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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a brief narration of my association with Ma Anandamayee.

Since my birth in 1955, my parents would take me religiously to Ma but I never really recognised Her till I was 40 years of age, when She had already left Her body.

There are people who aspire to tread the spiritual path but I was just the opposite. My father tried very hard to convert me but to no avail since I was not interested, or so I thought! So with tears of joy in his eyes he said, "It was only Ma who could do it!" It is only with God's grace that one can tread the path and Ma Anandamayee pushed me literally on to it! For eight months, She came to me continuously and guided me. This was in 1995 after She had left Her body! After this time, from 1995 to 2012, my life was a whirlwind. Ma pushed me into becoming a *brahmacharini* (female celibate) in white garb and ended this journey by making me a *sannyasi* (renunciate). It is just not possible to make this transition from a worldly person to getting *sannyas* (renunciation) in such a short span of time. Today I totally agree with my father that only Ma can do this. I am always indebted to Ma for taking over my journey.



SWAMI NITYANAND GIRI



One day I thought to myself, why not pen down some beautiful incidents that occurred to me, my family and in the lives of different people through the grace of Ma? People encouraged me to compile them into a book, so that the new generation would benefit. Not all who have come to Ma have been with Her or even seen Her. Under those circumstances this tribute to Ma, with so many different incidents, would be a treasure for them and allow them to have a glimpse of Ma. I hope all of you who read this will benefit and receive Ma's grace just as we did.

So here I am sharing some of Her *lilas* (divine sport) with you. Every incident is accompanied by a wonderful 'Saying of Ma'.

My special thanks go to Rekha Khanna for sponsoring this book in the service of Ma, the publisher Gautam Sachdeva, Devika Khanna for the book design, Arvind Pandeya for technical support, and the entire team of Yogi Impressions.

Offering my oblations at The Lotus Feet of Ma.

Swami Nityanand Giri

January 2019

Brief notes on main personages in the book appear, in alphabetical order, at the end of this book.





INTRODUCTION

WHO IS MA?

MA IS THE ONE BEING
WHO BOTH PERVADES AND
TRANSCENDS CREATION,
WHO IS BOTH FORMLESS
AND WITH FORM, AND
IS THE SOURCE
AND CAUSE OF
ILLUMINATION
OF THE THREE
WORLDS, AND
THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF
A YOGIN

“I was the same, I am the same. And I shall be the same as long as the dance of creation goes on in the hall of eternity.”

These were the words uttered by Ma to Paramahansa Yogananda in 1936 when he visited Her in Calcutta. Someone had asked, “Ma, who are You?” Ma's reply had been, “Whatever you think – I am that.”

So, the question arises, “Who is Ma?”

Ma is the one being who both pervades and transcends creation, who is both formless and with form, and is the source and cause of illumination of the three worlds¹, and enlightenment of a *yogin*². She is one without a second to whom we approach as Mother, Father, Brother and Friend.

Here, we are talking about Her descent in our midst. She is both the imperishable foundation of manifestation and the phenomenal creation in ceaseless flux. In Her outgoing stream of existence flows both joy and sorrow. Our perception of Her is dependent upon the state in which we are.

In Ma's presence, people shed their inhibitions and flocked around Her. The love that flowed from Her enveloped everyone and everything including birds and beasts, trees and plants. Her eyes saw through everyone and accepted their infirmities and imperfections with understanding and compassion. She responded to everyone as a mother would to her child, with an eagerness to guide him or her from darkness to light.

In the effulgence of Her love, a *sadhaka* (practitioner of spiritual discipline) surrendered completely to Her. He sees nothing, asks nothing from Her, but the interplay of love frees the *sadhaka* from worldliness and envelops him in Mother's Divine protection.

So again one asks, who or what actually was Ma Anandamayee?

¹ The three worlds: Devotion to God and the gods of Hinduism is known as Bhakti. It is an entire realm of knowledge and practice unto itself, ranging from the childlike wonder of the unknown and the mysterious, to the deep reverence that comes with understanding the esoteric interworkings of the three worlds. Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds: the First World is the physical universe; the Second World is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas, angels and spirits live; and the Third World is the spiritual universe of the *Mahadevas* (great shining beings), our Hindu gods. Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds.

² Yogin: Sanskrit word for an ascetic or person following the yoga philosophy.

MA HAD NO MISSION.
HER MANIFESTATION,
FOR A BRIEF PERIOD,
WAS IN RESPONSE TO
THE PRAYERS OF MANY

All religions speak about the descent of the Divine either to establish and spread their doctrine or to put an end to unrighteousness. The Divine is *Purna* (Absolute), that is, complete in Itself. To fulfil Its mission, only a part of It necessary for that purpose, descends in the phenomenal world and leaves when the mission is complete. One sees this phenomenon in all the 24 Avatars³ in the Bhagavat Purana. Ma had no mission. Her manifestation, for a brief period, was in response to the prayers of many. She lifted a corner of the veil of *maya* (illusion) and revealed Her benign countenance. Those who could see Her radiant visage of outflowing compassion were spellbound and remained to pray. Saints, sages, yogis, mendicants and sadhaks responded with *bhajans* and *kirtans* (singing devotional songs), and danced with sheer joy. Scholars and celebrities bowed in humility and received Her blessings. The dignity with which She conducted Herself conveyed Her cosmic awareness. The three worlds in which She moved were Her garden. She was never in an alien land. These words are not mere superlatives but are expressions of the awakened.

How can one articulate or write the story of such a One? We can only call Her Ma. Only Ma can unravel the mystery of Her macrocosmic Being. She had come in the garb of Ma Anandamayee. Though all-pervading, She had revealed just a small part of Herself so that those of us without divine sight could behold the ineffable. Her presence, Her touch, Her smile, Her voice, Her gestures had intoxicated the devoted. How can one convey Her being where speech and mind are helpless spectators? She is beyond our grasp, and yet She has illuminated many minds and hearts, establishing for one and all to see that in deep darkness – Her light prevails. At Her touch, a person foregoes the ego and finds immortality.

³ The 24 Avatars of Lord Vishnu: According to the Puranas, the incarnations of Vishnu are many. The Bhagavat Purana lists 24 incarnations:

1. Catursana (The four Kumaras, sons of Lord Brahma)
2. Narada
3. Varaha (Boar)
4. Matsya (Fish)
5. Yajna
6. Nara-Narayana
7. Kapila
8. Dattatreya
9. Hayasirsa (Hayagriva)
10. Hamsa (Swan)
11. Prsnigarbha
12. Rishabha
13. Prithu
14. Narasimha (Man-Lion)
15. Kurma (Tortoise)
16. Dhanvantari
17. Mohini
18. Vamana (Dwarf)
19. Parasurama (Rama with the axe)
20. Raghavendra (Sri Rama or Ramachandra, King of Ayodhya)
21. Vyasa (Vyasadeva)
22. Balarama
23. Krishna
24. The Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama)



AT HER TOUCH, A PERSON FOREGOES THE EGO AND FINDS IMMORTALITY

Being an embodiment of Reality, She holds a mirror in which one's innermost failings are reflected. The infirm were made whole; the imperfect were ushered into the realm of perfection. In Her presence or vicinity, some went into meditation, some became aware of subtler existences, and some saw the presence of higher intelligences. Many found their doubts and questions resolved. Many had miraculous experiences and found their path. Everyone who came in touch with Her felt fulfilled.

She claimed She did nothing – '*Tasmin Dhrashte Paravare*,' that is, by the mere sight of the transcendent. What is this benediction that today in *Kaliyug* (the fourth and most destructive yuga), where materialism prevails, many are enabled to take shelter under Her benign grace and thereby escape the temptations of sensuality? What is this phenomenon? What is this 'life divine' that in the company of devotees the atmosphere radiates with love and blessings and those present feel free from the oppression of worldly existence? Many who came in touch with Her have found the path of righteousness and are flowing towards total emancipation.

What compassion is this that those souls who are lost in darkness, are redeemed and liberated?

Once a devotee asked Ma, "Where were You before this time?" Ma replied, "Here and now." He then said, "I am not asking from the point of view of *atma* (soul, self, consciousness), but please tell me from the point of view of space and time."

Ma's reply was still the same. Ma exists in the eternal present and therefore She is here and now. Although in a physical body, She was not confined within it. As such, many inexplicable phenomena occurred both in Her body, and in its proximity. Time and again She has said that She and everything around Her is one.



BEING THE DESCENT OF THAT PURNA BRAHMAN, MA WAS ALWAYS AWAKE

Being the descent of that *Purna Brahman* (Absolute Brahman), Ma was always awake. At the time of Her birth, She did not cry. She said that She was fully awake and was watching a mango tree. What does this prove? It shows complete awareness! Is it possible then to put Her in a slot and say She is 'this' or 'that'? One cannot impose any such limitation. What is it that She is not? We write from the knowledge and experience we have of Her. She is limitless. Only She can reveal Herself and tell us who She is. We cannot even begin to grasp Her essence. Therefore, She was neither a *siddha* (one who has attained supernatural powers) nor an *avatar* (a manifestation of a God in bodily form on earth; an incarnate divine teacher).

When manifested in a physical body, there was nothing for Her to achieve. All one can say about Her is that She is what She has always been. She is pure Being. For that reason, Ma is to each one what he believes Her to be. To those who have experienced compassion and been blessed with Her grace, She is our Ma:

*"Who gives us breath, who gives us strength?
Whose bidding all creatures must follow?
Whose shade is death, whose shadow immortal?
Which god shall we adore with our oblations?"*

— HIRANYAGARBHA SUKTA OF RIG VEDA, R.V.X. 121

Who is Ma? To us, in our overflowing Love, She is our Mother.





IT IS THE PURE, UNDEFILED FLOWER
THAT FINDS A PLACE AT THE FEET OF THE LORD
AND NOWHERE ELSE



MY KOTI KOTI PRANAAM TO MA

*“Bhavataapa pranaa shinye aananda ghana murtaye.
Gyaan bhakti pradaayinne matastubhyam namo namaha.”*

This is the *Pranaam Mantra*, that is, the chant for obeisance. Its meaning is: ‘The three worlds are suffering in agony, so we are bowing to You, *Ananda Murti* – Joy incarnate – to shower grace on us, release us from this suffering, and give us the benediction of knowledge and *bhakti* (devotion)’.

I recall a small incident here. When I was very young, my father made me learn this mantra and took me to Ma to recite it to Her. Since I was so very young and my speech was not well formed, I, in my babyish way recited:

*“Babatap panaa shinye anand gha murti,
gyaan bhakti pradaanine maatatubham tamo tami!”*

Ma simply looked at me, smiled, and patting my back said, “*Shaabaash*” (Well done).

What do we learn from this? No particular technique, impressive vocabulary, or intelligent approach is required to reach God. He just sees your *bhaav* (feelings). That is all that is needed. Become a child.

Note: *Koti koti pranaam* (countless obeisance).



MA



Baba fell at Her feet and said,
“Ma, I have lost. You are
victorious, not me. I do not
deserve to be on the seat.”

Ma: Mother of everyone

The tradition of the Shankaracharyas¹ (there are four Shankaracharyas appointed to head the four *Maths* (Spiritual Centres) in India, is that every time a new Shankaracharya has to be appointed to head the respective Math, he has to undergo certain tests. As you may be aware, the Shankaracharyas are all about *gyaan* (knowledge). They are very well-versed about our scriptures, theology, philosophy, and are accomplished *sadhakas* (spiritual seekers). Once a candidate is chosen as the next Shankaracharya to head one of their Spiritual Centres, he has to travel all over India on foot with his staff, which signifies his authority in one hand, and a flag in his other hand. On their travels, they have to meet the saints or sages of every region and engage them in a verbal debate on subjects pertaining to wisdom and knowledge. Obviously, they only engage with those sages who are all-knowing. Once the Shankaracharya wins the debate, he hoists his flag in that region and is said to have conquered that state. He is then known as a *Digvijayi* (Conqueror). Thus, he goes from one place to the other establishing his reputation and renown.

I will now tell you about the time when a particular Shankaracharya, who had covered every state in India and had been declared a Digvijayi, was ready to go back and be crowned as the next Shankaracharya. One person, who had heard about Ma, told him

that his exercise was not over since he had not gone and met Ma for the debate. His reaction was, “Oh! A woman? I am not interested!”

Anyway, he finally consented. On meeting Ma, he offered his *pranaam* (reverential form of greeting/ obeisance) and told Her that he was here to answer any question She may put to him. Along with Ma, there were several *sadhus* (holy men) and *brahmacharis* (male celibates) in the ashram and they were all very eager to know the outcome of the debate. Ma went on saying, “Baba, whatever you say is right. I am a small child and what will I ask?” But he was adamant and did not give up. This argument went on from morning till evening, and Ma did not budge. At last, in the evening Ma asked, “Baba, tell me, what is the *Maha Vaakya* of the Vedas?” (The one great statement of the Vedas.)

He replied, “Ma, it is *Ekam Brahmo Dvitiya Naasti*.” (There is only one Brahma, no two.)

Ma said, “Then Baba, where is the question of any *vaad vivaad*?” (debate with whom – when there is only One?)

Baba fell at Her feet and said, “Ma, I have lost. You are victorious, not me. I do not deserve to be on the seat.”

Ma said, “No-no Baba, you are the Digvijayi because your victory is mine – where is the two?”

¹ The original Adi Shankaracharya founded four *Peethas* or *Maths*, known as ‘Amnaya Peethas’. These are located in the four corners of India and are as follows:

1. Vedanta Jnana Peetha, Sringeri, South India
2. Govardhana Peetha, Jagannath Puri, Orissa, East India
3. Kalika Peetha, Dwaraka, Gujarat, West India
4. Jyotih Peetha, Badarikashrama, Uttarakhand, North India

The ashrams of Shankaracharya are amongst the most revered pilgrim destinations in India. The heads of these four Peethas are considered the principal Shankaracharyas in India.



IN EVERYTHING AND IN
EVERYBODY IS
BUT THE ONE HIMSELF

Ma and children

Ma called all children Her friends. Just as grown-ups did, the children also adored Ma. I know of some kids who could never be away even for a short time from their parents, and others who could never sit still for five minutes. Yet they loved to see Ma and, as if fascinated, sat quietly in front of Her for an hour or two without becoming restless. I remember that if Ma was resting in the afternoon, we were told to go home and come later. I would tell my parents that instead of going and then coming back, I would like to play with the frogs in the pond that was in one of the places where Ma would be. Ma gave a lot of attention to children. She would give them garlands and flowers that were offered to Her and whenever possible, She would give them fruits and sweets. I simply loved the sweets! Sometimes, She would put a sweet in my mouth! Those days one never realised who She was, but I loved going close to Her because She sometimes exuded an aroma of lotuses, and at other times of roses. It was Divine!

She would often laugh and joke with us children, and sometimes took us very seriously. Even a child of five or six years was instructed to think of God. She would say, “You are my friends, aren't you? Then will you listen to me? Are you willing to do something for this friend of yours? All right, be careful and remember what I am going to ask you! First of all, as soon as you get up in the morning do pranaam, bow down on the ground before God, pray to Him to make you a good boy or girl and say, ‘God, I do not know where You are, grant that I may find You!’”

“At night, before going to sleep, do pranaam again and if you have done anything wrong during the day, ask God to let you do better the next day. The second thing is, try to obey your parents and teachers. Third, study well! Pay attention to your lessons and try to master them. Fourth, always try your utmost to speak the truth. Fifth, laugh and play to your heart's content. If you do the first four things I have asked of you, there is no harm in being a little naughty at times!”

To the older children, Ma frequently said, “How much time can you spare for Me? Don't reply in a hurry, think it over, and see how much time you can give Me – five minutes daily, or ten? Not just once in a while, but every day for the rest of your life. All right, then for those five or ten minutes, think of God. Choose the time of day which is most convenient. If you can sit still and be by yourself, so much the better. But if this is not possible, whether lying down, standing or walking, think of Him, and don't ever give it up. These few minutes of every day belong to God, even if you are travelling by train or bus.”



“As soon as you get up in the morning do pranaam, bow down on the ground before God, pray to Him to make you a good boy or girl and say, ‘God, I do not know where You are, grant that I may find You!’”

HE HIMSELF SELECTS THE METHOD BY WHICH
TO DRAW HIS CHILDREN CLOSE TO HIMSELF,
THE METHOD THAT IS BEST SUITED TO EACH ONE



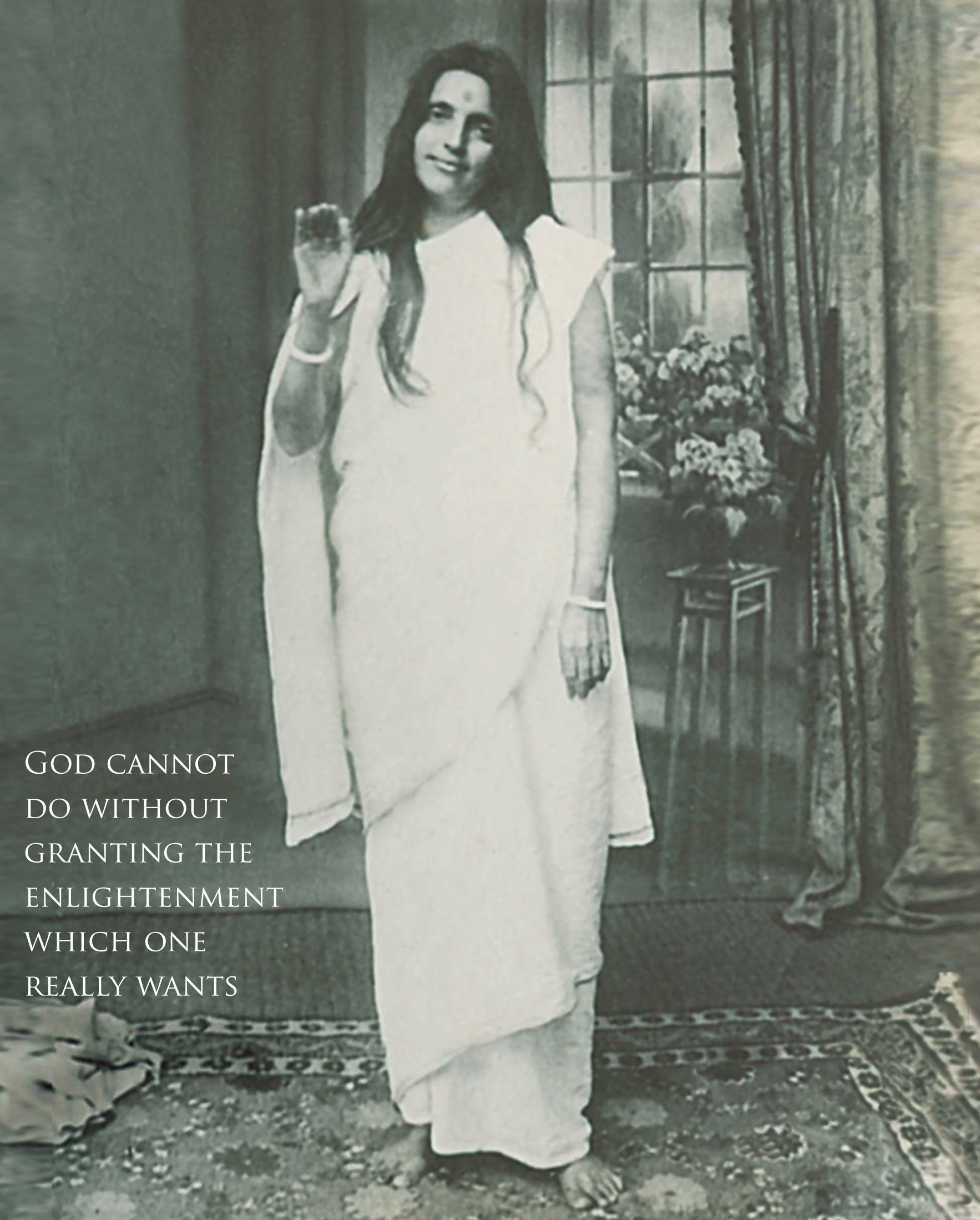
LATE PADMAJI (AJAY SOPORY'S MOTHER), LATE SWAMI VIJAYANANDAJI WITH MA



KANYAPEETH GIRLS, DIDI, DIDI MA WITH MA



DEVOTEES WITH MA



GOD CANNOT
DO WITHOUT
GRANTING THE
ENLIGHTENMENT
WHICH ONE
REALLY WANTS



The light of benediction

The Bhimpura ashram above the holy Narmada river in Gujarat is one of Ma's beautiful ashrams. Located in a forest, it is home to over 20 different species of birds and monkeys and snakes. There is a huge banyan tree which is very old and Ma used to sit under it. This land is known as a *Tapo Bhumi* (Places where saints and sages have done *tapasya* – austerities, penance – and *sadhana* – spiritual practice, since ancient times). In fact, all of Ma's ashrams are Tapo Bhumis. The sunrise here is a lovely sight to see as the sun slowly ascends, and the Narmada river glistens with its rays. Although the ashram at Bhimpura today has electricity, water and nice rooms, I am talking about the time when there was no water, no light, and no rooms to stay! There was only a room for Ma that had a porch in front and where we also would stay. Water had to be fetched from the river to bathe and wash kitchen utensils. But Ma's attraction was so much that nobody cared whether they got any such conveniences or not.

One day, my father and I were in the ashram along with several other devotees. We would all open our sleeping bags in the night and sleep on the terrace above Ma's room. One such night, at about 3 am, we all got up seeing a brilliant light, as if someone had switched on floodlights. As I mentioned earlier, there was no electricity in that village. Then, where was this light coming from? It was so powerful that we all got

At about 3 am, we all got up seeing a brilliant light, as if someone had switched on floodlights

up and went to the edge of the terrace to see what was happening. What did we see? Ma was standing, Her hand slightly raised, and there was a silhouette of a yogi standing in mid-air! It looked like Ma was busy doing something with him. The blinding light, the form, and Ma with Her hand raised – that's all we saw. After a while, Ma's hand came down and the form disappeared. Ma retired to Her room and everything was dark again. After that, none of us could sleep. We wanted to know what had occurred.

The next day, one of the ascetics of the inner circle went up to Ma and asked Her what had transpired. This is what She said: "It was nothing. Just like you all come to this body when you have a problem, similarly, that was a yogi who was stuck in his *sadhana* and wanted to go to *Vishnulok* (Vaikunth – the abode of Lord Vishnu) but could not, so he came for help and I sent him off. That's all!"

The light we saw was the light of benediction, where Ma initiated him so he could go where he wanted to. To me this was as if I would say I want to go to so and so place and Ma saying, "Okay go!"

Prarabdha can be annihilated only by Ma

We all know about *prarabdha karma* (past action, work or deed which is experienced in the present life). We are here to exhaust this. Prarabdha is something that no one can erase for you – no saint, no sage, no guru. The question then arises – is there anyone who can? Yes, there is only one who can and that is God.

See how Ma gave a new birth to a mad woman:

This incident occurred when Ma was in Her ashram on the banks of the Ganges at Varanasi. All the sadhus, *Mahamandleshwars* (Heads of spiritual organisations), renowned saints and sages, had organised a great seminar at this ashram. On occasions like this, a lot of protocol and decorum had to be maintained and no other person, not even an inmate of the ashram, was allowed to enter the seminar hall.

On the other bank of the Ganges, there was a mad woman in a boat being rowed by two or three boatmen. They did not see what the woman was about to do since they were busy talking among themselves. One of them was saying, “Do you know, there is one Anandamayee Ma, who has arrived at the ashram which is on the banks of Gangaji? I have heard She performs a lot of miracles!”

At the other end of the boat, the mad woman was ready to jump in the river and kill herself, but the moment she heard the name ‘Anandamayee Ma,’ she stepped back and asked the boatmen to repeat what they had said and then insisted they should take her to Ma. The boatmen agreed and dropped her there. The woman was in a terrible state – her clothes were torn and tattered, she had no slippers on her feet, her hair was unwashed and dishevelled.

She rushed towards the ashram shouting that she had to meet Ma. The inmates of the ashram tried their best to make her understand that no one could go in. Ma heard all this noise and interrupting the seminar, asked the inmates to let the woman come in. The dignitaries gathered in the hall looked at one another.

The woman rushed towards Ma and asked, “What is your name?”

Ma replied, “Ma... this body is called Anandamayee.”

The woman said, “Oh! You are the one! I have heard you can do miracles?”

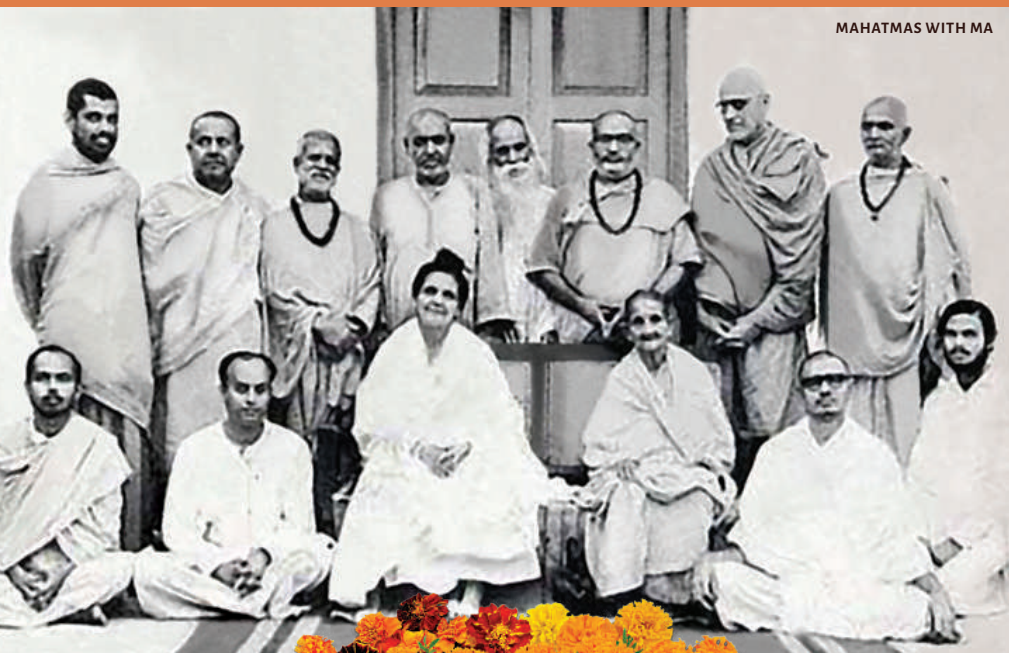
Ma asked her, “What is your problem?”

The woman said, “I was working on the other side of Gangaji and I had a cat, but I don't know where it is now? So, can you get my cat back for me? I want my cat!”

“Yes I can,” said Ma and called for some of the girls of the ashram. There were a lot of cats roaming around in the ashram, so Ma told the girls to give one of them to the woman. After she was given a cat, the woman was very happy and stayed back in the ashram.

The moment she heard the name of Ma, her destiny was changed that very second – by just hearing the Name!

Now, milk was ordered every day to feed the cat. The girls were becoming quite jealous of this complete stranger who was getting so much attention from Ma, who had allowed her to stay in the ashram. They would constantly complain to Ma about this woman, and question Ma as to why She had asked this mad woman to stay. One day, Ma was to travel to some other place and She took this mad woman with Her to do Her *seva* (service). The girls were aghast! This went on for two years. One day, the woman went to Ma and asked Her whether she could go to her Gurudev's ashram. The moment she said this, Ma immediately instructed one of the ashram's inmates to go and drop her there. Then Ma called for the girls and told them, "This body is not answerable to any question. This woman's prarabdha was over and she was to commit suicide." The moment she heard the name of Ma, her destiny was changed that very second – by just hearing the Name! Ma kept her in the ashram to allow her to tide over that difficult period and gave her a new lease of life. Then after two years, this woman remembered her Guru, which meant that period was over and she was normal once again! That is why Ma then sent her away.



HE ALONE DOES
EVERYTHING
AND CAUSES IT TO BE
DONE... WHATEVER IS TO
HAPPEN WILL HAPPEN



ONE CAN ONLY HOPE FOR PEACE
BY KEEPING THE MIND AT HIS FEET,
WILLINGLY OR OTHERWISE