

**THE MOST GRACIOUS PRESENCE**  
**SRI MA ANANDAMAYI**



**Bithika Mukerji**

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**Volume Three : 1960-1982**

**BITHIKA MUKERJI**

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**DEDICATED AT THE FEET  
OF  
SHREE SHREE MA ANANDAMAYEE**

*eṣa ha devaḥ pradiṣonu sarvāḥ  
pūrvo hi jātaḥ sa u garbhe antaḥ  
sa eva jātaḥ sa janiṣyamānaḥ  
pratyanjams tiṣṭhati sarvatomukhaḥ*

**Śvetāśvataropaniṣad II. 16**

"This God, in sooth, is in all the quarters; long, long ago indeed, he had his birth, he (verily) is now within the germ. He had been born, he will be born, behind all who have birth he stands, with face on every side."

"Verily, I am with every one; after all, there is the One Supreme Being alone, isn't it so?"

- Sri Ma Anandamayi

"I had boasted among men that I had known you. They see your picture in all works of mine. They come and ask me, 'Who is he?' I know not how to answer them. I say, 'Indeed I can not tell.' They blame me and go away in scorn. And you sit there smiling.

I put my tales of you in lasting songs. The secret gushes out from my heart. They come and ask me, 'Tell me all your meanings.' I know not how to answer them. I say, 'Ah, who knows what they mean!' They smile and go away in utter scorn. And you sit there smiling."

Rabindranath Tagore

Gitānjali, No. 102

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## Publishers' Note

By Sri Sri Ma's *ahaituki kripa*, the third and last volume of Late Dr. Bithika Mukerji's book **The Most Gracious Presence: Sri Ma Anandamayi** is being published during the year of the Platinum Jubilee of Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth. It is absolutely in the fitness of things. Sri Sri Ma Herself nominated Bithudi together with Padmaji (Late Dr. Padma Mishra) as the twin guardians of the Kanyapeeth. All her life, she tried to justify this honour and privilege conferred on her by no less a being than the Supreme One.

Dr. (Km.) Bithika Mukerji (M.A., D.Phil. Allahabad University; Ph.D., Mc Master University, Canada) was born on 26 December, 1924 around 3 a.m. Bithudi, as she was known in the circle of Sri Ma's devotees, became associated with Sri Ma in her childhood along with her entire family and remained singularly devoted to Her for ever. While she was teaching philosophy at Banaras Hindu University, Bithudi was in close contact with Sri Ma's Ashram in Varanasi and the Kanyapeeth and successively held the ranks of Secretary, Vice-President and President on the Kanyapeeth Managing Committee rendering dedicated service with great love and commitment.

On 10 January, 2012 at the *brahmamuhurta* of 3 a.m. she breathed her last at her parental house, 31 George Town, Allahabad, hallowed by the holy feet of Sri Ma Anandamayi.

Bithudi wrote a partial biography of Sri Ma in 1964, which has long been out of print. Later she began writing a

much more elaborate and complete biography of Sri Sri Ma in three volumes the first two of which were brought out respectively in 2009 and 2011. Bithudi had a special flair for understanding Sri Ma's way of being in the world. Her personal knowledge of people and incidents she has written about, her deep commitment and painstaking research add up to the quality of authenticity to be appreciated by the cognoscenti. Richard Lannoy (author of *Anandamayi*, Element Books, England) writes that she is "a valiant and loyal interpreter."

The last few years of Bithudi's dedicated life were spent in giving shape to this volume and she indefatigably pursued this goal inspite of her indifferent health and awareness of the fast approaching end. She left the manuscript, partly typed, in the safe custody of her youngest brother, Sri P.K. Mukerji (Babuda), who according to her wish, passed it on to a member of the Sangha for editing and getting it ready for publication. This lady, formerly a student and later a colleague of the author, had promised her revered mentor to do the needful if the volume was not published during her life time.

Bithudi was a fastidious scrutinizer and self-critic. Like a perfectionist, she would revise her own writing until the script brought satisfaction to her. We missed her while getting this volume ready, trying at every step to approximate her standard of excellence and yet feeling somewhat inadequate. If we have been successful in accomplishing our task well, all the credit goes to the author and of course to Sri

Sri Ma's Grace behind everything. If there are shortcomings, we hold ourselves responsible and offer sincere apologies. An obvious lacuna is the omission of references. We regret that it was not possible for us to supply references due to paucity of time and other inconveniences. We crave our readers' pardon for this and other flaws if any.

Jai Ma

Guru Purnima  
12 July, 2014  
Varanasi.

**Publishers**



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"Can I ever adandon that one who desperately calls, 'Mother , where are you ,Mother, where are you?' -the one who remembers (Me) in his heart and fills his life with the Name, sees nothing in the universe excepting the form of my Image, one who does not speak ill of any other and is pained to see the sorrows of others; one who remains tranquil in his own sorrow and joy and does not harken to the calumny of others? When a child cries for his Mother and his tears flow, can I then stay away? Immediataly I give him the shelter of My arms."

Translation of a traditional Bengali song in praise of Mother Kali (*Shyama sangeet*) which was often sung by Sri Sri Ma's father and also by Sri Sri Ma Herself.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Ardha Kumbha Mela at Allahabad, 1960*

*"The Kumbha is the emblem of Hindu ethos as it were. A mammoth congregation resolute in their devotion to the Holy River proceeding one-pointedly toward their goal of spiritual emancipation, each free to be himself and yet gathering strength from the togetherness of a common commitment! The utter lack of worldly thoughts creates an atmosphere of purity which prevails over everything and affects all participants."*

—Sri Ma Anandamayi

This was the year of *Ardha-Kumbha Mela* at Allahabad. Swami Paramanandaji came to the town to arrange for the camps at the site of the *Mela*. Anandamayi Ashram was always allotted a spacious site in the *Mela* ground along with all other monastic orders. All such compounds were fenced in with ornamental gates in front. Pilgrims found their way to their own particular *akhara* guided by fluttering banners and colourful flags displaying distinctive insignia.

Sri Ma came to Allahabad on January 13 driving down from Vindhyachala. All along the road they had passed groups of villagers carrying their baggage, walking or riding all sorts of vehicles, toward the *sangam* (the confluence of the sacred rivers.)

Sri Ma came to Bindu's residence in the city and put up at

the cottage built for her near the main house. It was decided that she would stay in this cottage and visit the campsite from the city everyday. There was a reason for this. Sri Ma's devotee Niraj Nath Mukerji (Bindu's father) had passed away on 12th November during the *Samyam Saptah* of the previous year. His death was very sudden. Obviously he died in his sleep. As it transpired later, it was attended by incidents which were no less than miraculous. He had died during his afternoon nap around 3 p.m. This was the hour of *dhyana* or meditation during the *Samyam Saptah* being observed in distant Kolkata. Coincidentally Sri Ma got up at this time from her seat gesturing to all the young girls sitting near her to remain in their places. She beckoned Renu (Niraj Nath's daughter) to accompany her. Holding Renu's hand she went to her tent and lay down on her cot, a most rare or rather unique instance of breaking the routine of the *Samyam Saptah*. After a while she came back to the rostrum. The time of meditation came to an end and then it was the time for discourses. By this time news had been received from Allahabad. One of the brahmacharis went up to the rostrum and bending forward spoke in a whisper to Sri Ma, "Ma, Niraj Nath of Allahabad has just passed away!" He had not taken note of the microphone just in front of Sri Ma. The entire congregation heard the news but strangely Renu did not hear it. Her cousin Sidu and others sitting next to her looked at her in consternation but realized immediately that she had not heard anything. Sri Ma gestured to every one not to say anything to

Renu. After the session was over Sri Ma returned to her room. She said to Renu. "It is my *kheyala* that you are needed at home now. So go home and take Sidu with you." Renu thought that maybe somebody was ill. She was not too much worried because Sri Ma did not look as if there was anything amiss. So while Renu slept for a few hours, Sri Ma sat awake in her room directing arrangements for the quickest mode of travel. She arranged for a couple of plane tickets for Renu and Sidu. There were many people in the Ashram who were close to Niraj Nath but they were all asked to contain any expression of sorrow till Renu was on her way.

In Allahabad Bindu, confronted suddenly by the unexpected event, took it very hard and seemed devastated. When Sri Ma came to the cottage and stayed on he was conscious of her great compassion for him. In her continued gracious presence, he was able to get rid of the burden weighing on his heart and regain his normal buoyancy of manner. One bereaved family (Kanti Bhai Munshaw's) after another was sustained by Sri Ma's incomparable and inimitable grace and compassion.

Everybody in Allahabad had remarked on the serene expression on Bindu's mother's face at the time. She seemed to have acted with cool competence when she realized what had happened. She was alone in the house, as Bindu was out. She had immediately sent for a neighbour and then she had rung up the family doctor. She had proceeded to call the younger daughter at Varanasi by telephone. Much later her

children asked her, "Ma, how did you manage to make all these phone calls, you who had never had occasion to touch the telephone before? How did you find the numbers?" There was a strange bemused expression on her face. She said, "I don't know. I thought your father was asleep. I touched his shoulder to awaken him. As soon as I touched him I knew he was no more, at the same time I felt as if my right wrist was clasped by Sri Ma's hand very strongly. I do not remember at all what I did after that. It seems I was very practical and efficient. When Madan (Bindu's friend) came and took charge I felt I was trembling a little. I went and sat near your father quietly because it was not necessary for me to do anything further. I felt Ma was with me so I was not afraid or upset."

Sri Ma tided over the critical times from afar and near. Almost every family under Sri Ma's aegis could relate similar experiences.

On January 28, 1960 the whole throng of devotees bathed in the Sangam at the right time. (The new moon day of Magha that is *amavasya* is the time for the *Kumbha* at Allahabad). After this occasion the *Mela* starts breaking up slowly. Sri Gulzari Lal Nanda (a Minister of the Central Cabinet) was a devotee of Sri Ma. His interest in the religious way of life brought him to Sri Ma as frequently as he could manage to get away from his official duties. He called on Sri Ma at the camp. He said to her, "There was a very serious discussion in Government circles that we should discourage the assembly

of Sadhus and withdraw recognition of the ascetic orders but better sense prevailed. Sustained by your *kripa* I spoke strongly about the tradition of the *akharas* at the various *Kumbha-Melas*, so now we will continue as before."

Many auditors realized that a crossroads in the history of the gathering of Sadhus had been passed. It was clear that Sri Ma's authoritative countenancing of the saffron-clothed Mahatmas had brought about a change in the ethos of the general public. Sri Ma's travels and the presence of the Mahatmas on the dais everywhere had awakened an awareness of the dimension of renunciation in our culture. There were Sadgurus in many parts of India but their influence was personal and confined to a locality. Sri Ma moved among all levels of people everywhere. By showing total acceptance of asceticism as the highest achievement of human life, she certainly stemmed the tides of unbridled consumerism of the modern way of life. Only the future will show the effectiveness of this quiet reaffirmation of our ancient heritage. Sri Ma did nothing in a pioneering spirit. She truly was an "Onlooker" only as she said herself many times. But she demonstrated the *Shreyas* (the Good) and pointed the way toward its realization in life for everyone, for humanity.

After the *Ardha Kumbha* at Allahabad Sri Ma spent a little time in Vindhyachala. This Ashram being on a remote hilltop was usually quiet and very peaceful. It had a pervasive aura of serene contemplation which was experienced by all visitors. She came to Varanasi on the occasion of

Mahashivaratri on February 25. This was celebrated with the usual circumsppection and dedication by a large number of people who had gathered for this purpose. After Mahashivaratri Sri Ma returned to Vindhyachala.

Sri Ma left Vindhyachala to visit Etawah at the invitation of Jaichand Bajpai. The whole family was gathered together to welcome Sri Ma and perform *puja* on a very large scale. Sri Ma stayed here for a couple of days, February 28 to 29. Many plans were in train for Sri Ma's further travels but she began to experience a kind of breathing trouble. The normal rhythm seemed broken and creating some discomfort. Sri Ma of course said she was ready to follow the plans and that it made no difference to her. But Didi, Swamiji and others opted for Delhi, where they would have the support of eminent doctors and a host of devotees. She did not seem to improve in Delhi although the steady answer to inquiries about her health was uniformly "I am always well."

On March 7 very early in the morning she said to Didi "Let me go to Haradwar." Swami Paramananada being apprised of Sri Ma's *kheyala*, said, "When?" to which Sri Ma answered predictably, "Now!"

It took some time however to strike camp as it were. Sri Ma travelled in the big Kaiser car (given for her use by Kantibhai Munshaw). In Haradwar, Sri Ma usually stayed in Baghat House, a big *dharamshala* managed by the people of Jogibhai (The Raja Sahab of Solon) where a suite of rooms was reserved for Sri Ma. This time as they approached the city

Sri Ma said, "Let us go to Nitai's house. He has invited me many times to visit him."

They crossed the Ganges-Canal and entered Kankhal. Nitaida (as he was known to all) was a widower and lived alone in his small house on the banks of the river in the manner of an ascetic. He was thrilled and overwhelmed to see Sri Ma descending from the car at his door. He made haste to make suitable arrangements for her and her retinue. Sri Ma said, "Shall I go away to Baghat House?"

Nitaida, although flustered and nervous, prayed for her to stay saying he would organise everything as soon as possible. This was the right answer. Sri Ma took up her abode in one of the first floor rooms which looked out to the Ganges.

This auspicious beginning in time led to the construction of the magnificent and spectacular Ashram at Kankhal which now is the holy *peethasthan* for all devotees of Sri Ma Anandamayi. Nitaida's small and remote house named "Shanti Sadan", in a way, can be called the nucleus for the future main establishment of Anandamayi Sangha.

At this time Sri Ma stayed here quietly while devotees arrived from far and near to express concern for her health. Sri Ma smiled at everyone and said, "This body is always well. Whatever happens let it be so (*jo ho jaye!*)."

The business magnate Jugal Kishore Birla had sent his personal Vaidya (Doctor of Indian Medicines) to stay at hand. Even if Sri Ma did not take any medicine he was to report her welfare to Birlaji regularly. The even rhythm of Sri Ma's

breath seemed broken, at times alarmingly so, for the onlookers. Amongst those who knew her well, Jogibhai, the Rajmata of Tehri-Garhwal, the Raja and Rani of Mandi as well as others gathered in Kankhal to pray to her to give her *kheyala* toward recovery.

After seven days or so Sri Ma went to Saptarshi Ashram at the request of Narayan Dasji, an old man of great piety and devoted to Ma. She continued as she was. Sometimes the breath was tumultuous, sometimes broken and sometimes quite normal and even.

Haribabaji was expecting her to go to Bandh on the occasion of Holi. Kantibhai and Keshavabhai were sent to Bandh to apprise him of her indisposition as understood by her retinue. The Mahatma was ready to abandon all functions and come away to Rishikesh immediately. He was however persuaded to abide by the wishes of his own devoted villagers who were so eager to celebrate Holi in his company.

Haribabaji came to visit (March 14, 1960) Sri Ma at Saptarshi Ashram for a couple of days. Although the Ashram was supposed to be a quiet retreat for ascetics, the presence of Sri Ma attracted people from far and near. One day the Speaker of the Lok Sabha Sri Ananta Shayanam Aiyengar and his wife came to have her *darshan*.

Sri Ma's retinue of young women was considerable. One day Sri Ma had the *kheyala* to send them to Kishenpur Ashram to practise their own *sadhana*. Billo, Udas, Kripal, Pushpa, Buni, Chitra and Shobha reluctantly obeyed Sri Ma.

In truth it was not their aim in life to become ascetics, but just to stay near Sri Ma and have her *darshan* all the time. Sri Ma said to them, "You have left the world behind to follow an other-worldly way of life. Self improvement is necessary. The proximity of this body is not helping you to get rid of worldly ways of anger, feeling hurt, gossip and other such things. *Sadhana* is required to get rid of these worldly ways." Sri Ma continued in this strain for some time. Didi, in her turn, was concerned that Sri Ma was sending everyone away when she herself was not quite her normal radiant self. According to Didi Sri Ma needed attendance; since she herself could not do anything who would look after Sri Ma? Didi also knew (who better than she?) that Sri Ma never considered this aspect of the matter. She was always ready to manage with new comers if there were any or without anyone in case there was no one suitable. At this time Didi was relieved to see Parashuram's daughter Munni and her own younger sister Belu arrive to be with them. Sri Ma smiled and said, "See Didi, you were worrying needlessly!"

From Saptarshi Ashram Sri Ma went up to Anandakashi to be the guest of Rajmata Anandapriya. This devout lady had long prayed for her visit. The cottage for Sri Ma was situated amongst the beauteous surroundings characterising the foothills of the Himalayas.

It was time for the Vaidya to leave. On the eve of his departure he said, "Ma, what shall I say to Birlaji? Why are you having this breathing trouble? He will ask why I did not

treat you with ayurvedic medicines." Sri Ma said, "Pitaji, you see changes in the body. I am the same. Am I not seen to be laughing, talking etc? this is also like that. If you say a disease has happened then it is also a guest and just as all of you are around it is equally welcome."

Vaidyaji demurred. He said, "Why don't you send this troublesome one away?" Sri Ma said, "Where? Where is the place I am not? All is one. The disease and I am one. There is naught else but the One. Why make an 'other' of the disease? Everything is acceptable. The breathlessness also is a musical *kirtan* going on in its own rhythm." Sri Ma paused a little while the Vaidyaji gazed at her in bemused silence with folded hands. She then said, "You can tell Pitaji, that I am much better."

Sri Ma continued in Anandakashi for a few more weeks. The grandeur of the scenic beauty seemed a fit environment for Sri Ma. Rajmata Anandapriya graciously extended her hospitality to all those who came to visit the honoured guest. During this time an elderly Swiss lady came to Anandakashi. She was an adept in yoga, she said, and was accompanied by a young man who was learning yoga from her. Both of them seemed self-assured and were knowledgeable about the heritage of spiritual quest in India. The young man approached Sri Ma and said in a slightly aggressive manner, "Are you capable of bestowing some power? Give me something just as Ramakrishna gave to Vivekananda!"

Sri Ma said (translated by the Rajmata), "If there is

Vivekananda, Ramakrishna also will be manifest!"

The young man did not quite accept this answer; he continued to engage Sri Ma in dialogues about spiritual matters. One day he asked, "Why do they sound the conch shell?" Sri Ma said, "It is believed that there are five basic elements, fire, wind, water, earth and ether. We have five sense organs for relating to them. With everything we worship God and then we purify ourselves with the sanctified objects- the flowers, the incense the wicks of lamps, the ornamental fan or the sound of the conch. Sound is Brahman. It creates the solemn atmosphere necessary for the *puja* of God. One must worship by dedicating oneself totally in order to know oneself as the Totality."

Gradually the young man seemed to lose his truculence. He was on a genuine quest. He and his teacher prolonged their stay, not being able to tear themselves away from Sri Ma, as they said. Within this time a remarkable change came over the young man. He seemed calmer and more at peace with himself. Sri Ma gave them names : the young man became Ramananda and the lady Karunamayi.

The *Puja*-festival of Vasanti Devi was observed in Anandakashi. The temple of Shiva for three days assumed the look of splendour and magnificence usual with the *puja* of the Goddess. The simple precincts were decorated gorgeously. Plenty of offerings were at hand. In Sri Ma's presence the remotest corners of India became touched with the magic of fulfilment.



Another event which happened in Anandakashi was that Didi one day with some difficulty and hesitancy cooked a meal for Sri Ma. Sri Ma herself brought about this very heart-warming instance. When Didi was very ill in Mumbai and losing hope of recovery, Bhaiya had said to her encouragingly, "Didi, you will not only get well but will be able to climb to Anandakashi, and I will partake of a meal cooked by you." Now Sri Ma wrote to Bhaiya, "Here is Didi in Anandakashi and is well enough to cook again but where is Bhaiya?" So Bhaiya took some time off from his busy schedule and came for one day to Anandakashi. He was happy to find Didi on her feet and able to perform simple acts of service for Sri Ma, the only worthwhile object of life according to her as everyone knew. Incidentally this was a flash in the pan because Didi never did regain her former health.

On April 8 one Prof. Upen Datta came from Mussoorie. More than thirty years ago when Sri Ma had come to Mangala Giri Ashram at Haradwar with her father he had been residing there with Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj. He now told the assembled company how he had seen Sri Ma lying in *samadhi* for many hours. He said that it was impossible to give expression to the utter beauty and majesty of her appearance especially at the time when she was slowly rousing out of *samadhi*. It was an experience of the proximity of divinity. Never in this life would he forget that experience of something utterly beautiful.

The professor related another incident which had happened to his relative recently. He and his son's father-in-law (also known to Sri Ma) were in Mussoorie during the Vasanti-puja earlier in the month. On Mahashtami day his relative had suddenly exclaimed, "Sri Ma is here! She has a yellow crown on her head. Don't you see her?" The professor had not seen anything. His relative realized it was a vision he had seen. Didi and the other auditors marvelled at this story because on Mahashtami day a crown of yellow flowers had been put on Sri Ma's head by Rajmata Anandapriya.

Sri Ma said, "Sometimes such things happen. On that day when they were putting the flower-ornaments on this body I had a strong *kheyala* about Jyoti Kanchan (the professor's relative) and his wife. Many years ago Jyotish and I had gone to Mussoorie one day. Jyoti Kanchan's wife had cooked a meal for us. All these things were coming to my *kheyala*." Evidently Sri Ma's *kheyala* was so strong that Jyoti Kanchan had not only felt her presence but had seen her. Sri Ma related another similar story to the little group of people sitting in her room. She said, "On the same day (of the visit to Jyoti Kanchan at Mussoorie years ago) Jyotish and I descended to Dehradun. As we were trekking down I asked Jyotish if he was carrying any water. The heat was considerable and there was no water anywhere near us but after a short while I said to Jyotish, 'Never mind about the water. Atal in Rajshahi is offering me fresh pieces of water melon. That has quenched my thirst.'

"On arrival in Dehradun, Jyotish wrote to Atal immediately asking him to tell him what he was doing that day and hour if he could remember. In due time Atal's answer came saying he was indeed giving in *bhoga* fresh pieces of water melon to this body!"

### **Janmotsava in Mumbai**

This year's (1960) *Janmotsava* was celebrated in Mumbai. The venue was Bhaiya's house in Ville Parle. Sri Ma stayed in her own cottage. The teeming crowd of devotees was accommodated in various nearby buildings, mainly a very large school building standing empty now because of the summer vacation. Many local families came over from their town houses to live in Parle. In the overall atmosphere of an ongoing *satsang*, many people forgot dates or what day it was. They just hurried everyday to the *satsang* not wanting to miss any programmes. Several Mahatmas came to grace the occasion. Haribabaji, Avadhootji, Akhandanandaji and Yogesh Brahmachariji were well known to the congregation. Now they had the rare opportunity of listening to the very charming discourses of Vishnu Ashramji Maharaj. Swami Madhava Tirthaji came for a few days. Swami Maheshwaranandaji, Mahantji, Vasudevanandaji and Swatantranandaji were daily visitors.

The congregation was also fortunate in their wealth of musical talent. Chhabi Banejee had come from Kolkata. Her very melodious and sonorous voice added new dimensions to the daily *kirtans*. She was a very devout person dedicated to

the worship of her *Ista-Devata* (Image of God). Although a professional singer, she had cancelled many an important engagement to be with Sri Ma in Mumbai. In time Chhabi became one of Sri Ma's close companions. After the *Janmotsava* Sri Ma went to Pune for a few days. Here Nandaji and his wife Prameela had made adequate arrangements for Sri Ma and her large entourage. The weather was pleasant and very soon Nandaji's house was teeming with crowds of devotees. Since Haribabaji was also in Pune, all his programmes of *kirtan*, *raslila* and *satsang* were duly observed.

### **Sri Ma anticipates the disconsolate mood of her young devotees :**

One evening while Haribabaji was reading from a text, Sri Ma turned a little in her seat and whispered some instructions to Billoji.

After the reading was over Shobhan Brahmachari asked if he could speak to the Mahatma. Permission being given, he said, "We have a prayer. We all wish to tread the path of spirituality. The sacred texts say that if a man walks one step toward God, He comes forward seven steps. In reality we are experiencing the opposite. The way is becoming harder and longer!" Haribabaji said, "This path is full of hazards and it is but natural that you should experience hardships. You must be patient. God is not far but he tests the strength of your application."

Biren (rather unusually for him) added his prayer, "Baba,

you must help us. Time is rushing by, we seem to achieve nothing. "Other young men appealed to the Mahatma to show them the way. This cry of despair, as it were, affected everyone and created a solemn atmosphere. Haribabaji said in his soft voice. "There is a poem in Urdu, which says, 'O God, my boat is sinking in midstream, be gracious and steer it to the shore!'"

Shobhan exclaimed. "This is right, Ma will save us all!"

After the *satsang*, Haribabaji went away for a little while. Although Sri Ma left at the same time she came and sat again on the *chowki* in the *pandal*. She had instructed Pushpa to sing the song she had dictated to Billoji earlier.

Pushpa sang :

*He Bhagavan (God), he Bhagavan,  
Forgive us our sins.  
Show the way to those who stray,  
O my beloved,  
help to reform ourselves.  
Take away the sufferings, these sufferings  
Be gracious, be gracious  
to our yearnings.*

Sri Ma herself added her sweet voice to Pushpa's. The song, tune and rhythm touched everyone's heart. As if the yearnings of all hearts had found expression in these simple lines. A beautiful atmosphere was created as if binding in loving accord the pilgrim and his beloved, God.

It seemed Sri Ma had anticipated the anguish and was

ready with her inimitable touch of compassion. Did she also dispel Shobhan's doubt about the ever-ready Divine succour for the pilgrim?

Pune continued to enjoy *matri-satsang*, thanks to the unstinting hospitality of Nandaji and his wife. It was at times marred by the sad news of deaths of old devotees. On June 6, Parashuramji died in his sleep in Dehradun. It was another case like Niraj Nath of Allahabad. It was recalled that Sri Ma had stayed quietly in her room away from the *satsang* that day. His was a life of total dedication by, as it is said, *tan, man aur dhan* (body, mind and wealth).

Members of several princely families from far and near were gathered in Pune at this time. The ladies of these prestigious families wanted to hold a function for Sri Ma. One night the Ashram was cleared of all men-folk (because some families observed *purdah*). The princesses decked themselves in beautiful clothes, jewellery and flowers. They performed the Gujrati *garba* dance in front of Sri Ma. It became a gala occasion with *puja* and *arati* to Sri Ma.

All festivities must end sooner or later. The time arrived when the devotees of Pune bade a sad farewell to Sri Ma while the people of Mumbai prepared to receive her with joy. The same atmosphere of festive celebrations prevailed at Bhaiya's house for a while. Sri Ma then went up to Delhi, to the Ashram at Kalkaji. On July 8, 1960 the occasion of Guru Purnima was celebrated with great enthusiasm. Jugal Kishore Birlaji was of much help in matters of big feasts for all devotees. He was a

frequent visitor whenever Sri Ma was in town. His great wish was that moral uprightness would prevail everywhere and become a characteristic of the nation.

At this time Sri Subimal Dutta came in close contact with Sri Ma. He was the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India. His quiet unassuming manners and dignified look reminded many of Bhajji. Sri Ma said he had many of Bhajji's characteristics as well as his looks.

From Delhi Sri Ma drove upto Kishenpur Ashram in Dehradun. On this trip up to Dehradun they met with an accident. Two children suddenly dashed across the road. The boy was unhurt but his small sister was hit by the swerving car. The motorcade stopped. The little girl, who was a Muslim, was taken to a nearby hospital by one of the following cars. Sri Ma's car had to stop till the police came and finished with their enquiries.

Sri Ma descended from the car and entered the nearby residence of a Punjabi gentleman. All his family came out to see Sri Ma. Sri Ma was surrounded by the children of the house. She immediately entered into conversation with them. To her question, whether they prayed to God, one teenaged girl said she read the Ramayana every day. Sri Ma sat under a big *bilva* (*bel*, wood apple) tree while the girl Krishnalata, at Sri Ma's request, recited portions from the Ramayana. Krishnalata seemed bewildered but attracted to Sri Ma. Sri Ma had found a devotee unexpectedly under unusual circumstances.

Sri Ma's car being released she continued on her journey. The little girl was well. All her expenses at the hospital were paid by Panuda on behalf of the Ashram. Now it was the turn of the devotees of Dehradun to experience the delight of Sri Ma's presence in their town. For the last three years Sri Ma had been experiencing a kind of sound in her head. Sometimes it would increase and at other times it abated. Not that the public or the general assemblies of devotees knew anything about this constant discomfort. Sri Ma always looked serene and her inimitable smile was never absent for long. Only Didi and a few other close companions heard about this from Sri Ma. But they could do nothing but pray helplessly for Sri Ma's own *kheyala* to deal with the problem.

On 18th July, Sri Ma had the *kheyala* to spend one night on the verandah of the Temple in Ananda Chowk where she had stayed with Bhajji more than thirty year ago. This was a rare experience for Shobhan, Kamal and Chinmaya, the only companions she took with her in her own car (the Kaiser). Nobody else knew about her programme, so this was like a flashback to the earlier life of random wanderings.

Due to the very ardent prayers of Haribabaji and Avadhootji. Sri Ma descended again to Vrindaban on the occasion of Jhoolan Purnima. Avadhootji had made elaborate arrangements for her reception in her own Ashram. The Mahatma identified himself completely with Sri Ma's Ashram and knew quite well that Sri Ma was equally at home in her own Ashram or any wayside inn or even just under a

tree anywhere. After the gorgeons celebration at Vrindaban she travelled to Varanasi on August 11, 1960 to be with the girls of the Kanyapeeth on the occasion of Janmashtami.

### Varanasi

The Ashram quickly settled into a routine. Visiting hours were fixed. The devotees followed the timings. The only exceptions were Mm. Gopinath Kaviraj and Kali Babu, a *sadhaka* of some reputation. These two erudite scholars came in the late evenings and stayed discoursing with Sri Ma for long hours. It is a pity that there being no auditor to these dialogues much of this valuable *vani* is lost to us. Anil Ganguly from Kolkata was visiting Sri Ma at this time. He was a long time follower of Kali Babu whom he knew to be a man of considerable spiritual achievement. One day Kali Babu spoke to Anil Ganguly who had gone to pay his respects to him, "Ma is a very powerful personality but so utterly beautiful. She is the quintessence of all poetry!"

On August 15, 1960 a great shadow of sadness descended on the Ashram. The much respected Dr. Gopal Dasgupta died in Kolkata. Dr. Dasgupta besides being a prestigious practitioner of medicine was a great humanitarian missionary. He had started a centre for distributing milk free of charge to children. This place near the Temple at Sankat Mochan in Varanasi was also a small Ashram. He himself was an uncompromising agnostic but was totally devoted to Sri Ma as a personification of Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

The Ashram lost a dedicated well-wisher, a stalwart

supporter of all its concerns.

The last week of August saw Sri Ma in Vindhyachala. Her departure from Varanasi was sudden. Arriving in Vindhyachala she sent her car back to Varanasi with the message that if some persons came with sweets for her they were invited to come. Sri Ma had the *kheyala* to await them! Since she had unexpectedly left town, she sent word and a means of transport for them to go where she was. She returned again to Varanasi to attend the yearly *Bhagavat Saptah*.

### Durga Puja in the new Ashram at Kolkata

Travelling through a few towns Sri Ma arrived in Kolkata on September 19. The spacious grounds of the new Ashram immediately began to fill up with crowds of devotees. Sri Ma remained mainly at the Ashram. Didi and others dissuaded the devotees from asking her to visit various residences in the town but Sri Ma seemed her normal radiant self from the first day of the *puja*. Whatever the reason for her *kheyala* of recovery, everyone was pleased.

On the main day of the *puja* (*Mahashtami*) the princess of Ramgarh presented Sri Ma with a costly silk sari, a string of pearls as a necklace and other items of jewellery and fruits, flowers, sweets and so on. These items were lying at her feet. One of the children crowding round stretched out her hand asking for the string of pearls. Sometimes those who offered gifts to Sri Ma would take them back as blessed items for their own use in the family, so Sri Ma did not give the necklace away. Later the princess assured her that everything was for

her to do with as she wished. Sri Ma then asked Udasji to keep the pearls in readiness for the young girl who would surely come again. On the last day of the *puja* while Sri Ma was distributing sweets to all she recognized the girl and gave her the pearl necklace. The next day the girl came to show Sri Ma that she was wearing her necklace. The white jewels on her very dark-complexioned skin looked strangely beautiful. Narayana Swamiji asked in some curiosity if she was anybody special. Sri Ma said, "When I was staying in Ashtagram I knew a family of low-caste people living near our house. They were very friendly to me and sought opportunities to help me with my household chores. I have a *kheyala* that the young girl of that family has been born as this one here."

No account of a big function can be complete without paying tributes to the untiring efforts of those who cooked mammoth meals and helped to serve them also. Hemididi, Giribala Didi and others were as efficient in the kitchen as were Mataripishima, Sushilamashima and Thakurma of earlier days. Those who have had the good fortune to taste this *prasada* (food) will always remember them with gratitude and love.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### The Development of Nimsar as

#### Naimisharanya

*What is dharma? Those actions which are conducive to attaining to Him who is desirable for everyone. This is also the natural way of life.*

—Sri Ma Anandamayi

Sri Ma Anandamayi had visited Nimsar many times during her travels. Nimsar was a small town near Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh. Nimsar was a place of great sanctity because it is the holy site of the original discourses given on the eighteen *Puranas* compiled by Maharshi Vyasa. Thousands of sages had assembled here to perform *yajnas* and listen to the *Puranas*, narrated by eminent speakers.

A few of Sri Ma's close companions became aware of her *kheyala* for a suitable function at Nimsar which would give it some recognition as hallowed ground. It was decided that the annual *Samyam Saptah* of 1960 would be celebrated at Nimsar. Not only the *Saptah* but after it an ambitious scheme for holding not one but 108 *Bhagavat Saptahs* was mooted and daringly decided upon. The devotees were confident that Sri Ma's *kheyala* would see them through as always.

Swami Paramananda came to Lucknow to meet and consult with Government officials whose help would be

needed to organise a function of such mammoth proportions. The officials were eager to help but there were disquieting news of flooding in Nimsar. This year the river Gomati had risen in floods. The area earmarked for the function was totally submerged. Swamiji quite undeterred by this news came to Nimsar accompanied by the officers who were interested in the scheme. The reports were true, the whole area was under knee-deep waters.

The officials expressed their disappointment. Swamiji, however, knew that if such were Sri Anandamayi Ma's *kheyala* then all impediments to it would vanish in good time. He sent a telegram to Sri Ma who was in Dehradun at this time. It so happened that a glass of water had been brought for Sri Ma when she was given the news of the floods at Nimsar. She said, "Is that so? Maybe due to God's Grace the waters will recede in time." Sri Ma Anandamayi then drank off the full glass of water. The people standing around her felt this to be a good omen and became optimistic about future events.

At Nimsar, Swamiji's dogged determination to begin work under such dire conditions puzzled the officials. They tried to dissuade Swamiji from what they considered to be futile efforts. They said, even if the flood waters receded in time the ground would be so soggy that no kind of temporary structures like *pandals*, tents or cottages could be erected safely. Swamiji smiled but would not be persuaded to abandon his efforts. The bewildered officials realized that a miracle was taking place in front of their eyes. Within a record



Sri Ma holding the Image of  
Sri Padmanabhan



Sri Ma and the image of Ma Kali  
at Ranchi Ashram



Sri Gopalji on His sandalwood throne in  
Anandajyotir Mandir, Varanasi.





Purana Purusha in the  
Purana Mandir at  
Naimisharanya



Sri Ma and "Didima" Swami Muktananda Giriji



Sri Ma roused from *samadhi*, with Gurupriya Didi

time the grounds emerged dry and firm as if a magic wand had been wafted over them. Swamiji's faith was justified.

Soon a temporary township came into being with facilities for accommodating the crowds which started pouring in for the *Samyam Saptah*. Sri Ma had been inviting everybody she met to come to Nimsar to avail of the opportunity of the *Samyam-Vrata* and also the *Bhagavat Saptah*. So the number of participants grew to 500 and over!

It was Sri Ma's *kheyala* that different *Puranas* would be chosen for reading at each *Samyam Saptah*. In this way the devotees would have the privilege of listening to all the eighteen *Puranas* considered authentic in our tradition. The *Purana* chosen for Nimsar was *Brahmavaivarta Purana*. It came as a surprise to the organisers that no copy of this text was available anywhere. After much research one copy was procured from a remote place in the South.

Sri Ma said to Avadhootji, "Is it not strange that right in Nimsar, the legendary home of the *Puranas*, such a thing should happen?" She further suggested that a copy each of the *Puranas* be collected and housed in the Ashram of Swami Naradananda, the prestigious Mahatma of Nimsar, or even in the house of some pious and willing priest.

Avadhootji made himself responsible for carrying out this *kheyala*. In time a full collection was made. Moreover a beautiful *Purana Mandir* was established. The Image of *Purana Purusha* was researched and given form by expert sculptors. The Temple housed all the *Puranas*. But all this lay

as yet in the future.

For the time being the *Saptah* proceeded as a very successful undertaking. At this time a piece of land on Hanuman Tila was acquired for an Ashram by the Sangha. Swami Naradananda, a long time resident of Nimsar, became well acquainted with the devotees of Sri Ma. He became one of the very prestigious of "Pitajis" in Sri Ma's Ashram. This *Samyam Saptah* became memorable for many reasons. The extra-large attendance indicated the ever increasing popularity of this week of abstinence and *sadhana* in the radiant presence of Sri Ma and the galaxy of ochre-robed ascetics. Many of these Mahatmas were recluses but they always responded to Sri Ma's invitation. Such an erudite scholar was Sri Chaitanya Giriji Maharaj whose discourses were very popular. He used to invite questions from the audience. One man stood up and said, "Maharaj, our children are being educated in modern schools. They ask awkward questions which we can't answer. They ask why it is that all good and devout people seem to suffer unaccountably whereas the obvious evil-doers seem to flourish."

The Mahatma smiled and said, "This is not a modern question. It is an ancient query put to Yudhishtira by his wife Draupadi. She said to him, "You are righteousness incarnate, so we are living like thieves in hiding in forests, while evil minded people are ruling our kingdom!"

The answer to this question is that time is infinite; it cannot be measured by our small scales. Take the example of

a daily-wage earner. You engage a labourer and pay him his dues at the end of the day. But at lunch-break he eats the food he has brought with him from home. He is enjoying the previous day's wages while he is providing for the future today. Man is not born in random circumstances. He must abide by all these but what he does in this life is his own affair and this will determine the future. We are looking at the effects but not the causes. It behoves him to consider that everything is linked by cause and effect in this world."

After the *Samyam Saptah*, the equally popular function of *Bhagavat Saptah* was celebrated with the usual dedication and scrupulous care which characterised all such rites conducted under Sri Ma Anandamayi's aegis.

Ancient Naimisharanya again resounded to the sounds of the solemn recounting of Divine *Lila*.

One of Sri Ma's old-time devotees Prayag Narain and his wife were living like Vanaprasthis (hermits retired from the householder's life) in a nearby retreat on the banks of the Gomati. They had prayed very often to her to visit their hermitage. This was granted now. There were many huts in this place. One of them was specially prepared for Sri Ma. It was far away from bustling crowds. After the hectic activities of Nimsar Sri Ma's companions found the quietude of this hermitage very soothing. As far as Sri Ma was concerned none had ever discovered her preferences simply because she had none!

The hermitage of Prayag Narain settled down to a daily routine of *satsangs* for the inmates as well as visitors from

nearby towns. One day Sri Ma related a story to the small gathering in front of her :

A king was troubled by questions about his understanding of God. He invited an assembly of erudite savants and said he would ask four questions. Whoever could give satisfactory answers would be rewarded suitably. The questions were :

1. Where does God live?
2. What is His food?
3. When does He laugh?
4. What does He do?

The scholars made various learned answers but none was to the satisfaction of the king. The assembly was dismissed. A simple farmer had his abode near the palace. He saw groups of people going away and asked, "What is happening in the palace and who are these people?" When he was told about the king's questions he said, "Is that all? I can easily answer these questions!"

The courtiers were amused and thought they would have some fun at his cost. So they invited him to the *darbar* (audience-chamber) and presented him to the king saying the farmer was ready to answer his questions. The king said "Is that so? Well, let me hear the answer to the first question: Where does God live?" (where is God?)

The farmer rejoined promptly "Where does He not live!" (Where is He not!) The king was pleased. He put his second question : "What does God eat?" The answer came back

quick. "He eats the egoity in man!" This answer also pleased the king. He asked, "When does He laugh?" The farmer said, "When a man is born and cries! You see, in the unborn state he prays with joined palms 'Deliver me from this prison, O Lord! I shall for ever devote myself to you!' But as soon as he is born he forgets his promise and begins to be of the world. God laughs."

The king found this answer satisfactory. He asked the last question, "What does God do?" The farmer was silent. At length the king said, "What's the matter? Don't you know the answer?" The farmer replied, "Sire, this is a difficult question. I need to establish myself properly in a suitable position before I answer." The king, very eager for the solution now, said, "Name your terms."

The farmer said, "I need a position of the highest authority; so will you please come down here where I am standing, so that I can sit on the throne?"

The king had received satisfactory answers to three questions. He willingly came down to where the farmer was standing. The farmer went up to the throne and sat upon it comfortably. Time passed but he did not speak, so tension mounted in the *darbar*. The king at length asked, "What is it? Don't you know the answer!" The farmer said, "I have just demonstrated the answer! God can do anything : He can give a poor man the highest rank and reduce a rich man to a poor status."

Grinning hugely the farmer came down from the throne

and bowed to the king. The king accepted the solution to his problem and rewarded him suitably.

The audience was very pleased with this story. There were other meaningful dialogues between Sri Ma and the serious-minded seekers of Truth. One day an ascetic sitting with the group of people assembled in front of Sri Ma started a discourse on Brahman. He said, "Brahman is one. Maya is the experience of duality. When this false-knowledge is dispelled then Brahman abides in Itself."

One of the audience objected, "If Brahman is one from where does Maya come?"

Sri Ma smiled and asked the ascetic to solve the doubts of the interlocutor. The *sadhu* entered upon an erudite discourse on Maya. He said in effect that Maya was an illusion only, it had no reality. Realization of truth means the dispelling of this very delusion that there is duality. The interlocutor was not satisfied and continued to find fault with this thesis. Then Sri Ma said, "Why do you say Maya hides Brahman? He himself plays with Himself. He alone is."

The questioner accepted this view of the matter.

Another question was asked by a different person. "If God is doing everything and nothing may happen without His *kheyala* that it should be so then I do not need to do anything. My burden is being carried by Him. So why should I worry?"

Sri Ma said, "Pitaji, if you could abide in this realization then truly nothing needs to be done! But is that so? You are repeating words you have heard from others. Your efforts at

*sadhana* are required in order to experience the truth of this statement."

A question was put to Sri Ma from another angle. One of the men asked, "Ma, I take great delight in the world. If I get involved in *sadhana* then I shall have to give up pleasures of the world!"

Sri Ma smiled and said, "Pitaji, how much pleasure can the world give? You do not know, but a taste of the happiness of that other dimension will make all this seem insipid and banal. Besides why do you think you have to give up anything? Just make a connection with the Divine. All that needs to happen will happen; that which should be eschewed will fall away, gradually."

Question : "That is the difficulty! How to make the connection?"

Sri Ma : *Satsang!* Keep company with those who are treading this path; read books which talk about such matters, spend a little time with the Name, that is, do a little *japa*. The Name is identical with the Named so you will be in touch. If nothing appeals, then just sit quietly for a while in order to offer a prayer : 'I do not know you! Be gracious and show me the way to come to you!'"

The interlocutor seemed already touched and gazed in awed silence at Sri Ma.

The time for a break-up of camp was soon upon them. Prayag Narain and his wife bade farewell with heavy hearts. At this time Didi heard about a miraculous incident which

involved one of the invited scholars to the function at Naimisharanya. Prof. Vashishtha Sharma of Banaras Hindu University had come to read one of the sacred Books on the occasion. He was well known to the people of the Ashram because he was tutoring Chandan, one of the senior girls of the Kanyapeeth. He was a saintly elderly man who rendered this service to Sri Ma's Kanyapeeth.

The grils of the Kanyapeeth escorted by the Railway Engineer Harish Banerji (posted at Varanasi) travelled down the same route on the day after the Panditji had left Naimisharanya. When they came to Balamau Station they heard rumours of an accident to a Panditji. Kshama (The in-charge of the Kanyapeeth) had a premonition. She asked Harish Banerji to make enquiries. He was directed to the local Hospital at Sandila. He found the Panditji sitting on his bed. He looked serene and quite composed. Harish Banerji was astounded to discover that his entire left arm had been cut off from the shoulder! He had descended from the train to fetch water. Unnoticed by him a stationary goods train had moved suddenly knocking him down and his arm was severed. Panditji had fainted. On regaining consciousness he had picked up his arm and walked back to the platform. His train had left. The Railway people gave him some emergency treatment and then sent him on to a Hospital at Sandila as there were no such facilities in Balamau.

Harish Banerjee was impressed by the calm aspect of the scholar. He made arrangements immediately for better

treatment. The scholar wished to go back to Varanasi. The Doctor said that the patient's heart and pulse were absolutely normal so he could travel. His son was sent for. Panditji returned to Varanasi where he was looked after expertly by the University Hospital.

Chandan and Panuda went to visit him with offerings of sweets and flowers. The Professor very calmly told them not to be distressed on his account. He knew that he had been saved from death which was ordained for him at this time. He was not in pain and had experienced Divine Grace at the time of the accident. This statement was very credible because otherwise none could have behaved as he had done at the time. That he had not bled to death was in itself a miracle.

November 23, the day of departure, arrived all too soon for Prayag Narain and his wife. On this day Sri Ma received an unexpected visitor, Sri Mohananandaji Maharaj. (the inheritor of Sri Balanandaji Maharaj's position and status at Deoghar). He came with a large retinue of his devotees. They were made welcome by Sri Ma. Didi with the willing help of the local people provided a more than adequate meal for the visitors. There was some lighthearted banter regarding the unexpected nature of the visit. One of the ladies in Brahmachariji's retinue said, "Ma is all-knowing, *antaryamin* (Inner Witness). What is the need for sending word of our arrival? She always knows everything." The Brahmachariji endorsed this views. He said, "That is so!"

Sri Ma, "Pitaji, one should not demand to see the signs of the supra-natural within the scale of the natural."

Brahmachariji, "This is quite possible."

Sri Ma, "Pitaji, do you say that omniscience belongs to the natural order?"

Brahmachariji, "Yes, why not! All is one after all."

Everyone realized that Brahmachariji had avoided the crux of the matter. Yet in a way he was perhaps right. He had known Sri Ma for more than thirty years, so he had seen the commingling of the two dimensions many times.

The end of the year 1960 found Sri Ma in Kolkata. She had responded to the prayers of the devotees to spend a few days in their town. She arrived in Kolkata on December 25. She had the *kheyala* to visit four of her ailing devotees who had been bed-ridden before she went to the Ashram at Agarpara. So Jyoti (The daughter of Ganga Charan Dasgupta), Binay Sen, Kanu Bose and Suren Banerjee were able to have *darshan* of their beloved *Ista Devata*.

At Agarpara all was joy and celebration to mark Sri Ma's coming to the Ashram. Many festivities were put in train and many people had the felicity of receiving Sri Ma in their own houses. One such visit was marred a little by the sudden loss of a basket of silver utensils, which in general formed a part of the baggage of Sri Ma's retinues. Everyone began a frantic search. On being told about the loss Sri Ma broke into a peal of her inimitable laughter saying, "It is His will-He will give it to whoever He wills."

At this time the driver of the taxi returned carrying the basket. It had been left in his taxi. At Sri Ma's suggestion the largest bowl of silver was given to him. She gave him the towel which in general was draped over her head. The Sikh driver said, "What shall I do with these? If you are giving then give me something of real value!" Sri Ma said to him, "Use this bowl to offer '*bhoga*' to Guru Nanak Deva. Use the towel to cover the *bhoga* before *puja*." So the driver accepted the gifts. One more devotee was added to the ever increasing numbers. A devotee of a different order came to have *darshan* of Sri Ma. This was H.E. James George, Ambassador from Canada to Ceylon at the time. Later he held the same post in India and became close to Sri Ma.

Sri Ma stayed in Kolkata for a while. The devotees were happy that they had her *darshan* on New Year's day. (January 1, 1961)

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## CHAPTER THREE

### A Special Shivaratri at Baghat House

*How much more time will you spend in a wayside inn? Don't you want to go home? How exquisite it all is! One in one's own self. The wanderer, the exile, the home coming and the home.... Oneself is all that exists....*

—Sri Ma Anandamayi

Agarpara Ashram wore a festive look. Sri Ma Anandamayi sat out in the Hall in the evenings. It was noticed by her close companions that she was sagging in her seat but there was no diminishing of the radiance of her countenance. The crowds milling round her therefore were not aware of her indisposition. Didi was concerned but Sri Ma Anandamayi smiled and said, "It is the body only which is showing these signs of discomfort. It does not matter; I am as I am." Didi, of course, knew this and could only pray for the *kheyala* for her own recovery.

Agarpara Ashram celebrated a few religious rites. Chhabi Banerji and Utpala Sen sang *kirtans* and *bhajans* to make the occasions memorable for everyone. Too soon it was time for the break-up of the joyous company. Sri Ma travelled back to Varanasi to be present on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of the Savitri Yajna.

Markell Brooks and her friend Mukti came from America to spend a few days with Sri Ma. She at this time was expected in Allahabad. Markell and Mukti were accommodated in Sri Ma Anandamayi's car for the drive to Allahabad from Varanasi. Markell recalled that Sri Ma chatted in a friendly manner with the driver all the while. Sometimes she would look back at them to talk to them also. The driver Bindu, who had come to fetch Sri Anandamayi Ma, translated for them.

At Allahabad Sri Ma was received at Satya Gopal Ashram by Bani and Kalyani, the daughters of the Acharya. The family were wishful to keep up the tradition of this short yearly visit started at the request of Gopal Thakur about thirteen years earlier.

From Allahabad Sri Ma came to Delhi in response to Haribabaji's wish for her presence before and during the festival of Holi. Sri Ma had the *kheyala* for abiding in Haradwar during Shivaratri. Haribabaji agreed to this, saying he would be happy if she returned to Delhi again for Holi.

Sri Ma Anandamayi at this time was seen to have some difficulty with her breathing. But her demeanour was quite normal. She attended all programmes and was constantly surrounded by relays of devotees. The milling crowd never realized that Sri Ma hardly ever had the leisure to lie quietly in her room. She understood quite well the problems faced by her close companions in this matter. She said one day, "When people are asked to vacate my room at night or told that Ma needs to rest they simply think it is not true. They feel Ma is all



right, only the Ashram people like to keep her away from the public!" Sri Ma indeed made no difference between strangers and devotees so the problem of providing for a reasonably comfortable way of daily activities always remained at the fore front.

Sri Ma came to Baghat House in Haradwar on February 4, 1961. Jogi Bhai received her at the Station. He was already in Haradwar for some time engaged in various religious rites being performed under his aegis.

For some time Sri Ma had been entertaining a special *kheyala* for three of her young devotees, namely Bharat, Kusum and Tapan. Bharat, a young man from Gujrat had become her close companion for some years. He was a graduate and a qualified lawyer. But he had chosen to leave his profession and home life and surrender himself at Sri Ma's feet. Kusum similarly preferred to abide by Sri Ma's *kheyala* for him. He was highly educated. He had passed his M.Sc. from St. Stephen's College at Delhi and was teaching in Simla when he had been drawn into Sri Ma's entourage. Tapan had come as a young boy to the Vidyapeeth at Almora. He was a special protégé of Jogibhai who had financed his higher education in Sanskrit. He had received a traditional training in Sanskrit as well as the Master's degree from Delhi University. Sri Ma was always seen to be specially indulgent toward him as a very young scholar who seemed to have embarked on a life of asceticism.

It was Sri Ma's *kheyala* that the three young men should

be formally initiated into the Brahmacharya Ashram as indicated in the scriptures. All brahmin boys receive their sacred threads at a suitable time in their families but this rite is not carried out in its entirety. Instead of *brahmacharya* becoming a way of life for the youngsters up to the age of 25 or so, they resume their normal life in the world after a token number of days spent in isolation.

Sri Ma had sent for Batukda from Varanasi to guide them in scriptural proceeding. This initiation would follow all instructions scrupulously. Bishuda had also come in order to help with the various ritualistic *pujas*. Bishuda was a devout brahmin of Varanasi who was chosen by Sri Ma to perform many of the Durga Pujas celebrated near her. Now all arrangements for the prestigious ceremony were seen to be made quietly and unobtrusively but also no detail, however small, was neglected. Under Sri Ma's guidance perfection was achieved. She herself personally checked every detail of the paraphernalia required at the venue of the *yajnas* to be performed. Jogeshdada had come to Haradwar to explain the method of tending the sacred fire to those who would be required to do so.

Bharat, Kusum and Tapan were devoted to Sri Ma. Because of their exposure to modern times they were not familiar with our traditional heritage of scriptural injunctions. Tapan alone had received a traditional schooling. They were content with Sri Ma's guidance for them but were brought to realize that she herself gave the greatest importance to the

scriptures. They were the privileged ones who had evoked Sri Ma's *kheyala* for this ancient ritual to be performed in all its meticulous details.

Haradwar is a holy site and Baghat House a spacious residence. Jogibhai himself was a most generous host and totally dedicated toward carrying out Sri Ma's *kheyala*. He himself being a very devout person was specially pleased that such an important ritual was going to be performed at Baghat House.

Traditionally the Brahmacharya Ashram begins with the *Upanayana* that is the ceremony of assuming the sacred thread and being initiated into the Gayatri Mantra. The *brahmachari* then becomes fully qualified to perform all Vedic rites and ceremonies. He retains this right by practising the daily routine of *japa* and *svadhyaya* (perusal of scriptures) and the performance of *yajna* that is the maintenance of the sacred fire. The *brahmachari* is expected to follow the dietary rules of simple *sattvic* (pure) food.

The conferring of *naishthika brahmacharya* therefore is a special privilege of our tradition because it is the gateway to *sannyasa*, the final stage of renunciation, the high ideal spoken of as the ultimate aim of human life.

The elaborate rituals were begun on February 9. The three young people were accommodated in a special room. They kept total fast on this day. For the next two days Batukda presided over the many rites of purifications to be performed by the candidates in preparation for the ceremony of

initiation. Sri Ma was continually with them, seeing to the arrangements, plugging any loopholes and imparting an aura of divinity to the whole enterprise.

The day of *Shivaratri* (February 13) dawned cool and clear. The assembly listened to the Vedic mantras being recited as benediction for all. Sri Ma had chosen Jogeshda as the pioneer who would blaze this trail. Nobody else could be so suitable as he. He had been initiated by Bholanathji himself. His cheerful funloving nature had endeared him to all. He easily commanded respect as well as friendship from all young people in the Ashram.

Jogeshda now formally assumed the ochre-robos of a life of *naishthika brahmacharya* and given the name Niranjanananda. He was given the privilege of imparting the Gayatri Mantra to the three young men, Bharat, Kusum and Tapan. Tapan being the youngest the other two agreed that he should be the first. The entire ceremony was unique in its conception and execution. The Gayatri Mantra was written out in sandal paste on *bhurjapatras* (dried bark of *bhurja* tree used as paper in ancient times). At the right time Brahmachari Niranjanananda stood with this piece of *bhurjapatra* in his hand. At the request of Jogibhai Sri Ma extended her hand and held a corner of it. Jogibhai was also asked to give his support. The few onlookers were overwhelmed to see the young boy in shining ochre-robos receive the most prestigious mantra from a person who was acknowledged to be the very personification of Brahavidya by all learned ascetics of

monastic orders. This privileged young person was given Sri Ma Anandamayi's own name. He became Nirmalananda. The initiation of Bharat and Kusum followed in the same manner. Their names were Bhaskarananda and Nirvanananda.

After the conclusion of the ceremony the three young people resplendant in their bright ochre robes came to Sri Ma for doing their *pranams*. The atmosphere was charged with exalted emotions. Tapan put his head on Sri Ma's lap and burst into tears. Sri Ma gathered him in her arms and held him till he was himself again. When it came to the turn of the other two she embraced each of them closely. Her expression of *prasannata* was indescribable. The Sanskrit word cannot be translated. It cannot be said that she was pleased or delighted, but her divinely indulgent expression at this brave act of embracing the life of spiritual discipline impressed itself as such on the onlookers.

The whole of the day was given over to the preparations for the night of Shivaratri. As usual perfect arrangements were made for the whole-night session of *puja* to be performed in unison by all the devotees who had come for the purpose. At dusk all preparations were complete. The devotees assumed their allotted seats which they would occupy till dawn. Baghat House resounded with melodious *kirtan*. Bibhuda's repertoire of songs dedicated to the worship of Shiva was extensive. His matchless voice created a memorable evening and the night passed all too swiftly.

At pre-dawn Sri Ma came to the room occupied by the

*brahmacharis* who had also performed the *puja* of Shivaratri. She said to them. "It has been a long vigil for you, the whole day and this night. Now lie down a little for rest, you will have to begin on your daily routine soon enough!" When the young men lay down on their blankets in the room, Sri Ma directed her companions to make the room ready for the day. Silently she pointed out what was to be done. She made all ready for them to the last detail while they slept peacefully. Didi watched in silence the graciousness of this concern which was truly overwhelming. She wrote in her journal that she neither had the language nor the ability to describe Sri Ma's total concern and management of this important ceremony.

After this sojourn in Haradwar for this special occasion Sri Ma returned to Delhi to participate in Haribabaji's *satsang*. He had decided to hold the festival of Holi this year in Delhi. As usual with him all programmes were organised meticulously. Sri Ma attended the *satsangs*. In the Ashram she was forever surrounded by visitors who wished to talk with her. She sat in the Hall for sometime to be available to them.

On February 27, 1961, Sri Ma Anandamayi received Rehanaji who was very well-known as a devout lady. Although not belonging to the Hindu tradition she was enamoured of the Vrindaban-*lila* of Sri Krishna. She was known to Kamala Jaiswal and Madalasa (the daughters of Jamna Lal Bajaj) who escorted her to the Ashram. She had spent a few years with Gandhiji at Sevagram so she was well-

known to Madalasa.

Rehanaji embraced Sri Anandamayi Ma closely. She held her hands in her own, covering them with kisses of adoration. Then she sat quietly in front with lowered eyes in an attitude of meditation.

Rehanaji was made welcome by the girls of the Ashram. Sri Ma Anandamayi herself put a rosary of *Tulasi*-wood round Rehanaji's neck. Rehanaji seemed very pleased. She said in some wonderment, "It was my great wish that I get some memento from Ma. This is indeed beautiful."

Sri Ma requested Rehanaji to sing for her quoting a line from a lyric, "Play the flute, (otherwise) I will not let you go!" Rehanaji complied by singing in her own special style. She could produce flute sounds so beautifully that it indeed sounded true. Her songs were interspersed with these flute-notes executed very beautifully. The small audience listened in pindrop silence.

At last it was time to bid farewell. Rehanaji reluctantly took her leave expressing again and again her sense of fulfilment at this *darshan*. Sri Ma's companions were also impressed by her aura of a person living in constant God-remembrance.

Delhi being the capital, Sri Ma received many highly placed officials as well as a few ambassadors from the various embassies. On February 28 she received Dr. Kuta, the Swiss Ambassador as well as Mr. Brohi, the ambassador from Pakistan. Dr. Kuta was an Indologist. He took delight in

checking his understanding of Hindu systems against Sri Ma's expositions of them. They conversed together for a long time. Mr. Brohi wished to sit quietly with Sri Anandamayi Ma for sometime. There being no opportunity on this day, he promised to come again.

On 2nd March the festival of Holi was celebrated by the performance of the famous *nama-yajna* of Delhi. The Ashram precincts resounded with melodious singing throughout the eve and the day of Holi. It was concluded with the usual fanfare at dusk.

Late at night Mr. Brohi accompanied by his wife came to visit Sri Ma. Although he brought no flowers with him he had sent a large bouquet of flowers for her the previous day. He talked with Sri Ma Anandamayi for sometime. He wished to sit in meditation in front of her for five minutes. When all was quiet, Mr. Brohi assumed a posture of stillness. Instead of five minutes, he sat immovable for one and a half hours. He himself was surprised, saying that he had experienced a quality of peace and tranquillity unknown before!

Sri Ma then spoke to him about her request to everyone for the time of 15 minutes everyday. He was pleased and readily agreed to devote this time to God.

Sri Ma continued to receive a galaxy of very important people as well as the usual crowd of devotees. On March 4, Upadhyayji (Pandit Nehru's family friend) escorted Indira Gandhi and her son Rajeev to the Ashram. The young man engaged Sri Ma in a dialogue for some time. It was seen that

Sri Ma was especially gracious toward Rajeev and his mother. Many people remembered the utter self-surrender of Kamla Nehru at Sri Ma's feet and thought it worked like a benediction on her whole family.

Sri Ma went back to Haradwar and to Baghat House. The newly initiated *brahmacharis* were happy to have her near them again. Two of Sri Ma's devotees, Natavarbhai Patel and Vasudevabhai had arranged for religious functions to be held in her presence. A *Bhagavata Saptah* was celebrated during March 17-25 together with a nine-day reading of the Ramayana. Both rituals created the usual festive air around Sri Ma. For the few close companions it was overcast a little by the failing health of Buni, who had been ill for quite some time. From a very young age she had suffered from a heart-condition. Her family were always pleased for her to stay with Sri Ma thinking that this might prolong her life. Buni was usually very sprightly and most competent among the girls for sensing Sri Ma's *kheyala* and creating order out of the chaotic activities taking place near her. Now she was ill and bed-ridden. Sri Ma visited her as often as she could. At her suggestion several types of foods were prepared to tempt Buni's appetite. By a lucky chance a competent doctor came to visit Sri Anandamayi Ma at this time. Dr. Sharma together with the local practitioner Dr. Bose examined Buni and prescribed medicines and diets. In a few days she seemed to recover a little.

#### **In Gwalior :**

The Maharaja of Gwalior had been indisposed for

sometime. The Maharani had prayed for Sri Ma's presence in her State on the occasion of an Installation Ceremony of Deities in Temples. After the functions at Haradwar Sri Anandamayi Ma accompanied by Avadhootji and Chetan Giriji Maharaj as well as her considerable retinue arrived in Gwalior on March 17. The princely household made them all welcome. All arrangements for the board and lodging of this heterogeneous group were exemplary. The Maharani had also invited the party of young men from Delhi who were to perform their special *Nama-Yajna* in Gwalior.

Sri Ma on arrival had seen the concern of the Maharani for her ailing husband. She suggested a change of diet and herself made out a meticulous list of foods to be taken throughout the day. Much to the relief of everyone concerned the Maharaja gained in health. He actually recovered so much as to be able to attend the main function at the temple and even to give directions about how things should be arranged. The entire State rejoiced.

Sri Ma left Gwalior on March 24.

#### **Janmotsava in Allahabad**

This year's *Janmotsava* was scheduled for one day only that is May 2 and 3, the calendar date of Vaishakh 19 and the lunar date of the 4th day of the dark phase being just one day apart. Bindu had the boldness to suggest that this most prestigious of all functions should be performed in his house. That he was one of the privileged ones was demonstrated because Sri Ma most graciously spent more than two weeks at

31 George Town, Allahabad on this occasion. Sri Ma arrived on April 22 to attend a *Bhagavat Saptah* which had been scheduled to take place ahead of the *Utsava*. A number of other religious rites were inaugurated in her presence. The house filled up with devotees coming from all over the country. Suitable quarters were arranged for all the Mahatmas who came to attend this function. A big *pandal* (marquee) had been put up at one side of the house. Swami Paramanandaji had arrived in Allahabad at the beginning of April to supervise all arrangements. Haribabaji also arrived ahead of time and began the routine of his *satsangs* and *raslilas*. It was a great occasion for the people of the town. They came to listen to discourses of the Mahatmas. Chetan Giriji was always a favourite orator. They attended *kirtans* and the various *pujas* taking place all over the compound. For a few weeks it became a hermitage of ancient times as it were with everyone focussed on spiritual endeavours.

On May 3, Jawaharlal Nehru accompanied by Indiraji and Upadhyayji came to visit Sri Ma. He was in Allahabad at this time. Coming to know of Sri Ma's presence in town he had wished to see her. Sri Ma received them in her own cottage. After a while it was time for her to go to the *satsang*. She took her visitors with her. Jawaharlalji and Indiraji sat on the stage at her side. The people of Allahabad were pleased to see their Prime Minister. They greeted him and requested him to speak a few words. He, however, smiled and said, "I have not come here to speak but to listen!"

He along with the audience listened to the melodious *kirtan* being sung by Chhabi Banerjee. After a while Sri Ma mingled her voice with Chhabi's who delightedly gave over the lead and followed in chorus. After this rewarding interlude, the Prime Minister and his daughter bade her farewell and went away while the *satsang* continued with its scheduled programme.

Sri Ma had invited Bani and Kalyani the daughters of Gopal Thakur to come to 31 Geogre Town so that they could observe their own usual celebration of the *Gita Jayanti* near her. All arrangements for this *puja* were made on the platform adjacent to Sri Ma's cottage. Sri Ma's *kheyala* was all-encompassing. In Allahabad it was just right that Gopal Thakur should be remembered and suitable homage paid to him.

The night of the *Utsava* was passed in an atmosphere of dedicated worship of the Deity most dear to the heart of the entire congregation. *Puja* was performed by Kamalakanta Brahmachari.

After the joyous event the inevitable time came for sad farewells. Sri Ma left for Mumbai on May 5.

Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kavirajji had been ailing for sometime. For some years past his dependence on Sri Ma's *kheyala* for him had been total. She had been kept informed of his condition. She had asked that he should get himself examined by the best doctors of Delhi. She was informed that he was suffering from cancer of an internal organ and had to

undergo an operation preferably in Mumbai. Kavirajji had returned to Varanasi. Sri Ma went to Varanasi from Allahabad for one day to meet him and make arrangements for his travel to Mumbai. She detailed Kamal Brahmachari and Hemidi to go with him to Mumbai so that he could be well looked after. Kavirajji like a child said to Sri Ma, "Ma, they say I need to undergo an operation. Will you not be with me at the time?" Sri Ma answered, "I shall come to Mumbai from Allahabad just for this."

In Mumbai Bhaiya (B.K. Shah) and Surabhai Sheth as well as Kania Bhai and others had mobilised themselves for the proper board and lodging of Kavirajji and his attendants. The examination by specialists had taken place. Sri Ma arrived in Mumbai on May 6. She found many people awaiting her arrival. The son of the Raja of Mandi had been married. The family were waiting to perform *pūja* to seek her blessings for the newly married couple. Nagpalbhai and his wife were waiting to escort her to Pune. He had donated a small house to the Ashram and was keen that Sri Ma should enter and occupy it as soon as possible. Haribabaji Maharaj with his retinue had accompanied her to Mumbai. He had understood that Sri Ma would spend some weeks in Pune, so he had left Mumbai to await her arrival there.

Sri Ma found time to attend to Kavirajji's affairs. She listened to the doctors and endorsed their opinions. She asked Didi to communicate with Kavirajji's family and friends in Varanasi and other towns informing them of the imminent

operation and seeking their permission for the same. Everyone answered that he or she would abide by Sri Ma's *kheyala* for Kavirajji. They put their trust in her praying for her blessing for his recovery.

Kavirajji was admitted to the Hospital and the operation was performed successfully on May 16. Sri Ma Anandamayi stayed in Sunayana House receiving almost hourly reports from the Hospital. She went to see him in his room in the evening. She continued in Mumbai visiting him every day till the doctors pronounced him out of danger and said that he would be soon discharged after the first week in June. Sri Ma visited him on June 2. She went up to his bed and blessed him by touching his head and shoulders in a caressing manner. She spoke to the doctors commending their care and concern. She put her arms round the Anglo-Indian nurse in a loving embrace. Truly the nurse had looked after the aged scholar (74) in an exemplary fashion. It was her duty but she had discharged it with untiring dedication.

On leaving Kavirajji's room Sri Ma stopped near the bedside of another patient. The doctors said he was a visitor from an Arab country. He had no relations in India and in spite of the best medical attention was terminally ill. Sri Ma placed her hands on his head and passed them gently down his emaciated body. When he looked at her she pointed up, asking him to remember "Allah". He seemed to relax in his bed. Sri Ma Anandamayi indeed belonged to all! Her compassion for the devout scholar was as spontaneous as for

the lonely stranger.

Sri Ma had engagements in Pune. Kavirajji after a suitable time of rest and recovery joined her there.

### In Pune

The usual crowds assembled in the premises of the new Ashram, that is, the house donated by Nagpalbhai.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of India was sojourning in Pune at this time. He was the guest of Sri Prakashji the Governor of the State and the eldest son of Babu Bhagavandas of Varanasi. Sri Prakashji was an admirer of Kavirajji. He wished to pay his respects to the scholar. The distinguished guests came to the Ashram to have *darshan* of Sri Ma Anandamayi. They were pleased to see Kavirajji evidently recovered and sitting in a chair in her room. Rajendra Prasadji requested her to give them some advice. Sri Ma said, "Pitaji, you know that there is nothing here. You should ask Kavirajji who is an ocean of learning. He will resolve your doubts."

Kavirajji knew how to get answers from Sri Anandamayi Ma so he said to them, "Put a specific question to her." Sri Prakashji said, "Ma, we see a lot of deceitful activity in the world. How can it be reconciled with spiritual endeavours also?"

Sri Ma said, "Some years back I was passing through the hill-town of Mussoorie. Jyotish was with me. We happened to sit down for a rest near a school. We saw children playing noisily. Then a bell rang out. All the children stopped as if

pulled by a string. They formed into lines and left the playground and entered the school building in an orderly manner. It occurred to me that discipline is necessary for inculcating good qualities. In our own tradition, the *brahmacharya ashram* was for instilling moral values, good behaviour and the dutiful discharging of all obligations including the search for self-enlightenment. Without a proper grounding, nobody can succeed. If the foundations are weak then buildings begin to show cracks. What you see around you is the result of a lack of sound upbringing. Good schooling is essential. Values have to be imparted by exemplary behaviour. Children need models as well."

Rajendra Prasadji asked, "Ma, how can one begin to be interested in spiritual values?" Sri Ma said, "Familiarity creates interest. If you are totally unaware of something you cannot feel any interest. But if you know a little and like it then you would want to know more. So it comes again to the same thing. That which is for your ultimate good must be inculcated and taught so that one may begin on a search for further enlightenment. Practice alone may create interest."

Haribabaji had been out for a walk. On his way back he came to Sri Ma's room and met the visitors. They also made their obeisance to the Mahatma. Then it was time to leave.

### Arnaud and Denise Desjardins :

This well known French couple had come to India for making documentaries. They had first come to Varanasi Ashram in 1959 during the Durga Puja in October. They had



returned to their country in order to show their films in France where they had been very well received. Arnaud and Denise came back to India and to Allahabad during the *Janmotsava* and had been travelling with Sri Anandamayi Ma during her sojourns in Mumbai and Pune. They had become quite devoted. This association continued over the years. Later they came with their daughter Muriel and baby son. In time they became quite well-known in the various ashrams.

Now in Pune they wished to show a few of their films to Sri Ma. On June 26 they got the opportunity to arrange for this viewing. Haribabaji came for it and also Dilip Kumar Roy and Indiraji. Everyone was very pleased to see Sri Ma made so beautifully available for *darshan* in foreign countries.

The Maharaja of Gwalior was in Pune at this time. He came to have *darshan* almost every evening although he had not yet recovered fully. The well-known singer Heerabai Barodekar came to renew her acquaintanceship with Sri Ma. Sri Ma was kindness itself. She said, "You have this gift. Music is capable of rising to the highest pinnacle. Use it for your *sadhana*!" Heerabai sang a few *bhajans* for her.

The prolonged stay in Pune drew to a close. At this time one of Sri Ma Anandamayi's long-time devotees Mr. Justice S.R. Das (known in the Ashram as Kohinoorda) was holding the office of Chief Justice of Mysore High Court. He came to invite Sri Ma to visit Bangalore on her way to Kolkata.

Sri Ma was well-known in Bangalore so it was a renewal of many connections. She herself was not in the best of health

at this time. Her breath seemed erratic. Her close companions saw a stillness of limbs which was unusual. She ate next to nothing. She took a glass of water in the evening. At night some fruit-juice or a little *dalia*. Asked about her health she would say. "There is no inconvenience; all is joy." Before leaving Pune Sri Ma made suitable arrangements for Kavirajji to go to Mumbai to meet his doctors. He would stay at Ville Parle till they permitted him to return to Varanasi.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### Sri Ma Anandamayi In Bangalore And

#### In Shuktal

*"Sri S.R. Das was first introduced to Sri Ma as the brother of N.R. Das, whom she already knew well. Sri Ma said, "Brother! brother...brother...all are brothers!"*

—Sri Ma Anandamayi

In Bangalore Sri Ma met many of her well-known devotees as well as newcomers. She sat in *satsangs* and answered questions quite often. She was asked, "How to know God?"

Sri Ma : "Keep company with Him. How? To do *japa* is to keep company because He is His Name. Don't you spend time with your friends? You come to know about them intimately. Similarly the more time you spend with God, the more you will know about Him. Can anyone stand on the shore of the ocean waiting for breakers to subside before taking a bath? One has to plunge in inspite of the turbulent sea. So amidst your everyday busy life, you must find time to sit apart and keep company with God!"

"How long does it take to find God?"

"Time! He is immanent in time! If the call is genuine He appears immediately! Just as a mother knows when her child is in real distress; she will abandon her other duties to come to



Sri Ma with Swami Sivananda Saraswati and  
Sri Haribabaji Maharaj



Swami Chidanandaji with Sri Ma



Sri Ma with the saint Sri Seetaramdas Omkarnathji



Sri Ma with Mm. Pt. Gopinath  
Kaviraj Mahashay



1982, Kumbha Mela, 31 George Town, Allahabad  
Dr. Bithika Mukerji at the lotus feet of Sri Sri Ma.



1968, December in "Ananda Jyotir Mandir", Varanasi. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Dr. Sushila Nayar with Bithikaji, having a glimpse [*darshan*] of Ma.



In the open courtyard of Ananda Jyotir Mandir the Canadian Prime Minister Mr. Pierre Elliot Trudeau in association with Ma. Bithikaji in the role of interpreter



Sri Ma with Atmanandaji



Sri Ma playing on cymbals during *kirtan*

him!"

"Can an ordinary guru initiate one onto the path of fulfilment?"

"Yes, because he is transferring to you the *mantra* which comes from the *rishis* and which is in his safe keeping. The true guru, the Jagadguru, is God himself. He alone can give Enlightenment. Your role is to strive and have faith!

"Time is passing—do not waste it. One has to live surrounded by thoughts of God, in order to dispel the conviction that He is far away. To live ordinarily and die—there must be annihilation of this death. The death of death is life of immortality. Strive to realize your immortality, that is Enlightenment.

"Realization is one, paths are many. Just as the same person is father, son, brother and husband to different people so is God to be realized in many ways. Whether your path is of *jnana* (knowledge); *bhakti* (devotion) or *karma* (action) the goal is one. All names are His, also He is impersonal, without name and form.

"Everyone has to strive. Whether you are male or female, you have the same right to engage in the path of enlightenment. The only thing for human beings is to make their life worthwhile, to realize that one is heir to Immortality."

Sri Ma came on to Kolkata on July 25. Before coming away from Bangalore they had received the sad news of the passing away of the Maharaja of Gwalior. Sri Ma dictated a sustaining letter of condolence to the Maharani.

The people of Kolkata were happy to be able to celebrate Guru Purnima on July 27. In an extra-ordinary gesture of

thoughtfulness Sri Ma had the *kheyala* to visit Birendra Chandra Mukherji in his home. He was living like an ascetic in distant Bhadreswara. He had not come to visit Sri Ma for almost 14 years. He was taken completely by surprise and overwhelmed that she should seek him out herself. Next day he and his wife came to the Ashram and spent a few days with her. Some of the old-timers were put off by the crowds and the atmosphere of hectic activity near Sri Ma. Many preferred to stay away. Birendra Chandra now saw that amidst a throng Sri Ma remained the same person he knew in Shahbagh.

The ceaseless travels continued. Sri Ma returned to Varanasi. She visited Vindhyachala and then it was time to go back to Delhi to see to the affairs of Kaviraj Mahashaya. He had come from Mumbai and was convalescing in Delhi. Sri Ma arranged for him to be admitted to Dr. Santosh Sen's Nursing Home because he still needed nursing care. The Maharani of Tehri Garhwal undertook to provide his meals and be responsible for his welfare in Sri Ma's absence.

Sri Ma then went to Vrindaban to attend the festivals of Jhoolan and Janmashtami at the invitation of Haribabaji Maharaj.

The new Ashram in Vrindaban was expanding very fast with many new buildings. Swarupanandaji was in charge here. Under his able management all construction work was orderly and smooth. The Raja and Rani of Mandi had financed a cottage for Sri Ma. The opening ceremony took place with all its attendant rituals. Devotees arrived from distant towns to be with their beloved Mother. Jhoolan is a time of joyous celebrations. Many swings were put up.

Profuse flower decorations enhanced the beautiful aspect of the Divine Pair. Melodious *kirtan* created the atmosphere of total dedication to the remembrance of Sri Krishna-lila. Sri Ma presided over all the functions. The Mahatmas lent support by participating in all festivities. Haribabaji, Chakrapaniji, Vishnu Ashramji, Prabhudattaji and many others added to the solemnity of the occasion.

After this glorious week of festivity Vrindaban Ashram settled back to quietude because Sri Ma left for Haradwar.

Baghat House in its turn woke up to the rhythm of Sri Ma's presence. The three *brahmacharis* were elated to find her with them. The absence of her usual large retinue gave them the opportunity of staying close to her. She ate the food cooked by them and Nirvanananda was happy to be able to feed her. They were now released from the restrictions of a life of seclusion away from the world. Sri Ma went with them to the Ganges where they bathed and embarked on their new life in the world.

Sri Ma returned to Delhi via Dehradun to be with Kavirajji. He was still in the Nursing Home. In Delhi Sri Ma became involved with V.I.Ps as usual. On September 5, Indira Gandhi came to visit Sri Ma. She had returned from a long journey and was very tired. While listening to a *bhajan* being sung by Pushpa Sri Ma saw that she could hardly keep her eyes open. Sri Ma descended from her *chowki* and sat on the carpet. She said to Indiraji, "Your mother sometimes slept near me. She would put her head in my lap and so sleep. You can also do the same." Indiraji gratefully laid her head down



and slept peacefully. Pushpa, who was singing with her eyes closed, saw this when she opened her eyes. There was nobody else in the room. Kamala Nehru must have been a devotee of great distinction. Her spirit sustained her family. The Prime Minister also visited Sri Ma as often as he could whenever she was in Delhi.

On September 11, Sri Anandamayi Ma visited the Rashtrapati Bhawan at the invitation of Rajendra Prasadji. She talked at length there answering questions from the people sitting in front of her.

### **Vikram**

Vikram was the second son of Parashuramji. His wayward behaviour became very troublesome for his family after his father's death. His sister Munni prayed to Sri Ma to grant some sense to Vikram. Sri Ma had asked him to come away with her from Dehradun. Vikram had become a member of her retinue. He was quite happy to be travelling around.

From Delhi Sri Ma went to Jaipur for a few days. The host Madan Mohan Verma made them welcome. After they had settled in it was discovered that Vikram was not with them. Swami Paramanandaji and other members of Sri Ma's party went around to look for him but to no avail. The police were informed but they did not meet with immediate success.

Kamalaji's son Ananda Mohan Lal was posted in Jaipur. He took Sri Ma to the famous Temple of Ganeshji and also to the Govinda Temple. Sri Ma asked Ganeshji to look after Vikram and keep him from harm. They returned to Delhi in a state of undiminished anxiety about Vikram.

From Delhi Sri Ma sent a messenger to Dehradun to find out if Vikram had gone home. Munni arrived in Delhi in a state of shock. Her tears would not stop. She prayed again and again to Ma for her brother to be restored to the family. Billoji went with Munni back to Jaipur to renew their efforts of looking for Vikram. Luckily for everyone the police had found him near the Railway Station. Munni thankfully returned to Delhi with Vikram. He seemed quite at peace and not at all disturbed about his adventure. Sri Ma said, "See, he has lived like an ascetic who is solely dependent on God for his sustenance. Ganeshji has looked after him. He has found food and shelter without asking for it." Munni and the other devotees, however, believed that it was Sri Ma herself who had graciously guided him back to them unharmed and at peace.

Kavirajji needed to be examined by his doctors. Sri Ma made arrangements for him to travel to Mumbai again. On one of these days she said, "When Jyotish (Bhaiji) was alive I never had to take any decisions or give directions. Now I have to do all these things!" As Didi was totally dependant on Sri Ma's words for guidance she was not perturbed by this nostalgia which sounded charming. Didi knew that she was not at all like Bhaiji. She did not aspire to understand the enigmatic personality she loved to serve. Her fulfilment was in the obeying of the *kheyala* as understood by her.

### **Durga Puja at Swadeshi House**

Sri Mangtaram Jaipuria had asked to be allowed to hold



the annual Durga Puja in Kanpur at their residence, Swadeshi House. This festival as organised by the Jaipurias reached an all-time high standard in success. The extensive lawns and gardens were converted into almost a small township of tents and temporary residences. The beautiful summer house in the midst of the garden was fitted out comfortably as a cotage for Sri Ma. Hundreds of devotees were accommodated suitably. All the Mahatmas with their retinues were quartered in individual houses. The staff of Swadeshi House were everywhere, looking after the needs of the guests. Almost 500 people had breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner everyday. There was no dearth of facility and the devoted service of the workers was exemplary.

The Jaipurias were tried severely by the elements. A deluge descended on Kanpur at the commencement of the festival. Overnight the *pandal* was made secure by a total coverage of tin sheets. The guests living in tents were moved to guest houses. Seetaram Jaipuria, the son of Mangtaram seemed quite nonplussed by these setbacks. He was so swift in his work of reparation that no one was inconvenienced. The rains passed and the weather cleared up for the *puja*.

The magnificent image of Devi Durga captivated all hearts. The elaborate process of the *puja* was sustained faultlessly by the family. They were a devout family and devoted to Sri Ma.

Brahmachari Nirvananandaji was chosen by Sri Ma for performing the *puja*. The *Puja-mandap* took on its usual festive look. All devotees listened to the melodious songs and

*kirtans* of Chhabi Banerji and Pushpa. The three days passed all too swiftly. On the last day after the ritual farewell ceremony for the Goddess the *mandap* was given over to the women folk for the ritual of bidding good-bye to the clay image itself.

Abani Mohan Sharma an old man and a long-time devotee was sitting in one corner engaged in the reading of the *Chandi* the Puranic Book of the Goddess Durga (*Durga Saptashati*). The crowd of women milling around the Image thoughtlessly invaded this corner. Abani Mohan himself was pushed aside, his book and *puja* equipments were scattered. He was beside himself with rage and disappointment. Sri Ma dressed in a red Banarasi *sari* (like the Goddess) was suddenly beside him, holding him in her arms and saying, "Here is Chandi, see, here is Chandi!" For Abani Mohan the most upsetting moment of his life was converted into a moment of fulfilment. The Goddess he was meditating upon had materialised right in front of him. Sri Anandamayi Ma had spontaneously responded to the distress of the old man in a very uncharacteristic revelatory manner. Didi and others felicitated Abani Mohan.

On October 21 Swadeshi House woke to the sad notes of farewell being played on the *shehnai* (Indian clarionet). Sri Anandamayi Ma left for Varanasi. Jaipuria House seemed empty and forlorn.

#### **Devotees from other countries :**

During these months and subsequently the Ashrams saw an increasing influx of foreigners. Daya Mata of Self-Realization Fellowship and many of her colleagues paid visits

to Sri Ma. At one time a German visitor who wished to join in a group of people sitting in meditation asked if she could do *japa* of Christ's name. Sri Ma replied, "Certainly, there is but One only."

Evidently the films of Arnaud Desjardins had made an impact abroad. Singly or in groups foreigners found their way to wherever Sri Ma was in residence. Once in Vrindaban Sri Ma asked a German family (Dr. Bosch') to sing for her. Everyone was charmed by the old German devotional hymns they sang in unison. This became a regular feature of the evening *satsang*. When asked if Sri Ma liked them she said smilingly in English, "Very much!"

Sometimes she made a retreat for the foreigners at Vindhyachal Ashram where they could come closer to her in quiet and peaceful surroundings. Even the *Samyam Saptahs* saw a few foreigners as regular initiates sometimes as many as nine!

In this context, a little digression may not be out of place here.

Sri Ma, easily made a transition to a quiet contemplative interlude for people who did not quite feel happy with the sound and lights of exuberant pageants. The main groups for these occasional retreats consisted of Europeans who very often spent Christmas with Sri Ma in Vindhyachala, Rajgir or Bhimpura and other such remote places. As early as 1937, Sri Ma had been in contact with the West in the person of Mrs. Jennings who had come to attend the conference on World Religions sponsored by the Ramakrishna Mission. Since that time there had been a regular influx of seekers of spiritual guidance from the West. All foreigners will remember Atmanandaji (Miss Blanca Schlamm) who was so helpful in

corresponding with them and in editing *Ananda Varta* till the time of her passing away. She was an Austrian by birth and had been 'interned' in India during the years of the war, that is, she was obliged to stay in India. This was congenial for her because she had been very fond of India and things Indian since her childhood. She became very close to Sri Ma; she was able to 'communicate' with Sri Ma without outward help of physical means. When Sri Ma sat in meditation at the request of her foreign visitors, she would choose Atmanandaji to sit in the room with her; sometimes also Billoji, knowing these two would not be overcome by sleep as soon as they were required to sit still, as it happened, with her other women companions.

Other Europeans who came and became members of the family of devotees were Swami Vijayananda (Dr. A. Weintrob from Alsace-Lorraine), Jayananda (Jack Unger from America), Premananda (Colin Turnbull from England), Satyananda (Henri Petit from France) and many more. Arnaud Desjardins and his wife Denise were regular visitors. Their daughter Muriel was a lovely little girl who wished to be dark complexioned like her other friends in India. Sri Ma said to her "You are beautiful" in English to console her for her lack of the dark skin. Muriel was very fond of Didima. Often she would be seen gathering wild-flowers (In Vindhyachala) and bringing them in a bunch to Didima's feet. Didima always put out her hand and touched the child's head. Muriel visited India again when she was a grown up young woman and brought her husband with her.

In France, America, Spain, Germany, Italy and England there are families who are as close to Sri Ma as any of the

Indian families who have never travelled abroad. The readers of *Ananda Varta*, would be familiar with the writings of Melita Maschmann, Richard Lannoy, Jean Herbert and others. Alexander Lipsky's book on Sri Ma (published by Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi) remains a very readable one. Amongst all these very close companions, Vijayanandaji stands out as the person about whom Sri Ma herself said "There is the look of a *Rishi* (Upaniṣadic sage) on his face." His *tapasya* (austerities) in the Himalayas was an example of obeying Sri Ma's spoken words, rather than choosing the more congenial way of travelling around with her for her daily *darshan*. Sri Ma's call towards an one-pointed, undeviating and relentless effort was practised when Sri Ma herself recalled him to the plains.

In more recent years there were other visitors too numerous to be recorded in this book. Many people wrote to her from different countries. Atmanandaji could read and answer letters written in French, German and English. For other languages, she took help from competent people. One letter she published is given here :

A letter from abroad :

"Mother, are we friends ?

Mother, do you love me?

Can you reach me here ?

You have said you are here, so sould you please appear ?

Am I too impure ?

Am I not sincere ?"

**Sri Ma's answer to this letter :**

"God is the Supreme Father, Mother, Beloved, Friend,

Companion. Of course He is a friend. He is indeed the Friend. Everything that appears is the manifestation of the Supreme Lord. He is the true friend. All pain and sorrow are due to the sense of 'I' and 'mine'. The world is God's creation. In God is everyone and everything. Where is He not? This is how Ma is always near although the body does not go everywhere. In the *Paramātmā* (Supreme Being) there is no possibility of impurity or insincerity at all. " Truly as Colin Turnbull has said :

".....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 each one who comes to her but in her very being she is a message for the whole of mankind."

### **The Twelfth Samyam Saptah at Shuktal, 1961**

Kalyan Deva of Shuktal had requested the privilege of holding the annual *samyam saptah* at his remote ashram. Sri Ma arrived at Muzaffarnagar on November 7, 1961. Didi and her other companions were surprised to see that a big reception party was awaiting Sri Ma at this small railway station. A band party struck up a welcoming tune. A procession escorted her with colourful flags and decorated staffs.

Shuktal is known to be the sacred site of the first teaching of the Bhagavata by Shukadeva to Raja Parikshit. Raja Parikshit was doomed to die within a specific time. He chose to live like an ascetic listening to *Bhagavat-Katha* related by Sri Shukadeva, the illustrious renunciate who is held to be the

supreme ideal for all who seek to give discourses on scriptures. Mahatma Kalyan Deva had done some work of research and was engaged in reviving the ancient site for modern times. Temples had been built on what was considered to be the original site of the first oration. He was a quiet person. He had attended many of the functions held in Anandamayi Ashram but had not made himself known to anyone. He became formally known to Sri Anandamayi Ma at Shuktal.

Sri Ma's entourage was reminded of the previous *samyam saptah* at Naimisharanya. A whole township had come into being in this remote far away corner of India. There were rows upon rows of tents; poles upheld lines of electricity; pipes were laid for an adequate water supply. Large kitchen quarters were busy providing food for the guests as well as hordes of local visitors. Haribabaji came with his *ras-lila* party, Swami Akhandanandaji, Chakrapaniji, Chaitanya Giriji Maharaj, Avadhootji and many more arrived. Vishnu Ashramji was this time their host.

The *samyam saptah* began with the day of total fasting. Mahatmas, princes and princesses, business magnates, government officers, teachers, students, housewives and some village folk were united in the resolution of embarking on a life of *samyam* for a week with hopes that it would become a way of life rather than a sporadic effort. Sri Ma was available for most of the time. In her radiant presence time went by all too swiftly. As usual no one suffered from pangs of hunger or felt bored or fatigued. All participants always

declare that they feel rejuvenated after the *samyam saptah*.

Immediately after the *samyam saptah*, a special *Bhagavat Saptah* was inaugurated. Vishnu Ashramji himself accepted the role of Shukadeva, that is the one who would give the discourse in the evening session. Batukda would read the text in the morning session.

Shanta Pathak had been with Sri Ma Anandamayi for quite a while. She was the youngest daughter of Gopal Swarup Pathak, an eminent lawyer of Allahabad and at this time the Vice-President of India. Shanta had wanted to celebrate a *Bhagavat Saptah*. She was devoted to this ritual for almost a year. She had come prepared with everything that is required for such a ritual. Her meticulous amassing of the elaborate paraphernalia was admired by everyone. Her parents came from Delhi to join in as auditors. The audition or the listening to the reading as well as to the discourse on the Bhagavata is considered a very important part of the ceremony. Vishnu Ashramji was a speaker of reputation. His voice itself was pleasing and his exegeses of the Text were fascinating. It became an unforgettable experience for all who were lucky enough to attend.

Narayana Swamiji was one of the dedicated auditors. He had decided not to miss even one sentence of the discourse. At the commencement of one of the evening sessions, Vishnu Ashramji asked him to escort one of the pandits to the presence of Sri Ma who was still in her room upstairs. Narayana Swami hesitated because he did not want to miss

the beginning of the discourse. He, however, could not disregard Vishnu Ashramji's request, so he went up the stairs to Sri Ma Anandamayi's room accompanied by the pandit. The doors were closed. He was told that Sri Ma was resting alone in her room. He became restive not knowing what to do. Suddenly the doors opened and Sri Ma appeared saying, "I had the *kheyala* to come out!" Narayana Swamiji hastily and thankfully presented the pandit to her and hurried back to the Hall. He found that the assembly was singing *kirtan*. Vishnu Ashramji had not begun his discourse. There had been some fault with the microphone which had gone off the air. It came back again simultaneously with Narayana Swami so that he did not miss even a little of the discourse! He thankfully acknowledged a case of divine grace!

Shanta performed an elaborate *puja* of Sri Anandamayi Ma. For this purpose she used the money and ornaments given to her by her parents. Her complete dedication at the feet of Sri Ma, her unostentatious demeanour, her quiet and intelligent way of doing things became a matter of inspiration for other girls. One of them said joyfully that she would ask her parents to give her the money set apart for her marriage so that she could use it for a religious ceremony.

Sri Ma seemed not to endorse this sentiment. She said, "All of you have elected to follow a path of renunciation. So if you wish to organise a religious rite, you should take help from where you are and not ask your parents. The ashram will provide. Moreover a Bhagavat Saptah is for the deepening of

spiritual aspirations. All of you might form a group, helping each other to bring about such a function. One of you could read the Bhagavata, another could give a discourse. All necessary duties could be carried out by other members of the group."

Sri Ma continued in Shuktal which in itself was unusual because in general she left a place after the main function was concluded. Crowds collected everyday for her *darshan*. People walked from nearby villages, or came by bullock carts from distant ones. Kalyan Deva was surrounded day and night by people all requesting him to make it possible for them to have Sri Ma's *darshan*. He did not have to disappoint anyone, because he saw Sri Ma appear before the crowd again and again. The assembly broke out in shouts of "Jai Ma Jai Ma, Jai Ma Anandamayi" again and again. Sri Ma spoke sometimes to the villagers. When Kalyan Deva attempted to express his gratitude for her compassion, she said, "Janata Janardan (God in the form of Crowds). They have come to give *darshan* to me. There can be no question of inconvenience because everyone belongs!"

Kalyan Deva himself was an ascetic of high repute. He was always seen covered with a wrapper, It served him during the considerable heat of summer and also the excruciating cold of the winter season. He subsisted on fruits and raw vegetables only. There was no question of cooking for him. He did not have a specific residence either. He lived on temple verandahs or just about anywhere. The local people were very

devoted to him. He said to Sri Ma, "It was my great wish that Ma should come to Shuktal. Now that Ma has come the whole region is blessed by her presence! I have never seen such crowds here before. The word has spread that Ma, 'the Goddess in human form' is residing here. The people are ecstatic to have Ma's *darshan*. We are all fortunate to have had this opportunity."

All the sadhus and Mahatmas were reluctant to say good-bye to Sri Ma Anandamayi. Vishnu Ashramji was scheduled to perform a prestigious *yajna* at Bulandshahar. He had requested Sri Ma to come to Bulandshahar on this occasion. Kalyan Deva had organised a mammoth meeting of local people at Muzzaffarnagar. The people of the region were still coming in hordes to catch a glimpse of Sri Anandamayi Ma.

Sri Ma left Shuktal on November 30, 1961, On way to Bulandshahar she arrived in Muzzaffarnagar in midmorning. Kalyan Deva was already there. With great difficulty he made way for her through a great press of people to the platform under a tree where a throne-like silver chair awaited her. He spoke to the crowd and also on behalf of the crowd to Sri Ma to say a few words to them. Sri Ma said, "All of you know that I have no speeches to give. I am a small child only; as such all children are my friends; their parents are my parents. So I belong to all of you and you are close to me. Nobody at all is an other or a stranger. So I may make a request. I say unto you *Harī kathai kathā aar sab vritha vyatha!*"

Kalyan Deva took it upon himself to interpret this *vani* to

the crowd. The people were ecstatic at this meeting. But, alas, again it was time to go. Kalyan Deva bade a sad farewell and went back to Shuktal while Sri Ma proceeded on to Bulandshahar.

A local Sethji Puran Chand had put his new *dharamshala* at Sri Ma's disposal. All arrangements for her reception and accommodation were exemplary. Other devotees Sri Rishi and his wife, Vimal Chatterjee and his wife were associated in welcoming the large retinue accompanying Sri Anandamayi Ma.

In the evening Sri Ma was escorted to the *pandal* (marquee) for the evening session of *satsang*. Vishnu Ashramji and other Mahatmas made her welcome. The Chief Priest of the *yajna* made a special speech. He said, "The recitation of the Chandi (*Durga Saptashati*) was commenced yesterday. Today the Goddess herself has arrived to bless us all. She who is not easily available even to the gods of the heavens, to day is here now in her Divine Person. The people of this town are blessed indeed to have this *darshan*. Due to the meritorious acts of our previous lives we today have earned this privilege."

Other people spoke in this strain. This sojourn at the sacred site of Shuktal saw the beginning of public acknowledgments by *sadhus* and *mahatmas* of Sri Ma Anandamayi's divine personality. No one hesitated to give her the highest form of respectful allegiance. Wherever she went, she was received as the personification of Divine

Grace.

Sri Ma, however, always appeared to efface herself and to humbly bow to the ascetics. She would say that her "Babas" liked to place her high just as a father lifts up a child to play with it.

The elaborate function was concluded with all its attendant pagantry. Sri Ma left Bulandshahar on December 4, for Vrindaban.

Vrindaban Ashram was comparatively quieter. Sri Ma had some time to be on her own away from crowds although religious rites and functions continued to be held in the Ashram.

### **Death of a young girl in the Kanyapeeth**

News had come to Vrindaban that many girls of the Kanyapeeth were suffering from typhoid and measles. Dr. Mathur, a local doctor, who had become attached to the ashram, was in charge and was looking after the girls. At this time Kshamadi's own niece Chua was an inmate of the Kanyapeeth. She was very keen to stay in the Kanyapeeth and had come away very happily from her own home. This girl succumbed to the illness and died on January 5, 1962. It was a shocking news for everyone. Kshamadi was so sure that nothing untoward would happen that she had not informed Chua's parents about the illness. Kshamadi's mother was in Varanasi at this time. In great agitation of spirit she came to Vrindaban. Sri Ma listened to her lamentations at length. The usual magic was wrought. The lady regained her calm. She

and her husband Dr. Girin Mitra (Kshamadi's parents) had long been living separately like *Vanaprasthis* in the Ashram. Girin Mitra had settled down at Puri Ashram. He wrote a sensible letter of consolation to his daughter. Chua's parents also accepted God's will in a spirit of complete dependence on Sri Ma's *kheyala* for their family.

Sri Ma sent a few people to Varanasi for Kshamadi's support directing that all the girls who were not ill should be immediately removed to Vindhyachala Ashram. She sent a few people to Vindhyachala also to look after the girls and provide security because this was a remote place. News of another tragic death was received at this time. Vishuddha's elder sister Shraddha who had lived in the Kanyapeeth sometime, but now was married and at home, died after a short illness. Her father and brother came to Vrindaban to Sri Ma, an unfailing refuge in times of sorrow. This family was also very close to Sri Ma, Vishuddha and Shraddha were Virajmohini's grand daughters.

At this time in Vrindaban Sri Ma had become very quiet. If not required to attend *satsangs* or give *darshan* she would lie on her bed or sit in Didima's room. She ate very little. In the afternoon she took a glass of water, and at night some boiled vegetables without any seasoning and sometimes a small *roti* with it. Her demeanour remained the same. No visitors saw any change in the radiant presence. Didi was very concerned but was helpless. She conjectured that the irresponsible and wayward behaviour of some of the ashramites was not

pleasing to Sri Ma but it was not her *kheyala* that she should speak words of reprimand. After all she never sought to bring about any changes in things or people. She spoke to those who wished to listen and in terms of advice or suggestions only. Now Sri Ma said to Didi, "I know you will not go against my *kheyala* so now go to Varanasi to look after the girls."

Didi was helped to make swift preparations for leaving Vrindaban the same day. When the train started she reflected sadly that Sri Ma had sent away all those who could look after her a little, that is, herself, Vimala and Udas. Among those left was Buni who was so ill and seemed to be living on divine grace only. Sri Ma had sent for Guneeta's mother Kripal who also accompanied Didi to Varanasi.

Didi found that Dr. Mathur was looking after the girls most competently. He seemed dedicated to the care of his little patients. He not only provided medicine for the sick but also toys for the convalescent ones. Didi and Kripal escorted the girls who had recovered to Vindhyachala. She was happy to see in Dr. Mathur a worthy successor of Dr. Gopal Dasgupta who had for many years looked after the health of the Ashram people.

Sri Ma Anandamayi (whatever Didi's worries were) was never inconvenienced by the absence of her close companions. Now Lakshmiji (a Kashmiri lady who had joined the Ashram) was glad to assume charge of the simple dishes to be prepared for her. Chitra and Pushpa stayed close but there was really nothing very much to do.

After spending some more quiet days in Vrindaban, Sri

Ma came to Allahabad on February 6, 1962 to Satya Gopal Ashram. This was to grant their request of an at least three-day visit every year. From Allahabad Sri Ma went to Vindhyachala to be with the little girls of the Kanyapeeth.

Sri Ma came down to Varanasi to attend the *Bhagavat Saptah* in the memory of Tutu, the pilot son of Bhubanda and Moinadi who had died in a plane crash. She also attended the ceremonial rites related to the death of the young girl of Kanyapeeth. In Chua's memory one hundred and eight small girls (*kanyas*) were invited to the Ashram. They were received ceremonially, seated on *asanas* and offered flower garlands and sandal paste. The little girls are worshipped as images of the Goddess. They are offered *puja* and *bhoga*. Arati is performed. This is known as *Kumari-Puja*.

Another *Bhagavat Saptah* was arranged by the family of Dr. Mathur. This was a devout family totally dedicated to the service of the Ashram. Sri Ma praised Dr. Mathur and his brother again and again for this care and concern for the little girls of the Kanyapeeth.

Kavirajji was now in Varanasi. Sri Ma visited him and also his ailing friend who was known in the Ashram as Kalida. Kalida was also a scholar. The greatest pleasure of his life had been the sessions of dialogues he would hold with Sri Ma whenever she was in Varanasi.

Didi saw that Sri Ma's indifferent state of health was continuing but she graced all occasions in her inimitable style of pleasant equanimity.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Purna Kumbha at Haradwar, March, 1962

*Sri Ma Anandamayi took up her residence at Baghat House. People started assembling for taking part in the ritual of bathing on specific dates. The Kumbha started with Shivaratri on March 4, 1962. Sri Ma Anandamayi said. "Many years ago Jogibhai had arranged for me to see the processions from a vantage point. He had rented a room for the occasion right on the bank of the river near Brahma Kunda. It is a unique sight. Crowds and crowds of people moving toward the same goal. Hordes of people without any selfish desires or hankerings motivated only by the wish to cleanse themselves by the purifying waters of the sacred river. A rare phenomenon, a dimension of the Immeasurable, a play, a lila of Him who is the Ultimate."*

—Didi Gurupriya

Shivaratri was celebrated in its usual style of joint worship. The large congregation spent the whole night in *puja, kirtan and dhyana*.

Haribabaji Mahraj was in Bandh at this time preparing to perform the inauguration ceremony of a new Temple of Lord Gauranga. He would have been pleased to see Sri

Anandamayi Ma in Bandh but learning that she was not in her usual health refrained from inviting her to the functions. But Sri Ma, knowing that for him all functions would be incomplete without her, proceeded to Bandh on March, 18.

This was the time of Holi also. It was celebrated at Bandh much to the happiness of the villagers who were fully dedicated to their Guru, Haribabaji. Their unquestioning obedience was demonstrated one day by a remarkable incident. An old woman while carrying the baskets of earth for the *bandh* (dam) slipped and fell and was buried under the collapsing sides. Her fellow workers immediately set to work and dug her out. She was hurt and bleeding a little but she still wanted to finish her own assignment of two more baskets of earth. She said, "Baba's orders must be carried out!" She was however persuaded to go home and rest for the day. Sri Ma related this incident to many people as an example of the unquestioning obedience to the Guru which is important for all aspirants of Truth.

From Bandh Sri Ma returned to Haradwar via Dehradun on March 31. She had gone to Dehradun to see one of the very ill sannyasis in the Ashram. This was Swami Chidananda (father of Jamuna, one of the erstwhile girls of the Kanyapeeth). He passed away while Sri Anandamayi Ma was in the Ashram. She accompanied the station wagon carrying the remains of the old sannyasi to Haradwar where the last rites were performed with care and circumspection.

In Haradwar Didima's various disciples were celebrating

the *sannyasotsava* that is a week of celebrations culminating on the day of her *sannyasa*. The hall had been decorated tastefully by Billoji. Hiru Brahmachari performed *puja* and *arati* every day of the week. Chaitanya Giriji Maharaj gave his usual erudite discourse on the Upanishads in the mornings. Other Mahatmas spoke in the evening sessions. In Sri Ma's presence the entire function took on an added festive air. The concluding day coincided with the main bathing event of the Kumbha as this was *Chaitra Sankranti* that is April 13, 1962.

In Haradwar Sri Ma had become well-known amongs all the ascetic orders. They gave her public recognition during this *Kumbha*. The Mahants of Niranjani Akhara came to Baghat House to request Sri Anandamayi Ma to grace the Shahi procession with her presence. On 12th April they came to fetch her in a car at 9 A.M. She and her entourage were escorted to the Akhara. Here Sri Ma's retinue were impressed to see a well caparisoned elephant awaiting her. There was a silver throne on its back; the sadhus with the greatest care helped Sri Ma to mount on to the back of the huge elephant and sit on the throne. Her spotless white dress added to the sparkle of the silver. Her black tresses cascaded down her back and gently framed her face. The Sadhus put a glowing garland of red roses on her neck. Her natural majesty seemed to have increased a thousandfold. Udasji in her ochre robes stood quietly behind her.

When the elephant moved out to lead the procession through the teeming throngs, Sri Anandamayi Ma joined her

palms together in response to their greetings and salutations. Her matchless grace and inimitable smile made this *darshan* memorable for hundreds and thousands of pilgrims. The Niranjani Akhara truly created history as their lead was followed by other Akharas at all other *Kumbhas* later.

### **Janmotsava at Kishenpur Ashram**

Kishenpur Ashram in Dehradun had the privilege of celebrating the *Janmotsava* of 1962. As years went by this function grew in scope and splendour. Devotees arrived from far and near; the Ashram could accommodate quite a number now. Other places were rented to house the overflow. The Mahatmas were the V.I.Ps. of this function who attended in greater numbers every year. Haribabaji arrived with his own entourage and also the *raslila* party. Mahamandaleshwara Maheshwaranandaji from Mumbai, Vishnu Ashramji from Shuktal, Sharananandaji and Swami Akhandanandaji from Vrindaban came to preside over the sessions of *satsangs*. Jogibhai was always in the fore front of the princely states of the country.

The Janmotsava was from 2nd May to 22nd May this year. For nearly three weeks Kishenpur Ashram radiated a festive aura. All the days were spent in almost constant God-remembrance, in *kirtan*, *patha*, discourses, and of course *Matri-Satsanga*.

On May 6, the ritual of Akshaya-Tritiya was observed. On May 7; a special function marked the installation ceremony of Chhabi Banerji's two small Images of Radha and

Krishna. She herself sang beautifully on the occasion to captivate the hearts of all. An *akhanda nama samkirtana* leant its melodious accompaniment to the ritual. On May 17. Sri Ma Anandamayi came to the Hall late at night. She was surrounded as usual by a group of young women, Chitra, Chhabi, Kripal, Billoji, Bishuddha, Munni, Shanta, Indira, Pushpa, Anasuya and a few others. To the accompaniment of a lively *kirtan* Sri Anandamayi Ma held one girl at a time and danced along with her. She partnered all the girls one by one. Somebody had brought a bunch of colourful handkerchiefs. Sri Anandamayi Ma as well as the girls fluttered these aloft creating a rainbow of colours. It was a beautiful *lila* of a way of celebrating the presence of many abilities in the Hall. Later Anasuya said that there are some Temples in Maharashtra where such a dance is performed with colourful cloths but Sri Ma Anandamayi had not seen such a festival. As usual her spontaneous *kheyala* must have been evoked by the presence of so many devout young women all looking toward her gracious person as their *Ishtadevata*.

The *Janmotsava* was concluded on May 22. From early evening the Ashram precincts became crowded with devotees. Many foreigners were also part of the congregation. Before midnight all devotees had taken their seats after bathing and putting on fresh clothes. They listened to the *kirtan*, the reading of scriptures and the recitation of Sanskrit hymns (*stotras*). The beautifully decorated *chowki* awaited Sri Ma's coming. She was in her room. At 2.30 A.M. or so

Jogibhai, Avadhootji, Nirvanananda and Nirmalananda went to her room and prayed for her presence in the courtyard. She was escorted to the *chowki* where she lay down, covering herself completely with her spotless white wrapper. Udasji took up her position near the head of the *chowki*. Nirvanananda performed the elaborate *puja* watched by the worshipful congregation.

At the time of the concluding *arati* a simultaneous *arati* was performed by four young men to the assembled ochre-robed Mahatmas sitting on a dais. The magnificent ceremony was over with the coming of dawn. A long queue was formed for the much coveted *pranams* at the feet of Sri Ma Anandamayi, an annual opportunity available to all irrespective of status, caste, creed, sex, age or any other difference. Ruling Princes stood quietly sometimes behind their own servants, business magnates with their workers, high officials perhaps behind their own clerks. For this occasion all were at one level. They quietly approached the *chowki* one by one. This ritual took a few hours. Sri Ma lay quiet and inert on her *chowki*. After the last *pranam* had been offered she was roused gently and escorted back to her room. After the festival the process of farewells also was inevitable. Groups and individuals bade Sri Ma sad farewells and departed. Soon the Ashram became quiet.

At this time Sri Ma had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with her retinue of young girls. She said one day, "Some of you think that *sadhana* should be performed away from the

world in seclusion so that there would be no distractions. This is fine if the world were practically speaking a safe place for young girls. Unfortunately this is not so. It is best to abide in a place where your safety is ensured, where you are free to pursue your *sadhana* to the best of your ability. The presence of fellow-seekers can be very supportive; you can join together for some *satsang* every day. Work is never a distraction if you take it in the proper spirit. If you think that various duties are just a waste of time then that leads to resentment, tiredness and lassitude. If you think that all that you do in the Ashram is also *sadhana* then you are spending the whole day in God-remembrance.

"You know that at one time I was required to look after a large family. This heavy routine was never a chore for me because it was all done for Him who alone appears in various forms. If you work for Him only then it is all *seva* and not a hardship.

"Rigourism is not essential to *sadhana*. What is required is one-pointed perseverance in your resolution to engage in the search for self-realization."

Sri Ma spoke in this strain for some time. She never projected herself as a Guru who must be obeyed. But in other contexts she always laid emphasis on obedience to the Guru. The group of young women were fortunate that Sri Ma showed them the way to what is real *sadhana* which can lead to fulfilment. (In later years Kishenpur Ashram saw the establishment of special rooms where young women could

stay and follow their own individual ways of *sadhana*.)

Sri Ma continued, "One is sometimes pulled in two directions : whether to discharge one's duty to parents or to abandon them in order to engage in *sadhana*. Actually this is not a conflict; if one can truly surrender at His feet then He assumes all responsibility. He is the Genuine Merchant, (*asli vyapari*) who offers to take away all your heartaches, impurities, faults and sins and give you in exchange the gifts of bliss, immortality. Just as a doctor operates and removes malignancy so does God cleanse you by hardships and sorrows. It is all for your ultimate good. I am not saying that all adversities should be suffered as God's gifts. There is reasonableness in everything. One must seek all redress that is available, keeping one's trust in God. Of course, without a strong feeling of utter renunciation (*vairagya*), worldly ties cannot be loosened. So, effort is required. Your tears of anguish, heartaches are all offerings which He accepts. He is the Friend who understands.

"If you choose to remain in this life then you should develop a friendly attitude toward fellow residents. Co-operation gives strength to a community."

Under the influence of these inspirational talks a few of the young women formed a group. They formed a *satsang* and asked Sri Ma to sit with them. Sri Ma even gave it a name 'Paramartha Bhagavati Sangha'.

Sri Ma Anandamayi continued in Dehradun, alternating between the Ashrams at Kishenpur and Kalyanvan. On July

11, 1962 while sitting in the *satsang* she described a strange scene she had "seen" (not physically). She said, "I 'saw' a place. There was some habitation on one side. There were roads and railtracks. The people were foreigners. There was some radio announcement which stunned the people who stood stock still. This body was among those people standing quietly. A huge spiral of dark smoke was seen rising from below. The column of smoke rose higher covering the sun. It started to rain fire, but this did not come down to earth. The radio said, 'It has come', 'it has come'. Slowly the smoke spread out like clouds covering the sky."

One of the audience Mrs. Sabbarwal said that America was testing atomic bombs. She had read in the newspapers that some tests had taken place at Pacific Islands. May be Sri Ma had witnessed these.

Sri Ma was continuously on her travels during the rest of the year. She visited towns and *puja* sites at the invitation of her devotees. Lakshmi Puja was celebrated in October in the new Satsang Hall at Agarpara Ashram.

She spent a little quiet time in Hazaribagh at the invitation of Jagannath Rai. Then it was time for Kalipuja at Ranchi Ashram and then for the *Samyam Saptah*.

#### ***Samyam Saptah at Pilani***

By 1962, the eleventh year of the *Samyam Saptah*, it was well established as the main function to be celebrated near Sri Ma (apart from the *Janmotsava*). There was no fixed location for it so it was scheduled according to the convenience of the

sponsors. In 1962 Sri Jugal Kishore Birla invited Sri Ma to Pilani, the well-known site of his educational venture. The entire campus was planned with care and imagination. There were green lawns and flower beds separating the many buildings all upto date and modern looking. There was a spacious Guest House where Sri Ma was received with great respect on November 4.

Pilani used to be a small village in Rajasthan but Birlaji's experiment with establishing a residential educational institution had transformed it completely. The Vidya Vihara now housed a student community of nearly ten thousand in commodious hostels. Suitable residences were provided for teachers and professors. The whole area was presided over by a graceful Temple to the Goddess of Learning, Saraswati. This university town was fully functional and running smoothly when Sri Ma was made welcome here.

This time *vratees* or initiates were fewer in number than usual that is, just 150 from other towns. The school hall was the venue of the *satsangs*. It was seen that the hour of *maunam* was well attended and also observed with scrupulous care. There were hardly any fidgetings, coughs or clearing of throats that sometimes affected bigger groups.

The hour of discourse also was extremely interesting. Dr. Tripurari Chakravarty made the Mahabharata come alive for the audience by his thrilling descriptions. He said that it was this time of the year exactly and also the place from where Sri Krishna had proceeded to Hastinapur on his mission of peace.

The town of Udupi may have been around Pilani where the Pandavas had stayed for one year doing *tapasya*. The final day of the *Samyam Vrata* coincided with Sri Krishna's return with the news that He had failed in His mission. He advised the Pandavas to prepare for war. Was it an augur for the forthcoming battle with China? Dr. Chakravarty with his rare powers of expression brought the past to the present so that the audience was thrilled to feel that it was living in the age of Sri Krishna as well as Sri Ma Anandamayi.

Sri Ma left Pilani on November 12 for New Delhi. On November 14 she had a sudden *kheyala* to visit Jawaharlal Nehru at his residence. She arrived very early in the morning without any appointment. Indiraji and Jawaharlalji were specially delighted because it happened to be his birthday. Sri Ma came away before they had time to make any arrangements for her proper reception.

Sri Ma evidently had some *kheyala* for her devotees of foreign lands. She left Delhi for Dehradun and Haradwar accompanied mainly by foreigners. They could have a rewarding time in closer proximity with Sri Ma in these quieter Ashrams.

After a fortnight Sri Ma descended to Vrindaban for some rites which were performed in her presence. She continued to move to other towns including Mumbai attending various religious undertakings.

The end of the year 1962 was marred by the unprovoked sudden attack by China. It was a most unexpected threat from a source which India had accepted as a friendly nation. The country was in shock and for a few days quite panic-stricken.

An interesting incident happened near Sri Ma at this time. Upadhyayji (Nehru's family friend and private secretary) came to see Sri Ma one night and spoke privately for some time.

Early in the morning Sri Ma asked Udasji if there was some special news. Udasji knew nothing about the outside world. So she answered in the negative. Not long after India breathed a sigh of relief when the broadcast came through regarding the sudden and unaccountable halt declared by the Chinese Army. Some important people around Sri Ma at this time (like Dr. Triguna Sen) opined that there was a connection between Upadhyayji's prayers and the sudden cessation of hostilities which followed immediately.

February 1963 saw her in Modinagar. Sri G.M. Modi had invited her on the occasion of the sanctification of the Temple at Modinagar. The function was very elaborate. Many Mahatmas had been invited to conduct *satsangs* and prayer meetings. Sri Ma added considerably to its celebrations by singing *kirtan* for quite some time. At the concluding function she distributed *prasada* herself which was always a most endearing feature of any *satsang*. As written earlier she picked up handfuls of sugar puffs (*bataas*) and hurled them at the crowds surrounding her. Sometimes she made a feint

by pointing in a direction but actually throwing it in another causing laughter and merriment and lastminute scramblings. Sri Ma's hands were small. It was always a wonder to see the profusion of the sugar-puffs cascading forth from one such small hand.

Sri Ma Anandamayi continued to travel and attend many religions functions in various towns. In Jodhpur Haribabaji held elaborate functions to which. Sri Ma as well as other Mahatmas were invited. After the *satsangs* at Jodhpur Sri Ma went up to Dehradun and Haradwar. She attended Shivaratri at Haradwar. Prayag Narainji had opened a *dharamshala* in Sitapur and also in Nimsar. He received Sri Ma very joyfully when she visited both residences. Nimsar now had a plot of ground earmarked for a small Purana Mandir in the future. It will be recalled that at the time of the *Samyam Vrata* Sri Ma had suggested that all the Texts should be kept somewhere in Nimsar and they should be read (even a little portion) every day at the same time. Sri Ma's *kheyala* itself made everything possible and gradually the Purana Mandir took shape in the new Ashram at Nimsar.

Sri Ma spent some time in Vindhyachala quietly with her devotees from Germany, America and France during March/April. These interludes seemed to be becoming a part of her otherwise hectic programmes. The foreigners awaited their time most patiently and were never disappointed.

The *Janmotsava* of this year (1963) was celebrated in Kolkata. A new spacious hall had been built in the new

Ashram at Agarpara. Living quarters were also added so that Sri Ma's retinue could be housed comfortably. The function was held in its usually grand manner. Mahatmas graced the occasion. Crowds had learnt to be disciplined for *satsangs* and other items of the celebration. Beautiful music was ever the most endearing feature of all celebrations in Kolkata.

After the *Janmotsava* Sri Ma travelled back to Dehradun/Haradwar visiting many towns on her way. The month of July (1963) saw her established in Kishenpur Ashram. One day Sri Ma sustained a little injury to one of the toes of her foot. She herself placed a tiny stick as a splint and bandaged up her foot. She took some rest for a few days so that the little toe could heal itself.

One day a charming ceremony was observed in Sri Ma's room. Gopal, a little boy (youngest son of A.P. Dikshit), was taught by Nirvananandaji to read and write the Alphabet. This ceremony is known as *Vidyarambha* that is "The beginning of learning". Gopal wrote on a new slate following the instructions by Nirvananandaji.

Another unusual event was the coming of a Roman Catholic clergyman from France who wished to know about Hindus and about Sri Ma as well. He seemed not to be on a mission but just an inquirer into the strange new ways of Hinduism. In an interview with Sri Ma, he asked, "What does Mataji consider to be the most essential thing in life?" Sri Ma answered, "To try to find out 'Who I am.' To endeavour to know the meaning of this existence. The search after God, He

who has brought into existence the body that I know."

**Question :** Are there many people who succeed in this quest?

**Sri Ma :** Quite a few attain some perfection. Realization is rare indeed!

**Question :** Does Mataji think she has attained perfection?

Sri Ma laughed and said, "Whatever you believe me to be, that I am!"

**Question :** What does Mataji think of Christianity?

**Sri Ma :** By claiming a special position, it breaks up the unity of all religions.

The priest asked many more questions and seemed to acquire some understanding of his environment. From his country he wrote back to say that he missed the atmosphere of the Ashram!

More and more foreigners found peace in Sri Ma's company realizing that there were no aliens near Sri Ma. They could practise their own *sadhana* in harmonious togetherness with other devotees.

Sri Ma Anandamayi spent about a month in Varanasi during the *pujas* of Durga, Lakshmi and Kali (Deepavali). The devotees of Varanasi counted themselves blessed to have had this opportunity of prolonged *darshan*.

The Rajmata of Gwalior had invited Sri Ma to Mumbai to bless with her presence the *Bhagavat Saptah* she had arranged in the memory of Maharaja Scindhia who had passed away a year earlier. Mahatma Vishnu Ashramji had been requested

to perform the *Saptah*. The Mahatma had hesitated a little to come to the Palace in Mumbai not being used to secular settings but he reconsidered his decision when Sri Ma herself came to attend the function for a few days. Sri Ma's presence did away with his scruples. She could not stay to see its completion because she was expected in Ahmedabad for the annual *Samyam Saptah*.

**Ahmedabad :** It had been Kantibhai Munshaw's ardent wish to hold a *Samyam Saptah* in his house. Now Kundan Ben (his wife) and other *bhaktas* of Ahmedabad got together to arrange for this mammoth gathering of devotees in order to fulfil Kantibhai's wish. All arrangements were perfect as if he were there himself to see to them.

A miracle marked this *Samyam Saptah*. On the third day a sudden thunderstorm threatened to disrupt the hour of *dhyana* in the morning. The *pandal* equipped with electric lights, fans, loudspeakers etc. swayed dangerously. Sri Ma sat still like a statue in her place. Everyone in the *pandal* took heart and continued to keep to his seat. Now the storm turned into a fierce downpour of rain. The canvas top of the *pandal* was breached at several places. Some people held up an extra canvas sheet along the heads of Didima and Sri Ma where it was coming through. Big vessels from the kitchens were brought and placed under other leaks. These vessels needed to be emptied by pails, to contain the rainwater from inundating the sitting space. All this took place in utter silence so that the quietude of the hour was maintained.



At the conclusion of the hour the announcer asked everyone to leave the *pandal*. When the people hesitated the announcer said that Sri Ma would not leave until the *pandal* was empty. So an orderly crowd assembled on the verandah of the house. As soon as Sri Ma came out on to the porch of the house the *pandal* collapsed burying everything under it. Sri Ma indicated that *satsang* could continue. She herself sat in the porch facing the house. The *vratees* arranged themselves on the verandah and the spacious drawing room opening on to it.

The management most efficiently set to work and repaired the *pandal* and re-erected it within a very short time so that the *satsangs* could take place as usual the next day. A miraculous escape for everyone! The fact that *satsangs* had taken place actually in the house for one morning and evening may be of some significance as fulfilment of Kantibhai's desire for it.

Many people came especially for the *Samyam Saptah* each year. The crowd was considerable but nobody had sustained any hurt or inconvenience. Some foreigners were also in this crowd, notably Melita Maschmann a journalist who came from Germany and soon became one of the usual crowd travelling with Sri Ma.

The new year 1964 found Sri Ma in Kolkata attending the annual *Geeta Jayanti* which had been inaugurated by Gopal Thakur Mahashaya.

As expected Sri Ma kept moving from town to town. She

was in Haradwar for the function of Mahashivaratri of 1964. (March 12).

The *Janmotsava* of 1964 was held in the new spacious Ashram at Almora. The crowds were pleased with the mild climate, the large open terrace and the uplifting view of the high rising mountains on all sides. The usual mood of gaiety was marred when the news of Pandit Jawaharlalji's death was received. Some high-ranking officers were obliged to leave for Delhi immediately. Panditji was devoted to Sri Ma, so his loss was felt as such by all other devotees who crowded round Sri Ma. The *Utsava* concluded with the usual elaborate *puja* and *kirtan* during the night. The morning was a blessed one for everyone. They beheld their beloved Sri Ma in her radiant beauteous form arising out of the deep *samadhi* of the night. This was fulfilment for everyone.

A new temple to Rama, Sita and Lakshmana with Hanumanji was established and consecrated in Kalyanvan at Dehradun during July 13-15. The spacious grounds had been donated by Sachi Ghosh, a devotee of long standing. Sri Ma continued to move around Dehradun and Haradwar. During her stay in Dehradun a group of 30 boy scouts came to visit her from Jallundhar. They were enchanted with their new "Friend" and on their way back chanted in chorus "Ma Jallundhar" (Ma came to Jallundhar) Sri Ma answered "Ma is in Jallundhar, Ma is travelling with you back to Jallundhar". The boys grinned happily.

During the sojourn in Dehradun close contact was

established between the Institute of Divine Life Society and our Ashrams. The then Head, Swami Chidanandaji came to see Sri Ma and continued to pay to her the greatest respect and faithful adherence. He became a regular visitor to all functions celebrated near Sri Ma in our Ashrams.

Sri Ma was invited to visit their Ashram at Rishikesh on Sept. 9. They were celebrating Swami Sivanandaji's advent 100 years ago. She was received with ceremonial fanfare. It was truly a mingling of like-minded people following difficult paths of self realization.

Foreigners continued on the increase as visitors. A party of ten French people came to Sri Ma breaking their journey to holy places in India. They were very happy because they could communicate with Sri Ma in some fashion of their own. Sri Ma captivated their hearts by thanking them for coming to visit with her.

An American repeated Yogi Yoganandaji's invitation to Sri Ma to visit America. Sri Ma's response was quick and surprising, "I am in America. Try to see me in America."

This year Vrindaban had the luck to serve Sri Ma for a considerable time. Not only the three important *pujas*, that is Durga, Lakshmi and Kali were performed here but also the ever popular annual *Samaym Saptah* (1964).

Sri Ma's long time devotee Maharatanji (the name given to her by Sri Ma, meaning "great jewel") had been ailing for some time. Sri Ma had asked her children to bring her to the Ashram but due to the severity of the sickness they had not

dared to do so. Maharatanji passed away on Vijaya Dashami day (October 16, 1964) in Delhi. Her daughters, Jeetji, Billoji, Shakuntala, Kamla, Vimla and son brought the carriage carrying her body to Vrindaban Ashram. Sri Ma came out of her room and caressed Maharatanji lovingly saying thrice, "Maharatan, Maharatan, Maharatan". There was not a single dry eye amongst the onlookers.

### *Samyam Saptah in Vrindaban 1964*

This *Samyam Saptah* took on the aspect of an international affair because of the presence of visitors from abroad in considerable numbers. Arnaud Desjardins came with his wife Denise, a small girl Muriel and a baby boy just four months old. The baby would lie in his pram near the *satsang* Hall. In a way he was being looked after by all the *vratees*. When presented to Sri Ma, she smiled at him and said, "Do you recognize me?"

There were other families and individuals who participated fully in the *Samyam Saptah*. The rostrum was occupied by Haribabaji, Swami Akhandanandaji, Maharaj Chetan Giri. Mahatma Sharananandaji and other Mahatmas of repute. The *satsangs* were well-attended and the curriculum carried out with scrupulous care.

On November 25 the very well known Sadhu Thakur Sri Seetaramdas Omkarnath paid a visit to Sri Ma. He gave a talk in Bengali. Every one was much affected by the radiant presence of this great saint.

Another life dedicated to Sri Ma from early childhood

ended around the same time (26th November 1964). This was Bunidi (Juthika Guha) who had been a close companion. She had elected to travel with Sri Ma from the day she had spontaneously left home to be with her. Bunidi's attachment to Sri Ma was exemplary. While she did not care about religious functions she attended to Sri Ma with scrupulous care.

Bunidi breathed her last in Sri Ma's presence. The entire Ashram was plunged in sorrow. The funeral procession was attended by sannyasis, brahmacharis and other residents of the Ashram. Didi gazed mournfully at the flower decked body of Bunidi who lay as if asleep. Didi had lost her young almost inseparable companion of more than 25 years.

The end of the year saw Sri Ma in Varanasi where she remained upto January 31, 1965. The Shree Shree Ma Anandamayi Sangha took this opportunity to observe the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of a Charitable Hospital which in later years became a fully equipped modern Hospital.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### The Popularity of the *Samyam Saptah*

*"By the Samyam Saptah, Mataji gives the vrates initiation into samyam. There is a great difference between teaching and initiation. Teaching appeals to man's intelligence while initiation transforms the I-ness. This indeed is Grace!"*

—Swami Sharananandaji Maharaj

During Sri Ma Anandamayi's gracious presence the years flew by on swift wings of joy and fulfilment. Sri Ma travelled ceaselessly visiting hundreds and thousands of devotees, amongst these were surely those who could not afford to travel to where she was or were incapable in other ways. The religious functions multiplied by leaps and bounds. Devotees arranged many rites and functions which could grant them the blessing of Sri Ma's presence for a few hours or a few days.

The Ashrams developed suitably to accommodate larger congregations and also the constant flow of devotees who came to spend days with Sri Ma. The most remarkable feature of Sri Ma's wandering way of life was the presence of the Mahatmas at every major function. The prestigious savants, heads of monastic orders, found in Sri Ma Anandamayi their Ideal of *sthitaprajna* as described in the Gita. Swami Swatantrananda said of her, "She says she is an unlettered

child but I have heard the wisdom of the Upanishads pouring out of her lips!"

As years passed by the *Samyam Saptah* became the most important function of the Ashram because Sri Ma herself made it so by her full participation and endorsement of its strict routines. That it was pleasing to the Mahatmas was demonstrated by their presence en bloc irrespective of doctrinal disparities. The key-note central, restraint, abstinence, *samyama*, was endorsed by all as the corner stone of *sadhana*, spiritual endeavour for God realization, the highest ideal of human life.

#### **Sri Ma's Special Mission**

Years before, quite unusually for her, Sri Ma had once made a categorical declaration of her "special mission" in her favourite context of fifteen minutes' God remembrance. Dr. Prafulla Chandra Datta describes one day's visit to Sri Ma's Ashram; (13.2.59) at Agarpara : He found Sri Ma surrounded by a motley crowd. There were men and women from far off countries as well as the Bengalis from near at hand. The eminent scholar Dr. Nalini Kanta Brahma was explaining to a group of foreigners Sri Ma's message of participation in a joint effort toward the seeking of Truth. He was saying, "Sri Ma says, just as *kirtan* may be kept up for any number of days by relays of singers, similarly God-oriented people may engage in an unbroken (*akhanda*) *japa*-series, throughout the day and night also. Everyone can participate irrespective of religious orientations, status and occupation in

the world, sex, age or country. Those who have a thirst for arriving at Truth may combine their efforts, irrespective of differences in opinions, divergent paths, variety in Names by which He is remembered. Everyone sensing an identity with others may strive toward achieving the One who alone appears as many."

Sri Ma herself began to say something and since she was looking at Daya Mata and Swami Kriyananda, she spontaneously spoke in English the words "Special Mission...." Immediately she stopped and looking at the Indians she said with a smile, "What is the meaning of Special Mission? Did I use the words rightly? I always ask for a favor from those who have an affection for me, and alms from those who are indifferent - a gift of 15 minutes every day. Just 15 minutes at the same time every day. No matter in what state or where you are in your room, outside, whether you are ill or well, whether you are called upon to serve or command - at the appointed time remember Him. There is no question of purity of clothes etc. He is ever the Holy. He is untouched by impurities because it is He who makes everyone pure. Amidst the transient din of the world, try to fix a time for remembering daily the Blessed One for achieving the Bliss of Enlightenment. There is no question of country or religion or brotherhoods - a new vista opens up unifying all pilgrims on the path of God-realization."

Dr. Brahma said, "Sri Ma is making things easy for us. In this modern age, not much time can be given to an austere way

of life, but 15 minutes are just possible for everyone!"

Sri Ma said, "Don't you talk about laying a foundation? If the foundation is not strong then the entire building may collapse. These 15 minutes will be like the corner-stone of continuous remembrance. The meaning of *akhanda* (fissureless) *sadhana* is just this: the daily routine of 15 minutes should be unshakeable."

Dr. Brahma again raised a point: "Ma, there are injunctions regarding fixed timings in all religions. How is this a new dimension?"

Sri Ma : "Look at it this way. Not all religions are the same. The Hindu observes (if he does at all) the three *sandhyas* (meeting point between night and day, midday and between day and night), the Mussulman says *namaz* five times, the Christians also have their timings and so on. But this little duration of time of 15 minutes cuts through all barriers and diversities. Wherever a *sadhaka* is engaged in *sadhana*, you also can add your own little effort to that and so create a unity- an individual effort to line up with the totality of human endeavor."

As a result of Sri Ma's constant reiterations on the theme of dispassion and self-discipline, the function which emerged as the most popular celebration of all was the *Samyam Saptaha-Mahavrata*. Gradually it acquired a unique characteristic of its own. It had seemed incredible that a man or woman may devote more than three parts of a 24 hour period to the seeking of Truth; God was never that much of a

reality or pre-empt all other preoccupations of daily life. But so it happened. Men and women not at all used to any kind of rigourisms, enjoyed keeping fasts, listening to the reading of scriptures, singing *kirtan* and meditating for one hour at a time. Even the kitchen staff were able to join in because cooking was reduced to a minimal level. The elaborate feasts which marked Sri Ma's presence everywhere did not happen during this week. The *bhandara* (feast) took place only on the completion of the *Samyama-Saptaha-Mahavrata*.

Thus Sri Ma's "Special Mission" of a corner stone of the daily 15 minutes toward God-remembrance had truly flowered into a full-fledged *Samyam Saptah*.

To say that Sri Ma emphasized a distancing of the world, a life in retreat from the theatre of action, will however not be at all correct. Her emphasis was on the Good-The *Shreyas*. She had said once, "I am an onlooker only. If you do not ask, I have nothing to say. But if you ask and it is my *kheyala*, certainly I will tell you the *Shreya* way of life. The 'good' way is the way of *samyama*."

The *Samyam Saptah* was a practical demonstration of how *samyama* could become an integral part of life in the world — a small wedge to break up the tides of forgetfulness.

Sri Ma's own way of life in the world demonstrated fully that she neither trivialized it nor did she recommend a retreat from it. On the contrary, to thousands of her devotees she spoke constantly on their role in life, their obligations to their families and their commitment to a spirit of service in the world.

Sri Ma's travels were ceaseless. On February 28, she was present at the establishment of a Shiva Mandir at Rajgir. Rajgir was as yet not quite well-developed as was usual with Sri Ma's visits to a place.

Sri Ma had been invited to visit Bhopal for some time. Now in answer to Sir Datar Singh's invitation she reached Bhopal on March 27. Sir Datar Singh and his wife had established a sort of ashram, a conglomerate of a dairy, a school and residential rooms. Sri Ma and her retinue were made welcome and other arrangements were perfected by Kripalji, their daughter who already had joined Sri Ma's Ashram. Kripalji's daughter Guneeta was a member of the Kanyapeeth.

The Senior Begum Sahiba of Bhopal came to visit Sri Ma. After her private dialogue with Sri Ma she declared that she had spent the happiest day of her life!

Ranchi Ashram had the felicity to celebrate the *Janmotsava* of 1965. Ranchi again was another town which had seen quick expansion of its Ashram.

Ranchi being close to Kolkata and Jamshedpur it had to cater to a large congregation but all was done well. The considerable crowd participated joyfully in all religious rites and festivals. The final *Puja* maintained its high standard of focussed attention, melodious *kirtan* and the discipline of *dhyana*. The devotees felt well rewarded when they had *darshan* of Sri Ma's beautiful glowing form early in the morning the next day.

### The Samyam Saptah at Hazaribagh, 1965

It was Sri Jagannath Rai's ardent desire to host the annual *Samyam Saptah*. His chosen place was his own mansion in a village called Suriya near Jamshedpur. This quiet remote village woke up to the sounds and activities of a large residential congregation. It was a legend of this locality that Mahaprabhu Gauranga had passed through these erstwhile forests on his way to the South. It seemed the same *kirtan* he had probably sung was again resounding through these lonely precincts. The surprising fact was that all the villagers came to participate in the general functions like *kirtans* and discourses. Sri Ma sang *kirtan* for the villagers for a long time, who in their turn joined in large numbers.

After the *Saptah* Sri Ma travelled back to Varanasi. She was accompanied by her hostess Srimati Rai and her daughter, who joined her for a prolonged stay. On November 24 the Governor of Uttar Pradesh Sri Vishwanath Das Prasad, came to the Ashram for a *darshan*. Gulzari Lal Nanda also came to be with Sri Ma for some time.

### Purna Kumbha at Allahabad, 1966

The usual lay out of prestigious *akharas* made the precincts colourful as usual and full of pilgrims busy with their temporarily transformed way of life of *sadhana* and *samyama*.

Unfortunately for our country Lal Bahadur Shastri died in Tashkent. His cabinet colleagues headed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi came to Prayag to observe the sad ritual of the

consigning of the ashes to the sacred river. After this observance, all the ministers came to pay their respects to Sri Ma Anandamayi. Mrs. Gandhi was especially eager to see more of Sri Ma in the future. She requested that she should always be informed whenever Sri Ma happened to be in New Delhi.

For some time Sri Ma had been getting news of Haribabaji's indispositions. She now undertook the long journey to Hoshiarpur to visit with him. Haribabaji's health and spirits improved visibly during Sri Ma's sojourn and when she left for Vrindaban his condition was very hopeful. She returned to Hoshiarpur to spend Holi with Haribabaji because he was not yet strong enough to come to Vrindaban.

Sri Ma's travels were generally connected with the needs of her devotees. One such need was fulfilled by her in March 1966. She was in Anandakashi at this time when tragedy befell the family of Manomohan Ghosh living in Varanasi. His eldest son Saroj Kumar passed away suddenly plunging the whole family in sorrow. Sri Ma came away from Anandakashi in the hills to the gruelling heat of Varanasi to be with the family in their hour of need. Only Sri Ma's gracious presence could assuage a grief that would have been unbearable otherwise.

Sri Ma's visit to Varanasi coincided with the annual Vasanti Puja at Varanasi Ashram. The girls of the Kanyapeeth were happy to have Sri Ma in their midst so unexpectedly. For three days the Ashram was in a special

festive mood presided over by Sri Ma's radiant presence.

One day somebody gave a special book to Sri Ma saying it was a new publication. Sri Ma gave it to one of the girls of the Kanyapeeth sitting near her and asked her to read it aloud so that all could hear. The girl did as she was bid. Sri Ma signalled somebody to put a small *chowki* (wooden small table) in front of her to rest the book on.

Sri Ma very unobtrusively put a garland round the girl's neck. A mark of sandal wood paste was put on her forehead and a *kushasana* provided for her to sit on. It seemed Sri Ma quietly initiated her into the role of a *pathak*, a reader of Scriptures on formal occasions.

This quiet *lila* was an important landmark in the educational history of the Kanyapeeth. Subsequently a few girls became fully qualified as *pathaks*. The future would see the girls of the Kanyapeeth organise and perform a *Bhagavat Saptah* by themselves. Sri Ma's pioneering ways were very subtle.

Another function which had assumed importance in the Ashrams was the *Sannyasa - Utsava* of Didima. The middle of April every year saw the celebration of this event; the Ashrams commemorated the prestigious occasion in the presence of both Didima and Sri Ma. This year this celebration took place in Delhi with its usual solemn programmes of *Puja* and discourses by eminent Mahatmas.

Among new devotees mention may be made here of Sri M.L. Khaitan and his wife Raja Ben. They had acquired a

piece of ground near the Kishenpur Ashram where they intended to build a house for themselves in order to be close to the Ashram. This year they prayed for celebrating the *Janmotsava* on this plot of ground. A small building was already in readiness to receive Sri Ma and her attendants.

### ***Janmotsava in Dehradun***

As it happened Sri Ma stayed in Dehradun for a prolonged period of four months this time. The people of Dehradun had the good fortune of celebrating not only the *Janmotsava* but other smaller functions as well. The Khaitans had made perfect arrangements for Sri Ma and her large retinue. Sri Ma, Didima and Didi were housed in beautifully made temporary thatched cottages on their spacious grounds. A *pandal* for *satsangs* had been erected.

This ground adjoined Kalyanvan which was in a way an extension to the Ashram at Kishenpur. This entire region hummed and throbbed with the presence of a large crowd which assembled for the function. The V.I.P. guests, namely, the Mahatmas arrived and as usual imparted great solemnity to the occasion. Amongst them were Mahamandaleshwara Sri Chetan Giri of Kailash Ashram, Rishikesh, Swami Sri Sadananda and Bhajanananda of Paramartha Niketan. Dandi Swami Sri Vishnu Ashramji of Shuktal and Swami Sharananandaji of Vrindaban. Sri Krishnananda Avadhootji may be said to have become a part of our own organisation.

Haribabaji Maharaj came with his usual large entourage. He and his party were accommodated in the residential house

ready now for this purpose in Kalyanvan. Haribabji had recovered fully but had been advised to take care of his health. He did not stand to play his heavy gong any more during the evening *kirtan* but sat near clapping his hands. The stretch of the Rajpur road from Kishenpur Ashram to Kalyanvan and the Khaitans was full of people walking back and forth. There were constant *kirtan*, small rituals, distribution of fruits and food to asylums in the city, a *Kumari Puja* and many such celebrations. The final day arrived and everyone focussed on the main *puja* to Sri Ma Anandamayi.

The usual atmosphere of blessed peace reigned in the *pandal*. Only those who have participated in this collective *puja* will remember and understand. The morning saw the crowd of devotees coming forward to touch Sri Ma's feet in an orderly fashion, the once-a-year privilege looked forward to by everyone.

Since Sri Ma continued in Dehradun and as it was vacation time, lots of people stayed on. For some time past restrictions regarding *darshan* had been gradually introduced. The sheer press of people made this necessary. At specific times Sri Ma would come out of her room and sit in public. But this was only a part of the story. Sri Ma's room was almost constantly filled with guests who needed special interview. Sri Ma in general had no respite from visitors even if she was not visible to the gatherings outside. Gradually people got accustomed to these new ways of the Ashrams. Sometimes Sri Ma travelled to nearby quiet places like



Raipur or Kankhal to be away from the crowd for one or two days but in general she was available to the devotees almost round the clock.

### **A Car Accident**

Sri Ma went to Haradwar for one day on the 15th July. While returning to Dehradun on the 16th her car met with an accident in the town. A public bus ran into the car sideways at a crossing. Sri Ma had seen the out of control bus and had flung out her left arm as if to ward off the danger of impact. The sharp collision was felt by all but it was a miraculous escape. Sri Ma herself was seen to have injured her left palm and received a severe shock on the left side of her body. Fortunately the radiological investigations did not show any dislocation or fracture. Sri Ma made her own arrangements regarding treatment. Her palm was bound up according to her instructions.

The devotees knew only one way of rendering service in such situations. An *akhanda* (non-stop) *kirtan* was started in order to pray for Sri Ma's recovery. The Ashram was full of devotees so the *kirtan* was a great success. The constant repetition of the Name produced an ever increasing atmosphere of harmony and bliss which was tangible and felt by visitors who came to the Ashram. It seemed that Sri Ma was using the poor condition of her health to fire the enthusiasm of the people to put in their best efforts. She improved visibly. She was also able to take complete rest in her room. The hours of *darshan* were curtailed. The doors of

Sri Ma's room would be opened for half an hour everyday for the daily *darshan*. On July 28 people were greatly delighted to see Sri Ma's left hand without the heavy bandages for the first time since the accident.

During these times a few people closely connected with Sri Ma passed away; one of them was "Thakurma" (Granny), a lady who was known as such because it seems she resembled Sri Ma's *Thakurma*. She belonged to that cadre of great women who assumed charge of the cooking of mammoth meals for congregations wherever Sri Ma abided for long or for some special functions. Her cheerful nature and sense of humour had endeared her to all co-workers in the Ashram.

Another long time devotee who passed away was Manomohan Ghosh. As written above he was obliged to suffer the event of his eldest son's death which perhaps was just too much for a crippled old man. He left a gap in the array of devotees from Dhaka and Shahbagh.

### **The New Temple at Vrindaban Ashram**

The middle of August saw Sri Ma in Vrindaban. The Temple for Sri Krishna was almost ready for its inauguration on September 7. This new Temple for Sri Krishna had a very interesting history. Jogibhai had wished for such a Temple in Vrindaban to fulfil his late grandmother's desire to build a Temple for Krishna. Nothing had been done about this for some time although the site had been earmarked for it between the two Temples to Gauranga and Nityananda on

one side and a temple to Shiva on the other. When the construction was commenced the ground was found to be sandy. The foundation was dug till firm ground was reached. This altered the superstructure as well. It was now bigger than either Temple on each side and higher too. Nothing had been done about the Deity so far.

In the meantime the Rajmata of Gwalior (Vijaya Raje Scindhia) had so admired the Images of Gauranga and Nityananda in their Temple that she had commissioned the well-known artist Nitai Pal to create an Image of Krishna for her. She had a Temple ready for the Image in Gwalior. As it happened this was Nitai Pal's last piece of creative art because he died soon after. The Figure was a little different from the usual ones, since the feet instead of being crossed were in a very delicate and charming posture.

But the Rajmata could not reconcile herself to this unusual Figure. She repacked the statue and procured a conventional one for her Temple. Subsequently she came to Vrindaban and presented the crate to Sri Ma. Sri Ma for her was the presiding Deity of Vrindaban, that is Sri Radha Herself. The Rajmata said, "This *Chhalia* (Krishna) has given me great trouble. Now He is all yours! Take Him!"

Didi hearing the name *Chhalia* (Krishna) was reminded of Sri Ma's song which she had sung spontaneously many years ago (Vol. II). Now it seems *Chhalia* had come to Vrindaban to occupy a Temple predestined for Him. The Rajmata said that if Jogibhai was agreeable she would like to

share in the cost of the building. She said he was like a brother to her and so the brother and sister would provide for the Temple.

Sri Ma for the last few months had been inviting people to come to Vrindaban for this function. The attendance therefore exceeded even that of the 60th Birthday celebrations in Varanasi.

Great numbers flocked from Kolkata, Ranchi, Varanasi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Poona, Dehradun and other towns. The *Satsang* Hall at Vrindaban as well as the grounds were spacious. At this time the Ashram began to look like a beehive. Accommodations had been reserved months before in *dharamshalas*, temples and guest houses.

Krishnananda Avadhootji interested himself in all the various activities taking place in the Ashram. He arranged for overall decorations and took charge of the procession of the Deities through the town before the installation ceremony. This was a pageant on a very large scale enjoyed by all.

Sri Ma herself was busy giving directions for every detail of the ceremony. She composed a lyric for the occasion to be sung continuously for five days including the day of consecration:

*Krishna Chhalia Anandalal*  
*Brajaramana Prangopal.*

The teeming crowds were happy to have Sri Ma's *darshan* nearly the whole day and late into the night. On September 7 all devotees sat in meditation in the Hall adjoining the Temple.

during the time of the consecration. The qualified personnel performed all rituals with scrupulous care under Sri Ma's guidance. The invoking of the Deities in metal Images was performed in an atmosphere of solemnity and profound devotion. The ambience was hallowed. All participants felt the utter joyousness of this unique occasion.

Sri Ma resumed her travels after the big function in Vrindaban. She visited Dehradun, Hoshiarpur and Ahmedabad in quick succession, then it was time for the festival of Durgapuja in Mumbai at the residence of B.K. Shah (19th-23rd October).

As usual this function was celebrated with great enthusiasm by the local people as well as visitors from other towns. The well known singer Lakshmi Shankar delighted the congregation by her *bhajans* one day. Soon it was time to go to Pune where the devotees were waiting to perform the Lakshmi Puja in their new Ashram. From Pune Sri Ma returned to Mumbai leaving for Bhopal on November 2. Datar Singhji had built an Ashram for Sri Ma on a piece of land quite remote from the city. She had already stayed here earlier.

Sri Ma had promised to be in Delhi for the festival of Kalipuja which was celebrated as usual with great enthusiasm by the concourse of devotees.

In Delhi Sri Ma found time to visit Sri J.K. Birla who was seriously ill and wished for her *darshan*.

She returned to Vrindaban to preside over the festival of

Annakuta, that is, an offering of large quantities of food to the Deity and later its distribution amongst the devotees as well as the poor of the town. A colossal amount of food was prepared for the Chhalia Mandir. Sri Ma personally guided all efforts toward a successful distribution of this special *Prasada*.

### **The Samyam Saptah of 1966**

The Maharaja and Maharani of Bhavanagar sponsored the *Samyam Saptah* of this year in Vrindaban. The Ashram was shaping well and could accommodate the large influx of devotees from out of town. Sri Ma as always took great interest in this week of intense *sadhana* and was well-nigh untiring. No detail escaped her. Not only was she present in the hall nearly throughout the long hours of the daily programmes but she was visible at odd moments here and there, looking to the arrangements so that they would be faultless.

Every one of the Mahatmas who usually graced this function with his presence came either for the whole week or part of it.

Among the speakers was Mahamandaleshwara Maheshwaranandaji of Mumbai, who had shown his appreciation of this function and made it a point to participate in it. He as well as other Mahatmas spoke unreservedly in praise of Sri Ma for bringing about such a unique function of concentrated spiritual endeavour.

This year six foreigners had enrolled as *vratees*. Their patience in sitting through hours of discourses in Hindi was

rewarded when Swami Chidanandaji (Divine Life Society) spoke in English on four days of the week.

The *Saptah* ended as usual with the midnight meditation on the last day. Next morning Sri Ma distributed *prasada* to all participants.

Sri Ma continued in Vrindaban because a special *puja* was celebrated in the Ashram right after the *Saptah*. This was Katyayani Puja performed by the well-known *sadhaka* Sri Narendra Nath Brahmachari of Deoghar. Theirs is a special way to worship all Deities. Sri Brahmachariji sat in front of the beautiful Image of Katyayani (an aspect of Durga). His followers (more than seventy) sat in rows behind him and they performed the *puja* all together. After the *Puja* the Image was immersed in the river Yamuna with due ceremony.

After all these ceremonies and the departure of visitors the Ashram became quieter. Sri Krishnananda Avadhootji organised a music festival on December 17 to celebrate Thakur Haridas Jayanti. It is believed that on this day (400 years ago) Haridasji had a vision of Bihariji (Lord Krishna) while singing. The function was very successful. Sri Ma graced it with her presence for some time. She also attended everyday a *Bhagavat Saptah* at Swami Akhandanandaji's Ashram.

Sri Ma started on her travels on December 19. She went by car to Agra at the invitation of Mr. And Mrs. K.P. Bhargava. She had three European devotees with her. The Europeans were delighted to enjoy this quiet interlude.

After a couple of days Sri Ma travelled to Varanasi. The girls of the Kanyapeeth were happy to receive her in their midst after a long time.

From Varanasi Sri Ma proceeded to Allahabad where she spent three nights in the Ashram of the late Sri Gopal Thakur. Her sojourn in Allahabad was as delightful as it was short. Sri Ma was in an excellent expansive and inspiring mood and the devotees of Allahabad felt themselves singularly blessed. Sri Ma returned to Vrindaban on December 31, 1966.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Sri Ma Anandamayi in Vrindaban

**Question :** *During the hour of silent meditation we all concentrate on our Ishta. Whom or what does Sri Ma contemplate?*

*Sri Ma (smiling) : Whatever anyone imagines her to contemplate-be it any Ishta, or person or objects. There is only one.*

**Swami Maheshwaranandaji :** *If there is only one, who meditates on what?*

**Sri Ma :** *Yes, where there is a meditator and an object of meditation, there one can speak of meditation. But this small child (Sri Ma) knows no japa, no achamana, no meditation. Nothing at all! Therefore, whatever her fathers, mothers and friends do in their meditation does its work also for her!*

—Sri Ma Anandamayi

The new Ashram at Vrindaban continued to be lucky enough to see Sri Ma for another few months in between her brief sojourns at other places. The end of January saw Sri Ma in Naimisharanya to attend the laying of the foundation stone for the Purana Mandir. Sri Prayag Narain of Sitapur had made excellent arrangements for their stay. They were housed in

five cottages directly on the banks of the Gomati river. Sri Ma had stayed here in 1960 for a few days after the main functions at Nimsar were over. This time Sri Ma spent three days in these charming and peaceful surroundings of great natural beauty.

Didi Gurupriya and her attendants as well as Didima with hers had come to Nimsar from Varanasi. They went back to Varanasi while Sri Ma returned to Vrindaban. This separate mode of travels had now become quite usual. Because of her indifferent health it was considered inadvisable for Didi to travel constantly. In general she and Didima stayed in one of the big Ashrams. They would come to join Sri Ma for a major function or if she had the *kheyala* to stay in one place for any length of time. People gradually got used to the absence of Didi from Sri Ma's entourage. Udasji remained Sri Ma's constant companion. Others were Lakshmiji, Pushpa, Chitra, Shanta, Indira and many young women who were allowed to travel with her more often. Swami Paramanandaji remained Sri Ma's chief escort ably supported by the younger brahmacharis of the Ashram namely Panu Brahmachari, Swarupananda, Bhaskarananda, Nirvanananda and others.

Sri Ma spent a quiet time in Vrindaban. During these years Sri Ma was visited by many foreigners, singly or in groups. Mr and Mrs. A. Desjardins with their two children came very often. Their daughter Muriel was a great favourite with the Ashram people. As she grew up she came to know Sri Ma more and more. There were other families who swelled

the number of devotees. The ambassador of Czechoslovakia was a frequent visitor. They could have *satsang* with Sri Ma in between her major engagements.

For the last several years Sri Ma had been spending the festival of Holi near Haribabaji Maharaj. It was his birthday as well as the Birthday of Sri Gauranga Mahaprabhu, his *Ishta-Devata*. This year (1967) Haribabaji invited Sri Ma to spend Holi and Shivaratri at Bandh with him.

As written earlier Bandh is a unique place. It is situated at a distance of 12 miles from Anupsahar, the nearest Railway station. The road to it is negotiable by jeeps or bullock carts only. Until about 40 years before the villagers of this region had to suffer from the floods during the rainy season and after. The State Government had built a dam but it proved to be inadequate. Sri Haribabaji used to wander about in this area doing his own *tapasya*. Moved by the misery of the villagers, he organised them and personally helped to raise the dam (*bandh*) to a suitable height. He sang *kirtan* with them and carried baskets of earth on his head to the *bandh*. More than 800 villages were involved in this work of reconstructions and looked upon Sri Haribabaji as God Himself who had come to rescue them. They were totally devoted to him as their Saviour. Since he himself was so devoted to Sri Ma, all the villagers accepted her as a person to be worshipped whole heartedly.

At this point in time, Bandh as a location was well-developed. It had many houses, a Satsang Hall and Temples

to Radha Krishna and Gauranga-Nitai. There was enough accommodation for visitors. There were several tube wells, electricity and proper sanitation. The whole place was spotlessly clean and the spirit of service shown by the villagers was truly admirable.

Bandh being so inaccessible Sri Ma did not have a crowd round her. The villagers were told to await her arrival in the Satsang Hall for *darshan*. Thus Sri Ma's cottage doors could remain open without fear of intrusions.

This year Sri Ma and her party watched a special *lila* from the life of Sri Gauranga. This drama had been written by Swami Premananda of Manipur. He took 14 years to compile it researching every kind of material available on the subject. He trained the actors too. It was truly special. The audience forgot that a drama was being enacted and followed with breathless attention. Even Mahatmas were moved to tears. It was entirely due to Sri Haribabaji that Bengal Vaishnavism found such a foothold in regions where the *lilas* of Krishna and Rama reigned supreme.

The festivals of Holi and Shivaratri were observed quietly but with joy and delight.

It was time for Sri Ma to leave Bandh. Travelling through Moradabad and Dehradun she arrived in Kankhal Ashram on April 10.

This small Ashram called Shantiniketan became the venue for Didima's *sannyasotsava*. Didi and Didima and their attendants coming from Varanasi had joined Sri Ma at

Dehradun.

As usual Didima's *sannyasotsava* was performed with meticulous care on April 14. The day was marked by *puja*, *kirtan*, *patha* and discourses by Mahatmas invited to grace the occasion.

The next day being the Bengali New Year's day the door of Sri Ma's room was opened again and again so that everyone could do *pranam*. Usually Sri Ma gave *darshan* every evening by sitting on the open terrace-like roof of the small building. There was always a big crowd round her. On this day an old woman apparently looking for a very distinctive personality made her *pranams* to an American lady sitting near Sri Ma's chair, before taking her place among the crowd. She must have realized her mistake after some time. At the end of the *darshan* time she approached Sri Ma and clasped her feet. As this was strictly forbidden she was rebuked severely by the girls sitting near Sri Ma. But Sri Ma held her hands and spoke kind words enquiring about her family. It transpired that she had been fasting all day for this *darshan* and was totally overwhelmed by Sri Ma's gracious touch. Sri Ma gave her a bag of fruits with which to break her fast. On learning that she had four sons, Sri Ma said, "From to day you have a daughter too!"

Somebody told Sri Ma about the old lady's earlier mistake. Sri Ma said, "You are quite right. There is but the One only. To whom soever you bow, you bow to Him only; persons, animals, trees, stones all are He."

While Sri Ma stayed in Shantiniketan crowds eddied round her. There were some religious functions as well. After a few days Sri Ma moved to a house called Shantiniwas on the road to Rishikesh between Dehradun and Haradwar. This house belonged to Sri J.K. Birla and had been placed in her service to suit her convenience. In later years Sri Ma often retired to this house for quiet spells in between busy programmes.

### **Janmotsava in Swadeshi House, 1967**

The Jaipuria family had prayed for the *Janmotsava* of this year to be performed in Kanpur at their residence. They had made extensive arrangements for this function (May 3 to 27).

As it happened the *Janmotsava* of this year was celebrated in three towns, Dehradun, Varanasi and Kanpur. Sri Ma continued in Kishenpur Ashram so the devotees mindful of their good fortune arranged for the first *puja* on the night of May 3.

From April 26 to May 5 Sri Ma kept *mauna* all day long talking only in the evening after the time of *arati* in the Temples. During the time of *darshan* nobody spoke a word and so there was a pin-drop silence. Many delighted in the deep hush that enveloped the meeting.

On May 5, Sri Ma accompanied by Didima and others left for Varanasi where the girls of the Kanyapeeth happily performed special *puja* to mark the passing days of the *Janmotsava*.

Sri Ma arrived in Kanpur on May 12 to the great joy of her

hosts and a large crowd of devotees awaiting her *darshan* by this time.

In Kanpur the Jaipuria family had made excellent arrangements for the birthday celebrations that were held in the extensive compound of their property called Swadeshi House. In the midst of a lawn a very charming thatched cottage had been erected for Sri Ma. The cottage was air-conditioned. Sri Ma was amused because she hardly ever used the air conditioner. There was a covered space in front of the cottage where Sri Ma could meet small groups of people.

A very spacious beautiful *pandal* which served as a Satsang Hall was put up at a short distance. It was equipped with many coolers, fans, loudspeakers, etc. and proved most comfortable in spite of the heat of May.

On May 12, the day Sri Ma reached Kanpur, the well-known saint Sri Seetaramdas Onkarnath came to see her with some of his disciples. He left for Vrindaban the same evening. In the afternoon of May 13 Kanpur experienced one of the heaviest hail storms within living memory. The *pandal* was abandoned and partly dismantled but in no time another one was erected on a different lawn and the programmes could continue.

The Mahatmas who graced these functions arrived to take up their positions on the dais. Sri Haribabaji came accompanied by the *ras-lila* parties. These performances became very popular. The *pandals* were packed to capacity whenever a *lila* was performed.

The usual features of the Birthday Celebrations, namely *Kumari-Puja* and the *Nama-Yajna*, were observed with faultless care. The *Tithi-Puja*, which marks the climax and end of the functions, was celebrated from 3 to 5 a.m. on May 27. The attendance was truly enormous, but for the efficiency and foresight of the hosts things could have become chaotic. However, everything proceeded in an orderly fashion and every one was given the chance to ascend on to the dais after the *puja* and do *pranam* at Sri Ma's feet, the privilege granted only at this time.

Sri Ma remained lying on her couch without the slightest movement til 2. p.m. while the morning *satsang* was carried on in another *pandal*.

The hosts entertained more than a thousand people to a sumptuous feast on Sri Ma's Birthday. Sri Ma herself, roused with difficulty by Avadhootji and Jogibhai, was allowed to remain undisturbed in her room for the rest of the day. The *Nama-Yajna* party from Delhi started their function late at night as usual. They believed whole heartedly in the power of *kirtan* and that *kirtan* was sufficient *puja* to Sri Ma on all occasions. Their faith was borne out because Sri Ma attended in *kirtan* many times while it continued throughout the night and next day. With the conclusion of the *Nama-Yajna* a great festival was concluded to the grateful satisfaction of all participants.

#### Summer in Delhi radun

Sri Ma accompanied by Haribabaji Maharaj left Kanpur



for Dehradun on May 29. The Mahatma and his large party were settled in Kalyanvan, which now had enough accommodation. Haribabaji continued with his *satsangs* as meticulously as ever.

Sri Ma remained in Dehradun for the rest of summer. It being holiday-time, the Ashram had its full complement of men, women and children. After a sojourn of about six weeks Sri Ma returned to Vrindaban on July 20, 1967.

At the time of the *Janmotsava* the devotees lost one of the eminent ones from amongst them. Dr. Panna Lal, as great a scholar as an administrator, died actually on May 27. He had come to know Sri Ma in the early forties and since then his and his entire family's commitment to Sri Ma was total. They were all devoted to Sri Ma. Dr. Panna Lal was one of the admirable elders in the family of devotees. His loss was irreparable.

This time Vrindaban Ashram was lucky enough to enjoy Sri Ma's considerably longer period of residence. All the major festivals were celebrated here with their usual high standard of ritualistic observances. *Kirtan* and *bhajans* were almost continuous in the Temples. Sometimes the voice of Sri Ma thrilled the hearts of the congregation. Beginning with Guru Purnima, the Ashram was able to celebrate Jhoolan, Janmashtami and then Navaratri itself.

Just before Durga Puja a *Mahaprabhu Lila* was enacted in the hall by a new *ras* party on October 5. It was a performance of rare beauty. Sri Ma remained present throughout the play

which took 4-5 hours. The audience was spell bound and often moved to tears. The author Sri Swami Purushottamananda had composed the *lila* on the life of Sri Gauranga Mahaprabhu. The subject matter was taken from a book called *Swapna Vilasa*. The author had taken great pains to preserve authenticity as well as train the actors. This was their first performance. Only after the *lila* had been hallowed by being staged in front of the Nitai-Gauranga Temple in Sri Ma's presence it was shown to general public everywhere.

In the month of October Sri Ma paid a short visit to Varanasi. The school for young girls known as Sri Ma Anandamayi Kanyapeeth or simply as the Kanyapeeth was doing very well. The annual function of Prize-Distribution was held at this time in Sri Ma's gracious presence. The guest of honour who distributed the prizes was Dr. Gaurinath Shastri, the Vice-Chancellor of the Sanskrit University. He spoke words of praise for the achievements of the girls. He was pleased to have Sri Ma's *darshan* at the same time.

Sri Ma returned to Vrindaban in time for Diwali or Kali-Puja which was celebrated on a grand scale.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Samyam Vrata, 1967**

The *Samyam Vrata* was again observed in Vrindaban from November 5 to 15. Every *Samyam Vrata* is a spiritual experience. Many of the participants look forward to it from one year to the other making it a point never to miss it; those who have come for the first time and perhaps part of the week express the desire to come again the following year for the

whole period. Almost all the Mahatmas who grace this function with their presence came as usual to enlighten the *vratis* with their inspiring talks. Swami Akhandanandaji, a resident of Vrindaban, was a daily visitor. Among those who had taken to come from out of town were Mahamandaleshwara Chaitanya Giriji, Mahamandaleshwara Swami Maheshwaranandaji, Swami Chidanandaji of Divine Life Society, Swami Vishnu Ashramji of Shuktal and Swami Sharanandanaji. Only Haribabaji was absent due to indifferent health. Swami Krishnananda Avadhootji was as usual ready with his inaugural talk for this occasion.

The *Samyam Saptah* was enriched by beautiful music as usual—Chhabi Banerji, Bibhu Brahmachari, Pushpa and also Malati Devi of Rai Bareilly were present, so this part of the programme was exquisite. Moreover, the *vratis* had a special treat on November 14 when Mrs. Talyarkhan brought the famous singer Mrs. Subbulakshmi and her husband and daughter for Sri Ma's *darshan*. The well-known singer and her daughter sang *bhajans* for about 70 minutes at the end of the morning session. It was superb. Everyone forgot that their single meal of the day was getting delayed by more than an hour. The kitchen staff also could be seen standing at the back listening entranced. Sri Ma sat in the hall till 13.30 that day. The illustrious singers seemed to enjoy the atmosphere and expressed the desire to come again and again for Sri Ma's *darshan*.

Every evening session ended with *Matri-Satsanga*.

Sometimes she allotted part of her time to some speaker. This time for the first three days she gave part of her time to Pandit Kapindraji, the well-known witty expounder of the Ramayana who kept everybody amused and relaxed after the many serious and thought-provoking discourses of the day. On the 11<sup>th</sup> night he left for Delhi and promised to return on the 13<sup>th</sup> but he did not come. On the 14<sup>th</sup> night at the end of the programme, he suddenly emerged out of the crowd and ascended the dais. Sri Ma requested him to have some rest and a meal first as he had just arrived but he wanted to relate his experience of a miracle. He said he and five other people had left for Delhi on the 11<sup>th</sup> at midnight in a jeep which he was driving himself. Evidently he must have been overtaken by sleep because suddenly the jeep got out of control and fell into a deep ravine of about 50 feet. However as if by a miracle nobody was hurt and even the jeep remained intact so they could proceed to their destination. His daughter had shrieked with fear but immediately shouted, "Ma has come!" Kapindraji said "Yes, Ma is here". He could see her distinctly standing in front of him. Only she seemed much taller than usual. Sri Ma asked, "How did you lift the jeep out of the abyss?"

Kapindraji : "You yourself lifted the wheels. I saw it clearly. You yourself saved us!"

Sri Ma : "There is only one. God saved you. Since you have faith in this little girl, He appeared to you in her guise to save you." Kapindraji said, "My body was in Delhi for three

days but my mind has been at you feet all along. I couldn't think of anything else."

The congregation was impressed by Kapindraji's narration of his experience.

On the last day midnight meditation was observed as usual by candle light. Another custom which had been propagated recently was the presence of a very special Narayana Shila during the hour of midnight *dhyana*. Sri Ma came to the evening *satsang* at 8:30 p.m. and continued till 12.30 a.m. She asked Kapindraji to speak for an hour. After that Sri Ma began to sing "Ram-Sitaram" in ever new variations and modulations with great enthusiasm and everybody repeated in chorus. Sri Ma kept the whole congregation enthralled. She then asked Chhabi Banerji and Malati to continue the *kirtan* till the hour of meditation.

*Havan* started early the next day. After its completion Sri Ma distributed flowers, fruits and sweets to all the *vratis*. A substantial and delicious meal was served to all that day after a week of austerity.

The Ashram had acquired a piece of land in Naimisharanya more commonly known as Nimsar. Sri Ma's *kheyala* for a place where all Pauranic scriptures could be available was made possible by the devotee Sri Manubhai Bhimani. He financed the construction of a Temple for Purana Purusha on this piece of land (Hanuman Tila) as well as a room for Sri Ma's occupation next to it. The opening ceremony of the Purana Mandir was performed from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>

December, 1967 in Sri Ma's presence. Sri Prabhudattaji and Sri Naradanandaji had especially come for this function and spoke to the congregation about the special spiritual significance of Nimsar.

The end of the year saw Sri Ma resting quietly at Vindhyachala for a while. This was a rare interlude for her. Vindhyachala was not big and spacious enough yet it remained peaceful and quiet due to its remote location.

Sri Ma came to Varanasi for a week or so and then accompanied by a few people only went to Rajgir where again she could have a quiet time.

On January 16, 1968, Sri Ma was invited to visit Hatrasgarh Colliery at Dhanbad where she spent two nights. Sri Morarjibhai Thacker, the owner of the Colliery, a devotee of many years, standing, made excellent arrangements for Sri Ma and her retinue. *Satsang* could be held daily and many people came for Sri Ma's *darshan*.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> Sri Ma left for Dubrajpur to visit Niramay T-B. Sanatorium where about three years before a *Shiva Mandir* had been consecrated in her presence. Responding to the prayers of the General Secretary of the Hospital, Sri Ma spent three days near the Sanatorium. She was very gracious toward all the patients. She sang for them the most popular Names of God saying they should choose the one they liked best and learn to live with it, that is remember it constantly.

Some of her retinue felt that Sri Ma actually blessed them by this subtle form of initiation. Those who could walk came

to the *satsang*. Sri Ma herself visited those who were bed-ridden. A tide of joy overwhelmed the Hospital.

### Tarapeeth

Bengal is generally believed to be a stronghold of the *Tantrik* way of *sadhana*. Amongst many locations sacred to this way of life is Tarapeeth, which at the beginning of the century was just a vast cremation ground presided over by the Temple of Tara Devi. It had been sanctified by the great *Tantrik* saint Bamakshepa who had practised austerities and *sadhana* right in the heart of the cremation ground. Ordinary folks never loitered near it after dark. The villagers kept their distance. It was desolate and bleak. A dark brooding silence permeated the atmosphere.

Sri Ma's *lila* in Tarapeeth has been described earlier. When she first visited Tarapeeth it was as described above. There were no roads, only tracks for bullock carts. Sri Ma's visits brought about major changes. The track became a motorable road. Some of the land became residential bringing about further changes like mushrooming little shops catering to the demand for essential commodities. It rapidly became popular as a pilgrim town.

In order to preserve the sites of Sri Ma's *lila* the Sangha had purchased a plot of ground near the Temple. A small ashram had been built here for Sri Ma's accommodation. In response to prayers for her presence Sri Ma travelled to Tarapeeth on January 21. Outwardly everything was changed but Sri Ma was remembered! She was engulfed in crowds

local as well as those who rushed in from neighbouring towns. A *pandal* was erected for the usual hours of *satsang* etc, now current in Sri Ma's vicinity. But Sri Ma herself found the level of intercommunication with the villagers she had achieved during her earlier sojourns. They flocked round her, eagerly exchanging reminiscences. News had spread about her visit. From neighbouring villages people came with their kith and kin to greet the Person they had accepted as Goddess Tara personified.

Sri Ma herself was seen in her very outgoing joyous mood. The new devotees were shown the places where Bholanathji had practised his rigorous *sadhana*, where Jogeshdada had tended the sacred fire.

There were other memories. Didi and Maroni had been given their sacred threads at this sacred site. In Tarapeeth Sri Ma had sung the beautiful lyric "Krishna Kanhaiya bansi bajaiya" etc. She had heard its ethereal tune, uttered it and so passed it on to Bibhuda, Chhabi and others as a rare gem among *kirtans*.

Chhabi Banerji now delighted the hearts of congregations sitting in the *pandal* by singing away her marvellous repertoire of *Shyama Sangeet*, that is, hymns in praise of the Dark-hued Goddess.

For a few days Tarapeeth lived in euphoria. The presence of their beloved Ma spread an aura of joy and blessed peace. Sri Ma responded to the welcome of the people by being her most gracious and radiant self. She seemed indefatigable in

her efforts of reaching out to the people.

Time, however, was passing. The day of farewell came. Sri Ma left Tarapèeth for Deoghar on January 24. She was very well known in Deoghar also. Here she put up at "Deva Sangha", the Ashram of Sri Naren Brahmachariji Maharaj. She had visited this Ashram earlier in 1953. It was extremely peaceful, situated amidst beautiful surroundings.

Brahmachariji had made perfect arrangements for Sri Ma and her numerous companions. Sri Ma also visited the Ashram of the Late Sri Balananda Brahmachariji where she was well known. Mohananandaji was away at this time. This was an occasion of quick visits. Sri Ma visited Brahmajna Ma's Ashram, Nirvana Math as well as The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapeeth.

Sri Ma attended a special "*Rudrabhisheka*" at the prestigious Temple at Vaidyanathdham on her way back to Varanasi on January 30.

This year Allahabad was lucky to enjoy Sri Ma's sojourn in the town for almost a week. She spent half of this time in her cottage in Bindu Mukerji's house and the other half in Satya Gopal Ashram. The Saraswati Puja on February 2 was celebrated at Bindu's residence. Sri Ma's presence as always enhanced the atmosphere of a deep spiritual commitment to the worship of the Goddess of Learning. The daughters of Thakur Mahashaya Sang *kirtan* beautifully while *puja* was offered. Both houses were totally devoted to Sri Ma's *kheyala* of doing things, so there was complete harmony as regards Sri

Ma's presence at either place.

The joyful days were all too short. Sri Ma left for Varanasi Ashram which prepared to celebrate Shivaratri in Sri Ma's presence this year after a long time. The many levels of this sprawling building took on a festive look as preparations were made for the usual joint *puja* by the large congregation of devotees. Throughout the night Sri Ma visited the numerous sites of the *puja* creating for the devotees the aura of divine blessedness which is peculiarly her own.

Soon after Shivaratri Sri Ma left for Vrindaban alighting there on February 29. The first few days were quiet. Because of Sri Ma's crowded programmes all Ashrams had begun to observe some rules regarding *darshan*. A time was fixed for the morning and another for the evening. Crowds waited for Sri Ma's *darshan* in a quiet, disciplined way. Sometimes devotees were delighted to get *darshan* unexpectedly or at odd moments. Sri Ma herself attended *satsang* at Haribabaji's Ashram everyday and thus was in public view for a considerable time.

Among visitors from abroad was a French Trappist monk who stayed for ten days and had some private talks with Sri Ma. He seemed greatly impressed. Later it was heard that on returning to his monastery, he felt come nostalgia for the atmosphere of Sri Ma's Ashrams.

Mahatma Haribabji Maharaj had asked for Sri Ma's presence in Hoshiarpur and Garhwal, his native village during the first week of April. After attending the functions

celebrated there she reached Haradwar on April 9. the *Ardhakumbha Mela* was being observed in Haradwar and the extensive site was overcrowded with pilgrims. For some years, the date of *Chaitra Sankranti* (the last day of *Chaitra* according to the solar calendar) that falls on or around April 14 was celebrated in the Ashrams as Didima's *sannyasotsava*, the date of her initiation into the *sannyasa* order. This was also the main day of *kumbha snana*, that is bathing in the sacred river. In spite of vast crowds milling round everywhere, all functions could be organised and celebrated in an orderly fashion. To the joy of devotees, Sri Ma was available during these functions with best health.

#### **Ananda Jyotir Mandir**

For some time the Ashram had been planning to put up a Temple to Sri Ma in Varanasi. The well known architect Verma had been entrusted with the task of building a worthy edifice for this purpose. The Temple was ready in due time for installation ceremonies. The Temple-building was double-storeyed with a very spacious basement. On the first floor there was a very big terrace in front of another Temple room which was just over the main shrine on the ground floor. The stones were flawlessly smooth and of delicate hew. Vermaji was an ardent devotee. He could well be proud of this impressive building. The temple was awaiting the installation of Sri Ma's statue sculpted by Nitai Pal, the famous sculptor of Bengal. It is said that Sri Ma had uttered the following or similar words to Didi: "You have created a Temple, so it is for

you to do with it as you like, but I have a *kheyala* that it could house Sri Gopalji very well." Didi, without a moment's hesitation, proceeded accordingly. Her acquiescence to this *kheyala* was proof of her total commitment to Sri Ma's way of doing things. It will always remain to her credit that she was not found wanting when "tested" by the Adored One. Everyone came to know the Temple as Gopal Mandir, because Gopalji was installed in the main Shrine on *akshyaya tritiya* day, that is the third day after *amavasya* (New Moon) in the solar month of Vaishakh.

It will be recalled that Gopalji had a room to Himself in the Ashram. From here He was taken in procession to the Temple. Sri Ma herself was supported by Haribabji Maharaj, Sri Gaurinath Shastri and all the brahmacharis of the Ashram. Gopalji, resplendant in new clothes, sitting in this gorgeous sandalwood throne seemed to enhance the beauty of the Temple a thousand fold. The joyful crowd sang *kirtan* while all the solemn rites of the installation ceremony were conducted by priests and qualified personnel.

The shrine room on the first floor of the Temple was set up as a temporary bed-room for Sri Ma. The antechamber in front of this room was an ideal place for giving *darshan* to visitors. The open terrace in front could be used also. Sri Ma sometimes had the opportunity of strolling there and looking at the panoramic view of the sacred river flowing past.

**Janmotsava :** This year the Ashram at Varanasi was to celebrate Sri Ma's *Janmotsava* also after an interval of twelve

years. A spacious *pandal* artistically decorated and equipped with lights, fans and microphones had been erected on the open grounds expansion at this time.

Haribabaji held his *satsangs* under this *pandal*. The highlight of the morning session was the *Raslila*. The people of Varanasi were fascinated by these depictions of scriptural stories. In spite of the heat of May, devotees started to flock in from all points. Haribabaji was already present. Mahatma Maheshwaranandaji came from Mumbai, Sri Vishnu Ashramji from Shuktal, Avadhootji and Sharananandaji from Vrindaban. Their brilliant talks commanded huge audiences.

Varanasi is known for its heritage of music. Every evening *satsang* was highlighted by classical musical recitals, either instrumental or vocal. Sri Ma in her radiant personality graced all occasions and the function attained the level of joyousness which characterised all ceremonial events in her presence.

*Tithi-puja* was celebrated on the night of May 15 in the specially decorated *pandal* which was filled to capacity. The *puja* was conducted in an atmosphere of devout dedication. The songs and *kirtan* on this occasion are always specially touching. All devotees had the opportunity to bow at Sri Ma's feet in the morning, the special privilege of this occasion, awaited by everyone throughout the year.

All visitors from out of town were delighted to be informed that Sri Ma would spend the rest of the summer holidays at Dehradun. Dehradun at this time had plenty of

accommodation for visitors. There were the main Ashrams at Kishenpur and also at Raipur. Next to Kishenpur the buildings in Kalyanvana now could accommodate Haribabaji and his entire party. Next to Kalyanvana the spacious property of Sri and Srimati Khaitan was available for *pandals* for *satsangs* as well as other temporary structures for various purposes. The devout couple had built a beautiful cottage for Sri Ma herself where she could spend some time in quiet retirement. For a few weeks Dehradun enjoyed the presence of Sri Ma in their midst. *Satsangs* were popular where the eminent Mahatmas spoke words of wisdom. There were beautiful *kirtan* and devotional songs in Chhabi Banerji's beautiful voice. The Delhi-party came to perform their *nama yajna* one day much to the joyous exhilaration of devotees. The mild climate of the hill-station together with the sprawling venue of activities which precluded crowding was enjoyed by all.

Guru Purnima was celebrated on July 10. The devotees performed *Puja* to Ma. Those who had been initiated by Didima were especially eager to approach their Guru on this day. Many were ready to take *diksha*, so Didima graciously acceded to their wish. Sri Ma was not keeping good health, but her companions were amazed to see her make herself available to the whole crowd throughout the day. This special day was one of fulfilment for everyone.

Swami Paramanandaji and other senior members of Sri Ma's retinue were constantly concerned that Sri Ma hardly

every got respite from public audiences. After the *satsangs* she would be surrounded by groups of people. Even her room was hardly ever empty of devotees who had come from afar and awaited her *darshm*. Sri Ma was always gracious, made kind enquiries and spoke words of welcome. Under these circumstances the only way of giving some respite (our language) to Sri Ma was to ask her to retire to a smaller and quieter Ashram.

Kankhal was near at hand. Sri Ma moved to this retreat for a few days. Even so a few devotees found their way to her because their need was great. Among these was Haridatt Vasudeva who had recently lost his wife Amrit who was well known in the Ashrams. Srimati Amrit Vasudeva was suffering from cancer for some time. She was in excruciating pain; it was said that to the amazement of her doctors and attendants she seemed to be able to ignore her bodily condition and for the last hour or so could utter her *mantra* in full consciousness and in obvious peace. A near relative, up to then a confirmed sceptic, had been converted to believe in divine power by witnessing this miracle and had since then himself taken to spiritual practices.

Another devotee of long standing, Sri Lalita Deogan also passed away at about this time.

Sm. Lalita Deogan had the rare good fortune of discovering Sri Ma as far back as 1932 when Sri Ma had just come to Uttar Pradesh from Bengal. She was staying in a dilapidated Shiva Mandir in Raipur at that time. As written earlier this temple was hard of access; there were no proper

roads to it. The paths became perilous after a sudden mountain storm. Lalitaben braved all this, walking several miles every day to bring some simple edible things for Sri Ma in her remote retreat. She took great pleasure in preparing *rotis* and vegetables for Sri Ma, Bholanathji and Bhaiji. Her devotion gradually drew in her whole family. Thus her loss was not only felt by her family but the whole community of devotees.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### A Miscellany of Religious Rites and Functions

*My only request to you is to find a place for myself in your hearts.*

— Sri Ma Anandamayi

Sri Ma's endorsement of all religious functions, rituals and festivals had prevented people from knowing her own preferences, if any at all. Moreover, as her presence enhanced the splendour of all celebrations, each was deemed the most important.

The girls of the Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth had resided in the Ashram at Varanasi since its very beginning. The *Savitri Mahayajna* had brought about many changes. Now it was a sprawling residential school for about 60 students. The school was fully functional with regular academic classes as well as musical lessons and other facilities for learning handicrafts etc. For many years they had the privilege of entertaining Sri Ma for the functions of Jhoolan and Janmashtami in July/August. But for many years Sri Ma had been spending Jhoolan and Janmashtami elsewhere, mostly in Vrindaban. This year Gopalji had been installed in Ananda Jyotir Mandir. It was just right that Sri Ma should come to Varanasi for these celebrations so special to

the Child Image.

The beautiful new Mandir provided a good venue for the week long festivities. The girls of the Kanyapeeth arranged clay dolls to depict tableaux from Sri Krishna's life in Gokul and Vrindaban. They also enacted their dramatic *lilas* every night in their own School Hall for Sri Ma's entertainment. These *lilas* have been written up elsewhere (*Ananda Varta* Vol. VI. No. 3). After several years Varanasi Ashram was delighted to observe the colourful festivals of Jhoolan and Janmashtami. The last function of Nandotsava was especially delightful because Sri Ma made it so. She distributed the '*dahi*' to all and sundry leading the *kirtan* herself dancing along with the women who had dressed themselves as dairy maids. Sri Ma made herself available to the families of fishermen living in the lanes surrounding the Ananda Jyotir Mandir. Due to the presence of "Kalo Manik" (The Baby-Image) Varanasi again experienced a delightful series of celebrations.

Sri Ma spent a few quiet days at Vindhyachala. She returned to Varanasi on August 24. Her travels were resumed on the 27th. She passed through Lucknow and Nimsar and also Kanpur to visit the seriously ill old devotee Sri Mangtaram Jaipuria.

Sri Ma arrived in Vrindaban on August 29. Here she spent a fairly quiet time.

#### *Nama-Yajna* at Delhi

The devotees of New Delhi were keen to set up a suitable

function to which they could invite Sri Ma and so be blessed by her *darshan*. What better function could there be other than their special *nama-yajna*? This they performed with their usual total dedication and enthusiasm. Sri Ma's presence fulfilled their heartfelt longings for spiritual blessedness.

Sri Ma left for Dehradun on 10<sup>th</sup> September. Dehradun was hoping to celebrate many functions this year (1968). The annual Durga Puja was to be held in the new estate acquired by the Khaitans which adjoined the Ashram's extension known as Kalyanvan. The Khaitans had made elaborate arrangements for the *Satsang Pandal*. A very beautiful cottage had been built for Sri Ma's occupation during the *puja* as well as the *Samyam Saptah* which was also celebrated in Dehradun. For a couple of months the devotees of Dehradun participated joyfully in the daily routine of the *satsang* as well as the magnificence of the *pujas*.

On the 23rd of September, the first day of Navaratri, Sri Ma shifted to her charming new cottage in the compound of Mr. and Mrs. Khaitan next door to Kalyanvan. Durga Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Kali Puja and the 19th *Samyam Mahavrata* were all celebrated in a large and beautiful *pandal* put up in the same compound. Sri Ma remained in her cottage until November 8.

The devotees of Dehradun and visitors from other places enjoyed the festivities experiencing the blessedness of Sri Ma's presence throughout the unusually prolonged time of her sojourn in one place.

Practically during the whole period of about four weeks between Durga Puja and the *Samyam Vrata* Sri Ma gave *darshan* in her room from 11 a.m. to midday. The lovely spacious room which commanded a panoramic view of the mountains was packed with people overflowing into the corridors and the adjoining rooms. Lovely memories were to be retained no doubt by the fortunate who could attend these sessions.

One morning an old English gentleman came for Sri Ma's *darshan*. He had been a Government official in Dhaka while she was in residence in Shahbagh almost forty years ago. He was now a teacher at the Welham School in Dehradun. He sought permission to bring his students for audience. Thus on October 18 evening, 41 boys arrived accompanied by one of their teachers. Sri Ma was most gracious. She conversed with them easily about their lessons and play and other activities. They in turn sang for her and asked for a portrait of her which could be put up in their School Hall. Sri Ma gave them sweets and flowers and touched each boy's head in blessing. After the *Samyam Vrata* (from October 29 to November 4) Sri Ma left for Naimisharanya. Each *Samyam Vrata* had begun to develop its own distinctive aura of quietude and spirituality. Dehradun was no exception. The presence of the Mahatmas lent it the distinction of a festival attuned to the extolling of renunciation as the only worthwhile aim of life.

Sri Ma herself was indefatigable. She attended all functions. She guided and supervised all arrangements. Her

gracious presence rewarded the workers in the kitchens as well as the *pandal*. For the *vratis* the week passed by all too swiftly.

Naimisharanya at this time was developing into a big commodious ashram. The little Purana Mandir (Dec. 1967) was now surrounded by a small ashram as well as some ordinary living quarters. A beautiful *pandal*, originally brought from Kolkata to Dehradun for use during the *Samyam Saptah* was put up at Nimsar for a large audience who were expected to gather for the *Bhagavat Saptah* to be performed here. Swami Akhandananda of Vrindaban was the commentator. He always commanded a large audience. Profoundly learned, a brilliant speaker as well as an expert on the *Bhagavata*, he made clear the symbolism of many passages that seem obscure or even devoid of meaning to the ordinary person.

Sri Ma Anandamayi was present for all sessions and also for the *satsang*-session of Sri Haribabaji from 7:30 to 9 p.m. Some Mahatmas such as Swami Sharanandandaji, Sri Govinda Prakashji and others came from distant places to listen to the *Bhagavata*. It was altogether a most beautiful and concentrated gathering of dedicated people worthy of the sacred site where thousands of *rishis* are said to have lived in the past. Sri Ma's *kheyala* of a revival of the place where *Puranas* had come into being was now fulfilled.

Sri Haribabaji had been prevailed upon by his disciples to countenance a big function called *Brihat Hari Sammelan*. Sri

Ma being invited to attend it came to Delhi and stayed at the ashram at Kalkaji, at this time a beautiful, quiet and fairly solitary place. From here she came to Subash Maidan the venue of the *satsang* every morning and evening for ten days. The festival became a great success due to Sri Ma's presence, which as usual attracted crowds of devotees.

Sri Ma came to Varanasi on December 18. Here she retired to her room adjoining the terrace of the Kanyapeeth. This room was remote enough and ensured her privacy for a few days. The visitors became used to the timing of an hour's *darshan* every evening.

### The Opening of the Hospital

Dr. Gopal Dasgupta (as written earlier) was greatly devoted to Sri Ma. He called himself an agnostic and was interested only in rendering service to humanity. He had started a free clinic where homeopathic treatment was made available for all. It was his great desire to build in Sri Ma's name a first class hospital equipped with all modern amenities that would cater to the destitutes of all communities irrespective of caste or creed. This ideal was adopted by the Sangha and it slowly became a successful project. From the year 1965 the Hospital was rendering considerable service to out-patients. Now in 1968 the Hospital was well-equipped to open its doors for indoor patients with nursing facilities. The Sangha planned a grand function for the Hospital by inviting Srimati Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister to perform the

opening ceremony in Sri Ma's presence.

On December 26, the Hospital precincts were decorated beautifully. The elite of Varanasi as well as many distinguished guests and devotees came from other towns to attend the function which was excellently organized by Sri Panu Brahmachari who was emerging as being especially gifted in such matters.

Sri Ma sat quietly on the dais. She also was an invitee to the function. The Prime Minister was received by the Maharajah of Benares, the President of the Hospital Committee. He escorted her to the dais where Indiraji bowed to Sri Ma and exchanged a few words with her. She then occupied her own seat. A speech of welcome was given by Kashi Naresh and the Hon Maharajah of Tehri Garhwal, another official of the Hospital committee, read out a report regarding the Hospital. Then Indiraji delivered her inaugural address. She spoke for five minutes with great simplicity, dignity and charm. She remarked that the ground on which the Hospital stands has some connection with Gandhiji as well as her father, therefore also with her. She then stressed the point that the patients of this hospital would return to their homes filled with the peace and inspiration that is derived from Sri Ma's influence.

The Prime Minister then cut the flower garland and entered the precincts of the Hospital on a tour of inspection. After the function at the Hospital Indiraji spent some time with Sri Ma at the Ashram before it was time for her to leave

for Delhi.

1969

Sri Ma remained in Varanasi until January 9, 1969. She then travelled to Naimisharanya via Allahabad arriving on January 11. The Ashram was as yet very small but very comfortable because all amenities were provided by dedicated devotees. They even managed to celebrate the annual Saraswati Puja near the Purana Temple on January 22. Sri Ma's presence lent it the usual aura of splendour and success.

The next big function near Sri Ma was Shivaratri on February 12 in New Delhi. Sri Ma did an incredible amount of travelling around during this interval. She visited in quick succession Dehradun, Haradwar and Kankhal.

Shivartatri in New Delhi was an event of magnitude. the new Ashram became full of initiates for the nightlong *puja* as was usual wherever Sri Ma happened to be. All those who took part said that they would never forget that night of constant God remembrance, with the help of *puja*, *kirtan* and recitation of *mantras*.

Sri Haribabaji Maharaj invited Sri Ma to join him on the occasion of Holi at Bandh. Bandh as written earlier was rather difficult of access by train or car but the villagers were enthusiastic and fully prepared to welcome Sri Ma as well as other Mahatmas to celebrate Holi together with Haribabaji's birthday. All who have visited Bandh acknowledge that it pulsates with the resonances of *mantra-sankirtana*. Haribabaji seemed to have recreated the atmosphere of

Navadweep in Bandh.

On March 5 Sri Ma accompanied by Swami Akhandananda and a few companions left for Gwalior at the urgent request of Rajmata Vijaya Raje Schindhia to be present at the installation of a Shiva Linga on the 6th morning and the unveiling of a statue of the late Maharajah the same evening. Swami Akhandananda, Swami Sharananandaji and Govinda Prakashji of Ram Tirth Ashram spoke on the occasion. The young Maharajah gave a moving talk about his deceased father. He related how Sri Ma's influence had brought about a complete change in his father's attitude to life. Before meeting Sri Ma he never had faith in religion or Mahatmas. Sri Ma's divine presence had altered everything.

The young Maharajah made arrangements for Sri Ma and her retinue to travel to Vrindaban by car where she stayed for four days only. Sri Ma then travelled to Naimisharanya. Here also her sojourn was short. She left for Varanasi on March 17. From Nimsar she came by car to Hardoi Railway station for boarding the train to Varanasi. It so happened that the train was late. Sri Ma strolled up and down the platform for some time then she sat on a bench under a tree. She signalled a sweet-vendor who was selling the famous "*sandila laddus*" of the region. One of the companions gauging her mood bought out the whole consignment. Sri Ma then started to distribute these sweets to all who approached, which soon became a crowd. Railway staff, vendors, shoe-shine boys, passengers, sweepers, all received sweets and then fruits from her. She

started a *kirtan* in her sweet melodious voice, which soon swelled into a chorus following her lead. Nobody knew who she was but were enthralled by the radiant vision. Sri Ma spoke to the assembly about God-remembrance and the better way of life, till it was time to entrain for Varanasi.

In Varanasi the annual Vasanti Puja was celebrated in Sri Ma's presence. Then it was time to go to Ranchi where devotees had arranged for the celebration of Didima's *Sannyasa-Utsava*. Sri Ma had not visited Ranchi for many years so it was a very happy congregation which participated in this popular function of paying homage to Didima, Sri Muktananda Giriji Maharaj.

From Ranchi Sri Ma unexpectedly paid a flying visit to Kolkata for one day. For many years devotees had been praying for her to come to their new homes. These were not being used awaiting her inaugurating presence. Some of them had been waiting for four or five years. Now Sri Ma like a whirlwind rushed by car to these places one after another, eleven in number. She also visited two Hospitals to see two ailing people who were anxious for her *darshan*. Sri Ma found time to visit Ganga Charan Dasgupta (aged 100 years at this time) and Tripurari Chakravarty. She then managed to catch the evening train to Varanasi where she alighted the next morning (17th) after two nights in trains and a very hectic day in between.

On April 19, the festival of *Akshaya Tritiya*, the first anniversary of Ananda Jyotir Mandir, was celebrated by a special *puja* performed by Brahmachari Nirvananandaji. Sri

Ma herself distributed the *prasada*.

### **Janmotsava in Mumbai, 1969**

For a few weeks Sunayana House at Ville Parle knew the joy of an abiding atmosphere of God-remembrance. The *Janmotsava* celebrated its usual programmes of *akhanda-japa*, *dhyana*, *kirtan*, *kumari-puja*, readings from scriptures and the culminating event of the evening *satsang*. Mahatmas came to lend their support and speak on the occasion. Everything happened as it should be so that the people of Mumbai were happy and fulfilled.

During the *Janmotsava* a few notable people visited Sunayana House. The ex-minister Gulzarilal Nanda came to the *satsang*. He did not seek a private audience but amenable to Sri Ma's *kheyala* spoke to the crowd for a few minutes very successfully.

One evening a well known Christian saint, who had lived in India for 37 years, Mother Anna Hubertha, attended the evening *satsang*. The next morning she together with an English Reverend Father of the Catholic Church and two nuns had a long private interview with Sri Ma.

The day before Sri Ma left for Pune Sri Kamubaba, a famous Mohammedan saint, came to see her. At her request he answered questions from the audience for a while.

Sri Ma left for Pune in the last week of May-accompanied by Haribabaji Maharaj.

### **Pune**

Pune Ashram was as yet small. *Pandals* were put up to

deal with *Raslilas* and *satsangs*. Sri Ma adjusted herself to a more leisurely routine. She could go for walks and drives. She very often visited the grounds of the university where she took notice of a large banyan tree. She brought it to the notice of others as a special place possessing an aura of tranquillity.

One day the famous singer Srimati Hirabai Barodekar came to see Sri Ma and delighted the congregation by her magnificent signing. Sri Dilip Kumar Roy was a frequent visitor.

**Barsi :** A new devotee, Sri Kantilal Madhvani invited Sri Ma to his house in Barsi, an important town on the way to Pandharpur. His mother had dreamt of this visit although she had not yet seen Sri Ma. The family treated this as a big event in their life. Members living abroad came home to receive Sri Ma. The old lady's dream was fulfilled much to their profound joy and sense of great achievement.

On her way back to Pune Sri Ma stopped to grace the house of Sri Pratap Singh at Sholapur. Pune was beginning on the process of enlargement of accommodation. This was usual wherever Sri Ma stayed for a while.

On July 29 Gurupurnima was celebrated with its usual perfection at the house of Kantibhai Munshaw at Ahmedabad.

The Governor of Gujrat, Sri Narayana and his wife Madalasa were well known to Sri Ma-they being the son-in-law and daughter of Jamna Lal Bajaj. They invited Sri Ma to Government House one day where the Gujrati Congress of men and women born in free India had assembled for Sri Ma's

darshan.

In response to the prayers of this dedicated young group who were pledged to the service of their country, Sri Ma spoke at length about her request of 15 minutes every day from every one. She said "This little slot of time is to be given to God. A daily time (at one's convenience) should be fixed. At that hour one should sit quietly in meditation for communing with God. If that is not possible on some days then one is to keep the mind fixed on the *mauna* (period of silence) while doing what has to be done, in total silence. In time this will become such a habit that it will become a natural way of joining in the already existing chain of "*Akhanda Bhagavat Smriti*" (continuous remembrance of God). This time slot is a thin wedge to break into the continuous preoccupation with the world. Others also may follow the routine, so you will find strength from them. This bit of time is short but who knows when one may not get caught up in the blessedness of that constant rhythm of Divine Grace?"

Sri Ma was shown an orphanage run by Madalasaji. Here also she spoke most endearingly to the children claiming friendship and thereafter delivering her five point programme for them.

It was time to resume her travels. She visited the state of Bhavanagar at the invitation of the ruling princely couple. Here also she spoke of the "fifteen minutes" to crowds of students who surrounded her most of the time.

Sri Ma returned to Ahmedabad and immediately

proceeded to Bairagarh in Bhopal. Datar Singhji and his wife had built comfortable premises for her on their estate. This was Sri Ma's third visit. All the dignitaries of Bhopal expressed their sorrow that they would have nothing to look forward to anymore. In response to this prayer the residence became an ashram where Sikh Scriptures would be read and *kirtan* performed everyday. Sri Ma suggested that once every month they could assemble for a *satsang* for all. Such was a beginning of the Ashram at Bairagarh.

Sri Ma spent the festivals of Jhoolan and Janmashtami at Dehradun. A new and much appreciated item of the programme was a daily talk by Brahmachari Nirmalananda. He seemed to be emerging as a fine speaker for such occasions.

There is a small Ashram called Sadhan Ashram at Jakhan about a mile from Kishenpur. This is a gift by Sri R.G. Sood who had built it for his own residence in his old age. Beautiful ceremonies regarding *Ramayana Patha* were held here at this time in the presence of Sri Ma Anandamayi.

Sri Ma's programme fluctuated between a little time of rest and mostly busy travels and the reception of important guests. Sri Ma came to Delhi on August 7 to meet Haribabaji who was ill. Sri Ma persuaded him to stay at the Willingdon Nursing Home for a few days for medical examination where she visited him daily. Haribabaji's devotees started on a continuous *kirtan* to pray for his recovery at the Ashram. The Mahatma did make a recovery and was able to go back to

Sri Ma returned to Varanasi. This Ashram had the good fortune to celebrate many religious functions in her presence including two *Bhagawat Saptahas* and the *Pujas* of Durga, Lakshmi and Kali.

Sri Ma also had the occasion to visit Sri Gopinath Kaviraj at the Hospital at Banaras Hindu University. She asked him to convalesce in the Ashram after being discharged from the Hospital. Sri Ma made her own room available to him for this purpose. He recovered his health here and could meet visitors and devotees at regular visiting hours.

Sri Ma's oldtime devotee the *sannyasini* "Mauni Ma" breathed her last at this time (September 28, 1969) in her presence.

Sri Ma used to receive daily reports regarding Haribabaji's health by phone or telegrams. On receiving the news that the Mahatma was leaving Hoshiarpur for Bandh and passing through Delhi on October 14, Sri Ma left for Delhi on the 13th only to find that he had been unable to come owing to a sudden set back to his health. Sri Ma returned to Varanasi on the 15th.

Sri Ma had agreed to be present in Varanasi for Durga Puja at the newly built house of the devotee Sri Harish Chandra Banerji. The Durga Puja is a grand festival and so it was celebrated in this house. The assembled crowd of devotees sat under *pandals* for regular *satsangs*. The Puja was celebrated in the Ashram also by installing a symbolic representation of the Goddess instead of the magnificent clay

image.

Sri Ma was kept in touch with Haribabaji's fluctuating state of health. She saw him in Delhi on October 25 and stayed in town for a few days.

October 29 saw her in Kanpur in Jaipuria House where they had built a cottage especially for her. Sri Ma was here for one day and night only.

Sri Padampat Singhanian and his wife had also invited Sri Ma at this time to grace by her presence the very special residence built for her by them. This was a very beautiful spacious and commodious building with a *satsang* hall and also furnished living rooms. It was situated near their famous Radha Krishna Temple.

After a very satisfying sojourn in this "Ashram" as it was called Sri Ma came on to Varanasi. She abided in Varanasi during Kali Puja and the subsequent festivals of Annakuta and the observance of the ceremony of "Brahma Bindu".

### **An Ashram in America**

An American young man had come to India in search of a guru. He had met Sri Ma at various places. He was very impressed by her and chose to adopt the path of renunciation. He took *sannyasa* from a Swami in Bengal and was given the name Nirmalanada Giri. Towards the end of the decade he came accompanied by a few of his own disciples. They had decided to inaugurate an Ashram in their own country in Oklahoma City since they were eager to devote their lives to *sadhana*. They obtained permission to call it "Sri Sri Ma



Anandamayi Ashram" because as they said they looked upon Sri Ma as their guiding light.

In later years this young man took a *Shiva Lingam* from Varanasi to Oklahoma. When Sri Ma said that *bilva leaves* were required for the daily worship of Shiva Nirmalananda said he would take a few saplings of the *bilva* tree as well. Visitors to his Ashram reported that it had a special aura of peace and was very well maintained by the group of young American *sannyasis*.

The twentieth *Samyam Saptah* was observed from November 17 to 23 in Vrindaban. It achieved its usual high standard of discipline and one-pointed concentration of the otherworldly way of life.

This time Haribabaji was not present on the dais. He was ill in Delhi much to the disappointment of all participants. Sri Ma travelled to Delhi to visit him a number of times as he was keen to have her *darshan*. She paid visit to Varanasi and then to Nimsar to attend *Bhagavat Saptah* by Vishnu Ashramji Maharaj. The new Ashram had expanded suitably so all the religious rites could be held within its own buildings.

Sri Ma responding to Haribabaji's prayers went to Delhi on December 26. She persuaded his disciples to allow Haribabaji to accompany her back to Varanasi. Indeed all his devotees knew that the Mahatma was very restless unless he knew Sri Ma was near. The dedicated doctors could not hold out hope for his recovery. They thankfully saw to his journey to Varanasi by plane in Sri Ma's company and followed by

train.

Sri Ma installed Haribabaji in one of the residential rooms in the new Temple. Medical aid cum nursing aid was provided with scrupulous care. But the final time had arrived. The Mahatma passed away on January 3, 1970. His departure from the world was as beautiful and inspiring as every phase of his extraordinary life of immaculate saintliness. Sri Ma was sitting by his side from the evening. The girls of the Ashram were singing *kirtan* near his room. During the last few minutes Sri Ma stood up and regarded the Mahatma very intently. At 1.40 a.m. he suddenly opened his eyes, looked at Sri Ma steadily and breathed his last breath. The onlookers felt that it was a passing into immortality, into the eternal. He had been determined to be in Sri Ma's presence at the time of leaving his body and so it was granted to him.

The disciples of Haribabaji with Sri Ma's permission took the mortal remains of their beloved Guru to the small village of Bandh, where he had spent many years of his life amongst the villagers. Avadhootji was now without his longtime companion. He took charge of the funeral rites and ceremonies at Bandh. His expertise in organizational matters was truly commendable.

Sri Ma accompanied by a few of *sadhus* from the Ashram went to attend religious festivities taking place near the beautifully decorated *samadhi* of Haribabaji Maharaj. Villagers from the entire district flocked in thousands to pay homage to their Guru. They all came and did obeisance to Sri

Ma imploring her especially for her blessings now that they were bereft of their Guruji's presence.

Sri Ma Anandamayi returned to Varanasi on January 20. She was kept busy with religious festivals. First the annual Saraswati Puja at the residence of Gopal Swarup Pathak in Allahabad was held on February 10. The Mahashivaratri also of this year was celebrated on March 6 in its grand fashion in Varanasi. A large congregation participated in a joint *puja* divided up in four major groups. The whole night was spent joyfully in *japa*, *kirtan*, *bhajan*, *puja* and melodious hymns to Shiva.

In between these functions the people of Varanasi saw the beautiful ritual of a *Bhagavat Parayana* presided over by Swami Akhandananda Saraswati Maharaj of Vrindaban. A grand *pandal* had been put up adjoining the hospital grounds. A well adorned stage provided room for the installation of the Sacred Text and also the distinguished orator.

Sri Akhandanandaji's deep and resonant voice held the audience in thrall for 3 to 4 hours every morning in the *pandal* packed to capacity. It was a unique experience enriching the lives of those who had this rare opportunity to audit the scholarly yet very lucid exposition of the most sacred text.

After Shivaratri guests started to leave gradually. Sri Ma was kept busy from early morning to late at night granting farewell visits in her room to every single person before they left for their respective homes. In between she also attended small *satsangs* in the hall. One morning two Jain Sadhus came

for her *darshan*. Sri Ma had the *kheyala* to disclose for the first time many interesting details of the way of *sadhana* she had practised amongst innumerable others in Bajitpur from 1918 to 1924. The Jain *Sadhus* were extremely pleased with the ensuing dialogue.

The function of Holi, which in general was mostly spent so far with Haribabaji, was being planned for Naimisharanya this year (1970). Sri Ma travelled to Nimsar via Lucknow and then Kanpur where she spent a few days in Sri Padampat Singhania's "Ashram", a very commodious house specially built for her.

Sri Ma's sojourn in Nimsar had to be curtailed, however, because the friends and disciples of Haribabaji invited her to Vrindaban to grace with her presence the festivities of Holi, which was also the Mahatma's birthday. Swami Akhandanandaji, Avadhootji, Sharananandaji, Sri Baba Ramdas, Sri Chakrapaniji, Pt. Kapindraji and others spoke on the occasion extolling Haribabaji's life and work. A life-like photo of the Mahatma was placed in a big chair. Puja and *arati* were performed in front of this beautifully decorated *asana*. It was evident that Sri Ma's presence was considered indispensable for this occasion.

Next day a big feast was organised for the entire community of Vaishnavas in Sri Udiya Babaji's Ashram under the aegis of Sri Akhandanandaji. It was evident that Haribabaji had brought about a unity of all denominations. Sri Ma in her usual style enhanced the splendour of the occasion

by participating fully in all the festivities. Clothes and gifts were distributed to the specially dedicated participants and as usual to children participating in all the *lilas*.

The *Janmotsava* of this year (1970) was celebrated in a different manner. Sri Ma had the *kheyala* to keep moving throughout the extended period from May 3 (Solar Calendar) to 24th May (Lunar Calendar). Pune Ashram had asked for the privilege of observing this function. Sri Nagpalji had constructed a spacious house for Sri Ma and her retinue. The function would include the opening ceremony of this addition to the Ashram which was also donated to the Sangha by Nagpalji.

The festivities in all our Ashram were a little overshadowed by the sad news of the sudden passing away of Mahamandaleswar Maheshwaranandaji on May 1. It is to be recorded that this very prestigious head of the *Sannyasa Ashram* was especially drawn to Sri Ma for the last few years. He was eagerly awaited at Pune for Sri Ma's *Janmotsava* and now his loss would be felt by the entire *satsang*.

Sri Ma spent the first day of the *Janmotsava* at Bairagarh (Bhopal) at the residence of Sri Datar Singh and his family. This house was already like an Ashram. Sri Ma's *puja* was observed and celebrated by every possible distinctive measure. The next day there was the usual feast for all and a lavish distribution of *prasada* for all charitable institutions of the town.

Sri Ma left for Delhi on May 8. Here it was a tale of

crowds milling round her. The V.I.P.s. of Delhi also tried to see her for private interviews. Sri Ma was always equal to any situation. Much to the joy of devotees she seemed to be available for *darshan* throughout the day. Nobody was disappointed. The VIPs also were accommodated in between public functions. A tide of joy flooded the Ashram for a couple of days and then Sri Ma left for Mumbai, where She stayed in her own special cottage in Sunayana House in Ville Parle. The ensuing two days were in comparison quieter for her and then it was time to go to Pune where all preparations were ready for the final celebrations.

The most important feature of the *Janmotsava* now in an Ashram was the presence of the Mahatmas. Pune witnessed the gathering of Swami Akhandanandaji, Sri Vishnu Ashramji, Sri Chakrapaniji, Sri Sharananandaji and Sri Jogesh Brahmachariji.

Sri Avadhootji was present from the very beginning with our Paramanandaji and Nirmalanandaji. All the usual programmes were being followed with scrupulous care.

Sri Ma arrived on the 13th and was received in the new house with tremendous joy and exuberant celebrations. *Satsangs* acquired the splendour which attended Sri Ma wherever she was. Devotees arrived from all over the country as well as a few from abroad. Women put up a special function of their own by singing an all-night *kirtan*.

The *Raslilas* and the *Ramlilas* had become regular features. A decorated chair with Sri Haribabaji's photo was

placed on the stage at the time of the *Lilas*. A delightful function is always the *Kumari Puja*. It is a feast given to 108 Kumaris including a few small boys as *Vatuks*. Sri Ma mingled with children eating and playing with them while the brahmacharis of the Ashram performed *puja* and *arati* to the group.

**The Puja :** From the early days in Dhaka it had been noted that Sri Ma did not countenance any form of personal *puja*. The devotees arranged the paraphernalia of the *puja* wherever Sri Ma happened to be. They would gather round her *chowki* and sit in meditation or sing *kirtan* while Baba Bholanath performed the *puja* making the offerings to their Deity, who lay totally inert and covered from head to foot with a white *chaddar* (wrapper).

This pattern had prevailed over the years. The sheer press of people on these occasions prevented Sri Ma from wandering around in her usual way. Especially with Haribabaji things became more settled. Haribabaji was very orderly in his habits and preferred to follow a schedule of strict routine throughout the day. He made no secret of his complete surrender at Sri Ma's feet. He joined the devotees for the final *puja* and kept vigil till morning. Other *sadhus* followed his lead. Things became organised. As written earlier a rostrum was erected near Sri Ma's *chowki* where the *Sadhus* sat quietly participating in the *puja* along with the mammoth crowd of devotees. At break of dawn when Nirvananandaji (in general) rose to perform the grand *arati*

four Brahmacharis were seen to perform *puja* and *arati* to the Mahatmas also.

The soft light from the East leant splendour to the hundreds of twinkling tips of the *arati* creating an atmosphere of indescribable joy, peace and fulfilment. The congregation with full hearts prepared to avail of the special privilege of the day. Only once a year devotees were permitted to touch the feet of Sri Ma while she lay inert on the *chowki*. Long queues were formed. The crowd was visibly transported to an ethereal region of grace. In bemused silence they approached their beloved Ma and touched her feet so much like the soft and glowing lotus leaves which lay scattered round them.

After this ritual was over Sri Ma was roused gently and escorted to her room. The important day was celebrated by the grand midday feast for all. The *Janmotsava* had become a grand festival to be looked forward to and enjoyed more and more every year.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### Swami Muktananda Giri

Swami Muktananda Giri Maharaj was known to the devotees of Ma as Didima. Sri Ma herself referred to her as "Giriji" sometimes, more often as just "Ma", Didima was completely unselfconscious regarding Sri Ma's position in the world. In referring to her, she would say, "Your mother". When she had occasion to write to Sri Ma, she would address her by name, as for example, "Dear Nirmala", and sign herself, "With blessings, your mother."

A little has been written already regarding Didima's early life. She did not change with the passing of years. Her calm acceptance of the many hardships of village life became the serene tolerance of the bewildering changes in the circumstances of city life. She was obliged to share in the limelight which illuminated Sri Ma's activities, but this never disturbed her or made her do or say anything to show that she was even aware of it. She occupied her seat near Sri Ma on rostrums all over the country with quiet dignity. Even during the last years of her life, she could sit for many hours in a *satsang* without any sign of tiredness.

She had all the qualities of a renunciant from her early life; so the assumption of the ochre robes did not indicate the state of an aspirant for dispassion in her case but marked a recognition of what she was already.

The Sangha created in Sri Ma's name had requested Didima to give initiation to people who came to ask for it at the Ashram. After Bholanath, there was no one who could be considered in the role of a Guru. Didima was an ideal choice. She belonged to a very prestigious monastic order; she herself was a generous-hearted, absolutely undemanding person, overflowing with kindness for those who came to her seeking any kind of redress, spiritual or otherwise. Hundreds of people flocked to her room, to sit with her, listen to her words of solace, or just to receive a touch of her soft fingers on their head.

She never forgot any of her disciples; she kept in touch with them, writing letters herself whenever possible. When they became too numerous for her to handle alone, she accepted the willing services of any one who would help her out. She was very scrupulous regarding her correspondence, as in everything else. My (the author's) most endearing memory of Didima is with a Hindi Primer just a few years before her passing away, when she was perhaps 86 or 87. Surprised, I asked her, "Didima, what are you studying so intently?" She laughed a little self-consciously and answered, "You see, many people write in Hindi nowadays. Although they (other Hindi speaking disciples) read out the letters to me, it is never the same as reading them myself. The alphabet is not too dissimilar." Blessed, indeed are all her disciples, with such a caring Guru.

Didima had that true self-confidence which allows a

person to see a joke against himself or herself. Once in a gathering of women Sri Ma was describing the days of her childhood. Didima was also present. In a mood of humour Sri Ma said, "My mother had a novel way of pouring oil in the cooking pan. She would put her finger on the top of the bottle and then turn it upside down on the pan. Have you ever seen such a way of pouring oil?" Everyone laughed including Didima. Didima said very calmly and composedly, "Well, I could not afford to waste even a drop of oil." She then added with a matching smile of humorousness "We were all right as we were; I dare say you could have chosen a family with more means, had such been your will."

Sri Ma appeared to be embarrassed. She hastened to say, "No, no, I and my brothers and sisters were very well looked after; we felt no need of anything at all. It is only when we grew up that I heard people say that my parents were not in easy circumstances. We have no recollection of any kind of hardship."

A glowing tribute to Didima's skill not only in housekeeping but to her abiding sense of sufficiency quite unrelated to actual circumstances!

Didima's behests were obeyed by Sri Ma to the best of her ability, always. In the last years, very uncharacteristically. Sri Ma used to stretch out her hand to touch the heads of people bowing in front of her. Sometimes the visitors not realizing that she would bless them in this way, bowed from a distance then seeing the beautiful gesture of the outstretched hand

would hasten forward to get within its reach. On one such occasion, looking at my (the author's) surprised expression, she smiled and said, "Ma says to me, 'So many people bow in front of you; you could at least touch their heads in acknowledgment.' So I now do her bidding, whenever it comes to my *kheyala*."

So thousands should be thankful to Didima for this particular *kripa* of the magic touch. It is also quite possible that Sri Ma had been carrying out Didima's wish when she started to "give" initiations to whoever came forward for it. It had seemed at the time that she had opened the flood-gates of *kripa*. No one was refused; even if Sri Ma was busy for the whole day and night she would find time for a few minutes to sit with those who sought to be initiated into a new way of life. We, who always stated with great firmness that "Sri Ma never gives initiations," were effectively silenced. She in fact seemed to deputise for Didima by developing a way of carrying out her task, with the help of Bhaskarananda.

Sri Ma said once (to Didi) : "See Didi, I see my mother sitting around, or doing ordinary things. She has drawn such a veil around her, that nobody may know what she is. Such characters behave in this manner... (not to be noticeable)."

Didi pondered over Sri Ma's words and then wrote in her diary, "Didima is now 85 years old; her one wish is to be near Sri Ma all the time. She is quite child-like in this matter. Wherever Sri Ma happens to be, Didima is sure to come over and sit near her. If it is her mealtime, she will say 'I am not

hungry, I shall eat later.' We used to tease her about this; Didima would laugh with us acknowledging tacitly that she did not wish to leave Ma even for a few minutes.

"Indeed it is difficult to think of another such person as Didima. Hundreds now come to receive initiation from her. It occurs to me that maybe she is not learned or scholarly like other Gurus but by nature she is a true Mahatma. I have been in close contact with her for the last 35 years. Anger, greed, ego, jealousy, enmity are unknown to her. This is not an exaggeration. She is kind and generous toward all. She sees no fault in anyone. If we are referring to somebody's many short-comings, she is sure to point out at least one good quality in that person. It used to amuse us that for Didima nobody was blameworthy! All who have come in touch with Didima will agree with me."

Dayanandaji (who used to be Vimaladi in the Ashram) was for many years in the position of attending on Didima. Vimaladi's problem was how to prevent Didima from doing everything herself and not leave anything over for her attendants to do. Even in her very old age, she would wash her own clothes. Vimaladi could be heard very often scolding her charge, "Now if you catch cold and get a fever, people will take me to task! I shall be answerable to Ma - do you want me to get a scolding?" Didima would soothe her down with soft words and promises of "better behaviour" in the future.

Sometime in early 1964, Didima decided that it was time for her to leave the world. The entire incident is characteristic

of her large-hearted concern for every one. In the first week of February, 1963 Didima was in Haradwar. For a few days she seemed to be in a very strange quiet mood, quite unlike her own pleasant outgoing self. One day she was seen to perform her usual ritual of offering flowers and water at the Temple of Shiva and then on her return, she sat in her room as still as a statue. Repeated requests for breaking her fast were unavailing. After some time she went and lay down under the bel-tree. Before her attendants could really feel alarm on her account, a telegram had been received from Sri Ma (in Jodhpur at the time) enquiring about Didima and asking her to come to Delhi immediately.

Didima had a vivid vision of a wide river; she was standing at the shore waiting for the boat in which to cross over. The boat came, she climbed aboard, saying to the shadow figure of the helmsman, "What about the others who are left standing?. I cannot go unless all of them come with me." The helmsman assured her that everyone would be taken across. After this vision Didima had made up her mind that she had lived long enough and it was time to go. She was always in close rapport with Sri Ma - so Sri Ma in Jodhpur "saw" Didima saying to her, "Shall I go away tomorrow?" Sri Ma said very forcefully, "No, not now, not for a few years as yet!"

After this inner exchange of thoughts, she had asked that a telegram should be sent to Kankhal. The time of Didima lying under the bel-tree and Sri Ma's request for the telegram

coincided. Someone asked Sri Ma, "You had already communicated with Didima, what was the need for the telegram?" Sri Ma smiled and said, "For all of you! Otherwise you would find it difficult to believe that Ma was ready to leave her body at that time and that I made her change her mind."

Didima left us on August 7, 1970. This time she did not ask for permission. The time and place were suitable for this event which marked the end of an era. Jaipuria House is a *dharmasala* for pilgrims in Haradwar. A *Bhagavat Saptah* was taking place with the usual high standard of arrangements, a hallmark of all functions celebrated near Sri Ma. Didima used to sit next to Sri Ma on the dais everyday listening to the programme. The orator described the birth of Sri Krishna. The age-old story, ever-new in the countless retelling of it, gripped the attention of the audience. Didima got up from her seat on the dais, made her *pranam* to Sri Krishna and returned to her seat. She was very quiet the whole day. Late at night she sat as usual in Sri Ma's room for a while. When it was time for her to go to her rest, she placed her hand on Sri Ma's head in blessing, saying thrice, "Keep well (bhalo theko)." Generally Sri Ma always used to reciprocate by joining her palms together and saying, "You too". This day the ritual remained incomplete, Sri Ma did not say anything.

Around 1 a.m. Didima felt a little discomfort; Vimaladi enquired anxiously, if she should fetch Sri Ma. Didima said, "No" quite positively. Vimaladi could see that Didima was

wakeful and a little restless. She was in a quandary. Her relief was great to see Sri Ma walking in and taking charge of the situation. Sri Ma tried to give Didima a little honey mixed with gringer-paste, but she hardly took it in. Sri Ma then massaged her chest and held her almost in her arms. She went on calling her, "Ma, Ma, Ma". Didima answered in one syllable which sounded like "Om".

Didima showed herself fully conscious in the last few minutes, because she raised her joined palms slightly and moved them from side to side around her. It was a farewell gesture of leave taking. She then raised her eyes to Sri Ma's face and so breathed her last breath.

She had been a personification of desireless benevolence toward all; she would no more give succour to the hearts of her disciples by listening to their troubles and tribulations. A veritable Ganga, an all-encompassing confessional for the washing away of sins and sorrows was forever withdrawn, or perhaps not, who knows!

Sri Ma sat in Didima's room clasping her body, for many hours. She herself said later, "When I saw Paramananda enter the room and roll up his sleeves, I knew he would now take Ma away, so I then put her down." Sri Ma's radiant smile was overshadowed by her tears falling freely. It has been written again and again that Sri Ma was never seen to grieve over a death; and she did not grieve now, yet this occasion was very unusual. It is difficult to describe the poignancy of the lamentations of Sri Ma over the death of her mother. She went



on smiling at people as they flocked to the *dharmasala* on hearing the sad news. She would say to them, "Ma did not even give me a chance to sit with her for a while. So many times she used to say, 'Have you a little time now?' and I would say, 'Right after this appointment I'll have enough time' but alas, I never had the time to listen to her or converse with her. Always there were pressing matters which came first. How patiently she waited for me to find a little time for her but I hardly ever could do so!"

So she talked about her mother while Paramananda made all arrangements for the *samadhi* at Kankhal Ashram. All rituals and rites attending on the internment of an ascetic were set in train with scrupulous care. The *sadhus* of the monastic order to which Didima had belonged assumed responsibility for the last rites. In due course the solemn internment ceremonies were carried out with the greatest circumspection and honour. The Ashram organised with great solemnity all the *pujas* and functions prescribed for such occasions. Sri Ma attended all engagements bestowing her own vibrant radiance on them and so enhancing their worthwhileness.

The end of the year saw the laying of the foundation stone of a *Samadhi-Mandir*, a Temple to house Didima's *samadhi*. Sri Ma returned to Kankhal for this function after her extensive travels in between the two events.

Sri Ma went up to Dehradun for a day and then came to Delhi on August 21. She immediately proceeded to Vrindaban and there attended a *Bhagavat Saptah*.

Responding to the invitation of Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindhia, Sri Ma came to Gwalior to attend a *Bhagavat Parayana* by Swami Akhandananda Saraswati. Sri Ma was present daily for three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon.

From Gwalior Sri Ma returned to Delhi but only on her way to Solan. She had not visited Solan for quite a few years. Here she could get a few restful days. Visitors were very circumspect. They kept strict timings for *darshan* and did not crowd round her all the time.

All this changed in a trice as soon as Sri Ma descended to Delhi on September 24. To begin with, the annual important *pujas* of Durga, Lakshmi and Kali were to be celebrated in Delhi this year.

Durga Puja reached its usual magnificence in our Ashram. Sri Ma's presence enhanced every aspect of the festival. Crowds milled round. *Kirtan* and seasonal music filled the hall. Chhabi Banerji's special songs delighted the hearts of the audience. Brahmananda and Pushpa also were in much demand.

Many Mahatmas had responded to the invitation for their presence. The *puja* began after the daily *satsang* every day. It was the good fortune of the audience that they could listen to the inspiring speeches by Sri Chaitanya Giri Maharaj, Sri Swami Vishnu Ashramji, Sri Avadhootji and others. Every evening Professor Tripurari Chakravarty talked about the Valmiki Ramayana in his unique way speaking in Bengali,

Hindi, English and Sanskrit alternately.

All big functions performed under Sri Ma's aegis included a few regular features such as a feast for the working staff as well as all the poor of the neighbourhood who were especially invited to the *Puja*. The entire police force on guard duty was permitted to accept fruits and sweets as *prasada* from Sri Ma. On the last day of Sri Ma's stay, Oct 15, she called the children of the neighbouring colony and taught them to sing "Sri Rama, Jaya Rama, Jai Jai Rama", and then gave each of them a simple gift.

The devotees of Haribabaji were beseeching her to visit Hoshiarpur. She travelled to Hoshiarpur on October 16 and stayed for three days at the Satchidananda Ashram. Haribabaji's disciples were overjoyed to welcome Sri Ma amidst them. It was as if their Guru had returned to them.

Sri Ma returned to Delhi from the Punjab on October 20 for one hour only. She came to visit Didi who was ill and lying bedridden in the Ashram. During this short hour the famous singer Sri M.S. Subbulakshmi had an interview with Sri Ma. She sang to her for a little while also.

Sri Ma went on to Vrindaban returning to Delhi for the Annual Kali Puja on October 26. The Puja was performed with the usual scrupulous adherence to details existent in our Ashrams creating the solemn atmosphere of this all night vigil.

#### The 21st *Samyam Saptah* at Shuktal :

Shuktal is a village with not more than 500-600 inhabitants situated near the Ganges about 18 miles from Muzaffarnagar, the nearest railway station. It is said to be the site where Sri Shukadeva related the whole of the *Srimad Bhagavatam* to King Parikshit of ancient times, who chose to live out the days of his doom as an auditor to this Treatise and so achieve salvation.

Shuktal is a place of pilgrimage as the hallowed spot of the first ever narrating of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. There is a beautiful Shukdeva Mandir on the top of a hillock. It will be recalled that the twelfth *Samyam Saptah* was also held in Shuktal but that was at a different site (in 1961).

This *Samyam Saptah* had the distinction of being hosted by an eminent ascetic who had himself invited the devotees to hold this function in his Ashram and himself seen to all its arrangements. Sri Dandi Swami Vishnu Ashramji Maharaj was already well known to all participants of the *Saptah*. His inspiring talks spoken in a very interesting way and a specially charming voice had made him a favourite speaker. He was greatly revered and loved for his serene and benevolent presence.

Swamiji's arrangements were faultless. There was plenty of accommodation and all other amenities provided for with scrupulous care.

The Satsang Hall was newly constructed adjoining Sri Ma's rooms. Swamiji had prepared his own rooms for Sri Ma removing himself to a temporary thatched cottage nearby.

This year Haribabaji, Maheshwaranandaji and Didima were absent from the rostrum but other Mahatmas fulfilled the gap by their eminent presence. Swami Akhandananda Saraswati, Mahamandaleshwara Chaitanya Giriji, Sri Sharananandaji, Sri Govinda Prakashji of the Ramtirth Ashram, Sri Chakrapaniji, Sri Brahmananda, (the successor to Swami Maheshwaranandaji), Sri Dharmananda of Paramartha Niketan and Vishnu Ashramji himself made the occasion a very special one. Swami Chinmayanandaji of Mumbai came for one day only and gave a talk in English much to the gratification of a few foreign *vratees*.

The concentrated week of *sadhana* reached a new peak of achievement in Shuklat. The sponsorship of Mahatmas increased year by year. Everyone acknowledged gratefully the experience of a unique spiritual feeling of fulfilment.

On November 11 everybody dispersed. Sri Ma left for Delhi from where she came to Kanpur the next night that is the 13th November. Sri Padampat Singhania and his family had invited Sri Ma to grace with her presence the *Bhagavata Parayana* to be celebrated by them from 15th to 29th November. The speaker was the very prestigious learned ascetic Swami Akhandananda Saraswati. A *pandal* of impressive size was erected near the exquisitely beautiful Temple of Radha-Krishna. The Singhania had built a residence for Sri Ma known as the Ashram near the Temple. It was a fully equipped spacious and commodious house where Sri Ma could stay with her retinue.

After the successful functions at Kanpur, Sri Ma went to Varanasi for a few days. From Varanasi, she came to Haradwar on December 9 to attend the ritual of the laying of the foundation stone of a new Temple to be constructed over Didima's Samadhi.

This ceremony was performed on 12th December 1970 in the as yet small Ashram at Kankhal. Sri Giridhar Narayana Puriji, the Mahant of the Nirvani Akhara (which is amalgamated with the Ashram of Sri Mangal Giriji Maharaj, Didima's Sannyasa Guru) was the special guest of the function. He was profoundly impressed and full of praise about the rituals. Didima's *Samadhi-Mandir* at Kankhal Ashram became a place for pilgrimage for her innumerable disciples scattered all over the country.

Sri Ma somehow looked a little lost without Didima at her side. The dais also seemed strangely empty. A framed photograph of Swami Muktananda Giriji (Didima) was placed on the rostrum. For many months Sri Ma carried a photograph of Giriji always with her. She would place it by her side or hold it in her lap. Her smile remained undimmed and as glowing as ever, but her eyes looked withdrawn toward memories which she went on sharing with the visitors who came crowding in from far and near.

Among all the opposites she held together so effortlessly, surely the simultaneity of tears and laughter, on the occasion of Didima's passing away, was unique. It is true that the tragic muse had no role to play near Sri Ma Anandamayi. It can be

said that Tragedy touched the lives of the people around Sri Ma at this time because this event definitely marked the beginning of the end of the era of joyousness.

With the withdrawal of the protective aura of the pure selfless love which had enfolded Sri Ma all these years, did she become more and more exposed to the endlessly demanding nature of human frailties? To quote one of her own *vanis*, "Just as the mother-cow licks the entire uncleanness clinging to the calf and ingests it within herself, so does God His creatures. He draws away all their weaknesses and infirmities and makes them clean and pure. For you (the people), you are just to render service firmly established in the belief that all is His," (Spoken to Mrs. Talyarkhan, Mysore, July 1961).

Sri Ma continued to cleanse us all of our impurities. We have read in the scriptures about how the snow-white colour of Shiva turned to the colour of darkness by ingesting the poison that threatened to destroy the world. We have read about the sufferings of an Incarnation who came to save humanity. Cannot humanity so change itself that God may not suffer for us nor need to come to redress suffering but only to enjoy His creation?

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## CHAPETER TEN

### *The Janmatsava of 1971 in Varanasi*

The new year 1971 saw Sri Ma in Varanasi. After her usual swift visits to many towns to attend various functions she came to Varanasi on January 4. The next day Mrs. Mallefant, a member of the Unesco Delegation, came to meet Sri Ma "on her way" to Malaya although Varanasi was actually a good distance out of the way. She had met Sri Ma three years earlier in New Delhi.

On January 11 the Canadian Prime Minister Mr. Pierre Eliat Trudeau accompanied by the High Commissioner of Canada in India Mr. James George came for Sri Ma's *darshan*. Mr. James George was already known and devoted to her. He had arranged this visit for his friend who was on a state visit to India. Evidently New Delhi had acquiesced in this matter. The Prime Minister was accompanied by the usual quota of high officials, journalists foreign as well as Indian, television men and so on. Mr. Trudeau however wanted a quiet interview with Sri Ma. Sri Ma went up with him to the reception room of the second storey of the Gopal Mandir. Mr. James George came with him. With the help of a translator some conversations took place. There were no private questions so maybe they can be published now to demonstrate Sri Ma's saying that nobody was a stranger to her.

After Mr. Trudeau had greeted Sri Ma, She said to him, "You are coming from a very far away country, did you have a comfortable journey? Is everything congenial and comfortable now?"

After the visitor had answered suitably, a few more questions and answers of like manner followed. Then Sri Ma said in her very pleasant manner, "There is one Supreme Reality in and beyond the universe. That alone (the Reality) in this form (of yourself) has come to meet this body, to whom nobody is a stranger or a newcomer. There is but one Reality, one Atma, It is that which has always been, is, will be. It is eternally abiding and yet ever new."

The visitor quickly contemplated this statement and then asked, "Is progress possible?"

"Yes, always with effort you may achieve an experiential truth which is direct, palpable and real. Just as a student may achieve a state of knowledge which to begin with was not within his grasp, so a human being may attain to a level of awareness which is permissible to his state of creaturehood.

Question : This attainment, does it happen all at once or after long efforts?

Answer : Both. You keep on striking a match—the flare is always sudden, it may happen after much effort or at the first stroke. In God's creation everything is possible.

Question : How can a man know that what he is doing is the right thing to do? Whether he is being true to

himself or not?

Sri Ma : Is this question about things in this world or the other?

Question : To me, the two are not separate. I can understand the other only in relation to this world.

Sri Ma : There are stages or levels of understanding. The student of the lower grade has potentiality but he cannot be expected to grasp the lessons of the higher grades. The veil of unknowing or ignorance is pushed back from time to time. Man can act according to his best knowledge of a situation; but his efforts are relative and not absolute. For this reason, you see, you make an all out effort but the result is not to your satisfaction. It is not possible for a human being to know his best.

"What you said about not differentiating between two worlds is very just. This world is dominated by the mind and so is divisive. The mind operates in the realm of creativity, fruitfulness, the better way of life, etc. We are determined by our sense of values. The mind sets out norms. The mind measures. The immeasurable is perfect as it is. This realization dawns with the liquidation of the mind—the realization that whatever is there it is that only. It is just as it should be and not otherwise. It is true, however, that unless one obtains that comprehensive vision of totality one ought not to give up his best efforts to do what he thinks is the right thing to do."

Sri Ma elaborated her statement. Mr James George also joined in; he was already well known to Sri Ma.

Sri Ma gave a very special and beautiful *asana* (square of carpet) to Mr. Trudeau, saying "If you so wish, you may sit on it everyday for a few moments of meditation."

The Prime Minister seemed very happy. He carried his exquisite gift himself although his various aides offered to hold it for him. Sri Ma and Mr Trudeau accompanied by James George walked out on the terrace for a while. The Press then had its time with the very distinguished visitors who were indulgent towards them.

The popularity of Sri Ma Anandamayi at this time reached a high peak. If one or two days of rest were not contrived she would constantly be in the midst of milling crowds and at the centre of big functions. The press of foreign visitors also increased especially whenever she was in New Delhi. Many of the dignitaries of the Embassies became close to her. Sri Ma was unique. Her vision knew no barriers of country, race, state of modernity or any other difference. Her all comprehensive glance created an aura of friendliness. The visitor confronted an all knowing friend who spoke directly to his state of puzzlement and resolved all knots of persistent queries. Everyone experienced the truth of Sri Ma's statement that there were no strangers for her.

1971 was the year of the *ardha-kumbha mela* at Allahabad. Sri Ma came to Satya Gopal Ashram on January 19. She was expected thus every year for three days as

requested by the Acharya as well as his family. Sri Ma divided her time between this Ashram, the camp at the site of the *mela* and her cottage at 31 George Town. The atmosphere of the *mela* was as usual impregnated by spiritual aura due to the efforts of thousands of people. The whole camp was one-pointedly remembering the highest aim of self-purification. It started to rain a little. Sri Ma in her most benign and light hearted manner walked out in the rain for a while. The lowering clouds went away. The next day (the main day) dawned clear and sunny. The ritual of bathing at the auspicious hour could be observed very comfortably. The joyful atmosphere prevailed to delight the hearts of all pilgrims.

Sri Ma continued to travel. Sri Haribabaji's disciples had urgently requested Sri Ma to spend Holi at Bandh where the Samadhi Mandir of the great saint was to be consecrated on his birthday. Sri Ma after attending Shivaratri at Haradwar responded to their prayers and arrived at Bandh on March 7.

Many Mahatmas had asssembled for the function. *Satsang* was conducted on a very large scale. On March 10 at about 6 p.m. the Mandir was opened in Sri Ma's presence and *puja* performed with great solemnity and devotion. The Mandir housed a life-like statue of Haribabaji in his typical sitting posture.

After the ceremonies were over Sri Ma left Bandh to resume her travels to different towns awaiting her presence for a variety of functions.

In 1971 Sri Ma was 75 years old. The devotees wished to celebrate her Birthday in as special a manner as possible. The venue chosen was the Ashram at Varanasi which was now big enough to cater to such a function.

Sri Ma herself did not have any *kheyala* for this particular *puja*. The country was in a state of unrest due to the trouble in Bangladesh. In any case it was never her *kheyala* to countenance worship of her person but the wish of the large family of devotees would not be denied. On her way to Varanasi from Dehradun at the end of April she unexpectedly detrained at Lucknow with two companions only. The rest of her retinue were asked to travel on to Varanasi. From Lucknow, Sri Ma came to Allahabad via Kanpur. At Allahabad she came to her cottage at 31 George Town much to the delight of the fortunate family. She asked Babu (Bindu's younger brother) to drive her to Varanasi after meals and some rest. Sri Ma came quietly not to the main Ashram but to the little cottage near the temple of Sankat Mochan which was also a small ashram used as a centre for the distribution of milk to the poor started by Dr. Gopal Dasgupta as a charitable mission.

Babu was told not to disclose her whereabouts apart from his sister at the University and Premlata at the D.L.W. So for a couple of days Hiru Brahmachari the resident caretaker at Sankat Mochan had the privilege of taking care of Sri Ma. The few people attending on her had a joyous time, since Sri Ma was in a delightful and playful mood.

But it was not her way to cause confusion and disarray among her people. She was always gracious and merciful. Responding to the prayers of the devotees headed by Mahatma Sri Avadhootji Maharaj Sri Ma returned to the main Ashram to participate in the programme already set in train to hold the main function.

A large and beautifully decorated *pandal* had been created in the Hospital grounds for the *satsangs*. On May 7 the function was inaugurated solemnly and in hushed silence by the Chief Minister of U.P. Sri Kamalapati Tripathi in the presence of an enormous audience. The Chief Minister had come from New Delhi specially for the occasion. He read out a letter of good wishes from the Prime Minister Srimati Indira Gandhi. She had conveyed her *pranams* to Sri Ma regretting her inability to be present in person for the function. The Maharajah of Benares, the Vice-Chancellor of the University Dr. K. L. Srimali, the great scholar Sri Rajaram Shastri, the Vice Chancellor of the Kashi Vidyapeeth, several eminent Mahatmas and Prof. Tripurari Chakravarty of Kolkata sat in a semicircle on the dais. Sri Ma occupied a seat on the extreme right.

After the preliminaries the *satsang* was inaugurated solemnly by the chanting of Vedic mantras by the students of the Kanyapeeth. The *pandal* was packed to capacity and so it remained during the morning and evening sessions throughout the duration of the celebrations.

All other usual undertakings were carried out with

circumspection. Ample sweets, fruits and flowers were presented to all institutions which cared for the needy in town. Worshipful prayers were held at all the temples.

Sri Avadhootji made himself responsible for the decorations. He was very fond of the tiny white fragrant flowers of summer. Under his direction a pretty cottage of these white flowers was erected on a separate stage for the night of the *Tithi-Puja*. The cottage had beautiful trellis-work walls and pillars of flowers surrounding the space where a *chowki* was positioned for Sri Ma's occupation.

It may well be imagined that devotees had come not only from every corner of India to be with Sri Ma on this joyous occasion but also from abroad specially from America and Europe. All felt as if they were transported to a sphere of joy and peace. Sri Ma although usually surrounded by the milling crowd found opportunities for meaningful communications with every single person. This was one of her very special gracious gestures. Nobody was overlooked yet she seemed never to disrupt any even flow of the proceedings.

The main *Tithi-Puja* was to be observed in the small hours of May 14. *Satsang* went on in the *pandal* until midnight. Then the *pandal* and entire lane from the Ashram to the *pandal* was cleaned and decorated with flower garlands and fresh flowers. At 2 a.m. the *pandal* was opened again and in a few minutes filled to capacity by devotees who had employed this time also in bathing in the river (mostly) and dressing in

fresh clothes for the *Puja*. Km. Chhabi Banerji with her companions began to sing the hymns that she usually did at this time.

Sri Avadhootji Maharaj, Jogibhai and other dignitaries persuaded Sri Ma to occupy a sitter palanquin at the Ashram. They escorted the palanquin to the special dais in the *pandal*. Sri Ma had become still and quiet. Udasji helped her to descend from the palanquin and lie down on the *chowki*. She covered herself completely with her white wrapper and so in a way was invisible to the congregation.

Before starting the *Tithi-Puja* Nirvananandaji performed a short *Puja* before a large picture of Didima that had been positioned near Sri Ma. The beautiful music was interrupted for half an hour for the time of silent meditation. It was really amazing that pindrop silence was possible in the packed *pandal*. After this silent homage paid to the Beloved for Her gracious presence amongst them the devotees began to sing the morning hymns and concluding prayers of the *Tithi-Puja*. After the final *arati* at dawn long queues were formed and everyone got the chance to mount the dais and touch Sri Ma's feet while she lay still in deep *samadhi*. There seemed no end to the people lining up patiently to approach the *chowki* for this rare privilege.

At about midday Sri Ma was gently aroused. With great care and circumspection she was escorted to her room in the Ashram. The festivities continued with the lavish midday meal for all devotees most of whom had kept a fast the



previous day.

The usual *nama-yajna* by the Delhi Party was inaugurated in the evening. The singers gathered round the altar decorated with pictures and flowers for the ceremony of *adhivasa* that is a ceremony of invocations and consecrations preluding to the main programme.

The entire ritual was now familiar to all. Sri Ma had made the custom of *kirtan* for the whole night by women only, since the days of Dhaka. After *adhivasa* the women took over the *nama-kirtan*, while men vacated the precincts. At dawn they returned to receive the *nama-kirtan* from the women. In this way the *Nama-Yajna* remained continuous from one evening to the next.

Sri Ma was visibly glowing with her special radiance. She came to the *kirtan* a number of times during the night much to the delight of Chhabi Banerji and other participants. The whole day was devoted to this melodious worship of God creating an atmosphere of joy and fulfilment. The last item was the distribution of *prasada* (sugar puffs) which had also become a special feature because Sri Ma herself threw these sweets amongst the crowd who scrambled after them joyfully.

Even the elements were specially benign for this entire festival. Within living memory the residents of Varanasi had not known such cool and pleasant weather in the month of May.

The decades of the seventies found Sri Ma Anandamayi at

the peak of her active participation in a plethora of religious functions big and small. All the Ashrams rapidly grew in size and facilities to accommodate more and more participants. The foremost amongst these was Kishenpur in Dehradun. Kalyanvan already adjoined it as an extension to it. Small cottages came up as residences for Mahatmas or those who wished to live in retirement. A large tract of land next to the Ashram was purchased by Sri M.L. Khaitan and his wife Sm. Rajaben Khaitan, two new dedicated devotees as mentioned earlier. They wished to live in Dehradun close to the Ashram. A very beautiful cottage was first built for Sri Ma on this land. On occasions Sri Ma could retire here for a much needed rest and respite (our language) from her relentless programmes. Sri Ma herself never looked anything but her radiant and beautiful self inspite of suffering at times from small ailments and inconveniences of her bodily condition. Her very close companions alone were privileged to know about these. They however could only pray for her own *kheyala* toward her bodily health. In time many big functions were celebrated on the land. The Rajpur Road to Mussoorie from Dehradun passed in front of these Ashrams, so at times this section of it would be travelled constantly up and down by men, women and children walking from one direction or the other. Other Ashrams also expanded suitably to cater to the demands of the times.

Sri Ma continued to travel as always but the pattern changed almost radically. Her leisurely ways became fixed

itineraries; people would be eagerly awaiting her arrival and ready to celebrate the occasions. After the Birthday Celebrations Sri Ma resumed her travels. In the month of June she came to her cottage built for her by Sri and Srimati Khaitan in Dehradun. The girls of the Kanyapeeth also came to Kishenpur for their summer vacation. Thus they could have *darshan* of Sri Ma at times. Nirmalanandaji acquired some reputation as a speaker during the *satsangs* held at this time. Guru Purnima was observed near Sri Ma with great enthusiasm. This year it was specially so because all devotees missed the benign presence of Didima and so flocked to Sri Ma in great numbers.

After travelling around Sri Ma returned to Dehradun on July 12 with some devotees, notably the Maharajah of Travancore and his family. This was their first visit to Sri Ma. They stayed at Kishenpur Ashram. The Maharajah's brother known as Elia Raja also came to Dehradun to visit Sri Ma. He was always accompanied by a small Image of Sri Padmanabhan the presiding Deity of Travancore. He with this image was housed in one of the new cottages at Kalyanvan. Sri Ma was very pleased to see the Image. She said, "Since Sri Padmanabhan has come graciously to the North to bless it, let us make Him welcome here." To this effect some capable devotees took the matter in hand. Expert jewellers of Mumbai were commissioned to sculpt a similar Image. This Image was nearby for Sri Ma this year in Dehradun.

The lucky people of Dehradun were given the opportunity

of observing all the major *pujas* of this time of the year. Durga Puja, Lakshmi Puja and also Kali Puja were celebrated on the premises of the new extension to the Ashrams. Under the swift management of the Khaitans, new *pandals* and other facilities became functional very quickly. *Satsangs* were held, large meals cooked and served to the ever increasing number of devotees.

The main day of the Durga Puja this year also saw the ceremonious installation of Sri Padmanabhan. Elia Raja had come himself with South Indian priests to guide those who were detailed to take charge of the Image by Sri Ma. He was installed in the same cottage which had been kept ready for Him.

Sri Ma travelled widely before she came to Vrindaban for the twentysecond *Samyam Saptah*.

### **Sri Ma's Endearing Ways :**

From Delhi Sri Ma started for Vrindaban with a small party. Her car was followed by a few devotees who wished to accompany her in a jeep. After a few miles something went wrong with the jeep. Sri Ma's car also stopped because she wanted the vehicles to proceed together. For the last few weeks Sri Ma had been observing *maunam*. But this was not in her usual mode of benign quietude. This time she freely made gestures and even wrote with her finger on surfaces to enquiries in order to make people understand her *khayala*.

There seemed to be no workshop anywhere near. Someone going in search of a telephone entered a newly built

factory. The owner, a Sikh gentleman, was greatly delighted when he heard that Sri Ma Anandamayi was stranded on the road in front. He had read about her a year before and from then was eager for her *darshan*. He at once came out and after this unexpected fulfilment of his cherished desire he begged her to step inside the premises of the factory. While Sri Ma granted his prayer, he had the jeep repaired and ready for the ongoing journey. However, after several miles the jeep failed again near the village Hodal. A message was sent to Vrindaban to send a car to rescue the stranded party. Sri Ma got down from her car and strolled up and down the road. A few women from the nearby small houses or huts came forward and asked Sri Ma to sit on a cot brought out for her. Sri Ma sat at ease and began to sing *kirtan* "Jay Ram, Sri Ram", and some other Names too. Every one joined in. After sometime Sri Ma indicated that maybe food should be prepared for the now definitely hungry people because it was getting late. She asked the villagers to bring out their provisions as well as a cooking stove, coal etc. The villagers were obviously very poor but they very enthusiastically brought forth potatoes, ghee and other ingredients for an impromptu meal.

Sri Ma herself leant a hand toward preparing a simple but satisfying meal not only for her companions but the villagers also. Every one ate on big leaves from nearby trees. A most friendly air prevailed. Sri Ma distributed all the fruits which had been placed in her car. Sri Ma again sang *kirtan* for them,

this time all the villagers joined. Soon a car arrived from Vrindaban. They also partook of the delightful picnic.

Needless to say, the villagers were amply provided with cash which they were very reluctant to take but were persuaded that it was a memento of Sri Ma's visit to their village.

The 22nd *Samyam Saptah* was held in Vrindaban (October 26 to November 2)

Sri Ma's bewildering travels continued until she was obliged to stay in one place for a big function in picturesque surroundings in the vicinity of the vast lake at Bhopal with Shamla Hill in the background. Sri and Srimati Datar Singh had already built a small Ashram for Sri Ma on their estate. A *Bhagavat Saptah* was celebrated here (23rd to 30th November). The speaker was the much admired Sri Vishnu Ashramji Maharaj. The "*Samkalpa*" was very solemnly taken by Guneeta, the granddaughter of the couple, who was a member of Sri Ma's Kanyapeeth at Varanasi. The Dandi-Swami Vishnu Ashramji was a recluse but he responded to Sri Ma's invitation and came to Bairagarh for the function.

The end of the year was overshadowed by news of war for the freedom of Bangladesh. Even so. Sri Padampat Singhania arranged for a *Bhagavat Parayan* in Kanpur near his famous Temple of Radha-Krishna. A beautiful, very commodious house was already in readiness for Sri Ma's stay near this Temple known as "Ashram". The most prestigious speaker Swami Akhandananda from Vrindaban was gracing

the rostrum for both morning and evening sessions. This time Sri Vishnu Ashramji was also present on the stage at his side.

The first few days the people of Kanpur could not participate fully, but the war concluded victoriously so the celebrations rose to unexpected heights. The devotees were specially gratified because Sri Ma was seen to enter into a state of *bhava*. After leaving Dhaka, Sri Ma had on very rare occasions such states of *bhava*.

Sri Padmapat Singhanian was overwhelmed by Sri Ma's gracious presence which he acknowledged publicly.

Sri Ma left Kanpur on December 30. A long awaited visit to South India was undertaken by her accompanied by a large retinue. She visited Madras.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Call of the Unmanifest to the Bird on the Wing

Sri Ma seemed to have started the process of withdrawal as unobtrusively as had been the manner of her inconspicuous emergence into the limelight of public acclaim. She had allowed people to get used to her awe-inspiring presence by very slow degrees; she had travelled constantly so that the effect of her charismatic personality would be diffused and the flocks could go back to normal ways of life. So now, like the blazing sun suddenly dimmed by scudding clouds, Sri Ma went into a state of physical unapproachability. She was hardly visible to the press of crowds although whenever she did appear at close quarters, she looked as serene and as intimate as ever.

In later years, meditating on this aspect of her life it seems reasonable to suppose that it was only an indication of the immeasurable quality of her compassion for her people. If she had suddenly made herself invisible, while all the devotees were as yet used to the glory of her presence, it would have been a devastating experience for the hundreds and thousands who drew their sustenance of life, as it were, from the assurance, Ma is here, why worry!

It was given out that Sri Ma was not well and so, many irksome rules of *darshan* had to be imposed. This was not quite grasped as reality by devotees of long standing. They

had seen Sri Ma deal with much illness. The ailments had never before disturbed the usual tenor of her ways. Nothing after all could happen to her, unless it was her *kheyala* that it would be so. She had succumbed to many "ailments" for some reason or other and then got rid of them in due time. The desperate prayers for her recovery had never before gone unanswered. No physical causes had engendered the ailments and no medications had been required for their treatments. So no one seriously considered the possibility that this time Sri Ma did not and would not have the *kheyala* to terminate her indisposition or what looked like it. She was very quiet. She seemed to have contained the joyousness of her usual demeanour. Everyone close to her went about with a serious face - a very unusual state of things.

Meanwhile, in the seventies, the Varanasi Ashram witnessed the setting of a great luminary of rare splendour. Mm. Pt. Gopinath Kaviraj breathed his last on 12 June, 1976 in Mata Anandamayee Hospital. He had been living peacefully in the Ashram and until his last illness had continued receiving visitors who came for his *darshan* as well as guidance in intellectual and spiritual matters.

### **The Last Days of Didi Gurupriya**

Apart from the inaccessibility due to overcrowding and the proliferation of functions which seemed to enmesh Sri Ma from all sides, there were other subtle indications that the end was near, but no one interpreted them as such

at the time. In September 1980 Didi Gurupriya passed away in Varanasi. Didi had been in Mumbai for a long time, to be near her doctors. Sri Ma herself had seen to these arrangements. In retrospect the dates of various events assume significance. Didi had been suffering for many years. Hari Babaji had always admired her one-pointed dedication to Sri Ma. He had undertaken to perform many religious rites toward Didi's recovery. He was convinced that such scriptural remedial measures could not fail. He would come and sit near Didi's bedside and say, "Didi, get up! You are not ill anymore!". It remains a fact that while he was alive, Didi also did not quite succumb to her illness. It did so happen that Didi made a recovery and could go about with Sri Ma for some time.

Once Abhaya had very characteristically raised an unusual question to Didi. He had asked if she had ever seen Sri Ma doze at any time! Didi, not uncharacteristically, had never given this matter a thought, and answered in growing wonderment, "You know, Abhaya, I never have, for the matter of that, nobody has ever seen Ma overcome by sleep! Even when she was sitting for more than twelve hours at a stretch, as so frequently happened in Dhaka, we never saw her dozing or fatigued. This was the main reason why the fact that Ma was sitting for long hours went

unnoticed. People came and went, the newcomers thinking themselves lucky to find Ma still sitting. On the other hand I must say that whenever I happen to doze off while sitting in a *satsang* I wake up with a jerk to find Ma's eyes on me! This happens invariably without exceptions! When I am quite alertly listening to the discourses and hoping that Ma would see what an intelligent interest I am taking in the proceedings, she does not glance at me but as soon as my eyes begin to close, I find her regarding me steadily!"

Sri Ma joined in the general laughter, but paid the following tribute to Didi, "You see, her thoughts are always directed here (Sri Ma); no matter what she is doing or with whom she is talking, her thoughts remain one-pointed; but when she dozes off this thread is broken and my *kheyala* is drawn to her."

Didi's illness took a serious turn in the month of September 1980. Sri Ma traveled to Mumbai from Vrindaban on September 11, arriving on the 12th. It was her *kheyala* to take Didi to Varanasi the same day, that is, 12th September. She took Bhaiya's permission. Bhaiya made all arrangements efficiently and rapidly. Didi's compartment adjoining Sri Ma's was like a mobile hospital room. Sri Ma arriving at Varanasi the next day settled Didi in the Ashram but did not stay to see the end. She stayed in Didi's room alone with her for a few moments. The attending girls from the Ashram

thereupon saw Sri Ma pass her hand gently from Didi's head to toe, three times. Sri Ma asked permission to leave, "Shall I go now?" Didi gave her assent, yet Sri Ma repeated her question twice more and elicited her answers accordingly.

Sri Ma left for Vrindaban to attend the *Bhagavat Saptah* being observed in the Ashram.

Didi was seen to open her eyes at 10 o'clock in the night and look fixedly and serenely at Sri Ma's photograph near her bed. Her eyes remained unblinkingly open for nearly 11 hours, till the moment of her passing away the next morning. Sri Ma sitting in the *satsang* at Vrindaban was heard to exclaim softly, "Didi has gone away!"

She waited for the news to be conveyed to her and then started back for Varanasi. From Vrindaban to Mumbai, from Mumbai to Varanasi, from Varanasi to Vrindaban and back to Varanasi, Sri Ma spent five consecutive nights on the train. It seemed she could not abide in one place to await the inevitable news of the final parting from a friend of such long standing. Sri Ma on arrival at Varanasi, quietly retired to her room. She gave all necessary instructions to Panu Brahmachari regarding the last rites to be observed. She suggested that the mortal remains should be given such honour and respect as is accorded to the ascetics of our tradition. Didi also had received the *sannyasa* mantra from Sri Ma like Bhaiji and Bholanath. Her *sannyasa* name was Sri Gurupriyananda Giri.

So in the time-honoured custom Didi's body was dressed in new ochre-robos of *sannyasa* and immersed in the holy waters of the Ganges in front of the Ashram which owed its existence, expansion and consolidation almost to her single-handed efforts. The whole Ashram mobilized itself toward observing the ritual ceremonies. Sri Ma remained in her room saying, "I shall not witness the immersion of this image."

Sri Ma had never before displayed such an awareness of a final parting although from a worldly point of view many near and dear ones had died in her vicinity. It may be untoward to impute human feelings to Sri Ma but maybe it can be stated that the ballast of her sojourn on earth was shaken a little by the departure of her sister-like companion of more than fifty years. From some words that Sri Ma had spoken about Didi years before, her audience had concluded that Didi had been born previously to Didima as her first-born child which had not survived infancy. Sri Ma seemed to indicate that the infant girl had come only to herald the coming of Sri Ma; this was the reason why Didi was addressed as such by Sri Ma because Didi means "elder sister". If Didi had prepared the way for the birth of Sri Ma, would it be too fanciful to say that by dying she called Sri Ma's attention or *kheyala* toward the ending of the *lila* of her life in the world?

That Sri Ma during the year 1981-82 adopted a one-

track course toward the final dissolution of ties becomes very clear when we examine the concurrence of events as they unfolded during this time.

### ***Atirudra Mahayajna at Kankhal***

Sri Ma's last positive *kheyala* as far as it can be made out now, was for the celebration of the *Atirudra Yajna* at Kankhal. This was symbolic in many ways. As with all other manifestations of *Shakti* in Sri Ma, the beginning of this *yajna* also originated in a very humble manner; some of the young women companions of Sri Ma happened to be watching a *yajna* being performed by one of her devotees. It came to their minds almost simultaneously as to how nice it would be if they could arrange for such a function under Sri Ma's aegis. It seemed an impossible dream, because for uncounted centuries such Vedic rituals were the monopoly of the men-folk. But when somebody dared to express this desire in front of Sri Ma, she said lightly, "Why don't you.?" Since Sri Ma seemed agreeable, other people in authority were consulted. Nobody opposed the idea. A small committee was formed consisting of Dr. Padma Mishra, Shanta, Nirmala, Parul and Aruna. The second hurdle was money. The young women pooled their resources together, but evidently this would be a drop in the ocean of the total expenses!

The project, however, seemed to snowball drawing together resources and manpower or rather human power to

an unprecedented degree. Money came from unexpected sources; an architect of great repute agreed to design the Hall of the *yajna* in accordance with the Vedic stipulations; skilled engineers and competent overseers appeared of their own free will, eager to be of service. The logistics of the whole undertaking was worked out in detail by Professor Pandit Vamadeva Mishra, a former colleague of Dr. Padma Mishra. Sri Ma, quite in her own old style, directed the affair of the *yajna*. Regarding the choice of the *Acharya* (main priest), she seemed to approve of Vamadeva Mishra and listened to all his proposals with indulgent understanding, making a few suggestions which were accepted gratefully. Sri Ma, as always, could plug in loopholes with unerring judgement.

The site chosen was Kankhal, a township rich in religious legends, the most famous and widely believed in being that once Daksha Prajapati had started a *yajna* here but it had been destroyed mid-way by the retinue of Shiva because the King had insulted the God. There is an ancient Temple in Kankhal known as the House of Daksha near the site chosen for the *Atirudra Yajna* in Sri Ma's Ashram nearby. All the devout people of Kankhal, all the Heads of Monasteries declared that who else but Sri Ma could have completed the *yajna* of legendary fame at the very site of its first destruction.?

It did seem that a magic wand had been waved. The

committee of young women felt that everything was being made easy for them. A hidden power flowered into the many-splendoured *Atirudra Yajna* causing admiration, awe and a bemused feeling of being at once transported to the times of Satya Yuga when such events were the norm. In answer to Sri Ma's question as to how the general public should participate in this very exclusive ritual, Pandit Vamadevaji said that those who heard the sounds of the Vedic mantra and did a circumlocution round the Hall would derive the greatest religious merit from it. Quoting a text, he remarked ruefully that they who performed the *yajna* were like the beasts of burden who carry on their backs a load of supreme value! It is the lay public who were the real beneficiary of such rituals.

Sri Ma had a three-feet wide path made around the Hall. On this path for eleven days and nights, thousands of men, women and children walked slowly in orderly queues with folded hands, listening to the sonorous chorus of more than 135 voices raised in pronouncing the Vedic *mantra* and watching the sacred flames arising from eleven *kundas* (receptacles) in tongues of yellow, orange, red, saffron, gold, white and grey colours.

Sri Ma took part in all the activities. She seemed to have recovered her normal health and spirits during this interval. She was constantly advising, directing and suggesting improvements towards perfection. Pandit



Vamadevaji, although a stranger to begin with, quickly came to regard her as the quintessence of the spirit of the *shastras*. He referred to her in all matters. One Vedic scholar said that she had even at one time corrected the movements of the arm and elbow which is obligatory when singing a particular rhythm, not by saying anything but by doing it herself. This was his moment of revelation as to her complete mastery of scriptural injunctions to the last detail. The Vedic scholars coming from Madras, Gujrat, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra formed a congenial group living together for nearly a fortnight in one of the Monasteries (Udasin Akhara), following all the rules of an ascetic way of life. Even the local pandits who were participating in the *yajna* lived away from their homes during the fortnight. The entire region became an ancient *rishi-ashram* (forest hermitage) closing the gap between legendary history and modern times.

Responding to Sri Ma's *kheyala*, the *acharya* (head priest) allowed the committee of young women to enter the Hall and take their seats among the privileged. This was a departure from the norm. The pandits opined that there were no scriptural injunctions against participation by women; as a matter of fact in ancient times not only did they sit with the audience but also engaged in dialogues with the greatest of scholars.

It was one of Sri Ma's characteristics that she judged

every case on its own merits. While the *yajna* was about to begin, one young professional photographer wanted to enter the Hall and use his camera. He was told that no one who had not gone through the process of consecration and initiation could be allowed to enter the Hall. He was very eager and wanted to be told what if anything he could do to qualify himself as he was already a brahmin by birth. Sri Ma sent him to the *acharya*, who on being told his problem said succinctly "*Mataram prichchha*" (ask Mother). So the photographer returned to Sri Ma. Very unexpectedly, she made a concession for him, by saying, "Go to the Ganga, have a bath and change into a new set of washed and unstitched clothes or silken ones." She also told him to do a certain number of *japa* of the Gayatri Mantra. He was very happy and departed with alacrity to the Ganges.

During the *Yajna* Sri Ma one day composed a prayer in Bengali which was given out to everyone who was involved in the work as either a participator or spectator. The hymn was:

*He atirudrayajnasvarupa bhagavan :*

*Amar hridaye Atmajyoti prakasha hau.*

"Thou who art manifest as the Atirudrayajna, pray, O Lord, reveal Thyself in my heart as Enlightenment (Splendour of the Self).

This prayer no doubt could lend itself to pages of exegeses; the simplest meaning, however, takes us right from

the *Karmakanda* (ritualisms) through the *Upasanakanda* (devotion) on to the *Jnanakanda* (knowledge) of the Vedic heritage. It is a beautiful aphorism revealing the harmony which underlies the entire Vedic corpus. Rituals, devotion and knowledge are the exclusive ways but they are simultaneous and so one should understand the message of the Vedas. The Upanishads are after all an integral part of the Vedas.

Another day, Sri Ma uttered the following words (in Bengali with some Sanskrit words) spontaneously in *bhava* :

"Pathakarini shikho riti.

Makhakarini shikho riti.

Satramat."

Sri Ma herself gave the meaning as "Learn the way to walk the Path. Learn the way to perform *yajna*. (Follow) the rules of *yajna*."

After the *yajna* (April/May, 1981) Sri Ma seemed to retire within herself. Questions remained as if unheard, or given a quiet response, "Whatever happens is how it should be", or "Wait and see", Her ceaseless wanderings continued but these were not joyous flights from one perch to another; they were carefully programmed ahead so that all eager expectations for a glimpse of the "Bird" could be fulfilled.

The last year of Sri Ma Anandamayi's gracious presence on earth was very different from all the previous years. Devotees knew that nothing could go wrong if Sri Ma was there. Her *kheyala* was sufficient to set right the most

disastrous circumstances; perhaps this *kheyala* itself worked toward preparing her people for the inevitable moment of heartbreak. Who can say if she did not knowingly adopt the slow movement toward total withdrawal ? People got used to long queues for a moment's *darshan*. They were told Sri Ma was not well and could not be disturbed. But Sri Ma looked as radiant as ever. Even for the last *Samyam Saptah* in 1981 she was as bright and busy as was usual for these festivals, so the devotees told themselves that Ma would right herself as soon as it was her *kheyala* to do so. But the few people who travelled with her or stayed around her knew that this *kheyala* seemed singularly impervious to their ardent prayers for recovery.

1982 was the year of *Ardha-Kumbha Mela* at Allahabad. It was expected that Sri Ma would visit the camp which would be ready for occupation along with all other similar camps of *akharas*.

Sri Ma's cottage near the town house of Bindu Mukerji was also in readiness for her occupation for the first few days. It was reported that Sri Ma was not well. The young Raja of Hathwa drove her down from Vindhyachala in his Limousine. He had so arranged the back seat that Sri Ma could lie down comfortably in it. He himself drove the car very carefully so as to avoid any jerks over rough patches. Sri Ma had the *kheyala* to go to Sri Satya Gopal Ashram first. She did not get down from the car but spoke words of greetings and then farewell to all those who were surrounding her. They

were overwhelmed by her kindness and considered themselves blessed by her *darshan*. They could not know that this indeed was a farewell visit! Sri Ma then came to her cottage and sat on the verandah looking as radiant and benign as always. She was pleased to be informed that her escort the Raja of Hathwa and his companions and all her other retinue had been treated to a special hot morning meal in the main house. The family had been ready to receive and fully entertain all those who came with Sri Ma. Sri Ma began speaking words of praise for this family, their unfailing record of being hospitable toward all devotees. This eulogy, however, was very strange because the devotees always felt that they belonged to her and whatever service they could render was a privilege. Neither did Sri Ma ever behave as if she was unaware of the family-like togetherness of all devotees. No one had the wit to realize that Sri Ma was indeed making a valedictory speech of farewell to people she would visit no more.

Next day (January 10, 1982) the Mahatmas of leading *akharas* came to the town to request Sri Ma to come to the *Mela* so that she could be taken out in the main procession. The teeming crowds would have the rare luck of her purifying *darshan*. The Mahatmas said they would see to it that she was not inconvenienced. Sri Ma smiled and said, "This body is never inconvenienced. It is so limp. If you wish to take it to the *Mela*, then do so if you can."

The Mahatmas were scrupulously careful. They helped

Sri Ma to mount to her silver throne on the back of an elephant. From this elevated position Sri Ma was visible to the large mass of people. She joined her palms in acknowledgement of their greetings.

The Ashram had as usual put up a camp in Sri Ma's name at the site of the *Mela*. This year rains were so heavy and devastating that much of the camp was affected badly. Thus it was everywhere. People used to Sri Ma's *kheyala* working its magic in such circumstances were non-plussed and coped as best as they could.

Sri Ma came to her cottage in the camp on the 10th evening and some kind of routine of *satsang* was inaugurated. Not only so but Sri Ma invited all the Mahatmas to a feast in her camp. Then she proceeded to invite the devotees of the town to the camp for sumptuous meals. Not one single person was forgotten. She even arranged for suitable escort for a crippled lady who was hesitating to attempt the journey. Nobody had any sense of premonition that the very elements were presaging an ominous future for the devotees. Renu, one of the girls attending on Sri Ma, thought she was very quiet. Once she got up from her *chowki* and slowly walked to the window of her cottage holding Renu's arm. She looked out on the scene of disarray. This was one of her all-comprehensive glances difficult to describe. The movement of the head was very slight. Less so the movement of the eyes, but she seemed to take in the entirety of the vista all at once.

Renu had a strange feeling that it was not a usual viewing

of how things were but rather a gesture of farewell. She recalled Didi's accounts of how Sri Ma had behaved when she was finally leaving Shahbagh. Not only the people but the very places had become attached to her wherever she stayed for a while. For nearly fifty years now she had been regularly visiting this holy city of the confluence of three sacred rivers. The camp seemed aware of her mood of withdrawal. Nothing went right. There was so much disruption due to the rains that the camp had to be abandoned before time. Never had such a thing happened before. Sri Ma went away to Vindhyachala.

Sri Ma continued to be indisposed and frail but there was no respite from her travels. On March 26 she undertook a long train journey to distant Tripura state. This was an unusually controversial journey. The Maharajah of Tripura had invited Sri Ma to pay a visit to the State of her birth and arrangements had been made on a lavish scale for her reception. Tripura happened to be a communist state. It was reported that some of the populace disapproved of this show of according welcome to a "religious personality."

It was a tale of misunderstanding and uncalled for panic. Although the Chief Minister (of the communist government) came to pay respects to Sri Ma rumor gained ground that some untoward events would take place. The crowd which was increasing by the hour went beyond all calculations. People from far flung villages trooped in to get a glimpse of the so illustrious "Daughter of Tripura", their own Ma!

The Inspector General of Police felt his responsibilities

keenly. Instead of arranging for high rostrums from where Sri Ma would have been visible to the crowd he sought to surround her with stringent security measures.

All state functions were gone through hurriedly including the inauguration of a Temple to the Goddess of Learning and Wisdom, Devi Saraswati.

Sri Ma was not given the chance to mingle with the crowd. She was heard to say "*Janata Janardana*" a few times as if wishful of coming closer to them but the police were strict. The Inspector General of Police whisked her away to the Railway Station under his personal escort. He felt he was responsible for her safety while she remained in Tripura. It had been seen countless times that crowds did not inconvenience her. It was just an unfortunate misunderstanding all round because the crowd was not hostile at all. Sri Ma was not allowed to respond to the prayers of thousands for a *darshan*. Sri Ma was seen to wilt visibly on her way back from this sojourn. She blamed nobody but herself bore the impact of the people's disappointment. She looked tired and unwell.

Sri Ma visited Agarpara Ashram in Kolkata on her return from Tripura. From Bengal she proceeded to Kankhal, in total a long journey of more than 72 hours. The travels were not over. She made another journey to Kanpur, at the invitation of the Simhanias. She returned to Kankhal where preparations were in train for her 86th Birthday Anniversary.

This last major function of the Ashram to celebrate the

presence of Sri Ma on earth turned out to be a series of woeful events. Never had the devotees experienced such calamitous rains which proceeded to drain everything. The devotees felt helpless in the face of Sri Ma's total abeyance of her *kheyala* for their efforts.

Some professional decorators had been asked to construct a chariot-like throne on which Sri Ma's bed would be placed. When the chariot had taken shape Udasji took great exception to it. She ordered the men to dismantle it forthwith saying, "Why a chariot? Do you want Ma to go away?" In any case Sri Ma's frailty precluded any suggestions of a different venue for the *Tithi-Puja*. All accessories for the worshipful night were assembled near Sri Ma's *chowki* in her own room. The girls who would sing hymns and *kirtan* were accommodated in one corner of the room. For the assembly of devotees a *pandal* was put up facing Sri Ma's room.

The elements, however, became relentlessly disruptive. Strong winds and heavy rains soon brought down the *pandal* leaving the assembly to find some nooks and corners of shelter. Most of them had to go to the hall of the Ashram which was at a distance from Sri Ma's room. Nobody had experienced such utter confusion spoiling the solemnity of the special occasions. With the coming of dawn they could not even see the final *arati*. The question of queuing up for the most coveted privilege of touching Sri Ma's feet on this one occasion did not even arise. Sri Ma's room was vacated quickly to enable her to rest undisturbed. She was heard to say

that in the future all such *pujas* should be performed in front of a portrait in the hall. People thought she was referring to the mismanagement of the entire episode and the discomfort of the devotees rather than the prophecy it undoubtedly was.

The devotees who had come from distant parts of the country now took their leave convinced that they would see Sri Ma in her usual radiant form when they next had occasion to visit her. Those near at hand and her close companions were not so. Sri Ma was very quiet. She had stopped taking food which of course was not usually disquieting as far as Sri Ma was concerned. She had very often dispensed with food and drink without any adverse effects. But this time the attendants were fearful that it would affect her general well-being.

In the meantime Sri Ma continued to attend as far as possible all activities of the Ashram. On June 16 she received the Jagadguru Sri Shankaracharya of Sringeri Peetham. The Mahatma was on a pilgrimage to the Himalayan Temples. He stayed for a few days in the Ashram which rose to the occasion with all necessary rituals and rites of welcome to be accorded to the great scholar and his large retinue. He resumed his trek to the Himalayas with the understanding that he would return to visit Sri Ma again on his way down to the plains.

Sri Ma came to Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun on June 26 to attend the programme on the Bhagavatam by Mahatma Vishu Ashramji Maharaj.

On June 30 Jagadguru came to Kishenpur Ashram on his way back from the Himalayas and stayed till July 2. He was very well pleased with Sri Ma's Ashram but rather saddened to see her so obviously ill and withdrawn. He invited her to come to Sringeri during the coming Durga-Puja. Sri Ma did not say words like "jo ho jaye" etc. She in her usual humble demeanour toward all Mahatmas made excuses for declaiming the invitation. She assured him that even if not is her physical form she would be with him always.

The Mahatma requested her to get rid of her illness. Sri Ma responded to his plea by saying, "Pitaji, this is not illness. It is the state of tension between the manifest and the recall of the unmanifest." Her calm answer to this very-perhaps only-worthy interlocutor created an aura of inevitability.

After the departure of the Jagadguru the Ashram settled down to its usual routine. Sri Ma paid a short visit to her cottage on the estate of the Khaitans next to Kalyanvan. Here she seemed to withdraw herself still further from outside contacts. Bhaskarananda failed to elicit any answers to letters which came pouring in enquiring about her well-being. He however managed to obtain a message for all those who were unable to see her or hear from her at all, "Strive to become an aspirant toward the fulfilment of the Grace of your Guru." To the anguished visitors who sought her advice Sri Ma said, "*Bhagavan ke niye thako* (live in God's presence)".

On July 24 Sri Ma indicated her *kheyala* for returning to Kishenpur Ashram. So Udasji and Patun with great care and

circumspection brought her to Kishenpur in a car. She took to her bed quietly; she had come to the same Ashram which had witnessed the departure of Bholanathji nearly 44 years before.

Doctors who were devoted to her came to see if they could do anything toward her physical comfort. Dr. K.N. Udappa came from Varanasi but stood helpless in the face of the absence of any medical anomalies. He could only pray to her to bring about her own recovery.

Dr. Surabhai Seth, eminent doctor and a long time devotee, came from Mumbai to see if he could stir her *kheyala* toward recovery. He knew he would not and did not find any medical reasons for her breathlessness and consequent suffering. He prayed with folded hands seeking for a change in her demeanour. Sri Ma looked steadily at him for a long time. The compassion in her gaze overwhelmed him. She said gently to him, "Look after Paramananda". Dr. Seth knew that the days of his devoted attendance on Sri Ma were drawing to a close. He asked, "Ma, are you suffering?" Sri Ma answered, "Not at all." She indeed seemed apart from the body which was ailing.

Bhaiya (B.K.Shah) came from Mumbai and took up his vigil in Sri Ma's room along with a few others. One day he said forcefully, "Ma, I must see you sitting up before I leave for Mumbai." He wished to ridge her *kheyala* toward some activity. Her limbs seemed as limp as those of a rag doll.

After a while Sri Ma indicated to the attending girls that she should be propped up to a sitting position. The girls

assembled pillows and bolsters and managed to position Sri Ma to a sitting posture. She looked at Bhaiya for a long time, her expression serene and compassionate. Bhaiya understood that she had no *kheyala* for recovery but that she had made an effort toward fulfilling his words. Bhaiya stood with folded hands tears running down his cheeks marveling at the never failing effervescence of the fountain of Grace which fulfilled in a hundredfold measure even a trifling plea for what was after all one's own ease and comfort.

Sri Ma was quiet. Although there was no question of food the attending girls could give her a few drops of water at infrequent intervals. The atmosphere of despair reigned supreme. The desperate question in every heart was, "Why should their beloved Mother suffer at all and why could they not do anything to recall her to her usual ways of being with them?" Sri Ma perhaps responded to this cry from so many anguished hearts; she spoke once clearly apparently to the girls surrounding her bedside:

She said in Bengali : "*Je jekhane achho boshe paro*" — "Sit down (for *sadhana*), each one of you, wherever you are (physically? spiritually?)."

This *vani* being her last (midnight August 26th) radiates out to embrace all those who derive (and will derive) their courage and sustenance from her to proceed on the path shown by her to be the most worthwhile goal for all human beings.

Although Sri Ma did not speak, she was heard to murmur

certain mantras from time to time. On the night of the 25th she pronounced the sacred *panchakshara* mantra in its reversed form. In the Shaiva tradition it is exegeted to mean an indication toward the dissolution of all worldly ties when the *yogin* is ready to dissolve the last worldly tie of the body. It is true that her attendants did not realize the significance of this mantra but Sri Ma herself seemed to be declaring her withdrawal out of their reach forever.

August 26 happened to be the holy day of *Radhashtami*. Swami Krishnanandaji, General Secretary of the Divine Life Society, came from Rishikesh to perform a special *puja* of Sri Ma as Radha. He himself writes : "The most important event in my contact with Sri Ma is when I went to have her *darshan* at a time when she was very ill in her Dehradun Ashram. Visitors were not allowed to see her due to her indisposed condition. But I was graciously taken in by Revered Sri Panu Maharaj. I had taken with me a good *saree* which I with trepidation covered her with and did also a camphor *arati*.

"I was told by people that this was the last *darshan* that she gave and it happened to be with me. I cannot forget this divinely inspired blessed event. May the benedictions of Sri Ma be upon all."

(*Ananda Jyoti* p. 41)

For the handful of people who were keeping vigil near Sri Ma, the moment of her withdrawal into the Unmanifest came around 7:45 pm on August 27. They had watched day and night in anguished heartbreak but they were all well-prepared; so nobody caused any disturbance to the atmosphere of calm

dignity and peace. Sri Ma was not physically with them anymore yet she would abide by.

Next day the event was reported in headlines in all news papers. From all corners of India people started out for Dehradun and Haradwar (Kankhal). It was related later that the Railways rose to the occasion in a most helpful manner. They allowed hundreds of people to board trains without reservations and sometimes even without tickets. The trains were even held up at times to accommodate people running to board them.

The foothills of the Himalayas are holy ground. All renowned monastic orders have their Head Quarters at Haradwar. By a spontaneous consensus of opinion the entire body of the Mahatmas came together to take charge of the last rites. She who had not worn the ochre robes of any denomination or acknowledged any *guru-parampara* was paid the highest respect ordained in the tradition.

A mammoth crowd gathered in Dehradun to form a procession to accompany the vehicle which would carry the sacred Image being awaited at Kankhal by the whole town. The roads were so full of devotees who wished to pay their last respects that the motorcade had to stop at the entrance of Kankhal.

Only the vehicle carrying the Image of Sri Ma proceeded slowly through the crowd. The concourse of people both sides of the road raced right up to the Ashram.

The Mahanirvani Akhara took the lead in the management of the *Maha Samadhi* (internment). Sri 108

Giridhar Narayana Das Puriji Maharaj had for many years been very close to Sri Ma. Often she had delegated to him some of her own time-honoured blessings toward the crowds such as strewing the *batasas* (sugar puffs) on occasions. Now he came forward to guide the Ashram in all matters of correct ritualistic procedure.

The mourners seemed to comprise anybody and everybody. The Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi came and took up her position with the quiet group of girls surrounding Sri Ma; other dignitaries stood shoulder to shoulder with the common people.

With scrupulous care all ceremonial rites were carried out by the Mahatmas. Miraculously a suitable piece of ground for the *Maha Samadhi* was found within the Ashram precincts. The site was well prepared, purified and made ready for receiving its precious treasure of the manifest form of Sri Ma Anandamayi.

The crowd was disciplined. The chanting of the mantras as always was impressive. The sonorous sound-forms opened up a vista of the divine.

The devotees watched in heartbreaking sorrow the withdrawal for ever of the beloved Image. The Bird on the wing had flown out of sight, beyond the horizon, yet they were simultaneously sustained by the promise :

"I am ever with you".

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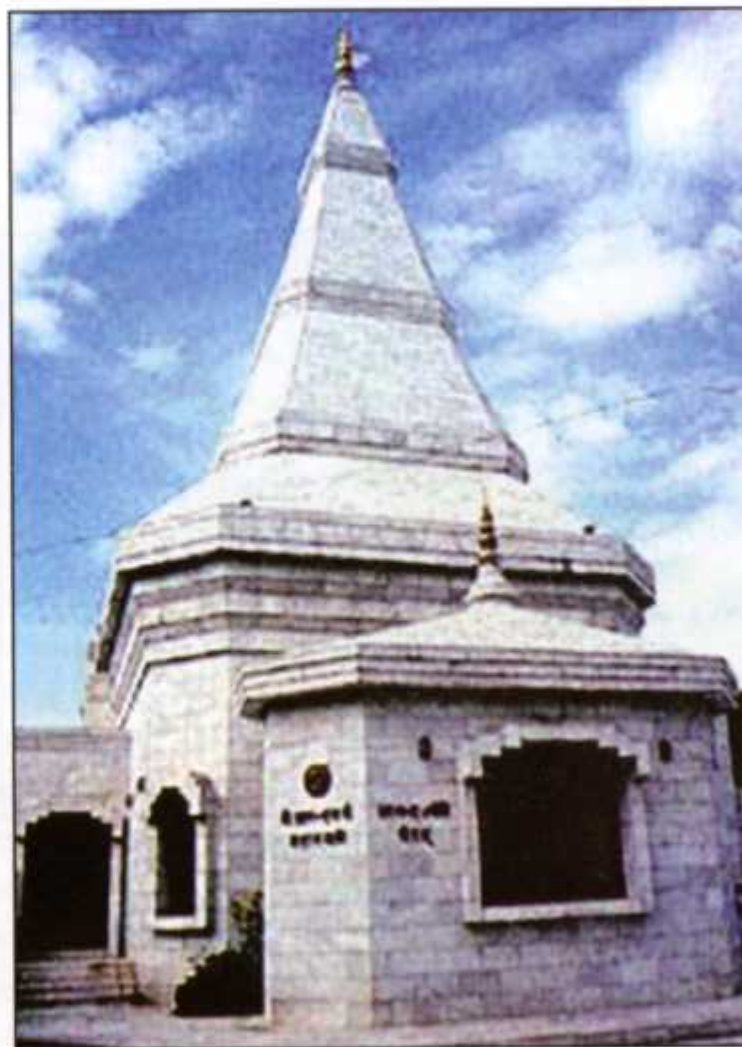
Sri Gura Sharanam  
Sri Ma Sharanam



Sri Ma throwing handfuls of sugar puffs



Sri Ma greeting a congregation



The Samadhi Mandir, Ananda Jyoti Peetham  
at Kankhal



Sri Haribabaji playing on his gong during *kirtan*.  
Sri Ma in the background.



Sri Ma in the Yajnasala



Sri Ma taking flowers to worship the Kumaris.  
Shantaji and Padmaji by her side.





Atirudra Mahayajna in progress



Purnahuti



Sri Ma and the Mahatmas during a *satsang*.



For a span of more than 50 years Sri Ma Anandamayi treaded gracefully the spiritual horizon of India — and in Her wake followed top dignitaries as well as the lowliest of the lowly, enchanted by Her gentle dispensation of wisdom and love to all.

The ascetic orders of India were united in recognizing Ma Anandamayi as the quintessence of the Upanishadic tradition. Scholars trained in modern universities derived inspiration from Her. She consolidated our past and taught how to live in the very demanding times of the twentieth century and face up to the challenges of the twentyfirst. She was born in India but in Herself She belongs to humanity (Colin Turnbull).

Swami Sivananda (The Divine Life Society) said that Ma Anandamayi was the purest flower that the soil of India had ever produced. Such questions as whether She was a Siddha Yogini, an Incarnation or the Adya Shakti (Mm. Pt. Gopinath Kaviraj) used to sink into irrelevancies in Her presence. She was for every one from all corners of the world a guide of infallible power, a friend of unfailing compassion and understanding.

To Ma Anandamayi there was no one who was an "other". In Her we touched a dimension of unity which encompassed all religions and all countries. Each person in Her presence found fulfilment and Her presence is ever abiding.