

*The Eternal, the Atman—
Itself pilgrim and path of Immortality,
Self-contained—THAT is all In One.*

ANANDA VĀRTĀ

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YOU ARE THAT

(Quotations from Mataji's sayings)

"Just as inside a flower are seeds, to be seen only when it blossoms forth, and inside the seed exists the tree, so also within you dwells Divinity. Through sādhanā comes the blossoming forth ; that is, on being able to destroy the veil, right then and there appears what is Self-effulgent. As the whole and complete tree is contained in the seed, just so the Divine in its Fullness enthroned is within you as You."

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"This body Sri Ma always advises : Become an explorer of Eternity, not a drifter to mortality. Strike out along the path of Deathlessness. Bring to light—you are imperishable, immortal."

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"In property and prosperity there is no peace. So, in what can peace be found ? I am the very embodiment of Peace, embodiment of Wisdom, I am Consciousness Itself. Until merged in this innermost sense of life, where is Peace ? In order to find your Self, you must focus light on yourself. How beautiful !"

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"The human being seems to be a manifestation of want. Contemplate only want, and what is obtained will be only want. Therefore, one's duty is to contemplate his real Fullness - otherwise emptiness, wrong action, frustration, misfortune, death. Within Itself reposes the Self. Whether in the garb of coming - going or as Self-being, One alone Is. In truth, I myself am Ātmārāma - but now, to be ensphered in all-Knowingness. Naught is but you, you, you alone. You everywhere, in everything. And beyond you is That Itself. In the infinite many solely One, He-She, solely I Myself."



Matri Vani

(Dictated by Sri MA as letters in response to devotees' requests for personal advice and guidance.)

When the desire for Reality has awakened God Himself will fulfill it. Such divine aspiration must ever and ever be kept aflame—this is indeed for one's real Good. Spiritual practice (*sat kriyā*) whether carried enthusiastically or reluctantly bears fruit. By engaging in practices and activities directed towards the Real good luck opens up and misfortune recedes.

* * *

To ask questions lies in the nature of the individual (*jīva*). Where "if" is, questions will arise. In every *jīva* there is Śiva. In order to bring this to light one must become a pilgrim in the world of individuals with its constant change and flux. When the pilgrimage has been accomplished there is Śiva-hood. In the individual world of constant movement, there sorrow and trouble do exist. Movement produces friction. In work such friction occurs naturally. Therefore, when on the path of the *sādhaka-yogi* the fire that has been lit by friction—when what can be burnt or dissolved has been reduced to ashes by the flame of Knowledge—then man's Śiva-hood stands revealed.

* * *

To the genuine devotee the Sadguru is bound to appear in person. When there is real need of a Guru it is but natural that one should meet Him. Until contact with the Guru has been established it is incumbent on the average person to read scriptures, perform japa and meditation, sing kirtana of any Name he prefers. In order to become firmly grounded in *bhakti* the devotee must remain pledged to *sat-kriyā* (action aiming at the Eternal).

* * *

Whose trouble is it? Who is the trouble? Who causes it to whom? Where? Oneself by oneself to oneself. When one's tooth bites the tongue, who takes notice of it? It is a part of oneself. Oneself reposing within oneself.

* * *

Human life is fruitful when one becomes a pilgrim to the revelation of one's True Being (*Svarupā prakāśa*). Time is fruitful when one is ever keenly intent on becoming Self-pervaded.*

* * *

The awakening of inner Knowledge is man's calling. Inner vision must open out.

* * *

Distraction and restlessness are produced in the mind by the talk and activity of the people all round

* A play upon words : *samaya* time, *svamaya* self-pervaded. *Samaya* and *svamaya* sound alike in Bengali.

due to the clash of all kinds of vibrations. To mix with those who are not inward turned is itself a distraction. Just as when diving into the waves of the sea, one has to come up again, it is man's duty as a human being to cultivate a similar spirit in all situations. In order to avoid distraction one has been advised to eat pure (*sattvic*) food, to foster divine aspirations and gentle, benevolent conduct, and to study books of wisdom. Get into the current that leads to Him who has created you. From there you will derive the power to deal with all circumstances.

* * *

What has happened is often seen in dreams in ever new ways and variations. It is seen according to the attitude (*bhāva*), the movement and activity of the mind. Dreams are illusory, and the letter you have written, this also is within the dream of waking, the empire of the mind. All the same, very often the dream that is linked to the Supreme Quest gives direction to life's journey in the world. Therefore the form you love most was assumed by *Bhagavān*.

Within the world of individuals a human being must continuously advance on the pilgrimage to the supreme Goal in a beautiful manner for his real Good (*kalyāṇa*). Unless one reaches beyond the mind it is difficult to grasp, to understand everything. Questions arise only within the realm of the mind. The whole-hearted aspirant obtains light leading to his elevation. According to the state one has attained one receives.

—

Matri Satsang

Swami Bhagavatananda Giri

(Translated from Bengali)

(17) Saptarishi Ashram, Hardwar,
November 16th, 1956.

Question : If God is everywhere, how can the world be called illusory ?

Mataji : God does not come or go anywhere. Yet again he comes and goes as well. He Himself exists in the guise of illusion. There is nothing whatsoever apart from Him. When speaking of coming and going, this coming and going is indeed within God. Where everything is illusory (i. e. mistaking the rope for the snake), there the world too is an illusion. World (*jagat*) denotes continuous motion; thus what is ever changing is of course illusory. But God is eternal and real.

Question : Is man subservient to his karma or to God ?

Mataji : God alone is everything.

Question : Then why do I suffer punishment ?

Mataji : Punishment exists for the ignorant. It is God who appears both as sorrow and as the preventor of sorrow. On the level where pain and grief occur, one has to suffer them. But actually *Bhagavān* alone IS. "One Brahman

without a second." Two kinds of approach are possible. The first is through Vedanta and the second through *bhakti* (devotion); in other words: "Thou are the Lord and I am Thy servant." God causes everything to happen, He is present also as action. It is He who shows you which path to follow.

Question : If God is the doer and sole master why then should we have to experience pain and happiness ?

Mataji : Even this represents His play, His fancy. "Lord, Thou alone existeth in all forms and shapes. Thou and no other appeareth as sorrow and happiness." When you walk along your path it is He who helps and assists you. God pervades everywhere. Until and unless you become aware of this fact, there will be no end to your questions. God is self-effulgent just like the sun, but when it is hidden behind clouds one cannot see it. Similarly, while the intelligence is clouded by the covering of *māyā* one cannot obtain His vision.

Question : Do you believe in clouds ?

Mataji : Who appears as clouds ? It is Thou Thyself. So long as He who causes the work to be done and he who executes it have not fused into one, how can God who is self-effulgent become visible to you ? Where illusion abounds in the form of clouds, of transitoriness, there must of necessity be the veil of ignorance.

Question : If God is everything, from where have clouds originated ?

Mataji : It is He Himself who manifests in countless forms. From you people I have heard that He exists as

reflection, as illusion, as error. Until you become the Lord's servant, true Knowledge will not supervene. In order to realize Him, it is as equally effective to go on affirming, "He is, He is !" as to repeat : "Not this, not that !"

Question : If there is no falsity in God, how is it that we have learnt to tell lies ?

Mataji : In the realm of the ego falsehood arises. God is never untrue. He is Truth Itself, Knowledge Itself. You have no right even to state that God is false. Everywhere there is "One-Brahman-without-a-second"; "Wherever my glance falls there Sri Kṛṣṇa springs forth." So long as this has not been revealed to you, you have no right to talk about it. You must always speak the truth and nothing but the truth. You are merely repeating what you have heard, you have certainly not experienced this. Falsehood exists in "myself" and "yourself"—in the ego. Where ego is there is "mine" and "yours".

Question : Am I responsible for what I do, or is it God who makes me act ?

Mataji : Change "I" into "I am Thy tool". If you say it is God who makes you commit thefts, then you should also not feel sorry to believe it is God who sends you to jail and that He has the right to punish you. Walk in God's ways, God is ever true. Where Rāma is, there is *ārāma* (rest and ease); where Rāma is not, there is *be-ārāma* (restlessness and uneasiness). So long as you have not realised that there is only one MOTHER, one Supreme Being (*Bhagavān*), it is not right for you to declare that God is false. God is Truth.

You should maintain that everything takes place as God causes it to happen. Foster this spirit.

Question : The Lord has said in the *Gītā* that whenever sin predominates on earth, God takes birth as an *Avatāra*.

Mataji : In God duality does not exist. Where God is revealed there is no duality. God is eternally Self-revealed. Where Rāma is there is rest and ease, where Rāma is not—restlessness and uneasiness.

Question : How can the ego be destroyed ?

Mataji : It is for the destruction of the ego that this *Samyam Vrata* has been devised.

November 17th, 1956.

Questioner: Ma, will you please talk to us !

Mataji : You will hear the bell exactly as you ring it. Some people have said we should observe two *Samyam Saptahs* per year. You have now got into the habit of sitting down twice a day for meditation and *japa*. It is necessary to continue this practice. You know what is written about the yoga of practice (*abhyāsa yoga*), don't you? Now, when you go back home you should observe this *samyam* weekly or fortnightly according to your capacity. He who is unrestrained is heading towards death; he will obtain a "return ticket", be born again and die again. The rules and regulations of the *Samyam Vrata* are helping you to transcend birth and death. It is in this way that *Bhagavān* who is self-effulgent becomes revealed. "There is one Brahman without a second." This statement is eternally true. Just as clay is the substance

while names and forms are ever-changing, so in earthly life God alone is true and the world illusory.

Now take another illustration : just as water and ice are essentially the same, so are the Formless and That-with-form. Fetters consist of name and form. If you let the mind move within the transitory, this will lead to death. Endeavour to bring about the realisation that you are indestructible.

Question : What does "maintaining stability in motion" mean ? Ma, please explain this !

Mataji : Sense objects are subject to constant change, continuous flux is the characteristic of the world. If your mind is occupied with the ever-changing, this will gradually lead you to death. While, if you proceed towards the supreme Goal you will obtain supreme Reality. You must use whatever will-power is vested in you for the service of God. Try to become established in Brahman, in Atman. Do you understand, father ?

Pandit Sundarlal : Yes, very much so.

Mataji : This body never speaks to "another", that is why it talks in such a topsy-turvy fashion.

Question : Do you never look upon anybody as "another" ?

Mataji : No—never at all.

Question : Then why this hesitation on your part ?

Mataji : It is due to your own diffidence. You are the father and I am your little girl. The father's qualities will be found in his daughter.

Question : Which day is suitable for the observance of *samyam* by all ?

Mataji : *Samyam* should be observed on the day that suits you best. Do not tie yourself down rigidly, but once you have made a rule, do not deviate from it without a very special reason.

Question : Suppose one is mourning for a close relative, what should one do ?

Mataji : God's name purifies any state however impure. Where there is grief, there is indeed impurity. Japa and meditation can be carried on in all conditions. Another consideration is that one should act according to the rules and regulations enjoined on householders.

Question : Ma, who are you ?

Mataji : Whatsoever you think me to be, that I am.

Question : Suppose someone calls you Kṛṣṇa, then what ?

Mataji : What is wrong in being called Kṛṣṇa ? Let whoever wants coin a new name. Whatever anyone says is correct.

Question : Then are you not Kṛṣṇa ?

Mataji : Kṛṣṇa resides within everybody.

Questioner : They all say Kṛṣṇa is present within you.

Mataji : "Wherever the eye ranges Śrī Kṛṣṇa appears."

Questioner : If you are actually Kṛṣṇa, people wish to see the flute and the crown.

Mataji : If they cannot see any flute, let them not say that I am Kṛṣṇa. Whatever anyone may say is right. Kṛṣṇa resides within everyone.

Question : Why does sorrow come even if one treads the path to God ?

Mataji : Sorrow comes as a precursor of Supreme Happiness.

Here, at the request of Pandit Sundarlal, Mataji started singing :

*“Kṛṣṇa Kanhaiya bansi bajaiya, gaua charaiya, re, re, re.
Kṛṣṇa Kanhaiyā, mere neiyā, āo Kanhaiyā, Prāṇa Kanhaiyā.
Mere neiyā pār kareyā, mere neiya, āo Kanhaiya. Kṛṣṇa
Kanhaiyā, āo Kanhaiyā, mere neiyā.”*

*“He Bhagavan ! Ha Bhagavan ! Dhyeya Bhagavan !
Preya Bhagavān ! Śreya Bhagavān ! Jñeya Bhagavān.
Mangalamoy he Bhagavān ! Santimoy he Bhagavān.
(Kṛṣṇa beloved plays the flute tends the cows, re, re, re.
Kṛṣṇa Kanhaiyā, my ferry, come Kanhaiya, Beloved of my
heart. My ferry, take me across, my ferry, come Beloved.
Kṛṣṇa Kanhaiyā, come Beloved, my ferry.”*

Sapta Rishi Ashram, Hardwar,

Kārtik fullmoon, November 18th, 1956.

Question : Is it true that Hari is everywhere ?

Mataji : The One Hari alone exists. There is nothing except Hari. So long as you do not find Hari, try to live according to the precepts of your Guru.

Question : I have never even caught a glimpse of Hari.

Mataji : You have seen what he is not. The rules and practices by which Hari can be realised are called *samyam* (self-restraint). To observe *samyam* means to proceed towards God. Take recourse to the process by which Hari dwells fixed in your thoughts so that ultimately nothing remains except Hari. It is not proper for a sādhu to dress decoratively. For example, he should not oil his hair. It is not right to attract attention by his dress. A sādhu should never utter a lie. He should listen to and speak of divine subjects. This is his best ornament. Did Rṣis ever get the time or place to comb their hair, or the opportunity to look into a mirror ?

Question : Worldly people may not approve of such unkempt fellows.

Mataji : They certainly will. If this were not so, why should there be the path of a Rṣi ? All the seven Rṣis are present within you. Just let a path, an entrance be found, this is why these words are being spoken. Everything and everyone that exists is God and God alone. In the guise of father, son or wife is the One Person. From another viewpoint neither father nor son nor anyone exist—there is only one *Atmā*. Endeavour to realise your Self. If you know yourself, you will not be interested in dressing attractively. Who will approve of this ? Those who have cultivated satsang. In the world people madly go after sense enjoyment, but they do not even realize that they are insane. In the Ranchi lunatic asylum the madmen exclaim : “I am not mad, he is mad !”

Someone may question : “Merely because a sādhu oils his hair he will not attain God ?” How do the invisible

germs of disease enter the body? One is not aware of it. Microbes are very subtle and just as subtle as action aiming at Divinity. Who knows what qualities will be developed by the use of hair oil? "As one eats so the mind becomes." A human being craves for the type of food that corresponds to his nature. According to the sustenance provided for the mind, good or bad qualities will increase. If the mind becomes really concentrated on the Supreme Quest, this is indeed excellent.

Who is as unreal as the rope mistaken for the snake? You yourself. So long as it is not realised within oneself that God permeates everything, everywhere, where is Hari? When your dark (*tamasic*) qualities are reduced, you will also need less sleep. In the measure as heedlessness and sloth (*tamas*) decrease, harmonious (*sattvic*) qualities will develop. If you just eat, drink and make merry, what will you gain? A person perceives only what can be seen from where he stands. What will be the result of observing *samyam* or a strict code of discipline? It is self-restraint that opens up for you the road from death to Immortality.

In course of conversation Mataji said: "There are two types of *mouna* (keeping silence): one is called *kaṣṭha mouna* and the other *gao mouna*. In *kaṣṭha* it is forbidden to write or make any kind of signs or gestures; while in *gao mouna* signs may be permitted in cases of urgent necessity. Some people carry on their recitation of scriptures and their kirtana even when observing *mouna*. But here recitation, chanting and singing are not allowed during the time allotted for silence. But when *akṣhandā* (uninterrupted) *kirtana* is

performed, it continues also during the time set apart for silence.

Questioner : During the *Samyam Vrata* I do participate in the daily reading of the *Gītā*, *Caṇḍī*, *Upaniṣāds*, but I do not understand the meaning.

Mataji : But you have at least realised that you do not understand. It has occurred to you that you should understand. However, even if the meaning of the words that emanated from the lips of *Rṣis* is not grasped, some benefit is definitely derived from reading them.

Om Ma.

(To be continued)

A Prayer

M. P. Jain

Mother of Grace ! May we ever keep ourselves open to Thee for the fulfilment of Thy Will in us and through us. May we learn and realize that in Thy Love lie hidden all the secrets of life; the answers to all riddles.

May our love for Thee be unconditional, unreserved and entire so that we may make a complete offering to Thee of all that we consider belongs to us.

Mother ! Thy Grace flows in abundance perennially; make us worthy of it by teaching us to love and aspire.

Prelude to the Drama of a Mystical Life

Anil Ganguli

Anandamayi Ma at Ananda Kasi

It was the spring of 1960. Anandamayi Ma came to Ananda Kasi accompanied by Her mother Didima and a few others including myself. Ananda Kasi has been named after Her. Bosphored high among magic mountains, it looks like the abode of gods. A beautiful bungalow, perched on the shelf of a hill, overhangs the rushing torrents of the turbulent Ganga. It belongs to the Rajmata of Tehri Garhwal who had the privilege of being Anandamayi Ma's hostess at Ananda Kasi. The Ganga below the bungalow is vibrant and sonant. The hills encircling it are grave and still; they are steeped in primeval silence. The contrast is impressive.

There is also artistic contrast between the blue sky above and the panorama of fleecy clouds floating past. The sky is inane, static, serene, sublime and limitless —symbolizing the Infinite or Brahman, the clouds constantly in motion and changing their shapes and colours from time to time. Underneath the canopy of the sky stands Ananda Kasi bedecked with extensive terraced fields of charming flowers peeping out of a green belt of wilderness. The slopes of the surrounding hills display a riot of colours, but at the same time harbour dangerous thorns and deadly snakes. The scenery is at once magnificent and fearful. The solemn solitude of the place adds to its charm and majesty. The whole atmosphere is surcharged

with something sublime and mysterious, inspiring awe and wonder.

There is close resemblance between Nature at Ananda Kasi and what appears to be the mystical nature of Anandamayī Ma. Ananda Kasi is a manifestation of divine *ananda* (bliss); Anandamayī Ma is the fuller and more explicit revelation thereof—She is Bliss Incarnate. As in Nature, so extremes meet in Anandamayī Ma—saints and sinners sit at Her feet and equally find refuge in Her. She is magnetic in Her attraction and yet She can be frightening. Though ever the same Herself, She often appears different from moment to moment. Playful like the Ganga and colourful like the Himalayan flowers and clouds, She usually sparkles with delightful humour and excels in witty comments enlivened by charming irony. But She is unpredictable. She may, if so prompted, by *kheyala*, completely withdraw within Her inner Self and then She becomes inaccessible like the mountain peaks and aloof like the lofty sky. During a spell of such *kheyala** nobody dares to approach Her or speak to Her; not even Didima.

During our stay at Ananda Kasi one day I ventured to ask Didima : “Tell me, Didima, who really is this daughter of yours ? What is She ?” Didima looked vacant, paused for a while in a pensive mood and then told me in despair : “Well, what do I know of Nirmala ?” Thus, even Didima after the

* *Kheyāla* Ordinarily a sudden and unexpected psychic emergence, be it desire, will, attention, memory or knowledge. In Mataji's case it must be understood to denote a spontaneous upsurge of Will which is divine and therefore free.

closest association for over sixty-four years was unable to define her daughter's identity and interpret Her spiritual status.

The stories of the mystical life of Anandamayi Ma constitute an enigmatic drama, too deep for words to unfold and too subtle for ordinary comprehension. No wonder, She is the despair of Her biographers.

Bliss Abounding

An octogenarian of peerless charm and perfect poise, Ma Anandamayi fully justifies Her name—She is steeped in joy and radiates joy. She lives in an atmosphere of cosmic peace. Hers is not the peace of unconscious sleep nor of a self-satisfied inertia producing indifference to the world.

Anandamayi Ma is impervious to extraneous disturbances. In fact, for Her there is nothing extraneous and what is ordinarily termed "disturbance" is only a particular facet of *ananda* (bliss). Suffering and misery may be worldly realities which God calls into being to purge the impure, or for some reason or other over which philosophers wrangle. For Ma, however, suffering and misery are non-existent except as gentle ripples on the vast ocean of transcendental bliss and harmony. In terrifying lightning and thunder, in devastating storm and earthquake, She only beholds the benign hand of the great Architect of the destinies of mankind in whose scheme of creation there is only *ananda* and nothing but *ananda*. This *ananda* is not pleasure as distinguished from pain. It is Bliss which is above both, untainted by either. "Beatitude", says

Ma, "is the only Reality, all else is mirage." And Ma seems to be the embodiment of Beatitude.

The world today has been overtaken by a haunting sense of frustration—"Out of the day and night a joy hath taken flight". Civilized man has learnt how to live prosperously, but does not know the secret of living peacefully. Mankind is urgently in need of a World-Teacher with a message that the mission of human life is "not to destroy but to fulfil". The advent of Anandamayi Ma at this juncture may usher in a joyful era if mankind accepts whole-heartedly the message of Bliss, Peace and Love emanating from Her.

It may be that Her message is neither new nor novel but Her words have immeasurable potency behind them—they seem to acquire a dynamic force from Her 'life divine'. A strange peculiarity of Her words is that quite often they are not actually uttered and yet mysteriously communicated to those for whom they are meant. Even if not properly understood the message is invariably inspiring.

"Ma Anandamayi", observed Sri Aurobindo, the sage of Pondicherry, "remains in the state of *Saccidānanda*". Although plunged in a state of mysterious and spontaneous bhāva (ecstasy) She never betrays any sign of being remote nor aloof from Her "children" who seek Her. She raises no barricading rampart of stoical apathy in order to isolate Herself from the material world. For Her matter is spirit and spirit matter—different manifestations of the same Reality. "All one", She often declares.

Anandamayi Ma never assumes any patronizing or superior air. On the contrary, She says, in season and out of

season, that She has hardly had any schooling, nor does She claim any study of the scriptures. Instead of professing Herself to be the Universal Mother, She prefers the role of a "little child" and says to people, "This body is a crazy little daughter of yours". The expression "this body", is usually employed by Her when referring to Her person. It highlights the fact that the body is a transient shell and the Self far beyond its narrow confines.

Presage of Advent

Let us now say a few words about the fortunate couple to whom the world is indebted for the birth of Anandamayi Ma. Her father, Bipin Behari Bhattacharya belonged to a highly esteemed Brahmin family of village Vidyakut (now in Bangla Desh). A prominent trait of his character was a spirit of renunciation—a natural aversion to things worldly. Though married, he had no attachment for anything in his wedded life. He had temporarily left home and lived as an ascetic until he was found and brought back by his people. Even when living in the family circle, he dedicated himself to spiritual pursuits. The form of *sadhana* most congenial to him was to invoke the Godhead through devotional songs; and he was a master of vocal as well as instrumental music. An inspired singer, he could, it is stated, conjure up the presence of God by his songs as did Ramprasad, the famous God-intoxicated poet of Bengal.

Anandamayi Ma's mother, Mokskada Sundari Devi (popularly known as Didima, that is to say, Mother's mother), came of a well-to-do Brahmin family of eminent preceptors. Her father used to be held in the highest esteem for his learning,

character and good deeds. Born with a silver spoon in her mouth, Didima spent her early years in prosperous surroundings. The first tragedy in her life was the loss of her parents during her childhood. She was married to Bipin Behari at the tender age of twelve. This marked the beginning of a new chapter in her life—a chapter full of acute problems created by abject poverty and an indifferent husband. Then she suffered a series of bereavements in the loss of her first daughter and later of three sons in quick succession. Misfortune literally came to Didima 'in a battalion'. She endured all this smilingly, accepting even sorrow and misery as gifts of God. She gave her surviving children a good up-bringing and created a spiritual atmosphere in the household. Worship of the family Deity was her most sacred duty to which she had dedicated herself.

Mokshada Sundari lived the life of *Karma Yoga*, (the path of Realization through action) as taught in the *Gītā*; she worked without attachment and without desire for the fruit of action. She was endowed with the virtues of a *Sthitaprajña* (a person established in wisdom) as described in the *Gītā*. After having lived the life of a householder for nearly fifty years she took *samnyāsa* in 1938 and came to be known as Muktananda Giriji Maharaj. From that time till she gave up her mortal frame in 1970, Didima continuously kept the company of her illustrious daughter.

It is in the fitness of things that Anandamayi Ma, the embodiment of Bliss, should have chosen a noble couple like the Bhattacharyas for Her parents. Didima once told me that before the birth of Nirmala she had seen in her dreams gods

and goodessess giving indication of their coming to her cottage. This fact had filled her heart with *ānanda*.

Rising Sun

In the wake of such mysterious dreams, Didima, on April 30th, 1896 gave birth to an angelic daughter in a small thatched cottage in the hamlet of Kheora (now in the District of Comilla, Bangla Desh). It was seventy-two minutes before dawn. The night was dark – the fourth day of the New Moon. The month was a holy one—Vaisakh—in which had been born centuries ago Lord Buddha, the Light of Asia. This child of Didima originally named Nirmala Sundari (stainless beauty) later came to be universally known as Ma Anandamayī, Mother Bliss-Incarnate or Mataji (revered Mother) or, simply Ma (mother). The expression *Ma*, without any epithet or embellishment, conveys the deepest significance. The sound itself has a universal appeal in our country.

Didima's little baby illumined the cottage by the lustre of Her body. At the same time She cast a shadow of anxiety—the new-born child did not cry. Not that there was anything physically wrong, still She would not utter any sound. Naturally, this symptom caused alarm and apprehension. Thus, the first step in the journey of Ma's mysterious life was marked by a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow in Her near and dear-ones. Ma remained above both. She was not a normal new-born baby completely unaware of the world outside. On the contrary, She was quite alert and fully aware of what was happening around Her.

I had read in some book about Ma's strange behaviour at birth and was curious to know the details. In May 1975,

Ma was in Kankhal where I got the chance of approaching Her with a request for clarification of the mystery. Quite unexpectedly there was no festival or special programme in the Ashram at that time. The atmosphere was calm and quiet and Ma was free to relax and to give us company in homely surroundings. This emboldened me to ask Her: "How is it, Ma, that you did not cry at birth?" She smiled and said: "Well, well, why should I have cried?" This was really no answer to my question; it was just an evasive counter-question. But suddenly the answer spontaneously flashed into my mind. "In Anandamayi, Bliss-Incarnate, there could be no room for tears even at birth!" I was satisfied. Ma looked at me meaningfully and smiled at me approvingly.

With reference to my question, Ma added that She had been looking at a tree not far away from the place where She was born. She was thus responsive to objects of nature immediately after birth. And what a wonderful feat of memory on the part of Ma to have remembered all this. She also remembers other experiences of Her early infancy. Thus, She has a vivid recollection of the visit of one Nandan Chakravarti, a relative, on the thirteenth day after Her birth. Even Didima had forgotten all about it. Didima earnestly charged her memory and then confirmed that Ma was correct. Ma's memory is superhuman and it extends even beyond the limits of this life. Actually "memory" is not the word for it—it is something else. For Ma, there is no past, present or future. There is only Time, or rather Eternity – a continuous, flowing current. Time unrolls its scroll before Her vision and Ma easily reads all that happened in the so-called past, all that is now happening at present and all that will happen in the

future. It is not a question of "remembering" but one of transcendental knowing.

As time elapsed, Nirmala grew up to be an exceptionally beautiful and lovable girl, Her face radiant with the light of Divinity. Attractiveness was the most striking feature of Her personality, as it continues to be even after She has crossed eighty. She was the darling of the village, eagerly sought by all, Hindus and Moslems alike.

Among the prominent traits of Nirmala's character as a child were Her eagerness to be helpful and a keen sense of responsibility. She would with the greatest pleasure assist Didima in household work, particularly looking after Her younger brothers. Moreover, She was ever ready to run errands for anybody seeking Her assistance. Whatever was done by this little child would be done to perfection. She was a prodigy.

But curiously enough, She seemed to be lacking in common sense. Here is an anecdote. One day Didima asked Her to go to the pond and wash a cup. Didima noticed that She was holding the cup carelessly, almost negligently. So as to draw Her attention to it, Didima remarked in a pique : "You may as well break the cup into pieces and then bring it home". Nirmala could not appreciate the note of warning in Her mother's words spoken half in jest and half in earnest. She took Didima's words seriously and literally. How She behaved in this connection was later described by Ma Herself. She went to the pond with the cup and there became engaged in a conversation with a tree so that She did not notice when the cup fell from Her hand and was smashed to pieces. She brought back the broken bits, Didima asked Her what it was

that She had brought ? She replied, "Well, you asked me to bring back the broken cup. So, here it is; all the bits have been returned". At this explanation Didima did not know whether to be cross with Nirmala or to refrain from laughing at Her cost.

So Ma used to have conversations with trees even in Her childhood. But nobody knew about it at that time. Nor could anybody understand this mystery until it was disclosed by Ma years after the occurrence. What was noticed by all was Nirmala's absent-mindedness from time to time, apparently without rhyme or reason. Thus, in the midst of play, work and meals She would suddenly stop and remain motionless like a statue staring into space for an indefinite period.

Once when Nirmala was less than three years old, Didima took Her to listen to *kirtana* in the house of a neighbour, Chandranath Bhattacharya by name. Nirmala appeared sleepy and could not remain in a sitting posture. Didima rebuked Her, saying, "Why do you fall asleep ? Listen to the *kīrtana* !" Long afterwards Ma narrated this incident to Didima, giving every detail of the place where the *kirtana* had taken place. Gradually Didima did recollect the whole episode. Apparently it was too insignificant to be registered in Didima's mind. Its real importance was not realized until Ma said, many years after the incident, that "even at that stage *kīrtana* used to produce the same effect on this body (meaning Herself) as it does now". This revelation indicates that in the case of little Nirmala, the morning did show the day, but not to Her own people. The supernatural phenomena that occasionally became manifest in Her conduct and actions in childhood created

only a sense of concern and perplexity. Her relatives apprehended that She was affected by some mental malady. Didima herself had a poor opinion about Nirmala's intellectual capacity and gave Her darling nick-names such as *Tellay*, *Athela*, *Bedisha* etc., each coinage (derived from the East Bengal dialect) suggesting lack of intelligence. It was from Ma Herself that I got all this interesting information at Kankhal where I found Her in a light and communicative mood. Sushila Masima, one of Ma's cousins (a year older than Ma) who was present there, heartily participated in the merriment provided by Ma. Loving playmates as they had been in childhood, the two old ladies kept on exchanging notes of their recollections. It transpired that Sushila had enjoyed the reputation of having been the cleverer of the two girls and that Nirmala was supposed to be not quite upto the mark. Sushila Masima modestly disowned the compliments paid to Her by Ma in the presence of outsiders. Extremely embarrassed, she apologetically said that she was a pigmy compared to Nirmala. The more self-conscious she felt the more did Ma prolong the discussion emphasizing Sushila Masima's superior intellect. Everybody laughed to the embarrassment of the poor old lady. And Ma laughed the loudest. In despair, Sushila Masima at last covered her face with the fringe of her *sari*. No one can beat Ma in the art of innocent fun and delightfully witty teasing. Whatever is done by Her is done to perfection.

Whatever may be the present opinion of Sushila Masima about Ma's intellectual superiority, the fact remains that such opinion was not entertained by Her near and dear-ones at

home in Her childhood. But the records of Ma's school life tell quite a different story.

The period of Ma's role as a pupil at school is short but bright, lasting hardly a couple of years. And even this short spell could not be fully utilized for study. Lack of funds and pressure of household duties stood in Her way. Moreover, the school was at some distance and when no escort was available, Nirmala was forced to remain at home. Notwithstanding all these handicaps, Nirmala was considered by Her teachers to be one of the brightest students of Her class. In recognition of Her special proficiency She was promoted at once from the Nursery School to the Lower Primary School. Such recognition was certainly not based on any conscious effort on Nirmala's part. Referring to this phase of Her life, Ma laughingly said : "Somehow or other I invariably happened to look up at home the very questions the teacher would ask, and consequently he always found me well prepared even after long absences. The meaning of unknown words would occur to me spontaneously. Supposing I came across the word *hasti* I would ponder for a while and it would occur to me that it meant 'elephant'. My parents hardly ever found time to help me with my lessons. So, my formal education was extremely rudimentary."*

All this was mysterious. More mysterious still was Ma's unique behaviour on the occasion of bereavements in the family. When She was about ten years old, She lost three younger brothers in quick succession. To them She used to be an elder sister, a playmate, a nurse and almost a mother.

* From the *Life of Sri Anandamayi Ma* by Bithika Mukerji, p. 7.

Each of them was deeply attached to Her. When I had the opportunity for informal talk with Ma at Kankhal, I pointed out to Her that She had lost Her brothers when She was about ten years old and was thus mature enough to understand that death meant separation for ever. Then I asked Her point blank whether or not She had felt the pang of separation from Her dear brothers. "No pang of separation" said She rather emphatically with a smile. I followed up the point and said that it was on record that after the death of Her brothers Ma sometimes did cry and then I asked Her why She cried at all if She did not feel any pang of separation. The gist of what Ma said in reply is this : Nirmala had accepted the loss of Her brothers as a matter of course and there was no question of mourning, so far as She was concerned. If She cried, it was not from a sense of loss of the brothers but from a sense of duty to Her lamenting mother. Whenever Didima wailed, little Nirmala would play the role of a mourner. Her heart-rending sobs would naturally touch Didima and induce her to console and quieten the "grieved" child. Hardly could Didima understand that there was no sorrow at the root of Nirmala's tears and that there was really no need to console Her. Absolutely unperturbed Herself, Ma thus played Her role to perfection.

Ma's behaviour as a "mourner-pacifier" cannot be taken exception to by any standard. But Her conduct in a different sphere stands on a separate footing. The venue in this case was the shrine-room in which the family Deity was installed and the party involved was the Image itself. Quite often Didima used to send Nirmala to the pūjā room for certain minor jobs, with a warning that, in any event, the

Image should not be touched by Her. According to scriptures and time-honoured custom, it is very wrong for anyone except certain privileged persons, to touch a Deity. Nirmala was not at that time one of such privileged persons and this is why Didima took special care that Nirmala should not commit an act of sacrilege by touching the Image. Though Nirmala was normally very obedient and submissive, in this case She acted against Didima's instruction. Often the Image happened to be touched by Her inspite of Herself. About these incidents Ma said long afterwards : "Mother (Didima) used to caution me that the Image should not be touched. But strangely enough, I don't know how, the touching of the Image did take place. This body does not do anything on its own initiative. Particularly in this case there was my mother's prohibition. It would occur to me then and there—what is all this ? Immediately after a solution would strike me : this was not done by me deliberately. As I would come out of the shrine-room after finishing my work there, the fact of having touched the Deity would leave no impression on my mind. I would completely forget all about it. So, there was no question of my narrating the incident to anybody."*

In an orthodox Hindu family such an act of grave sacrilege has far-reaching consequences. It involves performance of expensive and complicated ritual. To Ma, however, it did not evidently mean much. She had no qualms of conscience. Perhaps Her relationship with the Deity stood on a special footing justifying Her unconventional conduct.

* *Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi* by Sri Gurupriya Devi (2nd ed), 860.

Once Didima sent Nirmala to the pūjā room with instructions to pray to the Deity for Her own well-being. Though properly briefed, Nirmala did not address the *Thakur* (Deity) according to instruction; She did it in Her own ingenious way. And what did She say? "Oh Thakur, do what gives you *ānanda*." Such was the spontaneous prayer of the simple little child. Could any prayer be more befitting for one destined to be Ma Anandamayi? Was this an indication of the morning promising the wonderful days to follow?

Ma

Elwood Decker

Words, no matter how sweet
 At best lead to Thy Feet
 Where Thy Merciful Bliss
 Fills up our consciousness
 Setting us Ever Free
 In Thy Eternity.

From the Life of Mataji

Bithika Mukerji

(Continued from the last issue.)

Summer 1941.

During these early years of Mataji's ceaseless and totally unplanned peregrinations all over India, Her birthday celebrations were observed in a comparatively simpler way. Mataji Herself never allowed Her movements to be restricted on this account. Pūjā had to be performed wherever She happened to be on the particular day. Later, She was obliged more and more to remain in one place during the celebrations because Mahātmās came to attend the function and Mataji would never subject them to the least inconvenience. Thus, gradually the pattern of this festival grew to be more structured and well organised.

The birthday celebrations in 1941 were held in Dehradun. Mataji sometimes would move from Raipur to Kishenpur. A few days before the festival She was in Kishenpur. Late one night, after retiring to Her room, Mataji's body underwent a change and She was seen to assume various yogic postures. This phenomenon had become rather uncommon of late and surprised Abhaya who was the sole observer. Mataji had asked everyone to retire, but obedience was never Abhayas strong point. He now ran outside to fetch Prajñānānanda Brahmachari who was staying in the Ashram at the time. Didi soon joined them.

Mataji's entire body seemed activated by a spontaneous rhythm in obedience to which Her limbs were assuming

beautiful postures. It did not appear that She was deliberately adopting yogic *āsanas*. Her hands expressed numerous *mudrās*, all marvellous to behold. She uttered various mantras in a clear, soft tone to the accompaniment of these attitudes. There was a bright look on Her face. An exalted atmosphere prevailed. The small impromptu audience watched in reverent silence.

After a while Mataji became still and then spoke in a soft voice, "I asked Abhaya to go to bed; not only did he not listen to me but now has disturbed the sleep of Pitaji (Brahmachariji) too." Prajñānānanda denied any sense of inconvenience. On the contrary, he considered himself fortunate to be vouchsafed this rare opportunity. He said : "I had the good luck to witness a similar phenomenon once before at the residence of Kunja Mohan Babu in Varanasi. At that time Mataji's body had lain on the floor for a long time in a state of *samādhi*. Today's transformation is specially remarkable to me because Mataji was sitting up and seemed somehow quite normal and yet transported to a region which we have only read or heard about but never seen and which remains dubious to us. It is indispensable for faith to be given the opportunity to actually see what the books write about."

Mataji replied : "These transformations are also normal. Just as I talk and laugh and walk around, so these postures which seem so extraordinary to you are equally natural."

* *Mudrā* Particular pose representing the expression of a particular *deva śakti* (higher natural force).

The Brahmachari asked if She felt any fatigue afterwards, to which Mataji replied : "None at all. I am not straining after anything so there is no question of exertion. These *kriyās* take place of their own accord. I remain as I am."

The truth of this statement was evident to the Brahmachari and he again and again marvelled at his good luck of being vouchsafed the opportunity of seeing Mataji's yogic *kriyās*.

The birthday celebrations took place in Raipur; the *pūjā* was performed by Manmatha Nath Chatterji. On its completion the concourse of devotees went to Mataji's room to offer their *praṇāmas*.

On this auspicious day in May 1941, the foundation of the Vidyapeeth was laid at the Kishenpur Ashram. It will be recalled that Bhaiji had expressed a desire to establish an educational institution for boys where they would be taught according to the traditional Indian way. They would be under a religious regime and at the same time trained to take their place in the world on completion of their education. Bhaiji's desire was concretized by his loyal devotee, Raja Durga Singh of Solan. He was helped in this enterprise by Sri Sachikanta Das who had decided to stay in the Ashram after retirement.

Responding to the insistent entreaties of the devotees of Meerut, Mataji went there for a short while. The rest of the summer She spent between Kishenpur and Raipur. Visitors to Raipur had to cross four river-beds. Sometimes a sharp shower would make the mountain streams unfordable within minutes of the rainfall. In spite of these hazards

