



CORDIAL INVITATION

We have great pleasure in announcing that *Śrī Durgā Pūjā* will be celebrated from October 2nd to 6th, 1973, at Baghat House, Kharkhari, Hardwar, by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha.

There is every hope that Sri Sri Ma will grace this auspicious occasion with Her Presence.

Varanasi,
31 July, 1973

DURGA SINGH
President

Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha.

Those who wish to come and attend the celebrations are requested to kindly inform us of their arrival at least fifteen days earlier at the address given below, so as to enable us to make suitable arrangement for their lodging and food from October 2nd to 6th.

Swami Paramananda

Baghat House
Kharkhari
HARDWAR, U. P.

Twenty-fourth Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata



We are happy to announce that the twenty-fourth *Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata* organised by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha will be held at our Vrindaban Ashram from November 3rd to 9th at the invitation of H. H. Maharani Smt. Lakshmi Devi of Gandal.

Self.-knowledge, Self-realization is the ultimate aim of the *Samyam Mahavrata*. By observing truthfulness in every respect, by the practice of brahmacharya and non-violence we endeavour to progress ourselves and to help our fellow-men to advance on the spiritual path.

It is hoped that Sri Sri Ma will grace the function with Her Presence.

Varanasi,
31 July, 1973.

DURGA SINGH

President

Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha

Those who wish to join the *Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata* are requested to kindly write to the address given below at least fifteen days before the starting of the function so that the necessary arrangements for their accommodation and meals may be made.

Swami Parmananda

Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi Ashram

P. O. Vrindaban

Dist. MATHURA, U.P.

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Ma in Gopal Mandir, Varanasi

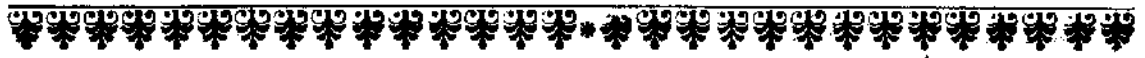
Ananda Varta



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Mātri Vāni

The day that is gone never returns: this is very true indeed. The individual and the world: to be an individual implies bondage, whereas the world is in continual motion. So long as consciousness is focussed on the level of happiness and pain, light and darkness, the polarity between attainment and non-attainment is bound to persist. To be a human being means to be a seeker after Truth.

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Man should address all his appeals and petitions to God and pray to Him regularly. Everything is verily within the One who creates, preserves and destroys. If anything happens in one's worldly life that causes distress and anguish, one should endeavour to cleave to God's name by all possible devices and cry at His feet. There can be peace only when God

Himself, the Fountain of Peace, Who is the end of everything, has been enthroned in one's heart.

* * * *

God is supremely merciful and compassionate; without cause or reason His compassion, His grace are pouring forth at every instant. Eager to receive them, stretch out your hand, palm upwards. Shun the mentality of a businessman. "I have done my best but without the desired result. I have reaped the fruit of my past actions. Lord, Thou hast given it to me. Thou art lavishing Thy grace on me!" Keep this in mind. If one lives in this spirit, there is hope of attaining to the Ultimate Good.

* * * *

Try and try again to reach the goal you have set before yourself. So long as Realisation does not come you must never relax your efforts. Let this be your firm resolve.

* * * *

At all times and in the very circumstances in which you are placed, try to the limit of your capacity to sustain the remembrance of God, to pray for His mercy, to keep your mind absorbed in Him. Truly, truly, those whose aim is God-realisation have started on their pilgrimage. Spiritual exercises must be done as regularly as possible.

* * * *

Worldly happiness alternating with periodical troubles that cause much sorrow are characteristic for the householder's life at every step. With great patience endeavour to do your duty to the best of your ability. Always pray for God's grace.

* * * *

To regulate one's life in accordance with the injunctions of the *Śāstras* is one's duty in human life. To accept what one is not entitled to is forbidden by the *Śāstras*. Those who live as *sādhus* may accept people's gifts as well as their obeisance in keeping with their merit. Unless one has attained to a certain state of achievement it is not helpful on the path to the Supreme to accept veneration and gifts. It is not fitting to take pleasure in what one is not entitled to.

* * * *

If the aspirant on the spiritual path can full of endurance, patience, steadiness, calm and serenity remain engrossed in his religious practices, then even if a wave of ill-luck comes it will not be able to touch him. To try his utmost to reach such a state is indeed man's duty.

* * * *

Of all creatures man alone has the capacity to create an atmosphere, an environment that is conducive to the revelation of Truth. With this faith one should endeavour to adhere steadily and without wavering to the practices meant to awaken one's true nature.

Matri Satsang in Solan

Swami Bhagavananda Giri

(Translated from Bengali)

(2)

(Continued from the last issue)

Solan, June 11th, 1955.

After the evening *kirtana* Mataji comes out and sits on the veranda, as she did yesterday. One by one the devotees go and perform obeisance at her feet and, purified and blessed by Mataji's radiant smile and her glance of love and compassion, return to their places in the hope of hearing some words of wisdom from Ma's lips. Last evening they tasted the sweet nectar of her dialogue and so they eagerly look forward to it again today.

Mataji is seated absorbed in her own mood. The atmosphere is quiet and peaceful. We are in the midst of mountainous country, far away from noisy cities, in an Ashram that has been built by Raja Durga Singh on a hillock just below his palace. It is pleasant indeed to sit still in Mataji's holy presence. Yet the wish to hear some of her words of wisdom keeps on recurring to my mind. However I cannot pluck up sufficient courage to ask her a direct question. While I am pondering in this manner someone asks :

"It is said that there is only one Brahman without a second. When and how is it possible to see this truth?"

Mataji : To see here means the vision of the *Ātman* (Self) (which is one). What does 'direct vision' signify? So long as the seer, the act of seeing and the vision remain three different entities, where is the realisation of the Brahman? When there is no question of action or inaction, of existence or non-existence, then only one can speak of being established in the Brahman, in the *Atman*—in one's own true Self. On the other hand, if you want to view God's creation of names and forms, then you should regard all names and forms everywhere as the names and forms of your own Divine Beloved (*Iṣṭadeva*). It is said, "However far the eyes may reach, only Krishna is visible". "Wherever there is a human being there is Śiva, where there is a woman there is Gouri" (the Divine Mother or *Śakti*). Whatever I may behold anywhere is but a reflection of my *Iṣṭa*. Who am I? HE alone is. But who is He? HE is myself! Where am I? HE exists and none else. Thou, O Lord Thou art all! I am and He is—again, I am also not and neither is He, so what is? *Ātma* (the Self). As the Self, I, you, He and all else exist, again there is nothing, yet everything. This is difficult to understand. To 'understand' (by one's intelligence) merely means to 'stand under' an increased burden. (Mataji claps her hands and laughs). A little later she speaks again ; "Whether you take the path of *dvaita* (dualism)† or of

† *Dvaita* The doctrine which holds that Ultimate Reality is not undifferentiated unity, or more than one, for instance, *Puruṣa-Prakṛiti* or *Śiva-Śakti-Bindu* in *śaiva*.

advaita (nondualism)†† or the path of *dvaitādvaita*††† —what matters is to set one's feet firmly on the road, to mingle with fellow-pilgrims and to advance steadily. When the time is ripe all will be revealed."

Question : Where can Sri Krishna be seen ?

Mataji : There is only the one Sri Krishna; Sri Rama alone exists and nothing else at all. Whatever you perceive that is not Sri Krishna or Sri Rama, in other words, your *Iṣṭa*, is not true vision. All-embrasive, complete vision is the revelation of the Divine Beloved.

Question : Does this mean actual vision or merely some spiritual experience ?

Mataji : Call it a name or a form, an intuition or a spiritual experience, in all these there remain the three separate identities. Even in spiritual experience there is still the person who experiences, the act of experiencing and the experience. You must rise above this. Spiritual experience belongs to a particular stage of progress.

Question : Can a child know his mother ?

Mataji : Why not try to answer yourself ?

Question : I have read in books that a child can never know his mother.

†† *Advaita* Non-dualism. The doctrine that posits the Ultimate Reality as one and undifferentiated.

††† *Dvaitādvaita* The doctrine which holds that the Ultimate Reality is non-dual and yet dual, looked at from different points of view.

Mataji : According to the state one has reached one may know or recognize her. Whatever is said is right from the point of view from which it is said.

Question : Can Real Being (*sat vastu*) be diverse ?

Mataji : Real Being is one and one only.

Question : How is this possible ?

Mataji : In essence it is one. Nevertheless you may look at it or hear of it or speak of it from a certain angle of vision and somebody else may do so from a different view point.

Question : Why cannot everyone look at the One Being in the identical manner ?

Mataji : Because THAT has an infinite variety of forms, qualities and states of existence. How can there be an end to it ? Whatever anyone may discern from his particular stage of progress is correct at that stage.

Question : You mention from time to time, "I do not have the *kheyāla*." What is this *kheyāla* ? * Is there any reason behind this *kheyāla* ?

Mataji : A *kheyāla* is just a *kheyāla*; the question of reason or unreasonableness does not arise. This body is your whimsical daughter. Some people even go to the extent of saying : "My whimsical, mad daughter." Whatever any-

* *kheyāla* In Mataji's case there is no ego to account for her movements, feelings and thoughts. When she uses the word *kheyāla* with reference to her own person, it must be understood to denote a spontaneous upsurge of will, which is divine and therefore free.

one may say, to him it is true. Whatever you say is all right.

Questioner: My mind is also unhinged. I am mad because my Mother is mad.

Mataji: Oh, what a wonderful statement! You have verily spoken the truth. This body has merely repeated what people sometimes say. You seem to be a wise madcap. Quite true! Some are mad for learning, others are mad for sports or games. Some are mad for their wives and children, others are mad for cars and houses. Everybody is madly after something or other. The whole world is indeed insane. Some are slightly mad, others half mad, and yet others are completely and totally mad. God's play is wonderful—He has created a lunatic asylum of a world! It is His pleasure. God is playful, He is His own Law. He Himself plays with Himself in an endless variety of ways.

Question: Mataji, what kind of thing is God?

Mataji: God is no thing. A thing is limited, isn't it? But He is indeed everything, full and complete in Himself. Do you not recite from the scriptures: "*Purnamadah Purnamidam* † Even if the whole is taken from the whole there still remains the complete Being." What a marvellous saying! Because these are the words of *Rishis*. To become complete yourself, you must approach God, the supremely complete Being. But why say "approach"? The knowledge that it is He alone who exists must supervene. This and that thing, bits and pieces of substance

† "That is whole and this is whole."

are seen in the world. But God is complete and perfect, full to overflowing, of infinite Being. For what does one pray to Him if not to become free from want and from the sense of separation? Some are sorely in need of knowledge, others lack learning, yet others want wealth and friends. Surely, one prays to Him to fulfil one's wants and to awaken to one's true Being. The chanting of the Lord's name, the remembrance of God, the study of scriptures have for purpose the fulfilling of one's insufficiency. It is the lack of faith in the all-pervading, constant presence of God which is the harbinger of sorrow in this world.

But do believe, everything is all right. This or that person says something because to him it is so; he is thus not lying. He can only speak of what he perceives, of what his intelligence is able to grasp, of what he understands. In God's kingdom everything is possible. Everything is contained in everything.

Question : If a person realizes something while in the state of ignorance, and later makes progress into a higher state, is his previous realization rendered untrue?

Mataji : Well said! Splendid! (Mataji laughs.) What is seen depends on one's stage of progress. Why, did you not grasp this? A truly profound subject. Where the question of stage or no stage does not arise, how can such a state be described in words?

Question : What can an infant son do for his mother? He can only cry for her.

Mataji : He can at least act exactly as his mother tells him to.

Question : What will happen if he does ?

Mataji : If he implicitly obeys his mother, he will come to know his mother, he will realize what she is, he will become one with her. What does *Ma* signify ? *Ātmā*, the Self, *Mā* means *mayi* (all-pervading). She who gives to everyone exactly what he needs is called a mother. Can anyone but a mother bestow precisely what is required ? *Mā*—the all-permeating core of the Self ! Is it not that alone who exists ? To become like It means to merge in It, to be It. Call It the epitome of wisdom, the Self, Siva Himself, nothing can be outside of or excluded from That. Just as the same individual is father, son and husband. Someone may call him father, and someone else son, yet he is one and the same person. All names and forms are His alone.

Question : When Mother so carefully measures out to everyone what he needs, what is there to worry about ?

Mataji : What do you think ?

Questioner : She will of course give to each one only as much as is possible.

Mataji : The mother knows herself how to foster her children. She will accordingly give at the time, in the quality and quantity that are most appropriate. But why merely "will give" ? She gives, is giving constantly and will ever continue to give—but one must have the intuition to recognize it.

God has not been realized : this is why people suffer. When God is revealed there is neither duality nor sorrow. Due to lack of faith in the immanence of God, the whole gamut of temporary happiness and pain arises. He who

in order to find God renounces everything, tries his best and carefully attends to his spiritual practices, is the genuine madman. What is meant by calling him mad? He is madly rejoicing in God's revelation.† You know the well known verse : "*Akhaṇḍā mandalākāram vyāptam yeṇa charācharam*", that is to say, God is an undivided whole pervading this universe of the moving and the unmoving, like a circle. He is without beginning, or end. If He is revealed to you, everything becomes round and topsy-turvy, melts into one and vanishes. Having found God, does one ever lack anything at all thereafter? By realizing Him, everything is realized. If you become mad with God intoxication, your previous madness of duality disappears entirely. Some people are mad for money, others for their bodily comforts. Still others are mad for another human being. In the grip of infatuation they destroy their body, mind and health. Sleep and diet should be strictly regulated. Your thinking must be centred in God. Talking about God is the only mode of conversation worth the while, any other mode is useless and ultimately leads to pain. Where there is Rāma (God) there is ease and comfort, where Rāma is not, there is discomfort and disease. God is your very own Being. You must continue to practise and endeavour to realize your own Self; this is a *must* for you! God is the breath of life, the heart of hearts, the all-pervading Self of everyone and everything.

†. A play upon words : *Pagal* madman and *pawa gelo* it has been realized.

(To be continued)

The Hundred Mridang Holi Festival at Ghaziabad

R. K. Banerji

In February 1973, Mataji spent several days in Poona, and meanwhile we in Calcutta had been hearing vague rumours about Mataji's probable programme on the occasions of Sivaratri and Holi, without receiving any authentic news. Consequently, I had gradually been led to believe that we would miss participating in Mataji's celebration during Holi this year.

The greater was the surprise, therefore, when I received out of the blue, a letter written by Swami Paramanandaji just before Mataji's party left Poona on February 22nd, requesting me to supervise the finance, transport and well-being of nearly 130 persons travelling from Calcutta to Ghaziabad and back over Holi, which was scheduled to be celebrated on the 18th March, the kind host on this occasion being Sri Sitaram Jaipuria, M. P.

This meant a direct visit to and contact with the Goswamis of Khardaha a suburb beyond our Agarpara Ashram on the Barrackpur Trunk Road. There, in the precincts of the celebrated temple of Sri Shyam Sundarji (the original of three similar deities personally installed by Prabhupad Sri Birchandra, the only son of Sri Nityananda Prabhu), the *Shata Sukhol Utsava* is regularly and annually held over the Holi period.

But first of all the Calcutta office of the Jaipurias had to be approached, and here, even before the necessary authority had

been received from Swami Paramananda or Sitaramji, I obtained prompt, courteous and efficient assistance from the person in charge, with the result that my task was rendered that much easier right through to the end.

Armed with initial finance, I then visited Khardaha with Birenda on the 6th March, and established rapport with the Goswamis and their family in their own home. On arrival there, I was shown copies of a printed pamphlet that had been circulated, calling upon all kirtanias and khol players to make use of this unique opportunity of responding to Mataji's invitation.

Thus the presence of at least 102 khol players, complete with srikhol, together with their ancillary assistants, was firmly ensured for assembly at Howrah Station on the evening of the 14th March. In all there were 112 professional and 18 amateur kirtanias, including Sri Haren Gupta and family, Birenda and family, Sm. Chitra Thakur, Sm. Bina Dutt, Smt. Saraswati Majumdar, my wife and myself.

In careful consultation with Swamiji and Sri Shanti Banerjee, it had been decided to request the railway authorities officially on behalf of the Sangha to place a double bogie with 90 seats, and another standard bogie with 40 seats, for attachment to the Janata Express leaving Howrah at 9-25. P. M. on March 14th for Ghaziabad, scheduled for arrival there at 8-13 A. M. on 16th March.

Furthermore to ensure definite availability of bogies for the return journey on the 21st, it was considered feasible to offer to pay demurrage as the double bogie which would then be detained by the railway specially for our re-use, together with a

standard bogie in the Janata leaving Delhi on the 21st March. For this purpose, an initial deposit had to be paid several days before the 130 tickets were actually purchased.

Meanwhile the electrifying news that Mataji had suddenly reached Deoghar, and might come on to Calcutta percolated through to us at about this time, without any definite details being divulged. But when Swamiji himself arrived at Howrah on the 8th of March, his very presence presaged the imminent coming of Mataji in the near future.

On the 9th and 10th March I was extremely busy with Swamiji all over Calcutta, and it was only at 9 P. M. on the 10th that I realized that Mataji was arriving in Calcutta early next morning, but did not know where she might stay. As our chroniclers will have already recorded, Mataji duly arrived at 5-30. A.M. on the 11th at Howrah, left straight for the Ashram at Agarpara, but returned to Calcutta within 10 minutes of reaching there, to visit about half a dozen extremely sick and ailing devotees in their homes, before going back to Agarpara.

But this is another story that may be told some other day. Suffice it to say that Mataji's stay in the greater Calcutta area from the 11th to the 14th meant that all the amateur kirtanias destined for Ghaziabad were rushed off their feet, going to and fro between Agarpara and the newly built Niramay Hospital near the railway overbridge on Gariahatta Road, where Mataji spent the hectic nights of the 12th and 13th. Bhavani and I were among the crowd, that saw Mataji off at Howrah Station at 8.45 P.M. by the Kalka-Delhi Mail on the 14th evening, before we ourselves entrained in the 40 seater bogie of the

Janata Express at 9.25. P.M., the double bogie being filled with most of the professional kirtanias and khol players.

And now comes the crux of the story.

The Delhi Mail with Mataji on board correctly passed from Belur along the Howrah Burdwan Chord line, but whether it was Mataji's magnetic attraction, or the fault of the signaller or driver, or guard of the Janata Express, believe it or not, our train, scheduled to proceed along the main line via Bandel, was also bye-passed along the Chord line that evening after leaving Howrah! We had proceeded a few miles beyond Belur when the last daily passengers from Calcutta along the main line realised their predicament, pulled the alarm chain, stopped the train, beat up the driver, and then went along to the guard for violent redress of their grievance. Seeing the coast clear, our engine driver promptly ran away with his engine to Burdwan, leaving us stranded for hours, before the inevitable enquiry could be carried out, and a pilot engine could be brought to push us back to Belur to proceed onwards along the main line. The dawn of the 15th found us still at Asansol, 8½ hours late, until a locomotive could be brought from Chittaranjan to push us on to Jhajha. At Jhajha, there was another change of engine and crew, and we steamed off from there 9½ hours late.

Meanwhile, careful arrangements had been made in accordance with the kind and hospitable co-operation of the Jaipuria organisation to supply 260 covers of food at Moghul Sarai Station on the 15th March, to serve as our two major meals that day. The scheduled time of arrival at Moghul Sarai was 1-53 P.M., but in actual practice it was nearly 11 P. M. when we steamed into Moghul Sarai station.

But the painstaking dutiful Jaipuria agent was on the platform to meet us even at that late hour and provided us with very welcome delicious warm chapatties, vegetables and plentiful sweets, which were at that stage detained to last us for our late dinner and our midday meal on the 16th as well !

To add to our troubles we suffered throughout with continuous lack of water in the lavatories. But nothing could dampen our spirits for kirtan, and with such an august gathering and varied talent on board, we enjoyed a feast of top class folk songs and kirtan throughout the 15th and 16th, climaxed with our full Ashram Kirtan on the 15th evening.

We eventually reached Ghaziabad, not at 8.13 A.M., but at 4.45 P.M. on the 16th, over 8½ hours late, eagerly looking forward to seeing Mataji, and taking part in the *Nāma Yajña* over Holi. Had we reached Ghaziabad on the 16th morning, it was possible that the Kirtan party would have wished to perform the *adhivāsa kirtana* the same evening, and the *Nāma Yajña* from the sunrise of the 17th to the sunrise of the 18th to be followed by a full scale *Nagara Sankirtana* on the 18th afternoon.

But Mataji held different views, and it is my firm conviction that our train was delayed because she wished the *adhivāsa kirtana* to take place on the 17th evening, followed by an all night performance of our Ashram girls, and the *Nāma Yajña* proper to be held from sunrise on Sunday the 18th to sunrise on the 19th. This change in the programme certainly enabled the Delhi and Ghaziabad crowd of distinguished visitors to participate not only in the *adhivāsa* on the Saturday evening but also the major part of the *Nāma Yajña* on Sunday

the 18th. This however cut the time of the kirtanias somewhat short for their full programme of *Nagara Kirtana*.

It must be understood at this stage that the khardaha kirtanias had agreed to perform their annual *Shata Srikkhol Utsava* this year at Ghaziabad, and not in their home grounds, for two vital reasons alone, namely, to have a continuous memorable *darśana* of Mataji, and to be enabled to pay a visit to their sacred Vrindavan, before returning to Calcutta.

The *adhivāsa kirtana* duly started at about 8 P. M. on Saturday, the 17th by which time the huge pandal, the *mancha** round which the kirtanias would rotate for 36 hours, and the images of Sri Radha, Sri Krishna, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Nityananda Prabhu, together with a life like picture of Sri Hari Babaji, had been beautifully decorated and illuminated. There is an interesting story behind these images. Some time ago, when Sitaramji's local employees wished to celebrate Durga Puja, a Bengali member of his staff with artistic inclinations volunteered to mould the images. These were so outstanding that thenceforth this particular staff member has always been entrusted with similar tasks. For this occasion too, he had moulded with great devotion and inspiration the dual figures of Sri Radha and Sri Krishna, as well as those of Sri Nityananda and Sri Chaitanya, in accordance with the deities installed in our Vrindaban Ashram, which are said to be the supreme masterpiece of the renowned Calcutta sculptor, the late Sri Nitai Pal. As mentioned above, the *adhivāsa kirtana* started at about 8 P. M. on Saturday the 17 th., under the inspired guidance of veteran Sri Sisir Mukherji, who was one of

* *Mancha* Circular altar.

the two or three famous accompanying disciples of the well-known Vaishnava Saint Kirtania, the late Ramdas Babaji or Sri Path, Baranagore. Before the start, at the thoughtful request of Mataji, Panuda distributed beautifully decorated *Namāvallis* bearing the Mahāmantra, to each Sri Khol player.

The entire audience listened with rapt attention to the inspired singing, and towards the conclusion, Mataji requested all 100 Sri Khols to sound together for the first time in rhythm with the singing. The solemn grandeur of this moment defies description on paper.

From about 10. P. M., the Ashram girls under Kumari Chhabi Banerji took over for the night, and whenever lagging, Mataji personally encouraged them throughout most of the night. The girls handed over to the male kirtanias before sunrise on Sunday the 18th.

All that day the huge pandal was thronged with crowds from Delhi and Ghaziabad Districts and to the everlasting credit of Sitaramji, no one was turned away from participating in the midday meal.

Mataji had frequently appeared in the Pandal throughout the day but in the evening she suddenly entered the kirtana group performing round the *mancha*, and thereafter for nearly half an hour with Nani Banerji of Delhi at the harmonium, Mataji led the kirtana of the *Nāma Yajña* herself, with devotees thronging round her near the circular altar. That night the professionals excelled themselves with their melodious chanting of the *Akhanda Nama*. Their rendering of the Malkosh Rag in Jhaptal for over 2½ hours from 10 P. M. onwards was an outstanding performance.

On the 19th morning, well after sunrise, the *Akhanda Nama* was at last brought to a conclusion amidst scenes of grief and sorrow, and thereafter the first *Nagara Samkirtan* was taken out as a fitting corollary to the *Nama Yajna*. Swamiji had advised against appearing in public streets, and so the *Nagara Samkirtana* confined its route to going round the building housing Mataji and her party, while Mataji herself stood with folded hands on the steps to see them start off along this route.

There was an interval from 8 A. M. to 12 P. M., while the kirtanias had some rest, and the midday *bhoga** was prepared for Sri Chaitanya Deva, Prabhu Nitayananda, their three main associates and others, including 64 Mahantas.

All the 112 Srikhols were laid out in six rows, and picturesquely decorated for worship. The *bhoga*, *puja* and *ārati kirtana* were performed with great fervour and enthusiasm by the entire party in Mataji's presence. Then the Srikhols were worshipped just in front of her dais, and then the kirtanias trooped out with their Srikhols on the final *Nagara Samkirtana* which was a fitting climax to their celebration.

And now all the mridangas sounded together once again, in a grand crescendo, as the kirtanias filed out of the pandal along a route which was still confined to inside the factory compound, but which was more circuitous than the route, taken for the *prabhāṭphery*. The amateur kirtanias joined the procession in the wake of the professionals, and were all back round about 1-30 P. M. or so, after which the final time-honoured classical stanzas were quickly sung in Mataji's presence before the programme came to a culmination.

* *Bhoga* Food offered to a deity.

Thereafter the kirtanias were allowed to file singly to Mataji to perform their *pranāma* at her feet, each to be presented by her with a beautiful specially ordered tulasi-bead garland, a favourite with all true Vaishnavas. The kirtanias then departed for a hurried meal, before getting ready to board two large buses specially laid on to carry them by road to Vrindavan and back. Naturally under the circumstances they were late in starting, and reached Vrindavan not before 1-30 A. M. on the 20th morning. There they were put up in our commodious Ashram premises, and their meals were provided by the Jaipuria organisation during their stay until the 21st morning. When they returned to Ghaziabad, they were not only fed by their hosts before entraining in the three bogies of the Janata Express from Delhi that afternoon, but were also given two square meals in addition, to tide them over the long journey which was bifurcated at Moghal Sarai as the large double bogie had to be detached and joined to the 12 Dn. Express from Delhi, following an hour or so behind. But both sections of the party reached Howrah on the 23rd morning at the right time, thus ending what must have been a memorable, unique and indescribably happy episode in their lives. This account cannot be completed, without a reference to the outstanding courtesy, hospitality, and individual attention shown by the entire Jaipuria family and organisation throughout the festival, without which it could not have been possible to look after such a large mixed residential congregation over most of five days.

Mataji's grace was abounding and always there, and the gratitude and reverence of the kirtanias, many of whom had their first contact with her on this occasion, were something to be

seen to be believed. Her high praise is constantly being sung after their return to Calcutta, and they are only waiting for another opportunity to serve her wishes, should they ever be again called upon to undertake a similar mission in her august presence,

Jai Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu !

Jai Ma !

We may rest assured that nothing whatever happens on earth without God's permission. What a source of consolation to know that even the sufferings and adversities which God sends us are for our best, and have in view our eternal salvation. Ah, how great will be our shame when we stand before the judgement seat of God and see clearly the loving intention of Divine Providence in sending us those trials which we tried to evade, thus battling against our own salvation !

St. Alphonsus Ligouri

Umā Haimavati

A. M. Gupta, M. A.

The devas¹ are the shining ones—bright in intellect, pure in heart, noble in soul. Truth, tranquility, compassion, gentleness, modesty, boldness, forgiveness fortitude—these are some of the traits in which the devas excel.²

The asuras are mere enjoyers—ostentatious, arrogant, selfish, conceited, wrathful, harsh, ignorant.³ They know not what to do and what to refrain from. Neither purity nor conduct nor truth is in them.⁴ They say—“The Universe is without Truth, without moral basis, without a God, brought about by mutual union, with lust for its cause—what else?”⁵

And the two types are constantly at war with each other. There is mention in the mythologies of a *hundred years' war*⁶ between the devas and the asuras.

The devas follow Rita⁷ (laws) of Brahman.⁸ They keep the asuras in their proper place and teach them a good lesson

1. V Div=to shine (Sans)
2. Gita--XVI, 2-3.
3. Ibid--XVI-4.
4. Ibid--XVI-7.
5. Ibid--XVI-8.
6. See Durgā Saptasati-II-2 (included in Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa)

whenever required. But the asuras sometimes defeat the devas by sheer brute force and drive them away from their region.

Now, Brahman gave victory unto the devas in one of these great wars on such an occasion.

For the nonce, the devas forgot Brahman—forgot the divinity within, forgot their dignity. They became vain-glorious. In their conceit the powerful devas—Indra⁹, Agni¹⁰, Vāyu¹¹, Varuna¹² and others behaved like deluded mortals, boasting in elation how they had vanquished the asuras by their own powers. All the credit for the victory they arrogated to themselves and gave thanks to none.

In a split second 'like the twinkling of the eye' like the 'flash of lightning' a light broke ahead—a Jaksha—an adorable luminosity! The devas knew not what or wherefrom.

7. "According to Rig Vedic Varuna-hymns Rita commands the winds to blow, the waters to flow and man to know, so that exactly as the conscious or partially conscious constituents of the Universe fulfill their specially assigned duties, so man should become clearly conscious of his own position and take his proper place as one party to the cosmic social contract"—Belly Heinmann, quoted in Vedanta Kesari, July '67. P. 158.
8. Brahman=Ultimate Reality variously expressed as "Creator-Preserver-Destroyer", "Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute", "Teacher of Teachers", Greater than the greatest—smaller than the smallest", Dispenser of Fruits of Action" etc.
9. Indra, the leader of the devas.
10. Agni, the deva appearing as Fire.
11. Vayu, the deva appearing as Wind.
12. Varuna, the deva appearing as Ocean.

They asked Agni—"ascertain for us, Agni, who the adorable one is."

"All right", said Agni.

Agni approached the Jakshā.

The Jaksha said—"Who are you?"

—"I am Agni, also known as Jataveda."

—"With such a name as you bear, what is your power?"

—"I can burn whatever there is in the world."

—"Burn this". A dry blade of grass was placed before Agni.

The burner of all things could not catch that dry blade of grass even with all his might.

Shamefaced Agni returned to the devas and said: "I have not been able to know it."

Then the devas asked Vāyu—"Ascertain for us, Vāyu, what is that."

"All right" said Vāyu and went.

—"Who are you?"

—"I am Vāyu or Mātarisvā."

—"With such a name as you bear, what is your power?"

—"I can sweep away whatever there is in the world."

—"Remove this." A dry blade of grass was placed before Vāyu.

Vāyu tried hard but could not move that dry blade of grass by a jot or tittle although he put forth all his energy.

Humbled, he went back to the devas and said—"I have not been able to know it."

Then the devas requested Indra—"Find out for us,

Maghavan, thou most powerful among the devas, what is the significance of this phenomenon."

"All right"—said Indra and went ahead. This time the Jaksha disappeared as if in disdain.

But Indra did not turn back like Agni and Vāyu but closed his eyes in meditation.

And in the space just occupied by the vanished Jaksha there appeared the *Giver of Knowledge of Brahman* : Uma Haimavati !

"Himala's daughter Uma, gentle, pure,
The Mother that resides in all as Power
And Life, who works all works, and
Makes of One the world, whose mercy
Opens the gate to Truth and shows
The One in All".¹³

Indra looked at Her with wonder and humbly enquired of Her who was the Jaksha who had just vanished.

"Brahman ! Be ye glorious in the victory of Brahman", said Uma.

Thus did Indra come to have a knowledge of Brahman who is the real victor behind all victories.

And as Agni, Vāyu and Indra, amongst the devas, were the first to come nearest to Brahman, they surpassed all the other devas in power and excellence.

"And so shall another be, who likewise comes to have a knowledge of Brahman."¹⁴

13. Swami Vivekananda.

14. The story is based on the Kena Upaniṣad.

TO MY MOTHER GANGA

By Radhapriya

**Oh, Sri Ganga ! ever flowing
Current of Love
You wash away all sorrow
all wordly attachment
My life flows into Yours,
Oh, Sri Ganga ! We are ever one !
All nature dances to Thy
Eternal Rhythm
Oh, it is as if Krishna
were standing before me
playing His Flute !
Entrancing beyond all earthly
desires art Thou—my Ganga Divine !
Om Jai Jagadisha Hare !
I bow at Thy feet and
I flow ever into Thee !
Thou art Beyond, within, without,
ever flowing Purity and Bliss !
Oh Bliss ! Oh mother Divine !
my Beloved Ganga, Thou art
Everywhere !
Transmuting Ganga ! Destroyer
of delusion ! Dissolve this ego
rock and transmute it into
Thee !**

Great Women In The Mahābhārata

Prof. Tripurari Chakravarti

1. Introduction

The Mahābhārata, the great Epic of India, has enshrined for us certain imperishable ideals of Indian womanhood. These ideals we find embodied in a most perfect manner in the lives of Gandhari, Kunti, Draupadi, Damayanti, Sita and Savitri. The most important of these ideals, however, is an abiding faith in *dharma* or the moral order of the universe. These noble women did realize that there was a moral law, ever present and ever active, which regulated the universe and made it an organic whole. *Dharma* to them was not merely a matter of ceremony or conventional ritual and forms ; it had a larger and more fundamental significance than that of religion as commonly understood by us. It included the whole individual and social conception of law and impulse, conduct and worship. *Dharma* in the entire *Mahābhārata*, really is the force or principle that binds together the entire universe. It implies also the union of traditional thought and faith, of common custom, loyalty and understanding that makes human society an organic unity. Patience, steadfastness and sincerity are needed for understanding and realizing this broad conception of *dharma*, and it is a matter of supreme satisfaction that the main women characters in the *Mahābhārata* rose to the level of this *dharma*, and by their character and conduct they proved that such a level of righteousness could be reached in human lives. They had no doubts

or misgivings as to the existence of this all-pervasive and all-embracing principle, and so at a moment of supreme crisis in the fortunes of the Kuru family, Gandhari could utter these ever memorable words to her son Duryodhana : "Where there is righteousness, there is victory." In the affairs of men, sometimes wrong-doing, no doubt, flourishes, but the eternal lesson of the *Mahābhārata* is that by unrighteousness man may prosper for some time, gain what appears desirable and conquer enemies, but he ultimately perishes at the root.

2. Gandhari

Undoubtedly; the noblest and best of the women characters in the *Mahābhārata* is Ghandhari. She more than any other person in the Epic kept her faith in the moral order undimmed, and in the hours of supreme crisis in her life, she always unhesitatingly sacrificed narrow, personal, selfish interest, and embraced the cause of virtue and righteousness. This she did even at the peril of herself and the fortunes of her family. She kept aloft the standard of *dharma* and asked others to act in the same manner. After the terrible disaster of the Kurukshetra War, in which she lost all her hundred sons and other near relations, Gandhari stood firm and maintained her unflinching faith in the triumph of the moral law, and she could boldly express her feelings to that effect.

The life-story of Gandhari, as depicted in the *Mahābhārata* may now be briefly told. Maharshi Krishna Dwaipayana, the famous author of the *Mahābhārata*, mentions her devotion to duty and righteousness in the very forefront of his introduction to the great Epic. Gandhari was the daughter of Subala, the king of Gandhara in the north-west of India. Bhishma, the

uncle and guardian of the Kuru prince Dhritarashtra was in search of a proper bride for the prince, and he heard from brahmins that Gandhari was an exceedingly pious and dutiful girl who would be Dhritarashtra's proper wife. Messengers were accordingly sent from Hastinapura to Gandhara with the marriage proposal. At first Subala had some hesitation in entertaining the proposal on account of the blindness of the bridegroom, but considering the nobility, greatness and reputation of the Kuru family, he decided to give Gandhari in marriage to Dhritarashtra. Gandhari, as soon as she knew that her husband was blind, made up her mind that she would voluntarily deny herself the pleasures of eyesight by wrapping her eyes with a thick bandage. This bandage she kept on throughout her life, never wavering for a moment—so great was her devotion to her husband.

Gandhari gave birth to one hundred sons, but these sons did not fulfil the expectations of the virtuous mother. She never approved of the conduct of her sons towards their Pandava cousins, and often appealed to her husband to check their evil propensities. In the game of dice at the court of Hastinapura Yudhishtira gambled away his all; he lost his kingdom, fortunes, his brothers and even his dear wife. There was great jubilation at the court, in which the old king Dhritarashtra also joined. But there was one person in Hastinapura on that day who was terribly stricken with grief. It was Gandhari. On seeing the base and irreligious conduct of her sons and the unmerited and unjust suffering of the Pandavas, she approached her husband and asked him to express his entire disapproval of the conduct of their wicked sons. She went even a step further,

and peremptorily told her husband to banish Duryodhana, who had become a disgrace to the whole Kuru family.

As a mother Gandhari never allowed her love for her sons to get the better of her judgment and wisdom. Her voice throughout the *Mahābhārata* is the voice of warning to her sons, who were treading the path of error and injustice. Her constant exhortation to Duryodhana was to make up the quarrel existing between the Kauravas and the Pandavas and to find a formula of peaceful and amicable settlement. When Sri Krishna came to Hastinapura on the eve of the Kurukshetra War as the plenipotentiary of the Pandavas with specific peace proposals, and when these proposals were being contemptuously rejected by Duryodhana, Gandhari throwing aside all hesitations appeared personally in the royal court of Hastinapura and sternly rebuked Duryodhana for his wayward conduct. She plainly told her son in the midst of the entire assembly that the wages of sin was death. She also said that war did not solve any problems; on the contrary, it led to further complications. So her definite and emphatic advice to her son was to restrain his greed and desist from war.

Duryodhana however, had no respect for these wise words of his mother and adopted war as an instrument of his policy. After the outbreak of the Kurukshetra War, which lasted for eighteen days, Duryodhana used to visit his mother every day before going to the battle-field, in order to seek her blessings. The pathetic prayer of Duryodhana was that his mother should wish victory for his cause, but in spite of his repeated entreaties, Gandhari always uttered the highly significant words before Duryodhana that righteousness always and invariably triumphed.

After the conclusion of the War, in which all her sons were slain, Sri Krishna, after pacifying Gandhari, asked her permission to go away immediately to save the Pandava Princes from an impending danger from Ashwatthama. She quickly asked him to depart and save the Pandava princes from this disaster; such was her composure in the midst of a terrible calamity, and so great were her sense of duty and her affection for the Pandavas. There was only one occasion when she seemed to be overpowered by terrible grief. Before the dead bodies of her sons in the battle-field of Kurukshetra, she fell unconscious to the ground.

Gandhari made Sri Krishna responsible for the Kurukshetra War and uttered a fearful curse on the Yadavas, of which he was the most distinguished representative. She prophesied that a cruel calamity would overtake the house of the Yadavas, inasmuch as Sri Krishna ignored or failed to prevent the ruinous war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. On the strength of her chastity and asceticism, she even said that Sri Krishna himself in no distant future would fall a prey to a foul death. It is important to bear in mind in this connection that Sri Krishna smilingly accepted this curse and recognized her truthfulness, piety and penance.

After the Kurukshetra War, Dhritarashtra and Gandhari lived for sixteen years at Hastinapura under the protection of the Pandavas. They forgot to a great extent their grief at the loss of their sons on account of the wonderful care and sympathy bestowed upon them by Yudhishtira. At the end of the sixteenth year, however, they decided to go on a final pilgrimage to the Himalayas. In this mission they were accompanied by Dhrita-

rashtra's half-brother Vidura, his minister Sanjay, and Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas. On the eve of their departure, Dhritarashtra addressed a big assembly of citizens of Hastinapura and men from the countryside. In this meeting Gandhari appeared by the side of her husband with her eyes bandaged and made a request to the assembled multitude through her husband asking their forgiveness of the sins of her sons.

The final departure of the sorrowful old King Dhritarashtra was pathetic. Kunti came forward to lead the journey. Gandhari put her hands on the shoulders of Kunti, and Dhritarashtra followed Gandhari, placing his hands on her shoulders. Vidura and Sanjaya were on either side of this procession. The citizens of Hastinapura wept aloud like orphans as the procession came out of the main gate of the city, but Dhritarashtra and Gandhari and others walked on unmoved. In the Himalayas, they spent a few more years till they were burnt alive by a conflagration which had enveloped that part of the forest in which they lived. Confronted by it, they showed remarkable courage and fortitude. They refused to escape from the fire; on the other hand, they sat down on the ground with calmness and in a spirit of resignation welcoming the approach of the flames. On the day of her passing away from the earth, Gandhari's eyes were still bandaged, and she made the supreme sacrifice with unflinching loyalty to her ideals. She exemplifies the best ideals of Indian womanhood through the ages from the days of the *Mahābhārata*, and remains immortal in the minds of millions of Indians who derive their inspiration from the great Epic.

3. Kunti

Kunti, throughout the *Mahābhārata*, is the embodiment of

patience, fortitude and self-sacrifice. She was the daughter of a king and was married to King Pandu of Hastinapura. She accompanied her husband to the Himalayas and lived for a number of years in a hermitage at North Paripatra. There she gave birth to three sons, Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna, and at the time of the birth of Arjuna, she heard the prophecy that this son of hers would in no way be inferior to Indra, the king of the gods, and that he would recover the lost glory and prestige of his family.

After the death of her husband, Kunti came to Hastinapura with her three sons and also with her two step-sons, Nakula and Sahadeva. She showed wonderful patience and forbearance while she passed her days under the care of King Dhritarashtra at Hastinapura. These were, to a certain extent, days of suffering and persecution, but Kunti bore them well, and after passing through the ordeal of fire at Varanavata, where Dhritarashtra and his son Duryodhana planned the burning of the entire Pandava family, she escaped with her sons, after crossing the Ganga and wandering for days together in the wilderness to the kingdom of the Panchalas. There Arjuna, by his prowess and skill in archery, obtained Draupadi, the daughter of the king of Panchala as his wife. The prophecy about him, which sustained Kunti throughout her life, was thus being fulfilled. The alliance of the Pandavas with the Panchalas now compelled Dhritarashtra to reconsider his former views regarding his nephews. He sent Vidura to the king of Panchala with a request to send Kunti and her sons back to Hastinapura, where they were now received with kindness, hospitality and honour. Yudhishtira was given half of the kingdom of the Kurus with Indraprastha on the Yamuna as his capital. Kunti was now the queen-mother,

But her days of happiness and prosperity were short-lived, inasmuch as Yudhishtira and his brothers, together with Draupadi, had to go to the forest, losing everyting in a game of dice organized by Duryodhana and his uncle Shakuni. Kunti was not prepared for this unexpected reverse of fortune. She was terribly aggrieved, but remained firm as a rock and uttered words of encouragement and advice to Draupadi as she was accompanying the Pandavas to the forest.

Kunti stayed at the house of Vidura during the thirteen years that the Pandavas had to live in exile. After this exile, the last year of which had to be passed incognito, the Pandavas returned and demanded their heritage. Duryodhana refused to return it, and war followed as a consequence. Before the outbreak of it, Sri Krishna made a last attempt to avert the great tragedy and went personally to the court of Hastinapura with overtures of peace. While there, Sri Krishna saw Kunti at the house of Vidura in order to receive instructions from her regarding the impending conflict. Kunti wept bitterly and advised against compromise on humiliating terms. She could never forgive the Kauravas on account of the insults that they had heaped particularly on Draupadi, who was dearer to her than even her own sons.

She was greatly pained that nobody except Vidura had protested against the inhuman conduct of Duhshasana towards Draupadi on the day of the game of dice. Vidura had made a last attempt to save the Kauravas from the impending destruction consequent on their iniquity. Referring to this episode Kunti declared that the only person worthy of respect and worship in that great assembly of Hastinapura was Vidura. She undoubtedly laid down a very important maxim necessary for the moral evolution of mankind when she said that a man

attained moral elevation by his character and conduct, and not by his fortune or learning.

Kunti had some messages to deliver to her sons through Sri Krishna. Her message to Yudhishtira was that his *dharma* was becoming fruitless by his failure to perform the duties of his station. To Bhima and Arjuna she pointed out that it was now necessary for them to vindicate the honour of their mother. Her exhortation to Nakula and Sahadeva was that anything which was achieved by strength and prowess was to be preferred to life and fortune. She ended her speech by pointing out that Yudhishtira's power of understanding and common sense had become blunted by his excessive reading of religious texts. Her counsel was war.

Kunti now related the famous story of Vidura, the queen of the Sindhu country. Vidura had peremptorily asked her only son Sanjaya to embrace death instead of making a compromise with disgrace and dishonour, since it was far better to arise and shine even for a moment than to cling to a life which was purposeless and devoid of glory. Kunti asked her sons not to accept poverty and humiliation on any account. Her one advice to them was war—for the vindication of the honour of their family and for the redemption of their lost glory and fortune.

The only occasion in which Kunti seemed to show some signs of weakness and mental indecision was when she went out to meet her deserted son Karna on the eve of the Kurukshetra War. A terrible conflict passed through her mind when she visualized the impending battle between her two sons, Karna and Arjuna. Her motherly heart was bleeding at the prospect of the terrible fight, and she offered Karna alluring terms in order to win him

over to the side of the Pandavas. But Karna remained steadfast in his loyalty to Duryodhana, and rebuked his mother for her pitiless desertion of him immediately after his birth. He described her as a person who was anxious to consult her own interests alone. Kunti perhaps did not deserve this rebuke. As a mother who was suffering from unbearable mental agony, she conceived it to be her duty to play the part of a mediator ; and throwing aside all hesitation and sense of shame, she interviewed Karna for the purpose of bringing about an honourable settlement between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Her firm conviction was that Duryodhana, being deserted by Karna, would come down to reach an agreement with her sons. Thus the impending catastrophe would be averted, and the two branches of the same family would be able to live together in peace and with mutual understanding.

The Kurukshetra War became inevitable. It was fought to a finish and was a terrible tragedy, for through it India became bereft of all male warriors. Sixteen years after this dire calamity, Dhritarashtra and Gandhari decided to retire to the Himalayas. Vidura and Sanjaya volunteered to accompany them. This was understandable, because, both were attached to the old King. But what was most surprising was the attitude of Kunti on this occasion. She had always urged her sons to fight and recover their lost fortune. This had been accomplished, and her son Yudhishtira was the overlord of the whole of India. It was to be expected that Kunti would be glad to continue indefinitely her life of ease and comfort after long years of suffering. But wealth and fortune had no more attraction for her. She made the supreme decision of her life that it was her duty to accompany Dhritarashtra and Gandhari on their journey to the forest.

Her sons Yudhishtira and Bhima, in particular, tried to dissuade her from this resolution. But she remained firm. She pointed out that she had already enjoyed enough wealth and fortune : her clear duty now was to adopt a life of asceticism. She had only one message for her sons, namely, that they should cultivate righteousness and be also generous.

In the Himalayas, Kunti passed the remaining years of her life in placid contentment. Thoughts of Hastinapura and the fortunes of her sons no longer troubled her mind. Her devotion to Dhritarashtra and Gandhari during this period was also wonderful. Her end was as noble as her life. When a conflagration engulfed the forest in which she was living with Gandhari and Dhritarashtra, she remained steadfast and embraced death peacefully.

4. Draupadi

Draupadi, throughout the *Mahābhārata*, is the embodiment of courage, fortitude, sense and sensibility, and even pride and prejudice. In a sense, she is the central figure of the great Epic, and her character has been depicted with wonderful skill by that master-artist, Maharshi Krishna Dwaipayana. The very circumstances of her birth made it abundantly clear that she had come to this world to fulfil a great destiny. She arose from a sacrificial fire lit by her father, Drupada, king of Panchala, and at once a voice from above announced that Draupadi would in course of time perform duties pleasing to the gods, and that the Kuru family would meet with disaster on her account. Her beauty was indescribable, and her body emitted the fragrance of a blue lotus. In short, she was a veritable goddess in human form. When she came of age, her father

arranged a *swayamvara sabhā* (marriage assembly) in order that she might have the opportunity of selecting her own husband. In that great assembly of the foremost heroes of India, Arjuna, by showing his prowess obtained Draupadi as his bride.

As a wife, Draupadi became the ideal mistress of the household when Yudhishtira became installed as king at Indraprastha (modern Delhi) on the bank of the Yamuna. Yudhishtira performed a great sacrifice called Rajasuya in which kings from different parts of India participated and rendered homage to him as the paramount overlord. The Kaurava brothers also came and joined the ceremony which lasted for a number of days. Duryodhana became very jealous on seeing the immense prosperity of the Pandavas and returned to Hastinapura with a heavy heart. He complained of many things to his father Dhritarashtra, but he testified with great candour to the fact that Draupadi had supervised the feeding of all alike, from the highest to the lowest, herself remaining without food till everybody was fed and satisfied.

Mercy and solicitude for the poor and the distressed were not the only traits in the character of Draupadi. She was a woman possessing courage and a sense of dignity. When Yudhishtira lost her in a game of dice at Hastinapura, and Duhshasana, brother of Duryodhana, taking recourse to unfair means, heaped all sorts of personal insult upon her in the open assembly, she turned round to the members present and asked for protection and justice. Finding everybody silent, she rebuked the open assembly saying that sense of justice had disappeared from India and that the members of the warrior caste had forgotten their duties. Otherwise, said she, "How could the

members of the assembly, in an open session at Hastinapura, remain silent spectators of the injustice that was being perpetrated before their very eyes?" With her hair dishevelled and her garments displaced, she called Duhshasana a fiend guilty of savage (anārya) conduct, as he was going to strip her. As her last resource, she made a passionate appeal to the elders in the assembly to come to her rescue. But even Bhishma, the noblest man and greatest warrior of the age, remained inactive and pleaded as an excuse, his inability to understand the intricacies of *dharma*. The only person who raised a protest was Vidura, who earnestly exhorted everybody present to express his disapproval of the heinous conduct of Duhshasana. Bhima then announced that Duhshasana would have to pay dearly for his gross insults to Draupadi.

As a faithful wife, she accompanied the Pandavas on their journey to the forest. During the twelve years that they had to live there, Draupadi acted as the ideal mistress of the household. But she carefully nursed her suffering and humiliation, and did everything in her power to refer to that episode of her life, whenever possible. Once Sri Krishna came to the forest to enquire about them, and Draupadi, with tears in her eyes, told him that she could not forget for a moment that a woman of her status could be so openly humiliated in the presence of the Pandavas. Sri Krishna at once solemnly assured her that the wives of the Kauravas would have to weep in the same manner as she was doing on that day. She was further told that she would become an empress. So she must cast away her grief. Draupadi was satisfied for the time being, but later she entered into a controversy with Yudhishtira about the attributes of *dharma* and their application to human affairs. In this, however,

she was defeated, for Yudhishtira succeeded in proving his thesis that *dharma* was an all-pervading law in the universe, and its pursuit was never fruitless. He asked her to banish all her doubts regarding the triumph of *dharma*.

Draupadi was pacified and derived considerable solace and strength from his words. During the remaining years that she had to stay in the forest in the company of the Pandavas, she acted as an ideal wife bearing patiently all the difficulties of that life. When Sri Krishna and his wife Satyabhama came to meet the Pandavas in the forest towards the end of the period of their stay there, Satyabhama asked Draupadi in all humility how she could manage her household affairs with such credit, and how she could win the confidence, love and respect of such great heroes as the five Pandava brothers. Draupadi's discourse on the duties and responsibilities of the wife on this occasion is one of the important chapters of the *Mahābhārata*.

The stay of the Pandava brothers with Draupadi at the house of Virata, the king of the Matsya country, during the thirteenth year of their banishment, was perhaps the greatest penance of their life. During that year they lived a life of complete self-effacement, since they had to pass it incognito, and all of them accepted occupations which were completely unworthy of their status. Just before their entry into the Matsya country, Yudhishtira was greatly perturbed on account of Draupadi. She was a beloved wife and, according to him, deserved to be maintained like a mother and honoured as an elder sister. So he could not come to any conclusion in regard to the occupation that she should adopt at the house of Virata. Draupadi relieved his anxieties by voluntarily accepting the life

of a maidservant at the house of Virata. In spite of her all-captivating beauty and her bearing, she submitted herself to performing the lowliest duties of the household. On one occasion she tearfully told Bhima that her palms had become rough, and her fingers had developed corns by performing the hard work that was laid on her. Her tears did not really flow because of the hard work that she had to do; they were caused by the insults that she had received from Kichaka, the commander-in-chief of the king. One day she sought protection from him in the open court of Virata. But Kichaka insulted her in the presence of all by kicking her. The stern reproach that Draupadi administered to the king on this occasion is memorable. She had no hesitation in proclaiming that the law of the jungle, and not justice was prevalent in the kingdom of Virata; she also declared that the king was unworthy of his royal seat, and that even the members of the court were not true to their *dharma*, inasmuch as they worshipped such an incompetent king. She thus clearly hinted that the members of the assembly should rise against the king and depose him. *Virata-parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, however, ends on a note of joy and merriment. On their identity being revealed at the end of their period of exile, the Pandavas cemented their friendship with the king of the Matsyas by a marriage alliance—the marriage between Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna, and Uttara, the daughter of Virata.

Then the Pandavas approached towards the Kuru country and established their camp at Upaplavya just on the frontier of the Matsya territory (modern Alwar, Jaipur and Bharatpur). There was a council of war, in which Drupada, Virata, the Pandavas, Sri Krishna and Draupadi participated. At the hour of crisis almost everybody counselled moderation and spoke in

favour of a policy of peace. Even Bhima was prepared to forgive and forget, but Draupadi remained adamant. She could on no account pardon Duhshasana and the Kauravas for the insults that they had inflicted on her. Addressing Sri Krishna she said that if Bhima and Arjuna were so down-hearted as to advocate a policy of peace, her old father Drupada would wage a relentless war against the Kauravas. In that war of vengeance Abhimanyu, with her five sons, would march forward to exact the price of humiliation. She would have no peace of mind until she saw the severed hands of Duhshasana lying in the dust—the hands that had pulled her hair in insult. She was particularly pained by the words of Bhima, who counselled peace and moderation in the name of *dharma*. Draupadi said that *dharma* was entirely misunderstood by Bhima and others, and in her utter helplessness she burst into tears, taking the lock of her hair in her left hand as she denounced the policy of reconciliation. Her spirited outburst was in every way worthy of her position and dignity; it was her sworn revenge for outraged womanhood. She could be satisfied with nothing less than the utter extinction of her oppressors. Sri Krishna was visibly moved by her bold speech, and assured her that he would himself try his utmost to wage the war of vengeance which would bring about the total annihilation of the Kauravas. This assurance, Sri Krishna averred, was bound to be fulfilled, and Draupadi was destined in the near future, to see the Pandavas recover their lost glory and fortune.

The Kurukshetra War, as Sri Krishna predicted, was a total war, and it ended in the complete annihilation of the Kaurava dynasty. The Pandavas got back their lost kingdom, and Yudhishthira became the paramount suzerain of the whole

of India. Draupadi was now an unquestioned empress, and she occupied the royal palace of Hastinapura made vacant by her enemies. For thirty-six years she passed her days there as a worthy consort of the Pandavas. But when Yudhishtira and his four brothers decided to forsake the world and undertake a journey of pilgrimage into the unknown, Draupadi came forward and adopted the same course. Giving up royal dresses and garments, they all put on the robes of mendicants and left their seat of power, Hastinapura, for their final pilgrimage to the Himalayas and even beyond. First of all however, they made a tour of the whole of India, east, south, west and north : before their final departure from this world, they wanted to have a last glimpse of their dear motherland in its entirety. That purpose accomplished, they did not cast a second look behind. Their life's mission was fulfilled. They passed through the almost insurmountable Himalayas, and saw a great desert on the other side.

As they were proceeding fast in their final great journey, Draupadi, who was not thoroughly fit for it, encountered a fall. She had certain limitations in her character—and who has not?—which prevented her from achieving what she desired. The only pilgrim in the group who could reach the goal was Yudhishtira, who was a model of unflinching moral virtues ; he did not look behind, nor did he turn either to the left or to the right, but moved straight on. In spite of her failings Draupadi remains a unique type of woman, not merely a fond and devoted wife, but a true helpmate and partner in life's affairs. She is perhaps the best illustration of Kalidasa's famous verse : 'A good housewife, wise counsellor, dear companion and

a beloved pupil in the cultivation of the fine arts." She was the very embodiment of *Shri* or good fortune in the house of the Pandavas. She was occasionally subject to moods of indignation, no doubt, but the loftiness of her soul, her unfailing courage in the face of disasters, her spirit of self-sacrifice, and above all, her moral earnestness and spiritual integrity have shed a lustre on the ideals of womanhood in ancient India.

"If we realized the presence of God as witness to all we say and do, we would not have anything to conceal from anybody on earth. For we would not think unclean thoughts before our Maker, much less speak them. It is uncleanness that seeks secrecy and darkness."

MAHATMA GANDHI

The 'Bewildering Beauty'

Kamakhya Prasad Roy

"At times her eyes gaze into the far distance and her expression is of a supernal beauty which defies all descriptions", thus observes a French devotee Arnaud Desjardins while writing about Mother under the title 'Teaching without Words'.¹

And Melita Maschmann, a contemporary German authoress of fame, one endowed with clarity of vision as well as a distinctive way of expressing it in her Diary, attempts a sort of delving into the depth of the unfathomable sweetness of this enchanting beauty of Mother. An English tourist, she reports, who had seen Mātāji once only for ten minutes during *darśana* time, remarked: "I do not understand anything about holiness, but the beauty of Sri Anandamayī Mā is bewildering".²

Following her individual bent of reasoning as to what exactly this 'bewildering beauty' could mean, Melita Maschmann gives her unreserved opinion: "A woman aged nearly 70, dressed in the plainest white cotton *dhoties*, with hair that according to western standards never looks combed. And yet: bewildering beauty! And that in the most diverse situations, not only in moments of spiritual transference. I should say always: The secret of it is impenetrable, but one might perhaps circumscribe it: for instance Mātāji's freedom from any kind of self observation. She does not either seek herself in the

1. Ananda Varta Vol. XIII/I, Page 6

2. A. V. Vol. XIV/I, Page 1-15

mirror of admiring eyes. Long ago and for all times she has let herself go. Whether—watched by thousands of eyes—she stands, walks, sits or lies, there is invariably absolute freedom and artlessness in her movements. One has the feeling that she never has to conquer any resistance in herself, be it of bodily or psychic origin, never to restrain any impulse".²

As Miss Maschmann proceeds in her reasoning and tries to understand Mother in the midst of her ever-changing environments, yet herself maintaining unaffected simplicity all the time, while on the surface one may not miss "the charm and the friendly mockery with which she reacts to challenges in the discussion; the motherly seriousness when she reprimands, the confidence when she comforts, her attention when she listens", and above all "the pleasure with which she enjoys fun". The authoress revels in her discovery, which is recorded in the following words : "All these situations have something in common, they show Matāji in spontaneous response and ever full of spirit. Besides they disclose the central impulse that pervades all her relationship to human beings : Kindliness".³

It is interesting to observe how the authoress concludes her assessment of this intriguing feature of Mother's Beauty, which she holds is due to her "perfect reposing in God". We reproduce below the entire paragraph :

"Spontaneity, liveliness, kind-heartedness—do they make a person beautiful in the sense in which Mātāji is beautiful? Do they impart to this beauty the power to transform hearts? They certainly do. Of course only when they are rooted in the

3. A. V. Vol. XIV/I, Page 16-17.

very centre of Being where reigns absolute peace. The Self reposing in Itself establishes undisturbable balance, a harmony expressing as beauty when translated into the physical, although beauty is not of the body. This harmony operates even in the most insignificant gestures : The expression of a hand during sleep; the position of a foot; the sound of laughter, the bearing of the head while drinking. There is no gap whatsoever. *The peace originating in the centre of Being radiates right to the periphery of the hairtips. Mātāji's beauty is but her sanctity, her perfect reposing in God*".³

At this point we revert to an illuminating dialogue that took place at Varanasi between Mother and a young Irish journalist who came to see Her at the Ashram on the 10th of October, 1957⁴ :—

The journalist asks : Am I right to believe that you are God ?

Mataji : There is nothing save Him alone; everyone and everything are but forms of God. In your person also He has come here now to give *darśana*.

Question : Then why are you in this world ?

Mātāji : In this world ? I am not anywhere. *I am myself reposing within Myself.*

Now, while Miss Maschmann traces the secret of Mother's bewildering beauty to her state of "perfect reposing in God", we have on the other hand a direct record of Mother's own confession—should we say testament—that 'She is reposing within Herself.'

4. A. V. Vol. XIV/I, "Old Diary Leaves"—By Atmananda.

The anthropomorphic conception of God is all right so long as one is in the kindergarten of religion. But, as one advances in his understanding and matures, he has to, sooner or later, enter into the mystery of that pure God-concept, nay, God consciousness, so vividly held before us by Christ Jesus in these living words :—

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: For the Father seeketh such to worship him.

“God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”⁵

We believe therefore, that for these earnest and maturer seekers it may not be difficult to subscribe to the views of our revered Maunanandaji (more often referred to as Bhaiji) expressed in his positive assertion that ‘God’ and ‘Mā’ (i. e. Sri Sri Mā Ānandamayi) are two synonymous words.

This presently brings to our memory the illustrious Paramahansa Yoganandaji’s very significant reference to Mā in his “Autobiography” :

“The closest of dear friends, she made one feel—yet an aura of remoteness was ever around her—the paradoxical isolation of omnipresence.”⁶

What a masterly presentation of the superb idea that even though due to the absolute sincerity and spontaneous all-

5. John IV/23-24

6. “Autobiography of a Yogi”—By Paramahansa Yogananda, Page 470 (Revised 3rd edition).

embracing love that flows from the holy being of Mother, one is immediately drawn to Her and also experiences the rare feeling of a personal kinship, yet the next moment, one is aware of the remoteness of Ma's divine presence, failing to get within the spiritual aura in which she remains isolated from the rest! But mind, this isolation actually is not Mother's but ours: an isolation that is the creation of our own egoistic living.

It is extremely interesting to find that though Miss Maschmann does not speak of this paradox, yet in her observation of the feeling of kinship and oneness that is instantly established with Mother, it is really the Omnipresence of God revealed in and through the presence of Mother. And in clear and unequivocal words she gives expression to her feeling, only with trepidation of heart lest the unwilling doctrinaires of little faith look askance with scorn and scoff:

"The elegy of the remoteness of God that has for years been sung with such fervour in the West!" She continues, "Its pathos is gradually getting on my nerves. Perhaps because I myself have sung it so perseveringly? Even the sermons and prayers of priests are full of this pathos. It has almost become the only testimony for 'true religiousness'. Does anyone still dare to say: What do you want. He is right here among us, in every selfless action, in every loving word! The reaction would be an outcry of scorn by those who enjoy their depravity".⁷

In the same context, the authoress very aptly quotes an Indian Christian to have spoken to Mother one day, "You yourself are a proof to me of the correctness of the Christian

doctrine, 'God is Love'. It is only because you are so permeated by God that you are so loving. Or, put differently, only because you are so brimful of love do you flow over with God".⁸

We have a fine account of her first '*darśana*' of Mātāji given in Miss Maschmann article "Mātāji Gives Darshan", in the Book "Mother As Seen By Her Devotees". It was sometime during the summer months of 1962, when Mother was at Kankhal that the authoress had the opportunity of her first *darśana* of Ma : How beautifully she has described her wonderful experience as she found herself before the august Presence that is Mā Anandamayi ! And such was the impact of that rare experience on herself that even her own words sounded somewhat strange to her ears and she wondered whether she had gone crazy or had been dreaming all the while ! "What I experienced...", she says, in her inimitable way of expressing things, "cannot be conveyed to a person who has never known anything similar—I can only relate outer signs and speak in metaphors. Just imagine that a tree—a beautiful strong old beech for instance—approaches you with calm steps. What would you feel ?" Alive to her own human limitations, yet like a bold adventurous diver she is determined to dive into the immensity of the egoless existence that Mother is. That the result of her honest attempt is not of a mean success will be borne out by her own account we present here. ".....I feel very much like those artists. What is describable in Mātāji is the familiar human element. For that which is beyond, for the Divine, I also have no means of expression. But I could use an expedient similar

to those of the painters. Sometimes I believed to see a stream of light radiate from her eyes. But at such moments I more than ever felt pained at my blindness. I knew that if only I were more of a seer, I should have beheld her whole form in this halo. *Although incapable of perceiving it, I yet felt it and was able to register its effect by the complete peace that filled me at certain hours*"⁹

It is beautiful on its own merit, in spite of the fact that she is still caught in one of her subjective moods of communication, as is wont with an artist of letters of her eminence. Still continuing in her attempt to find some clue by which to decipher the mystery that is beyond words, she takes a plunge, as it were, into the unfathomable and holds out the secret of her find in the following manner, "The mystery of its secrecy shall remain untouched, but perhaps I may be permitted to try and approach it by a few more steps. I felt that this divine light must be connected with Mātāji's egolessness. It originates from the eternal ground of all existence, let us unhesitatingly call it 'God'. And it streams through Mātāji because it is not impaired by the opaque texture of the I-ness which, in the case of all of us is more or less dense"⁹. [Page 76]

We may go on quoting one after another such tributes paid to Mother during the last fifty years or so of her public ministrations, by her countless children drawn from the entire globe: all of which will bear testimony to Her egoless absolute Universality. And these, we know, are not merely reproductions of individual moods, or subjective responses awakened in the presence of Mother. Rather a good many of them draw

9. Mother As Seen By Her Devotees"--Page 72-76.

their objective conclusions after a close study of her words and actions—though of course, she does not act in the sense which the word usually conveys to us. How small incidents around Mother leave an indelible impression in one's mind, working perhaps a near-miracle of transmitting to the heart the joy and felicity of the indwelling spirit of Grace and truth of which she appears to be the very embodiment in her own Being! Here is one such, again borrowed from the same source : [Page 75]

“At one moment a tattered old peasant woman who was almost blind and gave off an indescribable smell, came and squatted on the floor close to Mātāji. Mātāji bent down low to her. For several minutes their heads almost seemed to touch and one could hear a soft murmuring. Mātāji listened with Her whole being. A kindness was expressed in this, which represented something human to perfection.....”¹⁰

And this is just a drop as compared to the ocean of Mother's boundless compassion.

Yet, we shall probably never realise in totality the secret of this 'Bewildering Beauty'—that Mother is—until we have allowed to instil and percolate through every fibre of our being her salutary Grace, which, to say the least, is like unto the very meat and drink of one's life. But, alas! this is not to be, so long as we have not been able to release ourselves from the opposite pull of the lower nature, the ego, the 'flesh'.

Ah! *“The spirit truly is willing
But the flesh is weak!”—*

10. Mother As Seen By Her Devotees—Page, 75
—2nd. revised and enlarged edition. Oct. 1967
Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, Varanasi.

as the Great Master of all times, Jesus Christ so lovingly pronounces of the most tragic of failings in human life.

Mother says : "Just as there is a veil of ignorance, there is a door of knowledge too". So, even in spite of the unyielding incrustations of habits, prejudices and superstitions laid thick on ourselves, our true inner life, the divine, pure and unsullied Self within will quickly receive the grace at moments, as is evident from the testimonies of Mother's children enjoying this rare privilege on occasions. Here is one such, we quote as a fine specimen :

The year 1963. December twenty-fifth. Mother was at Calcutta at the place of a devotee Sri D. K. Nag, in the southern part of the city, where a 'Gita Jayanti' was to be held from that day. The incident is reproduced below from the original source :

"Today, I was standing near the bookstall outside of the *satsang* tent. Suddenly emerging from the twilight of the background, Mataji advanced towards us with quick steps, heading a group of *sādhus*. It was like a dream. The people who stood around fell at her feet. I remained standing. For a second I had a sensation as if I were at the sea-shore. I saw a large luminous wave coming towards us and was wondering why all the others threw themselves on the ground. Everything in me waited with hushed jubilation to be swallowed up by the wave.

"Across the stooping backs Mātāji smiled at me. At that moment I understood what a tremendous power accumulates in the joy of those who see God. Not only Mātāji's face, but her entire body radiates this overwhelming joy. Joy that draws its

sustenance from the dust of the road, from the voice of the beggar, from the fragment of a passing conversation, from the greeting of a child—from everything, for all is God."¹¹

Herein then is the secret being revealed, at least to a certain extent, to the understanding heart that this supreme Joy—being probably the very basis of the 'Beauty'—contrary to our common belief, gets its nourishment not only from all that is high and noble alone but as well from the lowly and meaner objects and surroundings, even as the poet philosopher R. W. Emerson has so nicely sung in one of his lyric poems, "Music" :

‘Let me go where’er I will
I hear a sky-born music still,
It sounds from all things old,
It sounds from all things young,
From all that is fair, from all that is foul
Peals out a cheerful song.

“It is not only in the rose,
It is not only in the bird,
Not only where the rainbow glows,
Nor in the song of a woman heard,
But in the darkest meanest things
There alway, alway something sings.

“It is not in the high stars above,

11. A. V. Vol. XV/III. Page 118/19 “From the Diary of a European”—By Melita Maschmann.

Nor in the cups of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There always, always something sings."

We believe that the poet had also touched the hem of that Life, the Truth—in which undoubtedly is rooted the life of Mother, abounding with Joy, Love and Beauty.

We have not to go far then to realise that this TRUTH, the very basis of Mother's Holy Being, holds the sure answer to the mystery of Her 'Bewildering Beauty.'

And we remember with what passionate zeal did Keats once sing of this fundamental of life on earth :

"Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth and all ye need to know."

Mātri Līlā

(March 23rd—June 24th, 1973.)

During the last three months Mataji moved to and fro a great deal within a comparatively small area in the U. P. During this period Mataji came to Kankhal five times and to Varanasi and Naimisharanya three times each. She never stayed anywhere for more than a few days, with the sole exception of Uttar Kashi where she remained for two and a half weeks.

On March 23rd Mataji reached Varanasi from Delhi. There was a meeting of the Sangha and so a number of devotees came from Bombay and other places. One day, after they had all left, Sri Tanpura Baba, a sādhu from Maharashtra who is a famous kirtana singer and keeps a party of about a hundred singers, came to Mataji. He related to her that there was great scarcity of food in his part of the country as the rains had failed for two years and he was trying his best to feed the starving villagers. He requested Mataji to provide him with hundred sacks of wheat. Mataji said: "Gopalji will arrange." One devotee at once volunteered to pay for one sack and others followed suit. Mataji also gave whatever people would bring for her. In this way the price of fifty sacks was collected. But Tanpura Baba refused to be satisfied with less than he had asked for. Mataji then remembered that she had about two years ago asked people to forgo one meal every week or month

and donate the money thus saved for the needy. Sri Ram Panjwani who collects this money and regularly feeds the poor, was asked whether he could spare the amount required. He fortunately could. Thus Tanpura Baba returned to his province with a truckful of wheat, his wish fulfilled.

On March 27th Mataji left for Vindhyachal, taking only a very few people with her. After spending one night at our Ashram on Ashtabhujā Hill, she sent some of her companions to Varanasi and Allahabad, keeping only two of them with her, and suddenly descended to Vindhyachal, choosing an empty dharmasāla on the bank of the Ganges for her abode. There she could really be alone and rest. On the second day, Sri Gurupriya Devi's sister who lives in the Vindhyachal Ashram succeeded in finding Mataji, but no one else did. On March 31st Mataji motored to Allahabad. Now everyone was again allowed to join her. She first went to 31, George Town, where she has a permanent cottage at the residence of the late judge M. Mukerji, and spent a few hours with his family. From there she proceeded to the Satyagopal Ashram at Allengunj where she regularly every year spends two or three nights. During her stay at Allahabad she went to see the old father of two of our Brahmacharis who is very sick and also visited the houses of two or three other devotees. Early morning on April 3rd she left for Varanasi. On her way she halted at the Ashram of Sri Prabhudatt Brahmachari at Jhusi. She had brought two large baskets with fruits and vegetables with her. Cooking was started at once and Mataji and her party had their midday meal with Sri Prabhudattji. Mataji was in an excellent mood and of her own *kheyāla* talked for quite a while about the spiritual life.

The devotees of Varanasi tried to persuade Mataji to remain with them for *Vasanti Pūjā*, which was to commence on April 8th. Mataji, unable to give way to their entreaties, was however present when the image for the worship was brought, and in this way gave her blessing to the function. On the 6th she entrained for Naimisharanya.

On the 10th morning, *Ashtami* day of *Navarātri*, a devotee presented a cow to that Ashram, performing an elaborate pūjā. Just at that time a villager arrived from a considerable distance. He told Mataji that he was an ardent worshipper of Goddess Kali. He had prayed to Her for guidance. Kali appeared to him in a dream and directed him to go to Purān Mandir where he would get from Anandamayi Ma what he needed. Mataji was very gracious to the poor villager. She talked to him at length and taught him some special kirtana. She also asked a local devotee to note his address and inform him when Mataji would come to Naimisharanya again. Thus when Mataji returned there later in the month he came and Mataji again sang to him. She one day sent two Brahmacharis to sing Kirtana in his far off village.

Mataji left Naimisharanya on the 10th evening, alighting at Kankhal early the next morning, which was *Ram Navami* day. Various functions took place that day in the Siva Mandir and Mataji started supervising the arrangements the moment she arrived. Later in the morning, Swami Madhavananda of the Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, arrived with a party. Mataji asked him to talk and he spoke about Sri Rama and also sang kirtana. Then some of his people asked Mataji questions and an interesting discussion ensued.

On April 13th, Didima's *sannyāsa utsava* was celebrated in the usual manner by Siva Puja in the Siva temple and Gurupuja in Didima's *Samādhi Mandir*, by kirtana all day long and a feast at midday. There was also sādhu feeding at the Nirvani Akhāra in Didima's honour. In the morning the foundation stone for an extension of the small Kankhal Ashram was laid in Mataji's presence. Some land opposite the Ashram has been acquired by devotees who want to build a spacious *satsang* hall and some guest-rooms.

At about midday, Srimati Indira Gandhi, who had come to Kankhal for a function, came to pay her respects to Mataji. She visited the Siva and *Samādhi Mandirs* and was taken upstairs to see Mataji alone. In the evening Mahamandaleshwara Sri Prakashanandaji and Swami Gyaneshanandaji gave very interesting discourses in Mataji's presence in front of Didima's Mandir.

The next day was the Bengali New Year's day. Mataji came downstairs in the early morning and was kept busy all day long. Mataji gave the following New Year's message: "Man must undertake the supreme pilgrimage so as to attain to his Goal. He should be firm in his determination to reach a state in which there is ever new experience of the Divine." A devotee had a special *pūjā* performed at the adjoining *Daksheshwar Mandir* and Mataji attended for some time. Some Swamis came to invite Mataji to *Bhagavad Dhāma*, Hardwar, where a special gathering was being held for a week. Mataji went there the next afternoon. When asked to address the large audience, she sang very beautifully. On her way back to our Ashram she visited *Sādhana Dhāma* at Kankhal.

On April 16th night, Mataji once again left for Naimisharanya, reaching there the next morning. On the 18th she suddenly decided to go to Varanasi and left that very afternoon. Sri Gurupriya Devi was starting from Varanasi for Kankhal on the 20th midday and Mataji boarded the same train. At 6-30 p. m. she got down at Lucknow and from there went by car to Kanpur, reaching at about 9 p. m. at the Radha Krishna Temple. A phone message was sent to Lady Singhania who at once came to take Mataji to Ganga Kuti, the residence of Sir Padampad Singhania. He had recently had a severe heart attack. Sir Padampad was carried in a chair to Mataji and sat by her side for about half an hour. Mataji then declared that she would spend the night at Swadeshi House, the residence of the Jaipuria family, where a cottage is permanently reserved for her. She and her few companions reached there at 11 p. m. It was 1 a. m. by the time everyone had gone to bed. At 5 a. m. Mataji was up again and half an hour later started for Naimisharanya. At Lucknow she halted at Sri R. Sahai's place and had something to drink. She then stopped at the temple of Sri Prayag Narain Saigal at Sitapur, alighting at Naimisharanya at about 11 a. m. in the heat of the day with hot winds blowing.

Now followed a few quiet and peaceful days. Mataji would come out at 6 a. m. and all by herself go for a stroll in the Ashram grounds in the cool air of the morning. Then someone would feed her milk from the new Ashram cow. Later in the morning Mataji would occasionally enter the kitchen and teach the girls how to prepare a particular dish. Since there were no visitors, Mataji could relax and everyone had great fun watching her. At 5-30 p. m. there was *satsang* in the

hall. Brahmachari Virojananda would read out from ‘*Amara Vāni*’ and sometimes Mataji commented herself. Then she would go upstairs and stay on the terrace all by herself. From 9-10 p. m. the few present at the Ashram would again meet Mataji and sometimes she gave very beautiful and valuable spiritual instructions.

On April 27th night, Mataji left by the Doon Express. She did not disclose where she was going. Most of her companions got down at Hardwar, while Mataji went straight to Dehradun, reaching there on the 28th morning. She first of all went to Kalyanvan, seeing to various things and then proceeded to the Kishenpur Ashram. Mataji had arrived quite unexpectedly. All the same, quite a number of people collected from all over Dehradun and had Ma’s *darśana* at intervals during the few hours of her sojourn. At 4-30 p. m. she motored to Kankhal where she remained over night. On the 29th morning she again left by car with a very few companions. Her destination was not disclosed. She actually went to the farm of Sri Panjwani, which is situated somewhere midway between Hardwar and Rishikesh. On May 1st all the people at Kankhal Ashram were called to the farm and entertained to a feast.

That very evening Mataji returned to Kankhal where her informal birthday celebrations started on May 2nd. Kirtana of *Mā Nāma* was kept up throughout the day and night until 3 a. m. when the *pujā* started. Perpetual *japa* was also started and continued first at Kankhal and later at Uttarkashi until the Tithi Puja on May 21st morning.

On the 2nd night, Mataji went to sleep at 10 or 11 p. m., lying on a wooden bed in the open, in front of Didima’s *Samadhi*

Mandir. She was hidden by a mosquito curtain. Her photo and her sandals, placed on a low table in front of Ma's bed served as the object of worship. Yet Ma herself was there and her presence could be felt most powerfully. It was an extraordinarily beautiful and intimate function : no loudspeaker, no sitting arrangement, no formality. The thirty or forty persons present sat scattered all over the courtyard. Soft music was sung by the Ashram girls throughout the *pūjā*, followed by *Usha Kirtana*. Mataji lay motionless until the sunrays streamed in, when she had to move upstairs to her room.

During the next few days, Mataji gave long *darśanas* during the morning and evening *satsang*. On the 4th at about 2 p. m., Mataji suddenly got into the car with 3 or 4 companions only. She did not say where she was going nor when she would return, but it was assumed that she would come back the same evening. She actually did arrive at nearly 11 p. m. in another car, as her car had had a puncture. Someone asked : "Ma, where did you go ?" She replied, "To Giriji !" She had been to the Jaipuria House at Ramghat, Hardwar, where in August 1970, Didima had taken *Mahāsamādhi*. That room has been made into a *pūja* room and regular daily recitations are performed there by a pandit. The following few days also Mataji drove every afternoon to Ramghat for a few hours of undisturbed rest, returning to Kankhal at about 8 p. m. for the evening *satsang*.

From May 6th onwards devotees from far and near began to collect in large numbers for the purpose of accompanying Mataji to Uttarkashi on May 9th. Mataji had not been to Uttarkashi for 38 years. In August 1935, when the Kali

temple was consecrated there by Bholanathji himself. Mataji had trekked from Dehradun not only together with local devotees but also with quite a number of people who had come from Bengal for the occasion. It was a walk of about six or seven days. Some of the pilgrims had never even seen mountains. With the help of dandies, ponies, coolies and mules the party had finally reached their destination. In those days, Uttarkashi was an obsolete village with neither electricity nor tap water or any other modern amenities, a place that was attractive only to sādhakas who wished to do *tapasyā* in solitude. Now it is a town with schools and colleges for boys and girls, a bank, a hospital, any number of Government offices, well-stocked shops, regular bus services, and can be reached from Rishikesh in five or six hours.

On May 9th, the large party started along with Mataji in two busses, by cars, taxis and jeeps. On the way Mataji paid a short visit to Sivananda Ashram and reached Uttarkashi before the evening. Every day more and more devotees arrived from all over India. The Elaya Raja and Rani of Trivandrum were among the guests as well as the great singer Sm. S. M. Subhalakshmi with her family. Some devotees had come all the way from Goa.

The official celebrations of Mataji's birthday started on May 14th. A beautiful pandal, designed by a Calcutta artist, had been erected on the lawn of Bajoria Bhawan, which is next to Kailash Ashram, where Mataji, her attending girls and some other were housed. Just opposite, the large buildings of the Sanskrit College accommodated the bulk of devotees and also provided kitchens and dining places. In addition there was a whole camp of so-called "Swiss Cottages" besides a few ordinary

but solid tents. We were right on the bank of the Ganges and almost a mile beyond the town. The attendance was much larger than had been expected and the pandal, though quite spacious, proved too small. 600-700 people had assembled from outside and the local population also took very active interest. It was altogether a unique experience. It is difficult or impossible to find words to convey an idea of the charm and the special atmosphere of this remote place in the Himalayan mountains where for centuries so many mahātmas have lived and practised austerities in solitude, far removed from the madding crowd. The hours of *satsang* were somewhat shorter than usual. We were told : ‘Uttarkashi itself is *satsang*, wherever you may go, you are in the lap of Ganga’. And truly, when one sits down near the Ganga, one has to force oneself to get up. A meditative mood arises spontaneously. The Ganga is exhilarating, sanctifying and enchanting everywhere—be it in Hardwar, Varanasi or Calcutta. One cannot help loving it. But at Uttarkashi one comes to realize more than anywhere else that Sri Ganga is not a river, but Divinity appearing as water. There Mother Ganga may be compared to a gleeful, boisterous young girl, dancing and prancing over rocks and boulders and all the while singing loudly her bewitching song that drowns all noises of the world, transporting everyone who listen to it into another realm altogether. What a wonderful idea of Mahamandaleshwara Vidyanandaji to invite us to celebrate the birthday of our beloved Mataji at Uttarkashi? Many people, young and old, who might have never been able to go there, seized the opportunity of visiting this ancient place of pilgrimage and from there a large majority went on to Gangotri, some to Jamunotri or Badrinath and Kedarnath or all these.

Mataji was extremely active. Not only did she attend the lectures of mahātmas, the performances of the Rāsālilā and Mahaprabhu lila, she also went to our Ashram and to Yoga Niketan daily, where hundred Durga Sapta Shatis were recited by pandits, and visited a few mahātmas. Besides she was besieged by devotees even during the short hours she spent in her room. Mahamandalshwara Swami Vidyanandaji, our host, and Swami Omkaranandaji daily enlightened us by their beautiful talks. Swami Govinda Prakashji of Ramatirtha Ashram came only for a couple of days in the beginning. He, Swami Vishnuashramji, Swami Anandanandaji, Sri Avadhutaji, Sri Jogesh Brahmachari and Professor Tripurari Chakravarti contributed their brilliant discourses. As always, "Matri Satsang" marked the climax of every day. In the congenial atmosphere of Uttarkashi, Mataji's replies to questions seemed more inspiring than ever. Once she sang. Sm. S. M. Subhalakshmi gave two superb recitals assisted by her daughter. It could not have been more perfect.

The night before the *Tithi Pujā* was ladies' kirtana and the night after the *Pujā* and the following day *Nāma Yajña* was performed. Thus many kept awake for three successive nights. A number of V. I. P.s had assembled for the *Tithi Pujā*. The pandal was packed beyond capacity. Sri Govind Narain, Chief Secretary of Defence, had even travelled by helicopter with his wife and daughter. Mataji, as always on these occasions, went into *sāmadhi* and remained motionless till about 1 p. m. the following day, when she walked to her room supported by two devotees. By the evening she had regained her liveliness and came to the pandal for the *adhivāsa* of the

Nāma Yajña. She then joined the men when they started circling round the altar and again sang and walked round when the women took over for the night. She then sat down on the dais and, while the kirtana continued, talked most animatedly to some newcomers till late at night.

It goes without saying that none of the items that are customary during those celebrations, such as *kumāri puja* and *bhojan* and all the rest, were missing.

By May 24th, most people had dispersed and Mataji shifted with a small party to our own Ashram, over a mile away. That evening there was *satsang* in the picturesque courtyard of the Ashram surrounded by flowering shrubs and bushes. Sm. Subhalakshmi and her daughter once more regaled us with their incomparable songs and at their special request Mataji also sang some of her old songs.

On May 27th, Mataji descended to Kankhal and from there proceeded to Kishenpur on the 28th evening. The next morning she shifted to the Raipur Ashram where she spent four nights. At Raipur Mataji's health was far from satisfactory. All the same she every evening gave *darśana* to a large crowd on the open terrace. On June 2nd, early morning she motored to Kankhal. There, on the 5th morning, seven boys, mostly students of the Vidyapeeth, and one girl of the Kanyapith who had passed the Acharya examination, were invested with the sacred thread. On the 7th there was all night kirtan and on the 8th morning the new brahmacharis, who had been in complete seclusion for three days and nights, emerged and a feast was given to all at midday. The same evening Mataji moved to Jaipuria House, Hardwar, with a few

companions. Those who stayed on at Kankhal were told to go to Ramghat only in the evening for *darśana*. On the 11th early morning Mataji left by car for an undisclosed destination, but said she would again be in Jaipuria House by the 17th. Actually she, for some reasons, returned already on the 15th. Mataji with a small group of people had gone to Swami Vishnuashram's Ashram at Suktal, where she could enjoy real rest and quiet. This time at Ramghat Mataji was available very freely to all. On the 19th morning a temple was consecrated in Mataji's presence in a village beyond Kankhal and Mataji came to our Ashram for a few minutes only. On the 20th night there was general exodus. Didiji and her attendants left for Bombay, others for Varanasi and Naimisharanya. Mataji with a few companions boarded the Howrah Express, but nobody knew where she would alight. She very nearly got down at Gaya but at the last moment chose to go right to Calcutta. There, a devotee who had bought a new car and was eager that Mataji should use it first, had heard by which train Mataji was travelling. He took his chance and met the train at Howrah Station. Mataji sent her small retinue to the Agarpara Ashram, and with Swami Paramananda and one girl attendant got into that new car and the delighted devotee had the opportunity of driving Mataji all over Calcutta, where she paid surprise visits to at least half a dozen very sick and mostly very aged devotees. Some of them were moved to tears by Mataji's graciousness. At midday she at last reached Agarpara. There she spent two hectic days, besieged by never-ending throngs of people eager for her *darsana*. On the 24th she left with only five people without disclosing her destination. We have by now come to know that Mataji was at Naimisharanya for a few days, and again it

is not known where she proceeded from there. Before leaving Hardwar, Mataji had said that she would not write or receive letters for some time. However, there is every hope that Mataji will be accessible to all on Gurupurnima day at Kankhal on July 15th.

It is not yet known where the Jhulan and Janmastami festivals will be celebrated in Mataji's presence. *Durgā Pujā* is to be celebrated at Bagat House, Kharkhari, Hardwar, from 2nd to 6th October. The next *Samyam Mahāvratā* is scheduled to be held at Vrindaban from 3rd to 9th November.
