

Some Memories of Ma

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I first met Mother on a mid-October night in 1972 at the Naimisharanya ashram. I had come from Delhi with my friend, the American Swami Nirmalananda whom I had joined a few days earlier in Delhi.

Before embarking on my journey to the East, I had been living in the ashram of an Indian yogi in America where I had studied and taught Hatha Yoga and attempted to practice the basic disciplines of meditation and Raja Yoga for more than two years.

The trip to Naimisharanya was a leap into the unknown. The long train journey brought us to Hardoi well after dark. From there we took a two hour bus ride to Naimisharanya. The final two kilometers to the Ashram were made by bullock cart, dreamily ambling along through the moonless star-filled night.

We reached Mother's ashram at about 10:45 P.M., dazed and disoriented, expecting to find everyone asleep, but were pleasantly surprised to see Mother sitting outside, giving *tilaks** to all as they made *pranāma* to Her. It was the eve of the ten day Durga Puja festival and Mother sometimes observed a tradition of giving *tilaks* to everyone on this night. All day long on the train, Nirmala-

**tilak*, a mark on the forehead.

nandaji had been telling me how Mother is God. Now, here I was, face to face with God who was sitting in a chair with a yellow towel over Her head, giving out *tilaks*, laughing, talking, inquiring after people's accommodations, giving minute instructions for the *pūjā*, and seemingly awaiting our arrival. "Why not?" I thought, and following Nirmalananda's lead went to make my *pranāma*. As I rose up Mother smiled and with Her divine finger placed a small red dot of *kumkum* on my forehead. We were then shown to our tent where we quickly retired for the night. It was only later that I learned that all *darśana* of Mother were not conducted in the same manner as my first one.

For the next ten days and for several weeks after that, I saw Mother for many hours daily as the fantastic, spectacular festival of Durga Puja was under way. I was struck by the divine glamour, queenly dignity and the supernatural beauty radiated by Mother paralleling that of the Goddess Durga Herself. This was no humble saintly hermit, but a veritable living Goddess. I found that whenever I attempted to meditate in Mother's presence, my mind turned deeply and powerfully within. To be with Her was to spontaneously become aware of God, of one's highest ideal, more constantly and intensely than ever before. Further, the more I basked in the light of Her spiritual presence, the more refined and receptive I became to the God-awareness which She constantly generates.

After a few days, I discovered to my horror that the intensity of Mother's darshan was filling

my head with, or rather, churning up from deep within me, all sorts of impure thoughts which I had not been consciously aware of before. Nevertheless, I continued to stay around Her as much as I possibly could as I felt this to be a purification process ; although I was unable to look Her in the eyes during this period which lasted for about two weeks. I felt afterwards all the more receptive to Her grace.

One day toward the end of our stay in Naimisharanya, Nirmalanandaji told me he would be having a private with Mother and asked me if I would like to speak with Her. At the time I still had my Guru in America and did not feel I had anything to ask Mother and so declined the offer. A few days later, however, as Nirmalanandaji was going for his private, I had the thought : "If She is really as great as everyone says, may be I should go and ask Her those basic burning questions concerning the ultimate meaning and purpose of life with which I had always been obsessed." I caught up with Nirmalanandaji and said I would like to join in his private.

Once seated before Mother, I realized I must state myself as briefly and concisely as possible. I quickly told Her of my search for Truth and of the obstacles which I felt were beyond my control and thwarted me. She gave me a clear, specific answer as to what to do in order to attain to my ultimate Goal. Later Nirmalanandaji told me that it was as though She had known me for a long time. (And in fact several years later in a private with

Mother, in response to my query regarding a very important spiritual experience I had had as an adolescent many years before meeting Her, She indicated clearly that She had been aware of that experience at the time it occurred ! After my first question I suddenly felt inspired to ask something else. I blurted out : "Please grant me the grace to never forget you, not even for a second" ; for I knew that if I could remember Mother I could remember God far more intensely and profoundly than I could do on my own. Indeed, to think of Mother is to be in the presence of God. It is *Ātmā darśana* or as Mother says : "I am your own Ātman". How absolutely true !

After my private with Mother, I felt as insignificant as ever around Her although Nirmalanandaji assured me that I had received Her '*kheyāla*'. It was only several months later after my return to America that I realized the full truth of this.

After Kali Puja in Naimisharanya, I followed Mother to Hardwar for *Samyam Saptah* and then to Vrindaban and Benares. During this period I attempted to meditate as much as possible in Her presence, and became increasingly aware of an ever-growing receptivity to Her spiritual power. Still I felt that my relationship with Her was totally impersonal, that She was not particularly aware of my existence.

Thus, shortly after Nirmalananda's departure for America, I decided also to be on my way. I was holding a 'round-the-world' plane ticket which allowed me to stop anywhere and everywhere on

the way. I was determined to take full advantage of it and in no hurry to return home. Besides there was still much of India I wanted to see. It seems, however, that Mother had other plans for me.

Since I did not feel that I merited, or perhaps did not even desire at that time a personal relationship with Mother, I did not feel it appropriate to formally say good-bye to Her. Therefore, one day in Benares I simply *pranāmed* from a distance and left, not at all sure I would ever meet Her again. Later I learnt that for several days after my departure, Mother had enquired about me and had even asked people to look for me.

The day after I had said goodbye to Mother I became sick and when the illness persisted, I saw a doctor who told me that I had jaundice. I somehow made it to Calcutta and a plane that took me back to the U.S.A. My parents to whom I returned were surprised but relieved to see me, as I had been sending them exotic descriptions of my proposed adventurous round-the-world itinerary.

Shortly after my return home, I came down with a bad flu on top of the jaundice. For about a week I ran a very high fever of 104 to 105 F. for which I, perhaps stupidly, refused to take any medicine. Then one morning I awoke to find that I was completely cured,—the fever was gone and I had more or less regained my full strength. At the same time I was filled with a startling awareness that I had a completely new body—that every molecule was new and pure. Furthermore, I fully

realized that this total rebirth was due to Mother and to having had the *darśana* of so many sacred places in holy India while travelling with Her. For several days I would look at my arm or hand and marvel at it for I *knew* that my entire physiological being was wholly new and that Mother had caused this.

After this time I began to meditate for a minimum of six hours daily,—2 or 3 times as much as I had done previously. Furthermore, I became increasingly convinced that I would devote my life to the practice of *sādhana*.

During this period I faithfully followed my Guru in America. There was no question for me of conflict between him and Mother. However, the closer I tried to get to him, the less I felt it was where I belonged. For several months I lived alone in the Guru's private hermitage in the country where I spent as much time as possible in *sādhana*. One afternoon I was meditating, and as was then my custom, did one mala of "Om Ma" while looking at a picture of Mother. After finishing this I said within (or, perhaps even out loud) to Mother: "If you can really hear me, prove it." At that very moment a small whirlwind about two feet tall came in through a large open window and began to violently spin around the place where I was sitting. "Go away, go away," I yelled, more than a little terrified; and Mother, disguised as the whirlwind, again graciously granted my petition. In the silence that followed I felt the room reeling with Her Kālīesque laughter. How many

times since was I graced to see Her divinely beautiful physical form, like a storm, thundering forth that mercilessly liberating Laughter !

Shortly after this incident I returned to India and Mother in time for Durga Puja of 1973. In a private I told Her that I was confused regarding my *sādhanā* and She replied : “Don’t worry, I shall put everything right.” A few days later I received *dīksā* from Ma. I felt that this was the most important moment of my life for at last I had a specific tool. I had full faith in its appropriateness, efficacy and power with which to carve out my self-liberation. Here I should add that Mother says, it is the Guru or the Guru’s grace which does everything for the disciple including his *sādhanā*. Also, in retrospect, I realized that my real initiation by Mother must have occurred earlier, perhaps the first time I saw Her. It would seem that this initiation, or transference of spiritual power from Guru to disciple is a continuous process. At any rate I am convinced that the type of *sādhanā* given is wholly secondary to the transference of the Guru’s shakti and the incorporation of the chela into the cosmic body of the Sad-Guru. Whatever mantra or Iṣṭa-devata, be it Hindu or Christian, etc. into which one is initiated, that form of God to which one is devoted must ultimately merge into the Sad-Guru’s *swarūpa* which in turn ultimately reveals itself as the *sādhakā-chelā*’s own *Ātman*. As Mother has said again and again : “I am your own *Ātman*. I am Darshani”,—one who gives darshan (in this case of the *paramātmā*).

Shortly after my *dīksā*, I had a strong desire to return to America. I had not consciously planned to remain permanently in India, however, Mother suggested to me during a long private that I should consider doing so and that I could construct a room in the new Kankhal Ashram if I desired. My inclination to live in the West immediately vanished and, almost miraculously, from that time on I found myself totally adjusted to the food and climate of India which had previously been quite troublesome for me. From that day to this I have been determined to remain in India near Mother for the purpose of doing *sādhanā* in spite of innumerable obstacles.

After that fateful private with Ma at the end of 1973, I returned to the U.S.A. for a short visit. One day out of sheer desperation and boredom with what I considered the spiritual waste-land of the West, I entered a Catholic church and knelt before an image of the Virgin Mary. To my amazement I found it identical with having Mother's *darśana* just like being in India with Ma : the same Shakti and spiritual inspiration ! For some time thereafter I recited the traditional devotional prayer to Mary on the rosary and I found tremendous spiritual power therein ; but I was well aware that it was Mother who had opened this door for me ; that there is only one Truth and that Mother was my *entre'* to its myriad manifestations.

The Kumbha-mela of 1974 at Hardwar was a revelation to me. I particularly enjoyed walking alongside Mother who was carried in a palanquin

during the various processions. Here more than ever She radiated that Divine regal majesty and the atmosphere was charged with a special spiritual intensity. This experience was even more profound three years later at the Allahabad Kumbh. How many times must I have gazed upon Her and felt that all the pain and suffering of human existence were worth enduring if only for the privilege of catching a glimpse of Her. No amount of hardship was too great if one could see Her once during the day—even if it was from a distance and only for a second. For to see Her was to catch a glimpse of one's own true Self, i.e. God. To be in Her presence was to become aware of the Ultimate Reality to a degree that would normally be beyond one's personal ability. Usually when I would *pranām* to Mother I would be slightly afraid because it was a leap into the unknown. The rebellious ego must temporarily die at Her feet, drowning in the purifying nectar of Her radiant love—time, space, ego, the world temporarily ceased.

One of the rare instances where my resolve to remain physically close to Mother wavered was shortly before the construction of my *kutir** was to begin. I expressed my doubts to Mother who told me I could do as I pleased. The next day I told Her that I had reconsidered but I was not sure to what extent I would use the room and asked Her if it was alright to go ahead and build. She told me: "You may come and go as you like

**Kutir* cottage.

but know that you will always have a home here.” This was said with such intensity, penetrating my soul, that all my doubts were immediately dispelled. By giving me the maximum amount of freedom rather than trying to constrain me, She had effectively caught me.

Once after my *kutir* was built and I was living in it, Mother was passing by on Her way to the *sādhu kutir* and noticed that the tulasi growing around the *kutir* was tied up tightly with a cord to keep it from falling over. Mother told Gadadhar and myself to untie it because God (tulasi is thought of as a divine plant) should not, cannot be bound and, furthermore, an ashram should be a place where there is a minimum of compulsion and where there is complete ease. Finally Mother gave instructions for the tulasi to be loosely bound in such a way so as to give it a maximum amount of freedom while at the same time protecting it from falling. During the years I lived in the ashram I came to greatly appreciate Mother’s rules which may appear unreasonable to outsiders, but without which the esoteric work that leads to complete freedom would be severely impaired.

One of the many and main ways in which I am aware of how Mother differs from other ‘gurus’ I have known is that She allows you to become uniquely your own self rather than a kind of slave to the ‘guru’s’ work or organization or slavishly imitative of the ego-personality—no matter how highly developed—of the so-called ‘guru’. Because

in Mother's case there is, without a doubt, no question of ego, the more one attempts to cling to Her transcendent personality, the more one approaches the uniqueness of one's own *Ātmā*,—of one's own inherent and unique divinity. In other words each one's way to that ultimately non-dual, monistic absorption in Brahman must be his own. One cannot do another man's dharma, Mother is the light that reveals to each one his own unique path to the supreme, undifferentiated One. In describing Her own awareness, Mother explicitly states that it is uncompromisingly non-dual at all times. Thus it is not by chance that a *mūrti* of Adi-Shankaracharya, the great proponent of advaitic philosophy, graces the Kankhal ashram.

Mother's physical manifestation, Her "personality" is so irresistably attractive to those who are chosen to be Her devotees that it effectively entices them away from their worldly attachments and establishes them in that higher but more subtle spiritual reality that Mother epitomizes. The more they are weaned from the world for Her sake, the more intimate and ecstatic becomes their devotional relationship with Her. Much like Sri Krishna's *rās līlā* with the gopis, each devotee feels that Mother is dancing only with him,—that She is uniquely his or her own ; that She is there only and especially for him. The point of this attachment to the external Guru is not to engender an unhealthy dependence but to establish the disciple on firm spiritual ground. Then when the disciple is ripe, and this I think is the ultimate greatness of any

true Guru, Mother dissolves the dualistic relationship and reveals Herself as one's own true Self, the supreme Guru, the *Paramātman*.

One of the main things I feel Mother has taught me, at least to some measure, is the necessity of truthfulness in thought, word and deed. Most of us are so much in the habit of being dishonest and lying that we are usually not even aware of it. This unconscious, socially acceptable dishonesty is often considered 'worldly wisdom'. So to prefer truth to falsehood is to sincerely desire the supreme Truth rather than to grovel in some transient worldly egoistic gain achieved through cowardly deceit. Obviously one who is at all established in, aware of and striving for the eternal reality of the spirit will not stoop to falsehood and deception and thereby jeopardize their everlasting spiritual gold for the cheap ephemeral junk of this world. Frequently people with spiritual pretensions boast of being in the world but not of it—but this is so often just empty words.

What I consider to be one of the most beautiful aspects of my relationship with Mother is that She did not try and pretend with me that by remaining in the world and practising 'karma yoga'—a popular euphemism for slave labour in the Guru business today—I could ever attain to any genuinely deep spiritual realization. Instead She provided me with all the tools and facilities to engage in *sadhanā*, real inner exploration—something that only those who have done their practice in sustained seclusion, aided by the grace of a true Guru,

can understand. It seems that many people often like to think of Mother as a sweet, gentle Bengali lady who advocates *grihasta* ashram, sings beautiful Vaishnava kirtan and preaches *bhakti marga* but the Mother that I know, like Siva, prescribes the yoga of complete and uncompromising renunciation (a renunciation that is, no doubt, the by-product of true devotion); and like Kali, mercilessly destroys all egoistic illusions which keep the *jiva* enslaved and are the ultimate source of suffering.

Once after calling out to Mother intensely in my meditation for several days, I asked Her in a private if She always hears me when I call Her from within. Suddenly She turned toward me and with tremendous charm and intimacy—a sort of cosmic coyness—as if giving a conspiratorial wink—said: “what do you think?” On countless occasions She proved to me that She knew what I was thinking.

One evening in the Vrindaban ashram I was sitting with Mother and a small group of devotees on the raised area in the garden next to the mandir. It was dusk and the air was fragrant with the intoxicating scent of jasmine. An occasional conch or temple gong could be heard in the distance punctuated by the cries of wild peacocks. Mother was at Her majestic best,—epitomizing and embodying all the beauties and powers of nature. Although there were not many people present, I purposely sat a little away from the others, lost in my own reverie. Suddenly the thought entered

my mind : “Perhaps it is time to move on. After all my motivation has never been particularly religious but has been driven more by the search for adventure. This has been a grand adventure but perhaps there is something else over the next horizon.” Suddenly, in what can only be described as a timeless moment, I lived out—mentally experienced—every possible adventure my mind could conceive of to the point of complete satiety. Then I saw that all sense experience was a type of fantasy and that real adventure lies in going beyond the entire mind ego-conditioning. I saw that Mother, like *Mahāmāyā*, held the keys to all mental-sensual ego experiences and that She also was the key to the Ultimate Reality beyond the cinema of the world. My desire to move on vanished. I was sitting in front of the ultimate adventure ! By this time it had become dark and Mother suddenly got up to go to Her room. Very much dazed I walked along beside Ma when She suddenly took the torch She was holding and shined it in my eyes only a few inches from my face. “*Tik hai ?*” “Is it all right ?” She asked me, and then burst out laughing. It was the same Kali-like laugh I had heard within while meditating in America with a miniature tornado whizzing around me two years earlier. “*Tik Hai, Ma.*” I somehow managed to murmur. This was the first time She spontaneously spoke to me.

In what was perhaps the last private I ever had with Mother, in Bhimpura, shortly after my marriage, Mother spontaneously said to me, repeat-

ing with great intensity as though pointing Her finger at me : “Nothing between us has changed. Nothing between us has changed. Nothing between us has changed”, and so it is.

“At all times keep your mind immersed in the thought of God so that there may be no possibility of straying into a path that leads to misery.”

—Sri Ma Anandamayi

Mother the All-knowing

Chaitanyaben Divatia

In 1978, Durga Puja was celebrated in Ma's presence in great style in the Durbargarh at Gondal and Lakshmi Puja in the Hawa-Mahal there itself.

When I went for Ma's darśana in the morning, Ma said twice to me : "I have to talk to you, sit down." So I sat in Ma's room for at least an hour or more and thoroughly enjoyed Her *darśana*. People were coming and going constantly, so Ma got no chance to say a word to me. After some-time She told me "Go and have your lunch and then come again." After having had my meal I tried to see Ma but nobody was allowed to enter Her room as Lakshmi Puja was being celebrated that very evening.

At last, when the festivities were over, after 10 p.m., I could go to Her room. Only a few people who were leaving Gondal came to bid farewell to Ma and within half an hour I got the opportunity to be alone with Her. With great love Ma told me what She had the *kheyāla* to convey to me. Then She touched my head and back and Her loving gaze rested on me. I was drowned in bliss. I did *praṇāma* and left in a mood of great exultation, which I cannot describe.

The next morning, a party of four of us started for Ahmedabad by bus. Mataji had asked us to

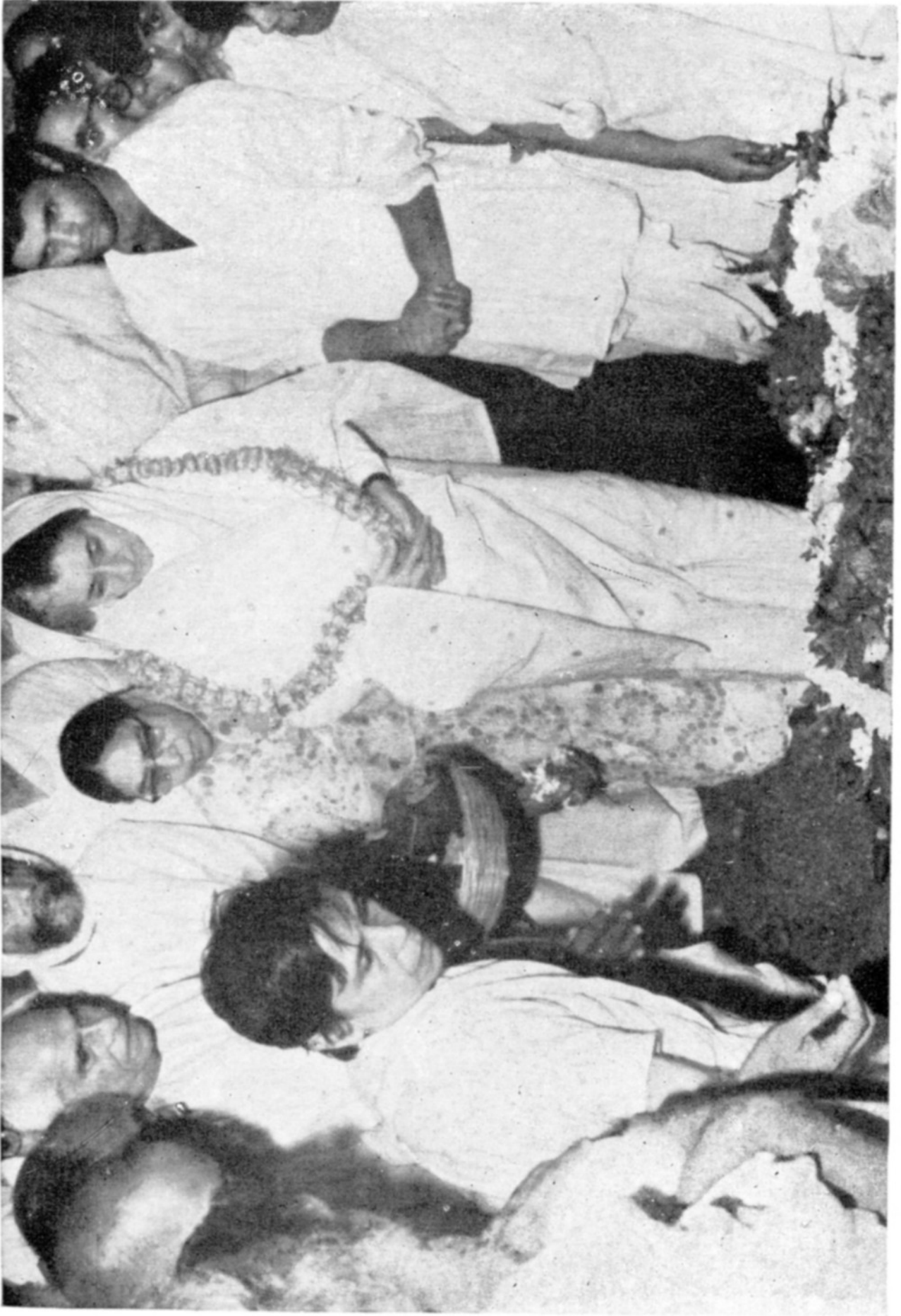
take Beenadi, a Bengali devotee with us. She originally was to go in someone's car, but that person had left for Rajkot the previous night.

Before starting we had Ma's *darśana* and received *prasāda*. We partook of it as soon as the bus started and then I got busy doing *japa* with my eyes shut. After having driven a few miles beyond Rajkot, our bus driver, when trying to overtake another bus, lost control and our bus with three big jerks fell into the gutter by the side of the road. We all jumped up shouting "Ma, Ma", loudly. Only Beenadi who was lying on the bench behind the driver's seat fell down. All the passengers, in great fear, tried to get out of the bus by the back window. The bus half rolled over and stopped with a jerk. We also managed to get out with our luggage. I had been injured and blood was running down my forehead and cheeks but I had remained fully conscious repeating Ma's name. Some people helped to carry out Beenadi. Someone produced benzoin-iodine which was applied to the wound. The bus driver ran away! The conductor offered to take us to Rajkot hospital, but we refused at our own risk and signed his paper. We told him to wait for the next bus going from Rajkot to Ahmedabad and prayed silently. Our prayers were heard; within fifteen minutes a De luxe bus arrived in which there were three vacant seats for the three of us. Beenadi could not sit and so was kept lying. Nobody objected. By Ma's grace all passengers had been saved and the four of us reached Ahmedabad. My

companions felt worried about my wound and so one of them went to Munshaw's place and phoned to my home. The other one was walking with difficulty but was not wounded so could get to her home easily, while Beenadi and I were taken to the V. S. Hospital in our car. Beenadi had fractured her back and so had to be put into plaster. Mr. Munshaw wired to her son.

The next day Sri Ma received the news of our accident. She at once decided to go to Ahmedabad and She visited the V. S. Hospital. Since Beenadi was unable to get out of bed, Mataji intended getting out of the car to see her, but there was no time as She had to catch the train for Delhi at Baroda. It was my good fortune that I could be taken for Sri Ma's *darśana* in a chair. She gently stroked my neck, forehead and back. How deeply happy I was to be blessed by Her loving touch. She said a few words with great affection. With folded hands I bowed to Her. She then consoled Beenadi's son and left for Baroda.

Within three weeks the *Samyam Mahavrata* was scheduled to be held in Nadiad. I was eager to participate in the *Samyam Vrata* and was praying to Ma. My spinal chord had been affected by the accident and I had to wear a collar round my neck. Within two or three days my brother came from Bombay to see me. He told me that Swami Virajananda was coming to Bombay for a short visit. With great difficulty I wrote two sentences to Ma and asked my brother to entrust my note to Virajanandaji who was going to Delhi from Bombay.



Sm. Indira Gandhi, amongst others, paying her last homage to MA

