

I AM EVER WITH YOU



MĀTRI LĪLĀ

Volume I

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PREFACE

Divine Light-Love-Bliss-Compassion crystalized into a human being in the body of a woman who walked the earth for eighty-six years, (1896-1982), blessing, awakening, inspiring, enlightening. We called Her Sri Anandamayi MA : the Un-created in peerless manifestation — a breath-taking miracle.

By Her very Being and by Her words, She directed our gaze towards God, towards the ONE who alone IS.

"*Bhagvat smaran*" — remember Him with every breath, become aware of what you are in Reality. And if you can't remember Him constantly, being absorbed in your work, at least fix definite times for *Bhagavat smaran*. Let the Divine be your first thought on waking in the morning and your last thought before you fall asleep at night. Consecrate to Him everything that you eat and drink, do all your work as His service, regard whomsoever you meet as His manifestation, His messenger. Worship the ONE in any form that expresses Divinity to you, invoke His presence by any of His Names that is most dear to you, abide in complete reliance upon Him in all matters of life.

What is perceived by the senses is the surface play of the ONE, ever in movement, ever changing, with its opposites of joy and sorrow, sunshine and rain, attraction and repulsion, ceaseless coming and going. Play your part well, but don't mistake your role for the Real, don't look upon the temporary disguise as your true Nature — "man's true Nature flows towards God alone."

This book is the first volume of an account of Sri Ma's *līlā* during Her last thirty years on earth. This volume covers the years 1952 — 1962. It has come into existence by the joint efforts of several devotees, Indian and Western.

When our quarterly journal *Ananda Vārtā* was started in 1952, one of its tasks was to keep its readers informed about Sri Ma's movements during the intervening three

ONE

(October 1952 — October 1953)

South Indian Tour

In response to suggestions and requests, from various devotees and particularly from Samnyāsis, Mataji set out on October, 20th 1952 with a small party of fourteen including Sri Hari Babaji,* Sri Avadhutaji,† to visit the sacred places and temples of South India. Starting from Puri, She went to most of the important towns and places of pilgrimage in the South, such as Waltair, Ramakshetra (Guntur), Madras, Pondicherry (Sri Aurobindo Ashram), Tiruvannamalai (Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram), Kumbhakonam, Tanjore, Trichinapoli, Rameshwaram, Madura, Trichur and Kanya Kumari. From there She proceeded to Dwaraka via Coimbatore, Mysore, Bangalore, Pandharpur, Pune, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Junagadh, Prabhash and Porbandar. From Dwaraka She passed through Rajkot, Morvi, Bhavnagar, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Bhimpura, Chandod and Khandwa, and finally returned to Vindhyachal on January 26th 1953. She halted for varying periods from a day or part of a day to a week or more at every place according to circumstances. Often while staying at some town, She would make it the base and visit by car the renowned temples and sacred places far and near, sometimes covering as much as 100 or 200 miles to reach some spot not easily accessible by rail.

Mataji's visit received some measure of publicity in the press. In some important towns and cities local committees consisting of prominent citizens were formed to welcome Mataji and to take charge of all arrangements. But for the

* Swami Haribabaji Maharaj, the well-known saint of Hoshiarpur (Punjab).

† Swami Krishnanandaji Avadhuta another saint from Punjab who later permanently lived in Mataji's Ashram at Vrindaban, where he passed away.

most part, the task of looking after the comforts of the party and whatever was needed in connection with Mataji's itinerary in the South, was taken up and executed very admirably by a few individuals working in co-operation, namely Mrs. Taleyarkhan, a devout Parsi lady from Gujarat who had been long with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Kantibhai Munshaw, an old devotee of Ma from Ahmedabad, and others.

In most temples and places visited by Mataji, She was received and shown around with great ceremony and courtesy by the people in authority and the priests. In some important towns such as Madras, Madurai, Trivandrum, etc., She was accorded tremendous ovations. In Bangalore a civic reception was arranged in Her honour, in which the Mayor read out an address to Sri Ma. The usual evening Satsang and mauna (fifteen minutes' silence from 8.45 to 9 p.m.) which were observed throughout the tour wherever Mataji happened to be, often attracted, in the larger cities, huge gatherings, sometimes exceeding ten or twelve thousand. Princes, who had till recently been rulers and heads of states, with their families, as of Travancore, Mysore, Morvi etc., ministers of state and other high dignitaries, eminent sādhus, religious leaders and men and women of all classes and creeds flocked to have Sri Ma's darshan and pay homage to Her.

The universal respect and honour shown to Mataji, the pomp and ceremony, the huge crowds and ovations, all this naturally fills the hearts of Ma's devotees with joy and delight. It demonstrates the deep-seated and instinctive veneration that Indians have for, and the spontaneous homage they pay to the values of the spirit and the personalities who embody them — a trait which, be it said to her credit, India has preserved intact through all her varying fortunes down the ages. We rejoice that our countless brethren in the South had the opportunity to have Sri Ma's darshan and to come in contact with Her beneficent, healing and transforming influence. Only those who have had the good fortune to be with Mataji for some time and felt Her grace have some idea of what this means.

Wherever there is genuine aspiration for Truth and the higher values of the spirit, wherever the heart cries out for peace, joy or light in the presence of Mataji or addressing itself to Her, Sri Ma's benediction flows out swiftly to fructify, console, transform and illumine. That is why we believe that more and more — and sooner than many of us are inclined to believe — the world and humanity at large, weary and torn with misery and conflicts, will turn to Sri Ma in their eager and desperate search for peace and truth. It is for Mataji's devotees to help the world to discover the unique and inconceivable fact of Mataji's presence among us and the inexhaustible spiritual power and grace ever flowing from Her.

Samyam Vrata

Shortly after Sri Ma's return to Vindhyachal, the Anandamayee Sangha organised there itself the Second *Samyam Mahāvratā* from 30th January to 7th February 1953.

How did the idea of *Samyam Vrata* originate? People often said to Mataji: "You ask us to live in the constant remembrance of God, to aspire to Self-realisation. But our worldly duties and our families keep us busy all day long. Even if we set apart a few minutes every morning and evening for the thought of God, for the rest of the day we are immersed in our work, overpowered by our habits, our desires and cares. What are we to do?"

Mataji was frequently heard to reply something like this: "All right, if your time is taken up by your every-day occupations and thoughts, at least you can set apart certain days and dedicate them entirely to the "Supreme Quest". If possible let the members of a family co-operate and devise together the programme for those special days, which may be observed once or twice a year, once or twice a month, or better still once or twice a week. Decide that on those days at least you will strictly speak the truth, avoid all gossip and unnecessary talk, keep brahmacharya, forego your favourite foods and

drinks and live on simple, moderate diet. Let the thought of God be with you all the time, read the Gita or some other sacred text, seek the company of sages and saints, do your work as a service to God, be in harmony with all, do not quarrel with anyone.

"If on such a day you get even a slight touch of Him, who is your SELF, you will begin to hanker after His constant presence, the thought of God will be with you more and more along with your outer activities and gradually your life will be changed."

Out of this originated the idea of *Samyam Vrata* to be organized by the Sangha. Our President, Raja Durga Singh of Solan, popularly known as "Yogibhai", suggested that as many as possible might join together at set intervals for a week of intense aspiration and rigorous self-discipline in the presence of Mataji. For, as Sri Krishnananda Avadhutaji said in one of his talks: "While it is difficult for the *sādhaka* to live up to his resolve when left to himself, literally nothing is impossible in the presence of Sri Ma. Have firm faith in Her grace."

The Raja of Solan submitted his proposal to Mataji, and after praying for Her blessing and for the precious boon of Her presence on the occasion, the date and place of our first gathering were fixed in due consultation with Mataji and Gurupriya Devi.*

The first week of *Samyam Vrata* was held at the Varanasi Ashram from August 6th, 1952.

This initial experiment proved a great and real success. Everyone was amazed to find that it was not at all difficult to live on such a simple and scanty diet, to sleep less than usual, to keep up many hours of *japa* and meditation, to attend the satsang mornings, afternoons and evenings. There was no time left for gossip or for quarrels, no time to even remember

* Gurupriya Devi, known as "Didi", almost a constant companion of Mataji for more than 50 years and practically the founder of the whole organization.

all sorts of comforts we had to do without. Everyone felt light and happy and many wished they could continue in this manner in Sri Ma's presence. A deep peace and a deep joy penetrated our hearts and minds and overwhelmed us. In such an atmosphere things that we had deemed indispensable become superfluous. We actually experienced that when we give full attention to our one real need, which is spiritual, we require only a bare minimum of food and sleep and comfort, and the desire for relaxations, distractions, entertainments and society dies away naturally.

Amongst the 150 or so participants of the *Samyam Vrata* some were used to extravagant comforts and luxuries in their homes. They came rather hesitatingly, wondering how they would be able to stand such a week of austerity and strain. It was a revelation to them to discover how utterly delightful, how much richer was this simple life in the presence of Mataji.

The *Samyam Vrata* started after a night of vigil, entirely spent in kirtan and meditation, as it was both *Jhulan Pūrṇimā* and a lunar eclipse; and the week terminated with *pūjā* and kirtan throughout the night of *Janmastami*.

Every morning at 3-30 a.m. the rising bell called us from our short rest. Several times Sri Ma Herself attended the *Usha Kirtan* at 4 a.m. After the usual morning ablutions and at any other time we could spare throughout the day we were at our individual *pūjā*, *japam* and meditation.

2½ hours daily were spent in silent meditation in Mataji's presence: 8-9 a.m., 3-4 p.m., 8.45-9 p.m., and 11.45-12.15 midnight. After the reading of the Gita in the morning, Mataji usually replied to questions, or related incidents from Her early life, and sometimes Sri Krishnanandaji spoke. In the afternoon the Bhāgavata was read and then Sri Krishnanandaji Avadhuta gave some inspiring and instructive talks explaining the meaning of *Samyam Vrata*, about *sādhana*, about the attitude of the *sādhaka* and other similar topics that gave much practical help to the aspirants.

Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj* had written down a few simple but very useful instructions about *āsana*, *japa* and meditation, which were read out and discussed. He also came in person on two or three occasions.

Many residents of Varanasi joined the satsang enthusiastically and kept up the food restrictions and rules of behaviour in their own homes.

Mataji was present regularly at the long hours of satsang from 7.45 a.m. to 11.30 or 11.45 a.m., from 2.45 p.m. to 5.30 or 6 p.m. and at the evening kirtan for at least an hour or more. Again at 9.30 p.m. people gathered round Sri Ma informally for half an hour or so on the open platform overlooking the Ganges. There the happenings of the day were discussed and suggestions made for the next day.

Sri Ma Herself gave minute instructions as to how the food was to be prepared and by whom, and went round daily whilst meals were served. As usual but perhaps more obviously than at other times, Sri Ma was everywhere, supervised everything and gave everyone the guidance and assistance he needed.

It is certainly not an exaggeration to say that in that week we had gained something lasting, a new strength in our search after Truth, a greater certainty of purpose. We got a taste of how wonderful life can be, when it is spent in satsang, every minute dedicated to the search of God.

* * *

Another similar reunion in the presence of Mataji, probably even more concentrated and more delightful, took place at Vindhyachal from January 30th to February 7th, 1953, continuing for nine days this time instead of seven.

The Ashram at Vindhyachal seems an all but ideal spot for such a meeting, being situated on the crest of the charming

* Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, the renowned scholar and *sādhaka* of Varanasi, who during the last few years of his life lived in Mataji's Ashram at Varanasi, where he passed away in July 1976.

Ashtabhuja Hill amongst rambling woods and rocks with an exquisite view over the plains and the Ganges, quiet and secluded, yet within easy reach of the District Board Dak bungalow and two other spacious houses that had been put at the entire disposal of the Sangha for the two weeks of Mataji's stay.

About 100 men and women from near and far participated in spite of the very short notice that had been given due to the uncertainty of Mataji's movements.

It had been suggested from the outset that devotees who were unable to attend the meeting in Mataji's presence, might practise *Samyam Vrata* in groups or by themselves wherever they happened to be. A number of reports have reached us from devotees at various places, who observed as far as possible in their own homes and ashrams the programme and the mode of life prescribed for the *Samyam Vrata*.

It may well fill us with joy and hope that Sri Ma's bhaktas are taking with such enthusiasm to the ideals of *Samyam Vrata*. Those who have been able to keep satsang or else to live in *sadbhāva* for 9 days and to observe *Samyam Vrata* will find, as many have actually done, that the trend of their lives has been changed, that the spell of uncontrollable habits like smoking, drinking tea, chewing pan and the like has been broken, and this brings a sense of freedom and relief that far outweighs the pleasures of indulgence.

On the last evening at the informal gathering in Mataji's room someone said, "Ma, we feel sorry that the *Samyam Vrata* should be over, we want it to continue." Mataji replied, "This is the fruit of what you have done in these 9 days"; and then She went on explaining how, when we indulge in eating, drinking, etc. for enjoyment (*bhoga*), since every action brings forth its own fruit, we are driven on and on to seek material pleasures. Hence it is so important to introduce a counter movement by acts of renunciation. These also bear fruit and therefore every time we renounce some transient

enjoyment or comfort we thereby make a step on the path that ultimately leads to Supreme Delight (*Mahābhoga*).

Sivaratri at Varanasi

Śivarātri, which this year fell on February 12th, is an important festival at Varanasi, the presiding deity of which is Śiva according to ancient tradition. Mataji came to Varanasi from Vindhyachal on February 10th. Her presence lent special interest and enthusiasm to the usual *Śivarātri* celebrations there. One noteworthy feature of this year's celebrations was the participation in the worship of Śiva by different groups — one of the girls of the Kanyapeeth, another of the *kumārīs* (young unmarried girls) of the neighbourhood, and others of devotees present at the Ashram. During the night, each group sat in a circle with a Śiva Linga in the centre, profusely decorated with garlands and flowers. Each person performed the worship of Śiva four times during the night, the intervals between the pūjās being spent in kirtan. Mataji was most of the night moving from group to group staying for some time with each, while they were engaged in worship or kirtan. An unwonted sense of elevation, of joy and a spirit of devotion permeated the atmosphere in which the strain of the fast and the night-long worship were forgotten or seemed hardly noticeable. The worship too ceased to be mere ritual but became intense glowing experience.

Holi at Vrindaban

Leaving Varanasi on the 17th of February, Mataji proceeded to Vrindaban in the company and at the request of Sri Hari Babaji on the occasion of the *Holi* festival as in the last few years. *Holi Pūrṇimā* is the birthday of Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu of Navadvīp whom Sri Hari Babaji held in deep veneration. During these functions, which were observed by Sri Hari Babaji and his followers in a very impressive manner, the celebrations continued for a month and included a varied programme of kirtan, discourses, Krishna Līlā, etc.

The opening ceremony of 3 cottages of the new Anandamayee Ashram and the inauguration of Sri Sharananandaji's "Manava Seva Sangha" next door had been celebrated in Mataji's presence on February 26th, two days before Holi. On the morning of the actual day of the festival there was 'Śiva Pratisthā' at our new Ashram and Mataji was present throughout.

There was a general expectation that Mataji Herself would take part in the *Holi* play. Accordingly some devotees had the previous evening procured 'abir' and 'gulāl' (red and pink powder) and dye, as well as a bucket and a syringe (*pichkāri*) for the coloured water.

After the morning function Sri Ma returned to Her room at Oriya Baba's Ashram. A number of devotees had assembled in the hall of the Ashram waiting eagerly for Mataji to come out. Suddenly Ma appeared. Someone sprinkled a little coloured water on Her and handed Her the syringe. The dish with the red powder was presented to Her. In the twinkling of an eye Mataji's expression changed. She seemed to have become the spirit incarnate of the festival. Everyone was seized by the magic of a riotous joy. Was it the Krishna Līlā that we beheld and took part in? We all sang loudly "*Holi khele, Nandalal*,"* feeling that it was more than a mere song.

Mataji began by throwing coloured powder up into the sky. For a moment we were enveloped in the fine crimson dust and blinded. Then She smeared the red powder on our foreheads, one by one. Next She took the *pichkāri* and shot some coloured water up into the sky. This She did several times. Her silent gesture seemed to say, "Upwards is Godwards." Our minds were lifted up. Now Mataji aimed the *pichkāri* at the inmates of the Ashram, who were watching from the first floor, then on each and everyone present, sparing none. With the coloured water Ma's blessings were showered on us. By that time we were in an almost ecstatic mood.

* "*Holi khele, Nandalal*" "Krishna, Nanda's son is playing *Holi*."

We followed Mataji out of the Ashram courtyard. Her face and hair were covered with red powder, Her clothes splashed with coloured water. Her movements were swift and light, Her feet hardly touched the ground. She went to Sri Hari Baba's place, then to Sri Akhandānandaji's, to Kathia Baba's Ashram and so on. With the extreme cleverness so characteristic of Sri Ma, She caught everyone unawares and none escaped.

Hari Baba cautiously peeped down from the roof, and as quick as lightning Mataji had already sprinkled colour on his robe. He fled with a smile.

A similar treatment was meted out to a number of well-known *saṁnyāsīs* as well as to the Mahant of Nimbarka Ashram. Mataji said, "whoever is at Vrindaban has to join the play, or else let him hide in the jungle."

She coloured the cow and the calf, the tulsi plants, the altar where the new image was to be installed, in fact everyone and everything that came Her way.

We were swept along on a mighty wave of Divine joy and unity and from the depths of our hearts we sang the praises of God. All difference, all separation had been swallowed up in the rhythm of the festival.

Back at the courtyard in front of Her room *batāshā* (sugar puffs) were placed before Mataji. With large sweeping movements She flung them in all directions and everyone tried to catch as much of it as possible. The floor was covered with *batāshā* bits and colour. Mataji rolled in it and returned to Her room as suddenly as She had come out. We prostrated in great awe and wonder, steeped in delight. Mataji had revealed Herself to us in one of Her rare moods and we deemed ourselves thrice blessed.

"Through all appearances I am always the same. I do not do anything, I do not go anywhere, there is no change for me", and "See Him in all forms, in all modes of being". So many times had we heard these words from Ma, but had we grasped their meaning? Now amidst the wild, uproarious

Holi play with its mirth and noise and the surging crowd, understanding had broken in upon us in a flash, for the fraction of a second.

Strange are the ways of the Great.

Vasanti Puja, Devi Bhagavata and Gita Jayanti at Varanasi

Mataji stayed in Vrindaban till the middle of March, then She returned to Varanasi for *Vasanti Pūjā* (the worship of Durga in spring), which was celebrated there from March 22nd to 25th. It was after several years that Mataji happened to be at Varanasi during this function. Her presence drew a large number of devotees and visitors to the Ashram, reminding one of the gaiety, animation and the devotional mood of Durga Pūjā in autumn, though on a smaller scale.

At the instance of Raja Durga Singh of Solan, the reading of the sacred text of *Devi Bhāgavata* by several pandits to be completed in nine days (*Navaha Pāṭha*) was also organised on the occasion. A popular exposition of the text was given daily in the afternoon to the assembled congregation. The *Devi Bhāgavata* gives an account of the various incarnations of *Śakti*, the Divine Mother, as the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* does of those of Viṣṇu.

Vasanti Pūjā was followed immediately by *Gītā Jayanti* which culminated on the 29th of March. For the past few years these celebrations were being conducted under the inspired guidance of Sri Gopal Thakur of Allahabad.

Short Visits to Calcutta, Puri, Varanasi

On April 14th, 1953 Mataji left Varanasi for Calcutta. She stayed for four days (from 15th to 19th April) in a room specially constructed for Her by Sri Aptab Mitter, a devotee of Calcutta, not far from Dum Dum Aerodrome. From there She proceeded to Puri on the 19th and after a short stay, returned to Varanasi on April 24th.

Birthday Celebrations at Hardwar

On April 29th, Mataji left for Hardwar where Her 58th birthday celebrations were held under the auspices of the Sangha.

Our humble and respectful homage to Ma on this auspicious occasion with the prayer that She may, out of Her infinite grace and compassion, lead all humanity to light and peace by awakening their true divine nature. That, as we see it, was the sole object of Her advent. Sri Ma had no *saṁskāras* to work out ; She assumed the human form only for the sake of universal welfare. She often declared that it was our needs and prayers that brought Her body here, that it moved and acted only in response to our wishes and desires, that it was like a musical instrument which gives out sounds as it is played. So far as She is concerned, Sri Ma said that She was, is and will ever be the same : birth, childhood etc., made no difference at all. To speak of Her birth therefore and celebrate Her birthday in the conventional sense is meaningless. Her birth for us signifies that we may be born into Immortality and Truth. Let us therefore unite in our prayer that She may purge each of us of our weaknesses and ignorance, free us of our petty desires and make us fit children of Immortality and Light. Let the Divine Mother be born in each one of us and become for us the only living reality. Let our 'I' and 'we', die. It is only then that our celebration of Sri Ma's birthday can prove fruitful and fulfil its object.

On April 30th, 1953, Mataji arrived in Hardwar at Baghat House, belonging to the Raja of Solan and now known as Śivālaya from the fine Śiva temple built there a few years ago by the Raja Sahib. It has a spacious compound and on the 1st floor a set of rooms especially built for Mataji over a kirtan hall. Devotees and guests were accommodated in the various *dharamśālās* in the neighbourhood.

Usually Mataji's birthday celebrations begin with the calendar date (19th Vaisakha according to the Bengali almanac)

and continue till the final *Tithi Pūjā* on the actual *Tithi* or Ma's birthday according to the lunar calendar (which happens to be *Krishna Chaturthi* i.e., the fourth day in the dark phase of the moon in the month of *Vaisakha* after *Akshaya Tritiya*). In 1953, the Birthday celebrations continued from 2nd to 31st of May.

The last two years, Mataji's birthday celebrations had been held in Punjab in Ambala and Khanna* respectively, under the initiative and management of Sri Avadhutaji Maharaj. This year too Sri Avadhutaji had arranged for *Sahasra Chandi Pātha* i.e., 1000 readings of the text of the Durga Saptasati, which began on 2nd May along with the start of the ceremonies and *pūjā* connected with the birthday celebrations.

The usual daily programme during the period included *Usha Kirtan* and *Prabhāt Feri* between 4.30 and 5 a.m., readings from the *Gītā* and the *Upanishads*, followed by questions put to Sri Ma and answers by Her from 9.30 to 11 a.m. ; readings from the *Bhāgavata* and discourses by *Mahātmās* from 4.30 to 6 p.m. The question time used to be eagerly awaited by the gathering when many rare and invaluable utterances, interesting reminiscences as well as witty repartees could be heard from Sri Ma.

Once a devotee (Dr. Pannalaji)† declared that while some people took away Her *kripā* (blessing) in large vessels, some in smaller ones and others in cups, he tried to take it away in his bare hands (*anjali*). But by the time he reached home he found that all of it had leaked out through his fingers, so what was he to do ? Mataji laughingly reminded him that at least his hands remained wet !

In addition to the usual programme and celebrations, there were special features and functions, such a feeding of *sādhus*, worship of *kumāris* (on 16th, 27th and 30th May), *Akhaṇḍa Nāma Kirtana*, etc. These special functions became more fre-

* See "As the flower Sheds its Fragrance", p. 57-62.

† Dr. Pannalal, D. Litt., I.C.S., Chief Secretary U.P., later became Principal Adviser to the U. P. Governor.

quent as the final *Tithi Pūjā* day approached and visitors and devotees kept on pouring in from all parts of India, presenting an animated scene permeated by the devotional atmosphere associated with such gatherings. On May 27th the devotees of Delhi organised an *Akhaṇḍa Nāma Kirtana* in their characteristic way which made a sure appeal to all present.

On several occasions, particularly on the opening day and also on May 20th, 550 Sādhus and Mahātmās along with Mahāmandaleshwaras were received with due ceremony, entertained to a feast and presented with cloth, etc. Many celebrated Mahātmās and religious leaders, some of them heads of Ashrams and religious institutions in Hardwar and elsewhere, graced the occasion with their presence and delivered discourses; to mention a few: Swamis Asaṅgānandaji, Sharanānandaji, Avadhutaji, Swatantrānandaji, Paramātmānandaji, Mahiṣānandaji, Krishnānandaji, Bhagavatānandaji, Prabhu-datta Brahmachariji, Gopal Thakurji, Prem Puriji and others.

One day the Mahanta of 'Chaitan Kutir', an Ashram for Sādhus of the Vedanta School, visited Mataji with his followers and invited Her to his Ashram. Accordingly, on 29th May Sri Ma with many devotees followed his invitation. After *bhajan* and discourses all were served a sumptuous meal.

On May 31st when the *Tithi Pūjā* was to take place, a fine mandap artistically decorated with arches and flowers had been put up under the direction of Sri Avadhutaji Maharaj by experts especially brought from Vrindaban for the purpose. By now the number of devotees and visitors who had flocked for the occasion had swelled enormously, filling the place to its utmost capacity. Since morning the atmosphere seemed to have been noticeably charged with feelings of devotion and exaltation. The various programmes of the day were followed with rapt attention by the assembly.

The eagerly awaited *Tithi Pūjā*, the culmination of the celebrations of nearly a month, started shortly after midnight to synchronise with the actual time of Mataji's birth between 3 and 4 a.m. Sri Ma was brought and seated on the specially

prepared mandap where, after a while, She lay down and remained perfectly still as if in *samādhi* throughout the *pūjā* as She usually does on such occasions. It was a very impressive sight. The spacious compound was filled to overflowing with devotees and visitors sitting or standing hushed and absorbed, all eyes intently fixed on the recumbent figure on the mandap and the worship being performed in front. As the *pūjā* came to an end, the devotees went one by one, and bowed low at the feet of Mataji in homage to Her — a most significant and auspicious moment. It was by then almost day-break. The people present waited expectantly till Sri Ma showed signs of returning to external consciousness. She got up with some difficulty with Didi's help and was taken to Her room, walking slowly as if in a daze and not yet steady on Her feet. *Prasāda* was distributed later in the day and devotees and visitors began to leave for their homes. Sri Ma too left for Kishenpur (Dehradun) on June 3rd.

Bhagavata Saptah at Kishenpur

A *Bhāgavata Saptah* was organised there from 12th to 19th June. A large number of devotees and visitors used to come daily from Dehradun, which is about five miles away, and participated in the function.

Twelve days at Almora

On June 20th Mataji left for Almora where She stayed till July 3rd. The young students of the Vidyapeeth (Boys' School) of the Ashram and the people there rejoiced to have Mataji in their midst after several years.

There was a big toon tree in the Ashram with some rooms built on two sides. It had dried up and was cut down during Mataji's stay there. As the tree fell, the Ashram buildings escaped with but slight damage, though ordinarily the damage might have been much greater.

Bhaiji, one of the earliest and the most outstanding among Mataji's devotees, had come to this spot in course of his pilgrim-

images with Her in 1937 and sat under this very tree. He liked the place so much that he wished to build a kutir (hut) there for *sādhana*. After the Mahāsamadhi of Swami Maunānanda Parvat, as Bhaiji came to be known later, his body was laid to rest at this spot. In course of time the present Ashram with its fine and commodious buildings was constructed there. Mataji came to the tree and gently touched it. She was heard to declare that there was a good soul inhabiting the tree.

Ratha Yatra at Puri

On Her return from Almora, Mataji went to the Raipur Ashram (about four miles from Dehradun) on July 4th and from there to the Kishenpur Ashram on the 6th. It now became known that She was shortly to leave for Puri. But She had not been keeping well and had high fever with nausea on the 6th, so it was doubted whether She would be able to undertake the journey. She had, however, sufficiently recovered by the 7th evening and entrained from Dehradun. She halted for a day each at Varanasi and Calcutta, arriving at Puri on July 11th. The *Ratha Yātrā* (Car Festival), which attracts a vast multitude of pilgrims every year, came off on July 13th and continued for several days. Mataji had been at Puri last year also about this time i.e. during the *Ratha Yātrā* festival.

Mataji left Puri on July 22nd for Varanasi where She reached on the 24th after spending a night at Dum Dum (Calcutta) where a nice little place had been built for Her by a devotee.

Guru Purnima and Janmastami at Varanasi

At Varanasi, *Guru Pūrṇimā* was observed in the usual impressive manner. A large number of devotees participated in the function and paid their respects to Sri Ma. She stayed at Varanasi till August 2nd when She left for Raipur, where She remained upto August 16th and came to Kanpur for a day

on the 17th. From there She went via Delhi to Vrindaban and halted there till the 28th when She returned to Varanasi.

Janmastami, the birthday of Sri Krishna, was observed with due ceremony and enthusiasm on August 31st and the next day, attracting many devotees and visitors to the Ashram.

Mataji went to Allahabad afterwards and stayed at Satya Gopal Ashram at the request of Sri Gopal Thakur for a few days during which certain ceremonies connected with the installation of the clay image of Sri Durga were performed in preparation for the forthcoming *Durga Pūjā* festival.

A few days after Mataji's return to Varanasi, a *Bhāgavata Saptah* was observed in the Ashram from 16th to 23rd September. Mataji went to Vindhyaachal on September 26th returning to Varanasi on the 28th.

Durga Puja and Bhagavata Saptah at Kishenpur

On October 6th, Sri Ma started for the Kishenpur Ashram (Dehradun), where *Durga Pūjā* was celebrated this year. Preparations for the Pūjā as well as for the *Bhāgavata Saptah* were in full swing when Mataji arrived with Her party on October 7th, 1953. *Naomi* and *Dashami* this time fell on the same day, which shortened the function; thanks to Mataji's guidance every detail was carried out to perfection and hence the blessing and the spiritual impetus the Pūjā is meant to give were experienced to the full. Every night after the satsang Mataji gave minute instructions for the proceedings of the next day. Every detail becomes alive in Sri Ma's presence.

A large number of devotees had come from far and near. To read and explain the Srimad Bhāgavata in seven days is not customary in Bengal. Those who had come from Calcutta found the function so inspiring that they at once decided to repeat it on the occasion of the *Saṁyam Mahāvratā* that was to be held at Calcutta in November.

TWO

(October 1953—October 1954)

Rehearsal for Samyam Vrata at Vindhyachal

On October 22nd Mataji journeyed to Vindhyachal, accompanied by a number of devotees from Calcutta. In the solitude of this charming place, in the presence of Mataji were thought out and discussed the details of the forthcoming *Mahāvratā*. Three days of rehearsal of its programme and its rigours were thoroughly enjoyed by the small group present.

Kali Puja and Annakut at Varanasi

Mataji arrived at Varanasi on November 5th, in time for the *Kali Pūjā* at the Annapurna temple of the Ashram on *Divali* night, succeeded by *Annakut* on Nov. 7th, when 140 different preparations of rice, vegetables and sweets as well as fruits were offered at the shrine and then distributed to the large crowd assembled for the occasion.

Third Samyam Mahavratā at Calcutta

On November 10th Mataji travelled to Calcutta. The third *Samyam Mahāvratā* and a *Bhāgavata Saptah* were held there from November 14th to 28th. Calcutta, true to the tradition in which it was born and brought up during the British rule is really a nursery for all sorts of luxuries and sense enjoyments. There are cinemas, theatres, dancing halls, restaurants of various kinds and what not. Ballygunge in Calcutta reflects more than any other locality the real character of the city, and *Samyam Vratā* took place at Ballygunge for full 7 days !

Ma Anandamayi Herself came and stood firmly at the centre of the whole function and was shining as a divine inspiration to thousands of people of Calcutta who gathered around Her and particularly to about 300 men and women who actually participated in the *Samyam Vratā*. Not to speak

of elderly people, even young men and women bore the strict discipline and rigour of *Samyam* very cheerfully without the slightest murmur. Undoubtedly this was something unique in the history of Calcutta.

It was a week of intense devotion and negation of sense enjoyments and pleasures. A huge pandal had been erected and decorated in a way to suit the atmosphere of the great Devotional Week. In the early hours of the morning, before the actual break of day, *Usha Kirtan* was heard, which, as it were, purified the whole atmosphere of the locality. A little before 7.30 in the morning, not only the *vratis* (participants) but many others rushed to the pandal with *āsanas* in their hands. The door of the pandal was closed punctually at 7.30 a.m.; and was not opened till 8.30. Everybody sat in silent meditation for full one hour and Sri Ma was sitting on a dais as the centre and source of all inspiration, showering Her divine blessings on every head. Amongst those who gathered for meditation were not only elderly people but young men and women and even young girls, perhaps in their teens.

At 8.30 a.m. when the door was opened, there was another rush of people eagerly waiting outside and soon the huge pandal was full to its utmost capacity. Sacred texts like *Gītā*, *Chandi*, *Upanishad*, were chanted and everybody in the pandal was welcome to join. The readings which lasted for almost an hour were followed by *bhajans*, kirtan and speeches by eminent persons on religious subjects.

The morning programme continued till about 11.30 and towards the end, for about half an hour or so, came the time for Mataji to say something. Everyone of the huge crowd was eagerly waiting for the moment when Ma would open Her lips. She never delivered a speech. She answered simple questions of simple unsophisticated hearts and very abstruse questions on philosophy and religion of scholars and pandits.

At about half past twelve rang the bell for the one daily meal of the *vratis*, who were divided into 2 classes : Class

I had *Gangajal** only on the 1st and last days and a single meal on each of the remaining days. Class II had milk at night as well, and no fast on *Gangajal* the last day. There was, of course, no restriction regarding drinking of water. Except for the prescribed diet, the *vratis* were not to take anything else. Tea was forbidden and smokers had to forgo their smoke for the period. Those who were addicted to chewing *pān* had to give it up also. But where the wonder comes in, is that people amongst the *vratis* who were very hard smokers (some of them smoking at least 50 cigarettes a day) would gladly forgo their smoke for the period. Many ladies and gentlemen, very severely addicted to chewing *pān* with tobacco leaves, gave it up without the slightest grumbling. They welcomed, as it were, all the restrictions including the scanty diet supplied during the whole week. Tea was given up by those who were severely addicted to it as if it were of no consequence. They were smiling and a peculiar kind of joy was clearly visible on their faces. What was the source of this inspiration? OUR DIVINE MOTHER.

The afternoon programme started at 3 o'clock with an hour of meditation. At 4 o'clock the door of the pandal was opened and a large crowd entered. Till 5.30 p.m., there were lectures on the *Gītā* and speeches by eminent *sādhus* and scholars. *Bhajans* and kirtans were sung after 5.30 p.m., till the evening programme started again at 6.45 p.m. It began usually with lectures on the *Mahābhārata* followed by kirtan, and from 8.45 to 9 p.m. there was *mauna* (silence) in the presence of Ma who sat there, as the embodiment of the GREAT DIVINE LIGHT in the universal darkness.

The last item in the programme was mid-night meditation from 11.45 to 12.15 at night, but it was not compulsory for the *vratis* to join. That is very shortly a bare outline of the daily programme of the Devotional Week.

* Water of the Ganges.

Visits to Puri, Jamshedpur, Ranchi, Varanasi, Vindhyachal

On Dec. 2nd Mataji left for Puri, where She remained till Dec. 22nd. The Ashram there is right on the seashore next to Swargadwar, the burning ghat. Many came for Mataji's darshan at the evening satsang. Quite unforgettable the beautiful kirtan mingling in a strange harmony with the wild music of the sea, the sight of the flames of the blazing funeral pyres against the background of the dark, tossing waves — and the ever radiant figure of Sri Ma, clad in spotless white, seated in perfect repose, yet so keenly alive, containing all, transcending all

During Her sojourn at Jamshedpur from Dec. 23rd—29th, one day of *Saṁyam Vrata* was observed with its full programme and austerities at the request of those who deemed themselves unfortunate for having missed the recent Calcutta function. So deep and widespread was the interest aroused by that memorable gathering!

On Dec. 29th Mataji gave one day only to Ranchi. Notwithstanding all entreaties to prolong Her visit, She sped away to Calcutta on Dec. 30th, where She spent two days at Dum Dum.

On January 4th, 1954 Mataji reached Varanasi. Interrupting Her stay by a week-end at Vindhyachal, She was back again on the 12th. On January 14th was celebrated the anniversary of the great *Yajña* that had been performed at the Varanasi ashram from 1947-1950, about which a book by Gurupriya Devi with many illustrations has appeared in Bengali and Hindi.

Kumbh Mela and Kumbh Disaster at Allahabad

On Jan. 22nd Mataji motored to Vindhyachal, and back to Varanasi for a day on the 26th. On Jan. 28th She arrived at the *Kumbh Mela* at Allahabad.

Even a few days earlier no arrangements had seemed possible at Her Camp. But at the eleventh hour all the necessary materials were procured and Mataji found a small township

of huts and tents accommodating 300 people, with main roads, lanes and by-lanes, a spacious pandal for satsang, separate units for Herself and the Kanyapeeth, for Sri Hari Babaji Maharaj, for Jogibhai and Dr. Pannalal, different sections for men and women, kitchens and dining-sheds, bathrooms, electricity and street-lights.

In the course of Mataji's stay the Mahants and Acharyas of the various *Sampradayas* (religious sects), including Sri Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath, were given a reception, the like of which — as many remarked — had only been accorded them very rarely.

On February 3rd 1954 a dreadful disaster occurred at the Kumbh Mela, when there was a terrible stampede and hundreds of pilgrims, men, women and children were crushed to death and hundreds more were seriously injured.

Amidst all the conflicting views and statements it is but natural that many of Mataji's bhaktas wanted to know, how the memorable day that is considered so auspicious and occurs only once in almost a century, was spent in Mataji's Camp and what Mataji had to say about the ghastly event. Indeed on learning the details of this, the whole matter presents itself in a surprisingly new and unexpected light.

Over 300 men, women and children from all over India had gathered in Mataji's Camp, eager to bask in the sunshine of Her presence as well as to purify their bodies and souls by plunging into the sacred waters at the *Triveni** on February 3rd, the most auspicious day of the *Kumbh Mela*. The problem was how to get this large number of people safely to the *Sangam** and back again. Following Mataji's suggestion it was decided only after midnight that the bathers should form themselves into small groups, each under the leadership of one or two men. But a little later Swami Paramananda† came

* *Sangam* Confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Jamuna, Saraswati.

* *Triveni* confluence of three rivers.

† Swami Paramananda was one of the seniormost sādhus of the organisation and also the General Secretary of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. He left his body in March 1984.

and said he had hired two spacious boats in which all the inmates of Mataji's Camp could be taken to the *Sangam* in two or three large batches. Mataji said: "Since you have already made the arrangement, proceed as best as you can." The Swamiji who is well known as an excellent organizer could not foresee the terrible difficulties he would have to encounter, trying to keep such a large number of people together amongst the teeming crowd.

At 2 a.m., about a hundred devotees were accommodated in the boats, ready to take off. Before embarking all had *pranāmed* to Mataji and She had impressed on them to choose a sacred Name like 'Jai Guru', 'Jai Rama', 'Jai Śiva', which they should repeat aloud uninterruptedly — so that if anyone got separated from the others he would be able to recognize his party on hearing the Name. Vibhu* at once called out: "We have decided on 'Jai Ma' ", to which Mataji laughingly replied: "See, how you don't accept a single one of my suggestions!" Everybody started away in high spirits.

Mataji walked to the gate of Her camp. Watching the broad stream of bathers pressing on relentlessly, She said: "Does it not look like an endless procession of ants! This mighty ocean of human beings, all pilgrims on the path to liberation." With that She returned to Her hut and lay down, only to emerge again after a short while. She obviously was in one of Her strange moods, seeming so distant and yet so near, in one of those states so extremely hard to describe which have often been noticed in Mataji during kirtan.

Just then the Swamiji had sent someone back to the Camp to escort the second batch to the *Triveni*. When they took leave Mataji enjoined on them also to repeat God's name incessantly right through their pilgrimage. Then Mataji at short intervals alternatively rested in Her hut and strolled hither and thither. At about 9 a.m., She was lying down, appearing to be in a state of *samādhi*, when suddenly She sat

* Brahmachari Brahmananda, alias Vibhu, the famous Ashram singer.

up and exclaimed: "There, there, they are being crushed, choked, they are being suffocated!" Gurupriya Didi, who was by Her side, started up in alarm. Were her younger sisters and brothers in danger, those who had gone to bathe amongst the uncontrollable crowds at the *Sangam*? Abruptly her anxiety gave place to exaltation. With almost supernatural determination she declared: "Nothing will happen to anyone of our party." "Are you quite sure?" questioned Mataji. In a very definite tone Didi reaffirmed: "Yes, Ma, nothing will happen to anyone of our party." Twice Mataji repeated Her question, and twice Didi promptly gave exactly the same reply. At last Mataji said, "Good!" and reclining once more, remained silent. Didi straightened herself as if in a defiant mood. Again Mataji's voice rang out: "Didi, I see *mūrtis* (apparitions,) they are horror-stricken!" Didi began to feel troubled. "They are clearly visible", insisted Mataji. Didi became thoughtful: she knew from experience that whenever Mataji spoke of apparitions (*murtis*) it was an unfailing indication of disaster. As if to keep up her spirits, Didi said after a moment's reflection; "Well, Ma, all that takes place in the world is within your consciousness. You must be seeing what is happening elsewhere. Most certainly nothing has befallen our party." As if in confirmation Mataji said in the end, "Very well, be it so!"

From where came Didi's unshakable conviction? Was it Mataji Herself who inspired it? At that time Didi could have no idea that her words were prophetic: not a single person belonging to Mataji's party incurred even the slightest injury.

Confusion and difficulties there were no doubt, but everyone returned safely. Some got separated from the rest and had to force their way back to their camp on foot. Others could not advance as far as the *Triveni* and had to be content with a bath in the Ganges. The boat got stuck in the sand and was pulled out only with difficulty. The second batch never met Swamiji at all.

Between 10 and 10.30 a.m., Mataji, Didi, Yogibhai and Dr. Pannalal were ready to go to the *Sangam* by car. Just then Swami Paramananda turned up. Mataji wanted to know how everyone was faring. Swamiji brought the news that many of the first batch had returned, but he knew nothing about the fate of the second batch. Amongst the gigantic masses it had proved impossible to keep to his original plan. Moreover, Gangadi, the lady superintendent of the Kanyapeeth, had remained back at the *Sangam* with all the girls in her charge to wait for a procession of *sādhus*. "You should have brought them back with you," said Mataji, "you should never have allowed them to stay without male protection."

Now Mataji's car started for the camp of Jogibhai's people. Though he himself had chosen to reside in Mataji's Camp, the Camp of his people was situated near the *Triveni*. There Mataji sat down on a chair on the river bank. Dr. Pannalal and Swami Paramananda tried to persuade Mataji to go to the *Sangam* by boat, but She said very firmly: "I am not going anywhere just now." Then She requested Swamiji to go in search of the people who had not yet returned. Mataji seemed in a peculiar mood. We were aware of something special, quite unusual in Her behaviour.

How could Swamiji possibly find anyone amidst the swarming mass of humanity? He was struggling to drag a boat along for Mataji. Meanwhile a few of the second batch, who had been separated from the main body, managed somehow to catch sight of Mataji from a great distance and fought their way to Her through the multitude. They related all their various adventures. Nothing was then known about the remainder of the second batch.

Paramananda was still trying to pull along the large boat. His efforts seemed in vain. Mataji and Her party therefore got into a small boat and rowed to the *Sangam*. Mataji did not bathe. She put a little Ganges water on Her head and then sprinkled some on all who had come with Her. Onlookers were intrigued to know who were this strange lady and her

companions, who were satisfied with a little sprinkling of Ganges water on a day when bathing was considered so exceptionally auspicious. By that time Swamiji had succeeded in pulling along the large boat and all returned to Mataji's Camp. She asked: "Is there any news?" No one could then have any idea of the real purport of Her question. Later when we learnt about the dreadful disaster, Mataji said: "I could clearly see great heaps of human corpses!" After a thorough search in our Camp it was ascertained that every single person was present, hale and hearty. There was naturally much consternation about the catastrophe and everyone began to question Mataji as to the fate of its victims. According to the *Śāstras*, '*apamrityu*', (untimely death by accident), causes the departed to undergo a state of restless ghostly existence. In some cases the deceased is tied to the place of the accident, unable to proceed to higher states of consciousness.

Mataji said: "What the *Śāstras* declare holds good in the ordinary course of events. In special cases it is different. In this case, just consider: the constellation of the *Kumbh*, the sacredness of the *Triveni*, the atmosphere created by a vast gathering of *Sādhus* and *Saṁnyāsīs* with their spirit of complete renunciation. Death occurred at that auspicious moment: this must certainly mean the opening out of a path to higher planes of consciousness. Just as there is such a thing as *apamrityu*, there are other possibilities as well."

A few days later Mataji sent Her car for Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, who visited our Camp for a day. With him also Mataji discussed the disaster. "What is your opinion about the fate of the victims?" She asked. Sri Gopinath Kaviraj gave the following reply: "The condition of man after he leaves his physical body depends on his state of mind at the instant of death. On that auspicious day and when at the crucial moment everyone was deeply concentrated, I cannot believe that this could have been a case of *apamrityu*. It is of course true that the time, place and manner of death are the result of one's past actions; but since it

happened during the constellation of the *Mahā Kumbh*, at the *Triveni*, in the holy month of *Māgh* and in the presence of so many saints, sages and rishis, I feel as good as certain that there can have been no question of *apamrityu*; on the contrary the departed must have had the very rare good fortune of being raised into higher states of existence."

On another occasion Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj enlarged on the subject, saying: "I know of a similar occurrence where, by some special Divine Grace the dying in their subtle bodies were severed from their physical bodies just an instant before death took place, and were lifted up into higher states of consciousness. I have a strong feeling that here also, due to the intervention of some special Divine Mercy the dying were blessed with the capacity to ascend straightaway into loftier states of being." Mataji very definitely seemed to endorse the Mahamahopadhyaya's view. He added: "I have visited three other *Kumbh Melas* at Prayag. The crowd was equally dense on those occasions; but this time I have been aware of a very exceptional atmosphere of Divine Blessing, which I did not notice then."

Someone asked Mataji: "When you exclaimed 'they are being crushed, suffocated', did you see only those who were trampled to death?" Mataji said: "I saw those who were saved as well as those who shut their eyes for ever. I saw pile upon pile of human beings being crushed and choked, and some were completely suffocated. Many closed their eyes and opened them again, others shut them for good. It was as if this body was those who were stifled to death, and also those who were trampling on them — and all the time I was lying on my bed in my hut." Here Mataji smiled Her beautiful, radiant smile, as if nothing had happened.

Someone asked: "Why did you feel all this? Did you take their suffering upon yourself?" Mataji: "What I felt was not suffocation in the worldly sense, just as I seem to laugh as you do, as I seem to speak your language, yet I remain what I am. Who is it that appears as suffocation? Who is it that appears as distress? To take upon oneself the

agony of another is a different matter. Every kind of action is not possible everywhere. Where in very truth all is THAT, where in the shape of misfortune and suffering, in the shape of laughter and play is the ONE, who also manifests as suffocation, in that state there is no such thing as taking on the tribulations of others, there is only perfect identity, sameness (*sama*). Again, the whole thing might not have happened at all; what was it but a play!"

Gita Jayanti and Sivaratri at Varanasi

On February 16th Mataji took a trip to Vindhyachal, reaching Varanasi again on the 18th, while Acharya Sri Gopal Thakur of Allahbad arrived on the 20th to conduct the annual *Gita Jayanti* that continued till Feb. 25th. Sri Gopal Thakur had not been keeping good health for the last two years. But to his own amazement he found himself capable of carrying out with vigour and efficiency all the details of the celebrations. This he ascribed solely to the inspiration of Sri Ma's presence. He left on Feb. 26th for Allahabad, the same day on which Sri Ma started for Vindhyachal.

On March 1st, in good time for *Śivarātri* She was again at Kashi. The festival was observed on March 3rd on a magnificent scale and in a very impressive manner. A complete fast is kept on that day and a vigil during the following night, when *Śiva Pūja* is performed four times, with kirtan in the intervals. Only the next morning after a bath in the Ganges may the first drop of water be taken.

On the verandas in front of the Annapurna Temple and of the Chandi Mandap as well as inside the Mandap the worshippers were seated in circles round *Śiva Linga*. From sunset to sunrise Mataji sat or moved about among the various groups, inspiring, encouraging and at times Herself leading the kirtan. Some devotees had come specially for that night, drawn irresistibly by the memory of last year's function. The atmosphere of intense spiritual aspiration, the outpouring of Divine Grace was so powerful, so overwhelming, the hardest agnostic might have been moved to adoration.

Opening of a New Cottage for Ma at Vrindaban Ashram

The very next day, on March 4th, Sri Ma left for Vrindaban, where the ceremonial opening of a new cottage for Ma in our ashram was performed in the presence of Sri Haribaji Maharaj, Sri Krishnanandaji Avadhuta and other distinguished *sahnyāsis* and devotees. Mataji also joined the *Holi play* on March 19th.

On the 27th She went to Delhi for a day, giving Her blessing in person to the *Nāma Yajña** held every month by Her Delhi bhaktas.

Visit to Hoshiarpur & Jalandher

On the 29th She proceeded to Hoshiarpur, remaining there till April 9th and then spent 5 days at the Savitri Devi Ashram at Jalandher, where everyone was entertained with great generosity and attentiveness by Sikh devotees, a father† and his three sons, whom Mataji had named Ram, Lakshman, Satrughna (the fourth, Bharat, having passed away some years ago.) Both at Hoshiarpur and Jalandher Mataji received tremendous ovations as always in the Punjab.

On April 13th She travelled to Almora, where the consecration of a *Śiva Linga* took place at Her ashram at 'Patal Devi'.

Birthday Celebrations in Almora

It rarely happened that Mataji remained at any one place for even a month without a break. In summer 1954 Almora had the exceptional privilege of Her presence for very nearly two and a half months, namely from April 14th till June 27th. In former years Mataji used to visit Almora frequently, but preceding this recent sojourn She had not been to Almora for six years, except for twelve short days in June 1953. The

* *Nāma Yajña* Uninterrupted kirtan for 24 hours, the singers circumambulating round a circular altar.

† Sant Sadhu Singh of Jalandher, a devotee of many years standing, who also set up a Girl's College in Mataji's name within the Ashram precincts.

greater in consequence were the rejoicings when She came this time, indeed it seemed one long series of celebrations in succession and perpetual exultation and wonder.

From May 2nd to 22nd Mataji's birthday was celebrated. The turning point of every year in the lives of Mataji's bhaktas is the period when Her birthday is celebrated in the month of Vaisakh. This year a very large number of bhaktas from all over India had gathered, besides those of the Almora District, to join in the one-pointed devotion of worship; also coming for Mataji's darshan were people from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, England, Scotland, America, Canada, Australia and Mauritius.

From May 2nd to 23rd the Ashram was the scene of constant activity, satsang, discourses by *sahnyasis* and pandits, kirtans, *bhajans* and a variety of ceremonies, all for the purpose of maintaining intense dedication to the worship of God throughout the twenty-four hours of every day. A harmony and single-mindedness was forged from the feeling of love and devotion for Mataji in the hearts of all assembled. Here was a friendliness which only those united in a single purpose such as this can create. There was a buoyancy and joy in all, inspired by the constant loving attention bestowed on everyone by Mataji, a detailed attention, utterly selfless, which She alone could give. Many, who for the first time were living close to Her for a prolonged period were amazed by the endless pains She took, to ensure the comfort and welfare of each person. Thus She created an atmosphere of love and service which pervaded the weeks of celebration and transformed all the routine activities and natural hardships of Himalayan Ashram life into a source of profound happiness for everyone.

From early morning almost until late at night Mataji was in our midst; hardly was there a time when She was not somewhere in the Ashram supervising every little detail, seven hours of every day remaining with us in satsang. So many things happened, so many moments of significance and beauty that in this small space it is not possible to record them.

The night preceding May 2nd there was all-night *Nām-kirtana* with Pujā at 3 a.m. Next morning, with decorations going up and beautiful pahari floor patterns (*alpanas*) being completed, Mataji was seemingly everywhere at once. In the evening the huge crowd assembled in the Bhajan Hall were fortunate enough to hear Mataji lead the kirtan with Her own exquisite voice. Throughout the evening and after the arrival of Sri Haribabaji Maharaj there was much rejoicing, and a feeling of elation spread through the vast gathering.

Every day in satsang Sri Hari Babaji read and discussed Bhajji's book 'Matri Darshan'. Swami Svatantrānandaji discoursed on Vedānta and Sri Krishnanandaji Avadhuta on the Bhagavad Gītā. On these occasions anything up to 500 people were present. In the morning and evening Sri Hari Babaji sang kirtan with his disciples, and whether one was present in the hall or perhaps somewhere out on the slopes of Patal Devi, this was a profoundly stirring sound which imbued all with a sense of exaltation as they came to sit at the feet of Mataji.

On most evenings at nine o'clock, after the fifteen minutes of silence, Mataji would answer questions and give profound discourse on many subjects. The mood in the evenings was always one of happiness and laughter. Manohar and others of Sri Hari Babaji's party performed religious parables with brilliant characterisation and rich humour. These parables always illustrated some serious spiritual subject, sometimes one of Mataji's own stories which She often invents or recounts, and their humour and real devotion kept everyone enthralled.

After the first few days, Didi, who had been ill for some time, had a set-back and therefore was forced to leave Mataji on the great occasion in order to go to Calcutta for treatment. Her dynamic presence in our midst was sadly missed. Swami Paramananda was in charge of all arrangements in the Ashram, no mean task as by the end of the celebrations a few hundred bhaktas were living in or near the Ashram. He was constantly

busy, yet ever smiling and ready to give assistance and to work at any task.

Some of the hill people travelled long distances on foot to have Mataji's darshan. One evening a man arrived from a remote village after walking for nine days, remembering Mataji from 1937 when She had visited Mount Kailash. Just as he was saying: 'I do not know whether I shall have the chance of Mataji's darshan today', Her door opened. She looked towards him, as if solely to give him what he wished, after he had travelled that tremendous, hard distance. Outstanding faith and devotion always called forth a corresponding wonderful response from Mataji, and She performed the real miracle of granting exactly one's deepest wish.

As all present became gradually transformed by long periods of japa, meditation, satsang, by joining in the daily *ārati* and *pūjā* and by the inspiration of Mataji's presence, the significance of Her birthday dawned in our hearts. Yet the true inner meaning of Her birthday will perhaps always remain a mystery. This is not just the celebration and rejoicing, the presentation of gifts which are the spontaneous expression of the event. Nor again is it only a celebration of the blessed day on which She came into the world. Living amongst us and directing us solely towards God, the day of Her birth when She assumed Her body could perhaps be considered of no importance. Yet She had said: "This body is what you think it to be." Here lies the crux of the matter that we, almost unconsciously, for we do not know the full reason, desire to enter into some kind of communion with Her on this anniversary of Her birth. If we are really in harmony, then Her birthday is our birthday, it is the day on which our hearts were set alight with the Divine fire.

The night of May 21st

What magnetic force beyond our ken attracted over two thousand people to the Ashram to keep an all-night vigil? An all-night vigil holds no prospect of feasting, of *prasāda*,

as perhaps might attract many to what is conventionally considered an ordeal. Yet this huge crowd of people from widely scattered parts of India came and sat silently for hours, awake, patient, completely absorbed, suffused with happiness, people from all walks of life, *sannyasis*, pandits, children, rajas, businessmen, families, artists, beggars, — pilgrims all on the route to the inner Kailash. Kirtan and *bhajans* were sung throughout the night and a grotto was created out of pines and banana leaves on a stepped terrace. At three in the morning Mataji came out of Her room; She was radiant in white, a kind of minuscule fineness and perfection, wreathed in garlands. She mounted the steps and after briefly sitting, surrounded by devotees, She lay down on a couch and was covered with a beautiful golden and floral coverlet. Only Her forehead gleamed out of this robe of spring flowers and freshness, and Her black hair fell like a plume on the pillow.

Pūjā commenced and salvers of sweets laid out in rows on the steps were uncovered. Three *sannyasis*, led by Sri Hari Babaji, sat near Her like the Three Wise Men in the Adoration. For two hours the ceremony continued in a mood of intense exaltation. Yet there could hardly be anything more simple and supremely undramatic. Almost no outward sign was manifested beyond Her recumbent figure. But here, within the black arena of invisible Himalayas, Mataji lay in Her birth dream, the mystery of mysteries, Her brow alone marking Her presence like a mountain peak, inscrutable. This *Mūrti* seemed like Viṣṇu asleep upon the Ocean of Bliss, dreaming of the Universe, or Queen Maya dreaming of the birth of Lord Buddha, or Devi immersed in the imponderable mystery of *Śunya*, beyond creation and dissolution, birth and re-birth.

Yet it was none of these things, for it was the very essence of Anandamayi. And the assembled crowd filled with bhakti, kept vigil for That. Whether the pandits may have called this *śamādhī*, *sushupti*, or complete absorption in the causal *prakṛiti*, whatever the guess, nothing can either approach the full truth, nor dissolve the reality of that surge of devotion which filled

those assembled and made them as one. For if, as is supposed, only the perfected yogi can perceive One *jīva* where before there was the whole world of many *jīvas*, here was an unvoiced awareness of that reality, lived for those few wondrous moments.

As the Pūjā ended, everyone, still entirely absorbed by the moment, by the mystery of the Birth Day, processed quietly, unhurriedly to the foot of the couch, there to do *prāṇāma* and re-dedicate themselves. As the last filed past a new mystery was born, reborn, and Mataji awoke; laying aside the coverlet of flowers She walked forth into the morning in Her simple white robes. But now it seemed that one had never really seen Her before, so different She appeared to us, almost delicate, pale and beautiful as a full-moon in a blue day sky, with eyes utterly remote and serene, remote in that they seemed to embrace all, to look beyond and to embrace That which abides deep within; but never in so close a communion with Her bhaktas as at that unforgettable moment.

* * *

A *Bhagavata Saptah* was held from May 23rd to 30th, for which many guests remained and new ones arrived. In the course of Mataji's stay several Sacred Thread ceremonies were performed, one *Annaprashana** and a naming ceremony of some brahmacharis. Visitors also vied with one another in giving feasts to all present on the occasions of their own or their children's birthdays or at the news of a successfully passed exam, etc. In fact Mataji jokingly remarked: "We have had every kind of celebration except a wedding!"

Several times the Swamis of both Sri Ramakrishna Mission and Sri Ramakrishna Dham came and were entertained by Mataji. Everyone was charmed with their delightful kirtans. They in turn invited Mataji and Her large party for satsang and kirtan, followed by sumptuous dinners at their own beautiful, spotlessly clean and well organized Ashrams. Ministers of the U.P. Govt., M.Ps, M.L.As, and officials

* *Annaprashana* The first feeding of solid food of a baby.

came from Ranikhet, Nainital and even from the plains for Mataji's darshan. Some of them asked questions that received very generous response from Her.

During Mataji's stay useful and most welcome improvements were made in the Almora Ashram, such as the installation of electricity, the completion of new bathrooms and lavatories with septic tanks for the students of the Vidyapeeth, and the building of a watertank with pipes supplying about 8 taps in kitchens and bathrooms.

It seems only befitting to express our appreciation and warm gratitude to the people of Almora for being exceptionally well disciplined, orderly and considerate throughout the whole period. There was no pushing, no blocking of Mataji's way by falling at Her feet when She was walking, which were so common almost everywhere Mataji went. Yet this exemplary behaviour was certainly not due to indifference, as could be clearly seen from the fact that there were but few occasions when the hall was not packed to overflowing, and that for many hours daily the compound of the Ashram was crowded with visitors eager for Mataji's darshan or a few words from Her. Even at the all-night kirtans a great number of women attended who had come on foot several miles; Patal Devi is far from almost every part of Almora and there was then no conveyance, with the exception of two or three private cars.

During the last few days many of the visitors from outside dispersed, yet even then about 80 people, among them a few westerners, could be counted daily at lunch time at the Ashram.

Late at night a small group of devotees would collect in Mataji's sitting-room to discuss and have their doubts and difficulties cleared. Those were unforgettable hours of intimate and close personal touch with Mataji. On the last night but one, a few of the citizens of Almora, instead of returning to their homes after the satsang, sat patiently waiting for this informal gathering. Rich was their reward. Mataji sat up till 1 a.m., replying to questions in great detail and relating

incidents from Her early life. Everyone kept wide awake, listening entranced. At the end one of the residents of Almora exclaimed: "Mataji, you are leaving us, we shall feel so lonely! Our lives will be empty without you!" "Why do you say I am leaving you?" replied Mataji. "Why do you want to push me far away? I am always with you!" "Do you then dwell in our hearts?" continued the questioner. "In your hearts?" said Mataji. "Why do you want to restrict me to a particular spot? Blood of your blood, bone of your bone am I. This is the truth. Believe me, I never tell an untruth!"

The following evening, the last at Almora, the hall could scarcely hold the crowd. Sri Hari Babaji and his party left the satsang before 9 o'clock. Mataji got up but sat down again. No one stirred from their places and Mataji sang with Her wonderful, crystal clear, gentle voice: "He Bhagavan, ha Bhagavan, All-bountiful Lord of Love" and then "Sita Ram, Breath of my Life", and all present, as if welded into one body, repeated each line in a mighty chorus, deeply moved. As on the previous night, someone clamoured: "Mataji, we have been coming to you daily, but now you are going away. How desolate we shall feel! How are we to go on?" "Why do you say I am going away?" said Mataji. "I am your little baby, always with you. Remember this, I am ever with you! Does an infant leave his parents? I am not asking you to sit up straight, to hold your breath, to purify yourselves. In whatever condition you are. I am with you. Bear this in mind! A child remains with his parents, be they what they may." "But we revere you as our mother," someone else protested, "we do not look upon you as our child." "Well, everything is all right," conceded Mataji. "If you say 'mother', that also is right. But does a mother forsake her children? Never!"

At 11 p.m., Mataji reminded us that it was getting late. A few men got up and left, but not the women. "We are not going home to-night," they declared with determination. They had come prepared to spend the night in the hall and sing

kirtan. Mataji was to leave at day-break and they wished to see Her off and so they did. Mataji went to Her room to retire for the night, but soon She was back again in the hall and for several hours sat listening to the songs of those true bhaktas. At 4.30 a.m., they performed *arati* in the Ashram courtyard and at 5 sharp, in the dim light of dawn, a large crowd with heavy hearts and tears in their eyes watched Mataji's car start and disappear in the distance, followed by two buses in which travelled Mataji's and Sri Hari Babaji's parties.

At the 'Brewery', where the Almora and Nainital roads meet, a number of bhaktas from Nainital were waiting with flowers and fruits, anxious to have a few moments with Mataji. From there Mataji, accompanied by Sri Haribabaji and Swami Paramananda, motored straight down into the flaming heat of Bareilly. The monsoon had not yet broken.

After five days at Bareilly, in the early morning of July 3rd, the whole party left for Moradabad and remained there till July 7th. That night Sri Haribabaji and his disciples said good-bye to Mataji who left for Her Kishenpur Ashram near Dehradun, while they proceeded to Delhi the next morning.

Guru Purnima at Varanasi

In the night of July 12th, Mataji was again in the train travelling to Lucknow. The 13th was spent in the capital of the U. P. and on the 14th early morning Mataji alighted at Varanasi and was greeted enthusiastically by a great number of devotees, who after Her absence of over four months had been impatiently looking forward to Her arrival. The next day *Guru Purnimā* was observed. People had come from Bombay, Calcutta, Nainital, Kanpur, Allahabad, Patna and other places to do obeisance to Mataji and receive Her blessing on this special day. From early morning till late at night a steady stream of visitors continued to pour in, eager to offer garlands and gifts and to do pūjā. There was kirtan from dawn onwards, and from approximately 10 to 12 midday, pūjā was performed at the Chandi Mandap. The day ended with a

common dinner on the moonlit terrace of the Ashram overlooking the Ganges, where at nearly midnight everyone partook of the *prasāda* from the Annapurna Temple.

How great was our disappointment when the following morning Mataji announced that She intended to leave on July 17th, after barely three days at Varanasi. She stayed at Hardwar for three days and from there returned to Kishenpur on the 21st.

A fortnight at Dehradun

Didi (Sri Gurupriya Devi) had come to Varanasi from Calcutta on July 12th, definitely improved in health though not yet recovered. On July 20th, she set out for Dehradun with Didima (Mataji's mother) and others by the train that Mataji was to board at Hardwar on the 21st morning.

Until August 8th Mataji remained in Dehradun, oscillating between the two Ashrams at Kishenpur and Raipur. She reached Varanasi on the 9th.

Jhulan and Janmastami at Varanasi

For the last several years Mataji had blessed Varanasi with Her presence during the *Jhulan* and *Janmastami* celebrations. These festivals are occasions of rejoicing for every Hindu family and Ashram, but more especially for children. The child Krishna, divine mischievous Gopal, tremendously fascinates the imagination of every boy and girl.

At the Varanasi Ashram there is a small residential school, called "Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth", where girls are brought up according to the ancient ideals of Brahmacharya, while at the same time they are taught all the subjects of the modern curriculum with special stress on Sanskrit.

During the *Jhulan* week (as in previous years), every night at 9 p.m., when the satsang was over, Mataji was being invited upstairs to the girls' hall as the chief guest at their artistic performances. Every night the decorations of the hall were

changed into more and more lovely ones, every night a new programme of religious songs, dances and dramatic scenes was displayed. The culmination was a really exquisite dramatic representation of the main incidents from the life of Sri Gauranga. Many in the audience were moved to tears.

With what simple means and few accessories the plays were made effective! Watching these children perform night after night, in Bengali as well as in Hindi, we became ever more delighted and also ever more thoughtful.

Modern education is largely outward turned. Children are given every scope to observe and get acquainted with as many interesting people, things and progressive activities in the world as possible. Here on the contrary, hidden away in a lane on the bank of the holy river, students and teachers lead a strict, secluded life, devoid of outer distractions. Not for the sake of discipline or austerity, but with the definite purpose of giving them a taste of That which alone is worth having, of laying a solid foundation for a life of dedication under every circumstance to the search of the Highest Good.

These children never go out to a cinema or any other worldly entertainment, they do not even go home during their holidays. But do they miss anything? From where do they get such a remarkable sense of art and beauty? Who teaches them to play-act with such intelligence? Every single one of them took part in several items and they all showed surprising talent, skill and depth of feeling. Where else can one find such a school? It is true, it consists of only about 30 students, but what do numbers matter? Does not one man or woman who is egoless and divinely inspired influence millions and for centuries?

These children's lives are not only occupied with studies, work and play; much of their time and thought is taken up by kirtan and devotional music, by the reading of scriptures and of the lives of saints and sages, by ritual, *japa* and meditation. There is practically no time or opportunity for gossip and

quarelling, for idle chattering, the display of fashion or any of the vain pursuits that drain so much of the energy of most children and grown-ups. We see the sparkling eyes and the quiet happiness on these girls' faces. We hear them laugh and sing whilst they are about their work in the house or in their tiny garden. The brahmacharinis seem possessed of an inward richness, of a sense of inner security and poise which is very rare with the very young and even at an advanced age. We have begun to wonder whether this unassuming, insignificant little school may not perhaps prove to be a very significant educational experiment?

History of black Gopalji

Last March on the eve of Mataji's departure for Vrindaban, a devotee came to inform Her that somewhere at Varanasi a beautiful large *vigraha* of Gopal, made of black touch-stone was kept in the house of its pūjārī, its owner living in Pakistan. Since the latter had for the last three years been unable to send money for the pūjā, the priest was eager to find another home for the *vigraha*, failing which he had decided to immerse it in the Ganges, as he could no longer afford the expenses for the pūjā.

On hearing the story it was generally felt that it might be a good idea to take the *vigraha* to the new Ashram at Vrindaban. A brahmachari was sent for the image. But there were difficulties. The pūjārī hesitated to part with the image without the formal consent of its owner; moreover, he wanted the expenses incurred for the worship during three years, refunded. The Ashramites declared that there was no object in spending money on the *vigraha* and the matter was left at that.

However, on Mataji's arrival at Varanasi on August 9th, 1954 a message was sent to Her by the priest himself that he was now willing to hand over the image to Her Ashram free of charge. At once, Mataji sent Brahmachari Kantibhai* in Her own car to bring 'Gopal' to the Ashram. As soon as the

* Brahmachari Kantibhai later became Swami Bhagavatananda Giri.

vigraha arrived, it was exhibited to everyone on the elevation of the terrace. Kirtan was sung and incense burnt. Mataji Herself put a couple of garlands round 'Gopal's' neck. Every night during the *Jhulan* week Gopalji was placed on the swing in the girls' hall and was present during their artistic performances described above. At *Janmastami* the image was the object of special pūjā at the Chandi Mandap during both nights.

On *Janmastami* day came the blind wife of the pūjārī, in whose house the image had been worshipped for the last 31 years. With tears in her eyes she related a number of details, connected with the *vigraha*. Once one of her relatives had dreamt that Gopalji was not satisfied with the worship offered to him. Later her son dreamt that Gopalji said: "Do not remove me from Varanasi!"

On the morning after *Janmastami*, before the *vigraha* was given a place in the room adjoining the Annapurna Temple of the Ashram, photos were taken of Mataji together with the image.

During the recent *Durga Pūjā* at Ranchi a devotee from Calcutta, Sm. Rani Majumdar was struck with surprise when she saw the photos. She was a great admirer of Sri Ramana Maharshi and had never worshipped Gopal. Four years ago, however, she had had a strange dream, which she related to Mataji when she met Her two years later. She had dreamt that she was sitting on a terrace overlooking the Ganges, when a small boy of very dark complexion came up to her and stood on her lap. She asked him who he was and he pointed to a shrine nearby, saying: "The one who lives in there and I are one and the same. Worship me!" He then changed into a tiny baby and lay in her lap.

On seeing the photograph of the stone image of Gopalji, the lady recognized with certainty the black little boy of her dream. She felt strangely moved. Accompanying Mataji to Varanasi and seeing the *vigraha*, she confirmed the correctness of her impression and also verified that the place where

she had sat in her dream had similar surroundings as the Ashram terrace. She was evidently profoundly touched and expressed the desire to arrange for a special pūjā for Gopal. It was celebrated on Oct. 10th, before Mataji left for Vrindaban and everyone present partook of the *prasāda*.

This is only one example of the innumerable strange things that constantly happened around Mataji. To comprehend the reasons why She did or said anything, is far beyond our limited capacity of understanding.

There was yet another new feature at *Janmastami* this year. The customary plastic representation of the principal scenes of Sri Krishna's early life at Gokula, Vrindaban and Mathura was, at Mataji's suggestion, arranged in the open air. The small garden that had grown up where the *Savitri Mahayajña* was celebrated from 1947-50, proved an ideal site. The elevation erected over the place where the sacrificial fire (*Yajña Kunda*) had been kept, provided a natural 'Mount Govardhana'; the *Rāsa Līlā* was staged under the tree near Mataji's kitchen, the river Yamuna made to flow through the two little ponds, and the black snake placed in one of them, while 'Mathura' was on the terrace across the path. Although slightly disturbed one day by a short shower of rain, the charm of this miniature 'Vrindaban' amidst trees and creepers was undeniable.

After the pūjā, late at night on August 21st, Mataji went round showering rose-petals on all the trees and plants and on all people present, saying, "All the trees and plants are Gopal, everyone is Gopal today".

The next morning the '*Nandotsava*' was observed. It is a sequel to *Janmastami*, full of frolics and laughter, the rejoicing of the cow-herds over the birth of Sri Krishna. Some of the children of the Kanyapeeth dressed up as Gopas and Gopis, carrying on their heads large earthen pots containing curds, danced round Mataji, who was seated on their closed veranda. But gradually Mataji and all of them came outside with their cymbals and drums and pots of curds, and collecting at 'Vrindaban' sang kirtan with ever increasing enthusiasm moving

round 'Mount Govardhana'. Mataji led the kirtan for a while, rousing everybody to join in the chorus. Whenever Mataji sang it always was more than a mere song. All women present began to take part in the circumambulation, whilst the men stood watching from a slight distance.

Suddenly someone with great force banged down a pot of curds. It broke into thousand pieces, its precious contents splashing in all directions. This is part of the celebrations. Does it signify the breaking of the shell of the ego that imprisons each one of us? If only it had really happened! ...Many scrambled to pick up a piece of the earthenware and marked each other's foreheads with the sacred curd. Now pot after pot was handed to Mataji who distributed curds in large quantities, turning right and left, backwards and forwards with great smartness and swiftness to satisfy the clamouring crowd. Her face was beaming. She was obviously quite oblivious of the pushing and the noise, of being wedged in between women and children — and all the while the kirtan was mounting to ever higher waves of rapturous joy.

At last everyone had received his share of the curds — and to be sure it was not only curds that we got! The kirtan calmed down and was brought to an end. Everyone prostrated, Mataji went inside, followed by the girls with their musical instruments. A few brahmacharis came out and began to take down the canvas roofing and to dismantle "Vrindaban". Some of us stood around as in a dream, still under the spell of the '*Nandotsava*'. Then we remembered that we were in Bhadaini, Varanasi, and that it was lunch-time. Strange! Where had we been all the morning?

Mysterious hibiscus garland at Chunar and planting a Panchavati there

From August 16th to 19th, between *Jhulan* and *Janmastami*, Mataji had visited Vindhyaachal accompanied by Dr. Pannalal and a very few others. On returning, the party halted at Chunar.

We have to remind our readers of an incident mentioned in Bhaiji's book 'Mother as Revealed to Me' ('*Matri Darshan*'). In September 1927 Mataji took the train to Jaipur from Chunar. When Bhaiji came to see Her off at the station, She indicated to him a certain spot near the hillock on which the fort is built and told him : "Go there on your way from the station. You will find a garland of hibiscus flowers (*java kusum*) there. Take it with you and preserve it carefully."

Bhaiji did exactly as he was told. When Mataji returned to Chunar She saw the garland. Later, when She went to Dhaka, it was found that Brahmachari Kamalakanta who daily used to offer a garland of hibiscus flowers to the image of Kali in our Ashram at Siddheshwari, had forgotten to do so on the very day Bhaiji found the garland at Chunar. From where the garland came and whether it was connected with the one left unused at Dhaka is a puzzle which we cannot solve.

Some two or three years ago, when Dr. Pannalal once motored to Vindhyachal with Mataji, She showed him the place at his request and kirtan was sung there by some bhaktas who happened to be present.

A few months ago Dr. Pannalal's son-in-law Sri Rameshwar Sahai was transferred to the region of Mirzapur and Varanasi as Conservator of Forests of the Eastern Division of U.P. Dr. Pannalal had for some time been eager to plant some trees, a *panchavati*, at that memorable spot at Chunar. His son-in-law agreed to arrange for it and he secured Mataji's consent to be present Herself at the ceremony on the afternoon of August 19th. The function took full two and a half hours. Vedic Hymns and other sacred texts were chanted. Brahmachari Kamalakanta, who had forgotten to offer the garland at Dhaka in 1927 and who was now staying at Vindhyachal, took active part in the ceremony. Mataji gave suggestions throughout.

It was pouring with rain and everyone was drenched. Dr. Pannalal felt very remorseful at having been the cause of what he considered an ordeal for Mataji. He was very gloomy even the next morning at Varanasi, but Mataji called him and,

laughing merrily, said, "Pitaji, would you believe it, it did not hurt me at all to be drenched to the skin ; on the contrary my rheumatic trouble has considerably improved due to this prolonged rain bath. Don't feel sorry, everything happened exactly as it should have."

New Ashram at New Delhi

In the evening of August 22nd, the day of the *Nandotsava*, Mataji left Varanasi for New Delhi, where on the 26th the inauguration of a new Ashram at Kalkaji, 8 to 10 miles from the centre of New Delhi, took place in Mataji's presence. Sri Haribabaji Maharaj also came for the occasion.

For many years the devotees of Delhi had been trying to build an Ashram for Mataji. A plot of land had been purchased, but they were unable to raise sufficient funds for a building. However, when recently a devotee very generously donated another piece of land at Chandralok, Kalkaji, the previously acquired plot was sold and the money used to start building. A few rooms were ready for the use of Mataji and Her party during Her sojourn in August. A circular Satsang Hall in the centre of the Ashram was planned. It had then come up to plinth level.

An all-night kirtan was held in the new Ashram. Many women attended, who had never before stayed up for a whole night in this way. To their own amazement they felt so inspired that they were not aware of any fatigue.

One day, the then High Commissioner of Pakistan, Raja Gaznafar Ali Khan came for Mataji's darshan and seemed profoundly impressed.

On August 30th Mataji left Delhi for Kanpur, remaining there for half a day only. At 3 a.m., the train passed through Etawah. Even at that most inconvenient hour a large number of devotees came to the station with offerings.

Mataji visits Manmohanda at Clacutta hospital

Mataji's party, headed by Didima, reached Varanasi on Sept. 1st night, but Mataji Herself went on to Calcutta. She

passed through Mogal-Sarai without even informing the bhaktas at Varanasi.

Putting up at Dum-Dum She went straight to the hospital to see one of Her very old devotees, Sri Manmohan Ghosh, the architect of the greater part of the Varanasi and Vrindaban Ashrams. It is largely due to his skill, hard work and rare artistic sense that the Varanasi Ashram is even now considered to be one of the most beautiful and imposing structures on the river front. Manmohanda was one of those unusual people, who never spoke about their devotion or crowded round Mataji. Yet in his quiet way he had by his actions given ample proof of his sincerity and whole-heartedness.

Several months ago he fell seriously ill and had to return to Calcutta to seek medical aid. In the course of his treatment one of his legs unfortunately had to be amputated. When Mataji suddenly appeared in his room at the hospital, he was almost beside himself with happiness. Forgetting his condition he tried to advance towards Her and literally fell into Her arms. He clasped Her with both hands, as if never to let Her go again. He and his wife cried for joy and tried their best to persuade Mataji to stay for another day, but She was in a hurry to get to Varanasi and left the same evening, reaching the holy city on September 3rd morning, after two nights in the train. It was only after Mataji left the hospital at noon, that people at Calcutta were informed of Her flying visit. She gave darshan at our Ashram then at Ekdalia Road, Ballygunj, before boarding the train.

Mata Anandamayi Ghat, Varanasi & Reopening the Hall by Bhagavata Jayanti

The Mata Anandamayi Ghat, upon which the Varanasi Ashram had been erected, was in a more or less precarious condition ever since the high flood in 1948. Although large scale repairs were being carried out every winter for the last three years, a number of cracks periodically appeared in the Satsang Hall and some engineers expressed their doubts as to

its safety. Some 20 months ago Mataji declared that She would not enter the hall for one whole year. Mataji never gave reasons for what She did. Anyhow, the hall was emptied of carpets, pictures, fans, etc., and locked. Thereafter the satsang had to be held in other parts of the Ashram, which were not nearly so spacious or convenient. According to some engineers the hall was for some time even in danger of collapsing and falling into the Ganges.

It was a sad prospect that the beautiful hall in which Mataji had sat day after day for several years whenever at Varanasi, and which was associated with so many unforgettable, inspiring memories, might have to be abandoned to the river. Luckily this danger seemed to have passed at least for the time being. It was therefore decided that the hall should be restored and reopened for general use on the occasion of the *Srimad Bhāgavata Jayanti*, which had become an annual function at the Ashram and was held this year from 5th to 13th Sept.

Dr. Pannalal was instrumental in calling Pandit Srinath Shastri from Vrindaban, a young man in his late twenties, who in spite of his comparative youth was a remarkable expert in the reading and expounding of the *Srimad Bhāgavata*. He delighted the very large audience not only by his learning, but even more by his melodious voice and great sense of humour. A loud-speaker was installed in the court-yard of the Ashram, so that the Ashramites who were busy with housework, as well as the overflow of visitors who could not find places in the hall, were able to listen to the talks from anywhere on the premises. A *Bhāgavata Saptah* is nothing unusual in Mataji's Ashrams, nevertheless everyone was agreed that this one was a specially successful and enjoyable function.

As soon as it was brought to completion, on Sept. 13th evening, Mataji motored to Vindhyachal for a night and from there to Allahabad. Usually She visited this town round about that time of the year, at the request of Sri Gopal Thakur, to attend certain ceremonies connected with the installation of the image of the Goddess Durga in preparation for *Durga Pūjā*.

On the 16th night She was back at Varanasi. The day of the 17th was spent at Vindhyachal, where the District Magistrate of Mirzapur and his family had lunch at the Ashram. Again on the 19th afternoon Mataji returned to Vindhyachal for a couple of hours, accompanied by Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj and others. In the morning She had been present at a feast given yearly to one hundred sādhus at the Varanasi Ashram, on the anniversary of Sri Akhandanandaji's* Mahasamādhi.

Durga Puja at new Ranchi Ashram

On Sept. 22nd a large party including Didima and Didi left the Varanasi Ashram for Ranchi, to assist with the preparations for the forthcoming Durga Pūjā, whereas Mataji Herself proceeded to Calcutta and paid another visit to Manamohanda, who was still ailing. On the 24th morning She arrived at Puri and after a stay of barely two days travelled from there directly to Ranchi.

About a year ago Dr. Priyaranjan Ghosh, a young dentist of Ranchi, was building a new house for himself. When meeting Mataji last November during the *Samyam Mahāvratā* at Calcutta, he was so impressed that he decided to offer the house to Mataji as an Ashram. Thereupon the devotees of Ranchi approached Mataji with the urgent request to inaugurate the new Ashram on the occasion of *Durga Pūjā*. Although other plans were already under consideration, they were scrapped in favour of Ranchi. Invitations went to bhaktas all over India. But the people of Ranchi, who had no experience in arranging a gathering of such magnitude, became nervous. They were wondering whether they would be able to raise the necessary funds and to manage efficiently such a huge and elaborate function. But Didi reassured them, and by Mataji's grace everything worked out without a hitch. Whatever was needed turned up invariably at the right time.

*Swami Akhandananda Giri was Sm. Gurupriya Devi's father, formerly known as Dr. Sasanka Mohan Mukherjee, Civil Surgeon (Rtd.).

The whole town seemed to be interested. The large pandal erected in the open space near the Ashram was mostly packed and yet there was pindrop silence. Mataji knew the art of converting even a half-hearted on-looker into an active and enthusiastic participator. During the pūjā one group sang kirtan, another was engaged in japa, a third in *Devī Bhāgavata Pāṭha* and yet others sat absorbed in silent meditation. Whoever approached the pandal was startled by the overwhelming atmosphere of a Divine Presence.

Durga Pūjā is supposed to have been performed for the first time by Sri Rama as a thanksgiving for his victory over Rāvana. Mataji therefore suggested that the reading of the whole of the Rāmāyaṇa should be accomplished during the *Navarātri*, alongside with the pūjā. Some *sahnyāsīs* and brahmachāris took turns in the chanting. Moreover, in the evenings of the four main days of the pūjā, certain portions of the Rāmāyaṇa were recited and expounded in a most lively, dramatic manner by a famous expert*, who kept his listeners spell-bound for hours together.

* Prof. Tripurari Chakravarti of Calcutta University who was well known as a brilliant orator.

THREE

(October 1954 — October 1955)

Journey to Hoshiarpur, Jalandher, Khanna

On October 8th Mataji left for Varanasi, from where She proceeded to Vrindaban on the 10th at the request of Sri Hari Babaji Maharaj. On the 14th, She was once again in the train, travelling to Hoshiarpur where She stayed at the Sachchidānanda Ashram. On Her way to Hoshiarpur She had halted for a few hours at the Savitri Devi Ashram at Jalandher and again on Her way back stayed there from Oct. 20th to 22nd. Both times the then High Commissioner of Pakistan Raja Gaznaffar Ali Khan came to pay his respects to Her.

From Jalandher Mataji proceeded to Khanna, a small town in Punjab where one of the very great saints of our time, Sri Triveni Puri Mararaj had spent the greater part of his life. When at *Śivarātri* 1952 we had his last darshan at Hardwar, he looked hale and hearty in spite of his advanced age. We were looking forward to meeting him again at Khanna, where Mataji's birthday was to be celebrated the following May. Unfortunately he left his mortal frame just a few weeks before the function began. His great devotee Sri Krishnanandaji Avadhuta with his usual energy and enthusiasm had at once set to work and managed not only to complete all the elaborate arrangements for the celebrations, but also in an incredibly short time got a beautiful *Mahāsamādhi Mandir* erected for the departed sage. It was up in its main structure so that perpetual kirtan could be held there day and night throughout the birthday celebrations.

This time Mataji found the Mandir completed to the last touch. As on the former occasions, Sri Avadhutaji himself saw to all preparations for the stay of Sri Mataji, Sri Haribabaji and their parties. Everyone was amazed to see how perfectly every minute detail had been thought out; one could not help

wondering at the remarkable efficiency and foresight in all practical matters displayed by a *sannyāsi* of so many years' standing.

One day the Deputy High Commissioner of Pakistan came for Mataji's darshan. Inspired by Her presence he went into some kind of ecstasy, began to perform Namāz and recited from the Korān for nearly three hours. He was expected at Jalandher the same evening, but cancelled his journey, so as to enjoy a few more hours of Mataji's company and remained at Khanna overnight. He felt that to have met Mataji was a unique and momentous event in his life.

Dīvali & Annakut at Vrindaban

From Khanna Mataji motored to Delhi on October 24th and left for Vrindaban the same afternoon in time for the *Dīvali* festival. The Minister of Agriculture for U. P., Sri J. P. Rawat, who had met Mataji first at the *Kumbh Mela* and again during Her birthday celebrations at Almora, was eager to arrange for a celebration of *Annakut* in Mataji's presence at Govardhan. People had already gathered from far and near, when at the 11th hour he himself was compelled to cancel the function due to the sudden death of Minister Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. He expressed his regret by phone and later in person. *Annakut* was therefore observed at Vrindaban.

Short visits to Delhi, Meerut, Karanvas

On Nov. 5th Mataji proceeded to Delhi from where She made a short trip to Meerut on the 6th, returning to Delhi on the 7th, and going to Karanvas on the 8th. Some years ago Swami Nirmalanandaji, a *sannyāsi* of repute, had requested Her to visit his beautiful Ashram on the banks of the Ganges at Karanvas. Mataji stayed there for one night and the Swamiji in his turn passed the following day at Mataji's Ashram at Chandraloka, New Delhi. On Nov. 12th Mataji went back to Vrindaban from where She took the train to Bombay on the 13th, alighting there on the 14th.

morning. The *Samyam Mahavrata* had been fixed for Nov. 18th to 24th.

4th Samyam Mahavrata at Bombay

Ever since Sri S. N. Sopori, a devotee of Mataji, had been transferred to Bombay, as Chief Executive of the Associated Cement Companies, he had been trying to persuade Mataji to bless this city with a longer visit than the usual two or three days. When his proposal to celebrate Her last birthday there did not materialize, he offered to arrange for *Samyam Vrata* in November. Many of us shook our heads, puzzled at his enterprise and courage. How could a secluded place large enough for such a function be found in an overcrowded city like Bombay!

At first the Lakshmi Narayan Temple at Santa Cruz was thought of as a suitable site for the Satsang, while visitors were to be distributed at various places round about. But the hall was found far too small for the purpose and besides there was the problem of space to cook in and to take meals. The situation looked none too hopeful when about a fortnight before the function was to begin, Sri Sopori approached Sri B. K. Shah, then the General Manager of New India Assurance who fortunately knew a way out of the difficulty. He very kindly offered to make available two beautiful bungalows situated in a palmgrove directly on the sea beach at Juhu. They had been lying vacant for 5 or 6 years due to some litigation, and happened to be at the disposal of one of his friends. It is true, the palmgrove had grown into a regular jungle and moreover there had been a murder in or near the compound a few months before, the body of the victim having been found in a tank on the estate. The houses were known as "bhoot bungalows"* and people felt afraid to go near them after dusk.

However Sri Shah at once deputed a contractor to cut down the jungle and see to all the necessary repairs. The bungalows, although well-built and comfortable, with mosaic flooring,

* bhoot—ghost.

several good bathrooms, etc., were in a sorely neglected condition. It seemed quite a miracle to put them into working order in the course of a few days and in addition to this to construct a room for Mataji on the roof of one of the bungalows, as She will not enter a house where families have lived. The room was beautiful and comfortable although it consisted chiefly of cardboard and matting, the materials having been procured from a film studio. A pandal for satsang measuring 75×100 ft. was erected, tastefully decorated and fitted up with lights, loudspeakers, etc. — in fact everything was thought out and provided for in a truly perfect manner. A few flats had also been rented in the close vicinity, and thus the unbelievable actually happened: in the outskirts of the congested city which was suffering from acute shortage of accommodation, about 100 visitors were put up without crowding, enjoying comforts they had never expected, besides a wonderful view over the open sea and lofty palmtrees overhead, swaying in the gentle, cool breeze.

It is no exaggeration to say that the place was ideal. Many of us were soon secretly wishing we could stay on even after the *Samyam Week*, when lo and behold, Mataji actually extended Her sojourn up to Dec. 4th night, instead of leaving on Nov. 25th as originally contemplated. Although on the first day Mataji did see a shadowy human form hovering about, which might well have been the ghost of the murdered man, the haunted place turned out to be an abode of happiness, harmony and peace, quite like an Ashram.

Many things that happened around Mataji had a deep significance and the places specially connected with Her were often found to have a remarkable history. To mention only a few examples: Just recently the remains of a majestic temple about 1000 years old were excavated at the very gate of Mataji's Ashram at Vindhyachal. It is now believed that this was most probably the original temple of Sri Vindhyavasini Devi, which had been destroyed during the Mohammedan invasion, centuries ago, whereas the new temple is about two miles away.

Those who have read Bhajji's book "Mother as Revealed to Me" will call to mind that the Dhaka Ashram was built on a site where, as Mataji had told Bhajji, some *samnyāsīs* had lived long ago and he himself had been one of them. Actually bones and skeletons were unearthed when the foundations of the Ashram temple were dug.

When digging the ground on which the Varanasi Ashram stands, two beautifully carved *Śiva Linga* came to light, which are now kept in the Annapurna Temple of the Ashram.

In Bombay Mataji was heard to say : "Do you think it is by mere chance that this function is being held here and in no other spot ?" The whole function was a great success in every respect.

Sri Haribabaji, Sri Krishnanandaji Avadhuta, Sri Swatantranandaji, Sri Chakrapaniji and the *Mahant* and *Samnyāsīs* of the Vile Parle Samnyasa Ashram, were present and gave illuminating and inspiring discourses. The last item of the daily programme 'Conversation with Mataji' was no doubt the most popular one. Although Juhu is about 12 miles distance from the heart of the city, often 20-30 cars were parked in the compound, while the greater part of the congregation came by train and bus.

Samyam Vrata was observed simultaneously in all Sri Anandamayi Ashrams. Reports were also received from a great number of devotees who had kept the *Samyam Vrata* in their own homes, many of them choosing Class A for their diet, taking delight in submitting to the Spartan regime, as they derived great benefit from it. Amongst other things it gave them an opportunity of freeing themselves from old habits such as smoking, chewing pan, drinking tea, etc.

From the outset the Bombay bhaktas had been eager to arrange for a *Bhāgavata Saptah* to follow the *Samyam Vrata*. Nothing had been decided. At the urgent request of the *Mahant* and the *samnyāsīs* of the Vile Parle Samnyāsa Ashram, (where Mataji had stayed two years before) the *Bhāgavata Saptah* was held at the Samnyāsa Ashram. Everyone remained

at Juhu where the morning and evening satsang was continued, but every afternoon Mataji used to be present at Vile Parle for the Hindi exposition of the Srimad Bhāgavata.

Bhimpura Ashram

On Dec. 4th Mataji travelled to Bhimpura. The Ashram there is in a beautiful, secluded spot near Chandod, in Baroda District, on an elevation at the apex of the bend of the river, with a wonderful view of the surrounding hills. The river Narmada is supposed to be as holy as the Ganges. Since ancient times many *sādhakas* and saints have practised austerities along its banks. Some of us went by boat to see the places where the Rishis Sukadeva and Vyasa are said to have resided, and at Vyasa we were shown the room where many years before the Ashram was built, Mataji had spent some time.

At present also there are a number of other Ashrams in the vicinity. Mahātmās and Mahants came daily to see Mataji and in turn invited Her and Her party to their own places. The villagers of Bhimpura are Bheels, a tribe who practise an original kind of kirtan which they combine with the playing of cymbals and with rhythmic movements of the whole body. Every evening they came and performed in the Ashram hall and on the last day the whole of the village, men, women and children were invited for dinner.

Whenever Mataji visited Bhimpura Her bhaktas from Rajpipla (a town close by) would leave their homes in order to camp in the Ashram grounds and act as extremely generous and attentive hosts to anyone who happened to come. On those occasions the place, usually so solitary, teemed with life.

Bhagavata Saptah at Ahmedabad

On Dec. 10th Mataji journeyed to Ahmedabad, putting up as usual in a specially constructed room in the garden of Sri K. C. Munshaw who always made excellent arrangements for Her and Her party. This time a *Bhāgavata Saptah* was held in Gujarati in commemoration of his mother who had recently

passed away. The spacious, beautifully decorated pandal could not hold the audience and had to be enlarged during the second half of the week. Mataji used to be present for about an hour each at both the morning and afternoon sessions. She also accepted invitations to several Ashrams, schools and private homes in Ahmedabad. The night of Dec. 20th and the following day were spent at the house of another very old devotee, Sri Mukund Madhav Thakur. At the kirtan in his garden, Mataji delighted the large audience by singing for quite a long time.

Short Visit to Bhopal

The next night Mataji entrained for Bhopal, where She was the guest of the I.G.P., Sri S. N. Aga, an old devotee. Her very short visit of one night and half a day was extraordinarily well organized and made the most of. All the state officials from the Nawab, the Chief Minister and Chief Commissioner down to the last constable came to pay homage to Mataji. On the morning of December 23rd, She was taken round the city and received with due honours at the residences of the Nawab and of every one of the chief officers.

Gita Jayanti at Varanasi

On Dec. 24th She arrived in Varanasi after an absence of over three months. From Dec. 26th-30th the *Gita Jayanti* was celebrated by Sri Gopal Thakur, who every year used to come from Allahabad for this occasion.

History of Rajgir

On Jan. 5th, 1955 Mataji left for Rajgir, where a small Ashram consisting of two rooms had only just been built. The day before Mataji's arrival *Griha Pravesh Pūjā** had been duly performed.

Rajgir, formerly known as Rajagriha, now a small town about 50 miles from Patna in Bihar, was long ago one of the six chief cities of India, and at the time of Lord Buddha's

* Ceremonial inauguration of a new house.

Mahānirvāna had 18 large monasteries. Lord Buddha went to Rajagriha after renouncing and again soon after Enlightenment. King Bimbisara entertained Him and His monks at the palace and gifted Veluvana to the order. It is said that Lord Buddha spent several rainy seasons there and also one winter and one summer. After His *Mahānirvāna* the King collected various relics and built a large Stupa over them.

Rajgir is also well-known for its hot springs that have cured many from all sorts of rheumatic pains, skin diseases and other ailments.

One of the extraordinary things about Mataji was that She hardly ever had a bath, generally not more than two or three times a year. At Rajgir however She bathed in the hot springs on three nights.

Sri Haribaba's functions for Didi's health

On Jan. 17th Mataji returned to Varanasi. Mention has been made of Didi Gurupriya Devi's ill-health. Sri Haribabaji Maharaj who had deep sympathy for the suffering of others, had been showing much concern at her indisposition. Being a great saint, he believed in God's Name as the panacea for all evils including illnesses, and was anxious to effect or at least speed up Didi's cure in this way. Already at Vrindaban he had induced his followers to arrange for special kirtans and the reading of scriptures with this purpose in view. At his advice the Chandi was chanted a hundred times (*Śata Chandi Pāṭha*) by ten Brahmins at the Chandi Mandap of the Varanasi Ashram from Jan. 19th to 29th, followed by a *yajña* on the 30th. Sri Haribabaji came in person from Bombay and stayed for about seven days. He was present when a new function for Didi's health was started on the 31st, namely *Rudrābhisheka* recited by twelve Brahmins for eleven days, followed by another *yajña* on February 11th.

On Jan. 27th Mataji motored to Allahabad for two nights and a day, to be present at the *Saraswati Pūjā* on Vasant *Panchami* day. She went to Vindhychal on February 12th for three days.

Sīvarātri at Varanasi

As we had hoped, Mataji again gave us the inspiration of Her presence during *Śivarātri* at the Varanasi Ashram. The festival fell on the 20th of February. The arrangements this time were more or less similar to last year's. Yet where Mataji was, mechanical repetition found no place, everything that was done or happened was always new and a living experience. Several distinguished guests who had come from Allahabad, Lucknow and other places, joined in the observances with enthusiasm. To their surprise they discovered that in an atmosphere surcharged with divine aspiration, peace and joy, it is no hardship to forgo eating, drinking and sleeping. For those who had spent longer or shorter periods near Mataji it was nothing new that in Her presence one's need of food, sleep and physical comforts decreased to a remarkable degree. On occasions such as *Śivarātri* this became even more evident. The injunction for this festival, if carried out to the full, demands that one should have a day's complete fast without a drop of water and at night-fall sit down for worship without ever leaving one's *āsana* until the next morning after sunrise, when the *sandhya* (daily worship at dawn) is joined to the *pūjās* of the night. Many who took part in the celebrations, some of them old people of indifferent health, were able to achieve this feat naturally and easily, without feeling any strain or weakness either at the time or afterwards. Such days convince us of the supremacy of the Divine in man and bring about a radical change of our values; we begin to wonder why we spend so much time, thought and energy on the things that matter so little, as for instance bodily needs and comforts.

In the early hours of the morning on February 23rd Mataji left by car for Jhusi, where She stayed for the rest of the day at Sri Prabhudatt Brahmachari's Ashram and the following night at Allahabad. At 3 a.m. on the 24th She took the train to Vrindaban.

Consecration of Nitai Gauranga Temple

The Vrindaban Ashram was comparatively new. Only in March 1954 it had been opened ceremonially in the presence of Mataji, Sri Haribabaji Maharaj and many *saṁnyāsīs*, *sādhus* and devotees.

Some time ago Manohar, one of Sri Haribabaji's disciples, suggested to Mataji that it would be a good idea to erect a temple for Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (Lord Gauranga) in the spacious grounds of the new Vrindaban Ashram. When soon after someone donated Rs. 5000/- for Mataji's service, She remarked: "Why not start building the shrine for Mahaprabhu with this sum?" About a year ago the construction was begun, but for lack of funds the temple remained without a dome until last November. When a devotee expressed his wish to present electric fans for each room of the Vrindaban Ashram, Didi objected: "Should we make the Ashram so luxurious? Would you not rather spend the money on the new temple?" The generous donor at once agreed and the building work could be resumed.

Now the *vigraha* had still to be procured. Didi wondered whether Dr. Pannalal, who happened to be at Vrindaban, could not be approached on the subject. But Mataji cut her short, saying: "This body never asks anyone for anything." The next day, however, most surprisingly Dr. Pannalal of his own initiative sought and obtained Mataji's permission to take on himself the responsibility for getting the sculptures made. He thereupon commissioned an eminent artist of Calcutta, Sri Nitai Pal, to carve statues of Lord Gauranga and Sri Nityananda. The consecration of the temple had been fixed for March 8th, *Holi*, at midday and the sculptor himself brought his creation to Vrindaban, arriving there on the 5th. Everyone was amazed and delighted at the sight of the wonderful pieces of art. From the beginning they seemed alive. It is no exaggeration to state that they are among the most beautiful *vigrahas* of Vrindaban.

"Due to Haribabaji's great devotion and his kīrtan, Mahaprabhu has manifested Himself in this shape", declared Mataji.

She also mentioned that some people had told Her how very congenial they found the Vrindaban Ashram for meditation and *sādhana* in general.

For the consecration of the temple all the Goswamis and Mahātmās of Vrindaban were invited and many of them came. Needless to say, Sri Haribabaji and his party were present. A large number of devotees had gathered from far and near and there was great rejoicing.

The next morning Dr. Pannalal requested Mataji to take part in the *Holi* play, as She had done in former years. Mataji said: "What do you want me to do?" Dr. Pannalal had a '*pichkari*' (syringe) and '*abhir*' and '*gulāl*' (coloured powder) all ready, in the hope that Mataji would come out into the open and start the play. Mataji was at the time in the room of Didi, who was still ailing and unable to leave her bed. She was however in very good spirits and one could often hear her laugh and joke. "Why not begin right here?" she suggested. The response was instantaneous. Mataji squirted the first lot of coloured water on Didi. The frolics continued in the sickroom for quite a while. When Mataji at last came outside, the crowd round Her swelled rapidly and Sri Prabhudatt Brahmachari too joined in the fun. As usual on these occasions people not only felt elated, but forgetting their age, their self-importance, their preoccupations and worries, enjoyed themselves like happy, carefree children. "Look at Dr. Pannalal", Mataji called out jokingly, "does he look like a man of 72?" All present went to the new temple where Mataji blessed them by putting *abhir* on the forehead of each one. A day or two later a feast was given to about 500 mahātmās and *sādhus*.

Mataji Hurts Her Big Toe

From the outset Mataji had been expected to remain at Vrindaban for about a month. Subsequently Her stay was prolonged till April 11th, but Her departure had to be postponed once more. On March 31st, as Mataji was walking

down the steps from the new hall, She slipped and fell, hurting one of Her big toes. Some doctors even suspected a slight fracture and an X-ray picture was therefore taken at the hospital. In any case Mataji had to take a rest from walking for several days. "It all happened through the grace of Mahāprabhu", She remarked with Her ever radiant smile.

Mataji was free of any karma. Accidents and illnesses therefore not only did not disturb Her in the least, but they also had quite another significance than in the case of ordinary mortals. From what we observed we came to the conclusion that whenever Mataji got hurt, it was to save someone from a fatal or at any rate very serious accident. It also happened on various occasions that sick persons who met Mataji were cured, while the symptoms of their illness appeared on Her body for a very short time. There were however no rules about anything concerning Mataji and we could only surmise.

Didi and most of Mataji's party left on the 11th for Delhi en route to Solan, whereas Mataji remained in Vrindaban for a few more days. She started on the 20th April for Solan, where Her birthday was celebrated from May 3rd to 11th.

* * *

Mataji often said that She was always the same, that no changes existed for Her, that She never went anywhere, never did anything. For Her there was no birth and no death and hence no birthday. But for us Her birth, Her advent into this world, is of the utmost importance — in fact nothing that might happen can stand any comparison with the magnitude of this event. Divine love, flawless, immaculate assumed a body and was walking the earth. What greater miracle is there than this? If only we could awaken to the full significance of it, if only we could be aware of it at every moment of our lives — would our petty personalities have a chance to continue? It is well therefore that every year we should celebrate Mataji's birthday as we do by intense and profound rejoicing, by a searching of our hearts, by uninterrupted *satsang*, worship, meditation, *kirtan*, wherever possible for

several days or weeks, or at least throughout the one night which is the anniversary of Her birth.

Let us all unite and pray to Mataji with one voice that we may become worthy of this Ocean of Heavenly Light that had crystallized into the shape of a human body to irradiate the darkness of the world of men; that we may be granted the capacity to celebrate this ineffable wonder not once a year, not once a month or once a day, but ceaselessly, with every breath of our life, with heart and soul and mind and body; that thereby we may be transformed into what we really are, for all times to come and in eternity.

At Solan for 2½ months comprising Birthday celebrations and Guru Purnima Reminiscences about Solan

During the last 15 months it had happened three times that Mataji remained in one place for two or two and a half months: in Almora in summer 1954, in Vrindaban from February to April and in Solan from April 24th to July 11th, 1955.

Solan is a place which played a comparatively prominent part in Mataji's *Lila*. Leaving Bengal in 1932, She first stayed in Raipur (Dehradun) with Bholanath and Bhaiji. The very next place outside of Bengal that She chose for Her abode in spring 1934 was a cave at Salogra, about 5 miles from Solan, just below the car-road to Simla. She Herself gave us an amusing description of how She sat in the one dry spot in a cave not big enough to lie in, with rain-water streaming down all round Her, while Bhaiji was occupying the outer chamber, equally wet, if slightly more spacious, when suddenly the Raja of Baghat State, Solan turned up in a car. This was the Raja's first darshan of Mataji. He was amazed to find Her perfectly happy and unconcerned in such surroundings.

The cave was later repaired and made waterproof, a temple built near it and a proper path leading to it. Mataji said it had been changed out of recognition.

The Raja tried to persuade Mataji to move to Solan, but She smilingly declared She was all right wherever She was.

Several days later however She did visit Solan. Quite a famous old sādhu was then residing there, named Shogibaba, who was reputed for his bad temper, for scolding, abusing and even threatening to beat people who ventured to approach him. Although, if in spite of these provocations they persisted, he became friendly.

When Mataji expressed a wish to call on the strange mahātmā, both Bhaiji and the Raja felt rather apprehensive. But Mataji would have Her way. However, to everyone's surprise the sādhu welcomed Mataji with the utmost joy and reverence, in fact he seemed all courtesy and sweetness.

Mataji greeted him, saying; "Pitaji, your child has come," upon which he at once offered Her a special carpet to sit on and began a most amiable conversation with the words: "I hold you in great love and respect."

The Raja and the Rani of Solan, profoundly impressed by Mataji, became Her sincere devotees. Mataji afterwards visited Solan many times. In summer 1946 for instance She spent over a month and a half there, including *Guru Purnimā*. The Durga Club was then put at Her disposal.

During the morning satsang, Sri Haribabaji Maharaj used to read from the lives of saints. One day he announced that he would next take up Bhaiji's "Matri Darshan". To read out and discuss the story of someone's life in his presence was quite unheard of. Mataji did not come. Sri Haribabaji waited for a long time, everyone sitting in silence and suspense. Finally he sent a messenger humbly soliciting Mataji's presence. She first declined, but suddenly rose with a start. "What is the difference whether the story of this body is read out or anyone else's? I am coming!"

Sri Haribabaji would interrupt his reading by innumerable questions. Keeping reserved to begin with, Mataji gradually responded more and more freely. Spell-bound we listened to Her inspiring narrations of incidents from Her early life, especially to Her truly breath-taking descriptions of the various

*sādhana*s that manifested through Her body. Those mornings will ever remain unforgettable.

Again in summer 1952 at Solan, when Sri Krishnanandaji Avadhuta used to put questions, Mataji had favoured us with many fascinating reminiscences from Her life She had never disclosed before.

But never even at Solan, it seemed to us, had Mataji been so communicative as this summer. Not only did She delight all by frequently leading the kirtan and by relating incidents from the past, but She also gave an extraordinary amount of teaching on a vast variety of subjects. Often She would reply to questions mornings, afternoons and evenings. People from all over India as well as westerners from many walks of life voiced their problems, which gave rise to really enlightening and sometimes very detailed discourses by Mataji.*

During *Durga Pūjā* in October 1946, Mataji had for the first time occupied the charming and comfortable Ashram which the Raja and his wife had built for Her just below their palace, facing a large unused tennis-court. The broad verandas on two sides of the Ashram provided a very suitable site for satsang.

The elevation at the east-end of the tennis-court put up for the image of Durga in 1946, had been kept enclosed and protected ever since. Mataji's couch was placed on it during the recent birthday celebrations and a waterproof tin-shed built round it, which was beautifully draped and decorated. Between it and the paved path in front of the Ashram was a large pandal.

The length of the period of the birthday celebrations varies from year to year, subject to astronomical calculations. This time it was barely one week, May 4th-11th. Untimely rains set in on May 3rd, continuing unabated and culminating in a violent thunderstorm on the night of the final puja. The pandal could not stay the torrential rain, the carpets got soaked and



* See: 'As the Flower Sheds Its Fragrance', Part II. "Satsang in Solan", P. 85-110.



submerged in a muddy puddle. These outer disturbances only heightened the spirit of pervading joy and harmony. Perhaps we were to have an object lesson of the inclemencies of the weather. During the long night-watch, in spite of the cold wind and rain, many remained in the less flooded areas of the pandal, families huddled together with remarkable patience in the face of considerable discomfort, others watching from the Ashram veranda. After the Pūjā, Mataji was carried to Her room on a chair. Utterly still, She seemed transfigured with the shining radiance of a celestial being. People stood silent as if stunned with awe by such beauty.

A Punjabi lady who was sitting in the pandal, suddenly had a clear vision of Mataji sitting on a lion as the Universal Mother (*Jagaddhātṛī*). She fell unconscious and had to be carried to the veranda of the Ashram.

Mataji afterwards praised the Raja's staff who were putting up again and again decorations that had been knocked down or spoiled by wind and rain. "This is as it should be", She said, "let the rain do its work, you do yours. After all no serious damage was done. Suppose the lights had gone out or the pandal had been blown away! The only trouble was that you had no place where you could sit comfortably."

Mataji related to us how, many years ago at Dhaka, a severe rainstorm during Her birthday celebrations had induced people to pray to Her to stop the bad weather, instead of which Mataji, followed by many, ran out into the rain, merrily singing kirtan. She splashed rainwater with both hands on the few who preferred to remain under shelter to protect their clothes. So they had no alternative but to join the others. Later She asked everyone to receive *prasāda* by holding out a piece of their dhotis, since the ground was flooded and food could not be served on leaf-plates in the normal way. Finally She led the party to a tank where everyone had a good swim. When laughing and shrieking with delight they returned to the Ashram, the sky had cleared up.

As usual a great number of visitors arrived from far and near. The hospitality of the Raja, (whom Mataji had named "Yogiraj" and Yogibhai") and of his people was outstanding and we wish to express our deep appreciation for the trouble they took to secure our comforts. Everyone felt at home at Solan.

The observances during the week were more or less similar to last year's birthday celebrations. Perpetual japa was kept up besides satsang and kirtan. Over and above, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Durga Saptah Śati* were being chanted for several hours daily in different parts of the Ashram. On the 6th of May there was *Nāma kirtan* for 24 hours. On the 9th of May 108 *kumārīs* (small girls aged between 6 and 10) were given a feast. As they sat down in rows on the Ashram veranda, Mataji appeared and took Her seat with them. Pink silk scarves were distributed among the children and Mataji also put on a similar one. She was served food along with the *kumārīs* on leaf-plates and fed a little of it. Later She got up and approached a tiny girl. Mataji opened Her mouth and the little kid, without any hesitation, with her left hand took a morsel from her own leaf-plate and put it into Mataji's mouth. All present took immense delight in Mataji's playful childlike mood.

Another day when the *Daridra Nārāyaṇa* (the Lord in the guise of the poor) were invited for a meal, two hillmen turned up with a dog. Mataji remarked, referring to the dog: "It is difficult for people to know which mahātmā has come in what guise to partake of the feast." Thereupon the two men with the dog feeding between them were entertained along with the others.

On June 30th one day's *Samyam Vrata* was observed. Many decided to continue the practice in their own homes on the first Thursday of every month.

On July 5th *Guru Pūrṇimā* was celebrated in a most beautiful, quiet and dignified manner. Right through the morning pūjā Mataji sat straight and still, with Her eyes shut,

as if absorbed in deep *samādhi*. In the afternoon She sang kirtan for a whole hour. We all felt specially blessed that day.

The Governor of Himachal Pradesh, Raja of Bhadri, and other officials, as well as Rajas and Ranis of neighbouring states, came to pay their respects to Mataji.

In connection with the visit of Sri Shiv Dutt Upadhyaya, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's private secretary, who came from Simla, Mataji related how the late Kamala Nehru, wife of Pandit Jawaharlal had had her first darshan of Mataji at Dehradun. Mataji was then known only to a few in U. P. No Ashram had been built for Her except the one at Dhaka. When Mataji stayed at Ananda Chowk (Dehradun) in 1933 or so, Mrs. Nehru would arrive after night-fall and leave before dawn, so as to remain unrecognized. She used to have very deep meditation in Mataji's presence, her body becoming stiff. Sri Upadhyaya would sit and prevent the ants from crawling up on her. She loved and admired Mataji so much that she once said, if Mataji permitted, she would some day give up her political work with Gandhiji and remain with Mataji.

In the beginning of Mataji's stay at Solan Her foot that had been injured at Vrindaban still needed rest, but after a few weeks She resumed Her usual evening strolls up and down the paved path in front of the Ashram. During that hour She would as a rule distribute sweets or fruits received during the day. One day a dog came, insisting on getting into Her way in spite of all attempts to chase it away. Mataji said, "Give him some sweets." The next day 'Moti' came again. Mataji gave him a double share of *rasagullas*. Since then Moti turned up regularly to the last day of Her stay. Mataji was quite evidently lavishing Her grace on the animal. Someone asked, "Ma, who is Moti really?" "Perhaps it is Toma who has returned. Toma was a dog Bholanath kept at Bajitpur when this body was engaged in the play of *sādhana*."

On July 11th, to everyone's sincere regret, the wonderful days at Solan came to an end. On the 12th morning Mataji arrived at the Kishenpur Ashram. Her stay there was however interrupted by a trip to Hardwar from 18th-20th July. On the 25th evening She proceeded to Delhi en route to Vrindaban.

Reminiscences from Ma's Childhood

In Kishenpur there is a large orchard called 'Kalyanvan' belonging to the Ashram. There, two mangoes of a peculiar oblong shape and peculiar colouring, a mixture of pink and yellow, as if made of clay were brought to Mataji's notice. She narrated the following: In Her childhood the villagers used to perform pūjā on the 1st of *Vaisakh* (the Bengali New Year), offering mangoes. Mataji asked Her mother why no such pūjā was observed in their home. "On our mango-trees there are no ripe mangoes", replied Didima. She also forbade her little daughter to pick fruits from other people's trees or cause them to fall down by throwing stones. When Mataji went to bath in the village tank that morning She saw a lovely ripe mango high up on top of a tree. "If this mango fell down we could offer it at pūjā." No sooner had this *kheyāla* come to Her than the mango dropped down. Mataji picked it up and brought it to Her mother, who at once enquired how it had been procured. On being satisfied with Mataji's explanation, Didima offered the fruit at pūjā. It was the same peculiar variety as the two mangoes at Kalyanvan described above. Mataji remarked that in all Her life She had come across this type of mango only on one other occasion, also in Her childhood.

One afternoon Didima meant to give mangoes to her children, but to her disappointment there were none in her store. When a little later Mataji went out to collect some plants that are used as a vegetable, She discovered a mango of that same extraordinary variety lying among the plants, although no mango-tree was anywhere near. Didima was glad to divide the fruit among her children. It was of a delicious

flavour as if it were heavenly fruit. Didima therefore wanted to plant its stone, but it could not be found anywhere.

At Dehradun Mataji once said: "At Bajitpur, when this body was playing the play of *sāadhanā*, a Gopal used to move about with me. Who can tell whether it was not the same Gopal who is now in the Varanasi Ashram?"

Is it not remarkable that within a few days Mataji should have mentioned three things from Her early *līlā* that had appeared again: the dog, the mysterious variety of mangoes and Gopal. We could only record the fact — Mataji knew their significance.

Jhulan and Janmastami at Vrindaban

For the last several years Mataji had spent *Jhulan* and *Janmastami* at Varanasi. Again and again bhaktas at Vrindaban had clamoured for Her presence there during those festivals. At last their wish was fulfilled. Mataji reached Vrindaban on July 29th. The *Jhulan* celebrations as customary started on *Ekādasi*, July 30th, and *Jhulan Pūrṇimā* was observed most solemnly by āratī, kirtan and a long midnight meditation. It is the anniversary of the memorable fullmoon night on August 3rd, 1922, when Mataji all by Herself went through the actions of a spiritual initiation (*dīkṣā*). She Herself was the Guru, the mantra and the *Iṣṭa*. Some time before this happened, the *kheyāla* had come to Her to play the role of an aspirant for Self-realization. Thereupon the different stages of a *sādhaka*, namely the intense yearning for God or Truth, the finding of the Guru and initiation, then the performance of various *sāadhanās* under His guidance — (the Guru was also Herself) spontaneously manifested through Her body with a perfection quite beyond human imagination. During that period of Her life all the 24 hours were spent in *sāadhanā*, She hardly ate or slept. Not that *sāadhanā* was necessary for Her in any way — there was nothing to be attained — it was just part of Her *Līlā* and Her *Līlā* was invariably self-sprung action manifesting for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Jhūlan means 'swing festival'. When this year at Vrindaban the swing was fixed in Didima's room next to the hall, some birds' nests had to be removed from the ventilators. Two baby birds fell down. They died during the kirtan at the time of fullmoon in Mataji's presence in holy Vrindaban — a rare combination of auspicious factors. After the function the fortunate little birds were given *samādhi* under a young mango plant in the compound.

Vrindaban is the place where Sri Krishna spent His childhood, where the *Rāsaliḷā* took place, the Divine love-play between Him and Radha, between Him and the gopis. Every tree, every stone is associated with sacred memories. There is a saying that many mahātmās live in Vrindaban in the guise of stones, trees, plants, birds, reptiles or animals, just to enjoy the atmosphere of the blessed town.

Somewhere in the Ashram grounds in front of the sādhu kutias there was a large white stone. In spring 1955, a strange incident took place: During one of Mataji's evening strolls a devotee from Gujarat suddenly saw a man appear and do *prāṇāma* to Mataji. She stopped and folded Her hands as She usually did and the devotee heard Her say: "Oh, in the shape of a stone!" She walked on and the devotee could clearly see the human figure disappear into the stone. When later he asked Mataji about it, She said: "You have also seen Him?"

The Vrindaban Ashram was built only recently (the inauguration took place in March 1954), yet it quickly developed and gained in importance. Mataji favoured it with frequent short and long visits. Situated near the entrance of Vrindaban on the main road to Mathura, it naturally attracts attention. The plot of land on which it stands measures approximately 8 bighas. It was planned to cultivate on it every species of the trees mentioned in the Bhāgavata, so as to evoke the memory of ancient Vrindaban.

A one-room cottage for a *sādhaka* and a new cow-shed were ceremonially opened on *Janmastami* day (Aug. 10th 1955); Mataji Herself fed the cows.

Later that day She visited Brahmanda Ghat at Gokul, the famous spot where Jashoda Mai is said to have ordered her child Sri Krishna to open His mouth, suspecting that he was eating earth — and wonder of wonders — she beheld the whole universe in it.

Throughout Mataji's stay at Vrindaban, bhaktas kept on arriving from far and near. On several occasions large numbers of the Samnyāsīs, Goswamis and Vaishnavites of the town were entertained at the Ashram.

Visits to Gwalior, Mainpuri, Etawah, Kanpur, Allahabad

From August 14th-17th Mataji's sojourn was interrupted by four days spent in Gwalior at the invitation of Maharani Vijaya Raje Scindia; it was a most enjoyable trip.

On Sept. 10th Mataji left by car for Mainpuri, where She was accommodated at the Sri Ekarasananda Ashram. About two furlongs before reaching Her destination, devotees came to receive Her. She was requested to get into a bullock-cart which bhaktas themselves drew. At the Ashram the students of the Vidyapith performed *Sūrya Namaskāra* before Mataji and then *Sandhya*, *Havan* and *Āratī* before the statue of Sri Ekarasananda.

On Sept. 12th Mataji proceeded to Etawah. Here also She was welcomed most enthusiastically by a large gathering of people from Etawah and other towns and villages of U. P. In the course of Her stay She visited, among other places, Sri Sivaji temple, where She had once stayed, in 1950 and where perpetual kirtan was being performed this time. She was also taken to the spot where about 20 years ago She twice spent some time in *ajñāta vāsa* (incognito).

From 15th-17th Sept. Mataji blessed Kanpur with Her presence. As at Etawah She followed invitations to the compounds of various devotees. Satsang was held in a Girls' College and on the roof of Her host's house.

On the 17th Mataji entrained for Allahabad. For the last few years She had always been present at a ceremony connected with the forthcoming *Durga Pūjā* at Sri Gopal Thakur's Ashram. He himself having in the meantime passed into *Mahāsamādhi*, Mataji this year accepted the invitation of his family.

Bhagavata Jayanti at Varanasi

On Sept. 20th Mataji reached Varanasi after an absence of full six months. A tremendous ovation was accorded to Her by a great number of bhaktas. A kirtan party received Her on the main road and triumphantly led the way to the Ashram which was decorated with special care and wore a truly festive appearance. Flower petals were showered on Mataji as She approached. She responded to the deep joy of the Ashramites at having Her once again in their midst by giving darshan for several hours that evening. During the annual celebration of the *Bhāgavata Jayanti*, which took place from Sept. 24th-Oct. 2nd, Mataji was present daily throughout the Hindi discourses, mornings and afternoons. Occasional heavy storms and rainshowers failed to create disturbance.

Matri Lila in foreign countries

Foreigners hailing from Germany, Italy, France, Hungary, Mauritius and Israel came for Mataji's darshan and some of them to talk to Her. It is not possible to say how many bhaktas there are all over the world and in what way Mataji chose to reveal Herself to them and still does so, even after taking *mahāsamādhi*. To our own surprise letters are received occasionally not only from Europe and America, but also from such out-of-the-way places as British West Indies, British Cameroons, the Gold Coast in Africa, the Isle of Bali, etc., enquiring about Mataji, full of eagerness and burning interest. Although She never travelled beyond Cape Comorin in the South and Mount Kailash in the North, there is now undeniable evidence that She lived and still lives in

the hearts of many devotees in Australia, China and Japan as well as in Europe, the two Americas and Africa.

Is it not thought-provoking when, as it once happened, a European lady came for Mataji's darshan and told us : "It is exactly ten years to the day that I first heard about Mataji. She has been an inspiration to me ever since, in fact it was She who gave me my first spiritual impulse." Or when a gentleman, who is obviously a very serious seeker after Truth, said : "The moment I heard about Sri Anandamayi Ma when still in Europe, I felt that I must contact Her."

Perhaps it is not out of place to quote here what an Indian devotee wrote home when she had all by herself gone to foreign countries on an educational trip.

"Ma has always been in my thoughts. I do not think I have ever thought of Her or relied upon Her as much as I have done during the last few months. I feel very strongly that She has been guiding and helping me all along. There have been such almost miraculous incidents. Just when I felt everything was uncertain and I was apprehensive of what might happen, a helping hand was stretched out from the dark. Help came from the most unexpected quarters. I feel so humble when I think of this all-protective, all-guiding Power which envelopes one on every side—I have never thrown myself upon It so much as I have done now and never have I profited more than now. And yet one feels so stupidly frightened and so stupidly proud."

A devotee who suddenly had to undergo a major operation in a foreign country of the Far East wrote : "I was thinking so intensely of Ma, it never occurred to me to feel nervous or afraid. I was completely unconcerned when the doctors and nurses prepared for the operation."

On returning from the U.S.A. where a devotee had met with unusually adverse and depressing circumstances in which he seemed caught for the rest of his life, he said : "I have never felt Mataji nearer than at that time. There seemed to be no way out of the difficulty. I had already resigned myself

to it, when somehow the whole trouble resolved itself and I found myself free to return to the life I wanted to live. To this day however I cannot understand how this could have been made possible."

These are only a few stray examples. Yet, just as a sailor knows that land must be near when he notices a blade of straw floating on the water, so do we feel justified in surmising that we can have no idea of the magnitude and universality of Mataji's līlā.

* * *

After a stay of twelve days at Varanasi Mataji motored to Vindhyachal on October 3rd, returning to Varanasi on the 6th. On Oct. 7th, the anniversary of Sri Akhandanandaji's *Mahā-samādhi*, a feast was given as usual to *Saṁnyāsīs* and Brahmanas.

On Oct. 8th Mataji quite unexpectedly left for Bombay, where She put up in a special structure in the garden of Sri B. K. Shah at Vile Parle. Sri Gurupriya Devi had been in Bombay for treatment ever since leaving Solan in July. She accompanied Mataji to Calcutta, arriving there on Oct. 19th.

FOUR

(October 1955 — October 1956)

Durga Puja at Calcutta

Durga Pūjā is the most important religious festival in Bengal. Apart from being observed in every family, it has in recent years become the custom for whole localities to join in community celebrations. During this season the entire city is in a festive mood for many days.

Devotees from Calcutta had come to Solan beseeching Mataji to be present at Calcutta during *Durga Pūjā*. In an open space in Lake Road in South Calcutta a very large pandal was erected and elaborately decorated. From every corner of the city huge crowds flocked for Mataji's darshan, not to speak of the many devotees who had come from outside. On *Saptami* day torrential rain played havoc, but the emergency was met immediately by covering the floor with wooden planks and platforms, so that everyone could sit in the dry. It luckily cleared up the next day and the celebrations henceforth proceeded undisturbed.

On Oct. 27th Mataji went to Dum Dum, returning on the 30th for *Lakshmi Pūjā*. On the 31st She journeyed to Deoghar and from there on Nov. 1st to Rajgir.

Installation of Kali & Kali Puja at Ranchi

After a sojourn of about a week in the comparative solitude of the Rajgir Ashram, Mataji proceeded to Ranchi on the 8th of November 1955, to be present at the installation of a permanent *vigraha* of Kali, which was consecrated on November 13th, *Divali* night. The statue had been carved by Sri Nitai Pal, the same artist who had produced the twin statues of Nitai-Gauranga for the new temple of Mahāprabhu at the Vrindaban Ashram.

During the *prāṇa prathishtā* a strange thing happened. *Prāṇa prathishtā* is the prescribed ritual by which the image is linked to the aspect of the Divinity which it represents (in this case the aspect which we call "Kali"). Through this ritual the image becomes a *vigraha*, that is to say a living focus through which the particular power of the Divine can function.

The statue was adorned with a golden necklace from which a locket was suspended. It could be clearly seen that the locket vibrated as if the statue were breathing. Mataji drew the attention of the *pūjārīs* to this extraordinary phenomenon. After the ceremony one of them who felt rather nonplussed, carefully examined the statue to make sure whether the vibration had not perhaps been due to some exterior cause. Far from this being so, he found on the contrary that the necklace had got stuck in the paint that was not yet quite dry.

Annakut at Varanasi

On November 15th Mataji reached Varanasi where *Annakut* was celebrated as usual in the Annapurna temple of the Ashram. On the 7th morning Mataji motored to Vindhyachal for a day and a night returning to Varanasi on the 18th afternoon, only to leave the next day for New Delhi, where the fifth *Samyam Vrata* was observed from November 22nd-28th at the Kali Bari near Birla Mandir.

5th Samyam Vrata at Kali Bari, New Delhi

A gathering of this kind is bound to be a success. When a fairly large number of people assembled in Mataji's presence and for seven days concentrated on various *sādhana's*, avoiding all distractions and putting aside for the time being their worldly occupations, their cherished habits and comforts, they could not fail to gain new strength and to make a very definite step forward in their spiritual search. Some might have been enriched greatly and others to a lesser degree, but none could have left the gathering the same person as when he came. On one occasion, after the function was over, Mataji explained

that by meditating in a group, especially in the presence of Mahātmās, the less advanced are helped by those who reach greater depths in their meditation, since the *prāṇa* is the same in all beings; It is like water seeking its own level.

This is one of the reasons why satsang is of such incomparable value. Without personal effort all who participate become automatically attuned to the vibrations of those who are one-pointed seekers after Truth, and the best and highest is thereby quickened in them. But if we can have the great good fortune of coming into the presence of one who has transcended the illusion of separateness, the benefit is quite immeasurable. As on the occasions of the four previous *Samyam Vratas* that had been held since August 1952 in Varanasi, Vindhyachal, Calcutta and Bombay respectively, this time also a number of Mahātmās took part in the function. Their daily discourses kept our thinking on a high level.

On November 29th kirtan was performed all day long at the Birla Mandir and continued at the Kali Bari hall till late at night, as there happened to be a lunar eclipse.

New Ashram at Kalkaji, New Delhi

By November 30th the greater part of the *vratīs* had dispersed to their homes practically all over India and Mataji shifted to Her new Ashram at Chandraloka near Kalkaji on the outskirts of New Delhi. It is a charming place, far out in the wilds as yet. The last half mile of the road was in those days extremely bad. In spite of this, anyone approaching the Ashram during Mataji's stay could always easily spot it from a distance by half a dozen cars that were usually parked outside. The hall of the Ashram yet remained to be built. The satsang had to be held in the open in the day and in Mataji's room in the evening. On most afternoons Mataji would drive to 48, Hanuman Road, where Didi was housed, so as to be under medical supervision.

On December 4th morning Mataji took a trip to Vrindavan, returning to Delhi on the 5th evening. On December 9th She

once again alighted in Varanasi. December 11th and 12th were spent at Vindhyachal, but on December 13th afternoon Mataji was back at Varanasi.

Solar Eclipse at Varanasi

On December 14th, during the solar eclipse, there was a long programme of silent meditation, japa and kirtan, Mataji remaining present throughout at the Chandi Mandap.

It is customary to bathe in the Ganges both at the beginning and at the end of an eclipse. When the bathers went down to the *ghāt* for the first time, Mataji sat down on the *ghāt* steps watching them dip into the river and when they returned She playfully sprinkled a few drops of the sacred water on everyone present. But in the afternoon, when we descended to the Ganges for the second time, Mataji accompanied us all the way and Herself bathed, a thing which She did only on very rare occasions. Everyone at the Ashram had been observing a complete fast since the previous evening. After 4 p.m. we all sat down in a large circle with Mataji in the East and partook of the *prasāda* that had been cooked and offered in the Annapurna temple in the early morning before the eclipse started and preserved locked up in the temple ever since. At dusk a large boat carried us down the river to Dashashwamedh Ghat from where Mataji returned by car via Sankat Mochana. Sri Anandamayi Karuna maintained a herd of goats there and distributed free goat's milk to the children of the destitute.

On December 15th a wire arrived from Hoshiarpur to say that Sri Haribabaji Maharaj's health was not satisfactory. On the 16th afternoon Mataji motored to Vindhyachal where another wire from the devotees of Sri Haribabaji awaited Her. We had hoped that She would remain at Vindhyachal for a quiet stay of at least one or two weeks, but within an hour of Her arrival She was off to Delhi.

Journey from Vindhyachal via Delhi to Amritsar and return to Delhi by plane with Haribabaji for his operation

Only Swami Paramananda and an Ashramite who had never before attended to Mataji all by herself were allowed to accompany Her. People present felt rather puzzled at Mataji choosing this particular woman. Later we heard that soon after reaching Delhi she developed high fever and had to undergo a serious operation, from which she has since recovered. It is more than doubtful whether she would have had the chance of getting the adequate medical treatment so necessary just at that time, had she not gone with Mataji.

Such an incident is an example of what by a superficial and critical observer might be misunderstood as odd in Mataji's behaviour; although there were very sound and weighty reasons behind it, which sometimes She Herself explained afterwards. Having witnessed similar occurrences time after time, one naturally became convinced that even when the reasons were beyond our power to grasp, they nevertheless certainly did exist.

From Delhi Mataji proceeded to Jalandher on December 17th night, stopping at the Savitri Devi Ashram on the 18th morning for an hour or so, and from there by car to Amritsar, where Sri Haribabaji was lying in hospital. On the 18th evening Mataji and Sri Haribabaji took the plane to Delhi where Mataji arrived quite unexpectedly, while people were waiting at Jalandher for Her return by car from Amritsar. She stayed at the Birla Mandir for one night and then moved to 48, Hanuman Road, where several years ago the late Dr. J. K. Sen had built a two-room house for Her in his garden. Sri Haribabaji was then admitted into the Nursing Home of Dr. S. K. Sen, the renowned surgeon who operated on him. The operation was completely successful. By God's Grace Sri Haribabaji regained his health and was able to return to Hoshiarpur at the end of January.

When Dr. S. K. Sen's Nursing Home, which had been planned and fitted out according to the most modern scientific

discoveries, had been opened only in October 1955, Dr. Sen, who was one of the leading surgeons of India, was desirous of having the opening ceremony performed in Mataji's presence. But somehow this had not been possible. On this occasion however, Mataji visited the Nursing Home daily and was also shown round the whole establishment.

During Mataji's visits to Delhi this winter a number of foreigners hailing from various countries such as England, Holland, Finland, France, U.S.A., Israel, Mexico and Chile came for Mataji's darshan and to talk to Her.

On January 2nd Mataji moved to Her Ashram near Kalkaji and on the 4th She left for Vindhyachal, stopping in Allahabad for a few hours on January 5th morning. At Vindhyachal a few people who had hoped in vain to spend some quiet days with Mataji there in December, assembled for three delightful days. On the 8th Mataji was again at Varanasi from where She returned to Vindhyachal on the 10th, leaving for New Delhi via Varanasi on the 12th.

In New Delhi with convalescing Haribabaji

She remained in Her Ashram at Chandraloka till January 31st. Sri Haribabaji was discharged from hospital the day after Mataji's arrival in Delhi and joined Her at Chandraloka where he was convalescing till the end of the month. Mataji then paid a very short visit to Vrindaban and via Delhi returned to Varanasi, reaching there on the 3rd of February, only to leave for Vindhyachal on the 5th.

At Vindhyachal with Professor M. Boss

Professor Dr. Medard Boss, one of the leading psychiatrists of Europe accompanied Her and had long discussions with Her daily until She left for Varanasi on the 10th. A medical doctor from California and two English ladies also motored to Vindhyachal from Varanasi in order to have private interviews with Mataji.

Saraswati Puja & Opening of Sanskrit Educational Centre for Girls at Varanasi Ashram

At Varanasi Didi's birthday was celebrated by a day of *Samyam Vrata* with its full programme as well as the food restrictions pertaining to it. On February 16th, *Vasant Panchami* day, *Saraswati Pūjā* was performed in the hall of the house opposite to the main Ashram building, which had been acquired and added to the Ashram some time ago. It was then in a rather dilapidated condition but was afterwards completely changed and almost rebuilt.* On that auspicious day, which is specially sacred to Saraswati (the goddess of learning, music and Supreme Knowledge), the Ashram library which had formally been opened on the occasion of *Saraswati Pūjā* in 1952, was assigned a more spacious room. It contains books in Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali and English on religion, philosophy, yoga and allied subjects.

On March 25th morning a Sanskrit Educational Centre for Girls was inaugurated in Mataji's presence in a large room above the hall. Dr. Padma Misra, Reader of Sanskrit at the Banaras Hindu University, who had been teaching Sanskrit privately for the last several years in the Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth, gave the first lesson to a number of young women connected with the Ashram, some of them post graduates in other subjects. Mataji Herself led the kirtan singing "*Satyam, Jñānam, Anantam, Brahman*", as appropriate to the occasion.

Here one could observe Mataji taking keen interest in the education of women, seeming to encourage them to study Sanskrit and Philosophy. There is hardly a constructive activity in which at some time or other Mataji did not take active interest, yet She remained aloof and could not be identified with anything in particular. At one moment She seemed immersed in one thing and the next moment we found Her doing or saying something else which might to

* Subsequently this building was however pulled down and in its place the majestic Ananda Jyoti Mandir was built in 1968.

us express the contrary, or else She appeared far removed and remote. She was indeed quite unfathomable and not to be understood by the mind. If we judge Her by our standards we shall surely be wrong.

On March 1st Mataji went to Vindhyachal again for one night's stay returning to Varanasi on the 2nd.

Consecration of Siva Temple on Sivaratri day at Vrindaban

On the night of March 4th She left for Vrindaban where She remained over *Sivaratri* and *Holi*.

When after touring South India about three years earlier, Mataji had gone to Dwarka and visited Prabhash, a place specially connected with the life of Sri Krishna, She had found a *Śiva Linga* there. Soon after, three *Śiva Linga* that had been lying under the bel-tree near the entrance of the Varanasi Ashram were installed in a small house at the gate of the then new Vrindaban Ashram. We guessed that there must have been a connection between Mataji's visit to Prabhash and the installation of the three *Śiva Linga* at Vrindaban. The three *Śiva Linga* all hail from the banks of the holy river Narmada in Gujarat, of which it is said that every stone on its banks is a *Śiva Linga*.

Once many years ago, before the Bhimpura Ashram had come into existence, when Mataji stayed at Vyas, (a place on the banks of the Narmada where the sage Vyas is supposed to have lived for a time), a Dandi Swami offered Her a *Śiva Linga* which was subsequently brought to Varanasi. It was one of the *Linga* later installed at Vrindaban. On the occasion of the *Śivarātri* festival this year two more *Linga* were added, donated by two bhaktas in memory of their deceased fathers. All the five *Śiva Linga* were then installed in the new *Śiva* temple in the Ashram grounds, which had only just been completed. The consecration of the temple took place on the morning of *Śivarātri*, March 10th, in the presence of many Mahātmās and bhaktas who had gathered from far and near.

Throughout the following night *Śiva Pūjā* was performed as usual by a large number of men and women sitting in circles round *Śiva Linga* in the space between the Sri Gauranga and *Śiva* temples, also in the *Śiva* temple itself and outside. It was a most solemn occasion.

On March 25th *Holi* was observed in the usual manner with all its fun and frolics.

Satsang Bhavan at Hoshiarpur

On March 28th Mataji left for Hoshiarpur. Last winter before Sri Haribabaji fell ill, he had started building at Hoshiarpur a *Satsang Bhavan*, a spacious hall to be dedicated exclusively to religious gatherings. Adjoining to it he had a set of rooms constructed specially for Mataji's use. The rooms were just ready when Mataji arrived. As they invariably do, Sri Haribabaji's people gave Mataji a tremendous and spectacular reception. These receptions are something unique, quite indescribable, something that one must have seen to be able to imagine it.

A word of praise must be said about the enthusiasm and religious fervour of the Punjabis, especially the women, who attended the satsang with surprising devotion and regularity, sitting quietly for many hours and keeping excellent discipline, even when they came in huge crowds.

On April 8th Mataji proceeded to Jalandher, from there by car to Chandigarh and on the 9th evening to Vrindaban. On the 11th She was at Aligarh from where She entrained on the 12th morning, reaching Varanasi the same night.

First Celebration of Didima's Samnyasa Utsava at Varanasi

On April 13th, 1956, *Chaitra Sankranti*, the last day of the Bengali year, the anniversary of Didima's taking *samnyāsa* was for the first time solemnly celebrated at the Varanasi Ashram by a full programme of *ārāṇ*, kirtan, the reading of Scriptures etc., and at night Swami Shashwatananda gave an inspiring talk about Didima's life and character. 'Didima',

as Mataji's mother is lovingly called by all the thousands of Mataji's children, took *sannyāsa* at Hardwar soon after her husband passed away in 1939. Swami Mangalananda Giri, also the Guru of the late Swami Akhandananda, (Sri Gurupriya Devi's father), gave her *sannyāsa*. Her name since then was Swami Muktananda Giri.

Didima

Utterly simple, quiet and unassuming she was always of an extraordinary saintliness. Throughout her life she never felt angry or quarrelled with anyone. Never did she speak ill of others, never told a lie. Little is known about her childhood, but it is a fact that she was an ideal wife and mother. Her life was by no means an easy one. Her husband, a saintly person like herself, was given to constant singing of sacred songs and at times went away for shorter or longer spells to live the life of a *sādhu*, so that the task of looking after house and family had often to be faced by her alone. She had to manage on a bare minimum, but this did not embitter her in the least, she accepted her lot without questioning, never losing faith in Providence.

From the beginning she knew that Mataji was not an ordinary child, but this did not make her proud in the least. At Mataji's birth there was no labour, nor did Mataji cry as babies do first thing when they are born, nor did She ever cry during Her childhood except when She saw Her mother mourn the loss of her three little sons — and even then She only cried to divert Her mother's attention so as to be able to console her.

One of Didima's outstanding qualities was her intrinsic kindness and compassion. She concerned herself with the weal and woe of everyone who came within her orb and was ever kind and helpful even to those who were considered bad by others and found no sympathy elsewhere.

After taking *sannyāsa* she showed a spirit of true renunciation. Revered and loved by all, she later began to give mantra *dīkṣā*, since Mataji Herself did not give *dīkṣā*. Thus the gentle,

unassuming old lady became the Guru of a large number of disciples who one and all looked up to her, not only because she was Mataji's mother, but for her own outstanding qualities: for she lived the ideals that she professed and asked them to follow. She was a true Guru, without a trace of a feeling of superiority towards anyone, leading a life of complete dedication to the Divine. Few know that there was also an artistic side to Didima. Although she had nothing more than a village education, she composed a great many religious songs and poems.

Opening of Shishu Kalyan and Anandamayee Karuna at Varanasi during Vasanti Puja

From April 19th to 22nd *Vasanti Pūjā*, which is the *Durga Pūjā* of spring, was celebrated. It is an annual function of the Varanasi Ashram, which this time gained special impetus by Mataji's presence. On this festive occasion took place the inauguration of a new set of rooms for the Anandamayee Karuṇā and the Shishu Kalyān, two charitable institutions related to the Ashram. They had been started in 1952 due to the initiative and the spirit of untiring service of Dr. Gopal Das Gupta* and have ever since been of active help and assistance to the poor.

The *Anandamayee Karuṇā* runs a homœopathic dispensary which gives free medical advice and medicine to everyone. A competent homœopathic doctor assisted by a compounder are in attendance daily for several hours and a very large number of patients are taking advantage of the institution.

The *Shishu Kalyān* distributes even to this day free goat's milk to young children of the destitute. For this purpose several years ago a small goat farm was started on a plot of land near Sankat Mochana.

Sri Ma's Sixtieth Jayanti Celebrations

On conclusion of the *Vasanti Pūjā* Mataji very graciously granted the prayers of Her devotees at Varanasi to stay

* He was a renowned medical practitioner of Varanasi as well as a very staunch devotee of Mataji.

on for Her forthcoming 60th birthday anniversary commencing on May 2nd and continuing till May 28th.

It was indeed our singular good fortune to have had this rare opportunity of witnessing and participating in this unique function. As was said by Mahamahopadyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, "the descent of the Divine Mother on earth, a descent of the timeless in time, marks in itself an important event but the completion of the cycle of the first 60 years of Her holy life is an event of even greater spiritual significance in the history of man".

In order that all Ma's bhaktas in India and abroad might have the fullest opportunity to avail themselves of this glorious occasion and participate in the various functions, the Sangha set up a powerful Celebration Committee under the able chairmanship of Maharaja Manavendra Shah of Tehri Garhwal, a great devotee of Mataji. This attempt at organized work on an all-India and even wider basis was the first venture of its kind undertaken by the Sangha.

Unlike other years, the *Jayanti* celebrations this year at the suggestion of Gurupriya Devi, were inaugurated on the 2nd of May with pūjā offered to Mataji with full rituals lasting for two to three hours round about 3.30 a.m., the actual time of Sri Ma's birth, on the same lines as the pūjā performed on the last i.e., *Tithi pūjā* day. It took place in the Chandi Mandap or pūjā hall of the Ashram, with Sri Ma seated on the steps of the 'lion-throne', especially made for the *Jayanti* celebrations this year. In spite of all entreaties She refused to take Her seat on the throne itself.

We are told that Sri Krishnananda Avadhutaji Maharaj had a vision of Mataji as '*Singha-Vāhini*' i.e., seated on a lion, a familiar figure of the incarnation of *Mahāśakti* described in the Chandi and other scriptures. He therefore had proposed that a special throne resting on a lion be made and that Sri Ma should be worshipped seated on it during the celebration. Though not everyone was very enthusiastic about it, a suggestion from an eminent Mahātmā like Sri Avadhutaji could not be lightly set

aside. So Gurupriya Devi made efforts to have such a throne manufactured by Sri Nitai Pal, the famous artist of Calcutta, who designed a fine and impressive figure of a lion of more than life-size, made of the traditional eight metals and a spacious silver throne in two sections, exquisitely ornamented and covered with velvet resting on the lion's back, and accessible from the ground by silver steps also covered with velvet. The throne and the lion together weighed 28 maunds and became one of the special sights for visitors and the local public during the celebrations.

On two occasions beautiful bowers made entirely of flowers, and decorated with a profusion of white flowers, were set up on the dais of the pandal for Sri Ma, by experts in flower decoration brought specially from Sri Behari Lalji Temple at Vrindaban at the suggestion of Sri Avadhutaji. But Mataji could not be persuaded to sit there for more than half an hour at the most. These bowers were then utilised for the *Līlā* which was part of the daily programme at the pandal.

A unique feature of these *Jayanti* celebrations was the *Tulā Dān* ceremony performed on the 24th of May. It had been suggested by Mataji's bhaktas that Mataji should be weighed against different articles, such as gold, silver, etc., which should then be distributed to Brahmins and other deserving persons, as enjoined in the *Śāstras*. Devotees had accordingly contributed varying amounts of gold, silver and money for this purpose.

A light but neat structure with a wooden frame and supports, roofed with palm leaves, was put up on a raised platform in front of the entrance to the Kanyapeeth. The entire structure was covered with bright red cloth and suitably decorated. Inside was set up a specially constructed wooden balance strong enough to support the normal weight of a person. Preliminary ceremonies including pūjā and *yajña* had begun the night before and were concluded at about 2 p.m. on May 24th.

Mataji was then brought there for the actual ceremony of weighing. Devotees who had been waiting since the morning

with keen expectation, now poured into the rather small Ashram compound in such large numbers that volunteers, aided by a few policemen, were hard put to it to control the crowd. Many had to go away disappointed.

Sri Ma was successively weighed against various articles, viz. the traditional eight metals such as gold, silver, brass, copper, etc., taken together and also against rice, wheat, sesame, *mashkalai* (a kind of pulse), *ghi*, *batāsha* (sugar puffs), fruits, silk as well as cotton cloth. Later these articles were distributed among Brahmins and other deserving persons. In addition, at the suggestion of Dr. Pannalal, Mataji was weighed against silver only, the proceeds from its sale being ear-marked for a religious object.

At last on the 28th of May came the *Tithi Pūjā* day which marked the culmination of the celebrations and for which so many devotees (their number having swelled to nearly fourteen hundred) from far and near had been waiting eagerly all those days, braving smilingly the rigours of the extreme heat and all other discomforts. Arrangements for the *Tithi Pūjā* had been made at the pandal erected on a vacant plot of land at a short distance from the Ashram, as the Ashram compound was far too small for the function. Admission into the pandal was only after midnight and by passes, so that there was no unseemly rush and over-crowding, as had been the case during some of the earlier functions. The actual *pūjā* commenced at 3-30 a.m.

The dais in the pandal had been tastefully decorated with flowers, hangings, carpets etc. In the centre stood the lion throne gleaming brightly in the light. Paraphernalia for the *pūjā* had been arranged very neatly. At a short distance on the dais were seated Sri Haribabaji, Sri Avadhutaji and other distinguished Mahātmās.

At the appointed hour, Sri Ma seated on a palanquin decorated with flowers and surrounded by bhaktas singing kirtan, was taken in procession from the Ashram to the pandal. She took Her seat on the steps of the throne as She had done

on the opening day of the celebrations. However, at the request of Sri Hari Babaji and Sri Avadhutaji, She at last agreed to mount the steps and took Her seat on the throne. But as soon as the *pūjā* performed by Brahmachari Kusum* commenced, She lay down, as She usually did on these occasions, on the spacious couch-like throne and remained quite still till the end of the ceremony.

The vast gathering sat hushed and motionless in an atmosphere charged with solemnity and deep devotion, their gaze focussed on the huddled and covered figure of Mataji on the throne. When the *pūjā* was completed shortly before day-break, the assembled bhaktas ascended the dais one by one — and felt blessed and happy to place their *anjali* (offering flowers) at the feet of Sri Ma who lay perfectly motionless. Each devotee, as he left the dais, received a gift of *prasāda* tied in a handkerchief especially made for the purpose. It was now broad daylight and Sri Ma was slowly escorted back to the Ashram in procession in the same manner as She had been brought.

This marked the end of the great celebrations begun nearly a month ago, unique in the annals of the Ashram. The programme at the pandal continued on a reduced scale for another day or two. The next few days saw the gradual exodus of the bhaktas, who after taking leave of Mataji, returned to their respective places. Mataji stayed on at Varanasi till June 5th.

For Mataji's devotees Her birth signifies their own birth into a new life — that of the spirit, from the life of the body they had been leading so far.

We have to say something about Sri Ma as the bhaktas saw Her during the celebrations, apart from the *pūjās* and ceremonies performed in homage to Her. Of course there was no possibility during this period to come close to Her, and hear Her talk for long periods or to speak to Her as in ordinary times when staying in the Ashram with Mataji.

* He later became a *naisthika* brahmachari and is now known as Brahmachari Nirvanananda.

The only opportunity to see Her for long was during the programme at the pandal where She remained for several hours daily both in the morning and in the evening. Although half an hour every night after 9 p.m. was set apart for talks or kirtan by Sri Ma, She hardly ever, as was usual with Her, addressed the audience. She would sometimes sing kirtan in Her inimitable rapt manner with the vast gathering repeating each line after Her with rare fervour.

Mataji could be seen at the kirtan of Sri Hari Babaji in the morning and in the evening or during Her *ārati* before or after the kirtan, or when taking a much-needed stroll for a few minutes in the evening along a narrow path formed by bhaktas, standing in a dense mass in two lines on the parapet facing the Ganga.

At other times Sri Ma would be closeted in Her room with people specially seeking Her advice either regarding matters connected with the celebrations or their personal problems.

But it would be altogether wrong to conclude that during the celebrations Mataji remained aloof and inaccessible to the majority of the devotees. In fact one could often catch a fleeting glimpse of Her most unexpectedly, darting electrically from one spot to another, Her head wrapped in a wet towel if it was hot, followed by a small group of devoted attendants, who could hardly keep pace with Her. On Her way to the pandal, She would be seen pausing for a few moments at the *Chandi Pātha* where a whole host of Brahmins were reciting the Chandi, or pushing Her way into the kitchen, the workers waiting apprehensively as Her eye critically took in the situation at a glance, or again watching the devotees at their meals sitting anyhow and enjoying the experience so different from what they were accustomed to at their homes. If anybody fell ill, and there were several cases, some of them serious, Mataji would come often and sit by the bedside making enquiries, giving directions and thus bringing cheer to the patient and the attendants. What is more significant, it was no rare experience for many who longed for a word or gesture of recognition from

Mataji, to find Her suddenly passing from nowhere by their side, with a nod and a smile or even a word or more rarely a garland thrust upon them, and the next moment She was again engulfed in the crowd and impossible to follow.

Thus Her presence was felt everywhere by everyone, making the entire atmosphere pulsate with life and joy. Literally the whole celebration moved round Mataji as the centre.

But in the midst of all Her dynamic activities, Her passive impersonality was felt to remain as it was. Such was Sri Ma, as has been well put — “in everything, yet not in anything.”

Visit to Paramartha Niketan, Rishikesh

Among the various distinguished Mahātmās attending the *Jayanti* celebrations was Swami Sadananda, General Secretary of Paramartha Niketan, a famous Ashram at Rishikesh. Before he left he earnestly requested Mataji to stay in his Ashram for some time during the Satsang which is organized there for three months every summer.

Accordingly, Mataji reached Rishikesh on June 6th. More than three hundred inmates of Paramartha Niketan led by Swami Sukdevanandaji, its founder, as well as Sri Hari Babaji and Sri Avadhutaji who had already arrived there, welcomed Sri Ma with kirtan and took Her to the Ashram.

Paramartha Niketan had been founded with the primary object of enabling religious minded people including *grihasthas* (house-holders) to lead a life of devotion and meditation amidst an environment ideally suited to the purpose. Nestling at the foot of the Himalayas on the banks of the Ganga, Rishikesh has from ancient times been reputed as an ideal place for austerities and meditation for sādhus and Mahātmās. Covering a large area on the banks of the Ganga, Paramartha Niketan comprises about 200 rooms built in rows, and is equipped with modern amenities like tap water, electric lights, telephone, etc.

Expect for an interval of an hour or two after the midday meal, the entire day at Paramartha Niketan, from 4 a.m. when

a kirtan party went round calling people to their devotions, till about 10 or 11 p.m. at night, was taken up with some kind of spiritual exercise or other. As usual, Sri Ma's presence seemed to infuse a new spirit and zest into the life and atmosphere of the Ashram.

During Her stay there, Mataji one day, accompanied by Sri Hari Babaji and others, paid a visit to the Ashram of Sri Swami Śivananda, founder of the famous Divine Life Society. The Swamiji and the Ashramites warmly welcomed Mataji and showed Her round the Ashram. Swami Śivananda sang kirtan in Hindi and English. After taking their midday meal there, Mataji and Her party returned to Paramartha Niketan.

Visits to Ananda Kashi and Varanasi

Sri Ma also paid a flying visit of a few hours to Ananda Kashi, about 14 miles from Rishikesh, where the Rajmata of Tehri had put up a small structure comprising a few rooms for Sri Ma at a secluded spot on the bank of the Ganges at the foot of the Himalayas. The place had been named Ananda Kashi after Mataji.

On June 13th Sri Ma suddenly left for Varanasi reaching there the next day. No previous intimation of Her arrival had been received. Didi's health had again taken a slight turn for the worse after Mataji's departure. The incessant strain she had to undergo in her weak condition during the *Jayanti* celebrations and possibly the depression of spirit induced by her temporary separation from Sri Ma might have been at the root of her indisposition. Mataji's unexpected arrival filled her with joy and her health began to mend rapidly.

On June 20th Mataji left for Dehradun, accompanied by Didi. After arranging for Didi's stay at the Kishenpur Ashram, Mataji returned the next day to Paramartha Niketan.

On June 27th Sri Ma arrived at Kishenpur from Rishikesh and the next day Sri Hari Babaji and his party also reached there. The usual programme of Sri Hari Babaji consisting of kirtan, *lila*, etc., was followed in the Ashram.

Bhagavata Saptah in memory of late Choudhry Sher Singh of Dunga

From 9th to 17th July, a *Bhāgavata Saptah* was observed at the Kishenpur Ashram, at the suggestion of his widow, in memory of the late Choudhury Sher Singh of Doonga, a village in Dehradun district. Choudhury Sher Singh who died last year, was an old and ardent devotee of Sri Ma. He was one of those who began visiting Sri Ma soon after She first came to Dehradun from Dhaka with Bholanath and Bhajji in 1932.

At Varanasi over Gurupurnima, Jhulan, Janmastami

On July 19th Mataji left for Varanasi while Didi had to go to Bombay for treatment. On Her way to Varanasi Mataji halted for a night at Brahmachari Prabhu Dattaji's Ashram at Jhusi, Allahabad. She reached Varanasi on the 21st morning.

Guru Pūrṇimā was celebrated with due ceremony on the 22nd of July. A number of bhaktas had arrived for the occasion. On this auspicious day, the sacrificial fire which had been carefully tended in the small temple at the southern end of the Varanasi Ashram facing the Ganga, was removed from there and placed into the *kunda* (a hollow receptacle for sacrificial fire) built and preserved in the centre of the Ashram compound. It was here that *Pūrṇāhuti* (final oblation) had been offered on the conclusion of the *Great Yajña* in 1950. A beautiful small temple was built later over the kunda.

This time Varanasi became the scene for a long — we should say longer — intermission in the usual protracted but spontaneous itinerary of Sri Ma. Recalling, as we often do, the rigorous routine of travel and the life of little rest that She so faultlessly sustained for many years, the kaleidoscopic changes of conditions and environment, the inexhaustible variety of modes and tempos of the animated life around Her, we cannot help but marvel at the unmarred serenity and self-composure with which She bore it all. "Bore" is not the proper word either, for She effortlessly responded to every heart-felt prayer,

the yearning and expectations that contributed in their fulfilment to the general good of those who came to Her. Just as we might observe the symphony of movement in the soft undulation of a silk banner floating in clear response to every whisp of breeze passing over it, so did we see in Mataji's serene features the changes that corresponded to our inner states, our aspirations, our needs.

How well do so many remember moments of unforgettable depth and sweetness when She suddenly appeared in order to reclaim them from some besetting error, disease, or difficulty. These moments, although we cannot share them in the true sense with even our nearest friends, all go to make up a rich repository of awareness of our perfect relationship with the Divine — unmistakable evidence of the supremacy of the path that She beckoned us to follow.

If we felt remorse for the demands that we frequently made on Her endurance and wished to make amends and amenities by fixing rules that restricted Her unhindered play among us and with us, we also found it useless. One might as well try to control the ocean that in its dynamic thundering action raises ceaseless, undulating swells of surf as far as the eye can see, that tosses huge liners like matchboxes on its bosom, whose uncharted depths are hinted at by man but nevertheless remain a mystery. And so to resume our account of the surface play of Mātri Līlā.

For about two months after *Guru Pūrṇimā* (22nd of July), with the exception of a brief stay at Vindhyachal Ashram in between, Mataji in Her delightful unpredictable way, remained at the Varanasi Ashram. Apparently Her protracted stay was the opportunity that many had waited for. She soon became the focus, as in previous years, for many a charming gathering in Her presence. Besides the regular familiar Ashram attendance, many devotees living throughout the city came, sometimes bringing with them foreign visitors for whom these meetings were new experiences.

The satsangs in the presence of Mataji, whenever She stayed continuously for some time in Varanasi, we had noticed, had a characteristic quality, a special appeal which seemed to be lacking elsewhere.

There, on the balcony veranda of the Annapurna Mandir overlooking the holy Ganga, a place usually chosen for satsang, the very atmosphere seems to breathe a fragrance of the sanctifying prayers of countless souls, earnest seekers by the thousands who wended their ways through nearby lanes and by-paths to the river, down the ages to Truth and abiding rest.

"The atmosphere of Kashi is pure gold", Mataji sometimes remarked of the enigmatic spiritual force at work in the city.

Particularly in Varanasi did scholars, philosophers and highly qualified *sādhakas* frequently gather round Mataji for discussions and elucidating answers from Her on involved or very subtle points relating to spiritual practices.

On such occasion we found Mataji listening attentively to the learned discussions of Sri Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj with visiting scholars and *sādhakas* and often Herself entering into these conversations when questioned.

At opportune moments, we were fortunate indeed to hear such lucid answers and comments from Sri Ma as caused one and all to cherish and look forward to these gatherings. Besides, these discussions, for all their informative depth and philosophical subtlety, did not lack a prominent note of wholesome humour and naturalness. It was not uncommon to hear rolling gales of laughter of the entire group in response to Mataji's keen wit.

Sometimes deeply engrossed in discussion, at moments a beatific vision of abstraction, again singing in sweet child-like tones some devotional kirtan, Sri Ma nevertheless remained as She was; the lovely smile of wholeness never faded from Her features and yet Her true identity remained hidden as does that of the dramatist who changes the play-scenes behind a velvet curtain.

Referring to the questions which were put to Her, Mataji had often been heard to remark, "as you beat the drum, thus exactly do you hear the sound". The questioner, the question, the act of inquiry and the response were all one and the same to Her.

And so the time slipped away like quick-silver at those sunny, open-air gatherings with Mataji, leaving behind legacies of sustaining thought, rich remembrance of the underlying Truth of Being, the true nourishment for the journey ahead. But then, was this not the very nature of all time spent with Sri Ma? We were always the gainers, far more than we fully realized. She took from us only a few moments but gave in their stead, Eternity. But we must, with all the means at our disposal, try to abide by Her words of instruction and counsel and by the hints She gave from time to time; for a word, once uttered, seldom is repeated nor does opportunity to act, once passed, return again.

In a blissful mood of reverie, we noted with a start that August was about half spent. The second half of August with Sri Ma in the Varanasi Ashram heralded the return of those festive religious dramas, presentations of the pupils of Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth, during the seven *Jhulan* nights which commenced this year on the 16th and culminated at *Jhulan Pūrṇimā* on the 22nd. Since Mataji had been at Vrindaban Ashram last year for a memorable *Jhulan* festival in the enchanting country-side of Vraja where those classical Divine love scenes from the *Rāsa-Līlā* of Radha-Krishna and their adoring divine playmates the gopis (celestial milkmaids of Vrindaban), actually transpired, the girls of the Kanyapeeth and their teachers necessarily had to forgo the joyousness of these performances in Mataji's presence. This year, however, they made up for it and, as nothing good is ever really lost, perhaps their talents, whetted by the natural delight of having Mataji back in their midst again, were all the more aptly used in portraying those old beloved scenes, scenes ever old and yet ever new.

As in times past during *Jhulan* week, every night when the satsang was over at 9 p.m., Mataji went upstairs to the girls' hall to be the very special guest of Her youthful following, these young pupils (about 30 in number) of the Ashram's residential school who are receiving through the tireless, painstaking efforts of their teachers, training which is, perhaps, unique in the modern annals of child education.

Night after night, in the girls' hall, moving scenes from the age old stories of Divine Love and Truth unfolded before the eyes of a spell-bound audience, the women folk visitors of the community, young and old, mothers, grandmothers, some holding in their laps tiny children who had been brought to witness this holy pageantry.

Sri Ma, reclining on the *jhūla*, (the festively decorated swing) commemorative of the *rāsa-līlā*, seemed to mirror every movement, every breath that found its outlet in the swift moving life of the scenes before us; She was at once witness, actor, dramatist and audience. Her very presence seemed to function as the primemover of everything, catching up the divergent life and activity focussed in the external, the tumult and restlessness, and sweeping all along in deft, loving care to the conclusion of the play. With arrested breaths, we felt Her presence and saw Her mirrored both within and without. Ma's keen appreciation, Her lively comments and bubbling laughter that set everyone freely at ease, Her loving care and attention to every detail, not to mention Her saving grace that seemed to mend even the gaps of forgotten lines, grace that with words of encouragement came to the rescue of the confused, these were the little things that left their indelible impress on the heart — little things that spelled out Her greatness.

During the nightly performances, we experienced in moving tableau the simple, unadorned sweetness of the love of the milkmaids and herdsmen of Vraja for divine, fascinating Gopal. Sri Radhika of celestial beauty and peerless character spoke of *Prema* (love). Sri Krishna in an impenetrable guise of a yogi expounded once more the ancient Truth beyond yoga, the

attainment of *jñāna* and *mukti*. Scene after scene of the divine *rāsa* again sprang to life before our eyes, while Mataji looked on. Her mere presence unfolded in young hearts the inner significance of the play scenes, heightened the tone of the entire performance from that of stage craft where lines were spoken and acted out, to that of direct experience where actors and audience, in one accord, saw not only the surface play but into the heart of things, themselves experienced the modes of consciousness symbolized by the imagery of each theme, those landmarks in the progressive steps of the individual soul towards Truth.

Each night's performance continued until midnight and sometimes later without visible fatigue to the young performers who blossomed forth with surprising capabilities under Mataji's watchful care and inspiration.

To Sri Ma, before whom veteran actors had performed in all their artistry, the natural talent of these young girls was equally significant. She entered most freely into the spirit of play with children as the door to a child's heart is often open : Sri Ma Herself being the Eternal Babe, the immaculate One which exists in each and all, finds free access to those who open themselves to Her as does a child.

Each night we found womenfolk, young and old, girls and infants crowded around the swing watching the play, happy above all to be with Ma.

One night when all were settled for the performance, the curtain rose on the dismal parting scene of Nachiketa, the hero of the Kathopanishad, as the young boy took leave of father and kingdom to fulfil his father's covenant with *Yāmā*, the Lord of Death. But the sudden appearance on the scene of a wildly gesticulating "Lord of Death" of very portly bearing played havoc with all preconceived ideas of how *Yāmā* should be.

Mataji initiated the laughter and merriment that his very presence aroused and all joined in, young and old alike, with rollicking gales of laughter, music of the soul that lightens every burden. Ma's laughing, radiant face was a sight to

behold. So perfectly, so wholeheartedly did She give Herself to the lighthearted, carefree spirit of the occasion that all were refreshed and gladdened by Her very presence. Just one glance at Ma on such occasions was enough to void all the axioms that link spirituality with a saddened countenance. She frequently joined in leading kirtan during the intervals between plays but, towards the end of the performances, those who had been expecting Mataji to appear in some role of one or the many, became eager to see Her take a more active part.

Sri Ma, who, during performances, was usually in the dressing-room helping the girls with their costumes, readily turned the opportunity to telling effects in Her incomparable playful way. One of the women devotees was quickly disguised in such a way that no one could guess her identity when she appeared on the stage. Mataji laughingly told one of the girls to ask the audience to do *pranāma* to her. As a result, the audience was bewildered ; some bowed in respect while others confusedly hesitated, "Is it Mataji or isn't it" ? At the very moment when the long flowing veil was lifted revealing the devotee's identity, Sri Ma's clear laughter could be heard ringing from the dressing-room. Everyone laughed at themselves and with each other, all were captivated by the charm of these playful ways of Ma.

The remaining performances that alternated in dialogue from Hindi to Bengali and from musical programmes to Sanskrit recitations and religious dramas bore ample evidence of the talents, the insight and versatility of these young girls who with considerable depth of feeling and perspective enacted scenes from well known religious scriptures, mythology and philosophy.

Towards the end of the week-programme, many were again expecting Ma's appearance in the cast of players. The curtain suddenly rose revealing, to the delight of the audience, seven beautifully adorned and thickly veiled ladies seated on the stage before them. The similarity in appearance of the forms seated there on the stage readily recalled to mind old mytho-

logical tales of the gods who descended on earth in identical forms much to the confusion and distraction of the people. The audience rocked with laughter and tried to guess who the seven were and whether Ma was among them. Finally the veils were raised and all identities disclosed while Mataji looked on from Her usual place in the dressing-room.

Jhulan once again drew to a close to the regret of all who had been blessed by Sri Ma's close companionship during the many hours of play-acting and satsang in the girls' hall.

Janmastami, the birth of the child Krishna and *Nandotsav*, the pastoral festival following the wondrous event, were commemorated this year by Sri Ma's participation in the festivals in an atmosphere of striking realism and indescribable charm.

A young University student, who came with his mother's father, Dr. Pannalal, to witness the *Janmastami* celebrations, wrote an account of the event in a letter to his mother. To convey to our readers something of the uniqueness of the experience, we publish the letter with his permission.

Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Ashram,
Varanasi, 30.8.56.

"I am still here, though the Varsity opened today. Grandfather kept me to attend the *Janmastami* celebrations. He says that it has been to him an experience not to be forgotten. He brought me here to see an ordinary *Janmastami*, but Mataji gave us a treat quite out of the ordinary. You know Her Gopal, whose temple is on the first floor. Ma says it was His wish to be taken out, so She took Him in a right royal procession, in a palanquin, to the house opposite, where a huge pedestal, about 6 feet high, had been erected. There He was placed with other deities flanking Him on right and left, and decorated. Ma Herself was seen going about arranging with loving care, here a flower garland, there a necklace, and in another place a silk covering.

In front of the pedestal a barrier had been erected and we all sat on the far side, and were not allowed to stand up even

for *ārati*, so there was no confusion. A beautiful, all metal, weighing balance had been set up by a bhakta from Rajpipla. It had been made for Mother's own *Tula* at Her *Jayanti* last May but was not used then, because of the *Śāstric* injunction that such balances should be made of wood. Mataji said that She did not object then because Her *Jayanti* was our '*Utsava*' — our business. So She decided to use it for Her Gopal converting His birthday into a royal *Jayanti*.

First Gopal was placed on the lowest platform and all were allowed to touch Him. You know He is crawling on His knees like a baby. He was bathed in water, *panchāmrita*, *dahi*, (curds), etc., in succession, and then sandal paste and perfumed oils were applied. He was dressed and decorated with jewellery and placed in one of the scales of the balance and weighed against tulsi leaves, fruits, *panchāmrita* and several other things. Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj himself held the image of Gopal and served as an assurance that everything was strictly according to *Śāstric* injunctions.

How can I describe it all! There was a regular rain of bliss upto midnight and even until more than an hour later. The last flower offering, (*pushpāñjali*) was given by all who had observed a *nirjal vrata* (fast without water). It ended with the distribution of *prasāda* from Ma's own gracious hands. How true is the saying of Ma in one of Grand-father's books:

"Worship is not a ritual: it is an attitude; it is an experience."

Simultaneously, a 24 hours *Nāma Kirtan* was held in the Ashram, from sunrise on the 29th to sunrise on the 30th, the formula being the *Mahāmantra* (Hare Krishna, etc.). It ended this morning with the usual '*Dadhikand*': *Dahi* (curds) coloured with turmeric, brought in an earthen jar which was dashed on the floor, *dahi* which we afterwards sprinkled on one another (Ma included). How She plays with us and causes us to forget ourselves!

Today, 30th August, Mataji played the *Nanda Utsava* with the girl inmates of the Ashram. It is touching to see how fond

they are of Ma, how they treasure every moment they get from their rigid discipline to play with Her and they devise hundreds of ways to amuse Her. Nanda, Sri Krishna's father, happy beyond words at the birth of Krishna, observed the festive occasion in the traditional custom of the cowherds, playing with the gopis with *dahi*, putting it into their mouths, smearing their faces with it. For quite a while Ma played in the same manner with the girls, laughing and singing, while the women joined in. We men kept looking on from a distance with envious eyes. Ma, realising what was in our hearts, walked towards us. Instantly, there was a rush towards Her; young and old vied with one another to get to Her first; old men in *gerua* (ochre) coloured cloth with long beards and matted hair received their due attention from Ma. One of the songs She sang was the old Bengali folk-song in which the Lords Nityananda and Gauranga call upon one and all, to come to them and be drowned in the ocean of their love. The refrain is still ringing in my ears :

"*Nitai dake, aiye, aiye,
Gaur dake aiye.*"

(Nitai calls ! come, come : Gaur calls ; come !)

To me a newcomer, this was also a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

Friday, 31st August, 1956 — Everyone is still engrossed in the happenings of the previous two days. At the satsangs the conversation turned again and again to the various aspects of the ceremonies, especially the details of the weighing, for though the birthday of Krishna has been observed all over India with pomp and ceremony for an untold number of years, this is perhaps the first occasion when His image has been weighed in this manner.

Ma explained that it was Her idea to weigh Gopal against nine articles, namely : (1) Tulsi leaves, including one tulsi leaf made of gold, (2) *panchāmrita*, (3) large white *batāshās* (sugar puffs), (4) fruit, (5) *ashtadhātu*, (eight metals : gold, silver, copper etc.), (6) basmati rice, (7) *til*,

(sesame) (8) *ghī*, (9) white cloth. It would have been easy to weigh the image beforehand and provide the necessary quantity of each article ; but Ma would not have Gopal weighed in order to determine his weight. It would be too matter of fact, prosaic and unfeeling. So approximations of more than the needed quantities of each article were provided.

In the first eight weighings, there was no trouble ; the balance dipped low to show that the articles were more than sufficient. In the ninth weighing however, strangely enough, the cloth provided did not weigh down the scale. What had happened, none could understand. Surprised glances met one another. Then Ma sent to the Ashram for more cloth. "This was a trick of Gopal, His habit of old", She said, "of stealing clothes." So more cloth had to be added to lower the scale.

Then the *kheyāla* came to Ma that She would make this ninth weighing absolutely exact. This would not be possible without cutting a *thān* of cloth into two, which was not permissible ; She thought of taking off one or two pieces and substituting *ghī* which was also white in colour and could be weighed to balance Gopal exactly. Fortunately there was in the Ashram the best quality of *ghī* which a bhakta of Shillong had sent for Ma's own use. At once She gave orders for it to be brought, and at the first trial the needle at the top of the beam stood vertical, pointing to exact weight. When asked, "Why exact weight, what would be the harm in giving overweight," Ma said, "a mother sometimes does not like to give her child too much to eat lest there should be indigestion." We retorted that this was a nurse's idea, not a mother's. She replied, 'A mother has to be a nurse as well.'

This remark afforded a clue to Ma's conduct throughout the ceremony. She, who usually sat serenely giving directions only by signs or a few spoken words, on this occasion was moving from place to place doing things with Her own hands, busy as a mother would be with her own child's ceremonies.

We questioned Ma what was Her idea in utilizing Gopi Baba in the operation of weighing. She said the *kheyāla* had

come to Her suddenly that Narayan Swami would be busy putting articles in the weighing scale and there might be jerky movements of the beam, so someone had to hold Gopal lest He should suffer any discomfort. Gopi Baba was present there in ordinary clothes and, as such, could not touch the *vigraha*. So Ma gave him a new silk dhoti and upper cloth and asked him to change his clothes and stand by Gopal and hold him. 'Who except a Gopi can hold Gopal,' added Ma with a twinkle in Her eyes. The question next arose about the *śakti* (the power) to hold Gopal. Whence would he have so much *śakti*? At first Ma said, 'Gopal would give the *śakti*'. But Gopi Baba demurred, saying: "Hardly, that. The *śakti* can only come from the primeval source of all power, the *Mahāśakti*." Ma agreed saying it was in deference to the feelings of many Krishna devotees present that She had said 'Gopal'.

At another sitting Ma described the story of how Gopal came to Her. From the very first day of Gopal's arrival in the Ashram, Ma's maternal *bhāva* towards this new (?) child of Hers was apparent to all. This explained also Her unusual activity during the *Janmastami* festival, and at the end when She posed for a photograph standing with Her arm round Gopal She looked the image of Yasoda, Sri Krishna's Mother.

Ma says, Gopal is a *jāgrat* image. When asked what were the characteristics of a *jāgrat* image, She said it was difficult to define them fully so as to make others understand, but She gave instances of how this Gopal had appeared to many in dreams and had extended his hands in the attitude of asking for food or jewellery or other things. "This", said Ma, "would be one sign of a *Jāgrat Mūrti* (living image)".

FIVE

(October 1956 — October 1957)

Mataji visits Gaya en route to Calcutta

After a stay of over two months, Mataji left Varanasi on Oct. 1st, proceeding to Calcutta, where *Durga Pūjā* was to be celebrated in the house of a devotee. On the way a bhakta, who worked as a railway signaller at Gaya station, got into the train and it was decided that Mataji accompanied by two or three of Her people would break journey at Gaya, while the rest of the party would proceed directly to Calcutta. Mataji and Her companions went on to Bodhgaya, but as it was late at night they found the temple closed. However, they walked about in the vicinity, surveying the whole place. When they finally got back to their conveyance, it was noticed that the air was filled with a strange fragrance. When someone remarked on it, Mataji confirmed that She had also noticed it, in fact She found that the sweet scent was emanating from Her own body. "Well", said Mataji, "we could not have darshan at the temple, but at any rate we seem to have been blessed by His touch."

Vishnupada Pith was then visited and it so happened that Mataji and Her companions arrived there just in time for the midnight *ārati*.

Durga Puja at Entally

On October 2nd Mataji reached Calcutta and went straight to Dum Dum. The owner of the house, having received no previous intimation, had gone out. But Mataji spent the night there incognito. Before proceeding to Entally for *Durga Pūjā*, She paid a few surprise visits at the houses of devotees in Calcutta. This reminded us of olden times, when many years ago Mataji would suddenly turn up at the house of some friends and collecting the inmates would take the whole party

to someone else's house and so on, to the delight of everyone concerned. In those days She still used to visit people's houses freely, whereas later She would enter only their gardens, courtyards or similar places outside the actual house.

Durga Pūjā is usually a collective function of the Ashram, but this year Mataji graciously agreed to attend the celebration at Entally, Calcutta, at the house of a devotee who every year arranges for the Pūjā in his own home. One day She went to Shyamnagar, a place about 30 miles from Calcutta, to be present at the home of another devotee where *Durga Pūjā* was being performed.

Story of Durga Puja at Shyamnagar

The year before Mataji had also been at Calcutta for *Durga Pūjā*. The celebration had been held at Ballygunge. At that time the devotee from Shyamnagar had written to Mataji, begging Her to be present at least for one day at the *Durga Pūjā* celebration in his house. He got the reply that since Mataji was already booked to attend the Pūjā at Ballygunge, all She could do would be to come to his house on the day before the actual ceremony started.

The devotee at Shyamnagar was a man of very modest means and his wife therefore felt greatly worried when she heard of his intention to perform the pūjā in his own house. He then disclosed that in a dream Mataji had ordered him to perform the pūjā and had also described to him a peculiar, quite unusual type of image which he was to procure for the occasion. He thereupon went to Navadwip in order to get an image of the kind that had been indicated to him in his dream.

The potter demanded Rs. 150/-, a sum beyond the means of the purchaser. When however the artist looked at the devotee's face, he suddenly said, "I am prepared to let you have the image for any price you are able to pay." On his way to Shyamnagar the devotee had to change over from meter gauge to the main line at Krishnanagar station. He felt rather

worried as to the safety of the image, as the sky was heavy with black clouds and a downpour just at that time was sure to cause damage to the sculpture. But to his great surprise the station-master was most obliging and had the two trains shunted alongside one another so that the transference of the image became quite easy. As soon as the image was safely stored away torrential rain started. These lucky coincidences naturally reassured the devotee and, although he had not the faintest idea from where the necessary funds would come, he felt that the pūjā would somehow be accomplished successfully.

When Mataji visited his house the day before the ceremony was to start, a devotee offered Rs. 500/- for the pūjā. Mataji suggested : "Let Rs. 100/- be preserved for next year's *Durga Pūjā*. This was done. When subsequently the devotee from Shyamnagar came to Kishenpur last July, he requested Mataji to grace the function by Her presence this year again. She replied, "Even if this body should not come, the Presence will be there." However, since Mataji was in Calcutta again this year, his request was granted.

Lakshmi Puja at Ranchi

On October 15th Mataji left Calcutta for Ranchi where *Lakshmi Pūjā* was performed and on the 19th She travelled to Puri for a short visit, returning to Varanasi on Oct. 22nd. She then motored to Vindhyachal where She spent two or three days.

Kali Puja at Varanasi

The devotees of Ranchi had tried their best to prevail on Mataji to spend *Kali Pūjā* at *Diwali* in their midst as in the previous year, when a permanent *vigraha* of Goddess Kali had been installed at the Ranchi Ashram. It was taken more or less for granted that Mataji would agree. However, some time last September before She left Varanasi for Calcutta, She saw Goddess Kali standing in the new hall in the house across the lane. The house had been acquired by the Ashram about

two and a half years ago and since then been completely rebuilt and named '*Mātri Bhavan*'. Kali was facing West and Mataji requested Her to turn round so as to face South. When Mataji related this incident to the Ashramites it was decided that *Kali Pūjā* should be celebrated in that very hall in Mataji's presence on *Diwali* night in Oct. 1956.

In this connection we recall another strange occurrence. Last May during Mataji's 60th *Jayanti* celebrations one thousand Durga Sapta Śatis were chanted in that same hall by a number of Brahmanas. One day, when a certain devotee passed by on his way to the pandal he saw a particularly beautiful image of Kali standing where pūjā was being offered in the hall—he assumed that the image must have been placed there for the celebration; but great was his amazement when he found the place empty a few hours later on his return. On enquiring he was told that no image had been put into the hall.

Another interesting feature may be noted here. '*Mātri Bhavan*' originally belonged to a wealthy land-owner from Pakistan. Due to the partition he lost many of his possessions and after his death the Ashram acquired the house from his heirs. In his last Will he had left definite instructions that the house should be dedicated to Kali, Tara and other deities.

When an image of Kali was purchased for the pūjā at *Diwali* it was kept in the Chandi Mandap for a few days. When it was later taken to the hall to be installed for the pūjā, Swami Paramananda placed the image exactly where Mataji had seen the Goddess stand in September although he did not know at all which spot it had been.

6th Samyam Mahavrata at Sapta Rishi Ashram, Hardwar

Soon after *Diwali* Mataji left for Hardwar where She alighted on November 9th morning. For two days She stayed at Bhagat House and then moved to the Sapta Rishi Ashram, where the 6th *Samyam Vrata* was held from November 12th to 18th.

A few words must be said about this quite unusual place which proved a perfectly ideal setting for a function of that type. According to an ancient legend seven Rishis did *tapasyā* at that very place. When the Ganges began to flow, it divided itself into seven branches so as to show due respect to each one of the Rishis. Situated between Hardwar and Rishikesh it is of great natural beauty. But as the road was not at all good, it was difficult to approach and therefore comparatively few sight-seers or tourists disturbed its solitude.

The grounds of the Ashram are extensive. There is no large building, but a number of very charming one-roomed houses, each named after one of the Rishis, surrounded by a small garden, to suit the requirements of mahātmās or *sādhakas* who wish to spend their time in meditation. There are also a few houses consisting of two or three rooms each. In the centre there is a Śiva temple and a covered well. A new hall for satsang had just been constructed, in fact it had not yet been fully completed, and the roof and the flooring were improvised for our function. Just large enough to accommodate the participants of the *Samyam Vrata* and a few visitors, it proved a most congenial place for our group meditations, kirtans and lectures, with its feeling of friendliness and intimacy. A few brand new one-roomed houses dedicated to the wives of the Rishis were, like most of the other buildings, also put at the disposal of the Sangha. But a large number of the *Vratīs* lived in tents. There is a peculiar charm and a great sense of freedom from encumbrances in camp-life. Although nights were often bitterly cold and days very warm, many of the campers felt that it would have been impossible to find a more suitable setting for a function of this kind.

With the Ganges nearby, and far removed from the distractions and comforts of a city, we were able to devote ourselves undisturbed and with single-minded concentration to the programme of the *Samyam Vrata*. Our heart-felt gratitude and appreciation are due to Sri Ganesh Dutt Goswamiji, who very generously invited the Sangha to hold the function at the

Sapta Rishi Ashram. Not only were the arrangements quite excellent, but also did the Goswamiji deliver a series of talks that proved of real practical value and were greatly enjoyed by everyone present. Sri Goswamiji was not only a man of spiritual depths, he had also distinguished himself by his remarkable and sustained social service to the country.

On November 19th Mataji left Hardwar for Delhi and from there went on to Vrindaban a day later. On the 23rd She reached Varanasi, only to leave for Vindhyachal on the 28th.

Akhanda japa and kashtha mounam at Vindhyachal

Vindhyachal was always a charming retreat where Mataji sometimes had a comparatively quiet time. However, quite a number of devotees came from Varanasi, Allahabad, Kanpur, Delhi, Calcutta for longer or shorter visits. At Vindhyachal a new practice was started, namely "*akhaṇḍa japa*" (perpetual meditation) from sunrise to sunset. That is to say in a room specially set apart for the purpose, one person at a time sits in meditation, people taking turns of one hour each. At certain periods this meditation was sustained not only during the day but also throughout the night. Besides that, *kashtha mounam* (keeping silence without making signs or gestures and without communication by writing) was introduced, seven people taking a turn of twenty-four hours each once a week.

A Month at Varanasi

On December 21st Mataji motored to Varanasi to attend some function and was expected to return to Vindhyachal the next day. Instead the whole party was summoned to Varanasi on Dec. 24th. Mataji remained at Varanasi till January 23rd, when She went to Calcutta for a short visit returning to Varanasi on the 28th.

Sri Ma's Health

Mataji's health had not been quite satisfactory for some time. A few days before She was to leave Varanasi for

Calcutta to attend the *Durga Pūjā*, She suddenly got high fever. When after two days the doctor tried to persuade Her to take some medicine, She declined, saying: "Wait for two more days." When the two days were over the fever had promptly subsided. Later She explained: "Some time ago the *kheyāla* came to me: 'How would it be to have fever for some days?' And the fever came."

Just before leaving for Hardwar Mataji's health was again indifferent. Till the last moment it was uncertain whether She would be able to undertake the journey or not. In spite of this, She not only went to Hardwar but attended regularly the long hours of satsang, with any number of private interviews in between and till late at night. At Varanasi and Vindhyachal in December and January Mataji had kept to Her room rather more than usual and saw fewer people. In Varanasi especially She would give darshan mostly twice daily only and was taking a certain amount of rest, either in Her room or on the roof of the Kanyapeeth where She had a daily stroll.

Since in Mataji's case no *prārabdha* karma had to be worked out, Her illnesses had quite a different significance from those of ordinary mortals. There were occasions when She obviously had taken other people's illnesses on Herself. It was also observed that on the extremely rare occasions when Mataji took even any indigenous medicine, the illness took a definite turn for the worse, so that afterwards nobody dared to persuade Her to take any medicine. Mataji used to say that illnesses were beings having definite shapes, resembling those of animals or human beings. Before anyone is gripped by a disease it can thus be seen approaching its victim by those who have eyes to see, and similarly it can be seen leaving its victim at the time of his cure.

When people inquired about Mataji's health She very often replied something like the following "I am always well. Whatever happens is all right. Illnesses are also His manifestations."

When asked why She got ill, She sometimes remarked : "I do not send away anyone who comes to me. Why should I reject illnesses ? Everything is HE alone, I welcome Him in whatever shape He chooses to come."

Quiet Stay at Bombay

On January 31st Mataji left Varanasi, reaching Bombay on February 1st. There She stayed quietly at Vile Parle till February 12th. Only once She went out to attend the inauguration ceremony of the Sadhubela Ashram, which was held at the Vallabhai Stadium.

Short visits to Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Kuchaman, Jodhpur

On February 13th She arrived in Ahmedabad, leaving again on the 15th morning and alighting at Jaipur late that night. Two days later She proceeded to Kuchaman in Rajasthan at the invitation of Raja Pratap Singh of Kuchaman, an old devotee of Ma. She was given a royal reception and even guns were fired in Her honour.

At Jaipur Sri Ma and Her party were the guests of Sri Madan Mohan Varma, who had made arrangements for their stay at the ashram of the late Swami Lachhi Ramji, a renowned *vaidya* of Jaipur and a yogi. The ashram is dedicated to the Dadu line of saints, and is used only for select religious purposes. It is situated in a large garden amidst peaceful surroundings. Mataji's stay in Jaipur, though all too short, enabled many a devotee to have Her darshan and enjoy Her holy satsang. There were devotional songs and kirtan in the evening, followed by a gathering of spiritual aspirants in Sri Ma's room, when She was pleased to favour those present with Her utterances full of love and wisdom. She also granted interviews to individual aspirants and enquirers.

A couple of days earlier, Sri Hari Babaji and his *rāsa* and kirtan parties had also come to Jaipur from Vrindaban to join Sri Ma. Kirtan, satsang and *rāsa* used to be held at Sri Varma's residence (where Sri Hari Baba and his party were

staying) both in the morning and afternoon, which Mataji regularly graced by Her presence. One morning *Rāsa Lilā* was also performed at Poddar Park (the residence of Seth Ram Nath Poddar), which Mataji attended.

Jaipur felt indeed blessed by Her visit. Many were simply charmed by the benediction on Mataji's darshan and satsang. And many who had been unable to get news of Mataji's visit in time expressed their deep regret. Mataji also visited Jodhpur and, after another few hours at Kuchaman, travelled to Vrindaban, reaching there in the morning of the 24th of February. Several people from Jaipur and Kuchaman followed Her to Vrindaban. Bhaktas arrived in ever increasing numbers from Varanasi, Calcutta, Allahabad, Kanpur, Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad and other places to attend the *Śivarātri* and *Holi* festivals and the *Bhāgavata Saptah* held in between.

Inauguration of two new buildings at Vrindaban Ashram on Sivaratri

The Vrindaban Ashram had recently been enlarged by two beautifully designed and well-planned buildings. One was the Satsang hall called *Bhagavata Bhavan*, measuring 76 square feet, adjoining the two temples that are dedicated to Śiva and to Nitai-Gauranga respectively. The cost of the hall was donated by a Nepalese Rani in memory of her deceased husband. In the beginning it was open practically on all sides, supported by pillars, with a large room on one side which served as a dressing-room when the *Rāsa Lilā* or other dramatic performances were staged and otherwise as a store-room. Just outside of it there is a large glass cupboard in which the Srimad Bhāgavata is being permanently kept. Every day throughout the year portions of the Bhāgavata are read out in this hall, and on every fullmoon night *Rāsa Lilā* is being performed there. Beneath the hall a number of rooms that are partly below ground level were also constructed, which could accommodate many guests and would be especially useful in the hot weather,

The second new building was a guest-house called *Gītā Bhavan*, donated by another Nepalese royal widow. It is situated between the main Ashram and the entrance of the compound. So far it consisted of one storey with some underground rooms. One room of *Gītā Bhavan* was permanently set apart for the daily reading of the Bhagavad Gītā and for satsang in general. The ceremonial opening of both buildings took place on the 27th of February, *Śivarātri* day, early morning, in Mataji's presence.

Śivarātri was celebrated in the beautiful new hall in the usual way by four pūjās throughout the night and kirtan in between. *Śivarātri* is always a very special occasion of an extraordinarily grave dignity and a concentrated, pervading peace that makes an indelible impression on all present. Mataji remained in the hall from about 6 p.m. to 4 a.m. Some beautiful, soft and delicate songs sung by a few South Indian ladies who had come from Delhi specially to spend that holy night in Mataji's blissful presence, gave their added charm to the festival.

108 Bhagavatas at Vrindaban

From March 3rd to 10th a *Bhāgavata Saptah* on a most unusual scale was held, followed by *Havan* (fire sacrifice) on the 11th. In fact two *Bhāgavata Saptahs* were going on simultaneously: one in the large hall where 108 pandits clad in bright orange silk shawls chanted the Bhāgavata in Sanskrit every morning for 3-4 hours, followed by explanatory discourses in Hindi in the afternoon, and another reading in the *Gītā Bhavan* followed by Bengali discourses. In both places kirtan was sung right through the interval at midday and again after the *ārati* in the evening.

Apart from the large number of guests who had come from outside, visitors from Vrindaban and Mathura assembled daily during the whole of the week. In that enormous hall there was ample space for all. Only on the evenings when the *Rāsa Līlā* or similar dramatic performances were staged, even the hall proved inadequate.

108 Gītā Patha at Holi

Sri Hari Babaji's birthday falls on *Holi*; it was celebrated in our Ashram a day earlier in great style in the packed hall. The whole Ashram compound had been decorated with flags and garlands. Sweets were distributed to all present.

On *Holi* morning, March 15th, there was once more a ceremony to install the holy scriptures in their respective permanent places. This time the Gītā was recited 108 times, not by pandits but by about 55 ashramites and guests, a few of them taking two or even three turns. Mataji was in and out of *Gītā Bhavan* distributing garlands, fruits and sweets and encouraging the readers who had spread out all over the veranda as well as the room.

Before midday the joyous task of chanting the Gītā 108 times had been accomplished and Mataji was begged to start the *Holi* play. Since Her health was not very good at the time, She just sat in the hall in front of a large bucket with coloured water squirting a few shots on each one of the dense crowd that surrounded Her, eager to receive Her blessing in this way. Throughout the day very lively and enthusiastic kirtan was kept up.

During the whole of Mataji's sojourn of three weeks, perpetual meditation was sustained day and night, people taking turns of one or two hours each.

Nama Yajna at Modinagar for a week

On March 17th Mataji left for Modinagar and everybody dispersed. By the evening the Ashram seemed deserted with only the few permanent residents remaining behind.

Modinagar is an industrial town, about 20 miles from Delhi on the way to Meerut. Seth G. M. Modi, the industrialist after whom the town has been named, had arranged for a *Nāma Yajña* (perpetual kirtan without a break) for a whole week. Mataji, Sri Haribabaji Maharaj and Sri Krishnanda Avadhutaji had accepted Sri Modi's invitation to be present throughout the week. Elaborate arrangements had

been made to ensure the comforts of all guests. But untimely rain and heavy thunderstorms played havoc with pandals and tents. In spite of the bad weather very many visitors kept on coming from Delhi and other places and the atmosphere of abounding joy could not be damped by the inclemency of the elements. The *Nāma Yajña* was brought to a successful completion.

On March 25th Mataji proceeded to Hapur and from there to Vindhychal for some rest and quiet. She arrived there on the 26th late at night.

Vasanti Puja at Varanasi

On April 1st She motored to Varanasi where *Vasanti Pūjā* was celebrated from 6th to 9th April. Mataji however left on the 8th (*Ashtami* day) for Barabanki where She attended a function on the 9th, reaching Dehradun on the 10th morning.

Kishenpur & Kalyanvan

At Dehradun there are four Sri Anandamayi Ashrams, two at Raipur near the Śiva temple where Mataji had stayed for several months with Bholanathji and Bhaiji when She left Bengal for the first time in 1932, and two at Kishenpur on the road to Mussoorie.

This time Mataji, during the first few days of Her visit, chose to reside at 'Kalyanvan' which is about three furlongs further up than the older Kishenpur Ashram. Kalyanvan was originally intended to be the site of the Vidyapeeth, the Boys' School for Brahmacharis run by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha at Almora. Instead of this it has developed into a beautiful fruit and flower garden. It is a quiet, secluded spot with a charming view of the Mussoorie Hills.

Usually when Mataji came to Kishenpur, the two cottages at Kalyanvan were occupied by *sannyāsīs* and a few brahmacharis. Last year a large platform was built in front of the upper cottage. There Mataji would sit or walk about in the cool of the evening, people coming from all over Dehradun

and surroundings for Her darshan amongst roses and jasmines. Sometimes She was in a communicative mood and would reply to questions or tell stories, one after another till it got dark and everyone had to hurry back either to their homes or to the main Ashram for the evening kirtan.

Didima's Samnyasa Utsava at Dehradun

On April 13th 1939, *Chaitra Sankranti*, which is the New Year's Eve of the Bengali year, Srimati Mokshada Sundari Devi, Mataji's mother, lovingly called 'Didimā' by all the thousands of Mataji's children, had been initiated into *sannyāsa* by Swami Mangalananda Giri Maharaj at Hardwar and thence she became Swami Muktananda Giri.

Last year for the first time the anniversary of this happy and auspicious event had been celebrated solemnly at the Varanasi Ashram by a full programme of kirtan, *ārati*, the reading of Scriptures, etc.* The celebration was to be held once more at Varanasi, when towards the end of Mataji's stay at Vrindaban it was decided to observe it at Kishenpur for the convenience of Giriji's devoted disciples at Dehradun.

Gurupriya Devi with a few others had already gone to Kishenpur from Vrindaban on March 17th and when Mataji left Modinagar eight days later a number of *sannyāsīs* and brahmacharis joined Gurupriya Devi at Kishenpur and readily undertook to help with the preparations.

The festivities were to be on such larger scale than in the previous year. In fact a preliminary function had already been held at Varanasi on the 5th of April. Invitations were printed and an elaborate provisional programme drawn up, starting from 4-30 a.m. on the 13th and continuing without a break till 6 a.m. on the 14th.

Until almost the last moment it had been quite uncertain whether it would be possible to get enough experienced singers to keep up the long hours of kirtan and whether the cooperation of some learned Mahātmās could be secured who would

* See p. 83.

deliver talks worthy of the occasion. Moreover some *sannyāsīs* were to be entertained to choice food and presents and a feast given to all who cared to be present.

Only during the very last days before the function, funds began to pour in abundantly, justifying to the full the faith of the disciples. Encouraged by Mataji who often stressed the importance of devotion and complete surrender to the Guru as God, they felt that a celebration in honour of their Guru must needs be crowned with success. Didima herself, who by nature was extremely shy and reserved and disliked nothing in the world as much as she did to be the centre of attention, seemed to feel visibly uneasy at the thought of a big celebration in her honour. But Mataji said: "The festival has nothing to do with Didima. Giriji's becoming a *sannyāsi* will be commemorated by her disciples, that's all." It was to be taken completely impersonally.

Actually the whole day and night passed in such harmony and deep joy, one item of the programme spontaneously following another, one could not help feeling interested and inspired. Some visitors who had come only out of politeness and intended to stay just for a short while could not tear themselves away and remained for hours together and many sat up all night for kirtan.

The whole Ashram including the garden and the gate has been gaily and tastefully decorated and during the night there was a blare of coloured lights that could be seen from a considerable distance.

On the 12th evening two *sannyāsīs* of our Ashram were sent to Hardwar and Rishikesh to invite several Mahātmās to grace the function with their presence and enlighten the audience by their discourses. Three of them responded, namely Mahamandaleswar Sri Maheshwaranadaji from Bombay, Sri Sukhadevanandji of Paramartha Niketan at Rishikesh and Sri Krishnananda Avadhutji.

Punctually at 4-30 a.m. the kirtan started with a circumambulation of the Ashram. At about 8 a.m. everyone present

went to Kalyanvan. Didima, Mataji and Didi were taken in procession from there to the Ashram in a car decorated with *gerua* coloured cloth, a tigerskin and garlands. Even the police band had been called for the occasion. They marched in front, followed by bhaktas and disciples who sang "*Satyam Jñānam Anantam Brahman*" all the way, surrounding the car which was driven at walking speed by the Raja of Amb.

The usual reading of portions from the Gītā, Upanishad, etc., was followed by a talk by Sri Sukhadevanandaji Maharaj. He as well as the Mahamandaleswar and Avadhutaji who spoke in the afternoon, enlarged on the significance of *sannyāsa*, and gave instances from the Scriptures of enlightened women *sannyāsīs*, such as Gargi and Vāk.

Opinions among learned men vary as to whether women are entitled to take *sannyāsa*. It was pointed out that *sannyāsa* is a state in which the question of a person's sex cannot arise. *Sannyāsa* means complete renunciation of everything that is fleeting; this is possible only for one who has had at least a glimpse of real Knowledge, a taste of Divine Joy, which automatically evokes *vairāgya*, indifference to worldly pleasures and enticements, for in the Light of Reality those things are felt to be savourless and unalluring. A true *sannyāsi* is desireless because the one thing in which he is interested is *Brahmavidyā*, the Knowledge of the Supreme. Therefore the question of whether he happens to be a man or a woman does not arise. Unaffected by pleasure or pain, heat or cold, praise or blame, intent only on the Realization of the One in every being and beyond all beings, he naturally becomes an example, a guide, a beacon light to those who are stumbling and groping in the dark.

It was the significance of the function and its purpose to bring home to us that we all are travellers on the Path to Immortality.

By various ways and methods Mataji always kept on reminding us of our divine calling. Indeed after a day and a night spent in this intense, concentrated atmosphere, suffused

by heavenly bliss, our petty worries, cares and quarrels seemed out of proportion; we were lifted into a happier, clearer and lighter sphere.

To pay homage to Didima's outstanding kindness and concern for all who came within her orb, her disciples had decided that everyone who visited the Ashram on that day without exception or distinction would be asked to partake of the very delicious meal served to all alike from about 12 midday to 8 or 9 p.m. The Swamis of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission at Kishenpur, many neighbours and all bhaktas of Dehradun had been invited for the feast.

The next day, as a sequel to the celebration, the inhabitants, men, women and children of two villages near the Ashram were entertained to two maunds of *khichuri* with an adequate quantity of vegetables and curds.

The all-night kirtan was brought to its happy close when, at about 7 a.m. on April 14th, all present went to Kalyanvan to offer flowers at Mataji's feet and receive Her blessings for the Bengali New Year. That night Sri Giriji's disciples (several of them are *sahnyāsis*) assembled in Mataji's room and She told them that they were an '*Ānanda Vardhana Sabhā*', that is an association for the promotion of real Joy, the Joy that is eternal, that is beyond the opposites of happiness and sorrow and comes with the realization of the Brahman, of THAT which IS. Unattached and without craving for anything of this world or the next, the *sahnyāsi* has to pursue the knowledge of the Absolute and do service wherever required, remembering that it is the Supreme who is served in every creature. Didima added that infinite patience was the virtue that is the most beautiful adornment of every *sahnyāsi*.

Giriji's *Sahnyāsa Utsava* was celebrated also at our Ashrams in Varanasi, Vrindaban, Delhi and Rajgir.

Mataji remained in Dehradun till April 25th when She motored to Hardwar. From there She went on to Vrindaban on the 27th, leaving on the 29th for Ahmedabad where Her 62nd birthday was celebrated from May 2nd to 18th.

Birthday Celebrations at Ahmedabad

The celebrations took place at the house of Sri Mukundbhai Thakore from 2nd to 10th May. They consisted of a *Bhāgavata Saptah*, *bhajans*, kirtan, meditation from 8-45 p.m. to 9 p.m. and talks with Sri Ma, etc.

Further, from 2nd to 18th May there was *rāsālilā*, kirtan, *kathā*, *bhajan*, meditation and talks with Ma at Sri Kantibhai Munshaw's house. In fact, except for a few hours of sleep, the whole period was spent in divine work which created an unusually divine atmosphere.

A devotee asked Mataji: "What is the meaning of your birthday? According to the *Vedānta Śāstra* nobody is born and nobody dies." Mataji: "This body says that it was not born. Sri Krishna had no birth, yet people are celebrating his *Janmastami*. By celebrating such occasions, there is an increase of devotion, true knowledge and satsang and therefore I do not object to these activities. I enjoy them as others enjoy them. It is a similar function as on *Rāmanavami* (Sri Rāma's birthday). On such occasions saints and devotees gather together, have discussions, and many questions are solved. Therefore, the level from which the birthday celebrations are viewed must be taken into consideration."

Question: If those who believe in the absolute oneness of the spirit, celebrate such occasions in which divided talks and observations occur, will not their unitary (*Advaita*) knowledge disappear?

Mataji: If a man who has passed his B. A. examination talks to little children and takes interest in their play, will his knowledge of B. A. disappear? In the same way, a man who has firm knowledge of absolute unity will not lose his knowledge if he takes part in such festivals. Real Knowledge is self-sufficient and perfect. It does not admit divisions. It is not subject to *māyā* and it knows no disturbance of peace.

On the 2nd of May, Mataji was to be specially worshipped and Mukundbhai had made good preparations. But Ma did

not want to be worshipped. She desired that God should be worshipped. She devised a remedy. There was a book in Her hand with a picture of Sri Krishna on the cover. She said this should be worshipped. But the devotees wanted to adore the living God in the form of the Mother. Yet, Ma did not like it. She found a way out. She wanted to demonstrate that God is in all. Therefore, She got down from Her seat, moved about among the devotees, threw flowers amongst them and prostrated before them, thus worshipping God in all of them. The whole atmosphere was changed. It appeared as if we were celebrating God's birthday. Then She took Her seat and allowed the pūjā to be performed.

Bombay, Pune, Delhi, Hardwar : Gurupurnima

Mataji left Ahmedabad on May 18th for Bombay. On May 23rd She proceeded to Pune where She stayed fairly quietly until June 21st, when She returned to Bombay. On June 24th She left for Delhi arriving there on the 25th evening. After a visit to Hardwar of a few hours She alighted in Kishenpur, Dehradun by car on the 28th evening for a long stay of about two months, interrupted by a visit of five days to Hardwar from July 8th to 12th on the occasion of *Gurupūrṇimā*. The celebration at Hardwar marked a joyful reunion of bhaktas who had assembled in large numbers even from places as distant as Calcutta, Bombay, Almora etc., not to speak of those who had come from Delhi, Dehradun and so forth, to pay homage to Mataji on that auspicious day.

Mataji's ill-health in August 1957 at Kishenpur

Mataji did not keep good health during Her sojourn at Kishenpur, although for the first few weeks it would have been difficult for a casual visitor to notice it, since Mataji attended the satsang daily, talked and joked in Her usual lively manner, and almost every evening went for walks to Kalyanvan, where a great many devotees from Dehradun used to gather for darshan and occasional discussions. Towards the end of July,

however, Mataji's condition took a turn for the worse. From August 1st to 23rd She did not come downstairs at all. During those 23 days we had darshan three times daily for a few minutes only and every time we found Mataji sitting or lying on Her bed.

Within that period fell *Jhūlan Pūrṇimā* and *Janmastami*. Everyone felt rather anxious and perturbed about Mataji's bad health and nobody was in a mood for celebrations. But Mataji insisted that celebrations, decorations and feasts should be observed in the usual manner and She Herself gave instructions about every detail of the preparations. Although during *Jhūlan* week Mataji's health was at its worst, She came out on the veranda near Her room on the nights of *Jhūlan Ekadasi* and *Pūrṇimā* and sat in an arm-chair in front of a large ventilator that opens out into the hall below, so that She could admire the charmingly decorated swing that had been installed for the occasion. Several images of Lord Krishna had been placed on it, to be worshipped according to the custom. The people sitting in the hall could at the same time have Mataji's darshan from a distance.

By *Janmastami* which fell on August 18th this year, Mataji's condition had fortunately improved and She came out of Her room four times that day and sat in front of the ventilator giving darshan to all and listening to the excellent kirtan that was sustained for twenty-four hours by devotees from Karanpur (Dehradun) and Delhi. Mataji was also present in the same place from 12-1 a.m., watching the midnight pūjā. The attendance was tremendous throughout the day and night. On that special occasion people were allowed to go upstairs, to do obeisance and place their offerings before Mataji while She was sitting on the veranda. In spite of everyone's deep regret that Mataji was too weak to come downstairs and move about among people as She always used to do on similar occasions, this festival was celebrated in a beautiful, dignified and solemn manner. Even the frolics of the traditional '*Nandotsav*', which expresses the joy of the cowherds over

the birth of the Divine child Sri Krishna the next morning, were not omitted. Some of the young people dressed up as Gopas and Gopis and acted their parts, dancing round the room with large pots of curds on their heads. Mataji appeared again at Her elevated point of vantage, but it fell to Didi's lot this time to distribute the curds to everyone present at the end of the function.

A new feature of those days was that, while as a rule whenever Mataji left the satsang, many people would get up and follow Her wherever She went or if She retired to Her room wait in front of the closed door, this time people attended all the meetings daily in large numbers, although Mataji's seat remained vacant.

Kalyanvan and Raipur

On August 23rd almost the whole of Mataji's party, including Didima and Didi, left for Varanasi, whereas Mataji with a very few people moved to Kalyanvan, Her second Ashram at Kishenpur. To our amazement Mataji walked down the steps very steadily, after having been confined to Her set of rooms for over three weeks. After sitting in the hall for a few minutes, She boarded the car that took Her to Kalyanvan, where She at once began to stroll about on the large platform and then sat down in the open, giving darshan to those who were tearfully taking leave as well as to the crowd that had come from Dehradun. Mataji spent three days in the little garden house, and then moved to the Raipur Ashram.

The approach to the Ashram is by a good number of steep steps and some of us wondered whether Mataji would not have to be carried up in an armchair. But lo and behold, She climbed up the steps as if She were quite well and strong. Her condition had improved and when Mataji left for Varanasi on August 29th, She even followed the urgent invitations of bhaktas of Dehradun to three different houses and on Her way to the station sat in their gardens for a few minutes each. In one of the houses She responded to the host's request to

sing '*Rāma nāma*'. To our delight we heard Her sing after a long time.

Reflections on Sri Ma's health

As always with Mataji, the nature of Her illness could not be defined by the various doctors that had been called from Delhi and Varanasi as well as Dehradun to relieve the anxiety of the bhaktas rather than Mataji's condition. It is a well-known fact among those who are close to Mataji, that Her illnesses baffled and bewildered medical experts as much as laymen. A doctor might diagnose a certain disease, only to discover that it had simply vanished the next day or else given place to quite a different type of illness, only to change into a third one the day after, or he would possibly find Her perfectly well again. It was very similar as regards Her pulse : it would be very quick at one time and ten minutes later quite slow and weak and so forth. When taking Her temperature the thermometer might have shown high fever and perhaps half an hour later subnormal temperature. Doctors mostly did not dare to diagnose Her condition and since medicine of any kind, be it allopathic, homœopathic or ayurvedic, far from having a curative effect, only aggravated the trouble, nobody had the courage to request Mataji to take medicine. All that doctors could do was to give suggestions as to diet and rest, and allay the anxiety of Her attendants by reassuring words. Often they humbly requested Mataji to explain Herself the nature of Her illness, which She did with a most radiant smile and complete detachment, as a perfectly dispassionate spectator. On such occasions She repeated invariably that She was always well and in "*Ananda*" and that She did not experience any discomfort, although the ailment seemed obvious enough to us. When asked why She got ill at all, since there was no karma for Her to be worked out as in the case of ordinary human beings, She often was heard to say : "Diseases are beings with definite shapes like every one of you. I do not send you away when you come to me, but welcome everyone and everything

as forms of Him. Why should I make an exception with those of His guises which are called illnesses? It is all His Play. He is in all forms, be they pleasing or painful. I can assure you that I feel no discomfort, all conditions are equal to me, I am always well."

Nobody could comprehend why She sometimes got seriously ill suddenly and also got cured equally unexpectedly without the use of medicine or treatment. Sometimes Mataji stated that health and disease depend largely on the breath, on its quality, its rhythm and rate. (It must be borne in mind that the breath is the outer expression of the life force (*prāṇa*) which keeps the body alive). If the rhythm of the breath is disturbed, this is followed by illness, but if the normal rhythm of the breath can be regained and made harmonious, the body will be fit and healthy in no time. Then also She said: 'I am the nerves, the arteries and the veins, I am the breath as well as its movements, I am also the observer who stands apart and watches the process of living and breathing, if at all the word 'I' is to be used!'

During the days when Her condition appeared most critical to us, She would perfectly calmly and smilingly — albeit with a weak voice — explain the details of the symptoms, the details of the disturbed functioning of breath and pulse, while in spite of seeing the general disability of Her body, all the doctors agreed that every one of Her organs was in perfect condition. It was in fact most perplexing.

One day, while Her illness was acute, Mataji told us that in the night certain Mahātmās had come to see Her in their subtle bodies. They first sat before Her for a while and then walked round Her in solemn circumambulation. She did not tell us why they had come, but we felt that it was probably to join in the fervent prayers of devotees all over India, nay all over the world, for Mataji's speedy recovery.

Mataji was repeatedly heard to state that not only visible beings flocked round Her, but also equally many or even more human and other beings came to Her in their subtle bodies,

invisible to the ordinary eye. They came for many different reasons: to have darshan, to enjoy Mataji's company, for satsang, to ask questions and have their problems solved, and also for purposes which are beyond our ken.

Fortunately Mataji granted the prayers of all the thousands of visible and invisible devotees and was gracious enough to become better again, although She was not yet in perfect health.

Bhagavata Jayanti at Varanasi

Mataji reached Varanasi on August 30th after an absence of nearly five months. From September 1st to 8th a *Bhāgavata Jayanti* was held, which had become a regular feature of the Ashram. It was celebrated in an even more impressive manner than on former occasions — perhaps to make up for Mataji's absence from Varanasi during *Jhūlan* week and *Janmastami*, which used to be such feasts of joy there in years past. Part of the success of the *Bhāgavata Saptah* was surely due to the active interest of a devotee from Bombay who attended with his whole family. Although functions of this kind were being repeated time after time, yet in Mataji's presence they seemed ever new and inspiring.

A few years ago the parents of a promising young man, who had died under tragic circumstances in an air crash, arranged for a *Bhāgavata Saptah* in the Ashram. The bereaved father was a fairly westernised person, who had not much faith; and moreover the simplicity and frugality of the Ashram was not quite to his taste when he first arrived. But day by day his mood brightened and he came to appreciate more and more the spiritual atmosphere around him, until by the end of the week he was a changed person, full of joy at having made contact with Mataji.

A veritable host of visitors had come to take part in the *Bhāgavata Jayanti* this year. Many of them returned to their homes when it was over and Mataji had a more restful time until a new influx of guests arrived to attend *Durga Pūjā* which was celebrated from September 30th to October 3rd.

Durga Puja

Already a year ago an old devotee of advanced age had begged Mataji to be present at the *Durga Pūjā* at Varanasi this year, as it might possibly be the last celebration in the old lady's lifetime. The request was granted. Preparations for the *Pūjā* began quite early and invitations were sent to all bhaktas and friends. A surprisingly large number responded to the call — in fact one was reminded of the 60th *Jayanti* celebrations in 1956; of course it was all on a miniature scale compared to that gigantic function. Nevertheless this time also many guests had to be accommodated in various houses near about, even though the Ashram itself can give shelter to a very considerable number of visitors.

The whole celebration was pervaded with great joy. Mataji was not present for as many hours as she used to in former years. However, visibly or invisibly She was felt to take part in everything and at intervals could be seen moving all over the Ashram giving suggestions, directions, encouragement. Visitors had Her darshan several times daily.

A word must be said about the artist who created the image for the puja in front of our eyes in the Ashram itself, in an incredibly short time and yet with rare artistic skill and perfection. It was quite an experience to watch him work and produce the beautiful image, seemingly out of almost nothing, as if by magic.

Lakshmi Puja

On October 8th *Lakshmi Pūjā* followed. In the Chandi Mandap of the Ashram there is a lovely statue of goddess Lakshmi, which was used as the focus for the worship. *Lakshmi Pūjā* is performed after dusk in the full moon night and takes only about two hours, which Mataji graced with Her benign presence. It was on a much smaller scale than *Durga Pūjā*, but nonetheless impressive, charming and harmonious.



Divali & Annakut

A fortnight later, on October 22nd and 23rd, *Divali*, the festival of lights, was observed in the traditional way by a profusion of oil lamps and candle lights outlining the Ashram roofs and verandas, by crackers and fireworks for the children and by the solemn worship of goddess Kali throughout the moonless night. Mataji was present in the evening and again during the pūjā from 10 p.m. to nearly 3 a.m. When everyone had partaken of the *prāsada* it was nearly dawn and therefore time to start cooking for *Annakūt*, the yearly feast of Annapurna, the goddess of plenty.

An enormous quantity of food of a great variety (108 dishes in all) has to be offered on that occasion and there was no end to the guests who kept on pouring in the whole afternoon, until at about 6 p. m. everyone had had his fill. No special invitations had been sent out for this feast, but everyone who ventured along was welcome to partake of the *prasāda*, and thanks to Annapurna's grace there was no scarcity; everyone who came could be satisfied.

It was no small task for those of the Ashramites who prepared and served the meal, not only in the two dining-halls, but also simultaneously wherever else space permitted. Mataji could be observed now in the kitchen, the next moment in the temple, then again taking part Herself in the serving of food and a little later receiving people in Her own room, putting a garland round one person's neck, a fruit into another one's hand, with a smile for one, an encouraging word for yet another — as ever giving just the right thing at the right moment to everyone who came within Her orb.



SIX

(October 1957 — October 1958)

Vindhyachal

On October 24th Mataji motored to Vindhyachal. There She had a comparatively quiet time, although guests from Calcutta, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad, Varanasi, etc. kept on coming and going without a day's interval. A visit to the Vindhyachal Ashram, however short, while Mataji was present, remained a cherished memory for the rest of one's life. Everything was delightful on Ashtabhujia Hill. The wide landscape, the soft breeze, the sparkling water from Kali Kuan, the excavations of ancient sculptures at the entrance to the Ashram, the herds of cows and goats grazing on the hillside, the solitude and the pervading peace — and last but not least the fact that Mataji could be met here surrounded by a handful of people only, in contrast to the large crowds in most other places. In the Vindhyachal Ashram there was no rush and no pushing, one could relax and feel at perfect ease...

On November 15th Mataji returned to Varanasi only to leave for New Delhi on November 19th, to be present at the seventh *Samyam Mahāvratā*, held at the Ashram at Chandraloka near Kalkaji on the outskirts of New Delhi.

History of Delhi Ashram and Seventh Samyam Mahāvratā

Mataji had a very fine group of devotees in Delhi and New Delhi. Formerly, whenever She visited that city, Dr. J. K. Sen, a renowned physician of New Delhi, used to put up tents for Mataji's use in his garden and with generous hospitality entertained Her party in his own house. Several years ago he had built for Her a small cottage adjoining his own house. In Mataji's absence Her room was used for satsang and meditation, and regularly once a week kirtan was being

performed there by some devotees who are excellent and ardent singers and players.

In 1948 Mataji's birthday* was celebrated in Dr. J. K. Sen's compound. It was a beautiful and memorable function in spite of the scorching heat of May. A large pandal had been erected in the garden for the occasion and it was generally packed throughout the long hours of satsang. Several nights were spent completely in kirtan. Once a heavy rainstorm played havoc with the roof of the tent; notwithstanding, the enthusiastic kirtan singers, housed by Mataji, went on dancing and singing, although splashed with mud and drenched to the skin. The inclemency of the weather seemed to encourage them to do even better than usually.

However, to everyone's deep regret, Dr. J. K. Sen had a stroke in February 1952 and was since then bed-ridden until he passed away a year or so later. On March 17th, 1952 Mataji had come to Delhi and paid a visit to the ailing bhakta. On this occasion She remarked to another bhakta, whom for the sake of convenience we shall call "D": "See, how ill the old man is. There is no knowing when he will leave this world. Then, where will you carry on your kirtan and satsang? Try to build at least a hut somewhere in New Delhi for this purpose." "Since 1946 I have been trying to build an Ashram here," replied D, "but all my efforts have failed."

At that moment Didi entered the room; "What have you tied into the end of your dhoti?" questioned Mataji. "Rs. 101/-" came the prompt reply, "which someone has just given me as a donation. I want to use it for the repairs of the *ghāt* at Varanasi." Mataji asked Didi to hand over the money to D. with the words: "Let this be the first contribution for the good work that you are going to embark on from today."

The next day Mataji left Delhi. D. at once began to look around for a suitable plot. After a thorough search he decided on Chandraloka beyond Kalkaji Colony and drew up a plan

* See "As the Flower Sheds Its Fragrance," P. 20-21.

for a building. Mataji approved of both the site he had chosen and D's design. With funds that he had in the meantime collected, one acre of land was purchased. The land was then comparatively cheap, as Chandraloka is situated about 10 miles from Connaught Place and some 15 minutes walk from the nearest bus stop. Moreover the last bit of the road was extremely bad and then hardly motorable. Yet Chandraloka has proved an ideal place for an Ashram, solitary and peaceful, at the foot of a low hill and far removed from the activities of the busy metropolis.

At a distance of perhaps half a mile there is an ancient Kali temple. The image of the goddess is supposed to date back to *Dwāpara Yuga*. The legend has it that it was installed by the Pandavas themselves. It is supposed to be a *Jāgrat Mūrti* (a live focus for the power of goddess Kali). The temple is a famous place of pilgrimage: twice every year, at *Navarātri*, *Vasanti Pūjā* ending at *Rama Navami* (Sri Rama's birthday) in spring and at *Durga Pūjā* in autumn, it teems with crowds that gather from all over North India and camp in the vicinity. It is for the sake of this image of Kali that the colony has been named "Kalkaji" (short for "Kalikaji"). Kalkaji has recently become fully developed as well as self-sufficient with various shops, Primary and High Schools and a large Degree College for boys and girls.

On August 18th, 1953 the foundation stone of the new Ashram had been laid in Mataji's presence and the construction begun without delay. The main building was to consist of a large circular hall with four rooms adjoining it on four sides. However, funds were not too plentiful and so to begin with three rooms, out of which two were for Mataji and Sri Hari Babaji, were erected whereas the hall had progressed merely up to plinth level. Two separate structures for kitchens and bathrooms had also been completed, when on Aug. 26th, 1954 the opening ceremony took place in the presence of Mataji and Sri Hari Babaji. Henceforth D. began to live in the Ashram taking upon himself all sorts of hardships, undreamt

of by the inhabitants of New Delhi. Neither water nor electricity had been laid on and all commodities had to be procured from a considerable distance. But D. was undaunted and held out faithfully until his perseverance was crowned with full success during the recent *Samyam Vrata*, which was held at the Ashram from November 22nd-28th, 1957.

Mataji had paid several short visits to the Ashram at varying intervals; kirtan was performed there regularly once weekly since its inauguration. Besides that, a *Nāma Yajña* was celebrated once every year in Mataji's presence. It took place for the first time on November 7th, 1954. In 1955 Mataji halted at Chandraloka on Her way to Solan in April and again in July on Her return journey.

On July 26th, 1957 a rather strange thing happened. Mataji was resting in Her room in the early afternoon, when Her attendant heard Her say: "Water, water!" Thinking that Mataji was perhaps feeling thirsty, the girl brought a glass of water, at which Mataji shook Her head, saying: "No, no, there is water all round." The girl could not understand what Mataji was referring to.

That day a lady had come from New Delhi with her two small children, who went to play near the water tank and fell into it. They came back to their mother drenched to the skin and dripping with water. Shocked at their sight, she inquired what had happened. They related that they had both fallen into the open tank in the course of their play and that they found a beautiful lady swimming in the water, the same lady who had given them garlands in the morning (namely Mataji). The lady had caught hold of them and dragged them out of the tank, thus saving them from drowning. At the same time Mataji had been lying on Her couch exclaiming: "Water, water." Three days later Mataji had left for Vrindaban.

In November 1955 the fifth *Samyam Vrata* had been observed at the Kali Bari, New Delhi.

During the *Samyam Vrata* at Kali Bari, and again the next year at a similar function held at the Saptarshi Ashram at Hardwar, Sri S. N. Aga, the then Chief of the Railway Security Police, and Mrs. Aga had asked for permission to arrange for the next function in the Delhi Ashram. Their request was granted.

In the middle of September 1957 Swami Paramananda went to New Delhi to assist with the preparations. He and D. with the help of other bhaktas achieved the remarkable feat of arranging for the construction of a most beautiful circular hall as well as several rooms and a wall round the whole of the compound in less than two months. In the meanwhile Mr. Aga made elaborate arrangements for the camp. Truck loads of tents and all other necessities were procured, electricity was installed in the Ashram, and when we arrived on Nov. 21st, we could scarcely believe our eyes, when we beheld a large imposing building, surrounded by a city of white tents, glittering brightly in the winter sun. The office was housed in a tent near the gate, with a phone at everyone's disposal. Police staff pitched the tents, received the arriving guests, carried their luggage, filled and cleaned the lamps, in fact did hundred and one odd jobs that were necessary for the smooth running of the function and for the comforts of the participants — last but not least guarding the camp by day and by night.

Mataji arrived on November 20th, two days before the *Samyam Vrata* began. She was here, there and everywhere, giving useful suggestions and encouraging everyone, inspecting every branch of the preparations that were in full swing to the very last moment.

The seventh *Samyam Vrata* was one of the most wonderful and harmonious gatherings we have ever experienced. Indeed, there were many requests that the *Samyam Vrata* should be observed twice yearly instead of once only.

About 200 people, old and young, had flocked from far and near and with a very few exceptions everyone lived in tents, as there was no other accommodation available. However,

open-air life in the midst of nature proved most helpful and congenial to what we were attempting. It gave us a feeling of freedom and exuberance: civilization does not help concentration and the fewer our needs the happier we feel. With all that, we were really quite comfortable in spite of the cold weather.

The inhabitants of New and old Delhi came in large numbers by cars and buses to attend the satsang and for Mataji's darshan. Amongst them were many high officials, several ministers and other well-known personages. They came not only once out of curiosity, some of them showed a lively interest and continued their visits after the *Samyam Vrata* was over, when it became possible to see Mataji more informally, surrounded as She was then by a smaller group of devotees. A number of Europeans and Americans also were attracted and some of them had private talks with Mataji.

Mataji was in great form throughout. While we had recently become accustomed to seeing Her only at fixed darshan hours twice or three times daily during Her sojourns in Dehradun, Varanasi and Vindhyachal, we were most agreeably surprised to find Mataji attending the satsang morning, afternoon and evening during the *Samyam Vrata*; besides that She used to be about and see people in between and until late at night in Her own room as well. After Mataji's recent ill-health we had felt doubtful whether She had completely recovered. But in Delhi She showed no fatigue; She was as She had always been before Her recent indisposition.

The *Samyam Vrata* represents a concerted effort at concentrated *sādhana* and satsang to the exclusion of everything else for a week. It is no exaggeration to declare that we cannot imagine that even a single one of the participants should have failed to find the gathering a very definite and lasting help. During that special week everyone seems at his or her best and this becomes less and less of a strain and more and more of a deep joy. This time the diet was appreciably more restricted than on former occasions. Everyone began the week by a com-

plete fast on Ganges water for the first 36 hours. For the rest of the week there was at midday just one dish for everyone alike, either rice boiled with vegetables and dal, or wheat porridge boiled in milk, and so on. For the 2nd class milk was served in the evening. The last day was another fast on Ganges water for nearly 48 hours for the 1st class only.

The most cherished hours were as always the daily silent meditations in Mataji's presence from 8-9 a.m. and 3-4 p.m., and the *Mātri Satsang* at the close of each day, when Mataji replied to questions for half an hour or more. As usual Mahātmās and pandits delivered discourses on the meaning and value of *Samyam Vrata*, on the lives of saints and sages and on other instructive and enlightening subjects; the programme also included kirtan, chanting of the Vedas and other sacred Scriptures. On the last day of the *Vrata* the new hall was given its name: '*Nāma Brahman Mandir*' during a simple ceremony.

The *Samyam Vrata* ended with a collective *mahānīsha dhyāna* (midnight meditation) on November 28th. After the meditation someone asked Mataji what was the advantage of meditating at that odd hour. Mataji explained that there were certain times especially favourable to meditation, namely the so-called *sandhi-kshanas*: when night changes into day at dawn, when day gives way to night at dusk, and also midday and midnight. Midnight is called *Amrit Kāla*, the hour of immortality.

Mataji also said that while *Samyam* (self-discipline) does not actually bring about Self-realisation, since He is self-effulgent and no effort can take us to Him, yet for the purification of mind and body, self-restraint, satsang and the activities practised during the *Samyam Vrata* are imperative. All these combine to harmonize a human being so as to attune him to the Divine. "If you are observant", said Mataji, "you will notice that everyone here looks different from what he looked a week ago and you will also find that every *Samyam Vrata* seems easier than the one before and takes you a step further. The restricted diet and sleep, the life that you lead during those

gatherings are an aid to meditation and self-discovery". At the end Mataji distributed a copy each of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and of the *Rāmāyana* to every *vrati*.

On Nov. 30th the Delhi bhaktas celebrated their yearly *Nāma Yajña*, for the first time in the newly built hall. As customary the kirtan began late in the evening and continued till sunset the next day. An altar with pictures on all four sides is erected in the centre on these occasions and the kirtan singers walk round it in solemn circumambulation in rhythm to the music. The men started and then the women took over and continued till sunrise. Mataji remained with them for some time. It so happened that two ladies from California were present and so they also joined. They were visibly impressed. One of them exclaimed with tears in her eyes: "This I can never forget in all my life. Here one has just to be oneself and forget everything else. How wonderful!"

Mataji remained at the Delhi Ashram until December 16th. From December 9th the whole of the *Rāmāyana* was read by groups in turns, day and night. During the later part of Her sojourn Mataji followed the invitations of quite a number of bhaktas and visited their homes, although She would not enter the actual house of a *grihastha*.

Vrindaban, Modinagar, Kalyanvan, Meerut, Etawah

From Delhi Mataji proceeded to Vrindaban for a very short visit. On the 20th She passed through Delhi again, halting only for a few hours. Spending the night in Modinagar She reached Dehradun on December 21st. There She stayed quietly in the small cottage at Kalyanvan in Kishenpur. It was a restful time, although She gave darshan twice daily, mostly in the open air on the terrace in front of the cottage. On December 26th She left for Hardwar and from there for Delhi the very next day. She paid a short visit to Meerut to console a devotee, whose husband had died suddenly, and then went on to Etawah, where She remained for 6 days. Some devotees were eager to start an Ashram in that town. A plot of

land had already been acquired for this purpose and a building was to be put up. However, this plan never materialized.

Ananda Kashi

On January 4th, 1958, Mataji was back at Hardwar. From there She motored to Ananda Kashi near Vasistha Gupha, a solitary place of extreme natural beauty on the banks of the Ganges, amidst hills and forests. The Rajmata of Tehri Garhwal has a country house and a guest-house there in a lovely garden with fruit-trees and flowers and fountains. A few years ago she built a beautiful, little cottage for Mataji there, which is quite an ideal place for a retreat, as it is not easily accessible even from Rishikesh and really quiet and solitary. The only sounds that chime into one's ears are the sweet melodious song of the water course that traverses the estate and the dancing jingle of the swiftly flowing Ganges. There the river is full of mirth and gaiety, quite different from the serene, mature Ganga at Varanasi. In the centre of the garden a small Śiva temple had been erected over a linga that was found deeply buried when the foundations were dug up.

Whenever Mataji visited Ananda Kashi, She took only very few people with Her; so also this time. January is the coldest month of the year, but Mataji did not seem to mind the cold. She used to sit on Her veranda from the time the first rays of the sun entered the compound and She spent the whole afternoon there until the last ray bade Her adieu. Those who stayed with Mataji were extremely fortunate to have Her close company almost throughout the day amidst ideal surroundings.

On January 13th morning Mataji motored back to Hardwar, where She spent the day at Baghat House, only to catch the train to Varanasi that very night. A number of devotees had come from Dehradun for Mataji's darshan.

Sankranti at Varanasi & Saraswati Puja at Allahabad

Mataji arrived at Varanasi on January 14th, Sankranti evening, just in time for the end of the yearly commemoration

of the great *yajña* that had been celebrated at the Varanasi Ashram from January 14th, 1947 to January 14th, 1950. The girls of the Kanyapeeth had been singing kirtan since the morning and as Mataji entered the Ashram the kirtan reached its climax. After it was terminated Mataji distributed fruits and sweets to everyone present. She remained at Varanasi until January 23rd, when She motored to Allahabad to grace with Her presence the *Saraswati Pūjā* performed on January 24th at the residence of Sri Gopal Swarup Pathak.* She stayed at his house till the 27th, but spent one night in between at the Ashram of the late Sri Gopal Thakur at Allenganj and attended the *Saraswati Pūjā* there as well, which the inmates of the Ashram observed of January 25th. She returned to Varanasi for two days only, leaving for Rajgir on the 29th.

Rajgir

Mataji used to visit this place off and on for a day or two, putting up at a *dharmaśālā*, until in 1954 a bigha of land was acquired by the Sangha and a small Ashram built. The Ashram had recently been enlarged and also been improved by the installation of water and electricity. This time Didima, Didi and a fairly large party joined Mataji, who remained there for 16 days.

Sivaratri at Varanasi

On February 14th Mataji was back at Varanasi in good time for the preparations for the *Śivarātri* festival that was celebrated with the usual solemnity and splendour throughout the night of February 16th.

There were two groups of worshippers sitting in circles round Śiva linga, one upstairs on the veranda outside the Annapurna temple and another one downstairs. Mataji was present throughout the night, alternating between the two groups.

* Sri G. S. Pathak, Law Minister, Govt. of India and later Vice-President of the Indian Union. He passed away two days after Sri Ma took *Mahasamadhi*.

From 3-3.30 a.m., when people began to feel sleepy, She Herself led the kirtan, which fired everyone with new vigour and enthusiasm.

Holi at Vrindaban

On February 21st Mataji left for Vrindaban, where She remained until after *Holi*. On most days She visited Sri Haribabaji's Ashram thrice daily. There *Rāsa Līlā* or *Mahāprabhu Līlā* was enacted in the mornings, followed by the usual satsang in the afternoons and kirtan at night. *Holi* fell on March 5th. That day (*dhola pūrṇimā*) is also Lord Gauranga's birthday. Mataji was in an exceptional mood. She played *Holi*, sprinkled coloured water on each and everyone and at the same time sang kirtan. Special *pūjā*, *bhoga* and *ārati* were performed in the temple of Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. The beautiful statues of Sri Gauranga and Nitai had been newly painted for the occasion which considerably enhanced their splendour. The Bhāgavata Hall in front of the temple had been profusely decorated with multi-coloured floral festoons and kirtan was sung in the hall from sunrise to sunset.

One Day in Delhi

On the 8th of March Mataji arrived in New Delhi by car and spent the night at the Ashram in Chandraloka. The following day being a Sunday gave many devotees a chance to have Mataji's darshan. The construction of the Ashram was now almost completed. We were happy to notice the progress it had made since the last *Samyam Vrata* in November 1957. It looked even more impressive than it did already, since it had been colour-washed yellow with a red border.

Hoshiarpur & Jalandher

On the 9th night Mataji took the train to Hoshiarpur from Delhi Junction, following the invitation of Sri Haribabaji Maharaj, who had arranged for a *Rāsalīlā* programme which continued for seven days. A *Rāsalīlā* party had been called

from Vrindaban and Mataji daily attended their performances. From the terrace of Mataji's room at Hoshiarpur one could enjoy the silhouette of the Kulu valley snowrange.

Visit to Jalandher, Death Anniversary of Oriyababa at Vrindaban, Dehradun

On March 17th Mataji left by car for Jalandher. She visited the houses of some bhaktas in the city and spent the rest of the day at the Savitri Devi Ashram. A Girls' College in Mataji's name is maintained by the Ashram. Late at night Mataji entrained for Delhi where She stopped on March 18th for 6 hours only, and then motored to Vrindaban to be present at the death anniversary celebrations for Sri Oriyababaji on March 19th. The following day She returned to New Delhi and spent the night at the new house of a devotee at Kailash colony. On the 21st morning She was once again sitting in a car on Her way to Dehradun via Modinagar, reaching Kishenpur the same night.

Vasanti Puja at Varanasi

After a stay of barely two days Mataji boarded the train to Varanasi, reaching there on March 24th afternoon. From March 27th-30th *Vasanti Pūjā* (*Durga Pūjā* in spring) and *Ram Naomi* were celebrated in Mataji's presence. On this occasion we also enjoyed a well-enacted Chandi *Līlā*.

Didima's Samnyasa Utsava at Agarpara

On April 11th Mataji, accompanied by a large party, left for Calcutta, in time for the anniversary of Sri Muktananda Giri's *samnyāsa*. A new Ashram with extensive grounds, which had been recently acquired in Agarpara near Calcutta was inaugurated by this festival.

New Ashram at Agarpara (Calcutta)

For several years it had been felt that the Calcutta Ashram at Ballygunge was far too small and moreover situated in a

congested area of the city. Devotees at Calcutta therefore desired to start a new and much larger Ashram in the suburbs of Calcutta in more open and congenial surroundings. At long last a suitable site was found on the East bank of the Ganges at Agarpara, not very far from Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa had spent a good many years of his life. The old small Ashram in the city was sold and only last spring the new plot of land, measuring $9\frac{1}{2}$ bighas, with an abundance of fruit trees of various kinds and a two storied building was finally purchased. It was duly renovated and repaired and necessary additions and alterations were made and it was ready for use in time for Didima's *Samnyāsa Utsava*, which took place on April 13th. A large number of disciples and admirers of Didima had assembled for the occasion, as usual observed by kirtan, religious discourses and a feast given to sādhus as well as to all present, perhaps over a thousand persons.

A fortnight in Calcutta

From April 14th to 28th Mataji stayed in Calcutta in the compound of the house of Sri Ranjit K. Banerjee, and in the houses of Sri K. N. Banerji, Sri Nirmal Chakravarti and Sri Kiron Bose where separate arrangements are available for Her stay. A *Bhāgavata Saptah* was also held in Mataji's presence at the residence of Sri N. Chakravarti from April 21st to 28th. Pandit Srinath Shastri of Vrindaban did the reading. The function was indeed very delightful. On April 28th Sri Haribabaji reached Calcutta with his party and was taken to the Agarpara Ashram in a decorated car, accompanied by a large kirtan party and a band.

Birthday Celebrations at Agarpara

Mataji's birthday was celebrated at the new Ashram from May 2nd to May 7th. As usual devotees from all over India had flocked together in very large numbers. Several distinguished Mahātmās attended the function. Mahamandaleswar

Sri Swami Maheshwaranandaji from Bombay had also come and stayed at the Ashram with his disciples. His discourses on *Jñāna* and *Bhakti* were something to be listened to. Full and detailed accounts of the birthday celebrations have been given on former occasions. It goes without saying that the decorations and the functions were as beautiful and inspiring as ever or even more so.

During Her stay at Agarpara, Mataji accompanied Sri Haribabaji to several holy places connected with the life of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and to the Panihati and Barahnagar temples. She also visited the Science College of the Calcutta University and was shown round by Prof. N. N. Das Gupta.

On May 11th the drama of "Nimai Samnyāsa" was enacted in Mataji's presence in the grounds of the Ashram, under the management of Sri Tarun Kanti Ghose, Dy. Minister, West Bengal.

Ranchi Ashram and Its History

On May 14th Mataji left for Ranchi, accompanied also by Sri Haribabaji Maharaj and his party. There She occupied a new set of rooms which had been constructed for Her use on the terrace of the Ashram. On May 18th, Mataji visited Sri Yogada Math. The opening ceremony of a new guest-house was performed in Her presence. The same day Mataji also paid a visit to the famous Hospital for Mental Diseases at Kanke to see the son of a devotee.

During a conversation with Mataji it came to light that the Ranchi Ashram is like most of the other Sri Anandamayee Ashrams, built on a site which had in ancient times been a religious centre. Mataji said that once upon a time a dense forest was where the Ashram is now and in the midst of it there was an ancient Kali temple. At present also there is a Kali temple in the Ashram. Who, except Mataji can disclose the mysterious history of that particular place?

Short visits to Puri, Calcutta & Chandigarh

On May 30th Mataji with a very few companions proceeded to Puri, where She stayed at Her sea-side Ashram for four nights only, while Sri Haribabaji remained in Ranchi with his party and Didi left for Agarpara. On June 5th Mataji returned to Calcutta. The train was late by several hours. Mataji went straight to the houses of a few devotees and also saw a couple of patients in hospitals. Late in the evening She reached the Agarpara Ashram where devotees had been waiting for Her darshan since early morning.

On the 10th of June Mataji left for Solan. Sri Haribabaji boarded the same train at Gaya Station and Didi at Moghalsarai. Hundreds of devotees gathered at each of the railway stations at Allahabad, Kanpur, Etawah, Aligarh and Delhi to have Mataji's darshan. At the urgent request of a number of devotees, Mataji broke journey at Chandigarh for a day and spent the night at the Circuit House there. Many high Government Officials came to meet Her and had talks with Her.

A month at Solan with Devi Bhagavata Saptah

Mataji remained in Solan for over a month. Solan was always a place where one could enjoy Mataji's company in a very special and more intimate way than in most places. Here Mataji was hardly ever surrounded by immense crowds. The arrangements made by the devout Raja Saheb of Solan were excellent in every respect; everything was done in an impersonal manner, so that an atmosphere of great harmony and ease prevailed throughout.

A *Devi Bhāgavata Saptah* was held from 18th to 25th June, the Principal of the Simla Sanskrit College being the recitor. His Sanskrit reading as well as his explanations in Hindi were delightfully clear and lucid and greatly appreciated by the audience.

Swami Shanker Bharati's Demise

On June 15th the news of the passing away of Swami Shanker Bharati reached Mataji by wire, followed by a long letter with elaborate details. Swami Shanker Bharati was one of the most learned and truly detached *sannyāsis* at Varanasi. He left his body at the age of 49 at the Lalita Devi Math, where he had been residing for nearly 20 years. He was guided by the divine injunctions of the goddess Tripura Sundari and had the highest regard for Mataji.

Two Miraculous Incidents

During the first days of Mataji's stay at Solan a high official of the Himachal Pradesh, Sri P. N. Deogan, an old devotee of Mataji, came to see Her with his family. He narrated two remarkable miraculous incidents :

(1) His son had been suffering for a long time from a serious type of eczema. One day the priest of a temple in the hills, which is far away from the official's residence, came to his house. The family had never met the priest before, nor had they even had any knowledge of his existence. The priest narrated to them that he had dreamt of a beautiful divine lady, dressed all in white who was accompanied by two girl attendants. She requested him to treat the official's son with a particular medicine which would cure his eczema. In order to fulfil the command received in his dream the priest tried his utmost to procure the medicine and when he finally succeeded, he started out in search of the official's house. When Sri Deogan heard the description of the priest's vision, he had not the slightest doubt that the lady in white was none else but Mataji. The priest began the treatment and in no time the boy was completely cured.

(2) One day the same official and his wife went to see a certain saint on a hill top. On their way a large poisonous snake suddenly coiled round the foot of his wife. Frightened to death and having lost all hope of escaping the poisonous fangs, She began to pray to Mataji. All at once the snake left

her foot and vanished into the bushes. When they reached the saint's cottage, he told them that he had been watching them from a distance and he had seen Mataji standing near them and that the snake receded at Her order.

Incidents of a similar type happened very, very often, but as a rule we had no chance of getting to know them. It was only very rarely that Mataji Herself disclosed them.

Gurupurnima at Solan

On July 1st *Gurupūrṇimā* was celebrated in a most beautiful and dignified manner. For this occasion many arrived from out of the way places and a whole pile of letters and telegrams were received from bhaktas who were unable to be present in person. Towards the end of this happy day some devotees requested Mataji to speak about the easiest way to Self-realization. Mataji responded by explaining in clear and simple words that went straight to the hearts of everyone present. The following sentence of what Mataji had said, was included in replies to wires, letters etc., received on the occasion: "*Try to become a pilgrim on the path to the Ultimate; then there will be no anxieties, no misfortunes, no straying into by-paths.*"

Sri Haribabaji and his party left for Vrindaban two days before *Gurupūrṇimā*. Before their departure *Rāsālilā* was enacted on two mornings by a party from Vrindaban.

Sri Haribabaji used to relate from the lives of saints during the evening satsang. After he left, Mataji was begged to reply to questions, which She did most generously for a few days. But then She introduced something new: She suggested that in continuation of Sri Haribabaji's satsang, every evening a different devotee, both men and women, should narrate the story of a saint of their own choice. First we listened to the stories of Dhyaneswar, Jayadeva, etc., but gradually people began to speak of saints whom they had contacted personally like Bhajji, Sri Ramana Maharshi and others and finally some bhaktas of many year's standing told of their experiences

relating to Mataji. It was fascinating to see that there was no end to the variety of Mataji's *hīā*.

Bhagavata Saptah, Visnu Yajna & Rudrabhishek at Varanasi

It had been taken for granted that Mataji would proceed to Dehradun from Solan with a short halt at Delhi in between. But Mataji suddenly announced that She was leaving straight for Varanasi on July 16th. We soon found out what was the probable reason for this sudden change. Some time ago a devotee from Bombay had told Mataji that his family astrologer who was very aged and in fact likely to pass away any day, had expressed an earnest desire to have a *Bhāgavata Saptah*, a *Viṣṇu Yajñā* and *Rudrābhishek* performed in a holy place like Varanasi on the banks of the Ganges. The devotee had also asked whether these functions could possibly be arranged in our Varanasi Ashram. Mataji had not given a definite reply at that time. At Solan however She suddenly enquired whether those functions could be started at the earliest possible date. A brahmachari was immediately sent from Solan to Vrindaban and Varanasi to make necessary preparations. In a miraculously short period of time everything was arranged and the functions began on July 20th and were successfully completed on the 30th. The devotee from Bombay came to Varanasi to be present at the inauguration and telegraphed to the old astrologer that the three functions had been commenced at the Ashram in Sri Ma's presence. A few hours after the old man received this message he passed away peacefully, his last desire fulfilled.

Vindhyachal — Kishenpur

On July 31st Mataji motored to Vindhyachal from where She returned to Varanasi on August 4th, only to leave for Dehradun on the 5th morning. Not more than 4 or 5 persons were allowed to accompany Her. She remained at the Kishenpur Ashram until August 15th, when She proceeded to Delhi.

Didi's Ill-Health

Didi (Sri Gurupriya Devi) had come to the Delhi Ashram from Bombay already on August 2nd.

A few days before *Gurupūrnīmā* during Mataji's stay at Solan, She had suddenly asked Didi to leave for Bombay for a medical checkup. For the last four or five years Didi had not been keeping good health. But nobody could understand why she should be asked to leave a cool and lovely hill-station in the middle of summer in such a hurry. However, Didi obeyed without a murmur as she always did. Soon enough the reasons why Didi had to go to Bombay just then became only too clear. A few days after her arrival there, she developed a temperature and became more and more indisposed until on July 11th she fell unconscious. The best doctors were immediately summoned and diagnosed meningitis. There is a very effective new method which nips the illness in the bud, but only in a big city like Bombay are the first-class physicians as well as the necessary remedies available. When the news reached Solan everyone present knew that, had Didi fallen ill at Solan, the right treatment could simply not have been given. By Mataji's grace Didi's life was thus saved and she became free from fever within a couple of days. She had however been advised complete rest in a quiet and dry place for several months. As soon as she was fit to travel, she therefore proceeded to the New Delhi Ashram, which is ideally solitary and at the same time within comparatively easy reach of the city by car.

Didi Gurupriya Devi

Didi was Mataji's closest companion for over 50 years. Ever since meeting Mataji in January 1926, she had devoted her life to Her with a whole-heartedness that will be difficult to equal. Ignoring even the most elementary comforts, unrelaxing, she gave herself, body, mind and soul in selfless service. Mataji was known only to a few when Didi first met Her. In those days *samādhis* and *bhāvas* were the rule of the day with Mataji. Didi would undertake any task, menial or otherwise

that was required to be done. In the measure as Mataji attracted ever growing numbers of admirers and devotees, Didi's work increased geometrically. Ashrams began to spring up one by one, most of them due to her untiring efforts and it was Didi who started the Kanyapeeth, where young girls are brought up and taught according to the ancient ideals of the Brahmacharya Ashram, while at the same time learning all modern subjects as well. Until Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha the registered organization was founded, Didi had been carrying on almost single-handed the administration of several of the Ashrams, besides being responsible for Mataji's correspondence, Her personal work and innumerable other tasks. When her day's work was completed at about 1 or 2 a.m., she would not lie down for her well-deserved rest, oh no, far from it — for this was very often the only time she could snatch to write Mataji's diary! Eighteen volumes of it have been published in Bengali, twenty in Hindi, one in English translation* and another volume by Didi about the *Sāvitri Māhayajna* that was performed at the Varanasi Ashram from 1947-50. How Didi could find the time and energy for all her manifold activities is quite incomprehensible to the ordinary intelligence. Such feats can only be accomplished by forgetting oneself entirely and becoming an instrument of the Divine.

Even during the last few years of ill-health, although unable to do physical work, Didi continued to direct her numerous helpers and assistants who tried their best to fill the gap. Those who came in contact with Mataji owe a debt of deep gratitude to Didi.

Bhaiji's Mahasamadhi Anniversary & Jhulan at Delhi

The devotees of Delhi had urgently requested Mataji to be present in their midst this year during the *Jhulan* celebrations which continue from *Ekādasi* to *Pūrnīmā*. The anniversary of Bhaiji's *tirodhan* (passing away) falls into that time. It was

* Didi's 2nd volume is ready translated into English and may appear within 1985.

observed on August 25th and 26th. The programme started on the 25th noon by silent meditation in Mataji's presence at the exact hour of Bhaiji's passing into Mahāsamādhi. In the early morning of the 26th Bhaiji's favourite song "*Usha Arune*" sung by Brahmachari Vibhu went straight to the hearts of all present. The kirtan continued from sunrise to sunset. Simultaneously, from 10 a.m., *pūjā*, *homa*, *ārati* and *bhoga* were performed by Brahmachari Kamalakanta, one of the greatest admirers of Bhaiji. As customary on that day a number of sādhus and a great many other guests were entertained to a feast at the Ashram. In the evening a symposium was arranged on the life and teachings of Bhaiji. Some of those who had been close to him spoke with feeling about this ideal human being and *sādhaka*.

Bhaiji's Life Story

Bhaiji was the person who, as many believe, understood Mataji better and knew more about Her than anyone else we know of. His name was Jyotish Chandra Roy, but he was lovingly called "Bhaiji" by all Mataji's devotees. He met Mataji first in 1924 in Dacca where he was posted as a high Government official of the Agricultural Department. Religiously inclined since his childhood, he found in Mataji his true guide, who gradually drew him away into the realm of the purest spirituality.

About one and a half years after contacting Mataji, his health deteriorated until he developed tuberculosis. Given up as a hopeless case by the best physicians, Mataji literally snatched him from the jaws of death. To everyone's amazement he recovered and Mataji even asked him to return to his duties as an official in 1929. He worked again for three years. When Mataji left Bengal in 1932, he however finally relinquished both home and office and accompanied Her and Bholanath, first of all to Raipur near Dehradun, where they remained in seclusion in a ramshackle hut near an old Śiva Temple. The Raipur Ashram was later built at that very spot.

Bhaiji with the help of other devotees was responsible for starting Mataji's first Ashram at Ramna-Dacca in 1929. In 1937 Bhaiji went with Mataji, Bholanath and Sri Akhandananda Swamiji to Mount Kailash. Just before arriving at their destination the Swami felt somewhat indisposed due to the extreme height; therefore he and Mataji, who offered him the use of Her dandy, lagged behind, while Bholanath and Bhaiji paced ahead. On reaching Lake Mansarovar, Bhaiji was seized by a spirit of profound renunciation with such vigour that he gave up his clothes and with folded hands begged Bholanath to give him leave for ever. But Bholanath would not hear any of this; he prevailed on him to put on another set of clothes and wait for Mataji. No sooner did Mataji arrive than *saṁnyāsa mantras* spontaneously flowed from Her lips. This is how Bhaiji became Swami Maunananda Parvat.

Mataji was often heard to explain that there are two kinds of *saṁnyāsa*: one is 'taking' *saṁnyāsa*, which implies an effort on the part of the candidate, a Guru and certain prescribed rites, etc. It is however only a preparation for the real *saṁnyāsa* which comes about effortlessly, spontaneously with the realization of the futility of worldly pursuits. This is what evidently happened to Bhaiji.

Soon after the party reached Almora on their return journey, he left his body. A *Samādhi* was erected in his memory in the grounds of the present Almora Ashram. Bhaiji put down some of his experiences in connection with Mataji in his wonderful book "*Matri Darshan*", ("*Mother as Revealed to Me*" in English) and a small collection of Mataji's teaching in "*Sad Vani*". Both were published long ago in Bengali, Hindi, Gujrati, English, and "*Sad Vani*" also in French, and ever since have been greatly treasured as sources of inspiration by countless bhaktas and admirers; in fact, both in India and abroad they have attracted many earnest seekers to Mataji's feet.

On the night of August 28th, the *Jhulan* festival was observed with due solemnity. The swing on which *vigrahas* of

Sri Krishna were placed together with Mataji's photos, was decorated most artistically and tastefully by a young artist who was a newcomer to the Ashram. Mataji Herself seemed very delighted while minutely noticing his artistic skill when he decorated the floor with a number of exquisitely beautiful designs (*alpanas*).

A high official of the Government of India,* who has quite recently become Mataji's devotee together with most of his family, brought valuable cushions and covers of red velvet with gold embroideries and decorated Mataji's seat. It looked like a royal throne. Only with great difficulty Mataji was persuaded to sit on it, giving way to the entreaties of the devotee and his wife.

Jhūlan Pūrṇimā† (the August full moon) is a very special day in the Ashram, apart from being a Sri Krishna festival: When Mataji acted the role of a *sādhika* from May 1922, a spiritual initiation (*dikṣā*) came about spontaneously, at midnight of *Jhūlan Pūrṇimā*, on August 3rd, 1922. Mataji went through this process all by Herself. There were no external accessories, She Herself was the Guru, the mantra, the *Ishta* and the neophyte all in one. In the few years that followed She went through every kind of *sādhana* in incredibly quick succession, not only those described in Hindu Scriptures, but of all other faiths as well. The question of *sādhana* did not arise for Mataji, as there was nothing to be attained for Her. Nevertheless She played the role of a *sādhika* as truly and sincerely as She had acted the role of a child in Her parents' house and that of a house-wife in Her husband's. Yet through all apparent changes She ever remained the same.

The anniversary of this *dikṣā* was, as every year, observed by silent meditation in Mataji's presence from 11.30 p.m. to 12.30 a.m.

On August 29th, which was *Jhūlan* according to the Vaishnavites, the festival was celebrated again by kirtan, etc.

* Sri Yogendra Singh of the Indian Foreign Service.

† See also p. 69.

While Mataji stayed in Delhi from August 16th to September 3rd, many distinguished visitors came for Her darshan and had private interviews with Her. The elder sister of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of India visited Mataji a number of times. The old lady who was over ninety, had met Mataji for the first time only last November when Mataji had come to Delhi for the *Samyam Vrata*. At her advanced age, the old lady developed a great attraction for Mataji. She also invited Her to the Rashtrapati Bhavan a couple of times. Dr. Rajendra Prasad as well as other members of the family paid their respects to Mataji on those occasions.

Dr. Pannalal, also joined Mataji in Delhi and, as he always did, put many interesting questions to Her during satsang hours. Mataji responded with generosity and humour.

Janmastami at Varanasi

On September 3rd Mataji left for Varanasi. The students and teachers of the Kanyapeeth had implored Her to spend *Janmastami* with them. Not until almost the last moment was it disclosed where Mataji would be during this festival.

For several years it had been the privilege of devotees at Varanasi to welcome Mataji in their midst during *Janmastami* with only two exceptions: in 1955, when Mataji was at Vrindaban and last year when She remained at Kishenpur for two months.

One of the items of this festival is to build up a miniature Vrindaban and Mathura and depict with tiny plastic models some of the main scenes of Sri Krishna's life. Every year the pupils of the Kanyapeeth, helped and guided by their teachers, had been ambitious to surpass the decorations of former years. No wonder that this time the whole Ashram looked like a fairy place!

During the night of September 5th the black *vighra* of Gopalji, which was quite famous by then, was worshipped with due solemnity. A number of photos were taken on that occasion. Especially the picture of Mataji with Gopalji placed on Her lap is even now much coveted by all.

Gopalji's Lila*

It is the regular practice of the inmates of the Kanyapeeth to do obeisance every morning at the Annapurna-Siva temple of the Ashram and at the adjoining shrine of Gopalji. One of their wardens, an old bhakta of Mataji, hailing from Dhaka, while bowing to Gopalji one morning, heard a voice saying quite distinctly: "Who can wear a silver crown day after day!" Believing that she must have had a hallucination, she dismissed what she had heard without further thought until she heard exactly the same words again the next morning. Did Gopalji want her to present him with a golden crown? she asked herself. But how could she afford it? She did not tell anyone about her experience, but kept on pondering over it.

Within a fortnight her son, who had been without a job, secured some well-paid employment. She at once felt that she should now try for the gold crown and went to a goldsmith to enquire about the cost. But she had not definitely made up her mind about the matter. One afternoon she discovered two tiny footprints on her bed cover, just over the pillow. The strange thing was that they were of dust, while the weather was extremely wet. She at first suspected with indignation that one of the small children of the Kanyapeeth had stepped on her bed, but then none of them had such very small feet. At last the foot prints were measured and identified as those of Gopalji! This moved her. She went to town to order the gold crown and wrote to Mataji, humbly requesting Her to come to Varanasi for *Janmastami* and place the new crown on Gopalji's head. What strange things happened in Mataji's surroundings! Shall we one day be able to grasp their significance?

The morning after *Janmastami*, the *Nandotsav* (the joy of the cowherds at Sri Krishna's birth) was celebrated. There was dancing and singing, the girls enacted a little play and Mataji with Her own hand fed everyone present with curds. On those occasions Mataji was ever full of fun and frolics.

* See also pp. 40-42.

Kali Puja at Vindhyachal

On September 7th afternoon Mataji motored to Vindhyachal. On the 10th She was back at Varanasi, only to leave again for Vindhyachal on the 12th. The same night *Kali Pūjā* was performed in Taru Kutir, a cottage in the Ashram grounds, in which Shanti Devi, Didi's younger sister was staying for a few years. There is a special history behind this *pūjā* too.

Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj accompanied Mataji to Vindhyachal and remained there for five days. The Rajmata and Maharaja of Tehri-Garhwal, and the Rajas of Mandi and Solan, who had come to Varanasi for a meeting of the Anandamayee Karuna (a registered body to serve the sick and needy), all motored to Vindhyachal on the evening of the 12th and were present during the *Kali Pūjā*, which must have been a unique experience.

Mataji returned to Varanasi on 17th September morning. She was expected to leave for Calcutta on the 22nd or 23rd to fulfil the prayers of a devotee for Her presence at the opening ceremony of his newly purchased house. Devotees in Calcutta were eagerly awaiting this opportunity of having Mataji in their midst once again. But to their disappointment Mataji's programme was suddenly changed.

Accompanied by Sri B. K. Shah, the then Managing Director of New India Assurance Co., who had come to Varanasi on a flying visit to meet Mataji, and by only two or three other persons, Mataji boarded the Delhi Mail on the 21st morning, reaching the Chandraloka Ashram the same night.

Dehradun & Hoshiarpur

On September 30th Mataji left by the morning train for Dehradun with only three or four companions. Great was the delight of the Ashramites at Kishenpur when She arrived there the same evening quite unexpectedly. It had not been given out where She would go from Delhi. In Dehradun Mataji had a comparatively quiet time, although within two days, every-

one had received the news of Her arrival and the crowd gathering for Her darshan every evening became larger day by day.

Mataji left for Hoshiarpur on the 6th of October, halting again in Delhi on the 12th for one day, and reaching Varanasi on the 13th night.

Balgopal Utsava at Varanasi

Dr. Gopal Das Gupta had made all preparations for the annual Balgopal Utsava which took place on the 14th morning in the premises of the Ashram at Bhadaini. On this occasion warm clothes and sweets were distributed to the infants of the poor. Since early dawn mothers with their babies had begun to flock to the Ashram. Dr. Das Gupta had arranged for a small brass image of Gopal (the child Krishna) to be given to each one of the tiny children. It was a charming sight to watch Mataji hand to every baby one of the images along with a woollen sweater and some sweets.

SEVEN

(October 1958 — October 1959)

Sri Gopal Thakur

The same afternoon Mataji left for Allahabad and went straight to the Ashram of late Sri Gopal Thakur. Perhaps it is not out of place to say a few words about this great soul. Bengali by birth, he had studied law and was earning his living as an employee of an Insurance Company at Patna, when his Guru, Sri Satya Deva Thakur, founder of the Sadhan Samar Ashram, gave him the order to resign his post and devote his life to the dissemination of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā. Although he had his wife and several children to provide for, he obeyed instantly. His great faith and devotion helped him to face all difficulties and hardships. After some time he and his family moved to Allahabad at the request and with the assistance of one of his disciples. His sincerity and his brilliant discourses on the Bhagavad Gītā attracted more and more admirers and disciples to him. He was also deeply devoted to Mataji and brought all his followers to Her. Once a year he used to celebrate the *Gītā Jayanti* in one of our Ashram in Mataji's presence, even after his health had deteriorated towards the end of his life.

At his Ashram at Allahabad *Durga Pūjā* is observed every autumn and for the last few years Mataji had blessed the function by Her visit. Even after Sri Gopal Thakur passed away She continued to do so. This time, in response to the earnest requests of the Ashramites, She spent 3 days there, after which She moved to the residence of Sri N. N. Mukerji, Retired District Judge, at George Town. In the beautiful garden a small bungalow had been newly constructed for Mataji. The entire planning gave evidence of the artistic skill of the owners. A Swiss cottage had also been pitched for Mataji near the bungalow and She used to spend the nights there.

Durga Puja at Allahabad

Just as in October 1952, *Durga Pūjā* was celebrated at the residence of Sri Baleshwari Prasad, Advocate of the High Court. He and his whole family are deeply devoted to Mataji. For months a number of young girls, all bhaktas and admirers of Mataji, worked at pieces of decoration for the pandal and its main entrance, with the result that the decorations were said to be the most artistic ones that Allahabad had ever known. Altogether the *pūjā* celebrations proved a great success. There was nothing left to be desired concerning the arrangements that had been made.

However, since nothing can be claimed as perfect in this world, rain poured down in torrents on the evening of October 19th, *Ashtami* day, and the pandal was almost flooded. Fortunately the images remained quite unaffected by the bad weather. *Pūjā* and *ārati* could be continued smoothly as if nothing had happened.

Mataji's Swiss cottage was also very wet and Mataji gave way to the entreaties of many to shift to the house of Sri Gopal Swarup Pathak. Mataji had stayed there on two or three previous occasions in a room reserved for Her use, with an independent entrance from the garden. The master of the house, Sri Pathak, was away at the U. S. A., but the rest of the family were ever ready to serve Mataji as well as Her devotees and guests.

In the morning of the 23rd of October Mataji returned to Sri N. N. Mukerji's house, from where She motored to Varanasi the same evening. Quite a large number of bhaktas who had come for the *Durgā pūjā* followed Her to Varanasi in the hope that Mataji would soon return to Vindhyachal.

Lakshmi Puja at Varanasi

However She remained in Varanasi for *Lakshmi Pūjā* at the special request of the teachers and students of the Kanyapeeth and proceeded to Vindhyachal only on the 28th of October afternoon. Not less than 32 persons, amongst them Maha-

mahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, accompanied Mataji. Dr. Pannalal joined later. Apart from the Ashram itself, accommodation had been reserved beforehand at the Bhajan-alaya as well as at the P.W.D. Bungalow in the close vicinity on Ashtabhuj Hill.

Kali Puja and Annakut at Varanasi

After about 9 days of rest Mataji returned to Varanasi on the 7th of November morning. Everyone was eagerly looking forward to *Kali Pūjā* to be performed on the 9th night in Mataji's presence. However, immediately after returning to Varanasi Mataji developed a very bad pain in the back which made it difficult for Her to move about. In spite of this She came downstairs and sat in the *Pūjā Mandap* for some time during the ceremony. Nobody could have guessed from Her ever radiant countenance that She was attacked by severe pain.

One or two days after *Kali Pūjā* falls the *Annakut* festival. On this occasion thousands of people gather at Varanasi to witness the ceremony at the famous Annapurna temple, near Vishwanath temple, which is known throughout the length and breadth of India. Special *bhoga* is offered to the goddess of plenty, Annapurna, on that day, consisting of not less than 108 different preparations, sometimes even more.

The Annapurna temple at our Varanasi Ashram has also grown quite famous lately. *Annakut* is an attractive festival which is celebrated there yearly with due solemnity and grandeur. Quite often Mataji had Herself been present on that day at Varanasi. Hundreds of people come every year and partake of the *prasāda*.

This year, according to astronomical calculations, *Annakut* was to be held one day later, namely on November 12th. The *Samyam Mahāvratā* had already long before been fixed for the week from the 13th-19th November and Mataji was therefore to leave for Kanpur on the 11th at midnight. Everyone was naturally disappointed that Mataji should be absent on that

joyful festival, but the programme seemed unalterable. At the last moment however, Mataji's backache increased to such a degree that it was considered most inopportune for Her to travel at midnight. The railway reservations were cancelled and Mataji left only on the 12th November at midday after the *Annakut* ceremony had been completed. Mataji was unable to move all over the Ashram as She did as a rule on similar occasions, but, notwithstanding Her poor state of health, She sat in the Annapurna temple for some time during *bhoga* and *ārati*.

8th Samyam Vrata at Swadeshi House, Kanpur

Accompanied by about 38 devotees Mataji reached Kanpur the same evening and was received at the station by a large number of persons, headed by Sri Sitaram Jaipuria. At Kanpur Mataji's backache soon vanished. Altogether Her health was excellent throughout the *Samyam Mahāvratā*, in spite of the tremendous crowd that clamoured for Her darshan in and out of time and in spite of the long hours of satsang. We have had occasion to observe that Mataji's health seemed at its best during gatherings of this sort, when people were concentrated continually on spiritual things so that there was very little chance for worldly thoughts and activities, notwithstanding the fact that Mataji then got hardly any rest during the day and little enough during the night.

The eighth *Samyam Mahāvratā* was held at Swadeshi House, Kanpur at the invitation of Sri Sitaram Jaipuria. All the arrangements were carried out with so much forethought, meticulous care and lavish generosity — they could not have been better in any respect. Everything was managed in a most exemplary manner, quietly and efficiently, in fact there was no occasion to ask for anything, as it was provided before one had the chance to utter a wish. This was largely due to the fact that the members of the Jaipuria family themselves, with Sri Sitaramji and Sri Kashi Prasadji as guiding stars, supervised and took part in every branch of the work, giving their

personal service unstintingly day and night, assisted by a whole battalion of well-trained staff and servants.

Swadeshi House is situated in a quiet area of the city, a few minutes' walk from the Ganges. The compound contains several houses and extensive well-kept gardens with huge lawns. A spacious pandal, decorated with extreme simplicity and dignity, seating about 2000, had been erected and fitted with lights and excellent loudspeakers; indeed it was a joy to listen to the various speeches and *bhajans*, whether one happened to be inside the pandal or anywhere else in the compound. A thatched straw-hut had been put up specially for Mataji's use at a fair distance from the pandal so as to ensure privacy. It looked pastoral from outside, but Mataji's set of rooms lacked no modern comfort. There was a veranda and a small pandal next to it, so that people could enjoy Mataji's company in smaller, more intimate groups in between the general functions. There was also a new trailer for Mataji's use placed just outside the main pandal. The *vratis* were accommodated in guest-houses and also in comfortably furnished and electrified tents within the compound. Besides, a whole *dharamsālā* in the close vicinity, just near the bathing *ghāts* on the Ganges, had been reserved for our sole use.

The *Samyam Saptah* may serve as a model and give a taste of a dedicated life, to be continued to whatever degree possible by each one individually throughout the year. As usual a number of Mahātmās and other distinguished and learned men took part in the function and delivered enlightening and instructive discourses; amongst them Sri Krishnanandaji Avadhuta, Sri Krishnanandaji of Bombay, Sri Chakrapaniji of Vrindaban, Sri Jogesh Brahmachariji of Calcutta, Dr. Nalini Kanta Brahma, a well-known Philosopher, and Acharya Divakar Datta Sharma, Principal of the Sanskrit College, Simla. The Chief Minister of U.P., Dr. Sampurnanand, also came to pay his respects to Mataji and at Her request delighted the audience by a short talk on yoga.

Visitors from Kanpur city were scarce for the first two or three days, but increased to such an extent, specially in the evenings when Mataji replied to questions or sang kirtan after 9 p.m., that the walls of the pandal had to be moved far away. It was not just a crowd coming out of curiosity and for sensation, many were highly educated, serious persons eager to hear Mataji's words. The numbers that attended could be compared only to those storming the pandal during Mataji's 60th Jubilee celebrations at Varanasi in 1956. But the standard of organization and order achieved at Kanpur was incomparable. It was generally felt that the eighth *Samyam Vrata* was so far the most successful function held under the auspices of the Sangha.

Short visits to Lucknow, Delhi, Hardwar, Kishenpur

On November 20th morning *Homa* was performed, followed by a feast given to all, including workers and servants. In the afternoon Mataji left by car for Lucknow, where She stayed for 2 days at the Forest Rest House, as the guest of Sri Rameshwar Sahai, Chief Conservator of Forests, U.P. He and his wife Leila (Dr. Pannalal's eldest daughter) had requested Mataji repeatedly to spend a few days at their residence. Everyone was amazed at the excellent arrangements made for Mataji and Her party although the hosts had attended the *Samyam Saptah*. Here also a beautiful small pandal had been put up and here also it failed to accommodate the large numbers of people who rushed for Mataji's darshan.

At Lucknow Mataji followed calls to the houses of several devotees. She was also shown round the plot on the banks of the river Gomati that had been selected as the site for a new Ashram to be founded at Lucknow.*

On November 23rd morning Mataji reached Delhi, leaving for Hardwar on the 24th night. The Raja of Bhagat State, Solan, received Her at Hardwar station and took Her to Bhagat House, Kharkhari. The beautiful *Śiva* temple in the centre

* This project was later abandoned, the Ashram was never built.

of the compound had been consecrated a few years ago in the presence of Mataji and many distinguished Mahātmās, including the late Sri Triveni Puriji of Khanna.

On Nov. 26th Mataji motored to Dehradun where She visited both the Ashrams at Raipur and Kishenpur, returning to Hardwar the same evening.

3 weeks at Ananda Kashi

Mataji left for Ananda Kashi on November 27th. Last January the Rajmata had requested Mataji to remain there for 3 weeks, but due to Didima's ill-health Mataji had broken off Her visit prematurely and hurried to Varanasi. This time, Didima's health was as good as it could be at Her age and she was able to join Mataji at Ananda Kashi for twenty-two undisturbed days of quiet, solitude and beauty. Throughout Mataji's sojourn, the *Rāmāyana* was sung for two hours daily and completed before She left for Dehradun on December 19th.

She stayed at Kalyanvan for two nights and proceeded to Hardwar on the 21st morning. On the 23rd She motored to New Delhi where She was expected to stay for a couple of days or so. But to the joy of the numerous bhaktas, Mataji remained quietly at the Chandraloka Ashram for more than twelve days. Actually She did not leave until January 5th, 1959, when She started for Jhalawar in Rajasthan.

Visit to Jhalawar

Jhalawar was a Ruling State until the Government of India took it over. Recently an ardent young devotee, Sri Anand Mohanlal, I.A.S., was posted there as the Collector and Magistrate. Ever since, he had been trying to persuade Mataji to spend a few days at Jhalawar, promising to provide the most congenial surroundings for Mataji and Her companions.

While Delhi was in the grip of a cold wave, Jhalawar was enjoying spring weather. A thatched cottage, very much after the model of the one at Kanpur, had been specially put up for

Mataji in a large and beautiful compound. She was received at Kotah Junction (52 miles from Jhalawar) by the state car and as soon as She reached Her destination guns were fired in Her honour and the state band began to play. The Rajmata, the Raja and Rani of Jhalawar as well as Government officials came for Mataji's darshan. Visitors were admitted only between 7 and 9 p.m., during the evening Satsang.

Short halts at New Delhi, Varanasi, Allahabad, Rajgir, Patna

After about 10 days at Jhalawar Mataji returned to the New Delhi Ashram for a week-end on January 16th and then proceeded to Varanasi, breaking journey at Allahabad for a few hours. On the 23rd night She reached the Rajgir Ashram.

On February 5th Sri N. Bakshi, I.C.S., drove Mataji to Patna in his car. After paying a short visit to his house, Mataji proceeded to Prof. S. Choudhury's house where She spent the night in the family temple.

Vasant Panchami at Calcutta

A party of devotees from Varanasi headed by Didima joined Mataji at Patna, from where everyone entrained for Calcutta, arriving at the Agarpara Ashram on the 7th morning. Since it was known that Mataji would most probably spend more than two weeks at Agarpara and would moreover move to the city during the later part of Her stay, the rush of devotees was in the beginning, not quite as great as usual, since Agarpara is far out of Calcutta proper. Among the regular visitors were a number of Europeans and Americans, some of them belonging to the Self-Realization Fellowship that was started by Paramahansa Yogananda. Their Ashram at Dakshineswar is not far from ours at Agarpara.

Mrs. Anitra Lucander, a Finnish paintress of repute, stayed in the Agarpara Ashram for a week, and then flew back to her country.

The Ānanda Vārtā and the few English books that had so far been published about Mataji had found their way even into

countries of the midnight sun. Mrs. Lucander had read them in her home and was ever since eager to meet Mataji face to face. Spending X'mas at Bethlehem, she alighted in New Delhi early in January. As luck would have it, Mataji happened to be there and within a few hours of her arrival she was able to have Mataji's darshan. She remained in the Chandraloka Ashram for a couple of days and later followed Mataji to Jhalawar, from where she went to visit the Ajanta and Ellora caves. Halting in our Ashrams at Vrindaban and Varanasi en-route, she joined Mataji again at Rajgir. She felt quite at home in India and we hope to welcome her soon again.

On February 12th, *Vasant Panchami* day, *Saraswati Pūjā* was celebrated with great rejoicing at the Agarpara Ashram. It has become almost a national festival in Bengal.

At devotees' houses in Calcutta & Burdwan

On February 18th Mataji stayed for one night in a room specially constructed for Her use in the house of Sri K. N. Banerjee, Rtd. Asst. Income-tax Commissioner, Bengal. The next morning She proceeded to the residence of Sri D. K. Nag, the son-in-law of the brother of Sri Jatish Chandra Guha. Their whole family were amongst Mataji's oldest devotees. The opening ceremony of Sri Nag's house was performed in Mataji's presence. Here a large number of people, who were unable to travel all the distance to Agarpara, had the golden opportunity of Mataji's darshan.

In the morning of February 24th, Mataji left for Burdwan, about 60 miles from Calcutta. There She spent six or seven hours in three different houses of devotees and left for Varanasi the same night, reaching on the 25th morning, only to leave for Dehradun on the 28th of February.

Consecration and History of Temples at Kishenpur & Kalyanvan

In September 1957, the construction of two temples had been begun in the grounds of the Kishenpur Ashram, but was

left uncompleted for about a year. Only in 1959 the building work was at last brought to a successful end, and the consecration of those two temples, as well as of a small Śiva shrine at Kalyanvan took place on *Śivarātri* day, March 7th, 1959 in Mataji's presence.

Just as in the case of every one of our Ashrams and the temples located within the precincts of those Ashrams, there is a long and interesting history behind those temples.

In 1938 Sri Bholanathji took *Mahāsamādhi* at the Kishenpur Ashram. Several years after he passed away, one of Mataji's devotees, Srimati Nihar Kana Ghosh of Calcutta, dreamt that Bholanathji, whom she had never seen in his lifetime, suggested to her to take *dikṣā*. She attached no special importance to the dream until it was repeated again the following night which made her thoughtful. When in the third night at about 4 a.m. Bholanathji appeared to her once more, asking her with a peremptory voice to rise and have a bath, she obeyed and initiation was then actually given by Bholanathji according to the full rites prescribed in the *Śāstras*, notwithstanding the facts that Sri Bholanathji had passed away years before. She hurried to her husband and said, "Bholanathji has just given me a mantra". Her husband advised her not to pronounce the mantra to anyone, but to sit in their prayer room. She at once began to practise the repetition (*japa*) of the mantra and continued this practice regularly day after day. Her husband was of the opinion that everything must have happened in a dream. She herself, however, felt that there was no more necessity for her to take *dikṣā* again in the physical. When she uttered the mantra before Mataji, Mataji confirmed that it was one of the mantras to be found in the *Śāstras*. But nothing was at that time mentioned to Mataji about the strange dream.

The new disciple conceived an ardent desire to have a memorial shrine erected for her Guru in the Kishenpur Ashram, where he had breathed his last. She discussed the matter with Sri Jogesh Brahmachari, one of the oldest Ashramites. A few

hundred rupees were collected by her and other devotees for the purpose. However with such a small sum one could not even think of building. The money was therefore given into Sri Jogesh Brahmachari's custody.

A few years later another interesting thing happened. Srimati Bhavani, wife of Sri Ranjit K. Banerjee of Calcutta, dreamt of three temples: Two were close together and made to the same pattern, the third one was some distance away, small and somewhat round in shape. Her dream was vivid and impressive. She related it to Mataji and requested Her to present her with a *Śiva Linga*. By Mataji's grace she was so fortunate as to receive a *Śiva Linga* that had been brought from the holy river Narmada. When visiting Hardwar with Mataji after some time she was surprised to find that the Śiva temple built by the Raja of Solan at Hardwar somewhat resembled the one she had perceived in her dream. During her stay at Hardwar her *Śiva Linga* was given the name of "Gangeshwar".

On returning to Calcutta she told her husband about her dream vision and expressed a keen desire to have a temple for 'Gangeshwar' constructed in their own compound. However, on thinking over the matter, her husband had serious misgivings as one could not be sure whether after he and his wife left this world, the *pūjā* would be continued regularly by their descendants. Such neglect is considered most inauspicious for the whole family. He therefore suggested that the temple should be built in one of Mataji's Ashrams and he made an offering of Rs. 5000/- for the purpose. It was subsequently decided to erect the Śiva temple in memory of Sri Bholanathji in the grounds of the Kishenpur Ashram.

As fate would have it, devotees from various places felt inspired to contribute towards the expenses of the temple, the construction of which was begun in September 1957. Srimati Shanti Devi, wife of late Sri Choudhry Sher Singh, Zamindar of Dehradun, died of an operation shortly after the building work had been taken in hand. Before going to hospital, she

had deposited Rs. 5000/- with her relatives, requesting them to pass this sum on to the Ashram in case she did not recover. The money was added to the building funds and a *Śiva Linga* named Shantishwar set up in memory of the deceased. Srimati Maharatan Jaspal, a Punjabi devotee (who by the way did not even know that temples were being constructed) suddenly offered Rs. 5000/- to Mataji to be used for any purpose required. Prof. Nalini Kanta Brahma, whose son had recently lost his life in a tragic accident, donated Rs. 1000/- for the installation of a *Śiva Linga* in memory of the departed. The *Linga* was named 'Kalyāneshwar'. Further, a bhakta of many years' standing, Srimati Lakshmi Tankha, widow of Pandit Kashinarayan Tankha of Dehradun, the architect who built the main Kishenpur Ashram, presented Rs. 1000/- in memory of her husband. A *Linga* called 'Kashishwar' was therefore added. Yet another old and faithful devotee, Kumari Dr. Sharada Sharma (Seva) donated Rs. 500/- with the request for a *Linga* in her father's memory, which was given the name of 'Mamuleshwar'. Finally, a *Linga* called 'Kirtishwar' was installed in memory of the son of Sri Rameshwar Sahai, who bore the expenses for the construction of the altar of the temple. At the desire of Sri Ranjit K. Banerjee and his wife, 'Gangeshwar' was also consecrated; and by the consecration of the *Śiva Linga* named 'Bholonath' the heart's desire of Srimati Nihar Kana Ghosh was at last fulfilled and thus the new *Śiva* temple came to house seven *Śiva Linga* in all.

When Mataji had visited the Sapta Rishi Ashram at Hardwar for the first time, the *kheyāla* had suddenly occurred to Her about seven *Śiva Linga* in memory of the seven Sages. She had gone into the temple and touched the *Śiva Linga* with Her hands. Strangely enough, when seven *Śiva Linga* were installed in our new temple, Mataji one day was heard to say: "Look, Dehradun is so near Rishikesh and Hardwar, all in the Uttarakhanda. 'Bholanath' and 'Gangeshwar' have become the main cause for the installation of seven *Śivas*, *Mahayogeshwaras*, on one and the same altar."

Now about the second temple *Matri Mandir*. During the opening ceremony of the Kishenpur Ashram in 1936, a raised platform with a sacrificial pit (*homa kunda*) in the centre had been erected and one lakh of libations were offered into the sacrificial fire on that occasion. Bhaiji (Sri Jyotish Chandra Roy) was very eager to build over that platform a temple dedicated to Mataji. But during the year that was still left to him he had no opportunity to see his pious wish materialize. Therefore Sri Gurupriya Devi tried ever since he passed away in 1937 to fulfil what he had left undone and kept on collecting and putting aside small sums of money for the purpose. When the construction of the *Śiva Temple* was now taken in hand, the construction of the *Matri Mandir* too proceeded along with it and both temples were consecrated on *Śivarātri* day.

The small shrine at Kalyanvan has also a history of its own. Late Sachikanta Ghosh, Retired Asst. Income Tax Commissioner, who many years ago bought a plot of land now called 'Kalyanvan' on 176, Rajpur Road, about 3 furlongs above the ashram, had fixed a place in it for a special room for Mataji. He laid the foundation stone and buried the Bhagavad Gītā, Upanishads and other sacred scriptures at that spot. He later presented the whole of the plot for the cause of the Vidyapeeth. But he died soon after and so his desire to build the room for Mataji in the grounds of Kalyanvan did not materialize.

When the two temples at the Kishenpur Ashram were in the process of being constructed, Mataji suddenly said one day: "I see that you are building a *Śiva Temple* here. Sachibaba bought Kalyanvan for the use of the Vidyapeeth. There is no sign to mark the blessed spot where he has buried so many holy books, and people walk over it. Is this right? Suppose you dug up the ground and found the place where the foundation-stone was laid and the scriptures buried, how would it be if a *Śiva-Linga* were erected over it? Think it over and decide!"

Thus shortly before *Śivarātri* a small Śiva Shrine named 'Maheshwara' was built over the spot where the sacred scriptures had been found buried. The shrine was consecrated along with the two temples of the Kishenpur Ashram on March 7th, 1959.

Srimati Bhavani Banerjee had dreamt of three temples. When she arrived at Kishenpur to be present at the consecration, she found only two temples there and exclaimed: "In my dream I saw another small, round temple at a short distance. I cannot see it here." Swami Paramananda said: "Go to Kalyanvan and you will find it." When she reached the garden she stood speechless with amazement: The three temples had actually been completed as they had appeared to her in the dream. This can surely not be explained by ordinary commonsense or reason. By Mataji's grace the impossible becomes possible. Who could have foretold that the pious wishes of all the devotees concerned would materialize in this way! While supervising the construction of the temples Swami Paramananda felt that the two temples in the Ashram grounds should be made to the same pattern, but the third one to a different one. Thus Srimati Bhavani's dream came true. Mataji always used to say: "The Will of the Almighty is being fulfilled."

There is another interesting feature worth mentioning: When some people voiced their doubts as to how the constant expense involved in *pūjā* and *bhoga* in all the temples could be regularly met, Mataji replied: "You need not worry. Śivaji will Himself see to all arrangements." Indeed, this also has already happened in the most unexpected manner!

Holi at Vrindaban

On March 9th Mataji paid a short surprise visit to the New Delhi Ashram and the next day motored from there to Vrindaban, where She remained for the *Holi* festival on March 24th. A devotee of Mathura had arranged for a *Bhāgavata Saptah* there, which commenced on the 12th.

Visits to Patiala, Hoshiarpur, Jalandher

On March 25th Mataji left for Delhi and from there the next day by car for Patiala at the invitation of Rai Bahadur G. M. Modi of the Modi Industries.

After five days at Patiala, Mataji and the whole party proceeded to Hoshiarpur, where everyone stayed at the Sachchidananda Ashram till April 6th. The next day and night were spent at the Savitri Devi Ashram, Jalandher. On the 8th April early morning Mataji and Her large party reached Hardwar. The same afternoon Mataji motored to Ramnagar, Rishikesh, the site for the next *Samyam Mahavrata*; after a short while, the car took Her to Kishenpur, Dehradun, where She had three comparatively restful days.

At Sapta Rishi Ashram with Jawaharlal Nehru

On the 11th afternoon She was back at Rishikesh. On April 13th Mataji accepted a special invitation to the Sapta Rishi Ashram, Hardwar, where Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister addressed an enormous gathering, while Mataji sat by his side on the special dais. Sri Nehru took this opportunity of paying his respects to Mataji and having a few words with Her after a lapse of about seven years.

Didima's Samnyasa Utsava at Ramnagar, Rishikesh

On April 14th Didima's (Sri Swami Muktananda Giri's) *Samnyāsa Utsava* was celebrated by a programme that continued without interruption from early morning till late at night. The celebration took place at Atma Vijnan Bhawan, Ramnagar, Rishikesh, a truly wonderful spot on the banks of the Ganges, solitary and far removed from the hustle and bustle of modern civilization.

9th Samyam Mahavrata at Ramnagar, Rishikesh

From April 15th — 22nd the Ninth *Samyam Mahavrata* was observed in the same place. Ramnagar is about three miles distance from Rishikesh, right on the banks of the

Ganges. The natural beauty of the surroundings is entrancing, with spreading old trees and lofty mountains rising from the opposite bank of the river. *Atma Vijnan Bhavan* is owned by the Kalikamli Trust. Apart from a fine Satsang hall there are a number of spacious buildings scattered over the extensive grounds. All of them had been put at the disposal of the Shree Shree Anandamayce Sangha for the occasion.

The *Samyam Vrata* is held as a rule only once a year, in November. But this *Samyam Week* was a special one, special in more than one respect. Many felt that it was the most wonderful and inspiring gathering in which they had ever taken part. Physical arrangements were good, but a number of modern comforts were conspicuous by their absence, such as taps and bathrooms, etc., although it must be said that thanks to Sri G. M. Modi who very kindly lent us an electric plant, electricity could be temporarily installed and the loudspeaker was in working order, even if the transmission was not too clear. Yet these outer inconveniences seemed only to enhance the spirit of the function. The atmosphere of the gathering was quite incomparable from beginning to end.

Mataji was always at Her best during every *Samyam Vrata*, but this time we felt as if She were even more radiant, more accessible and communicative than ever. During the short intervals between the long hours of Satsang, we could meet Her in smaller groups on the roof near Her room which overlooked the Ganges and the hills. While at previous *Samyam Saptahs* an impetuous crowd used to inundate the hall or pandal as soon as the doors were opened after the group meditation, at 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. On this occasion there was no crowd, no rushing and no crushing. Only a comparatively small number of visitors were able to come from Rishikesh, Hardwar and Dehradun in cars and once or twice parties arrived by special buses. The whole function passed in intense and ever-growing concentration and harmony, without any discord or disturbance. Everyone of the participants must have returned to his ashram or home inwardly enriched,

refreshed and purified. It goes without saying that in a place situated between Hardwar and Rishikesh there could have been no dearth of Mahātmās to grace the function with their presence and to enlighten the audience by their inspiring and learned discourses.

We were fortunate to welcome amongst us for three days four American *Samnyāsīs*, all disciples of Sri Paramahansa Yogananda. Chief of them was Sri Daya Mata, the President of the Self-Realization-Fellowship, which consists of any number of centres for meditation all over the world, several Ashrams in India and several in the U.S.A. Although our foreign guests had been in India only for a few months, they had adapted themselves admirably to the ways of this country, in fact they appeared to feel more at home here than in their motherland. We deeply regretted that they could not stay longer and they also had tears in their eyes when they said good-bye to Mataji. Daya Mata gave a short talk in English that went straight to the hearts of the listeners, telling us about her Guru and what he had related to her about Mataji. Mataji's picture had been an inspiration to her for many years until she finally met Mataji in Calcutta last February. She enjoined on us to make the utmost of the precious boon of Mataji's holy presence and pray for nothing except Self-realization.

As on former occasions, every day's programme of the *Samyam Vrata* ended with *Matri Satsang*, when Mataji either replied to questions or sang; everyone cherished that delightful half hour from 9-9.30 p.m. One evening toward the close of the function, Mataji requested an old bhakta, Prof. Arun Prakash Banerji to tell us of a strange experience he had had.

He said something like the following: "Yesterday afternoon I went to have a bath in the Ganges, but as I walked back I discovered that I had lost the key of my room. All searching proved fruitless. Here I was, aching to join the satsang — but how could I enter the hall when I was wearing wet clothes? Almost in tears I sat down on a stone, wondering

how to open my room. Suddenly I felt someone was approaching. Looking up I saw a beautiful lady dressed in a fine sari standing before me. She seemed to hail from the hills. "What is the matter?" she inquired. I told her and she replied: "Your key may be in the water somewhere." She took off her sandals and stepped into the Ganges. In no time she had found my key under a stone. It seemed quite miraculous amongst all those stones. I felt so intensely grateful, I could not help thanking her. "You call me "Mother" and thank me?" she said. "Go and wash your key, it is covered with sand." I obeyed and when I turned round and looked up, the lady had vanished. How she could have disappeared out of my sight so quickly I could not understand, there was in fact something incomprehensible about the whole incident. I opened my room and changed into dry clothes, but I did not go to the satsang. I was deeply stirred. I had lost my key and my mother had found it for me. But where was the key to my life? I was tormented by this question and lay awake all night. When I told Mataji about my strange experience, She asked a few questions about the beautiful lady and then said: "It was Mother Ganga who appeared to you." I said: "There was no one to be seen there." Mataji remarked: "Where no one is, there is HE."

After we had listened to the old gentleman's story Mataji said: "This is why you take part in the *Samyam Vrata* — in order to find the key. This is why the function is held on the banks of a holy river, that you may find the real key that has remained lost for so many births. This is the place where the key can be found, Mother Ganga herself may come and give it to you."

Birthday Celebrations at Kishenpur

On April 22nd Mataji and a large party left for Dehradun. Sri Hari Babaji and his party joined us there on May 3rd, the day on which Mataji's birthday celebrations commenced. As on former occasions satsang consisting of discourses by Mahātmās

with kirtan in the intervals was kept up from early morning till late at night. Simultaneously perpetual *japa* throughout the 24 hours was sustained in the *Matri Mandir* until May 26th, the actual anniversary of Mataji's birth. From May 9th to 16th a *Bhāgavata Saptah* was held and from May 17th to July 16th the *Rāsaliṅ* party that had arrived from Vrindaban and, by acting scenes from the lives of Sri Krishna and Gauranga Mahāprabhu, morning after morning for about two and a half hours by rain and by sunshine, delighted the audience and even more the children who turned up in large numbers.

Dehradun played a prominent part in Mataji's Līlā. In summer 1959 also Dehradun was singularly fortunate to be blessed by Mataji's presence for full three months. It happened very rarely indeed that Mataji stayed in one place for such a long period. Mataji had spent two months in Dehradun in summer 1957, but then Her health was not at all satisfactory. Fortunately it was very much better this time and people could enjoy Mataji's company to their hearts' content.

Many prominent visitors came to Kishenpur for Her darshan, to mention only one example, Srimati Indira Gandhi with her two sons. It was many years ago in Dehradun itself that her mother, Srimati Kamala Nehru used to come for Mataji's darshan as often as she could, spending night after night in meditation near Mataji and returning to her home in the early morning.

Among foreign visitors there was a gentleman from Columbia in South America; then a couple from Wisconsin who felt rather mystified, as they both noticed a striking resemblance between Didima and the mother of the American lady. A Dutch paintress also arrived, desiring to paint Mataji's portrait. She stayed for three days and then proceeded to Mussoorie to paint a picture of the Dalai Lama. Many painters, both Indian and foreign, tried to produce Mataji's likeness on canvas, but up to then none of them had succeeded. It was by no means easy to reproduce Mataji's ageless face, Her mysterious eyes with their distant look that seemed to gaze at what we

cannot even fathom ; Her radiance, Her perfect repose, Her super-human serenity under all circumstances, Her sweet and bewitching smile. Besides, there was another difficulty : After having spent a few hours in the Ashram, a famous painter once said : "Mataji has so many faces, I have already seen ten or twelve. I wonder which of them I am to paint ! At moments She looks like a young girl, then again like an old woman and so on."

Guru Purnima at Kishenpur

Mataji's sojourn at the Kishenpur Ashram for full three months found its second climax at *Guru Pūrnimā*, which fell on July 20th. As usual this auspicious day was observed by a full programme of pūjā, kirtan, etc. Sri Haribabaji and his devotees had left for Vrindaban together with the *Rāsālilā* party a few days earlier, only to make room for a new onrush of visitors.

A fortnight in Delhi

On July 21st afternoon Mataji motored to New Delhi with Didima and others. Gurupriya Didi and a large party followed the same night by train. Only a few people were left behind at the Kishenpur Ashram and a feeling of a great void after Mataji's exceptionally long and happy stay.

Bhagavata Saptah at Vrindaban

After spending about a fortnight at the Chandraloka Ashram at New Delhi, Mataji proceeded to Vrindaban on August 7th. Dr. Pannalal's daughter Sm. Leila and his son-in-law, Sri Rameshwar Sahai, had arranged for the ceremonial reading of the Srimad Bhāgavata commencing on August 10th and ending on August 17th, *Jhūlan pūrnimā* day, in memory of their son, who had passed away in Paris two years ago, while still in his early twenties. In his all too short life on this tragic earth he had already distinguished himself as a quite outstanding scientific research worker both in India and abroad.

Along with the *Bhāgavata Saptah* that was held in our *Bhāgavata Bhawan*, 108 recitations of the Srimad Bhagavad Gītā were also completed in the Gītā Bhawan. Many distinguished persons and a number of well-known Mahātmās graced the functions with their presence. Sm. Aparna Devi daughter of late C. R. Das, the great nationalist leader of Bengal, was among the visitors who stayed in the Ashram for several days during the *Jhūlan* week.

On August 19th Mataji returned to Delhi. On the 21st She was taken from there to Modinagar by Rai Bahadur G. M. Modi and his wife and shown round the new temple under construction. It promises to be one of the foremost in the whole province.

Jawaharlal Nehru's visit

On August 24th, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru came to meet Mataji at our New Delhi Ashram. He was accompanied by Sri S. D. Upadhyaya, M. P., a member of his personal staff of many years standing, who made it a point to come and pay his respects to Mataji and enjoy Her blissful presence whenever possible.

Sri Jawaharlalji was given a cordial reception at the Ashram gate by Gurupriya Devi and then conducted upstairs to Mataji's newly-built room. He was offered light refreshments and then had a private talk with Mataji for over half an hour. A photographer who somehow managed to sneak in unobserved, succeeded in taking a number of photos of the Prime Minister together with Mataji and others.

Various functions at Vindhyachal & Varanasi

Immediately after Sri Jawaharlalji took leave of Mataji, She started for Vindhyachal. On the 25th morning She was met at Mirzapur station by Seth Mangtu Ram Jaipuria and some members of his family, who took Mataji by car to the Vindhyachal Ashram on Ashtabhuja Hill. The Jaipuria family had been observing a special *Sahasra Chandī Anushthān* (one

thousand ceremonial recitations of the Durga Sapta Shati) at the Bhajanalaya, which is the house adjoining our Ashram compound at Vindhyachal. The Jaipuria family requested Mataji to remain there at least for a couple of days, but Mataji was unable to grant their wishes, as She was due at Varanasi on the 26th August to be present at the *Janmastami* festival. However She stayed at Varanasi only for one day and returned to Vindhyachal on the 27th. There She enjoyed a comparatively restful time till September 2nd, when She motored back to Varanasi, where Sri S. T. Nanda of Poona had arranged for *Shata Chandi Patha* and *Sūrya Japa*, beginning on September 5th.

No sooner was this function completed, than the annual *Bhāgavata Jayanti* was held from September 9th to 16th. Srimati Rama Saxena was responsible for this celebration, which was held in memory of her late husband, Dr. Ram Babu Saxena, a well-known personality in U.P. Pandit Srinath Shastri of Vrindaban officiated as the reader of the Sanskrit text in the mornings and also as the expounder of the Hindi explanations every afternoon. His lucid and brilliant rendering of the *Bhāgavata* with his melodious voice and his humorous interspersions were highly appreciated by all his listeners who flocked in large numbers.

Daya Mata's visit

On September 15th Sri Daya Mata, the President of the Self-Realization Fellowship, came by plane from Calcutta to pay a short visit to Mataji before her impending departure for the U.S.A. She was accompanied by another American *sahnyāsini*, Sister Mataji. The American Swami Kriyananda, also of the S.R.F., had already arrived three days earlier, as he was eager to be near Mataji on his spiritual birthday, which falls on September 12th. Swami Kriyananda had succeeded in learning quite a lot of Bengali during his short stay in India and could talk to Mataji in Her own tongue. On the 16th night Sri Daya Mata and her companions left by train for Calcutta.

Except for Swami Kriyananda they could not talk to Mataji without an interpreter, but they loved sitting by Her in silence with closed eyes, entering into meditation. We watched Daya Mata sitting as motionless as a statue for long periods. It is gratifying to find that the spirit of renunciation is not confined to India alone. These American *sahnyāsīs* are evidently genuine renunciates who have dedicated their lives wholly to the Supreme Quest. Sri Daya Mata, although the head of a worldwide religious organization, seemed humility and self-effacement personified.

On September 17th Mataji left for Allahabad, where She stayed at the Satya Gopal Ashram for three nights at the invitation of the wife and daughters of late Sri Gopal Thakur. On September 20th She proceeded by car to Vindhyachal for a short visit of two days only and then returned to Varanasi to attend the annual function in memory of Swami Akhandananda, Gurupriya Devi's father.

On Swami Akhandananda Giri (Didi's father)

It seems fitting to say a few words about this rare soul. The retired Civil Surgeon of Bengal, Dr. Shashanka Mohan Mukherji, as he was then called, discovered Mataji already early in 1925, when She stayed at Dacca. He soon became one of Her most faithful and devoted followers, who accompanied Her on Her ceaseless peregrinations throughout the length and breadth of India. He had the privilege to be with Her when She first visited South India in 1930 and went right down to Cape Comorin, and he was also with Her when She scaled the heights of Mount Kailash in 1937 together with Bholanathji and Bhajji. We are told that he was of exemplary perseverance and determination in his spiritual practices. He could sit in meditation for whole days or nights without even changing his posture, while hundreds of mosquitoes feasted on his body. To his last breath he served Mataji with the most selfless devotion.

It is customary in our Ashram to give a feast to sādhus on the anniversary of a samnyāsi's *Mahāsamādhi*. As soon as this function was over on September 24th, Mataji left once more for Vindhyachal. She was back at Varanasi again on September 29th.

Durga Puja at Varanasi

On October 3rd, the first day of *Nava Rātri*, Durga Pūjā celebrations began with the installation of the image of the deity, although the main pūjā took place from 8th — 11th October. The whole function proceeded in great style. Raja Joginder Sen and Rani Kusum Kumari of Mandi had the privilege to arrange for it. Hundreds of devotees from all over India availed themselves of this golden opportunity to spend this joyous festival in Mataji's holy presence, right on the banks of Ganga. Needless to say that the function proved a full success and everyone who participated felt greatly enriched by the deep joy and peace he had experienced at Varanasi.

Visit of Sri V. V. Giri

On October 7, Sri V. V. Giri, then Governor of Uttar Pradesh had Mataji's darshan at Varanasi Ashram. He told us that he had heard about Her in South India and had, for years, been cherishing the desire to come in personal contact with Her.

Sri Giriji started the conversation on spiritual subjects by narrating his personal experience as to the value of introspection and retrospection. He told Mataji emphatically that he attached little importance to worldly success, which is so ephemeral and so empty. He regretted that very often people at the top forget their past and attribute their rise exclusively to their merit. This, he said, shows ego and narrowness. In his opinion, India would have been altogether different if all Indians, particularly those who are at the helm of affairs, could be simple, selfless and innocent like children.

His very first darshan of Mataji enabled Sri Giri to rise above formality and conventions and to talk to Her about

matters of a very personal nature. Association with Mataji, he remarked, was a source of happiness and inspiration. To this, Mataji's simple reply was : "This body is your little child."

"This answer", observed Sri Giri, "only shows how great She is."

Within a few minutes, the child in this veteran leader of men — the child who lies hidden in all — seemed to recognise in Mataji his own Mother, being the Universal Mother. Like a typical child, Sri Giri had not the slightest hesitation in opening himself before Mataji without any reservation. Thus he narrated how he had occupied high places in life — he had been a Minister in the State of Madras twice, a Minister at the Centre, Ambassador, and now was a Governor* — and having occupied these high stations he had realised that there is not much in them. After all, worldly success, he said, does not lead to real peace of mind, which is the cherished objective of man.

Evidently pleased with the conclusions of Sri Giri and, in particular, with his frank and informal approach, Mataji said : "You are right ; there is only one Maharaja who is the source of the power of all who are in high stations in life."

After this, complete silence prevailed for some time, and thereafter Mataji broached a new topic and said : "Pitaji, may this body ask for a favour, or rather for an indulgence ? When this body approaches persons who have accepted me as their own, this body uses the expression 'indulgence' ; for others, it prefers the expression 'begging'."

With this short preamble, Mataji told Sri Giri that the Divine has ever been pervading Time in its eternal flow. Out of this eternal flow, each day consisting of 24 hours, is a unit. This unit, divided by 96 gives you a period of 15 minutes. Now, a number of devotees have, with a view to keeping themselves in unbroken touch with the Divine, formed a team of *Akhaṇḍa Bhagawat Smṛiti* (constant remembrance of the

* Incidentally Sri V. V. Giri also adorned the post of President of India for full one term afterwards.

Divine). Each devotee dedicates to the Divine any period of 15 minutes suitable to him. Now, what this body wants to request of you, is this : do select any period of 15 minutes and dedicate that period to the Divine. Once you have selected the time, do not change it ; after your decision, that particular part of the day will cease to be yours. There is no need to take a bath or change your clothes before starting your 15 minutes' meditation, but you must keep to the time sincerely and steadfastly."

Sri Giri replied : "I am grateful to you for this suggestion. I feel honoured by being invited to join the team of *Akhaṇḍa Bhagawat Smṛiti*. As a rule I devote some portion of the day to introspection. Henceforth I will, in addition, set apart 15 minutes for meditation. I will not forget this as long as I live."

Incidentally, Mataji observed that not often did She broach the subject of *Akhaṇḍa Bhagawat Smṛiti*. The irresistible conclusion from this observation is that membership of the *Akhaṇḍa Bhagawat Smṛiti* group is confined to the chosen few who have spiritual receptivity.

EIGHT

(October 1959 — October 1960)

Matri Saptah and Diwali at Varanasi

After the Durga Pūjā celebrations had been successfully completed, Mataji left for Vindhyaçal with a large party of Ashramites and guests on October 17th. Only six short days were spent in that blessed spot of solitude and natural beauty. On October 23rd Mataji was again at Varanasi, where at the suggestion of Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj and others a special week of individual *sādhana*, named *Mātri Saptah* was observed from October 24th — 30th. It was of a kind that was new to our Ashram. Fixed types of concentration and meditation had to be practised at fixed hours of the day by those who wished to take part, each one remaining in his or her own room. There were no special gatherings. Throughout this week Mataji, whose health was indifferent, remained upstairs in Her room on the 2nd storey of the Kanya-peeth. Three times daily people were allowed to go there for darshan for a short while.

In the night of *Diwali*, 31st October, *Kali Pūjā* was performed in the Chandi Mandap on the ground floor of the Ashram and to everybody's delight Mataji descended and was present until the early morning when *prasāda* was distributed. It is customary all over Bengal to celebrate a special *Kali Pūjā* in the night of Diwali, which is the festival of lights.

The *Annakut* festival followed on November 1st.

10th Sanyam Mahavrata at Agarpara, Calcutta

On November 3rd Mataji left with only a few companions for Hazaribagh, a hill-station in Bihar, while most of Her party proceeded directly to Calcutta, where Mataji alighted on November 5th evening. On arrival in Calcutta She received a tremendous ovation and it took hours until She reached the

Ashram. A gate had been erected on the main road at Agarpara, where the lane leading to the Ashram branches off, and from there Mataji's car was led to its destination in a procession with kirtan.

Most of the next day was spent in Calcutta proper, where Mataji visited the residences of a number of devotees. From November 8th — 14th the 10th *Samyam Saptah* was held at Agarpara. Not for the first time did Calcutta witness a function of this kind, for the 3rd *Samyam Mahāvratā* that had taken place at Ballygunge, Calcutta in November 1953 is still fresh in the memory of its participants.* It was not an ordinary event to observe a week of concentrated *sādhana* including 2, 3/4 hours of silent meditation daily in the midst of the roaring city. Nevertheless it had proved a full success and roused the devotees of Calcutta to great enthusiasm.

A whole week spent in individual *sādhana*, satsang and collective meditation in Mataji's presence, which left neither time nor opportunity for worldly thoughts and occupations, gave an inward exhilaration equal to a change in the rarefied atmosphere of high mountains. The function at Agarpara was very different from the 8th *Samyam Mahāvratā* last April at Rishikesh, which in an ideal setting marked a climax never to be forgotten by those who attended. Nevertheless the 10th *Samyam Saptah* had undoubtedly its own beauty and perfection.

Agarpara like Rishikesh is situated right on the banks of the Ganges and from every seat in the spacious pandal one could have a fine view of the sacred river. Thus the inspiration of its sight was added to that of Mataji's presence and of the discourses and songs we were fortunate enough to listen to. It goes without saying that the large number of bhaktas of Calcutta came at all hours for Mataji's darshan and to participate in as many of the functions as they were able to. Over and above, huge crowds, including several whole schools, flocked into the compound and the pandal at certain times. However, arrangements were excellent, so that the *vratis* could

* See p. 18.

not be disturbed by the invading flood of visitors; the collective meditations proceeded in singular silence. The grounds of the Agarpara Ashram are extensive. Moreover the adjoining property of Sri Ramkrishna Dalmia with its large houses, outhouses and lawns had been put at the entire disposal of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha and provided us with ample living accommodation, kitchens, dining halls and a car park. Several hundreds of men and women had enrolled themselves as *vratis*.

Each day some of the discourses were in Bengali, others in Hindi, so that everyone got his due share. Swami Sri Vishnu Ashram, a well-known mahātmā as well as a great scholar, delivered a series of fine talks in Hindi on the significance of *samyam vrata*. He encouraged the *vratis* by saying that they had obviously already obtained what the *Śāstras* declared to be the three greatest boons, namely: birth in a human body, the desire for liberation and the grace of a *Sad Guru*. During the last two or three days we had the privilege to listen to the words of Swami Sri Sharanānanda, a greatly revered saint of North India. The short interludes of congregational Kirtan led by Swami Sri Krishnanandaji of Bombay were always enjoyed by everyone.

Among the very learned and brilliant speakers from Calcutta were Dr. J. B. Choudhury and his wife Dr. Roma Choudhury, both outstanding Sanskrit scholars; Sri Tripurari Chakravarti, Professor of Calcutta University, who every night very lucidly expounded the Ramayana in Bengali; Dr. Gourinath Shastri, Principal of the Sanskrit College, Calcutta; the well-known Philosopher Dr. Nalini Kanta Brahma.

As usual the last half hour of the daily programme was called *Mātri Sanga*, when Mataji either replied to questions or sang. We should like to quote here (in translation) a few words She uttered one evening concerning *Samyam Vrata*: ".....He who aspires to the Highest (*māhān*) is called a mahātmā. To engage in *sādhana* means to observe *samyam*. *Samyam* has to be practised so that real *samyam* may come

about spontaneously. A patient goes to hospital ; the *samyam vrata* is meant to cure one from *bhavaroga* (the chronic disease of being born again and again as an individual apart from the All, and the sorrows and afflictions that such existence entails). The Mahātmās are the doctors, the *vratis* the patients, religious discourses the medicine. Instructions that help towards Self-realization are the remedy that must be used to the full. A whole day's programme (of the *Samyam Vrata*) is one dose of medicine. So as to gain strength for your search you should listen to what the Mahātmās say : For your sake only have they taken the trouble to come from great distances. Try to digest their teachings and to put them into practice."

As on previous occasions the function concluded with half an hour's midnight meditation on the 14th night. Kirtan commenced almost immediately and was sustained without interruption until the evening of November 15th. On November 16th Mataji visited some more houses of devotees in Calcutta, returning to the Ashram only at midnight. Even at that hour visitors who had come from Calcutta in cars were waiting patiently for Her darshan and to talk to Her.

Bombay Via Jamshedpur

On the 17th early morning Mataji left for Jamshedpur reaching the same evening. From there She proceeded to Bombay on the 20th. Already last January Mataji had been expected to go there for some time, but due to Her indifferent health the programme had been changed at the last moment. As during several of Her previous visits, Mataji stayed in Her house at Vile Parle in the compound of the residence of Sri B. K. Shah. Mataji's party were put up in Sri B. K. Shah's house. As on former occasions the master and the mistress of the house vied with each other to provide all possible comforts and conveniences for Mataji and all their numerous guests and to make everyone feel at home. Satsang was held daily and people would come for darshan at fixed hours.

During Her sojourn in Bombay Mataji paid a visit at the *Jñāna Yajña*, a celebration in memory of the late Swami Sri Prem Puriji. When Mataji was requested to address the large audience that had collected, She uttered Her well known sayings : "*Hari Katha hi Katha*" etc. "Of Thee alone must be the spoken word, all else is but futility and pain" and, "In Ram there is *arām* — rest and ease ; where Ram is not there is *vyārām* — discomfort and disease." She also sang : "*Satyam Jñānam Anantam Brahman.*" She further visited the Samnyāsa Ashram at Vile Parle, where She charmed everyone present by singing : "He Bhagavan."

The Mahamandaleshwara of that Ashram, Swami Sri Maheshwaranandaji had known Mataji for many years and had on various occasions very kindly responded to invitations to deliver discourses at functions arranged by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. Mataji had stayed at the Samnyāsa Ashrama for about a fortnight on returning from South India in winter 1952. In 1954, immediately after the *Samyam Mahāvrata* in Bombay, a *Bhāgavata Saptah* had been held at that Ashram, which Mataji used to attend daily.

Bhagavata Saptah for late K. C. Munshaw

On December 4th Mataji left Bombay for Ahmedabad, where She put up as usual at the residence of the Munshaw family. A *Bhagavata Saptah* was celebrated from December 7th — 14th for Sri Kantibhai Munshaw, who had passed away just two years ago.

Sri K. C. Munshaw had been a devotee of many years' standing, who excelled not only in great efficiency, but also in a rare spirit of service. On countless occasions he had put his services at the disposal of Mataji and the Ashrams in Her name with their various needs and activities. To mention only one instance : it was he who was responsible for most of the arrangements during Mataji's tour to South India in 1952.

At Ahmedabad also Mataji responded to the invitations of a good number of devotees to their residences. She further visited the Vedanta Ashram of Swami Sri Madhava Tirtha.

Utkantheswar

On December 16th She motored to Utkantheswar, a beautiful and solitary spot about 35-40 miles from Ahmedabad. She and Her party were accommodated for three days at the Yogashram, where Mataji had already stayed on several previous occasions. Utkantheswar is a sacred place with a famous Śiva temple. It derives its name "Utkantheswar" from the Śiva Linga, which resembles the hump of a camel. Sage Jabala is supposed to have practised *tapasyā* there in ancient times. The legend has it that the *vibhuti* (sacred ashes) of his sacrificial fire solidified and formed into the surrounding hills, which add considerably to the charm of the landscape.

On December 20th Mataji returned to Ahmedabad to be present on the 2nd anniversary of Sri K. C. Munshaw's death, which was commemorated by perpetual kirtan throughout the day and the chanting of the whole of the Bhagavad Gītā. A number of sādhus and mahātmās were entertained to a feast.

Ashram at Bhimpura

The next day Mataji left for Baroda, where She and Her companions were put up in a school near Tarakeswar temple. On December 23rd Mataji proceeded by car to Bhimpura*. Our Ashram there is about a mile's distance from the village and therefore specially suited for the contemplative life. Three brahmacharis hailing from three different provinces, namely Gujarat, Bengal and Andhra were the residents at the time.

River Narmada

Just as to die in Kashi on the banks of the Ganges is considered to be the most fortunate death, so the banks of the Narmada are said to be the most congenial to the performance

* See p. 55.

of *sādhana* and more especially *japa*. Moreover the river bank has been sanctified by the presence of some of the greatest Rishis and Munis of ancient times. The famous Muni Vyasa who was the author of the Mahābhārata is supposed to have lived there and one place is named after him. Also his son Sukadeva who related the whole of the Srimad Bhagavata to King Parikshit, and further Anusuya, the wife of Rishi Atri are said to have practised meditation and austerities on those sacred shores. In recent times as well many great seekers after Truth have chosen this place for their abode, such as for instance Sri Balananda Brahmachari of Vaidyanath Dhama and his Guru. Every stone there is said to be a Śiva Linga; in fact all the linga installed in the Śiva temples in our Ashrams at Vrindaban, Hardwar, Rajgir and Kishenpur, etc., have been procured from the banks of the Narmada.

Mataji had not been to Bhimpura for several years. However, after a stay of only about three days Mataji motored to Baroda on the 27th and the same day She and Her whole party boarded the train to Vrindaban, where She remained only for two days. Bhaktas in Delhi had hoped that She would spend a few days there, but suddenly She decided to leave for Varanasi, where She alighted on the 31st December early morning.

Devotees at Varanasi deemed themselves fortunate to be able to end the old year and start the New Year in Mataji's presence. However Mataji motored to Vindhyachal on January 1st afternoon. Just a few companions were allowed to go with Her, while Didima, Didi and the rest of the party remained at Varanasi. On January 5th morning Mataji arrived in Varanasi quite unexpectedly, only to leave again about two or three hours later in the company of Didima, Didi and several others. The car which was taking Her to Vindhyachal was diverted to Allahabad. At a moment's notice Mataji had decided to pay a flying visit to Allahabad and the site of the *Kumbh Mela*, where Swami Paramanandaji was making arrangements for the Camp. She went to Vindhyachal the next

day. During Her stay there not only bhaktas from Mirzapur, Varanasi and Allahabad used to come for Her darshan but also a few from Lucknow, Delhi and Calcutta. On the last day even four European ladies belonging each to a different country arrived in a taxi from Varanasi, spent the day at the Ashram and had private interviews with Mataji. In the early morning of January 13th She drove by car to Allahabad. A large party from Varanasi and most of Her companions at Vindhyachal had gone ahead already on the 12th.

Kumbh Mela at the Triveni, Allahabad

January 14th is the day of the winter solstice and supposed to be especially auspicious for bathing in the Ganges and even more so at the *Triveni* near Allahabad. *Triveni* is the confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Jamuna and Saraswati. This is the place where the famous *Kumbh Mela* is held. Thousands of sādhus and *saṁnyāsīs* gather on such occasions, camping in huts and tents; and millions of men and women from all over India avail themselves of this opportunity of purifying mind and body by plunging into the waters of the *Triveni* and by basking in the atmosphere of the holy and wise.

N. N. Mukerji

A special camp had been prepared in the *Kumbh Mela* area for Mataji's devotees, but as to Mataji Herself, She decided to put up in the house that had been specially built for Her use about two years ago at George Town, Allahabad, in the garden of the residence of the late Sri N. N. Mukerji, Retired District Judge. He and his wife and children are amongst Mataji's oldest and most sincere devotees.

Sri N. N. Mukerji was one of the foremost organizers of functions at Allahabad connected with Mataji. He was greatly respected by all. The news of his sudden death on November 12th, 1959 had been communicated to Mataji by phone during the *Samyam Vrata* and came as a great shock to everyone. His loss is mourned by his countless friends, in

fact by all who had the privilege of coming in contact with this rare soul.

From January 13th to February 3rd Mataji stayed alternately in George Town, Allahabad and in Her Camp at the *Kumbh Mela*. This time it so happened that Mataji bathed at the Triveni on all 3 auspicious bathing days, namely on January 14th and 28th and on February 1st, while on former occasions Mataji as a rule only used to sprinkle Ganges water on Her head. We recall the *Ardha Kumbh Mela*, twelve years ago, when Dr. Pannalal was in charge of all arrangements, including the construction of Mataji's Camp. Mataji then had gone to bathe in the Ganges together with Sri Mohananandaji of Baidyanath Dham and with late Gopal Thakur of Allahabad. She now related that on that occasion the sacred rivers that form the Triveni, namely Ganga, Jamuna and Saraswati had appeared to Her in the shape of three young girls who came arm in arm and requested Her to bathe.

Many devotees, Indian as well as European, American and even Chinese, came to spend a few days or hours with Mataji at the *Kumbh*, enjoying the satsang as well as the sense of freedom and holiday from all worldly affairs that is characteristic for life in such a Camp.*

Varanasi & Vindhyachal

On February 3rd Mataji motored to Varanasi. On the 9th four young brahmana boys received their sacred threads in Mataji's presence. On the 10th She proceeded to Vindhyachal. Just below Astabhuj Hill, on the way to the Ashram, Sri Tushar Kanti Ghosh, the Chief Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had built a guest-house about a year ago. He was celebrating a *Viṣṇu Yajña* in his compound; Mataji halted and blessed the function by Her presence. She also attended the final ceremony (*pūrṇāhuti*) on February 12th.

In Vindhyachal Mataji as usual enjoyed a comparatively quiet time, although as always many visitors came from various

* See "As the Flower Sheds Its Fragrance" p. 132—135.

places, some to stay for a few days, others in cars for a few hours only.

Sivaratni at Varanasi

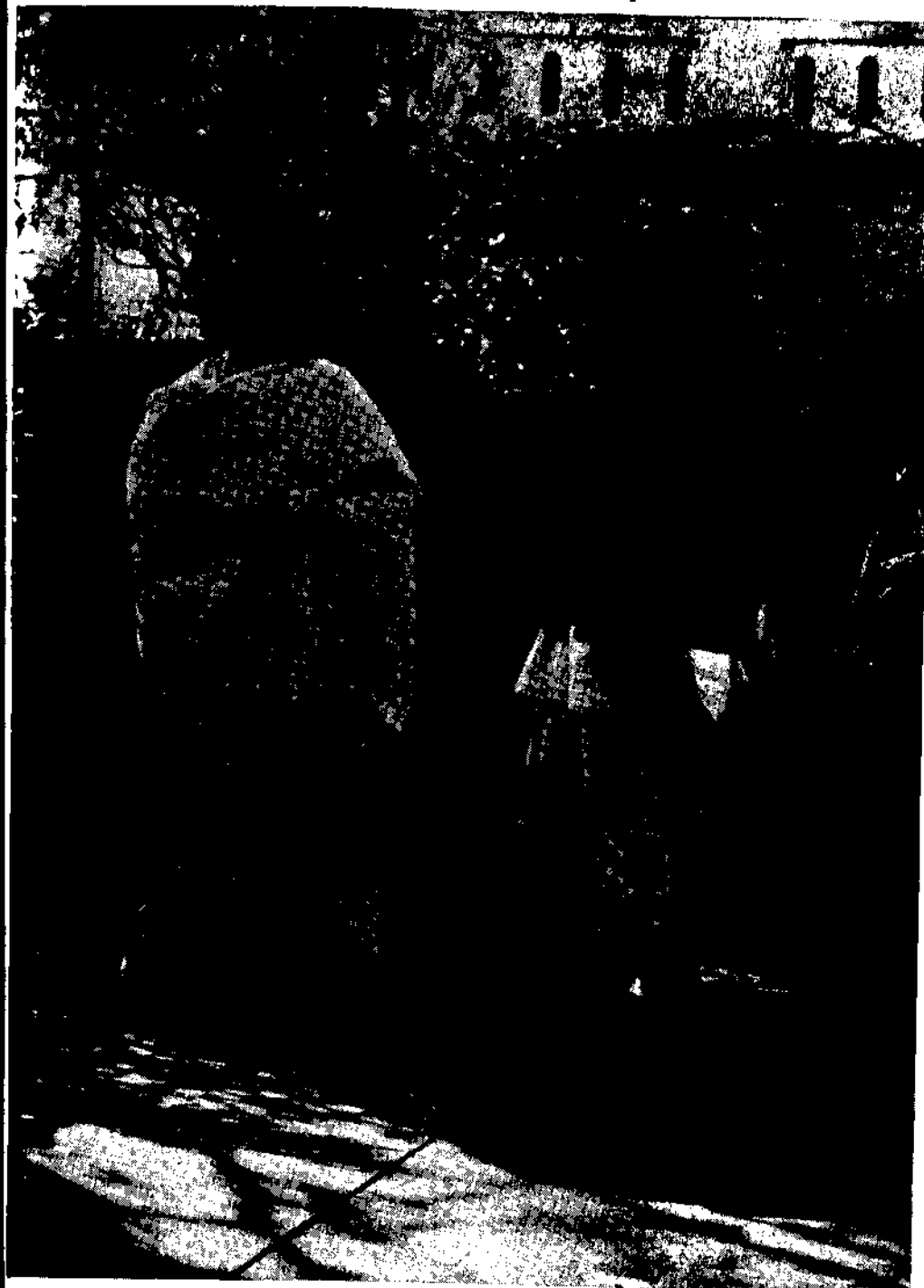
On February 23rd Mataji returned to Varanasi, where the *Śivarātri* festival was celebrated on the 25th. Ever since the Ashram had been deprived of its hall and open terrace, there was great dearth of space on such occasions. Yet every inch of the available space was used most ingeniously. People were seated in groups round Śiva Linga, doing pūjā all night in the temples, on the verandas and in the courtyard over which a roof of canvas had been spread. Everything was arranged so beautifully, it was truly inspiring to watch the pūjā; the atmosphere during that night is always one of profound peace and solemnity.

Devotees had come from Calcutta, Delhi, Lucknow, Allahabad, etc., to join in the celebration, the fast and the vigil. Mataji was up almost throughout the whole night, moving from group to group, without showing any signs of fatigue. A number of Europeans and Americans were present during the celebration, among them Swami Kriyananda, a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, who had also spent some time at Mataji's Camp in the *Kumbh* and again at Vindhyachal.

Special Puja at Etawah

On February 27th Mataji boarded the train to Etawah, where She alighted on the 28th early morning. A special pūjā had been arranged for Her in the house of a devotee, Sri Jaichandra Lal Bajpayee. It was practically on the scale of the Birthday celebrations.

Mataji was to leave Etawah for Bandh (near Aligarh) on February 29th at 3 p.m. Originally it had been planned that She should be at Vrindaban for the Holi festival, but at the request of Sri Haribabaji She had agreed to go to Bandh instead. However Her state of health suddenly became such that Her trip to Bandh had to be cancelled at the last moment.





At the time that She was to leave for Aligarh, She moved to Etawah and the next morning travelled to Delhi, where She remained in the Chandraloka Ashram for a week, resting in Her newly built room on the upper floor. Visitors were allowed *darshan* only twice daily at fixed hours.

Sapta Rishi Ashram

On March 7th Mataji came downstairs early morning and expressed Her wish to start immediately for Hardwar. Two hours later She was driving by car to Kankhal, where She and Her party put up at Santiniketan, the house of a devotee Sri Nitai Basu Mallik. On March 10th She moved to the Sapta Rishi Ashram, which is nearly half way between Hardwar and Rishikesh. The Ashram had recently been enlarged by a number of small houses and a Sanskrit School for boys, but we regret to say that Sri 108 Ganesh Dutta Goswamiji, who was the heart and soul of the place, had in the meantime left this world. Rai Bahadur Narayan Das, who had specially come from Delhi, acted as the host and made everyone feel at home and at ease. Sri J. K. Birla had sent his Ayurvedic physician to attend to Mataji. Actually Mataji's health improved considerably in that quiet and congenial place. A number of visitors came for Mataji's *darshan*, among them Sri Gopalswami Ayengar, the Speaker of the Indian Parliament, with his family. Sri Haribabaji also arrived by car from Delhi and stayed for two days. He was eager that Mataji should visit Hoshiarpur some time in April, but Mataji did not seem vigorous enough to fulfil his wish.

Didima's Samnyasa Utsava at Ananda Kashi

On March 22nd Mataji moved to Ananda Kashi, near Rishikesh on the banks of the Ganges, where Mataji was able to relax more than anywhere else.

It had been planned to celebrate Didima's *Samnyāsa Utsava* on April 13th in Delhi this time but at the last moment Mataji decided to remain at Ananda Kashi till the middle of

April. Since neither Didima nor Didi were willing to leave Mataji, the function was held at Ananda Kashi itself. In spite of dearth of accommodation and the difficulty of providing food for so many people, the function proved a great success and everything was arranged in a most efficient and pleasing manner. A number of Mahātmās, hailing from different Ashrams in Rishikesh, came and enlightened the audience by their fine talks, and a party from Sivananda Ashram sang excellent kirtan. The programme of satsang continued throughout the day. In the afternoon many hill people in their colourful costumes arrived in order to attend the *Vaisakhi Mela*, which fell on the same day. They incidentally joined in the festival and had Mataji's darshan. This was a novel and charmingly picturesque feature that added zest to the joyful occasion.

Kishenpur & Mussoorie

On April 15th, after a stay of full 3 weeks at Ananda Kashi, Mataji motored to the Kishenpur Ashram near Dehradun where She remained for nearly two weeks till April 29th. At Kishenpur She had a comparatively restful time.

However on April 27th She went to Mussoorie to inaugurate a new house of the Rajmata Kamalendumati Shah of Tehri, who had been Her hostess at Ananda Kashi. In the early morning of the 28th Mataji returned to Kishenpur, only to leave the next afternoon by car for Delhi, where She spent the night in the Chandraloka Ashram and proceeded to Bombay on the 30th morning, reaching there on May 1st.

Birthday Celebrations at Bombay

As during all Her recent visits to this city, Mataji was accommodated at the residence of Sri B. K. Shah in Her Burmese pagoda-like cottage. A pandal of moderate size was pitched nearby to serve for more intimate functions and meetings. In this very pandal Mataji's birthday celebrations began on May 2nd. Mahamandaleshwara Swami Maheshwaranandaji

gave an inspiring talk and pūjā was performed there in the night. For the main programme of the birthday celebrations, which continued from May 3rd to 14th, from early morning till late at night, a very large and beautifully decorated pandal, seating over 2000 people, had been erected in the grounds of the Nanavati Girls' School, Vile Parle, at about two furlongs distance from Sri B. K. Shah's house. The whole of the Girls' School had been put at our disposal and the majority of guests who had flocked from far and near were accommodated there. Thanks to the organizing genius of Sri D. I. Kania and Sri B. K. Shah and the efficiency of his wife Srimati Lilaben, who attended to everything personally in an inimitable spirit of service, arrangements were excellent in all respects. The whole function proceeded in singular harmony and perfection.

As usual a number of prominent Mahātmās took a leading part in the satsang. Amongst them were Sri Haribabaji, Sri Krishnananda Avadhutaji, Swami Swatantranandaji, Sri Vasudevanandaji of the Samnyasa Ashram, Vile Parle, Sri Vishnu Ashramji and Sri Akhandanandaji of Vrindaban who was then the President of the All India Sādhu Samāj. In the interval between the lectures, first class musicians delighted everyone by their songs and kirtans. On one occasion the renowned singer Sri Raghunathji Panigrahi sang beautiful songs from the Gītā Govinda.

A *Bhāgavata Saptah* that was observed from May 4th — 12th formed an important part of the birthday celebrations. The Sanskrit reading took place at Sri B. K. Shah's residence, while the exposition in Hindi was done very lucidly by Sri Srinath Shastri of Vrindaban in the large pandal. Mataji Herself was present at the Satsang three times daily, singing kirtan on occasions, especially on the night of the 13th. In between She could be approached by individuals and smaller groups at Her own place. On the 14th the usual birthday feast was given to all who cared to partake of it. In the evening Sri K. G. Ambegaokar, Retd. Deputy Governor of

the Reserve Bank of India, Sri S. R. Das Gupta, Chief Justice of Mysore and Srimati Lilaben Shah spoke about Mataji.

6 Weeks at Pune

On May 15th Mataji motored to Pune, accompanied by a party of about 45 people. Everyone was accommodated at the Palitana House and at the house of Sri S. T. Nanda, who had had a special thatched hut for Mataji's use constructed in his garden. The Nanda family moved into the basement, while all the rest of their house was put at the disposal of Mataji's party, who were entertained with the utmost care and hospitality. A pandal in the compound served as a Satsang hall. Satsang was held three times daily and Mataji gave darshan at those times. Every evening between 6 and 8 p.m., Mataji used to go for a drive and visit a number of places, such as for instance, the Bhandarkar Research Institute, a new branch of which was opened in Her presence; the National Chemical Laboratory; the Ashram of Sri Dilip Kumar Roy, who in turn came for Mataji's darshan several times and delighted the audience by his beautiful songs. The famous singer Srimati Hirabai Barodkar also came for Mataji's darshan, incognito at first. When she expressed her wish to sing to Mataji, her identity was soon disclosed. At Mataji's request she subsequently arrived with her whole party of accompanying musicians and gave two or three thrilling recitals.

Several prominent personages came to pay their respects to Mataji, among them Dr. K. N. Katju, Chief Minister of M.P. and Sri Gulzarilal Nanda, Home Minister of the Government of India.

On June 10th Sri Haribabaji arrived and with him the *Rāsālilā* party from Vrindaban. They all remained in Pune for full three weeks. The daily performances of the Krishna Līlā were, as ever, greatly appreciated and drew crowds that could not possibly be accommodated although the pandal was enlarged and then opened — all this proved insufficient.

One evening Mataji and Sri Haribabaji paid a visit to the Mahant of Ramtekari, a well-known saint of Pune, who in turn gave us the honour of his presence during our satsang.

Thus, except for the first week, which was fairly quiet, Mataji had an extremely busy time at Pune. Originally She had been expected to remain there only for a fortnight or at the most for a month, but incidentally Her stay was prolonged till the end of June to the joy of our generous hosts and all Her Pune admirers.

Mataji had been in Pune just for a night on returning from South India early in 1953. It was then that Sri S. T. Nanda had met Her for the first time. Even on that occasion She responded to his humble request to bless his house by a visit of a few minutes. When Mataji had stayed in Pune for four weeks after the birthday celebrations in 1957, the Nandas were again fortunate to receive Mataji's visit for a short while.

Guru Purnima & Nama Yajna at Delhi

On July 1st Mataji, Sri Haribabaji and the whole party proceeded to Bombay for a stay of five days. Mataji, as before, put up at Her 'pagoda', but attended Sri Haribabaji's programme twice daily at Khar. On July 6th She entrained for Delhi, reaching there on the 7th in time for *Guru Pūrṇimā* that fell on July 8th. The Delhi devotees had made very good arrangements for a beautiful and dignified function, that elevated all who took part. Kirtan was kept up throughout the day in the spacious Ashram hall, while Mataji received people from early morning till late at night in Sri Haribabaji's newly constructed room upstairs, which was inaugurated on that occasion. There seemed no end to the crowd that kept on surging in, eager to pay homage to Mataji on that auspicious day. Mataji, as ever untiring and over-flowing with grace, abundantly blessed everyone and distributed flowers, fruits and sweets with Her own hands. At intervals She appeared downstairs in the hall and joined the kirtan. It had been

planned that Mataji should leave New Delhi for Dehradun immediately after *Guru Pūrṇimā*, namely on July 9th. Instead a *Nāma Yajña* was held from the 9th evening till the 10th evening; Mataji's departure was therefore postponed to July 11th. As always in Delhi the kirtan was quite exquisite and roused everyone to joy and enthusiasm.

Among the persons who came for Mataji's darshan and to talk to Her during Her short stay in New Delhi were Sri C. P. N. Singh, Ex. Governor of Punjab, Sri Subimal Dutta, Foreign Secretary to the Govt. of India; and on the 11th morning, just before Mataji's departure, Sri Bhagawan Sahai, the Chief Commissioner of Delhi came with his family. Sri J. K. Birla also saw Mataji several times during those few days.

Dehradun: Short visits to Pt. Parasuram Dhammi's house & Ananda Chowk

Leaving Delhi by car at 11 a.m., Mataji alighted at the Kishenpur Ashram at 7 p.m. on July 11th. On reaching Dehradun She went first of all to the house of Pandit Parasuram Dhammi, who to our deep regret had passed away suddenly in the beginning of June. Pandit Parasuram was one of the first devotees of Mataji outside of Bengal, when She stayed in Raipur (Dehradun) with Bholanath and Bhajji in 1932. He was a most unassuming person and nobody could guess how real and genuine his devotion was and how much selfless service he did for the Ashram while he and his family lived in a very simple way. Everyone who had come into contact with him, sincerely mourns the loss of this rare human being.

The devotees of Dehradun had great hopes that Mataji would remain in their midst for a good long time and spend *Jhulan* and *Janmastami* with them, but at the urgent invitation of Sri Haribabaji, Mataji left for Vrindaban on August 1st. While at Kishenpur She suddenly one evening went away by car to an undisclosed destination with only 2 or 3 compa-

nions, leaving behind Didima, Didi and all the others at the Ashram. Fortunately She returned the next morning to be present at the reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is performed regularly once a month at the Kishenpur Ashram. It takes about 24 — 26 hours or sometimes more of uninterrupted reading (done by turns) to complete the whole of 'Tulsidas' *Rāmāyaṇa*. Only after returning, Mataji disclosed that She had spent the night at the Kali temple at Ananda Chowk, Dehradun, where She had put up many years ago, long before the Ashram at Kishenpur and Raipur had come into existence. During Mataji's stay at Kishenpur many interesting discussions ensued at darshan time twice daily.*

Jhulan at Vrindaban

Mataji reached Vrindaban early morning on August 2nd in time for "*Jhulan Ekādaśī*". Every night beginning from *Ekādaśī* (the 11th day of each phase of the moon) until *Pūrṇimā* (full moon night), the images of Krishna and Radha are placed on a profusely decorated swing and worshipped to the accompaniment of songs in praise and adoration of these deities. The day before fullmoon *Mahajhūla* was celebrated in the very spacious hall of our Vrindaban Ashram. Not less than eleven swings had been provided and on each of them were placed images of Krishna and Radha. Many Mahātmās graced the function with their presence. On fullmoon night *Mahārāsa līlā* was performed by a professional troupe of *Rāsālīlā* players. As usual it drew an enormous crowd of spectators who witnessed spell-bound.

The hour of Mataji's unique *dikṣā* was as usual very solemnly commemorated by kirtan and silent meditation. Since *Jhulan Pūrṇimā* is also the festival of *Raksha Bandhan*, this was observed immediately after, namely between 2 and 3 a. m., when Mataji with Her own hands tied bracelets of silken thread round the wrists of everyone present.

* See "As the Flower Sheds its Fragrance", p. 138—139.

Janmastami at Varanasi

On August 10th Mataji left for Varanasi to spend *Janmastami* amongst the girls of the Kanyapeeth. On August 17th Mataji motored to Vindhyachal to have a short rest before the next function which was the *Srimad Bhāgavata Jayanti* that was observed from August 28th to September 4th also at Varanasi. On September 6th Mataji again returned to Vindhyachal with a large party, remaining there until September 17th.

Durga Puja at Agarpara

Breaking journey for a day and a night in Patna, Mataji reached the Agarpara Ashram on September 19th. *Navārātri* began on the 20th and *Durga Pūjā* was celebrated with great fervour and enthusiasm from September 26th — 30th. Needless to say that the crowd that flocked to the Ashram, over and above the many visitors from far and near, was quite overwhelming. Several buildings had been recently constructed in the beautiful grounds of the Ashram, among them a Śiva Temple and a guest-house, consisting of about a dozen rooms with bathrooms, etc. The new buildings were inaugurated in Mataji's presence soon after Her arrival at Calcutta.

Lakshmi Puja at Dehradun

The devotees there had hoped that Mataji would remain with them for *Lakshmi Pūjā* which falls on the full-moon night after *Dassehra*. However Mataji took the train to Varanasi on October 1st and after a night's rest there proceeded to Dehradun where She alighted on the 4th October morning. *Lakshmi Pūjā* was observed that very night in a new room upstairs, that had just been constructed. After the pūjā, when Mataji sat down with everyone else on the platform in front of the Śiva Temple to partake of the *prasāda*, a light shower of rain gave an additional and unexpected blessing to all. No one stirred from their seats until they had finished their meal.

Mataji Relates about Raipur in 1932

One evening at Kishenpur Mataji was requested to relate something about Her first visit to Raipur in 1932. In Her inimitable, delightful manner She told us some details of how She went there by tonga from Dehradun with Bholanath and Bhaji. Now there is a broad motor road and a regular bus service, but in those days Raipur was nestling peacefully in the midst of jungles. There was only a rough path leading to it and moreover a river had to be forded; the bridge was built much later. Mataji was quite unknown at Dehradun at the time. Bholanath used to sit in meditation for hours together in front of the Śiva Temple, while Mataji remained in the dilapidated room. With great humour Mataji related how the villagers wondered, whether he had perhaps left his home in order to do *tapasyā* and his wife, against his wish, had followed him with their servant (Bhaji).

Bhaji, dressed in a dhoti and walking barefoot, was then doing every kind of menial labour such as cooking, cleaning vessels, etc. Gradually however letters began to arrive for him and thus the news leaked out that he was really a high Government official. At that time Mataji used no bedding, only one thick cotton cover, half of which served as a mattress and the other half as a blanket. She did not comb Her hair and it became matted. When subsequently She caught fever, a barber was called to cut off Her hair, which had become inextricably inter-twined and resembled a crown. The barber took great pains to cut off the whole of the crown in one piece and succeeded. Only with the greatest difficulty could he be persuaded to part with it, as he was eager to use it for *Rāmliḷā* performances.

Floods in Uttar Pradesh

The quite untimely rain became very vigorous for several days, after which it cleared up. We received with apprehension the news of the floods in Lucknow and all along the Gomati river, wondering whether it would be possible to observe *Divali*

on Oct. 19th in Lucknow as planned, and even more doubtful it seemed whether Naimisharanya would dry up in time to complete the arrangements for the next *Samyam Mahāvratā*, which was to begin on October 21st. During the floods the whole area including the site of the satsang pandal was waist deep under water. The officials who had undertaken to assist with the arrangements suggested the shifting of the function to Lucknow. Wires and trunkcalls were sent to Mataji for Her permission.

Nevertheless Mataji appeared supremely unconcerned and was urging everyone who happened to approach Her to take part in the function at Naimisharanya, remarking with Her usual radiant smile that the whole place had been specially purified by the rain in preparation for our meeting and also how lucky it was that the camp had not been erected before the floods broke in.

In the meanwhile, Swami Paramananda was in Naimisharanya in order to prepare for the gathering. "Since Mataji has sent me here," he said to the officials, "I shall not give up the attempt to arrange here itself". They felt that he must be either crazy or lacking in intelligence to attempt the impossible.

One day, Mataji, who was in Dehradun, asked for a glass of water and drank it up to the last drop, saying : "Just as it takes no time to empty a glass of water, so God, if He so wills, can withdraw the floods in no time." Within three days the water had all flown off. People said that they had never before witnessed floods subsiding at such speed. However, the place where the pandal was to be erected was just a mass of deep, soaking wet mud. Swami Paramananda hired hundred kulis and had the whole area covered with a thick layer of sand. Only the night before the *Samyam Saptah* started, could the pandal be completed. Many of the tents were pitched after the *vratīs* who were to occupy them had arrived. But the function took place as scheduled and was one of the best and most memorable we had ever known.

NINE

(October 1960 — October 1961)

Divali at Lucknow

On October 16th Mataji entrained for Lucknow where *Divali* was celebrated at the residence of Sri Rameshwar Sahai.

Eleventh Samyam Mahavratā and 108 Bhagavatas at Naimisharanya

On October 20th Mataji reached Naimisharanya where the 11th *Samyam Mahāvratā* took place from October 21st to 27th followed immediately by the recitation of 108 Bhagavatas, up to November 3rd. Many distinguished Mahātmās accepted the invitation to grace the function with their presence and a very large number of participants arrived from all over India.

All those who had been present in previous years were agreed that this was the grandest and best *Samyam Vratā* they had ever attended, not only in size but also in the quality and standard of the spiritual fare provided in the form of discourses by Mahātmās. These talks were never boring — as religious discourses sometimes tend to be — but were really a treat. Some of them, like those of Sri Swami Naradanandaji were sweet, of Swami Vishnu Ashram full of humour, of Swami Avadhutaji somewhat contentious, of Swami Maheshwaranandaji measured and dignified, of Swami Akhandanandaji forceful like a sledge-hammer and yet dripping with the love for God's personification as Brajalal, of Swami Chaitanya Giri Maharaj bearing the stamp of high scholarship, a clear analytical mind and mastery of the Upanishads. These great saints alternatively cajoled and castigated, consoled and encouraged. The total effect was purifying and ennobling, leaving the hearts of the hearers filled with a spirit of love and devotion for God.

In a secluded spot, at some distance from the little township of Nimsar as well as from the main places of historical and religious interest like the Chakra-Tirtha, Lalita Devi temple and Vyāsa Gaddi, is the Ashram established by Sri Naradanda Swamiji who conducts there an *Adhyātmā Vidyāpīṭh* (School of Divinity). In the unusually spacious grounds belonging to the Ashram were erected several rows of about seventy tents and a number of soldieries for those who came to attend the *Saptah*. One cottage of the Ashram was reserved for Mataji and some other cottages were made available for ashramites. A big pandal was erected for the main functions. In one corner was a small open kitchen with open space in front for serving meals.

Everybody cheerfully bore the vigours of camp life. Rich and highly-placed ladies, some of them elderly and some even Maharanis, used to a life of luxury and ease, not only lived in tents but early every morning even walked on foot a mile or so to the Gomati or Chakra Tirtha for a holy bath. Gentlemen, occupying high official positions, would walk, buckets in hand and clothed in nothing more than a lungi (loin cloth) to the well or pump. On the 28th morning there was a *yajña* to celebrate the completion of the *Vrata* and everyone received Mataji's blessings.

On the 28th, simultaneously started the *Bhāgavata Saptah* on a grand scale: In the special pandal erected for the purpose, 108 Pandits hailing from all over India were sitting with neat little desks in front of them, arranged in long rows. They presented a colourful spectacle dressed in their yellow robes. On a decorated dais facing them sat the head priest Agnishwatta Agnihotriji (Batuda) from Varanasi who was the main reader. For a week, every day for three hours in the morning and three in the afternoon, all these together read the *Bhāgavata* in the original Sanskrit. Simultaneously in the public pandal, an eminent scholar and saint, Swami Vishnu Ashram, explained to us the whole of the *Bhāgavata* in Hindi. He performed this feat in a calm and unhurried manner, without

unnecessary gloss and yet without letting the subject get dry. Swami Akhandanandaji who is an authority on the subject also did his bit by speaking about it in the evening.

An extraordinary incident

One of the readers of the *Bhagavata*, Pandit Sri Vasistha Dutt Misra, a teacher in the Banaras Hindu University, who also teaches the students of our Kanyapeeth, was returning by train to Varanasi after the reading of the *Bhāgavata* was over on Dec. 3rd. At Balamau Station while trying to get water from an overhead hydrant in between the railway tracks, he was knocked down by a goods engine which ran over his right arm and clean cut it off just below the shoulder! Any other person would have died of shock or at least fainted, but this gentleman calmly picked up his severed arm with his left hand and walked up to the Railway platform! In the absence of any medical aid there, the Station master arranged to send him at once to Sandila. Railway Engineer Mr. H. C. Banerjee, one of Mataji's devotees, hearing of the accident, went to the Railway Hospital in Sandila and was surprised to find Pt. Misra sitting up on a blood-stained bed with a beaming ruddy countenance and absolutely unconcerned! As the hospital was ill-equipped it was decided to take him to Varanasi. After a week or ten days he was reported to be progressing satisfactorily. Whenever people expressed surprise that such a sad mishap should have occurred immediately after his participation in the *Bhāgavata Saptah*, he cheerfully replied that his time had come to die and it was the *Bhāgavata* reading which had saved his life at the loss of only an arm! Mataji remarked that it was the *Bhāgavata* which had made him *sthitapragya* (steadfast and calm).

A second incident, not gruesome like the first, rather a pleasing one, illustrates how Mataji lived the life She always preached, of recognizing God in everyone. The day after the camp was dismantled and most people had left, while we were sitting near Mataji on the veranda of Her cottage, a

woman, dressed in a gorgeous Banarasi sari and bedecked with ornaments, came up with a plate to do Mataji's *ārati*. She was the sweeper woman of the camp to whom Ma had given the costly sari and the valuable ornaments that had been presented to Her as an offering at the end of the functions by one of the Rajas.

After the functions were over and the city of tents dismantled, Mataji remained at Naimisharanya for another fortnight with only a few companions, mostly *sādhus*. The whole party was accommodated in huts at Saigal Kshetra directly on the banks of the Gomati river. This solitary stay in the most charming surroundings was enjoyed so much by everyone that it was suggested by many to acquire a plot of land there for the Ashram and put up a structure on behalf of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha.

Sitapur

On November 23rd Mataji left for Sitapur at the requests of many devotees of that place. She passed the night at the residence of a very old devotee, Sri Sripal Singh, where there was a separate room specially constructed for Mataji. She was also present at the foundation-laying ceremony of a separate block of the renowned Eye Hospital at Sitapur.

Seven Days at Forest Resthouse, Lucknow

On the 24th noon Mataji motored to Lucknow staying for the night at the residence of a devotee, Sri P. K. Banerjee, Retired Deputy Director of Education, U.P., where a special room had been constructed for Her use. Mataji shifted on the 25th along with Her companions to the residence of Sri Rameshwar Sahai. She remained there at the Forest Rest House for full seven days and thus fulfilled the prayers of Mr. and Mrs. Sahai who had been repeatedly requesting Her to spend a few quiet days there. The scenic beauty of the entire surroundings, the peaceful atmosphere and the lavish and sincere hospitality of the Sahai family as well as the spirit

of service amongst the whole office-staff left a deep impression on the minds of all who had the privilege to stay there with Mataji.

Rajgir via Varanasi

Mataji then left for Varanasi on December 2nd early morning reaching there the same afternoon. It was believed at first that She would stay there for only one or two nights. But She did not leave for Rajgir before the 7th noon reaching there the same night.

Mataji remained at the Rajgir Ashram this time for full sixteen days and had a rather quiet and peaceful sojourn without any special programmes. A young American, connected with the Self-Realization Fellowship of California, Brahmachari Stephen, was with Mataji for the whole period. During that period Swami Kriyananda, an American disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, also paid a visit to Rajgir along with one of his American companions. After an enjoyable time there both of them proceeded to our Ashram at Varanasi and stayed there for two nights.

Christmas at Agarpara via Patna

On the 24th morning Mataji, along with Her party, motored to Patna and remained the whole day in the Station Waiting Room. Sri N. Bakshi, I.C.S. (Rtd.) Bar-at-law, a great devotee of Mataji, had made all arrangements for Her departure for Calcutta the same night by the Delhi Howrah Express.

Mataji alighted in Agarpara Ashram on Christmas Day, 25th morning, remaining there for an unusually long period, i.e., for seventeen days. During that time She visited a number of places in Calcutta. Mr. James George, High Commissioner for Canada in Ceylon, came to Mataji with his whole family having motored all the way from Dhanushkodi to meet Her. All of them were spiritually-minded.

Sankranti at Varanasi

Mataji reached Varanasi on the 11th January midnight to be present for the annual celebration of *Sankranti* on the 14th. This is the anniversary of the day on which the great *Vedic Yajña* that took place in our Ashram at Varanasi was begun in 1947 and successfully completed after full three years in 1950.

During Her short stay in Varanasi Dr. Miss Luce Sannangelantonio, a famous Italian Endocrinologist and Psychologist who was connected with the UNESCO and was then on an official tour of India, came to meet Mataji and had private interviews on two consecutive days. She seemed to have been deeply impressed by Mataji and by the talks she had had with Her.

During that same period two other foreign ladies arrived in India who had come all the way only to have Ma's darshan and stay a few days with Her. They were Madame Jean Trocmé from Paris and Mrs. Markell Brooks from Minnesota, U.S.A.

Three Days at Allahabad

Mataji left for Allahabad on the 17th early morning by car to spend three days in the Ashram of Late Gopal Thakur. The two foreign ladies also accompanied Mataji to Allahabad.

40 days Satsang at New Delhi at Sri Haribabaji's invitation

From Allahabad Mataji went to New Delhi on Jan. 20th morning at the cordial invitation of Sri Hari Babaji, who had arranged to attend a programme of the chanting of the *Rāmāyana* and of the dramatic performance of scenes from the life of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu that was being held for 40 days in the Feroze Shah Kotla grounds at New Delhi. A huge pandal with a tin roof had been erected for the purpose and the satsang took place every morning and every afternoon, with an attendance that became larger and larger daily and grew enormous towards the end of the function.

Mataji used to be present every morning for an hour or two. Many devotees and admirers were thereby enabled to enjoy Her darshan, who found it impossible to visit our Ashram, which is miles away from the centre of New Delhi. At about 1 p.m., Mataji would return to the Ashram and give darshan there from 6-7 p.m., after which She spent two or three hours granting private and semi-private interviews.

History of Purana Mandir at Naimisharanya

One day Mataji related that while She was at Naimisharanya last November, it was discovered that although Naimisharanya is supposed to be the place where all the 18 Purāṇas were composed, not even one complete set of those Purāṇas could be found anywhere in that town, much less did anyone read them systematically. It was therefore suggested to arrange for a regular daily reading of a portion of one of the Purāṇas continuing throughout, so that all the Purāṇas should thus be read one after another and started again from the beginning on the completion of the reading. A pandit was immediately engaged and entrusted with the task, and copies of most of the Purāṇas were secured. Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha was planning to build a Purāṇa Mandir for this purpose on a plot of land that was proposed to be acquired on the banks of the Gomati river.

Akhanda Kirtan and Japa at New Delhi Ashram

During Mataji's stay in New Delhi a special programme was arranged to sustain uninterrupted Kirtan of the *Mahā-mantra* for a whole month ending on *Dolpurnimā* (March full moon) on which falls the *Holi* festival and the birthday of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The Kirtan was held at our Chandraloka Ashram from January 31st until March 2nd for 12 hours daily, from 6 a.m. — 6 p.m., while silent japa continued throughout the night, six brahmacharis and *sainyāsīs* of our Ashram taking turns every two hours. A party of six excellent kirtan singers had been brought from Vrindaban

expressly for the occasion and ashramites as well as visitors joined in at all times. People who chanced along were struck by the atmosphere of joy and peace that was created by this constant singing of the names of the Lord.

Hardwar via Modinagar

On February 3rd Mataji interrupted Her sojourn in Delhi by a visit to Hardwar that extended over *Śivarātri*. On Her way She halted in Modinagar, where She spent the night. Rai Bahadur G. M. Modi had invited Her to see again the temple, that was being constructed there. The building work had gone on for the last four years and was nearing completion. Rai Bahadur Modi was keen to have every detail in the temple arranged exactly in keeping with the *Śāstras*.

Siva Purana, Sivaratri and Initiation into Naisthika Brahmacharya at Hardwar

On the 4th morning Mataji alighted in Hardwar, where She and Her party were accommodated at Bhagat House, Kharkhari. The Raja of Solan had arranged there for the reading of the *Śiva Purāṇa*, which was completed just before *Śivarātri*. On February 5th a preliminary rite was performed in connection with the initiation into *naisthika brahmacharya* of three Brahmacharis* of our Ashram, which took place on *Śivarātri* day.

There are two kinds of brahmacharya: the first is the ordinary *brahmacharya* ashram, followed by the *grihastha* and *vanaprastha* ashrams and finally by *sannyāsa*. The second, namely *naisthika brahmacharya* may lead straight to *sannyāsa*. The life of a *naisthika brahmachari* is strictly regulated; the whole of his time is devoted to various religious practices and the study of scriptures. He has to cook his own food, attend with his own hands to all his personal work, such as cleaning utensils, etc. He takes one cooked meal at midday and only

* Brahmachari Bharatbhai got the new name of Bhaskarananda, Br. Kusum became Nirvanananda and Br. Tapan Nirmalananda.

milk and fruit at night. He has to rise early, bathe in the Ganges if possible or else in any river or pond and is not permitted to sleep during the day. He is expected to live up to a very high ideal of conduct. Praise, blame and even abuse must be borne with equanimity. He is enjoined to regard everyone as a manifestation of the Brahman. The whole idea is to prepare oneself for Self-realization and this is one of the ways. A *naisthika brahmachari* does not work for money and avoids all worldly pursuits and contacts. He should preferably stay in a place, which is favourable to the performance of *sādhana* and where it is possible to go for solitary walks in the open country.

Interval at Kishenpur

On February 6th Mataji motored to Dehradun accompanied by only a few, while the rest of the party remained at Hardwar. It was bitterly cold at Hardwar at the time, but the temperature at Kishenpur was very near freezing point. The surrounding hills were covered with snow and ice, presenting a most entrancing spectacle, which reminded Mataji of Her trip to Kailash with Bholanath, Bhajji, Didi and Didi's father, the late Swami Akhandananda. Mataji thus related some amusing details of that trip, which made us forget that our hands and feet were numb with cold. The next day Mataji returned to Hardwar, taking with Her most of the inmates of the Kishenpur Ashram.

Śivarātri was celebrated in Hardwar on February 13th. Many devotees arrived from far and near to take part. The function was as beautiful and solemn as ever in Mataji's presence. Mataji did not only stay up throughout the night, but also led the kirtan for over an hour, starting at about 2 a.m., the time when people usually begin to feel drowsy and easily fall asleep even while sitting. It goes without saying that everyone was wide awake as soon as Mataji's voice rang out in its inimitable sweetness that penetrates to the very depth of one's heart and stirs one again and again to profound religious fervour. We counted seven foreigners belonging each to a

different nation, who sat on the gallery watching the pūjās with great interest at least for part of the night. A lady from Canada took photos and a Finnish gentleman was busy with his tape-recorder.

Consecration of Prabhudatta Br.'s Lakshmi Narayan Temple

On February 15th the solar eclipse was observed by kirtan and on February 16th Mataji returned to New Delhi. From there She motored to Vrindaban on February 25th to be present at the consecration of a new temple of Lakshmi Narayan at the invitation of Sri Prabhudatta Brahmachari of Jhusi. On the 26th evening Mataji was again in New Delhi.

Holi at New Delhi & Visit of Raihana Tyabji

On March 2nd Sri Haribabaji's birthday was celebrated by *Rāmārchana*, kirtan and *kathā*, followed by the distribution of sweets and fruits to all present. The hall was packed to capacity and the overflow of visitors spread out on the verandas and the lawn. On March 3rd Mataji played *Holi* in the morning and again in the afternoon when She suddenly appeared in the hall in the company of Srimati Raihana Tyabji, the famous Mohammedan lady saint, who is the author of the book "The Heart of a Gopi". Everyone present agreed that they had never before seen Mataji play *Holi* quite like this. It was a unique experience which has left its traces.

Raihana Tyabji had been in close contact with Gandhiji for many years. Even now she resided in Rajghat, New Delhi, with Kaka Kalelkar and his family. She was a well-known personality, not only in India, since many foreigners used to seek help and advice from the extraordinary old lady. A few days before *Holi* she had come to pay a visit to Mataji, which was greatly enjoyed by everyone present. When Mataji requested her to sing, she on the spot composed a new song to Krishna. At her invitation Mataji attended a meeting at Rajghat held in memory of Srimati Kasturba, Mahātmā Gandhi's wife. A number of Mohammedans as well as Europeans and Americans

were present at the meeting and Mataji delighted everyone by singing kirtan. At the end Raihanaji embraced Mataji with such vigour as if she never again wanted to part from Her.

During Mataji's stay in Delhi and Hardwar a great many foreigners made contact with Mataji. A few of them had travelled all the way for the sole purpose of seeing Mataji face to face and coming in living touch with Her. Others, after meeting Her once or twice had become so fascinated that they could be seen in the Ashram every single day. Quite a number of foreign Ambassadors and High Commissioners also had long and interesting interviews with Mataji and were obviously greatly impressed by Her radiant presence as well as by Her terse, enlightening words.

Hoshiarpur ; Jalandher ; Delhi ; Hardwar

On March 4th Mataji left for Hoshiarpur. She halted at the Savitri Devi Ashram at Jalandher for an hour on the 5th, visiting the Girls' College there, run in Her name. On the 15th morning, She travelled through Delhi to Vrindaban to attend a function in commemoration of Sri Uriababaji's *Mahāsamādhi*. On the 16th She returned to Delhi by car, halting in the Ashram for a couple of hours and then proceeded to Hardwar where She alighted on the 17th morning. Immediately after Her arrival a *Bhāgavata Saptah* and a reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were begun. The one function took place in the hall of Bhagat House and the other on the veranda of the Siva Temple, which forms the centre of Bhagat House.

Mataji was not keeping very good health and remained upstairs for 5 days. However She came out on the gallery adjoining Her room at least twice daily to give darshan and to be present at the *ārati* performed in the hall downstairs every morning and evening.

Didima's Utsava at "Shantiniketan", Kankhal

On April 3rd, Mataji, together with Her whole party, moved to Shantiniketan at Kankhal. It was the Ashram of a

devotee, Sri Nitai Chandra Basu Mallik, situated very charmingly between the Ganges and the Ganges canal, adjoining a famous Śiva temple called Dakshālaya, which, as we came to know afterwards, Mataji had visited long ago together with Bhajji and spent a night there under a wonderful old banyan tree.

Although the space available seemed inadequate for such a large party, Sri Nitai Babu succeeded in making excellent arrangements. The whole thing was almost like a miracle. Mataji gave darshan under a bel-tree twice daily. A great many of the local women gathered in the late afternoons and sang with deep feeling portions of the Rāmāyaṇa.

On April 13th, *Chaitra Samkranti*, the *Samnyāsa Utsava* of Sri Muktananda Giriji (Didima) was duly celebrated as before. Didima's disciples had flocked in good numbers from Dehradun, Delhi, Calcutta, Varanasi and even Bombay, Pune and Ahmedabad to pay homage to their revered Guru. A dust-storm on the 12th night pulled down the pandal as soon as it had been pitched on the compound just outside of the compound of Shantiniketan. Since another storm broke out early next morning the Satsang had to be improvised in the compound itself under a large tree. Mataji Herself supervised the arrangements, using every inch of the space available. "Whatever God does is for the best", She remarked cheerfully; it really all worked out surprisingly well. Some well-known Mahātmās, amongst them Sri Krishnanand Avadhutaji, Mahamandaleshwar Sri Maheshwaranandaji of the Samnyāsa Ashram at Vile Parle and others gave interesting discourses on the meaning of *Samnyāsa*. In the meanwhile the weather had cleared up and a large number of *samnyāsīs* and *sādhus* were entertained to a feast in the newly pitched pandal. The programme continued until 9.30 p.m.

The next morning Mataji visited a satsang at 'Bhagavat Dhāma' in Hardwar where She sang "He Bhagavan" and then was taken to Modi House for a short while.

Consecration of Temples at Gwalior

Mataji left Kankhal on April 16th for New Delhi, where She stopped in our Ashram for one night. A large crowd of devotees enjoyed Her darshan until late. On the 17th morning Mataji went to Gwalior, alighting there the same afternoon. The Maharani of Gwalior had specially come to Hardwar to invite Mataji to be present at the consecration of some newly built temples at Gwalior. The function proceeded with great splendour. Many mahātmās attended. Everyone was entertained with the most generous hospitality. During Her stay at Gwalior, Mataji also visited the famous Scindia Public School, at the invitation of the Principal.

Bhagavata Saptah & Birthday Celebrations at Allahabad

From Gwalior Mataji travelled to Allahabad on April 22nd. A *Bhāgavata Saptah* was held there from April 23rd to 30th. The family of the late Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was responsible for the function, which proved a great success. Pandit Sri-nath Shastri of Vrindaban officiated, and the audience listened spellbound to his lucid, and often very humorous Hindi rendering of the great Purāṇa. On April 25th Mataji paid a flying visit to Varanasi, returning to Allahabad the next day.

As soon as the *Bhāgavata Saptah* had been completed, Mataji's birthday celebrations began. This time the function was compressed into two days only, ending with the *Tīthi pūjā* on the 4th early morning, that was followed at midday by the inevitable feast given to all who cared to participate.

The devotees of Allahabad had made excellent, carefully thought out preparations, so that everything proceeded most beautifully and harmoniously, without a hitch. A large, artistically decorated pandal had been erected in the compound of the house of late N. N. Mukerji, at 31, George Town, where Mataji was accommodated in Her charming little cottage.

Visit of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru & Indira Gandhi

As usual, the birthday was celebrated by a full programme of religious discourses, kirtan, perpetual *japa* throughout day and night. On May 2nd and 3rd morning, the *Rāsa līlā* was enacted by a party from Vrindaban. On the 3rd night, the Prime Minister, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, came with his daughter, Srimati Indira Gandhi to pay homage to Mataji on the occasion of Her birthday. They stayed for about an hour and a half, first in Mataji's own room, and then accompanied Her to the pandal, where Swami Chetan Giri Maharaj was just delivering a talk. At the request of several devotees, Mataji afterwards led the kirtan, and finally a member of the *rāsa* party performed a dance, balancing with great skill two trays with burning lights in both hands. Panditji seemed to enjoy every single item, especially Mataji's singing.

Mr. Desjardins's films

A special feature of the Allahabad function was a talk in English by a Frenchman, Mr. Arnaud Desjardins. Mr. and Mrs. Desjardins had come all the way from Paris to participate in Mataji's birthday celebrations, notwithstanding the flaming heat of the Indian plains in May. This was not their first visit. They had already had Mataji's darshan at the time of *Durga Pūjā* in 1959 at Varanasi. Moreover, Mrs. Desjardins had come again, all by herself, in October 1960, accompanying Mataji for two months wherever She happened to go, which included the *Samyam Mahāvrata* at Naimisharanya. Mr. Desjardins at that time worked at the Paris Television. While in India in 1959, he had prepared a film, which he called "At the Secret Heart of India". The film includes some very impressive pictures of Mataji that have roused profound interest, nay adoration, in many Westerners. We have received a great number of letters to give evidence of this fact. Mr. D. showed his films privately at first, and thereafter in large halls in Paris and North Africa, with remarkable success.

He was able to take some more moving pictures this time at Allahabad, and also in Bombay and Pune. He showed those films to Mataji and the assembled devotees, once at Bombay and once at Pune.

In Bombay with Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj

On May 5th Mataji left Allahabad for Bombay, while most of Her party proceeded directly to Pune. It had been expected that Mataji would remain in Bombay for a few days only, and then motor to Pune for a long stay. However, in order to be near Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, who had to undergo a serious operation, Mataji changed Her programme. Except for two short visits to Pune for a couple of days each time, She was in Bombay until June 9th, putting up at Sri B. K. Shah's compound at Vile Parle.

It seems fitting on this occasion to say a few words about the unique personality of Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, who was well-known and greatly revered all over India, and in certain circles also abroad, for his fabulous learning as well as for his quite outstanding qualities as a human being. No religion, no philosophy exists that had not been mastered thoroughly by this great scholar. To any question along these lines he would, on the spur of the moment, give the most lucid and enlightening reply. At Varanasi, where he resided for many years, every research student came to him for advice when working at his thesis. Practically every foreigner interested in the spirituality of India, consulted Dr. Kaviraj, and none ever left disappointed. He was not only one of the most prominent contemporary Sanskrit scholars, he also read Persian, Urdu and any number of Indian and European languages. He had moreover practised yoga most of his life and obviously gained experience of his own. Many, therefore, sought spiritual advice from him. But even more extraordinary than his unequalled learning, even greater than his achievements on the Path, seemed to us his humility, his loving kindness, his childlike guilelessness and simplicity.

When this rare personality recently became seriously ill, it was solely due to Mataji's watchfulness and motherly care that his illness was found out and treated in good time. While at Hardwar in April, Mataji had asked him to come and see Her there. He had hardly arrived, when She arranged for him to go by car to Delhi and consult Dr. S. K. Sen, the famous surgeon, who diagnosed cancer. She then requested Dr. G. N. Kaviraj to travel to Bombay and have the diagnosis confirmed by other experts. He was subsequently operated on May 16th by the foremost surgeon of the Tata Cancer Institute. Mataji took great trouble to make arrangements for the very best treatment and nursing, supervising every detail in person, and waited in Bombay until he was well enough to be discharged from hospital. A few days later he was taken to Pune to convalesce.

We owe a debt of deep gratitude to Mataji for saving this wonderful human being from succumbing to a disease that might easily have proved fatal. At Pune Sri Kavirajji seemed to be well on the way to recovery. He was able to move about, and people were again allowed to come and see him and put their problems before him.

Five weeks at new Ashram at Pune

In summer 1960 Mataji had spent 6 weeks at Pune at the invitation of Sri S. T. Nanda, who put up a special structure for Mataji's use in his garden, and accommodated most of Her party in his own house, which is by no means over-spacious. The devotees of Bombay and Pune had since long been eager to start an Ashram in Pune. Recently, a bungalow consisting of a few rooms was donated for this purpose by Sri Bhagwandas Nangpal and his wife, both devotees of Mataji. The surrounding plot was later acquired by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. The Ashram is situated in one of the best localities of Pune on Ganeshkhind Road, very near Pune University, and a few furlongs from Government House. There are two hills in the immediate vicinity and much open

country. Mataji stayed in the Ashram from June 9th to July 15th. Sri Haribabaji also was accommodated in the building for a whole month. A large pandal, holding about 150 — 200 people, effectively protected from the very abundant rain by a tin roof and walls, was put up in the compound, and served as a satsang hall during Mataji's stay. Sri Haribabaji expounded the Gītā every morning, the Rāmāyana in the afternoon and related stories from the lives of bhaktas in the evening after kirtan.* Mataji gave darshan at least three times daily and sometimes even more often. Sri Dilip Kumar Roy, the well-known singer and disciple of Sri Aurobindo, had his own Ashram in Pune, less than a mile from our Ashram. He came several times to talk to Mataji and to Dr. G. N. Kaviraj, and we had the privilege to listen to his songs. Mataji also visited his Ashram once.

Visit of President of India & Governor of Maharashtra

On June 23rd, the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, together with the Governor of Maharashtra, Sri Sriprakasa and his family paid a visit to Mataji. They stayed for the best part of an hour in Mataji's room and had a most interesting conversation of general practical value. The main question asked by Sri Sriprakasa was, how an active life in the world could be reconciled to a religious life. Mataji replied in great detail, pointing out that if the right education and teaching is given in childhood, in other words, if the Brahmacharya Ashram is observed as enjoined by the *Śāstras*, then the rest of man's life will naturally proceed in the right manner, in fact the householders's life will then be a dedicated, religious life.

Visit of Singer Hirabai Barodkar

On July 10th, the famous singer, Srimati Hirabai Barodkar came and delighted everyone present by her beautiful and delicate songs. Mataji remarked that Harikirtan was a way to experience His touch, that He may be revealed in the rhythm

* See "As the Flower Sheds Its Fragrance", p. 156—159

and the melody of the song. Ram Prasad, the Bengali bhakta used to be constantly engrossed in singing the praises of Mother Kali, and finally realised the Great Mother of the Universe. Gurupriya Didi was called and asked to relate some incidents from Ram Prasad's life. At Hirabai's request, the musical evening ended by one of Ram Prasad's compositions, sung by Brahmachari Vibhu. Mrs. Barodkar had agreed to come once more on July 14th, but the floods made this impossible.

Flood in Pune

On July 11th, the day before the dam broke, Mataji visited the National Military Academy at Kharakvasla. She and Her party were taken to the guest-house that faces a large lake, one of the main reservoirs for the water supply of Pune. Didi later remembered that while riding in the car, Mataji had remarked two or three times: "Suppose the dam breaks, what will happen?" On the 12th afternoon a large part of Pune was under water, but fortunately it was not the main dam at Kharakvasla that had been damaged, for in that case the whole of Pune might easily have been drowned. The locality in which the Ashram is situated was not affected, being on a high level, except that the water supply stopped completely during the last two days of our stay. Water had to be fetched by car from a great distance, while military lorries were distributing water to the general public.

Visit to Bangalore and Madras

On July 15th Mataji, Didima, Didi and a party of about 20 left Pune for Bangalore, at the invitation of Sri S. R. Das Gupta, the Chief Justice of the High Court in Mysore. Sri Das Gupta was a devotee of many year's standing who formerly used to live in Calcutta. He made excellent arrangements and everyone enjoyed a comparatively quiet and restful time in the pleasant climate of Bangalore, surrounded by beautiful gardens abounding in colourful flowers. Needless to say that many

people of Bangalore and Mysore, amongst them high officials, availed themselves of this rare opportunity to have Mataji's darshan and to listen to Her enlightening words.

On July 23rd, Mataji left for Madras, where She halted for a few hours on Her way to Calcutta. Mrs Talyarkhan, who had specially come from Tiruvannamalai to welcome Mataji, received Her at the station together with devotees from Madras. Mataji was taken by car to a newly built house where She spent a couple of hours.

Guru Purnima at Agarpara

To the regret of the South Indian devotees, Mataji had to leave that same evening for Calcutta, where She alighted on the 25th midday, proceeding immediately to the Agarpara Ashram. It goes without saying that from the moment Mataji arrived at Calcutta until She left for Varanasi on July 31st night, She had an extremely busy time. In fact the crowds that came from great distances, eager for Mataji's darshan, were often quite unmanageable. On July 27th, *Gurupūrnīmā* was celebrated in the usual manner from early morning till late at night, with thousands trying to pay homage to Mataji. During Her sojourn at Agarpara, Mataji visited the residences of several devotees at Calcutta, who arranged for kirtan on these occasions.

Varanasi — Delhi

From August 1st Mataji remained at Varanasi for a week. On the 8th She motored to Vindhyachal, where She stayed for one night only. Even so, a number of officials and other devotees arrived from Varanasi and Mirzapur for Mataji's darshan and She talked to them until late at night. On the 9th She proceeded to Allahabad by car. The same night, She boarded from there the train to Delhi where She reached on August 10th. Among the many distinguished visitors in New Delhi Ashram were Ryhana Tyabji and the famous singer Hirabai Barodkar, not to mention the many Government

officials and Ambassadors who used to come to see Mataji whenever She happened to be in New Delhi. Sm. Indira Gandhi, also paid a couple of visits to the Ashram to see Mataji. On August 20th *Akhaṇḍa Nama Yajña* (uninterrupted kirtan for 24 hours) was performed at the New Delhi Ashram.

Jhulan at Vrindaban

On August 21st Mataji left for Vrindaban, to be present at the *Jhulan* celebrations, which were observed in great style.

Janmastami at Hardwar and Nandotsava at Kishenpur

On August 27th Mataji left for Hardwar with a very few companions only, while Didima, Didi and the rest of Her party remained in Vrindaban for *Janmastami*. At Hardwar Mataji put up as usual at Baghat House, Kharkhari, where *Janmastami* was celebrated on September 1st. On September 2nd morning, Mataji motored to Dehradun, where *Nandotsava* the riotous joy of the cowherds over Sri Krishna's birth, was commemorated by the usual frolics at the Kishenpur Ashram.

On September 4th, Mataji boarded the train for Delhi, where She arrived on the 5th morning, when Her party from Vrindaban also joined Her. On September 17th, Mataji went to Jaipur for four days. From September 21st to October 7th, Mataji again remained in New Delhi. During that period She accepted special invitations to the Rastrapati Bhavan by the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and also to the residence of the Prime Minister Sri Jawaharlal Nehru.

TEN

(October 1961 — October 1962)

Durga Puja at Kanpur

On October 7th night Mataji left for Kanpur, where *Durgā Pūjā* was celebrated from 15th — 20th October at Swadeshi House at the invitation of Sri Mangtaram Jaipuria and his sons Sitaramji and Rajaramji. The Jaipuria family made excellent arrangements, taking endless trouble to ensure that every detail was carried out to perfection. Needless to say, the celebration was a great success, proceeding in a spirit of harmony and deep joy, inspite of the difficulties caused by the inclemency of the weather. A beautiful pandal which had been erected to start with was blown down by a terrific rainstorm; however, a new one with a tin roof was provided at lightning speed.

Visits of Americans of S.R.F. at Kanpur and Vindhyachal

Devotees flocked from far and near, eager to be with Mataji on this happy occasion. A few foreigners also came for part of the time, among them were Sri Daya Mata, the President of the Self-Realization Fellowship with some of her companions from the U. S. A.

On October 19th Mataji left for Varanasi, where *Lakshmi Pūjā* was celebrated on the 23rd in Her presence. Then She motored to Vindhyachal to have a rest after the hectic days at Kanpur. Yet at Vindhyachal a great number of devotees arrived by turns to enjoy the solitude of that unique Ashram. A number of Americans and Europeans also came to see Mataji. Sisters Durga and Sailasuta and Mr. Benvau, all belonging to the S.R.F., and a South Indian couple who are running an Ashram of the same association in Durban, spent about a week with Mataji and seemed altogether charmed by Mataji as well as by the beautiful surroundings. Mr. Benvau was so fortunate as to accomplish some excellent tape recordings of Mataji's voice,

songs as well as Her conversations in Bengali and Hindi. On occasions Mataji seemed in a communicative mood, relating some most interesting incidents from the history of the Ashram and also from its pre-history. The original Vindhyavasini temple is supposed to have been where our Ashram is now situated.

In the early morning of November 4th, Mataji motored to Allahabad where She spent a few hours only, boarding the train to Dehradun that very evening. On the 5th morning She alighted at the Kishenpur Ashram, only to leave for Suktal on the 7th. *Diwali* was not specially celebrated that year, but a festive mood prevailed throughout Mataji's short visit at Kishenpur, which the Dehradun devotees enjoyed immensely.

Samyam Vrata & Bhagavata Saptah at Suktal

Mataji reached Suktal (near Muzaffarnagar) on the 7th night accompanied by a large party. Suktal is a very special place of pilgrimage on the banks of the Ganges. Sukdeva is supposed to have related the Bhāgavata to King Parikshit at Suktal. The temple of Sukdeva is situated on a hillock which commands a fine view over the mountains, which were already snow-capped so early this winter. A motor road leads up to the hillock and a flight of steps right up to the temple. One of the Mahātmās told us that Suktal should really be called 'Suktirtha'.

Each *Samyam Vrata* seems to us to have been the best of all. It may well be imagined that this 12th *Samyam Saptaha* topped the list. A number of Mahātmās, Swami Vishnu Ashram, Swami Akhandanandaji of Vrindaban, Mahamandaleshvara Swami Maheshwarananda of Bombay, Swami Krishnananda Avadhutaji and others, gave us new inspiration by their talks, which dealt mostly with the history and greatness of Suktal and the significance of the *Samyam Vrata*. They one and all stressed the point that human birth was coveted by all other creatures of the Universe (84 lakhs of different species), since man alone has the possibility to attain

to Self-realization. Even so, most men do not live up to this precious boon and thereby waste an invaluable privilege. In his last talk Swami Akhandanandaji urged everyone with eloquent words to make a firm resolve to think of God and repeat His Name daily with love and longing for the Divine presence. No happiness in this world can be lasting, the only real happiness is to be found in God.

Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj gave some very interesting replies to questions about Buddhism. Mataji attended the satsang mornings, afternoons and evenings. We also had the good fortune to listen to Her singing several times during that memorable week. On some days Mataji replied to questions during the last half hour of the programme, from 9 to 9-30 p.m. In response to a question, why it was so difficult to sit still and concentrate for a whole hour at meditation time, so that some people longed to hear the song that followed, Mataji said: "Your whole life is arranged so as to make you outward turned; your work, your food and drink, the way you spend your leisure, everything. The important thing is to create conditions for yourselves that will help you to turn inwards. Already many years ago this body therefore suggested that people should practise *Samyam* on certain days of every month. On those days at least they should make a special effort to speak the truth, to regard everyone as a manifestation of the ONE, to eat only as much as necessary and not for the sake of taste or enjoyment, to be kind to their servants and refrain from scolding them. They could attend to their duties as usual but do them as a service to God. They should look upon all children — be they their own or others' — as Gopal or Kumari, regard their husband as Nārāyaṇa and their wife as Sri Lakshmi. Every moment of their leisure should be spent in practices such as japa, meditation, kirtan or the reading of holy books, etc. Yogibhai had the idea that all might gather in one place for a week and practise *Samyam* collectively. This is how this regular annual function started about 10 years ago."

On the last day of the *Samyam Vrata* Mataji exclaimed : "Are you not sorry this wonderful week has come to end ? To perpetuate the remembrance of it, keep *Samyam* at home once weekly, or at least once every month." "How should we observe it" ? "Keep the food restrictions, speak the truth, be kind to everyone, do *japa*, meditate and read books of wisdom." Someone put in : "Ma, why don't you say : I shall be with you ?" Mataji : "When this is not always so, it has to be specially mentioned. But where is He not ? *This tiny Child is with you at all times*, even when you think there is nothing — even then." Mataji asked everyone to try and do some extra *sādhana* in memory of our pilgrimage to Suktal. The people present agreed to practise *Samyam* in their own homes or Ashrams every full-moon day.

On the last day of the *Samyam Vrata* a *Bhāgavata Saptah* began and continued until November 22nd. It had been prepared carefully and with much love and devotion for the last so many months and therefore was singularly beautiful to the last detail. The Sanskrit recitation took place every morning in Sukdeva Temple while the Hindi explanations were expounded very lucidly by Swami Vishnu Ashram for about 6 hours daily, every morning and afternoon. The last two days of this function coincided with a *mela* on the occasion of the full-moon. Thousands of villagers, arrived by buses and in bullock carts with their families, camping in the open space round about and bathing in the Ganges in the cold of the early morning. The villagers, men, women and children, crowded into the compound in hundreds, eagerly waiting for Mataji's darshan. They were rewarded at intervals by Mataji appearing in the French window of Her room upstairs and blessing them with Her radiant smile and also with a rain of *bataṣa* and other sweets. The reverence and devotion of these simple, unsophisticated people was extraordinarily moving.

Visit to Bulandshahr

Mataji stayed on at Suktal with a few of Her party until November 30th, when She proceeded to Bulandshahr at the invitation of Swami Vishnu Ashram. On December 4th, She alighted at Vrindaban, where She remained upto February 6th. It had originally been planned that She should go on to Hardwar at the end of December, but largely due to the cold wave, this programme was changed or rather postponed.

Two Months at Vrindaban

The Vrindaban Ashram is one of our largest and most beautiful ones, with its spacious grounds, its temples, the large hall, the guest-house and a number of houses and cottages, each nestling between shady trees and an abundance of flowers. All the buildings contain underground rooms which are specially suited for rigorous *sādhana* during all seasons.

Bhagavata Saptah

Another *Bhāgavata Saptah* was held at Vrindaban from December 13th to 20th, arranged by the widow and children of Late Pandit Parasuram Dhammi of Dehradun. The reading of the *Bhāgavata* was followed by the recitation of 300 Durga Sapta Śatis for about 10 days. The crowds of visitors that had come for the functions gradually dispersed and Mataji was then able to have a comparatively quiet time. There was no fixed programme. Some building work was in progress in the Ashram grounds which Mataji inspected at intervals. She was walking about in the sunny garden and giving *darshan* in the open during the day and in Her room at night.

Inauspicious Planets

Into the last part of Mataji's stay fell the period that was considered a very inauspicious planetary constellation (*ashta graha*), feared all over the world. Whenever Mataji had been questioned as to Her opinion about the prophecies of world-wide disaster, She either kept quiet or else replied that rather

than worrying about such things we should devote our energies to reaching beyond fear. After the bad constellation had passed over, Mataji remarked with Her most radiant smile that it had been a singularly auspicious occasion, since it had induced the people of every town and village in the country to pray from their hearts and to give in charity. Even those who proudly declared to be far above such superstitions prayed in secret. For this reason this much dreaded occasion had actually proved most beneficial.*

No special function had been arranged in our Ashram to ward off the bad planetary influence, but perpetual *japa* and meditation was sustained day and night from January 25th until Mataji left Vrindaban. When a German visitor who wished to take her turn in the meditation wanted to know whether she would be permitted to do *japa* of Christ's name, Mataji replied : "Certainly, there is only One".

Christian Songs at Kirtan time

For the last two weeks, four German guests, Mr. Robert Bosch with his wife and sister and a friend, were staying with us at Vrindaban. They were well trained in music. When Mataji asked them to sing, they surprised everyone present by singing beautiful old German religious music in 3—4 voices. Throughout their stay a few Christian hymns formed part of our regular daily evening kirtan. This was a new feature in our Ashram. It is an example of how minutely Mataji responded to the needs of whoever came to Her. One day Mataji was asked how She liked those German songs. She said : "Very much".

Incident from Sri Ma's Childhood

This reminded Her of the following incident which She related to us. Once during Her childhood some Christian missionaries had come to Mataji's village. They pitched a tent and went about singing Christian hymns very beautifully.

* See also "As the Flower Sheds its Fragrance", p. 142-143.

Mataji, always sensitive to devotional music, was greatly moved and tears rolled down Her cheeks. She could feel the missionaries' religious fervour which fascinated Her, and She followed them about wherever they went. Being a child, She knew nothing about the difference between Hinduism and Christianity, She only sensed their religious spirit. She remained with the missionaries until nightfall and when they retired to their tent She stood outside. The entrance of the tent was closed and it became quite still. Mataji knew that they were praying inside. At last, when it turned pitch dark, She ran home. Strangely, nobody had noticed Her absence and so She was neither questioned nor rebuked. Little Nirmala (Mataji) begged of Her mother to buy for Her one of the Bengali hymn books that the missionaries were selling for 1 pice each.

Visit to Satya Gopal Ashram, Allahabad, Saraswati Puja at Vindhyachal, Bhagavata Saptah at Varanasi

On February 6th Mataji entrained for Allahabad where She spent two nights in the Ashram of the late Sri Gopal Thakur at Allengunge. On the 9th She alighted in Vindhyachal. *Saraswati Pūjā* was celebrated there on that day (*Vasant Panchami*). Most of the students of the Kanyapeeth were then holidaying at Vindhyachal. After a sojourn of 24 hours only, Mataji motored to Varanasi, where from February 11th to 18th a *Bhāgavata Saptah* was held. Pandit Nityanandaji of Vrindaban was responsible for both the Sanskrit recitations in the morning and the Hindi explanations in the afternoon. Mataji did not attend very regularly as Her health was indifferent. An unusually large number of foreigners came for Mataji's *darshan* this time at Varanasi.

Four days at Kishenpur

On February 23rd Mataji left for Dehradun. Originally She was expected to stay there for a couple of days only, but since one of the *Sannyāsīs* of the Ashram was seriously ill,

Mataji prolonged Her stay and finally took the patient with Her by car on the 28th morning. After settling her at Kankhal, Mataji proceeded to Baghat House, Kharkhari.

Sivaratri at Hardwar

On March 4th *Śivarātri* was celebrated as customary. The function proceeded with great solemnity and harmony. As in former years at least half a dozen Europeans of various countries watched from the gallery with great interest. However, this time comparatively few people had come and Mataji remarked that it was the quietest *Śivarātri* we had known for years.

Significance of Sivaratri Puja

One of the European visitors wanted to know the meaning of the four periods (*prahāras*) of the night and why four pūjās had to be performed. At Mataji's request one of the Swamis explained that each pūjā was different. In the first pūjā the *linga* is bathed in milk, in the second in curds, in the third in ghī and in the fourth in honey. Special varieties of fruit have to be offered that are different for each pūjā, and so forth. Mataji then commented that milk was the basic substance; out of milk curds are made, out of curds, ghī, while honey is symbolic for the sweetness of the milk. The different actions in the different pūjās are symbolic for subtle changes that occur in the psyche of those who perform the pūjā. Mataji also remarked that during the four periods (*prahāras*) of the day we take in the world through the senses, while during sleep we withdraw within and unconsciously contact our real Self in deep, dreamless sleep. By fasting and spending the following night in worship on *Śivarātri*, an effort is made to reach with full consciousness where we go unconsciously at least once every night. If we can succeed in this, the purpose of the festival will have been achieved. Actually, all the 24 hours are meant for the search of God or Truth. If at least on this special occasion we can remain absorbed in it continually, how great will be the gain!

Holi at Bandh

It had been taken for granted that Mataji would remain in Hardwar over *Holi* and up to the end of the *Kumbh Mela*. However Sri Haribabaji more than once invited Mataji to spend *Holi* at Bandh, but Mataji's health being indifferent, one of the *sannyāsīs* of our Ashram went in person to explain to Sri Haribabaji why Mataji could not come. Suddenly, in the afternoon of March 18th, She declared that She would leave the same evening. Only 3 people accompanied Her. Bandh was difficult to approach. The last several miles of the road were in bad condition. The morning after Mataji's departure, a letter arrived from one of Sri Haribabaji's disciples to say that it was just as well that Mataji had declined to go there as the road was not at all as Haribabaji would have liked it to be.

The birthday of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and also that of Sri Haribabaji fall on *Holi* day and Haribabaji's devotees therefore liked to celebrate in great style. But Haribaba was not in a mood for any celebration. Needless to say, no sooner had Mataji arrived quite unexpectedly, than the gloom gave place to hilarious joy and the four days of Her stay turned into one continuous festival. Lo and behold, at Bandh Mataji's health suddenly seemed excellent and when Mataji returned to Hardwar on March 23rd night, She related with much laughter about *Holi* at Bandh. A number of people who had come to Hardwar from various places to spend *Holi* with Mataji, had been sorely disappointed to find Her absent. However, at the request of some Ashramites, Mataji played *Holi* with all present one morning soon after Her return.

Dehradun: Demise of Swami Chidananda

On March 27th Mataji motored to Dehradun. Not less than five guests from Europe and America accompanied Her.

An aged *sannyāsī* at Kishenpur Ashram, Swami Chidananda had been ill for some time and recently his condition had worsened. Mataji was expected to return to Hardwar on the 30th.

She had the *kheyāla* to take the patient with Her, but the doctor advised against his being moved. Mataji therefore postponed Her departure until the next morning. At 4-30 a.m. the fortunate Swami passed away peacefully in Mataji's presence, pronouncing the *prāṇava* (Om). By 7 a.m. Mataji started for Hardwar; a truck carrying the body of the deceased followed Her car. The body of the *saṁnyāsī* was immersed in the Ganges soon after arrival there.

Kumbh Mela at Hardwar

Mataji's sojourn at Hardwar was fairly quiet and restful during March, but since the beginning of April the crowd increased geometrically. Many pilgrims of the *Kumbh Mela* also came for Mataji's *darshan*. One day, Swami Naradanandaji, our host at Naimisharanya, graced Bhagat House with his presence, bringing with him his school for Brahmacharis and all the inmates of his Ashram. The hall and the gallery were packed on this occasion, and many had to watch from the courtyard. The students of the school chanted with great enthusiasm and Swami Naradanandaji gave a short address.

Didima's Samnyasa Utsava

From April 7th to 13th Didima's *Samnyāsa Utsava* was observed in great style. So far Didima's *saṁnyāsa* had been commemorated by one day's celebration on April 13th, for the last few years. This year for the first time a full programme of meditation, Kirtan, Gurupūjā and discourses by distinguished *saṁnyāsīs* extended over a whole week. On April 5th Swami Krishnananda Avadhutaji gave an introductory talk, elucidating on the significance of *saṁnyāsa*. He stressed the point that without renouncing the fleeting joys and experiences of the three worlds it is impossible to find the SELF, which by its very nature is Bliss everlasting.

The last day, *Chaitra Sankranti*, represented the climax of the whole function. It started at 3 a.m., when Didima in

Mataji's presence conferred *saṁnyāsa* on 3 ashramites near the Ganges. A few brahmacharis received the gerua cloth and new names. The chief item of the day was bathing in the Ganges. Fortunately the Government had made excellent, well thought out arrangements, so that in spite of the terrific crowd, everyone got his turn of immersing his body in the holy waters and emerging purified and blessed.

In the afternoon Mataji suddenly walked out of the compound, crossed the road and proceeded straight to the Ganges. A large group of Ashramites and visitors accompanied Her. Everyone was asked to sit on the steps leading to the Ganges. A ceremony was in progress at the neighbouring burning-ghat. We saw military and police march in formation, saluting the blazing funeral pyre. One of the leading officers of the Bharat Seva Sangh, who were doing devoted and very efficient service throughout the *Kumbh*, had died of heart failure while on duty. The deceased had probably never even had Mataji's *darshan* during his life time, but Mataji obviously had the *kheyāla* to give Her blessing while his body was being consumed by the flames. It was a significant and deeply moving incident. Everyone was aware of the hush that descended on the whole assembly.

All traffic had been suspended for the whole of that day and night, to give a chance to the pedestrians who streamed to and from the Ganges in thousands. However, after 9 p.m. some police officers came and offered to take Mataji by car to Brahmakunda. Mataji consented, although She did not descend the steps down to the river but watched the bathing pilgrims from the top. The whole day was certainly unforgettable.

Mataji's prolonged sojourn at Kishenpur Ashram

On April 15th, Mataji proceeded to the Kishenpur Ashram with a large party. She remained there without any interruption until July 18th. About 23 students of the Kanyapeeth, the girls' school at Varanasi run by the Ashram had already

arrived with their teachers to spend the summer at Kishenpur. Preparations for the forthcoming birthday celebrations had begun, and so the Ashram was buzzing with joyous activity.

On April 27th, the Prime Minister Sri Jawaharlal Nehru paid a visit to Mataji, together with his sister, Srimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. Mataji received them in Her room on the upper floor. They remained closeted with Her for about half an hour. After being shown round the hall, where Kumari Chhabi Banerji was singing beautiful *bhajan*s, they had darshan of the temples and then took leave.

Birthday Celebrations

From May 2nd to 23rd, Mataji's birthday was celebrated in great style. As usual, devotees gathered from far and near and joined in the functions with great enthusiasm. Owing to dearth of accommodation in houses nearby, about 20 large tents had been pitched in a neighbouring garden. Men and women braved the heat and other hardships of camp life without a murmur. Others stayed in Dehradun, several miles away. A few foreigners, who had specially come for Mataji's darshan all the way from America and Holland, chose to put up at Mussoorie, motoring down once daily to spend a few hours in Mataji's presence. How many people were accommodated and catered for in the comparatively small Ashram, and how many activities carried on simultaneously and smoothly in the very limited space is something that one must have witnessed for oneself. Mataji was here, there and everywhere, ever radiant, ever joyous, giving suggestions, encouragement, guidance, inspiration. Right in front of our eyes She seemed to perform the miracle of transcending space and time here and now.

The daily satsang continued without interruption from early morning until 9.30 or 10 p.m. At times two or three meetings proceeded simultaneously, in the hall, the temples, and on the platform in the open that had been given a temporary canvas roof. There was something for every taste and temperament. Sri Haribabaji Maharaj arrived on May 4th

and with him the *Rāsalilā* party from Vrindaban. Scenes from the lives of Sri Krishna and Sri Gauranga Mahāprabhu were enacted by the *Rāsalilā* party every morning from 6.30 to 9 a.m., attracting and delighting amongst others villagers and children who flocked from all directions, some from considerable distances. At 9.30 a.m. followed the usual recitation from the *Gītā* and other scriptures. Whenever possible a visiting Mahātmā would deliver a talk from 11 — 12 midday. The interval between the morning session and the afternoon satsang at 4 p.m. was spent in kirtan. Sri Haribabaji and often other Mahātmās as well, spoke until 6 p.m. or longer. Again at 7.30 Sri Haribabaji performed his kirtan and then related stories from the lives of saints. This was followed by silence from 8.45 to 9 p.m. and finally *ārati*. Simultaneously perpetual meditation was kept up day and night in the Śiva temple; the Chandi was chanted throughout the morning in the *Matri Mandir*. On fullmoon day and night the whole of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was recited in about 30 hours.

One of the features of the celebrations was a feast given to all the lepers (about 200) of Dehradun. The food was prepared in the Ashram itself, transported to its destination by jeep and served by ashramites in the open space near the Leper Hospital.

A set of rooms had recently been built on the upper storey of Kalyanvan house. It was inaugurated one morning by pūjā and *Rāmārchanā* and the evening satsang was held that day on the large platform in front of the house.

A similar ceremony was performed a few days later to open a set of rooms for Mataji's use that had just been completed on the roof of the Sadhān Ashram at Jakhan, (about one mile below Kishenpur). The evening session took place on the roof of Sādhān Ashram, which commands a magnificent view of the surrounding hills. Mataji stayed on for the night, sleeping in Her new room.

Many well-known Mahātmās attended the final pūjā in the night of May 22nd. Also some high officials such as the Lt.

Governor of Himachal Pradesh with his wife and several officers of Dehradun. All available space on the platform, in the temples, on the verandas downstairs and upstairs, was tightly packed, yet perfect order and silence prevailed throughout. The decorations were superb and the music exquisite. No sooner had all done obeisance and Mataji retired to Her room in the morning, than the stage was prepared for the performance of the *Rāsaliṭā* at 7 a.m.

About 1000 people partook of the feast that it is customary to serve to all who care to come on the day after the final birthday pūjā.

Birthday Celebrations in U. S. A.

It would be a mistake to presume that Mataji's birthday is celebrated only in India. The numbers of those who love and adore Her are swelling rapidly also in Europe and even more in the U. S. A. The following is quoted from a letter by an American devotee.

"..... On Wednesday, 2nd May, at Ananda Ashram in La Crescenta, California, services were held in the temple to celebrate Ma Anandamayi's birthday. I think there were three services during the day. My wife and I arrived in the evening just after the last service. One of the young sisters saw us coming and reopened the shrine and let us see Ma's smiling photograph on the altar, surrounded with lights and flowers. We sat in meditation for a few moments, then joined about 20 people in the living room of the headquarters section, gathered to sing and talk about Anandamayi Ma.

"Jadu Ma, who was the Head of the Ananda Ashram at Dhaka, told us how she met Ma when She was staying with Bholanathji at Shahbag Garden. Jadu Ma, a lover of the great Ramakrishna, had heard that an unknown girl was in the habit of going into *samādhi*, and she was eager to see Her. On their first meeting she had her heart's desire fulfilled. Anandamayi Ma's father and Bholanath sang a song and our beloved Mother went into *samādhi*.

We were all thrilled to hear this. As far as I know this was the first public celebration of Mother's birthday in America."

Satsang after the Celebrations

After the Birthday celebrations at Kishenpur were over, Sri Chakrapaniji Maharaj delivered talks for a few days during the morning satsang. At his request Mataji sang each day after his lecture. On one occasion She got into an extraordinary mood and continued singing for 50 minutes without ever stopping, improvising new songs and new tunes. The whole audience was electrified. It was unique and quite unforgettable.

Haribaba's evening satsang was now regularly held at Kalyanvan in the open air. One day Mataji related to us about a vision She had had many years ago, of numberless Risis, Munis and other Great Beings of every kind and description, populating the garden. The name 'Kalyanvan' came to Her spontaneously on that occasion.

One day in June, Jagadguru Shankaracharya, Sri Shantanandaji of Joshimath, visited our Ashram and gave a very fine talk.

At the request of several devotees, Mataji very graciously consented in the beginning of June to give one hour daily (11-12 midday) to "questions and answers" meetings. Dr. Pannalal and Pandit Sundarlal being present, there was no dearth of questions. Gradually many others, men and women, lost their shyness and joined in the animated discussions, which ranged over a great variety of subjects. At times Mataji's incomparable sense of humour roused the whole audience to peals of hearty laughter. As it became known that Mataji was replying to questions, more and more people collected and soon the available space proved quite insufficient. *

On July 9th Sri Haribabaji and the *Rāsaliṭā* party left. Mataji moved to Kalyanvan that very night. A *Bhāgavata Saptah* started on July 9th at Kishenpur. Pandit Nityanandaji of

* See "As the Flower Sheds Its Fragrance" p. 168-178.

Vrindaban officiated as the reader of the Sanskrit original in the mornings and also gave Hindi explanations in the afternoons for over 3 hours daily. The function proceeded with great concentration and solemnity. Mataji would come twice daily from Kalyanvan.

The much coveted "questions and answers meetings" had to be shifted and reduced to half an hour, namely 9 to 9.30 p.m. One evening a devotee said, she had read in two different Scriptures that bhakti did not come without fear. She failed to understand this. Mataji explained that life in the world was full of fear : fear of death, sickness, old age, poverty, public opinion, etc... When people become conscious of intense fear they turn to the Almighty for help and succour. Mataji then related that when She was very young, at Astagram, (1914-1918) She used to repeat 'Haribol' and once had the *kheyāla* that there should be mass prayer and invocation of God's name, all over the world, millions and millions joining. During the recent *ashtagraha*, the so-called disastrous constellation of planets last January and February, Her *kheyāla* had been fulfilled. Here also it was intense fear that made people invoke God with fervour and concentration.

Guru Purnima

On July 17th *Guru Pūrnimā* was celebrated. It marked the second climax of Mataji's sojourn. From early morning until late at night devotees came — some from considerable distances to pay homage to Mataji and to offer large and small gifts to Her and to Didima, as customary on that auspicious day. At midday Mataji went to Kalyanvan for a short function. Even there people followed Her and did pūjā, while She sat in Her room there for about an hour.

Ma oscillating between Kishenpur and Kankhal

On July 18th Mataji left for Kankhal, only to return to Kishenpur on the 20th. But the crowd had left with Her, and now followed a quiet and comparatively restful period up to

August 6th. Mataji remained in Her room a great deal and came out to give darshan twice daily only, at midday and after 6 p.m., usually on the veranda upstairs. The devotees of Dehradun felt proud and happy that after a prolonged stay with large crowds and functions, Mataji had chosen Kishenpur for a rest and was able to have it.

On August 6th She motored to Kankhal. However She was back again in Kishenpur for *Jhūlan Pūrnimā*, arriving on the 14th and leaving on the 16th. The *Jhūlan* celebrations started on *Jhūlan Ekādasi*, which fell on the 11th. A profusely decorated swing had been put up and several images of Sri Krishna and Radha were placed on it every evening ; pūjā and kirtan was performed daily in front of those images. On the 15th the usual collective midnight meditation was held in Mataji's presence on the platform in front of the two temples.

Since the festival of *Raksha Bandhana* also falls on *Jhūlan Pūrnimā*, people brought bracelets made of silk thread and tied them round Mataji's wrists from early morning till late at night. Mataji in turn distributed these bracelets to everyone approaching Her that day and the next, and finally sent some to the girls of the Kanyapeeth at Varanasi and also to Didi, who was in Delhi for reasons of health.

On the 16th Mataji returned to Kankhal. However, in the afternoon of the 18th She quite unexpectedly turned up at Kishenpur by car, remaining for 3 hours only. A very aged devotee, Sri Nivaran Chatterji residing at Rajpur, was in a precarious state of health, and Mataji's short visit was mainly for his sake. In spite of his being over 90, his condition improved to some extent.

Janmastami at Kankhal

Janmastami, was celebrated in the small Ashram at Kankhal in the night of August 23rd. A number of people came from Dehradun and other places to be present on this joyful occasion. Fortunately the weather was dry and so the satsang could be held in the open courtyard, the Ashram being too

small to accommodate all the guests. As had been the case also on *Gurupūrnimā* and even more on Mataji's birthday night, a number of Europeans and Americans attended. Mataji was present the whole evening and night up to 2 a.m.

Sri Krishna's birthday, like Christ's, is observed at midnight. A solemn *pūjā* took place accompanied by beautiful and delicate music. As customary, many had observed a more or less strict fast throughout the day. At nearly 2 a.m. *prasāda* was served to all. The holy night was followed by *Nandotsava* the next morning. The person in charge of Kankhal Ashram dressed up as a *Gopa* (cowherd) balancing on a yoke two large earthen pots filled with curds, and came out dancing and singing. Mataji was in a great mood, as always on that day. She led the kirtan for quite a while, at the same time putting first sandalpaste and then curds on everyone's forehead. Later She, with Her own hand, put curds into the mouth of everyone present. Even Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj, who had remained in his room, was not spared. To finish up She distributed baskets full of fruits.

The new Ashram at Kankhal had been inaugurated only recently at the great desire of Sri Nitai Charan Basu Mallick, the owner of the property. He had been living the life of a *Vānaprasthi* at Kankhal for many years past and because of his great devotion for Mataji, he had donated a part of his property named 'Shanti Niketan', for the purpose of establishing an ashram there.

On September 4th, Mataji returned once again to the very fortunate Kishenpur Ashram, remaining there until the 12th. That summer the people of Dehradun were greatly blessed since Mataji spent full four months in their midst. On the 12th night, Mataji boarded the train to Delhi where She arrived on the 13th morning.

New Delhi : Visits of V.I.Ps

During Mataji's stay at the Kalkaji Ashram several hundreds of people used to come every evening for Her

darshan. The rush of devotees was sometimes quite unmanageable. Among the prominent persons who came to meet Mataji, mention may be made of the following : Sm. Raihana Tyabji, Sm. Tarakeshwari Sinha, the Maharani Saheba of Jodhpur, Mr. and Mrs. Bhagwan Sahay (Chief Commissioner, Delhi), Mr. M. Rahman (Deputy High Commissioner for Pakistan) with his wife and Prof. Humayun Kabir, Education Minister with his wife and daughter.

Three days at Allahabad

After a sojourn in Delhi for twelve days Mataji travelled to Allahabad on September 25th, staying as usual for three days in the Ashram of late Sri Gopal Thakur.

Durga Puja at Devotee's House, Calcutta

From there She proceeded straight to Calcutta, reaching on the 29th September early morning, the first day of *Navarātri*. To avoid the rush of devotees at Howrah station, Mataji detrained at Bandel, several miles before Calcutta, and was taken by car to Her destination. Until October 2nd She stayed in a newly built room at the house of Sri M. L. Ghosh at New Alipore. Then She moved to the residence of Sri K. N. Banerji where She remained until the 5th. From 6th to 8th October She was accommodated in the house of Srimati Sarbani Basu. *Durga Pūjā* was celebrated there in Mataji's presence. Many devotees of Calcutta who found it very difficult to come all the distance to our Agarpara Ashram, had thus the opportunity of Mataji's darshan in various localities of Calcutta proper.

Lakshmi Puja at Agarpara Ashram

Only on October 9th Mataji proceeded to Agarpara, where the newly built Satsang hall was inaugurated in Her presence and *Lakshmi Pūjā* celebrated. Mataji remained in the Ashram until October 15th.

Restful days at Hazaribagh

At the repeated invitations of Sri Jagannath Roy, a devotee of many years' standing, Mataji travelled from Calcutta to Hazaribagh and stayed in Sri Roy's newly built house for five days. There, She and the small party that had come with Her could enjoy a delightful time of quiet and relaxation after the hectic days of Calcutta.

Consecration of Kali Temple & Divali Puja at Ranchi

Most of Mataji's party had gone directly to Ranchi where Mataji reached on October 21st morning. In Her presence the consecration of a new Kali Temple took place in the Ashram. *Kali Pūjā* was celebrated in great style on Divali night, 27th October. A few devotees who had come from Calcutta for the festival, were travelling back to their homes by the Ranchi Express which derailed. Very luckily two of them who were 1st class passengers escaped with slight injuries, while the others who travelled in 3rd class were not hurt at all.

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