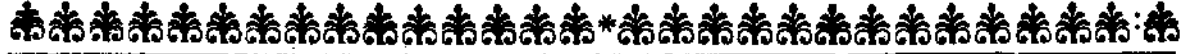


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Ānanda Vārtā



V I. XXII]

JULY, 1975

[No. 3



*The One who is the Eternal, the Atman,
He Himself is the pilgrim on the path of Immortality,
He is all in all, He alone is.*

Mātri Vāni

God builds fate—He is not only the maker of fate, He Himself is also fate; keep this in mind. When one speaks of destiny, it is as He decrees—here rules and regulations do exist. World (*jagat*) means that which moves and individual (*jiva*) that which is in bondage. In this state fate and restraint, rules and regulations, activity, are in force. As ordained by the Great Mother, whatever is the result of any action that She will bestow without fail.

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Where a true bhakta (lover of God) is, the Sad-guru will most certainly manifest in person. When there is need of a Guru, his appearance is but natural. So long as one has not found one's Guru, the ordinary person's duty is to engage in the study of Scriptures, in japa, meditation, the chanting of God's name—any Name one likes best. In order to reach the state of a genuine bhakta one must constantly devote oneself to *satkriyā*, action which aims at the Eternal.

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It is Ma's *kheyāla* that you should live in the pursuance of the Supreme Object of life, constantly remain in this atmosphere—so that He Himself may stand revealed. Men and women of the most varied temperaments and conditioning gather round Ma. One lives in an Ashram to drive away the habit of considering others as distant from oneself which is foolishness. Mataji does not send anyone away. By prolonged residence in a *satsihān*, in other words, a place dedicated to God and the search after Truth, and by *satsang*, the company of saints and seekers after Truth, *sadbuddhi*, true understanding, will be awakened.

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This body (Mataji) does not call any ashrams into being. Where *shrama* (weariness) is not, there one can speak of an Ashrama. Beyond the universe and extending over the entire cosmos is only one single Ashrama—where there are lakes and oceans, where there is no such thing as one's own country

and foreign countries, which contains whatever anyone may ascribe to it.

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Ashramites must not pay attention to honour or insult, to praise, position and fame. Everything has to be surrendered at the feet of the Lord. Have you not chosen this life, renouncing everything! To be insulted (*apmān*) means to bear animosity willingly (*apa mene nowa*). In all shapes is He alone—be friendly and affectionate towards all.

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Like a hero, taking refuge in patience attend to your duties. Don't fall a prey to despair, don't be broken. One must remember that just as good times do not continue for ever, so God can also put an end to bad times. While repeating God's name mentally carry out whatever happens to be your duty.

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Father has written that he finds no joy (*rasa*) in the spiritual. So long as one has not crossed over the desert, dryness will not go. At present the One has taken on the guise of dryness, so there is hope that He may also let Himself be found as delight (*rasa*). For how many lives have you not been in the body to reap the fruits of your actions. Your longing for the taste of divine delight will make you a pilgrim from the realm of want to the realm of your true being. Body means want—want of completeness, fulfilment, perfection.

Mātri Satsang

Swami Bhagavatananda Giri

(Translated from Hindi)

Ardha Kumbha Mela,
Triveni, Prayag.
February 6th, 1948.

A devotee : I like your teaching very much.

Mataji : This is very good. But you have to follow to the letter the instructions of your Gurudeva. With every breath, day and night, you should repeat the mantra received from your Guru. In the shape of the mantra your Gurudeva is always with you. Carry out his orders with great precision. Even if, since your receiving the mantra, your Guru has attained to *Nirvāna*, still the Guru-mantra will pave the way to Self-realisation.

Question : Should one have more than one Guru ?

Mataji : When you dig a well you have to dig in one place. Then only will you for all time be able to draw sweet, refreshing water. If you start digging a well today here and to-morrow somewhere else, how can you ever get water ? We are told that the great Guru Dattatreya had accepted twenty-four Gurus. But these were instructors who taught him. *Dikṣa* (initiation) must

be taken from one Guru only. The same path will not do for everyone. However, every person must specially bear in mind that the commands of one's Guru must be followed implicitly to the minutest detail. Whether one lives or dies, the Guru's orders must at all times be carried out with single-minded devotion. Without such dogged devotion, how can anything be achieved in God's empire? Wherever you may go, keep in mind that everything all around belongs to your Gurudeva. This attitude of a purified mind comes about of itself. One may certainly also profit from the teachings of other mahātmās, provided they be in tune with those of one's own Guru. But if a mahātmā tells you something that clashes with the commands of your own Guru, it is not right to follow it. You should not even go near such a mahātmā, because this may prove harmful (*aniṣṭa*) to you. Do you know what *aniṣṭa* means? That which can never be *aniṣṭa* (harmful), that verily is the *Iṣṭa*. When you have the good fortune of meeting great men and of listening to their words, you should understand that these wonderful opportunities have presented themselves by the grace of your Sadguru, because you have taken refuge in Him. Feel: "All this good luck is due to the mercy of my Gurudeva." One must try to see one's Guru and one's *Iṣṭa* in everything in the world. To obey the injunctions of one's Guru implicitly is the highest *dharma* (duty).

Question : If after having been initiated one's Guru attains Nirvana and is therefore liberated, will the Guru-

deva have to come back to get liberation for his disciple ?

Mataji : If you think that your Guru has attained final release, then also He will find ways and means of helping and guiding you although you may not be aware of it. Your Guru is your all. When by His grace you will have found God then you will come to know this. When you desperately yearn for the vision of the merciful, adorable Lord and invoke Him with a sincere heart full of intense devotion, He will surely listen to your call. Appearing to you exactly in the form in which you love Him most and desire to have his vision, He will give you complete satisfaction.

February 7th, 1948.

In the morning some reading of Scriptures is going on in the Satsang tent, Mataji is present and listens. When the reading is over, a devotee asks :

“Mataji, how can the mind be made one-pointed ?”

Mataji : Take good care of the mind which can be compared to a child. If you serve the mind well it will get into the habit of being calm.

Question : Should one then act according to the dictates of the mind ?

Mataji : Do you obey your children ? If you patiently explain to children again and again, this will have a result. Remember that in order to control their children, parents choose the best company for them,

that is to say, satsang. If children are given nourishing, wholesome food and are kept in the company of wise people, they gradually take a liking to their studies. Real sustenance for the mind is provided by satsang and the constant remembrance of God. Give more time to the thought of Him than to anything else. Japa, meditation, the company of saints and sages, worship, recitation of scriptures, chanting hymns in praise of God, the repetition of mantras—all these constitute the proper diet for the mind. By partaking of it the mind will gradually calm down and become one-pointed. Just as when a small child is given a toy, he will stop crying and start playing with the toy, forgetting everything else. Therefore keep your mind constantly engaged in some pure and holy work. The mind should ever be busy with some God-centered activity. The Iness with which you perform all your work must with all its intelligence and energy be consecrated to actions aiming at the Supreme One. Lay whatever you do at His holy feet. Thereby all your undesirable tendencies will be obliterated. This is the way to serve your child, the mind.

Question : I am full of anger; what am I to do? How can I get rid of it?

Mataji : Get absorbed in the worship of God and anger will take to its heels, your temper will cool down. A man who gets angry is out of his senses. He becomes red in the face. Firy sparks flash from his eyes. Just as when a single drop of poison falls into the best, sweet milk, the whole of it is spoiled, so anger creates

havoc in you. Someone related that a mother became very furious at the time of feeding her baby. As a result the infant died on the spot. Excessive anger had poisoned the mother's milk. Wrath means death—therefore never allow deadly anger to take possession of you. The evil tendencies of the person whom you condemn or with whom you become enraged will enter into you. What do you gain by this? Why do you want to have a share in sin? You should engage in good and godly actions that will blot out sin and evil tendencies. Never make common cause with anger.

Question: What is the expedient for getting rid of anger?

Mataji: When a plant becomes dry, what do you do? You water its roots. Similarly when your body feels the lack of energy, what do you do? You have a substantial meal. The root cause of anger is foolishness (*durbuddhi*).

Question: How does one acquire the power to eradicate anger?

Mataji: How one acquires power? By doing exactly as one's Guru prescribes. Carry out the orders of your Guru who is the ocean of compassion and mercy. Seek the company of sādhus and mahātmās. Whenever anger arises call to mind that the road of anger is the road to death. Whereas you must tread the path to immortality. Therefore never lose your temper. Spend more and more of your time in the thought of God, practise japa, meditation or other spiritual exercises,

attend religious meetings and read sacred books. By thus watering the roots of your being you will acquire plenty of power.

Question : Mataji, you have said, one should divert one's desires and cravings to the attainment of God-realization. What does this mean ? Please explain !

Mataji : When a small child needs something, he cries and his mother takes him on her lap. Likewise you must just think constantly of your beloved God and He will grant you whatever you desire. You cannot remain divorced from God. In whatever shape a devotee wishes to see God, in that very shape He gives him *darśana*.

"If you place on one side of the scales all spiritual practices and efforts, and on the other silence, you will discover that silence outweighs the others.

We should love silence so that the world may die in our hearts."

St. Isaac of Syria

From the Life of Mataji

Bithika Mukerji

(Continued from the January 1975 issue)

The Kumbh Mela and Bholanath's death in 1938.

1938 was the year of the *kumbha* at Haradwar. The *kumbhamela* (the festival of the *kumbha*), is a religious event of great moment for all Hindus. This festival is held in rotation of three years, at four places, viz, Prayag, Haradwar, Nasik and Ujjain, so that each town has a turn after twelve years. The festivals in Haradwar in April and in Prayag in January are considered specially important. Pilgrims from all corners of India foregather on the banks of the Ganges, to bathe in it on the auspicious days and at the indicated times. People put up in all kinds of impromptu shelters, such as tents, straw huts or any other type of temporary construction. The residents of the town meet such members of their family and friends, they have not seen for decades.

All pilgrims are expected to gather under the banner of their own *pandā* (the professional caretakers of pilgrims at holy places), for facilities of food and shelter. The fluttering of differently marked flags of the *pandās*, indicate their destinations to the pilgrims from afar. The riverside becomes alive with the voices of thousands of people. The highlight of the *mela* is the gathering of all the ascetic orders of the Hindu religion. This is one place and time when the lay

people get glimpses of all the *sannyāsa āśramas* (ascetic orders). In accordance with the tradition of the *kumbha*, the sadhus are shown the highest respect and given precedence over all other participants. The lay people go around visiting the camps of the renowned ascetics, monks or *sadhus*, listening to discourses on their favourite scriptures or attending other religious events, or simply joining in any *kirtan*. As a matter of fact, one may hear the strains of *kirtan* at some camp or another, from almost any corner of the vast camp-site. For one month or so, people live in the exhilarating atmosphere of a joyful festivity.

Mataji has called the *kumbha*, the *dhvajā* (sign, emblem, banner) of the Hindu dharma. Mataji's description seems singularly apt when we consider the various elements which combine to make possible such an extraordinary occurrence as the *kumbhamela*. Just as a banner is indicative of the place where people gather actuated by the same purpose, so perhaps is the *kumbha*, a place and time which discloses to the Hindu his religion as an option which is viable (*śreyas*) and is to be existentially experienced as such. The tradition brings together the ascetic as well as the householder in an experience of personal commitments (*sankalpa*) to the common goal. This again recreates the opportunity of a religious experience which is indicative of the dimension of freedom inherent in it.

Mataji, in general, accepts invitations and suggestions for attending the *kumbha* festivals, mostly because Her presence makes it possible for many people to take part in it. Hundreds of devotees have had occasion to become alive to Her kindness and thoughtfulness in bringing the *kumbha*

within the bounds of possibility for them. In 1938, Mataji already happened to be in Haradwar, having arrived there a few months before. She was staying at the house of Dr. Pitambar Panth on the bank of the Ganges. Dr. Panth had retired from service and had settled in Haradwar. He had met Mataji previously when She had been travelling around with Virajmohini Devi. While in Etawah, Mataji had suffered from some stomach upset. Dr. Panth, who was the civil surgeon of the town at the time, had brought some medicines for Her. Mataji had said to him that although it was not Her *kheyāla* to take any medicines at the time, if ever She did have the *kheyāla*, perhaps She would begin by placing Herself under his medical care. It so happened that Mataji was quite ill at the beginning of the year. She ran high temperatures and suffered from pain in Her arms. While in Dehradun, the doctors wanted to treat Her for the fever which became very alarming at times. Bholanath was put in a quandary over this matter because he knew only too well that the course of Mataji's *kheyāla* should not be interfered with. The new devotees of Dehradun, however, not knowing Mataji so well, began to demur at Bholanath's reluctance to put Her under medical treatment. At length, he gave way in the face of general opinion and agreed that Mataji should be treated by the much respected Dr. Some of Dehradun. When this question of medical treatment came up, Mataji recalled Her words spoken to Dr. Panth years ago. Somebody came up with the information that Dr. Panth had retired from service and was living in nearby Haradwar. Mataji thus had the *kheyāla* to go to Haradwar and contact Dr. Panth. He was overjoyed to see Her again

but very troubled to find Her ailing. He agreed to prescribe medicine for Her but he did this with great hesitation. He said to Her, "I can prescribe only for ordinary people. My medicine is not going to be effective unless you have the *kheyāla* to terminate this illness. Please, for our sake, get well now."

Mataji became seriously ill from the first day of Her taking the medicines. To Her alarmed companions She said smilingly, "Why do you have such distaste for the illnesses? I don't ask any of you to go away, do I? The illnesses want to be with me for some time. I am not 'ill'. But if I take medicines then naturally I have to be ill."

Acceding to Dr. Panth's request, Mataji came to his house on the Ganges in the last week of February. It was a spacious house and slowly began to fill up with visiting devotees. Mataji gradually began to walk about a little. Her illness and recovery, as always, followed a pattern of their own, not correlated with the intake of medicines. Throughout this time She continued to receive people as usual and talk to them. There was a constant flow of guests from Delhi, Dehradun, Bareilly and other places. Niraj Nath Mukerji came with his family from Etawah for a few days. Bholanath was very pleased with Niraj's young son, Bindu, whose singing was liked by everyone. Bindu learned to sing kirtan and accompanied Bholanath on his *nagar-kirtan*, sometimes hoisted on his shoulders, so that the boy's voice could be heard over the general din of the crowds.

Bindu's mother asked one day, "Is it necessary to perform the yogic disciplines of *āsana*, etc.?"

Mataji replied, "It is advisable always to discipline oneself. After all everybody is sitting or standing or lying in some posture or other. The bodily attitudes reveal the state of the mind. It can be easily seen that all feelings and emotions are related to a stance of the body. The mind can be controlled only when the body is adjusted appropriately. But one must not despair. The mind which appears to be singularly unamenable to discipline, is also to be appreciated as a great 'ascetic'. It is never satisfied with what is given here but is forever turning away to look for something beyond!"

Haradwar was becoming crowded with the rush of pilgrims for the coming *kumbha* on April 13th. Bholanath was always happy on such occasions of religious significance. Every morning, he would collect all available men and set out walking through the streets of the town, singing *kirtan* (*nagar-kirtan*). His tall and dignified personality commanded respect from all passers-by. Strangers came up and bowed to him and stayed to swell the throng of his *kirtan* party.

On April 13th, the final day of the festival, Bholanath accompanied by a great crowd of devotees went to *Brahma-kunda* for the ceremony of the bath. He was spontaneously acclaimed by the other ascetics gathered there for the same purpose. They did not know who he was but must have perceived in him an exalted personality commanding respect.

Unknown to others Bholanath, while bathing in the holy river, performed by himself the rituals of adopting formally a life of renunciation. This was in pursuance of some conversation he had had with Mataji, earlier.

At the conclusion of the kumbha, the pilgrims are always in a great hurry to leave the town, creating difficult travelling conditions. The devotees thought it better that Mataji should leave immediately by car for Dehradun. Bholanath stayed behind to escort all those who wished to go on to Dehradun. It was easier to find railway accommodation from Dehradun at this time rather than from Haradwar. At the conclusion of a function Mataji is always required to move first, sometimes at great inconvenience to Herself, because while She is there hardly anybody likes to leave, if he can spend a few more hours or days with Her. This becomes a problem for those who are in charge of providing food and shelter because with Mataji all arrangements have to be impromptu and temporary. So the easiest method of striking camp is for Mataji to leave for another place.

In Dehradun many people, who had been with Her in Haradwar, bade Her reluctant farewells. Jyotish Guha's daughter, Buni, cried so much that everyone's heart was touched. Mataji said to her, "Why do you cry for somebody who is smiling?" All those who have come close to Mataji will have experienced for themselves that this question is unanswerable.

On April 24th, Didi's father Swami Akhandananda and Bholanath returned again to Haradwar to attend the *samvāsa* ceremony of Akhandananda's brother, Kunja Mohan. Bholanath was feeling indisposed but did not regard it seriously. Mataji said to Didi, "Bholanath is going to be very seriously ill." Didi, alarmed at these words wished to persuade Bholanath not to undertake the trip, but Mataji said again, "You may try, but he will insist on going and the illness is also inevitable."

Bholanath returned from Hardwar with a high fever and complaining of pain in his stomach. The fever persisted and in a few days the doctors pronounced that he was suffering from chicken-pox.

Mataji said quietly to Her companions, "It does not appear to me to be chicken-pox. You see, the diseases reveal themselves to me just like persons. The personification seen by me is described as being much more fearful than chicken-pox. I do not know about symptoms, but I can tell you what I have seen."

Within a short while nobody was left in doubt about Bholanath's illness which turned out to be the dreaded small-pox. Bholanath was given the best medical treatment available in the town and the very loving care of the devotees but the terrible nature of the disease made him suffer excruciatingly. Mataji visited his room at frequent intervals and made such suggestions for his care and comfort as She alone knew how to.

Bholanath's condition deteriorated rapidly. Everyone was in despair at this sudden calamity. At this crucial time Mataji unexpectedly asked Didi and Swami Akhandananda to leave Dehradun immediately and to take Didima with them. Although Mataji had spoken quietly in Her usual manner, Didi knew that this was one of those occasions when Mataji's *kheyāla* was not to be gainsaid. To forestall any pleadings, Mataji further said, "It must be either all of you or I. If you do not leave, I shall." This was not to be thought of, so Didi with great misgivings in her heart, and in utter dejection of spirit at being obliged to leave Mataji under such difficult conditions, set about making

arrangements for their immediate departure. Swami Akhandananda expressed his bewilderment by saying, "Ma, why are you sending us away when we require as many as we can have here to look after Bholanath?"

Mataji said gently, "You are a *samnyāsi*. You are not required to render Bholanath any physical service. The only way you can be of help to him is to engage steadfastly in your own undertaking of the contemplative life."

To inconsolable Didima, She said, "Is it not agonizing for you to watch Bholanath's suffering? At this time he does not require your physical presence. You can help him by your prayers and healing thoughts. Do that for him now." To Didi, to whom nothing at all makes any sense apart from Mataji, She could only enjoin patience and fortitude.

Didi and others left for Varanasi on May 4th. Mataji spent most of Her time in Bholanath's room. Bholanath had been calling out to Her 'Ma' like a child in distress and Mataji responded to his call naturally and spontaneously. Death had dissolved the unauthentic barriers to a disclosure of this relationship. Bholanath now was not self-conscious anymore in showing his total surrender, publicly. On the last day of his life Mataji sat by his bedside and asked him, "Are you in great pain?" Bholanath replied that he was but that he could not quite locate where the pain was. His whole body was under the influence of the dread disease on his side and his suffering could be imagined easily. He was lying on his side and Mataji was seen to pass Her hand over his entire body, from head to toe and seemed to have

done some *kriyā* over it. After some time, in answer to a question, Bholanath replied that he did not have any pain and he was completely relaxed. Since the beginning of the illness, this was the first time, he was at peace. He murmured "Ānanda."

At one time he said, "I am going." Mataji responded by saying, "Why do you think so? There are no goings or comings, but a presence only where there is no room for such things." Bholanath seemed to agree, saying, "Yes, so you have said always." Mataji's hand was on Bholanath's head when he breathed his last on the night of May 7th, 1938. His death was calm and peaceful. For the people who were keeping vigil at his bedside this created in the face of the most mysterious event of life an atmosphere of reverence.

The man who had so joyfully and so completely given of himself in the service of Mataji and who was like a beloved parent to the devotees was no more.

(*To be continued*)

Mataji and Puran Purush at Naimisharanya

R. K. Banerjee

This is not only the story of how an exquisitely beautiful golden-coloured *astadhātu* (eight metals) image of Puran Purush arrived at Naimisharanya at 10-30 P. M. on the 8th of Jan., 1975 from Calcutta, but also the story of Mataji's infinite mercy and compassion in fulfilling the innermost thoughts of all who happened to be fortunate enough to be in Her vicinity during the ensuing seven days. The holy site of Naimish Kshetra has been hallowed from time immemorial by the Lila of gods and goddesses, and 60,000 wise and learned Rishis continually meditating on God, as related in our ancient scriptures. In fact, there is not a single Purāna or Epic, wherein mention of Naimisharanya does not find a prominent place.

On this occasion Mataji extolled the virtues of the site of our Ashram with Her own lips by stating that the place had been rendered sacred in each of the preceding Yugas. In the Satya Yuga, Manu himself and his wife Satarupa, who had no issue, prayed devoutly to God on the banks of the Gomati, near the present temple of Manu at Vyas Gaddi, seeking God's favour in earnest ; so much so, that when He finally appeared to the praying couple and graciously told them to ask for any boon, they unswervingly prayed to be granted a son very like the Lord Himself.

In reply the Lord said that it was not possible for anybody to be "like Him", so He would Himself be born to them in each Yuga. Thus in the Treta Yuga, He came as Sri Rama, and in Dwapar Yuga, as Sri Krishna.

To satisfy certain of those present with modern scientifically inclined minds, Mataji went on to describe how three distinctly separate and successive layers of civilisation had been discovered recently while digging two deep tube wells within our Ashram compound. Geologically it can be imagined how the Gomati, in successive generations of flooding, had deposited newer and higher layers of silt on the surrounding areas, possibly resulting in the formation of a mound called Hanuman Tila, next to which our Ashram has been built on a high level locally termed as the "camp of the Pandavas". At the peak of Hanumam Tila exists a very ancient Hanuman temple, built like a fort, containing a deep cave inside the temple which is said to have access to the Gomati.

This brings us to the latest known heavy flood that was witnessed during the late monsoon of 1960, after which Mataji was present in Naimisharanya for a wonderful Samyam Saptaha, followed by a magnificent reading of 108 Bhagavatas simultaneously for a week.

This date, so far as is known to devotees, can be said to be the origin of how our Naimisharanya Ashram came into being. During a subsequent phase, in Nov-Dec. 1968, Swami Sri Akhandananda Saraswati held his famous *Bhagavata Parāyana Paksha* at our Naimisharanya Ashram, and it was then that the germ of an idea was formed in his

mind (possibly through the *kheyāla* of Mataji) to request Her to instal an image of Puran Purush to be worshipped in our Ashram. The statues of Sukdevji and Vyasdevji had then just been erected alongside our library which contains all the Purānas, and a site to the north of the Puran Mandir was earmarked for a Puran Purush Temple.

It will be appreciated that in the secular part of his life Swami Akhandananda had worked as secretary of the Gita Press at Gorakhpur, and had then come across an ancient picture of Puran Purush as depicted by an old artist in a copy of our scriptures. He had later used this picture as a cover page of certain subsequent editions of his religious quarterly "*Chintamani*."

The Puran Purush, i. e., the heart and soul of all Puranas, or Narayana himself, is pictured as a Brahmin with the aquiline nose of a parrot, seated in *padmāsana* pose on an elaborate solid *āsana*, resting his back on a bolster, with a suitable canopy as a backdrop. The left hand is raised in *abhaya mudrā*—in benediction—and the right hand is placed near the right knee, counting beads. It must be emphasized here that such an image will be unique throughout the length and breadth of India.

With just a copy of this cover picture of Puran Purush we in Calcutta were allotted the task of preparing a two feet high clay model so as to satisfy Mataji's first inspection.

After certain initial fruitless attempts on a small scale, our efforts to fabricate a full-size clay model commenced in earnest in July 1973, and by September a photograph of the model was sent to Swami Paramananda for Mataji's

comments. These were promptly received and the model rectified accordingly, so that the more difficult work of casting the image under the expert guidance of the late Nitai Pal's chief assistant commenced in November 1973.

In the morning of March 6th, 1974, while motoring to Ranaghat from Jodhpur Park, Mataji inspected the freshly cast image of Puran Purush by the roadside from Her car, and expressed Her general approval. So the work of casting the three other pieces, namely the *āsana*, the back-rest pillow, and the background was then taken up with renewed vigour.

Meanwhile Swami Akhandananda had been keeping indifferent health. So, although the whole image was completed, polished and packed by June 1974, efforts at despatching the three crates concerned were abandoned thereafter until the cold weather of 74-75.

Eventually in December 1974, we received the all clear from Swami Paramananda, and the image was taken out of its packing, repolished and repacked for despatch to Naimisharanya by rail, for possible installation between the 8th and 15th Jan. 1975.

But here again there was a hitch. After his strenuous Kanpur tour, Swami Akhandananda expressed his unwillingness to proceed straightway with the arduous work of installing Puran Purush in the coldest time of the year. So, although the next auspicious date was fixed for Akshay Tritiya on the 14th May 1975, we were instructed to bring the three crates with us by the Amritsar Mail leaving Calcutta on Jan. 7th.

To collect 200 Kg of net metal packed in crates from a narrow lane in Kumartuli in North Calcutta, and then load them on a particular day in a particular train was too cumbersome, an operation except when entrusted to a specialist firm, but in due course, with Swami Swarupananda and myself in a coupé, the ladies of the party including my wife, as well as the two craftsmen responsible for the image in a sleeper, and the crates in the luggage van, the Amritsar Mail steamed out of Howrah on Friday, January 7th.

We were met at Varanasi Station the next morning by Swami Paramananda himself, who supervised the loading of sacrificial *yajña* fires and *akhaṇḍa jyoti* from Varanasi Ashram into our coupé in charge of a Brahmachari. This had all been planned in advance, but we did not plan to arrive at Lucknow more than three hours behind schedule, so that it was 10-30 P. M. by the time the van carrying the Puran Purush crates, our luggage, unloading workmen, Dasuda (who had met us at Lucknow) and myself reached Naimisharanya Ashram gates on January 8th.

But Mataji had been up expecting us for hours, and the blowing of conch shells from the hall entrance welcomed the arrival of the future presiding deity into His Ashram abode.

The next morning Mataji was up early, supervising the unloading and opening of the crates. She personally superintended the operations of carefully fitting the pieces together, and of placing the image temporarily on a pedestal to the east of the old temple housing the sacred books. Thereafter She Herself first performed the full rituals of *varan* (i. e. ritualistic welcome) as is done on the 6th day of

Navaratri before the Goddess Durga, and then instructed three other senior Ashram Brahmacharinis to perform the same rituals, including *ārati*, before the image. Subsequently She asked all of us, including the Sadhus of the Ashram, to bow down in *praṇāma* before the deity, who looked simply splendid, shining in his new surroundings.

Thereafter She had the image wrapped carefully in layers of fine new white cloth, surmounted by new blue tapestry cloth, the whole encased in a strong rope net barrier, to prevent possible damage during the waiting period upto May next.

The reason became apparent on the 10th and 11th January, the days of *amāvāsyā*, when lakhs of pilgrims thronged into Naimisharanya village, of which a considerable portion found time to visit our Puran Mandir to see the Puran Purush—even though swathed in bandages !

Mataji's frequent visits of late to the Naimisharanya Ashram have encompassed the place with a halo of holiness.

While the Ashram was in the process of being developed, Mataji often moved for quiet and rest into one of the *five kuthias* existing right on the banks of the Gomati below Hanuman Tila, belonging to Her close devotee and Naimisharanya host, Sri Prayag Narain Saigal. During one of Her brief stays there, two miracles had taken place in connection with trees adjoining Her hut.

The first concerned an *amlakhi*-tree, which had possibly been struck in the distant past by lightning, and all that remained was a five feet high withered and rotten

stump. Immediately after Mataji's visit a new green sprout appeared to grow out of the top of the stump, and this has now blossomed out into a huge new *amlakhi*-tree, bearing flowers and fruits although the original withered stump remains unchanged as a mute testimony to the miracle. (vide the story of the hollow bakul-tree at Puri where Haridas, the saint, lived and died in the sixteenth century, in the presence of Mahaprabhu Sri Krishna Chaitanya).

The second miracle concerns a neem-tree adjacent to which Mataji's temporary bathroom was erected during Her stay. And now in Mataji's own words :

"Pitaji, one night as I was lying in the hut, I saw two *murtis* come down from the neem-tree and bend low, as if to have a drink. The next morning the neem-tree fell down for no apparent reason, but you can go and see the remains above ground even today, to testify that there was once a tree there."

Who can tell who were the imprisoned souls that were liberated by the holy touch of Mataji's presence that day, more or less as the child Sri Krishna liberated the twin Jamal-Arjuna trees in Vrindaban in *Dwapara Yuga* ?

During this visit Mataji, in a lavish mood of benediction, continued to bestow Her boundless Grace on all who asked for it.

Someone wanted to play the mridangam in Her presence, so as to be blessed by Her in this ambition, and promptly She created such a situation that at the frequent kirtans that followed, somehow there would be nobody else present to accompany the singing except the person concer-

ned, although there were other more accomplished players in residence among the ashramites. The highlight took place on the 14th morning, when Mataji sang Her favourite hymn "Hey Bhagavan" to celebrate the first *yajña* in the newly inaugurated *yajña-shala* in front of a large congregation, and when the devotee in question was privileged to accompany Her on the mridanga for the first time in his life.

A devotee wished to have *darśana* of renowned sages, and take part in intimate satsang with them. So, while he was walking along the heights of Hanuman Tila on the 10th of Jan, he espied a venerable and resplendent saint in saffron, surrounded by his disciples, giving a fascinating discourse on Sri Rama and singing Sri Rama's name in great veneration, on the banks of the Gomati. This Mahatma was none other than Swami Sri Sri Shivadeva Ashram of Varanasi, passing through Naimisharanya for a day or two over *amāvāsya*. The Mahatma was gracious enough to think nothing of breaking off his discourse to give ten minutes of wise counsel to the devotee in question in answer to the latter's unspoken queries.

The same devotee later had a similar experience while visiting Swami Sri Naradananda Saraswati, the long standing and well-known saint of the Gurukul Vidyalaya in Naimisharanya, who has now handed over charge to his able successor Swami Vivekananda, and who has lived for over 40 years in a grass hut inside his 100 bigha Ashram, exactly like the Rishis of old, while his subordinates have to occupy pucca buildings.

Both Swami Naradananda and Swami Vivekananda visited our Ashram subsequently at Mataji's invitation, on

Jan, 14th and gave very interesting talks, the former on Shankara's Vedanta, and the latter on Tulsidasa's Rāmāyana.

When the devotee in question went to perform his obeisance at the feet of Swami Naradananda on arrival at the Ashram, the Mahatma, with a wonderfully sweet smile, placed around the devotee's neck the garland he had just received from Mataji.

The two master craftsmen, father and son, from Calcutta, primarily responsible for casting the image of Puran Purush, were amply rewarded by Mataji's *darśana* and wise counsel and enjoyed a free trip to Lucknow for a day or two on the way back home on request.

A devotee wished to spend an appreciable time in solitude doing japa under the famous peepul-tree in Vyas Gaddi under which past sages of Naimisharanya are said to have delivered their learned discourses. In spite of the heavy influx of visitors over *amāvasyā*, his wishes were amply fulfilled to his heart's content.

Another devotee arrived in the evening of Jan. 14th without notice, out of the blue, straight from London, by pure chance. He had no difficulty in finding accommodation in the *dharmasālā* for his family and himself, and was duly initiated by Mataji on the 15th morning before departing for Dehradun.

Yet another devotee, a heavily engaged businessman, had arrived by air without adequate bedding etc. in the intense cold, and Mataji arranged his room in the *dharmasālā* next to ours, and provided him and his wife with Her own

spare bedding which She conjured up from somewhere within the Ashram premises at a moment's notice.

The same devotee wished to perform his own private *yajña* on the 14th during the time the new *yajña shala* was being inaugurated with *vastu homa* and *Savitri yajña*. His wife had also had a prior dream, and wished to offer special *pūjā* to the seven Rishis (Saptarshis) of the Yuga on the same day. Both their wishes were completely fulfilled by the Grace of Mataji.

A devotee had an intense desire to be present in front of Mataji inside the *yajña-shala* at the sacred moment of *purnāhuti* (the final *havan*), but he found himself mixed up with the multitudinous throng that had gathered outside the *Yajña-shala* during satsang with Swami Vivekananda. Soon after, Mataji suddenly entered the *Yajña-shala*, and the main doors closed behind Her.

The devotee in question prayed silently for succour, and immediately Mataji personally opened the small closed side-gate near which the devotee was quietly standing outside, and She at once sped away like lightning to Her legitimate place in front of the sacrificial fire. It was then a simple operation for the devotee to slip inside, lock the side-gate behind him, and enjoy the holy moment of *purnāhuti* in peace in the presence of Mataji, exactly as he had longed for all that morning.

Another strong and active devotee wished to perform manual labour by filling the lower levels of the compound with earth and by felling and clearing unwanted trees from the lower levels of the Ashram garden, with his gang of

labourers and a lorry. Mataji let him have this pleasure to his heart's content throughout Her stay.

Yet another devotee, living in Lucknow, had been unable to find suitable transport to, and accommodation in Naimisharanya to meet his requirements, but the Governor himself offered to bring him and his wife to Mataji in his car, and invited them to stay as his guests in the dak bungalow at Naimisharanya. At the conclusion of Mataji's stay, he also transported them back to Lucknow.

Finally His Excellency, the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Chinna Reddy, wished to celebrate his birthday on Jan. 13th, in Mataji's presence. So he arrived at Naimisharanya on the 12th evening and left on the 15th morning, having had continuous *daršana* of Mataji throughout his stay, and having enjoyed the frequent kirtans performed by the Ashram girls at Mataji's request, since he was known to be exceptionally fond of devotional music.

One evening, during satsang with Mataji in the Governor's presence, Mataji turned round and said to His Excellency, "Pitaji, all classes of people come to visit this body, some may be Governors, like you, others may be senior executives of big companies (pointing to a devotee) and yet others may be busy businessmen (looking towards another devotee), and so on."

The Governor may have wished to let Mataji use his car as often as possible. So, much to our astonishment and to the consternation of those senior Ashramites whose duty it is to guard Her person zealously, She decided to go to Lucknow Station in the evening of the 15th of January from

the house of Sri Rameshwar Sahai all by Herself, solely with the Governor and his A. D. C.s, unaccompanied by any Brahmacharis or Brahmacharinis.

In this context, a fascinating facet of Mataji's unusual and all-embracing activities cannot be omitted.

On the morning of January 15th, at our Ashram, after having undergone all the previous heavy programme, and after initiating that very morning between 7-30 and 9 A.M. at least three people to my knowledge inside the Puran Mandir, She spent two solid hours between 9 A. M. and 11 A. M. sitting on an unkempt seat in an unswept kitchen, sorting out with Brahmacharini Ganga the stores that would be required by Ashram inmates remaining behind after Her departure for the next few months.

When devotees are engaged wholeheartedly in the service of Mataji, it is well-known that minor miracles take place almost continually, whenever hitches of any sort are encountered.

We were a large party, and our bookings from Calcutta had been finalised well in advance through a specialist agency. But we were worried about our return rail bookings, particularly as three extra Ashramites, Visuddha, Pushpa and Pushpa's uncle were told to accompany us.

Here the Sahais of Lucknow proved to be a tower of strength, and did all that was necessary and even more. But as our return rail bookings could only be made some time after our arrival, I was anxious to send word to my son at home about a definite date on which to meet us at Howrah with transport. Miraculously, a very kind P. W. D. official

visiting the site opposite our Ashram one morning soon after our arrival, offered to send a telegram on my behalf to Calcutta from Lucknow, after verifying from the Sahais the exact date of our booking.

The most difficult part of the return journey was getting out of Naimisharanya. All our immature plans for the morning of Jan. 15th went astray, but no sooner had we finished our midday meal at the Ashram, than a second taxi, over and above Panuda's requirements, suddenly turned up from nowhere, seemingly predestined to take our party together with all our luggage to Sitapur, from where we easily managed to get seats in a luxury bus to Lucknow.

However, I was still anxious about our heavy transport arrangements to Lucknow Station on the morning of January 16th, but thanks to Mataji's grace, an old colleague whom I had not met since retiring ten years ago, and who had—unknown to me—settled down in Lucknow, turned up at the Sahais' residence on the 15th evening to greet Mataji. I was overjoyed to see him, and he was mainly instrumental in transporting all our heavy luggage to the station on the 16th, in addition to driving us there in his car. But for his help, I could not have loaded all that huge amount of luggage into our sleeper, or found our allotted seats, or settled down comfortably, within the comparatively short space of time the down Amritsar Mail stops at Lucknow.

Meanwhile the Varanasi Ashram knew we were travelling on the 6 down train through Varanasi Station on the 16th evening, but they could not be informed in time that Pushpa was with us, destined to get down at Varanasi, and

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Jai Ma
Jai Pura Purushji

It will be difficult for Calcutta devotees, preparing feverishly for Mataji's Birthday Celebrations at Agarpara, to be present at Naimisharanya immediately before. But let us see what Pura Purushji and Mataji hold in store for us, for it is only by their special grace that we are destined to witness any of these special ceremonies, anywhere, at any time.

Finally, as far as our Naimisharanya Ashram is concerned, all eyes are looking forward to the week from 9th to 16th of May, 1975, during which Pura Purushji is going to be installed in the beautiful new temple already completed to the north of the Pura Mandir.

I was reluctant to leave her alone on the platform without any escort. But luckily, through Mataji's *khyala*, a friend from Varanasi had taken the trouble of ascertaining from the Ashram the exact date and hour of our passing through, and met us at the Station, so that it was simple to arrange for him to escort Pushpa to the Ashram on his way home.

Pujya Swami Sharananandaji

M.M.V.

I have been asked to write an article about Sri Swami Sharananandaji, who has departed from our midst on December 25th last. As the Editor wrote in the January issue of *Ānanda Vārtā*, for an egoless being of his stature it makes no difference whether he is in the body or not, but for us his departure is a very heavy loss.

Very little is known of the early life of Swamiji, except that he had lost his eyesight at the age of 11 or 12; so that he was not at all 'learned'. He attained enlightenment by sheer depth of his thought and discrimination (*viveka*.) Further, he is known to have practised a good deal of *tapasya* in his adolescence, mostly on the banks of the Ganges, including Uttarakhanda.

He was a most loving and compassionate Mahatma, ever intent on mitigating the suffering of all who approached him, never sparing himself. Who will not share the hope that the seeds of light and love he has sown over so many years will grow and go on bearing fruit for evermore ?

The above is but too true. Even after his first heart attack as long back as in 1959, when doctors advised him to take rest, he continued to give his discourses and to travel about as before, paying no heed to the body. And during his last prolonged illness, in spite of the intense suffering caused thereby, he was constantly thinking of others. He

teachings. A common feature of them all is that by the transparent sincerity and compelling simplicity of his dissertation he makes the most abstruse spiritual verities intelligible to the unsophisticated rational mind. Acknowledging the book *Sant Samāgam* (first Hindi collection of Swamiji's teachings), Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India, observed : "I have had the privilege of meeting Swamiji on one or two occasions, and I was very deeply impressed by the way in which he dealt with the most complicated problems in a simple, intelligible way."

He probes into the three natural propensities of man—doing, feeling and thinking—and shows how these have only to be carried to their logical conclusion to be transformed into the truest action, love and knowledge—*karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna* respectively—ultimately fusing into one. The crisis of man—individual as well as social—he declared, can only be solved by his realising his spiritual potential and his true aim of life, which would spontaneously result in non-injury, non-appropriation, desirelessness, freedom from fear, selfless service and love of God.

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Let me conclude with some characteristic aphorisms of the Swami relating to *sādhana* in general from his teachings during the past many years :

"Renunciation of wrong action spontaneously leads to right action.

"Do to others as you should like others to do to you.
Do not do to others what you should not like others to do to you.

