

Twenty-fourth Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata



We are happy to announce that the twenty-fourth *Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata* organised by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha will be held at our Vrindaban Ashram from November 3rd to 9th at the invitation of H. H. Maharani Smt. Lakshmi Devi of Gandal.

Self.-knowledge, Self-realization is the ultimate aim of the *Samyam Mahavrata*. By observing truthfulness in every respect, by the practice of brahmacharya and non-violence we endeavour to progress ourselves and to help our fellow-men to advance on the spiritual path.

It is hoped that Sri Sri Ma will grace the function with Her Presence.

Varanasi,
31 July, 1973.

DURGA SINGH

President

Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha

Those who wish to join the *Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata* are requested to kindly write to the address given below at least fifteen days before the starting of the function so that the necessary arrangements for their accommodation and meals may be made.

Swami Parmananda

Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi Ashram

P. O. Vrindaban

Dist. MATHURA, U.P.

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Ma in Gopal Mandir, Varanasi

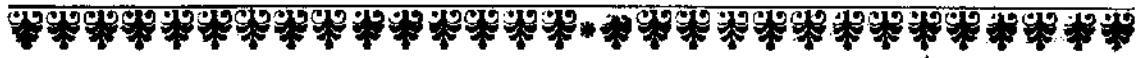
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Mātri Vāni

The day that is gone never returns: this is very true indeed. The individual and the world: to be an individual implies bondage, whereas the world is in continual motion. So long as consciousness is focussed on the level of happiness and pain, light and darkness, the polarity between attainment and non-attainment is bound to persist. To be a human being means to be a seeker after Truth.

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Man should address all his appeals and petitions to God and pray to Him regularly. Everything is verily within the One who creates, preserves and destroys. If anything happens in one's worldly life that causes distress and anguish, one should endeavour to cleave to God's name by all possible devices and cry at His feet. There can be peace only when God

Himself, the Fountain of Peace, Who is the end of everything, has been enthroned in one's heart.

* * * *

God is supremely merciful and compassionate; without cause or reason His compassion, His grace are pouring forth at every instant. Eager to receive them, stretch out your hand, palm upwards. Shun the mentality of a businessman. "I have done my best but without the desired result. I have reaped the fruit of my past actions. Lord, Thou hast given it to me. Thou art lavishing Thy grace on me!" Keep this in mind. If one lives in this spirit, there is hope of attaining to the Ultimate Good.

* * * *

Try and try again to reach the goal you have set before yourself. So long as Realisation does not come you must never relax your efforts. Let this be your firm resolve.

* * * *

At all times and in the very circumstances in which you are placed, try to the limit of your capacity to sustain the remembrance of God, to pray for His mercy, to keep your mind absorbed in Him. Truly, truly, those whose aim is God-realisation have started on their pilgrimage. Spiritual exercises must be done as regularly as possible.

* * * *

Worldly happiness alternating with periodical troubles that cause much sorrow are characteristic for the householder's life at every step. With great patience endeavour to do your duty to the best of your ability. Always pray for God's grace.

* * * *

To regulate one's life in accordance with the injunctions of the *Śāstras* is one's duty in human life. To accept what one is not entitled to is forbidden by the *Śāstras*. Those who live as sādhus may accept people's gifts as well as their obeisance in keeping with their merit. Unless one has attained to a certain state of achievement it is not helpful on the path to the Supreme to accept veneration and gifts. It is not fitting to take pleasure in what one is not entitled to.

* * * *

If the aspirant on the spiritual path can full of endurance, patience, steadiness, calm and serenity remain engrossed in his religious practices, then even if a wave of ill-luck comes it will not be able to touch him. To try his utmost to reach such a state is indeed man's duty.

* * * *

Of all creatures man alone has the capacity to create an atmosphere, an environment that is conducive to the revelation of Truth. With this faith one should endeavour to adhere steadily and without wavering to the practices meant to awaken one's true nature.

Matri Satsang in Solan

Swami Bhagavananda Giri

(Translated from Bengali)

(2)

(Continued from the last issue)

Solan, June 11th, 1955.

After the evening *kirtana* Mataji comes out and sits on the veranda, as she did yesterday. One by one the devotees go and perform obeisance at her feet and, purified and blessed by Mataji's radiant smile and her glance of love and compassion, return to their places in the hope of hearing some words of wisdom from Ma's lips. Last evening they tasted the sweet nectar of her dialogue and so they eagerly look forward to it again today.

Mataji is seated absorbed in her own mood. The atmosphere is quiet and peaceful. We are in the midst of mountainous country, far away from noisy cities, in an Ashram that has been built by Raja Durga Singh on a hillock just below his palace. It is pleasant indeed to sit still in Mataji's holy presence. Yet the wish to hear some of her words of wisdom keeps on recurring to my mind. However I cannot pluck up sufficient courage to ask her a direct question. While I am pondering in this manner someone asks :

"It is said that there is only one Brahman without a second. When and how is it possible to see this truth?"

Mataji : To see here means the vision of the *Ātman* (Self) (which is one). What does 'direct vision' signify ? So long as the seer, the act of seeing and the vision remain three different entities, where is the realisation of the Brahman ? When there is no question of action or inaction, of existence or non-existence, then only one can speak of being established in the Brahman, in the *Atman*—in one's own true Self. On the other hand, if you want to view God's creation of names and forms, then you should regard all names and forms everywhere as the names and forms of your own Divine Beloved (*Iṣṭadeva*). It is said, "However far the eyes may reach, only Krishna is visible". "Wherever there is a human being there is Śiva, where there is a woman there is Gouri" (the Divine Mother or *Śakti*). Whatever I may behold anywhere is but a reflection of my *Iṣṭa*. Who am I ? HE alone is. But who is He ? HE is myself ! Where am I ? HE exists and none else. Thou, O Lord Thou art all ! I am and He is—again, I am also not and neither is He, so what is ? *Ātma* (the Self). As the Self, I, you, He and all else exist, again there is nothing, yet everything. This is difficult to understand. To 'understand' (by one's intelligence) merely means to 'stand under' an increased burden. (Mataji claps her hands and laughs). A little later she speaks again ; "Whether you take the path of *dvaita* (dualism)† or of

† *Dvaita* The doctrine which holds that Ultimate Reality is not undifferentiated unity, or more than one, for instance, *Puruṣa-Prakṛiti* or *Śiva-Śakti-Bindu* in *śaiva*.

advaita (nondualism)†† or the path of *dvaitādvaita*††† —what matters is to set one's feet firmly on the road, to mingle with fellow-pilgrims and to advance steadily. When the time is ripe all will be revealed."

Question : Where can Sri Krishna be seen ?

Mataji : There is only the one Sri Krishna; Sri Rama alone exists and nothing else at all. Whatever you perceive that is not Sri Krishna or Sri Rama, in other words, your *Iṣṭa*, is not true vision. All-embrasive, complete vision is the revelation of the Divine Beloved.

Question : Does this mean actual vision or merely some spiritual experience ?

Mataji : Call it a name or a form, an intuition or a spiritual experience, in all these there remain the three separate identities. Even in spiritual experience there is still the person who experiences, the act of experiencing and the experience. You must rise above this. Spiritual experience belongs to a particular stage of progress.

Question : Can a child know his mother ?

Mataji : Why not try to answer yourself ?

Question : I have read in books that a child can never know his mother.

†† *Advaita* Non-dualism. The doctrine that posits the Ultimate Reality as one and undifferentiated.

††† *Dvaitādvaita* The doctrine which holds that the Ultimate Reality is non-dual and yet dual, looked at from different points of view.

Mataji : According to the state one has reached one may know or recognize her. Whatever is said is right from the point of view from which it is said.

Question : Can Real Being (*sat vastu*) be diverse ?

Mataji : Real Being is one and one only.

Question : How is this possible ?

Mataji : In essence it is one. Nevertheless you may look at it or hear of it or speak of it from a certain angle of vision and somebody else may do so from a different view point.

Question : Why cannot everyone look at the One Being in the identical manner ?

Mataji : Because THAT has an infinite variety of forms, qualities and states of existence. How can there be an end to it ? Whatever anyone may discern from his particular stage of progress is correct at that stage.

Question : You mention from time to time, "I do not have the *kheyāla*." What is this *kheyāla* ? * Is there any reason behind this *kheyāla* ?

Mataji : A *kheyāla* is just a *kheyāla*; the question of reason or unreasonableness does not arise. This body is your whimsical daughter. Some people even go to the extent of saying : "My whimsical, mad daughter." Whatever any-

* *kheyāla* In Mataji's case there is no ego to account for her movements, feelings and thoughts. When she uses the word *kheyāla* with reference to her own person, it must be understood to denote a spontaneous upsurge of will, which is divine and therefore free.

one may say, to him it is true. Whatever you say is all right.

Questioner: My mind is also unhinged. I am mad because my Mother is mad.

Mataji: Oh, what a wonderful statement! You have verily spoken the truth. This body has merely repeated what people sometimes say. You seem to be a wise madcap. Quite true! Some are mad for learning, others are mad for sports or games. Some are mad for their wives and children, others are mad for cars and houses. Everybody is madly after something or other. The whole world is indeed insane. Some are slightly mad, others half mad, and yet others are completely and totally mad. God's play is wonderful—He has created a lunatic asylum of a world! It is His pleasure. God is playful, He is His own Law. He Himself plays with Himself in an endless variety of ways.

Question: Mataji, what kind of thing is God?

Mataji: God is no thing. A thing is limited, isn't it? But He is indeed everything, full and complete in Himself. Do you not recite from the scriptures: "*Purnamadah Purnamidam* † Even if the whole is taken from the whole there still remains the complete Being." What a marvellous saying! Because these are the words of *Rishis*. To become complete yourself, you must approach God, the supremely complete Being. But why say "approach"? The knowledge that it is He alone who exists must supervene. This and that thing, bits and pieces of substance

† "That is whole and this is whole."

are seen in the world. But God is complete and perfect, full to overflowing, of infinite Being. For what does one pray to Him if not to become free from want and from the sense of separation? Some are sorely in need of knowledge, others lack learning, yet others want wealth and friends. Surely, one prays to Him to fulfil one's wants and to awaken to one's true Being. The chanting of the Lord's name, the remembrance of God, the study of scriptures have for purpose the fulfilling of one's insufficiency. It is the lack of faith in the all-pervading, constant presence of God which is the harbinger of sorrow in this world.

But do believe, everything is all right. This or that person says something because to him it is so; he is thus not lying. He can only speak of what he perceives, of what his intelligence is able to grasp, of what he understands. In God's kingdom everything is possible. Everything is contained in everything.

Question : If a person realizes something while in the state of ignorance, and later makes progress into a higher state, is his previous realization rendered untrue?

Mataji : Well said! Splendid! (Mataji laughs.) What is seen depends on one's stage of progress. Why, did you not grasp this? A truly profound subject. Where the question of stage or no stage does not arise, how can such a state be described in words?

Question : What can an infant son do for his mother? He can only cry for her.

Mataji : He can at least act exactly as his mother tells him to.

Question : What will happen if he does ?

Mataji : If he implicitly obeys his mother, he will come to know his mother, he will realize what she is, he will become one with her. What does *Ma* signify ? *Ātmā*, the Self, *Mā* means *mayi* (all-pervading). She who gives to everyone exactly what he needs is called a mother. Can anyone but a mother bestow precisely what is required ? *Mā*—the all-permeating core of the Self ! Is it not that alone who exists ? To become like It means to merge in It, to be It. Call It the epitome of wisdom, the Self, Siva Himself, nothing can be outside of or excluded from That. Just as the same individual is father, son and husband. Someone may call him father, and someone else son, yet he is one and the same person. All names and forms are His alone.

Question : When Mother so carefully measures out to everyone what he needs, what is there to worry about ?

Mataji : What do you think ?

Questioner : She will of course give to each one only as much as is possible.

Mataji : The mother knows herself how to foster her children. She will accordingly give at the time, in the quality and quantity that are most appropriate. But why merely "will give" ? She gives, is giving constantly and will ever continue to give—but one must have the intuition to recognize it.

God has not been realized : this is why people suffer. When God is revealed there is neither duality nor sorrow. Due to lack of faith in the immanence of God, the whole gamut of temporary happiness and pain arises. He who

in order to find God renounces everything, tries his best and carefully attends to his spiritual practices, is the genuine madman. What is meant by calling him mad? He is madly rejoicing in God's revelation.† You know the well known verse : "*Akhaṇḍā mandalākāram vyāptam yeṇa charācharam*", that is to say, God is an undivided whole pervading this universe of the moving and the unmoving, like a circle. He is without beginning, or end. If He is revealed to you, everything becomes round and topsy-turvy, melts into one and vanishes. Having found God, does one ever lack anything at all thereafter? By realizing Him, everything is realized. If you become mad with God intoxication, your previous madness of duality disappears entirely. Some people are mad for money, others for their bodily comforts. Still others are mad for another human being. In the grip of infatuation they destroy their body, mind and health. Sleep and diet should be strictly regulated. Your thinking must be centred in God. Talking about God is the only mode of conversation worth the while, any other mode is useless and ultimately leads to pain. Where there is Rāma (God) there is ease and comfort, where Rāma is not, there is discomfort and disease. God is your very own Being. You must continue to practise and endeavour to realize your own Self; this is a *must* for you! God is the breath of life, the heart of hearts, the all-pervading Self of everyone and everything.

†. A play upon words : *Pagal* madman and *pawa gelo* it has been realized.

(To be continued)

The Hundred Mridang Holi Festival at Ghaziabad

R. K. Banerji

In February 1973, Mataji spent several days in Poona, and meanwhile we in Calcutta had been hearing vague rumours about Mataji's probable programme on the occasions of Sivaratri and Holi, without receiving any authentic news. Consequently, I had gradually been led to believe that we would miss participating in Mataji's celebration during Holi this year.

The greater was the surprise, therefore, when I received out of the blue, a letter written by Swami Paramanandaji just before Mataji's party left Poona on February 22nd, requesting me to supervise the finance, transport and well-being of nearly 130 persons travelling from Calcutta to Ghaziabad and back over Holi, which was scheduled to be celebrated on the 18th March, the kind host on this occasion being Sri Sitaram Jaipuria, M. P.

This meant a direct visit to and contact with the Goswamis of Khardaha a suburb beyond our Agarpara Ashram on the Barrackpur Trunk Road. There, in the precincts of the celebrated temple of Sri Shyam Sundarji (the original of three similar deities personally installed by Prabhupad Sri Birchandra, the only son of Sri Nityananda Prabhu), the *Shata Sukhol Utsava* is regularly and annually held over the Holi period.

But first of all the Calcutta office of the Jaipurias had to be approached, and here, even before the necessary authority had

been received from Swami Paramananda or Sitaramji, I obtained prompt, courteous and efficient assistance from the person in charge, with the result that my task was rendered that much easier right through to the end.

Armed with initial finance, I then visited Khardaha with Birenda on the 6th March, and established rapport with the Goswamis and their family in their own home. On arrival there, I was shown copies of a printed pamphlet that had been circulated, calling upon all kirtanias and khol players to make use of this unique opportunity of responding to Mataji's invitation.

Thus the presence of at least 102 khol players, complete with srikhol, together with their ancillary assistants, was firmly ensured for assembly at Howrah Station on the evening of the 14th March. In all there were 112 professional and 18 amateur kirtanias, including Sri Haren Gupta and family, Birenda and family, Sm. Chitra Thakur, Sm. Bina Dutt, Smt. Saraswati Majumdar, my wife and myself.

In careful consultation with Swamiji and Sri Shanti Banerjee, it had been decided to request the railway authorities officially on behalf of the Sangha to place a double bogie with 90 seats, and another standard bogie with 40 seats, for attachment to the Janata Express leaving Howrah at 9-25. P. M. on March 14th for Ghaziabad, scheduled for arrival there at 8-13 A. M. on 16th March.

Furthermore to ensure definite availability of bogies for the return journey on the 21st, it was considered feasible to offer to pay demurrage as the double bogie which would then be detained by the railway specially for our re-use, together with a

standard bogie in the Janata leaving Delhi on the 21st March. For this purpose, an initial deposit had to be paid several days before the 130 tickets were actually purchased.

Meanwhile the electrifying news that Mataji had suddenly reached Deoghar, and might come on to Calcutta percolated through to us at about this time, without any definite details being divulged. But when Swamiji himself arrived at Howrah on the 8th of March, his very presence presaged the imminent coming of Mataji in the near future.

On the 9th and 10th March I was extremely busy with Swamiji all over Calcutta, and it was only at 9 P. M. on the 10th that I realized that Mataji was arriving in Calcutta early next morning, but did not know where she might stay. As our chroniclers will have already recorded, Mataji duly arrived at 5-30. A.M. on the 11th at Howrah, left straight for the Ashram at Agarpara, but returned to Calcutta within 10 minutes of reaching there, to visit about half a dozen extremely sick and ailing devotees in their homes, before going back to Agarpara.

But this is another story that may be told some other day. Suffice it to say that Mataji's stay in the greater Calcutta area from the 11th to the 14th meant that all the amateur kirtanias destined for Ghaziabad were rushed off their feet, going to and fro between Agarpara and the newly built Niramay Hospital near the railway overbridge on Gariahatta Road, where Mataji spent the hectic nights of the 12th and 13th. Bhavani and I were among the crowd, that saw Mataji off at Howrah Station at 8.45 P.M. by the Kalka-Delhi Mail on the 14th evening, before we ourselves entrained in the 40 seater bogie of the

Janata Express at 9.25. P.M., the double bogie being filled with most of the professional kirtanias and khol players.

And now comes the crux of the story.

The Delhi Mail with Mataji on board correctly passed from Belur along the Howrah Burdwan Chord line, but whether it was Mataji's magnetic attraction, or the fault of the signaller or driver, or guard of the Janata Express, believe it or not, our train, scheduled to proceed along the main line via Bandel, was also bye-passed along the Chord line that evening after leaving Howrah! We had proceeded a few miles beyond Belur when the last daily passengers from Calcutta along the main line realised their predicament, pulled the alarm chain, stopped the train, beat up the driver, and then went along to the guard for violent redress of their grievance. Seeing the coast clear, our engine driver promptly ran away with his engine to Burdwan, leaving us stranded for hours, before the inevitable enquiry could be carried out, and a pilot engine could be brought to push us back to Belur to proceed onwards along the main line. The dawn of the 15th found us still at Asansol, 8½ hours late, until a locomotive could be brought from Chittaranjan to push us on to Jhajha. At Jhajha, there was another change of engine and crew, and we steamed off from there 9½ hours late.

Meanwhile, careful arrangements had been made in accordance with the kind and hospitable co-operation of the Jaipuria organisation to supply 260 covers of food at Moghul Sarai Station on the 15th March, to serve as our two major meals that day. The scheduled time of arrival at Moghul Sarai was 1-53 P.M., but in actual practice it was nearly 11 P. M. when we steamed into Moghul Sarai station.

But the painstaking dutiful Jaipuria agent was on the platform to meet us even at that late hour and provided us with very welcome delicious warm chapatties, vegetables and plentiful sweets, which were at that stage detained to last us for our late dinner and our midday meal on the 16th as well !

To add to our troubles we suffered throughout with continuous lack of water in the lavatories. But nothing could dampen our spirits for kirtan, and with such an august gathering and varied talent on board, we enjoyed a feast of top class folk songs and kirtan throughout the 15th and 16th, climaxed with our full Ashram Kirtan on the 15th evening.

We eventually reached Ghaziabad, not at 8.13 A.M., but at 4 45 P.M. on the 16th, over 8½ hours late, eagerly looking forward to seeing Mataji, and taking part in the *Nāma Yajña* over Holi. Had we reached Ghaziabad on the 16th morning, it was possible that the Kirtan party would have wished to perform the *adhivāsa kirtana* the same evening, and the *Nāma Yajña* from the sunrise of the 17th to the sunrise of the 18th to be followed by a full scale *Nagara Sankirtana* on the 18th afternoon.

But Mataji held different views, and it is my firm conviction that our train was delayed because she wished the *adhivāsa kirtana* to take place on the 17th evening, followed by an all night performance of our Ashram girls, and the *Nāma Yajña* proper to be held from sunrise on Sunday the 18th to sunrise on the 19th. This change in the programme certainly enabled the Delhi and Ghaziabad crowd of distinguished visitors to participate not only in the *adhivāsa* on the Saturday evening but also the major part of the *Nāma Yajña* on Sunday

the 18th. This however cut the time of the kirtanias somewhat short for their full programme of *Nagara Kirtana*.

It must be understood at this stage that the khardaha kirtanias had agreed to perform their annual *Shata Srikkhol Utsava* this year at Ghaziabad, and not in their home grounds, for two vital reasons alone, namely, to have a continuous memorable *darśana* of Mataji, and to be enabled to pay a visit to their sacred Vrindavan, before returning to Calcutta.

The *adhivāsa kirtana* duly started at about 8 P. M. on Saturday, the 17th by which time the huge pandal, the *mancha** round which the kirtanias would rotate for 36 hours, and the images of Sri Radha, Sri Krishna, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Nityananda Prabhu, together with a life like picture of Sri Hari Babaji, had been beautifully decorated and illuminated. There is an interesting story behind these images. Some time ago, when Sitaramji's local employees wished to celebrate Durga Puja, a Bengali member of his staff with artistic inclinations volunteered to mould the images. These were so outstanding that thenceforth this particular staff member has always been entrusted with similar tasks. For this occasion too, he had moulded with great devotion and inspiration the dual figures of Sri Radha and Sri Krishna, as well as those of Sri Nityananda and Sri Chaitanya, in accordance with the deities installed in our Vrindaban Ashram, which are said to be the supreme masterpiece of the renowned Calcutta sculptor, the late Sri Nitai Pal. As mentioned above, the *adhivāsa kirtana* started at about 8 P. M. on Saturday the 17 th., under the inspired guidance of veteran Sri Sisir Mukherji, who was one of

* *Mancha* Circular altar.

the two or three famous accompanying disciples of the well-known Vaishnava Saint Kirtania, the late Ramdas Babaji or Sri Path, Baranagore. Before the start, at the thoughtful request of Mataji, Panuda distributed beautifully decorated *Namāvallis* bearing the Mahāmantra, to each Sri Khol player.

The entire audience listened with rapt attention to the inspired singing, and towards the conclusion, Mataji requested all 100 Sri Khols to sound together for the first time in rhythm with the singing. The solemn grandeur of this moment defies description on paper.

From about 10. P. M., the Ashram girls under Kumari Chhabi Banerji took over for the night, and whenever lagging, Mataji personally encouraged them throughout most of the night. The girls handed over to the male kirtanias before sunrise on Sunday the 18th.

All that day the huge pandal was thronged with crowds from Delhi and Ghaziabad Districts and to the everlasting credit of Sitaramji, no one was turned away from participating in the midday meal.

Mataji had frequently appeared in the Pandal throughout the day but in the evening she suddenly entered the kirtana group performing round the *mancha*, and thereafter for nearly half an hour with Nani Banerji of Delhi at the harmonium, Mataji led the kirtana of the *Nāma Yajña* herself, with devotees thronging round her near the circular altar. That night the professionals excelled themselves with their melodious chanting of the *Akhanda Nama*. Their rendering of the Malkosh Rag in Jhaptal for over 2½ hours from 10 P. M. onwards was an outstanding performance.

On the 19th morning, well after sunrise, the *Akhanda Nama* was at last brought to a conclusion amidst scenes of grief and sorrow, and thereafter the first *Nagara Samkirtan* was taken out as a fitting corollary to the *Nama Yajna*. Swamiji had advised against appearing in public streets, and so the *Nagara Samkirtana* confined its route to going round the building housing Mataji and her party, while Mataji herself stood with folded hands on the steps to see them start off along this route.

There was an interval from 8 A. M. to 12 P. M., while the kirtanias had some rest, and the midday *bhoga** was prepared for Sri Chaitanya Deva, Prabhu Nitayananda, their three main associates and others, including 64 Mahantas.

All the 112 Srikhols were laid out in six rows, and picturesquely decorated for worship. The *bhoga*, *puja* and *ārati kirtana* were performed with great fervour and enthusiasm by the entire party in Mataji's presence. Then the Srikhols were worshipped just in front of her dais, and then the kirtanias trooped out with their Srikhols on the final *Nagara Samkirtana* which was a fitting climax to their celebration.

And now all the mridangas sounded together once again, in a grand crescendo, as the kirtanias filed out of the pandal along a route which was still confined to inside the factory compound, but which was more circuitous than the route, taken for the *prabhāṭphery*. The amateur kirtanias joined the procession in the wake of the professionals, and were all back round about 1-30 P. M. or so, after which the final time-honoured classical stanzas were quickly sung in Mataji's presence before the programme came to a culmination.

* *Bhoga* Food offered to a deity.

Thereafter the kirtanias were allowed to file singly to Mataji to perform their *pranāma* at her feet, each to be presented by her with a beautiful specially ordered tulasi-bead garland, a favourite with all true Vaishnavas. The kirtanias then departed for a hurried meal, before getting ready to board two large buses specially laid on to carry them by road to Vrindavan and back. Naturally under the circumstances they were late in starting, and reached Vrindavan not before 1-30 A. M. on the 20th morning. There they were put up in our commodious Ashram premises, and their meals were provided by the Jaipuria organisation during their stay until the 21st morning. When they returned to Ghaziabad, they were not only fed by their hosts before entraining in the three bogies of the Janata Express from Delhi that afternoon, but were also given two square meals in addition, to tide them over the long journey which was bifurcated at Moghal Sarai as the large double bogie had to be detached and joined to the 12 Dn. Express from Delhi, following an hour or so behind. But both sections of the party reached Howrah on the 23rd morning at the right time, thus ending what must have been a memorable, unique and indescribably happy episode in their lives. This account cannot be completed, without a reference to the outstanding courtesy, hospitality, and individual attention shown by the entire Jaipuria family and organisation throughout the festival, without which it could not have been possible to look after such a large mixed residential congregation over most of five days.

Mataji's grace was abounding and always there, and the gratitude and reverence of the kirtanias, many of whom had their first contact with her on this occasion, were something to be

seen to be believed. Her high praise is constantly being sung after their return to Calcutta, and they are only waiting for another opportunity to serve her wishes, should they ever be again called upon to undertake a similar mission in her august presence,

Jai Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu !

Jai Ma !

We may rest assured that nothing whatever happens on earth without God's permission. What a source of consolation to know that even the sufferings and adversities which God sends us are for our best, and have in view our eternal salvation. Ah, how great will be our shame when we stand before the judgement seat of God and see clearly the loving intention of Divine Providence in sending us those trials which we tried to evade, thus battling against our own salvation !

St. Alphonsus Ligouri

Umā Haimavati

A. M. Gupta, M. A.

The devas'¹ are the shining ones—bright in intellect, pure in heart, noble in soul. Truth, tranquility, compassion, gentleness, modesty, boldness, forgiveness fortitude—these are some of the traits in which the devas excel.²

The asuras are mere enjoyers—ostentatious, arrogant, selfish, conceited, wrathful, harsh, ignorant.³ They know not what to do and what to refrain from. Neither purity nor conduct nor truth is in them.⁴ They say—"The Universe is without Truth, without moral basis, without a God, brought about by mutual union, with lust for its cause—what else?"⁵

And the two types are constantly at war with each other. There is mention in the mythologies of a *hundred years' war*⁶ between the devas and the asuras.

The devas follow Rita⁷ (laws) of Brahman.⁸ They keep the asuras in their proper place and teach them a good lesson

1. V Div=to shine (Sans)
2. Gita--XVI, 2-3.
3. Ibid--XVI-4.
4. Ibid--XVI-7.
5. Ibid--XVI-8.
6. See Durgā Saptasati-II-2 (included in Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa)

whenever required. But the asuras sometimes defeat the devas by sheer brute force and drive them away from their region.

Now, Brahman gave victory unto the devas in one of these great wars on such an occasion.

For the nonce, the devas forgot Brahman—forgot the divinity within, forgot their dignity. They became vain-glorious. In their conceit the powerful devas—Indra⁹, Agni¹⁰, Vāyu¹¹, Varuna¹² and others behaved like deluded mortals, boasting in elation how they had vanquished the asuras by their own powers. All the credit for the victory they arrogated to themselves and gave thanks to none.

In a split second 'like the twinkling of the eye' like the 'flash of lightning' a light broke ahead—a Jaksha—an adorable luminosity! The devas knew not what or wherefrom.

7. "According to Rig Vedic Varuna-hymns Rita commands the winds to blow, the waters to flow and man to know, so that exactly as the conscious or partially conscious constituents of the Universe fulfill their specially assigned duties, so man should become clearly conscious of his own position and take his proper place as one party to the cosmic social contract"—Belly Heinmann, quoted in Vedanta Kesari, July '67. P. 158.
8. Brahman=Ultimate Reality variously expressed as "Creator-Preserver-Destroyer", "Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute", "Teacher of Teachers", Greater than the greatest—smaller than the smallest", Dispenser of Fruits of Action" etc.
9. Indra, the leader of the devas.
10. Agni, the deva appearing as Fire.
11. Vayu, the deva appearing as Wind.
12. Varuna, the deva appearing as Ocean.

They asked Agni—"ascertain for us, Agni, who the adorable one is."

"All right", said Agni.

Agni approached the Jakshā.

The Jaksha said—"Who are you?"

—"I am Agni, also known as Jataveda."

—"With such a name as you bear, what is your power?"

—"I can burn whatever there is in the world."

—"Burn this". A dry blade of grass was placed before Agni.

The burner of all things could not catch that dry blade of grass even with all his might.

Shamefaced Agni returned to the devas and said: "I have not been able to know it."

Then the devas asked Vāyu—"Ascertain for us, Vāyu, what is that."

"All right" said Vāyu and went.

—"Who are you?"

—"I am Vāyu or Mātarisvā."

—"With such a name as you bear, what is your power?"

—"I can sweep away whatever there is in the world."

—"Remove this." A dry blade of grass was placed before Vāyu.

Vāyu tried hard but could not move that dry blade of grass by a jot or tittle although he put forth all his energy.

Humbled, he went back to the devas and said—"I have not been able to know it."

Then the devas requested Indra—"Find out for us,

Maghavan, thou most powerful among the devas, what is the significance of this phenomenon."

"All right"—said Indra and went ahead. This time the Jaksha disappeared as if in disdain.

But Indra did not turn back like Agni and Vāyu but closed his eyes in meditation.

And in the space just occupied by the vanished Jaksha there appeared the *Giver of Knowledge of Brahman* : Uma Haimavati !

"Himala's daughter Uma, gentle, pure,
The Mother that resides in all as Power
And Life, who works all works, and
Makes of One the world, whose mercy
Opens the gate to Truth and shows
The One in All".¹³

Indra looked at Her with wonder and humbly enquired of Her who was the Jaksha who had just vanished.

"Brahman ! Be ye glorious in the victory of Brahman", said Uma.

Thus did Indra come to have a knowledge of Brahman who is the real victor behind all victories.

And as Agni, Vāyu and Indra, amongst the devas, were the first to come nearest to Brahman, they surpassed all the other devas in power and excellence.

"And so shall another be, who likewise comes to have a knowledge of Brahman."¹⁴

13. Swami Vivekananda.

14. The story is based on the Kena Upaniṣad.

TO MY MOTHER GANGA

By Radhapriya

**Oh, Sri Ganga ! ever flowing
Current of Love
You wash away all sorrow
all wordly attachment
My life flows into Yours,
Oh, Sri Ganga ! We are ever one !
All nature dances to Thy
Eternal Rhythm
Oh, it is as if Krishna
were standing before me
playing His Flute !
Entrancing beyond all earthly
desires art Thou—my Ganga Divine !
Om Jai Jagadisha Hare !
I bow at Thy feet and
I flow ever into Thee !
Thou art Beyond, within, without,
ever flowing Purity and Bliss !
Oh Bliss ! Oh mother Divine !
my Beloved Ganga, Thou art
Everywhere !
Transmuting Ganga ! Destroyer
of delusion ! Dissolve this ego
rock and transmute it into
Thee !**

Great Women In The Mahābhārata

Prof. Tripurari Chakravarti

1. Introduction

The Mahābhārata, the great Epic of India, has enshrined for us certain imperishable ideals of Indian womanhood. These ideals we find embodied in a most perfect manner in the lives of Gandhari, Kunti, Draupadi, Damayanti, Sita and Savitri. The most important of these ideals, however, is an abiding faith in *dharma* or the moral order of the universe. These noble women did realize that there was a moral law, ever present and ever active, which regulated the universe and made it an organic whole. *Dharma* to them was not merely a matter of ceremony or conventional ritual and forms ; it had a larger and more fundamental significance than that of religion as commonly understood by us. It included the whole individual and social conception of law and impulse, conduct and worship. *Dharma* in the entire *Mahābhārata*, really is the force or principle that binds together the entire universe. It implies also the union of traditional thought and faith, of common custom, loyalty and understanding that makes human society an organic unity. Patience, steadfastness and sincerity are needed for understanding and realizing this broad conception of *dharma*, and it is a matter of supreme satisfaction that the main women characters in the *Mahābhārata* rose to the level of this *dharma*, and by their character and conduct they proved that such a level of righteousness could be reached in human lives. They had no doubts

or misgivings as to the existence of this all-pervasive and all-embracing principle, and so at a moment of supreme crisis in the fortunes of the Kuru family, Gandhari could utter these ever memorable words to her son Duryodhana : "Where there is righteousness, there is victory." In the affairs of men, sometimes wrong-doing, no doubt, flourishes, but the eternal lesson of the *Mahābhārata* is that by unrighteousness man may prosper for some time, gain what appears desirable and conquer enemies, but he ultimately perishes at the root.

2. Gandhari

Undoubtedly; the noblest and best of the women characters in the *Mahābhārata* is Ghandhari. She more than any other person in the Epic kept her faith in the moral order undimmed, and in the hours of supreme crisis in her life, she always unhesitatingly sacrificed narrow, personal, selfish interest, and embraced the cause of virtue and righteousness. This she did even at the peril of herself and the fortunes of her family. She kept aloft the standard of *dharma* and asked others to act in the same manner. After the terrible disaster of the Kurukshetra War, in which she lost all her hundred sons and other near relations, Gandhari stood firm and maintained her unflinching faith in the triumph of the moral law, and she could boldly express her feelings to that effect.

The life-story of Gandhari, as depicted in the *Mahābhārata* may now be briefly told. Maharshi Krishna Dwaipayana, the famous author of the *Mahābhārata*, mentions her devotion to duty and righteousness in the very forefront of his introduction to the great Epic. Gandhari was the daughter of Subala, the king of Gandhara in the north-west of India. Bhishma, the

uncle and guardian of the Kuru prince Dhritarashtra was in search of a proper bride for the prince, and he heard from brahmins that Gandhari was an exceedingly pious and dutiful girl who would be Dhritarashtra's proper wife. Messengers were accordingly sent from Hastinapura to Gandhara with the marriage proposal. At first Subala had some hesitation in entertaining the proposal on account of the blindness of the bridegroom, but considering the nobility, greatness and reputation of the Kuru family, he decided to give Gandhari in marriage to Dhritarashtra. Gandhari, as soon as she knew that her husband was blind, made up her mind that she would voluntarily deny herself the pleasures of eyesight by wrapping her eyes with a thick bandage. This bandage she kept on throughout her life, never wavering for a moment—so great was her devotion to her husband.

Gandhari gave birth to one hundred sons, but these sons did not fulfil the expectations of the virtuous mother. She never approved of the conduct of her sons towards their Pandava cousins, and often appealed to her husband to check their evil propensities. In the game of dice at the court of Hastinapura Yudhishtira gambled away his all; he lost his kingdom, fortunes, his brothers and even his dear wife. There was great jubilation at the court, in which the old king Dhritarashtra also joined. But there was one person in Hastinapura on that day who was terribly stricken with grief. It was Gandhari. On seeing the base and irreligious conduct of her sons and the unmerited and unjust suffering of the Pandavas, she approached her husband and asked him to express his entire disapproval of the conduct of their wicked sons. She went even a step further,

and peremptorily told her husband to banish Duryodhana, who had become a disgrace to the whole Kuru family.

As a mother Gandhari never allowed her love for her sons to get the better of her judgment and wisdom. Her voice throughout the *Mahābhārata* is the voice of warning to her sons, who were treading the path of error and injustice. Her constant exhortation to Duryodhana was to make up the quarrel existing between the Kauravas and the Pandavas and to find a formula of peaceful and amicable settlement. When Sri Krishna came to Hastinapura on the eve of the Kurukshetra War as the plenipotentiary of the Pandavas with specific peace proposals, and when these proposals were being contemptuously rejected by Duryodhana, Gandhari throwing aside all hesitations appeared personally in the royal court of Hastinapura and sternly rebuked Duryodhana for his wayward conduct. She plainly told her son in the midst of the entire assembly that the wages of sin was death. She also said that war did not solve any problems; on the contrary, it led to further complications. So her definite and emphatic advice to her son was to restrain his greed and desist from war.

Duryodhana however, had no respect for these wise words of his mother and adopted war as an instrument of his policy. After the outbreak of the Kurukshetra War, which lasted for eighteen days, Duryodhana used to visit his mother every day before going to the battle-field, in order to seek her blessings. The pathetic prayer of Duryodhana was that his mother should wish victory for his cause, but in spite of his repeated entreaties, Gandhari always uttered the highly significant words before Duryodhana that righteousness always and invariably triumphed.

After the conclusion of the War, in which all her sons were slain, Sri Krishna, after pacifying Gandhari, asked her permission to go away immediately to save the Pandava Princes from an impending danger from Ashwatthama. She quickly asked him to depart and save the Pandava princes from this disaster; such was her composure in the midst of a terrible calamity, and so great were her sense of duty and her affection for the Pandavas. There was only one occasion when she seemed to be overpowered by terrible grief. Before the dead bodies of her sons in the battle-field of Kurukshetra, she fell unconscious to the ground.

Gandhari made Sri Krishna responsible for the Kurukshetra War and uttered a fearful curse on the Yadavas, of which he was the most distinguished representative. She prophesied that a cruel calamity would overtake the house of the Yadavas, inasmuch as Sri Krishna ignored or failed to prevent the ruinous war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. On the strength of her chastity and asceticism, she even said that Sri Krishna himself in no distant future would fall a prey to a foul death. It is important to bear in mind in this connection that Sri Krishna smilingly accepted this curse and recognized her truthfulness, piety and penance.

After the Kurukshetra War, Dhritarashtra and Gandhari lived for sixteen years at Hastinapura under the protection of the Pandavas. They forgot to a great extent their grief at the loss of their sons on account of the wonderful care and sympathy bestowed upon them by Yudhishtira. At the end of the sixteenth year, however, they decided to go on a final pilgrimage to the Himalayas. In this mission they were accompanied by Dhrita-

rashtra's half-brother Vidura, his minister Sanjay, and Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas. On the eve of their departure, Dhritarashtra addressed a big assembly of citizens of Hastinapura and men from the countryside. In this meeting Gandhari appeared by the side of her husband with her eyes bandaged and made a request to the assembled multitude through her husband asking their forgiveness of the sins of her sons.

The final departure of the sorrowful old King Dhritarashtra was pathetic. Kunti came forward to lead the journey. Gandhari put her hands on the shoulders of Kunti, and Dhritarashtra followed Gandhari, placing his hands on her shoulders. Vidura and Sanjaya were on either side of this procession. The citizens of Hastinapura wept aloud like orphans as the procession came out of the main gate of the city, but Dhritarashtra and Gandhari and others walked on unmoved. In the Himalayas, they spent a few more years till they were burnt alive by a conflagration which had enveloped that part of the forest in which they lived. Confronted by it, they showed remarkable courage and fortitude. They refused to escape from the fire; on the other hand, they sat down on the ground with calmness and in a spirit of resignation welcoming the approach of the flames. On the day of her passing away from the earth, Gandhari's eyes were still bandaged, and she made the supreme sacrifice with unflinching loyalty to her ideals. She exemplifies the best ideals of Indian womanhood through the ages from the days of the *Mahābhārata*, and remains immortal in the minds of millions of Indians who derive their inspiration from the great Epic.

3. Kunti

Kunti, throughout the *Mahābhārata*, is the embodiment of

patience, fortitude and self-sacrifice. She was the daughter of a king and was married to King Pandu of Hastinapura. She accompanied her husband to the Himalayas and lived for a number of years in a hermitage at North Paripatra. There she gave birth to three sons, Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna, and at the time of the birth of Arjuna, she heard the prophecy that this son of hers would in no way be inferior to Indra, the king of the gods, and that he would recover the lost glory and prestige of his family.

After the death of her husband, Kunti came to Hastinapura with her three sons and also with her two step-sons, Nakula and Sahadeva. She showed wonderful patience and forbearance while she passed her days under the care of King Dhritarashtra at Hastinapura. These were, to a certain extent, days of suffering and persecution, but Kunti bore them well, and after passing through the ordeal of fire at Varanavata, where Dhritarashtra and his son Duryodhana planned the burning of the entire Pandava family, she escaped with her sons, after crossing the Ganga and wandering for days together in the wilderness to the kingdom of the Panchalas. There Arjuna, by his prowess and skill in archery, obtained Draupadi, the daughter of the king of Panchala as his wife. The prophecy about him, which sustained Kunti throughout her life, was thus being fulfilled. The alliance of the Pandavas with the Panchalas now compelled Dhritarashtra to reconsider his former views regarding his nephews. He sent Vidura to the king of Panchala with a request to send Kunti and her sons back to Hastinapura, where they were now received with kindness, hospitality and honour. Yudhishtira was given half of the kingdom of the Kurus with Indraprastha on the Yamuna as his capital. Kunti was now the queen-mother,

