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Ānanda Vārtā

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Mātri Vāni

By loving Sri Krishna, by repeating His Name and contemplating Him, His attraction should grow so intense that even all troubles and difficulties would seem welcome. Therefore, placing your mind at His Feet, be immersed in His contemplation and dedicate every action to Him, regarding yourself as an instrument in His hands. Keeping your body—His temple—neat, clean and pure, remain engrossed in His Name and the thought of Him and strive to let all your activities be permeated by Krishna.

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This body (Mataji) always says and will continue to say that it is man's bounden duty as a human being to find God, to know Himself. The search after Truth is man's only expedient for attaining supreme peace. Mataji also says : all creatures of this world and beyond are

without exception the Self (*Ātmā*) of this body. The quest for Immortality by becoming a pilgrim on the path of Immortality is incumbent on man.

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Whatever God does is for the ultimate Good. This is indeed difficult to understand for man and so he suffers when his desires remain unfulfilled. If one has faith in God it is surely fitting to believe that He does what is for the best. This world has been created by a mere stroke of God's imagination. He ceaselessly does and will ever do what is for the real well-being of the universe which He Himself has brought into existence. All human beings are scions of the Immortal. Consequently it is man's calling to set out on the journey towards Immortality. God arranges for everybody's real welfare. Nevertheless, when a worldly-minded person's cherished desire has been thwarted there is pain, grievance, affliction. Quite often even some religious work prompted by the best intentions meets with obstructions and difficulties. All the same keep in mind: "I cannot possibly know by what device God is drawing me to Himself. He, the Fountain of Grace and Compassion is at all times lavishing this Mercy on me." Calm your mind by the repetition of His Name, by the contemplation of Him. Address all your appeals and petitions to Him, pray to Him.

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That God's transcendental actionless action is ever present in the universe should always be within one's

consciousness. The instructions and the mantra given by the Guru in order to deliver the mind have to be remembered and reflected upon. To the limit of your capacity try to tread the supreme path faultlessly so as to attain to the consummation of human life.

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Mataji advises men and women alike to serve all living beings with the conviction that they are manifestations of God. A person who can remain steeped in the thought of God all the twenty-four hours is indeed constantly engaged in the greatest service of all sentient beings. His actions set an example for worthy human conduct.

Now, father, do please try to understand this : at times, Mataji says certain things in a peculiar manner; if it has not been understood, one should ask for an explanation. It is necessary to remain constantly in a spiritual atmosphere and keep one's thoughts occupied with the contemplation or discussion of Truth. If there is a gap, one's mind may be drawn downwards. A human being should be aware of this at every instant.

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The power of *mahāyoga* is concealed in everything. So long as this has not been fully revealed, how can one speak of uninterrupted, undeniable Supreme Vision ?

Matri Satsang in Solan

Swami Bhagavananda Giri

(Translated from Bengali)

(3)

Saturday, June 11th, 1955, 9 p. m.

The *kirtana* and the period of silence are over. Mataji is seated, the very embodiment of grace and bliss. Everybody is eagerly waiting to hear some words of wisdom from Mataji's sweet lips. One of the devotees asks a question :

"Is it right to use spiritual and mental powers for the accomplishment of worldly matters?"

Mataji : If God-given power is employed for worldly purposes instead of being utilized for God's work, then this power is wasted. By exploiting spiritual power for worldly pursuits, the current of divine energy that ceaselessly flows through human beings is interrupted. When in the course of one's devotional practices a source of power becomes available, it should not be frittered away. Take for instance superhuman power (*vibhuti*). Everything that exists is an expression of God's divine power—of His sportive activity (*līlā*), His magic (*māyā*), His play. If, while taking part in this play certain spiritual powers are acquired, it is improper to use them in the pursuit of worldly affairs, thereby forgetting one's divine calling.

Once you have become a pilgrim on the path of Immortality and attained to special powers, if you deviate from the straight path, this creates an obstacle to your progress. You must not be enticed by the glamour of supernormal powers. For example, by taking the virtuous resolution to always speak the truth, finally, whatever you say comes to pass. Just this—nothing more than that. This is merely one stage : you have attained to *vāksiddhi*.* But what has this to do with the ultimate state of Enlightenment? People may wonder : “Whatever he says truly comes to pass !” But if you start using this power in your daily affairs, you will get tangled up at that very spot. Even if you have been blessed with certain powers, you must never allow yourself to be diverted from your ultimate goal. Not to strive constantly for Self-realization constitutes an impediment, you are heading for a fall ! The spontaneous and instantaneous display and evolution of self-manifesting power is one thing; of quite a different order is the deliberate use of supernormal power in which there is the deed and the doer. Here the ambition for applause and fame is still prominent. Therefore one cannot become free. Hence the danger of a fall is imminent.

Question : God has provided plenty of scope for enjoyment. Is it necessary to renounce this? What sense is there in relinquishing carnal pleasures?

Mataji : Birth after birth you have indulged in those pleasures, even now you are doing so. Supposing you

* *Vāksiddhi* By strictly speaking the truth for many years, the power that whatever one says comes true, is attained.

beat someone. You have committed an offence, you may have to go to prison and suffer. When you have served your sentence you will be released again; such is the way of the world.

Questioner : Then the question of renunciation does not even arise !

Mataji (laughing heartily) : Whatever anyone says is all right. However, in order to realize one's true Being there also exists an injunction for renunciation. Admitted, there is scope for enjoyment, but it is through renunciation that you can find your own real Self, that is all. You may or may not wish to take the path of self-denial, of renunciation. If you prefer to come and go endlessly, life after life, there is always the road for enjoying earthly pleasures (with the suffering it entails.) Do not the Śāstras speak of two different paths : namely *pravṛiti marga* which means pursuit of worldly undertakings, and *nivṛiti marga*, complete detachment and transcendence of desire. Everyone chooses what he likes. "Who am I ?" The Ātmā (Self). He who feels drawn to the search after Reality will naturally follow the path of renunciation.

Question : God is supposed to look impartially on all creatures. He also bestows the fruits of one's actions. Why then does He punish innocent beings ? How many innocent men and women were killed in Pakistan ! Thousands lost their lives abnormally. Were they all guilty ? Does God create this world with His own hands only to destroy His carefully arranged garden ? What a travesty !

Mataji : It is His pleasure, His play. He may do what He likes with His own garden and will continue to do so. After clearing the entire soil He will again plant new trees and produce a new garden.

Questioner : He should not do this !

Mataji : For Him everything is possible. He is the supreme Lord in His own kingdom. There is no anarchy there. He Himself appears in the shape of trees, flowers, fruits, leaves and shrubs, everything is in fact He Himself. He alone plays with Himself according to His pleasure.

Question : Do the so-called paradise (*swarga loka*), the heaven of the moon (*chandra loka*), the realm of the Lord of Death (*yama loka*), hell (*naraka*), really exist ? Do human beings have to go there to enjoy and suffer after death ?

Mataji : Certainly. Just as you have to take on a human body to enjoy and suffer on earth, so do you adopt an ethereal body to partake of ethereal fruits. Those realms are within yourself and outside as well. Everything exists everywhere.

Question : Is there such a place as *Vaikunṭha* (the abode of Viṣṇu) ? If so, where is it ?

Mataji : Where there is no hesitation or fear (*kunṭha*) there lies *Vaikunṭha*.

Question : What is the difference between infatuation (*moha*) and love (*prema*) ?

Mataji (laughing) : What do you think ? By infatuation man gets entangled. He is ensnared by his delusion. Infatuation engulfs a man like a python. This is what is called darkness (tamaś). He is blinded by it; the door to gloom and ignorance is opened. While through love one's true being is revealed. What is it that becomes revealed ? Who am I ? I am the self-effulgent *Ātmā*. By infatuation people get thoroughly enslaved. They then have to direly repent for their folly. So now, which is better ? (Mataji laughs loudly).

Questioner : Love is better.

Mataji : A human being (*jīva*) should be in love with God (*Siva*). Love of the world is nothing but infatuation, delusion.

Question : I acknowledge somebody (meaning Mataji) as my Guru. I call this somebody 'Mother', but She does not call me 'son' nor does She acknowledge me as her disciple. What should one do under these circumstances ?

Mataji : What is there to worry about in this case ? You should look upon her as your ally, friend and well-wisher. Claims on a friend are all-embracing.

Questioner : But in my heart I do not feel this, nor do I accept it with my mind. Even a friend may at times deceive me.

Mataji : Oh no, no ! How can this be so, father ? How can He who is the Supreme Friend of every human being resort to trickery ? Even if a man is discarded by the world as a fallen being, how can he be forsaken by Him who is the Supreme Father, Mother, Friend, Beloved and Lord ? (Mataji smiles gently while saying these words.)

Question : What is the supreme purpose of human life ?

Mataji : To realize one's Self, to know one's Self—the first-hand experience that you are ever poised in your own true Being.

Questioner : What a short answer to such a big question !

Mataji (smiling) : How big is the seed of the giant banyan tree, overflowing with branches, leaves, fruits and flowers ? Inside this small seed lies hidden the infinite potential of that huge tree.

Questioner : Once I approached a famous saint and asked him : "Where is God ? Why does He not reveal Himself ?" The Mahâtmâ hit me with his stick and said : "Let me see where the pain is ?" I replied : "How can pain be seen ? One can only feel it." The saint laughed : "Even so do you have to realize God in your heart of hearts. How can I show Him to you ?"

Mataji : Well said ! What a beautiful story we have heard ! Just as pain is felt, so is the experience of Realization self-revealed. So long as you have not found Him, you must continue to pray to God for the realization of Him. Whether it is by counting your beads or by meditation or by singing the glories of His name, you must strive to live constantly in His Presence. The influence of the tendencies and dispositions acquired in countless past births is still at work and obscures your vision. This is why the desire for Enlightenment does not yet awaken.

Questioner : This also must be due to God's Will. He wishes to keep Himself shrouded in darkness. You yourself frequently say that whatever happens is beneficial.

Mataji : Oh ! So you have gone beyond the range of desire and averseness ! Do you think you have already reached the state where you recognize whatever happens as the expression of God's Will ? This body always maintains that this can be said at the state of Illumination. **THERE** this holds good. From here one may hear about such an attitude of life or observe it. **THERE** whatever anyone may say from whatever point of view is right, being an expression of the stage he has reached. But where there is the perception that all that happens is due to God's Will alone, there the question of ignorance or darkness cannot arise. You say : "All this is God's Will" and at the same time you talk about darkness—how can this be ? He and His Will, both are self-evident. Who is He ? The *Ātmā* (Self.) What is the *Ātmā* ? The *Mātā* (Mother), all-pervading, all-embracing—none other than you yourself ! It is your own will that manifests as the veil of ignorance and then again as unveiled Light. This is difficult indeed to understand. Of the little that can be expressed in words and action, you have heard according to the manner in which you have sounded the strings.

It is now past 9-30 p. m. All take leave after performing their *praṇāma* and *Mataji* retires to her room.

(To be continued)

From the life of Mataji

Bithika Mukerji

Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash

(June 1937)

(Continued from the April issue)

Mataji returned to Almora on June 10th, 1937. It had been decided that a small party would accompany Mataji on the pilgrimage to Mount Kailash. Bholanath was the moving spirit as it were, and his enthusiasm overcame many misgivings about the expedition. The students from near Mt. Kailash, who had first broached the subject, were now on their way back home and would accompany Mataji's party.

This pilgrimage at that time was most hazardous and arduous. Mount Kailash is a snow covered mountain situated near twin lakes called Manas Sarovar and Rākshas Talao, at the height of 16,400 ft. about 150 miles from Almora. The mountain is a symbol of Lord Siva and the pilgrimage consists in going round the mountain and then touching the waters of another lake, the Gaurikunda.

The party consisted of Didi, her father Swami Akhandananda, Bhaiji, Tunu*, and Dasubabu from Banaras. Didi

* Prankumar's son, or more familiarly, Bunidi's uncle. This writer had the opportunity to see and read these copy books and also transcribe from the diary most of the account of this pilgrimage.

contrived to write her diary every day during this memorable journey, even under the most trying circumstances. Many times her fingers would be so stiff with cold that she could barely hold the pen. Sometimes she wrote crouching over a small fire in the dim light of a hurricane lantern. She could not write at length but the bare recital of facts has preserved for us the details of this journey at the end of which Bhaji passed away at Almora on August 17th, 1973.

It seems best to write about the events in Didi's words. The translation is very free.

From Didi's Diary :

Thursday, June 10th :

We have arrived in Almora. Arrangements are being finalized for our journey to Kailash. The Bengali devotees are very apprehensive and doubtful about this hazardous expedition, whereas the people of this region are full of enthusiasm. Parvati and the other girls from the mountains will accompany us.

Friday, Saturday, June 11th, 12th :

I was quite unable to pack the huge piles of things we are expected to take with us. Each porter will carry not more than 80 lbs, so the boxes and knapsacks have to be weighed carefully. At my wits' end, I requested Ma to sit near me while I packed. Under her guidance the job was accomplished within a short time to my great relief.

Sunday, June 13th :

To-day we started on our pilgrimage to Kailash. The devotees who had travelled with us to Almora from Calcutta and Banaras, bade Mataji a tearful farewell.

Starting at 8 o'clock in the morning we arrived at Barachhina at 11 o'clock, a distance of about eight miles only. There are about a dozen porters to carry our baggage. They are to be paid Re 1/- per day. We have also engaged five *dandees** One member of our party is an old man, Bhaiji is not too robust and Ma is also not in the best of health. Moreover none of us is used to mountain climbing and it has been felt that *dandees* should be in readiness if required by anyone. There are 25 *coolies* for the five *dandees* as each crew of four is accompanied by a fifth man as relief. Travelling slowly again after a short period of rest we have come up to Dhawalchina. This is five and a half miles from Barachhina. I cooked a scrap** meal in the open. We are to spend the night on the open verandah of the Bungalow.†

Monday, June 14th :

We made an early start at 5 in the morning. The sun becomes so hot that it is difficult to walk. We made midday camp at Sheraghat, a distance of about eleven miles from Dhawalcheena. The river Saraju flows alongside the road. The scenery is beautiful.

We occasionally came across small shops where we could buy pulses, rice, *ghee* and salt. We are told that none of these

* A sort of chair of canvas and wood shafts swinging free between two shafts carried by four *coolies* on their shoulders.

** Didi alone cooked such meals as they ate on this pilgrimage because they observed all orthodox rules about food.

† There are Government quarters all along public roads in India are called Bungalows. These are meant for Government officials who are travelling on duty. Sometimes other travellers are permitted to stay in them.

things will be available as we climb higher. We have brought with us dry fruits, black pepper-powder, tamarind, pickles, dried grain powder and such other items that various knowledgeable people advised us to keep with us. Tamarind or pickles are good for counteracting dizziness when climbing heights and the dry food stuff will be required when it is not possible to cook. Innumerable other things have been packed—coloured spectacles, waterproofs, lanterns, stoves and on Ma's advice cotton padded woollen clothes such as the people of hilly regions wear.

We are a happy party although Ma, Jyotishdada* and myself are not feeling too well. We have had to sit in *dandees* most of the time. Swamiji† on the other hand has walked a considerable distance. Our concern about him because of his age, seems unfounded. Bholanath is full of energy and all the time walking ahead of the party with great enjoyment.

The view is magnificent, enhanced a thousandfold for us by the presence of Mataji. These serene and vast spaces are a fit environment for her majestic personality.

We started again at 3 P. M. and at sundown camped at Ganoi seven miles from Sheraghat. We had brought with us a permit for staying at the Bungalow, so we could rest there comfortably for the night.

Parvati told us to-day of a dream she had had almost five years ago and of which she was reminded now. She had dreamt that she was going on a journey in the company of strange people. Only one figure of this company had been clear to her:

* Bhaiji.

† Swami Akhandananda, Didi's father.

She also had had the impression of one lady dressed in white but she had not seen her clearly. When Parvati first met Bholanath in Almora, she had at once recognised him as the clearly seen person of her dream. She had been in Almora for five years and now, on the completion of her schooling, was on her way back home in the company of Ma and Bholanath. Mataji smiled and said, "It seems you came to Almora so that your dream would be fulfilled".

While we were on our way up to the Bungalow, an old gentleman approached us enquiring about Mataji. She being pointed out to him, he bowed to her and placed some flowers and fruits at her feet. He came again at night, bringing fresh milk and vegetables for us. We asked him how he came to know about Mataji. He said, "It was in the papers. I have been waiting eagerly these many days for her darśana".

Tuesday, June 15th.

We started at 6 A. M. for Berinag a distance of thirteen miles. But we had to camp after ten miles at Rani for our midday meal. It was very difficult to climb on this steep road. We actually arrived in Berinag at sunset. As we were tired we didn't consider it worthwhile to climb further to the Bungalow but found shelter on the open verandah of the school-building. Berinag seems to be a big place. It has many shops, a school and a dispensary. People had read about Mataji's visit to this part of the country and there was quite a crowd of visitors in the evening.

Wednesday, June 16th.

Camping tonight at Thala, about eleven miles from Berinag. After every few miles, the men carrying the dandees

need to rest for a while. At one of these rest-camps Bhaiji declared in great good humour that Swamiji was the *Raja* (King) of the expedition and he himself was the *Yuvraj* (Prince). After a few miles, Swamiji's dandee broke down and Bhaiji also met with a slight accident and was hurt. I laughed and said, "You've been rightly served for thinking yourselves to be the leaders of this party!"

At the next camp, Mataji called out in greeting to an old woman who, accompanied by a few children, was going in the opposite direction. Ma said, "Where are you going, mother?" The old woman answered over her shoulder, "This way"—and then looked back at Ma. She stopped and slowly walked back to where Ma was sitting and squatted in front of her. Ma talked to her for a long time. Then it was time for us to resume our journey. When we had come quite a distance, I looked back and saw the old woman standing still on the road and gazing in our direction.

We arrived at Thala around 10 o'clock. We had seen the river Sarayu at Sheraghat. At Thala, Ramganga flowed noisily over rocks and boulders. The vista of mountain ranges naturally creates a mood of exaltation. I have no language to express the beauty and grandeur of the scenery.

Thursday, June 17th.

We have travelled a distance of ten miles today to a place called Derithat. It is quite hot in the sun, but the water for the last two days has been rather cold.

We met the Rajah of Askote on our way up to Derithat. He had been on the look out for our party, he said, having heard that Mataji was travelling on this road. He was going towards

Almora but gave us letters for some officials at Ascote and asked us to contact them on arrival.

We reached Askote at sundown, a distance of seven miles from Derithat and put up at the *dharamśāla*. From the palace people made kind enquiries regarding our requirements. After some time the ladies from the Raja's family came to visit Mataji.

We were drenched in a sudden shower this morning. We are now happy to be able to dry and air our clothes in the *dharamśāla*. Everybody is feeling quite well. The air is invigorating. I think we are all improving in health.

Friday, June 18th.

We could not make an early start today. The Rani of Askote requested Ma's presence at the palace for the midday meal. It transpired that the Raja's brother and the Peshkar's son were studying in Almora. They had written to their families to look after Mataji and her party. This explained the concourse of people at Askote who were waiting eagerly for Ma's *darśana*.

Starting at 1 p. m. we came to Baliakote (ten miles) after sunset. It rained incessantly. The heat becomes almost unbearable when the sun shines. After the Ramganga we now see the Gouriganga, a, swiftly flowing river. Five miles from Ascote we had seen the Kaliganga. The confluence of these two rivers is locally known as the "Gateway to Kailash".

Approaching Baliakote, we realized that we had missed the road to the village. We decided to stay where we were for the night and camp in the open. Parvati had thoughtfully

brought a tent for Mataji. This was now put up and all the baggage stacked inside, in case of rain. We now realize that it is the greatest discomfort to get the luggage wet.

The headman of the village had evidently been informed of our visit. He had been on the look out for our party and came down to our camp to tell us that a suitable place had been kept in readiness for us in the village. We thought it was too late to strike camp and go up, so we stayed where we were. It rained the whole night and the wind became blustering and cold.

Saturday, June 19th.

After a most uncomfortable night we started at dawn. The baggage was left behind. It would follow later. We stopped for a drink of milk at one of the wayside villages. We came to a swiftly flowing river. It was out of question for us to try and cross this river so the coolies had to help us do it. They are so surefooted that they keep on their feet under the most trying conditions. Ma's dandee was carefully carried over by six or seven men. Then in the same manner we crossed a second river.

We arrived at Dharchula Dak Bungalow at noon. The sun shining brightly we hung out some of our clothes to dry. The porters had not arrived by then so we could make no arrangements for cooking the midday meal.

This is quite a big village. The Kaliganga can be heard from afar like the breakers of the ocean. The mountain ranges look magnificent.

The luggage is a problem. From Calcutta to Almora, we had collected things which would be required for this journey.

I have had nothing to do with boxes and trunks for a very long time now. The packing, unpacking and repacking of his vast array of things seems quite beyond my power sometimes. But somehow it gets done every time.

Our porters are tired out. A local man of some standing in the village came to call on us. He had received letters from the Rajah of Askote and Sri Krishna Panth asking him to help Mataji's party as much as possible. He advised us to dismiss the porters who had come with us and engage another set of men. The road from here was more arduous, and local-men who were used to it would be able to negotiate it better. So we stayed on at Dharchula for one more day so that all these arrangements could be completed. The new set of porters will come from a village seven miles away. The baggage will have to be rearranged because these men are not expected to carry more than 70 lbs. We are to take six dandees from here. Also a couple of tents. When the entire crew of porters and coolies was engaged, they chose a leader from amongst them who is called Mate. The Mate would act as the representative of the whole group, and they would obey him in all matters concerning the journey.

Monday, June 21st :

We resumed our trip. The road was so steep that we preferred to walk slowly rather than sit in dandees which are tilted at an uncomfortable angle. Although the carriers are very, very surefooted, I could not rid myself of the nervousness that they would slip with such a cumbersome burden on their shoulders !

Ma and I outdistanced the others a little. While we

waited for them to catch up with us, Mataji sat on a rock and with her inimitably sweet and melodious voice sang a few lines from the old well known Bengali song which says, "It is time now to go back home."

The majestic grandeur of the scenery engenders a tranquility of the mind and indeed exercises upon the pilgrim such a strange attraction that it really feels like a home-coming. This place answers to the deepest longing in man for an experience of exaltation.

We met on the road here a very devout old lady, Ruma Devi, held in great respect by the local people. She is a disciple of Sri Sharada Devi the wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Ruma Devi was very pleased to see Ma. She came with us to Khela, our camp for today, about ten miles from Dharchula.

Ruma Devi has an ashram in Khela. She helps the pilgrims a great deal. In fact she has dedicated her life to the service of others. Ruma Devi was enchanted and expressed again and again her feeling of happiness at this encounter.*

Tuesday, June 22nd :

It rained a little in the morning. Ruma Devi and the students left for Almora. She advised us against starting in the rain because there might be danger from falling rocks and stones.

We started at 7 a. m. The road is not too bad but steep. The Kaliganga after staying with us all this time has receded

* She later joined Mataji and lived for years in the Kishenpur Ashram. She died in Varanasi a few years ago.

a distance. The music of the swiftly running waters over a bed of rocks is heard no more.

Ma frequently left her dandee and walked to give rest to the coolies. The road was so steep that the swinging dandeers often struck against the rocks and sustained minor damages. We had to stop for them to be repaired wherever we found a carpenter who could do the job.

We arrived at Pongu which is Parvati's husband's village. They invited us to the midday meal. On being told that we would have to cook for ourselves, they provided us with all the facilities. With their help I cooked for the entire party in the open courtyard of the school building. Parvati had been very keen that her family should meet Mataji and Bholanath and she was happy that her wish had been fulfilled. She continued her journey with us.

Starting again at 3p. m. we came to Sirkha, about eleven miles from Khela. We took up quarters on the verandah of the village school. It rained heavily almost the whole night. We tried to protect ourselves with the help of umbrellas and rubber sheets as best as we could but were drenched. In spite of this great discomfort I managed to sleep curled up in all the protective garments.

Wednesday, June 23rd :

Camp at a place called Deepti, about eleven miles from Sirkha. For the last two or three days we have been able to see snow-covered mountain ranges. A beautiful sight during the day when the distant snow shines like silver in the sunlight. We found the road harder to negotiate after the rain of last night.

We took shelter in a small room next to the village shop. The floor was anything but clean so we spread out oil-cloths and are trying to get a night's rest as best we can.

Thursday June 24th :

We camped at Malpa travelling only seven miles. This short journey will live long in my memory. The road was so steep and precarious that no one could use the dandee. In fact it was even difficult to climb on foot without support from the coolies. It was either an almost perpendicular ascent over slippery stones or down an equally precipitous incline. To add to our discomfort, we had to share the path with herds of sheep either going up or down. We passed a number of springs and waterfalls cascading down the mountainside, but we paid them scant attention. All our concentration was required to keep our feet on the difficult path. We hardly noticed any of the beauties of nature all around us.

We generally choose the sight for the night's camp before sunset. By the time we finish with the business of unpacking, cooking, eating, cleaning etc. it becomes quite dark. The room where we stayed in Malpa was considerably dirtier than the previous one we had occupied. But we were, or at least I was so tired that I was thankful to be able to lie down for a while and was in no mood to find fault with our surroundings.

A rather odd phenomenon is that the higher we climb the greater becomes the nuisance of flies. One reason could be that although the nights are cold the days are still warm.

Friday, June 25th :

Starting at daybreak we made our midday camp in Bodhi

about eight miles from last night's camp. It is a constant source of amazement to me to observe how surefooted these porters and coolies are. It is a marvellous sight to see them walk on this difficult road so skilfully, not only by themselves but helping others as well.

Garbyang, the base camp as it were, for the pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash is five miles from Bodhi. Negotiating this stretch of the path in the afternoon we reached Garbyang at sunset. The local people came out to meet us as soon as we arrived. I have noticed a very strange fact about these village receptions. No doubt they are used to the sight of travellers and groups of pilgrims on their way to Kailash, but somehow they always find their way to Ma's dandee and surround her wherever she is. We have speedily become used to this phenomenon of the local people communicating in some fashion with Ma. Who can say if some of them are not closer to her than many of us. Ma herself seems quite as much at ease with them as with crowds at, say, Calcutta or Dehra Dun.

We are to stay in Garbyang for a few days to make arrangements for the climb to Kailash. The journey has to be made on horse back. The road is not too steep but the air being rarefied the climb becomes exhausting for people coming from the plains.

Saturday June 26th :

It is a relief to know that we shall not be required to travel today. Many men and women came to visit Mataji. Some of the pilgrims who were camping at Garbyang came over to see us. A few brought fruits and flowers. We met Sri Nandaram,

the father of Randra Devi of Almora. A bundle of letters was delivered to us from the post office.

We are being given advice about the journey ahead of us. The next big camping station will be Taklakote, considerably higher than Garbyang which is 16,780 ft above sea level. We have to go over Lipu pass (16,780 ft) in order to get to Taklakote. The round trip from here to Mt. Kailash and back is estimated to take 20 to 22 days. The charges are as follows : For each horse Rs. 20/- and for the attendant groom 12 annas* daily. The luggage will be carried on mules. The owner accompanies his mule and is to be paid 8 annas** per day. We are to engage a guide, who will take charge of what now seems to be like an expedition of considerable proportions. The guide is to be paid Rs 25/- and his horse has also to be paid for. No food stuffs are available excepting at Taklakote so we are to carry sufficient rations for the round trip. The men will do the same. We are to hire tents to take with us, for ourselves as well as for the men, because there are no inns or shops or resting places for pilgrims beyond Garbyang.

The reverberating, unbroken sound of the river is audible from here. The river has sometimes receded to a distance but most of the time we are made aware of its presence. Its music matches the beauty of these places. The still, vast spaces awaken in one a new awareness. It touches some innermost chord and makes the mind still and receptive for a new experience.

We are glad to rest for a few days at Garbyang. Bholanath alone seems not to be tired at all. In fact his enthusiasm and

* 75 Paisa.

** 50 Paisa.

energy is a matter of wonder for all of us. We have been told that this journey is so exacting that not even a father can stop to look after his son. But Bholanath is indefatigably concerned about the entire party. He walks down again and again to see to the stragglers and encourage those who are feeling desperate or weak. The porters are moved to admiration saying that they have not seen anybody from the plains walk as comfortably and expertly as Bholanath does. Mataji's presence and Bholanath's heartening enthusiasm have made the journey less arduous for us. We have come 135 miles from Almora in twelve days.

Sunday, June 27th :

Amongst pilgrims who were waiting at Garbyang before resuming their journey were Swami Jnananada, a veteran on this trek, and the Kumar of Dinajpur. The Kumar and his party were starting today and came to visit Ma before their departure. The Kumar said to her, "I am going on a hazardous trip and pray that you give me your blessings." Ma smiled and said, "HE alone directs everything. Whatever takes place happens as it is to transpire. You, on your pilgrimage should keep your own *mantra* in constant remembrance." The Kumar bowed and said he would do as she said. Other members of his party also came to take leave of Mataji. We were given to understand that it was usual for two or three parties to combine for this last bit of the expedition because of the dangers, not the least of which is an attack by robbers!

The coolies who had come from Dharchula have been paid off and dismissed. It has been agreed that we shall write to Raisahib at Dharchula before our return and he will engage coolies for our return journey. The men are so poor that it is

not fair to ask them to wait for us at Garbyang. They can earn more by working whereas they are paid very nominal wages for waiting. Such are the rules of this mode of travelling. The terrain over which we travel changes as we climb higher. The local people alone are capable of guiding and walking with the pilgrims. So it seems customary to take the help of a new set of porters at different stages of the journey.

We have decided to start on Tuesday. In addition to the horses, we have arranged to take with us one dandee for Ma. The charges are Rs. 180/- for the dandee plus the cost of a tent for the crew and also mules for carrying their baggage and rations.

Monday, June 28th.

We were happy to be greeted by a strong sun today. For the last few days we had encountered a thick fog which reduced visibility. But this respite was of short duration. The sun vanished very soon and it rained heavily for the rest of the day. Anyhow, we are at last rid of the flies.

Brahmachari Bharati of Dehra Dun who joined our party at Dharchula is suffering from some pain in the chest. We hope he will improve by the time we are ready to start.

Many of the local people come to see Ma with various offerings. Conversation is difficult as they do not understand any of the languages we can speak. But I daresay that they communicate with Ma entirely to their satisfaction because that is how they look.

Parvati's village is close-by. Her mother came yesterday to invite us to her home for tomorrow. It was decided that on

leaving Garbyang we would first walk to Parvati's home and spend the night there,

Tuesday, June 29th

We left Garbyang in the morning and walked to the village of Parvati's parents. Only Ma was in a dandee. We could see cultivated land all around. The mountain tops were covered with snow. The walking was not too easy and although the distance was not great we became tired very soon. Parvati had gone on ahead and we were able to rest in a tent on arrival. It was evening by the time we could finish with the routine of cooking, eating and washing up. It rained during the night. The water trickled into the tents. We are beginning to get used to the discomfort of wet and damp clothes and beddings.

Wednesday, June 30th

We resumed our journey at about 1.30 p. m. Our guide Sendel Singh organised the train of 21 horses and mules. We noticed that he was fully armed and so were many of the porters. We had to give up our usual mode of dress and don warm trousers, coats, caps and gloves, etc. The novelty of the dress, the strange experience of sitting on horseback brought home to us with great vividness the reality of this expedition.

There seemed to be no road anymore. The horses stumbled over a bed of stones and pebbles in single file. The open land stretched out in all directions enclosed by snow-capped mountains.

(To be continued)

The "I" of the Sadhaka*

Men generally treat *sādhana* as a part of their life. The thoughtful, however, treat their life itself as *sādhana*. Indeed, the life of man — being merely a bundle of desires and aspirations — is only a *sādhana* for eternal life. The superficial *sādhaka* regards his objective life alone as life, and adorns it by various so-called *sādhanas* even as a materialist, equating himself with the body, decorates it with various beauty aids. As all such decorations remain separate from the body, so all such *sādhanas* remain separate from life.

The difference between a man who makes *sādhana* only a part of his life and him who makes his life itself a *sādhana* is that the former fails to become one with the goal, while the latter never mistakes the wood for the trees.

The "I" of the *sādhaka* who makes his life itself a *sādhana* is soon transformed into a yearning for Truth or God, by whatever name one calls the Supreme Reality. In believing himself to be a servant of God, his whole life becomes an instrument in God's service and his mind and senses become willing tools. Unless a man becomes a servant of God through and through, his service would only be of the category of 'good deeds'. Similarly, unless one becomes a seeker after Truth through and through, one's search for Truth would merely remain an exercise of the intellect. Unless he becomes a devotee through and through, his contemplation of God would only be a prayer for

* Reprinted from the book "A Saint's Call to Mankind" with the kind permission of the "Manav Seva Sangh", Vrindaban.

various objects, never true *bhakti*. Therefore, real *sādhana* emerges from the whole "I" of the *sādhaka*; it makes his whole life a *sādhana* and all his activities and undertakings constitute only various forms of his *sādhana*. The devotee must become entirely His. Then he will not be bound by the various forms of *sādhana*; but his whole life—whatever he thinks, feels or does—will become *sādhana*. That alone can make for rapid progress towards the goal.

It should thus be clearly understood that fundamentally man does not really become good by doing good, but does good by being good. *Bhakti* flows from one who becomes a devotee, service from one who becomes a servant of God, and desirelessness comes of its own accord in the egoless. The entire life of such a one becomes a *sādhana* instead of *sādhana* being only a part of one's life.

The source of man's action is feeling which is the motive-spring of the doer. That is to say, a man actuated by certain feelings and motives turns himself into some sort of entity wherefrom his plans and actions come into play. The server feels himself to be a servant and then serves, and so on. The *sādhaka*, therefore, should first purify his own "I" which is the source of action. When the source is purified, pure action flows therefrom. If the *sādhaka* believes himself to be a child or servant of God, only such actions and thoughts will flow from him as would please God. This makes for rapid purification of desires and actions. The actions of such a *sādhaka* in due course become like the actions of an actor on a stage who plays his part but does not regard his part as his real life. Such actions do not deposit any *samskāras* on the mind of the *sādhaka* and his mind remains uncontaminated.

The *sādhaka* alone is the true man and the life of a *sādhaka* alone is the life worthy of a man; all that he thinks or feels or does must be a part of his *sādhana*. There is something basically wrong with the *sādhaka* whose mind and senses do not co-operate with his *sādhana*. Such a man should pause to consider deeply what is the goal of his *sādhana*. The whole 'I' of a man hankering after wealth receives the co-operation of the mind; similarly the mind is bound to co-operate also with the *sādhaka* whose "I" really craves for the Divine. In case the mind does not co-operate, it only means that its owner does not really want that for which he poses to be a *sādhaka*.

In the case of a man whose whole life is a *sādhana*, every action, thought and feeling is directed towards the goal.

Only a true aspirant, i. e. one whose whole life becomes a *sādhana*, can do justice to his duties even to the world; for he desires nothing from the world for himself but only repays his debt to the world by rendering every service to all alike who come his way.

Identification with the body causes various concepts, as for instance, I belong to such and such a country, class or caste, creed, school of thought, position, family, etc. The man who identifies himself with the body remains engrossed only in seeking indulgence of the body. The man in whom is kindled the quest of Truth or Love Divine becomes a *sādhaka* who sheds his false identifications through service and the power of discrimination.

Body-consciousness means that, assuming ourselves as the body, we attach ourselves to objects, circumstances, individuals, etc. Subservience to objects gives rise to greed, subservience to individuals gives birth to attachment, subservience to environ-

ment leads to bondage. Freedom from body-consciousness means the realization of oneself as separate from the body, the senses, the mind, the vital breath, etc. Thereby the being who has long regarded himself as a child of his parents, as father of his children, as a brother of his sisters, as husband of his wife, as a neighbour of his neighbours, as a citizen of the state, as a follower of a certain religion or creed etc., awakens after due discharge of his past obligations, to his basic Self on which all these phases were implanted. The discharge of his obligations means service of the world by rendering unto the world all that was the world's and offering his heart, thus freed, to the Lord of the heart.

The limited "I" is born of non-discrimination which leads to limited affections that cause unbrotherliness. Its limited utility is the perception it gives of love that expands as it grows. He who cannot rise above the 'I' by deep thought or devotion should go on expanding his 'I' so as to gradually embrace the whole universe. To renounce all or to love all, paradoxical as it may seem, comes to the same thing. For the *sādhaka* who is still in midstream and questions whether to adopt the path of embracing all as one's own or of discarding all, the best course is to regard all as one's own to serve and love, but not to regard anyone or anything as one's own for one's own fulfilment. Renunciation enables one to turn one's back to the fleeting, and love enables one to unite with the Eternal.

The 'I' of the *sādhaka* is indeed the essence of spiritual discipline, the seed which sprouts as the tree of service, on which blossoms the fruit of renunciation, in which is contained the juice of Divine Love, which is the hidden want of men, the

children of God. The aspirant begins as a server, renounces as he advances, and ends in unity with the Beloved. On the other hand the ego gives rise to the tree of delusion which produces the fruit of attachment (*moha*), in which is hidden the poison of sorrow and grief.

The aspirant should cease in believing himself to be a being who indulges in the pleasures of the senses, and should regard himself as a seeker after Truth even though the desires of the senses still lurk in him as outgoing thieves. As so many seeds reside in the soil, so do desires of the senses reside in the indulgent. As all the seeds perish with the destruction of the soil, so do desires of the senses die of themselves when the enjoyer of the senses is replaced by the *sādhaka*. It is therefore of fundamental importance to the aspirant to assert his transformed 'I' in his thought and deed. In believing himself to be a *sādhaka* one's whole life will naturally become a *sādhana*, instead of *sādhana* being a part of his life; for life unrolls before one in accordance with what one takes oneself to be. Thus, everything that appears in the life of a *sādhaka* as a result of his past associations becomes for him a tool of his *sādhana*, for all his past assumed and fleeting identifications have got to disappear before he comes to be one with Truth.

Long enough have we fed ourselves on beliefs in passing phases; that we are children on the lap of the mother; that we are youths or maidens; that we are officials or business-men or some other professionals or the like; that we are learned or philanthropic or men of so many qualities. But all these varied phases only went to create innumerable projections and

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Heart Song

A western devotee

Have you ever sat and let
The world slip out of sight and sound
And listened to the beating of your heart,
That rhythmic, pulsing pound
That speaks a language none may hear
Save those, who listen with the inner ear.
Have you, I say,
Forgot the trouble of the day
And reached out
Far beyond the moment's pained unrest
To where your heart begins?
And started on a quest of loving
That can never end.
Have you looked up unto the stars
And felt your soul
Burst forth in brighter raiment
Than those selfsame stars could
Scatter in the firmament above?
Have you exploded with the joy of love
And let your heart sing anthems in the void?
Oh, it would be
A peace eternal,
Just to see, to touch, to hear
The core of loving,
To know no further feeling

Than that great unbounded
Sense of Oneness with all men,
To let all fear and doubt
Vanish in the vaporous mist,
To lift the heart to God,
And quite permit, the soul
To be a sun kissed drop of light
Amid a weary world.

●

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distractions of the mind (*sankalpas* and *vikalpas*), whose vicious circle continued to feed our vanity or frustration by turns, and we remained chained to a life of abject servitude to a world of objects in perpetual flux ! It is time we broke as under the chains.

★

The Moon

A. M. Gupta

A party of travellers weary and footsore find themselves in the midst of a dense forest, having lost their bearing in a stormy night.

Darkness thick, close and compact surrounds them all around except for streaks of moonlight here and there, percolating through the clouds and the moving leaves.

They struggle hard to find a passage out of the woods.

Wending their way through dark and dismal paths they come at last to the shore of a lake.

Myriad moons they find reflected in the ripples of the lake.

The weary travellers take rest and see the wonderful sight: countless moons reflected in the dancing waters !

The storm ceases and they see the reflection of the full moon in the calm lake.

Hush !

A fortunate traveller, one among the many, breathes slowly and closes his eyes to take rest for a while.

A night bird sings sweetly, up above.

The traveller down below looks up.

He does not see the bird but gazes at the full moon, the Real Moon and not the reflected moon !

He forgets everything. He forgets the dark forest, the tortuous paths, the shimmering lake, the reflections of the moon in the dancing waters. He forgets the sweet song of the bird even, the bird that drew his attention from the reflected moon to the Real Moon. His gaze is fixed.

His strivings come to an end.

He has reached the goal.

Saint Avvayar and Her Wisdom

T. Krishnaji

In South India, over two thousand years ago, an orphan girl grew to maidenhood in devotion to God Ganapati. She was noted for her sweet speech, her wit and beauty. Many princes and rich men offered to marry her. To avoid marriage, she invoked God Ganesa, who, at her request, took away her youth and beauty. She became an old woman, free to go without possessions anywhere she pleased. She was fearless and roamed about the Tamil country endearing herself to young and old, who addressed her as *Avvai* (Grandmother). Her real name is unknown but the popular name *Avvai* has been famous down the ages. Her mission in life was to spread morality and wisdom among all people, wherever she went. Many men and women sought her help to solve domestic problems.

Avvai was revered by everyone. A young man requested *Avvai* to honour him as his guest. In response to his request, she went to his house. The young man told his wife to serve the guest in a fitting manner but the young woman went into a terrible temper complaining about him in the presence of the guest. *Avvai* withdrew herself and left the place. The young man ran after *Avvai*, sorely grieved at his wife's behaviour, pleading excuse. *Avvai* told him, "married life is happy if one has an affectionate spouse." Though *Avvai* was a lifelong virgin, she recommended married life. "True virtue lies in married life only."

On another occasion a farmer and his wife sought her opinion. The farmer's wife felt keenly about her husband's hardships when working in the fields and suggested to him that it would be better if he sought service under a King or rich man. Both the farmer and his wife sought Avvai's advice. Avvai told them, "If a free man secures food with his plough it is sweetest. The tree on the river bank and a life of service under a King or any other person are precarious. There is no more dignified profession than to be a husbandman. Life by the plough is better than service under any person."

Avvai was not only wise but a *siddha* yogini capable of curing physical and mental ailments. She was also reputed to possess knowledge of alchemy. In *Jñāna Kural*, she describes Raja yoga practice. She says that *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *moksha* pertain to human embodiment and that the purpose of life is to realize God. She was a keen observer of men and their behaviour. Her uncanny wisdom was based on her spiritual life and experience.

Avvai emphasizes that God is Love and Love is God. Some of her moral maxims addressed to children are :

1. Love righteousness.
2. Subdue wrath.
3. Speak sweetly.
4. Don't sleep long.
5. Wake up before dawn.
6. Begging is contemptible.
7. Live for others.
8. Protect your parents.
9. Don't be garrulous.
10. Be grateful.

11. Give alms and eat.
12. Father's word is mantra.
13. Mother is the greatest shrine.
14. Worship God.
15. Love learning.
- 16; Man's character is known by his speech.
17. What can't be got, forget.
18. Strive for salvation.
19. The best penance is non-injury.
20. Wealth is unsteady, practise charity.

Such precepts numbering 108 each have been compiled and called *Attichudi* and *Konday Vendan*. These two garlands of gems scintillate with wisdom and epigrammatic brilliance.

Avvai's life is lost in the mists of antiquity and many legends have gathered round her. Tradition reveals that she was the eldest of seven children, born to a Brahmin, named Bhagavan, and a Harijan girl, Adi. The children were abandoned by their parents but all of them grew to fame as poets and writers in Tamil. Avvai's younger brother was Valluvar, the author of Kural, a manual of ethics in Tamil, popularized by the Government of Tamil-Nad. Avvai influenced the Tamil Sangam to get recognition of the Kural as a great work. When Avvai was abandoned by her parents at Urayoor, then Chola Capital and she were taken care of by a childless minstrel couple. She moved about with her foster parents as minstrels and observed keenly men, morals and life in the Tamil region. When she grew up, she wandered alone spreading wisdom. She became famous for her wit and knowledge and was sought after by princes and people of all ranks. She had many patrons. Adigaman was a feudatory chief of Ingadoor (now Dharmapuri). A saint gave a

myrobalan fruit to Adigamon assuring its efficacy to prolong life. Adigamon passed it on to Avvai and it is said that she lived for 240 years. Two girls wanted to marry a prince and the prince accepted Avvai's proposal provided the kings of Pandya, Chola and Chera would officiate in *kanyadān*. Avvai had arranged a gathering of all southern kings at the wedding of those two girls and as the three kings had their camps, the place is called Muppandal. Once Avvai was commissioned to bring about conciliation between two princes at war. She pointed out to them the enormous damage to their countries and people and thus stopped the war.

Her wit and wisdom were proverbial. God Kartikeya wanted to humble her. In the guise of a boy, he climbed up a jamboo tree. Avvai happened to come there. She asked the boy to give her a fruit. The boy asked her whether she wanted a hot or cold fruit. She was nonplussed and said 'hot fruit.' The boy threw a fruit down on sand and Avvai had to blow away the sticking sand and she realised what he meant by a hot fruit.

The intuitive knowledge of Avvai is perennial and can be applied by all humanity and has been acclaimed at all times. The children of Tamilnad learnt by heart those golden moral precepts which influenced their lives in early times. A Tamil scholar Sri V. Kanakasabhai observes, "Avvai was the most famous Tamil poetess, more popular than Valluvar. Her thought and aphoristic expression are products of her spiritual life. Morality is the common heritage of all religions and countries. Avvai's golden maxims admonish all men to live as loyal subjects. Secularism of a country is not opposed to morality.

Even in her life time Avvai was venerated as the Goddess

of learning, Saraswati. Many shrines in Kanyakumari District are dedicated to her worship. Children are named after her. Every Tuesday in the month of Ashada is reserved for her special worship. There is a shrine at a hamlet called Avvayar Amman Koil where, it is believed, she left her mortal coil. But she has immortalized herself by her profound knowledge. She is one of those women whose memory is to be honoured and whose wisdom is to be cherished all over India.

Mātri Līlā

(June 25th—October 15th, 1973)

After two very hectic days in Calcutta, Mataji alighted at Naimisharanya on June 25th with five companions only. There she could enjoy the quiet and solitude of that sacred place in the flaming heat of June for about a week. Later the devotees of Sitapur and Lucknow somehow found out where Mataji was and quite a number of them came daily for her *darśana*. On July 4th Mataji boarded the Doon Express. Even her attendants did not know where she would get down. Mataji went straight to Dehradun but remained hidden for three days in the house of a devotee where some rooms are kept reserved for her use permanently. On July 8th morning Mataji gave *darśana* to everyone at Lakshman Chowk at the residence of another devotee and early in the afternoon she came to the Kishenpur Ashram and Kalyanvan for less than three hours. Many came in the evening and were sorely disappointed to find that Mataji had left at 5 p. m. for Hardwar. She spent the night at Jaipuria House at Ramghat and proceeded to Kankhal the next morning. On July 9th the recitation of *Akhanda Rāmāyana* was started at the Kishenpur Ashram and on July 10th early morning Mataji again motored to Kishenpur to be present at the *Pūrnahuti* (conclusion) of the *Rāmāyana*. This time all the disappointed devotees could have Mataji's *darśana* to their heart's content as she remained till 5 p. m.

On July 15th *Gurupūrnima* (the full moon day of the

month of Asadh on which the Guru is worshipped) was celebrated at Kankhal in the usual manner by *Guru pūja* in Didima's *samādhi mandir*, by all day *kirtana*, a feast given to sādhus and to all visitors, etc. Already on July 14th there was a great crowd of devotees and admirers from far and near, amongst them a dozen foreigners from various countries. On *Guru Purnima* day it rained incessantly from early morning until about 3 p. m. which made things rather uncomfortable as there was hardly enough space for everyone to sit or even stand under cover. Some stood in the open, holding umbrellas over their heads. Mataji moved about a great deal within the premises of the tiny Ashram and everyone was trying to do obeisance and place their offerings at her feet wherever they could get near her, even in the soaking wet courtyard. However, the foundation stone for a very spacious hall across the road was laid that very morning in Ma's presence, so that we may hope to be more comfortable next year ! We noticed with satisfaction that the guest-house is going up with great speed and may most likely be inhabitable before the starting of the Kumbh Mela next spring.

Many who were unable to come in person had sent letters, telegrams and gifts from all over the country. In reply, Mataji had the following message written to everyone of them. "*He Bhagavan, kripa kore sparsh dao ! He Atmā Guru kripā koro !*" ("God Almighty be gracious and let me feel thy touch ! O Guru who art the one Self of all, pour out thy grace !")

On the 16th morning Vice-President G. S. Pathak arrived with his wife and daughter to pay homage to Mataji on that special occasion. They stayed for the whole day and late at night Mataji also boarded the train that took them back to Delhi. Nobody knew where Mataji would alight. From Delhi

she went by the Frontier Mail to Bombay reaching there on the 18th morning. For a few hours only she remained at the residence of Sri B. K. Shah at Vile Parle. She also went to a hospital to cheer up an ashramite who had recently undergone an operation. The same evening she motored to Poona and remained there until July 22nd. A new room was inaugurated at our Ashram in her presence. Nobody could guess where Mataji was going from Bombay where she again halted for a few hours.

Mataji travelled straight to Rajghir. Her stay was kept completely secret as Mataji was badly in need of rest after a very strenuous summer. Only a couple of devotees from Bombay who had to see Mataji privately were allowed to come for short visits and Sri Subimal Dutt, the Indian Ambassador to Bangladesh, came from Dacca and spent three very quiet days with Mataji. One of the disciples of Sri Sivananda Ashram, Sri Ram Ratan Pandit, who lives at Jhumri Telaya near Kodarma, somehow got a clue where Mataji was and one day, shortly before Mataji was to leave for Ranchi, came to Rajghir. He was delighted to find Mataji there and persuaded her to stop at his place for a night's rest on her way to Ranchi. His friend had recently built a guest house that would thus be inaugurated by Mataji's visit. He offered to send cars for Mataji and her small party and again to provide cars for the journey from Telaya to Ranchi. Thus Mataji left Rajghir on August 6th evening. On her way she got down at a Kali temple for a short while. She spent the night at the new guest-house, proceeding to Ranchi on the 7th after the midday meal reaching there the same evening.

At Ranchi the *Jhulan* festival was celebrated from August

9th to 14th in our Ashram hall. Mataji had not been to Ranchi for a long time and a terrific crowd eager for Mataji's *darśana* collected every evening. Mataji had to be protected by a wooden fence. A good number of devotees had also arrived from Calcutta and other places. A swing beautifully decorated with leaves, Kadamba flowers and red apples had been put up in front of the Gopal Mandir. As customary, *vigrahas* of Sri Krishna and Sri Radha were placed on the swing and *pujā* was performed every evening to the accompaniment of lovely music. Mataji sat near the swing for nearly two hours daily. On August 14th, the fullmoon night, there was midnight meditation in commemoration of Ma's self-initiation that had occurred during that night in 1922. About a dozen of the inmates of Yogada Ashram attended the function and Brahmacharini Mira, an accomplished singer who is incharge of the School of Indian Music of the Yogada Satsang society sang very beautifully before the meditation. After the meditation Mataji replied to questions until about 1.30 a. m. Since the *Raksha Bandhana* festival falls on the same day, it goes without saying that Mataji received and distributed *rākhis* (bracelets of silver or gold tinsel) tirelessly and with infinite patience.

One day Mataji followed an invitation to the Yogada Satsang Society. A meeting was held in their temple in Mataji's honour. She was received with great veneration and profusely garlanded and decorated with flowers. Beautiful *bhujans* were sung and at the end Mataji led the *kirtana* for a short while.

During her sojourn at Ranchi, Mataji visited the Centre for Adult Education run by the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Sanitorium where she had an interesting

discussion with a Maharashtrian sādhu. She further graced several houses of devotees with her presence, amongst them the residences of Sri N. Bakshi, I. C. S., the Raja of Ratu, Sri K. P. Roy. Mataji also went to a hospital to pay a visit to an American disciple of Swami Kriyananda, who had come to India to spend some months with Mataji and had fallen seriously ill.

From Ranchi Mataji motored to Dhanbad and from there took the train to Delhi where she arrived on August 17th. At Mogal Sarai junction, the majority of the inmates of our Ashram at Varanasi and other devotees had assembled for Mataji's *darśana*. Mataji has not been to Varanasi for several months.

Mataji came to Delhi at the urgent requests of devotees to spend *Janmastami* (Sri Krishna's birthday) with them. It fell on August 21st. During the few days before the festival Mataji received visits of the Prime Minister, several other Ministers and V. I. Ps. *Janmastami* was celebrated on a gigantic scale by a very special midnight *pujā* in the mediation room at the Panchavati of the Ashram. The attendance was enormous. Many foreigners also were present. After the *pujā* Mataji herself distributed prasad to each and everyone. This took over an hour.

The next morning *Nandotsava** was observed in the traditional manner by a picturesque dance round a circular alter performed by devotees dressed up very colourfully as cowherds of Vrindaban. Mataji was in a great mood. She sang very animatedly and for a short while danced with a small girl. The festival started in the hall. But for the climax, when

* The riotous joy of the cowherds over the birth of Sri Krishna.

buckets full of curds were brought and Mataji threw the contents into every single person's mouth, splashing it all over them as well, Mataji went out into the open, followed by everyone present in spite of the rain. Both *Janmastami* and *Nandotsava* in New Delhi will ever remain unforgettable to all who had the good fortune to take part.

The same evening Mataji went to stay in the new house of Sri Lalit Mohan at Vasant Vihara. Sri Lalit Mohan had dreamt some time ago that Mataji had come to his new home and so his dream became an actuality. Mataji's entire party also accompanied her. On August 23rd and 24th *Akhaṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* was recited and on the 25th *kirtana* performed throughout the day. In the evening Mataji returned to the Ashram. Siddharta Shanker Roy, the Chief Minister of Bengal came and had a private interview with Mataji. We are grieved to report that his mother, Sm. Aparna Roy, the daughter of Sri C. R. Das, a devotee of many years standing died of cancer on July 8th. Mataji had been to see her in the hospital twice during her recent flying visits to Calcutta.

On August 27th, Mataji boarded the night train to Hardwar, alighting at Kankhal on the 28th morning. On her way from the station she took Swami Swarupananda who is now the Secretary of our hospital at Varanasi, to see the Ramakrishna Seva Hospital at Kankhal. Nowadays Mataji seems to lay more stress on active service to the Lord as a *sādhana*. Of course, she again and again points out that what matters is *Tat buddhi*, that is to say the constant awareness that everything and everyone is nothing but a form or guise of the all-pervading ONE. He alone has to be remembered, He alone has to be served.

Mataji remained at Kankhal for three days. On August 30th evening she drove to Kishenpur without any previous notice. The 31st was (according to the Hindu calendar) the anniversary of the installation of the sacred fire at Kalyanvan.† A special *yajña* (fire sacrifice) was celebrated and Mataji distributed fruits and sweets with her own hands. This was followed by a feast at the Kishenpur Ashram. On September 1st morning, Mataji left by car without disclosing her destination. She went straight to the Sapta Rishi Ashram which is situated between Hardwar and Rishikesh. Mataji was supposed to be in seclusion, but people soon discovered where Ma was and several came daily from Hardwar as well as from Rishikesh clamouring of her *darśana*. After three days she shifted to another Ashram nearby. But soon people followed her there as well.

On September 12th, Mataji returned to Kankhal. There she daily replied to the questions of a small group of devotees, giving very interesting and enlightening replies. On September 18th, Swami Chidananda, the head of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, came to see Mataji with a small party after a long interval. He had been touring in foreign countries for months and had arrived at Rishikesh from Delhi that very morning. Mataji asked him to talk but he said he had come to listen to Mataji. Finally he very impressively chanted hymns to Devi and also sang *kirtana*. It is hoped that he will grace the *Samyam Vrata* at Vrindaban with his presence. He also came for Durga Puja on *Ashtami* and *Naomi*.

† This sacred fire had been lit at Dacca in 1926 by some supernatural means and has been preserved in several places ever since.

On September 20th, Mataji moved to Baghat house, Kharkhari, Hardwar, where Navarātri celebrations were to start on the 27th and Durgā Pujā on October 2nd at the invitation of the Raja and Rani of Nabha. Preparations were already in full swing, led by Swami Paramananda assisted by a band of ashramites and devotees, Pujā was performed for five days of a decorated earthen pitcher filled with Ganges-water, which symbolized the Goddess, while the image representing Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesh, Kartik, etc. was kept hidden behind a curtain. On October 2nd it was unveiled and Durgā Pujā started in great style.

On October 1st, the head of the Anubhava School of Enlightenment of California with fifteen students came and asked for an interview. Mataji met them after the morning *satsang* when everybody had gone to take their midday meal. Several questions were asked and Mataji not only responded very generously by wonderful and detailed replies, but finally also asked them for "viksha" (alms), namely to fix a definite time of every day for the remembrance of God. Formerly Ma would demand fifteen minutes of every twenty-four hours, now a days she asks for one moment only. At the end, Mr. Berner, the leader, said; "Will you come to America with us?" Mataji replied; "I am in America, I never leave America at all."

The next evening a disciple of Swami Satyanānda of Moyghyr, a French *sannyāsini* who is running two schools of yoga in France, attended the whole of *Sashti Pujā* with twenty of her disciples. Afterwards they sat round Mataji, asking for her blessing for self-realization. Ma said; "Follow the Guru's instructions and pray for his grace." When taking leave, the *sannyāsini* asked Mataji to give her power to guide effectively her

five hundred pupils. Mataji took off her wrapper and presented it to the supplicant who was visibly overwhelmed and almost in tears with joy.

The Durga Puja celebrations were truly magnificent in every respect. A beautiful, colourful, yet very simple and dignified pandal had been erected over the whole of the courtyard, including the trees and the path. Every inch of the very limited space was used with real ingenuity. The *pratima* (image) was, as usual, extremely beautiful and full of life. Not only *pujā* was performed, there was *satsang* every afternoon with brilliant talks by Mahātmās, such as Swami Akhandananda Saraswati, Swami Govind Prakashji of Ramathirta Ashram, Mahamandaleswara Swami Vidyanāndaji, Ananda Swamiji and others. Professor Tripurari Chakravarti daily expounded the Valmiki Ramayana with great skill. Every evening Br. Nirmalananda gave very interesting explanations of the significance of *Durga Puja*. "Do not think that the Goddess is worshipped only in the image. She resides hidden in every human heart. There she is fighting Mahishāsura who symbolizes the animal nature in man, with its greed, anger, passion and so forth. If you truly worship Durga, enthroning Her in your heart, the *asura* will be killed."

Chandi Patha was recited daily by a pandit in a separate room, the whole of the Tulsidas *Ramayana* was completed in nine days in another room, the whole of the *Devi Bhagavata* was read, perpetual japa performed throughout *Navaratri*. During the long hours of the elaborate *puja*, celebrated by Br. Nirvananda with several assistants, there was exquisite music; a great variety of hymns and songs mostly to Devi sung in turns by Chhabi Banerji, two south Indian musicians, Ashramites

and others. On the veranda of the Siva temple *Kumārī Pujā* took place daily.

The attendance was spectacular. Six hundred people had written for accommodation from Calcutta, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Varanasi, Jullundur, etc. etc. Over and above there was the local crowd of devotees and casual visitors from Hardwar, Rishikesh and Dehradun. Several Americans were among the regular congregation. Everyone wanted to offer flowers, fruits or garlands to Ma personally as well and many to perform her pūjā. Believe it or not, Mataji found a way of giving individual attention to every single person, to accept offerings and gifts, moving about with the quickness and suddenness of lightning; to supervise all arrangements in minute details untiringly, taking no notice whatever of her frail health. Twice Mataji put sandalpaste on everyone's forehead and twice distributed sweets to one and all. As a climax she sang on *Vijaya Dasami* day : 'Mā Durgā, Brahmaswarupini, Ātmaswaruyinī, Brahmamayi, Prāṇamayi, Śivamayi Mā' with many new variations and then "Śrī Guru śaranam mama, namo, namo". Mataji was present in the *pujā* room for long hours every morning, midday and evening and yet attended to everything else as well. In the evening of *Vijaya Dasami*, after the image had been taken to the Ganges for immersion, a large basket full of sweets was placed on a table near Mataji's seat and everyone queued up to receive a large, delicious sweet from Ma's own hands to the accompaniment of *kirtana*.

To hold celebrations of such magnitude, to organise within a very limited space a veritable symphony of dedicated activities in which everyone had a share was a stupendous feat that only Mataji could achieve. Various difficulties, as for instance

almost incessant rain from *Saptami* evening until *Daśami* midday, the road being turned into a puddle of deep mud, periodical absence of electric current, occasional failing of the loudspeakers, were hardly felt as disturbances. It seems impossible to give even a faint idea of the effect that this whole function created.

On October 7th the majority of people dispersed to their respective homes, yet a certain number remained over *Lakshmi Puja* which was held on full moon night, October 11th. In between Mataji visited Kankhal two or three times. One day, *Daridra Narayana Puja* (offering of food to God in the guise of the destitute) was performed according to Mataji's *kheyala*. A large number of beggars received food and sweet on that occasion at Kankhal. On the 12th night there was general exodus and everyone left for the station. Some were going to Vrindaban headed by Didiji, others to Varanasi, Delhi, Calcutta. Mataji was to leave for Naimisharanya with a few companions. They left, but Mataji returned to Kankhal from the station and left only on the 14th.

Kali Puja is to be celebrated on October 25th (Diwali night), at Vrindaban in Mataji's presence. The 24th *Samyam Mahavrata* is to be held also at Vrindaban from November 3rd to 9th.