
In all your activities, in your *kīrtana*, Ma is with you. With perfect repose sit still thinking: "In the midst of emptiness Ma is with me." This will give you *ānanda*. Whether you meditate sitting quietly or lying down, feel: "Ma is with me at every single moment."

God is the one and only friend of the pilgrim to the Ultimate. Act in this spirit so that you may come to accept Him as your all in all. Unless one is single-minded there will be obstacles at every step.

He who is the Supreme Friend never deceives. From the worldly point of view, a son may have to be disowned, but that Friend can never be given up.

To invoke THAT, to be constantly intent on realizing it, is man's duty. At all times in Her arms, in Her embrace — within the Mother. On finding the Mother, everything is found.

—Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi

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ĀNANDA VĀRTĀ

*A quarterly presenting the divine life and teaching of
SRI ANANDAMAYI MA and various aspects of
Universal Dharma*

* * * *

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ĀNANDA VĀRTĀ welcomes contributions on the life and teachings of Ma and reflections and personal experiences of Ma's devotees and admirers. Articles on religious and philosophical subjects as well as on lives of saints and sages of all countries and all times are also invited. Articles should as far as practicable be typed with double spacing and on one side of the page.

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ANANDA VĀRTĀ

*The Eternal, the Ātman—
Itself pilgrim and path of Immortality
Self contained—THAT is all in One.*

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Conditions vary. During times of misfortune it is necessary to rely on Him with even greater tenacity. There is no knowing through what mishap He may wipe out peril. Sometimes He actually removes danger by adversity. This is why He is called Dispeller of Danger — Saviour.

—Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi

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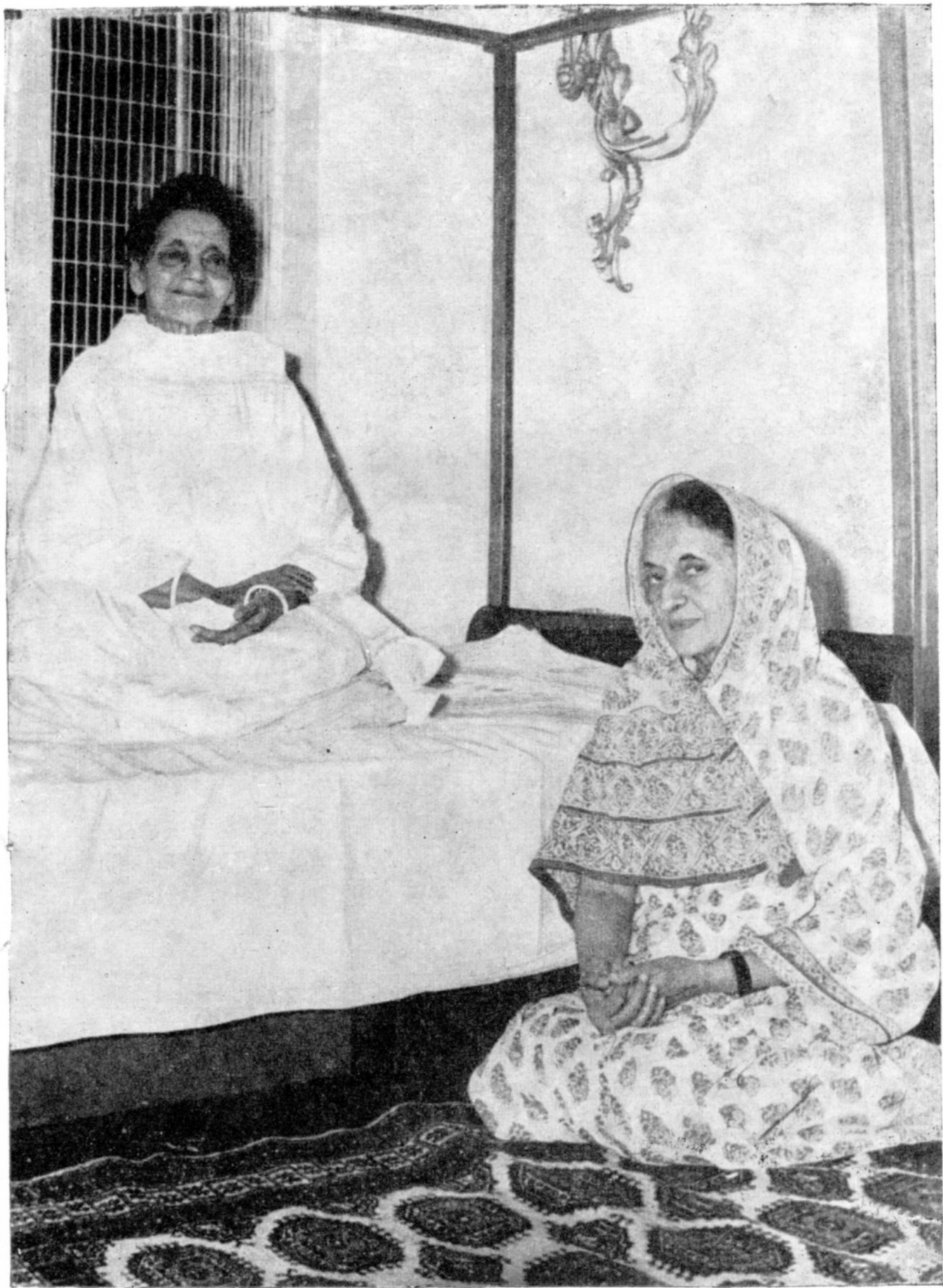
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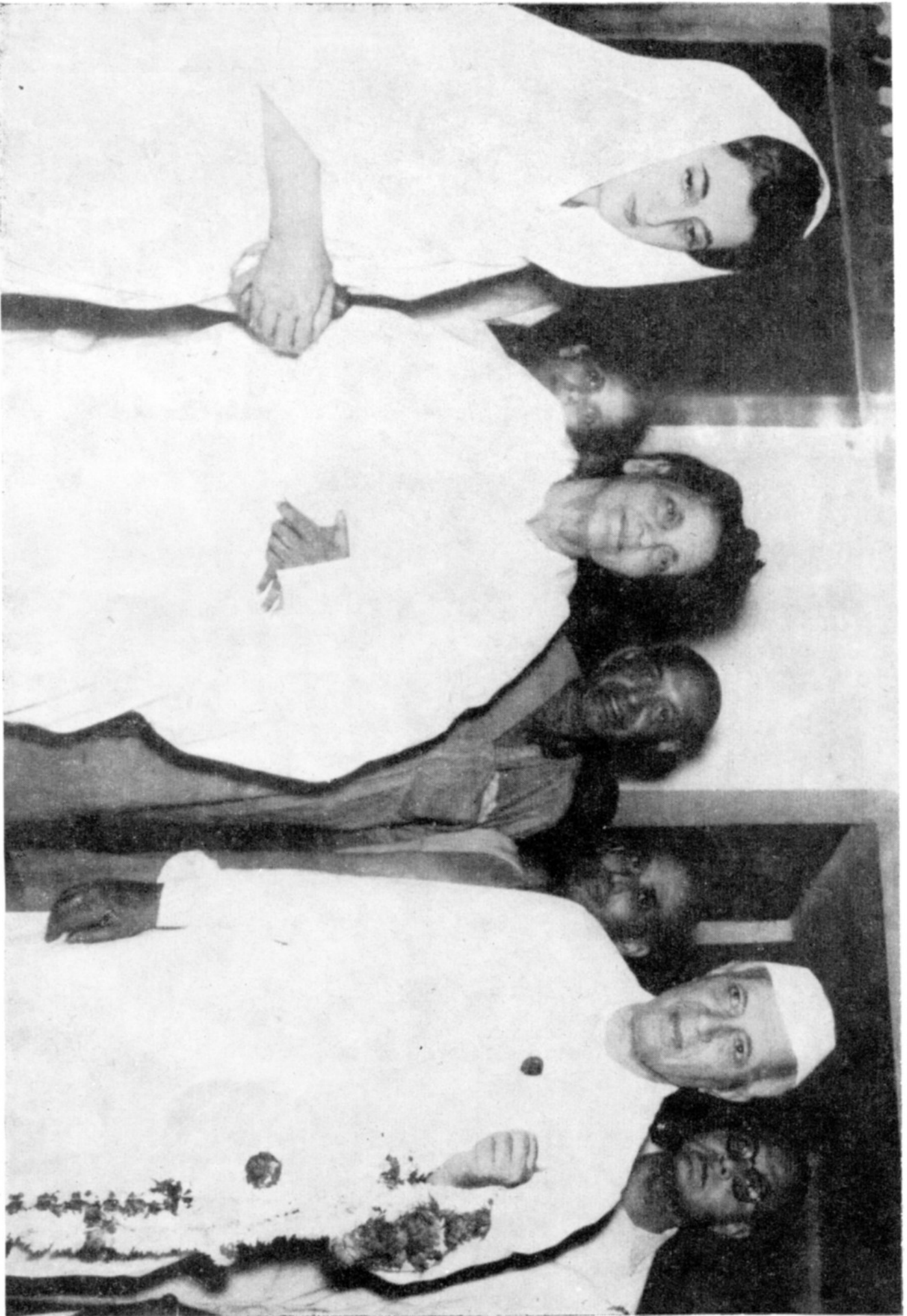
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With Ma—Bangalore, May, 1979



During Ma's birthday at Allahabad in May, 1961

In Memoriam

Srimati Indira Gandhi—a bhakta and karmayogin.*

The whole world is in deep mourning over the cruel fate that has deprived us of the physical presence of Indira Gandhi. Loved and admired by millions, not only Indians—people everywhere owe her a great debt of gratitude. As long as this planet remains in existence, she will be hailed as a shining example of one, who remaining faithful to her high ideals through all vicissitudes, sacrificed her very life for the welfare and unity of her country and for humanity as a whole.

Indira Gandhi was not only a towering statesman, an ingenious diplomat of rare integrity and foresight, not only was she possessed of a passionate love for her countrymen and all human beings, of a spirit of service and self-denial—she was actually a sincere bhakta, a true karmayogin. The offspring of a distinguished family, that is well-known and revered for labouring for the freedom and upliftment of India, for the raising of the depressed classes, Indira distinguished herself by following in their footsteps and crowning their endeavours.

Her mother, Sm. Kamala Nehru was deeply religious and devoted much time to meditation.

* We hope to publish some correspondence of Sri Ma with Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi in the next issue of A.V.

Already in July 1933, she discovered Ma who was then staying in a small temple at Anand Chowk, Dehradun, and was known only to a few. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was then in jail in Dehradun. Kamalaji would come to Ma after nightfall and leave before dawn. She used to have deep meditation in Ma's presence, her body becoming stiff. She was so irresistibly drawn to Ma that she felt tempted to give up her political work in order to remain with Ma. However, she became very ill, and in 1935 Ma went to see her in Bhowali Sanatorium on Her way to Almora and again on Her way down to the plains. Shortly after, Kamalaji was taken for treatment to Europe where she passed away. She gave to Indira the *mala* (rosary) she had received from Ma. Kamalaji had corresponded with Ma from Europe through Bhaiji and wrote to him that, although thousands of miles away, she often had visions of Ma, not only in dreams but even in waking.

Indira's father, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, also held Ma in great veneration and visited and consulted Her in private at intervals in Delhi and elsewhere.

For instance on May 3rd 1961, Panditji came with Indira to pay homage to Ma on Her birthday at Allahabad. They stayed for about 1½ hours, first in Ma's room, then accompanied Her to the pandal, where Swami Chetan Giri was just delivering a talk. At the request of several devotees, Ma then led the kirtan and afterwards, a member of the *Rāsālilā* party performed a dance, balancing with great skill two trays with burning lights.

Panditji seemed to greatly enjoy the whole programme, especially Ma's singing.

While Ma was in Delhi in autumn 1961, Indira made a special request that Ma should grace the Teen Murti House, official residence of the Prime Minister with Her presence. In the evening of October 2nd, Ma was taken to the residence of the Prime Minister together with Gurupriya Devi and 3 other ashramites. She was received in a lovely garden. After Indira had welcomed Ma, the Prime Minister came and had a private talk with Ma. She was wearing a garland of sandalwood beads, which She put round Jawaharlalji's neck. He had to leave at once. Ma then spoke to Indira for some time. The entire staff of the Prime Minister's house came one by one to offer obeisance to Ma. When Ma got up to leave, Indira took Her through the office to the hall and then accompanied Her to the car. Indira walked barefoot while with Ma.

On returning to Delhi after the *Samyam Mahāvratā* at Pilani, Ma had the *kheyāla* to pay a visit to Pt. Jawaharlal. On Nov. 14th, 1962, She suddenly arrived at the Prime Minister's house very early in the morning, accompanied by one brahmachari only. Nobody in the Ashram knew where Mataji had gone. To everyone's utter surprise, the evening papers gave the news that Ma Anandamayi had been the first to greet Pandit Nehru on his birthday.

When his health was failing not long before he passed away, Mataji advised him to spend some

time quietly at Rajgir to recoupe, but he was unable to give up his work.

It is obvious that Ma's *kheyāla* was definitely on Indira's parents, in fact on the whole family.

Indira had her first darshan of Ma when still in her teens. Ma told us that She remembered Indira wearing frocks. Indira highly treasured her connection with Ma throughout her life and seized every opportunity to have Ma's darshan and to talk to Her. She also took her sons to Ma whenever possible, and later her Italian daughter-in-law. Soon after her grandson was born Indira visited Ma with her daughter-in-law and placed the baby in Ma's lap.

Indira often cancelled all her engagements in order to see Ma when Ma came to Delhi. Ma also occasionally accepted her invitation to visit Indira's residence and once Indira fed Ma with her own hand. Whenever Indira was requested to grace special functions in any of Ma's Ashrams, she gladly accepted. On December 26, 1968, for instance she flew to Varanasi specially to open the newly constructed Mata Anandamayee Charitable Hospital. In her inaugural address she remarked that the ground on which the hospital stands has some connection with both Gandhiji and also her father and thus also with her. She stressed the point that the patients of this hospital would not only be cured from their ailments but would return to their homes filled with the peace and inspiration derived from Ma's influence.

At Indira's request, Ma sent Pushpa and others to sing at the Prime Minister's house on September 8th, 1961, which was the anniversary of the death of Indira's husband, Feroz Gandhi. When Pt. Jawaharlal passed away during Sri Ma's birthday celebrations that were held in Almora in May 1964, Ma again responded to Indira's request and sent Pushpa with other Ashramites from Almora to Delhi to sing kirtan. Immediately after Indira became the Prime Minister for the first time, she visited Ma's camp at the Kumbha Mela at Allahabad in January 1966, seeking Ma's blessings.

When Ma's birthday was celebrated in Delhi in May 1972, Indira attended on the 2nd day and also gave a short but pithy address, soliciting Sri Ma's blessings for our country in the difficult situation of that time.

On January 28th, 1974, Saraswati pūjā was celebrated in Delhi in Ma's presence. In the evening Mataji paid a visit to Indira who could not come to Ma because she was not well.

On the occasion of Durga Pūjā in our Delhi Ashram in October 1976, the auspicious *sandhi pūjā* was chosen by Indira. At the instance of Ma, she occupied a seat just below the pūjā mandap and sat quite still in a meditative posture for nearly one hour. Thereafter she had a 'private' in Mataji's room for a few minutes and came out all smiles.

At Kankhal also Indira came to Ma several times as well as at Dehradun.

On July 21st, 1981, Indira came to inaugurate the Institute for Puranic and Vedic Studies and

Research at Naimisharanya. Ma also graced the function and drove back with Indira, who spent some time with Ma and took her lunch in our Ashram. This was broadcast by the All India Radio and Television and reported in the papers.

On February 26th, 1982, Indira together with Ma opened a new charitable dispensary in our New Delhi Ashram.

When in summer 1982 Mataji was staying in Her cottage at panchavati in the compound of Mr. & Mrs. Motilal Kaithan next to Kalyanvan, Dehradun, Indira, having heard about Ma's indifferent health, came on Sunday, July 11th, accompanied by her son Rajiv, her daughter-in-law and her grand-children, to pay a short visit to Ma, who sat up for a few minutes and talked to them. Ma was then bed-ridden. This was the last time that She sat up of Her own accord and gave darshan. It was also Indira's last meeting with Ma whom she loved and adored from the depth of her heart.

When Ma took *Mahāsamādhi* on August 27th 1982 at about 8 p.m. at Kishenpur, Dehradun, Indira was abroad. As soon as she returned to Delhi at midnight, she received the message and at once offered to send a helicopter to Dehradun to take Sri Ma's body to Kankhal and also offered to come herself to Dehradun in the morning. This arrangement, however, could not be adopted as all necessary arrangements had already been finalised by the government officials to take Ma's body to Kankhal by road.

On August 29th, the day Sri Ma's body was given *Mahāsamādhi* at Kankhal, the Prime Minister arrived at 1-15 p.m. straight from Delhi together with the Senior A.D.C. of the President of India and a host of high officials. When Ma's body was put into the *samādhi*, all were shedding tears and Indira stood like a marble statue in her white clothes. When the function was over she did her *pranāma* at the *samādhi* and left for Delhi.

On May 15th, 1983, *Akshaya Tritiya*, Indira was invited for the foundation stone laying of Matri Mandir over the *Samādhi* at Kankhal. She gladly accepted. Straight from the helipad she went to the *Samādhi* and offered *pranāma* and garlands together with other high officials. One of the five foundation bricks was laid by her. She stood in silence while the rituals were being performed. After the ceremony she took light refreshments in Sri Ma's cottage together with the Chief Minister and other dignitaries. This was her last visit to our ashram.

Recently a French book, "*Guru Kripa*" by Patrick Mandala, has been published in France. It contains teaching of Ramakrishna Deva, Swami Ramdas and Sri Anandamayi Ma. The author had asked the Prime Minister to give a message about Ma for the book. She responded by sending the following lines which were printed in the book in the original English as well as in French translation.

Prime Minister's Office

New Delhi 110011

September 3rd, 1981.

“Dear Dr. Mandala,

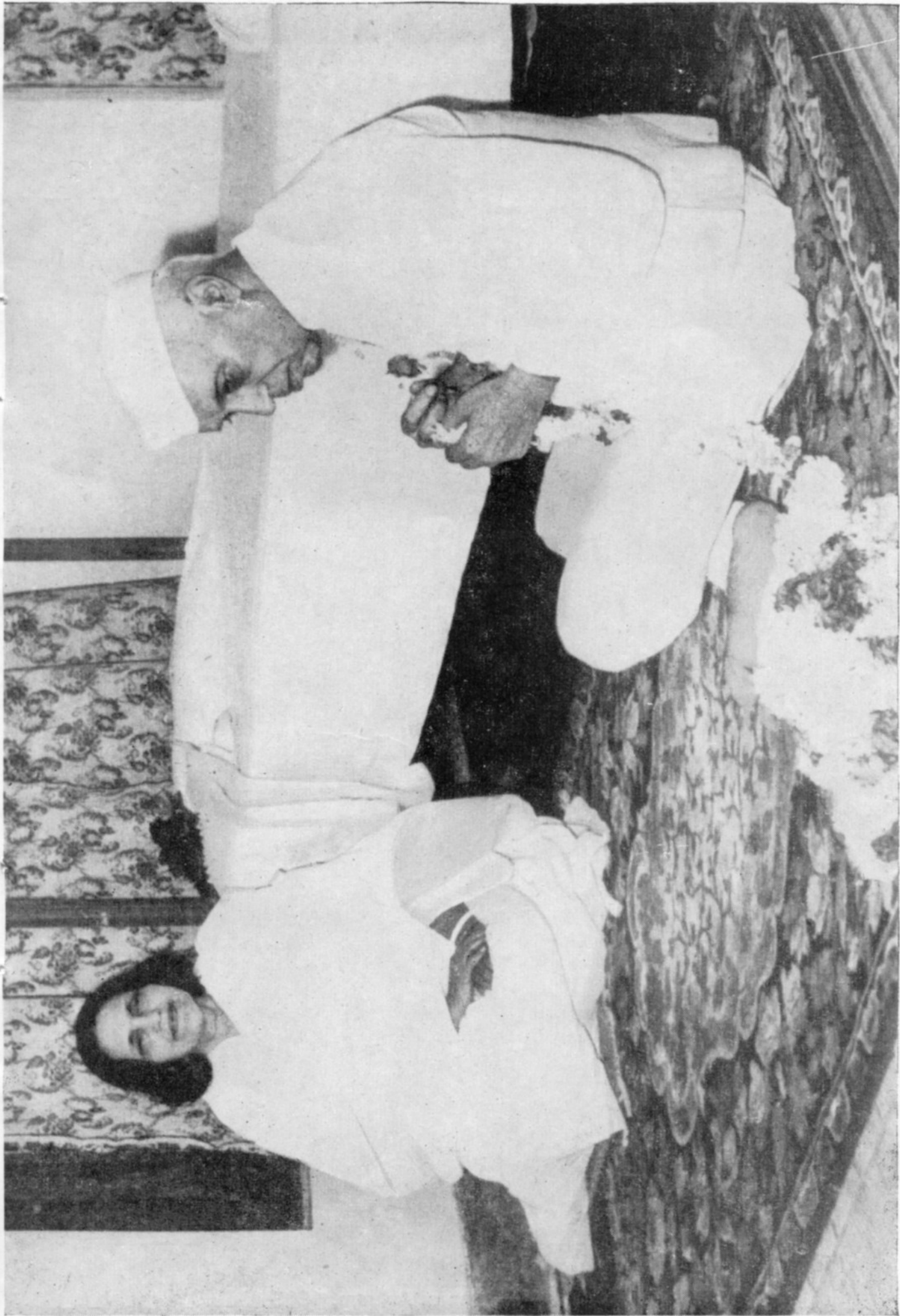
The Prime Minister is glad to know that you are writing a book on Ma Anandamayi, for whom she has the highest regard.

She has specially written for you the following tribute to Ma Anandamayi which you may use in a suitable manner.

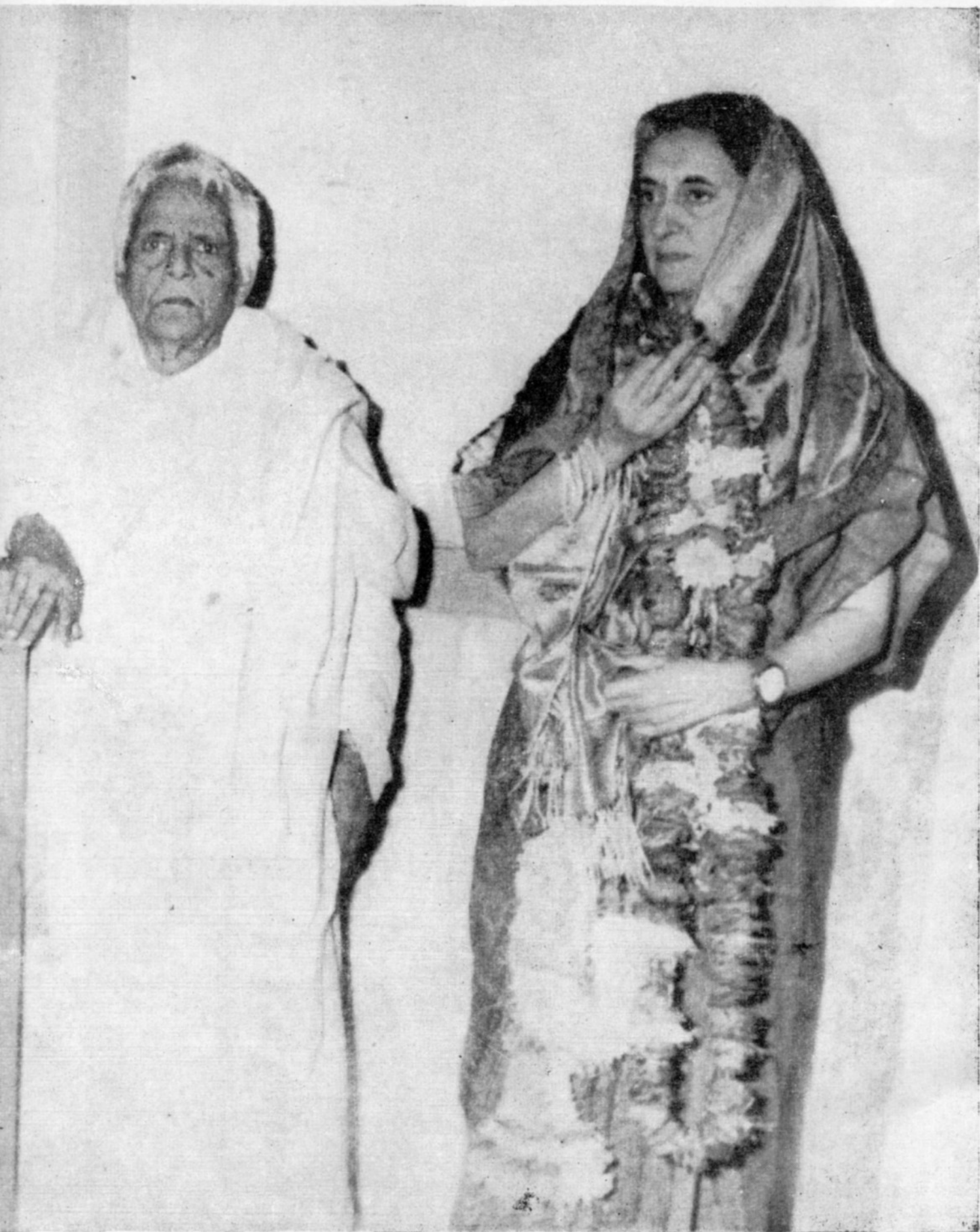
“Ma Anandamayi is a radiant being whose presence exudes tranquillity. It has been my good fortune to know her and to have received her affection in generous measure from my earliest years because of her close friendship with my mother, Kamala Nehru. Ma Anandamayi represents Indian values and insights at their most universal. It would not be appropriate for me to attempt an appraisal of her spiritual achievements. Millions have derived light and consolation from her and become better persons. This indeed is her message : that everyone's guide is within.”

Indira was a beloved and faithful child of Ma, always eager to live up to Ma's injunctions and to be guided by Her, who never grew tired of proclaiming and constantly demonstrated by Her life : *“There is only ONE without a second ; everyone and everything are but manifestation of the ONE.”*

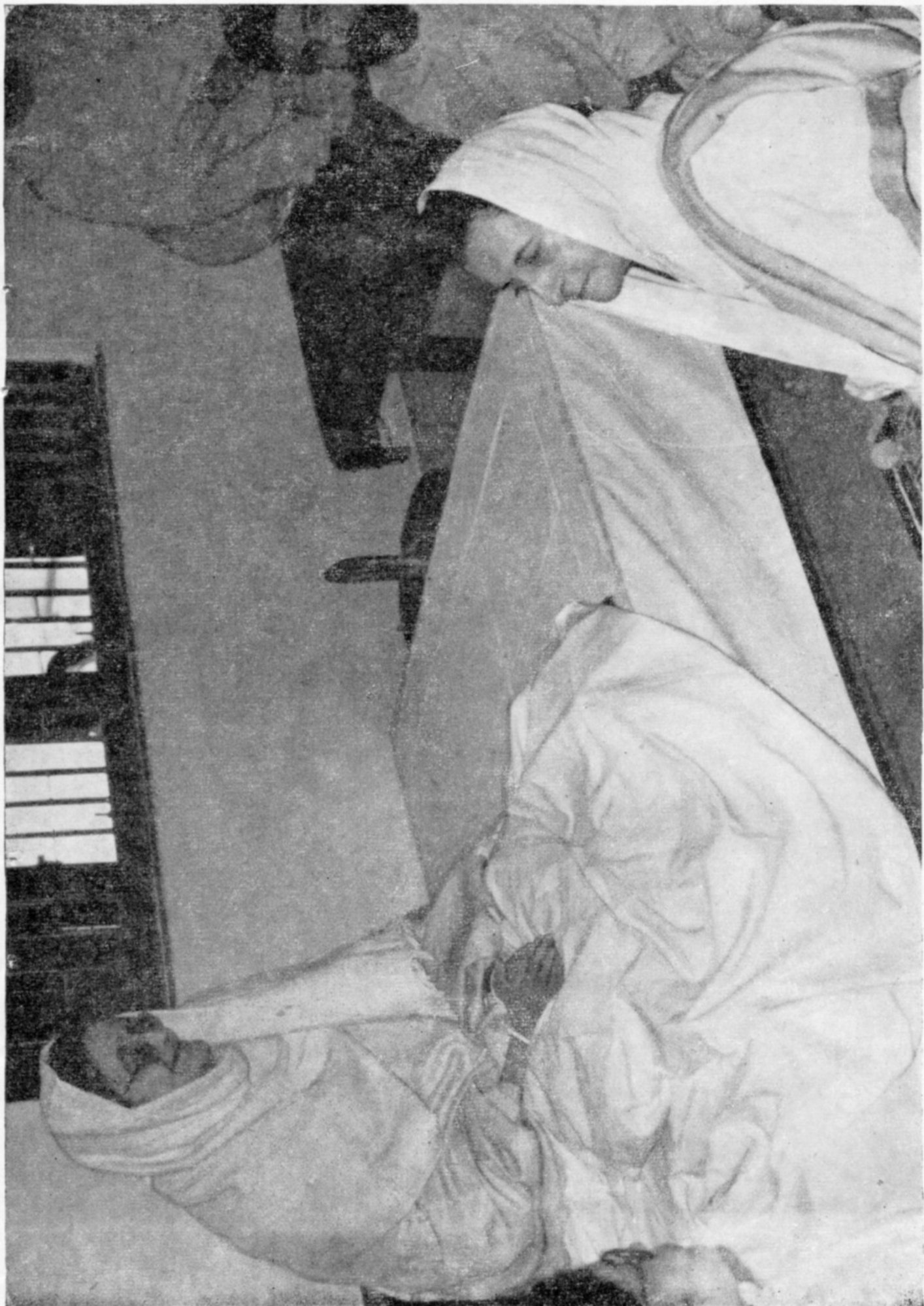
Indira's body is no more, but her heart and soul and spirit have remained with Ma and will continue to inspire and bless us for all times.



Pd. Nehru with Ma—New Delhi Ashram, August, 1959



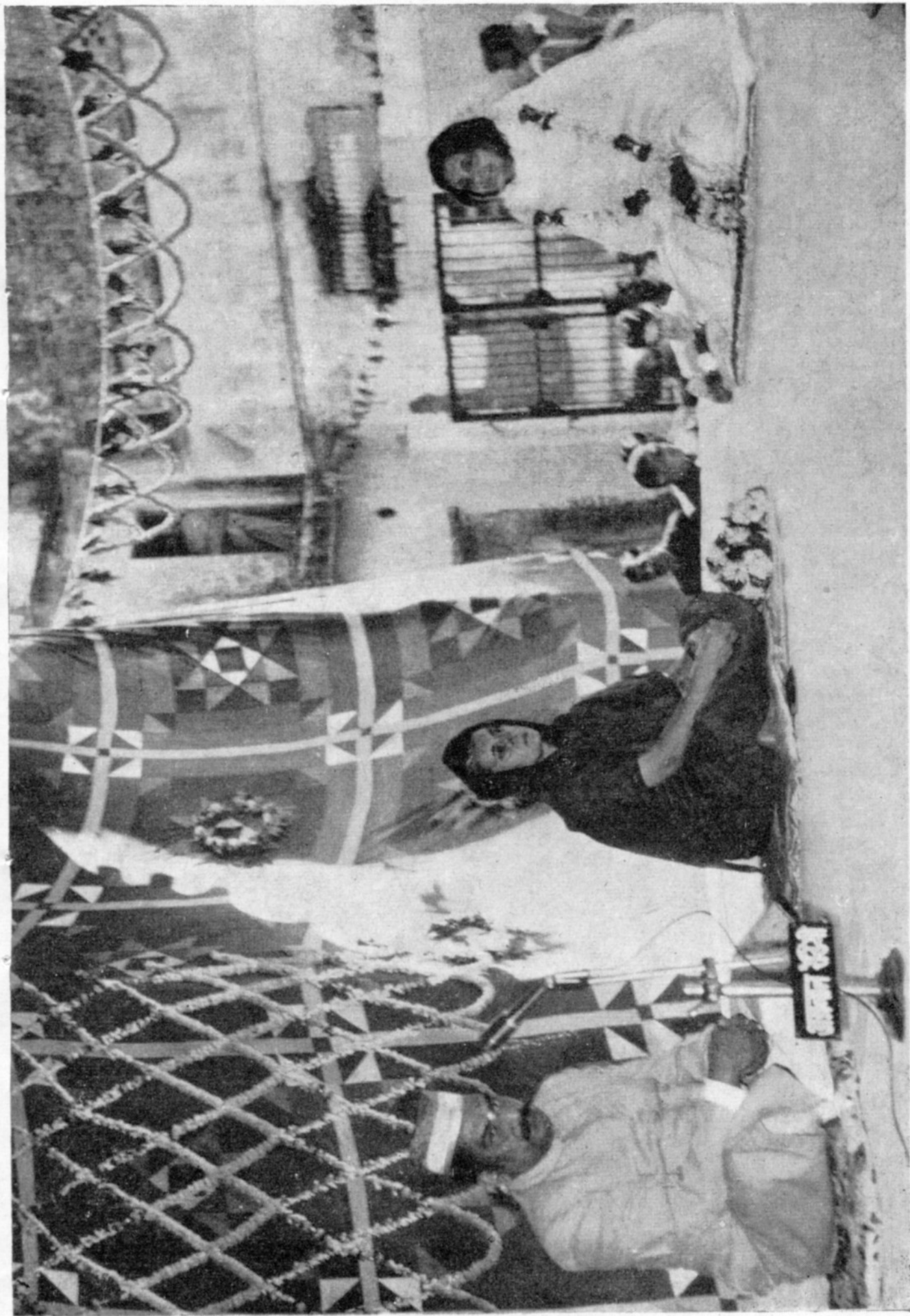
With Didi Gurupriya—Varanasi Ashram, 1968



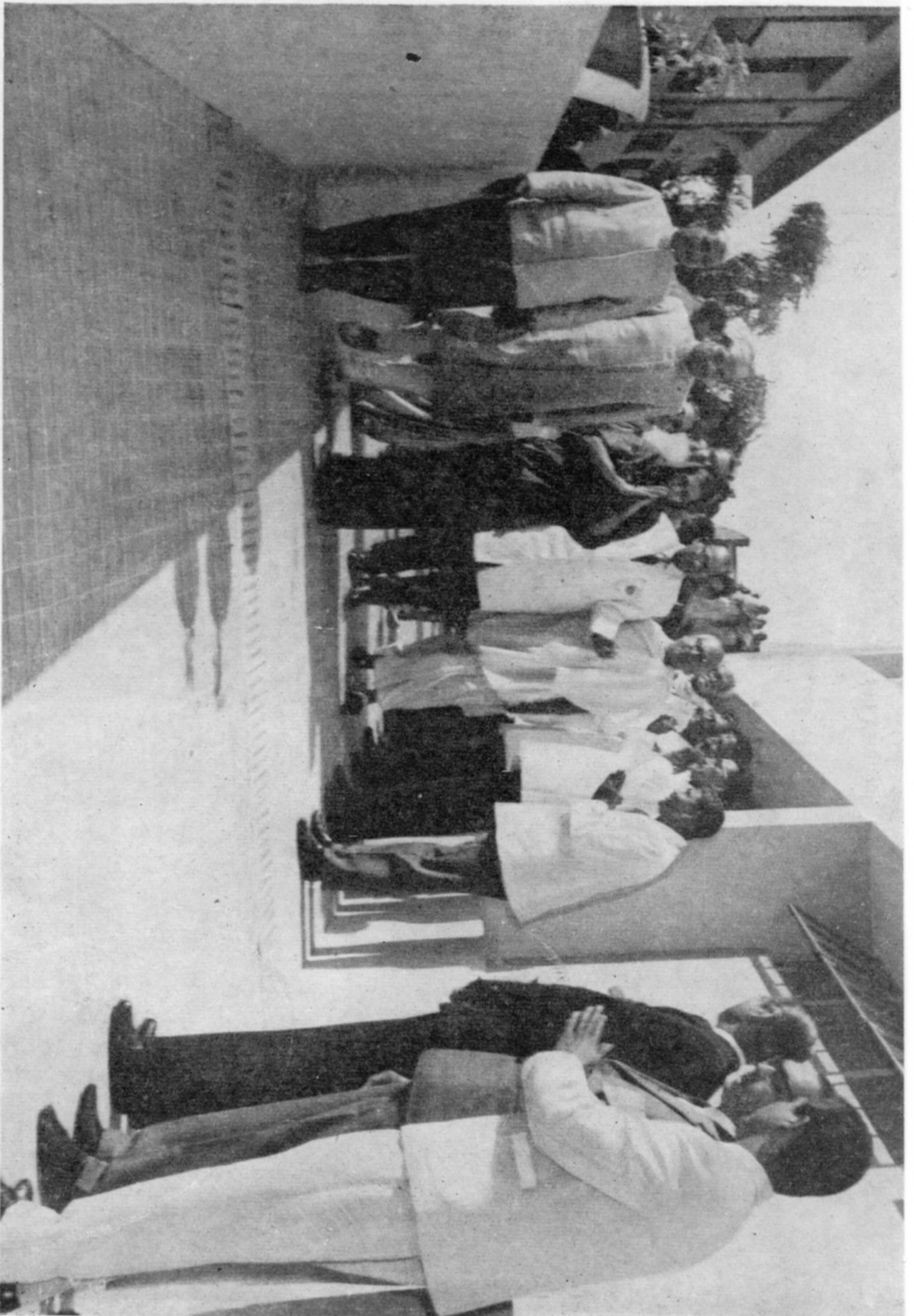
With Ma at Kankhal Ashram—September, 1977



With Ma at Kankhal Ashram—October, 1979



With Ma & Kashi Naresh Varanasi, 1968



Inaugurating Ma's Hospital in Varanasi on 26th December, 1968

Sri Sri Ma's Utterances

(Reported by Sri Gurupriya Devi in "Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi," Vol. V.)

In course of conversation, Ma observed : "God alone can perform *līlā*, no one else. A *sādhaka* may become God-like by practising *sādhanā*, but he can never become God Himself. *Līlā* is possible only for God."

* * *

In a certain context, Ma said : "Do you know what happens quite often ? Suppose I am talking to someone and my *kheyāla* is directed thereto ; in the midst of this, someone comes and says : 'Ma shall I do such and such work ?' and the response, in that particular mood, comes out 'Do' ! He does it, but thereby he is not following Ma's advice, rather acts according to his own will. If someone pays sufficient attention, he will understand what is uttered by Ma out of Her own *bhāva*, and what *you* have extracted from Her in response to your personal desires."

* * *

Keep on advancing in *that* direction ; don't stop to look back and see how far you have moved forward. Do you know what happens if you do

look back ? You just forfeit whatever progress you have made. That is why you should not linger to measure how far you have advanced ; just continue steadily on your march.

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Question : Ma, are dreams real ?

Ma : Just as this world is real, in the same way dreams are real. However, sometimes you see in your dreams things of the past and at other times you may see what is going to happen in future. All this is the play of *samskāras* (impressions and tendencies developed in the present or brought over from former births).

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A lady said : “Ma, whenever I sit down to take His name, I feel either sleepy or thirsty ; there is no inclination at all to concentrate on His name.”

Ma : All right, if you feel sleepy, do sleep for a while and then again sit down to take His name. You feel thirsty ? Well, drink some water and then resume the Name. Do not harbour thoughts like : “Since I have taken water, how can I do *pūjā* ?” “*Under all circumstances I must invoke Him by repeating His name.*” This must be your attitude of mind.

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If someone has a desire to perform some auspicious work, but it never comes to be carried out physically—even then, just on account of his intention, a certain *krīyā* (action) of pure, holy impact manifests in him. Nothing is ever wasted, to be sure. Just as it is said that if someone resolves to go on pilgrimage to Kashi and dies on the way without ever reaching his destination, he gets the same result as from dying in Kashi. This is why one should always nurture pure thoughts and intentions.

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Question : Ma, you are always steeped in bliss ; how can one catch hold of such bliss and establish it in oneself ?

Ma replied with smile : How do you keep your clothes on, no matter what may happen ? In bereavement, disaster, storm or rain, without fail you keep your garments in order. That the clothes must be kept on, has been so strongly ingrained in you as a necessity that you have got into the habit that if your clothes get even slightly disarranged, you immediately put them in order. In a similar manner this bliss too can be obtained and maintained by constant endeavour.

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Question : Ma, how can peace be won ?

Ma : As soon as the idea of distance is gone, there is peace : So long as one imagines that He is far away, restlessness is experienced,

Someone said : I understand everything quite well, but I am unable to do anything at all.

Ma smilingly rejoined : “Baba, actually we do not understand, otherwise it would manifest in action.” “How to understand ?” To this question *Ma* replied : “Blind faith. Go on acting according to your Guru’s behest ; you will receive everything by means of Guru-Śakti. Faith as such is blind, faith has no eyes.”

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Once a beneficial, religious course of action is launched, even if it does not reach completion outwardly, yet it has a certain inward effect. If you try to nurture such a desire constantly in your heart, He will see to it that the desired project is accomplished somehow or other, though this cannot always be grasped by worldly understanding.

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Ma said : Listen, it so happened that someone heard it said that if one lakh of *japa* is performed in a particular manner, certain esoteric experiences occur to one within a specified time. Having heard this, he set to work. Do you know what happened to him ? He was carrying on with the *japa* and whenever he would hear even the ‘tak-tak’ sound made by a lizard he jumped to the conclusion that he had already started to have spiritual experiences. He completed his lakh of *japa* in this way. But

actually no spiritual experience occurred at all, because his mind was continually diverted to external sounds and he was so engrossed in the anxiety to have some supernatural experience that his practice was just fruitless. Hence you are told to forge ahead on your path without looking back to take stock of the result. If you halt on the way to calculate how much you have gained, it means you have slipped back for that much time. March forward with your gaze fixed on the target.

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Question : Ma, for such a long time the diseases have now lodged in your body, why don't you chase them away ?

Ma replied : "Look, it is my *kheyāla* that all beings belong to this body. Whether it is you or diseases or afflictions, they are all, as it were, within this body, like one's hands and feet. Hence the question of chasing them away does not arise. Do you ever say : "Drive away your hands or feet, drive away your head ?" Just as the body does not and cannot exist without them—just likē that ! And to you who are householders, I say : when ailments or afflictions come to you, regard them as your guests. Looking upon them as your visitors, do take a little care of them, forbear, regarding them as 'guests'. Verily, all powers are His powers. Just as when you have guests in the house you have more work to do and so many inconveniences to put up with, yet it is the host's

duty to cheerfully and gladly see to the comforts and well-being of his visitors. In the same manner you should also calmly put up with your disease-guests.

* * *

It is good even to *imitate* truthfulness in speech and behaviour.

* * *

When the mango is ripe, it does not announce "I am ripe, come and see!" Simply by seeing its hue and getting its flavour everybody understands that it is ripe. Similarly, if purity arises in the heart and mind of a person, this need not be announced—it becomes evident from his deportment and looks.

* * *

Question : Ma, is there any need to practise *āsanas* (yogic postures), *prāṇāyamas* (breath control), etc ?

Ma : Well, the act of inhalation and exhalation is going on perpetually ; and sometimes even concentration on worldly affairs has such an impact that *kumbhaka* (withholding of breath) or some kind of *āsana* comes about automatically, since in that particular posture the mind can be best engrossed in thoughts of worldly interests. There-

fore the posture and the particular rhythm of breathing happen spontaneously.

In a like manner, one should practise to sit in a posture and to control the rhythm of the respiratory flow in a way that is conducive to the mind's absorption in the contemplation of the Self (*ātmā*). Those who have a natural bent in that direction need not practise *āsanas*, *prāṇāyamas* and so forth. By constantly meditating on God, *āsanas* and *prāṇāyama* come about spontaneously. While seated in a particular posture, a particular tendency related to a particular action arises powerfully in the mind ; and, on the other hand, when the said action is performed, one's body automatically assumes the posture which corresponds to that particular action. This can be observed on the mundane plane of life. From the posture in which you are sitting, it can be guessed what are the predominant tendencies in your mind at the moment. By observing your glance, by listening to your voice or even by the style of a letter written by you, it may be distinctly understood what kind of a person you are. As a mirror shows one's face, this can be clearly seen.

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At first, one has with the help of pure actions to destroy one's impure tendencies (*saṃskāras*). Again, later even the pious actions cease to be obligatory. Just as, if one's body is dirty one applies soap to it, but the lather of the soap is also

a kind of impurity. First the dirt of the body is loosened by soap. Next, by pouring water over it the soap lather as well as the dirt, both have to be washed away.

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In a certain context, Ma said : “Look, there are so many kinds of *bhāvas* : Rapt in listening to kirtan, a devotee may experience in his own body certain movements or postures pertaining to his adored deity. For instance, a worshipper of Kṛṣṇa or Kālī may take on a posture of Kṛṣṇa or Kālī in a state of rapture produced by kirtan. After this he may drop down from sheer exhaustion, which people may mistake for *samādhi*. No feeling of joy or sorrow pertaining to this world can lurk in *samādhi*. Then again by listening to kirtan someone’s arms and legs may become numb through the experience of intense bliss. People mistake this for *samādhi*. But that is just an expression of inertia pertaining to the mundane level of existence. Such physical reaction which expresses itself in a variety of desultory states of elation, though superior to ordinary human experience, is not anything near the sublime state of *samādhi*.

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Question : Ma, what should one do to attain to peace ?

Ma: Go on obeying unquestioningly the injunctions of your Guru. Just as, if the roots of a tree are regularly watered the tree gradually grows, the old leaves fall off and new leaves appear on their own, similarly simply go on performing whatever is assigned to you, and you will see that whatever is destined to disappear is by and by disappearing of its own and whatever is to come into being is appearing in due course. Do not indulge in thoughts such as : "I'll give up this, I'll give up that." Just hold on tenaciously to one sacred Name and you will see how everything will be accomplished of itself.

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Ma: There are so many different states and stages (*bhāvas*) that it is difficult indeed to understand them. Do you know what happens at the very beginning? *Sādhakas* feel very modest and humble. They think : "I am so very insignificant, why do people respect me so much?" At that stage they feel quite embarrassed when honoured by others. If someone wants to do anything to show respect to such an aspirant, he cringes with timidity. Then there are some who are too bashful even to go near other people. "What will people think?" They feel embarrassed by this thought. On the other hand there are some who do all kinds of things in public for the sake of popularity. All these are different stages of *sādhakas*. Such meaningful signs and symptoms

can be observed ! Of course the feelings of modesty and humility are necessary—without them the shackles will not break.

Then again, do you know what peculiar condition may develop ? Just like a child he smears colour on his own body or starts putting palm impressions on the walls, without the least awareness of other people, not mindful of anyone who might be watching him. Engrossed in his play he laughs to himself. Even if someone comes along he is not embarrassed, he continues in the same mood. He has no barrier of secrecy anywhere in him, he is completely open.

It is very difficult to understand these different states and stages. Just as, for example, if there is any expression of emotional exuberance during kirtan, you immediately call it *samādhi*. To grasp the inner significance of all these conditions is really very difficult. To comprehend who belongs to what level is not possible for ordinary people, this is why they make such mistakes.

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Sri Kṛṣṇa is in reality transcendental. But men want to interpret this in terms of their sense experience. This Reality is not at all a matter to be grasped by the senses, so how can they possibly comprehend it ? They have attributed a meaning to it according to their intellectual capacity.

In Association with Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi

Amulya Datta Gupta
(Translated from Bengali)

(Continued from the last issue)

*Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun
16th May, 1941*

Dadamashai's Death & Ultimate Liberation

(As Jyotishdada (Bhaiji) and Dadamashai (Mataji's father) both passed away in 1937, the former in mid-August and the latter in mid-December, Mataji continued to talk this in the same strain after having recounted Bhaiji's end.)

Ma : A similar series of events occurred after the death of the father of this body. Jyotish died in August of that year, and merged with this body on the 12th Agrahayan (approximately 27th November) of the same year. And your Dadamashai merged with this body on the 5th Māgh (approximately 20th January 1938.)

You will remember that your Dadamashai accompanied us to the Narmada valley and returned to Calcutta from there. At that time this body had no intention to visit Bengal. But see how events actually came to pass ! Due to Bholanath's urging, I had to go to Tarapith. In the meantime your Dadamashai fell seriously ill. On seeing his condi-

tion, Jyotish (Guha) and others came to Tarapith to take me back with them to Calcutta. I told them that I would go to Calcutta on a certain day, but they held that according to the ayurvedic doctor's opinion, Dadamashai would not last till then. So they insisted on my going to Calcutta with them. I had already told them that I would not enter the house-and that I would come away after seeing your Dadamashai from outside. This is what actually took place. After seeing your Dadamashai from the courtyard on arriving at Calcutta, I immediately went to the Birla Mandir (in Ballygunge).

The following day we were to return to Tarapith. Before our departure, the next morning, I again went to visit your Dadamashai. A number of house-holders were also staying in the same house. In the morning they had all lit their kitchen fires, and when I arrived, the yard was full of smoke. You know very well that up to then your Dadamashai had looked upon this body as just his daughter and nothing more. But that day I noticed a change in his attitude. Lying in bed he was trying to catch sight of this body. In the gloom he could not perceive anything, yet kept on crying, "Ma, Ma", while straining to catch a glimpse of me. It was the moment of our farewell. All were trying to make me eat something, so nobody noticed the changed attitude of your Dadamashai.

After this we returned to Tarapith. When we were in Burdwan, waiting for a train connexion to Kashi, I asked Swami Akhandananda to go with certain instructions and see your Dadamashai. Had

he started in time, he would have been able to see your Dadamashai before he passed away. Of course, he had been given an indication that there was a possibility that they might never meet. For some reason or other, Akhandánanda could not reach Calcutta in time. On arrival at Kashi, we heard the news that your Dadamashai had expired. It was then realized that the day I had previously fixed for visiting him in Calcutta from Tarapith was the day of his death.

After that, I caught a glimpse of your Dadamashai on the 5th of Māgh (approximately Jan. 20th, 1938). I saw him in an extra-ordinary disguise. His appearance was that of a naked fakir with a turban tied round his head. See, how significant it all is ! When alive Dadamashai often used to threaten us when in a temper, "What do I care ? I will put on a turban and go off in some direction or other." From time to time he had had a desire to become a fakir, hence his appearance beheld by me was that of a fakir. But the nearer he came to me, the more did he resemble a smoky cloud. Later he slowly and gradually merged with this body.

Don't think that only those known to you have merged with this body—others unknown to you have also done so.

May 17th, 1941

In the morning I went and sat down near Ma and resumed the discussion which had taken place the day before yesterday. I asked : "Ma, you mentioned that Jyotishdada and Dada-

mashasi merged with your body. What exactly does "merging" mean? Did they entirely lose their own identity (*satta*)?

Ma: What do you mean by their own identity?

I: Was there a complete disappearance of the individual identity that was Jyotish?

Ma: Had there been any finite being left, how could he be considered to have merged completely?

I: Why? To merge and yet remain separate, can this not happen simultaneously? Cannot a being remain finite and be infinite at the same time?

Ma: To be both finite and infinite simultaneously, this is called merging. This in fact is realization of the Self. In that condition one cannot define what remains and what does not remain. In such a state everything exists and yet nothing exists.

I: Does this realization of the Self supervene after one realizes Divinity? (*Iswaratva*)?

Ma: Certainly. After becoming established in Divinity, (*Iswaratva*) that is to say, realizing the significance of creation and destruction, of the power of divine compassion and suffering, the attainment of the Supreme Self ensues. But how long this divine state lasts depends upon the rate of the upward progress of the *sādhaka*.

I: You had mentioned yesterday that not only those known to us had merged with your body but that others, unknown to us, had also done so.

Ma: Quite right.

I: Well, if they were unknown to us, were they known to you in their physical bodies?

Ma : They were not.

I : Then why did they merge with you instead of with their own *Iṣṭa Deva* ?

Ma : To merge with one's *Iṣṭa Deva* is all that matters. Did they not merge with their *Iṣṭa Deva* ? In Him also I exist, just as their *Iṣṭa Deva* exists in me. I already explained to you that at all times everything exists everywhere.

The conversation now changed to another topic.

Mantra Chaitanya and Diksa

I : Ma, what is meant by *Mantra Chaitanya* ?

Ma : You want to know what *Mantra Chaitanya* signifies ? Well, suppose I call you, saying "Baba", you immediately respond ; because the name and he whose name it is are not separate. Thus, if one calls someone by his name, the bearer of the name will reply. So also, if by pronouncing the mantra the Deity of the mantra or one's *Iṣṭa Deva* is clearly perceived, then the mantra is said to be alive (*chetan*). This is what is called *mantra chaitanya*.

I : What is this clear perception of the Deity of the mantra or *Iṣṭa Deva* like ? Does the *sādhaka* look upon his *Iṣṭa* as distinct from himself or does he see himself within his *Iṣṭa* ?

Ma : Although to start with the *sādhaka* sees himself as separate from his *Iṣṭa Deva*, yet when the essential being (*tatwa*) of this Deity of the mantra or of the *Iṣṭa Deva* becomes revealed to him, then the *sādhaka* realizes himself to be within this *tatwa*. This is why it is said, is it not, that one has to become one with the Deity one is worshipping. By worshipping his *Iṣṭa*, the *sādhaka* thus worships

himself, in other words, the *Iṣṭa* and the *sādhaka* become one.

I: I have heard it said that when a *Sadguru* gives initiation, he renders the mantra alive (*chetana*). You have just described a *chetana* mantra as a mantra by whose recitation the *Iṣṭa Deva* becomes revealed. But our experience is, although we recite the mantra in *japa*, no revelation of the *Iṣṭa Deva* takes place. Are we then to understand that our mantra has not been rendered potent to arouse our consciousness?

Ma: No, why should this be so? There are various kinds of *dīkṣā*. There is a kind of initiation by which the disciple is radically transformed instantly. As soon as this kind of *dīkṣā* is received, the physical body of the disciple merges completely in the five elements and he attains full Self-realization. This is called Supreme *Dīkṣā*.

Initiation by a *Mahāpurusha* or *Sadguru* may be called a medium type of *dīkṣā*. Here the Guru bestows the mantra on the disciple after infusing his own power into it. As a result of such an initiation the disciple gradually gets free from his *samskāras* (tendencies and impressions, i.e. conditioning) and realizes his True Self in due course. To become thus liberated from one's accumulated tendencies and impressions takes time. Some people are of the opinion that the disciple will obtain liberation within at the most three births. Even if the disciple is not conscious of the power of the mantra, yet it does its work within him. That is why it is said that when a *sādhaka* has taken refuge in a *Sadguru*, whether he exerts himself or not, his progress cannot be prevented. All the same, if after receiving

the mantra he faithfully performs his spiritual exercises, he will be able to advance at great speed.

There is yet another kind of *dīkṣā*, which is a sort of general initiation, such as *dīkṣā* from the family guru. Now the family guru may not possess the inner capacity with which to bestow the mantra, nevertheless every mantra has its inherent power. Because every mantra is in itself fruitful. At some time or other, someone may become perfected by the constant repetition of the mantra. Because the power inherent in the mantra can drive him onwards. But this process is very slow indeed.

Apart from all this, there is also scope for repeated initiations, one after another. For instance, a Guru may bestow a mantra on his disciple by the recitation of which progress up to a certain stage has been made ; then, to induce further advancement, the Guru may give him another mantra. In this way, before being ready for the ultimate final *dīkṣā*, several preliminary initiations may be given. Such initiation by successive stages may also spontaneously arise within the disciple in course of time, that is to say, the very first *dīkṣā* bestowed by the Guru can by itself provide all that is necessary to take the disciple onwards from one stage to another.

Alternately, the Guru can himself appear and by initiating the disciple again and again, take him along the path of progress by stages. The fact that the Guru may no longer be in the body cannot be an obstacle to successive initiations step by step,

because the Guru can never die. At the appropriate time and as necessity arises, he can always manifest himself to the disciple.

Sunday, 18th May '41

Initiation by mantra versus initiation without mantra

In the afternoon, sitting near Ma, I again raised the topic of *dīkṣā* which had been discussed yesterday. I said : "Ma, yesterday you divided initiation into three categories, namely Supreme or Ultimate Initiation, medium initiation and general initiation.

Ma : Yes, this division was more or less according to the final results obtained by initiation. However, *dīkṣā* may of course be of many different kinds.

I : What is meant by *dīkṣā* with mantra (*saḥajā dīkṣā*) and *dīkṣā* without mantra (*nirbīja*) ?

Ma : This may also be called initiation without form (*nirākāra dīkṣā*) and initiation with form (*sākāra*). Or one may also look upon the former as initiation without a mantra by which the disciple gets rid of his conditioning and is established in the Supreme State. Here all the inherent tendencies and inclinations of the disciple are washed away and obliterated and he is established in his true Self.

The ultimate aim of initiation by mantra is also the same ; but here the disciple is guided through stages of worshipping a form or Deity to the completely unconditioned state.

I: If all *saṃskāras* are extinguished entirely through initiation without mantra, how then can the relationship of generations of Gurus and disciples have been established ?

Ma: In what is called the Supreme State or Self-realization, nothing at all is destroyed. I have already explained to you that in this exalted state it cannot be said what remains and what does not remain.

I: *Ma*, now you have touched upon a very controversial subject. So far as this state of realization of the Infinite is concerned, we cannot form any clear idea of anything in particular. So it is better to deal with one aspect at a time. I understand that everything is possible in the state of Self-realization. But leaving this aside, please do tell us something about how successive generations of Gurus are established. Is there no *saṃskāra* or desire at the root of this creation of a traditional order ?

Ma: You may remember that during yesterday's discussion I said that in some people a lingering desire for acquiring reputation or praise remains dormant and later this trend manifests in various ways. It may also happen that whatever is caused by *samādhi* is present in a person, yet none of it is exhibited outwardly. All the inward action of *samādhi* is quietly taking place, yet it cannot be perceived outside ; that is to say, the body is not in any way incapacitated and lying motionless due to *samādhi* as is ordinarily the case.

Elsewhere, on the other hand, such bodily signs are indeed exhibited. The reason for this is that the desire for acquiring status and praise, which is present in a subtle way in some of us, results in the outward manifestation of *samādhi* or exhibition of

supernormal powers (*vibhuti*). Although we may not be in the least aware of such feelings within ourselves, yet they do exist and are manifested in such a way so that people may pay us homage and respect. But if someone has not the least ambition of this kind, then although he may acquire any number of supernormal powers, yet there will be no outward sign of it at all.

Similarly, from a desire for fame and applause, an Āchārya or a particular sect of Āchāryas may arise. Alternately someone may be an Āchārya or Guru spontaneously by his inner qualification.

I: It appears that if someone becomes an Achārya by his inner qualification, probably no separate sect or community is thereby created ?

Ma: No, why not ? By this kind of Āchārya also a sect may be created. Look, if everything could be achieved by one mantra and by one particular *bhāva*, why should there be so many different mantras ? The reason is that at different times, due to the individual needs of different persons, Āchāryas have come into being to elucidate different paths that lead to liberation. This is why there are so many sects and religious communities.

I: Does the status of an Achārya correspond to a particular level of existence ?

Ma: Yes, some may attain to a certain status and become qualified to act as Āchāryas. But this does not mean that they remain Āchāryas for all times. They may progress from this level to a still higher one. Then someone else may become qualified to take their place.

I: Can it not therefore be construed that *dikṣā* without seed-mantra means an initiation as a result of which the initiated does not take on any other disciples, in other words, the seed of such a *dikṣā* is not passed on through a succession of disciples? And a *sabija* (with seed) *dikṣā* (by mantra) is an initiation the seeds of which are passed on through a succession of disciples?

Ma: Yes, this also may be possible.

Light and Shadows

This world of light and shadows
Shadows larger than Life
Light flickers and dies
Shadows dance into the Night.

—J. N. Dhamija

Ma, We Remember Thee So Much !

A. P. Dikshit, I.A.S. (Retd.)

(Translation from the Hindi original by G. D. Shukla)

(Continued from the last issue)

One day I received the information that my son-in-law (a Captain in the Merchant Navy) had to undergo an operation for appendicitis. At first it was to take place in Bombay, but later on, in view of certain facilities available there, it was decided to have it performed in Calcutta. We found it impossible to leave Ma. An operation, whether minor or major, is always full of risks. We were weighed down by this anxiety. After much thought, it was decided to send a telegram with Ma's blessings. That nothing untoward would happen while we were at Ma's feet was our strong conviction. In those days I did not seek any private interviews with Ma. By Ma's kindness no one would have denied me the request, but I hesitated to do so, for it would have upset others' programme and denied them the occasion for Ma's darshan. Moreover Ma was not well. Everyone was worried on this score ; but under the circumstances, what else could be done ?

At about 10 O'clock in the night we went to Ma's bedroom. Ma, as always, was lying in a state

of perfect peace. We went after obtaining permission, it appeared as if Ma was expecting us. We acquainted Ma with our problem. Spontaneously Ma said, "God's will, God's dispensation". We got unnerved on hearing these words. Was something unfortunate going to happen? But soon after, Ma said, as if She had seen everything, "Won't it be done in Bombay?" I replied, "No, Ma! it will be done in Calcutta." Ma then repeated 3 times: The favoured of God! The favoured of God! The favoured of God!"

Hearing these words from the mouth of Sri Ma, our confidence was restored. In a trice Ma had visualized the past, future and present and in a few words declared him safe. Overwhelmed with gratitude, and reassured we prostrated ourselves in veneration before Ma, and obtained prasād as well as permission to leave. Ma bade us goodbye with compassion and love in Her eyes. Jai Ma! Jai Ma!

We telegraphically conveyed Ma's blessings to our son-in-law in Calcutta. Later on, it was found that after the operation he suffered from some special trouble and called out to Ma in distress. Ma gave him darshan in a dream. The son-in-law said to Ma: "In spite of such great kindness from you I am suffering so much?" Ma replied, "To exhaust some evil karma." In this way Ma showered Her grace upon the family of Her devotee. The truth is that Ma takes upon Herself the onus of the welfare of the person who places himself under Her care and shelter. But one has to have faith, one has to surrender oneself to Her.

“Abandoning all duties, come unto Me for shelter : sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins,” (Bhagavad Gita, XVIII/66).

Where has such a supremely benevolent mother gone, leaving us all alone ?

Ma ! we miss you so much !

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My camp was close by the Ashram Camp of Ma. It was bitterly cold in January 1982. While in town I was used to getting up late in the morning and that too in a leisurely fashion. It was not my habit to rise early during the winter. But it was so different in the camp at the Mela, all the more so when Ma was present. During the night, even after retiring, the sounds of kirtan and those emanating from the Ramlila and other performances produced a unique joy in the heart. From time to time glimpses of Ma, Her lilās, and Her various aspects would appear before the mind’s eye in flashes, and offering unspeakable delight to heart and mind, sent me to sleep in that blessed state.

At 4 O’clock in the morning, I would get up automatically and proceed to the Sangam (the place of confluence), accompanied by my wife. The confluence was about one *kilometer* away. My camp was on the main route leading to the Sangam. On the way, the crowd of those who wanted to take a bath in the Sangam would start as early as four in the morning. That we were able to take a dip in the holy Triveni in that biting cold when

the stars were still glittering is all due to the blessing of Ma. It was so contrary to our daily routine.

Puja and meditation also interested me deeply while in the camp. I had some experiences during meditation as will not be proper to narrate here. Suffice it to say that for an ordinary person like me, leading a householder's life and subject to anger, greed, pride and so on, it is difficult to have such heavenly experiences. It was all due to Ma's grace.

One day I was meditating at the back side of my camp. Our son, Gopal who was then studying at Allahabad University and had come to the camp from our residence in the town, after having a few words with his mother, left for Ma's Ashram. When I was told on rising from my meditation that he had come and gone without seeing me, I took it ill. For several days I had not received any news from my residence. My 92 years old father-in-law and my mother-in-law were also staying with me. A little later we also went to the Ashram and met Gopal at the gate. Both of us reprimanded him for having come away without seeing me. Ma was inside Her tent. We sat down under the Shamiana, waiting for Ma to come out.

Gopal has been a recipient of Ma's favour from his early childhood. In fact he is Ma's own Gopal. More shall be written on this point later. Here it is sufficient to say that Gopal had permission to go to Ma at any time. The other inmates of the Ashram also treated him with great affection. The Brahmacharis, the Brahmacharinis and all others who were close to Ma shared the same feeling.

Hence, Gopal went straight to Ma. As soon as he had bowed before Her, She said, "Always obey your parents." This incident happened outside of Ma's tent near the entrance to the camp. We had given vent to our views regarding Gopal's going away in our own camp. How was it that Ma came to know of this? Obviously, Ma is omniscient. What Ma is is beyond what is vouchsafed to our physical eyes. She is all pervasive, She watches all our activities without any let or hindrance. Not only this, She is also always guiding us from Her seat in our hearts. We are unable to see all that She is because of our dimmed vision and impure hearts. We might be sitting in any corner of the Ashram waiting eagerly for Ma's darshan, but actually Ma is always near us and watching us. She is listening to all we say, only we cannot observe this. The truth is that not only while we are in the Ashram, but also when we are in our homes Ma is present with us. This is an experience shared by all Ma's devotees. Not only this, we might be in any part of this wide world, on the road, in a railway train, on board a ship, in an aeroplane or in the most desolate and deserted place, in any part of the earth, the ocean, the sky, and there may be nobody with us, but Ma never leaves us. Shall we never see again such an omniscient, omnipresent and omni-loving Ma?

Ma, we remember you so much !

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There is a tradition that in the Kumbh fair sādhus of different sects go to the Triveni in procession. For this reason particular routes and particular points are set apart. Those anxious for darshan line up on either side of these places. Ma was also taken out in such a procession. She was accompanied by the Mahātmās, Brahmacharis, Brahmacharinis, and some devotees. I too, along with my wife, had the good fortune to accompany Ma on two occasions—once on Sankranti day and again on Mouni Amāvasya—for a bath. The second time Gopal was also with us.

These processions start from 3 O'clock in the morning (Brahmamuhurta) and continue till late in the evening. Ma's procession was to start at 4 A.M. The inmates of the Ashram stood ready before Ma's tent. Ma was seated on a brightly shining silver palanquin. All around Her the girls and women devotees, all dressed in white, sang bhajans in praise of the Lord, while ahead of them were the Mahātmās, and other devotees of Ma carrying coloured banners, chanting the name of God and singing hymns in praise of Him. Right at the head of the procession were the Nāgā mahātmās and behind them several others in different robes, and on different conveyances decked with diverse coloured banners. The procession was about a kilometer long and afforded a grand sight. Above was the starry sky, with a few stray clouds here and there, and on the road below this colourful majestic procession wending its way slowly, with bands playing, and people shouting

salutations to Ma ('*Jai Ma*'). On either side were standing lacs of people, old and young, men and women, feasting on Ma's darshan. Under the dazzling flood light they were enjoying an exceptionally delightful sight of Ma's heart-winning, divine beauty. Dressed in immaculate white, seated on a resplendent white palanquin decorated with flower garlands, Ma appeared like Goddess Saraswati Herself and the mahātmās were just charmed and overwhelmed by that inspiring sight. One felt as if the belief in the "formal" worship of God (belief that God has form and external attributes) sanctioned by Sanatana Dharma, had materialised in the form and figure of Ma proceeding towards the Sangam ; or Ma Durga Herself had assumed a visible form to bless Her devotees on this sacred occasion of the Kumbha. Or may be, the veritable Light of the Kumbha had descended to the earth to bear out the statements of the mahātmās. The sky was resounding with the cries of "Jai" rising from countless throats. To describe the experiences of these sacred moments is beyond the power and range of words.

This slow moving procession had gradually reached the Sangam. A few stars were still twinkling in the sky, but the first rays of dawn were also emerging and spreading in the East. The silver palanquin of Ma was deposited on the bank of the Triveni. The white waters of Ganga from the west were eagerly rushing forward to meet the slow moving blue waters of Yamuna. At the place where the two meet was present our Ma, gifted with divine beauty

and appearing like Saraswati incarnate. That charming sight beggars description. Toward the east the sun was rising slowly from the marge of the earth and ascending the heavens though bedimmed by a thick mist. It seemed as if he was proclaiming that, though he circumambulated every day the entire girth of the globe, he had nowhere encountered such divine beauty which put into shade his own splendour.

Shall we never again be able to see so-rare-to-be encountered Mother ? Ma, we remember Thee so much !

(To be continued)

Of himself, man can accomplish nothing. There is only one thing to be done. Pray to God and pray unceasingly. Thus we may forget the ego altogether and continually remember that God alone is real, that God alone is the Truth. Then only can we be freed from ignorance.”

—Swami Brahmananda
(Rakhal Maharaj)

From Slavery to Sainthood

Story of the Renowned Sufi Rābiā

Ma Das

Part II

RĀBIĀ AND OTHER SAINTS

When the sufi saint Malik-bin-Dinar came to visit Rābiā, he found that she had only a damaged earthen pot from which she drank water, an old gunny bag to sit on, a brick for a pillow and a tattered mat to serve her for a bed. Seeing all this, he said, "I have among my friends many wealthy persons. If you permit, I may beg something from them." Upon this Rābiā enquired, "Is there one God who supports me and another who supports those wealthy people?" When the saint admitted that He was the same, Rābiā added, "Has He forgotten me for my poverty and remembers them for their riches? If not, then why should we remind Him? The truth is that He does not forget anybody. He knows what is best for us, and caters or withholds His gifts accordingly. And so I like this style of living, because it is pleasing to Him."

Another sufi saint, Sālih Qazwīnī used to always teach his disciples that whenever anyone knocks at any door repeatedly, then it does open one day or the other. Once, when he said this in front of Rābiā, she commented, "Sālih, how long will you go on saying that it will open? First tell me when

was it closed that it would open some day in the future ?” Sālih bowed in submission and praised Rābiā highly.

Once two dervishes visited Rābiā, when she was sitting in her cottage ready to partake of her meal. The dervishes had come with the thought that whatever would be available with Rābiā, would be pure and not a product of greed, injustice, etc. When they arrived, she had only two loaves with her, which she placed before them. Before they started eating, a fakir came. Rābiā lifted those two loaves and gave them away to him. After a short while, however, a maid servant of someone came carrying some loaves, saying that her mistress had sent them. Rābiā enquired as to how many loaves she had brought, and when told that they were eighteen, Rābiā declined to accept. She said that the loaves were not meant for her and asked that woman to take them back to her mistress. She went away but returned soon with twenty loaves. These Rābiā accepted and placed all of them before the dervishes.

While partaking of those loaves, the dervishes were wondering about all that had happened. When the meal was over, they requested Rābiā to disclose the secret concerning the whole affair. Rābiā then said, “When you came, I knew that you were hungry and that the two loaves which I had would be insufficient for you. And since God has said in the Qurān that He gives ten times in return, I gave away the two loaves when that fakir came. The eighteen loaves that were brought later were against

the promise and so I refused to accept them. And since the twenty received after that were in accordance with God's order, I took them.

PILGRIMAGES TO MECCA

Being a Muslim saint, it was natural that Rābiā should have the desire to visit Mecca. She, therefore, once joined a caravan of pilgrims with a donkey to carry her luggage. But, as the animal was a weak one, it died on the way. The other pilgrims offered to carry Rābiā's goods, but she declined the offer on the ground that she had undertaken the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) under the shelter of the Lord and not under their protection. After she was left alone and the caravan was out of sight, Rābiā addressed God in a tone full of great love. She said, "What are these strange ways of yours? Does the Master of all the seven skies offer such a treatment to a poor meek woman? She is first invited to visit His house and then when she is in the middle of the journey, her donkey is killed." After this, when she was just saying, "What can I do single-handed in this jungle," the donkey revived. Pleased at this turn of events she re-loaded the donkey and proceeded on her pilgrimage. People have recorded that after this happening, the donkey remained alive for many years.

By the time Rābiā decided to go again on this pilgrimage, she had already gained great heights in the spiritual field. As a proof of this, the great Fariduddin Attar, has said in his famous memoirs

(*Tadhkaratul-Aulia*) in Persian that when Rābiā neared Mecca, the Kaaba itself came forward to receive her and was not seen at its normal place by other pilgrims.

In this connection, a very interesting anecdote is available. Just when Rābiā was being welcomed by the Kaaba, a well-known contemporary saint, Ibrahim-bin-Adham had also reached Mecca. During his journey, he had performed one *rukkat* (a special Muslim prayer) at every step on the way. Because of this, it had taken him fourteen years to reach Mecca. But when he did arrive there at last, he did not see the Kaaba. His inability to have darshan of his holy shrine, for which he had laboured so much, made the pilgrim-saint highly perturbed and miserable. Thinking that perhaps a defect had developed in his eyes, he prayed to God earnestly and with great humility. Soon a Divine Voice was heard in response to his heartfelt prayer. It assured him of God's grace and told him that there was no defect in his eyes. The reason why he was not able to have darshan of the Kaaba was that it had gone to welcome an old woman-pilgrim.

Ibrahim-bin-Adham wondered who such a highly fortunate woman was whom Kaaba itself had gone to receive. On the other hand, it is said that when Rābiā saw Kaaba coming to receive her, she commented like a true mystic unconcerned with the entire creation, "What will I do with the house of Kaaba? I want the owner of the house."

When the Kaaba returned and Rābiā arrived leaning on her staff due to old age, Ibrahim

approached her and said full of love, "O Rābiā, what a tumult you have raised in the world?" Rābiā replied, "I have done nothing of the sort. It is you who have created the commotion all over by coming to the house of God in fourteen years to gain publicity." Ibrahim admitted that he did offer prayers at every step during the journey. Revealing her secret, Rābiā said, "You covered the journey saying prayers, whilst I covered the way in self-forgetfulness, meekness and humility."

This is a remarkable incident in the history of the spiritual world. It was certainly providentially arranged that both of them should reach Kaaba at the same time. Ibrahim's *bhāva* (inner feeling) of extrovert nature and pride was behind his prayers and penance, and this was fully exposed by the disappearance of Kaaba at that particular time. Modesty and humility destroy pride, and then self-surrender blossoms. It was to proclaim the superiority of self-surrender and humility over the *sādhanā* based on egoistic actions that such a reception was accorded to Rābiā through Kaaba at that time.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS

Something of great significance in the life of Rābiā, which has also great value for the earnest seeker, took place during the early years of her *sādhanā*. Rābiā had fasted for seven days. On the eighth night, she decided to take the soup which someone had brought for her in a tumbler. When Rābiā got up to light the lamp, a cat upturned the

tumbler. Rābiā, then, thought of drinking plain water. When she tried to do that, the light went out and the earthen pot containing water slipped from her hand and broke. Feeling very miserable, Rābiā cried, "O' Allah! What is this you are doing with me?" The reply came, "O Rābiā, if you like, we will give you all the good things of life and take away all your painful longing for us from your heart." Then the Lord added, "Look Rābiā, you want something and we want something else. These are respectively the desire for worldly comforts and pining for God. It is not possible for these two to remain together in one heart". Hearing this, Rābiā withdrew her heart from everything concerning this world, just as a dying man gives up all hopes related to the entire creation. From then onwards, she became totally unattached and began *to pray constantly* to God to keep her heart drawn towards Him so that the world may not be able to pull her to itself.

Rābiā had complete faith and trust in the Lord, and He too was graciously alert in responding generously to Her total dependence on Him. Once a thief came when Rābiā was sleeping. He picked up something, but when he tried to leave the place with the stolen material, he could not see the way out. When he replaced it, he saw the way. Due to greed, he again grabbed the same article and again could not see the way out. Then the Divine Voice was heard asking him, "Why are you creating difficulties for yourself?" It added, "It is long since she handed herself over to us. When one friend

sleeps, the other keeps awake. How is it possible that anyone could ever be allowed to take away anything of such a friend ?” This reminds one of the following previous words of Ma : *‘God Himself will take care of everything that concerns the man who puts his whole trust in Him.’*

Rābiā’s matchless one-pointed devotion and love for God was clearly revealed one night when Prophet Muhammad appeared to her in a dream and questioned her if she considered him her friend. Answering the query, Rābiā said, “O Rasul Allah (Prophet of God), who is there who does not look upon you as such. But my whole being is so filled with the love of God that there is no room for friendship or enmity for anyone, “and added,” I keep so busy in worshipping God that I have no leisure to engage myself in treating even Satan as my enemy.”

Once someone asked Rābiā, “When is the Lord pleased with his devotee ?” Immediately Rābiā replied, “The Lord is pleased with the devotee who feels equally grateful to Him both when the devotee makes efforts to unite with Him and when he receives the downpour of Lord’s grace for it, i.e., when the devotee recognizes that he cannot even make those efforts without His grace.”

Once someone asked Rābiā’s hand in marriage. She replied, “My body and my life do not belong to me. They are the Lord’s property. Ask Him for my hand (in marriage).”

When the devotees asked Rābiā, “Do you see the Lord whom you worship.” she replied “If I did not see Him, why would I worship Him.”

At one time Rābiā said in her prayers, "O God, send your enemies to hell and give heaven to your friends. For me, you alone are enough. At another time, she was seen to pray, "If I worship you out of fear of hell or greed of heaven, then this desire of mine for heaven may never be fulfilled. And if my worship is for you only, then give me your darshan."

THE END

Rābiā used to say in her prayers that her one work and one desire in the world was that she may always have His name on her lips, His constant remembrance in her heart and at the time of death, be blessed with His darshan. "This is my wish," she would say, and then add, "Of course, you are the Master and so do what pleases you."

When her end drew near, many saints and sheikhs had assembled around her. She asked them to leave and make the place available for angels. All came out and the door was closed. People then heard Rābiā's voice, reciting one *āyat* (group of words from the Quran) and saying "O satisfied soul, now proceed towards your own God." There was silence after this. When people finally opened the door and went inside, they found that she had departed, uniting with the divine strength.

The saints present there said that Rābiā came into the world, but not once did she ever neglect God, Her beloved Master. Neither did she ever request Him to keep her in any particular way or

not to keep her in the way He kept her. And when she never asked for anything from her Master, what then could she ask from the creatures of God.

RĀBIĀ'S FAMOUS WORDS

He is a true lover of the Lord who is so steeply steeped in His love that he cannot even distinguish between pain and pleasure. All that cometh from the Friend is sweet to him beyond measure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The contents of this paper are based on the information available in the following four publications. The help received is gratefully acknowledged.

1. Selections from Fariduddin Altar's *Tadhkaratul-Aulia* or Memoirs of Saints by Bankey Behari. Revised ed. 1965. Publishers : Sh Muhammad Ashraf, Kashmiri Bazar, Lahore.
 2. *Sufi Sant-charit* (Memoirs of Sufi saints) by 'Bhagavan' (Hindi) 1st ed. 1961. Publishers : *Sasta Sahitya Mandal*, New Delhi.
 3. 'Ideals of Sufism' by Dr. M. Hafiz Syed. Ananda Varta, Vol. III No. 3 (Nov. 1955) and No. 4 (Feb. 1956).
 4. Sufis, Mystics and Yogis of India by Bankey Behari 1st ed. 1962. Publishers : Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay-7.
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Centering Prayer

DHYĀNA IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Father Thomas Keating*

Ishvara, the Lord of the world, is not a thing to be perceived by the senses or grasped by the mind. By contemplating the Divine, peace is won. God Himself draws you towards Him.

—Ma Anandamayi

[Father Thomas Keating, former Abbot of the Trappist monastery, St. Joseph's Abbey, in Spencer, Massachusetts, is well known in the West as a teacher of Christian spirituality with a profound understanding and appreciation of the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism. He is the chairman of the North American Board for East-West Dialog, president of the board of directors of the Temple of Understanding and a member of the staff of the annual Christian-Buddhist Conference of the Naropa Institute. Through these and other activities, he seeks to promote increasing understanding among the world's religions by sharing the experience and wisdom of the spiritual journey, East and West.

Abbot Keating is also the author of several books on spiritual life and practice including *Crisis of Faith*, *The Heart of the World*, "*And the Word Was Made Flesh*" and a forthcoming one on contemplative prayer. He has been a monk for forty years and now resides at St. Benedict's Monastery in the Himalayan-like mountains of the State of Colorado where he is the much loved quest master and retreat director.]

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Centering prayer is a renewal of the traditional teaching of Christianity on contemplative prayer. Is a practical attempt to present it in an up-to-date form and to put a certain order and method into it.

In discussing the experience of this form of prayer we are talking about reality at a level that is beyond conceptualization. It is like a precious diamond that you are trying to appreciate. So you turn it in your hand, examine it from different angles and let the light fall on it in different ways. By exchanging reflections and insights about it, we see more and more of its riches ; it begins to dawn on us what is involved, and we develop deeper respect for it.

I

Here is a parable that points to what is happening in this prayer. There was a little fish who swam up to his mother one day and said : "Mummy, what is this ocean I hear so much about ?" She said to him, "You stupid little fish ! It's all around you and in you. If you can't see it, just swim up onto the beach and lie there for a while in the sun and you'll find out."

Another time, there was a little bear who lumbered up to his mother one day and asked : "Mummy, what is this air I hear so much about ?" She said to him, "You stupid little bear ! It's all around you and in you. If you can't feel it, just stick your head in a pail of water for while and you'll find out."

Finally, there was a certain beginner in the spiritual life who was having a hard time. One day he staggered up to his spiritual master and said : "What is this God I hear so much about ?"

Now the master should not, of course, say, "You stupid little novice !" But the master is supposed to be able to suggest what to do to find out.

God is all around us and within us. Why don't we perceive it ? We cannot get away from Him. He fills us. Wherever we go, He will be there ahead of us. Even the greatest evil-doers, however far they try to run from God, will always find Christ waiting for them, because, by identifying with the sins* of every person, in his Passion, Christ was thrust as far as anyone can ever go from God.

Centering prayer is one way of answering the question. By turning off the ordinary flow of thoughts, which reinforces our habitual way of looking at the world, the world begins to change. It is like turning a radio from long wave to short wave. You may be used to a long wave set and the stations it picks up, but if you want to hear stations from far away, you have to tune to the other wave length. In similar fashion, if you turn off your ordinary thought patterns, you enter into a new world of reality.

To do this systematically, take up a position that quiets and relaxes the body. Close your eyes. Half of the world disappears, because we think most of what we see. Slow down the normal flow

* *Pāp*.

of thoughts by thinking a sacred word of one or two syllables that symbolizes your intention.* Immediately you go to a deeper level of reality and pick up vibrations that are there all the time but not regularly perceived. This broadened perspective gives you a chance to know yourself and God in a new way.

Ordinary thoughts are like boats sitting on a river so closely packed together that we cannot see the river that is holding them up. We are aware of one object after another, either inside or outside ourselves, passing across the inner screen of consciousness: thoughts, memories, feelings, external objects. By slowing down that flow, space begins to appear between the boats and we begin to sense the reality on which they are floating, the source that is holding up everything, the stream of consciousness which is our being at the deepest level.

It is toward that reality that we direct our attention. The prayer of centering is a method of directing our attention from the boats to the river on which they are resting, from the particular to the general, from the concrete to that which has no form. At first you are preoccupied by the boats that are going by. You become interested to see what is on them. Let them all go by; no need to think of them. If you catch yourself becoming interested in them, return to the sacred word you have chosen, which is the expression of your intent.

* It should be noted that this is not the same as *mantra japa* for the word is not meant to be repeated continuously; it is rather more like the use of "neti, neti" in *Jñāna Yoga*.

This should be some word that expresses your inward movement toward the presence of the God who is deep within you.

The religious gesture* of the hands placed together, palm to palm, pointing upward sums up the movement of our body and soul toward God. All the faculties are gathered together and pointed toward God by this gesture. That is what your sacred word is trying to say. It is a pointer ; its meaning does not count for much. It can get flattened out or prolonged, become vague or disappear altogether. It can be only an impulse of your will. It does not have to be expressed in your mind. Do not get angry if your thoughts keep coming because that would mean more thoughts. This prayer is an exercise in letting go ; it is learning how *not* to make any effort. It is a way of developing our intuitive faculties to get over the hang-up so many have in our time, which is the tendency to over-conceptualize and to depend on thoughts in going to God. God cannot be contained in a thought. But if we give God a quiet rest, the flame of divine love gets sown in our psyche. In due time, we become aware of the fire within. We do nothing to bring it about, but we *allow* it to be sown in the quiet of interior silence.

II

If at the beginning of centering prayer, your sacred word does not emerge spontaneously when you open yourself to God in faith, then introduce

* *Mudra*

it—as gently as if you were laying a feather on a piece of absorbant cotton. The effectiveness of this prayer does not depend on how distinctly you say your sacred word, or how often, but rather on how easily you introduce it into your imagination at the beginning, and how promptly you return to it when you are hooked on some other thought. Pay no attention to superficial thoughts. Little by little you get used to them. When you are trying to talk to someone in a city building, you cannot help noticing the noise of the traffic in the street. You are continually aware of the noise but you pay no attention to it. So it is with this prayer. You hear the hubbub of your superficial thoughts, but they are like the noise of the street. You put up with them and maintain your attention to God. When you notice you are getting interested in a particular thought, reintroduce very gently—unbelievably gently—the sacred word, the symbol of your intention.

Pure faith is to accept God just as He is. He is all around us and within us. There is no place to go to find Him. Like the little fish or the young bear, we need to launch out of our limited world of ideas and experience and into Him who dwells at the center of our being. Then we can go back to our ordinary world with the awareness of His presence.

III

It is important not to reflect on what is happening while you are practicing the centering prayer.

You can do that during the other twenty-three hours. While in this prayer, dedicate the time to silence. As you quiet down and go deeper, you may come to a place that is outside of time. Time is the succession of motion. Without the movement of successive thoughts, you may experience the time of prayer as passing like a flick of your fingers. "It certainly did not seem like half an hour!" That teaches you something that is extremely important for you to know about yourself, namely, that you are not your thoughts and not your body. That very awareness tells you that your spirit is immortal and indestructible. It is a tremendous affirmation of you as a person created by God and sharing His life. What you experience then in a moment of pure awareness is your own being. It is only a step from there to realize God in the center of your being.

Just when you are settling down to inner freedom from all thoughts, a temptation to reflect on what is happening may arise, such as, "At last I am really getting some peace," or, "This feeling of peace is just great," or, "If only I could make a note of how I got here!" A delicate and intimate kind of self-denial is required to resist such temptations. This prayer is not just an experience of rest and refreshment—a sort of spiritual "happy hour". It is the denial of what we most love and are most attached to, namely, our own thoughts and feelings. This kind of asceticism is extremely useful. It goes to the roots of our attachment to our superficial or false selves, our egocentric and

manipulative tendencies, and teaches us to let them go. It is a deep kind of self-denial but it is also delightful. Self-denial does not have to be afflictive to be effective. It is a question of choosing the best form of self-denial and working at it.

And this is not the time to pray for yourself or for others. Centering prayer is not meant to take the place of other kinds of prayer which are also good, but it puts all the other kinds into a new perspective. It also happens to be the best kind. Where you and I end, God begins.

The experience of this prayer cannot be put into words, because it is beyond words. You can circle around it, talk about it from this angle and that. But it is only by doing it that it gradually dawns on you how unbelievably simple it is! You just stop doing everything else. It is the beginning of a new world that will go on expanding forever. It centers your attention on God's presence within and moves on to discover His presence everywhere else. It is the exercise of faith, hope and love.

God wants us to be aware of His infinite life within us instead of merely our own, and to share this reality with those around us. He wants us to be free from our hang-ups and to experience His life in our own consciousness.

This prayer is a way into God's presence. It picks you up where you are. If you have already experienced some simple form of prayer, this will put more order into it and make you realize what direction to take. And it will give you the confi-

dence to continue in that direction without fear or hesitation.

IV

The basic principle for handling thoughts in this prayer is very simple : Whenever a thought, feeling or experience attracts your attention, return to the sacred word. A thought can be anything you notice, inwardly or outwardly. Even if you should have an overwhelming experience of God, this is not the time to think about it. Just give it back to Him and proceed as if nothing has happened.

The presence of God is like the air. You can have all you want of it as long as you do not try to take possession of it and hang on to it. There is something in us that wants to reach out and grasp the divine presence. We want to carve out a piece of it and hide it in the closet for future enjoyment. But that is like trying to grasp a handful of air. As soon as your fingers close over it, it is gone. The presence of God does not respond to greed and possessiveness. It has a different dynamism. It is totally available, but only on the condition that we accept it freely and do not try to possess it.

Contemplative prayer is a communion with the Spirit of God who is charity, pure gift. The possessive instinct wants to hang on to what is good for dear life ; and this tranquillity is so good and brings such a deep sense of security that the temptation is great. But accept it like a child. Let it come, let it go. Accept each experience of center-

ing prayer as it comes, without asking for anything, having no expectations. In that way its fruits will grow.

As we sink into deep peace and interior silence, something in our nature—or may be it is the devil—starts fishing. Brilliant ideas and insights, like tasty bait, are dangled in front of our minds and we think, “If only I can remember this.” But the temptation to think some beautiful thought long enough to remember it afterwards will bring you out of that deep and peaceful silence, because attention given to any thought will bring you out.

In deep silence you are often offered a choice between reflecting on what is going on, or letting go. If you let go, you go to deeper silence. If you reflect, you come out and have to start over. And you must expect that there will be a lot of starting over.

Let thoughts go by. Only when you get interested in them or want to hang on do you need to return to the sacred word.

We want to reflect on the moments of deep peace in order to remember how we got there so that we can get back. We always want to possess. That is why it is so hard to let go. But love is non-possessive. It gives all back to God as fast as it comes. It keeps nothing for itself. The tendency to reflect is one of the hardest things to handle in deep prayer. We want to savor the moment of pure joy, pure experience, pure awareness. But if you allow the desire to reflect on this experience to go by like every other thought, you will pass to a

new level of freedom and possess more joy, more refined experience, pure awareness. You will come to unity.

We are so accustomed to think that we do not really experience something unless we express it in a thought, it is difficult to be childlike, to enjoy what is happening and then forget about it when it has passed—to savor the immediacy of reality. Reflection is one step back from experience. It is like a photograph of reality. As soon as you start to reflect the experience is over. If in this prayer you can get over the inveterate habit of reflecting on what is going on—have peace and not think about having peace—you will have learned how to do it.

We do not want to die, but we must die to ourselves in order to rise again. We must lose the false self to find our true Self. The sharp edge of self-surrender has to be gotten over. This method of prayer is a training in self-surrender. It teaches you by your own mistakes not to be possessive. Reflection on joy is an attempt to possess it. Then it is lost. Just move gently toward the sacred word, pick it up at whatever level you find yourself. The simple impulse of your will may be sufficient. Then you can return quickly to interior silence.

All through the prayer of centering your mind will be flirting with interior silence like a balloon floating in the air on a calm day. Just when it seems to be about to touch the earth, a little zephyr comes out of nowhere and up goes the balloon.

So it is with your consciousness. If you get angry —“Oh! I wish my mind would keep still”—you get thrown out farther. Patiently go back to your sacred word. This is fulfilling the Gospel precept to watch and pray; it is a waiting game to the nth degree. If you try to do something, you lose everything. The discipline is to wait calmly and accept whatever comes.

Be non-judgemental about your prayer. It takes place at a deeper level than your judgement can go. The only way to judge it is by its fruits: whether in daily life it brings a greater awareness of the presence of God, greater peace, humility, compassion.

Having come to interior silence, you will perceive a new capacity to relate to others at the deepest level. You become aware that there are wonderful people behind the superficial appearances of clothes, social status, color and personality. You “love your enemies”.

V

The sacred word is a simple thought that you are thinking at ever deepening levels. The word on your lips is exterior; the thought in your imagination is interior; the impulse of your will is more interior still. When in the depths of your heart you identify with the word in pure experience, you have completed the interiorization. That is what Mary of Bethany was doing at the feet of Jesus. She was going beyond what he was saying, to the Person who was speaking, and identifying with him.

It is what we are doing as we sit at the feet of God interiorizing the sacred word. We go beyond the word into union with that which the word represents—the Ultimate Mystery, who is without form and beyond any concept that we can have of Him.

He Who Is—the Infinite, Incomprehensible, Ineffable One—is the God of pure faith. In this prayer we are asking, “Who are You?” and waiting for the answer. It is a being to Being communion. To know God at this level is perceive reality; it will transform our lives and our conduct. The ripe fruit of this prayer is to bring back into our ordinary lives, not the thought of God, but the awareness of His presence beyond any concept. This prayer is not an end in itself; it is a beginning. We do not do it for the sake of the experience, but for the sake of its fruits in our lives.

New life is growing in that darkness and emptiness. You are entering into a process which is death to your false self and a rising to a new life which is a share in Christ’s consciousness. We are participating in his emptying in order to partake of his Risen Life. This is the contemplative dimension of the Gospel: death to the false self, rebirth in Christ, the gift of the Spirit, inner transformation, the manifestation of God in and through everyday life.

An Encounter with a Mystic Divine Sage

Parvathy Devi Varma

This is dedicated to my beloved, divine and Immortal Mother and Guru - Sri Ma Anandamayi. I wish to thank my most loved mother and father for having inspired me to write this.

While submitting this humble piece of work at Her Divine Lotus Feet, I pray, O, Immortal One, that Thou grant me the ability to do Thee justice. I am only a devout scribe of these notes and do not know how and where to begin, but begin I must, for there has to be a beginning without which there can be no conclusion.

My first encounter with this Resplendent Saint occurred on the 10th of July, 1971. My mother saw a picture and an article in the Illustrated weekly of India in Bangalore just before this and wanted to have Ma's darshan. It was soon learnt that Ma was in Hardwar in the Kankhal Ashram. I too joined my parents on a sudden impulse and we flew to Delhi on the 9th, motored to Hardwar and reached the town by 8.30 P.M. Father went to the Ashram to find out when all of us could have darshan of Ma the next day. He came rushing back to tell us to get ready as we would be able to have darshan of Ma that very night itself. We managed to bathe and get to the Ashram by 9 P.M., and in a few

minutes we were in that marvellous presence. Ma was sitting on Her cot and when I looked at Her after we had done our *pranāmas* Ma gave that all conquering smile, so full of beauty, overflowing with radiance that I lay conquered at once. It was that strange, mystic smile that drew me towards Her, an all-knowing smile, and in that smile and glance She seemed to draw my past, my present and my future, it seemed to me. In silence She conveyed to me that the past and the present are but one in the countings of eternity.

From then on we used to go as often as we could to see Ma. Two years later on our trip to Uttarkashi, we had the grace to be blessed so much by Ma. It was here that I had the great good fortune to be initiated. Ma was in Uttarkashi for Her birthday celebrations in the month of May, 1973. May and June are the hottest part of the year in the North and all of us were feeling the heat. Just before the celebrations began untimely rains came and Uttarkashi became so pleasant. One morning someone from the Ashram went to where we were staying to ask father and me to go to the Kali Temple as Ma wanted us there at once. It was a divine day, so unexpected! What happened was so sacred, mystical and divine. It was a secret that can never be told in words. All that I know was that I was in the presence of something Unknown whose power was almighty. I felt the Divine Mother dancing with the anklets on Her feet—the tinkling making a rare sound of the mystic Om.

Another summer we were once again in Ma's Ashram, this time in Almora at Patal Devi. The special good fortune of this trip was that we were almost alone with Ma. A strange thing happened here too. Ma gave me dīkshā a second time. On that day we left Almora for Delhi via Nainital. Now was demonstrated the visible strength of Ma's super power. My parents and I were going to Nainital to spend some time with some friends before proceeding to Delhi. After we had left the main road and taken the path to the hills, we were stopped by a landslide. Seeing that it would take a long time to clear this road, we reversed the car to get back to the main highway when to our dismay we were stopped by another landslide, so that we were now caught between two of these and may be we would have to spend a few hours in the car. The car was literally trapped. We waited and waited but no help came our way. My parents then decided to walk to Nainital and get help and possibly find some conveyance to take us to the house of our friends. But I refused to go saying that I was unable to walk uphill all the way to Nainital. The few people around us told me that it would take a whole day and night for the earth to be removed from the road. As my father and mother were going to walk, I would be left alone with the driver. I prayed to Ma to help me. "Ma please save me," was all I could say. I was very frightened, but at the same time I was sure that my beloved Ma would rescue me somehow. In the meantime my parents had very

reluctantly left, saying that they would come back with help at once. The hours went by and then a miracle happened. A truck came with a lot of men who started clearing away the rocks and stones. All this time I was alone and I was getting nervous as the daylight was fading, and it was getting on to dusk. Mother's image came to me in my mind and She smiled and seemed to tell me not to worry. Then a remarkable thing happened ; it seemed Ma had come to my aid : Another truck with a lot of people rolled up and they and the first truck load of workmen cleared the way. Within a short time the whole of the debris was removed. The landslide was no longer there and the road being fully cleared the car was able to proceed towards its destination. I reached the house of a kind friend of ours where I met my parents who had just returned after finding no trace of the landslide or the car. They were surprised and happy to see me safe and sound and back so soon. If Ma had not saved me, I would have had to spend the whole night alone in the car on a lonely stretch of road in the biting cold. I poured out my gratitude to Ma in my heart. I said "*Jai Ma*" many a time. This is one of the many incidents where the graciousness of Ma was showered on us and we were able to experience Her power and compassion. I do know that I have not lived in vain for I have had the good fortune of meeting such a Divine Being. She will always be to me the Immortal One—The Immortal Goddess.

This is dedicated to my Beloved, Divine and Immortal Ma and Guru, Sri Ma Anandamayi. May the Divine Empress shower on all of us Her Blessings.

“Miserable is the soul whose affections are entwined to things below, for when they are taken away from him, he is torn to pieces. And then he comes to realize his misery through experience of the harm which these affections make him suffer—though he was miserable too before he suffered it. But Thyself, Lord, none can lose.”

—St. Augustine

Unforgettable Gouri

'Māmā'*

Ranadheer Dastidar

I

A pair of tiny flowers, nipped in the bud came drifting down the Ganga and after a meandering journey reached Ma's feet at Varanasi. She in Her infinite mercy, took them up and clasped them to Her bosom. Bathed in the sunshine of Her love, they gradually blossomed into a new life, full of bright hope and promise.

About two decades and a half rolled by when, suddenly one spring morning, one of them wilted away and dropped down. Gouri had left us. She was the brightest jewel of the Kanyapeeth, the most precious pendant of its necklace. She was unique. A prodigy without a peer.

It was February 27, 1984, Krishna Ekadashi, Uttarayan. A very auspicious day, we were told, when Gouri set out on her final voyage.

In reply to my query on the previous day whether she was a little better, Gouri shook her weary head to indicate that she was not. I had a faint foreboding of what was lurking behind her silence, but brushed it aside from my mind. When I went to see her next morning the air of the little cabin of the hospital was heavy with suppressed

* "Māmā" means uncle.

sighs, tears streaming down everybody's cheeks. Time seemed to stand still in a hush of mute anguish.

To one who had to endure the agony of sleepless nights, slowly came deep sleep from which she would never wake up. Gouri would never again say in her faint voice, "Māmā, (uncle) do please sit here for a little while". It was brought home to me with a painful wrench that Gouri was no more.

The tireless efforts of the physicians and the tearful prayers of the near and dear ones were of no avail. Our minds hovering between hope and fear, at long last, were face to face with the stark reality. "Ma is calling me. I can hear Her voice. I am going away. All of you chant the name of Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma." With these words Gouri left us. It was a moment charged with deep anguish but also shining with divine light. The little music of Ma's lullaby reached the ears of Her dear child, and she fell asleep. A truly touching finale: Gouri walked out of life as quietly as she had walked through it.

Though she now is far away from us, paradoxically enough, she seems nearer. More than ever before we seem to hear her silent foot-falls and voice in and around the Kanyapeeth. One craving for love has left for a far-away land where she will have her fill of it, where all her futilities will be turned into fruitfulness and her dreams into living realities.

"A man is not completely born until he is dead. Why then should we grieve when a new child is born among the immortals?"

Gouri's mortal remains were brought to the Ashram and laid in front of the Kanyapeeth. The girls with tears in their eyes sang kirtan and chanted the holy name of Ma. Draped in new clothes after a ceremonial bath, decorated with dots of sandal paste and floral wreaths, Gouri began her final journey by boat along the holy Ganga. Ahead of her lay the boundless ocean of peace and tranquillity.

II

As I set myself to writing, my mind harks back half wistfully, half melancholy, to the day when, a little more than a decade ago, I first met Gouri at the Kanyapeeth where, under Ma's instructions, I had come to stay and teach the girls. A slim young girl, quite and shy, was in charge of serving meals to me. I was told that her name was Gouri. I was further told that she had passed the Acharya examination in the first division with special distinction. I definitely remember how surprised I was to hear this : she looked much younger than that, I thought.

When I got to know her more intimately, I found her a strange mixture of contradictions, at once attractive and yet, occasionally baffling. Her zeal for studies was as great as her physical exhaustion caused by a series of illnesses. Her brief spell of youthful enthusiasm soon petered out and gave place to listlessness, her enthusiasm which came in fugitive flashes shading off into a mood of deep melancholy. Her body and mind resembled

the unadorned simplicity of a wandering minstrel's *ektārā* (one-stringed instrument), but her voice held in it the resonance and sweetness of the seven-stringed Veena of Goddess Saraswati. A promising life chequered with the light and shadow of thirty-three summers was cut off in its prime.

III

Gouri lost her mother in her infancy and was denied the love of her father. Her mind yearned for paternal love so essential to a child. During Sri Ma's occasional stay in the Kanyapeeth, her heart was full, drinking deep of Ma's bountiful love. But Ma was not always available and she longed for the warmth of a loving heart and looked for it all around her. A sense of emptiness haunted her and a vague longing for what she had never fully tasted, often made her restless, quite out of tune with her quiet nature, which to all but an understanding mind, appeared enigmatic.

A frail child, she grew up to be a lonely young girl—like a star that dwelt apart. She was in poor health all her life and had neither the inclination nor the strength to take part in games with girls of her age. At an age when girls play with dolls, books became her playmates. She took refuge in them and they supplied her with mental food but she felt emotionally starved. This made her a little self-centred and quite unconsciously, engendered in her a sense of alienation which rendered it difficult for her to mix freely with others. She used to spend most of her time with books chosen at

random, which widened her intellectual horizon and saved her from the mental insularity from which many girls suffer. It was in the realm of books that she was thoroughly at home.

Gouri was born with a keen intellect. She had also a burning zeal for the pursuit of knowledge. Neither the periodical bouts of illness, some of them quite serious, nor the enforced confinement to bed which they entailed could extinguish it. Hers was a shining example of the triumph of the spirit over physical disabilities. A double Acharya (*Puran & Darshan*) with a first class in both, she was engaged in preparing for her doctorate when she was snatched away from us. Her teachers loved teaching her and marvelled at the brilliance of her intellect.

Shy and sensitive, she always shunned the lime-light and played her part from the background. She had a penchant for directing playlets staged by the girls of the Kanyapeeth at different functions. She never took part in debates, but trained the girls and prepared them with arguments in Sanskrit, both in favour and against a subject. Once during the Sanyam Saptah at Kankhal, she was forced, much against her wish, at the insistent request of Padmaji* to say a few words, and her speech was widely acclaimed as one of the best. A Sanskrit poem composed by her on the occasion also received profuse praise from all.

She was gifted with a golden voice, and though she had no formal training in music, her songs cast a spell over everybody.

* Dr. Padma Misra, Ph. D.

As a teacher she was very popular with the students. In fact, she earned the love and affection of all by the graces of her intellect and heart. She was above all meanness and bore her physical and mental ills with quiet fortitude. Her keen sense of self-respect under all circumstances added a rare dignity to her character. The Kanyapeeth will not see her like again.

IV

Memories come crowding into my mind, memories sad and sweet, which might seem inconsequential trifles to others. But to me they are tender with emotion, vibrant and vital, which I fondly cherish.

On the day Gouri was removed to Mata Anandamayee Hospital, her elder sister Geeta with some other Ashramites left for Calcutta on her way to Bangladesh to visit Ma's birth place and other spots hallowed by Ma's holy presence. Gouri felt a bit forlorn. I could give her no physical relief. But she was glad to see me now and again, "Māmā, please send a wire to my Didi (an elder cousin of hers) at Durgapur"—she was very fond of her—she said to me one day, "and another one to the Eliya Raja and Rani of Trivandrum". I knew how dearly they loved her. Telegrams were sent to both places. Her cousin rushed from Durgapur to her bedside. The Eliya Raja and Rani of Trivandrum could not come immediately but by frequent trunk calls enquired about her condition.

One morning, I found her cousin seated by her. Gouri seemed happy and asked me with a knowing look if I knew who she was. Gouri knew that I did and her face lit up with a smile. That was the last time I saw her smile.

Geeta returned from Calcutta on Feb. 25, 1984, on receipt of the news of Gouri's serious condition. I met her immediately on her arrival near the entrance of the Kanyapeeth. Instead of entering the Kanyapeeth, Geeta, very much shaken, requested me to take her first to Gouri. On seeing her lying in hospital, Geeta burst into tears, and locked in each other's embrace they wept bitterly for quite a while. It seemed such a relief to both, their pent-up emotion finding an outlet in the tears trickling down their cheeks. That was the first time I saw both sisters crying on each other's shoulders and I knew it would be the last. Later on, it was for others to weep.

It was a painful sight to see Gouri fading away slowly and losing grip on herself. It soon became apparent that the doctors were fighting a losing battle. Chamelidi (Brigadier Dr. Ganguly's wife) who had been taking a keen interest in Gouri was rather worried over her condition, and one day asked me to persuade Gouri to listen to doctors' advice and follow their instructions. When I spoke to her about this, she replied with all the innocence and helplessness of a child, "why, I always do."

It was the eternal child in Gouri that stole everybody's heart. It was this that made the Eliya Raja and Rani of Trivandrum distraught with grief when

they came here after Gouri's demise. "We loved her more than our own daughter," they said in a voice choked with deep emotion and sobbed their hearts out. It was this that made Chamelidi go out of her way and look after her in the hospital with all the tenderness and love of a mother.

V

Childlike simplicity was the dominant note of her character and it resolved all the apparent contradictions in her nature into a harmonious whole. I used to tease her now and again about her childishness and tell her that she was intellectually mature but emotionally immature. She resented this and would fly into a rage and exclaim, "Oh, you terrible Māmā"—a very favourite expression with her. Whenever she was in a tight corner, she would fling that delectable epithet at me and walk away with an air of finality—an attitude of sweet unreasonableness so delightfully childlike.

Once after her return from Kankhal, Gouri was all excitement and told me that Ma had described her to someone as such a brilliant girl and yet as simple as a child. I told her that this was just what I had been telling her all the time. She beamed with delight. "That's just what I mean when I say that you are intellectual by nature, but —" Before I finished the sentence she had vanished from the scene with the echo of the words "Oh, you terrible Māmā" trailing behind her. That was Gouri all over.

She was interested in learning English and came to me on several occasions to brush it up. She would sometimes suddenly come and without the least hesitation sit in my class with girls much junior to her. But her enthusiasm was shortlived and sporadic.

When I found her sunk in deep despair, I would remind her of Tagore's lines—She was very fond of Tagore, and incidentally, a great admirer of Vivekananda—

“Though the evening comes with slow steps
and has signalled for all songs to cease ;

Though your companions have gone to their
rest and you are tired ;

Though fear broods in the dark and the
face of the skies is veiled ;

Yet bird, O my bird, listen to me ;
do not close your wings.”

I often reminded her that such morbid melancholy was unbecoming to the young : “You are the spring of life” I said to her once. With a wan smile, born and of the depth of tears, she quietly replied, “There isn't any spring in my life, Māmā. There never was. Only childhood and old age. Nothing in between. I am now in my old age.” Sometimes she added playfully that she would predecease me. I dismissed this as a fancy which the young sometimes like to toy with. I never realized that those words were fraught with such dire prophecy.

Gouri had a lively sense of humour. About a year and a half ago a newly married girl of the

Kanyapeeth came to visit us and I was telling her that she should cultivate a sense of belonging and adjust herself to her new surroundings. Suddenly, from the far end of the room came Gouri's playful remark, "Māmā is the 'Kanvamuni' of the Ashram". Alas ! little did poor 'Kanvamuni' dream that he would have to bid such a tragic farewell to the dear child of the Ashram.

My mind likes to linger over nostalgic memories about Gouri and before closing these rambling reminiscences I should like to narrate one or two other incidents which moved me deeply. One day a number of girls were washing their faces after lunch at a place commonly known as '*pāñch nal*'—(five water taps in a row)—and I was waiting my turn at a distance. Suddenly Gouri caught sight of me and cried out, "Māmā, come along. There's enough room for you here." Somehow that rang bell in my mind. More than sixty years ago, I had read a story by Tagore, in which a young man with his aged mother was at a loss in a crowded railway station and did not know how to fight his way into the compartment. From a compartment at the far end of the platform, came a girl's voice "Come along here, there's enough room for you both." I don't know why that stuck to my memory. Out of sheer curiosity I asked Gouri if she could recall where she might have read these lines. Imagine my surprise when, after a brief pause, she narrated the main incidents of the story. That voice still rings in my ears and how I should love to imagine Gouri's sending out a call to me from

the beyond, "Māmā, come along, there's room for you here !"

I have reached the end of my long and weary journey and soon I shall be embarking on the greatest adventure of life. I do not know what the future holds for me. With all its bountiful gifts, my life has been one long stretch of futility, strewn with shattered dreams. Still I go on dreaming. My dream is to make my death beautiful. I have a great desire that my final leave-taking, fragrant with flowers and incense, should be an occasion not for mourning, but for joyous, thanksgiving. Once, not so very long ago, I told Gouri that besides Ma's name and 'Hare Krishna', I should like to have '*Satyam Jñānam Anantam Brahma* (सत्यम् ज्ञानम् अनन्तम् ब्रह्म) chanted during my last journey. Gouri was taken aback. She asked me in utter amazement, "Māmā, why this ? Are you a Vedantist ?" I told her that I just loved to hear this hymn chanted by the girls. She thought for a while and assured me that she would sing it even if none else did. I had an implicit faith in her words and felt reassured. Little did I dream that it would be left to me to pay my tearful tribute to her memory.

VI

Gouri had to keep a tryst with destiny. Now that she is not among us, so many thoughts rise in our minds. Was she summoned to the heavenly temple to sing the morning prayer there ? Was this flower of immaculate purity plucked away to

be offered at the feet of the Divine ? Is the light that was extinguished all too suddenly now illuminating the festive hall beyond the skies ? Is the voice that was stilled here one spring morning breaking into fresh melodies and soulful songs in a far-away land ?

We would fain imagine that Gouri who was lulled into sleep by Ma has woken up into a new life, her feverish brow soothed, her anguished heart healed and her weary mind filled with a sense of fulfilment by Ma's grace. A life, now rippling with smiles and laughter, now murmuring into soft breaths of sorrow, not losing itself into the depth of silence has, at last, flowered into one of eternal hope, peace and joy.

“In every shape and form is He alone and therefore everything can be done as His service. The important thing is to be ever aware of Him, to think of Him in everything one does.”

—Sri Ma Anandamayi

Ashram News

Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth's visit to our Ashram at Bhopal.

Twelve brahmacharinis of the Kanyapeeth accompanied by some of their teachers spent six weeks of their summer vacation at Bairagarh, Bhopal, with its wide open spaces, fruit trees, fields and lakes. Ma had visited that Ashram several times. Once a newly admitted brahmachari had said: "Ma, there is no sacred river here, nor is it a place of pilgrimage." Ma had replied: "A Bhagavata Saptah was held here," after a pause: "This body has also been here." Wherever Sri Ma's lotus feet trod there is holy ground.

After a long and tedious journey, the party of eighteen reached Bairagarh from Varanasi. They were put up comfortably at the house of late Sir and Lady Datar Singh, since the Ashram is very small. However, their daily routine of prayers, puja, kirtan, āratī, reading of Scriptures etc. was performed at the Ashram. They played in the garden, climbed trees, picked fruits, made friends with the fawn, the young calves, the cat and the kittens, watched the great variety of birds.

"We don't mind what we eat but we want to be taken out to interesting places," they said almost in chorus. So this was arranged.

First of all, a local, well-known educationist, Sri Motwaniji, taking special leave, accompanied

the girls to Bhel, All India Radio, to the aerodrome and the waterworks. Another day they visited the famous Gupha Mandir, where water pours on a Śiva Linga without any outer aid, also the ancient Neṛi Temple and the recently built Birla Temple. Another excursion took them to the reputed Bhojpur Temples, situated about 20 miles from Bhopal, which are partly destroyed, but still attract devotees from all over India. The Raja and Rani of Neemkoda very generously arranged for their transport and also at their residence showed them a film of Gandhiji. Sri Motwaniji displayed educational films of the Pondicherry Ashram and on wild life.

They travelled by train to the Jyotir Linga of Mahakal. Spending the night in a dharmasālā they were up at 3 a.m. and witnessed the *ārati* at 4 a.m. They were an impressive group, attracting much attention when reciting in chorus from the Vedas, which is part of their daily routine. It profoundly moved all present. Where else nowadays can one come across such divine brahma-charinis reciting in flawless Sanskrit! People enquired who they were and one of the pujaris later came to the dharmasālā to get his daughter admitted into the Kanyapeeth. A Rajkumar of a nearby state also brought his daughter from Indore to join the school.

Further the next Jyotir Linga at Omkareshwar was visited. It entailed a difficult, tiring journey but they joyfully endured all trials to visit the Śiva Linga on the banks of holy Narmada river.

The whole party scrambled down the rocks to have a bath in sacred Narmada. It is said that even the darshan of Narmada purifies.

Then they proceeded to the Jyotir Linga Mamuleshwara on the opposite bank of Narmada. There 18,000 Śiva Linga are made daily and puja is offered to them. Formerly one lakh of Śiva Linga were worshipped daily.

One day a special programme was arranged in the Ashram. All devotees and visitors were greatly impressed by the excellent singing of religious songs and hymns, the recitation of the Vedas and the talks on Ma and on the Ramayana by the elder brahmacharinis. This led Sri Motwaniji to request them to address the students of the local *Nawa Yuwak Sabha*. Over 300 girls were present as well as the Principal and the staff who all listened with rapt attention, as the brahmacharinis enlarged on Ma's teaching for young students. A special speech of thanks was given by the Principal.

Sri Mazumdar and his wife, both disciples of Didima, invited the girls for *bhoga* and *puja* offered to Ma at their house. Here also a number of visitors listened with interest to speeches on Ma's teaching and to kirtan.

Guru Pūrṇimā was observed at the Ashram by special *Guru puja*, *bhajan* and *prasāda* with beautiful decorations, everything arranged by the brahmacharinis. All present were full of praise.

Finally the girls were able to visit Sanchi in two taxis, generously provided by a devotee.

With all their wishes fulfilled and with cherished memories the girls returned to Varanasi. By Sri Ma's grace and Her ever loving presence everything had been achieved without a hitch.

Durga Puja

The main celebration of the Sangha took place in Vrindaban from 1st to 4th October. It was a great success. The attendance was very large, a number of devotees flocked even from Calcutta. At Kankhal also the festival was observed in great style as well as in Ranchi and Agarpara (Calcutta). At Agarpara ashram, the attendance rose to about 1400 on *ashtami* day. Everywhere Sri Ma's presence is felt overwhelmingly on such occasions.

Calcutta Zonal office and office of Publications Division

On October 10th, immediately after Lakshmi Puja, which was also celebrated on fullmoon night after Durga Puja, the new Calcutta Zonal office of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Charitable Society and its Publications Division at "Matri Mandir", 57/1, Ballygunge Circular Road, Calcutta-700 019 was ceremonially opened in the presence of a few devotees. To the accompaniment of kirtan of Sri Ma's name, Her picture was carried in procession round the entire premises, followed by Narayan Puja and Sri Ma's Puja, ending with distribution of fruits and sweets *prasāda*. Ma's benign presence was strongly felt.

This Zonal office with the Publications Division, however, started functioning officially on October 16th. The premises are spacious with several big rooms including a hall where it is planned to hold satsang and regular Veda-patha. The location of this new office will be specially convenient for devotees residing in South Calcutta. There is also a separate shrine room and a big lawn in front with outhouses.

Big Function at Agarpara Ashram

The annual Nam-yagna was duly celebrated this year, too, along with a 8 day long Bhagwat Saptah between 29th of November and 7th of December. After a special "Adhibas" done on 29th, the week-long "Bhagwat Saptah" commenced on the day following i.e., on 30th of November and continued upto 7th of December. On the last day, about 1600 people who assembled were all fed sumptuously. The function was a grand success and by the grace of Ma could be performed in a very befitting and disciplined manner.

Weekly programme of Agarpara Ashram is as follows :

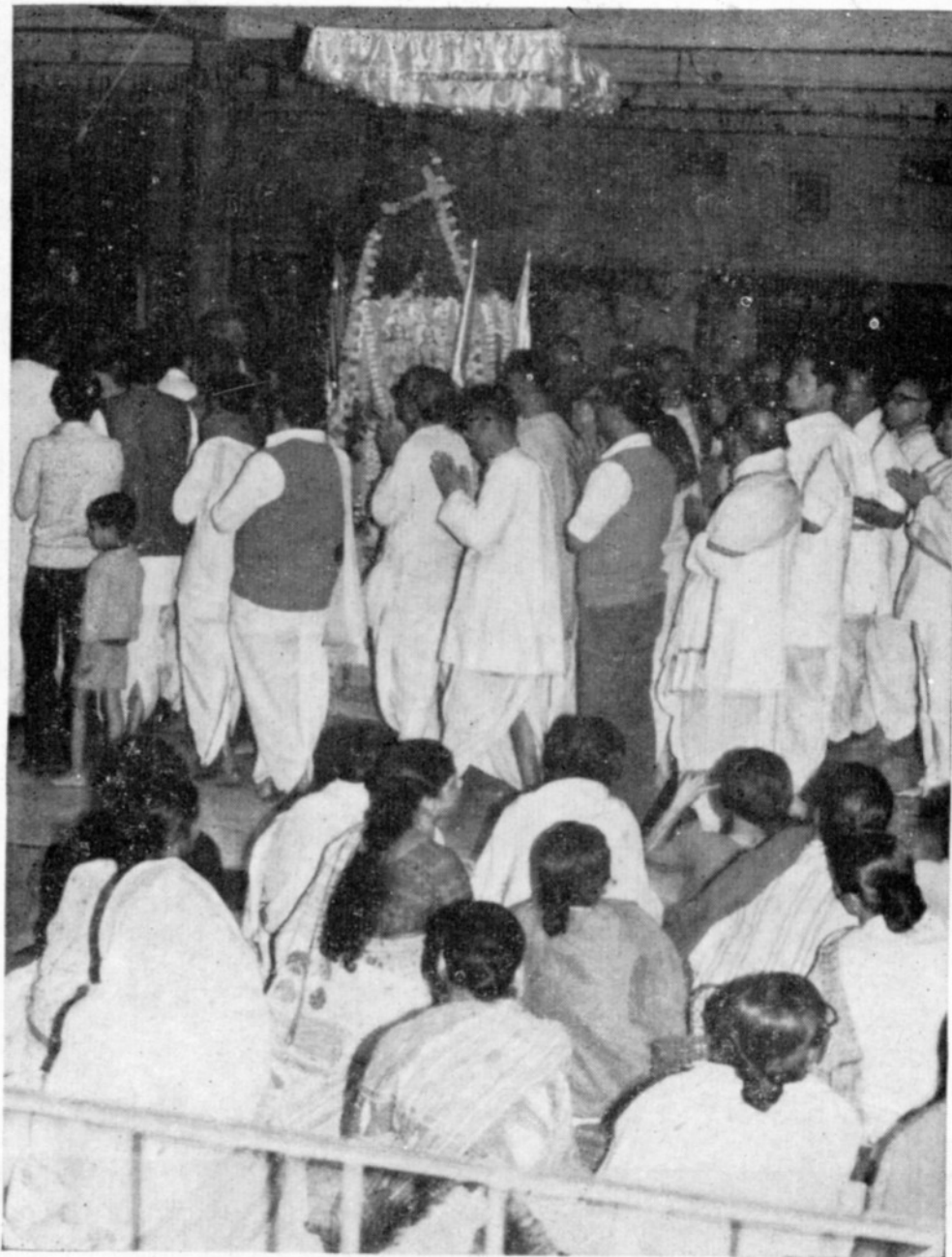
1. Daily between 4-30 p.m. and 6-30 p.m. Satsang, interpretation of Bhagwat Hanuman Chalisa, devotional songs and kirtan.
2. Every Saturday—between 4-30 p.m. and 7-30 p.m.—Satsang, lectures, and interpretation of Geeta and Bhagwat by the various visiting college professors.
3. Every Sunday—between 10-30 a.m. and 12 noon—Reading of Yoga-basistha Ramayana, devo-



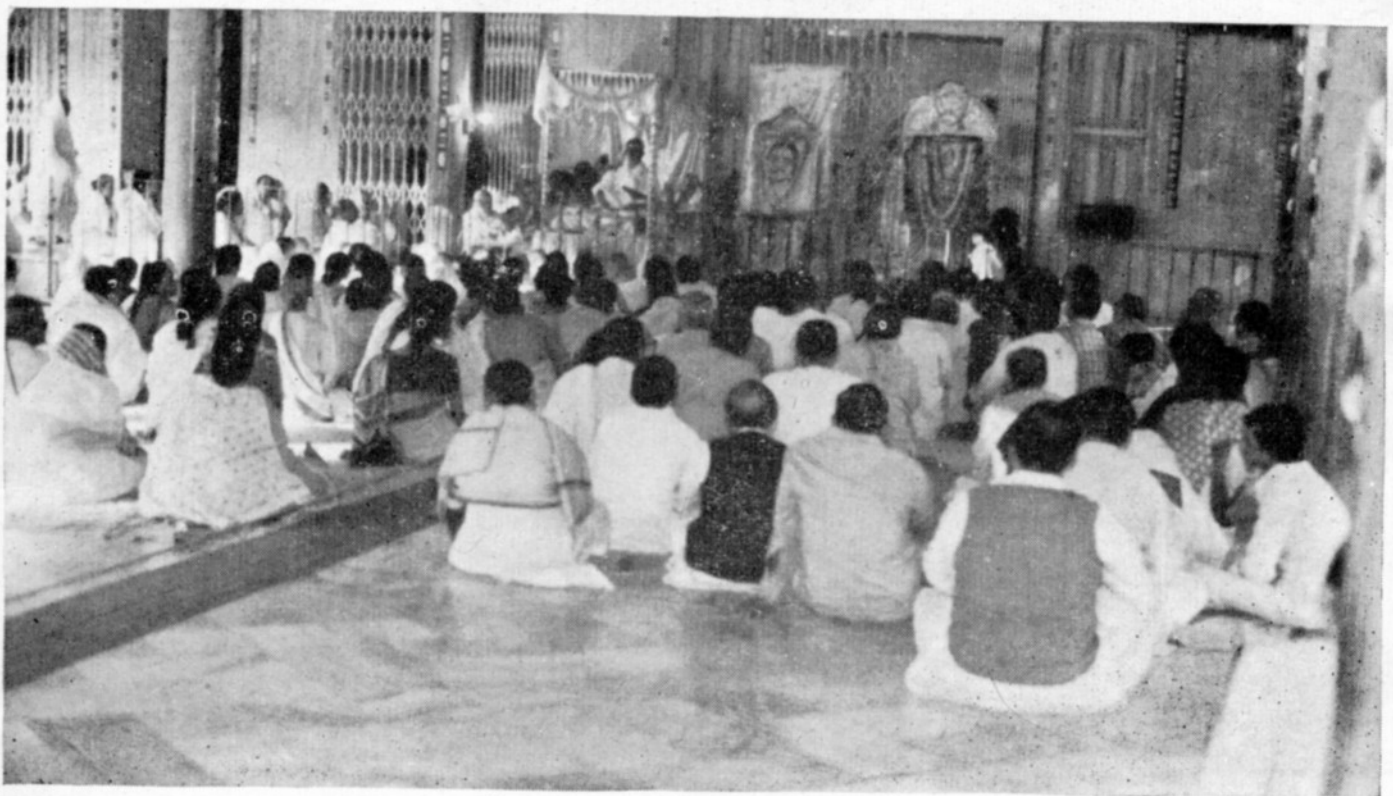
Male Devotees in Nam-Yagna utsab



Lady devotees in the Kirtan



Nam Sankirtan at Agarpara Ashram



Devotees listening to Bhagwat at the Ashram

tional songs and kirtan along with Akhand japa from sunrise to dusk.

4. On every 4th Sunday between 3-30 p.m. and 8 p.m.—Reading and interpretations of Geeta, Chandi, Upanishad and occasional discussions on Matri Vani and Sad Vani, by the visiting professors and devotee scholars, regular interpretations on Yoga-basistha Ramayana and Matri Vani by Swami Chinmoyanandaji, the monk in charge of the Ashram is an added attraction for all the resident ashramites and devotees. Prasad is also distributed regularly to the devotees after each function. It is really heartening to find that this Ashram with the increasing attendance and all-round co-operation of devotees is gradually becoming quite popular. Thanks to the ceaseless efforts of Swamiji and all concerned.

Nam Kutir in the Ashram

It was from Ma's own utterances that we came to know that nearly 500 years ago from to-day Bablu Nityananda and Mahaprabhu Chaitanya Dev on their way to Gambhira in Puridham took rest in this very place on the bank of the ganges and coming to know about this, late Heramba Bhattacharya an intimate devotee of Mother, built a thatched cottage right on the spot. Ma had stayed in that Kutia erected on such a sanctified place but in later years—with the permission of Ma—the ashram authorities had built a round room in pucca structures replacing the old thatched hut which was difficult to maintain. The same round room right on

the bank of the ganges in front of the main Ashram building is popularly known now as "Nam-kutir".

Kali Puja and Annakut

The official celebration of the Sangha was held at Ranchi which has a Kali temple. Brahmachari Nirvanananda performed the Puja. The attendance was large beyond expectation. It was also celebrated in Varanasi, Kankhal, and in New Delhi which has a Kali temple. The next day Annakut was observed by *bhoga* of as many different items as possible and distribution of *prasāda* to all.

35th Samyam Mahavrata

Was observed at Kankhal from 1st to 8th November. It happened to start on the day after the tragic murder of the Prime Minister and continued during the week of widespread unrest all over India. However the function proceeded harmoniously and peacefully without any disturbance. Swami Chidanandaji, Head of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh stayed with us throughout the week, gave a short talk every evening, was present in the hall for every meditation and often at other times as well. Mahamandaleswara Swami Vidyanandaji of Kailash Ashram every morning gave very enlightening explanations of the Upanishad and every afternoon Pt. Vishnu Dutta Rakesh talked on the Purana. Mahamandaleswara Brahmananda of Sanyasa Ashram, Swami Brahma Hariji of Chetan Dev Kutia, Swami Shyam Sundar Dasji of All India Sadhu Samaj and on some days Mahamandaleswara Prakashananda

of Jagat Guru Ashram delivered beautiful and interesting lectures. The kirtans and bhajans sung mostly by Gitasri Chhabi Banerji, Brahmacharini Pushpa and Brahmachari Tanmayananda and others were as inspiring and elevating as ever, it goes without saying.

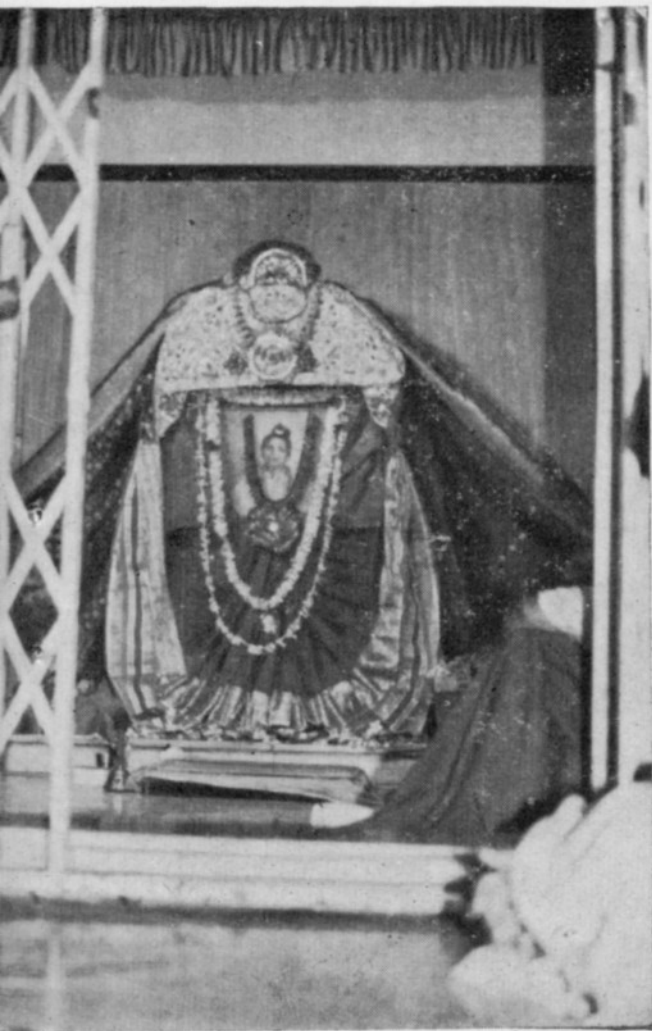
Every speaker enjoined on the *vratis* to pray for the peace of Indira Gandhi, her family, the whole country and the world at large. It is likely that this concentrated gathering of 250 participants and the fact that very many devotees, not only in India but also all over the globe, observe this week as a period of retreat and meditation, has helped to restore peace and order.

Of course, people from Hardwar could hardly come to listen to the talks due to curfew and those who usually came for a day in cars from Rishikesh and Dehradun were conspicuous by their absence owing complete breakdown of communication.

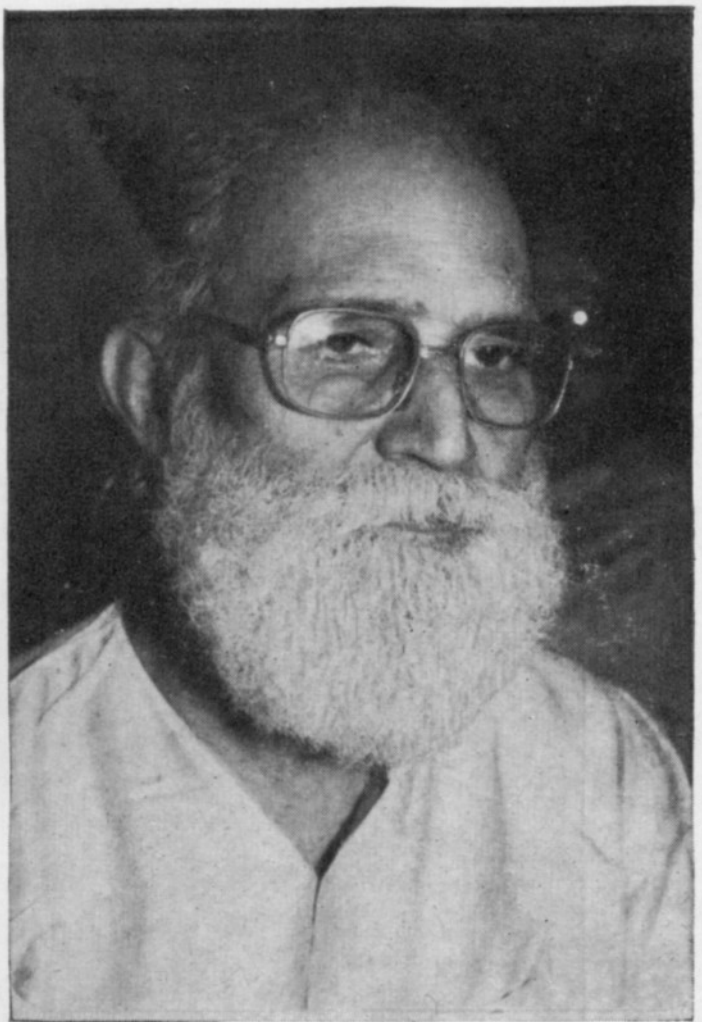
On November 7th and 8th there were feast for *sādhus* and for the *vratis* and on the 9th uninterrupted kirtan from dawn till late in the evening.

Two devotees had come from France to participate in the Samyam Vrata and a German who lives in Delhi for part of the week. They declared that they felt Ma's presence as potent as when She was with us physically.

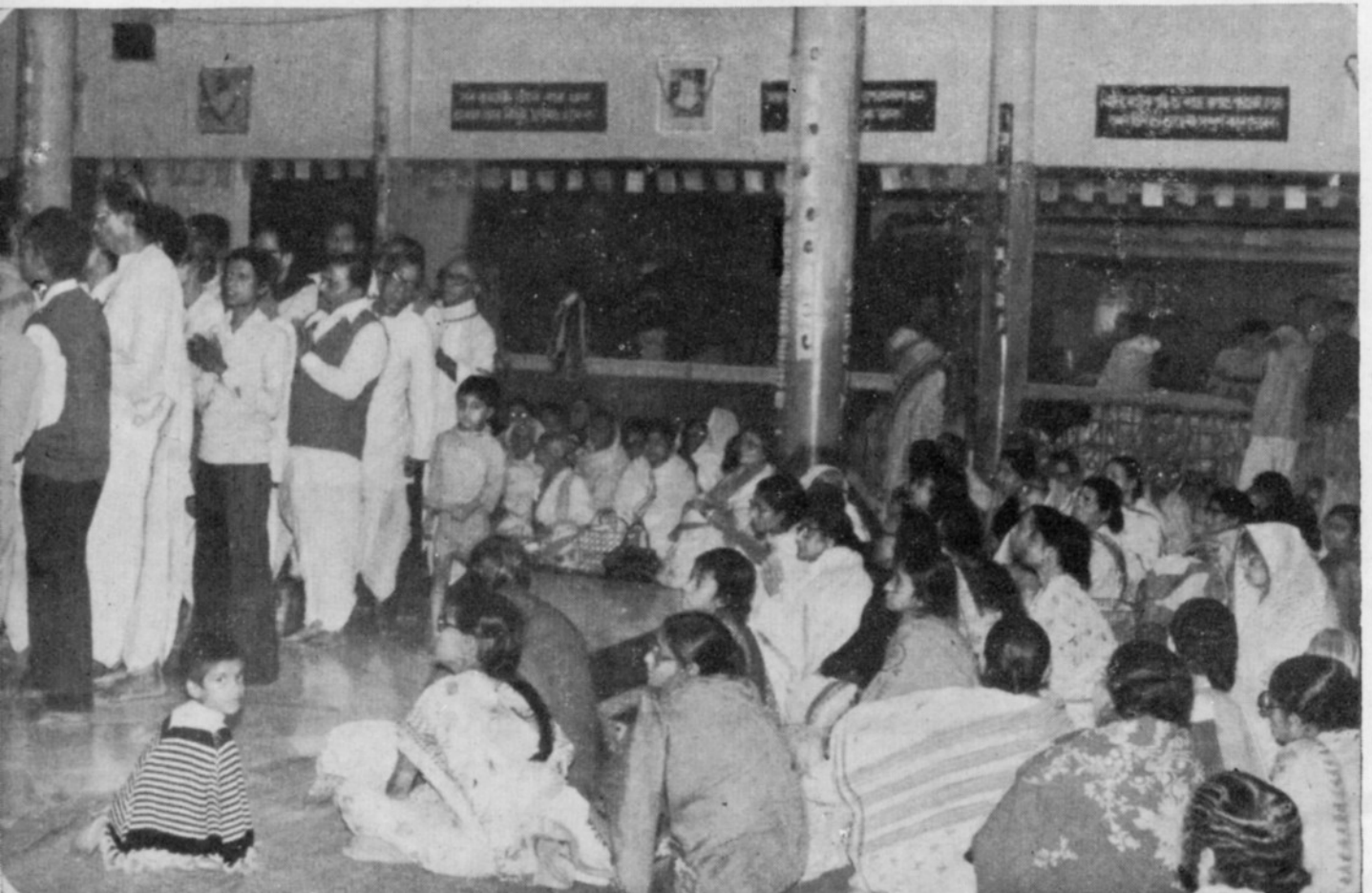
Saraswati Puja on Vasant Panchami day, January 26th, is to be celebrated in the Pune Ashram and Siv-ratri on February 7th at Bhimpura. Of course these festivals will be observed in all other Ashrams as well.



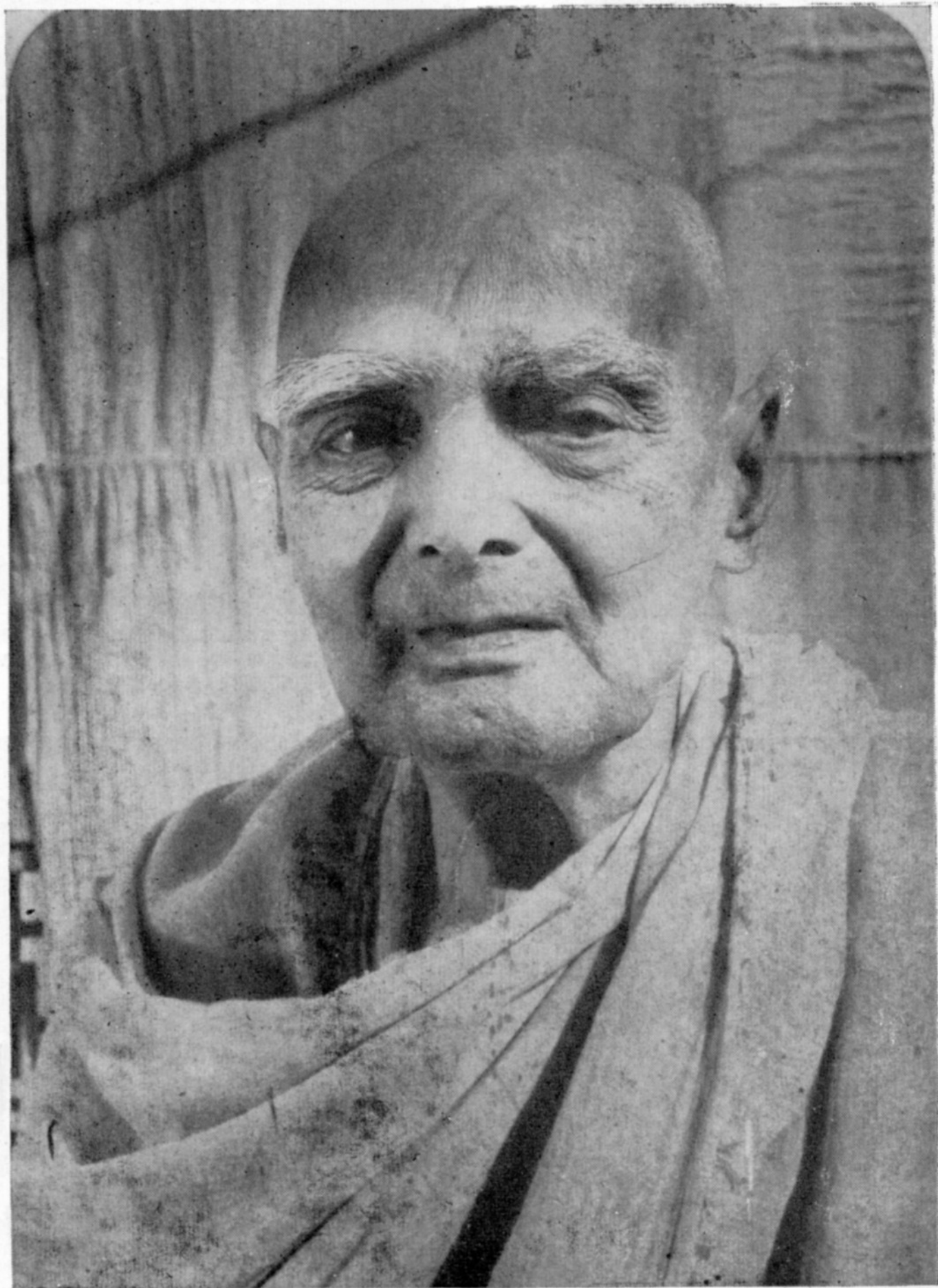
MA being worshipped daily at Agarpara Ashram



Sw. Chinmoyanandaji, the Seniormost amongst the resident Sannyasis now of MA's Ashrams.



A view from the "Nam-Yagna" held in the Ashram



Swami Niranjanananda (Br. Jogesh) who left on 10th Nov. 1984

In Memoriam

Swami Niranjanananda (Jogeshda)*

1890-1984

In the night from 10th to 11th November 1984, Swami Niranjanananda, known to all as "Jogeshda" left his body at the age of 94 in our Varanasi Ashram, which is situated within the *Mukti Kshetra*. He was one of the oldest and sincerest devotees and ashramites.

Being the offspring of a Brahmin family of Dhaka, his original name was Jogesh Chandra Rai. Since his early youth he had been inclined toward the life of a sādhu and did not get married. For a couple of years he was a brilliant student at the Medical School. Then he took part in the struggle for political freedom and also underwent a prison term. When he had his first darshan of Ma in 1925 or 1926, he was working as an assistant in the Health Laboratory of Dhaka.

He was a good singer and used to sing beautiful songs to the Divine Mother. He heard about Ma from various people and so went to Shahbagh. As first he could see only Ma's feet as Her face was completely covered. He felt attracted by the beautiful kirtan and came again and again. Once Ma requested Bholanath to ask Jogeshda to sing

* See also 'Ananda Varta', XXIII/I, Jan. 1976 "A momentous year in the life of Jogeshda."

a bhajan. This became a regular feature twice a week. When after some time Ma's face was uncovered during kirtan, Jogeshda was fascinated by the light on Her face and the radiance of Her inner beauty.

One day during kirtan Ma was in a very exalted *bhāva* (mood), moving about all over the hall, at some moments looking terrifying, then again peaceful and blissful. Suddenly She climbed on Jogeshda's shoulders and stood there, while he was sitting crosslegged on the floor. The next moment She was flat on the ground doing *pranāma*. Everyone started marvelling at Jogeshda's good luck. When asked how he had felt when Ma had stood on his shoulders, he replied: "As if a little girl was standing there, hardly any weight at all."

One day, Ma sent for him and asked him through Bholanath to take one year's leave from office. When he returned after having done this, Ma talked to him alone. This was the first "private" Ma granted to anyone. After this the practice of giving private interviews started.

Ma asked Jogeshda to wander to places where he was not known, without taking money with him, and to subsist on begged alms for one year. Before leaving he was to inform his mother only, but no one else, shave completely and then remain unshaven for the whole year. If by chance he should meet Mataji and Her party he was not to approach them. When the year would be over he should return to Ma.

He did as he was told, although begging his food was extremely difficult for him and he sometimes preferred to remain without a meal. When he had gone to say good-bye to his mother, his sister-in-law gave him Rs. 10/-. With this money he took the train to Hardwar, where he found it bitterly cold. (*He trekked about in the North, also to Dehradun and Kashmir.*) When his clothes became shabby and his hair and beard grew, he began to look like a sādhu and it became easier to get food.

When he returned to Ma after a year, he looked so different, people could hardly recognize him. Ma told him to have a photo of himself taken in that condition and then shave off his hair and beard and return to his job. She said: "For the present this much is enough. Later we shall see what comes to pass."

Off and on Ma would entrust to him various duties. Later when he left his job and became a brahmachari in our Dhaka Ashram, he became the priest of the Annapurna temple. In the early days Ma once asked him to observe *mouna* for five years, which he did. When the Ashram at Uttarkashi was started, Mataji put him in charge of the Ashram for some time. He had taken *dīksā* from Bholanath. When Bholanath went to Tarapith to practise sādhana, only Jogeshda accompanied him. Jogeshda also went with Ma when She visited South India for the first time in 1930 with Bholanath, Gurupriya Devi, Swami Akhandananda and others. After returning from South

India, Ma went to Jamshedpur where Jogeshda's younger brother, who worked in that town, had organized a kirtan and Ma had *bhāvas* there after a long interval.

During Bholanath's last illness at Kishenpur in summer 1938, Mataji sent Didima, Didi and Swami Akhandananda to Varanasi. Only Jogeshda was allowed to remain and nurse his guru. When Bholanath passed away, Jogeshda, Hariram Joshi and the vaidyas took the body to Hardwar for immersion in the Ganges.

When in 1959 the Śiva Temple in memory of Bholanath and "Matri-Mandir" were consecrated in the Kishenpur Ashram, Jogeshda became the priest of the temples and was put in charge of the Ashram and of Kalyanvan for several years.

When Gurupriya Didi became seriously ill, Ma asked Jogeshda to recite daily the whole of Durga Sapta Śati. Being fully occupied with his other duties, he did this for years every morning from 3 to 4 a.m.

In February 1961, brahmacharies Nirvanananda, Bhaskarananda and Nirmalananda were initiated into *Naisthik Brahmacharya*. Mataji asked Jogeshda to take initiation along with them and gave him the name 'Niranjanananda'. However he did not use his new name, he preferred to be called "Jogeshda". However, only about 3 or 4 years ago, Ma had the *kheyāla* that *atur samnyāsa* should be conferred on Jogeshda and so he became Swami Niranjanananda and adopted the ochre robe. This happened at Varanasi.

Jogeshda enjoyed robust health throughout his life until a few years ago when he began to suffer from arthritis and could not walk. For half a century he served Ma and Her ashrams indefatigably. He was totally devoted to Ma and carried out Her orders unquestioningly. He was able to bear any number of hardships and do any amount of work cheerfully and without a murmur. Of course, when he was burdened with heavy responsibilities and varied activities he expected his co-workers to be as dedicated as himself and when they disappointed him he flared up in anger. In his old age he became serene, calm and was always cheerful. He never gave a thought to his infirmity and was in excellent spirits all along. In fact he was a tower of strength for the Ashramites who sought his advice, and cherished his presence among them.

For the last few years, Ma had settled him in the Varanasi Ashram where his niece or at times a nurse attended on him. Mataji had told him : *"Vishwanath jabe ashray den sei āshā thaka !"* *"Stay here patiently until Vishwanath gives you shelter."* He therefore was determined to remain in Varanasi for the rest of his time on earth. A few days before he left his body he developed breathing difficulty, urinary trouble, etc. and so was taken to our hospital across the street. Since treatment was not effective he was brought back to his room at the Ashram, where he passed away the next night very peacefully, doing japa to his last breath.

We lose the physical company of our friends when they leave their bodies but they remain with us in spirit. Jogeshda had dedicated his life to Ma and Her service, he had no other interest. For all eternity he rests in Ma.

Announcement

The Calcutta Zonal office of Shree Shree Anandamayee Charitable Society and its Publications Division have been already shifted to its new premises at Matri-Mandir—57/1, Ballygunge Circular Road, Calcutta 700 019 on and from 15.9.84 and therefore all correspondences and transactions in regard to the above offices should now be made to the new address only viz. at 57/1, Ballygunge Circular Road, Calcutta 700 019 (Phone : 47-1993).

By Order

Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha

TARAPITH

P.O.-TARAPUR, Dist. BIRBHUM, W. B.

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

Shree Shree MA Anandamayee Ashram

Tarapith (Birbhum)

This year *Shree Shree Vasanti Puja* will be celebrated in the above ashram between Wednesday the 13th of Chaitra and Sunday the 17th of Chaitra—B. S. 1391 (27th March to 31st March 1985).

In addition to the above function, *Shree Shree Annapurna Puja* and *Shree Shree Ram Navami day* will be celebrated, too, in the said ashram on the *Astami* day and the *Navami* day respectively. The special daily puja of *Shree Shree Tara Mata* will also continue as per programme. As we do not see it possible to extend formal invitations or to despatch detailed programmes of these functions to the devotees individually, we hereby extend our cordial invitations—through the columns of our popular Quarterly—ANANDA-VARTA—with the genuine hope that they will participate in the functions in large numbers thereby making our endeavours a grand success.

Jai MA

For enquiries,
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42-3173

Sri Utpal Ray
On behalf of the Managing
Committee
Shree Shree Anandamayee
Sangha
Tarapith, Dt. Birbhum,
W. Bengal.

Man should address all his appeals and petitions to God and pray to Him regularly. The One who creates, preserves and destroys — in Him is everything indeed. If anything happens in one's worldly life that causes distress and anguish, one should endeavour to cleave to God's Name by all possible devices and cry at His feet. There can be peace only when God Himself, the fountain of peace, who is the end of everything, has been enthroned in one's heart.

—Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi

By Courtesy of :

The Asiatic Air Products & Chemicals Ltd.

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