
“Ma has gone, so people say,
From the weary world away
Into the radiant realm of love,
Ever-effulgent, glorious, gay.
Ma is Life, Knowledge and Bliss
A certain cure to all amiss,
Worldly woes and human ills—
May the ailing remember this.
Blessed Mother, do not play
Hide and seek with us, I pray,
We are lonely and love-lorn
Thou art our sole belay.
May Thy love forever stay.
In the heart of L.R. Jay.

“As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it, or as one gets the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, in the same way one gets spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God.”

Holy Mother Sardamani Devi
(the Divine consort of
Sri Ramakrishna Deva)

The Beatific Mother No More

A. B. Gupta.

On the martyrdom of Gandhiji, the Father of the Nation, Nehru said in anguish : "the light has gone out of the world"! The same can be said about the recent demise of the great lady 'Anandamayi Ma'. She was unlettered,—the same as saint Ramakrishna, but the purest gems of wisdom flowed from Her tongue, as easily as water flows from the Ganga.

This writer has had the opportunity of meeting Her for a brief, few minutes, at Dhanbad ; and he is not ashamed to admit that though he is an agnostic, he was entirely electrified, and energised in a way that cannot be expressed in words. He was introduced by a common friend, who is a disciple of Ma Anandamayi. He kept a safe distance, and saluted Her in the Indian conventional way, by folding his hands. There were others, who were eager to touch Her and prostrate themselves before Her, though this was not permitted. He did nothing of the kind. The Mother beckoned to him. She blessed him, unasked and unsolicited !

Greater men and women than this poor scribe, who met Her on that day for a few fleeting moments, were keen to meet Her and solicit Her blessings. A man of the stature of Dr. Triguna Sen used to be constantly at Her feet. The Prime Minister's mother, Kamala Nehru, is reported to

have been initiated by Her, and since then, the Prime Minister and all the members of her family are devotees. In fact, as the reports go, it was the Prime Minister herself, who first put the shovel of earth into the special *samādhi* (a Hindu decified saint would be interred, and not created).

A bewitchingly beautiful lady, She retained Her eternal beauty, radiating from the great spiritual powers She possessed, till the last. She suffered a lot physically. It is reported that She could take, and absorb the diseases from others, so that those who were diseased, could be cured.

She used to be frequently in trance, *samadhi*, as it is known in Hindu spiritualistic terms. When She breathed Her last, some people around thought that She was in *samadhi*, as She used to be so very often. Her death was self-willed. Probably, She did not like to see anymore what was going on in India, and abroad. Spirituality is the eternal source of energy which sustains the multitudinous people living in this sub-continent. Ma Anandamayi was spirituality personified. She was a born Yogi, of the type nobody else was. In the *bhandāra* or mass feeding, celebrated after Her demise, thousands of people were fed, many of them in the highest ranks of the Hindu spiritual world.

She was a great organiser, and also very pragmatic. Probably, this emanated from the livewire spirituality She personified. She could see things far ahead. It is a coincidence, a very happy coincidence, that a house was built at Dhanbad by one of Her most devoted disciples, a great

musician, who has earned her fame as a singer of devotional songs. That house may be converted into another ashram to carry on the mission the great lady lived for, and died for.

This is a homage, a personal homage from a confirmed agnostic, who is not Her disciple. There are a number of Her disciples in this coalbelt, who would continue to be guided by Her teachings, and Her way of life. We only wish that they may behave, in their personal and public stances, in the way She asked them to. The pity is, however, that this may not be so. Reciting mantras and singing songs in praise of Ma Anandamayi in their places of worship, and doing just the opposite of what She asked all of us to do, is the kind of life we have been used to, particularly in contemporary India.

Anandamayi Ma has a large number of foreign disciples too. We do not know how they will react, now that Her mortal body is no longer in our midst. The Mother was married but had no family life, as we understand it. Her husband also embraced the life of a sādhu, but died many years back. The Mother's mother,—the 'grandmother', as she used to be called by her disciples, initiated many of Ma's disciples. The 'grandmother' also died a number of years ago, the beatific Mother plodded Her way alone,—*'akela chalo re'*.

I do not know whether the Mother named anybody to succeed Her. Probably, this was not done, and Her succession may, therefore, be carried on by a band of dedicated workers and

disciples,—people like Dr. Triguna Sen, who sat at Her lotus-feet, and lived according to the words heard from Her.

She was a very humble lady. She never displayed any extraordinary, magical powers, which other 'godmen' and 'godwomen' in this country do, probably to charm the people. And yet She was loved, and respected by millions all over the country and abroad.

The Mother believed in the '*varnashrama*',—the caste system, which used to be the basis of the old mores of life, inculcated in some of the scriptures of Hinduism,—*sanatana dharma*, the eternal religion. Probably, there are many, who would raise their eyebrows over this. We do not know why She did this. It is something beyond rationalisation. May be this was a way to teach Her disciples that in the practice of *dharma*, austerity and rigours were essential. Perhaps what She meant was that the disciplined way of living, ensures a better and fuller life. As an agnostic, this writer may not agree with some of Her teachings, particularly on the outdated *Varnashrama*, in the context of the present day atrocities perpetrated by people of the so-called higher castes on the lower ones.

That Anandamayī Ma was not in favour of politicising *dharma*, was evident from one incident. It is reported by an eye witness that a few months before Her death, some persons from Paunar, the ashrama of Acharya Vinoba Bhave, sought an audience with Her, and solicited Her to advise the Prime Minister to ban cow slaughter. Ma

Anandamayi did not respond. In Her own characteristic, humble way She said : “This *body* is unwilling to say anything about this matter”. That meant that She was against the tendency to mix up religion with politics.

Yes, “the light has gone out”,—the light eternal, which kept the spiritual values of eternal India alive, and burning. No more need be said.

Awareness !

“The mind is centred in the body and consciousness is centred in the mind, but awareness is free. The body has its urges and mind its pains and pleasures, but awareness is unattached and unshaken. It is lucid, silent, peaceful, alert and unafraid without desire and fear. Meditate on it as your true being and try to be it in your daily life and you shall realize it in its fulness.

“The mind is interested in what happens, while awareness is interested in the mind itself. The child is after the toy, but the mother watches the child, not the toy.”

—Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

The Heritage of the Hindus

Bithika Mukerji

(Continued from *Ananda Varta*, January 1982)

Veda is said to be supreme knowledge. The numbering of the Vedas into four and the division of each Veda into its constituent parts are simplifications for the convenience of seekers after Truth. In our own time the available Vedic literature is not complete and parts of it are said to be "lost". Tradition, however, upholds the belief that the Vedas are eternal and can never be lost. Whatever is not manifest in the living memory of man remains unmanifest and hidden in the region of *Āditya* or the sun. The sun is the visible, ever-present sustainer of this creation and the Vedas abide with it till dissolution. They become manifest with creation and remain unmanifest during dissolution. A story is related in a Purāṇa¹ regarding the recovery of Veda from the *saurya-maṇḍala* (the region of the sun) by the seer Yājñavalkya : Guru Vaiśampāyana on one occasion was required to perform severe penance to expiate some unworthy act committed by him. He gathered his disciples together and asked them to undertake the penance on his behalf jointly so that the burden would not be too great on any one of them. Yājñavalkya, the favourite, stepped forward and said, 'There is no need for all of us to do penance. I alone will accomplish it.'

1. Viṣṇu-purāna, III, 5.

The Teacher was annoyed by the show of arrogance and took away the rights of discipleship from Yājñavalkya. Further, he was asked to 'return' all the teachings already imparted to him. Yājñavalkya, obediently belched out the entirety of the knowledge acquired by him at the ashram of the Guru. The latter, then, asked his other disciples to assume the bodies of *tittiri* birds and eat up the 'food' given up by Yājñavalkya. This knowledge given up by Yājñavalkya and saved by *tittiris* is known as the *Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda*. The great sage Yājñavalkya in his turn went away to do severe penance and perform austerities in order to regain the knowledge lost by him. By proper *tapasyā* he became *brahmavit* (knower of Brahman) by the grace of the great God Savitā (the Sun). This knowledge acquired by the sage is known to us as the *Śukla-yajurveda*.

The story accounts for the two divisions of the *Yajurveda* and also indicates that Brahman-knowledge is eternally present in the *Saurya-maṇḍala*. Fragmentations of this eternally abiding truth is with us because we are limited beings. Since truth is homogeneous and one, even the fragments are considered to be complete in themselves ; the Veda, therefore, as available to us is complete and Supreme Knowledge itself.

Mantra Samhitā

The first part of each Veda is called *samhitā*, which consists of hymns to gods. The worship of many gods is sometimes condemned as thoughtless

primitiveness or unphilosophical idol-worship. All primitive cultures have shown a course of development in historical times from worship of many gods to the awareness of one God, a progression from polytheism to monotheism. The Hindu tradition is peculiarly neither polytheistic nor monotheistic. Max Mueller coined a phrase 'henotheism' to fit the case of worship enjoined in the Vedas. Many gods are extolled but each hymn gives the highest praises to the god to which it is dedicated. How can many gods be supreme lords of creation? This supremacy of each god in turn is termed henotheism. The more natural interpretation with which we are familiar is that the Veda teaches all are manifestations of the same Reality. A hymn to a particular god is a hymn to that One Reality which remains hidden as the ground of all that is visible, felt or known to us. Some hymns do not refer to any gods at all, but addressed to the One Reality. The famous Nāsadiya Sūkta says :

There was neither the non-existent nor was the existent then ; there was neither the region nor the sky that is above. What did cover it? Where, in whose protection? Was there water, unfathomable, deep?

There was neither death, nor immortality. There was not even the distinct knowledge of night and day. That one breathed without wind by its will-power, other than that there was nothing beyond.

The darkness was concealed with darkness in the beginning. All This (world) was indistinguish-

able water. That, which existed, was covered with all-pervading void ; through the power of austerity that one was born.

Desire, that was the first seed of the mind, came upon that in the beginning. The sages, having searched in their heart with wisdom, found out the bond of existent in the non-existent.

Their (web of effects) was extended like the ray of the Sun ; was it across ? Or was it below ? Or was it above ? They were impregnative ; there were great forces ; food was below, and consumers (were) above.

Who knows truly ? Who shall here proclaim whence it is born ? Whence its vivid creation ? Gods are later by the creation of this universe. Then who knows whence it has come into being ?

Whence this vivid creation has come into being ; either he held it or if he did not (then who held it ?). He who is the lord of this (creation) is in the highest heaven ; certainly he knows it ; or if he does not know (then who knows ?).—Rigveda X. 129-1-7.¹

The hymn states that the gods are coterminous with creation ; they are to be worshipped as the first manifestations of the Divine. The Vedic culture is embedded in mythology. It does not seek to emerge into an air of pure rationality because mythology itself is considered to be a dimension of truth. Thus, in the Vedas the wor-

1, Translation by N. K. S. Telang and B. B. Chaubey ; *The New Vedic Selections* (Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1981), pp. 477-491.

ship of many gods forms the framework for the meditation on the one Reality.

The Brāhmanas

Mantras are used as recitations on the occasion of sacrifices. The second section called *brāhmaṇas* are manuals giving guidelines regarding the performance of *yajñas*. The *yajña* (sacrifice) lies at the heart of the Vedic tradition. It is a unique mode of relating to that one overarching and underlying unity which transcends all multiplicity. The sacrifice is a ritualistic re-enactment of the beginning of things ; a celebration of God's creation of man ; a commemoration of the immanence in the world of that which is transcendent. It is a function celebrating the descent of Divine grace which sustains all creatures. By the mode of oblations consigned to the sacred fires, singing of hymns of adoration etc., man establishes commerce with the gods, who are our elders in the hierarchy of the sportive-creation (*ṣṛṣṭi-līlā*) of God.

In our mundane world, we see clearly that the commerce of give and take upholds the entirety of human relationships. A family, a community, a nation or even the one world in which we live cannot survive without the reciprocity of self-restraint on the part of one and acceptance on the part of another. He who denies himself in one respect is fulfilled from another quarter. Duties and rights, privileges and obligations are so dovetailed that one loses meaning without the other. This universal law is upheld in the ritual of sacrifice. The

rising flames of the fire symbolise the mingling of the two dimensions of reverential worship on the one hand, and benedictory granting of boons on the other. All aspects of human life are permeated by the thought that in anything and in everything one must invoke the presence of the Divine. From the birth of a child to the death of an aged one, all are events, strung like pearls on the same thread of the universal rhythm of life and death. The multifaceted religious atmosphere which is so characteristic of our country, derives its strength and sustenance from this tradition of sacrifices. The region of gods by this mode of worship is always near at hand for the man living a life of striving in the world.

The Aranyakas

A good life of enjoyment in the world is commendable for a righteous and just society. The Vedic tradition gives due importance to the ideals of social justice and individual happiness and freedom in the world. Let him then seek to establish himself in that ultimate knowledge which will leave nothing else to be desired and so will be a state of total freedom and of bliss supreme.

After a useful life in the world a seeker of truth (or a couple together) could repair to forest hermitages where he (or they) would meditate on such questions and hold discourses with other *jijñāsus* (seekers of knowledge). This could be a life of retirement, spent in studying and teaching. These forest schools were both for those who were on

the threshold of entering society and those who having discharged their debts to a particular society were seeking to engage in a greater task for the benefit of the whole of mankind.

In order to get a glimpse of the society of Vedic times, we may cite from the following sermon spoken to the pupils on the eve of their departure from a forest hermitage. The pupils have finished their education and are about to enter society as responsible householders. The very first injunction emphasised by the Teachers is that truth is to be spoken and practiced, no deviation from truth must be allowed ; righteousness must be cultivated, the pupil must discharge his obligations to his Teacher (before entering the world) and also to his family by getting married. Carelessness in anything is not permissible ; without being cruel to others, he must observe the right of self-protection ; he must discharge all duties of the householder, be specifically respectful toward his mother, his father and his teacher ; the guest is to be honoured, all actions which are praiseworthy are to be resorted to but not the other kind...

The Teacher then propounds a remarkable criterion for ethical judgements : he says, 'When in doubt, about yourself, see how good men of the highest integrity of character the highly respected brahmins "who are not cruel", behave, and take your cue from them.' Even for "accused people" the same rule holds good. The injunction is not to mete out justice to wrong-doers but again the criterion is, to be guided by the judgement

of those who are well versed in such matters and who are good and righteous and not cruel, and are desirous of acquiring merit for their actions (deliberations in this case). Morality here is squarely based upon precept and conscious emulation of the goodness in other worthy leaders of society, rather than one's own evaluation of a situation. In this context we must keep in mind the fact that brahmins were privileged, not because they had power or wealth but because they had moral, intellectual and spiritual excellence, and so were worthy of emulation. A combination of moral excellence together with wealth and power is a rare phenomenon, given due recognition as in the character of Janaka, etc., but ordinarily learning, power, wealth and constructive work were divided up for brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras.¹ A mingling of these privileges makes for disorder in society, but we may see that in Vedic times, brahmins were poor scholars engaged in the pursuit of knowledge only and in imparting it to deserving pupils.

The Upanisads

The Upaniṣads contain the highest teaching for man, viz, the unity of *ātman* and Brahman. This statement is called a *muhāvākya* and in general four such utterances are cited from the four Vedas as the quintessence of their teachings, they are :

1. No attempt is being made here to discuss the much-vexed question of the caste system. It will be taken up for elucidation in a later essay.

1. *ayamātmā brahma* (Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad, 2)
2. *prajñānam brahma* (Aitereyopaniṣad, 5.3)
3. *tattvamasi* (Chhāndogyopaniṣad, 6.9.4)
4. *aham brahmāsmi* (Bṛhadāraṇyaka, 1-4.10)

“In the Upaniṣads, philosophy arises as a question and lives as a dialogue...” writes one author, “there is no inquiry if there is no question. A dialogue arises not because a question is asked and answered, but because a question is questioned... The Upaniṣads are a demonstration of the fact that man can bring about a revolution in his nature through dialogue. The Upaniṣads are, therefore, dialogues of the civilization of man.”¹

The Upaniṣad is for the *saṁnyāsī* or the ascetic who has renounced the world. Renunciation as a concept is easily understood in India, because we have lived and breathed the tradition of discrimination between that which is pleasing (*preyas*) and that which is to be preferred (*śreyas*) as an ultimate goal of human life. Renunciation does not mean a physical gesture of disgust with the world. Such an attitude actually would be a bar to renunciation. Renunciation is that state of the mind which is of an all-consuming yearning for supreme Knowledge. It cannot be foretold when one may be inspired by this *jijñāsā*, and at what age. The Upaniṣads, therefore, relate the intellectual quests of kings, sages, women (ascetics as well as housewives), men of low birth and also the very young.

1. N. A. Nikam : Ten Principal Upanishads (Bombay, 1974), pp. 1—5.

The teaching of the unity of the self and Brahman is imparted in many ways. In every case the disciple is required to 'see' for himself the truth being discoursed upon, by a process of meditative austerity (*tapasyā*). On the realization of this truth, the disciple is joyous and in turn becomes a *btahmavit*.

We see, therefore, that this teaching is highly selective and yet completely universal in that anyone may become a *jijñāsu*, and thus qualify himself as a suitable disciple for the lesson in *brahma-vidyā*.

It may be asked, why a desire to know, coupled with the teachings already available in the Upaniṣads, should not suffice for Self-realization. This brings us to the fact of the indispensability of the Teacher in the tradition. The knower of Brahman alone may enkindle the light of Self-knowledge. A description of a sparkling bright lamp may be very pleasing but it cannot ignite the fire which is required for lighting other lamps.

There is another aspect to this necessity for the Teacher. A man who is in ignorance does not know that he is labouring under a misapprehension. To him error is truth. It is an outsider, who alone can point out the error to him. The nature of this error and enlightenment is related in the following story used very often in philosophical writings as *daśamo'sīti* (you are the tenth man) :

Ten men are obliged to swim across a river at night. Arriving at the other shore they want to make sure that none is lost. The man who takes a tally omits to include himself and there is great

anguish and sorrow at this 'loss'. A compassionate passerby (although he knows there is no cause for alarm) takes pity on his predicament. He taps the man on the shoulder and says, 'you are the tenth man.' There is great rejoicing at this 'recovery'.

The Upaniṣadic knowledge teaches that the self is Brahman and of the nature of Bliss Supreme ;¹ *ātmā* is the immortal Brahman ;² Brahman is Reality, Knowledge and Infinity,³ etc. etc. The human being living in the world is in a state of forgetfulness of his real nature. The gracious teacher helps him to become aware of his state of ignorance. Nothing else needs to be done. Once doubt about what is apparently real but in reality unreal is enkindled, the disciple is set on the road to *jijñāsā* regarding the quest for self-knowledge. This turning around from an outward vision to an inner vision is called renunciation.

The Importance of Continuity in a Tradition

The available Vedic literature has been preserved for succeeding generations by special modes of memorising and transmission to qualified disciples. Vedic scholars refer to the following verse to enumerate the eight artificial modes of arranging the *mantras* in mnemonic lines :

*jaṭā mālā śikhā rekhā dhvajo daṇḍo ratho ghaṇaḥ,
aṣṭau vikṛtayaḥ proktāḥ kramapūrvā maharṣibhiḥ.*⁴

1. Taittirīyopaniṣad, III. 6-1
2. Chhāndogyopaniṣad, 8-14-1
3. Taittirīyopaniṣad, II. 1-1
4. Together with these 8 artificial, there are 3 natural modes in which *mantras* can be stated and memorised. This

The methodology of this process of memorising in order to preserve the unity of the entire body of literature, is itself exact science with its ramifications of grammatical rules and specified rhythms regarding pronounciations. For this reason, when the Vedas come to be written and transliterated into other languages, a profound unity was seen to uphold the Texts recited from memory by scholars belonging to different parts of India. This remarkable continuity, preserved so painstakingly and faithfully by generations of Vedic scholars is for the Hindu a fact of metaphysical importance, because the Veda is sometimes defined as :

Sampradāyavicchede sati asmaryamāṇakarṭṛkatvam.

This definition may be rendered freely as : the Vedic heritage is a continuing unbroken tradition of self-authenticating literature. The originator of Veda is not subject to proofs because Veda itself is the only source of indicating the vibrant presence of the ultimate Reality. The *mantras* therefore are not composed by the seers, but they are 'seen' by them and transmitted as joyous tidings to their disciples. The Vedas are eternally present, but they are 'recovered' in time by seers for the good of mankind.

ensures that no sequence is broken or extraneous matter interpolated into the Texts. The Vedic Texts were made available to the English speaking world for the first time at Oxford, England during the year 1849.

They were edited by Max Mueller. Since then other editions in German and French have been published. For the Indian readers the following edition with translation into Hindi may be recommended : Sripad Damodar Satvalekar, *Rigveda kā subodhabhāṣya*. (Svādhyā Maṇḍala, Paradi, 1967).

A point may be raised here regarding the relationship of passing times with what is stated to be eternally existing. This question was raised in a different context earlier.¹ It is elucidated more fully here because the relevancy of time is made important for us in the present century, when we are automatically imbibing many of the ideas of western culture. Traditions which do not believe in rebirth, have a different way of evaluating the goals of human life. Time, for them has a reality and quality of irrevocability which is unfamiliar to Indian ways of thinking. Belief in time as a reality also influences man's thinking regarding his role in the world. Man becomes a historical being, which means that he is in essence subject to the changes which time may bring and his authenticity lies in relating meaningfully to the transformations taking place ceaselessly.

The belief in cyclic orders in time on the other hand, imparts to it a relativity which is peculiar to the Indian traditions. According to this way of thinking, creation and dissolution are the outflow and inflow of God's breath, as it were. Time and space are both created along with the world of creatures but they are not in themselves more real than man himself.

This should not be taken to mean, however, that the changes in time are irrelevant or not of supreme moment to us as well. Time and life in the world are simultaneously true. As long as we live and strive in this world, all time-bound

1. *Ānanda Vārtā*, vol. XXIX, No. 1, p. 15.

values are inescapably real. The Vedic tradition does not oppose the world. In fact the Vedas themselves contain mantras to be uttered by men desirous of greater felicity, wealth and good-fortune in the world. Discrimination, rather than rejection lies at the heart of the Hindu way of life. The scriptures teach the way of discriminating against the sphere of the not-self. It is true that materiality is a dimension of the not-self hence to be discarded, but so are planes of mental feelings and intellectual ideations. The I-consciousness in man belongs with the awareness of the world in which he finds himself. Both have the same status in the scale of reality as experienced by man. Such being the case, the only source of information regarding the possibility of transcending this 'I and the world' scale is the Veda. The Veda seeks to act as a constant reminder that man must seek for Self-knowledge.

There is no tension between the seeker of knowledge and the world here. The opposition is only between the Self and its ignorance regarding its own nature. Teachers of the Vedic wisdom feel called upon to reiterate again and again, through succeeding generations, the necessity for sublating the sphere of ignorance which threatens to engulf the self and keep it from knowing its true nature. The quest operates not within a polarity of the world and the individual but rather within that of *vividiṣā* (yearning for knowledge) and *ātmā-sākṣāt-kāra* (Self-realization). If there is no desire for knowledge, then the question of realization also

does not arise. The world is, in fact, indispensable in the sense that it instigates the desire for knowledge.

The question of the passage of time is also important, in the sense that the dialogues regarding *Brahma-vidyā* necessarily must relate to specific situations. The questions and the answers which constitute the supreme teaching will of course differ from age to age and even place to place but the content of the teaching as transmitted from Teacher to disciple, remains the same. The dynamism required for adjusting with the march of time falls within the structure of created time. Reflective analysis and appropriation of the teaching which indicates the presence of Brahman as Bliss supreme is required on the part of the disciple. The disciple is required in every case to hearken to, meditate on and realize for himself the Truth and thus although he may belong to one particular time and place, he is in a position to overcome all such limitations.

The question of continuity is necessarily related, therefore, to the mode of teaching envisaged in the Vedic literature. The definitive injunctions to be found in the Vedas pertain to life in the world and felicity after death. A good life on earth is necessary both for the attainment of heaven after death, as well as for an awakening toward *jijñāsā* (yearning for knowledge). Renunciation, then, forms the core of the Vedic tradition. Renunciation, to this way of thinking, is a dimension of knowledge, a power of discrimination between the

changing world-order and that which remains hidden and unchanging. The enquiry into the ground of our being does not follow naturally from man's given status in the world. Without the Texts there would be no indication of knowledge of anything other than that which is given in our experience of the world. The emphasis on continuity, therefore, does not seek a perpetuation of meaningless reiteration of aging principles. The tradition seeks to preserve the purity of the indicators towards a life of blessedness because man, says *Śruti*, is capable of attaining the highest knowledge.

—*To be continued*

“In Nama Japa, you are not taking God's name ; you are taking the name of your Atman, the name of the Self who is Rama, Atma-Rama.”

—**Swami Ramdas**

Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi in Mahāsamādhi

(As felt in Calcutta)

R. K. Bānerjee

Seen in retrospective, it would now appear that most of Ma's devotees in Calcutta as well as elsewhere, were lulled into a sense of security during August which is always a busy month with *Jhulan*, *Janmastami* and *Rādhāstami* festivals regularly celebrated in various households, Ashrams and temples. It is also a month in which Bhaiji (Aug. 18th, 1937), Didima (Aug. 8th, 1970) have passed away.

Ma had given certain warnings of the coming catastrophe, to which we, in our fond belief of Her invincibility had paid no heed.

When She was unable to leave Her room for the 1982 Birthday celebrations at Kankhal, people gave vent to their disappointment and frustration, but Ma issued the dire warning ; "In future you will have to be content to do pūjā in front of a picture !" We had ignored the terrible prophecy.

When Sri Ma's only brother took his newly-wedded twin-sons and daughters-in-law for Ma's blessing while She was bed-ridden in the Kishenpur Ashram, Ma whispered : "You must continue to live !" Now only we understand the significance of these ominous words.

Reports of Her ill-health brought about by Her refusal or inability to partake of solid or even liquid nourishment for months, kept on reaching Calcutta, but everybody hoped and prayed that Ma would gradually recover, so as to enable Her devotees to have Her *darśana* in the ordinary course of events during the coming Durga Puja in October or Samyam Vrata in November.

So whenever a gathering of devotees took place, we hopefully recited the *Hanuman Chālisa* and increased our japa of “*Om Mā*”, each according to his or her capacity.

In due course *Janmastami* and *Nandotsava* festivals were observed as usual in the households of Ma’s devotees in Calcutta, and at Agarpara.

Even on August 26th, several devotees assembled to celebrate *Rādhāstami* all day in a household at Ballygunge, and many of them actually felt Ma’s presence during the joyous festivities, with no inkling what was to follow.

At 11 p.m. on the 27th, the all-world Radio news first broadcast the tragic news of Ma’s *Mahāsamādhi* which was heard by a devotee in Jatindas Road, who at once rushed to Km. Chhabi Banerjee’s residence nearby. In pouring rain these faithful, dedicated disciples went to Jodhpur Park and together with the inmates managed to board the early morning flight to Delhi. Later in the day others left by hopping flights and finally about 60-70 devotees took the evening plane. A trunk call had meanwhile been received in Calcutta at about midnight.

