

# MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

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

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Ma in a highly ecstatic mood during the Durga Puja in Bombay in October, 1966, with Didima sitting on her right.

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## URGENT CIRCULAR

All devotees are desired to make a special note that the next *Purna Kumbh Mela* is going to be held in Allahabad in January, 2001.

The principal bathing days are as under :

1. *Paus Sankrānt* - 14.1.2001
2. *Mauni Amāvashyā* - 24.1.2001
3. *Vasant Panchami* - 29.1.2001

Those who are desirous of attending and also staying in our Ashram camp in the Mela ground are requested to intimate in details the exact period of their stay alongwith actual number of persons accompanying them to enable us to hire tents etc. in advance and make other arrangements. All this information should reach the undersigned latest by 15th November, 2000.

—Panu Brahmachari  
Mata Anandamayee Ashram  
Bhadaini, Varanasi-221001

## MATRI-VANI

Where no question of birth and rebirth exists, no question of being bound, this surely, is called eternal.

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It is movement as that of the ocean (*Samudra*), He *expressing* Himself (*sva-mudrā*). The waves are but the rising and the falling, the undulation of the water and it is water that forms into waves (*taranga*), limbs of His own-body (*Tār anga*), water is the essence.

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You call transient, that which never stays fixed anywhere, do you not ? But what does not stay? Who does not stay? Who comes ? Who goes? Change, transformation - what are they ? WHO? grasp the root of all this ! Everything passes away, that is to say, death passes away - death dies .

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He himself as action; He Himself as form, for this reason He is called *Sākāra* (with form). He Himself as Qualities (*guna*) . Therefore, He is called *Saguṇa* (with qualities) where the Lord (*Isvara*) or anything pertaining to this Divine Splendour is manifested, He Himself (*Svayam*) appears in action, yet ever remaining the non-doer. He as such is the Essence of Absolute Truth.

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The beauty of it is that man's very nature is to long for Reality, Supreme Wisdom, Divine joy; as it is his nature to return home when the play is over. The stage of the play is His, the play is His as well, and so are those who take part in it, friends and fellow beings, everything is He alone.

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It is your nature to crave for the revelation of that which Is, for the eternal, for Truth, for limitless knowledge. This is why you do not feel satisfied with the evanescent, the untrue, with ignorance and limitation. Your true nature is to yearn for the revelation of what you ARE.

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At a certain level one sees glimpses, sparks as it were of Reality, this also is one of the states, One cannot understand what one perceives and therefore is bewildered. There are indeed states and stages without number, The power of fire to burn is one and undivided, but how can there possibly be wholeness and completeness in the so-called glimpses or sparks that one gets ? Only where that wholeness is, there, the question of division does not arise.

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You should understand that if a veil of ignorance has been burnt or dissolved, as it were, the seeker will, for a certain period of time, have unobstructed vision. Afterwards it becomes blurred again. All the same what will be the result of such a glimpse? Ignorance will have become less dense, and true knowledge gained greater prominence; in other words, by the momentary removal of the veil, the individual's bonds will have been loosened.

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In the Kingdom of forgetting one forgets. So long as you are identified with the body, it is your very nature to call out : give, give, You say 'give' ! because you are in want. Where want exists, there must needs be error and ignorance; and where error and ignorance abide, there will most certainly be forgetting. When in the midst of all this you practise *sadhana* in order to realize yourself, or rather, when by God's Grace *sadhana* comes about, - for to be able to engage in *sadhana* is itself the grace of God — There after having worked through layers and layers of ignorance, you discover: "I am in fact the whole". I am — this is why there are trees and plants, and everything that exists, however manifold. Every single form is in fact I.

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## CONVERSATION WITH WESTERN DEVOTEES

—Vijayananda

[ Nine ]

### SADHANA

Question - (A Spanish young lady, whose mother's family is from Avila) I am back here after a year, as if not a single day has gone by. Why is it so ?

Answer : This is the place where God alone is enough, like in the famous poetry of St. Teresa of Avila.

Question - (In tears) I am not sincere enough in my sadhana.

Answer - Sincerity is a question of discernment and understanding, not of effort. If you feel that sadhana is the most central thing, then you will find it. For me it is not an effort. If you have a taste of the experience of true meditation, that will help you a lot. But while you wait for that experience, try to practice regularly. Sometimes, flashes can come, even outside of meditation. I had one when I was a student. I felt that it was that, and that was the only interesting thing.

Question - What are the signs of progress in sadhana ?

Answer- The experience of a great inner bliss.

Question - Isn't it selfish to spend my time doing sadhana with the intention of gaining bliss for myself > Shouldn't we be trying to become selfless and spend time trying to serve others to made them happy?

Answer - In the end, realisation destroys the ego. Even if at the beginning the motivation for starting sadhana was selfish, the practice purifies. Regarding serving others: it is like a student in medicine. He has to spend all his time for several years studying so he can become a doctor. During that time, he does not have time to spare for helping others. But after that time, he comes back and is able to treat people, which he wouldn't have been able to do if he hadn't studied.

Question - Why is the mind and people, so difficult to change ?

Answer- *Tāmas* is the strongest force in this world. That is because there is this reversed quality, which is the symmetry of the Self, that change is so difficult. The Self is also a base which doesn't move.

Question - (A member of a French group in the ashram for a short visit): Can we combine worldly pleasures with the spiritual path ?

Answer- (Vehemently) No! God is jealous, as it says in the Bible. We must consider that it is only the spiritual path which is really important. That's why I'm here. However, when we are in this world, the spiritual path consists of acting with as little ego as possible and in offering the results of one's work to God.

Question - There is a spiritual teacher who says, there are seasons for sadhana. A season to gather, for instance, and a winter season, to rest. What do you think?

Answer- There is no season to rest in sadhana. We must always be ready to work for spiritual progress.

Question - Are there some paths in sadhana which are shorter than others ?

Answer- The paths in sadhana are like those in the mountains. The one that seems the shortest can in fact be the longest and the most dangerous, because we could be facing cliffs and unsurmountable obstacles. It is better to follow the beaten track. When we see that the grass has been walked on so much in one place, that means that many people have come this way, and that the path leads somewhere.

Question - How to realise our short comings ?

Answer- Spiritual seekers usually have trouble realising their shortcomings. If we help them by telling them, they can get angry with us, sometimes for life. The guru puts them in situations where their hidden defects come to the surface. The very fact that you are conscious that you have shortcomings is itself a rare quality. But let go of your inferiority complex. In the end, it is only you who can change your inner self and dissolve your defects.

Question - What is the relationship between ritual and devotion?

Answer- The more ritual there is, the less devotion there is. Rituals are not ends in themselves. They are only there to awaken devotion, but people forget that and they act automatically. The true prayer is done from within, in a completely unified state, just as Moses did when he asked for his sister to be cured from leprosy. He said only five words, of one syllable, "El nah refa nah la", My God, make her be healed', and his prayer was granted.

## **BASIC QUALITIES**

Question - Is it really useful to follow completely the *yamas*, *niyamas* and the monastic rules?



Answer- If we follow the rules, we must follow them completely, otherwise it is like a leaking dam, it will end up breaking down. In this case many as well do left-handed tantrism, *vāmāchāra*. All the rules are inverted. But we are talking about a very dangerous path that must be followed under the direction of an authentic guru. But just by following the *yamas niyamas* we can obtain a purification of the mind which is such that it can lead us to liberation.

In response to a sadhu who was criticising some members of the ashram.

A. Do not criticise others, because in the end, you don't have a bond with them, you are not their guru. You can at the most criticise children or brahmacharis who are under your responsibility. As long as we are not realised, we should not criticise anyone. And when we are, we act from within, and therefore we don't have the need to criticise either. We should not criticise others, because we cannot really put ourselves in their place. They usually have motivations which we don't see. There was a jewish sage who lived not long ago and who wrote a whole book against criticising others. His work is based on the beginning of a psalm which we could translate with this : 'Where is the one who desires life? Prevent your tongue from saying evil and your lips from calumniating people. Once, when the author was going to speak at a conference in a neighbouring town, he was travelling with a man who did not know him and who was actually going to listen to the author's talk. Out of humility, the author started to criticise himself without saying who he was. As a result, the traveller became furious and spat in his face. When they reached the conference, the traveller realised who he was, and apologised. The author concluded that we must never criticise anyone, not even ourselves. There is another story of the same sage. A student, who was a friend of the Rabbi had been arrested by the Tsarist police. The sage went to the police station with so much fervour that the police suspected him of being an accomplice of the student and arrested him as well. At the time of judgement, the barrister told the judge that he had heard the following story about him. A thief was running away from his house with his belongings. The sage ran after him saying: 'I'll give you everything you have taken, please don't have a bad conscience.'" The judge asked the barrister: "Do you believe this story?" "Certainly not! And you? Do you believe it?" "I don't know. But what I do know with certainty is that such stories are not told about you and I liberate the suspect."

When asked to give his blessing to a lawyer—

A. The best blessing is to follow dharma completely. Don't lie. There are different levels in the observation of *yamas niyamas*. There is the story about Buddha in one

of his previous incarnations, when he was a sadhu. One day, he was meditating under a tree, facing a beautiful pond with lotus flowers. He got up to smell one of the lotuses, but the spirit of the tree rebuked him, saying: "If you do this, you are stealing something from the lotuses". So the sadhu sat back down. A little while later, a peasant came and going into the pond took all the lotuses, tearing them all out of the pond. The sadhu was astonished and said to the tree spirit: "Why don't you say anything to him?" The tree spirit replied, "What at your level would have been a very big fault, at his level is not a fault at all".

**Question - (A beginner in meditation who had started meditating 6 hours a day and was experiencing anger)**

**Answer- We shouldn't meditate too intensely if we haven't previously purified the mind. Meditation intensifies everything. We must look at the root of the emotions. Ultimately, what is anger but a swelling of the ego?**

**Question - The Greek Fathers advised tears to fight anger.**

**Answer- Yes, this is the behaviour of the helpless child, one who depends completely on the mother.**

**Question - How do we know if we are progressing in meditation?**

**Answer- By seeing how we have mastered the main negative emotions. It is, for example, more important to master anger than to go through hours and hours of intensive meditation. Meditation is only a means to goal. The control of the mind. If you are interrupted in meditation, and you get angry, it is best to stop meditation. It is said that a samurai went to see the master Hakuin to ask him questions about heaven and hell. "Who are you ?" asked the master. "A samurai", he replied with some pride. "A samurai ? But nobody wants your services to fight". Furious, the samurai want to take his sword. "Your sword ?" said the master, "but it is made of wood." Further angered, the samurai brandished his sword threateningly in Hakuin's direction. Hakuin looked at him and said, "Here opens the door to Hell." Stupefied by the perfect quietness of the master, the samurai fell on his knees in front of him. "Here opens the door to Paradise", said Hakuin.**

**Question - You said we must face fear. But can we face all our fears ?**

**Answer- Yes, of course, we must face all of them.**

**Question - It is possible to do sadhana and still enjoy worldly pleasures ?**

Answer- Its a question of intensity. It is like two children on the way home from school. One is not in such a hurry to see his mother, so he looks around him on the way, and stops to gather flowers. The other is eager to see her and runs straight home.

## **PRACTICE**

Question - Are there citation in Hindu scriptures which seem fundamental to you for sadhana ?

Answer- Yes, for example in the Upanishads it is said that when the knots of the hearts are united, the mortal becomes immortal. And it also talks about the eye which turns within itself to look within. This is the very definition of meditation. In the Bhagavad Gita also we find some precious help. For example, it is written about the qualities of the sage: 'beyond praise and blame, in silence'. I interpret this juxtaposition as a key to really go beyond praise and blame, by silence. In another place it is said, beyond pleasure and pain, to be in the Self, is an indication of doing sadhana.

Question - How can I calm my mind ? It seems impossible.

Answer- Its not that difficult when you know how to take care of it. It is because you think it is impossible that it becomes difficult. Nisargadatta Maharaj says that the mind is like the hands or the feet. We must be able to let them rest when we don't need them. Another way is to recite the mantra very rapidly without any interruption, as Mother Krishnabai used to say. Also visualising dissolving in the light of the divinity. Silence is also a great help. Especially at the beginning of sadhana, when we must learn how to control the waves of emotions. Otherwise we panic, and we feel we are drowning. We try a lot of varied techniques, but when we have the beginning of an awakening, we realise that our own emotional attitude or bhava, is what provokes uncontrolled movements of energy. We try to master them by force, which creates a counter wave, which only contributes to agitating the mind more and more.

Question - What is more important, effort or grace ?

Answer- Ma used to say that we are rewarded to the extent of our effort. We must do all we can, and then whatever happens, happens. On the other hand, there is also grace without cause, which depends on nothing, but becomes only rarely.

Question - Can too intense a desire become an obstacle ?

**Answer-** Yes, that can happen. There is the story of a man who had invited a friend to his house for a feast. He waits for him at the door, and when the friend arrives, he is so happy to see him he stands there hugging him and talking to him and forgets to invite him into his house. In the end, the friend is not able to get into the house. However, there is no need to be afraid of the emotions. It is like a storm on a lake. If we try to calm the waves with our hands, instead of letting them become quiet by themselves, we will only create more waves, and it will become a vicious circle that never ends.

**Question -** I sometimes feel I am regressing in my sadhana. What can I do ?

**Answer-** Be like Saddam Hussein-celebrate the victories and forget the defeats.. Progression in sadhana is rather through a series of ups and downs than a continuous line upwards.

**Question -** (An adolescent) What should I do if I commit a fault ?

**Answer-** First, you must ask for forgiveness; second, you must try to repair it if it is possible; third, you must take a resolution never to do it again. Fourth, and this is probably the most important, you must forget all about it.

**Question -** How do we go beyond fear and depression ?

**Answer-** Since my childhood, I got into the habit of facing danger. During the period of my hermitage, there were dangers in the form of ferocious beasts and bandits, but I had developed the habit of not letting the vibrations of fear appear in my mind. During the war, soldiers know that a good way to fight fear is to attack. As far as depression is concerned, the best attitude, when it comes up, is just to observe it. What causes perturbation in this type of emotion is that we think it is going to last forever. We think, the depression will never leave up, and we will be displeased during our entire life and have to continue in this condition. But you must remember that this is all part of the play of the three *gunas*, and that *tāmas* will pass after a few days, so do not worry about it more than necessary.

**Question -** What is the best encouragement for sadhana ?

**Answer-** It is to come back to the fact that realizing the Self is an incredible fortune. When, through discrimination, we understand that it is the only thing that is worth anything, and that we have eternity in front of us, then even if success takes a thousand years, it doesn't matter.

(To be continued)

## THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE MIRACULOUS

—Dr. Bithika Mukerji

Mataji's life was full of extraordinary incidents. Manifestations of yogic powers became the norm, rather than otherwise. It would be wrong, however, to draw lines of demarcation between stages of Mataji's life. She did not become different from what she had been, but there was, at that time, an accentuation and proliferation of what ordinarily is called the miraculous. Mataji has said, "I had the *kheyāla* to be like a *sādhaka*, so it was but natural that the characteristics attending intense *sādhanā* occur spontaneously. The earnest *sādhaka* does not attach any importance to these powers which develop in him. He may not make any deliberate use of them. But all the same people may derive great benefit from the abundance which overflows his conscious efforts at *sādhanā*."

People from far and near came to Shahbagh to beg her to cure physical ailments. Healing would be effected by a glance, a touch, the gift of a flower, or in a hundred other ways. Instances of such cures are too numerous to be recorded in this volume. In fact, every devotee will be able to relate from his own experience one or two or more of such examples. As in all other matters, Mataji's way of helping people was unspectacular but real.

One day a very sick child was brought to Shahbagh. The child had lost the use of her limbs and could not move by herself. Mataji was chopping betel-nuts. She tossed one of the pieces a little in front of the child saying, 'catch'. The little girl with great difficulty made an effort and picked up the piece of nut. After some days the mother came and reported gratefully that her daughter had recovered and was slowly regaining the use of her limbs.

Ordinarily, Mataji did not attempt to heal anybody. On the contrary, she would say, "Pray to God. He will do what is best for the patient. You cannot know if physical recovery is desirable for him. The only thing for you to do is to get the best medical advice available and look after the patient as well as you possibly can. For the rest you must put your trust in God." Mataji would sometimes be compelled to do or say something because of Bholanath, who was always greatly moved by the suffering of people.

On occasions someone insisted on her visiting the patient, in the belief that he would recover if she did so. In such cases Mataji had her own way of prophesying the future. She would look about her and ask her companions, "What do you say?"

He is asking me to go because he thinks the patient will pull through. Will it be so?" The companions would naturally answer in the affirmative emphatically. She would then continue, "Who knows, since all of you say so, perhaps he will recover." In such cases it was seen that the patient invariably got well. Didi says, "Although we had all come to know Mataji's peculiar way of foretelling the future, we would, at times, unaccountably hesitate, stammer and fail to give an emphatic reply in the affirmative. Mataji would observe, 'Why are you hesitating like this? Then perhaps the patient won't regain health'. And so it happened invariably."

One day a lady<sup>1</sup>, who was a frequent visitor, came to request Mataji to pay a visit to her son who was seriously ill. Mataji continued with the usual pursuits, seemingly not paying any attention to what was being said to her. The lady, therefore, appealed to Bholanath, knowing that Mataji would not disoblige him. When Bholanath spoke to Mataji about it, she at once declared, "What is the use? The boy won't recover." On hearing this, another devotee, who was present, remarked, "In that case Mataji need not go. The family should be told what Mataji has said."<sup>2</sup> Nobody liked to tell the parents what Mataji had said. Bholanath had already promised the lady that he would bring Mataji; so they went to see her son. After a few days, the lady again came to Mataji to beseech her to save her child. Mataji replied, "Even if I tell you what to do, you will not be able to carry it out." The mother promised to follow instructions faithfully. The simple instructions were, not to allow the boy to get up from bed for a certain number of days, probably eighteen. Immediately after this, the boy started improving slowly, but all of a sudden his illness took a turn for the worse. On seeing the mother again, Mataji said, "What is to be done? He got up on Monday." The mother however insisted that the boy had not left his bed at all. He died a few days later and his mother lost all faith in Mataji. After quite some time she came to know that on the specific day the boy had actually got up from bed and had come out on the balcony to see a passing procesion. Full of remorse, the bereaved mother came to Mataji who now had to comfort her in her double sorrow.

On occasions, Mataji, of her own accord, would go out of her way to cure people. One day she was strolling about in the field outside Shahbagh. A cab drove by, Mataji asked her companion to signal to the driver. When he drew near, she climbed in. The cabman asked, "Where will you go?" Mataji answered, "To your

- 
1. The wife of Atul Datta,
  2. He was actuated by the thought that people would later say that the patient had died inspite of Mataji's visit. Needless to point out that neither Mataji nor Bholanath were concerned with this aspect of the matter.

house." The man was a Mohammedan. Without saying another word he drove to his home. On arrival, they found an old man lying on his death-bed. The relations were weeping. Mataji asked her companion to fetch some sweets. These were distributed amongst the family and neighbours. Mataji then came away. Mataji's companion took pains to find out that the old man had recovered from what appeared to be his last illness.

At times, Mataji would take upon herself the illness of others. The person who had asked for a cure would recover, but Mataji would suffer from the disease for a few days or a few hours.

Didi one day came to Shahbagh to find Mataji suffering from a sudden cold and cough. On enquiry, she discovered that Pramatha Nath's young son Pratul, who was due to appear for an examination, had felt a severe cold coming on and had prayed to Mataji to prevent it. On that occasion Pratul escaped from any inconvenience due to a cold.

Such incidents taught Bholanath and others not to ask Mataji to cure sick people. They found that to her, life and death were the same. She would say, "Don't ask me to cure anybody. Do you ever pray that somebody should fall ill? Everybody must work out his own destiny. If obstructions are deliberately placed in his path, the results may be anything but beneficial. I myself have no objection to paying a visit to anybody. Perhaps the dying one need this (that is, Mataji's Presence) just as much as those who may survive."

In this connection, an incident may be related illustrating Mataji's attitude towards physical pain. This happened much later, in 1954. "A lady from a distant country", writes Atmananda<sup>3</sup>, "came last summer to see Mataji in Almora. One of the questions she asked was, since ailments are the results of our actions in this or in former lives, was it advisable to consult doctors and take medicines? Rather was it not more appropriate to bear whatever came to us without interfering with its natural course? Mataji replied that it was right to do everything in our power to keep our bodies fit and healthy, for an ailing person could hardly expect to engage in *sādhana*. All the same, it was certainly necessary to learn to endure pain, since suffering cannot always be avoided. In such cases, we should accept it as one of the ways in which He manifests Himself.

"Several months later the same lady badly fractured her ankle. This happened in the mountains, miles away from a doctor. To make things worse, heavy rain set in and she had to wait for three days before she could be carried down in a *ḍāñḍi*.

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3. Ananda-Varta, Vol. III, no. 2, p. 151.

The pain was acute. The lady kept awake all night but, remembering what Mataji had told her, she concentrated on Divine Love in the form of Christ and Mataji. To her own amazement she forgot all about her pain and felt well and refreshed the next morning. She remained in a state of bliss throughout those three days. Later she declared that She would not have missed this experience for anything in the world. Was this what Mataji had meant, when she said, we had to learn to endure sufferingj when it came?

"After that whenever she felt any pain, the lady tried to concentrate in a similar manner, but was never able to get again into that elevated state of mind, On meeting Mataji this year she wanted the cause of her failure explained. 'Your pain was not severe enough', said Mataji with a smile."

Devotees relate many instances of inadequate quantities of food, clothes and flowers just sufficing for the congregation amongst whom they had to be distributed. Many instances are heard about calamities having been averted and cherished desires fulfilled in spite of seemingly impossible conditions. Several volumes many be filled with the narration of such events. It is a favourite topic of conversation with devotees, not merely to harp on the yogic powers of Mataji, but also to strengthen each other's faith and share the joyful experience of receiving her *Kṛpā* (grace).

The atmosphere of the miraculous", writes Vijayananda (Dr. A. Weintrob), "around Mother has impressed me ever since the very first day that I met her. It is a daily experience in our relationship with the Mother.

"Mother can call down or stop rain at will. When she toured South India in 1952, Madras Province had been suffering from acute scarcity of rain for a prolonged period. I was present when a delegation came and prayed to Mother to bring about rainfall. Subsequently, abundant rainfall was reported in the newspapers as due to Mataji's *kṛpā*."

Many who come in contact with her have been impressed by the fact that Mataji is able to answer an unspoken thought or desire. a typical personal experience may be recorded here<sup>4</sup>. "It was in Solan, near Simla, where we had been invited to take part in a *Nāma-yajñā*<sup>5</sup> in the presence of Anandamayi Ma. We went in a batch from Simla on a Saturday and did our best till about 9 o'clock in the night. We felt tired and moved into a room situated at some distance from the temple of Śiva where the ceremony was being held. There we spread ourselves out to rest our aching limbs.

4. The narrator is late S. Sarkar, J.C.S., who at that time did not know Mataji well.

5. A function devoted to singing of *kirtana* according to the rules and directions laid down in *Chaitanya.Charitāmṛta*, a Vaisnava scripture.



It was a dark night and the sky was overcast with clouds. Soon a very heavy downpour followed. We were smoking and talking and our talk naturally centered round Anandamayi Ma. One of our party wanted to convince us that she had supernatural powers. A disbeliever in miracles, I jeered at him and blurted out, 'Better keep your cock and bull story to yourself. If your Anandamayi Ma is anywhere near about the position you ascribe to her, let her appear before us here and now, and I shall then believe your stories.' I had hardly finished when we heard a bang from outside. The door, which we had closed to prevent rain-water coming in, fell ajar and, believe it or not, there appeared before us a figure robed in white, thoroughly drenched from head to foot. We were startled by a loud laughter which we knew to be Anandamayi Ma's. Before we could collect our wits, the figure had vanished into the darkness. It was still raining cats and dogs, but we did not mind. We sprang to our feet and ran out in the torrential rain to the temple, to be told that Anandamayi Ma had gone out unnoticed and had just returned, thoroughly drenched."

This aspect of Mataji's life has been expressed very clearly by Vijayananda : "Something that has struck me from the very first day is the atmosphere of the miraculous in which one moves when one is with her. Let me explain : In Europe (and no doubt here also) by the word 'miracle' one conceives of a breaking away from the laws of nature, something that strikes one as impossible, as absurd. But this is only its crude objective side. Its subtle, subjective aspect is quite different. What does it matter to me if a certain yogi has walked across the waters or flown through the air ? The real miracle is, when that which one needs, which one desires keenly or feebly, comes at the very moment it is needed. And still better when it comes, not only as one desired it, but as one would have loved to see it in the innermost depth of one's heart. "Coincidence", I thought at first. But a coincidence that goes on repeating itself daily cannot be called so anymore. And all this happens without apparently violating the laws of nature— for the Lord has no need to break any laws : He is the Law. Should I give examples ? No, for those who do not know her, will not believe me and those who have lived near her have already understood."<sup>6</sup>

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6. Mother as Seen by Her Devotees, 2nd ed., p. 46.

# THE FUNDAMENTALS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

— P.C. Mehta

## CHAPTER— VI

### 1. The Upanisads:

The 'Satapatha Brahmana' of one of the Sukla Yajur Veda schools reveals the symbolic key which is the identity between the macrocosmic 'Purusa' called 'Agni-Prajapati' and the microcosmic individual. As such this identity may be considered the bridge between Rg. Vedic and Upanisadic thought.

The Sanskrit word 'Upanisad' can be broken up as follows. '*Upa*' means 'near', '*ni*' means 'down' and '*shad*' means 'sit'. 'To sit down near someone' is the meaning. This implies a session with a teacher in which a pupil learnt the secret wisdom. This wisdom was jealously guarded from the unworthy.

The number of these treatises are very many; but only about 13 of them can be considered classical or genuine parts of Vedic literature. They are, I) Brihadāranyaka ii) Chhāndogya; iii) Isa iv) Kena; v) Aitareya, vi) Taittiriya vii) Kaushitaki; viii) Katha ix) Mundaka x) Svetasvatara; xi) Prasna xii) Maitri and xiii) Māndukya. They are the flowers of Vedic thought. The rest belong to a later period and are relatively of lesser value.

They are written in easy Sanskrit. Where they are not metrical, they are written in rhythmic prose. They possess a musical quality all their own. In them we come across short and pithy sentences which were elaborated by the teacher. Being of great depth, they have been understood at different levels. Their intelligent and sympathetic study does not fail to uplift the reader.

### 2. 'Vedanta' :

'*Vedanta*' means 'at the end of the Vedas'. Upanisads come at the end of Vedas. Therefore, its philosophy is known as '*Vedanta* philosophy'.

As the teachings in certain important areas, can be interpreted in different ways, in later times there have emerged diverse schools of *Vedanta* philosophy, which will be dealt with where appropriate. The most important teachings of the Upanisads are briefly summarized hereunder.

### 3. 'Brahman':

'Brahman' is the cosmic principle underlying the world as a whole. In the Brihadāranyaka Upanisad, sage Yāgnavalka describes 'Brahman' as 'a mass of knowledge'. It is without selfconsciousness and beyond all subject-object categories, the One-without-a-second, the only real Being. No qualities can be posited of it. The Brahman therefore can only be described negatively as 'neti-neti' or 'not this-not-this'. The word '*Brahman*' is derived from the root 'brh' to grow or evolve. It therefore stands for the power which of itself bursts into utterance as 'prayer'. According to some scholars, it is this power or primary principle which spontaneously manifests itself as the universe. '*Brahman*' is therefore the cosmic principle, which is the source of creation as a whole.

### 4. 'Atman'

There is a second current of thought in the earlier literature. It aims at discovering, not the cosmic principle which is the source of creation as a whole, but the psychic principle, the inner essence of man. This inquiry ends by representing the essence of man as '*Atman*' or 'the Self'.

It is also sometime described as the true subject, which knows but can never be known-'The unseen seer, the unheard hearer and the unthought thinker'. Brihadaranyaka Upanisad says, 'That by which one knows all this- whereby could one know That? By what means could the Knower be known?'

Kena Upanisad says: 'That which cannot be expressed by speech, but which illumines speech, know that to be *Brahman*. That which cannot be conceived by mind, but by which mind thinks, know that to be *Brahman*, that which is not visible to the eye, but by which the eye sees, know that to be *Brahman*. That which is not heard by the ear, but by which the ear hears, know that to be *Brahman*. That which is not breathed, but by which the breath functions, know that to be *Brahman*'.

Katha Upanisad says: Atman is subtler than the subtle, greater than the great and is dwelling in the hearts of all. As fire, being one, assumes different forms according to what it burns, so the *Atman* existing in all, though one, assumes different forms according to whatever it enters. It also exists without'.

The idea, in either case, is that it is unknowable in the ordinary sense of the term. *Atman* being the eternal witness, the unchangeable reality, it can only be self-evident.

'*Atman*' is a small being, a homunculus, '*Purusa*', which has its seat in the heart, where it is felt stirring and from which it directs the animal spirits. Here it

seats at its ease, for it is not larger than the thumb. It could even make itself still smaller, for it is felt making its way along the arteries and could be distinctly seen in the small image, the pupil, which is reflected in the center of the eye. A '*Purusa*', quite similar, appears with dazzling effect in the orb of the sun, the heart and eye of the world. That is the '*Atman*' of nature, or rather it is the same '*Atman*' which manifests itself in the heart of man and the sun; an invisible opening at the top of the skull affording a passage for it to go from one dwelling place to another".

One Upanisad brings out this uniqueness of the Self by stating paradoxically that it is known only to those that do not know it; meaning that though intuitively realizable, it cannot be made the object of thought. In other words, it is above the subject-object split, within which man normally operates.

#### 4. Identification of Atman with Brahman: the doctrine of unity

The essential teaching of the Upanisads is the identification of '*Atman*' with '*Brahman*'. This is epitomized by the well known sayings '*Aham Brahmāsmi*', i.e. 'I am the *Brahman*'; '*Tat Tvam Asi*' i.e. 'That thou art'. They mean that the principle underlying the world as a whole and that which forms the essence of man, are ultimately the same. Here ended the long Indian quest for the all-pervasive cause of things. As the Chhandogya Upanisad expresses it, 'the search for That, knowing which we know everything'.

The identification of '*Atman*' with '*Brahman*' delineates the spiritual character of the Ultimate Reality, as well as the infiniteness of '*Atman*' covering not only all the selves but also the whole of the physical universe. It is this Reality inclusive of both '*Atman*' and '*Brahman*', which is referred to as '*Satyam, Jnānam, Anantam Brahma*'. '*Satyam*' refers to the certainty of existence, '*Jnānam*' refers to its spiritual character and '*Anantam*' to its all-inclusive infiniteness. This Upanisadic absolute is what is meant by the monism or the doctrine of unity, as taught by the Upanisads.

If this identification was not available, '*Brahman*', as the ultimate cosmic principle, though all comprehensive, could be claimed to be non-spiritual or material; Further, it would only be an objective conception and hence little more than a mere hypothesis and therefore not compelling enough to be regarded as existing. There would be no logical absurdity in denying it.

The establishment of the spiritual character of this principle and the removal of the uncertainty about its existence are both accomplished by its identification with '*Atman*' or the self. For our own self is known to us to be spiritual and there is an intuitive obligation to recognize its existence.

On the other hand, if we start from the '*Atman*' without identification with '*Brahman*', we meet with another difficulty. While the self points to what is spiritual, it is limited in its nature, on the one hand by the world of nature and on the other hand by other selves. It is this deficiency of finiteness which is overcome by its identification with '*Brahman*'.

The character of this '*Atman-Brahman*' self is '*Satchidananda*' explained earlier.

### 5. Creation of worlds, man's subtle bodies & '*Māyā*'.

The journey of the Vedic Rsis in search of the inner essence of man is described thus in the Taittiriya Upanisad, which says: The Self is covered over by sheaths. The sheaths are i) the '*annamaya*' sheath of gross matter being the physical body composed of the five elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether. ii) within this is the '*prānamaya*' sheath being the sheath of 'breath' or vital life. iii) within this is the '*manomaya*' sheath of 'lower-mind' along with its sense-functions. iv) within this is the '*vijnānamaya*' sheath of 'higher-mind' or intellect. Within this is '*Atman*' which is identical with Brahman and is bliss. In later Vedanta philosophy the last one is considered the fifth sheath of 'ananda' or bliss and the *Atman* identical with *Brahman* transcends that also. At death only the first sheath of gross matter is shed and the rest transmigrate till release.

These sheaths with their corresponding worlds is a part of creation and considered '*Māyā*', meaning, illusion. In the Upanisads, the word '*Māyā*' is first used in Brihadaranyaka Upanisad in a quotation from Rg. Veda which reads, 'Indra by his '*Māyā*' or magic powers goes about in many forms. The theory of '*Māyā*' as a cosmic illusion is found in the Svetasvatara Upanisad, 4.9-10 as under:

'This whole world the illusion-maker projects out of this Brahman.

And in it by illusion the other is confined.

Now, one should know that Nature is illusion,

And that the Mighty Lord is the illusion-maker'.

### 6. '*Karma*' doctrine

The Brihadaranyaka Upanisad presents the first clear exposition of the doctrine of '*karma*', which extends the principles of causation to ethics by proclaiming it as 'the law of the deed' and that one reaps as one sows; and '*sansara*' as transmigration of souls. The good or evil deeds are caused by a man's desires: 'where one's mind is attached, the inner self goes thereto with action, being attached to is alone'. Desires also cause rebirth and determines its nature. The round of birth, death and rebirth, with some good births and some bad ones depending on '*karma*' is called '*sansara*'. To obtain release from '*sansara*', one must eliminate

desire. According to the Upanisads, desire is eliminated by knowledge of the immortal Brahman and of the soul's identity with it. This knowledge is gained first with the help of a teacher and then by one's own intuitive self-knowledge one achieves direct experience of identity. When this self-realization is won, 'moksa' or release from 'sansara' is gained. The philosopher who has experienced this identity lives only till he completes his present life for his *karmas* to run out. at death this identity which he has established becomes constant.

### 7. The esoteric syllable 'Om' :

The Mandukya Upanisad is noted for its exposition of the esoteric syllable *Om*. It is the ultimate in religious meaning. In the early Chhandogya Upanisad, it stands for total Reality. In Sanskrit *Om* has three syllables, A-U-M. The letter 'A' is the waking state, common to all men. This is the gross state of enjoyment of the pleasures of the senses which includes mind. At the macrocosmic level this is the first fourth of manifested Brahman, the concrete world of matter. The letter 'U' is the dreaming state. Here the human subtle body interacts with the macrocosmic subtle world. This is the second fourth of the manifested Brahman. Letter 'M' is the state of deep-sleep in which there is no bodily activity. It is described as 'cognition-mass' consisting of 'Ananda' or bliss. Being a more unified state, it is higher than the sleep state. This is the third fourth of the manifested Brahman. The fourth and highest state which is called 'turya' in the Maitri Upanisad and 'chaturth' in the Mandukya Upanisad, is silence.

### 8. Ethics in the Upanisads:

Ethics in itself is not emphasized in the Upanisads. There are important passages that praise the virtues of truthfulness, reverence for parents, teachers and guests, generosity, modesty, pity and self-restraint. The apparent reason for the scarcity of discussions of ethical values is that mention of specific moral precepts and values is superfluous in the light of the ethical implications of the general metaphysical teaching of the Upanisads that the atman or self is Brahman. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanisad (2.4.2-5) the sage Yāgnavalka tells his wife that a husband, a wife, sons, the gods and the creatures are all dear, not for themselves as separate beings but because they are the self: 'Verily, everything is not dear that you may love everything; but that you may love the Self, therefore everything is dear.'

If all men and creatures are united in their ultimate essence which is Brahman, there is no room for hurting another, because thereby one hurts one's own self. The man who has realized his identity with Brahman does not act egoistically because he has overcome the illusion that he is a separate self. He acts in the pure knowledge

that all others are his own true self. This means that he acts with love and for the good of others.

The Upanisads do not teach a life of service to humanity as a way to salvation. This concept did not appear till the Bhagavad Gita.

### **9. The important teachings of the Upanisads:**

- I) The concept of non-dual Brahman,
- ii) The identity of Atman with Brahman,
- iii) Creation of worlds and sheaths of 'Atman',
- iv) The meaning of Om,
- v) Doctrine of '*karma*' and meaning of '*sansara*'
- vi) '*Moksa*' as release from *karma* and *sansara*.
- vii) '*Jnāna*' or knowledge to attain '*moksa*'



[To be continued]

**Beauty is the flower,  
but virtue is the fruit of life.  
A pure heart is the end of Religion  
and beginning of Divinity.**

