

MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

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

VOL.-8.

April, 2004

No. 2

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“पुकारो - बो लो - गाओ - भजो



जपो - माँ - माँ - माँ - माँ”



मातृ शरणम्
पूज्य श्री श्री माँ आनन्दमयी १०८ वां जयन्ती महोत्सव



Photo & Designs by Late S.N. Sopyry, in Service of Three Three Ma, 1933-1979

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MATRI VANI

To know yourself does not mean to know your body only; it signifies the full revelation of That which eternally Is—the Supreme Father, Mother, Beloved, Lord and Master — the Self.

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When you have caught the Supreme Moment you suddenly come to know who you really are. At that instant, when you have found your Self, the whole universe will have become yours.

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Just as by receiving one seed, you potentially receive an infinite number of trees, so must you capture the One Supreme Moment, the realization of which will leave nothing unrealized.

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You attempt to appease want by want, hence want does not disappear, and neither does the sense of want.

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When man awakens to the acute consciousness of this sense of want, then only does spiritual enquiry become genuine. You must bear in mind that when the sense of want becomes the sense of the want of Self-Knowledge, then only the real Quest begins.

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When one sees the bud of a flower he perceives the bud only; whereas actually the full blown flower, the fruit, the seed, and the whole plant are contained in that little bud.

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Childhood, youth and old age, are all contained within you. No sooner is childhood over than youth takes its place; the one swallows up the other. This cannot be grasped by ordinary perception.

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In a garland of flowers the thread is one, but there are gaps between the flowers. It is the gaps that cause want and sorrow.

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Single-minded devotion engenders deep thought, which expresses itself in action. The Lord's Light descends on the devotee. His Power awakens in him and as a result profound inner enquiry blossoms forth.

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Divine happiness, even the tiniest particle of a grain of it, never leaves one again. When one attains to the Essence of Things and finds one's Self-this is Supreme Happiness. When it is found, nothing else remains to be found, the sense of want will not awaken anymore and the heart's torment be stilled for ever.

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Do not be satisfied with fragmentary happiness, which is invariably interrupted by shocks and blows of fate, but become complete and having attained to perfection, be *Yourself*.

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When all differences have been burnt up and everything has merged into the One, this marks a state of achievement that you may call *advaita sthiti* (the state of unqualified Oneness). The ever changing world, with its varying movements and states of rest and all diversity then completely vanishes, and only the One remains.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH MA ANANDAMAYEE

[Translated from Bengali]

— Sri Amulya Kumar Dutta Gupta

October 20, 1938, Calcutta

In the morning I learned that Ma was going to Dakshineswar. Didi asked me to accompany them. At about 10 a.m. Ma started by car. I boarded a bus together with Bhupatinath Mitra. On arriving at Dakshineswar by about 11.30 we saw that Ma had occupied a place in the house where Sri Sarada Ma used to live, and that Ma's *bhoga* was being prepared there. This was the best opportunity I had so far obtained of sitting near Ma and listening to Her discourse.

I told Ma, "Sobha Ma, the disciple of Sri Santadas Babaji*, maintains that there are seven levels in the practice of *sadhana*". I now gave a brief description of the various stages, according to what I had heard, and then asked, "Do these seven stages refer to the practice of any particular sect, or are they valid for every *sadhaka*" ?

Ma (laughing): Do you mean to say you hope to receive a comprehensive reply on this subject from me ?

I : No (everybody laughs). However, referring to these various stages of spiritual practice one hears of, are they different for different sects, or do they hold good universally ? If so, please tell us something about it.

Ma : You know very well that not at all places and not to all questions do answers issue from my lips. When it does come, then of course I speak. Anyway, you may discuss this subject, and I shall listen. The more this kind of thing is spoken about, the better.

I : Ma, you know that I never come to you to give a talk .

Ma (smiling): Look, whatever one may hear about the different stages in *sadhana* will always be laid down. Perhaps not all these stages can be found but some at least are sure to be described there. And the funny part is that, whatever different people may assert, this body will always reconcile their conflicting views. But mind you, those who are *jnanis*, or those whom you look upon as being

*. A famous Guru of the Vaishnava sect, and the chief disciple of Sri Ramdas Kathia Babaji Maharaj.

omniscient, do not usually have the inclination to reveal Truth. Even if they are willing to do so, and under certain circumstances such a situation does arise from time to time, they divulge to particular persons only as much as is necessary for them. Such an exposition is of course partial. Truth is not revealed in its entirety. This is why it is said that Supreme Truth is never revealed. I have previously talked to you about the different stages of *sadhana*. You should understand that this also was partial.

I : Can a *sadguru* reveal basic truth through a disciple ?

Ma : Indeed ! This is exactly what your *sastras* lay down ! Don't you often say that the Guru - or God has given certain directions through a particular individual ? This is nothing new !

I : Well, when a *sadguru* reveals some truth through a disciple, is the disciple then quite in his normal senses ? Is he not as if possessed by some spirit ?

Ma : Not necessarily.

I : I have read in books that the spirit of a dead person can sometimes take possession of a human being, and reveal secrets about material things through him. But he who is possessed is not conscious of what he is saying at the time. He lies unconscious while he is possessed by the spirit. When this is over he regains his normal self, and behaves like an ordinary person. When a *sadguru* reveals Truth through his disciple, is there any change noticeable in the disciple ? Does he not lose his intelligence and does he remain normal ?

Ma : No. There is a definite difference in the disciple then. But this is very difficult to notice for ordinary people. Also, what you have said about the body being inert when possessed by a spirit, is not always true. There are various stages when possessed by a spirit. Quite often the body is seen to droop down when so possessed. But at other times it is noticed that the body - in spite of drooping down - remains almost normal. There is another stage, which we look upon as becoming quite used to being possessed by a spirit, i.e, the body is not incapacitated in any way when possessed. But of course there is a distinct difference between possession by a spirit and possession by a *sadguru*. It is difficult, very difficult, for ordinary persons to grasp this.

Having spoken thus, Ma said to me, smiling gently, "Do not misunderstand me. I have not referred to any particular person or sect in whatever I have said."

I : Ma, only a short while ago you asserted that he who is omniscient does not reveal Supreme Truth. Well, can a *jiva* ever become omniscient ?

Ma : If you call him *jiva*, how can he be omniscient ? Can a finite being become infinite ?

I : When I refer to a *jiva*, I do not mean his state of existence as a finite being, I am referring to his body. The purport of my question is; Can a human being realise omniscience while in the body ?

Ma : Yes, it may happen. But this cannot be perceived externally. This kind of omniscience is not intelligible to the average person. Do you not often say you cannot see something with your naked eyes but only when wearing spectacles ? This is somewhat similar. Unless special vision has been awakened you cannot notice this omniscience. Somebody may be omniscient but people look upon him as an ordinary embodied human being, although omniscience can exist even in a person with an ordinary body. This is a manifestation of the Infinite within the finite. Do you not hold that even in the tiniest particle of sand, the Brahman exists in Its fulness ? This is similar.

I : What kind of omniscience is this ? Is it perfect omniscience ?

Ma : Yes - omniscience in its entirety.

I: All right. Can one who is omniscient, fabricate an engine?

Ma: When perfect knowledge is referred to, does this not contain everything?

I: So he who is omniscient can build an engine if he so desires.

Ma: This is where you are mistaken! He has no desire. Can there be omniscience where desire or longing is? Because you yourself are bound by limitations, you look at everything in terms of cause and effect. You distinguish between desire and non-desire in everything you come across, and so you cannot have any idea of what omniscience actually is.

At this juncture, Ma was taken from the veranda to Her room for *bhoga* and as Ma would rest afterwards, we all went downstairs.

We came downstairs and were wandering about at random when Nagen called us to partake of the *prasad* of Goddess Kali. So we all sat down on the veranda. Just then Sri Subhas Chandra Bose arrived to have Sri Ma's *darsan*. He also partook of *prasad* along with us.

After the meal, the manager of the Dakshineswar temple took Subhas Chandra to the Panchavati* and other places of interest. We also accompanied them. It was nearly 3-30 p.m. when we beheld Mataji proceeding to the *Panchavati*. An *asana* was spread for Sri Ma on the platform below the *pipal tree*. We all sat around Her. Subhas Chandra tendered his *pranama* to Ma and sat right in front of Her. Some time passed in silence. Neither Sri Ma nor Subhas spoke a word.

* *Panchavati*- A grove of five sacred trees, namely *pipal*, *banyan*, *asoka*, *bel* and *amalaki* with a platform in the middle. It is considered a congenial place for meditation. Sri Ramakrishna is said to have obtained realization under this Panchavati.

Then Bhupati Babu introduced Subhas Chandra to Ma, who said: "I met your brother at Ahmedabad."

Subhas: So you went to Ahmedabad?

Mataji: Yes.

Again silence.

I indicated to Bhupati Babu to ask Subhas Chandra whether he wished to put some questions to Ma. Subhas said he had no question. Again silence. Sm. Bhramar sat next to me. At her insistence I at last had to introduce some topic. I said: "Ma can one realize God by service to one's motherland?"

Mataji: (to Subhas) Baba, do please tell us whether God can be found by service to one's country.

Subhas: Am I in search of God? (Everybody laughs).

Mataji: (smiling) So what is it that you pursue?

Subhas: But that question was not addressed to me?

Mataji: It was raised in connection with yourself. (glancing at me) Was it not?

I: Yes, Ma.

Ma: (addressing Subhas): Now, please reply!

Well, why do you serve your motherland? What do you gain by it? If you explain to them the merits of doing so, they will all start serving their country. Nobody does anything unless he profits by it. You give such eloquent lectures, so do now speak, please.

Subhas (smiling): But I have not come here to deliver a lecture. I derive great happiness from serving my country, that is why I do it.

Mataji: Is this happiness perpetual?

Subhas: The meaning of the word 'perpetual' is not easy to understand.

Mataji: That which remains all the time is perpetual. There is perpetual happiness in carrying out the dictates of one's true nature (*svabhāva*). If service is performed in the right spirit, lasting happiness may be found. Is this so with you, Baba?

At this point Sri Ma was interrupted by a lady who started talking about her own problems. I gathered from what she said; that she was a teacher of the Calcutta Corporation School. She would from time to time in her dreams obtain glimpses of Sri Krishna and His instructions. She had come to Sri Ma today also in obedience to His direction. It was her belief that Sri Krishna would perform some work for the world through her. However, off and on she would feel afraid and desperately lonely. So she implored Sri Ma to help her.

Ma said: "Since you are receiving His instructions, where is the need of help? If you rely solely on God, everything will be all right."

(Addressing Subhas): "Baba, won't you say something?"

Subhas: I have not come here to speak, I am here to listen.

Mataji: If this is so, will you then listen to what this little girl has to say? Will you do as I tell you?

Subhas: I cannot guarantee, but I may make an attempt.

Mataji: Look, all work performed in connection with worldly affairs is prompted by want (*abhāva*). Certainly when this want has been fulfilled one feels happy. But remember, the happiness obtained from accomplishing worldly work merely keeps the sense of want awake. Suppose you feel the need to acquire something and to fulfil this need you start on a certain course of action. As a result of your efforts you get rid of this want and therefore are full of joy. But along with this joy some other need will arise. This is why I maintain that all action connected with worldly affairs belongs to the realm of want (*abhāva*). But by following the dictates of one's true Nature (*svabhāva*) perpetual joy will result. You say it makes you happy to serve your motherland. To serve one's country is of course very good. Your heart is noble, very large, try to make it even larger. If you serve your country without enthusiasm, this will be work prompted by the sense of want and the happiness derived from it will not be lasting. But everybody desires unbroken joy, the joy that is endless. If you follow the dictates of your true Nature (*svabhāva*), this will lead to permanent joy and you will become established in bliss. Now you may well retort: "What is the use of bliss for myself alone when the whole world is full of misery?" The answer to this is that if permanent bliss is realized, it will be communicated to others.

Subhas: What exactly does *svabhāver karma* mean ?

Mataji: Action as such arises out of want (*abhāva*) because without a sense of want there is no action. However, action that leads to permanent bliss can be called '*svabhāver karma*,' action prompted by one's true Nature. *Svabhāva* is that which is man's own through all eternity. Because the kernel of perpetual bliss lies hidden within yourself; you desire this permanent bliss. You cannot want anything that is not already potentially within you.

Subhas: Is everybody's *svabhāva* the same ?

Mataji : Yes, all mankind basically desires constant happiness. In this whole universe there is but ONE without a second. When people serve others it is ultimately for their own Self. Happiness is derived from serving others because in essence all are one.

Subhas: You say that the true Nature of all is the same, but the Gita states: "*sreyān svadharmo vigunah paradharmo bhayāvahah*. "Better die in the discharge of one's own duty; to do the duty of another is full of danger."

Mataji: What actually is *svadharma*? * The dharma of your true Nature is your *svadharma*. *Sadhana* is performed in order to fulfil one's *svadharma* (one's real duty). This body (Ma) has no learning, so it speaks in an incoherent fashion. The effort to realize your inherent wealth *sva dhana* I call *sāadhanā*. The words of the Bhagavad Gita are infallible indeed. To attain to the *dharma* of one's *svabhāva* is the aim of mankind.

Subhas: But it is also true that different people have different natures. Nobody knows where his real duty lies.

Mataji: Even though people's dispositions and inclinations (*samskāras*) vary, there is one *dharma* for everyone. Truth is one.

Subhas: But one cannot know by one's own efforts how to proceed.

Mataji: Having started working in this direction, if you continue steadily, everything will fall into place. Then, whatever tendencies (*samskāras*) have been lying dormant in each person are aroused. Look, children do not feel inclined to study. But if for some time you compel them to pursue their studies, you will observe that each child does well in a different subject. One may excel in English, another in mathematics. So also when people start on this quest, it is seen after some time that they are advancing each according to their inherent dispositions.

Subhas: But you have not yet indicated a definite path.

Mataji (smiling): You will have to set to work. You must resolve: 'I will study!'

Myself: Ma, your reply is still unclear. You say everybody desires uninterrupted happiness. Subhas babu maintains he finds happiness by serving his country. So should we understand that by serving one's motherland one can attain to perpetual joy and to God-realization ?

Mataji: The service must be done with one's whole being. One must see to it that really genuine service is performed.

Subhas: There is a particular method for doing service. It is difficult to find the correct method.

Mataji: The difficulties of choosing the right path are considerable and on the path the maximum toil is required. But just as you acquire knowledge if you firmly

* **Dharma**- The law of being. It signifies the inner principle of religion Man's dharma is to realize his innate Divinity.

make up your mind to study, so if you are totally and completely determined to realize THAT you are bound to find the right path.

Subhas: While groping in darkness it is difficult to find the correct path.

Mataji: Yes, but one has to start walking in darkness. Don't you call faith blind? Taking recourse to this blind faith one must begin one's work. Later everything will be understood. When children start learning, do they understand anything? Yet by protracted study knowledge supervenes.

Subhas: All the same, if the correct path is known precious time can be saved.

At this stage the lady teacher from the Corporation School interrupted again: "If all of you permit me I think I can explain the matter."

Mataji: All right, do!

Now the lady started talking on work free from desire for results as expounded in the Gita. But Ma interrupted her, saying: "Oh Ma, all this is very well known to him (Subhas Bose)".

Whether due to these frequent interruptions or for some other reason, the conversation between Subhas Bose and Sri Ma did not gather momentum today. We all felt somewhat frustrated.

Before leaving, Subhas asked Sri Ma: "For how long will you be here?"

Mataji: Nothing has been decided. This body has not been keeping good health for some time. Before coming here from Hardwar, the doctor examined this body and said, something or other had become excessive, so travelling was not advisable. Later when the trouble subsided somewhat, the journey to Calcutta was undertaken. There is some talk now of proceeding to Dhaka, but the previous excess seems to have recurred. So I am waiting. They so very kindly take care and look after this body, so I have put the full responsibility on them.

These words Sri Ma uttered like a little girl in broken sentences. How sweet this sounded I just cannot convey.

Subhas Bose tendered his *pranama* to Ma and took leave.



REMINISCENCES AND REFLECTION

— Subimal Dutt

It was early evening three days before the Jhulan festival of 1958. A junior colleague of mine took me to the ashram of Sri Anandamayee Ma at Kalkaji, New Delhi where I had my first darshan of Ma. She was seated in a small room upstairs. At first sight she seemed to me as one who was in this world, but not of it—an ethereal being with a halo round her, calm and serene—with compassionate eyes and a soft benign smile. She spoke a few words of solace to me and immediately the cloud of depression which had enveloped me for a year, lifted. However, I had hardly savoured the delight of her company for a few minutes when an elderly lady, who looked rather formidable, entered the room and announced in half soliloquy that it was the time for Ma's refreshment. The lone visitor took the hint, bowed and left. It was only later that I knew that she was Gurupriya Devi, Didi to all, young and old, in Ma's circle. She combined total surrender to Ma with affection for all, devotees and visitors alike.

In the hall below a small gathering was singing bhajan songs. Who was that young man there singing with fervour? I recognised him. I had him dismissed from the Indian Foreign Service a few months earlier on serious charges of corruption. I was told that he and his wife, who was also there, had become ardent devotees of Ma for some months and were assisting the ashram in several small ways. I kept my counsel to myself.

It required another shattering blow in life to bring me close to Ma, never again to part. That was five years later. I then began to read avidly the first-hand accounts of Ma's early life in Mymensingh and Dhaka, so vividly described by Bhaji and Didi in their priceless books. I would also hear from some Brahmacharis, who had been with Ma since the forties, how they were eye witnesses of some extraordinary scenes centered on Ma, her ecstatic movements during kirtan, frequent *samadhis* and the very unorthodox rituals followed by her on the few occasions she was persuaded to perform formal pujas, etc. I felt a regret that one could no longer witness such scenes. Ma was now like an ocean of peace and quiet. A senior Brahmachari who had left his job, his family and his home to live with Ma, to whom I mentioned this, said, "Keep your eyes open, brother. You can see evidence of Ma's extraordinary and supernatural powers even today." I had not long to wait.

Note: The writer Sri Subimal Dutt, a very renowned I.C.S. officer, who was Foreign Secretary Govt. of India, became in later life a very staunch devotee of Sri Ma.

In July, 1966 I was staying for a few days in the Kishenpur ashram while Ma was in residence there. Every morning she used to send for Virajanandaji and talk to him at length on abstruse spiritual topics. He would take notes and occasionally ask a question. I had the supreme good fortune of being asked by Ma to be present at these talks. One morning while we were in, someone began banging the door furiously from outside. I thought it very extraordinary. The door was opened and a young man came rushing in with a telegram in his hand and announced that Monada¹ and Thakurma² had passed away the previous day at Varanasi. Ma said, she knew. The evening before Didi had wanted to send a telegram enquiring about the condition of these two old devotees who were lying seriously ill at Varanasi, but Ma told her to wait for the night. Obviously Ma knew that they had passed away. She then said that the night before first Monada and later Thakurma looked in through the window and asked her permission to leave. Ma sensed my bewilderment. She then said, "If these walls were not in front of you, wouldn't you be able to see what is happening at a distance from the ashram?" I understood. Sitting at Kishenpur Ma saw what happened in Varanasi. Verily, our *shastras* have said that for a yogi barriers of time and space do not exist. I can recall several such incidents within my experience in later years.

During those years I used to pay visits to the ashrams where Ma was in residence. The crowd of visitors grew from year to year and one did see among them some people whose reputation for honesty was not very high. Why did Ma extend to these people the same kindness and consideration as she did to others? There were audible comments on this among the lay devotees. Ma told me once— it was extraordinary how she answered questions unasked. She did not ask anybody to come to her or anybody to leave. Each one would find his way, she said. I then remembered the young man whom I had seen during my first visit to Ma at Kalkaji. Not having seen him anywhere subsequently, I enquired about him and was told that he and his wife had stopped seeing Ma within a few months. Obviously, after his appeal against the order of dismissal was rejected by Government, he saw no further need for Ma Anandamayee's grace.

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1. Late Monomohan Ghosh, an ardent devotee who rendered great service to the ashram and, as Ma told me, migrated to Varanasi in utter penury after partition.
 2. An old Brahmin lady who had become a widow at the age of six and devoted herself to Ma's service.

Still another case comes to my mind. The Samyam Saptaha' had ended in Vrindaban and Ma asked me if I could escort Bunidi* and few other Brahmacharinis to Delhi. I agreed, of course. We were within sight of the railway station at Mathura when our jeep broke down. The train was due in a few minutes. I felt helpless. Bunidi then turned to me and said "Do you see that big factory across the road, Dada? Some years ago Ma formally inaugurated the factory with great fanfare. Thereafter, whenever Ma came to Vrindaban, the owner, a big industrialist, used to place three or four cars at Ma's disposal. His business has failed and his visits have ceased and, of course, the supply of cars." Suddenly, another jeep came from behind. The owner-driver offered us a lift and we reached the station in time.

But who am I to criticise ? How few of us sought Ma's company in a purely spiritual quest ? Was there no material motivation in us, expressed or unexpressed ? It would, therefore, be wrong for anybody to assume a holier than thou attitude. As the Bible has said (Matthew - Sermon on the Mount) "Why seest thou the mote in thy brother's eye and perceivest not the beam in thine own eye ?"

It was painful for me occasionally to hear loose talk among the inmates of any ashram. When I came to live with Ma at Varanasi in 1965 — permanently as I had thoughtlessly hoped, Ma one day casually told me that people with different backgrounds, some of whom had received initiation elsewhere, had come to live with her and one should not expect them all to look at things from the same angle. I thought it rather odd that Ma should make such a remark. Some years later, in 1971, before the annual Durga Puja at the Kalkaji ashram, a senior lay devotee spoke to me in sorrow, tinged with some bitterness, that Didi distributed the expensive sarees presented to Ma among her favourites. I was rather upset to hear of this and mentioned the complaint to Ma. It was not fair to say so, Ma said. Didi invariably consulted her before disposing of any present. Ma added that the ladies who gave expensive sarees would like to receive a few of them back to keep as treasured mementos and, therefore, these were given back to them with Ma's blessing. One feels sad that we are always ready to believe the worst of others. Self-reformation is not an easy process.

As the pressure of visitors grew, the Swamijis tried to regulate the hours of Ma's darshan and private interviews by some sort of a schedule so as to ensure Ma some rest and quiet. All of us, however, are self-centred. What is worse, while we recognised the need for control, individually we would like relaxation in favour of

* As a young girl she left her parents and her home and devoted herself entirely to Ma's service. She passed away in the Vrindaban Ashram while Ma was in residence there.

ourselves. Often there would be heated arguments with the Brahmacharis guarding the passage to Ma's rooms. Immediately charges of favouritism were bandied about-why was so and so being admitted while others were being kept out ? Most discontented were some elderly ladies who knew Ma in the old days at Dhaka. They would recall with nostalgia that they could see Ma at all hours of the day then; some would even spread their beds at night in Ma's room. They would make no allowance for the fact that what was possible when visitors could be counted in tens was not possible with thousands milling around to see Ma and have talks with her. In their frustration, many men and women, would say in audible whispers that, "our Ma" had now become "a rich man's Ma".

Over the years all celebrations in the ashram, whether it was the annual Durga Puja, the Samyam Saptaha, Ma's birth anniversary, Didima's sannyas utsav, etc., etc. had become very expensive. The number of brahmacharis and sannyasis permanently residing with Ma had grown and they accompanied Ma from place to place. To every important function mahatmas would be invited and their journeys had to be financed and they and their retinues had to be fed lavishly. Hundreds who came to see the celebrations would be fed. The ceremonies themselves were most elaborate and Ma would frown on economy either in puja rituals or in service to the mahatmas. All these involved heavy expenses. Had it not been for the generous contributions by a few well-to-do devotees who had the money and the will to give, celebrations on this scale would have been impossible. If, therefore, the organisers showed them some special consideration, why should we humbler people protest ? On occasions I would tell the critics, particularly at Agarpara, that were it not for the generosity of a few rich persons, we poor people would not have had an opportunity to see Ma at all. Of the thousands who used to gather at Agarpara, for example, not many could afford to travel to Varanasi, Vrindaban or Kankhal. It was because Ma could come to Calcutta that thousands of her poor devotees had a chance of seeing her.

Memories come flooding in. In Sankaracharya's famous verse 'Śivāparādhakshamāpanastotram' there is a line "The days that are gone will not return again. Time consumes the world."

With me however, the memory of those glorious days will always abide.

Ma - Ma - Ma



SUPREME WOMAN OF BEING

[III]

—Chloe Goodchild

'Ma can be everything and nothing at once. Both personal and impersonal in one body.' I told Vijayananda. 'But I would like to hear more of your own journey. How did it begin ?'

Vijayananda shot me a huge grin, took in a deep breath, then began his story, as he must have done for so many other seekers like myself.

'At 17 years old,' he started, 'I had read all the books of the Western philosophers. You know, Plato and others. I devoured these books. Philosophy convinced me that God didn't exist. So I became an atheist. Then, when I was 19 years old, I came across a book by Vivekananda. He was mentioned in the footnotes of one of my Western books. I read his book on yoga, and decided that I must become a yogi. He wrote in the book, "If you are brave enough, in six months you can become a perfect yogi." So I was 19, and I thought, "I am brave enough." Not only that, I thought if an Indian can attain perfection in six months, I can attain it in one month ! So I started the exercises, focusing on retention of the breath. It was very dangerous, but I did it. Needless to say, in one month I had not attained perfection, but nevertheless, I learnt that this practice, this quest, is a very difficult path. So, I thought, as I was especially interested in yoga, I must go to India to become a yogi.

After the war, I set up a doctor's practice, at the same time practising meditation with a Buddhist teacher. His teaching didn't satisfy me. So I went to visit a Buddhist community in Ceylon (Lanka), which was not so easily done as it is now. The boat journey took several weeks. I stayed there one week. I was a member of the Buddhist Society. The head of the monastery was a German monk, called Nayanatilaka, who had written various books on Buddhism. But the whole thing was too dry for me, too intellectual. There was no heart in it. So I told the monk in Ceylon I must leave for India.

'Originally I was planning to go and visit Ramana Maharshi, but he slipped away in April. I was to arrive in December. So I thought I should go and see Aurobindo, but just before I left for India there was a news article in the paper saying that Aurobindo also had passed away.

'So what to do ? I had booked my boat !' Vijayananda exclaimed, laughing. 'So I went to Aurobindo's ashram and met his female counterpart, known as the Mother. But she didn't appeal to me, so I left. In Pondicherry, I met a Canadian lady who was coming from Afghanistan to the south, and I was heading north. So I asked her whom I should go and see. She told me to go to Benares to see the University, the Ramakrishna Mission and also Sri Anandamayi Ma's ashram.

'I asked her, "Who is Anandamayi Ma?" She said, "Anandamayi is a woman saint." I couldn't believe that my guru could be a woman. My idea of the guru was an old man with a long white beard ! So, I said, "She must be very old, and hunch-backed." The Canadian woman replied, "Oh, no, she is young, and she is beautiful." So I said that she must teach women only. But my friend told me, "Oh no; there are as many men as women there, if not more so." So I wrote Anandamayi Ma's name down, but it didn't really appeal to me.

When I went to Benares, a devotee took me to meet Anandamayi Ma.

'Now it's very common for the Westerner. to go in search of a guru, but in those days, it was very rare. I walked into the hall where Anandamayi was sitting. I felt quite neutral about meeting her. I didn't have much interest in meeting a traditional Hindu saint. But as soon as I saw her, my heart and mind were totally seized by her presence. I stayed with her from that day on, some 30 years, and I never left India again. I wrote a letter to my brother and asked him to take over my practice in Marseilles. I never saw my family again.'

We all sat together in silence for a while. Then Roger asked, 'Why is it that so rarely a great guru leaves behind someone who can take on that mantle of Being ?'

'Well it is very difficult, extremely difficult,' Vijayananda replied. 'Even the Buddha, it is said, had only two disciples who could transmit the power. Krishnamurti had the same difficulty. Somebody asked him, "Who will succeed you ? Who can succeed you ?" So, he looked around and replied, "I don't see anybody." You see, some people may enter into that same level of samadhi, but few are able to transmit it", even so.,

'Ma also transmitted power in so many ways to many people, but in fact, most people could not stand it. So she tested people's strength, their readiness, but they were not stable enough, You must have adequate strength, will-power, self-control, discrimination, and so on. What to do when faced with this power, when you have this power at your disposal ? It's like the story of the *Sorcerer's Apprentice*. You can easily be carried away by the power. So the guru extinguishes that flame of intensity if he or she sees that you cannot stand in it. I also saw that happen to several people.'

'Did she transmit power to many people at the same level of intensity that she did with you ?' I asked.

'Some, but not all had the capacity to sustain it,' Vijayananda whispered back to me.

'What is the nature of a guru ? Why is it that some traditions maintain a lineage, handing down the power from guru to disciple, for example, with Hariakhan Baba, Sai Baba and so on ? Why does that only occur in some traditions ?' I asked.

'It is an old tradition in India that the power is sustained even when the guru dies. But this is so for other spiritual traditions also, the Tibetan, Jewish, Sufi, Christian, and so on. Sometimes this transmission is genuine, sometimes not. Nowadays, the guru's successor is usually the one who oversees the ashram and collects the donations. He keeps the ashram, and so he is considered to be the successor. You know, they say that sometimes the father of the disciples can create a great guru. Ma could awaken faith,' Vijayananda proclaimed with victory in his eyes.

'What is faith ?' I enquired quietly.

'Well, you see there are several kinds of faith. There is blind faith. That is not real faith. True faith comes from an experience, for example, after meeting Ma. This faith is nurtured by the contact with her, by her presence, her talk. If the faith is genuine it strengthens. If not, it collapses. If you undertake *sadhana* [spiritual exercises], you must have a goal, a goal for self-realization. If the wish for that goal is present, then there must be already some kind of faith.'

I had been reflecting on the nature of the 'inner guru'. Anandamayi Ma says that when the disciple is ready, the guru emerges from within. I thought that 'inner guru' was perhaps the completion of the cycle of the relationship between the physical guru and the disciple, so I asked Vijayananda about this.

'Yes,' He replied. 'It is the work of the real guru to awaken the "inner guru" in the disciple. Once that is awakened, there may still remain a relationship of affection, but the guidance is no longer needed in the same way. Also, the work of establishing the "inner guru" is not broken by death. The guru will still be present to watch you, sometimes through several lifetimes.'

This made perfect sense to me, in the light of my relationship with Anandamayi. Ma Her presence was constant within me, despite the fact that I never met her in the flesh. Her photographs alone had been enough to awaken her presence in me.

'What of reincarnation?' I asked. 'How does that affect the journey of the seeker in the establishing of the "inner guru"?'

'What reincarnates is not the Self. Atma does not reincarnate. The ego, which is the individual expression of the Self is what reincarnates.'

A benevolent smile suddenly lighted up Vijayananda's face.

'The ego is propelled by desire, ambition and so on,' he continued. 'When we die with no desire, we are not reborn. If there is still desire present at death, the most powerful desire comes to the surface of the mind and leads the person, like a rocket, out of the body, in the direction which is most likely to fulfill this desire.'

And does this affect the form of rebirth, which that body will enter next lifetime ?' I asked him.

'Yes,' he replied emphatically. 'Each birth is conditioned by a specific state of mind. It may be "*tāmasic*" [inert], "*rājasic*" [energetic] of "*sāttvic*" [harmonious]. I am not talking about the surface mind, but the basic mind, the overriding tone of being. At the moment of death, it is the basic or unconscious mind that comes to the fore.'

I then turned the conversation back to Vijayananda's own awakening through Ma and the events that led him to her.

'My Buddhist teacher in France did not have the capacity to awaken me. I didn't know at that time what I was actually looking for, but I just felt something inside. So I came to India with that wish. When I came to Ma, I came in a state of despondency. She "caught" me. She gave me guru's grace. She appeared in the form that I needed, just when I least expected it.'

'What of *kundalini* ?' I enquired. 'People in the West talk about having had a *kundalini* experience - negative and positive. I have heard about people experiencing severe physical pain when the *kundalini* is negative. You were saying that Ma does not awaken people at that level because most people cannot withstand . . .'

' . . . the negative psychological states that are awakened - anger, sexual desire, greed,' Vijayananda completed my sentence. 'Before awakening of the *kundalini* can occur,' he continued, 'there must be control over anger and sexual desire. If you do not have the control, the power will automatically magnify those energetic forces. Ma would first test people to see how controlled they were able to be. Sometimes they were unable to withstand wild, and so she withdrew the power.'

'What happened with you?' I asked.

'I had a very hard time at the beginning.' Vijayananda spoke in sombre tones. 'It took several stages. The real *kundalini* awakens in you from the base. It awakens you on various levels. In the beginning it can awaken all the negative aspects of oneself. With me, Ma awakened the heart in the beginning and that'

distracted my mind. She directed my heart towards her, and diverted my mind. I was already half-ready, therefore, to withstand the full *kundalini* awakening. Then later, when I was established in a clear *sadhana*, the real *kundalini* was awakened.'

'So it wasn't one experience that she catalyzed in you, but rather a series of experiences which led you deeper and deeper into the Self? People in the West have a romantic, or even fantastical, idea of what the *kundalini* is all about. What is it?'

'Basically,' Vijayananda replied, 'it is the sublimation of sexual desire. If this power can be utilized in *sadhana*, then instead of running after sex, one has a powerful tool to attain self-realization. If you really have control over your mind, you have to be willing to die rather than pursue sexual desire. With the full awakening of the *kundalini*, sexual desire becomes so powerful that you find yourself fighting for your life. Most people yield, they cannot stand it. So you must have this attitude to overcome desire. If you can transmute the energy of sexual desire, it gives you a powerful tool with which to cross the threshold of realization. Imagine what it means to overcome desire. That is a great victory !'

'In Irina Tweedie's book, *Chasm of Fire* . . .'

'Oh yes, I knew her Guru.' Vijayananda intervened affectionately.

' . . . There is a moment when Irina Tweedie is faced with the hell realms for several nights,' I continued.

'Yes, it is like that. This is the experience of Christians also, when they are faced with this moment of transformation in the overcoming of negative states. I remember reading about the experiences of a French Christian monk. He thought he was doomed. He thought he was possessed by the devil. This is the impression one has. The sexual desire becomes so intense, you think you are being possessed by the devil.'

'How did you sublimate this desire? Did you use certain inner practices?'

'Through meditation. You know you have to open the psychic nerves so that the power can go up.'

'So, did you meditate on the force rising?' Roger asked.

'Yes. One has to master the way of '*Prāna*' [breath-force] to lead it up through the psychic nerves. It needs great control.'

'Did Ma instruct you at this point?'

'No. She just let me do. She let me stew in my own soup, until I got it.'

'Did you use meditation practices that you had read in books?'

'No. She gave me instructions. She did not want to discuss my experience with me. You cannot really discuss what *kundalini* is.'

'So how long did this process of awakening take?'

'There were two stages. The first stage was controlling desire, but the fear of falling back again was still present. So, for eight or nine years, I did not look at a woman, until I had overcome my fear. So now, I can look at a beautiful woman and am not affected one way or the other. By 1966, I had overcome my fear of falling from self-control. It was a great victory for me !' Laughter bubbled up from inside him, and we all joined in.

'So between 1956 and 1965 you led a solitary life ?', I continued.

'Yes, especially when I was at Almora in the mountains. I spent a whole year there, in silence. Then I returned to Benares. In Benares, I refused to speak to women. I was based in the ashram at Benares between 1957 and 1960. Then she sent me to Almora again. I stayed at Almora for many years. In total, I spent 17 years in the Himalayas. I was at the Almora ashram for eight years, then in total solitude in Dhaulchina Ashram for seven years.'

'How were you aware that the fear had finally passed away?'

'It was an awareness that arose organically with practice and concentration. So then fear passed away. It was an internal experience. I did not need Ma's physical presence to know this.'

'What remained to be done, after you had conquered fear and desire?' asked Roger.

Vijayananda pondered on this for a while, then replied in muted tones. 'There were still the subtle weaknesses to be conquered, for example, the fear of insult, attachment to praise, identification with physical illness. To overcome these you have to travel beyond body-consciousness totally - not just the body, but the ego. So that you can see yourself as a personality, and be aloof from it. So you see yourself as one and the same as every one else.'

'Is this the development of a witness consciousness?' asked Roger.

'In one way, but more subtle than that. You are inside yourself, and beyond. The witness has a dualistic aspect. You must be aware and fully involved in yourself at the same time. Krishnamurti talks about this. He advises people not to look as the witness, but to be fully involved. The attitude of the witness is a good preparation, as in Buddhist practices, but it is not the highest practice.'

'Would you be able to share more detail about the real *kundalini* experience ?' I pressed him further :

'The *kundalini* brings the whole unconscious mind to the surface. It is the way of psychology to study and transform the pathological mind into a normal working life. The goal of *sadhana* (spiritual practice) is quite different. The psycho-analyst never intends to destroy the mind. It is the nature of desire and the mind to veil

