

The Universal Mother
SHREE SHREE MA ANANDAMAYEE
(A short life sketch & Her teachings)





Mo and Her mother Susan, Mukwonago, Ill.



Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee.

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(A short life sketch & Her teachings)

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PREFACE

Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee is the Divine Being with the full cosmic power of the universe and even beyond that.

Padma Bibhushan and Mahamahopadhyay Sri Gopinath Kaviraj, an eminent scholar and a realized 'sadhaka' wrote this about Ma - "It is almost impossible to make an attempt to know the real identity of Ma. Who is Ma? What is Her real identity? It is not possible to assess or understand such difficult subjects for a child having a limited knowledge. When the child was not born, Ma was there. When the child will not be any more, even then Ma will remain. Ma is 'Shuddha Sanatani' (the Pure Eternal). Being the internal power as the life of all creatures and the deities - who can understand Her? It is not possible to lower Ma's stature by calling Her an ordinary human being and height of Her spiritual state does not become manifest by praying to Her as an Avtar (an incarnation of God) or 'Nitya Siddha' (Self Realized all the time). High praise or bad criticism was all the same for Her. It will not be possible to understand Her identity, remaining separate from Ma."

Mahamandaleshwar of Bholagiri Ashram, Devanandaji Maharaj wrote in his article on Ma: - "None who was acquainted with Ma since Her childhood, ever found Her performing any hard 'sadhana', although, we saw Ma at the top of the spiritual world since Her teen years. That is why; She was an amazing exception in the divine kingdom. She was fully realized right from Her birth and therefore Ma's whole life passed in a wonder which was beyond our perception."

From the worldly point of view, although She had almost no education, Her talks on the highest philosophical percepts and spiritual realizations surprised many highly learned persons, saints, and devotees, whomever came in contact with Her. Ma never used to deliver discourses. However, She used to guide the devotees as per their own 'Samskar' (impressions of previous births) and according to their needs. She did not create a separate 'Sampradaya' (sect) and She Herself did not initiate anyone except

for very rare cases. That is why devotees from all sects came to Her without any hesitation. Devotees from different religions - Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh, and Parsi etc. came to Ma for Her spiritual guidance and to receive Her grace. Ma in Her kindness, always cleared their doubts or questions and resolved the difficulties in a way suitable to their own spiritual paths.

Many books have been written in volumes on Ma and on Her sayings. However, it was felt necessary to prepare a brief life-sketch of Ma in single volume for those persons who do not know Ma and want to know something about Her and Her teachings. Therefore, the first edition of this book was published in 2013. Due to great demand in India and abroad, a second edition is now being published with a few important additions.

We acknowledge with thanks to Ms Pushpa Khanna, a retired Senior teacher of the famous Welhem Girls School in Dehradun and Sri P. P. Madhava, Air Vice Marshal (Retd.) for their valuable help in correcting the manuscript. Sri Madhava himself is also an author of a book on Ma in English language. Besides, a devotee of Ma Ms Marsie Romano of USA, who was a former teacher there, also helped to correct the manuscript of this book. I am grateful to all of them. If there is any short coming in this book due to misprint or any other sort of mistake, I beg pardon from Ma and the readers for such lapse.

Our pranams to Ma. Jai Ma

Date : 27-7-2018
Gurupurnima

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Contents

1. Chapter - I	
i - Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee	1
ii - Parents of Shree Shree Ma	1
iii - Ma's appearance in this world and her infancy	3
iv - Ma's brothers and sisters	9
v - Grihastha Lila (play of household activities) of Ma	16
vi - Ma in Ashtagram village	19
2. Chapter - II	
i - Ma at Baijipur	21
ii - Diksha-Lila of Ma	22
iii - Sadhana Lila of Ma (play of Sadhana)	23
iv - Ma at Shahbagh and Her display of Mahabhava	27
v - Revival of the ancient holy seat at Siddheshwari	33
vi - Establishment of Ramna Ashram in Dhaka	36
3. Chapter - III	
i - Ma's journey all over India	41
ii - Ma at Calcutta (Kolkata)	45
iii - Ma at Vindhyachal	49
iv - Ma at Tarapeeth	53
v - Ma's visit to Southern India	55
vi - Ma at Jagannathpuri	60
4. Chapter - IV	
i - Ma's arrival at Uttarakhand	63
ii - Pilgrimage to Kailash	70
iii - Demise of Bhajji and coming up of ashrams in Almora District	73
iv - Demise of Ma's Father and Baba Bholanath	76
v - Ma arrives in Haridwar and Didima took Sannyas	78
5. Chapter - V	
i - The great philosopher Gopinath Kaviraj meets Shree Shree Ma	84
ii - Mahatmas (Saints) come in contact with Ma	88
iii - Arrival of a few great leaders of the nation	103
iv - Attraction of Foreign devotees towards Ma	113
v - All religions have the same destination	119

6. Chapter – VI

i - Establishment of Ma's ashram at Varanasi	123
ii - Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth	127
iii - Ma Anandamayee Vidyapeeth for boys.	129
iv - The Savitri Mahayajna in Varanasi Ashram	131
v - Formation of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha in 1950	133
vi - Ma's Diamond Jubilee Janmotsav at Varanasi	136

7. Chapter – VII

i - Shree Ma's arrival at Vrindavan	141
ii - Establishment of Bhimpura Ashram in Gujarat	147
iii - Ma in Shimla and devotees planning establishment of an ashram in Delhi	151
iv - Arrival of Ma at Ranchi	155
v - Ma at Rajgir	157
vi - Ma at Naimisharanya	158
vii - Giriji's Mahasamadhi and establishment of Kankhal Ashram	165
viii - Atirudra Mahayajna in Kankhal Ashram in 1981	171
ix - Ma at Agartala	178
x - Other ashrams of Ma Anandamayee	180

8. Chapter – VIII

i - Guru diksha system after mahaprayan of Giriji.	185
ii - Advice to sadhakas seeking spiritual progress	190
iii - Importance of satvik food in sadhana	192
iv - Strict observance of 'Shastriya' rules in puja	194
v - Ma's words about duties of any sadhaka	199
vi - Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata	203

9. Chapter – IX

i - Shree Shree Ma in the 'Kumbha-Mela'	209
ii - Ma's contact with the 'subtle' disembodied beings	214
iii - Ma's Lila towards the 'Avyakta' (Un-manifested State)	217
iv - The summing up (Upasamhar)	222

10. Appendix

- The ashram's evening kirtan	225
Glossary of words	226
A few important English books written on Ma	231
Tel. Numbers for Ma's Ashrams	232
About the author of this book	233

Chapter – I

SHREE SHREE MA ANANDAMAYEE

Ma Anandamayee, the Universal Mother, appeared in this world at the end of the 19th century. She was born on April 30, 1896 on Thursday, in the late hours of the night nearing the dawn, at about 3.30 A.M. It was the fourth day after the full moon i.e. in 'Krishna-chaturthi tithi' in the month of 'Vaishakh' as per the Indian calendar. She was born in a pious and highly orthodox family in a remote small village called 'Kheora', in the Komilla District of East Bengal (now in Bangladesh). Her father Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya was an earnest devotee of God. Her mother Mokshada Sundari Devi was the very embodiment of saintly virtues, of deep forbearance, calmness, patience, and kindness. She named her radiantly beautiful child as Nirmala Sundari Devi.

Parents of Shree Shree Ma

Father Bipin Bihari was of the 'Kashyap Gotra' belonging to a well-known Brahmin family of the village of 'Vidyakut' in the Komilla District (now in Bangladesh). The family had an ancient lineage of great ancestors. One of their family members with the grace of his Guru became fully enlightened and Self-realised. Since his time, the ancestral family deity "Shree Shree Raj-Rajeshwar-Narayan"—a shaligram-shila¹ has continuously been worshipped. Presently, the deity is worshipped daily in Ma Annapurna Temple in the Varanasi Ashram.

¹ Shaligram Shila - It represents the deity Narayan. Its shape is like a small ball of black stone with a hole at the centre. Such stones are available at the source of Gomati River in Himalayas, at a sacred place called 'Muktinath' in Nepal.

Bipin Bihari fully inherited this deep reverence for the ancient Guru-oriented tradition that teaches that the Guru is the power who bestows grace and awakens the disciple's inner latent spirit. He had been the 'Guru-kumar' (inheritor) of this ancient tradition continuing since time immemorial from the era of the Rishis. The family always maintained a 'Rishi-kul' way of life like an ancient Rishi, full of purity and spiritual values. This had been their pattern of life through many generations.

Bipin Bihariji lived mostly in a God-permeated state of mind, ever forgetful of the world and its problems. He was a great singer with a melodious voice and loved chanting of God's names and singing devotional songs. Even reputed musicians of his time admired his melodious voice. He was often away from home for long periods, wandering with 'kirtan' parties from place to place, in a state of detachment and unmindful of the family affairs.

Before Shree Ma's appearance in our world, Bipin Bihariji had taken to the life of a wandering monk for about three years. However, shortly before Shree Ma's arrival, the village-folk looked around for him and brought him back to the family. But he remained forgetful of his familial duties particularly when he was chanting kirtan (devotional songs). Once, late in the night, he was so lost in singing kirtan that a storm blew away the tin-roof of his room and he remained unaware of it. His clothes and bedding were drenched but he remained unmindful of it until his wife Mokshada came and shook him up to awareness of what was happening around him. Apart from singing, he possessed special expertise playing various kinds of musical instruments like ektara, veena, violin, sarod, and sitar. He was completely self taught and never received any training.

Mother Mokshada was the gentlest of beings. Her power of endurance was like that of 'Mother Earth' herself. Simple and gentle by nature, deeply contented, she was totally dedicated to truth in every aspect of life. There was never a touch of anger in her. Her compassion for the poor and suffering was a lesson for others to follow.

Mother Mokshada belonged to a well-known Bharadwaj family of Sultanpur. The life and actions of her ancestors was also like that of the ancient Rishis. They were learned scholars for several generations. Her father, Sri Rama Kanto Bhattacharya, was one of the great Pandit counselors of the Maharaja of Tripura.

Mother Mokshada's household-means were indeed very slender, bordering on poverty; but truly, she was rich at heart and was contented under all circumstances. It filled her heart with joy to feed a guest and forego her food. So skillful she was as a housewife that despite her frugal means almost touching penury, no one in the family went without food. She was unique and magnanimous in her ways. Father Bipin Bihariji and mother Mokshada both inherited the ways and beings of the 'Rishis' of yore. In such a highly spiritual family, Ma manifested. Much later, the devotees of Ma called Her father as 'Dadamoshai' and mother as 'Didima'.

Ma described Her relationship with Her parents like the 'Triveni', the confluence of three sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Swaraswati as father, mother and the daughter where these three are that of One only, and in each of these three, the three exist as well.

Ma's appearance in this world and Her infancy

Bipin Bihari's mother, Tripura Sundari Devi belonged to the Kheora village. Being the only child of her

parents, she was the lone legal heir to her parental property. After the passing away of Bipin Bihari's father, Sri Trilochan Bhattacharya, Bipin Bihari along with his wife and mother shifted from his ancestral village of 'Vidyakut' to the village of 'Kheora'. Their first child was a daughter who survived only nine months after her birth. Thereafter Shree Shree Ma was born at Kheora village.

Mother Mokshada was very pious by nature. She had visions and dreams of Gods and Goddesses (the images of different aspects of God) many time before she realized that Ma was in her womb. One day, during her pregnancy, Mother Mokshada was sitting in her room wide-awake and saw a divine woman wearing a sari with red border and a veil on her face. The divine woman offered mother Mokshada a winnowing platter, called 'Varankula'². It was decorated with the requisite articles for ceremonial welcoming of Deities. After that, the divine woman suddenly disappeared from that very spot.

Later, mother Mokshada used that 'Varankula' solely for performing 'Varan' (reception) whenever she had the visions of the Deities, Avatars (incarnations of God), Rishis, Munis and great Mahatmas. They appeared before her very often and all of them manifested with full brightness. Mother Mokshada later said, "The visions of the Avatars which used to take place – it was your Ma only in each of those forms." They disappeared at the very place of their appearance; she never saw any one of them going out. Her visions continued for some time even after the birth of Ma.

² **Varankula** - It is a hand-woven winnowing cane platter for sifting good grains or other ingredients from unwanted materials. It is called 'Soop' in Hindi language. Along with sacred materials, it is used for reception of the Deities in Bengal, by rotating it like 'arati' in front of the Deities, which is called 'varan'.

In those days, mother Mokshada herself radiated great beauty and light herself. This was apparent to all around her and people exclaimed looking at her – "Great God! What a beautiful glow is bursting forth?"

Birth of the divine baby was accompanied by some exceptional supernatural changes in the whole environment of the village. It was a painless birth and the child did not cry like other newly born children. Seeing the radiance of the beautiful child, their past anxieties of the death of their first child were soon forgotten. Instead, there prevailed a sense of joy and confidence. Regarding Her own birth, Ma later revealed that Her arrival in this world was of Her own. It did not occur like other babies coming into mother's womb because of intimate contact of their parents.

Since a baby girl passed away before Ma's birth, Ma's mother would put this baby under the sacred tulsi (basil) plant every morning for nearly eighteen months, praying for a longer life for the baby. Surprisingly, the baby Herself continued it for some time on Her own and used to roll beneath the plant every day.

When the infant Nirmala (Shree Ma) was nine or ten months old, a strange event occurred. At that time, mother Mokshada and the family were on a short visit to their ancestral home at the village 'Vidyakut'. One day, although mother Mokshada was very busy at some work, she was keeping her attention on the child. Suddenly, she noticed that there appeared the form of a man, a lustrous figure wearing saffron dress like a mahatma (saint) standing very close to the child. Mother Mokshada too came there standing behind the child. The baby Nirmala happily crawled up to him as if she was very familiar with him. The mahatma observed very minutely the entire body of the divine baby. He sat in front of the baby Nirmala and

went into a worshipful trance. What wonder he observed in that baby is not known. Adoringly, the mahatma picked Her up tenderly and placed Her feet on his forehead. Thereafter, he seated the baby Nirmala near himself and he appeared to offer puja (worship) to the baby, doing certain 'Kriya' (divine actions), chanting 'mantras' (sacred hymns) and many more forms of worship. His way of offering 'pranam' (kneeling down) was as if he had entirely given himself to the child. Before he disappeared, he placed the baby in Her mother's lap and pointing towards the divine baby he said to the mother – "Whom you are seeing before you, this is 'Ma' and She is so not only among men and women, but also permeating and transcending the 'Vishwa' (the Universe)". He continued – "You will certainly not be able to keep Her bound in family ties. She will definitely not remain here." Saying this, the Mahatma became suddenly invisible right there itself. He disappeared exactly from where he had manifested. No one could ever trace his whereabouts. Thus, he revealed the identity of baby Nirmala before the world for the first time by addressing Her as 'Ma' (mother). Who was he? Only He knows through whose 'Kheyal' (free divine will), this kind of manifestation took place.

Mother Mokshada would sometimes attend the 'Harinam Kirtan' going on in the village. On such occasions, she would go there carrying little Nirmala in her arms. Hearing soulful chanting of divine names, baby Nirmala's body would go into a miraculous state of stillness (trance). Mother Mokshada had to pat and shake the little baby several times to bring Her back to normal consciousness. People around could not understand this unusual and strange behaviour of the little child.

Once baby Nirmala visited Her paternal village 'Vidyakut' with Her parents. Her aunt there used to extract butter daily by churning curd in an earthen pitcher when usually Nirmala would come with a bowl to collect some buttermilk for Her. One day when the aunt just started churning the curd, Nirmala arrived there with Her bowl. The aunt out of vexation told Her irately, "You come daily to collect buttermilk. Go away, you will not get any today." The moment She told this to Nirmala, suddenly the earthen pitcher carrying the curd broke by itself and the curd started oozing out. The aunt was stunned seeing this and could not understand how it happened. However, she quickly poured some curd in the bowl of Nirmala and sent Her back. Then onward, the aunt would invariably give some buttermilk first to Nirmala and then would extract butter.

At the age of six, during the Durga puja festivities at the house of Her maternal uncle Sri Sharada Charan Vidyasagar, She was worshipped as the Goddess in the 'Kanya' form (a virgin). At that moment, Her uncle was surprised to see Nirmala go into a sort of trance and quietly recite some mantras. When questioned by Her uncle, She remained silent.

Mother Mokshada often found little Nirmala absent minded while feeding Her. She would keep the food within her mouth and would look up without eating until mother Mokshada shook Her saying, "You sit down for your meal but you do not eat. Why do you look up around?" Nirmala would keep quiet. Later, Shree Ma revealed that She used to watch the Gods and Goddesses (the images of different aspects of God) coming and going at that time. Many incidents that are even more unusual happened which perplexed others. People failed to understand how they could happen. However, all loved the baby Nirmala. She

was ever radiantly happy and was a source of joy to all who met Her.

Nirmala's favourite playmate in Her childhood was Her own grandmother, a yogi of highest order whom She called 'Thakurma'. The grandmother had worshipped and prayed most fervently at the famous 'Kali-Temple' at Kasba (a nearby village), for a son for her son Bipin Bihari but somehow she uttered, "May a girl be born to Bipin". Thereupon, Nirmala arrived in the family. The grandmother was always in her divine state. Her prayer was so consistent that resulted in the incarnation of Ma in this world. Ma said that in her wish there was pure, intense and single-minded thought. As a result, the Divine Mother who is always present in all, manifested Herself as her son's daughter.

Schooling of little Nirmala was far from a regular affair. In fact, it lasted only for a short span of time. Even during those short periods, She used to be more absent than present in the school. Either She had to help in household chores or She lacked a proper escort to go to school, which was quite far. However, teachers in the school were impressed by Her sharpness. Talking of Her school days, Ma once said that She could always answer the questions asked by the teachers correctly although She could not prepare or study for the test. The teachers were very pleased with the answers and promoted Her to the next higher class. However, Her studies at school could not continue due to several family problems.

Everyone was extremely fond of little Nirmala as She was very cheerful and behaved like a simple girl. She would astonish the elders by Her skillful ways of doing everything. In arts like weaving, stitch-crafts, clay-works and embroidery, Nirmala displayed ever new and ingenious

ways of making things. There was something new and inventive in what She did. People were always astonished with Her skills in doing such jobs.

Nirmala was very popular and most wanted amidst Her friends circle. They always desired Her presence during their play as they enjoyed themselves the most when She was with them. Even animals, birds, cows, and calves were drawn to Her. While playing in the field it was seen that the cows, which were grazing in the field, were also attracted to Nirmala and would always come and move on their own towards Her. Other playmates would giggle seeing the unusual actions of the cows. Though Nirmala would shout and laugh at the cow's behavior, She never moved away from them.

Ma's brothers and sisters

Shree Ma (Nirmala) was the second of the eight children born to Her parents. Three brothers were born after Ma. She was close to them both as their sister and playmate and She looked after them like a mother. However, when Ma was about eight years old, all three of Her brothers passed away in succession within a period of six months.

Kali Prasanna was the eldest of the three brothers. He was weak and often sick. Once there was a plan for Nirmala to go to Her maternal uncle's house. The ailing brother, who was five years old, told Her not to go immediately, but after his death. One night, his condition became very serious. When his father Bipin Beharaji enquired about his health, Kali Prasanna replied that he was not going to live any more. It seemed as though his end was imminent. In the morning, he was found gasping as if dying. According to the common practice in the villages, the child was carried and kept under the open sky

in the courtyard where he soon breathed his last. His body was covered with a piece of cloth.

Little Nirmala was standing nearby and watching. At that time, she was hardly seven or eight years old. Just then, She had the 'Kheyal'³ in Her mind - let the life reappear in Her brother, he would be shifted inside and given some nourishment and he would say something to his weeping mother. As this thought swept across Nirmala's mind, instantly life reappeared in that lifeless body and he opened his eyes. Soon after, he was taken inside the house. Little Nirmala did it all in silence. Mother Mokshada was delighted and gave Kali Prasanna some barley water to drink. His breathing became better but it deteriorated soon again. While taking him outside this time, he looked up at Nirmala and said, "Ma, Ma, I am now dying, I die, I die" and he expired as soon as he was brought back to the open sky. An invisible person in subtle form had offered earlier to Nirmala a medicine for recovery of Kali Prasanna, but She refused the offer. She told him, "No, he is now on the way to be established in his own swaroop (True Self)", i.e. this was his final journey to the Supreme.

Afterwards, the second brother of Nirmala fell ill. He had the mark like a 'tilak' on his forehead. Seeing the mark, someone foretold that he came from a royal family and therefore his survival in a poor family would be doubtful. He suffered about five months and died when he was only four years old. The youngest of the three brothers lived in this world for a few months only and passed away on the day of 'Diwali' festival. Thus, within a period of six months, three brothers of Ma passed away at their residence in Kheora village in presence of Her.

³ Kheyal - Ma never had any will of Her own. Her will was the divine inspiration of the Supreme. It is a divine stage beyond human perception.



Ma with father Sri Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya and mother Mokshada Sundari Devi



Ma with mother Swami Muktananda Giri Ji and only brother Makhana (Mama Ji)



Ma with Baba Bholanath

Those were months of deep sorrow and anguish for the parents and the family. However, all these pains and sufferings at the loss of their children were borne by Shree Ma's parents with great fortitude. They accepted their sorrows and tragedies as God's dispensation, which deepened their devotion to God. Mother Mokshada maintained her calmness and talked with everyone in her easy and natural manner, as much as was appropriate in the context. Ma used to say later that the pains that came to them, had to go away themselves in pain having failed to inflict pain on Her parents.

After these three brothers expired, two sisters, Surabala and Hemangini and one more brother, Yadunath (Makhan), were born. Surabala was about nine years younger to Ma. She was very beautiful and had an extraordinary attraction for Ma. Hemangini was two years younger to Surabala. When marriage of both the sisters was fixed, Ma objected to the marriage of Surabala with the selected bridegroom. Others however, had no objection to this marriage and both the sisters were married on the same day at Dhaka⁴. Ma did not attend the blessing ceremony before the marriage. Later, it was found out that the bridegroom of Surabala had a mental disorder. When Surabala did pranam to Ma before leaving for her husband's house at Jaidevpur, Ma told her not to stay long in family life. Within a year, Surabala became severely ill. Her vision and hearing were impaired. Ma visited her when she was nearing her end and whispered something in her ear. A flash of joy was noticed on Surabala's face. Thereafter, Ma returned to Dhaka where She stayed that night in Siddheshwari Kali temple. She had Her 'Kheyal' (divine

⁴ Dhaka - Most important city in East Bengal at that time. Presently it is the capital of Bangladesh.

will) continuously on Surabala. In the early morning, suddenly Ma said – “Now you attain liberation.” The next day Ma received the message of her demise. Surabala lived only three years after her marriage. She was thus liberated on Ma’s kheyal (divine will).

Ma’s youngest sister Hemangini led a married life and lived up to thirty-seven years of age. Her husband was a chemist in a sugar factory in Shahgunj near Varanasi. During her last days of severe illness, she lived in a houseboat on the river Ganga at Varanasi. Prior to her passing away there in 1949, she, in the presence of Ma, received ‘Sannyas Mantra’ from her own mother Mokshada who was by then a sannyasini and was known amongst the devotees as Muktananda Giriji or ‘Didima’. Hemangini was named Sw. Jayananda Giri after becoming a sannyasini. She attained the state which a realised sannyasi attains.

When Hemangini expired at Varanasi, her mother ‘Didima’ saw a vision at Raipur Ashram in Dehradun that Lord Krishna along with his parents, Vasudeva and Devaki, appeared before her. Ma was present at that moment. Didima was charmed seeing the attractive appearance of Lord Krishna. Hemangini also appeared there for a moment but soon after, disappeared. Didima could understand that Hemangini at Varanasi was no more, but the significance of her appearance with Vasudeva, Devaki, and Sri Krishna, specifically after death, remained unrevealed.

Ma’s only surviving brother was Her youngest brother Judunath Bhattacharya, called ‘Makhan’ at home and was popularly known as ‘Mamaji’ in the ashram. He was about nineteen years younger to Ma. When Makhan was a small boy, he suffered badly due to a poisonous blister on his face. His whole face swelled up and he suffered from a very high fever. The village Kaviraj (Doctor) had

no hope for his survival. Ma was at that time in Shahbag in Dhaka. She arranged to bring Her brother near to Her. Ma Herself made a tiny pill by crushing some selected leaves and placed that on the blister. It gradually sucked the entire puss inside it and cured Makhan.

Makhan during his school days stayed with Ma under Her care. His sacred thread ceremony was arranged there in Ma’s presence. After completing his education, he joined a good service. He was then married to Savitri Devi, ‘Mamima’ as she was later known in Ma’s ashram. Ma’s father, prior to his death, had selected Savitri for his son but the marriage could not take place before his death.

Soon after Mamaji’s marriage, Didima chose sannyas. She left her teenage daughter-in-law under Ma’s care. Mamima stayed with Ma for about five years, leading a life like a brahmacharini during that time period. Both Mamaji and Mamima were good sadhakas all throughout their life.

Much later, Mamaji was requested to look after the accounts of the newly formed ‘Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha’, at its Head Office in the Varanasi Ashram. The Sangha at that time was formed to look after the management of all the ashrams, which were established in different places in the name of Ma. Mamaji left a good job in Lucknow, shifted to Varanasi along with his family, and settled in his own small house adjoining the ashram. Since then he led a life of a ‘Banaprasthi’ (retired from family life). He carried on the ashram seva sincerely with honesty and served Ma for the rest of his life.

Mamima, the wife of Mamaji, was also very helpful to the ashram. She was hard working, expert in cooking and capable of making all the puja arrangements, which she had learnt from Ma. All liked her co-operative and friendly nature.

Mamaji was well conversant with the puja procedures. Ma selected him many times to perform the puja in the ashram on some special occasions. He also carried on daily puja of Gopalji in Varanasi Ashram for a long time. In Ma's presence, he performed Durga Puja and Kali Puja in his house at Varanasi in October 1963. He lived a normal span of life and expired in November 1983 in Varanasi at the age of 69.

Mamaji had six children, four sons and two daughters. The eldest son, Sri Jagadish Bhattacharya (Bachuda) who is staying in Delhi, the second son, Sri Jagabandhu Bhattacharya (Balai), is staying in Haridwar, next son, Sri Jagannath Bhattacharya (Kanai), expired in 2014 at Kolkata at the early age of 60 and the youngest son, Jaidev, survived only eighteen months and died in Varanasi. Mamaji's eldest daughter, Geetadi, is staying in Kolkata and the youngest daughter, Gayatri, is well known in the ashram as Buludi. All of them got their initial education in Ma Anandamayee Vidyapeeth or Kanyapeeth and they were disciples of Sw Muktananda Giri, their own grandmother. After completing higher education and marriage, they are all now leading a religious life.

After demise of the youngest son Jaidev, Shree Shree Ma told Mamima that once two saints in subtle form came to Her. One of them stayed with Ma and soon the other one went back. The saint who stayed was Bachuda, Mamima's eldest son, and the saint who went back was Jaidev, her youngest son.

Once, when Mamaji's twin sons Balai and Kanai were small, they went to do pranam to Ma. Balai out of curiosity asked Ma that when Ma was small like him where was he at that time. Ma smiled and said, "Are you not my

youngest maternal uncle?" The name of Ma's youngest maternal uncle was Sri Sharda Charan Vidyasagar who was a learned man and remained unmarried. He used to take the child Nirmala to his home during Durga Puja and he himself used to do 'Kumari puja' considering Her a living form of Ma Durga. Regarding Kanai, Ma said that he belonged to a royal family in his previous birth.

All the previously mentioned brothers and sisters of Ma had taken birth with distinct signs of being elevated souls and all were very beautiful. However, Shree Ma did not reveal where they came from and what were their real identities before coming into Ma's family. Ma said that they had come to give Her company and to complete their cycle of births for their liberation. Obviously, only highly elevated souls got the opportunity to take birth in this divine 'Guru-Vansh' (successive generations of the Guru). Ma indicated that sanctity of this 'Vansh' remains maintained with the arrival of great-realized saints at certain periodic intervals. Therefore, Ma once said, "If anyone does not like to pay regards to the persons belonging to this Vansh, it is up to him; but, one should never show disrespect to them".

Shree Ma once indicated that Gurupriya Didi, the closest and most intimate devotee and companion of Ma, came in her previous life as the first child of Didima (Ma's mother) who expired prior to Ma's arrival. That was the reason that everyone in the ashram called Gurupriya as 'Didi' (elder sister). She was the daughter of Dr. Shashanka Mohan Mukhopadhyay, the Civil Surgeon in Dhaka, and met Ma in 1926. Since then, she became Brahmacharini and served Ma all through her life. Didi accompanied her father after his sannyas and travelled on foot in the

Himalayas to visit Badrinath and Kedarnath in Uttarakhand. She was hardworking, an expert cook and possessed extraordinary organizing capacity. Many of Ma's ashrams were started due to her great effort. She was also a good writer in Bengali language and left behind seventeen voluminous diaries in which she faithfully recorded the day-to-day activities and words of Shree Ma. These are a source of great inspiration to the devotees of Shree Ma for all times to come. These were published in Bengali language and later translated to Hindi, Gujarati and English. Gurupriya Didi expired in September' 1980 in the Varanasi Ashram.

'Grihastha Lila' (play of household activities) of Ma

Nirmala was gradually growing into girlhood. She was not an ordinary child. She exhibited every virtue of sweetness, with no demands, selfless nature and ever obedient to Her elders. She was radiantly beautiful. She attracted everyone who came in contact with Her. People even much older than Her, held Her with high regard. It just came naturally to them to treat Her with reverence and love.

Six months after passing away of Her grandmother, Nirmala was married at a very early age according to the custom of those times. She was married to Ramani Mohan Chakravorty on 7 February 1909 on Sunday when She was only twelve years and ten months old. The marriage procession came from Kashba to Kheora village with the groom riding an elephant and proceeded with a band party. At the time of departure after the marriage, Nirmala broke down and She was crying uncontrollably. Was She preventing others from breaking down? Soon after the

marriage, Nirmala came back to Her parents and stayed with them for some time.

Ramani Mohan belonged to the well-known Bharadwaj Brahmin family of Atpara village in the district of Dhaka (In Bangladesh). He was son of Sri Jagatbandhu Chakravorty and his mother was Tripura Sundari Devi. Amongst five sons and five daughters of his parents, he was the third son. At the time of the wedding, his own mother was not alive and his father died about two years later. He was of a simple and pure nature but considerably older than Nirmala. He was fond of singing and chanting 'Kirtan' (devotional songs). He was known later as Baba Bholanath.

After the marriage, Ramani Mohan had to remain for some time without any job and he had no place or residence of his own. Nirmala was taken to the family of Ramani Mohan's eldest brother Rewati Mohan Chakravorty and his wife Pramoda Devi at Sripur in East Bengal (now in Bangladesh). Rewati Mohan was the Station Master of the Railway Station there. According to the joint family traditions of the Hindu Society in India, it became their responsibility to train and guide the young bride in the ways and traditions of the family. At the time of sending Nirmala away to Her new family, mother Mokshada told Her that She now belonged to Her husband's family. She must respect, obey, and serve Her husband and the elders of his family implicitly as the husband is Her guardian for life. Ramani Mohan also instructed Nirmala to obey and respect his elder brother and his wife in every way.

Nirmala was then very shy. She strictly observed all the rules and regulations laid down for a daughter-in-law. Paying respects to seniors came naturally to Her. She would speak softly, get up in the presence of seniors, and cover Her body keeping Her face veiled. She served everybody

cheerfully without expecting any gratitude, which teaches a lesson in propriety to others.

Pramoda Devi, Nirmala's elder sister-in-law, suffered from poor health. Nirmala took on all the household chores like cooking, cleaning the utensils, keeping the floors and house clean, neat and tidy and also, taking care of the children in the family. Nirmala carried out Her duties so perfectly and in so joyous a manner that She soon won the admiration and love of the elders and of the children. The children of the family became so attached to Nirmala that they preferred Her company more than that of others in the family.

Nirmala was very good in cooking. She could make many verities of dishes. Once She did all the cooking herself for a large number of visitors. All of them were surprised to have such a tasty food prepared in a very short time. Mostly it was all perfect; but on some occasions, Pramoda Devi could smell burnt food coming from the kitchen. Pramoda Devi would rush down to the kitchen and to her amazement would find Nirmala lying unaware on the floor. On one such occasion, Her hand came in contact with the hot oven and She got burn injuries. In that state of trance, Nirmala was unaware of Her surroundings and of Her body. This was well beyond the understanding of the family. They took this condition as a kind of blackout from physical exhaustion caused by overwork. Except for a few occasional instances of trances, Ma's spiritual state remained undetected during that period.

After a few years, Rebatu Babu became ill and died in 1913 at Narundi where he was transferred shortly before his death. Thereafter, his family went back to their house in Atpara village where Ma stayed for six months. Later, she went back to stay with Her parents for about six months.

Ma in Ashtagram village

Shree Ma joined Ramani Mohan in the year 1914 at Ashtagram where he found new employment in the Settlement Department of the Estate of Nawab of Dhaka. This was the beginning of their life together. Ramani Mohan had taken a one room accommodation on rent in the compound of the house of Jai Shanker Sen. Seeing Ma's smiling look and blissful mood, Ma was called there as 'Khushir Ma' (Mother of Bliss) by all.

Ma and Ramani Mohan's domestic life was extraordinary, a life that maintained perfect self-purity denying worldly pleasures. Such a pure and sanctimonious life was beyond the understanding of ordinary people. During the daytime, Ma remained fully occupied with Her housework. After serving the night meal to Her husband, Shree Ma spent the night sitting on the floor in one corner of their room. Without any effort or self-will on Her part, there occurred spontaneously innumerable extraordinary 'asanas' (yogic postures) and 'mudras' (hand gestures that indicate a particular mystical state or bhava) in Shree Ma's body. In the morning, She again remained busy in household works. In spite of hard work during the whole day and being awake throughout the night, she had no symptoms of fatigue or lack of energy. Ramani Mohan was the sole witness of those extraordinary spiritual activities occurring in Ma. He was simple, pure-hearted and God loving. He could not fathom the activities of Ma but soon he realized that his wife was in a very highly spiritual state and was not a simple village girl.

A brother-in-law of Jai Shankar Sen, by the name of Hara Kumar, began addressing Nirmala as 'Ma', although he himself was much more aged than Ma was.

He was a good sadhaka and became deeply devoted to Shree Ma. His regard and reverence for Her was unbounded. In those days, Ma was keeping Herself veiled and did not directly speak to visitors. In spite of Ma not talking to him, the disheartened Hara-kumar made a prophetic statement about Ma by saying, "Now I am calling you Ma, but one day the whole world will call you so." Hara-kumar's prediction became true. Who could believe at that time that one day, Nirmala (Shree Ma) would answer the most erudite questions in simple words, which would perplex the learned scholars and Pandits. It was beyond imagination that a host of mahatmas, eminent persons and devotees would sit at Her feet watching and listening to Her spellbound.

Once, someone asked Ma, "What is the way of achieving salvation for family men like us?" Ma's reply was, "Serving others and chanting of mantras will do. You will get everything by chanting His name. Devote as much time on this as you can. If you cannot find enough time for that then at least talk of God, sing His glory, or read books containing spiritual thoughts." Ma also said that without following first stage of life, the 'Brahmacharya-asram', by strictly maintaining celibacy, the other three stages of life – 'Grihastha-asram' (family life), 'Vanaprastha-asram' (retired from family life) and 'Sannyas-asram' (completely surrendered life to the Divine) get spoiled. Even after becoming a family person, one may live almost like a brahmachari as in ancient time the 'Rishis' invariably adhered to it.

In 1916, Ma was seriously ill and went to Her parents. In the meantime, Ramani Mohan was transferred to Bajitpur in the Mymensingh district of East Bengal in 1918. During this period, Ma remained with Her parents at Vidyakut village for about three years.

Ma at Bajitpur

Ma came back to Ramani Mohan (Baba Bholanath) at Bajitpur in 1918 where She stayed about six years. Within few days of Her arrival at Bajitpur, the first external indication of Ma's bhava (inner state) began to appear. Ma would have strong reactions to Kirtan singing and religious discourses. She would move into a trance all by Herself.

Once there was a new experience of Her divine powers when Ramani Mohan arranged their family Kali puja (worship of the deity Kali) on the night of the annual worship of Goddess Kali. As usual, it was pitch black on a moonless night but suddenly the whole area was flooded with an ethereal glow like the radiance of a full moon. Bholanath and a few others walked around in that light as if remaining unaware about it. None expressed any surprise. After completion of the puja when havan (yajna) was started, a tall, fair, and luminous male figure with a reddish glow appeared from Ma's right side and entered the nearby room where the cooked food (bhoga) was kept ready for offering to the deity, Ma Kali. The figure sat there and symbolically partook of a little food from each plate thrice and then disappeared back into Ma.

After the incident, while carrying the same plates of food offerings to the puja place, a stray dog came suddenly and intervened on the way making it unfit for offering to the Deity. Ramani Mohan immediately disposed it off under a tree and after taking bath at the nearby pond to purify himself. He fetched the freshly cooked food offerings (bhoga) to the puja place. When the pujari (priest)

came to know about the incident, he said that the originally cooked food offerings were the real sacred 'Prasad' (Offered bhoga to the Deity). Thereafter, unexpectedly a large number of people received the bhoga prasada, yet there was no shortage of any item.

Diksha-Lila of Ma

During Ma's play of sadhana, a wonderful divine event took place on 'Jhoolan-Purnima' night on August 3, 1922 at Bajitpur. It was Ma's Self 'Diksha⁵-lila' (Play of self initiation). Ma Herself was the Guru and the disciple, Herself the 'Ishta' (desired deity) and the 'Mantra' (a sound representation of the chosen Deity). All the essential ingredients for the initiation ceremony along with the 'Agnideva' (Sacred fire) emanated from Ma's own body. After that self-initiation, all ingredients merged back into Her body again. Ma had kept all Her 'lila' (divine events) away from the public eye – but Ma's miraculous activities were beginning to be noticed gradually by more people.

Hearing of Shree Ma's uncommon spiritual activities and of self-initiation, an elder cousin of Shree Ma could not tolerate such non-traditional behavior and felt annoyed. So, one day he questioned Shree Ma in the presence of Ramani Mohan, "Who are you?" Ma replied in all serenity – Poorna Brahma Narayan⁶. At this point, Ramani Mohan asked Ma that in that case who he was. Ma replied again – Mahadev⁷. Then they asked Ma – "What is the proof that you are indeed Purna Brahma Narayan". Ma called Ramani Mohan and touched the crown of his head. Uttering

⁵ **Diksha** – Diksha is initiation by the Guru. But in Ma's case She was Herself Her Guru.

⁶ **Poorna Brahma Narayan** – The Supreme Being, with, without attributes, and beyond.

⁷ **Mahadev** – Lord Shiva, the Supreme amongst the Devas.

'Shivam', he sat down and went into a state of deep 'Samadhi' (trance). He remained in that state for a long time, calm and submerged in an ocean of bliss. Later on, in the evening when his nephew Ashu who was staying there under Ma's care, returned from school and seeing his uncle in such unusual condition, he started weeping. Then all of them earnestly requested Ma to bring Ramani Mohan back to normal consciousness. Ma brought him back to his normal state by touching his head again. Thereafter, Ramani Mohan said that it was not possible for him to describe what a heavenly blissful state he was in during that time.

In 1923, Shree Ma initiated Ramani Mohan. The entire ceremony of imparting the 'mantra' poured forth from Shree Ma in an effortless, spontaneous manner. There was never a touch of the worldliness in Ramani Mohan's attitude towards Ma. He knew Her exalted state fully well. He had surrendered himself to Shree Ma and accepted Her as his 'Guru'. Ma hinted that in his previous birth, he led a life of severe penance. He was a Saint (Mahapurush) and a 'Siddha' (Realized soul). In his service to Ma, he led a life of great purity and 'Sadhana'.

A few days after Ramani Mohan's initiation, Ma stopped talking and continued her silence for about three years. She said, "This body has none to bow to." Ma also did not allow anyone to touch Her feet from then onward.

Sadhana Lila of Ma

Ma's 'sadhana-lila' (play of spiritual practices) was in full swing at Bajitpur. Her play of 'sadhana' had some characteristic features which must be borne in mind. The point to remember is Ma's divine and limitless awareness was of Herself. Ma never received any instruction from outside sources nor did She even study

spiritual texts. She neither made efforts nor followed spiritual practices. All actions during the play of sadhana were spontaneous due to Ma's own 'kheyal' (divine will). All the 'yoga-asanas' (yogic postures), 'mudras' (Setting of fingers and palms in particular posture) and 'kriyas' (divine actions), were effortless manifestation of Shree Ma's own inner being. In Ma's play of sadhana, the articles needed for puja along with the presence of Gods and Goddesses (the images of different aspects of God), manifested themselves from Ma's own body and 'Mantras', 'Yogic mudras' and 'Asanas' befitting the puja, followed spontaneously. After the puja, all the articles of puja and the Gods and Goddesses that manifested earlier from Shree Ma, merged back into Her.

During Her play of sadhana, Ma remained without sleep for about nine years. She had no bed and used to pass the night in Samadhi (trance), sitting or lying on floor. She had no interest in taking food and even lost the capacity to feed Herself. She had to be fed by others which continued unbroken until Her last days. Later, Ma went without food and water for several weeks, yet She always looked serene and radiant. This was followed by a stretch of an eight or nine month period, when Ma would take only three morsels of food during the day and that much at the night. Thereafter, She started taking food which could be held within two fingers and which could be fed to Her within the time interval of one breath of the person feeding Her. Later She was taking no more than just three grains of boiled rice twice a day and nothing else. This small quantity of food She consumed only to prevent complete stoppage of food intake permanently. This continued for about six months. Thus, Ma was virtually living without food for years but Her health never deteriorated. A divine glow was always visible on Her face. In this context, Ma once said,

"As a result of sadhana, the body becomes so constituted that though no food is taken physically, it can imbibe from the surroundings whatever is necessary for its maintenance."

Devotees and family members were highly distressed about Ma not taking food. They were pressing Her to take proper nourishment. One day Ramani Mohan's sister while keeping a fast herself, cooked several dishes and prepared a large quantity of 'kheer' (a sweet dish prepared with milk & rice) with about twenty litres of milk. While feeding Ma, she was pressing Her to take more food, though Ma in those days used to take only three morsels of food. Ramani Mohan also insisted Her to accept his sister's request. Ma then continued eating the kheer until no more remained and then She asked for more. Ramani Mohan feared a bad effect from such large eating, so he asked Ma to stop. Shree Ma agreed and then cautioned them never to interfere with Her 'kheyal' (divine will). She also indicated that nobody could provide enough for Her if She really started eating.

Thus Ma reached the end of Her Sadhana Lila completing all aspects of sadhana. Ma said that this play of sadhana (spiritual practices) was not limited to a particular spiritual line; it covered all paths. Whatever ways of sadhana the Rishis had made known until now, Ma had gone through all of them. While following a particular way of sadhana, a sadhaka may take a very long period to achieve any result. He may even have to continue for several lives to gain an advanced stage in that line. However, Ma covered all those stages in moments. Ma said that it was like turning the pages of a book, the contents of which were already known. Thus Ma had complete knowledge and full realization of

all religious practices of past, present and future. Ma said that whatever sadhana She did, it was nothing but play of Herself with Her body. However, Her play of sadhana, was solely for the benefit of humanity. Whenever, truth seekers from any religion came to Ma with their difficulties in their prevailing stage of sadhana, Ma guided them properly in the way they needed. While removing their difficulties She sometimes cited Her own experience in that sort of sadhana which obviously helped them to understand.

Ma had full command of unlimited spiritual power since birth but She never had any wish of Her own to use it. Ma in general was not in favour of breaking the laws of nature nor interfering with what was ordained. Her will was the divine inspiration of the Supreme which Ma called as Her 'kheyal'. It is a divine stage beyond human perception. However, whenever any supernatural event occurred due to Ma's 'kheyal', Ma would only smile and say "God has done it". Sometimes Ma, without disclosing anything, would take on other's sufferings in Her own body so that the concerned person would get relief. She would simply say, "It is God's grace." Mostly in such cases, it was felt as if those miracles happened in a natural manner.

Ma was genuinely against any external manifestation of a saint's divine powers. In Her own words, "One should not exhibit one's inner realization – rather keep it locked in a box. If something spills out of an over-full box, don't worry; proceed along your own path. If by chance some of miracles are revealed, do not be concerned; rather, take care that you yourself do not reveal or take credit." Most of Her actions were performed in such a subtle manner that those who saw or experienced them, wondered as to how it could happen in such a way.

Ma at Shahbagh and Her display of Mahabhava

Ramani Mohan (Baba Bholanath) lost his job towards the end of 1923. He was naturally perturbed and after much thought, he decided to take Ma with him to Dhaka in search of another job. He got a job at Shahbagh in the Nawab's Estate. He was appointed Manager of the huge and beautiful sprawling 'Shahbagh' garden in April 1924. The Nawabzadi (Princess) Pyari Bano was the owner of this property. A bungalow within the garden was provided for Bholanath and Ma to stay. There was a big hall with two small rooms on its both side and a small dining hall called 'Khanaghar'. Soon after, he moved to that house in Shahbagh along with Ma.

The revelation of 'Matri-lila' (Ma's play of miracles) begins from 'Shahbagh' where Ma's condition underwent a remarkable change. Though She was still taking care of food and the other needs of Ramani Mohan like any other housewife, Ma was now becoming gradually incapable of handling housework like cooking, cleaning of utensils etc. She was frequently going into samadhi (states of deep trance) and becoming unaware of the outside world and even of Her own body. Such a state of Samadhi sometimes continued for hours at a time, sometimes even for few days. Ramani Mohan was getting more and more anxious about Ma. He was now beginning to accept that it was no longer possible for Ma to perform the domestic chores of a housewife. This problem was solved soon after when his younger sister, after becoming a widow, came to their house and took over all the domestic work herself. She was known as Matari Pishima.

Ma, since childhood, was deeply drawn to the rhythm and chanting of 'kirtana' (devotional songs). At the

chanting of 'Hari-bol', Ma's 'Bhava' (Divine mood) and ecstasy knew no bounds and there would appear the strangest of supernatural manifestations in Ma's body. Occurrences of such 'bhava' went on increasing day by day. The moment the chanting would reach Ma, Her body would become still and would stop working completely and often She would fall to the ground. Sometimes She would stand erect on Her toes or on heels with outstretched hands and a far-away look with unblinking eyes. At times, Her head bent backwards fully as if there was no bone at Her neck. Sometimes, She would be as still and lifeless as a stone statue and sometimes She swayed rhythmically with Her breath and the beat of the 'khol' (drums). Sometimes, She arrived quickly to the place of kirtana and moved from one spot to another like lightning. Her blissful body moved like a dry leaf in a whirlwind and She would be rolling on the ground at an incredible speed. It was not possible to stop Her at that time. It was unbelievable that Ma, who was always careful to keep Her body properly covered including wearing a veil, now was in such a condition that She was completely unaware of Her clothes and body while in such an ecstatic condition. In these states, Ma was totally unaware of Her surroundings.

Sometimes during such ecstatic condition, Ma would appear taller or shorter; at other times, She wound up like a round coil, rolling on the ground at a high speed as though Her body was boneless. Sometimes Her body would be shivering with the wave of 'bhava' and sometimes it would become so much blissful that Her body would swell and turn red with body hairs standing erect. Sometimes, She would be crying with streams of tears running down Her eyes or laughing uncontrollably to such an extent that people

around Her felt alarmed fearing any ill consequence. It is impossible to describe such innumerable 'bhavas' coming out in infinite ways from Ma's divine body whenever She heard the chanting of 'Hari Naam' kirtana. People around were overwhelmed seeing Ma in such Mahabhava state,

Much later, someone asked Ma the reason why She had stopped showing that sort of 'Mahabhava'. Ma said that whenever the persons came to Ma with the desire to see such bhavas, the same occurred on its own in Her; possibly, it was required at that time. However, Ma clarified that Her body gradually became so normal that people sometimes were in doubt whether Ma possessed any spirituality at all. But Ma was the same at all times.

One day, a kirtana was arranged at Shahbag to mark the solar eclipse in January 1926. This was the first time that Her state of spiritual ecstasy came into public view. People began to talk about Ma's amazing and radiant presence. Fame began to spread from person to person about Her dazzling goddess-like magnetic personality and Her high spiritual powers. People reported feeling as if She could read their minds or see into their deepest selves. Sometime She would foretell future events, which would always come true; persons seeking Her blessings got rid of their incurable diseases and so on. A large number of people now started coming to see Ma at the bungalow in the Shahbagh Gardens. Many of them started believing that Ma was Goddess Durga in human form. To others, Ma was Goddess Ma Kali Herself and people called Her 'Manush Kali' (Ma Kali in human form). She became widely known as 'Ma of Shahbagh'.

During this time period, many high Government officials and other prominent people of Dhaka became lifelong devotees of Shree Ma, along with their families.

Amongst them, the most notable was Sri Jyotish Chandra Roy, I.S.O. He was posted at Dhaka as Personal Assistant to the Director of Agriculture under the British Imperial Service. He later became known as 'Bhaiji'. Another well-known devotee of Shree Ma, at this time, was Dr Sashanka Mohan Mukhopadhyay. He was the Civil-Surgeon of Dhaka. He later took sannyas and became known as Swami Akhandananda. His daughter Adorini Devi who used to be called 'Khukuni', became well known to Ma's all devotees as Brahmacharini Gurupriya Didi. Income Tax Commissioner Sachi Kanto Ghosh, Deputy Post Master General Pran Gopal Mukhopadhyay, Assistant Income Tax Commissioner Niranjana Rai, Rai Bahadur Yogesh Ghosh, Professor Amulya Kumar Dutta Gupta of Dhaka Law College, and many others were deeply attracted towards Shree Ma. Around this time, all the devotees started calling Her 'Ma' and Ramani Mohan as 'Baba Bholanath'.

By this time, many had the good fortune of directly experiencing and observing Shree Ma's unlimited divine powers. Some came for Mother's grace, some to satisfy their spiritual aspirations, some seeking fulfillment of their worldly desires, some visited Ma to find relief from various sufferings of the world, illness, poverty, loss of dear ones, etc. All sought Ma's blessings.

In 1926, the devotees wished to worship Ma on the three specific days of Durga Puja⁸ at Shahbag. However, on the Saptami Day, it was seen that Ma had closed the door of Her room from early morning to evening. Only Baba Bholanath was allowed to go inside. Therefore, the

⁸ **Durga Puja** – It is a very important festival in India. Annual special puja of the Goddess Durga is performed during Navratri days in the month of October. Special puja is offered to Ma Durga on saptami, ashtami, navami and dasami tithi. After completion of puja on dasami tithi, the idol of Goddess Durga is immersed in water in a river or pond.

worship had to be performed from outside in front of the closed door. Similarly, the puja of Ma was performed in Ashtami and Navami tithi as well. On the Dashami Day, Ma startled everybody by jumping into the adjacent pond, similar to the immersion of a Durga Pratima (Idol) in water on such occasion. Ma had no mood to come out from the pond, but after great persuasion, she came out. The devotees wondered whether She had transformed Herself into Ma Durga.

Following Durga Puja the Kali puja⁹ was arranged at Shahbagh on Deepawali moonless night. Baba Bholanath (Ramani Mohan) made a special appeal to Shree Ma to perform the Kali Puja Herself. Under Ma's own 'Kheyal', the 'Yajna-purnahuti' (Final oblation) was not allowed by Ma and the sacred fire was kept live continuously thereafter. The earthen idol of Ma Kali was also not immersed in water. Daily worship of Ma Kali and 'Havan' at the sacred fire continued with the help of three young brahmacharis namely Yogesh, Kamlakanto, and Atul. All of them served Ma throughout their lives and passed their spiritual life very sincerely in ashram.. Ma had said, "You have read about Munis and Rishis, have you not? They exist even today" and She pointed towards the three brahmacharis as perfect examples. All of them took sannyas later on.

Kamalakanto came to Ma when he was only a teenager. He was suffering from epilepsy. Once Ma sent him to bring a carriage to go somewhere. He brought the carriage to the gate of Shahbagh but while coming to inform Ma about it, he suddenly felt an attack of epilepsy coming on. He ran as fast as he could and managed to utter "Ma, the carriage," before falling to the ground in an epileptic

⁹ **Kali Puja** – Worship of Goddess Ma Kali is done in the late night on the black moon day after the Durga Puja and the festival is called 'dipawali' as every house is lighted in the evening with candles or lighted wicks in small earthen pots filled with oil.

fit. Ma came out and, while moving towards the carriage, She gave a gentle touch of Her toe on his head. Thereafter Kamalakanto never had another attack.

Ma had some Muslim devotees as well in Dhaka including members of the ruling family of Dhaka and Nawabzadi (Princess) Piyari Bano, owner of the 'Shahbagh Garden'. They held Ma in special regard and devotion. Once they all had a meal at Shahbagh at Ma's place. Ma Herself cooked the meal for them. The Nawabzadi put gold 'Munda-mala' around Ma Kali's neck on that occasion.

Sometimes chanting of kirtana used to be arranged at Shahbag at nights where only women devotees were allowed to be present. Large numbers of women used to participate in such kirtana and pass the whole night with Ma. One night, a Muslim boy hiding outside the kirtana hall was watching the function and got absorbed seeing Ma in bhava (divine mood). Suddenly, Ma came out and took the boy to a secluded spot in Shahbag Garden where there was an old 'Mazar' (Tomb of a Muslim saint). Ma loudly called the 'Ajaan' (Call for prayer) and then performed the Namaz (Muslim prayer) just like a devout Muslim. The Muslim boy stayed with Ma during the Namaz. People present over there were stunned, as Ma was never known to have received any teaching of Islam. Afterwards the Muslim boy disclosed that he had never heard such a perfect 'Ajaan' and he experienced great divine bliss at that time.

This news reached the Nawabzadi of Shahbag as well. She insisted Ma to perform again the same. Instead, continuous flow of words from Arabic scriptures came out spontaneously from Ma's lips. Following minutely Ma's unusual recitation, the daughter in law of the Nawabzadi

could understand and told the others that Ma's words were from the holy 'Koran' in the original Arabic language. Thus, it was revealed that there was no linguistic or religious barrier for Ma. She had equal respect for all religions. Its influence was far-reaching.

Revival of the ancient holy seat at Siddheshwari

Ma had 'darshan' (vision) of a tree in its subtle form while She was at Bajitpur. After coming to Dhaka, Ma began to talk and find out about Siddheshwari. A devotee of Shree Ma and a childhood friend of Baba Bholanath, Baul Chandra Basak, and Bholanathji himself took Ma to Siddheshwari in August 1924. Siddheshwari was at the extreme end of the city of Dhaka. It was unknown to the public and was surrounded by deep forests at that time.

On further enquiry, it was found out that Siddheshwari was a sacred place in olden times. The ancient Kali-temple was established by a Sannyasi named Sumeruban. There used to be three trees, a banyan (bata), sandalwood (chandan) and 'peepal' tree growing together, earning the name 'Tintiri'. Only the peepal tree in fallen condition was surviving there when Ma visited the place. Seeing the place Ma said that She had seen earlier that very place and that very tree in its subtle form while staying at Bajitpur. Hearing Ma, Baul Babu said that there was a general belief about that place that earlier a 'Jyoti' (divine light) emanated from the 'Tintiri' and was absorbed in the Kali image inside the Kali temple. There was also a sacred seat of 'Panchmundi'¹⁰ at that time which was considered very suitable for 'Tantric' sadhana.

¹⁰ **Panchmundi** - a place of sitting for sadhana over five sanctified human skulls

Sometime later Shree Ma visited the Siddheshwari Kali Temple with Bholanathji. Ma had the kheyal to stay there for seven days in the adjoining room behind the temple. Ma spent day and night, lying on the floor of the room when it was almost continuously raining outside. On the last day, accompanied by Baba Bholanath, Ma walked out of the room when raining almost stopped. She reached a spot of land; walked thrice around it, and then sat down there. With a little pressure of Her hand on that spot, Ma's arm went into the ground up to the shoulder. Alarmed at the sight, Bholanathji immediately pulled out Ma's arm forcibly. As soon as the arm was withdrawn, there began to spring forth warm water of red colour from the hole. It was a very special holy place, about which Ma indicated that it was the 'Siddheshwari-Peeth'. Its location was to the north of the 'Kali Temple. Later on Ma said about this place that at intervals of five thousand five hundred and five years, some special sadhakas (persons who do spiritual practices) come to this place. Bholanath was one of them. He had performed his Sadhana at Siddheshwari ages ago.

Under Ma's instructions, a square vedi (altar) of 27 inches side length was constructed over the spot. A square area of 15 feet width on each side was enclosed around the sacred spot with bamboo fencing. Thus, Ma resurrected the holy 'Siddheshwari Peeth'. Ma's first Ashram was built on that sacred piece of land consisting of a room constructed in 1926. Afterwards, construction of the larger building at Siddheshwari was completed in 1928 and Ma's birth anniversary was celebrated that year at that place. Baba Bholanath performed Ma's puja on that occasion.

There were times when Ma would go and sit on that 'vedi' (altar), absorbed in deep 'bhava' (divine mood), and there would be 'kirtana' going on around Her. On one such

occasion, watching Shree Ma's divine blissful appearance, Jyotish Babu (Bhaiji) out of great emotion and joy, looked at Bholanathji and cried out, "From this moment, we will all call Ma as Anandamayee Ma." Bholanathji readily consented to it. Ma was known as 'Ma Anandamayee' from then onwards. Ma said to people present there, "You all have brought this body here to fulfill your works."

It was here that the first Basanti Durga Puja was performed in April 1926 as wished by Baba Bholanath. In their devotion and adoration for Shree Ma, the height of the image of Goddess Durga was made the same as that of Ma. Ma instructed that all those present during the three puja days were to be given bhoga-prasad. Whatever would be cooked and offered to the deity would be distributed and nothing to be cooked again.

Mother's divine 'Annapurna-Lila'¹¹ was experienced on the day of 'Ashtami-Puja' when after distribution of the bhoga-prasad very little was left for the few persons who were busy with the puja arrangements. When in the late afternoon just before the twilight, a party consisting of several men and women came to see the image of Ma Durga, Ma instructed them to distribute whatever little prasad was available. Surprisingly, all were fed well and yet enough was left to feed the remaining unfed persons of the ashram.

Another strange incident happened a day earlier on the Saptami Puja day. Labanya, the niece of Bholanathji, was delighted attending this puja. When Ma in bhava (divine mood) stood up on the altar. Labanya went to Ma and embraced Her querying what happened to her Auntie i.e. Ma. As soon as she embraced Ma, a tremendous change

¹¹ Annapurna -The Goddess who provides 'anna' i.e food for all.

came over her. When all left the room soon after Ma had left, Labanya had stumbled and tripped in her trance-like condition and fallen down. She was rolling in the slushy mud near the room unaware of anything, smiling and repeating 'Hari bol'. Labanya's mother, Pramoda Devi, was perplexed seeing her daughter in such condition. She angrily told Ma to set right Labanya's mood quickly as she was to look after her family. Seeing her spiritual condition, Ma said that the condition she was in was unattainable even after much spiritual practices. Ma reluctantly performed a kriya and Labanya became normal. However, the bliss within her continued for a few days.

Baba Bholanath installed a 'Shiva-linga' on that 'vedi' (alter) during Ma's birthday celebration in 1932. Looking at the people assembled there, Ma once said, "You all have come here; do try and rise above jealousy and violence. If you persist in it and continue talking ill of others, then there is no benefit in being here. Hard times are to come with stormy harsh winds. Some may fall to it, some may survive. Choose the right way. The choice is yours."

Ma's warning became clear after about two decades. Devastating communal riots broke out in 1947 when India was divided and two independent nations, India and Pakistan, were formed. Large numbers of persons were killed and a huge number of Hindu population migrated to independent India from East and West Pakistan.

Establishment of Ramna Ashram in Dhaka

The 'Shahbagh Gardens' were surrendered to the British Government In 1928. As a result, Bholanathji and many other employees lost their jobs. Bholanathji and Shree Ma then shifted to the Siddheshwari Ashram. The idol of Ma Kali and the sacred flame of the 'yajna' were also brought to Siddheshwari.

In March 1929, Ma empowered Baba Bholanath to give 'Diksha' (initiation) to devotees. Bholanathji always told the devotees to keep Ma foremost in their hearts. He sought nothing for himself; Ma was all in all for him. Bholanathji was well known for his kindness, for helping devotees to reach Ma and for guiding them in their sadhana. He never spared himself if he could help anyone in his or her 'sadhana'. Baba Bholanath and Bhajji were very much vigilant in allowing only the genuine spiritual seekers to have a personal audience with Ma.

While Ma was still at Shahbagh, one day Jyotish Babu (Bhajji) and Niranjan Babu submitted to Ma the need for building a suitable ashram. Ma said, "The whole world is like an ashram, what you will do with a separate one?" Jyotish Babu said that they needed a place where they could stay at Ma's feet and do their sadhana. Ma pointed towards a plot of land in the Ramna field and said that the land of Gokul Thakur would be appropriate. While negotiating for the land, it was discovered that the land at one point belonged to a man named Gokul Thakur. Ma also indicated that several yajnas took place there earlier and a Durga Bari¹² was at this place. Later, Ma's ashram was built there.

In olden times, this plot was a 'Tapobhumi' – a place of deep penance and sadhana of great Mahatmas (Saints) of the 'Dashnami' sect. Samadhis (graves) of several such mahatmas were found during construction of the ashram there. They all came to Ma in their subtle form and requested Her to be present there. Shree Ma shifted to the newly constructed Ramna Ashram in May 1929, after Ma's birthday celebrations at Siddheshwari. The idol of Ma Kali

¹² Durga bari – A place where Goddess Durga used to be worshipped.

and the sacred yajna fire were also shifted from Siddheshwari to that ashram.

In 1930, a strange incident happened when Ma was staying for a short period at Cox Bazaar (now in Bangladesh) which was far from Dhaka. Ma behaved strangely on the night of Amabasya Tithi (black moon night) when She began twisting Her own hand with the other and said She was going to break it. However, Ma was stopped from doing so by holding Her hand firmly. Though a divine smile prevailed on Her face, Her eyes were full of tears. The whole night Ma was in a strange condition.

A few days later, a letter was received written by Bhajji from Dhaka, which revealed that a thief had broken into the temple of Ramna Ashram and had stolen a gold ornament after breaking one hand of the earthen image of Ma Kali. The strange tendency in Ma occurred at the same moment when She intended to break Her hand, exactly at the same point where Ma Kali's hand was broken. Later, when restoration of the broken hand was being done using some clay, Ma contributed few drops of her blood to be mixed in that clay. Does not this unique incident reveal Ma's oneness with Goddess Kali?

Several men with high spiritual attainments came to see Ma at Ramna in those days. One day, Ram Thakur, the eminent highly realized aged saint of East Bengal, came and prostrated (sashtang pranam¹³) to Ma. Ram Thakur used to tell others: "Go and have a glimpse of Ma at Ramna – She is Bhagavati (the highest epithet of Godhead) in person."

A beautiful gold idol of Ma Annapurna (the Goddess who provides 'anna' ie food for all) seated on a silver throne

¹³ **Sashtang pranam** – To bow before anyone or a deity by laying flat on the ground to show complete surrender at his/her feet.

was installed on a pedestal inside the temple at Ramna Ashram in 1931. On one side of Annapurna is Lord Shiva standing with his begging bowl and on the other side the idol of flying Kali – the way Ma had earlier visualised the deity. An image of Vishnu has been placed at the top of the silver throne and Ganesha at its base. The idols were built utilizing the gold ornaments and the silver 'Kalasha' (pitcher) and a silver plate used by Shree Ma. These idols were recast in 1932 under the guidance of Jyotishda (Bhajji). Baba Bholanath himself performed the Pratishtha ceremony¹⁴ of Ma Annapurna.

At that time, Ma's Janmotsav (birthday) puja used to be performed on the deity of Ma Annapurna. Ma entrusted five brahmacharis for performing the puja, bhoga, etc. of the deity. They were prohibited to take any food prepared or offered by others. Sometimes, Ma Herself cooked food for the bhoga of the deity.

An underground basement room with a door to it was built underneath the pedestal. The earthen idol of Ma Kali that had been worshiped for so long was placed in the basement and locked. The door was allowed to be opened only once in a year during Ma's Janmotsav. Later, the idol of Ma Kali showed signs of cracks. Thereupon, a brick wall was raised over the door and the basement-room was sealed permanently on 19 May 1938.

One night during the celebrations, Ma and about thirty other women chanted God's name without a break. The next day, about 150 women joined the chanting for the whole night and Ma gladly joined them. Regarding such chanting Ma said, "Why does one do the chanting, what is the significance? When you call by name, the called one

¹⁴ **Pratishtha ceremony** – Permanent instalment of the deity following the procedures given in the scriptures.

responds. Don't you see that if you call your mother, she at once comes near you?" Later, Bhaiji took initiative to introduce chanting of 'Ma nam kirtana' at Dhaka.

At the time of the partition of India in 1947, the sacred 'Yajna fire' and the previously mentioned idol of Ma Annapurna were brought to the Kashi Ashram. The deity was installed inside the newly built Annapurna Temple in 1950. The statue of Baba Bholanath, which was installed at the Ramna Ashram in 1945 on 31st of May, was also brought from there and established later at Agarpa Ashram in Calcutta (Kolkata).

The Ramna Ashram is no longer in existence. When the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan surrendered to the Indian Army in 1971 at Ramna Maidan, the newly formed Government of Bangladesh cleared the Ramna fields to create a 'Martyrs Memorial' there. The Ramna ashram, which was within the Ramna fields, was also demolished. Ma said later, "Ramna Ashram is now demolished but Siddheshwari remains untouched. It will remain as long as evil does not flourish there." Shree Ma's last stay at Dhaka was from 17 to 22 April 1946, before the partition of India.

Chapter -III

Ma's journey all over India

Shree Shree Ma's appearance in human form was for the welfare of all the humanity; hence, it was not possible for Ma to remain confined to Dhaka only. In 1926, the Deputy Post Master General of Dhaka, Sri Pran Gopal Mukhopadhyaya requested Shree Ma to meet his Guru, the famous Yogiraj Balanand Brahmachariji, and took Ma, Baba Bholanath and a few others to his Deoghar Ashram in Bihar. Balanandaji at that time was about one hundred years old. When Ma met him, he was greatly delighted to see Ma and said, "My daughter, once you had come here to give 'darshan'¹⁵ in your ethereal form and today you have come personally to show your physical form." Ma replied politely, "Baba was not keeping well at that time and therefore your this daughter came to see you." It surprised all the devotees present there, as Ma never visited this place earlier.

One day, there was an evening kirtana (devotional singing). As soon as 'Hari-bol' kirtana started, Shree Ma went into an ecstatic trance. Suddenly She stood up and walked straight into the crowd of devotees performing kirtana. In bhava (divine mood), She started rolling on the ground as if a dry leaf rolling with the blowing of wind. She also danced for some time standing on her toes only and singing in a beautiful voice, 'Hari Om, Hari Om'. Ma's appearance at that time was like a goddess in human form. Balananda Brahmachariji and all others were observing Ma

¹⁵ **Darshan** – It means personal audience/vision, act of seeing someone (a holy person or a Deity), a revelation by a divine being. This word is generally used when one goes with great respect to a saint to have personal audience or visits a temple to see the deities there or have a vision of God.

with great admiration. In that condition, Ma touched Balanandaji's head and he immediately held Ma's hand and took Her to his dhyana mandir (place of meditation) where they talked for some time in privacy. Only Baba Bholanath was present at that time. Balanandaji disclosed later about Ma that Shree Ma was neither a spiritual aspirant nor She needed to perform any kind of spiritual practice or prayer. She was 'Nitya Sidhha' (completely Self-Realized always). She came for some special work for the good of humanity, and after its completion, She would depart.

After this visit to Deoghar, Ma did not remain confined to Dhaka only. She kept travelling ceaselessly from state to state in India without any pre-planned programme. Those travels were sudden and spontaneous and could not be obstructed. She had no fixed place to stay. She would decide to move even at mid-night. Wherever She went, a unique blissful divine environment prevailed around Her. Sadhus, mahatmas (saints), scholars, philosophers and ordinary people from all walks of life were drawn to Her. They were charmed by Her blissful holy attractive personality radiating divinity and the profundity of Her words.

Ma was fond of kirtana. Group of persons who sing kirtan often would come to Ma for performing kirtan in Her divine presence. Sometimes Ma Herself would lead the Nam-kirtana for others to follow. Some times with great bhava (divine mood), She would lie down completely in trance or dance gently raising Her hand. Seeing Ma's such unique divine bhava, the kirtan participants would get more inspiration. Wherever Ma travelled, the crowd was increasing day by day. Whoever came could not forget Her and returned to Her repeatedly. Whatever was offered to

Her, She would distribute amongst the devotees. Everybody wanted Her company and She responded.

Sometimes, persons keenly desiring for Ma's divine presence, attracted Her and She reached over there. None could tell whose distress call was drawing Ma to move towards them. A remarkable such incident occurred at Sarnath near Varanasi. A simple woman devotee from Bareilly once set out for Varanasi all by herself, solely for Ma's darshan. She had heard that Ma was in Varanasi. However, on reaching Varanasi Railway Station, she was misinformed that Ma was at Sarnath, which was about ten miles away from Varanasi. Therefore, she went to Sarnath. It was a quiet place where Lord Buddha started preaching the Buddhist religion. There the woman went all over looking for Ma but could not find Her. When the day ended and it became dark, she was in despair as she was alone in a lonely strange place. She found her way to Birla Dharamshala, a rest house for pilgrims and stayed in a room on the first floor there. She lit a candle and tearfully appealed to Ma, feeling lost and bewildered.

Ma at that time was at Varanasi. Suddenly, Ma got up from the 'satsang' (spiritual programme) that was going on around Her at that time. She called an ashram brahmachari to accompany Her and hurriedly made Her way to the Varanasi Railway Station. Shree Ma got into a fast train standing on the platform. It was not supposed to stop at Sarnath Station, but mysteriously it made an unscheduled stop at the outer signal of that station. Ma got out of the train in thick darkness and led the way directly to the Birla Dharamshala with the brahmachari following Her. She reached the first floor and knocked at the door of the forlorn devotee. The devotee opened the door to see Ma standing there. Can words be found to express the

feelings of that fortunate devotee at that moment? Ma simply said, "You called this body, so here I am." There are numerous such instances of Ma appearing at the prayerful call of Her devotees.

During Her initial whirlwind tours, Ma stayed in dharmashalas, temples or even under a tree. Ma had stopped entering the home of householders. Bhaiji, Gurupriya Didi and many others felt concerned to provide comfort to Ma for Her stay and to facilitate the devotees to have Ma's darshan. They took the initiative to establish ashrams in all such places where Ma visited frequently, although for Ma, there was no need of any separate ashram for Her. She once commented: "This body of mine is a bird flying around. It flies into the places where its fancy guides it and leaves it on its own whims. When you mention an ashram, can't you see that the whole world constitutes one single ashram?"

However, gradually several ashrams in Ma's name were established, but only at specific places indicated by Ma, which were either places of sadhana (spiritual practices) from ancient times or where some divine supernatural events had occurred in Ma's presence. The ancient sadhakas of those places in their subtle forms humbly requested Ma to settle there.

Shree Ma's early ashrams which were built before India's independence are:

Siddheshwari in Dhaka (1926), Vindhyachal (1928), Ramna in Dhaka (1929), Uttarkashi (1934), Kishenpur in Dehradun (1936), Kheora in Bangladesh (1938), Puri (1939), Bhimpura near Baroda (1939), Raipur in Dehradun (1940), Almora (1943), Calcutta at Ekdalia Road (1944), Varanasi (1944) and Kalyanvan in Dehradun (1944).

After India's independence in 1947, sixteen more ashrams were established. They are:

Vrindavan (1949), New Delhi (1953), Ranchi (1953), Rajgir (1955), Dhawalchina in Almora District (1957), Agarpura near Calcutta (1958), Pune (1961), Naimisharanya (1961), Bardhaman Kunj at Vrindavan (1962), Jakhan in Dehradun (1964), Tarapeeth (1968), Kankhal in Haridwar (1970), Bhopal (1975), Agartala (1977), Kedarnath (1980) and at Jamshedpur (1988). The ashrams at Calcutta on Ekdalia road and the Ramna Ashram in Dhaka do not exist now.

Following are some details of how some specific ashrams came into existence as well as important events that happened there in Ma's presence.

Ma at Calcutta (Kolkata)

Shree Shree Ma came to Calcutta (Kolkata) in West Bengal for the first time in 1927 on Her way to Haridwar. Ma was accommodated in a vacant house, which belonged to the 'Bhagyakul Estate'. During that visit, the Nawabzadi (Princess) Pyari Bano, the owner of the 'Shahbagh Gardens' in Dhaka, invited Ma to her palatial residence in Calcutta (Kolkata). To welcome Ma, she arranged a 'Hari naam kirtana' there. During the 'kirtana', Ma was immersed in deep 'bhava' (divine mood).

Shree Ma visited Calcutta again a second time and it was also at the earnest request of Pyari Bano to grace the occasion of the marriage of her son and daughter. Amongst many distinguished guests, there was also present Smt. Basanti Devi, wife of the renowned Congress leader, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. She was overwhelmed by Shree Ma's dazzling and attractive presence. Seeing Ma, she also exclaimed that she had a vision of Ma in her dream.

Basanti Devi could not resist embracing Ma lovingly and she insisted that Ma sit on her lap. Later, her daughter Smt. Aparna Ray became a devotee of Ma and she stayed several times in Ma's Ashram to have her divine company.

In October 1938, Ma came to 'Dakshineshwara' temple for a short stay there. She stayed in the 'Nahavat khana' where Shree Shree Sharda Ma, wife of the eminent saint Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev used to stay. During Ma's stay there, the renowned Congress leader Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose¹⁶ came to meet Her. About a year before, his eldest brother, the well-known patriot Sri Sharat Chandra Bose paid a visit to Ma when She was at Calcutta.

Ma said to Subhash Babu, "We have heard that you are a great speaker. Speak something here too." Denying the request, he immediately replied, "I have come here only to hear you." Thereafter, a long conversation ensued between Ma and Subhash Babu in the nearby sacred Panchavati garden¹⁷. When he told Ma that he gets pleasure to serve the country, Ma appreciated it but at the same time, She told him that such a pleasure would stay for the time being, while paying attention towards God would provide him the continuous divine bliss. Taking religious directions and 'prasad' from Shree Ma, he left the place with a desire to meet Ma again. However, the desire remained unfulfilled as Subhash Babu became very busy in the national movement to liberate the country from British rule and went into exile. However, later on, some of his brothers and their

¹⁶ **Subhash Chandra Bose** – A brilliant I.C.S. officer resigned from the British Govt. services and joined Congress Party to fight for India's independence. He was its President in 1938 & 1939. While remaining in exile, he formed the Indian National Army and invaded British India to liberate the country but could not succeed. The British Govt. declared him dead in a plane crash in 1945.

¹⁷ **Panchavati garden** – The place where five sacred trees were grown up. Sri Ram Krishna Paramahansa Dev often used to meditate there.

family members came to Ma several times.

Gradually, there was a great increase in the number of Ma's devotees in Calcutta. The devotees felt it was important to establish an ashram there for Ma. They managed to make a small ashram at Ekdalia Road in Baligunj area in July 1944, in a small three-storied building there. Seeing shape of the building, Shree Ma called it 'Govinda's Tiffin Carrier'! Later in 1958, a more spacious ashram was established for Ma on the bank of the river Ganga at 'Agarpara'. That year, Her birth-anniversary was celebrated there. The Ekdalia Ashram was disposed off afterwards.

A huge function was arranged in the Agarpara Ashram in September 1960 to celebrate the establishment of three temples there. A number of big functions like Shree Ma's 'Janmotsav', 'Durga Puja', 'Samyam Saptaha', and 'Bhagawat Saptaha' etc. were arranged at that Ashram in the presence of Ma. Huge crowds used to visit the ashram whenever Ma was there. It was a difficult task to manage the crowds on such occasions. Sometimes Ma had to be shifted elsewhere to provide Her rest. There is a small hut inside the ashram campus nearby the river Ganga, where Ma would go for a short rest. It is said that centuries ago, Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu¹⁸ while proceeding to Panihati had taken rest under the shadow of a tree there at that time.

An interesting incident took place during the 'Durga Puja' in 1960. A lady from a royal family while performing 'Puja' of Shree Ma, offered a costly necklace of pearls to Her. Standing nearby, an obviously poor girl with a dark

¹⁸ **Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu** – The great religious leader born in Bengal in 1485 A.D. who propagated Vaishnavism and he was the exponent of 'Hare Krishna' naam sankirtana.

complexion was watching the ceremony. The beautiful necklace of pearls charmed her. Quite unaware of its value, she spontaneously begged Ma to give her the necklace. Shree Ma asked her to come later. On the day of 'Vijaya-Dashami' evening, when Ma was distributing sweets to the large number of devotees with Her own hands, the same little girl came up again to have her share of sweets from Ma. After she received her share of sweets, Ma asked her to wait nearby. Ma then asked one of Her attendants to bring that costly necklace of pearls and on receiving the same, Ma handed over the necklace to the little girl. Overwhelmed with joy, the little girl simply ran away.

Narayan Swamiji, a 'Dandi Swami' and a senior Monk of Ma's ashram, was sitting nearby and watching. He could not resist asking Ma why She gave the costly gift to that unknown poor girl. Surely, there was a secret behind it! Ma smiled and replied that when She was running a household in Her early life at Bajitpur, that little girl (in her previous birth) was a maidservant there. Ma said that she loved caring and doing chores for Her. Ma further revealed that the little girl then belonged to a lower caste, but in this birth, she had gained a higher caste. Thus, the secret was revealed. Surely, all were happy at the little girl's good fortune! The incident also revealed that nothing was unknown to Ma, even the details of previous births of anyone. Once Ma told Gurupriya Didi that whatever desired facts the great saints like a Rishi or Muni could know by concentrating in their Dhyana, Ma was capable to know those instantly without any effort on Her part.

In February 1974, Ma attended a 'Bhagawat Saptaha' at Jodhpur Park in Calcutta. Huge crowds in thousands, thronged to have a darshan of Shree Ma. After

completion of the 'Bhagawat Saptaha' on the day of 'Dol-Purnima', Shree Ma along with the renowned saint Sitaram Baba Onkaranathji were taken out in a procession in an open carriage to enable people to have a darshan of Shree Ma. Sri Tushar Kanti Ghosh, an eminent journalist and the 'Vaishnava Sampradaya' (the sect devoted to Lord Vishnu), mainly arranged the procession. Lakhs of people gathered on both sides of the road and thus got a chance to have darshan of Shree Ma. She was taken to Deshapriya Park where She sang a few devotional songs at the request of the devotees.

Ma visited the Agarpara Ashram in April 1982 to attend the 'Murti-Pratishtha'¹⁹ ceremony of Swami Muktanand Giri. On Ma's instruction, Mamaji's eldest son Bachuda performed the 'Murti-Pratishtha' puja of his Guru who was his grandmother as well. That was Ma's last visit to Kolkata.

Ma at Vindhyachal

In 1927, Shree Ma with Bholanathji came to Vindhyachal in Uttar Pradesh for the first time. The elder uncle of Gurupriya Didi Sri Kunj Mohan Mukhopadhyay (Swami Turiyanandaji as was known later), had built a small cottage on the Ashtabhuja hill plateau. This he offered to Ma at Her feet. By 1928 the construction activities of Shree Ma's ashram had begun.

In 1929, Ma visited Vindhyachal again after visiting Coxbazar, Adinath, and Chattagram in Bangladesh, Kolkata, Haridwar, Dehradun, Ayodhya and many other places. By this time, Ma's Vindhyachal Ashram was completed with the efforts of Gurupriya Didi's uncle and

¹⁹ **Murti-Pratishtha** – Installation of the statue as per procedure given in the scriptures.

father. In the presence of Ma, they performed their annual family Durga puja there. Later, the Maharaja of Ramnagar (Kashi Naresh) donated twenty-eight 'bighas' (about 17.5 acres) of land around the ashram. The surroundings there were very lonely. Tigers and large snakes were often seen at that time. One can see a wonderful view of the river Ganga flowing at about a mile away from this elevated plateau, especially during August and September months when the river flows in full spate. Ma stayed there several times in isolation for taking rest as She liked the pure air blowing all over there. Sometimes Ma with great bhava (divine mood) moved alone around in this place.

Ma stated that some ancient temple was beneath the surface of land near the ashram. She also indicated that the buried 'Vigrahas' (statues of the Deities) of the temple came to Ma in subtle form to request Her that they should be taken out. Thereafter, the District Authorities carried out excavations close to the Ashram at the place pointed out by Ma and discovered the remains of a vast ancient temple there. They sent the artifacts of the excavations to the Archaeological Museum at Lucknow where they are being preserved. As per Ma's direction, a big stone platform in the shape of the plinth of a temple was constructed at the place where the ancient temple was found.

Much later, a European couple came to see Ma in the ashram. They told Ma that while sitting on the stone platform at the site of the ancient temple, the woman saw a bright triangle in the sky. At that time, Ma was present on the verandah of the first floor of the ashram. Ma told them that seeing the woman there, Ma had the 'kheyal' (divine will) that the woman should see something divine there. That very moment, she saw that bright triangle in the sky

which Ma had also seen simultaneously. Ma said that the three apex points of the triangle were representing the location of three nearby sacred 'Shakti Peethas'²⁰, namely - 'Vindhyavasini Temple', 'Ashtabhuja Temple' and 'Kali-khoh Temple'. Ma also told her that she missed to see a spot at the centre of the triangle, which was the location of this ashram itself. Thus, Ma gave an indication that the ashram also comes within the sacred area, which is most beneficial for sadhana (spiritual practices). Ma once displayed Devi's 'Ashtang Yoga' in the ashram. It was the belief of the local people that in ancient times, Goddess Durga at this place on the Ashtabhuja plateau killed the demon 'Mahishasura'. The people thus hold the area to be most sacred.

Several big functions like Durga Puja, Samyam Saptaha, etc. were arranged at Vindhyachal ashram in presence of Ma, although no electric or water supply was available there at that time. The only source of water for the ashram was a well at the foothills from where water had to be fetched physically. Once Ma indicated that in Her vision, She saw the sadhus in ancient times drawing water from a well near the ashram but She did not reveal the location of that well.

Much later in the year 1980, the entire Vindhyan rocky area suffered from an unprecedented drought. In those days, Ma came to Vindhyachal Ashram and stayed there for some time. The ashram also experienced an acute shortage of water. In order to inspect the drought-affected areas, Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, came there. She also came for Ma's darshan at the ashram where mid day meal had been arranged for her. On this

²⁰ Shakti Peetha - Most sacred and congenial place for Shakti sadhana.

occasion, extra effort had to be made to arrange adequate water from the distant well which was located in the foothills.

A few days later, when Ma was leaving the ashram, Swami Nirvananandaji, seeing the water problem in the ashram, requested Ma repeatedly to indicate the location of that ancient well. Ma revealed the spot pointing at the small open space outside the ashram boundary wall towards the hill slope. However, there was no trace of existence of any well there and the place was as rocky as the adjoining places were.

In those days, the State Government arranged installation of large number of India Mark-II hand pumps in that area. A reputed Geohydrologist was engaged for indicating various spots where a boring might yield water. They were approached to locate that ancient well in the ashram compound with the help of his detectors. The Geohydrologist after exploring several places could not find the location of the well. At last, when he was asked to explore the spot where Ma had indicated, his electrical equipment indicated a positive result confirming existence of the well there. However, the Geohydrologist intimated that revival of that ancient well was not possible as it was completely filled up long back and if at all revived, it would not be possible to draw water from the well, excepting in the rainy season when the water table would remain high. However, the ashram received both the facilities of electricity and piped water supply later on, with the help of the State Government.

Once a devotee asked Ma at the Vindhyachal ashram, what their duty in this life would be. Advising him to continue sadhana, Ma said, "Go on digging a canal, the water will flow in due course."

After attending Allahabad Ardha-Kumbh-Mela in January 1982, Ma stayed at Vindhyachal ashram for about a week. It was Her last visit to that ashram.

Ma at Tarapeeth

Tarapeeth is a religious place in Birbhum District of West Bengal and is regarded as the foremost seat of 'Tantrik-Sadhana'. It is a big cremation ground where dead bodies from even distant places are brought for cremation at this sacred place. The elegant temple of Tara-Ma exists next to the cremation ground.

When Bholanathji was doing sadhana in Kali temple at Siddheshwari he once had a vision of a headless Ma Kali. On hearing about it, Ma asked him to proceed to Tarapeeth. Accordingly, Baba Bholanath went to Tarapeeth from Dhaka in December 1928. He spent some time there in solitary sadhana and meditation in Tara-Ma Temple.

One early morning, during the bathing ceremony of the deity, he found that the silver face of Tara-Ma was kept separate from her body. He came to know that it was the tradition there to detach the loose head of Tara-Ma every night before her daily 'sayan' (rest in the night) and would be attached again next day in the early morning after the bathing ceremony. Baba Bholanath then could realize why Ma had sent him to Tarapeeth, just to have a darshan of the headless Ma Kali there that he had seen in his vision at Siddheshwari. Baba Bholanath greatly benefitted from this visit. He felt empowered with 'Tara-Siddhi' and 'Shiva-Siddhi'. Bholanath received a command from Goddess Tara to spend at least one day every year at Tarapeeth, which he complied with every year of his life.

Shree Ma joined Baba Bholanath at Tarapeeth after a few days of his solitary stay there. Ma manifested many a 'Matri-lila' there. Ma with great bhava moved around in this place in the open field. Hindus and Muslims alike thronged to have darshan of Ma. She would mix with Muslim families, choosing to become a daughter of one of the heads of a family. Sometimes She forbade others to accompany Her and She would go out alone. After waiting for hours, they would find Ma sitting in a mosque nearby or in some secluded place lying down in a trance under a tree. One late night, Ma went out all alone in cold weather and after walking for some time, Ma in great bhava jumped into the adjoining pond, wearing all Her garments and woolen shawl. The sacred pond is located behind Tara-Ma's Temple and is widely known as 'Jibit-Pushkarini'. Bhajji was following Ma keeping himself at some distance. He rushed there and brought Her back.

On one lunar eclipse, huge unexpected crowd arrived there for Ma's darshan. The local people felt great attraction seeing Ma's magnetic personality. They looked upon Ma as their deity Tara Ma Herself in this form. Most of the time Ma was surrounded with these simple rural folk, many of them were even Muslims. They told Ma that Tarapeeth being a 'Siddha Peeth'²¹, many sadhus and mahatmas come there off and on and they were familiar with them. However, they never got the opportunity to see a Bhagavati Ma (Goddess) like Her. Sometimes when Ma was to leave the place, the women folk there began weeping bitterly, as if their dearest one was parting from them.

²¹ **Siddha peeth** - A sacred place where several saints achieved 'Self realisation' after sadhana.

Shree Ma indicated that Tarapeeth was Baba Bholanath's place of sadhana in his previous birth. At Tarapeeth, Ma revived the practice of ancient Vedic times of conferring 'yagnopaveet' (Sacred thread) to adolescent (kumari) Brahmin girls. Gurupriya Didi and Marani Didi underwent the 'yagnopaveet' ceremony there. Thereafter, Gurupriya Didi became a brahmacharini and Marani Didi, who was a niece of Baba Bholanath and had stayed with Ma since her childhood, was married there itself and allowed to enter into family life. They were to perform 'Gayatri sandhya' daily as is done by male Brahmins.

Much later in 1968, the devotees constructed an ashram for Shree Ma and a Shiva temple there on the land donated by Maharaja of Dinajpur. The ashram was further extended later on and Ma's Vighraha was installed inside the newly built 'Matri Mandir' in 1989 where daily puja is being carried out.

Shree Ma's visit to Southern India

In 1930, Shree Ma set out on Her travels to South India. Bholanathji, Swami Akhandanandaji, Gurupriya Didi and several others accompanied Her. Ma went all the way up to Kanya-kumari. She visited the religious places at Waltair (Visakhapatnam), Madras (Chennai), Pakshiteerth, Kanchipuram, Chidambaram, Madurai and Sri-Rangam. She stopped at these places for a day or two, but at Rameshwaram, Ma stayed for five days and at Kanya-Kumari for fifteen days. Everywhere and at every temple that Ma visited, She was accorded the welcome which is generally reserved for the holiest of the holy.

From Kanya-kumari, Ma visited the Padmanabham Temple at Trivandram (Thiruvananthapuram). The huge idol of 'Padamanabham' (Vishnu-in-Eternal-Rest form) was

made of a cluster of sacred 'Shaligram Shilas'. Ma stayed there for three or four days. The priests and organizers who were looking after the temple were deeply gratified for Ma's darshan. They showed Ma every part of the temple.

From Trivandram, Ma went to Mangalore, Bombay (Mumbai) and then to Dwarikadheesh temple at Dwaraka. Overtaken by a sudden upsurge of bhava, Ma bathed Lord Krishna's Vighraha (Idol) and then wiped the Lord with the folds of Her sari-anchal (end part of a sari) as is done by an Indian mother after bathing her child. This 'Matri-lila' happened so suddenly and spontaneously that only a few fortunate persons saw it.

Ma travelled widely and extensively for three months in the South again in 1952. She had with Her the most revered saint Haribaba, Avadhootji, Gurupriya Didi, Swami Paramnandaji and some others. Shree Ma and Her party began their travels from Puri. Wherever Ma went in the South, all the arrangements for Her and Her party were made by Mrs. Talyar Khan, a Parsi Lady who was a great devotee of Maharshi Ramna and Sri K.C. Munshaw, a great devotee of Ma from Ahmedabad. Sri Munshaw provided his big Kaiser car exclusively for Ma's use.

This time Ma visited almost all the holy places and great temples of the South. Amongst the prominent places, they visited were Waltair, Guntur, Madras (Chennai), Kanchipuram, Pakshiteertha, Mahabalipuram, Arunachal (Tiruvannamalai), Shri-Rangam, Amaravati, Tanjore, Kumbhkonom, Rameshwaram, Madurai, Trichur, Kanyakumari, Trivandrum, Kaladi, Mysore, Bangalore etc. Ma visited all the famous temples there. Ma was also received with great honour at the Maharshi Ramna Ashram at Tiruvannamalai. Everywhere, there were crowds of people

waiting for Her darshan. At Madurai Temple, there were more than ten thousand people waiting to see Ma in a disciplined manner. Seeing Ma's powerful yet benign personality, they were overwhelmed and felt as if they were beholding their own temple deity 'Meenakshi Devi' in a living form. There was no exchange of words due to the language difference. All were silently observing Ma and they were lost seeing her radiant divinity.

In most of the temples, Ma was received like a royal visitor with the playing of ceremonial bands etc. as they do on such occasions. Rows of elephants duly decorated were lined up on both sides of the road to receive Ma. At the entry of many great temples, Shree Ma was garlanded by the temple elephant and was offered silver 'kalasha' as per their tradition.

At Pondicherry, Shree Ma met the French Mother at Shree Aurobindo Ashram. The then Rajas of Travancore, Mysore, Rajkot, and Bhavnagar, along with their families, accorded Shree Ma a royal welcome when She visited their states. Her sojourn in the South ended with her visit to Dwarakadheesh temple at Dwaraka. Ma was requested there by the priests to touch the deity from head to foot.

At the time of Ma's arrival at Dwarakadheesh temple, the Shankaracharya²² of Sharada Peeth was waiting for Ma at the entrance of the temple. After meeting Ma, he went straight to his Math and lay down on his bed. After a

²² Shankaracharya – Adiguru Shankaracharya in the twelfth century had created the four highest religious Maths (a seat of authority), for guiding and sustaining the Hindu religion. The head of each Math is called 'Shankaracharya'. Most learned Sannyasis, who are also spiritually very advanced, hold these posts. These four seats are located at four holy places in India, namely – Badrinath in the North, Puri in the East, Kanchi in the South and Dwaraka in the West of India.

while when someone went there to call him for his meal, he found that the Shankaracharya was no more. Possibly, he had a desire to have the blessings of Ma before leaving his body. After receiving the news, Ma went there Himself and touched his head. When Ma was asked later that why She touched the dead body. Ma said that Baba's subtle form had a link with his departed body even at that time.

At the request of the Chief Justice of Mysore High Court, Sri S.R. Das Gupta, Ma went to Bangalore in July 1961. An attractive palm-leaf hut was erected for Her stay. One day, the Chief Minister of Mysore and his wife came to see her along with Mrs. Talyar Khan. Ma told them, "You have seen a cow licking her calf to cleanse it and swallow all the dirt on its body. Similarly, God absorbs all that is wrong in His children to make them pure and sanctified. One should fix the thoughts on Him alone and work without expecting any re-turn."

Shree Ma visited the South again in January 1972 with a large group. That time on Her visit to Madras (Chennai), Shree Ma was the guest of Smt. Subbulakshmi, a renowned exponent of Karnatik music and a recipient of the highest award 'Bharat Ratna' from the President of India. The Governor of Tamilnadu with Smt. Subbulakshmi, Mrs. Talyar Khan, and many other distinguished persons received Ma and Her party at the Railway Station. Ma stayed in the cottage specially built for Her within the compound of their residence, called Kalki-Gardens. Many distinguished persons and thousands of citizens came there for Her darshan.

One day in the early morning Smt. Subbulaxmi with her husband Sri Sadashivam and her daughter offered puja of Ma gracefully. After completing the puja, they brought

one dish full of gold coins (Mohar) and they offered those coins at Ma's feet as pushpanjali. At that time, Ma's lap was covered with a towel. Obviously, all the offered gold coins were lying scattered on the towel. Ma with great care picked up the towel along with all the gold coins and handed it over to Subbulaxmi and said, "This body is your small daughter whose things remain only with the parents." Thus Ma returned back the costly offerings.

After a few days there, Ma went to Trivandrum where She was the guest of the Maharaja of Travancore. She participated in the memorable 'Lakshadeepam' festival (Lamp festival) held every six years interval in the 'Padmanabham' Temple where the deity is Vishnu-in-Eternal-Rest form. On this occasion, thousands and thousands of oil lamps in earthen pots are laid in a pattern both inside and outside the temple and in the courtyard, presenting a dazzling spectacle. There too, a large number of people and several renowned personalities came to Ma. Ma also visited Kaladi, the sacred birthplace of the great Adiguru Shankaracharya.

In 1979, Ma visited Secunderabad where the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Dr. M. Chenna Reddy²³, received Her. He took Her to a hut in his farmhouse, which was especially built for Ma's use. After few days of stay there, Ma proceeded to Bangalore where, the State Governor of Karnataka Sri Govind Narain, I.C.S. (Retd.) accorded a grand reception to Ma at the Railway Station. Ma was taken to the farmhouse of the Travancore royal family where special arrangements had been made for the stay of Ma and Her companions.

²³ Dr. Chenna Reddy - He was an eminent public leader in Andhra Pradesh and twice he was the Chief Minister of that state. He had been also a Central Minister at Delhi and the Governor of Uttar Pradesh & Punjab states.

Ma's Janmotsav was celebrated that year at Bangalore with great joy and enthusiasm under the aegis of the Elaya Raja Marthanda Verma of Travancore and the State Governor. A huge pandal with a canvas roof had been erected at the courtyard of the Gondal Palace which could easily accommodate a few thousand devotees. The Shankaracharya of Dwaraka inaugurated the function. Renowned spiritual figures of the South, eminent personalities and large crowds in thousands attended the function. The huge pandal was packed to capacity. At the end of the function, a 'Nam yajna' was arranged. The kirtana continued from the evening to next day evening. The devotees got the opportunity to see a unique bhava (divine mood) in Ma in that occasion.

Thereafter, the Governor of Tamilnadu State Sri P. D. Patwari invited Ma to Madras (Chennai). He came to the Railway Station to receive Ma and took Her to the Raj-Bhawan where She was accommodated in its campus with great honour. Large number of devotees and eminent personalities came there to have Ma's darshan.

Ma's last visit to the South was in January 1981 when Dr. Chenna Reddy invited Ma to visit Secundrabad. Thousands of devotees came for Ma's darshan there. Ma visited south India about six times, but no ashram of Ma exists in that part of the country.

Ma at Jagannath Puri

Jagannathpuri in Orissa is considered one of the four 'Dhams' (most sacred places) in India. The ancient elegant temple of Lord Jagannath is situated there. Ma's visit to this place has its own little story. Buba Shyam Sunder Das, an ascetic of Haridas Math living in Puri, was very ill and was completely confined to his bed in his room. He often

wept and tearfully longed for Shree Ma's darshan. A devotee told him not to lose heart. Consoling him, he said that it was very possible that Ma might visit him one day in his own room and so it happened. Shree Ma made a hurried and a surprising visit to Jagannathpuri and visited Shyam Sunder Dasji in his own room. Shree Ma always heard the call of Her devotees in great distress. This is just another instance of Ma reaching out to Her devotees calling Her in distress.

In 1939 a small ashram of Shree Ma came up at 'Swargadwar' on the sea coast of Jagannathpuri. From time to time Shree Ma stayed there on Her visit to that place. She had been there a few times during the annual 'Ratha-Yatra' festival when a procession proceeds with three very large wooden chariots, beautifully decorated, carrying the three Deities - Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram. The procession starts from the Jagannath Temple and ends at the Gundicha Temple, which is also called as 'Mashibari'. Thousands of pilgrims and devotees draw these chariots with the help of big ropes, with the sole belief that they will come out of the cycle of birth and death.

While staying at Pune Ashram in Maharashtra State in around 1973, the devotees there requested Ma to sit in a car on the day of 'Ratha-yatra' at Jagannath Puri and they pulled the car with a big rope round the Krishna temple in the ashram. While coming out of the car, Ma indicated that those who participated in pulling the car did the same thing as those who pulled the chariots at Jagannath Puri on the 'Ratha-Yatra' day.

A few more incidents took place that reveals the oneness of Ma with Lord Jagannath. Once when a close devotee of Ma visited the Jagannath Temple at Puri, she was surprised to see Ma in place of the vigraha (Idol) of

Lord Jagannath. Initially she could not believe it. She rubbed her eyes and looked again to find the same vision. Even the people around him were also surprised seeing Ma in the same manner. Soon after, the vigraha of Lord Jagannath reappeared in place of Ma.

While staying at Puri during the Rathayatra ceremony, Ma's own aged mother Didima told Ma remorsefully that her desire of touching personally the Lord Jagannath, remained unfulfilled. Showing Her own body, Ma told her – "Touch this body and in doing so, the touch of Jagannath will happen."

After the South India tour in 1979, Ma came to Bhubaneswar after receiving an earnest request from the Governor of Orissa State Sri B. D. Sharma. When Ma's train arrived at late night, a large number of people, led by the State Governor, were present at the Railway Station to receive Her. Ma was accommodated in the Raj-Bhawan (Governor House) campus with great honour. After few days of staying there, Ma came to Puri and spent about a month in the Puri Ashram. She attended the famous Chariot Festival of Lord Jagannath. That was Her last visit to Puri. Presently, the Maharaja of Puri is the President of Ma's ashram there.

Chapter – IV

Shree Shree Ma's arrival at Uttarakhand (Establishing of ashrams in Dehradun and Uttarkashi)

After Shree Ma's Janmotsav celebrations at Ramna Ashram in 1932, Ma left Dhaka all of a sudden with Jyotish Babu (Bhaiji) and Baba Bholanath for an unknown destination. Travelling via Gorakhpur and Lucknow, Ma reached Dehradun, which is located in the foothills of the Himalayas in Uttarakhand.

Raipur Ashram

On 8 June 1932, Ma reached a small Shiva-Temple at Raipur, close to the city of Dehradun. The Temple was very old and was on the top of a hillock. It was known as the 'Koumadeshwara Mahadeva Temple'. Ma stayed there in a two-roomed dharamshala (a shelter for pilgrims) for some time. Baba Bholanathji did hard tapasya (penance) in the Shiva Temple there. It is from then onwards that Jyotish Babu came to be called as 'Bhaiji'. Ma had a kheyal (divine will) since then, not to enter in any grihastha's house (a home of a householder). She would prefer to stay in dharamshalas, temples, and cowsheds or in any unused house.

Ma had chosen Her own attire. She preferred to wear a white Dhoti with a thin border and a wrapper to cover Herself. Ma stopped the practice of using a veil. She used to tie Her hair at the top of Her head or would allow the open hair to fall onto Her shoulders. At the insistence of Her devotees, She agreed to use footwear to ease Her movements in the hilly terrains.

The Raipur Ashram, which was one of the early ashrams of Ma, was established in 1940 after the owner Pandit Kusumaree Lal of Raipur donated the land with the temple complex. It was renovated later on in 1941 and Ma's janmotsav function was arranged there in that year. In 1942, the annual Durga Puja, Laxmi Puja, and Kali Puja were performed at that ashram in the gracious presence of Shree Ma. Later in 1948, Sri Parashuram, an ardent devotee, built a small house for Ma in that ashram on the adjoining land donated by the family of late Jammalal Bajaj and it became known as 'Tapalaya'. It was inaugurated in presence of Ma in May 1949.

From Dehradun, Shree Ma travelled many places in the North and a large number of people became Her devotees. She travelled ceaselessly and did not stay for more than a few days at any one place. She would stay at a temple or a dharamshala where people would throng around Her. She would leave a place all of a sudden, even at midnight at times, and very often to destinations unknown. Bhaiji would manage a simple meal of a few rotis (bread) and some vegetable only. After feeding Ma and Bholanathji, he would take the remaining as prasad. Ma stayed at Raipur for about 3 months from January 1933 with Bholanath and Kamala Kanto, Bhaiji joining them midway.

Uttarkashi Ashram

In May 1933, Ma, Baba Bholanath, and Bhaiji walked about 150 kms. on their way to Uttarkashi, which is a sacred place, situated deep inside the Himalayas. They stopped at a beautiful spot on the bank of the river Ganga. The place was surrounded by a thick forest. Shree Ma's Uttarkashi Ashram and the Kali Temple were built later at

the same spot. Under Shree Ma's instructions, Baba Bholanath went on pilgrimage to Badrinath, Kedarnath, and then Yamunotri. On his return to Uttarkashi, he plunged himself into hard sadhana (spiritual practices) and penance. As a result of his efforts, Maharaja Narendra Shah of Tehri Estate donated two 'bighas' of land at the aforesaid place. On it were constructed the Kali Temple and Ma's ashram.

Baba Bholanath brought the Vighraha (Idol) of Ma Kali from Dehradun, carrying it personally himself and walking all the way on foot. Whenever he had to take rest, he kept the idol on his own lap and never placed it on the ground. The idol of Ma Kali was installed in the presence of Ma in 1935. Idols of Shiva-linga, Laxmi-Narayan, Amba and Ganesha were also installed. Baba Bholanath became the first 'Pujari' (priest) of the temple. When he left for Gangotri for further intensive sadhana, Yogesh Brahmachari, a close devotee of Ma from Dhaka, took over the service and worship of Ma Kali in the temple. Maharaja of Solan, Durga Singh ji, on his own, offered to meet the expenses of the temple.

Later, Ma visited Uttarkashi on several occasions. She came there in 1939 when She visited Gangotri as well, which is at an altitude of about 14,000 feet. The source of holy Ganga River is about seven miles away from there which is called Gomukh. The place is surrounded, by snow-capped mountains. Ma met the reputed very old saint Krishnasramji Maharaj at Gangotri. He used to pass the winters without covering his body even when there was regular snowfall.

After a long period, Ma visited Uttarkashi again in 1973 at the invitation of Mahamandaleshwar Swami Vidyanandaji for celebration of Ma's Janmotsav in Kailash Ashram. The function was performed with great

enthusiasm. During the 'Tithi Puja', Ma as usual entered into a deep samadhi (trance), and came out of that state only by the afternoon of next day. The great singer Smt. Subbulakshmi and many distinguished persons attended the function. Thereafter Ma went again to Uttarkashi for a week in 1975. Ma's last visit to this place occurred in 1976 at the invitation of Mahamandaleswar of Kailash Ashram Sw. Vidyanandaji and She stayed there for a week from 2nd to 8th June.

Kishenpur Ashram

At Raipur in Dehradun, Ma met a noble soul named Hari Ram Joshi who was a native of Almora and was working in Dehradun as an officer in Uttar Pradesh State Government Service. Seeing the number of devotees of Ma increasing, Bhaiji expressed to Hari Ram Joshi the need of an ashram for Ma's stay in Dehradun. When they approached Ma, She said, "What need is there for raising an ashram or a temple. There should be a temple in every heart." However, Joshiji used all his efforts and finally succeeded in acquiring half an acre of land on Rajpur Road. Shree Ma's Janmotsav was celebrated on that land in May 1935. Ma's Kishenpur Ashram, as it came to be called, was completed on that land in 1936 by the tireless efforts of Joshiji and Hansa Bhai, who were truly great devotees of Ma. Thereafter, a yajna was arranged there from 4 to 12 May. Ma's Janamotsav was celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm on the 10th of May night in 1936 after Ma's first entry in the ashram on that day.

The ashram building at Kishenpur was constructed under Bhaiji's supervision and guidance as he had an earnest desire to make it convenient for Ma and Baba Bholanath to stay there. Bhaiji understood that in the future, devotees

would flock at Shree Ma's feet from many different corners of the world, as She belonged to the whole world. Under his inspiration, the words "Ma Anandamayee Vishwa Mandir" were inscribed on the arch of the entrance gate of Kishenpur Ashram. That arch is still there today. Who could have foreseen at that time that one day innumerable mahatmas, wise and learned men, leaders of the country and great devotees would gather there and experience feelings of peace and brotherhood? Ma's words would convey a universal message of love for all humankind for their spiritual advancement.

Later in 1949 and 1953, Ma attended the Durga Puja celebrated at Kishenpur Ashram. Ma's Janmotsav was also arranged in this ashram in 1959 and 1962. A temple dedicated to Shree Ma and a similar one to Baba Bholanath were built in 1958 according to Bhaiji's wishes. In Bholanath's temple, seven 'Shiva-lingas' were installed in presence of Ma. A marble statue of Shree Ma was installed in Ma's temple in 1984. This was the first statue of Ma installed after She passed away. Much later in 2006, a marble statue of Baba Bholanath was also installed in that 'Shiva temple' on the auspicious day of 'Akshaya Tritiya'. Daily puja and bhoga are continuing there. A double storied building was constructed to accommodate the Kumari (virgin) Brahmacharinis at its first floor and Ma named [t as 'Kumari-Peeth.'

Kalyanvan Ashram

A furlong away from the Kishenpur Ashram, there is another ashram of Ma which is called 'Kalyanvan'. The Additional Income Tax Commissioner of Dhaka, Sri Sachi Kanto Ghosh purchased eleven 'bighas' of land there on

the Dehradun Rajpur road and donated the land for Shree Shree Ma's ashram. The Kalyanvan Ashram was built on that piece of land in 1944.

While staying at Haridwar, Shree Ma had a vision of Kalyanvan. Ma had seen that she was sitting on the hill slope there in the form of a bright white condensed pure Jyoti (divine light) and in a state of 'Akhanda-bhava-ghana' (the unbroken condensed spiritual divine mood). She saw an endless host of Gods and Goddesses in their aerial carriages and innumerable Avatars, Rishis and Munis bowing before Her. The assemblage around stretched to the horizon in all directions. It was like an ocean with no end in sight. A similar vision Ma had also seen in 1928 when She was at a sacred place 'Kamakhya', a famous shakti peeth temple near Gauhati in Assam. Later, a 'Panchavati' (a cluster of five sacred trees) were planted at the same spot in Kalyanvan in July 1947 to mark down that sacred place. At present, the place is within the adjoining compound belonging to the Khaitan family who constructed a beautiful marble cottage for Ma near that Panchavati. Ma stayed there several times.

A 'Ram-temple' was constructed in Kalyanvan Ashram. On eighth of July 1966, Ma was standing under a tree there and began the kirtana - 'Sri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram'. The devotees took up its melodious refrain and the kirtana lasted for the next twenty-four hours without a break. Ma saw Shree Ram in teen age at that place in royal attire riding on a white horse.

On the Mahashtami day during the Durga puja in 1971 arranged in Dehradun at Khaitan's place, a silver replica of Padmanabha idol of Lord Vishnu of the Padmanabha-temple at Trivandrum was installed at

Kalyanvan Ashram. The deity is now placed at Kanakhal Ashram for daily worship. Two small huts were added in this ashram, one for Atmananda, (Miss Blanca) and the other for a Dutch female devotee, G.Ammerral for their sadhana. After their demise, these are now used for guests.

Jakhan Ashram

There is another ashram at 'Jakhan' on the Rajpur Road in Dehradun about a kilometer away from the Kishenpur Ashram. Sri R. K. Sood, a devotee of Ma, donated his spacious house along with a big compound there for Shree Ma's use and it developed into an ashram. He had no child of his own. Ma named this ashram as 'Sadhanalaya'. A 'Shiva-linga' was also installed there in Ma's presence.

For the blessing of Sood's late wife, a 'Bhagawat-Saptaha' was celebrated there in 1964 in presence of Shree Ma. A strange incident happened during that ceremony. One day Ma's close attendant Udasji saw a small white coloured snake gliding on Ma's bed in the early morning. When she wanted to remove it, Ma did not allow her to do so. Ma disclosed that the snake was present nearby Ma's feet all throughout the night. Soon after, the snake died on Ma's bed in presence of Ma. Ma got the snake placed in an empty bottle and sent to Haridwar for its immersion in the sacred river Ganga. Later Ma said that for whose blessings the Bhagabat Saptah was arranged, she in this form came to seek 'Moksha' (Liberation) from Ma.

This property was under litigation for a long time with some persons who called themselves relations of the late Soodji. With the court's verdict in October 2014 in favour of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, this property is restored to the Sangha.

Pilgrimage to Kailash

Mount Kailash in the Himalayas is an ancient religious place which is considered as the abode of Lord Shiva. It is situated in Tibet (China) and its height is about 22,200 ft. (6,770 metres) above sea level.

In 1937, Shree Ma travelling via Nainital and Ranikhet arrived at Almora. Ma stayed there in the temple of Nanda Devi. Plans for Shree Ma's travels to holy Mount Kailash were finalized there and they started their journey possibly on 13 June 1937. Baba Bholanath, Bhaiji, Gurupriya Didi, Swami Akhandanandaji and few more devotees accompanied Ma.

While climbing the hard mountainous terrain, they came across other pilgrims and the simple mountain folk living there. All felt great attraction towards Ma and when they had to part ways, they did so with tearful eyes. When Ma's party reached the place 'Askot', Ma had a royal reception from the royal family there. The Queen of that estate offered Ma her personal 'dandi' to carry Ma on Her journey.

A strange incident happened at Dharchula, a remote interior place on way to Kailash, from where new coolies had to be engaged who knew how to carry loads in the very difficult mountainous terrain. As per prevailing norms at that time, each coolie was supposed to carry a luggage weighing not more than 35 seers (approx. 30 kg). While checking weight of each luggage, it was found that the box, which was carrying all essential materials, was found weighing 40 seers i.e. five seers more than the permissible limit. Gurupriya Didi was upset, as none of the materials inside the box was dispensable. Finding no other way, she

requested Ma to touch the box so that its weight would reduce miraculously. But Ma avoided that and advised her to wait and see what would happen. However, when the new coolies arrived and each of them rechecked weight of their luggages they had to carry, it was found that weight of that box came down to 34.5 seers without taking out any material from it. The coolie gladly carried the box for onward journey.

While Ma's entourage was proceeding from the place Taklakot, a black hairy dog accompanied Ma on its own and was present all through the journey moving to and fro of Ma's 'dandy'. Whenever Ma would take rest sitting on a stone block, the dog would rest nearby Ma touching Her body. Ma did not indicate who it was.

While covering the most difficult route at very high altitudes, all the members were disturbed due to cold and frequent rains but Ma was mostly calm and quiet. However, Baba Bholanath was always bright and enthusiastic all through the journey. Ma's entourage reached the sacred 'Manasarovar' on the sixth of July 1937 where a very large lake exists around picturesque surroundings. Its water is considered very sacred. Baba Bholanath and Bhaiji, after taking a bath in that lake, received the 'Sannyas-mantra' uttered spontaneously by Ma on Her own. Ma also gave them their monastic names. Bholanath ji became 'Swami Tibbatananda Teertha' and Bhaiji became 'Swami Mounananda Parvat'.

From Manasarovar, they proceeded to holy Kailash and reached the place called 'Bund' at the foothill of Kailash. Everybody was charmed seeing the huge temple shaped snow covered mount Kailash and its wonderful surroundings. Ma also was delighted seeing its splendor

and drew the other's attention to behold the surrounding hills curved beautifully around the mount Kailash, forming a huge natural 'Gauripeeth' around it. A Gauripeeth is considered as the seat of Goddess Gauri, wife of Lord Shiva, in which the Shiva-linga remains fixed and the channel around there meets the purpose of draining the water poured on the Deity. Ma also said that after coming to this place one feels as if one has entered in a different world away from all.

From the place Bund, they started 'Parikrama' (going around) of the holy Kailash, completing it in three days journey and reached the place Gaurikund on 11 July 1937, covering a steep rise of the narrow path leading to that place. At such a height, one feels severe breathing problems. Ma's entourage also experienced the same but all were well due to Ma's grace. As per Ma's advice, all were given some camphor to smell and 'achar' (pickles) etc. to taste in order to reduce the breathing troubles.

There was a snow covered small lake at Gaurikund, which was situated at a height of about 22,000 feet. All the puja rituals and offerings to Kailash are performed only at this place. Baba Bholanath and few others took a bath in that frozen lake after removing the snow from its surface. A bunch of hair (jata) from Bholanathji's head was cut and offered into the Gaurikund. Ma also washed Her head with the water of the pond. Later Ma revealed to Gurupriya Didi that five mahatmas (in subtle forms) wearing saffron coloured dress appeared there and informed Ma that they accompanied Her while travelling around holy Kailash.

From Gaurikund, Ma and Her entourage came down at the foot hill of Kailash on the same day. Their return journey started next day. Instead of coming back to

Manasarovar, Ma's entourage returned via the Rakshas Talao route. After about a month's journey, they arrived back at Almora on 10th of August 1937.

Demise of Bhaiji and coming up of Ashrams in Almora District

Bhaiji's health deteriorated considerably while travelling on the way back from Kailash to Almora. His condition at Almora became serious with high fever. In spite of every possible medical care, Bhaiji could not be saved. He breathed his last on 17 August 1937 in the presence of Shree Ma and Baba Bholanath. He was then about 58 years old.

Much earlier, while staying at Dhaka, Baba Bholanath accepted Bhaiji as 'Dharma Putra' (Spiritual son). Ma also sometimes used to introduce him to others in that way. Thus, he was very close to Baba Bholanath and Ma and he was with them just like a son, spending all his time for their service. Ma had a kheyal (divine will) that Bhaiji was a Brahmin and accordingly She gave him a sacred thread in Ramana Ashram.

Just few minutes before he passed away, he said in a very clear voice expressing great joy, "Ma and I are one, Pitaji (Baba Bholanath) and I are one, and we are all one." Bhaiji repeated his 'Sannyas-mantra' and breathed his last. At that time, Gurupriya Didi, Sw Akhandananda, Hari Ram Joshi, and few others were present there. Ma revealed in their presence about the manner the 'Sannyas-mantra' was given to Bhaiji and Baba Bholanath at the Manasarovar. It was their own great desire for renunciation that made Ma spontaneously utter the 'Sanyas-mantras' for them. Thus being a self-realized sannyasi, Bhaiji's holy remains were

placed in 'Samadhi' at a place called 'Patal Devi' in Almora. Ma had a vision of holy men in ethereal forms springing out of the site. She was told later that the place had been a burial ground in the past for the sadhus. Later, the Almora Ashram was built there in 1943. Ma's birth anniversary was celebrated at the new Ashram. Several holy men including Haribaba and Prabhudatt Brahmachariji were present in that occasion.

Talking about the late Bhaiji, Ma once said that She had seen Bhaiji in a form like a vapour without any garments and made of brightness and luminosity; that form merged in Ma Herself. The great sadhaka reached to such a great height of spirituality that once he told Ma that without following the sequence of different stages of samadhi, he was able to attain the stage of 'Nirvikalpa Samadhi'²⁴. He demonstrated the same when Ma asked for that. However, Ma quickly brought him back to normal by touching his head.

Bhaiji had gained many super natural powers, although he had no interest to utilize or display them. Once, a student was very much eager to meet Ma. He told Bhaiji that his high-school result would be announced within a few days. He was anxious to know whether he would pass or not. Bhaiji took a piece of paper, wrote something on it, gave to the boy after folding it, and told him to see it just before his result is announced. After few days, the boy turned up again, but this time he sought to meet only Bhaiji, because after unfolding that piece of paper he found written on it 'IInd Division' which came to be true.

The book 'Matri Darshan' (Mother as revealed to me) was the first book published about Ma written by Bhaiji.

²⁴ **Nirvikalpa Samadhi** – A state in which the mind ceases to function and only pure consciousness remains, revealing Itself to Itself.



Sacred Kailash Peak



Ma with Gurupriya Didi



**Ma with Baba Bholanath
and Bhaiji**

He wrote twelve distinct points revealing the reality of Ma in this book, which are most useful guidelines for any sadhaka. He wrote several other books like 'Mayer Katha' (Ma revealed Herself), 'Sad Vani'.

A temple was raised over Bhaiji's 'Samadhi'. A 'Narmadeshwar Shiva-linga' was installed there in presence of Shree Ma on 16 April 1954. While bringing the 'Shiva-Linga' to Almora, Brahmachari Panuda of Ma's ashram was miraculously saved from a dangerous bus accident when the bus rolling down into the deep gorge stuck miraculously to a tree there and thus all the passengers including the 'Shiva-Linga' were saved.

The Almora branch of the dance centre run by world famous dancer Udaya Shankar was situated close by Ma's ashram. Udaya Shankar and his brother Pandit Ravi Shankar, the world famous sitar player, along with family members and pupils became Ma's devotees. They used to arrange Durga puja every year in the dance centre. However, in the year 1943, the celebrations were cancelled due to demise of their Guru. The Puja was therefore arranged at Ma's Almora Ashram that year. As usual, the devotees mostly surrounded Ma. She told them one day, "From one life springs many lives – this is the sequence of living beings. The One God splits into all living beings. Thus the saying –where there is jiva, there is Shiva."

Afterwards, Shree Shree Anandamayee Vidyapeeth, a residential educational institution as conceived by Bhaiji was established there where the boys from childhood used to get their education in an atmosphere of the 'Vedic-Rishikul' traditions, along with the current system of education.

One more ashram was established in 1957 at Dhawalchina in Almora district. While proceeding to Kailash, Ma stayed at Dhawalchina on the way. At that time, Bhaiji with Ma went up the nearby hilltop, which was a solitary picturesque place. Bhaiji was charmed seeing the wonderful view of the snow-covered Himalayan ranges almost all around that place and the 25,600 ft. (7,817 metres) high Nanda Devi peak right in front. He expressed his desire to Ma to establish an ashram there so that one can perform sadhana in calm and quiet environment and seeing the captivating view of the snow capped mountains. Ma told about Bhaiji's desire to Hari Ram Joshi who belonged to Almora. Due to Joshiji's great effort, a big forestland was taken on lease and Ma's ashram was established there. However, rainwater was the only source of water there. Ma visited the ashram later and stayed there a few times. Presently, the ashram is having the facilities of water supply and electricity provided by the State Govt.

Demise of Ma's father and Baba Bholanath

Demise of Ma's father - In December 1937, Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya, father of Shree Ma, breathed his last at Calcutta (Kolkata) at the age of seventy-one years. At that time, Shree Ma along with Bholanathji was travelling in a train on the Varanasi route. A few days earlier, Ma had visited Calcutta to see Her ailing father. Later, Shree Ma revealed that at the time of father's death, Shree Ma was with him in her subtle body and gave him the 'Sannyas-mantra'. About six months later, his 'Jyoti-swarup' atma (subtle form radiating divine light) merged into Shree Ma.

Earlier, Ma's father had a desire to install a 'Shiva-Linga', which he could not do so during his lifetime.

However, his son Makhan ('Mamaji' to the ashramites) after constructing a small temple in his own house adjacent to Ma's Varanasi Ashram, installed a 'Shiva-Linga' and thus he fulfilled the wish of his father. That ceremony was carried out on 16 January 1957 in Shree Ma's presence. Ma named the Shiva-Linga after Her father's name and called 'Vipineshwara'. His daily puja is being carried out with the help of Varanasi Ashram and Mamaji's family.

Demise of Baba Bholanath - In April 1938, Ma came to Haridwar to attend the great 'Kumbha Mela' (Kumbha-fair). At the end of the Mela, Ma with Bholanathji returned to Kishenpur Ashram in Dehradun. Bholanathji went to Haridwar again to attend the 'Sannyas' ceremony of Sri Kunj Mohan Mukhopadhyaya, uncle of Gurupriya Didi. He came back from Haridwar with a high fever. Seeing him, Ma understood at one glance that Bholanath was not suffering from an ordinary fever. Few days before his arrival, Ma told Gurupriya Didi that Bholanath would come with some serious illness. He was actually suffering from smallpox. His condition became serious. His days were numbered.

6th May 1938, was the last day of his life. He gratefully accepted the saffron wrappings offered to him by Shree Ma Herself. Like a child, he called her 'Ma'. With Ma's hand on his forehead, he breathed his last. He was then 57 years old. He had a wish earlier to leave his body in presence of Shree Ma and so it happened. His great and selfless life was an example for others to follow. Being a self-realized sannyasi, a proposal was there to arrange 'Sthal-samadhi' (burial) of his sacred body inside the ashram campus at Kishenpur. However, as the death occurred due to an infectious disease, he was given 'Jal-samadhi' in the holy waters of Ganga at 'Neel-Dhara' in Haridwar.

In India, a wife after becoming widow, changes her way of life including dress, food habits etc. as per the rules of the community to which she belongs. However, such compliances were not required for Ma. Although a formal marriage had occurred, Ma was a maiden all through Her life. She said laughingly, "When was I a married woman and when did I become a widow?"

Departure of Baba Bholanath created a deep void in the hearts of Ma's devotees. They were plunged in deep grief. Well-known for his kindness, he had emerged as a father figure to the devotees and a connecting medium between Shree Ma and themselves. Baba Bholanath had initiated a large number of devotees in presence of Shree Ma. All of them lost their Guru. Once a woman devotee told Ma with tears – how Baba Bholanath, after he passed away, appeared in subtle form and fulfilled her earnest desire for 'diksha' by giving her the 'Guru-Mantra', along with all rituals carried at that time. She was overwhelmed with gratitude for this unparalleled kindness.

Thus within ten months, three great self-realized saints close to Shree Ma, left for their eternal abode. Ma said that after accepting the 'Sannyas', both Bhajji and Baba Bholanath did not remain in their bodies for long. Ma also told the ashram brahmacharis that if Baba Bholanath and Bhajji remained alive, they would have the opportunity to see how they could have moulded them nicely, making them fit for the spiritual journey.

Ma arrived at Hardwar and Didima took sannyas

Shree Ma's first visit to Haridwar was in 1926-27 to attend the great 'Kumbha-Mela'. Ma bathed in the 'Brahmakunda', on the first day of the 'Kumbha-shahi-

snana'²⁵ when 'Shobha-yatra' (procession) of the leading sadhus along with 'Naga' monks took place. Ma bathed in the 'Brahmakund', the ancient auspicious pond within the river Ganga and met great sadhus and sages who had come on this occasion.

Ma's second visit to Haridwar was with Her father in 1929. Third visit was in 1934. It was in connection with the 'Sannyas-ceremony' of Gurupriya Didi's father who was then close to 70. Shree Ma stayed in Kankhal for some weeks at that time. Initially he was not prepared to adopt a Sannyas Guru leaving Ma. However, Ma pacified him telling that there is no relationship of master and disciple so far Sannyas is concerned. Therefore, he should not feel that he was going to accept a different Guru. Thereafter he took sannyas from the reputed Mahant of Nirvani Akhara, Swami Mangalanand Giriji and was given the monastic name of Swami Akhandananda. Thereafter, Ma stayed in a hut on the bank of the Ganga at Rishikesh for about two and half months.

In 1938, Shree Ma was in Haridwar for a few months during the Kumbha-Mela. She stayed in a cottage built by Dr Pant on the banks of the Ganga. He was a devotee of Ma and was the Civil Surgeon there. After all the main bathing days, Ma returned to Dehradun where Bholanathji breathed his last on sixth of May 1938.

Later, Didima (Ma's own mother) came to Haridwar with Ma in April 1939 after the marriage of her only son Makhn. She was now free from all family responsibilities. She wished to spend the rest of her life beside Shree Ma only. Ma asked Didima to take sannyas if she wanted to

²⁵ **Kumbha-shahi-snan** – The important bathings in the sacred river take place on specific auspicious days. All the head sadhus along with their followers and 'Naga sadhu', go for bathing in a procession.

stay with Her. Didima readily agreed to it. It was decided to approach the aged and reverend Mahant of Nirvani Akhara, Mahamandaleshwara Swami Mangalanand Giriji, who was staying in Kankhal at Haridwar. At first, he refused to give 'Sannyas-diksha' to a woman, but when he learnt that Didima was the mother of Shree Anandamayee Ma, he readily agreed. On 14 April 1939 on the auspicious day of 'Chaitra-sankranti', Didima received the 'Sannyas Diksha Mantra' in the early hours of the morning after performing the 'Viraja-hom' (A specific 'yajna' performed on such occasion). She was given the monastic name of Swami Muktananda Giri. She was already the very personification of detachment and a real sannyasi at heart.

After the sannyas diksha, Swami Mangalanand Giriji said, "Daughter, I have till today never conferred the sannyas mantra to a woman, but I have conferred it to you, because you are the mother of Anandamayee Mataji. Not only this, I have given you all what should have been given for the sannyas transformation." He was full of supreme joy at finding a disciple full of all virtues to hand over whatever spirituality he had. He told Giriji (Ma's mother) not to touch a fire. It means she cannot cook food even for herself. She was expected to depend upon whatever food she would be provided by others. However, on Ma's request he allowed her to cook for Ma only if She would desire so.

Giriji had no ego. While she was at Dhaka, a devotee was very much astonished seeing the negligence shown towards Giriji when a Brahmachari of the ashram offered her a discarded mango after distributing good mangoes to all others present over there. Giriji tasted a bit from it and placed the remaining in the cow-pot for feeding the cows. When Giriji was asked as why she did not refuse to accept such a fruit that was rotten, Giriji calmly answered that by

doing so she did not like to pain the Brahmachari. There are many such incidents which display enormous patience and no ego within her.

After the passing away of Bholanathji, no 'Guru-Diksha' had taken place in the ashram for a year or two. Later, Shree Ma empowered Giriji (Ma's mother) to give Deeksha (initiation) to the true seekers. Shree Ma said that Giriji possessed all the ten great qualities of 'Dharma' (Religion) needed in a 'Sat-Guru'²⁶. They are purity, kindness, compassion, fortitude, forgiveness, self-control, knowledge, truthfulness, deep understanding, and lack of anger. Confluence of so many great qualities within a person is no doubt very rare. Most of Shree Ma's devotees at that time received 'Diksha' from Giriji only. Her first disciple was Br. Hiruda (Sw. Tanmayanandaji).

Giriji would keep awake for almost full nights and do 'Japa' herself on behalf of her disciples who were unable to do their spiritual practices regularly. Such was her compassion and responsibility for them. She once remarked, "Till all are liberated, where is liberation for me". Great was her feeling for the welfare of others.

Few fortunate ashram brahmacharis were blessed to receive 'sannyas mantra' from Giriji. They were Swami Chinmayananda, Sw. Prakashananda, Sw. Chaitanyananda, Sw. Swaroopananda, Sw. Keshava-nanda, and may be a few others. All of them achieved spiritual advancement to a great extent. About Sw. Prakashananda Ma once said that he was only little away from his spiritual destination. Sw. Chinmayananda and Sw. Swaroopananda later became the General Secretary of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha.

²⁶ Sat-Guru – A self realized Guru who is capable of leading a disciple to gain self-realization.

Swami Kesabananda belonged to Parsi religion. He completed the difficult parikrama (going round) of the sacred river Ganga, by walking. Sw. Chaitanyananda spent a simple divine life in Delhi Ashram for a long time.

Ma said about Giriji that she was holding the single throne of 'Jagat-Guru' available in the kingdom of spirituality, for which she was fully entitled. From the worldly point of view, although she had little education, her spiritual realizations were enormous. She had vast spiritual powers but she had no interest in using or displaying them. Her simple nature never allowed others to know her great spiritual status but the realized saints could know about it. Following are few incidents:

When Giriji was on tour of South India with her disciple Sw. Chinmayananda, she visited Pondichery also. The eminent realized saint Sri Aurobindo was there at that time. Giriji went to his ashram for his darshan and she was in the long queue along with others. Seeing Giriji from long distance, Sri Aurobindo enquired, "Who is she?" A perfect jeweler is capable of recognizing a real jewel. When Giriji in her turn came in front of Sri Aurobindo, he exclaimed in great delight, "What a wonderful flower she is!"

Once while staying in Varanasi Ashram, Ma was very much ill, but Ma had no 'kheyal' to cure Herself. Finding Ma in alarming condition, Shankar Bharatiji, the eminent mahatma in Varanasi at that time, was requested to come to the ashram. When he came to see Ma, at that moment Giriji, as usual, was sitting nearby Ma's cot. After coming out from Ma's room, Bharatiji pointed towards Giriji and said that one should not be worried about Ma so long as mother Giriji was alive.

Mahamandaleshwar Girdhar Narain Puri, the Mahant of Nirvani Akhara was the capable disciple of Sw Mangalananda Giriji and a close devotee of Ma as well. He told to a disciple of Giriji that Giriji knew many 'yogic kriyas' and she was capable to wander frequently in her subtle form.

Chapter – V

The great-learned philosopher Gopinath Kaviraj meets Shree Shree Ma

Shree Ma's first visit to Kashi (Varanasi) was in 1927. Accompanying Ma were Baba Bholanath, Gurupriya Didi and her father. They stayed in the house of Kunj Mohan Mukhopadhaya, the elder uncle of Gurupriya didi. They were staying in the Ramapura area of Varanasi. Shree Ma's presence brought about an atmosphere of continuous festivity. Ma was very often in deep samadhi. It was during that time that Mahamahopadhyay Gopinath Kaviraj, a great sadhaka and one of the most respected Indian scholars visited Shree Ma in September 1928. He was then the Principal of the Govt. College of Sanskrit, currently known as Sampurnanand Sanskrit University. He was widely known as an authority on 'Tantra-shastra'.

He found Ma the very embodiment of all the knowledge contained in the shastras (scriptures). Whenever Ma was in Varanasi, he would find a seat close to Shree Ma and listen carefully as She explained highly philosophical topics in the simplest words. He felt that although Ma never received any formal education, She fully answered all of his spiritual questions. The great quality of Her answers was that She was able to read the thought behind the question and sensed the precise need of the person asking for Her help. There was a complete adaptation of the reply to the capacity of the individual concerned and to the demands of any particular situation.

According to Sri Kaviraj, Ma's identity was beyond ordinary human understanding. Ma Herself was beyond

all 'bhavas' (inner feelings) although possessing the supreme inner feelings. Ma was the source of infinite types of bhavas in infinite ways. Who is capable of perceiving such 'Turiyateet'²⁷ state of Ma? Whoever tries to see or understand Ma in whatever way, Ma reveals Herself to him in that very way. In order to understand Ma, it is essential to surrender oneself completely and concentrate on Ma. It will not be possible to understand Her identity, remaining separate from Ma. Kaviraj ji remained one of the foremost devotees of Shree Ma all through his life.

Once in his letter to Gurupriya Didi, Kaviraj ji differentiated about anyone's association with a saint who possess sattva guna²⁸ and that with a 'Gunateet' (beyond all qualities) saint like Ma who possess all the qualities but remain in the state beyond their effectual limitations. According to him, one may feel progress in his spiritual path after coming in contact with the former type of saints due to influence of their satvik qualities. However, in such case, one's adverse tendencies for the time being remain suppressed within him and do not go away permanently. They may crop up again under favourable circumstances. However, after coming in association with a 'Gunateet' saint like Ma Anandamayee, one may get rid of the adverse tendencies permanently. However, in such case, sometimes it has been seen that instead of gaining any spiritual advancement, one faces decadence for the time being. It happens so because those suppressed adverse tendencies

²⁷ 'Turiyateet' – 'Turiya' is a state of consciousness, which is beyond the state of wakefulness, sleep, and dream. 'Turiyateet' is well beyond the state of 'Turiya'.

²⁸ Sattva-guna - Guna is the qualities in any person. It may be of three types – sattva (serenity), rajas (passion) and tamas (ignorance). Sattva gun has all the good qualities, is pious and noble.

get very much excited after coming in association with a 'Gunateet' like Ma. Those come out from within for their permanent elimination and thereafter, the satvik qualities appear to remain stable.

In support of Kaviraj ji's letter, Ma said that when She was a child, She used to come out to play in the courtyard of Her house after the rains and She would joyfully splash the accumulated rainwater with Her tiny legs. Generally, in the rainy season, the worms underneath the wet ground come out and are seen crawling here and there. In order to avoid the possibility of crushing the worms under Ma's feet, Her mother Didima would sprinkle limewater all over the courtyard so that all the worms would come out at one time. Thereafter, she would sweep the courtyard for their permanent removal. Citing the incident Ma said that whoever would come to Her, She would do the same thing similar to sprinkling of limewater. Going to lesser competent mahatmas, the adverse tendencies may remain suppressed within themselves but after coming to Ma, they are brought out. Ma said, "It is no doubt good for them. Is it safe to allow the snakes to remain in the holes where you stay? Is it not good to remove them for ever before they raise their hood to harm you?"

Kaviraj ji wrote in his book 'Sadhu-darshan and satsanga' regarding Ma's state of samadhi. He gave in detail the answers given by Ma in this regard to the queries of the reputed saint and speaker Swami Dayanandaji when he came to see Ma and had a personal talk with Her in presence of Kaviraj ji. Swamiji was the Mahamandaleshwar of 'Bharat dharma' and had a strong belief that Bhagawati (Goddess Durga) Herself descended in this world as Ma Anandamayee.

Once Swami Dayanandaji asked Ma what She was in fact. Ma answered, "Well, I am that, what you consider me to be – not more, not less." Swamiji asked again that whenever Ma remains in the state of samadhi, was it a 'Sabikalpa-samadhi' or a 'Nirbikalpa-samadhi' and whether mind then persists or not? Ma told him "Baba, how can I judge it? Staying in samadhi has been seen by you and that version too is yours – therefore, it is also for your consideration whether that was a Samadhi and of what category that was. However all I can say that in the midst of all apparent changes of state in body and mind, I feel, I am always the same. Gaining or detachment of samadhi is your version, for this body both are the same. Now you tell what will you call such a state – is it Samadhi?" According to the Mahatmas, Ma was always in the state of 'Sahaj-samadhi' i.e. remaining in samadhi uninterruptedly in most natural way even when She was engaged in physical activities like moving, talking, working etc. Such a rare spiritual state is beyond our capability to understand.

About the state of samadhi Ma said, "The end of the path of all moods and actions is samadhi." On the concept of 'Atma' and 'Paramatma' Ma said, "Look, it is like a tree and its shadow; if you intently look at the tree only, then you will not see the shadow. When your goal is absolute, then you will find that there is just one self; the shadow is that of the tree nothing else."

In 1935, Kaviraj ji requested Shree Ma to visit his Guru – Paramahansa Vishuddhananda, a reputed Yogi of that time and took Ma to his Ashram in Maldahia area at Varanasi. He was then very old and was widely known as 'Gandha-Baba'. He had acquired the secret of transmutation of one thing to another using the 'Solar-energy'. He was

overwhelmed by Ma's holy presence. Alone with Ma, he had a long talk on spiritually related topics. At Shree Ma's request, he materialized a crystal stone from a flower and developed the smell of a rose in a handkerchief. When Ma told him that She knew how he managed it all, he humbly looked at Her and said that it could be done all due to Ma's power only. Before leaving, Ma told his devotees not to be beguiled, but to take Baba's real essence. Soon after meeting Ma, Swami Vishuddhanandaji passed away in Varanasi.

Sri Kaviraj received 'Padma Bibhushan' title from the President of India. Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the eminent philosopher and leader met him several times at his residence in Varanasi. Sri Kaviraj stayed in Ma's ashram at Varanasi for about a decade at the end of his life for sadhana (spiritual practices) and attained high spiritual level. He passed away there in 1977. Ma said that such a learned man was never seen in the present era.

Mahatmas (Saints) came in contact with Ma

The realized Mahatmas saw Ma at the top of the spiritual world since her teen years. According to the Mahamandaleshwar of Bhola Giri Ashram Swami Devananda, Ma was an amazing exception in the divine kingdom. She was fully realized right from Her birth and therefore, Ma's whole life passed in a wonder which was beyond our conception.

Initially, male Sadhus wearing Gerua (red brown) coloured dress maintained a distance from Her, as they could not accept a woman-saint who was in simple white dress. However, slowly the barrier was broken and they were charmed by Her spirituality and blissful personality. Prabhudatt Brahmachariji, the reputed saint of Jhusi at

Allahabad first introduced Ma to the sadhu community. Gradually, when other eminent Mahatmas came in contact with Her and realized Her unimaginable great status in the spiritual kingdom, She was recognized as the Universal Mother in the sadhu community as well. Many of them confided their problems and sought Her guidance to move along the path of their sadhana.

Whoever did some 'tapasya' (penance) in the past or in the previous births, Ma invariably bestowed on them Her grace and gave them darshan, either going personally to them, or going in a subtle form or they themselves came to Ma. Many realized saints came to Ma of their own or came after receiving divine direction from their chosen Deity or from their Guru. Following are few of such eminent Mahatmas who came in contact with Ma.

Shankar Bharatiji was an eminent realized saint in Varanasi and a greatly learned person in the sadhu community in early forties of the past century. He was residing near the famous Annapurna Temple at Varanasi. He used to live only on boiled vegetables collected from the left over or rejects of the vegetable market when all the vendors went back to their home.

Once he became very ill when his attendant was on leave and consequently he had to remain without having any food for few days. Helpless Bharatiji went to Ma Annapurna temple (the Goddess who provides 'Anna', i.e. food) and asked the Deity, how one remains without any food who stays so near to her domain. At that time, Ma was at Varanasi Ashram, which was quite at a distance from Bharatiji's place. Ma all of a sudden reacted on her own, called a brahmachari and sent all the food materials to Bharatiji, which surprised him deeply.

One day during the prayer, Bharatiji had darshan of his 'Ishta-devi'- the Deity 'Tripurasundari'. The Deity told him to go and see Ma Anandamayee within whose sacred body She always remains. Soon after, Bharatiji came to Ma on foot and offered Her a big garland and prostrated (sashtang pranam) to Ma. It became news to the sadhu community when they came to know about it, as Bharatiji never used to go and meet any one and always refrained from meeting any woman. Consequently, other sadhus also started coming to Ma for spiritual guidance. According to Bharatiji - "Ma is the embodiment of Chidananda Swaroop. The world is blessed by the presence of Her divine body."

Sevadasi Mataji, the eminent Mahatma of Navadwip in Bengal was the devotee of Govindaji (Lord Krishna). He always remained in 'Radha-bhava' (Self as Radha) and dressed like a 'Gopi'. He was in a direct communication with Govindaji. Surprisingly, he never consumed anything, not even a drop of water for more than two decades and his excretions also stopped completely. He never went outside the ashram without Govindaji's permission. When Ma went to Navadwip in 1937, Sevdasiji came one day to meet Ma and said that the Divine Govindaji directed him to go personally to Ma within whose sacred body He always resides. She took Ma to her ashram with great honour and told Ma, "You are Lord Krishna in person." According to him, Govindaji was within Ma since Ma's infancy.

Sri Haribaba, a saint of very high order, was from Hoshiarpur in Punjab. Haribaba belonged to Sikh community but he was a great devotee of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He had seen Ma for the first time at a place Sahasradhara in Dehradun when Prabhudatt Brahmachariji



Ma with Hari Baba and Sw. Krishnananda Ji of Mumbai



Ashram Sadhus from left : Sw. Bhaskarananda, Sw. Nirmalananda, Sw. Nirvanananda, Sw. Paramananda, Sw. Bhagabatananda, Sw. Brahmananda (Bibhuda)
Sri Nitai Basu Mallick

arranged a Yajna there and invited Ma to attend the ceremony. Haribaba's Guru, a realized saint, told him that it is Ma, who grants 'moksha' (liberation) to the aspirants. Thereafter, Haribaba came to Ma as per direction of his Guru. Since then, his devotion and veneration for Ma were quite outstanding. Ma also had a great affection and respect for him and said that such a Mahatma was rare in the present era.

In 1955, Haribaba was seriously ill and was operated at a Nursing Home in Delhi. One day, when his condition became very alarming, Ma came to see him. At the entrance door of Haribaba's room, his Gurudeva who was not alive, appeared in subtle form and requested Ma to save his life. By Ma's grace, Haribaba passed the crisis. Thereafter, he spent much of his time in Ma's company. Ma often used to adjust Her programme to suit his convenience.

On Haribaba's request, Ma once visited his ashram at Bundh in Bulandshahar District where with his initiative a long embankment along the river Ganga was built with the help of voluntary labours. Thus, hundreds of villages could be saved from floodwater of that river. During Ma's stay there, a unique incident happened. A villager brought loose earth on his bullock cart to dump them on the embankment. Unfortunately, one of the bulls collapsed and died there. Finding no other way, the simple villager refused to dispose of the dead bull. According to him, when such great spiritual persons like Ma and Haribaba were present there, they should bring the bull back to life. Hearing this, Ma told them to do continuous kirtan near the dead bull. After a daylong kirtan, Ma came near the bull; She touched its head and said, "How long will you lie down?" Immediately after Her divine touch, the bull got up and the villager's happiness was worth seeing. Such life-restoring

incidents happened on other occasions also due to Ma's divine grace.

In January 1970, Ma went to see Haribaba at Delhi where he was severely ill. When Ma was returning to Varanasi, Haribaba like a child was determined to accompany Ma and refused vehemently the advice of his disciples who were pressing him not to move. However, on Ma's advice, Dr.Durgadas Sengupta, a reputed heart specialist of Delhi and an earnest devotee of Ma accompanied Haribaba during the train journey. After few days of arrival at Varanasi, he passed away in the Ashram when Ma was present at his bedside. Thus, the great Mahatma who was a close devotee of Ma passed away the way he earnestly desired.

Sri Oriya Baba of Vrindavan was a realized saint of great fame in that part of Northern India. Haribaba often stayed at Vrindavan in Oriya Baba's ashram. The aged Oriya Baba had also great affection and devotion towards Ma.

Once, in presence of great mahatmas, Oriya Baba caught hold of Ma's hand in great emotion and with tears, he said, "Ma, I failed to recognize you." Ma often visited that ashram to attend the satsang and 'Raslila' there which depicts play from life of Lord Krishna. At Vrindavan, when Oriya Baba was ailing he would not leave Ma and would demand her presence near his sickbed. The two spent the days like a father and his little daughter. Ma had given a hint to Gurupriya didi that Oriya Baba's sudden burst of emotion could be an indication of his impending demise. Soon after, Oriya Baba suddenly expired when he met with an accident in his ashram. Ma remained present during Babaji's 'bhandara' (feast) and other functions connected with his 'Mahanirvana'.

Triveni Puriji, the eminent realized saint of Punjab was widely known as 'Khanna Baba'. He was a great Vedantist. To a query from a devotee whether Ma was an 'Avatar' (Incarnation of God), he said, "Avatar is a small thing; Ma is That, from where the 'Avatars' incarnate. He also said, "As all the rivers meet the ocean but no variation of its level takes place, similarly all the religious bhavas (spiritual ecstasy) are destined towards Ma and under all circumstances Ma always remains in the same state. As there is no limitation of the ocean, similarly Ma cannot be bound within limits."

Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj was the great-realized saint and founder of the Divine Life Society at Rishikesh. Ma went to see this aged Mahatma at his ashram. Swami Shivanandaji said later about Ma that She was the most completely blossomed flower of India. His trusted disciple and a realized saint Swami Chidanandaji and many others of that ashram had a great regard for Ma and used to visit Her frequently to have Her blessings.

Paramahansa Yogananda, an eminent saint and founder of 'World Yogada Satsang Society' in India and 'Self Realization Fellowship' in America had written in his renowned book, 'Autobiography of a Yogi' that he met several saints in India who realized God but he never had the opportunity to meet such a spiritually elevated saint as Shree Ma. Once he requested Ma to say something about Herself. Ma said politely, "Baba, there is little to tell. My consciousness has never associated itself with this temporary body. Before I came on this earth, I was the same. As a little girl, I was the same. I grew into womanhood, but still I was the same. When the family in which I was born, made all arrangements for this body to be married, 'I

was the same'. In front of you now, 'I am the same'. Even afterwards, though the dance of creation changes around me in the hall of eternity, 'I shall be the same". In this way, Ma revealed about Herself to Swamiji.

Swami Sharananandaji was a great-realized saint and founder of 'Manav Seva Sangha' at Vrindavan. He attended many major functions arranged in Ma's ashrams when Ma was present. It is said that in his early life, Swamiji lost his eyesight soon after having darshan of Lord Krishna and thus he was away from worldly sights forever. He said that Ma Herself is the 'Purushottam' (the highest divine). His Vrindavan ashram adjacent to Ma's ashram was inaugurated in 1953 in the holy presence of Shree Ma.

Sitaram Baba Omkarnath, a realized mahatma of very high order from Bengal and aged nearly hundred years, had a great affection towards Ma. He visited Ma on several occasions. He had written a letter to Shree Ma revealing in short Ma's real 'Swaroop' (identity). He wrote, "Ma, you are carrying on your 'Lila' (divine play), all being yourself. Before the creation, you were all alone. You desired to become many. You took birth. You made yourself the great 'Ahamkar-Panchatanmatra-Panchbhoot' (the ego, the first five subtle elements and the five gross elements) and you became the infinite universe. Accept millions of salutations to you and to your 'Lila'." About Ma he said, "This is Ma-Bhabatarini, the Bhairabi of Dakshineswar whom Thakur (Sri Ramkrishna Parmahansadev) used to worship".

Sw. Girdhar Narayan Puriji, the Mahant of Nirvani Akhara in Haridwar, was very much attached to Ma. One day he made an elaborate arrangement to offer puja at the sacred temple of Shakambhari Devi, a form of Goddess Durga. But in the previous night before the puja

day, he had a vision that Ma Herself was the same Deity. Therefore, he came next day early morning at the ashram and offered puja to Ma with the entire articles he arranged for offering the puja at Shakambhari Temple. Ma empowered him to give 'Sannyas-mantra' to the ashram Brahmacharis who wanted to become a sannyasi.

Gradually many other mahatmas came in contact with Ma, amongst them were Shankaracharyas, Mahants of all Akharas, Mahamandaleshwars, and sadhus of different religions and religious organizations having great followings. Ma always received them most humbly with due honour. They also loved to visit Ma whenever it was possible to have Her motherly affection and sought Ma's guidance and blessing in their spiritual journey. Most of them attended several ashram-functions in Ma's presence.

Mohananda Brahmachariji was a devoted sadhaka and a disciple of the reputed saint Balananda Brahmachariji of Deoghar. He had a great respect for Ma. He met Ma for the first time in his Guru's ashram when he was engaged in deep sadhana.

Once in the late night when he was about to start taking his food, a strange desire came in his mind. He wanted to feed Ma first and only then to start eating, but he was hesitating to disturb Her so late at night. Right at that moment, he heard someone knocking at the door. Opening the door, he was overwhelmed to see Ma standing there alone. He fed Her few pieces of fruit before Ma went back to Her room. In 1948, the ailing Mohananandaji was in great delight when Ma came to his bedside. He said that he was strongly remembering Ma in his illness. He continued visiting Ma's ashram even after Ma had passed away.

Gopal Thakur was a disciple of eminent saint Satyadeb Thakur of Bengal. He was a respected sadhaka who was staying in his ashram at Allahabad with his family. After meeting Ma, he became Her great devotee. He used to perform Durga puja every year with immense spiritual feeling. The specialty in his puja was that all his disciples used to perform puja along with him, uttering puja mantras in chorus.

During the Durga puja at Allahabad in 1944, Ma went to Gopal Thakur's place. Ma's unexpected presence overwhelmed him. He exclaimed, "Ma, what a good fortune for me that you have come, to see your own worship being performed." For him, Ma was Ma Durga Herself and the living 'Geeta'.

During the puja suddenly he asked Ma, "Does Ma Durga really come within this earthen Durga statue?" Ma immediately got up and touched the statue from the feet to the head and then She told Gopal Thakur to put his ear to the chest of the Durga statue. Gopal Thakur was very much astonished to hear the sound of a heartbeat. He bitterly wept saying that he committed a great mistake disbelieving the presence of Ma Durga in this statue. He repeatedly prayed for pardon from Ma for this lapse.

Ma never met the great-realized saints like Sri Aurobindo and Raman Maharshi who were alive when Ma was living, but they considered Ma in a rare supreme status in the spiritual world. However, after their passing, Ma visited their ashrams when their disciples had taken Her with great honour. Ma had a memorable meeting with the aged French Mother, a reputed realized saint in Podichery Ashram of Sri Aurobindo. Ma was at Thiruvanamalai, the birthplace of Raman Maharshi where about ten thousand people were eagerly waiting to see Her.

Ma's subtle connections with the great saints, even with those who expired before Ma appeared physically in this world, mostly remained unknown unless She revealed any of them. Ma had indicated that She had close subtle connection with the great saint of Dakshineswar – Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev – a great devotee of Ma Kali. Ma appeared in Her physical form after about eleven years of his passing away. When Ma was taken to Dakshineswar for the first time in 1938 and She was taken to the room where Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev used to stay, Ma said that the furniture in the room had been kept in the same manner as She had seen when Paramahansa Dev was living in that room.

While staying at Kishenpur Ashram at Dehradun, one day Ma asked for a conveyance in the early morning and arrived at the nearby ashram of Ramkrishna Mission. She went straight inside the small temple of Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev and standing before his photograph, She said, "Baba, this little girl has come as you desired." It became known later that Paramahansa Dev himself appeared before Ma in the preceding night and requested Her to come to his place the next day and that day was the sacred birthday of Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev.

Several mahatmas of Ramkrishna Mission came to Ma later to have Her blessings. Mukti Baba (Swami Nirgunananda), a very senior monk of Ramkrishna Mission and direct disciple of Shree Shree Sharada Ma (wife of Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev) came to Ma permanently around 1940 and mostly stayed in Ma's Varanasi Ashram until he passed away there. He said, "He preferred to stay with Ma as he feels he is with Sharada Ma". Another disciple of Sharada Ma, Swami Gyanananda (Gyan

Maharaj) came several times to Ma. During Ma's visit at Navadwip in 1930, he on his own accord arranged meeting of Ma with the aged respected saint Gauri Ma who was a disciple of Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev. Gauri Ma was immensely delighted seeing Ma. One more disciple of Sharada Ma, Ruma Devy from Kumayun hill region, was so much attracted seeing Ma that she accompanied Her during Her return journey from Kailash and stayed with Ma for few years for advancement in sadhana and expired in Ma's ashram at Varanasi.

Swami Ranganathananda, the renowned preacher of Vedanta from Ram Krishna Mission, came for Ma's darshan during Her Janmotsav in May 1977 in Dehradun. Later, he became the President of that respected organization. One may appreciate to know that the first General Secretary of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha was Sri Ashutosh Bhattacharya who was a disciple of Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev. He continued in this position for about fifteen years.

Ma's unannounced visit to Ramkrishna Mission Headquarters at Belur took place in March 1981 in connection with the 145th birthday anniversary of Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev. Ma had a special talk with the President of the Math, Swami Vireshwarananda, regarding the request made by all the disciples of Sri Ramkrishna to Ma when they appeared in subtle form before Her. She handed over in writing to the President the details of Her vision. However, the concerning facts about the vision remained unrevealed to others.

Devatas, Siddhas, Sadhus and departed persons in their subtle forms, visited Ma regularly. Sometimes it so

happened that an excellent divine smell spread inside Ma's room. Ma indicated only that some Mahapurushas (Realized saints) in subtle form had arrived. Sometimes She would indicate to offer 'asana' for such arrivals or ask to light an incense stick.

When Ma visited Bodh Gaya in October 1956, everyone who accompanied Ma experienced a superb divine smell for a short period underneath the holy banyan tree. When Ma was asked about it, She indicated that Lord Buddha made His presence known to them in that way.

A number of people joined Ma's ashram and became sadhus and brahmacharis. Even those who had received Diksha from other Gurus, but were very much inclined towards Ma, joined as brahmacharis in Ma's ashram.

Swami Paramanandaji, a highly advanced sadhu and a learned 'Vedanti' (knowledgeable about Veda) came to stay with Shree Ma permanently in 1938 in Dehradun. He was the disciple of the realized saint Brahmagnya Ma of Bengal. Baba Bholanath brought Paramanandaji to Ma when he was busy in sadhana at Uttarkashi and Gangotri. Paramanandaji gave word to Bholanathji at that time that he would serve Ma after completion of his sadhana. This word he kept as long as he was alive.

From the moment he joined Ma, he remained busy with all sorts of work in the ashram. He was not only a sannyasi but also an expert cook, a born engineer and possessed extraordinary organizing capacity. In all the big functions like Ma's birthday celebrations, Durga puja, Samyam-Saptaha, Bhagabat-Saptaha etc., Swamiji was invariably the overall in-charge because of his great organizing capacity and devotion towards Ma. On Ma's request, he agreed to become the General Secretary of Shree

Shree Anandamayee Sangha and continued throughout his life. Swamiji expired in Kankhal Ashram in March 1983.

Swami Avadhootji, a great saint of Punjab, was a disciple of the respected saint Khanna Baba. He was also with Paramananda Swamiji in Uttarkashi, studying 'Vedanta' from the eminent aged saint Devi Giriji Maharaj who had a great affection and regard for Ma. Avadhootji once asked Paramanandaji why he wished to devote his life in the service of Shree Ma. Paramanandaji replied that he saw in Ma all the qualities of a 'Sthitapragnya' (perfect being) as described in the 'Bhagavad Geeta'.

Once in the presence of Avadhootji, a sadhu with his followers came to Ma and started abusing Her profusely without any reason. Ma was calm and quiet all throughout and asked the angry devotees not to react. Seeing this unusual rare quality in Ma, Avadhootji himself surrendered to Her forever and began coming to Ma. On his inspiration, many other sadhus followed him. After attending Ma's Janmotsab ceremony in 1973, he stayed in Ma's ashram at Vrindavan where he expired.

Virajanadaji Maharaj came to Ma forever leaving his family and a good job in Tata steel plant at Jamshedpur where he was an engineer. He started looking after all the works at the Head Office of the Sangha in Varanasi Ashram. Virajanandaji received deep knowledge of Shastras (Scriptures) from Sri Gopinath Kaviraj, the great-learned man in Varanasi. With his help, Virajanandaji published the renowned book 'Amar Vani' in which Ma's sayings were compiled with Kaviraj Ji's shastriya interpretations.

Afterwards he continued compiling Ma's life incidents and Ma's answers to various questions in Bengali language and published them in six volumes. Ma named

the book as 'Swakriya Swarasamrita'. In the preface of Volume IV, Virajanandaji has mentioned that it is a fact that almost all the words recorded in it, excluding obviously certain statement here and there, are directly from Ma's lips, apparently for the benefit of us all. Ma's answers in that book were 'Herself to Herself' i.e. where the 'I' and 'You' are identical. Ma explained that since God Himself is the word 'Swakriya', He Himself is the word, He Himself is the act of hearing, in fact, it is He only who is everything.

Virajanandaji himself translated all the volumes into the English language. He said that some spiritual topics, which were not clearly explained in the scriptures, Ma explained them clearly in this book. Regarding the complicated language used in this book, Ma said that as the sadhaka would gradually advance in his sadhana, he would be able to pick up the concealed meanings from those answers by repeated reading. Virajanandaji called this book as 'Param Maha Bhagabat'. He said about Ma, "If all the branches of a tree are considered to be the various religions, then Ma is the root of that tree from where the sap of the tree flows to nourish all the branches i.e. from Ma Herself, all the religions get nourishment for their survival."

Virajanandaji was a good sadhaka as well as a great learned man. Receiving Ma's instruction, he used to cook his own food all through his life. In the later part of his life, he became the Sadhu Pramukh of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. He expired on 1 August 2005 in Kankhal Ashram at the age of 102.

Mauni Ma, Swami Akhandananda (Gurupriya Didi's father) and few more sadhus in Ma's ashram could achieve high spiritual achievements due to Ma's grace. Many

unmarried girls, widows and aged women also joined the ashram to have Ma's company and for their spiritual advancement. Amongst them, many were welleducated and belonged to well to do families. All of them practised an ideal religious life and their endeavours to carryout Ma's instructions deserve appreciation.

Amongst the ashram brahmacharis, few were freedom fighters, who rebelled against the British rule in India and were punished. Once, while Ma was staying in the Raipur Ashram, one such Bengali young man came to Ma. The police from Calcutta followed to arrest him and arrived in Raipur Ashram after getting information of his presence there. The Police Officer came and after showing the photograph of the young man, he enquired whether the person was there or not. Ma simply asked him to verify it himself, as all the persons staying in the ashram were present there. Surprisingly, the Police Officer failed to locate the young man, although he was very much present sitting nearby Ma. Thereafter, the young man joined the ashram and after taking sannyas from Giriji (Ma's mother), he was known as Swami Chinmayananda. Similarly, two more young men also came under the shelter of Ma at Varanasi Ashram and stayed with Her for their whole lives. After receiving sannyas from Giriji, they were known as Swami Prakashananda and Swami Swaroopananda.

Kalachand da, a freedom fighter and associate of Sri Aurobindo, joined Ma's Ranchi Ashram after passing a long period in solitary confinement in the jail at Andaman Island. He was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda (a disciple of Sri Ramkrishna Parmahansadev). He attained spirituality of very high order following Ma's guidance and became a sannyasi. His nephew Brahmachari Panuda, after

completion of his higher studies, also came to Ma and joined the ashram.

Gradually, many more sadhakas came and joined Ma's ashram. Whoever came to Ma, they were blessed with spiritual advancement. However, Ma said, "Neither anyone is invited here nor anyone is asked to go away. Whoever came over here, he came for his own sake and he will continue to stay here till his fate will permit him. Thereafter, he will go away giving some or the other reason". Bhajji used to say that if anyone gets an opportunity to come to Ma and stays here even like a stray dog he should feel fortunate for getting such an opportunity due to many of his past good deeds in his present or past bi

Arrival of a few great leaders of the nation

Ma stayed for sometime in Dehradun in 1933 in a small room in the Manohar Temple at Anand-Chowk locality. The administrators of the temple were from Kashmir and were related to Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru²⁹, who was in Dehradun jail at that time because of leading the national movement against the British rule. All of them were deeply attracted and drawn to Ma.

Knowing about Ma from the Tankha family who were residing nearby the Manohar Temple, Pandit Nehru's mother Smt. Swarup Rani and wife Kamalaji also came to Manohar Temple for Ma's darshan in July 1933. Kamalaji's response to Shree Ma's presence was deep and unique. She became so much attracted to Ma that on one occasion, she could not resist herself and visited Ma around midnight along with her only child, Indira. They spent the whole

²⁹ Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru – The great Congress leader who became the first Prime Minister of India after its independence on 15 August 1947 and continued until he passed away in May 1964.

night lying on a blanket stretched by Bhaiji on the floor of Ma's room. Sometimes, Kamalaji took Ma in her car to a secluded place in the hills, nearby the Mussouri Road. She used to lie down on the ground keeping her head on Ma's lap and both passed hours together in trance without having any feeling of the small insects moving freely on their bodies. On her insistence, Ma had a Yajna performed with great splendour at the Ambika-temple situated on a hill on way to Rajpur. Until the end of her life, Kamalaji remained in close contact with Shree Ma.

In 1935, Ma on Her way to Almora visited the ailing Kamalaji at the Bhawali sanatorium where she was admitted to continue her treatment. Thereafter, Kamalaji left for Switzerland for her medical treatment there. Sometimes she had Shree Ma's subtle and divine darshan there also. A strange phenomenon happened. One day, a devotee from Calcutta draped and dressed Ma in a wide, red-bordered sari, although Ma was always seen wearing a white 'dhoti' with thin borders. After some days of this event, Bhaiji received a letter from Kamala Nehru from Switzerland. She specified a particular day when she saw Shree Ma wearing a wide red-bordered sari. It actually happened on that very day when Ma was in such a sari at Haridwar.

Mahatma Gandhi, the most prominent leader of the nation, heard much about Ma Anandamayee from Smt. Kamala Nehru. She very much wanted Gandhiji to meet Ma and Gandhiji was also keen to meet Her. While staying at Wardha, Gandhiji sent a close associate and an eminent leader of the Congress Party Sri Jinnalal Bajaj to Ma at Raipur Ashram in August 1941, to enquire about Ma. Surprisingly, Jinnalal was so much drawn to Shree Ma that in spite of receiving several telegrams from Gandhiji,

he was unwilling to leave Ma and go back to Wardha, until Ma advised him to respond to Gandhiji and return to him. He went to Wardha only to come back again and this time he was eager to spend the rest of his life in sadhana living near Ma. He bought six bighas of land adjacent to Ma's ashram at Raipur but he did not live long. After he passed away in 1942, his wife Smt. Janaki Bai and family donated the entire land to Ma for the Raipur ashram.

Soon after Jinnalal's death, Ma visited the bereaved family. They were then living at Gopuri village close to Wardha where Jinnalal made all arrangements earlier for Ma's stay. Ma saw him in subtle form during Her stay there. Ma consoled the family and said, "There is no death of the soul. Can anyone knife through water and divide it into two parts? Death is just a change of state. Everything remains as it was. In fact, one who passes away merges into the One who is always present."

Gandhiji at that time was in his Sevagram Ashram at Wardha and was not well. He was very keen to meet Shree Ma. He sent Dr. Rajendra Prasad³⁰ and Acharya Vinoba Bhave³¹ to bring Ma with them to Wardha. Kamalnayanji, son of Late Bajaj, took Ma and Her companions to Sevagram Ashram.

Mahatma Gandhi was immensely attracted to Ma's radiant personality. He himself told Ma in presence of all other leaders present there as how Jinnalal after returning from Ma, had told him that he felt divine peace within three days in the company of Ma, that he could not feel in fifteen years of company with Gandhiji. Gandhiji asked Ma to stay

³⁰ Dr. Rajendra Prasad – A great leader of the nation. He became the first President of India after it became republic in 1950.

³¹ Acharya Vinoba Bhave – A true follower of Mahatma Gandhi who earned fame for implementing the unique 'Bhu-daan' movement,

in Sevagram for at least two days. However, despite dhiji's earnest entreaties, Ma stayed at the ashram only overnight. The two spent the whole day like a little daughter meeting Her father after a long time. Even at night, as per request of Gandhiji, Ma stayed in his room with a few of Her attendants and slept on a nearby bed. The ailing Kasturba, wife of Gandhiji, came to Ma and said with deep feeling that for long time she had the desire to have Her darshan, which could be fulfilled only now.

While leaving Wardha, Ma indicated to Janaki Bai, the wife of Jannalal Bajaj, at the Railway Station to convey to Gandhiji that time was passing away fast; his small child (i.e., Ma Herself) would come at a ripe moment to take him with Her. Hearing this from Ma, Janaki Bai and others present there felt scared about Gandhiji's survival. Ma assured them saying that nothing was going to happen that soon.

Later in October 1946, Ma attended Gandhiji's prayer meeting in Birla House in New Delhi on his special request. The two had a long chat that day. When Gandhiji ardently requested Ma to come over to Sevagram forever and never leave that place, Ma said, "Pitaji (father), don't you realize I am always with you as I am with you now. I never leave your company." Gandhiji said "But I do not find you and others would not believe your statement." Ma emphatically said, "Believe me, Pitaji, I am telling you the truth. Your little girl never utters a lie." Gandhiji asked Ma, why did She wander around so much? Ma replied, "But Pitaji, I am really at the same place. There is just one garden, and I move around within its premises."

Possibly once more Gandhiji met Ma before his tragic death in January 1948. At that time, Ma was in



Ma with Prime Minister Nehru and Mrs. Indira Gandhi at Ma's Janmotsav function at Allahabad in 1961



Ma with the Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada in Varanasi Ashram in 1971

Allahabad. After hearing the death news of Mahatma Gandhi, Ma's immediate reaction was "It is just like Jesus Christ." Ma said, "Jesus Christ absorbed the entire violence within his own body before laying it down. He did not have any ill feeling even towards violence. Similarly, Gandhiji also vanquished violence with his force of 'Ahimsa' (Non-violence). He fell down calmly taking the name of Lord Rama with folded hands."

Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, a prominent leader and educationist came for Ma's darshan at Kishenpur Ashram in Dehradun with Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri who after Nehru became the Prime Minister of India. Malviyaji, the founder of the Banaras Hindu University, once requested Ma to visit the University. The place where Shree Ma was received is where the Vishwanath Temple stand today which is India's tallest temple built by the Birlas. Ma was invited again to be the guest of honour at the annual convocation of the University in 1950. Malviyaji became a great devotee of Ma. He used to carry a picture of Ma and the book 'Sadvani' compiled by Bhaiji, and he kept them on his bedside.

Pandit Nehru with Sardar Patel³² came for Ma's darshan at the Kishenpur Ashram in May 1947 only a few months before India's independence. Later, even after becoming Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru came to meet Ma whenever it was possible for him to find time from his busy schedule. Gradually, all those in the Nehru family became close devotees to Shree Ma.

Several other prominent leaders of the nation like Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, Babu

³² Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel – A bold leader of the nation who became the first Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Minister after independence of India. Several of his close relatives became earnest devotees of Ma.

Jagjivan Ram, Acharya Kripalani, Jai Prakash Narain, Guljari Lal Nanda, Purusottam Das Tandon, Sampurnananda, Sri Prakash, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and many more prominent leaders met Ma, seeking Her blessings.

Kamalaji, wife of Pandit Nehru, once expressed her great desire to take Ma to their home 'Anand Bhawan' at Allahabad, but that wish remained unfulfilled as she expired in 1936. However, it became possible when Pandit Nehru along with his daughter Smt. Indira Gandhi, attended Ma's Janmotsav function at Allahabad in May 1961 and got the opportunity to take Ma to 'Anand Bhawan' for a few days of stay there. Ma was accommodated in a beautiful tent erected on their campus as she was not entering in any grihastha's (householder's) house.

Pandit Nehru had a strong belief in Ma regarding Her unlimited spiritual power. In 1962, when India was in deep trouble due to invasion by China, Prime Minister Nehru sent his personal assistant to Ma with a prayer to save this country. At that time, Ma was staying in the Delhi Ashram. That very night, the Chinese Government started withdrawing its soldiers unconditionally from Indian soil back to their own border.

In November 1963, on the night before Nehruji's birthday, his daughter Indira Gandhi wished that Ma should be invited to bless her father on his birthday before anyone else came to greet him in the morning because Nehruji had almost broken down due to the earlier military action of China. However, the Prime Minister's Secretary objected to the proposal as the President of India traditionally greets Nehruji first on his birthday. Indiraji had to accept that with a heavy heart.

However, nothing was unknown to Ma. Early the next morning Ma, with Gurupriya Didi and Virajanandaji, went to the Prime Minister's official residence 'Teen Murti House'. Nehruji and Indiraji were very much delighted by Ma's unexpected visit. Nehruji took Ma to the rooftop and offered Her a chair and he himself sat down on the floor near Ma's feet. They passed quite a long time in seclusion. While leaving the place, all members of Nehru family, including Indiraji and Nehruji's sister Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, met Ma. On Her way back to the ashram, Gurupriya Didi wanted to know from Ma about the conversation in between Nehruji and Ma, but Ma did not say anything. On repeated request, Ma only told her, "Why Nehru Pitaji repeatedly desired that this year he should pass well?" Gurupriya Didi immediately could follow the indication and asked Ma, "Will Nehruji not survive after this year?" Ma remained silent.

At the earnest request of Nehruji, Ma visited the 'Teen-Murty-House' in February 1964 to see the ailing Nehru. That was his last meeting with Ma before he passed away in May 1964. At that time, Ma was in Almora ashram. On the day of his passing away, Ma told Her close attendant Udasji in the early morning to be prepared to receive a bad news. A telegram was received in the afternoon with the news that Nehruji was no more. Hearing the sad news Ma said, "The way warriors lay down their lives in battle, Jawaharlal also breathed his last as an active worker. He did not have to lie in a sick-bed waiting for death."

On receiving a request from Indiraji, Ma sent five ashram brahmacharinis to participate in the satsang programme, which was continuing there in front of Nehruji's 'Asthi-kalash' containing his ashes. Indiraji liked

their 'Sanskrit-stotras' delivered in a melodic tune. She requested them to come for their programme, for the next day also when the ashes of Nehruji would be taken for immersion in 'Sangam' at Allahabad. They fulfilled her request accordingly. Even in that busy moment of departure of her father's ash, Indiraji did not forget to arrange a vehicle to fetch the brahmacharinies back to the Delhi Ashram and to provide them with adequate fruits, as she knew that ashram brahmacharinis would not accept any other type of food from outside.

Srimati Indira Gandhi, Nehruji's only child, was very devoted to Ma. Her mother Kamalaji in her last letter before her death, requested Ma to keep Her grace on her only child Indira. Since then, Ma maintained a great affection for Indira Gandhi. She became a close devotee of Ma and frequently visited Her. She became the Prime Minister of India in 1966 after the sudden death of Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri. Soon after, Indira came to meet Ma during the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad. She prayed before Ma and told, "Ma, you are allpowerfull, kindly give me also some power". Ma immediately said, "Whatever strength exists within you, awaken that power." Ma once said about Indira that if she had followed a spiritual path, she could have advanced to a high spiritual level.

On one winter night, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came to meet Ma in Her room when Ma was in the Delhi Ashram. She experienced a unique motherly affection from Ma. Ma observed that Indiraji was suffering from a severe cold. Ma immediately got a bowl of oil, which was used for rubbing Ma's feet. Like a concerned mother caring for her child, Ma asked Indira to take off her socks and rub the oil on the bottom of her feet and on her chest as well. Ma

also asked her to inhale few drops of oil through her nose. A medicinal hot drink 'Karah' (a drink made of tulsi leaves) was also offered to her. When Indiraji felt better, Ma asked her to go back to home and take rest after covering her body properly. Indiraji was reluctant to take leave from Ma so soon, but Ma insisted that she go back to take for rest, which was necessary for her at that moment.

In the general election held in 1977, Indiraji lost that election and she had to face bad days ahead. Thereafter once, while Indiraji came to meet Ma, Ma told her to tell her youngest son Sanjay to stop learning the airplane flying. Indiraji told that she forbade Sanjay several times but he did not obey her. Ma then told Indira that she should convey to him that Ma Herself forbade him to do so, failing which he would face a serious consequence. In spite of Ma's warning, he continued to fly. Shortly afterwards the plane which he was flying crashed and he expired. After a few months of this incident when Indiraji came to meet Ma, she almost broke down before Her. Ma consoled her saying that she should accept the ruling of the Almighty. Later on, with Ma's grace the 'Iron Lady' Srimati Indira Gandhi regained the position of Prime Minister of India, after winning the general election in 1981.

Indiraji met Ma for the last time in July 1982 when Ma was very unwell at Dehradun. She came with her son Rajiv and daughter in law Sonia. During that visit, Indiraji beseeched Ma to bless Rajiv by touching his head and Ma blessed him accordingly. About a month later, Ma withdrew from this physical world. After Indiraji's sad demise in 1984, Sri Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India.

After India's independence, most of the renowned political leaders, Honourable Presidents, Prime Ministers, Governors, Ministers and Government officials etc. were

visiting Ma often for Her blessings. Dr. Rajendra Prasad during his tenure as President of India had taken Ma with great honour to the 'Rashtrapati-Bhawan' in 1957 and 1961. Dr. Radhakrishnan, the eminent learned philosopher visited Ma several times and he had taken Her to his residence at Delhi in December 1955 when he was Vice President of India. Later he became the President of India. Sri Gopal Swaroop Pathak, who became the Vice President of India, was also an earnest devotee of Ma. His two daughters, Shanta and Indira, joined Ma's ashram permanently and later on, they became sannnyasis. Although, many such distinguished persons and prominent persons like Rajas, Maharajas, industrialists, business magnates etc. came frequently to meet Ma, there was no change in Her behaviour when ordinary persons met Her. All felt the warmth of meeting Ma.

Ma had cautioned the ashramites not to seek any privilege from the distinguished persons. Ma was a great symbol of simplicity and had no inclination towards ostentation, big money, publicity and so forth. Ma never encouraged material comfort in the ashram. Ma always advised the ashramites to depend completely on God and to live in the simplest possible way without any sort of luxury. Any voluntary donation was accepted in the ashram as 'bhiksha' (alms) for running and maintenance of the ashrams, which became places of satsang, sadhana (spiritual practices), and devotion. However, mostly it was experienced that the donations received were just sufficient for the actual requirements. Gurupriya Didi often used to say that in other organizations, people spend according to their income, but by the grace of Ma, donations are received here in accordance to the actual requirements.

Attraction of Foreign Devotees towards Ma

A large number of foreigners from different countries were drawn towards Ma. They began visiting Her as early as 1938. They were of an elite class, well established in life, belonging to different countries, races, and faiths. They came to Ma with philosophical and spiritual queries, and some with personal problems and difficulties. Often, there was no spoken communication between them and Shree Ma. They simply sat in silence, beholding Ma. Her pure and benign presence seeped into their hearts. They felt their queries answered, often problems resolved without any spoken communication. They could feel Her loving glance touching their hearts. She reached out to them in silence. Whoever came to Her, all felt that Ma was their own. To them, Ma was the living proof of the actual existence of a transcendental reality – 'extraordinary', 'superhuman', and 'divine'.

Once a French film producer, while visiting India came to meet Ma. After passing some time here when he went back to his own country, few of his friends who were coming to visit India asked him that as they were having very short period for this visit, he should tell them only one place that they must visit. The French film producer replied that they should never miss to meet Ma Anandmayee. That was how normally foreigners felt about Ma after meeting Her.

Amongst the very noteworthy and well-known foreign devotees was an Austrian woman by the name of Miss Blanca Schlamm. She was a teacher of a renowned school in Varanasi and she met Ma in Almora in 1943. Later, she joined Ma's Ashram in 1945 and came to be known as Brahmacharini Atmananda. She acquired a perfect

knowledge of Hindi and Bengali, in both written and spoken forms. She was already well versed in French, German, and English. Atmanandaji was, generally, the interpreter between the foreign devotees and Shree Ma. She was the Editor of the journal 'Ananda Varta' (English version) since its inception which was published quarterly by Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha and was about Ma and Her teachings. She translated Gurupriya Didi's diaries into English in which the day-to-day events which took place around Ma were recorded. Atmanandaji regularly published the English version of those in the 'Ananda varta' journal. She was also the author of several books in English on Ma and Her teachings. These books are of immense value not only for the foreign aspirants but also for Indian devotees not knowing the Bengali language.

Atmanandaji expired in Kankhal in Haridwar in 1985 at the age of 80. Her sacred body was brought to the Kankhal Ashram and after performing all the rituals of a sannyasi, her body was immersed in the river Ganga at Neeldhara, a place where immersion of the bodies of departed sannyasis takes place. Many years before, she had approached Ma and expressed her desire for 'Jal-samadhi' when she would pass away. Ma gracefully accepted and performed some 'kriya' (action) with Her hands and granted her request. Atmanandaji lived a simple life like a true sannyasi. She had only a few blankets and robes which teaches a lesson in propriety to others.

Dr Adolphe Weintrob, a successful French doctor came from Marseilles in France. He first met Ma in 1951. After taking permission, he followed Ma for about three years wherever She went. Ma gave him the name Vijayananda. He performed hard 'tapasaya' (penance) for

many years, staying in Almora Ashram and at the ashram in Dhawalchina, a solitary picturesque place situated at the top of a Himalayan mountain near Almora. There was no water or electricity at Dhawalchina Asram at that time. He had to depend on rainwater only. Later, Ma arranged his stay at Kanakhal Ashram in Haridwar when construction of the 'Sadhu Niwas' for the monks was completed.

Vijayanandaji was held in great regard and was much sought after by the foreign devotees particularly from the western countries. He was a perfect guide to convey them about Shree Ma and Her teachings. When he was requested to visit the Western Countries, his reply was, "I don't want to leave the Kankhal ashram as Ma Herself placed me here. Besides, if I go, the people there won't allow me to come back."

Long before, Ma in Almora had said about Vijayanandaji that he could accomplish the divine path. When he was reminded about it in the Kankhal Ashram a day before his passing away, he was greatly delighted and said, "Oh, Ma said like that!" Swami Vijayananda at the age of about ninety-five years passed away in his room in the Kankhal Ashram in April 2010. He had an earnest desire to leave his body in the Ashram itself which thus fulfilled. After performing all the rituals of a sannyasi, his sacred body was taken to France for the burial in Paris by Ms Isabell Decassan Floyrac (Izou), a great devotee of Ma and very close to Sw. Vijayananda.

A youth from America, Jack Ungvi (Jayananda) and another youth from England, Collin Turnbull (Premananda), and Henry Petit from France were deeply devoted to Ma. Petit had held a high post in Abyssinia, but his whole life was changed when he met Ma in India. He always wanted

to be with Ma. One day when Ma was requested to give a new name to Petit, Ma suggested, "How do you like the name Satyananda?" Petit was wonderstruck and said that he was thinking of this name for him only a day before, but how could Ma know about his desire!

Gadadhar was an American who came to Shree Ma at a young age. He was planning to join Ma during the 'Kumbha-snan' at Allahabad in January 1982, but he could not. Ma saw him accompanying Her in subtle form during the 'Kumbha-snan'. He expired soon afterwards. Ma told his parents that he would not come back to this world again.

Sister Daya Mata, President of the 'Self Realization Fellowship' in America visited Ma on the advice of her Guru Paramahansa Swami Yogananda. Swami Yogananda had once shown her a photograph of Ma and told her, "Strive to become like Her." Daya Mata came to Ma on a few occasions and said, "I thought of my blessed Guru, who had chosen Ma as an eternal example for all of us, this flower of divinity."

Several admirers from foreign countries came for Ma's darshan in groups. They included Swiss philosopher and Professor Dr. Boss, Dutch singer and linguist Dr. Arnold Beck, French writer Jean Herbert, British photographer Richard Lannoy and many others. The German author Melita Maschman in her book had written that as per her personal view, Ma was a human being without even least I-ness. The French film producer Arnaud Desjardin and Dr Alexander Lipski and many others found Shree Ma to be the answer to their spiritual aspirations. Mr. Ram Alexander came to Ma several times. He is the author of a popular book 'Death must die'. Many diplomatic and political envoys also visited Shree Ma. Noteworthy amongst them

were Mr. Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Queen Mother of Greece, King of Nepal, Ambassadors to India from Canada, Switzerland, Chile, Syria, Czechoslovakia, Pakistan and many other countries.

Prime Minister Trudeau met Ma at Varanasi Ashram in January 1971 along with the High Commissioner Mr. James George and all the members who accompanied him in this visit to India. All of them came by motor boats over the river Ganga directly to the ashram. Mr. Trudeau passed some time in seclusion with Shree Shree Ma. Ma told him in Her 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 no body is a stranger or a newcomer. There is but one Reality, one Atma. It is that which has always been, is, and will be. It is eternally abiding and yet ever new."

Mr. Trudeau asked several philosophical questions which Ma replied in the manner which would be suitable for him. During his departure, Ma offered him three items of Indian handicrafts which were – an 'Asan' made of silk with beautiful zari embroidery work, a 'Garland' made of flakes of sandal wood and some 'Prasad' in a small basket made of bamboo flakes, which he carried himself with great pleasure. Ma suggested to him that he sit daily on that asan for meditation. Later Mr. Trudeau said that he had never experienced such divine bliss before. He then proceeded to New Delhi. At the New Delhi airport, when the Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi received him, Mr. Trudeau had shown his own garland to Smt. Gandhi and told her delightedly that Ma had given it to him.

The Queen mother of Greece along with her daughter Irene met Ma at the Vrindavan Ashram in

November 1966 in the evening. They were with Ma in seclusion for quite a long time. In between when the electric supply went off, Brahmacharini Atmananda brought one gas light, but the queen mother requested her to keep that away as Ma was clearly visible to them due to Her natural radiance. Before leaving India, she told Atmanandaji that Ma is held in high esteem amongst the Royal families of the west.

Maharaja Mahendra Shah, the King of Nepal, came alone to meet Ma in 1962 at Kishenpur Ashram in Dehradun. He was with Ma in seclusion for some time. Only Ma's mother Sw Muktananda Giriji was present in Ma's room. Possibly, the King received 'Deeksha' from Giriji at that time in the presence of Ma. Shortly after returning to Delhi, King Mahendra's exile in India was miraculously over and he got back the Kingship of the Nepal kingdom.

An Italian woman, Miriam Ovr, became Ma's close devotee seeing a picture of Shree Ma. A famous actor Jennifer Jones was so charmed seeing Ma that she postponed her return to Hollywood to be with Ma for a longer period. She exclaimed that her coming to India became worthwhile after meeting Ma. Many foreigners felt Ma was a sage whose divine appearance evoked a deep admiration in them.

Considering the ever-increasing number of Christian devotees from the western countries, exclusive audiences with Ma had to be arranged for them. They observed Christmas on December 25 with a community meditation in the presence of Ma. Many of them had a sacred feeling of Lord Jesus Christ in Ma Herself.

Whenever foreign devotees tried their best to take Ma to their countries, Ma said that She is always there as

well. Several incidents happened that persons, who had never heard of Ma, saw Her in their dream or saw Her in the painting of Lord Jesus in the Holy Church. They came to know later that the one they saw was in fact Ma.

All religions have the same destination

Ma demonstrated and advised for universality of all religions as all doctrines sought only the ultimate truth – God. Ma had complete knowledge and full realization of all methods of religious practices. Once Ma said, "You don't know who you are? You are considering yourself a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Christian. The real truth is – you are that one 'Atma'." She also said, "Religion is that which binds all together and helps to follow the path leading to God. A religion inspires to take up those activities which are helpful to attain the path leading to the Supreme." Ma also said, "You start your journey from where you are positioned now. If you proceed well, you will be able to understand that all the directions coming from different religions lead to the same one goal." According to Ma, the essence of the message of every religion is the same; the disputes were over the external attributes and rituals.

Once Ma told a devotee, "Whenever you go somewhere and if you find any temple, mosque or church on the way, you do pranam (obeisance) in your mind to that form of God which you like the most. No need to raise your folded hand for that". Ma's views were so catholic that men of all shades of religious thought and belief came to Her and felt satisfied with what they saw and heard.

Ma was always in favour to preserve, encourage, and support the religious traditions. Sometimes the foreigner Brahmacharis, while staying in the ashram had

to face some restrictions, which caused them pain and brought suffering to their ego. However later, they could realize that such pains served them good ultimately. The truth is one cannot make any progress in one's sadhana if one's ego and mind are not sometimes painfully shaken. Apart from this, if those restrictions were not followed, the orthodox Hindu devotees would find it difficult to come to Ma and receive Her blessings, whereas such restrictions were not creating any hindrance for others, including the foreigners, to come to Ma. She did not come to abolish but to accomplish.

Religious Muslims started coming to Ma since She was at Dhaka and at Tarapeeth in Her early days. Once a Muslim Fakir told without hesitation that the dazzling form of Ma appeared within his heart whenever he performed 'Namaz' (prayer). That is why he comes running to see his Allah i.e. Ma. One staunch Muslim in Dehradun came to Ma when he came to know about Her from an Arabian Muslim Fauquier (Hermit) of very high spiritual order, during his 'Hajj' pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. With Ma's grace, he could attain spirituality, as he desired.

A Christian Father (Clergy) said that whatever details have been given in the holy Bible regarding the form of God, we see the whole appearance of that in Ma's divine body. That is why he came to Ma repeatedly covering such a long distance from his place. A Sikh devotee said that he found much that was said by Ma contained in the holy book 'Guru Granth Saheb' and he sought Ma's permission to read out some portions. Ma gladly agreed as She made no distinction between different religions.

Shree Ma held all religions and faiths as valid paths to realization of God. She did not form any religion or sect

of Her own. Ma said very strongly, "To go ahead with all the religions together is the only 'Sampradaya' (religious society) of this body." She also said, "Favourable actions manifest from this body for sadhakas for advancement in their own spiritual path, irrespective of their sect to which they belong. Their sincere seekings result in such favourable actions."

One day a devotee asked, "Is there really a God? Can one see Him?" Ma said, "The way you exist, God also exists. If you can take off the shroud, you will find Him, who is self-expressed. The way a whole tree resides inside a seed, God also resides in His full splendour inside you." Still doubtful, one asked Ma, "Then why does not He understand our sufferings, why is He so unkind?" Ma's answer was, "He is not unkind. It is His design to draw you near Him as you are fully engulfed in lust, pleasure and sorrows. Moreover, He is engaged in playing with Himself and that is His 'Lila' (play)."

A young man from a western country, who was an atheist, met Ma at the Vrindavan ashram. He told Ma that he had no belief in any religion or God. He requested Ma to tell him the way to achieve mental peace. Ma said, "You don't believe any religion and God – but you definitely follow some rules." The young man after a thought accepted it and said that he follows only the social rules. Hearing this Ma said, "A social rule conveys that (i) if anyone asks anything, one should speak the truth. Therefore, you will always speak the truth. (ii) Help the persons around you to the best of your capability which is called 'seva' (service). (iii) The social rule desires your association with good persons, which is called 'Satsang'. (iv) If you are a student, you will concentrate on your studies and if you are in

service, you will work with utmost honesty and sincerity and that will be called 'Swadhaya'. Thus if you follow these four social rules, you will definitely get mental peace. However, following the first rule only, the remaining three will automatically come up."

Regarding attainment of mental peace Ma once said, "There is no peace so long as there is personal desire. Peace is achieved only when one can merge one's own desire with that of God." Ma said, "You suffer because you want to be the owner and master. Don't be a Malik (owner) but be a Mali (Gardener) and you will see that all your miseries will disappear."

Chapter -VI

Establishment of Ma's ashram at Varanasi

Whenever Ma was at Varanasi (Kashi), throngs of devotees would approach Her. However, there was no suitable place where they could meet Ma conveniently. Ma often stayed on a barge on the banks of the river Ganga and met devotees there. Gurupriya Didi felt a desperate need to acquire suitable land and construct an ashram somewhere along the banks of the river Ganga.

However, one day Shree Ma and Gurupriya Didi were sitting in the waiting room of the Lucknow Railway Station waiting for the arrival of their train. Ma saw a map of Varanasi city on the wall. There was a table close to the map. Ma jumped onto the table and pointed to a spot between Assi and Bhadaini Ghats on the riverbank and said, "Didi, here is your ashram". In 1942, land for building the ashram was purchased on that very spot. Gurupriya Didi, after great efforts, completed the final registration of transfer of the land in January 1944. Ma was then at Almora. Ma saw several dwarf-sized mahatmas in subtle form dancing with great joy at that perticular site in Varanasi and Ma revealed at that very moment that Didi could get the land after all. Ma indicated that it was hallowed (sacred) ground and a 'Tapo-bhumi' (a place suitable for spiritual practices) since ancient times. It is said that Goswami Tulsidasji³³ had also done his 'Tapasya' there. According to the 'Kashi Panchang'³⁴, a big Shiva Temple existed at that place in ancient times.

³³ **Goswami Tulsidas** – He was an eminent saint and poet in sixteenth century who was the author of the famous epic Ramayan 'Ram Charit Manas' which was written in awadhi bhasa (awadhi language).

³⁴ **Kashi Panchang** – It is a book which contains the details of ancient temples in Varanasi.

In 1944, Shree Ma set Her holy feet in the Kashi Ashram for the first time. A room with a tin-roof was temporarily erected and the first Basanti Durga Puja of the ashram was performed in that year. Since then, this Durga Puja is celebrated there every year during the 'Chaitra-Navaratri' in the month of March. The puja complex is now called the 'Chandi-Mandap'. With the great effort of Gurupriya didi, construction of this grand and beautiful ashram of Shree Ma was completed by 1945. For three decades, this ashram remained the centre of many sacred and divine 'Matri Lilas'. Many important religious discussions with great-learned persons took place there. Prof. Amulya Kumar Datta Gupta, a great devotee of Ma from Dhaka, recorded those important discussions in his diary. These were published later in several volumes in Bengali and Hindi languages. A few volumes were also translated in English and were published with the title 'In association with Sri Sri Anandamayee Ma'. These books are very popular as Ma's invaluable words have been written in it.

In 1950, a small but beautiful 'Annapurna' temple was built in that ashram. The same 'Vigraha' (Idol) of Ma Annapurna, which was brought from Ramna Ashram in Dhaka, had been installed in the first floor of the temple on the night of 'Deepawali' ceremony. Ma entrusted the responsibility of performing the daily worship of Ma Annapurna to Atul Brahmachari of Dhaka who carried out this responsibility with utmost sincerity until he passed away in 1995. A fixed quantity of rice along with other suitable auxiliary items is still offered daily in the bhoga of the deity. However, during the 'Annakut' function, one and quarter Mund (about 50 Kgs) of rice along with delicious

vegetarian dishes of more than one hundred varieties are offered to Ma Annapurna. Hundreds of devotees get prasad on that day. Ma said, "The ashram will not face scarcity of 'Anna' (food) so long as daily puja of Ma Annapurna is performed and 'Anna- bhoga' is offered there properly." Two 'Shiva-lingas' which were unearthed while digging for laying foundation of the ashram building, were later placed in the Annapurna Temple. Shree Ma named them 'Swayambhu' and 'Vishwanath'.

An old devotee of Ma brought the deity 'Gopal'³⁵ to the ashram. It was very heavy and beautifully made in black stone. It is said that the idol may be a thousand years old. Formerly, 'Gopalji' was in the care of a ruling family in East Bengal. The ruling family sent 'Gopalji' out of Bengal through a Panditji (priest), as they feared an assault on 'Gopalji' by the invaders at that time. Due to paucity of funds and consequent lack of proper daily puja and bhoga, the caretaker brought the idol to Ma. In this way, 'Gopalji' came to Varanasi Ashram on 9 August 1954 and the idol was initially placed in the adjoining room of Annapurna Temple.

Construction activities did not end with the completion of the main ashram. The elegant satsang hall of the ashram, which was built on the bank of Ganga River, was damaged due to the floodwater and had to be demolished in 1954. Hence, more land next to the ashram was acquired and Shree Shree Ma's elegant temple along with the satsang hall were constructed there. The reputed French architect Le Corbusier designed the temple architecture. He was the designer of the city of Chandigarh, the capital of Punjab and Haryana states.

³⁵ Gopal – Child form of Lord Krishna.

The newly built Ma's temple was inaugurated on 30 April 1968. A beautifully designed marble pedestal was built at the ground floor of the temple for installation of Ma's four statues facing four different directions. However, as Ma was in the body then, therefore, instead of placing Ma's statues on the pedestal, Gopalji was placed there on a beautiful throne made of sandalwood. After about two decades, Gopalji was shifted to first floor when three bronze 'Vigrahas' (Idols) of Ma were placed on the marble pedestal in 1987. Later in April 2011, the fourth bronze 'Vigraha' of Ma was also installed on the same pedestal there. Thus, all the four 'Vigrahas' of Ma in four different bhavas (divine mood) have been installed as visualized by Gurupriya Didi. Those four bhavas as displayed by the sculptor are – Bhakti-bhava, Brahmachari-bhava, Shankar-bhava, and Buddha-bhava.

A small temple adjoining the Shiva Temple consecrated to Ma's mother was constructed wherein five Shiva-Lingas were installed and later a marble statue of Didima (Swami Muktananda Giri) was installed there in April 1974 in Ma's presence.

A fine hospital was also built close to the Ashram. Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, inaugurated the hospital in the presence of Ma on 26 December 1968. Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Hospital is regarded as one of the wellknown hospitals now in Varanasi. In the same campus, another social service, named 'Ma Anandamayee Karuna' also operates since 1951, which provides homoeopathic medicines to patients, distributes free milk to children daily, arranges free distribution of winter clothes to Sadhus and widows, and provides monthly scholarship to few poor meritorious students for their education.

Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth

Under Shree Ma's 'kheyal' (divine inspiration), the 'Kanyapeeth' for Brahmacharini girls started functioning at 'Peetkuti' in Haridwar from 25 December 1938 in the presence of Ma, with only two students initially. In 1945, this institution found its permanent place in Varanasi Ashram when the 'Kanyapeeth Block' was constructed there. The ideals of 'Kanyapeeth' were to follow the traditions laid down by the ancient 'Rishis' for proper education and moulding the character of the girls. Accordingly, 'Kanyapeeth' was made fully residential. Today, it has grown into an ideal institution where each student leads a life like a Brahmacharini. They wear only yellow coloured dress and avoid taking any food from outside. It is all due to the grace of Shree Ma and untiring effort of Gurupriya Didi.

The institution is affiliated with Sampurnanand Sanskrit University in Varanasi. Apart from a high standard of Sanskrit education, there are arrangements for training in Music as well. Examination in classical music is conducted under the reputed 'Prayag Sangeet Samiti' in Allahabad. The Kanyapeeth girls also learn various household works like arts and crafts, stitch-crafts, embroidery, cooking, knitting etc. However, special attention is paid to build the moral character and to develop religious inclinations.

Ma said that many ideals of Bhaiji are associated with the creation of both 'Kanyapeeth' and 'Vidyapeeth'. Bhaiji had remarked that only the most fortunate ones would come there for receiving education. He wanted scope and opportunity for the talent of every child to flourish. Along

with education for earning a livelihood, there must be a deep-rooted atmosphere of religious life. Bhaiji felt that 'Seva-sadhana' (spirit of service) must be woven into the pattern of education. Protection and practice of 'Truth' would come naturally to a person who follows the path of truth.

'Kanyapeeth' is following the 'Rishi-kul'³⁶ traditions and education. Scholars and Pandits of Varanasi are often wonderstruck at the fluent Sanskrit spoken by the girls there. Their disciplined and self-controlled behaviour, their training and ability in carrying out faultlessly every detail of puja arrangements, cooking and presentation of 'bhoga' and their daily routine congenial to sadhana, are without a comparison elsewhere. Those Kanyapeeth girls entering a family life would take with them the spirit of this deeply rooted religious and character education.

Only highly educated Brahmacharinis were selected to be Principal of Kanyapeeth; amongst them were Chandan didi, Jaya didi, Dr. Geeta and Dr. Gunita. All of them were educated in Kanyapeeth itself and had resided there since childhood. Apart from them, Brahmacharinis Ganga didi, Kshama didi, Bilwaji, Vishuddha didi, Satidi, Kantiji, Vanidi, Maladi, Induji and many others worked sincerely for its development under the guidance of Gurupriya Didi. A few experienced Professors of Benaras Hindu University also came forward to helpout to run the Institution and guide the students. Amongst them, the prominent names were Dr. Padma Misra, Dr. Bithika Mukherjee, Dr. Lalita Pathak, and Dr. Krishna Banerjee; all remained unmarried and were close devotees of Ma.

³⁶ **Rishi-kul** – The way of life being followed in ancient times for educating and moulding the Rishi's children.

Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Vidyapeeth for boys

Shree Ma was once visiting Mussouri with Bhaiji. She saw from a hilltop a school for boys and noticed how at the ringing of the school bell, children immediately stopped playing and entered quietly their classrooms and sat down in readiness to begin their studies. Ma was impressed and said to Bhaiji, "Can't we encourage children to attend to their prayers in the same manner?" Bhaiji, then, began planning a school for boys where boys from childhood could be educated in an atmosphere of the 'Vedic Rishi-kul' traditions, along with the on-going system of education for earning a livelihood.

Ma always said that 'Brahmacharya' (celibacy) and self-discipline from childhood itself were important for a character-building education, as it was done in the ancient Vedic days. Ma emphasized brahmacharya as the vital foundation for the smooth running of the other three 'Ashramas' (stages of life) – 'Garhastha' (family life), 'Vanaprastha' (complete religious life) and 'Sannyas' (Life surrendered to Divine) and for the peace and welfare of the society.

With these ideals in mind, Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Vidyapeeth was first started at the Kishenpur Ashram in Dehradun in the year 1941 to fulfill the wishes of the departed Bhaiji. It was shifted to Raipur Ashram and remained there for some time. It was then, on a more permanent basis, transferred to the Almora Ashram, which is located at a high altitude in the Himalayan ranges. However, during the winter months, the school had to come down to Vrindaban Ashram or to 'Baghat-House' in Haridwar which belonged to Maharaja of Solan.

Vidyapeeth was totally a residential institution; food

and clothing were provided to students free of cost. Maharaja of Solan used to meet most of the expenses for running the Vidyapeeth as long as he was alive. Shailesh Brahmachari (Swami Shivananda later) was the Principal of the Institute for about three decades. He took care of the students with perfect paternal love and motherly affection.

After joining the ashram, Brahmachari Panuda also served there for about a decade, teaching the boys of Vidyapeeth. Once he slapped forcefully a student on his delicate cheek when he found some fault in him. At that time, Ma was in Almora Ashram. Ma called Panuda and asked him to look at Her cheek which had turned red. Panuda was surprised to see the mark of his fingers clearly visible on Ma's cheek. From then on, Panuda never repeated such an action with any student.

After Shree Ma's 'Mahaprayan' (passing away), the Vidyapeeth was closed down for about a decade. However, it began functioning again in 1993 in the Kankhal Ashram at Haridwar with the effort of Swami Swaroopananda, the General Secretary of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha at that time. Dr. Gunen Roy, a close devotee of Ma and President of the Charitable Society of the Sangha helped to construct its ground floor. Shree Shree Anandamayee Vidyapeeth has now its own proper school building with furnished classrooms on the ground floor and fully furnished hostel facilities on the first floor. A spacious playground is also there. It is fully residential and totally free for the students. The Uttarakhand Government Education Board has granted its recognition for class VI to VIII standard.

One more Vidyapeeth is functioning at Agartala in West Tripura, which is not a residential school. It is an

English medium school where about 400 local students receive modern education. Due to great effort of Sri R.N.Chakravorty and others, it is now one of the renowned schools in Agartala.

The Savitri Mahayajna in Varanasi Ashram

On Ma's 'kheyal', a grand 'Savitri Mahayajna' was started from 14th of January 1947 on the auspicious day of 'Paush Sankranti'³⁷ in Varanasi Ashram. It was performed on an unprecedented scale and continued for three years. The fire which was used for starting this great 'Mahayajna' was lit in 1926 by Ma on the occasion of the Kali Puja held at Shahbagh in Dhaka and it was being maintained by offering of oblation (ahuti) daily. Ma at that very time indicated that the sacred fire would be used for a great yajna later on and that prophecy became true after two decades when the same fire was used for starting this yajna.

Ma was requested to indicate the place where the yajnashala would be located. Ma asked to locate it just at the centre of the ashram land. When the exact centre of the land could not be located, Ma Herself showed the exact spot. After proper measurement of the ashram land, it was found that the spot shown by Ma was in fact its centre. Thereafter, a beautiful yajnashala was constructed there.

'Savitri Mahayajna' was an invocation for world peace. Seven months after the start of the yajna, India achieved independence from the British rule on 15th August 1947 and after a few days of its 'Purnahuti' (final offering of oblation) on 14 January 1950, India became a republic on 26th January in the same year. In these three years, ten

³⁷ Paush Sankranti – The last day of the month of 'Paush', this generally takes place on 14 or 15 January in a year.

million 'Ahuti' (offering of oblation) were made in the sacred 'yajna' fire and more than 11,000 Brahmins were fed during this period. Such an expensive yajna was started with only 5 kgs of cow milk ghee in stock. Due to the grace of Ma, such an elaborate yajna could be completed without much difficulty.

Sri Agnisatwa Shastri (Batuda) was the chief 'Hota' (priest) of the 'Mahayajna'. Every injunction of the Shashtra's (scripture) was carefully carried out to the finest detail. Batuda was among very few people who could recite all the four Vedas without taking help from the book. He was a good sadhaka and was wellknown to have awareness of his three previous births. Tapanda (Swami Nirmalananda) and Dasuda, both Vidyapeeth students and Kusumda (Swami Nirvanananda) participated as 'hota' in this yajna and all of them continued to remain as Brahmachari of the ashram for rest of their lives.

On the day of 'Purnahuti' of the 'Savitri Mahayajna', Varanasi Ashram was flooded with the arrival of many respected saints, sadhus, and devotees from all over India and abroad. Haribaba, Triveni Puri and Avadhuti Maharaj from Punjab, Devigiriji from Uttarkashi, Prabhudutta Brahmachari and Gopal Thakur from Allahabad, Sharananandaji, Akhandanandaji and Chakrapaniji from Vrindaban, Krishnanandaji from Bombay, and many others were present for the 'Purnahuti' of the 'Savitri Mahayajna'.

Gurupriya Didi worked tirelessly in the service of the 'yajna'. She had a unique divine vision during the 'Purnahuti' of the Mahayajna. She saw that a large form of the 'Yajneshwar' (the Deity of the yajna) emerging from the flames of the yajna fire followed by a very large form of Ma also emerging out from the same fire and merged in

the sky. Ma Herself confirmed this vision of Gurupriya didi.

Sw. Bhaskaranandaji, a very senior Sadhu of Ma's ashram once narrated a unique incident. A mahatma devoted to Lord Rama, was practising his sadhana on the bank of Sarju River at Ayodhya. He had a vision of this 'Savitri Mahayajna' being performed at Varanasi by Lord Rama. Therefore, he came to Varanasi, searched for the location, and reached the place of yajna at Ma's ashram. He found that all the buildings and surroundings he saw in his vision were the same, but the difference was that he saw Shree Ma in the place of Lord Rama of his vision.

The same sacred fire of that great 'Yajna' is still kept burning continuously in the yajnashalas at Varanasi, Kankhal and Naimisharanya Ashrams, by performing daily 'yajna' there.

Formation of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha in 1950

Just after the successful conclusion of the 'Gayatri Mahayajna', many prominent devotees of Ma and various other well-wishers of the ashram felt the most urgent need to form a registered body which would look after all the ashrams founded in the name of Ma. It would also carry out all spiritual activities and provide proper daily worship of the Deities installed in various ashrams as per Ma's directions. In order to run the various ashrams it required regular office work, proper utilisation of funds, supervision and control over the accounts etc. to maintain the accountability of the ashrams. As a result of their dedicated efforts made in co-operation with a few knowledgeable persons, a registered body named "Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha" was formed in accordance with the

Societies Registration act of 1860 and was duly registered on 25 January 1950. This organization was established in Ma's divine presence and with her full blessings. It is perhaps the only organization in India, where ascetic and non-ascetic members of the Governing Body have been jointly taking part in the proper management of the Sangha from the very first day. Its Headquarter was established at Ma's Varanasi Ashram. Later around 1984/85, it was shifted to Kankhal Ashram in Haridwar after Ma's 'Mahaprayan'. Presently, its Governing Body consists of 42 members; 21 members are from the ascetic side and 21 members from the non-ascetic side. Each member serves for three years. Each year fourteen members are replaced when seven ascetic members are selected and seven non-ascetic members are elected.

As per the Memorandum of Association of the Sangha, the mission of the new Society is:

"To seek inspiration from Shree Shree Ma and to participate in all activities inspired by Ma for the spiritual advancement of mankind and to promote relief of the poor, education, medical relief and advancement of any other object of general public utility, not involving the carrying on of any activity for profit."

The Sangha looks after Ma's twenty-four ashrams in India and two in Bangladesh. It has now completed sixty years of its existence in 2010, with the inspiration and blessings of Shree Ma. Its Diamond Jubilee was celebrated in a befitting manner during Ma's Janmotsav function at Kankhal Ashram in 2011 in presence of respected Mahatmas, Ministers of Uttarakhand Government and a large number of devotees.

Even during its formative period, the Sangha was

privileged to have highly distinguished persons as members of this organization. Raja Durga Singh, of Solan Estate in Himanchal Pradesh was chosen as the first President of this new organization. The Government of India had offered him earlier the Governorship of the Himanchal State after India's independence, but he had politely refused that honour. By virtue of his manifold qualities, he was well known among devotees as 'Yogi Bhai'. Ma had indicated that he was a 'Yogi' in his previous birth. About three years later, Yogi Bhai preferred Rajmata Kamalendu Shah of Tehri Garhwal State in Uttarakhand, then a sitting Member of the Parliament, to become the President of the Sangha. She continued in this position for about six years. Due to her indifferent health, she relinquished the post in favour of Yogi Bhai (Raja Durga Singh) to become the President for a second time. He continued in this capacity as long as he was alive. After knowing from Yogi Bhai about the great spirituality of Ma, many other Rajas from all over India with their families became great devotees of Ma.

After Yogi Bhai's death in March 1977, Sri B.K. Shah of Bombay (Mumbai), a close devotee of Ma, was selected President of the Sangha. He was a renowned economist, Chairman of Life Insurance Corporation of India and had been the topmost official of New India Assurance Co. He continued as long as he was alive till September 1995. Thereafter Sri Govind Narain, a retired I.C.S officer and an old devotee of Ma since the forties became the President of the Sangha. He had been holding several top administrative posts in the Government of Uttar Pradesh and in the Central Government. He was a former Governor of Karnataka and a recipient of 'Padma Bibhushan' from the Government of India. At the earnest request from the

devotees, he continued as President of the Sangha until he passed away in April 2012.

Thereafter, Swami Nirvananandaji, a very senior Sadhu became President of the Sangha. Swamiji belonged to Allahabad and joined Ma Anandamayee Ashram as early as in 1944, after completing M.Sc. in Chemistry from Delhi University. He along with two other brahmacharis, completed the difficult three year long 'Gayatri Purashcharan' sadhana as per Ma's direction and all of them were made 'Acharyas' for giving diksha to the spiritual seekers when the Sangha Guru Swami Muktananda Giri passed away in 1970. Presently Swamiji's age is above 95. Therefore, as per his wish, Swami Achutananda, the next seniormost ascetic member has been selected as President of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha since March 2016.

After formation of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, the General Secretaries selected during Ma's time up to 1982 were – Sri Ashutosh Bhattacharya, Brahmachari Panuda, Sw Chinmayananda and Sw Paramananda and after 1983, Sw Swaroopananda, Sw Bhaskarananda, Dr. Deb Prasad Mukhopadhyay (Debuda), Somesh Chandra Banerjee (Somuda) and Swapan Ganguli (since 2016) were selected.

Shree Shree Ma's Diamond Jubilee 'Janmotsav' at Varanasi in 1956

Shree Ma was completing sixty years in May 1956. The devotees wanted to celebrate this occasion with great joy, pomp, and splendour. Most of them called it the 'Diamond Jubilee' celebration on the lines of western tradition. However, the renowned saint in Varanasi, Shankar Bharatiji, more appropriately named it in Sanskrit language as the 'Shashthitama Jayanti Utsava'. Ma's birthday

festivities were celebrated for twenty-six days from 2 to 27 May 1956, which was a memorable one.

Avadhootji Maharaj of Vrindavan once had a vision of Ma seated on the back of a lion. Devotees worshipped Ma as the very embodiment of Goddess Durga Herself. Hence, according to the wishes of Avadhootji Maharaj and of the devotees, it was decided to perform Janmotsav puja of Ma seated on a silver throne, firmly fixed on the back of a metal lion. A renowned sculptor from Kolkata, Sri Nitai Pal was engaged to give form and design to their cherished idea. The lion was cast in 'Ashtadhatu' (an alloy of eight special metals) and weighed 28 Munds (approx. 1100 Kgs). The eyes of the lion glowed with bulbs lit from inside. Beautifully embroidered velvet drapes covered the back of the massive lion and were firmly strapped to it. The throne was cast in silver and was beautifully designed. It was large enough to have Ma in a sitting or lying down posture. It was lined with beautiful red velvet cushions. A 'Chatra' (umbrella) was fixed on the throne, which was gorgeously embroidered with gold and silver designs. There were beautifully decorated steps to ascend the throne. The throne was so beautiful that the like of it was never seen before. It is at present kept in Shree Shree Ma's Museum at Kankhal in Haridwar.

May 2 latenight was the first Jayanti Puja. Shree Ma simply refused to ascend the silver throne. No amount of persuasion made Ma change her mind. All entreaties failed. Ma sat down on its steps in samadhi. At the end, 'Puja' and 'Arati' were performed with Shree Ma sitting on the steps only.

Innumerable devotees, rich, poor, special and ordinary beings, persons from different religion such as

Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Jain etc., the invited and the uninvited ones, old and young, every kind and variety of people assembled daily to participate in the festivities. Amongst the special mahatmas were the most revered Haribaba, Chakrapaniji, Avadhootji, Akhandanandaji and Sharananandaji from Vrindaban, Yogesh Brahmachariji from Kolkata, Prabhudatta Brahmachariji from Jhusi (Prayag) and Ramdas Baba of Gwalior. They came to take part in the celebrations.

Faultless arrangements were made suiting the condition of every individual guest. Besides the great mahatmas, many erstwhile Rajas, Ranis, and dignitaries came to participate in the celebrations. There were elaborate arrangements for almost two thousand people arriving, staying and eating in the ashram every day.

A huge canopy, the largest ever seen in Varanasi, was set up to accommodate the vast number of people coming everyday to the ashram. On one side of this big 'pandal', a very artistically decorated high platform was erected. It was to enable the devotees to have 'Darshan' (audience) of Shree Ma.

There were a number of religious programmes going on in the ashram such as continuous Japa for twenty-six days, Rudra-abhishek, Yajna, recitation of Ramayana, Chandi-path, Vishnu-sahasranam path, and Shiva stuti. There was also a daily performance of 'Rashlila' and 'Nitai Gaur Lila' by artists from Vrindavan and Kolkata respectively. There were also religious discourses by the great Mahatmas.

Famous musicians, both vocalists and instrumentalists were also adding lustre to the occasion. Pandit Ravi Shankar, Bismillah Khan, Ali Akbar Khan,



Ma in Samadhi in Her early life



Padma Bibhushan
Sri Gopinath Kaviraj



Ma in deep Samadhi laying on silver simhasan
during janmotsav at Varansi in 1956

Shanta Prasad, and Kanthey Maharaj were the great instrumentalists. Siddheswari Devi, Girija Devi, Dagar brothers, Sukhendu Goswami, Chhabi Bandopadhyay were the great vocalists who thrilled and attracted a huge audience with their performances. The 'pandal' could accommodate a crowd of eight to ten thousand people and was packed to full capacity.

Over and above all these events, the greatest attraction was the 'Tuladan' ceremony in which Ma was weighed against specific materials. A big 'mandap' was set up in the open space in front of the 'Kanyapeeth' where a square 'vedi' (platform) of eighteen inches high and eighteen feet wide on each side was built. A big scale was placed on it for carrying out the 'Tuladan' ceremony. Four 'yajnakundas' had been placed at the four corners of the 'vedi'. Each 'yajnakunda' was dedicated to each of the four Vedas – 'Rig', 'Sam', 'Yajur' and 'Atharva' Vedas.

Paramananda Swamiji gently led Ma to the Vedi (platform). Shree Ma was in great 'Bhava' with eyes full of tears but Her face was aglow with radiance. Ma was seated on the right scale. Six 'Narayana Shilas' were put in Her lap. The Acharya put a gold idol of Lord Narayana in one hand of Ma and an idol of 'Yama' in the other. Ma was weighed with different commodities placed on the other scale, one after another. She was weighed first with 'Ashtadhatu' (an alloy of eight specific metals) and then successively with different grains like rice, wheat, barley, sugar, sesame seeds (til), black-dal (pulses) and pure ghee from cow's milk, fruits and rolls of silk and cotton. At the behest of Giriji (Ma's mother) and Mamaji (Ma's brother), Ma was also weighed against 'misri' (sugar) and 'batasa' (puffed sugar). Finally, She was weighed with silver. Dr

Pannalal, a retired I.C.S. officer and a well-known devotee of Ma, contributed this. This time, the scales became even only when a few sacred 'Tulsi' (basil) leaves were also added on the silver side of the scale. Excepting silver, everything was distributed amongst the poor after the ceremony. Silver was used later in the 'Lord Nitai Gaur' temple at Shree Ma's ashram in Vrindavan where Pannalalji had borne the expenses for the installation of the Deities there.

For the 'Tithi Puja' on 27 May 1956, the puja platform and the silver throne were beautifully decorated. Elaborate arrangements were made for the 'puja'. Ma was carried to the puja platform sitting in a decorated 'Palki' (palanquin); but Shree Ma sat down on the steps of the 'simhasana' (throne) in the same manner as She did on the first jayanti puja on 2nd May. Haribaba, Avadhootji and other mahatmas begged Shree Ma not to disappoint the devotees. Finally, Ma ascended steps and lay down in the 'simhasana' in deep samadhi - still and motionless. Elaborate 'puja' was performed on Ma from late midnight to early dawn in presence of the great Mahatmas and the vast crowd of devotees. A spirit of pure worshipfulness and a heavenly atmosphere permeated the whole pandal in the midst of the chanting of Sanskrit 'shlokas', singing of 'kirtana' (devotional songs) and 'arati'. At the end of the Puja, all the devotees offered their 'pranam' to Shree Ma, one by one. Finally, Ma, still in Samadhi, was carried in a sleeping posture on the same palanquin to a secluded room inside the Kanyapeeth building, where She remained undisturbed until She came out of samadhi. Ma's face shone with divine radiance - it was an unforgettable 'Darshan' of Ma.

Chapter -VII

Shree Ma's arrival at Vrindavan

After attending the Kumbha Mela festival at Haridwar in 1927, Ma stopped at Mathura and Vrindavan on Her way back to Dhaka. That was Shree Ma's first visit to Vrindavan. She stayed in a dharamshala in the premises of Bardhamankunj Temple. Ma came again to Vrindavan in 1936 when She was on an extensive tour alone for some time in Northern India. Only a competent aged woman devotee Birajmohini didi accompanied Ma in that tour. Many religious persons came in contact with Ma and became Her devotees.

Later, as per wishes of the devotees, a large land was procured on the Mathura Road for Ma's ashram in Vrindavan. In 1949, the eminent saint Oriyababa of Vrindavan laid the foundation stone of Shree Ma's cottage in presence of Haribaba and Swami Akhandanandaji.

Whenever Haribaba would be in Vrindavan during the Holi festival³⁸, Ma mostly remained present there as it was the occasion of Haribaba's birthday as well. Ma would play holi on this occasion joyfully. Once She went from ashram to ashram in a procession of devotees, thoroughly enjoying the festival and sprayed colours on not only the saints and holy men but also even on animals and plants. She went to Haribaba and Akhandanandaji and enjoyed spraying colour on them. She said, "When one stays in Vrindavan, one cannot avoid getting a splash of colour."

Construction of the Vrindavan Ashram began from February 1952. A brick duly touched to Shree Ma's holy

³⁸ **Holi festival** - It is an ancient festival on which occasion Lord Krishna used to play with Gopis sprinkling colours on them on full moon day in the month of Falgun (March).

feet was first laid for the foundation. Raja and Rani of Mandi and Tehri Estates also placed bricks in the foundation there. A year later, three 'Shiva-lingas' were installed in the newly built 'Shiva' temple in the ashram. Ma called them as 'Yogeshwara', 'Siddheshwara', and 'Vaneshwara'

On Haribaba's inspiration, a similar temple was constructed slightly away from the Shiva Temple and vigrahas (idols) of 'Gaur-Nitai' were installed there on 8th of March 1955 in presence of Shree Ma and Haribaba. The expenses made on that account were mostly borne by Dr Pannalal, an I.C.S officer, about whom Ma once indicated that he was with Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in a former birth. Sri Nitai Pal, a famous sculptor of Calcutta, sculpted the beautiful idols. Thereafter, the large 'Satsang hall', 'Geeta-Bhavan', Ram Mandir, cottages for sadhus and willing vanaprasthis were built and guest houses for the visiting devotees were added gradually in the vast compound of the ashram. Apart from this, a cowshed is there where several cows are being looked after to meet the daily need of milk in the ashram.

Once Rani Vijaya Raje Scindhia of Gwalior Estate came to Ma and was overwhelmed seeing the beauty of Gaur-Nitai in the temple there. She engaged the same sculptor Nitai Pal to sculpt a medium size brass idol of a teenaged Lord Krishna for the newly constructed temple in her palace at Gwalior. She gave details about the size and standing pose of the idol as usually seen in the paintings of Lord Krishna. When the idol was delivered at Gwalior, it was found that the standing pose of Lord Krishna was quite different. The Rani Sahiba felt scared to install the idol in her temple when she lost her husband shortly after the arrival of the idol. Finding no other way, she got it

repacked and brought it in Ma's Vrindavan Ashram and handed it over to Ma.

One late night, the idol was taken out of the packing box in the presence of Ma and Rajmata Vijaya Raje. Everyone was charmed seeing the radiant beauty of the idol of Lord Krishna. Ma immediately asked to arrange a puja of that Krishna idol in early morning the next day. As the market was already closed by that time, Ma asked that, they make necessary arrangements by collecting whatever offerings were available in the ashram. Accordingly, with a meager arrangement, the puja was started next morning in Ma's cottage. Soon after the puja started, one person from the ashram of Prabhudatt Brahmachariji fetched 'makhan-misri' (butter and sugar crystals) in a big plate and various other eatables generally offered to Lord Krishna on special occasions. Ma was delighted and said immediately, "See, the Lord has started showing His 'Lila' (divine play) from right now."

Rajmata Vijay Raje who had lost her husband recently was very much devoted to Lord Krishna. Seeing the puja and the divine environment created in Ma's presence, she was vividly moved and told Ma with a heavy heart, "Ma, this 'Chhaliya' (Treacherous) has troubled me very much." Ma enquired immediately from where she got the word 'Chhaliya' for Krishna, which she could not answer. From then onward, the idol of Krishna was lovingly called 'Chhaliya'.

Ma then narrated about a divine incident when Ma was living earlier in a cottage nearby Jakhu Temple in Simla. One early morning, Ma had a vision of Radha plucking flowers and singing a single line song in a heart touching melody, calling Lord Krishna in a pathetic voice. The words

of the song in 'Braja-bhasha'³⁹ was, "Aao mere salona chhhalia re, banwari re." [Come oh my heartiest treacherous (Krishna), oh the protector of the forest.] Ma with great bhava was singing the song Herself, retaining that great divine 'Radha-Bhava'⁴⁰ emanating from those words and the tune. She indicated to call Brahmachari Bibhuda, a great singer in Ma's ashram. When he came, Ma asked him to follow Her melody to derive the divine song. Thus with the heart rending tune, Ma transferred that 'Radha-Bhava' as well to Bibhuda. Later, whenever he was asked to sing that song, he could never do so, except sobbing with deep emotion.

A large temple was built for 'Chhaliya' in the ashram, at the location indicated by Ma which was between and behind the Shiva and Gaur-Nitai temples. Three pairs of Radha-Krishna were installed in the temple. The main 'Vigraha' of Lord Krishna came to be called 'Chhaliya' and his Radha was called 'Ananda' as per the wish of Bhawani didi, a devotee from Kolkata, who donated for the idol. Thus, the temple came to be called 'Ananda Chhaliya Temple'. Another pair of Radha Krishna, almost of the same size as that 'Ananda Chhaliya', was installed as per the wish of Maharaja of Solan (Yogi Bhai) to fulfill the desire of his grandmother. The two well-known devotee sisters of Shree Ma, Rama Didi and Kamlaji, also installed one smaller pair of Radha Krishna there.

³⁹ **Braj-bhasha** – The ancient rural language, which is still spoken in 'Braj' area. Places like Vrindavan, Mathura, Gokul etc. are located within that holy area.

⁴⁰ **Radha-Bhava** – It is not possible to explain this great divine inner emotion, which is beyond the capability of ordinary people to understand. It depicts pure divine desire when one is unable to bear separation from God. Such a divine bhava (mood) was prevailing amongst the Gopies in Vrindavan when the teenaged Lord Krishna left for Mathura at an age of only twelve and never came back to Vrindavan.

Ma revealed that where the temple is today, a stream of the Yamuna River was flowing there in the ancient times of Dwapar-yuga. Ma saw in Her vision the teenaged Krishna in that 'yuga' (era) standing on the banks of the Yamuna river at that very spot. His appearance and standing pose was quite like the 'Chhaliya' in the temple. Later, while digging for laying the foundation of the temple, Yamuna-sand was found under the thick crust of soil there. The existing river Yamuna is flowing almost a mile and a half away from the ashram today. Ma also revealed that she saw Krishna was holding a 'Chhatra' (umbrella) in his hand, indicating that the idol had come from a Chatradhari i.e. from a ruling house. This revealing statements from Ma cleared the question as to why Ma wanted to locate the temple at the existing place. It also cleared the reason as to why the deviation in the standing pose of the idol automatically happened while giving its shape by the sculptor. Who can say, whether the sculptor was blessed to have a darshan of Lord Krishna in that standing pose? Ma said that the sculptor Nitai Pal left his mortal frame soon after making that particular idol.

The inauguration of the Ananda Chhaliya Temple in September 1966 was an occasion of joyous celebration. Ma invited all devotees to attend the inauguration of the temple. From 27th August to 7th of September, there was an atmosphere of continuous 'Kirtana' and singing of Sri Krishna's divine names and glories, starting from five in the morning to nine at night. Three days before the inauguration, there was a sudden melodious outpouring of a 'kirtana' by Shree Ma Herself. Ma sang "Krishna Chhaliya Anandalal, Braja Ramana Pran Gopal." Thrilled by Ma's Kirtana and its heartrending melody, the devotees took up Ma's refrain and kept it up for five days without a break.

Finally, on the day of 'Janmashtami' in the month of September 1966, a joyous 'Shobha-yatra' (procession) of Ananda-Chhaliya was taken out on the streets of Vrindavan with some wonderful jhankies (tableaus) on chariots arranged by the mahatma Avdhootji. The whole atmosphere resounded with sounds of 'Nam-Kirtana'. The same afternoon, 'Pran-Pratishtha'⁴¹ worship was performed in the temple in the presence of Shree Ma, with full splendour and devotion. On the same day at mid night, an elaborate arrangement was made for the 'Janmashtami' puja there. Since then, daily puja and bhoga are continuing in the existing temples.

A large water reservoir for the temple was excavated with the arrangement to fill it from the holy Yamuna River whenever it was in spate. Ma named it "Krishna Chhaliya Ananda Sarovar." However, this system is not working at present due to interference from nearby farmers.

Many big religious functions like Janmashtami, Durga puja, Kali puja, Annakut, Katyayani puja, Bhagavat Saptaha, Samyam Saptaha etc. were held in this spacious ashram in the presence of Ma. The 'SAMYAM Saptaha' was arranged here six times in Ma's presence. Thus, it became a very important ashram.

One more ashram in Vrindavan was established when the Maharaja of Bardhaman in West Bengal donated the historical Bardhaman-Kunj Temple to Ma. Seven pairs of Vighrahas (Idols) of Radha-Krishna are installed there and all of them are more than 700 years old. Ma stayed there when She visited Vrindavan for the first time in 1927. At that time, one and a quarter mund (around 50 Kgs) rice

⁴¹ **Pran pratishtha** – Permanent installation of the statue, performing various religious rituals as per scriptures.

with other suitable auxiliary food items used to be offered daily to the temple deity. However, it could not be maintained and was discontinued long back before it was handed over to Ma. This ashram was renovated a few years back.

Establishment of Bhimpura Ashram in Gujarat

In 1937, Ma came to Chandod on the banks of the holy river Narmada. Shree Ma visited several places – Utkantheswar, Dakore, Baroda, Chandod, Bhimpura, Vyas, Gangonath, Kamati etc. staying in these areas for about fifty days. Most of the journey was by boat along the Narmada River and manifested many a 'Matri-lila'. The details are available in the books written by Gurupriya Didi.

In 1938 during the winter, Ma came again at Chandod and stayed for about two months visiting a number of religious places in these areas. One day Ma was travelling in a boat on river Narmada. When the boat was passing Bhimpura village, suddenly Ma directed the boat to be taken towards the bank where She noticed a big banyan tree. Ma hurriedly managed to climb up the steep slope of the bank and came under that tree. She disclosed later, that while travelling in the boat, She saw several Rishis in subtle form under that banyan tree, earnestly calling Her to come. As per Ma's directive, Swami Akhandananda, father of Gurupriya Didi, later acquired that land. Construction of Shree Ma's ashram there began in 1939 on the banks of the river Narmada. Ma set Her holy feet in the ashram in 1940. Since then, this ashram has been a much sanctified place for Ma's devotees in Gujarat. Ma came again in 1940-41 and stayed in Bhimpura Ashram and other religious places in Gujarat for about two and half months.

Ma again stayed at Bhimpura Ashram in 1953 on Her return from travels in South India. Many great saints also stayed there with Ma on that occasion. Narayan Swamiji, a 'Dandi-Swami'⁴² in Ma's ashram, had a unique experience when Ma stayed at Chandod. One night when there was complete silence, Swamiji was thrilled to see someone moving away from Ma's room, walking up in the sky. Next day, when he narrated the incident and asked Ma about him, She disclosed that the mahatma was Sukdeva of 'Shrimad Bhagavata' who had come to request Ma to visit his temple which was not far from Chandod. Accordingly, Ma visited the temple taking Narayan Swamiji with Her. Many such incidents happened around Ma, but most of them remained unknown.

The number of devotees were ever increasing when Ma would visit Ahmadabad, Baroda and other places in Gujarat. Ma proceeded to Morvi from Ahmadabad in 1951 at the request of the Maharaja of that State. He arranged a royal reception from the state. At Ahmadabad, Kantibhai (later known as Swami Bhagabatananda) had made elaborate arrangements to celebrate the birth anniversary of Ma in 1957. She said at that time, "This body does not know the method of worship" and rolled on the ground to offer 'sastang pranam' (prostration) to everybody. In 1963, Sri K. M. Munshaw arranged the thirteenth Samyam Saptaha function at Ahmadabad in the presence of Ma.

Ma came to Ahmadabad in September 1972 and stayed in the Governor's House at the request of Sri Sriman Narayan, the then Governor of Gujarat. A guesthouse on the lawns of the Governor's House had been kept ready

for Her stay. The way the Governor and his wife treated Her is usually reserved for a State Guest. The couple went to the Railway Station to receive Ma and then gave Her a reception at the Durbar Hall of Raj-Bhavan. Over a hundred distinguished citizens attended the reception. Over four thousand persons, representing all religions and creeds, assembled on the lawn for Her darshan.

Ma said, "There is only one God for all sects, like the way the same man is seen as a father, son, or husband by different people. The human life is a rare gift. Only the human mind among all living creatures possesses the power to feel divinity. Everybody should strive to fulfill this aim of human existence; it does not matter to which race, religion, or sect one may belong."

On Her return journey, huge crowds waited at every Railway Station wherever the train carrying Ma was scheduled to stop. When Ma visited Ahmedabad in February 1973, a sea of people flooded Ahmadabad Railway Station to receive Her. Wherever Ma visited, the devotees sought Her guidance for their doubts and difficulties. At Baroda, a man wanted to know whether there was a previous birth. Ma answered, "It is there, but only those who believe in previous births and a re-birth will undergo the transmutation of soul. Those who do not have this in their samskar (influence of previous births) will not experience it."

Ma came to Bhimpura Ashram for a few days in November 1977 after attending the 28th Samyam Saptaha Mahabrata at the Badrikashram in Chandod where Ma went at the request of Mahamandaleshwar Swami Brahmananda. The function was arranged in a huge canvas 'pandal' erected near the Narmada River. One thousand people had taken a

⁴²Dandi Swami - A sanyasi who moves with a sacred 'danda'(stick) and follows some specific religious rules.

vow to observe a week of restraint. One day, Ma commented, "A worthy Guru will never desert his disciple. The Guru will not release the disciple, howsoever adamant he might be to run away.

In January 1978, a Samyam-Saptaha was organized at the Santram Mandir in Nadiad, a place close to Bhimpura, which was attended by a large number of devotees. Ma was greatly pleased and impressed seeing the spirit of service shown by the ashramites of the Santram Mandir. The subtle form of late Santramji appeared before Ma while She was there.

Sometime in the seventh decade of the last century when Ma was in Bhimpura Ashram, a young man named Sri Narendra Bhai Modi came to Ma when he was on 'Parikrama'⁴³ of the sacred river Narmada. He was very hungry. Ma affectionately arranged to feed him well. After about four decades, that noble man became the Prime Minister of India in 2014. In November in that year, he came on his own to Ma's ashram in Varanasi where he was cordially received. He visited Ma Annapurna Temple in the ashram and Ma's room in Kanyapeeth. Sri Modi stood silently for some time in front of Ma's bed and offered flowers on Ma's wooden paduka (slippers). He recalled when he met Ma in Bhimpura Ashram and said, "How can I forget Ma's deep affection on that occasion?" He was offered a framed photograph of Ma, some books and prasad before leaving.

⁴³ **Parikrama** (of a river) - Walking along the same bank of the river from the source to the point where it meets the sea, and then after crossing the river returning back to the source walking along the other bank of the river, following strictly the spiritual rules prescribed for such occasions.

In January 1979, Ma came twice to Bhimpura Ashram in January and in October to take rest there. She kept Herself confined to Her small room and came out only on rare occasions. In January 1981, Ma stayed in Bhimpura Ashram for a month. 'Saraswati Puja' and 'Shiva-Ratri' Puja were performed there in presence of Ma. That was Shree Ma's last visit to that ashram.

After a long period, due to an effort of Brahmacharini Madhuben of Ma's ashram and Sri Narendra Bhai Modi, the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, a big piece of land in Ahmedabad city was received where, with the financial help of Sri Joy Mehta of Mumbai, a splendid ashram of Ma was built. It is known as 'Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Nam Smaran Sthali'. At present, this sacred place is under the management of Bhimpura Ashram. The famous 'Rama Katha' exponent Sri Murari Babu inaugurated it in 2012. Many years earlier when Babu came to meet Ma at Kankhal Ashram in Haridwar, Ma told him, "Baba, Ram Katha hi Katha aur sab britha byatha." It means, the talk on Lord Ram is the only topic to be spoken, the rest is all wasteful and painful. After getting inspiration from Ma, he started giving lectures on the 'Ramayan' and he became a famous exponent on Ramayan.

Ma in Simla and devotees planned establishment of an ashram in Delhi

In 1936, Ma was travelling from Solan to Simla. Arrangements for Ma's stay in Simla were made at the 'Kalibari'. It became difficult to control the enthusiasm of the devotees, the residents and the hill-folks coming for Ma's darshan. They would surround Her till late at night and hear Ma's heartfelt words to their queries.

They asked Ma why people get distracted while chanting God's name. Ma said, "The fault lies with you; there must be something wrong in the way you conduct yourself. The distraction may be caused by something you see, somebody you meet, something you discuss, without you being ever aware of it. Therefore, if one chooses this path, one should shun company and seek solitude in order to concentrate. In the beginning, one should be careful to ensure that nothing comes in the way of directing one's mind towards God. Be with men of virtue, talk of virtuous ways. Being with men of virtue or reading their life story would help to purify your mind and direct your thoughts towards Him." Ma also advised: "Try to keep your body still for a long time, the longer you do so the greater will be your composure. Chant the name of God and that will get you everything."

In those days, the capital of India used to be shifted from Delhi to Simla for six months during the summers. A large number of employees of the Government of India also used to shift there from Delhi. Many of them had a leaning towards the 'Nam kirtana' and singing of 'Hare Krishna Nam'. They organized a 'nam-yajna' (kirtana) at the Kalibari during Ma's stay there. Hearing the chanting of kirtana, Shree Ma entered into a state of 'Mahabhava' (super spirituality). Ma was swirling, falling, and standing up on Her toes; Her movements were like that of a dry leaf carried away in a whirlwind. Ma in that state of 'Mahabhava' stepped into the room where the kirtana was going on. Shree Ma was totally unaware of Her body. Her appearance was radiantly beautiful and She was shining in Her splendour. The singers were overwhelmed by Ma's presence and the chanting reached its climax. Shree Ma,

then, entered into a still and motionless state of 'Samadhi'. She was gently led to a room, where She remained lying motionless till the next day late afternoon.

Most of these kirtana singers in Simla Kalibari were based at Delhi. They became firm devotees of Shree Ma. On their return to Delhi, they began to think in terms of building an ashram with the objective of having Ma with them whenever they are at their base in Delhi. When a devotee raised the issue of having an ashram in Delhi, Ma told him, "Look, there is no need for an ashram or anything else for you; I only want you to live in harmony and peace. Let good spirit grow in you. And since you talk of an ashram, the whole universe is an ashram; you may call it a limitless ashram."

However, they were not to be deprived. With the blessings of Ma's khoyal, they were able to procure land in Kalkaji in South Delhi and constructed an ashram that was inaugurated in August 1954 in the presence of Ma. It was then an undeveloped rocky area. A circular hall was constructed for kirtana and Ma named it 'Nam Brahma Mandir'.

Ma had a special love for 'Nam-Kirtana', the chanting of God's name. Sometimes She Herself would lead the kirtana in Her melodious voice while the others would follow. Ma said that 'Nam-Kirtana' purifies a place and its environment. One who chants will surely purify himself and the listeners as well in the process. Her advice on Kirtana singing was, "It is good to meditate with eyes closed before starting and at the end of a Kirtana session. There will be a special effect if the group looks upwards and moves slowly in circles." The 'Hare Krishna nam kirtana' was arranged in Delhi Ashram in November 1957

in the presence of Ma. Such 'Nam-kirtana' is still arranged there from sunrise to sunset on the last Sunday of every month.

Ma suggested the acquisition of the adjoining big piece of land where a cluster of temples was later built. When Ma was approached to show the spot where the temples were to be built, She asked someone to place a chair there before Her arrival. After coming to the site, Ma asked to bring the chair to where She was standing. Ma heard the temple proposals sitting on that chair and thereafter, She left the place without indicating any spot for the temple. All of a sudden Swami Swaroopananda, who was incharge of the ashram, realized why Ma had changed the position of the chair. He immediately finalised the site of the temple on the spot where Ma had sat.

Initially a Shiva Temple and a 'Hanuman Temple' were built there. The temples of Ma Kali and Swami Muktananda Giriji were added later which were inaugurated in the presence of Ma in May 1979. Much later, a beautiful small temple of Ma in white marble was also constructed there.

Ma once indicated that the Pandavas⁴⁴ in Dwapar-Yuga had been in this place. It is said that from this place, Lord Krishna took Arjuna to a nearby Ma Kali temple to seek blessings to win the great battle between Kauravas and Pandavas. Who can say the secret behind the consecration of the Kali Temple there? Has this place any link with that ancient Kali Temple where Sri Krishna and Arjuna visited? Ma did not reveal anything about it.

⁴⁴ **Pandavas** – The great five princely brothers - Yudhishtir, Bhim, Arjuna, Nakul & Sahadev, who won the battle of Mahabharat against the Kauravas.



Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is offering pranam near Ma's Bed in Varanasi Ashram



Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is being received by the author of this book Shri Somesh Chandra Banerjee (Somuda) the then General Secretary and Swami Deveshananda

There was an endless stream of visitors whenever She was in Delhi. Many great Mahatmas, renowned leaders from India and abroad, high bureaucrats, businesspersons and numerous other devotees visited Ma at the Kalkaji Ashram. Nehruji, Indiraji and their family members visited Ma several times in this ashram. During the Samyam-Saptaha in 1957, Sri Morarji Desai⁴⁵ and Babu Jagjivan Ram⁴⁶ with his wife came to Ma. Later, Sri Jagjivan Ram had come to Ma several times. Once he had taken Ma to his residence in Delhi with great honour.

Great festivals like 'Janmotsav', 'Durga Puja', 'Kali puja', 'Annakut' etc. were celebrated in Delhi Ashram in the presence of Ma. Presently, the ashram campus is beautifully surrounded by a green belt of trees and plants, keeping the place away from the din of the city. There is a metro Railway Station named 'Govindpuri' about half kilometer away from the ashram.

Arrival of Ma at Ranchi

Ranchi is a hilly place and is the capital of Jharkhand. Ma's ashram is located there in the heart of the city on the main road. It was established in December 1953 in the newly built house donated by Dr. Priya Ranjan Ghosh who was a bachelor and a renowned Dental Surgeon in Ranchi. He left his medical practices and came to Ma permanently becoming a brahmachari in the ashram. He was a good sadhaka and passed away at the age of about 96.

⁴⁵ **Morarji Desai** – He later became the Prime Minister of India in 1977

⁴⁶ **Jagjivan Ram** – An eminent Congress Leader, a Cabinet Minister in Govt. of India.

Soon after establishment of the Ranchi Ashram, a beautiful 'vigraha' (idol) of Ma Kali made of 'Ashta-dhatu' (compound of eight specific metals) was installed there in Ma's presence. The famous sculptor Nitai Pal of Calcutta sculpted the idol. Many devotees were attracted to Ma Kali and they experienced several surprising divine incidents.

In 1954, the Durga Puja was arranged there in Ma's presence in the adjoining vacant land outside the ashram campus. After the puja, Ma asked to make a mark on the spot where the 'Durga-pratima' was placed. The land was acquired later and the present Kali Temple was constructed at the spot where the 'Durga-pratima' was placed earlier. Ma Kali was shifted in the newly built temple and was installed in Ma's presence on 21 October 1962. Ma indicated that centuries ago, Ma Kali, the deity of the nearby Ratu Estate, was there at that spot. As per Ma's direction, the Maharaja of Ratu Estate, a devotee of Ma, became lifelong President of that ashram.

Ma's Janmotsav was arranged in this ashram in 1965. Hari Baba and many Holy men from all parts of India assembled on this occasion. Ma spent about two months at Ranchi on this occasion. Once a Czechoslovakian engineer working at Ranchi told Ma, "I do not believe in rebirth or transmigration of the soul; does it really matter?" Ma's answer was "There is only one true existence for us, a life that is devoted to God. The real death also happens only once – you can call it the death of deaths. Beyond this, there is nothing else that can be described as life or death."

Later, Giriji's marble vigraha was also installed in Kali temple in April 1980 in presence of Ma. A three-day function was held for installation of the statue. The consecration ceremony started on April 15. Didima's son

Makhan (Mamaji) performed all the rituals. The ceremony was held under the supervision of Mahant Giridhar Narain Puri, the Mahant of Nirvani Akhara at Kankhal. Much later, a marble vigraha of Ma was installed in the temple by the side of Ma Kali in 2007. The Chief Minister of Jharkhand State was present for that auspicious occasion.

Ma at Rajgir

At Rajgir in Bihar State, there is a small Ma's ashram in a solitary place that was established in 1955. The place is rocky and close to the hills. A calm and quiet environment prevails there, which is congenial for sadhana. Ma stayed there several times for taking rest. The Shiva temple in the ashram was inaugurated in Ma's presence in February 1965. Three Shiva-Lingas were installed inside the temple. Ma's temple was attached to a spacious hall and a double storied guesthouse was added later.

A strange incident happened to Swami Virajanandaji, a close devotee of Ma, while staying at Rajgir. He often went up the Rudrakoot Hill and Venuban for 'tapasya' (spiritual practices), which were favourite places of Lord Gautam Buddha. Ma also visited these places when She was at Rajgir. Once, while walking back to the ashram in the evening, Virajanandaji saw a tiger very close to him at a sudden sharp bend of the road. As the tiger was about to attack, suddenly, a truck came by and stopped. Quickly he got into the truck and was saved. About a year later, he and Ma were driving on that road in a car. When they reached the exact spot where the tiger incident happened, Ma on Her own told him, "Is that the place where you met the tiger?" Virajanandaji understood that Ma was always taking care of him and he was saved that day because of Ma's unlimited grace.

Due to scarcity of water in the ashram, it was decided to construct a well. One day while Ma was strolling in the open space in the ashram, the Secretary of the ashram told Ma about the proposal and requested Her to point out the place where the well should be dug. Ma stopped walking at a spot, gazed at him, and left the place without giving any instruction. The Secretary marked the spot where Ma stopped and asked the contractor to dig the well there, keeping the marked spot at its centre.

After about a fortnight, when he came back from Patna to see the progress of work, he got irritated seeing that the well was being dug after shifting its centre a little away from the previously marked centre. The contractor gave the reason that they had to shift its centre to avoid the cutting of a large rock found underneath. However, after digging deeper, they found an ancient well that was full of water but only part of it was visible. The ancient well could have been uncovered completely if they dug the well from the initially marked centre as indicated by Ma.

Ma went to Rajgir in August 1978 and stayed about a fortnight for rest there. Later in December 1981, She spent some time in complete seclusion at Rajgir to recoup Her failing health. It was Ma's last visit to this place.

Ma at Naimisharanya

Naimisharanya is a very small town in District Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh, located on the bank of the river Gomati. It is only about 70 kms away from Lucknow. In the age of 'Satya-Yuga', Naimisharanya was the holiest of all holy places. Eighty four thousand Rishis had assembled there and heard the Puranas⁴⁷ from the great-learned Rishi

⁴⁷ **Srimad Bhagabat Purana** – It is the eighteenth ancient Purana written by Veda Vyas.

Sutaji. Ma's visit to that place was therefore inevitable and She went there in 1936.

In 1960, Shree Ma's twelfth 'Samyam-Saptaha' was held at Naradananda Ashram in Naimisharanya. It was a weeklong programme of self-discipline, control, and sadhana. It was one of the most impressive 'Samyam-Saptaha' that was ever held before. It became possible only due to Ma's special 'Kheyal' (divine will).

A week before its commencement, the entire town including the place where the Samyam saptaha was to be held was inundated due to an unprecedented flood in the river Gomati. Ma was then in Lucknow at the invitation of Sri Rameshwar Sahai, a close devotee of Ma who was the Chief Conservator of Forest of Uttar Pradesh. Ma was staying in the forest guesthouse in Lucknow near his official residence.

The Kali puja on Diwali was arranged at that place in the presence of Ma. Gomati River is flowing through Lucknow city as well. In spite of the flood situation in that city, a heavy rush of people came to have Ma's darshan. The Governor, the Chief Minister of the State and a large number of dignitaries also came to meet Ma. When Ma took leave from the public for going to the puja place, an aged sadhu with white beard and long white hair quickly came before Ma and told that She would not be able to recognize him as he met Her about 30 or 40 years before. Ma immediately told him, "Yes Baba, we met while we were on a short trip on a boat during the visit of South India. Do you remember that you presented me a small Gita at that time?" Saying this Ma left for puja mandap. The Sadhu was deeply astonished because when he met Ma earlier, he was a teenage boy and his appearance was

completely different from what it was at this moment. He could not understand how, after such a long period, Ma could recognise him. However, the Sadhu did not realize that no one was ever unknown to Ma.

Due to such flood conditions in the river Gomati, Ma was requested to arrange the 'Samyam Saptaha' in Lucknow instead of Naimisharanya. Ma did not give Her consent to the proposal. Soon after, Ma asked for a glass of water and while taking the water, She had a 'Kheyal' that as She was emptying the glass of water, similarly the floodwaters at Naimisharanya would also be emptied. Surprisingly, the floodwaters receded with an unusual speed and the 'Samyam Saptaha' could be held on the right day at the selected spot in Naimisharanya.

Many learned Saints and Mahatmas attended the programme and delivered lectures on different religious topics. A large congregation of 'Vratees' (participants) were taking part. After the Samyam Saptaha, a Bhagavat Saptaha also commenced there. Swami Vishnu Ashramji of 'Shuktal' gave discourses on 'Srimad Bhagavat Purana'.

During Samyam Saptaha, Shree Ma suggested the reading from 'Brahma-Purana', but no copy of that 'Purana' could be found anywhere in and around Naimisharanya. Bearing in mind that the 'Purana' could not be found in the very birthplace of 'Puranas', Shree Ma started the revival of Naimisharanya to its past glory along with the preservation of all the 'Puranas' there.

A land was arranged on top of the 'Hanuman-Tila', which was the highest ground-level spot in that place and remained uninundated even during highest flood of the river. Ma first began with the building of a grand 'Purana-Mandir' (temple) after establishment of the ashram. Its

inaugural programme stretched over three days from 9 to 11 December 1967. Copies of all the eighteen 'Puranas' and four 'Vedas' were procured and those were beautifully bound, covered, and stored in a sandalwood almirah (book-case) to protect against any further damage. Shree Ma's deep insight went beyond mere preservation. Arrangements were made to ensure their daily recitation, worship, and aarti. One and half years later, two weeks long Bhagavat discourses by Swami Akhandanandaji of Vrindavan was arranged in the presence of Ma. Great Mahatmas like Haribaba, Swami Sharananandaji, Swami Govind Prakashji, and numerous people of the area attended the function.

Close to the 'Purana-Mandir' more construction activity was undertaken. Gradually a 'Matri-bhawan', 'yajnashala' and a 'guest-house' were built. The sacred flame of the 'Savitri Mahayagna' was brought from Varanasi and was placed in the newly built 'yagnashala' in the ashram. The burning of the same fire in the yajna-kund was started on January 14 in 1974 in the presence of Ma. The then Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Chenna Reddy, attended the function with many others. The fire has been kept alive continuously since then with daily 'havan' (oblation). Once, the fire in the 'yagna-kund' extinguished when Ma was present in the ashram. Ma came and placed Her cotton shawl inside the yagnya-kund. Soon after, it started burning and the same fire has been maintained since then.

A 'Purana-Purusha' Temple was also built behind the 'Purana Mandir' there. The 'Puran-Purusha' is conceived as the symbol of the essence of the totality of the Puranas. The vigraha (Idol) of the 'Purana-Purusha'

cast in 'Ashtadhatu' (compound of eight specific metals) was sculpted at the request of Swami Akhandananda of Vrindavan who was a learned saint and the foremost exponent of 'Bhagavat Purana'. Its sculpture was based on a picture printed in a magazine called 'Chintamani', which was edited and published by Akhandanandaji. It was the first such image cast in India and abroad.

The 'vigraha' was installed in Shree Ma's presence on the auspicious day of 'Akshaya Tritiya' in 1975. At night, the image was worshiped with a lakh and twenty five thousand thin wicks placed in five big earthen containers, each emitting a flame. After the aarti, the flames were kept outside the temple.

A 'Bhagavat-Saptah' was organized to mark the occasion. Swami Akhandanandaji himself was the exponent. Dr. Chenna Reddy and many other important people were also present on that occasion. A new wave of life in Naimisharanya began with the study and preservation of the 'Puranas'. Shree Ma made proper arrangements for the daily worship, bhog and aarti of the 'Purana-Purusha' as well.

Ma's Ashram is located not far from the well-known Hanuman Temple, where there is a massive statue of Hanuman. It is said that the Pandavas, during their stay at this place, installed the great statue. The Governor Dr.Reddy, on receiving inspiration from Ma, got the ancient places like Chakra-Teertha, Vyas-Gaddi etc. nicely renovated where thousands of pilgrims visit on every purnima (full moon day) and on Amavasya (black moon day). Besides, frequent visits of the Honourable Governor during Ma's stay at that place, compelled the District Administration to pay more attention to improve the general

facilities like roads, plying of buses, electric and water supply etc. for the township. Thus, Naimisharanya regained its rightful place amongst the holy places of India.

In October 1972, 'Durga Puja' and 'Kali Puja' were celebrated there in Ma's presence. An unusual incident happened at that time. A simple aged rural woman from a nearby village came to the ashram during the Durga puja. She was seen under the beautiful bel (wood apple) tree nearby the lawn where the Durga puja was arranged in a pandal. She knew nobody there, but Ma from a distance noticed the unknown woman and called her. The woman told Ma that in a dream on the previous night Ma Durga had asked her to go to Anandamayee Ashram in Naimisharanya where Ma Durga together with other Gods and Goddesses were staying there taking shelter in a bel tree. Ma told others present at that time that such a simple woman could never tell a lie.

It is a regular procedure in the Durga puja that on the first day evening in shashthi tithi (sixth day in the bright half of the lunar month), a short puja is performed nearby the sacred bel tree where Ma Durga together with other Gods and Goddesses are prayed to come and take shelter there. Thus, through that unknown rural woman, Ma made known to others that Ma Durga with other Gods and Goddesses were truly present in the puja there. That woman was also blessed to have Ma's darshan and received Her grace.

Later, Ma one day visualised Lord Shiva playing on a blow-horn (a kind of trumpet) under that tree. Surprisingly, that beautiful bel tree became lifeless soon after that and dried up completely. As per Ma's instruction, a small Shiva Temple was constructed at that location and a Shiva-Linga

from Narmada River was installed in Ma's presence in July 1981. Daily puja is continuing there since then.

More activities concerning the Puranas were undertaken in accordance with Ma's special 'kheyal'. A little distance away from the 'Purana Mandir', eight acres of land were acquired. Its purpose was to construct suitable buildings to house an institution of 'Pauranic and Vedic Studies' and to accommodate the staff members there. Besides, three wings of a hostel were also constructed to accommodate the research students. Cooperation and expert guidance of the then Governor Dr. Chenna Reddy and after him the next Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Sri C.P.N. Singh, helped a lot for establishment of the Institution. A Board of Trustees was formed with Dr. Reddy as President for life and Dr. Gaurinath Shastri as its Director. Shastriji was the learned Vice-Chancellor of the 'Sampurnanand Sanskrit University' in Varanasi with which the institute was affiliated.

A department for research studies was set up in 1978 under the guidelines of the learned Vice-Chancellor Sri Gauri Nath Shastri. The Institution earned a good reputation under his guidance. About 26 scholars of this Institute have so far received their Ph.D. degrees. In addition, there are scholars studying for 'Acharya' and 'Shastri' degrees as well receiving almost free education. The Institution arranged a few 'National Seminars' in its campus which were attended by many learned persons from all over India.

In 1981, Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, came to inaugurate the Institute in the presence of Ma and it was called 'Ma Anandamayee Institute for Puranic and Vedic Studies and Research'. On that occasion, Ma spread her shawl in her hands, went to

everybody present there and begged alms for the Institute. Ma was never seen doing such actions earlier at any time. However, presently the Institute still needs large funds to continue its functioning in a desired manner.

The calm and quiet environment of Naimisharanya Ashram attracted Ma almost every year for taking rest in isolation. Once Ma said that 'Kripa' (Grace) comes from three sources - i) Ishwara-kripa i.e. grace of God, ii) Guru-kripa, i.e., grace of the Guru, iii) Atma-kripa, i.e., grace of one's own self." Ma said, "Grace of the Guru is always there for the disciples. God's grace is also easily obtained, as God is ever kind and compassionate. But, if 'Atma-Kripa', the grace of own self, is lacking, grace of the Guru and grace of God proves ineffective." Ma emphasized that self-discipline, patience, and fortitude are necessary for receiving 'Atma-Kripa'.

Giriji's Mahasamadhi' and establishment of Kankhal Ashram

On July 29, 1970, Shree Ma together with Her mother Swami Muktananda Giriji was leaving Varanasi for Haridwar. Before leaving the ashram, Ma with Giriji came to Her brother Mamaji's residence for some time. While on the way to the Varanasi railway station, Ma with Giriji stopped at the house of Mamaji's daughter Buludi at Sidhagirbag for a few hours. Bhog of Ma and Giriji was arranged there and all others accompanying Ma also received prasad. No one could know at that time that before proceeding to Haridwar, Ma was giving chance to Giriji's own nearest family members to meet her finally.

After arriving at Haridwar, Ma stayed in Kankhal at the residence of Sri Nitai Basu Mullick. The house was

close to Daksha Mandir and was called 'Shanti Niketan'. Nitaida was a disciple and a great devotee of Giriji. He had no children of his own. After death of his wife, he offered a part of 'Shanti Niketan' to his Guru Giriji in July 1962. Giriji, in turn, gave it to 'Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha'. On July 31, 1970, Nitaida gave away the remaining part of 'Shanti Niketan' also to the Sangha. That was the beginning of Shree Ma's Ashram at Kankhal in Haridwar.

On 1st of August 1970, Ma and Giriji, along with other ashramites moved to 'Jaipuria Bhawan' at Ramghat on the banks of river Ganga in Haridwar. The occasion was a 'Bhagavat-Saptaha' arranged by Jaipurias from 3rd to 10th of August there. Shrinath Shastriji was the exponent of the 'Srimad Bhagavat'.

Every day after spending the day at 'Jaipuria Bhawan', Shree Ma used to return to 'Shanti Niketan' at Kankhal to spend the night there. Sri Krishna 'Janma' (birth) celebrations in the 'Bhagavat-Saptaha' were arranged on 8th of August. Shree Ma observed on that day a great light emanating from Giriji's face. That night, Ma did not go back to the Kankhal Ashram. She stayed on at the 'Jaipuria Bhawan' where Giriji was staying in a room adjoining the river Ganga. Every night, it was her practice to go to Ma's room, sit by Her bedside and before retiring, she would say to Ma, "Remain well and don't slip away leaving me." That night Giriji did not utter these familiar words to Ma and went back her room.

The same night Indiraji (Swami Dhyanananda), before retiring for sleep in Giriji's room, repeatedly requested Giriji to tell her who Ma was. Giriji remained silent in the beginning but finally replied that Ma is the

'Purna Shakti' (the complete power of the universe and beyond it). Thus, the holy mother Giriji revealed before passing away the real swaroop (identity) of Ma who came in to this world as her daughter.

Around one o'clock in the midnight on 9 August 1970, Ma on Her own got up and went to Giriji's room. Ma was told that Giriji was not breathing well. Ma shifted Giriji onto a bed placed on the floor and gently rubbed Giriji's chest. Later on Giriji opened her eyes. Shree Ma bent down to touch Her mother's feet but She could not do so as Giriji withdrew her feet quickly. Ma said later that it was evident from Giriji's behaviour that she had risen above the outer bonds of a mother-daughter relationship. If she would have even a little bit of that sense, Ma would not have allowed Giriji to leave her body. Giriji folded her hands to offer her 'Pranam'. Ma loosened her clothes and gently lifted her head, holding it in Her hands. Thus, Giriji left her body directly looking at Shree Ma. She left her sacred body in a dharmashala (shelter for pilgrims) without accepting any sort of service or nursing from anyone. Giriji was then ninety-four years old.

Her disciples lost their most kind and capable Guru who always had taken care to protect them. Several beggars and poor persons wept bitterly as they lost their dearest one who off and on gave them monetary and other help secretly without anyone's knowledge. Not only that, well before leaving this world, Giriji in her divine vision had taken word thrice from Ma to take all her disciples across the ocean of samsar (life of repeated births and deaths). Therefore, all Giriji's disciples are greatly blessed.

The sacred body of Giriji was brought to Kankhal Ashram in the morning. Giriji's body was placed in the

grave (Samadhi) on that night which was dug in the small open space in the ashram. Mahant Swami Girdhar Narayana Puriji of Nirvani Akhara was conducting the 'Samadhi-Kriya' (burial ceremony). He sought Ma's instruction regarding the direction the 'Samadhi' should face. Ma replied, "Baba, what does the rule says?" Mahantji said that according to their custom, a 'Samadhi' of a sannyasi should face the west. Raising her finger upwards, Shree Ma asked, "What if Giriji had already attained That level!" Mahantji understood Ma at once. Giriji's body in sitting posture was buried keeping her face southwards. Generally, any divine Deity is preferably installed with their face in that direction.

Ma maintained calmness at the demise of Her dearest mother but She became serious. While feeding Ma the next day at noon in seclusion, Mamiji, the wife of Ma's brother, started weeping remembering Giriji. Ma reacted to such display of sorrow. Her seriousness melted away and Ma too wept bitterly saying, "Oh ma, you left all of us breaking the pitcher of fortunes⁴⁸."

After Giriji's Samadhi, puja of specific God or Goddesses used to be performed daily on Giriji's portrait as per Ma's direction and in Her presence. On the Bengali New Year day i.e. on the first Baisakh evening, Ma saw in Her divine vision that Gopalji (child form of Lord Krishna) came crawling into Giriji's room and raised Himself to a standing position holding onto Giriji's cot and was looking at her. Ma lovingly told Gopalji, "Oh! You have not received puja as yet, that is why you have come to remind for that!" Ma immediately directed Her attendants to prepare 'puri-

halwa' bhog for Gopalji. From then onwards, such 'puri-halwa' bhog is offered to Gopalji every year on the first day of Baisakh in the evening as directed by Ma.

An elaborate 'Sadhu Bhandara' (feast for Sadhus) was arranged at Shivananda Ashram in Rishikesh in honour of Giriji. Ma was present during the bhandara (feast). A special ceremony was arranged at Kankhal Ashram on 23 August in 1970 for conducting 'Shodash-Dan' as is done for a departed sannyasi. Besides, there was a special programme for the feeding of the poor also as Giriji was known for her compassion for the poor and the hungry. A 'Daridra-Narayan-Seva'⁴⁹ was arranged at 'Har-Ki-Pauri' in Haridwar. On August 25, a big 'Bhandara' (feast) was given in honour of Giriji at the 'Nirvani Akhara' in Kankhal. Thousands of devotees were fed there on that day.

One year later, the death anniversary of Giriji was observed at Kankhal on August 29 in 1971, on the shukla saptami tithi before the jhulan festival when she had expired. Kirtana singing, observance of silence and meditation marked the occasion. Coinciding with the time of Giriji's passing away, a puja of Giriji at midnight was observed along with meditation for half-an-hour from 12.45 to 1.15 A.M. in the presence of Ma. Since then, this special ritual is observed every year at midnight in that specific tithi in Giriji's samadhi temple in Kankhal Ashram.

On 25th of April 1974, the auspicious day of 'Akshaya-Tritiya', a beautiful marble statue of Giriji was installed on the 'Samadhi', in the small but beautiful temple built over it. The day coincided with the main bathing day for the Poorna-Kumbha. The ceremony was carried out in

⁴⁸ **Breaking pitcher of fortunes** – It is said in the colloquial language of East Bengal when one expresses grief by saying that the person departed has taken all fortunes along with him.

⁴⁹ **Daridra Narayan seva** – A feast arranged to feed the poor with due care, considering them God in that form

the presence of Shree Ma. Several Mahamandaleshwars of different ashrams in Haridwar attended. Swami Chidanandaji of the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh, Sri G.S. Pathak, the then Vice-President of India, and many other notable devotees of Giriji were also present.

Giriji was born in Vaishakh (April-May) in 1877, but the exact date was not known. Therefore, it was decided that the birth centenary would be observed for a full month from April 14 in 1977 and it was observed accordingly with great enthusiasm at all the Ashrams of Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Sangha.

In the meantime, a big piece of land was acquired on the other side of the road in Kankhal for further extension of the ashram. A guesthouse attached with a big 'satsang' hall was constructed there. On 10th of May 1978, a beautiful statue of Adi Shankaracharya was installed in that hall, in presence of Shree Ma. The Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath Swami Shantananda Saraswatiji and several Mandaleshwars of Haridwar also attended the function. This 'Satsang' hall came to be known as 'Shankaracharya Hall'. Many celebrations like Ma's 'Janamotsav' festivals, Durga Puja, Samyam Saptaha and many other important religious functions had been arranged here. Many great Mahatmas, Sadhus, leaders of the country, high bureaucrats, royal families and innumerable devotees came there for Shree Ma's 'Darshan'. Even now, most of the important celebrations and pujas are arranged here only.

In that big land, many other buildings like Matri Niwas, Sadhu Niwas, two Yangyashalas, a kitchen complex with spacious dining hall named 'Annapurna-Sthal' were constructed there during Ma's time. A flame of the sacred fire brought from the yajnashala in Varanasi Ashram was

ceremonially installed in the newly built yajnashala on the 14 January 1978. Later on, more guesthouses, the Vidyapeeth building, library and the elegant temple of Ma in white marbles were added.

There is another ashram campus in front of the Sadhu Niwas on the other side of the road. One more Matri Niwas was built in the land right on the bank of Ganga River, where Ma stayed for two months in 1982 until 4th of July 1982. It was Her last stay in Kankhal Ashram. The last Janmotsav in presence of Ma was arranged there. Presently a part of the building has been converted into a wonderful Museum, displaying Ma's various photographs, paintings and different articles used by Her. Presently, the Kankhal Ashram is the Headquarter of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha.

Atirudra-Mahayajna in Kankhal Ashram in 1981

The 'Atirudra Mahayajna' at Kankhal in Haridwar was the last elaborate religious function arranged in presence of Ma. The Fire-God (Agni) is conceived as the God of Destruction (Rudra) and the Yajna is devoted to the well-being of the Universe.

The first stirrings of the 'Atirudra Mahayajna' were in the hearts and minds of some Brahmacharinis, close to Shree Ma. Their aspirations found place in Ma's 'Kheyal' (divine will). Ma advised them to perform the yajna in a 'satvik' way. Thus, this great Vedic Mahayajnas came to be performed under Ma's benign guidance in the Kankhal Ashram.

Ma formed a small committee taking a special group of kumari brahmacharinis for working out and planning the 'Mahayajna'. Dr. Padma Misra, a retired Professor of

Banaras Hindu University was selected as President of the committee. Nirmal Handoo (retired Professor of Allahabad University), Aruna Pandya and Parul Banerjee were its members and Brahmacharini Shantaji (Swami Purnananda)⁵⁰ was selected as its Secretary. Sri S.K. Datta (Patanda) an old devotee of Ma and a few others were there to help them. They were to shoulder all responsibility towards this 'Mahayajna' under the guidance and direction of Shree Ma. Ma also asked all the women members of the ashram to work to the best of their ability for the yajna. Some expressed their doubts whether it would be possible for the Brahmacharinis to perform such a big and intricate job. Ma said that if selfishness did not come in the way, there would be no problem. This invaluable advice of Ma is applicable in all affairs.

For conducting such an elaborate and expensive yajna, adequate funds were required but money had yet to be collected even though the yajna was to begin only six months later. A significant contribution was received on Deepavali day when Shantaji found a Re.1 coin while cleaning Ma's room and deposited it into the collection box of the yajna as Ma's contribution. After such an auspicious contribution, there was of course, no shortage of funds and the working committee received just sufficient money to the extent it was required.

In December 1980, Shree Ma, along with this group, visited Varanasi. Pandit Vamdevji of Varanasi was contacted who was considered one of the foremost Vedic 'yajniks' (priest of a yajna) of India at that time. He was requested to be the 'Pradhanacharya' (Chief Priest) of the

'Atirudra Mahayajna'. Due to Shree Ma's blissful presence, he accepted the position. According to his suggestion, it was decided to commence the Yajna on 6th of May 1981, on the auspicious day of 'Akshaya Tritiya'. It would continue for eleven days, concluding on 16th of May.

As per Ma's direction, location of the yajnashala was finalised at the spot in the open land behind the Matri Niwas where the river Ganga and the Ganga canal flow on either side. Several suggestions about the venue of the yajnashala were received but the spot Ma selected, was adhered to finally. The layout plan of the 'Yajnashala' was prepared at Varanasi with the help of Vamdevji and the engineer devotee there, following strictly the design and measurements laid down in the scriptures. It was perfect in every detail. In February 1981, the 'Bhumi-Puja' and foundation laying ceremony of the yajnashala was performed at the site. During the bhumi-puja, Ma clapped her hands and said, "Who knows, this may be the very place of Sati⁵¹."

Its construction was carried strictly according to the plan. A square yajnashala of 67.5 feet wide on each side was constructed where four beautiful 'Toran-Dwars' (entrance doors) had been located at the centre of each side. It was a temporary construction of mud and wire mesh walls with three-tiered sloping straw roof, resting on thirty six pillars decorated with relevant pictures of their devatas. A fine bamboo network fencing was laid out at an arm's length away from the outer wall of the yajnashala. Its purpose

⁵¹ Sati – In the ancient times, Sati, the wife of Lord Shiva immolated herself when she was unable to bear the insult to her husband during the great Ati Rudra Yajna being performed by her father King Daksha Prajapati at Kankhal in Haridwar. The yajna could not be completed due to the disturbance created by the followers of Lord Shiva.

⁵⁰ Brahmacharini Shanta (Sw. Purnananda) – The youngest daughter of Sri Gopal Swaroop Pathak, the former Vice President of India.

was to prevent any contact or touch of the yajnashala-walls by visitors and common folk from outside. It was to maintain the most scrupulous purity of the whole structure, as enjoined in the scriptures (shastras). Although a temporary structure, the yajnashala was a treat to the eyes. Its splendour and purity attracted all.

There were eleven 'yajnakundas' built according to the ancient shastric injunctions. A shining gold-like chain coming down from the ceiling was carrying a gold-like new brass pitcher (kalasha) over the center of every 'yajnakunda' for a slow dripping of pure 'ghee', drop by drop from that kalasha, into the sacred fire in the 'yajnakunda'. In the four corners of the 'yajnashala' were four 'Vedies' (podiums). There was a special 'Vedi' in the northeast corner; over it hung a canopy, called a 'chandwa'. These vedis were the seats of Gods and Goddesses.

One hundred and thirty five learned Brahmin Pandits from Varanasi, Haridwar, Rishikesh, the South, and Maharashtra were engaged for the performance of the 'yajna'. They were to maintain and observe the minutest rules of personal, physical, and inner purity, to be eligible for performing this greatest of the 'yajnas'. Shree Ma, by the request of all, was the foremost and final guide and supervisor of the 'Yajna'. Ma used to give proper guidance on every aspect with the minutest details and kept a watchful eye on every detail of the preparations.

The 'yajna' ceremonies commenced on 6 May 1981. Brahmin Pandits entered the 'Yajnashala' after bathing in the Ganga in the early hours of the morning and wearing unstitched pure yellow robes. With chanting of the 'Vedic-Mantras' by the Acharya and by the Pandits, the great 'Mahayajna' began. On the first day, Kalashas were installed

at all the vedies (podium) and puja was performed there. Recitation of each of the four Vedas was continuing simultaneously. Pandits from each of the four Vedic sects (Rik, Sam, Yajur and Atharva Vedas) occupied their sitting place nearby the particular entry door which was conferred to the concerning Veda. Separate kalashas were installed for the concerning 'Dwarpal' (guard) at each gate and puja was performed there too. Worship at the 'Vedies' was performed everyday in full details, item by item, with offerings of flowers, bilva-patra, roli (sacred thread), vastra (clothing), anna (grain-food), mewa (dry fruits), batasha (puffed sugar), fresh fruits, and coins.

Shree Ma, along with the Mahant of Nirvani Akhara, Mahamndaleshwara Swami Girdhar Narayan Puriji, Swami Chidanandaji of the 'Divine Life Society' (Rishikesh), and many great sadhus and sannnyasis were present on the first day of the yajna. With the sacred practice of 'Agnimanthan' (generation of fire), there was the manifestation of 'Agnideva'. With the chanting of the 'Ved-Mantras', the sacred flame of the 'Agnideva' was ignited in all the eleven 'Yajnakundas', one by one.

Thus, the 'Atirudra-Mahayajna' began. It lasted for eleven days from 6 to 16 May 1981 during Ma's Janmotsav function that year. In all, 2,429,758 'Ahutis' (oblations) were offered in the sacred fire of yajna, accompanied by the melodious chanting of mantras ending with 'Swaha'.

One day there was a huge thunderstorm during the Mahayajna. Torrential rain and fierce winds lashed the temporary structure of the yajnashala. Everybody felt alarmed. Ma, who was in Her room at that time, was informed. She immediately came outside in the rains. Soon after, the rains started subsiding and stopped. Shantaji said

that when the storm was over, she and the others present over there, saw in wonder a stunning light in the sky directly over the yajnashala. The sky was aglow with striking colours – orange, pink, gold, rust and yellow. They never saw such a beautiful sight before.

One day the brahmacharinis of the ashram dressed up Shree Ma as Lord Shiva. Ma went into deep 'Samadhi' sitting in a state of yog-mudra of Lord Shiva. The whole atmosphere was charged with devotion and the chanting of 'Har Har Mahadeva' and 'Shiva-Kirtana' continued. Devotees felt that they had 'Darshan' of Rudradeva (Mahadev) in Shree Ma Herself. Ma remained in that state for a long time.

'Parikrama', that is, going round the periphery of the 'yagnashala' held a great significance. Every day, there were streams of devotees from early morning until late night, going round the yagnashala. 'Parikrama' continued even after the 'Atirudra-Mahayajna' was over. Shree Ma wanted the devotees to undertake a fixed number of 'parikramas' like 108, 54, 11 or 7 times in slow and steady steps and 'Japa' must be maintained with full concentration during that time.

Invitations had been sent out all around. Many religious heads, nearly all Mahamandaleshwars and Mahants of Niranjani, Nirvani and Udasin Akharas and other well-known people attended the yajna. Foremost amongst them were the Shankaracharya Abhinav-sacchchidananda Tirtha of Dwarika Sharada Peeth, Sw. Ram Swaroop (Vedanta-Sammelan), Sw. Sachchidananda (Bholagiri-Ashram), Sw. Brahmananda (Suratgiri-Asram), Sw. Vireshwarananda (Ramakrishna Mission) Sw. Prakashananda (Jagat-Guru Ashram), Sw. Brajo Kishore

Puri (Geeta-Bhawan), Sw. Vidyānanda (Kailash Ashram), Sw. Chidanand (Divine Life Society), Sw. Ganeshananda (Sannyas Ashram), Gita Bharatiji (Hariharananda Ashram), Swami Akhandananda Saraswati from Vrindaban and Sw. Vishnu Ashram from Suktal and Sw. Shyam Sundar Das (Garib Dasi Ashram). Their presence heightened the joyous atmosphere. Amongst the prominent persons Gyani Zail Singh⁵², Sri G.S. Pathak⁵³, Sri Gulzari Lal Nanda⁵⁴, Sri Kamalapati Tripathi⁵⁵, Dr. Triguna Sen and many others attended the function.

After Shree Ma's holy touch, the senior most naisthik brahmachari Swami Bhaskaranandaji performed the closing ritual of 'Purnahuti' (final oblation) of the 'Atirudra-Mahayajna'. This was followed by a magnificent ceremony befitting Shree Ma's majestic presence. Ten beautifully ornamented cows and many other objects were given away in charity in accordance with shastric injunctions. At the end of the great 'yajna', a shobha-yatra (procession) with Shree Ma and the Shankaracharya was taken out from the 'Ashram' to the 'Brahmakund' in the river Ganga and returned back.

Shree Ma indicated that Kankhal was the place where King Daksha Prajapati performed the great yajna in the ancient Yuga (era), but the yajna could not be completed by him at that time but had been completed now. She also said that such a 'satvic' (virtuous) yajna is not likely to be performed again. Those who were able to participate or

⁵² Gyani Zail Singh – Served as President of India from 1982 to 1987.

⁵³ Sri Gopal Swaroop Pathak – Former Vice President of India.

⁵⁴ Sri Gulzari Lal Nanda – He was a great leader and former Prime Minister of India.

⁵⁵ Sri Kamalapati Tripathi – He was a former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and later a Cabinet Minister of India and President of the Congress Party.

even witness the 'yajna' had done some good deeds in their former birth and so they gained a chance to attend the 'Atirudra-Mahayajna' in this era in their life. The aim of the Mahayajna was 'Vishwa-Kalyan' – welfare of all forms of lives and of all human beings all over the world.

After completion of the yajna, Ma expressed Her 'Kheyal' to convert the temporary yajnashala into a permanent structure, which could last for thousand years. It was constructed adhering strictly to the measurements and design code laid down in the scriptures and keeping intact the location and size of the yajnashala, location of inside pillars, and all the eleven yajna-kundas as they had been. Sri Kanvinde, a renowned Architect of Delhi, prepared the plan and its construction was completed accordingly. It is now considered as a unique yajnashala not seen elsewhere. As per Ma's advice, a book in English language giving the minutest details of this unique Mahayajna was published later on.

Ma at Agartala

Agartala is the capital of West Tripura State which is situated in the Eastern part of India nearby Bangladesh. The ashram at Agartala came up in 1977. Maharaja Manikya Bahadur of Tripura Estate had donated to Ma the famous temple of 'Uma- Maheshwar' along with the big adjoining land.

Ma's last visit to Agartala was in March 1982 when She stayed there for a week. The local devotees had been waiting for about three years for Ma's arrival. Ma was honoured as a State Guest of the State Government there. The Chief Minister of the State came to meet Ma. In this visit, Ma went to the Kali temple at Kasba, which is situated

near India-Bangladesh border, where Her grandmother had prayed for a child for her son Bipin Bihari and thereafter Ma was born.

Ma entered the ashram on 31st of March 1982 for its formal inauguration. A cottage was newly built there for Ma's stay. Out of Ma's kheyal (divine will), a vigraha of Goddess Saraswati was installed on that day in the newly built room for Ma and a Shiva-Linga was installed in its verandah in Ma's presence. Ma had foreseen at that time and professed that in future the place would be known in the field of education. Later, Ma Anandamayee Vidyapeeth, an English medium school was established there which is developing into a prominent school of the State. Besides, there is a planning to acquire a big piece of land and establish a University in Ma's name. The next day, She visited the temple at the royal palace at the special invitation of the Maharaja. The royal family accorded a fitting reception to Her.

Ma's immense attraction had drawn about a lakh people to Agartala from all around and still larger numbers were coming from the distant villages around the city. It was difficult for the State Administration to cope with such an unprecedented and ever-increasing crowd. As per advice of the Police Administration, Shree Ma had to leave the place before her scheduled day of departure to avoid any untoward incident. It was Ma's last visit to this place.

From Agartala, Ma travelled to Dharmanagar and Bangaigaon before returning to Calcutta (Kolkata). A high platform was constructed at Dharmanagar for Ma for the convenience of the large crowd assembled there to have darshan of Ma. Later Ma said that if similar high platform was arranged at Agartala, it would have been possible for

Her to see all the persons who had come to see Her. On 10th of April 1982, Ma was back at Kankhal.

Other ashrams of Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee

Pune ashram – Ma's only ashram in Maharashtra state is in Poona (presently called 'Pune'), which is near Bombay (Mumbai). Ma visited this place in May 1960 after the conclusion of a fortnight long Ma's janmotsav function at Bombay (Mumbai), which was arranged in the large compound of B.K.Shah's residence at Ville Parlay. During Ma's stay at Pune, eminent singers Dilip Kumar Roy and Hira Bai Barodkar came and sang wonderful devotional songs in front of Ma.

Ma came again to this place in June 1961 when some land on Ganesh Khind Road was donated for Ma's ashram by Sri Bhagwan Das Nagpal. This time, Ma was at Pune for about six weeks. The President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, during his stay at Pune, met Ma in the ashram with Sri Prakash, the Governor of Maharashtra. Several inmates of the 'Sacred Heart of Christ' also came to Ma to have Her blessings. Afterwards, Ma came to Pune several times and in Ma's presence, a few important functions like Janmotsav, Bhagabat Saptaha, and Shiva Ratri etc. were arranged there.

A day of self-discipline (Sanyam-vrat Divas) was observed there on 25th of January 1981, which was marked by a community meditation. One day, She made a fervent appeal to the devotees there: "This body begs you to devote just 15 minutes at any time during the day exclusively to remember God. Even if one is busy in work, one may at least observe complete silence for that span of time." It was Ma's last visit to this place.

Bhopal Ashram – In Madhya Pradesh, Ma's only ashram is at Bairagarh in Bhopal. The charming view of the nearby large lake attracted all who came there. Sir Datar Singh, who belonged to a 'Sikh' community, donated the land to Ma. At his invitation, Ma visited the new ashram in March 1965. His eldest daughter Kripalji, who had been an assistant to Mahatma Gandhi, joined Ma's ashram with her only daughter Gunita, a three-year-old child. Gunita received her education from the Kannyapeeth in Varanasi Ashram and became a Brahmacharini there. Kripalji's niece Srimati Menaka Gandhi, now a Central Minister, is also a devotee of Ma since childhood. When she was in teen age Ma said about her that she would be widely known. Later she was married to Sanjay Gandhi, the youngest son of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and she became well known after that.

During Ma's stay in Bhopal Ashram, the Begum of Bhopal State also came for Ma's darshan. She was immensely delighted seeing Ma and recited from the holy Koran. A weeklong Bhagabat discourse by Swami Vishnu Ashramji Maharaj was arranged there in November 1971 in Ma's presence. Ma's last visit to this place was in December 1977, on way to Mumbai and Pune. Presently, a large school has been established in the ashram campus under the guidance and care of Brahmacharini Dr. Gunita where hundreds of poor and neglected boys from the nearby slum areas receive free education.

Ashrams at Kedarnath & Jamshedpur – Ma stayed in all the previously mentioned ashrams, except the ashrams at Kedarnath in Uttarakhand and at Jamshedpur in Jharkhand State.

A small ashram at Kedarnath was built in 1980 when

the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Chenna Reddy took initiative to provide a land for the ashram there on nominal lease rent. Ma accepted to visit the place in 1982, but the visit was cancelled seeing Her adverse health condition.

Ma visited Jamshedpur for the first time in 1932. Thereafter, She visited the place several times. Ma's Janmotsav was celebrated there in 1937. However, the devotees built the ashram in 1988, five years after Ma's withdrawal from this physical world.

Ashrams in Bangladesh – Land for the Kheora Ashram was acquired after Ma's visit there in 1937. In that visit, She pointed out the exact spot where She was born, when none, including Her mother Mokshada could remember it correctly. The ownership of the house in which She was born had changed hands long ago. This time the house was bought from the current Muslim owner. Ma passed Her initial life for about 15 years in that house. A very small temple presently exists there.

The main ashram exists a bit away from the sacred 'Janmasthan'. No further development of the birthplace could be possible after partition of the country as the place came under East Pakistan. The place is now under the Government of Bangladesh since its formation in 1971 at the end of the war with Pakistan. A big school in honour of Ma's name has been established there.

The 'Ramna Ashram' in Dhaka is no longer in existence. It was demolished in 1971 to create a 'Martyrs Memorial' at the Ramna Maidan after formation of Bangladesh. However, the Siddheshwari Ashram at Dhaka remained safe. It was renovated in 2008.

Apart from the previously mentioned twenty-six Ma's Ashrams, a few private Ma Anandamayee ashrams

also exist in India and abroad, which do not come under the management of the mother organization, 'Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha' and are not affiliated with it.

Ma's Ashrams were established mostly in remote places away from cities at that time. One should not consider any of them as ordinary places. They had been places of sadhana since ancient times. The ashrams established at those places were due to the humble requests of those ancient sadhakas to Ma to settle at their places of sadhana. The Deities installed therein are also not like the Deities in other ordinary temples. One must have the full faith in their divine presence there. Ma always emphasized the need for faultless service and worship of the Deities at these ashram temples.

Ma once said, "I have no need of your ashrams. I do not need anything from you. I simply want that you all live together in peace and harmony. Your bhava (divine mood) within you should flourish and that only I want from you. If you say this is an ashram – then it is for you only and you established it with the aim to enhance peace and bliss within you all. Contrary to this, if separate parties are created within you, then for what purpose there should be an ashram, better not to have it. Your bliss only is my bliss. My ashram if you say, then the whole universe is itself an ashram or is of infinite ashrams. I have only to say that you all collectively do that which will provide you the spiritual benediction and then you will see that whatever should take place that will go on happening. That One is watching you all; you will be well if you move on the right path and if you move towards the worldly pleasures, you will get the jolt. No one can escape from His watching. All is going well and will continue so afterwards."

Ma once warned that in future, seeing the wealth of these ashrams, arrival of some such persons might occur who would endeavor for gathering their own amenities only. Ma also indicated about the possibility of committing injustice (Abichar), malpractices (Anachar) and even scandals (Byabhichar) in the future within the ashram. We humbly pray to Ma to protect our ashrams from entry of such evils. Ma had cautioned that only those persons should be allowed in ashram administration who would never harm this sacred organization. Ma said, "Whoever has knowledge and capability, take them."

Chapter – VIII

Guru diksha system after the passing away of Giriji

'Diksha' (initiation) is opening the door for any Sadhaka for the onward journey to achieve the spiritual goal. A person becomes eligible for Diksha when the Almighty showers Kripa (grace) on him and a strong inner urge develops to start a journey to achieve that goal. A Sat-Guru⁵⁶ recognises the same and accordingly allows the recipient to receive the 'Beej Mantra'⁵⁷ of the chosen Deity at the appropriate moment. Therefore, this highly responsible job requires great spiritual attainment.

Ma once said about Herself that She was completely free from any 'Samskar' (influence of previous birth), even the 'Samskar' of becoming a Guru as well. Therefore, this highly responsible job Ma carried out through Baba Bholanath who used to perform japa of about one lakh every day and afterwards by Her sannyasi mother Swami Muktananda Giri. Both of them were completely realized souls and were having all such spiritual qualities, which a 'Sat-Guru' should possess. About Giriji Ma said that she reflected the glory of enlightenment with composure, i.e., 'Sthita-Pragya' as mentioned in the Gita.

After passing away of Giriji in 1970, the 'Guru-Diksha' form of initiation stopped altogether. However, Ma allowed the 'Diksha' ceremony to continue with the help of a 'Beeja-mantra Yantra' to be shown and guided by the Acharya⁵⁸. The compassionate glance of Ma and Her words

⁵⁶ **Sat-Guru** – The Guru who is realized and capable to guide the disciple properly as per his 'samskar' (influence of previous birth).

⁵⁷ **Beej Mantra** – A sound representation of the chosen Deity.

⁵⁸ **Acharya** – A superior Brahmin sadhaka who is acting as a religious guide but is not the Guru.

of guidance completed the initiation. After the diksha ceremony, Ma used to clarify to the recipients by saying, "If anyone asks you, who is your Guru, the reply will be, your 'Ishta' (the chosen Deity) is the Guru." However, the role of the Acharya is also significant in the Diksha ceremony. If the recipients feel any difficulty in spiritual practices, they may take guidance from the Acharya. Gradually, with the advancement in spirituality by sadhana, one will be able to realize that Ma who is always present, She Herself is the 'Guru', 'Ishta' and the 'Mantra'.

Regarding maintenance of secrecy of the deeksha mantra, Ma said, "Look, as a beeja (seed) which is sown in the soil and is covered with earth, will not germinate if the seed is taken out and looked at frequently. In the same way, if you keep the 'beeja-mantra' concealed within mind, not considering as who gave it to you and continue japa regularly, undoubtedly the 'beeja' (seed) will sprout and yield a tree with flowers and fruits (i.e. will yield the result). Whatever care you may take after sowing a seed, you have to wait for the right moment for its sprouting. You must have patience to continue to serve, as you cannot hasten the process of growing of a plant. The tree, its flowers, and fruits will grow at the proper time. The essence of sadhana is patience."

About the benefit of keeping a count of japa, Ma's observation was, "It is good to keep a count (of mantra). One can never say after how many japas one would realise the effects of His blessings. But if somebody reached the stage of deep meditation while mentally doing the japa, he need not keep a count." Regarding significance of 'Japa-Samarpan', Ma said, "Japa itself has a beneficial effect. But, if somebody can dedicate that value back to God, then

it will remain under safe custody. God will return the value in good time."

Speaking on the virtues of meditation, She said, "If all of you can decide to reserve a fixed time for Japa or meditation on God, then all of you will achieve 'bhavateet avastha' (transcendent mood) and the achievements will have a multiplying effect on all others." As per Ma's direction, daily 'Maun' (silence) is observed in all the ashrams from 8.45 to 9.00 PM. While in meditation, one is able to know to what extent his mind is disturbed. About mind, Ma said, "Following a path of separation from God and this is the mind." About the 'Mantra' Ma said, it results 'Mana-tran', relieves from the mental disturbances.

Ma gave three deeksha yantras to three Brahmin Naishthik Brahmacharis to continue the deeksha ceremony displaying the yantra to the recipients as an 'Acharya' and not as a 'Guru'. Those Brahmacharis were Swami Bhaskarananda, Swami Nirvanananda, and Swami Nirmalananda. All of them completed the 'Gayatri-purascharan' sadhana rigorously in a 3 to 4 year period as per Ma's direction. Presently, the Sadhu Committee of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha selects the Acharyas who are entitled to perform diksha after receiving approval from the Governing Body of the Sangha. They are permitted to convey the deeksha mantra only in Matri Mandir within Ma's ashrams with the help of 'Beej Mantra Yantra'. After the demise of Swami Bhaskarananda, Brahmacharini Chandan Puranacharya, the Vice President of the Sangha, was selected as one of the Acharyas. As per Ma's instruction, she was conferred with yagyopaveet like a male Brahmin and she also completed the 'Gayatri Purashcharan Sadhana' as per Ma's guidance.

The system of giving diksha through 'Kula Guru'⁵⁹ has been continuing since ancient times. Ma's parents also received diksha from their Kula-Guru in the presence of Ma when Ma was merely a child. However, after their diksha, the Kula-Guru told them that there was none in his family after him who was capable to continue diksha to any one in their vansha (successive generations). He advised Ma's parents that the coming generations of their family would share this responsibility amongst themselves. Ma did not permit anyone of Her vansha to have diksha from a person who did not belong to that vansha.

Therefore, Ma also handed over one 'Beej Mantra Yantra' to Mamaji (Ma's younger brother), empowering him to give diksha mantra to those who would be eager to have diksha from the 'Guru-vansha' (successive generations of the Guru). Mamaji was a very elevated soul who attained a high spiritual level. He received the mantra of 'Ichchya-Mrityu'⁶⁰ from his own mother, Swami Muktananda Giri, before she passed away and later on, the 'Sannyas Mantra' from Ma Herself in privacy. However, he never displayed himself as a sannyasi by wearing the saffron colored dress. Instead, he preferred to conceal himself and continue his life as a true sannyasi. Ma had empowered him to give diksha as a Guru. He gave diksha to a few persons in the presence of Ma. Ma also said that after Mamaji, persons from this vansha (successive generations) would be able to continue communicating diksha mantra to the willing

⁵⁹ **Kula Guru** - Since ancient times, it was a custom to receive diksha from a learned religious Brahmin who belonged to the vansh (dynasty) of a realized saint. He or suitable persons of his successive generation could function as a Guru for the successive generation of the followers. Such a Guru is called 'Kula Guru'.

⁶⁰ **Ichchya-Mrityu** - With the help of this 'Mantra', one can choose his time of departure from this world.

recipients. Thus, the persons in this vansha who are leading a religious life like Mamaji are capable to give diksha to the truth seekers as a 'Kula Guru'.

One person who was having doubt about the capability of the 'Kula-Guru' sought out Ma's advice. Ma clarified that as the sacred 'bel' (wood apple) leaves sprout from a bel tree only and not in any other variety of trees, similarly, a diksha mantra received from a person belonging to the successive generations of the great earlier realized Gurus, the disciple would gain the same grace of spirituality (Guru-Dhara) that is coming down from them. Ma said, "However the Guru may be, the seed mantra what you receive (from the Kula-Guru) is obviously His (God's) name. With that seed mantra if you go on taking actions (i.e. to continue japa) as per laid rules, result will take place. Look! One pointed concentration and genuine faith are only means to get Him."

However, Ma warned those sadhakas who were having a leaning towards the Guru profession and said very clearly, "Wherever Guru's direction is there (for imparting diksha), it will be one's duty to obey Guru's instruction to that extent only. The sadhaka, whose only destination is to gain the ultimate goal, will never accept the position of a Guru. On arrival to the stage at which status of the Guru appears on its own, that occurs in a natural way. Distracting from one's own ultimate goal of sadhana or treating it as a secondary issue, if one likes to carry on giving prominence to public welfare, where from he will get that strength? Wherever earning of self-strength takes place, there prevails the 'kalyan' (all goodness); otherwise, downfall is inevitable. Wherever (in a sadhaka) the desire of worldly praise, prominence, and thirst for making disciples and

money prevails, all (his sadhana) go to waste. Not the wastage alone – where is the advancement (for him) towards the ‘Amritatwa’ (Eternal)?”

On the subject of choosing one's own Guru, Ma said, “In this great journey there is always a fear of obstacles coming up. Therefore, one should proceed with great caution. Generally, the beginner is unable to recognize a real sadhu. He comes across ordinary religious persons who may be good at performing the rituals of pujas, doing kirtan and may also be able to talk on some religious topics after reading books, but have no real spiritual progress in them. Such persons may adorn themselves with flower garlands, rosaries, sandal wood paste and give blessings to people by touching their head etc. If the beginner sadhaka is impressed with such persons, he may take one of them as his Guru. The difficulty is that any Guru can take his disciple at the most up to his own (spiritual) level. Therefore, this beginner will remain stuck at a low level. However, in rare cases, a sadhaka may be able to go well beyond the Guru by special grace of God.”

Ma said, “So long one could not find his own Guru, he should follow any form or name of God and always pray, ‘O God, you appear before me as a Sad-Guru’. Guru is actually within one's inner self. Unless the inner Guru is revealed, you have not really achieved (Guru). One has to take Guru to realize the inner Guru”.

Advice to sadhakas seeking spiritual progress

Looking towards the Brahmacharies Ma told them “Keep it in mind; one accomplishes such a life as a result of enormous good fate. Don't waste it.” Ma told them, “One must live always in patience and discipline. The way even

a drop of curd in a pail of milk would turn the entire milk into curd, similarly, a little burst of emotion can do immense damage to one's composure.”

Explaining about evil influence of physical touch on human beings, Ma said, “If you touch a green fruit growing in a tree, the fruit may decay. Similarly, there is a fear of evil influence of physical touch on human beings. Touching may give pleasure, but the pleasure itself may prove harmful. It is permissible only in cases of illness, dangers, and accidents, or of life saving.”

About characteristics of a real Sadhu, Ma said –

“इस्त, वाक्य, उदर, उपस्य, चारो जिनका है
सुरक्षित, साधु उन्हें जानना निश्चित”

In these words, Ma cleared that one will certainly be called a sadhu who protects his hands from doing anything wrong, guards his words from speaking untruth, safeguards his stomach from intake of undesirable foods, and protects his own sex by practicing celibacy. These words of Ma are so rational that it may be applicable in all religions.

According to Ma, the specific dress of a sadhu or brahmachari is only to protect themselves from the worldly influences; in fact, gaining status of a sadhu depends upon to what extent the inner-self could actually be transformed. Ma said that one is the witness of his own self and he should be judicious to improve himself accordingly. According to Ma, “Sarva sukh tyag is sannyas,” that is, a sannyasi should keep him away from all sorts of worldly pleasures and comforts. She even said that it is better to lead an ideal family life than to become an aimless sadhu or brahmachari.

In Her view, “There is nothing wrong in leading a virtuous family life. It may be good for some people to strive to move closer to God through marriage,” She once

told to some brahmacharis that several sadhakas, even staying in family environment, gained spiritual status much higher than what they could gain. Sincerity in sadhana (spiritual practices) and self-restrictions really matters in both ways of life.

Ma said that in early days, people used to lead a family life after observing a life of Brahmachari since childhood. Therefore, their family life was unable to mislead them and their life was totally in their own command. After following the 'Griha Dharma' (laid rules of a family life), they were able to take up the life of a 'banaprasthi' and later to become a 'sannyasi' well in time. Thus, their passing through a family life could not obstruct them to gain such spiritual transformations. Ma said that one should try to follow, "Preya tyag, sreya grahan" i.e. one should avoid own likings and accept only the supreme.

Importance of satvik food in sadhana

Ma said, "It is 'bhajan' (worship) to be performed first and then to be followed by 'bhojan' (eat-ing). Both are needed in this life. You have to take God's name but to cultivate a sincere devotion to God you must also control your way of life, your conduct, and food habits. For example, a diet is equally important for a patient as the medicine is for him, otherwise the patient will not be cured. The trouble with you is that you want to remain a patient leaving everything to be done by the physician." Ma also told the devotees, "As the nature of the food is consumed, the nature of the mind forms accordingly." That is why intake of only Satvik food⁶¹ is essential to maintain the

⁶¹ **Satvik food** – Such food which does not impart adverse effect on anyone's religious inclinations and health. Neatly prepared pure vegetarian food comes under such category.

body congenial for spiritual practices and to remain healthy throughout the life. Intake of only satvik food is itself a vital sadhana. From purity of food, one gains the internal purity.

Ma once said, "You cannot lead your life to the Supreme without observing discipline and self-control. There should be self control in every matter, be it eating, speaking, or behaving with others." Ma created a special group of devotees in the ashram whom She called 'Shuddhacharis', i.e., who would endeavour to maintain high importance in saintly life. They were to follow special dietary rules and disciplines. According to that rule, they have to prepare their own food themselves or may take food prepared by other shuddhacharis only. They are to be pure vegetarians. Even the use of vegetables like onion and garlic and a spice like hing (asafetida) were not permitted in their food as they affect adversely the development of 'satvic' (pure) qualities. They cannot take cooked food from outside places, i.e., from the vendors, restaurants, hotels etc. Even they avoid the food touched by a non-suddhachari. The brahmacharis, brahmacharinis and even the householders (Grihasthas) desiring to perform sadhana may decide to be a 'Shudhachari'. Under unavoidable conditions like long travelling, they were permitted to take food like 'puri' or 'roti' made of flour kneaded only in milk without using water and the vegetables cooked without using common salt. However, salt can be added before eating. From the market, they can take only milk, curd, milk preparations like rabri (condensed milk) etc. from a shop where salty food items are not prepared. In other words, such sadhakas will have to confine themselves for consuming only the satvic (pure) food to control their temptations, which is a big obstruction for

advancement in sadhana. Above all, they were to be fully committed to practices of sadhana and observe purity in their inner and outer life. To inspire and encourage the devotees, Shree Ma Herself observed all these disciplines, although it was not at all necessary for Her to follow them. In order to encourage such sanctified life, Ma sometimes allowed the suddhacharis to cook for Her and they were sometimes allowed to feed Ma which was a great attraction for them.

Once while Ma was staying in Her room in the first floor of the old ashram at Kankhal, a brahmacharini who was strictly following the suddhachari rules, was busy cutting the vegetables for the ashram kitchen sitting on the ground floor almost below Ma's room. She was thinking in her mind to cook food for herself in her own room and to make it tasty by adding spice like 'hing' (asafetida). Immediately she heard Ma saying in a loud voice peeping through the window from Her room, "If anyone wants to use 'hing' (asafetida) while cooking food, ask her to cook and eat outside the ashram premises." Thus, it was not possible for the persons residing in the ashram to hide anything from Ma, not even the hidden facts they kept in their mind. They were always under strict vigilance of Ma.

Even now, many persons in the ashram and the householders are passing life as a shuddhachari. However, their number is reducing gradually. Ma said one must take a vow to live and eat in a spirit of purity for at least one day in a week. The duration should be increased gradually.

Strict observance of 'Shastriya' rules in puja

Ma emphasized on observance of rules and regulations laid down in the 'Shastras' (scriptures) for

performing any religious ritual. As per scriptures, in the 'Sanatana' (Traditional) way of worship, following three types of sanctity are specifically required –

- i) **Drabya Shuddhi** – It is the sanctification of all puja materials, mainly by cleaning or washing the materials.
- ii) **Kriya shuddhi** – It is the process of sanctification of all actions during the puja by following correct puja procedures, utterance of the mantras correctly and maintaining sanctity in all puja activities.
- iii) **Manasik Shuddhi** – It takes place by sanctification of the state of mind. It is the most important aspect desirable for the puja participants who can achieve it mainly by practicing sadhana and samyam (self-restrictions).

According to ancient scriptures, 'Brahmins' having 'yangyopaveet' (sacred thread) are permitted to enter the place of puja and bhog⁶² after taking bath and wearing 'shuddha bastra' (washed unstitched clothes). Similarly only those Brahmin women who received diksha are permitted to prepare the bhog but not during their menstrual period. If there is a special puja, they will take a drop of panchagavya (a purifier) for purification of themselves before taking part in the puja activities. They will abstain from food and water until the puja and bhog have been completed. If it is not at all possible for anyone due to adverse health or sufficient old age, he may be allowed to take only water or sarbat (sweet water), milk, fruit juice etc. depending upon his prevailing health condition.

Wood or charcoal fire are used for cooking of the bhog; specifically when cooked bhog is to be offered during special pujas like Durga puja, Kali puja, Annakut etc. or for the Temple Deities. The non-brahmins may help to carry

⁶²Bhog – Cooked food which will be offered to the deity.

out the puja activities like marketing, cleaning or washing of materials to be used in puja and bhog, related helps at the kitchen like cutting of vegetables, grinding of spices etc., without entering the place of puja and the bhog kitchen. Shree Ma kept a watchful eye that those rules were meticulously followed to maintain the desirable sanctity. Even today, these rules are being observed in Ma's ashrams as far as possible.

According to the 'Shastras' (scriptures), one is not allowed to participate physically in any religious function in the event of a death or a birth in a family, as the household environment is not considered pure for a specific period for the performance of any puja. Such a restriction is called 'Ashauch'.

Ma narrated an incident to confirm this. Ma said that during her childhood in Vidyakut village, one day in the 'Durga Puja' when She was taking meal with Didima (Ma's mother), Ma saw Goddess Durga, accompanied by other Gods, and Goddesses pass by their door. They looked at Shree Ma and said that they were unable to accept 'puja' in a nearby household, as conditions prevailing there were not pure and suitable due to touch of puja materials by the persons having ashauch. Therefore, Ma reminded the devotees to remember the 'Shastric' injunctions and follow them scrupulously.

Ma never permitted to pass over any ritual either due to absence of any desired material or due to negligence. Once Ma in Vrindavan Ashram asked Batuda, the most experienced and knowledgeable priest, to prepare a list of the puja articles needed for 'Durga-Puja'. Batuda was an expert in such matters and perfect in priesthood. He took two days to make a long list on a rolled paper and came to

Ma. Ma enquired whether the list was complete and nothing was left out in it. Batuda replied quite confidently that it was complete. Without seeing the list, Ma immediately enquired if 'Mauli' the coloured cotton-twine for tying up sacred things had been included in the list. Stuck with surprise, Batuda admitted that it was the only one thing missing in the list, Ma laughed loudly. Thus, Ma instantly detected even minute faults in all arrangements.

Ma emphasized that a faultless puja as per scriptures (Shastras), gives a good result. But we often tend to fail to perform such a perfect puja due to our negligence, laziness, lack of proper knowledge or lack of desirable sincerity. Therefore, the result is also affected according to the lapses. It has been seen that due to vital lapses, specifically in Shakti-pujas like Durga-puja, Kali-puja etc., sometimes an adverse result is experienced shortly after any significant lapse.

One such a case happened in 1969 when Ma graciously attended the Durga puja arranged by an old devotee of Ma, Sri Harish Banerjee, in his newly built house in Sidhagiribag locality in Varanasi. Ma stayed there for five days during the puja. It was possibly their 100th family Durga Puja.

Amongst several offerings in the Durga puja, sugar as the Bali-bhog⁴³ is essentially offered daily. On the day of Saptami puja, Ma reminded them about this, but due to an error, they thought that the family tradition was to offer the same on the day of Ashtami puja and acted accordingly.

⁴³ **Bali bhog** – During shakti puja in some places, a he-goat is sacrificed and its blood is offered to the deity which is called bali bhog. But in the puja where swatwik procedures are followed, only sugar in a plate is offered as bali bhog.

On that evening, Ma was attending the satsang programme in the nearby pandal, but suddenly She went back to Harish Babu's house, telling the devotees present there not to follow Her but assured them that she would come back very soon. That was the time when Harish Babu's youngest son was electrocuted due to an accidental contact with a live wire behind Ma's room when no one was there and fell down with the live wire still in contact. Hearing the sound of shivering coming from him, somebody came and detached the wire.

At the precise time of this electrocution, Ma was seen to become stiff in Her body, as though the electric shock was on Her body. In that way, actually She took the shock on Herself and saved life of Harish Babu's son.

Later on, Ma indicated that his life was destined to end at that time of electrocution, but Ma Durga Herself came and saved him giving a further lease of life. Ma also explained that when serious lapses like omission of 'balibhog' etc. occurs, 'Putrabali' (i.e. death of a son in the family) could occur. In this case, Ma out of Her grace, averted the serious disaster.

Some months before this incident, Ma appeared in a dream to that son of Harish Babu and asked him whether he would feel disturbed if She would tell him that his life would end soon. In that dream itself, he requested Ma to be present with him at that end moment. It is clear that Ma graciously accepted the request made in the dream and attended the Durga puja in their house. In that way, She was not only present at that critical moment in his life but also saved him by granting practically a second life.

The pujas in Ma's presence were performed in such a manner that each of the 'Nawadha-Bhakti' (nine specific

ways of Bhakti) would be covered simultaneously and a unique divine environment would prevail during the puja. Such a unique ancient religious culture, which was prevailing earlier all over the country, is unfortunately fading away very fast. Puja procedures are being adjusted in accordance to the convenience of the pujari (priest) and the yajman (organizer). Ma's great efforts were to sustain these ancient systems, which always provide desirable results.

Ma said that 'tapasya' means 'tap-saha', i.e., to bear the heat or pain caused due to physical and mental exertion for carrying any religious activity. If it is carried out sincerely as per rules given in the scriptures or as directed by the Sad-Guru, then it will help to achieve the desired result and to gain spiritual advancement. No one can move towards Him unless one passes through sufferings.

Ma's words about duties of any sadhaka

Ma said, "First of all, when anyone starts doing sadhana, the sadhaka should keep a target of practicing 'brahmacharya' (celibacy) i.e. purity of body and mind. Without practicing brahmacharya, nothing can be attained. The foundation of sadhana for a human being is – observance of truth and brahmacharya.

How can a human being realize God? There must be a strong desire for it. Thus, willingly or unwillingly there must be an inner flame of desire with continuous meditation on God. Just as a woman immersed in great sorrow still keeps her clothes on her body in a proper way; or as a mother carrying her child or chewing pan also attends to her household works; similarly even while attending to worldly duties, one should keep his mind ceaselessly on

God repeating His name. Due to excess works, if this remembrance is forgotten and thereafter when memory comes back about this break, one should deeply repent for this lapse and pray, "O God, I forgot you all this while." If this practice is maintained, the thought of God will increase day by day. You have to remember that the only true thought is the thought of God.

One should not talk unnecessarily with others. One must restrain one's desire to talk as well as to hear from others. However, any conversation that will enhance God oriented thoughts - one can participate in such discussions. Even so, you should understand that the more you meditate on Him, your power of discretion will increase and guide you as to what is good and necessary for you and it will also help you to sustain pure thoughts. You will also see that your attraction for the worldly obstructions like 'Rupa' (Appearance), Rasa (Divine sweetness), Gandha (Smell), Sparsha (Touch), Shabda (Sound) is diminishing and gradually you will want to remain immersed in the thought of God. The principal sign of attaining pure thoughts is that one will never get any contrary thought for anyone or anything. Gradually day by day the qualities like 'Satya' (Truth), Tyag (Sacrifice), 'Samyam' (Restrain), 'Prem' (Love), 'Kshama' (Forbearance), 'Dharya' (Patience), 'Titiksha' (Endurance) etc. will go on increasing. You will further realize that the more you receive the grace of God, the feeling of existence of separate religious goals will be diminishing and a feeling will be developed that the various types of religious prayers are done to your own Ishta (God), similar to the same person being called as father, friend or uncle by different people.

One should utilize time usefully day and night by remaining engaged in various types of religious prayers like doing Japa, prayer, meditation, puja, kirtan, yajna, etc. Initially, in spite of concentrating on spiritual matters when thoughts of worldly works remain, under such circumstances no special result can come up if that work is not done with the help of spiritual thinking or at the same time, the two are mixed up. At least for some time remaining in seclusion or alone closing the door of the room, you have to look into the inner world forgetting the outer world with the continuous thought of God. At that time, one will have to be careful so that the mind does not go astray and he carries on only the thought of God. In spiritual works, if any obstruction or delay occurs, then the sadhaka necessarily should feel disgust or distaste for the same. If this does not come up, then it is to be understood that sadhaka's deep attachment towards that obstructive thought has remained.

Citing an example Ma said that once a woman who was engaged for cooking bhog for the temple in the ashram, came to Ma and complained that she is unable to find time for sadhana for which she had come to Ma. Immediately, Ma made such an arrangement so that she could continue sadhana at least eighteen hours a day staying in her room. Arrangements were made to serve her food in her room itself and her clothes were arranged to be washed by someone else, so that she need not leave her room at all. That woman with great difficulty spent seven days in her room and after that, she surrendered before Ma with the plea that she would like to return to her earlier duty of cooking bhog for the temple. Ma then explained to her that

without completing 'Karma' (service), one could not devote only on sadhana. Therefore, a sadhaka should carry on all works considering them as service to God.

Ma said that in general, there are three kinds of intellect. The first is 'Jiva-Buddhi' or human intellect – although religious matters are associated with it, but it is used with general intelligence. The second is 'Dharma-Buddhi' or spiritual intellect – in which religious faith is predominant. In all actions, one moves keeping spirituality as the target. The third is 'Yogaj-Buddhi', which is superior intellect. It appears following the above two paths. When the purity of the 'Chitta' (higher mind) is attained by practicing sadhana, then like the morning sunrise a pure 'Gyan' (wisdom) appears within oneself, by which one really comes across the true spiritual essence. Naturally, a pure intellect is achieved which can be called as 'Yogaj-Buddhi'. This intellect keeps playing holding only the eternal and absolute truth. In such a play, the appearance of worldly or spiritual likes and dislikes does not remain.

Advancing on the path of truth and sincerity, the sadhaka sometimes gains some supernatural powers as per his progress. If one gets pleasure out of that and becomes deeply involved in it, loss of power invariably will take place and he will be unable to proceed further, whereas those who can overcome these obstacles, reach the highest level.

Only a few of the stages experienced by a sadhaka have been mentioned. Naturally, there are many further steps for the progress of sadhana. Ma said, "Of course, the way in which the Jagat-Guru's compassion flows is quite apart from this".

Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata

'Samyam-saptaha Mahavrata' means a vow to abstain from worldliness and to observe self-discipline for a week. Its participants are called the 'Vratees'. To strive towards spiritual progress is the aim of the 'Samyam-Saptaha'. Ma said, "The purpose of this is to know the Self, to merge with the Self, to elevate one's own spiritual life by following in all respects – truth, nonviolence, celibacy and to help others for their spiritual upliftment".

The idea came up a long time ago when Shree Ma was in Shahbagh at Dhaka. Ma always stressed the point that aspirants and devotees of spiritual life (sadhakas) should observe self-discipline, at least once or twice a month initially. Ma said that the auspicious months 'Vaishakh', 'Shravana', 'Kartik' and 'Magh' of Indian calendar were more helpful for observing self-discipline. During such times, one must avoid pampering the palate, refrain from anger, greed and any kind of falsehood, and maintain strict celibacy. Men should consider women as 'Bhagawati' and must see 'Gopal' in all children.

Years later, Maharaja of Solan, Durga Singhji (Yogi Bhai) came forward with the idea of the devotees observing self-discipline and performing sadhana collectively for a week in the presence of Ma. He felt, it would be very conducive to the spiritual progress of the participants. With Ma's consent and Her grace, Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha took upon itself the responsibility of organizing the 'Samyam-Saptaha' for a week on an annual basis from Ashtami to Purnima tithi after the Diwali function. Persons from any religion desiring spiritual progress are allowed to participate in this weeklong sadhana and follow its rules strictly.

The daily programme of the 'Samyam-Saptaha' begins with the ringing of bell at about 4.00 AM to awaken the participants. 'Usha-kirtana' commences in the early morning before sunrise. The morning session starts with the recitation of the 'Vedas', followed by chanting of kirtana, 'Satyam Gnyanam Anantam Brahma' (Truth, wisdom, infinite Absolute Being).

An hour of collective 'Dhyan' (Meditation) begins with the blowing of conches and every participant remain in 'Maun' (Silence) from eight to nine o'clock in the morning; the same again from three to four o'clock in the afternoon after the kirtana of 'Hey Bhagwan' in the tune Ma had sung. All the doors in the hall remains closed during the collective 'Dhyan' and no one is permitted to enter during this period. A burning ghee lamp is placed in front of Shree Ma during the Maun. Shree Ma's holy presence pervades peace and stillness in the whole atmosphere. The devotees there try to descend into their own self in such a congenial atmosphere.

'Ma Nam Kirtana' for a short period follows the 'Maun'. A collective recitation from Geeta and Durga-Saptashati is done thereafter in the morning session. Learned mahatmas deliver discourses from Upanishad and Purana in the morning and afternoon sessions.

The first 'Samyam-Saptaha' (Restraint Week) took place in Varanasi Ashram from the 6th to 12th of August, 1952. Shree Ma had slowly chanted the following hymn at the end of the 'Dhyan', -

हे पित हे हित हे ब्रह्म तत्त्वम्। He Pita, He Hita, He Brahma
Tatvam. (Oh Father Oh Well wisher Oh the essence
of God)

हे पित हे हित हे ब्रह्म भूतम्। He Pita, He Hita, He Brahma

Bhutam. (Oh Father Oh Well wisher Oh the God in existence)

हे पित हे हित हे ब्रह्म स्वरूपम्। He Pita, He Hita, He Brahma
Swarupam. (Oh Father Oh Well wisher Oh God's reality)

Ma revealed that a beautiful dusky little child in subtle form had sung these words to Her. Ma sang the chant in the tune that had been sung by that divine child. Since then, this is chanted very slowly in that specific tune at the end of the hour-long silence to stir the devotees out of the stillness of their meditation. It is not chanted at any other occasion.

There are special rules concerning food during the 'Samyam Saptaha Mahavrata'. Only water from the river Ganga is to be taken on the first and last day. Only one meal at noontime is served on the five days in between. For 'B' class 'Vratees', a glass of milk is also given at night on those five days and simple food at noon on the last day. Any intake inbetween is not allowed except the drinking of simple water. Apart from this, every vratee will have to complete a minimum of 5000 japa every day. Vratees are expected to avoid use of hair oil or any cosmetics, nail cutting, shaving, smoking or consuming any alcoholic substances, tea, coffee etc.

Those who are not used to having such a limited intake of food may feel some difficulty initially. However, within a few days, they start feeling physically much better and they find disturbances in their mind reduced considerably. After about five days, they start feeling that why not the weeklong programme should be extended further for few more days. Not only this, its good effects prevail even afterwards.

The most sought-after and unforgettable part of the

'Saptaha' was the daily 'Matri-satsang' in the night from nine o'clock onwards. Ma heard questions asked by the devotees and replied to them Herself. Sometimes, She would turn to the Mahatmas present there and request them to answer, but mostly they requested Ma to answer Herself, as they were also keen to hear from Ma. Most unforgettable were the moments, when at the request of the mahatmas, Ma would sing the 'Hari-naam Kirtana'. Ma's chanting of 'Hey Bhagawan' (Oh God...) was the very climax of the ecstasy of Divine Love. One would be automatically swept into the divine realm.

One day, Ma begged of everybody that each one should set apart a fixed time everyday to remember God. They should pray earnestly at least once a day and say, "Oh Lord, I belong to you; only you can give me shelter. Have mercy on me; show me the way to reach you."

On the last day of the 'Samyam-Saptaha' the 'Maharisha Dhyana' (midnight meditation) used to take place in presence of Shree Ma from 11.45 PM to 0.15 AM. Thereafter, She used to shower Her blessings and distribute 'Prasad' to all the 'Vratees' with Her own hands. Everyone could do pranam to her individually at that time. Presently, all are allowed to go inside Ma's Samadhi enclosure on the next morning for pranam. Thereafter, the ceremony concludes with the performance of 'Havan' and a feast is arranged at noon for all.

Such 'Samyam Saptahas' were held thirty two times in the presence of Ma, at different places in North India. It was arranged six times in Ma's Vrindavan ashram. On several such occasions, mahatmas of other ashrams and a few capable devotees as well offered their own space and buildings for holding this great function. Everywhere the

atmosphere was full of devotional joy. The 'Vratees' (participants) felt immersed in the continuous flow of 'Satsang' with great Mahatmas and imbibe their teachings.

Many memorable incidents happened on such occasions. One such incident took place during the fourteenth 'Samyam Saptaha' which was arranged in November 1963 at Ahmedabad as per desire of Sri K.C. Munshaw, a close devotee of Ma. Just a few minutes after the collective morning meditation had started, a quite untimely and severe thunderstorm broke out on the third day of the function. Torrential rain began to batter the canvas roof of the pandal, which was supported only by bamboo pillars. A large number of ceiling fans and tube lights had been fixed on the ceiling of the pandal. One can imagine what might have happened to the participants sitting underneath the pandal, if even a part of the roof had collapsed due to heavy load of those ceiling fans and the accumulated water on the roof.

The fury of the storm threatened all the 'Vratees' inside the pandal, including Ma and the Mahatmas sitting on the platform. However, Ma herself sat like a statue until the meditation of one-hour duration was over. The 'Vratees' also stayed there with their drenched clothes. Immediately after the 'Maun' and the short kirtana, all were requested to vacate the pandal without any delay. Ma refused to leave the pandal until the last person was out. The moment Ma came out, the huge pandal collapsed in the twinkling of an eye. It was indeed a miracle that no one was hurt due to Ma's grace. The 'Samyam Saptaha' resumed next day as per schedule, after erection of a new pandal there overnight.

The last 'Samyam Saptaha' in the holy presence of Shree Ma was arranged in the Kankhal Ashram in Haridwar

in 1981. Since then, this much-awaited function is regularly held every year in the 'Shankarcharya Hall' of Kankhal Ashram. The learned mahatmas have continued to take pains to go there and deliver lectures on religious topics for the vratees. All the participants attending the function feel the presence of Ma in spite of Her physical absence.

Ma had said, "Samyam Saptaha is the medicine for curing 'bhava-rog'- pains and ills of worldly life. We all are the patients of 'bhava-rog'- experiencing troubles of life and death, pleasures and pains, losses and gains." Ma said further, "The Mahatmas are the doctors, 'Vratees' (participants) are the patients, religious discussion is the medicine and the guidance given to search the 'Self' is the way to get the remedy.

Chapter – IX

Shree Ma in the 'Kumbha-Mela' (fair)

'Kumbha-parva' is the largest religious and cultural fair of India. It takes place at Prayag (Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh), Haridwar (in Uttarakhand), Ujjain (in Madhya Pradesh), and Nasik (in Maharashtra) at intervals of every twelve years in each place. Realized Saints as well as Religious Heads of all sects and persons from all levels irrespective of castes, creeds and rich or poor from almost every part of the country gather at this fair for taking a dip in the nearby sacred river on specific auspicious days. Many people come from abroad as well.

The Shahi (Regal) procession of the Sadhus takes place on three specific days. Millions of pilgrims from all over the country and abroad, line up on both sides of the road to have a glimpse of the leading sadhus seated on silver thrones and escorted by their 'Naga' sadhus. The Nagas do not wear any clothes. They merely spread ash all over their bodies and wear garlands of flowers.

The religious significance of Kumbh Mela lies in the legend that a Kumbha (pot) of Amrita (divine nectar) was obtained during the 'Samudra-Manthan' (churning of the ocean) by the Devatas (Gods) and the Danavas (demons). When there was a struggle between them to capture the nectar pot, some nectar spilled out at these four places, sanctifying them forever. The 'Kumbha' fair is held to commemorate that great event.

Regarding the Kumbha Mela Ma said, "The 'Kumbha-Parva (festival)' is the 'Mahadhwaja' (the great flag) of Sanatan Dharma (Eternal religion). All are trying here in various ways for that 'One' only, for that bathing. A

mass of humanity emerges and gathers at one place under that one Dharma-dhwaja (the great flag of religion) with great devotion, bearing all discomforts to gain that one goal. In no other country, a religious fair of that magnitude is ever seen or heard of."

Ma attended the 'Ardha-kumbha'⁶⁴ mela in Allahabad in 1947. While returning on the main bathing day in a boat from the ashram of Prabhudutt Brahmachariji in Jhusi, Shree Ma stopped at the holy confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers which is known as 'Triveni' and entered the holy waters with all the winter clothing She was wearing. Shree Ma revealed later that the sacred Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati in the form of three beautiful maidens (kumaris) invited Her, urging Her to take a dip in their holy waters.

In 1950, Ma came to Haridwar on the occasion of the Kumbh Mela, and stayed at the 'Baghat-House' of Maharaja of Solan. Shree Ma went to 'Brahmakund' along with several devotees on the main bathing day of 'Chaitra-Sankranti' (14th of April). While all were bathing in the river Ganga, Shree Ma suddenly dived into the water. She surfaced once and then disappeared from sight. The Ganga water there was so clean and transparent that one could even see the riverbed clearly. Devotees got alarmed at not seeing Ma there. They dived under the water all around but could not find a trace of Ma. It was a very sad moment for all who were there. A while later, Ma surfaced again at the very spot where She had entered the water earlier. Later, Ma revealed to the anxious devotees that She had no 'kheyal' to swim and float in the water. For a while, She

was in a lying posture in the water as if lying on a cot, although others could not see Her there. It was also not clear that when the river-bed was clearly visible then why Ma could not be seen at all. Had She merged into water? Later Ma said, "Had the mood been more intense, there was a chance of not coming out of the water." Had the bhava (divine mood) continued, what could have been the consequences? It simply left the devotees speechless. Ma shed no further light on this mysterious 'lila' (play).

In 1954, Ma arrived at Allahabad for 'Poorna-Kumbha'. The Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath paid a visit one day. On February 3, Swami Paramanandaji left with about a hundred devotees for the dip at three in the morning on that auspicious day. Ma looked unusually disturbed after that. When the second batch left the camp a few minutes later, Ma told them to chant God's name all the while. At nine in the morning, Ma lay down and suddenly cried out, "There, they are being crushed, stampeded, there they cannot breathe." Shortly, the sad news of hundreds of devotees having been stampeded to death was received. Ma said, "It was clear before the eyes, the whole incident with piles of dead bodies. When the tragedy occurred, it was as if 'this body' was being crushed and was losing breath." Did She take the pains of all the effected people on Herself?

On the occasion of the 'Poorna-kumbha' held in Haridwar in 1962, the 'Niranjani Akhara' mahatmas set a precedence by taking Ma with honour to lead the 'Shahi-Julus' i.e. procession of the Sadhus. All the other 'Sadhu Akharas' (Co-organizations) welcomed Her lead. Shree Ma was seated in a silver 'Howdah' (throne) on an elephant in the procession. Another precedence was created on the auspicious day of 'Chaitra-sankranti', the principal day of

⁶⁴Ardha Kumbha - Kumbha Mela (fair) takes place at an interval of twelve years and are called Poorna Kumbha mela whereas the Ardha Kumbha mela occurs at the same places, six years after the Poorna Kumbha mela.

the holy dip there, which was the most prominent occasion in the Kumbha mela at Haridwar. Mahatmas of Nirvani Akhara led Shree Ma to the 'Brahma-kunda' for Her to bathe or touch first the holy waters. All other 'Akharas' were to follow after Ma's bathing and, public bathing followed thereafter. Same precedence was followed on other principal days of the 'Kumbha'. These traditions were invariably observed as long as Ma was in Her physical form. In this way millions and millions of people got the opportunity to have a darshan of Ma who was the most sought after personality in the Kumbha Mela.

There were times when various Sadhu 'Akharas' had disagreements causing bitter animosity amongst them. They approached Ma to resolve the issues. Under Her benign advice and influence, problems were resolved amicably. Sometimes, different sectarian groups, in order to heighten their own public image, spoke against other sects. Ma did not run down others. Ma said that there is room and place for all. People behave only from the level of their own state & stage, hence no need to blame them.

The great 'Shankaracharyas', Mahants of the Akharas, Mahamandaleshwars of different ashrams, and other prominent sadhus visiting Kumbha Mela, always visited Ma and paid their reverential regards to Her. After assuming office as the Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi came to receive the blessings of Shree Ma at the Kumbha Mela in Allahabad in 1966. World-renowned instrumentalist Pandit Ravi Shankar (recipient of 'Bharat Ratna' and a devotee of Ma) also came to Ma in her camp in that Kumbha. He played for Ma a beautiful melody on his sitar. The big crowd of people there were spellbound by the soulful melody.

In the 'Purna-Kumbha' of 1977 at Allahabad, all the great mahatmas, great personalities, important public figures like Governors, Ministers, Administrators and innumerable public attending the Kumbha fair came to Ma to seek Her blessings. The Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi with Rajiv Gandhi and his wife Soniaji with their children visited Ma for Her darshan and sought Her blessings. There was heavy demand on Her time. Every Akhara present at the Kumbha Mela wanted to take Ma to its camp. Ma tried to fulfill their wishes as much as She could.

Ma generally used to stay at Allahabad in the house of Late Justice Niraj Mukherjee where an independent house was constructed for Ma's stay only. This house used to be treated as base camp of Ma during the Kumbha Mela although Ma used to stay in Her temporary cottage built in Mela area.

Once while Ma was coming to Varanasi by train, She got off at Allahabad railway station for a short while. All others accompanying Ma were asked to continue on to Varanasi. Panuda knew Ma had changed Her programme. He, with Ma's car, had started from Varanasi ashram in early morning in order to be present at the Allahabad railway station. After a short while, Ma proceeds to Varanasi by that car. The ashram driver Sudhirda could not understand why Ma wanted to go to Varanasi by car instead of going by train with Her party; it seemed a wastage of money on petrol and unnecessary. He expressed his anguish saying that petrol had become costlier and therefore traveling by car should be decided carefully. Ma immediately asked, "Oh, has petrol become so costly?" After arriving at Varanasi Ashram, Panuda asked the driver to fill the petrol tank of the car immediately so that it remained ready for

movement at any moment. When the car was taken to the petrol filling station, the attendant there said that the car tank was completely full and there was no space to add even a drop of petrol in it. The driver Sudhirda was astonished as to how after travelling about 300 kilometers, not a drop of petrol was used! Then he realized that Ma gave him a lesson in a supernatural way that one should not interfere with Ma's 'kheyal'.

The last time Shree Ma attended a Kumbha' Mela was the 'Ardha-Kumbha' held in 1982 in Allahabad. All the 'Sadhu Akharas' observed the same precedence of keeping Ma at the front to lead the Shahi Julus, as was laid down in the Kumbha at Haridwar in 1962. This time, Ma led the 'Shahi-Julus' procession seated in a beautiful silver palanquin, which was in the shape of a 'Sheshnaag' (The divine serpent 'Shesha'). The reverence and devotion to Shree Ma shown by the Sadhus and Mahatmas and by the people at large was unique and unprecedented.

Shree Ma's contact with the 'subtle' disembodied beings

Devatas, Siddhas, and departed Sadhus and other persons in their subtle forms, visited Shree Ma regularly almost all the time. Shree Ma sometimes talked about their visits; She met them, talked to them, guided and instructed them and also rejoiced with them in the same way as She did with us. Even plants, creepers, trees, birds and animals conveyed their feelings and their needs to Ma. She said that some of them were so bound to their own locations that their needs had to be fulfilled wherever they were. She visited them in Her subtle form or She visited them directly at their own places to relieve them of their sufferings. Ma's great compassion reached out to all who called Her from the depths of their being.

Gurupriya Didi specifically wanted to know from Ma about the subtle presence of the disembodied souls. Ma said, "Often, the 'Atma' of a dead person comes in a subtle form. Like you, they are also with hands and feet or their presence may be felt by touch, words, smell or in many other ways. You may not accept this as true because you cannot see them."

Ma said, "The happenings in the subtle kingdom may also be revealed in this physical world. As this body is near you, similarly it may also appear before them. You are seeing it here; but like this, it exists there too. If it is a dream then all others are nothing but dream. As you sit nearby this body and touch its hand or feet, the subtle bodies also do exactly the same in a similar way. Several such come (to Ma) and only mere touch reveals their identity. They are not bound by time as we are here and may spend hours together." Ma further said, "This body behaves with them exactly the same way it behaves with you all. For this reason, when you think this body is resting, it is not actually like that." When Ma's birth anniversary was celebrated at Raipur ashram, Ma later said that there was a similar ceremony in the ethereal world also.

Once in Vrindavan, Ma was apparently taking rest. It was midnight; but in reality, there was no sleep for Shree Ma. Ma's ears resounded with the sound of 'Kartals' (cymbals) and 'Mridangas' (drums). Shree Ma said that people chanting 'Kirtana' surrounded Her. They were singing, "Esho Digambar - Aruna Shikhar - Esho, Esho Esho he" (Addressing Ma as Lord Shiva they sang - "Come oh Digambar on the Mountain Top of Dawn - come, come - come to us).

Ma also said, "Sometimes the disembodied 'Atmas' ask for something. However, their restlessness is not always

manifested and they are unable to reply or counter reply. When talks about any topic take place, the disembodied 'Atmas' who are interested in that topic, come of their own accord without a call. Sometimes you people feel that the talk has intensified and then it may be assumed that the disembodied 'Atmas' are there and are helping to maintain the 'bhava' of the talk. As you all are perfectly real for this body, so they are as well." Ma also revealed that sometimes some departed ones in their subtle bodies asked for 'Diksha'. A number of times, 'Mantras' were written on 'Tulsi' (Basil) leaf or 'Bilva-Patra' (Leaf of woodapple tree) as per instructions of Ma and set afloat in the sacred river Ganga for them.

In 1952, on Her travels in South India, a Mahatma visited Shree Ma in his subtle form. He told Ma all about his life and sadhana (spiritual practices) while living in the world. Ma instructed the Mahatma to accompany Her to Rameshwaram and from there to Dwaraka. Haribaba and few others accompanying Ma also had the opportunity to have a glimpse of that Mahatma. By the grace of Shree Ma, the Mahatma entered the state of liberation, of 'Moksha', at Dwarikadheesh temple in Dwarka. On hearing this, Haribaba was thrilled. Shaking a brahmachari nearby, he exclaimed, "How do you feel about Ma? Shree Ma Herself is 'Moksha-dayini' (the liberator)". Later Ma had indicated that the Mahatma was the priest in Dwarakadheesh Temple in his previous life.

Once when Ma was in Almora, She walked into the 'Samadhi' of Bhaiji, holding the hand of the ashram brahmachari Swami Bhaskarananda for support. The brahmachari had a unique experience inside the temple. He had a vision of some 'Rishi' like great souls in deep meditation, seated a little above the ground in the air around

Bhaiji's samadhi. However, when Ma dropped his hand, the vision vanished. On coming out of the 'Samadhi-Mandir', he told about his experience to Shree Ma. Immediately Ma asked him to do a specified number of 'Japa' sitting inside the 'Samadhi Mandir'. The number was large and was of the order of a few crores (ten millions make one crore). The brahmachari, with full resolve, completed it as instructed by Ma.

There were several instances when Shree Ma in Her subtle form reached out to distant places to give solace or to save Her devotees from an untimely demise. There is an experience of Bhaiji when Ma was at Raipur Ashram. He was travelling from Raipur to Dhaka in June 1932. He got down at Varanasi enroute and went to take a dip in the holy waters of the 'Ganga' at noon. At that time, the bathing ghat was totally deserted. As he was stepping into the river, his foot slipped and he fell down in the water. When he was about to drown, suddenly someone came down from the ghat and pulled him out. Later, when he went back to Raipur Ashram, he learnt that on the same day exactly at the time of the mishap, Ma was seated on Her bed at Raipur Ashram. Suddenly She became completely drenched with water. All Her clothes were wet and water was dripping from them as if She had just come out from the water. A large number of such experiences, known and unknown to devotees, are there. How can these be told and recorded fully!

Ma's Lila towards the 'Avyakta' (Unmanifest State)

Shree Ma reached Kankhal on the 10th of April 1982 after her visits to Agartala, Kolkata, and Varanasi. Those visits marked the end of Ma's long distance travels. A few days after Her arrival at the Kankhal Ashram, Ma stepped into the newly built Matri-Niwas on 26 April 1982 which

was built right on the banks of Ganga River. Shree Ma's Janmotsav was celebrated at that place in May in an unusual sudden storm with torrential rains. Many mahatmas, dignitaries, and devotees came for Ma's 'darshan' on that occasion.

Jagat Guru Shankaracharya of the 'Sringeri-Peetham', accompanied by a hundred devotees, came to Kankhal on 16 June 1982, to have Ma's 'darshan'. Ma was not keeping well at that time. The Shankaracharya made a special appeal to Ma to take care of Her body and to keep good health. But, Ma was now withdrawing into Her own Inner Being. Ma told him, "Pitaji, there is no illness; there is only the pull of the 'Avyakta' (un-manifest)." A great many mahatmas beseeched and begged Ma to remain in Her body but it was of no avail. Ma's reply to the Shankaracharya was an admission that She was now withdrawing from this world.

Ma almost stopped eating and was growing weaker day by day. Ma stayed in the new Matri-Niwas for two months and it was Her last stay in the Kankhal Ashram. At present, the building has been renovated to accommodate the museum which is named as 'Matri Smriti Mandir'.

On the 4th of July 1982, Ma was taken from Kankhal Ashram to Dehradun to the residence of Smt. Rajaben Khaitan, which was next to the Kalyanvan ashram. Rajaben was a close devotee of Ma. She had constructed a beautiful marble cottage in 1968 in the huge compound of her residence for Ma's exclusive use. Ma stayed there on many occasions when Rajaben arranged Ma's Janmotsav, Durga puja, Kali puja etc. in that compound. A special programme was organised there to celebrate the auspicious Guru Purnima function on 6th July 1982. Ma gave a rare message to the devotees on the occasion of Guru Purnima: "Be a



The sacred birth place of
Shree Shree Ma at Kheora Village in Bangladesh



Ma Anandmayee Ashram at Kishanpur in Dehradun
the place where Ma dissolved in Herself

seeker of your complete (real) identity, Sri Gurudev's kripa (compassion) is ever with you.

On the 11th of July, the Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi came for Shree Ma's darshan, with her son Rajivji and daughter-in-law Soniaji, as she was concerned about Ma's deteriorating health. For a few minutes, Ma sat up in bed and spoke to her. This was possibly the last time that Ma sat up on Her own to give darshan to anybody.

Ma's condition was deteriorating day by day. She was shifted to Kishenpur Ashram on July 24 in the morning. She was seated in a chair kept in the courtyard to be taken straight to Her room on the first floor. Ma never came out of Her room after that day. Many mahatmas, old devotees, and great public personalities continued visiting Ma. Dr. Chenna Reddy was one of them. He was then the Governor of Punjab. Ma told him, "You came often here, continue to come considering this as your own." Perhaps, that was Ma's last message to all the devotees.

The renowned, realized saint Sitaram Baba Omkarnathji came to visit Shree Ma in July 1982 when he received the news of Ma's health condition. Even at the age of about hundred years, he travelled the long distance from Kanyakumari for darshan of Shree Ma. Sitaram Baba too beseeched Her, like many others, to take care of Her body for the welfare of the world but it was of no avail.

Several highly qualified and well-known doctors from Mumbai also visited Shree Ma. After a careful check-up, they declared that there was no touch of illness or disease in any part of Shree Ma's body.

On the 25th of August, Ma gave the message for all who were staying in the Ashram and serving her, "Whereever you are, immerse yourself totally in one-pointed sadhana." Swami Nirmalananda asked Ma, with

immortal words are the greatest source of solace to all her children – “I neither come – nor do I go.” Ma, the Universal Mother, is always there – forever with us.

The summing up (Upasanhar)

To attempt an account of Shree Ma's life is like trying to contain the water of oceans in a pot. Only a very small part of 'Matri-lila' is known. Very few were capable of understanding the infinite essence of Shree Ma's presence. Shree Ma preferred to remain silent about Herself. She never revealed Her true identity. Ma revealed Herself to the seekers only to the extent of their capacity to receive, depending upon their spiritual state and stage. To express Ma in words is not possible.

From a spiritual point of view, all the 'Kriyas' (actions) that happened to Shree Ma during Her 'Sadhana Lila', were a spontaneous outpouring for the benefit of the spiritual world and all humanity. Otherwise, for Ma, who was born with 'Poorna-Gyan', that is, complete enlightenment since birth itself, what need was there for 'Sadhana'?

It is impossible to give an account of Her endless grace towards humanity. Ma said, "Who can count the countless fruits that fall off the trees in the forests?" Similarly, who can tell how many people Ma cured by taking their ailments on to Herself; how many She relieved of their sufferings by absorbing it into Herself; how many She rescued from unexpected disasters and even death and how many souls She liberated from the sorrows of repeated births and deaths? Ma alone knows Her endless, limitless grace and compassion that Ma showered on us. We know only what Ma has allowed us to know. A great and fully realized person capable of knowing all events of all times,

possibly may be able to throw light on the unknown natural and supernatural 'Lila' of Shree Ma as was done by the eminent saint of the ancient period Shree Shukdeva who expounded on the Krishna-lila in 'Shrimad Bhagavata Maha Purana'.

Ma's greatest benediction on humanity was Her appearance itself amongst us. Once when Gurupriya Didi told Ma about Her deep concern for the devotees who would come later after Ma's departure, Ma assured her that whoever came and saw Ma or even whoever saw Ma's photograph or could once remember Her, they would never face degeneration. What a great assurance She gave for all!

Ma was never bound by space, time or circumstance. She played according to Her 'kheyal' in Her own nature within Herself. Nothing was unknown to Her. She had the full knowledge of the past, present and the future of all the beings in the Universe. Ma is prevailing everywhere. Ma said that there is no space even to change Her sides i.e. Ma pervaded all over the universe and even beyond that. Ma generally did not deliver lectures. She preferred to guide the seekers individually, as per their own limitations and capabilities.

Ma said, "All actions of this body are happening automatically as per your requirements." Considering place, time, and person, the necessary action came out from Ma spontaneously. Such actions of Ma were for our betterment and there was no scope for any shortfall or mistake on Her part. Her actions were said to have been the result of Her 'kheyal', Her divine inspiration with no motivation of Her own. She always wanted everyone to progress rapidly on his own spiritual path and gain liberation from the pleasures and pains of worldly life in the cycles of repeated births and deaths.

Glossary of Words

Ahuti	- Offering of oblation.
Akhanda	- Indivisible whole.
Amritatwa	- The divine nectar one receives from God, Eternal.
Asana	- Yogic posture or physical pose. (Every posture corresponds to a particular state of mind)
Avtar	- Incarnation of God, Descend of the Divine.
Banprastha	- The stage of life after a family life, leading a completely religious life in a religious place or ashram
Bhagavati	- The highest epithet of Godhead.
Bhava	- Inner feeling, Spiritual ecstasy, Generally emotional in nature, Divine mood.
Bhog	- Food offerings made for any deity or revered person. After the offering, these are called 'bhoga prasad'.
Brahmacharya	- Observance of strict celibacy.
Brahmachari	- One who practices strict celibacy and sadhana.
Chaitanya	- Pure consciousness, which is the essence of atman or Brahman, the Supreme Spirit.
Dharma	- Religion, Actions desirable for the spiritual advancement of the followers of any religion.
Dharmashala	- Rest-house for pilgrims.
Darshan	- Personal audience / Vision, Act of seeing someone (a holy person or a Deity), a revelation by a Divine being. Glance.
Deeksha	- Initiation into the spiritual life, effected through the grace of the Guru.
Didima	- Maternal grandmother. (Ma's mother in this book)
Gandha	- Smell, odour, scent.
Gerua	- The saffron colour worn by Sannyasis and

	Naishthik Brahmacharis
Grihastha	- Married householder.
Garhasthya	- The second stage of life after 'brahmacharya' for a married householder.
Guru/Gurudev	- A spiritual guide / a respectful way of addressing the spiritual guide.
Guru-vansh	- Successive generations of Guru, Guru's dynasty.
Havan	- Yajna
Ishta	- Desired divine objective, the chosen deity of one's worship.
Japa	- Recitation of Mantra or a name of God as received from the Guru at the time of initiation.
Kashyap Gotra	- The successive generations originated from the great Rishi 'Kashyap' in the ancient time.
Kali Yuga	- The present age, the era of sin and degeneration.
Kheyal	- Divine inspiration or mood, a free divine will.
Kirtana	- Devotional songs, singing of the names or glories of God.
Kriya	- Yogic or ritual action.
LilaMahabhava	- Divine play or event, activities of the Supreme Beingsuper spirituality.
Mahadeva	- Supreme amongst the Devas.
Mahatma	- Saint, Great soul.
Mahapurush	- Realised saint.
Mandir	- Temple.
Mantra	- Divine power transmitted through a word, a sound representation of the chosen Deity (Ishta devata), A portion of the Vedas containing sacred hymns.
Mudras	- Settings of fingers and palms in a particular pose indicating a particular mystical mode.
Gold Mundamala	- A gold chain formed by connecting number of small gold human faces cut at the neck. The

Vansh	- Successive generations, Dynasty
Vedas	- Sacred scriptures of the Hindus – revealed by the Supreme to several Rishis. The oldest scriptures of the world.
Vigraha	- An image consecrated through mantras becomes the Deity itself.
Yagna	- Oblation to Deity by offering in fire.
Yoga	- Any one of the various methods of achieving union of the individual jivatma with the Paramatma the universal Atma.

A Few Important English books written on Ma Anandamayee.

A – Translated from Bengali Language

1. Mother as revealed to me - by Bhajji (J.C.Roy).
2. Ma in Her words - by Bhajji (J.C.Roy)
3. Sad Vani - by Bhajji (J.C.Roy).
4. Sri Sri Ma Anandamayee - by Gurupriya Devi
(In seven volumes)
5. Matri Vani - by Gurupriya Devi
6. In association with
Sri Sri Anandamayee Ma - by Amulya Kr. Datta Gupta.
7. Anandamayee the universal - by Buddhadeb Bhattacharya
8. Swakriya Swarasamrita - by Chandan Puranacharya
(Volume I, II, III, IV, VI)

(Ma dictated its contents to Swami Virajananandaji. He compiled & published the books)

B – Written in English Language

1. As the Flower Sheds its Fragrance - by Atmananda (Ms. Blanca)
2. Words of Sri Sri Anandamayee Ma - by Atmananda (Ms. Blanca)
3. Anandamayee Her life and wisdom - by Richard Lannoy
4. Ma Anandamayee Lila - by Hariram Joshi
5. The most gracious presence Sri Ma Anandamayee - by Bithika Mukherjee
6. Ma Anandamayee, the Divine Mother showers grace on us - by P.P. Madhava
7. Death must die - by Ram Alexander

Details of photographs in the book

Top cover page – Shree Shree Ananamayee Ma at Lucknow in 1962.

Inside cover page – Ma and Her mother Swami Muktananda Giriiji.

Back cover page – Ma Anandamayee Mahajyoti Temple in Kankhal at Haridwar.

Inside back cover – i) Ma's Vighraha and 'Garbh Griha', - Sanctum Sanctorum ii) Ma's Samadhi inside Matri Mandir at Kankhal.

Inside photographs -

1. Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee.
2. Ma i) with father and mother ii) with mother and only brother iii) with Baba Bholanath.
3. i) Sacred Kailash peak ii) Ma with Gurupriya Didi iii) Ma with Baba Bholanath and Bhaiji.
4. i) Ma with Hari Baba and Sw. Krishnanandji of Mumbai ii) Ma with some of ashram sadhus.
5. Ma i) with Prime Minister Nehru and Mrs. Indira Gandhi ii) with Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada.
6. i) Ma in samadhi in Her early age ii) Sri Gopinath Kaviraj ii) Ma in deep Samadhi during Her Janmotsav.
7. i) Prime Minister Narendra Bhai Modi in Ma's room at Varanasi ashram
ii) Sri Modi is being received in Ma's Varanasi ashram by Sri Somesh Chandra Banerjee, the then General Secretary of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha and author of this book and Sw. Deveshananda of Varanasi Ashram.
8. i) The sacred birthplace of Ma ii) Ma's ashram at Kishenpur in Dehradun where Ma dissolved in Herself.



Ma's Vighraha and 'Garbh Griha', -Sanctum Santorum



Ma's Samadhi inside Ma's Mandira at Wazirpur

*Ma Anandamayee Mahajyoti Temple
in Kankhal at Haridwar.*

