

**MA ANANDAMAYEE**  
**AMRIT VARTA**

A quarterly journal dealing mainly  
with the divine life and sayings of  
Sri Anandamayi Ma

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The beautiful statue of Shree Ma installed in Ranchi Ashram

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## *Sri Sri Ma's Self composed Song*

*The ultimate state will not be reached by the jiva without detachment. Therefore, make renunciation and discrimination your sole objective, giving up all desires.*

*What is the extent of renunciation,  
You will know when you are engrossed in action,  
Then you shall see constantly,  
In which direction your mind will be drawn.*

*Offering all your activities,  
Adhere to man's dharma*

*You are the eternal, changeless Brahman,  
Meditate on this in your heart repeatedly.  
Beckon the mind which wanders outwards,  
Keep it within your heart continuously,  
Mount the raft of Brahman  
And cross the ocean of samsara.*

*When your ego is annihilated.  
And all duality transcended  
You shall see that you repose in your true nature,  
Which is the Supreme Truth to be realised.*

*—Vindhyachal, March 1936*

**With best wishes**

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## MATRI VANI

Verily, abounding sorrow is the essential characteristic of life in this world. Fix your mind upon God.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Ishwara*, the Lord of the world, is not a thing to be perceived by the senses or grasped by the mind. By contemplating, the Divine peace is won. God Himself draws you towards Him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Never let your mind be idle; endeavour to keep it concentrated on the Eternal.

\* \* \* \* \*

In all matters without fail depend wholly upon God. To Him you should submit your hearts's petitions and yearnings. Your whole life will have to revolve round Him. You have no other resource; on your own you are utterly helpless, for are you not His creature ? Whatever He does is all for the highest good. You certainly are not in a position to choose what seems best to you. Why should He permit you, who are the offspring of the Immortal, to stray towards that which is of death ?

\* \* \* \* \*

You may deem yourself fortunate, for as you yourself say, God has rescued you from the jaws of death and preserved you to this day. Place your reliance on Him alone. The sufferings and obstacles bred of desire which you encounter, even these should be welcomed as in fact the doing of His merciful hands. To become agitated is of no avail. If you must be impatient, be impatient for God; cry "To this day I have not received any response from Thee and invaluable time has been spent in vain." Do not let your mind and body be tormented with restlessness induced by worldly longings.

\* \* \* \* \*

On hearing the news of someone's death, Mataji had the following conveyed to the bereaved : "Such is the law of worldly existence. You must dwell in fortitude. Surely, you have realised by now what is the true nature of the world ? Peace can be found only by directing one's mind towards God. The more time you devote to japa and meditation — whether so disposed or not — the greater the likelihood of your obtaining deliverance from your grief."

\* \* \* \* \*

To perform one's duties is a good thing. At the same time one has to be mindful of man's real Duty.

\* \* \* \* \*

Since everything belongs to Him alone, there is no other means but to lie prostrate at His Feet. If there is to be anxiety, it must be solely for Him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Under all circumstances depend on God. "Of Him is all that need be said, the rest is vanity, woe." Wherever you may find yourself and in whatever condition, appeal to Him. In this way only may you expect peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

Set your mind on God. Whatsoever He, the Fountain of Goodness does is the very best that could have happened.

\* \* \* \* \*

Placing your trust in your Guru practise the *Seed Mantra* you received from him and contemplate the Beloved (*Ishta*). It is imperative to have firm faith in one's particular *Ishta*. What is the use of seeking initiation again and again ? Rather is it not of the utmost importance to strive strenuously after the full revelation of the form under which He has manifested Himself to you ?

Whenever practicable seek *satsang* — the company of Sages, Saints and seekers after Truth.



## URGENT CIRCULAR

All our subscribers, who have not yet paid their subscriptions for the year 2008, are requested to send the amounts at the earliest. Failing which it will not be possible to send copies of the journal from next issue.

—Managing Editor

Truth, but, of course you get some glimpse. Something happens through that also. Through repeated discussions about these matters *sanskāras* also get lessened bit by bit and also assist in revelation of Truth. That's why this body says, repeating *nāma*, *japa*, good discussions, reading of scriptures, all these are helpful in the spiritual path.

#### **About Baba Bholanath's illness and passing away :**

Ma started again "You frequently say that this body knows, but does not speak". Really, many times all things are not said. Because, I can also see what will be the result of saying all that; and as a result the *kheyāl* arises that the words should not be uttered now. On many occasions something is said in the midst of so many people, who will hear those words and understand the meaning that also is known to me. Among so many persons, perhaps only one or two may hear, others will not hear anything or even understand anything.

"At times this body may speak out something in short, but many won't be able to catch the meaning. As for during Bholanath's illness Shibshankar baba said - "Ma, atleast you knew that Baba Bholanath won't live, inspite of that why did you advise to put butter over his eyes repeatedly from three or four days before ? From that I surmised that perhaps Baba Bholanath would survive.

"Really speaking, I knew that Bholanath won't live and I also knew that at the last minute he would like to see me. As a result of small pox there were burning raw sores in his eyes and the upper portion of the sores were getting dried up. In this condition if the eyes were not softened through butter then he could never see. Blood would come out as soon as he would try to open his eyes and look at. On the day of his passing away, he was saying repeatedly, 'Where are you ? I would like to touch you.'" Going near I spread my hand. He touched the same, but as there was no strength in his hand he could not keep the same raised for long; again and again the hand used to drop down. At last I myself kept his hand erect through the help of both of my hands. Bholanath then started speaking - 'I cannot see you. I long to see'. I then asked him to look at and he could see me. I then passed my hand through his whole body and asked - 'How do you feel ?' Bholanath answered - 'Ananda'. Again I asked him - 'Do you remember your *sanyasa mantra* ?' He replied - 'Yes' and by repeating the same he made me listen to that. At this time arrangement was so made that no one could hear the same. Your Sushila *Mashima*\* was sitting there. She was asked to bring glucose water. At a distance she was sitting preparing the same. So, she could not hear the *sanyasa mantra*.

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\*. Sushila Devi — Matajis cousin sister.

Apart from that garlands etc. whatever was needed after Bholanath's passing away were all kept ready. At the last moment Bholanath said he was feeling chilly. Then he was covered with a *gerua* cloth which had already been kept ready. Thereafter, I asked everyone to start kirtan. Even then no one could understand that his last moment had arrived, because doing kirtan was a routine affair and Bholanath also loved to listen to the same.

"This body did make all arrangements for Bholanath. When the doctor used to be told about the arrangements already made he okayed the same as all right. When one is going to serve a patient it is not to be judged if the patient would survive or die. The main object of nursing is to give some solace to the patient. The arrangement to keep Bholanath's body soaked in oil was also arranged by me. *I am Bholanath*. So, I very well knew what was his pain and through what he would get some peace. So many go to nurse a patient, but as they do not have this knowledge, they cannot give much relief. When this body was in the form of a house-wife and was *mauna*, even then also this happened. There was a young man near our house. They belonged to a low caste and were very poor. Frequently I used to visit their house. He used to call me as '*bhāvi*' (sister-in-law). He used to suffer from fever frequently and suffered much through head-ache. Those of his relations who nursed him of course used to put wet cloth over his forehead. Still whenever this body used to go and put the soaked cloth over his forehead in such a manner that he used to get comfort and even with his closed eyes he would utter-'Perhaps *bhāvi* has come.'

"Whatever might have been the outside reactions of Bholanath he had the feeling of great inner respect for this body. He would never want me to be far away from his eyes. The reason was that he used to think that if I was alone I might even leave this body. But he will never allow that to happen. People used to consider him as very much attached to his wife; but they did not know the real reason. Bholanath had the inner desire that he would leave his body before me; and also used to remark - 'I shall do whatever I like, I shall eat whatever I want, but nothing will happen to me. If I die in front of you I shall attain a better state. He very well knew that all sorts of *yogic kriyās* had occurred in this body. All those occurred before him. Therefore, whatever he might say outwardly he had much respect for this body in the inmost depth of his heart.

"Bholanath was not ashamed to disclose that he had received initiation from this body. He used to say - 'What is there to be ashamed of in disclosing this ? On the other hand people should know that even wife can be the '*guru*' Later on he had the feeling that he had also given *diksha* to me. Formerly when I used to take the



name of 'Hari', he would tell me - 'We are *shāktas* (followers of *shakti*), so why do you take Hari's name ? When I asked, which 'name' should be taken. Should I repeat '*Jai Shiva Shankara*' ? He said, 'Yes'. But he did not notice that the 'Name' to be taken came out from my mouth itself.

"Apart from that while giving advice to people this body used to frequently say - 'Father is *guru*, mother is *guru*', 'husband is *guru*' and so on. Listening to this he in fact developed the belief that he was my guru and he had also given *diksha* to me. Once thereafter, on the bank of the Narmada, Khukuni\* raised the question who had given *dikshā* to whom. Bholanath repeated that he had given *dikshā* to me. I said to him - 'If you have given *dikshā* then please tell what is the *mantra* ?' Bholanath replied - '*Shivāya nāmah*'. Then I explained to him gradually what had actually happened. Then I asked him - 'Now say, who has given *dikshā* to me.' Then he was compelled to admit that so long he had a wrong notion. Some times a question comes out of this body in such a way that no one can give a false reply. Bholanath also could not. Apart from that he always had the fear that if any false reply was given then I might even leave my body."

While all this discussion was going on it was found that it was already 12.30 noon. So, Ma was taken for rest.

Ma came and sat in the hall at about 5 p.m. Nepal dada\* started reading from the 'Ramayana' in Hindi. He alone had been daily reading from the sacred texts for one hour three times daily. In the morning from '*sāadhan samar*', in the afternoon from the 'Ramayana', and at night from the 'Mahabharata'. A lot of ladies from the village has come to meet Ma today, seeing them I got out of the hall. After half an hour when I went back I found that the ladies had left. We sat near Ma. After a while Ma again raised the topic about Baba Bholanath.

Ma started saying - "When Bholanath returned to Kishenpur from Hardwar, then itself I saw that he had come back in the full form of illness. His face, nose, eyes were very much inflamed. Bed was arranged for him in the north - western room in your Kishenpur ashram ground floor and it was also advised on which side he would put his head. Later on when I went I found that he himself had changed the same and was lying on another side.

"His disease was of a very serious nature - a very bad type of small pox, which is also known as '*Charma dal*' (Skin-pox), (Pointing out to Swami Akhanda—

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\*. Khukuni didi - short name of revered Gurupriya didi.

\*. Nepal Chakravorty - subsequently Swami Narayanananda Tirtha of Varanasi ashram.

nandaji\* ) Ma said they at first considered the same as ordinary ailment. But at night time through the help of a torch light I pointed out to them a number of small boils in the body which were of a very bad type. Bholanath's body got so much inflamed that it took a very fearful form. People were so much afraid that rarely people would pass even through the main road in front of the ashram. Bholanath's body was soaked in olive oil even before Shiv Shankar baba (the Ayurvedic doctor) arrived. He also put ayurvedic oil on the oil cloth and Bholanath was kept lying on the same.

"Several days before Bholanath passed away, this body's mother (Didima), Khukuni & others were sent away to some other place. Because, when an ashram has been set up then the sanctity of the place would have to be maintained. If they were there, they would have spoilt the sanctity of the ashram by crying after Bholanath's death. Therefore, as they had left the place, everything was quiet there - no noise. There was also no feeling of impurity among those who were with the dead body. The same thing happened at the time of passing away of Jyotish\* also. Apart from this there was no feeling of fear also among those who did the nursing of Bholanath. I had asked all of them to act with caution. When touching Bholanath's body they were asked to wrap their fingers with cloth. They all used to do accordingly, only Shivshankar baba would not follow that. There was no feeling of any apprehension or hate also among any one. They used to think as if they were nursing any patient suffering from ordinary fever.

"After Bholanath's death arrangements for his *jal-samādhi* were going on. No one was feeling sorrowful, this was as if getting ready to depart from one place to another. It was also surprising that almost all the things which would be required after death were being arranged automatically one by one, whereas no one had the doubt that he would leave his body. When I was asked even in the afternoon about Bholanath's condition I had told them that the condition was very bad. But many of them thought that being very much worried about my husband's condition and also due to affection I was exaggerating the thing. Not even the doctor had opined that the condition was very bad, perhaps he himself did not understand, because the doctor himself was getting ready for coming next day to see Bholanath. Everyone in the ashram was considering him comparatively better than other days. For so many days he could not speak, but that day he spoke, The day before Bholanath asked to take rice with *dal*. I enquired from Shivshankar baba if rice could be given

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\*. Swami Akhandananda - Gurupriya didi's father, who was formerly a renowned Civil Surgeon in Bengal.

\*. Late Jyotish Chandra Roy - popularly known as 'Bhaiji'.

in that condition. He replied that if Bholanath could take then there was no objection. Really, a person, who was unable to even speak and swallow anything on account of sores in his throat as well as on the whole body, how could he take *rice* and *dal* ? However, this body made arrangement for that also in order to fulfil this desire of Bholanath. We used to keep awake the whole night. Even when it was dark, I asked to keep two fireplaces alit upon which in two pots rice and *dal* packed in pieces of cloth were put in water to be boiled. When these were quite well boiled then a sort of juice was prepared by mixing some portion of that rice and *dal*. Afterwards they were put in a glass like barley water for Bholanath to take. Every thing was prepared while this body was standing all the time. After that I went to have a wash by sending the same to Bholanath's room.

"When that juice was taken before Bholanath he declined to take that by any means. He said that unless I took the same first he would not put that in his mouth. His previous feelings came up at this moment. It was seen on prior occasions also that when Bholanath and I used to sit for the meals he would not take anything without first putting rice etc. in my mouth. Infact he used to take only after the food was first put into my mouth and thus because *prasād*. In between, this thing would stop for some time on account of adverse comments by others. People used to ask him what all this was being done by him, was I not his wife ? As a result he used to behave occasionally in a quite different manner with this body. But all such behaviour of Bholanath was only temporary and to some extent done even reluctantly. He used to act accordingly due to general shame. Therefore, that did not last for long. It is only for that reason stress is given upon regular practice even in the *shāstras*. If through regular practice it becomes a part of nature that is a different thing. Even otherwise sometimes as a result of regular practice pure instincts are aroused at the last moment after suppressing other instincts.

"Two or three days before leaving his body Bholanath was calling this body as 'Ma-Ma'. Being unable to see with his eyes he used to touch this body and feel that it was I, who was there or not. Later on he became restless to see this body. That arrangement was also made, which has already been told.

"As Bholanath refused to take the juice unless the same was taken by this body, I then asked them to put a portion of the juice into my mouth. They followed that. But even then he refused to take. Only, if this body would give the same to him, then he would take the juice. Then through the help of a spoon almost the entire quantity was swallowed by him slowly.

"Two or three days before Bholanath left his body it was found that the centre point of his skull had become low and soft like those of the babies. But this was not on account of his illness.

"After Bholanath's passing away almost everyone from the ashram went to Hardwar along with his body for giving *jal samādhi*. Next day persons came from the Govt. dept. for cleaning the rooms of the ashram with disinfectants. While washing they made all the room topsy-turvy. I sat on the verandah of the kitchen. Now, the doctor's wife, Bhanu Babu's wife and others came to meet me. They were found advancing very slowly deliberating among themselves how to start the conversation with me. Seeing this I laughed loudly, They were somewhat amazed to see me laughing in this manner and advanced towards me a bit fast. When I started talking about Bholanath's last stage in such a way that they also could not help laughing and while returning, all their hesitation was removed. They left for their homes in a smiling mood."

After talking so long about Baba Bholanath Ma talked also about the death of Nirmal babu\*. In this connection a new thing was told by Ma. Ma said that She saw Nirmal babu a few days after his death. He came down from a certain *Jyotimay loka* (luminous abode in the heaven) and returned after meeting Ma. A couple of sages were also with him in their astral bodies. Perhaps Nirmal babu was residing there being merged with the head of that *loka*.

While discussing all these matters it became almost dark, Ma came out of the hall. We also went to the canal down below to have some wash and after returning sat for our evening prayers.

After evening Pandeyji came to meet Ma along with several distinguished persons. They returned after about 10 p.m.

(To continue)

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\*. Late Nirmal Chatterjee - husband of Gurupriya didi's elder sister.

## RĀMĀYAṆA : THE SONG OF LIFE

—Dr. I. Panduranga Rao

The most valuable contribution of the renowned poet *Vālmiki* to the time honoured tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa* cult and culture is the name '*Rāmāyaṇa*' chosen by him for his immortal composition. We do not normally go into its etymology as the name is very simple, catching and homely even for the illiterate. But the main concern of the sage poet in writing this epic poem will reveal itself to us only when we try to understand the genius behind this coinage.

Literally, the word '*Rāmāyaṇa*' means the '*ayanam*' of *Rāma*. By '*ayanam*', the poet perhaps means abode, path, movement, goal or simply march. Thus *Rāmāyaṇa* as conceived by the poet is not a mere story, but much more than that. It is true that even as a story, the epic composition is superb, fascinating and captivating even for children. But it is the '*ayanam*' or the 'March' part of it that is more significant. The sage poet wants us to realise this real significance of his treatise by carefully observing how '*Rāma*', the Man of his vision, acts and reacts responding to the normal and natural course of events that encounter him in his life. **What** he does is not so much important as **how** he does it. How he takes things as they approach him and tries to face the problems as they face him is to be studied properly to understand the beauty of his magnificent March in search of truth, justice, love, compassion, dignity, decency, dedication and humanity that can excel even divinity.

A discerning reader of *Rāmāyaṇa* will appreciate that there is an inbuilt rhythm in the great grand March of *Rāma* which the poet chose to call *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is this rhythm that brings grace and grandeur to the movements of *Rāma* making the March sing for itself. This movement or march transforms the events both pleasant and unpleasant into sweet melodies that spring from the hearts of those who act and also those who observe. It is this point of view that makes us feel that *Rāmāyaṇa*, the first Indian epic presented by *Vālmiki* reads like a song, the language of the heart. That is why *Vālmiki* is often compared to a cuckoo chanting the name of *Rāma* in a voice that is sweet in sense and spirit.

There is one more point worth noting in the nomenclature of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. The two component words—*Rāma* and *ayana* are so combined in the name *Rāmāyaṇa* that the *ayana* can be applied to both *Rāma* and *Rāmā* (meaning *Sītā*). In fact *Vālmiki* uses the word *Rāmā* (रामा) to denote *Sītā* on several occasions. Thus the word *Rāmāyaṇa* can easily mean the march of both *Rāma* and his life companion *Sītā*. Practically what we see in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a

coordinated march of *Rāma* and *Sītā*. They are two faces of the same coin. A strange, surprising and amusing identity between the two characters, both in physical form and in mental set up was noticed by *Hanumān* when he sees her for the first time in *Laṅkā*. He exclaims.

अस्या देव्या यथारूपं अङ्ग-प्रत्यङ्ग-सौष्ठवम् । रामस्य च यथारूपं तस्येयमसितेक्षणा ॥  
अस्या देव्या मनस्तस्मिन् तस्य चास्यां प्रतिष्ठितम् । [वा. रा. ५.१५.५१-५२]

asyā devyā yathārūpaṁ aṅgapratyaṅga sauṣṭhavam /  
rāmasya ca yathārūpaṁ tasye-yamasitekṣaṇā //  
asyā devyā manaṣtasmin tasya cāsyāṁ pratiṣṭhitam / [vā. rā. 5.15.51-52]

[This noble lady closely resembles *Rāma* even in minute physical features. There is absolutely no difference between the two. Their minds also must be thinking on the same lines and in the same wave-length.]

*Rāmāyaṇa* is therefore, a co-ordinated march of *Rāma* and *Sītā*, whose sole mission in life was to promote this cosmic rhythm in all our activities. In spite of unsurmountable problems and untold suffering at every stage in their missionary march, they ultimately succeeded in establishing truth and justice as the permanent solutions for all problems in life. *Sumantra*, the royal charioteer, makes a significant observation while consoling *Daśaratha* and *Kauśalyā* not to feel depressed on account of the suffering to which *Rāma* and *Sītā* are subjected. He assures them that their suffering is going to create a story in the history of mankind which will be sung and celebrated for all time to come,

इदं हि चरितं लोके प्रतिष्ठास्यति शाश्वतम् । [वा. रा. २.६०.२१]  
idaṁ hi caritaṁ loke pratiṣṭhāsyati śāśvatam / [vā. rā. 2.60.21]

As a song of life, *Rāmāyaṇa* reaffirms the universal truth that it is suffering that gives rise to any lyrical expression. *Vālmīki* himself experienced this when he saw the couple of birds shot at mercilessly by a cruel hunter. Suddenly he burst into emotional ecstasy which took the form of a metrical expression which happened to be the inaugural verse composed by the poet without himself being conscious of it. This oft-quoted verse has become immortal as it transformed pathos into poetry.

As if to highlight the dynamic nature of the March of *Rāma*, *Vālmīki* introduces *Viśvāmitra* in the same canto (*Balakāṇḍa*-18) in which he describes the advent of *Rāma*. *Viśvāmitra* approaches King *Daśaratha* with a request to spare the services of his son *Rāma* for protecting his *yajña* from the terrorism of two demons, *Mārīca* and *Subāhu*. *Daśaratha* hesitates to comply with this request as he feels that his son, hardly 16 years, can not be deputed for such a challenging task. But *Viśvāmitra* tells him that his son *Rāma* is not an ordinary prince but a great soul

(*mahātmā*) born with immense potentialities deriving his full strength from Truth Eternal (*satya-parākrama*). But the affectionate father almost refuses to do this and instead offers himself for this perilous task. Then his family priest *Vaśiṣṭha* intervenes at the instance of *Viśvāmitra* and tells *Daśaratha* that the sage *Viśvāmitra* has not come merely to seek his help; but his real intention is to project the potential divinity of *Rāma* and present him as a universal figure. Convinced that the challenging task that has come on its own is not only in the personal interests of *Rāma* but more significantly in the larger interests of the destruction of evil forces and resurrection of human values, the king ultimately sends *Rāma* with his brother *Lakṣmaṇa* for this first assignment sponsored by the greatest sage of his time, *Viśvāmitra*. This marks the beginning of the March of *Rāma*. It was a feast for the eyes of both gods in the heaven and saintly personalities on earth to see the two princes *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* following the foot-prints of *Viśvāmitra*, the seer of *Gāyatrī*.

Though *Viśvāmitra* wanted *Rāma* for ten nights, the itinerary extends up to 24 days till *Rāma* and his three brothers get married in *Mithilā*. In the early hours of the 25<sup>th</sup> day *Viśvāmitra* leaves for his native hill-station in the North (*jagāmottara-parvatam*) having accomplished his mission of inaugurating the March of *Rāma* for the betterment of humanity. Though the original task contemplated was just to protect the *yajña* from the two demons, several other adventures also await the arrival of *Rāma*. *Viśvāmitra* equips *Rāma* with all the weapons of offence and defence on the way to enable him to meet the challenges. It was in a way a refresher course for the young prince potentially divine and temperamentally inclined to do anything to promote universal good under the guidance of the great sage *Viśvāmitra*.

The spiritual diplomacy with which *Viśvāmitra* conducts the tour is marvellous. Though he does not spell out the various items and events he had in mind, he executes the plan in a systematic way. We come to know that the *Ahalyā* episode had already been planned by him only when *Śatānanda* enquires about it on seeing *Viśvāmitra* in *Mithilā*. The *Tātakā* episode was also a pre-planned one because when *Rāma* hesitates to kill her, *Viśvāmitra* insists on the execution of his orders. *Rāma's* hesitation was that as his first adventure under the stewardship of *Viśvāmitra*, he was to kill a woman however devilish and dreadful she might be. But very soon he realises that it is his duty to obey the orders of his father and the preceptor. He expresses this in clear terms before he takes up his arms.

He says:

पितुर्वचन-निर्देशात् पितुर्वचन-गौरवात् ।

वचनं कौशिकस्येति कर्तव्यमविशङ्कया ॥

[वा.रा. १.२६.२]

*piturvacana-nirdeśāt piturvacana-gauravāt /  
vacanaṁ kauśikasyeti kartavyamaviśaṅkayā //* [vā. rā. 1.26.2]

The subtle point underlined in this event is that *Tātakā* being the mother of *Mārīca* should be dispensed with before handling *Mārīca*. This paves the way for the main task of protecting the *yajña*. *Mārīca* figures again at the time of abduction of *Sītā*. *Rāma* saves him on his first appearance despatching him to a distant land and teaching him a lesson which he remembers throughout his life. His first encounter with *Rāma* brings about a total change in his outlook. He tells *Rāvaṇa* that *Rāma* is an embodiment of *Dharma* (रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः- *rāmo vighrahavān dharmah*) and any attempt to confront him is inviting total destruction. Thus this incident, the first adventure in the March of *Rāma*, forms the basis for the ultimate goal of *Rāma*.

Even the trip to *Mithilā* was unspelt, though not totally unscheduled. After the protection of *yajña* was over, the sages of *Siddhāśrama* suggest that the two princes should be taken to *Mithilā* so that they can see another *yajña*, *dhanur-yajña*, which King *Janaka* was performing there. *Viśvāmitra* immediately accepts the suggestion and the party proceeds to *Mithilā*.

After *Viśvāmitra* leaves for his abode, *Rāma* faces a fierce encounter with *Paraśurāma*. He manages this independently without getting upset and also without causing any embarrassment to his formidable opponent. On the other hand the incident results in spectacular success for himself and immense relief and redemption to the opponent.

Thus the inaugural March of *Rāma* from *Ayodhyā* to *Mithilā* and back strike a pleasant and promising note for the smooth running of the future events. *Sītā*, the embodiment of grace (*śrīśvarūpiṇī*) also joins him in his march in search of service before self. As the most fitting life companion of *Rāma*, she adds fragrance to his sweetness, beauty to his truth and patience to his penance. *Vālmiki* says while referring to their mutual understanding that they speak in the language of their hearts so that their hearts can speak for themselves making their union a song of life.

The real music of life starts in *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* when the proposed coronation of *Rāma* takes the form of his exile for fourteen years on a trivial ground. As the crisis originates from lust for power on the part of *Kaikeyī*, the most beloved of all the queens of *Daśaratha*, and *Daśaratha* was helpless and miserably caught in the meshes of the two boons granted by him to *Kaikeyī* way back, it poses a threat to the prestige of the royal family and also to the basic human values and the norms of the state administration. The crisis starts at midnight when *Kaikeyī* takes a firm stand and some amicable solution had to be found before the sunrise as the whole of *Ayodhyā* was eagerly waiting for the most exciting event of the coronation.

The moment *Rāma* comes to know of this terrible crisis, he resolves it in a minute offering himself to fulfil the desires of his stepmother *Kaikeyī*. The conflict between truth and justice discussed throughout the night by *Daśaratha* and *Kaikeyī*.



ends with one sentence spoken by *Rāma*. Without any hesitation, he said, "Here I go, let the proposal stand as desired' (*evamastu, gamiṣyāmi*). The contrast between the shameless selfishness of *Kaikeyī* and the spirit of selfless sacrifice on the part of *Rāma* is so striking and surprising to the whole of *Ayodhyā* that the news spreads to the remote corners of the city in seconds after *Rāma* decides to leave *Ayodhyā* the same day before sunset. The people who spent the whole night eagerly waiting for the sunrise and the enthronement of *Rāma* that was to follow receive the news of exile with a shock, a rude shock as no one could expect such a turn of events overnight from the royal family headed by *Daśaratha* who cared more for his word than for his life. But the irony is that nobody was to be blamed because everyone including *Kaikeyī* was justified and their entire brunt of the cruel destiny had to be taken upon him by *Rāma* with a genuine smile converting the crisis into a challenge. This is what makes *Rāmāyaṇa*, the March of *Rāma*, a song of life. Taking things in their normal course with a spirit of confidence in himself and those who have a heart to feel and brain to think in the right direction is what projects *Rāma* as the most cherished member of the world of humanity (*lokābhirāma*).

When *Kaikeyī* feels nervous that the departure of *Rāma* may be slightly delayed awaiting the arrival of *Bharata*, *Rāma* catches the hint and clarifies her doubt and his stand saying:

नाहमर्थपरो देवि लोकमावस्तुमुत्सहे । विद्धि मामृषिभिस्तुल्यं विमलं धर्ममाश्रितम् ॥

[वा.रा. २.१९.२०]

*nā-ham-arthaparo devi lokamā-vastum-utsahe /*

*viddhi mām-ṛṣhistulyaṁ vimalaṁ dharmam-āśritam //*

[vā. rā. 2.19.20]

[Dear mother, I am not after the material possessions and positions. I am eager to join the world community and culture sanctified by the great sages. I prefer staying in the forests along with them to relaxing in the royal palace. I bank upon the blissful and the benevolent 'dharma' (righteous conduct) which supports and sustains this universe].

This declaration of *Rāma* marks the beginning of the second phase of his March.

[To continue]

## GLIMPSES FROM MATAJI'S LIFE

A personality, unique, immeasurable and unfathomable; yet cherished by millions today as the living personification of man's ideal of eternal values, and so, one most familiar, intimate and dear to the heart. The gracious calm which was undefinable in its perfection made Mataji unapproachable; yet through Her compassionate understanding which knew no horizons, She could reach the heart most estranged. There was no hiatus between Her transcendence and immanence. Because, "There is an unborn, unbecome, uncreated, unformed; were there not this unborn, unbecome, uncreated, unformed, no escape could be found for the born, become, created, formed."

According to Mataji's own words about Herself, She had not passed through any stages of infancy and childhood to maturity; neither from that of a spiritual aspirant to a state of Realisation. She remained inherently changeless through all the physical and emotional changes that seemed to affect Her body and mind. There had been no progressive knowledge for Her, because there was nothing hidden from Her. Mataji had not passed through any previous births and therefore Her body was not the manifestation of accumulated *samskāras*.

In her life She had no mission to fulfil because no desire or personal will influenced Her actions. Her apparent activities occurred spontaneously according to the need of the time, place and people.

Mataji had never performed any *sadhana* in the accepted sense of the term. In fact Her simple village life was not conducive to such ways of esoteric religion. A very short period of Her life however was given to what might appear to be a highly concentrated form of *sadhana*, just as other periods of it were given to infancy, childhood and maturity.

Although at one phase of Her life the ways of a *sadhaka* became unequivocally manifest in Her actions, this was not a radical change from Her previous way of living. Mataji always appeared strangely affected by devotional music and the reciting of scriptures. Even during Her infancy She would get into transcendental states which people variously interpreted as sleep, unconsciousness or fits.

There were other unique features of Her infant life. Her infallible memory amazed Her parents. She once reminded them of an incident that had occurred when She was thirteen days old. Instances of a wisdom beyond Her years were plentiful. She would have been an awe-inspiring prodigy, had not Her gracious winsomeness made Her a very lovable little child.

Didima (Mataji's mother) said that Mataji was never unhappy and did not cry except once during Her childhood, when She saw Didima grieving the death of Her three little brothers. Mataji broke out into such heart-rending sobs that Didima instantly forgot her own tears in the attempt to console her little daughter. The much enduring mother never found any further occasions for indulging in her sorrow. All heartaches were healed, then as always by Mataji's radiant presence.

Her father, Sri Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya, was well known for his upright nature, otherworldliness and love for devotional music. He had a fine voice and taught his daughter to sing Kirtan. His wife Mokshada Sundari Devi was equally worthy of the privilege conferred upon her by providence. The blessed couple, pious and simple, were however extremely poor. It is said that although Lakshmi withheld her material gifts, the very spirit of the goddess of wealth seemed to reign supreme over the content little household. 'Didima' was never at a loss to produce for the most unexpected guests some sort of refreshments from her meagre yet seemingly inexhaustible supply. The dire indigence neither embittered her outlook nor made her slovenly. She was the most careful of housewives and looked after her family so competently that its members hardly ever felt the trials of poverty.

Didima was the kind and gentle soul she had always been, unaffected by all the radical changes which had transformed her outward life. Her self-sufficiency was saintly : she chose self-effacing retirement when she could command the attention of many; and yet no one was ever deprived of a kind word or a blessing from this sincerest of all well wishers.

Mataji was the second child of Her parents, named by them Nirmala Sundari. She was fair and beautiful and Her bright and sunny disposition endeared Her to all. The extreme guilelessness of Her nature puzzled many who even thought Her lacking a little in intelligence. She was very obedient and dutiful. In fact Mataji's habit of carrying out orders to the letter sometimes led to amusing consequences and sometimes quite otherwise. When still a child She was taken to a fair by a relative, who put Mataji down before a Shiva temple and told Her to sit there quietly, while she herself went away with her other companions. Incidentally she forgot all about the lonely child. Remembering Her at last after a long time, she hurried back and was amazed to find little Nirmala sitting in exactly the same position she had left her. She had not moved at all.

Once Didima, giving Her lessons in reading, had pointed out that She was to pause only when She reached a full stop. If Mataji came across a long sentence She would twist and contort Her body in Her effort to arrive at the full stop in one breath. If She was forced to take a fresh breath in the middle of a sentence, She

would start all over again. Such extreme obedience naturally annoyed Her mother, but the child's palpable innocence and obvious good intention disarmed all rebukes.

Mataji's education was quite elementary. She was a pupil of the local school for a short while. But since She helped at home with the housework and also looked after Her brothers, She could not attend school regularly. In spite of this She was one of the star pupils and got promoted to the primary school in an inexplicably short time. Referring to Her school life Mataji once said laughingly, "Somehow or other I invariably happened to look up the very lesson the teacher would ask and consequently he always found me well prepared. Actually my education was extremely sketchy."

Even at this early stage Mataji sometimes fell into supra-mundane states, which however nobody saw, or seeing, failed to understand. People generally agreed that She was a most unusual child.

In 1909, at the age of twelve years and ten months Mataji was given in marriage to Sri Ramani Mohan Chakravarty, who later became known as 'Pitaji' or 'Bholanath'.

Thus ended the first period of Mataji's *Lila* in the role of a carefree girl in the house of Her parents. From the moment She entered Her husband's house She behaved as a shy and retiring bride. Her husband's people felt charmed by Her grace and beauty, and soon were amazed to discover that the young and inexperienced girl could easily outdo the expert in housewifely work.

Immediately after Her marriage She was taken to live with the family of Bholanath's elder brother. He was a station-master in the service of the Railway Department. Mataji remained with them for nearly four years. She did the entire work of the household and personally looked after the children of Bholanath's brother. She easily managed to give full satisfaction to Her somewhat exacting sister-in-law. Mataji, then as always, so completely followed the written and unwritten rules of behaviour that no one could possibly find fault with Her. It was not that She consciously tried to remain on Her best behaviour, but it was in the very nature of things that Her conduct would never fall short of the ideal. There could be no half-measures for Mataji, from things trifling to matters great.

She never complained against the occasional unjust behaviour of others, nor did She try to defend Herself if taken to task for another's negligence. She Herself never found fault with others. Once Her silver anklets were taken away by an acquaintance. Mataji smilingly refused to disclose the culprit's name.

The heavy work could not change Mataji's happy disposition. She had a tendency to excel in whatever She attempted. She was good at canework, also at weaving and spinning fine thread and at various other crafts.

In fact Her housekeeping was an art in itself and other housewives came to see and admire Her kitchen and store-rooms.

Although Mataji was as gentle and obliging as the most exacting heart could wish, the extraordinary nature of Her character never seriously in dispute. She sometimes entered into *samadhi* in the midst of housework. At that time however, these lapses into the supra-mundane did not change Her general behaviour very greatly, and the simple people unaware of its true significance, were glad to gloss over this aspect of Her life.

When in 1914 Bholanath found employment in Ashtagram, Mataji came to stay with him. From the very beginning he was impressed by the unusual character of his bride. There was never a question of his exerting the rights of a husband over Her. Mataji has said that their relationship was that of a father and his daughter. Although he was convinced that it would never be possible for him to lead a conventional family life, he was quite happy and satisfied with this state of affairs.

Mataji looked after him and kept house for him as faultlessly as She had done for his brother before coming to Ashtagram.

In Ashtagram She became acquainted with other young girls. Her pleasant disposition and charming manners soon made her a general favourite.

Mataji's behaviour spontaneously adjusted itself to Her surroundings. Being completely in tune with Existence no force of circumstances could find Her unprepared.

Conscious endeavour plays no part in this scheme of things and therefore Mataji's conduct was always infallible.

It was in Ashtagram that She was first called "Ma" by Harakumar, the brother of her most intimate friend.

A few close companions had begun to notice Her peculiar reactions to Kirtan and to the chanting of Scri ptures. But these occasions were rare and Mataji was still the shy and retiring young wife. Harakumar defying the customs and traditions of village life visited Her every day to do *pranam* and ask for *prasad*. Mataji however would not comply with his request. Hidden behind Her veils, She would stand at a distance, quiet and unresponsive. In despair Harakumar appealed to Bholanath, saying that his entreaties which left Mataji unmoved would have melted the heart even of a statue. Bholanath, impressed by his sincerity and devotion, aksed Mataji to give Harakumar Her *prasad*. Mataji always tried to obey Bholanath as implicitly

as She had obeyed Her parents, and Harakumar had his wish fulfilled. He used to say, "Now it is only I who call you Ma. Some day the world will recognize you and call you so".

When after staying in Ashtagran for about a year and four months Mataji fell ill, She came to Vidyakut to live with Her parents. She was not very seriously ill and recovered soon, but stayed on with Her parents for nearly three years.

In Her own village She could dispense with Her heavy veils and move about freely among neighbours and friends. Hindu as well as Muslim villagers loved to have Her visit their homes and talk to them.

Referring to this period of Her life, Mataji said, "My mother did not need my help and so I just spent my time with my friends. In the evenings I used to stroll about by myself. Sometimes in the dark I saw a strange effulgence enveloping my body and this light seemed to move about with me."

(To continue)

*"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
And where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life!"*

*—St. Francis of Assisi*

## LORD KRISHNA : AN EPITOME OF VEDĀNTA\*

—Prof. Bireswar Ganguly

The advent of Lord Krishna, a plenary incarnation (*avatāra*) of God at the fag end of *Dvāpar Yuga*, just before the present *Kali Yuga*, is the greatest event in the spiritual history of India, for he not only manifested the best qualities of the ideal man, the ideal king and the ideal practical philosopher, but also the best propounder of practical Vedānta in *Shrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, which was preached to prince Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The great Indian epics, viz., *Mahābhārata* and *Shrīmad Bhāgavatam*, written by Veda Vyāsa are the two authentic sources for the study of Lord Krishna's life, personality and teaching. Lord Krishna may be considered as the universal world teacher and an epitome of Indian culture, but I shall confine my treatment to the best and common tenets of Hinduism only, for the catholicity of Hindu culture of *Sanātana Dharma* of India encompasses all other cultures without any contradiction.

There is a long history of controversy, regarding the historical dates of the battle of Kurukshetra and the compilation of *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavat Purāna*. Many Indian scholars have put the dates much earlier than some reputed Western scholars. Following the chronology as accepted by Lokamanya Tilak, we can safely accept 4500 B.C., as the approximate period of *Rig Veda*, the most ancient scripture of the Hindus, and the compilation of *Mahābhārata* about 900 B.C., though, according to the famous astrologer, Makarandakar, the date of the beginning of the Kurukshetra battle was 6 December, 3101 B.C., (vide : *Epigraphia India*, VI, pp. 11-12.) This has been held by the latest historical research also. The *Purānic* age is supposed to commence from 200 A.D. Of course, the devout Hindus believe that both *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavat Purāna* were written by Maharshi Krsihna Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, a contemporary of Lord Krishna at the end of *Dvāpar Yuga*, about five thousand years ago. In the words of Chakravarty Sri Rājāgopālāchāri, "But, generations of gifted reciters have added to Vyāsa's original a great mass of accretion. All the floating literature that was thought to be

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\*. Courtesy : "Practical Vedanta from Sri Krishna to Ma Anandamaycc"—Published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavān", Mumbai.

worth preserving, historical, geographical, legendary, political, theological and philosophical, of nearly thirty centuries, found a place in it."<sup>1</sup>

Though Krishna consciousness or the Christian concept of Christ consciousness is a symbol and *summum bonum* (i.e., ultimate goal), yet Lord Krishna was also a historical personality. Sri Aurobindo, the greatest Indian philosopher yogi of the 20th century observes : "The historical Krishna, no doubt, existed. We meet the name first in the *Chhândogya Upanishad*, where all we can gather about him is that he was well-known in spiritual tradition as a knower of Brahman, so well indeed is his personality and the circumstances of his life that it was sufficient to refer to him by the name of his mother as Krishna, son of Devaki, for all to understand who was meant. In the same Upanishad we find mention of Dhritarashtra, son of Vichitravirya, and since tradition associated the two together so closely that they are both of them leading personages in the action of *Mahābhārata*, we may fairly conclude that they were actually contemporaries and that the epic is to a great extent dealing with historical characters and in the war of Kurukshetra with a historical occurrence imprinted firmly on the memory of the race."<sup>2</sup>

Historicity apart, there is near unanimity in the belief of all Hindus that Lord Krishna was the ideal personality of ancient India, who represents the epitome of Hindu culture.

The essence of ancient Indian culture, later on known as Hindu culture, is found in the *Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata*, *Manusmriti* and *Shrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*. Life was viewed by the ancient Indian *Rishis* (wise seers) in its integral nature, evolving from the lowest animal man, governed by the vital impulses to the highest divine man, aspiring for communion with *Brahman* or God. For this type of evolution of the human soul, which is an eternal part of God, four goals of human life were enunciated, known as the *Chatur Varga* or *Chatur Purushārtha*, viz., *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Moksha*, i.e. moral duty, earning of wealth for the necessities of life, normal sex life for procreation as well as recreation, and aspiration for liberation or realisation of God. Every good citizen was expected to earn money for livelihood and lead a normal family life in the path of righteousness, moral duty to society and ultimately make efforts for the realisation of God through liberation from the bondage of desires, that is, achieving supreme wisdom and

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1. Vide : Preface of *Mahābhārata*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, as quoted in *Mahabharata — Its influence on Indian Life and Culture*, Souveenir, 1988 of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna, p. 1.
  2. Śri Aurobindo : *Essays on the Gītā* . Śri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 8th ed, 8th imp. 1987. pp. 12-13.