

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of humankind, great saints and sages have come to spread the light of spirituality in a darkened world. In India, it is believed that God Himself has incarnated or appeared many times to restore victory of good over evil, re-establish the Path of Righteousness, and guide humanity to the revelation of its innate divinity.

Anandamayi Ma was often asked the pertinent question, “Who are you?” She would reply to this question, at different times, in different ways. She once told a very close disciple, “I am the *vyakta rupa* of the pure aspiration of all true spiritual aspirants. You called for this body, and now you have it among you.” By this definition, we see that Ma belongs to all who feel an inner yearning for the Divine, and she came for all of us. To know and study her life is of great importance and significance.

Many times, Ma stressed that the manifestation of her birth was not a result of *karma*, as is the case of a soul trapped in relativity. We are bound by our karma and by the destiny we have to fulfill. Ma was a completely 'free' being, and her every action and word was an expression of this freedom and divinity. Therefore, every minute detail of her life bears a moral lesson. Those who saw her felt that every movement of her body was a divine expression of sublime beauty and grace.

Ma frequently said that everything she did was for all of us. The *lila* that she performed on the world stage was for all those who had joined their minds and hearts to hers. She became a repository of all spiritual blessings and powers, and still is, to those who know of her and think of her.

Ma also said that no one could think of her unless she first thinks of them. Therefore, in the knowing of her life, and in thinking of her divine *lila*, we tune in to all her virtues and perfection for the blessing and upliftment of our own hearts and lives. The more we know about her life and teachings, the more that eternal life lives in us, and her words can constantly guide our actions in the difficult times we live in.



Anandamayi as the young Nirmala Sundari Devi



## A DIVINE CHILD

**O**n 30th April, 1896, a beautiful girl-child was born at Kheora village, in the Tripura district of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Her family traced its descent from *Rishi* Kashyapa, who was a devout worshipper of Lord Vishnu. Her mother, Mokshada Sundari Devi, the embodiment of simple and pure virtues, would play an important role in the child's later manifestation as *Ma*. She was affectionately addressed as *Didima*. Before the birth of this child, she had many visions of gods, goddesses, and the divine light that entered into her.

The child's father, Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya, was a very religious and otherworldly man, who spent his days singing the praises of God in a sweet, soul-stirring voice. Sometimes, he would stay absent for months at a time, wandering as a penniless mendicant, singing bhajans and practicing spiritual discipline.

The child was named Nirmala Sundari Devi, which means 'goddess of flawless beauty'. In later years, Ma always stressed that she has always been the same. *"As I was at birth, and as a child, so am I now."* Didima said that at birth she never uttered a cry, but was very peaceful, radiant and possessed full consciousness. She later amazed people by recalling the names of those who were present at her birth, and of events that occurred in her early years.

The first sign that her mother had of her supernatural identity came when the child was just a few months old. One day, as Nirmala lay in her crib and Didima was going about her household chores, she noticed that a *sadhu* with a radiant face and long, matted locks was standing before the crib with folded hands. He addressed the mother and said, *"This is no ordinary child, and she will not be confined within an ordinary life. This is none other than the 'Mother' of the whole world!"* After giving his blessing he walked out of the door and when Didima looked out after him, he was nowhere to be seen.

The small child grew into a sweet-natured and friendly little girl. The second dominant trait in her life was also noticed during childhood. She never had a desire of her own or moved to fulfill any personal wish. If left to herself, she reposed blissfully contented in her own self. What motivated all her actions and movements during childhood and throughout her life, were the desires and needs of others. It was seen that the young Nirmala was always at hand to serve and help others. Transcending all social and caste barriers, she was loved by everyone in the village.