

*The Self, self contained,
calling to Itself for its own Revelation—
this is happiness.*

MATRI VANI

To invoke Him, to be constantly intent on realizing Him alone, is man's duty. At all times in His arms, in His embrace—within the Mother. On finding the Mother, everything will be found.

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Endeavour to keep your body healthy and your mind engrossed in *japa* and meditation. It is but natural for man to become agitated at times. Nevertheless, try to advance speedily beyond the level on which agitation occurs. Time is gliding away.

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By saying 'I cannot' one does not get far. One has to acquire capacity and achieve. Truly, for man everything is possible. By God's Grace one is born in a human body. Even though someone may slip and fall, he will not remain

lying on the ground but rise, stand up straight and walk again. The speed of advancing must become brisk. In order to find your Self, progress along your own path, in your own rhythm.

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The One for Whose sake you have chosen this path in order to dedicate your life to Him, should be remembered constantly. Talk solely for His sake. Be mindful of His words, ever aware of Him; listen to Him alone.

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For those who are pilgrims on the path, it is imperative to forge ahead vigorously, energetically, steadily and at great speed. Sitting in a rickety cart will not do. Virile strength of mind is always needed. You yourself have to mould your own life—remember this !

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Thou art ever close by. The idea that He is distant must be removed far away. Thou, truly, art within and without, in every nerve and fibre, in every plant and stone, in the world and beyond.



Mataji Gives Darshan

MELITA MASCHMANN*

(Translated from German.)

Towards the end of the summer of 1962, I visited India for a few weeks. My knowledge of Indian religion and philosophy was almost nil, which was due to the fact that I had been unable to prepare myself for the trip. In the very first days, 'chance' (if there is such a thing) led me to a famous saint. Subsequently I believe that a centre of *karmayoga* has to be seen in his Ashram, and it would surely be presumptuous if I dared to give an opinion. But at that time I was disappointed. Probably I noticed only the surface.

However, after this experience I decided to keep away from the living saints of India and to let the past speak to me through its temples. But 'chance' brought me straight to Ma Anandamayi at Kankhal. While waiting for Her in the small courtyard of the Ashram, I was angry with myself. What a waste of time ! Could I expect anything but new disappointment ? If someone had told me that I would a few hours later kneel before a human being, I should have laughed. My religious upbringing forbids such a gesture, except in specially solemn moments of divine worship.

About 15 people had been waiting together with me. At dusk we were taken to a roof-garden. When later Mataji

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appeared, I had no choice to decide whether it would be against my convictions to kneel before a human being. 'It' simply threw me on my knees. What I experienced in the next few seconds cannot be conveyed to a person who has never known anything similar. I can only relate outer signs and speak in metaphors. Just imagine that a tree—a beautiful, strong, old beech for instance—approaches you with calm steps. What would you feel? "Have I gone crazy?" you would ask yourself. "Or perhaps I am dreaming?" Finally you would have to concede that you had entered a new dimension of reality of which you had hitherto been ignorant. This exactly was my position.

So far as we know, it is part of the nature of a tree to be rooted into the ground, is it not? According to Western thinking, a human being is characterized by his 'I'. In his existence as 'persona' Christians recognize the mystery of his immortality. Here I was suddenly confronted with a human being of whom I felt that she had no 'I' anymore. Expressed in non-medical language, it may be said of certain mentally deranged patients that their 'I' is disjoined or diffused and that they have thereby lost the special quality, which is the distinctive mark of a human being. I have come across such patients. The profound senselessness of their existence called forth a similar horror as I felt at the sight of a forest in the mountains after a heavy storm: the old pine-trees stood with their crowns piercing the earth and their roots sticking up towards the sky.

However, here now is Mataji—a human being that has no more 'I' and just because of this, is not less but *more* than all other men I have ever met!

Later I read much about this and learnt that egolessness is one of the characteristics of a *jivan mukta*. But at that time I did not know anything about it except what I saw with my own eyes. That I did not deceive myself is testified by a letter written to friends, which marks an inarticulate attempt to express what I had experienced. I wrote : "..... She seems to be a human being without an 'I', belonging to the category of Mata Ganga or Pita Himalaya. Looking at Her, one feels that she must have transcended good and evil." (These considerations crowded upon me, while I felt that I did not understand their significance.) Something similar I also said a few days later to one of the ashramites who replied : "Do not imagine it is your merit that you have been able to recognize Her so instantaneously. It depends entirely on Mataji how much She allows anyone to see of Her." I gladly agreed to this statement. Everything great in our life is a gift, or as the Christians say—Grace.

While writing all this I realize that I am talking much, because I haven't the courage to say something about Mataji Herself, and even less to describe Her. In my travel-diary there are a few groping sentences : "Mataji has the superpersonal personality that speaks to us when we stand at the seashore or at the foot of a mighty mountain. But what is it that speaks to us in those moments ? Surely not the sea, whom men have named as one names a child. The child is then its name. Mataji also must have been given a name when She was born. But what is the significance of Her existence grasped under that name ? Anyone who would address Her by that name may be compared to a man who wants to attach a label to the Indian Ocean....."

“For about ten minutes Mataji slowly walked up and down along the far side of the roof-garden. Sometimes She stopped and gazed at the sky. She did not seem to notice us. The evening clouds were reflected in Her eyes. What I perceived there is quite beyond the ken of rational thinking. The clouds, the woods, the mountain range of the Himalayas dived into that gaze as if it were their own home. When the moon is mirrored in a puddle of rain-water, it becomes tiny and pale. But Mataji’s eyes reflected the sky as only the ocean can : sisterly, out of the same order of creation.

“While watching Mataji, my whole body was trembling. What confounded and perplexed me so greatly was that this ‘phenomenon Anandamayi Ma’ did not fit into any place of my scheme of the world. Just as the tree that starts walking cannot be fitted in anywhere and therefore threatens to blow up the habitual order.

“Later Mataji sat down on a couch kept ready for Her, and conversed with the people. The strange, bewildering element of Her being receded into the background, but never for a moment entirely disappeared. One could endeavour to forget it. Then, a woman clad in a white sari,—I should have estimated her about 50—whose hair fell loosely over her shoulders and back, sat there between the cushions. Gracefully and at the same time with vigour, She was engaged in a lively conversation. Occasionally She broke out into laughter, then again seemed absorbed in some deep contemplation ; off and on affectionate mockery could be detected in the corners of Her eyes. While She discussed some theological problem with a distinguished old Indian dressed in

European style, She reminded me of my teacher of mathematics who was a great philosopher and very likely searched for a mathematical formula by which to define God. At one moment a tattered old peasant woman who was almost blind and gave off an indescribable smell, came and squatted on the floor close to Mataji. Mataji bent down low to her. For several minutes their heads almost seemed to touch and one could hear a soft murmuring. Mataji listened with Her whole being. A kindness was expressed in this, which represented something human to perfection.....”

That evening I made up my mind to drop all other plans and to proceed to Dehradun where Mataji was expected within the next few days. In the meanwhile I attempted in vain to gain clarity about what I had seen and felt. Finally I decided to postpone this for later and first of all to take in with all my senses. In Kishenpur Mataji would appear twice daily, usually for about two hours, and was then mostly subjected to the onrush of Her devotees and admirers. Except for a very few hours of sleep, She had ‘privates’ for the rest of the days and nights.

Several times She Herself saw to it that I could sit very near Her in spite of the crowd. I felt like an enthusiastic lover of music : while opening himself, heart and soul, to the enchantment of the music, he at the same time observes the way the instruments are played. Mataji’s presence filled me with an irresistible mysterious fascination, such as I had never before experienced. And yet I was simultaneously clearly aware of the specific human element in Her. I saw how Her eyes lit up when amongst those who fell at Her feet and touched the ground with their foreheads, a familiar,

friendly face turned up. I believed to notice how She suffered from the heat. I felt Her slight resistance when She withdrew Her feet from an importunate adorer. I observed Her pleasure in puns (an ashramite translated to me what was being said). I saw how She dismissed a Parsi lady from Bombay who requested a miraculous cure from Her. "Take your husband to a good doctor and pray to God for peace for both of you." At that moment Her face had an expression of sadness and inexorability. I also marked how Her attitude and the deeping shadows in Her features betrayed fatigue before She got up and traced a passage for Herself through the multitude that thronged round Her.

The Christian painters of the early Middle Ages had a simple, yet effective device to express holiness when depicting scenes from the life of Jesus or any saint. Representing, for instance, the birth of Jesus, they would paint the infant and His parents as ordinary human beings, but put them against a background of gold. This golden background symbolized the inexpressible mystery of sanctity. One who wished to give a message of holiness by painting, was not free to let his brush be voluble, he could only tacitly hint at the mystery of the luminous background.

I feel very much like those artists did. What is describable in Mataji is the familiar human element. For that which is beyond, for the Divine, I also have no means of expression. But I could use an expedient similar to that of those painters. Sometimes I believed to see a stream of light radiate from Her eyes. But at such moments, I more than ever felt pained at my blindness. I knew that, if only I were more of a seer, I should have beheld Her whole form in

this halo. Although incapable of perceiving it, I yet felt it and was able to register its effect by the complete peace that filled me at certain hours.

The mystery in its secrecy shall remain untouched, but perhaps I may be permitted to try and approach it by a few more steps : I felt that this divine Light must be connected with Mataji's egolessness. It originates from the eternal Ground of all existence—let us unhesitatingly call it 'God.' And it streams through Mataji because it is not impaired by the opaque texture of the I-ness which, in the case of all of us, is more or less dense.

I have yet to mention how very thoughtful it made me that although millions of men and women of all strata of society fell at Her feet, I could never detect even the faintest trace of pride, neither also of humility in Mataji. Probably there is a connexion between this and what I stated when I first met Her, namely that She seemed beyond good and evil. I must confess that, to this day I am unable to understand this fully. I have still to ponder deeply about it, for I know now that this statement is in keeping with one of the elements of Hindu teaching.

Mataji's mysterious power lies in Her being, not in what she does. Without a doubt, She has for many, many years lived solely for Her fellow-beings. But this may be said of a fair number of others as well, although with them it has a very different significance. Seen from our angle of vision, Her whole life seems to be one continuous self-sacrifice and could therefore still be called 'action'. Yet, when watching Mataji for a sufficiently long time, one comes to feel that,

what is essential in Her existence does no longer fulfil itself by action. She is not what She is because she *does* good. Her life seems a manifestation of pure, self-contained Being, perhaps I should say 'Being reposing in God.' Hence she corresponds to our highest conception of 'good', but the ethical laws are for Her not anymore a matter of struggle and daily decision as for us who still live fully steeped in action. The Christian apostle Paul says: "Christ is the end of the law." He does not thereby mean the denial of ethical commandments, but their fulfilment as a matter of course. For Him who is "one with the Father" (with God), ethical demands are no more of the nature of commandments. He fulfils them spontaneously by His very Being. This also holds good for Mataji. For one who sees Her with open eyes, not only the beauty of God is reflected in Her, such as we may recognize in a flower or — more powerfully—in the sea or the mountains, but also God's Love. Moreover Her whole being is a passionate, indefatigable, newly formulated proclamation of self-experienced Divine Reality. According to the Christian doctrine, Christ is the most perfect child of God — *the Son*—because His Love for God and men was most perfect. The ocean or a mountain cannot testify to Divine Love, but man, if he is what he should be, gives evidence of God's Love. This is so with Mataji. Hence She is one of the important religious figures, as a proclaimer and a witness.

While I was sitting at Mataji's feet with Her other devotees and nothing happened except that we looked at Her, I, at certain moments, felt the presence of Divinity more powerfully than I had ever before during church ceremonies. I believe, I understand that all ritual of that kind

exists only because of the want of Divine Presence, as a gesture of longing and invocation of That, which cannot be forced to come. But where Divinity IS, even prayer is silenced. The ritual action is blotted out in the mysterious presence of Divine Being. A strange experience, impossible to convey to others—this fulness in the void of gazing. A gazing with closed eyes, and yet with eyes wide open. Once or twice I perceived what can hardly be grasped by a Western brain. I do not know how Mataji experiences Her own person. Certainly not as we should express it, namely as a human being in whom the divine spark emits a specially bright light—for She lives in Oneness. I believed to observe that She, in whom Holiness is embodied before our eyes, 'joined' us in the reverent contemplation of the Divinity that she Herself IS. In my diary I find the clumsy sentence: "Sometimes one has the feeling as if Mataji revered Herself. But this attitude is completely superpersonal." Later I discovered the conception of '*Lila*.' Does it perhaps give the clue ?

Mataji's Darshan I have probably experienced only three or four times. The numinous by which it was characterized did not lessen, but to my great surprise a fundamental change took place : My first feeling that I had lit upon a dimension of reality entirely foreign to me was reversed into its opposite. I now felt that I had only just, for the first time, discovered man's own true reality.

It may sound presumptuous, but I should like to say it in all humility : In Mataji, God allowed me to see Him with the closeness of intimacy. Ever clearer I felt, what distinguishes me from Her is nothing essential, it lies where the brightness of a candle is distinguished from that of the

sun. This was of course a tremendous discovery that, by the grace of God, I should wish to justify by the trend of my life in future.

Mataji's last evening in Kishenpur, which was also my last one, has remained in my memory as a big festival. About two hundred people had assembled in the Ashram. I see Mataji standing in the courtyard, indefatigably distributing *prasād* in all directions. Not in a solemn manner but laughingly, like a mother whose greatest happiness it is to satisfy the hunger of her children. Sometimes She would suddenly throw a fruit over many heads to someone standing at a distance, who had asked for it only with his eyes. Afterwards, for a long while, She walked up and down between us, talking to a child, joking with one or the other, allowing questions to be put to Her, sitting down near the musicians who were singing *kīrtana*, then rising again to walk once more between us. It was as if she wished to distribute Herself, and She did this with a hundred hands. Never have I met a more beautiful human being, or more precisely, never have I seen the mysterious beauty of the Imperishable shine with such effulgence through mortal flesh.

Late, that same evening, there was a very special moment for me. I stood behind a trellised window, which looked out over the temples. Mataji stood between them and, for a short while, all the people who had surrounded Her receded far back. My memory shows Her to me standing there all by Herself. I raised my folded hands to bid good-bye to Her. From my prison (behind the latticed window) my greeting went out and upwards to Her freedom.

She lifted Her folded hands in response, and simultaneously sent a veritable torrent of joy right into the core of my heart.

Leave-taking usually makes me feel quite sick. This parting should actually have torn me to pieces. Yet there was not a single painful moment. The instant in which Mataji had lifted Her hands to respond to my greeting lay outside of time. I felt this with every fibre of my being : here nothing was threatened with transitoriness !

Never in my life have I felt so carefree, so confidently happy as during the weeks that followed, although I was travelling alone, with little money, and for the first time in a non-European country.

During the Cuban crisis it became clearer than ever to me how much I owed to Mataji. Just like everyone else I saw the dreadful danger of the situation, but quite contrary to my attitude in similar crises hitherto, I did not feel afraid. Perhaps I have grasped—not with my mind but with my whole being—that even the most cruel outer destruction does not touch that which we ARE in Reality. May I be able to preserve this knowledge.

There is a Zen Buddhist saying : “When an Enlightenedone touches a dry twig, it begins to blossom,.....”

Pages from my Diary

GURUPRIYA DEVI

(Translated from Bengali)

Naimisharanya, 18th November 1960.

For the last few days Mataji has been staying in a hut on the bank of the Gomati river. This evening after the *kirtana*, all came and sat in Mataji's room. Mataji told Dr. Pannalal : "As soon as the last sounds of the *kirtana* had faded away, a tune, a vision, a vibration came floating along as if from a great distance, yet very distinctly : '*Parameśa śaranāgatoham, śaranāgatoham.*'"

Mataji sang these words in various modulations and then spoke again : "Look, *Pitāji*, this has evoked some other memory. About seven days ago, (while waking, not during sleep) this body saw a woman under the mango and neem-trees that have grown into one. She did something there and then vanished. This body was lying here in the hut. But as if there were no wall on that side, everything was clearly visible. And what was seen ? For that woman there seemed to be no difference between excrements and sandal-paste—a state of realization of the *Brahman*. This was the impression she gave."

Mataji did not disclose anything else concerning the matter. There really is something special about those trees. Through the trunk of a mango-tree a neem-tree has grown and another kind of wild tree has also put forth its branches

from there. Mataji called it 'Tintirī-tree.' In Kheora, above the place where Mataji was born, there also a mango-tree and a neem-tree had united into one.

21st November 1960.

This evening Mataji was lying in Her hut. As soon as I entered, She said in a low voice : "I see a child floating on the Gomati river. Having traversed a short distance, it changes into a jet black, very aged human being. A little later again it is transformed into a wild boar. Then, turning into a buffalo it runs towards this body and, as it approaches me, changes into yet another form and disappears."

After a while of silence, Mataji began to speak again : "This morning I saw the brother of teacher Kedar of Dacca, Anadi by name, who had left his home to lead the life of an anchorite. He came clad in the robe of a *sādhu*. Introducing himself, he said : 'I am Anadi'. When asked how old he was he replied, '82½.' He said he intended to get married. While still at home he had incurred a debt. With the money he would receive on marrying, the debt could be cleared. Questioned about the bride's age, he stated : 55. Then this body said : 'Very well, have the wedding performed, but declare openly that you are marrying only in order to get rid of the debt. When this has been accomplished, both of you should again live a life of renunciation.' He agreed to this and went away highly pleased."

Mataji added : "Look, Didi, this place is peculiar. The aforementioned is an example of the fact that *sādhus* are

able to take on many bodies. There is nothing incredible about Anadi's debt and marriage. This is what I saw."

22nd November 1960.

The *dharmasālā* and the daily feeding of *sādhus* here are managed by Sri Prayag Narayan Saigal, a devotee from Sitapur. In response to his keen desire, Mataji is here. The whole family are staunch devotees. Coming daily from Sitapur he sees in person to all the arrangements. When he came to-night and sat by Mataji, She said in the course of the conversation : "During this *Samyam Saptah*, the *Brahmavairārta Purāṇa* was to be read and explained and hence we tried to procure a copy of it. But it could not be found anywhere in Naimisharanya. Just then, Mrs. Modi arrived and asked whether she could be of any service. This body replied : 'No personal service is required. However, one of the *Purāṇas* is not available here. Please, could you send for it ?' Seeing that in a place like Naimisharanya* one of the *Purāṇas* was not to be had, this body said to Sri Avadhutaji : '*Pitājī*, please arrange for all the *Purāṇas* to be kept somewhere in Naimisharanya.' Mr. Modi and a few others were present when this body uttered this."

After a pause Mataji continued : "In this way the *Purāṇa* arrived here within an hour. Just see, had the *Purāṇa* been procured earlier, that conversation would never have taken place. Such is the *Līlā* of God manifesting as the *Purāṇas*.

* All the 18 *Purāṇas* are said to have been composed in Naimisharanya by *Riṣi Vyas*.

“When Mr. Modi came and asked this body : ‘Which place would be most appropriate ?’ This body replied : ‘It is for you people to decide. The *purāṇas* may be kept either in Sri Naradanandāji’s Ashram, or else in Sri Prayag Narayan’s hut, or in the residence of the *paṇḍas*—in fact anywhere you choose.’”

But not all were satisfied with this. Many felt that, since Mataji had had the *kheyāla* to arrange for a special place where the *purāṇas* should be preserved, the Ashram ought to acquire a plot of land and build a *purāṇa mandir*. Mataji was then asked, which would be the most suitable site for this purpose. She said : “Try to secure the most elevated spot. The recent flood has indicated clearly where this is to be found.” When we shifted from Naradānandāji’s ashram to the bank of the Gomati, we noticed that the *Hanuman Tila* was the highest elevation in Naimisharanya. Therefore the Ashram is negotiating for some land there.

Mataji had asked Sri Krishnananda Avadhutaji to arrange for the *purāṇas* to be kept somewhere. But seeing that nothing had been done about the matter so far, Mataji called Sri Avadhutaji and Bharatbhai on full-moon day. She requested Avadhutaji to place the volume of the *purāṇa* into Bharatbhai’s hands, and told Bharatbhai to read daily some portion from it in Mataji’s room. In this manner Mataji’s *kheyāla* was made effective. Mataji does not speak in vain. At present the *purāṇa* is kept in Mataji’s own room. Where it will be preserved in future, Mataji alone knows.

Today the camp in Naimisharanya will be broken up and Mataji is to leave for Sitapur. After spending one night

there we are to proceed to Lucknow. This morning, at about 11 o'clock, Sri Sri Mohanananda Brahmachari suddenly arrived for Mataji's *darśana* with a number of his disciples, both men and women. Their unexpected visit was a pleasant surprise to all of us. Sitting down in front of Mataji's hut, a lively conversation ensued. As regards the fact that we had not been informed previously of their visit, one of the disciples said to Mataji: "Ma, you are all-knowing, why then should we have sent word to you beforehand?" When Sri Mohananandaji also agreed to the remark of his disciple, Mataji said, laughing heartily: "Baba you also share his opinion? In this secular world one should not make transcendental claims. Does omniscience belong to this world? What do you say, Baba?" Mohananandaji said very softly: "After all, everything is the One." Mataji laughed: "Baba, dont you say this because you are at a loss for a reply?"

Later, one of the devotees mentioned that he had heard of certain Gurus who went so far as to beat their disciples. Was that right? Mohananandaji replied: "If a disciple has implicit faith, he may even be beaten. '*Sāma*,, *dāna*, *bheda*, *daṇḍa*.' (Friendship, gifts, differences and punishment)."

Mataji asked: "Do these apply also when dealing with disciples?" Mohananandaji first said "yes", but immediately added: "Of course, these injunctions are actually meant for behaviour in political life." Mataji said laughingly: "This is why the question was put twice."

After further interesting discussions all were invited to have their midday meal. At Mohananandaji's request,

his and Mataji's *asanas* were spread inside the hut and they both took their meal together. Soon after lunch, our visitors had to leave for Lucknow. Mataji accompanied Mohananandaji right up to the car. She told his disciples: "This body has known the Babaji for a good many years. When meeting him for the first time, he was still very young. This is why this body speaks very frankly to him." On taking leave, Mohananandaji and his whole party repeated again and again: "The short time we spent with Mataji was really wonderful!"

16th January 1961.

Since a few days Mataji is staying in Varanasi. This morning I asked Her a question: "So many people want to know Mataji's opinion about all the worship that is offered to Her person and to pictures of Her."

Mataji replied with a smile: "Look, if you ask this body—here, there is no question of opinion or its opposite, of yes or no. In fact, there is nothing to be said. Does anyone offer worship merely to the body? What do you think?"

I put in: "What you have just said is not at all clear to me. Could you please be a little more explicit?"

Mataji: Seen from one angle, nobody worships another. One does *pūjā* to one's own Self. What is your Self, and what is not? Think it over! Call it 'Him' or call it 'Thee', it is all the Lord of Life, the *Ātmā*. 'There is only one Brahman without a second', you people say, don't you. Whatever line of approach you have chosen, along that you should conti-

nue to proceed. God is said to be without form, *Saccidānanda*—(Being—Consciousness –Bliss). Again, just as water becomes ice, so the One is Himself also with form. No simile is ever applicable in all respects; take as much of it as fits the occasion. Where He manifests as the actionless Power of Creation, there He is of many forms and modes. Everything is indeed contained within Him—within you; others and your own, whatever it be. As regards worship you should understand that in order to know one's Self, to find one's own Self, one worships in fact one's Self. So then, reflect, whose worship is performed? Who worships whom? You worship your own Self; He Himself, you yourself are the worship. When you realize your Self, you are fulfilled in yourself. When one is out to fulfil oneself, to find, to realize one's Self, then the aforesaid is pertinent."

After a short interval Mataji resumed the topic : "Just reflect, He who is the supreme Father, *Puruṣottama*, *Iṣṭa*, *Guru*, He alone manifests in all forms, He alone is worshipped. You consecrate an image, you establish a connection with the Divinity it represents and thereby instil life into it before you use it for worship. You, also worship trees, the Ganga, Jamuna, fire, the cow, Siva, the child Krishna. *Pūjā* means *His Pūjā*. The adoration of all this that is manifested in many modes and in great variety is the adoration of Him alone. Look, by worship the worshipper finds himself—this is the highest fulfilment. Then also, consider, one likes to talk and discuss with one's friends, one's near and dear-ones. Here also, having obtained what one seeks one feels contented. The ultimate purpose of seeking

company and conversing together is supreme happiness." Having said this much, Mataji became silent.

17th January 1961.

This morning, at dawn, Mataji left by car for Allahabad. Every year she receives a special invitation to go to the Satyagopal Ashram for three days before Durga Puja. But last time, Mataji could not possibly go there due to Her ill-health. After all these months, Mataji is now at last responding to the urgent requests of the ashramites. Two ladies who have come from foreign countries for Mataji's *darśana* and to spend some time in Her presence, also accompanied Her. They will return to their countries in a few days.

Some days ago, a distinguished Italian lady came to see Mataji. She has come to India on behalf of the U. N. O. and is herself also an eminent scholar of psychology. After having a private interview with Mataji about spiritual questions, she left deeply delighted. She told us that she had been so lucky as to become acquainted and converse with many great leaders, saints, sages and learned men. But never before had she had the good fortune of meeting anyone comparable to Mataji's unique personality.

Mahaśivaratri With Mataji

KRISHNANATH.

Mahaśivaratri with Sri Mata Anandamayi is an unforgettable experience. Those only who have participated in it can appreciate its glamour and grandeur. What seems an impossible feat of endurance in the form of a total, even waterless fast of thirty-six hours and a whole night's vigil spent in worship, prayer and meditation, is not only performed without the least feeling of strain but actually leaves one in a serene state of mind bordering almost on bliss. I can only make an inadequate attempt to convey some idea of how the *vrata* is performed under Mataji's auspices so that those who are unaware of it or deterred by its rigour, may be encouraged to avail themselves of this wonderful opportunity when it accurs again, to learn how this *vrata* should be performed in order to get real benefit out of it.

Mahaśivaratri is undoubtedly one of the principal Hindu holy days observed all over India. Its merits are enshrined in the legend of a hunter, who, after a day-long tracking of game on an empty stomach, is benighted in the jungle and then, to avoid falling himself a prey to wild animals, takes refuge in a bael-tree. Fear keeps him awake all night. On account of his movements, the dew from the leaves and the leaves themselves keep on dropping on a *Linga* or symbolic image of Śiva, which happens to be on the ground below. Even this involuntary performance of the

vrata (a day of fast and a night of worship of Śiva) takes him to heaven when death claims him the very next day. Devotees who consciously observe these two features of the *vrata* have therefore greater assurance of attaining to bliss. Though it may sound incredible or even absurd to those who do not believe in rituals, the *vrata* as observed in Mataji's Ashram does have a purifying and uplifting effect.

Here the fast itself is a reality and not a farce. Very often a fast means only the foregoing of common articles of food while gorging oneself with milk and milk-made dainties, fruit and other special kinds of diet, thus making a feast out of it ! But in the Ashram it means complete abstinence from eating or even drinking water and it starts from the last meal of the previous day, so that it is in fact a total fast for thirty-six hours. To this complete lack of nourishment is added the night-long worship. Starting from 6 in the evening, the night is divided into four periods of three hours each, the commencement of each period or *prahār* being marked by long ceremonial worship. There are naturally intervals between the ceremonies, but no relaxation is allowed even during these recesses because the worshipper must not leave his seat and is expected to utilize the free time for the performance of *kīrtana*, *japa* or meditation, and avoid falling asleep. How do people stand up to this strain and why do they, at the end, feel not exhausted but exhilarated ?

I think a fast which is performed for a spiritual purpose is quite different from one undertaken merely for health. In the latter case we remain all the time conscious of the body's need and feel the pangs of hunger at our accustomed meal times. In the former, our mind being occupied with

spiritual fervour, forgets to think about food. This is particularly so, (as many people have experienced) when the fast is done in Mataji's presence. Besides, abstinence for such a short period as one day, far from having any adverse physical effect, makes one feel light and happy; it gives a much-needed rest to the digestive organs and also helps to purify and etherialize body as well as mind. That exactly is the purpose of the fast : to eliminate physical and mental impurities and thus to prepare the devotee for the worship by endowing him with the necessary humility, holiness and power of concentration; for, has not the Lord said that only the poor in spirit and pure in heart can reach Him ?

As regards the night's vigil, it is the beauty of the ritual that not only sustains but vivifies and electrifies the spirit. It is because a ritual performed artistically and with feeling has this quality of uplifting the spirit and putting it in tune with the Divine, that it forms such an essential part of most religions. Though puritans may sniff at ceremonies, there is no doubt that a ritualistic worship in a colourful background, with brightly hued and fragrant flowers, scented incense, candles waving and bells ringing, has a peculiar appeal to the human heart and mind and helps to induce that love and devotion for the Divine without which it is not possible to approach Him. What I mean will be clearer by a short account of the ceremony.

As the dusk falls, the *vratīs* do their ablutions, change into clean pure clothes, perform their own evening worship and wend their way to the hall where elaborate arrangements have already been made for the *pūjā*. At one end is the dais for Mataji with an *āsana* nearby for the officiating priest.

Śiva-lingas are placed in different spots all over the hall. For facility of worship and in order that the floor may not get littered with the offerings made during the *pūjā*, the *Śiva-lingas* are kept in large brass trays. Around each are arranged six or seven *āsanas* for worshippers with all the paraphernalia for the *pūjā* laid out before them, consisting of sandal and saffron paste, *java* and rice, *bel* leaves, *durba* grass, various kinds of flowers and fruits, ablution material, incense sticks, water containers, *dryas*, etc. In addition a basket full of further provisions of these items is supplied to each group. The Ashram girls must have spent hours in fixing up all this. Some worshippers also bring their own *Śiva-lingas* or pictures, and instruments of worship. The essential feature which distinguishes this *pūjā* from most others is that here the worship is performed collectively, all sitting in groups around every centrally placed *Śiva-linga*, according to the directions given by the prompting priest, that is to say, everyone is an actual participant, unlike other *pūjās* where only one person officiates and others merely watch.

The first *pūjā* which commences at about 7. 30 p. m. is the most elaborate because before starting the worship of the *Iṣṭa* or main deity it is necessary to go through various purificatory rites and also to invoke and worship other deities. Thus, the *āsana* on which the worshipper sits, the containers of water, the water itself, all the other instruments of worship like the bell, the flowers, even the fingers of the worshipper, have to be sanctified by *mudras* and the chanting of appropriate *mantras*. Among the deities to be invoked, Ganesh always comes first—no *pūjā* or even the reading of holy books is ever started without first making obeisance to

this god who is the harbinger of everything auspicious. Then other deities like Krishna, Durga, Saraswati, follow. This shows the catholicity of the Hindu. Even though he may be the devotee of a particular deity such as Śiva, Rama or Krishna, the Hindu believes that there is only one God, the One whom he adores, and yet he pays reverence to all other deities as manifestations of the same Godhead. After these preliminaries comes the main *pūjā* of Śiva, which is quite long because He is offered all the sixteen items of worship (षोडशोपचार). There is also *japa* and *prānāyāma*. The whole procedure takes over an hour and it is 8.30 or 8.45 by the time the *ārati*, which marks the end of every *pūjā* has been completed. As the second *pūjā* can start after nine there is only a short interval that passes quickly in one or two Kīrtanas and slight relaxation of one's posture.

As one does not leave one's seat or change any of the articles of worship, the preliminaries are dispensed with in the succeeding *pūjās*, which do not take so long. The main variation consists in the bathing material and the offerings of fruits and sweets. At each of the four *pūjās*, Śiva is bathed in a different fluid: for the first, milk is used, for the second, curds: for the third, ghee; and for the last, honey. The priest slowly recites the whole ritual in Sanskrit, stopping after two or three words to enable the worshippers to repeat them. Thus each one actually recites the entire text of the ritual while performing the appropriate actions, the priest telling him in Hindi what to do. This prevents the *pūjā* from becoming mechanical as is the case with most religious ceremonies we see performed, and the worshipper's attention is given fully to the worship, as he has to follow both the words and the actions.

The main problem is the interval between the *pūjās*, which is longer after the second *pūjā* and even more so after the third, when it is past midnight and drowsiness assails you while you are not actually engaged in the activity of worship. How this is overcome as well as how the general strain of the *vrata* is cheerfully borne without any feeling of fatigue may be shown by my two experiences.

The first *Mahaśivaratri Vrata* I ever attended was five years ago in Dehradun. It coincided with the installation of the seven *Śiva-linga* in the newly-built temple there. A big *yajña* was performed in this connection in the morning and various ceremonies of *ब्राह्मप्रतिष्ठा* (endowing the image with divinity) continued the whole day. We were also asked by Mataji to do as much *japa* as possible and, being new to this, I remember how I marvelled at the way one gentleman (I think it was Sri Aga) sat motionless for over two hours telling his beads. The whole day passed in various activities of this kind which made us oblivious of the fact that we were fasting, though it was the first time I had attempted anything similar. Being a special occasion there was a large gathering for the *pūjā* at night. Even a group of small children-pupils of the Ashram School—did the *pūjā* with Kripal sitting amongst them, but they were allowed to finish by midnight. There must have been several novices like me, so we were told that we could quit after any particular *pūjā* and I felt quite sure I would not be able to hold out till the end. Mataji evidently sensed the need for giving support to waverers like me and sat among us most of the time, encouraging people to sing *kīrtanas* during the intervals and even Herself leading the chant on occasions. In this way, though I did feel the strain somewhat, I managed to stay on

till the end, and it was worth while because then Mataji distributed a few Rudraksha Malas and I was the fortunate recipient of one.

This year the *pūjā* was held at Hardwar in the hall of the Śiva temple premises of Baghat house. The Raja himself did the *pūjā* separately in the temple. The number of worshippers in the hall was small and most of them were old-timers. Only one new-comer got marked out by the way he sat down to the *pūjā* in trousers and a bush-shirt ! After the first *pūjā* Mataji very quietly and tactfully had a new *dhoti* presented to him into which he changed before continuing. Mataji for some time went to the Kankhal Ashram where 2 or 3 Brahmacharis were celebrating Śivaratri, and so did not remain with us continually. During the second interval She was suggesting what *kīrtanas* to sing and one very melodious tune in Bengali began to lull me into drowsiness. Then Atmanandaji appeared on the gallery above and sang two *bhajans*. Mataji told her to have some more ready from her 'stock' (that was the English word Mataji used to everybody's amusement) for the next interval. That waiting period turned out to be most trying. Our presiding priest, Nirvanananda went through the third recital rather fast because he must have thought that by then most people knew the words and the 'actions, but even the time he allowed for doing one *mālā* of *japa* was inadequate. In any case he did not realize the need for prolonging the third *Pūjā* as long as possible in order to diminish the length of the after-midnight vigil. Instead he finished in the shortest time with the result that we were faced with a very long interval. Chitra sang one very sweet *bhajan* and another Ashram girl and Vibhuda were doing their best

by turns but, in the absence of Mataji, time was moving very slowly and I could see at least one lady fast asleep, leaning her head open-mouthed against the wall! It was really getting difficult for people to keep awake, when the situation was saved by Didima, Mataji's mother, who is over 86; she came out on the balcony above and started a new *bhajan* which we had never heard before. It went like this :

जय जय विश्वेश्वर, जय त्रिपुरारि। काशी विश्वनाथ, जन्म भिखारी ॥

She sang it melodiously and quite loudly for a long time making us all repeat it after her and it effectively woke up everyone from the drowsiness that was stealing over us. I discovered afterwards, however, that one of the girls in the Ashram—I am sure she had worked very hard all day—must have slept even through this. When, a few days later, questioned by some of them about the wording of the *bhajan*, this girl, even though she had been in the *pūjā* all the time, asserted emphatically that Didima had never sung! Anyway, for me the crisis passed and I was able to remain awake. Mataji appeared towards the end. There was the usual scramble to do *pranāma* to Her and then we were allowed to collect the offerings of fruit and sweets from our *pūjā*. It was only a little after 4 A. M. and we could thus rest for two hours or so before beginning the next day.

I had been told by a relative who once attended this *vrata* and left by plane immediately after the *pūjā* was over, how etherialized he felt while flying, with the chant of the *pūjā* and the *bhajans* ringing in his ears. My feeling the next day in Hardwar was similar. Even in spite of the fast and vigil, one experienced a peculiar sense of well-being and liveliness, almost as if one were walking on air! We all in-

cluding Dr. Pannalal, felt so energetic that we first went by car to see the *Saptarshi Ashram* where Rai Bahadur Narayan Das showed us round. We then took a bus to Rishikesh. Not only did I forego my usual siesta but could put up with the long wait for the return bus. After going back to Hardwar, our last act before taking the train for Lucknow that night was a visit to Har-ki-powri. Here we not only watched the glorious sight of myriads of lights being floated by devotees and floated them ourselves, but also took part in the evening worship of *Ganga-Mata* and the big *ārati* with blazing lamps. I was thrilled to the core and for the first time in my life felt that the Ganga was some Divine Presence. The journey to Lucknow was a fitting end to our *vrata*, for Mataji travelled by the same train. We were able to do our *pranāmas* to Her before the train started and throughout the night I was buoyed up by the idea that She was going with us and felt Her presence. Such was the blissful state of my mind after the fast and the night's vigil. If one wants to experience a spiritual glow in the shortest time there is nothing like the *Mahāsivaratri Vrata* done in Sri Mata Anandamayi's presence.

A Modern Christian Saint

SARA MASHUKR

Having been asked to write about a modern Christian saint, I should like to tell you about Simone Weil. Some Christians call her a modern saint, and she is certainly one of the few religious geniuses that contemporary Europe has produced. I say 'is' and not 'was', although she died 20 years ago, for the supernatural light that emanates from her being is affecting the lives of thousands today, whereas before her death it was hardly perceived by two or three.

What I have put down in the following are but very fragmentary notes of a lay person who has read the writings of Simone Weil, (mostly letters and diaries) published posthumously. I shall not try to present a genealogy of her thinking or to systematize her thought, but the fact must not be overlooked that her spiritual and intellectual powers were enormous. What I am interested in at the moment is the actual life of a religious genius of our days.

People of Asia often accuse us of inconsistency between what we are and what we think, between our everyday lives and our professed creed. Simone Weil has given an example of complete accordance of the two. In her thinking the ego was a reality, which had to be destroyed for God's sake; therefore her life was marked by merciless severity towards herself.

She was born in Paris in 1909 of a wealthy Jewish family, in which religion hardly played any part anymore. In her early youth she seemed remarkable only because of her alert and keen mind that enabled her among other things to qualify herself with the greatest ease as a High School teacher. When, at the age of 22, she accepted a post for the first time, she shocked the people around her by one of those 'exaggerations' which from then became typical for her : She invited some starving unemployed of the city to occupy the empty seats in the dining-hall of the school. At that time she identified herself with the socially handicapped. She took part in their demonstrations, fought in passionate newspaper articles for their rights and meant to force the school to put into practice in an unusual manner the commandment of loving our neighbour. It was neither a party-political outlook (she had, as far as I know, never been a Marxist) nor even an expressly religious impulse that prompted her, but rather her strong sense of justice and her eagerness to share the sufferings of others.

A similar impulse caused her two years later (in 1933) to take leave from school in order to join a motor factory as a simple labourer. Under an assumed name she lived in a miserable room in the midst of the working district, exclusively of her earnings. Although her parents were only too willing to help her financially, she led an existence in no way different from that of her fellow labourers. The headache from which she had suffered since childhood grew worse during this period and tormented her continuously. After twelve months, intense exhaustion forced her to give up this work. She went back to teach, and

in summer 1936 travelled to Spain to nurse the wounded of the Civil War. An accident soon forced her to return to France. Up to the beginning of the second World War she continued her teaching and her studies as far as her frail health would permit. When the German troops approached Paris in the summer of 1940, she had to flee with her parents to the south of France. Had she stayed she would, because of her Jewish descent, have immediately been taken to a concentration camp. The family settled at Marseille. Simone Weil volunteered to work on the land. Although it was far beyond her strength she helped in the vineyards, forcing her weak body to toil as hard as robust agricultural labourers did. At that time she lived in a miserable hut on insufficient food, although friends offered her every conceivable comfort. We learn from her diaries that she studied Sanskrit at night and was greatly fascinated by Indian philosophy.

In 1942 her parents fled to U. S. A. from the Germans who had in the meanwhile occupied the whole of France. Contrary to her own wishes and solely out of filial obedience she accompanied her family, but in the very same year travelled to England to place herself at the disposal of the Acting French Government-in-Exile in London. At that time she pleaded with her superiors to enable her to go to Russia secretly. She wanted to help the people of the country who were suffering under the German occupation. The plan failed because of her bad health. She was found to suffer from consumption, yet she did nothing to get better. Finally she died in a sanatorium in 1943 at the age of 34. Although, because of her disease, she should have had specially nourishing food, she refused to eat more than was allo-

wed by the starvation-rations to Frenchman under the occupation. She wanted to share the privations of her fellow-countrymen and actually died due to self-imposed undernourishment.

Those are the facts of her outward life. About her religious development a letter, dated May 1942, provides some information. Simone Weil writes that "she was born and grew up in the Christian spirit as it were", although for a long time she had known practically nothing 'about Christianity as such. At the age of 14 she went through a spell of serious depression, because she was afraid that "she could never gain access to the realm in which Truth dwells and which is open only to the great Masters." Months later the certainty, one day, came to her that "any human being may enter this realm as soon as he keenly desires Truth." This certainty was based on the fact that whoever hungers for bread will not receive stones' and that "this spiritual hunger is effective in itself."

In her craving for spiritual food she first devoured philosophy and developed a passionate love for everything Greek and for Oriental wisdom, whereas she felt repelled (not without unconcerned subjectivity) by Rome and the ancient Israel, because of the despotism exercised in those empires. The first Christian personality who fascinated Simone Weil was St. Francis of Assisi, that son of a rich Italian family who (like Buddha) led the life of a beggar-monk, and who was related to the whole of creation by a mystical friendship. "I have always hoped that fate would one day force me into that state of a beggar, which he took upon himself voluntarily." In this early predilection we notice a trait that was

to become decisive for her whole life: Her longing for poverty and her inclination towards radical asceticism—poverty and asceticism as a path to Truth.

Not until the age of 29 did she have an experience that bound her whole existence to Christ. Her innate, almost unconscious Christianity developed into an explicit Christian attitude, embraced with her entire soul and spirit. She spent Easter 1938 in a monastery. "I suffered from a splitting headache, but then an uttermost effort of attention enabled me to step out of this miserable flesh and to find pure and unalloyed joy in the indescribable beauty of songs and words." Until then Simone Weil had repeated the 'Our-Father' only now and again "as one recites a beautiful poem," but suddenly "it acquired the power of a prayer."—"Once while I spoke it, Christ himself came down and seized me..... Through my sufferings I felt the presence of a love, such as one perceives in the smile of a beloved countenance." Behind these cautious words is hidden a first experience of the mystic union, and from here Simone Weil gains access to the mystic literature of the Christian Middle Ages and of Asia.

In the letter already mentioned we find the following passage : "In 1941 I read the Bhagavad Gita. Strange, when I read those wonderful words, so much like Christian sayings, avowedly spoken by an incarnation of God, it happened that I was overcome by the strong feeling that we owe to religious truth very much more than the assent one grants to beautiful poetry, a confirmation of a much more categorical order".

At that time she was considering the question of whether she should be baptized and thus enter the Catholic church, so as to give her approval of the Christian faith this

definite form. There are several reasons for her not doing so then or later. I shall mention here only the most important one : Again and again she confesses her love for Christ as the centre of her faith, and she finds, besides criticism, also words of the most tender love for the Catholic church, but she persists at its threshold : "I shall remain on the side of all the things that cannot enter the church. Wide realms of secular life in Europe, large parts of science, and above all the great religions of Asia have no place in the church, "this universal house of acceptance." The church itself draws the line against these spheres. To Simone Weil such exclusion was painful. "The love for those things that stand outside of visible Christianity holds me outside of the church."

The more earnestly she studied the non-Christian religions, the more distinctly did she recognize in them too the light of the same Truth that came to men through the incarnation of God in Christ. To make this intelligible, I must now explain her most important religious thoughts. Simone Weil saw everywhere in the world two opposite forces at work: the power of gravitation, and Grace. "All natural movements of the soul are subject to laws that correspond to those of physical gravitation. Exceptions are worked solely by Grace. Men are by nature selfish, hungry for power, greedy for possessions, etc. Whenever we overcome those cravings, be it for the love of God or for the love of a human being, divine Grace is working through us..."

History is one giant field of gravitation, because it is the realm of the struggle for power. It is part of the essential nature of divine Grace that it does not set up power

against power, but reveals itself in weakness and poverty. Through the child Jesus of Nazareth, born in a stable, the Reality of God enters history.

In the creation of the universe God emanated the world out of Himself, and the biblical legend of Adam and Eve's fall tells us that this separation of creation from the Creator was followed by man's fall into sin, that is to say into godlessness. Such laceration can only be healed by the Grace of God. In the shape of his son Jesus Christ it comes to men as their saviour. He is poor and weak and teaches them to love God and one another. At the end He is nailed to the cross like a criminal, because the ruling caste of priests sees in him a dangerous adversary. But he defeats the power of evil and reconciles God and the world with each other.

Simone Weil says in this context : "Every unjust deed forces its victim to return evil for evil. Only when the evil deed meets with a completely pure soul as that of Christ, it does not call forth revenge but suffering, then the causal chain of evil is broken. Jesus is the innocent lamb of sacrifice. He voluntarily takes upon himself the sins of the world—its being evil—and bears it unto death. Whoever believes in him is reconciled with God in love.

"But also in the world after the death of Christ gravitation rules, while Grace is hidden like a tiny mustard seed that reposes within the earth and from which one day a large tree could grow." Again and again Simone Weil experienced the absence of God. "God cannot be present in creation in any other form except that of absence." "When we cry for an answer and it is denied to us we touch the silence of God"

and "this world, insofar as it is entirely void of God, is God Himself."

The void (by medieval mystics sometimes called "the dark night of the soul") was experienced and pondered over by Simone Weil time and again. It is mysteriously connected with Grace. "Not to exercise all the powers at one's disposal, that is tolerating the void. It contradicts all natural laws. Grace alone can do it."—"Grace is fulfilment, but it only finds access where there is a void to receive it, And it is Grace itself that creates this void." "Loving Truth means tolerating the void and therefore accepting death. Truth is on the side of death." Death means here detachment from all ties in the world. Unless this has been achieved, the void is not transformed into Grace. Detachment is reached by two methods: through suffering and by emptying the will. "The greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it seeks not after a supernatural cure for suffering, but after a supernatural application of suffering." ... "Not to strive after less suffering, but after not being changed for the worse by suffering." ... "Every pain that does not detach us is pain wasted. Nothing is more dreadful. Desolate cold. The soul curls up like a dry leaf."

And on emptying the will : "To detach our desire from all possessions and then to wait..."—"In everything, whatever it may be, to be void of willing, to will the void....." But in this utmost desolation without any comfort, indeed renouncing every hope, "the soul must continue to love into the void."—"To love God right through the destruction of Troy and Carthage, and without consolation. Love is not consolation, it is Light."

The last thing from which man can and must detach himself when all desire has been overcome, is the ego: "We possess nothing in the world, for everything can be taken from us by accident, except the capacity to say: 'I'. This we ought to surrender to God, in other words, destroy." One cannot offer any sacrifice except the ego, and everything one calls 'sacrifice' is only a label on something offered in place of the ego. "The ego is never destroyed by pressure from outside without resisting most violently." If one renounces this resistance (against a misfortune) for the love of God, then the destruction happens from within.

This is the path that Simone Weil trod to the very bitter end. She did not resist the misfortune of her illness and agreed to the total destruction of the ego unto death, in a foreign country, among indifferent people. In her records there are several remarks indicating that she wished for herself as the highest earthly fulfilment to share the passion of Christ. I should think, God granted her this.

One may ask what constitutes the fascination of this life. I met former soldiers of the Spanish Civil War. They told me of Simone Weil: "She used to dress without any interest for what looked attractive. She was always silent and serious and would not suffer anyone to assist her in any way or do her a favour." Evidently her feeling of solidarity with all suffering people was coupled with a deep reluctance to communicate herself in any way. She never did anything in order to shine or please. Whoever had the courage and tenacity to penetrate through her outward roughness to the kernel, met with a soul equally tender, very pure and at the

same time wholly uncompromising. Even where she loved she was always unyielding. The shortness and consuming intensity of her life did not allow her to integrate harmoniously those traits which at first sight appear to be eccentric contortions or exaggerations. She did not grow old enough to gain patience, softness, serenity and the effortless detachment from the 'I' which maturity offers.

In Europe today there are many who consider everything concerning God as belonging to the realm of suffering and privation. To some of them Simone Weil shines as a straight, brightly burning flame, because of the integrity of her character, her intellectual severity, the bold ruthlessness with which she subjected her sensitive nature to asceticism, and the uncompromising unity of thinking and being that she achieved.

Matri Lila

(April 1st—July 15th, 1963)

After a fortnight of comparative quiet and rest at Vindhyachal, Mataji reached Delhi on April 12th. On the 14th Chaitrya Sankranti, Didima's *Sannyāsa Utsava* was celebrated in our Ashram at Chandraloka New Delhi by a full programme of Puja, Kirtan etc. Fifty sadhus had been specially invited for a feast at midday, and about 500 people in all partook of the meal. In the evening Sri Maheshanandaji of the Nrisinha Giri Ashram, Delhi, gave a fine talk on *Sannyāsa* and Swami Sivananda Giri spoke about Didima and her extra-ordinary life. At night there was illumination.

On April 16th Mataji left Delhi for Hardwar, where She reached the next morning early. Her stay there of five days was divided between our Ashram at Kankhal and Baghat House, Kharkhari. In both places some of our *naistik brahmacharis* were performing rigorous *tapasya*. One day, when Mataji went for a stroll on the bank of the Ganges She was reminded of the time when She stayed at Hardwar and Kankhal with Bholanath, Bhaiji and Swami Akhandananda (Gurupriya Devi's father). She also related about Her trip to Mansarovar. On the way to Kailash they came across a valley called Mantāl that is so deep that the rays of the sun cannot penetrate. It is so dark there that at times the stars are visible in the day. The people round about believe that one who comes to the valley and is unable to see the stars, will die

soon. Bhaiji could not see the stars. It so happened that he left his body soon after returning to Almora from Kailash.

As usual at Hardwar several Europeans came to see Mataji and had talks with Her.

On April 22nd early morning Mataji motored to Dehradun. Before going to the Kishenpur Ashram She went to the Civil Hospital to see a devotee, Sri A.P.Dikshit, Collector, who had just undergone an operation. During Her stay at Kishenpur, She one day related to us in detail how, when Mataji had gone to Jodhpur in February, having left Didima and some others at Kankhal, Didima appeared to Her in her subtle body on February 11th and indicated to Mataji that she intended to leave this world the next day. But Mataji did not agree and requested her to remain in the body for some time more. To confirm this also physically, She had a wire despatched to Sri Narayan Swami who was at Kankhal with Didima, asking him to be careful and see that Didima kept good health. Everyone at Kankhal wondered why the wire had been sent, since Didima was in any case leaving Kankhal on the 13th night in order to join Mataji in Delhi on the 14th of February. Many other interesting incidents were related to us by Mataji in this connection, which may be published in future in the form of a separate article. Didima is not ill, but at the age of 87 her health is naturally frail. Nevertheless she still follows Mataji almost everywhere and bears the strain of this constant travelling with admirable poise.

Before leaving Dehradun on April 29th Mataji visited a devotee's house at Raipur on way to the railway station. She took the night train to Delhi and from there proceeded

straight to Calcutta to be present at Her birthday celebrations, that were observed from May 3rd—12th. At Burdwan Mataji suddenly decided to detrain and thus reached Calcutta in the evening of 1st May to the disappointment of many devotees who were waiting to receive Her at the Howrah station in the early morning and found that the party had arrived without Her.

An imposing hall and some living rooms have recently been added to the Agarpara Ashram and were inaugurated on the auspicious occasion of Mataji's birthday celebrations. Arrangements had been thought out with such care this time, that even the unmanageable crowds of Calcutta were kept in check, although they were still very noisy. A special passage for Mataji's sole use constructed, leading from Mataji's room directly to Her seat in the hall, so that nobody can crowd round Her. The celebrations proceeded with much fervour, yet in harmony and order, inspite of the very large attendance. A number of well-known Mahatmas were present, such as Sri Sri 1008 Swami Santananda Saraswati, who is the Jagatguru Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath, Sri 108 Haribabaji Maharaj, Sri Krishnananda Avadhutaji and others. Amongst those who came for Mataji's *darshan* was the renowned dancer Sri Uday Shanker who has known Mataji for many years. One day Mataji visited the famous Sanskrit College at Calcutta.

On May 13th, Mataji left for Varanasi, as Sri Gurupriya Devi was very much ill. Sri Haribabaji also flew to Varanasi, especially to see Didi.

We are happy to say that Didi's (Gurupriya Devi's) health has lately much improved. She was able to proceed

to Bombay in the last week of May for a thorough medical check-up and has reached Dehradun on the 15th July.

Mataji reached Ranchi on May 21st while most of Her party had already gone there straight from Calcutta. Sri Haribabaji & the Rasalila party that always accompanied him had also come to Ranchi. Satsang was held daily, ending with half an hour when Mataji would reply to questions. The performances of *Krishnalila* & *Mahaprabhulila* delighted the audience as usual.

From May 27th to 30th Mataji was at Jamshedpur, putting up at Satya Narayan Mandir. During the *satsang* many interesting questions were asked and replied to. On the 29th *akhanda* kirtana was held.

From 1st—17th June Mataji again remained in Ranchi. During Her stay there She visited the houses of several devotees. On the 17th She left for Patna, reaching on the 18th. On the 20th She proceeded from there to Rajgir, where She spent two days together with Sri Haribabaji, who had never before been there. After one more day at Patna, Mataji took the train to Roorkee, where a car waited for Her to drive Her to Hardwar on the 25th early morning.

At Baghat House, Kharkhari a *Bhagavat Saptaha* was observed from June 28th to July 5th. It was arranged according to Didima's wishes, not for the good of any deceased person's soul, but just for the love of God. This is called '*niṣkāma*'. Didima's son and his whole family took an active part in the Saptaha, having come specially from Varanasi for the occasion.

During Her stay at Hardwar many distinguished persons came for Mataji's darshan, among whom special mention may be made of Shri Chavan, the Defence Minister, Government of India.

The number of visitors that flocked from all over North India increased daily, until it became a large crowd on *Guru Purnima* day, July 6th. Many travelled from great distances to pay homage to Mataji and Didima on this auspicious day. One of the items of the day's programme was a feast given to 108 *Kumaris* on the veranda of the *Siva mandir*. While they had their meal, *ārati* was performed to them by the Brahmacharinis of our Ashram, who circumambulated in a line between the *Kumaris* who sat on both sides of the veranda. Each Brahmacharini was wielding one of the instruments with which the worship is performed while Mataji Herself topped the line, throwing sweet smelling flowers to each one of the *Kumaris* and saying: "*Puspanjali*" (Flower offering done to a deity.) The idea being that the Divine Virgin is adored in the form of the little girls. The following night there was a lunar eclipse, which was celebrated by *kīrtana* in Mataji's presence on the roof of the Baghat House from 2 to 5 a. m.

Many visitors left already on the 6th. Mataji and the rest of the party dispersed on the 7th early morning, Mataji proceeding by car to the Kishenpur Ashram at Dehradun where She is expected to stay for a few weeks.
