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—Dehradun, 1969



A scene from the Bhāgawat Pārāyana

Varanasi, 21st February, 1970

Just as there is a veil of ignorance for the individual,
So there is also a door to Knowledge.

MĀTRI VĀNI

The remembrance of God must be with a human being day and night so that he may be cleansed from his shortcomings and errors.

* * *

In order to solve his queries and doubts, it is incumbent on man to be engrossed in spiritual practice.

* * *

Human beings have to be dwellers of the inner cave so that God who resides within may be revealed.

* * *

A man can be recognized as a human being by his worthy character. A human being is in fact a traveller towards the realization of the superman. Each one should advance with his gaze fixed in this direction. A spiritual atmosphere and satsang will be helpful in this pursuit.

* * *

Those who have adopted the ashram of the householder should be model householders and live according to the precepts of *dharma*. Endeavour to know yourself.

* * *

Through the ever new transformations of a life dedicated to the Supreme Quest, one must strive to become firmly established in one's true Self (*Swarūpa*).

* * *

In the proximity of Him from whom Creation and Preservation emerge is all coming and going. Everything is within His dispensation, is indeed with Him. Thus, solely by the remembrance, the realization of Him, everything is found —supreme peace and supreme bliss.

* * *

God is the one and only friend of the pilgrim to the Ultimate. He should act in this spirit so that he may come to accept Him as his all in all. Unless one is single minded there will be obstacles at every step.

* * *

To keep company with Mahātmās, to associate with great souls means to put into practice precisely what one has heard them say.

*

*

*

Just as a flower contains seeds that can be seen only when it opens, and in the seed again the tree is potentially present, so also He resides within you. By practising *sādhana* this may come to light—in other words, if the veil of ignorance can be destroyed, the One who is Self - effulgent will be realized. Just as the whole tree is potentially contained in the seed, in a similar manner, He in His fulness is enthroned within you.

**SOME ASPECTS OF THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF
THE EAST BENGAL SAINT
SRI SRI ANANDAMAYĪ MĀ* †**

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One of the striking features of Indian culture is the continued vitality of Hinduism. Throughout the ages Hinduism has produced inspiring personages, capable of infusing Hinduism with new vigor. In modern times, in response to the challenge of the West, it has demonstrated again its remarkable resilience. Any assessment of the interaction of modernization and tradition in India must, therefore, give due consideration to the strength of traditional thought. It is well known that Bengal has not only played a significant role in India's modernization but also in the preservation of tradition. Even the most secularly inclined historian will admit the importance of the Hindu revival brought about by the great saint from

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1 The most important source for the life of Ānandamayī Mā is Brahmācārīnī Gurupriyā's *Sri Sri Mā Anandamayī* (hereafter cited as "S. S. M. A.") (3d ed. ; Bhādāinī, Benares, 1956-64). So far, thirteen volumes of this most detailed record of Ānandamayī Mā's activities have appeared. Other important books published by Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha in Bengali are *Gangāsamīran* and *Bibhupada Kīrti, Anandamayī Mā* (Bhādāinī, Benares, 1952); Kumārcandra Bhaṭṭacārya (comp.), *Sri Sri Anandamayī Updesamṛta-Samgraha* (Bhādāinī, Benares, 1952); Saileś Brahmācārī, *Sono Bali Mayer Katha* (Bhādāinī Benares, 1955); Gurupriyā Devi, *Akhanda Mahayajna* (Bhādāinī, Benares, n. d.); Bhāiji, *Matydarśana* (3d ed. ; Bhādāinī, Benares, 1966), translated into English by G. Das Gupta under the title *Mother as Revealed to me* (3d ed ; Benares, 1962); Gurupriyā Devī, *Matyvanī* (Bhādāinī, Benares, n. d.), translated into English by Bramacharīnee Atmananda under the title *Matyvanī* (Benares, 1959). In addition, Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha published in English *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees* (Bhādāinī, Benares, 1956) and *Words of Sri Anandamayī Ma*, trans. and comp. Atmananda (Benares, 1961). A quarterly, *Ananda Vārtā*, has been published since 1951 in Bengali, Hindi, and English. From 1955 on, three separate editions have been issued: (a) Bengali-English, (b) Hindi-English, and (c) English. The English edition does not always contain the same material as the Bengali or Hindi editions. In 1965 Gaṅgeścandra Cakravartī published the first volume of his *Viśvajananī Anandamayī Mā* (Calcutta ; Viśvanāth Mukhopādhyāya).

West Bengal, Rāmakṛṣṇa. Just ten years after the death of Rāmakṛṣṇa, East Bengal gave birth to another great religious leader, Ānandamayī Mā, whose life in some ways bears a resemblance to that of Rāmakṛṣṇa. To this day Ānandamayī Mā continues vigorously to uphold traditional Hinduism.

The historian who ventures to deal with Ānandamayī Mā's life encounters considerable obstacles. Her followers have stressed the fact that she was a fully realized being from birth. Also, those who know her consider her being more important than her actions. Even a poet cannot easily portray being, much less so a historian. Moreover, after 1926, when her *sādhana* was completed, there has been no noticeable evolution in her life. As far as her teachings are concerned, they appear fully formulated from the beginning. Thus the historian cannot show a gradual unfoldment of ideas.

Nirmalā Sundarī, later to be known as Ānandamayī Mā (Bliss-permeated Mother) or briefly as *Mātājī*, was born in the tiny village of Kheora in the Tripurāh district of East Bengal on April 30, 1896 (19th Baisākh 1303 Bengal Era) in an orthodox Vaiṣṇava family. Her father, Bipinbihārī Bhaṭṭācārya, a Brahman originally from the village of Vidyakūṭ, was ascetically inclined and a great lover of *kīrtana*. For long stretches of time he would leave his family and accompany visiting *kīrtana* parties. Her mother, Mokshadā Sundarī later known as Didimā, came from a family that had produced many pandits³. It was a matter of family pride that there had been a recent case of joyous *sati* among Didimā's paternal relatives⁴. The house in which Ānandamayī Mā grew up was surrounded by the homes of Muslims, chiefly illiterate peasants. Apparently the

There is a German work by Melita Maschmann, *Der Tiger singt Kirtana* (Weilheim, Oberbayern : Otto Wilhelm Barth-Verlag, 1967) and a French work by Arnaud Desjardins, *Ashrams—Les yogis et les sages* (Paris : La Palatine, n. d.). Desjardins' book was not available to me. However, portions of the book have appeared in *Ananda Vārtā*. A brief reference to Ānandamayī Mā can be found in Richard Lannoy, *India : People and Places* (New York : Vanguard Press, 1955), pp. 17-18. Arthur Koestler devotes a portion of his chapter "Four Contemporary Saints" in his book *The Lotus and the Robot* (New York : Macmillan Co., 1961), pp. 63-84, to an appraisal of Ānandamayī Mā. It appears to me that Koestler was prevented by his ethnocentricity from understanding some of the deeper aspects of Indian spirituality. He himself admits : "Thus, in a sense, I came back impoverished rather than enriched. I felt that I had been put in my place—and that my place was Europe" (p. 282).

Finally there are two brief accounts of Ānandamayī Mā's life in Benoy Gopal Ray, *Religious Movements in Modern Bengal* (Santiniketan : Visva-Bharati, 1965), pp. 128-29, and in P. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (New York : Philosophical Library, 1946), pp. 454-59.

3. S. S.M.A., I, k (Introduction).

4. *Ibid.*, p.g: Bhāijī, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

Muslim neighbours were extremely fond of Ānandamayī Mā, who frequently visited their homes. Indicative of her mother's orthodoxy is the statement attributed to her : "As long as *annaprasanna* [ceremony when a baby first takes rice (solid food) at about five or six months] has not taken place, it is no sin to touch a Muslim. After that such contact requires an ablution."⁵

As a result of her father's disregard for worldly success, Anandamayī Mā's family was in extremely poor financial circumstances and could not afford to let her attend school regularly. Often she was kept at home to help with the housework and to take care of her little brothers.⁶ At most, she attended elementary school for two years, and she never acquired a mastery of reading and writing. In later years when asked to autograph a book, she would sign with a dot.⁷

In 1908, when Anandamayī Mā was almost thirteen years old her parents married her to Ramanimohan Cakravarti, a Brahman from Aṭpāra near Dacca. Her husband, later on usually referred to as Bholanāth or Pitāji, was a Śakta. Through him Anandamayī Mā changed from Kṛṣṇa to Kālī worship. It must be pointed out that the marriage was never physically consummated. Bholanath apparently had implicit faith in Anandamayī Mā and was willing to accept the exceedingly unconventional marriage which initially placed him in an awkward position toward his family. Ultimately he looked upon her as his guru. Anandamayī Mā, on the other hand, throughout their married life (Bholanath died in 1938) combined the role of a devoted wife with that of a spiritual guide.⁸

The first four years after the wedding, Bholanath continued to live in Aṭpāra, where he was employed in the police department, while Anandamayī Mā kept house for his eldest brother, Revatimohan Cakravarti, in Śripur. While she was normally extremely efficient in performing various household chores, there were times when she was overcome by spells of fainting. On one occasion, she was found lying unconscious on the kitchen floor when the smell of burnt food attracted the family.⁹

5. S.S.M.A., I, j.

6. Ānandamayī Mā was the second child. One elder sister had died prior to Ānandamayī Mā's birth. Four brothers and two sisters were born afterwards. *Ibid.*, pp kh, ch—j

7. B. Mukerji, "From the Life of Sri Sri Mā Anandamayī," *Ānanda Vārtā*, English sec., V, No. 1 (May, 1957), 50; Swami Madhav Tirtha, "Conversations with Mataji at Gujrat," *Ānanda Vārtā*, English sec., VIII, No. (November, 1960), 158.

8. Mukerji, "From the life of Sri Sri Mā Anandamayī," *Ānanda Vārtā*, English sec., V, No. 2 (August, 1957), 151-52; S.S.M.A. I., jh—n

9. S.S.M.A. I, n; Mukerji, "From the Life of Sri Sri Mā Anandamayī," V, No. 2 (cited in n 8 above) 152—54

In 1913, at the age of seventeen, Anandamayi Ma joined Bholanath, who had found employment in the Land Settlement Department in Aṣṭagrāma. In Aṣṭagrāma they were the tenants of one Jaiśankar Sen, whose wife was so charmed by Anandamayi Ma's blissful nature that she referred to her as "Khusir Ma" (Happy or Cheerful Mother).¹⁰ Harakumar Ray, a brother of Sen's wife, was the first to address her as "Ma" and to prostrate himself in front of her. He started coming daily for *prasāda*.¹¹ Supposedly he predicted : "You will see, I began calling you Mother. Some day the whole world will call you so."¹²

A new phase in Anandamayi Ma's life began in 1917, when Bholanath procured a position in Bajitpur. In later years Anandamayi Ma referred to the next six years (1917-23) as the period when it was her *kheyāla* (free will manifesting itself spontaneously)¹³ to play the role of a *sādhikā* : "Let me tell you that what I am, I have been from infancy. But when the different stages of *sādhana* were being manifested through this body¹⁴ there was something like a superimposition of *ajñāna* [ignorance]. But what sort of *ajñāna* was that ? It was really *jñāna* [knowledge] masquerading as *jñāna*."¹⁵ During these years various strange phenomena have been recorded by her followers. Often during *kirtana* her body would suddenly stiffen, and she would lose consciousness. At times mantras spontaneously proceeded from her lips; or her limbs formed into various yogic postures. It is reported that she passed at a rapid succession through every kind of *sādhana* described in Hindu scriptures as well as those of other religions.¹⁶ At first Bholanath was greatly disturbed and consulted various exorcists and doctors. Finally, a distinguished physician, Dr. Mahendra C. Nandi from Kalikaccha, assured him that what appeared to be fainting spells, resembling attacks of epilepsy, were in fact signs of God intoxication.¹⁷

10. S.S.M.A., I, t—th.

11. *Ibid.*, I, th—d.

12. *Ibid.*, I, dh.

13. Ordinarily *kheyāla* means fancy, whim, tendency, or imagination. In Anandamayī Mā's case the translation given has been suggested. See "Matri Vani" *Ananda Vārtā* English sec. III No. 3 (November 1955), 204.

14. Anandamayī Mā refers to herself usually as "this body" or as "this little daughter of yours"; see "Mataji's Amara Vani," *Ananda Vārtā*, English sec. III, No. 3 (November 1955), 206.

15. Vijaiananda (A. J. Weintrob). "What Mother is Not," *Ananda Vārtā*, English sec. VIII, No. 1 (May, 1960), 20.

16. "Matri Līla," *Ananda Vārtā*, English sec., VI, No. 3 (November 1958) 250; S.S.M.A., I, n—d.

17. S.S.M.A., I, dh.

In 1922, at the time of *Jhulana* (Swing Festival), Ānandamayī Ma bestowed upon herself *dīkṣā* (initiation). There were no external accessories. She herself assumed the role of guru, mantra, and *iṣṭa* (chosen deity). Even now her followers observe the time of her *dīkṣā* with meditation.¹⁸ Five months after her own initiation, Ānandamayī Mā conferred *dīkṣā* upon Bholānāth. There is only one other instance known when she gave *dīkṣā*. As a rule she insisted that she was not a guru, and she refused to initiate her disciples.¹⁹ Before the end of 1922, she began a three years' period of silence, with occasional interludes, when she would utter Sanskrit mantras or give short talks to the increasing number of visiting devotees.²⁰

While Ānandamayī Ma was still observing silence, she moved with Bholanath to Dacca in 1924. Bholanath had lost his position in Bajitpur and concluded that it would be easier to find employment in a larger town. He secured an appointment as manager of the nawab of Dacca's Shah-bag garden. For the next six years (1924-29) Bholanath and Anandamayī Ma lived in a little cottage in that garden. Six months after her arrival in Dacca, Anandamayī Ma terminated her silence. Immediately thereafter, however, she started on a dietary regimen. For a while she did not eat more than three morsels a day. Then again she would fast completely, once for sixteen days and another time for twenty-three days. Before the end of 1924 she lost the ability to feed herself. Food would simply slip through her fingers when she attempted to raise them to her mouth. To this day she is being fed by one of her disciples.²¹

Knowledge of Anandamayī Ma's strangely exalted spiritual state had preceded her arrival at Shah-bag. There was, therefore, a steady stream of visitors to the "Mother of Shah-bag." as she was soon called. Daily *kirtana* was performed in her cottage. Her first public appearance occurred during the Kali *pūjā* of 1925. When first requested to perform *pūjā*, she declined claiming that she did not know sufficiently the *śāstric* rites. Ultimately she did perform *pūjā*, and to the astonishment of the audience, she placed flowers and sandal paste upon her own head instead of on the image of Kali. One disciple describing the *pūjā* stated : "At that time all were under the spell of the compassionate Mother's uncommonly beautiful sight and throughout the ceremony all were deeply absorbed."²²

18. *Ibid.*, pp. dh—n ; "Matri Lila." pp. 250-51.

19. S. S. M. A., I, p—b ; in 1937 she initiated J. C. Rāy (Bhāiji) in *samnyāsa*. Bhāiji, *op. cit.*, p. I (Preface).

20. Bhāiji, *op. cit.*, p. 28 ; S. S. M. A., I, b.

21. S. S. M. A., I, 11-13, 58-59, 88-92 ; Bhāiji, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-87.

22. Bhāiji, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

During a public *kirtana* in Anandamayi Ma's home on the occasion of the winter solstice, Anandamayi Ma suddenly arose and, totally oblivious to her surroundings, ecstatically danced in rhythm with the *kirtana*. One disciple later declared that it reminded him of the *Mahābhāva* of Lord Gauranga. To others she appeared to be the visible embodiment of the Mother of the Universe.²³ In 1926 Anandamayi Ma was again asked to perform the Kali *pūjā*. Without explanation she again deviated from the usual procedure. When the *pūjā* drew to a close and *pūrṇahūti* (the last oblation) arrived, she did not permit it to be offered and ordered the preservation of the sacrificial fire. The fire is still kept burning in Vindhya-cala and Benares, where it was transferred at Partition.²⁴ On the following day, when the immersion of the image of Kali was to take place, Anandamayi Ma took the further unusual step to order the preservation of the statue for the purpose of making it available for future worship. She issued specific instructions to the effect that on her birthday the image be made accessible for *darśana* to people of all castes and creeds.²⁵

The performance of Hindu rites in the nawab's garden did not encounter opposition from the Muslims. Anandamai Ma even gained the respect and affection of the nawab's family and of many neighbouring Muslims. Two incidents are reported that help to explain her popularity with Muslims and indicate that she was beyond narrow creedal confines. Once when Anandamayi Ma passed close to the grave of a *faqir* in the Shah-bag garden, she was observed performing *namaz* (Muslim prayer) and uttering phrases that upon examination proved to be verses from the Koran.²⁶ On another occasion, during *kirtana*, she noticed a Muslim watching her from a distance. She thereupon moved toward him chanting "Allah, Allahu Akbar."²⁷ Anandamayi Ma gradually acquired a number of devoted Muslim disciples. Partially this can be explained by the fact that there are quite a few Muslim worshippers of Kālī in East Bengal. In any case, she always stressed that she had equal respect for all religions and that in her eyes *kirtana* and *namaz* were one and the same.²⁸ She also stated that she considered herself "a Christian, a Muslim, anything you like."²⁹ With her emphasis on the equality of all religious paths, she, as

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35 ; see also footnote in the English translation, *Mother as Revealed to Me*, p. 44.

25. Bhālji, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

29. Atmananda, "Old Diary Leaves," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XIV, No 1 (May, 1966), 32.

many an Indian, understandably objects to the exclusive claims of Christianity : "If Christianity claims a special position for itself and places itself apart, it thereby breaks up all other religions. We recognize Jesus Christ, but within the unity of all religions. He Himself stands above this aloofness."³⁰

As Anandamayi Ma became increasingly accessible to the public, it was becoming quite common for people from all over East Bengal to seek her *darśana*. By 1926 some of her most loyal disciples—the nucleus of a future inner circle—had appeared. Among them was Śaśāṅkamohan Mukhopadhyaya, a retired civil surgeon from Dacca, who was later initiated in *sannyāsa* under the name of Swami Akhandananda Giri. His second eldest daughter, Didi Gurupriya Devi, usually referred to as Didi, became Anandamayi Ma's close assistant. When Anandamayi Ma first met Didi, she is said to have exclaimed : "Where have you been all this time ?"³¹ This reminds one of Ramakṛṣṇa's similar exclamation upon meeting Narendranath Datta, the future Swami Vivekananda. Didi carried out almost singlehandedly the administration of the various ashrams founded from 1929 onwards and after, until the establishment of a regular organization, the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, in 1950. At the same time she compiled in her diary an extensive record of Anandamayi Ma's daily life.³² Reputedly the most devoted disciple was Jyotiścandra Ray, known as "Bhaiji," a personal assistant to the director of agriculture in Dacca. Deeply impressed by the blissful nature of the "Mother of Shah-bag," Bhaiji was the first to suggest that in future she be called Anandamayi Ma.³³ And Bhaiji was also chiefly responsible for the establishment of the Ramaṇa Ashram in Dacca in 1929 the first of twenty-one Ashrams in northern and central India, to serve as centres for Anandamayi Ma's spiritual activities.³⁴

With the founding of the Ramaṇa Ashram, the "Shah-bag" phase of Anandamayi Ma's *līlā* ended. Henceforth she abandoned all stationary life, and since that time she has been incessantly traveling throughout northern and central India, and occasionally in southern India, following her *kheyāla*. She remains at a certain place for several days or at the most for a few weeks or months. Wherever she stays, there ensues an intense spiritual activity : chanting of *kirtana*, meditation, recitations

30. Atmananda, "New Diary Leaves," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XI, No. 4 (February, 1964), 185.

31. Mukerji, "From the Life of Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., VI, No. 3 (November, 1958), 241—42.

32. "Matri Lila," pp. 248—49.

33. *Bhāijī*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 121—24.

from the Gita, the Upanisads, the *Puranas*, discourses by visiting mahatmas and scholar-disciples, general question and answer periods, interspersed with individual interviews, known as "privates," one of the English words Anandamayi Ma has incorporated into her vocabulary (she has also acquired a good knowledge of Hindi). All Hindu festivals are celebrated with careful observance of *śāstric* rites.³⁵ While Anandamayi Ma personally has no need for ceremonies, she knows that the majority of people have not attained her level of understanding, and she tries to wean them from a mere mechanical observance of rites and to make them aware of the underlying significance of ceremonials: "Pūjā is done so that real pūjā may come about.... What does it mean to perform real pūjā? To give oneself entirely to the object of one's worship.... When one's dedication becomes complete, He reveals Himself. To find Him means to find Oneself and to find Oneself means to find Him."³⁶ Not only are pūjās regularly performed at her ashrams, but she also does not belittle Vedic yajñas. In fact, from 1947 to 1950 a giant yajña was performed at her ashram in Benares "for the good of the whole world."³⁷ Mahatmas from all over India participated, and thousands of Brahmans were entertained.³⁸

By dedicating a *mahā yajña* to the entire world, Anandamayi Ma clearly indicated the fact that she did not consider the scope of her activity limited to East Bengal: "From a practical point of view this body belongs to East Bengal and is a brahman by caste, but if you detach yourself from all these artificial attributes, you will understand that this body belongs to one common human family."³⁹ After 1932 she only occasionally visited East Bengal until Partition, when such visits naturally ceased. Visits to West Bengal occur at regular intervals, and when Durgā pūjā is celebrated in Calcutta it turns into a mass affair. Thousands of *darśana* seekers literally mob Anandamayi Ma.⁴⁰ Even at the present time, Bengalis constitute a large proportion of the "inner core" of

35. Gaṅgāsamīran and Bibhupada Kīrti, *op. cit.*, pp. 18—19 (Appendix); Gurupriyā Devī, "Dāyerīr kayek prṣṭā," *Ananda Vārtā*, Bengali sec., XII, No. 1 (May, 1964), 3—10; XIII, No. 4 (February, 1966), 142—45; XV, No. 3 (November, 1967), 128—37; *Mother as seen by Her Devotees*, p. 38.

36. Atmananda, "New Diary Leaves," *Ananda Vārtā*, English sec., VIII, No. 2 (August, 1960), 92.

37. *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees*, p. 50; The yajña is described in detail in *Gurupriyā Devī, Akhanda Mahayajña*.

38. *Mother as seen by Her Devotees*.

39. Bhāijī, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

40. "Matri Lila," *Ananda Vārtā*, English sec., XII, No. 4 (February, 1966), 180—81; III, No. 3 (November, 1955), 241; information about the Durgā pūjā in Calcutta has also been supplied to the writer by several eye witnesses.

devotees. The general following, however, has become all-Indian and includes foreigners. Political leaders, university professors, medical men and artists are among her adherents. Through Kamala Nehru the whole Nehru family has been closely associated with her. Kamala Nehru frequently spent whole nights in deep meditation with Anandamayi Ma in her ashram, in Kishenpur and in Dehradun.⁴¹ She introduced her husband, the agnostic Jawaharlal Nehru, to Anandamayi Ma. Jawaharlal continued to go occasionally to Anandamayi Ma for *darśana* after the passing of his wife. On February 29, 1964, three months before his own death, he had her *darśana* for the last time.⁴² His daughter, the present Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, has been a regular visitor with Anandamayi Ma since the 1930's.⁴³ Well-known devotees include Subodharañjan Dasgupta, chief justice of Mysore; Vijayaraje, maharani of Gwalior; Jugal Kishore Birla, the great industrialist and philanthropist; the singer Dilip Kumar Ray; the dancer Uday Shankar; Rehana Tyabji, a close follower of Gandhi; and, above all, Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, the great Sanskritist.⁴⁴

One of the first Westerners to be attracted to Anandamayi Ma was Blanca,⁴⁵ an Austrian refugee who met her in Almora in 1943. Upon the death of her father in 1945, Blanca became a *brahmacārini*, assuming the name Atmananda. Having acquired a good knowledge of Bengali and Hindi, Brahmacarini Atmananda serves frequently as an interpreter when foreigners request interviews with Anandamayi Ma. She also is on the editorial board of *Ānanda Vārtā*, a quarterly founded in 1951 to disseminate Anandamayi Ma's teachings and to promote spirituality in general.⁴⁶ Another western monastic is Vijayananda, the former Dr. Adolphe Jacques Weintrob. A successful medical doctor from Marseilles, he gave up a remunerative practice in 1951 to go to India on a spiritual quest. Upon Anandamayi Ma's instruction, he has been living largely in solitude in Almora.⁴⁷ Greatly influenced by Anandamayi Ma's person and teachings

41. Gurupriyā Devī, "Dāyerīr kayek pṛṣṭā," *Ananda Varta*, Bengali sec., XI, No. 4 (February, 1964), 166—67.

42. 'Matri Lila,, *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XII, No. 1 (May, 1964), 47.

43. Seen n. 41 above.

44. Gurupriyā Devī, "Dāyerīr kayek pṛṣṭā," *Ananda Varta*, Bengali sec. XI, No. 3 (November, 1963), 12; XII, No. 1 (May, 1964), 4—5; S.S.M.A., VIII, 91—92; 'Matri Lila,' English sec., X, No. 4 (February, 1963), 234.

45. I have so far been unable to find her second name.

46. Atmananda, "Reminiscences," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., VI, No. 4 (February, 1959), 325—30; S.S.M.A., IX, 210.

47. N.R. Das Gupta, "The Divine Mother," in *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees*, p. 128; Adolphe Jacques Weintrob (Vijayananda), "My First Impression," in *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees*, pp. 59-66.

were also the well-known British photographer Richard Lannoy, the French film producer Arnaud Desjardins, and the German novelist Melita Maschmann.⁴⁸ It is not surprising that Anandamayi Ma has drawn foreigners to her, given the fact that in this century an increasing number of westerners dissatisfied with the answers that western religions and philosophies offer have turned to India in the hope of finding there more satisfying solutions to perennial problems. An atmosphere of serenity, peace, and bliss emanating from Anandamayi Ma seems to account primarily for the great attraction she exercises over her devotees. All seem to agree that in her presence they feel lifted above ordinary worldly problems.⁴⁹

Those who have fallen under the spell of Anandamayi Ma have understandably speculated about her real nature. She has not had a guru. At no time has she made references to previous incarnations. As pointed out earlier, she emphatically insists that she is not a guru and refuses to give *dīkṣā*. One is mystified by the fact that she never enters the home of householders, while permitting her disciples to do so. Her seeming inability to feed herself adds to the enigma. When asked who she is, her usual answer is, "Well, I am what you consider me to be, not more, not less,"⁵⁰ or, "This body is like a musical instrument; what you hear depends upon how you play it."⁵¹

An interesting assessment of Anandamayi Ma has been made by Vijayananda in an article entitled "What Mother Is Not."⁵² He points out that "a vedantist, for example, when talking to Mother for the first time, will feel convinced that She is a pure *advaita vedantin*; a śakta may very likely say that She is an incarnation of the Divine Mother, advocating the cult of śakti; while a vaiṣṇava will see in Her a great *bhakta*, and so on."⁵³ He then emphasizes the fact that Anandamayi Ma cannot possibly be considered a Tantric in the way this is commonly understood in the west, that is, in association with sexual rituals. *Brahmacarya* is strictly observed in all her ashrams. She herself clearly states: "It is the pure undefiled flower that finds a place at the feet of the Lord and nowhere else. Take great care to spend your life in spotless purity,

48. The works of Lannoy, Desjardins, and Maschmann are listed in the initial footnote of this paper.

49. This conclusion is chiefly based on *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees*, and personal conversations with some of Ānandamāyī Mā's disciples.

50. *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees*, p. 199.

51. Bhāijī, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

52. Vijayananda, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-22.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

worthy to be dedicated in worship to the Lord."⁵⁴ Does she recommend the cult of Śakti? Undoubtedly among her followers are a great number of Śāktas. Moreover, it is quite customary for Anandamayi Ma's devotees to greet each other with "Jai Ma." And *kīrtanas* in praise of "Ma" are regularly chanted in her ashrams. However, other *kīrtanas* are devoted to Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, or just to Bhagavan (Godhead). Vijayananda draws attention to the fact that her earlier *bhāvas* have ceased. Moreover, Anandamayi Ma strongly warns against emotionalism: "At the supreme summit of love which is *mahābhāva*, exuberance, excessive emotion and the like cannot possibly occur. Emotional excitement and supreme love are not to be compared at all, they are totally different from each other."⁵⁵

A discussion of the teaching of Ānandamayī Mā must be prefaced by some reference to the amazing ease with which this illiterate woman handles complex questions posed by eminent scholars. Answers are couched in a simple, homely language and include parables. Ānandamayī Mā is especially fond of making puns, such as *Vedanta* means *bheda anta* (end of difference); where Rāma (God) is, there is *ārāma* (rest); where Rāma is not, there is *byārāma* (discomfort, disease); desire (*vāsanā*) is where God does not dwell (*vāsanā*); to understand intellectually (*bojhā*) is but to be burdened (*bojhā*); *sādhana* has to be practiced to discover *svādhana* (one's own wealth.)⁵⁶

When people come to Ānandamayī Mā with their problems, she does not offer one specific solution. Instead she points out various ways of viewing a problem. For instance, someone asked her whether it was proper for him to engage in a suit in view of the fact that he had been cheated in a business deal. In reply she stated that one could argue that one must go to court to teach the culprit a lesson and to keep him from further malpractices. On the other hand, who is really cheating? "Are not all forms, all beings, manifestations of Him? What I have been deprived of was evidently not my due, it is God who has taken it from me."⁵⁷ Another way of looking at the problem is that through generosity and forgiveness one might bring about a transformation in the criminal.

54. *Matyvanī*, p. 99.

55. "Words of Sri Anandamayī Ma," p. 37.

56. "Śrī Mukher Kathā," *Ananda Varta*, Bengali sec., XV, No. 1 (May, 1967), 1; "Matyvanī," *Ananda Varta*, Bengali sec., VII, No. 1 (May, 1959), 1-2; Kṛṣṇanāth, "With Mataji on the Bank of the Gomati River," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., IX, No. 3 (November, 1961), 135; "Mataji's Amara Vani," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., III, No. 4 (February, 1956), 292; "Bhasa Dharana Mala," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XIII, No. 3 (November, 1965), 126.

57. Atmananda, "Old Diary Leaves," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XV, No. 1 (May, 1967), 42.

Or one might refrain from going to court, considering it sufficient punishment that the villain had caused bad karma for himself. Finally, one could reason that one would not go to court if the wrongdoer were one's own brother. "Whichever of these points of view appeals to you, according to it you should act."⁵⁸

When someone complained to Ānandamāyī Mā about her unwillingness to give clear-cut answers to problems, she retorted : "At least you have understood that there is a state where problems are no longer settled in any particular way...But now you will have to realize that no solution is ever conclusive ; in other words, you will have to go beyond the level where there is certainty and uncertainty. The solution of a problem arrived at by the mind must of necessity be from a particular point of view ; consequently there will be room for contradiction, since your solution represents but one aspect."⁵⁹

An examination of Ānandamāyī Mā's teaching leads one to the conclusion that she considers a life combining *karma yoga* and *mantra yoga* most suitable for the majority of householders. At the same time, she urges disciples to spend at least a few minutes a day in *dhyāna yoga*. In general, it seems that she varies her instructions according to the temperament and development stage of the particular disciple. While making allowance for different religious approaches she constantly stresses the fact that ultimately all paths merge in one : "While engaging in *sādhana* one must concentrate in a single direction but after it has been completed, what comes then ? The cessation of difference, distinction and disagreement. Differences do indeed exist on the path, but how can there be a difference of Goal ?"⁶⁰ Her strict monism is borne out by such statements as : "The One, who is the Eternal, the Atman, He Himself is the traveller on the path to immortality, He is all in all, He alone is,"⁶¹ or : "In the Supreme, in the Ultimate, when limited vision has disappeared, how can there be distinctions, such as duality or non-duality ? He who inquires, perceives the two ; and there is likewise duality for him who practises *sādhana*, although he aims at Oneness. You must grasp the truth that He who is dual is indeed the One who is non-dual—just like ice and water."⁶²

Essentially her teaching is based on the wisdom of the ancient Indian sages : "This body presents the matter from the standpoint of the

58. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

59. *Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma*, p. 1.

60. "Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma," p. 6.

61. "Matri Vani," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., VII, No. 2 (August, 1959), 41.

62. *Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma*, p. 123.

rishis and munis, from the line of approach which they chose."⁶³ Thus it is centered on renunciation, simplicity, and other-worldliness. When the late president of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, visited Anandamayi Mā in 1961 and asked her what she considered a sound basis for modern society, she told him that above all the four *āśramas*, in particular the *brahmacarya āśrama*, must be preserved. If at an early age children were taught self-restraint, simplicity, and frugality, and if it were made clear to them that the only purpose of human existence is the realization of God, they would be thoroughly grounded in the art of living. Then *brahmacarya* would naturally lead to *brahmavidya* (knowledge of God). In that case it would not matter so much whether he or she chose the shortcut of proceeding from *brahmacarya* directly to *saṁnyāsa* or whether one first passed through the *gṛhastha* and *vānaprastha* stages.⁶⁴ Those who chose the path of *gṛhastha* were admonished to let their parents select their marriage partner, since young people were likely to be swayed in their choice by mere physical attraction. Under no circumstances should bride and bridegroom see each other prior to the wedding. Looking at a girl before one is married to her is likened by Anandamayi Mā to offering for *pūjā* a fruit that has been pecked at by a bird. After the birth of one or two children, she advocates that husband and wife live in a brother-sister relationship. And she urges house-holders to retire from wordly life at fifty-five or at the latest at sixty.⁶⁵ Ordinarily one was not entitled prematurely to foresake one's family and become a *saṁnyāsin*. However, if one's religious urge became compelling, it was permissible to abandon *gṛhastha*. She compares the state of a man who took such a step to that of a person who abandons a burning house, and she cites Buddha as an example.⁶⁶ Obviously the state of such a person is the very opposite of that to which Paul refers when he declares: "For it is better to marry than to burn."

With her emphasis on renunciation and self-control, Anandamāyi Mā makes exacting demands that must be truly disconcerting to those who consider it man's birthright to enjoy "the good things in life." She

63. "Mataji's Amar Vani," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., V, No. 3 (November, 1957), 205.

64. Gurupriyā Devī, "Dāyerīr kayek pṛṣṭā," *Ananda Varta*, Bengali sec., XI, No. 3 (November, 1963), 116-17.

65. Atmananda, "Old Diary Leaves," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XII, No. 1 (May, 1964), 44-45; Maschmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-95.

66. Atmananda, "Diary Leaves," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., III, No. 4 (February, 1956), 314.

insists that man must be heroic : "During spells of misfortune he must abide in fortitude and patience."⁶⁷ And she adds :

"The word *mānusa* (man) i.e. *man* [mind] and *hus* [consciousness, cognition] gives the clue to what man should really be : a being who is self-aware. Even if he has slipped and fallen, is it not his duty to raise himself up again with the help of the very earth to which he has tumbled ? ..If he has not awakened to the consciousness of his own Self, what has he achieved ? He has spent his life in vain. How many lives have been wasted, age after age, in endless coming and going ? When man becomes a traveller on the path to his inner Being the distance that separates him from his goal gradually vanishes. You will most certainly have to undertake this pilgrimage to immortality, trampling under foot hundreds and hundreds of obstacles."⁶⁸

Over and over Anandamayi Ma belabours the need for endurance in the face of all difficulties. Once when she was asked why pain existed, she countered that there was also a good side to pain and in this connection recounted a tale referring to Hanuman's construction of a bridge to Lanka. While building the bridge Hanuman accidentally hurt a squirrel. The squirrel thereupon complained to Rama and demanded in punishment that Rama step upon Hanuman. Rama did accordingly and told Hanuman not to commit such an error again. Hanuman, however, retorted that he would frequently repeat his wrong action, in order to enjoy the pressure of Rama's feet.⁶⁹ At another time Anandamayi Ma exemplified the value of suffering by telling the story of a pitcher who underwent all sorts of tribulations while being fashioned into its present form. Ultimately it was used as a *pūjā* vessel, and Ganges water was kept in it. Similarly, human "vessels" had to be moulded to become fit for the divine life.⁷⁰

Regarding pain and suffering as beneficial for spiritual growth, the usually loving and kind Anandamayi Mā at times outwardly displays severity. Thus it is reported that when a devotee came to see her shortly after he had suffered the loss of his wife, she greeted him with laughter. Stunned by her seeming callous attitude, he inquired into the cause of her merriment. "*Pitāji*," she replied, "there is one less barrier between you and God."⁷¹ To those who complain that the price of success

67. *Matyivani*, p. 86

68. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

69. Swami Madav Tirth, "Sixty second Birthday of Shri Ma Anandamayi," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., V, No. 2 (August, 1957), 160 (a).

70. "Conversations with Anandamayi Ma," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XV, No. 3 (November, 1967), 111-12.

71. *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees*, pp. 15-16.

in the spiritual life is the abandonment of worldly pleasures, she retorts that foresaking spirituality is an act of supreme renunciation.⁷²

Anandamayi Mā is aware of the fact that modern conditions do not favour a life totally dedicated to spiritual pursuits. Therefore, she is willing to compromise and urges people to spend at least fifteen minutes a day in meditation.⁷³ To assist householders in withdrawing from their ordinary worldly activities, she instituted an annual Samyam Vrata (vow of self-restraint) in 1952. All those taking the Samyam Vrata must abstain from drinking and smoking and must partially fast, or at least greatly reduce their food intake, for one week. During that week there is a program of meditation, *kīrtana*, and talks by specially invited pandits. Usually several hundred persons attend.⁷⁴

Positing the realization of God as the only worthwhile purpose of life, Anandamayi Mā, as can easily be surmised, is not interested in western-style progress. From her point of view, the material accomplishments of modern civilization lack as much reality as all other aspects of this transient world: "Many feel the urge to create a new and better world: instead one should let one's thought dwell on such subjects that help toward finding perfect peace."⁷⁵ However, she does not completely reject technical advance, considering it neither good nor bad. And she concedes that occasionally technical progress might be an aid in one's *sādhana*. In that case it has her approval. Technical change has made a definite impact on her outward life. The times when she traveled by the most primitive means of conveyance are long past. Nowadays the unending pilgrimages are performed by car and train. Although she personally does not take medicine, she sees to it that the best possible medical treatment is given to her close disciples when they contract an illness.⁷⁶ With her blessings, the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha founded in 1965 the Ma Anandamayee Seva Hospital at Benares. Equipped with up-to-date modern instruments and facilities, it provides free treatment for destitute persons.⁷⁷ But whatever concessions have

72. *Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma*, p. 158.

73. Krishnanath, "With Mataji on the Bank of the Gomati River," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., IX, No. 4 (February, 1962), 181.

74. Atmananda, "SAMYAM VRATA," *Ananda Varta*, English sec.; I, No. 2 (1953), 150-53
K G. Ambegaokar, "SAMYAM AND BHAGAVATA SAPTAKS IN NAIMISHARANYA," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., VIII, No. 4 (February, 1961), 175-90.

75. *Matyvanī*, p. 102. See also Bhaṭṭācārya (comp.), *op. cit.*, p. 114.

76. "Matri Lila," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XIII, No. 2 (August, 1965), 83; Guru priyā Devī, "Pages from My Diary," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., VI, No. 2 (August, 1959) 83, 87.

77. *Annual Report, Ma Anandamayee Seva Hospital 1966-67*, pp.1-19.

been made to modern civilization do not alter the fact that utter simplicity continues to prevail in her ashrams.

In view of Ānandamayī Ma's detachment from worldly affairs, it is not surprising that she ordinarily does not comment upon political events. In all the twelve volumes of Gurupriya Devī's diary there are only scanty references to the momentous events that occurred in India in recent years. Ānandamayī Ma met Mahatma Gandhi several times, but if the record of their conversations is complete, there was no mentioning of India's struggle for independence.⁷⁸ When a German visitor wanted to know Ānandamayī Ma's opinion of Mahatma Gandhi, the interpreter told her that Ānandamayī Ma did not discuss political matters. She evidently caught the gist of the visitor's question and replied that Gandhi was doing the will of God.⁷⁹ When the Mahatma was assassinated, she likened it to the crucifixion of Christ.⁸⁰ At no time did she directly remark upon Partition and the loss of her homeland, East Bengal, to Pakistan. But Bhaji in his *Matrdarśana* mentions that once, in the 1930's, Anandamayi Ma expressed her dismay at the communal strife that was then convulsing Calcutta.⁸¹ On another occasion, when questioned about the causes of the insecurity, distress, and tensions existing in this present age, she stated that she considered these phenomena the inevitable birthpangs of a coming social order "which He is planning."⁸² She did not go beyond this vague hint, however.

If Anandamayi Ma envisions a new social order, she obviously does not consider it her function to hasten its coming by direct action. For, while welcoming people of all castes, races, and religions, she permits the observance of strict caste regulations in her ashrams. Even those westerners who have taken monastic vows, eat and sleep apart from the other ashram inmates. There is no doubt that Anandamayi Ma is beyond caste prejudice. In her personal dealings she conforms to her statement: "To this body everyone and everything is equal."⁸³ German novelist Melita Maschmann, who stayed with Anandamayi Ma in 1963 and 1964, questioned her about the seeming incompatibility between her teachings and the practices in her ashrams. Anandamayi Ma thereupon explained to Miss Maschmann that most people lived on a level of consciousness where traditional observances were essential to them. Were she

78. S.S.M., A VII, 135-42 ; IX, 89-92.

79. N. Chowdhuri, "The Unforgettable 'Holi' Day," *Ananda Varta*, English sec., V, No. 2 (August, 1957), 129-30.

80. S.S.M.A., IX, 182.

81. Bhaji, *op. cit.*, '54.

82. *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees* pp. 105-06

83. "Matjivānī," *Ananda Varta*, Bengali sec., v, No. 4 (February, 1958); 281,

to ignore their feelings, she would drive them away and would then have less of an opportunity to elevate them. She made it clear that she did not believe in forcing people to change their erroneous views. Such mistaken attitudes will fall naturally off at the proper time, as a result of the evolution of consciousness.⁸⁴ And she often affirms : "As you know, this body does not as a rule interfere with one's natural ways : whatever is meant to come about just happens spontaneously."⁸⁵ That does not mean that she is blind to the existence of social, economic, and political injustices. However, Anandamayi Ma, as many a mystic, regards the solution for all problems as an inner reform : the overcoming of selfishness by self-realization. Above all, she wants to reform by her example.

In summing up, it can be said that Anandamayi Ma's defense of India's traditional value system and her advocacy of an inner spiritual reform cannot possibly appeal to those who see India's salvation in a rapid secularization and appropriation of modern western values. As an open challenge to modern man's concentration on problems such as nuclear warfare, industrialization of underdeveloped regions, the population explosion, and race and ideological conflicts, she wishes to direct man to a different level of reality, urging him to make the quest for God his sole goal : "Every breath with which we do not remember God is wasted. Birth in a human body is a rare boon. If you had been born as animals or birds, what significance would your lives have ? Human beings alone have been endowed with the capacity to find God."⁸⁶ It may even be that her very otherworldliness is her greatest attraction for those who feel that "the world is too much with us." A "hard-headed realist" might ask to what extent Anandamayi Ma has made an actual contribution to the advancement of human welfare. Melita Maschmann, in a way, addressed herself to this question. During her stay in Calcutta she met a Catholic missionary who had dedicated her life to the founding of orphanages, medical centres, homes for the aged—in other words, 'had been engaged in social-welfare work. Miss Maschmann was deeply impressed by the activity of the Catholic missionary. She mentioned to one of Anandamayi Ma's disciples that it seemed to her that, in contradistinction to Anandamayi Ma, this Western missionary was truly living up to the commandment that one should love one's neighbour as oneself. The immediate reply of the disciple was that service to mankind was precisely what Anandamayi Ma was doing all the time.⁸⁷ Obviously there are

84. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, pp 110-11.

85. "Mataji's Amara Vani," III, No. 3 (cited in n. 14 above) 209.

86. Melita Maschmann, "From the Diary of a European." *Ananda Varta*, English sec., XIII. No.2 (August, 1965), 52-53.

87. Maschmann, *Der Tiger singt Kirtana*, pp. 142-47.

different views of what constitutes service to humanity. It may not be inappropriate to end this brief account of Anandamayi Ma's life and teachings with a modified quotation of Franklin Edgerton's concluding summary of the Bhagavad Gita : "And speaking pragmatically, Anandamayi Ma's point of view is justified by the fact that many millions of men have found religious comfort in it, and expected salvation through it. Who can say that they were disappointed? And if it should be granted that they were not, would not that have proved the usefulness of her teaching and so their pragmatic 'truth'?"⁸⁸

88. *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. and interpr. Franklin Edgerton (New York : Harper & Row, 1964), p. 194.

"On the journey through life in this world, nobody ever remains happy. The pilgrimage to the Goal of human life is the only path to supreme happiness. Try to tread that path which is your very own, where there is no question of pleasure and pain—the path that leads to freedom from egotism and to the highest Bliss."

—Mata Anandamayi

THE JEWISH CHASIDIM

Chaim Goldstein

It is perhaps the coldest day of winter in the Polish village of Berditchev this year, 1775. But in the tumble-down shack of the poor Jewish quarter where ten shaggy figures are eerily illumined by the light of a single flickering candle and the glowing coals of a dying fire, all seems to be warmth and joy. They sway back and forth in their seats around the rough wooden table, their faces aglow with love and appreciation for one of their number who chants in Yiddish to a haunting East-European tune.

Where I wander—You !
Where I ponder—You !
Only You, You again, Always You !
You ! You ! You !
When I am gladdened—You !
When I am saddened—You !
Only You, You again, always You !
You ! You ! You !
Sky is You ! Earth is You !
You above : You below !
In every trend, at every end,
Only You, You again, always You !
You ! You ! You !

The one who sings is Rabbi¹ Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, known as their *Tsadik* (Righteous One) ; they are known as his *Chasidim* (Pious Ones). They are all members of that religious movement of mystical devotion known as *Chasidism* which gathered so many of the poor and wretched Jews of Eighteenth Century Poland into its warm, life-giving embrace.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak has been known to work wonderful miracles, and is said to possess many strange powers ; greater than any of these, however, is the very fact of his presence and the presence of others like him among these poor Jews of Eastern Europe in the mid-Eighteenth Century.

To understand the phenomenon we should perhaps go back 100 years to the eve of one of the blackest episodes in Jewish history—the

1. *Rabbi* is a Hebrew term (which means 'my master') applied to one who combines the offices of *pūjāri* and *śāstri*. To the Chasidim it also has the sense of *Guru*.

appearance of Shabbatai Zvi, who proclaimed himself to be the "annointed one of God," the Messiah. Judaism had of course produced, even from Bible times, various self-proclaimed and self-styled "messiahs." Soon after the destruction of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, there was the warrior Bar Cochba whose dashing military exploits against the Romans in Judea led thousands, including the great scholar Rabbi Akiba, to believe that he was the long awaited Deliverer. In subsequent periods of Jewish history, whenever the yoke of oppression, moral disease, and poverty weighed heavily upon the Jews, the appearance of some "messiah" or other became almost predictable.

Yet for some reason Shabbatai Zvi was different. His popularity in the poor and crowded ghettos of Eastern Europe seemed to grow and grow. Others like Shabbatai Zvi had drawn followings of few or perhaps even many; but he was attracting the masses. After all, Poland was well on its way out of the Dark Ages. But the ghettos of Poland at the same period suffered from all the ignorance, disease, and superstition that had been prevalent during the most depressed periods in Medieval Eastern Europe.

Shabbatai Zvi offered the Jews a glorious way out of their miseries: their Messiah astride a prancing white horse would lead them triumphantly out of the ghettos to the treasure laden ships which would carry them to the Promised Land of Israel. Never before had the Jews of Europe put so much trust and hope in promises like these. Their world was so full of death and gloom, however, that Shabbatai Zvi's outrageous claims were embraced with jubilant dancing in the streets and joyful preparation for the exodus. Then one day the "Great One" simply disappeared; some months later verifiable reports came to substantiate a dreadful rumor—Shabbatai Zvi had fled to Constantinople where he had accepted the faith of Islam. Some of his followers even then remained faithful, creating for themselves fantastic reasons and excuses for their leader's actions. For the majority of Shabbatai Zvi's devotees, however, there was only depression.

Where at this time were the Rabbis, the spiritual leaders to whom the people might turn for answers, for relief from their growing confusion and hopelessness? The reply to this question lies in the fact that in the rarefied atmosphere of the great Jewish seminaries and universities sat scholars of great erudition, not saints of great spiritual attainment. These scholars would spend almost every minute, day and night, in painfully picking apart hair-splitting enigmas and writing commentaries on works which were themselves commentaries of great commentaries. To these men, the highest goal a Jew could achieve was continuous study and mastery of the mammoth expanses of Rabbinic literature.

Of course, the impoverished, semi-literate Jewish masses had little or no hope of attaining to the "spiritual" heights of the learned elite. Thus their religion left them no basis for self-esteem or respect. If great piety was synonymous with great learning, what hope was there for the common man?

Yet in the wake of one charlatan, and catering to the people's disillusionment and suicidal depression, there lurked even greater evils and worse deceptions. One of these was Jacob Frank who led thousands into very negative and spiritually dangerous rites. It seemed that the Jews of Eastern Europe, freakishly kept alive for centuries in various contexts of misery and persecution, were finally about to destroy themselves from within.

It was precisely at this awful juncture that the first of the great Chasidic saints and the founder of the mystical revival made his appearance. His name was Israel ben Eliezer, later referred to by all Jews as the *Baal Shem Tov*—the Master of the Good Name.

Israel was born at the beginning of the eighteenth century to a poor family in the town of Okop in Podolia, on the old Polish-Turkish border. His formal education did not go much beyond the more basic Jewish Scriptures and writings. In his youth, Israel's spiritual light was hidden from all but small children who loved him greatly and would follow him, against their parents' warnings, into the fields where they would dance and sing to lively tunes set to passages of David's Psalms.² People thought him crazy and foolish. Later, as a young man employed as a caretaker in a village study-house, Israel gave an impression of laziness because of his occasional daytime sleeping. In reality, his nights were devoted entirely to meditation and spiritual disciplines and his daytime naps were actually the only rest he ever got. Not until he was thirty-six years old did Israel begin ministering to the great spiritual needs of his people. The following story is told of how the Baal Shem Tov first revealed himself. (I quote from *Tales of the Hasidim* by Martin Buber.)

Israel ben Eliezer had held successively the posts of school assistant, servant in the House of Study, teacher of children, and for a time he acted as driver for his brother-in-law. Finally this man rented a piece of land for him in a village on the Prut river. On the land was an inn which also had room for guests. A short distance away, across the ford, a cave had been hewn into the side of a mountain. There the Baal Shem spent the week sunk in meditation. Whenever a guest came to the inn,

2. The Psalms constitute a book of poems and hymns in praise of God, a part of the Jewish Scriptures,

Israel's wife went to the door and called over to him, and he always responded, and immediately came to wait on the guest. On the Sabbath (which for Jews begins at sundown Friday and ends at sundown Saturday) he stayed at home and wore the white Sabbath robe.

One day—it was on a Tuesday—a disciple of Rabbi Gershon's the Baal Seem's brother-in-law, was on the way to his teacher who lived in the town of Brody. He passed through the village on the Prut, stopped, and went into the inn. Then the woman called to her husband and the Baal Shem came and served the guest his meal. When he had finished eating, he said: Israel, harness the horses; I have to go on."

The Baal Shem harnessed the horses, reported that the carriage was ready, and added: "But how about staying here over the Sabbath?" The guest smiled at this foolish suggestion. But hardly had he driven half a mile, when a wheel broke.

He found that it would be some time before it could be fixed, so he had to go back and spend the night at the inn. The next day, and the next after that, and even on Friday morning, one obstacle after another presented itself, and finally he had no choice but to stay for the Sabbath.

That very night, the last before the day the Baal Shem would complete the thirty-sixth year of his life, Heaven sent him a message that the time for concealment was over.

In the middle of the night, the guest woke up, and from his bed in the main room of the inn, saw a great fire burning in the hearth. He ran there because he thought the logs had caught fire. But then he saw that what he had taken for fire, was a great light. A great white light shone out from the hearth and filled the house.

When Rabbi Gershon's disciple reached Brody, he told what had happened to him and added: "A great light dwells close to you. It would be no more than right for you to go and bring it into the city." They went and met the Baal Shem at the edge of the woods which skirts the village. They wove a seat of green withes for him, set him upon it, on their shoulders, and he spoke words of teaching to them.

Thus in the year 1736 Israel ben Eliezer's nature was revealed for the first time and so began his active mission to the Jews of Poland and Eastern Europe.

In the coming years Rabbi Israel raised many great disciples who in turn along with their disciples taught and preached throughout Eastern Europe. They preached to the common man of hope and joy saying that one need not develop mammoth Intellectual capacities to please God, but must only devote all his actions and thoughts, no matter how lowly, to the

Holy one. They taught the poor Jews to dance and rejoice before God and to pray with devotion and fervor for experience of the Divine Presence. The Chasidic Rabbis wrote almost no books, but their words and deeds were preserved and conveyed by their followers and were eventually collected and written down by a subsequent generation of devotees. Here are a few characteristic stories about some of the great Chasidic masters. Once again I quote from Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*.

I

The Baal Shem said :

"I let sinners come close to me, if they are not proud, I keep the scholars and the sinless away from me if they are proud. For the sinner who knows that he is a sinner, and therefore considers himself base—God is with him, for He 'dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.' But concerning him who prides himself on the fact that he is unburdened by sin, God says : There is not enough room in the world for Myself and him."

II

Rabbi Barukh of Mezbiz, grandson Yehiel was once playing hide-and-seek with another boy. He hid himself well and waited for his playmate to find him. When he had waited for a long time, he came out of his hiding-place, but the other was nowhere to be seen. Now Yehiel realized that he had not looked for him from the very beginning. This made him cry, and crying he ran to his grandfather and complained of his faithless friend. Then tears brimmed in Rabbi Barukh's eyes and he said : "God says the same thing : 'I hide, but no one wants to seek me.'"

III

Concerning the verse in the Scriptures : "But from thence ye will seek the Lord thy God, and thou shalt find him," the maggid of Mezritch said : "You must cry to God and call him father until he becomes your father."

IV

Rabbi Abraham said :

"We say in our prayers : 'Every stature shall bow before Thee.' When man reaches the highest rung, when he reaches his full stature, only then does he become truly humble in his own eyes, and knows what it is : to bow before Thee."

V

Rabbi Rafael of Bershad said : "They say that the proud are reborn as bees. For, in his heart, the proud man says : 'I am

a singer, I am a writer, I am a great one at studying.' And since what is said of such men is true : that they will not turn to God, not even on the threshold of hell, they are reborn after they die. They are born again as bees which hum and buzz : "I am, I am, I am."

VI

Concerning the verse in the Scriptures : "I stood between the Lord and you," Rabbi Mikhal of Zlotchov said : "The 'I' stands between God and us. When a man says 'I' and encroaches upon the word of his Maker, he puts a wall between himself and God. But he who offers his 'I'—there is nothing between him and his Maker. It is to him that the words refer : 'I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me.' When my 'I' has become my beloved's, then it is toward me that his desire turns."

VII

Walking in the street, the rabbi of Berditchev once went up to a man who held an important office and was evil-minded as he was powerful, took hold of the hem of his coat, and said : "Sir, I envy you : When you turn to God, each of your flaws will become a ray of light, and you will shine with a great light. Sir, I envy you your flood of radiance !"

VIII

Once Zalman of Ladi interrupted his prayers and said : "I do not want Your paradise ; I do not want Your coming world. I want You, and You only."

IX

Once, at the close of the Day of Atonement, when Rabbi Shelomo of Karlin was in a gay mood, he said he would tell everyone what he had asked of Heaven on these holy days, and what answer was intended for his request. To the first of his disciples who wanted to be told, he said : "What you asked of God was that He should give you your livelihood at the proper time and without travail, so that you might not be hindered in serving Him. And the answer was that what God really wants of you is not study or prayer, but the sighs of your heart, which is breaking because the travail of gaining a livelihood hinders you in the service of God "

X

Rabbi Shelomo asked : "What is the worst thing the Evil Urge can achieve ?" and he answered : "To make man forget that he is the son of a King."

SRI SRI MUKTANANDA GIRI MAHARAJ*

(Swami Bhagavatananda Giri)

Invocation :

Salutations to Sri Gurudeva-Sri Dakshinamurti Sankara himself-who beholds the world within like a reflection in a mirror and the world outside projected by *māyā* like the scenes in a dream, and thus visualizes the Self alone at the moment of awakening.

It is our great good fortune that we are celebrating today the 26th. *Sannyāsa* anniversary of Gurudeva Sri Sri Muktananda Giri Maharaj by the grace of revered Mataji and the venerable Giriji Maharaj in the holy city of Kashi. The sanctity of this holy city is enhanced by the flow of the Ganges in the northern direction. The spiritual sanctity of Kashi, considered to be the oldest city in the world, has been especially mentioned from the Vedic period onwards in the *Srutis*, *Smritis*, the *Puranas* and the *Itihāsa* tradition. The *Puranas* especially attach great importance and sanctity to Kashi, so much so that the *Skanda Purana* devotes one whole section to it. It is even believed that Kashi balanced on the trident of Lord Kashi Vishvanatha escapes destruction at the time of universal dissolution. Kashi is frequently referred to in all the *Upanishads* and the *Muktikopānishad* particularly states that one who dies anywhere in the holy precincts of Kashi is sure to obtain salvation. The Lord Kashi Vishvanatha himself utters the *Taraka Mantra* into the right ear of the departing *jiva*, thus absolving him from all sins and thereby leading him to Him.² It has been noticed that the right ear of all the persons who have breathed their last in Mataji's Ashrama turns upwards as if to receive the holy mantra.

The spiritual efficacy of Kashi is also evident from the fact that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva, during his stay here, saw the divine form of Sri Kashi Vishvanatha Himself.

* (A discourse delivered by Sri Bhagvatananda Giri on 13th. April 1965 on the occasion of the 26th, Sannyasa anniversary of the Revered Gurudeva Sri Sri Muktananda Giri Maharaj.)

1. visvam darpaṇa-dṛṣṭmāna-nagarī-tulyam-nijāntargatam
pasyannātmani māyayā bahirivodbhutam yathā nidrayā.
yaḥ śakṣat kurutu prabodh samaye svātm̄namevādvayam
tasmai śrī-guru-murtaye nama idam śrī-dakshināmurtaye.
2. punarāvṛtṭi-rahitam muktim prāpnoti mānavaḥ
yatra kutrāpi vā Kāśȳm marane sa mahesvarah. (20)
jantor-dakshina-karne tu mantāram samup̄diset
nirdhutasesha-papaugho matsārupyam bhajatayam. (21)

Kashi, also called Varanasi, is mentioned in the *Jātalopaniṣad*. In answer to sage Atri's query, Rishi Yajnavalkya stated that Varanasi was the "avimukta kshetra", because situated between 'Varuṇa' and 'Nasi'. These are explained as the two forces that annihilate all sins.¹ In spiritual connotation Kashi or Varanasi is situated at the point above the nose and between the eyebrows at the *Ajnachakra*. It is stated :

"The juncture of the eyebrows and the nose is the point of 'sandhi'. The knower of Brahman who concentrates on this point is "avimukta."²

Kashi thus described as the 'avimukta kshetra' is the spiritual centre of India. In days of yore sages and scholars who wished to have their philosophical or spiritual precepts accepted had to expound them first at Kashi. It was here that Adiguru Sri Sankaracharya wrote his well known commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*. Similarly the propounders of various sects like Sri Vallabhacharya, Sri Madhavacharya, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and others had to come to Kashi to propagate their teachings.

Kashi has been the chief centre of three religious faiths, namely Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Beginning from Raja Harischandra, pious kings, saints and scholars, like Sri Madhusudana Saraswati, Tulasi Das and Kabir have belonged to Kashi. It is our great privilege that the 26th *sannyāsa* anniversary of Sri Muktananda Giri Maharaj is being celebrated in this holy city.

I shall now try to describe in brief the salient features of the life of Sri Giriji Maharaj.

Sri Giriji was born in the Sultanpur village of Tipperah District (now in East Pakistan) in the month of *Vaiśākha*, 1977. It is in this month that many great souls have assumed their bodily forms. All the three memorable events, the birth, the enlightenment and the *nirvāna* of Lord Buddha occurred on *Vaiśākha Pūrṇimā*. Lord Narasinha, Sri Paraśurama, Sri Adiguru Śankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, Sri Śivaji and our gracious Mataji have all come to this earth in the holy month of *Vaiśākha*.

The exact date of the birth of Sri Giriji is not known. She was the eighth child of her parents, Sri Ramakanta Bhattacharya of Bharadvaja Gotra and Sri Hārsundari Devi. Sri Ramakantaji belonged to a family which could trace scholars, pious and virtuous members for many generations. Himself was a scholar and a very pious man. He was a *kulaguru*

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1. sarvān indriya-kṛita-doshān vārayatīti tena Varuṇo bhavati.
sarvān indriya-kṛitaṁ papān-nāsayatīti tena Nāsī bhavatīti.
 2. bhruvor-ghrānasya cha caḥ sandhiḥ sa eṣha sandhir-bhavatīti
etaḍ-vai sandoim sandyām brahmaivid upasata sosvimukta upāsyā iti.

and had many disciples. His aunt had become a *Sati* and one of his brothers, Sri Dinakanta Bhattacharya had received the title of *Vidyāsāgara*.

Giriji was named Vidhumukhi Devi. She lost her father at the age of ten and her mother a year and a half later.

Childhood : From early childhood her disposition was extraordinarily calm, affectionate, sweet and courteous. She never had a quarrel or argument with anyone. She preferred peaceful solitude to playing with children of her own age. On being asked as to what she thought of God in her childhood, she stated that even then she believed that there was only one God. At that time she also felt that if she went in search of Him, far away, she would surely find him.

These qualities that were apparent in Sri Giriji at such an early age are referred to in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇas* (7-13), as the attributes of a *sannyāsī*. It is stated that a *sannyāsī* should not argue with anyone and should be able to tolerate the censure of others.

Everyone appeared to her as her *apan jan*, her very own. From the very beginning she was indifferent to food. She would eat only if someone gave her food, otherwise she never asked for it. She was not tempted by any delicacies. On the other hand she derived great pleasure and satisfaction from serving food to others. This trait was observed in the great saint Oriya Baba as well. He took delight in serving food to his devotees and used to say that eating was the pleasure of the *jīva*, whereas feeding others was heavenly bliss.

Giriji never took anything that did not belong to her without asking for permission first. She had great faith in religious acts and started observing various kinds of fasts from the age of seven. For four years she regularly undertook the special fasts enjoined for the months of *Kartika*, *Agrahan*, *Magh* and *Phalguna*.

Education :— Sri Giriji started going to school at the age of seven. Her schooling was discontinued when she lost her mother. She enjoyed listening to readings from *Rāmayaṇa* and *Mahabharata*; she still remembers many of the legends heard in those days. In spite of her meagre education Sri Giriji is an inspired poet. Innumerable devotional songs and verses have poured forth from her lips spontaneously. If recorded they would be of invaluable help to many devotees and *sādhakas*. The substance of one such inspired composition is given below. It was composed at Kashi on 20th, March 1965.

“The *Kunḍalini* dwells in a hidden spot in *Mūlādhāra*. It rushes towards *Maṇipura* after piercing through its place of repose by spiritual effort. If good fortune holds, it wishes to keep awake. It stays in seclu-

sion in *Anāhata*. That subtle force listens to everything. Advancing to *Viśuddha Chakra* it consumes edibles bit by bit. *Kundalinī* united with all the nerves proceeds towards the *Sahasrāra Chakra*. *Ājnā Chakra* (absorbed in meditation) remains unaware. Piercing the *Brahmarandhra* it proceeds upwards. Taking along the lustre of the luminous it mounts to the sky. This *Kundalinī* force moves within all *jīvas* though they are not conscious of it. O Mind ! seek it within yourself and discover it. You are misled all the time by 'me' and 'mine'. There is only God in this Universe. You are intoxicated by worldly enjoyment and have forgotten Him. O Mind ! take refuge in Him. Thus you will be freed from the cycle of birth and death and always be one with him. Oh what bliss ! You will always see Sri Hari Govinda. You will be united with the Eternal Self (*ātmā*). Self is the real friend of Self, (on realizing this) the cycle of birth and death will cease to operate."

Giriji belonged to a highly religious-minded and pious family, in which *Durga Puja* were regular annual features. No one really knows when *Durga Puja* in the family was first started. The family also possessed a *Sri Nārāyana Vighraha*. Sri Giriji was herself keenly interested in all forms of worship, but she was particularly drawn towards *Narayana*. Of all the names of the Lord the name *Narayana* appealed to her most. At times she dreamt of various gods and felt as if she was being called. At bedtime she would pray to Lord Krishna 'O Guru ! I offer my humble obeisance at your lotus feet,' and then she would fall asleep.

Family life :—Sri Giriji was married to Sri Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya of Vidyakut (District Tipperah now in East Pakistan) when she was twelve years and four months old. Giriji and *Dada Mashai* were an ideal couple extremely pious, truthful and religious minded. They literally followed the advice imparted by Sri Krishna to Uddhava in the *Bhāgavata Purāna* (22-27-42) :—

"To be born as a *Brahmin* is a rare privilege indeed. It should not be frittered away by indulging in worldly enjoyments, but it should be utilised by leading an austere life and ultimately striving for salvation."¹

Dada Mashai by his own inclination led a detached life. It is said that once he left home to lead a life of renunciation. He had reached a high state of spiritual evolution. He would take an *ektara*² and sing the praises of the Lord.

The family life of Sri Giriji conforms to the ideal laid down in the *Bhāgavata Purāna* (22-17-52), for the life of a householder :—

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1. brāhmanasya hi dehosyam kshudrakāmāya neshyate.
kricchrāya tapase cheha pretyānanta-sukhāya cha.
 2. Musical instrument with one string.

"In spite of the pressing needs of his large household, a householder should not be too devoted to his family ; nor should he be negligent of his religious duties. A householder who is not attached to his body or family cannot be entangled by family ties as he realizes that heavenly joys are as transient as those of this world."¹

Keeping this in mind a householder should not get entangled in family affairs. He should live in a detached manner like a guest in the house. Family ties cannot ensnare one who has conquered his ego, that is the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'.²

This description of a completely detached life was fully reflected in the family life of Sri Giriji and Dada Moshai. Giriji used to discharge her family duties in a selfless manner without any involvement. She faced the joys and sorrows of life that came her way with great equanimity. Her financial condition in those days was far from satisfactory, but she bore all privations cheerfully and never thought of asking for help.

Sri Gopalji once appeared to her and asked her for one pice worth of *batashas* (sugarpuffs) in *bhoga*. She confessed that as she did not have even a single pice, she would borrow the money and offer *bhoga*. Ever since then offering the *bhoga* of *batashas* has become a daily routine with her.

We find that all the ten attributes of *dharma* are inherent in Sri Giriji. They are as follows : forbearance, forgiveness, self-restraint, purity, control of the sense organs, pure understanding, knowledge, truth, absence of anger, non-stealing.³ Let us first try to understand what *dharma* is. It is explained as :—

"That which sustains the people. According to the *Śāstras*, the activity relating to this sustenance is *dharma*."⁴

1. *Dhṛiti*--that is forbearance. To be happy and contented in whatever circumstances the Lord puts one. Not to be affected or upset by any misfortune. To be beyond joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, peace and tribulations. Sri Giriji appeared to be forbearance incarnate in the midst of the trials and tribulations of family life.
2. *Kshamā*--forgiveness : Not to be moved by insult, abuse, censure or any wrong done to one. To remain calm and to forgive offenders.

1. Kutumbeshu na sajjeta na pramādyet kutumbapī. vipaschin-nasvārm pasyed-adrishtam apī drishtavat.

2. ittham partimrisan mukto griheshvatithivad vasan. nā griheshvanubadhyeta nirma-mo nirahamritah.

3. dhṛitih kshamā damos steyam sauchamindriya—nigrahah.
dhāir-vidyā satyam akrodho dasakm dharma-lakshanam.

4. dhāranād dharmamityāhuh dharmam dharayate drajāh
yassyād dhārana samyuktan sa dharmā iti nischayah.

This is the attribute of the highest *dharma*. Hiranyakasyapa tortured Prahlāda and tried to take his life but the Lord preserved him and destroyed his father. The Lord then asked Prahlāda to ask for a boon. Prahlāda begged the Lord to forgive his father as he had acted through ignorance. Christ did something similar. When crucified he prayed for his prosecutors : "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." *Chaitanya Mahāprabhu* also reformed the wicked Jagai and Madhai by his grace. It was his principle that "praises of Hari should always be sung by one who is more tolerant than a tree and who respects a disrespectful person,"¹

Similarly it has been noticed that Sri Giriji cheerfully put up with any abuse, censure or insult that came her way.

3. *Dama* : self-restraint is the control of the six internal adversaries ; namely desire, anger, avarice, attachment, pride and envy. This self-restraint came to Sri Giriji without any conscious effort on her part.
4. *Asteya*—non-stealing : It is the opposite of *steya*, which means to appropriate the material possessions of others and to deprive them of their rights and not merely stealing as is generally understood. *Asteya* is actually another form of Truth. The poor and starving man who steals to appease his hunger is not as great a culprit as any of the following :—
 - (a) A tyrant who usurps the political, social, religious and economic rights of his subjects.
 - (b) A greedy usurer who charges exorbitant interest and manages to usurp the belonging of the poor.
 - (c) A dishonest tradesman who makes money by adulteration.
 - (d) Corrupt judges.
 - (e) Avaricious lawyers.
 - (f) Greedy doctors and *vaidyas*. Mental peace can be obtained by the observance of *asteya*. This quality also is inherent in Sri Giriji. Since her childhood she has never taken anything belonging to others without their consent.
5. Purity—*Śauca* : It is of two types—external purity and inner purity.
 - (a) External purity : To keep oneself, one's belongings and surroundings clean by the use of water and earth. External purity also

1. trinādapi suniśchaiva tarorapi sahiṣṭhunā.
amānino mānadena kīrtanīyah sadā hariḥ.

means keeping the body clean and healthy by regular, pure and nourishing diet.

- (b) Inner purity : To avoid jealousy, pride and hatred ; and not to indulge in finding fault with others. To remove evil thoughts by inculcating good thoughts and to substitute evil behaviour by good deeds is purity of the mind. Mental purity is achieved by the removal of ignorance through enlightenment. Both external purity and inner purity are found in Giriji's life. Her life throughout has been completely pure and righteous. She has never been seen to dislike or envy others.

She is untouched by pride. The difference between a *Jivātmā* and a *mahātmā* is that the former observes his own merits and the shortcomings of others, whereas the latter is incapable of seeing anyone's shortcomings and discovers only their virtues. Giriji is a *mahātmā* in the real sense. She manages to discover only virtues even in the vilest of persons approaching her, while others may see only their shortcomings. This quality is well illustrated by the following story :—

Once upon a time a *mahātmā* was walking along the bank of the Ganges with his devotee. On the way they came across the rotting carcass of a donkey. The companion unable to bear the stench drew the attention of the *mahātmā* to the rotting carcass. The *mahātmā* ignoring it, exclaimed —“Look what lovely white teeth the dead donkey has.”

6. Control of senses :—It is frequently mentioned in the *Bhāgavata* that body, mind, intellect and the senses are bestowed to enable the *jīva* to realize God. This is amply illustrated in the life of Sri Giriji.
7. *Dhī* :—Pure intellect, an essential attribute of *dharma* brings about discrimination (*viveka*), renunciation, control, tranquillity, forbearance, peace, faith and the desire for salvation. The inherent pure intellect of Sri Giriji has automatically brought about spiritual knowledge and renunciation.
8. *Vidyā* :—The knowledge which enables man to attain salvation is *Brahma Vidyā*. There is a legend in the Upanishads that once Naradaji went to Sri Sanakaji and other sages and placed his problem before them, that though he had studied all the *Śāstras* he had failed to attain Self-realization. The sages replied :—

“The knowledge of Brahman is not acquired by merely reading the *Śāstras*. It is essential to listen, to meditate, to reflect and to follow the instructions of the Guru.” That the knowledge of Brahman does not depend on the study of the *Śāstras* but is self-illuminating is

illustrated by the lives of great sages and saints. Giriji though not educated in the worldly sense is fully versed in *Brahma Vidya*.

9. Truth :—The highest form of truth is its observance in thought, word and deed. Sri *Veda Vyāsa* in his commentary on *Yoga Darśana* (II, 30), explains truth as the capacity to be accurate in thought and word. Manu too lays down :

“Speak the truth, but only that truth which is pleasing and not that which is unpleasant.”¹

Without any voluntary effort this dictum has become a part of Sri Giriji's life. She cannot help uttering anything but truth.

10. *Akrodha* :—absence of anger : No one can obtain peace unless he is free from anger. The derivative meaning of *Krodha* is that which obstructs the path of eternal bliss.¹ The Gita also says : “From desire anger cometh forth, from anger proceedeth delusion, from delusion confused memory. Anger leads to destruction of reason and of discrimination.”²

Swami Vidyāraṇya has commented on *krodha* (anger) in '*Jīvan-mukti-viveka*'. According to him anger is of two types. Firstly anger which is directed towards another and secondly anger of others which is directed towards oneself. The remedy suggested by Yājñavalkya for the former is to direct one's anger towards 'anger' itself as it is the chief impediment in the attainment of the four purposes of life, namely *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *moksha*. If others are annoyed with oneself, one should never think that others are unnecessarily angry since one is not at fault. On the other hand one should realize that one's greatest fault lies in not attaining salvation from the cycle of birth and death. The sage Yājñavalkya addresses anger thus : “Hail to thee ! you torment and oppress him who takes refuge in thee. If one is the object of another's anger, one becomes conscious of one's own shortcomings and is thus led to detachment, So I bow to thee.”³

1. satyaṃ brūyāt priyaṃ brūyāt na brūyāt satyamapriyam.

1. kaṃ-sukhaṃ rodhayati.

2. kāmāt krodhos bhijāyate krodhād bhavati sammohah. sammohād buddhi-vibhramah.

3. apakāriṇi kopaśchet kope kopaḥ katham na te.

dharmārtha-kāma-mokshānām prasahya paripanthini. Yājñavalkopanishad, 20.

(b) na mesparādhaḥ kimakāraṇe nriṇām madabhyasuetyaPi naiva cintayet.

na yat krito prāg-bhava-bandha.niḥsritis-tatos parādhaḥ paramo na chintyatām.

(c) namos stu kopa-devāya svāśraya-jvāline bhriṣam,

kopasya mama vairāgya-dāyine dosha-bodhine.

It is remarkable that whatever the provocation, Sri Giriji is never annoyed or irritated ; on the other hand she sometimes responds with a laugh.

Sri Giriji, who thus has all the ten attributes of *dharmā* inherent in her, led the life of an ideal householder with *Dada mahasaya*.

1. Their first child, a beautiful little daughter was born to them in 1893. She was named Sarvamangala. She had a very short span of life, surviving for nine months only.
2. The coming of Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi : As in the days gone by, Devaki and Vasudeva were blessed with Lord Krishna and Devahuti and sage Kardama with Sri Kapilaji the Samkhya incarnation, as the fruit of their penances, similarly our Didima and Dada *Mahasaya* as a result of their penances in previous births, were graced by the all-compassionate Mataji—the mother of the universe and Brahman incarnate. Mataji has been perfection personified from the time she assumed this earthly form on the of 30th April, 1896. Mahamahopadhyaya Sri Gopinath Kaviraj writes in the introduction of 'Ma Anandamayi' by Sri Gurupriya Devi : "Ma is inscrutable. She transcends the range of thought. though all thoughts and ideas in infinite forms and in infinite ways live and move and have their being in her. It is difficult to grasp the infinite for those who breathe in the finite. One who desires to understand Mataji will have to become one with her through complete self-surrender. This self-surrender that is the extinction of the ego can only be attained by the grace of Mataji herself. 'Mother what are you in fact ?' was the question once put to Mataji by someone, to which she answered : "I am what you consider me to be."

The coming of MA is a great blessing. Mataji is compassion as it were. Every glance, every sentence and every action is a showering of grace and benevolence. She is beyond time and space. Mataji is a unique blend of the one and the many, of the part and the whole. The dynamic and the static mode of *Brahman* have merged in Ma. Mataji is the quintessence of Truth. She is the greatest friend of all who aspire to Truth—may they belong to any country or creed.

3. Sri Kali Prasanna was born three years later. He lived to be seven and was conscious till the very last moment. Uttering the words—"Ma I am leaving", he breathed his last.
4. Almost three years later Sri Durga Prasanna was born. He died at the age of about four and a half.

5. Sri Hari Prasanna, the next child, lived for only one month and a half. Surprisingly all these three brothers passed away within six months.
6. Then followed Sri Surabala. She is reported to have stated that she had come from the same place as her elder sister (Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi). She departed from this earth when she was seventeen. It is said that Mataji had thrice repeated the injunction to go before Sri Surabala's death. At first she refused to go, but when Mataji said that she would have to go, Surabala acquiesced. When Mataji asked her where she was going, she replied: "I shall merge myself in your lotus feet." With these words she departed from this world. After her death Mataji said that Surabala had gone to the *Urdhva-loka* that is the *Devi-loka*. Mataji added "In one sphere this body put a barrier round her but she broke through the barrier and went higher to the *Urdhva-loka*."
7. Sri Hemangini Devi was the next child. She was married and has been survived by her children. Sri Giriji herself initiated her into *sannyāsa* before she passed away at Kashi after a serious illness.
8. Sri Jadunath Bhattacharya is Didima's last child. He is known as Makhan or 'Mamu'. Mamu has constructed a house near Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi Ashrama, Kashi, and has installed Sri *Vipineśvara Mahadeva* therein. Mamu lived as a householder but now he observes the rules of *Vānaprastha*. He devotes his services to the Ashrama.

Giriji first received her initiation and a *mantra* in a dream. She used this *mantra* for her *japa* for many years. Later on in 1905, Giriji and Dada *Mahasaya* received initiation and *mantra* from their family Guru Sri Kali Krishna Vidyavinoda—a resident of Krishnapura-Sonargaon. Sri Giriji always keeps with her the photographs of both her *kulaguru* and the *sannyāsa* Gurus.

(To be continued)

"In all matters, without fail depend wholly upon God, to whom you should submit your heart's yearnings and petitions."

—Mata Anandamayi

THE UPANISHADS AND THE LIFE DIVINE

(Synthesis of Science and Religion)

II

"Divya Darshi"

In view of the incredible progress of natural science and social philosophy and psychology, it is a pertinent question even for highly educated men, whether the eternal religion of the Upanishads can stand the test of time. Yes, it is emphatically affirmed that the religion of the Upanishads has nothing to fear from the tide of advance of science and society. If material conditions improve, superstition and ignorance are removed and man becomes rational in thinking and behaviour and enjoys perfect freedom to apply his mind to the unravelling of the mystery of his ephemeral existence on earth. If a materialistic philosophy is not imposed on him in the most unscientific way in the name of scientific progress, and man develops a habit of enquiry, free from any preconceived idea of God, it can be boldly and with emphasis declared that people in general will veer round to the religion of the Upanishads. They will meet here a perfect understanding of the unlimited dimension of human personality. A new horizon of enlarged consciousness will open for man. It is a strange experience to meet people who boast of their scientific outlook, yet are found most dogmatic when they talk about religion. Even most enlightened views on religion, as arrived at by the Upanishads, perfectly consistent with reason and rational investigation, do not provoke their interest, as they are afraid that the acceptance of those ideas will rob them of their age-long pleasing fancies of their own religion.

In fact science and religion are two great disciplines, which, when combined harmoniously can bring about an all round development of human genius. They can heartily embrace each other and work for the good of humanity without detriment to the cause for which each stands. In the Upanishads one comes across bold questions and a perfectly rational attitude to religion. After a thorough investigation into the real nature of man, the sages of the Upanishads made a fundamental discovery: Man in his essential nature is divine; behind the finite man is the *Atman*, ever free, ever pure and perfect. The body, the mind and the ego are mere externals of the real man who is immortal and divine. This discovery led to the further discovery that the same divinity is the ground of the world

as well. This they termed the *Brahman*, the totality of the self and not-self.

In the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (1. 1. 3.), we find the following question put by an earnest student to the Divine teacher : *Kasmin no Bhagavo vijñāte sarvam idam vigñātām bhavati.* "What is the reality, oh Blessed-one, by knowing which we can know all there is in the universe?" Is there such a unique reality by knowing which we can understand all the manifestations of nature, internal as well as external? Is there a unity behind this diversity, a one behind the many? To this question the teacher gives a very significant reply—*Dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yad Brahma-vid vadanti parā caiva aparā.* "Two are the types of knowledge to be acquired by man, so say the knowers of the *Brahman* : one is called *para-vidyā*, higher or supreme knowledge; the other is called *aparā vidyā*, lower knowledge." Both must be investigated. Of these the lower or ordinary knowledge consists of the sacred vedas, phonetics, the code of rituals, grammar, epistemology, prosody and astronomy. In fact it includes all the sacred books, literature, art, history and science.

Here we have a scientific mind of the highest order, impersonal, objective and detached. There is no desire to put forth a pet opinion; Truth alone is the motive power, even if that Truth goes against one's cherished attachments and aversions. The teacher says that even the Vedas, the sacred books belong to the category of lower knowledge. Who would dare to say that his sacred books are not of the highest knowledge except he who is of a detached and scientific frame of mind and is in search of Truth and not dogmatic—he who has no truth to hide, no opinion to uphold, no prejudices to defend, who just wants to find Truth and is prepared to sacrifice everything into the bargain. Suffused with the spirit of Truth, they declared :

सत्यमेव जयते नानृतम्

सत्येन पन्था विततो देवेयान : (Mundaka Upanishad)

"Truth alone triumphs, not untruth. The path to the highest excellence is spread out through Truth only."

In reality the teachers of the Upanishads had the detachment and boldness, proceeding from the love of Truth, to say that even the Vedas, held in such veneration by themselves and by their people, were secondary. All the sacred books and all the positive sciences and arts are but lower knowledge, *aparā vidya*. What then is left to be included in the category of higher knowledge, *parā vidyā*? The teacher proceeds to indicate this elusive theme. There is a tremendous field of knowledge still left, he thinks, but it belongs to a different order. So he says,

अथ परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते ।

“That is *parā* by which Imperishable is realized.” Science and all the rest deal only with things that change, that are perishable.

Science gives us knowledge of structural form and not knowledge of the content ; though we feel in the words of Eddington : “All through the physical universe runs that unknown content. If the positive sciences cannot get at it, there must be another discipline, another line of inquiry which is able to give us that knowledge.” Herein we might have an idea of the broad outline of the trend of the modern scientific thinker’s thought. The relationship between science and religion was not at all happy for the last two centuries. In the twentieth century, however, a new approach can be noticed and the representative thinkers among scientists and religious people are beginning to discern a close interrelation between these two branches of human knowledge. Although modern scientific thought does not yet have a recognised place for any spiritual reality or principle, several scientists of the twentieth century have endeavoured to soften the materialism of physical science and to find a place for spiritual experience in the scientific world picture. Science admits today that it deals only with the appearances of things and not with the reality behind those appearances. Some of the greatest modern physicists tell us that what science has revealed of the world around us is only the outer aspect of things. Behind this observable universe there is another unobservable universe. This is a great confession of the limitation of science and its methods. We find scientists like the late Sir James writing books on the scientific view of the universe with such titles as, “The Mysterious Universe.” In spite of all the knowledge that he has gained, the scientist feels that he has only scratched the surface of nature, that he is yet far away from the heart of the problem of the universe. He is compelled to write a book on “The New Background of Science”. This new background is nothing but the spiritual mystery of the universe. If the mystery of the universe has eluded the scientist so much, the mystery of man has eluded him even more.

Sir Arthur Eddington, the famous mathematician and physicist, concludes his book, “Space, Time and Gravitation”, with a pointed reference to the predicament : “We have found a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown. We have devised profound theories, one after another to account for its origin. At last we have succeeded in reconstructing the creature that made the footprint. And lo, it is own. Man as thinker, man as observer, man as the Self, has left his footprints on the shores of the unknown.”

It is time that science tried to unravel this remarkable mystery of man. Man is primarily a subject, man cannot be reduced to objective dimensions. He is essentially the seer, the knower the observer, he is the *dr̥k* or *sākṣin* or *kṣetrajñā* in the language of the Upanishads.

नैव स्त्री न पुमानेष न चैवाय नपुंसकः ।

यद यच्छरीरमादत्ते तेन तेन स बध्यते ।

“Man is neither male nor female nor neuter, but holds the form in which it is enveloped.”

बालाग्रशतभागस्य शतघा साल्पतस्य च । भागो जीवः

स विशेषः । स चानन्त्याय कल्पते । (Swetaswetara Upanishad.)

“Though like a hundredth part of a hair, the conscious being appears on the earth, still it goes on for eternity and has the possibility of unlimited extension.”

It is also curious to note that in the lecture on “The Evolutionary Vision”, delivered in 1959 to commemorate the century of the publication of Darwin’s “Origin of Species,” Sir Julian Huxley, the noted biologist, gave a spiritual orientation for the evolutionary process :

“The evolutionary vision shows us mind as enthroned above matter, quantity subordinate to quality...In the light of our present knowledge man’s most comprehensive aim is seen not as mere survival... but as greater fulfilment - the fuller realisation of more possibilities by the human species and more of its component members individually.” (“Evolution after Darwin”.) He even suggests that the two books by Darwin “The Origin of Species” and “The Descent of Man” should have been properly named : “The Evolution of Organism” and “The Ascent of Man”.

Man is moving towards greater possibility of Divinity ; he is ascending. In reality the whole of modern scientific thought is in the throes of a silent spiritual revolution with the emergence of mind and consciousness and the consequent need to develop what James Jeans calls “a new background of science.” But the problem is who can correct those thinkers who based their philosophy on Darwin’s “Origin of species” and became the votaries of triumphant materialistic philosophy ? They obliterated religion from the scheme of life and proclaimed : “Religion is a sort of spiritual bonze, the true source of humbugging mankind” (Lenin : “Socialism and Religion.”) Had they been acquainted with the religion of the Upanishads, the whole picture would have been different. Whatever they severely criticised as religion, was the religion as revealed in the west, which has no possibility of any synthesis with

science. It is also very gratifying to note that in the Communist Manifesto Marx lamented over the loss of heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour which was destroyed by the bourgeoisie, when he said : "It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour." Religion which he encountered in Europe was unscientific and dogmatic. Even men like Bertrand Russel who claimed to be an out and out materialist, betrayed his mind when he said : "A purely personal religion, so long as it is content to avoid assertions which science can disprove may survive undisturbed in the most scientific age —" ("Science and Religion")

These men had glimpsed a religion which might move in consonance with the march of time ; but they did not come across such a religion in their land of birth. Men like the great German poets Goethe and Rilke, the high-souled Tolstoy were abundantly misunderstood and branded heretics and non-believers, because they could not reconcile their intellect and judgement with any personal God, although they had the deepest reverence for Christ and they were ardent seekers of divinity. In this respect we are fortunate to be born in the land of the Upanishads which always inspire man to transcend the personal limits and say about God :

न तस्य प्रतिमास्ति यस्य नाम महत् यशः ।

"He has no image. He is great and His greatness can be glorified and man be overwhelmed with his glory."

The religion of the Upanishads will be the resort of all rational men of the world if they do not develop any prejudice against it, as it may not be the religion in which they were born. If people do not lose their self in the glory of technology and social philosophy and develop a true scientific mind of rational investigation even in the field of religion (which is expected of rational men), the religion of the Upanishads will be the religion of the whole of mankind embracing all religions ; it will broaden the outlook of man and allow him a glimpse of the true religion even in the background of the totality of human experience. It is also astounding to observe that in the cosmology of the physical universe, the Upanishads reveal many points of context. The fundamental position in the cosmology of both is what the Upanishads say in the words of Swami Vivekananda : "The postulate of a self-evolving cause—i. e. the universe is evolving from a great cause, Upanishads call it Brahman, which is a universal spiritual principle."

The Taittiriya Upanishad (111-1) defines the Brahman in a majestic utterance, which will be welcomed by every scientific thinker and find immense scope of imagination to understand the mystery of man and its spiritual significance.

Yatovā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti ; yat prayantabhi samviśanti ; Tad vijigñāsasva ; Tad Brahmāti.

“Wherefrom all these beings are born ; by which, being born, they abide; into which at the time of dissolution they enter—seek to know That; That is Brahman.”

Evolution has revealed that the mystery of existence stirs in man as the mystery of the Self. The mystery of the universe will ever remain a mystery until the mystery of the Self is cleared. Till then all our conclusions about the Truth of the universe proceeding from science and philosophy, theology or logic will be speculative ventures yielding mere postulates and conjectures. The mystery of the universe is finally resolved through the discovery of the solution of the mystery within man himself. The sages of the Upanishads discovered the centre of the universe in the heart of man. *Tat twam asi.* “That thou art” proclaims the Chāndogya Upanishad. It is the consciousness of the Supreme Soul that will unravel the mystery of existence and of the universe. The Brhadāranyāka Upanishad says :

यः सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन् सर्वेभ्यो भूतेभ्योऽन्तरो
यं सर्वाणि भूतानि शरीरं यः सर्वाणि भूता यन्तश्चे
यमयति एष तु आत्मा अन्तर्यामी अमृतः ।

“That which exists in all beings and which is within everything ; which is the body of all beings, which regulates and constructs the inner being, is immortal bliss, the supreme soul.”

Herein, in the vast embrace of Upanishadic religion, science can have its full extension and still be churned of the Infinite Bliss. Referring to this spiritual kinship between modern science and Upanishads (Vedānta), Swami Vivekananda said in the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 (and how prophetic was his statement.) —“Manifestation and not creation is the word of science today and the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages (in the Upanishads) is going to be taught in more forcible language and with further light from the latest conclusions of science.” (Complete works, vol I, p. 15).

The religion of the Upanishads is the religion of man in quest of the mystery of the universe and the mystery of science. Herein science and religion will live in perfect harmony and peaceful embrace.

(To be continued)

MĀTRI LĪLĀ

(January—March 1970)

In the last issue of *Ananda Vartā* we had been obliged to give the sad news of Sri Haribabaji Maharaj leaving his mortal body on the 3rd of January in our Varanasi Ashram. His departure from this world was as beautiful and inspiring as every phase of his extraordinary life of immaculate saintliness. Mataji was sitting by his side since the evening, while on the veranda outside his room the girls of our Ashram were singing in beautiful modulations kirtan of "Sri Ram, jai Ram, jai jai Ram." Shortly before the end, the picture of his *Iṣṭa devatā*, Sri Gouranga Mahaprabhu, was taken from the wall and put near him. During the last few minutes Mataji stood up watching the *mahatma* intently. At 1.40 a.m. he suddenly opened his eyes, looked at Mataji and breathed his last. There can be no doubt that it was a passing into immortality, into life eternal. He had been determined to be in Mataji's physical presence at the time of leaving the body and so it was. It may not be by mere coincidence that another well-known *mahatma*, Dandi Swami Sri Somashram passed away the same day at Hardwar and that the great, very aged Swami Sri Krishnashram of Gangotri took *mahasamadhi* the same week.

During a quarter of a century, Sri Haribabaji Maharaj played a very special role in Mataji's *lila*. A saint of the highest order, he was utterly childlike and simple and there was not a trace of self-consciousness about the fact that thousands of disciples looked upon him as God-incarnate. He was obviously one of the very few who understood Mataji's real nature. Before Sri Haribabaji's advent, Mataji had been quite unaccountable, she would not commit herself to any time, place or programme. For the sake of Haribabaji she began to attend *satsangs* at regular hours. He made it a point to take part in Mataji's birthday celebrations and would usually spend the rest of the summer up to *Gurupurnima* with Ma. One could then be sure that Mataji would not leave the place during that period. Later he also sometimes attended our yearly *Samyam Vrata* and Mataji would be present at Sri Haribabaji's birthday celebrations at Holi wherever they were held. About four years ago, in January 1966, he had fallen seriously ill and Mataji hurried to Hoshiarpur from Varanasi. When she left Sri Haribabaji ten days later, his health and spirits had visibly improved and he was well on the way to recovery. When during the last few months his heart trouble recurred, Mataji went to Delhi several times to see the ailing *mahatma*. Before proceeding to Naimi-

sharanya on December 7th, she said to him, "Baba, wait for twenty-five days!" Exactly twenty-six days later he left this world on a Saturday. He had been born on a Saturday and his birthday, this last Holi also fell on a Saturday. On January 6th his body was given *samadhi* at Bundh.

Mataji remained at Varanasi until January 15th. A number of dignitaries came to visit Ma during that period. One day a group of about 15 German scholars had her *darsana*. They asked questions and were delighted with her simple and straightforward replies. On January 8th the new Vice-Chancellor of the Benares Hindu University, Dr. K.L. Srimali, spent about an hour with Mataji. On the 13th, the Vice-President of India, Sri G. S. Pathak, with his wife and grandson, paid a visit to the Mata Anandamayi Hospital. After being shown round and expressing his satisfaction and appreciation of the arrangements and activities of the hospital, he and his family met Mataji and had lunch at the Ashram.

On January 14th, *Makara Sankranti*, the anniversary of the *Savitri Mahayajna* that had been performed at the Ashram from 1947-1950, was celebrated in great style and with great joy, since, after a lapse of several years, Mataji was present for the occasion.

The next evening Mataji, accompanied by a few *sadhus* of our Ashram, left for Bundh to grace with her presence the religious functions held in honour of Sri Haribabaji. Reaching Anupshar on the 16th morning, she was carried from there to Bundh in a palanquin, as the road of several miles is very bad. The festivities had started on January 12th and were in full swing. Swami Krishnanand Avadhutji was in charge of the whole programme. *Raslilā* and *Ramlilā* were enacted in Mataji's presence. In the night of the 18th, between 1-2 a.m. *Śiva* and *Viṣṇu Abhiseka* were performed over Sri Haribabaji's *samādhi* which had been beautifully decorated with flowers and banana stems by men from Vrindaban: Fifty-six items of food were offered in *bhoga* to Sri Haribabaji. Sixty-four of the early Goswamis of the *Vaiṣṇava Math* were also worshipped. A sumptuous feast was given to the villagers of the whole district who flocked in their thousands and thousands to pay homage to Sri Haribabaji. They all came and did obeisance to Mataji, imploring her blessing and guidance since their Guru had left this world.

One evening Mataji related some of her reminiscences in connection with Sri Haribabaji Maharaj. How he met Mataji for the first time in 1944 at the Sahasradhara near Dehradun. Sri Prabhudatt Brahmachariji had arranged for this meeting. How a year or two later Mataji took Sri Haribabaji to Dacca and to all the places in East Bengal where she had

lived (this was before the partition). How she toured the whole of South India together with Haribabaji and Avadhutji in the winter of 1952-53.

On January 20th Mataji again returned to Varanasi. On her way, she got down at Allahabad station to see the son of a devotee who was down with polio ; Mataji again boarded the same train at the next station. Remaining in Varanasi until February 7th, she usually gave *darsana* at about 5.30 p. m., but round midday also small groups of devotees would collect outside her room.

On February 7th Mataji left for Allahabad, spending two nights at the Satyagopal Ashram, which she visits once every year. The first evening she was in an excellent mood, talking animatedly until midnight to an intimate group in her room. The next day she was in a strange *bhāva*. She just did not move. She had to be carried downstairs in a chair to attend the satsang. Everybody was non-plussed and wondering what would happen to the *Saraswati pūja* that was to be celebrated on February 10th. Fortunately, on the 9th morning when moving to the residence of Sri G.S. Pathak, the Vice-President of India, where the *pūja* was held, Mataji walked and during the day became her normal self again.

Sri G. S. Pathak had come from New Delhi for three days for the occasion and on arrival had at once gone to see Mataji at the Satyagopal Ashram. His daughters had taken immense trouble over the preparations for Mataji's visit and the celebration of *Saraswati pūja*. At the house of Sri G. S. Pathak there is a permanent room for Mataji with a separate entrance from the garden where she has stayed already on previous occasions. On the lawn a charming hut had been constructed for the *pūja*, into which a fine clay image of the goddess of art, learning and *Brahma-vidya* (Supreme Knowledge) had been placed. A pandal served as a hall for the congregation and for *satsang*. Since *Vasant Panchami* is the birthday of Saraswati, a beautiful painting of the *Avataras* singing the praises of the goddess had been specially prepared by an artist and like a fresco covered part of the back wall of the hut, which was decorated with great skill and excellent taste. On the 10th morning the *pūja* was celebrated with solemnity and deep feeling. Swamis Sri Sarananandaji of Vrindaban and Sri Krishnanandaji of Bombay were present and each of them delivered a talk. There was also a musical treat in the form of so-called '*Pala kirtana*' performed by the famous Bengali artist, Sri Ganesh babu.

108 articles of food were offered in *bhoga* to Saraswati and about 350 people, including a large number of security staff, partook of the *prasada*. Mataji was in a wonderful mood throughout.

On February 11th after lunch she motored to Vindhyachal where she could indulge in two days of comparative solitude and rest until February

13th when she returned to Varanasi. For three days she remained on the 2nd floor of the Kanyapith, occupying her tiny room with the large roof in front of it. People were allowed to go upstairs only if called and Mataji used this retreat to organize every conceivable detail in preparation of the *Bhagavata Parayana* that was held from February 21st to March 7th. For those three days Mataji gave *darśana* twice daily strolling up and down the roof for a little, while people were gazing up to her from the courtyard downstairs and from the Annapurna veranda. On February 16th Mataji descended and henceforth took up her abode in her tiny room on the first floor above the office. She would now give *darśana* on the veranda in front of Annapurna temple or in the hall of Ananda Jyoti Mandir. One evening the blind Swami Gangeshwaranandaji Maharaj delivered a short talk in the hall in Mataji's presence. Guests had began to arrive from far and near to listen to the exposition of the Srimad Bhagavata by Sri 1008 Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj of Vrindaban. On the 20th late at night all preparations for the functions were completed.

The Sanskrit chanting of the *Srimad Bhagavata* took place every early morning in the sanctuary of Gopal Mandir, with Sri Agnishwatta Shastri (Batuda) officiating. At dawn on February 21st, Mataji and Swami Akhandanandaji were present at the inauguration of the Sanskrit reading, which was performed to the accompaniment of exquisite kirtan sung by the pupils of the *Kanyapith*. The *Srimad Bhagavata*, wrapped in silk and brocade and placed on an *āsana* of sandalwood, was then taken to the pandal in solemn procession. It is believed by the *Vaiṣṇavas* that Sri Krishna Himself entered the *Bhagavata* on leaving His body. This scripture is therefore worshipped as Sri Krishna Himself.

A spacious, very beautiful and solid pandal had been erected in the hospital grounds to serve as a *satsang* hall for Swami Akhandanandaji's talks. Walls and ceiling were covered completely with folded orange and white cloth. At the main entrance were placed two life-like clay models of *brahmacharis*, dressed in the ochre robe, inviting the audience, while high up on top of the gate Rishi Vyasa sat enthroned to bless everyone who entered. Inside the pandal there were two large platforms at right angles to one another. In the centre of one of them was a carefully decorated wooden couch with a desk for the *Bhagavata* and a cushioned seat for Swami Akhandanandaji. Mataji and Didima as well as several Mahatmas had their seats by the side of the lecturer. In the centre of the other platform, lovely sculptures of Sri Krishna and Sri Radha surrounded by coloured lights feasted the eyes. The rest of the platform was daily occupied to capacity by a large assembly of *sādhus* and *sannyāsis* who attended with great regularity. The whole function was a unique event. Last winter a

similar function had been held for fifteen days at Naimisharanya which is still very fresh in the memory of all who had been present. But this occasion was of a greatly enhanced magnitude. Perhaps this is possible only in Kashi. Swami Akhandanandaji truly surpassed himself. Every day for five hours, namely from 8-30 to 11 a. m. and from 3-30 to 6 p. m. he sat in one posture giving a most brilliant exposition in lucid Hindi of every single chapter of the *Bhāgavata* explaining its symbolism and clearing up many doubts. The enormous congregation listened spell-bound day after day. Swami Akhandanandaji is not only a renowned exponent of the *Bhāgavata* and very learned, he also has a keen sense of humour and is a master of the art of mixing a funny story or an amusing allusion into very serious and profound teaching just at the right moment to provide relaxation and to keep the interest of his listeners alive.

Mataji was present in the pandal throughout the whole function and often Didima as well. On the first morning she saw Haribabaji in a subtle body sitting next to Swami Akhandanandaji. Sri Haribabaji had in fact planned to take part in this function. Swami Akhandanandaji thus felt that Haribabaji was sitting by his side day after day, which gave him additional impetus and inspiration. A sense of universal love and harmony pervaded the atmosphere. On the day when Sri Krishna's birth was described, there was special *bhoga* in Gopal Mandir and sweets and fruits were distributed to the enormous crowds who attended the talks. Mataji herself had arranged every detail of it and saw to everything in person.

On March 6th, *Sivātri* was celebrated by four *pūjās* during the different phases of the night with kirtan in between. Those who take active part in the *pūjā* have to fast without water for the whole preceding day. In spite of this fact, a record number of 215 people did *pūjā*. They sat in circles round *Sivalinga* in different places of the Ashram, namely in the hall, on its gallery, on the large closed veranda outside of Mataji's room upstairs in Ananda Jyoti Mandir and on the veranda outside Annapurna Mandir. Amongst the participants were even devotees from Madras and Cochin. Mataji was present most of the night, moving from one place to the other at intervals. After midnight she sang with great inspiration, playing the cymbals all the while. Early morning she distributed *prasada* to all.

A few hours later everyone again gathered in the pandal for the last day of the function, while *havana* (fire sacrifice) was performed in the courtyard in front of the Kanyapith to mark the successful completion of an unforgettable religious festival.

Guests were leaving gradually. Mataji was kept busy from early morning until late at night granting farewell *darśana* in her room to every single person before they left for their respective homes. In between she would come outside, either to Annapurna veranda or the hall to meet groups of people who kept on collecting, anxious for a glimpse of Mataji. One morning two Jain *sādhus* attended the *satsang* and Mataji had the *kheyāla* to disclose for the first time some interesting details of the Jain *sādhanā* she had practised amongst innumerable other *sādhanās* at the time of her *līlā* of *sādhanā* at Bajitpur from 1918-1924. Swami Akhandanandaji remained in Varanasi for three more days and on the 10th of March there was a charming farewell gathering for him in our hall in Mataji's presence for the best part of two hours.

A number of foreigners came to see Mataji at Varanasi. Mr. Robert Bosch from Germany with his wife and mother-in-law, devotees of several year's standing, had spent a delightful afternoon with Mataji at Vindhychal and stayed in Varanasi for the first week of the *Bhāgavata*. Several newcomers had private talks with Mataji, amongst them an American journalist and a few French people. Two European Buddhist nuns also came from Sarnath.

On March 11th, Mataji with only three or four companions left by the night train for Lucknow, from where they were taken by car to Kanpur by Sir Padampat Singhania. Mataji remained for a few hours at his residence where *Maharudra Yajñā* was being performed for a week. The whole family had requested Mataji to bless the function by her presence. Before proceeding to Naimisharanya the same afternoon, Mataji also visited the Ashram that the Singhania had recently built for her use.*

After this followed three quiet days at Naimisharanya. Mataji stayed in her new room on the first floor and nobody was allowed to go upstairs unless called. On the 15th, Didima, Didi and a party of about fifteen persons arrived from Varanasi. Even at this secluded spot a French couple managed to find Mataji and the Indian Ambassador in Holland, Sri Dhamija and his wife paid a visit to Mataji there. One day Swami Naradanandaji came and gave a talk.

Holi was to be celebrated at Naimisharanya from March 21st to 23rd. All preparations had been completed, when all on a sudden on the 19th, one of Sri Haribabaji's disciples, sent by Swami Akhandanandaji, came to invite Mataji to Vrindaban for the celebrations of Sri Haribabaji's birthday. Mataji immediately cancelled all arrangements and proceeded to Vrindaban the next day. Trunk calls had to be put through to

* See Ananda Varta, January 1970, p. 42.



Sri Sri Hari Babaji Maharaj



Sri Hari Babaji in mahāsamādhi, January, 1970

various places from where devotees were on the point of starting for Naimisharanya to spend Holi with Mataji. They all went to Vrindaban instead.

On her way to Vrindaban Mataji spent a few restful hours at the residence of Sri Rameshwar Sahai at Lucknow on the 20th evening, reaching Vrindaban the next morning. The same evening there was a function in our Ashram to commemorate Sri Haribabaji's birthday. Mataji supervised decorations and arrangements. A large photo of the *mahātmā* was placed on a decorated armchair and *Pujā* and *Āratī* were performed. Sri Swamis Akhandanandaji, Sharananandaji, Sri Ramdas baba, Sri Chakrapaniji and Pd. Kapindrajī spoke very beautifully on the extraordinary life and character of Sri Haribabaji. The next morning Mataji was present at the *Mahaprabhu Lila* enacted in the hall of Sri Uriababa Ashram. Everyone was moved to tears. As in previous years on similar occasions Mataji presented clothes to the actors and also to all sadhus and brahmacharis of Sri Haribabaji. That day about 500 *Vaishnavas* were given a feast in Sri Uriababa Ashram in honour of Sri Haribabaji Maharaj. For the first time *Vaisnava* feeding on such a large scale was undertaken by Sri Haribabaji's disciples.

On March 25th, Mataji again left for Varanasi, mainly to see Mm. Pd. Gopinath Kaviraj, who has been convalescing in our Ashram after the recent operation. We are happy to say that the great savant is gradually improving in health.

On March 29th Mataji motored to Vindychal, returning to Varanasi after three nights. On April 4th, she boarded the train to Hardwar, alighting at Baghat House, Kharkhari the next morning. Didima and Didi with a few others who had gone to Kishenpur from Vrindaban joined Mataji at Hardwar the same evening. Mataji moved to our Ashram at Kankhal on the 8th. A newly built shrine for Siva was consecrated there on the 13th and Didima's *Sannyāsa Utsava* was solemnly celebrated the next day. Mataji left for Dehradun on the 15th by car.

On the 24th she is to grace with her presence the consecration of a new temple of Sri Luxmi Narayana at Patiala at the invitation of Rai Bahadur G.M. Modi. Mataji's 74th birth anniversary falls on 3rd May, but the main celebration will be held this year in our Ashram in Poona from 18th to 25th.