

CONTENTS

1.	Matri Vani	...	...	...	173
2.	A Letter and Mataji's Reply	...	...	...	176
3.	Matri Satsang in Solan	—Swami Bhagawatananda Giri		...	177
4.	From the Life of Mataji	—Bithika Mukherji		...	183
5.	A Visit to Naimisharanya	—Subal Ganguly		..	193
6.	Holy Reminiscences	—Jainath Kaul		...	200
7.	Three Poems	—Monique Peace		...	206
8.	Inernal Voice of the 20th Century and the Universal Mother Divine Sri Anandamayi Ma				
			—Sri Dibyadarshi	...	207
9.	Contemporary Saints and Sages :				
			—Vijayanda	...	212
10.	Matri Lila	...	...	...	223



Ānanda Vārtā



V. XXII]

OCTOBER, 1975

[No. 4



*The One who is the Eternal, the Atman,
He Himself is the pilgrim on the path of Immortality,
He is all in all, He alone is.*

Mātri Vāni

They are living in a locality where *tapasyā* is practised, in the foot-hills of the Himalayas, in the vicinity of a Siva temple. By the atmosphere of their *sādhana*, their *tapasyā* the place should become so filled with spiritual vibrations that even people coming from outside would be able to notice this distinctly. Ashram life must be made worthy of its name, must be blessed—this is as it should be. Eyes, face, the whole body will then radiate tranquillity, gentleness. All travellers on the supreme Path must be full of

devotion, ascetic, the very embodiments of love, great yogins. The pilgrimage is undertaken for the sake of self-forgetfulness, for the revelation of one's true Being, to experience the touch of Him.

*

*

*

Change your life completely, from its very root. Become a *sādhaka* and go ahead on the spiriual path with splendid vigour and energy. At every single moment He is with you as your helper – keep this in mind. The One to whose service you are devoting your life is Himself the Saviour. In order to experience this deep within, try with all your might to purify yourself. If for a whole year one strictly speaks the truth and adheres to truth scrupulously in every respect, a glimpse of Truth may possibly be caught as a result. Let there be not even a hint or suggestion of falsehood.

*

*

*

Keep a strict watch over everything you do – how you eat, sleep, move about and sit. Furthermore, the practice one has undertaken in order to be released from bondage must be performed with faith and love. No religious exercise should be done disrespectfully for it is He Himself who has come in the guise of the practice. By affliction He destroys sorrow. The suffering that has to be endured with patience, fortitude and forbearance is the Destroyer of Sorrow Himself who appears in this shape so as to conquer all suffering.

*

*

*

devotion, ascetic, the very embodiments of love, great yogins. The pilgrimage is undertaken for the sake of self-forgetfulness, for the revelation of one's true Being, to experience the touch of Him.

*

*

*

Change your life completely, from its very root. Become a *sādhaka* and go ahead on the spiriual path with splendid vigour and energy. At every single moment He is with you as your helper – keep this in mind. The One to whose service you are devoting your life is Himself the Saviour. In order to experience this deep within, try with all your might to purify yourself. If for a whole year one strictly speaks the truth and adheres to truth scrupulously in every respect, a glimpse of Truth may possibly be caught as a result. Let there be not even a hint or suggestion of falsehood.

*

*

*

Keep a strict watch over everything you do – how you eat, sleep, move about and sit. Furthermore, the practice one has undertaken in order to be released from bondage must be performed with faith and love. No religious exercise should be done disrespectfully for it is He Himself who has come in the guise of the practice. By affliction He destroys sorrow. The suffering that has to be endured with patience, fortitude and forbearance is the Destroyer of Sorrow Himself who appears in this shape so as to conquer all suffering.

*

*

*

By chanting the Gayatri mantra, by performing fire sacrifice, by japa, meditation and similar practices one is cleansed and purified from the dross and the karma accumulated during countless former births and in the present. Thereby is aided the unveiled revelation of that blazing, glorious Reality which like a radiant light shines deep within oneself and which is the goal.

*

*

*

The endeavour to keep the mind constantly engaged in the contemplation of THAT is man's duty as a human being. Do not escape by saying: "I cannot". You will have to develop the capacity for it, you will have to do it. For a human being everything is possible. By God's grace you have been born in a human body as a Brahmin. If someone is knocked down, he surely does not remain lying on the ground. He rises, stands up and walks on again. The speed of one's advance must become swift. For those who are pilgrims it is necessary to forge ahead with great energy, vigour, vivacity and velocity. Do not proceed leisurely sitting comfortably in a hackney carriage.

*

*

*

In order to annihilate what is undesirable and harmful (*aniṣṭa*), the mind has to be steeped in the adoration of the Beloved (*Iṣṭa*). The notion that He is far away must be altogether given up. Thou art within and without, in every vein and artery, in

every leaf and blade of grass, in the world and beyond it. The awakening of the sense of want is to be welcomed, it opens the way. HE is there at every step to make the unfit expert. As the sense of want and emptiness Thou appearest and no other—Thou art ever close by. “Lord I take refuge in Thee, I take refuge in Thee !”

A letter and Mataji's Reply

Mother, are we friends ?
 Mother, do you love me ?
 Can you reach me here ?
 You have said you are near,
 So would you please appear ?
 Am I too impure ?
 Am I not sincere ?”

Mataji's reply :

“God is the supreme Father, Mother, Beloved, Friend, Companion. Of course He is a friend, He is indeed *the* friend. Everything that appears is the manifestation of the Supreme Lord, He is the true friend. All pain and sorrow are due to the sense of “I” and “mine” The world is God's creation. In God is everyone and everything. Where is He not ? This is how Ma is also always near although the body does not go everywhere. In the *Paramātmā* there is no possibility of impurity or insincerity at all.”

Matri Śatsang in Solan

Swami Bhagavananda Giri

(Translated from Bengali)

(9)

Question : “*Sarva bhuta hite ratah*” (“.....intent on the welfare of all beings.....”) says the Bhagavad Gita. Mataji, so long as our lives are not self-restrained it is difficult to put this and similar injunctions into practice.

Mataji : This body sometimes says that it is difficult for men and women living a family life to be self-restrained. This opens the door to a wonderful subject. Formerly there were four *āśramas* : 1) The *Brahmacharya Aśrama*, 2) the *Grihastha Aśrama* (householders Aśrama), 3) the *Vana-prāsthā Aśrama* (for men and women retiring into seclusion to practise *sādhanā*), the *Samnyāsa Aśrama*. Thus previously one's life would be moulded from the beginning during the time spent in the *Brahmacharya Aśrama*. Those who experienced an overwhelming desire to renounce the world used to advance straight away to the *Samnyāsa Aśrama*. While others followed the normal path of householders after the stipulated period as Brahmacharis. In the householder's *āśrama* there is also the road that leads to God. ‘*Aśrama*’ means a place where there is no *śrama* i. e. no strain resulting from one's efforts. That is why it is called an *āśrama*. Even while

adopting the householder's āśrama people used to live a life of self-restraint. Those who had observed the rules and regulations of the Brahmacharya Aśrama had already received their training in self-mastery. Therefore they would strictly practise the restraints, manners, customs and regulations laid down for the *Grihastha Aśramā*. The Rishis were such householders. They had children of their own. Nowadays there is no such thing as the *Brahmacharya Aśrama*. This is why licentiousness and lack of self-control have come about. For the same reasons the *Vanaprastha Aśrama* and the *Samnyāsa Aśrama* are not being followed correctly. If the prescribed conduct and regulations were observed in the life of the householder, then the correct conduct and rules of the life in secluded retirement would automatically be followed. Thereafter, for such persons, life as a *samnyāsi* would be simple and straight forward. But because there is no observance of the rules of the first āśrama therefore there is no self-control thereafter in the lives of men and women. Even so, by strictly following the instructions tendered by one's Guru, it may be possible to reach that elevated state of existence.

Question : Mataji, nowadays it is difficult to find a real Guru. The Maharaja of Baroda once arranged a conference of pandits. The subject for discussion was "*Ahimsa*" (Non-violence). Various pandits delivered long speeches. When at the end of his discourse, one of the speakers took a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe the perspiration from his face, an egg fell out of the handkerchief.

The Gurus of our days no longer wield any real influence. This is the saddest part of the picture. In my opinion a

religion can only be called real when it leads to respect for humanity, truth, forbearance and equal regard for all.

Mataji : Pitaji, listen. There is something else to be said in this connexion. There was a pandit who used to recite the Ramayana very beautifully. Everybody was charmed when listening to his recitals. Some felt as if Sri Ramachandra himself were relating his story. A certain boy took initiation from the pandit. Later his whole family followed suit. The boy became so devoted to his Guru that there seemed to be no room for anything else in his life. The pandit could keep spell-bound a gathering of a thousand people. But his character was not good. The boy however was obsessed by his Guruji. His parents told him, "Why are you all the time after your Guru ? You must first complete your studies." The boy became deeply pained at hearing his parents blame his Guru. He would cry himself to exhaustion. How wonderful to behold such a spectacle ! A sincere, artless boy—like a flower with its petals just blown open. The boy was absorbed in the thought : "I must find Rama." He felt, one must not stay anywhere where one's Guru is found fault with. Almighty Lord, what enchanting sights you hold up in front of us ! In reality it is God that pervades all forms. To see faults in others is itself a fault. It is due to duality. *Duniya* (world) means "based on duality". Because there are "two" one sees faults. Even in sinners and wicked beings God resides. He who is aware of this will indeed be victorious. If sins are overlooked then the evil tendencies of the sinner undergo a change for the better. This sort of thing has happened in front of this little girl. (Mataji points to **Herself.**) God has revealed Himself in this way as well.

The father told the boy : "I have heard that your Guru's character is not good." This body then remembered that the person who was that Guru's Guru had also misbehaved in a similar manner. People related this to me. But even so this body does not hold anyone in disrespect. It is not right to place an impediment on the path taken by anyone. The boy came to believe that his father was his enemy. But gradually, on growing up, he started reading religious books. Later, when he realized that his Guru's character was not good, he alienated himself of his own accord. How many men and women had become entangled there ! Subsequently some of them came and confided everything to this body. One of them said: "I do not feel like letting this defiled body live any longer. I replied: "You have no right to destroy your body. The very fact that you are now repenting is sufficient to atone for your past sins. Purify yourself. Nothing good would result from your death, on the contrary it would have evil consequences." That person was then saved by following the path that leads to God-realisation. All is God's play. Pitaji, as regards those who deliver brilliant speeches—well, this is just an art, a science. Consider the case of that *jagat guru* (world-teacher) who spoke so fascinatingly on non-violence and then produced an egg from his pocket ! Such a brilliant speech, but people were completely disillusioned on seeing what happened subsequently. God is present in every form and appearance. It is fitting to remember this at all times. It is difficult to realize and easy to reject. All manifestations are but expressions of Thee. In this creation good and evil exist side by side. You are *Atmarām*, the Bliss of the Self. You are fortu-

nate enough to be created in the image of God Himself. To rouse so much interest by mere words, to express beautiful sentiments so lucidly, all this is a matter of art—a skill. This art has nothing to do with the Supreme Being (Param-ātmā). That art has been developed by certain persons. There can be a skill in the art of singing which entrances people. But this proficiency has no affinity with truth, religion or character.

It is extremely difficult to find a *Sad-guru*. * There was another great guru who had any number of disciples. He told one of them: "Accept bribes and send me the money." "In the end matters came to such a pass that the disciple had to sever his relationship with the guru. Truth Itself comes to the rescue of Truth. If you tell lies in the name of Truth, the lies will evaporate like camphor. God is omnipotent in His own Self. Ultimately He alone exists but He is a whimsical sovereign! "In each and every form, Oh Lord, Thou Thyself art present." One must regard everything and everyone as THAT. The plant which is full of thorns also produces roses. "Oh Lord! All forms and shapes are Thine alone!" This is most difficult to accept.

A book which contains wise counsel is called "*Guru Granth*." The book itself is an expression of the Guru. No falsehood can come from the study of Sacred Scriptures or from the repetition of God's holy Name. Let those who have not found a Guru as yet call out: "Oh Lord, Thou art the Guru of the whole universe. Deign to arrange whatever is necessary for my well-being!" Remain immersed in the perusal of sacred Scriptures and see in which particular

* *Sad guru* A guru who shows the way to Self realisation.

form He will reveal Himself to you. As long as He does not appear to you as *Sad guru*, so long should you persevere with your devotions. "All names, all forms, all qualities are Thine, oh Lord." Never cease to think about Him. The Name is *akṣarah*. (indestructible) it does not wane from day to day, therefore take refuge in His Name. By continuously clinging to Him who is the Supreme Being, you will be able to destroy your own negative qualities. Thereafter, how is it possible that He should not reveal Himself? It is your duty to keep your eyes constantly fixed on one goal. Of Him alone must be the spoken word, all else is but futility and pain. Become a pilgrim on the road to Immortality. You have so often in the past set out on journeys leading to death, now take the road to Immortality.

1. A play upon words: *Aksara* means "indestructible" as well as "syllable."

Boundlessness

Elwood Decker

The chains of circumstance that seem to bind
 Offer an Opportunity to Find
 Greater Freedom than we have ever known
 By wholly abiding in Love alone
 We easily improve our attitude
 With a good proportion of Gratitude
 And when we express it wholeheartedly
 We're Liberating our identity
 Fortunately the human mind is small
 And Love is the Essence of Virtues all
 When MA ANANDAMAYI Fills the mind
 There's no room left for anything to bind !

From the Life of Mataji

Bithika Mukerji

(Continued from the last issue)

After Bholanath's death (1938).

Bholanath's passing away was an event of great moment in the lives of the devotees, firstly, because it was an irreparable personal loss for all those who knew him, and secondly, because nearly all of them had in some measure or other to reorient themselves in their understanding of Mataji.

In the beginning, as in other cases of bereavement, the local people hesitated to intrude upon Mataji; but they soon realized how ludicrous it was for them to think that Mataji would be found grieving over the death of Bholanath. Mataji's attitude towards Bholanath's death was the same as it had been, and was to be in future towards the deaths of others who were closely connected with Her way of living in the world, and who were totally dependent upon Her for their well-being. While they were alive She seemed entirely concerned with their welfare, but She did not mourn their deaths. She has said in this context, "What is the occasion for grief? Nobody is lost to me. Do you feel sad when you are obliged to go from one room to another?"

The ladies of Dehradun felt a little ashamed of themselves for attributing their own emotional reaction to Mataji,

which they acknowledged to Her very soon. The general opinion was voiced by someone who said, "It is due to our limitations that we see you go through changes of time, like growing up or growing old, or changes in marital or social status. You are always the same and just what you are in yourself. So please continue to do as may be your *kheyāla* now as always."

Thus, no drastic changes were brought about in the mode of Mataji's life. Didi, waiting anxiously in Banaras for news of Mataji, got reassuring tidings that everything was quite as usual in the Ashram at Kishenpur. The attitude on the part of the devotees in this context brings to light Mataji's unique way of 'playing' the roles that She adopts. Nobody could doubt Mataji's concern for Her people, yet in the beginning they had to learn by experience about Her total self-sufficiency. An understanding and a compassion which are compatible with extreme detachment are hard to comprehend, especially when the enigmatic personality herself has nothing to say in explanation of her own way of projecting this image.

Mataji remained quietly at Dehradun for some time, occasionally visiting Raipur. There were very few people at the Kishenpur Ashram. Ruma Devi cooked the simple meals for Mataji and looked to the comforts of visitors. Manmatha Nath Chatterji, who had retired from service, was living in the Ashram. Abhaya, a youth who had attached himself recently to Mataji was a constant companion. Abhaya had many aggravating qualities, such as monopolizing Mataji's time to the exclusion of others; answering on behalf of Mataji the questions put to Her by visitors; being insensi-

tive to the requirements of others to the point of rudeness. His sometimes very impertinent behaviour toward Mataji Herself would outrage the older devotees. All this was forgotten and forgiven again and again, because of his childlike devotion for Mataji on the one hand, and on the other his golden voice and marvellous repertoire of devotional songs, many of which he composed himself. Kirtan, before and since has never been the same, according to some people. Abhaya had the unique distinction of evoking a most indulgent compassion from Mataji which remains unrivalled so far. In himself he was a most charming and entertaining companion for all the younger members of the families visiting Mataji. Many young boys became his devoted followers in music; many others, with rather unfelicitious results tried to imitate him in his orientation toward Mataji without possessing his guileless spontaneity.

These events are demonstrative of Mataji's mode of affirmation or reformation of individuals strictly in their own rights. Cries of favouritism or partial behaviour can be heard amongst the people around Mataji. But a little reflection shows clearly that everyone evokes from Mataji the response that he merits. This is a fact which is hard to comprehend because it is not met within our ordinary everyday world. It can be experienced in the proximity of Mataji alone. Ordinarily, Mataji does not give definitive directions to people who come seeking Her guidance but only suggestions, which if they so wish, can be complied with. In other words, Mataji responds to the total personality of an individual, which She seems to perceive at a glance, and thus,

no two people will get the same treatment. The one common denominator is that She calls everyone to his best efforts toward the highest endeavour, and She shows limitless concern for those who try. For failures She has nothing but compassion, and so, having once taken refuge with Her, no one need ever be afraid again. This also accounts for the very motley nature of Mataji's entourage. People from all walks of life, all age groups, any or no religious persuasion, ascetics as well as householders, find the same quality of affirmation in Mataji and experience a sense of homecoming. The onus of understanding even a little of this entirely unparalleled personality, rests totally on the visitor. Nobody can explain things to everybody's satisfaction, because nobody has a clue to the mystery of Mataji's *kheyāla*.

Mataji's indifferent health at that time continued to cause anxiety to the devotees. Abhaya had the happy idea of writing and asking everyone who was willing to do so to engage in some *nāma-japa*, expressly for the purpose of praying for Mataji's health. He wrote to Didi also, who in turn conveyed the idea to others; in this way, probably for the first time, devotees distant from and unknown to each other, became united in a common resolve for prayers.

In the last week of July 1938, Mataji travelled to Solan and then on to Simla. This was Mataji's first visit to Simla after the death of Bholanath. The devotees of Simla largely consisted of Bengali officers of the Central Secretariat. Simla at that time used to be the summer headquarters of the Government. The periodic reassemblies had forged a common bond between such of the men and their families

as were interested in keeping alive the tradition of *nāma-sankirtana*, sanctified by Sri Gauranga Mahaprabhu. This group of people had become very attached to Mataji and welcomed her joyfully in their midst. Not finding Didi with Mataji, they enquired about her. Didi had gone to Varanasi, Vindhyaçal, Calcutta and Dacca according to Mataji's suggestions. She had been in Dacca during the Birthday Celebrations. This was an especially poignant year for the devotees of Dacca because of Bholanath's death and also because the image of their beloved Kali had to be given its final internment inside its own little shrine.

Didi, although inconsolable at being separated from Mataji for so long, had realized how necessary her presence had been in Dacca at this time. Now she was happy to be recalled to join Mataji in Simla. Didi met Mataji for the first time since Bholanath's death and now eagerly listened to Her description of the events leading up to it. The devotees of Simla who had wanted to hear about it but had hesitated to broach the subject to Mataji, now had an opportunity to learn about these events. Mataji, in Her inimitable style related the whole incident in detail, recreating for Her audience the last hours of Bholanath's life.

Describing the last few hours which were characterised by Bholanath's serenity and calm acceptance of his imminent death in the face of which he said "ananda", Mataji asked Didi, "Did I not do well to send my mother away with you and Swamiji? Without a doubt She would but have

made this incident a matter of grief and lamentations. Whereas Bholanath's last minutes were so quiet and peaceful that not even the people in the room realized what had happened till I drew their attention to it by saying to the Kaviraj (ayurvedic doctor), "What do you say ? As far as your science goes, isn't everything over ?"

Then, with a half-smile Mataji added, "Some people are amazed to hear me talking like this about the death of Bholanath, and are a little shocked too." Many of the group of people sitting around Her protested that such thoughts had not occurred to them. Mataji turned and looked at an elderly lady and asked lightly, "What do you say, mother ? Isn't it shocking the way I talk so unconcernedly about the death of Bholanath ?"

This lady then joined her palms together and said humbly, "Yes, Ma, I must confess that such was exactly my reaction to your narration. However, I see that this is due to my lack of understading of what you are. We are unable to disassociate ourselves from human relationships and therefore automatically ascribe them to you. I am now taken aback at my own folly in thinking that you should be bound by such ties as we experience. Forgive us and bear with us." Mataji laughed away her apology and said that such thoughts were quite natural after all. The slight constraint which the people of Simla had created for themselves vanished and they gave themselves over to the joyous experience of having Mataji amidst them for a few days.

A woman asked Her one day, "Ma, I am quite unable to calm my mind and am in despair how to control its perpetual restlessness." Mataji smiled and said, "What I would say is that your mind is by no means 'restless'. If you experience the restlessness of ardent yearning for God then at once you will be on the way to tranquillity. Learn to be really 'restless' ! "The woman was very delighted with this answer to her question.

On August 2nd Mataji expressed Her *kheyāla* to leave Simla. The residents at once raised strong objections. They were not at all willing to let Mataji leave them after such a short visit. They were then obliged to take note as it were, of another of the unique facets of Mataji's personality. In spite of Her gentle demeanour and Her unfailing consideration for others, Her *kheyāla* was not to be gainsaid. It was not that She sought in any way to impose Her decisions on anybody, in fact it was quite to the contrary; but it always so happened that things arranged themselves in such a manner that Her *kheyāla* was borne out. Didi and other close companions had long since given up the idea that they were dogged by series of coincidences and had learnt to abide by Mataji's *kheyāla* to the extent to which they understood what it was that was required of them. The people of Simla were obliged to bid Mataji a sorrowful farewell for the time being.

Mataji went to Solan, about 2000 ft down and 30 miles away from Simla on the same mountain range, the home of Jogibhai and his wife the Rani Saheba of Baghat State, a princess of great ability and remarkable generosity, who always made people feel welcome and at home in Solan.

All officers of the princely household became involved in eager and willing service to Mataji and to all those who happened to be with Her.

Mataji stayed in Her usual place which was known as Shogibaba's temple in Solan. During the week-end the devotees of Simla came down and performed their beloved ritual of the *nāmayajña*, under the aegis of the Raja Sahib of Solan. Nothing gave these men greater pleasure than to be able to celebrate this function in the presence of Mataji.

From Solan Mataji went to Dehradun and stayed at the Ashram for a few days. On August 18th, Mataji went to Mussoorie accompanied by quite a large group of people. The local inhabitants quickly became attached to Mataji and as always and everywhere is the case with Mataji, the crowd of visitors kept on swelling continuously. One day, the entire party went on an expedition to see the view from the highest point of the mountain-town. Two dandies were hired to go along with them. While they were resting near a church, the coolies who carried the dandies started talking to Mataji. One of them said, "Look Mataji, (all women are addressed as such in India), this is called a church. The foreigners worship God here just as we worship Him in temples. After all, what difference is there amongst people of different religions ? We are like brothers born by the same mother, are we not ?" Mataji concurred and then She went on to say, "God alone is real, all else is illusion and a source of our forgetfulness of our real Self. But alas, we are such weak mortals that it is difficult for us to turn away from indulgence."

Mataji's companions were thoroughly enjoying this interlude. She Herself was in Her own inimitable fashion totally involved with Her newly found teachers. She said, "Is that so Pitaji ? Then I must begin to carry out the lessons you are teaching me. I shall give up the comfortable way of travelling and walk the rest of the way." With a mischievous look She left the coolies behind and started walking down the steep mountain path. The coolies were alarmed at this prompt obedience on the part of their student and ran after Her to persuade Her to sit in the dandi again. Mataji went on with Her dialogue with the coolies, and ended up by saying that in remembrance of their conversation they should promise to devote a few minutes of every day to spiritual endeavour. They agreed readily and assured Mataji that they would never forget Her.

Mataji stopped in front of a sweets shop. Didi, interpreting this rightly, purchased lots of sweets which were distributed to all the coolies.

In the second week of September Mataji returned to Dehradun and almost immediately went to Hardwar.

(To be continued)

HYMN

J. N. Dhamija

O give me strength enough to break the chains
 Of bondage we call life, I pray, Most High.
 We sleep, awake and sleep again to dream,
 We save and spend and thus our life doth end;
 Pride and passions, Joys and pains, death, decay,
 Our hopes and fears-shadows chasing shades.
 Not knowing whence we came and where we go,
 While Life's eternal stream in silence flows.
 Open the portals wide, come flooding Light,
 And let me see Thy Vision O Most High.
 I seek Thy Grace, grant me my simple prayer,
 Abide with me my Lord for ever abide.

Notice to Foreign Subscribers

Our Quarterly Journal has been struggling to make both ends meet in spite of unprecedented rise in the cost of paper, printing and postage. We greatly regret to inconvenience our subscribers but we are now forced to increase the annual subscription rates as stated below with effect from January 1976.

Annual Subscription

Foreign—(By Sea Mail) 12/50, or £ 1-0-0 or \$ 3-00

(By Air Mail) Rs. 30/- or £ 2-15-0 (Europe etc.)

(By Air Mail) Rs. 40/- or \$ 6.50 (North & South America)

A Visit to Naimisharanya

Subal Ganguly

"*Nimsar āgayā, Nimsar āgayā*" would shout the robust conductor of a rickety bus after it had jerked to a halt at a small wayside station somewhere on the way to Hardoi from Lucknow. Yes, this is Naimisharanya which in local parlance is known as Nimsar, situated at a distance of nearly 80 miles from Lucknow, in the district of Sitapur. Naimisharanya can be reached by rail as well as by bus. Today Nimsar has emerged into a new light with the blessings of Ma Anandamayi.

Naimisharanya is said to be the place where all the eighteen Puranas were composed by Vyasadeva and his son Sukdeva. Hailed in our scriptures as the most sacred place, Naimisharanya was visited by the Pandavas in the course of their pilgrimage (*Tirthayātra*). Sri Rama had come to this place to perform the "*Aśwamedha Yajña*" after slaying Ravana. Here, at this place, on the bank of the Gomati river, Sita is said to have gone underground for ever. Lava and Kusha recited the Ramayana in the company of Rishi Viswamitra before Rama at this sacred spot. Lord Krishna and Balrama came to Naimisharanya on their pilgrimage. Prahlada, the great devotee, worshipped and meditated at this centre and Urvasi the famous beauty of heaven came to this spot with king Pururava. The *Matsya Purana* says: "*Tirthantu Naimisha nāma sarva tirthaphalapradam*". (Naimisharanya, the centre of pilgrimage, bestows the benefits

gained by visiting all other places of pilgrimage.) Similarly Tulsidas has written :

*“Tiratha vara Naimish vikhyātā
Ati punita sādḥaka siddhidātā
Basahi jahān muni samājā
Tah hiya harasi chale’ manu rājā ॥*

“Outstandingly meritorious, conferring fulfilment on the seeker after Truth is the pilgrimage to the famous and most sacred Naimisharanya, the abode of the company of sages to which Raja Manu hastened with great rejoicing in his heart.”

For centuries, however, Naimisharanya lay in obscurity until about fifteen years ago it was restored to its pristine glory by Mata Anandamayi. After a devastating flood Mataji visited the Swami Naradananda Ashram in Naimish on the occasion of a “Samyam Mahavrata” held there by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha at the invitation of Swami Naradananda. Everyone was fascinated by the sylvan beauty and the spiritual atmosphere of the place. During those gatherings that are held in different places once a year, one of the Puranas is discussed every time. It was then discovered that not even one complete set of the eighteen Puranas was to be found in Naimisharanya, the place of their origin. It seemed fitting that the Puranas should be preserved at Naimish and also a portion of the Puranas read every day in rotation. The Puranas were procured, a pandit was engaged and the daily recitation started in Mataji’s presence. Some devotees then decided to acquire a plot of land at the highest spot of Naimisharanya, namely at Hanuman Tila, in the name of

the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, where the foundation of a *Puran Mandir* was laid in Mataji's presence on 30-1-67. The temple was constructed by the Lotus Trust of Bombay under the leadership of Sri Manubhai Bhimani, a business magnate of Bombay. The temple was formally inaugurated on 11-12-67. It contains marble statues of Vyasadeva and Sukdeva in niches and a casket of sandalwood and glass in the centre in which copies of all the eighteen Mahapuranas are being preserved. The Puranas are read daily in rotation. Since the opening of the temple Mataji used to frequent this place. Gradually an ashram grew up. When in 1968 Swami Akhandananda Saraswati held a *Bhagavata Paksha* in the Ashram, he suggested that a *vighraha* of *Puran Purusha*, the presiding deity of the Puranas should be installed. Another temple was then built and the statue of Puran Purusha was consecrated on *Akshaya Tritiya*, which fell on May 14th, 1975.

This was the occasion which took me to Naimish in a party of thirty-one men and women, led by our Gurudeva, well known as Bholababa. An invitation from Mataji had been sent to our Gurudeva and I also did not miss the opportunity to squeeze with my family into the group which consisted of devotees from Calcutta, Patna and Dinapur, led by our Gurudeva.

On May 11th, burning in the oppressive heat and "loo" (hot wind), we reached Naimish at midday by a chartered bus from Lucknow. A number of tents had been pitched in the vicinity of the Puran Mandir and we were allotted three of them. Cots were brought and carpets spread within an hour and after that a decent camp-life followed.

The surroundings of Nainisharanya are unique. The River Gomati, with chest-deep water flowed close by and all of us would have refreshing baths every morning and evening. Sand-dunes and undulating land could be seen on all sides. A number of tall, majestic-looking trees and a few ashramas lay in the vicinity of our tents that had been pitched on elevated land. Very recently a cave with a wall-figure of Hanumanji was discovered underground. A little behind our tents was "Pancha Pandava Mandir". It is said that the Pandavas spent a few years in disguise at this spot.

From early morning the plaintive calls of peacocks would resound in the air. Free, unfettered peacocks moving from one tree to another were a heavenly sight. As the day lengthened, the heat became unbearable and after midday we would toss on our camp-beds with soaked towels on our heads which would dry up very soon and the heat would burn us inside out. The evenings under the shady banyan trees would bring some relief.

We had a *dars'ana* of Ma Anandamayi soon after our arrival. Clad in white, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, Mata Anandamayi beamed with joy as She received us. A photograph of Mataji that hung on the wall of the Ashram, carried the following poem :

Like moonlight Her refulgent soothing smile,
Chases away the looming shadows of the mind,
While captivating sweetness of Her illuminating speech,
Fills with sustaining bliss the entire universe."

How true this is of Mata Anandamayi who radiates divine Love and Joy! During the few days that I saw Mother,

I was simply overwhelmed. In spite of Her eighty years of age. Ma showed tremendous dynamism. From early morning, She had no rest, moving all over, from kitchen to temple, paying attention to all details, attending prayer meetings, bestowing blessings on hundreds of devotees, looking after guests. Whether it was the Governor of U. P. Dr Channa Reddy, or Sri Gulzarilal Nanda or a commoner, Ma had Her kind eyes on everybody.

*

A personality who impressed me with his erudition was Brahmachari Nirmalananda, the Secretary of Mataji's Delhi Ashram. An M. A. in Sanskrit of the Delhi University he explained many difficult aspects of the Puranas in lucid English. Quoting from scriptures he pointed out that the Puranas denote eternal truths in ever new form. Puranas also signify intuitive knowledge through which our ancient life breathes. He emphasised that all religions were basically one and built on the essence, *Satchidananda*.

I was equally impressed by a few other ashramites. The devotion and knowledge of some of them were simply admirable. There was perfect order and discipline in Mataji's Ashram. The kitchen was run by a band of devoted men and women. The variety of delicious food left an unforgettable taste in our mouths. I shall always remember the ever smiling persons who attended to the guests in a truly dedicated spirit of service.

I happened to hear about one of the numerous miracles of Ma from Sri Manubhai Bhimani, who had come with the aid of a nurse and a doctor. Sri Bhimani, who was behind the construction of the Puran Mandir, told me that he had

a serious car accident in Bombay some fifteen months ago. There was no hope of his surviving. Trunk-calls were put through to Mataji who was then at Calcutta. She replied: "Give best treatment. Trust in God". For sixteen days Manubhai lay as if without life. Then, consciousness returned miraculously. "What I am today is all due to Ma", declared humble Manubhai with tears in his eyes.

I met a few young American men who had assembled in the Ashram. Two of them, fresh from the Universities, would daily bathe in the river Gomati, meditate, read Scriptures and pray. I found them to be jolly good companions. An American girl who would turn her beads all the time with her eyes closed, told me that she had been drawn to India by reading books on Tibetan Buddhism. One American, influenced by Swami Yogananda, had come to India to see Ma.

Our life in the tents was of unalloyed joy. We would wake up daily to the tunes of devotional and classical songs played on the tape recorder of one of our neighbours. After our morning ablutions we would hurry to the Pandal where the Srimad Bhagavata would be expounded daily by Pandit Srinath Shastri. His exposition of the Bhagavata Purana commenced on May 9th and continued up to the 16th. Then and also in the evenings Swami Akhandananda Saraswati would explain the Puranas in a captivating manner. In between the *lilting* devotional songs of Chhabi Bandopadhyaya would reverberate in the sky and in our hearts.

May 14th will go down as the most memorable day as the statue of 'Puran Purush' was installed. A colourful

procession with festoons, buntings and multi-coloured flags was taken out in the small town. For a short while Mataji walked in the hot sunshine with a wet towel on Her head, followed on foot by Dr. Channa Reddy, the Governor of the U.P. and many other dignitaries. Then everyone got into cars. The songs of Chhabi Bandopadhyaya echoed and re-echoed in the streets. After the *Nagar Parikramā* (circumambulation round the town) the image was installed at 11-30 a. m. with floral offerings amidst the chanting of hymns and prayers.

The night of May 14th was equally remarkable as *ārati* with more than one lakh of wicks was performed by the priests under the canopy of the clear, moon-lit sky. Devotional songs in Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi mingled in the air as Mataji sat motionless on the stairs of the temple and watched. It was indeed a heavenly sight for the gods to see men and women in ecstasy prostrating before Ma and She declared with a voice quivering with emotion that it was the united efforts of all the assembled devotees that had made successful the consecration of the temple of Puran Purush. She invited all to come again and again to this holy place.

With tears in our eyes we bade good-bye to Naimisharanya on the morning of the 15th of May after four sweetest days that we shall cherish for ever.

Holy Reminiscences

Jainath Kaul

(Continued from the last issue)

5. At Allahabad During Durga Puja

In 1958 *Durga Puja* was celebrated in the presence of Ma, at the residence of the late Sri Baleshwar Prasad, Advocate of the High Court of Allahabad, from the 18th to the 22nd October. Ma had gone from Varanasi to Allahabad on the 14th, but two days earlier, on Her way to Varanasi from Hoshiarpur, She had halted in Delhi for a day. The following morning I had gone to the railway station to see Her off, and when the train had just started moving, She graciously asked me to come to Allahabad for the *Puja* celebration.

So I had gone there, accompanied by my second son Ajay, then only fourteen, his three younger sisters and their mother. On arrival we had found a fairly spacious room reserved for our use in one of the houses nearby. Ma had just shifted from the Ashram of the late Sri Gopal Thakur, after spending three days there, to the residence of the late Sri N. N. Mukerji, where, in the midst of his beautiful garden, a separate small bungalow had been newly constructed for Her use. When we went there for Ma's Darshan after settling down in our new temporary home, She generously enquired about our lodging, showing thereby Her compassionate solicitude for the comfort of those, in particular, for whom She may, at any time, have the *kheyāla* to ask them to come.

The *Pandal* (large tent) and its main entrance at Sri Baleshwar Prasad's residence had been artistically decorated,

the general arrangements were also very good and by Ma's grace the entire function turned out to be a great success.

Caught and Brought

One day, during the celebrations, when hundreds of devotees had gathered in the *pandal* for Ma's *darśana* and *sangha*, an exchange of ideas on our spiritual future had taken place among those in whose midst I happened to be seated. When many had seemed to agree that only a few among the thousands who come to Ma could hope to attain to spiritual heights, an old and well-known devotee, Sri S. N. Aga, from our group, suddenly addressed Ma loudly thus : "Ma, so many of us come to you. Are all of us going to pass, or will some fail also ?" And Ma replied back immediately, "Do you come by your own free will ? You are caught and brought here."

Mother's gracious Responses

Another day, when we had gone in the morning for Ma's *darśana*, Ma was sitting beside the *Durga Pratima* (Image), which had been installed on a raised flooring at one end of the *pandal*. To prevent unauthorized persons from entering this sanctified area (*puja mandap*), a one-foot-or-so high latticed barricade had been put up above and along the lengthwise edge of the *mandap*, with proportionate pillars rising a few inches higher at intervals in between.

In this situation, since the devotees in general could not go very near Ma, they came up to the barricade, did *pranāma* (obeisance) and such of them as had garlands to offer, hung them on the pillar nearest to Ma. Accordingly,

when we came, we did the same except my eldest daughter Vijay Lakshmi, then just twelve years old, who, to our horror, threw her garland at Ma before we could prevent her from doing so. But, to our sheer amazement, as the garland reached Ma, She burst out laughing. Disapproving of Vijay Lakshmi's action, I reprimanded her, but started smiling myself when I heard her say, with her characteristic innocence: "Everyone was garlanding the pillar as if it was for worshipping the pillar that they had brought their garlands. But I had brought mine for offering it to Ma and not to the pillar." Evidently, Ma's gracious response was due to Her having been aware instantly of this delightful reasoning, while ignoring, with divine mercy, the child's consequent impulsive action.

The following small incident provides a glorious example of how Mother encourages struggling beginners like me. One day Ma was sitting in the *pandal* at a place where devotees could approach Her without any restriction. A couple of yards away I was standing behind Ma at an angle from where I could see Her but She could not see me. As usual, the devotees were coming to Her with fruit, sweets, flowers, etc., and were doing *pranāma*, one after another. As I was watching them my attention was drawn towards a girl of about ten years or so. She had come to Ma and offered Her a flower, with a remarkably graceful poise and affection. In return, I noticed Mother giving her a richly-deserved full measure of gracious love and blessings. The sight thrilled me, fusing my entire mental and emotional being into oneness with the inspiring rare veneration of an innocent *bhakta* and the divine grace of *Bhagavan*. But just when I was thus

lost in witnessing this purifying *līlā*, Ma suddenly turned round and threw a garland at me.

In relating this holy reminiscence, I am reminded of what happened on another occasion at Delhi Railway Station a few years back. Ma had alighted from the train and was proceeding towards the main exit, accompanied by a large number of devotees. I happened to be just behind Ma, and after we had covered about half the way to the exit, the thought suddenly came to me that there had been a time when Rama lived on this earth and those with a rare good fortune moved about with Him. And now Ma was here in our midst like Ram and we in this group were today as fortunate as they had been in the past. I remember clearly that as this thought crossed my mind, Ma turned Her head back and glanced at me without stopping. I am sure this was not done just to tell me that She knew my thoughts, but, more important, to provide me with yet another gracious *līlā*, by recalling which I could remember Her over and over again.

Darśana of Joyous Surprise

Because of the four children in our party we took breakfast at our lodging before having Ma's *darśana* at the *puja* site. One night, after dinner, I announced that I would not eat anything the next morning before having Ma's *darśana*. So, next day, when Vijay Lakshmi and I went out to buy something for breakfast, we purchased, among other items, just five pieces of a sweet, one each for the children and their mother. On our return trip, after we had passed by Anand Bhawan, the ancestral residence of the Nehrus, I thought of pointing out the building to Vijay Lakshmi, and so turned

round in the rickshaw to do so. But when I did this, I noticed in the distance a car coming in our direction with a person in *gerua* sitting near the driver. Thinking that perhaps Ma might be in the car, I asked the rickshaw-man to pull the rickshaw aside to allow us to get down. He did that and we had an excellent *darśana* of Ma.

Afterwards, when we returned to our lodging this news was given to everyone. All the same, I failed to appreciate that Ma had graciously fulfilled my self-imposed condition for eating in the morning. For, in my mind the thought had been firmly planted that since Ma's *darśana* could be had only in the *pandal* in the morning, the question of eating could not arise before going there. And so I asked all others to go ahead and have breakfast without me. However, someone—perhaps my youngest daughter Jai Lakshmi—protested at once, saying “But Papa, you have had Ma's *darśana* already”, and it was only then that I realized what Ma had done and so joined them with joyous remembrance of the welcome unexpected *darśana*. What was still more remarkable about this incident was that among the food articles bought we found six pieces instead of five of the particular sweet mentioned above—one extra for me—a moving token of loving omnipotence !

Nature's Fury Controlled

On *Ashtami* (eighth day of *Durga Puja*) there was such a sudden and heavy downpour in the evening that almost the entire *pandal* was thoroughly soaked with water. A canopy of tarpaulin had no doubt been fixed to protect the *Pratima* when it had been installed a couple of days earlier. But the torrential rain produced a dangerous sag in the tarpaulin.

The *Brahmacharis* responsible for the *Puja* brought bamboos and tried to push up the sagging part in an attempt to empty it of the accumulated water. But the moment Ma saw this, She asked them to stop that at once and directed them instead to "Pray to the Devi" (Goddess).

I was watching all this and when I heard Ma's directive, I felt quite sure that the rain would not continue and that no harm would come to the *Pratima*. Firmly convinced of this I even told my son Ajay, when we had returned to our lodging, that the rain would soon stop that night. And that was exactly what happened. Ajay asked me next morning, "How did you know that the rain would not continue, Papa?" And I replied, "Durga Puja in the presence of Ma is not an ordinary affair. If the rain had continued, the canopy would have collapsed and the *Pratima*, when exposed to rain, would have been ruined. This, I was sure, could never happen when Ma had directed us to pray and not to rely on our feeble efforts to save it."

And so, on the *Navmi* (Ninth day), *puja* and *ārati* were performed freely and the final function on *Dashmi* (Tenth day) was also celebrated as if nothing of any consequence had taken place at all—a miracle indeed of Ma!

Our memorable visit to Allahabad ended on the 22nd of October. We returned to Delhi having thoroughly enjoyed our participation in the *Puja* celebration, in obedience to Mother's command. Of course, the happiest in our group was naturally my second daughter, Ajay Lakshmi who had been included in the group of blessed girls chosen for *Kumari Puja* and had thereby become a recipient of some presents and special attention of Ma.
