

BIOGRAPHY

Sri Anandamayi Ma, 20th Century Mystic

The God-intoxicated Bengali saint spent her life absorbed in the Divine

Six months before Sri Anandamayi Ma's Mahasamadhi at age 86, a young Chinese-American, Stephen Quong, had a private meeting with her. He adopted the name Umananda. Now a Vedic Astrologer deeply immersed in Hinduism, he wrote the following account for *Hinduism Today*.

I FIRST READ ABOUT SRI MA ANANDAMAYI in 1970 in *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda. That initial contact with her words, her picture and her inspiring life story touched my soul deeply. I was fascinated and wistfully yearned that someday I could meet someone like her.

In the years following, I had many inner experiences which I attributed to the unseen workings of Sri Ma Anandamayi—receiving guidance and inspiration in meditation through darshan visions with specific instructions. While these experiences were of immense benefit, I yearned for an outer confirmation of the inner guidance. I was still seeking the relationship with the incarnation of the *satguru*, which I felt was indispensable for spiritual progress.

Then one day in the summer of 1981, I heard from friends that Sri Ma Anandamayi was still alive in India. I wrote to her immediately, not really expecting a reply. I asked her questions about my *sadhana*, my life

direction, etc. To my great surprise, I soon received an aerogramme reply: "Your questions are too personal to be answered by correspondence. If you ever have a chance to come to India, I will answer them in person."

I was thrilled and elated to have received such a message from Sri Ma, but I felt uncertain about financing a trip to India. However, fate was about to help me—in a very unusual way.

In November, 1981, I was involved in a automobile accident. My car was crushed like an aluminum can in a head-on collision with a truck. The entire front end of the car was smashed beyond recognition except

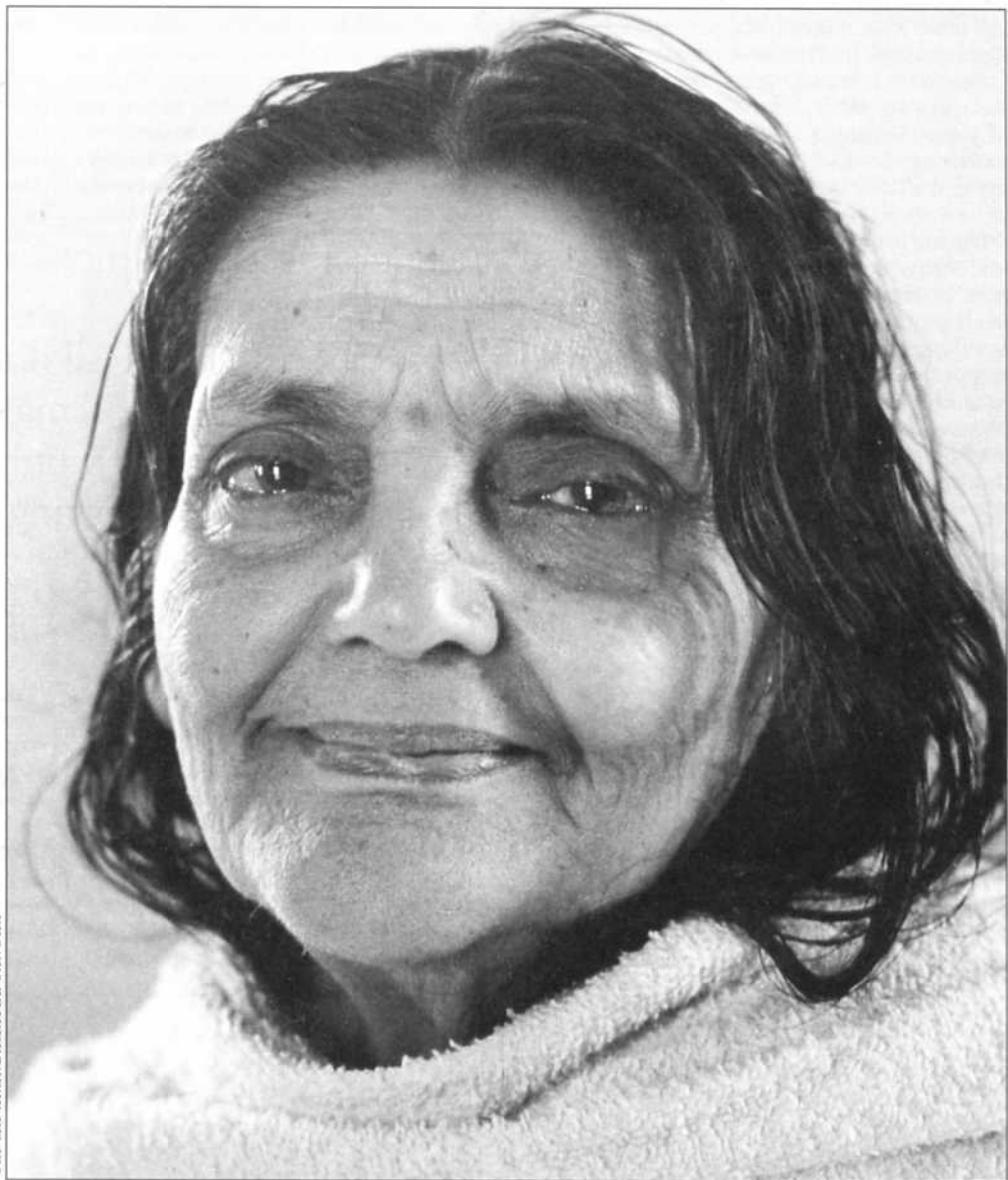
Gazing at Infinity: (left) Ma in her mid-twenties. Though she lived to be 86 (right), the Bengali saint was forever identified with her timeless True Self.

my personalized license plate lettered "JAI MA." I was knocked unconscious and almost died on the spot. While in a coma, I had the vivid experience of Sri Ma's blissful darshan (sight), and clearly heard the voices of brahmin priests chanting in Sanskrit this famous verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*: *Sarvadharmaan parityajya maamekam sharanam vraja. Aham twaa sarvapaapebhyo mokshayishyaami maa shuchaa.* It translates, "Abandoning all of your duties, take refuge in Me alone. I will liberate you from all of your misdeeds; grieve not!" Blissful at receiving Sri Ma's darshan and the words of Lord Krishna, I was totally content and prepared to depart my mortal frame.

Instead, I regained body consciousness. By Ma's grace I had a miraculously quick recovery from the injuries. Off crutches in only two weeks, I was soon flying to India, with costs paid for by the insurance settlement. I came face to face with Sri Ma Anandamayi in February, 1982, in Vrindavan, India.

Our meeting confirmed a precognitive vision which I had had in the summer of 1981, after receiving Sri Ma's letter. Just as in my vision, we met on the roof of her ashram shortly after sunset. One of her senior *brahmachari* disciples translated her Bengali into English for me. Two other women attendants were present. Sri Ma had just returned from a journey, and was taking rest. I was brought before her for a short private interview, but was warned not to ask her for mantra initiation; such a request could only be made after one year. I tried to distill years of questions into a few essential words. In the process, I realized that all of my questions could be answered by asking her just one.

Thus, to the utter dismay and consternation of the translator, my first and only question to Sri Ma was "May I have mantra initiation?" My reasoning was that the answer to this question would provide the answer to the other ones, such as: "Who is my guru?" "What is my *sadhana*?" and "What should I be doing with my life?" Sri Ma did not seem surprised or perturbed by my request. After a few questions about my family background and spiritual practices, she consented to give me mantra initiation on the next auspicious date. I was stunned. Was all this a dream? How could it be so easy?



SRI MA ANANDAMAYEE SANGHA

Did I really deserve to be her disciple? Sri Ma saw my transparent thoughts and with a gracious nod and smile, she indicated her complete, unconditional acceptance of me at that moment as I was. She confirmed our inner relationship, her wish to accept me as a disciple. I belonged to her and she belonged to me; until the end of time, we would never be separate.

At that moment, Sri Ma was nearing ninety, in poor health and suffering from intestinal parasites. In fact, she left her body six months later, on August 28, 1982. Yet even at that age, her spiritual radiance was undiminished, immense, awesome, almost mythical in proportion. It had almost no relationship to her joyous manners; instead, it was the radiance of the light of the Atman shining through the illusion of her physical frame. She had a titanic spiritual presence about her that transformed every-

thing within hundreds of yards into bliss. Wherever she went, she carried a portable Devaloka. All who came near her felt the ocean currents of Satchidananda coursing through her. Because of this, her foremost disciple, Bhajji, titled her Anandamayi Ma, "bliss-permeated Mother."

Sri Ma never appeared like an ordinary human being to me. I never related to her as an Indian woman, or even as a Hindu saint, or incarnation of the divine Mother or as a *satguru*. She was a personification of Absolute Reality, dwelling always in a state of cosmic consciousness, the natural state of *sahaja samadhi*. Many claim to have achieved that state, but in Anandamayi Ma its attainment was indisputable.