

A reading of Sri Ma's palm on 5th February 1937, as recorded in the diaries of Gurupriya Didi, Volume IV, Pages 37-39

Jyotish Dada introduced a gentleman from that house to Ma and said, "He has been to England and is very proficient in astrology." All the people began requesting him to read their palms. The gentleman did pranam to Ma and with her permission began reading her palm. He exclaimed, "I have never seen such a palm in my life before. I must have written out ten or twelve thousand horoscopes – and I have read a countless number of palms, but this *chatuh sagari yoga* that is present in this palm is capable of almost anything at all, I know nothing but I say a little because of my Guru's will. I understand that Ma has the beneficence of four planets and so far only the effect of one planet has begun to manifest. Work worth only a quarter of a rupee has been achieved ; what has been done will be nothing compared to what is going to be done in the coming years. The waters will drown everything and rise still higher."

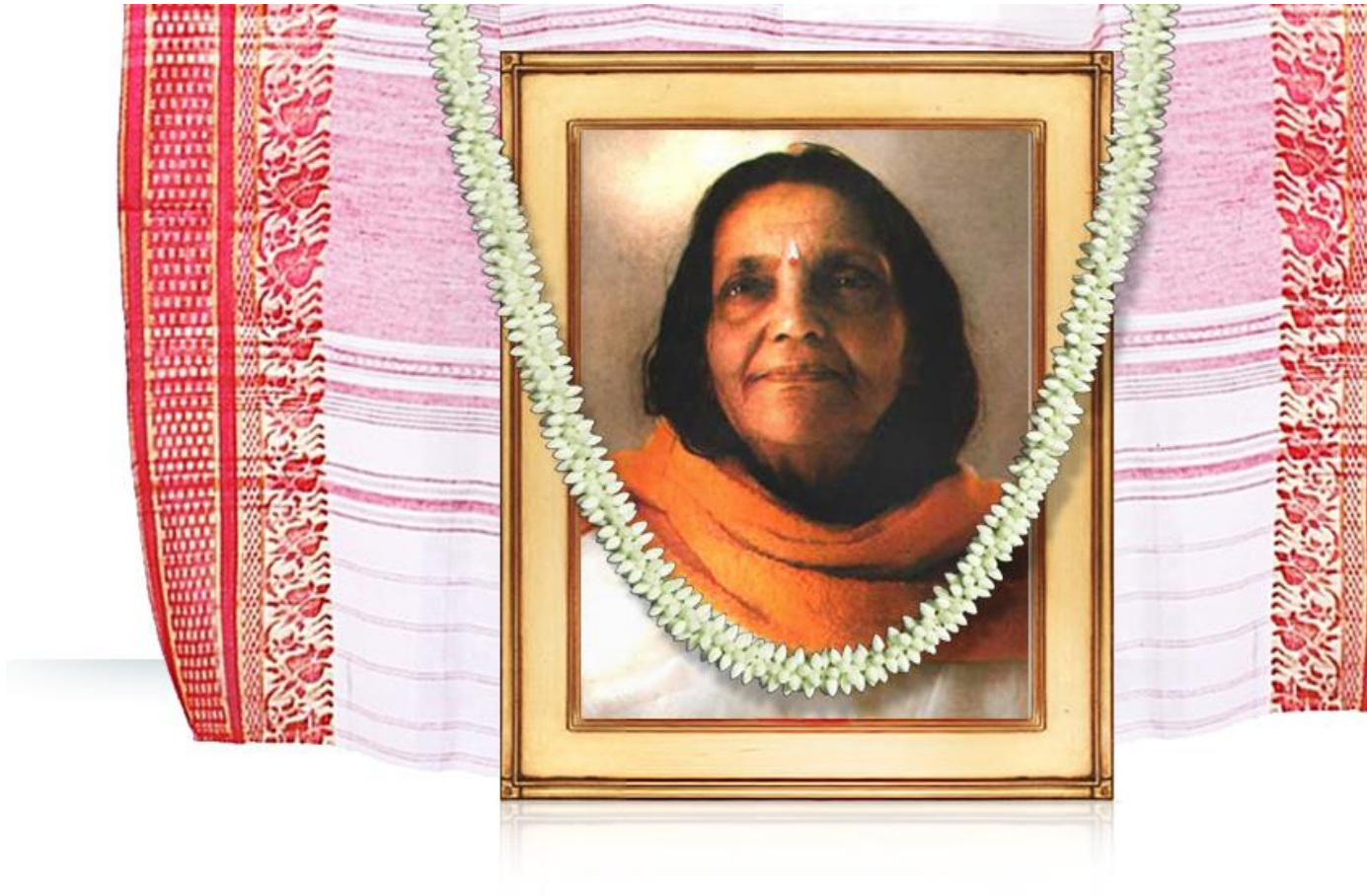
Jyotish Dada questioned, "How do you see Ma's sadhana ? Will it be of any help to the world or not ?" The astrologer replied, "What shall I say of sadhana ? She is beyond it !" Jyotish Dada said, "People say she is a worshipper of Kali." The astrologer, Abinush Babu laughed and declared, "Kali will come and worship her ! And about being helpful to the world, I can only say that even Chaitanya Dev and others had to put some effort to help the world, but in Ma's case, as I see it, even those deeds do not have to be performed. Everything will occur of its own accord which is called 'falling from above', In my life I have seen another hand which appears to match this one. It is the hand of a person who lives near Manasarovar and, as he himself told me, his age is 350 years. But he is a yogi and had to perform yoga to attain his present state. I see that Ma did not have to do even that. I have read about certain markings

in books, but I have never seen them on any human hands. Today I have sighted them on Ma's hand. My Guru has said, 'Whosoever has such markings on his hand is beyond the control of the invisible'.

After making various such comments and after reading the palms of some others, the astrologer spoke about the invisible. He was not like other astrologers and seemed to be enveloped by a strange mood. His readings were quite correct and he mainly disclosed the natures of people. He is one who performs intense spiritual practices. We heard that he took his image of Siva with him when he went to England and worshipped the image every day.

Later he took me aside and said, "Listen, I have never seen Ma before. Yesterday when I sat down to do puja I saw Ma. I have never seen such a phenomenon before. I have also never seen earlier what I saw on Ma's palm. From the lines that I see on her hand I am convinced that she is Brahma Vidya Herself. I have absolutely no doubts on this score. I am only afraid that she may not retain her body for long. I can see the marking of this disaster looming over your heads but I am also anxious about the preservation of Ma's body, therefore I shall also ask Ma about it,"

In fact he did speak privately to Ma about all this and prayed to her to preserve her body. Ma replied, "Whatever has to happen will happen; if you can protect this body then do so. To me everything is fine." Abinash Dabu said, "A disharmony is destroying this body and without changing that it will be difficult to look after this body." On our asking him for a solution he replied, "I shall also go to Ma and say whatever occurs to me at that time. I shall certainly aspire for the protection of Ma's body, but what powers do we have anyway? To speak thus to Ma is blasphemy. Yet I dared to read her hand only with her permission."



Sri Ma Anandamayi today is widely recognized as a personality of great spiritual eminence. She was born in 1896 and she took samadhi at the age of 86 ; these limitations, however, cannot said to have conditioned her utter freedom to be just herself under all circumstances. **She was the embodiment of a joyous self-sufficiency, which enraptured the hearts of all who came near her.**

The mysterious aloofness of her personality was totally beyond human understanding and yet it was so tempered by her compassionate love for all living creatures that she seemed closer than the most indulgent friend ever could be. She was the Teacher whose guidance was sought by the learned as well as the simple, the old and also children, people from alien cultures or from traditional backgrounds.

Although she travelled incessantly, it was seen that she was at home everywhere and no one was a stranger to her. Throughout the length and breadth of India and also beyond its shores people found her to be, as if the personification of their own inner vision of the Adored one who is most dear to their hearts.

In Dhaka where she first gained recognition, She was known as “Manush Kali”, that is, the ‘living Kali’. Kali is the presiding Deity of Bengal so that was quite understandable. When she moved out of Bengal and visited other provinces, her presence elicited the same type of response, even at her first appearance. On the shores of the Holy Narmada, she was greeted as “Devi Narmada”. In Madurai she

was hailed as the Goddess Minakshi by surging crowds who waited hours for a glimpse of her. In the Punjab she was given the same place of honour as the Holy Granth Sahab. In Vrindavan, the much-respected Mahatma, Sri Haribabaji Maharaj saw in her his adored Deity, the Lord Gauranga. The Sindhi devotees of Sri Udiyababaji Maharaj paid her homage as the visible Form of their Deity Jhoolelal. One Muslim devotee used to see a vision of her with a Taj on her head during his meditations. A Christian devotee remarked quite spontaneously “Now we have a Face to put on God”. The simple highland women of Almora would say to her, “Now that we have you with us, we do not need to visit the Temple”

One visitor, an Irish journalist frankly asked her, “Am I right to believe that you are God?” Sri Ma answered, “There is nothing save He alone; everyone and everything is but a form of God. In your person also He has come here to give darshana”. He persisted, “Why are you in this world?” “In this world?” Sri Ma answered, “I am not anywhere. I am myself reposing within myself”. During the same conversation the Irishman said, “I am a Christian:” Sri Ma answered, “So am I, a Christian, a Muslim, anything you like”.

In general Sri Ma’s inimitable smile disarmed all questions regarding her identity. She once answered a devotee’s query in these words: “What a childish question to ask; People have various visions of gods and goddesses (in me) according to their own predilections. What I was before, I am now, and shall be hereafter. I am also whatever you or anybody may think I am; why don’t you look at it this way: the yearnings (of seekers after Truth) have brought about this body. All of you have wanted it and so you have found it. That is all you need to know.”

Richard Lannoy, a devotee of many years standing has summarised Sri Ma’s ways of being with us in a very telling phrase: “Yet there is a strangeness, a particularity, an indefinable quality which comes so near the limits of the definably human as to make an adjective like ‘human’ quite inadequate when applied to Her case, and ‘divine’ paltry. It is widely accepted that She was, simply, unique. She was, throughout Her life, the acme of effortless perfection”.

Sri Ma Anandamayi was born in a small village called Kheora, in what is now Bangladesh, on April 30, 1896. She was born into a pious, prestigious but non-affluent brahmin household. Her given name was Nirmala Sundari Devi. It is translated as ‘Immaculate Beauty’ which seemed appropriate as the infant grew up to be a lovely child.

Little Nirmala, a blithe and happy child spent her childhood in agreeable village surroundings. She was a favourite with everyone – ready to fetch and carry and to render whatever service she was capable of to anyone who asked for it. The entire village, consisting mainly of Muslim families, extended to her a love and affection which has endured through the years. Even now the Muslim population of Kheora refer to her as “Our own Ma.”

Sri Ma's father was a devout Vaishnava. He was well known for his beautiful rendering of devotional songs; his melodious voice never failed to touch the hearts of his audience. In fact he was sometimes compared to Ramprasad, the saintly bard of Bengal who it is believed had invoked the presence of Shakti by his inspired singing. Sri Ma's mother was a gentle woman of upright nature totally dedicated to the welfare of her family. That she was not just like countless such others became evident as the years went by. Many will remember her as the ochre-robed Swami Muktananda Giri who accompanied Sri Ma on her travels.



Sri Ma with her parents, Bipinbihari Bhattacharya and Mokshada Sundari Devi.



Sri Ma with her husband, Ramani Mohan Chakrabarti of Vikramapura, whom she would later rename Bholanath.

Sri Ma was barely thirteen when she was married to Sri Ramani Mohan Chakravarty of Atpara. Their family had a tradition of Shakti-upasana. As a child-bride Sri Ma was received into the family of Ramani Mohan's eldest brother Sri Revati Mohan and his wife Pramoda Devi. She remained with them for nearly four years while Ramani Mohan was in Atpara and in Dhaka. From a carefree childhood in her parents' home she was catapulted into a demanding situation of considerable physical hard work in an atmosphere of restrictive discipline. She cooked, cleaned, fetched water, took care of the children and served her sister-in-law in every way possible. Hard work is the lot of village women not only in India but all over the world. What sets Sri Ma apart from all such girls placed in similar situations is the fact of her total adequacy and a little extra, as it were. She remained uniformly cheerful, good-humoured, and more than willing to shoulder other people's burdens. Nothing was a chore to her. Her serene and equable temper was never disrupted by thoughtlessness or unfair treatment at the hands of the elders.

Actually Sri Ma's untroubled happy disposition caused her new family some anxiety; it could only mean a simple mind. In her childhood also she had invoked this fear in her parents' thoughts – perhaps the little girl was just a little below par, not to be at all mischievous and naughty like other children? It took many years for Sri Ma's close companions to realize that she was ever established in her often repeated Vani: jo ho jaye: 'Whatever comes to pass, let it be'.

It took time for discerning people to understand that Sri Ma was obedient but not biddable or suggestible. Her boundless compassion overflowed in concern for whoever came within the orbit of her ministrations: family, neighbours, servants as well as animals and plants felt the magic touch of this innate interest in their welfare. She also had a very ready and impish sense of humour which always took note of the foibles of her companions and gave her and perhaps a friend, much quiet enjoyment but being without malice she never made fun of anyone. She always had the aura of perfectibility all around her but somehow it never overwhelmed her companions. On the contrary; by her gentle ways and ready smile she endeared herself to everyone who came in touch with her.

At the age of 18, Sri Ma by the mutual consent of both families came to Ashtagram to stay with her husband at his place of work. In later years Sri Ma used to refer to her husband by the name 'Bholanath' so we shall use this title for him in this account. At the time of her coming to Ashtagram her mother had told her that she should give the same respect and obedience to her husband as she had given to her father. It has been noted that throughout her life Sri Ma was very mindful of her mother's gentle behests. Bholanathji met with a friendly but deferential treatment, which was very endearing. The mantle of a responsible guardian in charge of a precious treasure descended on his shoulders as it were. It may be stated at once that he wore this mantle with circumspection and competence all his life, till his death in 1938.



Sri Ma always had the aura of perfectibility all around her but somehow it never overwhelmed her companions. On the contrary; by her gentle ways and ready smile she endeared herself to everyone who came in touch with her.

Much has been written regarding the purity and perfect celibacy of Sri Ma and Bholanathji's married life. These words are rather inadequate because it would be much better to say that such questions never arose where they were concerned. Bholanathji obviously bore the impact of a beautiful young wife who was ready to obey his slightest bidding with an exemplary calmness of spirit. Their neighbours and close friends do not report that he was not perfectly contented as he was.

Bajitpur: From Ashtagram, Bholanathji came to Bajitpur on a transfer.

The township of Bajitpur has acquired special significance for the devotees of Sri Ma as the place where she went through the various processes of intensive sadhana. How this came about may be best related in her own words; "One day in Bajitpur I had as usual gone to the pond near the house where we lived, for my daily bath. While pouring the water over my head, the kheyala came to me, 'how would it be to play the role of a Sadhaka? And so the lila began" These two words used so constantly with reference to Sri Ma, perhaps need to be explained a little. Kheyala may be best explained by the words 'a spontaneous thought', distinct from an act of will or a wish for some desired end. It generally came into being perhaps taking shape out of the needs of her companions.



Sri Ma lived the life of a pilgrim on the path of spiritual endeavour for nearly six years; during this time she initiated herself and proceeded thereafter in a more systematic manner. Bholanathji realized that he was in the presence of a very special embodiment of Divine Power

Once expressed it was seen that a concatenation of events led to its fulfillment. Sometime kheyala could be invoked by repeated requests or deflected also. Sri Ma seemed equally agreeable toward any of the results accruing from her kheyala. Lila could be translated as “sportive play” -an activity, which is an end in itself. With Sri Ma, Kheyala was simultaneous with spontaneous action in relation to it. In the evening she again swept out her room and its precincts. She lit incense and made a circumambulation round the cottage with the burner in her hand. She took care of Bholanathji’s needs on his return from work. Even to the detail of preparing a hookka for his after-dinner smoke. After Bholanathji had settled down, she asked his permission to engage in a little sadhana. This, he readily granted. So Sri Ma sat on the floor in a corner of their room and orally began to repeat the word ‘Hari, Hari, Hari’ . . . , for no better reason than that she had learnt to sing this Name from her father in her childhood. Bholanathji saw her becoming gradually absorbed in a world of inner joy. After a few days of this routine, he saw her assuming some yogic postures or asanas. The first of these was probably the siddhasana. Bholanathji knew of course that she had no previous knowledge of Yoga or Yogic asanas; they were happening to her. He said one day, “Why do you say ‘Hari’? We are not Vaishnavas”. Sri Ma asked, “Shall I then say Siva, Siva?” Bholanathji was satisfied. The change of Name had no effect on the kriyas of sadhana.

Sri Ma has said that she contemplated no visual forms when she repeated the words. The sound was all in all. The syllables were like the resonance being struck off an all-pervasive beat. Her body was as if in tune with the universal rhythm of that power, which underpins all that exists. Her body became as if an instrument for the play of this cosmic music. She seemed to become one with the sound of the letters that she uttered; her limbs, her entire body moved rhythmically as if in vibrant dance-forms of an extraordinary choreography directed by an inner Power. Sometimes she lay for many hours absolutely still and totally absorbed in an inner bliss. At such times her body emanated a radiance which was visible to onlookers, Bholanathji watched her enthralled never doubting the genuineness of the manifestations; he was able to brush aside adverse comments from some of the neighbours who failed to understand that they were witnessing the unfolding of the magnetic personality of Sri Ma who had the kheyala to reveal herself in the role of a sadhaka.

Sri Ma lived the life of a pilgrim on the path of spiritual endeavour for nearly six years; during this time she initiated herself and proceeded thereafter in a more systematic manner. Bholanathji realized that he was in the presence of a very special embodiment of Divine Power. He himself accepted the much-coveted initiation from Sri Ma within the first year of this manifestation. Thereafter their relationship acquired a new dimension – that of Guru and disciple, although Sri Ma never changed in her attitude of complete obedience and deference to Bholanathji's wishes.

Referring to this period of her life, Sri Ma has said, "Sadhanas by which man endeavours to attain self-realization are of endless variety, and each variety has innumerable aspects. All these revealed themselves to me as a part of myself". In later years she had occasion to talk about her experiences in select gatherings of ascetics, scholars or other seekers of Truth. The pandits have marvelled at her knowledge of all tenets of faith, in all their doctrinal details. Sri Ma has said that even so she has not talked about one thousandth part of all that was revealed to her during her years of intensive sadhana. Sometime in 1922 she became maunam that is silent. This silence came as a mark of the fulfillment of sadhana. After the period of maunam, she began to converse with visitors on religious topics.

From Bajitpur Sri Ma and Bholanath came to Dhaka on April 10, 1924. Bholanath became the Manager of the Shahbagh Gardens, a part of the Estates of the Nawabzadi Pyari Bano. Many of the people who had known them in Ashtagram and Bajitpur had relations in Dhaka. The rumour gained ground that the young housewife in the Shahbagh Gardens was gifted with great spiritual powers. Visitors came out of curiosity and stayed to become life-long devotees.

In accordance with the orthodox customs of those times Sri Ma kept herself veiled in public. If Bholanathji asked her to speak to anyone, she would do so but not otherwise. Women, of course, were always free to visit and soon there was a crowd round her. The men continued to be at a disadvantage

because they were mindful of public opinion, but here Bholanathji played an important role. Soon he began to be looked up to as Baba Bholanath, a person commanding respect in his own right. Under his aegis, the swelling crowds assumed the shape of an ever increasing but close-knit family.

Among the early devotees were **Sri Jyotish Chandra Rai**, who came to be known as Bhaiji in this circle; **Sri Shashanka Mohan Mukherji (later Swami Akhandanandaji)** and his daughter Adorini Devi, known to all devotees as **Gurupriya Devi or Didi**. Sri Nishikanta Mitra, Sri Pran Gopal Mukherjee, Sri Niranjan Rai, Sri Baul Chandra Basak (Bholanathji's life long friend) and many many others.

Sri Ma's parents were invited by **Bholanath** to come and stay at Shahbagh. They came to be known as **Didima (Mother's Mother)** and **Dadamashai (mother's father)**.

From them, the devotees of Dhaka heard about Sri Ma's childhood days. Bholanathji's sisters and brothers with their families also came together in Dhaka after many years. One sister remarked "After our father's death we had become rather scattered; now Badhuthakurani (a term of endearment for a brother's wife) is making it possible for us to come together as a family again".

In Dhaka, Sri Ma lived amidst an atmosphere of the miraculous. Her healing touch was sought by strangers from far and near. She was seen in ecstatic states of samadhi and mahabhava during kirtans. An eyewitness account of a mahabhava on the occasion of a kirtan is described in these words: "At one moment Sri Ma was sitting like one of us. The next moment she had changed completely. Her body was swaying rhythmically. Her sari's border fell back from over her head. Her eyes were closed and the entire body swayed to the rhythm of the kirtana. With her body still swaying, she stood up or rather was, as if drawn upwards on her foot. It looked as if Sri Ma had left her body, which had become an instrument in the hands of an invisible power. It was obvious to all of us that there was no will motivating her actions. Sri Ma was evidently quite oblivious of her surroundings. She circled round the room as if wafted along by the wind. Occasionally, her body would start falling to the ground, but before it completed the movement it would regain its upright position, just like a wind-blown leaf which flutters toward the ground and then is uplifted and blown forward by a fresh gust of wind."

Sri Ma moved in this manner with the kirtan party for a few moments. After such bhavas she would lie in a samadhi for many hours. It was always Bholanathji who decided when to try and rouse her. She had this kheyala of obeying him, so when he called her repeatedly, she would somehow open her eyes and say, "You want me to get up?" in lisping and slurred tones. At this time he would ask the women to rub her hands and feet gently and keep talking to her and make her answer some questions. In this way slowly Sri Ma would be drawn back to the ordinary world. Didi Gurupriya writes in wonder "It amazed me that Sri Ma so naturally entered into a state of God-intoxication, a state which is coveted by

sadhakas of all time. No, not God-intoxication, her state could not be called that, I do not know how to describe a state which was at once sublime and yet normal”.

This interplay of the dimensions of normalcy and transcendence was a constant and inalienable feature of Sri Ma’s behaviour. Sometimes it was likened to a sudden play of lightning in the skies. One description is, “It was like simultaneously experiencing sunlight and moonlight. Before one could be dazzled and overwhelmed by the rays of the sun, one would be soothed and reassured by the gentle moonbeams”.

These states were frequent and visible to all at this time but they had happened in her childhood and while she was with Revati Mohan’s family as well. They had not been understood by her companions of those times and been dismissed as some mild kind of fits which would pass away as she grew older. Sri Ma’s overall deportment was so radiant and cheerful that it was easy to discount a few signs of sudden withdrawals into an inner world of mystery.



The halcyon days of happy gatherings round Sri Ma were rather short lived. Sri Ma set out on her travels in 1927. Baba Bholanath liked to visit places of pilgrimage. They travelled quite extensively. The devotees of Dhaka gradually got accustomed to Sri Ma’s frequent absences. It became clear that Sri Ma had the kheyala to leave Dhaka. The devotees had built a small Ashram for her but Sri Ma’s kheyala to move out proved too strong. **Accompanied by Bholanath and Bhaiji Sri Ma left Dhaka on June 2, 1932.**

Travelling in a haphazard way she happened to arrive at Dehradun. From here they found their way to Raipur a remote village in the interior. They took up their abode in the dilapidated Siva Temple a little way from the village. This was the beginning of a new way of life for two of them. Bholanathji devoted himself to his sadhana wholeheartedly. Bhaiji tried his hand at rendering such services, which so far he had received from his own servants. To sweep and clean, wash clothes, cook primitive kind of food was

hard work for him. Sometimes Sri Ma helped him out but in general she wandered around alone or sat surrounded by the village women.

When she returned to Dehradun she and Bhaiji stayed at the Manohar Temple in Ananda Chowk. Bholanathji spent almost 3 years in Uttarkashi in doing his own tapasya; In Dehradun she came in touch with all the Kashmiri families who resided nearby. Sri Hari Ram Joshi became a devotee and a great admirer of Bhaiji. He was a man of strong convictions; moreover he had the courage of his convictions. Having given his allegiance to Sri Ma, he tried his best to bring all his friends to her feet. He was instrumental in introducing Smt. Kamala Nehru to Sri Ma. This proved to be a meeting which led to other ties being forged with other people from far and near. **Smt. Kamala Nehru's one-pointed devotion to Sri Ma was remarkable in its depth and strength.** She carried her memories to Switzerland and so influenced some of her friends, that they came to India to see Sri Ma. **Mahatma Gandhi came to know a lot about Sri Ma from Kamalaji.** He was so impressed by all that he heard that he sent his trusted right-hand man Sri Jammalal Bajaj to Sri Ma. He in his turn became so dedicated a devotee that Sri Ma had the kheyala to travel to Wardha after his unexpected death and so met Gandhiji himself. **In later years Sri Jawaharlal Nehru and Indiraji came to Sri Ma drawn to her inevitably by their memories of the last days of Kamalaji.**

The Raja Sahab of Solon, met Sri Ma around this time. He became one of the foremost devotees and was known to all as Jogibhai. Dehra Dun became another Dhaka. The tradition of joyous gatherings spread to other towns such as Delhi, Meerut, Lucknow, Solon and Simla. At Simla the festival of Hari-kirtan under the aegis of the Hari Sabha received a new lease of life in Sri Ma's presence and by Bholanathji's enthusiastic participation. Bholanathji had rejoined Sri Ma on coming down from Uttarkashi. He had been introduced to the new devotees and accepted whole-heartedly as Pitaji (father). The swelling tides of the happy crowd unknown to themselves were facing two crises : **Bhaiji passed away in Almora in August 1937 and Bholanathji himself left his sorrowing family of devotees in May 1938 in Kishenpur Ashram.** The passing away of Bholanathji resulted in a new understanding of Sri Ma and her ways. Sri Ma had been a very devoted wife and she had tirelessly rendered personal service to him whenever he had been ill. During his last illness she was constantly at his bedside. He died with her hand on his head and breathing the word ananda. It was felt that he was giving expression to his own state of an ananda and peace.

Most of the devotees had thought that Sri Ma would be distraught but they were amazed to see that there were no signs of grief. She remained as serene as always. She noted their reaction and said gently, **“Do you start to wail and cry if a person goes to another room in the house? This death is inevitably connected with this life. In the sphere of Immortality, where is the question of death and loss? Nobody is lost to me”.**

Sri Ma's followers began to understand a little of the meaning of her total detachment and yet an overflowing compassion for her people. As the years passed the enigma of her personality deepened; from the very moment of her birth she had been fully self-conscious; she was not a sadhika, yet the stages of various sadhanas were revealed through her body and reached their culmination without her being engaged as a doer, in a very short time span. This might have taken aeons for an ordinary sadhak, even for a single path of sadhana. She was not a teacher yet people learned from her lucid explanations of various complex spiritual queries put forward even by erudite scholars and contemporary authorities on those subjects.

She seemed fully aware of all doctrinal differences, never confusing one with the other in her conversations with the learned pandits; yet she had not been initiated into any particular religious order or trained by any yogic instructor. She had not encountered any Guru who could have exerted any influence on her life. In fact she had never retired from the world to become a recluse, neither did she withdraw herself from her kith and kin. She had not performed sadhana as it is generally understood in the tradition, yet she could speak with authority on all aspects of the life of a religious quest for enlightenment. **Such are the facts why the word 'unique' is applied for describing her.**

Sri Ma continued to move around in her own style of unstructured itineraries but she did not always choose her companions. It was a motley crowd which surrounded her. Many times it so happened that many in her entourage did not speak the same language. People from different provinces, different walks of life, mingled together in happy throngs. It was experienced that Sri Ma would accept invitations for religious functions. So the devotees would arrange for Bhagavat Saptah, Durga Puja, Chandipath etc. in their towns. They would pray for her presence at these functions. Wherever Sri Ma stayed, it immediately became the centre for a gathering of thousands. Sri Ma in her compassionate regard for the organisers moved out as soon as things began to get out of hand. There was no central management in Sri Ma's vicinity; whoever was able, took charge for as long as he could. Matters arranged themselves as it were. It is difficult to describe the sheer impromptu nature of management, which took place near Sri Ma. Unless one has experienced it for oneself, it is not possible to credit the utter fortuitous nature of a concurrence of events which seemed to fulfil Sri Ma's kheyala regarding her travels, companions or at times her places of retreat. In all the major cities, Sri Ma visited frequently, the devotees got together to construct one Ashram after another but it did not serve the purpose of restricting her movements or providing her with some comforts while she stayed in one place because as often as not she would not visit the Ashram at all but go some place else.

In 1940 Sri Ma came in close touch with Sri Prabhu Dattaji Maharaj of Jhunsi, a Mahatma of considerable renown. He invited her to join in their council of sadhus at Jhunsi in 1944. Here other Mahatmas came to know her, notably **Sri Haribabaji Maharaj**, Sri Chakrapaniji and Sri Sharananandaji. So far the Sadhu Samaj had avoided her because she happened to be in the form of a

woman. Sri Prabhu Dattaji broke down this artificial barrier. Thereafter **Haribabaji Maharaj** gave her the highest honour possible. The heads of other Monastic Orders recognized in her the quintessence of the Upanishadic tradition and accepted her word as Shastra itself.

At Sri Ma's kheyala a great Savitri Yajna was started at Varanasi in the newly built Ashram on January 14, 1947. The samkalpa was for "The Good of Mankind".

There was great tension in the country just before Independence in August of the same year. Notwithstanding all these negative factors the Yajna proceeded unhindered and came to a spectacular conclusion on January 14, 1950. A great concourse of renowned Mahatmas graced the occasion. It was attended by princes, artists of repute, political personalities, and the ordinary mass of people. In Sri Ma's presence all functions take on an extra-ordinary glamour. This yajna solemn and grand in itself was overwhelming in its impact on the participants.

The most attractive function under Sri Ma's aegis turned out to be the **Samyam Saptah. Sri Ma very often spoke on the importance of observing restraints in one's way of life at least once a month if not once a week. Sri Jogibhai, the President of the Sri Anandamayi Sangha suggested that a Saptah of samyam be arranged in Sri Ma's vicinity so that all devotees could assemble for this purpose. The first such saptah was organised in Varanasi Ashram in 1952.**

The participants would observe total fast on the first and last days.

In between a menu of very simple meals once a day was drawn up by Sri Ma herself. Under her guidance the programme for the whole day was sketched like this. After personal daily puja etc., all participants would gather in the Central Hall for listening to scriptural discourses, kirtans and meditation. Doors would be closed so that there would be no disturbances. After a short break during the afternoon for food and a little rest, the Vratis (participants) would assemble for the evening session and so on.

The popularity of this function was phenomenal. The whole Ashram geared up to it. Mahatmas came from far and near. People heard learned lectures from orators whom they would never have had occasion to hear in the ordinary course. They heard rare scriptures and listened to good music. The best part of the day was at 9.30 P.M. when Sri Ma answered questions from the audience. The whole day passed by like a flash in looking forward to this half hour of matri satsang. The participants were amazed that they could live like ascetics for a week so effortlessly.

The best way to understand Sri Ma is not to compare her with any of the luminaries in our spiritual skies. The recognition that she gained in her own lifetime was just by her presence. This is what Swami Chinmayananda said about her in Bangalore (June 1978) 'When the sun shines nobody needs to demonstrate the sunshine'. The harmony of opposites was the underlying theme of her way of life. Amidst the splendour and magnificence which seemed inevitable wherever she was, she lived like an

ascetic. Throughout her life she was a very small eater. Apart from the months of abstention from food, which happened periodically, she followed other rigourisms. For many years she used to eat on alternate days. **When remonstrated with Sri Ma would say, “It is not necessary to eat at all to preserve the body. I eat only because a semblance of normal behaviour must be kept up so that you should not feel uncomfortable with me.”** The intake of food was not related to any of her illnesses. Actually she was in perfect health when she was not eating anything. Illnesses came and went following a rhythm of their own.

In her time she met with nearly all the political dignitaries who rose to power after Independence. They did not talk about state affairs with her. She only spoke about God and the religious aspirations of man.

Some devotees in praise of her all-encompassing message sometimes say that she welcomed all faiths as true paths to God. This could be an understatement. The fact was that Sri Ma saw no differences which had to be cemented; to her, indeed, everything was the One only. The same may be said about her treatment of women. She recognised no inferiority or superiority. She demanded (if such a word can be used for her) the same high quality of asceticism from the brahmacharis as well as brahmacharinis of the Ashram. **Purity of speech, action and thoughts was ever the ideal, which she set forth for all travellers on the path of God-realization.**

Sri Ma when speaking with modern young people, showed herself to be fully aware of the trends of the times; even so, her interlocutors could never make her accede to their demands for compromises. She with great humour and understanding could always bring them around to accepting her request to begin the search for Him who is hidden in the cave of the heart.

It could be said that for all devotees, the following text expresses their sentiments regarding Sri Ma : bhidyatehrdayagranthicsahhidyanthe sarvasainsayah kshiyante casya karmani tasmin drste paravare

The knot of the heart is penetrated, all doubts are resolved All bondages are destroyed on seeing Him who is here and beyond. Mundakopanisad 11.2.8

In retrospect it now seems that Sri Ma started the process of withdrawing herself much ahead of time. She became increasingly unavailable because it was said she was not well. All her devotees know that illness happened to her because it was not her kheyala to deny them access to her. Many times she had said, “Why do you feel so antagonistic to illnesses? They also come to this body like you do. Do I tell you to go away?” Acceding to the prayers of her companions Sri Ma had been seen many times, also, to perform certain Yogic kriyas to get rid of her ailments. In the late seventies and in 1981 she did not have kheyala to respond to any kind of prayers for her recovery. She went about fulfilling her various engagements. She did not look ill but as beautiful and serene as ever; but definitely the mass of devotees got used to the idea of not getting her darshana as easily as always. For all practical purposes

she had withdrawn herself from public audiences apart from a few exceptions. Her last kheyala seemed to have been for the performance of the ati Rudra Yajna at Kankhal. This was the greatest of the Vedic Yajnas. Under Sri Ma's Guidance it was celebrated with such splendour and scrupulous adherence to every detail of scriptural injunctions that the Savants said Sri Ma had initiated the Satya Yuga in the front Age of Kali.

In the last days Sri Ma was serene but uncharacteristically seemed to be removing herself beyond the prayers of people around her. Ordinarily she always gave the greatest heed to the words of the Mahatmas, but now to all prayers for her own recovery, she would smile and say, "There is no kheyala" .

Sri Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Shringeri, Sarada Peetham, wanted to invite her to Shringeri on the occasion of the Annual Durga Puja and urged that she should get rid of her illness speedily. She replied in her usual gentle tones, "This body has no illness, Pitaji. It is being recalled toward the Unmanifest. Whatever you see happening now is conducive toward that event". At the moment of bidding him farewell next day (July 2nd) she again reiterated her inability to accede to his wishes, saying "**As the Atma, I shall ever abide with you**".

Sri Ma, in other ways weaned her devotees from her physical presence. She did not answer letters but the correspondents felt her presence in their hearts and their questions answered. She did not attend any of the functions, which were being performed with the usual circumspection at their proper times in the Ashram. She had stopped taking food for many months. The attending girls could give her a few drops of water only at odd moments.

Sri Ma spent her last days at Kishenpur Ashram. She made no farewells apart from saying "Sivaya namah" on the night of the 25th; this mantra is indicative of the final dissolution of worldly bondages. She became Unmanifest on Friday evening of August 27th, 1982 around 8 P.M. Kankhal at the foothill of the Himalayas is holy land. All monastic orders have their Head Quarters at Hardwar.

By a consensus of opinion the entire body of the Mahatmas came together to assume charge of Sri Ma's physical remains. The highest honour was given to her; a procession of thousands escorted the vehicle carrying her body from Dehra Dun to Kankhal. The Mahanirvani Akhadha arranged for the last rites of Samadhi. As Sri Ma had said she did belong to everybody and so everybody participated in bidding farewell to the human body which had sustained their beloved Ma for 86 years. Sri Ma came at a time when India as well as the world passed through many crises. She remained as one of the people, throughout it, imparting hope and solace and upholding the age old ideals of our tradition through overwhelming impacts of alien influences. She fully understood the existential implications of the present age of technology and by her way of being in the world put it in a correct perspective for those

who wished to see beyond it. That God is as much present in the world given over to scientific research as in the age of mythology we may say is the “Message” conveyed by her sojourn on earth.

We think the soil of Bharatvarsha is holy. Once in a while we see in India, not merely a teacher, or just a saint but an exemplar of the way of life which is the quintessence of her spirit. India cherishes a coming together of heaven and earth, a commingling of the timeless order and the order of time; a meeting of horizons of the eternal yearning in man and the descent of Grace. Once in a while such a dream is realized. We find a Teacher, a Jagadguru, who not only awakens the longing for the quest for Truth but enkindles and sustains faith in its ultimate fulfillment.

**Sri Ma will ever remain with us in the form of her immortal words, the dearest of which are, “Ma is (I am) here, what is there to worry about?”
(Ma Achen, kiser cinta?)**

From “In Your Heart – Is My Abode, Life and teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi,” by Bithika Mukerji

Sri Ma's Nature

**“I always play
with you people.”**

First She said: “When I come out, everyone can come to Me, especially all of you foreigners. **I always play with you people. I keep on playing with everybody. I can play with you any way I like.**“

Then the words which had confused and left me wanting were correctly translated by Rameshji.

She had said: If you have anything left out, which you have not given to me, then you have that (or can go that way). **Otherwise you are completely mine.**“

The answers to the many questions that are put to Her come not as the result of deliberate thought but as a spontaneous pouring forth of an intuitive understanding.

“Why does not the Mother answer to the cry of Her children?” She was once asked.

Immediately without a moment's deliberation, rang Her voice – “Pitaji, Pitaji”. There was no response to Her call.

Once more She called and someone stood up in the hall and responded. She laughed and She laughs with the whole of Her being, and triumphantly said –

“You did not answer, because you thought I was not serious in calling you. But you answered when you realized that I was calling you. Likewise the great Mother knows when Her children are at play and when they really need Her.

They call Her often without really wanting Her.

But when they fall and, are hurt and cry for Her help, She answers immediately.”

One is reminded of Christ's teaching – “Ask and 'it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” But this asking, seeking and knocking must be genuine, must out of the depths of our being; only when there is this integral demand, will there be an appropriate answer.

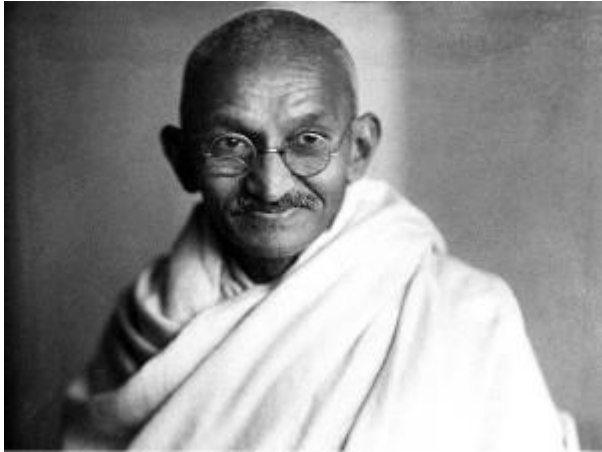
Q. Ma, we feel it awfully boring to have such a crowd pestering us with tales of their domestic troubles and worries.

A. Because you feel that your own body and theirs are distinctly separate. As you do not feel the weight of your head, of hands and feet, of so many fingers and toes, of legs and thighs, to be a burden nor a heavy load upon yourself because you feel they are but vital parts of your own body, so do I feel that these persons are all organic members of THIS BODY; So I don't feel their pressure nor find their worries weighing upon me.. Their joys and sorrows, problems and their solutions, I feel to be vitally mine. Their acts and awards, too, are essentially mine. I have no ego-sense nor conception of separateness.

Each one of you have the “height and depth of eternity” in me equally.

These experiences of Mother, quoted above, find their echoes in these lines: – (Hindi):

“How wonderful; In Me, the shoreless expanse of My Being, the ripples individual Selves rise, strike each other down, play about for some time and then finally merge themselves into Me according to their nature.”



Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the preeminent leader of the movement for independence in British-ruled India. Also known as Mahatma Gandhi, Bapu, Gandhiji, his major contribution was the philosophy of Satyagraha, Ahimsa or non-violence, and pacifism. He has an ashram at Sevagram, Gujarat

Mataji with all of us left for Sevagram to meet Bapuji. Bapuji thus met Mataji for the first time. My feeling was that in his great eagerness to win Swaraj by following the path of truth and non-violence in his own way, Gandhiji was too concentrated on his aim to recognize fully Mataji's Divine Nature during Her short stay of about eight hours in Sevagram.

He was certainly immensely attracted by Mataji's radiant personality. But it seems, due to the peculiar circumstances of this meeting at an odd hour and without previous intimation, he could not find leisure to talk to Mataji in private, although this was the cherished desire of his great disciple, Seth Jammalal Bajaj. This was all Mataji's own Lila .

As soon as Mataji entered Bapuji's room where he was plying his charkha, (spinning-wheel) She called out loudly: **“Pitaji, your pagal bachhi (crazy daughter) has come to see you!**

Bapuji remarked laughingly that if She really were a pagal bachhi, She could not possibly have impressed men like Bhayyaji, whom Bapuji was unable to give inner peace, in spite of his best efforts during thirty years of close association with him. Bapuji also told Mataji that he himself had asked Bhayyaji to meet Her, the Guru of Kamla Nehru. Mataji at once emphatically declared that She was neither Kamla Nehru's nor in fact anybody's Guru. Bhayyaji had been so much attracted by the Divine Personality of Mataji that he had repeatedly written to Bapuji from Dehradun for permission to stay with Her for longer periods. Bapuji consented as he felt that Mataji's presence was helping Bhayyaji to get peace of mind.

Bapuji now told Mataji that a mad child could not possibly give peace of mind to persons like Jammalal Bajaj. Bapuji also related to Mataji Bhayyaji's cherished desire that She should stay in Gopuri for at least a month, so that Bapuji, Bhayyaji, Rajendra Babu and Swami Atmananda could discuss with Her many intricate and complex problems facing the present war-ridden world. Bapuji did

not allow Mataji to move to Wardha that night and succeeded in persuading Her to remain with him at Sevagram.

Beddings were spread for Her and Bapuji on two wooden planks close to each other in the open veranda of Bapuji's cottage. Bapuji, being a patient of high blood pressure, had to go to bed at about 10 P.M., when light massage was administered to his body by his attendants, Dr. Sushila Nayyar, Amrit Kaur, and others. Bapuji got hold of the wrist of Mataji's right hand as She was sitting close to him. While the ladies were busy massaging Bapuji, Mataji asked them what they would do if Bapuji were taken away by Her. Mataji repeated this question three times and one of the ladies replied that they would go with Bapuji. Mataji then told Bapuji that at an opportune time She would take him away.

I was greatly upset on hearing this, as I thought that Mataji was perhaps giving an indication of the early death of Bapuji which might occur within a year or so. Mataji did not appreciate my interruption and ordered me to keep quiet and watch. This I did, though reluctantly. The following morning, Mataji left Sevagram for Wardha on Her way to Sagar (M.P.) via Nagpur and Itarsi. At Sagar, Mataji wanted to remain in seclusion for some time. Only Gurupriya Didi and Abhaya stayed with Her. From Wardha to Itarsi, I travelled with Mataji in a first class compartment. Thus I could get ample time to discuss with Her in private Her strange behaviour during Her short stay at Sevagram. It puzzled me that She did not give Bapuji the necessary help to understand Her real Swarupa (Nature) and philosophy. This had been the great desire of both Bhaiji and Bhayyaji. Mataji told me many things about the doctrine of non-violence as propagated by Bapuji. I wanted to communicate to him through a letter all that I had heard from Mataji so that Bapuji might perhaps remodel his future plans of action. Mataji at first did not agree to my suggestion but when persistently requested, She finally permitted me to do so.

She however told me that all She had stated was meant for my own personal guidance. I then wrote a letter to Bapuji in the presence of the Divine Mother, and after reading it to Her, dispatched it from Lucknow in the first week of March 1942. A copy of this letter and Bapu's reply which was in his own handwriting, and their English translation are reproduced below for the benefit of the readers. They may draw their own conclusions about Mataji's personality, about Bhayyaji's devotion and his spirit of self-surrender to Her after a brief meeting at Raipur, about his full faith in the philosophy of life as explained to him by Mataji which had given him complete peace of mind. I have tried in this letter to give, as far as possible within my own limitations, a correct version of all that I had heard from Mataji in private while travelling with Her in the train. This letter gives in a nutshell some clue to Mataji's teaching, which is universal, and also depicts to some extent Her real Divine Nature. I am confident that a careful reading of the letter with reverence and in a meditative mood will be very helpful to the reader.

Letter of Sri Hari Ram Joshi to Bapuji Nazarbagh, Lucknow March 1942.

Sri Sri Ma Saranam Hari Ram Joshi offers obeisance at the lotus feet of revered Bapuji. After taking Mataji directly from Wardha to a solitary place as desired by Her, I reached Lucknow on the 25th of February. Brahmachari Abhaya and Sri Gurupriya Didi are with Mataji at the moment. Swami Paramanandaji has gone to Dehradun and will join Mataji again shortly. Sri Ma said that Her whereabouts should not be disclosed to anyone until She directs otherwise. If anybody wants to write to Her, he may do so care of my address and I shall forward the letter. This time Mataji did not give way to your entreaties to stay with you longer and, like a small child asked your permission to leave so soon. Yet it is my hope that your next meeting may be an event of great magnitude with far reaching results. By that meeting the whole world will benefit.

It was Sri Bhajji's (J. C. Roy) and Sri Bhayyaji's (Seth Jamnalal) great desire that on this special occasion we should be able to recognize Mataji's Divine Nature and to experience the joy of directing our lives towards the Supreme Quest. They felt confident that you were possessed of the rare capacity to understand Sri Ma's Real Being. It is a matter of deep happiness to me that their great expectation has been fulfilled to some extent at least. From Wardha station Mataji sent you a message through brother Radha Krishnaji which he must have delivered to you. The message was: "One has to go to one's own Self. If Pitāji wishes this smallest of all children to come and play with him, he may kindly send word. If Pitaji keeps good health and reminds her of it, this little girl will come to him again."

Sri Ma made the following remark concerning food and clothes : "Whatever one eats or wears is obtained from one source. All forms and shapes are His. From this point of view—the point of view of God—Mataji told you : 'I am indeed wearing your clothes!'

Kamla Nehru gave Mataji khaddar (hand spun and hand woven cloth) and Mataji wore it. Mataji always talks about spiritual things and on the journey from Wardha I had the opportunity to listen to Her words while no one else was present. Never before did I have the good fortune to hear so many significant remarks from Her blessed lips. I feel extremely happy that this should have happened just after meeting you and I am longing to write to you what I have heard Mataji say. I therefore asked Her permission to communicate Her words to you. When I kept on insisting, Sri Ma said : "We are all of the One. Why should I be asked? The Supreme Father, Mother, Friend and Lord is One indeed. He is Rama, Narayana, Krishna, He is Mahadevi, Sakti, He is the Brahman, the Atman. Truly, everything is His play." It goes without saying that I do not possess the capacity to understand the import of Mataji's utterances. Moreover, there is sometimes a vast difference between what one hears and what one is able to note down. I am writing to you as much as I have understood.

About meeting you, Mataji told me : "Pitāji, who is an embodiment of love, called this little child and received her with the joy of affection. In a way this small girl is as dear to Pitaji as all children are to him. Looking equally on all, Pitaji will have to accept this small girl also as his very own, and since she

is the tiniest of tiny babies, she will have to be looked after with even greater care.” Now to the special things that Sri Ma uttered

(1) Universal love and permanent peace are won only through Perfect Power (purna sakti).

(2) Perfect Power comes into being where there is complete knowledge, in other words, all-encompassing Knowledge.

(3) Where Perfect Power reigns, there, whatever manifests is perfect in its own right. There everything can be accomplished by mere willing.

(4) Self-knowledge means knowledge of the one Self.

(5) Knowledge of the Brahman is the realization that there is only One Brahman-without-a-Second.

(6) The realization of God in His multifarious images signifies the realization of Him in His infinite Power. There is nothing outside of Him. HE IS and none else. This does not mean that there can be something separate. All different names and forms that exist are but He alone. The wonder of it is that the destructible and the indestructible exist simultaneously—in Him this is possible.

(7) God is without form, without quality as well as with form and quality. Watch and see with what an endless variety of beautiful forms He plays the play of His maya with Himself alone. The lila of the all-pervading One goes on in this way in infinite diversity. He is without beginning and without end. He is the whole and also the part. The whole and the part together make up real Perfection. Try to remember the aforesaid at all times. If you like you may read it over once every day. Just as a child has to exert himself in the beginning to learn the alphabets so, if you labour hard for it, you will come to understand the meaning of all this. Questions do arise and their solution will also come.

(8) To believe in Him under any particular form is not enough. Accept Him in His numberless forms, shapes and modes of being, in everything that exists. Aim at the whole and all your actions will be whole. Just think, how marvelously in the small seed of a banyan tree small trees, medium sized trees and giant trees and seeds in numberless stages of development are potentially present.

(9) Endeavour to know yourself! To know oneself signifies to discover everything within oneself. There is nothing separate from you.

(10) As you love your own body, so regard everyone as equal to your own body. When the Supreme Experience supervenes, everyone’s service is revealed as one’s own service. Call it a tree, a bird, an insect, an animal or a man, call it by any name you please, one serves one’s own Self in every one of them.

(11) In order to be able to really serve the whole world in a universal manner, it is necessary to pray to the Fountainhead of all Power or to repeat His Name or to contemplate Him. Without full power full success does not come.

(12) Look, one has to pay special attention to the following: to become wholly absorbed in the pursuance of anything in particular and to forget the whole world over it, is not right. In such a

scheme, ignorance of the essence still persists. One's determined aim must be not to allow partial knowledge or ignorance to persist.

(13) Don't become inert; to contemplate all-encompassing Knowledge does not mean inertia. See how wonderful the play of Rama and Krishna is

(14) While in ignorance one can only do the work of the ignorant. Yet it must be said that even in ignorance one may be able to achieve something by His inspiration. Whatever is undertaken should be done with direct knowledge.

(15) He is and He is not ; and yet neither is He nor is He not—and even beyond this. One who has attained to perfection can grasp this, having risen beyond mind and intelligence. Through the spectacles obtained by His Supreme Grace it is possible to realize everything. To pray for God's grace is man's innate duty (dharma).

Pardon me for this very long letter. I hope this finds you in the best of health. I am praying to Sri Ma that your object may be fulfilled and that you may attain to perfect bliss and perfect peace.

Yours, Hari Ram Joshi

Revered Bapuji's reply Sevagram, Wardha, M.P. 10-3- 1942.

Brother Joshi,

Thank you for your letter. You did well to write it. Now Janakibehn has gone there. Please tell Sri Ma to come any time She feels like it. With Bapu's blessings. A year later, namely on February 20th, 1943, when Bapuji was facing a severe crisis in the Ahmednagar jail, I visited the Vindhyachal Ashram and prayed to Mataji to save Bapuji's life. She responded by pointing to a Maharashtra brahmin, aged about seventy-five years, who was sitting before Her. He was a lifelong brahmachari and a great scholar of the Gita. He had come from Varanasi and was praying all the time to Her to save Bapuji's life. He had been crying before Her for the last three days. Two hours after my arrival at Vindhyachal, Mataji ordered everybody in the Ashram to join Akhanda Nama Yajna, but She would not give any clear indication to us whether Bapuji's life would be saved. Happily for us all, the following day, news was broadcast that Bapuji had passed the crisis under miraculous circumstances, to the great surprise of all his attending physicians, including Dr. B. C. Roy, who had declared that Bapuji had no chance to survive. I feel that a further lease of life was given to Bapuji by Mataji in Her great mercy.

From "Ma Anandamayi Lila", Memoirs of Hari Ram Joshi.

The last meeting in late 1947

Haribabaji was also in Delhi. He wished to meet Gandhiji who was in town at this time. Sri Ma's name was enough for opening all doors. We arrived at Gandhiji's residence in a motorcade because all who were at hand wanted to go with her wherever she went. Gandhiji received her with great affection and

pleasure. He talked of her visit to Sevagram and how she would not stay with him and was against her wandering around so much. **Sri Ma with some emphasis said, “Pitaji I do not need go anywhere away from you, I am ever with you. Believe this. This daughter never speaks an untruth.”**

Gandhiji did believe her, but was reluctant to let her go away, quite like everyone else from mahatmas to the merest child. He put his arm round her and led the way to the prayer meeting. It was obvious that he was not interested in the mahatmas who had come to visit him. Sri Ma held back till he had acknowledged their presence and it was arranged that the mahatmas also would be accommodated on the dais. Upadhyayaji (a close friend of the Nehru family) who knew Sri Ma since the days of Smt. Kamala Nehru was there; he made all the arrangements most satisfactorily. Gandhiji made Sri Ma sit close to him. He was in a happy mood. He would talk to her, and then he would talk about her to the congregation. I think he was asking for some donation or other. I remember him saying, “Do give generously; see my daughter (bachhi) is here. What will she think of you if you behave in a miserly way!” He made the congregation laugh a number of times.

This was their last meeting. The tragic date of 30th January 1948, was not far away.

From “My Days with Sri Ma Anandamayi”, by Bithika Mukerji.



Mother of Pondicherry

The Mother was born Mirra Alfassa in Paris on 21 February 1878. In 1914 the Mother travelled to Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo, whom she at once recognised as the one who had inwardly guided her for many years. After 11 months she was obliged to return to France and in April 1920 she rejoined Sri Aurobindo. When the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was formed in November 1926, Sri Aurobindo entrusted its full material and spiritual charge to her.

Sri Sri Ma meets the Mother of Pondicherry (on 3rd of November, 1952) On November 3, she was at Pondicherry. At eleven in the morning that day she had a meeting with “The Mother”, who stood in the sitting room of Sri Aurobindo. Mother looked at her for a long time with a fixed gaze as Ma looked at her with a natural poise. Mother’s eyes blinked after a long time. She presented Ma with a rose, a ‘ball’ flower (globe lily) and two pieces of chocolate. Ma returned the rose and one piece of chocolate. Mother kept the chocolate but gave the rose back. This exchange of flowers was repeated twice or thrice after which Mother tore a portion off the rose and returned the rest to Ma.

The same evening the two had another meeting at the same place. Mother was distributing roasted peanuts to visitors with a spoon from a wooden container. She offered some to Ma who said, “This little girl is the youngest of all.” Mother said in English “Forever a little child.” The singer-saint Dilip Roy, an inmate of Pondicherry, met Ma several times during her stay and sang before her.

From “Anandamayee – The Universal Mother”.

Sri Ma has given her own account of this meeting (*Ananda Varta*, P. 171 Vol VII, No 4 1960). As you know, Sri Haribabaji took this small child with him when he went on a pilgrimage to South India. This is precisely how this little child went to see the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This body did not approach the Mother in quest of spiritual experience or the like; a little girl is simple and natural in the presence of her own mother. You well know that the behaviour of this body is quite Unpredictable (‘elomelo’): here there is no question of giving or receiving power, of finding anything bearable or

unbearable-whatever comes to pass at any time is as it should be. As this body feels here with you now, just exactly the same it felt at Pondicherry.

What is the difference between this body, the Mother and you all ? From your angle of vision only they are different one from the other. “Very well then, since you are eager to hear, listen – When the Mother came and stood before this body, this body out of its own kheyal looked straight into the Mother’s eyes and for a moment, just as it looks at all of you ; but then the kheyal came that the sadhus who had come with us were all being kept standing and so this body for a second looked in their direction ; then again there was the kheyal to respond fully to the blinkless gaze of the Mother.

Thus this body of its own accord did look directly into the Mother’s eyes for some length of time, did it not ? Then the Mother herself lowered her glance and put a flower into my hand; an exchange of flowers followed.”

Turning to us Mataji added : “You all witnessed this yourselves. The Mother’s eyes did not even radiate intense light while focussed on this small girl.

In other words did my Mother attract and hold the eyes of this small girl with her glance as is done in the case of others? This is the exact truth of the matter.”

After pausing for a while, Mataji spoke again. “Some years ago, when this body met Satubhai, he talked about the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and said that when one goes for her darshan she gazes straight and steadily into one’s eyes. At that time this body had the kheyal ‘Very well, if ever circumstances bring about a meeting of this body with the Mother, this body will behave quite naturally according to its kheyal; whatever happens is as it should be’.”

Mataji laughed and then continued : “If someone had told this body that at the Pondicherry Ashram it was a rule to respond from the very beginning to the Mother’s gaze and look straight into her eyes, this body would have had the kheyal to do accordingly. Every place and every condition, wherever and whatever they may be, are but the ONE. If the kheyal had come, this body would spontaneously have acted (to whatever extent it might be) as consistent with the demands of that particular place. Where this body was made to stay, there it stayed. When and where it was taken to see (someone or something) it did go and see at the appointed time and place. Further it sat down or stood up, etc. for precisely the length of time and at any particular spot that was in keeping with the ritual of the place, so far as it had been made known to this body. From your worldly point of view there are no doubt a great many different ways of expressing things. So long as the individual is what it is and has not been freed from its knots, how can a correct solution of any problem be arrived at ?

Suppose the Mother’s gaze had been met by the gaze of this body from beginning to end, this might have given you the chance of saying : ‘Look, Mataji held the eyes of the Mother with such power that the Mother was incapable of averting her eyes.’” Here Mataji broke out into ringing laughter

and then remarked : “This is the kind of thing you might have said, is it not ? Look, all forms are but the expressions of the Power of the One Lord; at different times He manifests in different ways.”

Ethyl Merston records the meeting: Everyone sat with Khukhi (Sri Ma) for some time, expecting a meeting with The Mother. Nothing happened. They went to sit by the flower covered samadhi of Sri Aurobindo in the ashram itself. Finally a summons came from The Mother for Khukhi. She was to go upstairs for darshan. She went up with her two close attendants, Didi and Bhumi, and two sadhus. Ethel and the other four decided to see the meeting of the two “saintly women”. They went up a narrow steep stairway to a landing where a doorway opened into a room. They sat down. Just inside the open door, close to Ethel, stood The Mother with her attendants. Mataji emerged through a doorway at the far end of the room. Ethel looked at her watch to fix the time of the meeting: 11.25 am.

Anandamayi Ma came down the two steps into the room followed by her people in single file: she smiled as she approached The Mother, who stood rigid, unsmiling and motionless, her hands clenched behind her back, her head thrust forward fixing Khukhi with her eyes. It was an amazing meeting, completely silent. For a moment Khukhi looked taken aback by the fixed unwelcoming stare, then just stood still facing The Mother and relaxed, simple and childlike. There they both stood, not a muscle of their bodies moved, it was like puppets arrested suddenly, frozen; each showed her essence: power and simplicity.

It lasted 15 minutes by our watches! Then The Mother relaxed, took some flowers and handed them to Khukhi who took and then returned them: again The Mother gave them and this time Khukhi took them and passed them back to her attendants; the sadhus too each got a flower.

Khukhi then stepped forward, took The Mother’s hand, fondled it, The Mother returned the caress, whereupon Khukhi and the others passed her to leave the room. Not a word had been spoken. We eavesdroppers fled downstairs as Anandamayi Ma came to the door. Never would we forget that meeting, the tension, the atmosphere and that silence.

In the afternoon, Mataji and all her people went to watch The Mother, now seventy-four, play tennis. Afterward they went to the ashram workshops. At the drill ground there was a gymn display by ashram devotees followed by a marching display. Afterwards The Mother sent prasad to Khukhi. She then gave prasad to all the ashram school children, for each of whom she had “a very sweet smile.”

The Mother now came over to Khukhi who told The Mother she was a very young child, and The Mother was her Ma. **“They both laughed over this and Khukhi put her head on The Mother’s breast.” At five o’clock the next morning Mataji and her devotees left.**

*Extract from A Woman’s Work With Gurdjieff, Ramana Maharshi, Krishnamurti, Anandamayi Ma & Pak Subuh by Mary Ellen Korman Arete Communications, Publisher Available from Gurdjieff Legacy Bookstore:
<http://www.gurdjiefflegacy.org/30books/author.php?author=Korman&cat=Fourth%20Way%>*



Photo copyright 1961, Self Realisation Fellowship, Los Angeles CA.

Sri Daya Mata

Daya Mata (Sanskrit for Mother of Compassion), was the President and Sanghamata (mother of the society) for over 55 years, of the only organization that Paramahansa Yogananda created to disseminate his teachings – Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) in Los Angeles, California / Yogoda Satsanga Society of India (YSS),

Meeting between Sri Daya Mata and Sri Ma (on 12th of February, 1959) Sri Daya Mata is a disciple of the Paramahansa Yogananda and President of Yogoda Sat-Sanga Society of India and Self-Realisation Fellowship of America.

February 12, 1959, was a wonderful day in my life, for on it I met a holy personage, the joy-permeated Ananda Mayee Ma!

Many years ago, in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., my blessed Gurudev, Paramahansa Yogananda, showed me a photograph of Ananda Mayee Ma and said to me **“Strive to become like her.”** That memory has remained these many years in my heart, and on February 12th I met at last my Ideal in the mother-form.

A small group of us came to India from America in October 1958 to look after some organizational affairs of our Yogoda Sat-Sanga Society, founded in 1918 by Paramahansa Yogananda, with headquarters at Yogoda Math, Dakshineswar. Knowing that Ananda Mayee Ma also has an asram very near Dakshineswar, I secretly hoped that she might visit it during my stay in Calcutta. That desire was fulfilled, for on February 12th, I attended the Saraswati Puja at her asram, filled with expectancy.

As my eyes first beheld the blessed Mother, it seemed that a great dart of love went out from her and struck my heart, leaving me transfixed. I remained in that state for some moments, eyes locked on the Mother, feeling great waves of love surging within me. Later our party was asked to go to an open tent where the Mother was already seated on a dais. We were motioned to sit next to her. I could not take my eyes away from her sweet face, so enchantingly full of love. My tears flowed. She tossed flowers to our party.

Sri Prabhas Chandra Ghose, Vice-President of Yogoda Sat-Sanga Society, then introduced me to Ananda Mayee Ma. The Mother placed a garland of yellow flowers around my neck and I was plunged into an ecstatic state. When I opened my eyes the Mother gazed long and lovingly into my eyes. What sweetness—what blessing ! I can say no more. She is a divine being. We were served with prasad, while the Mother rested in her room; then we were told to go to the verandah where she would see us. **I touched her in deepest reverence and love, just to have the blessing of her sacred hand.** She put her hand over mine and gently stroked it. It seemed that my heart would burst with the love and joy that filled it. My tears could not be stemmed in this holy presence that so tangibly reminds us of the great Universal Mother of us all.

On the morning of February 13th our party again visited the Mother. She was seated on a wooden bedstead. Our group made their pranamas and left gifts in front of her.

I said, “O Ma, we offer you these fruits and flowers on behalf of all the disciples of our Gurudev; Paramahansa Yogananda, as a token of our deep reverence for you. They are but an outward expression of the deep devotion we feel for the formless Divine Mother that dwells in you.”

Later in the afternoon Ananda Mayee Ma was out walking on the lawn facing the Ganges. Some of our party went forward to take her picture. I remained in the back-ground deeply absorbed in that bliss within. As our group prepared to leave, I knelt silently on the grass, inwardly praying to the Lord within Ananda Mayee Ma for a blessing. I opened my eyes and saw her blessed tiny feet beside me.

How tightly I held those feet within my mind and heart! I could not take my gaze away from them, because for months I had been inwardly crying to the Divine Mother to let me see Her Blue Lotus Feet. She had answered my prayer through Her child, Ananda Mayee Ma.

During one of our visits, Swami Kriyananda and I went to the main hall where the Mother meets the devotees each morning at eleven. The Mother was resting. Chitra, the young devotee who travels at times with the Mother, came and sat with us, asking questions about our work in America and about our way of life. I explained to her about our Gurudev’s training and how he had taught us to control the body and mind through yogic techniques so that we can go deep in meditation—that whenever we had stirred unnecessarily he would say: “Is your love for Divine Mother so superficial that you allow outer distractions to take your attention away from Her ?”

After a time Ananda Mayee Ma came in and took her seat on the dais. We sat quietly meditating while she listened to the people who had come for a darshan. How sweetly she smiled on each one ! At times her laughter rang out merrily. She is like a divine child. Our party visited the ashram of the Mother every day that she remained there.

Later she went to Calcutta and on the evening of February 20th we went to the home where she was staying, to show her a motion picture film of herself and our Guruji, taken during his visit to

India in 1936. Paramahansaji first met her then, in the Bhowanipur section of Calcutta. Later she visited him at his school for boys in Ranchi, Bihar. Gurudev wrote a chapter about her sacred life, in his book, “Autobiography of a Yogi.” That book has now been translated into many Eastern and Western languages, and thus readers all over the world have come to know and revere Ananda Mayee Ma.

On February 21st our group attended a kirtan at the Calcutta home where the Mother was staying. Her devotee, Chitra told me that after the kirtan the Mother would see me in her room. When the chanting was over I went to her room. After a time the Mother entered, and as I opened my eyes to behold her, I noted her arms outstretched carrying a sari. How thankfully I received this blessing from her—one of her own cloths. She looked at me lovingly while I told her that I sought no counsel, I wanted nothing except love for the Universal Mother, to serve Her and my Gurudev until the last breath in my body.

She smiled sweetly and replied, “Think of the Divine Mother in the morning, all day long, and the last thing at night.”

– During this visit I said that I felt selfish that she had given me so much love and attention. She answered gently: “No, that is not selfishness at all. It is selfishness when one’s attention is on the body, but your attention is fixed on this Self. It is not selfishness at all.”

What utter tranquility my soul felt in her presence Our final visit with the Mother was on February 23rd. She was to leave Calcutta early the next morning, and so a vast crowd, wishing for a darshan of her holy form, was present. The Mother had invited our group to see her at the home of a devotee. We went there and sat in front of her, meditating. I found, in Her holy and loving presence, that my consciousness became immediately withdrawn, centered upon the Beloved Mother.

On this occasion, as I sat on the lawn, absorbed within, suddenly I felt a tremendous spiritual experience in my spine, centering at the heart chakra. A feeling enveloped me of great, expanding peace, spiritual fulfillment and oneness with the Universal Mother. It seemed, too, that my heart would burst with the great surgings of love that flowed through it the sweetness of which flooded my eyes with streaming tears.

After a time Chitra came up-to me and said that I might now present to Ananda Mayee Ma the offerings I had brought, red and pink roses and a silk chaddar.

As I placed them at her feet, she removed from her neck a string of small rudraksha beads. She put them about my neck and said with great tenderness: “This daughter of yours ever lives in your heart.”

During March and April our party from America traveled to north India. While we were in that area we made it a point to visit the blessed Mother again, this time in Rishikesh, during the “Week of Self-Restraint.” How wise is the Mother to have inaugurated such a period every year, when devotees

from far and near can gather about her to receive more concentrated spiritual nourishment from her motherly heart divine.

I had other opportunities to see the beloved Ma during this stay in Rishikesh, and above all, to meditate deeply in her presence.

On one of these occasions I told her, “You have captured my heart.” How sweet was her reply, when, like a tiny child, she said, “And I won’t give it back !”

During our visit to Rishikesh it seemed that the Mother could not do enough for us, through her wonderful devotees who looked after us. The more I saw of them the more I was impressed with their selfless spirit and devotion. It happened that I was asked to speak before the gathering one evening. I was told that Mother would give me part of her time in the program. I was introduced to the assembly as a disciple of Pitaji Yogananda. I told the audience about Master’s limitless love for the Divine Mother, about his great task in the West to spread the message of Yoga. Then I dwelt on the duty of disciples—the duty to take up the mission of the Guru with ever-increasing zeal and selflessness.

Having seen in India how devoutly saints are worshipped, I reminded the gathering that it is not enough to praise these saints and to seek their darshan; that we, the devotees and disciples, must use our lives rightly by striving to follow in their footsteps. Only by constant meditation and good actions may we become divine. The best way, by which we can truly appreciate what the great ones like my blessed Gurudev and Ananda Mayee Ma and other holy ones have to give us, is to become like them. I finished by saying that the only mission of such holy beings is to rouse in us the desire to find the Beloved within ourselves.

The next morning, after the meditation in the large hall with the Mother and her devotees, she placed around my neck a beautiful garland of roses. As she gazed at me with the tenderness she showers on all, my eyes filled with tears. I was burning with the divine desire for the Divine Mother and with longing to serve my own beloved Gurudev’s work better and better, with greater humility, love and wisdom. All other thoughts were gone and my soul was afire.

How can I ever forget those treasured moments spent with the Mother, and the words she uttered during our meetings, which are forever etched on my consciousness. Never can I forget her words, uttered at our last meeting,

“The same spirit (bhava)that I saw in your Master, I see in you.

With all of you who are devotees of Pitaji Yogananda, one feels here as if you were from his own asram.”

How deeply was I touched as she spoke of her regard for my Guru. As we were leaving the ashram, beholding for the last time the Mother’s soft, loving gaze, I thought of my blessed Guru, who had chosen, as an eternal example for us, this flower of divinity, Ananda Mayee Ma, through which we have beheld the spirit of the ancient, Holy India he loved so much, and which we too have come to love.

(Reproduced from Ananda Varta, VOL VII No 3).



Sri Ma's Handwriting



**“Strive for being good.
This mercy I beg of you all.”**

Sri Ma's words about her own handwriting.

“Whatever mental disposition we demonstrate before Ma, most of the time she becomes one with that.

With reference to that Ma was saying, “You have been witnessing different styles of (my) handwriting, the reason for that is: once while seeing Kumudini, the aunt of this body, was writing I sat to write the same way- it seemed to me that the fonts got smaller like those of hers. Again when I wrote keeping in mind my father's handwriting I noticed that the style of writing was becoming like that of father.

Again, perhaps without being aware of anybody when I used to write keeping in mind the printed alphabets, just to make the alphabets look similar I had been writing in a special way, each letter starting from a fixed point. Any deviation was not to my liking.

In my younger days while sitting alone (being indifferent about correct or incorrect) such a thing happened once or twice – have you understood the extent of my proficiency in reading and writing!” Saying this she was laughing as if at herself.”

(Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee, by Gurupriya Didi. Bengali, Vol. VI, 2nd edition, Ch 1, page 21)

४ अश्वि १३३७
४. अश्वि १३३७ (बंगाली)

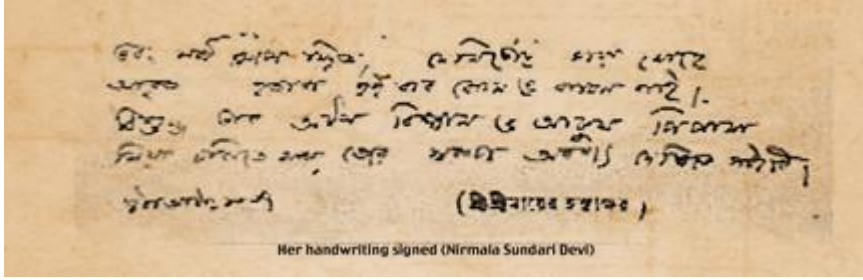
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।
हे परम पुरुष । जगत पति पत्नी पिता
माता स्वतन्त्र एवं सर्व रूप में स्थित;
देख रहा हूँ मया मोह में अप्त
जिसे मैंने का कोई भी कारण नहीं ।
विशुद्ध भाव अटल विश्वास और
आफूल प्यास लेकर चलते रहो,
तेरा (अपना) तपस्य देखने को मिलेगा
श्री निर्मला सुन्दरी देवी
(श्री श्री माँ के हस्ताक्षर)

Translation

4 Ashadh, 1337 [Bengali calendar]

O Supreme Purush who art established in this world in the form of husband, wife, mother, children and in all other forms. I see that every thing is enveloped in Maya [delusion] and attachment. There is no cause for despondency. **Remain steadfast on the path with a pristine heart, unmoveable faith and a desperate thirst. You shall assuredly discover your own self.**

~Nirmala Sundari Devi~

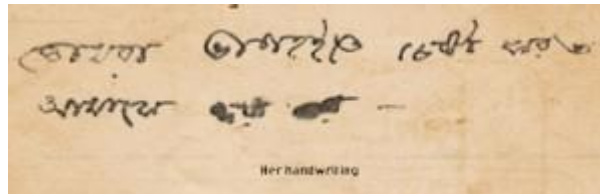


Translation

O Father, the Absolute (Parampita), you are moving about as the restless universe, as couples, as parents, as offspring, and as all diverse forms. But you appear to be covered under the veil of ignorance (maya) and attachment (moha). No matter there is still enough scope to come out of the veil. Pick up single-pointedness in your attitude, firmness in your confidence and deep sincerity for your quest, and take up your journey.

You are sure to reach your goal – your own true self.

~Nirmala Sundari Devi~



Translation

Strive for being good. This mercy I beg of you all.

Translation of Ma's writing

I am letting you know a little bit about the state when it started manifesting for the first time in me. Just on hearing about sangkirtan there appeared some sort of attraction and happiness (in my) heart. And when I was listening to the sangkirtan the heart stood in a state as if I had been floating away somewhere in the stream of bliss. And (felt) that a different force was dancing with my body. In that state I was totally conscious. Some days I could sit and on some other days whether I was hearing about Sangkirtan (holy songs/singing the name of god aloud in chorus) there appeared an atmosphere in the room or in the jungle, wherever I had been, I used to roll on the ground. And such a state would come that at one time I would cry and at another time I would laugh. When the attraction of that force gradually receded then I was able to sit motionless and it happened in the mind that the state should come again and I would enjoy the state along with everybody in the world. But when the intensity of the state was a little less the feeling of great joy at heart continued for 3 / 4 days. And whenever there was any sound I would startle like a child. I would think that sitting all throughout day and night I should sing the name (of God) accompanied by everyone. If anyone was reluctant to come, touching their hands and feet I would tell them, you would not be able to enjoy such great bliss which is there in the name, through luxuries (of life) and spending hundreds of rupees. But I could not express it. I would weep when people around were whispering (about me). I would imagine nightfall after daily chores are complete and I would silently sit alone and enjoy the bliss. During that period only two of us (Bholanath and I) were there. I would sit when it was night. I sat for 2/3 days. Thereafter I could feel that my senses were gradually shaken up and a sort of fear would lessen that force. I would cogitate that as I do not have Diksha (religious initiation), lest the condition of my body would get worse, I would not sit any more. Sometimes I would restrain myself. Again somewhere else (Note: When Ma was invited to attend kirtan in the neighborhood) that state of being would come (during Kirtan) I would think that while other women hear the kirtan and stay normal but what are all these happening in me (!). I felt ashamed to go in the midst of people. Again I consoled myself. And it happened in my mind that when I don't act willingly the Great Benefactor will do good. I would think about the reason why God's divine qualities are manifested in various forms. Verily, He out of kindness projected (Himself) in different forms. Now

(you) take names the way you want and ultimately those (manifestations) become one.

I could not make it be written any more. (I cannot write any more)

After having Diksha and receiving teachings you hold fast to the right path. Why fear, the universal mother, the ultimate reality, is bound to bless you with her ten hands. (i.e. The Goddess Durga)

After 15 Shravan (4th month of the solar Bengali calendar) the day when there the Tithi Chaturdashi(14th day of Lunar calendar) falls on Monday, sit with the name with which you sat for practice so far, for five hours at a stretch. After that follow the way your heart wants to proceed. On different occasions in the past it occurred in my mind that when the concept of egotism, the attraction of Maya(delusion) and power to try to act are there and the understanding (of all these) had also been given by Him then He also brings into the light the underlying implications of all these.

When the body is being hurt then there is need to take resort to the mental faculty of tolerance. But if once that....(the writing stops here abruptly)

Communication from Sri Ma to Prangopal Mukhopadhaya in 1924/25 in response to his earnest desire to know her spiritual state from her own lips. The original letter was handed to Sw Nirvanananda (the first Ascetic Sangha President) by Prangopal's son, Dr Govinda Gopal.

Sri Ma Expresses Herself



A beautiful hymn from Sri Ma

On the 20th of Visakh 1336 (1929 by English calendar) Mother left the Ramna Ashram having stayed there for 24 hours after the installation of the deity. She was dressed in a sari only. Just at that time this hymn came from Her lips. She asked Her devotees to write it down. She was in an ecstatic condition then and only a portion of the hymn could be transcribed. One cannot vouch for its correctness. But She gave permission to sing it to the accompaniment of musical instruments before starting Kirtan. From this translation it will be evident that Mother's thought-body has expressed itself in speech for the welfare, peace and progress of the world. Her boundless love and compassion for all living beings radiates in all directions and She sits Supreme at the centre embracing the universe.

“Thou art the Light of the universe and its controlling and guiding spirit.

Do thou appear in our midst !

From Thee a cobweb of worlds is spreading out at every moment.

Thou art the dispeller of all fears; do Thou appear before us!

Thou art the seed of the universe; Thou art the Being in whom I reside.

Thou art present in the hearts of all these devotees.

Do thou, whom I find present before me,

banish the fears of all created beings.

Thou art the embodiment of all gods and much more.

Thou hast come out of me and I am the epitome of the created world.

Let us contemplate the very Foundation of this universe,

through Whom the world seeks liberation.

Thou standest on Thy own eternal basic nature.

Thou hast come out of the Pranava,

the seed-word and base of all existence and the truth of all.

The Vedas are but sparks from Thy eternal Light.

Thou dost symbolise the heavenly couple,

Kama and Kameshvari who are dissolved

together in all-permeating Bliss Supreme

and signified by Nāda and Bindu,

when differentiated for keeping up Thy Lila.

Do Thou dispel the fears of the world.
I seek refuge in Thee.
Thou art my shelter and final resting place.
Draw Thou my whole being into Thine.
As the Deliverer Thou dost appear in two forms—
the liberator and the devotee seeking liberation.
By me alone are all created in my own image;
by me all are sent into the world; and in me all find final refuge.
I am the final cause indicated in the Vedas by Pranava.
I am Mahamaya and Mahabhava all in one.
Devotion to me is the cause of Moksha (liberation).
All are mine.
To me Rudra owes all his powers and the self-same
I sing to the glory of Rudra, who becomes manifest
in all actions and in their causes.”

Mother as Revealed to me, by Bhaiji — May 2004 edition P46-47

Sri Ma's Kheyal for Lord Padmanabha

Sri Ma once said before several witnesses “This body is Padmanabha”.

The ashram image of Padmanabha was consecrated on the Mahanavami of Durga Puja 1971. Swami Nirvanananda kept the image for daily puja until, after a short time, it was passed to Swami Bhaskarananda. In 1984 Padmanabha was passed to Swami Nirgunananda, who kept it for 17 years, until it was passed into the care of the ashram.

The following accounts explain how Lord Padmanabha came to Sri Ma.

They were written by H. H. Marthanda Varma, the Elia Rajah of Travancore.

(Lord Padmanabha is the presiding deity of the State of Travancore, and the old ruling family are the servants of Padmanabha. They are related through edited excerpts from Ananda Varta magazine).

“Both my wife and I had the privilege of Sri Ma’s darshan in Trivandrum in 1952, when Mother was touring the South. It was in the right hand pavillion in the grounds of Kaudiar Palace. At that time, both Swami Ramdas of Kanhangad and Rama Devi of Mangalore were in Trivandrum. This was a vision, but we understood little of what we had glimpsed.

In July 1971, while we were staying in Bangalore, my wife saw an article on Mother in the ‘Illustrated Weekly of India’ and was eager to have Her darshan.



Sri Ma with Lord Padmanabha

It was possible to find out from friends in Bombay that Mother was at Hardwar. On Saturday, July 10th, 1971, my wife, daughter and I flew to Delhi and motored to Hardwar the next day. I went to Kankhal to find out when we could have Ma's darshan. I was asked to wait and in a few minutes was given the joyful news that all of us could come to the Ashram at 9 p.m. Very soon we went inside for Mother's darshan. She was seated on Her couch, with a few people sitting in front of Her on the floor. We did our pranamas, offered fruit and sat down. Peace and serenity pervaded the whole place.

The next day we went to the ashram for darshan and later were served with great care and attention. When we returned to the ashram Mother told us that She would be leaving for Dehradun the next day. We were anxious to go to Dehradun as well and gracious permission was given. Thus we motored to Dehradun on July 12th, reaching the Kishenpur Ashram by midday. My wife and daughter were very near Mother's room. I was allotted a cottage in "Kalyanvan", the last one in the grounds.

I retired for the night by about 9.30 pm. My bed was near the left hand window of the cottage. Being a good sleeper, I went into deep slumber at once. It must have been around 11.30 or 12 midnight that I became wide awake for some unknown reason. I am absolutely certain that all vestige of sleep had left me. There was a glow outside my window. I sat up and looked out and beheld:

"The entire space, as far as the eye could see was a brilliant blaze of light." I recollected the words of the 11th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, particularly the slokas (verses) 12 and 13 which say :
"If the splendour of a thousand suns were to blaze out at once in the sky, that would be akin to the splendour of that Mighty Being."

And also sloka 20—

“The space between the heavens and all the quarters are filled by you alone.” The experience is very clear in my mind but I struggle to find words to convey what I saw.

This wondrous sight was Mother—encompassing the boundaries of my vision fully and completely; Mother, magnificent, lustrous and universal; Mother in Her Mahima form but as always seen by us, and most remarkable was the radiance in and around **Her hands in which She held Padmanabha Bhagavan.**



The image of Lord Padmanabha shows Lord Vishnu reclining on the many hooded snake Sheshna (Sheshnag), also known as Ananta (eternal). A lotus (padma) is shown growing out of his navel (nabha) with Brahma seated on it. Next to Vishnu's right hand is a Siva Linga – hence the image represents the trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

This experience lasted for about five to six minutes. I was thrilled and so profoundly at peace that I was able later to get the sleep of wonder and joy unalloyed.

On July 14th, 1971, while still in Dehradun, I had a call from Delhi that I should go there to meet someone on the 15th. So we had to ask Mother's permission to leave on the 14th night. On the 14th morning someone from the Ashram suggested to me to show my Bhagavans or Thakurs (Deities) to Mother. I asked for permission and was allowed to take my puja box to Mother's room on the first floor of the Ashram. It was about 5.45 p.m.

Mother was sitting on Her bed and I placed the box on the carpet and opening the box, started to take out its contents. When I was about to take out Padmanabha Bhagavan, Mother asked me to place Bhagavan not on the floor in the tray but on Ma's bed, next to Her. I also put the other vigrahas there, namely Mahalakshmi, Sri Krishna, Ayyappa (Sastha), Ganeshji and Siva.

For the next half hour I stood entranced as Mother adored the Bhagavans and when She got up She told me to pack the puja box only after She would go down to the hall. Thus after Mother left the room, I packed the box and went downstairs, took leave of Mother and departed for Delhi.

Later I heard that when some members of the Ashram went to Mother's room the next morning, they found Her lying down on Her bed just like Padmanabha Bhagavan on Ananta. (Note added later from another source: she then said

“This body is Padmanabha. Do pranam.” She also said that Padmanabha had not left, and showed some small footprints on her sheet). From the next day a snake came to the Ashram daily and when Mother was told about this, She said that Ananta had come and soon Padmanabha Bhagavan would also come. The snake used to come and do pradakshina (circumambulation) of the Panchavati, next door to Kalyanvan.

On the 24th of July Sri B. K. Shah telephoned to me to Bangalore. After the trunk call I wrote to him : “I was enthralled to hear what you so kindly conveyed to me over the trunk lines. I have no words to express the feelings that come to my mind and heart about Mother's decision to have a Padmanabha Swami Vighraha and I am already arranging to get a vighraha, similar to the one that I am privileged to do puja.”

August 9th brought a letter from Sri B. K. Shah which reads as below :

“It is Mother's kheyala that Sri Padmanabha Swami's vighraha installation should take place on September 29th, which is Mahanavami (of Durga Puja). However, I appreciate that it will not be possible for you to be present, because Vijayadasami (the day after Navami) is the most important celebration for you. If Rani Saheba is there, she can represent the family.”

As is usual in South India, **a wax model was made and then covered in mud and then the wax melted away with hot water. Then the silver is poured and the mud cast broken up.** Instructions were left to purchase the silver and keep it ready. But when I came to Bangalore on a Sunday morning, I found that the silver had not been procured. The casting was to be in the early hours of the following Monday morning. On a Sunday afternoon or evening it was not easy to get 6 kilos of silver. The markets were scoured and all of a sudden the required quantity of silver was found and bought. **Next morning, at the proper muhurta (moment), it was cast and when, after cooling, the mud mould was removed, a perfect cast emerged.**

Padmanabha Bhagavan and all the other articles for the puja were got ready. Permission was taken from my brother to be absent at the Dussera as the installation (chal pratishtha) of Padmanabha Bhagavan was all important.

On the Saptami day of Dussera my wife was ready to leave for Delhi but due to a bereavement she was unable to do so. Since she could not go, I got ready. On the morning of the 29th I was in Dehradun and the astonishing things that happened there are well known.

Mother was in mouna at that time. As soon as I arrived and had darshan, I was asked to go to a cottage in Kalyanvan and wait for Mother. In Her presence I unpacked the box and submitted the newly made image of Padmanabha Bhagavan. **A procession was immediately organized and Mother, leading everyone, went to the cottage where I had stayed before and had the wonderful first experience.** Bhagavan was kept and puja done where I had slept previously. From nowhere seemingly, all the requisites for a puja appeared and then Bhagavan was taken to the Durga Puja pandal. Bhoga had been prepared for all the Deities there as is the custom on all Durga Puja days. When Padmanabha Bhagavan was enshrined in the pandal, it was seen that there was an extra thali (tray) of bhoga ready for Him. Mother then remarked that Padmanabha Bhagavan had already begun to see to all arrangements for Him. The Chal Pratishta (installation) was performed by the Nambudiri pujaris from Trivandrum.

[Know more : 1971 in Ma's Life History](#)

On the 30th I was able to fly to Trivandrum from Delhi. It so happened that due to a difference in the calendars of North and South India, Vijayadasami that year was one day later in the South. So I was able to be present in Dehradun for the Chal Pratishta and also to get to Trivandrum for the Vijayadasami.

As mentioned earlier, **Mother was in mouna and would only occasionally pronounce words like “Bhagavan, Name, Krishna, Hare, Padmanabha Bhagavan.”** It is a magnificent recollection that during this Durga Puja it was my good fortune to be called “Padmanabha Baba.” In course of time the cottage at Kalyanvan where I had the first and most marvellous experience has become a temple for Padmanabha Bhagavan. It is also a matter of joy and bliss to know that wherever Mother went Padmanabha Bhagavan would also be taken.”



“The year 1972 was very gratifying, in fact a year to be treasured, for Mother made it possible for my wife and me to be with Her for many days. She came to Trivandrum for the Lakshadeepam ceremony in the Sri Padmanabha Swami Temple which was celebrated on the 14th of January (Sankranti day). Mother was in Trivandrum for 5 days, from 10th to 15th.”

“As soon as the Samyam Saptah (1974) was over we too moved to Anandamayee Ashram, Kishenpur. I was staying in the cottage in Kalyanvan above the one which I had been given in 1971, where I had the vision and my first experience. I found that by this time a marble peetam had been made and it was here in this cottage that puja was performed of Padmanabha Bhagwan by Swami Bhaskaranandaji whenever

Ma was in Dehradun. It was thrilling to see that the cottage where I had had three years ago the Divya Darshana of Ma, had become a Temple of Sri Padmanabha Swami. The aura and vibrations here were indescribable. It was also my good fortune to do my daily worship there for a couple of days.”

“Everyone by now had come to know that I always have my puja box with me wherever I go and many had seen the, contents and there was a lot of silver. I was very concerned about the safety of the Deities, for after all the tents had only a moral protection. The very day we reached, I submitted my anxiety about this to Ma. This was on the 17th of November. It was about 6 in the evening when we had darshan after reaching Chandod from Baroda.

Ma solved my problem and worry at once. She decided that before and after my puja was over in the mornings, the puja box was to be packed and kept in Ma’s own room and taken to my tent only for worship. So from the 17th to 25th Sri Padmanabha Swami and the other Deities were with Ma most of the time.



Tradition,

pauranically, has it that in the golden past of India’s heritage many ceremonies for the good of mankind used to be done and performed regularly by the Kings and Rulers in those ancient times. One of them, particularly in South India, was a ceremony called mura japam. This translated would mean japa done traditionally, numerically and religiously. This ceremony, almost a yajna, takes 56 days to perform and had Veda parayana, recitation of the Vishnu Sahasra Nama and jal japa (where the Ritviks do japa standing in waist deep water) in the evening at dusk. All this was for the wellbeing of the state and of the people of the state. This is done like the Ardha Kumbh, once in 6 years. King Karthaveerarjuna used to conduct this ceremony, as we are told in the Mahabharata. It has been the good fortune of the Travancore Ruling family to have done this seva to Sri Padmanabha Bhagwan for years and years. (It may be recalled that in the year 1972 Ma had come to Trivandrum for the last day of this festival which is on the 56th day. This was all done in the temple of Sri Padmanabha Bhagwan and the last day’s function is called Lakshadeepam when literally Lacs of lights are lit in the temple and a yatra within the 4 furlong long corridors of the temple takes place at 8-30 p.m. on the 14th January which is the Sankranti day). On the 20th of November, when I had darshan of Ma, I submitted that on this day, at Trivandrum, my brother would be commencing

The Murajapam festival which would conclude on the 14th of January, 1978. I prayed for Ma’s blessings that this 56 day ceremony should be accomplished auspiciously and with all propriety and grandeur and that Ma be gracious to bless my brother in this undertaking. Ma said that something should be done here in Chandod that day, that a lamp should be lit for Sri Padmanabha Bhagwan and that Bhaskaranandaji would tell me what was to be done. I had no idea as to where this lighting of a lamp was to take place : in my tent or in Ma’s Kutia or somewhere else. At about 5 p.m. Swami Bhaskaranandaji told me that Mother had told him that it was to be done in the pandal. At dusk, I went

to the pandal and Sri Padmanabha Swami was kept in a silver tray on top of the puja box next to Mother's asana. I lit a lamp and waited. When the hall was full to overflowing and the Mandaleswars and Mahants had been seated and Mother had also come, I was permitted and privileged to sit behind Sri Padmanabha Swami and Mother on the dais for the whole evening.

In no time Ma had numberless candles brought and lit in front of Sri Padmanabha Swami and it was like a mini Lakshadeepam itself. Sri Padmanabha Swami was to the right of Ma and constantly Her attention would be on HIM, so much so that one of the Mandaleswars said in Hindi "Ma, where is your shraddha ? It is not with us !"



“January

1975 found me in Naimisharanya. The experience did not happen to me directly nor was I in any way really connected with it ; but what it was all about was so much in keeping with my devotion, love, respect and reverence that I feel that I could lay at least a partial claim to its being my experience as well. Actually it is an Ashram experience and particularly Swami Bhaskaranandaji's. It was related to me in hallowed Nimsar as Naimisharanya is now called.

It was in the year 1971 that it had been my privilege to submit to Mother a Padmanabha Bhagwan in Dehradun during the Durga Puja of that year and if I could use a metaphor, a twin of the Padmanabha Bhagwan I have been doing worship to since 1946.

When I had taken the Padmanabha Bhagwan for Mother to Dehradun, I had covered the Lord with a yellow cloth typical of Kerala, gold laced and with black borders and then packed the puja box.

Naimisharanya in January is very cold and one night Mother felt very chilly and the girls brought blankets for Her to cover Herself but still Mother kept on saying that She was feeling cold. Then Swami Bhaskaranandaji was sent for and asked where was the yellow cloth that was used to cover Padmanabha Bhagwan and that it was not on him right then. When this was checked it was found that the cloth had been misplaced. Right then another suitable covering was arranged for and as soon as that was done **Mother no longer needed the blankets and required only the usual wraps that had been in use till that night.**”

Her instructions are of a universal type meant for all men, yet their real import is not always comprehended by people like us. Still, when some of her words illumine the mind of a particular person, what he realizes by his own limited knowledge finds expression in his life according to his own capacity to move forward. It is not easy to imagine how infinitely various are the streams of water flowing from the Himalayas to plains of India through glaciers, cataracts, rivers, streamlets and springs, enriching and fertilising many sterile tracts. Although the Himalayas do not lose anything by sending out these perpetual streams, the welfare of the world is being secured by them. It is similar in the case of Mother and her devotees.

The central theme of all her words and expressions is this: 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 perfecting one's spiritual existence in tune with the universe. To bring about this synthesis, religious culture should be made as natural and easy as taking our food and drink when we are hungry and thirsty.



Mother says “With earnestness, love and goodwill carry out life’s everyday duties and try to elevate yourself step by step. In all human activities let there be a live contact with the Divine and you will not have to leave off anything. Your work will then be done well and you will be on the right track to find the Master.

Just as a mother nourishes her child with all possible care and affection and makes him grow up into a healthy boy and a handsome youth, so you will find the subtle touches of the Divine Mother shaping your inner life and making you reach your full height and stature.

Whatever work you have to do, do it with a singleness of purpose, with all the simplicity, contentment and joy you are capable of.

Thus only will you be able to reap the best fruit of work. In fullness of time, the dry leaves of life will naturally drop off and new ones shoot forth.”



Mother says: “Just as there is a definite time-table for work at school, office or the shop, so should we set apart for divine contemplation a few minutes out of the twenty-four hours of every day, preferably in the morning and evening. One must make a fixed resolve that this little time shall be dedicated to God throughout life. During this period no worldly activity should be allowed to encroach upon the contemplation of God.

A fixed time for prayer or meditation must be allotted to all the members of the family including the servants. If this practice is continued for long, divine contemplation will become a part of your nature. Once the habit is established, the future course of your life will be made quite easy. You will feel the flow of the mysterious Divine Grace feeding all your thoughts and giving you new strength. You get a pension or bonus after years of hard work, so that you need no longer earn your livelihood. In the spiritual realm the reward for good, sincere and selfless work is even far greater and can be obtained more easily.

“Your earthly pension expires with your life,
but the divine pension continues long, long after death.

Those who amass money, store it up in a hidden chamber of their house, add to this store what they can save from time to time, and keep a constant watch over their treasure. So also reserve a little corner of your mind and heart for God and always steal an opportunity to add to your stock in the shape of the invocation of His name or some pious work or divine thought.

If you cannot do anything else, at least morning and evening at the appointed time, lay down your body, mind and life before Him in salutation and surrender, and think of Him just a little.”

One day Mother was showing the various ways of saluting God and said: “Lose yourself altogether when bowing down to God with a single-minded devotion and you will obtain joy and power in proportion.

In this connection she added: “There are two kinds of pranamas : Offering to Him your whole body and mind with all thoughts, desires, sense-impressions, love, affection, devotion, just like emptying the contents of a full pitcher to its last drop. The other way is like scattering face-powder through the minute holes of a powder-box : the major portion of your thoughts and desires is kept back in a hidden chamber of your mind, and only a little dust is allowed to escape.”



From Mother as Revealed to Me, by Bhaji

The Sanyam Saptah is a collective attempt at concentrated and uninterrupted 'Sadhana' and 'Satsang' for one week, which may serve as a model and give a taste of a dedicated life, to be continued to whatever degree possible by each one individually throughout the year.

Sri Ma: "For those who are pilgrims on the path, it is imperative to forge ahead vigorously, energetically, steadily and at great speed. Sitting in a rickety cart will not do. Virile strength of mind is always needed. You yourself have to mould your own life remember this."

"To invoke Him, to be constantly intent on realising Him alone, is man's duty at all times in His arms, in His embrace, —within the Mother. On finding the Mother everything will be found."

To achieve this ideal, Sanyam in one's life is imperative. **Thus under Shree Shree Ma Anandamayi's personal guidance evolved the function organised by Shree Shree Anandamayi Sangha — The Sanyam Mahavrata.**



The Sanyam Mahavrata is cosmopolitan in nature and maintains the highest ideals of all religions. It is open to all who wish to participate in it irrespective of their religion, caste, creed or colour. Whether they are young or old, rich or poor everyone can be a part of it. It is an extremely popular function with Indians and foreigners alike and is successful from an intellectual, cultural, religious and spiritual point of view.

The goal of this Mahavrata is the "Realisation of the Self." It is a combined effort of all the sadhaks towards the One. Individually one may find the path too difficult. However by a

combined effort all the energies are motivated and sublimated towards the One end. The weak willed are inspired by the stronger.

In Ma's words "By meditating in a group specially in the presence of Mahatmas the less advanced are helped by those who reach greater depths in their meditation since the "prana" or life force is the same in all beings."

The Vrata provides a forum of speakers representing different schools of thought. Each speaker makes his contributions in his own way and with consummate skill. They are all the more effective as the Mahatmas are themselves travellers towards the 'Mahan' (Great).

Currently, Ma is in a formless state with the conclusion of her Divine leela. This creates a screen for a common man to have Her physical divine darshan. But everybody feels Ma all around with her boundless kripa, merciful attention to all our activities and programs, particularly programs like Sanyam Saptah and other special programs. Devotees can really feel it. With the infinite inspiration and blessings of Shree Shree Ma Anandamayi, the Sangha has been carrying out all the programs efficiently. Great traditions of Ma, particularly through programs like Sanyam are still preserved. Devotees are also giving their best in co-operation and support.

It is a matter of great rejoice that we are carrying on with this program successfully for the last more than 60 years.



Now Sanyam is held every year at Kankhal (Hardwar) Ashram, adjacent to the Ananda Jyoti Peetham, the holiest shrine of Chetan Samadhi of Shree Shree Ma, after Her physical departure in 1982 from this mundane world. Let us pray to Ma and seek her blessings so that we can properly maintain this parampara, and hold the Sanyam Saptahs in the coming years.

We trust devotees support and continuous faith shall always prevail. Let one and all participate in this rare but great program every year voluntarily with utmost zeal. Let all the devotees come and pray at the lotus feet of Ma at the Ananda Jyoti Peetham on the concluding day of the Sanyam and be blessed and happy ! Let us not lose this rare opportunity of achieving the objectives of Sanyam i.e. “knowing one’s self and attainment of one’s self”. Let that be seriously and consciously felt by all of us. These are our submissions and sincere invitations to all the bratis and devotees of Shree Shree Anandamayi Sangha. Jai Ma!



Bhramar Ghosh (centre front) with Sri Ma and Bholanath about the time of these letters

Letters Addressed To Bhramar Ghosh

Bhramar Ghosh was the eldest of the children of Mr. Atul Chandra Gosh, son of Roy Bahadur Jogesh Chandra Ghosh. From Ma's letters to BG one could conclude that Ma had her Kheyal that BG should take up the ascetic life and in a way Ma was grooming her for that. Ma in fact assumed the role of a spiritual mentor to BG. She had been given an ascetic name Yogananda. Ma also gave her a Shivalingam (Yogeshwar) for worship and named her in-house built personal temple as Yogamandir. Her spiritual inclination was unquestionable. Her sincerity in sadhana and her spiritual experience made her a special seeker.

Apparently BG had all the qualities to be an ideal ascetic. But Providence had something else in store. Her family status, intelligence, educational excellence, connection with the then elite society of Calcutta only added to her inflated ego.

LATER LIFE OF BHRAMAR GHOSH

Some additional photos to illustrate the text; both photos and text by Sw Nirgunananda.

Her love towards Ma was not associated with surrender. Besides, perhaps there was a mental conflict – taking up the ascetic life from conviction and the mundane desire to be a householder. During the second world war from fear of bombing, people were fleeing en masse from Calcutta to different safer places. BG left her teaching profession in Calcutta and joined a new school in the nearby district of Bankura, West Bengal. There she met a young and handsome civil engineer, Suhrit Sengupta, who was a contractor at the school which BG joined as the Head Mistress. To the astonishment of all the two fell in love and got married in 1939. After marriage she contracted TB and in spite of being under the care of one of the best doctors in India, Dr Bidhan Roy, she died in 1948 from pleurisy/TB. By then she had

three children, two daughters and a son. The eldest daughter Chandana was 4, the son Bhaskar was 3 and the youngest daughter Anjana was 1 year old when she died.

Following the links below you will see, by Sw Nirgunananda, translations from Bengali and commentaries for 30 letters/cards sent to Bhramar Ghosh during the period 1934-1936.

Origin of the letters.

The present writer, after taking up the responsibility of looking after the Almora ashram, noticed that the library was in utter disarray. The books there had remained uncared for for years and were infested by white ants and bookworms. To save the rest of the books from destruction he sort out those still intact and started rearranging the library.

He happened to notice one very old note book infested with white ants on the heap of trash about to be burnt. Out of curiosity he took it out and very carefully tried to leaf through the fragile yellow pages; he found that some letters were pasted on each of the leaves of this note book. To his utter astonishment he observed that all those letters (post cards and plain sheets) were from Ma addressed to Bhramar Ghosh, one of her earlier associates. Of course these were not in Ma's handwriting. The writers were Bhairji, Didi Gurupriya, Dr Sharada and Sri Shishir Guha. The letters, dating back to the early 1930's, had so far remained unnoticed. With the hope that they would open up some very important aspects of Ma's life he started examining them. It may help future seekers towards a better understanding of Ma's life and ways.

The present writer was appointed by Ma on the very first day of joining the ascetic order as her personal letter writer. Every day scores of letters from various corners of the world would come to Ma. The letter writer had to read these before Ma. Most of time Ma would then ask him to reply on her behalf putting her words in quotes. But in the case of these letters one can observe that most of them were actually written in Ma's name.



Letters Addressed To Prangopal Mukerjee

These pages consist of the translation from the Bengali of letters on Ma Anandamayi written mainly in 1925-26; they were addressed to Pran Gopal Mukerjee, who was one of the first devotees of Ma, and one of the first also to speak of her to a large audience. He had an important administrative position (Assistant Post Master General of Dhaka, the capital of present day Bangladesh) and was disciple of a well known saint, Vallananda Brahmachari of Deogarh – Bihar).

The bundle of letters was given by Govind Gopal, Pran Gopal's son and a well known pandit, to Swami Nirvanananda in Dehradun. Swami Nirgunananda (Shantivrat) made a copy of them, and translated

them in March 1998 in Ma Anandamayi ashram in Dhaulchina (Kurnaon, Himalaya), where he has been living as a hermit for the past twelve years. He is among Ma's senior disciples. The text was edited by Dr Jacques Vigne, who hails from Paris but had been living in India, especially near Ma's ashram in Kankhal, for many years.

The selection which was made here will be simultaneously published in English for Ma's website on the internet, in French in the quarterly 'Jay Ma' released both on paper and on the Internet, and in the Bengali version of *Amrita Varta*, Ma's quarterly published from Benares. Although this correspondence does not bring any revolutionary knowledge on Ma, it is a valuable record of the very beginning of her public life, and has the freshness and candour which comes from the writings of direct witnesses. Moreover, they confirm and authenticate certain episodes related by Gurupriya Devi in her diaries

In April 1924, Ma and Bholonath had shifted from Bajitpur to Shahbag in Dhaka, where the latter had been appointed as the manager of the estate and garden belonging to the daughter of the Nawab of Dhaka. Ma had started her 'play of sadhana' where she explored all the paths of sadhana -except the left hand Tantrism- in a short period. This enabled her to guide in the course of time every sadhaka on his own path, a capacity rarely found with other gurus. She had observed a period of 23 months of silence until December 1925, and she announced in the beginning of 1926 that she wanted to keep again, for five years, a type of silence where she would not speak on other subjects than religious ones. Eventually, due to the entreaties of her close disciples and relatives, she gave up the idea.

During this period and for several months, she used to eat very little: three mouthfuls of food including water on Mondays and Thursdays, and nine grains of rice only on the other days. She also gave up eating with her own hands. On January 26, 1926, Ma started becoming more widely known : a large scale kirtan was organised in Shabag by Bholanath on the day of a solar eclipse -an occasion for celebration in Hinduism.

Ma entered into different bhavas (ecstasies) and for the first time, spontaneous mantras came out of her mouth in front of a large audience. A miraculous atmosphere became manifest around her, and people started flocking to her with all kinds of demands for a cure from illness and so on.

The main author of these letters is Atal Bihari Bhattacharya, also referred to as Atal or Atul Babu. He was a teacher in the college of Rajshahi, a town in Bangladesh. Ma told him he was her son, but somehow discouraged his wish for complete renunciation as being premature. The other author of the letters is Baul Bashak, also called Baul Dada (Dada means 'elder brother'). He was Bholanath's boyhood friend, and always at hand to render service during these years. It is quite interesting to see how Ma allowed him to enact a mystical vision he had about her in reality.

As a third part of this text, we added a few more questions and answers with Ma which were reported at some place or the other in the correspondence and also a hymn to the Mother composed in Bengali by Girija Shankar Bhattacharya and translated by him into English.

Ma's effect on the recipient of these letters, Pran Gopal Mukerjee, has been long lasting. His son writes of him, after his death: "Whenever my father spoke of Shri Ma, there was a thrill of awe and reverence in his voice which remained undimmed over the years. He knew her to be a teacher who had come to show the way. He would ask her very often 'Ma, when are you going to reveal yourself?' Shri Ma would just smile". (quoted by Bithika Mukerji *A Bird on the Wing – Life and Teaching of Shri Ma Anandamayi*, Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1998).

At the end of this introduction, we may mention the function of the Internet to bring quickly these genuine documents about Ma's early years to the attention of a world audience, for the benefit of spiritual seekers, students or researchers in religions and mysticism. These letters have been dormant for the past seventy + years, were just translated in March 98 in a Himalayan hermitage, and are now on-line. This availability would have been unthinkable only a few years ago, when communication was mostly dependent on the slow and cumbersome system of publication and distribution.

Letters From Atal Bihari (mainly March 1926). In these letters, we can clearly see how the world of gods and human beings, visions and realities are mixing in the company of a sage like Ma Anandamayi. At that time, we mentioned she had the 'kheyal' (divine intuition) to start a five years silence, or more exactly, a period where she would not answer queries related to worldly matters, but would respond only to spiritual demands. On the eve of such a fateful day, the crowd assembled to ask Ma for last minute boons and favours, etc. Eventually, Atal Bihari, along with Ma's sister-in-law, Pishi Ma, insisted so much that Ma dropped her idea of long-term silence. She discusses with Atal Babu his longing for renunciation:

1. "Could you stand to see me dressed in rags and bark only?"

Ma : Do you find it difficult to do your job in Rajashahi while leaving me here?

Atal Babu : Yes, Ma.

Ma : But it is not possible to stay with me and to do all the duties of a householder at the same time. Should you want to stay, you will have to live in a forest like a hermit; but obviously, I must myself also try to live the life of a hermit along with you.

Atal Babu : Yes, Ma, let it be.

Ma : Can you endure the hardships of the hermetic life?

Atal Babu : With your blessings and with you, I am sure that I can.

Ma : Look, recently, you were anxious to put in order my kitchen (which was somehow not in a proper order). You always buy new clothes and care much for me. Now, what will happen if you see me

dressed in bark and in torn clothes? Will you be able to tolerate all this? At that time, if you say :‘Ma, I cannot stand to see you in such an attire’, I will leave you!

Atal Babu : Ma, you’ve put me to the hardest of tests. You’ve yet to grant me the capacity to pass it. Let your will be done anyhow, but it will really be a punishment for me to leave you here while staying in Rajshahi.

After this dialogue, Ma gave him advice and consoled him.

2. Ma acknowledges Atal Babu as her son but does not allow him to touch her feet

[/full width]

One day, I, along with Pishi Ma (‘paternal aunt), Bholanath’s younger sister who was helping Ma at that time) requested Ma to die before she herself dies. Ma told Pishi Ma “You please bless me so that I can go before you and before becoming a widow.” And she told me :”How can it be? Can a son die before his mother?” I was very pleased that Ma acknowledged me as her son for the second time in her own words. At that time, I understood that she would not take her vow of silence as long as myself and Pishi Ma were along with her. Such was her compassion.

After that, I described some spiritual experiences to Ma, and I requested her to endow me with the capacity of keeping this kind of experience for the rest of my life. After that, Ma asked me :”Did you describe all that to Pran Gopal Babu?” “Yes, to him and to his guru, Vallanand Brahmachari of Deogarh, and both of them told me that I am on the right path and that if I follow it, I will reach my Goal. Moreover, Pran Gopal Babu especially instructed me to describe to you everything in detail and to ask for your grace.”

On hearing this, Ma smiled and asked Bholanath “What should I say?” Bholanath said:”As you wish!”

Atal Babu : Ma, whatever my questions are, you always seek permission from some other person to answer them, but a son always likes to hear from his mother directly.

Ma : Don’t you ask permission from your Guru to do whatever you do?

Atal Babu : I do, I even seek permission from him for whatever I say.

Ma: So, don’t utter these words ‘some other person’ (this means that not only she considers her husband as her guru, which is the custom in Hinduism, but that she sees him as not different from herself). Ma added, regarding Atal’s capacities to retain the high spiritual experiences he had. “Right now, I won’t say anything. I will answer at the right time”.

Atal Babu :At least, give me your spiritual assurance (lit ‘*abhay vani*’ ‘word of fearlessness’).

Ma later told Bholanath :”If I describe his spiritual future to Atal, he will be overwhelmed by joy and feel much encouraged”. Atal told Bholanath :”I am least interested in knowing my future. What I want

is her assurance regarding my spiritual security, it may be today, tomorrow, in ten or twenty years or even after my death, but what I want is coming back to Ma's lap".

Atal Bihari was granted permission to touch Ma's feet whenever he came and was always eager to do so, but used to seek permission again every time. (Touching the feet means to surrender oneself to a superior, be it a parent or the guru). But once, Ma expressed her displeasure publicly about people doing so. He felt hurt. Ma took him aside in private, along with Bholanath, and explained to him the reasons for not allowing him to touch her feet, and added he should not divulge these reasons. What is remarkable is that from that moment onwards, Atal's eagerness to touch Ma's feet completely vanished.

3. Ma identifies herself with Bhadra Kali

Near the Ramna Kali temple (Kalibari), there was an old dilapidated Shiva temple. I was going to that temple along with Ma and Sonu, Pishi Ma's son. We playfully decided to start a race. Sonu and myself were going well ahead of Ma, and when we were about to reach the old temple; we looked back and said jokingly : "Ma, you are defeated!" To our astonishment, she started running, overtook us and reached the temple ahead of us, laughing heartily.

Then we all went inside and she gave some further advice to a student who had asked for her blessings the day before to be able to pass an exam in Calcutta. She instructed him to offer hibiscus flowers to Bhadra Kali one by one, repeating his prayers to Her. it was 11 or 12 noon, and then we understood that Ma had come all the way here only to grace this student.

The same evening, Ma returned to Ramna Kalibari with a few devotees. The manager of the temple, Nityananda Giri, had had some dispute over the endowment of temple properties. He had asked Ma about the auspicious time to file a suit. That evening, she advised him to start it in the month of Magh (after January 14, the beginning of the six auspicious months of the year according to Hinduism). All of a sudden, Ma started shouting : "Where are you all!" We were startled to hear such shouting. Then, addressing Nityananda Thakur, she added : "You cannot keep me here anymore. For some time, I will leave this place and stay in Shahbag (Ma and Bholanath's place). You may go there if necessary, but I won't come here." Ma was telling this with a really harsh voice. Then she burst into a violent peal of laughter and came out of the temple. She was waving her hand as if throwing out somebody and was telling : "Go, go!". Then she went inside the samadhi temple (tomb) of a saint which was located in the courtyard and instructed us to go back inside the main building since she would be late coming out.

(In another letter) Atal Babu reports that they asked Ma about her unusual behavior. She started a few words, but suddenly stopped and said "I have the kheyal (a sure divine inspiration) that if I explain this right now, I will lose my speaking power". Anyhow she indirectly gave some hints as to how Bhadra Kali was displeased with Nityananda Giri's improper behaviour, and how she expressed her feeling of discontent through Ma's body. Sonu asked "If the Mother Goddess is no more in Kalibari, will the

offerings of people going there be accepted and their prayers granted?” Ma said “The Mother-Goddess resides always everywhere, but in places of pilgrimage (*tirtha*) and holy places her power is particularly manifested. Ordinarily, she will always be in Ramna, but for some days her special power will not be felt there. Still those who do not know this and worship Her in good faith at that place will have their prayers granted!”

4. Baul Basak is allowed by Ma to enact his vision.

In deep meditation, Baul Dada saw himself making circles around Ma’s head with Shiva’s trident (trishul). He told Ma about this vision. While everyone was discussing this Pishi Ma said to Bholanath “I will put a trishul in your hand” and Ma approved. The next day, at 10 am, when Baul Dada came to Shahbag, Ma immediately asked him to go to Siddeshwari temple to a certain Bairavi (a tantrik female ascetic) to get a trident from her. On the way we bought offerings of flowers and fruit. Because the main temple was crowded, we decided rather to offer the items to Ma’s mahasana (a small platform especially built, for Ma in Siddeshwari courtyard). We took the trident of the Bhairavi, placed it on Ma’s mahasana, worshipped it and returned to Shahbag with it. On the way back, Baul Dada kept on singing Shambu’s (Shiva’s) praise. We put the trident in Ma’s bedroom.

In the evening, I placed two asanas down (small carpets for meditation), requested Bholanath to sit on the right one and Baul Dada asked Ma to sit on the left one, though she protested jokingly saying: “I feel very weak, I cannot get up from the bed”. We could clearly understand that Ma was in a special spiritual mood (*bhava*); all her limbs were stiff. After some time, she regained her normal state and sat on her specified asana. Seeing that Pishi Ma was bringing the trident from her room, she said, making fun of the situation: “I am frightened to see you thus. Will you strike me?” At this time, Pishi Ma was looking just like a bhairavi with the trident and her face had an awe-inspiring glow. She put it in Bholanath’s hand, then got absorbed in deep meditation for some time. Bholanath gave the trident to Baul Dada, who started moving it in circles over Bholanath’s and Ma’s head, while singing Lord Shiva’s praise. It was as if he was possessed by some holy madness (in fact. Baul in Bengali means crazy, often for God). After some time, Ma told him “Now, you understand why there is a trident in the hand of Lord Shiva”. Incidentally, a few days back, Baul Dada had asked this question to Ma and she had not given any answer.

Then Baul Dada explained:”Lord Shiva is the great God (Mahadev, a name used for Lord Vishnu as well, the preserver of the universe), the great Time (mahakal, means the great Destroyer) and the creator of the Universe (an allusion to the essence of Shiva as being above the manifested trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu – and Shiva as simply destroyer). He holds in hand Nature (*prakriti*) in the form of a trident. The trident stands for the three attributes of Nature (i.e., the three *gunas*). It is always striking at the world, hence the sorrow. He further added “Kashi (the ‘shining one’, the traditional name of Benaras) is Shankar’s (Shiva’s) capital and is placed on the trident, which means that it is not a part of the universe.

This kingdom is beyond the gross world, in it there is neither pleasure nor pain, that's why there is no earthquake in Kashi. In this microcosm which the body is, the five elements and the three gunas correspond to the five interior chakras and to the three nadis, ida, pingala and sushumna. The eyebrow chakra (ajna) is beyond them, it is called by tantric practitioners 'Kashi'. When the mind is stabilized in this chakra, there is 'no earthquake', i.e., mental and emotional disturbances subside". Ma approved of these explanations.

From A Letter of Baul Basak

Ma evokes her own experiences.

In Siddheshwari, the devotees had built a small cemented platform for Ma to sit on while being there. They wanted to consecrate it during the nine days of the Durga Puja festival in 1925. They had prepared a meal (prasada) for about a hundred people, but more than three hundred of them turned up. Yet, after everyone could have their fill, there were still some leftovers. Then, Ma evoked her own spiritual state: "When waking up after quite some time, I am quite oblivious of the world outside, of where I am, whether on the ground, in water or in air, of what type of room I am in, whether a building or a hut, where the doors are, whether it is day or night, and whether there are people or not surrounding me. After a long time, the outer perception becomes clear again. Many a time, I just lay down with inert body. I do not have any special perception of my body parts like hands, feet, eyes, ears or mouth. It feels as if a small lump clay is just lying there. Inside, I feel just like clean and solid glass where no stinking smell or putrefied air can enter. If they somehow manage to get in, it is very difficult to get rid of them. I cannot do anything against it on my own. Should I be forced to do anything in that state, I feel pain. It seems that it is better not to take any food. If I do so, I feel a burning sensation in my body, profuse sweating and impaired breathing. If in that state someone is calling me, it seems as if a person is striking hard on my head. If I respond to anybody's call at that time, I may go mad.

Few Questions And Answers

(In a letter, Pran Gopal Mukerjee was probably criticizing somebody. Ma answers the following):

Those who are trying to proceed towards God should refrain from criticizing and speaking ill of others. If you see someone, you should not try to label him as good or bad. The attraction towards God of those who do so will be weakened and they will be tempted to glorify themselves. One should better look within.

How can we get rid of the sense of 'me' and 'mine' ('amar' in Bengali)?

Ma: Delete this 'a' at the beginning; what remains is 'mar' (lit 'belonging to Ma', 'of Ma'). Let the five senses and the five organs of action do their work, but stay put on the Name; then, your ego will

gradually diminish. When you feel that the recitation of the Name is going on spontaneously from within, the ego will decrease as well.

Ma, you have reached the culmination of sadhana. Is there any necessity for you to observe these strict rules?

I just have to stay in this world. Self-restraint is necessary so that the ego does not get the upper hand. (Ma wants to set an example for others as well).

Nani Babu asked Ma – “Ma, you are all merciful; you have to teach the world non-violence (ahimsa). Then, why are you after blood? (Ma was from a Shakta family, in a tradition where one performs animal sacrifice, while many other people in Bengal were following Vaishnavism which strongly condemns bloody rituals : hence this perpetual bone of contention between the two groups)

Ma, in a special mood (she had been addressed by Nani Babu directly as the Goddess):”I drink my own blood (a reference to the famous representation of Chinnamasta ‘the one with her head which is severed, who actually drinks her own blood while at the same time giving a part of it to Jaya and Vijaya). I am *nirahara* (which may mean I do not take any other food, or else I have not taken any food, hence I am hungry). I am the whole world in its entirety.

Why do you have so much greed for blood sacrifice?

To me, everything is equal. What is sacrifice? What is not sacrificed? Why do you pluck flowers and fruit from the tree? Why do you take vegetables from the fields? Whatever you are taking is only sacrifice. The presiding deity (Chinnamasta) is drinking her own blood. She is taking everything in and giving everything out.

Hymn To The Mother

By Girija Shankar Bhattacharya (who was originally from Ashtagram and Professor in Calcutta,). This hymn was written in 1943 first in Bengali and then translated by the author himself into English..

1) I bow down to the Blissful Mother of the Universe (Shree Shree Anandamayee) again and yet again do I bow down to her, whose irradiant smile dispels all mental darkness: whose sweet words attract all: and who by her affection makes everyone her own.

2) I bow down to the Blissful mother of the Universe (Shree Shree Anandamayee); again and yet again do I bow down to her. whose mysterious life (literally the truth about whom) is beyond the comprehension of human beings: and who, though living always without any break in the bliss of Brahman, moves about free, for the good of the downcast, as a veritable mother, full of infinite patience and infinite readiness to pardon transgressions.

3) I bow down to the Blissful Mother of the Universe (Shree Shree Anandamayee) again and yet again do I bow to her, whose mercy is my only hope: who, in her infinite graciousness, manifests herself even in minds prone to evil thoughts and fills them with ecstasy; and utter surrender to whom, together with all near and dear ones, is the only duty of sensible men.

4) To Bholanath do I bow who has a body of bliss (or who was a second Nityanand, (Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's main disciple) and I bow to the Supreme Bhakta who has obtained Unity with the effulgence of Brahman (or to the supreme Bhakta Jyotish, i.e. Bhairavi, whose first name signifies literally 'God of Light').

A thousand times I bow to one whose name is Gopal and who has dedicated his breath to the service of God (or to the saintly Prangopal, pran meaning 'breath'). Again and again do I bow to Rama Chandra, who has access to the most inaccessible mysteries. (Ram Chandra Chakravarti was a widely revered saint, who was the first to declare that Ma is *Jagadamba, Mother of the universe Herself.*)

