

THE DIVINE MOTHER SHRI SHRI MA ANANDAMAYEE

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Dedicated to the Devotees of Sri Ma

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The purpose of Ma's descent on this universe has been to enrich and enhance the tradition of spiritual culture with Her divine aura and grace. The innumerable tales of Her Leela will forever remain contemporary to the people of this universe.

Ma Anandmoyi is a name synonymous with Spiritual awakening in the world, she Herself was so completely detached and indifferent like the limitless sky, yet everyone was attracted to Her. And she responded with profound love and respect for all, irrespective of their caste, creed or religion. She considered all, whether human beings, plants trees, birds or animals, weaved into the united whole, exuding the Akhand Bhav.

Waves of happiness ran across the massive crowds that gathered for Ma's darshan. They waited with utmost sincerity and immense perseverance. With Ma's darshan, thousand of those devotees would instantly tune themselves into a new found happiness. This treasury of boundless joy of Ma was open for all. Her divine glance and smiles, and Her infinite flow of pity and compassion attracted anybody and everybody. For one such glance of the Mother, the personification of compassion, people waited for hours together. Ma had a wonderful knack of bringing people closer to Her. Ma befriended people of different, diverse cultures, habits, creeds as if she knew them for ages, "and each of us thought Ma liked and loved me the most". The reason for this feeling is that Ma actually was the soul of all of us.

The ever infectious smile of Ma swept the devotees, who lost their self during such darshans. When Ma laughed, each and every molecule of Her body laughed. As Her whole body stirred during that laughter, people wondered whether such divine exultation is ever possible for a human being!

The words emanating from Sri Ma were captivating. Her words and Her songs electrified the innermost core of the audience in attendance. It was a current of joy and happiness that was generated from the wonderful rendering. Ma's voice reverberated.

Though she always regarded Herself a child, at every moment in Her speech, song, smile, giggle, crackle, laughter, in every posture, in every pause of Her movement, there was an air of infinite, unexplainable sweetness and happiness. One darshan would have prompted the devotee to desire for repeated darshans. She Herself has said "whoever has once been drawn to love this body will never succeed in wiping out its impression despite hundreds of attempts."

No propaganda, no public speeches. Neither did she gave diksha nor made disciples but with every darshan, she gave the devotees a sea of happiness. Her devotees were from every walk of life. From common people to renowned pandits, political leaders, rulers and bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, lawyers etc of all creeds, clans and religions and faiths. They all came whether out of want, curiosity, in distress or anything else and returned with coffers. This was divine peace amid din and chaos.

In Ma's presence, there was always some festivity or the other and the crowd of curious visitors. Massive crowds, but Ma managed them so deftly! It was Ma's attraction which drew people from near and far, time and again for that divine company. There have been several instances in which devotees worshipping, meditating or praying at Ma's feet have gained a kind of power and closeness to Ma.

Ma's enigmatic personality attracted common householders and vedantist pandits, Mahatmas alike. When she spoke about the supreme knowledge and wisdom Her few words sounded like the words of the Vedas. Though she had hardly any formal education, Ma's sayings are

found to be exactly as mentioned in the Shastras. Her speech has illuminated the dark alleys of life to guide people to spiritual bliss.

Ma never went for debated solutions, nor did she impose anything on Her devotees. But when she discussed 'Bhakti' she personified it. It was for Her devotees to draw as much as they can from the Mother of the Universe. Someone got profound wisdom, someone else wealth, some other has got the path to stoicism from the divine self. But nobody has returned empty-handed.

Ma had all the pleasures at Her disposal but she was indifferent to them as she was always absorbed in the supreme bliss. An old devotee of Ma, Pannalalji, had once asked Her:

"After the bath in the holy Ganges, people take home the sacred water containers matching their capacity. And I take the water in my curved palms. By the time, I reach home the water trickles out of the gaps in between my fingers. Nothing is left, that's how my condition is, after I leave this place."

Ma quipped : "Baba, but your palms remain wet!"

The comments of revered Mahamahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj is worth mentioning in this context-

"She is extremely dear to the wistful Sadhak as well as for the dispassionate Sadhak. The one who is lustful, wants the pleasures. He is not attracted towards Ma but Her riches and wealth. Ma too gives him what he wants. She manifests Herself in the form he desires. But the Sadhak who is dispassionate, disturbed and distressed, who doesn't have any lust or desires but wants salvation, Ma relieves that sadhak from the bondage of the world.

Her supernatural divine personality is reflected in Her several bewitching bewildering Leelas.

From the earthly point of view, Sri Sri Ma was an ideal daughter, an ideal wife and then the ideal Mother for thousands of Her devotees. She played the role of a housewife, administrator, friend to mention a few, but ultimately Ma remained Ma, the embodiment of happiness-"Universal Motherhood."

Ma's sympathy, compassion, pity and candour for human beings is unparalleled.

The fact that Ma was present in the ashram was a source of immense pleasure, even without Her darshan. Ma would suddenly come out into public view, laughing and giggling and then the next moment she would vanish. This game of hide and seek by Ma has generated a flow of love in which countless wise men, sadhak, sanyasis, family people, sinners, and afflicted persons have battled to purify themselves.

Ma was after all, the mother of all.

Despite the din and chaos of the crowd of the devotees, Ma spent hours, sitting in the same place. Her face exuding that inexplicable charm and the atmosphere soaked by an infinite happiness. Ma was always present in a unique detached mood.

In all situations, she was firm and composed. All Her manifestations and illuminations were with complete Bhav, in totality. Ma's nature was so benign that everyone who came in contact with Her, considered himself or herself closest to Her. Without hesitation, the devotees offered their utmost at Her divine feet and enriched themselves with Her divine advice.

Whether visiting a king's palace or a commoner's thatched hut, whether alone or amidst a massive crowd, she had, in fact, no inclination for any particular thing. Those who were in Her constant company also, did not know when Ma would leave them.

Ma had no bondage. She could effortlessly shatter Her own empire and go away smiling in a split second, leaving the devotees to mourn Her absence.

It is impossible to compartmentalise Matri-leela. Rather it would be unjust to limit the sphere of Matri-leela which was unique and unlimited. Wherever you take a dip in the holy Ganges, it is after all the 'holy bath'. With this boundless, limitless sphere in mind, I have attempted to pen a few incidents of Matri-Leela. Understanding and testing the divine sport is beyond me. Therefore, I seek pardon in the errors I make in my small effort. My appeal to Ma's devotees is to pardon me from their core of their heart for the mistakes in my small, but sincere attempt.

On several occasions, during Her darshan, Ma used to advise me to write something. She never spoke about the subject, nor did I ask Her. Whenever I had Her darshan, I kept noting them in my diary. For 25 years what I had jotted down, the events of Matrisang, Matri-leela and the divine speech, have come in handy.

I do not know the art of writing. Never in my dreams did I imagine that Ma will prompt me to write this way. But that divine advice has come true. Today, when she is orienting me to write this book, I can feel Her divine grace, compassion and pity.

This book mentions many anecdotes tales and fables which I have either heard directly from Sri Sri Ma or from the many senior devotees, who had the privilege of being in Ma's company for a long time. I have collected all these flowers to make an amateur attempt to put them together into a string, a garland.

I seek pardon once again from the readers for the errors.

Essentially, this book is Ma's prasad. If someone derives happiness out of this book, that will make me immensely happy. Jai Ma

My first Darshan of Ma

It is difficult to say when I met Ma for the first time. I can emphatically say it was an eternal relationship. Could anybody get Her love and affection without Her divine wish?

The earliest darshan of Ma that I can distinctly recall was in the last week of November 1958, when I was studying medicine in Lucknow Medical College. During the Kalipuja festivities Ma had come to the Late Rameshwar Sahay's house in Lucknow and I had accompanied my parents to that place.

In 1941-42, when I was barely three years old, my parents used to take me along to meet a Mataji on the banks of river Gomti. A description of that period is found in 'Ma Anandamoyee' (a book based on Didi's diary) and it suggests Ma had stayed for a week at Sitalprasad Dharmashala in Lucknow.

The scene is still alive in my memory. The Dharmashala on Gomti's banks, which survives even today, used to be frequented by my parents in the evenings when Ma would be sitting in spotless white robes on the sprawling terrace. My father would hand me over a garland of white jasmine flowers he bought on the way, and ask me to place it at Ma's feet. Only this much do I remember after all these years.

She was seated on the dais. Her charming face exuding a kind of divine happiness. I felt like meeting Her at a single breath but who could allow me? That was not to be. The clock struck quarter to nine, the lights, except a faint blue one, were put off. Later I came to know, it was silent prayer time at the Ashram.

The changed mood and ambiance was fascinating. At nine o'clock, the lights were back on. A slow, light music began to play and soon Ma left the place with folded hands. I watched intensely this moving image of love, compassion and kindness. The feeling of a novel experience however wasn't there. Instead, the feeling of familiarity and bondage overcame me. Before returning home, I bought a picture of Ma and Bhaiji's book 'Sad Vani'.

Next day, as Ma was scheduled to leave for Delhi by Lucknow Mail we went to the railway station. Ma could be seen amidst a massive crowd and getting close to Her meant an impossible task. But inspired as I was, I managed my way not only to the compartment but to the coupe in which Ma was travelling. I touched Her in reverence and asked: "Ma, how can one meet God?"

Very sweetly she said and repeated "call Him".

Ma's sweet words rang in my ears as I left the train in silence.

My father, who was watching me from a distance, was delighted that I was able to reach Her. Patting me he said: "we could not move past the crowd but were glad to see you talking to Ma."

My first visit to Ma was with my father's kind efforts. Later it was my mother who took the cue to encourage me.

As a student of Medicine, I knew little about Ma. For nine long years, I hadn't met Her. On a couple of occasions, I had a glimpse of Her from a distance. But memories of the first darshan lingered on and the desire to meet Her again remained as strong as ever.

I came to Delhi in 1966 for a job-related interview with the Indian Railways. From Delhi, I accompanied Nanaji (my maternal Grandpa) to Vrindavan. Nanaji, who went there to have darshan of Bankey Behariji, would generally put up at Swami Sharanandji's Ashram. It was just a coincidence that he left for some work but I stayed there. Here I came to know, Ma was staying in Vrindavan those days and Her Ashram was just next to Swamiji's.

In fact, I went through the gate that separated these two Ashrams to meet Ma. It was half past one in the afternoon and was told that Ma was taking rest. Deciding to wait, I sat on a platform surrounded by neem trees. Hardly had I spent sometime before a girl came running to me and said Ma want to meet whoever was sitting under this tree. Delighted, I quickly responded to this unexpected call.

Ma had no knowledge of my academic background. We had never talked about it. But what followed was an introduction to Ma's supreme blessings and divine power.

"Are you a railway doctor?" I said 'No, not yet'.

Dumbfounded, I was quick to realise that the interview in Delhi must have gone in my favour.

Silently I stayed at Ma's feet for sometime before she spoke again.

"Pray to God." "Call Him".

"Call Him with your heart and soul."

In a strange coincidence she was saying the same thing to me nine years later.

She gave me a big apple as prasad uttered something divine and blessed me. This was my first chance to spend some time with Her and words are not enough to describe the infinite happiness I derived from it.

I joined the Railways as a doctor at Kashi (Varanasi) in January 1967. It was in Kashi I worked for the next twenty two years before opting for voluntary retirement in January 1989. During these years I was fortunate by Ma's infinite grace to see and meet Her in public and private- these are the invaluable treasures of my life.

During these years, she filled my cup to the brim, my empty bag with Her tender love and affection, pity and compassion, mercy, sympathy, and kindness and what not. She had not left any corner of my being empty. Can anything in the world be more valuable than Her compassion and love? I say no for an answer.

Despite being in Kashi for the whole of 1967, I hadn't met Ma even once. How could one be so thoughtless and unfortunate? the reasons dawned on me later. But again the call came due to Ma's blessings alone.

In January 1968, I came to know that Ma had come to Kashi and celebrations were going on at Ma Anandamoyee Ashram. My house and the Ashram were located at two different ends of the city. Nevertheless, the news of Her arrival inspired me once again to seek Her blessings.

I went there in the evening and was moved by the location of the Ashram on the banks of the Bhagirathi. Ma was on the terrace of Kanyapeeth; Satsang was going on and the place was full of Her devotees. My heart was filled with immense happiness when I had Her divine darshan again. Satsang over, Ma got up as well as others including me.

Somebody beckoned me when I was climbing down the stairs. In fact, it was Ma who had called me. I went to Her small room on the second floor.

This time Ma asked me about my work, my family. I told her, my father was no more. He left us for his heavenly abode in 1963. My mother lived with my younger sister in Lucknow or with me at Kashi.

After that day, I frequently visited Ma's Ashram. One day, after Satsang was over, Ma asked me: "How are you?" I went along with her to Her room where Didi was also present.

Ma asked me about my family, occupation all over again and then turned to Didi.

"This young girl is a doctor, unmarried, what do you say, Didi?"

Didi said, "Ma's 'Kheyal is there, what else is required?"

Ma asked me whether I had taken 'Diksha' I said "No". Then she said, "tomorrow is an auspicious day: get initiated".

I hadn't made up my mind yet. That's why I put forward my mother's absence in Kashi as an excuse. When I returned home, I found my mother there. She had suddenly come to Kashi.

I told her about the whole episode. She said, "Take Diksha tomorrow itself when Ma has desired it".

So with all Her blessings, compassion and love overflowing in Sri Ma's divine presence I underwent the rituals of spiritual initiation on 18th February 1968. A wonderful experience - and Her blessings continued to shower down but the collecting vessel was upside down....

Jai Ma

(a) The Divine Descent

Kheora, a tiny village in the interior of East Bengal of undivided India (now in Bangladesh) suddenly came into the limelight with the advent of Universal Mother Ma Anandmoyee. She took birth at Kheora, as a human being in a poor brahmin family on 30th April 1896, at about 3 o'clock when the world was fast asleep.

She was the second child of her parents and scared by the death of their first child her deeply religious mother would lay her infant daughter daily below the Tulsi shrub (a kind of basil tree regarded as very pious in Hindu mythology) invoking the blessings of the sacred tulsi on Her. When the infant grew up She Herself used to go and roll down there.

This little child was given the name of Nirmala Sundari Devi by her parents, who is now known to the world as Sri Ma Anandmayee or simply 'Ma'. Henceforth she will be referred here as 'Ma' only.

Ma's father Sri Bipin Behari Bhattacharya was a highly religious man with an ascetic allegiance. The most remarkable feature of his personality was a total apathy to worldly interests. Eye-witnesses say that he had long hair and a shining bearded face full of contentment and an inborn liking for God. He had a beautiful sonorous voice and used to play Ektara (Single string instrument) while singing which lasted hours and hours together and sometimes it would be dawn before this devoted soul finished singing hymns of various schools. People loved to attend his kirtans and songs wherever he sang with his melodious voice.

(Note:Kheora village is now in Distt. Baman Baria in Bangiadesh. In 1927, Ma with Bholanath and her parents went to Kheora. By this time everything was changed so even Didima and Dada Moshai could not find out the place and then Ma showed them and then they also could recollect. With Didi's and Moulvi Prem Copal's efforts this land was purchased for an ashram. On 17th Feb 1984, a delegation of a few devotees went there including myself. We were moved by the arty reception given by the Muslims of that village. They beautifully sang a welcome song and said "Ma is our Mother also, our own Mother").

Ma's mother Mokshada Sundari Devi (Didi Ma) was also an extremely pious lady, very religious, calm and serene with an ever smiling face. No one has ever seen her angry. The contentment and patience were her outstanding qualities.

The extreme poverty of theirs never worried her and any guest at anytime was always welcomed by her. She was pure and pristine as a lotus in a pond. Before Ma's descent she had dreams of several Gods and Goddesses who she felt were keen to come to her lap.

Didima continued to have several Gods and Goddesses in her dreams even after Ma was born. Even when she was carrying Ma - she had ill-health. Nevertheless neighbours said she was looking very beautiful and shining. (Note 1)

One day Mokshada Devi lit a lamp at the altar of Tulsi. Suddenly she discovered a marvelous sight of an extremely beautiful Goddess with a wonderful glow like the rising sun standing in front of her instead of Tulsi. A few moments later a fascinating ray had replaced the Goddess. The rays traveled in a circular way and entered the body of Mokshada Sundari. She lost consciousness and fell down at Tulsi Manch.(Note 2).

It was said by Didi Ma that unlike a normal child neither did Ma cry nor did she make any other noise. Afterwards to this Ma said "Why cry? I was looking at the mango and neem trees through the holes of the thatched hut."

(b) Childhood

Ma was a witty and a pretty child, ever smiling. Unlike other children, however, she was neither naughty nor fickle-minded. During that age, Ma's leela began, albeit in a low-key manner.

When she was two and a half years old, Ma went to Her maternal Grandma's place. There, Didi Ma took her to a kirtan recital. Kirtans had an effect on Ma's body and soul. Time and again, Didi Ma would notice that the child was losing Her control Then she could not realise that it was ecstasy which overcame the child.

Even during mealtime, Ma's lack of concentration was noticeable. But Her indifferent behaviour at that time was not explainable.

Ma was greatly fascinated by devotional songs and music. The residents of Kheora village used to go round, doing kirtans, during New Year's Eve, and other special occasions. She would run to join them whenever such 'Nagar Kirtans' went by. The Vaishnavites used to visit every home, sing songs in praise of Krishna with their drum and cymbals. Ma would become ecstatic on such occasions.

During her childhood in Kheora once a storm blew a part of the thatched roof off Bipin Behari's house. The storm was dangerous enough to scare everybody but Ma continued to laugh till the next evening when, pointing to the hole, she said to her mother. "Now we can see stars without going into the open. Now, inside and outside have become one and the same."

Ma had an easy independent gait. It was heard from Didi Ma that in childhood Ma would often look at the far off sky without blinking. At times, she would loudly sing and dance with divine grace, jump and laugh and talk to plants and trees. Sometimes she would be lost in Herself; in a playful mood. This sweet little girl would visit the neighbours singing and dancing. Often suddenly, in sharp contrast she would withdraw and turn serious. In what type of rapture She was submerged only She knew.

That even as a child She had no fear was exemplified when one day Ma and other girls, who were Her friends, suddenly saw a herd of cows. While the others ran away instantly, Ma easily befriended the cattle and walked alongside until herdsman rushed in to move them away.

Ma's devotion for the supreme authority was also evident when at Her maternal grand Ma's place she worshiped small earthen images given to Her as toys.

When Ma was about five, Bipin Behari called Her to do 'Hari Kirtan'.

Ma asked him, "Baba, who is Hari?"

Father said, "Hari, is the name of God".

Ma: "What happens when you sing the name of Hari?"

Father: "Hari Naam Kirtan will bring Him closer."

Ma: "Is Hari too big?"

Father said, "yes, He is very big"

Ma: "Is He big as the field we see?"

To her childlike innocent -queries, Bipin Behari said, "Yes daughter. He is bigger than the field. Call Him, then only you can see how big is He?"

Narrating this episode, Ma said, this is how she was initiated to Hari Naam kirtan by her devoted father.

Ma's respect for elders and heed for their advice was beyond doubt. Once, an aunt took Her to a fair. At a nearby temple, she asked Ma to wait until she returned. The aunt went to the fair and forgot about it. Only after two three hours did she remember and came back in a hurry. She was astonished to see Ma seating in the same place, as she had asked Her to.

Once Ma went to her Badi Ma's (aunt) place, near their house for getting 'Mattha' which was used to be churned from milk on a daily basis. When she was very small, She would go to the aunt's home, holding a utensil close to her chest. Ostensibly, she went there to collect butter and Mattha. One day, when she went there, the aunt cried out, "I have only started just now and you are already here!"

The aunt suddenly noticed the utensil, being used for the process, had a hole through which all the curd was draining out. She was astonished by this development. She gave Ma whatever was left in the pan. After this incident, Badi Ma would call Ma to give Her Her share even if she was late.

Her childhood games were unique. She would draw a circle around it with the big toe of the same foot while keeping the other foot suspended in air. Then She would dance by rotating Herself in similar fashion. Didi Ma used to be scared of Her dancing in this manner. Ma's other friends were not able to repeat Her feat.(Note 3).

She used to play with her friends, but she could always detach Herself from the rest. Here She was fully involved, as part of the playing group. Then She was all alone, detached like sand is brushed away from one's body. Her friends knew Ma was honest, would always speak the truth. That's why, whenever they wanted to do something secretly, Ma wouldn't be taken into their confidence. So whenever people wanted to know the facts, they would ask Ma rather than any of Her friends. Ma would not speak a lie even by gestures. "That - Truth is the first step to divine attainment" is Ma's teaching.

Ma's way of wearing a saree was so good that the village women used to cite Her way as a perfect example.

Ma's used to be the center of attention among the children who never felt satisfied in playing without Her being present.

The tale of Ma's childhood cannot be complete without the mention of Her youngest maternal uncle Sharda Charan Vidyasagar (Sona Mama). A very pious and virtuous man, Sona Mama was an acknowledged master of the Vedas. He had a special affinity for the young Ma. Later, Ma has recollected many incidents involving Sona Mama.

When she was about 7 year old, Ma visited her Grandma's, place during Durgapuja. Amidst festivities, people noticed a change in Her mood. She had turned ecstatic and was mumbling something to Herself. Having watched Her in a trance, Sona Mama later asked:

"What were you muttering?"

Ma had no answer to Sona Mama's, apparently frivolous question.

Sona Mama was a saintly person. During the Pujas, he used to worship Ma as Kumari (Virgin Goddess) before performing Durga puja. Likewise some others also used to treat Her as the Virgin Goddess during some puja or the other.

When she was a child, Ma would often be found lost in Her world of dreams during the religious celebrations. When she regained Her normal composure, She would feel shy about Her trances.

Ma's childhood friend and cousin, Sushila Masi, who lost her husband at a very young age, was initiated by Bholanathji and thereafter lived in our Ashram.

One of Thakurma's (Bipin Behari's mother) friends was Chikkan Didi who liked Ma very much. She would often take Ma to her house and ask her to cook meals. Chikkan Didi described Her preparations as ambrosia.

Ma had a friend who at 30, was twenty years older than She was. One day, she asked Ma about the nuances of evening prayers. Smilingly and playfully, the ten-year-old Ma demonstrated the entire ritual before her.

"The body responded on its own" Ma said to Didima later.

Although She never failed in what the elders instructed Her to do, She used to be always a bit detached, often lost in Her own world in the midst of friends and relatives. Such actions invited comments. Some used to consider it as Her innocence, others termed it as dullness and lack of concentration.

Didima always considered Ma simple and straight. One day, Ma went to the pond filled the brass pitcher (given to her by Sona Mama) with water, pulled it up to Her stomach to see Her curved shadow in the pond water. Then she cried aloud to Didima: "You always call me straight, see me now."

(c) Ma's Education

Ma went to school only for a few months in Kheora and Sultanpur (Grandmother's village). She was irregular because she couldn't go to school on Her own. Secondly, Her brothers and sisters were prone to diseases due to which She had to care for them.

Ma went to Kheora's primary school for sometime. There whatever She studied She learnt quickly. Incidentally, the teacher would ask Her only what She knew well. To the teacher, Ma was a bright girl.

In later years though Ma could write in Bengali but whenever someone requested Her to write something Ma would simply put a dot and say this dot encompasses everything. (Bindu mey Sindhu). On Baba Bholanath's request in 1930 Ma wrote in Bengali. English translation of this writing is given at the end of this chapter.

(d) Marriage

On 7th February 1909 Ma married Ramani Mohan Chakravarty who later become known as Bholanath, also as Pitaji (Father) by the devotees.

About Her marriage She has said "The sentiments with which you marry - no vibrations of that sentiments ever existed in This body."

Ma's conduct as a bride was excellent. In the absence of Her mother-in-law who had passed away, Pramoda Devi, wife of Bholanathji's elder brother Revati Mohan, was in charge of the household affairs. She was a hard task mistress. Ma did all the household chores – from fetching water, cleaning the house, to cooking - with utmost sincerity under Pramoda Devi's supervision. As was the custom for a newly wedded bride, Ma used to keep a part of Her saree over Her face as a veil. Nevertheless, she looked very attractive in the bridal composure. On many an occasion, ladies of Her age in the neighbourhood would share Her work in many different ways.

Sometimes, while cooking, Ma would be in a trance, not realising the food being cooked on the stove was burnt. These incidents at times invited comments from those who never could understand Her deep religious introspection. However, never did She retaliate against such

comments. Thus, duty, and service to mankind are to be cultivated foremost in a sadhaka - is Ma's teaching. Years later, when Ma was in Calcutta, the sister-in-law Pramoda Devi visited Her. She was surprised by the crowd of Her followers there. During the festivities, one night when most of the people had returned home, Ma herself went to old Pramoda Devi and talked to her for a long time about the old days in their East Bengal dialect. Those present there, were entranced by Ma's excellent sense of humor and memory. Pramoda Devi said, "You won't believe the way She did Her household chores. She never left any scope for me to complain."

Ma has said "no duty can be fulfilled without putting one's heart into it. Service or duty strengthens one's zeal for good work."

Ma has mentioned that "this body has lived with father, mother, husband and all. This body has served the husband so you may call it a wife. It has done all sorts of cooking and also all menial work and scrubbing etc so you can call it a servant. But looking from another stand point this body has served none but God. All served are different manifestations of the Almighty God and this body served them as such. When I prepared food it was done as a ritual, for food cooked was after all meant for God. All Service is service to the Divine. Serve all as God and for the sake of God."

After the death of Revati Mohan in 1914 Ma went to Ashtagram with Bholanath. Ma's life with Bholanath started from here. The wife of Jaishanker Sen, at whose residence they stayed, used to call her 'Mother of Joy'.

In Ma's words—"At the time of marriage this body's mother (Ma used to refer to her like this) had asked her to respect and obey Her husband. Hence She loved and respected Bholanath like she esteemed Her father."

"This body had a relationship with Bholanath which can be likened to the closeness between a father and his daughter."

To Bholanath Ma was a mystery from the very beginning. She saw in him a little child Gopal (Name of Lord Krishna as a child) and inspired in him to take Her as his mother.

Ma broke into laughter recalling that Bholanath initially passed off Her trance and bodily symptoms as childishness. He would emphatically say "It will be all right when you grow up."

Ma said, "It seems I never grew up."

Bholanath had no inkling of his unusual marriage. He thought he married an ordinary village girl. But Ma - instead of leading an ordinary conjugal life, managed Bholanath's shift into the spiritual world with extraordinary care, determination and devotion acting as a friend, philosopher and guide. Even while engaged in domestic duties She would often lose control over Her limbs. Thus the mysterious housewife was a mixture of opposites. Household duties were usually performed by Her to perfection. But She was unpredictable, often prompted by kheyala. He often wondered if She was a Goddess in human form. It is beyond all comprehension that they had a unique relationship based on the spiritual plane.

(e) The Sacred Task of Service

From the early days Ma was pained by people in distress. She always extended Her helping hand to people in need. Hence She was welcomed to every house of Kheora village.

Beside the general upkeep of the house Ma used to make pickle and spin the wheel to make clothes. In 1974 during Ma's birthday celebrations at Agarpara Ashram, Calcutta one lady presented Her with a piece of cloth which Ma had spun years ago and given to this lady. Ma's expertise at embroidery work was excellent, some of Her work reportedly being kept at Her Ashram at Kashi.

Sri Ma has said "Unknowingly, Her respect for Bholanath extended to providing even water and a towel for washing whenever he returned home. Ma's mother said to her, "husband is Her guru." That is why Her body devoted itself to the service of Bholanath "

Bholanath used to be amused by Her obedience and devotion.

When spiritual practices started, duties towards Bholanath were never neglected. Ma would sit for meditation on the floor of the bedroom at night only after finishing the household work. Even that work was done completely engrossed in Her own world, with a feeling of reverence for God. The single aim in all Her work was to do everything in the name of God.

Ma's neatness and competence in the upkeep of the house, preparing for evening prayers, cooking meals, and treating guests was discernible from the very early days.

She cooked delicious food and Bholanath enjoyed treating his guests to the delicacies. Once Ma came to know the guest who would be dining at their place had a distaste for preparations of radish. Invariably, the guest was treated with excellent food prepared by Ma. He was astounded however when told that all the dishes including a sweet dish had radish as the base substance.

One day a Gujarati Sadhu visited Ma's place. She received him reverentially, wiped the seat with the corner of Her saree before offering it. She devotedly treated the Sadhu with an assortment of food. The whole arrangement, reflecting an honest and dedicated service, deeply impressed the Sadhu.

He said, "Today, I had meals at the hands of the 'Mother of the Universe'. I never had such an experience."

Ma's spiritual life was noticed from Her Ashtagram days. Ma had maintained a 'Tulsi Manch' at the house where she lived. The Tulsi altar was so well kept - with Ma regularly worshipping the place - that people, the neighbours too, reverently came there and prayed. The famous kirtan group of Shri Gagan Roy too came for a recital at their place. During the kirtan Ma went into a trance.

The earliest revelations, according to the records, of Ma's bhava samadhi was in kirtan sometimes sung by neighbours and strangers. Ma becoming totally unaware of the surroundings, fully absorbed in something indescribable and would lose body consciousness. In the beginning She tried to keep it a secret but slowly took Bholanath into Her confidence. Here for the first time She went into a trance in public. Bholanath tried his best to bring Her back to this world but failed. Ma remained in that condition for nearly 19 hours. During this period ants had gathered around Her eyes - as She appeared absolutely lifeless.

Referring to the trance later Ma said "As sweat oozes from a human body streams of Joy and Happiness (Anandam) emerged through this body, with a feeling of strange communion with the hymns."

Ma once said 'Hari Kirtan' (which her father used to do as part of his Sadhana, and in which She when a child became his regular companion) was now extended to Naam kirtan at Ashtagram when She lived there."

It was in Ashtagram where not only Hara Kumar Roy called Her 'Ma' but Kshetra Mohan, a friend of Bholanath, prayed by falling at Her feet calling Her "Durga, Durga".

Some people would take Ma's trances as evidence of mental disease, while some others took it as the effect of an evil spirit. So for a cure Bholanath took Her to many saints and exorcists - but without success. Finally Bholanath invited his friend, a physician Dr. Mahesh Nandi, to examine her. Dr Nandi stayed at their place and after thoroughly watching Her for few days opined, "it is not the illness or any disease but Her exalted stage on the path of spirituality. You should not show Her to everybody".

(f) BAJITPUR (1918-1924) MA's Sadhan Leela Katha.

The history of Ma's deep religious practices can be understood only by the sayings that have emanated from Her lips on different occasions; in some context or the other I have tried to knit them together.

Bajitpur was the main centre of Her Sadhana where She came with Bholanath in 1918. By and large the sole witness of this wonderful leela of Sadhana in Ma's body was Bholanath together with only a few lucky ones who had glimpses of this leela.

On being asked whether Bholanath understood the happenings, Ma said—"How could he? Until one reaches to that stage."

Ma's Sadhana has been described as Her Leela for two reasons. Firstly, this illustrated Her 'Kheyala' and secondly, this whole drama took place on Her body in its own way automatically, effortlessly and with no intention of Her own. She used to watch in silence, She being only a passive participant, "what a unique unparalleled experience" She has said.

Thus in Ma's case—it is "Realisation of the Self by the Self."

Her days during Sadhana were not divided into morning, evening and night. There was only one prolonged period of indescribable bliss.

Evidence of Sadhana, its ascendance to higher planes for the realisation of the Self or God, have no meaning in Ma's Sadhana-Leela. For Her, Sadhak, Sadhya and Sadhana are one and one only. It is unique in its own way.

In Ma's words—"It is like one reads a book already read or revisits a place once visited. This Sadhana was nothing more than a 'play'. One day while bathing in a pond This body had a 'kheyal' to play the role of a Sadhak, and that is how it all started."

In Ma's words "this body has not followed only one particular line of Sadhana but has covered all the known lines. It has passed through all the different varieties of practices referred to by the sages of ancient times. In order to attain to a particular stage along one of these lines of Sadhana an ordinary individual may have to be born again and again but in the case of This body it was a matter of a few seconds."

During those days Ma had an unusual life style. After finishing Her daily household work with care and concern She would scrupulously clean the surrounding area, then She would go round the place with incense likening the place to a temple. Then she would sit (it used to be night by that time) in the corner of Her room for daily puja without a break. The various Pujas and asanas would start automatically; Bholanath used to watch with awe lying on his bed. And what did he see in the dim light of the room? Ma was sitting inert like a statue and suddenly Her limbs would be in brisk motion. Her body would perform various asanas and mudras in quick succession. Her complexion also changed from time to time. Quite often Her respiration assumed frightening proportions and occasionally it appeared She had fainted. A solitary spectator to all these nerve-racking transformations repeated night after night Bholanath knew not what to do?

Ma's image as a forceful religious personality thus began to blossom, just as that of a newly wedded bride gradually went into oblivion.

Watching the effect of Harinaam on Her, one day, Bholanath asked—"why do you chant Hari-Hari" all the time? We are shaktas, this is not proper".

"Then what?" Ma responded back like a child, "should I then repeat "Jai Shiv Shankar Bom Bom Har Har"?"

"Yes, this is all right", Bholanath said. Ma explained later that She felt the same kind of happiness with the changed call for God as Hari and Har are one and the same. "When I prayed with my heart and soul an unparalleled indescribable joy descended on This body. The initiation was yet to be done so the effect was due to the repetition of 'Naam' alone."

Narrating the leela of Her Sadhana once She has said "this body has experienced so many varied stages, so diverse and extreme in their nature that words fall short to explain them. In general stages do occur and last in sadhaks, but here it is all different."

She further clarified- "As long as you are in different stages, so long only levels exist. After that it is just like moving in a lift. There you cease to exercise your will power. You only remain a witness of the show."

She said "As seeds are planted and pressed into the soil for saplings to come forth, likewise during Sadhana it is to be kept as a guarded secret otherwise many invisible and indirect hurdles come in the way."

Elaborating on the point Ma said "Secrecy then was absolutely necessary. There are kriyas of Sadhana which are required to be exercised in private. The different forms of Sadhana were not meant for This body but are meant for you all. When you relate your spiritual experiences to Me, I often say that This body had those experiences and that is how it knows what they are. Not only that if anyone discloses to This body a specific line of Sadhana it can describe in minute detail the various stages of that very line."

During those days of Sadhana different Mantras, and seed Mantras used to come out of their own from This body's mouth. Now I hear from you people that in ancient days mantras used to be automatically pronounced by Rishis. How enchanting are these mantras, their form and their meaning and respectively different manifestation through human bodies. Even breathing becomes different with the chanting of different mantras."

Further She said "Even different Asanas and Mudras were performed spontaneously. This body never knew what ananas and mudras were or how they were performed".

Sri A.K. Dutta Gupta has very well recorded Her sayings in this context.

"Sometime I would hear distinctly 'repeat this mantra'; when I got the mantra, a query came to my mind 'whose mantra is this?' At once the reply came. Again 'how does it look?' A form was revealed to me in no time."

"While sitting for yagna fingers would automatically draw the mandal on the floor. No formal arrangement for the puja was made yet this body spontaneously reacted to the rituals."

Ma said "while in the fifth month of Sadhana a time had come when everything around this world appeared to cry and pray, to show them the way to spiritual bliss. They all prayed, even the dry wood. And not only that, even 'exercises' would take the shape of an image and would go, bidding good bye to This body."

She once mentioned that one day when the various effects of Sadhana were evident She had noticed a glow around Her body. The glow was so bright that She could easily walk in pitch dark with its illumination.

"At one time This body was a frail slender frame because of the 'Kheyal'. Like sages do extreme austere meditation, Kricha Sadhana, This body also went through such Sadhana to retain only the skin and bones."

During the period when Ma's body was devoted to Sadhana-Leela it was said that even a scratch on the bark of a tree would cause pain to Her body.

"As it happened sometimes people were scared of This body seated with eyes upturned, looking indifferent with tongue protruding, the hands and elbows looking different from each other."

During talks with Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj some illuminating utterances came from Ma.

"Look in the case of a Sadhak there is aspiration towards a goal. But here there is no question of goal or aim. Every artery, vein and nerve, their functioning and vibration are clearly seen just as when somebody in a dark room holds a lamp in his hand and throws light on every object one by one exactly like this. But for the Sadhaka who is still on the path it is impossible to perceive it in this manner. He has to advance, overcoming various kinds of obstacles. Baba, here there is no question of this. Here the artery is Myself, the vein Myself and the observer Myself. Of course when saying 'Myself' it is because some word has to be used".

Someone asked Ma "though you were bestowed with supreme knowledge since birth, the Sadhana Leela came upon you. During that stage in what form did the complete fulfillment of Sadhana take place?"

Ma said, "It happened in Dhaka (now capital of Bangladesh) but in what form it happened I am not able to describe now. Completeness or manifestation of it can be said to be the culmination of Sadhana." She paused for a moment and then said—

"There is a stage in Sadhana where answers to any query would come out spontaneously. At that stage, it is possible to speak on any subject with conviction. This body had no formal education, leave alone the method of following or imitating. Baba, you have not taught this little daughter of yours to read or write. What is said therefore is spontaneous and true. It is for you to see and understand the beginning of complete fulfillment and enlightenment."

Asked whether all these stages are mentioned in the scriptures Ma said, "How many of these can be mentioned? Like a timetable only the important ones are noted. If you walk down the road you will find many more things. Scriptures give only the broad indications."

In the month of December 1922 all of a sudden Ma took Mouna (complete silence)- not a normal reticence but a complete abstinence. She would speak to Bholanath or to somebody else when it was absolutely necessary. She would draw a circle with the index finger of Her right hand. Then Mantras would pour out from within and She could then speak. Again after the talks She would pronounce mantras, wipe out the drawn circle and once again She would take up Mouna. However this was not a regular feature.

(g) Meals during Sadhana

'My food is dedicated lives' Ma once said. In Ma's words:"During Sadhana this body had hardly taken a full glass of water. Years passed without taking breakfast or a full meal. No bath, no breakfasts, no meals. Now, for the sake of keeping up the routine to satisfy you people, it is taken."

Ma once explained—

"Once this body lived on three grains of rice daily for 4-5 months. Nobody can live for such a long time on such a meagre diet. It looks like a miracle. But it has been so with This body, because it can be so. The reason for this is that what we eat is not at all necessary for us. The body takes in only the quintessence of the food, the rest is thrown out."

"As a result of Sadhana the body becomes so constituted that though no food is taken physically, it can imbibe from the surroundings whatever is necessary for its subsistence. Secondly

one can live on air alone, in everything there are all other things. The properties of other edible things are in the air in some measure. Therefore by taking in air alone we get the essence of other things."

"Again, it may so happen that the body is not taking anything at all, yet it is being maintained unimpaired as in a state of Samadhi. So as a consequence of Sadhana it is quite possible to live without what we call food. In a similar way, Sadhana can effect such a transformation in the body that by virtue of it any part of it can discharge the function of the eye."

In 1924, when Ma came to Dhaka, she used to take three morsels of food with drinking water twice a day. Gradually, she restricted this intake to only on Mondays and Thursdays. On the other five days, she would eat just nine, three or five grains of boiled rice. However, on the persistent requests of Her followers, Ma has at times broken this schedule. Once during Amavasya Pratui—the son of Pramath Nath—dedicated 'Bhog'(a feast) to Ma at Shahbag. Ma accepted it and thus began the practice of dedicating 'Bhog' in the name of 'Ma' during Amavasya by Her followers.

Bholanath's nephew Amulya had just got employment during those days. He arranged special Puja and 'Bhog' out of his first salary. This also became a tradition. Much later, at Kashi Ashram, Ma narrated these incidents and said, "the Pujas and Bhog during Purnima and Amavasya are continuing ever since those days."

In 1924, Bholanath noticed that Ma was not able to feed Herself properly as Her hand would not move up and reach Her mouth – which had to be lowered in the process, creating difficulties for Ma. Bholanath himself decided to feed Her instead. Later, Didi also got this opportunity frequently.

Once Ma had a 'Kheyal'. She would take only three grains of rice for Her meal. If there were four grains, they would automatically come out of Her mouth. For some days, She would eat only as much as one could feed Her in a single breath. That would be Her quota for the next 24 hours, she wouldn't even drink water after that.

During Her stay in Shahbag, for some days, she ate only those fruits which, upon ripening, fell from trees in the adjoining garden, which had mostly Mango and Lichi trees. Incidentally, when She resorted to this practice, it was not the season for these types of fruit. Hence, Ma's wish to skip meals would naturally be fulfilled. She had an uncanny knack of following systems and She made others follow them too.

Many of Her Sadhana Leelas were such extreme changes in Her way of feeding. Sometimes very little intake, total abstention, and also on occasions overeating. Once She abstained from drinking water for 13 days at a stretch, on another occasion, She did the same for 23 days and to the point of not even washing Her mouth with water.

Ma said, "Realising that use of water was being forgotten, This body once again started in a normal way, to bring a balance."

Once, after abstaining from meals for six months, She resumed, eating cooked rice and vegetables meant for 7-8 people.

In 1925, Bholanath's sister came to their place to spend the Christmas holidays. Wishing to prepare kheer for Ma she cooked 20 litres of milk for the dish. On that day Ma was supposed to be fasting. On Bholanath's request, Ma left the fast and lo and behold, She took all the kheer made from 20 litres of milk. Kheer was prepared again and Ma quickly finished that too.

On another occasion, Bhaiji (Late Sri Jyotish Chandra Roy,) quietly supplied ghee and maida to serve Ma with pooris at mealtime. Accepting the food for a few days, Ma suddenly

changed heart. On that day, She asked pooris to be made from the entire maida and ghee in stock. And in Her charismatic way, Ma ate all the pooris—60 to 70—and said: "If this body eats this way daily all your money put together will prove insufficient. This body will not go on like this."

Didi used to say, "Ma would unconsciously eat everything including the skin and seeds of fruit unless told in advance."

Usually, Ma had extremely simple and small meals. However, despite this, nobody has even found Her weak or weary.

Ma remembered once that while in Kashi a tiny brass container with its lid was bought. Bholanath would eat the rice cooked in the fire of the Yagna at Shahbag while for Ma, Didima would put a little rice, dal and vegetable in that tiny container and drop it in the big utensil in which rice for Bholanath and others was cooked. Ma would remain on Her fast the whole day. Only after dusk, She would take whatever She wished from that tiny container. This became a routine for several months.

(h) Sri Ma's Spiritual Initiation Ceremony (Diksha) Bajitpur 1922

Sri Ma, Herself recounted Her initiation ceremony at the request of a devotee. May I be pardoned by Sri MA for any error in interpreting and writing about that solemn occasion.

This particular Leela of Sri MA is as incredible as it is astounding.

Diksha is a sacred ritual, requiring Guru, Shisya and Ishta—Beej Mantra. Here MA alone is Guru, Shisya and Ishta.

MA has emphatically mentioned that at no stage was She in need of a Guru or initiation, so what was the meaning of Diksha to Her?

"He who is the Guru, is also the Shishya (disciple)".

On 3rd of August 1922 (Jhulan Purnima or Rakhi Purnima) the spiritual initiation of Sri MA took place between 10-12 at night when She was by Herself. In MA's words—

"On that special Jhulan Purnima day, This body was unusually flaccid from the morning. After finishing the day's household jobs This body sat in a corner of the bedroom at nightfall for daily worship. Asanas and mudras started all by themselves. Requirements for the Puja were not procured from outside. Rather they were brought out from within and arranged in order. Although nobody could have visualised this, there was no doubt about the offerings present. In between all these activities This body was a silent spectator, nothing was done with intent. Guru, in the same way as Gods and Goddesses, appeared out of this body during Puja and faded back into it after the rituals.

After the puja and lighting of the sacred fire, many rituals started spontaneously. The fingers automatically drew a mystic design (yantra) on the floor. This body never before knew what a yantra was and how to draw it. The yantra, thus drawn, conformed to the requirements laid down in the scriptures."

Manifestation of the Beeja Mantra took place within Herself and it welled out from Her lips, and there was a distinct visible impression written by Her fingers inside the already drawn yantra. In Ma's words:

"the ritualistic prayer was also made spontaneously of its own accord. Instead of the repetition of the Name (Naam) a Beeja Mantra now started. Slowly the fingers started responding to 'japa'. Pujas in tune with the japa were performed without ceasing. Several God and Goddesses

were worshipped. They would come out of This body and after the Puja was over, they would again go back inside the body. Specific requirements for specific pujas were offered. Even the Namaskar was done in a specific posture instantaneously. Prayers and mantras were more distinctly pronounced than before."

So after the initiation, the spiritual exercises grew more intense.

Ma's maternal cousin Nishi Babu, who happen to be there, witnessed Her doing Puja and evening prayers in a different style, one day, asked Bholanath why he did not object to Her doing japa like this when She was not yet initiated.

When Ma overheard this comment, she broke Her usual calm and shy composure, and retorted—

"What do you want to say?" And repeated: "What do you want to say?"

Nishi Babu: "How can you do these exercises?"

Have you been initiated:?"

Ma: "Yes, I have been".

Nishi Babu: "Who are you?"

MA: "Purna Brahma Narain".

Bholanath asked "Who are you?"

Ma: "Maha Devi".

Later Ma explained the two different answers. "Purna Brahma Narain' came out first but as Ma was a lady they had doubts. That was why Purna Brahma Narayani, Mahadevi etc. were pronounced later. There was a reason behind the pronouncement 'Mahadevi'. This body would respond completely to the Gods or Goddesses who were being worshipped. At that time, soul and body were one for puja. That is why 'Mahadevi' was pronounced."

Nishi Babu said: "Where is the proof that you are Purna Brahma Narayan?"

Instead of a clear answer a stream of slokas and Mantras flowed eloquently from Ma's mouth. Ma asked Bholanath to be seated and then touched his 'Brahmatalu' with Her right hand. The moment She touched him, Bholanath uttered "OM" and went into a deep, self-absorbed meditation. He remained in that state for hours together. Bholanath's nephew, Ashu, became visibly scared; Janaki Babu and others requested Ma to bring Bholanath back to his normal self. Ma touched Bholanath's Brahmatalu again and he returned to normal instantly. Bholanath said that during this period he was in a state of supreme bliss.

Nishi Babu asked Ma again whether Ramani Babu was initiated. Ma replied "No. Not yet. It will happen after five months". She predicted even the date, day and time - to the utter disbelief of Nishi babu. It was difficult for Nishi babu to comprehend how Ma, an illiterate village woman, knew about the calculation of time according to the movement of the stars. In fact, he knew little about this and he confessed his ignorance to Her.

Ma asked him to contact Janaki Babu who, She said, would now be fishing in the pond. This was another shock for Nishi Babu, as the pond was not close by. It was out of sight of that place.

Secondly, Janaki Babu was supposed to be at his office at that time. But instead Janaki Babu was there. When Nishi Babu went to him and found out the details of Ma's calculations of Ramani Babu's initiation date, it was found to be correct.

(i) Bholanath's Diksha

When Bholanath heard about this, he decided not to take it on that day. He usually took his breakfast before going to the office. On that fateful day, however, he left for his office early without taking his breakfast, fearing he would be held up and compelled to take Diksha.

Meanwhile, the auspicious moment for the initiation ceremony was imminent. Ma sent somebody to bring Bholanath from his office (the Collectorate). At first Bholanath refused. But thinking that Ma might Herself drop in, Bholanath decided to return home.

Ma was taking a stroll at that time and Mantras and stotras were being pronounced by Her. Ma asked Bholanath to bathe. When Bholanath came back after the bath and took his seat a Beeja Mantra came out of Sri Ma's lips. Bholanath, on Ma's instruction, brought his ear close to Ma and he was told to repeat that Mantra. In this manner, Bholanath's Diksha took place at the time Ma had ordained five months back.

In the annals of Matri Leela, this was a unique example of 'Mantra Diksha'. The second example was that of Bhaji's Diksha with Sanyasa Mantra on the banks of holy Mansarovar at Mount Kailash in 1937.

Notes and References

1. From Introduction 'Sri Sri Ma Anandmayee': 1st part.
2. Ananda Varta, April 1973, p. 100.
3. From the Life of Sri Sri Ma Anandmayee: Part 1, p. 26, Bithika Mukherjee.
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5. Most of the childhood Leelas are from 'Swakriya Swarasamrita' by Br Chandan Bhattacharya: Part I & II.
6. Ananda Varta: Vol. VIII, No. 1, p. 21.
7. Anandmoyee Ma: by Bibupadakirti, P. 19-20.
Ananda Varta: Vol. XXVII, No. 3, p. 222.
8. Ananda Varta: Vol VIII, No.1, p. 21.
9. Mother as seen by the devotees, P. 121-122.
10. Ananda Varta Vol. XI, No. 1, p. 36.
11. Mother as seen by the devotees, P. 117-118.

There is one specimen of Ma's writing in Bengali written on 4th Asadh 1337 (1930). She wrote:

"O, thou supreme Being, thou art manifest in all forms — this Universe with all its creations, wife, husband, children, mother, all in one. Man's mind is clouded by worldly ties. But there is no cause for despair. With purity, unflinching faith and burning eagerness go ahead and you will realise your true self." (translated from Bengali)

A. Shahbag Leela: Ma of Shahbagh Dhaka.

Bholanath was a disappointed man in Dhaka when his mission to get a job in that city failed to materialise. When he decided to return to Bajitpur, Ma intervened. Since She was observing silence those days, through gestures, She indicated to Bholanath to wait for three more days.

How prophetic was Ma's intervention!

Within the next three days Bholanath was appointed the supervisor of the beautiful vast garden of Shahbag, the traditional resort of Nawab Gani Mian of Dhaka. The estate was part of the property of Nawabjadi Pyari Banu. Rai Bahadur Yogesh Chandra Ghosh was a trustee of this estate, and he had heard about Ma and Bholanath from his son-in-law Bhudeb Basu. Pyari Banu later became a devotee of Ma and had many striking experiences of Sri Ma's spiritual power. She and her family were at times miraculously saved by Ma from imminent danger and difficult situations.

On his appointment on 17th April 1924 Bholanath and Ma shifted to a three-room cottage inside Shahbag gardens. Adjacent to their residence, was the famous dance hall of the owners, the future venue for Sri Ma's many divine spiritual leelas.

After their arrival at Shahbag, Ma appeared to be the picture of great serenity and tranquility along with Her usual reserve. Various metaphysical manifestations and spiritual sayings manifested during those days. Ma still abstained from speech, since the time it started in Bajitpur. She remained in 'Samadhi' for most of the time. Hence, Bholanath invited his nephew Ashu, his widowed sister Matori and son, Amulya, to stay with them at Shahbag and manage the household work. Janaki Babu and Bhudeb Babu had also come from Bajitpur to Dhaka. Through these people, and eyewitnesses, word of Ma's super-natural leela spread. Soon well educated and learned established citizens of Dhaka gathered round Her with their families, and remained life-long devotees of Sri Ma.

She was now manifesting Her spiritual power before scores of devout followers, as the Mother of the Universe. This image of Ma was seen so frequently that in no time, She became famous as 'the Mother of Shahbag'.

The garden of Shahbag, located near Ramana's race course, was spread over a huge area. It had all varieties of plants. Ma often used to mention about a Madrasi Mango tree, which did not normally grow in Bengal. The leaves of this particular tree used to release a kind of honey. Once, Ma asked for a bowl to be kept below that tree. Soon, the bowl was full of honey. There used to be a Jackfruit tree in the garden, which produced fruits all through the year. Ma said, people used to liken these trees to a Mahatmas, deeply engrossed in their Sadhana. She would frequently walk about on that side of the garden. She would also frequent the Ramana Kali Mandir, located nearby, where She sat with Bholanath for hours together. She met many subtle corporeal beings at that place, where She told us later, many great Mahatmas lay buried.

Ma has said, "While cooking meals, during the stay in Shahbag, often the landscape of a particular place used to emerge before This body's eyes. It was the view of Dhaka's Siddheshwari Mandir but then This body did not know its location. Neither did Bholanath".

Master Baul Basak, a childhood friend of Bholanath, used to visit them frequently. A devout worshipper of Kali, he spent nights singing hymns in praise of Kali. At Ramana Kali Mandir, Baul Basak had his first 'darshan' of Ma.

It was in December 1924, when Jyotish Chandra Roy (Bhaiji) had his first 'darshan' of Ma at Shahbag. During the first meeting itself with Ma—the embodiment of the Supreme reminded him about his previous birth by saying, "You should always remember that you are a real brahmin. This body had an inseparable connection with you through the string of Bhagavatbhava."

The sole aim of Bhaiji was to bring the devotees, saints, recluses, Mahatmas, the needy and distressed closer to Ma, to enable them to place their respect, trust, and faith in Her. Bhaiji was convinced that Ma's only food for survival in this world of ours, was the selfless propensity, love, and devotion of Her followers.

In December, 1925 or January 1926, Dr. Shashanka Mohan Mukherjee visited Shahbag for Ma's darshan. So overwhelmed was he, that on the next day, he came again, this time with his daughter Adarani Devi (Guru Priya Didi). A retired civil surgeon, Dr Mukherjee had an imposing personality and a military manner. He was a very established name in society. But he parted with all this gradually through a gruelling Sadhana. With the blessings of Ma Dr Mukherjee later became Swami Akhandanand Giri after his spiritual ordeal.

Shri Guru Priya Devi (Didi) later came to stay with Ma, and devoted her life in the service of Ma - in many roles — sister, friend, attendant and so on. Didi became Ma's companion during Her leela on earth from the moment of her first darshan until her poor health no longer permitted this. Didi would always be in the service of Ma and Her devotees. She deserves all praise.

From now on Shahbag was generally seen to be crowded by Her devotees. From common people to the respected and established persons - whoever came in contact with Ma, gave himself to Her service forever.

Ma had a magnetic attraction. Traditionally, the people of Dhaka enjoyed organising Kirtans. The tradition was so strong that later devotees also followed it. They would encircle Her, and dance to the tune of Kirtans, Khol and Kartal. When it came to the climax, Ma would join the followers ecstatically, looking upwards as if looking for someone in the endless blue sky. She would turn Her hands, lift Her body upwards to dance to the tune of the kirtan. The devotees had the feeling of having touched and seen the inaccessible and invisible God.

Bholanath's nephew Ashu, who was staying at Shahbag those days, also enjoyed the kirtans. Sri Ma's stoic disciple Biren Maharaj, who was conspicuous for his resounding voice and capacity to sing kirtans continuously, once said to Ashu "We come from faraway places for Ma's Darshan, and you despite your proximity to Her, continue to be evasive. Come, and take the path of renunciation".

Kirtan recitals were held every evening in Shahbag. Kirtans were also held occasionally during Purnima and Amavasya. Ma said "wherever kirtans are held in great fervour, many spectacular changes do happen there." In the garden of Shahbag where Ma lived, the wood of two Cyprus trees turned into sandalwood. It was not only the aroma of sandalwood which purified the surroundings, the wood had many other properties. Ma's devotees took some branches of these trees to Kashi Ashram. Interestingly the leaves, flowers etc. of the Cyprus tree had remained the same, only the wood had changed.

Ma says, "Whether Hindu or Muslim, or believers of any other religious faith in the world—all are same. They all worship God and seek His blessings. Kirtan and, Namaz are one and the same, indistinguishable from each other."

This is Ma's message to Her children.

The number of Ma's devotees shot up in no time, and Bholanath's job was to manage them. Women devotees usually came in the afternoon, and directly went to have Her darshan. Ma would

welcome them with great care, talk with them about their family etc. Men, however, were in a way screened by Bholanath before getting entry.

In the beginning itself, Ma had warned Bholanath "Before you open the door of your house for the entire world, think twice. Afterwards, you will not be able to stem the tide of humanity". But Bholanath was a warm-hearted person, perhaps, he had an inkling that he would not be able to restrict such a forceful personality to mere domestic chores.

While strolling in Shahbag one day, Ma happened to see a mausoleum there. They were tombs of two Fakirs—Guru and his disciple - who had come from Arabia to Dhaka. Subsequently when their bodies were laid to rest, the Nawab family which respected the Fakirs built the tombs there.

Interestingly, during Her stay in Bajitpur, Ma is said to have enquired about the Arab country, as if Fakir Saheb (the Guru) had visited Bajitpur to invite Her to Shahbag. At Shahbag too, the two met in the non-physical plane.

One day, Kirtan was being held at the dance hall of Shahbag. In the midst of kirtan, in a sudden change of mood, Ma rushed out beckoning Mohammad Zainuddin, a friend of Bhaiji. Ma hurriedly went to that mausoleum and read Namaz in exactly the same way as a devout Muslim would. The Maulavi Saab was astonished to see Her gestures and the distinct and correct pronunciation. That was Thursday, the day lamps were lit there and Batasa, (Sugar puffs) were offered to the tombs. But by mistake this had not happened that day. Therefore, on Ma's request, the Maulavi later completed the ritual and offered Batasa to Ma as prasada. Ma opened Her mouth and accepted it from him.

Meanwhile another surprise was in store. During the Durga Puja of 1926 professional photographer Shashi Bhushan Das Gupta came to Shahbag and wanted to take Sri Ma's photograph. But nobody could tell him Ma's whereabouts. At the end of a search Ma was found lying in samadhi in a dark room. Assisted by Bholanath and Bhaiji Ma came outside and the photographer exposed eighteen plates. On developing the plates it was found that surprisingly only a ball of light was visible on 17 plates with no figure. Only the last plate showed Ma with a semicircular light on Her forehead and Bhaiji standing at Her back, though Bhaiji had been much out of the range of the camera.

Explaining the above point later Ma said, "When This body was lying in a dark room the whole room was flooded with light radiating from it. When This body was taken out for photographs the whole body was engulfed by a very bright light. This may have spoiled the first few plates. This light began to diminish gradually until it remained concentrated on the forehead only. This body had a kheyal that Jyotish (Bhaiji) was standing behind".

Bholanath's keenness and the devotees requests prompted Ma to do Kalipuja in Shahbag in November 1925, As word spread, the devotees delight knew no bounds. On the Kali puja night, all articles for puja were properly placed before the image of Kali. Ma sat on the mat meant for the Pujari and then quietly lay on the floor. After sometime, She was in a trance, spontaneously pronouncing the mantras, and offering the sacred flowers, Bel leaves and sandal paste both to Herself and Kali's image.

That was an unusual Kalipuja; many people had a chance on this occasion, to have darshan of Ma as Kali. Naturally, this Kalipuja became a subject of discussion. Soon the mother of Shahbag became famous as Mother of Dhaka.

In 1929 a few internationally acclaimed philosophers who came to Dhaka to attend the National Philosophical Congress, met Ma at Shahbag. The meeting lasted three hours in Bholanath's presence. According to witnesses, questions on almost all aspects of philosophy and

religion were promptly answered by Ma without any hesitation. Her answers were to the point, and bore the characteristic of spiritual, independent thought. All those present on that occasion were simply moved by Ma's range of knowledge, the manner and power of expression.

To the question of how She could answer such questions without studying philosophy, Ma has said, "Life is like an epic novel. One who goes into its great depths cannot remain untouched by the facts of science, philosophy and related subjects."

After this successful meeting and discussion, even common people began recognising Ma as an outstanding personality.

“Mahabhav during Kirtans”

The play of sadhana through kirtan was revealed in Her ever since Her childhood. It was Her father, a natural singer, who taught Her to sing in praise of Hari when She was still a child. But the effects of kirtans on Her body were witnessed from the Ashtagram days.

Recollecting the 'Mahabhav', Ma said, "some carpenters used to live near our house in Ashtagram. They specialised in making boats. They worked during the day and after nightfall, they sang kirtan. A cluster of bamboos obstructed the view of their house. Nevertheless, we could hear their kirtans.

This body would lose all its senses once it heard the kirtans. Even a look in that direction filled this body with immense happiness. There was a boy from the family, who used to visit us. He would dance and sing kirtans when told. In this way, many types of kirtan at many places caused This body to lose all its senses. Initially, efforts were made to conceal this reaction. Later, when ecstasies grew more intense, they couldn't be controlled. Except for Bholanath, no one would suspect these developments." This too was a 'kheyal' of Ma.

Initially, Bholanath was careful to keep the matter secret. When kirtans were held in the courtyard, he would not allow Her to remove Her veil. Ma continued, "completely overwhelmed, This body would be topsy-turvy inside the house. At times This body reacted and responded to ordinary kirtans. However, sometimes the most ritualistic kirtans would fail to effect This body." (Note 2).

When the Gagan Kirtan group sang one day at their place, Ma, sitting on an elevated seat, sank inconspicuously into a trance. Later, the group could not be offered food as it had been polluted by the dog. When Ma did not regain consciousness even the next day, Bholanath invited the same group again to do Kirtan. Hours after the recital began, Ma returned to the material world.

Ma once described Her experience during the kirtan; "This body became as it were, identified with the Kirtan. If anybody has bhava during kirtan that would be of a different type. The reason is that such bhava is mixed with action and so it is tinged with a trace of worldly emotions. But the bhava experienced by this body had nothing to do with any action. The conclusion is that here the world is totally closed off. And the feeling of joy here is to some extent, something unique."

On the request of devotees, on the occasion of Uttarayan Sankranti (26 January 1926) and solar eclipse, Ma presented Herself in the first public kirtan ever. A massive crowd which had gathered on that occasion, had the privilege to watch Ma's body glow with 'Mahabhav'. It is said, the illumination and ecstasy was somewhat similar to what happened in the case of Gouranga Mahaprabhu.

The venue of this kirtan was the ballroom of Shahbag. Bhog-prasad were to be distributed after the kirtans. The recital began at 10 o'clock in the morning. Ma with other ladies was inside

Her house, (adjacent to the dancing hall) wherefrom one could hear the melodious tunes of hymns. Suddenly like a gust of wind She came to the dance hall. The continuous devout music had motivated Her, and brought Her to a kind of illumination, happiness and state of ecstasy seen never before. The public was simply amazed to see 'Ma' in that divine composure (Mahabhav).

Kirtan over, Ma Herself distributed the prasad. Bhajji has written that Her versatility and dexterity in distributing the prasad in a wonderful manner gave one the feeling that 'Mahalakshmi' Herself had come down to earth.(Note 4).

The instruments - Khol, kartal etc - which were played during the kirtan on the day of solar eclipse, were kept at Shahbagh. One day, Ma suggested that they may be used every evening during prayers. Thus the tradition of daily kirtan started with Bholanath, Ashu and Amulya promptly acting on Her suggestion.

Variations in Ma's manifestations during the ecstasies were evident. Sometimes Mantras would be pronounced immaculately. However Ma was not necessarily overwhelmed by every kirtan recital. During such occasions, Ma entered into such divine trances as Mahabhav. Bhajji's vivid description of Ma on one such an occasion goes like this——

"Suddenly Her (Ma's) body sank down flat to the ground and began to roll on it. Then She slowly rose and stood on Her two big toes. Both hands were raised straight up, Her head slightly tilted to one side and a little backwards, and Her radiant eyes stared with a steady gaze towards the far end of the sky. A little later She began to move in that posture. Her body appeared to be filled with a heavenly presence. She was not at all aware of Her clothes hanging loosely on Her person. No one had the strength to stop Her. Her whole body danced on with measured beats in a most delicate way and reached the place where kirtana was going on; Her body then noiselessly melted down, as it were, on the floor. Led by some mysterious power it rolled on like the dry leaves of a tree moved slowly by a gentle breeze. After sometime while still lying on the floor, very soft sweet musical strains came from Her lips "Hare Murare Madhukaitabhare"—after sometime she was again Her normal self. Her glowing face, Her sweet ineffable looks, Her soft, tender voice brimming over with divine emotion all reminded the assembled crowd of the image of Sri Chaitanya Dev as described in his biographies. All the physical changes observed long, long ago in Sri Chaitanya Dev (1485-1533) manifested themselves again in Her person on that occasion.(See note 5).

Sri Sri Ma's Samadhi Bhava

Apparently Ma's period of Sadhana extended for six years from 1918 to 1924. However as regards Ma's Samadhi Bhava it has happened to Her even before and after this period also. Not that she had Samadhi Bhava during the early years which diminished afterwards. She was always in Sahaj Samadhi. She has explained that "your strong desire to see This body in states of samadhi causes it to manifest at times. With a call of full intensity, This body, reacts and its physical expression will invariably follow."

Even in Her childhood, She went into a trance. For even then Her body loosened when She heard the melodious Kirtans held in the neighbourhood. Didima would shake Her out of what people then thought was slumber or childish pranks. After she passed through the rigours of Sadhana and became obviously ecstatic, then people remembered the unusual events of the past.

In the later years also Ma's Samadhi manifested during Her Birthday celebrations, when Mahatmas requested Her to come to the place of puja. She would go into Samadhi and remain in that state for hours together.

In the earlier chapters of Her book Didi has given a detailed and excellent description of Ma's various ecstasies. Didi was amazed to see Her in such states. It is a common knowledge that Arjun was frightened to see Sri Krishna's Virat Swarup and requested Him to be again as his childhood friend. We too like to see Ma in Her familiar motherly state.

Bhaiji has given splendid details of Ma's Samadhi Bhav in his book 'Mother as Revealed to Me'—

"Like the waning Sun, Ma's normal behaviour and manners transformed slowly, She would gradually turn breathless and speechless. With Her eyes closed, Ma's face would be lit up by a bright auspicious glow, the whole body would cease to move. The pores of Her body emanated a unique radiance. It appeared that Ma was sinking deep into samadhi. This went on for hours..."

When She returned to this world from Her ecstasies, the breathing slowly returned to normal and the body reactivated to regain its normal self.

Ma has described Her experience of Samadhi as follows:

"It is a state beyond all conscious and supra conscious planes—a state of complete immobilisation of all thoughts emotions and activities both physical and mental—a state that transcends all the phases of life here below. What you call Savikalpa Samadhi, is also but a means to reach that final objective, it is only a passing stage in your sadhana."

"Deep concentration on any one of the five elementals of sense—sound, touch, smell, taste, and sight derived chiefly from air, earth, water etc. leads a man to merge his identity into it and as concentration deepens the body, as it were, gradually freezes with it. Then that special object of sense pervades his whole being and his ego gradually dissolves in it and coalesces with one Universal entity. When this condition settles down, the consciousness of One Universal Self too melts away, and what then remains is beyond words, expression and experience.(See note 6.)

Ma explains samadhi as follows:

"The consummation of action and feeling may be called samadhi. It is a state where the question of knowledge and ignorance does not arise. A stage comes when the sadhak realises that he is one with his object of contemplation. From that plane he may again comeback to the ordinary level of self-consciousness. This type of samadhi also must be transcended. The ultimate state, being unparalleled, cannot be explained or expressed in any language. It is solely a matter of direct experience." (See note 7).

When Ma was requested to throw light on Her experience in intense Samadhi, She said:

"When you sit in this room, you look out of the door and windows when they are open, and see many things outside. If they are closed, you cannot see those things. During such experiences, This body too feels that all outlets are closed, all connection with the world is stopped....When you drop a handful of loose soil over the still water in a pond, you see how beautifully it spreads over. This body too enjoys similar feelings on those occasions.(See note8).

She further explained this situation, saying She felt a subtle flow of vitality running through Her body, inducing each and every particle of Her body. "Whatever things this body saw and touched, it felt in oneness with all of them. This body retained no identity of its own in this situation."(See note 9).

B. Dhaka Siddheshwari

While returning from Ramana Kali Mandir with Ma and Bholanath, Baul Basak frequently used to go somewhere else. On Bholanath's query Basak said he frequented Siddheshwari temple. Ma indicated to offer no comment as Bholanath glanced at Her for Her reaction.

One night, Baul took them to Siddheshwari. To reach that place at that time one had to tread rough, uneven roads, to reach the ancient temple, then located far away from the city. A huge Peepal tree lay uprooted in front of the temple, exactly the same landscape as Ma had once envisioned in Bajitpur. On Her visit, Ma touched the tree and after darshan of Siddheshwari Kali, returned with Bholanath.

From that day onwards, Ma frequently visited Siddheshwari. Sometimes Bhog was offered to the deity.

Ma said, "One afternoon This body was packing things for a short journey somewhere, though I knew not the destination. While I was putting together the articles for daily use, Bholanath dropped in and asked me: "What are you doing?"

I said, "Let's go to Siddheshwari."

Bholanath didn't object. So we went to the temple that afternoon. There, I had a kheyal that I would stay for 7-8 days. When I expressed my desire to Bholanath, he said, he would not be able to keep me company because of his duty in Shahbag gardens.

I said, "that's not a problem. Siddheshwari Ma is with this body.""

Bholanath acceded to Ma's request. Ma's father used to stay with Her during daytime while Bholanath used to stay with Her overnight. Happiness knew no bounds as they sojourned at the Siddheshwari temple.

Before dawn, Ma would bathe and enter the temple. And then, She would be there the whole day and night, without drinking a drop of water or eating a morsel of food. Baul Babu, who taught in a local school during daytime, would bring fruits after nightfall for Puja. Baul braved the muddy pathway after rain singing all the way in praise of Goddess Kali, to bring those offerings for puja. These were offered to the deity and were later distributed as prasad at midnight to the devotees present at the temple. Initially, Ma Herself used to make the offerings. On occasion, She would offer the Bhog and become ecstatic, either in a sitting posture or lying down. Then suddenly She would stand up and announce (to Siddheshwari) that the Bhogh had been offered and was ready for distribution. There were also occasions when local priests would bring flowers, sandal paste etc. Ma would sometime offer them to Kali, sometimes throw them upon Herself. Pujas were performed in unusual ways, until Ma said to Bholanath:

"I am not able to continue it this way. You have the Mantra (Bholanath was initiated) You offer the Bhog instead."

Ma remained at the Siddheshwari temple for seven days at a stretch. Ma has said later; "when Baul learnt about Ma's sojourn at Siddheshwari for a week, he anticipated some miraculous incident would take place. Therefore, he stationed himself in front of the temple in the evenings as a watchman, like the Nandi, looking for some unusual event to unfold. Six days and nights passed. On the seventh day at daybreak, Ma by Her own kheyal came out of the temple. Baul, who stood guard for the last six nights, was fast asleep. It was drizzling outside, following heavy rains in the night. Bholanath was awake. Ma gestured him to follow Her, and, walked into the forest behind the temple. After walking for a while, they found a clean place. Ma went round this place before squatting down, facing south. Bholanath sat nearby.

The drizzle had stopped. As Ma was sitting, stotras started coming out of Her mouth - this was usually the way She resumed speaking after mouna. She pressed the soil with Her right palm at the place where She was sitting. Incredibly the soil layers gave way under Her palm, then Her entire arm up to the armpit entered the earth. Bholanath got frightened and in a reflex action, he jerked Her arm out of the earth. The moment, he brought Her hand out, a fountain of reddish hot water emerged from the same spot.

This was not rain water. It was hot and red in colour and it stained the white bangles (made of conch-shell, a customary sacred, symbol of marriage). Visibly scared, Bholanath said to Ma, "Let's go away from here."

Ma asked Bholanath to put his hand on the same spot. Together, they covered the spot with some soil and returned to the temple. Baul Babu, upon learning what had happened, cursed himself for falling asleep. Ma requested Baul to protect the spot.

Later bricks were put around the holy spot to make a vedi (altar) of roughly a square-metre, raised half-a-metre above the ground level. That this spot is the real Siddheshwari Peeth, has been deduced from Ma's words.

The discovery of Siddheshwari Peeth was a significant and unusual event, the news of which spread like wild fire soon to become common knowledge. This spot - the Siddheshwari Peeth sthan - came to light through Ma in 1924. It is said that a saint called 'Sumeru Van' had established a Kali temple at this place. In ancient days, many saints, sadhaks etc had meditated there: from Ma's talks it can be inferred that Bholanath was one of them.

In April 1925, a dwelling for Ma on that holy ground, fenced with bamboo sticks, was contemplated. Ma was in favour of an ordinary hut with mud walls. Shashanka Babu took the initiative. In just seven days, it was ready. On the appointed day, amidst kirtan, Ma and Bholanath moved into this hut. As part of the celebrations kirtans were held the entire day and night.

This place became Ma's Adi-Ashram-the first, where in the spring of 1926, Bholanath organised Basanti Puja.

Ma frequently used to sit on the holy vedi in Her Ashram. She would squeeze and reduce Herself and manage even to lie down on that tiny vedi. One day, the devotees were scared to see Her shrunk so much that only the clothes were visible, not Ma's body. However, there was a sigh of relief when they saw, to their amazement, a slight movement of the clothes as Ma's body gradually expanded and finally, She sat up.

In this context, Ma said later:

"As the kites fly with the help of a string, yogis with their respiratory system and embellishment ties, are capable of transforming themselves into the smallest or the most massive beings, and even capable of disappearing altogether."

One day on this holy vedi. Ma appeared to embody the spirit of Joy. This sight of Ma prompted Bhaiji to suggest:— "From today we will call Her Ma Anandamoyi."

Bholanath seconded the proposal.

Bholanath and then Shashanka Mohan and Didi had deeply meditated at this holy place, which on occasions was the venue of deep religious gatherings. Answers to many of the unsolved points in those discussions were provided by Ma. One day, during the course of such a meeting, Ma said:

"Whoever has come here, should get ready. So far, nothing has happened. Digging with a spade has just begun. An unknown amount of suffering will have to be endured, many storms will have to be faced. With these blows the one destined to wither, will fall and the one destined to survive, will stay on. There is no room here for petty quarrels and jealousies."

One day, Ma looked at the devotees present and said:

"I am seeing that everything is one and the same. The One, who is embodiment of the soul, the embodiment of knowledge and wisdom; how can there be two? There is only one soul, encompassing the whole universe."

Siddheshwari Kalipuja (1926)

One day, while going somewhere with Bholanath, Ma had the vision of an image of Kali, walking 18 foot up in the ethereal sky. She was eager to come to the lap of Ma. A garland of Hibiscus flowers lay on Her neck. But there was no image of Mahadev under Her feet. Ma said nothing, but lifted Her left arm in the direction of Kali.

It was time for Deepavali when devotees expressed their desire to celebrate Kalipuja. Bholanath asked Ma for Her permission. Ma didn't reply but Bholanath sensed Ma's reaction was positive. As it was just the night before the Kalipuja, and all the image makers would have sold all the images, from where could the image be procured? What will be its size? These were natural questions that one would be faced with, the night before the Kalipuja. Perhaps, due to Ma's kheyal, Bholanath had known that Ma raised Her hand twice that day and so he decided to measure Ma's height in a sitting posture - Ma was then in Samadhi. Somehow, they managed to get Her to sit. Raising Her hands, Bholanath measured the height of two arm's lengths.

It was 11 o'clock at night. Even at that time they found an image of exactly the same size with an image-maker, who had made only 12 images. Eleven of them were made to order. He made the twelfth himself. When Ma saw the image She said, "this was the colour of the image I had seen." Instead of the usual black, it was dark bluish black.

This Kalipuja was performed with great fervour. The lucky and privileged devotees had a glimpse of Ma as Goddess Kali during this occasion.

The time for the final invocation was imminent. Ma was in samadhi but at the right moment, She gestured with Her hand to proceed no further. The fire was kept burning. After sometime, when She returned from Her samadhi, She piously touched the fire. She advised that the sacred fire should be carefully protected. By thus not finally extinguishing the fire did She not initiate the future Savitri Mahayagna? Perhaps; only Ma knows.

Niranjana's wife Binodini brought all the offerings to be made during the immersion of the image of Kali. After the darshan of Kali, Binodini humbly cried to Ma that she could not bear to see this image immersed.

Ma said, "when this kind of thought has come to your mind, it appears that this image wants to stay with us. Let it be kept properly and regular puja be arranged."

This clay-image was shifted from one place to another four times. The fifth and last time, it was moved to the cave of the Ramana Ashram Dhaka. Ma had arranged to offer a garland of Hibiscus flowers to this image daily. Any day it was not offered to the image, Ma would Herself accept it in a miraculous way instead, to maintain the routine.

In 1938, after Ma's birth celebrations, this image was worshiped and thereafter the doors of this Kali Mandir were sealed with cement and bricks as directed by Ma.

Talking about this Kali puja's background, Ma said: "Truly, like an infant jumps onto her mother's lap, the image of Kali jumped to this body's lap. I too, cajoled Her as if she was a child. This was a human body, which was fondling the Brahmamoyi Kali like an infant."

She further said: "This body had seen Kali on the move, without the splendour of Shiva under Her feet. This Kali image had the splendour of the Primordial God (Adya-Shakti). The Kali which came to Ma, was not the awe-inspiring, pitch-black Kali which reigned supreme, philandering on the bosom of Mahakal (an epithet of Shiva), a terribly destructive manifestation. Instead, She was the soft, sweet, dark blue Shyama, traveller in the ethereal. Ma saw Kali without Shiva. Do you know why?"

"The kind of feeling and ecstasy you people bring in to This body reacts to that only. These emotions are manifested from inside This body."

The sacred fire of Yagna, lit during the Kalipuja, continued to burn under the directions of Ma, who delegated this responsibility to the Brahmacharis of the Ashram. Ma instructed them that in case of difficulty in keeping this sacred fire burning, they should follow a particular ritual to rekindle the fire. Whenever such a problem arose, the fire God (Agnidev)—himself appeared before Ma. Ma used to tell of the meeting. Later, when working out the exact time, the presence of Agnidev could be confirmed. Thus in Ma's experience, Agnidev always remained burning, there without a break.

Oblations were offered with Kali-Mantra and Gayatri Mantras to keep this sacred fire burning. Ma was worshipped as the living embodiment of this sacrificial fire, along with the Gods and Goddesses who emerged from it.

In May, 1929, when Ma was staying at Uttama Kutir in Dhaka, Bholanath had already decided to dedicate his life to Kirtan and meditation. Besides, two or three people had joined him to spend the rest of their lives under the blessings of Ma. For them, Ma was an ideal, an eternal source of energy, knowledge, wisdom and sacrifice. But how and why?

For 15 days, Ma used to sieve and drink the dirty water of Dhakeshwari pond, the next 15 days she drank the water of tender coconuts.

She would take only as much as three fingers could hold from the food cooked in the Ashram, or fruits from trees inside the Ashram premises. Sometime Ma would take 8-10 morsels with the help of a small spoon, from a handful of puffed rice mixed with water. The devotees would spend day and night together in puja, yagna, kirtan, and reading religious scriptures. She thus showed how one can remain in Bhagavat Bhava all the 24-hours in service of God or Herself.

At times She would not eat anything and considered the oblations offered to the sacred fire were the same as Her taking Her meals. When the fire would die down, Ma would enliven it with the 'Pranagni' of Her body and protect it. At that moment if anybody was found drowsy while doing Japa Ma would wake him up. Her actions reflected a meticulous way of doing things.

During one Amavasya in Shahbag, Ma asked Didi to bring the sacred fire. Playing with the pot of fire in Her hands, She said, "See here. This sacred fire will be utilised in Mahayagnas"

After the establishment of Dhaka Ashram, Agnidev was installed on the premises. Seeing the all pervasive effect of this fire, Ma said:

"Why Savitri Mahayagna alone? We can hold Vishnuyagna, Rudrayagna — many yagnas - with this sacred fire."

On some other occasion, She was discussing with Acharya Batuda (Agniswat Shastri) the naming of this sacrificial fire, She suddenly said: "You may wish to call this fire by whatever name, but can we not call it—Vishwaroop?"

Batuda was amazed to hear this statement. He conceded that in the Shastras, (the religious scriptures,) he had read Vishwaroop as one of the names of Agnidev.

At different Ashramas of Shree Ma, especially in Kashi and Kankhal, this sacred fire remains lit, with Havans supported by Gayatri Mantra, being performed daily even today.

During the Kalipuja celebrations of 1929, Shree Ma had a divine kheyal for there to be an idol of Ma Annapurna. As the Kheyal dawned, so its implementation followed, with Bhaiji and other followers taking the initiative to establish an Ashram in Dhaka. Arrangements were also made to install the idol of Ma Annapurna on its premises. First, an idol was made of silver. A year later, at the request of devotees, another idol made of Ashtadatu (combination of eight different metals), replaced the silver idol.

The idol was made of Ashtadhatu by the divine Kheyal of Sri Ma. Ma gave all Her gold ornaments, silver utensils etc for the making of this sacred image. Everything was done under Ma's direct supervision. The image was crafted with the best possible mix of the metals to make it most beautiful. Ma herself often visited the sculptor, with Bholanath or Bhaiji, to give instructions.

This is Ma's brief description—

"Devi Annapurna squatting, Her right foot resting on Her left thigh. She should have a bowl in Her left hand. She would distribute food with a spoon with Her right hand. The left hand would have a Trishul, as well as a bag for alms. Annapurna is being asked for alms with both hands outstretched. This is the 'Bhaav'. Slight above and on the left of Annapurna is the image of Kali—in the ethereal space; without Shiva being under Her feet. Only the Shiva of Annapurna will remain.

On 2nd May 1929, Ma came with Bholanath to live formally in the newly constructed Ramana Ashram in Dhaka. Construction of the Annapurna temple also began. Bhaiji had the job of organising the Ashram work, which he did with great sense of responsibility. With Sri Ma in his heart, with the support of Her divine power, Bhaiji would easily accomplish the task of building the Ashram. Behind this pious, selfless accomplishment was his willpower and complete devotion to the service of Ma. He would easily befriend and be close to Ma's other devotees whom he regarded as his own people.

In 1932, during the birth celebrations of Sri Ma, at Brahma-Muhurt the idol of Devi Annapurna, and other idols, were consecrated in Ma's divine presence, by none other than Bholanath. They were installed in the newly-constructed temple as "chal murti", (can be moved if necessary).

During this occasion, Tithi Puja of Ma, revolved round Ma Annapurna as the central deity. Baba Bholanath did all the puja rituals. The celebrations continued from 2nd May to 23rd May, 1932 for 21 days at a stretch.

The Pujas, Kirtans, Havans and Prasad distribution went on without any break for 21 days considering Ma and Annapurna as the same. The disciples seated Ma upon the round platform at the Panchavati, and dedicated their love, respect and faith at the feet of Sri Ma. During this period all the Ashram inmates, the Brahmacharis, the householders and those absorbed in meditation were content with the small amount of food that remained after the offering was made to the sacred fire. On the last day, according to the ritual of Annakut, Bhog offering to Ma was made of more than 108 different items.

During this time, the renowned old mahatma Ram Thakur visited Ma. He prostrated before Ma, She stood before him with folded hands. This drew resentment and protests from the followers. When Baba Ram Thakur learnt this, he said "I have prostrated before the person who deserved to be given that respect". The news also reached Ma, who smiled and said "Baba's revered feet are always placed on the head of this girl."

Dhaka's devotees were pained and disturbed when Ma left the city. They met Ram Thakur, then in Dhaka on a visit, and disclosed to him their plight. Ram Thakur explained: "By building a temple of Ma Annapurna, she has instituted Herself forever amongst you. You must see Ma Annapurna as Ma Anandamoyi."

In 1944, on the banks of the Bhagirathi in Kashi, the construction work of a large Ashram began. But circumstances, Ma's Kheyal and the requests of devotees, caused the move of the deity of Ma Annapurna and the other idols to Kashi Ashram. Ma Annapurna had to come to Kashi, the holiest of the holy places in the universe. Upon her arrival a splendid temple on the banks of the holy Ganges was built. Shri Manmohan Ghosh was the main contributor in designing this temple which was built like Dhaka Annapurna Mandir. In 1950, after Deepavali, at the auspicious moment

of Annakut, Ma Annapurna's idol together with other idols were consecrated once again in the newly built temple.

According to Ma's directions, even today Bhog is regularly offered to Ma Annapurna with a very systematic schedule. Besides special pujas during Purnima, Amavasya, and Annakut with 108 preparations, there is a specific arrangement for Bhog offerings on all the days of the week.

Who is this Kali near Ma-Annapurna?(See note 10). Kali-kal, Mahakaal, the manifestation of terrible destruction, the primordial Goddess of Shakti. To escape from the destructive kaal (time), one has to take refuge in the lap of soft-sweet loving Ma. Was this alone the reason for the descent of Shyama? Who is She, in whose fold even Mahakaal wants to go? Whose power has made Mahakaal the master destroyer of the universe? Therefore, Ma Annapurna is flanked by Mahadev and Ma Kali. Beyond time (or kaal), is infinite happiness and peace. That is why Mantras, Japa, Tapa, and meditation are practised.

Kali is Mahashakti. Kali symbolises beings. Ma Kali wishes to be secure with Parashakti. If we also sacrifice our lust, ambitions and greed, and clean and purify ourselves in dedication at the feet of Ma, we would also be able to get the blessings of Ma as Ma Annapurna.

Notes and References

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4. Matri Darshan by Bhaiji, p. 37.
5. Mother as Revealed to Me by Bhaiji, p. 36-37.
6. Mother as Revealed to Me by Bhaiji, p. 68.
7. From the Life of Sri Anandmoyee Ma by Bithika Mukerjee, p. 63.
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9. Matri Darshan by Bhaiji, p. 70.
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A. Good-bye Dhaka

In 1932, there was a gap of 21 days between Ma's birth date and her birth tithi (lunar date). Therefore, celebrations were held for 21 days without a break. A couple of days after the festivities were over, Ma with Bholanath and Didi, had visited an acquaintance. The lady of that house offered some vegetables and lentils to Didi who put them in the folds of her sari. Thereafter, they visited another home and asked for alms. In this manner, they visited many homes and collected so many things that they had to hire another vehicle to transport them to the Ashram. She had asked all the people from whom She took alms, to take Bhogprasad from the Ashram in the afternoon. This Bhog was prepared from the food items received as alms. Thus, by playing the role of mendicant, Ma satisfied everybody and unknowingly prepared to leave the city forever.

In renouncing the comfortable easy way of life at the Dhaka Ashram, She opted to tread the unknown, much more difficult path of a true wandering ascetic.

On the day of Her departure, Ma went to Siddheshwari to touch the deity of Kali and the peepal tree. By evening, She was in a different mood.

It was 11 o'clock in the night. Most of the followers had returned to their respective homes. Bholanath was fast asleep, after the exhausting festivities for the last three weeks. Ma woke him up and took him along to the temple.

After sometime he was seen getting ready to go somewhere. Meanwhile Bhaiji, too, arrived there probably at Ma's call. Ma was seated on the Panchavati platform. She told Did: "Patience is the foundation of Sadhana".

When She saw Didi disturbed, Ma said again:

"Don't be afraid. Allow This body to act according to its kheyal. If you intervene, I would not be able to survive."

Ma turned to others including Shashanka Mohan, who was present there, and said emphatically:

"This body is going out tonight and do not know when I'll return."

Ma asked Bhaiji to accompany Her. Bhaiji was in a dilemma. His duties and responsibilities at home came before his mind. He said to Ma "Let me go home to collect some money".

But Ma said that time was short and Bhaiji would better make a collection at the Ashram.

When Bhaiji didn't move at Ma's suggestion, She retorted with conviction: "Can you not do so?"

With the resolute Ma in front of him, Bhaiji regained his confidence.

"Yes Ma, I can do it if it is your kheyal."

By 11.30 p.m. on Thursday, 2nd June 1932, Ma left the Ashram for the railway station on foot. Many of Her followers wanted to see Her off at the station, but She discouraged them.

On reaching the station, She was asked where She wanted to go. Ma pointed to the train waiting at the platform. Tickets were bought up to the terminus station of the line. They boarded the train to reach Katihar. Whatever little money they had was almost exhausted. By a strange coincidence, a friend of Bhaiji met them. Inspired by Ma's darshan, he arranged for their further travel.

They reached Dehradun from Katihar via Gorakhpur and Lucknow. Dehradun was completely new to them. It was an unknown place, full of unknown people, an entirely different atmosphere, but Ma ecstatically said, "Nothing is unknown."

They took lodgings at the local kalibari. Subsequently Bholanath and Bhaiji went off to enquire about a remote place and they came to know that Raipur was a village in a remote locale in the middle of the jungle, about 7 km away from the city.

Ma said she could adapt to any place without any problem.

By another coincidence a gentleman, who was going that way, volunteered to help.

B. Ma on the Move (1932-1982)

At 10 o'clock on Wednesday, 8th June 1932, Ma, Bholanath and Bhaiji took shelter in the damp, cramped room of the inn adjoining an old Shiva temple in Raipur. This temple was on a hillock at the end of the village. The pathway was rough and weathered, and became a stream during the rains. The temple was in the midst of clear ground at one corner of which stood a Mango tree, encircled with a vedi-platform around its base. All this looked withered, ill-kept, and neglected. Later on Ma has pointed out the sanctity of this place and said that many saints meditated at that place in Raipur.

The place however, overlooked the beautiful Shivalik ranges. Bholanath liked this place in the foothills of the Himalayas and began his meditation here. They managed to survive on whatever food Bhaiji brought as alms. Sometimes he was given vegetables, on some other occasions flour. The flour was kneaded on a cleaned stone slab and loaf, then roasted and taken with the juice of boiled vegetables. Thus, Bholanath and Bhaiji had begun the very hard, arduous life of an ascetic.

Only Ma knows why She opted for such difficult living conditions in a forlorn place when She could have had the comforts of Dhaka Ashram at Her disposal. But She demonstrated that control of one's desires and sacrifice is a must on the path of Sadhana.

Ma, who had a retinue of followers at Her service for any little chore, had now taken up the role of a mendicant, begging for alms. Where will She go from here? Nobody could know Her mind. She was either lying in a trance-like state in the temple room or She was taking a stroll outside.

Just as the clouds cannot completely cover the bright sun, likewise, despite this forlorn and remote locale, Ma's magnificence could not be kept in the shade. Word spread in villages that an exquisitely beautiful lady was staying in the temple and most of the time She was lying in Samadhi, Her body illuminating a radiance.

Sevaji (Dr. Sharda Sharma) was among those privileged few who had darshan of Ma at that time. Her body exuded an aura which She covered with Her sari. When she slowly returned from Samadhi, the glow used to diminish to that degree.

Gradually, some people braved the jungle for Ma's darshan. Bhaiji, who could speak English, communicated with the visitors, and replied to their queries. Later, people stopped asking questions. They were simply overwhelmed by the magnificent personality of Ma.

Ma's hair, which had become matted due to negligence for a long time, took the shape of a crown. The local women cut off the matted hair, which was in the shape of a cap, still preserved at the Kashi Ashram. After the haircut, Ma - in white clothes—looked like a young Brahmachari.

In March 1933, Shri Hariram Joshi met Ma. He was, then an Inspector with the U.P. Cooperative Society, and was among those people who moved with VIPs. Hari Ram Bhai was so impressed by Ma that he encouraged whoever he met, to have darshan of Ma.

In his book he has written:

"Ma's body exuded a kind of joy and happiness. The pleasant smile on Her face and Her amiable nature had completely transformed Her personality. It is unbelievable that this level of

contentment, of joy and happiness, as mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita, can be attained by a human being."

Baba Bholanath went to Uttarkashi via Mussorie. In Uttarkashi, he began his most arduous meditation on the banks of the Ganga. Ma, on the other hand, moved to Krishnashram and from there to Manohar Mandir, both in Dehradun and nearby places perhaps at Bholanath's instance.

For almost ten years after She left Dhaka, Ma's Leela was evident in Dehradun and the hilly areas nearby. From here Ma's leela spread to the entire north India.

Life in Dehradun (Manohar Mandir).

Among the ladies who visited the mandir in the morning were Laxmiji and Meeraji, the wives of Kashi Narayan Tankha and Dwarakanath Raina respectively.

Ma's magnetic personality—the charm, ambiance and amiability - attracted them to the veranda of the temple where she was putting up. Ma could speak only Bengali which these ladies did not understand. However, that did not deter them from visiting Ma daily with their families. In this manner, the number of visitors increased. Initially the Kashmiris, then Punjabis, Bengalis — people from different provinces came for Ma's darshan.

At the request of Her devotees, Sri Krishna Janmashtami festival, which was a regular feature of Manohar mandir, was attended by Ma that year (1933). Havan was arranged after the puja. The sacred fire for this was specially brought from Vindhyachal Ashram. The place on the verandah where Ma used to sleep earlier was made into a 'Havan Kund' by removing a few stone slabs. Later Ma shifted to one of the rooms in the mandir. Gayatri Havan was performed, so also Kumari and Batuk Puja. For people of this region, this was a novel experience. They were impressed by these rituals.

Gradually, Bhajji taught the regular visitors the way of praying and kirtans which were in vogue at Ramana Ashram, Dhaka. Thus Dehradun became another Shahbag.

Smt Kamala Nehru, the wife of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was staying in Dehradun during those days. Hariram Bhai who used to visit them regularly, wanted to take Mrs Nehru to Ma. He also wanted a meeting of Mahatma Gandhi with Ma, which, he thought, would pave the way for quick success of Gandhi's movement of non-violence. Thinking in this manner was Hariram Bhai's mistake. For, never did Ma show any interest in politics despite giving darshan to several national leaders. Among those stalwarts who met Ma were Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sarojini Naidu, M M Malviya, Jarnalal Bajaj, Sardar Patel, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant and many others.

In July 1933, Kamala Nehru, accompanied by Hariram Bhai, had Ma's first darshan at Anand Square, Dehradun. A pious lady, she was initiated by Swami Saradananda of Ramakrishna Mission. Ma's charming personality attracted her so much that she returned to see Ma again the same day in the evening. She stayed with Ma for a long time before returning home. Ma asked Kamala to visit Her only with her husband's, permission. Once Ma said, "Kamala had infinite love and respect for This body. At the slightest opportunity, she would take This body out for short excursions". Around this time She also organised a Yagna at the Ambika temple, Rajpur, Dehradun. Like the Ashram's female inmates, She wore unstitched clothes, and took part in the yagna with utmost sincerity. For several devotees japa Ahutis were consecrated in this yagayagni. One Ahuti was given after one lakh Japa.

Around this time Ma began the tradition of ten minutes 'Silence' prayer after returning from Rajpur to Dehradun.

Ma with folded hands actually begged devotees for this ten minutes uninterrupted silence daily, throughout their life. Many devotees even in the worst of their lives have followed this routine.

During this time Kamalaji used to visit Ma quite often in the dead of the night. She would sit in meditation beside Ma with full attention, unmindful of the surroundings. She would sleep alongside Ma and would return back home before dawn.

With Ma's attraction and constant meditation, Kamalaji had attained significant spiritual bliss which was evident when at times she went into samadhi. She wanted to give up her social work, inspired by Gandhiji, and come to Ma. But Ma refused her permission.

In October 1935 Kamalaji was recovering at the Bhawali sanatorium when Ma met her. She stayed with Ma for a night in Mussorie when Bholanath and Ma stayed there on their way back from Uttarkashi. Probably, this was Kamalaji's last meeting with Ma.

Kamalaji, after she left for Switzerland to recover from her poor health, kept on writing to Bhaiji to know about Ma's well being.

Once, she wrote:

"I regret to say that you do not write to me often so that I am posted with regular information about Ma. However, I see (visualise) Her at times. Yesterday, I saw Her clad in a broad red-bordered sari."

Bhaiji, who was at Kankhal (Hardwar) those days, wrote back. "It's a fact that the evening, you've mentioned you had seen Her, Ma wore a similar sari, presented by a Bengali devotee."

Kamalaji had a telepathic contact with Ma. This is also evidence of Kamalaji's higher spiritual attainment.

As destined, Kamalaji lived for only three years after her meeting with Ma. Later, her husband Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru came to see Ma on many occasions. Ma, too, had visited Teen Murti House, then the Prime Minister Nehru's residence.

In the later years, many big leaders—including Indira Gandhi - came for Ma's darshan. Indiraji, who had immense love and respect for Ma, used to come whenever she could snatched some time off from her work to visit Ma. At times, her sons Sanjay and Rajiv and their wives accompanied her to Ma's Ashram.

In 1933, the Bengali followers of Dehradun organised Durga Puja in Ma's presence. They invited all non-Bengali devotees to the puja, thereby assembling the devotees of Ram, Krishna, Kali, Durga etc started with Ma as the central figure.

Smt. Laxmi Tankha, a devout follower of Ma, was asked what attraction she saw in Ma when neither could she communicate with Ma (Ma knew only Bengali which Laxmiji didn't) nor she had seen any of Her miracles. Laxmiji's terse reply "Is there any need for miracles in Ma's case? Ma Herself is the greatest miracle to us; what more can anyone want than Her presence? To see Her welcoming smile is more than enough for us."

Dr. Madan Mohan Joshi, brother of Hariram Joshi, was the chief medical officer of Solan (then in the Baghat Kingdom). On Dr. Joshi's persistent request, Ma agreed to visit Solan. It was in March 1934 when Solan was having rains and snowfall, that Ma reached Kalka railway station, and went straight to stay in Salogra cave. This cave, located below the bus stand on the Solan-Simla highway, was so small that Ma could barely sit inside.

When Raja Solan came for Ma's first darshan at this cave, he was astonished by Ma's cheerfulness despite the cramped condition of the cave, with water dripping all over from the ceiling. Raja Saheb saw Ma in a splendid mood as She beckoned him to come inside and suddenly

She broke into peals of laughter. Yogi Bhai (a name given to him by Ma) was completely overwhelmed by the roaring laughter as it came suddenly out of a person apparently so frail, so innocent, with so many peculiarities to Her nature, in that cave. That was the turning point in Yogiraj's life, the rest of which was spent in Ma's proximity. From that time until his death in 1977, Yogiraj, as christened by Ma, lived like a yogi.

Durga Singh, the Raja of Solan, was a religious minded pious person. No child was born to his wife. As per the custom of Princely states Durga Singh could marry again. But he did not. Instead, he took the path, as shown by Ma, and dedicated much of his resources in service of Ma. He also motivated many royal families to come out of their regal homes and follow the path of spiritual bliss.

Raja Durga Singhji who instituted Ma Anandamoyi Vidya Peeth at Almora, regarded Ma and the Kali of Dakshineswar as one and the same.

Since the summer of 1933, Bholanath was absorbed in sadhana at Uttarkashi. The people of Uttarkashi, who showed deep respect for Bholanath, intimated to Ma in 1935 that they were establishing a Kali temple and requested Her presence on the occasion of its consecration ceremony.

This was the beginning of the tradition of festivities at different places in Ma's presence. Ma's devotees from Nainital, Almora, Dehradun, Mussorie etc. played excellent host to Ma's devotees who came from far-off places.

Ma left for the Uttarkashi function in August 1935, along with a group of devotees. The hilly circular track and the beautiful landscape reverberated with the kirtans of Ma's followers. This multi-lingual group included Bengalis, Punjabis, Kashmiris, and people from the hills and plains of Uttar Pradesh. Since the destination was at a high attitude, climbing of the hilly tracks was difficult for many. Some were vomiting, some others complained of breathlessness. Ma kept on cheering them all the way until they all reached Uttarkashi.

The Kali of Uttarkashi was consecrated following full religious rites in the divine presence of Ma. On this occasion, the family priest (Kulguru) of Bholanath was also invited. On returning Laxmi Tankha, who reached Dehradun before Ma and other devotees, had arranged for the group's comfortable stay and return journey.

Ma's devotees saw Baba Bholanath for the first time when he came back to Dehradun via Gangotri. Deeply impressed by his personality, they welcomed Bholanath and started calling him Pitaji (Father).

While returning from Uttarkashi, Ma and Her devotees faced extremely bad weather. With women, old people and children, they came across a hilly stream in its full, rapid flow amid heavy rains. Despite the current, Ma went into the middle of the torrent. Not only did She stand her ground but amidst the rain and frequent lightning, Ma helped everyone in the group, across the river.

This was Ma's Leela, amidst the thunder, rain, and lightning. What a splendid sight was this! Someone has rightly said that Ma's role in that calamity was like the controller of this universe in the act of deliverance from earthly life.

Kirtan at Shimla Kali Bari (*The first Naam yagna in North India*)

After the birth anniversary celebrations of Shri Ma at Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun in 1936, Ma left for Shimla with some of Her devotees. Being the then summer capital of India, Shimla was then buzzing with lots of activities. There, She went for a walk daily in the morning

and evening, attracting passers-by with Her magnificent charm and composure. There too, a following picked up rapidly particularly among those who were members of the 'Harisabha', organisers of an annual kirtan festival from dawn to dusk. That year 1936, some members of Harisabha proposed to organise the kirtan festival in the presence of Shri Ma and Baba Bholanath.

The arrangements were made in line with the Vaishnava tradition of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, including a Tulsi manch around which kirtans would be held. The Naam yagna began after the ceremonial purification on June 22. With holy sandal paste mark on the forehead and garlands of flowers around the neck, the devotees danced around the altar to perform the kirtan. Bholanath, who got up at 6 in the morning, was there until the end without drinking a drop of water. As the sound of kirtan reverberated in this hilly place, Ma's body was beginning to show signs of the Mahabhava.

In spite of Shri Ma's best efforts to control it, the Mahabhava burst out suddenly with Her body shining with an aura, and slokas and mantras streaming out of Her mouth.

Most of those present on this occasion were from respected, well-to-do families. It hardly took any time for them to realise that this manifestation of Ma was something extraordinary and they were lucky to be a witness to this event. It was shocking as well as overwhelming for the citizens of Shimla.

It was at the same place on June 27th when Ma organised a kirtan recital for the first time exclusively by the ladies of Shimla.

In this way, the tradition of Naam Kirtan began in Shimla and then the entire North India - as some devotees at the Shimla Kirtan, who were from Delhi, returned home to carry on the tradition with other like-minded people.

Ma would often say, "Everything is possible through Japa and Kirtan; this purifies the place, the soul, and also those who listen or do it."

The death of Bhaji in 1937, and Bholanath in 1938, sent disturbing waves among the devotees. But Ma remained calm, unmoved and unperturbed.

From 1932 to 1982, this fifty years of Matri Leela, was the Leela of unending and uninterrupted religious festivities centred round Ma. Thus she traveled from one corner to another extreme corner of India, at the earnest desire and request of Her devotees, unmindful of Her comforts and convenience. Millions of Indians and hundreds from abroad had Her darshan. Wherever She went She brought joy and happiness to the surroundings. Festivities over Sri Ma, like a bird on the wing, the focus of the crowd, would promptly bid good bye with great sense of humour leaving the devotees sad and melancholic by Her absence.

It was astonishing to see Ma managing big crowds by Herself even when organisers failed to control them. She could very well organise in limited time, space and often resources, big religious festivals and functions in which everybody could participate.

Looking to their own ease and happiness, devotees started constructing new Ashrams to invite Ma to join them for various religious activities. Most of the time Ma would respond to their calls.

Thus a string of Ma's Ashrams started coming up, mostly during the fifties, and surprisingly all of them were born out of some special events.

At present there are 25 ashrams of Sri Ma in India and two in Bangladesh. Ma frequented all of them - not sticking to one place for long. As soon as the place become comfortable Ma would leave, giving the aspirants on the path the lesson of a hard and austere life.

The vast amount of travelling by Sri Ma enabled thousands of people to have Her divine darshan - not only mankind but even trees, birds and animals. Here only few of the events from Matri Leela are mentioned—

Once, Ma was travelling by car from Kanpur to Lucknow. On the way, she suddenly commented, whilst passing by a village near Unnao, on what a lovely village it was and how lovely the trees were.

The car had already passed the place by the time Sri Ma had commented. Nevertheless, Didi, who was accompanying Sri Ma, asked for the car to turn back. On reaching the spot, Ma went near two trees, one a Neem tree and the other a Banyan tree beside a pond. She caressed them fondly. She asked for flowers and fruit baskets to be brought from the car, and decorated the trees with them, calling them Hari-Hari. Distributing the fruits to the villagers, who had assembled by then, Sri Ma advised them to perform puja of these trees for their well-being. The trees might have been waiting for ages to have darshan of Ma, which is how they attracted Her attention!

Before visiting Kailash, Ma and Bholanath had gone to Nainital. While resting at a Dharmashala, Ma suddenly suggested they went for a walk. Strolling along the banks of Nainital, Ma decided to return home. On Her way back, they saw a bird fall down from a tree. A devotee placed the fallen bird before Ma who looked at it with great kindness and compassion. The bird too looked at Ma, struggling before becoming calm forever.

While the people in Ma's company wondered about the strange happening, Ma mentioned that the bird's earnest and humble request brought Her there.

In another incident, Ma suddenly started from the Kankhal Ashram for an unknown destination. The devotees who were accompanying Her, knew not where they were going. She went to Calcutta where she took up residence in the garden of a local devotee, on the outskirts of the city, thereby by Her sudden arrival, pleasantly surprising Her devotees in Calcutta. In that garden where she stayed lived a pet deer which was unwell. Ma saw the deer, the animal too looked at Ma keenly. The next day that deer died. Ma asked the host to prepare the samadhi for the deer with all the rituals. Evidently, the deer waited for Ma's darshan till that day.

From now, only occasional events from Matrileela are mentioned.

In the forties, Ma's kheyal took her to the ancient religious city Kashi, (Varanasi). For the next two decades, Kashi remained the centre of Ma's Leela.

Initially Ma lived on a boat on the Ganges, the river that purified the holy city. Didi was looking for a suitable place for Kashi Ashram. Once, when Ma and Didi were relaxing in the waiting room of Lucknow railway station, they saw a map of Varanasi city hanging on the wall. Ma quickly went up on the table and pointing to a spot on the map, said "Look Didi, this is where your Ashram is."

Ma had placed Her finger between the localities of Assi and Bhadaini. Ma's Kheyal and Didi's follow-up took shape in 1942 when land was procured exactly at the same place. In the year 1944 under a tin shed Basanti puja was performed, at the spot where stands the Chandi Mandap of the Ashram today.

On August 16th, 1941, the disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, Jamnalal Bajaj came to Raipur, Dehradun to see Shri Ma. He had come for a day but actually returned only after a fortnight. He was deeply moved by the solemn surroundings of the Ashram and of course, Ma's divine presence. Jamnalal spent hours talking to Ma. He said, he was lucky to get Ma as mother and Mahatma as his father. Planning to build a house near the Ashram, he even bought land.

But Ma was characteristically evasive. "Does one know how long he will carry on? Here, there is no assurance of a single breath."

On his return from Dehradun, Jammalal Bhai followed Ma's instructions to live in a hut at a remote place called Gopuri. Abstaining from speech during the entire day, he spent his time in kirtan, bhajan and service of cattle.

On 10th February 1942, that is seven months after he met Ma, Jammalal Bajaj breathed his last at Wardha, Maharashtra.

The first meeting between Sri Ma and Mahatma Gandhi was on 20th February 1942, at Sevagram. To the Mahatma, Ma said she had seen him before, in Dhaka, from a distance.

Bapu was spinning the wheel when She entered the hut. Ma said to him, "Father your mad daughter has come."

Mahatma replied, "If you were mad, Jammalal Bajaj wouldn't have been so influenced. He got the peace of life from you in two weeks, which I couldn't give him in 30 years!"

Bapu had heard about Ma from Kamala Nehru. When he addressed Ma as Kamala's Guru, She flatly refused to accept it. Ma said: "Father, this body is nobody's Guru."

Among those present on that occasion in Sevagram were Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Vinoba Bhave and others. Despite requests from several people, Ma spent only one night in Sevagram.

On 14th January 1947, the occasion of Chaitra Sankranti, Savitri Mahayagna began at Kashi Ashram. During the three years of the yagna, the venue was visited by several saints and Mahatmas, and thousands of Ma's devotees from India and abroad. The Ashram looked as if some fair was being held with continuous religious festivities. During this period, Ma quite often visited Kashi Ashram. Ma Anandamoyi Girls school (Kanyapeeth) was now permanently located at Varanasi. During the Jhoolan Purnima and Janmashtami, the students of this school used to enact plays in Ma's presence. Sometimes, even Ma took part. Meant for only ladies, men were not allowed there without Ma's permission.

During Jhulan festival in the month of August 1952, these girls were playing some drama with Ma in the centre. Ma asked them "If this body arranges tomorrow's Leela, would you like it?" (See note 2). Everybody agreed to it.

Students, teachers, some senior girls of the Ashram - each of them knew their part in the play individually. But one didn't know what the other would do.

The play started at night. At one corner, Didi was absorbed in Shivpuja. At the other corner, Ganga Didi was doing Krishnapuja. Both were sitting straight, fully concentrated in their meditation. As was customary, a swing hung from the ceiling in the middle of the hall. In the southern part of the hall, on a pedestal was the seat of Ma, Didi Ma and Mouni Ma. One girl stood as "Shankaracharya" among her 'disciples' in one place. While little girls performed yogasana at a distance from them.

Ma, as always, was in the green room until she came out as an old lady, wrapped in a white sari. An old devotee, given the job of an announcer, declared, "Tirthavasani Ma, a book is needed there," Ma gave the book as requested.

Main lights were put off. In the dim light, everybody sat in meditation. Ma quickly sat on Her seat. Everybody played the role advised to them. Eyewitnesses claim it was a wonderful event of Ma's Leela.

In this manner, Ma educated and entertained Her pupils through the medium of plays and sports.

During Holi in 1951 Ma was in Vrindavan.(see note 3). After the Rasleela, Ma was returning along with Her devotees when the group were confronted by a beautiful black cow. It came running through the crowd of Her followers; they tried to but could not stop it. Finally, Ma

went near the cow, caressed it and said, very affectionately. "Mother, we have met now. You may return happily." Strange as it may seem, the cow responded to Ma's words and affection and left the place.

The same year, Ma's birth celebrations were held in different places of Punjab, mainly Ambala. This function was organised at the initiative of Haribaba and Avadhoot Swami Krishnanandaji. In this small township, Ma frolicked in the fields, canals, and trees as She enjoyed fresh air of the countryside.

In 1952, the major celebrations in Punjab were held in Khanna. On the request of Trivenipuri Maharaj, Khanna was chosen as the venue. (The local Sanskrit college in Khanna is due to Triveni Puriji's efforts). But a little before the scheduled celebrations, Khanna Baba Maharaj left this world forever.

The celebrations were very well organised by the disciples of the late Triveni Puriji and Avadhootji. As in Ambala, Ma frequented the fields and the green surroundings. Once, She reached a cluster of houses, which, she was told, housed several Mahatmas. She sat on a platform under a tree nearby, and pointed to the lush green foliage even in the month of May, the peak of Indian summer.

Sri Avadhootji had invited artists from Vrindavan to decorate the podium and place of Puja on the main tithi day. They were expert in making a beautiful house of Jasmine flowers and banana leaves (Phool Bangla) which was prepared for the occasion.

In 1952, Ma went on a tour of South India along with 14 people, which included Haribaba and Sri Avadhootji Maharaj. The tour was organised by Ms Talyarkhan, who had lived at Ramana Maharishi's Ashram. Ma was given a rousing reception everywhere She went during this trip. On this tour, She also had darshan of Shiv in an image of Krishna.

On return, Ma's Kheyal was to institute a Shivlinga. Therefore, in Vrindavan Ashram, first at Shivkuti and later Panchashiv temple it was installed in the mainhall of the Ashram.

On 18th February 1953, Ma reached Vrindavan for the inauguration of the new Ashram and special puja in the Shiv temple. Eight days later the Ashram was formally opened in the presence of several saints. The Ashram of Swami Sharananandji just adjacent to Ma's ashram was also inaugurated on the same day.

28th February was Holi.(See note 4). After the Rasleela, devotees sprayed colour on Ma. In a sudden change of mood, Ma too started playing. The joy of the devotees knew no bounds as Ma threw some colour powder upwards; the colour seemed to stand still in the sky. Someone handed Her a colour spraying gun which Ma used effectively to colour everyone present, as if spraying Her love and compassion on everybody. After playing with Her devotees, Ma went to Pandit Sundarlalji's house and sprayed colour on him.

Panditji said, "I will be impressed if you can manage to spray colour on Haribaba."

Ma's next stop-over, therefore, was Haribaba's residence. Haribaba had kept his door locked from inside. When he heard that Ma had come, Haribaba looked out from his terrace. That was Ma's chance to spray him.

From Haribaba's ashram, Ma went to Swami Akhandanandji's place. She did the same and said smilingly; "Father is a Sannyasi but he is now in Vrindavan."

People around laughed at Ma's comment but She asked for his pardon for this childish behaviour and left for Krishnanandaji's Ashram. She was in no mood to leave anyone out. Accompanied by kirtans and several devotees, She also visited the ashram of Kathia Baba. Thereafter She sprayed colour on cattle, trees, plants; whosoever and whatever came within range. This was Ma's wonderful way of playing the festival of colours.

One day during satsang. Pandit Sunderlal said:

"Ma, we are all beggars. We beg for your pity and compassion." Ma replied, "And I am the poorest of all who all the time beg you to surrender all your desires, jealousies, lust, vanity, anger etc to God."

Haribaba's disciple Manohar, who was impressed by the splendid sprawling seven acre ashram of Ma at Vrindaban, suggested a temple of Gaur Nitai in that place. Ma's Kheyal took shape and construction work for this temple began in right earnest.

The idol of Gaur-Nitai, made of eight alloys (Ashtadhatu,) was carved by an eminent artist of Calcutta, Nitai Pal. On Holi-Purnima day in 1955 this temple was formally consecrated amidst festivities in the presence of Ma and other Mahatamas.

Purna Kumbh at Prayag (1954)

Sri Ma was camping at Prayag and many festivities were going on. Haribaba had already reached there. One day the Dashanami sect visited the camp, the next day Udasi sect, then Vaishnav sect and so on. Thus there was a celebration each day. The visitors were highly pleased by the manner Ma entertained them—"Excellent, faultless arrangements—" remarked one sadhu. One day Shankracharya of Jyotir Math also visited the camp.

It was 2nd February 1954. The last quarter of the night was a very auspicious time for the holy bath at the sangam. Swamiji (Swami Paramanand of our Ashram) had hired two launches which were to take Ma's devotees to the sangam. Before leaving everybody bowed before Ma. Ma asked them to remember God's name all the time. After they left, Ma went up to the camp gate and after having a look at the swarming crowd remarked "look at the ocean of humanity on the move—for one goal on the path of salvation."

Returning, Ma lay down but was in a strange mood which hinted at some kind of impending danger. Suddenly at about 9 o'clock she uttered, "They are under tremendous pressure gasping for breath. What images of death."

After a while the sad news broke of a terrible accident at the site of the Mela.

Ma said- "This body could clearly see the heaps of dead bodies. When the accident occurred this body too felt the pressure and gasped for breath."

To the question whether these deaths were unnatural Ma said-"As per the religious scriptures it is so. But here it is different. Here the holy site of the Kumbh Mela, the Triveni Sangam, the sacred presence of Mahatamas, definitely the souls of the dead are moving on upward. Mahamahopadhyay Gopi Baba said, "I know a true incident in which the dying person's soul left his body for the heavenly abode before death actually occurred. In this case too, I believe that there is no question of an unnatural death as the soul of the dead has made their way to heaven."

In 1954, Ma stayed at the Almora Ashram for almost two and a half months—from April 14 to June 27. Located amidst picturesque surroundings near the temple of Pataldevi, the Almora Ashram has a Shiv Mandir and the samadhi of Bhajji.

That year, devotees of Ma celebrated Her birth anniversary at Almora. Except marriage, all other functions were held in Ma's presence. Sacred thread ceremony, 25 years of married life, Annaprasan, Bhagavat Saptah and several other religious ceremonies were held. Avadhootji Maharaj had daily reading of Gita and devotees of Haribaba used to enact plays about religious stories.

People of this hilly region travelled from far-flung areas on foot across the hills to have Ma's darshan. One person walked nine days to reach Ma at Almora ashram. He had cherished the desire to meet Ma Anandamoyi since 1937 when She went for a pilgrimage to Kailash Mansarovar.

On reaching the Ashram, he was expressing doubts to someone as to whether he would have darshan of Ma this time, and just at that moment the doors of Ma's room just opened, and Ma came out, ever-smiling, as if she knew about this gentleman's long cherished desire.

The day before Ma was to leave Almora, hundreds of woman of this area stayed at the Ashram at night and did Kirtan. Ma told them. "I'm always with you. This body doesn't suggest that you sit straight, hold your breath, purify yourself and so on... In whatever circumstances you are, I am ever with you. Be sure about that," She said.

Black Gopal of Kashi Ashram

Whosoever has seen this idol of 'Gopal' would not be able to forget its magnetic attraction.

In 1954 when Ma was in Kashi one of Her devotees disclosed to Her about this idol which was in the possession of a local priest. He told Ma that this idol belonged to someone, who was in Pakistan. The priest was not receiving any money from him for the puja and upkeep. He could not manage on his own. Therefore he had decided to immerse the idol in the holy Ganges.

Ashram inmates wished for this image to be installed at Vrindaban ashram which was being set up at that time. Enquiry revealed that the priest wanted money for puja and upkeep of the idol for the last three years. Talks in this regard remained inconclusive.

Later one day, in Dehradun, Ma was resting when she abruptly said: "For just Rs.500, You (God) could not come. Let's see!

On 9th August 1954, on Her arrival at Kashi, Ma was informed that the priest was now ready to give the idol without any conditions. She immediately sent the Ashram brahmachari to bring 'Gopalji' and arranged for the idol's arrival at Kashi Ashram.

During the Jhulan festival the students of the Kanyapeeth used to enact many plays (Leela) with Ma, with Gopalji placed on the swing. With a special puja on Janmashtami, Gopal was installed at Smriti temple, beside the Annapurna temple. A lot of fun started with the arrival of Gopal at Kashi Ashram.

When Ma was in Ranchi during Durgapuja, a devotee came there from Calcutta. She was a devotee of Raman Maharshi, she never did puja of Gopal. In her dream, she saw herself sitting on a terrace facing the Ganges when a boy of blue black complexion came and sat on her lap.

During the Durga Puja at Ranchi, she was startled to find a similarity between the boy in her dream and the picture of Kashi Ashram's black Gopal. Curiosity led her to accompany Ma from Ranchi to Kashi. She was astounded when she saw Gopal's idol at Kashi.

She went to the terrace of Kashi Ashram, and found the locale exactly the same as in her dream. After this incident, she worshipped Gopal in many ways.

During Janmashtami in 1957, Ma was in Dehradun. But She had instructed people to move Gopal from his throne very carefully. Ma asked about Gopal of whoever came from Kashi to Dehradun,

Later Ma mentioned "Gopal came and repeatedly pointed to This body with His small, pinky hands as if he was physically hurt, injured in several parts of his body."

Meanwhile, Ma's body had pain in the neck and arms. Was that related to Gopal's hurt? When Didi asked Ma about it, She did not say anything clearly.

She however did say, "Look, how awake Gopal is! When there was talk of sending Him to Vrindavan, the money factor came in the way. But without any hassle, He came to Kashi Ashram on the day of Jhulan Purnima.

Dancing on His small feet He has even pulled the gold chain of one lady devotee. He has asked for a gold crown from another devotee. There are lots of such incidents of Gopal's playful mood.

Some devotee presented a beautiful, bejewelled Sandalwood throne for Gopal. After a customary puja on 12th August 1963 Gopal was placed on this throne.

Sri Ma once said; "When this body was busy in Sadhana at Bajitpur, one Gopal used to keep it company. Is that not the same Gopal? Who knows?"

From August 15 to 19, 1954, the students of the Kanyapeeth celebrated the Jhulan festival with Gopal and Ma. They enacted many plays (Leela).

Two years later, from May 2 to 27, 1956 the devotees of Ma celebrated Her 60th birth anniversary with great enthusiasm, love and respect at Kashi. Mahatamas arrived in Kashi from every nook and corner of the country, not to speak of the number of devotees who dropped in for this big occasion.

The pandal was beautifully decorated. Among the various programmes held during this occasion was Raslila, Ramlila from 8.30 to 11.30 in the morning, followed by Kirtan by Sri Haribaba. Later, Haribaba's group would organise mass reading of the Ramayana prior to the talks by several Mahatamas.

The evening session would begin with Haribaba's Kirtan, the daily routine of total silence from 8.45 P.M. to 9.00 P.M., and then Matri satsang. The last programme attracted the maximum crowd, sometimes even seven to eight thousand people. How amazing!

The night used to be devoted to musical programs by eminent artists before this audience of seven to eight thousand. Sarod player Ali Akbar Khan, the son of Ustad Alauddin Khan, and Sitar player Ravi Shankar were among those who kept the crowd spellbound during the celebrations.

The festivities began with Ram Archa (Special Pooja of Sri Ram) on the verandah of the Chandi mandap from May 2nd and continued for the next 22 days. Shrinath Shastri was the chief priest for the Bhagavat Saptah. Brahmins did 'Chandipath' followed by Rudrabhishek, Shivarchana, Vishnu Yagna etc.

Among these pujas one was most drawn to Sri Ma's Tuladan beautifully arranged as laid down in the scriptures. Eye-witnesses have found this most fascinating and unique. At the end, were Chaturved Path and Basanta Puja. Puja of the major temples in Kashi, Gangapuja, service to lepers, Kumari Puja, Akhand Ramayan path were also done during this occasion. The Akhand Tapa and Kirtan also continued for 26 days without a break.

The festivities ended on May 27 with special Tithi puja. Someone said, "We had only read in Puranas and Mahabharat about Rajsuiya Yagna, but we were lucky to witness it today."

On August 25, 1954, Ma entered the newly built Kalkaji ashram in Delhi. The devotees organised Naam Yagna, for the first time in the Ashram premises in the presence of Ma.

The circular-shaped hall in Delhi Ashram has been built keeping in mind the liking of the Delhi devotees for Naam Yagna. This Ashram was the venue for 'Sanyam Saptah Mahavrata' from November 22 to 28, 1957.

Rajgir, a small town 50 miles away from Patna, was once Ma's most preferred spot where She could spend time, away from crowd. At Rajgir, She would frequently get lost in the bamboo jungles at Venuvan. She would sit there alone.

It is said that Mahatama Buddha had come to Rajgir after leaving his home forever. At the time of Buddha's Mahanirvana, there were 18 monasteries in Rajgir. It is said, that King Bimbsar, had felicitated him and other bhikkhus and offered them Venuban as a gift.

History tells us that during the monsoons, Buddha lived and preached here on a number of occasions. After Buddha's Mahanirvana, King Bimbsar built a stupa, commemorating his life.

On 5th January 1955, Ma came to the new ashram at Rajgir. This year Ma's birth celebrations were held in Solan from May 4 to 11. At the initiative of Yogibhai, several Mahatmas and devotees and of course Ma, graced the occasion. Ma stayed at Solan from April 24 to July 11. The Guru Purnima festival was also held at Solan.

This year's celebrations were held despite heavy rain with storm and thunder showers on the day of the main Puja. The Raja's men had decorated the pandal only to have it all spoiled by the weather, which pushed the audience under the sheds. Despite all this, however, the fervour of the festivities remained.

Similar situations have risen in the past too. Ma mentioned about Basanti Puja at Siddheswari, Dhaka which too faced torrential rain and storms, so much so that panicky devotees implored Ma to stop the rain. Unperturbed, Ma continued to sing kirtan in Her melodious sweet voice, in the open. Several others joined Her. Those who still held back for fear of spoiling their clothes, were compelled to leave shelter as Ma sprayed water on them. Amidst the heavy rain, kirtan continued with great fervour. Ma then asked everybody to collect the prasad in the corner of their sarees. After taking the prasad, Ma and all the devotees went to bathe in the pond nearby. By the time, they returned from the pond, the rains had stopped. Thus went on the leela. There were other similar instances though the locations were different.

In 1955, the Kalipuja at Ranchi Ashram was held in Ma's presence on November 13. An image of Kali that looked living was installed for the occasion. Nirvananand Brahmachari was doing the consecration pujas, touching Kali's chin and then heart. Ma was sitting close to the image touching it.

After sometime, Ma said, "The pendant of the chain round Kali's image is moving as if pushed by her breath."

In utter disbelief, the priest discovered that the pendant was stuck near the heart by the fresh coat of paint.

On the request of Swami Sukdevanandaji of Paramartha Niketan, Rishikesh (who had attended the 60th birth anniversary celebrations of Ma at Kashi), Ma went to Rishikesh on June 6, 1956. She was given a ceremonial welcome by more than 300 Ashram inmates of Swamiji as well as Shri Avadhootji and Haribaba and their respective followers. It was a memorable event to watch.

Paramartha Niketan, located on the banks of the Ganges, is a huge Ashram with more than three hundred rooms meant for religious minded people who spend their time in Sadhana, Bhajans, Kirtans, and Satsang. From 4 o'clock in the morning to 11 o'clock in the night, with a few hours break in the afternoon, some or other religious activity was going on.

During Her stay in Rishikesh, Ma visited Swami Shivanandaji's ashram one day.

On 29th Aug 56 on the auspicious day of Janmashthami (Lord Krishna's Birthday) it was Ma's Kheyal to weigh Gopal nine times with nine different articles. 1) Tulsi leaves, including one 'Gold Tulsi, 2) Panchamrita 3) Big, White Batasa (made of sugar), 4)Fruits, 5) Ashtadhatu, 6) Basmati rice, 7) Til (a kind of spice), 8)Ghee (clarified butter), and 9) White clothes.

The first seven articles were more than the weight of the Gopal idol. Strangely, at the time of weighing with clothes, the balance did not drop. Ma asked for more white clothes and said, "This awakened Gopal has the old habit of stealing clothes."

It was Ma's Kheyal that this time the weighing should be exact. But neither did She want clothes cut to balance the weight. Instead, pure ghee (clarified butter) which was white too, was used as a substitute. This ghee was sent by a devotee from Shillong. Now both Gopal and clothes with Ghee weighed the same.

Someone asked Ma. "What difference would it have made had the clothes slightly outweighed the idol as with the previous articles?"

Ma said, "Ma balances the weight so that no harm to children may occur."

On April 13, 1956 devotees for the first time at Kashi celebrated the sannyas festival of Giriji (Didima).

Akhand (Uninterrupted)—Kirtan started at 4 o'clock in the morning for the next 24 hours. Usha Kirtan, Mangal arti, Guru Bandana, Geeta, Chandi, Upanishad reading and then Guru Puja, arti and Pushpanjali were performed. As usual, Shrimad Bhagavat and Upanishads were read publicly followed by evening arti, kirtans, and bhajans. After the period of silence, there was a discourse on Giriji. All these were organised in the presence of Ma.

Ma left Kashi for Calcutta on 1st October 1956. Many devotees accompanied Her. Suddenly, on the way, Ma had a Kheyal to alight at the station at Gaya. With two or three companions, Ma got down while the rest of the party continued their journey.

From Gaya, Ma went to Bodhgaya. Her company included Narayan Swami, Udasji and Dasu. All of them were having darshan at the temples when they noticed a pleasant aroma of flowers in that area. Ma said: "Buddhadeb has presented himself today through the scent of flowers."

From this place, they went to Vishnu Pad Mandir. It was around midnight and they expected that temple to be closed. However, to their surprise, they found not only the temple open but that the decoration of Vishnupad Padma was in progress.

The Padpadma was covered with white sandal paste and upon that paste layer were drawn a Shankh (Conch), Chakra (circle) Dhvaja (Flag) and Ankush (hook with a long handle)— all auspicious symbols. The bower of Padpadma was covered with Tulsi leaves upon which were placed garlands of white flowers.

Everybody watched this adornment with great delight.

The moment Ma came out of the temple, the priest announced that a gold Shesnag would be decorated and dressed.

They went back inside to see many golden hooded Nags (serpents) were placed around Vishnupadpadma. The Arti followed after which the doors of the temple were closed.

Due to Ma's divine blessing, people were able to watch that spectacle. If the visit had been a little earlier or later they would have been deprived of this magnificent event! But Ma was there at just the right time!

In 1960, 'Sanyam Saptah' was organised from October 21 to 27 at Naimisharanya. According to the programme, a discourse on Brahma Vaivarta Purana was scheduled to be held at the initiative of Yogibhai. But the Purana was not available at the place where Maharishi Vedvyas had composed the 18 puranas.

The Purana was procured and read only after a lot of effort by Avadhootji Maharaj.

It was Ma's Kheyal to establish at this place a temple dedicated to the Puranas. Her Kheyal was fulfilled when a devotee pledged to donate the entire construction cost of the proposed temple.

Ma said, this year the flood has indicated how wide the Gomati could flow. She suggested the Hanuman Tila (hillock's top) as the ideal place for this temple. Needless to say, the spot as

suggested by Ma was chosen, and a beautiful temple was built there, which was consecrated in Ma's divine presence in November 1967.

Back to the Sanyam Saptah which was over by Oct 28, 1960. After that, a huge pandal was erected for reading of Shrimad Bhagavat. There were rows to seat 108 pandits who came from all over India. Everyone had a small desk before him, decorated with yellow silk cloth upon which were kept Shrimad Bhagvat and Panchapatra. On the occasion these pandits, attired in yellow clothes, faced the chief speaker, Batuda, whose seat was on a raised platform. The reading was done in Sanskrit for three hours each, morning and evening.

In another pandal a famous Bhagvat exponent, Dandi Swami Vishnuashramji, talked in Hindi both in the morning and evening. Swami Akhandanandaji Saraswati also used to speak briefly on Bhagavat regularly. In this way, Bhagavat's nectar was overflowing there.

After this festival was over Pandit Vishnudatt Mishra was returning home to Kashi. At Balamau railway station, he got down to fetch drinking water. As he was passing by the track, the engine of a goods train hit him and his right arm was separated from his body.

People were shocked to see him in that condition. But they were even more shocked when Panditji picked up his arm and went to the platform. The astonished station master sent him elsewhere immediately as no facilities to treat him were available at the station.

There was no sign of pain on Panditji's face; to people's queries, he said "I was destined to die (Mrityu yoga), but Bhagavat path enabled me to reduce the pain and suffering."

Sri Ma said later: "This kind of wisdom and knowledge he got only through the Bhagavat."

On the occasion of the Haridwar Kumbha Mela, on 13th April 1962, Ma was staying there at Baghat house in Kharkhari. Suddenly in the afternoon She came with Yogi Bhai and Gopi Baba to the ghat. At the nearby cremation ground, the final rites of a dead were being performed. As Ma proceeded to watch the rites, the devotees followed Her.

At the cremation, soldiers and police were present, giving full honours to the dead person. He was a senior officer of the force, who was on duty at the Kumbha Mela when his end came. That person had never met Ma in his life so then how Ma was present at his funeral? Was Ma there to honour this selfless worker?

On January 21, 1963, Raibahadur Gujarmal Modi had organised a ten-day satsang programme at Modinagar on the occasion of consecrating the temples of Laxmi Narayan, Durga and Maheshwar. He had invited his Guru, Shri Krishnanand of Gangotri, Ma Anandmoyi and several other Mahatamas and devotees for the occasion. A Raslila troupe came from Vrindavan. Ma and Her group were lodged in the beautiful 'Krishnashram'.

Modi's Guru Krishnanandji was then 100 years old but none could guess it from his quick movements and excellent physique. Guruji always lived in a cold place such as Gangotri without clothing; totally abstaining from speech, he never came down to the plains. He graced this occasion to break the tradition only at the request of Ma and Shri Modi.

On February 3, the festival at Modinagar concluded with day-long Akhand Kirtan that began at sunrise and ended at sunset without break. The last program was Ma's melodious Kirtan which mesmerised the audience of thousands and kept them spell bound.

On February 11, 1963 She was in Jodhpur. At 9.30 p.m. Ma suddenly requested Swami Chinmayananda of our ashram to send a telegram to Narayan Swami at Kankhal Ashram.

"Request Giriji to take care of her health."

As Ma was to meet Giriji in Delhi only two days later what was the need for such a telegram? Nobody could make out until Ma reached Delhi (See note 6).

On the night of February 10, at 2.30 a.m., Giriji wished to leave her body. She sat in an Asana for the whole night. First, she saw again her previous life, then she had a vision of various other things. In the morning, she left her seat late. Her routine was to go for her bath in the Ganges, have darshan of Daksheshwar Mahadev, then prolonged Japa. Bimaladi, now Swami Dayanand, had accompanied her. She distributed wheat flour and jaggery as alms before returning to the Ashram and sitting in meditation at the Tulsi manch. About this time, Ma was watching her from Jodhpur.

Ma said about the vision: "Giriji was not opening her eyes, her external senses were barely present. After a long time, she slowly opened her eyes. She was absorbed in a very deep meditation."

Eyewitnesses at Kankhal corroborated Ma's words: Giriji had many supernatural or transcendental visions. She saw the steersman of the boat which transported people from this world to the other. They were together in the boat, and she told him that she had already crossed over. She asked him what would happen to those people waiting on the banks for this ferry? Would he help all of them to cross?

Three times the steersman said he would do it.

At that time, she wished that everyone should have their thoughts on God, and none should feel pain and desire and lust. None should go to hell.

Then she saw a kingdom illuminated by an aura. She wondered where her near and dear ones were. God indicated that each was at their respective level. Once again Giriji said, "They should not suffer." The reply came thrice, "They won't suffer."

Giriji had many more visions.

This was a day of Mahabhav. Her message was that salvation would only come when others could also have it. Birds, animals, pests, insects, trees — none should suffer the pain of birth and death.

Until nightfall, such visions continued. After that Didima sat under the Bel tree. Batasas were brought which she herself threw into the air (distributing prasad) and sang Kirtan. The bhav was that through Naam Kirtan and 'Hari Loot', she would not get up again.

It was at this time that Ma said: "Won't you look at me?"

Ma did not move Her eyes from Giriji's. Later Ma said, "This body subtly connected to that of Giriji's. So that she may not be able to leave her body."

It was seen that after this subtle eye-to-eye contact that Giriji regained energy.

In some context, Ma had mentioned the sincere, dedicated Sadhana and bhajan of Didima in her Purbashram. Her husband's indifference to worldly things never perturbed Didima. Her faith in God was absolute and unparalleled.

Seeing the ever growing crowd of devotees, one day Narayan Swami commented—

"Ma, seeing the way new people claim a place in Your lap, it seems that no place will be left for us."

Ma replied: "Vishwanath, Ma Annapurna's lap is not so small. If there is no place in such a wide bosom, then forget about it."

Ma arrived at Raipur Ashram, Dehradun on July 29, 1963. It was this Ashram where She first settled after coming from Dhaka in 1932. The room where She lived years ago, had changed in shape and structure completely.

This time She was here from July 31 to August 5, when the Jhulan festival was celebrated. Among the crowd of devotees, were many foreigners, who came to see Ma from faraway places.

Ma returned to Raipur on September 11 and stayed for 15 days. This time crowd was so large that people had to listen to the discourses by standing outside the Ashram premises.

Installation of Radha-Krishna at Vrindavan.

As his late grandmother wished Yogi Bhai, the Raja of Solan, proposed to install an image of the divine couple Radha-Krishna at Vrindavan ashram. Ma agreed to it. The foundation stone for this temple was laid at a place between the Gour Nitai and Shiva temples there, in the presence of Ma.

The Rajmata of Gwalior, Vijayraje Scindia, a regular visiter to Ma, was impressed by the idol of Gour Nitai at Vrindavan. She ordered an idol of Krishna for her own private temple from Calcutta's image-maker Nitai Pal, who was had sculpted that impressive Gour Nitai.

The image Nitai Pal had sculpted on his own, was indeed fantastic. But instead of the usual 'Tribhangi' mudra, it was Krishna in his dancing stance—the right foot firmly on the ground while dancing on the toes of his left foot. Rajmata didn't find it in tune with the Vaishnavite tradition.

She took it home but two successive deaths—first her husband and then her eldest daughter—led her to part with this idol.

Ma told her: "If you are not keen on keeping this idol, you can give it to this body."

During this course of discussion, Rajmata referred to the Krishna idol as 'Chhaliya' —the deceiver.

During the Durgapuja in 1964 while giving the idol to Ma at Vrindavan, the Rajmata said again: "Ma, this Chhaliya has made my life miserable. I am giving this Chhaliya to you."

The "Chhaliya" title of Krishna was first pronounced by Sri Ma in Her merciful voice with pity when She had seen the loving Krishna in the form of 'Radhapukar', at the hut built by Yogibhai in Solan.

Ma was surprised to hear the same word for Sri Krishna coming from the Rajmata.

On the Mahashtami of Durgapuja, the 'Chhaliya' was placed beside Ma, decorated with flowers, sandal paste, garlands and clothes, and worshipped by the Rajmata. At the time of the puja, Prabhudatt Brahmachariji arrived suddenly with fresh butter and milk. These were considered essential for Krishna puja, but were not available at the time. This too, it seems, Chaliya arranged for Himself.

Ma said, "God, you have made your own arrangements!"

After the puja Rajmata said with deep respect to Ma:

"You are the Radha of our 'Chhaliya'."

This is how this temple of Krishna came to be called Chhaliya Mandir. Rajmata and the Raja of Solan volunteered to bear the construction cost of this temple.

Later Ma said: "She had seen that, at this very place, Krishna sat under a Babool tree on the banks of Yamuna, looking down at the river with his beautiful out-stretched neck."

It is possible that once the Yamuna flowed there. For, when the place was dug up for construction of a plinth, layers and layers of sand were uncovered down to an unusual depth. The cost of building went up for this reason. Ma said the expenditure over the amount pledged, would be borne by Herself.

Vrindavan dham's devotees worship the divine pair together. Therefore, ashtadhatu images of Chaliya's Radha and Yogi Bhai's Radha-Krishna were procured from Calcutta. On September 15 the images were installed at the temples but not before Avadhootji had organised a huge procession on September 7th in which the images were taken round Vrindavan. The procession included

horses, elephants, and several floats depicting the life of the divine pair. Ma and Sharananandaji too joined the procession. The next day, Naam Kirtan was arranged at the temple's hall. Ma was in great spirits during these festivities. On the concluding day, it was Ma who began the Kirtan:

"Shri Krishna Chaliya Anand Lal
Braj Ramana Pran Gopal."

In 1967, Jhulan and Janmashtami festivals were organised at the hall of the Vrindavan ashram. Chhaliya Mandir was the venue for daily Raslila (the tradition continues until today).

The Jhulan celebration began on August 16. A swing was hung in front of the Chhaliya temple. During the evening prayers, Ma Herself placed the divine pair (idols) on the swing. One day, eleven swings were put up at the hall. The Radha Krishna of the Raslila party, which enacted the plays, played on each of the eleven swings. It was a memorable scene to watch.

This Janmashtami there were two important pujas on two different nights (27 and 28 August). A Naam kirtan party from Delhi organised the Naam Kirtan on 27th August, Ma appreciated their performance.

On the 2nd of September, the Goswami of Radhaballabh temple, Vrindavan built a beautiful boat-shaped house of flowers (Phool Banela) in front of Chhaliya temple. The Goswami, who had seen Chhaliya in a boat cruise in his dream, built this house with flowers and plaintain leaves so wonderfully that it became a piece-de-art. Even the idols of Chhaliya and Krishna were decorated as boatmen with flowers.

It has been observed that whenever errors occurred in any puja Ma's body was hurt. Similarly, at the time of consecration of Mahaprabhu at Vrindavan ashram, a mistake was committed at the time of setting down the idol in its resting place. Ma once again hurt Her toe.

From 14 to 16 April, 1967 Narayan Puja was arranged at the Kankhal ashram in Ma's presence. On 17 April, Ma had a subtle vision that somewhere kirtan with "Bhav Bandhan Mukti Kama" was going on. Part of the prayer was not clear. Ma said gaps that were unclear should be filled with "Sarva Jai Shiv", since Hardwar was Shiva's place. However, Ma later asked for prayer with the name of 'Laxmi-Narayan' whose puja was being performed at that time. Ma Herself became engrossed in this Kirtan singing it for a long time. Then She asked the girls of the ashram to sing the next stanza of this prayer as Akhand Kirtan. Next day the "Sarva Jai Shiv" Kirtan was held in the afternoon. Ma said: "Laxmi Narayan has given this kirtan to this Ashram. It will stay here forever."

During Guru Purnima, 20 July 1967, Ma was in Vrindavan. In the evening, when Satyanarayan Puja was being performed at Nitai Gour mandir Ma suddenly started singing the sacred twelve Akshar Mantra. Compassionate mother with Her own 'Kheyala' showered unsolicited grace on Her children.

On 5 October 1967 the Mahaprabhu Lila at the same place was enacted by a new Raslila party in a very artistic and innovative manner. This was the original show of this troupe which wanted Ma to see the Lila first and Ma obliged them by sitting through it for five hours. The Lila, based on the divine descent of Mahaprabhu and taken from the book 'Swapna Vilas', was written by Swami Purushottamanandaji, was so well staged that the audience watched it spell bound, many shedding tears.

The Anandajyoti temple at Kashi was inaugurated on 30 April 1968. The special puja was held a day before, at Chandi Mandap. Then Gopalji was brought with great fervour to the temple in a procession. During such festivities, Ma exuded a magnetic charm and aura.

In Kashi, Nandotsav was celebrated on 15 August 1968 in the traditional way following the Janmashtami festival. But the next day, Ma celebrated Nandotsav again with the boatmen and their

families outside the ashram. Her humour, Her laughter and Her agility had to be seen to be believed. With lightning speed, She dropped the curd prasad in the mouths of the devotees all around.

Haribaba's festival was on at the barrage, when Ma reached there. She was given a grand welcome by Haribaba. Also present on the occasion were Swami Sharananandji, Swami Akhandanandaji, Swami Naradanandji, Kapindraji and many more. One day, Ayodha's Pandit Sitaram Sharan Das sang a beautiful prayer about the birth of Ram. After singing the hymn with great devotion, he said with great humility:

"When Ram was born, mother Kaushalya's joy knew no bounds. She distributed all the jewellery She had worn to the people present on the occasion. What are you giving Ma?" he asked.

Ma got up instantly, went over to Sitaramji and with folded hands and a smile on Her face, bent over and said: "This small girl is dedicating Herself."

The audience was stunned by this unique gesture. They presented a lot of things to Sitaramji but he distributed them all. Ma gave him 108 religious books for distribution.

Ma had organised a Bhagavat Paath at Naimisharanya from November 21 to December 5, 1968. The famous exponent on Bhagavat, Swami Akhandanandaji, gave a lucid talk on Bhagavat twice a day with great wisdom. When he delivered the lectures, he appeared to be another Sukhdev before whom the mass audience was like the eighty-eight thousand saints.

The devotees were gratified by the divine presence of Ma, Haribaba and Swami Akhandanandaji at the same place. The combined presence of the trio at this place was like the holy Triveni Sangam. Sri Ma's divine presence was like Bhagirathi flowing, Vaishnav saint Haribaba's satsang flowed like the sacred Yamuna, while Swami Akhandanandaji's discourses were like the undercurrent of the Saraswati.

Thus it looked like a unique Kumbhamela with the congregation of these saints at Naimisharanya.

On this occasion, Ma consecrated two small idols of Sukhdevji and Vyasji through Swami Akhandanandaji. She also instituted Bhagavat through Swamiji in the Sandalwood shrine, placed in the hall of the temple.

On 17th March 1969, Ma was travelling from Naimisharanya to Varanasi. The train was late and thus Ma waited at Hardoi station for a long time. Walking for a while on the platform, She sat down under a tree. She bought all the laddoo's from a sweet seller and distributed them among the passers-by. She distributed lots of fruits in the same way. Then she started singing hymns in praise of Ram, Shiv, Durga, Krishna etc. She also requested the crowd gathered around Her, to pray. In this quiet way Ma showered grace by giving them God's name to repeat in life.

During the Chaitra Navaratri—Basantipuja, Ma was in Kashi. The puja began on 24 March, 1969 and all through, Ma was in an unusual bhav. She remained present even during Mangalarati, which was unusually interesting. On Ramnavami, Ma marked all Her devotee's foreheads with the auspicious turmeric paste and then sang for an hour, moving Her body sideways and lifting both hands above Her head.

Meanwhile, Ma brought Haribaba from Delhi to Kashi Ashram despite his ill-health. Ma arranged for Baba's lodging on the third floor of the Gopal mandir and said: "Baba has done as this body had wished. Now Baba may please do as he wishes too."

On the third morning after his arrival in Kashi, Haribaba's condition turned serious. Baba's followers took Ma to Baba. Baba's departure seemed imminent. Ma, therefore, placed a picture of Gour Nitai (Baba was a devotee of Mahaprabhu) over the chest of the bed-ridden Haribaba. All this time, 'Shri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram' kirtan was going on on the 2nd floor of the Gopal mandir.

Around 2 o'clock in the night, Baba opened his eyes for the last time, saw Ma beside him and breathed his last. In this way, he died (see note 7) the way he wanted, in Ma's presence. That was 3rd January 1970. Haribaba left his mortal coil at the age of 84 yrs.

He played a very significant role in Matri Leela during the last 25 years of his association with Ma. For thousands of his devotees, Haribaba was the personification of Hari.

It was Haribabaji's heart-felt desire to have a similar Pakshik Bhagvat exposition (half of lunar month) at Kashi (the most suitable site with a religious and cultural heritage) as in Naimisharanya in 1968 given by revered Swami Akhandanandaji.

Elaborate arrangements were in full swing for this very important function. In the middle, on 3 January 1970 Haribaba left his mortal body but the program remained unchanged.

Organised at the instance of Ma, a large lecture series was held at Kashi Ashram from February 21, to March 7. The main reading, in Sanskrit, was done by Batuda in the basement (Garbhagraha) of the Gopal temple. Batuda, after the preliminary puja, began in the divine presence of Ma and Swami Akhandanandaji. A manuscript of the Shrimad Bhagavat, covered with sari cloth and placed on a sandalwood stool, was taken from this temple, to the pandal in a procession with great fanfare, accompanied by kirtan sung by the ladies. It is said that when Sri Krishna left this world, he placed His image into the Bhagavat - which is why the Bhagavat is revered and worshipped as Krishna.

The beautiful pandal, erected in the grounds of Sri Sri Ma Anandamoyi hospital, had two platforms. Swamiji, along with Ma, Didima and other Mahatamas, sat on one platform, while the other was kept for an image of Radha-Krishna on one side with room for other Sadhus, Mahatamas and Sannyasis to sit. The huge pandal, had room for thousands, ladies on one side and men on the other. The people of Varanasi were impressed by this beautiful structure. The interior of the pandal was of folded white and orange coloured cloth. The entrance was flanked by statues of two Brahmacharis in their yellow dhotis, as if welcoming the guests throughout. Above the entrance, was placed an image of Saint Vyas, positioned as if showering his blessings on all.

Swamiji delivered his lectures daily for two and a half hours each in the morning and afternoon. The audience was mesmerised by his touching stories during the lectures.

During these festivities Ma continued to be in a very special mood. She told Swamiji that on the first day She saw Haribaba sitting close by. Swamiji too had similar feelings.

When in the Bhagavat Sri Krishna's birth celebrations came about, a huge quantity of Prasad was distributed in the pandal, under the direct supervision of Ma. The 'Pakshik Parayan' of Shrimad Bhagavat was over on 7 March 1970. Swamiji again came to meet Ma three days later when She was in the hall of the Gopal temple, busy making some arrangements. Later it became apparent that Ma knew about Swamiji's coming though Swamiji did not send any information in advance; that was why She was busy making arrangements for the guest. Swamiji, was presented with sweets and fruit in no time by Ma. It all happened so fast that Swamiji was highly impressed and said, 'Ma you really are the Mother.'

On 4th April 1970, Ma was going to Kankhal from Kashi. As the train was running late, it had yet to reach Varanasi station. Strolling along the platform, Ma suddenly picked up a tiny tonga from a wooden toy seller, at the station and exclaimed: "Look, how, beautiful it is." She gave it to Gouri Nath Shastriji telling him 'to pace up riding that tonga.' Then She picked up a beautiful earthen image which She presented to the Kanyapeeth representative. She was in a special mood. She picked up an earthen pomegranate which was again a wonderful piece of art. Ma asked the shopkeeper, "Will you give that to me? I don't have money. I am asking for it for free. Will you give it?" The shopkeeper said, "You take all"

Ma said; "No I want only this. Present it to me with your own hands."

He did as suggested and touched Her feet. Ma then asked Patolda (an old devotee) to pay him and went to a fruit vendor. She picked up oranges from this vendor one after another and threw them to the crowd. As she counted 80 of them in this process, a huge crowd of curious onlookers had gathered around Her. Then She stopped and went back to Her usual stroll. The train came and She left for Kankhal.

Ma reached Haridwar on 29th July. 'Bhagavat Saptah' was arranged from August 3 to 10 at the Jaipuaria Bhawan, Ramghat. Ma's devotees as well as Didima shifted to Hardwar. Ma used to be in Hardwar the whole day but returned to Kankhal for her night's rest. The Kankhal Ashram, named Shanti Niketan, belonged to Nitai Basumallick until 31 July, the day he donated it to Matri Sangha in memory of his parents. On 7 August Ma and Didima ceremoniously entered the Ashram.

On 8th August, after the birth celebrations of Krishna, Ma and many others saw a different Didima in the evening. Her face exuded a different glow. That night Ma had no Kheyal to return to Kankhal. At 1.30 a.m., in Ma's divine presence, Didima left her body forever. The samadhi was installed at Kankhal ashram, which had been inaugurated only a day before her passing away. After a long and gruelling itinerary with several functions, while returning to Kashi via Kanpur, Ma stayed at Naimisharanya for a few days solitary rest. Here Ma was in splendid mood. She freely roamed about, rested in the open terrace in private, the sunlight bathing Her. She looked so carefree here like a school child on his vacation. It was pleasant to see Ma calm despite the stress of many functions, journeys, and Didima's passing away.

On October 20, 1971 Ma was on Her way to Vrindavan from Delhi by car, and others accompanying followed in a jeep. Midway the jeep developed some mechanical defect and so Ma also stopped there. While a message was sent to Vrindavan to arrange for more transport, Ma strolled around. Noticing Ma, the women folk of a hamlet nearby offered Her a seat. Ma started singing 'Ram' and 'Narayan' kirtan. It was time for lunch and so Ma asked for food to be prepared there for all. The poor villagers managed to arrange things and Ma joined them in cooking.

Thus it turned out to be a good picnic in Ma's company without a planned program. Ma Herself served the food and also the fruits they were carrying to each and everyone present there. The poor villagers had the benefit of Her divine presence and, though reluctantly, accepted money from Ma.

Whatever the circumstances Ma showered Her grace to ensure that people around Her felt happy. Men, animals, birds, plants, and even invisible creatures were all Her own.

A Sadhu in Shimla is said to have heard Ma's voice saying, "This body will come to liberate you at the right moment when your end comes."

The Sadhu awaiting Moksha (Nirvana) cried as he approached the end of his life "Ma, you told me to come, but now, it is time for me to go." Just at that same moment Ma appeared. With all Her grace She touched Sadhu's Brahmatalu and liberated him from the bonds of life and death. How fortunate was he!

Such incidents are innumerable.

On September 30, 1971 at Sri Vishnu Ashramji's persistent invitation Ma reached Suktal near Muzzafarnagar. He had sought Her presence and blessings at a Bhagavat Parayan organised at Suktal by Swami Akhandanandaji. At Shuktal She was given a warm welcome by the assembled crowd of devotees, sadhus and seers. She always did Her best to fulfill the wishes of sadhus and Mahatmas.

After the days program She would go around the ashram. On October 1, She had to return to Dehradun to be present there for Lakshmi Puja to be held there two days later.

In 1972, Ma's Anniversary celebrations were held at the New Delhi Ashram. The highlights were vocal recitals of the famous Calcutta singer Sri Dhananjay Bhattacharya among other musicians, and the dramatic presentation on the life of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu by the 'Nadernibhai' troupe of Howrah. The program, which included Leela from his Sannyasa and redemption of the outcastes, was very touching and it continued for three hours on two consecutive nights. Ma not only remained seated all through but at the conclusion went to the dais to pay Her obeisance.

Truly Ma appeared before everyone who remembered Her. Her actions were part of Her divine whole.

On 30 March, Ma went to Kurukshetra. She was given a hearty welcome there by Sri Gulzarilal Nanda, and a sea of humanity—eager to have a glimpse of Ma. After the satsang, Ma was taken to Sthaneshwar Shivmandir (it is said, Sri Krishna worshipped here before the Great War of the Mahabharat). There was a stool as a seat for Ma, and the arrangements for Puja. Ma beckoned Brahmachari Bhaskarananda to perform the puja. But then She Herself sprinkled holy water, applied the sandal paste, put Bilva leaves and finally rested Her head on the ancient Shivalinga. She was in a splendid mood that day.

From this temple, She was taken to Jyotishwar, where Krishna is said to have expounded the Gita. This was reiterated by Adiguru Shankaracharya. The whole Gita is read daily at this place even today.

'Samyam Saptah' was organised at Vrindavan from Nov. 3 to 10 1973. As on previous occasions, Mahatamas and saints delivered lectures, during the program. Swami Akhandanandaji spoke on the Upanishads in the early part of this week. Later, he fell ill. Among the speakers, were Swami Brahmanandaji, Vidyanandaji, Sharanandaji Chidanandaji and many others.

During Matri Satsang, Ma one day begged with folded hands full of compassion and love. She said; "Give me alms. Devote a certain time in 24 hours exclusively to God. Let it be dedicated to God. 'I am at your mercy, God. Shower on me your compassion, show me the way to reach you' Remember this at a definite time every day." None knows, how many of us were able to understand Ma's instructions, but certainly everybody was moved by Ma's gesture.

A marble stone image of Didima was being sculpted at Jaipur. For this reason, Ma returned to Jaipur on 3 Feb, 1972. Ma withstood the cold winter to help the sculptor for hours every day. Those present were simply overwhelmed by the sight of Ma Herself giving final touches to the image of Didima. By 8 February, the image took final shape; it began to look exactly like Didima.

On 11 April, several religious functions were held on the occasion of consecrating the image of Shri Muktananda Giriji (Didima) at Kankhal. On 25 April, on the day of Akshay Tritiya, another image of Didima was consecrated at Varanasi. This image, fondled for hours by Ma before the consecration, looks as if it has a soul too.

One day, the priest of Kashi Vishwanath temple visited Ma. He gave Her the holy sandal paste and marmelos leaves. Ma was overwhelmed. With the utmost care, She applied that sandal paste on Her face and forehead. She offered one holy marmelos leaf with sandal paste for distribution among those present while She carefully put the other marmelos leaf with sandal paste in a cloth and tucked it in the corner of Her saree, touching it to Her forehead with reverence. Here Ma was demonstrating as a teacher—stressing that this was the Prasad of Mahadev, the God of Gods.

Naimisharanya, said to be untouched by kaliyug, is an ancient sacred place, miles away from human settlements. This place is left uncared for, though thousands of Saints and Sadhus meditated here and the Puranas were written at this very place.

Swami Gangeshwarananda, of Udasini Monastery, visited Sri Ma. Despite his total blindness he has devoted his entire life to resurrecting the Vedas and spreading their message . He has compiled the four Vedas together in huge volumes, weighing 40 pounds each. This book was installed at many religious places in India and abroad.

On February 4, 1973 the Vedas were consecrated at the Puran temple of the Ashram at Naimisharanya. Ma Herself waited for this auspicious ceremony since 31 January. Under Ma's guidance, arrangements for the puja were done. Swami Gangeshwarananda arrived at the Ashram on February 3. The next morning 'the Veda God' was taken to the ancient Vyas seat from where a procession took went round the whole place. Inmates of Ma's ashram, the Brahmachari's of Shri Naradananda Swami's ashram and several pandits of Naimisharanya joined this procession. Ma sang kirtan on the way, "Jai Veda Mata,"

Swami Gangeshwarananda sang in praise of the Vedas. A platform, built at the Puran temple, was the spot where the Ved God was installed finally by Brahmachari Nirvanananda with an elaborate puja, supported by reading of the Vedas by Pandits.

On 23 March 1973, Maharashtra's well known saint Shri Tanpureji Maharaj arrived at Varanasi with his troupe of Kirtan performers. He told Ma about the famine in his state due to scanty rainfall in the last two years. He also requested Her to donate 100 bags of wheat to the affected people.

Ma was then sitting in the hall of Gopal temple. She replied to Tanpureji: "Gopalji will see it done!" In no time, money was collected from those present. But it was found to be enough for only 50 bags of wheat. Suddenly Ma remembered that almost two years ago She had advised Her devotees to skip one meal a week or month. The money thus saved, could be distributed to the needy people.

Sri Ram Panjwaniji who used to keep the accounts of these savings coincidentally was there. When he was asked about it, Rambhai agreed to make the payment for rest of the 50 bags out of those savings. Thus Tanpure Baba's request was met.

On 14 May 1975, celebrations for consecrating the image of Puran Purush Dev near the Puran temple began in right earnest. After the ceremonial bath, the image was taken round Naimisharanya in a procession with non-stop Kirtan. The procession stopped at the Vyas seat. Many Mahatamas and devotees of Ma graced the occasion. In recent months, Ma had been inviting whoever She came across, to these celebrations.

On this occasion, Ma distributed a copy of Puran Swarup (a Hindi book), a picture of Puran Purush and a handkerchief to everyone who attended the celebrations. The procession concluded with the image being installed at the temple. The 'aarti' was held with the lighting of 125,000 wicks in earthen pots. Imagine the illumination in the divine presence of Sri Ma on that solemn evening. It was an unforgettable scene.

The ashtadhatu image of Puran Purush installed at Naimisharanya is from the picture inscribed at the Sanga Ved Vidyalaya in Varanasi, where all the Gods and Goddesses of learning have been painted on the school walls, thanks to the research and efforts of Pandit Rajrajeshwar Shastri.

During the evening, Ma Herself started kirtan - "Shri Guru sharanam Namō Namō, Puran Purush Sharanam Namō Namō."

In 1975, Ma's devotees in Calcutta, requested that Her birth celebrations be held in that city. Ma acceded to this request and reached Calcutta on 20 May. A beautiful, pandal, erected in front of the guest house of Calcutta ashram, was big enough to accommodate thousands of people. Every

evening, renowned Bengali artists, including Baul singers, presented wonderful programs during these celebrations. One evening, the famous Children's Little Theatre presented an excellent play based on the Ramayana. On another evening, another group enacted the Leelas of Ramkrishna Paramhansa. Every day the climax was 'Matri Satsang'.

The devotees of Calcutta have a different way of expressing their gratitude. They laid so many garlands at Ma's feet that one day, Ma stood up amidst the heap of those garland's and then lay down on them. A wonderful sight to witness.

The crowd in Calcutta was massive, there was no end to this ocean of humanity. Amidst this stream of followers, Ma was busy day in and day out - not for a day or two but for months together. Is this not a miracle? It all began before the consecration of the Purana Purush statue. During the celebrations in Calcutta on 22 May, storms accompanied by thunder showers was a bad omen. The huge pandal shook as the storm blew, suddenly Ma appeared on the stage at 11.30 p.m. Most of the audience had gone. A crowd of about 150 people who were still around, hurried towards the platform as Ma appeared on the scene.

Ma sat down on the stage and started doing Kirtan "Shri Guru Sharanam Namō Namō and "Puran Purush Sharanam Namō Namō". She sang for an hour or so and She asked others to continue from when She stopped. Due to Ma's divine participation, the Kirtan recital took on new life. Devotees moved round the Tulsi plants and pictures of Gods, (placed on the stage earlier for 'Pala Kirtan' or the Kirtan series) and started singing the Mahamantra. Ma went away for a while, and returning and sat down on the stage. What a wonderful experience, heart-touching Kirtan in Ma's divine presence, what else could the devotees have asked for? Ma was there till 2 a.m.

On the next day, after the main Tithi puja, the place reverberated with the combined sound of 108 drums (Khol) and Cymbals.

In 1976-77, the birth centenary celebrations of Shri Muktananda Giriji were held at different ashrams throughout the year. At the Samadhi of Didima at Kankhal, special pujas, alms-giving etc were held every Sunday, the birth day of Didima.

As dawn broke on 6 April 1976, Narendranath Brahmachari of Deoghar (Bihar) visited Kankhal ashram with 150 devotees, both ladies and men. Ma welcomed them at the hall, specially decorated for the festivities.

They began reading the prayers from Durga Saptashati at 8 o'clock. Next day, everybody took part in the inaugural puja of Devi Annapurna. And on 8th April, an elaborate puja was performed which continued from early morning to the afternoon. Several Bhogs were dedicated to Devi Annapurna. Ma sat on a chair outside the Ashram hall and distributed custard, a Bhog prasad, with a spoon to everyone who came to Her; impeccably gracious, compassionate, she just looked like Ma Annapurna distributing 'Anna' to Her children.

On 20 April 1976, Father Yellomio Leslie came to meet Ma at the ashram on his way from Japan to Europe. Father Leslie had devoted all his life to studying meditation ever since he miraculously escaped from the Hiroshima bomb in 1945. Inspired by the power and faith in religion Father Leslie had founded the World Peace Cathedral in Japan.

From 27 June to 6 July 1976, reading and puja of Devi Bhagavat was organised at the Panchavati near Kalyanvan, at the request of Raja behan and her husband (Mr. and Mrs. Khaitan, old devotees of Ma). Dehradun's Pandit Satyanarayan Shastri explained the teachings of the Bhagavat in Hindi. Readings in Sanskrit were done separately. At the request of former Royal couple of Nabha, a Ramayana discourse was arranged at Delhi ashram from 27 July 1976. The famous Ramayan expert Sant Chhote Lal of Kashi who graced the occasion, rendered his lectures in Hindi for six hours daily. His way of speaking kept the audience spellbound.

The same year, Durga puja was celebrated with great fanfare at Delhi Ashram in Ma's divine presence. A massive turn-out, from the far corners of India and even abroad, including Mahatamas, made it a grand event.

At Ma's request, Gopal Swarup Pathak delivered lectures on the Upanishads. On another day, Pandit Kamalapati Tripathi spoke on the Ramayan. Professor Tripurari Chakraborty of Calcutta University gave daily lectures on Shakti puja. Several cultural functions were held, including a dance by Uma Sharma on Durga Leela.

On 27 April 1977, well-known pandits of Kashi laid the foundation stone of the school of Vedic and Puran Studies, at Naimisharanya- amidst chanting of Vedic Mantras.

The banks of Narmada are considered an ideal place for Sadhana. Several sages in ancient times have meditated here. Vyas, the author of Mahabharat, did his Sadhana at this place, now known as Vyas Tirth (holy place). Balananda Brahmachari of Deoghar and his Guru too lived here during their gruelling Sadhana. The rounded stones of the Narmada are considered Shivalingas. Most of the Shivalingas installed at various ashrams of Sri Ma are from the Narmada.

Badrikashram, on the banks of Narmada, was the venue for 'Sanyam Mahavrata' from 19 to 25 Nov 1977. A pandal was erected on the river banks. The wind grew stronger by the third day of function. The pandal appeared to be collapsing. Ma noticed this and immediately after the meditation hour, instructed one Brahmacharini to observe mouna for two hours. She also selected others who would do the same by turns. She advised another Brahmacharini to observe a more difficult regime for 24 hours.

The reason behind this came to light later.

Ma knew that if it rained heavily along with strong winds, the place would become completely chaotic and a disaster would ensue. She made those arrangements to stop the impending disaster in that area. The next day news broke that a severe cyclonic storm had devastated the Andhra coast. Bound for Gujarat, the storm, however, faded away."

In 1980, Ma's devotee Khaitan family organised a Rudra Yagna at Dehradun. It was here that the idea was developed by some of the Brahmacharini's of the ashram, of organising a grand Rudra Mahayagna at Kankhal ashram the next year.

This special Ati Rudra Mahayagna, was in a way, the last major function in Ma's Leela. Thousands came to attend this yagna from far away places. Ever since preparations began for the Mahayagna, Ma had been inviting people. Those who witnessed this great example of spiritual intensity, were privileged, and came to realise the power and extent of this Mahayagna.

It started on 6 May 1981. Among several saints, heads of several monasteries and dignitaries, who attended this Mahayagna, was the Shankaracharya of Shringeri Peeth. After the Mahayagna ended on 16 May, Ma's birth celebrations were held at the same venue till 22 May.

After a gap of several years, Ma participated in Holi celebrations at Vrindavan in 1982. She then decided to visit Tripura's capital Agartala. The former Maharaja of Tripura had been waiting to consecrate the temple, he had built, in Ma's divine presence. Ma arrived in Agartala on 30 March 1982 with a marble image of Goddess Saraswati and a 'Narmadeswar' Shivalinga. She said: "This body would not stay here. That's why I have brought the Goddess of learning to occupy this temple ...and Tripura Shiva Mahadev will give darshan from the verandah".

The idols were installed in Ma's divine presence on 31 May. The turnout was so great on this occasion that it became unmanageable. Ma was somehow escorted out of the huge crowd, who were waiting for Ma's darshan.

From Agartala, Ma came to Calcutta. Didima's image was installed at Calcutta ashram on April 4. Considering Her convenience, Ma was lodged in Bhasa village, 20 km away. Nevertheless, She came daily to Agarpara ashram, to fulfill the desires of Her devotees.

In 1982, Ma's birth celebrations were held at Kankhal. Ma was not keeping well. Therefore, the devotees celebrated this function half-heartedly. However, nobody thought it to be more than mere illness. Her body used to manifest Her Kheyal. In Didi's book, there are details of Ma's phases of ill health.

Devotees were hoping that Ma's kheyal would bring Her back to normal health. But Ma said "This body has no illness, what all of you see is happening is due to the pull of the Avyakta (Unmanifest)."

None could invoke Her Kheyal and Ma left Her mortal coil in the evening of 27th August 1982 at Kishanpur Ashram, Dehradun.

Many a times Ma has mentioned—

"God, himself appears as the Guru. He has to be invoked with full faith. Just as a Vighraha is not a stone so also the Guru is not a human being. Can a human being ever be a Guru? Guru is Jagad Guru. He is one who diverts man from the path of mortality to Immortality. Once the Guru has accepted a disciple he will never leave him until God-Experience has been achieved. The question of leaving does not arise. The Guru resides within, so long as the inner Guru has not been revealed nothing can be achieved. If one calls him Guru it has nothing to do with the body that is transitory."

Ma's gracious immortal saying—

"Be prepared with a spotlessly clean heart and mind to install the Eternally beautiful on the lotus seat of your heart then only you will find the whole universe divinely beautiful." May Ma shower Her blessings on each one of us.

Notes and References

1. From the Life of Sri Anandmayi Ma, part-ii p. 17, Bithika Mukerjee.
2. I am always with you—Br. Atmananda.
3. Ananda Varta, May 1961, p. 47.
4. Sri Sri Ma Anandmayee, part-xiv, p. 113, Gurupriya Devi.
5. Sri Sri Ma Anandmayee, part-xvi, p. 155, Gurupriya Devi.
6. Ananda Varta, Oct. 1970, p. 188.

Most of the incidents mentioned are from the Matri-Leela section of different volumes of Ananda Varta, from different volumes of Gurupriya Didi's book and from my personal diary.

The Element of Humour

By nature, Ma was amiable and humorous. There have been several occasions in Matri Leela when Ma has entertained people, through Her sense of humour, sporting nature and witty, intelligent conversation. Her child like innocence, politeness and playful mood has charmed people alike.

Even during routine work, Ma's way of talking has always reflected an unusual power that kept the audience spellbound. When She was asked about this, Ma replied: "Whether unusual or not, everything is for you only. This body is always the same."

She further said "All this is a sort of play, you like to be playful, that's why you are able to attract this body even in humour and fun. Had this body been serious, calm and quiet, you would have preferred to keep your distance. Learn to play beautifully the play of Anandam. Then you will reach the ultimate."

It is said that when Ma was young She used to love playing with cowries (seashells) with Her friends. After Her marriage, She gave up playing this game as Bholanathji didn't like it. She could have played the game, when She went to Her parents' home at Vidyakut. Since Bholanath was not present, She could have easily played with them, but Ma respected the wishes of Her husband and didn't play the game, She was so fond of.

She used to play a lot of other games with children — Sprint, Kabaddi, Hide-and-seek, long jump etc. sometimes as a spectator, on other occasions as a participant . Ma's Leela has been fascinating.

When she lived in Cox Bazar, in Bangladesh now, Ma had introduced the game of 'Sacchidananda' among the children. After school, the children would pick up cowries from the seashore. They would form two teams, one led by Bholanath the other by Ma. Drawing a circle on the ground, they would sit not separately but alternately; one player of 'A' team would sit followed by one from 'B' team, then again one from 'A' team and so on. One child would start the game by throwing 7 cowries in the air. When they fell to the ground, if three of the cowries were found face up, then it was 'Sat', if five then it was 'Chit' and if all seven cowries were found facing up then it was 'Anandam': The children used to play this game the whole day. The winning team would sing kirtan while the losing team would do Japa. (This is only a brief sketch of this game. There were many more rules that Ma had made.)

An example of Ma's sense of humour and wit was the event at Vindiyachal ashram.(Note 1).

A devout couple had brought shawls for Baba Bholanath and Ma from Varanasi. Wrapping Herself in that shawl, Ma laughingly said to Bholanath.

"Your shawl is shorter than mine."

The couple was not ready to accept this fact since they had bought two equal sized shawls from the same shop. On their insistence, the lengths of the shawls were measured.

Ma turned out to be correct as Bholanath's shawl was found to be two inches shorter than Ma's.

Sri Ma knows everything. Playfully, She proved this. Does it really make an impact on our dull grey matter?

There are innumerable such instances - a few are mentioned here.

Ma always tried to reach Haribaba's Satsang in time. Satsang was to begin at 8 o'clock in the morning. Someone was around to tell Her the time to leave for Satsang but Maharatanji (Mrs. Jaspal - devotees will better remember her as mother of late Billooji of our ashram) gestured to him to keep quiet so that Ma would eat something before leaving for Haribaba's satsang.

After having Her breakfast, Ma asked the time. It was one minute to 8 o'clock. One minute but the distance from Ma's ashram to Haribaba's ashram was a ten minute walk. Knowing that the delay was due to Maharatanji, She mildly scolded her.

"Even after staying with this body," She said, "you have not understood This body's ways." Other devotees enjoyed the easy, light way of Ma's making a point.

But Ma said, "Allow me to be serious."

Returning from Satsang, Ma said to Maharatan:

"I've scolded you. You should punish me now."

"The punishment," she said, "is that I will sleep with you tonight."

This suggests the kind of respect and esteem Her devotees gave to Ma, the Divine Mother.

Didi has told of a very old incident.

Once Ma, Didi and others reached Shimla Kalibari around dusk. Kirtan was being held in the hall. Ma decided to go inside alone, using a part of Her saree to veil Her face. Asking Her company to stand outside, She went straight in and upstairs and sat on the only chair vacant.

Seeing an awkwardly veiled woman whose face nobody could see, a part of audience became curious. The ladies thought perhaps this was a man disguised as a woman. A lady sitting beside Ma pushed Her when Ma had leaned towards her.

Curiosity turned into suspicion. Some people came close to Ma. When they recognised Her, they were delighted. Even the kirtan group got inspired in their recital when they too spotted Ma. She signed to all to keep quiet as the kirtan was on.

On another occasion, Ma was travelling by train in the North-East. At some station, a few children got into the compartment Ma was travelling in. Soon Ma befriended them. The children were enjoying Ma's company. Ma asked them. "Will you do what I suggest?"

When the children responded positively Ma told them.

"Get up in the morning, wash your face and mouth, and then write down the name of God you like in a note book, as many times as your age. Pray before and after writing the names. When the book is full, immerse it in a flowing river."

The children were delighted and readily accepted the idea. Two boys in this group, were Muslim. When they asked whether they can write 'Allah' in the note book, Ma said "Yes. Why not?" Ma called the young ones "my friends" and asked them to remember the following five points:

1. Always speak the truth.
2. Obey your parents and elders.
3. Study seriously.
4. Pray to God every morning that you wish to become a good person. Before going to bed, pray that He pardons you for your misdoings.
5. When you fulfill the first four then you can do mischief.

Ma joyously used to tell children about the last point.

Ma used to involve the children, who came to Her, in various sports and plays. She involved the girls in plays on Ramayan, Mahabharat, Krishnaleela, and the lives of several Mahatamas. She Herself used to direct these plays. She would come onto the stage, playing some role, and the viewers would not be able to recognise Her. During Jhulan festivities, the Kanyapeeth girls at

Varanasi Ashram used to host many such leelas. Ma never liked any sort of make-up. Without that, She was able to create the impact with normal dressing of the characters. Plays were staged in Bangla, Hindi and Sanskrit. The history of Kanyapeeth is replete with such splendid Leelas.

Ma's message to the Brahmacharinis:

"Don't visit the cinema, theatre or any other form of visual entertainment. Centre your activities around God in your Leelas and enjoy them. They are not meant for getting public appreciation."

On one such Jhulan and Janmasthmi (note 3), the festival ended with gaiety and fanfare. On the day of Nandotsav, it was Ma's Kheyal to stage a play involving senior girls of the ashram.

Ma Herself sported a sky coloured saree which She later covered with a huge lion skin. One girl was dressed as Radha Rani. Other girls became Radha Rani's friends. On the stage was seen Radha Rani with her friends, lamenting the absence of her lover Krishna weeping in silence again and again. Enter Chadmayogini Ma draped Herself with a lion-skin, blowing a Conch shell. Ma kept the conch close to Her mouth, but somebody else blew it back screen. She loitered on the stage, the face glowing and kept on saying 'I am hungry'.

At the other end of the stage Radha Rani asked her friends, who is blowing the conch?" Perhaps my Krishna has come! One of her friends then escorted Chadmayogini to Radha Rani. Knowing the yogini was hungry Radha offered her a variety of eatables. But who will eat? Chadamayogini was in a trance Her lips shivering every now and then. The friends asked each other 'Who is She? Some one suggested that She was Yogeshwar Shiv, another said, He is a Trikaal yogi. They then decided to ask Her 'where is our Shyam-Krishna?' However, by that time, intelligent Brinda, a mate of Radha Rani recognised Her and announced 'OH! here is our life-mate, our beloved Anandamoyee, the personification of joy and happiness.' In a split second Ma opened Her lion-skin and veil and everybody was charmed by Ma's divine novel appearance.

After this the girls of Kanyapeeth sang the famous song of Nandotsav—
"Brahma dances, Shiv dances also dances Indra, at Gokul the milkmen dance getting Sri Govinda".

Ma joined them as Gopeshwar in their celebration of song and dance, the girls encircled Ma and danced. The unforgettable moments of life...

According to Vraj tradition Nandotsav is celebrated on the day following Janamasthmi. The tradition is still followed with great eclat at Kashi and Vrindavan Ashrams.

In the physical presence of Ma playing the role of a milkmaid a lady would come with a long veil covering her face, singing and dancing she will go up to Ma with an earthen pot full of yoghurt on her head. Often Ma would dance with the Gopi. Youngsters playing the role of Gope (Sri Krishna's mates) would also sing and dance with yoghurt pots on top of their heads. Singing and dancing they would suddenly break the earthen pots. And the surroundings would reverberate with roars of laughter, the scene of immense delight.

Ma in a very cheerful mood threw morsels of yoghurt into the mouth of the devotees, who came running to Her specially to get the Prasad this way. Ma's Leela was so pleasant, so wonderful. The dollops spread across the mouth made designs on each face. Everyone giggled and Ma enjoying the devotees' laughter and happiness.

Ma's kindness was not only for human beings but for birds, animals, even the wild animals too. In Kashi the pot used for doing Aarti during Geeta Jayanti Mahotsav is designed like a snake. It is said, years ago during Geeta Jayanti celebrations at Vindhyaachal that someone killed a snake. Ma was pained to hear this news. Subsequently, She asked that the pot for Aarti be designed like a snake, so that at the time of Aarti, the snake is remembered by the people. Where else can one find so much compassion?

Here is another instance of Ma's sweet Leela with Her children. In 1979 during Ma's birth celebration in Bangalore, Ma was sitting in the corner of the stage and a function was going on. A young boy went up to Ma, gave Her a flower and prostrated. Ma pulled him closer and caressed his hair. Thereafter a stream of children, came to Ma one by one and Ma caressing everyone of them, giving Her blessings. In this way, hundreds of children got Ma's blessing that day.

She used to be so happy with things of apparently little importance. It was like the immense happiness a baby gets when she is given a doll.

Once, Durga puja was being organised at Delhi ashram. At evening time, Ma was seated on the podium when a gentleman came up to Her, placed a big 16 kg tin of something and showed it to Her.

Ma was very much pleased. Her eyes brightened. She immediately began distributing what had been brought to Her. They were toffees. It was a pleasure for the devotees to collect toffees from Ma in such a great mood.

In 1982, Ma was in Vrindavan during Holi: She was not keeping well. So it was made known that this time She would not play Holi (gulal). However, devotees would be allowed to pay obeisance to Her by putting colour on Her feet. On Holi morning, Ma put a coloured mark on the forehead of devotees who went to Her for Her blessings. At 10'clock, she was seen on the verandah of Chaliya mandir. She began playing Holi by throwing dry colour powder on the devotees. Then She picked up a water squirter and sprayed coloured water all around. This was an unforgettable scene; the sprayed faces in one direction, and colour being sprayed in another direction. She sprayed the coloured water so quickly and comprehensively that no one was spared. It was perhaps the last major get-together in which the devotees swam with Ma in the ocean of Joy.

Didi Ma with Ma

The relationship of Ma with Didima was supernatural. Didima used to call her, 'Your Ma', while Ma called her Giriji. Ma held Didima in great esteem.

Before going out of the ashram, Ma always used to touch Didima's feet in great reverence. Once, in a hurry at Kashi ashram She forgot. However, immediately after coming out She remembered the mistake and then and there in the lane She prostrated as if before Didima.

According to eyewitnesses Ma used to do this prostration in a spring-like action. Later, on Didima's insistence, She stopped this tradition.

Calm and quiet, Giriji was always busy in doing puja. When asked 'for whom she is constantly busy in doing Japa, she would reply "for the welfare of her dependents." When devotees came to pay obeisance to her and touch her feet she would bless them by touching the devotee's head with both the hands. She would discuss religious topics with them. But Giriji was most happy in Ma's company. She took sannyasa to be in Her constant company. On devotees repeated queries about Ma's earlier life she disclosed (see Note 4) "Your Ma is the personification of several avatars that you see. She saw the avatars, not as images but full of life, in action."

Ma used to say, "don't talk of all this in My presence". Didima once recounted an incident at Shahbagh.

It was during Kali Puja (1925) which Ma agreed to perform, on Bholanath's request, with difficulty. "First your Ma put vermilion (sindur) on Kali and uttered hymns in praise of Kali, then Started the puja. Gradually, She went into a trance. Asking Bholanath to give Her flowers meant for

puja She tried, but actually could not, offer them to Kali. Then She asked Bholanath to perform the puja. She sat beside the image of Kali.

Before Bholanath took his seat - he saw Ma in a different kind of ecstasy. Ma asked all devotees to close their eyes. Everybody did so except the gardener's wife who was standing out in the garden. Your Ma called her out loud to comply with the request.

When Bholanath sat for puja, we all opened our eyes. We learned the reason why we were told to close our eyes. It was Ma's change in appearance. Clothes fell off, Her face turned bluish like Kali with tongue hanging out. I saw Her and then left the place."

We told Didima that it was said that she intended to touch Her feet just then but changed her mind at the last moment.

Didi Ma said "yes, that is true. But then I thought - how could I give 'Anjali' to my daughter? Therefore, I offered the holy leaves of Bel and flowers to Kali instead. At the time, Bholanath and Ma were having their Prasad after Puja somebody said to me "Ask Ma, to whom She was offering her Anjali?" I said to your Ma—"I intended to offer to you, but did so to Kali instead."

A very interesting incident in Srimad Bhagavat mentions that Sri Krishna showed His mother Yashoda the entire universe in His mouth and as soon as her parental emotions were replaced by Sri Krishna's majestic grandeur He put a veil of ignorance before Yashoda as He was to perform many leelas later. Similarly Didima also left at that moment; Ma was, after all, her own daughter.

On Jhulan festival day (see note 5) at Vindhyachal ashram in 1943, a manifestation of Ma's leela was witnessed. In the afternoon, three virgin girls were worshipped (Kumari puja). After the Aarti when the priest began to touch their feet Ma asked them to bless the priest by putting their hands on his head and wish him well.

Didi was sitting close by. She requested Ma to allow all of them to pay obeisance at Her feet and She would bless them and say something similar. Ma said with a smile to Didi—"What have you started now?"

Prompted by Didi, everybody started paying obeisance at Ma's feet. Taken aback however, Ma readily consented to give Her blessings by putting Her hand on their head. Those who were not present on this occasion were also called. Didi watched this magnificent Leela of Ma with great admiration and said "whenever you start doing something, perfection and beauty blends so splendidly that the delight of the occasion is considerably intensified."

Meanwhile a devotee asked whether Didima too will come to seek Ma's blessings? Ma said "yes, please call her too." Then She muttered "now this body, and Giriji's body will be united into oneness. Yes, it is one and same. See, if Ma could do it.... "

When Didima came to the venue, Ma got down from Her seat, asked Didima to lie down on the ground upside down. Curious devotees looked on as Ma Herself too lay down in the opposite direction, so that Ma's head touched Didima's feet and Didima's head too touched Ma's feet. Lying in that position, Ma said "who blesses whom? Everyone is One only. I pray to Him." She further said, "Only one; it is from one to two, and from two comes one. He is the one who despite limits, is limitless. He is also the one who has no restrictions, but appears to be restricted and without appearing limitless, looks limited."

Watching this bewitching Leela, devotees fell at Ma's feet. For sometime, they all were in a unique and serious mood.

Once, Ma was going away from Vrindavan ashram where Didima was staying. Before leaving the ashram, Ma said to Didima —

"Stay well."

"You too Ma," Didima said, "come back soon."

Ma said, "this body is only due to your blessings. If you keep yourself well and bless it, this body will keep well."

Ma's words filled Didima's eyes with tears. "Namo Narayan, Namo Narayan, Namo Narayan," saying this Ma touched Didima's feet and left.

How intensely beautiful and heart touching was the leela of Ma and Didima!

Once during the 'Rakhipurnima' celebration in Vindhyachal, a lunar eclipse occurred. Therefore, the kirtan recital continued till 3.30 am. Ma had Her Self-initiation at midnight on Jhulan-Purnima (1922) and hence devotees prefer sitting in silence doing Japa during this time. It was still dark at 4.00 a.m., Ma asked Didi "will you not go for a bath in the Holy Ganges?" Didi said "No, I will not go."

Ma quickly came out of Her room. Didi said, "Ma, are you asking whether I should go now for the holy bath? If you ask me, I will go for it."

"I am not asking you to go but I am going for the holy bath," said Ma and went to Didima's room and asked her "Ma, will you come for the holy bath? Didima got up. Ma then put Her head at Didima's feet and said, "I'm taking the holy bath." Ma remained in that position for some time. Didi, Hariramji and Udasji also came in and witnessed this spectacle. Didi promptly said, "Ma, you taught us a good lesson. Now, we will also place our head at your feet and take the symbolic holy bath."

She did it followed by Hariramji and Udasji. When they touched Her feet, Ma said, "please don't do it."

Didi said, "No, we will not listen to this, today."

Everybody touched Her feet, people who were sleeping or doing kirtan were also called in to take Ma's blessings.

Ma's 'Kheyal'

Ma's 'Kheyal' is a word very familiar to Sri Ma's family of devotees. It is not the subject of logical analysis but is transcendental, beyond the range of senses. We want to be in Ma's Kheyal but do not realise it even after getting it.

Normally, it can be described as an unexpected and sudden psychic emergence of any action, thought, desire, will, attention, memory or knowledge. Ma describes it in a wider and different meaning pointing Her finger up, meaning the incomprehensible acts of the Supreme. In Ma's case, there is no ego to account for Her acts, thoughts, movements or feelings. It can be described as spontaneous upsurge of will, which is always Divine and therefore free. Explaining it in another way it can be said that the combined effect of desire/knowledge and action of the supreme power joined together is Ma's kheyal. There is nothing in this universe beyond 'Her' Kheyal.

Ma has said, "Do not misunderstand kheyal as desire or wish. Because when there is a wish, its negative (i.e. no wish) aspect is also there. Then an element of desire is also present, initiative is also there with wishing, but when kheyal comes, it is spontaneous and then there is no question of importunate or otherwise.

"This body believes in one thing 'Jo Ho Jaye'. Let whatever things happen, happen, without bothering about the consequences. Who likes it and who does not - opinions do not guide the

movements of this body. It is not necessary that the person that comes in kheyal is close. One who is far away, or one whom this body has never met, can also be included in the 'kheyal'. Kheyal may come at any time and any place, and the result is certain. But this body can't keep a 'kheyal' all the time."

Ma used to talk about two kinds of kheyal, definite and general. When it is definite, specific kheyal, it is bound to happen'. No power can stop it. "This body does not always say what will happen in future, a premonition. Sometimes, this body would agree, for instance, when someone wished to visit Allahabad. This body knows the visit will not be fruitful. Yet, the person's insistence for the visit is respected. If he is told not to go, he will continue thinking probably his work would have been done had he undertaken the visit. So when he actually visits, though it is not fruitful this dilemma is not there. Therefore, kheyal synchronises with your desires. But when the kheyal is definite, then it is bound to happen."

Once, someone asked "Ma: why did you descend as a female and not as a male?"

Ma replied: "It was not so in kheyal. Had it been, this body would have come as a male person."

Ma's kheyal had always been sudden strange and spontaneous without notice or reason, with a deeper meaning and relevance. Several devotees have recounted some strange incidents in their life which have reminded them of Ma's kheyal. A few examples are quoted here.

Once, Ma reached Vindhyachal ashram and in no time She said, "This body's kheyal is to go to Delhi. It was Ma's kheyal —so the journey is for sure.

She took one lady (the mother of Gopal) along and left for Delhi. This lady had never attended to Ma or never been close to Ma. So everybody at Vindhyachal was worried. But there was no change in Ma's kheyal and Gopal's mother accompanied Ma to Delhi perfectly easily. On the way, this lady had fever and a stomach problem. By the time they reached Delhi, it had turned serious. Doctor operated on her to save her life. Now it can be said, due to Ma's Divine kheyal she received back her life. If she had stayed at Vindhyachal she could not have got such prompt medical aid. Ma had a surprise, unexpected meeting in Puri with the veteran aged Vaishnav saint Baba Shyam Das. Mahatama Shyam Das, who was living in the temple city for quite sometime, happened to tell his disciple about his desire to meet Ma. The disciple comforted his Guru by insisting that if, what was said about Ma was true, She would Herself come and give Darshan to Baba. And so it turned out when without any prior intimation, She appeared one day to meet Baba and fulfilled the long cherished desire of the Mahatama.

Did She visit Puri for this reason alone?

On another occasion, Ma was going to Puri from Kharagpur. Waiting for the train along with some of Her followers at the station, She suddenly spotted a middle-aged woman. Claspng the hands of a boy, the woman was rushing in a great hurry.

Ma went a little forward out of Her Kheyal and called her aloud: "Oh mother, where are you going?"

The woman did not respond at first but a repeat call made her stop and look back. She had not met Ma before.

On enquiry, it transpired that the husband of this lady was seriously ill and needed immediate medical attention. But the lady had no means to face the situation. Distraught and confused, she was running from pillar to post in search of help, and at this very moment Sri Ma called her.

It was strange that Dr Anil Maitra, a reputed doctor of a Government hospital in Calcutta, happened to be with Ma at the station. Ma looked at him. Dr. Maitra promptly responded. He gave his address and asked the lady to contact him at the hospital.

What would be a difficult task even with money and recommendation in a metropolis like Calcutta was accomplished within minutes, thanks to the momentous call of Ma.

Not only that, Ma's followers took care to give the lady and her child a good meal and also arranged for their travel to Calcutta.

Moved by the incredible turn of events and her stroke of luck, the lady repeatedly called Ma in reverence. But Ma Anandamoyee was back to Herself, lost in Her world of wandering, unconcerned with the events.

Was this event a coincidence, a miracle or Ma's kheyal? Was it the cup of compassion from the Mother of the Universe to Her child?

Ma has said, "These events sometimes unfold on their own; sometime they are destined. Everything is possible. If the kheyal is strong that it should not be allowed to happen, then it does not. But such a decision is not always taken. More often, it is accepted that people wouldn't believe, things are bound to happen the way they do."

Once, without any prior intimation, Ma landed up at Varanasi. And within two hours of Her arrival, She had veteran Brahmachari Yogeshdada of the ashram initiated by Swami Narayanand Tirth into Sannyas. The sacrament over, Ma wanted the occasion to be photographed.

But there was no photographer in sight. Time was short for calling one for the job. However, it was Ma's kheyal and in no time there appeared a hippy-like foreign tourist with a camera suspended from his shoulders. He was asked to see Ma. He was thrilled to get Ma's Darshan in this way. Only too pleased to oblige Ma, the person perhaps had never dreamt of facing such a situation!

Ma's kheyal is infinite whenever in the world and in whatever situation a person may be, by Ma's kheyal at the very moment he finds himself before Ma. Ma's kheyal is all pervasive. Once, Durga puja was being held at Kashi ashram. Ma was seated in Her appointed place. The Chandi mandap was packed to capacity. People were all having a glimpse of the Divine mother. I was standing close to Ma when I overheard Ma muttering "Bindu, Bindu" (the late Samir Nath Mukherjee of Allahabad). After that, Ma as usual, became busy with devotees. But I saw, Binduda (Mr. Mukherjee) making his way through the crowd towards Ma. Such Divine kheyal! Simply unexplainable!

Ma narrated one incident- once She went to see Haribaba who made elaborate arrangements for Her welcome at his ashram at Bandh near Aligarh. An elephant was arranged for Ma to sit on. Haribaba asked his devotees to offer their backs and hands for Ma to help Her climb on the elephant. But Ma did not agree to it. She thought that it would look awkward if Haribaba and the devotees all walked doing the kirtan and She would be sitting on elephant. But Haribaba insisted. Then She had a 'kheyal' and in a split second She promptly climbed up with the helping hands of a disciple. "Normally, it would have been difficult to do. But when the kheyal came, it was bound to happen." Anything is possible if there is the kheyal. Pointing to the palm tree under, which She was sitting, Ma said, "if the kheyal comes, this body can be on top of this tree in no time."

In another incident, when Ma was in Kishenpur ashram, Dehradun, news came that the Swamiji of the local Ramkrishna Mission had left for his heavenly abode and he would be given Samadhi, at 9.30 hours next morning. At that time, only a few devotees were there. Ma asked them to make a garland of the flowers available there. But the flowers collected were not enough for a garland. Ma was told about this. Next morning before leaving the ashram She was strolling near the

ashram gate. Suddenly a car came and stopped in front of the gate. A gentleman came out, with a nice garland of flowers, surely meant for Ma. Ma took the garland from the hands of this gentleman, who had come to meet Ma for the first time on his way from Dehradun to Mussorie.

Ma's kheyal was thus fulfilled and garland was made available in time!

I used to live alone in Kashi with my mother, whose health was failing. Once, someone suggested that we tell Ma about her illness and seek Her advice.

When Ma came to Kashi ashram, one day I mentioned it to Her. Ma gave a very compassionate look at me — the deep, probing sight seemed to clear the darkness of ages — and said, "let the time come then it will be seen."

Many years later, in September 1980, Guripriya Didi was seriously ill at Bombay. So I decided to have my mother stay with the younger sister in Delhi, and go to Bombay to stay with Didi for sometime. We started off well. Suddenly my mother's health deteriorated during the journey. She had to be hospitalised on reaching Delhi. I felt very sad since I was responsible for taking her away from Kashi (it is said that one who dies in Kashi gets liberated). But I cannot imagine the priceless present Ma would give to my mother and to me in this way. I also did not know that Ma had brought Didi from Bombay to Kashi.

At Delhi, I was not alone. Lots of our relatives were at my mother's bedside. She remained in hospital for 4-5 days. Seeing there was no chance of her recovery we took her to Vrindavan by car as if prompted by Ma. When we reached Vrindavan in the evening, we came to know that Ma had also come there from Kashi the same morning. Had we taken my mother to Vrindavan four or five days before, things would have been different. Now, in Ma's presence, excellent arrangements were made for my mother and all those who accompanied her there. Again by Ma's grace and Her kheyal my mother was initiated into sannyas, and renamed Swami Atmananda Giri."

For three days, she lived in the ashram under Ma's Divine kheyal. Amidst the melodious kirtan of Dasu Maharaj, uttering her sannyas mantra, she left for the heavenly abode in an open sky. In this way, Ma's kheyal was fulfilled and her words, "Let the time come, it will be seen" proved providentially true.

In 1975, on the day of Akshay Tritiya, the idol of Puran Purush was consecrated in Ma's divine presence. Many Mahatmas graced this occasion. Ma was in a special mood. She had a kheyal that the Amrita Bhog of Heaven should be offered to Puran Purush. Nobody knew how to prepare it. They had only heard a little about it. Sweet rice was made into Amrita Bhog.

It was decided that matchsticks would not be used for lighting the fire. The fire could not be brought from the yagnikund also by any means, even wood sticks. But the Amrita Bhog was to be cooked by the fire from the yagnakund only. Even Swami Bhaskarananda, who was with Ma, was looking desperately towards Ma to see how to give shape to Ma's novel 'kheyal'.

Then Ma gave the solution. She said, "use the clothes of this body to hold the fire."

What She suggested was done. Amrita was cooked and distributed by Ma Herself.

At nightfall during Aarti 125,000 cotton wicks soaked in pure ghee were lit at the threshold of the Puran-Purush temple. Ma instructed everyone to circumambulate round them.

Ma's kheyal is the perception beyond the range of the senses. The destitution of our own state remains and even under the constant touch of Her kheyal we fail to realise it. Let this life be lived in Ma's kheyal— is my earnest desire.

Notes and References

1. Sri Sri Ma Anandmoyee Prasanga—Amulya Kumar Dutta Gupta.
2. Ananda Varta, Feb 1961, p. 166.

3. Ananda Varta, Jan 1989, p. 12.
4. Ananda Varta, Oct 1990, p. 298.
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There is always a curiosity in the general gathering, about Sri Ma's superhuman qualities and the incidents that focus on these aspects. These qualities were all the time evident in Her zest for life. Her aura of spirituality always put the lesser mortals on the path to peace and spirituality and gave new meaning to life.

Sri Ma's Advaita philosophy encompassed a plethora of mood and sentiments in Her association with the Almighty. If Her superhuman qualities were seen sometimes it was an overflow of Her majestic superhuman actions happening normally all the time through Her divine presence. Sometimes it so happened to inspire Her devotees or to guide them to better and pure thinking.

Ma said (see note 1) that while progressing in the way of Sadhana it is but natural to attain Divine powers. The results of such experiences are awe-inspiring. If such divine powers are exhibited with sole intention of self-glorification, then it is dangerous for the aspirant, as powers are lost by misuse. But if still one proceeds further in one's Sadhana as the ego melts away so also the attitude of self glorification goes away, and at this stage the question of the downfall of the Sadhaka does not arise. The stage can be assessed by seeing the situation.

When asked how She could cure diseases Ma said (see note 2), "There had never been an attempt to display these powers. Nothing deliberate. Sometimes mere touch, glance or just giving a flower or anything else would cure but at other times, even if one tried it would not happen. When this body became a Sadhak all this has happened."

Further She said "Many such divine powers were displayed, many a time unknowingly or without prior thought, sometimes with a mix of the feeling of knowing and not knowing. It just so happened spontaneously, automatically, as many a times a mere touch had cured the disease before so it could be cured again. With this thought the patient if touched would be cured. At other times the patient was touched with knowledge that he would be cured by that. Now these divine powers have gone. A person who expects this body to be supernormal always in its dealings will be disappointed. This little girl acts according to Her 'Kheyal'."

Once Bholanath was repeatedly requesting a cure for one person. The man came himself. At that time Kirtan was going on. He was asked to roll on the floor which he could not do; nobody even helped him. The patient died returning home. So if God is unwilling, no one can help."

"It happened many a times that there was no introduction, and no one even asked for the internal communion, which is with all, and it worked."

There were incidents when Ma would leave behind a cloth or something else or Ma would inflict wounds on Herself and the patient would be cured (see note 3.)

There are endless incidents of worldly achievements by Sri Ma's grace.

About fortune predictions Ma once said it involved many factors and so there are different types of fortune tellers. Some are spontaneous while some bring in an element of doubt. Some may try to develop their skill for forecasting, but cannot and without it, their will power makes blunders. But those who look at the future as divinity, do not err. Careful pondering can help to fathom situations, bringing out the abilities of the exponents.

Ma once told how a lady visited Her. As is customary Ma welcomed her and was about to apply vermilion on the lady's forehead. The lady retorted "apply vermilion only if you think I will never be a widow". Then Ma told her that it would not be proper. In this way from that time She

would not apply sindoor to a woman whose widowhood She could foresee. Imagine the plight of that unfortunate woman who would have to live in sorrow even before fate had brought it about. The lady who made the remark was now convinced of Ma's logic. Obviously it takes a lot of courage to accept the vagaries of fate and so nobody would like to know their destiny."

Sri Ma's staunch devotees Bhaiji and Didi in their respective books have vividly discussed Her various superhuman powers. Almost all Her devotees recount incidents that are astonishing.

The anguished call of a devotee never goes without a response from the merciful Ma whose benign look is ever focused on the welfare of all. Maybe sometimes we fail to perceive it. A youth visited Ma to ask Her views on Man's service to God. He was first sent to Baba Bholanath. But Baba's answers did not satisfy the youth. Then he was asked to go to Bhaiji. At that time many needy people used to see Bhaiji for getting a job. The youth was not in need of a job, hence he did not see him. So he offered Pranams to Ma and left the place disappointed. Ma sent him a green coconut full of water. The youth refused to accept it. On being told by Bholanath that the coconut was symbolic of Ma's blessings, the youth still politely declined it saying he did not desire worldly well-being or prosperity. At the devotee's query he said he had not yet finished his daily Sandhya-Puja and if he took it back home he would be forced to tell all that had happened. The youth left without accepting it.(See note 4).

After his departure, Ma asked that the green Coconut (daab) be cut open. This was done and surprisingly there was not a drop of water inside. The devotees concluded that as he had spurned the blessings of Sri Ma, She had attracted the entire coconut water subtly. How unfortunate the youth must have been to ignore Ma's blessings.

As the Kalki Puran says "The Lord (Sri Hari) does not give to others, nor do His devotees ask for anything but the mutual love and association that is enduring and unending."

Ma was in Vrindavan. Accompanied by Pushpa Didi and Dr. Panna Lal, She visited Hari Baba's Ashram. Rasleela was in progress there. The day's theme was Radha's dream in which for the first time she saw Sri Krishna. She was yet to see Him in person or even hear about Him. The divine presence in the dream kindled the love in her for Sri Krishan. She was lost in His thought. Seeing her in this state her friend, Chitrlekha started drawing the portraits of several men. As soon as she saw Sri Krishna's portrait she cried "He is the man!" That was for the first time she heard the name 'Sri Krishna'. At once she became one with her lord. His name resonating through her body and soul. Sri Radha's exalted emotional expressions were enacted through Ras-Leela that day.

While the episode of Ras-Leela was being enacted, Pushpa Didi noticed Ma's lips trembling. Her face radiating, became flushed and red. Only after some time did Ma become normal. Ma went to Shri Haribaba and said "She is not feeling well and would like to go". Hari Baba touched Her hand and found it was ice-cold. Dr. Pannalala too noticed this change. Ma later said "today This body somehow could control the changes, as suddenly the Kheyal came that here big Advaita Sadhu's are sitting and no such thing should happen here. Only then this body returned to normal."

In 1955 Shri Narsimha Chatterji was then the District Magistrate of Mirzapur.(See note 5) Ma was at Vindhyaachal Ashram. Shri Chatterji went to pay Her a visit. It looked as if She was waiting for him. Immediately She took him to the western veranda of the ashram and pointing to a site below (20ft x 16ft) Ma said, "underneath are lying innumerable idols of gods and goddesses who are stifled and should be taken out. Can you do something?" "Yes" he said. Labourers were pressed into excavation work. It was an arduous task. Removing huge stones was strenuous and as the work went on the labourers were restless and thought their efforts would go to waste. But Shri Chatterji had full faith in Ma's words. He ordered that the work be continued and soon one by one

about 200 idols, (some of them 10 to 12 mounds) were discovered. The news of the excavation spread like wild fire. People from far off places, including national and international geologists, historians, press reporters and curious onlookers thronged the site to witness Ma's miracle. Ma watched the scene casually.

One evening at Vrindavan ashram in 1955 Ma was taking a stroll when a body in human form emerged out of a stone and paid obeisance to Ma. With clasped hands Ma stood still and calm. Soon the body disappeared. A devotee, Deen Bandhu Parikh who witnessed the scene, asked Ma about the person. What transpired between them is not known. But Deen Bandhu built a cottage in that place and pledged his life in the service of God leaving the material world.

There is another old incident when both Bholanath and Bhairji were alive. Ma accompanied Bholanath on his annual visit to Tarapith, the temporal seat of Tara Devi where another famous devotee Bama Khapa practised Tantrik Sadhana.

It was a cold winter night, around 3 o'clock. Ma suddenly got up and started walking this way and that way until She stopped at someone's courtyard. Some devotees followed Her. Ma squatted on the cold ground and starting singing "Harinam" (Hymns). At that late hour on a cold winter night, how blissfully melodious those hymns would have been from the lips of the compassionate Universal Mother - it can only be imagined!

Probably woken up by Her singing, a man with a lamp in hand came out of a nearby hut. He did not utter a word and returned back to the hut. In a couple of minutes two or three persons brought a middle-aged man from the hut, physically lifting him. The man was paralytic and had been immobile for some years. He was made to sit on the ground near Ma. Soon, this man, who had lost his speech, started crying 'Ma, Ma, Ma' and joined Ma in singing hymns. After he sang for some time, Ma asked him to go home. Lo and behold! The man, who was totally paralysed for years, started walking all by himself and returned to his hut.(See note 6).

In 1951 Ma's birthday was being celebrated in Punjab at Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Ambala and other places. During its conclusion Ma requested Avadhootji to arrange for the meals for the poor and needy. He arranged the function at Ambala's leper asylum and took Ma there. Among the ashram's lepers was a brahmin well-versed in the Vedas who recited from the holy scriptures. Avadhootji remarked to Ma, such an enlightened brahmin was cursed by the deadly disease. Ma had a 'kheyal'; She embraced the leper brahmin and held both his mangled hands. Days after the incident, Avdhootji wrote from the Punjab about the published reports of how the poor brahmin leper was completely cured after Ma had touched him.(See note7).

On a Ramanavami day at Kashi ashram Ma was distributing oranges to those assembled. Everyone present got one fruit, the women with children got two oranges. More and more people came along to have oranges from Ma's blessed hands and She gave them to everyone. Only what was surprising was that Ma gave hundreds of them from only two small baskets. Such miracles were part of Ma's nature. There was a similar incident in 1971 at the Prayag Kumbha. A devotee brought some fruits (Ber) and offered them to Ma at the camp. Ma asked them to be distributed to all. Everyone got his share though those assembled far outnumbered the fruits in the basket.

A lady once presented a basket full of fruits. Ma asked a devotee to distribute them. The devotee thought there were not enough for those present and wanted the fruits to be cut into pieces for a fair distribution. But Ma said there was no need to do so. The devotee followed Her instruction. At the end there was one fruit left and two people to share it. Ma commented "He is only one, think of only one." And suddenly the lady who brought the fruits pointed out that She was given two fruits. Now Ma said "you know now where the one that was missing was". So, again everyone got one fruit.

Ma was to proceed to Vindhyachal from Kashi by train. But someone arranged a car and Ma delayed the departure. Meanwhile, she was informed that at a nearby Jain Dharmashala, a Jain Sadhu Brahmachari was breathing his last. "Come, let's go to see him, quick", said Ma. On reaching there Ma saw the Sadhu and asked Didi to put Ganges water into his mouth. She then asked for the quilt covering him to be removed. There was a cloth tied around his waist Ma Herself untied the knot and touched his 'umbilical cord'. Then came the end. Indeed, he must have been a great soul to be fortunate to have Ma's divine presence before his end. Was it not that by untying that knot Ma had disentangled the soul from the cycle of rebirths? And maybe She delayed Her journey to Vindhyachal only for this task. If She had taken the train, She would not have been there.

It is said that the sight and touch of Ma had the effect of enlightening many a sinful soul, on the path to salvation.

A 20 year old youth at Sri Ma's ashram was proving to be a big nuisance through his bad behaviour. Everybody complained about it and all ashramites were unanimous that he should be turned out. After listening to everyone Ma gravely said, "If nobody wants him here then he needs Me most. Can a sick child be left alone or discarded? Will it do any good to him or to the world? How can he be left deserted in the world?"

The inmates were moved by Ma's sense of deep love and had nothing to say in reply. The youth remained in the ashram and grew up as an esteemed devotee.

Vasantapanchami of 1947 was being celebrated at Vrindavan. Haribaba's disciple Manohar, who was always ridiculed for being an idler, gave Ma Rs. 3, which he had earned by his day long labour, for Bhog. Tahri (rice cooked in ghee with vegetables) was prepared in a small vessel and Manohar pleaded with Ma to distribute it Herself. Oriyababa announced it was Lord Jagannath's prasad. And, as Ma said later, "this request passed like an electric current and this body started distributing Bhog Prasad moving involuntarily."

The mouth of the small vessel containing the Bhog Prasad was partly covered with a handkerchief and was held by a devotee. Everybody present came running to Ma to get a spoonful of that Mahaprasad from Ma's hands. Sri Haribabaji's hands were not clean, so he opened his mouth and Ma dropped prasad into it. Haribaba also wanted to reciprocate but could not do so as his hands were not clean.

Later when Didi was going to feed Ma, She suddenly remembered that Haribaba wanted to put prasad into Her mouth but he could not do so. She hurriedly went to the kitchen where the vessel was kept for cleaning. Only one glowing particle was sticking to the vessel. Ma went to Haribabaji with the Prasad vessel and asked him to put that single glowing grain into Her mouth and said later, "That grain of rice was like a beacon of light. Baba had desired that not a grain of that Mahaprasad be wasted."

Dr. J.K. Sen had built an annex of two rooms specially for Ma at his residence at 48, Hanuman Road, New Delhi. So, Ma's devotees had a place in the city where they could gather and seek Her blessings. Various functions were held at this place and from time to time Ma was seen here in Her glorious moods.

It was here in 1948 that Ma's birthday was being celebrated. Saints and Seers had assembled and people would throng for the Satsang held thrice a day. Once during a morning satsang, a man looking insane and wearing a strange costume entered the place. First he went to the ladies side and shouted that all women should cover their heads. No one paid heed to his order. Then he went to Ma and told her the same thing. Ma complied and signalled the ladies present to follow Her. The intruder, with a triumphant smile, went to the men's enclosure and sat there. After some time he

shouted that he was leaving. Ma sent him an orange. But the deranged person reacted angrily and threw the fruit, aiming at Ma and hurting Her. This created a flutter in the crowd assembled but Ma sat unperturbed.

However two of Her devotees grabbed the deranged person and dragged him out, one of the devotees even hitting him. Later Ma called the two, disapproving of their act, and said "you cannot stop anyone from coming to This body. And you had no right to hit him. If that man wanted to return my offering, he was free to do so." She told those two devotees to atone for their violent act by keeping a fast the next day. The one who hit was told not even to drink water for the whole day. And the following day, the man who hit Ma with the orange, attended the satsang. On that day he was well dressed and looked totally normal. That streak of madness had disappeared. He sat through the satsang, later met Ma and on Her request stayed on for lunch. Ma said afterwards: "His act of hurting this body shocked the man so much that it restored him to sanity and normality". Ma would always say: "if you are angry, be so with this body then you will not be able to keep it up for long."

If someone cries for Ma in desperation, Ma would reach that person without fail.

Some 40 years ago, at Kashi, Ma was attending a satsang in a school building. Everyone was engrossed in the kirtan when Ma suddenly got up and walked out to the gate. Two devotees followed Her. As she reached the gate, She saw another devotee disembarking from his car. Ma asked him, "Will you drop us at the railway station?" The devotee drove Her to the station. There She asked for train tickets to Sarnath. She was told there was no train for Sarnath until the next day. But Ma insisted the tickets were purchased. In a few moments a train arrived and Ma along with the two devotees boarded it. She ignored the devotees' pleadings that it was a mail train and would not stop at Sarnath. The train did stop just before Sarnath at a signal and Ma with her attendants got down. Neither She nor the two following Her knew the way to Biria Dharmashala where Ma wanted to go but Ma kept walking. On reaching there Ma straight away went to a room where an old and ardent devotee, a distressed widow Maharatanji, was found. The poor lady was crying and calling out to Ma. On seeing Ma in person, Maharatan could not control her tears. They were tears of joy, of prayers being heard. She had been wrongly informed that Ma would be at Sarnath. On reaching there she was told Ma was not scheduled to visit there. The crestfallen devotee found herself in a helpless situation as the train had left and there seemed no way to reach Ma. Totally upset she started crying in despair. When Ma arrived before her She said "Now stop crying, I am here". Was it telepathy that brought Ma to respond to that anguished call?

In Association with the Invisible Souls.

Various Gods and Goddesses, invisible souls of long departed Sadhus and Seers and other souls were in communion with Ma. Sometimes She would acknowledge them outwardly or at other times communicate with them and deal with them in the same way as She would with Her other devotees. She had Her own ways of communication even with plants, birds, and other creatures.

Ma said "the happenings of the invisible world can be reflected in the living world also. The body which you see here also reaches to the other invisible world. If this is a dream, then everything in the world is a dream. They come to This body as you all, and sit as you people and their presence can be felt by touch also. They spend hours together as there is no time limit for them.

Once, while resting in the Vrindavan Ashram, Ma said She could not sleep. She said "this body's ears are buzzing with the sound of drums and cymbals. They are (pointing to subtle bodies) singing and dancing encircling this body." When the construction work of the Kashi Ashram was in progress, two Shiv Lingas were found during the digging. Both Shiv Lingas were to be consecrated on the auspicious day of the coming Akshya Tritya. Before this day subtle bodies gathered around Ma rejoicing by singing and dancing around Her as Shiva.

Ma once said the departed souls usually appear only on necessary occasions. She said "often these formless souls ask for something you people ask for, so the rest and sleep does not come in the way as it appears, but unlike you people they are not so restless all the time, neither do they counter-argue. If the discussions are going on smoothly, you can take it for granted that the spirits are participating and cooperating. They are as much a reality as you all around this body."

In response to their prayers for spiritual initiation Ma would sometimes advise offering in their names into the Ganges the sanctified leaves of tulsi or bilwa with the mantra written on it with sandal paste.

On being asked by Didi about the shapes of these invisible souls Ma replied "some like living beings have hands and legs while the presence of others, can just be felt by their touch, utterance, smell or in other ways. You may not believe this as you can't see them because you live on a different plane. After years of perseverance doctors have invented the microscope to see invisible things. So also it can be understood likewise. Sometimes you may see This body here, but at the same time It can go to another world also in another form."

Soon after the completion of the Savitri Mahayagya at Kashi in January 1950, one night everyone was fast asleep. Around 1 a.m. Ma got up and went outside. Didi and a few others followed Ma. They returned after some time. Ma asked if they could hear anything. Ma informed them that invisible souls were performing a yagna on the banks of the Ganges and had invited Her. Many times one could sense the smell of incense while no one was burning it. Many invisible souls help in different ways.

In the summer of 1957 Ma was indisposed at the Dehradun Ashram. Hearing this Gopi Baba from Kashi, Yogi Bhai from Solan, Haribaba and Avadhootji from Vrindavan, all reached Dehradun. One night when Ma's condition had worsened, it is said that Yogi Tailang Swami who left his body some sixty years ago, descended and squatted by Ma's bedside. Spirits of many great departed souls visited Ma that night and prayed for Her recovery. It is said Ma started recovering from that night.

Gurupurnima of 1958 was celebrated at Solan. As recounted by Ma later, the soul of Bholanath's brother, the late Rewati Mohan stood in the way that Ma was to pass. As She approached, She involuntarily uttered the Mahamantra (Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Ram Hare Ram, Ram Ram Hare Hare). The soul had waited for 40 long years to hear this holy mantra from Sri Ma's lips. Who knows when, where and in what way Ma will shower Her blessings on somebody!

Yogibhai and his wife, Rani Shashiprabha, had a desire to build a cottage at a solitary place on the hilltop of one of the idyllic hills of Shimla, and dedicate it to Ma Anandomayi. But before they could realise and fulfill their wish, Rani Shashiprabha died in March 1948 at the young age of 45. Yogibhai who had now taken the path of celibacy and service, strived to fulfill his wife's cherished desire and built an imposing structure and invited Ma to grace it.

While staying there, one morning around 8 o'clock when Ma was alone in Her cottage in a serene, sad, sweet anguished voice She was singing "come my beloved Chaliya, Banwari." The mellifluous tone was enriched by the agony of separation. The undulations of the voice were akin

to crystal clear water freezing into ice and again melting away into formless water. It was a voice that could enchant any human being and the tune was movingly heart-rendering. The words of the song were each like a ray of light dancing around the Holy Mother. The sentiments were piercing each and every molecule around Her in search of the Lord. Ma at once realised that it was a divine voice whose ephemeral melody would soon evaporate in the din of this material world, and let it be preserved before it could be heard no more. With Ma's kheyal Didi came, understood Her and called Vibuda to hear and memorise that voice and tune. It was like chasing a mirage. With great effort. Vibuda somehow managed to catch the tune but was stopped by Ma from rendering it in public. Vibuda later mentioned that, whenever he sang that tune his throat would choke and he would be moved to tears.

Ma said it was the anguished call of Radha away from crowds and commotion. Radha in solitude had expressed her love for Krishna being separated through this soul rendering song.

In 1958, in a rare display of yogic skill Ma transported Herself bodily, along with Her bed and things in Her immediate vicinity, into the invisible. This happened at Solan where Her birth anniversary celebrations had just ended. Yogibhai had made excellent arrangements. After lunch Ma was having a siesta. Ma later said, "if any of you had entered this body's room in the afternoon, you would not have found it there. This body with the bed was away."

That Ma's soul travelling into the netherworld, though Her body remained here, was known by now. But the Solan incident was the first occasion, when She bodily moved into the invisible world. But Ma said it was not a wonder, "if a small thing can disappear, a big one too can travel in the same way. Everything that was touching moved along with This body."

A parallel happening can be found in Srimad Bhagwat's 10th chapter wherein Chitrlekha by her yogic power transports Aniruddha, grandson of Lord Krishna, to princess Usha, daughter of Banraja. So the fact that Mother Divine who was a Maha Yogini, could do it, is no wonder!

Such incidents of Ma's interaction with occult world are innumerable.

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Ma organised two Mahayagnas, strictly in compliance with the principles laid down in the religious scriptures. The first was Savitri Mahayagna in Kashi from 14-1-1947 to 14-1-1950. The second was Atirudra Mahayagna in Kankhal ashram from May 6 to 15 1981.

Shri Savitri Mahayagna (see note 1)

This massive Mahayagna, which ran for three years at a stretch, was met with utter disbelief by many people. Shri Trivenipuri of Punjab, and Debigiriji of Uttarkashi, were so impressed that they said "There has never been a Mahayagna like this one, and there will never be."

Such a massive function was smoothly organised due to the inspiration and kheyal of the Divine Mother. Didi took the main initiative with the support of thousands of devotees.

It is difficult to tell whose brainchild this Mahayagna was. Once, when Ma was staying in Vindhyachal ashram, one Mahadev Malviya proposed to Her to do this Mahayagna. Ma told him, "it will be done if Yagneswar wants it". Interestingly, Malviya met Ma there for the first time and Ma asked Didi to note his address and the date of the meeting.

In Kashi too, many devotees requested Ma for a yagna. There were many coincidences. In 1926, as part of the Kalipuja at Shahbag, Dhaka, a Havan was performed. This fire was carefully kept burning, with all scriptural instructions given by Ma to the Ashram Brahmacharis. At that time Ma with Her own 'kheyala' said "this fire will be used in a huge yagna."

Didi says in her book, 'she had all this in her mind and this coupled with the insistence of Sri Ma's devotees, generated agreement to this approach. Arrangements for this Mahayagna started almost automatically.'

Manmohan Ghosh (steward of Dhaka University), who had come on vacation from Dhaka to Kashi ashram, was put in charge of constructing the yagna-kund, the sacred fire pit. By Ma's kheyal, this fireplace was to be set up in the centre of the Ashram's courtyard. When Ma asked him to find the central place, he requested Ma Herself to indicate the holy spot. One day, strolling in the Ashram courtyard, Ma halted at one spot and beckoned to Manmohan Ghosh. He later measured it and found it really to be the centre of the Ashram premises. In this context, Ma said 'when the land for this Ashram was procured this body had seen many formless Mahatmas doing Kirtan and dancing at this very place, encircling this body'.

As directed by learned pandits, Manmohan Ghosh constructed an excellent yagna kunda, the perfection of which has been mentioned by Ma many times later.

In this context, it is worth mentioning another interesting incident in Vindhyachal which has a bearing on the Mahayagna in some form or the other.

There was a huge mango tree near this ashram. It used to be the venue for Satsang occasionally, and Ma would go there with Her devotees and sit under the tree. One day, when She was strolling by this tree, Swami Prabhuddhanandaji picked up some tender mangoes and said, "make some pickle from these mangoes for Ma. I too would like to have some as Prasad."

Ma said, "It will be so when a sage has picked up the mangoes." Then She looked at the tree intensely. Was this tree too some Mahapurush?

When Didi went with Ma to Vindhyachal after some time, this tree was found fallen to the ground. The tree's trunk which had become hollow, could not bear the weight of this huge tree.

Like the soul of Mahatmas leave the body through the Brahma-randhra, so it appears the soul of this tree too had made its way out similarly. This tree was like a Mahatma, who stood on one leg in meditation. The Sadhana was complete when Ma's divine sight fell on it.

Ma asked the wood logs of this tree to be preserved. Years later, the same logs were the first to be used to light the fire of Savitri Mahayagna.

The major expenditure for this Mahayagna was to obtain wooden logs which would keep the holy fire going for nearly 1100 days! One gentleman volunteered to supply all wood from his jungle of Palash trees. Actually, he could offer only one truck load of logs as the jungle became the subject of a dispute and was subsequently sub judice. However, his bold support earlier at the time of planning had made a tremendous impact on the organisers.

The starting date was fixed as 14th January 1947. When Ma was asked how many offerings were to be made to the holy fire, Ma said, "one crore offerings." It was a phenomenal figure indeed. But any change was out of the question since it was Ma's words.

Ma had told Didi, "You have taken a plunge into the ocean. Do you know how much guts it requires?"

Didi had replied, "My only faith and confidence are your divine feet."

Shri Agniswat Shastri (Batuda) was chosen as the Acharya for this Mahayagna. While Narayan Swami (Nepalda) was made the person (Jajman) on whose behalf the Mahayagna would be done. Brahmachari Kamalakanta and Sadanand were the priests.

The rule was that any number of priests could be inducted. But once inducted their number could not be reduced.

Ma instructed that the yagna should be started with one or three persons. But She reiterated that religious customs should be followed and the yagna done with full devotion and concentration.

The postmaster of Dhaka had sent 5 kilos of clarified butter, made of cow milk for Sri Ma's use. Ma asked that the yagna be started using this ghee. Thus another problem was solved for the time being.

In this manner, preparations for the start of Mahayagna were completed. The holy fire of the 1926 Shabbag Kalipuja, which was still kept burning, was arranged to be brought to Kashi from Dhaka.

Though Ma had said long ago that the holy fire of the 1926 Kalipuja should be used in some Mahayagna, She would never impose anything on anybody.

When Batuda was asked about the fire, he said that in accordance with the scriptures, clintwood was to be used to light the holy fire. Disclosing the history of the Shabbag fire, Ma asked him whether this could be used to start the yagna.

Batuda kept quiet. Ma further asked whether both fires could be used together to start the yagna. Batuda understood Ma's wish. But he himself was in favour of clintwood.

Meanwhile Kamalakant, keen to learn the trick of starting fire from clintwood friction, bought clintwood on his own from the market. When he saw clintwood, Batuda decided to light the fire with the help of it.

The yagna was to start early the next morning. Batuda requested Ma to be present at that time.

The place was being prepared until one o'clock, being decorated with flowers, silk flags, paper bunting etc. in various ways. Since the clintwood was slightly damp, Batuda and Kamalakanta left it to dry over a warm chuiha (oven), the coal from which was already removed. The chulha appeared to be just warm enough to dry the damp clintwood.

At 4.30 am Ma came to Batuda and asked him what had happened.

The smoke from the oven had polluted the sanctity of the clintwood which now could not be used for such an auspicious occasion.

Ma said to Kamalakanta, "You have tried and seen the result. What Yagneswar desired has happened."

Ma said again, "Have you ever imagined that the holy fire, which had been preserved for 20 long years, would burn in this manner on the banks of the holy Ganges in Kashi?"

Ma's advice was sought for making the vow (sankalp). Didi made it and saying: "This Mahayagna is being organised in honour of the creator of this Universe, human beings, pests and insects, trees and creepers, birds and animals etc. for the peace and calm of the whole Universe."

After the consecration of the Yagnakund, the holy fire of the 1926 Kalipuja was brought in a copper vessel and installed in the yagnakund. The wood of the mango tree was used to light the holy fire. Thus began the long cherished Mahayagna. The priests were chosen from the Brahmin Brahmachari students of the Vidyapeeth. These boys were a great service to the Mahayagna. It appears that Yagneswar prepared them for this occasion. Each priest had to repeat Gayatri mantra as many times as they offered 'Ahutis' (oblations) during their stint at the Mahayagna. This went on daily. At every Purnima and Amavasya the yagnakund was redecorated with flags and flowers and special Ahutis were given. On these two days, pujas were done for the platform, the holy fire as well as Gods and Goddesses. The Havan material, used for the oblations to the fire, included barley, sesame (til), rice, sugar, clarified butter, dry fruits, and some incense. These materials were cleaned and sorted out as stated in the scriptures before being given for Ahuti.

Gradually, as the number of Ahutis increased so the collection and cleaning etc. of Havan material become a big and organised activity. Due to Ma's divine blessings many religious men and women volunteered themselves for this work. It was an interesting sight to see.

The collection of so much clarified butter (Ghee) in such difficult days was a tough job. Again, with Ma's divine blessings, an unexpected supply came from places like Pabna, Ahmedabad, Bombay. Among those who helped a lot were Mukund Bhai and Kanti Bhai Munshaw. Later Kanti Bhai even opened a dairy to see the Mahayagna got a constant supply of Ghee.

Before the Mahayagna, efforts were made to trace the Mirzapur Brahmin who had made the first proposal for such a yagna. Searching for him proved futile.

According to Batuda, as part of this Mahayagna, it was essential to invite Brahmins for food. For one crore of Ahuti, the ritual was to offer a meals to 10,000 brahmins. On a smaller scale, the minimum number of brahmins to be offered food was 1000.

From May 1948, Ma arranged to invite one brahmin every day for food

Just as three priests began the Yagna with only five kgs of ghee and yet the supply continued, so Ma's divine blessings allowed 11,000 Brahmins to have their meal during this Mahayanga. This too had begun with just one Brahmin. How great is Ma's Leela!

Ma says, "Truthfully God always fulfills the true resolve."

Ma always says: "Whatever happens is for good."

For the 'Brahmin feast', people of all classes and creeds who had not seen, heard of or met Ma came forward with their contribution. This amply proved Ma's saying 'that all homes are one and the same.'

During the rainy season, one hundred Brahmins were invited for a feast. This continued later in batches of 50, 100 and 200 regularly. Meanwhile, it became known that the Government had imposed restrictions on public feasting. However, due to Swami Parmanandaji's foresight and Ma's blessings this tradition continued uninterrupted.

Once Ma mentioned that Kashi had Brahmins from all regions of India and asked if it was possible to invite them all. So Brahmins of Bengal, Maharashtra, Madras, Gujarat, Punjab, Kashmir, Nepal, Orissa and even the hilly areas of the North were invited for the feast in batches. Maharashtrian, Gujarati and Madrasi Brahmins used to cook their meal themselves, from the raw material supplied by the Yagna organisers.

The feast for Maharashtrian Brahmins used to be very interesting. The food used to be placed before each of them on plantain leaves, along with incense sticks. Sporting a silk cap, with a sandal-paste mark on the forehead and garland of flowers around the neck, the Brahmins used to pronounce the various Vedic Mantras in batches. All four vedas were recited one by one, by the different groups among them for an hour. It was a sight to witness.

Before the 'Purnahuti' began there was the arrival of saints at the Ashram. Haribaba, Trivenipuriji and Avadhootji of the Punjab, Uttarkashi's Debigiriji, Krishanandaji of Bombay, Sharanandaji, Chakrapaniji, Akhandanandaji, Prahhudatt Brahmachariji, Gopal Thakur, Pandit Sundar Lal and many others, all were invited for this occasion.

On the eve of the Mahatma's arrival, the Ashram was decorated with colourful flags, which were also carried in their hands by the brahmacharis during Kirtan on Ashram premises. The Mahatmas were given a hearty welcome by the Ashram inmates. Ma Herself received Haribabaji, Tribenipuriji, Swami Akhandanandaji, Sharnanandji and others. Haribabaji prostrated before Ma. She too placed Haribaba's palm on Her head as gesture of blessing.

Acharya Batuda read 'Swasti' in the presence of these Mahatmas in the Ashram hall.

Uttarkashi's Debigiriji, who braved bad weather to attend the function, was delighted to see Ma's leela. He said, "In these days when a quarter of a kilo of sugar is a rare commodity, it is indeed a pleasant surprise to find the heap of laddoos (sweets) here. It is the charm and delight of Ma's Leela."

After Haribaba and Akhandanandji's arrival, reading of fortnightly Bhagvat was organised, besides, reading of the Geeta and several other religious scriptures. Avadhootji's lecture on the vedas went on simultaneously. During the evenings, famous musicians and singers gave recitals. Dawn used to break with the melody of the Shehnai. Amidst all this, Naam Kirtan and Nagar Kirtan were also arranged with separate participation by men and women. 108 Kumaris (Virgins) were given a public feast. Besides, Kumari Puja and the puja of Kashi's major temples was also done.

A Public feast was also organised for the 'Dandi' and Paramhans seers.

On Ma's instructions, ten kilos of rice, and a corresponding quantity of dahl, vegetables etc. were all cooked and presented to eleven monkeys on eleven plates with all the paraphernalia.

One day crows were also fed putting rice, pulses and vegetables mixed together on a big plate. Beyond our physical sight who accepted this, only Ma knows? On another day, the Ganga and a cow were worshipped. According to the rituals, 50 kilos of milk was offered to the Ganges in mid-stream after the full ritualistic puja of Ma Ganga.

Purnahuti

With the arrival of Mahatmas thousands of devotees from far and near started coming to participate on this auspicious occasion. Arrangements for their stay in the ashram and nearby places was done by Ma Herself. Whatever She did, was in regal style. All the Mahatmas and the devotees were presented with customary clothes, which most of them wore on the day of the Purnahuti.

So many people were coming and going, prasad was distributed to more than 1000 people at one go but everything went in order, smoothly and without any disturbance. Ma sometimes said, "He is the only One, the forms may be many."

Ma said, "If you look at it from the activity point of view, this is also a kind of Yagna. Work or activity itself is Yagna. The idea of work comes from your mind. When efforts are made to translate it into action that is called 'Ahuti'. What result you get after your activity, it can be called, is the result of Yagna... In this way, the universe is hosting Yagnas without respite.

"A lot of work is done to fulfill the individual's wishes; they are called 'Sakam' Yagna. When something is done for the benefit of the whole universe then it is called Mahayagna. Completion of this task is Purnahuti and manifestation of Yagneswar, the advent of God."

On the eve of Purnahuti, after the Satsang was over, the ashram was redecorated with flags and flowers and sprinkled with the Holy Ganges water. The Ashram turned into a garden of flowers with specific seating arrangements for Mahatmas and devotees. The articles to be offered were brought into the Yagnashala by the north gate.

Purnahuti was started on 14 January 1950, amidst the fluttering of flags; the biggest one was in the centre, with a string of silver bells attached to it. There were four platforms on the four sides, with awnings placed over them. All this made the place of the Yagna a fascinating sight.

All the Gods and Goddesses were worshipped. Before the Purnahuti, Ma asked for the brass spray which someone had presented to Her long ago. She also asked for Ganges water and milk. Batuda was astounded to see the spray at the place of the Yagna. However, so busy was he with the puja that he failed to see flames leaping up to the big flag. It was Ma's presence of mind which averted what could have been a major accident. However, when the flames were brought under control with the spray of milk combined with Ganges water, as the religious scriptures mention, an astonished Batuda fell at the feet of Ma and said, "Ma this is the correct procedure which you followed. I totally forgot this as well as the articles for offering which you had correctly asked to be brought from the Northern gate."

Batuda was all praise for Ma's knowledge of the religious rules.

"According to Ma's instructions, the Brahmacharis held a Benarasi saree around the Holy fireplace, as if Gayatri Devi at the Yagnakund was wearing this saree. During the Purnahuti, the sandalwood and ghee put in the holy fire, encouraged the flames. According to an eye witness, the Fire God leapt at the saree and accepted it in a flash. After this offering, a coconut filled with ghee, with a silver leaf attached and covered with red cloth, was offered amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras. After that 16 kilos of cow's ghee, was offered slowly to the Fire God. After the Purnahuti, Kumari, dressed in silk, jewellery, and flowers, was specially worshipped. Then Bhog of 50 kg rice with the corresponding amount of dal and vegetables was offered to Gayatri Devi. Ma Herself distributed this Bhog prasad later.

On Ma's instructions when the flames were leaping up, a flame from that fire was preserved to be subsequently consecrated in the Havan temple the same day.

After the Mahayagna, kirtan around the city in a procession was arranged. Swami Sharanananda, Batuda, Narayan Swami and Swami Paramananda and Ma went together. Other Mahatmas occupied other vehicles. Haribaba walked along with the scores of devotees in that procession. From the Ashram, the 1000-Strong Kirtan group proceeded to Kashi's famous Dashashwa-medh ghat and returned in three hours. When returning Ma's head was decked with flower petals.

At the end She said "the great Yagneshwar, Oh the Lord of the Universe, give salvation to the people of this grief stricken world."

A Word About This Yagna

Ma was in Kashi in December 1980 as the preparations for Atirudra Mahayagna were going on. On 10 December 1980, Ma reflected on the Mahayagna:

"Is it an easy task to organise such a massive yagna? Yagnas of this magnitude and greatness have neither happened before nor will it happen in future." Three lakhs of Rupees were spent in a single month, thanks to the donation from Kanti Bhai Munhaw. Water used to be boiled in a vessel big enough to seat three adults. Tea leaves used to be put in that... (imagine the gigantic scale). The students of Benares Hindu University used to say, "let's have free tea from there." Everyone who visited the place was treated with equal care. Everyday food used to be cooked for 500 saints. But the volunteers never felt difficulty in accomplishing their tasks. One would wash the feet, another would apply the sandal paste, and a third was engaged in garlanding the saints. Another group was standing by to distribute the Prasad. God had prepared the students of the Vidyapeeth for this service. Nirmai (Swami Nirmalananda of our Ashram) gave the Ahuti. Birjananda Swamiji, (also of our Ashram) used to ring a bell regularly, so that sleep would not overtake those who were giving Ahutis, amidst the chanting of mantras. Meanwhile Yogi Bhai donated the cost of meals for 1000 Brahmins. Kanti Bhai opened a dairy in Ahmedabad for cows Ghee. He sent regular supplies by rail, road, and even by air. The queue of visitors for darshan used to stretch one mile from the Ashram. There were so many vegetables stored that the ceiling of the room could not be properly seen.

How beautifully Ma recollected the events. She said "Oh, see what the Madrasi Brahmins are putting in their cooked rice? Moving closer, this body saw them putting ghee in the rice."

Atirudra Mahayagna-(Kankhal Haridwar).

This Mahayagna started in the presence of Divine Mother at the Kankhal Ashram on Wednesday, the Akshay Tritiya (6 May 1981 of the Georgian Calendar). This too demanded a massive organisation which was accomplished with Ma's infinite blessings.

Ma's devotees prayed to Her for this Mahayagna and Ma gave them a patient hearing. This was the foundation of the Mahayagna which, therefore, was destined to be a grand success.

In the last week of May 1980, the Khetan family had organised an Atirudra Yagna at Dehradun. With Ma's blessings, on this occasion several brahmacharinis participating in that yagna, felt like organising another Mahayagna on similar lines. Their feeling was supported by Ma's Kheyal.

In December 1980, Ma came to Varanasi along with many of Her devotees. During this visit, She accepted Pandit Vamdevji Mishra as the principal priest and Pandit Mishra began the preparations in right earnest.

Wherever Ma went during the intervening period, She spread word of the Mahayagna and invited people for the occasion. Hundreds of thousands poured into Kankhal for this massive Mahayagna. Ma's touch reflected on everything the Kankhal Ashram arranged.

The Yagnabhumi (soil) was consecrated in March, 1981. Gradually, a huge Yagnashala, rectangular in shape with gates on all sides, was built on the location strictly in accordance with the scriptures. Three layers of straw were used for the roof. A bamboo barricade, a foot away from the

walls of this Yagnashala, was also erected to prevent the public polluting the sanctum. The sanctity had to be maintained above all else. The mandap turned out to be a piece of art.

The first program of the Mahayagna was the acceptance (Varan) of the Pandits, Brahmachari Bhaskarananda of the Ashram was chosen as the host, and another Brahmachari as his assistant.

On the day, 135 Brahmins took their bath in the holy Ganges and returned to the Yagnashala dressed in yellow attire. The chief priest, other Brahmin priests and the hosts were received. Among these Brahmins, were mostly teachers from Benares Hindu University and well-known Pandits of Kashi. Pt. Narayan Mishra was among them. An expert on Vedas, he was invited to play the role of “Sarbadrashta” the guide in all matters. He could not make it due to unavoidable circumstances. The Brahmacharis involved in puja work, felt Ma could be the most appropriate replacement. There could not be a better choice. Ma is the guide for Her followers. In matters as of life and death, in material as well as corporal matters, Her command is all-encompassing, Her reach is infinite.

Inside, the Yagna mandap, the scene was different. There were 11 holy fire-pits installed and 11 brass vessels, filled with ghee, with a hole at the bottom, were placed above these fireplaces to supply sacred fuel to the fire. The vessels, hung with brass chains, looked like golden vessels. On the four sides of this mandap, were four platforms, with awnings over them. At the northern end of the mandap was the main platform, erected facing east, with a large awning over it. The platform had beautiful thin screens on its sides, which were lifted at the time of the Mahayagna. Upon this platform was placed a huge picture of Shiv-Parvati. The puja articles were arranged before this picture. In the centre was placed a gold image of Shankar, resting on a silver throne.

Close to this platform were the seats for Ma and other Mahatmas. Beside this place, a fire was lit with the help of clintwood (Arani Mantilan). The structure of the mandap was supported by pillars, painted in different colours and beautifully decorated with flowers. Pictures of Gods were hung on these pillars.

The seat of the Acharya ‘The chief Priest’, was near the south gate facing north. Once the acharya and other priests for the yagna took their respective positions, the yagna started amidst chanting of ved mantras.

First of all along with chanting of the Mantras, barley grains and water were sprinkled around the yagna Mandap to sanctify it. After this a Brahmin went up on the roof and hoisted a huge yellow colored silken flag onto the top of the vessel. So now the yagnashala was looking extremely beautiful. The four vedas were read on four different sides, while an earthen pitcher (Ghat) was placed on the platform (vedi) and worshipped.

The sun was setting in Kankhal, the sky had turned crimson red. A cool breeze from the Holy Ganges touched one’s body and soul, in the calm and quiet atmosphere. The function ended this day with Puja and Aarti.

The Havan started the next day with 135 Brahmins in yellow robes entering the yagnashala after a bath in the Ganges.

The holy fire, lit by clintwood was subsequently placed in eleven fire pits (yagni kund). Pure ghee from the hanging brass vessels dripped down. The priests offered a variety of spices, barley, gram, dry fruit, puffed sugar balls, flowers, holy wood-apple leaves, fresh fruit, clothes and other food grains. Every day one of these was offered collectively to the Holy fire. For instance, 1008 flowers were offered one day, on another day 1008 wood apple leaves were presented amidst chanting of veda-mantras. It was a bewitching sight as 135 Brahmins who were together involved in the Mahayagna sitting before the flames of the holy fire in 11 kundas with the sound of ‘Swaha’,

the chanting of mantras perfectly blended with the flames to produce an ethereal effect in which the head automatically bowed in reverence to the Ati-Rudra Bhagwan.

The effect of this Mahayagna was felt as general public circumambulated the mandap from outside. These rounds during the Atirudra Mahayagna are considered very auspicious. Different numbers of rounds are said to produce different results. 108 rounds, which many people did, without break, was considered to be best. These rounds continued round the clock, and even after the conclusion of the Mahayagna. Ma had said that the circumambulations around the mandap should be done praying with folded hands, without touching anyone for 108, 54, 11 or 7 times – as convenient. The best time with Ma and Mahatmas used to be inside the mandap or during the nights, undisturbed.

Oblations (Ahutis) were done in two sessions. The first session ended by noon. The second began at three in the afternoon. During the break, the Brahmin priests had a meal of fruit, rested and discussed religious scriptures.

From the first evening of the Havan, the manifestation of Rudradev's descent was evident. Clouds enveloped the sky, it was suddenly dark. Storm and thunder showers followed soon. Amidst the deafening sound of storm and lighting, the chanting of mantra's continued unabated.

What a sight was this indeed! The flames of the holy fires illuminated the atmosphere. Their glow created a delightful ambiance. The soul was purified by this sight; the bad weather was, therefore, no obstacle to witnessing such moments of a lifetime.

This manifestation of Rudradev's continued to a lesser extent for a few more evenings. When the showers became very heavy, sometimes there had to be a break in the Ahuti's.

There are always obstacles to every good work. Perhaps the violent weather was able to make the occasion even more breath-taking. But there was no stopping this Mahayagna.

It is said that vanity prevented Daksharaja from inviting Yagneswar Mahadev to his Yagna, which was then destroyed by the wrath of Sati, furious at the insult to her husband. Several pundits have suggested that after that abortive yagna, no big yagna took place here. Daksha's yagna was to insult Rudradev; but this one was done to please him. Thus its success was beyond doubt.

Religious minded people came to Kankhal from far off places. Excellent arrangements were made for their food and lodging. As part of the Yagna, 200 more Brahmins were fed each day besides the Brahmin priests for yagna. They were not only fed daily, but presented with 'dakshina', as well.

One of these mornings, Sri Ma was resting in Her room. The senior girls of the ashram dressed Her up as Bhagavan Shankar. The personification of Shiv, at this time was as if Rudradev himself had descended at Kankhal. It was a moving sight when scores of devotees, began chanting 'Har Har Mahadev'. It was accompanied by feverish kirtan, puja, and prayers to Shiva. All the time Ma sat in the typical posture of Shiva in meditation.

Many renowned saints, seers and Mahants graced the occasion by their presence, the prominent among them were Swami Vishnu Ashramji, Mahant Girdhar Narain Puri, Kailash Peethadishwar, Swami Vidyanand, Swami Chidanandaji, Swami Brahmanand, Swami Prakashanand, and many others..

One day, 108 little Brahmin girls, dressed in Rajasthani lehanga and choli, were worshipped.

After this Kumari puja, they were offered food and taken round the mandap. As part of this Mahayagna, 108 'Dandi' seers were presented with food, clothes, and 'dakshina'. Shri 108 Dandi Swami Vishnu Ashramji himself supervised this alms-giving function and took alms from the yagna priests at the end of the exercise.

In Ma's divine presence, one day all the other Ashram heads and Mahants of Kankhal were invited. They were seated at Satsang Bhavan in a row, on a specially raised platform. The saints were presented with various things by Swami Paramananda on behalf of Sri Sri Ma.

Invitations were sent everywhere for this Mahayagna. Dwarka Peeth's Shankaracharya agreed to come. The Shankaracharya of Shringeri Pith expressed his inability to attend. Instead, he sent two of his disciples as his representatives. Preparations were going on for the reception of Dwaraka Pith Shankaracharya. A new room was constructed for his lodging.

On 12th morning, a large group of Mahants and the Chief of the Sangh went to receive Shankaracharya at the railway station. He was brought to the Kankhal Ashram in a great, fascinating procession. Several people walked with silver sticks in front, followed by an elephant and horses with riders holding sticks. Then there was a band in attendance. Behind them was an open car, decked with flowers, carrying Sri Shankaracharya. He was the personification of peace and tranquility.

The Shankaracharya was taken directly to the Jagatguru Shankaracharya temple in Satsang Bhavan where Shri Ma Herself received him. Prostrating before the idol of Adi-Shankaracharya, and accepting Ma's cordial reception, Dwaraka Pith Shankaracharya took his seat.

After the Aarti, he was taken to the well-kept room, recently constructed for his stay at Kankhal. When he returned to Satsang Bhavan again, his route was flanked by little girls with auspicious brass vessels, decorated with coconuts and mango leaves, on their heads, welcoming the arrival. Shankaracharya was delighted to see the unique reception.

The Shankaracharya spoke at Satsang Bhavan before taking a round of the Yagnashala. At the mandap, he was moved by Pandit Vamdev Mishra's chanting of veda mantras. Thereafter, he visited yagna mandaps daily during both the sessions. Swami Vidyanandaji, of Kailashpith, too graced the occasion.

Gradually, the number of Ahutis was reduced. Finally, the day came when Ahutis were to be complete. All the offerings were brought to the main platform in the yagna mandap. With the divine blessings of Rajrajeshwari Ma, fine offerings were made. Several kilos of rice, pulses, household utensils, clothes, jewellery, cosmetics as well as furniture were included in the offerings. There were more than 1000 dakshinas. Clothes, food and money were arranged for each individual Brahmin participant. Eight specially decorated cows were brought outside the mandap and worshipped, to be presented on the occasion as Godan.

The time came for Purnahuti. Beside the presence of Sri Shankaracharya, and other Mahatmas, Swami Akhandanandji also arrived for this holiest of holy work. Brahmachari Bhaskarananda gave the Purnahuti, after Ma touched it. The Holy fire rose on the occasion to accept this Purnahuti as the place reverberated with the auspicious ringing of bells, blow of conchshells, drums and musical instruments as well as the chanting of Veda mantras. Smoke from the holy fire billowed out as if carrying the message of peace, the success of this Mahayagna, to Infinity. The whole place glowed with a kind of aura, the ambiance of which outshone the outwardly extravagance of yagna. The ultimate realisation was the presence of the 'Paramatma', as this yagna was meant for His appeasement and pleasure.

A massive procession followed with a huge festoon "Atirudra Mahayagna", held by two persons upfront. Behind them were flag holding students of Anandamoyi Vidyalaya, Jalandhar, a band, and Ashram kirtan. A well-decorated large procession followed with an open car, decked with flowers, in which the Shankaracharya was seated. Behind him, was Ma under a white umbrella, in a white chariot, followed by hundreds of Brahmacharinis, some of them doing kirtan. There were also several cars with devotees. Many devotees walked behind Ma's chariot in reverence. The sun

God was bright. But the devotees were not bothered by the heat. Nor were the scores of people of Haridwar who sang and danced all the way up to Har-Ki-Pauri, the culminating point of this procession.

At Har-Ki-Pauri, the sacred earthen vessels of this Mahayagna were consigned to the Holy Ganges to conclude the Purnahuti.

During the Yagna, on Ma's instruction, all the girls lit earthen lamps and sang in praise 'Oh God. Atirudra Mahayagna, illuminate our soul with your light.'

The success of Atirudra Mahayagna became the subject of discussion everywhere. With its completion, the wrath of Sati was over. The message of world peace spread far and wide. From Sri Ma, came the following words:

"This type of Yagna used to be held in Satyayuga. One can witness such yagnas only after good deeds of several lives."

References

1. Text from Gurupriya Didi's Book 'Akhanda-Mahayagna.
2. Anand Varta Jan 1982 p. 15, from an article courtesy of Br. Guneeta.

The Physical Association of the Great Living Souls

This is perhaps the biggest religious and cultural festival held in India. On the occasion, lakhs of people from all walks and corners of the country congregate with the desire for satsang, yagna, sacrifice, donations and a holy bath.

Ma has said, "This kumbha parva (function) is the supreme emblem of religion. So many people attempt through different means, different ways, to reach the kumbha, with the single aim of a holy bath. The sole aim is to embrace the united whole under this (umbrella of kumbha) canopy of supreme religion. For this sole reason, so many people have come together at one place. One has never heard about a similar event anywhere else in the world. People come here with so much profound respect and reverence, braving all odds to reach their destination, the kumbha." On this occasion there is a big gathering of spiritual leaders of all classes, learned scholars, saints and seers.

Kumbha is that particular time, the very special moment in Hindu religion, which is determined by the conjugation of specific stars and planets in the sky. Usually it happens every 12 years. Kumbha's history is related in the Puranas and Vedas. It is said that during the Great churning of the Ocean, a pitcher (kumbha) full of Nectar appeared with 14 precious jewels. The Gods and Demons fought for this pitcher of Nectar. During the brawl, the pitcher spilled and some nectar dropped at Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik. The Kumbha Mela is held only at these places.

God Brahma has said in Atharveda about kumbha:

"O my people, my creations, I present you with the four kumbha venues at Haridwar, Prayag, Ujjain and Nasik for getting both the pleasures of this world and the next."

Kumbha represents an auspicious occasion. It symbolizes the supreme.

The kumbha water, symbolises Brahma's all-pervading presence. That's why it is so holy and evokes so much happiness.

During the 1976 kumbha at Prayag, the following words spontaneously came from Sri Ma: "Brahmamoy Kumbha Jal, Anandamoy Kumbha Jal."

Ma Herself sang kirtan with these words in praise of the holy Kumbha.

Prayag's kumbha is considered the holiest and the most fruitful because Prayag is the greatest of the pilgrimage centres - Tirth-Raj. Here there is the confluence of the three great rivers - the silver coloured Bhagirathi, the grey Yamuna and the subterranean Saraswati.

Whether the kumbha is at Prayag or not, the banks of Bhagirathi becomes covered with tents or straw huts in the month of Magha (Jan-Feb). In the shivering cold scores of religious men and women, come here to meditate, and do japa, puja and have satsang. Several camps of saints and mahatmas are established for round-the-clock Ramlilas, Raslilas etc. The Mela venue looks like a small township.

It is not known when the Kumbha Mela started. History says Emperor Harshavardhan used to donate all his belongings during the Kumbha, and later begged for even his clothes from his sister. The Chinese historian Hu-N-Sung has mentioned about this great Kumbha Mela in his memoirs written in 7th century A.D.

Adi Guru Shankaracharya (9th century A.D.) has beautifully described the Kumbha Mela as a great meeting point of the wise religious heads, and proclaimers, who held serious discussions, lectures and seminars on various religious issues. Today also Kumbha Mela remains the venue, the

meeting point for such discourses by great religious people, the Mahatmas. Devotees enjoy proximity of so many Mahatmas at a single venue.

According to the Vedas, the holy bath at the kumbha absolves, one of his sins and misdeeds of several lives. It mentions that three baths at the kumbha are holier than 1000 Ashwamedh yagnas. It is said the fruits of observing the rigorous discipline of Kalpavas for ten years can be achieved by just taking three holy dips during Kumbha festival.

The tradition during the kumbha is for processions of different Mahatma's groups to go for the holy bath at the Triveni, the holy confluence of the three rivers. This also happens during the Haridwar Kumbha. For this tradition, the time and place of bathing is planned and devotees flank the route for hours to have darshan of the Mahatmas.

Sri Ma too used to be taken in such processions. In 1962, at the Haridwar Kumbha, the Niranjani Akhara took Ma in a silver throne, for the bath. That was 14 April, the Mahabipush Sankranti day.

In 1977, when Niranjani Akhara invited Ma and Her party for their bathing programs, it was decided that for the first and last bath during the Kumbha, Ma would be taken to Nirvani Akhara while for the holy bath on 'Mouni Amavasya', She would be taken in a procession to the Niranjani Akhara's bathing programme. This became a tradition afterwards.

In 1958, Bindu, the son of Ma's long time follower late Nirajnath Mukherjee, made a beautiful two roomed cottage for Ma's stay in his Allahabad garden. During the Prayag Kumbha, from 13 January to 3 February 1960, Ma split Her stay between this place and the camp on the banks of the Ganges. Until the Ardha Kumbha (every 6 years) of 1982, whenever Ma came to Allahabad she stayed at both the camp and this residence in Mukherjee's garden.

The speciality of the 1960 Kumbha at Prayag was that on all the three important bathing dates, January 14 (Sankranti), January 28 (Mouni Amavasya) and February 1 (the last day). Ma took a complete bath at Triveni. On several occasions earlier, She had only sprinkled the holy Triveni water on Her instead of bathing.

Ma said on this occasion that when in 1948, at the Ardha Kumbha, She went for her bath with Swami Mohananandaji of Baijnath Dham and Shri Gopal Thakur, the three sacred rivers presented themselves before Ma as virgins and invited Her to bathe.

Ma's arrival at the 1977 Prayag Kumbha was greeted with an excellent function arranged by Mahant Giridhar Narayan Puri and his Nirvani Akhara. Seated on a high, silver throne, in a procession, Ma was preceded by a palanquin in which the Narayan Shila was kept. Ma's old devotee Tushar Kanti Ghosh, the editor and proprietor of the Bengali Daily Yugantar, wrote very well about Ma's arrival in the Kumbha Nagar - "on the auspicious occasion of the Purna Kumbha at Prayag, the most beautiful Divine Universal Mother Sri Sri Ma Anandmoyee along with Her devotees has reached the sacred Kumbha township."

During the Prayag Kumbha, the processions for bathing started as early as 3 o'clock. It was much before dawn, the sky sometime overcast, sometime clear with twinkling stars, and biting cold-but Ma's devotees were ready with yellow handkerchiefs on their heads (a present from Ma) in the queue for the procession. Dressed all in white Ma travelled with them in a flower-bedecked palanquin as if golden Saraswati Herself was in their company. Devotees were delighted by this sight of Sri Ma. It appeared the embodiment of Sanatan Dharma itself, as Goddess in human form being adored by thousands, was moving to the Sangam site. Words are not enough to describe such memorable moments.

The Mela camps had several programs which included Satsang of Mahatmas, Gita, Chandi path (reading), Kirtan, Ramayan recitation etc. The chiefs of several Akharas and Mahatmas graced

these functions and gave religious discourses. Needless to say, such functions were packed with Kumbha pilgrims from common people to distinguished citizens like senior bureaucrats, Governors and Ministers. On becoming the Prime Minister, for the first time, on 25 January 1966, Smt. Indira Gandhi immediately came to the Kumbha camp at Prayag for Ma's darshan. She came to the Prayag Mela camp once again in 1977 (22 Jan) for Ma's darshan, along with Rajiv, Sonia, and their children.

Excerpts from Mela Satsang (see note 1) (5 Feb 1948). About a quarter to ten, one Jain Mahatma came for Ma's darshan at the Kumbha Mela camp. Within fifteen minutes, Ma arrived at the Satsang mandap. The Jain Mahatma touched Ma's feet.

Ma asked him, "When did you leave your home?"

Jain Mahatma: "Long ago, when I was a child."

Ma: "Did you leave your house to visit the Home?"

Jain Mahatma couldn't read between the lines of Ma's question.

He said, "No, Ma. I didn't leave my house to visit Home."

When one of Ma's devotees made the meaning clear that Ma meant the other Home as the Real Home, the Jain Mahatma laughed and enjoyed Ma's cryptic clue.

After this, Ma went out with Her devotees for darshan of the Mahatmas.

The holy book Ramcharita-Manas has vivid descriptions of Ram meeting different seers during his sojourn in the forests (vanavas). Fortunate were those who witnessed such rare events. Fortunate also were those who saw Ma meeting the Mahatmas. It is due to Ma's blessings alone that one can witness such rare moments.

One evening, at the Satsang, one devotee asked Ma, "I do not know how to do satsang. Please tell me."

Ma: "If you know or understand, then there is no need for Satsang."

"How to do satsang?" the gentleman asked

Ma: "Is that a problem? Go and sit under a tree."

Devotee "I don't follow what you mean by going and sitting under a tree."

Ma: "Go and sit where saints and seers give discourses, and please follow them. Your queries can be solved by the Mahatmas. For instance, you get shade when you sit under a tree. If the tree bears fruit, you get the fruit too. Similarly, if you sit at the feet of Mahatmas, you are bestowed with peace and happiness."

Sri Ma referred smilingly to another incident. She had once asked a devotee to drink the juice of 'Trifala.' After some time, that fellow reported back to Ma, "I had that water, now I have developed a cold." Sri Ma said, "This body had said, not the juice of the fruit but the juice Trifala 'Satwa, Rajo, Tamo'. (The three primary natural qualities of creatures). The real juice, the extract is beyond this." This devotee had actually asked Ma how to get peace, Ma had asked him to drink the juice of Trifala.

Q. "What is the use of Trifala?"

Ma: "The one which is beyond the three qualities is the real Trifala juice."

Q.: "How to get this real juice?"

Ma: "With the blessings of the Guru."

Q. "With blessings... I did not follow this."

Ma: "Someone came to this body and asked whether this body is asking one to take a human being as a Guru? This body said, 'why human beings? First learn to be disciples. When the soil is ready, the Guru will sow the seeds.'"

Q.: "How to become a real dedicated disciple?"

Ma: "How was Arjun a disciple of Sri Krishna? In the Bhagvad Gita, Krishna has beautifully described a disciple."

Gopal Thakur: "Without his disciples, what will the Guru do?"

Ma: "When the Guru is talking his disciple automatically comes into the picture. In the absence of the teacher, how can a child learn things? Until a child goes to school, how can he be called a student?"

Q. "It's difficult to find a Guru. In school teachers keep changing. But it is said, once you have chosen a Guru, it is a life-long Guru - shishya relationship. The Guru can't be changed."

Ma: "Unlike the change of teachers in a school, the Guru does not change. When a disciple pines for a Guru, it doesn't take much time before he discovers his Guru. At this time, the disciple is all the time thinking about his Guru, his behaviour reflects the urgency of his need. The Guru is everywhere. He is outside as well as within yourself."

Q. "What is to be done when one's 'Diksha-Guru' (one who initiates) passes away?"

Ma: "It is a misconception that the Diksha Guru has passed away. His body leaves the world, but his soul remains with you in an eternal bond which is never severed. You do not have the (God) vision, you can not therefore perceive his presence. He is always there if you have the power to see Him. When you meditate deeply, you can even see your Guru. Without the Guru, there is none else. Your guru is the Guru of this world."

Q. "Ma, you have said that Guru is outside as well as within."

Ma: "Inside, outside, the Guru is one and the same. Guru helps in wiping out the ignorance of several lives. When the omnipresent Bhagavan destroys the dark side of your life, doesn't He exist in you? Don't you know this when you read religious scriptures? How did God save Parikshit in Uttara's womb? Do not ever think that He is not in you. He is inside as well as outside, omnipresent. Guru is the personification of God. Who else can be the Guru? When a post-graduate teaches the alphabet to the children, does he forget his post-graduation studies? God is one, forms are different. Can Guru ever be a human? Guru is God. No one else can take the position of the Guru. To think of the Guru as a human being is a great sin."

Q. "It is easier to consider the image of God as God but it is very difficult to accept a human being as a Guru and worship him."

Ma: "You are asking for easy things like a trader. Until you accept God in any of his forms, God will elude you; who is there in each and every form? It is God who is everywhere. Like Hanuman said, 'through self realisation I am not a separate entity from Ram, we are one and same. From another point of view, I am a part of Sri Ram, who is complete. From a third view, I am the disciple of Sri Ram, my Guru. If you get God by any means you get everything. The Guru is at a much higher level; at your present level you can only see what you are seeing now. This is not your fault. That's why this body is advising you to spend more time under the Banyan tree, in the company of Mahatmas. The more you sit there, the sooner your ignorance will

become clarified. If Bhagavan's compassionate grace falls upon you, you might get His vision."

Q. Sometime ago, there was a discussion about the meaning of Triveni?

Ma: The confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna is Triveni.

Q. But Saraswati can not be seen flowing?

Ma: Father, when you have darshan of the real Triveni, you understand all. It's like Rasogolla (a Bengali sweet, made of fresh cheese) the taste of which you won't understand until you have tasted them. Try to keep the sweet name of God as misri inside your mouth all the time.

Q. One Mahatma once vowed to have darshan of Saraswati. He went to a 'Kunda' and began his meditation. His rigorous meditation resulted in darshan of the white flow of Saraswati in the river Yamuna. However, please explain to us about Triveni in detail.

Ma: The Mahatmas and you know what is written in religious books and scriptures.

Shri Ma turned to Gopal Thakur, who was present there, and requested him to speak about Triveni. While this discussion was going on, Swami Sharanananda arrived at the mandap. Ma stood up and welcomed Swamiji, saying "Namō Narayan, Namō Narayan, Namō Narayan." Swami Sharananda was accompanied by Swami Chakrapaniji Maharaj. Sri Ma was delighted to see both the Mahatmas.

Ma: Father, who is Yamuna, who is Ganga and what is Triveni—all these questions are being deliberated here. This body's Kheyal was that it would be wonderful if you came at this time. And actually both Mahapurushs have arrived.

Chakrapaniji: Mother, my answer will be dry and terse.

Ma: This body will listen to Father's dry reply—very good indeed. Don't tell others, tell this body only.

The Satsang, however, was now over and this discussion was resumed later. Acharya Chakrapaniji said the water of Yamunaji is not natural. It is actually the outcome of Shri Krishna and Radha's love and affection. The flow of Ganges is also very sacred. Ma said, "The sacred water of Ganges, is known as Brahmavari (a stream of Brahma)." She further said, "Triveni means triple power—a bath in Triveni frees one from his worldly bondage." Saraswati's manifestation is mentioned in Sri Devi Bhagavat. According to the Purana, Saraswati belongs to Golok Dham (Heavenly abode). To normal sight, the Ganga, Yarnuna and Saraswati are all rivers. From another vision, they are the embodiments of Bhagavan."

In 1982, Prayag was the venue for Ardha Kumbha. Sri Ma, who was not keeping well, was taking rest at Vindhyachal. At the request of several Mahatmas, who pleaded that Her coming to the Kumbha was necessary as She was the light of Kumbha, Ma conceded to the Mahatmas request. It was an unforgettable sight—the arrival of Sri Ma at this Kumbha Mela. A sea of motionless humanity watched Her arrival, flanking the route of the procession, with utmost sincerity, reverence and love, it looked as if Saraswati herself appeared moving slowly amidst the flow of the Ganga and Yamuna as they moved towards the Sangam.

During Her stay at the Camp site either Ma visited the Camps of different Akharas and Saints or She invited them to Her camp. She was always in a great spiritual mood, the mood in which one could see anything from its proper perspective. The various Akharas, Saints and Seers

may have had differences in opinion amongst themselves, but Sri Ma perceived the different faiths and the opinions of the various sects in their essence and spirit, and amicably solved their differences. The misunderstandings among several Akharas too were resolved when they came to Ma. She never cut down one's faith in order to establish Her own, and respected all faiths in their entirety. She has frequently said "All the religions are true in themselves." It is a fact that this difference of opinion could only be solved and united by someone at a very high spiritual level and Sri Ma did that. Eminent authorities of the Hindu religion and other religions too, have acknowledged Ma's sayings to be Scriptural Truth.

It is interesting to note that during the Kumbha Mela so many Mahatmas, Abbots, spiritual heads all together respected and welcomed Ma in their ritualistic tradition. That is history now.

Notes and References

1. Ananda Varta; July 1973: p. 75, excerpts from Swami Bhagvatananda Giri's writing.

8. “In Company of the Great Spiritual Leaders”.

Ma has met almost all the contemporary Mahatmas of Her time. From Her Dhaka days till 1982 many seers, Mahatmas, philosophers, Sadhaks of all types had Ma’s darshan.

Sometimes Ma used to invite them to Ashram functions, and they spoke and deliberated on various religious topics. Ma’s devotees became enlightened by these discourses. Ma Herself seemed to enjoy such occasions, as She said ‘the little girl of yours has come for darshan of Pitaji (father)’. These meetings were a real treat to watch.

Prominent among those who met Ma were Swami Balanand Brahmachari, Swamis Mangal Giriji, Devi Giriji, Tapovan Maharaj, Triveni Puri, Shanker Chaitanya Bharati, Prabhu Dutt Brahmachari, Krishnanand Avadhoot, Oriya Baba, Hari Baba, Sharnanandji, Swami Akhandanandji, Swami Vishnu Ashram, Govind Prakashji, Swami Chidanandji, Swatantra Nandji, Mahant Girdhar Narain Puri, Swami Vidyanandji, Brahmanandji, Prakashanandji, Geeta Bharatiji and many more others.

Ma had deep respect for all of them. She would leave Her seat, to welcome them with folded hands. If anybody was slow in giving them an Asana She Herself would offer Her own. She might even sit on the bare floor. Again at the time of their departure, She would sometimes even escort them with folded hands. She was the personification of kindness, compassion and selfless love and affection.

The lives of Mahatmas cannot be spanned or fathomed. I have attempted in all humility to recount the meetings of some Mahatmas with Sri Ma.

Balananda Brahmachari.

In 1926, when Sri Ma went to Deoghar, She met Balananda Brahmachari, a well-known saint of the Indian subcontinent. When he saw Ma, Balanandaji said “Earlier, you had given me darshan in the subtle body, now you have come physically. I welcome your advent to this world with great reverence.”

The disciple of Balananda, Dr. Nalini Kanta Brahma, who was present on the occasion, has later written that, “they used to discuss spiritual aspects daily for hours together. Sri Ma went into a trance during Kirtan. Eyewitnesses say this was an unbelievable sight in which Ma sang and danced, keeping the weight of Her body on Her toes. She danced all over the big platform. The dazzling dance was likened to Kali’s dance all over the universe. While dancing, mantras and slokas came out spontaneously from Her mouth.”

Ma’s first visit to Kashi was in 1928. Her arrival became the talk of this ancient town. Accompanied by Bholanath, Shashanka Babu, and Didi among others, Ma stayed at the farm house of Shashanka Babu’s brother. As long as She stayed at Benares, this house looked like a festival venue. From dawn to late in the night, a stream of followers visited Ma including Govt. officials, saints, Mahatmas and ordinary people. Some only came to pay obeisance, others came to solve their problems or out of sheer curiosity. Most of the time Ma remained in a trance. Whenever She regained Her usual self, Sri Ma would get involved in Kirtan or Satsang. All the time, an aura brightened Her face.

There, for the first time She became publicly involved in discussions on religious subjects with many well known preachers and teachers of Kashi.

Shri Padmanabha Vidyavinod was a famous religious authority and a sharp critic. His standard was so high that it was very difficult to get his appreciation. When Shri Vidyavinod saw Ma, he realised that Sri Ma was a mahatma of the highest order and recommended Her darshan to Shri Gopinath Kaviraj, telling him that the sight of Ma in samadhi was wonderful.

Pt. Gopinathji, a philosopher and pandit, too was moved by Ma's darshan. He had his first darshan was on 6 Sep.1928. He returned to see Ma again, this time accompanied by Swami Shankaranandaji. At that time, Ma was in Samadhi. After she came out of samadhi, Her face was shining with an aura, and her speech was unclear. Swamiji asked Her, "Who am I, Ma?"

Ma replied in Her semi-trance state, "You? you and me are the same." Ma's reply was very emphatic and far-reaching as if the knowledge of the Vedas had itself taken Ma's form and manifested Itself. Kavirajji was astounded to see Her in this state.

Mahamahopadhyaya-Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj

Gopinathji was born on Septmeber 7, 1887 in East Bengal, five months after his father's death.

He become a well-known teacher-philosopher, and authority on Hindu religions. A linguist and philologist, he himself became a sort of institution.

In 1914, he became the chief of the Saraswati Bhavan library. Appreciating his talent Raj Rajeshwar Shastri has written that he had read one lakh books, and manuscripts from this library and he remembered everything up until his death.

He was the Principal of the State Sanskrit College in Varanasi until 1937. After his retirement, he was requested by various universities to join them but Gopinathji preferred to continue his studies of Tantra literature and Sanskrit on his own.

Inspired by the supernatural attainments of Swami Bishuddhanandaji, Pandit Gopinath took diksha from him at the former's ashram at Hanuman Ghat on January 21, 1918.

Research into religious studies and darshan of Mahatmas were his preoccupations. Unmindful of the caste, creed, sect and Ashrams of different saints and renowned followers of different lines of Sadhana, he remained in their company to know their ways of sadhana in proximity. He himself felt the truth of Yoga darshan. He was witness to some unbelievable feats of his Guru through Yoga Sadhana and the use of sun science.

He once asked his Guru, "How do these outstanding people, the authorities on Yoga, relate to Sadhana? What do we get from these exercises?"

Swamiji asked him to have faith in Yoga Sadhana. Guided by his Guru, Pandit Gopinath actually experienced the manifestations and power of the Mantras.

His Guru told him that the power of a mantra was greater than all the electrical power of the whole world. He found the description of Kedar Malakar about the heavenly abode just as it was mentioned in the Shastras. He had faith in such things, saying so only after convincing himself about it.

Pandit Gopinathji's knowledge had no bounds. At the first darshan of Ma, Gopinathji considered himself to be Her son. Ma, too, considered him like father. His respect for Ma was most profound. Gopinathji once suggested to another devotee of Ma, "go on calling Ma-Ma, you will reach the destination."

Pandit Gopinath was always very forthcoming, whoever came to him, Indian or foreigner, Tantrik or Vedic, archaeologist, writer, yogi, saint, ascetic or atheist—they were all treated well

with the proper logical analysis applied to the topic under discussion. When Panditji would start speaking people would listen with rapt attention.

Kavirajji used to consider the sadhak and yogi to be different. He used to say, the aim of a Sadhak is to solve his own problems and worries and gain happiness. On the other hand, the aim of a yogi is to substitute worries and problems of others with love and happiness”

Gopi Baba was considered an authority in Tantra Shastra. He had understood the various theories of the mysterious Tantric scriptures up to the point of practical experience. With this multi-faceted personality he had knowledge of all three aspects of Sadhana tantra, Mantra and yantra. Neither were literature and philosophy foreign to him. Author of several books on Indian spiritual life and culture, Yoga and Tantra, he is known the world over for his contributions to that field.

This great son of Sri Ma had also been a guide in the Sadhana of many of Ma’s devotees. He had been the foremost exponent of Sri Ma’s principles. He had written an analytical book ‘Amarvani’, based on excerpts of Sri Ma’s talks on different topics. Pandit Gopinathji had written extensively on Sri Ma.

Acknowledging his talent, the Imperial Govt of India in 1934 had honoured him with the title “Mahamahopadhyaya”. Later, in 1964 the Govt of India conferred on him the ‘Padmavibhushan’, the second highest civilian award, only after the Bharat Ratna. He was editor of “Anandavarta” (quarterly journal) for 24 years, from 1968 till his death on June 12, 1978. Gopi Baba lived in Ma Anandamayi Ashram in Kashi, under the tutelage of Sri Ma.

Swami Vishuddhanandji.

A great yogi he had the honour of being Pandit Gopinath Kavirajji’s Guru. Sometime in 1935, Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj took Ma, Didima, Hariram Bhai and Didi to his Guru at the Vishuddhananda ashram at Varanasi. Ma said to Baba that Her companions wanted to see some of Baba’s miracles.

Baba Vishuddhanand had a range of lenses. He picked up one of them and took out his handkerchief. Through this glass, he reflected the sun’s rays to different corners of the kerchief and said, now smell it. “You will each get the aroma you like the most.” And astonishingly, Baba’s words were true!

Baba then plucked some leaves from a croton plant, made a paste of it, reflected sunlight through a glass, and it turned into a glass ball!

Swamiji was a great Yogi, who lived for a considerable period in Tibet. He was capable of teaching this sun science to whoever lived with him for some time.

Soon after this meeting with Ma, in 1937 he left his mortal shell.

When Ma used to live with Bhaiji and other disciples on the banks of Ganges at Rishikesh, around 1932-1935, She often went for a walk in front of the various huts of saints and seers living there. Sometime She visited them and attended their satsangs. The Mahatmas, accorded Her a hearty reception and even discussed various religious issues with Her.

Among these Mahatmas was Purnananda Swami who used to send his disciple to find out about Ma’s well-being at regular intervals. He also visited Ma and discussed various topics and asked Ma about the ‘Kriyas’. Later, he used to praise Ma to Bhaiji. On occasions he used to send Ma sweets, made of milk. One day, he sent one of his disciples to Ma with the question: “What do you see in your dreams?”

Ma replied. "Has Baba not asked you to ask me this? Well tell Baba that dream is where sleep occurs. When sleep does not occur the question of dreaming does not arise. This world is like a dream in the waking state." Swamiji was very happy to get this reply.

Swami Triveni Puriji.

The Guru of Swami Krishnanand Avadhootji, Shri Triveni Puriji was a famous saint, based in Khanna, Punjab. Highly respected, Triveni Puriji was a seer of the highest order, who had memorised the entire Guru Granth Sahib. Ma met Triveni Puriji through Swami Avadhootji.

Once, at the initiative of Avadhootji, Ma's birth celebrations were held at several places in Punjab. Ma, accompanied by many Mahatmas, visited those venues of the celebrations which concluded at Ambala. Triveni Puriji also gave Ma company during this festivity.

On another occasion, Triveni Puriji came to Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun where he attended the satsang at Haribaba's ashram daily. There he used to give darshan to a stream of visitors. Like Mahatma Ram Thakur, he also had the knack of extracting a religious meaning out of the most ordinary words.

Sri Ma said, "This bent of mind comes through endless search for truth and benevolence."

Triveni Puriji gave a cardamom as prasad with his blessings to whoever came to pay obeisance to him. One day, his stock of cardamoms was finished. Hence, he asked one of his disciples, Shri Chetan Pun, to fetch a kilo of cardamoms. Almost at this time, someone came from Sri Ma with one and a quarter kilos of cardamoms. Baba said, "I asked for cardamoms and 'Antaryamini' (one who knows another's mind) Ma has fulfilled my wishes. Baba had great regard for Sri Ma.

In 1949 the New Delhi ashram was the venue for an Akhand Naamyagna. It was forenoon when devotees were absorbed in Kirtan with great fervour around the stage in Ma's company. Triveni Puriji entered the hall, and seeing Ma in ecstasy, paid obeisance to Her with folded hands. Streams of tears flowed from his eyes. Those present around were moved by Baba's mute gesture.

Several Mahatmas attended the Purnahuti of the Savitri Mahayagna in January 1950 at Kashi ashram. Triveni Puri was among them. Ma would always receive the seers with great respect and care. For Triveni Puriji, Ma made matchless reception arrangements. She Herself went to receive him; there was a great fanfare, with a band and Kirtan sung with great fervour. As Baba entered the ashram, rose petals were showered from the roof tops by the Ashram girls, by Ma's instructions. The kirtan and shower of rose petals, moved Triveni Puriji.

Triven Puriji was a highly respected saint. Once, one person who came to pay obeisance to him, asked, "Please bless me with the kind of peace which Ma personifies."

Baba replied, "If I could get an iota of Ma's peace, my mission would be fulfilled."

Swami Krishnananda Avadhootji

Swami Avadhootji was a Vedantist, who met Ma for the first time in the 1940s. Very much impressed by Her darshan, Avodhootji remained in Ma's compay until his death at Ma's Vrindavan Ashram where he stayed for a long time.

Avadhootji graced almost all the celebrations at Ma's ashram. His contribution towards the consecration of Vrindravan temple, and installation of the images is immeasurable.

Once during a lecture series, Avadhooji said “When a Sadhak attains an impartial view, he can realise the truth in every cell. He attains this level after the elimination of attachment and jealousy”.

In this context he mentioned that once Sridama is said to have asked Krishna for his picture as Krishna’s absence was unbearable for him. Chitra who was known to be a good artist, was called. Chitra told Yashoda that she wanted to see her lala (dearest child). She had not seen him before.

So Krishna came and posed. Such was Krishna’s posture that Chitra’s heart was drowned in Eternal love. She could not draw the picture, every time she tried to sketch, the lines were swept by her tears. Because of this strange experience of love and happiness she prayed to Saraswati to draw this picture for her. Saraswati expressed her inability. Instead she asked her to pray for Krishna’s blessings. She took the advice, and soon an extremely beautiful picture was drawn. Both Lala (Krishna) and Yashoda were delighted. Yashoda asked Chitra what she expected by way of remuneration.

Chitra asked for Krishna, and Yashoda fell unconscious. Then Krishna told her “Yashoda would be hurt if he was taken away.” He promised to remain in her company as the same personality for ever.

After narrating this incident, Shri Avadhootiji exhorted all devotees of Ma to surrender themselves before Sri Ma. (see note 4).

The tradition of Sri Ma’s birth celebration is the outcome of Sri Avadhootji’s immense regard, love and devotion for Sri Ma.

He once saw Ma sitting on a lion. Then he suggested to Didi that throne of similar design should be carved. Most of the devotees including Didi, were against this idea but at the initiative of one Mahatma, a fabulous throne fitted on the back of a lion was made out of eight different metals. This throne, now kept at Kankhal ashram, was not used by Ma. Despite repeated requests of Avadhootiji, Ma preferred to sit on its steps rather than on the throne.

In 1952, when Triveni Puri met Ma during Shivaratri at Haridwar, he was hale and hearty. He requested that in May 1953 Ma’s birth celebrations be held in Punjab. However within a few weeks of the beginning of the celebrations, he departed for his heavenly abode. Avadhootji, who constructed a temple on the samadhi of his Guru, held akhand kirtan throughout Ma’s birth celebrations. He was the person behind this great show. Ma praised his tremendous efforts in organising such grand and joyous celebrations.

Swami Shankar Chaitanya Bharati

Kashi’s famous saint Shankar Chaitanya Bharati was better known as Chaitanya Giri. Preferring to remain aloof, he lived at Lalita Devi Math. He was a renowned scholar and wrote many religious books. He lived a secluded life, and never used to meet women. He had not even met Ma, despite living in Kashi. He had restricted his disciples to just a few, who closely served their Guru.

One day when this devotee of Bhagawati Tripur Sundari was meditating in the temple, Bhagavati herself asked him to meet Ma Anandamoyi, who was Her personification.

Shankar Chaitanya Bharati came to see Sri Ma during Her 60th birth anniversary celebrations at Kashi. As Shankar Bharati’s boat touched the Ashram Ghat, he was escorted with

great reverence to Ma on the podium. He prostrated before Sri Ma uttering a hymn in praise of Mahadevi, and was moved as if he were getting God's darshan in reality. He presented Her with a huge, beautiful garland that touched Ma's feet. Someone asked him who is Ma? Shankar Bharati replied, "Chaitanya Chidananda". During this occasion, he participated in the Satsang with Sri Ma and Gopibaba for two hours. He returned to Ma, thereafter, frequently for religious discourses and discussions.

A very trusted devotee of Ma later told me that actually Shankar Bharatiji had Sri Ma's darshan earlier also. Only Ma and Shankar Bharatiji were present at that occasion. Ma later confirmed this meeting. It was Shankar Bharatiji who named the Diamond Jubilee Celebration as '60th Birth Anniversary Festival'. During the festivities, Shankar Bharatiji once came to the Ashram and discussed several religious questions like manliness, and the relation between powers and compassion. Shankar Bharati, in his lucid speech, said that distinct compassion and kindness is manliness.

In an article published in 'Anandavarta' Swami Brahmanandaji had written (Note 5) that once Pannalalji asked Bharatiji about Ma's real form. His reply was that Ma is Chidananda personified.

Once a Brahmachari, who attended to Bharatiji and received alms for his Guru also, had gone to his village for some reason. Thus, Bharatiji went without food for a few days.

Then one day, Bharatiji came to the Vishwanath temple and Annapurna temple during his early morning visit to these places, and said "he was living in their place. Was he not entitled to even his 'bhiksha'?" It was akin to how Bhagavan Shankaracharya asked for alms from Ma Annapurna.

Bharatiji proceeded from this place to Lalita Ghat.

During those days Sri Ma was in Kashi. That particular day, Ma sent a brahmachari to Lalita Ghat for Bharatiji. The brahmachari returned with news about Bharatiji. Thereafter, Sri Ma immediately arranged for care and regular meals for this great Mahatma.

The following is a unique incident involving the two great souls.

Swamiji became very weak, suffering from blood dysentery. He could take only vegetable soup. Kashi's famous physician Dr. Gopal Das Gupta, an ardent devotee of Ma, was treating him while Ma arranged for his meals and other things with Swamiji's consent. This arrangement continued for almost eight years until Swamiji left for his heavenly abode on 14h June 1957.

Swami Devi Giriji

Swami Devi Giriji was a famous seer of Uttar Kashi. Swami Paramanandaji of our Ashram described his religious discourses as simply splendid. He had a wonderful voice, coupled with lucidity of speech and excellent pronunciation of Sanskrit. During his sadhana in Uttar Kashi, Swamiji frequently visited him for his guidance on Kathopanishad.

According to Swamiji, Devi Giriji had memorised the entire Tulsi Ramayan and his prayers to Lord Shiva were unmatched by any other devotee at Uttar Kashi.

Swami Devi Giriji visited Ma in 1948 at Kashi Ashram. During his visit, the Ashram was the venue for the Savitri Mahayagna. Both Devi Giriji and Sri Ma had religious discussions for several hours. One night while Kirtan was being held in the presence of Baba, Ma Herself started singing.

"Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram

Jayati Jayati Jai Sitaram”

What an auspicious occasion was that! In presence of Devi Giriji and the rippling sound of the Ganges flowing by the Ashram, the night must have been wonderful with Ma Herself singing..... What a thrill to imagine that moment! In the midst of Her song, suddenly Baba said, “Ma, you are Happiness personified.”

Baba left his worldly body in October 1950.

The old, dignified saint Swami Gyanananda lived in Kashi. Founder of Bharat Dharma Mandal, Swamiji was on his deathbed when he told his doctor Gopal Das that his last wish was to meet Ma. Dr. Das hurriedly went to Ma’s Ashram but Ma was not there. He was very much upset thinking perhaps the old man may not survive to have Sri Ma’s darshan. After two hours. Ma returned and just on seeing Dr. Das Gupta she said— “Pitaji, I went to see Gyanananda Baba.”

Dr. Das Gupta was stunned, how could Ma know about Swamiji’s wish?” Ma said She had the kheyal while She was in Vindhyaachal.

[Dr. Gopal Das Gupta was an outstanding person. A competent doctor he had a flourishing practice, the earnings from which he distributed among the poor and needy. Dr. Das Gupta used to be very affectionate towards Ma. He would cry while talking about Ma and make the listeners too cry. At times, he disclosed his troubles to Ma in private.]

Swami Maheshwaranandji

Swamiji was a regular visitor to Sri Ma. He was an excellent speaker. Once he said “For the attainment of knowledge of truth patience is needed. Truth is infinite. God is all truth, knowledge and infinite. That is why in the Sanyam Saptah the Kirtan “Satyam Gyanam, Anantam Brahma” is sung. So, keeping the sense organs under control, aspire for the real nectar. So all human beings should try to get settled in the bliss of supreme knowledge.”

Swamiji was listened to with rapt attention during the Sanyam Saptah.

On another day, Swamiji said, “One must pray daily. First prayer, then Japa. When the mind and soul is purified by Japa then Sadhana should be done. Sadhana should be intense so that your body and soul should be assimilated into the united whole”.

Once he explained Krishan Leela saying “Shri Krishna enters the house of a Gopi, when she complains then the cleverest of the clever, Krishna says ‘Oh, I entered here in confusion, actually dear consort, this whole world is full of confusion.’ So if there was no confusion the world would have been extremely peaceful.”

“Sri Krishna is the spiritual essence of all. It is the principle of Vedanta that through ignorance one feels the world and through knowledge one gets liberated from the world. Take the world that delights you as ever changing and fast moving. Get out of this delusion, sit calmly and be in touch with the Supreme. Then this world will not create doubts in you, and then there will be no confusion.”

“Happiness is of two types. One is outward happiness. But the real happiness lies within. Outward happiness and its manifestation should be pacified and turned inward.”

“From Sri Krishna, out of the din, chaos and a bitter battle, came the Gita. Arjun was told to be a Yogi.’ He was duty bound. He had God within him. He had to seek the company of a Mahapurush.”

“Samadhi attained with the control of breath is ‘Jad-Samadhi’ and that after supreme knowledge and bhakti is Chaitanya Samadhi. There is another called ‘Sahaj Samadhi’ as seen in Sri

Ma; it is spontaneous. Here it is not necessary to close your eyes. Here you can see God everywhere with open eyes. Knowledge is for knowing a thing while Bhakti is total acceptance.”

Shri Gopal Thakur

During the winter of 1944, Shri Gopal Thakur came with his family, friends and devotees for Sri Ma’s darshan at the Vindhyachal Ashram, responding to Ma’s invitation. Shri Thakur spent five days in Ma’s company and performed the Geeta Jayanti festival for the first time. On the first four days of this function, Puja and the main reading of Bhagavad Gita were held in the morning. Gopal Thakur elucidated the Gita himself after dark. On the fifth day Shri Thakur said prayers with his melodious voice and completed the Mahapuja of ‘Parthasarathi Govinda’.

Shri Gopal Thakur was disciple of Shri Satyadev Thakur, the founder of ‘Sadhana Samar Sampradai’. His devotees felt subdued by his lively way of worship. Before the Mahapuja, the life spirit of Gita Jayanti, Gopal Thakur used to shower basketful of flowers over Sri Ma with great reverence. He became so much engrossed in Puja that sometimes he would laugh and then often cry. Thakur had great love for flowers. Once, for this reason different flowers were cultivated in the ashram garden during winter. On the Geeta Jayanti day, Ma touched each one of them that had been beautifully collected in different baskets and said, “Dedicate yourself to the feet of God.” She enjoyed doing this like a baby who becomes happy after doing something new.

Shri Gopal Thakur made it a ritual that on the conclusion of Gita Jayanti, Ma would sing. It became an annual function. In the stillness of the silent, solemn night, the sweet melodious voice from the Divine Mother’s lips can just be imagined. How fortunate were those who have enjoyed those rare moments.

Shri Thakur’s favourite welcome song was—

“Oh, God My beloved,
today you must come and sit with us.”

(Aao Amar Praner Thakur, Aaj tomake astehobe, Basate hobey)

After the Puja of Shrimad Bhagvat, Shri Thakur held a ‘Gita Yagna’ on the terrace. After pronouncing every Sloka, he gave an offering to the fire. It was dusk by the time the Yagna was over. Then Thakur used to explain the niceties of the Gita, keeping the audience spell-bound. The Gita Jayanti festival concluded with Ma’s songs.

Once, after the festival, Shri Thakur asked devotees present to sing in groups of four or five. "Sing songs of happiness", he said. But actually the songs sung turned out to be melancholic. The last one was particularly so.

“Whoever, like me, wants you
keeps company with sorrow.”

As Shri Thakur had said he wanted cheerful songs not those ones, he turned to Ma saying "Ma, why don’t you ask Vibhu to sing." Ma replied, “yes I too had this kheyal...”

Vibhuda later recounted that he had lacked confidence when asked to sing. Then suddenly he had remembered that a lyric in praise of Sri Ma was written only the previous day. He ran into his room and returned with a piece of paper on which the song was written. He sang:

"Ma has come.
Happiness now has no bounds
The soul is filled with it.
We, Her sons, are on Her lap.

Moving ahead in delight
We have no fear, no poverty.
Who will go to the ever-smiling Ma,
She has opened Her lap to wipe away our sorrow."

Gopal Thakur went into ecstatic mood on hearing this song. As he acknowledged the singer and the song, someone from the audience came and hugged Vibhuda.

Shri Thakur asked his daughter Kalyani to write down the song. Ma too asked the girls to copy the words.

Every year, Gopal Thakur used to organise Durga Puja at his Allahabad Ashram. He used to invite Ma for this occasion. Pouring down on Her a basket full of Hibiscus flowers, he used to cry aloud in a trance.

He once said: 'Ma, you have come to watch your own Puja!' Gopal Thakur used to laugh and cry at times. Whoever has seen him performing Puja, would simply wonder at his total involvement.

During one Durgapuja, Thakur felt that the image had no life and looked like an image of just clay. He disclosed this to Ma, who came and touched each part of the idol. It was done behind the screen, away from public gaze. After She touched the image, Ma asked Thakur to place his ear near the heart of the Devi. Thakur did this and was stunned to hear the heartbeats. Next moment, he fell at the feet of Sri Ma, almost fainting.

Baba Sitaram Das Omkarnath

A great saint and a sincere loving son of Ma, Sitaram Baba visited Ma many times. He also sent his disciples to Ma regularly. Whenever Baba came, he would always be chanting stotras. Baba had a great following, with 61 ashrams all over India, but when he was before Ma, he came with childlike innocence. As long as he could walk, he would come and go back with his face towards Ma, prayers flowing from his mouth.

Baba regarded Ma as Adyashakti (a form of Durga). Once he said in Satsang, "Durga appear on the horizon when the time comes". Then winking at Ma he further said, "No question of appearing, Durga has already appeared."

When he heard that Ma was not well and had no Kheyal to get better he rushed on 2nd July 1982 to Dehradun ashram, where Ma was resting. He prayed to Her to get well. After Sri Ma's passing away from this world he also left his body after only a few months.

Shri Chaitanya Giriji

Shri 108 Swami Chaitanya Giriji Maharaj met Sri Ma during the nineteen fifties.

Born in a Saraswat Brahmin family in Hoshiarpur district of Punjab, he attained the degree of Shastri even before he became a saint. Later he studied Ayurveda, Astrology, Tantra and several other subjects in detail. He did his sadhana as a Brahmachari and attained perfection in many siddhis.

Once on the the banks of Narmada, he had put up for the night in a dilapidated building, where another Mahatma was sleeping. His snoring interrupted Giriji's Bhajan. Giriji woke him up and asked him to sing along with him.

"Whose bhajan do you want me to sing?" The Mahatma asked Giriji. 'Ram' Giriji said. The Mahatma then asked Giriji to hear his heart beats. Behold! Giriji heard "Ram, Ram" wherever he put his ear on the Mahatma's body.

Giriji met Swami Vishnudevananda at Kailash Ashram. The latter was a great scholar who tested the learning of Giriji before initiating him as his disciple. Soon, he placed Giriji in charge of Kailash Ashram and left the place quietly.

Giriji's presence at the Sanyam Saptah was something the ashram inmates and Ma's other disciples looked forward to. He also graced Durga Puja and Ma's birthday celebrations many times.

Giriji breathed his last in October 1972 but not before handing over the charge of Kailash Ashram to Swami Vidyananda Giriji Vedanta Sarvadarshanacharya. Ma's devotees would eagerly wait to hear Swami Vidyanandji's lucid talks on Vedanta.

Swami Sharananandaji

It was a treat to watch Ma meeting Swami Sharananandaji, the famous Bhakta-saint of Vrindavan. On many occasions, Swamiji left Vrindavan to attend functions at Ma's ashrams. When Ma came to Vrindavan they met almost daily.

Earlier, Satsang festivities were held at Oriya Baba's Ashram, where Oriya Baba, Hari Baba, Swami Akhandanandaji, Swami Sharananandaji and many other Mahatmas took part. After 1954, when Ma's ashram was set up, satsang began to be organised at Ma's ashram too.

Swamiji's discourses were simple, straight and full of humor and compassion. During one discourse Swamiji said the body is in control when one abstains from food. The soul and mind are closely connected. The soul is purified by taking a little pure food during Ekadashi (the 4th day before full Moon). One has to control all eleven senses. You can't attain fulfillment through power. You attain it by admitting it. Admitting Him as your own."

He said, "Desire makes you subservient. Necessity makes one independent. Everybody's necessity is the same. What troubles you is desire, what upsets you is necessity."

"To get closer to God is very easy, and the God is the most necessary thing. You can get God if you have faith and a respect for Him."

"When the association is perfect then the remembrance is also perfect, and when the remembrance is perfect then the love will be perfect. Have faith and reliance in whom we believe, then love for Him develops automatically. Then heart, mind and senses get lost in that. The love is with the lover. It is not knowing and accepting, it is accepting and then one knows by itself. The so far only-heard-of God now becomes a fact, a Truth before your eyes and He also becomes your own. The thing you get with labour and which makes you feel tired is the world, and that obtained without labour is God. It is the fruit of satsang that life blooms with peace, sacrifice, and love."

"Sanata dharma professes that everybody can get peace, liberation and bhakti. Yoga gives peace, knowledge, perfection and love, boundless pleasure. With the pleasure of both likes and dislikes comes spiritual love. But it never gets fulfilled. In every human being there are three forces — action, desire, and knowledge. When they are equalised the Guru showers his blessings.

Swamiji used to visit Beharaji regularly. Someone asked him one day, "You are not able to see, then why do you visit Beharaji? Swamiji replied cheerfully, "Brother He sees everything."

Swami Vishnu Ashramji

Suktal's Dandi Swami has visited Ma several times. He still takes time off to visit the ashram. He has read Srimad Bhagavat on many occasions in week long functions.

He invited Ma and Her devotees for Sanyam Saptah at Suktal, located on the banks of Ganges near Muzafarnagar (U.P.).

It is said that at this very place Mahatma Sukdev had shown Raja Parikshit the path of Nirvana by telling him the Srimad Bhagavat. The place gradually became famous as a pilgrim centre.

Unlike many other Mahatmas, Swamiji spoke in simple straight language, punctuated with excellent examples and instances. During one Satsang, he said, "Born on truth, religion lives in kindness, compassion and sacrifice. It is destroyed by anger. Two types of people live even above the heavenly abode - one who pardons others instead of taking revenge and the other who gives alms despite being poor.

Swami Vishnu Ashramji described Ramnaam's greatness in his inimitable way. "Ramnaam", he says, "has come out of the great churning of the Vedas. Shiva does not keep nectar in his mouth, he keeps Ramnaam instead. With Ramnaam one is able to overcome lust, anger etc."

Shri Ram asked Hanumanji, "I am very happy with you, what do you want?"

Hanumanji replied, "I am not just satisfied by taking Ramnaam all the time. I would like to live on the earth repeating your name."

Once during a discourse, Swamiji said, "For he who is in oneness with his Guru or Bhagvan, the Truth lights up his soul. It is by the mercy of God alone that one comes into close proximity with God. 'I am yours, take me into your refuge'. Thinking of the world you are aloof. You belong only to Bhagavan. In the world think I am nobody and nobody is mine. God is mine and I am of God. This is all."

Swami Kalyandevji.

Swami Kalyandevji has been one of Suktal's highly respected Mahatmas, who was known for his devotion and sacrifice. Swamiji had the chance of meeting Sri Ma twice when the latter visited Suktal during the Sanyam Saptah. In fact it was he, who organised a grand reception at Muzaffarnagar railway station from where Ma was taken to Suktal.

A very competent organiser, he was a person behind the institution of the temple of Sukdevji in the midst of a forest. He was also a saint with the least needs. He used little clothing even in winter. Fresh carrots and radishes was all he would eat and he never required even a hut to live in.

It was said that even before 1961, he had met Ma discreetly during some festivals.

Oriya Baba.

Oriya Baba came into contact with Ma through Hari Baba in the nineteen forties. An ascetic with a deep knowledge of religious scriptures he was appreciated most for his reclusiveness,

endurance and sacrifice. The first meeting between Oriya Baba and Haribaba took place at Karnvas in 1915. Hari Baba and Oriya Baba came to be known as very close friends, like Gour—Nitai and Ram Shiv though in their lifestyle they were totally different from each other. Oriya Baba was a monotheist while Hari Baba was a devout worshipper. Oriya Baba was a moody Fakir who never bothered about the time of day. Hari Baba was very particular about time.

Even then they were so close to each other that Oriya Baba once said, "When we meet we feel the same pleasure as when peacocks dance on seeing rain clouds."

Oriya Baba was 9 years older than Hari Baba. When he went for Hari Baba's functions, the festivities came to a climax in his divine presence. Once, he did not come for one such function because he was unwell and according to his own practice, he was supposed to walk the whole distance. Nevertheless, Hari Baba and Sri Ma went in a car to fetch him. He could not turn down Ma's request and went along with them to attend the function. On this occasion, both Oriya Baba and Ma came closer to each other.

After that the whole of Khadar district and the adjoining area was vibrating with an overflow of Hari Baba's kirtan and Baba's devotees too followed it. Some more serious Saints and scholars raised objections to this, and also Hari Baba's way of starting Kirtan by pronouncing 'Om'. They said that it was contrary to the scriptures for a common man to pronounce 'Om' in that way.

However, Baba remained unperturbed and continued his style of Kirtan without any change. Oriya Baba supported him vociferously, saying he considered Haribaba's words to be more auspicious and pure than even Slokas from the Vedas.

Hari Baba used to set out the Asana for Oriya Baba while he was reading scriptures or doing kirtana and likewise Oriya Baba did the same.

It was a pleasure for Oriya Baba to feed others. He used to say "eating good food is the joy of the soul; offering it is the joy of the creator".

During various different functions Baba used to be in charge of this area. Once the venue was Ardha Kumbh at Prayag, on the banks of holy Ganges near Triveni, scores of Mahatmas had gathered. It was a sight to witness people on pilgrimage. The satsang of Oriya Baba radiated brilliantly.

The Akhand Naam Sankirtan Mahayagna of Prabhudutt Brahmachariji was in its final stages. Brahmachariji asked Oriya Baba to take charge of the food store as "you have realised Goddess Annapurna." He had only a few hundred rupees left in the office (see note 9).

Baba smiled and provided for the grand festivities as if Ma Annapurna herself had opened Her food store. A few hundred rupees would not have been enough for even a single breakfast.

Once, in the Vrindavan Ashram of Oriya Baba festivities went on for days. People from several villages, who attended the festival, were given excellent food all day and night. One day, several Mahatmas including Ma and Oriya Baba were sitting on the dais during a Satsang. Suddenly Baba sprang up, hugged Ma and with tearful eyes, said, "Ma I could not recognise you."

The end came for Oriya Baba in a bizarre incident. During a function when he was seated on the dais, one of his disciples turned violent and beat him to death. The sudden incident fuelled other devotees to beat this disciple to death on the same spot. Much later, confiding to Her disciples, Ma said it is difficult to say why that disciple took such a step. This disciple lived in Oriya Baba's Ashram. He was a devotee of both Oriya Baba and Hari Baba, especially Hari Baba, because he was once heard singing in praise of Hari Baba as Mahapurush.

Hari Baba's troupe which played several leelas, one day used a particular theme: there was a priest in charge of a Shiv-Parvati temple. He was a devout pujari who worshipped the idols daily.

One day, he decided to ask for something in return. He picked up a stick and beat the Shiva idol. For three days he did the same and he got what he wanted.

Ma said that devotee who beat Oriya Baba to death, might have had similar sentiments. As the man considered Oriya Baba as Shiva personified, perhaps he also thought if he hit him hard his desire would be fulfilled. But there was no way of confirming it since that person was also killed at the same time (see note7).

Prabhudutt Brahmachariji

It was Prabhudattji of Jhusi, Prayag who during his travel to north India, was among the first Mahatmas to meet Sri Ma at Sahastradhara, Dehradun. Prabhudattji who was very much influenced later introduced Hari Baba to Her.

"I went to meet Her out of curiosity. She was speaking, and interrupting Her speech asked me whether She was right or not."

"Father, am I right?" She would ask me as if She knew me for a long time, though I was meeting Her for the first time." He has written that an element of ego in him was melted with this open-hearted encounter.

It was Prabhudutt Brahmachari who first placed Sri Ma among the Mahatmas on the dais during a function. Brahmachariji is credited with bringing Ma into the fold of Mahatmas and seers.

For almost 50 years, Ma and Brahmachariji remained in touch with each other. The relationship flowed like the holy Bhagirathi.

Prabhuduttji has written, "At my foolishness, Ma only laughs and laughs. She laughs during someone's birth, She laughs during someone's death. Whether it is sorrow or joy, She continues to laugh. Her laugh reverberates throughout the entire Universe. She fills this mundane world with Her laughter."

Once, Ma invited Baba to Vindhyaachal Ashram. Several dishes were prepared. Ma Herself presented them to Baba and Baba went on eating. He has written that "I am not able to recollect if I have eaten such delicious food ever in my life. On that day, I wanted to win by finishing all the dishes and it did so happen. She lost, I won, but the victory was like the child winning when his father lifts him ahead and says, "you have beaten me, you have won." Ma still remembers the incident and even today asks Khukuni (Didi) to prepare a lot of food when I am invited to eat there."

Once in Kashi, during Ekadashi, Baba was scheduled to visit Her. Ma had a lot of food prepared from fresh fruit and vegetables. A big pumpkin was boiled, its core emptied and then the halves were put together with dishes beautifully decorated inside.

When Baba sat to eat, this pumpkin was placed before him. Ma laughed and said, "Father, open it and see". Baba understood there was some mystery behind Ma's request. When he opened it, he found several dishes inside it. He was delighted by this Leela of Ma.

Baba and Ma were involved at times in serious religious discussions. The complicated theories of Yoga was one topic on which Ma spoke and Baba said "you are already a Siddha Mahayogini."

Ma replied that nothing was beyond Her knowledge and that all the yoga asanas had spontaneously enacted in Her body.

Ma had complete knowledge of everything. Whoever had a problem Ma solved it.

Brahmachariji has said, “Ma can hardly read a book. But She can teach eminent writers. She does not know any foreign language. But several foreigners come to Her and return enlightened. She cannot write, but She can inspire one to write about knowledge and wisdom. She respects all, She gives pleasure, distributes love and happiness. That’s why she is Anandamoyi Ma. Ma, give me alms of love, make this undevout soul devout.”

In 1943-44, Baba organised a Bhagavat Saptah at Sahestradhara, Dehradun. Ma, Haribaba, Avadhootji and many others graced that occasion. Several, spoke. When Brahmachariji asked Ma to say something, Ma came out with a burst of laughter. That was no ordinary laughter. No human being could laugh that way, thought the visiting saints and seers. After many requests Sri Ma said, “To talk only of Hari is worthwhile the rest is vain and painful” (Hari Katha hi Katha, aur Sab Vratha Vyatha).

In March 1944, Brahmachariji organised a huge Kirtan recital at Prayag. Ma went there, and several Mahatmas, a kirtan group from Navadweep too came there. During the closing ceremony of this function, a storm swept across the pandal. At that crucial time Ma asked a priest to put some holy water around the fire. None could follow why this was being done. It began raining heavily, then the sacred fire set the pandal alight and it began to spread dangerously. Amidst all this, Ma stayed near the yagnashala and returned only after the Ramayan path was over, it was potentially a catastrophic incident, a disaster which put the many people, who thronged the place, in danger. But surprisingly, not a single person died even though all the shamianas were turned upside down by that dangerous storm and the fire that followed.

Sometimes Shri Ma visited Brahmachariji without notice, He would be delighted like a child to see Her and present Her the fruit and vegetables from his ashram garden.

Once, Prabhudattji, and Chakrapaniji went to Vindhyachal when Sri Ma was there. The other mahatmas also liked the Ashram very much because of its tranquil atmosphere. The inmates of the Ashram took great care of the visitors. Before their return, the Mahatmas, said they were overwhelmed by the care and behaviour of the hosts. “This kind of care is not possible from a human being - Ma is really our Mother.”

Vindhyachal provided the perfect retreat for Sri Ma. She frequently came to this place from Varanasi or Allahabad for a short rest. Vindhyachal, traditionally the ideal spot for Sadhana, was the venue for Kalipuja in October 1944 when Sri Ma was present. On the second day of the Puja was ‘Annakut’ which Prabhudatt Brahmachari was scheduled to perform. Everything was arranged in order. Several dishes were cooked in huge quantities, for this offering. Prabhudattaji was surprised to see the elaborate arrangements. He could not believe this was possible in this remote place. Prabhudattji thereafter, offered the Bhog to Ma Kali in Ma’s presence and later it was distributed as Prasad to the devotees present.

Brahmachariji was a talented writer who wrote more than 108 volumes of ‘Bhagavati Katha’, which contains Srimad Bhagavat, Gita, Upanishad and Purana tales with a lucid explanation. Besides this popular series, he also wrote Chaitanya Chanitavali in Hindi in five parts.

In 1982, when Ma visited Kashi ashram for the last time, Prabhudattji came to see Her. Ma was not keeping well. Nevertheless She arranged for Baba’s food. It was always Baba who insisted that he would eat only in the presence of Ma. He said, ‘Ma you would also feel like eating something when you see me, eating?’

Brahmachariji left his mortal coil on 11th March 1980 at his newly constructed ashram in New Delhi.

Hari Baba:

He was born in a respected highly educated Sikh family of Gandhabal village (District Hoshiarpur, Punjab) on the Holi Purnima of 1885. His passion from his childhood was meditation. He was studying in the Punjab Medical college when his family insisted that he get married. He straightaway came to Hoshiarpur and devoted his life and time in the service of his Guru, Swami Sachidanandaji. He stood for hours, fanning his Guru. His devotion to his Guru was praiseworthy. That quality was in evidence much later when he stood for hours during the Rasleelas and other leelas to fan the various idols. He never used to sit during these occasions. He said he saw neither Ram nor Krishna during the fanning, he saw only his Guru instead.

Due to his stoicism, he wanted to take 'Vidwat sannyasa'. He meditated hard for six years at Prayag before going to the Punjab frontier for Sadhana and Bhajan. After taking sannyas, he studied the Vedas and related scriptures in depth.

Haribaba never wasted a moment in this life. He woke up at 2-3 o'clock, much before dawn. When he went for his morning walk, people used to set their watches. He had a good sense of humor. Once Baba was going somewhere across the river. He was accompanied by some 20 people. When he boarded a boat, the boatman said, he would not take any fare from him and his company. He only asked Baba to point out those who were going along with him.

Baba replied, "My dear, I am alone. There is nobody with me."

Haribaba travelled a lot and met new people and Mahatmas. In 1915 when he was roaming as an ascetic through Anup Nagar, Haribaba met Oriyababa. The meeting gradually turned into a great relationship. Similarly in 1922, the traveller Baba reached Ganwa village on the banks of Ganges in Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh. Making this a centre, he spread Harinam in the surrounding areas.

These areas were low-lying, and therefore prone to flooding every year. He was deeply moved by the plight of the villagers due to the losses caused by the floods. The 'Karmayogi' then decided to construct a dam there. It was a herculean task. Repeating Harinam all the time Haribaba himself together with villagers took up the challenge. They piled up maunds of earth to construct a 24 mile long dam across the Ganga without any Government assistance and in just six months. By doing so, he saved the lands of hundreds of families.

Haribaba's Ashram is located on this dam which has been the venue for several celebrations. For thousands of people of 'Bandh dham', it is Haribaba personified.

Attending the Maharashtra Sankirtan Mandat's function at Wardha Hanuman Garhi was a turning point in Hari Baba's life. It was at this function he manifested eight pure moods of Bhaktiras. From this moment, Hari Baba remained intoxicated with Bhaktiras and began his quest for this. He read the literature of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and visited the sites of his leelas. Chaitanya became the God for Hari Baba who preached His name throughout the rest of his life. At the time he was taken for granted as the foremost representative of Chaitanya Dev in heralding God's name.

Once Hari Baba recounted his experience— "I was a confirmed vedantist earlier. I always preached and studied Vedanta. Once I went to Wardha where I attended a wonderful Kirtan recital at a Maharashtra Mahatmas's ashram. When I was listening to this Kirtan, an unique 'Bhagavat Prem' came to me from within. And that was the end of my knowledge of Vedanta."

Hari Baba was a rare soul whose pure and ideal character was difficult to emulate. He was regarded as an Avatar of Raghunathji, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Mahabir and some even regarded him as a Siddha Yogi."

After meeting Sri Ma in 1944 at Dehradun, they gradually came closer. On Baba's request the Holi festival became Hari Baba's festival. Ma's functions were now better organised.

One day Haribaba was coming to Ma's ashram at Dehradun. On Ma's direction, Vibhuda and others stood at the Ashram gate with musical instruments. The moment Baba arrived, they began chanting kirtan. Baba reached Ma and prostrated. Ma too did the same. It was a rare treat to watch these meetings of great personalities.

Hari Baba and Avadhootji accompanied Ma to several places on North and South Indian tours. Wherever he stayed, he continued with his satsang as usual. He used to do Kirtan with a big gong in his hand, all the time on the move. After becoming ill, he was compelled to do Kirtan in a sitting posture.

Ma has said many times "Compared to what Hari Baba has done for This body little has been done by this ashram for him. You can not imagine the variety of ways he will welcome this body, make arrangements for this body to sit in a car, or on elephant back; he will walk on foot with a Kirtan party facing this body. He used to invite this body for a month-long program of Kirtan, satsang Rasleeta etc. at Bandh Ashram during Holi festival, together with other saints and seers. Prabhuduttji's happiness knew no bounds. All these Babas took this body to Mahatmas, saints and Pandits, otherwise this body was staying in one place."

When Hari Baba read the scriptures, particularly at the time of reading "Matridarshan" or Didi's book, he would ask questions to Ma. She would reply, recounting very old incidents. These satsangs were unique. Ma said, "you will hear the way you beat the drum". Baba was a perfect drummer. When in Dehradun Baba stayed at Kalyanvan. He called it 'Vaikuntha', the abode of God. At nightfall, he and his disciples read the Hanuman Chalisa (Prayer) loudly while dancing to the rhythm of the reading. Haribaba's fair complexion, grey hair and the yellow band on his forehead heightened the charm of his personality as well as the environment.

At Vrindavan, during Jhulan Purnima at his ashram, Haribaba himself seated This daughter on the swing. Nobody can believe that someone else can sit on the swing at Vrindavan dham that was meant for the Deity. But Baba would not bother about this, he would accomplish what he decided to do.

That is why This body says it is Pitaji who brought this body into the society of saints. He took this body to several Vaishnav centres and introduced it to the Mahatamas. Though the initial response to this female body was guarded, later all Mahants and Ashram Heads gladly invited this body to their temples and ashrams."

In the summer of 1947, Ma was in Kishenpur Ashram Dehradun. Haribaba too was there in Kalyanvan with his followers. One young couple came to Ma with their 4-year old child, Ramlal, who was then seriously affected by typhoid and pneumonia. One day during satsang, the child's mother came rushing to Ma's feet and cried aloud, "Ma you must save this child. You will have to, Ma."

Ma looked at Haribaba who instantly arranged for Kirtan Japa and Durgapath etc. Haribaba himself did Durgapath. The Kirtan mandali made frequent rounds of the place where the child lay. When Baba was doing so much Ma was bound to have Her Kheyal. She arranged for regular, uninterrupted Japa and on the 14th Day, between 1.45 a.m. and 2.15 a.m. asked Didi to touch the body of this patient and do japa. Ma had visualised something during this time. By Baba's effort, and Ma's Kheyal the child left the ashram after he had recovered. Now he is an Engineer working in California.

On March 22, 1948, festivities were going on Haribaba's ashram on the dam. Returning from Haribaba's satsang, Ma called three Brahmacharis privately and asked them to stage a Leela before Haribaba and Oriya Baba.

"Two of you dress as pilgrims visiting Kedar-Badri. As if going to Kedarnath, reach Oriya Baba and worship him as Kedarnath. Tell the audience he is really Shiva and then pointing to the ladies and call them Mother Bhagavati. Similarly, as if going to Badrinath, go to Haribaba and worship him as Badrivishal. This is how the leela, on Ma's direction, was played out before them. Once, Baba was in Dehradun. Several devotees of his had come there from the dam-ashram. The following day was Guru Purnima. Haribaba after consulting Ma, said "to plant the Panchavati in Her new ashram the place needs to be cleaned. My people know the job well. We will, therefore start the work after the morning Kirtan." Baba asked Didi to arrange for tools etc.

Next morning, Baba started as planned and told his disciples "today is Guru Purnima, even if you loose your life in serving Ma, do not stop the work."

Amidst heavy rains, they worked up to 12 noon when Baba asked them to do kirtan and celebrate Guru Purnima. With Baba's direction the disciples were ready for Kirtan, which went on without break for two hours. The downpour reduced and the disciples saw Ma and Her followers at a distance, smiling at them.

One day, Haribaba read the 'Chaitanya Charitramrita'. He was translating instantly from the original Bengali publication. He said the stage of a Bhakta is much higher than the stage of union. Mahaprabhu's Leela was for 48 years out of which he spent 24 years in that rare special mood (Prem Bhava). In the last 12 years, he was in 'Madhurya Ras' (pleasant mood). Only the lovers, the Gopis — have access to Bhagavan's Prem Bhava. Not even Brahma, Vishnu, and Kailashpati can reach there."

Haribaba used to enjoy Mahaprabhu leela, and Rasleela. Swami Puroshottamanandji had written a book 'Swapna vilas' on Mahaprabhu's Leela. On 5 October 1967, he presented the scripts to Ma and Haribaba. Similarly, Swami Premananda wrote the Gouranga Leela in 14 years and showed it to Baba and Ma. This Leela was played so well that various onlookers including saints and seers could not stop their tears.

Once Haribaba was in the Jhusi ashram of Prabhudattji. Prabhudattji wrote to Didi that Haribaba was himself supervising the cleaning work before Ma's arrival. In fact, he was asking the disciples why they were working so indifferently and why they did not show respect and faith, since Ma was coming."

Brahmachariji has written, "Faith and respect are not commodities. When Ma was asked to give, She laughs at this demand saying, "I am your little daughter."

During satsang discussions on religions topics were held. Once, Baba told of an incident: There was a thief who had a change of heart after meeting a Mahatma. The Mahatma initiated him, telling him that he had a new life from that moment onward. He should not continue that profession. Sometime later, the thief was taken to the king who asked him whether he had stolen some things. The thief who had now turned over a new leaf said, "No sir, not in this life." In those days, hot iron balls were placed on the palm of such suspects. If they were found to be cold after that, the person was thought to be innocent. The same was done with this man too. What faith he had in his Guru's words—the ball cooled down, and so he was found not guilty.

Haribaba said, "Ma does not belong to creation, She belongs to the creators. She had no previous birth nor would She be born again.

Haribaba was asked why She had taken a body.

Haribaba replied that She took that form for the welfare of humanity. She lived with Her husband as his daughter. She was self-initiated. All the sadhana exercises (Kriyas) took place automatically in Her body. She is the personification of Divine grace.

The last 25 years Haribaba spent mainly in Vrindavan or Kalyanvan, Dehradun - mostly in touch with Ma. He left his mortal coil in the presence of Ma at Kashi ashram on 3 January 1970.

Swami Akhandananda Saraswati.

Swamiji the renowned scholar of the Srimad Bhagavat, too came in touch with Ma around the time that Haribaba knew Her. He met Ma at Haribaba's Bandh-Ashram festival.

Swamiji, inspired by Oriya Baba took initiation from Shankarcharya Sri 1008 Brahmananand Saraswati. He was an excellent speaker on Srimad Bhagavat. Krishna Leelas and Brajleela flowed from his mouth in his own lucid style. When he was just 10 years old, he took the seat of an Acarya and first explained the Srimad Bhagavat. The function was organised by his grandfather who formally seated him to speak.

Sri Ma organised the Bhagavat Saptah and 'Pakshik Bhagavat' (fifteen days) on several occasions. In 1950 during the Purnahuti of the Savitri Mahayagna, at Kashi Ashram, Swamiji graced the occasion and spoke on Srimad Bhagavat. Those days, the crowd swelled so much that no space was left on the bank and the eager listeners would anchor their boats nearby and listen with rapt attention from the boat.

Once such a large Srimad Bhagvat function was organised at Kashi Ashram from 21 Jan. to 6 Feb. 1970. A huge pandal was erected in the compound of Sri Ma's hospital. Thousands of people attended Baba's discourses. At other times also whenever Baba visited Ma, he was requested to speak.

In one of his lectures, Swamiji said, "One must work with total involvement and full devotion". He gave an example.

Among the Sikh Gurus, one had a son and a disciple. The Guru asked both of them to construct two separate platforms. When they did so, the Guru asked them to destroy and rebuild them as they were not up to his expectations.

The same exercise continued for days, as after the platforms were built, the Guru asked them to rebuild it again as it was not up to the mark. Then the son lost his patience, and told the Guru. "I can not make a better platform, please ask me to do some other work". The disciple however, continued to build and rebuild according to the Guru's directions.

One day his Guru asked him 'What's the matter? All you are doing is making a platform' The disciple said, "I derive pleasure by following your orders. Building and destroying is my job, giving orders is yours." Guru was delighted to hear this. After his death, his disciple and not the son, took his place.

Swamiji said, "one must get pleasure from doing his duty whether he is a sadhak, a learned man, or a family man; everyone must do his work".

Ma said about Swamiji "Swamiji is illuminated by the power of knowledge from within. The significance of his life was authentic knowledge and absolute faith in God, belief in the Vedas and sacrifice for others."

In 1968 during a Srimad Bhagvat Parayan at Naimisharanya, Swamiji said to Ma "this Puran temple is ready. We must install the image of Puranapurush here." Ma instantly agreed to this proposal.

The image of Puranpurush was sculpted with the picture from Rajrajeshwar Shastri, who obtained this from his father - who used to worship it daily. Swamiji saw this picture and later published it in his magazine "Chintamani". The idol of 'Puran Purush' installed at Naimisharanya Ashram is based on this very picture. The image was consecrated in the presence of Sri Ma and other Mahatamas.

Swami Akhandanandaji, credited with writing many acclaimed publications, lived in Vrindavan during the latter part of his life. He visited Kankhal ashram during the Atirudra Mahayagna in 1981 May. On 19 November 1987, he left his mortal coil.

Swami Swatantranandaji

Swamiji perhaps met Ma for the first time during the nineteen fifties. Thereafter, he attended several functions organised by Sri Ma. According to him Ma's reply to queries were reflections of Acharya Shankar's monotheism. And Ma's simple words carry more meaning and weight than the scriptures on monotheism.

Swamiji has written that (note 33) "Ma is so wise as She is absent-minded about Her physical well being. If someone asks Her to eat She would do so. But She would not eat Herself. When asked why She would reply 'All hands are mine, is it not so? This is Ma's supreme bhav and reflects Ma's perfect knowledge of Advaita philosophy." This apathy towards worldly interests and Her knowledge combined showed Her supreme stoicism.

Whether She is deep in a forest or some remote place Her arrival would bring scores of people for Her darshan. In no time She would become very friendly and when She left that place the atmosphere there would become gloomy. Her personality had the power to transform the entire environment for the general good. But She had several Yogic powers which Mahatmas get only through samadhi. But She was born with these powers.

Swami Naradanandaji

Naimasharanya's famous seer Sri 1008 Swami Naradananda has met Ma many times. He made significant contributions in the Sanyam Saptah held at Naimisharanya in 1960.

He once spoke about Ma's attributes:

- 1) There is no difference between Ma and God.
- 2) Ma's darshan once is equivalent to 24 lakhs of Japa.
- 3) We are all children of Ma.

Swamiji's disciple Swami Vivekanandaji regularly attended the festivities at Kankhal ashram.

Rehana Behan.

The famous muslim saint Rehana Tayyabji, who was a great devotee of Sri Krishna, also met Ma on many occasions. Born with a great fascination for Krishna, she cancelled her marriage to a Muslim gentleman who objected to her devotion to Krishna, a Hindu God.

A companion of Mahatma Gandhi, she spent much of her life in Sadhana and Bhajan. She met Ma in the nineteen fifties.

On 16 Sept 1961, she met Ma at Delhi ashram and disclosed that she got a call from within to do Maha Mritunjai japa for Sri Nehruji and his daughter Indira.

Whenever she visited Ma, she showered lot of love and affection on her. Once, Ma presented her with a Tulsi garland and Namavali wrapper.

Author of the famous book, “The Heart of Gopi”, she was a good singer, and could also bring out the music of a flute by tuning her voice.

Once Ma insisted that she would listen to her song together with the flute music from her throat. She responded with an excellent song punctuated by flute music. Once Rehana Behan came to meet Ma during Holi in Delhi Ashram and the two playing Holi was a memorable occasion.

Swami Chidanandaji

Swami Chidanandaji, whose Guru is Swami Shivanandaji was visiting Sri Ma for many years. A monk of rare qualities he still enlightens the audience in his simple style, singing hymns in between. Once during samyam saptah he said that "the first boon from God to you is a rare gift of human life, then the second favour is to make you inquisitive - you all are aspirants that is why you are here - and the third most important compassionate gift is darshan of saints and seers, meeting them and attending satsang. Life should have only one aim and ambition and that is Self Realisation. To reach that goal there are several ways, be it by broad roads, foot paths or royal roads. Individuals choose the way they feel most suitable to them. Foreign devotees anxiously wait for his lectures as he also explains in English.

Mahant Girdhar Narainpuriji

Mahantji was associated with Sri Ma and Her devotees for the last several decades. His contribution to Sri Ma’s Leela is significant. The Kankhal Ashram is a living example of his excellent rapport with devotees. In spite of his indifferent health now he still comes and blesses Sri Ma’s devotees.

Swami Brahmanand

He had his first darshana of Ma in 1948 at Oriya Baba’s Ashram. In one of his writings he has mentioned that “three great mahatmas assembled there during Ras Leela; Oriya Baba, Haribaba, and Ma.”

After that meeting, Swamiji became a regular visitor. He also organised Samyam Saptah at Surat Giri bungalow, Kankhal and Bhimpura. Once he said “God, looks after everything but not the direct welfare of people. If that were the case, all living beings would have been content and happy. Actually, it is the faith and belief in God which does good. When one has the knowledge and remains in association with the supreme power, self realisation, then good things happen to him. Narayan himself awakened Arjun, but he did not do it directly. It was done through Bhagvad Gita.

Swami Vidyanandji

Swamiji met Ma during the Sanyam Saptah organised at Kashi in November 1958. He was then a teacher at the Dakshinamurti Sanskrit college. Thereafter he kept coming to Ma regularly.

On 21st July 1969, he was chosen as the head of Kailash Ashram. Three years later, in 1972,

Delhi Ashram organised Ma's birth celebrations which he attended, and he obtained permission to organise the next year's function at Kailash Ashram, Uttar Kashi.

An authority on Vedanta, his discourses on the subject are much sought after by Ma's devotees who are still enlightened by him. During one satsang he said "The Soul is the personification of the Supreme Being. Everybody acknowledges the existence of the soul. Someone regards soul as the momentary unconsciousness, someone as sense of perception."

Geeta Bharatiji

Geeta Bharatiji of Hariharanand Ashram, met Ma several times. She was especially invited by Sri Ma to the 1981 Sanyam Saptah. She spoke beautifully on all the eighteen chapters of the Srimad Bhagvat Gita and Kundalini.

Daya Mata, the chairman of the Self Realisation Fellowship was a regular visitor to Ma, with her other colleagues. Her Guru, Swami Yogananda, had met Ma in the thirties, which he later described in his book entitled "Autobiography of a Yogi."

Several more Mahatmas have met Ma and still grace functions at different Ashrams of Sri Ma. But this is just a glimpse of the great saints and seers associating with Ma. So many things are yet to be written and so many things are beyond my capacity to write. The extensive description of Ma's association with these saints, and glimpses of their satsang and lectures, may come out if the job is taken up properly. May I be forgiven for any wrong representation on my part when writing their wonderful lives.

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Baba Bholanath (Late Ramani Mohan Chakravarty)

In this world he has the credit of being the husband of Sri Ma. His character is especially praiseworthy and astonishing. He is the main receptacle to receive and unfold the Leela of the descent of Mahashakti onto this earth. Being the chief companion of Sri Ma in all the Universe, his ideas, and way of conducting himself were of the highest.

In Bajitpur, he was the eyewitness of Ma's Sadhana Leela, the leelas that stunned as well as delighted him. He never questioned these actions but his interest grew. With time as Sri Ma's powers became public talk and a crowd of the curious swelled at their home Bholanath remained unperturbed and calm. Contrary to the prevalent system of 'Purdah' (veil) he brought people face to face with Her, carefully managing them as they turned into devotees, and later disciples.

Bholanath faced objections from his own relatives and friends. But never did he stop Ma in Her leela. Occasionally, being a human being, he got excited over certain trivial matters - when Ma Herself would beautifully manage the situation. At times he got worried when Ma went into samadhi for long hours. He would then do kirtan and japa to bring Her back to worldly consciousness. At that time nobody was allowed to touch Ma's body without Baba's permission. He was definitely an outstanding soul with a character full of dynamism. In 1922, Bholanath became Her formal disciple. He remained Her faithful guardian until the last (1938).

As the number of devotees swelled, so their life-style changed. This change was very ably managed by Bholanath, who gave each turn of life a definite shape. In between if She would travel incognito, either he himself would accompany Her or he would send some respectable person with Her.

Ma was his spiritual Guru on the one hand, and a loving, obedient wife on the other. It was Ma's kheyal that Bholanath rarely intervened in Her way of doing things. But if that did happen, Ma would convince him of Her own way of doing things.

Sometimes, Ma would employ unique ways of putting forward Her ideas and suggestions.

At times, adamant like a child, Bholanath would stick to what was in his mind. He had a very helpful nature and Ma never went against his wishes.

Here is one example — they were invited to some devotee's place for puja, and Bholanath wanted a goat sacrifice after the puja. However the devotee was not inclined to this idea. But since Bholanath had said it, the sacrificial animal was brought. The devotee disclosed his feelings to Ma who asked him to wait and see.

They took the goat to the Kali temple for sacrifice. On reaching there, they came to know through the priest that it was 'Sudi Dashami', a day on which no animal could be sacrificed. The next day, Bholanath completely forgot about it.

Now what did Ma do at the time the goat was being taken to the temple? She merely raised Herself from Her reclining position.

During the Dhaka Religious Congress, in 1927, many delegates came to Ma for serious philosophical discussions. Aware of Ma's samadhi and Her divine experiences, the delegates were stunned to hear such quick, simple and straight answers from Ma who could hardly read or write.

Bholanath started his sadhana in a shack near the Siddheshwari Kali temple, while Ma lived in the only room in the Ashram premises to help him in his sadhana. She had restricted the meetings with devotees to ten minutes each, for his sake. For two months, Bholanath's sadhana

continued, during which time he went through several spiritual exercises and moods. During this period, he initiated many Ashram Brahmacharis and others.

From 1930, he himself started doing Kalipuja at Ramana ashram - where he also established a beautiful Panchavati. In Ma's presence, he planted a Banyan, Asoka, Neem, emblic myrobalan and peepul tree there and got a 'Beej Mantra' for planting each tree.

When he was doing his sadhana at Siddheshvari, he had seen the headless image of Kali. When he disclosed this to Ma, She suggested he should visit Tarapeeth and continue his sadhana. Bholanath went there and put up in the veranda of the temple. There, despite flies and mosquitoes, Bholanath did his sadhana for several days at a stretch without leaving his seat even once. It was in Tarapeeth, that he stopped his habit of chewing tobacco. In just seven days he attained a very high state of spiritual bliss.

Bholanath noticed that Tara Ma's jewellery was taken off in the night, and again in the morning She was redecorated with it. Now he remembered the headless figure of Kali which he had seen resembled Tara Ma.

After the Ramana ashram was opened in 1929, daily functions were held with Ma being the focus. In three years, She attracted a massive following. Yet, without the slightest hesitation She left Dhaka in 1932. She left all — Her established Ashram, thousands of followers, all facilities — for an unknown destination! Evidently She had little difficulty in coping with extreme situations. They went to Raipur, Dehradun which was liked very much by Bholanath. Nobody was known there, nor could they speak the local language to make acquaintances. Hence, Bholanathji quickly renewed his sadhana. Perhaps this may be one of the reasons Ma left Dhaka.

Bholanath went on a pilgrimage to Gangotri and other places and then stopped at Uttarkashi for his sadhana. He lived there on an open veranda facing the north flowing Ganges. Here he practiced severe austerities in his food during the two years of his very serious meditation. Ma came once in that period to see him. He attained to spiritual heights.

The people of Uttarkashi loved and adored Bholanath, who had gradually transformed into a different personality. With Ma's blessings, Bholanath's sadhana was accomplished with the installation of a Kali image at Uttarkashi (1935) where he did his rigorous meditation. Ma and Her followers were also present on the occasion.

Bholanath enjoyed Naam kirtan very much. He would spend ten-twelve hours without getting tired and even without drinking water. In Shahbag, Ma's father, playing the Do-tara led a kirtan group in some splendid recitals. When he got tired, Bholanath could not restrain himself and would take over so that kirtan went on without a break with new words and changes in the tune. He sang loudly, his voice reverberating in the surroundings.

In 1938 it was the turn of Hardwar to host the Kumbha Mela. Ma and Bholanath were put up in the bungalow of Dr. Pant. In the early morning, Bholanath and party would start their kirtan with sandal paste on the forehead and garland round the neck. After holding it for a while in the bungalow's courtyard and in the presence of Ma, they would go out into the streets of this holy city doing 'Nagar Kirtan'. Many passers-by joined him in what turned out to be three hour moving recitals.

The main Kumbha bath was on 14 April 1938. On that day, when Bholanath and his disciples went to the Brahmakunda for the holy bath, Naga Sannyasis present there bathed him with great care and devotion. Only they would know what they saw in Bholanath, but some of the special spiritual exercises that Bholanath did there remained a secret during his lifetime.

While Ma returned to Dehradun after the holy bath, Bholanath stayed there for ten more days. He returned to Dehradun on 24 April with high fever and a stomach ache. Soon the symptoms

of small pox appeared and he became seriously ill. Ma took upon Herself the entire care of Bholanath which confused even the doctors attending on him. During this time, Bholanath started calling Her Ma, Ma, like a child.

Ma said, "Somehow proper care was being taken... Why does it happen, do you know? Everything is the same, the disease, the patient, and the medicine. One must not think about consequences of the patient when nursing him. The care should be aimed towards the satisfaction, and contentment of the patient. That's why everything happened spontaneously when it was required."

Affected by small pox, there was great pain in Bholanath's body. Ma asked him, whether the suffering was too much. He nodded in the affirmative but could not speak. With great care, She appeared to caress his body but actually she did some 'kriyas'. She asked him again how he was feeling then? Bholanath indicated there was no pain, he was now very happy. In the evening, Bholanath was shivering. So Ma covered his body with his new saffron coloured clothes.

Sometime back, when the taking of sannyas by Bholanath was discussed, Baba said to Ma, "I have considered you as my Mother, but I cannot make this feeling public. When I will take Sannyas, the first alms I will ask from you will be calling you Ma in public."

Ma asked him, "Do you remember the sannyas mantra?" "Yes", he said. The mantras were being uttered within Bholanath.

Ultimately, realising Ma's real form, Bholanath addressed Her as 'Ma' and attained Nirvana. At that moment of his 'Mahanirvana', Ma's palm was placed on his 'Brahma randhra'. Bholanath left his mortal coil, pronouncing the sannyas mantra amidst kirtan recital at the Kishenpur ashram on 7 May 1938.

After the death of Bholanath, Ma disclosed, "For long, Bholanath had a bent of mind towards sannyas. He wanted to take 'dandi' sannyas from some big saint of the 'Tirth' order". When he said this to Ma, She supported and asked him to go ahead with his plan.

Bholanath, however, became angry at Ma's response. He hoped Ma would go against his wish to take sannyas. If the situation had been one of a family, then it would have been normal. But here it was different. Ma further said, "At Kailash Mansarovar the sannyas mantra came out of This body and continued for the next day also. This body saw Bholanath taking a bath at Manasarovar and said, 'if you wish, you can take the sannyas mantra coming out of This body'. Bholanath said he knew better mantras to pronounce. His words were partly true because he had taken down several mantras from sannyasis while at Uttarkashi.

This body told him, what it felt had to be said. It is up to him to follow the suggestions or not. After some time, Bholanath was seen repeating the same mantras coming out of Sri Ma's lips.

On the previous night before the Hardwar Kumbha this body had a kheyal that She should remind Bholanath about the sannyas mantra. Next day, Bholanath returned from his bath and said, he had done everything needed.

So Bholanath's sannyas at Manasarovar remained a secret in his lifetime and came to be known only after his death. He was given the name of Tibatand Tirtha.

Bhaiji (Jyotish Chandra Roy).

Bhaiji has the pride of place among Ma's lakhs of devotees. Almost all devotees agree that Bhaiji was the greatest devotee of Ma. None could comprehend Ma's kheyal and 'Bhava' so well as Bhaiji.

This Mahatma was born in 1880 in East Bengal. At the age of 28, he was initiated by the family priest in 'shakti' mantra. In the quest for the incarnation of Shakti, he travelled to several pilgrim centres, met several seers and Mahatmas but his wish to meet Shakti, Ma, the saviour of all, remained unfulfilled.

Bhaiji came to Dhaka in 1918 in connection with his job. In late 1924, he came to know about Ma who lived in a cottage at the garden of Shahbag. He was told that She abstained from speech for several days, then She would do some yogasanas and speak for a while. In the month of December, Bhaiji had his first darshan of Ma and instantly realised that whom he was looking for all these days, was before him.

In his diary Bhaiji has mentioned, "On one fine dawn I went to Shahbag and had Ma's darshan, courtesy of Bholanathji. Her calm composure and look of a housewife left an indelible mark."

Father of a son and a daughter, Bhaiji lived with his wife and children in Dhaka and worked as personal assistant to the Director of Agriculture in the Imperial Govt.

As was customary in those days, Ma used to veil Her face with part of Her saree. Therefore, Bhaiji was hesitant to have Her darshan. He thought until She removed Her veil and called him as Her son, how could he enshrine Her feet in his heart?

Almost a year passed before Bhaiji returned to Ma. In between, he kept himself informed about Her. He also read a lot and wrote a book 'Sadhana' on religion, duty and good deeds. He sent one copy to Ma.

Ma wished to see the author. Bhaiji came and read the entire book before Ma and Bholanathji.

Ma said, "After the period of retirement, my speech is not yet clear. But speech is now coming out on its own — the book is well written. Try to emulate it with pure thoughts."

Bhaiji felt as if he was a child before his parents. After this meeting Bhaiji became a regular visitor to Shahbag. On 4 January 1927, Bhaiji became seriously ill. Doctors diagnosed tuberculosis. Ma's kindness and compassion were showered on him in many different ways. Bholanath prayed to Ma for Bhaiji's well being. He brought the patient to Ma's lap and said, "Now, take care of your son."

Bhaiji recovered, it was almost a rebirth for him. For a long period in between, Ma did not give him darshan. Bhaiji said, "The pain of separation healed the pain of my disease".

In this context Ma has said, "The feeling of restlessness inside is the soul of all puja and worship. The Mahashakti flows within and in endeavours lies the seed of creation, stability and destruction."

Within a year, there was in Bhaiji a noticeable change in mood and behaviour. Doctor's attending to him in Calcutta after a detailed check-up advised him to take rest and a change. Accordingly, Bhaiji spent sometime in Chunar, near Vindhyachal in Uttar Pradesh. While resting there in the month of October 1927, Bhaiji sent a parcel for Ma's devotees in Dhaka from Chunar. The enclosed letter requested that the parcel be opened with reverence, since the packet contained something auspicious, which could be worshipped in Ma's absence. It turned out to be Ma's footprints on a marble slab which Bhaiji had collected during his stay at Chunar.

These footprints were being worshipped initially at the Ramana ashram, Dhaka and subsequently at Kashi ashram.

It is reported that Ma had said emphatically, "nothing will happen to Bhaiji in the next six to eight years." With these words in mind, Bhaiji's confidence was renewed and he rejoined his office duties. On the first day of his return, Bholanath and Ma accompanied him.

Mr. Finley, Bhaiji's manager, asked him "How could you recover from that dreadful disease?"

Bhaiji promptly replied, "It's by the grace of Mataji, who lives at Ramana ashram. Though doctors did their best Her kindness, compassion and care for me all through decided things in my favour".

Mr. Finley said, "Yes, in our country too, such things do happen".

Once he got back to his office job, Bhaiji gradually completed his duty as a family man. He married off his daughter soon.

Baba Bholanath liked Bhaiji very much. He had so much faith and confidence in Bhaiji that many times when Ma travelled to unknown destinations, he asked Bhaiji to escort Her.

During the early days, Bhaiji's devotion to Ma resulted in the composition of a song, "The song of a mad man" (Pagler Geet.) Ma listened to the song and said, "The universe is full of ecstasy, all creation mirrors it. If you can enlighten yourself with all that, you'll realise the Leelas everywhere in the universe are all the same. People look for contentment, in the absence of this 'Bhav' and remain unaware of the real truth of life."

Bhaiji wrote many such songs in praise of Ma and presented a compilation by the name of "Sri Charano Mein," dedicating to Her.

One day while Ma was sitting on Siddeshwari seat with several devotees around, Ma suddenly asked Bhaiji to sing the song of a mad man. With so many people around, Bhaiji hesitated. Ma laughed and said, "he has written only the song, he couldn't be a mad man." Ma's words pierced the the most vulnerable part of Bhaiji. Then he sang the song, whole-heartedly.

When the number of devotees in Dhaka swelled, Bhaiji organised daily kirtan. At Ramana ashram, stotras which came out of Sri Ma's lips were sung in stanzas. In 1931, during a similar recital, Ma interrupted it and said that the stotra was incomplete. Was there any alternative version?

By Sri Ma's inner impetus one night at 3 o'clock, Bhaiji woke up and spontaneously composed the song, 'Jai Hriday Basini'. Ever since, this song is sung daily in Ma's ashram. Ma's devotees are well aware of this heart-touching song.

Once Bhaiji asked Ma, "Ma who are you?" Ma laughed and said, "This body is always the same. What it was in the past is still the same and will remain in the future too. This body is present in whatever form the devotees would like to see. Why don't you think that This body is the outcome of your prayers. You people wanted and got This body. Only this much knowledge is essential. But you must all know that This body has not come into being to bear fruits of the past. You must understand that this body is an assemblance of different ecstasies."

From 26 Jan 1927, Bhaiji started the tradition of kirtan every Saturday. The kirtan prayed to Hari as much as Ma. Later, during daily kirtan recitals, Bhaiji made it a ritual to sing songs in praise of Ma. "This was the beginning of Bhaiji's proximity to the God incarnate, Sri Ma. All this began in Shahbag.

In his book, Matri Darshan, Bhaiji has written, "after Kamalakanta joined us, I asked him to use 'Ma' naam in the kirtan, because I thought, if we were dedicated to Her, 'Ma' naam would add to the beauty of the recital, to other saints also as Ma is the original syllable spoken by every human being all over the world daily. Therefore, kirtans as prayer to Ma should be a natural and easy exercise for Sadhana."

Earlier, one day Bhaiji had gone to Shahbag with his friend Niranjan. Both were serious types who did not much like kirtan. Ma asked those who had missed the evening kirtan to do it now. Suddenly, Ma said "today is Saturday, why not do kirtan together overnight". Niranjan, participated in the kirtan for a while and then left. Only Bhaiji was left and he spent the whole night

in kirtan recital. During the early hours, Ma sang beautifully ‘Hari, Hari, Hari bol’. Bhaiji was moved by this experience and realised kirtan was no less efficacious than any other type of sadhana.

Ma had given Bhaiji Her gold chain, for him to wear it as the sacred thread across his heart. Through this, many changes occurred in Bhaiji’s life. He started cooking his own meals and cultivated the habits of a pious Brahmin. After receiving the gold chain, Bhaiji desired to wear the actual sacred thread. Wearing this, he started doing daily puja with the help of a Brahmin priest. In all his decisions, thoughts and dreams, Ma was ever present. He has mentioned several related incidents in his book.

In late 1929 for almost three years, Bhaiji used to visit Ma very early in the morning for Her darshan. He woke up before dawn to finish his chores. If he went very early, he would go round Ramana, on he would wait at the step of Ramana Kalibari. At 5 o’clock, he would go to the ashram, and return only at 10-11 o’clock, after spending a lot of time with Sri Ma.

Ma would not speak always as was often Her wont. One day an old devotee commented that he does not come to see Ma, but to see this calf (Bhaiji) who came daily irrespective of rain, cold or shimmering heat, and walked with Ma — he enjoyed watching him.

After he recovered from his illness Bhaiji worked for three years. One day, plucking the petals from a flower, Ma said to Bhaiji, “you have shed a lot of your ‘Bhava’, but there still remains a lot. When everything is shed, I will remain subtly in you like this flower stem.” Six months later, Ma said to Bhaiji, “I can see that your working life as a family man is getting over.”

A few months later, Bhaiji seeking a change of place to have some rest, took four months leave. But, on 2 June 1932, at 11.30 in the night Bhaiji left Dhaka with Ma and Baba Bholanath.

When they went and stayed in Raipur village, Dehradun, people in the nearby village thought only Bholanath was the saint who had come there for his sadhana. They thought that Ma was his wife who had accompanied him. They took Bhaiji as an attendant because of his devout service to the couple. Later, when letters with government stamps kept coming to the local Post Office in the name of Bhaiji, they got to know who he really was.

With a piece of cloth (dhoti) covering his loin cloth to the knee, Bhaiji went out, seeking alms. Whatever he received was shared by the three. Once, Bhaiji got only wheat flour, which they mixed with water and drank.

Most of the time their diet consisted of unleavened bread (roti) and vegetable stew. Ma has many times applauded Bhaiji’s service during this period.

Once, Ma was going to Uttarkashi with Bhaiji. On the way in Mussorie, students were playing in the school grounds when the bell rang. Within moments, the ground became empty as the students quickly returned to their classes. Looking at the discipline, Ma was thrilled. She said to Bhaiji: “If one attempts a little meditation and participates in religious activities from this age and with this kind of spirit, happiness and discipline, it would be wonderful. It is on the celibacy of childhood that the building of the rest of the three ashramas is founded.”

Bhaiji was moved by Ma’s words. He thought about an institution where children could study in general as well as progress spiritually. This was the seed idea of what took shape later as the Ma Anandamoyi Vidyapeeth and Kanyapeeth. After the death of Bhaiji, at the initiative of Yogibhai the Anandamoyi Vidyapith started up in Almora. At present it is at the Kankhal Ashram. Similarly, at Didi’s initiative the Kanyapeeth was established; this later shifted to Varanasi.

When in Dehradun, Bholanath had introduced Bhaiji as his spiritual son. That’s why people started calling him Bhaiji. The name was perhaps given by Hariram Bhai Joshi.

Whoever had seen Bhaiji during this time has said that his main purpose was to let as many people have Ma's darshan as possible. He took special efforts to bring the devotees to Ma. However, he himself spent little time with Ma, and he hardly spoke. Standing behind Her, he would intensely look at the God incarnate. Through Bhaiji, many got the chance to serve Ma. Ashram Brahmacharini Billoji in 1934 had the opportunity to plait Ma's hair and take Her out in the former's car. Brahmacharini Udasji was brought by Bhaiji to be for Her personal service. If someone came up with family problems Bhaiji solved them himself, taking care that these household matters did not come in the way of Ma's divine ecstasies. He believed that the devotees would be deprived of the opportunity to see divinity if these matters intervened, though She would not be harmed. As Ma always said, "As you play the drum, so you hear."

Once, a youth came to Ma with some questions. Bhaiji learned that the boy wanted to know the results of his examinations. Bhaiji scribbled something on a piece of paper, handed it over to the boy and asked him to read it only after the results were declared. The boy passed in the second division; he found the writing on the chit said the same.

Bhaiji had accompanied Ma and Bholanath to Dehradun, taking leave from his office for four months. The period over on the return journey, Bhaiji was advised by Ma to break journey at Kashi for darshan of Kashi Vishwanath and for a bath in the Ganges. The bath proved to be near fatal for Bhaiji as he had almost drowned - but a man rescued him.

In Raipur, a strange thing happened. Ma, who was found sitting behind the temple, with Her clothes wet, so much so that a lot of water could be squeezed out of them. At that time, Kamalakant Brahmachari was beside Ma. He noted the date and time.

Later when Bhaiji revisited Raipur and recounted the Kashi mishap, the time and date of this mishap turned out to be exactly the same.

Therefore, thanks to Ma's kheyal, Bhaiji came back twice from the doors of death. First when he had contracted T.B. and secondly in Kashi with the drowning incident. During the very first darshan of Ma, Bhaiji's wife was the main helper in Ma's darshan, who later, however, objected to his frequent visits to Ma. Bhaiji bore all this pain and prayed to Ma, "Ma give her wisdom and peace."

In 1937 before Her birth celebrations, Ma had come to Calcutta. From there She was scheduled to visit Dhaka. She asked Bhaiji's aunt Purnamoyi Devi to accompany Her to Dhaka.

Purnamoyi Devi was the maternal aunt of Bhaiji's wife Manikuntala Devi. When Purnamoyi Devi went to Dhaka, Manikuntala Devi disclosed to Her all her reservations. She also rebuked Sri Ma for drawing Bhaiji away from his family. Purnamoyi Devi could not comprehend all this. The place where she stayed, had an atmosphere of unfavourable opinions.

When she went to Ma, the latter told her in a closed room. "Ma, I have brought you here for a very special purpose. It cannot be done without your help. Jyotish (Bhaiji) had mentioned that there is no better cook than his wife. She makes wonderful sandesh with a smell of lemon and also several other dishes. Jyotish is not keeping well. He will go from here in a few days. You somehow try to get his wife to invite him to take meals at home. Neither Jyotish nor his wife should know the idea came from This body.

Stay there and use your intelligence for this purpose. Purnamoyi felt at sea. The lady who is upset when her husband's name is mentioned, and comes out with all sorts of words — it was impossible!

But it was Ma's directive and with Ma's blessing, the impossible can happen. When she was invited by Manikuntala Devi, for a meal Purnamoyi Devi said she would not eat anything as she was not well. When Bhaiji's wife insisted, the aunt said, "I come to your house after so many years,

saw that Jyotish does not come home and and that you too cannot tolerate even to hear his name. Jyotish left his home to become a sanyasi — all this has disturbed me a lot.”

Bhaiji’s wife said, “It’s all my fate. But you will not eat and there is no question about it?”

Then the aunt replied “All right, I will eat, but you must do what I suggest.”

When Bhaiji’s wife promised her, the aunt asked her to invite Jyotish and feed him with the dish that he liked so much. Manikuntala Devi was stunned at this suggestion. She asked, “Will he come if I invite him?”

The aunt said that she would convince him to.

Finally as Ma had said, Bhaiji’s wife prepared wonderful dishes to feed Jyotish in the presence of Purnamoyi Devi. In spite of whatever animosity she had, Bhaiji’s wife was very happy to serve her husband once again and for the last time.

Soon after, Bhaiji went from Dhaka to Calcutta, from there to Dehradun and Mount Kailash. On the return journey he left his mortal coil at Almora.

‘Karunamoyi’ Ma was aware of this last visit of Bhaiji to Dhaka. That’s why she brought the aunt Purnamoyi Devi to facilitate the parting meeting between Jyotish and his wife.

Pilgrimage to Mansarovar: Bhaiji’s Mahaprayan

For some time, Bholanath had been keen on arranging this pilgrimage. Finally on 10 June 1937, Ma and Her group began their journey from Almora. They reached Kailash via Verinag, Askot, Dharchula, and Garbiang. At Garbiang, a Bhutia lady, Rumadevi, who was connected with the Ramkrishna Ashram, met Ma. She only arranged for the passage from Garbiang to Kailash. She accompanied Ma on Her return journey to spent the rest of her life with Her. She lived mainly at Kishenpur ashram, Dehradun where she breathed her last.

The fifth Part of Didi’s book “Sri Sri Anandamoyi” (in Hindi) has details of this pilgrimage to Mansarovar.

On the return journey, Bhaiji fell ill. He was brought to Almora where local doctors attended to him, but without any improvement. On the way, when he fell ill, Bhaiji expressed his concern to Ma, “Khukuni (Didi) looks after the cooking. She also takes care of you. How will she manage alone?”

Ma assured him that she Herself would manage and get the job done by others.

During this hour of grief and uncertainty, when others were sad and worried about Bhaiji’s illness, Ma took upon Herself the responsibility of organising what needed to be done. All devotees, particularly Bholanath and Hariram Joshi, cried helplessly. But there was no improvement in Bhaiji’s health.

On 17 August 1937, the day of Shravan Shukla Panchami, at 3 o’clock in the afternoon, Bhaiji slowly pronounced ‘Ma, Ma’ took his sannyas mantra and breathed his last. Before the end came, he told Hariram Bhai and Didi, “You and Ma are the same, Me and Father (Bholanath) are the same. We are all the same.”

The most ideal devotee of Ma left a void amongst the devotees which could not be filled.

Ma who had abstained from speech for some time, now asked the others to arrange for his samadhi. “He has already taken sannyas,” She said.

Ma then described Bhaiji’s sannyas: “Bholanath and Jyotish were the first to reach Mansarovar. This body stayed back to wait for Akhandananda Baba. On our reaching, we heard that after bathing, Jyotish left his clothes in the water, caught hold of Bholanath’s feet and said, ‘Baba, I wish to become an Avadhoot Sannyasi here and go away. Baba bid me good-bye’. He took off his

sacred thread and placed it at the feet of Bholanath, who was stunned at the sudden transformation of Bhaiji, and said, “what are you doing? Your Ma has not come yet. Come on, put your clothes on”.

This body was strolling near Mansarovar, mantras were coming out spontaneously. This body saw Jyotish too strolling behind. He came running, fell at my feet and said, 'This is the sannyas mantra, Ma, I have got it'. He was in an ecstatic mood. Remaining at my feet for some time, he took off his thread and gold chain and started pronouncing the mantras. He was advised to continue wearing the sacred thread and gold chain.

During this time, he did some spiritual exercises on the bank of the holy lake Mansarovar.

That day while walking together, Jyotish said, 'Can I abstain from speech from now on with your permission? This body said that it was not advisable during the journey. But when he expressed such a mood, this body christened him “Mounananda Parbat” (The mountain of silence)”.

From that day onward, sannyas mantra and his total emotional renunciation continued with him during his illness. Everybody has now been told about it, since the time has come. Before the end, he was absolved of responsibility by taking off the sacred thread and gold chain.”

In that moment of sorrow, on Ma’s advice, Hariram Joshi and other devotees chose a spot near Patal Devi temple in Almora for Bhaiji’s Samadhi. Now a Shiv mandir stands on that spot which is now part of Anandamoyi ashram. This is also the place where at the initiative of Yogibhai the Ma Anandamoyi Vidyapith was established.

Shri Shri Muktananda Giriji Maharaj: (Didima, Ma’s mother)

Didima is known as Giriji to seers, Mahatmas and disciples. Ma too called her Giriji.

Born in Baisakh (April-May), 1877 in East Bengal, she was the eighth child of her parents.

Didima’s parents called her Mokshada Sundari who was very calm and quiet and loved to spend time alone. Even as a child, she did not like games. Instead, she would stay in the religious environment of her home. As was the tradition in those days, she went to school to study up to the second standard. Her parents died early, therefore further studies were done at home. She could read the Ramayana, Mahabharat and Puranas in Bengali. At times she expressed her spiritual feelings through verses. She recited a number of such verses, which were her own composition.

She was indifferent to her domestic life. Though there were problems a plenty, including that of money, they never reflected in her behaviour. She was always an excellent host, who would give her own food to a guest and still retain the charm of a very satisfied, contented person. This quality of kindness and compassion was the dominant part of her character. Ma’s father, the late Bipin Behari Bhattacharya, frequently left home because of his passion for tapasya. He was brought back home by relatives and friends. Even during those situations, Didima never lost her composure, her patience. However much financial trouble she was in, Didima never made complaint.

Giriji hailed from the Shiva Shakta Sampradai. Durga Puja and Kali pujas were regularly held at her home. There was a Narayan Shila there too, which is now being worshipped by Brahmacharini Chandan Bhattacharya at Kankhal ashram.

From her childhood, Didima took interest in puja and its related exercises. She also had darshan of God in her dreams. She had a special fascination for Narayana and was very much fond of the name of Narayana. She once had darshan of Lord Gopal who asked her to “offer Batasa Bhog worth one paisa”. Since then Didima regularly offered Batasa Bhog to Thakur.

Didima first had her Mantra initiation in a dream. She did the japa of this mantra for several years. In 1905 she was formally initiated by the family priest Shri Kalikrishna Vidya Vinod. Didima always carried with her the picture of her family priest as her first Guru, and also that of her sannyas Guru.

Nobody has ever seen Didima angry. Nothing could antagonise her. Once Ma said, 'Dear Ma, what do you have in your brain that never loses its balance.' Didima laughed at this tribute.

On another occasion, Ma spoke about her patience and perseverance, "She is mother earth."

Didima had infinite compassion for her devotees. One day, when she was very old, Didima was found to be reading the Hindi alphabets. To a devotee's query why she was bothering to read them at that age, Didima said, "I myself want to read the several letters in Hindi which I get from my disciples, and reply to them suitably."

Her service and perseverance, love and affection particularly for the helpless, poor and needy was unparalleled. Whoever came in contact with her, was overwhelmed by her innocence and proper behaviour. Ma did not initiate her disciples in the customary way. It was Didima who in turn, became the Guru for innumerable devotees. At times, the devotees barely had a chance to touch Ma's feet; they were happy touching Didima's feet, and Didima too spread her arms in a gesture of blessing for the devotees.

Didima drew the devotees close to her, irrespective of their position, stature and intelligence. She did Japa non-stop. When asked about it, she said this was being done for the welfare of the devotees. Once she had said, "how can I get Nirvana, until others (my devotees) attain it?" What a marvelous thing to say!

In 1936, when Dada Moshai breathed his last and the only son tied the knots Didima expressed her desire to live with Ma. Ma suggested to her to take Sannyas.

Haridwar was the venue of the Kumbha Mela in 1938. Ma had stayed at the Peet Kutir of Dr. Pant. During this Kumbha, Didima was initiated by the well-known Saint Mangalananda Giriji on 13th April, the Maha-Vipush Sankranti. She was named Shri Swami Muktananda Giriji.

Mangal Giri Maharaj did not like the hustle and bustle and the crowds. He preferred tranquil surroundings. For this reason, he did not allow outsiders in his ashram. Ladies were definitely kept outside the ashram's boundaries. But he took Ma there, most respectfully with Her devotees, at a time when she was yet to be recognised by the Sadhu-Samaj. In the same way that a male brahmin is initiated with the Merumantra of sannyas. Mangal Giriji bestowed the same on Didima.

Next morning, when Ma found Didima dressed as a renunciate, Ma said, "You say that you give spiritual advice to all, but you do not advise me. Why? What is good has been said. People have problems in the family daily. How many people manage to get out of that? Now, be absorbed in meditation for the realisation of the self. Nothing will happen until you attain the power of wisdom and realisation of the Supreme Being."

Divine attributes were observed in Didima even when she was young. She really deserved to take sannyas. Those things described in Upanishads about the liberated soul were seen in Didima. She was very calm and quiet. While maintaining her composure for the outside devotees she was absorbed in deep spiritual thoughts. Sometime in 1963 Sri Ma mentioned in some context that uninterrupted japa of Sannyasa Mantra is continuing inside Giriji.

For sometime, she kept poor health. But she always pined for Ma's company.

The Mahaprayan of Muktananda Giriji Maharaj, came on 9th August 1970 on the banks of the holy Bhagirathi in Haridwar. The end came naturally to the 94-year-old Giriji in Ma's divine presence. Didima's Mahasamadhi is at Kankhal ashram.

Gurupriya Didi: (Sri Guru Priya Ananda Giriji)

The name, Didi, is immortal amongst the family of devotees of Ma. She was born on a Sankranti in the month of February 1899. In spite of being born in a wealthy family, Didi displayed qualities like stoicism, patience, self sacrifice and excellent manners. She was fond of reading religious books, philosophy and literature. For several decades she was Ma's shadow, every moment, everywhere.

Didi first met Ma either in Dec 1925 or Jan 1926 at Shahbag, Dhaka. Didi's mother had died in 1924. Before coming to Shahbag, Shashanka Mohan Mukherjee, her father, had heard stories about Ma from an acquaintance. Therefore when he took Didi for the first Darshan, she felt she had known Ma for a long time. Ma too behaved with her as if they knew each other from time immemorial.

Didi was married off in an established family. But neither did she visit her in-law's house nor did she see the face of her husband.

In this context, Didi has said, 'When I was young, I was very introvert. Whenever someone visited us, I used to hide under the cot or behind the cupboard. Even after marriage, I could not be forced to go to my in-laws place. Parents scolded me without effect, and tried to convince me through my friends. I did not change my mind. Finally they resigned themselves to the idea of not sending me to my husband's place. I remained with my parents.'

Though very young, she was very strong. She permitted her husband to marry again as she had no inclination for the 'family life'. That family too gradually took Didi as an ideal for the spiritual life and became a regular visitor to Ma.

Didi's father, Dr Shashanta Mohan Mukherjee, had a penchant for tapasya. Subsequent to Ma's darshan, he withdrew himself from general social family life and devoted himself to sadhana. Under the pretext of serving her father, Didi too got a chance to free herself from the bondage of family life, to be in Ma's company. Perfect selfless devotion and service to Ma, the capability to understand Ma's gestures immediately and doing most difficult jobs in the strangest situations were Didi's characteristics.

Didi used to reach Shahbag daily in the morning and left only late at night for Siddheshwari where her father was in deep meditation. This was the turning point in Didi's life as she became the constant company of Ma and her devotional service left no question about her dedication. So intense was Didi's devotion to Ma that during Ma's 'Mahabhava' and Divine leelas Bholanath allowed only Didi to touch Her body. Gradually due to Her ecstatic states Ma was unable to perform the usual household work and Didi took over the responsibility for the routine work in a most natural way.

For her, Ma's word was final and Ma's service her only aim and happiness. The name Dadabhai was most appropriate for her because of her organising capacity. The service of Didi can be described as an austere and rigorous sadhana.

At the time Didi came into Ma's fold, ladies of well-to-do families visiting saints was unheard of. Didi, however, relentlessly broke the tradition and proved that women too, instead of the usual marriage and family life, can very well lead an independent, progressive spiritual life.

Though initially she always went with her father for Ma's darshan, Didi had to face a lot of hostile comments from relative and acquaintances. Thus from her own experience she always felt like establishing a place or institution which would provide suitable facilities for those ladies who do not want to marry and who want to lead a life of a renunciate.

Later Didi cut her hair short and became a Brahmacharini, wearing light yellow coloured clothes. Subsequently, other Brahmacharinis in the ashram too took to a similar dress.

First in 1938 she started an institution at Hardwar with two inmates. Later it became the Ma Anandamoyi Kanyapeeth at Kashi. The Kanyapeeth owes its inception and subsequent development to Didi.

The girls of the Kanyapeeth used to call Didi, Dadabhai. This name was given to Didi by the respected 'Mouni' Ma. She said, Didi was no ordinary lady and no man could match her ability. As she fulfilled Ma's kheyal, she was known as Dadabhai.

As time passed, many girls from established families began visiting Ma. They came with their parents to spend their vacations with Sri Ma. Through Didi, Ma made arrangements for them according to the then prevalent customs.

Among the first batch of girls who came close to Ma was Bunidi, Renudi from Allahabad and Kshamadi. Due to Didi's supervision, they had no problem in staying at the ashram.

Ma's family of devotees was growing fast, and so were Didi's responsibilities as caretaker. She would cook Ma's food, attend to Her needs, supervise the ashram work, play host to the visitors and so on. Only failing health prevented her from doing the cooking. So many times Didi was seen feeding the visitors, and her way of doing work in the kitchen was very meticulous. Despite an elephant's memory, she labelled each container to make it easier to find an item.

She had the knack of planning. She did this by keeping notes for the next day's program so eliminating the possibility of forgetting anything. Of course, the primary motive was to serve Ma as perfectly as possible. Whoever went near to Ma would invariably feel Didi's presence.

Later when on Ma's direction, she was compelled to live away from Her, she felt the pain of separation from Ma every moment. In 1932, when Ma was living in Raipur Dehradun, she had asked Shashanka Mohan and her daughter to stay in Vindhyachal. After the sannyas of Shashanka Mohan, Didi remained alone there. Ma had told her, 'when you have worn the sacred thread so as to live the life of a Brahmachari then free yourself from all bondage, and live like a man.'

For four to five months, Didi bore the pain of being separated from Ma, unbearable though it was; after all it was Ma's orders. Therefore, Didi spent most of the time remembering Ma's leela. The first biography on Ma published in twelve volumes was based on her diary alone. Called 'Sri Sri Ma Anandamoyi' it was originally written in Bengali. It was later translated into Hindi in 20 volumes. This publication contains Sri Ma's Leela up to the year 1964. Due to her bad health, she could not remain with Ma all the time. Nevertheless, Ma's devotees are indebted to her for this great contribution. One who has never met Sri Ma and does not know anything about Her, would be greatly enlightened by reading Didi's books.

It was Didi who took upon herself the responsibility of organising the Savitri Maha Yagna (1947-50). She made this herculean task possible by keeping only one thing in mind— 'Ma would get everything done through her.' She is also credited with establishing the various ashrams in India and in Bangladesh (Siddheshwari Dhaka, and Kheora ashram) and the Anandamoyi Seva hospital in Varanasi.

Her Mahanirvana was 16 September, 1980. The setting was most auspicious: the Sri Gopal temple at Varanasi ashram where Naam Kirtan and Srimad Bhagavat Gita slokas echoed in the surroundings. It was here that Brahmacharini Guru Priya Devi laid herself to rest at the feet of her idol.

Ma said, "Didi completed the mission of her life. She revealed herself, and what was in her came to light. Bhaji left calling 'Ma, Ma', Akhandanandaji left in silence and Didi left looking only to this body. She fulfilled the mission for which she had left her home. Although, she stood

firm on her commitment and aim though sickness she lived with a picture of This body and she breathed her last, looking at it. Didi was no ordinary person. She proved it even in her dying moments, departing like a Yogi. She had come to serve this body. Service over, she has bid goodbye.”

About Didi’s samadhi, Ma had said, ‘Didi took sannyas mantra from this body. She used to live near this body. Whatever came out of This body’s mouth, Didi understood it promptly and replied that she had understood.’ According to a very reliable old devotee of Ma it took place in Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun. Didi received the sannyas mantra also from Akhandanandaji (her father). Then Ma asked her if she should call her Gurupreet or Guru Priya? Didi preferred Guru Priya, and so she became known as Gurupriya Anand Giri.

Swami Paramanandji

In 1937 a little after Bhaiji’s Mahaprayan, Swami Paramanandji arrived for Ma’s darshan at Kishenpur ashram.

Swamiji, who was staying at Ramkrishna ashram in the vicinity, was brought to Ma by Bholanath. The moment She saw him She said, “So you have come.”

Before coming to Ma, Swamiji did rigorous sadhana for twelve years at places like Gangotri and Uttarkashi. With just one blanket, he twice made it to Kailash Mansarovar. He studied Vedanta under the guidance of the highly respected 1008 Tapovan Maharaj and 1008 Debigiriji. Bholanath met Swamiji during his sadhana at Uttarkashi.

Swamiji had all the qualities of an ideal Sannyasi. One of the most ardent devotees of Ma, he was the main architect of the organisation of Ashram activities. Swamiji was regarded as the ‘Hanuman’ of Sri Ma. Wherever Ma sent him, Swamiji went and accomplished the job despite whatever difficulties arose.

Swamiji’s personality reflected all those attributes that make a Mahatma out of a human being. Without any attachment and ego, Swamiji never expected anything. He was the personification of perseverance and happiness.

In 1960, Naimsharanya, the venue for a Bhagavat saptah and sanyam saptah, was flooded by the rising Gomti. Everybody thought the festivities would be cancelled. But with Ma’s divine blessings, Swamiji made innovative arrangements that stunned everyone.

Again in 1970, against the odds, Swamiji successfully organised the Sanyam saptah on the banks of the Narmada. He was a real ‘Karmayogi’. Swamiji was at ease with the kitchen knife, sickle, or even a broom. There was no work which he could not do. The same Swamiji sat with child-like innocence at Ma’s feet or was seen discussing Vedanta to one who discussed his queries with him. Ma used to pass queries directed at Her on to Swamiji to reply.

In 1941, five years after Swamiji met Ma, they went to Dhaulchina. Pointing to a spot there, Ma told Swamiji, "while returning from Kailash this body had seen you here in the subtle body just as you look today. Bhaiji departed only after his pilgrimage to Kailash, then you came".

One day Swami Krishnanand Avadhootji had asked Swamiji, “you have done sadhana in the Himalayas for so many years; you have thoroughly studied the Vedas. Then what prompted you to be here with Ma. What have you seen?”

Swamiji replied “I have been in company of several saints and Mahatmas but in none of them have I seen the state of ‘Sthithyapragya’ described under ‘Shankhya yoga’ of Srimad Bhagvad Gita. Ma has no desire, no feeling of comfort and discomfort, no anger, fear or animosity, nothing. She is ever in Brahman. I have seen no one else like this - that is why I am so happy here.”

From 1940 onwards several ashrams were constructed under his able supervision, and several big festivals were organised by him before Panuda took over. For over four decades he has been an active part of Ma's Leela.

Swamiji attained mahanirvana on 5 March 1984 at Sri Ma's Kankhal Ashram.

According to Sri Ma's advice and suggestions, all major festivals are celebrated at Ma's Ashram, following full religious custom and traditions. Apart from the three major festivals - Ma's birth celebrations, Durga Puja and Sanyam Saptah - Ashram inmates also organise Saraswati puja, Shiv Rathri, Ram Navami, Jhulan, Janmashtami, Laxmi puja, Kalipuja, Akhand Ramayan path, Srimad Bhagavat Saptah, Gita Jayanti etc.

In accordance with the rituals Shiv Rathri is observed with the worshipers fasting without water) for the puja held on the night of Phalguni Krishan Chaturdasi (the night previous to full moon night). At the place of the Puja devotees sit in a circle with a Shiv Linga on a big brass plate well decorated with sandal paste and flowers in the centre. Every devotee has his/her own articles required for individual Puja. Those who are unable to fast until the last quarter of the night complete their puja of all the four quarters in the first sitting.

In the first quarter of that auspicious night, the linga is bathed with milk; in the second quarter with curd; in the third quarter with ghee and in the last quarter, the linga is bathed with honey.

There are different mantras for the puja during the different quarters. Kirtan recitals are also carrying on simultaneously.

During Ma's lifetime, She encouraged all by Her Divine presence. At times, when everybody felt a little sleepy, Ma Herself would start doing kirtan. So melodious was the kirtan that all were absorbed into the fathomless depths of kirtan music.

Sanyam Saptah Mahavrata ("The life of spiritual discipline")

Having been initiated by Ma and organised by Sri Sri Ma Anandamoyi Sangha, this annual festival is most popular among devotees. One of the senior Mahatmas described it as a rare and great occasion to get the opportunity to participate in it, as a result of good deeds of several lives.

Many times the devotees requested Ma to suggest ways and means by which they can remember and be in the company of God for most of the time. Ma in reply said —

"Spare sometime from your busy schedule exclusively for God. The family members can confer and decide the time. Start with a few days in a year then make it a few days in a month, then in a week. As you get into its habit increase the time. During this period speak only the truth, do not quarrel, have no loose talk, follow brahmacharya, restrict food to the bare minimum, engage in meditation, observing silence, and read the scriptures. Do your routine work as if you are doing it for God."

Initially one has to restrict oneself by imposing self-discipline. Gradually the restrictions become spontaneous. To attain to a certain stage of Sadhana is possible only through a conservative restricted life style. Self control leads one to the path of Sadhana."

According to Ma "if we are not inclined to get closer to God, we must impose self-discipline to awaken that feeling. Like children, who don't want to study, are forced to read and write, they gradually train themselves and slowly get interested and develop a liking for studies. Similarly to remain close to God and to carry on in thought of Him, one has to do certain spiritual exercises. It is essential to spare sometime at least for this. Do it with utmost sincerity and devotion. Perseverance comes only when you get impatient for Him. Light the fire somehow, with Ghee

(Butter oil) or Sandalwood or grass straw. Once the fire is lit, you can go ahead. Try to choose the deeds that will help your instinct for piety. Choose a goal and aim for it.”

Sanyam is not only an act towards perfection. Sri Ma links Sanyam to Sadhana. She says for a purified body and mind - restricted physical movement together with restrictions in diet are essential. This helps in the realisation of the Self.

On the basis of Ma’s philosophy the great disciple Yogibhai suggested to Ma the idea of the Sanyam Saptah in Her Divine presence. Ma agreed to the proposal and the devotees got a chance to improve their spiritual exercises. This week-long program was so set that the devotees could get the maximum benefit out of it. Who knows when Ma’s divine impetus will light the light of eternity.

From common people to senior officers, rich and established citizens, Rajas and Ranis, big industrialists and business men - all took part alike as “Vratis” following strictly the discipline laid down for Sanyam Saptah by Sri Ma. The schedule laid down equally suits the ashramite as well as all householders. The beginning of the first Sanyam Mahavrata at Kashi Ashram was from 6 August 1952. In Ma’s divine presence about two hundred devotees participated as Vratis. They were glad to have Ma amongst them for long hours during meditation, Satsang etc. Various saints and seers also blessed the occasion. Her presence inspired the devotees. Here the practical aspects of Sadhana and worship were seen. It began with some devoted, curious, spiritual and strong-headed followers participating. It is now a much more broadly based and organised function in which not only devotees from India but also from abroad actively participate. Though inaccessible to the senses now, Sri Ma’s loving presence is felt more than ever.

As already mentioned several functions are organised during the week-long celebrations. Many Mahatmas, seers and pandits participate. Their presence in itself and their lucid talks enhance the beauty and charm of the function and opportunity for Satsang. How kind and compassionate Ma is for the uplift of mankind.

Over the years during Ma’s physical presence the Sanyam Saptahs have been organised at various places on the invitation of Mahatmas to their ashrams. Ramtirtha ashram, Santaram Ashram, Nadiad, Rishikesh, Kurukshetra, Kankhal, Badrikaashram, Bhimpura, are examples. Since Sri Ma left this world, this function is organised annually near Sri Ma’s Mahasamadhi at Kankhal Ashram.

At a quarter to eight in the morning Kirtan of “Satyam Gyanam Anantam Brahma” starts once the veda path by a Pandit is over. At 8 o’clock in the morning and 3 o’clock in the afternoon there starts a period of silence and meditation. The surroundings become absolutely still - with Sri Ma (now Ma’s portrait) and other Mahatmas on the dais. The devoted worshippers try to go deep in their meditation. During Ma’s physical presence, these moments generated a kind of ecstasy difficult to describe. At these moments the worshippers with resolute mind try to have darshan of Ma, the personification of joy and happiness. Ma would slowly move Her divine infinite compassionate look to all the devotees sitting, from one end of the hall to the other. Who can forget those wonderful moments of superb joy. Now Ma is no more with us physically, still the warmth of Her divine presence is felt.

During the Sanyam Saptah Ma said, "the sadhak attempts to control his body, mind and soul with the spiritual exercises. These acts create a path towards enlightenment and Self realisation.”

During the first Sanyam Saptah at Kashi one day after the meditation period Ma was found singing in a low tone and unclear voice:

*“Hey Pita Hey Hita Hey Brahmatatwam
Hey Pita Hey Hita Hey Brahmabhutam*

Hey Pita Hey Hita Hey Brahma Swarupam

Later Ma said a boy was singing this tune to her. Since then this stanza is traditionally sung by the ashram Brahmacharinis quietly after the meditation; otherwise this hymn is never sung.

The most memorable event of the whole day's program was the last one of the day 'Matri-Satsang,' which used to be a question and answer session between Ma and devotees, other Mahatmas also participating. Ma narrated anecdotes, old stories or sometimes started Kirtan at the request of Mahatmas and devotees. She had a unique way of talking, with a great sense of humour. Her words sent the devotees into fits of laughter. Obviously, during this time, the crowd packed the pandal.

She often requested the Mahatmas to reply to their questions and then made her own comments, - She would politely say:

"This little girl talks irrelevant things; She was not given an education, Pitaji. So listen to what these learned Mahatmas say". But the crowd still demanded to hear Ma. Why were they so insistent in listening to Ma? Ma was like the sacred light of the earthen lamp which purifies the soul. The difference between Ma's words and bookish knowledge is something like the difference between the sun and the sun of an artist's creation.

So the crowd of devotees enjoyed every bit of Matri-satsang whether they understood the proceedings or not. One day someone asked Ma "Why is your hair so black?"

Ma laughed at the question, the crowd laughed too. Then Ma recounted some incidents. Once when in Raipur (1932) Her hair got matted and was removed as if removing a cap. People wanted to purchase this from Bholanath for using in drama, plays etc. but he did not allow that. It is still being kept at Varanasi Ashram. She also narrated how honey dripped from Her hair. She never told anybody about it. It was the people who discovered bees hovering around Her hair and then saw the honey. An old devotee present there got up and said she had been a witness to this incident.

Often She would tell little anecdotes. How nice it was to hear Ma telling stories in Her own simple way like a small child. Ma used to do Kirtan, clapping with Her small hands and moving Her body sideways. Ah! how melodious was Her Kirtan. The surroundings vibrated with Her melody. Those holy and memorable moments....difficult to describe!

The last Sanyam Saptah in Ma's physical presence was held at Kankhal in November 1981. That Anandam which can never be achieved by effort and desire was showered by Sri Ma of Her own as unlimited and unasked for mercy and compassion.

The climax of the Sanyam Vrata is Maha Nisha Dhyana on the last day of Sanyam Vrata. It starts around midnight in pin-drop silence by candle light. After this sacred occasion Ma distributed fruit and blessed the participants. Now other Mahatmas grace the occasion to bless the Vratis.

The final ceremony is completed with a havan by Pandits.

On the eve of the last sanyam saptah in 1981 Ma asked the famous singer/devotee Chhabi Bannerjee to sing a song whose lyrics had come from Ma's lips spontaneously. Ma Herself gave the tune to it. (The original song is at the end of this chapter).

*Oh! God oh! the Merciful, the Truth
you are calling me, the down fallen
to put yourself in my heart
to get me absorbed in Sanyam Mahavrata
Oh God! Oh God*

During this Saptah in Matri satsang Ma sang:

“Divya Sudhae Prem Jageyre Prem Jageyre”

(Divine nectar arouses love, deep in my heart). With Her eyes half open, Ma was ecstatic as She sang this song clapping all the time in perfect symphony as if stirring one’s soul to enter the whirlpool of love and happiness.

Is there Heaven on earth somewhere else?

Once Ma has said “The Sanyam Vrata” is the medicine for all worldly diseases. We are all victims sick of these worldly diseases like life and death, profit and loss, sorrow and happiness. The Mahatmas are doctors, vratis are patients, spiritual exercises are the medicine. One gets rid of them only through the attainment of Self realisation.”

Of the Sanyam Vrata Ma once said:

“There is the momentary happiness of the five sense organs and then again sorrow. Merciful God is showering pity and compassion on us. But there is no way other than a disciplined life for a sadhak. Then the worldly desires slowly die and then one attains the stage of realisation of Brahma. Yogibhai set the rules of Sanyam after hearing This body’s words. Here there is no publicity, nothing is done except praying to God; one soul, the unified whole. Here is the perennial flow of the Ganges—the Ganges of knowledge where one gets everything keeping one’s bowl upright. Baba (pointing to Mahatmas) why don’t you make me say something? He is Baba - he will accept it considering This body to be a little girl. Gain and loss, desires, questions, answers all are His game, His manifestation.”

This is the heartbreaking call to the Divine which came out of Sri Ma’s lips on the eve of the Sanyam Mahavrata (1981).

*“Hey Bhagwan, Hey Bhagwan, Hey Bhagwan
Hey Kripalu, Hey dayalu
Hey dayarnaya, Hey dayalu,
Deenbandhu Deenanath,
Deenbandhu Jagganath
Sudh Satya Swaroop Thakur
Dakcho Tumhi Nirantar
Dakcho tumhi dekeycho tumhi
Hridey Judai bosbey boley
Dakcho Jumi dekeycho tumi
Sanyam Mahavratey basabey tumi
Yogasaney basabey bole
Dakcho tumi dekeycho tumi
Hey Bhagwan, Hey Bhagwan, Hey Bhagwan.”*

Ma's divine power and charm has attracted so many people from abroad that they came to India not only once but several times for Sri Ma's darshan.

Many such devotees interested in Indian philosophy, religion and the path of truthfulness were especially attracted to Her, visited and revisited Her. It is interesting to note that they remained calm and patiently waited for hours together for Sri Ma's darshan.

In 1937, Mrs Jennings came from USA to participate in the Sri Ramkrishna centenary celebrations during the World Religions Conference in Calcutta. She travelled to several places in India and met several saints and mahatmas. At Sri Aurbindo's Ashram at Pondicherry she came to know about Ma. She went to Nainital for Her darshan. She was so attracted to Ma that she accompanied Her to several places and wanted to go to Kailash Mansarover also with Her but she could not. She had asked whether visiting holy places lifted one's spiritual capacity. Ma replied, "It varies from person to person. One who considers the place special for a particular God or Goddesses is definitely moved with a special bhav. Otherwise it is merely a visit for him."

Br. Atmananda (Miss Blanca) was an Austrian singer, who taught at Rajghat School, Varanasi before she joined Ashram. She met Ma at Almora in the summer of 1943 after a Danish saint suggested to her to that she should meet Ma Anandamoyi, telling her "though there is a lot of noise around, She is real." Miss Blanca, who was on the look out for a spiritual guide or Guru, found in Ma her ideal. She never felt that she was meeting Ma the first time. She joined the ashram, leaving her job sometime in 1944. It was Ma who named her Atmananda.

In the winter of the same year an English gentleman, Louis Thompson, came to India. Subsequently he came to Varanasi and stayed at Rajghat School. He had a picture of a saint he wanted to meet. The picture was shown to Miss Blanca who recognised the photograph instantly and directed him to meet Ma Anandamoyee. He met Ma at Kashi Ashram.

He first went to Sri Lanka and met the famous saint Yogiswami. A year later he came to Sri Ramana Maharshi. In between he visited Sri Aurobindo ashram and got initiation from one South Indian saint. He also had darshan of Swami Ramdas and Mata Krishnabai. But he was yet to get what he was looking for.

Then he had darshan of Ma. When Brahmacharini Atmananda asked him about his impression of Ma, Louis said he got much more than he expected. Ma's vision, he said, 'penetrates deep into one's soul.' She is a person without an ego."

Lewis Thompson went to meet Ma again in 1945 when she was staying at Birla Dharmashala, Sarnath. Thompson had discussions on religious topics with Ma privately. He acknowledged that all intellectual knowledge was as nothing before Her wisdom.

According to Atmananda, Thompson was very critical, and reserved his accolades only for the best. As Atmananda, then Miss Blanca, considered Lewis' opinion, she felt more attracted towards Ma. However, she got her chance to meet Ma again only two years later during Kalipuja at Vindhyachal Ashram. Afterwards whenever Ma came to Kashi, she regularly came for Her darshan. A few years later, Miss Blanca left her job to seek refuge in Ma's lap.

Atmananda's sacrifice, service and respect for Ma was unparalleled. On Ma's advice, she lived in a cottage at Kalyanvan, Dehradun. She followed Ma's directions and did kirtan every evening, irrespective of her illness or inclement weather. She edited the English periodical 'Ananda Varta' and due to her efforts, the section Matri Leela covering Sri Ma's travels during the period 1952-82 is there on record. This is now being published in three volumes.

In 1948, the personal secretary to the Emperor of Abyssynia, visited India. Henri Petit, who was studying philosophy for the last 19 years, came to enlighten himself through Indian spiritual life. He met the Mother at Sri Aurobindo ashram and spent a month there. Thereafter he went Sri Ramana Maharshi's Ashram, but he was not satisfied. Later, at Varanasi he met Louis Thompson who suggested he should meet Ma Anandmayi.

Henri Petit was in fact tired of hearing serious and dry knowledge on spiritual subjects and wanted to return home. Ma was not in Varanasi at that time. But on the insistence of Lewis, he waited and went to have darshan of Sri Ma. He was moved on seeing Ma even from a distance and felt that his wish was fulfilled. Streams of tears flowed down his cheeks as he watched Ma in silence. He felt as if he was sitting before an enlightened soul.

Next day, he had a talk in private with Ma and discussed several things. Ma named him Satyanand. Henri was very happy with this name and said he never told lies. He met Ma several times.

Ma asked Henry when he would return to India again. He said perhaps this was his first and last visit as he was 70 yrs old then. It is interesting that Henry although 70, returned to India with a job in the French embassy and met Ma immediately after his arrival in Delhi.

One day in the Ashram premises Henry and Thompson were busy talking in French when Ma pointed out how, after so many days, he had a chance to speak his own language. She said "He shed tears on listening to the songs, and to control that he often lay down on his front. How does he react so when he is not able to understand the meaning?" Yogesh Brahmachari said "as the Ved Mantra acts on our soul, so the kirtan and hymns create the vibrations and change the Bhav in one's soul." "This person really has the capacity to be stirred by these songs and kirtans."

Ma once said about Henry, "He is a confirmed bachelor. It is not easy to be so in the country where he lived. Blanca's case too is similar. Once a cab driver took Blanca somewhere else, whilst she wanted to come to the ashram. The moment Blanca realised his motive she started punching the cab driver. Taken aback the cab driver eventually dropped her at her destination. It is possible for a simple and pious person to do this."

Dr. Adolf Wintrobe was a successful physician in Marseille, France. He had a bent of mind for the spiritual life and for this he came to Sri Aurobindo's ashram at Pondichery. There, he met a Canadian lady who asked him to visit Anandamoyi Ma at Varanasi. He had his first darshan of Ma on 2 Feb 1951. The plan was to return home after darshan. However, as he came back to his hotel room he described it as if someone had put a flame to a heap of gunpowder.

Dr. Wintrobe sought refuge at Ma's feet the very next day. For the next 19 months except for one day, he remained in the company of Ma. Thereafter, Ma asked him to meditate in Almora. Swami Vijayananda, the name given by Ma, now lives at the Kankhal ashram. The British photographer Richard Lannoy, French film producer Arnaud Desjardin, and German novelist Melita Maschman also came in close contact with Sri Ma. Melita has also written a book, 'Tiger Singing Kirtan', in German. The foreword was translated into Bengali, to offer it to Ma.

One Italian lady, Mariam Ore, saw Ma's picture somewhere and came to meet Ma.

In later years, among the many foreigners who had Ma's darshan, were the Ambassador of Seychelles, the Queen mother of Greece and Canada's prime minister Trudo with his Secretary George.

The Canadian Prime Minister met Ma in private also and asked many spiritual questions. His Secretary George came to Ma several times.

The German author Meleta Maschman has written that her soul stirred when she saw Ma. "I was overwhelmed...! I couldn't place her personality in my 'general' perspective of the world. I felt

I was part of a profound happiness which was filling me with joy every moment. The supreme has given me darshan in Ma.”

French film producer Arnaud Desjardin has also written several books on philosophy. In quest of spiritual bliss Arnaud left his small town in Switzerland with his family. Earlier he had come across two ladies who had been to India. They suggested to him to meet Ma Anandmoyee. Brought up with a western outlook, the film producer couldn't accept a lady as a woman of God. On reaching India in 1959, he met the famous philosopher-saint in the Himalayas Swami Shivananda and asked about Ma Anandamoyi.

“Among the flowers that have blossomed on Indian soil, She is the most perfect flower,” said Swami Shivananda.

Arnaud and his wife met Ma for the first time during Durga puja in 1959. In 1960, his wife came alone to Ma. Then, again next year, during the summer, the couple returned to Her during Sri Ma's birthday celebrations in Allahabad.

Arnaud has written in French that “it is difficult to describe the sacred moments of Ma's darshan.” The words Devi (Goddess) and superhuman came to his mind.

The Desjardins kept coming to Ma for several years after that year of their first visit. He shot a film he called “India” — a biographical account of Ma which was broadcast on French TV. The film has clips of Ma doing kirtan “Krishna Chhalia Ananda lal, Brij Ramana Pran Gopal”. The film prompted interest in many people to visit Ma in India.

For several years he kept with him a picture of Sri Raman Maharshi, who was central to his spiritual life. He said it was Ramana Maharshi who prompted him to meet Ma.

Talking about Ma, Arnaud said she made him able enough to understand the Bible and the preaching of Christ. She opened the gates of Srimad Bhagvat for him well enough to understand Sri Krishna and took him closer to Christ.

Years ago before coming to India, he had heard that Indian saints, can totally transform the lives of their devotees with their blessings. He later acknowledged that ‘Ma was such a saint whose reach is infinite. Quite often Her deep look goes far beyond and in Her physical appearance She bears an indescribable Divine look. Her inner depth and completeness is so amazing that I was totally engrossed. Peerless knowledge and the awakening of the inner Guru takes place in Her divine presence.”

When he came in 1961 during Ma's birthday celebration, his son was only three months old and used to shout in happiness when brought to Ma. Ma would lift him onto Her lap.

Dr. Robert Bosch and his family from Germany had visited Ma several times. In 1961, when Ma was in Vrindavan he visited Ma with his wife, sister and friend. He used to sing daily German devotional songs for Ma after the evening kirtan. Ma liked the songs and remembered that in Her childhood, She saw missionaries visiting the village, singing in praise of Jesus Christ. She used to be moved by those heart-touching songs.

During the Jhulan and Janmashmi festivals of 1974, Robert Bosch and his three children stayed with Ma for fifteen days at Rajgir and Vindhyachal ashram.

In the French version of Sad Vani Jean Herbert has described Ma's knowledge as different from our intellectual knowledge, which is incomplete and subject to questioning. Her knowledge was not like an impractical dream with no connection to this world, it probes complicated spiritual subjects and explains them through the medium of small events in daily life. It projects God as a unified whole.

Dr. Alexander Lipski met Ma for the first time in 1965. He was inspired by Swami Yogananda's book, 'The Autobiography of a Yogi', which mentioned Ma Anandamoyi, beside hearing about her from his friends, who had already met Ma at different times.

After meeting Sri Ma at Varanasi in 1965, he had the opportunity to stay with Her at Rajgir and Vindhyaachal for 15 days. Describing the first meeting, Lipski has said, "Ma received me as if She knew me very well." He felt Ma could easily reach the depths of his soul and mind.

Lipski has likened Ma to a spiritually magnetic personality. "Once you have Her darshan, you cannot detach yourself from Her."

Lipski was stunned to hear from a supposedly illiterate lady, Ma, the lucid explanations of complex religious queries. Lipski became so interested that he learned Bengali just to read the original books and publications on Ma's Leela. Later he wrote a book on Ma's life and teaching in English.

Among the foreigners who came close to Ma was Gadadhar, an American devotee who could not take himself away after Her darshan. He remained as a Brahmachari and lived in a cottage at Kankhal Ashram. He stands out as one devotee who breathed his last at the feet of Ma. The grief-stricken parents came to offer the ashes to the Ganges after his funeral, and met Ma at Kankhal. Ma told them, "the soul is all pervading; the body is a temporary phenomenon. The world is on the move but mankind misconceives itself as an isolated existence and ties itself in knots."

Gadadhar's parents were moved by Ma's words. He had collected a lot of literature, tapes, videofilms etc on Ma's life. Ma told them to take all his collection home.

The parents took the collection back and subsequently gave it to the Havard School of Divinity.

In recent years another devotee of Ma who has neither seen nor met Ma, Lisa Leslie Marlyn, discovered them and did extensive research on Ma's life. She came to India after seeing this collection and met several serious devotees of Ma to complete her extensive research.

Lisa's interest in spirituality started after she worked for 12 years as a physiotherapist. A mother of four children, Lisa is currently doing research on the different religions of India - especially the Hindu Religion.

A large number of foreign devotees keep attending the annual Sanyam Mahavarta. They particularly enjoyed Ma's divine presence during the celebrations when they meditated and listened to Ma's melodious kirtans. That was a 'fantastic experience' a devout foreigner once commented.

In 1973, a young American, Swami Nirmalananda Giri, who ran Ma Anandmoyee monastery in Oklahoma, USA came to Vrindavan with his 15 disciples to take part in the Sanyam Saptah. They followed strictly the discipline of the week-long celebrations. Swami Nirmalananda also gave a talk on the occasion.

The disciple of Swami Yogananda, Sri Dayamata, met Ma in Calcutta for the first time in 1958. She subsequently returned to Ma with many more devotees of Swami Yogananda for meditation in Ma's divine presence.

Before Christmas 1978, Ma was resting incognito at Bhimpura (near Baroda). A few of the devoted foreign devotees who had come especially to join Ma and seek Her company, with Her permission, accompanied Her there. Arnaud dedicated his book "Beyond the I-ness" to Ma. The book is very popular abroad.

There are innumerable devotees abroad and only a few have been mentioned. Their love, devotion and dedication bring them to India's soil occasionally. They also organise Sanyam Saptah and Ma's birthday celebrations in their respective countries.

Ma has evolved Herself into an ideal teacher. Her teaching differed from person to person depending on his/her mental status, time and need. Ma's every movement, each gesture was a lesson in itself - of service, knowledge, devotion, sacrifice, austerity etc. She has given devotees every possible chance to learn.

From little things, like what is to be cooked and how, and what suits a particular Mahatma, how to serve food, decoration of the food plate, how to welcome a guest are so many small things that Ma taught. There is no end to Her teaching. Ma delegated work to her able workers; to someone - Puja work, to someone else - kitchen and store and so on. She even taught how one was to cut vegetables, and the way to cook.

Once at Naimisharanya Ma asked one Brahmacharini to cook rice with all the vegetables in it. She asked her to put water in the correct proportion so the rice was neither overcooked nor watery. After giving her instructions she went to the bathroom. After sometime the girl had a feeling that she had not put enough water and the rice was getting spoiled. What should she do now? Meanwhile Ma returned and realised the problem. She immediately lifted the vessel, full of rice, with both hands and shook it. Now the rice was nicely cooked.

That was how She taught.

Wherever She stayed, Ma did the rounds of the premises without any notice. Once, during one such round, She happened to find a place, the venue for the Akhand Naam Kirtan, that was not properly cleaned. She herself wiped the dust on the pictures of the Gods and Goddesses and then with the help of Her cloth Ma dusted the place. She herself did it while Didi begged Her pardon. But Ma continued until she had finished Her work perfectly.

Omniscient Ma pointed out such errors in Her uncanny manner. Once, before Ma's imminent visit, an ashram lady cleaned the entire premises and asked the waste to be left in a remote corner that Ma was not likely to visit. But as it happened, while talking to a guest, She strolled to that very spot.

Ma had a knack of delegating work to the right person at the right moment. With unlimited resources and no scarcity of sincere devoted workers in Her majestic domain it was for the welfare of the person to whom she delegated the particular work. He considered himself fortunate to get the chance to serve Ma, who was above any wishes and desires.

Those who have listened to Ma's words must have felt their impact. It is difficult to describe or analyse. Someone asked her "what should a human being do?" Quick came the reply. "He should try to recognise himself".

Why do people wait so impatiently to hear Ma? Her words have neither the skill of pandits nor are a logical analysis, as she says. But the beauty of Her words can best be understood by those who have listened to them. Her words touch the core of one's heart leaving a lasting impression of love and joy.

In course of Her everyday talks, with smiling suggestions and parables, She expresses ideas and thoughts about life and religion.

Sri Ma became serious, firm and reserved at times. Sometimes She would be totally unconcerned with even grave happenings. The next moment She was again a compassionate loving mother. She would enjoy and laugh at trivial matters.

Sri Ma chooses the tiny incidents of everyday life as vehicles to express lofty truths and principles of human conduct. Once someone asked Her "should someone who was cheated by his partner in business go to the courts or accept it as it is?"

Ma replied "you can guess; if you do not give him a response he would continue to cheat you."

There is a larger dimension to Ma's reply; "Who cheated whom? Is he not playing in different forms? What we did not get, was not ours.

"Further, he (thief) can be tackled in a different manner too. One thief stole something from a saint's hut. As he was moving away with the booty, the saint returned and ran after the thief calling him, saying there was still something left in his hut which could be useful for the thief.

The thief no longer ran off. He fell at the Sadhu's feet in reverence.

There is another way of punishing the guilty. But does that come within our scope? Ma recounted another incident - "Once a devotee of Sri Krishna was in an ecstatic mood. Unknowingly, he stepped on the clothes that had been washed by a laundryman (dhobi).

The dhobi shouted "Are you blind?" and ran after him. About that time Sri Krishna who was having his meal suddenly left, telling Rukmini he would return after some time. But Sri Krishna returned soon.

When Rukmini asked him the reason for His quick return Sri Krishna recounted the incident of the washerman and said He rushed to save the devotee but when He saw the devotee had himself picked up a stone to defend himself, He preferred not to interfere.

Another approach, someone was calling a saint bad names. The devotee saw that former was making a grave mistake so he softly slapped him to neutralise the former's sin.

And lastly, had the person who has cheated you been your brother, would you have called it a betrayal? Will you call the theft by you of your own possession - stealing? Is this not all the same? Who will punish whom?

Now, you do whatever you deem fit."

The sole goal of every religion is to reach God, says Ma who has never suggested to anyone to change their religion. She has always supported and helped the religious-minded person to carry on their sadhana irrespective of their religion. She has never taken someone away from their roots to allow them to attain the goal. With times the changes occur so slowly and steadily that even the aspirant would not guess it was happening. It all depends on our alertness to understand Ma. If someone is capable of visualising everything as God he can achieve the goal even if he is a family man. The service to God should be without pride or prejudice, with no desire, says Ma.

Ma further says "To reach God, one can take the path of Japa and meditation or go through logic and philosophy. "All paths reach the same place. In monotheism the aspirant starts by saying he is not this, not this, and he discards everything; ultimately when he gets enlightened then the multifaceted world is no more before him, there is only one Supreme bliss. At this stage there is only one and one, alone. Thus it is said "There is only one Brahman and nothing else. At that stage what was put aside as "not this, not this" is now permeated with joy and becomes a spiritual body. What is this spiritual body? The awakened body - awareness of the fact that whatsoever you see in the world is He alone in different forms. This observation or attainment is different from the way the world looks, where things are seen to be different. The diversified world instead looks a unified one. "Brahma is one". So - one in Infinity and the Infinite in one - can be achieved. Therefore what is present in the Universe seems to be present in oneself, and oneself in the whole Universe. So at this stage there is nothing to reject, dualism, or monotheism or concept of Leela everything lies

here. This is the stage of accomplishment. Referring to this stage it is said - now there exists 'He Alone'.

Ma used to solve doubts in a unique manner. Depending on the spiritual maturity She gave different answers, suggested different ways - sometimes privately - occasionally before an audience. One person's question solved the problems of many. It is reported that someone asked Her about such doubts. Ma either laughed it away at times or continued to speak on something else. Meanwhile, the questioner would get his reply in some subtle way.

One gentleman, once asked "Ma, I have a query: I am repeating something within myself; guess what it is." Ma smiled and said "I am giving you the reply, guess it yourself." While leaving he offered obeisance before Ma and left.

Next morning the gentleman was back at the threshold of Ma's room tears running from his eyes. Ma asked him what happened He said "I had a wonderful experience."

When Daya Mata, disciple of Swami Yogananda, came to Ma and sat in silence she had a telepathic communication with Ma without speaking a word. Later Daya Mata has written about this experience.

Once, another gentleman asked Ma: "should I go home?" "Yes, try to go to your real home. This home is unstable Pitaji, make it an inn, will you?"

Ma spoke about the supreme spiritual truth and the fathomless spiritual goal in a few words. Volumes can be written about the meaning of these plain and simple words of Ma.

Ma Herself is a reflection of the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas. She was the boundless ocean of knowledge and wisdom, who knew when a devotee would be able to accept and understand Her.

On another occasion, Ma said "keep a sugar cube in your mouth all the time; it means repeating God's name, praying to him. You don't have to go anywhere for this. Call him by any name you like, at each and every moment, in all situations. Purify your self with prayer, you will get knowledge and wisdom. The Ganges of knowledge purifies everything".

"Do satsang, it opens the path to spirituality." Ma, further explained, we do not concentrate on the main thing. Instead we run after the unimportant things in life. Have you heard the story of a cat? In a humorous way Ma told the story -

"A cat lived in a house where during puja days (Durga Puja) she was kept tied so that she could not spoil anything. However, the cat was given food as usual at the right time. After some years, the cat left the place. But people in that home thought, perhaps it is a tradition to keep a cat tied during Durga puja days. So they got another cat and tied her up during those puja days."

Ma said, "many times we also make similar mistakes. Rules are made out of necessity. Even after the reason has gone away, the rule still remains."

Ma narrated an incident illustrating the glory of satsang. One Mahatma visited a kingdom. The king received him with utmost respect. He washed the Mahatma's feet and then arranged for his alms. The Mahatma asked the king "do you hold satsang here?" "No, Maharaj," the king said, "we do not do satang." The moment he heard this, the Mahatma decided to leave the place without taking his alms. The Raja implored him to accept the alms but the Mahatma would not relent. The princess of that kingdom was an intelligent girl. She fell at the Mahatma's feet and exhorted him to stay.

The Mahatma did not listen to her also. As he walked out of the gate, the princess, accompanied him and again fell at his feet. The princess said, "I had heard that if one walks seven steps with another person, they become company. Though we had not organised satsang so far now

I have come with you this far. Your company is also satsang for me. Now you must accept the alms."

The Mahatma was delighted. He returned, accepted the meal and blessed all those present.

Once at Naimasharanya Ma was arranging a fruit basket to be sent to Kashi. A piece of paper, from a sweet box was lying nearby. She picked up the paper and placed it in the basket, saying, "this will also get a chance to visit the holy city." Ma actually showed that everything is God.

One's religion should be the basis of one's character. There are ways to attain that goal. Naam Jap, religious discussion, reading of scriptures, satsang and kirtan, meditation and pujas - they are all various means to control one's mind and soul. Ma insists on determination in all one's endeavours. So much time should be spared for work and if not completed, it should be completed the next day. Endeavours pave the way for a pure mind and attitude.

To have a pure mind and attitude, one must pursue one course and ultimately everything blends into one whole, all this is of Brahman.

A man leading a family life also gets various opportunities for sadhana. At home, the child is Gopal, the husband is the 'Parampati' and the wife 'Laxmi'. The home where all family members worship turns into a heaven. After a certain age, the couple spends the rest of their lives as Vanprasthees and devotes it to spirituality and meditation.

Ma has suggested to a householder that the lives of ancient sages and their wives be taken as an ideal example. 'Brahmacharya opens the path to Brahavidya.'

Ma says "when the human being is born, it is indeed virtuous. His birth means he has come to the path of Self-realisation and can achieve it, if he wishes so."

Ma has given special attention to the uplift of women's social and spiritual status. This should not be misconstrued with "women's lib". She has done it in a very simple way. As men held kirtan recitals, women also took their turn overnight - as early as 1929-30 in Kheora village. The ever-vigilant Ma arranged for their safety. Flowers were not available there that day. So Ma taught the ladies how to make garlands with leaves and wood chips. Bejewelled with these garlands and sandal paste marks on their foreheads, the ladies sang kirtan through the night, inspired by Ma's company.

Ma gave much importance to women's education. She held that women should have as much spiritual education as men and so together they should reconstruct society. Didi paved the way for the Kanyapeeth with just two students in 1938. This institution is now under Dr. Sampurnand, Sanskrit University, Varanasi.

Ma's kheyal to allow selected ladies to wear the sacred thread is also a significant step. Ma once said that when She did Her sadhana-lila She Herself wore the sacred thread and did all the rituals with strict discipline. But for others She asked the opinion of the learned pandits of Kashi. They replied that it was practiced in ancient times as written in the scriptures. However at present, it could not be permitted. But the best person to ask would be Gopinath Kaviraj.

Gopi Baba said "there is much evidence of this practice in ancient times. Ma's kheyal itself is the Shastra so there is no need for other opinions."

Listening to the opinions of the learned pandits of Kashi and Gopi Baba, Ma said "now, no more authority is required. This body had the kheyal and wanted to know whether it was in accordance with the scriptures or not, as many may query it. This body does not want to re-introduce this system in general but only to suitable and selected ladies."

At Tarapith on 14 Jan 1936 Didi and Maroni (grand daughter of Bholanath's sister) were

given the sacred thread following all the rituals. Bholanath initiated Maroni while Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya initiated Didi. Ma told Didi "wearing this thread is serious. You must become an ideal Brahmacharini."

The marriage ritual of Maroni was held at Tarapith. Bholanath did 'kanyadan' as she was brought up by Bholanath in the Ashram as his daughter. Thus Ma relieved Bholanath of his obligations before he continued his sadhana later in Himalayas.

Thus in an area where for hundreds of years only men could proceed, Ma brought forward selected ladies, giving them the right to pronounce the Gayatri Mantra. In later years a few more girls were invested with the sacred thread by Sri Ma.

It will not be out of place to mention here the reply Ma gave when asked whether ladies have a right to pronounce Pranav. Ma said "women have certain internal knots when the pronouncing of Pranav is not possible, but if this changes then it becomes possible for them. For women who cannot pronounce the Pranav - this may have a meaning also; who is a women? One who is weak! The one who seeks refuge. In this context all are women. The form of a man does not make one a man. Just as women take refuge from men, men too ask for the same from women. In this way both are equally weak. Everybody is stretching out their arms before the Supreme Being."

Ma further elaborated - "It is said women do not enjoy the right to pronounce the Pranav whereas it is also said "striya samasta sakala jagatsu". From this saying it is assumed that only women have the right to pronounce Pranav. You say Pranav is the primordial sound. Creation means work; who will work without shakti? Thus it is only 'sree' or 'shakti' who can pronounce Pranav."

It is rare for women to take sannyas. An important event was Didima's sannyas on 14 April 1938.

Generally Narayanshila is not worshipped by women. Here also Ma first gave Narayanshila to Brahmacharini Udas saying "now you have got the fruits of your worship after wearing the sacred thread for 25 years. Now God has come to you in this form."

In another incident Ma gave Brahmacharini Chandan the Narayanshila belonging to Didima's maternal family. This was located through Ma's kheyal on Didima's request after a lot of searching at Agartala. Brahmacharini Chandan continues to worship this Narayanshila daily to this day at the Kankhal ashram, where she lives.

A brief mention of Ma Anandmoyee Kanyapith will not be out of place here.

As already stated Ma's kheyal and Didi's efforts took shape on Sept 25, 1938 as the Anandmoyee Kanyapeeth. It was Durga Puja Navami when in Ma's divine presence, with only two students the Kanyapeeth made a humble beginning along the lines of the ancient Gurukul system at 'Peet Kuti' at Haridwar. It later shifted to Kashi Ashram in 1945 by Ma's kheyal and it became a large institution, where besides an academic education with Sanskrit as the main subject, music is also taught. The girls are also trained in stitching, embroidery and knitting etc. In addition to attention is paid to developing a good character.

Between 1947-50 Varanasi ashram was the venue for Savitri Mahayagna. Ma frequented Varanasi during this period. As the number of students at the Kanyapeeth grew, the administration and organisation was stimulated. A disciple of Sant Baba, Ganga Devi Panchatirtha, was placed in charge and organised an excellent Jhulan Festival in 1947 in Ma's divine presence. First she seated Ma as Sri Krishna on the holy Jhula. Then with the girls she played Divine Leelas, with Ma as the focus.

Once a Brahmacharini came to Didi and said "Dada Bhai, in order to administer and supervise the Kanyapeeth we need a lot of help. Most of the girls who study here leave the

institution after completing their studies. My suggestion is that we amend rules to make living in the Ashram compulsory for those who study for Shastri and Acharya." "It is Ma's Kanyapeeth" Didi said, "and she will look after it. I am serving the kumaris on Ma's directions. The girls grow up here through Her kindness. Whether they stay or leave it is all up to Her kheyal."

Most of the girls after their study, get married but with the strong foundation of knowledge and brahmacharya gained at the Kanyapeeth they prove themselves to be ideal housewives. Some girls remain at the ashram and take the path of sadhana for spiritual attainment.

In this context, Ma once said - "Bhaiji had some original ideas about the Kanyapeeth and Vidyapith (for boys). He had said that only the fortunate ones will stay here. The students of these institutions will be trained according to their own inclinations, one is inclined to Shivbhav, another to Krishna Bhav - they will be helped to further their interest in those directions. A religious bent of mind, the study of scriptures, should remain the focus amid the general academic education. Kumaris will engage themselves in service. Their sadhana and education will go together. Those who marry will carry with them the reflection of the education they received here."

Now again - Ma says- "Life and religion are one. All that you do to maintain your life, your everyday work and play, all your attempts to earn a living, should be done with sincerity, love and devotion, with a firm conviction that true living means virtually to perfect one's spiritual existence in tune with the universe. To bring about this synthesis, religious culture should be made as natural and easy as eating and drinking when we are hungry and thirsty."

Irrespective of their religion She extended Her compassion and kindness to all who went to Her for Her advice. Here is one incident - Ma was in the Pune Ashram in 1960-61 when a Parsi couple, the Camas, started from their place for the ashram to meet Ma. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, they could not do so.

Around that time Ma was in the pandal and satsang was going on. Suddenly Ma said to a girl sitting nearby "both of them returned after they got drenched." Since the people did not come neither Ma nor the bramacharini otherwise knew about their coming to the ashram. On the second day, Mrs. Cama came with a lady who had been sent by Ma to fetch her. As Mrs. Cama came Ma rose from Her seat and took Her along to Her room. Behind closed doors they talked for an hour, during which time Ma correctly set out Mrs Cama's daily routine without having any knowledge about her.

Then Ma said "this body watches you daily praying to God at 4 o'clock in the morning; you pray for 4 hours. This body saw you lighting a flame on water. How? why?" Mrs Cama then explained that Parsees worship fire. Oil is poured on top of the water in a glass, and a floating wick is lit.

Ma said "why do you cry while praying? What do you want? Ask this body and you will get it."

Mrs Cama replied "they are tears of joy, not sorrow." Ma appreciated this and said - "this is called the 'power of core.' Ma now asked for the door to be opened and then narrated the same to the audience there. Ma said that she had a strong religious inclination since childhood, when she visited the Parsee fire temple at Pali. On Ma's direction Mrs Cama came back with Mr. Cama. Ma told him "Pitaji, this body will visit your home to see the holy perennial fire there." Ma visited them later on. The fire was brought. Touching it to Her eyes, Ma said "for the last 12 years this fire has been burning. This body has seen it in a subtle form." She instructed the devotees present to have darshan of the holy fire and asked them to learn from Mrs Cama how to light it. Following this incident the Cama family became close devotees of Ma and Ma too had a 'kheyal' for them.

Mrs Cama passed away in 1985. After her death, Mr Cama was very much upset. He spent most of his time in meditation. During this period, thanks to Ma's graciousness, a miraculous incident occurred.

In Pune, there is a Christian ashram located near Ma's ashram. However, Mr Cama was unaware of its existence. The Principal Nun of the Christian ashram had seen Ma in her dreams for seven days continuously. Ma had been instructing her to show the path of peace to a particular visitor.

Sister Sara, the nun, pondered over who was coming and how she would recognise them? Many questions were going round in her mind as she finally decided to hold a meditation at the ashram. She had the news published in local newspapers and Mr Cama happened to come across it. It could only be Ma's kheyal. Mr Cama went to the Christian ashram in the evening. The stunned sister Sara took him to the prayer hall inside. There, Mr Cama saw the picture of Ma Anandmayi alongside the picture of Christ. Sister Sara told him that Ma visited this ashram on several occasions and they still followed Ma's puja and meditation. She recounted her dream to Mr Cama. She further said that Mr Cama belonged to Ma and it would be better if he continued his meditation at Ma's ashram.

After this event, Mr Cama became composed and calm. Since then he has been doing his meditation at Ma's Pune ashram.

Once Ma narrated a story, in the context of service to others. There was a philanthropic king of Ayodhya, who did his best to help others. Once, the benevolent king donated his kingdom to a saintly man, and left the palace in the garb of a mendicant. Moving away quite a distance, the king discovered a well. When he went to the well to fetch water, the king found four animals in the well, a lion, a monkey, a snake and a human being. They each requested him to pull them out of the well. The king rescued the lion first. The lion was very grateful. He said, "Please give me an opportunity to serve you. I live in a jungle near Bombay. Whenever you need me, please call me." As the lion left the place, he requested the king not to rescue the human being. The second to be rescued was the snake who too offered its service to the king whenever required, and requested the king to rescue only the monkey. The king then pulled the monkey out. Strangely, the monkey too said the same thing about the human.

Meanwhile, the human being implored the king to rescue him as well. Though, the other three animals advised against it, the kind-hearted king pulled the man out as well.

The person thanked him profusely. He introduced himself as the goldsmith of the king of Udaipur. Inviting this king to his home in Udaipur, the man bid goodbye.

After some time, the king went to see the lion as he had rescued him first. As he called out, the lion appeared. The lion asking the king to wait, went back to his cave and returned with a necklace of jewels to present to the king.

The king accepted the gift and then went to Udaipur to meet the goldsmith, who received him very well. The king was pleased and so he presented the necklace to the goldsmith.

The goldsmith recognised the necklace that he had made for the prince of Udaipur some time ago. The necklace had been subsequently stolen. The goldsmith secretly sent word to his king that both the stolen necklace and the thief were at his home.

The guards came and caught the king of Ayodhya. The king of Udaipur ordered the thief to be burned alive in a pit. The king's chief executioner, who was impressed by the personality of the thief, disclosed the reason for his execution.

The king was stunned. He could not believe the goldsmith, whom he had rescued, could do that to him. However, accepting it as the will of God, the king resigned himself to his fate. Soon,

the king remembered the snake, who came to him and, after it learned the bad news, taught the king a Mantra. The snake said it would bite the king of Udaipur to kill him and the king of Ayodhya should use this mantra to bring the king of Udaipur back to life.

So it happened. The king of Udaipur could not survive the snake bite. A pall of gloom descended over the entire kingdom, leaving everybody in a state of shock and despair. The Raja's guards and executioners too mourned, and passed on the news to the king held for the robbery.

The king of Ayodhya then volunteered to bring the king of Udaipur back to life. He did so with that mantra.

The recovered king was astonished to hear that the man on whom he served the death sentence, gave him back his life. He, therefore, invited the king of Ayodhya to his palace and was told the whole story. He became so enraged that he immediately passed the death sentence on the goldsmith in the same manner.

The king of Ayodhya, however, was not pleased. He said, "If someone is killed through my endeavour to help and sacrifice, my purpose will be defeated." He instead asked the King of Udaipur to give him the necklace as well as money and land.

The king of Udaipur acceded to the request of the king of Ayodhya. After that the sannyasi king went to the monkey in Dandakaranya. Tears came to the monkey's eyes as it saw its saviour. With great respect, the monkey offered him a seat made of leaves and presented him with a fruit. That was a celestial fruit which the king, instead of eating himself, in turn, presented to the present saint king of Ayodhya.

The present king asked for one more fruit from the former king in order to present to the queen. Thus the former king went to the monkey again but the monkey had got only one from Hanuman. They went to Hanuman who in turn said, it was Shankarji who had given him that fruit. The three then met Shankar Bhagwan who too expressed helplessness, saying it was given by Narayan.

They all now went to Narayan in Vaikuntha (Heaven). But Narayan said, "I can't help you because I've already donated my entire garden to that philanthropic king of Ayodhya. By his good deed, this king has staked his claim to heaven too. Whether he remains in Ayodhya or here, he does not have anything more to achieve."

The benevolent king, then took the second celestial fruit from 'his' garden and gave it to the present king of Ayodhya. The saint-king was pleased. He said, "I was only testing your kindness and benevolence. Take control of your kingdom. It belongs to you."

The Path of Sadhana

One feels God's presence through meditation, and determined endeavour. There are several methods of sadhana. Only the Guru can guide his disciple to the mode he should adopt. Ma likens sadhana to bitter medicine. "If one wants to escape from the sad state of worldly life, he has to take this bitter medicine. The sadhak should tread the path of sadhana with utmost determination, will-power and perseverance. He should devote his soul, mind and work to this endeavour."

She then says, "How can you come out if you keep the door closed? Open the door, somehow get out and start your journey. You will find fellow travellers asking you your destination. They only will show you the way. Once you start treading, the way will automatically open up. What you ought to do, will come to you from within. This is called self-illumination."

"Many times it is said, the ways of sadhana are infinite. There are really infinite ways. Look at the leaves on a tree. Each leaf is different from the other. The branches, seeds, fruit are all

different. Similarly, the feeling of sadhana is infinite. See, the seed incorporates one huge tree with an infinite number of trees, leaves and flowers. The feeling of one in many and the feeling of many in one is regarded as the complete perception."

"One should keep hold of what little supernatural powers one has achieved during sadhana carefully. As the food we take gets assimilated power achieved through sadhana should be kept hidden. In this way the power at the root level increases and then one gets enlightenment. This is the feeling of Supreme Universal Guru."

"One has to sustain his soul and mind for spiritual upliftment. Effort is not enough to get the vision of God. It is achieved only by the merciful grace of God. Like one digs deep at one place in search of water, and one has to concentrate completely for years together on his sadhana."

Ma has said "call HIM by any name you like. It is natural that one has a fascination for a particular name of God, as a result of Sadhana in past lives. All names Ram, Krishna, Durga, Kali or any other name are one and the same."

"It is an endeavour to hold the kite (one's mind) with the thread (the name of god). Asanas, Mudras, Pranayam, Peace and liberation all are achieved by calling HIM only. This has happened with this body hence it can be said with full confidence emphatically. Repeating God's name with an unstable mind makes the mind calm. Breathing has a direct link with one's thoughts. A time comes when Pranayam is done automatically."

"Daily rituals in the right direction open the path of sadhana and create a passion and supreme intimacy to God. One who has this culture should take to the course of daily worship. Worship is not a ritual, it is an attitude, an experience."

A vigraha (idol) becomes alive by continual prayer after prayer. It is His miracle only that He is in the vigraha, He is beyond this also; and beyond this, He accepts the form of a vigraha also like water and ice, God HIMSELF is SOUL, and in the shape of a vigraha He is near to his devotee and formless for an Advaita vedantist. Water assumes the shape of the vessel in which it is kept."

Once a devotee offered Ma very hot custard during Bhog. Ma took it casually. She then asked the devotee to taste it. The devotee's mouth rejected the piping hot custard the moment it was taken. Subsequently Ma said "one should take due care, in offering Bhog. The care of God should be done with enough devotion and care as your own self."

"The image gets life only when it is worshipped whole heartedly. That is how Bhav (feeling) emerges, then with that, feeling for serving HIM emerges. There is no general rule to serve God through Bhav. This is one's own. One way is to serve and another, being in service. The feeling or Bhav only shows the way of serving the God. Like, all read the same book, one becomes a speaker, another a poet. The way of speaking, oratory or writing poetry is not mentioned in that book. These things come from within. Likewise serving God comes from within as naturally as anything else. This real service as a natural instinct and emotion is not taught."

"The Guru handed over the image and said 'He is your master, you are his servant. Serve him the best you can.'"

"When someone says that Vedanta and Bhakti are two different schools, one can talk of Radha Krishna, which is absolute Vedanta. Radha is inseparable from Krishna. So is Krishna from Radha. Both are one. But Advaita is not separated from this Leela. The leela is full of bhav and there is no question of duality in Vedanta. (Ras-Swaroop). Even then if you see Bhaktavadis having dualistic faith, here too it is all rolled into one. This can be appreciated only if one has the right vision."

"See, whether through Bhakti or Vedanta you seek only Him, whichever path is tread, if you follow the distinct nuances of that path, you ultimately get the same thing, which would end all

inhibitions and doubts. After this if someone says – “I do not desire salvation, I stop worshipping HIM,” he actually does not stop. The process now goes on. He is infinite. There are infinite ways and means to get Him, there are disparities only midway.

Ma has said... "It is appropriate to recite stav and stotras. Depending on the spiritual state, the prayers come from the depth of the heart. 'Oh God you are the personification of kindness and compassion.' Actually stav and stotras are in praise of God. God is all powerful and virtuous. Bhav comes in a most natural way."

Regarding prayers as a significant part of sadhana, Ma says, "the power of prayer is infallible; with it the souls of living beings flourish. Whoever comes your way, regard him as God Himself and put heart and soul into praying for refuge under his guidance. This is the practice which prepares the foundation for unshakable faith in Him. With infallible faith comes simple and sincere prayer. And if the prayer is true and sincere from the heart He gives the fruits of your prayers out of His Compassion."

"Do not keep yourself away from His divine feet, it will enable you to keep clear of lust and desires. It is Man's duty to inculcate humanity among themselves rejecting animalistic tendencies, accepting virtues and rejecting glory and gifts; make your heart like flowers that are offered in worship to God. The single duty of a human being is the search for truth and one gets more enlightened by reading the biographies of Mahatmas, the servants of God, rather than God's biography. These servants of God have glorified Bhagavan. That is why if you love them, in your turn you too deserve to get the love of God."

"Whatever you read as advised by the Guru in order to achieve your goal, is called dedication. In other words, one is "kriya bhog', the other is "kriya yoga". Those who tread the path of kriya, follow the path of Nirvana. Kriya means japa, meditation, reading religious books, puja, kirtan, seva, raja yoga, hatha yoga, pranayam etc. Whichever stream one gets into, he should attach himself to that current daily for kriya, and tread the path for Nirvana. Being fully dedicated to the way to kriya yoga in itself liberates one from kriyas. Yogi means ever in union, and where there is complete union, liberation is also there.

Ma regards the study of religious scriptures as a significant part of sadhana. The scriptures are reflections of sadhak's feelings and perceptions through sadhana. It is difficult to explain all the feelings that occur during the transition period between one stage of sadhana and another. That is why Ma compares the scriptures to a time-table and says one cannot describe fully the ecstatic feelings when getting to the core of Truth.

What prompts faith in God and the religious scriptures?

Ma says, one's mission is fulfilled when the interest one nurtures is directed towards God.

"For example, one who likes to do service, does it with the feeling that God is everywhere and in all, and if service is done with this feeling a time will come when he will develop faith and come to enlightenment. Some people do service in order to get name and fame."

"One who loves music, can reach the path of spiritual enlightenment by participating in kirtan, and singing songs in praise of God regularly."

"Those who like to have feasts and parties, can achieve the same through this pastime. For those who do not like all this at all, and have a liking for a simple dedicated life, reading of religious scriptures can open the path to God realisation.

"Many people like to restrict themselves to their families. Service for them is taking care of parents, wife and children. In this situation too, it is possible to seek spiritual wisdom. If they take their parents as God, the wife as Laxmi and children as the Balgopal and Kumari, they can also go on the path to Nirvana. Those who do not like all this, can simply pray at least twice daily and get

similar results. Faith and respect are present in all, satsang and religious discussions lead to their manifestation, and further lead to God's proximity."

Religious music can be performed in seclusion but various obstacles like lust, anger, desire, greed and temptation can not be given up without participating in satsang. Satsang enables one to give up these vices through sincere efforts. Ma always says- "Ma, Baba (father), friends, only God is One, in all sects – just as a person is father, son, and husband at the same time."

"This body tells all that the best medicine for all diseases is remembering God.

Trust Him, seek refuge in Him, and accept whatever share you get. Whatever you do, consider it a service to God; do satsang and remember God in every breath. Live in His thought. Put your entire burden upon Him. He will look after everything."

One gentleman, who was close to Sri Aurobindo, came for Ma's darshan. He prostrated before Ma and then took a seat near Her.

Ma said, "You have come to give darshan to this body. Ask what you want?"

The gentleman asked, "By which means can God be delighted?"

Sri Ma: 'By remembering God, repetition of God's name (Namsmaran)

Gent: If one does not like Namsmaran?

Sri Ma: Namsmaran is for developing the liking.

Gent: If one is overcome by laziness, sleep and drowsiness?

Sri Ma: The solution is Namsmaran, Namsmaran, and rapid Namsmaran

Gent: There are several unimportant things which come up in the midst of Namsmaran. What should one do?

Sri Ma: Do only Namsmaran whole heartedly.

Gent: While doing Namsmaran, is it right to meditate?

Sri Ma: Have you ever had darshan of who you worship, your deity? If not, then you do not know in what form He will come to you. You can therefore meditate in the mind on the image of God as mentioned in scriptures. One thing - God will give you darshan in the form you feel in meditation through your emotions and you will be satisfied. Not all are satisfied in the same way. That's why repetition of God's name should be your meditation, which will turn deeper with the chanting or Namsmaran.

Ma has told us a very interesting tale about the glory of satsang:

"Where does God live? What does He eat, when does He smile and what does He do?"

In ancient times, Kashi had a king who once organised a big conference of Mahatmas, saints, and learned men, to ascertain answers to the above four queries. The king announced that whoever provided perfect answers to these questions in four days, will be presented with half the kingdom.

The court of the king was full with many eminent people, busy in working out the answers. The subjects came to see the conference. Everyone in the kingdom was curious to know the outcome of the conference. But there was no solution yet. A farmer who, while he tilled his land, watched people going to the capital everyday and talking intently together, asked them "what is going on?" He was told the situation.

One of the passers-by, asked the farmer "Can you give a reply to the king's queries?"

When the farmer said "yes", they took him along and asked him to stand in the queue of those with possible answers. But no pandit could satisfy the king with his answers. Lastly it was the turn of the farmer.

The king called him, "Can you provide answers to all my questions?"

The farmer boldly said, yes.

King: Where is God?

Farmer: Where is He not? He is everywhere.

King: What does He eat?

Farmer: He eats vanity. Until He swallows the vanity of a living being, the living being cannot get Him. Vanity is the biggest obstacle on this path.

King: When does Bhagavan smile?

Farmer: When the baby is inside the mother's womb, his body squeezed into that small place, he prays to God to get him out and prays to be rid of pain. However, once he is out of the womb, he cries and forgets to whom he was praying only moments ago. It is now that God smiles.

The king was pleased with his reply. He asked the farmer: "what does God do?"

The farmer hesitantly asked the king to step down from his throne. The king, so impressed by his replies, promptly left the throne. The farmer took his seat and told the king, "I've already given the answer to your last question. God turns a king into a common man and a common man into king.

The king was immensely pleased. All the replies of the farmer resolved his queries. The farmer, who was a regular listener of Bhagavat Katha, got half the kingdom and thus became a king, a good example of what God does.

People asked him where he got this knowledge from? "From satsang", replied the farmer. From his childhood, he accompanied his parents to satsang, this was the blessings of satsang, he said.

"That is why one should stick to one thing. Have only one goal and strive to reach it. One Naam, one place, and one thought."

Ma narrated another tale...

"There was a thief who took initiation from his Guru. After the initiation, the Guru barred him from stealing and from telling lies. Since stealing was his only means of income, the family of the thief ran into grave financial trouble. Realising this, the Guru permitted him to continue with his profession. But, "no lies", he warned his disciple.

It so happened that one night, the thief went to steal at the King's palace. The king, who was alerted by the strange sound of the thief's movements, came to the thief in ordinary dress. Introducing himself as another thief, he proposed they share the booty equally.

While the king-turned-thief stood outside the door, the real thief broke open the safe and got bags of gold coins. The theft over, they shared the booty. When the thief started running away, he was caught by the king's guards and was taken to the court of the king.

On interrogation, the thief correctly said how many bags he had stolen and he also mentioned that half the booty was with another thief.

The king was impressed by the thief's true confession. The thief further said, he was a thief alright, but not a liar. His Guru had barred him from telling lies.

Impressed by the truthfulness, and deep respect of the thief for his Guru, the king announced that he would take care of all the expenses of the entire family. Against this, the king asked the thief to renounce his profession.

The thief bowed before the king in reverence, and devoted his life to the service of the Guru in order to attain Nirvana."

Ma said, "The trust, and faith in the Guru's words, and taking refuge in truth, saved the thief on all fronts. Things are done, if one sticks to One only."

How does one get peace if he is blinded by carnal desire? Sansar (world) is full of grief only to those who have accepted 'Sa' of sansar as saar (quintessence). To those who believe that it is not real, sansar will not give pain. It is for cutting off the ties of three obstacles (lust, anger and greed) that austerity is practiced. Accepting the true and real ties, the worldly ties go away - ultimately all ties are severed and one gets liberated."

Ma narrated a story in this context- "There was a king, he had everything but peace. Hearing that initiation from his Guru will bring him peace, the king called for the family priest. The priest was then in dire financial straits. He assured the king he would have peace if he did Japtap and sadhana after the initiation. Nevertheless, even after doing so, peace eluded the king.

The priest was warned that if he could not bring about peace in the king's life within seven days, the priest and his family would be eliminated.

Deeply disturbed by the king's warning, the Guru lost his appetite and could not sleep. He had a vagabond, foolish son, who wandered about the whole day except at meal time when he came home for his meals. On the seventh and last day since the king's warning, he came home at the appointed time to find no food was cooked at home. On enquiry, he came to know the reason. Confidently he told his father that he would bring the much-sought peace to the king. When the king came to the Guru, the father turned to his son for the solution.

The son asked the king to follow his instructions. Accordingly, both the king and his Guru took one rope each and accompanied the son to the forest where the son tied them to separate trees and himself climbed the third, singing cheerfully. The king feeling very uncomfortable, appealed to the son to untie him. But the son would not even bother to look at him. The king turned to the Guru for help. Guruji said, 'How can I untie you, when I am myself tied up?'

The king cried out in extreme discomfort before the Truth suddenly dawned on him. "How can I expect peace with all this bondage. How can someone free me from this bondage when he is himself tied up? Blinded by worldly affairs, I am a fool to ask for peace."

The king told the son that he had found his way to peace and requested him to untie him.

"God has put a veil of ignorance over living beings. Yet the door to knowledge and wisdom is still kept open. He can be free if he moves through this door but for that he should lift himself up from the mind and worldly affairs. Until that is done, one can not get Brahma".

What is Maya? Ma narrated a tale about Maya.

"Once Narad asked Sri Krishna, what is Maya? Krishna instead asked him to join him for a walk. On the way, Krishna said he was feeling very thirsty. He requested Narad to fetch some drinking water from the nearby village. Narad went to the house and a beautiful girl offered him water. The mother of that girl proposed that her daughter be a bride for Narad. The offer was accepted and Narad in due course had one son and daughter. Suddenly, one day, it rained heavily and flooded the area. As the flood water entered their house, one by one, Narad's family members began sinking in the waters. Narad was helplessly crying then he saw Sri Krishna standing nearby. Krishna asked him, where is the drinking water? Naradji said, now I have realised, it is all your Maya. And this was the reflection of your Maya."

Why does God give us so much sorrow? Ma said; "God teaches us two lessons. If you ask for anything worldly you will suffer. If you look to the supreme power, you get happiness. If you have neither sorrow nor pain, you will never seek God. We can remember him only when He wishes it. We desire for worldly things. Like the washer-man who keeps donkeys to bear the cloth

bundles. The washer-man places the ropes loosely around the four legs of the donkeys and, believing that they are still tied, they stand for the whole night on the spot. The world is also like that. All living beings live with the touch and feeling of Maya. We think we can not do without our family, that we stand where we are like donkeys, and do not move forward."

"You've got the rare chance of human birth, do not waste a single moment. Trees, birds, and animals leave this world after reproducing. If you too do the same, what will be the difference? You get happiness when you desire it, its absence brings melancholy and sorrow. Everything is momentary in this world. Happiness is there at this moment, the next moment it is gone. If you want infinite happiness, perpetual happiness, you must get the Eternal."

"Krishna and Balaram are fighting because everyday Krishna goes to Mother Yashoda and eats the butter first. Balaram says, being the elder, that he should get it first. Yashoda defends her position, saying Krishna should come first. Despite his best efforts, Balaram is not able to get there before Krishna. Yashoda asked them to go and bathe in the Yamuna. Whilst they are gone she will churn for the butter and whoever returns first from the bath will get it first.

Both brothers went for their bath. Both took a dip in the water. Krishna got out first, but waited for Balaram to get out so that they could run together for the prize. But Balaram never came out. He had, in fact, reached the capital of a kingdom whose king had just expired. And the people there had decided to select the successor who would have the royal insignia on his body. Balaram, who had this insignia on his body, was picked and made the king.

Living like the king, Balaram spent his days happily with the Queen, Prince and Princesses. About this time, Balaram heard Krishna calling him, "Dada", and he came out of the water. As he came out he forgot about what happened after he took the dip. Meanwhile, Kanhaiya ran ahead and ate the butter first. When Balaram wanted to speak, Krishna asked him, "shall I tell about the dip in the river?" Balaram replied, "No, no from today, onwards you should eat the butter first."

This is the illusion (Maya) of God. Human beings are mesmerised by this Maya. Only sadhana can break the spell of this Maya. It is Maya in the form of a rope which ties human beings with false happiness. Whoever breaks this bondage, becomes independent. Ma Anandmoyi likens it to the cow who is tied to a pole and moves about in the area the length of rope permits. The independence of ordinary people is like this. Again, the area expands if the Guru wishes. So like the tied cow's freedom is restricted, the Guru allows limited freedom to his disciples for worldly entertainment and pleasure. The disciple enjoys his freedom of pleasure, but the Guru knows the former's limits and at any moment, he can stop him in this direction.

Ma says, "Brahma is truth, the world is Maya (illusion) and living beings are essentially Brahma, nothing else.

The universe is moving, changing constantly, not having a permanent existence, that's why it is Maya."

One time Ma was sitting casually; the disciples too were sitting quietly. Someone asked Ma, "you are so indifferent, why are we so much attracted and attached to you?"

Ma said, "It is the body; the body changes, it is an illusion from the worldly point of view. Are you not attracted to Bhagavan, Ram, Krishna?" She said further, when someone asked a question, so the reply came. "Does Bhagavan listens to our prayers? This body had said, "yes"."

Ma narrated a related story.

"A small boy, who lived with his parents, lost his father, a labourer. The mother somehow fed the child until the day came when she cried and said, "There is nothing left to give you. Whatever I could, I have given you. The boy watched his mother cry in utter helplessness. He

picked up a pencil and paper and wrote "God you provide food to all. Now my mother is crying. Whatever food she had, she offered me until now. There is nothing left, so you send us food."

The boy took this letter to drop it in a post box. But the small hands were not big enough to reach the opening of the post box. The child jumped time and again without success. A rich man, was passing by, and the child requested him to drop his letter in the post box. The rich man saw the plain sheet of paper, read the contents and then asked the child where he lived and where his mother was. The rich man accompanied the boy to his house and subsequently opened a post office account from which the child kept on getting money regularly. The rich man, who also arranged for the boy's, studies etc, asked him where he got this knowledge from?

The boy said, "from satsang which I regularly attended with my mother." This was absolute faith and it was God who came in the garb of the rich man. God cannot be indifferent to anyone who has done satsang."

Ma says "In any case one should not get angry. Anger is a big hurdle in the path of sadhana. The anger of Mahatmas is like fire upon water." Suppose, someone is abusing Bhagavan or the Guru; is one not going to be angry? In reply to this question, Ma says "it is He who is talking in this form."

Ma recounted, "when this body was in Dhaka someone asked about the rage of the sages who could in a fit of anger, burn anyone to ashes. This body had no formal education, and was then a bride, with a long veil covering the face. At that time this body had said, "Remember that those mahatmas who could do that, were also capable of bringing that person back to life. If you have that much power, you too can be that angry."

If your sadhana is done well, where is the room for anger? Pray to God time and again. "Oh, God please eliminate my anger."

In 1973, Sri Ma's birth celebrations were held at Bangalore. During the Matri satsang there, someone asked Ma, what one should do when overcomes by anger?

Ma quickly said, "look at yourself in the mirror. Drink a glass of cold water." Everyone laughed as Ma came out with such a simple solution. When the laughter subsided, Ma further said, after some time, try to find why you became angry and then drop your angry mood."

"It is the culture (sanskar) of generations, which is the essence of bondage. The culture which is created by actions is destroyed too by actions. It is the various actions which make up a human being like a long-playing record. Good deeds beget a pious nature and wash away your vices. Like the fire turns rubbish into ashes before going out, so the pious nature too vanishes after eliminating the bad tendencies".

"You all say that you want God. Think again, do you want Him whole heartedly? If you really do so, you can very well get Him. Do you know the signs of such effort? Like the passenger of a capsized boat would pray to get to the shore, like the mother who has lost her child craves for him, if you call him with that much sincerity, you'll always find him with you. You ask for all the worldly things, that is why he keeps you busy with prestige, pride, wealth and popularity. If you ask for only His company, you will definitely get His darshan."

"There are infinite ways to remove the veil of ignorance. Therefore, the ways of sadhana are also innumerable. The purpose of sadhana is to eliminate the veil. Once it is removed He appears, He, who is one as well as infinite; infinite as well as one. Do you want to know the meaning of unending sadhana? In whichever direction you look towards the ever illumined faith, there will be no difference? Each one of the directions is infinite. You sow a mango seed - which will produce a

tree. It will grow big with branches, leaves and fruits. The seeds will grow to trees. The trees will have seeds, similarly one is existing in the other. This is also eternal existence. You look at the seed, it is one. But when you look at the vibration in the seed, it is boundless. Similarly, looking at the supreme soul it is the incomparable, undivided self illuminating faith; but looking at its power and action, at that time, it is infinite motion and illumination. Therefore, it is said one is eternal and eternity is one. Do you not say, the whole remains even after the whole has come out of it? Similarly, sadhan kriyas are unlimited."

"You can not get the 'Akhandā' the supreme, with divided attention. The letters make up Brahma. Where is Brahma without the letters? Like the presence of eternity in the little seeds, the eternal power of God exists in the Mantras. You get the form after you pray to God continuously. With different names, the forms are also different. One is infinity and infinity is one. Brahma is one and there is no question of multiplicity. He is where He is. Then the question of numbers does not arise. What is 'Naam tatwa' and what is 'Beej tatwa'? It dawns automatically as you pray continuously. You do not know a seed, you sow it. It will flourish into a tree with flowers. Then you realise, what it is. This is how sect and communities grew up. In whatever form one has got Him, one should pray in that line, and then you will perceive His presence. Dedicating oneself also means gaining Him. Gaining Him means realising the self. If you wish to know this supreme doctrine, follow what your Guru says."

"If you make a noise in a room filled with things, it will not echo. If you do the same in an empty room, it will echo. Empty your mind and the Almighty will manifest Himself. Mind gets purified by regular prayer. One should pray the way one likes most. Naam jap, kirtan, reading of religious scriptures, sadalochana (religious discussion) etc. they all purify your mind. Recollect at bedtime the bad deeds done during the day. In this manner, if you recollect your own mistakes and try not to repeat them in future, your mind will be gradually purified."

"Bad food habits distract your mind, and do not allow you to do Naam jap." Ma always advised limited food. Obstacles can also come from the company of people, the sight of something, or even talk. That is why whoever wishes to travel this way, should live alone. Always care that nothing should come in the way of your reaching God. It is difficult for a family man to live the life of a single person, because of family obligations. But he should do satsang and sadalochana. The actions of a previous life too, could contribute in a negative or positive manner. Sometimes, even in this state, a Bhav becomes stronger and manifests."

Consider your daily chores as service to God? If you remember him this way then like the old leaves give way to the new, fresh green ones, so the preference for Him over worldly things, turns your extroverted outlook to become introverted. This is nature's movement. The old leaves fall on the ground to become manure for the tree. Nothing is wasted."

"Your outward look cannot go away until you adopt the liking for Him. Service or repetition of God's name is the means of sadhana for a family man. Like the meals twice a day, one should pray and do japa at dawn and dusk regularly. As you drink water and eat fruits at intervals, so also do some sadhana in between where you can, put Naamjap into your daily chores. If you keep the fire going in order to put it out, you will never succeed. Duniya (universe) means do (two). If you are saddled with the duality of sadness and happiness, joy and sorrow, how will you get peace? If you want peace, fall at the feet of God. Try to enrich yourself with the wealth which is the personification of God. Read the biographies of Mahatmas, religious scriptures. The study will enlighten and lead you to the path of sadhana. Ultimately, you will realise that worldly studies are perishable. What is perishable will be finished. As you do your sadhana, the illusion or ignorance will go away. Read the Gita daily and try to translate into your life what is said in the Gita."

God is the only custodian of all beings, but because of our ignorance, we worry. In this context, Ma narrated a tale.

“A seer lived in a jungle alone, spending all his time in sadhana and bhajan. At the day's end, he would go out for alms and return with a very small quantity of rice. He would then make Bhog with this rice and after offering it to God, would take this prasad. This used to be his only food.

One person, attracted by his dedicated life and simple living, wished to live with him as his disciple. The Mahatma became worried. The small quantity of rice which he had rationed for himself, was not enough for two and as a matter of principle, he could not take more alms.

The seer requested this man not to remain in his company. But the man stayed and the next day, took the water in which the rice was soaked and washed. He took no other food but lived happily with the seer.

The aroma of the pollen of flowers attract the hornets. Similarly, another follower soon arrived and wished to serve him.

The Mahatma was worried again. How would he survive here? God had once again put him to the test?

The next day, the first person as usual drank the rice washing water and the second man said he would have the starch of the cooked rice. And he actually only took the starch as food.

The Mahatma now realised how ignorant he was.

It is God who makes all arrangements in this universe. Yet we are unduly worried. Leave all your worries to HIM. Be carefree. The worrying is like travelling in a train with the luggage on your head."

"One gets the results of his actions. As you sow, so you reap. God's blessings too follow your deed. Even then, the sadhak reaches a stage where he feels the divine blessings and acknowledges that nothing can be done without HIS blessings. But in reality, it is the fruit of his actions which entitled him to the blessings. It is only your good work which paves the way for divine blessings."

“God's compassion and blessing is self-illuminated. The more sadhana and bhajan you do, the more you feel His blessings. And the other is cause-less mercy. This is possible only by God. Try to feel His mercy. God's mercy and compassion and the results of our deeds blend. Like this flower this body gave you - you stretch out your hand to receive it, so compassion and your action together have produced one work."

"Until you deserve His blessings, you can not understand talks of that nature. Call Him by any name. He will be near you. Therefore, you must pray with Naam to get Him.

Without His pity and compassion, it is difficult to tread the path of truth. But once you become a traveller on the path an unstable and confused mind should not be maintained. You need a clear definite mind, and self confidence and the compassion of your Guru. One is 'Kram Prakash'- illumination over time, the other Kripa - illumination through mercy - like the sudden brightening of a dark room. Then step-by-step illumination by sadhana is infinite. The wish for self-realisation is sadhana. Sadh-na (take me) is sadhana. He is there eternally in the guise of sadhana. Karma leads to gradual enlightenment. After several strikes of the match, the fire is lit, illumination opens up, and then comes the blessing of God. That is why it is said, where do you get Him? How to get Him? Pray for His compassion, kindness and pity.'

"Try to be a disciple then you will get your Guru. You will find the way to attract His compassion, the gentle flow of His kindness and pity. You stand a chance of getting the thing only when you seek it. But you must be a seeker at least!"

Despite knowing the future, Ma never held back from showering Her compassion and pity. Once, while travelling in a car, she got down suddenly in front of a fruit vendor and begged for alms. That unfortunate fruit-vendor refused the Mother of all mothers. Destiny had not willed him to live happily. After sometime, the news broke that the fruit-shop was gutted by a raging fire and the shop-owner incurred heavy losses.

It appears sometimes that the Guru, uncalled, showers his compassion on someone. Ma narrated a wonderful tale in this context...

"There was a famous Yogi who went for alms to a rich merchant of that city. The merchant sent one paisa through his servant for this yogi, who simply begged the merchant to utter the name of God with a pure mind. Despite the yogi's repeated requests, the merchant refused to oblige.

Deciding to teach him spiritual wisdom, the yogi entered the house as a look-alike of the merchant, who had then gone out for his morning walk. The family members were surprised to find the merchant back so early from his walk. The impostor replied that he returned early because a polymorphist had arrived in the city. Disguised, he was entering people's houses. They should not allow anybody in if he looked like him. When the real merchant came home, the servants gave him a severe beating. Even his wife refused to recognise him. The case went to court, a strange case indeed. Both of them looked alike, their manners, behaviour were identical. The yogi had knowledge of everything. The real merchant, who lost the court case, went to the river bank. A dejected man, he suddenly remembered God. The Yogi too arrived at that moment and asked him whether he was ready to take the name of God?

Now, the real merchant realised his mistake and the leela of the yogi. Asking for forgiveness, he then served the yogi with all respect and care.

"This was God's Nigralia (coercive) kripa, which meant bitter medicine while Anugraha (propitious) kripa is the sweet medicine.

When the child does not want to go home, out of necessity the mother gives him a slap to turn him homewards. But the mother only knows the pain of her child."

What are the duties of Guru and disciple?

Ma said "The disciple's job is to forget the 'self'. There is a story of a king who invited a sculptor to create murals on the walls of his palace. Two artists were engaged in making murals on opposite walls of the same room and a screen separated their activity. One made a wonderful mural while the other artist did nothing, except polishing and smoothing the wall finely. When the screen in the middle was removed, a spectacular reflection of the mural on the other wall was seen on this blank wall. And the reflection turned out to be more attractive than the original work."

This is the job of the disciple, Ma said, wash out your 'self'- self-glorification.

This way the disciple has to work more than the Guru?

Ma said, "No, the mural was made by the Guru".

When the soil is prepared by sadhana, a plant comes into being once the seed is sown. With the help of Guru, the sadhak can quickly attain divine grace through his sadhana. That is why Ma insists on the Guru-Shishya relationship and says:

"A few sadhaks get tired and disheartened after a lot of sadhana, thinking that had they been the disciple of a Guru they would have definitely got the Guru's support in their endeavour. The gaining of a Guru, who dwells in Brahma, is possible after a lot of good deeds."

"Put your mind and heart into the search for a Guru. Until you get his company, pray that you can not live without him. If you do this, God himself will manifest in the guise of a Guru. If your search is intense and of utmost sincerity, the Guru cannot stay away for long. Satsang enables one to further his desire for God. Until you get your Guru, pray and repeat any name of God of

your choice. If you do not like repeating God's name or meditation then simply sit and direct your heart and mind to your breath and sit quietly. If your attention is diverted, you lose that concentration."

The blending of God's power with the disciple's own biological power is called diksha (initiation). Keeping in view the directions for diksha, Ma has talked about three types of Diksha:

- 1) Supreme or Extreme
- 2) Medium or Middle
- 3) Ordinary or Common

If the disciple is initiated in Supreme Diksha, being made of the five vital elements viz, earth, water, heat, air and space, he gets assimilated into them and there is instant attainment of his goal.

The initiation from Mahatmas or Gurus can be regarded as the middle way in which the Guru initiates the disciple with his power and mantra. By this means, the disciple gradually gets rid of the bondage and stays in the 'SELF', attains nearness to God. Even if the disciple is unable to accept the force of the Guru mantra, it still works. That is why it is said that once the disciple is tuned to the flow of God power, the flow itself helps him someday to attain the goal. If he is engaged in sadhan-bhajan, he can move faster towards the goal as if flowing with the current.

"A diksha from a common family priest does not have the power to give union with the universal soul by means of contemplation. But mantra has its own power. Every mantra is endowed with occult power. At times, people have attained divine grace through this mantra-jap. But the process is very slow."

Ma has again said about systematic gradual initiation: in this system, as the disciple graduates, he is given another mantra later on to further intensify his search. This gradual initiation or diksha can spontaneously come from within. This process is not lost by the absence of Guru's body. At the required time and place, he is always there with you."

About 'Jagatguru' and 'Gurushaktipat', Ma has said, "Jagatguru is extremely rare, one in a crore. Who is Jagatguru? He is the saviour of this world, the deliverer, the rescuer. The mantras which are given by common gurus are not able to create 'Gurushaktipat'. But the mantras evolved by a seer and carried forward by generations of Gurus, are capable of doing Mantra shaktipat. Therefore, the mantra you have received definitely has the potential of Mantra Shaktipat but is also capable of dealing with the samskara (tendency) and where Guru Shaktipat is enacted, the connection is automatically established. Guru Shaktipat is possible in ecstasies other than during Mantra Diksha."

That the Guru is always with his disciples, has been explained by Ma in various ways.

"First see the object in its total unity. The Guru is present in every atom and molecule of this universe; from this point of view he is always with you. If you think the other way, the universe is one whole thing. He is the Guru, He is the disciple. In this way, the Guru is always present with you, and again Guru as mantra is always with you."

After this, Ma portrays the object in its diversity. "Yogis are capable of being present at several places at the same time by means of yoga. For the welfare of his disciples, the Guru can remain simultaneously with all his disciples. This is the truth. Again while having darshan of any Mahatma, if you remember your Guru or spontaneously start doing Japa of the 'Ishta mantra', then be sure that you have really had the darshan of a true Mahatma."

"We only attempt to become disciples, but in fact we are not. He is a disciple who follows his Guru's instructions totally. Surrendering to the Guru with the utmost sincerity and dedication, is

the indication of true discipleship. Until that whole hearted surrender, the urge to seek refuge, shedding of one's ego and vanity, the disciple can never be a true disciple.

The 'Sabeej' seeded or 'nirbeej' unseeded Diksha can also be regarded as physical or non-physical Diksha. The influence of the latter Diksha prompts the disciple to quickly be rid of his notions and prejudices and reach his Supreme destination. Purifying him of all taboos, this diksha brings the disciple to the vicinity of the Supreme Being. Even the goal of seeded diksha is one and the same.

Ma further said, "If all this was possible with only a single mantra, then why did so many mantras evolve? The reason is at that different times, Mahatmas have given their disciples different means of attaining divine grace. That is why there are so many groups and classes."

"There is no essential difference between 'Naam' or Beej. The empowered Beej or the empowered Naam take you to the same destination. As the plant lies in the seed, the seeds too exist in the plant. Who has got Naam, will also get 'Beej' at the appointed time. The Guru entrusts Naam or Beej to his disciple depending on his stage and sanskar and prejudices. Naam is for common sadhaks while Beej is for the more inclined and empowered. Naam is most of the time evident but Beej can not be seen. But from the point of view of the ultimate result, both are same."

Ma said again, "Do something at least; keep one Japamala in your hand. If not this, then do Naamjap like the clock ticks. There are no rules or regulations, repeat that Naam that you like as many times as possible. If you feel weary to get it over, take it like medicine. At the right moment, you will get the sound of your heart. Like the gorgeous continuous sounds of the ocean waves, the sound you will hear is singing in praise of the Almighty, reverberating the sound in air, water, land, and the whole universe. This is called 'Naammoy', (overwhelmed by Naam). Naam and form make this world. It begins with Naam and ends with Naam".

A disciple asked Her, "If everything is done when I call Hari, Hari, what is the need for Diksha? If it is true then at the end of life spent in Harinaam, if I am given shakti mantra by the guru what will happen?"

Ma said, "You do not even know what Naam will bring you good. But the omniscient Guru will give a mantra, knowing your feelings and inclinations. And you will realise after a period of Sadhana that this Naam was actually necessary for you. But you did not know it before. If you pray wholeheartedly, nothing can go wrong. But if you restrict yourself to only Hari Naam, concluding that you do not require diksha; how will you succeed? Mantra is deliverance from your mind and heart."

"I do not know your name. But if I call you by your general name, you will definitely come to me and then you will say, my name is so and so... like this."

Someone asked Ma whether she has seen God? Is God seen? Ma replied, "what do you mean? He is in all, He is all. Can't you see Him? To see Him, you must follow the path, shown by your Guru."

Ma recalled a story about Diksha and sadhu sanga.

"At times, Kabir Maharaj used to travel in disguise. One day, dressed like a labourer, he came across a rich man who asked Kabir, the labourer, to work as a porter. When asked about wages, Kabir said that he accepted whatever was given to him. But he added that apart from this, he had another gift. He could tell the span of one's life."

Disbelieving him, the rich man, however, asked Kabir about his life span. Kabir said, "a few moments more". The rich man ridiculed him and even threatened to punish him if proved wrong. Kabir said he never told a lie, and wanted to give him some advice. 'After your death, when you are

asked in Yamपुरi (abode of the God of death) whether you would like to enjoy the fruits of your good deeds first or later, then say that you would like to enjoy the fruits of your good deeds first.'

Kabir's premonition came true as a few moments later, the rich man breathed his last. At Yamapuri the records of Chitragupta's just one hour of sadhusang to his credit and all the rest were bad deeds.

When Yamraj asked him the question, the rich man repeated what Kabir had advised him to say. As a result of his good deed, the rich man was sent to the heavens where he came across Kabir as labourer again. There, Kabir said he would initiate the rich man so that he would not have to go to hell. The rich man agreed and stayed in heaven for good. Thus, an hour of sadhusang and then diksha earned him a stay in heaven for ever."

About the Guru, Ma has said:

- 1) Guru is the personification of the Supreme Being.
- 2) Devotion to one's Guru is devotion to God.
- 3) Ignorance increases if the Guru is considered as only a physical being.
- 4) Guru is the perennial source of knowledge and wisdom, the illumination of the heart and the core of sadhak's soul.
- 5) Meditating on the Guru one realises the 'Supreme Light'.
- 6) Only the unfailing faith and trust in the Guru and his words pulls one across the 'Bhavasagar', this mundane world.
- 7) At times of crisis, one gets relief if one calls his Guru.
- 8) Guru is not a commodity which can be bargained.
- 9) If the mind is distracted and one has the intention to change one's Guru, this leads one to fall.

Ma has always said Total Silence is an Integral Part of Sadhana

Abstention from speech (Mouna) implies the mind's concentration in search of God. Initially, while observing total silence, one sometimes feels like talking. However, subsequently, what is required gets done automatically without one speaking about it. Ma says, "one, is an effort to abstain from speech, the other is spontaneous 'Mouna'. If someone, as a product of anger, stops talking, it is neither 'Mouna' nor 'sanyam' (control) for when he resumes, his anger will burst out. Controlling speech is safe. This reduces lies, as in speech's spontaneity, one speaks many untrue words. If one sits down to write in 'Vak Samyam' (speech control), he has to be careful. However, this also purifies one's attitude and mind. Sometimes, people speak for a while before taking the name of God.

Ma says during 'Vak Sanyam', the mind reacts. Still, it helps in exercising restraint. As the mind grows intense, the reactions slowly cease to happen. If the mind is replete with worldly thoughts and worries, the silence would not be very beneficial at this stage. Like if you keep silence when angry, you would definitely burst out. If one sets his mind towards the supreme being, he progresses slowly, purifying the mind and body in the process. One loses power by thinking about mundane things. In these situations, instead of silence, natural talking will bring more relief. Otherwise silence like this may harm the senses; (thought of God) 'Bhagavat Chintan', opens up the knots.

Akhanda Mouna (Perfect-Silence)

Ma has submitted that...

"In family life, some people keep 'Akhanda Mouna'. Some remember God, but most people do nothing. In 24 hours time, one should keep aside sometime exclusively for God. If a specific time is fixed, it helps in developing the habit of discipline and punctuality. Years ago, in 1933-34, this body had talked about a period of 10 minutes. In Dehradun, This body had said that if you consider this body your own, please give 10 minutes. If you do not, then This body asks you for 10 minutes silence as alms. You must keep the same time daily. This very moment then becomes the perfect maxim, take care so that it is not interrupted. If it is not done, one should not hope for the complete illumination of the Akhanda and the united whole. The minimum you need to do is to restrain your speech.

"Whether at home, or in office, in kitchen or in hospital or on tour, whatever the situation, keep your silence there. Many have accepted this and have kept their promise with utmost sincerity so much so that even at the burning ghat, they have not broken their rule."

"Remember your God. Here, there is no talk of any caste or community. Muslim, Parsi, Christian, Hindu, whether Indian or foreigner, can all do this Akhanda silence. This is one way of self-realization. The rule is only for this time period."

"Whether in the bathroom, whether you have your shoes on, whether on the move, there is no question of sacredness since God is pure and sacred forever. Even if you remember him in these situations, there is no chance of His name becoming unholy, impure. If one sticks to this, he may feel like increasing the time period in due course. By the grace of God, remembering Him for this period can turn into a constant remembrance. How it will happen, with His grace nobody knows." During the Savitri Mahayagna in 1948, Ma had instructed that there should be daily Mouna at Kashi ashram between quarter to nine and nine o'clock in the evening. She had said wherever one is, even if busy at that time, one should observe silence unflinchingly.

Three sounds of a conch shell began this 15 minutes silence, later another sound of the conch shell signals the end. This tradition is going on in all ashrams of Sri Ma and also in some households of Ma's devotees.

Mass mouna helps one increase his spiritual powers. Ma says, "if you do not time it between 8.45 pm to 9 pm, do it at any other time at your convenience. But once you decide the time you should not change it. The habit of remembering Him will grow out of these 15 minutes. It should not be broken or curtailed. Gradually, one becomes capable of observing silence for 24 hours. If you have a time fixed for it, improve your habit and sense of discipline. With habit you are able to keep up the time."

'Dhyan' (Meditation)

"Dhyan is just the medium to get the grace of God. God is self-illuminated". To meditate is different from spontaneous meditation. During persistent efforts for meditation, a time comes when it begins spontaneously.

While explaining the nuances of Dhyan depending on the right to understand, it is different. Ma says, in normal course, begin your Dhyan from the Divine feet, then moving slowly up to the Divine head. Then with inverse dhyan you start with the head and come back to Sri Charan (Divine feet), and wherever your heart pines, stick to that place. If the Guru asks you to meditate on any one chakra of the shatchakra, then its different. Ma has said, "the

dhyān of different images of these chakras evolve different perceptions and ecstasies."

Ma says "The movement of heart and soul is in two ways - one outwardly that is worldward and the other inward. This introversion takes the shape of meditation but it is a very difficult process. If one is able to have a glimpse of Almighty in the normal course then his worldly inclinations slowly wither away. If that does not happen, then this creates an insensate meditation and may manifest in some disease. That is why this body advises you to continue with Japa. In that case chances of occurrence of such disease is less and it helps the sadhak to meditate in a most natural way. Japa and dhyān can go together."

"Like, watering the base of a plant reaches its roots, our body's roots lie in our brain while the heart forms the stem. Water the base and it will reach the roots. Guru is omnipresent. He is everywhere, in everything in all forms. He is the soul of all souls. One should meditate with each breath on the one in mind who has been placed at your heart by Guru or Ishta."

Sri Ma says, there are many types of Japa Dhyān.

"There is one type like Brund Pyasa (thirst of a foetus embryo) in which the person's hands are involved in work, the mind and heart, however, is pining for meditation. He is not uneasy, doing his work but simultaneously the urge for Dhyān is present like the thirst for water. Some people experience such an urge for Dhyān and meditation while being engaged in his routine chores."

There is another stage where one cannot help Japa-meditation, when a person does not like to do any work. Not that the thought of his usual work responsibility does not arise in his mind but he does not feel inclined towards it. This thought comes to his mind amidst meditation, but the Sadhak does not have the energy to leave Dhyān for his normal work.

Beside these two situations, there is another, third situation in which the Sadhak is so much absorbed in Dhyān Jap that he is quite oblivious of his worldly responsibilities."

Ma further explains:

"Some Sadhaks may or may not have their physical senses while meditating. But he should remain awake. He needs to exist with a purpose, whether it is self-realization or idol-worship. What happens with this purposeful existence? The way to supreme light opens up; this is perpetual.

"The asanas orient towards meditation. However, if someone is able to meditate effectively, even otherwise also then he does not need asanas. If his attention is diverted to his body or the asanas, what is the benefit? The real aim is to concentrate the mind towards Him."

"Initially, you have to start with, sitting on the asana. In other words asanas reflect the state of your mind. However, once the asana japa begins, proper asana is naturally evolved. As the meditation gets concentrated so the asana."

"When one actually gets in touch with real meditation, obstacles are cleared. Worldly talks become uninteresting and futile. Instead comes wisdom and right thinking. Firstly, the obstacles were worldly matters amidst which the Sadhak grew restless. Now, he moves between the levels of enlightenment. As he moves away from worldly matters, so he moves closer to God. And then, only the God remains, nothing else."

During Dhyān, some people see images in an aura. The Chinmoy Vighraha (Image personifying consciousness or knowledge) is also sometime seen.

Japa

Ma regards Mantra Japa and meditation on Guru and Ishta as all the same because the name and the named is the same. Therefore, start your Japa with the mantra given by your Guru. While doing Japa, meditate, at the image or picture as instructed by your Guru.

Ma further elucidated, while doing Japa the quest for meaning is one school of thought. The second is japa while meditating on Ishta or the Mantra, and Japa with thoughts about the forms of syllables make the third means. All these are scriptural truths. The image which is in the form of syllables should be concentrated upon while doing Japa with special emphasis on clear words. Further, control your breath delightfully doing Japa with each breath to get the Illumination of your 'Ishta'. Only a single aim and total devotion paves the way for the complete illumination. Ma related a tale....

One person went to a seer and prayed for refuge and mantra Diksha. Guruji said, "Let the time come." The person, however, kept coming to the Guru with the same request. One day, the Guru got angry and said, "Go and do Japa of Gopia Nandan." The man had total faith in the Guru. Hence, he went home and began uninterrupted Japa. Day in, day out he continued with his japa. No meals, no diversion. One of his family members, who were all stressed about his Japa, suggested that he would act as substitute for the disciple and continue Japa while the latter had his meals.

The substitute had no faith in japa. Therefore when the disciple returned after his meals, the substitute, in an emotional outburst, said, "Take back your Ghanta Nandan."

Now, instead of Gopia Nandan, the Japa of Ghanta Nandan went on as Akhanda Japa. As a result of this, the throne of Radha Krishna was shaken. Ultimately, God gave him the much desired darshan." This was the result of total faith.

Ma said, "one should satisfy himself bathing in the sea despite the high waves and salty water."

Ma further said, "some people try to synchronise Japa with their breathing. But it is actually a combination of breath, mind and Mantra. Breathing as usual, the mantra is also being pronounced, but the mind is elsewhere. However, attachment of a portion of the mind has enabled synchronisation of breathing and mantra. If the effort is with full concentration the time for illumination becomes imminent."

On several occasions, it becomes difficult to do simultaneous Japa and derive the meaning of mantras being pronounced. Therefore, Japa is to be done only after understanding the meaning of mantra which is to be pronounced simultaneously. Continue your Japa, considering the Mantra as the Guru or the image of Ishta. Sometime, while doing Japa, you feel as if you are drinking nectar. The 'Naam' being pronounced, is not dry, it is nectar. Then comes a stage when you ask yourself, what is more elegant than Naam?

The previous stage is suggestive of tasting nectar while the next stage is suggestive of not only the unparalleled taste of nectar but even comparison of Naam with the best things in the world. There is another stage, neither the taste of nectar nor the quest for comparison, only ecstasy - a stage of complete fulfillment.

Ma said, "like different flowers are offered for different pujas; there are different mantras and even different strings of beads. It is necessary to count the beads, but when Japa comes spontaneously, there is no need to count. Effortless, spontaneous Japa and Japa as a result of endeavour are different from each other. For spontaneous Japa, one must exercise the Kriyas that 'encircle' the Naam or Beej mantra. All this and Japa must be done privately. "While doing Japa, the Mantra's real image is illuminated - this is called Mantra Chaitanya".

"There is talk of different Malas (string of beads) viz. Monmala, Karmala etc. While repeating the beads the same string of beads turn into Monmala. Sometimes while doing so you do not even know when the string has fallen. However, that does not hamper the Japa which continues uninterrupted."

“Someone had a guest at home. He treated the guest with good food and made his bed. After the guest had retired for the night, the host began his Japa. A low sound came from the guest room. It was actually the chanting of 'Hare Krishna'. The breathing of the guest in sleep, was producing this sound. While continuing Japa, all the knots in body, which are glandular tissues and veins, open up. Then your own Japa is apparently echoed from all things in the surroundings. When all the tissues and veins start working, each and every part of the body gets involved in Japa." The guest was fast asleep but even in that state, Akhand Japa was going on inside him. This is also called 'Ajapa Jap', one which is not muttered but comes from deep inside. Therefore, all Sadhaks should enliven their mantras. In this endeavour, some get the help from Malajap. There are infinite ways to reach God."

"This body had heard from someone that one brother got tired of Japa with mala. He thought of doing Japa from his memory. His Guru told him, "well, you do Japa when you feel like." Almost at that time, the disciple's mala, the string of beads, fell on the ground, and the beads got separated. Lo and behold, the disciple had darshan of God in each of the beads that lay on the floor. He collected them together and preserved them.

Japa Samarpan (Submission)

About Japa Samarpan Ma has said "After Japa one has to submit it to the Lord. If it is not submitted and kept with oneself it may destroy or affect the Beej, as the Sadhak has not yet realised the supreme. There are chances of partial results only. It is like a priceless jewel in possession of a child, who might throw it away not knowing its real value. After offering it to God, it is like a Saving's Bank deposit. After repeated submission of Japa, gradual illumination occurs. What is Naam and after whom is it named? Who am I? When the realisation dawns, the japa is yielding the long-cherished goal. When that moment of realisation comes nobody knows. So continue with your japa, and at the right moment whatever you have submitted will be given back to you many times over.

Ma has said, one should follow his Guru's instructions about Sadhana. In 24 hours, there are four different times for 'Sandhya'.

- 1) Brahma-Muhurat (Pre-dawn)
- 2) Afternoon
- 3) Evening
- 4) Midnight

'Sandhya' is performed at Sandhitime. In this way, there are eight times for performing 'Sandhya' in 24 hours. Each of these eight different times have different powers and images. If the japa is performed at the right moment by the aspirant then its power illuminates at that moment. But one who has not forsaken his meals and sleep cannot achieve these powers. The same is true for 'Shat-Chakras' also. There are several other Chakras also, besides the six determined points. While practicing Sadhana when the sadhak reaches the lowest Chakra or 'lotus', then keeping in touch with the centre of this lotus, he must acquire the power of all the petals and once this is realised then from this lotus there is movement in the lotuses above this, like going up the stairs. In this manner the sadhak moves over all the lotuses and reaches 'Sahastrar', then what is to be known and seen is visualised. After this, is the move back to the starting point. At this stage Jagatguru, clears up his world of ignorance.

"At the 'Sandhya-instant' there is friction of two important powers that generates a force. So one should try to get this very moment in his daily prayers (sandhikhan - juncture of two periods or moments). If at this stage a real aspirant does his rituals he will in all probability get 'Shakti-pat'. There is need for a fixed time also, like all other works, you do at a definite time."

"For a 'Tantrik' sadhak the right time for Sadhana is between midnight and 3 o'clock in the night."

In a book on Oriya Baba it has been mentioned that evening prayers cannot be sacrificed. Because I am doing kirtan at this time, I can't just sacrifice the evening prayers.

Ma has said "If Guru visits you and you are at his service during the sandhya time then the evening prayers can be performed later, because service to Guru is more important and takes precedent over your 'Sandhya'."

Pranam (Obeisance)

Ma has said 'Pranam' is offering everything you have at the holy feet of God – everything, leaving a total void. And this void will be filled by the divine aura of God. When you do Pranam to God or Guru look at His feet, meditating, and then slowly proceed towards the face, fixing your gaze on each divine organ, finally coming to the face. Then pray from the core of your heart that you are getting transformed with the sight of His holy feet. Keep your breathing controlled while moving your gaze from feet to head and have darshan of the face. Try to fix your gaze and thoughts on His face. Do the reverse till you have placed your head at His feet. Like you clean the vessel with the holy Ganges water before filling it with the same. Breathing in and out - do pranam; so now you are ready to worship God. While bowing in reverence to His feet, your head will get power, emanating from His divine feet. "The head receives shaktipat and distributes it across the length and breadth of the body, just as when watering the roots, the entire tree receives the required water. While breathing out feel that by this you are completely surrendering yourself to His holy feet."

"After doing this sort of Pranam sit for meditation and worship. Some people say one who does Namaskar becomes eligible to do Puja, Japa and Dhyan. This is it in a nutshell, but there is much theory. Some people ask why pranam is done with the head? You work for this world. After a restless night you say the mind is not working, and you are not feeling well. The mind is the root of the body. As the root of the tree lies underneath, so the core of the human body lies at the top."

"Pranam will eliminate your pride; leave your ego and pride at the feet of God. In prostration too, one dedicates himself totally to God. While exhaling think that in exchange for all your foolishness and vices the Guru or God is transforming you into a pious, holy man. That is how you fill your empty soul with His grace."

"Shaktipat also happens through the finger tips. That is why blessings are bestowed by placing the hand on the head and back. Electricity emanates from the finger tips; that is why the ripe fruit of a tree gets destroyed if a finger is pointed at it."

Ma said "there are two kinds of Pranams; one is offering to Him your whole body and mind and all your thoughts, desire, sense impressions, love, affection, devotion, just like emptying the contents of a full pitcher to its last drop. The other way is like scattering powder through the minute holes of a powder box: the main part of your thoughts and desires are held back in a hidden chamber of your mind and only a little dust is allowed to escape."

"So if you are not able to do anything, at least morning and evening offer HIM a sincere Pranam."

In the course of Her conversation Ma, once said (note 1):

- (i) Purity of heart and mind comes through concentration on one object, which depends on one's particular disposition.
- (ii) Gradually as a man progresses, all his scattered ideas and ambitions come to be unified with this one object.
- (iii) Then various stream of thoughts flow along the same channel and the devotee becomes apparently motionless and inert.
- (iv) thereafter he finds a resting place in the one Universal Being and is engulfed in one Unitary existence."

Samadhi

Ma has said about this (note 3) as a state beyond all concious and supra concious planes - a state of complete immobilisation of all thoughts, emotions and actions both physical and mental - a state that transcends all the phases of life here. What you call "Savikalpa Samadhi" is also but a means to reach that final goal. It is only a passing stage in your Sadhana.

"Deep concentration on any one of the five organs of sense - sound, touch, smell, taste and sight - derived chiefly from air, earth, water etc. leads a man to merge his identity into it, and as concentration deepens, the body as it were, gradually freezes with it. Then that special object of sense pervades his whole being and his ego gradually dissolves in it and coalesces with one Universal Entity. When this condition settles down, the conciousness of one Universal Self too melts away and what then remains is beyond words, expression or experience."

While practicing sadhana one comes across many extraordinary powers. In the first stage it manifests in the form of joy (Anandam). This joy he has achieved by the repetition of God's name. Here, Ma warns the aspirant, those immersed in this Anandam if they are to proceed further, only they can acquire power. One should keep this joy as a carefully guarded secret. Those who still remain thirsty and aspire towards God, who are not satisfied simply with cure of other's diseases by mere touch, and one who is not content with the instant fulfillment of his desire, he alone will one day realise the Self.

It is difficult to predict when God will manifest to you. In this context Ma narrated a tale...

"One person used to worship 'Siddhidata Ganesh', hoping to get Siddhi from Him. For a long time he worshiped Ganesh but without success. He then decided to worship another God and placed this image alongside the image of Ganesh in his prayer room. Suddenly, while worshipping, the thought that the mantra for the other God would be overheard by Ganesh, prompted him to close the ears of Ganeshji. Once he did so suddenly, Ganesh gave him darshan and asked him, 'what do you want from me?'

The stunned devotee said, 'all these days when I worshiped you, you never gave me darshan. Today, when I have closed your ears, you have come, why?'

Ganeshji said, 'even though you worshiped me all these days, you never had faith in me. Today you have really believed that I could hear you.'

"Only after the longings of several lives does one get a human birth. Only the human being can aspire to get God. As you sow, so you reap. In this kingdom of God, one gets a new life after a fair trial of his good and bad deeds. You get this life based on your inclinations and deeds, at the time of death in your previous life. Gurushakti can burn generations of life. If you do bad deeds throughout your life, how can you expect to get good results at the end?"

“There was a queen who was very pious and kind-hearted but melancholic, the reason being the king did not believe in the supreme Being. Actually, the king was a great devotee who secretly led a life devoted to the Almighty.

Once, in deep slumber, the king uttered, the word 'Ram'. The queen who was at his side, was surprised and happy. The next day, she did many religious acts and also gave donations to the Brahmins, pandits. The king asked the queen the reason for her sudden happiness.

When the queen disclosed to him her experience, the king felt sorry that he could not keep his treasure a secret. As he pondered on his failure to keep it a secret the king left his mortal coil.

"Whatever the birds and animals think at the time of their death predetermines in what form their rebirth is. They cannot change their fate by their actions (karma). Only human beings can," says Ma. They can direct the fate in their next life through their 'karma'. But do not think that a person who remains a ruffian all his life can aspire to get a better birth by this at the tail end of his life.

This is because at the time of death, there is a stage in which he cannot perceive the way he wishes. This is propelled by the karma of his entire life. It is the entire life karma that is saved and compressed and in a way carried forward to the next life as 'Sanskars'. Hence it is necessary to perform good deeds in your life."

Ma related an anecdote...

"There was a greedy man, who lived his entire life as an oil merchant. At the end of his life this greedy man was asked to remember God. But he repeated, as he used to often tell his buyers, "I will not give you a single drop more (of oil)." He could not change his habit at the end."

Ma believes in fate or destiny and opines that it has its own ways. Ma advises everybody to accept all situations, whether difficult or not, without resistance. Generally human beings have to bear the consequences of the Karma of their previous life.

Ma related one tale...

"An old lady wished all her life to breathe her last by the holy Ganges. But she lived far away from the holy Ganges all alone. She had no way to fulfill her life time wish. It so happened that at the end of her life one day she saw a group of people carrying a dead body for cremation to the holy Ganges. Since nightfall was imminent they placed the body under a tree and retired for the night to the inn nearby.

By divine inspiration, the old woman got renewed energy. She managed not only to walk up to that tree but also put herself in place of the body which she pushed aside. Before dawn, those people who spent the night at the inn, took the woman who they thought dead, for cremation. Fate willed the woman to die on the way. When they reached the river, they were stunned to see the different body. What fate had willed was destined to happen."

Good deeds beget good fate.

Once, a few people came for Ma's darshan. One of their company did not come inside for Ma's darshan. When Ma gave them prasad, She also gave them the share of the person who stood outside. Thus, this person was destined to get Prasad even if he was absent inside.

Sannyas Ashram

Traditionally, Sannyas has been the highest spiritual order among Hindus since ancient times. In 1934, the sannyas of Shashanka Mohan was the first bold step, a landmark, in Ma's way of educating people. Who could be a better candidate for this, in Ma's Kheyal? Being an ideal family

person, a competent doctor of medicine, and a mature sadhak, Shashanka Mohan was the ideal person. That is why, Ma chose him as the medium for Her teaching of Sannyas dharma.

Shashanka Mohan's Sannyas

Dr Shashanka Mohan Mukherjee, Didi's father was among those who dedicated themselves to Ma's service at Shahbag. In the month of January 1926, the 60-year-old had Ma's darshan and then gradually proceeded on the path of sadhana. Having spent his entire life in luxury, with Ma's blessings, Shashanka Mohan took himself away from family life to spend hours at Sidheshwari in his sadhana. Shashanka Mohan had an enigmatic personality.

At the time (March 1934) of Sri Ma's sojourn in Salogra cave, Solan, Ma had seen Shashanka Mohan in the robes of a Sannyasi. Then Ma had a kheyal that the time had come for his sannyas. She sent him a letter through Bhaiji.

Shashanka Mohan was in Vindhyaachal when he got Ma's letter from Bhaiji. On the instructions of Ma, he and Didi reached Hardwar where Ma was.

Ma told him what She had checked and fixed the day of Chaitra Sankranti for the sannyasa Diksha. She told Shashanka Mohan, "you possess the inclination for sannyas. Let destiny prevail. I do not do anything, 'Jo ho jaye'."

Shashanka Mohan had no objection to what Ma said. But he did not want any other Guru than Ma. He said, "I cannot imagine having anyone other than you as Guru. Please do whatever is to be done."

Ma replied, "you know very well, I do not do anything Myself." Baba said, "I do not require what You are not able to give." Ma became withdrawn and said, "then there is no need to do anything." It was dusk, nightfall. The difference in Ma's mood earlier compared with now was palpable.

Shashanka Mohan went to the banks of Bhagirathi. He sat there beside the continually flowing sacred river for hours together, reconciling the pros and cons in his mind.

Before it was late at night, Shashanka Mohan was back at Ma's feet. After doing pranam, he said- "Ma, what I felt I told you. Now I am ready to do what comes to your Kheyal."

Therefore, on the day of Chaitra Sankranti, in the divine presence of Sri Ma, Swami Mangalananda Giri of Kankhal initiated him into Sannyas mantra. After the sannyas, he was named Swami Akhandananda Giri.

In the auspicious hour of dawn, wearing the dress of a Sannyasi, Swami Akhandananda Giri prostrated before Sri Ma. Ma blessed him and said, "you have served your family in the Akhanda form. Now I wish you accomplish your sannyas dharma in the same Akhanda form."

How wonderful was Ma's way of teaching. For ten years, She was graduating Baba towards this fold.

Ma advises one to take Sannyas dharma on attainment of a certain spiritual state when he has a right to receive it (adhikari bheda). Ma had the highest regard for a sannyasi, who has left his family for the attainment of the highest goal of his spiritual practice. But those who take sannyas to get rid of their duty and responsibility, are neither doing good for the world or for themselves. These ochre clothes, which belong to God, should be respected by all means.

In this context, an incident occurred in Dehradun when Ma and a few devotees were going to Kishenpur ashram from Kalyanvan on foot. At the entrance of Kishenpur ashram, Ma spoke to a sannyasi youth, already standing there, in Bengali although the youth by his face, did not look like Bengali.

On Ma's invitation, the youth came to Her for dinner. Ma asked him, Are you a Sannyasi?

He said, no.

Ma - "Then why are you wearing the sannyasi's dress?"

He replied that in a way he had left his family and friends.

Ma asked whether this sadhana was for self-realisation?

The youth said, he had not thought of it. However, he did not want to do anything in this world.

Ma said, "you are cultivating a tremendous confusion and doubt in your mind. With this, you can in no way benefit yourself or this world. The robes of a sannyasi carry significant meaning in this world. These robes should not be used to escape from the realities, the fundamental problems of life. If you do not consider sannyas dharma, in its ideal, as above everything else, you do not deserve to get the warm reception of the people.

Ma asked him to stay at the ashram as long as he wanted to, but advised him to go back home and face the realities he escaped from.

The youth perhaps heeded Her advice as he was not seen there again.

Ma says "It is better to sacrifice earthly pleasures, for as much as you sacrifice, your mind and body turns purer and healthier."

Despite protection, the old leaves of the tree fall off when the time comes. Similarly, do not do anything on impulse in a hurry. However, one should not delay or ignore things either. This world is a karma bhoomi. Therefore, one has to restrict his karma in a methodical way. If you sacrifice, the desires for worldly pleasures gradually go away. Therefore, one should not sit idle.

"Sacrifice has a vital role in one's sadhana. With complete renunciation, comes the feeling of total surrender. As he gets nearer to God, he moves away from worldly affairs. However, today only a few leave their hearth and home to strive towards total unconcern. This is a very difficult path to tread, full of thorns and pitfalls."

Ma Anandamoyi warns the sadhak to be careful about this path. Until desire, anger, lust, worry and fear are wiped from your mind, it will be foolish to escape from family duties and responsibilities. Such an attempt, before attaining a definite stage in one's spiritual effort, may prejudice the sadhak's sacrifice.

"The sadhak gains a lot during his sadhana. Sometimes, influenced by fame the sadhak is oblivious of his level of achievement."

Therefore, Ma advises the sadhak to tread this path of highest spiritual practices carefully. She says when the question arises in the mind of sadhak, whether to take sannyas or not, he should wait because there is still an element of doubt in his mind. The time actually comes when he moves away from the affairs of the world -just like the old leaves fall off the tree when the time comes. Then the sadhak has no doubt, no hindrance. Then he does not stop even if he is asked to.

About sannyas, Ma's view is that as long as one is influenced by actions of previous births, his taking to 'sannyas' after deliberating the pros and cons, the custom and tradition is "Vidhi Disha Sannyas". This is not true sannyas, this is merely to get the benefits of sannyas. By donning ochre robes, one does not become a sannyasi. Sannyas is a spontaneous outcome of one's nature and way of life."

"As you water the roots, the tree flourishes with flowers, and fruits - so you take the 'Name of God'; the feeling to take sannyas comes to you automatically. When you are actually awakened by this Bhav, even God can not lure you away from your goal.

There is another type of sannyas - Bidyut Sannyas (lightning sannyas). It comes to you with the speed of lightning, suddenly with tremendous force.

Once, one lady was telling her husband that another person was about to take sannyas for which his clothes had been coloured ochre. The husband replied: "Is this the way to take sannyas? See, I will do that." As he said this, he left immediately and became a sannyasi.

"The inner sannyas (Antar Sannyas) is the real sannyas. One who becomes a sannyasi is a very fortunate person. Sannyas means sacrifice of everything. Even the feeling of sacrifice is not present in sannyasi. Taking sannyas and automatic sannyas are different from each other.

"One must lift himself above knowledge and ignorance to get the supreme thing. Worldly bondage is a sort of return ticket; one who attempts spiritual practice properly, only he can break the ties of Maya. If you take your family duties and responsibilities as a kind of service, because we have created this bondage by enjoying the earthly pleasures, then, it is possible to get rid of bondage through Sadhana - a way leading to sannyas."

Spiritual Initiation by Sri Ma

Sri Ma has never considered Herself a Guru. But scores of people from near and far have repeatedly come to Her for spiritual guidance. Ma never initiated anyone in the customary way, but many devotees have received shakti, Bhagavatnam or a mantra from Ma.

It is said that when Gurudev, by His mercy and compassionate glance, has pity on his disciples, that is actually the initiation (diksha). This initiation or transferring of power can happen through different means by Mantra, sight, touch, exchange of articles etc. Even the subtle bodies have had initiation from Sri Ma.

Ma had an infinite number of ways for Her devotees. Sometimes, during public meetings, She would turn Her attention towards somebody with great intensity. This was not without reason. The person who had been looked at, would get blessings and power for a lifetime to experience illumination. A disciple recollected that once, he was in a queue for Ma's darshan. When his turn came, he stood aside. Suddenly he felt light from Ma's eyes filling his whole body. He always wanted Diksha or Naam only from Ma. Thus his desire was fulfilled in this way.

In another incident, which was narrated by ashram's Maitreyee Didi, a foreigner came for Ma's darshan to Kankhal ashram. This was a result of some dream he had back home. Upon reaching Kankhal, he came to know that Ma was in Delhi.

When he reached Delhi Ashram, Ma was not keeping well. But Her mood was transformed once this person came to Her. God knows what transpired between Ma and the visitor in that meeting which lasted only a few minutes. Ma asked for Prasad to be given to him. She also gave him a small towel as a present and said, "Baba, you must be busy in your business the whole day, but always remember each day the moment of this meeting at this very time, like the alarm clock is set daily at a particular time. So also remember this fixed time and do not break it."

The foreigner came away with so many things at that moment of truth, which so many others could not perhaps get after years in Ma's company.

It was Swami Bhaskarananda who acted as the interpreter on Ma's behalf. Overwhelmed, the person made obeisance and left the ashram. Ma had asked him to remember this moment without fail. The foreigner had left but Ma was now full of life.

She narrated an anecdote to those present.

"A Lotus, which had flowered in a pond, was very beautiful. A passer-by was attracted by it. He asked a fish and a frog, who were also in the pond, about that flower. Both replied, "what is so special in that? It's an ordinary flower." At that time, a bee flew by. As it was going towards the flower, the passer-by tried to stop it and speak to it. The bee quickly replied, "wait, I will tell you on

my return." After sometime, it came back and said, "don't you know that it is lotus flower, full of nectar. I have drank that and now I am totally transformed."

Ma said, "It is possible to be in the company of Mahatmas for a long time without understanding them or their vision. But one who is deserving will get the real thing in a few moments...for that matter, even flies and mosquitoes are also there.

Another incident heard and later confirmed by Swami Bhaskarananda, was the visit of Gadadhar's parents, after his untimely death in India. The mother of late Gadadhar came for Sri Ma's darshan at the ashram. They were staying in some hotel and his mother was due for her initiation next day. At that time when she was shown some written words as a mantra she exclaimed "Oh Lord". It so happened that at 4 o'clock on the morning of Diksha, she suddenly woke up in her hotel to find the entire room filled with an aura. And she heard those same words which were shown to her at the time of Diksha."

Ma's Wonderful Ways

One day, at the Annapurna temple of Kashi ashram, a small girl sang a beautiful religious song. So pleased was Ma that in Her kheyal, She decided to present her something. But any worldly thing as a gift would not match the soul-stirring rendering of the little girl. Suddenly, She had a kheyal that the queen of Charkhari had presented Ma with Tulsi leaves, inscribed with Bhagavat Naam or Mantra. Ma gave this girl one of those Tulsi leaves. She gave the same to a few others present. Some others requested Ma for this and received the holy leaves.

Similarly Ma has also given 'Bilva patras' in this way. Receiving Naam or mantra from Ma like this has been considered as Diksha by Ma.

In later years, there was a flood of 'Naam'. So many who came for Ma's darshan were asked which name they preferred? When they replied, they were advised by Ma to repeat the same name daily. A very interesting episode is mentioned here:

Ma was in Vindhyaachal ashram. My sister and her children, the 7-year old daughter and 5 year old son, were also there. Ma asked the children which name of God they liked the most? The daughter, the older child, was able to answer but not the son. Thrice he was asked. On each occasion, he pronounced his own name 'Anand'. Finally, Ma clapped joyfully and asked him to repeat Anand, Anand daily.

Both these children are now grown-up. As far as I know, for all these years they have been doing what Ma had asked them to do.

Once when Haribaba was sick, on his request Ma had pronounced the 12-letter mantra (Om Namoh Bhagavate Basudevai) twelve times. Later, She sung in Her divine voice on several occasions. These mantras have been received by several devotees who do Japa with utmost devotion and faith and take it as initiation.

Once, two girls came to Ma and requested initiation from Her. Ma asked them, 'Which name do you like? Whichever name you like, repeat that at least 1 Lakh times and then try to see This body.' Later Ma said that depending on the cultural characteristics, someone is told immediately and someone is told this way."

One another occasion, a man asked Ma for Diksha. Ma said, "only God gives Diksha here." One can interpret these words as one wishes.

Ma's devotees have a variety of experiences. Ma has said, "My Guru is Jagatguru (the master of this universe). Jagatguru is my Guru. This is also the state of Vishwa Guru (Universal Guru). This supreme connection is with everyone.

References

1. Matri Darshan by Bhaiji, p. 68.
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3. 'Sri Sri Ma Anandamoyi', Gurupriya Didi, (Part 1-20).
4. Sri Sri Ma Anandamoyee Prasanga (Part 1-4).
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Epilogue

Sri Ma's descent to the universe is extremely propitious for Human beings. Ma, who is beyond time and space, is the unique blend of unity and diversity, oneness and infinity. For one who was in search of truth - Ma was his best friend, irrespective of his caste, creed or religion. Ma was never one for Her own sect. She had equal faith and respect for all the religions. In Her view, "all religions were in search of the same Surpeme Truth."

Sri Ramkrishna preached Bhakti, Maharshi Raman - Knowledge and Wisdom, Mahatma Gandhi preached Karma but Ma never stuck to any one line of thought or institution. Wherever She was present, the atmosphere reverberated with joy and happiness amidst which flowed the pure thoughts of spiritual bliss.

Sri Ma has clarified, "there is no need for this body to tell or do anything. Things, which are destined, are happening being illuminated for your welfare. Do you know, how? It's like a fruit with seeds inside, falling on the ground. A plant comes out of the soil after some time, although no one had sown the seeds. As plants grow from the seeds you have sown in the soil, similarly plants also come up from the seeds of fallen fruits . In the latter case, there is no effort to make it grow. Nevertheless, the plants will have similar leaves, fruits and flowers."

"With whatever thoughts and inclinations you come here, This body reacts in the same way. There is no question of This body's wish.

Sri Ma has played the role of a sadhak only to confirm the truth of religious scriptures. It was a spontaneous play by Her. From a spiritual point of view, the different metaphysical exercises of sadhana revealed themselves naturally upon Ma. Vedic sutras, stav, stotras, have come out of Ma's lips spontaneously. This is incredible considering the fact that She hardly had any formal education. All the diverse Yogas - Chandayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Karmayoga, Samadhiyoga etc, have united in a rare combination in Her person.

Ma's contribution to this world in Her mortal frame is significant, particularly in the context of contemporary society, and especially in the spiritual, educational, and philosophical sphere, where Her contribution is more palpable.

Ma is one of the most important personalities of the spiritual world with which She was associated extensively. The descent of the Mother of the Universe was to motivate as many people as possible towards the spiritual life through Her infinite pity and compassion and Her parental love. Her ways of motivating were unique. She always asked people to opt for simple and straight ways of Sadhan and Bhajan. She never asked anyone to go for the most arduous, austere practices. Once she confided to a Brahmacharini "will you follow in the footsteps of seers who have been meditating for thousands of years?" After a pause, she muttered, "but here is a short-cut."

In this context, an incident mentioned by Narayanswami in his book is worth mentioning - Kashi ashram's Annapurna mandir: Satsang in the afternoon was in progress, in which there were discussions on the topic that salvation is not possible without complete knowledge.

Swamiji, visibly disturbed, said, "Ma, if this is true then there is no hope of salvation for me."

Ma said: "continue working according to your capabilities. After that..."

"Will you fill up what remains to be done after all my efforts?" replied Swamiji.

Ma: "Yes, It will be done, whatever remains to be done will be completed by Ma."

This is Ma's decisive word: who else could have said that She will complete the remaining 'tapasya'.

Ma pleaded with all for at least five minutes of time exclusively for dedication to God, so soul-touching was Her appeal. Through Her wonderful presence and speech, Ma motivated people towards the supreme being. She transformed many people who were once habituated to luxurious lifestyles.

Sri Ma solved queries and disputes which renowned pandits found difficult to fathom. And She did it so easily that never again did they seem troubled by difficulties as they had earlier. She hardly bothered about her own inconvenience when She travelled across the length and breadth of this country, to inspire people towards spiritual life.

Sri Ma has taught that a human being can rise spiritually only by accomplishing his duties and responsibilities according to the custom and tradition of his own religion. Non-violence, truthful life, love and compassion are the qualities of which all religions encourage cultivation. Similarly, in whatever sphere of life one is, he should strictly follow the tenets of the law. Brahmacharis, the family man, and even the sannyasis should follow their respective duties and responsibilities. He who is a householder should serve all without pride and prejudice. Ma's journeys around the country for 50 long years formed the primary basis of Matri Leela. Initially, Her tours were undertaken suddenly, without any notice. Someone came to Her, some place was mentioned in the talk, and suddenly She would have a kheyal to leave for that destination. In most cases, Her companions would not ever have had time to prepare themselves for the journey in such sudden and dramatic tour programs.

There has been no change in the enigmatic personality of Sri Ma for all these years. Whether the rural, serene, surroundings of Tarapith (1929), or the first South India visit (1930), the travel from Dacca to Raipur Dehradun (1932) or the first Gujarat tour (1937), Ma was at home in all these diverse cultures without bother. This simple, effortless mixing with people of so many different religions, who spoke altogether different languages, was itself miraculous.

At that time, Ma Anandamoyl was yet to become a household name in those far corners of the country. Despite that, people of all ages, creeds, castes and religions came to Her and she accepted them all.

In later years, when the crowd swelled to unbelievable numbers, it was worth watching the way Ma managed thousands of devotees. She always remained the centre of attention of the crowd. Initially, the programs were not very organised. As the number of devotees grew, so the organisation became very good in establishing new Ashrams and temples, and holding religious functions at different places. Festivity was in the air wherever the Divine Mother was present. The door of Sri Ma's world was always open to all. Her coffer of Infinite happiness was meant for distribution to the sea of humanity. Ma's serene look, pious, open-hearted laugh, and the natural ease of movement were bewitching. Therefore, it is appropriate to call Her the personification of the Mother of the Universe.

Ma has sometime talked about specific places like Tarapith, Vindhyachal, and Naimisharanya which she visited several times. Clearly, those places have at one time or the other been venues of some past Divine Leela. Her visits have reignited that glory. From Bengal to Gujarat, from Himachal and Dehradun to the distant South - many temples and ashrams have come about as the result of Ma's kheyal.

The Naam yagna on the lines of Mahaprabhu Chaitanyadev's Vashnavite tradition, started in North India by Sri Ma, has drawn thousands of people who have graced their life through this well known name of God.

In the vedic tradition, Ma organised two Mahayagnas, following complete rituals and customs.

By instituting the Puran temple at Naimisharanya, the compilation of the 18 Purans, and daily reading Ma has drawn people's attention to the Puranas. The establishment of the Purana research centre at Naimisharanya is a landmark step in this direction.

In infinite ways, Ma has taught us the need for restraint. She only started the tradition of 'Sanyam Saptah', which has been graced by the Mahatmas, pandits, seers brahmacharis and brahmacharinis of the highest order. It was Ma's grace which brought us the prabochans of the Mahatmas during satsang, Sanyam Saptah and other functions. Ma used to call this the 'showering of nectar' (Amrita Varshan).

After Ma's darshan, many households became established devotees while many children and adolescents were sent back home to join their families. They were told that This (Ma's) body will always remain with them.

Sri Ma has always given Her devotees the ideal to live a good moral life, when they would strive towards the spiritual goal with all devotion. For this, one needs to speak the truth, exercise restraint in his habits, and live a simple life. How can a person who has no respect for ethical values, follow in the footsteps of religion? The annual 'Sanyam Saptah' at several ashrams is a break to allow all sadhak to direct themselves towards spiritual bliss.

Ma considers that adherence to the Guru's instructions and parents advice is the basis of a good moral education. She said, limiting food is not only meant for Sannyasis and Brahmacharis, but for family persons too.

Sri Sri Ma Anandamoyi Kanyapith and Vidyapith are Ma's direct blessings. Didi apparently worked to establish these institutions to fulfill late Bhaiji's wish but it was ultimately the kheyal of Ma, which reflected through Bhaiji.

Ma never started Her own sect. Neither did She impose anything new upon Her devotees, nor did she initiate a new religion. She only gave immense spiritual inspiration in the midst of all the religions, sects, castes, creeds and communities.

Ma's company was unique. They came: a Sannyasi, a family person, a man of steady, reserved wisdom, another an exuberent devotee, a Vaishnavite, a Shaivite, a Shakta etc. Among the Sannyasis too, there were different groups. The central underlying theme that bound these people together was Ma.

In this world, all theorists have the tendency to reject the opinions of others. But Ma never did that. Ma said, "whatever happens is all right. As one perceives things, so he will speak about them. Where is the question of contradiction? In one complete whole, everything is present in its entirety. This united whole contains everything; Hindu, Islam, Sikh, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism, ascetics, atheists and innumerable streams of belief and non-belief which are outside human society."

All who sang, danced, recited, took part in the festivities or performed in Yagnas, were inspired by the divine presence of Ma. Ma likened them all to flowers in a big garden where Her body strolled about. She really did saunter through this wonderfully diversified colour, form and flavour as the Mother of this Universe.

Ma says, as you play, so is the tune. As you play, so you listen too. The disciples chanted "Ma, Ma" while playing the instrument. This was the reflection of Motherhood. In this melodious matrisangeet, the wise and the ignorant, Indians and foreigners existed together. When Ma's children from near and far assemble, it is a sight to behold! It is the connexion of the supreme religion.

Ma has allowed Herself into the wonders of this world. Thus is Ma's astonishing descent. Matribhav, the basis of all creation, which has illuminated the whole world, is the Leela of Sri Ma.

All Ma's manners, speech, and habits reflect this Akhand Matribhav (Motherhood). Ma has come to all of us, replacing Her divinity grandeur and glory. In a simple normal way She has extended Her hands towards all. Here She is, with the bowl of Bhagavat Kripa (love, compassion, pity) standing on the threshold of this universe, about to distribute love, happiness, wisdom, knowledge, yoga and constancy. Here She is, the mother of the Universe.

Be it, the child-like innocence with the Mahatmas, showering of infinite love and compassion to the disciples, assurance and solace to the refugee, enlightening the curious - all these are the Leela of that Maha Shakti.

Ma once said "There is only one Atma, you are that Atma, I am that Atma, and everyone is that Atma. So whatever you may be, I am ever with you."

Jai Ma

Sri Ma's Birthday celebrations are still the most cherished and celebrated function of the devotees. Sri Ma's advent on this earth was in response to our needs and prayers and not to work out any of Her Samskaras. It was exactly in tune with the way we have played the musical instrument, that we heard the music.

Let the Divine Mother out of Her infinite grace and compassion be born in the heart of each one of us, and let us be worthy enough to feel Her infinite grace as a Divine Reality.

Details of Jayanti celebrations in Sri Ma's Divine Presence:

Year Place

1926 At Didi Guripriya Devi's Tikatuhi residence at Dhaka Ma mentioned '19 Baisakh' today and Didi arranged a small puja then and there.

1927 Shah Bagh, Dhaka.

1928 Siddheshwari, Dhaka.

In fact the first anniversary celebrations started from here from solar birth date (19 Baisakh) to Tithi (Krishna Chaturthi) it lasted several days.

Akhanda Kirtana and Japa continued in between. As customary with Ma She used to advise on all matters related to religious practices. 'Akhand Japa, Kirtana and Puja's in between birth date and Tithi continued.

Bholanath did elaborate Shodasoupchar puja on Sri Ma's motionless body covered with flowers, garlands, and new clothes.

This early pattern for the celebrations of Ma's Birthday remained unchanged.

On this occasion Ma was lying on Didi Ma's lap since 10 in the night with a lotus flower in Her hand, which Ma later offered at Didi Ma's feet at the exact time of Her birth. Ma's father Bipin Behari was with the Kirtan singers and Ma put a garland on his neck and touched his feet. During the celebrations an old devotee, Baul Basak, one day decorated Ma with beautiful flower ornaments.

1929 Siddheshwari, Dhaka.

On the last day of the function at dusk Sri Ma with Bholanathji and devotees entered the new Ramna Ashram's thatched hut. On the steps, Ma in Her own Bhava remained sitting, decorated with flower ornaments by Baul Basak.

1930 Ramna Ashram, Dhaka. Ma remained lying at the Panchavati of the Ashram. Devotees arranged for Bhandara (mass feeding). During this Ma did obeisance to all present, saying it is to Narayan.

1931 Ramna Ashram, Dhaka. The worship for Ma was done on the image of Annapurna. One night during celebrations Ma with other ladies chanted God's name without a break. Again the same continued with the more ladies the next night also.

1932 Ramna Ashram, Dhaka. 21 days function Tithi Puja done on Ma Annapurna, with elaborate offerings of more than 108 dishes.

1933 Ma with Bholanathji went to several nearby places of Uttar Kashi. After this function Bholanath sat for his Sadhana at Uttar Kashi after visiting Badri, Kedar, Gangotri and Yamanotri.

- 1934 19 Baisakli, Jakhian Mandir, Tithi Puja was celebrated at Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun.
- 1935 Dhaka, Calcutta and Dehradun.
- 1936 Kishenpur Ashram formally declared open on Baisakh 26 on the Tithi puja day; a yagna too was performed to coincide with Ma's Birthday. During the gap between birthdate and Tithi Ma moved in and around Dehradun.
- 1937 19 Baisakh - Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun Tithi puja - Dhaka.
- 1938 19 Baisakh at Dehradun, Bholanathji passed away on May 6, 1938 (Baisak 23). Ma's anniversary was as usual celebrated at Dhaka and the doors of the inner Kali temple at Ramna Ashram were closed for ever after 12 years
- 1939 19 Baisakh Wednesday 2 May - Dharasu on way to Uttar Kashi at a road side shop (chatti) beside Ganga. Incidentally Didi had not taken anything since morning so she did Puja. It was both Poornima and lunar-eclipse. After the eclipse was over by 10.30. P.M. bhog was offered to Ma. On 5 May Saturday Tithi Puja was performed by Kamlakant. Dusk to dawn Kirtan, and Rudripathi by 11 pandits was performed.
- 1940 Raipur Ashram, Dehradun May 3 to May 19.
- 1941 Raipur Ashram, Dehradun.
- 1942 Raipur Ashram, Dehradun.
- 1943 Almora, on 19 Baisakh Ma was taken to Udaishiankar's dance centre. He displayed Ramlila through shadow play.
- 1944 19 Baisakh Tuesday-Ma was at Barielly station. Ma was to board a train at 5 A.M. from Barielly to Kathgodam and from there to Almora by car. The birth anniversary celebrations were held at the newly built Almora Ashram. At Barielly station on 3rd May Ma started strolling round at 3 O' clock and sat on a dark corner of the platform under a tree. A few of the accompanying girls, Renudi (of Allahabad), Ginidi and a few more were fortunate to witness this rare moment and were given flower garlands by Ma which had been offered to Her. Passers by also took part. The function ended there with the distribution of sweets to all present.
Tithi on 28 Baisakh - Thursday at Almora.
- 1945 19 Baisakhi - Kashi Ashram. Ma was requested to be at Nawadeep but Ma by Her Kheyala said She would stay at Kashi for the first seven days of the function. It so happened that during Her stay, on 7th day, Swami Turiyanand passed away at Kashi Ashram. On 27 Baisakh Thursday Ma started for Nawadeep. On 28 night Ma was at Nawadeep. 10 Thursday Tithi-celebrated at Dhaka. Ma lying at the Panchawati and Pooja was performed by Nepalda.
- 1946 19 Baisakh - Tithi at Calcutta Ashram.
- 1947 19 Baisakh - Tithi at Kashi Ashram; Nepalda did Puja.
- 1948 Delhi.
- 1949 Raipur Ashram, Dehradun.
- 1950 Calcutta-3 days celebration.
- 1951 Punjab and Ambala at the initiative of Swami Krishnanand Avadhootji.
- 1952 Different places in Punjab, finally at Khanna.
- 1953 2 to 31 May. Haridwar-Baghat House later known as Shivalaya with five Shiva temples. Avadhootji arranged for 1000 readings of Chandi (Shahastra Chandi Path). Special floral decoration on Tithi Puja was arranged at the initiative of Avadhootji.

- 1954 2 to 22 May. Almora.
Mataji stayed from 14 April to 27 June.
- 1955 4 to 11 May Solan, Himachal Pradesh.
- 1956 2 to 28 May Diamond Jubilee celebrations at Kashi Ashram. Puja on 2 May was as on Tithipuja day and arranged at Chandi Mandap. Sri Avadhootji had a vision of Ma as Singha vahini (sitting on a lion) so Didi made the throne and the lion weighed 28 Maunds. Flower decorations were especially done by artist from Vrindavan. Ma seated on the steps of the lion-throne especially made for the occasion. But in spite of all entreaties She refused to take Her seat on the throne itself. As a part of the function a Tula-dan was arranged on 24 May. It was unique. Many renowned artists of world fame especially reached Varanasi to give their cultural performances during the function.
- 1957 2 to 16 May Ahmedabad. Jointly celebrated by Kantibhai and Mukundbhai. On 2nd May puja at Mukundbhai's place. Ma suddenly picked up flower garlands and started putting them around the distinguished saints and seers. Then She broke a few garlands and showered the petals on the assembly and exclaimed 'this body does not know the methods to worship' and she rolled on the ground to offer satsang and pranam to everybody.
- 1958 2 to 7 May Agarpara Ashram Calcutta.
- 1959 3 to 26 May Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun.
Ma stayed for about 3 months here.
- 1960 3 to 14 May Vile Parle, Bombay.
- 1961 2 to 4 May 31 George Town, Allahabad -. Ma reached on 22 April 1961 for a Bhagwat Saptah from 23 to 30 April. Both Pandit J.L. Nehru and Indiraji came during celebrations.
- 1962 2 to 22 May Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun.
- 1963 3 to 12 May Calcutta. Here 1008 Swami Santananda Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Jyotirpeeth met Ma.
- 1964 2 to 30 May Almora.
- 1965 2 to 19 May Ranchi.
- 1966 3 to 8 May, Dehradun at Sri M.L. Khaitan's property adjacent to Kalyanvan. Ma stayed in a thatched hut.
- 1967 19 Baisakh. 3 May at Kishenpur Ashram, Dehradun. Ma started on 5 for Kashi and stayed up until 11; Tithipuja on 27 May at Kanpur.
- 1968 Varanasi 19 Baisakh on 3 May - Tithipuja on 15 May.
- 1969 2 to 5 May Vile-Parle Bombay.
- 1970 19 Baisakh. 3 May Bairagarh Bhopal. On May 6 She left for Delhi and stayed for only forty eight hours. May 9 at Vile-Parle, Bombay and stayed for three nights. 18-24 May at Poona-. Jayanti Celebrations.
- 1971 75th Birthday celebrations at Kashi Ashram from 3-14 May. Shiv Shakti Yagna held in between by 20 pandits.
- 1972 23 to 31 May New Delhi Ashram.
- 1973 19 Baisakh Kankhal Ashram. Tithi puja at Uttar Kashi at the request of Swami Vidyanandji Mahraj's Ashram from 14 to 22 May.
- 1974 May 3 to 10 at Andheri Bombay.
- 1975 Agarpara Ashram, Calcutta.

- 1976 May 2-at Naimisharanya Ashram Kankhal. May 10 to 18.
- 1977 2 to 6 May Ram Tirtha Ashram Dehradun.
- 1978 Kankhal Ashram. The main celebration was inaugurated on May 8 by Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth. The image of Adi Shankaracharya was installed in the assembly hall of the ashram. The Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath attended and lead a procession with the statue which was installed on May 12, 1978. From May 19 to 26 Ma's birth anniversary was celebrated at Krishna Niwas Ashram at the invitation of Mahamandaleshwar Swami Poornanand Giri Maharaj.
- 1979 2 to 16 May Bangalore. The main function on May 8 was inaugurated by Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeeth.
- 1980 Kankhal
- 1981 2 to 22 May Kankhal Ashram.
- 1982 3 to 11 May Kankhal Ashram

The Sanyam Vrata inspired by Sri Ma in 1952 is an unparalleled function observed annually, and since then regularly, by Her children. Initially, given the name of Sanyam Vrata Ma Herself suggested that in future it be known as Sanyam Saptah Mahavrata (Vindhyachal November 1953). It is a week-long programme of collective Sadhana for intense spiritual aspiration and rigorous self-discipline. During Sri Ma's physical presence it was observed at different places but now it is observed at Sri Ma's Kankhal Ashram since 1982.

Sessions of the Sanyam Saptah Mahavrata

Venue	Dates -
1. Varanasi	6.8.52
2. Vindhyachal	30.01.53 to 7.2.53
3. Calcutta	14.11.53 to 20.11.53
4. Bombay	18.11.54 to 24.11.54
5. Kali-Bari, New Delhi	22.11.55 to 28.11.55
6. Sapta Rishi Ashram, Haridwar	12.11.56 to 18.11.56
7. Kalkaji Ashram, New Delhi	22.11.57 to 28.11.57
8. Swadeshi House, Kanpur	13.11.58 to 19.11.58
9. Ram Nager, Rishikesh	15.04.59 to 22.04.59
10. Agarpara Ashram, Calcutta	08.11.59 to 14.11.59
11. Naimisharanya	21.10.60 to 27.10.60
12. Suktal	09.11.61 to 13.11.61
13. Pilani	05.11.62 to 11.11.62
14. Ahmedabad	23.11.63 to 29.11.63
15. Vrindavan	12.11.64 to 18.11.64
16. Suraiya, Hazaribagh	01.11.65 to 07.11.65
17. Vrindavan	20.11.66 to 26.11.66
18. Vrindavan	09.11.67 to 15.11.67
19. Dehradun	29.10.68 to 04.11.68
20. Vrindavan	17.11.69 to 23.11.69
21. Suktal	04.11.70 to 10.11.70
22. Vrindavan	26.10.71 to 01.11.71
23. Surat Gri Bangla, Kankhal	13.11.72 to 19.11.72
24. Vrindavan	03.11.73 to 10.11.73
25. Ram Tirtha Ashram, Dehradun	22.11.74 to 28.11.74
26. Swadeshi House, Kanpur	10.11.75 to 17.11.75
27. Hawa Mahal, Gondal	30.10.76 to 06.11.76
28. Badrika Ashram, Chandod Gujarat	18.11.77 to 24.11.77
29. Sant Ram Samadhi Mandir, Nadiad on the invitation of Swami Narain Dasji Maharaj The Shankaracharya of Dwarka Shardapeeth	07.11.78 to 13.11.78

	was an honoured guest.	
30.	Swami Ganeshanandji's Ashram Kurukshetra	28.10.79 to 03.11.80
31.	Kailash Ashram, Rishikesh	15.11.80 to 22.11.80
32.	Kankhal Ashram	04.11.81 to 10.11.81

Glossary

Aanchal	The corner part of a saree.
Abhisheka	Ceremonial bathing of the emblem of a deity in water, milk and many other things.
I	Scriptural head or teacher.
Acharya	Non-dualism. The doctrine that points to the ultimate reality as one and undifferentiated.
Advaita	Primordial energy.
Adyashakti	Uninterrupted repetition of one of the names of God or Ishita Mantra for definite time period. It is usually taken up in turn by group of devotees. The practice is still followed during Sri Ma's Jayanti celebrations from birth date to Tithi.
Akhanda Japa	Bliss, delight, Joy. The Bliss that is beyond happiness and sorrow and is not affected by either.
Ananda	Divine Mother, giver of food both physical and spiritual.
Annapurna	(i) Yogic posture or physical pose. Every posture corresponds to a particular state of mind. Certain poses are intended also for curative purposes.
Asana	(ii) A small mat or carpet used as a seat by each person individually.
Ashram	Hermitage. A place where spiritual aspirants live together under the guidance of a Guru.
Ati Maharudra-Yagna	A great yagna to propitiate Rudra.
Atma or Atman	The true self. Supreme existence or Being that is of the nature of self-awareness and self-delight and behind all manifestations in nature.
Avatara	Divine descent usually in one of the aspects or powers. It is said such Godly descent occurs to protect the moral order of the world
Balgopal	Infant Krishna.

Bhakti	Devotion and love for God.
Bhagirathi	Name of the Ganges.
Bhajana	Religious Songs.
Bhava	Spiritual ecstasy usually emotional in nature. Bhavas usually occur at elevated stages on the path of bhakti.
Bhava-roga	Malady of worldlimindedness.
Bhoga	Food offering to a deity.
Brahmachari	A religious student who devotes himself to spiritual practices and service, and observes strict celibacy.
Brahmamuahart	Predawn time, auspicious for practicing sadhana.
Brahmavidya	Realisation of immediate knowledge of Brahman.
Brajadham	Vrindavan and the surrounding villages, where Sri Krishna is supposed to have lived.
Chakras	Psychic zones in the human system, which represent the fields of different psychic forces and which have to be conquered, purified and sublimated by the yogi in his upward journey to the sphere of Divine Conciousness and Power.
Chaitainya Deva	The great apostle of Vaishnavism born in 1480 A.D. in Bengal, who taught the path of Divine love for the realisation of God. He spent much of his life in a state of God-intoxication and experienced many transcendental moods (bhavas) that also caused certain transformations in his body. He is also known as Lord Gauranga.
Darsana	Sight, vision, one speaks of having darsana of a saint, sage or a deity, which means to be blessed by his sight and presence.
Devi	Goddess.
Dharmasala	Rest house for pilgrims and travellers.
Dhyana	Meditation.
Diksa	Initiation into spiritual life by the grace of Guru, who represents the Divine. During diksa a mantra or a potent name of God is usually communicated to the disciple, who is asked to repeat it regularly in a specific way. This name or Mantra is the representation of the deity (Ista) of the disciple.
Durga	An epithet of Parvati, the Consort of Shiva.
Dvaita	Dualism. The doctrine which holds that the ultimate Reality is not undifferentiated unity.
Faquir	Mohammedan religious mendicat or saint
Gayatri	Sacred mantra of the Rigveda a hymn to the sun.
Ghee	Clarified butter.
Guru	Spiritual guide and teacher - representing the Divine for the disciple. In Hindu religious

	tradition for advancement in Spiritual life one has to take refuge in a Guru who usually gives him initiation by mantra or God's name.
Hari	God, a name of Vishnu who is the sustainer and preserver of the universe. Who is worshipped by Vaishnavas.
Ishta	literally beloved. The chosen deity one worships.
Isvara	The Lord of the universe, the Saguna Brahman.
Japa	Repetition of Mantra or name of God.
Jeevatma	The individual Self.
Kahi	The name of the divine Mother Kali is the destroyer of evil
Kamaldalu	Water vessel used by Sannyasis is made of pumpkin.
Karma	Action, the result of action, as well as the law of cause and effect by which actions inevitably bear their fruit. It originates from the individual self in its ignorance functioning as an active agent. When man realises his own true self Karma ceases for him.
Kheyala	An unexpected sudden psychic emergence, be it desire, will, attention, memory or knowledge. Ma has given the word a much wider meaning; she describes it as incomprehensible acts of the supreme. In Her case it denotes a spontaneous manifestation of the divine will.
Kirtana	The chanting or singing of the names or glories of God. It may be performed singly or by a group of persons to the accompaniment of musical instruments chiefly drums and cymbals. It is meant to be audible to others, so that they may be benefited by listening.
Kriya	Yogic or ritual action.
Lila	Play movements and activities of the Supreme Being that are free by nature and not subject to laws.
Laxmi	The consort of Vishnu. Laxmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity
Mahabhava	The highest type of love and self-dedication to the Divine. A state of deep ecstatic love for the Divine.
Mahalaya	The day of the new moon preceding the festival of Navratri.
Mahastami	One of the main days of Durgapuja.
Mandal	Sketch, circle.
Mandaleshwar	Leader of a group of saints.
Mantra	A series of sounds of great potency It is the sound representation of the Ista Devata. Name and form are inseparable. If therefore, the name is instinct with life, the form that it represents is bound to reveal itself, provided the practice is intensive enough.
Maya	The supreme divine power by which one conceals itself and appears as many.
Mouna	The practice of silence. in kasta Mouna even gestures are not allowed.
Mudra	Particular pose of the body as a whole or part, representing the expression of a particular deva shakti (higher natural force); without that pose that particular Sakti will not work. The performance of these mudras is necessary

to produce necessary changes in the mind or character. In Ma's case these mudras came spontaneously.

Nama Yagna	A special ceremony for continuous singing of Mahamantra or any name of God for 24 hours (Ashtaprahar).
Nandotsava	A ceremony celebrating Sri Krishna's birth.
Namaz	Mohammedan prayer.
Narayan	A name of Vishnu.
Narayan Sila	A Special kind of stone regarded by Hindus as an emblem of Narayana
Ojha	Exorcist of evil spirits.
Padmasana	Lotus pose. One of the meditative yogic postures.
Panchavati	A grove of five sacred trees namely peepal, Ashok, Banyan, bel, amlaki with a platform in the middle. It is supposed to be a sacred place for meditation.
Pandit	One who is learned in sanskrit and in Hindu Scriptures.
Poori	Unleavened loaf fried in clarified butter.
Pranam	Obeisance. A posture of surrender,
Pranava	The mystic syllable 'Om' which is the primal sound representing the supreme spiritual Reality.
Prasada	Food offered to a deity or saint becomes prasada when it has been accepted and thereby blessed. It is then partaken of by the devotees.
Pratima	Image of the deity.
Puja	Ceremonial worship of the Hindus.
Rishis	Seers to whom Mantras are revealed.
Rudra	Lord Shiiiva in His fearful aspect as destroyer.
Sadhaka	One who practises Sadhana.
Sadhana	Spiritual practices.
Sadhu	One who has dedicated his life to spiritual endeavour and is free from worldly entanglements.
Sadhya	The object of Sadhana.
Sakti	Divine energy.
Sakti Mantra	The sound representation of the Goddess of the universe.
Samadhi	A state in which the mind is completely concentrated on its object of contemplation (Savikalpa Samadhi) or ceases to function, and only pure conciousness remains, revealing Itself to Itself (Nirvikalpa Samadhi).
Samskara	Mental dispositions, which act like seeds and have a tendency to germinate into action. These Samskaras are often brought over from previous lives. They are burnt up when the light of supreme knowledge (Jnana) shines forth
Sannyasi	One who has taken Sannyas according to the Hindu system, it is the last stage of life in

which a man has to renounce his family, possessions, caste, position etc and surrender himself to the Divine. Technically it is of two types namely vividisa Sannyas, preceded by a sense of detachment from the world. The other is vidvat Sannyas which is Sannyas par excellence, preceding the dawn of Brahmajnana (Realisation of Brahman).

Sastras	The sacred Hindu scriptures.
Satsanga	Religious congregation.
Shaktas	Who worship Shakti; the Creator.
Siddhi	Realisation.
Sisya	Disciple.
Siva	Literally 'Good'. A form of supreme deity the aspect of the Divine personality that is associated with the dissolution of the universe. It also stands for supreme Being itself. Equally worshipped by shaktas.
Sradha	Rites performed for a departed soul.
Stotra	Hymn in praise of God.
Svarupa	Man's own true self.
Vaisnava	Worshipper of Vishnu.
Vasanti Puja	Durga Puja celebrated in spring.
Vedas	The most ancient scriptures of the Hindus.
Vedanta	Literally, the concluding portion of Vedas, namely the Upanishads, which represent the philosophical part of the Vedic literature. The subject matter of Vedanta is the knowledge of the Supreme.
Yagna	Vedic Fire-Sacrifice.
Yagna Kunda	The pit in which the sacrificial fire is kept.
Yantra	Geometrical diagram of different patterns representing the action and expression of different supernatural forces, and intended as a representation of a particular form of the supreme Divine Power. Every force, every mantra has its corresponding Yantra.

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