do this, I will not do that". It is you who make me carry out whatever work lies in your power to induce me to perform.

CONVERSATIONS WITH WESTERN DEVOTEES

—Vijayananda

(Two)

Q: Was Sri Ma a Guru and can we claim to be her disciples ?

A: Traditionally the relation between Guru and disciples is created through *diksha* (initiation). But Sri Ma did not give formal initiation (except to some rare individuals). Only giving a *mantra* is not real *diksha*. It must be accompanied by *Sakti pāt* (transmission of power). But *Sakti pāt* in the case of a great Being like Sri Ma can be given even without *mantra*, by simple look or touch or even from distant place. And that is what Sri Ma used to do. Therefore, individuals who had received *Sakti pāt* from Her can consider Her as their Guru. Any how, as Sri Ma told us on number of occasions that there is only one Guru, it is the Supreme Divine. All human Gurus are only channels or connectors of the Supreme Power. In the case of Sri Ma the Supreme Power came un-obstructed through Her. Therefore there was total identification in her with the Divine Power.

Q. : It seems that Ma had difficulties with a number of her followers regarding their evolution. Why ?

A. Spiritually speaking most people tend to stay where they are or fall, and people like Ma tend to push people into an ascending current. The action of such sages towards the masses is to push the greater number of people into the current so that sooner or later they would reach the goal. That's what we call *krama mukti*, progressive liberation after death, which allows one to evolve through the different subtle levels and towards the final liberation or *moksha*. On the other hand, Ma also had an inner circle of followers whom she could work with in depth. This circle was according to the spirit, and did not necessarily correspond to her immediate physical entourage, which sometimes included impossible people or *bhutas*, bad spirits, as we call them jokingly. Ma used to keep those people close to her because they were too weak to take care of themselves along, or because they had a desire to become gurus without having the necessary maturity, therefore, Ma could handle them better by keeping them close.

- Q. Ma gave the impression to worldly people that she could materialise all their desires. Is that true ?
- A. Each man has within himself a desire which is the strongest. But in the centre of it is the Self. Ma used to reactivate the Self. But worldly people superimposed their materialistic desires on that.
- Q. A great many people say that Ma used to teach mainly *bhakti*. What do you think ?
- A. From time to time, Ma used to give advice on *bhakti*, but she always came back to non-duality, *advaita*. She was firmly based on *advaita*.
- Q. Is it true that Ma was less smiling and less happy in the second part of her life ?
- A. I once told her that, and she answered me : "I am always the same, only the body is getting old". It is true that she looked more severe later. Perhaps it was also to show that she wasn't always in agreement with a certain number of people and attitudes around her. When a sage comes, he lowers himself from a very high level. For him, to be blissful is so easy. Bliss is always there. He doesn't understand why people try so hard to be unhappy. Little by little he realises the level at which people are. At the beginning Ma used to laugh a lot. She only wanted trees as an ashram. Later, Bhaiji, Didi and other devotees insisted that she accept the existence of ashrams, and finally she was forced to take care of them, to avoid the risk of corruption.
- Q. A number of Ma's devotees were afraid of Her. They did not dare to look at Her in the eyes. Why was that ?
- A. May be it was because they felt that Ma could see their shortcomings directly. But as far as I am concerned, I have never felt afraid of Ma. One time I was with her in Vrindaban, I was just finishing a period of six or seven years during which I hadn't talked to, or even looked to the face of a woman. For a few days I had to take care of a young and pretty American. And from the outside, it could have looked like I was attached again. Suddenly, Ma looked at me, with the kind of look that could create real panic in most people. But I looked at Her straight in the eyes, because I knew I had done nothing wrong. She began giving me a huge smile, as if relieved. If Ma could seem tough at certain times, during others she could be sympathetic to the slightest emotion of the visitor. In the Hindu scriptures it is said regarding the Divine Mother that she is hard as thunder and sweet like a flower.

- Q. You often mention the fact that Ma didn't have any ego, and could adapt to any environment. If she had been born in the West, how would Ma have adapted to the situation ?
- A. I think she couldn't have adapted to that situation, and that is the reason why she was born in India. Western people are too intellectual for a sage to be able to flourish. He or she needs to be surrounded by people who have a capacity for direct trust.
- Q. Can you tell us a fundamental word of Ma, which would be like a mantra ?
- A. Yes, there is one which is like a *mahavakya*, a great saying from the Upanishads, similar to 'I am that'. '*Amar. atmah amar panthi svayam*'—The eternal soul, the eternal pilgrim are He only.
- Q. Could you feel the presence of Ma ?
- A. How many times have I clearly felt, even from a distance, that Ma was thinking about me!
- Q. You say that Ma during her birthdays was not in samadhi, but in omnipresent consciousness, completely in the hearts of her followers. Can you be more precise ?
- A. Yes, it is true. Why would she have been in Nirvikalpa samadhi, completely cut off from the outside world, while everyone had come to see her ? I had the proof of this at the beginning of my association with Ma. At that time, there were not many crowd for her birthdays. She was lying down apparently unconscious of the outer world. I looked at her and told her mentally, probably in Hindi, 'It's sad you are so far away from us'. She immediately sat up and had a long look on me which meant: 'No, I am not far. I am always with you'.
- Q. When did Ma give you the ochre dress of sannyasa ?
- A. In 1956 I was doing intense tapasya in Vindhyachal on the Ganges not far from Benaras. I went to see Ma in Benaras, and we were three or four on the terrace. Ma saw the dark brown robe that I was wearing; it was the only one I had, and it was a bit torn at the back, but I hadn't noticed it. She started laughing, and tore it completely, while I was doing pranam to her. I told her 'Ma, you gave me sannyas !' and she smiled. She had me give her a dress, more or less orange. Before I received the ochre clothes, I was always careful not to use a colour which resembled it, however, one day, after washing it, my brown robe came out sort of orange. I asked Ma if it was O. K., and she said, 'It is the gerua', (that is to say the ochre colour that is reserved for sadhus) 'which is inside, that is coming out'. In 1971 she asked that a white

shawl she had worn and she gave me be dyed ochre. In 1976, for her 80th birthday, she gave me some cloth, to make a complete ochre dress. By myself, I would never have taken the ochre robe. I would either have dressed like a Westerner, or I would have worn simple and discreet Indian clothes. The ashram people as well as Ma considered me as a sannyasi. One day, she said, looking at me, 'I don't make a difference between a sannyasi' and then turning towards Bhaskarananda and another, who were on the other side, 'and a brahmachari'.

Q. Is it possible to make the ego disappear by oneself?

A. The one who does the sadhana is also the ego. Therefore it is very difficult to make it disappear. Ramana Maharshi compares this situation to the chief robber becoming the chief of police. He will be able to catch all the other robbers, but he will not be able to catch himself. A guru is necessary, because it is only when you surrender to the guru that the ego can disappear completely. However, sadhana is an important means to diminish the ego. When the mind is completely sattvic, it dissolves within itself, or it becomes at least so transparent that it is only a very thin translucent veil, which barely hides the Self.

Q. How can a sage be recognised?

A. First, a sage has compassion, real compassion. Then there is humility. The sage is so noble that everyone feels like bowing before him, and yet, he stays totally humble. There are also many other criteria. But it is necessary to stay near the sage for a while to really understand his level. A spiritual seeker can only take care of others when he is disidentified from his body. A sage acts like a lighthouse. He lights the path for solitary navigators who are travelling away. The farthest may benefit even more than those who are physically near the sage, who are more like employees, who are sweeping the stairs of the lighthouse, they are not necessarily well located to see the light of the lighthouse.

Q. Can we observe silence while speaking?

A. If we speak only when it is necessary and if we keep the mind silent when we are not talking.

Q. Is it all right to go from one sage to another?

A. The beginners, who are seeking a spiritual master can do it, just to assess the situation. But when you have become a real disciple of a real guru, you become a part of his body and you can never leave him. It would be a diminishing of energy to go like a butterfly from one to the other simply to

see. Indians understand that very well. But Westerners have difficulties with it.

- Q. Why do some sages die very early ?
- A. They have come to accomplish a mission. They consider their body a burden. In their opinion, the sooner they get rid of it, to melt with ananda (bliss), the better. Thus, as soon as they feel that they have finished their missions, they leave their bodies.
- Q. Why don't you tell people more often to meditate ? Even though meditation is the basis of your sadhana, and it has represented and still represents for you the largest part of your life, it is unusual not to hear you push the visitors to do more meditation.
- A. I don't feel I have the soul of a teacher, and I am very careful with this type of ego. Besides, I don't want to talk and for people to be bored with me, as if they were at school. Moreover, if we tell someone who doesn't like to meditate, to do it, they will be upset. In my eyes, spiritual knowledge is happy knowledge. During a conversation with me, people extract what they need, if they really feel it. All come spontaneously. I feel that I am not the one who is talking. Real spiritual teaching is way beyond words, even though sometimes words are important. What I least like are discourses. People feel that they are doing a good action, satsang, when they come to listen to them, but in fact, we say all kinds of common things that everyone already knows. People can have the behaviour that they wish, I do not disturb them, but if they ask me for my advice, I give it. Sometimes, I happen to intervene. But it is not as a guru, it is more as one who would shout 'be careful', if he saw someone in the street about to walk into a hole that he hadn't seen. It happens at times that people get too close to a hole, and I tell them.
- Q. Do you feel that living in an ashram was helpful to you ?
- A. Ma's ashram, as well as other religious institutions, is inhabited by human beings. At the beginning, when I had an impure thought, I would immediately chase it, because I believed that everyone around me was pure.
- Q. What factors make a sadhaka start to attract disciples ?
- A. There was a time in my sadhana when I clearly understood how to attract numerous disciples, and how to become famous. But I firmly pushed back this temptation. The majority of gurus cannot give *shaktipat* (which is the transmission of energy). Therefore, they are not true gurus. Moreover, they are very much taken by the ashram they have founded or inherited, and they cannot resume intensive sadhana. There are some, however, who have been able to renounce the ashrams they have built.

Q. Do you believe in telepathy ?

A. A person who has a guru knows that they can communicate with him or her from a distance. To receive a telepathic message, one must have a silent mind, otherwise, even if we perceive it to a certain point, we start to fabulate around it. When I was in my hermitage in Dhaulchina, I had a problem regarding whether the grocery would be open when I went down to the village, or if the person who was providing my ghee actually had some. I would ask them from inside, and those people would usually answer me yes or no.

Q. Vijayananda, are you a guru?

A. Cavour, the remarkable diplomat, who was able to restore unity in Italy in the XIXth century, was asked the secret of his success. He answered: "I tell the truth, but no one believes me !" The same for me. I say that I am not a guru, but I am not believed.

Q. You must be in a permanent state of bliss.

A. No, I am a very ordinary man. However, I do not have negative emotions. No anger, no sexual desire, this desire which is so difficult to master. I don't have any attachments, not even to my adopted daughters, whom I love very much. Of course, during meditation I have bliss, but to maintain it permanently, in daily life, is much more difficult. That corresponds to the summit of spiritual evolution, or sahaja samadhi, which is spontaneous samadhi.

A HUMBLE PRAYER

—'A devotee'

Oh God ! I know not who art Thou. I know not where Thou exist or not. I know not Thy intention. I fail to understand Thy Divine Play with my little knowledge. I know not how to propitiate Thee. I know not how to convey my prayers to Thee. Still I convey to Thee, Immutable, Eternal One (through this Divine Form) in my modest way the humble prayer and pranam sincerely and wholeheartedly. I know not when and how this pranam and prayer will reach Thee.

Oh God ! may Thy peace, bliss and purity descend on earth ! May these descend on every creature, every man ! With their touch may all difference and turbidity be removed ! May the Divine Life blossom !

Oh God ! may Thou reveal Thyself in human form for the welfare of the universe, for the welfare of the humanity, for the welfare of this country, for the good of all devotees ! Please reveal Thy Knowledge, Power and vibhutes through Thy choicest sons—the devotees, brahmacharis, sannyasis, (saints), workers, attendants and others.—who are practicing sadhana and doing service for Thee in various ways in different ashrams and institutions.

Oh God ! reveal Thy Divine Will ! Those who are aspirant yogis, may the Divine insight dawn on them. Those who are religious, may their lives become blissful and happy. Those who are pure in souls, may the God-consciousness be awakened in them ! May they follow the path of Truth of Righteousness. Those who are possessed with asuric ideas, also please inspire them to the life of Truth and God. If not, please mould them in a new fashion in Thy ways. May the Kingdom of Truth and Righteousness dawn on earth, where the centre will be spiritualism. Science, industry, art, literature, philosophy, culture etc will be the means of expression. May the social, economic and political life be guided by Thy Divine Inspiration. May Thy blessings and grace be bestowed on all. May the Divine life flourish in a new way, in a new form !

Oh God ! in individual and family life also may the Divine touch descend ! With that touch, whatever there is of lower nature may that be transformed into the Divine way to higher nature ! May lust be transformed into Divine love, trance

(moha) be transformed into divine attraction, greed into divine aspiration, anger into god-bestowed strength ! In this way, please make free this *adhara* from all failings, sins and sufferings and give a new Divine life. Mould as Thy capable true son. May Thy peace, calmness and tranquility descend on this *adhara* (vessel). Please make the mind sincere, concentrated and non-attached, simple and straight forward, firm to the faith and well established in life's goal. Oh God ! please initiate me in Thy divine work and direct me to the desired ideal path. Please bestow Thy spontaneous Divine Knowledge, Divine Strength and Divine Ananda on this *adhara* ! Grace oh God ! Reveal Thyself and make me one with Thee.

Sincerest pranam at Thy Lotus feet.*

*. The above prayer was composed by the devotee on the occasion of Shree Shree Ma's 75th birthday.

**SHREE SHREE MA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE
SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE
OF INDIA FOR THE
BENEFIT OF MANKIND.***

—Dr. S.K. Mukherjee

You should know that I, as a student of science, am very particular about believing something which I have not observed myself or experienced myself. This is the teaching of science and I do not know why a scientist has been asked to chair this session. I have experienced no such extra sensory thing that two speakers have just now talked about.

We are fond of hearing about miracles performed by saintly persons, as if, that is a certificate for their saintliness. It is not. If you think that if I or anyone else utter the name of Ma, all troubles will vanish, this is because of your faith that Ma was physically there or knew about the trouble. This is not quite clear to a scientist. But even then, if there is a person, who has influenced you to such extent, that you keep on thinking about him/her in times of danger or trouble, if you utter the name of that person in such a situation, I think, you subscribe to the belief that there is some force that is deciding our movement, our fate, our life and so on. From the speeches it is also clear that we have plenty of saintly persons in our country, but I am not sure whether there is relevance to this seminar.

You remember Anandamayee Ma and you get the thrill of a loving mother, who has always concerned herself with her children, devotees, disciples and that itself becomes relevant whenever we are in trouble. This country which has produced so many saintly persons, who have declared from the top of their voice that there is a God who guides all of us. By loving God one goes nearer to Him. These are simple things, but there are people who think otherwise. There are again those who make this holy country an unholy one. This is what we don't like to be. We want this country to be a holy one. And in order to do that we must remember godly persons like Anandamayee Ma. She is one of those who have made this country holier. Because of such persons it is a pleasure to live. It is not a painful life any

* Extracts from lecture delivered by Dr. Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, ex-Vice Chancellor, Calcutta University in the National Seminar on Ma Anandamayee held at Mahajati Sadan, Calcutta on 20th & 21st December, 1997.

more, if we think of such persons very close to us. This is the relevance of remembering them.

I can not judge what Mother was like or is like. There is no past for Her. She is always present. I have not studied that much and am not capable of doing so. Only once I had the happiness to touch her feet in one function. And I do not know if I am devoted to her just because of that. And this is some thing which science cannot explain. And it will be an arrogance on the part of a scientist to try to explain these things. Why is it that many of the saints or saintly persons have had the same type of experience. In that sense it is close to science. I may have not done an experiment, but if somebody else does this experiment, I know that he is a truthful person. I have reason to believe what he has done. So belief has got a place even in science. And therefore, I think that the existence of saintly persons is by itself a truth, if someone I believe, has found this to be so.

Anandamayee Ma has not studied anywhere. She has not gone to any school, college or university or done any sadhana. O yes, she mentioned that she did some sadhana, but that was not necessary for her, that is what Mahamahopadhyay Gopinath Kaviraj said. This exercise was not at all necessary for her. It was there already. It was just to show persons like us. She has had self knowledge because she was close to the source of knowledge. Before you ask a question she answers. She is perhaps a source of knowledge herself.

So this is how we have to look at such persons as Anandamayee Ma. I always pity that in a conference like this, when you are speaking about spiritual things, it is not the religion in its narrow sense. It is spirituality which is far above religion. Religion imparts spirituality. It is no longer painful that there is a dearth of younger people in conferences like this. What do they do, if they do not study these things and do not imbibe these things at an early age ? It is spiritual liberalisation that is important. And this one can study, learn and attain while attending a conference like this.

I take this liberty of joining you to pay my obeisance to Shree Shree Anandamayee Ma. Let Anandamayee Ma bless all of you.

THE PERFORMANCE OF LILĀS IN SRI MA'S PRESENCE

[TWO]

—Dr. Bithika Mukerji

One of my sister Renudi's very successful plays was *Shishupalabadha*. The last scene was very dramatic. While Krishna was still in the attitude of majestic wrath, the assembled kings started on a *stotra* of adoration, while Shishupala lay dead at his feet. I, as usual, was in the wings. Somebody came and hurriedly called me to Sri Ma's seat in the Hall. I bent down to listen to her whisper. She said "Ask Shishupala also to get up and join in the prayer to Krishna !" I returned to the wings and inched my way behind some of the "Kings" to whisper to the fallen hero. "Get up and join in the prayer." Shishupala was played by Manmohanda's daughter Agamoni. She took sometime to understand such a strange cut from the wings, but did get up and join in as directed. The audience probably thought it as a miracle, written in the Text.

Sri Ma later gave me an explanation. She said, "You see her mother and sisters were in the audience; they would not have liked the sight of Agamoni lying lifeless on the stage, when all the other girls were singing hymns to Krishna." Sri Ma's compassion reached out to all participants. The authenticity of the tableaux on stage was not more real than the audience. How blissful those festivals were. The girls of the Kanyapeeth were joined by many youngsters from the families of devotees living nearby. It was one glorious week of celebrations.

Once Gurupriya didi's sister Beludi brought a set of silver ornaments for Sri Ma from Vindhyaçal. When she was decked in these villager-type ornaments She had a kheyala for performing a *lilā* herself. Only the elder girls knew about Sri Ma's project. The whole day they were in and out of Sri Ma's room showing her the different props as requested by her. The evening programme started as usual. While one of the plays was going on, Sri Ma quietly left her seat and entered the green-room. She put on the blue sari and silver ornaments given by Beludi. We were to enact the story of *chhadma yogi*. The story is : Krishna enters Radha's bower in disguise because she being in a mood of hurt alienation (*maana*) would not give permission for him to come in. Sri Ma chose Buba to play the role of Radha. Sati, Tara and myself were the different *sakhis*. Ma would whisper lines which we were to speak from time to time. She had no opportunity to do a rehearsal or even to tell

us how to set about the enactment of the story. I had a difficult time dressing up Buba to her satisfaction. Sri Ma said, "Could not you get a nicer sari for her ? I want a gauze-like veil over her head and back through which the long black plait of hair (*veni*) will be shimmeringly visible." Buba had brownish fine textured hair. We added dark tassels to make it long and black. Sri Ma took great care with the appearance of Radha but alas, nothing was quite upto her standard; she went on saying, "Don't you have anything prettier than this ?"

At last we were ready. The scene opened with Radha sitting with her *sakhis* in the forest grove. Sri Ma as the disguised yogi entered with a conch-shell held to her mouth. The sound was a playback from the green-room. The *sakhis* engage the yogi in conversation. He begins to abuse Krishna to which Radha takes exception and orders him to be evicted from the bower. The yogi reveals himself and all is joy and celebration.

I cannot quite recall if we could systematically work out this scenario, because the audience went ecstatic to see Sri Ma decked out as she was and raised shouts of "Jai Ma", "Jai Ma". They were happy to see Sri Ma since they had missed her in the auditorium. I do not think they paid any heed to the dialogue or to us. Sri Ma walked into the auditorium to delight of the women and so the play came to a happy end in any case.

Pushpadi was a great asset with her musical talent. She provided all the songs, kirtans, hymns needed for the plays and also the background music, one of her very beautiful musical presentations was the dance-drama "*Mahisasuramardini*", performed by Jaya and Tara of the Kanyapeeth, who were very young and slim at the time. Jaya looked beautiful as the Goddess and Tara was very convincing as the asura. The martial rhythm of the famous *stotra* sung as accompaniment created a truly uplifting atmosphere.

We gained so much prestige by our performances that once we were asked to do a play in public, that is in the hall of the Gopal Mandir on the occasion of the annual Sanskrit Divas in the presence of Sri Ma and Pt. Gauri Nath Shastri, the guest of honour. I took on the task of abbreviating the Sanskrit-drama *Prabodha-Candrodaya* for this purpose. The Kanyapeeth rose to the occasion beautifully. The guest of honour was profuse in his appreciation of the purity and simplicity of the presentation. Since those times the young girls themselves, now more competent than we were, carry on the tradition very effectively. Km. Geeta Bannerji now can write, produce and direct plays which are appreciated by the elite audience of Varanasi every year. Swami Chidanandaji was once invited by Sri Ma to sit in with her while a group photograph of the Kanyapeeth was taken. He was many times the

guest of honour for the annual prize-giving function. He has become so identified with the aims and ideals of the Kanyapeeth that he graciously comes to attend this function every year, from wherever he may be. The ultimate compliment was paid to the Kanyapeeth by the most renowned scholar of Varanasi, Pd. Pattabhirama Sastri. After participating in one of the Sanskrit-Divas programmes, he said, "It is said that if one dies in Kashi, there is no rebirth but salvation; however, if I should be reborn I would like to come as one of the *Kanyas* (girls) of the Kanyapeeth !"

Sri Ma's *vāṇi* that "little girls (or boys) are like fresh unsullied flowers, worthy of God; for them to touch the dimension of the ever present grace is easy and natural." Sri Ma's *kheyala* was always with the Kanyapeeth. Perhaps it was right that when Sri Ma's *kheyala* was directed toward the performing of a *lilā*, the venue happens to be the Kanyapeeth.

SRI MA'S LILA :

During one of the dramatic evenings Mauni Ma said to Sri Ma, "Ma, why don't you do a lila yourself ?" Sri Ma, said at once, "Shall I do so ? Will all of you act in it if I direct a *lila* ?" Everyone agreed enthusiastically.

The next day, Sri Ma sent for me and gave expression to her *kheyala* regarding this *lila* to be performed in the evening. In retrospect I realize that in this Sri Ma revealed herself fully. The *lila*, simple in itself, may need pages for an indepth study of its meaning. To begin with, Sri Ma detailed a stage where actors and audience would form a homogenous group. Sri Ma never had time to instruct me fully, I would follow her around with a notebook and pencil and write down whatever she would manage to say from time to time, sometimes even while going from one meeting to another. I understood her instructions as follows :

The hall was to be divided up in 8 or more sections. These divisions were to be fluid and arranged without disturbing the audience who were to fill up the whole room inclusive of the space generally set aside for the stage. There would be two central figures in each of the main section. One, depicting an image of God and the other a worshipper. The entire hall would be like a congregation where people would be sitting in groups around some special images. Groups could merge into each other, but a discernible narrow path would lead to each group. The groups detailed by Sri Ma were as follows, that is, as far as my memory goes : The first two groups at one end of the hall would be those of Vaishnavas and Saivas. In the first square two girls from the Kanyapeeth would stand in the classical pose of Radha and Krishna. In the second Didi would sit in meditation in front of Ganga, another student, adorned as Siva. Other groups depicted devotees of Rama and the

Buddha. Buba would sit in the posture of Buddha. In one section we had ascetics who looked up at the calm and serene figure of the Adi Sankaracharya. In one rather amorphous section there were yogis, gānapatyas and Hanumanji depicted by Vishuddha, who was at that time a little imp of mischief. I think there were other figures not too clearly defined, but who could represent images or worshippers of non-Hindu forms of religions.

There was a small balcony on the other side of the hall. The many simple adjuncts to this lila were assembled here; a book, a pair of cymbals, a *rudraksha mala*, a flower garland, *tulsi petals*, *bilva* petals and many such items. The whole day Sri Ma would dictate to me snatches of the lines to be spoken by me. The idea was that I would describe the various images extolling their majesty and grandeur and also their captivating qualities which keep their devotees enthralled. Then I would call upon an attendant (Sri Ma, in disguise) to provide them with some item which would be of use to them in their mode of worship of their chosen *Iṣṭa Devatā*. Sri Ma said, "You will say, "Oh you servant woman ! Come here !" I was astonished. I said, "Who am I to call Ma a servant woman ?" (*dāsī*)

"This body, of course !"

"But I cannot say 'servant woman' (*dāsī*) to you !"

"Can't you ?"

"No, absolutely not !"

Sri Ma looked a little non-plussed, but Didi who was nearby supported me. She then overcame this check to her *kheyala* by saying, "Well, I had many nicknames as a child. One of them was *Tirthavāsini*. How about Tirthavasini Mai ?" (The lady who lives in places of pilgrimages). I had no objection to Tirthavasini Mai, which I thought was very apt.

Thus, I was to call upon her saying something like this', "O Tirthavasini Mai ! Come here, See how beautiful this grove of trees is; how captivating are the images of Radha and Krishna. See with what dedication people are gathered here for a *Kirtana*." Truly one is transported to another world in an atmosphere like this.

After this comment, Sri Ma so heavily veiled that she hoped she would not be recognised, would emerge from the balcony carrying a pair of cymbals which she would place in the hands of the worshipper. Then she would go back to the balcony and become invisible to the audience. Sri Ma very painstakingly dictated comments for every group in the hall. Her words were a paen of praise, a hymn of ecstatic adoration in every case. There were no special or marginal groups. All were equally important. She wove such a rich tapestry of words signifying man's upsurge toward the divine that it seemed to encompass all possible attitudes which bind God

and man together. It was a celebration of variety and a realization of unity. Only Sri Ma could create this *lila* and 'enact' it beautifully.

One of the incidents of this *lila* threw light on Didi's attitude of utter obedience. Sri Ma had said in the beginning to her to sit in meditation in front of Siva. Didi had closed her eyes. Throughout the *lila* nobody told her to open her eyes, so she missed the entire presentation. We all laughed at Didi, but it was truly a remarkable example of unquestioning obedience.

In my desk, I still have a few pages of my original notes; Atmanandaji wrote an account of this *lila*. I think she was one of the very few who appreciated the presentation. The rest were looking adoringly at Sri Ma while she moved up and down the hall totally absorbed in what she was doing. Although her face was hidden, the beautiful hands were unmistakable. The audience was content to look upon her to the accompaniment of devotional music. I do not think anyone bothered to listen to my comments or relate them to Sri Ma's movements. Such was always the effect of this fantastic personality. She commanded total attention. We never paid heed to what she was saying, but were interested only in being in close proximity to her, to see her, to be near her and generally live in the shelter of her magic presence.

Sri Ma, in a later year, directed another *lila* in Dehradun. I was not there but heard about it from the others. This time Sri Ma herself did not take part but directed others in their performances which was again a *lila* of Divine images and their worshippers. The players were Chhabidi, Chitra, Bishuddha and other young girls who formed Sri Ma's entourage at this time. It was acted out in public in the satsang hall of Dehradun Ashram. Sri Ma took delight in impromptu arrangements and also a type of contrivance which makes do with whatever is at hand. She was never at a loss or discouraged by lack of facilities; it must also be recorded that her *kheyala* itself brought about a concatenation of circumstances which bridged all lacunae.

The Kanyapeeth still maintains a high standard of artistic performances on special occasions. Sri Ma's *Kheyala* continues to sustain this institution which has celebrated its 60th year in September, 1998.

BHAIJEE—THE FOREMOST CHILD OF MA

—Dr. Debaprasad Mukhopadhyay

No narration about the *lila* of Shree Shree Ma would be even half complete without speaking about 'Bhaijee' —Sri Jyotish Chandra Roy.

It was Bhaijee who was called to Siddheswari (then a dilapidated Kali temple complex in the outskirts of Dhaka) from his office by Ma Herself in a mysterious manner, and here itself "Nirmala" was most appropriately named as "Anandamayee" in presence of Pitaji (Baba Bholanath), Her husband in 1924. The incidence was very much pre-destined.

Bhaijee was born on 18th July, 1880 in the port city of Chittagong in a respectable family of Bengal. He was groomed into a simple but highly cultured and educated man who held high office those days (I.S.O.) and was attached to Mr. Finlow, the then Director of Agriculture, Bengal in Dhaka.

Since his childhood, he had a deep spiritual urge which led him to look for the company of many ascetics in vain. He lost his mother at the early age of four, as such he used to always feel a sense of deprivation and longing for true motherly love and affection. But that was not easily available. He was married early to a girl when she was 8/9 years old. While outwardly Bhaijee maintained a normal family life with a comfortable home and children, his silent *sadhana* or yearning for inner peace and knowing the ultimate continued. He was initiated by his *Kulaguru* at the age of 28. Yet his restlessness of mind did not subside and still wandered for its destination. It was only in 1924, at the age of 44, that Bhaijee suddenly came in touch with Ma. It was very much pre-destined ! He heard that some Mataji had been staying at the Nawab's Gardens at Shahbag (Dhaka) since last few months. That time Ma was *mauna* (carrying out the vow of silence) for a long time. Seldom she used to sit in *Yogasana* and converse a few words. Thanks to Bholanath, Ma's husband in the material life, one fine morning Bhaijee could glance at the lotus feet of Ma. He could immediately realize that his half-a-century-long ambition and prayer was going to be fulfilled. It was for this "Mother" that he was restlessly moving in pilgrimage. He could feel an ecstatic joy with shivering. He felt like crying and ask Ma like a small child right then as to why She had not appeared before him earlier ? Also, due to his background as a *sadhaka*, he was stunned by seeing the highly elevated super-blissful state of existence of Ma as a housewife, always engrossed in a high state of *samadhi*, in which Ma used to be immersed at all times.

After some time Bhaijee asked Ma, "What are my chances of spiritual improvement ?" But the Master always tests disciples' tenacity and perseverance. Ma replied, "I do not see any true appetite for that as yet". Bhaijee returned home quite disappointed. He did not visit Shahbag Gardens for the next seven months but his attraction for Ma as a real mother became more unbearable ! The Mother had caught the right child in Her firm hands at the first sight, as Bhaijee was destined to play a very important role in Ma's *lila*, and help disseminate Ma's message and identify Her before the world.

Meantime, Bhaijee wrote a book titled "Sadhana" and sent it across to Ma at Shahbag. Ma called for the "writer" of the book. Bhaijee was delighted. Ma said, "After a long vow of silence I am now able to speak better. You have written a nice book. Try to improve upon the purity of mind and *bhava*". Pitaji (Baba Bholanath) was also present. From that day, there was sea change in Bhaijee's interior and exterior beings, and at last he fully surrendered himself at the lotus feet of Ma like a child.

Soon afterwards, two major events happened by which extremely kind and graceful Ma Anandamayee decided to remove all doubts and confusions from the mind of Bhaijee. Firstly, during a conversation Bhaijee suddenly asked Ma, "You tell me correctly Ma, who you really are ?" Smilingly Ma replied, "Why this childish question ? I am the same as what I was, what I am now and what I shall remain in future. I am all that what you people think and talk about me. But know it for certain that this body was not born to reap the fruits of any *prarabdha*. Why don't you see that this body is nothing but a Divine manifestation of *bhavas*. You people prayed for it and you have now got it ! Play with it for the time being. What's the use of knowing more ?"

Bhaijee said, "Ma, your reply does not satisfy my queries". On hearing this, Ma's face suddenly turned very serious, Divinely grave and she forcefully asked, "Tell me what more you want to know. Tell me." Bhaijee was stunned and scared to see Ma in that dazzling and terrifying form. He was dumbfounded and kept his head down ! The second incidence quickly followed the first one—a fortnight later. It was the summer of 1925. Bhaijee had gone to Shahbag gardens very early in the morning as usual and was waiting for Ma's *darshan* outside the door at a distance of about 25 yards. All of a sudden, the door opened and Ma appeared in front in a dazzling, Divinely beautiful form of a Goddess, and the whole room was suddenly illuminated as if with million suns. Within seconds, Ma reappeared at the same place in her usual human form, as if absorbing the whole energy emanating from her very quietly within Herself again. Bhaijee realized immediately that Ma gave

Her real identity and answered to his query this way. It was also a great and direct favour done by Ma at an early stage by which all confusions and contradictions were removed from Bhaijee's mind once and for all. He further realized that Ma was in reality not only the mother of his and others of Shahbag or Dhaka, but the mother was truly Divine and She was the Universal Mother. He further realized that his *Istha*, whom he had been worshipping for the last so many years was none other than Ma Herself.

During Ma's *lila* in this holy land spread over 86 years, we have seen that although many ascetics and non-ascetics were fortunate to get Ma's company even for a long time, a very handful of them could really know and understand Ma, as She was really *Durgneya* (beyond realization), until She Herself revealed Her real identity. Bhaijee was one of those rare persons and one of the foremost. Thus it was easier for Bhaijee for total self-surrender and also in projecting Ma before the rest of the world by proclaiming who the Mother was even during the early phase of Ma's *lila*. Probably, Ma wanted this way. Otherwise how, as early as sixty years ago, in his "Twelve Commandments" (Dwādash Vāni) Bhaijee could boldly proclaim before the world, "Whatever we can think of or comprehend about God, the Almighty, Shree Shree Ma is the total manifestation of that".

It is now clear that Bhaijee was born pre-destined to take the foremost and leading part in Ma Anandamayee *lila*, which Ma played in this holy country for the benefit of mankind, after Her enactment of the role of a housewife was over at Shahbag gardens Dhaka in 1924. In fact, it was during the later part of the same year 1924 that Bhaijee named Mother so far known as Nirmala or Dhaka's mother or Goddess Kali in human form (Mānush Kāli) as "Anandamayee" in a quick sequence of events which were pre-destined and much beyond the control of Bhaijee. Gurupriyadi and her illustrious father Dr. Sashanka Mohan Mukherjee, Civil Surgeon of Dhaka (later named Swami Akhandananda) did not come to Ma till then. By then Ma and Baba Bholanath had accepted Bhaijee as their loving son, a divine relationship, which Bhaijee enjoyed all throughout by virtue of his self-surrender, true love and constant yearning for Mother's lap as if in the form of a small child. By Mother's unique grace and exemplary *kripa*, Bhaijee could transcend his sense of status, prestige and ego of a high official, his family and children, his failing health and protection of his comfortable and secured home, everything so easily, but his mind, heart and soul were focussed at Ma's lotus feet at all times -- a state which even many ascetics were not able to attain. That's why Ma said at the time of Bhaijee's death in 1937 at Almora on his return from the trip to Kailash and Manas - sarobar, that he attained such a state of being which was

very difficult to attain. Bhaijee got immersed in the state of *Brahman* -- the Ultimate. He could then see Ma anywhere and everywhere around him in this world and beyond. He could as well see that Ma and he himself were one, and were immersed in the same 'ONE', *Brahman*. In Ma's entire *lila* spread over a span of 86 years, we have never seen such a unique and exemplary favour or *kripa* of Ma to any one of Her children, whether ascetics or others.

It has to be appreciated that Bhaijee came in touch with Ma quite late in his life, when he was 44 years old and could be actively associated with Ma's *lila* for only little more than 12 years before he became '*Brahmaleen*'. But when things are predestined and he was born to play a particular role in Shree Shree Ma's *lila*, time and space are meaningless entities. On the other hand, Bhaijee's deprivation and loss of his own mother very early in life followed by his relentless *sadhana* for the search of a true and motherly spiritual guide, made it easier for him to be able to totally surrender at Ma's lotus feet without reservation. Similarly, Ma also did not lose any time to bestow on Her marked and dearest child, "self-knowledge" and she steered clear his path of *sadhana* for the realization of the Ultimate. In doing so, Ma even had to apply her all-pervading *Kheyal* to save him on a couple of times from sure death due to severe illness, develop the spirit of total renunciation in him and ultimately made him relinquish the unreal and mundane bondage of family and home on the path of attainment of "self-knowledge" and eternal bliss. All these now may appear to be some-what mystique in nature, very difficult to imagine for a householder; but Ma Anandamayee made it happen.

Ma said to Bhaijee, "Don't forget that you are a *Brahmin*, and there exists very finest linkage with you and this body in a supra-sequential pattern." By saying this, Ma threw at him Her gold *Yagnopabita* (sacred thread made of gold). On another occasion, Ma said, "It was not easy to drag you out from your karma (*Prārabdha*) and your material life and home. If you had continued like that, you would have been finished long back. It was not an easy task !"

The above clearly shows that Bhaijee was not an ordinary human being. He was a 'marked' child of Ma who came along with Ma Anandamayee to help enact Her *lila* as the foremost child. It was a terrific privilege which could not have been acquired by anybody ! In Ma's *lila* , where motherly love and compassion (*Vātsalya-rasa*) became the most dominant constituent; it was Bhaijee alone who appeared before Ma as Her foremost and the most loving child after sacrificing his own identity at Ma's lotus feet. How great and most elevated soul Bhaijee was and what could be his rare achievement in terms of response from his Universal Mother, Ma Anandamayee -- has been very clearly revealed during the last few days

of Bhajee and immediately after-wards his becoming *Brahmaleen*. In this respect, I quote the relevant portion from the author's book "Matri-Lila Darshan¹" (English translation) :

"The hallowed last moments of Bhajji (Late Jyotish Chandra Roy) an eminent disciple of Ma shall stand out for all times as an illuminating testimony to the inexhaustible and boundless stream of Ma's motherly care which constantly flowed out for the benefit of her devoted children. It was Bhajji who first of all recognized Ma for what she was and held her up to the world. He was identified with her and when leaving his body merged with her. Such devotees are rare. Fifty odd years ago, he was able to say, "On the one hand the Mother is *Brahma*, and on the other She is compassionate, joy-radiating (Anandamayee) Mother. The whole universe is made up of energy. One who is immersed in the sea of this causal energy, cannot fail to recognize Ma. The mother is then everything to him, the only object of his seeking. Thus orientated, he discovered Ma in everything and being beside himself, lost all sense of discrimination between 'I' and 'You'. Austerities and spiritual discipline have to be practised only so long as the Mother is not attained. Of what need are these to him who has found his place in the Mother's lap ? As Bhajji has sung :

Eto bhalobasa ke kothay dibe ?

Kangaler tare ke eto kandibe ?

Thakite samay laiya sharan, kalyaner pathē hao aguyan !

Kanpaye saghane, medini gagane, uthhao mayer jai nishan !!

(Sricharane- p56)

(Where is the one to offer so much love and shed such profuse tears for the indigent ? Seek shelter with her while there is time and proceed along the path of self-uplift. Unfurl the flag of victory to the mother and keep it fluttering amain covering earth and heaven).

And Sri Ma ? Well, during Bhajji's last hours, she used to wipe his hands, face, forehead and the whole of his body with the skirt of the cloth and as if she had borne him, she kept sleepless watch night after night and tended him with care. At last when Bhajji reposing his head on the mother's lap breathed his last at Almora, and visualized the ONE -- Ma everywhere, then he broke out into an ecstatic cry, "What joy ! How beautiful." Ma went into *samadhi* and remained in that state for full six days and was carried to the Kishenpur Ashram at Dehra Dun. At that time she took nothing for sixteen days except a few spoonfuls of water.

Some of Sri Ma's erudite disciples are of the opinion that Ma could not be subject to grief. But this humble, unlearned writer cannot accept this view for the simple reason that it would negate Ma's role as really affectionate to Her children.

Glory to thee, Bhajji ! I offer my salutations at thy feet. "

1. Matri-Lila Darshan by Debaprasad Mukhopadhyay. pp. 240

IMPRESSIONS OF ANANDAMAYI MA

— Richard Lannoy

[TWO]

The sacred art of the past employs stillness, permanence, immobility, hieratic gesture, and stylized and abstracted features in the depiction of exalted spiritual beings. To achieve transcendence of mundane appearances, sacred art of all epochs and all cultures also depended upon the artist's ability not to depart as far as possible from any factual resemblance to natural appearances. For instance, the sublime beings carved from the living rock of India's ancient cave sanctuaries do not counterfeit the look of mere mortals, they are divine by reason of their distance from the facts of material reality. Was I, by freezing action with fast shutter speeds, committing sacrilege in a holy place' or was I pushing the limits of the optical to evoke that which lies beyond time? Anandamayi Ma did not curb my immoderate zeal, one of her most persistent leitmotifs was the need for skill in action. She tolerated my close attendance with intrusive apparatus for days at a time spanning a period of four years. So with equal generosity did many of her followers, who no doubt had better things to do than fuss over my needs.

What was I trying to do ? First of all, I was trying to be absolutely truthful to experience. A friend of mine; the veteran educator, Sri Sanjiva Rao, compared Anandamayi Ma's mind to an extraordinarily sensitive photographic plate. "She contacts the world around her without the mediation or interpretation of a busy mind. This mind carries on no independent activity of its own, but is a clean mirror for the reflection of Truth. Her photographic plate records without distortion the physical and psychic events occurring around it. Anandamayi Ma possesses an extraordinary gift of remembering people she has met, despite the ceaseless and numberless parade of faces which passes daily in front of her eyes. Here was my model in a dual sense; on the one hand, a paragon of that, "I am a Camera", truthfulness I sought to emulate; on the other, a photographer's 'model', whom I could record from every angle. By a series of decisive moments, recorded by ultra-efficient lens and film, at the very quick of life, would move in close to this hyper sensitive person, as she in turn moved out to meet me. In that conjunction of reciprocal awareness, a third reality would come into being, an image escaped from the trammels of time, recording an occurrence powerful enough to eclipse my own intrusive ego.

As things turned out, this proved to be a hard apprenticeship : sessions involved intense visual concentration and often as not, ended with no picture being taken, due either to the press of devotees or insufficient light. Almost all the best moments with Anandamayee Ma occurred at night or in deep shade, when it was not possible to use a camera. Besides, her attention was so acute that she seemed at times to anticipate my every move, however discreet, permitting me to use my camera only briefly, no verbal refusal was ever given, just ingenious evasion—and at her own moment of choice ! There was often no mistaking, those occasions when photography was deemed unacceptable. At other times compliance was tacit and the work proceeded without mishap. My most important requisite, I soon discovered, was my own heart. Nothing worked if I was not focussed heart and soul upon my task — there would simply be no way through and I would be blocked. Only when my emotional temperature was sufficiently high, or sufficiently cool, so it seemed, did she pick up the correct signal and make way for me. Here was a lesson in a new kind of concentration. Photography became my sadhana, as meditation and yoga were the sadhana of my fellow ashram inmates. It was my path to Truth.

The ashram garden was like the wings of a theatre; people made their entrances and exits through its screen of foliage to the handsome terrace over the Ganges. Here I watched many scenes of breathtaking beauty. It was indeed a kind of stage, but for the performance of sacred drama; it never had even the slightest touch of theatricality about it though, nor were the players given to "Strutting the boards," as my figure of speech might suggest. The marvellous thing about this terrace stage was the fact that every action which took place there sprang from the inner motivation of all who walked upon it. The performances were not according to a script in an assumed and predetermined role, but a spontaneous participation in divine *lila*. Like iron filings attracted by a magnet, every one was drawn into the ineluctable patterns of a current whose force was holistically greater than the sum of its parts. The location, high above the sacred waters, the magical light which is so distinctive a charm of this ancient city, the pulsation of the kirtan singers circling close to Anandamayi Ma, all contributed to the enchantment. The retinue of women who seemed to accompany her wherever she went looked exactly as one would imagine the Greek chorus looked — and no doubt had a kindred function.

Here on the terrace people would gather for Mataji's darshan during her promenades. Very early in the morning, when the mist created the effect of a lace veil in the still air between parapet and river, she might stroll for a while, heavily wrapped in a shawl. Nobody could tell when she would come out of her room; when at last she did so, all eyes would be upon her, following her every moment in

a kind of contemplative vigil. It was lovely to watch the people come and go, some prostrating themselves at Mataji's feet, sometimes she gave an exquisite response, her hand folded delicately in ever - changing *mudras*, at other times she would become absorbed with a supplicant in brief counselling.

I soon noticed the complete absence of regimentation— no serried ranks or rows of obedient congregation, no processions, no massed lines of followers performing synchronized rituals at the command of intoning priests. The only activity organized in patterns was the chanting of hymns, particularly a fine arati hymn, evensong verses composed for Ma Anandamayi's people. There were many occasions, especially during festivals, when the music provided an insistent and compelling rhythmical pulse to quicken the spirit and carry people to the border of rapture. More usually Nama Kirtan was an opportunity to generate ardour. I can still, 40 years on, feel a tingle in my spine when I recall the haunting voice of Pushpa, a gifted young woman, as she repeatedly called out the name of a deity, a wonderful archaic sound, like a maenad shrilling in the sacred wood. Now and then Anandamayi Ma would sing — inimitably — in a sweet, youthful, transparent way, the mood was relaxed, but also poignant.

Extracts from the widely acclaimed book of the writer — "Anandamayi : Her Life and Wisdom" published from England by Element Books Ltd.

FROM THE NOTES TAKEN IN SRI MA'S PRESENCE

— 'Kirpal'

6-5-59—Dehra Dun.

Dr. Panna Lal : I Surrender to my Lord with all my strength; but why doesn't the Lord, known as the Protector of his devotees, take me under his shelter ? Why does he keep me far away ?

Ma : (Turning to Sri Jogesh Brahmachariji, a senior saint) Father, why does the Lord keep at a distance? What do the *sastras* (Holy Books) prescribe ?

Sri J.B. : Shastras

Ma : Far from whom ? God does not keep you far away whatever you do (for God realisation). God gives immediately. Whatever actions you perform for God realisation, the rewards for these actions to the minutest detail are given. No effort is ever wasted. God cannot remain content without giving you the results of your efforts. As much as is your desire for God that is given. Whatever your efforts the blessings are given accordingly.

Q. : God does not give us as much as our efforts.

Ma : How do you measure your blessings? Whatever you give, you receive in exact measure. You should understand that the feeling "I am not receiving God's Grace" is also a form of God's grace ?

Q. : What form ?

Ma. : To increase the intensity of your longing for God the path to proceed further will be opened. The result is in direct proportion to your efforts, God cannot remain without giving. That is a fact.

Q. : If there is no advance.

Ma. : When one says, "I have no courage" that means that there is still courage.

Ma. : When one is completely absorbed in the love of God and there is deep longing for God realisation, then one does not have the time to look for the fruit of one's strivings.

Sri Jogesh

Brahmachari : The Grace of God, *Ahetu Kripa*, that Grace which is given without any cause .

- Ma. : *Ahetu Kripa*—That Grace is given from above without dependence on any effort. Whatever one does do not go unrewarded.
- J.B. : How does one receive the causeless Grace ? Does any one receive it ?
- Ma. : That is God's will.
- Dr. Panna Lal : Those sitting (here), does your Grace (*Kripa*) descend on them or not ?
- Ma. : *Kripa* (Grace) descends on all effortlessly. How ? As you place a *rasgulla* (sweet) in some place, whether the ants eat it or not, the sweet juice keeps flowing.
- J.B. : The sweet juice flows from the *rasgulla* and the ants come to know about it.
- Ma. : Yes, they get the news. The fact is that they (people) are so conditioned (they have no taste for spiritual matter) that they have no strength to advance towards God. Causeless Grace is a different matter. Where is the taste for sweets (spiritual pursuits) ?
- J.B. : As much as one's hunger (spiritual) is appeased. But one does not get a particle.
- Ma. : Father, where is the desire for spiritual matters ?
- J.B. : How many nights one has spent for the Lord ?
- Ma. : I have done so much, I have spent so many nights (in prayer). That is enhancing of the ego. If one truly aspires for God one will attain to the Divine. If the true desire for attaining to the Divine arises then one cannot rest till one reaches the Supreme Goal.
- Q. : Ma, arouse that desire for the Divine.
- Ma. : If I say follow these tenets, you are not ready to do, but say, "Ma arouse the desire".
- Q. : If God blesses anyone, do they profit thereby?
- Ma. : That is God's *maya* (play). God is doing what is to be done. There is no other aspect. Your desire for Divine realisation, that is also God Himself arousing it.
- Q. : Then is something happening ?
- Ma. : Definitely. It is happening, why will it not happen? If you strive for God realisation and (feel) it will not happen, is that ever possible ?

- Q. : There will be Kirtan (singing of the name of God) all night and if God does not come, then why is the kirtan being done ?
- Ma. : In God's domain there is no place for bargaining or worldly dealings. Everything belongs to God. All power is in God's hand. God can not take on the form of a bania trader) at the stage you are in, Do not practice worldly bargaining. That will not clear your path. In God all is contained.

THE ALTAR

—'Shobha'

HER presence springs forth like an altar from the galaxy of stars. In bounty are they scattered in the clear heavenly blue skies of the twilight. The ocean beneath rocking in silence. The white foam of pure froth eagerly rises with the rising waves to caress the Lotus Feet. Petite though they are, but strongly have they held those who touched them one by one.

Fragrance of the buds, opening to the warmth of the Sun, wavering leaves, clinging vines, ruffles of the long blades of grass, gentle creaks of the branches awaken the spirit with the calmness of HER Joy. Pines the heart for the longing of HER love.

The westerly wind calmly ruffles the veil of mist from the distant cliffs and ridges hailing the glory of the rising sun. Pastel colors of morn spread far and wide. Hark ! The whisper of falling leaf on the dewy laden ground, the twitter of the bird, humming of the bees, fluttering of the butterfly wings, the rythm in the canter of the horse, the soft bark of a mountain dog, light footsteps of a wandering monk. In harmony do they chime the song of Love. Drawing closer and closer to the door of HER ALTAR.

Here in HER ALTAR she regally sits high. Tresses so long falling down. Tiny feet planted so firm. Assuring HER presence so inevitable. MA Anandamayi. The Bliss Permeated Mother abides in HER glory in this abode of peace and beauty. The quiet humble monk awaits.....

O'lost wanderer, do not wail in the silence of your heart. Know that one finds HER not to part, but become a part of HER.

FROM PARIS TO THE HIMALAYAS

— Jacques Vigne

One of the inmates of Ma's ashram asked me to write how I came to Kankhal some twelve years ago, and how I have stayed since that time in this land of Bharat Mata, inspired by Ma's teaching.

I have been practising yoga since the age of 17 and I have been also attracted by the Christian monastic life. I did even two periods of solitude with intensive meditation in a forest near a holy place during vacation time, when I was a medical student. At the age of 29, I decided to come for six months in India to find some higher teaching in yoga and meditation. I was told independently by two friends that there was a French Swami near Hardwar who had lived a long time with a sage called Anandamayi Ma. So at 35 I came to Kankhal with the intention to stay three days, and I stayed three months and three weeks. I was looking for someone who had a real and protracted experience of solitary life, and who had been himself guided by an able guru, so I found all that in Swami Vijayananda. Moreover, beyond the language question, we could communicate more easily because we were from the same cultural background and from the same profession. I knew very little of Ma at that time, but I read and became quickly acquainted with her life and teaching.

The next year, I applied for and got a scholarship to study in BHU, and to write a book on the guru-disciple tradition. I stayed three years there coming for retreats often, until in 1989 I settled near Ma's ashram at Kankhal permanently. After my first book came another one on spiritual psychology and a third one on meditation and psychology, all published first in Paris, and then in Delhi for the first two ones. These writings were clearly linked with my own deepening of sadhana, my understanding of Yoga and Vedanta, as well as Ma's teaching. It is said in the tradition that after twelve years, all the cells of the body are renewed and that you are completely transformed in the process. It may be true for the body, but not for the brain which is a nut harder to crack. So, to tackle things seriously, I felt that the next step of my "schooling" in India was experiencing for some years the life of a hermit in the Devabhumi, i.e. the Himalayas. I like Kumaon, and in fact I am writing this article in Dhaulchina. This is the place that Bhaji liked much on his way to Kailash with Ma in 1937 just before his death. Now, Swami Nirgunananda has been living here for the past twelve years, following Swami Vijayananda's

steps, who spent six years there, except in winter when he was rather in Almora or somewhere with Ma. The clear days when we can have Nanda Devi's darshan, it helps me to remember another Devi permeated with Ananda... Since long, I had the dream to lead the life of a hermit. At times, dreams come true.

But I do not know if I will be able to stay here regularly, because after twelve years visa extensions are not so easy to get, and so I have always this uncertainty to be obliged to quit India quickly one day or the other. But I feel that even if I have to leave India for a few months due to administrative difficulties, I won't go back to the West. For some years onwards I will rather stay in the region. In fact, besides Hindi, I have got a working knowledge of Nepali, and I can continue my life of retreat in Nepal also if needed, without much problem of adaptation.

After these years in India, I would like to go back to my country, France, to continue my monastic life in the spirit of Ma there, somewhere in a quiet place, and to be present for the people interested in the path to follow, i.e., that of Yoga and Vedanta. To live in a foreign country is a boon for sadhana, because it favours solitude, but as far as communicating something about spirituality is concerned, being home is the best, for one can feel the psychology of people, what they can understand and what they cannot.

Of course, all that I am saying on my future can be changed, because sadhana is an inner adventure, especially when you start living in a hermitage... but what I feel for sure is that this adventure is not and will not be devoid of *ananda*, and for the rest, *Jo ho jaye*.

PAGES FROM GURUPRIYA DEVI'S DIARY

(Translated from the original in Bengali)

December, 1936.

Ma was in Navadwip. On a tuesday evening Ma took all her devotees to Lalita Sakhi . As soon as Ma reached, Sakhi Ma hurried outside, prostrated on the ground and did pranama to Ma. We all went with Ma and sat in the verandah. One of the devotees requested Sakhi Ma to say something. She replied, "I am only a machine which will sound the way you play. I surely do not have the capacity to reply to the questions. Yet it is always necessary to ask questions about God and it is good to bring up the subject."

Prankumar Babu— What is the duty of a Jiva ?

Sakhi Ma— Each one's duty is different. If the son has certain duty, the father has another kind of duty. Some duties are compulsory for all. If you meet a little boy and ask him, "Where do you live, why have you come ?" he is able to answer you. But we are so ignorant that if we are asked the same questions we are unable to answer. Therefore, it appears that our first duty is to try to understand— "Where have I come from, why have I come ?" Everything can be achieved by having faith in the guru's words.

All were very pleased with this reply and when they expressed their happiness Sakhi Ma said humbly, "There is none of ability in this. It is the skill of the one who plays. "Ma laughed and said, "If the strings of the instrument are not turned the sound will be dissonant; therefore the excellence of the instrument has also to be taken into account." Sakhi Ma replied, "Though the strings be broken the player can repair the strings and produce beautiful sounds".

Such conversation rendered a blissful atmosphere. Finally Sakhi Ma said, "Ma, we heard that you had gone. I felt very unhappy and thought that I am a worthless woman lying here & Ma went away without even once coming here. Then we got the news that you had not left." Ma laughed and replied, " Can the daughter go away without seeing her mother ?"

At this juncture since the space on the verandah was insufficient, we all came out into the open with Ma & Sakhi Ma.

A lady devotee – How is *sraddha* developed ?

Sakhi Ma – Faith in the guru's words arouses *sraddha*.

Devotee – And what if there is no faith at all ?

Sakhi Ma – Sadhana is performed in order to strengthen faith. You cannot say you have no faith at all. Look, your parents entrust you to an unknown young man saying that from this day you are his. Believing this you leave your parents and others and go away with him, taking refuge only in him. Is this something that can be done without faith? Did you not accept an unknown young man as your own only because of your faith in your father's words? Unswerving devotion towards the husband can lead to liberation – nothing else is necessary. But we make the mistake of expecting something from our husbands.

Saying this she went on to narrate the story of a chaste woman who was devoted to her husband—

The husband of a chaste woman was suffering from leprosy and was unable to even stand. His wife carried him in a basket on her head and took him around. One day when she was lowering the basket a tear fell from his eyes on her body. She immediately concluded that her husband was unhappy because of some shortcoming in her behaviour, and that the tear had therefore dropped from his eye. So she very humbly asked her husband if some mistake on her part had caused him pain and begged him to tell her what her mistake was. He replied, "How can anyone with a devoted wife like you feel sad?" But the wife was not consoled by this reply and questioned him persistently. Finally the husband confessed, "See, I have no strength at all, yet my mind is so weak and impure that today when I saw a beautiful woman walking past I was attracted towards her. Because of this I felt extremely unhappy, for I wondered how my mind could become so impure when I was blessed with such a devoted wife, Thinking thus my eyes filled with tears." The wife said no more, but entrusted his husband to a neighbour saying that she was going elsewhere on some business and that the neighbour should kindly look after her husband till she returned.

The wife searched exhaustively and finally located the woman and discovered that she was a prostitute. The wife now engaged herself in serving the prostitute without the knowledge of the latter. She served her secretly and went to the extent of cleaning her toilet. The prostitute was mystified as to who was thus attending on her clandestinely. After trying for two or three days, the prostitute finally managed to catch the chaste woman and asked her, "Devi, who are you? Why are you secretly serving a lowly woman like me? What is it that you want? I shall give you anything you ask for!" Then the woman said, "Tell me truly, will you give me whatever I ask for?" The prostitute replied, "Know for sure, I shall give you whatever you demand." The woman explained, "My husband is a leper. He saw you and was attracted by you. You must come to my husband". The prostitute replied, "All right. I have associated with so many lowly people, I shall be blessed by the touch of the husband of such a devoted and chaste wife like you." So saying she set out with the wife.

Meanwhile in Vaikuntha Narayana's throne began quaking. He told Lakshmi that he was going to the earth to see a devoted wife. Lakshmi declared, "She is one of our kind, so I shall also go." Similarly, Lord Shankara arrived from Kailasa with Parvati and Brahma descended from Brahmaloaka with Saraswati and they all went to the earth to see the devoted wife. Just as the devoted wife took the prostitute to her husband, the prostitute experienced a radical change in her nature. The wife approached her husband with great reverence and devotion. When she looked up she saw that all the gods & goddesses were present. She asked them why they had come. They replied, "Devi, we have come for the darshan of a devoted wife like you." That place was immediately transformed into heaven. Saying so much, Sakhi Ma concluded, "Look, because of a devoted wife all the people became blessed."

Sakhi Ma continued, "You should do sadhana methodically. If you are unable to do that, then just tie your small boat to this (pointing towards Ma) "big boat". Even if *samsara* drags the small boat from behind, it will just float with the big boat, so why fear? And a unique feature of this big boat is that it has specialized equipments to pull things that are behind it and so it drags them of its own accord."

MY FIRST MEETING WITH MA

—Jaya Kania

My first meeting with Ma Anandamayee & later episodes. My husband used to go often to Shri Ma for *darshan* at Mr. B.K. Shah's residence at Vile Parle. He had known Ma for several years, also during the Samyam Saptaha that was held at Juhu. He had Ma's first *darshan* at the Shiv Mandir at Sion. My parents and my mother - in - law had also gone there for Ma's *darshan*, but I never went.

Gurupriya didi once said to my husband, "You have been coming to Ma quite often, but your wife has never come with you. Bring her once", So, when Ma was at Vile Parle at B. K. Shah's house, we all went there. I remember that Tanmayananda was sitting outside Ma's room and singing Kirtan. I liked it very much. He had a lovely voice. If I remember right, the Bhajan was—"He Govinda He Gopal"

I went into Ma's room for her *darshan* and came out. This meeting, however, did not impress me much. And I did not go again for quite some time. I just did not feel the attraction or that longing which some people have felt for Her at the very first meeting. Why was that ? I wonder. Most people see Ma once and that is enough for a life long association. The attraction is so strong that they keep going again and again. In my case, the first meeting had no particular effect on me.

I used to visit quite a few other holy persons with my father, e. g. Upasani Baba, Hansdevji Maharaj, Narayan Swamiji, but none of them made any lasting impression on my mind. Everything happens at the appointed time and I suppose the time was not ripe for my association with Ma. That can be the only reason for this strange occurrence in my case. For some, the attraction is so strong, that they leave everything, wife, children, their jobs & come to Ma and never go back. For others it is not so strong. They ofcourse go to Ma as often as they can, but they do not leave everything to be with Her for the rest of their lives. They come to Her when their affairs permit, stay for a few days & go back home. However, this does not imply that their love or veneration for Ma is any the less. You come to Ma only if she so desires. You may not understand what Ma says, the language or the inner meaning & yet she manages to convey what she wishes you to understand. All this I am able to say now from my personal experience.

Some years after my first visit, I was in Pune with my children and Shri Ma was also there in Bhutakaka's house. I went there one morning. Ma stayed in the

Garage and Didi was sitting outside the door— a formidable presence. I went in, did pranam, and asked for a *mantra* for my daily puja. Ma asked Didi to bring something. It was written with chandan powder on a tulsi leaf. Ma gave me the leaf with the *mantra* written on it. I did not stay for long and came away. But before doing so, I requested Shri Ma that I would like to sing to Ma. She told me to come at 9 p. m. that night.

My son, Narottam, then was very small and used to sleep with me. So after he was asleep, I put a couple of pillows where I would have been sleeping & went to Shri Ma. She asked me how I had managed to come inspite of Narottom, I told her what I had done & she was highly amused. I sang before her that night & then went again & again. One night "Hare Krishna Hare Rama" kirtan was in progress and several of the Kanyapeeth girls & ladies were going around in a circle and singing. This kind of Kirtan was totally new to me. She made me also join it and somehow I went around singing with the others.

In our part of the country any kind of singing, bhajan song or classical or whatever is done sitting on the ground with the accompanying instrument around the singer. But Bengal type sankirtan is quite unique. You carry your own harmonium tied around the neck. There are others who play the khol and the kartal, which are both the life of the kirtan. Other singers follow the main singer. The effect is beautiful & one gets carried away provided the kirtan is done with *bhava*. One is reminded of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu & his god-intoxicated kirtan.

One night Ma was reclining on the sofa and she told me to sing. I sang : "Bhajan Karo, Premki Putaria", not knowing that this was one of Shri Ma's own compositions. She did not say anything, but merely smiled.

A VERY ILLUMINATING PROGRAMME

— Julia Shyama Mader

During the early part of September, 1998 the devotees of Sri Anandamayee Ma gathered to worship with Swami Bhaskaranandaji during the Samyam programme held in central Florida, US.A. in the home of Dr. Meena and Dr. Bipin Bhatt. The two worlds of ancient India and modern America merged as Ma nourished Her children with Her teachings of Eternity.

This occasion appeared as a miracle to me because the last twenty years since receiving Ma's blessings I had been without any communication with Ma's family. What a joy to feel again the warmth of satsang. The sweet sounds of familiar chants nourished our souls as we sat together through the day. We sang to Lord Vishnu (Sahasranama) and to the Devi from Sri Sri Chandī. We sang to Lord Siva and chanted to Sri Krishna. We sat in silent meditation with only the sound of mala beads moving as fingers follow the mantra. These hours of meditation impresses my mind even now the vision of Swamiji remaining one of solidity and motionlessness, "Rock of Ages" as the American Southern folk say. While my own body nagged at me with aches and pains I was aware of Swamiji in meditation that transcended the limitations of the physical. And the realization came to me that here and now I may return to Ma's loving care and be still. This stillness has increasingly eluded me in life in America where the ceaseless pressure to perform and adapt to a world of economic demands has eroded the rock within. And so the daily meditation with Swamiji renewed my commitment to my practice of sitting in meditation. Memories of sitting in the hall at Kankhal come to my mind's eye as I see Ma sitting in meditation, Her radiance touching all our souls. Ah, how precious to feel Ma's presence here in America.

On the final day of the Samyam programme a homa was conducted, officiated by a Tamil priest. I remember the homas I witnessed during my years in Puri, the homas at Ma's ashrams and the homas of my adopted Bengali family to honor the ancestors. I view homa as a ritual of Vedic India and also of each life, each breath that is given to the Almighty. And beyond the breath of life, it is the sacred Agni that consumes the body. I bow to Agni, he that consumes and transforms all.

After the completion of the homa Swamiji placed the sacred ash *tika* on each of us. I sat beside Ma's photo and breathed in the sweet scent of the offerings burning. The 92 year old Pitaji who had been in the circle of brahmins performing the homa also sat absorbing the aftermath of the ritual. The finalization of the homa rituals marked the end of the Samyam Vrata and we all parted, nourished by the prayers

and by the presence of Swamiji. Though we in America live in an environment which gives priority to the material and is increasingly alienated from nature and the soul, during the Samyam Vrata we experienced the Divine Grace of Sri Anandamayee Ma and shall continue to feel strengthened in our spiritual lives.

The six days of satsang with Ma's family renewed a sense of satsang which had long been absent in my life. Swamiji also visited the retreat property where I live and work, offering Ayurvedic medicinal oils in the tradition of the clinics in Kerala, India. The property is on the edge of Mother Florida's wilderness and Swamiji expressed his pleasure in the gentle quiet of the natural setting. The property is called Rasayana Cove, named after that branch of Ayurveda which addresses our ongoing absorption of life. Rasayana is the path of renewal and revitalization. Swamiji's presence here at the cove after the six days of worship and the homa has certainly been a rasayana to me of the blessings and continuous grace of our Divine Mother, Ma Anandanayee.

May we all continue to feel Her presence always.

THE ASHRAM IN HAWAII

Your expression of MA sings in the musical melody of your notes
 Pristine love shines forth from the eyes of your loved ones
 Thoughts so pious are wreathed midst the flowers of your devotion
 Compassion so tender.....
 Softly whisp like the morning breeze
 Presence of MA rises high with the waves of the ocean
 Laying in rest
 The turmoils of the heart
 Torments of the mind
 Flying with the gulls and the swans
 To distant horizon flaming with the colors of the sky
 Merging into One the land and the sea
 No pain.....No joy.....
 All is ONE !!

Matrisharanam

THE GLORY OF MY MOTHER

— 'Gautam'

O my Beloved Mother, Goddess of Innocence and Bliss.

Let me bow my head to thee.

For mine is no wit to perceive you,

Nor any intuition that maketh my mind to grow.

Quite ignorant, not a great devotee as well,

So I pray to thee; give thy vigil
to the yearning of my heart for the Divine.

One shining dawn, dancing hreeze
leaves me soothing, waking from slumber,

O Beloved of my heart! I open my eyes
to see you in your heart winning smile.

My joy knows no bounds —

For you are the Beauty of all, O my Beloved!

Now it's high time to enjoy nectar of beauty to be blessed.

You are the joy, you are the beauty,

You are the love, you the Almighty.

You are the war against the three senses, truth the ultimate,

Blessed we be, if we sing the glory of our Beloved.