



*Swami Muktananda Giri*

Courtesy : Sri Sadanand, Bombay.

*In Memoriam*

**SRI SWAMI MUKTANANDA GIRI**

[ May, 1877 = August 9th, 1970 ]



Sri Swami Muktananda Giri, "Giriji" as Ma used to call her, our revered and beloved Didima, took *Mahāsamādhi* on August 9th at 1-30 a. m. in Mataji's presence at Hardwar, deeply mourned by all who knew her. We had hoped that she would remain with us for a whole century, but Divine Dispensation willed otherwise. It was Giriji's wish to retain her body only so long as she would not be bed-ridden or too frail to travel with Mataji. Her wish was fulfilled. Her passing was as simple, peaceful and inspiring as her whole life.\*

Mokshada Sundari Devi, as her parents named her, was the offspring of a highly respected Brahmin family of East Bengal, which had produced a number of saintly and learned persons. She was the eighth child of her parents. Her father, a *kulaguru*, had many disciples; her mother was also deeply religious. Mokshada was one of those extremely rare souls that are born saints. She was a quiet, gentle child, fond of solitude. There were no negative sides to her character that had to be overcome. She never knew what it was to be angry, greedy or jealous. Neither did she ever quarrel with anyone or tell a lie. She attended school only for a few years. Yet she possessed a natural gift to express her spiritual aspiration and her love of God in poetry. From her early youth to her last days she used to compose many beautiful songs and lyrics. Both her parents passed away before her childhood was over.

At the age of twelve, she was married to Sri Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya, an equally saintly person, much loved and respected for his honest, upright nature and his integrity. Ascetic by inclination he had little interest in the affairs of this world. He also was an inspired singer. Soon after the birth of their first child, in 1893, he took his wife and daughter to his mother at Kheora and left home to live a life of renunciation. The child died at the age of nine months. After more than two years of absence, friends of the family found him in his place of retreat and persuaded him to return and to resume once more the responsibilities of a householder. However, a sense of detachment remained with him throughout his life.

\* Her departure is described in detail in *Mātri Līlā'* of this issue.

In 1896, their second child, Nirmala Sundari Devi, our Mataji, was born. It is in the fitness of things that Mataji should have chosen such an extraordinarily saintly couple for her parents. Didima, not only a model of all the gentler human virtues, was also wise by nature and intuitively knew what was best for her children. Thus, Nirmala was never slapped or even harshly rebuked. She grew up happily, unaware of the fact that, as far as material needs went, her family was poor. Mokshada, always working hard, kept her humble cottage spotlessly clean and orderly. Every guest was served as Nārāyaṇa, while she herself went without food on many occasions. Complete trust in God, one of the main features of Mokshada's character, gave her the fortitude to bear with equanimity and patience all the hardships and bereavements of her family life. Nirmala, while still a child, helped her in her own unique way to get over the loss of three young sons who passed away in quick succession. In later years, Mokshada also had to mourn the death of two daughters. Her youngest son, Makhan, has survived his mother.

When Nirmala had become Sri Anandamayi Ma, recognised as a Divine Incarnation by an ever increasing multitude of devotees and admirers, some of them of very high standing, Didima's life naturally became easier and her privations gradually ceased. Anyone else would have succumbed to the temptation of feeling proud and superior to others. Yet Didima proved herself perfectly equal to the changed circumstances of her life. It never even entered her mind that she occupied an elevated position. She remained her simple, humble self, full of calm and dignity, whether in the company of villagers or great scholars and rulers of the world.

After Dādāmaśai\* had passed away in 1936, Didima felt that she should become a *Sannyāsini*, mainly in order to be able to spend the rest of her life close to Mataji. In April 1938, she received full *sannyāsa* from the great Swami Sri Mangal Giri Maharaj at Hardwar. This kind of *sannyāsa* is hardly ever given to women. In fact, she was the only

\* Mataji's father was called "Dādāmaśai" (grand-father) by Mataji's devotees.

woman to whom he gave *sannyāsa*. Her guru called her "Swami Muktananda Giri".

Swami Muktananda Giri already possessed the qualities required of a *sannyāsi*. First and foremost she was self-effacement personified. Her compassion knew no bounds; it encompassed the righteous as well as the wicked. Unaware of her own needs, she was in the habit of giving away whatever she got. Neither did she find fault with anyone. She was always quick to discover some good quality even in persons whom nobody else would tolerate. She seemed desireless, with the exception of one desire: to be at all costs with Mataji. To the last day of her life she was ever ready to sacrifice the most elementary needs and comforts so as to be able to travel about with her beloved daughter.

In the early days, Bholanath and Bhaiji had given initiation to devotees who asked for it, since Mataji does not do so. Bhaiji passed away in 1937 and Bholanath in 1938. Thereafter Giriji began to act as the Guru of all who wished to take mantra *dikṣā*. Several hundreds of men, women and children must have received initiation from her in Mataji's presence in the course of all these years. By and by Giriji also became the *Sannyāsa Guru* of most of the *sannyāsis* and two *sannyāsinis* belonging to our Ashram.

Thus it may rightly be said that, not only during Mataji's childhood, but also during the 32 years of Giriji's life as a *Sannyāsinī*, she played a very important and unique part in Mataji's *lilā*. Giriji became the almost constant companion of Sri Sri Ma and in her selfless, unassuming manner was of invaluable help and assistance to her. All the thousands of Mataji's children loved and revered her as their spiritual grand-mother. Mataji alone knows how the painful gap created by Didima's departure from this earth is to be bridged.

One thing is certain: Didima has not left us. Although she has discarded her body that had served her well for nearly a century, she is here with us. We feel her presence tangibly wherever we may be and we may be sure of her readiness to help and bless us at all times. May we ever remain worthy of her benediction.

