



# **Anandamayi Ma :** **The Mother, Bliss-Incarnate**

*With a Foreword by*

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Dedicated to the  
Mother's Devotees

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## FOREWORD

Fully conscious of my limitations, I feel it highly embarrassing to comply with the request to write this foreword.

Once an unknown village girl of Bengal with no formal education beyond the elementary stage, Anandamayi Ma came to be recognised in course of time as the teacher of teachers, the *guru* of *gurus*. Eventually she has emerged as the Universal Mother, radiating love and light to millions in the East and the West.

Books can give us learning; scholars can give us guidance in study and research; saintly persons can infuse enthusiasm for the correct way of living. Anandamayi Ma does all this and more — she inspires and illuminates. Her teaching, if devoutly followed, enables one to face life's problems with fortitude and ultimately to accept death as life's fulfilment.

The present book includes the gist of a rich collection of Anandamayi Ma's sayings, some interesting anecdotes — mostly narrated from an objective point of view — and some glimpses of the Mother's mystical Being as caught by the author.

The author has had the good fortune of being closely associated with the Mother from time to time since his first *darsana* in 1947. A member of the English Bar (Lincoln's Inn.), he is a retired Professor of the University College of Law, Calcutta, and ex-Editor of the *Indian Law Review*.

The book is a valuable addition to the existing Anandamayi literature.

Vrindavan  
Dol-Purnima, 1982

Triguna Sen

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE\*

The mystical life of Anandamayi Ma is not on the surface for man to see. The drama centred on her, as enacted before the world's eye, reflects just an insignificant aspect of Anandamayi Ma, a 'Phenomenon' with dimensions of spirit not familiar to us. What passes in the depths of the spirit is beyond the comprehension of one who has not achieved deep spirituality. I confess I have very little of it.

Fortunately, however, Ma out of her own kindness accepted me as a 'child' even at my first *darsana*† in 1947, a momentous event of my life. She has since then graciously given me, from time to time, unique opportunities to have faint glimpses of the mysterious working of the Divine Will in every action of hers, be it big or small according to our estimation.

During the forties and fifties of this century the calls on Ma's time were not so pressing as in later phases, nor was the swarming crowd of seekers of *darsana* so formidable. Thus, Ma's doors were in those days open to me. Occasionally she granted me the privilege of accompanying her to her quiet retreats on the Himalayas — Ananda Kasi and Uttar Kasi ; and to her secluded *ashramas* at places of pilgrimage such as Vindhyachal and Naimisaranya, Puri and Rajgir.

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\*Vide Epilogue.

†*Darsana* literally means 'sight' or 'vision', in this context : "to be blessed with the Mother's sight and presence". Vide Prelude.

At these places I was blessed with Ma's company in homely surroundings and found her in a specially communicative mood. Unfortunately, at that time I lacked not only the proper spiritual urge but also the background necessary for deriving full benefit of *matrisanga* ( the Mother's company ). Truly speaking, I was not then much interested in religion or spirituality. Yet the very presence of the Mother was a wonderful source of indescribable *ānanda* ( joy ). What attracted me most was Ma's overflowing *motherliness* in the truest sense of the term. The tender care with which I was treated by her was simply overwhelming. Indeed, I was amazed to note that Ma was not indifferent even to my ordinary physical comforts. Thus was established the closest relationship of mother and son, in which there was not the slightest scope for any artificial barrier of social etiquette or the cold formality of decorum. Never have I experienced such deep affection with so much detachment.

On returning home after short periods of close association with the Mother I used to ruminate on what my mind had succeeded in treasuring up out of the uplifting thoughts and ideas expressed by Ma in her informal conversation. I recorded these reminiscences in the form of a diary kept for my private use only. So, I could say with the poet :

"Give me to warble  
My plaintive numbers  
For my own ears only !"

Thus I derived the self-rewarding satisfaction of being mentally with Ma.

Some time in the mid-seventies, Brahmacharini Atmananda, Editor of the *Ananda Varta* ( Quarterly in English ), requested me to assist her by writing for her paper some articles on Ma. Prompted by the desire to be of some little assistance to a noble mission, I welcomed the opportunity. Several articles contributed by me have since been serially published in the *Ananda Varta*. I acknowledge my deep debt of gratitude to Atmanandaji for guidance, encouragement and valuable suggestions.

My articles were based partly on my diary and partly on

- (a) the Mother's sayings heard by me or as tape-recorded or culled from letters dictated by her ;
- (b) Anandamayi literature\* and unpublished manuscripts ;
- (c) Discussions with Ma and her close associates including some who have ceased to be in the land of the living, such as Didima ( the Mother's mother ) and Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj, the great savant.

Many invaluable writings are lying buried in the almost forgotten back issues of the *Ananda Varta* ( 1952-1982 ), some of which are out of print. In these pages I have, therefore, given copious extracts from, and summary of select portions of, that esteemed journal - particularly the features *Matrivani* and *Matrilila* and the articles signed by Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj and Brahmacharini Atmananda.

In or about 1980, some readers of the *Ananda Varta* expressed their desire that my articles mentioned above should

\*Vide My Sources, p. 279.

be published in the form of a book. At first I was a little hesitant. I approached Ma, then in Delhi, for light and guidance. She appeared to be absolutely indifferent. Far from encouraging me, she put a rather embarrassing question: "Did I ask you to write on me?" Then she was pleased to add that she would neither give the permission sought nor withhold the same. I felt disappointed and depressed. I wondered if it had not been audacious of me even to have written magazine articles on Ma. My first impulse was that the idea of publishing the proposed book should be dropped altogether. At this juncture, Ma one day smiled at me, as if to 'appease' me, and gently remarked that she would, as a rule, have nothing to do with any publication regarding herself, but made it perfectly clear that we were, however, at liberty to do whatever was considered proper, and that without any reference to her.

The freedom of action thus granted offered no solution to the dilemma in which I had found myself placed. I, therefore, sought the advice of Swami Paramanandaji Maharaj. He assured me that there was no cause for apprehension that my desire to write on Ma had been disapproved by her. After going through the type-script he said that the proposed book should be published and that my hesitancy was not justified. An extract from his letter will explain:

Vrindavan

*Dol-Purnima, 1982*

My dear An'ida,

The type-script of your proposed book has been read over to me. I have noted your point of view that you cannot

give a true and full picture of Anandamayi Ma's life and teaching. But then who can? Still, books on Ma are necessary and may be useful, if written and read in the right spirit. A correct statement of facts about Ma collected from authentic sources claims publication without delay. Your chapters devoted to Ma's sayings are indeed illuminating and inspiring, although you seem to be not quite happy with the English rendering. Regarding your apprehension that your views may be unacceptable to many readers: well, does that really matter? That you have taken great pains is clear from your footnotes, so valuable for future research on Ma's life and teaching. I have no doubt that your reminiscences, if published in the form of a book, will be interesting and beneficial to Ma's devotees for whom the proposed publication is primarily meant. Ignore what others say and go ahead with your work in the service of the Mother.....

Paramananda

Swamiji's encouragement made me agree to the publication kept pending for years on account of my indecision.

This book, a collection of my articles mentioned above, as revised in the light of suggestions from some readers of the *Ananda Varta*, does not claim any originality. It is just a garland of assorted flowers offered at the feet of Ma, and these flowers were culled from different sources, interspersed with priceless jewels, namely the gist of some untranslatable sayings that have welled out of Anandamayi Ma's lips.

I have tried to be faithful to the original Bengali without doing violence to the English language. I have failed to

bring out the grace and dignity of the original for lack of my power of expression through a medium which is not my mother tongue. Besides, the nuances of the language used by the Mother in her inimitable style of conversation do not bear the strain of translation into English. In fact, the magic of her accents in her native dialect of East Bengal is difficult to recapture even in the Bengali dialect spoken by the residents of Calcutta. Lastly, printed words cannot possibly communicate to the reader the unique effect produced by a happy and harmonious combination of the Mother's sweet voice and soothing glance, her genial smile and inspiring gestures. English translation of non-English words has been given within brackets in appropriate places in the text. Correct pronunciation of such words has been indicated in diacritical marks in the Glossary.

Any attempt to interpret what has always been admitted to be uninterpretable must ultimately prove to be an exercise in futility. Naturally, no such attempt has been made. But my association with the Mother extending over more than three decades gave me the unique advantage of catching glimpses of certain phases of Ma's open life. I have tried, in these pages, to offer my fellow-travellers some clues which may prove useful to them without, of course, creating any sort of bias in any particular direction.

Incidentally, let me make one point perfectly clear — all that is said here falls far short of what should have been said and differs from the original as a picture does from a living person.

Glimpses of Ma caught by the camera sometimes reveal

Ma more effectively than pen-pictures. Here is the impression of two Europeans :

"These photographs," observes a noted German writer, "have a life of their own. For the one who can feel them, they emanate vibrations which remain mysteriously linked to their source in Ma. There are people far away in other continents whose lives have been radically changed through such a photograph. For Ma, contact with the everyday world is not severed when She suddenly assumes Her 'saintly' posture. The dividing line is paper-thin. When the photographer indulges in some professional acrobatic — almost flat on the stomach — in order to catch a particular shot of Ma, the expression of contemplation on Her face disappears, swept aside by infectious hearty laughter to be replaced in a split second by the serenity of the liberated soul. The transitions are breath-takingly fast."\*

And a Frenchman records his reaction to Ma's pictures as follows :

"When I had only just completed my studies, lost among the various problems that confront a youngman hardly prepared for life, I, one day, in a book-shop, glanced casually through the pages of *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda. Among all the photos of austere sages and venerable old men that illustrate the work, the picture of a very young woman with closed eyes struck me like a shock. She seemed extraordinarily beautiful and I thought : this is the Woman, the Mother, the Virgin.

\**Ananda Varta* XXII/2/84.



Eight years later some one presented to me the beautiful book *INDIA* by the English photographer and writer Richard Lannoy. As I turn its pages, the face of an elderly woman with a look unlike any other, touches me to the quick. I am reminded of the meaning of the name Krishna: 'he who steals the hearts'. I do not even skim through the rest of the book: it has remained open on that page and never been closed again.

\*                      \*                      \*

The more I observe Ma Anandamayi, the more I am struck by the extreme changeability of her expressions. This is in fact the first thing one notices when comparing all the photos that have been taken of her: one can hardly believe that they are of the same person. All those who have come to her have observed this diversity.\*\*

Lastly, let me acknowledge my debt of gratitude to all from whom I have received suggestions, assistance, guidance or encouragement. Some of them, including a few revered monks, do not desire their names to be disclosed. Out of respect for this sentiment no names are mentioned.

*Dol Purnima, 1983*

Anil Ganguli

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*\*\*Mother as seen by Her Devotees, pp. 60, 66.*





## PRELUDE

### MY FIRST DARSANA OF ANANDAMAYI MA

It was one of the coldest nights in Northern India — January 31, 1947. The Calcutta-bound Delhi Express was about to leave Delhi Junction Railway Station. I was rushing frantically from one end of the platform to the other in search of accommodation on the train. The porter led me to a vacant compartment and then went away to his other duties. I occupied one of the upper berths — a fact which eventually proved to be of great significance.

Soon after, some important-looking gentlemen claimed that the compartment had been reserved for Anandamayi Ma and I realized that law, equity, convention — everything was against me. I deserved to be turned out of the compartment as a trespasser. However, I was not; on the contrary, I overheard the sweet voice of a Bengali lady — “Leave *Baba* (the poor child) alone; he is so tired!” I could not see the lady, but was agreeably surprised and deeply touched by the sympathetic tone of her voice. The sense of the words uttered by her was comforting, the sound simply captivating. My first impulse was to be chivalrous and to leave the compartment. But expediency prompted me to feign sleep. In fact, I did fall asleep within a few minutes, not caring for my fellow-passengers, nor did they bother themselves about me.

Early the following morning I awoke, refreshed by sound sleep. The glow in the eastern sky indicated that sunrise

was near at hand. From my upper berth I could see the lower one on the opposite side occupied by a motherly lady with a radiant face and a pair of sparkling eyes. A cluster of her black silken hair was overflowing her pillow and swinging in rhythm with the movement of the train. Her gracious gaze, focused on me, seemed to penetrate into every fibre of my being. It was so loving, so soothing! I was told later on that she was Anandamayi Ma and that by such a gaze she often made, as it were, an X-Ray examination of a person's personality. Be that as it may, I seemed to read a mystic message in that gaze - a message of love and peace. My eyes were automatically closed in silent salutation. After some time I recovered from the bewildering effect of the first *darsana* and opened my eyes to find the Mother's face covered. I was disappointed.

As the day dawned, I came down from my upper berth. I wanted a seat on the berth below mine. It was occupied by a lady saint who looked the very picture of peacefulness. Later on, I was told that she was Didima, the mother of Anandamayi Ma. Didima was then immersed in meditation. She did not speak to me but offered me a seat on her berth and then sprinkled holy Ganga water on my head. I appreciated her courtesy, but not the chilling effect of the drops of water that had moistened my forehead that cold winter morning. However, I accepted the kindly gesture without protest and quietly sat down.

Soon I realized, to my dismay, that my fellow-passengers were all ladies and I was the only male in the compartment. I felt extremely embarrassed and out of place. The Mother

continued to remain covered up as before and was absolutely motionless. The impression of my first *darsana* kept my mind fully absorbed. Barring the noise of the running train, there was complete silence. Didima suddenly broke it by mildly warning me that I should not touch certain of her belongings. I was not quite familiar with the rules governing the orthodox Hindu way of life; naturally, my uneasiness in the company of my fellow-passengers increased. Concluding that discretion would be the better part of valour, I packed up my bedding and prepared myself for a change of compartment.

Meanwhile, I noticed that the Mother had uncovered her face and was sitting on her berth, tenderly looking at me. The train stopped at a wayside station and I tried to leave the compartment. However, the Mother would not let me go. Gently she asked me, "Where are you going?" Instead of replying to her question, I simply apologized to her for my trespass into a ladies' compartment. She uttered two words in an East Bengal dialect offering me a seat beside her. I gratefully accepted the kindly gesture and was thrilled with a peculiar sensation of love, peace and joy. The Delhi Express moved on slowly. Sitting so close to the Mother, I had the delightful feeling that I was being caressed by my own mother. It was a unique experience indeed! The Mother's very presence inhibited speech. For some time there was no exchange of words between us until she broke the silence with several questions of a personal nature, and then we talked on various subjects, which did not include religion or spirituality.

Occasionally, our conversation was enlivened by the intermittent intervention of a middle-aged lady with an impressive appearance and an imposing personality. Later on, I came to know that she was Gurupriya Devi (popularly known as Didi, that is to say, elder sister), authoress of *Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi*. On recalling the next turn of events I blush at my impertinence and tactlessness. Didi offered me *prasada* (sacramental food offering) at a time when I was hungry. However, there was a snag in her offer. She added that she was waiting for me to change my clothes (in accordance with the convention observed by orthodox Hindus) before I took *prasada*. I told her that I was not in the habit of changing clothes in the morning, adding that I should be much obliged if I got some food from her, otherwise I would have my breakfast elsewhere. My apathy to *prasada* was bad enough and my attitude worse still. Didi looked sullen. The Mother, however, seemed to be indulgent. She observed with a smile that the rules regarding changing of clothes were not for me. This one gesture from her was enough for Didi to be all smiles and she gave me *prasada*. I appreciated the Mother's liberal outlook and enjoyed the delicacies received from Didi.

Our conversation, temporarily interrupted by the *prasada* episode, was resumed by the Mother. Without any preamble she asked me to sing a song, and I immediately sang a Tagore song which was followed by an unprecedented experience... the Mother seemed to be pleased with my performance and asked me to sing more songs. For a normal listener one musical recital by me would have been more than enough.

Incidentally, I told the Mother how several years ago, my prospects of becoming a great musician had been ruined by a well-meaning connoisseur of music who regularly used to listen to my daily voice-training practice. Once he wondered whether I thought that my voice was in tune with the accompanying stringed instrument. Hearing my confident answer in the affirmative, he remarked in despair, "Well, if that be your assessment, I am afraid music is not in your line." Thereupon I bade good-bye to music.

I had previously narrated this sad experience of mine to several persons. Every listener enjoyed the fun, laughed at my cost for a few seconds and there the matter ended. But the Mother's reaction was simply amazing and almost alarming. An insignificant event, or rather an adverse opinion, spoiling the doubtful prospect of my becoming a great musician seemed to prove hilarious enough for the Mother to create quite a scene. She suddenly burst into a loud laughter which continued until she was half exhausted. After a short pause, she started laughing again and would not stop until she was almost out of breath. This fit of convulsive laughter went on relapsing at short intervals. The Mother's face turned red, tears rolled down her cheeks and at times she seemed to be almost reaching the point of suffocation. All this was terrifying beyond measure. Didi sternly stared at me with a look of consternation and I felt I was supposed to be responsible for the mischief. I failed to realize how I was at all to blame. I never had the faintest idea that my simple narration could possibly lead to such a serious climax. I had a mixed feeling of embarrassment and apprehension at

this unforeseen calamity. I regretted my original decision to continue travelling in the ladies' compartment, and now I learnt, from practical experience, that the Mother was absolutely unpredictable. Didi gently suggested to me that the mischief could be remedied by offering prayer to the Mother. I considered it worthwhile to experiment. With all the sincerity I could command, I prayed to God (and not to the Mother as advised) that nothing untoward might happen to the strange lady. Instantaneously the Mother again became as charming as before — a gentle smile replaced her roaring, erratic laughter and the alarming symptoms completely disappeared.

The train stopped at an important station — Fatehpur, if I remember aright. Several devotees forced their way into our compartment and prostrated themselves in salutation to the Mother. I thought it was also my duty to do so. As the train left the station I bowed to the Mother in reverence and was about to touch her feet when Didi admonished me indicating that my conduct had been objectionable. I could not understand why, as it is the time-honoured custom of Hindus to touch the feet of a superior person as a mark of respect for him or her. I did not know if there was any special reason for not touching the Mother's feet. I imploringly looked at the Mother, expecting support from her. Had she not already rescued me from several awkward situations? On this occasion even the Mother did not come to my rescue. In fact, she seemed to approve of Didi's objection. She would not permit me to touch her feet. I felt hurt. Had I not begun inwardly to regard her as my mother?

What did she mean by depriving a child of its natural right and privilege to touch its mother's feet? Anyway, I quickly finished a formal salutation from a distance and immediately thereafter I left the Mother's berth for the one on the opposite side.

Soon after, my heart leapt with joy when suddenly the voice of the Mother reached my ears — "Why not come to this berth?" I looked at her and noticed an apparently mischievous smile on her face. I came back to the Mother and she resumed talking to me, as if nothing had happened. This was enough for me to forget my childish pique. The Mother asked me whether my people would expect me in Calcutta on the morrow. I said, "No, Mother". "That's very good!" observed she. I failed to understand the implication of such a remark. Her second question was: "Is anyone coming to meet you at the Railway Station?" I said, "No." The Mother repeated her first remark, "That's very good!" I was unpleasantly surprised, because a repetition of the same remark seemed to confirm her apparently unsympathetic attitude. A mother who alternately attracts and repels seemed an enigma to me. Indeed, her "That's very good!" remained a mystery to me for the time being. Within a few minutes, however, I discovered that it had a deep significance for my future life.

The train stopped at Allahabad, the Mother's destination. I was about to bid her good-bye, when Didi told me that I was to break my journey at Allahabad. Without my knowledge or consent a lower berth from Allahabad to Calcutta had already been reserved for me on the Bombay

mail, the next convenient train for Calcutta. I helplessly saw my luggage being carried to the platform by two bright-looking boys who had come from the city of Allahabad to receive the Mother at the Railway Station. I got off the train as instructed. Apparently I had no option in the matter. The Mother asked me to get into her car. I did so and sat by her side. Our destination was the famous Triveni, the confluence of the rivers Gaaga, Yamuna and Sarasvati. *Arzha-Kumbha Mela*, a periodical congregation of saints and sages,\* was taking place there. The "Ma Anandamayi Camp", consisting of a large number of tents, had been set up especially for the occasion under the supervision of Dr. Pannalal, I.C.S., since deceased.

I stayed at Allahabad as the Mother's guest for about eight hours. She introduced me to Dr. Pannalal, who treated me with paternal care, accommodated me in his own tent and told me in details his rich experience at the feet of the Mother. Then he took me to the dining place for *prasada*. The food served there was more delicious than any I had ever tasted. What added to its charm was the fact that the Mother served one of the items and smilingly told me that I should not feel shy nor hesitate to ask for more, if I wished. Her hospitality was unexcelled. It deeply touched my heart.

After *prasada* Dr. Pannalal again took me to his tent. I asked him many questions regarding religion from a scientific point of view. He genuinely tried to be helpful to me. From his experience he warned me against a strictly ration-

alistic approach and advised me that in the spiritual field there was no alternative to faith. Though not fully convinced by his argument, I was touched by the ring of sincerity in his words which seemed to carry conviction. His views were supported by some elderly devotees, benefited by their long association with the Mother. I was much impressed by the narration of the experience of these venerable persons as recipients of the Mother's grace. It set me thinking from a new point of view. My mind was thus being prepared for the climax yet to come.

The time for my departure was drawing nigh. The sun was sinking down to rest. Its mellowed rays were reflected on the Mother as she was proceeding from her tent to ours. Her face, as seen by me at dawn, was charming; at dusk majestic. The Mother came right up to me and blessed me with her affectionate touch. Then she uttered a few sentences which touched my soul. Her words, too sacred to be repeated and too personal to be disclosed, kindled in me a new type of spiritual aspiration and a new awareness of my duty as a human being. This was the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

\* Vide Chapter 18.

## INTRODUCTORY

### Chapter 1

#### ANANDAMAYI MA, A 'PHENOMENON'

Anandamayi Ma is a 'Phenomenon', a wonder of wonders in the history of spirituality. To enquiries regarding her identity, she replies, "Whatever you think me to be." "It is said", observes Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj, "that from her very birth she was aware of what she had been and what she would always continue to be and that there was no possibility of a deviation from her self-conscious stature for a single moment." Self-illuminated, Anandamayi Ma is a 'Lotus' sprouting full-blown even at her advent, without a *guru's* guidance.

Anandamayi Ma is the despair of her biographer. A biographer's business is mainly to narrate facts relating to a person's life which are definitely known or ascertainable. The concatenation of the events of the Mother's life is not known and even the facts that are known admit of more than one interpretation. It is not therefore claimed that the picture of Ma's life and *lila* likely to emerge out of this narration will be faithful like a photograph which reflects an object as it is. It is also admitted that it may resemble a painting which gives the picture of an object not exactly as it is, but as seen by the painter, partially coloured by his personal emotions and predilections, and subjected to his

preferences and rejections. Incidentally, Ma's photographs also are bewildering. Thousands have been taken, but not a single print leaves on one's mind the same impression as any other.

A biography is expected to deal with one's aspirations, actions and achievements. But so far as Ma is concerned, she says that she has no aspiration, no action and no achievement. Again, normally the greatness of an individual is measured by the greatness of his or her mission. From this point of view also Ma simply baffles her biographer. "This body", she once told me, "has no mission nor anything of the sort."

From the worldly standpoint, Ma holds no exalted position of power nor any political eminence. Hailing from an almost unknown village in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and brought up in poverty, she had no formal education beyond the elementary stage. A member of a conservative Hindu family, she had to observe strict *pardah* (seclusion of women) in her early life and so had practically no contact with the world beyond the four walls of her humble cottage. Yet the name of Anandamayi Ma has since become a household word in this sub-continent, to be uttered with the profoundest veneration; and she who is known by this name has, for several decades, been occupying a unique position of adoration in the spiritual world as the Universal Mother.

Though so great in the field of religion, Ma has no patronising air about her. She has no pretensions — she does not even wear the traditional saffron robes, associated in India with spiritual leadership. She introduces herself

to all and sundry as "your unlettered little daughter" and behaves as such with unexcelled cordiality.

The emergence of such an unknown village girl of Bengal into the Universal Mother seems to us to be an astonishing transition. But the word 'transition' is probably inapplicable to the 'Phenomenon' that is Anandamayi Ma, as distinguished from the 'body' identified by that name. "My consciousness", Ma once told Paramahansa Yogananda, "has never associated itself with the temporal body. Before I came in this earth I was the same. As a little girl I was the same. I grew into womanhood, but still I was the same. When the family in which I was born made arrangements to have this body (meaning herself) married, I was the same. And, Father, in front of you now, I am the same. Even afterwards, though the dance of creation changes around me in the hall of Eternity, I shall remain the same."\*

This oft-quoted saying of Anandamayi Ma, as translated by the Paramahansa, is not easily understood by one not familiar with Hindu philosophical and religious thought. It carries a deep significance — Ma is changeless and eternal. Now, in this ever-changing Universe, nothing can escape inevitable transformation through lapse of time. The only exception is the Supreme Truth, called *Brahman*.† *Brahman* is beyond the limitations of time and space and ever remains the same. Ma also seems to answer to the same description as disclosed by herself to the Paramahansa. According to

\*Auto-biography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda, Jaiico Publishing House, Bombay, p. 448.

†Vide Appendix "A".

the *Gita* and the *Upanishad*, *Brahman* dwells in the heart of every individual and is essentially the same as the 'atma' or Self of each one of us. We are not conscious of our identity with *Brahman*; Ma is. She realizes that she, along with every other person, is *Brahman*. The *Upanishad* proclaims that *Brahman*, otherwise known as *Atman* — the Self — is the only Reality and that It cannot be reached by the senses or by the mind or by any recognised source of knowledge. *Brahman* can only be known by being at one with *Brahman*. An individual who has realized *Brahman* has, as it were, himself become *Brahman*. According to the *Gita*, such a person has attained *Brahmi Sthiti* (divine state). He is comparable to Nietzsche's conception of Superman. Among his characteristics are: joy, serenity, the consciousness of inward strength and of liberation, courage and energy of purpose and a constant life-in-God. He is fully conscious of his Being; in some cases, he gives expression to this realization. Thus, in the *Kausitaki Upanishad*, Pratardan declares: "I am, the *Prana* (the vital breath, explained as *Brahman*). I am the conscious Self." Similarly, in the *Devi-Sukta* of the *Rig Veda*, Vak (a seer, being the daughter of another seer, named Ambhrin), announces with supreme self-confidence that she is "all in all, the Supreme Being". The self-revelation of Thakur Ramakrishna Paramahansa was contemporaneously recorded in authentic books. When he was in the grip of the agony of impending death, Naren (destined to become Swami Vivekananda) thought within himself: "If he would declare his divinity now, in the presence of death, I'd accept."..... Ramakrishna's lips parted and he said in a distinct voice:



"O Naren — Ar'nt you convinced yet? He who was once born as Rama, and again as Krishna, is now living as Ramakrishna within this body — and not in your Vedantic sense."\*

Some of Ma's sayings are comparable to great utterances of Vedic seers such as *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am *Brahman*) and *Tat tvam asi* (That thou art).† Indeed, Anandamayi Ma is the embodiment of the ideal perfection revealed to the mystic seer of the *Chhandogya Upanishad*: "Where one perceives no other, hears no other, recognises no other, there is fullness."‡ "Oneness", as seen by Ma, has been expressed by her in words the gist of which is somewhat to the following effect: "Whether one takes the path of devotion where the 'I' is lost in the 'Thou', or the path of Self-enquiry in search of the 'I' — it is He alone who is found in the 'Thou' as well as in the 'I'. Why should one's gaze be fixed while treading the path? The 'gaze' is He and the way also is He. Whatever is revealed or hidden anywhere, in any way, is 'Thou', is 'I'." The crux of Ma's teaching is Union — conscious union with *Brahman*. Ma confirms this again and again in various ways, through dialogues and parables, through letters and songs. Illustrations have been given in appropriate places in the chapters that follow.

When Ma appears to us to be in communion with the Absolute, does she at all take notice of us? This question once happened to be the occasion for Ma to say something

\* *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* by Christopher Isherwood, p.309.

† Vide Appendix "A".

‡ *Chhandogya Upanishad* 7/23-25.

unique about herself. "I am conditioned, as well as unconditioned. I am neither infinite nor confined to limits. I am both at the same time. My will would be irresistible if I expressed it. My being had existed before there was any creation, duration or dissolution of the world. If you say I am conditioned, you confine me within a limit; again, if you say I am limitless, even then you are restricting me."\* By way of illustration, Ma said that she used to take food, a fact which might show that she was subject to the limitation of hunger and pointed out that she was not at all in need of food and that in that sense she was above conditioning.

Whatever may be the 'Phenomenon' that is Anandamayi Ma, my long association with the Mother has, rightly or wrongly, left on my mind an impression that she comprises a two-fold personality existing on two different planes. For the sake of convenience, let me refer to one of these as her 'inner being' and the other her 'outer manifestation'. The 'inner being' seems to be immersed in an immeasurable depth in the ocean of Eternity beyond our comprehension. Perhaps it represents quiet and restful Beauty, changeless at all times and in all circumstances, absorbed in itself and oblivious of the surroundings. To the common man, Ma's 'inner being' may appear cold and taciturn, if not formidable and awe-inspiring.

But her 'outer manifestation' is very human. Overflowing with compassion, Anandamayi Ma is the very acme

\* *Sri Sri Anandamayi Prasanga* by Amulya Kumar Datta Gupta, Vol. 1, p. 128.

of divine graciousness. She does not live in an ivory tower of isolation. On the contrary, she welcomes society and meets the common man at his level. She lives the Eternal Truth revealed to her — ALL ONE; and preaches accordingly. Her message is: "As long as you see this objective world, creation exists for you. There is conflict so long as the notion of dualities, such as "You" and "I", happiness and misery, light and darkness prevail. When the activities prompted by the senses and by outer impulses have been renounced, your *inner Self* will awaken. Then you will be able to fix your gaze on the Supreme Being and be liberated from the bondage of the vision that perceives the world of duality."\*

The 'inner Self' mentioned in the above-quoted passage seems to be God. According to Lord Krishna, "God abides in the hearts of all beings, causing them to turn round by His power as if they were mounted on a machine."† Ma equates God-realization with Self-realization.

What gives the drama of Ma's life a distinctive character is *kheyal*, one of the key words often repeated by her. Let us try to understand what is meant by *kheyal*. It may be recalled that *kheyal* is a style of classical Indian music which gives a singer ample liberty to improvise as he pleases, subject to certain norms. But Ma's *kheyal* is altogether different. "What Mother calls *kheyal*", observes Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj, "is really an upsurge of Will in a parti-

cular direction which is undoubtedly free and not indicated in the plan of things — it is usually connected with the domain of special Will rather than the general will. No law governs this region and there is no interruption in its freedom of activity. Even predestination which takes into consideration the triple flow of time-current is not an appropriate word for an urge which knows nothing but the Eternal Present..... It is also difficult to say whether it is intellectual or volitional. It has all the freshness of a playful and apparently unpurposive act holding within itself incomprehensible possibilities."\*

Once I asked Ma what was exactly the meaning of her *kheyal*. She simply raised her hand upwards, indicating that *kheyal* emanated from above. Thereupon I concluded that the motive force behind Ma's *kheyal* must be the Will of God Almighty. Then, what is the difference between Ma's *kheyal* and an ordinary man's *kheyal* which means a wayward will? The answer to this question is implanted in Ma's saying: "There is only One and nothing but the One. Everything is in the One and the One is in everything." This philosophical doctrine is to Ma not a mere conglomeration of words, but a living truth — a realization that conclusively rules out the possibility of a second entity as the 'I' of an individual, as distinguished from the One — without-a-second. Therefore, so far as Ma is concerned, the question of the existence of an individual will, apart from the Divine Will, does not arise at all. An ordinary individual, however, lives in duality.

\*Mother as revealed to me by Bhajji, p. 111.

†Gita XVIII/61.

\*Mother as seen by Her Devotees; Introduction; p. XXVc.

His will arises from his personal desires. So far as Ma is concerned, she has no individual life. She is in a state of uninterrupted oneness. Naturally, there is very definite difference between Ma's *kheyal* and an ordinary man's wayward will or whim or caprice.

Ma's *kheyal* is usually unpredictable and unconventional and sometimes apparently illogical and devoid of what is according to us rhyme and reason. But Ma is ever benign and gracious. All apparent contradictions of *kheyal* dissolve in her into a perfect sense of poise and proportion, inspiring awe and wonder.\* Yet Ma is full of sparkling humour. Indeed, she is a perennial fund of merriment.

Ma may be called a *crux criticorum* — a puzzle for critics. Inscrutable are her ways and enigmatic her words. Let me not try to explain what is inexplicable.

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\* *Kheyal* is illustrated in Chapter 7.

## Chapter 2

### MA'S 'OUTER MANIFESTATION': SOME PHASES

Ma's 'outer manifestation' consists of her human activities before the public eye; but even these inspire our wonder and admiration. To borrow a beautiful expression from *Vaishnava* literature, it may be described as *lila* (divine sport) which makes us feel that Ma is one of us, sympathetically sharing our joys and sorrows. This *lila* is comparable to colourful pictures seen through a kaleidoscope — pictures of life constantly in motion and rich in varieties. In her *lila*, Ma has from time to time assumed different roles on the stage of life such as daughter, housewife, mother, friend and unofficial *guru*. She generally acts in a manner seemingly similar to the behaviour of normal human beings, occasionally with a touch of the supernatural. What is amazing about her is that she has no 'I-ness', no 'my-ness', no desire, no emotion. Notwithstanding overwhelming evidence of Ma's dynamic and indomitable personality, it seems to me that she is just an Impersonality — unfathomable, inconceivable, inexpressible.

Limitless are the channels through which flows the current of Ma's 'outer manifestation'. Let us start with some glimpses as caught at the first *darsana* by an outsider with a receptive mind. It must be remembered that 'outsider' is a word not to be found in Ma's dictionary. In fact, as already stated, she invariably looks upon every individual

as a spark of *Brahman* — the same as herself. Besides, she generally inspires the feeling, even in a newcomer, that she is not a stranger but his mother, overflowing with affection.

The first experience of a newcomer to Anandamayi Ashram may be a confrontation with a compact mass of men and women jammed in a corridor — being the overflow of the crowd in the hall of *satsanga* (religious congregation), packed to capacity. Once he can inch his way into the hall, he is simply struck by the *darsana* of a motherly lady, sitting still, calm and composed, remarkable for her sparkling eyes and winsome smile, her benign glance and joy-inspiring appearance. The visitor wonders: "Can she be an ordinary human being?"

If the visitor is lucky, he may, in his very first encounter, find Ma in the role of a singer, surrounded by a group of experts, sometimes representing the best musical talent of India. Not long ago, Ma used to lead *kirtana* (the chanting or singing the name or glories of God) and others would follow in chorus. Such occasions, however, are rare now-a-days. Whenever Ma sings, she sings with surprising spontaneity. The verve and vigour, and the cadence of her music are ecstatic. The modulations of her voice vibrate in the heart of the listener and purify his mind. She gives to almost each word of her songs a different inflection and each inflection has a special appeal. The emphasis repeatedly laid by Ma on a particular word or syllable acts as a key to the understanding of its inner meaning. With her eyes half-closed and her tiny palms gracefully folded, she keeps on singing and then a wave of *ananda* (bliss) sweeps over the

*ashram* and floods the sky above. It lingers even after the sound of the music has faded away. "Her singing", remarked a European, "has such force, such vigour that we are shaken in our entire being. This surpasses by far everything of that order that I have had the chance to experience. Something immense that very nearly causes giddiness makes its presence felt among us. We want even more of it. But we feel that we should be unable to bear it."\* Indeed, language is no bar to a foreigner's appreciation of Ma's singing.

Lay listeners feel that Ma's singing has an undefinable quality which not only pleases one's ears, but also infuses something mysteriously thrilling into one's inner self. And renowned musical experts unequivocally confirm that her melodious voice is matchless and perfect is her rhythmic movement. Ma modestly says that she has had no technical training in music. But, she waits for no technical training in any sphere. Indeed, she has a technique of her own, the result of which can be felt by others but cannot be expressed, least of all acquired by anybody else.

The lucky newcomer listening to Ma's *kirtana* becomes almost enraptured. If he is attending an evening session of the *satsanga*, his attention is suddenly arrested by the ringing of a bell at 8-45 p.m., a signal for 15 minutes' *mauna* (silence), a daily ritual in Ma's presence. The lights are instantaneously dimmed and the votaries sit still in one posture, their minds concentrated on meditation of the

\**Mother as seen by Her Devotees*, 1967 ed., p. 64.

Divine. The visitor, if responsive, may then feel subtle vibrations from Ma creating an atmosphere of calmness and serenity. With his eyes closed, he may, like many others, see within himself the image of the object of his worship — whatever it may happen to be — in a new light. During *mauna* some devotees mentally see the image of Ma, the very embodiment of self-effacing meditation. The experience is exhilarating.

A wonderful phase of Ma's 'outer manifestation' is revealed during the period of *matrisatsanga*, an item of the programme of *satsanga* which provides the participants with a special opportunity of conversation with Ma. *Matrisatsanga* is free from the restraint generally inspired by Ma's imposing presence as also from the rigid conventions and rituals that mark *ashram* life as a rule. During *matrisatsanga* Ma is usually in a communicative mood. She is a fantastic conversationist. If she is in a mood to be serious, she keeps the audience awe-struck and there prevails complete silence. If, however, she chooses to be in a lighter vein, she can make everybody in the congregation laugh heartily in response to her keen wit and exquisite humour. During *matrisatsanga* Ma is usually very patient and indulgent and more motherly than any human mother. She then gives her 'children' almost unrestrained liberty and sympathetically attends to questions ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous. Ma's answers are as varied as the questions. They are enlivening, scintillating and inspiring. The wonder of wonders is that every question, however difficult, is disposed of without a moment's reflection. Every questioner gets

the answer he 'deserves'. Every answer is on [the mental level of the particular enquirer, has reference to his peculiar point of view and corresponds to his own power of understanding. Even if somebody is hesitant or too shy to speak and too conscious of being observed by others, his query is often solved in a mysterious manner. Thus, sometimes Ma of her own accord broaches the particular subject and incidentally clarifies the point involved. And sometimes, somebody else asks the very question over which the shy devotee had been worrying. Thereupon, Ma gives a reply which incidentally solves the particular problem. Then follows Ma's penetrating gaze at the person whose question was answered before he opened his lips, accompanied by her sweet and significant smile. Is this just coincidence? May be. But then such coincidences are quite frequent.

Followers of different faiths and members of different sects seek Ma's guidance in *sadhana* (spiritual pursuits preparatory to self-realization) from a practical point of view; erudite scholars want clarification of intricate points of metaphysics with an academic approach. Sometimes pretenders venture to propound meaningless theories with an air of importance, presumably out of sheer bravado. Again, common men of the world find relief in placing their personal and domestic problems before Ma, whereas fastidious cynics recklessly condemn God and expect Ma to answer for His failings. Thus, the questions cover a large canvas and are of varying interest and value. In the homely atmosphere of *matrisatsanga*, Ma generally accepts, for solution, all bona

fide questions, relevant or otherwise, however silly or supercilious, impertinent or irritating.

In *matrisatsanga*, questions relating to worldly affairs are not generally encouraged, and those on politics and personalities are nipped in the bud, whereas queries on spiritual subjects are always warmly received and sometimes discussed at length. Occasionally, Ma requests saints who are present to discuss controversial points in the light of the scriptures. They do their best. But the 'best' of the *Vedantists* following the path of knowledge often happens to be in conflict with the 'best' of the orthodox *Vaishnava*, that is, a votary of the path of devotion. Not unoften a barren debate goes on for some time and then the specialists jointly implore Ma to say the last word on the subject and thus to clinch further argument. Ma smilingly sums up the principle in a few short and simple sentences. With modesty she says that nobody has taught her *shastras* (scriptures) but invariably throws a flood of light which satisfies each of the contending parties and enlightens the whole audience. Then the tension created by experts is relieved and everybody is all smiles. Ma's very presence creates an atmosphere not favourable for fanaticism.

At the Mother's feet bow down in profound salutation devotees and admirers hailing from different countries, professing different faiths and belonging to various social, economic, cultural and intellectual levels. Amongst them are common men and women by the million as also top-ranking persons in all spheres of life such as religion and philosophy, education and literature, law and medicine, trade and industry, politics and administration, science and

humanities, art and culture, etc. Ma receives them with courtesy and consideration, treats them with sympathy and affection and shows her grace on them, without any discrimination. One who seeks, always finds.

If one is not conversant with Bengali and Hindi, presumably the *satsanga* may have no meaning for him. But this is not necessarily so. Once I noticed a foreigner listlessly gazing at Ma with tearful eyes, apparently incapable of understanding what Ma was saying in Bengali. Later on, I asked him: "Do you understand Ma's language?" "No, I do not", he replied, "but who does? Ma's language of the tongue is foreign to me; not the language of her eyes!" Ma's gracious gaze often conveys to a thirsty soul a message of hope and assurance: "You are mine; I am yours!" Perhaps that gaze simultaneously represents Ma's 'inner being' and 'outer manifestation'.

## PART I

AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF LIGHT:  
SOME FLASHES

## Chapter 3

## Early life (1896-1924)

'Anandamayi' means bliss-permeated and 'Ma' means mother. True to her name, Anandamayi Ma is Bliss-Incarnate and a mother to all. Her father, Bipin Behari Bhattacharya, belonged to a highly esteemed Brahmin family of village Vidyakut, now in Bangladesh. A prominent trait of his character was a spirit of renunciation — a natural aversion to worldly things. Though married, he had no attachment to anything in his married life. He dedicated himself to spiritual pursuits mainly through devotional songs.

Anandamayi Ma's mother, Mokshadasundari Devi (popularly known as Didima, that is to say, mother's mother), came of a well-to-do Brahmin family of well-known preceptors. Her father used to be held in the highest esteem for his learning, character and good deeds. Married to Bipin Behari at the early age of twelve, she was immediately confronted with two acute problems — her husband's financial stringency and his growing indifference to domestic matters. Subsequently she suffered a series of bereavements in the loss of her eldest daughter, and later, of three sons

in quick succession. She endured all this, accepting even misery as a gift of God. She gave her surviving children a good upbringing and created a spiritual atmosphere in her house. To Mokshadasundari household work was worship. After her husband's death she renounced the world in 1939 and became Swami Muktananda Giri. She had a large number of disciples and was an institution by herself.

April 30, 1896, was a red-letter day in Didima's life — the birthday of her second daughter, angel-like Nirmalasundari, destined to become Anandamayi Ma. The baby illumined Didima's cottage by the extraordinary lustre of its body. Everybody was happy. But there was a shadow of anxiety as the new-born child did not cry nor did she utter any sound.

"How is it, Ma", I once asked the Mother in quiet surroundings in Kankhal in 1975, "that you did not cry at birth?" She said with a smile: "Why should I have cried?" Presumably there could be no room for tears in Anandamayi. Ma added that she had been looking at a tree near the place of her birth. This statement is important — it shows that the child was responsive to objects of nature even at that stage.

One day when the baby was nine or ten months old, a monk paid a visit to Didima's house and found the sprightly creature crawling on the floor. In no time he became friendly with it, fondled and caressed it and then bowed down, as it were, in adoration to it. Thereafter, he suddenly vanished, leaving a message for Didima couched in mysterious language somewhat to the following effect :

"Whom do you see here ? — the Mother, the indwelling Spirit not only of men and women in the world but of the whole Universe and Beyond ! She is not destined to be contained in a household ; she won't remain here."\*

Time has since shown that this girl of destiny could not be contained in a household and that she belongs not only to Bengal or India but to the whole world. Originally named Nirmalasundari (stainless beauty) or Nirmala, she later came to be known variously as Ma of Shahbag, Ma of Dacca, Mataji of Bengal, Anandamayi Ma (Mother, Bliss-Incarnate) and simply as Mataji or Ma.

Nirmala grew up to be a radiantly beautiful and lovable girl - obedient, ever ready to help, always happy, never voicing any desire, never complaining. Her conduct often seemed incomprehensible even during childhood. In the midst of play, work and meals she would suddenly stop and remain motionless like a statue staring into space for an indefinite period. This created only a sense of concern and perplexity in Nirmala's family. In fact, some of her relations apprehended that she might have been affected by some mental malady.

Sometime in 1978 I once found Ma in a communicative mood, talking with Susila Masima (Ma's cousin, about one year older than Ma) in a small homely gathering of close associates. The two octogenarians were exchanging notes of their recollections of the good old days of their childhood.

\**Śvakṛtva Svarasamīta*, Part II, by Brahmacharini Kumari Chandan Puranacharya, p. 7.

Ma pointed out that Didima had a poor opinion about her daughter's intellectual equipments and gave her nicknames such as *Telley*, *Athaillya* and *Bedisha*, each coinage (derived from East Bengal dialect) suggesting lack of alertness. From Ma's narration it appeared that Susila enjoyed the reputation of being cleverer than Nirmala who was supposed to be not quite upto the mark. Susila Masima modestly disowned the compliments paid to her by Ma in our presence and said that she was a pigmy compared to Nirmala. The more abashed Susila Masima felt, the more did Ma prolong the discussion emphasizing the former's superior intellect. Everybody laughed ; and Ma laughed the loudest. In despair, Susila Masima at last covered her face with the fringe of her *sari*. No one can surpass Ma in the art of innocent fun and delightfully witty teasing. Everything done by her is done to perfection !

Whatever may be the opinion of Susila Masima about Ma's intellectual superiority, the fact remains that such opinion was not shared by others at home. Nirmala's record at school, however, was bright. In recognition of her special proficiency she was promoted at once from the Nursery to Lower Primary standard. But her career at school had to be cut short in about two years owing to certain domestic problems.

At home Nirmala's behaviour was remarkable on the occasion of the death of three younger brothers in quick succession when she was only about 10 years old. To them she used to be an elder sister, a playmate, a nurse and almost a mother. But she remained calm and showed no sign of



mourning. I once asked Ma whether she had felt the pang of separation at the death of her brothers. Her emphatic answer was in the negative together with an explanation for her occasional crying. The gist of our conversation is this : Little Nirmala had accepted the loss of her brothers as a matter of course and there was no question of her mourning. If still she cried, it was only from a sense of duty to her lamenting mother. Whenever Didima wailed, Nirmala would play the role of a mourner. Her tears would naturally touch Didima and induce her to pacify the 'grieved' child. Hardly could Didima understand that there was no sorrow at the root of Nirmala's tears and that there was really no need to console her. Absolutely unperturbed herself, this girl of inscrutable character thus played to perfection the role of a 'mourner-pacifier' which cannot be taken exception to by any standard.

But her conduct in the *Thakurghar* (domestic shrine room or chapel) could hardly be justified. It was my good fortune to hear the story from Ma. "Mother (Didima)", she told me once, "used to caution me that the idol should not be touched. Most unexpectedly, however, the idol would often accidentally be touched by me, but invariably without leaving any impression on my mind as to what had been done. In fact, I would completely forget all about it." Barring certain privileged persons, nobody is allowed to touch an Idol of a Hindu god or goddess. The way in which little Nirmala had behaved with the Idol, notwithstanding Didima's warning, amounted to an act of sacrilege. But the innocent girl took no serious notice of her involun-

tary action nor did she have any qualms of conscience. Was it her unique spiritual status which prompted her to do what she did and then to justify such unconventional conduct notwithstanding Didima's prohibition ?

Once Didima sent Nirmala to the *Thakurghar* with instructions to pray for her (Nirmala's) well-being. Though properly briefed by her mother, Nirmala chose to make a submission to the Deity in a novel way : "Oh Lord ! do what gives you *ananda* (joy) !" Could any submission be more befitting for a girl destined to become Ma Anandamayi ? Was this a portent of the future, a promise of the wonderful days to follow ?

In 1909 Nirmala was married to Ramanimohan Chakravarti when she was not quite 13 years old. For four years thereafter Nirmala lived apart from Ramanimohan — mostly in the house of his elder brother, Rebatimohan, a Railway Station Master, posted at different places in East Bengal. Rebatimohan's wife, Pramoda, took charge of the young bride and assigned to her various domestic chores, e.g. fetching water from a pond, washing and scrubbing, cooking and serving meals. Equally efficient in all kinds of work, Nirmala was most accomplished in one particular duty — looking after Pramoda's children. And they, in their turn, found in her a mother, more motherly than their own mother. In fact, Pramoda's eldest daughter, Labanya, would make no secret of her feeling. Once she felt prompted expressly to tell her aunt that she felt like calling her *ma* and not 'aunty' and wanted her permission to do so. Labanya's mother, amazed at such an unnatural attitude of her child, scolded her for the preposterous suggestion.

Judged by normal standards, the young bride's predicament might arouse pity. Immediately after marriage, her husband lost his job and he lived far away from her; her domestic duties under Pramoda, a hard-task mistress, permitted her no rest or relaxation; the prevailing social customs, including *pardah* (seclusion of women), deprived her of reasonable freedom of speech and freedom of movement. Yet Nirmala was at peace with herself. Such was the early phase of Ma's life lived in a house which was not her home, but only the training centre for her 'outer manifestation' as a housewife. Her 'inner being' seems to have remained unrevealed during this period. Only little Labanya was lucky enough to feel just a touch of it.

To Ramanimohan Nirmala was, from the very beginning, a mystery — a wonder of wonders. His mind was puzzled by a conflict of ideas. She was completely unresponsive as a wife. Ramanimohan hoped she would be all right in course of time. But that time never came. He often wondered: "Is she a goddess in human form?" And how was he received by Nirmala? "In earlier years", she once said, "my parents were my *gurus*; in household life my husband."\* This attitude was quite in accordance with the Hindu tradition. Ma went a step further — she saw in her husband not only her *guru* but the embodiment of Gopal (child Krishna). She also looked upon him as Bholanath (Siva). He will be referred to as Bholanath in these pages hereafter. She instilled into Bholanath spiritual fervour which ultimately

transformed him into an ascetic. From the very beginning theirs was a unique relationship poised on a spiritual plane beyond the comprehension of ordinary humanity. It reminds one of the relationship between Thakur Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Mother Sarada Devi. Let us approach the subject with reverence.

Between 1914 and 1924 Ma generally stayed with Bholanath at his place of work — Astagram (1914 to 1918) and Bajitpur (1918 to 1924). She kept house for him with consummate skill and built a happy home, acting as his friend, philosopher and guide. But Bholanath's peace of mind was disturbed by circumstances least expected. While repeating the name of Hari, Ma frequently used to lose control over her body and developed certain abnormal symptoms. Bholanath advised her a change in her chanting — from Hari to Siva. Ma's 'outer manifestation' readily accepted the suggestion and acted accordingly; but the name of Siva produced the same effect as that of Hari. So far as her 'inner being' was concerned, was not each of these two sounds a symbol of the same Truth, equally potent with the power to create mystical vibrations in her body?

The paradox of Ma's so-called 'married life' became very prominent at Bajitpur. During the day time she used to attend to all the duties of a housewife and proved herself to be an ideal wife. But at night she was in a different role altogether. She would take her seat on the floor of the bedroom and would be translated to a world of her own, completely oblivious of her surroundings. Lying on his bed, Bholanath, often wide awake, would silently watch with awe

\*Mother as revealed to me, by Bhajji, 4th ed., p. 154.

and wonder Ma sitting inert like a statue, but suddenly her limbs would be in brisk motion, her body engaged in various *yogic* postures in quick succession. Ma's complexion also changed from time to time. Quite often the speed of her respiration assumed frightening proportions and occasionally it appeared to Bholanath that she had fainted or might even be on the point of her last breath. The scene was simply bewildering and breath-taking. A solitary spectator to all these nerve-racking transformations on Ma's body, repeated night after night, Bholanath knew not what to do.

Ma's religious ecstasies and many symptoms, suspected to be pathological, became a subject for gossip. As advised by well-wishers, Bholanath consulted an *ajha* (exorcist of evil spirits) and a physician, but in vain. The experts themselves conceded that cure of the supposed malady was beyond their power.

There was another significant aspect of Ma's personality in her early life. Her winsome smile prompted neighbours to call her "Khusir Ma", mother of joyousness. Again, an elderly neighbour, Harakumar, could intuitively see the Universal Mother in her. He announced, with the vision of a prophet, "I have started calling you *ma*; a day will come when the world will follow me."

In 1924, Bholanath was appointed Manager of the Shahbag gardens in Dacca owned by Nawabzadi Pyari Banu. Here Ma's 'outer manifestation' underwent a remarkable change. She became progressively indifferent to household duties. Mostly absorbed in herself, she seemed to be living

in a world of her own and would fall into trance off and on. Was this her dive deep into her 'inner being'?

Notwithstanding all this, generally Ma would not spare herself in doing work which would please Bholanath. He was fond of delicious dishes, and Ma was unsurpassed in the art of cooking. Again, Bholanath loved to invite friends to dinner and Ma would never grudge entertaining them.

Such was the later phase of Ma's life as a housewife — she remained "true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home" by performing domestic duties as far as practicable without undermining the spiritual fire within.

## Chapter 4

### MA OF SHAHBAG

( 1924—1932 )

Motherliness long lying almost hidden and dormant within the wonderful lady who kept house for Bholanath suddenly sprouted and emerged into the light of day at Shahbag wherefrom it passed beyond the narrow bounds of the house supposed to be her home. It made itself felt by outsiders ; and even strangers who saw her for the first time were secretly impelled to call her *ma* (mother). In no time the shy housewife under strict *pardah* (seclusion) came to be known as the Ma of Shahbag to whom some started paying spontaneous homage. But she was fully alive to her obligations under the prevailing social customs. Seemingly reserved by nature, she would not usually appear before any gentleman unless permitted by Bholanath.

To start with, Ma's admirers were confined to a small group of ladies of the middle class society. One Hiranbala Ghose, belonging to a well-known family, used to come to Shahbag every day and pay her respects. Hiranbala's mother-in-law wondered why it should be necessary to go to Shahbag so often ; even if one were religious, religion could as well be practised at home. The daughter-in-law could not exactly explain why she felt mysteriously attracted towards Ma ; but she desperately wanted to visit Shahbag every day. Recalling her past experience, this old devotee of Ma once

told me : "I don't think I used to go to Shahbag for religion. I went there, because I had no peace if I failed to see the young lady even one day."

Hiranbala represented the emotional type of Ma's admirers. To the intellectual group belonged Rai Bahadur Pran Gopal Mukherjee, Deputy Post Master General, Dr. Sasanka Mohan Mookherjee, Civil Surgeon and J. C. Roy, an official of the Central Government posted in Dacca, besides Professors such as Birendranath Mukherjee, Girija Shankar Bhattacharya and Nani Gopal Bhattacharya. Moreover, Ma's admirers included some members of aristocratic families, such as Nawabzadi Pyari Banu, Rai Bahadur Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, a member of the Board of Trustees for the Nawab's estate and Nisi Kanta Mitra, Zemindar of Shyamsiddhi.

A picture of the atmosphere at Shahbag centred on Ma has been given by Dr. Nalini Kanta Brahma, Professor of Philosophy, Presidency College, Calcutta, as follows : "It was a cold evening in December 1924, when I was taken to Shahbag for a *darsana* of the Mother by Rai Bahadur Pran Gopal Mukherjee. We were taken straight to the room where Mother was sitting alone deeply absorbed in meditation. A dim lamp was burning in front of her and that was perhaps the only thing in the room. Mother's face was completely hidden from our view, as in those days she used to veil it exactly like a newly-married village girl. After we had waited there for about half an hour, suddenly the veil loosened itself and Mother's face became visible in all its brilliance and lustre. Hymns containing many *veeja-mantras* ( sound

symbols) began to be recited by the Mother in uncommon accents, producing wonderful resonance, which affected the whole surrounding. The stillness of the cold December night, the loneliness of the Shahbag gardens and, above all, the sublimity and serenity of the atmosphere in the Mother's room — all combined to produce a sense of holiness which could be distinctly felt. .... As long as we were in the room we felt an indescribable elevation of the spirit, a silence and a depth not previously experienced, a peace that passeth all understanding. We came away from Shahbag late at night with the conviction that we had been in the presence of a superior being whom it is difficult to doubt or deny.”\*

Presumably, the professor's deep feeling of reverence was not shared by the common people of Dacca. What attracted them seems to be something more spectacular — Ma's miracle working, such as thought-reading, healing ailments and foretelling the future. The phase of miracles became very prominent at Shahbag, but it did not last long.

Apart from supernatural powers, Ma of Shahbag had an indescribable grace of appearance which wrested the admiration and reverence of the residents not only of Shahbag but also of the whole city of Dacca. No wonder, the Ma of Shahbag soon became the Ma of Dacca. Neither of these two designations was, however, a measure of the plenitude of the individual destined to be the Universal Mother. By the time she was in her late twenties, Ma had outgrown both these names. It was in the fitness of things that she even-

\*Mother as seen by Her Devotees, p. 38.

tually came to be aureoled with an appropriate appellation — ‘Anandamayi Ma’.

Within a short period the name of Anandamayi Ma spread far and wide and she became a celebrity in different parts of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Ma's sanctifying company created among the elite of Dacca a new kind of enthusiasm for *kirtana* (singing of God's name or glories) and *saisanga* (religious congregation) not previously experienced. People belonging to different sections of society and professing different faiths flocked to her. Ma's message to mankind is: “Hindus, Muslims and all other communities in the world are one. They all worship one Supreme Being and call for His mercy. *Kirtan* and *Namaz* are one and the same.”\* Ma's catholicity brought both Hindus and Muslims close to her. Her *kirtana* was superb. On occasions she also chanted verses from the Koran. Once a Mohammedan youth who heard her chanting observed: “The ease and distinctness with which Mother called out the name of Allah was beyond our best efforts.”\*

Apart from householders, some eminent saints also adored Ma even when she was in her thirties. Thus, Thakur Ram Chandra Deva (popularly known as Ram Thakur), regarded as a man of God in East Bengal, offered *pranama* (obeisance by lying prostrate) to her although he was considerably older than Ma who was like a daughter to him. Later on, he offered an explanation for his unusually reverent attitude: “I offered *pranama* to one who

\*Mother as revealed to me, by Bhajji, p. 103

deserved it from me." "She is", he observed, "the Divine Mother Incarnate."<sup>2</sup>

Balananda Brahmachari, the great saint of Deoghar, used to hold Ma in the highest veneration. He once observed: "Ma is not an ordinary spiritual aspirant; she is a realized Being. ....Beings like her require no efforts in the line of spiritual pursuits."<sup>1</sup> Recognition by Balanandaji Maharaj in the manner described above had a profound effect on his disciples, including Sri Mohanananda Maharaj, now himself the *guru* of thousands of disciples in India and abroad.

In 1928 Ma went to Varanasi. Mahamahopadhyay Gopinath Kaviraj, who had her first *darsana* there, has recorded his impression in words as follows :

"What I actually saw with my own eyes far exceeded anything of a like nature I had ever seen before; it was a dream, as it were, realized in life. During the few days that Mother was at Benaras, Kunja Babu's house (where Ma stayed) presented a spectacle of festive jubilation where an unending stream of visitors continued to flow on every day from before sunrise till after midnight. The doors of the house were kept open all the time and everybody was always welcome. High officials, *panāits*, University students, *sādhus*, priests, shopkeepers, lay men and women in the street — all flocked in numbers, each at his own convenient hour, to have a glimpse of *darsana*,

<sup>1</sup>Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī, by Gurupriya Debi, II/84.

<sup>2</sup>Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī, by Gurupriya Debi, I/199.

to pay their respects to her and, if possible, to exchange with her a few words. People of both sexes, of all ages and all ranks, were to be found in the crowd. Some came to have her *darsana* only, a few to have their doubts solved, while others still were there out of mere curiosity. The beauty of it was that all felt a sort of magnetic charm in Mother's personality, so that those who had come once out of curiosity could not resist the temptation of coming back again, no longer out of curiosity which had been satisfied but owing to some mysterious attraction. The fact is that all felt that they were like children in the presence of their own mother. The bleakness of cold formalities was replaced by the warmth of familiarity and intimacy. Mother behaved with them as if they were her own children — dear, affectionate and very familiar. There was not the least reserve in her look nor any note of constraint in her expression. The whole atmosphere was one of a friendly gathering imbued with vivacity and joyousness."<sup>2</sup>

At the very first *darsana* Gopinath spontaneously enlisted himself as a 'child' of the Mother, and so he remained to his last breath. Ma also at once recognised his worth, accepted him as a 'father' and called herself his 'little child'. A few words about Gopinath Kaviraj will not be out of place in this connection, because he seems to have played a most important part in the drama of Ma's life.

<sup>2</sup>Mother as seen by Her Devotees pp. 160-161.

An eminent educationist, scholar, linguist and writer, Gopinath Kaviraj was a living encyclopaedia of *shastras* (scriptures) and a master of different branches of learning, such as Philosophy, Religion, History and Literature. He was the Principal of the Government Sanskrit College, Benaras and was associated with almost all Universities in India as an assessor of research work. Many honorary degrees were awarded to him by different Universities. The Government of India conferred on him the title of *Mahamahopadhyaya* in 1934 and *Padmavibhushana* in 1964. After his retirement from Government service in 1937, several Universities offered him the office of Vice-Chancellorship. He declined to accept any such offer, because he was absorbed in the pursuit of universal knowledge and practical *sadhana*.

This great 'child' of Ma continued for several decades to be the unofficial preceptor of other 'children' of hers. An institution by himself, Gopinath Kaviraj was one of the best exponents of the ideals which Ma stands for. He has written volumes on Ma and on subjects in relation to her. His interpretation of *Agamas*, *Tantras* and *Yoga-Sutras* has illumined the minds of earnest seekers all over the globe. To mention only a few of his great books: *Bharatiya Sadhana O Samskriti*, *Tantra-Sahitya*, *Memots*.

For twenty-four years the Mahamahopadhyaya was the Editor-in-Chief of *Ananda Varta*. Besides, he was the dynamic force behind all publications of the Association known as *Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha*. From 1968 till his death in 1976 he resided in the Anandamayee Ashram at

Varanasi under Ma's special care. The heritage of his illuminating writings and the example of his immaculate life of dedication to the Divine will inspire the seekers of Truth for ages to come.

Let us resume the story of Ma's life at Shahbag. In 1929 a number of eminent Professors of Philosophy visited Dacca in connection with a session of the Indian Philosophical Congress. Some of the delegates had a discussion with Ma in her house lasting for about three hours. A Professor of Wilson College, Bombay, asked a series of questions with reference to which the following remark has been made by Dr. Mahendranath Sarkar, Professor of Philosophy, Presidency College, Calcutta :

"All sorts of questions were put, mostly philosophical, and Mataji was ready with answers spontaneously. There was no hesitation, not the least conscious thinking, nor the least sign of nervousness in her. Her answers hit directly the point, free from metaphysical technique."\* He added that all present were impressed by "the profundity of her wisdom, the fluency of her expression and luminosity of the smile on her face."

Once Dr. Sarkar asked Ma whether she had read philosophy; Ma wondered why such a question was being asked. The Professor said: "The answers that you give to our questions invariably correspond to what books on our philosophy say. Now, how is this possible?" "There is", replied Ma, "a great book of life. To one who has

\*From the *Life of Sri Anandamayi Ma*, by Bitika Mukerji, p. 175

dived deep into it, all truths of your Science, Philosophy and allied subjects never remain unexplored.”\* This reply from Ma set the scholar thinking. Full of genuine admiration for Ma, he and other Professors carried to distant places the message of Ma's easy and conclusive answers to many knotty problems often posed in books but seldom satisfactorily solved.

Among Ma's devotees in Dacca, two seem to have played important roles in the drama of Ma's life—J. C. Roy (later known as *Bhaiji*, elder brother) and Gurupriya Debi (popularly known as *Didi*, elder sister). *Bhaiji's Matridarsana*, translated into English under the title *Mother as revealed to me*, is a priceless exposition of Ma's teaching. No less important was his contribution to the organization of *ashramas* and centres for the spread of knowledge about Ma.

Gurupriya Debi, daughter of Dr. Sasankamohan Mukherji mentioned above, had the first *darsana* of Ma in 1924. She was to Ma at once a daughter and a sister, a friend and an attendant, a counsellor and private secretary. Her *Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī*, an encyclopaedic account of Ma's life and teaching, is a standing testimony to her unparalleled contribution to the cause of spreading informations about Ma and giving publicity to her. Incidentally, Ma is completely indifferent to publicity. To her, there is no difference between eminence and oblivion.

\**Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī Astitama Avibhava Tithi Smaranika*, published by Swami Svarupananda Giri, p. 12.

Under Ma's inspiration an atmosphere of religious fervour was created in Dacca and a genuine spirit of brotherhood grew among her devotees. The need for an *ashram* was now keenly felt and one was founded at Ramna in Dacca in the year 1929, not by Ma but by her devotees led by *Bhaiji*. Ma had no attachment to anything; but she was the guiding spirit of the *ashram* which attracted many spiritual aspirants and seekers of Truth. Ma came to occupy the highest place of adoration in the minds of a large number of residents of Dacca. For years they had been merged deep into the joy of almost uninterrupted *mattisanga* (association with Ma). The climax was reached on the occasion of Ma's thirty-sixth *janmotsava* (birth anniversary) celebrated with great colat in the Dacca *ashram* in May 1932. Continuously for twenty-one days there was a crowded programme of a variety of religious functions, including uninterrupted *kirtana* without a break. Ma attended each and every item and her holy presence created great enthusiasm. Like a presiding deity, so to speak, she used to move about among the assembled devotees in her gracious and soul-kindling way, thus creating a thrill which seemed to electrify the entire atmosphere in a mysterious manner. There was, as it were, a flood-tide of spiritual fervour which uplifted, at least for the time being, all the devotees to unknown heights of moral and religious grandeur. Plunged into the ocean of elevated joy, they experienced the very acme of festive jubilation. They were temporarily translated to the rarefied climate of a new world where they became oblivious of the follies and foibles of their mundane



existence.\* But they did not know that separation from Ma was very near and that they were soon to be thrown into the deepest depth of depression on account of a sudden upsurge of an unpredictable *kheyal* of Ma.

On June 2, 1932, at about 11-30 p.m. when most of the inmates of the *ashram* had retired for the night, Ma declared that she would be leaving Dacca that very night. Her words, uttered in all seriousness and in a strange tone of solemnity, struck everybody dumb. Why this sudden departure? For what destination? For how long? Nobody ventured to put any question. Nothing was disclosed by Ma. When she is in a sombre mood like this, discussion is naturally inhibited among those who happen to be with her. Inquisitiveness has perforce to be checked. What came out from Ma's lips was like an ultimatum — final and irrevocable — hence shocking. Everybody knew Ma meant what she said; and no power on earth could prevent *kheyal* from having its way.

Ma made it perfectly clear that she would wander from place to place according to *kheyal* and that nobody should try to stand in her way. Her firm decision was a bolt from the blue, as it were. Bholanath and J. C. Roy were sent for by Ma. The latter had taken long leave of absence from his office with the idea of going out for a change to some health station. Ma just asked him if he could accompany her. He wanted to know where she desired to go. Ma's cryptic reply was: "Anywhere I choose". Roy silently submitted to Ma's *kheyal* and signified his consent without

consulting even his wife. The atmosphere appeared to be surcharged with solemnity. Bholanath had a short private conversation with Ma and immediately thereafter got ready to accompany her on a journey of unknown destination. An ominous stillness prevailed in the *ashram*. The surrounding darkness of midnight only deepened it. Most unceremoniously Ma left on foot and started walking briskly towards the Railway Station, accompanied only by Bholanath and J. C. Roy with hardly any baggage.

\* *Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi*, by Gurupriya Devi, Vol. II, Ch. XVII.

## Chapter 5

### MATAJI IN NORTHERN INDIA

( 1932—1982 )

Farewell to Dacca marked the beginning of a new act in the drama of Ma's life -- a veritable leap in the dark. The venue was suddenly shifted from a prosperous modern city in East Bengal to a forlorn and fearful wilderness in Northern India. There Ma of Shahbag came to be known as Mataji of Bengal or simply as Mataji.

On June 8, 1932, Ma, accompanied by Bholanath and J. C. Roy, settled down at Raipur, a desolate place in the district of Dehradun at the foot of the Himalayas.\* On the top of a hillock stood a very old temple of Siva in ruins. Bholanath discovered a room close by and selected it for a temporary shelter. It was a dungeon, insecure and ill-ventilated -- verily a horrible place to live in. The surrounding walls and the adjoining courtyard had crevices and fissures harbouring snakes and scorpions. And there was no arrangement for light. Besides, not far away there was a belt of green wood, dotted over with hills and infested with wild animals.

At Raipur *kheyāl* prompted Ma to subject herself to dire poverty, extreme privation and rigorous austerity. Thus, she and her companions lived on boiled vegetables and

milk and occasionally one piece of *chapati* ( unleavened bread ) each, acquired by J. C. Roy through begging in the neighbouring villages. Ma had only two sets of cloth, the spare one being also used as a pillow at night. She had nothing particular to do throughout the day nor any visitor to attend to. She used to stroll around or sit alone in the courtyard and Bholanath mostly remained steeped in meditation. The household chores were managed by J. C. Roy who used voluntarily to act as a faithful attendant. Ma was not in the habit of taking a daily bath. With her dishevelled hair, unwashed clothes and pale and listless appearance, she presented a picture of misery evoking pity.

In 1953, Ma was once pleased to take us to Raipur and to show us round the Siva temple and her erstwhile hovel. She gave us thrilling details of the hard life she had once lived at Raipur and described the amusing reaction of some local women who had become friendly with her. They had taken her for a hapless wife deserted by her husband, turned a mendicant. According to these simple-hearted villagers, Ma had gone half-crazy, pursuing her husband. "Well dear!" said they, "go on repeating the name of Rama; but first take your bath, change your dirty clothes and practise cleanliness; otherwise you cannot expect Rama's mercy or blessings." What a contrast to the hectic days of Dacca -- the life of ease and plenty there, the prosperous *ashram* with an incessant stream of visiting devotees, the unending appointments day in and day out and the pomp and pageantry of *pujas* and festivals. To us

\*Diary of J. C. Roy, quoted in *Ananda Varta*, XIX/1/14.

it seems that Ma's life at Raipur must have been a dreary chapter of dull monotony, full of discomforts and fraught with danger. To Ma, however, the changed conditions made no difference. This was confirmed by Ma in reply to my question as to how she liked her life at Raipur.

While narrating her experiences of a life with horrible snakes and scorpions and of austerity and hardship at Raipur in the early thirties, Ma incidentally disclosed the circumstances in which J. C. Roy became 'Bhaiji', the appellation with which Ma's devotees are familiar. Once the local Postal authorities had failed to trace the addressee of a registered letter from the Government sent to one 'J. C. Roy, I.S.O.' The man who claimed the letter looked like a menial. In fact, the poor quality of his dress and his voluntarily practised inferiority complex reflected in his demeanour belied J. C. Roy's real status. The postman was in a fix. At this juncture Bholanath identified J. C. Roy to the satisfaction of the postal authorities and added that he (Roy) was the *dharma-putra* (spiritual son) of Ma and himself. Thenceforward J. C. Roy came to be known as *Bhaiji* (respected elder brother) of Ma's 'children'. This episode had far-reaching consequences as we shall presently see.

People heard from the Postmaster and his staff about J. C. Roy and many became interested in the remarkable Mataji at whose feet a man of his official position had completely surrendered himself. Thus, Ma suddenly became prominent in the public eye even during the period of her self-imposed anonymity at Raipur. One of the notable persons attracted by hearsay evidence about Ma was Hari Ram

Joshi, a Government official of U.P. (United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, now named Uttar Pradesh), then posted at Dehradun. One day he called on Ma out of curiosity. "At my first *darsana*", he observed, "Mataji's enchanting and smiling face transformed my mind altogether. I had no preconceived notions about her spiritual attainments, not having heard from any quarter anything about her *sadhana* and supernatural powers."\* Thereafter, Hari Ram Joshi became one of the life-long devotees of Ma. He had respectable connections in U.P. and was well-known to some leading personalities of India. Immensely benefited by his association with Ma, he made it almost the mission of his life to bring his friends and relations to receive Ma's grace.

Some time in 1933 Ma left Raipur for Dehradun and stayed at the annexe of the Manohar temple at Ananda Chawk. Dehradun, a populous and prosperous town, is modelled on Western lines. Its population includes some sophisticated persons hailing from different parts of India, particularly Kashmir and the Punjab as also from Sind (now in Pakistan). Dehradun also happens to be one of the popular health resorts of Uttar Pradesh. The worshippers visiting the Manohar temple felt interested in the new lodger popularly known as 'Bangali Mataji'. Never before had they set eyes on one like her. They looked at her with amazement and many were impelled automatically to bow down to her in profound reverence.

\* *Ma Anandamayi Lila*, Memoirs of Hari Ram Joshi, p. 36.

One evening in July 1933, Hari Ram Joshi brought Mrs. Kamla Nehru ( wife of Jawaharlal Nehru ) who at first *darsana* of Ma lay down on the floor as if to relax, and soon went into what appeared to be a trance. After she had regained consciousness, she was sent by Ma to her residence, but Mrs. Nehru could not stay there for long and came back to Ma at about 11 p.m. to spend the night with her. The mysterious influence of Ma's touch left in Kamla Nehru's mind an almost irresistible urge for constant association with Ma. She lived hardly for three years thereafter, mostly abroad. She was fortunate enough in having visions of Ma, sometimes in dreams and sometimes in waking hours, though physically separated from her by thousands of miles.\* Some time in 1934, when Ma was in Kankhal, some visitors from Calcutta made her put on a wide-bordered sari, as she had been used to wear before coming to Dehradun. An interesting incident occurred to mark this unusual occasion. After a few days of this event Bhaiji received a letter from Kamla Nehru saying: "Bhaiji, you never write enough letters to give me news of Mataji. But I 'see' her some times. Last time I saw her wearing a sari with a wide red border."† After Kamla Nehru's death, her illustrious husband used to pay homage to Ma from time to time. Ma was a source of solace to him.

On a chilly day in March 1934, immediately after a heavy snow-fall, Ma visited Solan in the Simla Hills and

\*Ma Anandamayi Eli, Memoirs of Hari Ram Joshi, p. 55.

†Ananda Varia, Vol. XIX, No. 2, p. 71.

temporarily lived, *incognito*, in a cave attached to the Salogra temple, about four miles away from the town. The then the Ruling Chief of the State of Solan, Raja Durga Singh, heard about the presence of a saintly lady in his State. A pious man, His Highness felt an urge for her *darsana*, called at Salogra and found Ma seated quite complacently inside the cave with rain water running all around her. Ma asked the Raja to enter the cave, and then burst into a hearty laughter. The effect on the Raja was more than magical. This strange and overwhelming experience acted like a sort of spiritual baptism for him and marked a starting point in his new career as a missionary for preaching Ma's message. "I fully believe", he observed later on, "that our Mother and the great Goddess at Dakshineswar ( Kali ) are one and the same."\* Many have been called by Ma, but few chosen; the Raja of Solan was one of those called and chosen. A spiritual aspirant of a rare type, he earned from Ma the name of 'Yogiraj' ( King of Yogis ) which speaks for itself; he was also known as 'Yogibhai'. Personally he preferred the epithet *bhai* ( brother ) rather than *raj*. Ever since his first *darsana* of Ma in 1934 till his death in 1977, Yogibhai lived the life of a yogi devoted to Ma and spent money like a Raja for institutions associated with Ma's name. His deep conviction that Ma was the Divine Mother, his wealth and resources dedicated to Ma's service and his influential connections combined to make him an ideal apostle for preaching Ma's gospel, particularly amongst the Rulers of Princely States.

\*Mother as seen by Her Devotees, 2nd ed., p. 129.

To resume the story of Dehradun, the number of Ma's devotees and admirers went on increasing with the passage of time. The local people did not understand Bengali and spoke in a language supposed to be Greek to Ma. But that did not matter. Ma's benign glance had a message of its own and her smile invariably infused a spirit of holiness. Ma's very presence arrested people's devout attention and evoked their solemn admiration and devotion.

Manohar temple proved too small for Ma. Eventually her devotees, led by Bhaiji and Hari Ram Joshi, succeeded in founding an *ashram* at Kishenpur on the outskirts of Dehradun where Ma's fortieth *Janmotsava* (Birthday Anniversary) was celebrated in May, 1936. Some time thereafter Ma went to Simla, the then summer seat of the Government of India and stayed at the local Kali Bari. On the day of her arrival at Simla, only three or four Bengali gentlemen had come to pay respects to her. Very soon the number of visitors went on increasing day after day. In those days the floating population of Simla during summer included a number of Central Government officers on duty. They had a *Harisabha* (a religious organization) which observed annual *Nama-Yajna* (continuous singing the name of God for twelve hours, accompanied by certain rituals). Their *Nama-Yajna* in 1936 reached an unexpected pitch of success due to Ma's presence. During *kirtana* her appearance underwent wonderful changes and she passed into a trance. After a while Ma returned to her normal self and sat up on the floor, cool and composed, as if nothing had happened. Then followed unique chanting

of hymns, spontaneously welling out from Ma. The chanting was superb. It inspired awe and wonder. The language of the hymns was not exactly modern Sanskrit, but something resembling it. Ma's voice was sweet and her diction perfect. The involuntary flow of recitation went on till Ma's right hand was automatically lifted up so as to touch the point between her eye-brows. And at once the recitation came to an abrupt end. When all this was over, Ma lay prostrate on the floor, completely relaxed.\* All the while the hall was packed to capacity. The singers and listeners, mostly Central Government officers posted in Delhi, were overwhelmed with their wonderful and rapturous experience. This episode marked the beginning of momentous events to happen in the capital at the instance of the Central Government officers so blessed at Simla.

In August 1940, Seth Jammalal Bajaj, a leading figure in India's public life, was sent to Ma by Mahatma Gandhi who had heard about her from Kamla Nehru. Originally, Sethji had the intention of spending only one day in the *ashram*. But he found *matrisanga* (association with Ma) so very elevating that he prolonged his stay in the *ashram* for a long period with the special permission of Mahatmajji, obtained through exchange of telegrams. Deeply impressed by the benign effects of *ashram* life, he proposed to build a cottage in the Raipur *ashram* and spend his life there. Ma did not encourage such an ambitious project, involving so drastic a change in his life. "Look here", she said,

\*For a full description of Ma during *kirtana* see Chapter 8.

"there is no certainty as to when one is going to breathe one's last. For the time being you better start *sadhana* modestly in your own way."\*

Ma seems to have given Sri Bajaj an indirect hint about his impending death and a warning that it was high time for him to get ready for the next world. Accordingly, he was wise enough to build an humble cottage at Gopuri (not far from Wardah, famous for its association with Mahatmaji) and mostly lived there. He expired in January 1942.

Dehradun could not long contain Ma. Perhaps the next act in the drama of her life needed a wider circle and a larger variety of playmates, a better stage with a tradition of a deeper spiritual culture and a more central place easily accessible from all parts of India. Varanasi was the ideal venue from all these points of view. No wonder, after about ten years' stay at Dehradun Ma was prompted by *kheyal* to prefer Varanasi as her headquarters. At first she had no fixed abode there. Her improvised *ashram* — a mobile unit — was located on board a barge floating on the Ganga. Some time in 1944, a site was acquired for an *ashram* on a large plot of open land facing the Ganga with its vast expanse of water, claiming almost the dignity of an inland sea. Massive structures, since erected thereon, have added to the beauty and grandeur of the landscape of the locality. The Varanasi Ashram has, in course of time, become an important centre of religious and charitable activities, inclu-

\*Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi, by Gurupriya Debi, Vol. VII (Uttarardha).

ding *pūja* (worship) of the idols installed therein and maintenance of a hospital and a girls' school.

From January 1946 to January 1949, *Savitri Yajna*, inspired by Ma, was observed at the Varanasi Ashram with great eclat. *Yajna* may be translated as "a very elaborate process of Vedic worship involving sacramental oblations to blazing fire with *ghee* (molten butter) and other objects — all consecrated to gods and goddesses." Performed for the welfare of the whole Universe, this *Savitri Yajna* had '*brahmacharis*' (monks) of the *ashram* as priests. Thousands of worshippers participated in it, and among the guests were universally revered saints such as Triveni Puriji Maharaj of Khanna and Devi Giriji Maharaj of Uttar Kasi.

It was at Varanasi that Sri Sri Anandamayee Sangha\* was registered in 1950 and the first session of *Sumyama Vrata* was held in 1952†. For about a quarter of a century Varanasi remained Ma's headquarters, so to speak, and she had many temporary camps all over India, visited by her at uncertain intervals. Later on, other places in Northern India also became important centres of her *fila* — in particular, Delhi, Vrindavan and Kankhal.

The site of Delhi together with its neighbourhood has, for thousands of years, provided an arena for political duels and military confrontations. The present seat of the Central Government, New Delhi, is avowedly secular and appears to be

\*An association of Ma's devotees having for its objects, among others, to carry Ma's message to the world and to administer *ashrams* and other institutions in different places.

†Vide Chapter 15 for details of the *vrata*.

unconcerned about religion. Such a background is not calculated to be favourable for the growth of desire for *matrisanga* (Mother's association) among the residents of the capital. Yet some of them have derived immense benefit from Ma's presence and influence. We have already seen how some Central Government employees had the good fortune of Ma's *darsana* at Simla in the early thirties. The nucleus of *satsanga* started by them in the capital eventually developed into the present *ashram* at Kalkaji on the outskirts of New Delhi, established in 1950. This *ashram* has temples of Siva, Kali, Didi and Mahavira, a commodious hall for *satsanga* and a beautifully decorated structure for Ma's abode. There is a vast expanse of rocky wilderness in the east and a public green belt in the west. The *ashram* has an extensive lawn bordered by trees and shrubs with peacocks dancing thereon adding to charm and serenity of the place. The location of Anandamayi Ashram far from the madding crowd of the capital, its desolate surrounding and calm and quiet atmosphere have made this *ashram* an ideal place for *sadhana* in seclusion. When, however, Ma stays there, this solitary haven presents a completely different picture. Thus, the silence usually prevailing in this forlorn place is replaced by the din and bustle of festive jubilation invariably associated with Ma's presence. A swarming multitude comes in and goes out, motor vehicles with honking horns dangerously ply to and fro, to shatter one's nerves and deafen one's ears. Devotees by the thousand try to inch their way towards Ma's room through an almost impenetrable crowd, collected in the courtyard, packed to capacity. Not unoften their freedom of movement is, for

a few minutes, interfered with by the police, responsible for the security of some undisclosed V.I.P.\* — he or she may be the President or the Prime Minister of India.

In course of the last few decades, Ma's visits to Delhi have been quite frequent, extending from a few hours to a few weeks. Her sojourns are marked by a continuous overflow of joyousness showered on all devotees, from the highest to the lowest.

Besides, Delhi has, like many other places, also witnessed some remarkable events illustrating how Ma's benign influence effectively works, often unawares, within the mind of responsive devotees. Thus, many wayward youths addicted to drugs and drinking have been influenced to give up their vices and many warring religious sects and political gladiators to sink their differences. Again, Ma has given consolation and strength of mind to many bereaved hearts, restored peace in many broken homes and brought about reconciliation of long-standing disputes amongst members of many respectable families. Now, what was at the root of such wonderful results? Ma's sympathetic consideration and overflowing love. She is charitably disposed towards all and specially compassionate to those who are morally or spiritually backward. In fact, Ma does not seem to notice anybody's shortcomings. She only sees everybody's luminous aspects. She inspires in everyone an earnest desire for introspection and self-improvement. In her

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\*V.I.P., an abbreviation of very important person, has become current in common parlance in India.

presence one feels gradually advancing towards the standard expected of one accepted by Ma as her 'child'. The seed of self-respect and self-confidence planted by the Mother has worked wonders in many individuals in Delhi, as in many other places.

There is a saying in Zen Buddhist literature: "When an enlightened one touches a dry twig, it begins to blossom". Many a dry twig in Delhi has begun to blossom by the touch of Anandamayi Ma. Demands of propriety forbid the disclosure of specific names. Undoubtedly, the events that have actually happened in Delhi, as indicated above, were bordering on the miraculous. There are many eye-witnesses who will readily understand. Others are at liberty to be critical.

Another centre in Northern India to witness Ma in the best form is Vrindavan, an ancient place of pilgrimage associated with the life of Lord Krishna and Lord Chaitanya. The *ashram* established in 1954 has, from time to time, been blessed with Ma's prolonged stay and has been chosen by her for celebration of important functions including several sessions of *Samyama Vrata\** and *Bhagavata Saptaha* (week-long recital of and discourse on the *Bhagavata*).

Similarly, the *ashram* at Kankhal, near Hardwar, has, during the last decade, been hallowed by Ma's presence for long periods broken by occasional sojourns to different parts of India. Situated on the bank of the holy Ganga, close to the ancient Dakshesvar Mandir, this *ashram* has temples of

\*Vide Chapter 15.

Siya and Didima, a spacious hall and several houses including a three-storeyed guest house and a three-storeyed *sadhu-kuthia*. A statue of Adi Shankaracharya was installed in the hall in 1978 by Swami Shantananda Sarasvati Maharaj, the Shankaracharya of Jyotir-Math, in the presence of Ma and several Maha-Mandalesvaras.

In 1981 *Ati Maha-Rudra Yajna* was performed at the Kankhal *ashram* with ritualistic fire kept burning uninterrupted since 1926. Rudra or Siva represents the Supreme in His fearful aspect of annihilation as also as the Preserver and Benefactor of the Universe. The object of this *Yajna* was to invoke the grace of the Supreme for the purpose of bringing peace and security and of ushering in harmony in this world of perpetual conflict and discord. The conception of the *Yajna* was grand and grand was the execution from the beginning to the end, under the exclusive management of ladies devoted to Ma. For eleven days from the 6th to the 16th May, priests were engaged in chanting Vedic *mantras* in chorus strictly in accordance with the rules of Vedic procedure. The blazing flames of the fire, kept alive by 24, 19, 758 *ahutis* (battered oblations), seemed to recapture the Vedic tradition in this care-worn world threatened with extinction under the influence of forces of evil. Under Ma's inspiration and direct supervision every aspect of the *Yajna* was observed to perfection. The priests represented the best talents of India in the line.

Three memorable events in Northern India mark the first half of the year 1982. In January, *Kumbha Mela\** was held

\*Vide Chapter 18 for a note on *Kumbha Mela*.



at Allahabad, being an occasion for great saints of India to receive Ma as the Universal Mother. At Kankhal, Didima's *Samnyasa Utsava* was observed in April and Ma's *Jannotsava* in May.

Ma's *tila* in the role of Mataji of Northern India is closely associated with great saints who came into contact with her in different places, particularly Vrindavan and Kankhal. To mention only a few names of revered memory : Oriya Baba and Hari Baba, Chetan Giri and Mahesvarananda Giri who have since merged in *Brahman*. Amongst the *mahatmas* who have recently been making invaluable contribution to the success of *satsanga* inspired by Ma are Swami Chidanandaji, President of the "Divine Life Society" and Swami Vidyanandaji of Kailash Ashram, Hrishikesh (the premier institution for the study of Vedanta, where no less a person than Swami Vivekananda studied the subject).

## Chapter 6

### ANANDAMAYI MA'S SOJOURNS IN CALCUTTA

(1926—1982)

During the last fifty five years or so Calcutta witnessed manifold activities for the spiritual uplift of man inspired by Ma. Such a prospect could hardly be foreseen when the little known Ma of Shahbag, then about thirty years old, visited this great metropolis for the first time in 1926. The local people, burdened with multifarious problems and preoccupied with their own affairs, were ignorant of, or indifferent to, her gracious presence in their midst. Most of Ma's admirers living in Calcutta at the time were somehow associated with Dacca. Some of them acted in a missionary spirit in telling interesting stories about Ma's wonderful life of holiness. Soul-stirring reports of her spiritual greatness also reached Calcutta from sources in Northern India, particularly Varanasi. So Anandamayi Ma's name became fairly well-known in West Bengal by the mid-forties.

The pioneer batch of Ma's devotees in Calcutta primarily belonged to the middle class of the society, including some officials of high rank such as S. N. Banerjee, Commissioner of Income-tax, and his colleague Sachi Kanta Guha, besides Benoy Kumar Sen, District Judge and Major G. K. Mitra, I.M.S. Well-known educationists like Principal Ganga Charan Dasgupta, Professors Girija Sankar Bhattacharya, Nalini Kanto Brahma, Triguna Banerjee and Mahendra Nath Sar-

kar, to some of whom Ma was already known ever since their first *darsana* at Dacca, seem to have played an important part in explaining the ideals that Ma stood for. Though the influence of these intellectuals was mainly confined to a small group, Ma had an appeal for all. Not that the people of Calcutta saw much of astounding miracles as had been the experience of the devotees of Dacca, but they were simply amazed at certain extraordinary human virtues in Ma — equanimity, compassion and a magnetic power of attraction. And her glowing complexion and gracious gaze awakened memories of Lord Gouranga as described in the *Sri Chaitanya-Churitamrita*. Ma's beaming eyes radiated love and light and had an unspoken message: "Worldly pleasures are fleeting compared to the joy of communion with God." Besides, there were certain exterior factors — a source of additional attraction — which drew towards her people of different tastes for reasons not necessarily spiritual. Thus, certain popular speakers and eminent artistes participating in Ma's *satsanga* (religious congregation) attracted their respective admirers, and the latter eventually benefited by their association with Ma and paid homage to her.

Ma never gave a regular discourse but striking were her *impromptu* comments on topics under discussion. Her sayings in course of informal conversation were invariably without any effort. These were full of wisdom, and bore the stamp of authority. And her *kirtana* was sweeter and more appealing than that of the best singers of Calcutta, well represented at functions held in Ma's presence.

The common experience of many was the discovery that

Ma did not appear to be a stranger to them. She was, as it were, a loving mother, well-known for a long time. To those who had a responsive mind Ma proved to be a source of inspiration for turning it God-ward. Thus, the experience of the people of Dacca and Varanasi in the late twenties and of Dehradun in the early thirties was shared by the people of Calcutta in the forties and thereafter.

In many cases Ma's attraction was irresistible and inevitable. To mention one instance, Pran Kumar Bose, District Judge, surrendered himself at Ma's feet for reasons not known even to himself. Mrs. Bose became, in later life, a part and parcel of Sri Sri Anandamayi Ashram. Her granddaughter, Juthika Guha (also known as Buni), then in her teens, felt an impelling urge to dedicate herself to Ma's service and she led the life of a nun under Ma's direct guidance until she died in Sri Sri Anandamayi Ashram at Vrindavan in 1964. Not that Ma had asked her to renounce the world or join the *ashram*. She advises everybody that all kinds of work should be done in a spirit of dedication irrespective of one's calling or field of action.

Visitors to Ma in Calcutta in the thirties were mostly common people. But there were two distinguished personalities who deserve special mention — Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship, U.S.A., and Subhas Chandra Bose, destined to be universally respected as *Netaji*. Let us have glimpses of Ma in her encounter with them.

The former saw Ma "in a deep state of *Samadhi*" and discovered that "oblivious to her outward garb as a woman,

she knew herself as the changeless Soul.”\* His English translation of Ma's self-revelation before him, uttered in Bengali, has already been quoted. His observations in this connection are illuminating: “Anandamayi Ma does not refer to herself as ‘I’. She uses circumlocutions like ‘this body’ or ‘this little girl’ or ‘your daughter’, nor does she refer to anybody as her disciple. With impersonal wisdom she bestows equally on all human beings the divine love of the Universal Mother.” The Paramahansa's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, translated into several languages, has drawn from different parts of the globe many a thirsty soul to Anandamayi Ma who has been a source of solace to them.

Subhas Chandra Bose is known only as the intrepid fighter who had rocked the very foundation of the British Empire. Very few people know that he had also a genuine spiritual hunger which induced him to seek Ma's *darsana*. An interview was arranged and he met Ma at Dakshineswar on October 20, 1938. Subhas Chandra was requested to give a talk explaining what made him dedicate his life to the service of the mother country. He replied modestly that he had come to listen and not to speak. As a result a very interesting discussion followed, in course of which Ma made very instructive and illuminating observations on the nature of true and perpetual happiness, service in the true spirit, *svabhava* (essential disposition or nature) and *svadharma* (duty or action suited to one's inner nature or essential character) and

other allied topics. Incidentally, the discourse led to a reference to the use of these terms in the *Gita* and their correct significance in that context. Unfortunately the discussion was interrupted at this stage and terminated abruptly when there was a sudden influx of visitors which completely changed the atmosphere. Subhas Chandra bent down in *pranama* to Ma and took leave of her.\* This was his first and last *darsana* of Ma. Political circumstances prevented him from keeping in touch with her thereafter.

As years rolled by, the number of Ma's admirers went on increasing. In the absence of any fixed abode for her in Calcutta, Ma used to stay at the private residence of some devotee or other† till 1945 when an *ashram* was founded at Ballygunge in South Calcutta — a modest beginning in a small house on a narrow lane with no scope for expansion. And some of the neighbours were none too friendly — in fact, this *ashram* did not come floating on the wave of popular enthusiasm in Ballygunge. Undoubtedly Ma's devotees in Calcutta had profound veneration for her, but their number was comparatively small in those days. In course of time, some of those who had previously avoided Ma and her *ashram* were deeply impressed by the broad catholicity of her outlook and were convinced that every genuine seeker could derive some benefit out of his association with Ma without being called upon to compromise his own views.

\* *Ananda Varta*, XXIII/2/95; XXVII/3/183.

† Incidentally, Ma does not now-a-days enter the residence of a householder.

\* *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramahansa Yogananda, Jaiico Publishing House, Bombay, 1975 ed., pp. 448, 450.

*Satsanga* at the feet of Ma worked wonders — in many cases it turned idle curiosity into genuine thirst for knowledge and cynical scepticism into burning aspiration for spiritual experience. Although the so-called free-thinkers of Ballygunge were slow to appreciate Ma, the common and simple-hearted section of the people flocked to her. After partition of India in 1947, a large number of Ma's old devotees and admirers migrated from East Bengal to Calcutta. Thereafter, the number of persons who flocked to her went on multiplying in geometrical progression and eventually became countless. Whenever Ma came to Calcutta, her *darsana* was eagerly sought by men of all ranks — from Dr. K. N. Katju, the then Governor of West Bengal, to even the street beggar.

In course of time the Ballygunge *ashram* proved too small for big functions — particularly if Ma was present. Consequently, some suitable venue had to be found out for holding functions like *Janmotsava* (Ma's Birthday Anniversary) in 1950, *Samyama Vrata* in 1953 and *Durga Puja* in 1956.

In 1958, the Ballygunge *ashram* was shifted to a house on a plot of land measuring about 3 acres, situated on the bank of the Ganga in Agarpara, not far from Dakshineswar. To start with, three memorable functions were celebrated there in April/May, 1958 — the inaugural ceremony of the new *ashram*, Didima's *Samnyasa Utsava* and Ma's *Janmotsava*. Then followed *Samyama Vrata* in 1959 and *Durga Puja* — also called *Durgotsava* — in 1960 and 1965. In modern times the religious significance of *Durga Puja* is often lost in pomp and pageantry, sometimes the jubilation

of the *utsava* (festival) tending to overshadow the spirit of the *puja* (worship). Ma's presence at Agarpara made the *utsava* a grand success, particularly by raising the spiritual fervour generated by the *puja* to a high pitch. Under her inspiring supervision ritualistic service was duly performed by the *brahmacharis* (monks) of the *ashram* who officiated as priests. Thousands of devotees participated in the *puja* and the *utsava* and got opportunities for coming into contact with Ma. Under favourable conditions thus created, some even felt the mysterious presence of the Divine Mother Durga during Her annual sojourn on earth in autumn. Thus, a spiritual atmosphere soon grew up in the locality. The Agarpara Ashram has since become one of the most important centres of *Sri Sri Anandamayee Sangha*.

The hectic period of intensive *matrisanga* in Agarpara was followed by a long gap of eight years. The pang of separation felt by the devotees of Dacca in the wake of Ma's departure for Dehradun in 1932 was experienced by the devotees of Calcutta from 1965 to 1973 when Ma paid only a flying visit on the occasion of the opening of Niramoy Polyclinic in South Calcutta. In 1974 *Bhagavata Saptaha* was observed in Ma's presence at Jodhpur Park in South Calcutta and in 1975 Ma's *Janmotsava* at Agarpara. Although she maintained perfect detachment, Ma's influence was felt everywhere even in the minutest details. In those days she was exceptionally agile and active, and amazing was her capacity to stand physical strain.

After 1975 Ma paid only flying visits to Calcutta at long intervals — in 1978 on the occasion of *Janmastami* and *Kali*

*Puja*, and in 1981, *incognito* for a few hours for an undisclosed purpose. On April 4, 1982, Ma came to Calcutta on the occasion of the unveiling of Didima's statue in the Agarpa Ashram. She looked tired and emaciated and seemed to be in need of rest. So, arrangement was made for her stay not in the *ashram* but in a private garden house at Bhasa, about 32 miles to its South. Ma visited the *ashram* for a few hours on three days commencing from the 6th and left for Kankhal on the 8th April. The teeming multitude of devotees who used to gather in the *ashram* every day on this occasion assumed enormous proportions. For hours together they would continue standing or sitting and wait in eager suspense for Ma's arrival from Bhasa. Most of them would be content with a glance at Ma from a distance. There were, however, some who in the exuberance of devotion, elbowed their way through the crowd and forcibly entered the dais where Ma had been seated. Notwithstanding indifferent health, Ma patiently put up with the conduct of even those who had behaved in a frenzy, as it were.

Whenever Ma has come to Calcutta, for however short a period, new devotees have been attracted to her from all sections of the population of the city and from all other parts of India. A notable feature of Ma's recent visits to Calcutta is the initiation of hundreds of spiritual aspirants under Ma's inspiration and direct supervision.

Over the years Ma's sojourns in Calcutta have been few and far between. Under her influence there has been created in many localities of this commercial city an atmos-

phere congenial to spiritual culture. Thus, the *ashram* at Agarpa, the *matrimandir* at Jodhpur Park and several centres in private residences have kept burning the lamp kindled by Ma's message and the memory of her presence through *kirtana*, *satsanga* and *namayajna*.

## PART II

## KHEYAL (DIVINE WILL WORKING THROUGH MA)

## Chapter 7

*Kheyal* illustrated

As already indicated in Chapter 1, Ma's *kheyal* is too subtle and too abstruse to admit of any definition. Let me now give some illustrations of *kheyal* which may, perhaps, throw some light on the meaning of *kheyal* and its benign effect. A series of apparently unreasonable acts of *kheyal* is often found ultimately to lead to the healing of ailments in circumstances not foreseeable by ordinary mortals.

At Vindhyachal, not far from Varanasi, there is a branch of Anandamayi Ashram on the top of the Astabhuja hill. An ancient place of pilgrimage, Vindhyachal has a bracing climate and beautiful surrounding; and there is something mysterious in its atmosphere which makes Ma visibly jolly and communicative to those who happen to be there with her. An old devotee was once fortunate enough to be one of the few to be chosen by Ma, then in Varanasi, for a sojourn at Vindhyachal with her. On arrival, he was fixed up in *Bhajanataya*, reserved for Ma's distinguished guests. After setting down in the room allotted to him, the gentleman came to the *ashram* when some one said to him: "Mataji has gone away." "For a walk?" asked the old devotee.

adding: "She will, of course, return soon!" "No, she has left by train for Delhi." The gentleman was almost stunned. He had expected to spend a few memorable days with Ma at Vindhyachal; but a couple of hours after arrival she had suddenly left. But why? Nobody knew. There was no conveyance at hand; so Ma had to walk to the railway station which was quite at a distance. She was in a hurry and said she had to catch the next train to Delhi. It was unusual for Ma not to have taken into confidence the distinguished guest who had come to Vindhyachal at her invitation. It was surprising that Ma was now so reticent even at Vindhyachal!

Nobody was allowed to accompany Ma to Delhi except a *brahmachari* and Gopaler Ma, a naive, inexperienced lady, least suitable for Ma's personal service — she did not even know how and when to arrange Ma's meals and she lacked common sense. But that did not matter. When Ma arrived in Delhi there were devotees who were quite competent to look after Ma. So no inconvenience was felt. Unfortunately, Gopaler Ma had developed high fever and severe pain in the abdomen even during the journey. While in Delhi, a doctor was called in and he advised that immediate surgery was necessary. The patient was therefore removed to hospital where the operation was performed successfully the next morning. Thus, by Ma's *kheyal* which had seemed so crazy and erratic, Gopaler Ma's life was saved. At Vindhyachal, there was no doctor at all, not to speak of a hospital.

No sooner was the patient declared safe in hospital than *kheyal* prompted Ma to leave Delhi, not for Vindhyachal but

for Amritsar where the great saint Hari Baba had been suffering from a painful illness for some time. He had tried in vain to get cured by homeopathic and *ayurvedic* treatment, but the only effective cure for his ailment was a surgical operation. He would not, however, listen to anybody, not even to Ma's advice given in letters. So Ma went to Amritsar, in person, to bring Hari Baba to Dr. Sen's Nursing Home in Delhi. Hari Baba recovered completely and lived for many more years.

\* \* \*

Here is an instance of Ma's erratic *kheyal*, prompting action that looked like partiality, but eventually prevented an impending calamity.

Dr. P, a senior devotee and a man of commanding personality, has always been a *persona grata* in Ma's circle. He was holding a religious function — probably a *Bhagavata Saptaha* — at his residence in Delhi. Ma, then at Varanasi, was expected to leave for Hari Baba's place, Bandh, in a couple of days. Dr. P urgently requested Ma to halt in Delhi at least for a day and grace the function. Ma had not promised anything, but left her option open.

Suddenly Ma called a *brahmacharini* (nun) at the Varanasi Ashram and asked her to leave for Delhi a day earlier and to go straight to the house of S, another devotee in Delhi, and stay there. She was to inform S that Ma would arrive by the same train the next night. She was not sure whether Ma would stop overnight in Delhi, but in any case S should meet Ma at the railway station without fail. S felt very happy but also puzzled, wondering why Ma had sent

the *brahmacharini* to him and not to Dr. P. In fact, Ma had not even mentioned Dr. P. Elated beyond measure, S at once arranged a tent for Ma and a pandal for *satsanga* in his garden in case Ma would break journey in Delhi. He also informed Dr. P of Ma's arrival. At the appointed time S went to the railway station, accompanied by the *brahmacharini*. Dr. P also came to the station, hoping that Ma would allow him to take her to his place in his car. But man proposes and *kheyal* disposes. Ma arrived and unceremoniously got into the car of S to the disappointment of Dr. P.

It was probably after 10 p.m. S was driving his car. Ma was sitting in the front seat. There was no heavy traffic. Suddenly in a fairly deserted street a horse came galloping in the darkness and collided with the car. S pulled the brake abruptly. The glass pane in front was broken and Ma's forehead was slightly hit. A policeman appeared in no time and S had to get down and reply to his questions. In the meantime Ma asked the *brahmacharini*, sitting by her side, to get some water from Ma's thermos and Ma held a wet towel on the bump. Her companions felt alarmed, but Ma said there was nothing to worry about and the bump would be all right soon.

S naturally felt extremely distressed and remorseful that Ma should get hurt when he was driving. He told Ma he would never forgive himself for this. Ma replied that what had happened was not his mistake at all. A very serious accident, pre-ordained for him at that time, had been averted by the very slight injury on Ma's forehead.

One can well imagine that Dr. P, who was the older and more important devotee, failed to understand why Ma had been so 'partial' to S and so 'unjust' to him. Yet, it was not Ma's *kheyal* to explain to Dr. P her reasons for what she had been prompted by *kheyal* to do.

\* \* \*

Indeed, *kheyal* is unpredictable. Thus, bereavement of a devotee was the occasion for *kheyal* to express itself as consolation and condolence in one case and congratulation in another.

In the summer of 1948, a lady from South India had come to Kishenpur with a party from Hrishikesh. Seemingly absentminded and obviously distressed, she told Ma: "First my husband passed away. I was upset, but I could bear it, because I had my only daughter, a lovely talented child. When she was 12, she fell ill and died. Since then I cannot find peace of mind. She was all I had, so beautiful and promising. When she had hardly begun her life, she was torn away from me. Why did she leave me? I cannot understand. For some time I worked in an orphanage. I thought, if I have no child, let me at least serve motherless children. I got attached to these children and they to me. But my heart is still broken. My *guru* said: 'Continue your *sadhana*'. But I cannot concentrate. All the time I am pining for my darling. Nothing appeals to me. I want my child back. What am I to do?"

Ma: "First of all, sorrow comes from the sense of 'I' and 'mine'. You say: 'My daughter died', and so you grieve. But who are you? Find out who you are! She

was the fruit of your body. As long as you are identified with the body, there must be pain. It is inevitable. So many boys and girls die, young and beautiful, yet it does not affect you deeply. You only think this one child was your own and you have lost her."

"Then there is another thing to be learnt -- all sorrow is due to the fact that one keeps apart from God. When you are with Him, all pain disappears. Let your thoughts dwell on Him. Remember that your daughter is now with Him. The more you think of God, the nearer will you be to her. If you must shed tears, cry for Him."

"Just as some blossoms fall off without bearing fruit, so do some human beings die young. For a while God had entrusted the child to your care and then He took her back unto Himself. Now He himself is looking after her. One day you will go there too. Until then keep your mind on God and you will also be with your child."

"How do you know that your child is not much better off where she is now? How much trouble and distress life has brought you! Would you have desired a similar fate for her?"

"Then again, on the level where there is only one Self, there is no question of birth and death. Who is born? Who dies? All is one Self."

"The same mind that identifies itself with the body can be turned towards the Eternal and then the pain the body experiences will be a matter of indifference. Since the body is bound to get hurt at times, there must be suffering as long as one is identified with it. This world oscillates



endlessly between pleasure and pain ; there can be no security, no stability here. These are to be found in God alone. How can there be both, the world and the One ? On the way there seem to be two, God and the world, but when the Goal has been reached, there is only One. What worldly life is you have seen. Who is yours ? Only your *guru*, your *Ishta* ; in Him you will find everything and everyone. I am your child."

Several months later the same lady came to Varanasi for Ma's *darsana*. She looked younger and happier. "I have got over my grief," she said, "I am now reconciled to my fate. When Ma said 'I am your child', her voice was my daughter's voice. My hair stood on end and I had a wonderful feeling which I cannot describe in words. From that moment the wound in my heart began to heal. I have gained an inner conviction that my child is happy where she is. I am finding peace and am able to attend to my meditation. Now I am planning to go on a pilgrimage to Badri and Kedarnath. I only wish all bereaved mothers could be comforted as I have been."\*

In contrast to the words of consolation in the case of the South Indian lady, a devotee who had just suffered the loss of his wife, was greeted by Ma with an inexplicable, but meaningful, laughter. Naturally, the devotee was mortified at Ma's callous attitude and wondered what was the cause of her merriment. Ma's cryptic answer was : "Pitaji ! there is one less barrier between you and God." We look

upon death as an enemy. Ma does not. "The pilgrim on the path of Immortality", she has observed, "never contemplates death. By meditation on the Immortal the fear of death recedes far away ; remember this ! In the measure that your contemplation of the One becomes uninterrupted, you will advance towards full, unbroken Realization."

\* \* \*

An interesting sport of *kheyal* was revealed in Ma's encounter with Mahatma Gandhi in 1942. As already stated, Mahatmaji had heard about Ma from Kamla Nehru. Hearing that Ma was in Gopuri immediately after Jammalal Bajaj's death in 1942, he invited her to Wardah, nearby. Ma responded in her own way with the following message : "Is there any need for an invitation ? Invitation or no invitation, this little daughter will in any event go to *Bapuji* (Gandhiji), should there be *kheyal*."

Thereafter came Mahatmaji's representative, Sri Vinoba Bhawe, to escort Ma from Gopuri to Wardah. He conveyed to her the message that Bapuji wanted to meet Ma, and though indisposed, he was ready to come to her in the car already arranged to be sent from Gopuri for bringing him there. Still Ma did not accompany Bhaweji. She smiled and said, "This girl has a screw loose and goes by her *kheyal*, come what may !"

At last Vinoba Bhawe took leave of Ma, apparently with a feeling of disappointment. Eventually, Ma started for Wardah in the very car which was to be sent to Wardah to bring Gandhiji to Gopuri. Gandhiji gave her a most

\*Old Diary Leaves, by Atmananda, Ananda Varta, XIII/1/12.

cordial welcome and Ma responded like a little girl. With his arms stretched out, Mahatmaji held Ma's head and placed it on his bosom and Ma remained in that position like a little daughter with her hand resting on Gandhiji's bosom. Gandhiji began: "Mataji, don't you know who sent Jannalal to you? It was me! And who was it that asked you to come? Again, it was myself. Jannalal told me that the inner peace which I had not been able to give him, he obtained from you. You know well how he was influenced by you and became God-intoxicated, don't you?" Ma only nodded with a smile. "Do you know", continued Gandhiji, "who first told me about you? Kamla Nehru. It was she who made a special appeal to me that I should see you." Addressing those present Mahatmaji said: "Kamla used to look upon her as *guru*." Ma promptly contradicted: "No, nothing of the kind, Pitaji! I am nobody's *guru*. I am simply a little child!" Gandhiji in his turn, smilingly observed: "All right, all right."

With reference to Ma's proposed early departure from Wardah, Gandhiji said: "Look here! Banish from your mind the idea of going away now. Do stay here for at least a couple of days. The settlement of Jannalal's affairs will take two more days. And your presence will give them (Sethji's family) peace and solace." But Ma remained adamant. "Pitaji", said she, "this little girl is crazy and goes by *kheyal*. She is not always able to oblige others. But what can I do? After all, this daughter of yours has imbibed her father's traits!" Everybody in the room burst into laughter.

Baffled in his various attempts to persuade Ma to stay on, Mahatmaji pointed to the persons present, including Dr. Rajendra Prasad, destined to be the first President of the Republic of India, and remarked; "These people will laugh. They will comment that I have failed to persuade a non-descript crazy girl; how am I going to convince the Chief of the Chinese Army (Chiang Kai Shek)? I will look ridiculous!"

Ma in her turn laughed and said, "That's all right, if people feel amused and laugh at my father's cost, let them. But Bapuji does not pay the least heed to all this. He remains absolutely unperturbed." Gandhiji said in reply, "Well, I happen to be the *Bapuji* of so many. You also choose to call me so. That's very fine. In fact, it was my mistake to have addressed you as *Mataji* to start with". Then he burst into a laughter. Exchange of similar repartees went on between Ma and Gandhiji on the subject of extension of Ma's stay at Wardah. But Ma would on no account agree to postpone her departure. At last Gandhiji gave an ultimatum somewhat like this: "You are a girl who seems to have specialised in outwitting others. But you cannot outwit me." Smartly came Ma's sweet reply: "In a battle of wits one should counter wit with a rapier thrust of wit. Is it not right, Pitaji?" Then Ma clinched the issue by announcing: "I am sure Pitaji will comply and let me go tomorrow." Still Gandhiji would not yield. "Don't you take me for such a doting father", he said, "It won't be so easy to compel me to agree. I am also a hard nut to crack."

Ma repeated with her winsome smile : "I have no doubt that Pitaji will definitely oblige his little daughter." At last Gandhiji realised that it would not be possible to detain Ma any longer. So, he asked Sethji's son to arrange for her transport. Next morning Ma left Wardah, saying : "So many people obey Pitaji, but this little girl who goes by *kheyal* could not oblige him. I wonder if Pitaji will be cross with me!" Gandhiji retorted by saying : "Do you care a hang for that?" Instead of directly meeting this open challenge, Ma said : "If there be *kheyal*, I may some day enter your room unannounced. What's your idea, Pitaji? Such is the way of *kheyal*!" Gandhiji muttered mildly : "Yes, such is the way of thieves and robbers! A person of this type has come here from Dehradun! What am I to do?" Instantaneously Ma exclaimed in great glee : "Hurrah! Pitaji has dubbed me a thief and robber! But mind you, Pitaji! I am going to rob you of all! A female thief — this is indeed an excellent appellation!" With these words Ma burst into a loud laughter. Now spontaneously welled up from Gandhiji's mouth : "Where can one find such a female thief?" \*

The fixed hour for Ma's departure came at last. Ma's irresistible *kheyal* prevailed over the insistent appeals and persuasive eloquence of such a towering personality as Gandhiji's.

\*Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi, by Gurupriya Devi, Part VI Uttarardha, p. 130.

## Chapter 8

### THE MYSTERY OF SADHANA AS REVEALED IN MA

*Sadhana* means spiritual practice undertaken for the purpose of preparing oneself for God-realization or Self-realization. Such a goal is by no means easy to reach. It demands strenuous, sustained and prolonged effort under the guidance of a *guru*. The spiritual aspirant is called the *sadhaka* and his goal the *sadhya*. For Ma, *sadhya*, *sadhaka*, *sadhana* and *guru* did not exist separately. They were all rolled into one — the ONE. Normally a *sadhaka's* *sadhana* comprises an arduous journey through a hazardous path, sharp like a razor's edge. Ma, however, was an exception — no journey was necessary for her. It appears from her sayings that Ma did not perform any spiritual practices; there had only been different kinds of play of *sadhana* on her person. From time to time various types of experience were, so to say, mysteriously imposed on her; and these played their own part in spite of herself. Thus, Ma happened to be merely a passive participant without any aim to achieve any target.

Once Ma was pleased to tell me about her *yogic sadhana* at a certain stage consisting of *asanas*, *mudras* and breath control. *Asanas* are *yogic* postures and *mudras* are *yogic* poses of the body as a whole or of its part, representing the expression of some higher natural force. *Yoga* prescribes a powerful process of *sadhana*, well-known in India

from time immemorial, showing the means of emancipation of the soul from further migrations. It helps concentration of mind and gives the *sadhaka* heightened consciousness and tremendous powers. But there is the general caution that *yogic* practice should not be undertaken without proper guidance from a competent teacher; otherwise it may prove injurious to body and mind. In fact, self-taught *yogic* exercise is totally forbidden. Ma stands outside the scope of such an injunction. Though a novice in ordinary estimation, she successfully performed each and every *yogic* exercise with the skill of a master. It was nothing short of a miracle that Ma was an adept without a *guru* or any aid from any book or picture. I once asked Ma: "How is it that you did the *asanas* and *mudras* correctly without guidance?" She took exception to the word '*did*' used by me and emphatically pointed out that she *did* nothing, adding that she had no volition in the matter. What was still more surprising, Ma said that she had no aspiration to achieve anything nor any jubilation at the result. The *asanas* and *mudras*, she observed, had just visited her as guests, as it were, and played, in their own way, some games on her body and then left. The play of *asanas* and *mudras*, concluded Ma, occurred automatically as an expression of the Divine Will.

*Sadhana* has also been revealed in Ma's person through *kirtana* in a remarkable manner. Here is an interesting description of Ma during *kirtana* on one occasion:

"Suddenly Her (Ma's) body sank down flat on the ground and began to roll. Then She slowly rose and stood

on Her two big toes. Both hands were raised straight up. Her head slightly tilted to one side and a little backwards, and Her radiant eyes stared with a steady gaze towards the far end of the sky. A little later She began to move in that posture. Her body appeared to be filled with a heavenly presence. She paid no heed to Her clothes hanging loosely on Her person. No one had the power or the inclination to stop Her. Her whole body danced on with measured beats in a most delicate way and reached the place where *kirtana* was going on; Her body then noiselessly melted down, as it were, upon the floor. Led by some mysterious power it rolled on like dry leaves of a tree moved slowly by a gentle breeze. While She was still lying on the floor, very soft, sweet musical strains came from Her lips, '*Hare Murare Madhukaitabhare*' ..... After some hours She recovered Her normal condition. Her glowing face, Her sweet ineffable looks, Her soft, tender voice brimming over with divine emotion, all reminded the assembled people of the image of Sri Chaitanya Deva, as described in his biographies.\*"

The sport of *sadhana* in Ma's case was not confined to *asana*, *mudra* or *kirtana*. It was all-comprehensive, exploring innumerable paths right upto the end. Here is the gist of one of Ma's utterances:

"This body has not followed only one particular line of *sadhana* but has covered all the known lines. It has passed through all the different varieties of practices referred

\*Mother as revealed to me. by Bhajji, 6th ed., p. 34.

to by the sages of ancient times. Moreover, the different forms of *sadhana* that this body has been seen to practise were not meant for this body, they were meant for you all. When you relate your spiritual experiences to me, I often say that this body has had those experiences and this is why it knows what they are. Not only that, if anyone discloses to this body a special line of *sadhana*, it can describe in minute details the various stages of that very line.\* No wonder Ma has been playing the role of an unofficial *guru* of the seekers of Truth professing different faiths, belonging to different schools of spiritual thought and struggling at different stages of spiritual progress.

For a *sadhaka*, *diksha* (initiation) is an important step in *sadhana*. *Diksha* is a sacred ritual, requiring a *guru* (preceptor), a *sisya* (disciple), a *veeja-mantra* (germinal sound-symbol) and an *Ishta*. '*Ishta*' literally means 'beloved' or 'adored' or 'worshipped'. In the present context, it signifies the deity (being one of the manifestations of the Supreme One) chosen by the *guru* for his *sisya* (disciple). Normally, the disciple is in the dark about the deity appropriate for him or her. The *guru* envisages with his inner vision the particular *Ishta* of his disciple. He helps the latter in establishing communion with that particular deity. Such help comes through the medium of the *veeja-mantra* out of which sprouts the image of the deity worshipped. Usually, the *guru* transmits the appropriate sound-symbol into the disciple's ears, sheds light on his path and raises

\*Ananda Varta, Vol. I, p. 21.

spiritual vibrations in his mind. The *veeja-mantra* has immense potentiality—it is dynamic and creative. Constantly repeated with sincere devotion, it leads the disciple along the right path and enables him to realize the Supreme Truth.

It appears from Ma's sayings that at no stage was she in need of a *guru* or initiation. The question of a quest for the Supreme Truth never arose in her case, because the Supreme Truth has ever been with her from the beginning. Still, once in her early life, she submitted to the acceptance of a role of a seeker in the drama of her mysterious initiation.

It was *Jhulan Purnima* (full moon, commemorating one of the most important religious functions associated with Lord Krishna) on August 3, 1922. Ma entered her bedroom-cum-domestic chapel at night and quietly took her seat there. She witnessed her fingers automatically drawing a *yantra* (mystic design) on the floor. Strangely enough, the *yantra* thus drawn conformed to the requirements prescribed by the scriptures although never before had Ma known what a *yantra* was, nor how to draw one. This was mysterious. The next step was still more mysterious—there was a vibration of a *veeja-mantra* within Ma. It found visible expression in writing inscribed automatically by her fingers inside the *yantra* mentioned above.

In the whole episode, Ma just played the role of a disciple in quest of a *veeja-mantra* from a seeming outsider in the guise of a *guru*. As a matter of fact, nothing was outside. Thus, Ma found within herself not only the *sadhaka*

but also the *sadhya* and the *sadhana* — all merged in the One which was she herself. Ma calls this a 'play of *sadhana*' perhaps because there was nothing for her to be attained.

Once certain illuminating utterances welled up from Ma in course of her conversation with Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj. The gist is given below :

"Look, in the case of a *sadhaka* there is aspiration towards a goal. But here (meaning herself), there is no question of goal or no goal, of aim or aimlessness. Every artery, vein and nerve, their functioning and vibration are clearly seen, just as when somebody in a dark room holds a lamp in his hand and throws light on objects one by one — exactly like this. But, for the *sadhaka* who is still on the path, it is impossible to perceive in this manner. He has to advance by overcoming various kinds of obstacles. *Baba*, here, there is no question of this. Here, the artery is myself, the vein is myself, the functioning myself and the observer myself. Of course, when saying 'myself', it is because some word has to be used. .... Look, just as this body is seen in various attitudes, such as laughing, speaking, moving about, so you may, from your angle of vision, also perceive this body in the posture of *samadhi*. In concord with the rhythm of the breath it assumes various postures or attitudes. Here change or changelessness, concentration or abeyance of activities — there is simply no question of all these."

After a short pause Ma spoke again :

"*Baba*, here everything is perfectly open and unconditioned. But ordinarily the rhythm of the life-force depends

on one thing in the field of *sadhana* and on a different one in the field of worldly life. From the worldly point of view one thinks : 'my home, my wife, my son, my enemy, my friend'. Thus, the idea of the 'I' conditions the rhythm of the life-force of a common man, whereas in the case of a *sadhaka*, it is conditioned by the aspiration towards Realization. The *sadhaka* is ever concentrated on his goal, and therefore, while advancing, he is not aware of the details of the path. If he could once reach the goal, he would be in a position to explain the path, for then everything becomes illuminated by the one Light. *Baba*, in reality there is only One thing. The path, the aim — call it what you will — nothing whatsoever is apart from the Self."\*

*Samadhi* is said to be the culmination of *sadhana*. It is an indescribable state of ecstatic trance. Ma explains *samadhi* as follows :

"The consummation of action and feeling may be called *samadhi*. It is a state where the question of knowledge and ignorance does not arise. A stage comes when the *sadhaka* realizes that he is one with the object of his contemplation. From that plane he may again come back to the ordinary level of self-consciousness. This type of *samadhi* also must be transcended. The ultimate state, being unparalleled, cannot be explained or expressed in any language. It is solely a matter of direct experience."†

\* *Ananda Varta*, XI/1/37.

† From the *Life of Sri Anandamayee Ma*, 1st ed., by Bibhika Mukerji, p. 63.

Ma has also said: "*Samadhi* is a state beyond all conscious and supra-conscious planes — a state of complete immobilization of all thoughts, emotions and activities, both physical and mental — a state that transcends all the phases of life here below."

## Chapter 9

### MA AND MIRACLES

Both in the East and in the West mankind has, from time to time, been blessed with the august presence of personalities of spiritual greatness gifted with supernatural powers. And the present age is no exception. Certain performances attributed to Ma are also illustrative of these powers and are, indeed, nothing short of miracles.

Some easily believing people lay too much importance on a spiritual leader's supernatural powers. They seem to judge his greatness by the spectacular results of miracles shown by him or attributed to him. They flock to a *guru* in the hope of rewards, not necessarily spiritual. On the other hand, there are many who impatiently and superciliously dismiss outright all stories that do not conform to their standard of credibility. Some of them thoughtlessly look down upon a *guru* supposed to be prospering on miracles and ridicule his gullible and uncritical followers as victims of mass hysteria. Again, a thoughtful section condemns on principle the use of supernatural powers for mundane purposes as being abuse of spiritual achievement. It is well-known that supernatural powers can, if acquired by a person who is allured to look upon these powers as his goal, become a source of danger to himself and others.

Leaving aside all extreme views and observations on this controversial subject of supernatural powers, let us ponder

over Ma's answers to certain questions on *bibhuti* (supernatural faculties) in general, with special reference to herself.

Ma has made one thing perfectly clear — the exercise or non-exercise of occult powers attributed to her depends not on her volition but on *kheyat*\* (Divine Will working through Ma). She completely resigns herself to *kheyat*. In fact, she makes no effort to perform any miracle nor to resist any event due to happen as a matter of course. Thus, she is supremely indifferent to this aspect of spiritual life, viz. miracle-working.

Once Professor Amulya Kumar Datta Gupta asked Ma a specific question regarding her power of healing ailments. The gist of Ma's reply is given below :

"All this happened not due to my will but to God's Will. It has often happened that my hand spontaneously touched the body of an ailing person and he was cured. Again, in the case of some, there would be no *kheyat* to touch the patient at all. Once Bholanath repeatedly requested me to cure a particular patient. I referred him to medical experts. But Bholanath insisted on my healing the ailment. I kept quiet. Then *kirtana* commenced and the following words came out of my mouth : 'ask the patient to roll on the floor where *kirtana* is going on'. But notwithstanding the best efforts on his part, he failed to do so. Not that he was too weak for such a performance ; in fact, he had come to the *ashram* on foot. Strangely enough, none of his companions helped him in lying on the floor. I am told he died on his way back to his

\**Kheyat* has been described in the Introduction, vide Chapter 1.

home. This is why I maintain that nothing can happen without God's Will."

Ma once observed that acquisition of supernatural powers was a natural, often inevitable, consequence of successful *sadhana*. "Wonderful experiences", she said, "are gained and wonderful powers are acquired." At the same time she gave a warning as follows : "All that the spiritual aspirant should do is to watch. Once he indulges in playing with those powers, he misses the chance of reaching the destination and gets stuck up on the way. Supposing you are bound for the railway station from the *ashram*. On your way you will come across many buildings, the college etc. You will be able to reach the railway station only if you proceed onwards without caring for what you see on the way. If, on the contrary, you get interested in the college, enter into the building and enjoy what you see there, there will be no certainty as to your arrival at the railway station."

Patanjali's *Yoga-Darsana* elaborately deals with *bibhuti*. It recognises and postulates the immense potentiality of the human mind through *yoga* and fully explains how actions, obviously impossible for an ordinary man to perform, are within the easy reach of a Yogi.† No one familiar with *yoga* will be surprised at the play of supernatural powers

\**Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī Prasanga*, by Amulya Datta Gupta, 2nd ed., Vol. I, p. 38.

†*Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī Prasanga*, by Amulya Kumar Datta Gupta.

‡*Yoga*—Concentration of mental powers through abstract meditation in order to achieve union with the Supreme Spirit. Yogi—An ascetic who practises this concentration.



as revealed in or through Ma. Details of such play in her early life, particularly in Dacca, are mentioned in Anandamayi literature that has already seen the light of day. In the present chapter let me narrate some episodes of comparatively recent times collected from eye-witnesses of unimpeachable credit. Fortunately, all of them are still in the land of the living.

In 1943, Professor Haridas Pakrashi of Lucknow and his wife, Punyamayi, at present residing at 91/2 Bakul Bagan Road, Calcutta-26, were plunged into deep grief at the premature death of their only child Dhira, a sixteen-year old daughter gifted with physical grace and great promise. The couple had led a happy life until their peaceful existence was shattered by this bolt from the blue. In particular, the mother's heart was broken. The light seemed to have gone out of her life. All her thoughts were with her beloved Dhira whom she would never meet again. She would sit sleepless far into the night near the empty bed of her departed daughter, spending her heavy hours in painful memory. In the loneliness of the silent night she felt forlorn and helpless. When she was sunken in such a state of deep despair, solace came most mysteriously from Anandamayi Ma whose name she had never heard before, not to speak of having had her *darsana*. Here is the gist of her letter written to me in Bengali: "Some time after Dhira's death one night I saw her sitting on her bed in white *sari* (not usual for her when she was alive). I could not see her face clearly but her abundant hair was tied in a knot on the top of her head. Next

night again I had the same vision, vanishing after about half an hour. Although the light had been switched off, the room was fairly well lit up from outside and I could see Dhira quite well. The face of the girl was blurred — it was not exactly like Dhira's; but I had a feeling that my darling was with me. For three months she continued to appear before me like this at the same time in the night and on every occasion she gradually disappeared after about half an hour. My heart was filled with joy at the sight of my Dhira although she seemed somewhat different from what she had been in life. On hearing about my experience, a friend of mine concluded that Anandamayi Ma of Dacca answered to the description.\* "Who is Anandamayi Ma?" wondered I and "why should she come to Lucknow and visit me?" I became very anxious to meet her. I got an opportunity for her *darsana* after several years when Ma chanced to come to Lucknow. I went to the place where she was expected to stop. There I was struck at the sight of a lady in white *sari* with raven black hair tied in a knot on the top of her head. I had no doubt about her identity. I had seen her in Dhira's bed — not in a dream, but when wide awake — not on one occasion, but night after night continuously for three months. I had then mistaken her for Dhira.

"Ma, now seated on a dais, watched me from a distance and beckoned me to come to her. At once I did

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\*In those days Ma had abundant black hair, often tied in a knot on the top of her head. And she always wore a white *sari*.

so and then I completely broke down. Ma caressed me and calmed me. I remained at her feet, shedding silent tears. About an hour passed in this manner. The heaviness of my heart was relieved by magic as it were. As I asked for leave to go home, Ma said : 'Come at 5 a.m. tomorrow and sing to me'. 'Since my daughter's death I have stopped singing', said I. But Ma would not have it so. She said : 'The Mother (that is Punyamayi) will sing and the daughter (that is, Ma) will hear and the latter will also sing for the former'. So I had my second *darsana* the next morning and I sang. Ma then simply overwhelmed me with her unparalleled song : '*He Bhagavan etc.*'"

Punyamayi concluded her letter as follows :

"Ma drew me towards her. Once her shadowy presence had, to some extent, consoled my heart aggrieved at the loss of Dhira. Her *darsana* changed my outlook—bereavement for Dhira has since lost its sting for me. I know Ma is with me."

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Sometime in 1954, Ma temporarily stayed in Kanpur at the residence of Harendra Nath Gupta, retired Director, Small Industries Service, Ministry of Industrial Development, at present residing at 189 Dunlop Estate, P.O. Saha-gunge, District Hooghly. On the day of Ma's departure, Shri Gupta and his little daughter, Khuku, went to the railway station to see her off. In the meantime it was noticed that a blouse belonging to Ma had been accidentally left behind on the terrace of Sri Gupta's house where it had been drying. In the midst of a crowd gathered

round Ma on the railway platform, Khuku was singled out by Ma for a kind enquiry : "Friend! How are you? Are you well?" The child felt shy at such importance given to her and replied coyly : "I am quite well!" The same question was asked by Ma three times, followed on each occasion by a similar answer from the girl. Nobody then understood the significance of such simple conversation which seemed to be quite common and purposeless.

The following extracts from Sri Gupta's letter, since written to me, are self-explanatory :

"We returned from the railway station with a heavy heart and then suddenly discovered that Khuku was suffering from high fever which eventually took a serious turn. Doctors almost gave up all hope of recovery. We went on praying to Ma for her grace, kept her blouse under the child's head and sent a telegram to Ma. At midnight on the 5th day from the onset of the fever, we were desperately doing *japa* when suddenly the room was filled with a sweet fragrance like what we sometimes get in Ma's room. A friend of mine, Sri Sambhu Roy, entered the sick-room and immediately came out. He told me : 'Harendra, I have seen something amazing. When I entered the room I did not see your daughter, but a lady. That lady (pointing to Ma's photograph) was lying in the child's bed. Be prepared! Something good or bad will happen today.' After midnight the fever started subsiding and there was total remission by the next morning. Later on we learnt that our wire had been read out to Ma at Vindhya-chal precisely at 12 o'clock at night. Ma wired to us asking whether my daughter's health had improved.

"The mystery of Ma's blouse being left behind and her conversation with my daughter now seemed to us to have a special significance."

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Sri N. P. Chatterjee, I.A.S. (retired), at present residing in Delhi,\* had the good fortune of being an eye-witness to a wonderful *Ula* of Ma at Vindhyachal within his jurisdiction as District Magistrate of Mirzapur. One day in the beginning of 1955 he came to know at Mirzapur that Ma had arrived at Sri Sri Anandamayi Ashram, Astabhuja Hill, Vindhyachal, and he went there in the evening. Ma was then in her room on the first floor. She seemed to have expected him and so, as soon as he entered, without any preamble she took him to the *verandah* on the west. From there she pointed to a plot of land down below (about 20 ft by 16 ft) and said: "Look here, underneath this ground a number of idols of gods and goddesses lie buried. They came to me and told me that it was very irksome for them to remain buried there and they wanted to be taken out." Ma looked entreatingly at Sri Chatterjee: "Can you not do something about it?" He promised to do his utmost in the matter. He knew very well that the task was extremely difficult, as the ground consisted of hard rock. Experts were needed and all kinds of tools and implements.

Everything was arranged and soon work started in full swing. After the first day's strenuous digging by experienced

labourers, stones were removed and a big pit measuring about 20 ft by 16 ft with a depth of about 3 ft had been dug; yet there was no sign of any idol. The workers, greatly discouraged, said: "There are only stones and nothing else."

On the second day Ma looked unconcerned and indicated that efforts should not be slackened. Sri Chatterjee knew that Ma's words could never be uttered in vain; so he encouraged his workmen, assuring them of success. They dug tirelessly throughout the second day. The pit became deeper, many big boulders were dug out, but not a single idol was found. Ma simply said: "Continue the search".

The labourers had no idea about Ma, but obeyed their Magistrate's orders. He, on the other hand, was determined to carry out Ma's wishes. So the digging continued. The workers were gradually becoming disheartened. They lost all hope of success; failure seemed to stare at them, when suddenly the man in charge of the work rang up the Magistrate excitedly: "Sahib! many idols have been found, please come immediately." Sri Chatterjee, waiting in his office in eager expectation of a message from the *ashram*, did not wait for a second request. He hurried to the site and found a number of idols in good condition. Some of these, weighing about ten to twelve maunds, were specimens of exquisite art and beauty. The total number of idols excavated was 200.

The news of the excavation spread in no time. There was great excitement in the lonely Astabhuja Hill. A large crowd gathered and all kinds of opinion were voiced. Gradually, from far and near, archaeologists, historians, pressmen and the curious gathered at Vindhyachal. Specialists from

\*C/o Dr. Ajit Banerjee, Medical Officer, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi 16.

various countries also were attracted by the amazing discovery. But she, who was the guiding spirit behind all this adventurous operation, looked at the idols just once and then calmly walked away as if nothing special had occurred. Yet a miracle had happened.

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In March 1964, Pinaki Ganguli, Chief Engineer, Howrah Municipality, and his wife Mira, now residing at 1A, Bharat Chandra Road, Calcutta 29, had Ma's first *darsana* at Ranaghat, about fifty miles away from Calcutta. On the eve of their departure, Ma presented a garland to Mira who treasured it with devotion and was convinced later on that the garland had acted as a talisman in dreadful circumstances noted below.

From Ranaghat the Ganguli family, consisting of six members, drove to Navadwip in their car. On their way back to Calcutta they stopped at the steep bank of the Navadwip Ghat of the Ganga late in the evening. Sri Ganguli alone climbed down on foot to the riverside in search of a boat to cross the Ganga. The others remained in the car, parked on the bank, about 35 feet above water-level. As he turned back, Sri Ganguli witnessed a horrible sight — his car sliding down the steep bank and heading for a watery grave. The momentum gathered on the way brought the car into the river in no time. But somehow the vehicle got stuck in the mud and at last came to a halt at a place where the water was not too deep for the occupants to be helped out; and fortunately volunteers, with tools in hand, were readily available. They broke open a door of the car and rescued all. Thus, the Ganguli family narrowly escaped from the jaws of death.

The car remained partly submerged in water till the next morning.

Six years thereafter the Ganguli couple had Ma's second *darsana* — this time in New Delhi. The first question that Ma voluntarily asked Mira was: "You are the girl hailing from Ranaghat, aren't you, who told her mother-in-law when the car was falling into the Ganga: 'Ma's garland is in our hands, nothing will happen to us!'"

It was a fact that when the car was rolling down, Mira had spoken these very words to her mother-in-law. No one, not even Sri Ganguli, knew this. Mira was amazed to hear Ma repeat those very words. She wrote in her contemporaneous diary: "I was flabbergasted to hear Ma repeating the identical words that had been uttered by me six years ago and heard only by my mother-in-law. A regular tempest began to blow in my mind. Ma said: 'Relate all about the incident of drowning in the Ganga'. I described our experience in Bengali and Ma herself translated into Hindi."

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Dr. Jaques Weintrobe, once a medical practitioner in Paris, now a monk known as Vijayananda, has been known to me since 1951. He was not at all interested in 'miracles' in the objective sense of something that strikes one as impossible, as absurd — something that breaks away from natural law. "Its subtle, subjective aspect", he observes, "is quite different. What does it matter to me if a certain Yogi has walked across the water or flown through the air? The real miracle is, when that which one needs, which one desires keenly or feebly, comes at the very moment it is

needed. And still better when it comes, not only as one desired it, but as one would have loved to see it in the innermost depth of one's heart. It has been for me as if I were guided on a path, beset with obstacles, by the hand of the most loving mother — an all-powerful mother. As you advance, she removes all the thorns, all the stones from your path and, when it is necessary, she lifts you across in her arms. And all circumstances adjust and adapt themselves with a marvellous precision, without hurt. 'Coincidence!' I thought at first. But a coincidence that goes on repeating itself daily cannot be called so any more. And all this happens without apparently violating the laws of nature — for the Lord has no need to break any laws. He is the Law. Should I give examples? No, for those who do not know her will not believe me and those who have lived near her have already understood."\*

## Chapter 10

### BIRD ON THE WING PERENNIALY PERCHED ON ONE NEST

The title, apparently self-contradictory, is based on Ma's sayings: "This body is like a bird on the wing"\* and "here is a little wayward daughter who stoutly refuses to move away, even if asked to do so, who never has moved away and who will stay put."†

The contradiction can be reconciled in the light of another saying of Ma: "Far and near are concepts that only exist in your view. You imagine this body to be far away. Actually this body abides close by. How can it possibly desert you?"‡

The paradox inherent in the title can perhaps be explained if its first part — "Bird on the wing" — refers to Ma's 'outer manifestation' and the second — "perennially perched on one nest" — to her 'inner being'.

Ma once observed: "Ma means *atma*. All space is *ma-may* (that is to say, pervaded by *ma's* presence)". Here, does Ma mean *atma* in the sense of *adyasakti* (Primordial Energy)? To Hindus God is not only God the Father as the Christians believe, but also God the Mother, being

\* *Mother as seen by her devotees*, 1967 ed., p. 46.

\* *Aranda Varia*, XXIII/4/222.

† *Mauna Milani*, Bulletin No. 59.

‡ *Mauna Milani*, Bulletin No. 46.

*Brahman* or *Atma*, manifested as goddesses such as Kali, Durga, Lakshmi, Sarasvati etc. *Atma* dwells in all.\*

In her *lila*, Ma is verily a bird on the wing and she has given her reason for being so, somewhat to the following effect: "Many seek my company in diverse ways. So, it is for them that this body has to move from place to place. Of course, persons who can do *japa* and *dhyana* in the quietude of their own abode, whose restless mind has become to some extent subdued, who are self-composed and calm, for them it is different. But persons with an unsteady mind get the chance to attain peace of mind, at least for the time being, when they have the opportunity of the physical presence of this body in their midst. This explains their ardour for personal contact with this body."†

For the last fifty years or so Ma has been constantly touring all India. Even now she continues to be an inveterate traveller notwithstanding infirmities of advanced years. Ma generally responds to the call of those who earnestly seek her, whether living far or near. She, however, maintains that her physical presence is not so important and that in spirit she is always with each of her children.

Once Ma said: "I am ever present with you all, but you have little yearning to see me. What am I to do? Know it for certain I have my eyes fixed on what you do or fail to do."‡

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\*Vide Appendix 'A'.

†Manna Milani, Bulletin No. 64.

‡Mother as revealed to me, by Bhaiji, 1946 ed., p. 56.

Sometime in the fifties, it was Ma's *kheyal* that the members of my family should every day assemble round the sick bed of my octogenarian father residing in Calcutta, and chant the *Gita*. We did so for some years till father lost his power of hearing. Then we stopped the daily chanting as being useless any more and that without reference to Ma. Soon we received a letter from her, then in Dehradun, wondering why the reading of the *Gita* had been discontinued and pointing out that father still had the power of appreciating it. Thus, Ma's watchful eye detected what we failed to do in Calcutta though physically she was hundreds of miles away.

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Once Almora, a hill station in Northern India, having a branch of Anandamayi Ashram, had the exceptional privilege of Ma's uninterrupted presence for nearly two months and a half. On the last night of her stay, a small number of her 'children' had the good fortune of being blessed with Ma's holy company till 1 a.m. On that occasion Ma happened to be in a delightfully communicative mood, relating incidents of her early life and replying to all sorts of questions one after another. Everyone kept wide awake, listening entranced. At the end, a resident of Almora exclaimed: "Mataji, you are leaving us! we shall feel so lonely; our lives will be empty without you." Ma consoled the devotee by saying: "Why do you say I am leaving you? Why do you want to push me away? I am always with you!" Encouraged by Ma's answer, the questioner directly put a specific question: "Do you then live in our hearts?" There was a ring of sincerity in the enquiry. At once the Universal Mother in

Anandamayī Ma was revealed in a flash and she uttered these words : "In your hearts ? Why do you want to restrict me to a particular spot ? Blood of your blood, bone of your bones am I". This was, indeed, Ma's message of assurance that 'farewell' was a word not to be found in her dictionary, a message of confirmation that she completely identified herself with her 'children'. In fact, Ma's physical presence in any particular place seems immaterial in the light of her saying as follows : "This body has her being in all *ashramas*. You imagine she is confined only to the *ashram* set up by you. This body knows but one sole *ashram* which extends over the whole universe. Where is the scope for duality?"\*

In the late twenties and early thirties Ma's devotees of Dacca had been blessed with almost uninterrupted association with Ma till her sudden departure in circumstances already described. After years of separation they were again fortunate in having Ma in their midst, and a lady told her almost in a pique : "Ma ! now-a-days you do not want us." Ma's reply was : "Whether you want me or not, I simply cannot do without you !"<sup>†</sup>

Somebody asked Ma what she had brought for her 'children' after travelling in so many places. Ma denied that she had moved away to any far off place and observed : "I have been moving in the same house, in the same garden. Since I have been inside the same house, how does the question of bringing anything for you arise ?"<sup>‡</sup> Somebody

\* *Mauna Milani*, Bulletin No. 72.

<sup>†</sup> *Sri Sri Anandamayī Prasanga*, by Amulya Kumar Datta Gupta, 2nd ed., Vol. II, p. 168.

<sup>‡</sup> *Do. Do.*, Vol. II, p. 174.

complained : "But we cannot see you with our eyes. If you had really been with us, certainly we would have seen you. I am not satisfied with such an explanation from you." Ma's reply was : "By thinking about somebody one can come close to him. There is really no difference between seeing with the eye and seeing with the mind." Being requested to clarify her statement, Ma said, rather peremptorily : "First of all, do your best ; the rest will be done by Him. If you perform your part, the result will automatically follow."\*

Khan Bahadur Nasiruddin, Registrar, the University of Dacca, wondered why Ma Anandamayī should be moving about from one place to another, if she had attained peace. The gist of Ma's answer was somewhat as follows :

"It is because you people cannot but think in terms of 'coming and going' that you suppose that I too am coming and going in the sense intelligible to you according to your standard. As a matter of fact, I am stationary. Alternatively, I would say this — I do not move about hither and thither ; my 'movements' are restricted to my own house. When you are in your house, do you stick to a particular spot in it ? Of course, you do move about from one room to another within the confines of your house ; similarly, I have been promenading in my own house. This whole world is my house. I am in it (wherever I may happen to be according to your estimation)."<sup>†</sup>

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\* *Sri Sri Anandamayī Prasanga*, by Amulya Kumar Datta Gupta, 2nd ed., Vol. II, pp. 165-166.

<sup>†</sup> *Do. Do.*, 2nd ed., Vol. I, p. 179.

The experience of Kenneth Grant, a resident of London, is interesting.\* One evening he had a distressing problem and he decided that he would submit his perplexity to the Mother and seek her advice. "It is to be noted," he observes, "that there was no conscious formulation of prayer designed with the purpose of creating a link or channel between Mother and myself, through which she might pour the healing streams of her grace; on the contrary, there was a distinct feeling or decision of postponing the matter till the morrow when I would either compose a letter describing the problem, or, more subtly, ask directly of Mother, and within myself, that she give me the strength to dispel my perplexity, enshrining my plea in some sort of prayer or formula or incantation, I had not even made up my mind which it was to be." And what happened on the morrow to this 'child' of Ma, thousands of miles away? "Imagine my amazement", he continues, "on waking next morning, to receive a letter from one of her devotees in India...wherein was contained an answer to my unformulated plea — an answer, note well, that must have been given long before I had thought even of approaching Mother concerning my problem, an answer somehow implanted in the mind of another devotee with the express purpose of having that devotee convey the same to me in the manner in which it happened. Needless to say, my correspondent had not been informed in any way either by Mother or by myself as to the state of my

\**The All-pervading Presence of the Mother*, by Kenneth Grant, *Ananda Varta*, III/3;219.

mind which was known to none other during the time the letter was conceived, written down and despatched."

Kenneth Grant has placed these facts on record "as showing Mother's omniscience and omnipresence concerning one who has not contacted her in the physical at all, not even through correspondence." In conclusion he has postulated a theory to explain his mysterious experience: "Mother's ways are truly mysterious. Such an event, quite apart from the problem or the answer thereto, has had the effect of conferring that most valuable of boons, the certainty of the unity of existence, i.e. the absolute conviction that *guru* (preceptor) and *chela* (disciple) are one, and that if we could only and at all times enter and abide in the deep recesses of Being, where alone is the true Undifferentiated Consciousness, we could always know that which being known everything is known. And whether a problem is trivial or great, such distinctions of degree altogether vanish in that union of the individual soul with the Infinite Life which, for the sake of convenience and of our limited and finite understanding, we lovingly refer to simply as Mother."

Is the "Infinite Life" mentioned by Kenneth Grant another name for Ma's 'inner being'?



## Chapter 11

MA'S COMPASSION AND OMNISCIENCE :  
SOME EPISODES

Limitless is Ma's compassion. It flows spontaneously, irrespective of the question whether the one who is favoured is big or small, rich or poor, good or bad. Ma extends her grace as the rose exudes its perfume. Whoever comes near her with a receptive mind, physically or even in thought, will benefit — sometimes in a strange manner.

In one of Ma's *ashramas* there was, several decades ago, a young man, then aged about twenty — crazy, wayward, impulsive and egocentric. He was suffering from incipient hysteria and was always prone to wrong-doing. On one occasion he behaved so disgracefully that all the inmates of the *ashram* got annoyed. With great indignation and excitement they demanded that the boy be expelled from the *ashram*. Some started hunger-strike by way of protest against his misconduct and sought Ma's immediate intervention. Ma readily responded. She sent for each of the complainants and enquired if he would like the erring youth to remain in the *ashram*. Everybody said : "No, Ma, he should not be allowed to stay here." Under the rules of *ashram* administration and the standard code of ethics, perhaps the boy did deserve expulsion and punishment. But Ma decided otherwise.

With her usual serenity and gracious looks Ma said compassionately : "When nobody wants such a poor and hapless boy, don't you think that he needs me most ? Can a mother forsake her sick child in distress ? Will it do you and the world any good if this perverse young man be allowed to rot in the mire ?" These words came from Ma's lips with so much tenderness and fervour that the hearts of all complainants were visibly moved. They had no answer. They experienced a mysterious change in their attitude and outlook on life. They quickly submitted to Ma's decision and the young man was allowed to stay on.

He is now grown up and is one of the ardent devotees of the Mother. And all admire his wonderful transformation.\*

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\*1

In 1948, Ma's birthday anniversary was being celebrated in a private garden in New Delhi. One morning in the midst of *satsanga* (religious congregation) a weird-looking man entered the garden. He was dressed in a queer fashion and his face bore a look of insanity. He walked straight over to the women's side and spoke to each woman with her head uncovered : "Cover your head." No one took any heed of him. This seemed to annoy him much. He was obviously getting more and more desperate. Finally he approached Ma and repeated his request to her as well. She at once complied with his wish and motioned to the girls sitting near her to do likewise.

\*A Call from Above, by Ganga Charan Dasgupta — *Mother as Seen by Her Devotees*, published by Shree Shree Anandamayi Sangha, 1967 ed., p. 85.

Every woman in the assembly followed suit. The stranger was visibly pleased at his sudden success. With a triumphant smile he walked across to the men's side and sat down quietly. After some time, however, he got up, announcing in a loud voice that he wanted to leave. Ma handed an orange to some one to be passed on to him. This for some unknown reason infuriated the stranger and he threw the fruit at Ma with violence. He aimed well, it hit her. A wave of indignation surged through the crowd. Two of Ma's devotees caught hold of the offender and tried to lead him out of the garden. At the gate he freed himself from their grip and attempted to return to the *satsanga*. One of the devotees hit him and with difficulty the intruder was finally turned out on the street.

After the meeting Ma called the two young men who had dealt with the stranger. She wanted to know all the details. On hearing them, she said: "You are not to prevent anyone from coming to this body. Moreover, you must not beat anybody. To atone for what you have done, keep a fast tomorrow, and you who have hit the stranger may not even drink water." "But how could we allow him to throw the orange at you?" protested the young men, "there was no knowing what he might have done next." Ma's peremptory reply was: "Never mind, he wanted to return to me, you should have let him do so." Thus, the well-meaning volunteers who had saved an awkward situation at considerable personal risk were reprimanded, whereas the aggressive offender, out for mischief, was treated with unmerited kindness.

Next morning the stranger came again. This time he was decently dressed and looked normal. He did not concern

himself with the women's bare heads, but straightaway sat down with men in a dignified manner and remained quiet throughout the *satsanga*. When it was over, he went up to Ma and talked to her. She invited him for lunch, and he stayed until after the meal. He was found to be an educated, cultured and amiable person. Afterwards it transpired that the throwing of the orange at Ma had caused the man such deep remorse that he was healed of his mental disturbance. He had been unbalanced and was restored to normality by Ma's grace.

Ma sometimes says: "If you must be angry, be angry with me, for you will not be able to keep it up for long. If you focus your anger on me, it will soon evaporate."

\* \* \*

On the eve of *Durga Puja* at Ballygunge in 1956, it was once Ma's *kheyal* to take some girls with her in a car from Ballygunge to an undisclosed destination. On her way, she sprang a surprise on a poor resident of Shyamnagar off Barrackpore Trunk Road. He had seen in a dream *Durga Puja* being celebrated in his home. On waking up he felt distressed, because he lacked the resources to do the *Puja* which was due the next week. The girls accompanying Ma knew nothing about the poor man's dream nor about the problem that had been tormenting him. One of them, S, a girl of moderate means and shy temperament, happened to carry a purse containing Rs. 100/-, earmarked for her personal expenses for the ensuing *Durga Puja*. For some inexplicable reason she felt inclined to place the entire amount at the feet of Ma for such use as she might like to make of. S was wait-

ing for an opportunity to fulfil this desire when Ma would be back to Ballygunge. Suddenly Ma whispered to her if she could help Ma's host in Shyamnagar. S felt gratified for this opportunity to offer him the contents of her purse already mentally dedicated to Ma. Her humble contribution proved to be the nucleus of a fund which ultimately enabled the poor man to celebrate *Durga Puja*. He was surprised to note how Ma could know about his dream and was overwhelmed to find such a dream fulfilled through Ma's grace.

\* \* \*

In December 1960, Ma came from Rajgir to Calcutta and was expected to go straight to Agarpara from the Howrah railway station. But her *kheyal* decreed otherwise. To our surprise, Ma's car turned south instead of proceeding northwards for Agarpara. We were specially worried, because Ma looked tired after the tedious railway journey and she was none too well. We felt that Ma was badly in need of rest, but her arrival at Agarpara was delayed by several hours. It transpired later that Ma had visited the houses of four sick persons, scattered over a large area of south Calcutta. Though belonging to different levels from the social, economic and spiritual points of view, they had one common point — an earnest yearning for Ma's *darsana* on the eve of their final exit from this world; and the exit was imminent in each case. Bodily infirmities prevented them from going to Agarpara for *darsana*. The 'vibrations' of their yearning seemed mysteriously to have reached Ma and she thus responded to the inner call of their hearts.

\* \* \*

Once during a session of *satsanga* Ma suddenly evinced interest in something totally unconnected with the topic under discussion. She whispered to an *ashram* girl: "Hot water". Then she asked two other *ashram* girls to keep ready certain first aid items required in case of an accident — two pieces of white cloth rolled like bandage and two strips of flat wood. Ma seemed to be in a great hurry. The occasion for the preparation was not disclosed. Nobody present in the *satsanga* could then imagine that an emergency was imminent. Within a few minutes came an elderly woman with an injured right knee, groaning with severe pain. She was a victim of a street accident on her way to the *ashram*. Immediate medical relief was called for but no doctor was available at the time. However, Ma was there, ready for the emergency. Under her instructions, the *ashram* girls now attended to the patient and fomented her knee with the hot water kept ready. Properly equipped with bandage and improvised splint, they tied the injured knee with precision and meticulous care under Ma's guidance. The doctor who had been sent for turned up after half an hour. Ma told him: "Now you take over!" The doctor said that nothing remained to be done.\*

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The following episode illustrates how when a devotee in distress even mentally seeks refuge in Ma, she can physically appear at the scene, which is nothing short of a miracle.

In a *satsanga* at a school in Varanasi, Ma was once listening to *kirtana* then going on in full swing. Suddenly she

\*For details see *That Compassionate Touch of Ma Anandamayi*, by Narayan Chaudhuri, p. 15.

got up from the dais for reasons best known to her and hurriedly proceeded towards the gate leading to the public road. N and A followed her. A motorist who was driving to the *satsanga* was met at the entrance. Ma unceremoniously asked him to give her a lift to the railway station which he did. On arrival at the station, he was asked to purchase three railway tickets to Sarnath for Ma, N and A. The gentleman pointed out that no train for Sarnath would be available till the next day. Still Ma insisted and the gentleman procured three tickets for Sarnath, knowing full well that there was no point in doing so. Within a few minutes a train steamed into the station and Ma with her two companions hurriedly stepped into an empty compartment. The gentleman murmured that the train, being a mail train, would not stop at Sarnath. Ma paid no heed to his remonstrances. The train whistled off. The motorist went back to Varanasi to inform Gurupriya Debi about Ma's latest *kheyal* and eventually brought her and some others to Sarnath.

Now, N and A had almost an uncanny experience. Within a few minutes the train suddenly stopped, presumably because there was no 'all clear' signal. At once Ma alighted from the train and told N and A: "Come down, come down quickly." A jumped from the train. N was incapable of such an athletic 'feat'. While N was hesitating, Ma helped him get down. And within a few seconds the train started. N and A found themselves under the protecting wings of Ma at Sarnath, thus carried by a mail train not scheduled to touch such an unimportant station. The chain of events was mysterious enough so far. At Sarnath the mystery deepened. The

evening was dark and the locality desolate. Ma asked her companions whether they could lead her to the newly built Birla Dharmasala. Their answer was in the negative. Ma then assumed the role of a guide and started walking in a particular direction without any hesitation. N and A followed her silently. The party at last reached Birla Dharmasala — a big house with a porter posted at the gate. Without caring to make any enquiry Ma walked past many empty rooms and finally entered straight a particular room occupied by a lady who happened to be an ardent devotee of Ma, Maharattan by name.

Maharattan's experience was also very wonderful. She had come from far away for Ma's *darsana* at Varanasi. Misinformed that Ma had gone to Sarnath, she forthwith rushed to Sarnath in a *tonga* and learnt, to her dismay, that there was no question of Ma's visit to that place. In the meantime, the *tonga*-driver had left and there was no train for Varanasi. So Maharattan was stranded. She shuddered to think of the dreadful prospect of spending the night all alone in an empty *dharmasala* situated in a lonely locality far away from human habitation. On the top of this she was unwell and was running temperature. The helpless lady was in a terrible plight. She then completely broke down, crying 'Ma, Ma!' At this juncture Ma physically appeared before her and exclaimed: "Here am I, here am I ..... don't cry any more."

After some time the motorist who had escorted Ma to the Varanasi railway station brought Gurupriya Debi and others to Sarnath. Ma was now revealed in wonderful spirits — she

went on talking and laughing and cutting jokes at the cost of Maharattan. The whole party had *prasada* rather late at night and then they all slept on the roof of the building with Ma lying near to them.\*

## PART III

### A FOUNT OF WISDOM

#### Chapter 12

#### Ma's Teaching : Some Gleanings

Ma says that she says nothing — whatever wells out of her mouth is prompted by *kheyal*. As already stated, Ma never had any formal education beyond the elementary stage. She has written no book, nor does she deliver any lecture. But she gives prompt and conclusive replies to all questions, including recondite ones asked by erudite scholars. Her usual preamble has a sweetness all its own : "As you have not given any education to this little daughter of yours, she talks in a random manner". Her modesty notwithstanding, Ma's sayings invariably bear the stamp of authority and realization.

What is unique about Ma's teaching is that she has no particular doctrine of her own. "From whatever point of view anyone may speak", she once said, "this body will respond from precisely that point of view." It often happens that her answer given to one questioner is contradictory to that given to another on the same point. But why? "God's world", she says, "is made up of both, people who understand its nature and those who do not. They have to be kept satisfied with just the toys they want."

\*For details see *The Compassionate Touch of Ma Anandamayi*, by Narayan Chaudhuri, p. 129.

Ma knows : "there are many mansions in my father's house" and emphasizes that the house is one. She advocates not only tolerance and acceptance of all religions, but respect for each. A particular doctrine, she adds, may lead to imperfect achievement only. She warns : "Where there are doctrines, there will be differences." She once said : "This body responds strictly to the line of thought and to the spirit in which a question is asked. Consequently, what is the opinion of this body and what is not ? If there is a line of approach, there must be a goal to which it leads and beyond that is the unattainable. But where the question of distinction between the attainable and unattainable does not arise, is THAT ITSELF." The concluding sentence of this saying is enigmatic. So are many other sayings of Ma. Perhaps the meaning was—or, in course of time will be—clear to those to whom they were addressed and for whom they were meant. Some of Ma's utterances represent eternal truth of universal application. Not all 'toys', however, are meant for all at all times.

Ma does not speak from the platform of the founder of a new religion nor of a social reformer. Based on the conviction that there is only one Consciousness which abides in all beings, Ma's message is : All are the manifestations of the same Divine Consciousness ; nay, her very own Self. Again and again she reminds us of the eternal truth : '*Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*' ( All this is *Brahma* ) and '*Tat tvam asi*' ( That thou art ).\*

\*Vide Appendix 'A'.

How to attain peace and happiness in life ? What is the secret of bravely and cheerfully facing death as the fulfilment of life ? These and many other questions of vital importance have been answered by Ma in her unique way. For every earnest questioner she has a message of abiding value.

Many of Ma's sayings have been tape-recorded and many more published in books and journals or preserved in unpublished letters and private diaries treasured by her devotees. A compilation of these sayings—not exhaustive but only illustrative—has been made here with the kind co-operation of some spiritually advanced devotees of Ma including monks and foreigners favoured with long association with her.

Let me now present my readers with a rosary made of the gleanings from Ma's sayings classified under appropriate headings.\* These sayings often overlap one another, and thus the collection may be full of repetition. Repetition of the same truth ( with reference to different contexts ) is a useful method of teaching adopted in our sacred books from time immemorial. Sunrise, repeated day after day, never becomes stale ; every morning it has an over-renewed message of life and light. *Matrivani* stands on the same footing. It has a message that inspires—its charm increases with repetition. Like *matridarsana*, *matrivani* will never become stale. True, printed matter is a poor substitute for utterances welling up from Ma's mouth. Still, repetition of her words, in print, "reminds, refines and revives". Here are some examples :

\*I acknowledge my debt of gratitude to Atmanandaji for her translation of most of the sayings of Ma quoted in these pages and collected from publications edited by her.

## I The Supreme Truth\*

1. There is ONE unchanging indivisible REALITY which, though unmanifest, reveals Itself in infinite multiplicity and diversity.

2. That One — the Supreme Truth — is ever present everywhere in all circumstances.

3. Referred to as *Brahman*, He is no other than God: Almighty.

4. God Almighty is nameless and formless; yet all names and forms are His.

5. He is the Father, Mother, *Guru*, Friend, Creator, Preserver, Destroyer — everything.

6. His essence is Being, Consciousness and Bliss.

7. Indeed, He is in everything and everything is in Him; there is nothing but Him.

8. Try to see God in everything and in everybody, including yourself.

9. God Himself is revealed in some guise even in individuals supposed to be sinners, as also in suffering seemingly unbearable.

10. The vision of the Eternal *lila* of the Supreme Being is impossible unless one has seen His Bliss in His universality and self-sufficiency and unless one finds this repeated in one in union with, and as part of, the whole.

11. The immutable *Brahman* and the primeval sound: *AUM* are one and same as ( the word ) *Ma*.

\*Vide also Appendix 'B'

## II God's Name

12. God's name is He himself — the Name and the Named are identical.

13. Refuge has to be sought in His Name in order to realize Him Whose Name is invoked.

14. At every breath try to be in communion with Him through His Name.

15. If the Name that appeals most to you is constantly repeated, you will realize that all names are His Names, all forms are His forms.

16. Since all names are His indeed, He will let Himself be grasped by any one of them; furthermore, it will gradually be revealed that He is also without name and without form.

17. Whether with full awareness or in ignorance, whether willingly or unwillingly, whether with faith or in doubt, if God's name is adhered to, and His image in the mind is sustained, gradually what is to be burnt will burn and what is to be melted will melt.

18. The nature of fire is to convert everything into itself. Similarly, association with His Name inevitably enables one to be identified with Him.

19. Take it from me — repetition of His Name makes everything possible.

20. If you live with the conviction that God is in the closest contact with you, you will gradually discover that there is nothing but God.

21. If at all your 'I' remains, let it exist only as His

servant or as His child and, therefore, the notion that He is far removed will be ruled out.

### III Faith

22. The more one thinks of one's *Ishta* (beloved Deity), the firmer will one's faith in Him grow.

23. People meditate in front of a picture. But what is a mere picture? Just paper! Yet if faith is maintained in meditation, the Lord Himself appears in that picture.

24. Faith is always blind; but this blind faith may ultimately lead to firm belief. For this you are to acquire knowledge through reading — not reading ordinary books but the book that is lodged in every heart. If you read that book, your problems will be solved and all doubts will vanish.

25. You cannot find the Mother until the faith awakens in you that whatever the Mother does is all for the best of Her child.

### IV Guru

26. God Himself appears as the *Guru*. He has to be invoked, full of faith.

27. Just as a *vigraha*\* must not be regarded as a piece of stone, so the *guru* must not be regarded as an ordinary human being. If you look upon him as a human being, you

\**Vigraha* : An image, consecrated through *mantras* (sound symbols) or through the devotion or adoration of the worshipper, becomes the Deity itself.

have not found your real *guru*. Can an ordinary human being ever be a *guru*?

28. The significance of the word '*guru*' is '*Jagadguru*' (World Teacher). A World Teacher is one who diverts men from the path leading to death and puts him on the path of Immortality. He who does this is the '*inner guru*'.

29. Once the *Guru* has accepted a disciple, He will never leave him until the goal has been attained. The question of leaving does not arise at all. Where can the *guru* go? Does he dwell in the realm of coming and going? *Guru* has nothing to do with the body that is transitory and mortal.

30. The *guru* actually emerges from within. When genuine search takes effect, his genuine manifestation is bound to occur; it cannot possibly be otherwise.

31. The One, Himself assuming the shape of the *guru*, of His own accord brings about His manifestation or becomes manifested.

### V Worldly Life

32. There is '*nothing*' in this world; yet everyone is madly pursuing this *nothing* — some more, some less.

33. What a comedy God's *lila* is! What a lunatic asylum! He Himself is sporting with Himself!

34. Man is no other than the Self; but he wrongly thinks of himself as a separate individual centred on his body and identified by a particular name.

35. All sorrow is due to the fact that many are seen where there is only One.



36. Duality is pain. So long as man does not wake up to his identity with the One, the round of birth and death continues for him.

37. In wealth and property there is certainly no peace.

38. If you choose to feed upon the objects of the senses, you move towards the realm of death.

39. Sense enjoyment acts like slow poison. You are driven thereby towards death. Therefore, it is man's duty as a human being to get into the current that leads to immortality.

40. When the mind is full of worldly desires, it is their very nature to confuse the mind. Withdraw the mind from outer things and turn it inwards.

41. According as worldly interests decrease, one progresses towards real joy.

42. Even while living in the world, you can with a calm spirit attend to spiritual practices. Then only will that which is to be given up, fall away; and that which can never be relinquished, which does not go, that indeed will remain.

43. In proportion as one loves God, detachment from sense objects ensues. To concentrate on God means to become drawn towards Him. And *vairagya* (detachment)\* means becoming disentangled from sense objects. Feeling of attraction towards God and indifference to sense objects occur simultaneously.

## VI Man's Duty

44. The search after Truth is man's duty, so that he may advance towards immortality.

\*Vide Appendix 'A'

45. Your sole duty is to remember that He alone is, and that everything is His doing.

46. Invoke Him and be constantly intent on realizing Him.

47. Householders should emulate the ancient *Rishis* (sages), who were married men living with their families and leading a life dedicated to God.

48. Love and serve your consort and children as Divine manifestations. Perform all work as God's service.

49. Since you seek ownership of the garden, you feel unhappy. Be the gardener instead of trying to be the owner, and then you will feel happy.

## VII Breathing and the Mind

50. What is life-breath is really an aspect of the Universal, all-pervasive Energy that functions continuously; it is He in one of His forms - - He who is Truth Consciousness, revealing Himself in this mode.

51. Endeavour to concentrate on the breath: this will provide a check on the mind preventing it from wandering away to outer objects.\*

52. Restlessness and serenity both are aspects of the mind.

53. Do not allow your mind to wander here and there; endeavour to make it one-pointed; have one single end in view.

\*Vide Chapter 13.

54. Water inside a pitcher noisily moves to and fro when the pitcher is disturbed. But as soon as the pitcher is placed in a position of equilibrium, the water becomes calm. Similarly, sit for long in a steadfast posture with your mind concentrated on one fixed thought or aim, the restlessness of your mind will be slowly subdued.

55. When engaged in *japa* you are attentively to mark the motions of your breathing — inhaling and exhaling; if your mind tries to stray to and fro, forcibly attune it to your breathing; thus will slowly set in the process of calming your mind.

56. Utensils used for worshipping a god or goddess must be washed clean and bright, the place for worship also must be carefully scrubbed and kept clean. Then the mind of the worshipper will also feel a sense of purity. Mind you — your body also is a ceremonial vessel to be used mainly for worship. This will bring inner purity of the mind.

57. You need at least two meals a day. Similarly, you should remember God and chant His Name at least twice a day — say, morning and evening. This is for your mind's well-being.

58. If you do not like to meditate on an image, you are just to sit still and carefully attend to your breathing; you may not do anything else; even this practice will quieten your mind.

59. "Who am I?" With this attitude endeavour to let the mind stand back as a witness. Search after your Self. As long as possible, sit immersed in meditation, becoming quite still, steady and fully concentrated.

60. It is natural for worldly desires to try to take exclusive possession of your mind. These confuse the mind.

61. Control your desires for sense objects. Be moderate in eating, sleeping. As a pilgrim on the path to God, you should be content with such food and sleep as will help you to remain fit for the onward march.

62. Discipline of the tongue and other sense organs will help the mind to withdraw from outer things and will turn it inwards.

63. Regular prayer purifies the mind and the heart. Set apart at least 10 minutes for your daily prayer at a fixed hour. You may even go on doing your usual work during this period, but observe silence and meditate on Him in any way you like. Don't be squeamish about being in a pure or impure state — it is not necessary to be particular about sanctity of your clothes, washed or unwashed. But scrupulously stick to the time. See that throughout your life there should be no slackness in regularity and punctuality.\*

### VIII Sadhana

64. Whatever may be your shortcomings, don't be depressed, don't lose hope. Try to improve yourself.

65. Exert yourself to the limits of your power, however feeble. He is there to fulfil what has been left undone.

66. Begin here and now, it is never too late to begin.

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\*Ma lays special emphasis on strict observance of this practice. Vide Chapter 15.

67. How can you expect to see the road when you have kept your door shut? Open the door and you will see the road.

68. Proceed along this road where you will meet many fellow-travellers who will of their own accord enquire about your destination. They will often direct you to the right path, if you have chosen the wrong one.

69. Everyone should start along the lines taught by his own religion.

70. By saying 'I cannot' one does not get far. One has to acquire capacity and achieve his end.

71. By God's grace one is born as a human being. Try to make the best of this opportunity. Everything is possible for man.

72. Even though someone may slip and fall, he will not remain lying on the ground but will attempt to rise, stand up and walk again.

73. The speed of advancing must become brisk. In order to find your Self, progress along your own path, in your own rhythm.

74. How long do you want to stay in the wayside inn? Will you not go to your own Home? How nice to think — you are yourself your home, you are also the pilgrim, and at the same time a foreign visitor!

75. A spiritual traveller must not allow his mind to be distracted by anything; he should proceed with firm determination towards his goal.

76. Don't sit idle. Always be engaged in doing something useful. Either chant God's name in silence, or read

a good book, or discuss a good topic. But don't waste your valuable time in idle gossip.

77. Even though you feel that your spiritual practice is mere tedious reiteration, it is this very practice that will clear the path for you within you.

78. Whatever spiritual exercise, ritual and so forth one is engaged in, should be carried out with faith and love. No ritual should be performed irreverently.

79. It is by yearning and pining for Him that the ONE is found. In times of adversity and distress as well as in times of well-being and good fortune, try to seek refuge in the ONE alone. Keep in mind that whatever He does is wholly for the best. He is the fountain of goodness.

80. Prayer never goes in vain. So long as no response is received, prayer must be continued.

81. It is but the Self that calls Itself, and none other than the Self that realizes Itself.

82. By ceaseless prayer He Who is *Akhanda* (whole) is found. One's own Self, the Life of one's life, the Beloved of One's heart is the One to be eagerly sought.

83. There is one centre in your being from which come vibrations of *mantra* (sound symbols); images also are revealed therefrom together with the Truth underlying them. Who is it that does all this? Reflect! He dwells within you and does everything — He awakens enthusiasm; He inspires without your knowing it. He is the omniscient Being. Why speak of Self-realization in the future? It is here and now — only the veil That hides it has to be destroyed.

### IX Peace and Happiness

84. Relative happiness, that is to say, happiness depending on the fulfilment of any worldly desire, ends in grief.

85. A worldly desire, if unfulfilled, makes you miserable ; if fulfilled, it is almost invariably followed by some other desire and the chain of desires disturbs your peace of mind.

86. You will have peace only if you can rise above worldly desires.

87. So long as one believes that true happiness can be had in this world without searching within, one will remain in bondage.

88. Strive to abandon yourself, without reserve, to Him. Then you will have no grief, no pain, no disappointment, no frustration.

89. He is the fountain of Peace and the treasure-house of real Happiness.

90. It is only when you leave everything to Him that there is hope for Peace and Happiness.

91. In Him is all attainment, the summit of fulfilment.

92. Perfect resignation gives the deepest joy. Accept it as your sole resource.

93. Unconditional surrender to Him is the best solace for man.

### X Realization

94. Among all creatures man alone has been endowed with the capacity to realize God.

95. Man's bounden duty is to endeavour to awake to his real nature as a human being and to kindle the desire to realize.

96. Who am I ? This realization is the purpose of human life.

97. Don't indulge in cynical despair. Don't say : "Realization is not for me, not for me !" Resolve with determination "I must attain Self-realization, I must." Doubt is sin.

98. Self-realization is God-realization and God-realization is Self-realization.

99. It is the Will of the Almighty that prevails. By living in harmony with His Will and becoming an instrument in His hands you should try to realize Him.

100. What does *Atma-darsana*, the direct perception of the Self imply ? The seer, the seen and the act of seeing—where these three are one, there the *Brahman* is realized.

## Chapter 13

## DIALOGUES AND PARABLES

Some aspects of Ma's teaching in the abstract, briefly sketched in the last chapter, are elaborately illustrated in her dialogues narrated in the present one. These dialogues also cover certain other topics of general interest.

## 1

Who or what is Ma? A goddess in human form? An *Avatara*?\* A Self-realized person? A spiritual aspirant? These questions have agitated the minds of many. I once approached Didima for an answer. She told me that she did not know what her *Nirmala* was. I have had the privilege of discussing Ma's true identity and spiritual status with some other great associates of Ma including Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj. Each of them has some image of Ma painted on his or her mind. Strangely enough, not one of such images is identical with any other. In the Introductory Chapter it has been noted how Ma was revealed to, and described by, Paramahansa Yogananda. Ma's image painted on the Paramahansa's mind is beyond our comprehension. The following dialogues may, perhaps, shed some light on the subject:

\*Vide Appendix 'A'

Questioner (an Irish journalist): Am I right in believing that you are God?

Ma: There is nothing save Him alone. Everyone and everything are but forms of God. In your person also He has come here now to give *darsana*.

Questioner: Then why are you in this world?

Ma: In this world? I am not anywhere. I am myself reposing within myself.

Questioner: What is your work?

Ma: I have no work. For whom can I work since there is only One?\*

\*

\*

\*

Swami Dayananda (of *Bharat Dharma Mahamandal*): Mother! What are you in fact? People hold different views regarding you and no agreement seems to exist. What have you to say of yourself?

Ma: Do you want to know what I am? Well, I am what you consider me to be — not more, not less.†

\*

\*

\*

Bhaiji once made a submission, in the spirit of a genuine seeker, couched in prayerful language: "Mother! pray, tell me, what are you really?" Ma laughed and said affectionately:

"How could such childish queries arise in your heart? Visions of gods and goddesses appear in accordance with one's inherited dispositions. I am what I was and what I shall be. I am whatever you conceive, think or say. But it

\**Ananda Varta* VIII/140.

†*Mother as Seen by Her Devotees*, 2nd ed., p. 164.

is a supreme fact that this body has not come into being to reap the fruits of past *karma*.”\*

## II

Not many are so much interested in unravelling the mystery as to who or what Ma is as in knowing what she says, because her words improve one's mind and strengthen it spiritually.

While talking with spiritually advanced persons or erudite scholars, Ma often speaks from a level too high for the common man and in language almost unintelligible to him. Thus, once she asked Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj : “*Baba* : having attained *nirvana*, can one still be compassionate ?” “When speaking of compassion”, replied the Mahamahopadhyaya, “there must be another in sorrow.”

Ma : So then, does compassion constitute an obstacle to the attainment of *nirvana* ?

Mahamahopadhyaya : Ma, there are two opinions. According to the one, to feel compassion is impossible after the attainment of *nirvana*. According to the other, even after the attainment of *nirvana*, the compassion which is an integral of the Self ( *svarupabhuta* ) remains — just as in *moksha*, even without an object there is Bliss-Consciousness. This is called *Buddhahood*.

Ma : When speaking of *Buddhahood*, there is compassion even after the attainment of *nirvana*. Just as however

much heat you may derive from fire, its burning power will not be diminished thereby. In God, Whom you conceive to be the Absolute, nothing is lost. He is the Self, depending on nothing but Itself, thus free and Self-sufficient.

Mahamahopadhyaya : There is yet another point. One thing is the compassion that is practised and another the compassion that comes as a natural outflow. It is like the Light which is the essence of the Sun and the Light that radiates from it. Is there actually a difference between the two or are they both one and the same ?

Ma : Both are one and the same. ‘Being’ and ‘doing’ are in reality one, but when looked at from the empirical point of view of the world, they are indeed different. Essentially he who acts is one with him who becomes. Will-power arises because of separation from Essential Being. There is then Supreme Power on the one hand and will-power on the other. The power which inspires the action of the individual is a means to the realization of Supreme Power. But, *Baba*, when grasping the essence, ‘being’ and ‘doing’ are all one. Thinking that there are two, action is performed by everyone. But ‘there’ who is the second ? In order that this may be revealed there is *Svakriya* ( Self-action ).

Mahamahopadhyaya : Does a state exist that cannot be expressed in words.

Ma : Yes, such a state is inevitable. It is a state in which there is no question of vocal expression or anything like that. ( After a pause ) *Baba*, as one goes on advancing, one finds a fellow-traveller. Again, at times no companion is found. All the same, once the Goal is before one's eyes, one

\* *Mother as revealed to me*, by Bhajji, 1972 ed., p. 6.

cannot be deceived any more. This is why it is said : "He alone manifests as the Scripture, as the Path."\*

\* \* \*

Here are some dialogues of Ma, with different types of questioners, on topics mostly of general interest and free from technicalities e.g. questions relating to the existence of God, the purpose of worshipping Him and an easy way leading to God-realization.

Questioner (an eminent medical practitioner of Delhi) : What proof is there that there is God ?

Ma : What proof is there that you exist ?

Questioner : Simple. I perceived that I am.

Ma : Who is this I ?

Questioner : Ma ! I do not want to be engaged in a philosophical discussion. I want to know from you plainly and simply if God is a reality.

Ma (emphatically) : God is a reality. Just as you are to yourself.†

Questioner : Is a direct vision of God possible with our eyes ?

Ma : A vision as clear as day-light. The belief that God does not exist is the chain by which man is bound — the smoke-screen called *maya*. That covers your real Self. Remove it and God will stand revealed in all His glory.‡

\* \* \*

\* *Ananda Varta*, XI/1/37-39.

† *Upadeshāmṛta Samgraha*, by Kumar Chandra Bhattacharya, 2nd ed., p. 105.

‡ *Ananda Varta*, I/3/139.

Questioner : Is it possible for a man engaged in *sadhana* (spiritual pursuits preparatory to God-realization) to see God by direct perception ?

Ma : While advancing towards Calcutta, Calcutta cannot be seen. At the end of your journey there will be Calcutta. Similarly God will be found at the end of *sadhana*.

\* \* \*

Questioner : What can the Great Mother give to the individual ?

Ma : The spirit of motherhood — the Mother gives Herself. She loves, protects, does everything. What is there that She cannot give ?

Questioner : What is the easiest way to God ?

Ma : Profuse tears.

Questioner : If tears do not come ?

Ma : Seek the company of those who shed tears. Attend *satsanga* (religious congregation). The easiest way to God is through love and devotion.\*

\* \* \*

An unsophisticated devotee had genuine misgivings as to what was the point in observing prescribed rituals meant for the worship of a God not known to the worshipper. He had failed to formulate his question properly. But that did not matter. Ma herself clarified the purport of the question in course of her answer which satisfied the questioner and others present. Thus, his question was : "People are asked to worship God, to sing His praise, to repeat God's name constantly.

\* *Ananda Varta*, II/57.

And they do all this without knowing what God is. Will you please explain?" Ma's answer was as follows: "God is all-knowledge, and one cannot know His true nature till one attains Self-realization. Thereafter, one will find Him to be none other than one's Self, the only *Atman*\* — the *Atma*-with-form as also the *Atma*-without-form as *chit*, Pure Consciousness. In the meantime, prayer, worship etc., have to be performed as means to that end."†

\*                      \*                      \*

Here is Ma's answer to a somewhat similar point raised by another questioner :

Questioner : God is formless. But what can be thought of must have name and form ; God being formless, He cannot be thought of !

Ma : Yes, He is indeed formless, nameless, immutable, unfathomable. All the same, He has come to you in the form of *Sabda-Brahman* ( *Brahman* symbolised through sounds such as *Aum*\* ) and *avatara*.\* These also are He Himself, and consequently, if you constantly repeat His name and contemplate His form, the veil which is your 'I' will fall off and then He Who is beyond form and thought will shine forth.‡

### III

The following dialogues are on self-knowledge, happiness and allied subjects. To start with, a written record of Ma's

\*Appendix 'A'.

†*Ananda Varta*, I/57.

‡*Ananda Varta*, IV/4/338.

answers on the spot translated by Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of Madras :

Ma : Where questions arise, there is answer too. Who questions whom ? There is only one *Atman* everywhere.\* You are That. Where there is duality, there is misery. You are non-dual, eternal. You seek truth, knowledge, bliss, because you are that. No one wants *mrityu* ( death ), *ajñana* ( ignorance ), *duhkha* ( sorrow ). True, evil has a fascination for man, who, attracted by it, falls. This is due to *vasana* ( desire ). To counteract it one must be attracted towards God, one's true Self. You are *Purna* ( complete ) †

Questioner : How to distinguish *purnata* ( completeness ) from *apurnata* ( incompleteness ) ?

Ma : You are *purna*, and so you ought to know. There is the veil of *ajñana* ; but in the midst of that, there is also the door of *jñana*. You have to find yourself. Of course, the *guru* will help you. You can begin from anywhere. What is required is *ekagrata* ( one-pointedness ). Enquire : "Who am I ?" and you will find the answer. Look at a tree : from one seed arises a huge tree ; from it come numerous seeds, each one of which in its turn grows into a tree. No two fruits are alike. Yet it is one life that throbs in every particle of the tree. So, it is the same *Atman* everywhere.

All creation is That. There is beauty in the birds and in the animals. They too eat and drink like us, mate and multiply ; but there is this difference : we can realize our true

\*Vide Appendix 'A'.

†*Ananda Varta*, I/59.



nature, the *Atman*. Having been born as human beings, we must not waste this opportunity. At least for a few seconds every day, we must enquire as to who we are. It is no use taking a return ticket over and over again. From birth to death, and death to birth is *samsara*. But really we have no birth and no death. We must realize that."\*

Questioner : What is the best path to the knowledge of the Self ?

Ma : All paths are good. It depends on man's *samskaras* — impressions, dispositions, psychic traces left in the mind after any experience, his conditioning with tendencies brought over from previous births. Just as one can travel to the same place by plane, railway, car or cycle, so also there are different lines of approach for different people. But the best path is the one which the *guru* points out.†

\*                      \*                      \*

Questioner : Is the formless nearer to Truth than God-with-form ?

Ma : Is ice anything but water ? Form is just as much He as the Formless. To say that there is only one formless Self and all forms are illusion would imply that the formless was nearer to Truth than God-with-form. But according to this body form and the formless are He and He alone.

Questioner : Do you say happiness lies in finding my Self ?

Ma : Yes, find your Self ; discovering who you are really means to find God, for there is nothing outside of Him.

\* *Ananda Varta*, I/60.

† *Ananda Varta*, VIII/1/41.

Questioner (a European) : You say all are God, but are not some people more God-like than others ?

Ma : For him who asks such a question, this is so. But in actual fact, God is fully and equally present everywhere.

Questioner : Is there no substance in me as an individual ? Is there nothing in me that is not God ?

Ma : No. Even in 'not being God' there is only God. Everything is He.

Questioner : When there is only ONE, why are there so many different religions in this world ?

Ma : Because He is infinite, there are infinite varieties of conception of Him and of paths leading to him.\*

#### IV

Ma has a special message for sceptical men of the modern age of science.

Questioner : Suppose an atheist lives a moral and righteous life, is he nevertheless on a lower level than the faithful devotee ?

Ma : An ethical life purifies the mind even though one may have no faith in God. If one believes in some Supreme Power or holds a high ideal, this also will serve a lofty purpose. By living an ethical life one progresses unconsciously towards the realization of the Divine.

\*                      \*                      \*

Questioner : In the age of science it is difficult to believe in God.

\* *Ananda Varta*, VIII/1/42-44.

Ma : By studying science the thirst for knowledge is aroused, and thus one will awaken to the search after Truth. But he who denies God has a partial vision — his point of view is one-sided, not comprehensive. An integral, complete vision unites the point of view of science with that of faith. In a full vision, the standpoints of the believer and the non-believer meet. To lay stress on righteousness and ethics will elevate your character and eventually lead to perfection. A complete, unobstructed vision will then open out.

\* \* \*

Questioner : Since the world can be explained by environment, heredity, in other words by science, what need is there to believe in God ?

Ma : All those explanations are relative — not complete, not exhaustive.

\* \* \*

Once a party of American tourists, about fifty strong, visited the Vrindaban Ashram and had a long discussion with Ma on religious topics. They were satisfied with Ma's easy solution of certain problems which had been worrying some of them. The Americans were overwhelmed with joy. A smart Indian youth who happened to be present, failed to profit from Ma's words which had so effectively touched the hearts of the foreigners. After their departure, he told Ma : I do not believe in religion, nor in God. All that I want is prosperity in life and freedom from misery and suffering. Could you help me ?

Ma did not specifically mention the name of God to the pleasure-seeking youngman suffering from allergy to God.

Her message was : Prosperity and freedom from suffering can be achieved by those who live a good life and adhere to Truth — Truth is at once the end and the means. She also laid emphasis on straightforwardness, discipline, service, *satsanga* and study of the scriptures. Ma concluded with the observation that if one could achieve success in the pursuit of Truth, eventually misery and suffering — in fact, evil in all forms — would be ruled out of one's life.\* The *Upanishads* and the *Bhagvata* declare that Truth is another name of *Brahman*.

## V

Is renunciation of the world a condition pre-requisite to communion with God ? Ma's answer is in the negative. She prescribes a technique for leading a householder's life consistent with spiritual advancement.

Ma : You are not called upon to retire to the forest, nor to become inert, like a stone, unresponsive to what goes on about you. You have to start life from the position God has placed you in. Be His servant. If you are at home, look upon your son as Balagopal (infant Krishna), your little daughter as Uma (Divine Mother) and your consort as Narayana (God in one form) or Lakshmi (Divine Mother, daughter of Durga). Don't do any harm to anybody. Let the little attachment you have developed to people about you continue within its minimum limit. This world is but a *dharmasala* (a lodge for pilgrims where they may stay for a

\**Santan-Vatsala Sri Sri Anandamayee Ma*, by Swami Narayana-nanda Tirtha, p. 317.

short time). When the call will come for your final exit, all the ties of life will have to be snapped and you won't have a moment's respite. The goal of your final union is with the *Atma* or Self. Forgetting this, you look upon your body as your own self and that is the root of all bondage, of all the miseries of life.

\* \* \*

Questioner (a Westerner) : Is there no justification at all for professional and any other mundane work ?

Ma : Even while working in the world, that is, while you are engaged in your professional or mundane work, you can do one thing. What you do throughout the day, endeavour to do it in a spirit of service. Serve God in every one, regard every one and everything as manifestation of Him. Whatever work you undertake, do it as His servant. If you live with this attitude of mind, the path to Reality will open out before you.

\* \* \*

Questioner (another Westerner) : What is right for me — to live the worldly life or a contemplative life in seclusion ?

Ma : To whichever of the two you give your heart and soul, that is right for you.

## VI

Should *karma*\* (action) be avoided as being an impediment to spiritual advancement ? This all important question was considered in the following dialogues :

\*Vide Appendix 'A'

Questioner : How can we benefit spiritually by action ?

Ma : By doing work for its own sake without expecting any fruit or reward, i.e. engaging in *karma-yoga*. Such action leads to union with the Divine. As long as a desire to distinguish oneself is lurking, it is *karma-bhoga* -- working for one's own satisfaction, which often leaves a bitter taste. In *karma-bhoga* one does the work and enjoys the fruits through the sense of prestige it brings ; whereas by relinquishing the desire for fruits, you perform what is really *karma-yoga*.

Questioner : How is it possible to work without desire ?

Ma : By doing work with the feeling that one is serving the Supreme Being through work. That is a way to realize God, and the desire for God-realization is obviously not a desire in the ordinary sense. By regarding all manifestations as those of the Supreme Being one attains to communion that leads to liberation. Whatever work is undertaken, let it be done with one's whole being and in the spirit — 'Thou alone workest and I am only Thy instrument' so that there may be no opportunity for affliction, distress or sorrow.\*

## VII

Ma is very discriminating about recommending *samnyasa* (renunciation of the world) as will appear from the following dialogues :

Questioner : Should I renounce the world ?

\*Words of Sri Anandamayee Ma, p. 69.

Ma : If you ask me whether you should or should not renounce the world, I shall say that the time has not yet come for you to do so, since the question arises in your mind whether you should or should not. The call of renunciation must be felt as a compulsion. A man who hears this call leaves all behind even as a dry leaf falls from a tree. Renunciation does not consist in overcoming a sense of worldly duties prompted by escapism. Renunciation must come spontaneously. Does anyone debate whether one should escape from a house on fire ?

\* \* \*

Once a youngman, dressed like a *sannyasi*, visited the Dehradun Ashram.

Ma : Are you a *sannyasi* ?

Visitor : No.

Ma : Then why are you dressed like one ?

Visitor : For all practical purposes I am. I have renounced the world.

Ma : In order to carry on your *sadhana* for Self-realization ?

Visitor : I have not thought about it. For the present I have nothing to do with the world.

Ma : Does it mean that you have left home for personal reasons and do not wish to go back ?

Visitor : Yes.

Ma : In that case you are practising a great deception on the public and doing no good to yourself either.

Visitor : I have nothing to do with anybody ; it is nobody's concern what I do with my life.

Ma : That is not correct. Your appearance as an ascetic means something to the public. It is our tradition to support a man engaged in intensive *sadhana*, because he has no other means of support. He has given up his own will towards self-support, depending solely on the Divine Will. The people choose to support him as they would support any person selflessly engaged in some activity for the benefit of the society. This garb is not to be adopted to solve personal problems or to escape from difficult situations. If you are not engaged in *sadhana* to the exclusion of all other concerns, you have no right to accept food or shelter from the lay public who, seeing your robes, will give automatically without questioning your bona fides.

## VIII

The philosophy of evil has been explained by Ma in many dialogues, the gist of some of which is given hereinbelow :

Questioner : How is evil in the world compatible with the idea of a God, whom we should like not only to fear but also to love ?

Ma : When you have realized God, good and evil cease to exist for you any more.

Questioner : Where does the source of evil lie ? If *Brahman* is all in all, as Hinduism teaches, then evil also must derive from Him and occur with Him !

Ma : Good and evil are distinctions that arise only in human thought and experience ; otherwise these are two sides

of the same thing. Only when entering the world of duality we begin to distinguish between good and evil.\*

\*                      \*                      \*

Questioner : How is the idea of a benevolent God compatible with ruin and destruction in the history of peoples and lives of families and individuals ?

Ma : Do you believe that God is the creator of this world and therefore its Lord ?

Questioner : Let us any way in our discussion take it for granted,

Ma : Very well. If God is the Lord of the world, He can do with it as He pleases. Suppose you have grown beautiful flowers in your garden, but decide to plant fruit trees in their place, won't you have to remove the flowers ? If you have a fine house, but wish to build a larger and better one on the same plot, you demolish the old one. The freedom that is yours in small things, God exercises in great ones. In both is He, in destruction as well as in construction. The history of nations, families and individuals is the great *lila* (divine sport) that He stages with Himself.†

\*                      \*                      \*

A couple, overwhelmed with grief at the death of their son, sought refuge in Ma.

Questioner : Ma ! why did the child die prematurely ?

Ma : It all depends on one's *karma*.‡ Your *karma* was to serve your son for a few years and his *karma* was to accept

\*Ananda Varta, XIII/3/94.

†Ananda Varta, XIII/3/94.

‡Vide Appendix 'A'.

your care. When it was over, God took him away. Such is the great Divine *lila*. Loss and bereavement are parts of earthly existence.

Having thus prepared the bereaved couple's mind for accepting death as inevitable, Ma explained the philosophical aspect of life and death.

Ma : Remember that the *Atma*\* of your child and your own *Atma* are one. The *Atma* who is never born nor dies eternally IS. Only our body is discarded like a worn-out garment.

Then Ma gave them something to fall back upon : "Try not to be attached to the body nor to weep for it — weep for God alone. Remember Him, repeat His holy Name, contemplate Him and regularly read the scriptures. Thus you will be comforted and your grief will be alleviated. Let your life be dedicated to God."

Ma gave a finishing touch by explaining the great significance of suffering : "Suffering is sent to remind you to turn your thoughts towards That which is real — to God Who will give you solace."†

\*                      \*                      \*

A householder, distressed by misfortune which had visited him in a battalion, made a petious appeal to Ma : "Mother mine ! My health is shattered — I want cure of my ailments ; secondly, I am in dire poverty — I want money ; thirdly, my daughter has reached marriageable age — I want a suitable

\*Vide Appendix 'A'.

†Ananda Varta, XXIX/3/225, 226.

bridegroom for her ; and fourthly, a law-suit is pending against me—I want victory, so that my prestige may be saved. These are my only four submissions.”

With great patience Ma listened to the grief-stricken man's long tale of four-fold sources of misery. She concluded the dialogue with one sentence uttered with deep sympathy and unequalled grace : “The sovereign remedy for all ills lies in seeking refuge in Him.”

## IX

Beginners in spiritual pursuits, eager to learn, are given free scope for asking elementary questions and Ma sympathetically gives them replies in simple but inspiring language, for their self-advancement.

Questioner : When waking in the morning I feel myself near God, but by the time I had got up and sat down for meditation, this mood has evaporated to a certain extent. Is it all right to meditate lying down ?

Ma : When you learn something by heart, it is irrelevant in what position you do so. Some people learn better while sitting, others while lying down. If you find it easy to fix your mind on God while lying, you may do so, lying straight. But the best position for meditation is to sit erect and absolutely still in the posture which is comfortable for any particular person.

Questioner (a German) : What is the difference between prayer and meditation ?

Ma : When praying, one asks for the fulfilment of one's desire, even though it be the desire to become one with God or to serve Him or realize Him ; whereas meditation (*dhyana*) means to be absorbed in the contemplation of Him. In this there is no room for desire.

Questioner : How can one attain to such meditation ?

Ma : It comes spontaneously. At first you remember Him and ponder over Him and then contemplation sets in of itself. By *sadhana* contemplation of the Beloved comes naturally of its own accord.\*

Questioner : Again and again it occurs to me that I should stop praying altogether. Whether intentionally or not, our prayer usually becomes a petition. Does this not amount to some kind of interference with true prayer ?

Ma : Still you should go on praying. In fact, you can never pray enough. When the time comes for you to cease from praying, you will stop of your own accord. Then the question whether you should pray or not will not arise at all.

Questioner : How can our minds be free for prayer and meditation when we are so much burdened with various kinds of work, including domestic duties ? What should we do in that case ?

Ma : Let the work be done mechanically without your exertion. Work without the feeling that it is you who is

\* *Ananda Varta*, X/1/33.

working. Take it as if it is God's work done through you as His instrument. Then your mind will be at rest and at peace. That is prayer and meditation.\*

Questioner ( a Punjabi lady ) : I do *japa* regularly, but my mind does not become still.

Ma : All the same you must not give up the attempt : it takes time to make the mind still.

Questioner : My children are so noisy ; not always, it is true, but no sooner have I sat down for my *pūja* than, without fail, they get quite uproarious.

Ma ( with a smile ) : Suppose you stand by the seashore wishing to go into the water, can you wait until all the waves have subsided ?

**X**

In reply to questions regarding *japa*, *dhyana* and *mauna* (silence), Ma has given guidance somewhat to the following effect :

(a) **Japa**

If with the help of a *mantra* (sound symbol) received from the *guru* we can remain concentrated on the breath, or even at any time there be no *mantra*, we simply keep on watching the movement of the breath : this will help to steady the mind and may also be an aid in search of Him Who is the

\* *Ananda Varta*, 1:57.

**Life of our life, who is the Whole, the Eternal One.....The ever-moving breath changes its rhythm according to what we do, feel and think with the precision of a clock's pendulum, which works without break, though it may at times go fast or slow. With a similar constancy endeavour to concentrate on the breath ; this will exercise a check on the mind that will prevent it from wandering away to outer objects.....With the help of your intelligence and individual capacity try to unite the mind with the breath. Do you know what is the essential thing ? To realize that the unbroken current of respiration itself is a revelation of Him Who is the indivisible Whole.**

(b) **Dhyana**

The spiritual aspirant should practise *dhyana* in the proper *asana* (posture) and deeply meditate on his *Ishta* (beloved deity). He should purge himself of all outside thoughts and consider himself pure. Once he is absorbed in genuine *dhyana*, worldly attractions lose all their appeal and then worldly enjoyments cannot possibly touch him. Meditation opens up one's being to the Light, to that which is Eternal. In true meditation, Reality is contacted. When the movement of your true nature sets in, then, because it is directed solely towards God, the knots of the heart will be unravelled .....Then you should know that the current of your life is turned towards the Eternal. Give yourself up to the wave, and you will be absorbed by the current -- having dived into the sea, you do not return any more. The Eternal Himself is the wave that floods the shore, so that you may be carried away. Those who can surrender themselves to this aim will

be accepted by Him. But if your attention remains directed towards the shore, you cannot proceed — after bathing you will return to the shore. If your aim is the Supreme, the Ultimate, you will be led on by the movement of your own true nature. There are waves that carry away and waves that pull back. Those who can give themselves up, will be taken by Him. In the guise of the wave He holds out His hand and calls you : 'Come, come, come !'

Meditation of the syllable *Aum*\* has been extolled in the *Upanishads*. It is regarded as the best means of attaining *Brahman*.\* By repeated practice of chanting *Aum* one rises from the sound to the soundless *Brahman*.

### (c) Mauna ( Silence )

Even when speech is suppressed, the activity of the mind still continues. All the same silence helps control the mind. As the mind dives deeper, its activity slackens off, and then one comes to feel that He Who provides for everything will arrange matters. When the mind is agitated by thoughts of worldly things, the benefit that should be gained by abstaining from speech is lost. One may, for instance, keep silent at the moment of anger, but some time or other it is bound to burst forth. When the mind is centred on God, it keeps on advancing steadily, and along with this emerges purity of body and mind. To let thoughts dwell on objects of the senses is waste of energy. When the mind is thus occupied and silence is not observed, it finds release in speech ;

\*Vide Appendix 'A'

otherwise this kind of silence might put undue strain on the senses and possibly result in ill-health. But when the mind is turned inward, not only can there be no injury to health, but more than that, by constantly dwelling on the thought of God all the *granthis* ( knots )\* that make up ego are unravelled, and thereby that which has to be realized will be realized.

To observe silence means to keep the mind fixed on Him. At first, one feels the impulse to talk ; later, all inclination and disinclination vanish ... What is necessary becomes available of its own accord — presents itself, as it were, when there is closer union with Him.

To say 'through silence He is realized' is not correct, because Supreme Knowledge does not come 'through' anything — Supreme Knowledge reveals Itself. For destroying the 'veil', there are suitable spiritual disciplines and practices.

### XI

Sometimes replies, most valuable to Ma's devotees, from a practical point of view, are evoked by most ordinary questions from ordinary persons.

Questioner : People think they must sit as near as possible to you. Do those who sit at the back in the distance get less than the ones in front ?

Ma : Suppose someone sits very close to this body, but his thoughts wander away to his family, home or business, while another person right at the back in the distance keeps his mind on God and feels His presence, surely he is nearer to God than the one who sits close to this body.

\*Vide Appendix 'A'.



Questioner : What about doing *pranama* (obeisance) ?  
People think they must do it right in front of you.

Ma : *Pranama* is done to God alone, never to a person, and therefore can be done anywhere, for He is all-pervading.

\* \* \*

Questioner : What is the right way of doing *pranama* ?

Ma : When doing *pranama* to a deity or a living saint, first have *darsana* of his whole figure. Start with the feet and let your eyes move right up to the head, while inhaling slowly. Imagine that together with your breath you are absorbing into yourself 'power' from him to whom you are bowing. Then let your gaze descend slowly again to the feet while exhaling ; at the same time offer yourself to God with all that is in you, good and bad. Try to pour yourself out completely, without reserve. When in this attitude your head touches the feet of the deity or saint, his 'power' enters your head.\*

Ma added : To do *pranama* means to open oneself out to the Divine Power that is always streaming down on everyone. While doing *pranama* one receives His 'power' into oneself with the intaking of breath, and when exhaling one should feel that one is breathing out the 'I-ness' and remain as long as possible in *kumbhaka* ( suspension of breath ).

## XII

Here are some samples of Ma's replies befitting persons asking queer questions :

\* *Ananda Varta*, XI/4/179, 180.

Questioner : Would you agree that within the hierarchy of the spiritual world, Christ is somewhat like an elder brother to you ?

Ma ( laughs and then remains silent for a long time and at last says ) : One can find everything in Christ. He is brother, father, son and beloved. Ma also is contained in Christ.

\* \* \*

Questioner : Ma ! So many people come to you and offer you *puja* or worship. How do you feel about this ?

Ma : If you worship this body, it feels just as you feel. But, of course, it goes without saying that you worship God, not this body.

\* \* \*

Questioner : If our heart is full of faith, is it necessary to practise *japa* and meditation ?

Ma : Your question proves you have no faith. If you had genuine faith, these practices would be unnecessary.\*

\* \* \*

Questioner : Ma ! Krishna, Rama, Siva — what's the difference ?

Ma ( without a moment's reflection and with a winsome smile ) : You are at the same time son, father, husband — what's the difference ?

Questioner : Ma ! I have one weakness — desire for recognition from you.

Ma : Is that your only weakness ? Have you conquered all others ?

\* *Ananda Varta*, IX/3/118.

## XIII

The gist of Ma's dialogues with certain foreigners professing a faith other than Brahmanism is noted below :

Questioner (an American lady) : Mother ! I want initiation from you.

Ma : What faith do you profess ?

Questioner : I am mentally a Hindu.

Ma : What faith do your parents profess ?

Questioner : They are Christians.

Ma : Have you faith in Lord Christ ?

Questioner : Yes.

Ma : Lord Christ is your *Ishta*. If you worship Lord Christ, you will see light.

Questioner : But mentally I am a Hindu.

Ma : One who is devoted to one's *Ishta* is a good Hindu. This body does not advise change of one's *Ishta*.

\* \* \*

A European who had come all the way to India to study Buddhism, asked Ma : "Have you anything to say to me ?"

Ma : Live the teaching that you profess.

## XIV

Ma's catholicity of outlook is revealed in the following dialogues :

Questioner (a Christian) : I have read in a book on meditation that it is good for a beginner to concentrate on some concrete object or on a symbol, such as the Cross, a

Chalice, or the light of a candle, since to concentrate on the Supreme is very difficult.

Ma : Is this all that the book suggests ? Why not concentrate on Jesus Christ ?

Questioner : I have not got the courage to do this. The Christ is too holy, too sublime. I could only go wrong in trying. I do not feel pure enough to attempt this.

Ma : All that you perceive, you behold because there is light. Without light nothing can be seen. There is only one Light. Whatever anyone perceives—be he a man or an animal—is seen by that same Light. The outer light originates from the inner light; even a blind man is aware of an inner light. The Light of the Self is present everywhere and in all. Whether you worship Christ, Krishna, Kali or Allah, you actually worship the one Light that is also in you, since it pervades all things. Everything originates from Light, everything in its essence is Light.\*

\* \* \*

Here is an illuminating dialogue between Ma and a consecrated priest of the Roman Catholic Church from France who had come to India to see for himself what Indian spirituality was like.†

Questioner (to the interpreter) : What does Mataji consider to be the most essential thing in life ?

Ma : To try to know That which has brought into existence the body that I know : the search of God. One must

\*Ananda Varta, X/1/33-34.

†Ananda Varta, XI/4/183.

know oneself. When one finds one's Self, one has found God ; and finding God, one has found one's Self.

Questioner : Are there many people who succeed in this ?

Ma : Quite a few attain success to some extent. But complete Realization is very very rare indeed !

Questioner : Does Mataji think that she has attained that complete Realization ?

Ma ( laughs ) : Just as you believe !

The priest ( to the interpreter ) : It means that she does think so, otherwise she would have said 'No'. (To Ma) From what moment did you become self-realized ?

Ma : When was I not ?

Questioner : You can no doubt see people from within. Can you tell me whether I have advanced on the path, or am I just a beginner ?

Ma : Many ask similar questions, but this body does not usually reply to such questions.

Questioner ( to the interpreter ) : Does Mataji know about Christianity ? What does she think of it ?

Ma : If Christianity claims a special position for itself and places itself apart, it thereby breaks up the unity of religions. We recognize Jesus Christ and Christianity within the unity of all religions. Christ himself stands above aloofness.

Questioner : As a Christian my first duty is to search of God, but also to love my neighbour as myself. There is so much poverty in India. It is my duty to serve the poor. What is Mataji's opinion ?

Ma : Exactly the same teaching is given by Hinduism. To serve God in every human being is certainly a path to the purification of the mind.

Questioner : You say 'a path', while for us it is the only path. Do other ways to perfection exist ?

Ma : There are innumerable paths, and service is one of them.

Questioner : Is technical progress an aid to spiritual life or a hindrance ?

Ma : In themselves technical inventions are neither good nor bad, but these are so in their application. Anything that is of help in one's search is to be adopted, and whatever hinders, to be shunned.

Questioner : Take, for instance, the invention of printing. Through printed books people may be helped in their quest.

Ma : If some one really wants God, and nothing but God, he carries his book in his own heart. He needs no printed books. But there is no harm in reading books and in making use of modern inventions, provided these help the quest of God.

## XV

Ma's observations on ego appear from the following dialogues :

Questioner : What is the significance of the saying in the Bible : "Knock and the door shall be open to you" ? Does it refer to the opening of the door of the ego ?

Ma : What is your opinion ? One has, of course, to break up one's ego.

Questioner : When the walls that make up the ego have been demolished, what happens ?

Ma : On what foundation do those walls rest ?

Questioner : On the cover that spreads over the Light of the Self.

Ma : Now you have yourself given the answer.

Questioner : What actually is the ego ?

Ma : You imagine that you are the doer of all your actions — this indicates the existence of the ego in you. *Duniya* (the world) means *du-niya* (based on duality). Here the cause of the conflict lies in the idea that the ego is the doer of actions. Duality breeds conflicts, problems, and the separate 'I' and its activities. In the imperfect 'I' the ego is present, while the realization 'I am the Self (*Atma*)' is of the perfected 'I'. The result of egoism is blindness. In the attitude of mind 'I am the Lord's eternal servant', there also seems to be duality, but the worldly 'I' has not survived. Not until the 'I' is perfect, in other words, not unless *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am the *Brahma*)\* has been realized, will the ego be destroyed from its roots.†

## XVI

Very often Ma replies to questions by narrating appropriate parables illustrating moral truths in her homely,

\*Vide Appendix 'A'.

†*Ananda Varta*, VIII/1/5.

informal and effective style. She is unexcelled in the art of story-telling. A summary of three of her parables is given below :

(1) A beautiful lotus was in full bloom in a pond in which lived a frog and a fish. A passer-by, who had never before seen a thing of beauty like the lotus, enquired of the frog as to what it was. The frog, blind to the beauty of the lotus and ignorant of its nectar, said in a contemptuous tone, "Well, what should it be ? Nothing very particular, just the ordinary thing !" and turned away in search of prey of insects. Disappointed at the frog's indifference to something which wrests one's attention, the passer-by tried the fish for satisfaction of his curiosity and was surprised to find it equally callous about the lotus, described also by it as : "The common everyday thing, nothing special." Suddenly there appeared on the scene a bee hurriedly flying to the flower. Addressed by the passer-by, the bee excused itself for lack of time and asked him to wait a little. Then the bee settled, for some time, on the heart of the blossom, sucking honey to its heart's content, oblivious of the surroundings. After having had its fill, the bee flew back to the man : "Now you may talk to me !" The passer-by wondered what the bee had been doing on the top of the strange thing. "Don't you know ?" said the bee, "I was busy sucking delicious honey and now I am a changed being !"

Ma's comment was as follows : It is possible to live for a long time in close proximity to saints and sages, without being able to recognize their greatness, whereas one who is inwardly prepared and really ready for such contact may

come from a great distance and within a minute know the Great and Holy for what they are — it depends on one's capacity to penetrate into the essence of things.

(2) A precious necklace was seen flashing from the bottom of a lake. Many felt tempted to recover the valuable ornament and dived deep into the water for it, but found no necklace anywhere. Yet it was clearly visible to everyone from the edge of the lake. They were all puzzled. Eventually they realized that there was no necklace at the bottom of the lake; what they saw was its reflection in the water. They looked up and discovered the precious ornament hanging from a tree. A bird must have picked it up from somewhere and deposited it there.

"God who dwells within you", concluded Ma, "is the source of true happiness. In the objects of senses this happiness is merely reflected. The individual, misled birth after birth by having only glimpses of this reflected joy, thinks that this is the real thing, namely sensuous delight. So long as one believes that true happiness can be had in sense objects without searching within, one will never taste true happiness. The kingdom of God, hence of happiness, is within you."

(3) Once a king cut his finger which eventually had to be amputated. His minister, instead of expressing sympathy for this mishap, remarked that whatever was done by God was all for the best. The king was very much annoyed and sent the minister to prison for his callousness and audacity. Thereafter one day the king went to a forest for hunting,

\*A sect which offers human beings as a sacrifice to goddess Kali.

where a band of *Kapalikas*\* kidnapped him and decided to offer him as a sacrifice to Kali. The king felt helpless. But help most unexpectedly came from his amputated finger for a person's body with the slightest mutilation in any part is not fit for being offered to the goddess Kali as a sacrifice. So the king was set free. Returning home the king released his minister, thanking him for his wise remark, the truth of which he had failed to realise at the time. The king wondered why should God have prompted him to put the innocent minister into jail? "What good came out of such unjustifiable punishment?" asked the king. The minister said in reply: "If I had remained free, I would have, in course of my usual duties, accompanied you to the forest. And the *Kapalikas* would have kidnapped me along with you and would not have spared me, because my body had no defect in any part."

## XVII

It is to be remembered that in a large assembly of *satsanga* (religious congregation) where a question is asked by one person and listeners are many, Ma's dialogues with any individual is usually of a general nature. On the contrary, dialogues in private interviews meet a person's specific requirements and sometimes reveal Ma in a specially communicative mood, if the questioner is in earnest. I have had some experience as an interpreter in the service of Westerners favoured by Ma with private interviews. Some of them, fed up with materialism, wanted to fill the spiritual emptiness which had made their lives pointless. None of them knew

Bengali or Hindi and some did not know even English well enough to be able to express themselves clearly. Naturally, the interpreter's task was difficult. But I discovered a wonderful rapport between Ma and every questioner, rendering the interpreter almost superfluous. Ma knew exactly where a questioner stood, what was prompting his question and what was obstructing his understanding. Though supposed not to know English, she always pulled me up whenever my translation failed to be up to the mark. She would tell the questioner exactly what he or she needed, even if the question was imperfectly formulated or incorrectly translated. Ma knew the questions better than the interpreter, nay, even more deeply and comprehensively than the person who had posed them. This is not a matter of mere thought-reading. Perhaps it is a mysterious kind of 'seeing' a person's motive even before it has crystalized into thought. A questioner, gifted with the power of introspection can, at best, analyse his conscious mind. Ma knows even the subconscious, that is, the birth-place of the seeds of thoughts-to-be.

Having regard to the sanctity of private interviews it is not, of course, possible for me to divulge the wonderful dialogues between Ma and these strangers luckily heard by me while on duty as an interpreter (*functus officio* in circumstances mentioned above). I have seen how these foreigners, overwhelmed with depth of feeling at the first *darsana* of Ma, listened to Ma with rapt attention and stared at her, struck with awe and wonder. I have since heard from many of them what tremendous influence Ma's words had on their lives.

### XVIII

In course of her dialogues Ma has, from time to time, taken her 'children' into confidence regarding herself, as will appear from her sayings noted below :

Solely for you all is indeed everything that this body says or does — its actions, movements, its going hither and thither. Whatever is done for your sake through this body at any time, it is for you who cause it to happen.

\* \* \*

Very often this body keeps itself concealed both as regards its behaviour and its words. This is the actual fact. It is surely necessary and, therefore, it comes to pass.

\* \* \*

With this body, nothing happens unconsciously or by mistake — be it right here or far in the distance. Whether it is perceived outwardly or not, whatever is destined to occur does come about.

\* \* \*

This body has no desire, no intention or set purpose — everything occurs spontaneously.

\* \* \*

A person who expects this body to be always supernatural in its dealings with the world will be disappointed, for this little girl acts according to her *kheyal* — whatever it be at any time. In other words, accept what little service you may be able to receive from this child. In what light anyone sees this little girl depends on his ideas and attitude of mind. To her everything appears delightful.

\*                      \*                      \*

Your sorrow, your pain, your agony is indeed my sorrow. This body understands everything.

\*                      \*                      \*

You and I are two persons and yet you and I are one ; and the gap between the two of us, this also is myself. There can be no question of 'two'. Attachment and hatred arise out of the sense of duality.

\*                      \*                      \*

You may want to banish this body from your mind. But this body won't leave for a single day - it does not and never will leave your thought. Whoever has once been drawn to love this body will never succeed in wiping out its impression even despite hundreds of attempts. This body rests and shall remain in his memory for all times.

### Conclusion

Dialogues with Ma often act as spiritual seeds sown in the soil of the human mind. Properly nourished, these seeds sprout and grow into trees, yielding flowers and fruits. Ma's words are often accompanied by significant gestures and a sweet smile, more eloquent than speech. Above all, her gracious eyes cast an illuminating glance, conveying a message which goes beyond the restricted significance of words. Seldom does Ma give any command or make any request. Yet, the chastening influence of her silent message becomes irresistible once a devotee chooses to surrender himself at her feet. He then feels an under-current of bliss, love and peace permeating the innermost core of his being.

## Chapter 14

### SEVEN APHORISMS OF MA AS UNDERSTOOD BY ME\*

"Rain-water flowing down from a terrace through spouts shaped grotesquely like tiger-heads appears to come through the mouth of the animals, but in reality it descends from the sky ; so also the holy teachings that come out of the mouths of godly men seem to be uttered by them but in truth they come from God Himself."

—*Ramakrishna Paramahansa*

The quintessence of Ma's message to mankind is epitomized in a nutshell in a number of aphorisms. Cast in the mould of the sacred formulas of the *Upanishads*, these enunciate important principles of supreme spiritual value in conformity with the truths revealed to the seers of ancient India. Most appropriate words, mainly adapted from an East Bengal dialect (occasionally punctuated by her broken Hindi), are used by Ma in her aphorisms which are conclusive and have a completeness within the smallest compass as if rubbed and polished to perfection. She does not bother herself about a dictionary meaning or rules of grammar or syntactic composition nor about logic. To many Ma's aphorisms sound like

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\*See also Appendix 'B'.

jargons and seem enigmatic. It should be noted at the outset that these cannot be grasped, far less explained, without *sadhana* and spiritual experience. Admittedly, I have little of the former and less of the latter. If I still venture to write on this difficult and delicate subject, that is, because during the last thirtyfive years I have, from time to time, been fortunate enough to hear a lot thereon in course of informal conversation with Ma in homely surroundings. What emanated from her was, quite often, in answer to silly and superficial questions tolerated by her with sympathy, bordering on indulgence. Fully aware of my limitations, I earnestly desire to place before my readers only seven aphorisms as understood by me in the light of other sayings of hers and in the background of the scriptures.

#### First Aphorism

JĀR JEMAN BHĀVA TĀR TEMNI LĀBHA

( As the approach, so the meed )

The subject-matter of this aphorism seems to be the relation between God and man — man's approach towards God and the reward granted by God. It postulates that the seeker's *labha* is commensurate with his *bhava*. Having regard to the context, *labha* means gain, reward, acquisition, advantage etc., and *bhava* implies feeling, condition, emotion, sentiment, love, intension, idea etc.

This aphorism is an echo of Sri Krishna's assurance in the *Gita* : "As men approach me, so do I accept them". An illustration occurs in the *Bhagavata* — Sri Krishna ( then

below ten years of age ), on the eve of his fateful fight with the notorious *asuras* ( demons ) Kamsa and Chanura. As the lovely little child was entering the arena in the guise of a valiant warrior, a large audience had the privilege of having His *darśana* from a distance. Different groups derived *labha* therefrom, each according to its *bhava*. Sri Krishna, the ONE-in-all, could, and in fact did, fit in with the *bhava* of every individual to perfection and awarded *labha* on him or her accordingly. Thus, He appeared, so to speak, like a thunderbolt to the combatants, and like the God of love incarnate to the women ; the cowherd boys saw their beloved playmate in Him and the wicked rulers their chastiser. Again, He was a darling infant in the eye of His parents and death in that of Kamsa. And deluded people looked upon Him as the inconceivable, whereas Yogins as the supreme deity.\*

Ma says that God appreciates and accepts all kinds of *bhavas* offered to Him and gives with evenhanded justice precisely what one deserves. Ma also says that in some instances God is over-indulgent in granting *ahetuki kripa* ( grace which cannot be accounted for ) ; adding that in any event, if a seeker sincerely tries to proceed one step towards God, He responds by coming ten steps towards the seeker. What really matters, Ma emphasises, is the seeker's sincerity of purpose — his *bhava* ; the reward — the *labha* — will follow as a matter of course. This aphorism is very true in our relationship with Ma — she is revealed to us according to our respective *bhava*.

\**Srimad Bhagavata*, X/43/17.



## Second Aphorism

EK NISVĀSER VISVĀS NEI

( One cannot be sure of the next breath )

This aphorism reminds us that in the midst of life we are in death. Read with other sayings of Ma, it suggests that we must not allow a single moment to be wasted. Breath is the symbol of life which is so transitory. Indeed, one cannot be too sure that the present breath would not be the last. Citing the well-known dictum that spiritual pursuits must proceed along with the awareness that death has caught the aspirant by the forelock, Ma teaches that awareness of the imminence of death at any moment induces whole-hearted preparation for the final exit. What is the fate of a person departing from this world without preparing himself for the next? According to the *Isopanishad* he is "a self-murderer and goes to demoniac worlds enveloped in blinding darkness." Yama-raja, the god of death, asked Yudhisthira, in the *Mahabharata*, "What is most surprising?" Yudhisthira's answer was: "Day in and day out people are dying, yet the survivors hanker after everlasting life. What could be more surprising?" Here is Ma's word of caution and admonition: "The day that is gone returns not. To be a human being means to be Self-aware. Do not squander invaluable time. Beware of becoming a 'Self-murderer'; realize that you are none other than the immortal Self." "The joys and sorrows of the world", says Ma, "are fleeting shadows of your own self; playing with the divine forces brings in everlasting peace and happiness."

## Third Aphorism

ULAT JĀO

( Take an about turn )

To one not familiar with Ma's aphorisms, *Ulat jao* hardly makes any sense. People understand it according to their own *bhava*. Thus, in the army circle 'take an about turn' may stand for the command 'About turn'; in other contexts, the same sentence may imply a direction to be a renegade, a defector, a turn-coat. Ma's *Ulat jao* covers the whole of this life and extends beyond life hereafter. It means: "Turn away from worldly things towards a goal beyond this world." We are suffering from a serious malady called *bhava-roga* (malady of worldly-mindedness), a dangerous symptom of which comprises clinging to things of the world. Thus *bhava-roga* makes us earth-bound and leads to birth again and again. Indeed, the world is too much with us. *Ulat jao* is Ma's radical prescription for complete cure of that fell disease. She lays emphasis on a drastic revolution in our attitude from worldliness to inwardness, from material prosperity to spiritual attainment, from 'man-centred' to 'God-centred' aspiration. In short, *Ulat jao* is Ma's positive directive for complete transformation of the spiritual aspirant from pleasure of the flesh to *anandam* of Being.

Similar ideas about 'reversal of the mind' are to be found in the couplets of Kabir: "One who keeps his body and senses under control and thus purifies his mind, return to the state of childhood."

In fact, Ma's *Ulat jao* seems to be the echo of another

saying of Kabir : "Do not be led by your mind : rise above your animal habits : turn your mind ( *Ulti ani* ) like the shuttle of the weaving machine." By adopting the process that great saint-poet reached a spiritual level which justifies his claim : "Now the mind has turned back to its original state."

#### Fourth Aphorism

#### HATE KĀM MUKHE NĀM

( With God's name on your lips work with your hands )

If the third aphorism ( *Ulat jao* ) indicates the goal to be aimed at, the fourth one prescribes a procedure for reaching the same. Ma does not necessarily ask the spiritual aspirant to turn away from his worldly commitments or to renounce the world. In fact, says she, action or work cannot, and need not be renounced. This aphorism only recognises the principle laid down in the *Gita* that we cannot live for a moment without work. "Verily, no one can remain, even for a moment, without doing work .. every individual is made to work, by the impulses of nature, in spite of himself." "Even the bare maintenance of your physical life will not be possible if you remain inactive." In its concluding chapter the *Gita* emphatically declares : "It is indeed impossible for an embodied being to abstain from work altogether."\*

So work we must. But work usually leads to bondage. Hence the antidote prescribed by Ma — work with the hand

\**Gita*, III/5, 8 ; XVIII/11.

should be invariably accompanied by repetition of God's Name on one's lips. As already stated, God's Name is God Himself according to Ma. His *Nama* acts both as curative and preventive of the disease known as *bhava-roga*, usually a concomitant of action. Ma is very emphatic that constant remembrance of God, through repetition of His Name, turns work into worship and ensures deliverance from the attachment to things of the world.

Let me quote some more of Ma's sayings for elucidation of the aphorism "*Hate kam mukhe nam*". "By whatever Name you may invoke Him, your effort will be crowned with success. The main thing is to cling to the Name with constancy."

"Whenever you possibly can, sustain the flow of a sacred Name. To repeat His Name is to be in His presence. If you associate with the Supreme Friend, He will reveal His true being to you."

Ma's "*Hate kam mukhe nam*" is comparable to Lord Krishna's precept to Arjuna : "Therefore, at all times remember me and fight. When thy mind and understanding are set on Me, to Me alone shalt thou come without doubt."\* We must engage in the work of the world retaining our consciousness of Eternity. "Just as a dancing girl fixes her attention on the water-pot she bears on her head even when she is dancing on various tunes, so also a truly pious man does not give up his attention to the blissful feet of the Supreme Lord even when he attends to his many concerns."

\**Gita*, VIII/7.

## Fifth Aphorism

## TAPASYĀ MANE TĀPA SAHĀ

*Tapasyā* is austerity. '*Tāpa*' literally means 'heat' and '*sahā*' means to bear. The word '*tapā*' is used by Ma as a symbol of misery. For every individual there are in store some spells of storm and rain, some dreary days of unbearable heat. '*Tapasyā*' consists in facing these trials and tribulations with patience and fortitude and with one's heart fixed on the goal. "The distress that is experienced", says Ma, "burns to ashes all pleasures derived from worldly things. This is what is called *tapasyā*. The heartache, the anguish over the effects of obstructions, are the beginning of an awakening to Consciousness."

To a weak man, suffering is usually a stumbling block ; to a strong one it may be a veritable stepping stone leading to a higher level. Most people are overwhelmed by suffering ; but Ma says that suffering can be turned into an asset accelerating the process of *Ulat jao*. Thus, suffering can be a blessing in disguise. "Joys and sorrows", says Ma, "are time-born and cannot last. Therefore, do not be perturbed by these. The greater the difficulties and obstructions, the more intense will be your endeavour to cling to His feet and the more will your prayer increase from within. And when the time is ripe, you will gain mastery over this power."

Ma has also said : "It is by crying and pining for Him that the One is found. In times of adversity and distress seek refuge in the One alone."

## Sixth Aphorism

## JĀ HOYE JĀY

"*Jā hoye jāy*" has been expressed in English variously as :

- (1) Events take their own course, (2) Come what may, and
- (3) Whatever happens is equally welcome.

Each of these three versions brings out some aspect of the Bengali text which bears a profound message, covering all those aspects and conveying something more.

First version : "Events take their own course" means : What is destined to happen cannot but take place. According to Ma, "their course" is determined by God's Will and cannot be stopped nor altered by us. It is God's Will that always prevails ; not ours. To quote Ma : "God is not your order-supplier."

"*Jā hoye jāy*", in the sense that events are controlled not by man but by God, is supported by the *Gita*. "The Lord", observed Sri Krishna, "dwells in the hearts of all beings, and by His *māyā* causes all beings to revolve, ( as if ) mounted on a machine."\* Radhakrishnan's commentary on this saying in the *Gita* sheds light on Ma's aphorism under discussion :

"The power that determines events is not a blind, unfeeling, unthinking Will to which we give the name 'Fate', 'Destiny' or 'Chance'. The Spirit that rules the cosmos, the Lord who presides over the evolution of the cosmic plan, is seated also in the heart of every being and will not let him rest. The Supreme is the inmost Self of our existence. All

\**Gita*, XVIII/61.

life is a movement of the rhythm of His life and our powers and acts are all derived from Him. If, in our ignorance, we forget this deepest truth, the truth does not alter. If we live consciously in His truth, we will resign all actions to God and escape our ego. If we do not, even then the truth will prevail. Sooner or later we shall yield to the purpose of God, but in the meanwhile there is no compulsion. The Supreme desires our free co-operation when beauty and goodness are born without travail and effortlessly. When we become transparent media for the light of God, He uses us for work.”\*

Thus, it is our ego that makes us blind to the fact that events take their course according to God's plan at His pleasure. It is ego that misleads us to believe that actions are done by us. Lord Krishna gave Arjuna a warning: “He whose soul is bewildered by the self-sense, thinks ‘I am the doer’.”†

Second version: “Come what may.” This implies a precept that man should remain unperturbed by the course of events in all circumstances, however difficult or undesirable. This version may, perhaps, give us some light for future guidance but not necessarily any encouragement for the present — it is poor consolation for a sufferer to be reminded that he must take things unconcernedly in all circumstances.

One wonders — could this be Ma's message which always gives not only light but also delight? It is the third version. — “Whatever happens is welcome” — that gives both. Let

\**Bhagavad-Gita*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan, p. 374.

†*Gita*, III/27.

us try to understand it in the light of Ma's saying as follows: “God's Will is strictly in accordance with the demands of justice and truly auspicious.” She also says: “Perfect resignation gives the deepest joy of all. Accept it as your sole resource. Whatever God does at any time is wholly benign. If you can bear this in mind you will be at peace.”

The enigmatic aphorism *Ja hoye jay* appears to be the most wonderful among those often repeated by Ma. It is constantly illustrated in her ‘outer manifestation’ from day to day. She has not only formulated the principle in her characteristic cryptic style but has also given practical demonstration thereof in all matters big and small. Incidentally, to Ma nothing is too big and nothing too small.

*Ja hoye jay*, faithfully followed, bridges the gulf between God and man and gives the latter a taste of other-worldliness in the midst of his worldly life.

### Seventh Aphorism

JEMAN BAJABE TEMNI SUNBE

(As you play, so you hear)

This aphorism is Ma's almost invariable answer to a common question as to her identity and spiritual status. She compares herself to a musical instrument and smilingly says: “What you hear depends on how you play the instrument.” Thus, a violin gives out notes not of its own initiative but in response to strokes or vibrations received from outside, and the music that is heard as a result depends on the skill of the player, the instrument remaining the same.

Perhaps this aphorism explains why Ma is seen differently by different persons,\* depending on the angle of vision of each — *Jār jeman bhāvā tār teman lābh* (as the approach, so the meed). In fact, the seventh aphorism seems to be supplementary to the first.

## PART IV

### THE UNIVERSAL MOTHER

#### Chapter 15

Ma, an Ideal *Guru* : *Samyama-Vrata* (Vow of Discipline)

“There are”, Ma has observed, “various kinds of initiation — by *mantra*, by touch, by a look, by instruction..... *Guru* is he who can reveal the hidden truth out of deep darkness.....*Guru* is not an ordinary preceptor.....*Guru* is he who has the capacity to deliver man from *bhava-sāgara*. He is the pilot who helps his disciple cross the storm-tossed sea of life.”

Two words used by Ma in the above-quoted passage call for an explanatory note — *mantra* and *bhava-sagara*. *Mantra* means a series of sounds of great potency. A *mantra* is a word of power—divine power transmitted through a word. In the present context, it is the sound-symbol of *Ishita* (literally ‘beloved’) — the chosen deity one worships, the Object of one’s supreme wish.

Secondly, *bhava-sagara* (literally meaning ‘ocean of becoming’), denotes being born in the world of changes. The world is always in a state of flux and knows no rest. The true aim of human life is said to be the transcendence of this state — end to rebirth and realization of peace.

Reminiscences of devotees that have been recorded and

\*Vide Chapters 17 and 18.

published reveal that many have received from Ma initiation in some form or other, not infrequently in dreams confirmed by subsequent facts. A *guru* gives guidance and enlightenment. So does Ma. Moreover, she inspires a feeling in many that she is not only one's *guru* but also the *Ishta* and, first and foremost, one's mother — indeed an unfailing refuge and solace. One who dedicates oneself to Ma can feel the influence of the indulgent mother, as also of the hardtask-mistress in Ma — the *guru* with watchful eyes.

Her role as Ma and *guru* both combined is marvellously revealed in the annual *sanyama-vrata* (vow of discipline). This unprecedented innovation in the line of *sadhana* claims a note about its genesis, objects and functions, with special reference to Ma.

Ma was often approached by many who protested that they could not spare the time and lacked the opportunity to think of God, far less to meditate on Him, because their struggle for existence demanded their whole time and energy. Overpowered by their cares, desires and incurable habits, they felt helpless and sought Ma's advice. It is quite clear from her teachings and dialogues that, barring a few exceptions, Ma does not ask anybody to renounce the world or to neglect one's worldly duties; she takes a practical view and often says: "All right, if your time is taken up by your everyday occupations and mundane thoughts, you can at least set apart certain days and dedicate these entirely to the Supreme Quest. If possible, let the members of the family co-operate and devise together the programme for those special days, which may be observed once or twice a year, once or twice

a month — or better still — once or twice a week. Decide that at least on those days you will speak the truth, avoid all gossip and unnecessary talk, observe *brahmacharya* (abstinence), forgo your favourite food and drinks and live on simple, moderate diet. Let the thought of God be with you all the time, read the *Gita* or some other sacred text, seek the company of saints and sages, execute your work as service to God, be in harmony with all, do not quarrel with anyone. If on such a day you experience even a slight touch of Him who is your Self, you will begin to hanker after His constant presence, the thought of God will be with you more and more along with your outer activities and gradually your life will be changed."

Ma's precepts, briefly sketched above, encouraged Yogi-bhai (Raja Sahab of Solan) to make an experiment. He proposed to Ma, then at Varanasi, that as many as were willing should together observe a week of *sanyama* (spiritual discipline) at certain intervals. It was to be a week set apart for intense spiritual aspiration and a rigorous vow of discipline voluntarily accepted. The objects of the *vrata* are "to find out the way to one's home, to ascertain who one is, wherefrom one has come, what is one's Self and what is Reality". Having these objects in view, the *vratis* (participants) are required to develop spiritual life by observance of *satya* (truth), *brahmacharya* (abstinence), *ahimsa* (non-violence) etc., and go through a discipline of austerity in their diet and conduct which would make their body and

\* *Ananda Varta*, 1/2/50.

mind fit for spiritual pursuits. The *vrata* provides them with an opportunity for congregational silence in Ma's presence and in an atmosphere conducive to concentration and self-purification. The whole week is spent in individual *sadhana* (preparation for self-realization), *satsanga* (religious congregation) and collective meditation. The crowded programme leaves the *vratis* no time to spare nor does it permit any inclination for worldly thoughts or idle talks. They experience an inward exhilaration from the reverberating sound of Vedic hymns, devotional songs and talks by *mahatmas* (literally meaning high-souled persons and signifying wise and holy leaders). Some of the *vratis* feel in their innermost beings the soul-enkindling touch of the love and light radiating from Ma, the *guru* of *gurus*.

In the context of *sanyama-vrata*, the word '*sanyama*' is not confined to discipline or restraint in the sense of merely controlling one's unruly lower self — it is regarded as a step towards Self-realization. Ma equates *sanyama* with *sadhana*. To start with, *sanyama* has to be practised with conscious effort, so that real *sanyama* may come about spontaneously. The idea is this : Sustained effort to attain a particular state ends in an effortless existence in that state. In other words, the state that has been attained by constant practice is finally transcended and it becomes attainable easily without much effort. Once Ma made certain observations on *sanyama-vrata* somewhat to the following effect :

"*Sanyama* does not actually bring about Self-realization. For the sake of purification of body and mind, *satsanga* and the activities practised during *sanyama-vrata* are imperative.

All these combine to harmonize a human being so as to attune him to the Divine. The restricted diet and sleep, the life that you lead during these gatherings are aids to meditation and self-discovery."

Its comprehensive programme makes the *sanyama-vrata* admirably suitable both for men in meditation and action. This is why it appeals to saints who have renounced the world as well as to house-holders attached to worldly things. Initiated by a small group of determined devotees of Ma at Varanasi three decades ago, the *varta* has since been earnestly taken up by a large number of spiritual aspirants hailing from different corners of this sub-continent and also by some foreigners. So bold and ambitious a spiritual adventure on an all-India basis, inspired by such a great source of *sakti* (spiritual energy or force) and so meticulously maintained by such a band of zealous idealists is unprecedented.

The first session of the *vrata* was held at Varanasi and the second at Vindhyachal — both ancient sacred places with spiritual tradition. Each has an Anandamayi Ashram facing the Ganga and providing unique facilities for *sadhana* in quietude in the hallowed company of a galaxy of *mahatmas*. Naturally, the experiment of *sanyama* was a grand success in both the places.

Next came the turn of Calcutta, in 1953, as prompted by Ma's *khayal*. We, her devotees residing in this giant modern city of commerce, congestion and confusion, received the news of the impending event with a mixed feeling of joy and

\* *Ananda Varta*, V/4/238.

diffidence. We had innumerable problems, some of which had then seemed insoluble — unfavourable surroundings, unfriendly neighbours and non-availability of a suitable place. Circumstances, however, mysteriously made our task easy beyond expectation. But notwithstanding our best efforts we failed to arrange religious discourses by *mahatmas*, so essential to the success of the *samyama-vrata*.

The most acute problem was the dearth of the right type of *vratīs*. The President of the local Committee of the Sangha, a leading member of the Calcutta Bar, expressly said that he could not rely on the intending *vratīs* of Calcutta, mostly used to a life of ease and luxury and victims of certain Western habits, not calculated to qualify one for sustained spiritual pursuits. In despair I went to Ma, then in Vindhyachal, and placed our difficulties before her. I also told her about the hostile attitude of a band of local youths, claiming to be anti-God and anti-religion by conviction and determined to sabotage the proposed *samyama-vrata*. I added that there were grounds for apprehending that the misguided miscreants, in their fanatic frenzy, might set fire to our pandal. After giving me a patient hearing, Ma smilingly made a brief comment: "If you do your best, gaps left by you will be filled up by God." Ma's message, communicated through me, instilled into our *vratīs* and volunteers hope and self-confidence and a will to succeed. Subsequent events proved how Ma's *kheyāl* could work wonders even out of most unpromising material.

Ma arrived in Calcutta on the eve of the week-long *vrata* scheduled to commence from November 14, 1953. Her

*kheyāl* started with a pleasant surprise for us. She brought with her a team of saints and savants, including Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj and Krishnananda Avadhuta, for religious discourses. Unparalleled was their contribution to the success of the *vrata* which Calcutta was fortunate enough to witness. Thus, Ma filled up the big gap left by us through our failure to enlist the co-operation of any local *mahatma* of the stature of the Mahamahopadhyaya or the Avadhuta.

The austerity to be observed by the *vratīs* included abstinence from smoking, from taking tea and coffee and from chewing betel. They had to live on simple vegetarian food for lunch and a cup of milk for dinner; some kept fast on Ganga water on the first day and the last. The *vrata* required restraint of speech and thought throughout the week and congregational silence during stated periods four times a day. Once a questioner asked Ma: "What is the 'fruit' of remaining silent?" Ma's reply was: "It controls speech and preserves your energy. If the mind also becomes silent at that time, Truth shines forth."\*

Strangely enough, most of us did not feel much difficulty in observing the austerities. In fact, through will-force, mysteriously infused by Ma, we felt fitter and stronger than usual and received the inner strength not experienced before. Our power of concentration remarkably improved, and our enthusiasm for work and efficiency in the service of Ma gathered momentum day by day.

\* *Ananda Varā, VIII/3/154.*



The common experience of almost all the participants was that in course of this week of discipline they had gained something memorable, a new enthusiasm in their spiritual pursuit, a greater certainty of purpose and a stronger will to succeed. In the words of Ganga Charan Dasgupta, a veteran educationist and author: "We had to slam the door on our daily routine of soulless drudgery and direct our attention to a course of self-discipline with Ma as the central symbol, moulding our aspirations for a higher life. We had a unique opportunity to turn our eyes inwards and to find out that there were many dusty corners in the chamber of our soul which required vigorous cleaning. We felt the great need of a constant repair-job to be done in the daily scheme of our lives."\*

We appreciated, from experience, the force of the saying of Sri Krishnananda Avadhuta: "Whilst it is difficult for the *sadhaka* to live upto his resolve when left to himself, literally nothing is impossible in the presence of Mother. Have firm faith in Mother's Grace."

Under Ma's influence there was complete transformation of outlook in many individuals. Our President who had sounded a pessimistic note of warning against undertaking a venture beyond our capacity, observed later on: "*Sanyama-vrata* in Calcutta was, to my mind, to say the least, a wonder .....Undoubtedly this was something unique in the history of Calcutta."†

\* *Ananda Varta*, II/1/85.

† *Ananda Varta*, 1/5/307.

Incidentally, a reference may be made to an interesting episode connected with the *sanyama-vrata* in Calcutta. As already stated, I had communicated to Ma at Vindhyachal my apprehension about the possibility of arson by a group of misguided youngmen. The sequence to this apprehended mischief was a very gratifying fulfilment of Ma's remark to me at that time. During the *vrata* those youngmen sought Ma's *darsana* and were blessed with a conversation full of loving concern. Ma spoke to them without the least sense of embarrassment and in a homely atmosphere of friendship. Subsequently, they presented Ma with a poem in her adoration composed by one of them. Thus those who had come to destroy, stayed to pray.

Ever since 1952 sessions of *sanyama-vrata* have been annually held at some place or other, subject to Ma's approval. The occasion is invariably graced by Ma's hallowed presence, which invariably has an elevating influence on the minds of the participants. Universally revered *mahatmas* from all parts of India take a lively interest in the *sanyama-vrata* and add to its spiritual value by their presence and discourses.

Let me communicate to the reader a glimpse of the presiding spirit caught by me in the 24th session of *sanyama-vrata* at Vrindavan in 1973. On the last day of the *vrata*, we had the rare fortune of a special *darsana* of Ma who then seemed to be 'God-in-man one with man-in-God'. The interplay between her 'outer manifestation' and 'inner being' seemed to have reached the acme of perfect synthesis. The 'outer manifestation' was in the role of both a loving friend full of

concern for the well-being of the *vratīs* and an ideal guide or *guru* to help them attain their cherished goal. The 'inner being', ever in unison with the One, was apparently oblivious of our separate existence. But the *līlā* of her 'outer manifestation' was in the best form. The spiritual guide in Ma declared that she was a 'beggar woman' and asked the *vratīs* for alms: "Fix a definite time everyday for praying to God and let that period be dedicated to Him for the rest of your life." This saying combined in itself the humility of a 'beggar', the assertiveness of a *guru* and the affection of a mother. And what was the prayer to God to be like? Ma set a model for our benefit: "Lord, I am Thine. Thou art my refuge. Have mercy upon me and show me the path to Thee." This is the English translation (as far as a translation of Ma's saying is practicable) of the text of the wonderful prayer we heard from Ma Anandamayi—a prayer from Ma to Ma. There was a deep meaning underlying it. And the sound emanating from Ma had a message deeper than the sense conveyed by the three sentences uttered by her. It travelled beyond the bounds of words—its appeal was not to the brain but to the core of one's being. Ma, as revealed that night in the background of the *samyama-vrata*, was wonderful—her face aglow, her eyes half-closed, her body still as a statue, her hands folded. Ma seemed to be completely merged in herself, taking no notice of the presence on anyone of us and yet residing in all. Each of us felt her presence within ourselves according to our own lights.

## Chapter 16

### MA AS OUR 'PLAYMATE' IN NANDOTSAVA, 1973

Sometimes Ma's 'outer manifestation' offers opportunities for catching glimpses of her 'inner being'. Let me narrate an episode revealing the 'Universal Mother' in the role of our 'playmate' on the occasion of *Nandotsava* in New Delhi in 1973.

Lord Krishna's advent to this world took place thousands of years ago on the eighth day after full moon in August. On the morrow following the night of Krishna's birth, Nanda Raja (Krishna's foster father) celebrated a grand ceremony which came to be known after his own name as *Nandotsava*.

The anniversary of *Nandotsava* is a regular annual function in Anandamayi Ashram. Ma's presence in Delhi on this festive occasion in 1973 created a special atmosphere of religious enthusiasm, and the jubilation seemed to reach a rare and sublime height of spiritual exaltation.

The delight of Nanda Raja and his consort Yasoda and the riotous joy of *Vrajavasis* (residents of Vrindavan) over the birth of the divine child were, as it were, recaptured and reflected in this festival after the lapse of thousands of years. Ma radiated vibrations of love and light and thus inspired the whole assembly with an ecstasy of pure joy and devotional fervour.

Ma was in great form when an essential feature of this festival was being observed—crushing of the sacred curd-

container and distribution of curd as holy sacramental food. This ritual was followed by Ma's *kheyal* to be in a highly sportive mood with handfuls of curd splashed and sprinkled all around. One lady in the assembly carried in her satchel an image of Bala-Gopal (infant Krishna). Ma lovingly besmeared the face of this Gopal with the sacred curd, to start with. When she was almost piously absorbed in this apparently playful ritual, Ma's countenance became radiant with a glow diffusive of maternal love. That ancient picture of Nanda Raja and mother Yasoda painting their living Gopal with curd (did not this look like dressing him with a white robe?) was, as it were, re-enacted on this occasion at Anandamayi Ashram in the capital of India. The colouring of Gopal's image with curd was the opening scene of Ma's grand sport with her 'children'. Our turn came next. Did not Ma treat each one of us as her child Gopal, if not so in our own right, at least in Ma's overflowing affection? It seemed the Universal Mother had generously condescended to come down to the ordinary mundane level of ordinary mortals. And thus she ushered in an atmosphere of divine delight, and we on our part had a taste of this nectar of joy which made us quite oblivious of our worldly cares and anxieties for the time being.

It was, indeed, a day of days. As Ma began moving in the assembly of worshippers and her devotees, she seemed to be present everywhere, trailing behind her a flood-tide of maddening joy. All were seized with a sort of religious frenzy. This festive function was open to all — the young and the old, the rich and the poor, saints and sinners — and

they all participated as equals. Ma was the central figure dominating in her spiritual grandeur — the whole assembly plunged in a sea-wave of hilarious merriment. Ma in her sportive mood was also behaving like a self-forgotten child. As children spray on unwary people coloured water with their syringe during the spring festival of *Holi*, so was our loving Mother in the role of our 'playmate', engaged in splashing and hurling playfully lumps of curd at all people in all directions. And whoever fell in her way had his (or her) face smeared with curd, particularly those who happened to be immaculately dressed. Then he (or she) looked funny and comical and others laughed at his (or her) cost. It was indeed a great fun; but there was more of secret joy than embarrassment. It was interesting to note that even they who laughed were eagerly waiting for the Mother's approach and the touch of her hallowed hands. Their wish was mysteriously fulfilled even as it crossed their mind.

The choral chanting and singing of Sri Krishna's sacred name is also an integral part of the *Nandotsava*. On this occasion *kirtana*, from time to time led by Ma, started on the open balcony adjoining the temple. When this community singing had reached a high pitch, Ma suddenly walked down into the adjoining courtyard, and we followed her there. It was drizzling at that time; and the ground had become a little slushy and slippery. But our waxing enthusiasm suffered not the least slackening for this handicap. All of us had joined and contributed to the choral chanting and singing, in which we were deeply absorbed. We felt we were all 'playmates' of Ma in this Grand Game of the Eternal Quest.

Then, there was, for a very short time, an abrupt shift in this scene of overwhelming joy. For reasons unknown, and probably unknowable, Ma's body began slowly to be relaxed, and even though still standing in her proper posture, she began to swing rhythmically in perfect consonance with the concerted harmony of vocal and instrumental music. Soon after Ma lay down on the muddy ground and started rolling on her body which became mud-besmeared — even then she kept up the rhythmic movement and there was not the slightest discord. Though anointed with patches of mud, still Ma's body did not lose its spiritual lustre. Mother Earth had, as it were, painted Ma, in the role of a dear daughter, with sacred clay. It seemed Ma's sense organs slowly and gradually ceased to function — there was no motion except that of automatic but rhythmic swing of the entire body which appeared to be sans flesh and blood — an empty, weightless elastic doll of India-rubber tossed to and fro by the gentle breeze. Ma's countenance wore an other-worldly semblance, serene and solemn. Was Ma temporarily translated to an unknown region beyond human reach and beyond human comprehension? Did she cut off all communication with us, her poor 'children' lovingly accepted by her as her 'playmates'? Just for a while there was consternation amongst us. Why this sudden end to all gaiety? Oh joy! this was but a short-lived interlude! Soon Ma opened her eyes and sat up; she now looked her original self — perfectly human and normal, as if nothing had happened.

## Chapter 17

### MA AS SEEN BY SOME ADMIRERS\*

An ocean can reflect only an infinitesimal portion of the limitless firmament — it is circumscribed by its own dimensions. Similarly, every little pool of water can reflect a portion, however small, of the sky above. But the quality of the reflection depends, in every case, on certain conditions which, if present, can make the reflecting water effective like a spotless mirror. Thus, the water must be (a) free from *mala* (dirt) so as to be crystal clear, (b) free from *vikshepa* (motion, disturbance) so as to be still and unruffled, and (c) free from *avarana* (cover), so as to be directly focused on the object to be reflected.

The 'Phenomenon' Anandamayī Ma is comparable to the infinite sky and each one of us is, so to speak, a tiny pool of water, capable of reflecting only a portion thereof. A perfect image of Ma cannot possibly be reflected on our mind — it is so small and so imperfect! Let us see how Ma has been revealed to some of her admirers, to each according to his lights.

Bhaiji, author of '*Mother as revealed to me*', has said in unmistakable terms that 'The Holy Mother is the embodied manifestation of all we can possibly conceive of as the God-

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\*Vide *Mother as seen by Her Devotees*, published by Shree Shree Anandamayī Sangha, and *Ananda Varta*.

head or Divinity" and that "if we focus our concentrated attention on Her holy lotus feet, then we shall require no other haven or refuge in our journey of life towards ultimate spiritual enlightenment and emancipation."\*

Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj has elaborately discussed in his erudite writings on various theories about Ma's true identity and spiritual status. According to him: "She has the Cosmic and Trans-cosmic Consciousness. She is always poised in the self-same awareness as a Supreme and Integral University, transcending all limitations of time, space and personality and yet comprehending them all in a great harmony." He has finally come to the conclusion that "Ma is too near us to be seen in her proper perspective." He adds: "As for ourselves we too shall have to rise up to the height and attain to the broad outlook in which an attempt may be made to study her properly. What is really needed is to feel that she is Mother and we are her children and that as mere children we cannot be expected to know her as she is, but only as she shows herself to us in response to our cravings. It really becomes us to behave as infants crying out in the night and to invoke Mother with an inarticulate language for her descent and benediction."

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Principal Sanjiva Rao (formerly of Queen's College, Benaras) observes: "We do not know what Light is; we can know its existence by its effects. Likewise Love is invisible. It can be known only by what it reveals to us —

\*Bhaiji's 'Twelve Precepts'.

the beauty hidden in the heart of man. Ma lives in a world where there is no darkness at all. One has only to stand in the radiance of her love to realise that, though it is a mystery that baffles the mind of man, it is an intense reality. To be within her presence is to know that one is understood and forgiven. Love is everlasting forgiveness..... She (Ma) must ever remain a mystery. But to the heart that loves, she is no insoluble riddle — she is, in fact, intelligible only when the mind recognizes its own limitations and surrenders itself to her influence. To love her is the indispensable condition for gaining a real insight into her nature ....She is her own proof. She is self-luminous."

Ma's catholicity was revealed to Dr. Hajiz Syed, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., who has observed as follows in his article entitled "*Anandamayi Ma has come to fulfil and not to destroy*".\*

"She has been silently and unobtrusively guiding and instructing us to follow the traditional paths of spiritual practice without finding fault with any system of thought. She has been urging on us the utter necessity of understanding the underlying beauty of our own faith and leading our life accordingly.....Her greatest miracle, to my mind, is Her marvellous effort to transform and elevate the lives of those who have come in contact with Her. This is the most important service that one can render in the cause of human welfare and national progress of India. .... She gives to everyone according to his requirements, understands the

\*Ananda Varta, X/1/14.

natural weakness and faults of every aspirant and extends Her tolerance to all, understanding and elevating everyone, bringing peace and comfort to everyone who looks up to Her for help and guidance. How many fallen souls She has uplifted ! How many desperate human beings She has comforted ! She has brought light to ever so many aspirants struggling on the path of Self-realization. She has removed scepticism from the minds of so many doubting souls. Her message of hope and comfort to all mankind is that if we tread the path sincerely and earnestly we are sure to attain to our goal in good time."

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Professor Collin Turnbull, M.A., Ph.D., came to India with the conviction that in this country he would find not only what he himself wanted but what the whole of the western world needed. He was fortunate in coming into close contact with Ma. "Mataji", he observes, "is everywhere and at all times for those who want Her ; and nothing is more delightful than complete surrender, and a great plunge into the ocean of Truth, Goodness and Beauty with which Mataji surrounds Herself..... It is in the eternal Truth which is so perfectly revealed in Mataji that the world today will find the foundations on which to build a happier future. Mataji has a message for the whole of mankind."

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Another western seeker of Truth, Ethel Merston, saw the loving Mother in Ma : "From the world over Mataji attracts seekers — French, German, Austrian, English, American, Dutch, men and women are to be met in Her *ashtamas*

— all are welcomed by Her loving radiance. How often do we not come to Her, worried by the cares of life, puzzled about ourselves and others, and in Her presence our problems resolve themselves, we find peace in the glory of Her smile and, relaxed, we face life's cares afresh, energy renewed, understanding of ourselves and others deepened, and even when devotion is not our *dharma*, and we cannot follow the *mārga* of worship and *japam*, we recognize the greatness of all such Beings as Mataji, and, along with Her worshippers, but on our own path, find help and stimulation from the force of that Love which passeth understanding and which is Her Grace."

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To Father Enomiya-Lassale, Professor, Tokyo University, Ma was revealed as the Mother working for world peace. Originally a German Jesuit father, he was teaching Zen Buddhist meditation in Japan as well as in various countries in Europe, when he had Ma's *darsana*. After having miraculously survived the atom bomb disaster in Hiroshima, he had felt inspired to build a 'Cathedral for World Peace' there, to which people from all over the globe contributed. His talk with Ma prompted him to exclaim : "Ma is doing more for world peace than all the politicians and peace workers put together."

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Principal Ganga Charan Dasgupta, a worthy disciple of Swami Bholananda Giri, observes : "Mother works quietly and almost unnoticed among all classes of people. Like the life-force of Nature, Her influence penetrates the supra-physi-

cal plane of existence, in the region of man's motives, purposes and principles. It transforms his being, all invisible like the cosmic radiation from above..... She possesses the Supreme Power of healing all wounds, sorrows and bereavements; so She is often called the 'Great Healer' of men's wounds."

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The impressions of Sri Subimal Dutt, I.C.S., sometime Ambassador of India to U.S.S.R. and thereafter to Bangladesh, have been recorded by him in words as follows: "To watch Ma in action is an experience by itself. Nothing is too insignificant for Her. She gives the same attention to, say giving direction as to how a particular vegetable should be prepared in the kitchen, as to the elaborate ceremonials to be observed at a *puja* or to the service of a *mahatma*. And it is not uncommon to see Her go into a sudden discussion of abstruse philosophy while engaged in an apparently routine conversation. One has the conviction that She is in constant communion with the Divine and is a vehicle of expression of the Divine Will. This, to my mind, is the real meaning of the word *kheyal*, which Ma often uses. One common experience with Mataji is that She answers questions and resolves doubts unasked. I can recall many incidents of this kind within my experience."

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Arnaud Desjardins, a well-known producer of spiritual films and author of several books on spiritual subjects, had Ma's first *darsana* in September 1959. Thereafter he came all the way from Europe again and again and stayed with Ma for

long periods. "From the first day", he says, "I have had the conviction that I was not in the presence of a human being, however extraordinary, but of a Being of an altogether different order..... She has gradually made me understand the meaning of the Gospels and the message of Christ. Thanks to Ma, the word of Jesus has now for me become the word of Life..... My gratitude to Ma is as great for what I feel I have received from Her in Paris as for the extraordinary moments experienced in India. I do not seek any explanation. The oneness of the Self, the awakening of the inner *Guru* are enough..... Since my first visit to Ma at Varanasi I have discovered the Life in myself. The Christ said: 'I am the Life. I shall give Life to all who come to me'. I know that Ma is Life and that She gives Life to those who come to Her."

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Miss Blanca, an Austrian musician, who had her first *darsana* of Ma in 1943 and is now known as Brahmacharini Atmananda, has expressed her impression of Ma as follows:

"It cannot be denied that in Mother's presence is reared that flaming aspiration for the Divine which makes one forego and forget all comforts, be they physical, psychological or intellectual, and which is the most powerful means of breaking up the ego. But this is certainly not the only way in which Mother's influence manifests itself, it is only one aspect of what She does. Nine years spent in close contact with Mother have given me the conviction that She has the power to reveal to every human being the 'Secret of the Golden Flower' hidden in his heart. Be he a Hindu or a Buddhist, a

Christian or a Jew, a Mohammedan, a Parsi or an atheist, an introvert or an extrovert, an intellectual or an emotionalist; be he a *yogi*, a *bhakta*, or a *tāntrika*; a fastidious artist, an eminent scholar or an illiterate; whatever his upbringing, his traditions, his prejudices, from whatever school of thought he may hail; be he a beginner or highly advanced in his search, however tormenting his difficulty, however deep his error — for every seeker after Truth, Mother has the right word at the right time in the right manner. What has puzzled one for years, what has seemed an insoluble problem, an insurmountable cliff, a most exasperating issue, suddenly becomes so simple. Her solution is so obvious, so convincing, it gives instantaneous relief to a mind in agony, to a heart in distress. One hears Her utter a few clear and simple words — but miracle of miracles — they are not pronounced by another; one feels them emerge out of the depths of one's own being. Something in one whispers: "This is what I have always known, what I have always wanted. How strange that I could not discover it myself!"\*\*

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Dr. Alexander Lipski, Director, Religious Studies, and Professor of History and Religious Studies, California State University, observes: "When I was brought into the presence of Anandamayi Ma, I felt that, for the first time in my life, I was encountering someone who was the very embodiment of the Holy, the 'wholly other'. And yet Anandamayi Ma was so close and accessible. .... It was a delight to listen to Her pearly laughter and I was struck by the ease and

\*\**Ananda Varta*, II(1)/93.

assurance with which the almost illiterate Anandamayi Ma responded to the most recondite questions of erudite scholars. Facing Mataji I felt I was mentally stripped naked. It seemed to me that She could see into the innermost recesses of my mind. I asked Her to tell me what the chief obstacles on my spiritual path were. In response She revealed to me some glaring short-comings of which I had been hitherto totally unaware. What She said was in no way flattering, in fact painful, but Anandamayi Ma said it so compassionately although firmly, that I did not feel condemned. I realized what true loving detachment was. .... Her message is particularly appropriate in a world where the notion of progress is no longer taken for gospel truth and the whole array of our 'modern values' is undergoing an agonising reappraisal. Anandamayi Ma diagnoses the present disease of civilization as 'over-secularization'. She suggests that the cure from our severe illness cannot be brought about by engineers, sociologists or psychologists but by doctors of the soul. She prescribes a drastic revolution in our views and attitudes from outwardness to inwardness, from materialism to spirituality and from man-centredness to God-centredness. Her totally uncompromising transcendent point of view is truly a shock therapy for problem-solving oriented, pragmatic Americans. ... She brings peace and harmony into this world of strife."\*

Again, Dr. Lipski has observed in the Foreword to *Matri-vani* (collection of Ma's sayings), Vol. 2: "Mother's message

\**Life and Teaching of Sri Anandamayi Ma*, by Dr. Alexander Lipski.



is both timeless and timely, for a world filled with tensions and confusion needs to be constantly reminded that all our sufferings and tribulations can be traced to one primary cause : alienation from God, the source of our being....."

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Richard Lannoy, an eminent English photographer and writer, has observed with reference to his first *darsana* of Ma : "That some one so great, so full of life, some one with such a power immediately to inspire all those around Her, should really exist filled me with amazement. .... Any one from any part of the world may come to Her and receive guidance which no scholar can ever hope to give. For my own part it has been such a deep experience to be near Mataji, because She is so clear and direct.....If the path of *sadhana* be hard to live up to, something has been illuminated in the hearts of those who visit Her and which cannot be obliterated by time ; this is such a great love which She gives to all that at once the difficulties of sincere aspiration become simplified. .... If anything is new it is surely Her own unique way of helping you to realize, instantly, at once and for all time, how to kindle the inner flame. Her genius suddenly lights you up with happiness, inner and abiding happiness, the vitality of Joy, and shows you that this can never come from cinemas or a fat bank balance, but from within. She gently guides you to the point where you can know without fear that this Joy comes from God. Many people balk at the word 'God' and profess atheism or agnosticism, but that which one can receive from Her has nothing to do with any 'ism'."

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Let us have a picture of Ma as drawn by Melita Maschmann, a well-known German writer whose books have been rendered into other foreign languages. Her novel entitled '*The Thirteens*' has appeared in half a dozen translations, including English. She states that what she experienced at the first *darsana* of Ma "cannot be conveyed to a person who has never known anything similar. I can only relate outer signs and speak in metaphors. Just imagine that a tree — a beautiful, strong, old beech for instance — approaches you with calm steps. What would you feel ? 'Have I gone crazy ?' You would ask yourself. 'Or perhaps am I dreaming ?' Finally you would have to concede that you had entered a new dimension of reality of which you had hitherto been ignorant. This exactly was my position."

"According to Western thinking," Melita Maschmann continues, "a human being is characterized by his 'I'. In his existence as a 'persona' Christians recognise the mystery of his immortality. Here I was suddenly confronted with a human being of whom I felt that she had no ego at all. Did she then belong to the category of *Mātā Ganga* or *Pitā Himalaya* ?..... Although countless men and women of all strata of society fell at her feet, I could never detect even the faintest trace of pride, neither also of humility in Mataji."

Ever since her first *darsana* in 1962, Melita Maschmann has had the good fortune of *matrisanga* again and again. About a very special *darsana* she reports : "In Mataji, God allowed me to see Him sometimes with the closeness of intimacy..... Years ago I said to her in a private talk : 'I am such an extrovert that I cannot find God within myself', but

sometimes I see Him in your face'. That night I made a note in my diary : 'During evening *darsana* Ma glanced at me. Suddenly her face, which had looked tired and somewhat uneasy, became beautiful beyond all description, radiated by inner light. For an hour she sat silent and without moving on her couch, no one dared to talk. Each cell of her body seemed to vibrate in the joy of a mysterious presence. Is it allowed to try and interpret such a situation ? Perhaps when she glanced at me she remembered my remark that morning : 'Sometimes I see God in your face'. And there He was, called by my longing to see Him. I think Grace has infinite ways of working. One could consist in permitting us to draw It into Ma's heart, alone by our passionate desire to see It flourishing there..... During the Cuban crisis it became clearer than ever to me how much I owed to Mataji. Just like everyone else I saw the dreadful carnage of the situation, but quite contrary to my attitude in similar crisis hitherto, I did not feel afraid. Perhaps I have grasped not with my mind but with my whole being — that even the most cruel outer destruction does not touch that which we ARE in Reality. May I be able to preserve this knowledge !"

Daya Ma, President, Self-Realization Fellowship, U.S.A., herself a spiritual leader with a large following, describes her first impression of Ma's *darsana* as follows :

"As my eyes first beheld the blessed Mother, it seemed that a great dart of love went out from Her and struck my heart, leaving me transfixed. I remained in that state for some moments, eyes locked on the Mother, feeling great

waves of love surging within me..... The Mother placed a garland of yellow flowers around my neck and I was plunged into an ecstatic stage. When I opened my eyes the Mother gazed long and lovingly into my eyes. What sweetness — what blessing! I can say no more. She is a Divine Being.” “Suddenly”, continues Daya Ma, “I felt a tremendous spiritual experience in my spine, centring at the heart *chakra*. A feeling enveloped me of great expanding peace, spiritual fulfilment and oneness with the Universal Mother. .... Anandamayī Ma removed from her neck a string of small *rudrāksha* beads and put them about my neck and said with great tenderness, ‘this daughter of yours ever lives in your heart’.”\*

Let me conclude this gallery of pen-pictures of Ma with a few lines from the great savant Jean Herbert, born in Paris, who sat at the feet of almost all the great Hindu sages of the first half of this century, translated some forty volumes of their teachings and wrote about twenty-five himself. He toured Europe and lectured extensively on various aspects of Indian Philosophy. This renowned philosopher has described Ma's wisdom as follows :

“The wisdom of Ma Anandamayi is not the knowledge found in books, always incomplete and hesitant, which all the time discovers yet unexplored regions, stumbles over contradictions, destroys its hypotheses in order to set up new ones and is not concerned whether its achievements lead to benefit or to cataclysm. Nor is it ethereal vision, born out of ecstasy, which has no connection with the world in which human beings live and struggle. It is wisdom which at the

\* *Ananda Varā*, VII/3/130.

same time embraces the most arduous metaphysical subjects, the most agonizing problems of morality as well as the smallest details of daily life : which sees everything in its place and in its right relation because it knows the Reality of which our world is an appearance and of which all beings, all facts, all becoming, are but partial and changing manifestations, distorted by our senses and thoughts, and to these also She has the key. This wisdom has a clear and intimate knowledge of all that is, because it is firmly based on Joy which overcomes all conflict and on Love which realizes all unity.”\*

“In her presence, parties and sects, intolerant beliefs and philosophies disappear. Mother’s views are so catholic that men of all shades of religious thought and belief come to her and everyone feels satisfied and stronger, with beliefs purified and reinforced. .... Thus, everything opens up, and ever wider understanding awakens within us and enables us to discover treasures and unsuspected sources of joy in every aspect of life. Before us Ma stands as a mirror to our real Self and makes us unearthen in ourselves ever new potentialities. Sitting at the feet of Ma pulls down the veil and many people become capable of concentration and prayer. Her mere presence, her smile, her expression are a teaching in themselves. Her protection is actually felt as soon as our thoughts and actions are pure and free from egoism. Pure desires are fulfilled.”†

\*Translation of the Preface of the French edition of ‘*Sad Vāni*’ published in the series ‘*Les Grands Maîtres Spirituels*’ dans *L’Inde Contemporaine*, 1943.

†Translation of extracts from the Preface of Jean Herbert’s *The Teaching of Ma Anandamayi*.

## Chapter 18

### MA AS THE UNIVERSAL MOTHER

Crowned with the halo of spiritual glory, Anandamayi Ma is, as it were, the supreme Sovereign of an unlimited empire of *Ananda* — a Sovereign who neither rules nor reigns but remains enthroned in the hearts of millions of men and women hailing from both the hemispheres.

Citizenship of this empire is open to all. Indeed, all are welcome, including those who are condemned in society. Ma says : “I specially want those very persons who have no prop to support them on their path to good life.”\* A priceless commentary on this saying of Ma is treasured in my diary — Ma’s impromptu answer to an impertinent question once put by me years ago. The background was this : Surprised at Ma’s special indulgence in relation to certain individuals of questionable character, I once ventured to ask Ma her reason for discrimination in favour of some undeserving persons. The gist of her answer — prompt and peremptory — was somewhat as follows : “Should the doors of a hospital be changed shut against patients suffering from serious ailments ? In fact, the more acute the disease, the greater the urgency for treatment ; the more pronounced the symptoms, the stronger the claim for special attention.” Such a pointed, effective and unanswerable home truth completely disarmed

\**Mother as revealed to me*, by Bhajji, 6th ed., p. 88.

me. After a short pause Ma resumed : "If somebody thinks that he requires no treatment in a hospital, he may be at liberty to take care of himself." Was this an indirect admonition meant for me ? "How can this body", concluded Ma, "disappoint anyone suffering from some mental or moral malady and seeking an opportunity for an uplift ?" This was a stern warning that Ma was as much a loving mother of reprobates and sinners as of pious and virtuous people. Does not Ma, in her *lila*, share with human mothers the weakness of being more kindly disposed to the unworthy and backward among her children ?

Ma is the embodiment, in human form, of the ideal relationship between man and God, the Mother. Such relationship has been described by Ma in words as follows : "Even though you may want to push God the Mother aside, She will never leave you. Are you not her offspring ? A mother does what is good and beneficial for her child. She gives to her scion exactly what is needed, not more and not less. Her forgiveness knows no limits, this is why she is called MOTHER. If with deep faith, devotion and love you can exclaim : 'Mother, come to me, I cannot pass my days without you', rest assured, the Universal Mother will spread out Her arms and clasp you to Her heart. Don't look up to Her only as a mysterious refuge in your hour of distress. Keep in mind, She is always very, very near as the Force that guides your life. She Herself is the supreme refuge of every sentient being. With this conviction proceed. She will take the brunt of your burdens from your shoulders and make them light."\*

\**Mauna Milani*, Bulletin No. 11.

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We have already seen how common people by the million have hailed Ma as their own mother and how eminent intellectuals, philosophers and savants of India and foreign countries have been profoundly impressed by her spiritual greatness and universality. We have also seen how even persons holding exalted positions in different spheres of worldly life, including public men of all-India status, have surrendered themselves at her feet. Again, we have seen how, long before Ma became prominent in the public eye, she was looked upon with adoration by great saints such as Ram Chandra Deva (popularly known as Ram Thakur), Balananda Brahmachari Maharaj and Paramahansa Yogananda, themselves being venerable *gurus* of innumerable disciples. All this entitles Anandamayi Ma to the pre-eminent position of the Universal Mother.

Let us quote the observations of two other contemporary luminaries in India's spiritual firmament — Triveni Puriji Maharaj of Khanna and Devi Giriji Maharaj of Uttar Kasi. "I do not", said the former, "regard the Mother as *Avatara*\* (incarnation of God). She is Durga Herself. To call her an *Avatara* does not convey the truth about her."† And the latter, in course of a talk on Sri Krishna, incidentally remarked : "Look at Ma here. Has anyone recognised Her for what She is ? In Her there is no uncertainty. She is the *Eka Rasamay* (permeated by the One Divine Ambrosia).

\*Vide Appendix 'A'.

†*Ananda Varta*, 1/1/6.

Only he who becomes like Ma will be able to recognize Her. Ma seems to wander hither and thither, but actually She does nothing. Although we see Mataji coming and going, this does not mean anything. Mataji pervades everywhere — *Bāhiraṇtascha bhūtānāmacharam charamēba cha* (without and within all beings, immovable as also movable — *Gita XIII/16*).\*\*

Similarly, many universally adored saints of India, including a number of *Mahāmandalesvaras* (great leaders of groups of saints), have given expression to their deep appreciation of Ma in glowing terms of adoration. They have repeatedly recognized, in all-India religious conferences, Ma's unique status as the Universal Mother and paid homage to her in unmistakable terms.

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It is not necessary to multiply opinions of individual holy men. Let us see how Ma has been collectively received by the order of saints in the *Kumbha Mela*, their most important religious congregation. This holy festival of unique character deserves a special note. There is the legend that four places on earth were once hallowed by contact with the mythological *kumbha* (jar) of nectar — Nasik, Ujjain, Prayag and Hardwar. To perpetuate the memory of that sacred legend, *Kumbha Mela* (*mela* — a fair, here a religious concourse) is held at each of these places once every three years or so. It is not known when exactly *Kumbha Mela* began attracting pilgrims. In the 7th century A.D. the great Chinese pilgrim-traveller

\* *Ananda Varā, XXIII/4/224.*

Hiuen Tsang witnessed at Prayag a session of this magnificent *mela* in which people of all ranks participated — from the Emperor Harshavardhana with his ministers and tributary chiefs down to the beggar in rags, as also heads of various religious sects, scholars, philosophers, ascetics and laymen.

In the 9th century A.D. Sankaracharya, the great founder of the *Advaita* School of Philosophy and a religious leader of dynamic personality, sought to utilise the *Kumbha Mela* as a meeting place for the main religious heads of the country to hold serious discussions and exchange ideas. He had also established four well-known monasteries in four distant corners of India, each having a head, called Sankaracharya, who was to guide the holy men under his charge. These heads were exhorted to assemble regularly at *Kumbha Mela* for maintaining contacts with one another and also with religious leaders of other denominations.

As Brahmanism has no supreme hierarchical head competent to lay down canons for the guidance of the whole country, a forum of all-India importance like the *Kumbha Mela* has, for centuries, proved to be a highly useful institution. It has ever been an important obligation on the part of all Hindu religious sects to send their pontiffs or representatives to this *mela*. In fact, the most important part of the assembly is comprised of religious heads attached to different institutions, saintly philosophers, ascetics, wandering mendicants, high priests of temples and their disciples. It is the prospect of their *darsana* that forms an important incentive for pilgrims to flock to the *Kumbha Mela*.

In the *Kumbha Mela* at Prayag in 1977 (7.1.77 to 25.1.77) one crore and thirty lakhs of pilgrims were estimated to have participated.\* Here are extracts from an article by an eye witness depicting Ma in the background of that *mela* :†

“Mataji had arrived in triumphant procession from George Town, Allahabad, on January 7th. She was in such great demand by one and all that She never left camp until it was abandoned on the 25th. She was in Her serene, majestic, merciful Self wherever She made Her appearance. Between 10 a.m. and midday She would sit in the pandal, give *darsana* and receive obeisance from the thousands of admirers, pilgrims, devotees, ascetics, *mahatmas*, sight-seers, hippies...who entered our gate to have a glimpse of Sri Anandamayi Ma, to exchange perhaps a word or two with Her, to obtain Her compassionate glance or merely to sit down in silence and contemplate Her never-ending *lila*. A mere glance from the divinely radiant eyes would transport some one into raptures or impassioned prayer. To witness this never-ending miracle left a profound and lasting impression on one's mind. The continuous stream of visitors to the Anandamayi camp included beggars, Governors, officers, Rajas, merchants, Central and State Government Ministers, their families and so on. Mataji and Her camp were fully featured on the radio and television screens, including the processions on the 7th and 14th, and a special feature was prepared of the Prime Minister's visit to Anandamayi Ma on the 22nd.”

\**Ananda Varta*, XXIV/2/132.

†*Purna Kumbha at Prayag*, by R. K. Banerjee (formerly Vice-Chairman, Board of Directors, Imperial Tobacco Co. Ltd.): *Ananda Varta*, XXIV/2/135-136.





One unfortunate feature of the *Kumbha Mela* is rivalry among different *ākharās* (groups of saints). Of late Ma's motherly influence has inspired them to sink their differences and they have all joined in paying homage to Ma, the common object of adoration of all. Indeed, Ma is the Universal Mother.

Among the millions that have collected under Ma's banner there are not only members of the holy order but also official dignitaries of the highest rank including successive Presidents of the Republic of India, successive Prime Ministers, many Governors of States, Ministers of the Central and State Governments, Ambassadors and top men in all walks of life as stated above, besides many Feudatory Chiefs of the British period of Indian history. The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi used, in her childhood, to pay respects to Ma along with her mother, Kamala Nehru. Even in recent times she does not miss an opportunity for *darsana* of Ma who has been a source of much needed solace to her in all circumstances.

During British rule their Highnesses the Rajas and Maharajas occupied a very important position of almost royal prestige — practically speaking all-powerful 'kings' of their own 'kingdom'. Generally educated on western lines, they were trained by the British Raj to develop western ways of life and to prefer material prosperity to spiritual progress. Some of them were fortunate enough to come under Ma's benign influence and develop genuine interest in moulding themselves on the lines directly or indirectly indicated by her. To the pioneer batch of Ma's devotees recruited from the princely order

belonged the Raja of Solan, already mentioned and the Maharaja and Maharani of Tehri Garhwal and Mandi. Then followed many others. Attracted towards the goal of moral uplift and spiritual enlightenment under Ma's inspiration and guidance, the Rajas and Ranis held up an excellent ideal for their subjects to emulate. Ma's occasional visits to their principalities created an upsurge of religious enthusiasm shared alike by the Princes and the common people. Vedic *yajnas* and chanting of and discourses on the *Bhagavata* inspired by Ma and earnestly taken up by the Rajas and Ranis appealed more and more to their religious instincts and these became popular functions. Strangely enough, there was a corresponding wane in their craze for revelry in western style.

Ma's visits to the Feudatory States were few and far between and invariably for short periods. British India was more fortunate in having greater opportunities for Ma's *darsana* during her repeated all-India tours and particularly during her long stay in places such as Dacca, Dehradun and Benaras, as already described. Free India has witnessed the establishment of large number of Anandamayi Ashramas all over this sub-continent — Delhi, Calcutta (Agarpara), Varanasi, Vrindavan and Kankhal being the most important centres in Northern India.

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We have seen how in Eastern and Northern India Ma has been hailed as the Universal Mother. Let us also turn to the West and the South. In September 1972, Sriman Narayan, the then Governor of Gujarat, and his wife (daughter of Jammalal Bajaj, already mentioned) earnestly requested:

Ma to visit Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat. Ma agreed although she had very little time at her disposal. It was Sriman Narayan's earnest desire to bring, if possible, the entire population of Gujarat at the Mother's feet and the Governor spared no pains in making proper arrangements necessary for the purpose. He personally received Ma at the railway station and respectfully escorted her to the Durbar Hall where she was given a grand reception with *arati* (waving of lights etc.) and *kirtana* (chanting of the Name of God). Among those present were high officials of the State and leading citizens of Ahmedabad, besides Shri Y. B. Chavan, the then Finance Minister of India. A green house attached to the Government house was converted into a cottage for Ma's temporary abode, her small party having been accommodated in a palatial building on the bank of the river Sabarmati, with extensive grounds commanding a charming view. In a mammoth assembly of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Parsis, the Governor declared that Mataji had been earnestly and reverently asked to bless the gathering rather than preside over it. Ma gave a short reply: "God creates, preserves and again absorbs into Himself (the Universe). Wherever a man is, there is Siva, and wherever a woman, there is Gauri (Siva's divine consort). Serve your children, looking upon them as Gopal and Kumari."\* The essence of Ma's teaching is: There is nothing but God. The divine aspects of *Siva* and *Sakti* are present in every human being.

\*Ananda Varta, XLX/4/248.





Bhubaneswar at 1.30 a.m. on May 21st. Even at that hour the Governor of Orissa, Sri Bhagavat Dayal Sarma, came to the railway station to receive her. The next day Ma left for Puri where she remained till June 27th. A large number of local people, including some of the leading figures in Orissa, took part in the *satsanga* regularly held in Ma's presence in the Anandamayi Ashram at Swargadwar, Puri, facing the Bay of Bengal.

A memorable event took place in this Ashram during Ma's stay there in 1979 — Thakur Sri Sri Sitaramdas Onkarnath's meeting with her in a homely atmosphere in that holy place of pilgrimage. The Thakur is a towering figure in India's spiritual history of this century. A universally revered nonagenarian saint, he is the *guru* of disciples by the thousand. He has founded 61 *ashramas* in different parts of India and inspired a great organisation for publication of religious books and journals. Notwithstanding his unrivalled seniority and exalted position, he occasionally behaves like a frolicsome child before Ma. He evokes Ma's wonderful *lila* by adopting ingenious methods to please or 'tease' her. On this occasion he was in his best form and unique was Ma's response. Heedless of his physical infirmity, the Thakur did *pranama* to Ma by lying prostrate. Ma, in her turn, warmly received him, greeted him with folded hands and showed him the respect due to the hoary sage. The interview started in a profound silence which continued for some time. Speech was inhibited in the assembly. The devotees present, almost in a state of suspended animation, joined the *mauna* (silence) in the background of the roaring waves of the Bay of Bengal,

attuned to the silent transmission between two elevated beings — Ma and the Thakur.

A similar experience had been shared by the devotees of Delhi on the occasion of Durga Puja in 1976. The Thakur arrived at the Delhi Ashram and did *pranama* to the Goddess Durga. A hurriedly arranged seat was provided to him on the spacious verandah of the adjacent Siva temple. On hearing of the Thakur's arrival, Ma, then resting in her room upstairs, came down immediately and occupied her seat by the side of her 'Baba'. None of them uttered a word. The Thakur kept on gazing with lacklustre eyes at Ma, absorbed in herself. Time seemed then to stop running. There were hundreds of fortunate devotees who witnessed this heavenly sight, and still carry the impression and the impact of the wonderful communion.

To come back to the *mauna lila* at Puri in 1979, it suddenly took a new turn when the Thakur had a brain wave to pick a mock 'quarrel' with Ma. Ma accepted the challenge with her usual serenity and winsome smile. The 'confrontation' was enlivened with pleasantries accompanied by Ma's gracious glance and her Baba's buoyant behaviour and boisterous laughter. At the end, the latter prayed to Ma for her grace. Ma simply kept on mildly muttering 'Baba Baba Baha!' The language of the eyes of both was more eloquent than speech.

One is reminded of the Thakur's encounter with Ma on two subsequent occasions, as would be revealed by the following extracts from a letter of Major B. C. Bose (retd.), an eye witness :

"It was the last day of *Samyama Saptaha* at Hrishikesh in early November, 1980. Ma was seated in Her earmarked seat in one corner of the approximately forty feet long dais. It was about 10-30 p.m. Some artists of Gujarat were performing a scene from the Ramayana to keep the *vratis* occupied till the midnight *mauna*. Look, who is carried on a disciple's shoulders — the thin, physically incapacitated monk in loin cloth, his long flowing '*jata*' (matted hair) curled like a snake on his head, his broad forehead besmeared with sandal ! As the nonagenarian Thakur is lowered down from the shoulders of the disciple before Ma's seat, he bends like a bow, does *pranama*. Ma instantly says, "*Baba*, what are you doing ! what are you doing !" Thakur says in a loud voice, jokingly imitating Ma's East Bengal dialect : "*Tāre ektā pennām kairā lai*" (Let me do obeisance to thee before anything else). He then recited from the *Chandi* :

Whenever such difficulties arise because of the demons, I shall incarnate myself and destroy the enemies.

I am the only one in this universe. Where is the second other than me ?

Thakur in the same strain gave a talk in Bengali for more than fifteen minutes, the gist of which was that 'Ma is the physical emblem of the primeval *Sakti*'.

Again Thakur arrived unexpectedly at the dais of the *Samyama Saptaha* pandal one evening at Kankhal in November, 1981. This time, to our surprise, Thakur walked up to Ma's seat almost unaided, did obeisance to her and said with folded hands : "Your pull is so strong that I had to come tonight instead of tomorrow." He recited verses composed

by himself in praise of Ma, identifying her with the mother Ganga. Next day Thakur addressed the *vratis* according to programme previously announced. He spoke in a high pitch, narrated the story of a devout, but poor Brahmin, who was blessed by the Goddess Durga coming as his daughter and mysteriously disappearing in a pond, but showing her hands with conchshell bangles to the father. The burden of his discourse is that Ma is the Durga Herself."

Let me resume the story of Ma's *lila* at Puri in 1979. During her stay for a few weeks there, she was indisposed and could not move about. On account of her august presence, the *ashram* became the centre of attraction and its *satsanga* (religious congregation) created an atmosphere of spiritual uplift and festive jubilation. The tide of joy emanating from Ma almost drowned the residents of the town from the highest to the lowest. The Governor of Orissa was all attention to the comforts and convenience of Ma and her party, placed his guest-house at our disposal and made special arrangements for our *darsana* of Lord Jagannath's *Ratha-Yatra* festival. Pursuant to Ma's *kheyal*, a *Nama-Yajna* was observed in our Puri Ashram. Members of the local public, including monks belonging to different organizations, participated with great enthusiasm. They were received by Ma with her usual cordiality notwithstanding her indifferent health.

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It is well-known that Ma often happens to be the centre of pomp and pageantry associated with functions and festivals sponsored by persons stationed high in life. Let me give some illustrations of her sweet *lila* with less known people in

homely surroundings, showing that Ma gives herself away even to them with careless abandon. When the sun rises, it needs no artificial aid to make itself visible to us. Like the sun, Ma is self-revealing; she needs no introduction to any society. Wherever she goes, she conquers the hearts of the local people by her overflowing love and grace; her presence carries an exquisite sweetness, pervading the thoughts and ideas of people flocking around her. Even those to whom she is supposed to be a stranger, most mysteriously discover their own *ma* in Anandamayi Ma.

Tarapeeth is a tiny desolate place of pilgrimage in the district of Birbhum in West Bengal, inhabited by unsophisticated villagers. Far away from the din and bustle of urban life, it is almost an out of the way place for lack of transport facilities and it is also economically backward. Ma's first visit to Tarapeeth in the mid-thirties was for a short stay. Though already fairly well-known in East Bengal and Calcutta by that time, the name of Anandamayi Ma had hardly reached Tarapeeth; but her presence created quite a sensation in the uneventful life of that village. Ma used to wander about from cottage to cottage, attracting the loving admiration of all who came in contact with her. They became friendly with Ma and most humbly offered her, without any embarrassing formality, simple items of rural food — flattened rice and puffed rice with molasses — comparable to 'a dish of herbs where love is'.

As the time for Ma's departure from Tarapeeth drew nigh, these simple villagers expressed their sense of deep sorrow at the prospect of their impending separation from

her; and their genuine admiration for her found silent expression in their demeanour. Here is a brief sketch of their conversation with Ma just on the eve of her farewell.\*

A lady: "Ma! a motor car is waiting to take you away from us. The sound of the horn causes my heart to ache. It seems as if Akrur has come to snatch away our Sri Krishna from our midst."†

Ma: "Why are you so much moved? Am I not just an ordinary person like you? I have been here only on a short visit. And like a stranger I have wondered about in my own way. But you have offered me meals with great cordiality and tender care."

A young housewife said in her smart reply: "Ma, we belong to Tarapeeth, a sacred place of pilgrimage. We are used to seeing so many saints and sages. We can easily size up people. We have never come across one like you — verily a goddess in human form."

Ma replied: "No, I am neither a sage nor a saint. How could I be compared with them?"

The lady's rejoinder was: "Why try to deceive us? You are, indeed, goddess-incarnate!"

Subsequently, Ma paid a second visit to Tarapeeth. In the meantime a Mohammedan gentleman belonging to a respectable family of Delhi and known as Maulavi Saheb, had been fortunate enough to have Ma's *darsana* in Calcutta. He was so deeply impressed that he longed for closer association

\**Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi*, by Gurupriya Debi, Vol. II, p. 6.

†This reference is to Sri Krishna's exodus from Vrindavan, escorted by Akrur as described in the *Bhagavata*.

with Ma. Hearing that Ma was in Tarapeeth he came there for *matrisanga* in seclusion. He even composed poems in Urdu in adoration of Ma. Some local Mohammedans did not like the Maulavi Saheb surrendering himself thus to the Hindu Mother and made their adverse reaction perfectly clear to him. Thereupon the Maulavi Saheb called a meeting of his co-religionists at a mosque and had Ma seated on a raised platform. He then spoke for more than an hour explaining who Ma really was. He emphatically pointed out that there was nothing in Islam forbidding association with such a Mother. The Maulavi Saheb had so endeared himself to Ma as to earn from her the appellation 'Prem Gopal'. Out of respect for the sentiment of saints accompanying her and strictly observing the conventions of orthodox Hindu society, Ma usually avoids taking any food touched by a Muslim, or for the matter of that, by any one not belonging to a specially privileged class. But Ma, as the Universal Mother, is also above all this. Here is an example. 'Prem Gopal' once brought to Tarapeeth some food from Calcutta for Ma. It was his earnest desire to feed Ma with his hands, but he was naturally hesitating. Ma read 'Prem Gopal's' mind, and solved his problems by inviting him to do as he pleased.\*

Navadwip, the birth-place of Lord Chaitanya, in the district of Nadia in West Bengal, witnessed Ma's gracious *lila* with almost incompatible 'playmates', starting with a saint in an *ashram* and ending in a police officer at the police station. During her sojourn at Navadwip, Ma once paid a

surprise visit to Lalitā Sakhī, a well-known saint, who entertained in his heart a secret grievance that Ma had not cared to take any notice of him. He told Ma, in a pique, that he received a rude shock at the news that Ma had left Navadwip without giving him a chance for *darsana*. Ma simply said: "That's why I have come in person to prove that things are not what they seem!" Immediately Lalita Sakhi was all smiles and then followed *kirtana* and *satsunga* which left a lasting impression on all present, including the officer-in-charge of the police station who happened to be in the crowd. Soon after, Ma was one day passing through the lanes of Navadwip, singing *kirtana* with her party when, to the surprise of all concerned, *kheyal* prompted her to suddenly enter the police station. Her unexpected advent embarrassed the police staff, busy with their tough routine work, none too consistent with *kirtana*. Ma smilingly glanced at the officer-in-charge and asked him: "Did I not steal your mind for a few minutes?" At last the mystery was explained by the officer-in-charge: "I found that Lalita Sakhi had mentally sought Ma's *darsana* and Ma came to his place without having been expressly asked to do so. Therefore I mused within myself: 'Could I not be similarly favoured with such grace?'"\*\* The Universal Mother can read into our minds. She fulfilled the secret desire of the police officer, sincerely cherished in his heart but never disclosed.

Here is an eye-witness account of an act of wonderful *lila* of the Universal Mother narrated by her biographer

\*Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī, by Gurupriya Debi, Vol. III, p. 711

\*\*Sri Sri Anandamayī Prasanga, by Amulya Kumar Datta Gupta, Vol. II, p. 90.

Gurupriya Debi. At Ambala there is a Leper Asylum the inmates of which were once treated to a feast on the occasion of Ma's *Jannotsava* (Birth Anniversary) in the presence of Ma, Didi and Krishnananda Avadhutji. Ma asked Didi to offer *pranama* (obeisance) and *arati* (waving of lights, incense etc. as is usually done before an idol or a saint) to the lepers and observed: "He is present in every individual, including a leper". Accordingly, Didi offered *pranama* and *arati* to the lepers and she did so from a safe distance. What followed surpassed the wildest amazement of all present—the gracious Mother touched two lepers. Avadhutji observed: "Would it have been possible for Ma to touch the lepers had it not been for her firm conviction that God is present in every individual?"\*

Until recently the very picture of radiant health, indomitable energy and graceful agility, Ma's body has of late been showing incipient signs of decay, decline and emaciation, crippling her movements.

In March 1982, I was fortunate enough to be with Ma at the Vrindavan Ashram on the occasion of *Bhagavata Saptaha* and *Dol* festival. Ma's body showed symptoms of some undiagnosed ailment which baffled her doctors, particularly because ailments were looked upon by Ma as 'guests' not to be forcibly driven away, nor would she take any medicine. It was painful for us to look at Ma during her sojourn at Vrindavan this time. Her weakened body and feeble voice, her stiff

\**Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī*, by Gurupriya Debi, Vol. X, p. 130.

joints and irregular respiration, together with many other symptoms which perplexed the doctors, combined to present a touching picture, alarming to us. But Ma maintained that she was all right as ever.

Notwithstanding her physical disabilities Ma spares herself no pains in maintaining her itinerary in the interest of her 'children'. Her overflowing motherly love prompts her to be easily available to earnest devotees, completely unmindful of her personal discomfort and inconvenience. Illustrations in point are her recent visit to Agartala (in the State of Tripura) and Calcutta.

Several years ago the ex-Maharaja of Tripura had expressed his earnest desire to instal some idol in the compound of his palace, and he also made liberal donation for building a temple. The people of Agartala were eagerly looking forward to Ma's visit to their place for the installation. For some unavoidable reason the much longed for ceremony could not be held during the last few decades. It is a mystery how the cherished desire of Ma's devotees of Agartala at long last awakened in Ma at Vrindavan a sudden urge for doing what had been left undone. She suddenly declared her decision to visit Agartala – and to travel by train all the way from Vrindavan. And she acted accordingly. The inevitable strain involved in the trip in her then state of health was a matter of no consequence to Ma. *Kheyal* brought her to Agartala on March 30, 1982. Ma carried with her a small marble statue of *Sarasvati* ( goddess of learning ) and one of a *Narmadesvara Siva-Linga*. On March 31, the consecration was performed in Ma's presence. Agartala was flooded with

a tide of *ānanda*. The gathering of visitors at Agartala was often unmanageable and the over-crowded programme from day to day was extremely strenuous. Notwithstanding her frail body and failing health Ma smilingly submitted to all this strain — Anandamayi as ever !

Next to Agartala in Tripura came the turn of Agarpara, off Calcutta, to witness Ma's gracious response to the call of her 'children'. The devotees of Calcutta, with Swami Swarupananda Maharaj at their head, had, for some years, been praying for Ma's visit to the Agarpara Ashram for the performance of the opening of a temple with Didima's statue installed inside it. Ma fulfilled their desire in April 1982 at tremendous inconvenience to herself. Though ailing for months and almost exhausted by the hectic programme at Agartala, Ma expressed no hesitation in acceding to the earnest request of the Calcutta devotees. The railway journey from Vrindavan to Agartala and thence to Calcutta was not only extremely strenuous but almost nerve-racking. Naturally, Ma's body was in sore need of peaceful rest and uninterrupted relaxation ; but this would not have been possible at the Agarpara Ashram. So, arrangement was made for her stay in a secluded garden-house at Bhasa on Diamond Harbour Road, about 20 miles away from the Ashram. Bhasa proved to be an ideal retreat for Ma, but she declined to avail herself of the opportunity for rest and comfort. She would visit Agarpara everyday for a few hours. A daily drive of twenty miles each way through the noisy, congested and overcrowded streets of Calcutta and its suburbs was indeed unendurably sickening. But Ma put up with all this physical

discomfort, verging on 'torture', out of consideration for the sentiment of her 'children' eagerly waiting for her *darsana* at Agarpara. Notwithstanding her physical disabilities and the inevitable fatigue to be undergone, Ma condescended to offer to thousands this opportunity for her *darsana* in public. But this was not the end of the matter ; she even granted private interviews to quite a few who happened to be sorely in need of her healing touch. During this short stay of four days in Calcutta on this occasion Ma had, literally speaking, hardly any breathing time ; yet she managed to afford time enough and to spare for providing comfort and solace to many a suffering soul and shedding her salutary light to inspire many a struggling spiritual aspirant. In the interest of her dear 'children' and for their uplifting benefit Ma completely ignored the sage counsel of her medical attendants.

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In the interest of her 'children', every human mother sacrifices her own interest and willingly undergoes endless suffering. What prompts her to do so is not any compulsion from outside but an impelling urge from within, which makes her task easy and pleasant and its performance automatic and indispensable. The selfless love of a mother for her own child rules out the possibility of a conflict between her interest and duty. The affection of a mother gifted with genuine motherliness does not remain confined to the children in the family and in the neighbourhood, it extends even beyond. The larger the sphere of her love, the stronger her claim to be a human representative of the Divine Mother.

Anandamayi Ma's grace is not confined to a particular

family or group. Her stretched out arms embrace all. She has made it perfectly clear that no particular abode can contain her. She once said : "I find one vast garden spread out all over the universe. All plants and animals, all human beings, all higher astral bodies are playing about in this garden in various ways, each having its uniqueness and beauty. Their presence and variety give me great delight. Everyone of you adds with his special feature to the glory of the garden. I move about from one place to another in the same garden."\*

Ma's universality is revealed in the following statements : "Whatever you see here", said Ma to Didi, "is just a sport, a play to this body. In fact, this body has not the least relation or tie with anybody whatsoever."† And Ma once told Didima : "Look, had there been the slightest bit of preferential treatment for you on the ground of our relationship, I would have long ago left all of you. This body has just the same consideration for those who are related to it as for those who are not. As I feel no difference, I live with all of you. Whom to forsake or whom to adopt? To me all are equal."‡

In a *satsanga* at Vindhyachal Ma one day incidentally uttered the following words which shed light on her universality :

"You all love this body so much that you often come to see me, unmindful of the long distance that many of you

\*Mother as revealed to me, by Bhajji, 6th ed., p. 97.

†Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi, by Gurupriya Debi, Vol. 2, p. 51.

‡Ananda Varra, XVIII/3/110, 112.

have to travel. Yet, it is true that this body has no relationship with any of you except the kinship of *Atma* which this body enjoys equally not only with each of you but even with all trees, creepers and the foliage around, as well as with rocks, mountains and everything else."

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The nature of the relation between this Universal Mother and her 'children' has been revealed in the following saying of Ma : "Just as a human body has different parts such as the head, the hands, thighs, feet, fingers and toes, I find all of you representing my various limbs. You all belong to one body, each one has to do work of equal importance."\*

Why is Ma accepted by different classes of people as the Universal Mother? The mystery was once explained by Ma in course of a conversation with a venerable old gentleman of Varanasi.

Questioner : How is it that so many people, old and young, are attracted to you?

Ma : This child is very small and does not belong to anyone in particular, so all come to her. It is also like this — one who owns nothing and claims none in this world as his own finds that all are his own.

Questioner : Now you say that you belong to nobody, whereas usually you call everybody your father and mother.

Ma : This is also true. All are my fathers and mothers and this is why they come to see their little daughter.

Questioner : That is what you say. But we cannot look upon you as our little child.

\*Mother as revealed to me, by Bhajji, 6th ed., p. 93.



Ma : Well, then you come because you are so merciful, so compassionate ; you just take pity on this little child.

Questioner : No, certainly not ; I am neither merciful nor compassionate. Under no circumstances shall I accept this kind of explanation.

The venerable old gentleman was desperate—he was determined to have a straightforward answer to his direct question.

Ma : All right ; look here, is it not natural to come to one's own Self? Does this require any reason or explanation?

The universal nature of Ma's Being has also been revealed in her dialogue with a lady as follows :

Questioner : People say you are the Mother. Where are your sons and daughters ?

Ma : Here ( pointing to her heart ).

Questioner : Where is your husband ?

Ma : Here ( with the same gesture ).

Questioner : Where are your parents ?

Ma : ( with a smile ) Here within the heart.

Questioner : Your home ?

Ma : ( with the same gesture ) Here.

The lady who was putting these questions failed to comprehend what Ma said and looked completely puzzled. Ma noticed it and in her usual soothing and convincing manner said : "Here in this body lie all things in the Universe — father, mother, son and daughter — all created beings. From this One all have come into being. In the One all exist, all persist and finally merge.\*

\**Ananda Varta*, XVIII/1/28.

If Ma can indiscriminately love all, it is because she can see the Self in everyone. In fact, she has repeatedly confirmed in her broken English in a sweet manner, native to her, "All One, All One". Ma once said : "Is there any essential difference between yourself and myself? Only because He is, there are also you and I."\* This is how we are seen by Ma. But how do we see Ma? As already stated, Ma has answered this question : "This body is like a musical instrument ; what you hear depends on how you play." It is by no means easy to explain the meaning of this oft-quoted saying of Ma. It can be illustrated from the experience of her devotees. Thus some have seen in Ma their own *guru* and some their *Ishta* ( beloved deity ). In 1959, Jainath Kaul had the good fortune of having seen his own mother ( who had passed away in 1927 ) "in flesh and blood in the person of Sri Ma in broad daylight, right in front of me some five or six yards away."† Again, Ma has appeared to many as the embodiment of Love and *Ananda* and in various other forms. The common factor underlying all these types of experience of visions is the awakening of a divine flame within a devotee. That flame sheds light which enables a devotee to see an image corresponding to his own degree of attainment. The message underlying the metaphor comparing Ma to a musical instrument seems to be this : As we beat the instrument, it will produce a corresponding sound and, secondly, Ma is a perfect musical instrument from

\**Mother as revealed to me*, by Bhajji, 6th ed., p. 148.

†Souvenir published on the occasion of Ma's eightieth Birthday in 1975. pp. 117-118.

which emanate all kinds of sound and the soundless terminal of *Aum*. A spiritually advanced aspirant meditating on Ma's unfathomable 'inner being' may be lost in himself and may feel like repeating what Edwin Arnold said in a different context :

".....Measure not with words  
Th' Immeasurable ; nor sink the strings of thought  
Into the fathomless. Who asks doth err,  
Who answers, errs. Say naught."

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Nothing is farther from my mind than any attempt to 'measure' Ma. Such an attempt would be futile and presumptuous. However, it is possible for everyone basking in the sunshine of Ma's grace to see Ma from the level of his own I-ness. Let me, therefore, crave my readers' indulgence for expressing my personal experience. Whatever Ma may be objectively, to me she is my *ma*, loving me to perfection.

"If I were hanged on the highest hill,  
Mother O' mine, O mother O' mine ;  
I know whose love would follow me still  
Mother O' mine, O mother O' mine."

Ma was the *ma* of my parents, since deceased. She has been my *ma* since my first *darsana* in 1947. She is also the *ma* of my children and grandchildren. Such anomalous experience has been shared by numerous families in India and other countries.

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Individually, every 'child' is blessed with filial piety inspired by Ma in her *ma*-aspect. Her Universal-Mother

-aspect has been repeatedly indicated in her own sayings the gist of some of which has been already given. Ma has also said : "I have no need of doing or saying anything ; there never was any need, neither is there now nor will there ever be in future. What you found manifested in me in the past, what you see now and what will be observed in the future is only for the good of you all. If you think that there is something peculiarly my own, I must tell you that the whole world is my own."\* Again, Ma once observed : "From your worldly standpoint this body belongs to East Bengal and is Brahmin by caste ; but if you think apart from these artificial distinctions, you will understand that this body is a member of one human family."† Ma has explained the nature of her relation with her 'children' in words as follows :

"I know it for certain that I have only one Father, embracing the whole of humanity. You all come to me as I accept everybody as my father and you too love this body like your daughter."‡ On another occasion Ma told Bhaiji : "Why don't you take it that this body is the material embodiment of all your aspirations and ideas : you all have wanted it and you have it now. So, play with this doll for some time."§

It appears from Ma's sayings that the Universal Mother has come to this world in response to the universal call of the human spirit. She soars in the higher regions of spiritual life

\* *Mother as revealed to me*, by Bhaiji, 6th ed., p. 147.

† *Mother as revealed to me*, by Bhaiji, 6th ed., p. 148.

‡ *Sri Sri Ma Anandamayee*, by Gurupriya Debi, Vol. 4, p. 231.

§ *Mother as revealed to me*, by Bhaiji, 6th ed., p. 6.

and is ever in communion with the Supreme. Yet she is not indifferent to this world. Thus, she has not chosen the way of the recluse steeped in *samādhi* (trance) in the seclusion of the Himalayas ; on the contrary, she lives in the society of men and is intensely human in all her ways. No human mother has such selfless and pure compassion, such charitableness and goodwill to all. Did not Ma once say as follows : "Your sorrow, your pain, your agony is indeed my sorrow ? This body understands everything. You may want to leave this body. But this body won't leave you for a single day — it does not and never will leave you. One who has once been attracted to this body, even though he may make thousand attempts, will not be able to efface or blot out the memory of this body. It will remain and persist in his memory for all time."\*

Those who are afraid of God, afraid of religion and afraid of life, need not be afraid of Ma. Among such pitiable persons many have found in Ma something which stills and clarifies their mind. Ma's very presence, her impeccable simplicity and genuine humility have given them the novel experience of being at peace with themselves, at least for the time being. They have been awe-struck by Ma's pervasive joy, fundamentally so different from the pleasure of life which had allured them and eventually afflicted them with pain. Ma starts with a shower of joy. She also generates God-awareness and promises every seeker achievement of his birth-right — realization of the Self.

\**Ananda Varta*, XIV/1/1-2.

In her *ma*-aspect Anandamayi Ma seems to share our joys and sorrows. In the 'phenomenon' that is Anandamayi Ma, there is nothing but *Ananda*, suffering and misery being non-existent except as gentle ripples on the vast ocean of transcendental bliss and harmony. In terrifying lightning and thunder, in devastating storm and earthquake, Ma only beholds the benign hand of the Great Architect of the destinies of mankind in whose scheme of creation there is only *Ananda* and nothing but *Ananda*. All creatures want *ananda*, but they look for it in wrong places — worldly possessions and sense-objects. Worldly things have the seeds of pain and sorrow arising out of *rāga* (attachment) or *dvesha* (aversion) in relation to something or somebody in particular. This is our bondage. We limit our interest to particular objects and persons. Thus, we prefer this or that and become attached thereto, and we dislike this or that and become averse to the same. The root of all this is our ego. The Universal Mother, as already stated, has no ego. For her eternal *Ananda*, Anandamayi Ma is not at the mercy of any external object nor any particular individual. This *Ananda* is not pleasure as distinguished from pain. It is Bliss which is above both, untainted by either. "Beautitude", says Ma, "is the only Reality ; all else is mirage." And Ma is the embodiment of Beautitude.\*

\*Vide Epilogue.

## EPILOGUE

### HAS MA REALLY LEFT US ?

"... .. the pure spirit shall flow,  
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,  
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow  
Through time and change, unquenchable the same."

—*Shelley*

"Ma has just left us for good" — this stunning news, received in the early hours of the morning of August 28, 1982, gave me a rude shock and I almost lost my bearing. But did not Ma once observe : "There is only one *Atma*, you are that *Atma*, I am that *Atma*, everyone is that *Atma*. So, whatever you may be, I am also with you !" Again, it was in the perspective of Ma's universal existence in the totality of space that Ma once said : "I have no space even to turn aside !" Indeed, Ma has always been and still is, all-pervasive and omnipresent. But this Vedantic conception is too subtle for ordinary mortals to realize — it hardly offers us any consolation.

We cannot help feeling the pang of separation from the Universal Mother, revealed to us as our beloved *ma*. The entity referred to by her as 'this body' was to us the object of our deepest adoration, the one living source of inspiration and an unfailing guide in our voyage across the storm-tossed sea of life. It is shuddering to think that we have lost for

ever any further opportunity for Ma's *darsana* and that there is no chance of repetition of Ma's *lila* on this earth — her sweet words and soothing glance; her soft touch and soul-stirring gestures, her pleasantries that filled our hearts with a thrill of delight and her so-called indisposition that from time to time upset us.

It was only the other day that I had the privilege of offering the typescript of my book to Ma who touched it with a genial smile. I have for ever been deprived of the chance of presenting at Ma's feet a copy of the printed book which has come out too late on account of my lapses. In the typescript consecrated by Ma's touch, present tense was used in appropriate and relevant places of my narration. Even in the changed circumstances any alteration was considered unnecessary. Ma is above the concept of past, present and future. She still lives in the eternal present. True, *matrī-darsana* is no more possible except in the Vedantic sense. But Ma's photographs are still there. Let us meditate on these in the light of Ma's saying as follows :

"People meditate in front of a picture. But what is a mere picture? Just paper! Yet if faith is maintained in meditation, the Lord Himself appears in that picture."<sup>\*</sup>

Perhaps the drama of Ma's *lila* was completed so far as this world was concerned. She had scattered broadcast seeds of spirituality all over our land and these will germinate in the fullness of time. If we have any 'filial piety', it would now be our sacred duty to nurse these with tearful prayers into healthy saplings finally to grow into out-spreading trees

<sup>\*</sup>Vide Chapter 12.

to offer shade and shelter to all mankind. Therein lies also solace for our sorrowful hearts. Let us not weep for her, shed no idle tears and waste no time in disconsolate grief. Mother is still with us. If she was always with us in life, she is more so after her Great Departure from the world of manifestation when this thin barrier has been removed. Let our attention be now focused on searching for Ma within ourselves. Is it not incumbent on us to carry on with greater enthusiasm and faithfully to perform the duty assigned by her to each one of us? Let us fully realize the truth that her watchful eyes are still fixed on us — and let us not be caught betraying her trust.

During her life on earth two world wars wrought great devastation and ushered in a pestering period of moral degeneration on such a wide scale as to make it an age of absolute darkness. Groping in that blinding darkness, bewildered mankind desperately cried for Light and Life. Hence the advent of the Universal Mother as Anandamayī Ma. She responded with overflowing love and held aloft the golden taper burning and revealing the road to Love, Joy and Peace. The light she kindled still shines like a star and can never be extinguished. Did not Ma herself declare at Vrindavan only the other day that it was possible still, in this age, to listen to Lord Krishna's flute and see the shepherd boys — lucky companions of His childhood — leading their herd homeward at dusty dusk? It requires, of course, seeing eyes and listening ears!

Once Indian civilization reached the very culmination of glory, and the nation eagerly shared with sister nations

what she had achieved in the realm of the highest knowledge and the acme of spiritual illumination. That was, of course, in the hoary past. Then followed a long period of great upheavals which passed over this ancient country and threatened almost wholly to destroy that glorious civilization. India became a benighted land. But all was not lost. Most fortunately and surprisingly this nation did not lose its soul. This was nothing short of a miracle. How was this possible and who wrought such a miracle? It was the long line of saints and sages, prophets and prophetlike wise seers through whom the Divine Will worked all through the ages and continued infusing new life and light into the heart of the decaying nation. Anandamayi Ma was one of those who kept the dying lamp of divine light still burning into the encircling gloom cast by unrighteousness abounding in the world. True to the tradition descending from the Vedic age, never did she arrogate to herself the position of the founder of a new creed or cult, far less a new religion. Prompted by inscrutable *kheyal*, she preached the common fatherhood of God, the universal brotherhood of man and the unity of all religions.

— JAI MA —

## Appendix 'A'

### LIGHT ON SATSANGA ( RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION )\*

'*Sat*' as an adjective, and as in the conjoined word *satsanga*, means 'good'. '*Sanga*' denotes 'fellowship' or 'association'. In ordinary parlance, *satsanga* signifies 'being in good or holy company'. Ma has said that *satsanga* is an association which prepares one for realization of the '*sat*' where '*sat*', as a noun, means the 'One Being', the Being which ever remains the same everywhere in all circumstances. Ma also says : "*Satsanga* means keeping company with the Lord who is Truth itself."

*Satsanga* in the applied sense of religious congregation is an essential and integral part of life in Sri Sri Anandamayi Ashram. Regularly observed everyday at stated hours, it comprises an elaborate programme of *kirtana*, recitation of select portions from the sacred books ( such as the *Upanishad*, the *Gita* and the *Chandi* and educative talks by erudite scholars on religious and spiritual subjects.

Such *satsanga* gives guidance for spiritual pursuits and Self-realization. Spirit covers man's whole existence. His home, his office, the place where he carries on business or

\*Based on my informal reply to the questions of some Western devotees of Ma on *satsanga* in general, with special reference to certain topics that were being discussed in the *satsanga* in the Anandamayi Ashram at Kankhal in May 1978.

profession can at best be the 'workshop' for a man's mind, not the home for his Spirit. The home — rather the temple — where man's Spirit is installed, is his heart. Now, what is that Spirit? Certainly not a man's body bearing a specific name and identified with reference to his parents, age, occupation, residence etc. His Spirit is no other than a spark of *Sat*, the One Supreme Spirit — the Ultimate Truth — called by various names such as *Brahman*, *Isvara* etc.

*Brahman* cannot be defined by words — it is infinite. It has no beginning, no end, no change, no form. *Brahman* cannot be perceived by the senses; even the mind cannot comprehend it. *Brahman* has no past, no future, no dimensions. These conceptions are all in the context of time and space. *Brahman* is beyond both. Again, It is static as well as dynamic, yet above both. Though unseen and impersonal, *Brahman* is all-pervasive. Its presence is thus announced: "It is *Brahman* that is below and is above, that is to the west and to the east, that is to the south and to the north. *Brahman*, indeed, is this whole universe".<sup>1</sup> And, "All this is based upon Spirit; Spirit is the foundation of the Universe, Spirit is *Brahman*."<sup>2</sup>

Strictly speaking, it is not possible to describe *Brahman*. The *Upanishad* has adopted a technique of negative description. Thus, *Brahman* is *neti neti* (not this, not this); and *Brahman* is "without a body, without muscles, without sinews, without scar, untouched by evil"<sup>3</sup> and again It is

"without either shadow or darkness, without a within or a without."<sup>4</sup>

*Brahman* is only one — the ONE. The wise seer of the *Vrhadaranyaka Upanishad* announced: "Where everything indeed has become the Self itself, whom and by what one should think of? By what can we know the Universal Knower?"<sup>5</sup>

Absolute *Brahman* is too deep, too subtle and too abstruse for the common man. To the seers of ancient India, *Brahman* was also revealed as Qualified or Conditioned *Brahman*, known as *Isa* or *Isvara* who is the personified form of the Absolute *Brahman*. "By *Isa* is enveloped everything that exists in this world constantly in motion."<sup>6</sup> In the *Gita* Lord Krishna told Arjuna: "*Isvara* abides in the hearts of all beings."<sup>7</sup> The pronoun for *Brahman* is 'It', that for *Isvara* is 'He'. *Isvara* is manifested in different forms, such as *Brahman*<sup>8</sup> the God of Creation, *Vishnu* the God of Preservation and *Siva*, the God of Destruction.

*Isvara* is also manifested as *Sakti*, the Divine Mother, the Primordial Energy, worshipped as revealed in the forms of *Kali*, *Durga*, *Sarasvati*, *Lakshmi* etc. The expression 'God the Mother' possibly requires an elaboration, if not explanation. The Western, or rather the Christian, world accepts for adoration and worship only God the Father, and God the Son

1. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, VII/25/2; *Mandukya Upanishad*, II/11/11.

2. *Aitareya Upanishad*, III/3.

3. *Isopanishad*, 1.

4. *Gita*, XV/II/61.

5. *Brahma* is to be distinguished from *Brahman*.

as His only prophet or messenger. The idea of God the Mother is also perfectly relevant and logical. It is not possible to meditate on the Creator and Preserver of this Universe as *Brahman* — the Infinite Formless, Nameless, Sexless — the Ultimate Truth or Reality. Therefore, man has naturally humanised, if not anthropomorphised, God and has given Him a form and name (and sex). The form that has often appealed to certain Indian saints and prophets (we believe in more than one prophet) is that of the Mother. Of them Ramakrishna Paramahamsadeva was one. In Indian religious scriptures — even as far back as the time of the *Rig Veda* — the Supreme Being is invoked as the Mother.

The translation of a saying of Ma about our relation with the Divine Mother is given below :

"While the child is in its mother's womb, its inner power is united with that of its mother. .... The spiritual aspirant must become the child-yogi in the womb of the Divine Mother. Then the breath will not be broken up. While in its mother's womb, the individual has no connection with the outer world. There is thus no impediment and the blood circulation is not conditioned by the functioning of the breath but evenly flows straight in and out of the mother's blood stream. By the sight of outer things and by breathing the outer air, man's concentration is destroyed and the remembrance of his true nature vanishes. It is necessary for the aspirant to hide himself from the obstacles of the outer world by entering the Divine Mother's womb in the core of his own heart. Thereby lost remembrance will be restored. Then the Mother will take on Herself all his burdens."

As Absolute *Brahman* (also called *Paramatma*), the Supreme is the transcendental Reality which transcends all limitations and is beyond human knowledge. As Conditioned *Brahman*, the Supreme is the cosmic reality which supports and governs the whole universe. The Supreme has a third aspect — individual Reality, the essence of man, known as *atman* or *jeevatma*. "The Supreme", sums up Radhakrishnan, "is at once the transcendental, the cosmic and the individual Reality. In its transcendental aspect, it is the pure Self, unaffected by any action or experience, detached, unconcerned. In its dynamic, cosmic aspect, It not only supports but governs the whole cosmic action and this very Self which is one in all, and above all, is present in the individual."\*

In the *satsanga* in Anandamayī Ashram it is often taken for granted that the audience has the requisite background. So, newcomers sometimes find it difficult to follow the discourses. The following notes of an elementary nature are expected to be helpful to beginners.

*Anandam* — *Anandam* is variously translated into English as 'joy', 'bliss', 'delight', 'felicity', 'happiness' and 'beautitude'. But *Anandam*, as revealed to the ancient seers, has a meaning deeper than what is conveyed by any of these English equivalents. *Anandam* is the Bliss of the Supreme Self. "*Anandam*", observes Radhakrishnan, "is the highest fruition where the knower, the known and the knowledge become one. Here the philosophical quest terminates, the suggestion being that there is nothing higher than *Ananda*."

\**Bhagavad Gita*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan, p. 24.



*Aum* — The sacred AUM, otherwise known as *Pranava*, is the common sound symbol for the Supreme Truth in its three phases mentioned above — Absolute *Brahman*, Conditioned *Brahman* and *Atman* or *Jeevatma*. AUM, consisting of three sounds — 'A', 'U', 'M' — rolled into one, is the primordial sound. Indeed, sound itself is fundamentally *Pranava*. Meditation of the syllable *Aum* is extolled in the *Upanishads*. It is regarded as the best means of attaining *Brahman*. By repeated practice of *Aum* one rises from the sound to the soundless *Brahman*. *Aum* is stated to be the means and the end of knowledge. According to Professor Ranade, *Aum* occupies the same position as the 'Logos' occupies in Christology. *Aum* means 'Yes'. According to the ancient seers of India everyone is justified in saying: "Yes, I am *Brahman*". But the common man is not aware of this eternal Truth. He overlooks that Universal Spirit by which he is living, acting and thinking, the Spirit which makes him the same as each one of us. This state of consciousness inevitably misleads the common man to all selfish desires and passions, egotism and vanity, competitions and hostility. He shrinks from saying: "I am *Brahman*". On the contrary, he maintains: "No, I am not *Brahman*". Why? Because he identifies himself with his body bearing a particular name, as distinguished from others.

*Avatara* — '*Avatara*' literally means 'descending', also 'one who has descended'. In *satsanga* the word *Avatara* is used in the sense of 'Descent of God in man', also an 'Incarnation of God'. Whenever there is decline of *dharma* (righteousness) and uprising of *adharma* (unrighteousness), the

Supreme reveals Itself as an *Avatara*.<sup>\*</sup> Why does an *Avatara* come? For the protection of the good and destruction of the evil-doer and for the establishment of *dharma* (righteousness). The *Avatara* is both God and a man — a God-man. He appears to live, move and have his being like an ordinary mortal. Such a God-man is different from a godly man. The former descends as a manifestation of *lila* (divine sport) from the Divine to the human plane; the latter ascends, by his personal efforts, from the human to the superhuman level.

*Chaitanya* is pure consciousness, which is the essence of *Atman* or *Brahman*.

*Dharma* — The word *dharma* has been translated into English variously as law, duty, religion, righteousness and morality. Each of these renderings expresses some aspect or other of the Sanskrit word which has a profound and comprehensive significance not captured by any of these English expressions. *Dharma* is derived from the root '*dhri*' meaning 'to sustain', 'to support'. *Dharma* is something which holds together the different aspects or qualities of an object as a whole. It signifies the sum-total of the essential characteristics of any thing or being which make it what it is. Thus, heat and light constitute the sun's *dharma*; a cold and dark sun is unthinkable.

*Granthi* means knot. In the context of *satsanga*, *granthi* means the bond or fetter that ties down the *Atma* and makes it feel bound. Basically, it is identical with the ego. It has various ramifications and appears in different forms.

<sup>\*</sup>Gita, IV/7-8.

*Jnana* is literally knowledge. True knowledge is immediate and represents the unity of Reality. Every other knowledge, be it through the medium of the senses or the mind, belongs to the category of *ajnana*, also called *avidya*.

*Karma and the Law of Karma*—The word *karma* is derived from the root *kri* (to do, to act). Any action is *karma*, provided the doer has the intention to act. A writer writes with the intention of writing and so it is his *karma*. But a flag waving in the breeze is not doing any *karma*—it is only moving without its choosing to do so.

The word *karma* is also used in the sense of the law of *karma*, implying that what we receive is the result of our *karma* (actions). Every action of a man produces some effect—"Good deeds lead to good, and evil deeds to evil."\* In the well-known English proverb "As you sow, so you reap", the word 'sow' is a symbol for acts done during the span of one's life. The doctrine of *karma* goes further—it is not confined to the present life but also attracts acts done in one's previous births. That is to say, *karma* in any one of our successive lives must carry consequences—good or bad—which have to be enjoyed or suffered as the case may be. So long as a man's self does not become merged and identified with the Supreme Self, his *Jeevatma* is destined to be born again and again and its condition in a particular life is determined by the nature of his deeds in his previous lives. Thus, *janmantara* (transmigration of the soul) is a necessary corollary to the law of *karma*. All human beings—even godly men—are bound by the relentless and inexorable law of *karma*.

\*Gita, III/22, 23.

*Kumari* means the eternal immaculate virgin, divine in nature, the form assumed by the Divine Power before the creation of the world, the Mother of the entire creation. Little girls, treated as symbols of *kumari* (and called *kumaris*) are sometimes worshipped with offerings and *pranama* on ceremonial occasions in the Anandamayi Ashram.

*Maya*—This word has been translated into English as illusion. It is the power or principle that conceals from us the true character of Reality. Thus, it is *maya* that makes us see many, although in fact there is only ONE. In the *Gita*, *maya* has a special sense when used with reference to Lord Krishna. Thus, His *maya* is His free will. He is not subject to *maya* but above it. "This Divine *maya* of mine," said the Lord, "is difficult to cross over; those who take refuge in me, cross over the illusion."\*

*Prasada*—Food offered to a deity or saint becomes *prasada* (sacramental food) when it has been accepted and thereby blessed. It is then partaken of by the devotees.

*Rasa-lila*—Essentially connected with the life of Sri Krishna—His love play with Radha and the *Gopis* (cowherd maids) of Vrindavan. It has nothing whatever to do with human love, but is essentially a symbolic representation of the union with the Supreme, of the human soul that has attained to the highest stage of self-dedication.

*Samsara*—Cycle of life in the world through a continued series of births and deaths. It is consequent on ignorance of the true nature of the Self. *Samsara* stops when *mukti* is attained.

\*Gita, VII/14.

*Svayamprakasa* — Self-luminous. It is an essential attribute of the Supreme Consciousness, which does not require the aid of a mental or intellectual organ for its revelation.

*Vairagya* — Detachment from the world and its cause. Complete *vairagya* is conceived of as a fire, since in that state a 'burning' agony is felt at the least contact with worldly things or sense objects. When every single object of the world kindles, as it were, the fire of renunciation, so as to make one recoil as from a shock, then there is inward and outward awakening. This, however, does not mean that *vairagya* implies aversion to, or contempt for, anything of the world. In *vairagya* there is no place either for liking or for disliking.

*Veda* — The most ancient sacred scriptures of the Hindus. According to a strict orthodox faith, the *Vedas* are not human compositions, but are supposed to have been directly revealed by the *Brahman* and are called *Śruti* (what is heard or revealed), as distinguished from *Smṛiti* (what is remembered or the work of human origin). The origin of the hymns of the *Vedas* is ascribed to several *Rishis* who were seers, not composers.

*Vedānta* — Literally, the concluding portion of the *Vedas*, namely the *Upanishads*, which represent the philosophical section of *Vedic* literature. The subject-matter of *Vedānta* is the knowledge of the Supreme.

*Viṣvanātha* — The Lord of the Universe who is One with the Supreme. It is an epithet of Siva. *Viṣvanātha* is the name of the presiding deity of Varanasi.

## Appendix 'B'

### MA ON THE SUPREME TRUTH

What is the Supreme Truth? Ma's short answer is: *Ja ta* — verily an enigmatic aphorism. Over the decades I have been trying to understand the hidden meaning of this *Mātrivani*. To start with, I made a collection of Ma's sayings shedding light on *Ja ta*. My search for the Self — admittedly amateurish — has been through meditation on Ma's words. Now that I am nearing my journey's end, I feel prompted to present to my readers glimpses caught by me whatever their worth.

On the face of it, *Ja ta* baffles a spiritual aspirant. Contrary to the rules of grammar applicable to a regular sentence, this aphorism has no noun nor any verb but only two pronouns and these are without a noun preceding. The juxtaposition of two pronouns in this manner may not convey any sense and may simply create confusion. *Ja ta* has been translated as 'That's that' or 'That is what it is'. Such a tautological and apparent gibberish is of little assistance to a spiritual aspirant. *Ja* means 'that', 'which', 'what'. *Ta* means 'that', 'it'. *Ja ta* seeks to explain one unknown entity, namely *ta*, by equating it with an entity, equally unknown — namely *ja*. One who is ignorant of *ja* is left completely in the dark as to the meaning of *ta*. In colloquial parlance, *ja ta* means 'worthless', 'good-for-nothing'. Of course, such a meaning can, in the present context, be 19-

jected outright. It is, however, pronounced in a different and slighting tone.

But Ma has repeatedly said that the Supreme Truth is *Ja ta*. In what sense? Let us meditate on the following aphorism of Ma which may serve as a commentary on *Ja ta*.

“*Āchche, Nai, Āchchso nā, Nai o nā, Tār'o āge, Jā bala iāi* (literally meaning: Is, Is not, Nor is, Nor is not, Even beyond that, Whatever you say, So is). ”

Like *Ja ta*, this aphorism has no noun. Unlike *Ja ta*, however, it has a number of verbs, but these are simply bewildering. Let us assume that the noun to be understood in appropriate places is ‘the Supreme Truth’ or ‘God’. This aphorism may be considered in three parts, each divided into two sections as follows :

Part I — Section (1) — God is.

Section (2) — God is not.

Part II — Section (1) — Neither God is

Section (2) — Nor God is not

Part III — Section (1) — God is even beyond that

Section (2) — Whatever you say, so is God.

The four propositions occurring in Parts I and II mentioned above (namely, God is, God is not, Neither God is, Nor God is not) comprise irreconcilable contradictions. Thus, the two propositions in Part I seem to be directly contradictory to each other; so also these in Part II. And each of the propositions in Part I is either confirmed or contradicted by one or the other proposition in Part II. In this way, Ma simultaneously affirms and negates both theism (belief in the existence of God) and atheism (disbelief in the

existence of God). Her explanation for this seeming inconsistency is this: ‘exists’ and ‘does not exist’ are simultaneously possible only in Its (*Brahman's*) case. The *Gita* also declares “The Supreme Truth is neither existent nor non-existent” (*Gita*, XII/13). The mystery deepens.

The proposition ‘God is’ is unacceptable to the scientist as it cannot be proved by any scientific method. The atheist not only rejects the proposition ‘God exists’ but goes further — he dogmatically asserts that God does not exist. Is science justified in rejecting anything not capable of being examined? Can God be examined by any scientific method? The answer to each of these questions, is obviously in the negative. So, no scientist, unless he is a fanatic, can reject the proposition ‘God is’. The *Sankhya* School of Philosophy has a scientific approach — it does not go so far as to deny the existence of God but only maintains that it remains unsubstantiated in the absence of proof. An agnostic is one who holds that we know nothing of things beyond material phenomena — that a First Cause and an unseen world are things unknown and apparently unknowable. In this age of science, agnosticism seems to attract more votaries than atheism does.

In Ma's synthesis, nothing deserves to be rejected, in fact, everything is accepted and appreciated. The Supreme Truth (God, *Brahman*, *Ātman*), as seen by Ma, is, in reality, comprehensive enough to include everything — theism, atheism and agnosticism — in fact, all possible ‘isms’. Ma says: “The belief that God does not exist is the chain by which man is bound — the smoke-screen called *māyā*. *Maya* covers your real Self. Remove it and God will stand revealed in all His glory.”

Does *Atman* exist or does it not? On this question, Gaudapada says in his *Kārikā* on the *Mandukya Upanishad* :

"Childish persons verily cover It (fail to know It) by predicating of It such attributes as existence, non-existence, and absolute non-existence derived respectively from their notion of change, immovability, combination of both and absolute negation."\* Sankaracharya has discussed, in his commentary on the *Kārikā*, the 'assertions' of various 'disputants' regarding the existence and non-existence of *Atman* — *Vaiseshika*, *Kshanika Vijnanavadi*, Jain, Nihilistic Buddhist. He has come to the conclusion that those predicates of *Atman* are due to *kalpanā* (illusory ideas or imagination) and that "attachment of the learned to such predicates as existence, non-existence etc. serves verily as a veil between them and the Supreme Reality." He maintains that the real nature of *Atman* is that It is free from all ideas or *kalpana*, and that 'vain talkers', clinging to their pet theories, on account of their false attachment cannot know the real nature of *Atman*.

Learned dissertation is not usually in Ma's line. She does not, as a rule, characterise any 'ism' as 'childish' or its proponent as a 'vain talker': nor is she concerned with the question as to whether or not any view is based on 'false attachment to a pet theory'. On the contrary, Ma maintains that every 'ism' has its own value and a special mission and is entitled not only to tolerance but also to reverence. Ma's philosophy has come 'not to destroy but to fulfil'. This will appear from Part III of Ma's aphorism beginning with 'even

beyond that' and ending in 'whatever you may say so is God'. A question arises at the outset: Beyond what? The context seems to suggest the answer: God is beyond each of the alternatives offered by the four propositions already discussed — Is, Is not, Nor is, Nor is not. In fact, even these have to be transcended; otherwise the traveller may find himself stranded on the way before reaching the goal. The way — whatever it may be — has its limitations compared to the goal. 'Even beyond that' has the ring of the *Upanishadic* formula: "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached."

Ma's '*tār'o āge*' (even beyond that) seems to be an echo of the *Rig Vedic* aphorism *Charaiveti Charaiveti* (Do thou move on, do thou move on). Rohita wandered in the wild for one year when Indra repeated the same aphorism '*Charaiveti, Charaiveti*'. Rohita acted accordingly for another year at the end of which he was again told: '*Charaiveti, Charaiveti*'. And the same advice of Indra, implemented by similar action on the part of Rohita, continued from year to year. Indra concluded: "The fortune of him who sitteth also sitteth, that of him who reclineth lieth down. The fortune of one who moveth shall move indeed. Wandering one findeth honey. Consider the pre-eminence of the Sun who wearieth never of wandering."

Presumably on the same principle, Ma's '*tār'o āge*' encourages a vigorous march onwards until the goal is reached. But what is the goal? Has Ma given any answer? Let us see. It has already been noted that the *Upanishads* declare that the Supreme Truth cannot be expressed in words:

\**Mandukya Kārikā* — Quenching of fire brand: Sloka 83.

"Speech, senses and the mind come back without attaining it." Again, there is nothing to show that Lord Buddha made any attempt to define the Supreme Truth. He seems to have preferred to leave the inexpressible unexpressed. So has Ma through her almost unintelligible aphorism *Ja ta*. Let us try to understand, if possible, the message of *Ja ta* in the light of certain other sayings of Ma. To start with, the gist of what welled up from her mouth at Deoghar in 1938 in reply to questions asked by two highly venerable spiritual personalities — Pran Gopal Mukherjee and Mohanananda Brahmachariji Maharaj :

"Everyone is a wayfarer on the path of Knowledge of Self. The Self is One. It is an inadequacy to describe it thus, however, because to say that all is One is still not to state the One. Moreover, one may ask : 'If the Self is One, how is it that the death of Ram does not bring about the death of Shyam ?' The answer is : births and deaths are to the Self what a rising and falling of a breeze is to the air. We only feel the air when there is movement in it. We are not aware of it when it does not manifest itself as currents of air. Births and deaths, manifestation and non-manifestation, indicate the presence of the One unchanging *Chaitanya* ( Consciousness ). The crux of the matter is, to know the One Self. Actually, the enquiry into Self-knowledge comes naturally to every person — he loves himself more dearly than any other object of love. Not only that — we constantly participate in the play of the One and Infinite. This simple tree here is part of a series extending infinitely both before and after. Our bodies have a beginning, middle and end ; yet from within this finite-

ness we get glimpses of infinity. How ? Because, if I touch your hand, you will say : 'It is I'. If I touch your foot or head, you will still say : 'It is I'. The 'I' would fain not identify itself with any part of the body. The mind is yet more interesting. You cannot give a full account of your mental activity even of the last five minutes, let alone of months and years. This mind which is defeated by five minutes, yet dares to understand the Infinite. So you see, an awareness of our own desire to know more is all that is required to begin with. It is like cutting one's way out of the forest. The bewilderment of being lost in a multitude of ways and means is the natural state of the human being in the world. A sustained, uni-directional effort is required to work one's way out to a clearing to gain an unclouded vision. In other words, to attain to the stillness of perfect tranquillity, one must begin by focusing on the constantly wavering ebb and flow of one's own life-breath.

The *sādhaka* knows that his aim is to know himself. He proceeds to harness the powerful force of the mind to a one-pointed attention towards this goal. The questions of Infinity, Oneness etc. must remain unanswered till the goal is reached. It is right that this should be so, because, unless one experiences a state of burning insufficiency one cannot go beyond, to the region of certitude, which transcends speech as well as silence."\*

Let me cite another saying of Ma which seems to elucidate the enigmatic aphorism *Ja ta* :

\**Sri Sri Ma Anandamayī*, by Gurupriya Debi, Vol. III, pp. 18-20.

"A state of being exists where it is immaterial whether He assumes a form or not — what is, is THAT. In this case, what is there to express in words? Furthermore, at a certain level, the Self may reveal itself to Itself. At the same time He does not reveal Himself at all. To whom is He to reveal Himself? Where there is neither form nor attribute, what is to be put into language? Where nothing is excluded, how can Oneness be obstructed? In this state of complete poise, nothing at all is any longer apart from Him. What is IS. So, what can be said or left unsaid, since It is entirely beyond words? Obviously each one speaks from the level at which he finds himself. Yet whatever may be uttered are His words, His song addressed to Him."<sup>\*</sup>

One question inevitably arises: What is the meaning and scope of Ma's aphorism, "Whatever you say, so is God?" Is this meant to be Ma's answer to the question, "What is the Supreme Truth?" In this context, the following saying of Ma may shed some light: "At every instant you are changing. As you go on being transformed more and more, you will reach a state where there are no more questions, no more change, only Grace." Can this 'state', indicated by Ma in dubious language, be described otherwise than by an enigmatic expression such as *Ja ta*? While meditating on *Ja ta*, one is reminded of the Sanskrit aphorism *Tat Sat* described by Lord Krishna (*Gita*, Chapter 17) as denoting the *Brahman*. Like Ma's *Ja ta*, this cryptic expression also does not define *Tat* which is the Sanskrit equivalent of Ma's *Ta*. The general

<sup>\*</sup>Ananda Varta, XIV/3/112.

tenor of Ma's saying seems to me to justify the following conclusion. Although the Supreme Truth cannot be objectively defined, there is nothing to prevent any individual from forming some idea about It in his own way. Whatever experience an individual gains about the Supreme Truth comprises the qualified truth so far as he is concerned, at a particular time and at a particular stage. Such experience may be imperfect and tentative. But that does not matter. If he steadfastly follows the dictum '*Charaiveti Charaiveti*', he will climb higher and higher up, and, in this process the horizon will expand for him and new avenues of comprehension will be opened in a new light. Thus, ever-renewed types of experience will lead him to the final realization which cannot be expressed in words.

Like the limitless sky which cannot be equated with anything else, the Supreme Truth is what It is — nothing more, nothing less — nothing else. Thus, *Ja ta* confirms that it is not possible to categorize the Supreme Truth, nor to give an objective definition of the Supreme Truth as it is. Judged from this point of view, *Ja ta* is not really so fantastic as it appears to be on the surface.

Unexcelled in catholicity, these two aphorisms of Ma offer every *sadhaka* unlimited scope for the choice of his God, whatever may be his spiritual attainment, intellectual equipment or emotional preference. These do not impose any God on the seeker, nor discourage his rejection of a God prescribed by somebody else. *Ja ta*, read with *Ja halo tai*, may be construed as constituting almost a charter conferring on every seeker the right to 'create' his own God and that with-

out feeling any sense of compunction. Thus, every individual is brought close to his own God along the path most congenial to him. "You should," says Ma, "kindle fire by any means, either with clarified butter or sandalwood or even straw. Once alight, the fire burns on; all worries, darkness and gloom gradually disappear. It will burn to ashes all obstacles."\*

It is not Ma's way two interfere with any one's susceptibilities or predilections. At whatever point a particular aspirant may be, Ma sheds light on the path of his choice, kindles in him more and more aspiration and stimulates spontaneous flowering of the bud lying dormant in him. Says Ma: "He alone knows to whom He will reveal Himself, under which form. By what path and in what manner He attracts any individual to Himself with great force is incomprehensible to human intelligence. The path indeed differs for different pilgrims. To advance in the spirit means for everyone to tread his own path. One's own path is the path that leads to realization of the Supreme, the Ultimate Goal."†

## GLOSSARY

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
Advaita	<i>Advaita</i>	Non-dualism. The doctrine that points the Ultimate Reality as one and undifferentiated.
Aham	<i>Aham</i>	I. The true Self ( <i>Atma</i> ) that presents itself to one's consciousness as 'I'.
Ahamkara	<i>ahamkāra</i>	The ego or false I, which erroneously assumes the body, the mind etc. to be the <i>Atma</i> .
Ajnana	<i>ajñāna</i>	Ignorance of the true nature of the Self or of Reality. All knowledge other than that of the Self belongs to the category of <i>ajnana</i> .
Abaran	<i>āvaraṇa</i>	Veil, screen.
Adya-Sakti	<i>Adyāsakti</i>	The primordial Sakti: Vide Appendix 'A'.
Ananda	<i>Ānanda</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Arati	<i>ārati</i>	A devotional ceremony.
Asana	<i>āsana</i>	Yogic posture or physical pose; also a seat.
Ashram	<i>aśrama</i>	Monastery. Also form successive stages of life — that of

\**Bhagavad Gita*, XVII/23.

†*Mother as revealed to me*, by Bhaiji, 6th ed., p. 11.



Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
		a student, a householder, an anchorite, a monk.
Atheliya	<i>Atheliyā</i>	A nick-name of Ma given by Didima.
Ati Maha-	<i>Ati-Muhā-</i>	A great <i>yajna</i> to propitiate
rudra Yajna	<i>rudra Yajña</i>	Rudra.
Atma	<i>Ātmā</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Avatara	<i>Avatāra</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Avidya	<i>avidyā</i>	Also <i>ajñāna</i> .
Baba	<i>Bābā</i>	Father; a term of endearment for a child.
Balagopal	<i>Bālagopāla</i>	Infant Krishna.
Bapuji	<i>Bāpujī</i>	Father.
Bedisha	<i>Bediṣā</i>	A nick-name of Ma given by Didima.
Bhava	<i>bhāva</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Bhava-ruga	<i>bhāvaruga</i>	The malady of worldimindedness.
Bhavasagara	<i>Bhavasāgara</i>	Ocean of worldly life.
Bhagavan	<i>Bhagavān</i>	God.
Bhagavati	<i>Bhagavati</i>	Goddess.
Bhaiji	<i>Bhājī</i>	Respected elder brother.
Bhajan	<i>bhajana</i>	Religious song.
Brahmachari	<i>brahmachārī</i>	A devoted student observing the practice of austerities and strict celibacy.

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
Brahma, Vishnu, Siva	<i>Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva</i>	The three aspects of the Divine Personality associated with the creation, preservation and dissolution of the Universe.
Brahman	<i>Brahman</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Brahmi	<i>Brāhmī Sthiti</i>	Divine State.
Sthiti		
Brahma- Vidya	<i>Brahmavidyā</i>	The absolute knowledge of Supreme Reality.
Chaitanya	<i>Caitanya</i>	Pure consciousness, which is the essence of the <i>Atman</i> or <i>Brahman</i> .
Chandi	<i>Caṇḍī</i>	A sacred book on God the Mother.
Chela	<i>Celā</i>	Disciple.
Chit	<i>Cit</i>	The uncoloured Light of Pure Consciousness that lies behind all phenomena.
Darsana	<i>darśana</i>	Sight, vision. One speaks of having <i>darśana</i> of a deity or a saint which means to be blessed by his sight and presence.
Dharma	<i>dharma</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Dharmaputra	<i>dharmaputra</i>	Spiritual son.

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
Dharmasala	<i>dharmaśālā</i>	Temporary lodging for pilgrims.
Dhyana	<i>dhyāna</i>	Meditation.
Diksha	<i>dikṣā</i>	Initiation into the spiritual life, effected through the grace of the <i>Guru</i> who represents the Divine.
Dola	<i>dola</i>	A religious ceremony observed on the Full Moon Day of the Spring.
Duniya	<i>duniyā</i>	The world.
Durga	<i>Durgā</i>	The Divine Consort of Siva.
Durga Puja	<i>Durgā Pūjā</i>	Worship of Durga.
Durgotsava	<i>Durgotsava</i>	The festival associated with Durga Puja.
Dvaita	<i>Dvaita</i>	Dualism. The doctrine which holds that the Ultimate Reality is not undifferentiated unity.
Gauri	<i>Gaurī</i>	A name of the Divine Consort of Siva.
Gita	<i>Gītā</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'
Gopal	<i>Gopāla</i>	A name of Krishna when a child. Vide Appendix 'A'
Granthi	<i>granthi</i>	
Guru	<i>Guru</i>	The spiritual guide and teacher.

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
Hari	<i>Hari</i>	God. A name of Vishnu, the sustainer and preserver of the Universe, who is worshipped by the <i>Vaishnavas</i> .
Harisabha	<i>harisabhā</i>	A religious gathering for the worship of Hari.
Hatha Yoga	<i>haṭhayoga</i>	Yogic practice through the medium of the body.
Holi	<i>holi</i>	Same as <i>Dola</i> .
Isa	<i>īśa</i>	Same as <i>Isvara</i> (See <i>Isvara</i> )
Ishta	<i>iṣṭa</i>	Beloved deity.
Isvara	<i>īśvara</i>	The Lord of the Universe; <i>Brahman</i> , as manifested.
Jagat	<i>jagat</i>	Literally 'that which is going' i.e. the world, which is in a state of change and transition.
Janmantara	<i>janmāntara</i>	Transmigration of the soul.
Janmastami	<i>Janmāṣṭamī</i>	The auspicious day of Lord Krishna's advent.
Japa	<i>japa</i>	Repetition of a <i>mantra</i> or a name of God.
Jata	<i>jaṭā</i>	Matted hair.
Jeevatma	<i>jīvātmā</i>	The Individual Self.
Jhulan	<i>Jhulana</i>	A festival associated with Sri Krishna.

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
Jnana	<i>Jāna</i>	Literally the knowledge. True knowledge is immediate and represents the Unity of Reality.
Jnani	<i>jānī</i>	One who has attained knowledge of Self and Reality.
Kali	<i>Kālī</i>	A manifestation of the Divine Mother.
Karma	<i>karma</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Kheyal	<i>kheyāla</i>	Vide Chapters 1 and 7.
Kīrtana	<i>kīrtana</i>	The chanting or singing of the names or glories of God. Vide Appendix 'A'.
Kripa	<i>kṛpā</i>	Grace.
Kumari	<i>kumārī</i>	Eternal immaculate virgin, divine in nature — the Mother of the creation.
Kumbhaka	<i>kumbhaka</i>	A conscious process that aims at either retaining breath within the body or keeping it out of the body during which the conflicting tendencies of the incoming and outgoing breath will be in abeyance.
Labha	<i>lābha</i>	Vide Chapter 14.
Lakshmi	<i>Lakṣmī</i>	The Divine Consort of Narayana, the goddess of wealth

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
		and prosperity and the guardian of the household.
Ma	<i>Mā</i>	Mother.
Mahabharata	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	One of the two great epics in Sanskrit literature.
Mahatma	<i>Mahātma</i>	Great soul. Used with reference to a person who has given up his ego and realized himself as one with the All.
Mandaleswar	<i>Maṇḍaleśvara</i>	Leader of a group of saints.
Mantra	<i>mantra</i>	A series of sounds of great potency. A <i>mantra</i> is a word of power—divine power transmitted through sound.
Mataji	<i>Mātājī</i>	Mother.
Matrisanga	<i>mātṛsangu</i>	Association with the Mother.
Mauna	<i>mauna</i>	Silence.
Maya	<i>māya</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Mukti	<i>mukti</i>	Emancipation from the worldly life.
Nama	<i>nāma</i>	Name.
Nama-Yajna	<i>Nāma-yajña</i>	A special ceremony for repeating the name of God.
Nandotsava	<i>Nandotsava</i>	A ceremony celebrating the birth of Krishna.
Narayana	<i>Nārāyaṇa</i>	A name of Vishnu.

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
Narmadesvar	<i>Narmadeśvara</i>	A name of Siva.
Namaj	<i>Namāj</i>	Mohammedan prayer.
Neti Neti	<i>neti neti</i>	Not this, not this.
Ojha	<i>ojhā</i>	Exorcist of evil spirits.
Paramatma	<i>Paramātmā</i>	God. Vide Appendix 'A'.
Pardab	<i>pardā</i>	(i) Curtain. (ii) Seclusion of women.
Pitaji	<i>pitāji</i>	Father.
Prana	<i>prāṇa</i>	Life.
Pranama	<i>pranāma</i>	Obeisance. A posture of surrender, indicating the sense of one's own smallness in the presence of the one to whom the obeisance is offered.
Pranava	<i>Pranava</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Prasada	<i>prasāda</i>	Food offered to a deity or saint becomes prasada, when it has been accepted and thereby blessed. It is then partaken by the devotees.
Puja	<i>pūjā</i>	Worship.
Purnima	<i>pūrṇimā</i>	Full moon.
Rama	<i>Rāma</i>	An incarnation of God, the hero of the epic Ramayana.

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
Ramayana	<i>Ramāyaṇa</i>	One of the two great epics in Sanskrit literature.
Rasalila	<i>Rāsaliḷā</i>	The occasion of the love play of Sri Krishna with Radha and Gopis at Vrindavan.
Ratha-Yatra	<i>Rathayātrā</i>	Car festival of Lord Jagannath.
Rishi	<i>Rṣi</i>	Seers to whom <i>mantras</i> are revealed.
Rudra	<i>Rudra</i>	The God Siva in his fearful aspect as destroyer.
Sadhaka	<i>sādhaka</i>	A spiritual aspirant who practises <i>sādhana</i> .
Sadhana	<i>sādhana</i>	Spiritual practice performed for the purpose of preparing oneself for Self-realization.
Sadhya	<i>sādhya</i>	The object of <i>sādhana</i> .
Sakti	<i>Śakti</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Samadhi	<i>samāhi</i>	A state in which the mind is completely concentrated in the object of contemplation or ceases to function, and only Pure Consciousness remains, revealing Itself to Itself, Vide Chapter 8.
Samsara	<i>saṁsāra</i>	Cycle of life in the world.
Samskara	<i>saṁskāra</i>	Mental dispositions, which act like seeds and have a tendency

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
		to germinate into action. These <i>samskaras</i> are often brought forward from former births. They are burnt up when the Light of <i>Jnana</i> (Supreme Knowledge) shines forth.
Sanga	<i>sanga</i>	Company or association.
Sarasvati	<i>Sarasvatī</i>	Goddess of learning.
Sat	<i>Sat</i>	Being. Vide Appendix 'A'.
Shashtra	<i>śāstra</i>	The sacred Hindu scriptures.
Siva	<i>Śiva</i>	One of the three aspects of the Divine Personality associated with dissolution of the Universe.
Svabhava	<i>svabhāva</i>	One's own nature.
Svarupa	<i>svarūpa</i>	One's true self.
Svayam-prakasa	<i>svayamprakāśa</i>	Self-luminous. Vide Appendix 'A'.
Vairagya	<i>vairāgya</i>	Detachment from the world and its cause.
Vedas	<i>Veda</i>	The most ancient scriptures of the Hindus. Vide Appendix 'A'.
Vedanta	<i>Vedānta</i>	Vide Appendix 'A'.
Vishnu	<i>Viṣṇu</i>	One of the three aspects of the Divine Personality asso-

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
Visvanatha	<i>Viśvanātha</i>	ciated with the preservation of the Universe. An epithet of Śiva. Vide Appendix 'A'.
Yajna	<i>yajña</i>	An elaborate process of <i>Vedic</i> worship involving sacramental oblations to blazing fire with <i>ghee</i> (molten butter) and other objects — all consecrated to gods and goddesses.

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## Opinions

## OPINIONS

I

P. N. Ghosh, M.A.,

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*and*

*Principal (Retd.), Midnapore College*

I have read with pleasure and profit the manuscript copy of Mr. Anil Ganguli's book on Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma. He states with great humility that he has not attempted to write a biography of the Mother, nor to interpret the uninterpretable. Though he had the exceptionally good fortune of having been accepted in the inner circle of her devotees, he says he caught only glimpses of the Mother's *lila* and he seeks merely to share these with his readers. The Mother did not certainly extend this special grace to all, but only to a select few. This makes Mr. Ganguli quite competent to write about her with some authority which bestows authenticity on his work. His modesty notwithstanding, Mr. Ganguli has remarkably succeeded in holding up before his readers almost a live portrait of the Mother, which compels spontaneous veneration and makes them bow down in profound adoration. The secret of his success lies, I feel, in the fact that he has laid greater emphasis on the Mother's human aspects (e.g. her unsurpassed motherliness) than on her sainthood, or her prophet-like virtues, or on her admitted 'divinity', which he naturally considers too sacred to be dilated on — that aspect named by him her 'Inner Being' is better kept concealed in the back-



ground. In this the author appears to be a real artist — is not the Mother actually better revealed thereby?

Mr. Ganguli is perfectly right when he says that our ancient civilisation has survived the terrible onslaughts from Islam and Christianity during thousand years of Muslim rule and about two centuries of British occupation, because of the appearance and reappearance of saints and prophets throughout these ages. They were really the custodians not only of our Eternal Religion but also of our culture and civilisation. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ma came at the end of this long line of seers and sages, and kept the same torch of Divine Light still burning.

Revered to the point of adoration by some of the greatest contemporary spiritual leaders, the Mother occupied quite a unique position of supreme glory; but personally she claimed nothing more than that of a 'little child or a daughter'. This reminds us of Paramahansa Ramakrishnadeva's naive expression of childlike surprise, when publicly hailed as the Prophet of the Age. The Mother has sanctified the soil she walked on and this 'benighted land' may again wake up to a new life of national righteousness.

Mr. Ganguli has also enlightened us on many essential points of our religion, avoiding abstruse discussion. His narration is all through very lucid, logical and precise. He has also evinced great discrimination in his selection (out of an enormous mass of material) of the Mother's Dialogues, Parables, Aphorisms, Sayings and some very illuminating illustrations of her omniscience and compassion. These may serve as an eye-opener to the sceptical. His elaborate description

of *Samyama Saptaha Mahavrata* (the week of the great vow of self-control) compels our special and particular attention. The Mother used to prescribe and herself personally supervise the process preparatory to self-purification so essential for attaining self-realization or illumination. This remains the Mother's novel and unique experiment for the spiritual uplift of a vast congregation of people *en masse*. Ganguli has naturally put great emphasis on this 'Spiritual adventure'.

Lastly, I must confess that his narrative has roused in me a deep sense of remorse that I never availed myself of the opportunity of sitting at the Mother's feet and seeking her grace. "Mother Divine, forsake not this poor child" is therefore my concluding prayer.

18.2.83

## II

S. C. Sengupta, M.A. Ph.D., D.Litt

*Well-known Critic and noted Shakespeare Scholar*

More than half a century ago, Ma Anandamayee used to stay with a neighbour of mine when she visited Calcutta, and I used to see her daily as she went out or came in. Later on, I heard about her from her disciples, and my interest was stimulated by what I heard. One of them, Anil Ganguli, has written extensively about Ma, and I find that the secret of this author's attachment to her is that he found in her his own

dear mother. That was a very common as well as a very uncommon thing. We have all our mothers — very dear to their sons but undistinguished to others. Here was Anil's Mother, in whom millions of people, young and old, men and women of all races and countries, have re-discovered their own mother. I have read Anil Ganguli's book with great interest because he has revealed this uncommon commonness in a person who was divine because she was intensely human.

24.7.83

### III

Subimal Dutt, I.C.S. (Retd.)

The author who was very close to Ma Anandamayee for thirty five years has brought to bear on his task the reverent attitude of a devotee and the intellectual approach of a scholar. The result is a book which we, Ma's humbler children, can read with much profit and pleasure. Mr. Ganguli has sought to throw light on some aspects of Ma's personality which invariably struck many during their first meetings with Ma. Over the years a modest volume of literature has grown on Ma, thanks to the writings of some who were closest to Ma, such as Bhajji, Didi Gurupriya Debi and Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj. The author has drawn on these writings but supplemented his knowledge by what he had heard from Ma personally during innumerable conversations with her. One

has now a better appreciation of Ma's sayings and of some words and aphorisms so frequently used by her.

Who was Ma? What was Ma? Mr. Ganguli has described Ma as a phenomenon. A phenomenon she certainly was. Here was a simple village girl, born of extremely poor parents in a remote village of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) with only rudiments of education in the village school, emerging as a leading spiritual figure of India to whom homage was paid even by the heads of traditional Hindu religious establishments, very orthodox in their outlook, and many other seers and saints. Erudite scholars found in some of Ma's ordinary sayings deep spiritual and philosophical meanings. A notable example of this is the book '*Amar Vani*' by the late Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj. On the other hand, learned practitioners of Hindu religious ceremonies and practices would often seek Ma's guidance on correct procedures in religious performances.

Mr. Ganguli has referred to Ma's 'inner being' and 'outer manifestation'. The two, of course, form indistinguishable parts of the whole. Ma would often say that she had no volition of her own. One could infer from this that it was completely identified with the Divine Will. And this explains some apparent inconsistencies in her action. One sick person, an utter stranger, she would cure with her healing touch. Another similarly ill, a close devotee, she would completely ignore despite urgent pleas. She was having no '*kheyal*' — no inner urge, she would say.

In the *Upanishad* it is stated that "One who realises *Brahman* becomes *Brahman* himself" (*Mundaka* 3/2/9). Not

in that sense only but many have seen Ma with their own eyes as different manifestations of the Divine. This should not be regarded as impossible, even if unusual. As the *Bhagavata* says — "The Divine appears to a pure hearted devotee in the Form on which he meditates." ( *Bhagavata* 3/9/11 ).

Such was our adored Ma whose words the author has sought to interpret so faithfully.

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