

MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

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

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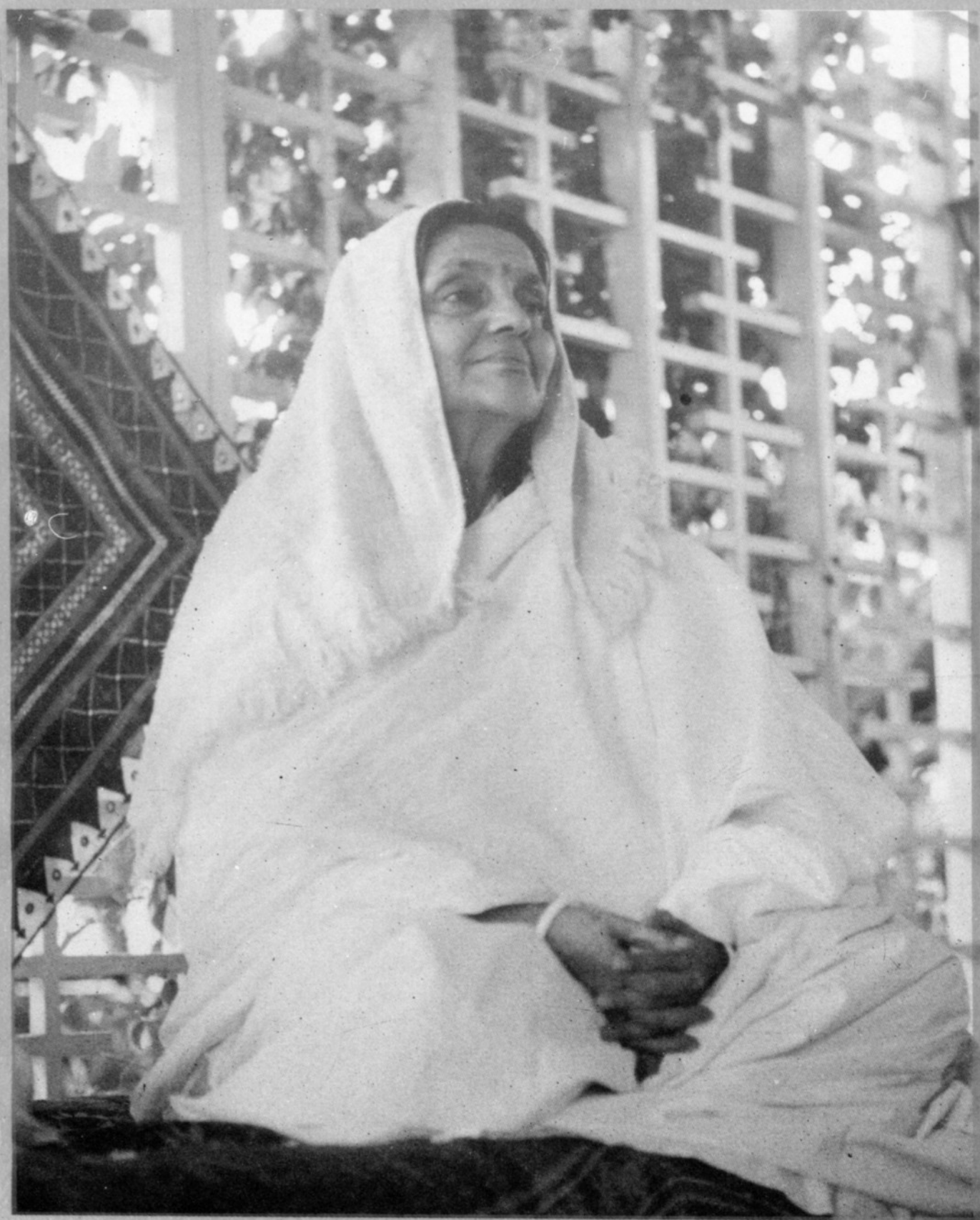
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MATRI VANI

When meditation occurs spontaneously, then only it is real meditation. It must come of itself, effortlessly.

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Let no gaps interrupt your attempt, for a gap will produce an eddy, whereas your striving must be continuous like the flowing of oil, it must be sustained, constant, an unbroken stream.

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Nobody is able to predict when for any particular individual that fateful Moment will reveal itself, Therefore keep on striving ceaselessly.

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The more ardent your pursuit the vaster the possibilities that will open out for you, and in proportion to your advance, suffering will diminish and not increase again.

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Body means perpetual change that which is ever moving away. But in the state when death may be said to be dead, can there be any question of a body ?

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If the teacher himself is in the state of ignorance, and the question is asked by one also in ignorance, how can there be even an expectation of the revelation of real knowledge ?

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Like a restless child, unconcerned with good or bad, you seek Supreme Bliss, never satisfied with transitory happiness and therefore ever wandering.

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How can you possibly be at rest until you have discovered a way to the Supreme Reality, until you become wholly absorbed in your source, reposing in your own self.

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In your innermost heart you know that you are free; that is why it is in your nature to yearn for freedom.

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Do not forget that it is the very mind which is the *mahayogi*, yes indeed the sublime *yogi*.

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As one is released from bondage, the destructible is destroyed, the Beloved alone shines forth.

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Do not be satisfied with fragmentary happiness, which is invariably interrupted by shocks and blows of fate, but become complete and having attained to perfection be YOURSELF

●

REPLIES TO WRITTEN QUERIES

by

FOREIGN DEVOTEES

—Vijayananda

1) About Ma

Q : People often speak of Ma's look, that she used to gaze at some people for a long time; or did she not need that to impart what she wanted to ?

V : A look is a full part of a facial countenance. It can communicate more clear and direct message than verbal phrases, because it directly expresses *bhava* (basic mood or spiritual state). That is why Ma, like other great sages, often used this medium to transmit a teaching or even simply to communicate a remark without needing to use words. Of course, Ma did not require to look at someone to give him a spiritual awakening. She could do it while being apparently busy with someone else or even from a distance.

In the beginning with Ma, I did not know any Hindi or Bengali (Ma did not speak English) and I used to communicate with her by look or simply by mental transmission. To take an example, I remember the first celebration of Ma's birthday which I attended. It must have been in Ambala, a big town in Punjab. At that time, the function was still very simple. Ma was lying on a small wooden bed and seemed to be in a state akin to deep sleep. Her devotees used to say that on these occasions she was entering *nirvikalpa samadhi*. In this state, empirical world has disappeared and an ocean of Bliss-Consciousness is left. At that time I was very attached to Ma's physical presence and I would have liked to have her near me always. I was sitting in front, at a short distance from Ma's bed. I was feeling quite bad that Ma had escaped into *samadhi* and said to myself. 'Ma went very far from us into *nirvikalpa samadhi*'. Almost immediately, Ma sat on her wooden bed, opened her eyes and intently gazed at me. It was a very long look full of tenderness which clearly conveyed that : 'No, I'm not far away from you, I'm always present in your heart'.

Q : *Ma's birthday centenary came to an end (May 1995-May 1996). It enabled us to remember temporal aspect of her life, its important events and so on. Now, how does one mediate on her timeless aspect ?*

V : Ma said that she came among us because there was an appeal which had attracted her on our plane of existence. We suppose that there was a group of spiritually advanced people with an intense devotion towards the female aspect of the Divine who made this appeal; but in reality, from where did she come ? Of course, these matters cannot possibly be conceived by mind. However, roughly speaking, we can say that there is a mass of Consciousness-Bliss, which has neither form nor place, but which is the support and basis of everything which exists. Modern scientists come near to this when they speak of a *unified field* which is the basis of every atom, molecule, etc.

So what appeared to us in the physical form of Ma was somehow a crystallization of the Omnipresent. Thanks to it, we could contact the Supreme in an easier way. The physical form has been removed from our visual field, but the Supreme of which she was the condensation is still the same. It (or She) will always answer our call if we do it with a devotion which is intense enough. Of course, most people cannot directly contact the formless and need a visual support. For those who were touched by this divine apparition which Ma Anandamayi was (even if they did not meet Her personally), a photo, reading a book or a meditation in front of the *samadhi* (tomb) can produce the necessary intensity so that the call might be effective.

II) Sadhana

1) Generalities

Q : *Is it better to meditate at a fixed time by disciplining one's body and mind or to meditate when we feel the need ?*

V : At the beginning of a sadhana, it is very useful to set a clear program for oneself and to meditate as far as possible at the same time and at the same place. One should sit during the duration which was decided on even if one does not feel like meditating. In this way, a habit will be developed, a good habit which will become a need, almost an addiction. Habit originates in *tamaguna* (the force of inertia) and from there comes its strength. The power of *tamas* lies in the fact that it is the inverted image of the Supreme : immutable, active, ever at rest. Hence *tamas* is such a considerable obstacle. But it is

possible to use this force by creating good habits for oneself, and the habit to meditate regularly is one of the best. This does not prevent one from meditating at any time whenever one feels like.

Q : *What is the relationship between marriage and spiritual life ?*

V : For those who want to reach the top of spiritual life (*moksha, nirvana, illumination, Self-Realization*), perfect chastity is a necessity, but those who can and want to reach this stage are very rare. The path of celibacy remains an exceptional one. This is why great sages have established and taught progressive paths leading an ordinary person from one stage to another until he or she has enough maturity to face this great problem, which is the discovery of Supreme Reality, and marriage is one of these stages. Sexual energy in a common human being must be channeled, then sublimated and divinized. Relationship between a man and a woman are part of nature, but of the inferior aspect of it (*aparā prakriti*). A level exists where this union occurs on the plane of pure consciousness without physical contact. In the usual marriage, man should consider his wife as an aspect of Divine Mother and the wife should see in her husband a manifestation of the male Divinity. Thus a relationship of mutual love and respect will develop which will eventually lead to the genuine love which is impersonal. And sexual relationships must be as rare as possible so that *sadhakas* might be prepared to reach the Supreme when the time comes.

Q : *May we consider anger as an addictive drug ? How does one overcome it ?*

V : The psychological mechanism of anger is as follows : the departure point is always a sensation of discomfort coming from our body which makes us ill at ease. The instinctive tendency is to free ourselves from it as quickly as possible and to come back to a state of euphoria. This sensation is not generally in the field of clear consciousness and mind tries to find a cause in the outer world to which it could attribute this feeling of being ill at ease and by destroying this cause it hopes to regain its balance. If an individual suddenly comes and abuses you or has rude behavior, that's it ! He is the one which is the cause of your uneasy feeling !

Mind then calls on this basic energy which is always present in *mulādhāra* and transforms it in a destructive force which is called anger. It directs it towards its enemy. Uneasiness, being projected outward, disappear from the

field of clear consciousness. The energy which was temporarily freed gives him a pleasant feeling of power, but when the fit of anger subsides, it is changed into a depression and the uneasy feeling comes back to the fore.

Another fit of anger and the same process takes place. An association of ideas is established between uneasiness and this anger which relieves it for some time. Then for certain people an addiction to the fits of anger occurs. They find an impression of power and a relative euphoria in them. Naturally, there is all the bad *karma* which is created by these fits of anger and which will have to be repaid by other sufferings. How to be cured from anger ? First, seeing clearly this mechanism of projection of an uneasy sensation toward an outer object. And also understanding all the sufferings imposed on others and oneself when we get angry. As scriptures say, anger is one of the doors to hell.

2) Psychology of *sadhana*

Q : *What is the real nature of the ego ?*

V : Ego is this entity (*ahamkār* in sanskrit) which makes us believe that we are a different personality from others, which gives us the feeling of 'I', 'I am'. It is also the root of our mind on which the whole superstructure of our thoughts and emotions is based; but it is only an empirical reality and exists simply as long as we have not yet discovered the play of illusion which created it. Our mind is a very complicated machine, but has no consciousness by itself. The uppermost part of the mind is *buddhi* (intellect) which decides and discriminates between what should be done or not; but intellect is deprived of consciousness, if left alone. It becomes animated when pure Consciousness, *Ātman*, reflects itself in it. Then it becomes this composite entity called ego. It participates in the nature of *Ātman*, i.e., Consciousness-Bliss, but with the limitations which its support, the mind, as well as the *prānic* and physical body, impose on it.

Q : *Is there no danger in constantly controlling mind ?*

V : Everything depends upon the method which is employed. it should be done skillfully and by adapting oneself to the variation of one's mind. This is similar to the way a rider behaves with a horse which he wants to tame. he or she should strike or hurt him as little as possible. Suppression of emotions should be avoided as far as one can, but this ought not to be taken as an axiom because there are cases where it is necessary. There are circumstances

where it is morally or socially harmful to yield to an emotion or to a forbidden act. In these cases suppression is a must, but on the other hand there is no danger at all to constantly check the mind. Danger would be in loosening the control. The best would be to consider one's mind as a child that we love and to make him understand what is for his own good. Mind ever looks for happiness and peace because it is its intimate nature and it is conscious of it; but it looks for happiness in the wrong direction, in reflected images like in a mirror. One should explain this error to it. And once it has understood, it will behave as a friend and will put all its attention in the good direction.

Q : *But who really controls the mind ?*

V : Control of mind and extinction of the thinking process should be distinguished. Control of mind consists of having under his sway negative emotions such as fear, sexual desire, greediness, anguish, anxiety, jealousy, etc. These emotions are part of the *tāmasic* and *rājasic* mind. Hence one should cultivate *satvic* states of mind, like serenity, softness, goodness, inner peace, thoughts going towards the Divine, etc. This work is accomplished by a purified intellect, i.e., a *satvic* ego. Ego is used to root out negative emotions. If a thorn went into our flesh, another thorn may be used to take it out. Once this is done, both thorns may be disposed of. When mind is purified, what is left is a *satvic* ego through which one can see Reality like a transparent evil through which someone can be seen. This *satvic* ego must also be dissolved so that we might be identified with the Real, because the joy and satisfaction in being a pure and saintly person is also a golden cage which imprisons you. Generally, by Guru's grace only this last bondage can be broken.

Q : *Can we indirectly dissolve ego without going through the control of the various layers of mind ?*

V : Yes, this is possible, but in those cases mental layers manifest themselves while we progress. For instance, in the path of devotion the ultimate goal is dissolution of ego in the Beloved; but before reaching that final stage, many obstacles will arise and they will do it from a mind that we must learn to know and master.

In Karma-Yoga, we attack ego at the root right from the beginning. This root is the wrong belief that is 'I' who acts, 'I' who reaps the fruit of actions. We will have to get rid of this illusion by performing actions only for the joy of a work which is well done, without caring for results, i.e., being indifferent

to success or failure. There again, obstructions built by mind will oblige us to know it and to master it. In the Path of knowledge-if one follows instructions given by Ramana Maharshi- one directly tackles the ego by wondering 'Who am I in reality ?' But before being able to find the solution of this problem, facing the storms of mind, knowing it and mastering it, will be necessary.

Q : *In the Upanishads, one speaks of rasa (the essence of happiness) which motivates all our actions and thoughts. Could you elaborate ?*

V : Sanskrit words have different meanings according to the context where they are used. It is so for the word *rasa*; but in Taittiriya Upanishad this word is used with a special meaning (II, 7). *Rasa* is there the very substance out of which the Divine is made. *Raso vaisha*, this in truth is Brahman. In all objects of desire what we are looking for is the pleasure they give us, ie, the *rasa*, the taste of these objects. These pleasures are only a reflection of the Supreme *Rasa*, he who gets this *rasa* becomes happy, *ananda bhavati*, the Upanishad says. All our movements, all our thoughts, even our respiration is moved by this Supreme Happiness which pervades space.

Q : *(An Italian visitor) Where can bliss be found ?*

V : Bliss, *Ananda* is everywhere, it is the basis, the essential motivation for all our actions, in fact of our life. Taittiriya Upanishad says : *Who then would act, who would breathe if this bliss was not in space ?* This base of all existence, the unified field of *physicians*, is made of an undivided mass of Consciousness-Bliss, *Chidananda*. We perceive it through the thick veil of our mental agitation. Clouds hide the sun, but even the black colour is visible because the sun is behind them.

Q : *Sometimes you say that one must face up to one's fears, and even one's desire and at other times that it is better to look at the mind on the side. Is that not contradictory ?*

V : Yes, the right method to look at the mind is 'from the side' by concentrating attention on a support (mantra, image, etc.) because if we look at the mind face to face, there is the danger that it will create artificial formations; its nature is indeed to swell when we try to analyze it. I said that we must face a fear, this was because if we try to run away from it, it will only intensify; but in this case what is required is looking at the *object* which produced this fear and not to the thought of fear. One should not focus on the feeling of fear. it

would most probably intensify it, but on the cause of this fear. By facing it, it will be vanquished.

Q : *If someone close to you is not doing well but does not want to listen to what could help him, what is to be done ?*

V : Ramakrishna used to say that there were four kinds of spiritual masters just as there are four kinds of doctors :

- 1) The common doctor who writes his prescription, gives advice to his patient and then does not care for him any longer.
- 2) The doctor of the second class enquires whether if he or she has well followed his advice and if he has taken his medicines, but if he sees that the patient is reluctant, he does not care for him anymore.
- 3) The doctor of the third class tries to convince his patient, explains to him at large all the advantages in following his diet and devotes much time to all that. But if he sees that the person is completely closed to communication, he drops him or her.
- 4) But the doctor of the fourth class, the best one according to Ramakrishna, does not become disheartened, If he could not manage to convince his patient, he immobilizes him and make him swallow the drugs by force.

Now, if one of your near and dear does not listen to you, it is up to you to choose the most fitting method. This depends upon the person and upon the degree of love he feels for him. But who knows what is right for each person ? Only a perfect sage can know it. And if this perfect sage has a genuine relationship with his disciple, he will use force if needed to again set the disciple on the right path.

[To be continued]

A YOUNG MAN'S JOURNEY

—Elizabeth Sims Moore

Why would a Christian boy become a Hindu Monk? This is something that parents and friends of Gary Yale Empie have pondered for a long time .

Many years ago, Gary began a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage that would take him from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois to a Buddhist Monastery in Northern India, and finally to Hardwar, India, where he became a devout follower of Sri Anandamayi Ma and the Hindu Religion.

Gary Empie was born on December 19th, 1947 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to Kathryn Elizabeth Empie and Robert Yale Empie. His father, a banker, and now State Banking Commissioner, is a native of the State and prominent. His mother, a former airline stewardess, is active in philanthropic organizations and serves on the Board of Regents of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma.

Gary grew up in the First Christian Church of the City. His father was an elder and Gary became a junior deacon when he was in high school. Religion was not just a passing interest to him. He showed a great love for the church from the beginning and was full of questions.

In Sunday School, when other five-year olds were coloring trees and clouds, Gary sat quietly by his teacher asking serious questions, Who is God ? Where does he live ? How do we *know* that God is everywhere ?

This curiosity increased, and when he was a little older, he began to put his words on paper in realms of poetry and prose. Why do people love ? Why do people hate ? Hadn't the Bible said, "love thy neighbor as thyself ?" In a tablet, he wrote one day a short poem.

"One seed can start a garden
One drop can start a sea
One doubt can start a hating,
One dream can set one free".

Gary was a good student in high school, and he also entered into the societies and activities around him. Still, he was full of questions. Who am I ? What am I here for ? Am I responsible for my actions ? The Christian belief that Jesus by dying on the cross had taken on the sins of the world did not satisfy. In time, he

came to a remarkable conclusion on his own. To be sure of God, to know total awareness of God, one must look within oneself. And if he were to find God this way, it would be a pilgrimage of a lifetime.

His senior year in high school, he told his parents he wanted Eastern Religions and Philosophies.

Dr. Edmund Perry, Dean of the Department, had been his advisor when he enrolled, so Gary consulted him. "I want to know about the Oriental Religions", he told him. "Buddhism, Hinduism, maybe Taoism."

"Oh, that will come the second semester", he said. "We'll study them in depth the second semester."

When the second semester came, Dr. Perry began his lectures on Buddhism, and Gary's interest soared. Here was a religion that taught people to seek on their own, to find their beliefs through meditation.

In the Christian Religion, people had *told* him about God and what he was supposed to believe. This was a new concept, one that he could explore.

He finished his freshman year and went home for the summer. He was torn between returning to Northwestern or transferring to Oklahoma State University at Stillwater, where his girl friend, Judy, went to school.

Toward the end of the summer he decided to transfer. The courses in Religion and philosophy should be comparable, if not the same as they were under Dr. Perry.

He matriculated and began his sophomore year, but soon he became dissatisfied. The Oriental Philosophies at Oklahoma State University were not what he thought they would be. He made up his mind to return to Northwestern for his junior year.

Gary had made a friend of Dr. Perry the first year, and when he reappeared in class, Dr. Perry was delighted. At a private conference he told him that he wanted to go to India and study in a monastic setting, that he was deeply interested in Oriental Thought, especially meditation.

It was arranged for Gary to make a pilgrimage into the Himalayas with a group of Tibetan Buddhist Monks in the summer. When the trek was over, he entered a Buddhist school and studied with Kalu Rimpoche, one of the great spiritual leaders in India.

It is not known why Gary did not embrace Buddhism. Probably the reason was it conflicted with his Christian beliefs.

In late summer Gary came home. He told his parents his experiences had left him puzzled, but he was deeply interested in meditation. "I've heard about a meditation retreat in California," he said. "I'd like to go out there and find it."

"What about college?" his father asked, trying to hide his disappointment.

"May be the second semester," Gary answered. "All right?" His father nodded.

So Gary left for California that summer. He was accompanied by two young friends. They wandered through the state and finally found the retreat in northern California in a grove of trees. After getting permission to stay, Gary went into the forest, located a grassy area, drew a circle (twelve feet in diameter) and sat down in the lotus position. Accompanied only by his Bible and a light coverlet, he remained there for forty days and nights while his two young friends took care of his bodily needs. During that time, he read the Bible through, meditated and prayed. Fortunately, the weather remained temperate.

While he was at the retreat, he learned about a Hindu Swami (teacher) who was planning to open an ashram (house of retreat) in Oklahoma City. The swami was an American who had studied in Hardwar, India, for six months, and had met the Hindu Holy Mother, Sri Anandamayi Ma. The Oklahoma Ashram was to be named in her honor.

Gary returned home in the fall, and he decided to enter the Ashram in Oklahoma City. Apparently, he had not given up his belief in Christianity, because he still read his Bible, but he seemed to think that meditation would lead him to what he sought.

He was in the ashram for three years. Not always happy years. For two of those years he was not allowed to see his parents, and all his personal belongings and money were taken from him.

However, he had one experience in the ashram that changed the direction of his life. Since it was named for the Holy Mother, a large portrait of Sri Anandamayi Ma hung above the mantel.

As Gary looked at the picture each day, he came to a decision. He would go to India and study with the great Hindu leader.

Shortly after, he left the ashram and moved back home. "I've always had understanding parents," he told a local editor. "They will never stand in my way. They would rather have me here, but the choice is mine."

The choice was his, a few weeks later he left for India. He entered the ashram at Hardwar where Sri Anandamayi Ma was. Later, he told someone that some of the happiest days of his life had been those he had spent with the Holy Mother.

During that time, he let his blond hair grow long and grew a beard. He adopted the robes and sandals of the Holy Men, and when Sri Anandamayi Ma went to her other ashrams, as far away as New Delhi and Calcutta, Gary went with her. He collected materials and prepared a documentation of Ma's life. Apparently, she began to look on him like a son, for she allowed him to build his own *Kutir* (small house) on the grounds near hers in Hardwar.

He spent his days in prayer and meditation. When he was through, he would visit the market place where he had many friends. Usually he cooked his own food, preferring the bland tastes of American dishes to the highly spiced Indian fare. Most of his free time was spent in refining the tapes, negatives, movies and cassettes to tell of the life and mission of Ma.

He liked to quote his Indian teacher whom he had gone so far to study with, and especially from her book, *Matri Vani*.

"By seeking, one will find; the Self is
within one's own grasp. God is one's own Self,
the breath of one's breath; the life of one's
life, the *Atma*."

During his time in India, Gary became a Yogi which is a follower of Yoga. Yoga is the Hindu system of meditation and self-control involving certain patterns of breathing and exercises.

Some of the most beautiful poetry that he left us was written about his experiences as a Yogi. At the funeral service in Oklahoma City, Reverend Don Alexander quoted these few verses from Gary's last message in prose :

"Be Thou A Yogi"

"Father, the Yogi leaves the world and does
Meditation. What good does he do for the world ?
How is he fulfilling the purpose of creation ?
How can this be called religion ?
You have asked a good question, my Son
Which every Yogi must answer."

"That love which is so deep
That deepens is forgotten,
Which people seek, because they know it is theirs.
Which makes one cry, and gives joy,
In which one cannot say "I" anymore

Because he has merged in his beloved-
That love is the love of the Yogi.
Dear Son, Be thou a Yogi."

"That courage with which all action is done,
Which needs nothing, which honors the self in all,
Is unaffected and is, with purity, the way to strength.
That is the courage of the Yogi.
Brave Son, be thou a Yogi."

"That humility which the world mistakenly seeks in degradation,
Which comes from oneness with all,
Which has self respect and dignity-
That is the humility of the Yogi.
Precious son, be thou a Yogi."

"That giving of oneself, for which giving is done,
Which is an expression of what belongs to all,
in which even giving is given, for which all the world begs-
That is the gift of the Yogi. My Son, be thou a Yogi."

Gary did not live out his life. He died in New Delhi January, 26th, 1982 of infectious hepatitis. He had been on a pilgrimage to another ashram with Sri Anandamayi Ma when he became ill. It had been his wish that at his death he was to be cremated and the ashes put in the Ganges river, so his parents respected that wish.

His remains were flown home for a Christian funeral service at the church of his childhood in Oklahoma City. then he was cremated.

The following March, Katie and Bob returned to Hardwar, India. The Holy Mother met them at the ashram and blessed the remains, something she had not been known to do for any other follower. Sri Anandamayi Ma placed a garland of flowers on the necks of Gary's parents and one on the small coffin, then a priest of Ma's choosing led the procession to the river. At the edge of the Ganges, the priest gave the ritual of burial, then the ashes were placed on the waters.

Hundreds of people had filled the ashram grounds and gone to the river. They were anxious to tell Gary's parents, in their simple way, what his ministry had meant to them.

The Holy Mother's last words to them were — "Gary will not be back again. He has attained oneness with God."

It would not be the whole story if we said that Gary Empie worked, prayed and meditated and finally found the peace for which he searched. His significant work in India, other than these things, was collecting, editing and refilming the works of Sri Anandamayi Ma, the Holy Mother that he so affectionately called as 'Ma'.

She is revered throughout India, but few in the Western world have read her writings. Now they will be available, through Gary's efforts at the *Center for the Study of World Religions* at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they have just been accepted.

Gary did not live to see Sri Anandamayi Ma's thoughts and ministry studied in America, but they will become known in the study of comparative religions at the Divinity School at Harvard. Gary will be remembered too, for his untiring contribution. His life was a symbol of his belief in the Universality of God, and the oneness of all people in God's Spirit.

"The more hungry, thirsty, full of faith and surrender one can be, the more benefit and satisfaction will be derived from Her immortalizing touch."

—'Bhaiji'

THE PASSING AWAY OF BABA BHOLANATH

—Bithika Mukerji

1938 was the year of the *Kumbha* at Hardwar. The *Kumbha mela* (the festival of the *Kumbha*) is a religious event of great moment for all Hindus. This festival is held in rotation of three years, at four places, viz. Prayag, Hardwar, Nasik and Ujjain, so that each town has a turn after twelve years. The festivals in Hardwar in April and in Prayag in January are considered specially important, Pilgrims from all corners of India foregather on the banks of the Ganges, to bathe on the auspicious days and at the indicated times. People put up in all kinds of impromptu shelters such as tents, straw huts or any other type of temporary construction. The residents of the town meet such members of their family and friends, they have not seen for decades.

All pilgrims were expected in those days to gather under the banner of their own *panda* (the professional caretakers of pilgrims at holy places), for facilities of food and shelter. The fluttering of differently marked flags of the *pandas* indicated their destinations to the pilgrims from afar. The riverside became alive with the voices of thousands of people. The highlight of the mela is the gathering of all the ascetic orders of the Hindu religion. This is the place and time when the lay people get glimpses of all the *samnyasa asramas* (ascetic orders). In accordance with the tradition of the *Kumbha*, the sadhus are shown the highest respect and given precedence over all other participants. The lay people go around visiting the camps of the renowned ascetics, monks or sadhus, listening to discourses of their favourite scriptures or attending other religious events, or simply joining in any kirtan, the strains of which can be heard as a matter of fact, from almost any corner of the vast camp site. For one month or so, people live in the exhilarating atmosphere of a joyful festivity.

Mataji has called the *Kumbha* the *dhvaja* (sign, emblem, banner) of the Hindu *dharma*. Mataji's description seems singularly apt when we consider the various elements which combine to make possible such an extra-ordinary occurrence as the *Kumbha mela*. Just as a banner is indicative of the place where people gather actuated by the same purpose, so perhaps is the *Kumbha*, a place and time which discloses to the Hindu his religion as option which is viable (*sreyasa*) and is to be existentially experienced as such. The tradition brings together the ascetic as well as

the householder in an experience of personal commitment (*sankalpa*) to the common goal. This again recreates the opportunity of a religious experience which is perpetuated by such repeated celebrations.

Mataji, in general, accepted invitations and suggestions for attending the *Kumbha* festivals, mostly because her presence made it possible for many people to take part in it. Hundreds of devotees have had occasion to become alive to her kindness and thoughtfulness in bringing the *Kumbha* within the bounds of possibility for them.

In 1938, Mataji already happened to be in Hardwar, having arrived there a few months before. She was staying at the house of Dr. Pitambar Panth on the bank of the Ganges.

Hardwar was becoming crowded with the rush of pilgrims for the coming *Kumbha* on April 13th. Bholanath was always happy on such occasions of religious significance. Every morning, he would collect all available men and set out walking through the streets of the town, singing kirtan (*nagar-kirtan*). His tall and dignified personality commanded respect from all passers-by. Strangers came up and bowed to him and stayed to swell the throng of his *kirtan* party.

On April 13th, the final day of the festival, Bholanath accompanied by a great crowd of devotees went to *Brahmakunda* for the ceremony of the bath. He was spontaneously acclaimed by the other ascetics gathered there for the same purpose. They did not know who he was but must have perceived in him an exalted personality commanding respect.

Unknown to others Bholanath, while bathing in the holy river, performed by himself the rituals of adopting formally a life of renunciation. This was in pursuance of some conversation he had had with Mataji earlier.

At the conclusion of the *Kumbha*, the pilgrims are always in a great hurry to leave the town, creating difficult travelling conditions. The devotees thought it better that Mataji should also leave immediately by car for Dehradun. Bholanath stayed behind to escort all those who wished to go on to Dehradun.

On April 24th, Didi's father, Swami Akhandananda and Bholanath returned again to Hardwar to attend the *sumnaysa* ceremony of Akhandananda's brother, Kunja Mohan. Bholanath was feeling indisposed but did not regard it seriously. Mataji said to Didi, "Bholanath is going to be very seriously ill." Didi alarmed at these words, wished to persuade Bholanath not to undertake the trip, but Mataji said again, "You may try, but he will insist on going and the illness is also inevitable."

Bholanath returned from Hardwar with a high fever and complaining of pain in the stomach. The fever persisted and in a few days the doctors pronounced that he was suffering from chicken-pox.

Mataji said quietly to her companions, "It does not appear to me to be chicken-pox. You see, diseases reveal themselves to me just like persons. The personification seen by me I have heard described by all of you as being much more fearful than chicken-pox. I do not know about symptoms, but I can tell you what I have seen."

Within a short time nobody was left in doubt about Bholanath's illness which turned out to be the dreaded small-pox. Bholanath was given the best medical treatment available in the town and the very loving care of the devotees but the terrible nature of the disease made him suffer excruciatingly. Mataji visited his room at frequent intervals and made such suggestions for his care and comfort as she alone knew how to do.

Bholanath's condition deteriorated rapidly. Everyone was in despair at the impending calamity. At this crucial time Mataji unexpectedly asked Didi and Swami Akhandananda to leave Dehradun immediately and to take Didima also with them.

Although Mataji had spoken quietly in her usual manner, Didi knew that this was one of those occasions when Mataji's *kheyala* was not to be deflected. To forestall any pleadings toward this attempt, Mataji further said, "It must be either all of you or I. If you do not leave, I shall." This was not to be thought of, so Didi with great misgivings in her heart, and in utter dejection of spirit at being obliged to leave Mataji under such difficult conditions, set about making arrangements for their immediate departure. Swami Akhandananda expressed his bewilderment by saying, "Ma, why are you sending us away when we require as many as we can have here to look after Bholanath?"

Mataji said gently, "You are a *samnyasi*. You are not required to render Bholanath any physical service. The only way you can be of help to him is to engage steadfastly in your own undertaking of the contemplative life."

To inconsolable Didima, she said, "Is it not agonizing for you to watch Bholanath's suffering? At this time he does not require your physical presence. You can help him by your prayers and healing thoughts. Do that for him now." To Didi, to whom nothing at all made any sense apart from Mataji, she could only enjoin patience and fortitude. Didi and others left for Varanasi on May 4th.

Mataji spent most of her time in Bholanath's room. Bholanath had been calling out to her as 'Ma' like a child in distress and Mataji responded to his call naturally and spontaneously. Proximity to death had dissolved the unauthentic barriers to a

disclosure of this relationship. Bholanath now was not self-conscious anymore in showing his total surrender publicly. Sitting by his bedside on the last day of his life Mataji asked him, "Are you in great pain?" Bholanath replied that he was, but that he could not quite locate where the pain was. His whole body was under the influence of the dreadful disease and his suffering could be easily imagined. He was lying on his side facing her and Mataji was seen to pass her hand over his entire body, from head to toe and seemed to perform some *kriya* over it. After some time, in answer to a question, Bholanath replied that he did not have any pain and was completely relaxed. Since the beginning of the illness, this was the first time, he was at peace. He murmured, "*Ananda.*"

At one time he said, "I am going." Mataji responded by saying, "Why do you think so? There are no goings or comings, but a presence only in which there is no room for such things." Bholanath seemed to agree, saying, "Yes, so you have always said." Mataji's hand was on Bholanath's head when he breathed his last on the night of May 7th, 1938. His death was calm and peaceful. For the people who were keeping vigil at his bedside this created an atmosphere of reverence in the face of the most mysterious event of life.

The man who had so joyfully and so completely given of himself in the service of Mataji and who was like a beloved parent to the devotees was no more.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

[Continued from before]

—Sri P. C. Mehta

Various schools of Indian Philosophy:

1. The orthodox schools:

The following six schools identifiable during the post-Vedic period are considered orthodox because, they either declare allegiance to the Vedas or are directly based on them

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| i) <i>Nyāya</i> | iv) <i>Yoga</i> |
| ii) <i>Vaisesika</i> | v) <i>Purva-mimāmsā</i> |
| iii) <i>Sāṅkhya</i> | vi) <i>Uttara-mimāmsā i.e. Vedanta.</i> |

i) *Nyāya-Vaisesika and Sāṅkhya-Yoga* are grouped in twos being allied.

These four doctrines in their present form declare allegiance to the Vedas, although they put their own interpretation on it. It is doubtful if they were Vedic from the beginning. However in view of their later features, they are described as orthodox.

Purva-mimāmsā and *Uttara-mimāmsā i. e. Vedanta*, are directly based on the Vedas, but need independent treatment .

The six systems, being rather technical, will be dealt with very briefly in a later chapter.

2. The Heterodox schools:

During this period, we also find views in opposition to the teachings of the *Vedas*, called non-Vedic views. The three schools which as systems reject the authority of the Vedas and therefore are called heterodox are;

i) Materialism, including (a) *Svabhāva-vāda* or 'Naturalism' and (b) the *Cārvāka* system.

ii) *Jainism* and iii) *Buddhism*.

Though we do not know the origin of these views, it is certain that they did not originate in the post-Vedic period. They are older, because we find allusions to them at all the important stages of Vedic literature. They are found as early as the hymns of the Rg. Veda. They now gets strengthened. They persist even today. Jain and Buddhistic works refer to a number of non-Vedic philosophical schools existing at the time of Mahavira and Gautama. The Kalpa-Sutras also refer to

Nāstika or unbelievers. This heretical thought gives rise to the distinction between the ideals of the Brahmanas and the Sramanas or non-priestly ascetics, recorded and noticed even by travellers like Megasthenes.

The followers of these views were also Aryans. If the theory of Aryan invasion of India is correct, the question arises whether these views were held by some Aryans under the influence of local thoughts and beliefs or whether they were naturally held, since people hold different views.

From early Buddhist literature we find that the concepts of a surviving soul and transmigration were denied by some Brahmins and Sramanas. Heterodox doctrine has left its permanent stamp on the Sankhya's system.

No detailed critique of heretical view is found in Sanskrit literature. Our main source is Mahabharata, though therein they are unclear and mixed up with other faiths. The Svetasvatara Upanisad as well as Mahabharata mentions half a dozen such views.

The impact of heretical views on orthodoxy, set in motion division of orthodoxy in two channels. Whatever the origin, these views play an important part from about the beginning of the post-Vedic period. They have greatly helped the progress of Indian thought as a whole and enriched it.

i) While the Vedic thought point to the north and the west as their home, these non-Vedic thoughts indicate east as their home.

ii) While Jainism has remained within India, Buddhism has spread all over the world.

iii) The literature of both Jainism and Buddhism is not in Sanskrit but in Prakrit (*ardhamagadhi*) and Pali respectively, being the language commonly spoken at the time. This suggests that their views or teachings were popular rather than priestly in character.

iv) The earliest part of their literature is some centuries later than the period when their exponents spoke; but we may be sure that much of the tradition which they enshrine reaches back to that age.

v) As for Naturalism, there is no such literature. There are only stray references to it, which are found in the writings of both orthodox and heterodox schools. Mahabharata appears to be the best source.

3. *Pramānas* or nature and function of knowledge:

Indian philosophical thought of the previous period deals more with conclusion and we know little of the process by which they are arrived at. The philosophy of the present period gives us both. They have provided a critique of knowledge i. e.

how do we know. Logic also surfaces as a branch of philosophy. The need to justify against heterodox doctrines must have forced each side to develop a basis on reason.

Pramānas means an enquiry as to what and how we know. In other words it is the proximate means to valid knowledge or *prama*.

As soon as early thought is systematized, it begins with inquiring as to what and how we know. This is its characteristic. Attention is paid by all the schools to this topic.

Pramānas are regarded as a help in i) verifying what is already known as well as in ii) acquiring new knowledge.

Therefore logic as conceived in India is a science both of i) proof and ii) discovery.

As for example, since perception is a *pramāna*,

i) it may be a means of verification, as when an object apprehended by the organ of sight is tested by means of touch, or when a doubt arising in respect of something inferred is cleared by actual observation, or

ii) it may also reveal the existence and nature of things not hitherto known.

There is a difference of opinion among thinkers about a) the acceptable number of *pramānas* among the various schools and b) details about the scope and nature of *pramānas*.

Some of these differences can be considered only during intensive study of the systems and not here. One of the commonest, though mechanical classification of the schools is based on the number of *pramānas* they accept, ranging from one to almost six or more.

Most Indian logicians, accept three *pramānas*, viz: i) *Pratyaksa* or perception, ii) *Anumāna* or inference and iii) *Sabda* or verbal testimony.

The importance of the first two *pramānas* is obvious and needs no general discussion.

1. Views shared by orthodox and heterodox schools:

There are three views shared by orthodox and heterodox schools. They are—

i) *Sabda* or 'verbal testimony' as a '*pramāna*',

ii) The doctrine of *karma*

iii) *Mukti* or liberation as the goal of life and asceticism as the way.

2. *Sabda* or 'verbal testimony' as *pramāna*.

Inclusion of *sabda* as a *pramāna* is a striking feature of Indian logic and therefore we shall deal with it hereunder. One reason for the inclusion of *sabda* as a

pramāna was that the contribution of tradition to philosophy was not lost. Both the orthodox and the heterodox set about examining their traditional beliefs and interpreted them with independent reasoning and as a result they came to accept *sabda* as a *pramāna*.

There are two aspects of *sabda*:

a) The logical status of verbal testimony and b) the interpretative or semantic aspect of spoken and written sentences.

The first question is whether the testimony of another can constitute an independent *pramāna*. Therefore, some Indian logicians believe in the legitimacy of only i) perception and ii) inference. They claim that iii) verbal testimony can be valid only when it is based directly or indirectly on i) those two *pramānas* i.e. perception and inference or ii) on experience as commonly understood.

This view is called empiricism. This type of Indian thought is best represented by *Svabhāva-vada* or 'Naturalism', referred to under Materialism.

This position is accepted by other schools, only in so far as *pauruseya* or statements of ordinary men are concerned. They maintain that—

- a) if we accept only the testimony of senses and reason for knowledge, we restrict the reality too much.
- b) further that, though the human mind may not be aware of what is beyond perception and reasoning, it is not altogether unconscious of it.

If we make a statement to the effect that 'common experience exhausts reality', we place a limit on reality, which means that we are aware of that limit. If we are aware of that limit, it means that we have travelled beyond the limit, to be aware of it. It is therefore futile to postulate such a transcendental realm as merely an unknowable something.

Therefore, there is a need for an appropriate *pramāna*, whereby we may know it.

Basically, this *pramāna* can come only from the inner vision of, *Yogin* i.e. a saint. The revelation itself, comes from the awakened state of the great seers of the past.

The knowledge thus gained is itself *Sruti*, meaning 'that which is heard'. But once it is brought down to the intellectual level, through the channel of words, it is termed *Smṛti*.

According to this view, for knowledge which transcends common experience, we have to depend entirely on the authority of awakened insight of an individual.

Jainism traces its truth to the insight of great prophets like Mahavira.

It is on these considerations that verbal testimony is accepted as a separate *pramāna* in Indian philosophy.

From Sayanacarya's (1400 A.D.) introduction to his commentary on the Rig Veda, we find that according to him, the chief function of verbal testimony is to obtain knowledge of the two higher ideals of *dharma* and *moksa*, and of the proper means to their realization.

- 1) Non-conservative philosophers accept the authority of individual insight as a *pramāna*.
- 2) Conservative thinkers also accept individual insight as a *pramāna*, provided that it tallies with the Vedas, which is *Sruti*.

Smṛti is a general word for tradition or 'what is remembered': but as accepted by the orthodox, *Smṛti* is only such tradition as has a basis in *Sruti* or 'revelation' directly or indirectly.

Jaimini, therefore, points out that the Vedas are the source of our knowledge, just where perception and inference fail. *Aprāpte sāstram arthavat — Mimamsa Sutra* (ii,5) 'When you cannot obtain (through perception and inference), 'Sastra' is valuable'.

Their viewpoint is discussed hereunder while dealing with the Vedas as *Pramāna*.

3. Vedas as *Pramāna*:

Those who do not accept individual insight without being supported by the Vedas, as *pramāna*, point out that nobody's private insight can carry with it the guarantee of its own validity. Kumarila, a well-known leader of orthodox thought, has remarked—'A vision that has unfolded itself to but one single person may after all be an illusion'. It means that the excellence of the character of a teacher is no guarantee of the truth of his teaching.

To avoid the defect of subjectivity, the approach of conservative thinkers is as follows.

They are divided into two schools; i) the conservative orthodox and ii) the conservative un-orthodox.

- i) The conservative orthodox thinkers postulate acceptance of *Sruti* or 'revelation', otherwise known as the Vedas, as authority, without any question and they accept individual insight, only if it is in conformity with revealed teachings i.e. the Vedas.

They claim that the *Vedas* have emanated from God or are supernaturally revealed. They cannot be traced to any mortal being. They are considered as

tradition which is *sanātana* or 'immemorial'. They therefore will not mislead us. What is written in the Vedas is therefore *pramāna* and has to be accepted without question.

ii) The conservative un-orthodox thinkers contend that the implication of maintaining that the revealed teachings have come down to us in supernatural way is that the realm of transcendental being is not accessible to the mind of man. This is contrary to the fact that 'yogins' can and have reached that realm. They therefore maintain that the Vedas have come to us through Sages or 'Rsis' of old, who were *Mantra Drstās* i.e. 'Seers of Mantra' and not through supernatural means.

Therefore, to avoid the defect of subjectivity, they laid down from old times, a further condition for acceptance of any revealed teachings and that is, that the revealed teaching should have proved acceptable to the *Mahājanas* i.e. 'the best minds', of the community.

This is obviously true of the Vedas, since from old times the best minds have accepted the Vedas. Nevertheless, this is only begging the question, for non-Vedic traditions have equal claim to being accepted by *Mahājanas*.

Therefore, the above condition regarding acceptance by the *Mahājanas*, is interpreted to mean that if a doubt arises as to the validity of the views handed down in the revealed teachings, i.e. the Vedas, the opinion of the best minds of the community should be acceptable.

They therefore maintain that,

- a) i) the Vedas are revelations and have to be accepted as *pramānas*,
- ii) but if a doubt arises as to the validity of the views contained in the Vedas, this doubt should be resolved through the opinion of the *Mahājanas* or a community of best minds having satisfactory character and knowledge.
- b) They accept individual insight, only if it is in conformity with revealed teachings i.e. the Vedas; but as interpreted above.

The *Mimāmsa* and the Vedanta systems accept revelation in this sense, as a means to a knowledge of supersensuous truth. Herein lies the superiority of the Vedas as *Sruti* over *Smṛti*.

4. Division of schools from the point of view of *Pramānas*:

The Indian schools of thought can be broadly divided from this point of view, as follows:

- a) Positivistic or Empirical.

They assume that reality is confined to what is given in common experience. They accept only two *Pramānas*, i) *pratyakṣa* and ii) *anumāna*.

b) Intuitionistic;

They assume that reality is not confined to what is given in common experience. It can be directly seen and accepts *śabda* as a unique *pramāna* for knowing what lies beyond. As we have seen, this category is further divided as follows:

- i) Non-conservative thinkers accept individual insight as *pramāna*, for a knowledge of the transcendental realm while,
- ii) Conservative thinkers accept individual insight as a *pramāna*, provided that it tallies with the Vedas, which is *Sruti*.

[To be continued]

"Strive to abandon yourself to Him without reserve. In Him no want of any kind exists, no pain, no agony — in Him is all attainment, the summit of fulfilment, rest, repose, tranquility."

—Sri Ma

THE DIVINE MOTHER

—Antonio Eduardo Dagnino

White-clad Mother,
immaculate spring of all powerful intelligence
garlanded with the capacity
to fulfill, the burning desire
of beings who, naked,
are in love with you
and transforming themselves into a burning ground
repeat your name incessantly,
until in the form of equanimity,
or silence, on the vision of Spirit
you bring understanding
and the breadth, of ecstatic peace.

Devi,
today you shine in infinite splendour
among the worlds
that swim freely
in your caressing heart.
you dissolve the suffering
created by ages of toil
and the recurrent error
of clinging to the body
as to life itself,
and believing proudly
that I
am that accumulation of pain and pleasure
that kindles the fire of time, death and terror,
For the solitary corpse
will burn inevitably by the blow
of the ever new river.

Kill me Mother !
Kill the demons that feed within me !
Kill the delusions that poison with desire
and dirty with anguish
the sacred receptacle
of your self-shining light !

Subdue my pride with your sweetness.
Dance upon my fears as upon corpses.
Silence, with an overflow of purity,
the snakes that terrify my heart.
With divine poison cure my poisoned karma,
in darkness let me dwell,
in not knowing,
in the silence of the void, you !

Because you are the
root of all longing,
the thrill of joy that passes.
the scar of pain that fades,
the memory of endless births
where we were fed by your timeless hand
and we didn't even know it;
unconscious of being the offspring of Eternity...
You. You. You !

OUR FOURTH TRIP TO INDIA

—Shraddha Davenport

Two years were spent yearning to return to Mother. No longer wondering if we would return, there was only one question of how soon it would be possible.

We wrote asking Mother for permission to come. Her cherished reply was that we should meet Her at Kanpur in December of 1974.

On each trip we managed a little longer stay than the last. This time there were fifty-four days of unknown adventure before us. I looked at the blank pages of diary and wondered what marvellous and unexpected tales they would soon hold.

Our plane was seven hours late, landing in Delhi about 2:00 p.m. on December seventh. There was time for a little rest at our hotel before catching the 6:00 a.m. flight to Kanpur. It took only one hour to arrive there.

In Kanpur we caught an airport bus whose driver kindly stopped to let us out at the front gate of Swadeshi House. That palatial estate of the Jaipuria family held sweet memories for us of the three days we were there with Mother on our last trip.

A large pandal had been erected on the grounds where the family was hosting a recitation of the Ramayana. Mother was present for that function.

The gate of the Swadeshi House was a little distance from the pandal and main house. So I waited there with our seventeen pieces of luggage while Satya went looking for help to bring them inside.

There we found Bhaskaranandaji and Nirvananandaji. It was so wonderful to see their smiling faces again. They led us to a garage where we could store our luggage, then we eagerly went to seek Mother. The daily program was just ending and She would be coming out from the pandal at any moment. Holding garlands which we had purchased at the gate, we waited for only a moment before She came out. I was wonderstruck by Her beauty, so radiant and young-looking. The Jaipuria family was taking photos of Mother standing next to Pandit Atul Krishna Goswami, who had been reciting the Valmiki Ramayana. The nine-day program had commenced on December first and tomorrow would be the final day.

Satya took movies of Mother as She stood smiling, then stepped forward as Bishuddha placed Her chappals before Her. Mother proceeded under a little white lattice arch and I was able to walk just behind Her as She moved across the ground. As She stood on the driveway we each presented our garlands, gently placing them

over Mother's head and then kneeling at Her feet as She removed them over our heads.

We followed as She proceeded to where rooms had been arranged for Her use. She went inside for a short time and all waited near Her door. When She came back out we walked with Her to an awaiting car. Satya filmed as She was seated in the car and we all gathered around reluctant to let Her go even for a short time.

It had been less than an hour since we arrived at the gate of Swadeshi House, and already the special enchantment of Kanpur was enveloping us. I do not know the reason, perhaps some past life connection, but every time we were with Mother in Kanpur it was as though rose petals were being scattered before us as we were welcomed home into the bosom of our family.

It was joy to be at Swadeshi House once again. Besides the great beauty of the place, the thing I enjoyed was seeing Mother free to move about as She chose without anyone hindering Her. Even though devotees were always waiting to glimpse Her, they stayed back, content just to be near.

The Jaipuria family had provided quarters for us in their dharmasala at Jai Market. Quite a few other western devotees were also guests there and we all took our meals in the garden gazebo at Swadeshi House.

The next day, the last day of the function, the holy Ramayana was carried out of the pandal with ceremony. Satya stood on the verandah of the house to get an elevated angle for filming the procession. He was unaware that the Jaipuria family was escorting Mother onto the verandah where they would offer garlands and pronams at Her feet for the blessings She had bestowed on them. It was Satya's great good fortune to be there first, as the crowd which came would have made it impossible for him to be anywhere near Mother. The pictures he took were rare in their beauty. A divine halo of light surrounded Mother as She stood before the marble pillars of the porch while bhajans were sung.

That afternoon under a clear blue sky little green parrots darted from tree to tree as we all stood along the edge of the lawn. Mother walked alone on the grass in the garden. Satya filmed as She crossed the lawn and stopped to look at something near Her feet. She bent over and picked up a tiny bit of pink yarn which had been discarded from a candy box. She held it for a while, then dropped it back onto the lawn as She stepped away. I waited until She had walked a few steps, then darted out quickly to retrieve that small scrap which, for me, had been made golden by Her touch.

We were transported daily from Jai Market to Swadeshi House by bicycle rickshaws. While making that trip the next morning I failed to notice when the end

of the sari blew loose and fell over the left wheel of the rickshaw. Before I knew what was happening, it became tangled in the wheel, and as it wound tighter I was being pulled out of the rickshaw. I shouted to the driver several times before he had heard me and stopped. By that time my ankle was scraped, and I was shaken and more than a little angry with myself for letting such a thing happen. Most of all I was sad to have ruined that sari because it was the one I had worn in 1970 on the day I first saw Mother in Suktal.

When we arrived at Swadeshi House I borrowed some scissors and cut the torn end of my sari as neatly as possible. I was glad that I had a shawl to cover the damage. Actually I was fortunate not to have been seriously injured, but when I saw Mother all concern left me.

I took Polaroid photos of several people there, and Swami Keshayanandaji said that I should take Mother's photo. She was walking on the lawn at that time, and I told Swamiji that I would love to photograph Her, but that he must help me by asking Her permission. He got Her consent and I eagerly stepped a little way in front of Mother, trying to focus the camera as She walked. I kept hacking up as She would only stand still briefly. Smiling and teasing, She allowed me to playfully chase Her as I carefully kept my shawl from falling off. I had just put a fresh pack of film in the camera and kept thinking, "Well. I will just take one more." Mother removed the towel from Her head and I could not bring myself to end this delightful sport as long as She did not end it.

After some time a devotee brought a white wicket chair for Mother. As she sat down I took Her picture, the last one in my camera. Intoxicated and smiling I prostrated at Her feet and sat upon the grass next to Her. Then I laid the ten photos in Her hands. She only glanced at them and handed them to a lady sitting on Her other side. Several people there had been enjoying Mother's game with me and all were smiling as they gathered around Her and passed the photos to those who wished to see them.

Satya had taken movies of the whole caper and was still filming as we sat before Her and watched Her mood shift to an extraordinary ethereal *bhava*. The playful expression was preplaced by a dreamy softness. I was in awe as She looked above our earthbound eyes. We could only wonder at what She was seeing. We sat like that for quite some time as Mother seemed to freely move in and out of that *bhava* though never completely leaving that divine mood.

Our friend Uma (Sister Uma) was sitting near me. She was carrying an ochre silk cushion which she had intended to place on Mother's chair before She sat

down. But Mother had taken Her seat so quickly that Uma was unable to do that service for Her.

When Mother arose from Her chair and stepped away, we all followed Her, expecting that She would go into Her room for a while. Instead She walked toward a tiny pandal which had been set up just outside Her room. As we followed Mother across the lawn, a devotee who had just arrived offered a garland to Mother, then lay prostrate at Her feet. I was very touched, as his genuine love for Mother permeated the stillness, and I smiled within the warmth of that feeling. When I looked to Mother's face, I found that She had been looking at me, smiling softly-like a brief caress-one that thrills my heart each time I am blessed to see it in Satya's film. For by Her grace he had captured that divine moment .

After placing the garland over the devotees's head, Mother proceeded into the little pandal. Uma immediately laid the silk asana on Mother's seat and Mother took Her place upon it. Such compassion our Mother bestows on Her children, fulfilling our desires with such perfect timing. There could be no doubt that Mother had entered that little tent just so Uma could do service, for She had already sat with us for a very long time. Soon with folded palms Mother smiled at all of us and arose from Her seat. Just outside the pandal, Uma placed Mother's chappals before Her on the grass. Mother stepped into them and walked to Her room as I stood dazed by the wonder of all that I had seen and experienced that marvellous day.

From Swadeshi House, Mother's party shifted to the ashram maintained by the Singhanian family for Mother's use. Situated next to the magnificent white marble Radha-Krishna Mandir, it was a place very dear to us as we had spent five ecstatic days there with Mother on our first trip in 1970. It looked very much the same. A huge pandal had been raised on the temple grounds. Swami Akhandanandaji gave talks twice daily on the Srimad Bhagavat. Mother was always present, sitting to his near the corner of the platform.

Every evening Mother and Swami Akhandananda sat in the ashram satsang hall. It was much more intimate, as they talked freely with each other and the devotees who gathered in the room.

On the back side of the kitchen and other ashram structures the Singhanian family had provided three separate courtyards, each surrounded by three or four guest rooms with common facilities. They were very clean and well maintained. We were privileged to stay in one of those rooms We shared the courtyard with our friend Jayananda (who had just come from Almora), Uma, and Atmanandaji. The most wonderful feature of those accommodations was that we were just around the corner from Mother.

The Singhania's made us feel genuinely welcome and I was always given a seat near the front where I could see Mother and contemplate Her being. I often gazed at Her sweet face and hands trying to burn into my memory every little feature and each unique movement, such as the way She would lift the bracelet on Her left wrist with thumb and two middle fingers of the Her right hand, the way She would straighten Her spine and shift slightly upon Her asana, the gentle lift of eyebrows and slight nod of Her head, smiling (most always smiling), the jut of Her chin as She positioned that yellow towel beneath it—so many things like that. I remember thinking as I sat there that the day would come when I could no longer behold Her like this and that I must remember as much as I was capable of seeing. By Her grace I will always see Her living in my heart and moving in those cherished memories.

In front of the ashram there was a small pandal where Mother would sometimes sit in the afternoons. One day as we sat with her there, few young devotees of Neem Karoli Baba came just to sing for Mother. They sat among Mother's devotees and sang a few bhajans. Many people joined in, as they were very devotional and revered Mother.

I was able to take some lovely Polaroid photos of Mother as She sat in that small pandal against the colorful backdrop. Satya also had the opportunity to take many excellent movies. What a great blessing to see those scenes again and recall that rare mood that enveloped us.

At the far end of the satsang hall a fully-enclosed tent had been set up and it was here that those who were to have private interviews with Mother would meet Her. There were two entrances to the tent the main front one and a smaller side opening where Mother could enter and sit upon Her wooden bed which was covered with sheet.

Bhaskaranandaji told us what time to come there for our first "private" with Mother since our arrival. We also had gifts for Mother which we brought to the tent. After we were seated before Mother, a young couple who had just arrived from Gujarat was brought into the tent. They presented a garland to Mother and She put it around both of them together as She spoke to them very affectionately. Bhaskarananda told us that through Mother's grace their lives had been spared.

Then an older lady entered the tent in a very emotional state and started talking to Mother. I could tell that she felt uncomfortable because we were there and that she said something about it to Mother. I understood Mother when She told the lady that we spoke only English and would not understand what she said. That seemed to satisfy the lady, for she then became oblivious of our presence and started telling

Mother a long story, crying softly at times. Mother was so sweet, consoling her with great compassion and concern.

Later we learned the story which the lady had related to Mother. Her husband, being an honorable man, had refused to become involved in some illegal dealings which were proposed to him. His life was threatened, and one night as he stepped from his door some men attacked him with a knife. He immediately cried, "Mother, save me!" He was savagely stabbed and cut many times. His life was saved by the narrowest of margins. His doctor said that the knife blade had been only an eighth of an inch away from his heart in one wound. His daughter and her husband had barely escaped the same attack. They were the young couple who had first entered the tent. They had come for Mother's blessings and to express their profound gratitude to Mother. They were there for about an hour. We quietly thrilled at the privilege of being allowed to stay and observe as Mother comforted them, soothing their fears as only She could do.

Our private also lasted close to an hour. Bhaskaranandaji translated very carefully for us. When we gave our gifts to Mother She asked us to keep the things "in store" for Her until later. We had photos of people who wanted Mother's blessing, questions from some, and messages from other. She listened to everything with complete patience, never rushing us. I was so intoxicated after two hours with Her in such an intense and loving atmosphere that I do not remember what happened during the rest of that day.

The holy Ganges River flows through Kanpur, but we had never visited Her banks there. One afternoon our young friend Babu took us in his car along with Bhaskarananda's nephew, Kamal Dave, and Brahmachari Gadadhar of Mother's Kankhal ashram to see Ganga. The three young men went in a boat with Satya and the boatmen to the middle of the river. We always brought a couple of bottles of Ganga jal back to America with us, and Satya was in quest of our supply for this trip. The boatman had told us that the water was cleaner away from the shore. I waited on the banks and shot a little film of them as they enjoyed the brief voyage.

There were many unhurried days at that little ashram, and Mother was in Her room or otherwise unavailable to us. We talked with Swami Paramananda, Bhaskarananda, Nirvanananda, Dasu and others who were usually too busy for visiting.

We had also become acquainted with some of the devotees of Kanpur and enjoyed the happy times spent in their company. One man who enriched our time there was Mr. Ranjit Basu. At the evening satsangs when Mother and Swami Akhandananda sat with us, we of course were unable to understand what they said.

Dear Mr. Basu would take mental note of stories or interesting points that were made and then sit with us as we were served our evening meal, relating all that he had remembered. He would never take food, though he was invited to do so by our hosts, but preferred only to share the gems he had collected from the satsang. So often I have remembered his kindness and sweet smiling face.

One afternoon we followed as Mother and Swami Akhandananda walked around the ashram to a house which was used by the Swami and his brahmacharis while they were there. This was on the same road that ran in front of the compound where we were staying. Seats had been prepared for Mother and Swamiji. They sat facing each other as a good-sized crowd gathered in a circle around them. Satya stood on a low wall which ran in front of the compound and was able to film this spontaneous event from above the heads of the crowd. Mother had been given some type of food, perhaps fruit or sweets. She took some of it in Her hand and fed it to Swamiji who opened his mouth like a small child being fed by his mother. It was so sweet to see, like Yashoda Ma feeding baby Krishna. Everyone was smiling and enchanted by that charming play.

The Singhania's garlanded Mother and Swami Akhandananda, then after some time they both stood and walked to the satsang hall as we all followed.

In the evening, we arrived at the satsang hall before Mother entered. I had brought Gopalji with me and sat Him near Mother's asana. When She came and took Her place, one of the ladies sitting near Her asked about Gopalji. I heard Mother say "Shraddha's Gopal. "I can still hear Her sweet voice saying my name as I recall that evening.

When Swami Akhandananda entered the hall, before taking his seat he asked Mother about Gopalji. Mother told me to show Gopal to Swamiji. I placed Gopalji into the open hands of Swamiji, whose laughing eyes were fixed upon Gopal. As he stood smiling before us he suddenly held Gopal about ten inches in front of his face and sent a big smacking kiss through the air to Gopalji. Everyone was delighted and we all laughed along with Mother and the Swamiji as Gopalji was returned to His place beside Mother and Swamiji took his seat.

On December twenty-second there was a Nama Yajna which had actually began on the previous evening. The satsang hall was decorated, and the men in the kirtan party went in procession with harmonium, drum, and cymbals around a circular altar which had been erected in the middle of the hall. At one point Mother briefly joined the procession. Then She stood amid the seated ladies for quite some time. Some offered garlands and the lovely sound of God's Name enveloped us all.

Later that day Mother sat in the hall as the Kirtan continued. I had dressed Gopalji in a beautiful shining blue dress and brought Him to where Mother was seated. She indicated where I should place Him near Her asana. He looked so beautiful as one of the men in the kirtan offered incense before Him and Krishna bhajans were being sung.

The next day Mother was leaving Kanpur and going into seclusion with only a few attendants. Others had been given permission to join Her in Vrindavan in mid-January. We had only limited time in India and asked Her permission to follow Her, promising to take care of our own meals and accommodations. Mother graciously granted that boon to us, but said that we could join Her in Naimisharanya on January first.

That last day in Kanpur was very sad. Even the sky was gray with clouds and the air was little chilly. Mother came outside wearing a burgundy quilted wrap. A yellow towel covered Her head. She walked the length of the driveway toward the wide red gate and back. Singhania and a few other ladies joined Her for a brief stroll on the lawn. Then we all followed as Mother went into the little pandal. Her wrap was removed and She took Her seat against the brightly-colored inner lining of the pendal. I stood near Her on the open side and watched as the Singhania ladies did Mother's puja. Mother requested that Ganga jal be poured over Her hands.

Three beautiful rose garlands were placed over Mother's head and very gently laid upon Her shoulders. The grace with which each offering was made showed the veneration which this family held for Mother. Incense and camphor were offered in the same unhurried fashion by each lady.

After the puja was completed, Mother stood and moved toward the car which was waiting to take Her away.

In a melancholy mood the devotees clustered around Mother's car. Her door was open and we were each allowed to pronam before Her. When Satya and I bowed together at Her feet She patted us very affectionately. Reluctant to let Her go, we clung to those last few moments. Then Her door was closed. The car slowly moved down the driveway as our steps followed it. We watched as it left the grounds and gradually passed from our sight. I felt as though my heart and soul had been wrenched from my body, leaving a hallow shell behind.



"OFFER TO ME....."

[English rendering of a talk on Bhagavad Gita by
Swami Akhandananda Saraswatiji Maharaj] — Jaya D. Kania

Faith (*sraddhā*) is a Goddess. When she goes anywhere it is on a vehicle (*vāhana*). Her *vāhana* may be anything, flowers, fruits or just a *namaskār*. Words or even language can serve that purpose too. What matters is your faith — *Sraddhā*.

The Lord has said : "*Patram. puspam falam toyam yo me bhaktya prajachhati*" This is because in Bhakti Mārg the strength therein is not that of the *Jiva*, it is God's power—not of man. What one offers to God is of little importance. He does not expect anything. Is there anything that the God does not have ? However, when the devotee asks of God what he can offer, God says— "Anything, however small or insignificant — *patram* (leaves), *puspam* (flowers), *falam* (fruits), *toyam* (water)—anything, the Lord is pleased. And through which ? — even by a small tulsi leaf, by a few drops of water. The Lord asks — "Is there devotion in your heart ? Do you love me ? This is all I want"

God is only hungry for your love. He does not expect *vairāgya* (detachment from the world) or that you go into *samadhi* — all He craves for is love. What does the Lord do with your offerings ? He says — "I accept them, I accept the giver too. That is, I give himself — realization;"

Sri Ramanujacharya says — "Nothing is mine. Whatever I think as mine is not mine, nor I have any thing. All is Yours. What can I give to You ? It was always Yours. It was my ignorance that prompted me to think it was mine."

Forget all. Think that whatever I have done is for You. Whatever is being done is not done by me. You alone are the doer. God does not want you to do any thing specifically. Only whatever you do should be done for Him without expecting any fruit. All Karma should be offered to Him excepting those which are forbidden by the *sastra* like, gambling, drinking, killing anyone etc. Take the food, only what is proper, offer it to Him first. Whatever is given in charity should be given in God's Name. If this is done then there is no fear of bondage.

The Lord has said — "Offer your *Karma* to me and then you will be free. The responsibility is mine. Offer not only your *Karma*, but yourself too, I shall accept all with love. You too shall be mine"



DEITY OF FLOWERS

— 'Shobha'

Was it just yesterday, or
Has a decade passed by ?
Time knows not its passing moments
Memories flow in the waves of Presence
Flowing in the river of present moments.

Midst the chants of
Jai Guru Sharanam Namah-Namah-Namah
Amidst the coming of the garlands
White and red - pink and purple
Yellow and green - russet and ochre

In the mele of blowing of the eonches
Beating of the drums - ringing of the bells
Clicking of the rosary - whispers of the fragrance
The Song of Love announces the footsteps
Of your coming

Adorned by nature's beauty
Wreathed with care in the twines of devotion
Where could these heavenly blossoms
Find a worthier place — but

For the crown of your head
The flower of your tresses
The bangles of your wrist
The anklets of your Lotus - Feet

O' the deity of Nature's Beauty
The Manifested Bliss of Creation
The expansion of Compassion
Our *Prema Mayi MA - Anandamayi MA.*

Happy 107th Birthday !!*

* Written on the sacred occasion of Sri Ma's 107th Birthday programme on May 29, 2002.

In Memory of My Beloved

Father—Sri Suresh Mahindra

*"Speak the Truth and
fear no-one."*

—Anjali Mehra
New Delhi

THE HOLY BIRTH PLACE.....

—Dr. S.C. Chandra

The most sacred place to us — the tiny village named "Kheora"! It was in this village where Sri Ma took Her birth, where She played manifold *lilas* during Her childhood days. How enthralling is the whole surrounding!

Since Sri Ma has left her physical body that tiny and almost unknown village has indeed become a hallowed place of pilgrimage for all of us! Is it not our bounden duty to pay a visit to that sacred spot and bow our heads on the holy altar? Our hearts will nodoubt be filled. with infinite joy, we shall feel blessed and deeply contented after we are privileged to put the dust of that holy place on our fore heads. Can there be any doubt?

The village "Kheora" is now not at all an inaccessible place. When Sri Má was born the place was within the bounds of the Tripura State, then in Bengal, now in Bangladesh, an independent nation on the east of India, almost bordering Burma (Myanmar).

Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is almost on the world air-map to day. It is easily accesible by air from Delhi, Calcutta in India, as well as from Europe, U.S.A. and other cities of Asia. And Kheora, the blessed village, is only about three hours drive from Dhaka. Railway services in Bangladesh is very fast these days, From Dhaka to Brahmanbaria (the present district headquarters of Ma's birth place) is only 2 hours journey in a super fast train and then to Kheora is just 45 minute's drive. One will be amazed to know that from Calcutta to Dhaka is also only 45 minutes run by air.

For a visit to Ma's birth place all you will need are : (i) International Passport (ii) Return air ticket to Dhaka and back (iii) Minimum U.S. dollar 50/- as approved foreign exchange and (iv) Visa from any Bangladesh High Commission or Embassy.

Your visit to Bangladesh will be indeed quite smooth if you don't forget to send a written message well in advance to a very sincere devotee of Sri Ma, who looks after almost all the devotees visiting the birth place at Kheora. He is Mr.

Pinaki Bhattacharya, a quite well-known and influential person of that area. His address is :

Mr. Pinaki Bhattacharya,
Rai Saheb's House, Medda
P.O. Brahmanbaria, Bangladesh

The gentleman is a very dedicated person, who, if informed in time, is likely to make all arrangements for your stay in Dhaka or Brahmanbaria and also arrange for necessary transport and other things for you.

Kheora, which was once an insignificant small rural area in Bangladesh, has gained much prominence during the last about twenty years since Sri Ma left her body in August, 1982. Ever since then scores of people from all walks of life and from various parts of the world have flocked to that small village, which now houses Sri Ma's small birth place temple, a small ashram in Ma's name and also the Ma Anandamayee Vidyalaya (School), which has recently been quite well-known in that area. As the ashram in Kheora is a small one and there is no other accommodation for guests available there it is quite convenient to stay overnight, either in Dhaka or even in the small town of Brahmanbaria.

Dhaka, now the capital city of Bangladesh, was also very intimately connected with the early life of Sri Ma, her *lila of sadhana* at Siddheshwari, Shahbag and Ramna, which have now all become veritable places of pilgrimage for countless number of people.

Once a visitor is in Bangladesh he or she always makes it a point to visit the very first ashram in Ma's name at Siddheshwari, where the historic temple of goddess Kali, popularly known as "Siddheshwari Kali Mandir" stands nearby. The small ashram at 14, Siddheshwari Lane, Dhaka, which was established in the year 1926, is connected with many miraculous incidents in Ma's divine life. The place, which was once almost inaccessible for visitors and was full of jungle has now been transformed into one of the best localities of the Dhaka city. A visit to Siddheshwari is almost a must for all devotees of Ma visiting Dhaka & Bangladesh.

Not very far from Siddheshwari stands the historic garden of the *Nawabs* (Muslim rulers) of ancient Dhaka, the 'Shahbag' (the royal garden). It was here in 'Shahbag' where Sri Ma lived for more than three years from 1924 to 1927. The days in 'Shahbag' is a very significant chapter in Sri Ma's early life of *sādhana*, and it was from this very place Ma very frequently visited the ancient temple of Siddheshwari.

It is indeed amazing to find that although the entire Shahbag garden has been taken over by the University authorities and the whole area has been changed beyond recognition, the two small ancient rooms, known in those days as the "Golghar" (circular rooms), where Sri Ma passed her days in divine ecstasy more than 77 years before, still stands there completely untouched even during so many changes in administration. It is really marvellous to find them still standing as they were !

Just opposite the principal road still exists the famous Ramna grounds, in the midst of which once stood the historic "Ramna Kali Mandir" and the adjoining "Shiva Mandir", where the first big ashram in Sri Ma's name was established in April, 1929. The ashram, which was once a landmark in the city of Dhaka, exists no more. It was totally destroyed along with the famous "Ramna Kali Mandir" during the war of liberation of Bangladesh in the early seventies. But the original site of the once majestic ashram at Ramna still exists and upon that very spot is proposed to be built the National Memorial, where the Pakistan forces surrendered before the Indian army and the new nation Bangladesh was born.

Coming back to Kheora, Sri Ma's holy birth place, it is significant to note that inspite of Bangladesh being an Islamic country and especially when more than 98% of the residents of that village Kheora are followers of Islam, the whole area has all along been free from any communal tension. The Muslim residents on the contrary veritably feel proud that it was in their own village, where the world-renowned "Ma Anandamayee" was born.

Jai Jai Ma