



*In Her Perfect Love*  
*by Shraddha*



*The Beautiful Lady of my dream*

**A Danda Swami's Tribute**  
**conveyed to the author**  
**by Swami Mangalananda Giri**

Something interesting happened that you will appreciate.

An 84-year-old Danda Swami is staying at the ashram during the rains. He speaks very good English and frequently comes to my room. He asked for any book about Ma, and I told him to browse my "library" which now extends the full length of one wall. Without any prompting from me, he went directly to your book "In Her Perfect Love", and I gladly lent it to him. After a day he came back and was literally raving about the book. He said, 'If I sold everything in the world, it would not pay the price of this book. I've been mad for this book since I started it - reading it day and night.'

I told him I communicated with you and would pass on his enthusiasm.

Swami Mangalananda

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Album of photographs from our trips – click here

<http://www.anandamayi.org/books/Shraddha.pdf>

# Introduction

These pages hold an account of the most precious days in my life. This is not an autobiography, but truly is the story of my life.

During the years of 1970 through 1981 my husband and I made seven trips from Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., to see Mother at various locations in India.

The events which happened during those seven trips are the fabric of this book. My experiences with Mother are the many-colored threads with which She embroidered the fabric, and the resulting picture which emerges is a touch of Her perfect love.

Instead of chapters, there are headings for each of the trips, along with their inclusive dates. For the purpose of reference, subheadings are given within each trip of the city, town, or village in which we saw Mother.

It has been a joy for me to relive those wonderful times as I wrote about them.

If devotees find some shared joy in reading these stories, then it will have justified the telling. That is the simple purpose of this book.

Jai Ma!

Shraddha

Anjali  
to  
Mother

With the wish that  
nothing be left out,  
these pages are offered  
at Her Holy Feet.

# Acknowledgment

In the fall of 1990, our dear friend and great devotee of Mother, Sri Rameshbai Patel invited Satya and me to visit him and his brother Kanoobai in Florida. While we were his guests there, I told Rameshbai of the writing I had been doing in order to preserve every possible memory of Mother's Darshan. As we sat together in the evening, upon his request, I would read aloud from small portions of what I had written. Rameshbai told us that those recollections should be made into a book.

In November of 1991, Swami Bhaskaranandaji told me that this book should be ready for Mother's Centenary Celebration. At that time I did not see how it would be possible. It was far from complete and to turn my handwritten scrawls into a book seemed inconceivable. By Mother's Grace, my dear friend Chaitanya was able to dedicate long hours typing the manuscript on her word processor, then doing it all over again when I had to make changes. With the support of Dr. Bipin Bhatt and the efforts of Rameshbai's three sons, Mahadev, Gopaldas and Devang, Swamiji's and Rameshbai's wishes were carried out.

The first edition of "In Her Perfect Love" was presented in India during Mother's Centenary Celebration at Bhimpura in 1996.

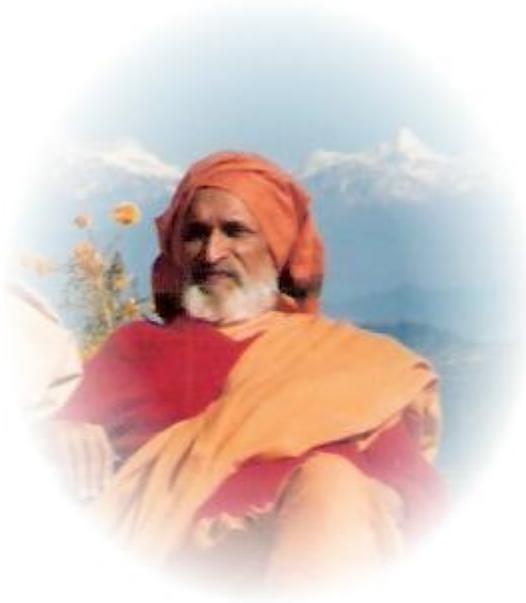
For this edition, I would particularly like to express my deep appreciation:

To my husband, Satya, my divine playmate, who's love and steady support gave me the courage to bare my soul on these pages which he affectionately referred to as "Our book." Soon after this book was completed and first published, he left this world while consciously gazing at Mother's photograph - - attaining our common goal and life's purpose, Mother's Eternal Darshan.

To Rameshbai, who left this world in 1998 and now dwells in his Real home, at Mother's Holy Feet.

To Rameshbai's family, Dr. Bipin Bhatt and all of the many persons whose efforts have contributed in making this record of my dream into the reality of "In Her Perfect Love," I offer my deepest pronams.

Jai Ma!



## Blessings of Swami Bhaskaranandaji

NAYAM ATMA PRAYATNEN LABHYO NA MEDHYA NA BAHUSHRUTEN  
YAMEVAISH VRUNATE TENA LABHYASTAISH ATMA VIVRUNATE

“The ‘Self’ is not attained by mere oratory, nor by intelligence, or learning (hearing scriptures) only. But aspirant of ‘that’ (Self) only, gets the SELF revealed to them.”

These diary pages are not just the account of incidents and mere description of traveling. Shraddha and Satya have jointly made seven trips to this Holy land of India from the other part of this globe in response to the inner voice. During their visits, Shraddha has maintained the diary and this reproduction of hers, gives us the vision – the touch of “being with Mother.”

With western body Shraddha and Satya are more Sanatani than they look. I am not sure about Shraddha’s experience of writing, but after reading this, I have no doubt about their belief that they think, they are pure Hindus.

Seven trips from U.S.A. to India in a span of about twelve years by not rich persons like Shraddha and Satya, for being with Mother; not knowing the language and tolerating enormous hardships, shows their zeal and that is depicted here under.

My reading of this has inspired me to write the verse of “Upanishad” above. May Ma bless them and help them to obtain their ultimate desired goal in this life.

Jai Ma!

Magh Purnima, 2051  
Sri Sri Ma Anandamayee Ashram  
Bhimpura, Gujarat, India

Swami Bhaskarananda  
February 15, 1995

# Foreword

Swami Nirmalananda Giri

Not much over one hundred years ago God walked with man in the blissful form of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa of Dakshineswar. One of His disciples, Swami Turiyananda, told in later times of one visit to Sri Ramakrishna during which a renowned Vedantic scholar spoke at His request. After more than an hour of brilliant exposition of the eternal philosophy, he fell silent. Paramhansa Deva was most pleased and spoke words of praise to him. Yet, He then said: "As far as I am concerned, I do not like all those details. There is nothing but my Mother and I. To you, knowledge, knower, and known - the one who meditates, meditation, and the object of meditation - this sort of triple division is very good. But for me, 'Mother and I' - that is all and nothing else."

Recounting this incident years later, Swami Turiyananda concluded: "These words, 'Mother and I,' were said in such a way that it made a very deep impression on all present. At that moment all ideas of Vedanta paled into insignificance. The Master's 'Mother and I' seemed easier, simpler, and more pleasing to the mind than the three divisions of Vedanta. I realized then that 'Mother and I' was the ideal attitude to be adopted."

Mother and I! Besides which all the greatest principles of philosophy are but "details"! There is nothing else to life, for She *is* life. I well remember talking with Shraddha and Satya once about the differing levels of "circles" of Mother's devotees and what marked them out from one another. One conclusion we came to was that the devotees could be divided into two basic groups: those that considered Mother to be the most important thing that had ever happened to them ... and those who knew that Mother was the *only* thing that had ever happened to them. This latter group was small compared to the former.

No one can really write about the reality or the nature of Mother. Infinity cannot be captured in finite words. This is why over half a century ago Mother's greatest devotee, Sri Jyotish Chandra Roy ("Bhaiji"), wrote the finest of all books ever written about Mother, naming it simply *Matri Darshan*, Mother's Darshan. Many wonderful books about Mother have been written since then, but it has remained unique, for it not only told about Mother's words and actions but about Her reshaping of his life. In other words, he wrote about "Mother and I." What else could be written?

Now, decades later, someone as far away from East Bengal and the culture of Bhaiji as it would seem possible has written about the same subject: Mother within the devotee's life - Mother *as* the devotee's life. And how alike the two are! For they reveal the universal face of God and the individual spirit as essentially one. It was in Mother that Bhaiji and Shraddha both met their True Self.

I was blessed to be with Shraddha and Satya at their first earthly meeting with Mother and at their last, also. Some of my happiest memories are those of Mother's love poured out upon my two beloved friends. Since the withdrawal of Mother's heart-stealing form from the earth I have never ceased to grieve over

the immeasurable loss. Who can understand that pain? Only another who has been wounded in the same way and to the same degree. There is a song in which one Gopi says to another: "Come, sister, take my hand; for you alone know my sorrow." The chariot of Akrura took the Gopis' Life from them in the form of Krishna, and seeming death has taken our Life in the form of Mother from us. Many times I have wished to be with Shraddha and Satya so we could mourn our loss together - for to whom else could I show my suffering but to those who are experiencing it as well? But to no avail. For whenever I am with them I cannot grieve, for my suffering is greatly alleviated. How is that? Because being with them I am with Mother. Mother is the life of all, but *they* have come to know it by Her grace.

It is a temptation to set down here some of my most cherished memories of Mother's loving interaction with Shraddha and Satya, but that must be left up to Shraddha in the following pages. I can only sum up the essence of this book in the words of a nineteenth-century English hymn - slightly altered by me.

O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee;  
I give Thee back the life I owe,  
That in Thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that follow'st all my way,  
I yield my flickr'ing torch to Thee;  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in Thy sunshine's glow its day May  
brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me thro' pain,  
I cannot close my heart to Thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain  
That morn shall dawn with Thee.

Jai Ma!

## First Darshan

(1960)

In January or February of 1960, soon after my thirtieth birthday, I had a dream which would lead me on a wondrous journey - beyond the shores of the small world in which I slept.

— — —

It was the most perfect of spring days. A soft breeze moved through the trees as the sun revealed the many colors hiding in the green leaves. Flowers of every hue were scattered across the verdant hilltop. Gently the birds sang to the earth.

I was among people who were standing upon the grass in small groups and speaking quietly as we waited in anticipation. I could feel the joy of the day celebrating in all of my being.

To my right, I could see an open car approaching. It slowly moved past me and stopped when it was on my left - with the front facing away from me. I could see a lady in the left rear seat whose back was toward me. She had long dark hair and was dressed all in white.

As I gazed at Her, She slowly turned to Her left; and as She turned everything began to still.

The people quit talking; the birds stopped chirping; even the breeze was still. There was no movement except Hers. She was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. She turned until She was facing me. And from the infinite depths of Her exquisite eyes She looked into my eyes and entered my soul. Nothing else existed but She who is my love. In ecstasy She revealed all things to me and I saw that everything is perfect. In complete awe I could only murmur in prayer and adoration, "Oh my God."

— — —

Upon awakening I told my husband of this dream, which was like no dream I had ever known in its clarity and reality. Even the colors were more vivid than any in waking life. I had no idea Who the beautiful lady was but I would never forget Her or those eyes. The experience which She had given to me was far beyond the grasp of my mind. I was unable to recall the things that had been revealed to me - only that the experience had happened and that *everything is already perfect*.

I knew that it was a mystical experience. But did the beautiful lady really exist somewhere?

Several months later we were introduced to a young woman who was preparing

to leave town. She had a small but nice library which she did not wish to take with her, and asked if we would like to have it. We were very pleased as it held many unusual volumes that interested us. We had become attracted to Indian philosophy as we searched for truth and found in it a way of thinking that was very natural to us.

As I looked through two particular books from India, I was startled to see pictures of a lady saint who resembled the beautiful lady of my dream. I showed the pictures to my husband, but said I could not be sure that it was She, as my lady was older than the one pictured in the books. The books were *Mother As Seen By Her Devotees* and *Matri Vani*. The saint was Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma - the "Joy-Permeated Mother."

The stories about Her were thrilling, and Her words were uniquely consistent, drawing us to the one-pointed nature of all that She said.

By 1961 we had met several people who were students of Self-Realization Fellowship, and we were very surprised to learn from them that Sri Anandamayi Ma was the same "Joy-Permeated Mother" that Master Paramhansa Yogananda (the founder of SRF) had written about in his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

One girl, whom Ma was later to give the name Haripriya, especially seemed to know about Sri Ma, and we were amazed to learn that Sri Ma was living. (It had been our past misfortune that any saint who attracted us was no longer alive.)

I saw more recent photos of Sri Ma and felt more certain that She was the lady of my dream. But always there was a little doubt. How could I be sure?

In the summer of 1962 Haripriya had the great good fortune of going to India with the express purpose of seeing Sri Anandamayi Ma. I will never forget the thrill of knowing that my friend would soon see that Great Mother with her own eyes. She was kind enough to carry my first note to Mother. I had asked for a flower from Her hand, for my altar.

That beautiful flower, given by Ma, is preserved in a frame along with the first picture I had of Ma. But it was no small miracle that I received it at all. While Haripriya was in India we had moved to a town in Northern California about five hundred miles away, but she did not know this. Wishing to get Mother's blessing to me before she returned to the States, Haripriya mailed the flower and a little note to me at our old address. For a return address, she had put her name and the address of Ma's ashram in India. It was returned to India safely. But when someone at the ashram remembered Haripriya (who by this time had left for the States), looked up her California address, and re-sent the letter to her, we all agreed that this was truly miraculous! Haripriya then forwarded this much-traveled blessing to me.

At the end of 1962 another dear friend went to see Sri Ma. Mother gave him many blessings and later when he took Sannyas his name became "Swami Nirmalananda Giri" after Mother's birth name of Nirmala. We had moved back to Los Angeles just before he returned and will never forget the joy of being with him so fresh from India.

He had with him a photo of Mother which he had asked Her to "autograph" for us. Sri Ma "autographed" photos by making some personal mark for the recipient. Ours had a small eye, drawn as the spiritual eye in usually depicted.

Soon after this we were given a copy of the book *Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma*. This book was like food for our starving souls. It was wholly Mother's words in reply to people from all walks of life who had come to Her with questions. Her answers always cut right through the surface where the problem only seemed to be and went down to the underlying source where all

difference dissolves and truth alone survives.

The first real letter that I wrote to Mother was in November 1963, and I did not write again until Haripriya returned to India in 1967. Then my husband and I both sent letters.

We had spoken many times about our desire to meet Sri Ma but it seemed that we never had enough money for the trip. So when Haripriya went for the third time in 1969 I thought I must at least write to Mother asking for a mantram and also requesting Her to give me an Indian name. I had no idea of how She could give me a mantram - as it should be spoken directly to me - but that was not *my* problem and so I asked.

Haripriya was to be in India for several months and there was no way to know when the opportunity would arise for her to read my letter to Mother and get Her reply.

One day as I went about my chores in our little house, the thought of Mother, Haripriya, and a certain Name of God kept coming to my mind. This happened all through the day.

When I received a letter from Haripriya with Mother's reply to me we found that my letter had been read to Mother on the same day I had this experience.

"Ma will give you a mantram and name - you will know from within what mantram or Name of God to take. When it comes spontaneously to you from within take that as coming from Mother." Haripriya, without knowing of my experience, wrote that as Mother replied to my letter she felt that I was receiving the mantram then.

One month later I was again blessed as a dreadful habit was taken from me. While a young girl, I had taken up the practice of smoking in an attempt to be like other young people I knew. As I became aware of my spiritual nature, it was obvious that smoking was not in harmony with my aspirations and I had made many attempts to break the habit. On one occasion I had forced myself to quit for five months. But I never lost the craving and had to battle with it every day until I finally gave in - as at least I did not think about smoking all the time when I was doing it.

Now just one month after receiving my mantram I awoke one morning and it was as though I had never smoked in my life. There was no "quitting," as the habit no longer existed. I have never again had any thought of smoking since that day.

One day after that I received my name from within - Shraddha. It is the Sanskrit word meaning "Faith."

Even after so much grace had been showered on me, I still felt the need to look into those eyes for myself, as I knew there were none like those I had seen in my dream. After one more year of still being unable to go to Her, I wrote to Mother to confirm what I had received. My heart filled with joy when I read Her affirmation.

A few months later we heard the news that Mother's mother, "Didima," had left her body on August 8, 1970. Suddenly the reality hit us that one day Mother would physically leave this earth and we would be left with the knowledge that we had made no real effort to go and see Her.

There was still no money for traveling, but we found that we had excellent credit. So a whole new world opened up for us as we applied for and received several credit cards. We would always pay our debts, so it would be easier to

pay after the trip than to save for it, and besides we were no longer in the mood to wait.

Suddenly the rush was on. We had to write to Mother for permission to come, obtain passports and visas, get all the needed shots, purchase gifts to take to India, and do an endless number of things that were all new to us.

A lady from whom we had just purchased a juicer asked if we were going to take movies while in India. We said no, we could not afford a camera. "Then you must take my camera," she said. Little did we know what a wonderful thing she was doing for us. Those films are among this life's greatest treasures.

## **First Trip (November 6, 1970 - November 20, 1970)**

### **Suktal**

Soon all the rushing stopped and at last we were on the plane, on our way to India - to Mother.

I had always thought that if I could only see Her once I would be satisfied and could go on with my life. How strange ... I did not know that SHE is my life.

As we flew over India, I looked down at "her" and a great love came pouring from my heart. As we stepped down from the plane in New Delhi I felt at home for the first time in this life. Such bliss to come home when I did not even know that I had one.

Our dear Swami Nirmalananda was already with Mother in Suktal, a small village about two hours' drive north of Delhi, on the holy Ganges River. But before he went to Suktal he had arranged for a wonderful friend of his, Mr. Shyam Lal Sharma, who lived in Delhi, to meet us at the airport.

Sharmaji was so very kind. He took us shopping in Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi, where we got suitable Indian-style clothing, and then to his home where we met his charming wife, three beautiful daughters, and handsome son. They insisted that we spend the night. We were given beds in the living room and slept very well.

At the first light of morning we were gently awakened by the soft tinkling of puja bells and the delicate aroma of incense in the air. Ladies in neighboring houses were worshipping in their household shrines. We arose and stepped to the front window where we could hear distant chanting. Completely spellbound, we stood silently listening as the chanting drew nearer. Then we saw in the dim morning light an ochre-clad sadhu leading a small group of people as they walked down the narrow dirt road singing God's Name.

And so began this most important day of my life, November 7, 1970.

After bathing and dressing, we went with Mr. Sharma by car to Suktal. He was afraid that the driver would not find the village if we went alone. On the way we stopped at a fruit stand and purchased apples and oranges to offer Mother when we arrived.

Without telling each other, we were both thinking that the fruit looked so good - I thought how nice an orange would be, and my husband thought how nice an apple would be. Of course we did not take any, as it was for offering to Mother.

It was 3:10p.m. when we first saw Suktal, but we were not to see Mother so easily.

The Samyam Saptā (week of renunciation), which is celebrated by Mother's ashram each year at this time, had been going on since November fourth, three days before we arrived. The function was usually held in a different location each year. This year it was not in Her ashram, but in that of Sri 108 Swami Vishnu Ashramji Maharaj.

As part of the program, each day after discourse and satsang there was an hour of meditation from 3:00p.m. to 4:00p.m. We had arrived just after the

doors and window shutters had been closed for that meditation. A young man, stood guard at the door and he told us that the doors would be opened at 4:00p.m.

The thought that filled my mind was, "Here I have come from halfway around the world to see Mother. She is just on the other side of that door, and still my waiting has not yet ended."

Sharmaji said we should go and visit the beautiful Sukdeva Temple which dominates this small village. So that is what we did. As we climbed the many steps to the top, Sharmaji told us the story of this temple which was built around the largest tree I have ever seen in my life.

It was under this very tree that the great King Parikshit, grandson of Arjuna and ruler of all India, attained liberation.

The great king had been hunting in the surrounding forest when he became very thirsty. As he searched for water, he found the well known saint Shamika sitting in deep meditation. His mind and body perfectly still in realization of his oneness with Brahman, he was in samadhi. The king did not recognize the saint's condition, and asked him for a drink of water. Shamika, in the state of samadhi, did not see or hear the king. The king, thinking that he was being ignored, became very upset. He noticed a dead snake lying nearby and in anger he picked it up, hurled it around the neck of the saint, and left.

Saint Shamika had a son who was born with great power. This son, Shringi, found the dead snake hanging on his father's neck and, learning of the king's insulting act, furiously cursed the king, saying that in seven days the king would die of snakebite. When the saint returned to ordinary consciousness, he learned what had happened and heard what his son had done. Though he was very saddened at his son's actions, he could not revoke the curse.

After returning to his palace, the king began to regret what he had done and prayed that his karma for this deed would come upon him directly so that he might never do such an ignoble act again. Presently he heard of the curse placed upon him by Shringi. Accepting this fate as a blessing, he renounced the material world, all of his possessions and powers, then went to sit on the banks of the Ganges with the resolve to fast unto death. With undivided devotion he fixed his mind on the feet of Lord Sri Krishna.

Many great sages and rishis gathered there and heard the story of King Parikshit. Suka, the Divine Son of Vyasa, who wandered about on the earth at will, arrived in their midst. The king bowed before him, knowing him to be the greatest of the great, and then in complete reverence asked that blessed one two questions: (1) What should a mortal do at all times and under all circumstances? (2) What is the duty of a man who is about to die?

As King Parikshit sat at the feet of the Divine Suka, on the south bank of the sacred Ganges, Sri Suka responded by teaching him that wisdom which grants liberation. In seven days Sukadeva had completed his teaching and the royal Parikshit was in the state of nirvikalpa samadhi, in union with Brahman, completely liberated. The curse was fulfilled when a snake came and bit the king. But he had already left his body.

The narrative of Sri Sukadeva in those seven days was from the holy book, the *Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana*, composed by his father, Vyasa. When we reached the top of the temple, which was all open except for the

shrines, we could look out beyond the tree and see the Ganges winding through the open countryside. The temple priest gave us his blessing and put tilak on our foreheads. Then it was time to go back to the satsang hall to see Mother.

What a lovely way to calm our minds and put us in such a perfect mood for our first darshan of Sri Ma.

Soon we were standing on the porch in front of the shutters. Then someone opened the shutters and I could see Mother at the far end of the large hall. There was a long platform at that end and several sadhus were seated upon it. Mother was also seated there on the end to my left. A large crowd sat in the hall, women on the left and men on the right. Then the double front doors were opened and we moved just inside where we knelt, gazing at Her as the haunting bhajan *He Pita* was sung by Brahmachari Vibhuda.

There were double doors all along the right wall, and the porch continued around that side of the long hall. Those doors were also opened. Mr. Sharma said, "See who is here!" We looked to our right, and there coming down the porch was Swami Nirmalananda, smiling as he came to greet us. Then a man told us to come with him. I did not want to leave, but did as I was told. We were taken along that side porch to doors that were just across from where Mother sat. There we had a much better view of Her. My joy was complete as I knelt with folded palms. Tears of happiness ran down my cheeks as I smiled and said to myself, "It is really happening. I am really here. This is the greatest moment of my life and I *know* it." As I looked at Mother with Her beautiful little hands together in Namaste, I thought She was greeting someone behind me until my husband told me otherwise. Then She took one corner of the yellow towel, which lay around Her throat, to wipe a tear from Her eye. Now my own tears came in a torrent.

After some time everyone arose and stood as Mother went out a door near where She had been sitting. Then someone told us to come to the front - that Mother was coming out to greet us.

We could not believe it. But there She was, seated in a tiny pandal in front of the satsang hall. We hastened to Her feet, prostrated, and offered the fruit, which we had brought.

Mother gave my husband an apple and me an orange - just as we had wished. Then She asked, "Did you have a comfortable journey?" I said, "Oh yes, thank you." She smiled at us so sweetly the whole time She was there. Then She went to Her room.

We met Brahmacharinis Chitra and Atmananda. I felt as though I had always known them. Everyone was so kind to us.

Mr. Sharma had to return to Delhi and we were shown to our "Swiss Cottage" tent situated on adjoining property. There was just enough time to drop our things there before going to evening satsang.

Dear Chitra had reserved special kusha grass asans for us very close to the front where Mother sat. The ladies seated by me were very concerned for my comfort and Chitra kept looking to see if I was all right. Mother often looked at me and smiled. Each time I cried and smiled. Again, She wiped a tear from Her cheek. After satsang we all stood as Mother moved toward the side door. The lady at my side pushed me gently forward until I stood right next to Mother as She passed. I dropped down and softly touched Her little foot. I have no words to tell what I felt for Her.

Outside I met my husband and Swami Nirmalananda. The three of us went to our tent in the compound where many like it had been erected to house those devotees attending the Samyam Sapta.

Our tent was very spacious and had three separate rooms. The interior walls were paisley print. There was a small front room for cooking, a large middle room which had straw upon the floor and was furnished with cots, a table, and chairs. A small

back room was the bathroom. Bricks had been laid in the sandy earth to make a platform where one stood while bathing - which was done by pouring large cupfuls of water over oneself. A shallow trench had been formed to drain the water away and absorb it into the ground. Hot water was always available by the bucketful just a few steps from our tent. Laundry was also done on the brick platform, and hung to dry on the tent ropes.

We ate at the ashram. Seated on the concrete floor under the beautiful clear blue sky, we listened to the birds singing as we were served rice and dal kichuri with aloo (potatoes) and cauliflower in curry sauce piled high upon leaf plates. I was in heaven. The food was wonderful, but I had almost no appetite. Atmanandaji kept trying to get me to eat, but Mother was giving me oranges every day and that was all I wanted. Several times Chitra brought Mother's prasada to our tent.

Daily Mother would gaze at us and fill our hearts with Her smiles. I was so intoxicated with Her grace - I had never known such joy could exist in this life.

My husband walked down to the Ganges one day and bathed in her sacred waters, but I never left the compound and ashram. On another day as I was standing in front of the satsang hall, Chitra came and gave me a pair of Mother's little slippers. What a treasure!

Whenever Mother came outside to visit a shrine or to be shown something on the grounds, we would follow along with Her, as did anyone else fortunate enough to be there. That also was a perfect opportunity to take movies.

I will always remember that dear lady who so kindly loaned her little windup movie camera to us.

## Kanpur

On November eleventh, our car came to take the three of us back to Delhi. It was the thirteenth before we could get accommodations on the train to Kanpur where Mother had gone for a Bhagavat Sapta.

In Kanpur we took a taxi to the J.K. Temple, a most wonderful white marble Radha-Krishna temple with great silver doors and marble mosaics of deities on the walls. Large shrines inside held great murtis of Sri Radha (gold), Sri Krishna (silver), Sri Hanuman, and the most unusual Sri Ardhanareshwara Shiva. This great temple was built by Sir Padmapad Singhania and took many years to complete.

Lord and Lady Singhania were hosting a Bhagavata Parayana (reading of the Srimad Bhagavata, the story of which we had just learned at the temple in Suktal) to be conducted by the esteemed Swami Akhandananda Saraswati, and had requested Mother's presence at the event.

An immense pandal had been erected on the extensive lawn in front of the temple. Heavy cotton carpets were placed upon the ground for seating the vast

crowds that were to come daily. Often there were so many people that a great number would sit upon the lawn around the open pandal. There was a raised platform at the far end where the Swamiji and Sri Ma would sit.

On an adjoining property just a short walk from the pandal was a very nice little ashram and large satsang hall that Lord Singhanian had built just for the use of Sri Ma when She was there. It was to this ashram that we came and joyfully pronounced once again at the divine feet of Sri Ma.

Our host had most graciously provided accommodations for us at a lovely estate called "The Retreat." It was some distance from the temple, but we were provided with transportation and could also take our meals there. The upstairs rooms which we were given were well furnished. Ours had a huge pink marble bathroom. The well-kept grounds had beautiful gardens everywhere and there was a swimming pool equipped with a unique wave - making machine - the only one in Asia. The ground floor of The Retreat housed a museum collection of various objects displayed in glass cases.

Also on the ground floor was a great long dining hall where we were served our meals. Above the long table, hung every few feet, were great crystal chandeliers from Imperial Russia. The gracious man who saw to all our needs was called Bandu Prasad. When we ate our meals he always stood behind the head of the table and saw that we were properly served and that we never wanted for the least little thing. He also arranged for our laundry to be done. We three were the only guests at The Retreat except for an older English couple. Several times we saw them in the halls and dining room. They had a table some distance from where we sat, but we never met them.

Most of our time was spent at the ashram near Mother. A small pandal had been erected on the ashram lawn, and sometimes Mother would sit there for darshan. It was in this pandal that we had our first "private" with Mother on Saturday, November fourteenth. Chitra translated for us.

Mother asked about our lives, our schooling, and what kind of work we did.

I told about the dream I had in 1960. Mother said, "You have very good samskaras to be here" (with Mother). She confirmed my name and said that She would check my mantram at 7:30a.m., Sunday, the next day.

My husband asked Mother for a name, and Mother told him to choose from Satya (truth), Vairagya (dispassion) and Dharma (righteous action). He could not, and asked Mother why She always made him choose. She laughed and told me to select one. I chose Satya, as that has been his great quest: the search for truth. Mother said, "Your names are Shraddha and Satya."

I asked about practice for Grihasta Ashrama. She said, "On one day a month or more often follow these seven rules:

- 1) Eat lightly (not fasting).
- 2) Read religious books.
- 3) Do twice your regular japa and meditation.
- 4) Dress simply.
- 5) Observe two hours of maun.
  - 6) Practice Satya and Shraddha.
  - 7) Keep the mind still.

Lead the life of renunciation. If friends come, allow only conversation of God and keep the Holy Day. The frequency of Holy Days may be increased. Be guided from within about the food that is taken."

Satya asked if there was a mantram for him. Mother said that we should both come Sunday morning at 7:30a.m. As we sat there at Mother's feet, I gazed into those wonderful eyes - the eyes of the beautiful lady in my dream.

Then I experienced something which I had never dreamed of - a presence so familiar, but something unusual at the same time. It took a little while for me to understand what it was. Then I recognized a presence I had known all my life - that I had never been without. But I had not identified it before, or truly even thought of it. *It was my very own self* But now I was experiencing this same presence: it was my self, only it was Mother, *Her* presence. *Her* self and *my* self were the same - not in some abstract philosophical way, not just alike, *but one and the same!*

Now I knew where I belonged, the joy of my heart knew no bounds as it was born of Her, the Mother of my heart. How could it be that I am so blessed? *Only* by Her sweet grace could such a thing happen. For without Her I am completely and hopelessly lost.

The next day, Sunday, November fifteenth, we awoke early, had our baths, and got ready to go to Mother. There were a few people there that morning, but Mother took us into the large satsang hall with only Brahmachari Nirmalananda of her ashram to translate for us. The doors were closed and Mother gave us instructions not to disclose the events of that day. (The two Nirmalanandas in this book will be differentiated by their titles of "Swami" and "Brahmachari,")

On Monday, as we sat waiting for Mother's darshan, Brahmachari Nirmalananda called to me and said that Mother had presents for us. Mother came and pointed to where we were to go. We met Brahmachari Nirmalananda in the back hall, then Mother came and told everyone else to wait. She gave us each a japa mala and a towel. She talked for a minute, smiling sweetly as She nodded Her little head to the side, accenting what She was saying.

When She walked away I asked Brahmachari Nirmalananda what She had said. He told us Mother had said that we looked very Indian, that we had been Indians before and that was why we did so well in India. He then took us into the satsang hall for further instructions. While we were there, Mother came in with something in Her hands. She had brought a volume of the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana in Sanskrit, covered by an orange silk envelope. She presented it to us and said that we need not try to read it, but were to keep it on our altar and treat it as God.

Later that afternoon Mother sent for us as She had yet another gift. She held two saris - one in each hand. One was red print and the other multicolor stripes. She said I was to choose one. I held my hands under the red one. Mother dropped it into my hands and walked outside to present the other to a lady from Switzerland who had just arrived the day before and was also seeing Mother for the first time. This beautiful soul, whom Mother would later give the name of Krishnapriya, was to become especially dear to us.

We went to The Retreat where I bathed and changed into the red sari. Every time Mother gave me a special blessing, whatever sari I wore at that time became my "favorite sari." By this time I had several "favorites." But now the red one which had come from Her own hand was surely *the* favorite one of all.

Upon returning to the ashram we met Mr. Sarmonat, the engineer who had built the great white temple for Lord Singhanian. He took us to his home where we met his charming family and enjoyed coffee and sweets with them. They presented each of us with a beautiful shawl.

When Mr. Sarmonat brought us back to the ashram, Mother was just about to enter the door. Brahmachari Bhaskarananda pointed out my sari to Mother. She smiled at me so sweetly and said, "Accha!" which meant "Good!" or "All right!" in the most

affirmative sense.

During satsang we were allowed to sit at Mother's feet as She blessed several things for friends of ours in the States. We had purchased some photos of Mother and I wanted Her to "autograph" them.

Chitra asked who they were for, and I told her they were for ourselves.

There was a new white pen in my bag which had never been used. I offered that pen to Mother and She used it to mark on each photograph. When Chitra returned the photos to me, I slipped them into a paper bag without looking at Mother's "autograph."

Later that evening Chitra and I had time for a short visit and she presented me with a lovely yellow towel which she had used to dry Mother's feet. What a special gift! She also gave me a white cloth which Mother had given for me to make a blouse. There was a towel for Haripriya and a cloth for the lady whose camera we had borrowed. But the most treasured of all was a strand of Mother's hair.

When we returned to our room that night I took Mother's photos out so that we could see how She had marked them. We were astounded to see that She had made the same "eye" on each one, exactly as She had marked the photo for us in 1963.

It was the practice during that Bhagavat Sapta, which was held daily from 8:30a.m. to 11:00a.m. and again from 3:30p.m. to 6:00p.m., that Mother would be taken by car from the ashram to the large pandal and back instead of walking the distance across the large grounds.

Tuesday morning we brought garlands to present to Mother, but She got into the car which was taking Her to the pandal before we were able to offer them to Her. As the car took the road to the pandal, we ran through the grounds and met Her car when it arrived and got to present our garlands. She lovingly received them, then dropped them over our heads, smiling sweetly as we bowed before Her.

That afternoon, we went to the Gita Press bookshop with Swami Nirmalananda to buy books containing beautiful pictures of the many aspects of God. One picture would be for our meditation room as Mother had directed. But we needed Her approval as to which one we should use. We had purchased quite a few of these books and I took them all with me to satsang that evening. When Mother came into the room and took Her seat, Chitra called me to come and sit by her at Mother's feet. I presented the books, hoping Mother would indicate the correct picture for us and then just touch the other books to bless them.

Mother took all of the books and one at a time looked at each page. She told us which picture to put in our meditation room and then specified a smaller picture, which She said, was to be carried with us any time that we traveled. She handed each book to me after looking at all the pictures. But one book, the large pink one, She started to hand to me, but took back. She touched it to Her

head. Then a little later She said that we had been led to buy those books because of a certain picture of the Lord and the little boy Dhruva, which was in this pink book. Mother said that I had received the mantram in the same way as Dhruva had and that I had been standing in the same posture as Dhruva when it came. (Chitra explained that Mother had seen that.) Mother said that we got the books and brought them to Her in order that this story would be told by Mother to us. She also said that the story of Dhruva had been told at the Bhagavat discourse that day by Swami Akhandanandaji.

Mother gave us prasad - an apple and an orange each. Then She looked at Swami Nirmalananda, who had been smiling through all this, and laughingly tossed him an orange. Mother said that he was so happy because we were there. He was very pleased.

After the blessing of the books, I put my head down at Mother's feet and She put both little hands on my head and blessed me lovingly. Then leaning forward and looking into my eyes She said, "You are not new to Me - I know you very well."

As She arose from Her seat and was leaving the hall, I knelt, telling Her "I love You." Looking at me with all sweetness She smiled and said, "Accha."

Mother asked when we were to leave. We told Her the next evening, November eighteenth, at 7:30p.m. She said that She would see us before that time.

At The Retreat that night I did all our packing so I would not have to take time out to do it on the last day. It was 3:00a.m. when I finished, and I got two short hours of sleep, but sleep I could get any time; Her darshan I could only get tomorrow.

At 7:00a.m. we came with our bags to the ashram. Chitra told us where to keep them, then brought us prasad from Mother - a lovely silk print calendar, a box of incense for Haripriya, and another for us.

We were not able to see Mother until 6:00p.m., and had to leave at 7:30p.m.

When we were brought to Her feet, we sat gazing at Her for a long while, then I asked Mother how to still the mind. She said, "Do japa and meditation and the mind will still." "When not talking, do japa with each breath, and when meditating sit without moving for as long as possible." She placed garlands over our heads and gave us apples and sweets. Chitra brought a box full of colorful little sweets for us which Mother had blessed. Mother then left the hall, saying that we could see Her again before we left.

We talked with our new - old friends: Chitra, Atmananda, Tapasi, Melita, Krishnapriya, and others of Mother's ashram, and of course our Swami Nirmalananda who was staying on with Mother after our departure.

Then Chitra brought the message that Mother said we should take food before we left the ashram. So we had to eat. A little table and two chairs were set up for us on the patio, near Mother's room. The food was excellent and Chitra had made a delicious guava salad for us.

Soon Chitra came and said, "Come quickly, Mother is coming out." So we washed our hands and faces then went inside where we found Mother standing in the hallway. She said for us to go safely and return safely. Also to let Her know when we arrived safely in America.

We knelt before Mother in pronam as She smiled at us with folded hands.

Chitra said that we must go, but we could not bear to leave as long as She was

there. Someone told Her this and She started slowly backing away from us toward Her room, one step at a time. On our knees we inched backward each time that She did, until finally She was at Her door and we were at the door leading out of the ashram. For one brief second I glanced behind me to see where the door was, and when I looked back She had vanished into Her room. My heart was pierced with sadness as I realized that She would not have gone into Her room if I had not turned away. What a valuable lesson, but of little consolation at that moment.

Our car was waiting to take us to the train station. There were many hugs and tears as we forced ourselves to leave this abode of joy. One last hug from Chitra and we were gone. Dear Swami Nirmalananda went with us to the train station. Our train was two hours late, so he stayed with us until it came and saw us off safely. We slept all the way to Delhi.

Mr. Sharma had a lovely surprise waiting for us when we went to his home. He had gone on his regular pilgrimage to Vrindavan, and while there had filled a small brass pot with earth from the Radha Kunj temple where Lord Krishna and Sri Radha had danced together. He presented this to us, along with a most beautiful little Gopal which he had ordered made just for us. The Gopal, formed of eight metals, was a silver blue color.

The next morning, at 9:50a.m., my heart ached as our plane lifted us out of that holy land, and I recalled having that same heartache many years ago. At last I understood why, as a small child of two or three years I had often cried for no obvious reason. My loving family did not know why, and being such a small child, I could not explain the loneliness I felt from not being with my people. Now I knew who my people were and why I was always a stranger in the west.

Many things of that nature were to be revealed to me - things about my childhood experiences, which were not typical of a western child, but not at all uncommon to an Indian.

The return to the west was a shock I had not foreseen. My mind kept returning to India, to the holy feet of that beloved Mother of my heart. It was very difficult to perform the duties of my job. All I could think of was that I must go back to Her as soon as possible. How could I have once believed that one single darshan of Her would suffice for this lifetime? Now I know that only unending darshan could ever be enough.

## Second Trip

(May 9, 1971-May 30, 1971)

### Varanasi

Mother's seventy-fifth Birthday Celebration was to be held in the most holy city of Varanasi (Benares) during May of 1971. There would be a week of daily programs starting on May seventh and culminating in a grand Tithi Puja on May fourteenth in the early hours.

We had received a letter from Chitra asking us to come for this special event. Our friends Haripriya and Swami Nirmalananda were also going to be there. It did not seem possible that we could manage to go again so soon, as it had only been six months since our first trip. But by Mother's grace all obstacles were dissolved and once again we were in that wonderful flurry of arrangements for the trip.

Our flight landed in Delhi about 4:30a.m. on May ninth. After clearing customs, we took a taxi to our hotel on the outskirts of Delhi. It was so wonderful to be in India again. I enjoyed the drive, especially down the wide streets where great trees line both sides and meet in a canopy overhead.

Arriving too early to check-in, we took tea on the lawn where we were seated in white wicker chairs. In the first pale light of day, we listened to the sounds of Delhi as she awoke.

The uniformed doorman smiled as he presented me with a blossom from the garden. Birds began to stir and softly chirp to one another. Beyond the gate, I could hear the bell of a bicycle that was passing by. The aroma of little wood cooking fires, incense, and flowers mixed with the sweet fragrance of Indian tea. All of my senses feasted as once again I was romanced by India.

After our baths, we went to see the Sharma family. They were surprised to see us and after a little while we understood why. The telegram we had sent them from California several days before arrived as we sat in their living room! We all had a good laugh. It was so nice to visit with them again, even for such a short time.

Mr. Sharma went with us to the train station where we got reservations on the May tenth afternoon train to Varanasi. No compartment was available so we took seats in the air-conditioned chair car. It was a very long trip and we would have to sit up all night, as the train would not arrive in Varanasi until late in the morning of the eleventh. But at least we had some air conditioning.

We loved being able to see the countryside, and Satya took a lot of movies from the door of our car. I was more than a little concerned as I saw him hanging outside to get a better view. But after some time he returned to his seat. We ate some of the fruit snacks we had brought and as night closed around us we tried to get some sleep. But had little success.

When the train pulled into Varanasi, three hours late, we were delighted to find Swami Nirmalananda waiting for us. He and four brahmacharis from his ashram in Oklahoma had been in Varanasi for some days.

May is perhaps the most difficult time of the year to visit India because the

heat is so intense. Monsoon season has not yet arrived, but its surety is felt in the dense humid air. It was hotter here than it had been in Delhi, but in the days that followed we would often hear people declare that it was "unseasonably cool." We were simply drained of energy, but happy to be so near Mother once again.

Swami Nirmalananda went with us to our hotel where we bathed and put on fresh clothes before going to the ashram. There was no air conditioning in the hotel, only a large ceiling fan. The water from the single tap in the bathroom was quite warm, just right for bathing.

We went by bicycle rickshaw on a twenty-minute ride down the narrow cobblestone street to Mother's ashram. Unlike Delhi, there were few automobiles on the streets, but many rickshaws, bicycles, and three-wheel motor taxis ("scooters"). Cows roamed freely through the traffic as everyone yielded to them. Small shops lined the street and there was always a lot of activity day and night.

Inside the ashram gates we saw that an immense pandal had been erected but no program was going on at that moment. We were delighted when Atmananda came to greet us. We asked about seeing Mother, but were told that due to the crowds and busy program, we would have to wait until after the Birthday Puja to see Mother privately. We were of course anxious to be near Her, but we would have to wait.

Chitra was almost impossible to catch as Mother had put her in charge of arrangements for the visiting swamis and she was kept very busy. We did get to see her for a quick hello. She said that after the birthday there would be a chance to talk.

Later that day we came to the pandal hoping to see Mother - even at a distance. In the great crowd seated there we looked for friends we had met in November and saw no familiar faces until Tapasi's beautiful smile lit up our hearts as she greeted us.

A long platform had been set up against one side of the pandal where several sadhus and dignitaries were seated. Each day some of them would address the crowd over a loudspeaker system.

We all stood as Mother came in and with folded hands greeted the speakers and the crowd. She took Her seat on the far right end of the platform. I wanted so much to go near Her, and when I saw a line of people with garlands going to pronam to Her I quickly purchased a garland and got in line. Soon there I was at Her holy feet once again. I laid the flowers near Her knees and bent my head in pronam. When I looked up at Her, She was busily engaged in conversation with the sadhu seated near Her. She did not look at me.

I quietly returned to my seat bewildered and feeling rejected. It was a long time before I could quit questioning why She had "ignored" me and question why I wanted an outer demonstration of that relationship which was within my heart. She had revealed that to me on our first trip, but the reality of it had yet to subdue my ego.

Over the years, by Her infinite mercy I was to receive many mild blows - and several were to be visited upon me in the succeeding days in Varanasi.

In the morning hours a Rasa Lila would be performed daily in the pandal and every afternoon a Ram Lila. The crowds grew larger each day and the heat was stifling. But we attended just to gaze at Her. I longed for Her look,

Her smile.

During the hottest part of the day we would go to our hotel room and try to cool off by putting damp towels on our bodies as we lay under the ceiling fan. Or, procuring a block of ice, Satya would chop it into small pieces and pack it around assorted bottles of soda, which he had placed in two metal buckets. After a short time they got very cold. Our western friends, including Krishnapriya, who was now living in India, often joined us and we would all share a cool drink, stories about Mother, India, and the great saints who have taken birth in this wondrous land. Swami Nirmalananda told many thrilling stories from the Hindu Scriptures and my heart would quicken as I sensed the familiarity of my true home, the heritage of my soul.

Kirtan was performed non-stop in the ashram and Atmanandaji often took her turn at the harmonium. One evening about eight of us westerners sat around her and joined in the divine chanting. What a wonderful feeling to participate in this celebration. We smiled at each other in shared delight at our good fortune to be here together.

On the afternoon of May thirteenth we stood at the top of Anandamayi Ghat, before the Gopal Mandir, as the Varanasi fishermen filled the air with their dynamic chanting. Their drums and voices were like the Ganges Herself softly flowing, then building to a great crescendo with waves of emotion as they sang "Jai Sita Ram." Later that same afternoon as Mother sat in the pandal I was thrilled to hear and record Her sweet voice as She sang the same "Jai Sita Ram."

That night-actually about 2:30 in the morning - we entered the great pandal where an immense crowd of people had gathered to join the puja and celebration of Mother's birth. Satya wanted to take some movies and slides of the puja so he moved around the pandal through the seated crowd and got to eventually stand right next to the platform where a beautiful couch had been prepared for Mother. A canopy of jasmine arched above it.

HariPriya and I tried to find seats, but it was almost impossible. As we stood in the aisle about a third of the way back, listening to the beautiful kirtan, we suddenly heard the trilling sound of the Bengali ladies - their greeting of the Divine Mother as She was carried in on a silver palanquin and taken to Her couch. HariPriya and I gasped as we saw Her so pale and obviously in an extraordinary bhav. Upon reaching the couch, Mother reclined facing away from the crowd and pulled a cover over Her entire body, including Her head.

Satya was allowed to move very close to the platform for filming and at one time even went to the back side and was able to photograph Mother's face as She lay upon Her couch.

The elaborate Tithi Puja was beautifully and gracefully performed by Brahmachari Nirvanananda. The whole function was not completed until dawn, at which time the devotees formed long lines and waited to offer pronams and flowers where Mother lay. Later Mother was assisted back onto the silver palanquin, and still in that divine mood She lay with eyes closed, completely limp, as She was carried to Her room in the ashram.

The heat, crowds, and long hours left us exhausted, but the magic of that night was worth that and more. We went to our hotel room and did not get back to the ashram until the next day, May fifteenth.

Refreshed and anxious to see Mother again, we came to the ashram. We

were told that Mother would be coming into the Gopal Mandir and we could go there for darshan. There were so many people in the temple that we were unable to find a place where we could see Mother. There was a balcony over the entrance and as no one was there we westerners thought that would be a good place from which to see Mother. So we all went there to wait for Her arrival.

After a while other people began to come to the balcony. One woman ashramite who found our presence as foreigners to be most disturbing, proceeded to make a scene and angrily insisted that we leave the balcony. I was humiliated and fled in tears. By now it was dark, and I went into the deserted ashram compound feeling very hurt and confused. Satya soon joined me and we stood there alone in the moonlight trying to understand what we were experiencing. How could it be that just six short months ago we had been treated with so much kindness and affection by everyone? Our beloved Mother had showered us with so many blessings, looking into our very being with Her wondrous eyes and claiming our hearts as Her own throughout eternity.

Now it seemed that we were not only strangers whose presence was offensive, but far worse - that Mother seemed to ignore us or did not even know us. We stood looking down at the flowing Ganges pondering these things and wondered why all this was happening.

Then we saw a figure approaching us. It was Brahmachari Bhaskarananda. He said, "There you are! I have something for you." His hand extended over mine and as he dropped something into my hand, he explained that it was a small piece of the cotton saturated with aromatic oils which had been placed upon Mother's holy feet during the Tithi Puja.

We were stunned. I did not think he was even aware that we were there, much less that we would be deemed worthy of such a treasure. Mother's touch and timing are unmistakable, for this could only be Her doing. Suddenly in the midst of our sorrow we were full of joy.

As we pronounced to Bhaskaranandaji we shared together not only the great blessing of that gift, but the knowledge that Mother was very much aware of our condition. We were just getting a little taste of the various mysteries, which we would experience when we drew near Her presence - the intensification of the conflict between physical and spiritual values, and the exalted feeling as She always triumphed in the heart.

We were to spend seven more days in Varanasi. One day there was a sudden heavy rain, and in spite of our umbrellas we were drenched on our rickshaw ride to the ashram. Laughingly we agreed that it was wonderful to get some relief from the heat and we were sorry it rained only that one day.

There were a few opportunities to talk with Chitra and we were feeling much better. Every day we came for Mother's darshan and though we could not sit very near Her, we could at least see Her.

Satya had a wonderful experience at one of those darshans in the Gopal Mandir where Mother allowed him to see Her in all Her gentle sweetness and beauty, piercing his heart as only Her love can do.

Haripriya and her husband Krishnadas had been in India for several months and expected to stay for several more. Their health was not too good and the heat and crowds were very difficult for them, so they decided to go to the mountains and rejoin Mother later when there was a better chance to be near Her. We were sorry to see them go, but certainly understood.

One day seven of us hired a boat so that we might get a view of Varanasi's many ghats and temples. Small boys and goats cavorted upon the steps as adults and children bathed in the low waters at the river's bank. Swami Nirmalananda pointed out many places that we had heard of and Satya took movies. What a thrilling experience-to see all those ancient and most holy shrines, to touch the sacred waters of Ma Ganga, to know that we had indeed been well blessed to set foot upon this land sanctified for thousands of years by the elite of the Lord.

We shopped for gifts and bought some jewels as presents for our little Gopal who was waiting in our meditation room in California. California! Surely on another planet. It was strange, but even when I was feeling sad, it never occurred to me to wish that I were there. No, it was much too late for that because truly my heart had been born of Her and there would never again be another "home" for me, no matter what might happen.

Just when it seemed that our whole trip would be spent in Varanasi we were given the news that Mother was going to Vrindavan and only three or four of Her brahmacharinis would be going with Her.

Swami Nirmalananda, his brahmacharis, Krishnapriya, Satya, and I all asked permission to go to Vrindavan with Mother. We were ecstatic when Mother said yes. At last we were to be with Her in a quiet, intimate place and the chance for private time with Her was no longer remote.

Travel arrangements had to be quickly made. Train reservations were very difficult to get on short notice, but we found that we could fly from Varanasi to Delhi, then hire a car to Vrindavan. That would be the fastest way and we would have the maximum time with Mother. So we made reservations on the local airline. I packed our luggage for the flight scheduled to leave the next day. Then we went to the ashram for a very special treat.

One day Chitra had introduced me to a lovely lady from Calcutta named Moni Chowdhuri. Her whole family had been devotees of Mother since 1937. Monidi was very kind to me and even taught me the words to some bhajans one day as we visited at the ashram. Then on our last day in Varanasi she told me that there was a phonograph record of Mother singing which was made in Dacca in 1937. Monidi said that the record was there in the ashram and that if I would come in the evening she would get a phonograph and let me hear the record. So I brought my tape recorder and we hurried to meet Monidi. She had some difficulty finding a phonograph that was in working order and it was getting quite late. Satya had some business to take care of at the hotel so he returned there and I waited with Krishnapriya. We had agreed that after hearing Mother's record, Krishnapriya and I would share a rickshaw back to the hotel.

As I waited for Monidi, I went upstairs to the Annapurna Temple, above the courtyard overlooking the Ganges. As I stood gazing down at the gently winding expanse of silver, I suddenly started sobbing. As tears flooded my eyes, I heard myself say, "I may never see the Ganges again." How strange, I had no idea that I felt such a strong attraction to those sacred waters.

It was about 11:00p.m. when Monidi located the only working phonograph in the ashram. It was not electric and had to be cranked by hand. The speed was a little fast but at least it would work. She brought it to the courtyard along with the cherished record. Two or three other devotees had also waited with us

to hear Mother's sweet voice.

I set my tape recorder near the phonograph and we were all thrilled as we listened to Mother sing. At one point Mother broke into peals of laughter, and it was so infectious that we all laughed too and I had to start my recording over several times. Krishnapriya just could not resist Mother's voice, and finally I promised her that if she would just not make any sound while I recorded the tape that I would play it in the rickshaw as we returned to the hotel and she could laugh and exclaim as much as she wished. In that way, thanks to Monidi's patience, we did hear it all and my copy was made.

After thanking Monidi for her great kindness, Krishnapriya and I left the ashram in a very intoxicated state. We found a rickshaw and as I promised, I played the tape. Mother's sweet voice and laughter filled the street that night. Our driver could not resist turning to look at the two crazy western women laughing and calling Ma's name. In fact everyone we passed must have thought we were totally mad. And so we were! Mad for that Beloved Who steals the heart away.

Suddenly we saw Satya coming from the opposite direction in a rickshaw.

We stopped both rickshaws in the middle of the street and he explained that he was going to the ghat at Mother's ashram to get Ganges water, which we could bring back to the States with us. He would then meet me at the hotel.

Enveloped in joy, Krishnapriya and I finished our ride through the magical night filled with a myriad of stars. Somehow, I do not remember there being any heat in Varanasi that night.

## Vrindavan

The next day we flew to Delhi then went by hired car to Vrindavan. The countryside was so beautiful. We were always attracted by rural India and its timelessness.

We were fortunate to be given rooms at the Jaipuria House dharmasala, where monkeys looked for handouts as they played in the garden courtyard.

Vrindavan, the land of Sri Krishna's childhood, is a wonderful place. Not a business town, but rather the sacred haven of pilgrims and devotees of Lord Hari. Temples abound and everywhere one hears God's Name in greeting and in song.

Mother's ashram in holy Vrindavan is very charming and peaceful. We entered the gate and proceeded up the wide pathway leading to the temple steps. I felt as though suspended in the stillness. What a contrast to all the activity and crowds of two days past. Here we found the India that thrilled our souls.

Inside the temple doors was a spacious hall used for satsang and various religious functions. Just beyond the hall were separate shrines for Mahaprabhu and Nityananda, Sri Krishna Chelia and Radharaniji, and Lord Shivaji.

Mother's asana was placed in the hall very near the shrine of Lord Chaitanya. We stood as Mother entered from a side door and came to take Her seat. I breathed deeply the perfume of that exalted atmosphere, intoxicated with the joy of Her nearness and the luxury of sitting uncrowded to gaze at Her for long periods of time.

In those days the Vrindavan ashram also housed the boys' school. When

they were all allowed to come for darshan it was delightful. Each boy had been given a lovely gold-colored shawl with "Om Ma" imprinted all over in red Sanskrit letters. They sat respectfully before Mother, singing bhajans to Her or quietly enjoying the chance to be in Her presence.

Brahmacharini Chhabi sat at Mother's feet with eyes closed, playing the harmonium and singing "Ma, Ma, Ma." Little birds came into the hall through the open grillwork above the windows and joined their voices with hers. At other times Chitra and Reena Mukherjee from Calcutta would chant verses from the Gita with Chhabi.

One day Mother allowed us to each sit at Her feet for taking photos.

When Mother arose from Her seat to leave the hall we would all pronam then follow behind Her down the brick path that led past the graceful bougainvillea, sacred trees, and gardens to Her house. On the patio at the foot of the steps we would stop, watching as She disappeared behind the double doors. Her presence was so irresistible that we often stood on that patio for some time after She had gone inside - still held captive by Her sweetness. Only then would I become aware of the heat. But it was never so consuming as was Varanasi's.

On our second day in Vrindavan, Chitra arranged for us to have our "private" with Mother. It was late in the evening when we were called to the roof patio of Mother's house, just in front of Her room. Mother's cot had been placed on the roof. She reclined on Her right side, resting Her head on a pillow or propped up against Her hand. We sat very near Her with Chitra. No one else was allowed to be there.

The heat of the day was gone and millions of stars filled the Indian sky.

There are more stars in India than anywhere else in the world. At least that is my belief, for I found it impossible to find even a tiny spot in the heavens that did not hold a star.

Mother was in a divine mood. She allowed us to take all the time we needed to ask our questions. Dear Chitra carefully translated for us. Intoxication made me bold as I said, "Mother, my heart is your ashram. What will you do with it?" Mother said, "Always think of God in your heart and when doing japa. Mother is one with the mantra. Doing japa advances spiritual progress. The more japa done, the more advancement is evident."

Wondering if we had any duty to pursue some social cause, we asked if we should concern ourselves with worldly matters. Mother said, "Do not concern yourselves with worldly things; concern yourselves only with spiritual things."

Feeling the last days of this trip slipping away, I was seized by the thought that I might never see Mother again, so I asked, "Mother will I ever come to India, to You again?" Mother's thrilling words, which would reassure and inspire me from that moment on, were: "I am always with you, wherever you are. I always see you sitting at My feet, as you are now."

Returning to our dharmasala that night, I wondered at Her great and perfect love. Never in this life had I known anything even remotely suggestive of such unchanging purity. And this was only a touch of Her, Who remains far beyond my comprehension.

We had only three days in Vrindavan with Mother, but each one was filled with Her sweetness as She sat with us morning and evening. During the middle of the day we returned to the dharmasala. Swami Nirmalananda and

the brahmacharis would walk across the open fields. I could not tolerate the heat and would go by rickshaw. Satya would sometimes walk with the boys and other times ride with me through the narrow cobblestone streets. After taking a rest, we would return to the ashram and the luxury of sitting uncrowded near Mother.

One afternoon as devotees pronamed at Mother's feet some left a few flowers there. Most were removed by one of the brahmacharinis sitting near Mother. However one very small pink flower which had a profusion of tiny petals was picked up by Mother, and as I watched She pressed each tiny petal between Her fingers, gently holding and caressing it for at least an hour. As I gazed at Her beautiful hands and that delicate little bloom, the desire to have it grew inside me.

People again started going up to pronam, offering and receiving a few flowers from Mother's hand. As She gave some blossoms to each person, my heart would skip a beat, thinking that the treasured little pink flower must have been given also. Then I would see that She was still holding it. But for how long?

I made my way to the line of devotees and at last was at Her feet. As I pronamed and looked at Her, She picked up a hibiscus flower to give to me. I held out my hands before Her and as She dropped the red blossom from between Her folded palms, there in my hand I found not only the hibiscus, but a tiny treasure - that precious little pink flower. Tears came to my eyes as I quietly returned to my seat and again was filled with the wonder of Her great compassion and love.

## Delhi

On May twenty-fifth we learned that Mother had still more blessings in store for us. Instead of returning directly to Varanasi as originally planned, She would be going to the Delhi ashram for a couple of days.

Our plane would leave from Delhi airport on the night of the thirtieth, so we would not have had time to follow Mother back to Varanasi. But - joy of joys - in Delhi She was granting us two more days to be near Her.

Leaving Vrindavan was sad, but because we were not leaving Mother we were all smiling as we piled into our two hired cars for the three-hour drive to Delhi. Krishnapriya rode with us. Swami Nirmalananda and the brahmacharis were in the other car. Satya took movies of our little caravan along the way. In Delhi, we stayed at a hotel while Swami Nirmalananda's group stayed with the Sharma family.

We went by taxi to the ashram and spent as much time with Mother as we were allowed.

Reena Mukherjee came to Delhi with Mother - in Mother's car. Reena told me that Mother had talked about Satya and me during the drive from Vrindavan, saying how we had met. It was hard for me to imagine that Mother would take such notice of us.

The Delhi ashram is on the outskirts of the city, away from traffic and noise. The atmosphere was peaceful with only a few devotees present in the circular satsang hall. There was a large ceiling fan, but due to some problem with the electricity it kept shutting off. So someone was needed to fan Mother.

One young man was trying to do that, but with very little force, so Chitra took the fan from him and called Satya to do this service for Mother. He could hardly believe that he was being so honored, but hastily stepped to where Chitra indicated he should stand, and with great relish made the fan perform to its maximum. I chuckled to myself as I imagined Mother being wafted into the air by such a strong current.

Another time Chitra said I could sit at Mother's feet during satsang. I had my tape recorder with me and turned it on to record Mother's voice as She talked. After one side of the tape finished, the machine clicked off. At that sound, Mother stopped speaking and Chitra quickly told me not to record further. After I put it away, Mother again spoke. Later I learned that She was talking about the two Krishna murtis in the Vrindavan temple. From that time on, I was more careful about using the recorder around Mother.

One afternoon we were permitted to have a few last words with Mother as She sat with us in the satsang hall. Chitra was interpreting for us when suddenly she was called away, leaving us alone at Mother's feet. Now as I look back on that most rare occasion, I wonder why I did not speak to Mother in English. There is no doubt that She would have understood, and perhaps might have answered in English.

In the evening carpets were placed in the courtyard and Mother sat with us out in the open. Such wonder-filled days She gave to us! It is hard to believe that there were only three days in Vrindavan and two days in Delhi. She could make time stand still. And why not? It is Her creation.

On May twenty-seventh we went for the last time to the Delhi ashram.

Mother came into the courtyard and walked around briskly. We all stood back so as not to interfere with Her exercise.

It felt so wonderful to be in the company of devotees who were so respectful of Mother. Each face held a personal love story as all gazed at Her with tearful eyes. She was leaving Delhi that day and we were all going to the train station to see Her off. We watched as the ashram cars were prepared. At an opportune moment I went to say a few last words to Chitra.

Swami Paramanandaji walked with Mother to the car that was waiting for them. Mother was seated and Her door closed. Our car was also waiting. In somber caravan we were taken to the station.

An Indian train station is a beehive of activity. Red-coated porters balance stacks of luggage upon their heads as they thread their way through the crowded platforms. Everyone travels by train for there are varied accommodations to suit each one's pocketbook. The cry of vendors hawking chai (Indian tea) and mumfree (roasted peanuts) rises above the din of voices. When a train arrives, the shrill metallic sound of brakes pierces through the "cush" of released steam as crowds of people gravitate to that sound.

Amid the clamor we searched for Mother's train. It did not take long to find the devotees clustered by one particular coach. Mother had gone inside to Her compartment and everyone was trying to catch a glimpse of Her through the windows. Soon our compassionate Mother appeared in the doorway. We managed to stand near Her for quite a while then stepped back a little to let others draw near. She stood there with us for about one hour as we pressed against each other with hands folded in pronam.

The heat was intensified by our closeness. I became aware that my clothes,

hair, and skin were all wet as though I had fallen into a pond. Satya also was soaked. I must have looked faint, as he led me to a large fountain near where we stood. We both bathed our faces and drank some water, then returned to stand near Mother for our last darshan.

Slowly the train began to move. Mother returned to Her compartment as we stood quietly, our eyes unwilling to release that Divine Thief who had stolen our hearts, our very being.

In the three remaining days before leaving India we visited with the Sharmas and Satya took me shopping at the Tibetan stalls where I found treasures to share with friends upon our return to the States.

Our pre-dawn flight lifted us from that sacred land and my eyes were filled with tears as I wondered if I would ever see her again.

## **Third Trip**

**(November 4, 1972 - December 6, 1972)**

### **Kankhal**

During the following year we fulfilled several requests to show our movies of Mother for local organizations and privately for friends. When Swami Nirmalananda came to our house between speaking engagements we invited a few people who had expressed an interest in Mother to join us for satsang.

Swami Nirmalananda told us wonderful stories from the Hindu scriptures and from Mother's lila. He also taught us some beautiful bhajans as they are sung at Mother's ashram. What joyful days those were, filled with the sweetness of God's Name and the presence of that One Who had laid claim to my heart.

Some of those who attended the satsang and had seen our movies had asked to accompany us on our next trip to Mother, which we had planned for the Samyam Sapta in Hardwar. We would leave for India on November 1, 1972. Swami Nirmalananda was also going, but would arrive some days ahead of us. He said that he and Sharmaji would meet our party when we arrived in Delhi. (There were ten of us and Swami Nirmalananda's group numbered about seven.)

Weather forced our plane to layover one night in Bonn, Germany. The airline provided hotel accommodations which gave everyone a chance to bathe and get a good night's rest. So when we arrived in Delhi we felt pretty fresh.

Once again I experienced the exhilaration of being in India. It had been one and a half years since our second trip. But when I set foot upon that great land it was as though I had never left, and my life in the west was like a dream that is only vaguely remembered.

Swami Nirmalananda came with Sharmaji and his beautiful daughter Rekha to meet us. Rekha garlanded everyone in our group and we were all joyfully talking at the same time. Finally we managed to get two or three taxicabs, and with the luggage piled on top of them drove to the hotel where Swami Nirmalananda had reserved rooms for everyone.

After shopping for suitable Indian dress, we enjoyed looking at shops displaying little clay images that were being sold for the Diwali festival. Among the rather crudely made forms, I was astounded to find a delicately made Lakshmi-Narayana. The work was South Indian style, about one foot tall. The seated figures were the color of pale sandalwood with the faintest tint of color on their features and borders of their clothing. They were also made of clay, and the idea of carrying them as we traveled in India, much less of getting them safely back to the States, caused me to hesitate at least a full minute before purchasing them. The merchants were so taken by my feeling for the murtis that they went to a lot of trouble to pack them in shredded paper and placed them in a good cardboard box tied with twine. We were guests of the Sharma family for dinner that evening where we enjoyed renewing our friendship.

Due to Mother's traveling schedule we would not be able to see Her until She arrived in Hardwar on November eighth. So there was no rush to leave Delhi. Our whole party gathered at the Sharmas' on the fifth of November for Diwali celebration. After the Puja we all went outside as the men and children set off fireworks. Mrs. Sharma and her daughters then lovingly served a typical Indian feast, which they had prepared in our honor. It was late when we returned to our hotel that night.

The next day, November sixth, we hired two cars to transport us to Hardwar. There were only eight of us as three were staying in Delhi for a few more days and Swami Nirmalananda's brahmacharis had proceeded to Hardwar before we arrived in Delhi.

Luggage filled the trunks, was stacked and tied to the racks on top, and stuffed into every open space inside the cars. There was not much room to move, but who cared? We were in India and getting closer to seeing Mother every minute.

Satya and I were in the car shared with Swami Nirmalananda and an old friend whom Mother was to give the name of Jyotipriya. The other car was occupied by two girls that I worked with, one of whom Mother had named Kripa, and the other was destined to be called Bhakti. Also in that car was a young couple who were friends of Jyotipriya. In a few days their names would be Radhapriya and Krishnadas. Still in Delhi were Lakshmi, Gopalapriya, and Mahesh, our three friends who would come to Hardwar in a few days.

On the outskirts of Delhi we crossed the holy Jumna river where clothes were washed and laid out to dry on the sand. Multicolored saris stretched toward the shore, and on high ground there was a charming thatched hut and a man working his ox-powered gristmill. As the ox slowly walked in a circle, it seemed that time had spiraled backward to centuries past when that man's and beast's ancestors must have performed that same act on that same ancient land.

About halfway to Hardwar is the town of Modinagar, and Swami Nirmalananda was anxious that we all have the opportunity to visit the magnificent temple there. It had been constructed by the Modi family and contained murtis of the most astounding beauty. We were all filled with joy to see the living Hanuman, Narayana, and all the other deities. We were given prasad of Hanumanji, and Swamiji told of his first meeting with Mother on the spacious well-kept grounds surrounding that great red Temple.

As we continued our drive to Hardwar, we enjoyed seeing the Ganges River, which flowed swiftly through a channel running parallel to the highway. At one point there were giant statues of reclining lions - one on each side of the channel - facing north toward the Himalayas. That place is called the "North Gateway to India." Since then we have seen other places called "Gateway to India," but none more captivating than this.

At this tranquil spot our car conveniently had a flat tire, giving us a chance to enjoy the scene as our driver changed the tire. The foothills of the Himalayas were on the north and two farmers and an ox worked the field near the road. The mingled sounds of rushing water and chirping birds filled the warm sunny air as we relished this unplanned break in our journey.

Upon reaching Hardwar we found accommodations at the Tourist Bungalow, a lodge for pilgrims situated between the channeled Ganges and the shallow stream of Her natural path.

In the north are the majestic Himalayas, home of many great yogi-ascetics. The Tourist Bungalow faces upon the wide, swiftly moving Ganges channel. There are chains around the lower steps of the ghat that descend into the sacred waters, making it safe for the devout to bathe or take a dip without being swept away by the current. On the opposite bank are several ashrams and structures, which have been painted in rust and golden hues that reflect in the rippling waters along with the clear bright blue of the sky. To feast the eyes on so much beauty at one time was almost too much for this starving child of India who had lived so long in exile.

Toward the north and across a bridge that spans the Ganges and past the myriad shops, is the most holy shrine of Gangawara and the Harki-Ka-Charan, or Harki Pauri, bathing ghat. On the stone wall of that ghat is an impression of Lord Vishnu's foot. The full Kumbha Mela is celebrated here every twelve years and multitudes of worshippers bath in the Ganges at this spot.

We settled nicely into our room and filled our canteens from the Ganges for drinking. We had not yet learned to use only purified or boiled water, but by Mother's grace we were spared any serious illness.

Mother's train was due on November eighth at 5:15a.m., but was running a little late. As we stood waiting on the platform we met Mr. and Mrs. Ram Panjwani who had also come to greet Mother. The first light of day heralded Her arrival as clouds of steam from the train breathed warmth into the cold morning air. My heart raced and pounded in my ears, as the braking wheels screamed upon the steel tracks. The coaches were slowly gliding past us. Then Swami Nirmalananda said, "That's Mother's car."

I ran as fast as I could to keep up with it, and saw Mother inside the compartment. I was at the door as She came out. Her wonderful sweet smile filled me with joy, and all of the time since last I saw Her vanished. She walked to the center of the platform and stopped as we offered sandalwood garlands to Her. I bowed, touching Her foot, then followed directly behind Her as She walked out of the station. We had taxis waiting and followed Mother's car to the ashram.

Mother's room in those days was upstairs adjoining a long hall with many windows which faced the Shiva mandir and overlooked Didima's samadhi mandir. When we arrived at the ashram Mother did not go directly to Her room, but responded to our longing hearts and sat for a while in front of the Shiva mandir as we silently gathered near Her feet, replenishing our souls with Her darshan.

When She arose to go upstairs we were unwilling to lose sight of Her and stood with folded hands beneath Her window - content for an occasional glance from Her, and reveling in the moments when She would sit looking down upon us with a tenderness I have never known from any other.

A dear lady ashramite called Shubhadi, whom I had met and grown fond of in 1970, came to where I stood, and looking up at Mother called in English, "Ma, Shraddha has come! Ma, Shraddha has come!" Mother looked down at me and smiled, adding yet another precious gem to the mala She was winding around my heart.

We stood transfixed below that window for two hours, unaware of the time.

When Mother retired we left slowly, in an intoxicated state, to return at 5:00p.m.

There was kirtan at the ashram when we returned, and we could see Mother by the window above us. As we stood gazing at Her, Bhaskaranandaji came to tell us that we could go upstairs to pronam. With great joy we climbed the stairs that led to the long hall, to Mother.

At the top of the stairs I looked to the left. There at the north end of the porch I saw a bed covered with white sheets and a white canopy above it. Upon that bed sat the Infinite Reason for my being.

When in Her presence it is not as though nothing else matters, but simply that there is nothing else *to* matter.

After pronaming at Her feet, we all sat very quietly. I allowed my eyes to embrace Her and mentally I adored Her.

We were permitted to stay undisturbed in that way for some time. Then Mother arose from Her seat and we all stood as She moved toward the door to Her room. When She came to where Satya stood, She motioned for him to bow down. As he did so, we all bowed down too. Then She motioned for him to clear the way, which he did, and She passed into Her room.

The next morning we stood again beneath Mother's window. A maharaja had come to see Mother, and was at that time upstairs with Her. So we waited below for those sweet moments when She would turn our way and grace us with Her loving smile. Sometimes when She held us in Her timeless gaze it seemed that She longed for us as we did for Her.

In the evening we climbed the stairs and I sat up front very near Mother.

Brahmacharini Chhabi was near the window by Mother's feet. I had brought a small silver and opal ring, which had been made for me with the express intent of asking Mother to bless it. This seemed an ideal opportunity, so I handed the ring to Chhabi and asked her to please convey my wish to Mother. As Chhabi spoke to Mother and was handing the ring to Her, Mother slipped the little finger of Her right hand into the ring and sat with it on Her hand for quite some time before giving it back to me. It was for the little finger of my right hand that the ring had been made. But much more significant even than that was what had motivated me to get the ring in the first place.

In 1970, when we were in Kanpur with Mother, Krishnapriya had placed two rings on Mother's hands, and Mother had worn them for a while during that darshan before returning them to Krishnapriya. It was so thrilling to think of wearing something which Mother Herself had worn that I could not get the idea out of my mind. So I asked a jeweler friend, Jack Dalton, to please fashion a little silver and opal ring for me. He made a lovely ring like flowing liquid silver that seemed to have caught the opal in its path.

Even though I had desired Mother to wear my ring, I did not believe it was possible that She would. And I did not have the courage to ask. So I only requested that She bless it.

The joy and wonder that filled my heart cannot be written in words. I recall Swami Nirmalananda saying one time about Mother, "Besides the great and miraculous things, the amazing thing about Mother is that She is simply so very kind."

Kindness from the source of pure love is the most sublime of gifts. I shall always treasure it.

Mother called for Krishnapriya to come and sit near Her. After lovingly teasing Krishnapriya, Mother asked her to sing. Krishnapriya loved kirtan so much and always had her cymbals with her. She sang a beautiful bhajan of Mother's, "Amar Krishna Gopal," as she softly played the cymbals.

Mother looked at me with great sweetness and said, "Narayana, Narayana, Narayana."

Later in our room Krishnapriya was kind enough to sing that Gopal bhajan and a few others for me as I recorded her lovely voice.

On November tenth, Mother gave darshan in front of the Shiva mandir.

Carpets had been spread in the courtyard and all space upon it was filled by women on one side and men on the other. A few people even sat upon the steps of an ashram building which faced the patio. Mother sat on the small porch of the Shiva mandir. Her asan had been placed by one of the two pillars which supported the porch roof. A large yellow towel was tied to the pillar as a backrest for Her. She looked radiant that day. Everyone was captivated by Her charm and animated grace.

At the end of our 1970 trip Mr. Sharma of Delhi had procured for us a small image of Gopal (baby Krishna). As we had not asked for this murti, I had written to Mother from California and asked Her what we should do with it. Mother's reply was, "Just keep it." So I had placed Him in our little meditation room on a small platform.

After some months I started feeling guilty that He was just sitting there with no clothes and hardly any attention, so I made one dress for Him. He had been like that up to 1972, when I decided that I should take Him to Mother and ask Her again what I should do with Him. For showing Him to Mother, I made a beautiful white satin dress and crown, beaded with small pale yellow glass beads. Pearl trim was around the front and upon the crown.

This was the day I had brought Gopal for Mother to see. I was quietly sitting near Her waiting my turn while others were talking with Mother and asking Her to bless things for them as Atmananda translated.

Satya took this grand opportunity to film Mother. He started out standing behind the seated ladies and noticed that Mother gave him a couple of uneasy glances. But he was not sure of the significance until She very unobtrusively held Her hand up with the palm toward him. He understood then that it was not permissible for him to be on the women's side even standing. So he moved over behind the men. The angle was not so good until Brahmacharini Binadi motioned for him to come closer, and he came to stand in the space which separated the men and women. It was Mother's grace that he got in that choice spot, as Mother stopped in the middle of a talk with someone and, turning toward me, looked at Gopal then reached for Him with Her right hand. In great surprise, I managed to quickly place Him in Her outstretched hand. Satya had just put a new roll of film in his camera and captured Mother's amazing LiIa with Gopal from the moment Her hand reached for Him.

There was total silence as everyone's eyes were upon Mother and Gopalji.

Brahmacharini Maitreyi garlanded Him lovingly with marigolds. The priest of the Shiva temple bowed before Him. Mother looked at Gopalji, turning Him slightly, lifted Him toward the camera to get His picture made, then placed Him next to Her heart as She seemed to withdraw with Him into a wonderful bhav. I could feel the shift in Her presence.

Some people whispered that Mother had gone into samadhi, but I find it difficult to use that term in reference to Her unchanging consciousness. We can try to describe what *we* experience, but fail totally to describe *Her* experience.

In awe I gazed as time dissolved in Her spell.

When the film in Satya's camera came to an end the camera clicked.

Mother moved ever so slightly and placed Gopalji into my hands by first putting Her hands in mine then slipping them from beneath Gopalji. Mother said that He was very beautiful and asked about His dress. When Atmanandaji told Her that I had made it, Mother complimented my needlework.

I sat very near Mother until She arose and went to Her room.

That evening we enjoyed kirtan in the courtyard for some time. Then Satya and I went upstairs to have a "private" with Mother.

One of the questions I asked was in regard to a previous instruction of Mother. I had understood Her to say that I should keep a diary entry for each day. I found this to be most difficult as well as very uninteresting. So I asked if I had understood Her correctly. I was quite relieved when She said no, She had meant for me to keep a record of spiritual experiences only.

This was truly a great gift She had given me, as I had only kept sketchy notes of some experiences in India up to this point. But this instruction from Mother caused me to gradually keep more and more notes until I ultimately was able to record the events of each day spent in India with Her as well as many wonderful dream darshans I was graced with when on the far side of the earth. So many events and details would have been lost as the years push them further back into my mind. But thanks to that instruction of Mother, they spring ever fresh from my diary pages.

I held our beautiful clay Lakshmi-Narayan murti which we had found in Delhi at Diwali time, and showing it to Mother, I asked Her to please bless it so that we could safely carry it with us back to the States. She graciously touched it bestowing a blessing which has protected that fragile image through many travels in the ensuing twenty years.

After that "private" we went downstairs and into the crisp night air. My chaddar felt good as I breathed deeply of the clean air and marveled at all the stars in the vast Indian sky. In a short time Bhaskaranandaji and Nirvananandaji came and told us that we could go back upstairs. Full of joy we returned to sit at Her feet once again. A perfect ending to this incredible day.

The next day was Saturday, and Mother sat with us again in front of the Shiva mandir. Satya had watched yesterday as an Indian devotee of Mothers picked up a small cotton towel and waved it to keep the flies away from Mother. He had a great desire to do that service for Mother also. There are so few things that we would be allowed to do for Her, but he felt that surely he could do this if the opportunity were ever presented.

This day, as we gathered at Her feet, that same little towel lay behind where Mother sat and no one had laid claim to the privilege of keeping the flies from around Her. Satya boldly walked to the spot behind Mother and, taking the towel in his hand, began waving it gently when flies came near Mother. One of the ashram girls moved forward to make him stop, but Mother turned the palm of Her hand to the girl and made her leave him alone. I was so proud of him for having the courage to do it, knowing that he could have been embarrassed by someone sending him away.

Satya sat just behind Mother on the edge of the mandir porch for some time.

One of Swami Nirmalananda's brahmacharis took several photos of Satya sitting near Mother. We were unaware that the photos had been taken until Swami

Nirmalananda sent the slides to us later in California. One of the photos was especially beautiful, like a portrait. Such a treasured reminder of that special time.

A little later Satya was able to take six rolls of movies as Mother sat for two hours in the warm morning light with Her back against the opposite pillar from yesterday. This was ideal for Satya's filming as Mother was in this way facing toward the men's side and he was able to photograph a long darshan as She looked right into the camera.

A Bengali singer had come, and she sat just behind Mother with several of the brahmacharinis. She played the harmonium and led kirtan which we all enjoyed. The Mahant of the Daksha temple was seated in a place of honor on the mandir porch near the shrine door. He was facing toward Mother and us. A basket of fruit had been prepared for him and Mother suddenly went crawling like Bal Gopal for about two steps to reach the basket and check it's contents. She looked so cute crawling with Her little white stockinged feet protruding from Her dhoti. After presenting that gift, She laughingly crawled backwards to Her seat and rearranged Her clothes and yellow towel. I had never had the idea before that Mother could be cute. But there She was, just as cute as any little baby might be as it crawled among loving family members.

What a free and intimate time we shared with Her that day.

Mother stood and laughed as She talked with the Mahant before going upstairs. We still had questions to ask of Mother, so we were permitted to follow Her for a continuation of our "private." Atmananda had kindly agreed to translate for us.

Mother answered all of our questions. She gave us instructions for sadhana and the conduct of our daily lives. Running through the whole of Her guidance was the thread of renunciation and upon that thread the beads of japa were tied - forming an ethereal mala. Forever bound by Her love, we pronamed at Her holy feet.

At 5:00p.m. we went to Sri Girishananda ashram where the Samyam Mahavrata was to begin on November thirteenth. We all stood and watched as Mother inspected the immense hall where the function would be held. Mother darted from place to place as a group of people followed Her every step and listened to any comment She might make.

When Mother left the hall, we all followed as She went down the walk, around another building where there was a beautiful little Shiva temple, and to the rooms that had been provided for Her use. Mother went inside and we found ourselves at the top of a wonderful ghat on the old Ganges - Her natural path. This spot was so quiet and peaceful, such a contrast to the mighty channel that swept through the center of Hardwar. On this side one could not see Hardwar at all, only the ghat, river, and Himalayas.

We descended the steps toward the shallow stream, so perfectly clear and sparkling in the sunlight. The small rocks that lined Her path made it easy for Satya to wade into those icy waters where he took movies of us on the ghat and the enchanting view.

Spellbound, we sat on the steps near the bottom of the ghat as Swami Nirmalananda led us in kirtan. I wondered at the great beauty that surrounded us and at Her Whose beauty it all is.

The seven days that followed were filled with the Samyam Mahavrata program. Mahamandaleshwar Sri Swami Brahmananda, who was the head of this ashram, Swami Akhandananda, and many other noted speakers sat daily on the long platform in the front of the vast hall. A special white asan was prepared for Mother on the same platform. She sat there for several hours morning and evening as the Upanishads were expounded and talks given in Hindi, and some in English, before the great crowd.

Swami Nirmalananda purchased some small Gitas with English translations and presented them to Mother. She called for our group to come forward. Each one went before Mother, pronounced, and received a Gita from Her hand.

It was wonderful to be near Mother for such long darshans, and there was always the daily hour of meditation after which Brahmachari Vibhu's sweet voice filled us with the heartfelt bhajan, "He Pita." Several times when Mother sang or spoke I was able to record Her sweet voice.

We were also blessed one day with the unexpected darshan of Sri Sitaramdas Omkarnathji as he walked with Mother on the ashram property.

On November twentieth after the havan and a great feast, Mother moved back to the Kankhal ashram. Most of the people who had attended the Samyam left and a more casual atmosphere prevailed. Private time with Mother was once again possible. Quiet and intimate darshan was ours for three days before Mother's departure from Kankhal.

One evening as Mother sat on Her bed in the upstairs hall, we drew close to Her feet as Swami Nirmalananda showed his album of photos to Mother. The pictures were of the ashram in Oklahoma which had been recently inaugurated.

Being nearsighted, I could see better without my glasses at that distance, so I quickly pushed them up on top of my head. Soon we noticed that Mother was sitting very quietly watching us with a look of amusement on Her face. Then we all had a great laugh when we realized that Mother had mimicked me by pushing Her glasses up on top of Her head. She sat looking at me, waiting for me to notice Her game. I have never seen Her do that before or after that night.

As the light was very dim, Mother asked for a "torch" to better see Swami Nirmalananda's photos. I quickly gave Her mine. As She held it, She playfully moved the beam of light back and forth across my eyes several times, smiling at me with a most delightful mischievous expression.

What inexpressible joy, to experience Her playful love. A joy found in this world only at Her Holy feet.

The next evening, November twenty-third, we joined Swami Nirmalananda as he led kirtan before Didima's samadhi mandir. Mother was upstairs in Her room overlooking the mandir. Someone was with Her having a private, but Her windows were open and She could hear the kirtan. It was a beautiful evening and we enjoyed the feeling of being near Mother, though there seemed no hope of seeing Her until the next morning.

Swami Nirmalananda played the harmonium gently but with a wonderful rhythm that made the bhajans lightly float on the cool night air. The chanting went on for quite some time, and then as we were preparing to leave someone came to the window and said Mother had requested that we not stop the kirtan.

A mat was spread under Mother's window, and we all sat upon it facing that window. Now the kirtan took on an even more joyful air as we thrilled to this "command performance." Other devotees that had been in the courtyard joined us in singing God's Name. I believe everyone's favorite bhajan must have been chanted. Then Swami Nirmalananda began singing, in Sanskrit, "O Lord of the Universe, kindly be visible to me." We all joined in, and soon word came down from Mother's room that She was calling us all to come up for darshan.

Unable to suppress our cheers of joy and laughter, we ascended those steps leading up to the Object of all our longing.

How sweet to finally see Her smiling face as She greeted us with folded palms and infinite mercy.

The memory of that enchanted evening is engraved forever upon my heart.

The friends who had traveled with us were all leaving India and each had their last

private and farewell darshan of Mother.

## Kanpur

On November twenty-fourth Mother left the Kankhal ashram by car for a short visit to Dehradun. That night She took the train to Lucknow.

The Jaipuria family met Mother's train in Lucknow and took Her by car to Swadeshi House, their spacious estate encircled by beautiful lawns and gardens in Kanpur.

We had asked and received permission to meet Mother in Kanpur for the three days She would be there and then to follow Her to Varanasi for the last five days of our trip.

Swami Nirmalananda went with us by car from Hardwar to Delhi. He and his brahmacharis stayed in Delhi to take care of some business and planned to meet us in Varanasi on the twenty-ninth. I had asked him to purchase a murti of Lord Narayana for us if he happened upon a beautiful South Indian style image while taking care of his own concerns.

From Delhi we flew to Kanpur. It was so heavenly to be in Kanpur once again. Swadeshi House was like an oasis - so peaceful and immaculately beautiful - a perfect setting for the Jewel of my heart. We were given a nice room in a house adjoining the property, only a very short walk to Mother's garden accommodations.

Sri Raja Ram Jaipuria and his family had arranged everything to ensure that Mother had three days of rest after the demanding schedule and crowds of Hardwar. Chitra and a few other brahmacharinis accompanied Mother. Krishnapriya was there and she had been given a room in the same house where we were staying.

Every day Mother would walk in the beautiful gardens. We were able to follow Her on Her walks, but we always stayed a little bit back and enjoyed seeing Her move so freely without anyone reaching to touch Her or asking anything of Her. How lovely is Her walk. She seems to float over the lawn; stopping as She chose to look at a flower, a tree, a bird, or something seen only by Her.

On one of these walks, Satya and I knelt as Mother held our Gopal.

Brahmachari Nirmalananda took two photos of us with Mother and Gopalji, and on a later trip he kindly gave us those two slides.

From Mother's room there was a door opening upon a small satsang hall.

Several times a day She would come into that hall and sit with us. One side of the hall was completely open to the garden. The atmosphere there was simply divine. The voices of Mother's girls chanting the Gita and singing kirtan filled the air like delicate incense.

Chitra interpreted as we asked Mother questions about our sadhana. With so few people there, I was able to sit right at Mother's feet and often sat Gopalji next to Mother's asana. One day when I had placed Gopalji there, the ladies of the Jaipuria family came to do puja of Mother. When the puja commenced, Mother lifted Gopal and held Him in Her hands resting upon Her lap. My eyes were captivated by Her exquisite face as She turned slightly so that She actually faced me.

Her eyes looked deep into mine and held me suspended in that timeless gaze. Mentally I told Her of my intense love and longing to be always with Her. There was no doubt in my mind that not only my thoughts were known to Her but also the deepest yearning of my heart. Satya took movies of that moment and I have had the good fortune to get a still photo made from the movie. I have been blessed to have a few photos of myself with Mother, but this rather obscure one from that movie is my very favorite for it seems to hold a trace of that rare mood.

We would have been more than content to spend the rest of our time on this earth in that divine garden sitting at Her holy feet. Too soon those magical days vanished forever.

## Varanasi

Mother left Kanpur on November twenty-eighth and arrived in Varanasi that same night.

The Jaipuria family kindly provided us with a car that took us to the Lucknow airport on November twenty-ninth where we had reservations to fly to Varanasi.

Lucknow airport is small, and we stood outside the terminal building by the gate watching with the other passengers as our plane landed and taxied near where we stood. After some time the door of the plane opened to allow the people on board to exit. Among those coming out were passengers going on to Varanasi. They stood by the plane as the ones ending their journey in Lucknow came through the gate and into the terminal.

As we stood waiting, we noticed a familiar figure in the group near the plane and recognized Swami Nirmalananda with two of his brahmacharis. We joyfully called out to them, and soon we were boarding the plane trying to share all the news from the three days we were apart. Swami Nirmalananda said that he had miraculously found a beautiful South Indian style Narayana murti for us. I could not wait to see Him, so Swami Nirmalananda gave Him to me as soon as we were seated in the plane. He was perfect in every detail and elegantly formed. I asked how he had found such a treasure fit for the finest temple.

Swami Nirmalananda said he had thought surely he would have to go to Madras to obtain such an image, as he had been unable to locate this style in Delhi. Then he found an exhibit of South Indian images and works of art which was just being set up. He went inside and was struck by the beauty of all the gods. They were not yet properly arranged, and he searched through all the lovely forms, but could not find Lord Narayana. Then he made another check of each image and saw the Lord where he had not been previously. It was equally strange that there was no image of Goddess Lakshmi. Customarily they would stand together.

It took a lot of persuasion by Swami Nirmalananda before the organizer of the exhibit would agree to sell the image. The exhibit was not yet open and there was no other image like it. The man wanted all to be perfect for the impending visit of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to the exhibit. Somehow by Mother's grace the gentleman agreed to release that murti and several others which Swami Nirmalananda selected for their ashram in Oklahoma.

When we arrived in Varanasi we took a cab to the small hotel where we had stayed on our last visit to this most holy city. Swami Nirmalananda and the brahmacharis went to a dharmasala where arrangements had been made for them.

When we went to the ashram it was greatly different than it had been during our last trip. Everything was peaceful, and though there were a number of people there everyone was relaxed and unhurried.

Swami Nirmalananda had made preparations to do Mother's puja the next day, November thirtieth, which also happened to be my birthday. We were thrilled when he invited us to participate. He presented me with a beautiful white silk sari with a wide red border, the type traditionally worn by Bengali ladies for puja. For Satya he purchased a wonderfully carved conch shell which he was to blow three times at the conclusion of the puja.

We arrived at the ashram full of joy and a few butterflies in the stomach at the

thought of actually doing puja of Mother. Our beautiful Narayana murti as well as the temple murtis for the Oklahoma ashram were brought with us as we wished to show them to Mother and ask Her to bless them.

Mother was in Her room which overlooked the Sacred Flame in the courtyard and the holy Ganges just beyond the wall. After we prostrated at Her feet, the puja articles were beautifully arranged on a silver tray. The camphor and incense were lit. We stood as the brahmacharis sang "Om Jaya Jagadisha Hare" and the chowrie was waved gently near Mother. Each of us took a turn in the offering, and at the conclusion Satya blew three resonant tones on the conch - as though he was quite accustomed to it. Actually it was the first time he had ever blown a conch, and later was amazed to learn that it is not always so easily or flawlessly accomplished as it was on that magical day.

Mother presented us with silk cloths to wear for puja. She remarked about the beauty of the conch shell, asking where Swami Nirmalananda had purchased it, and sent someone from the ashram to obtain one like it. The murtis were presented for Her blessing and She examined each one in detail, commenting to Chitra and Patalda who were in the room also.

When She reached for our Narayana, I started to help Her lift Him, as He was quite heavy. She stopped and looked at me as though to say, "Do you now think that I have become weak?" I withdrew and watched Her easily lift Lord Narayan as if He were very lightweight. She appeared to be telling Patalda about various markings and details on the murti, but later Swami Nirmalananda told me that actually Mother was planning a feast for us (Swami Nirmalananda, the brahmacharis, Krishnapriya, Satya, and me). She was requesting of Patalda that he prepare a dish for us that he had made for Her years ago - green peas in a special sauce.

When that feast was served to us we were seated just off the courtyard on a raised walkway near the Sacred Flame. Mother watched from the upper porch on our right as each item was served. I have never seen such a variety of dishes-and all so lovingly and elegantly prepared. I must admit that I had a difficult time at that grand meal because I could not keep my eyes on my plate, preferring to gaze at Her.

One afternoon Mother sat in front of the Annapurna temple and we all gathered around Her. The atmosphere was light and the breeze from the Ganges caressed me as kirtan began. I remember looking around at the faces of devotees and thinking how extraordinarily fortunate we were to be there.

Mother's health appeared to be somewhat fragile one day, and She spent most of that day on the roof. She had so completely filled our hearts in the preceding days that we were quite content just to see Her, even from a great distance. It was totally quiet as every person seemed to withdraw into their own secret place with Mother as She silently looked toward each of us bestowing a love that was undivided.

A garland of Tulsi leaves lay near Mother's hand as She sat on the roof. Later that day I was blessed to receive that garland when Chitra dropped it down to my waiting hands.

Mother often said, "The day that passes does not return." Now all of those precious days had passed and we were once again at Her holy feet asking for Her blessing as we reluctantly faced the time of leaving.

With sad and longing hearts we said our farewells, gazed at beloved faces, and tried to absorb as much of that divine bhav as we could, for it would have to sustain us for a long time.

We left Varanasi on December fourth and Delhi on December sixth.

## Fourth Trip

(December 8, 1974 - January 30, 1975)

### Kanpur

Two years were spent yearning to return to Mother. No longer wondering *if* we would return, there was only the question of how soon it would be possible.

We wrote asking Mother for permission to come. Her cherished reply was that we should meet Her at Kanpur in December of 1974.

On each trip we managed a little longer stay than the last. This time there were fifty-four days of unknown adventure before us. I looked at the blank pages of my diary and wondered what marvelous and unexpected tales they would soon hold.

Our plane was seven hours late, landing in Delhi about 2:00p.m. on December seventh. There was time for a little rest at our hotel before catching the 6:00a.m. flight to Kanpur. It took only one hour to arrive there.

In Kanpur we caught an airport bus whose driver kindly stopped to let us out at the front gate of Swadeshi House. That palatial estate of the Jaipuria family held sweet memories for us of the three days we were there with Mother on our last trip.

A large pandal had been erected on the grounds where the family was hosting a recitation of the Ramayana. Mother was present for that function.

The gate of Swadeshi House was a little distance from the pandal and main house, so I waited there with our seventeen pieces of luggage while Satya went looking for help to bring them inside.

There we found Bhaskaranandaji and Nirvananandaji. It was so wonderful to see their smiling faces again. They led us to a garage where we could stow our luggage, then we eagerly went to seek Mother. The daily program was just ending and She would be coming out from the pandal at any moment. Holding garlands which we had purchased at the gate, we waited for only a moment before She came out. I was wonderstruck by Her beauty, so radiant and young looking. The Jaipuria family was taking photos of Mother standing next to Pandit Atul Krishna Goswami, who had been reciting the Valmiki Ramayana. The nine-day program had commenced on December first and tomorrow would be the final day.

Satya took movies of Mother as She stood smiling, then stepped forward as Bishuddha placed Her chapals before Her. Mother proceeded under a little white lattice arch and I was able to walk just behind Her as She moved across the grounds. As She stood on the driveway we each presented our garlands, gently placing them over Mother's head and then kneeling at Her feet as She removed them and dropped them over our heads.

We followed as She proceeded to where rooms had been arranged for Her use. She went inside for a short time and we all waited near Her door. When She came back out we walked with Her to an awaiting car. Satya filmed as She was seated in the car and we all gathered around, reluctant to let Her go even for a short time.

It had been less than an hour since we arrived at the gate of Swadeshi House, and already the special enchantment of Kanpur was enveloping us. I do not know the reason, perhaps some past life connection, but every time we were with Mother in Kanpur it was as though rose petals were being scattered before us as we were welcomed home into the bosom of our family.

It was a joy to be at Swadeshi House once again. Besides the great beauty of the place, the thing I enjoyed was seeing Mother free to move about as She chose without anyone hindering Her. Even though devotees were always waiting to glimpse Her, they stayed back, content just to be near.

The Jaipuria family had provided quarters for us in their dharmasala at Jai Market. Quite a few other western devotees were also guests there, and we all took our meals in the garden gazebo at Swadeshi House.

The next day, the last of the function, the holy Ramayana was carried out of the pandal with ceremony. Satya stood on the verandah of the house to get an elevated angle for filming the procession. He was unaware that the Jaipuria family was escorting Mother onto the verandah where they would offer garlands and pronams at Her feet for the blessings She had bestowed on them. It was Satya's great good fortune to be there first, as the crowd which came would have made it impossible for him to get anywhere near Mother. The pictures he took were rare in their beauty. A divine halo of light surrounded Mother as She stood before the marble pillars of the porch while bhajans were sung.

That afternoon under a clear blue-sky little green parrots darted from tree to tree as we all stood along the edge of the lawn. Mother walked alone on the grass in the garden. Satya filmed as She crossed the lawn and stopped to look at something near Her feet. She bent over and picked up a tiny bit of pink yarn, which had been discarded from a candy box. She held it and looked at it for a while, then dropped it back onto the lawn as She stepped away. I waited until She had walked a few steps, then darted out quickly to retrieve that small scrap which, for me, had been made golden by Her touch.

We were transported daily from Jai Market to Swadeshi House by bicycle rickshaw. While making that trip the next morning I failed to notice when the end of my sari blew loose and fell over the left wheel of the rickshaw. Before I knew what was happening, it became tangled in the wheel, and as it wound tighter I was being pulled out of the rickshaw. I shouted to the driver several times before he heard me and stopped. By that time my ankle was scraped, and I was shaken and more than a little angry with myself for letting such a thing happen. Most of all I was sad to have ruined that sari because it was the one I had worn in 1970 on the day I first saw Mother in Suktal.

When we arrived at Swadeshi House I borrowed some scissors and cut the torn end of my sari as neatly as possible. I was glad that I had a shawl to cover the damage. Actually I was fortunate not to have been seriously injured, but when I saw Mother all concern left me.

I took Polaroid photos of several people there, and Swami Keshavanandaji said that I should take Mother's photo. She was walking on the lawn at that time, and I told Swamiji that I would love to photograph Her, but that he must help me by asking Her permission. He got Her consent and I eagerly stepped a little way in front of Mother, trying to focus the camera as She walked. I kept backing up, as She would only stand still briefly. Smiling and teasing, She

allowed me to playfully chase Her as I carefully kept my shawl from falling off. I had just put a fresh pack of film in the camera and kept thinking, "Well, I will just take one more." Mother removed the towel from Her head and I could not bring myself to end this delightful sport as long as She did not end it.

After some time a devotee brought a white wicker chair for Mother. As She sat down I took Her picture, the last one in my camera. Intoxicated and smiling I prostrated at Her feet and sat upon the grass next to Her. Then I laid the ten photos in Her hands. She only glanced at them and handed them to a lady sitting on Her other side. Several people there had been enjoying Mother's game with me and all were smiling as they gathered around Her and passed the photos to those who wished to see them.

Satya had taken movies of the whole caper and was still filming as we sat before Her and watched Her mood shift to an extraordinary ethereal bhav. The playful expression was replaced by a dreamy softness. I was in awe as She looked above our heads and beheld sights unseen by our earthbound eyes. We could only wonder at what She was seeing. We sat like that for quite some time as Mother seemed to freely move in and out of that bhav - though never completely leaving that divine mood.

Our friend Uma (Sister Uma) was sitting near me. She was carrying an ochre silk cushion, which she had intended to place in Mother's chair before She sat down. But Mother had taken Her seat so quickly that Uma was unable to do that service for Her.

When Mother arose from Her chair and stepped away, we all followed Her, expecting that She would go into Her room for a while. Instead She walked toward a tiny pandal which had been set up just outside Her room. As we followed Mother across the lawn, a devotee who had just arrived offered a garland to Mother then lay prostrate at Her feet. I was very touched, as his genuine love for Mother permeated the stillness, and I smiled within the warmth of that feeling. When I looked to Mother's face, I found that She had been looking at me; smiling softly - like a brief caress - one that thrills my heart each time I am blessed to see it in Satya's film. For by Her grace he had captured that divine moment.

After placing the garland over the devotee's head, Mother proceeded into the little pandal. Uma immediately laid the silk asana on Mother's seat and Mother took Her place upon it. Such compassion our Mother bestows on Her children, fulfilling our desires with such perfect timing. There could be no doubt that Mother had entered that little tent just so Uma could do that service, for She had already sat with us for a very long time. Soon, with folded palms, Mother smiled at all of us and arose from Her seat. Just outside the pandal, Uma placed Mother's chapals before Her on the grass. Mother stepped into them and walked to Her room, as I stood dazed by the wonder of all that I had seen and experienced that marvelous day.

From Swadeshi House, Mother's party shifted to the ashram maintained by the Singhania family for Mother's use. Situated next to the magnificent white marble Radha-Krishna Mandir, it was a place very dear to us as we had spent five ecstatic days there with Mother on our first trip in 1970. It looked very much the same, as a huge pandal had been raised on the temple grounds. Swami Akhandanandaji gave talks twice daily on the Srimad Bhagavat. Mother was always present, sitting to his right near the corner of the platform.

Every evening Mother and Swami Akhandananda sat in the ashram satsang hall. It was much more intimate as they talked freely with each other and the devotees who gathered in the room.

On the backside of the kitchen and other ashram structures the Singhanian family had provided three separate courtyards, each surrounded by three or four guest rooms with common facilities. They were very clean and well maintained. We were privileged to stay in one of those rooms. We shared the courtyard with our dear friend Jayananda (who had just come from Almora), Uma, and Atmanandaji. The most wonderful feature of those accommodations was that we were just around the corner from Mother.

The Singhanians made us feel genuinely welcome and I was always given a seat near the front where I could see Mother and contemplate Her being. I often gazed at Her sweet face and hands - trying to burn into my memory every little feature and each unique movement, such as the way She would lift the bracelets on Her left wrist with thumb and two middle fingers of Her right hand, the way She would straighten Her spine and shift slightly upon Her asana, the gentle lift of eyebrows and slight nod of Her head, smiling (most always smiling), the jut of Her chin as She positioned that yellow towel beneath it - so many things like that. I remember thinking as I sat there that the day would come when I could no longer behold Her like this and that I must remember as much as I was capable of seeing. By Her grace I will always see Her living in my heart and moving in those cherished memories.

In front of the ashram there was a small pandal where Mother would sometimes sit in the afternoon. One day as we sat with Her there, a few young devotees of Neem Karoli Baba came just to sing for Mother. They sat among Mother's devotees and sang a few bhajans. Many people joined in, as they were very devotional and obviously revered Mother.

I was able to take some lovely Polaroid photos of Mother as She sat in that small pandal against the colorful backdrop. Satya also had the opportunity to take many excellent movies. What a great blessing to see those scenes again and recall that rare mood that enveloped us.

At the far end of the satsang hall a fully enclosed tent had been set up and it was here that those who were to have private interviews with Mother would meet Her. There were two entrances to the tent - the main front one and a smaller side opening where Mother could enter and sit upon Her wooden bed which was covered with a white sheet.

Bhaskaranandaji told us what time to come there for our first "private" with Mother since our arrival. We also had gifts for Mother which we brought to the tent. After we were seated before Mother, a young couple who had just arrived from Gujarat were brought into the tent. They presented a garland to Mother and She put it around both of them together as She spoke to them very affectionately. Bhaskarananda told us that through Mother's grace their lives had been spared.

Then an older lady entered the tent in a very emotional state and started talking to Mother. I could tell that she felt uncomfortable because we were there and that she said something about it to Mother. I understood Mother when She told the lady that we spoke only English and would not understand what she said. That seemed to satisfy the lady, for she then became oblivious of our presence and started telling Mother a long story, crying softly at times. Mother was so sweet, consoling her with great compassion and concern.

Later we learned the story which the lady had related to Mother. Her husband, being an honorable man, had refused to become involved in some illegal dealings, which were proposed to him. His life was threatened, and one night as he stepped

from his door some men attacked him with a knife. He immediately cried, "Mother save me!" He was savagely stabbed and cut many times. His life was saved by the narrowest of margins. His doctor said that the knife blade had been only an eighth of an inch away from his heart in one wound. His daughter and her husband had barely escaped the same attack. They were the young couple who had first entered the tent. They had come for Mother's blessings and to express their profound gratitude to Mother. They were there for about an hour. We quietly thrilled at the privilege of being allowed to stay and observe as Mother comforted them, soothing their fears as only She could do.

Our private also lasted close to an hour. Bhaskaranandaji translated very carefully for us. When we gave our gifts to Mother She asked us to keep the things "in store" for Her until later. We had photos of people who wanted Mother's blessing, questions from some, and messages from others. She listened to everything with complete patience, never rushing us. I was so intoxicated after two hours with Her in such an intense and loving atmosphere that I do not remember what happened during the rest of that day.

The holy Ganges River flows through Kanpur but we had never visited Her banks there. One afternoon our young friend Babu took us in his car along with Bhaskarananda's nephew, Kamal Dave, and Brahmachari Gadadhar of Mother's Kankhal ashram to see Sri Ganga. The three young men went in a boat with Satya and the boatman to the middle of the river. We always brought a couple of bottles of Ganga Jal back to America with us, and Satya was in quest of our supply for this trip. The boatman had told us that the water was cleaner away from the shore. I waited on the banks and shot a little film of them as they enjoyed the brief voyage.

There were many unhurried days at that little ashram, and when Mother was in Her room or otherwise unavailable to us we talked with Swami Paramananda, Bhaskarananda, Nirvanananda, Dasu, and others who were usually too busy for visiting.

We had also become acquainted with some of the devotees of Kanpur and enjoyed the happy times spent in their company. One man who enriched our time there was Mr. Ranjit Basu. At the evening satsangs when Mother and Swami Akhandananda sat with us, we of course were unable to understand what they said. Dear Mr. Basu would take mental note of stories or interesting points that were made and then sit with us as we were served our evening meal, relating all that he had remembered. He would never take food, though he was invited to do so by our hosts, but preferred only to share the gems he had collected from the satsang. So often I have remembered his kindness and sweet smiling face.

One afternoon we followed as Mother and Swami Akhandananda walked around the ashram to a house which was used by the Swami and his brahmacharis while they were there. This was on the same road that ran in front of the compound where we were staying. Seats had been prepared for Mother and Swamiji. They sat facing each other as a good-sized crowd gathered in a circle around them. Satya stood on a low wall which ran in front of the compound and was able to film this spontaneous event from above the heads of the crowd. Mother had been given some type of food, perhaps fruit or sweets. She took some of it in Her hand and fed it to Swamiji who opened his mouth like a small child being fed by his Mother. It was so sweet to see, like Yashoda Ma feeding baby Krishna. Everyone was smiling and enchanted by that charming play.

The Singhania's garlanded Mother and Swami Akhandananda, then after some time they both stood and walked to the satsang hall as we all followed.

In the evening, we arrived at the satsang hall before Mother entered. I had brought Gopalji with me and sat Him near Mother's asana. When She came and took Her place, one of the ladies sitting near Her asked about Gopalji. I heard Mother say

"Shraddha's Gopal." I can still hear Her sweet voice saying my name as I recall that evening.

When Swami Akhandananda entered the hall, before taking his seat he asked Mother about Gopalji. Mother told me to show Gopal to Swamiji. I placed Gopalji into the open hands of Swamiji, whose laughing eyes were fixed upon Gopal. As he stood smiling before us he suddenly held Gopal about ten inches in front of his face and sent a big smacking kiss through the air to Gopalji. Everyone was delighted and we all laughed along with Mother and the Swamiji as Gopalji was returned to His place beside Mother and Swamiji took his seat.

On December twenty-second there was a Nama Yajna, which had actually begun on the previous evening. The satsang hall was decorated, and the men in the kirtan party went in procession with harmonium, drum, and cymbals around a circular altar which had been erected in the middle of the hall. At one point Mother briefly joined the procession. Then She stood amid the seated ladies for quite some time. Some offered garlands and the lovely sound of God's Name enveloped us all.

Later that day Mother sat in the hall as the kirtan continued. I had dressed Gopalji in a beautiful shining blue dress and brought Him to where Mother was seated. She indicated where I should place Him near Her asana. He looked so beautiful as one of the men in the kirtan party offered incense before Him and Krishna bhajans were being sung.

The next day Mother was leaving Kanpur and going into seclusion with only a few attendants. Others had been given permission to join Her in Vrindavan in mid-January. We had only limited time in India and asked permission to follow Her, promising to take care of our own meals and accommodations. Mother graciously granted that boon to us, but said that we should go to Delhi, Hardwar, Mussouri, or Vrindavan and "take care of your business." Then we could join Her in Naimisharanya on January first.

That last day in Kanpur was very sad. Even the sky was gray with clouds and the air was a little chilly. Mother came outside wearing a burgundy quilted wrap. A yellow towel covered Her head. She walked the length of the driveway toward the wide red gate and back. Lady Singhanian and a few other ladies joined Her for a brief stroll on the lawn. Then we all followed as Mother went into the little pandal. Her wrap was removed and She took Her seat against the brightly-colored inner lining of the pandal. I stood near Her on the open side and watched as the Singhanian ladies did Mother's puja. Mother requested that Ganga Jal be poured over Her hands.

Three beautiful rose garlands were placed over Mother's head and very gently laid upon Her shoulders. The grace with which each offering was made showed the veneration which this family held for Mother. Incense and camphor were offered in the same unhurried fashion by each lady.

After the puja was completed, Mother stood and moved toward the car which was waiting to take Her away. Everyone followed except one man who was collecting the puja articles near where Mother had been sitting. I noticed that he held the Ganga Jal, which had been poured over Mother's hands. I called Satya's name, but he was with Mother taking movies and did not hear me. I extended the palm of my right hand and asked the man, "Prasad?" Without hesitation, he poured some of that holy water into my palm and I quickly drank it. Hurrying to where Satya stood, I pressed the remaining moisture upon the top of his head, as I told him of that blessing.

In a melancholy mood the devotees clustered around Mother's car. Her door was open and we were each allowed to pronam before Her. When Satya and I bowed together at Her feet She patted us very affectionately. Reluctant to let Her go, we clung to those last few moments. Then Her door was closed. The car slowly moved down the driveway as our steps followed it. We watched as it left the grounds and gradually passed from our sight. I felt as though my heart and soul had been wrenched from my body, leaving a hollow shell behind.

As my eyes met the eyes of other devotees standing there, I knew that we shared that same loss. Babu's voice reflected how we all felt when he said, "Now what will we do? What will we look forward to each day, when we cannot come here to Ma?"

We flew to Delhi and checked into our favorite hotel that was not far from Sharmaji's house or the central area of New Delhi.

## **Naimisharanya**

Mother had said that we were to take care of our "business" while waiting to join Her. We did not know that we had any "business" to take care of, but each of those days in Delhi revealed previously unknown things, which needed to be done. Some of those things were supplies which we could not obtain in the remote little village of Naimisharanya.

Our friend Sharmaji helped us to secure some hard-to-get items.

Gadadhar, who had also come to Delhi, very kindly located some distinctive little silver puja articles for us. Those turned out to be extremely important in the days to come. We borrowed a small kerosene stove from Sharmaji, purchased pots for cooking, some raisins and nuts to offer Gopalji, and a few little goodies like Ovaltine.

Brahmachari Nirmalanandaji had been given charge of the Delhi ashram at that time, so one day we hired a taxi and drove to Kalkaji where the ashram is located. We enjoyed a lovely visit with him. There were only two or three other people there at the time, so he was free to visit with us. He also gave us a treasured gift: two color slides he had taken of us with Mother in 1972 on the grounds of Swadeshi House in Kanpur.

As Mother had given us permission to join Her on January first, we got

reservations on the night train to Hardoi for December thirty-first. From Hardoi we would have to go by bus to Naimisharanya.

It was still very dark when our train arrived in Hardoi on the morning of January first. After collecting our baggage, we made our way to the front of the train station and secured four bicycle rickshaws. Two were loaded with luggage. Satya and I each took separate rickshaws, keeping special and fragile things by our sides as we rode off into the still, black night. The only sounds were the clicking of the bicycle chains and the wind blowing across my ears as I wrapped my chuddar securely around my head and shoulders. I do not know how our drivers managed to stay on the road for they had no lights.

After a very long time we arrived at the bus site. As the first day of 1975 dawned, Satya managed to purchase tickets for our trip to Naimisharanya. There were several buses there waiting to be loaded. Ours turned out to be the one with no doors on the side, several missing windows, and seats that were actually wooden benches. Our luggage was loaded atop the bus and we took our seats on a bench behind the driver. The air was still quite chilly, especially as it whipped through the open bus. We bundled up in our chuddars hoping not to catch cold.

As the bus attempted to move through the town we saw many oxcarts laden with groundnuts (peanuts). It must have been harvest time, as farmers choked the streets with carts and piles of nuts. Our driver's partner went ahead on foot, trying to clear the road, but it was very difficult and took a long time to get out of town. Then we were treated to beautiful green fields and peaceful countryside that stretched all the way to Naimisharanya.

Upon arriving the bus stopped beside a large tree where a chai stall and a guava stand offered refreshments to the passengers. We stepped off the bus and I stood with some of our belongings while Satya collected our luggage from the roof of the bus. As the baggage around me increased, so did the crowd of local men who had been gathering. They stood with sober faces and silently stared.

We had been told that there were two rickshaw-type wagons available for transport in Naimisharanya, so we asked the men around us how to go about hiring them. No one said a word. We made several attempts, but no one would speak. Finally we said that we wished to go to Ma Anandamayi. Suddenly the solemn faces smiled and Indian hospitality embraced us. One rickshaw driver miraculously appeared, then he went to fetch the second one.

Soon all of our luggage was loaded. We sat on the rear end of the wagons as they carried us down the dirt road of that sacred village toward Mother's ashram. In 1972 we had missed the chance to come to Naimisharanya so we were very grateful that Mother had given permission for us to join Her there.

In ancient times the holy rishis had prayed to the Lord for a special blessing. Their petition was that He reveal to them the most sacred place on the earth where they might spend their days in sadhana. The Lord replied that he would hurl his mighty chakra and where it landed would be the most sacred place. Like a lightning bolt the glorious missile flashed through the heavens, and piercing the earth in the forest brought forth a bubbling spring which would be called Chakra Tirtha. The village which grew up around it is Naimisharanya. Many pilgrims come to bathe in the holy waters of Chakra Tirtha and bask in the divine atmosphere of this lush and peaceful place

where great rishis once dwelt and where Lord Ganesha transcribed the sacred Mahabharata epic as it was recited by Vyasa.

Mother's ashram in Nimsar (Naimisharanya) is in perfect harmony with its surroundings. Upon entering the grounds we saw the beautiful Puran Mandir on our left. Here the shrine holds the complete Puranas where worship is performed regularly. Just behind the Puran Mandir, construction of a new temple was almost complete. We learned that this was to be the site for installation of the "Sacred Flame." The same flame that has been kept burning in Varanasi, Kankhal, and other of Mother's ashrams since it was lit for the Kali Puja of 1926 in Dacca. To our right was a garden and a path leading from the Puran Mandir to a two-story structure which was Mother's house. The ashram land sits high and looks down on gently sloping fields. Among the trees we saw sheep grazing and in the distance a caravan of camels followed a winding path. Beyond this serene and charming sight, the silver Gomati River gently nourished the earth.

We were greeted by Nirvananandaji who was the only person on the grounds when we arrived. He instructed our drivers to take us to a dharmasala a short distance away in the village. Inside the door of the dharmasala a broad stairway climbed up to reveal a concrete courtyard. The courtyard was recessed about one foot below the wide walkway, which surrounded it. The rooms were built around this square, which was open to the sky.

We met the munimji (manager) who showed us to our room. The concrete floor and the walls were not clean, but when we opened the shuttered window overlooking the street there was only beauty. Because of the stairway rising within the dharmasala and the street outside dropping as it went beyond our location, it was as though we were on the second floor and could see over rooftops, glimpsing a simple and peaceful way of life that we became very fond of during our two weeks in Nimsar.

Mother was taking a few days' rest so She was not available for long darshans but usually would come to sit in front of the Puran Mandir for a while around 10:00a.m. or 11:00a.m. The atmosphere was most relaxed and very few people were there.

On our first day we took our meal at the ashram but most of the time did our own cooking in our room. Thanks to Bhaskaranandaji's nephew, Kamal, we got wonderful vegetables at the market twice a week when the farmers came with their produce. Kamal interpreted and helped us in many ways.

Every day we would get up, have hot Ovaltine, take our baths, dress, and go to the ashram. There we sat in the warmth of the sun as we waited for Mother to come out. She often walked around the grounds accessing the construction that was going on, we would follow behind Her or stand and watch from a little distance.

On the evening of our first Sunday in Nimsar, Mother sat with us inside the Puran Mandir. There was no electricity until about 10:00p.m. When it got dark someone lit a Coleman-type lantern, which made a soft blue glow. We sat at Mother's feet with only a few Indian devotees in hushed silence. The room was charged with adoration as Mother looked at us all so lovingly and with a sweetness that is Her's alone. Pushpa had come, and upon Mother's request she sang. Her mood was so extraordinary I was sorry not to have brought my tape recorder that evening.

Satya's birthday was coming on January seventh. We told Bhaskaranandaji that we wished to do worship of Mother on that day and sincerely requested his assistance so that it might be done with as little error as possible. He kindly agreed. As that day drew near, I got very nervous and began to wonder what I had gotten us into. But my fears were all for nothing as Mother shed Her grace on us that divine day.

We arrived at the ashram about 9:15a.m. Satya was wearing a new silk kurta and I a new silk sari. We had never done worship of Mother alone before, only as part of a group, so we asked Bhaskaranandaji and Biluji to help us keep it private to minimize our nervousness and any distraction.

Mother came down from Her room about 10:45a.m. and Bhaskaranandaji spoke with Mother, telling Her of our wish. Without a moment's hesitation Mother walked up the steps of the Puran Mandir, entered, and took Her seat. We followed Her inside as Bhaskarananda told the few people standing near to stay outside, that this was a "private."

I placed all the puja articles on a silk cloth at Her feet and sprinkled them with Ganga Jal. We washed our hands with the sacred waters and I heard Bhaskarananda tell Mother that it was Ganga Jal. As we had requested, Bhaskarananda quietly indicated the order in which we should offer the items. We each performed all of the offerings. After bowing before Her, Satya put sandal paste on Mother's forehead. Then I also gently placed my finger upon Her delicate skin to apply the fragrant paste. I could not believe that I was allowed to touch that divine countenance.

Our next offering was a white silk cloth which we placed behind Her and together draped over Her shoulders. We placed a bag of nuts and raisins at Her feet, adorned Her with a garland of seashells, and placed flower blossoms in Her hands and lap. We had brought a small wooden music box for Mother. I had put a Gita Press picture called "Rishi Ashram" on the lid, as it looked like Naimisharanya. The melody it played was "Sunrise, Sunset" which reminded me of the reference Mother often made to points of confluence.

Satya and I did not know all the words to the arati song, so Bhaskarananda suggested that we play the music box as we rang the small silver bell and waved incense and then camphor before Mother. And so we did. I could not help being amused as I felt sure that this must have been a unique arati - done to a music box melody. But Bhaskarananda was smiling and Mother warmly smiled at us as we pronamed, then She dropped towels over each of our heads. People had quietly filled the temple as our puja progressed, but we were so engrossed with Mother that we did not even notice and it did not distract us at all.

After the puja Mother was going to distribute the nuts and fruit as prasad.

The bag they were in was a Ziploc plastic bag but Mother seemed unfamiliar with it. Satya showed Her how the Ziploc worked, and after She distributed some of the prasad, She looked at us with amusement as She pinched the bag almost shut, pressed it next to Her, forcing the air out, then pinched the last part closed as She had seen me do. Now even a Ziploc plastic bag reminds me of Mother and how She teased us on that wonderful day.

I placed the puja articles in a box, and as Mother stood to leave the temple I spread the silk cloth which had been under the puja articles before Her,

hoping She would step upon it. She granted my wish. For several years I had dreamed of coming to Naimisharanya with Mother. She was fulfilling that dream and instilling life into my faith.

We walked southward on the road that runs past the ashram to visit the Hanuman mandir, then down to the bank of the Gomati River. When people came on pilgrimage to Chakra Tirtha, a ferryboat carried them across the river at this point. Our dharmasala was in the opposite direction, in the village.

Down the narrow cobblestone road past the dharmasala was the beautiful Chakra Tirtha. The waters of that holy spring were contained in a large circular concrete basin with graduating steps reaching down into the pool. About half way to the center, extending above the water's surface, was a concentric circular wall. Its sides had evenly spaced openings all the way around to allow free flow of the water. It was painted a very rich rust color. One time we saw two young boys swimming inside the inner circle. They climbed on top of the rust-colored wall then dove into the icy water and swam to the steps. Because this water comes from a spring there is a small amount of constant run-off. A beautiful iridescent blue bird sat next to the trickling overflow. We watched as the water moved down through the grassy slopes where two peacocks stood amid the trees. It looked like a place where one might see Lord Krishna playing his flute.

One day at the ashram a very kind devotee of Mother offered us the use of his car and driver so that we might see some of the holy places of Naimisharanya. We enjoyed the tour of graceful countryside, a peaceful ashram visit, and most of all seeing the marvelous banyan tree beneath which Lord Ganesha sat when he transcribed the Mahabharata as it was dictated by the Sage Vyasa. Up to that time the ancient Mahabharata had only been related verbally by the Sage. In order to preserve that great epic correctly, Lord Ganesha, the foremost scribe was requested to write the sacred words as Sri Vyasa spoke them. Lord Ganesha agreed, but only upon the condition that once the sage commenced the recitation, he would continue without pause unto the end. Sage Vyasa gave his consent with the provision that Lord Ganesha must understand all which was spoken before he wrote. With this accord, the two took their seats beneath the great banyan tree and Vyasa began the story. As the glorious tale unfolded under Lord Ganesha's hand, His pen suddenly broke. Without the least interruption He quickly snapped off his right tusk, dipped it into the ink, and kept writing. In that way the sacred Mahabharata was transcribed. I saved a leaf from that sacred tree.

Nearby we saw a group of small school children from Sitapur along with their teachers and school principal. We had seen them earlier when they had come for Mother's darshan. Now they were enjoying a picnic lunch before returning to Sitapur. The principal invited us to join them and we ate a little fruit as she told us about their outing. These tiny children were so well behaved and polite. What a wonderful country where school children are taken on field trips to see saints.

When we returned to the ashram that afternoon we found that a small package had come for us in care of the ashram. In it was a sandalwood mala and a letter from Gadadhar. He wrote that January eleventh was Lakshmi's birthday. She had asked him to present the mala, a garland, and fruit to

Mother on that day for her. As he was unable to be in Nimsar, he asked that we do this for Lakshmi.

Satya was ill that day with a stomach problem and stayed in bed. I took the mala and walked toward the ashram thinking, "How am I to get fruit and a garland?" We had seen neither for sale in the village. Just as I arrived at the ashram - there stood a man with a pushcart full of fruit for sale. Delighted, I bought some oranges. Inside the ashram gate, I saw Bhaskaranandaji and Biluji. I told them of my mission and sat to wait.

I was feeling bad about not having a garland to complete the offering when Kamal walked to where I sat. He said that he was to get diksha that day and was on his way to get a garland made. I asked if he would have one made for Lakshmi also. With his gracious consent, I knew that divine assistance was with me to fulfill this request of a devotee half a world away. Soon Kamal returned with the garland and I happily waited until Mother could receive me.

A lovely girl named Kiran had come to the ashram from Bombay and was to be there for some time. She had her own personal reasons for seeking Mother's counsel and I became very fond of her. Her family was in Bombay but she had been living out of the country for several years and had an understanding of western thinking which drew me to her. We seemed to share that unique mixture of east and west.

Kiran sat with me in front of the Puran Mandir as I waited. It was a very long time before I saw anyone else on the grounds. Finally Biluji appeared and I showed her that the poor garland was wilting. She went to tell Mother and after a little more time Mother came out on the patio. Kiran and I prostrated at Her feet. Then I presented the mala to Mother saying that it was from Lakshmi and that this was her birthday. Mother asked if it was a gift, or to be blessed. I said it was a gift from Lakshmi. I also presented the garland and fruit. Mother put the mala around Her neck, blessed the garland and said to send it to Lakshmi. Then She gave me an orange.

I told Mother about Satya's stomach trouble and asked Her to please bless him that he would quickly recover and not lose this precious time with Her. Mother said that he should eat curd (yogurt). After a little more private time with Kiran and me Mother stood with folded palms as we prostrated, then went inside.

I left the ashram in search of curd for Satya. There were a few shops down a little road near our dharmasala so I went there and asked for curd. No one understood me until a kindly gentleman who spoke English came to my aid. With a few words he got the shopkeeper to produce a clay pot holding fresh curd complete with a lid made of leaves. Paying the shopkeeper and thanking them all profusely, I hurried to Satya with Mother's instructions. Satya ate the curd in two or three portions, feeling better each time. By the next morning he was well enough to go to the ashram. In the past, such problems seemed to last for at least three days.

It has been our experience that when Mother gives an instruction for something, the important thing is to follow that instruction with full faith in Her. She never made small talk with us and every word had meaning. Sometimes the meaning would come long after She had spoken, spanning the intervening time in a flash and revealing once again that eternal relationship, outside of time.

The next morning as we opened the door of the dharmasala onto the street we were met by a solid wall of people completely filling the street and in a flowing motion going one way - toward Chakra Tirtha. There was not enough room for us to go the other direction to Mother's ashram. I have never seen such a sight. Hundreds of people had been coming into this small village during the night and now were like a mighty human river seeking to merge with the holy Chakra Tirtha. After a while their number was a little less and we managed to "swim upstream" out of their path and onto the road to the ashram.

Mother was on the grounds for a while and we stayed until She went into Her house. She would come to the temple in the evening, so we left to join the festivities in the village. Kamal and Kiran joined us. Little shops had been set up everywhere, lining both sides of the streets. We bought some pictures of the gods, a couple of little brass puja articles, and a small clay pot.

That evening at the ashram we were pleased to see Mr. Varma, a devotee from Sitapur, whom we had met just a few days before. He had taken photos of us sitting with his family at Mother's feet and presented copies of them to us - a sweet memento of our meeting.

As Mother sat in the temple I recorded the beautiful kirtan surrounding Her and was absorbed in the peace of Naimisharanya. More devotees had come, but still there was a feeling of intimacy as we all drew near to Her.

On January thirteenth the Sacred Flame was to be installed in its new temple just next to the Puran Mandir. Many sadhus were there for the function and a large crowd filled the grounds. Mother sat just outside the Puran Mandir and Satya took movies as people came to do pronam and speak a few words with Her. I savored this time near Her. The sadhus all looked so nice in their new, freshly dyed gerrua cloths. All the ashram was in a festive mood as final arrangements were made for the installation.

When the time came, we all went to stand before the new mandir. Satya climbed up on the roof of an adjacent structure so that he could film from above the heads of the crowd. It was a perfect place to view the procession. Mother led the way, sometimes walking backwards to direct every step taken by Bhaskarananda, who was carrying the beautiful Padmanavji, and Nirvanananda as he carried the Sacred Flame to its new home.

The Raja of Trivandrum had come for this ceremony. We had met him and his beautiful Rani in Varanasi a little over two years before. It was very interesting to learn that he had a twin murti of the Padmanavji which he always kept with him in his travels. He had both murtis cast in silver and presented one to Mother. Bhaskaranandaji attended that special image for many years.

We all waited in the courtyard as Mother and only the few involved in the installation went into the temple. A special puja was done and then Mother came out and sat with several sadhus on a long dais placed near the temple entrance. It was a lovely warm day and everyone was enjoying the light mood.

We were told that late that night Mother came down from Her room and sat inside the new temple, speaking to the flame and saying something like, "So, after staying in My room for some years, now you have come here." The mystery that is Mother, in breath-suspending stillness, holds more divine revelation than the unreality of this world can possibly know exists.

On our last full day in Naimisharanya, January fourteenth, I sat on the steps of the Puran Mandir with Kiran. She asked how I had learned about Mother, so I told her about my dream of fifteen years past. Kiran asked if I had told Mother about that dream and wondered what comment She had made. I explained that I had tried to speak with Mother about my experience on three different occasions over the years, but each time I had the feeling that it had not been communicated correctly as Mother's response was noncommittal. We had found that merely speaking the same language does not always guarantee that you will get an accurate translation. When having an important discourse with Mother that can be very unsettling to say the least.

Kiran's grasp of English was not only quite western, but actually very American. I asked her if she would interpret for us at a private with Mother and tell Her about my dream, after which I wanted to ask some questions of Mother. Kiran was a little unsure of the ashram protocol but said that if Mother gave permission she would translate for us. I prayed that Mother would allow it as it was a very rare opportunity.

That evening Biluji arranged everything for our private. We followed her, along with Kiran, to the door of Mother's house. Grass mats had been spread on the patio by the steps. Mother came out, and as Biluji went inside the screen door for something, Mother quickly sat on the top step with Her back against the closed screen door. Now no one could come out and only Satya, Kiran, and I were outside with Mother. That way, no one could question that Kiran was translating instead of someone else. Biluji, who was all smiles at Mother's ploy, stood behind Mother inside the screen door.

We then pronamed and took our seats upon the grass mats, facing Mother. Mother turned to Kiran and listened to every word as Kiran told Her of my dream. When the story was completed, I asked my questions.

*Shraddha:* Mother, why did you come to me in that way?

*Ma:* You wanted to see God in the form you wanted, so your desire was fulfilled. I did not go to anyone, I only came to Myself.

*Shraddha:* Why don't I remember the experience of samadhi [from the dream]?"

*Ma:* Lack of total jnana [spiritual knowledge].

*Shraddha:* Once Mother said that She always saw me sitting at Her feet. How can I experience always being at Her feet?

*Ma:* Pray to God and you will always be at Mother's feet.

*Shraddha:* I am praying to God now!

*Ma:* Yes, I know!

At long last I had Mother's verification that it was indeed She who was the beautiful lady of my dream.

It has been my nature to doubt my own ability to distinguish between intuition and imagination. These words of Mother, which I received this day, dissolved any reserve that was carried in my heart, washing it away and leaving in its place a knowing - still and deep - where my relationship with Her abides eternal.

After asking a few other questions, we bowed at Her feet and walked back to the steps of the Puran Mandir. Kiran told us two other personal things that

Mother had said in reference to us when we were not present.

The next day, January fifteenth, we were to leave enchanted Naimisharanya and travel in Mother's caravan to Vrindavan. Kiran was returning to Bombay and I was never to see her again. How strange is Mother's lila. In that brief time Kiran had secured for herself not only my undying gratitude but a sweet affection which I shall always feel for her.

## Vrindavan

Our taxi would take us to Lucknow where we had reservations on the same night train to Mathura as did Mother. En route to Lucknow there was one scheduled stop in Sitapur at the Shegal dharmasala where Mother would give darshan. We had plenty of room in our taxi so Swami Swarupanandaji rode with us. He was in charge of Mother's Calcutta ashram at that time and would be going there from Lucknow. He had a delightful sense of humor and we enjoyed his company.

In Lucknow we boarded the train for Mathura. Our compartment was in the same car as Mother's, though we did not get to see Her until the next morning. Then we got a quick darshan before pulling into Mathura station.

From Mathura we went by car for the six or seven-mile trip to Vrindavan.

This time we shared our car with Mr. J. N. Kaul, Secretary of the Sangha there. Mr. Kaul secured a place for us to stay while in Vrindavan: the Neem Karoli Baba Dharmasala. It was a most beautiful place with a lovely rose garden. The rooms were built in a "U" shape around the garden. When we were shown to our rooms, we stood frozen in the middle of the main room with our mouths open, gaping. There were two rooms plus separate bathing and toilet facilities, all private and *immaculate*. Once when I spilled some water on the floor and wiped it up, the rag was wet but not soiled. What a contrast to the dharmasala in Nimsar where we had to wear shoes in the room. The funny thing was that we loved Naimisharanya so much that we would have gladly suffered that dirty little room and lack of facilities to be there still with Mother. But this was to be our lovely home for twelve days and that of most of Mother's western devotees who came to Vrindavan to join Her.

We were happy to see Jayananda and Gadadhar again. They had rooms very near us. There were about six others who were fortunate to be welcomed at this peaceful haven.

How different Vrindavan is this time of the year. Our last visit there was in May of 1971. The intense heat had kept us from going to see any of the famous temples in this most holy city. This time we hoped to visit some of them, but there seemed to be plenty of time for that later.

On our first day we went to Mother's house in the ashram garden and climbed the familiar narrow steps up to Mother's room on the roof. There a small group of devotees were seated on carpets before Mother in a very informal setting. The relaxed atmosphere and nearness of Mother were to be ours for this entire trip.

Most mornings at 11:00a.m. Mother would sit with us. Sometimes She was quite animated, talking and laughing with people. Other times She seemed in a sweet quiet mood and would look at each of us lovingly or seemed to be looking at something which our eyes could not behold. She is so incredibly

beautiful! It is the most wonderful thing in this world to be able to sit at Her feet, letting the mind and eyes be engulfed by Her beauty. No other moves with Her flowing grace and there is no beauty but Hers.

A Bhagavat Sapta was held in the temple hall daily. Being the winter season, few people attended. Sometimes Mother would come into the hall and sit, but it was difficult to see Her there. Most of the time She would be more accessible on the roof of Her house.

On about our second day in Vrindavan as we sat in our room there was a knock on the door. We were delighted to see our dear friend Binuda Niyogi who had just arrived along with his beautiful daughter Anindita, her husband, and two children. They had been to Varanasi and a couple of other places together. He was an old devotee of Mother and we were very fond of him and his daughter. We actually met them in California when Anindita's husband, Eric, was a college professor there.

One evening as we visited in their California home I told her that if we should ever be together with Mother I would love for her to translate for me. When I saw Anindita at the ashram I asked if she would be willing to translate for us. She replied that if Mother gave her permission she would do so. We were delighted to get another chance for a very good translation, and started writing out the wording for our questions. In a few days we would seek Mother's consent.

One morning we waited on the patio outside Mother's house, hoping to see Her. Mother was in a downstairs room waiting for a French lady who was to have a private with Her. Shubhadi was looking for the lady, who was not on the grounds. When I asked if we could have Mother's darshan, Shubhadi said that Mother was waiting for the French lady but that she had not come. I said, "Shubhadi, *we* are here! Shubhadi, tell Mother, 'Shraddha is here!' as you did two years ago in Kankhal." Shubhadi laughed and went to tell Mother. We got to go inside for pronam and sat for a few minutes until the lady arrived for her private. Dear Shubhadi - such a kind and loving soul.

During one darshan on Mother's roof someone asked how to meditate on the formless. Mother gave these instructions and made a point of seeing that the westerners there understood Her. Gadadhar had recorded Her words and later we transcribed them with Anindita translating as closely as possible word for word.

Nirakar (formless) Meditation:

Sit quietly for as long as you can.

Sit without moving.

You are wanting the formless and not the form.

This Shunya (vacuum) is also a form. One has to also destroy *this* form and go further.

You come to this Shunya because you will not be able to think any further than the Shunya.

Coming into the Shunya (or emptiness, vacuum), you think or imagine, "I have to also penetrate this Shunya. That is why, in this Shunya, my whole body is also becoming Shunya."

So you sit without moving and meditate.

During the meditation you put your attention on your respiration and sit quietly, and think, "the light that can be seen - that I can see - is what I am

inhaling and exhaling. That Jyoti [self-effulgent light] is God's light. It is with that light that I can see this inhalation and exhalation that is going on."

This is how one can begin to meditate on the formless.

Mother sat with us for two hours or more. We were floating on that divine bliss which is Her love. Why cannot we just always be at Her feet like that?

The next day was the last day of the Bhagavat Sapta. Sometime after the havan (fire sacrifice) Mother was presented with a beautiful cow and her calf. The cow had garlands of marigolds around her neck and engraved silver tips fitted on the ends of her horns. While puja was done to her, she looked so sweet and then just stood and stared at Mother. We felt very fortunate to be there and witness that gentle moment.

Mother had given Her consent for Anindita to translate at our private. After going over our questions with her, we three came to the patio by Mother's door. A large grass mat had been spread upon the bricks by Mother's chair. Bhaskaranandaji knelt near where Mother sat. Anindita, Satya, and I pronounced to Mother and took our seats upon the mat at Her feet. I placed my tape recorder beside me to record Mother's answers so that we could be sure of getting Her words correctly. Some things we asked were:

*Satya:* Mother, I know that Shraddha and I have a special relationship; would Mother please explain what that relationship is?

*Mother:* Atma Rup - one who is in Atma Rup. It is in order to express that. God expressing one atman in two bodies. It is a spiritual relationship.

*Satya:* Is Mother always with me?

*Mother:* Remember that Mother says that Atman is covering the whole universe. That relationship is permanent.

*Satya:* How can I know that relationship in this state of ignorance?

*Mother:* Study good books, keep good company (satsang), japa, meditation, and the remembrance of God. If you do this, the road will open and you can obtain strength from that.

*Shraddha:* Mother, how are we to tell the truth?

*Mother:* Tell what you know to be truth - worldly truth. This is necessary to attain divine [eternal, unchanging] truth.

*Shraddha:* Mother, please be present with us in our meditation.

*Mother:* Ma says to everyone that if you sit even for five minutes, Ma is with you. At all times. As one feels the body to be one's own, so that is how one feels closeness with Ma.

We then asked Mother to bless some beautiful Tulsi malas which we had purchased there in Vrindavan. She wound them around Her wrist and arm, keeping them like that for some time before giving them back to us. After this private, Bhaskarananda advised me to erase that tape, as Mother did not approve of taping private conversations. With his permission we listened to it once with Anindita to be sure that we wrote everything correctly. Then with a pain in my heart I erased Her sweet voice as I had promised.

On our last full day in Vrindavan, we were to receive a great blessing.

At the daily darshans on Mother's roof, Satya had often sat next to a lovely gentleman, Mr. J. N. Dhamija of Delhi. Just when it appeared that we would not get to visit any of the famous temples of Vrindavan, Mr. Dhamija asked if

we would like to go with him and a guide, in his car, to see some of these holy shrines. I was thrilled to think that this dream was coming true - and typical of Mother's blessings - with little time to spare.

The guide that he brought with us was very knowledgeable and had a most charming way of telling the story associated with each temple which we visited on that full moon eve.

These are the temples names and the stories which he told to us.

### *Banki Bihari*

There was once a sadhu who had great love for Lord Krishna. He came to this temple and meditated lovingly on the little dark image of the Lord. Sri Hari was captivated by his devotee's yearning, and when the sadhu left the temple the Lord went with him, leaving the lifeless image in the shrine. The people were lamenting their loss and pleading with the Lord to return into the temple image. But it was a very long time before He finally came back. So now the murti is kept behind a curtain which is pulled open for a few seconds, then closed for a few seconds, again opened for a few seconds, and so on. Never is the curtain left open long enough for anyone to meditate upon the form and woo the Lord away again. Also within this temple is a piece of the sacred Govardan Mountain, placed where all can reverently touch it.

### *Seva Kunj*

This is the garden where Sri Radha and Sri Krishna danced together. They danced so long that Sri Radha's legs grew very tired. The Lord, Sri Hari, Himself pressed Her legs by way of massage. He told Her that She had very good karma to have the Lord doing Her seva (service). It is said that in this garden, Lord Krishna walks at night. No one has stayed all night in that garden and lived to tell what he saw. Even the monkeys, which romp and play in great numbers during the day, abandon the garden as the sun sets. The story is told of a sadhu who hid in the garden one evening and spent the night there. When morning came, his lifeless body was found, but there was a most mysteriously beautiful smile upon his silent lips. In the dust he had written, "Krishna came."

### *Gopeshwar*

This is a Shiva temple, honoring the great Lord Shiva Who came to Vrindavan just to see the gopis dancing with Krishna in the Rasa Lila. But Lord Krishna bade him go, saying that the gopis were very shy. They were used to no other male but Himself and would not dance if they saw Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva pleaded, "I have come from so far away, surely there is some way that I may stay for the Rasa Lila?" Then He had the idea to disguise Himself as a gopi and take part in the play. He was so successful that no gopi knew that He was there as He enjoyed the Rasa Lila.

## *Ranga Nath Temple*

The story of this South Indian Temple I have claimed for my own, as I know of no other. Foreigners are not allowed inside this beautiful temple and only Indians are allowed in who are properly dressed in the simple style of religious pilgrims. The grounds are neatly kept and in the rear there is a huge pool where sometimes is staged a reenactment of the great legendary battle between the elephant and the alligator.

As we waited in the rear garden for Mr. Dhamija who had gone inside, we felt wonderful to be in such a holy place. I had absolutely no negative feelings about not being allowed inside. We heard chanting, and as we gazed within the open double doors of the temple we were overwhelmed to see men coming out carrying a great throne bearing an incredibly beautiful image of the Lord. They came down the temple steps and proceeded to walk toward where we stood - and stopped. Amid tears and smiles, we bowed to the Lord.

What an amazing thing had happened. We could not go inside, so the Lord in infinite mercy had come outside to grant us darshan.

After circumambulating the temple with the Lord in procession, we watched as He was carried back into the temple. Our guide told us that this was not a regular occurrence.

I felt that it was another of Mother's loving touches that always took our breath away with heart piercing joy.

## *Radha Ramana*

Long ago, there was a group of sadhus who lived together, and each had his own image of Lord Krishna. One sadhu had a Shalagrama (sacred stone with very particular natural markings) while all of the other sadhus had murtis formed in the physical likeness of Sri Hari.

The sadhu who had the Shalagrama was very sad because he longed to gaze on the sweet form of his beloved Lord. In tears he spoke to the Lord of his grief, saying that he did not understand why he had only the stone when the others had His sweet image. He begged that he, too, might have that beloved form.

At that instant the Shalagrama split in half and revealed the beautiful Krishna murti that is worshipped today in this temple.

We were there for arati and were given prasad. The feeling of genuine devotion and presence of the Lord made this my favorite temple.

## *Nidhi Ban*

This was a lovely garden belonging to Sri Hari Das. It was in this garden that the Lord of Banki Bihari temple was unearthed after a lady devotee had a dream of the Lord who told her where His image was buried.

After visiting all these temples we went to see the holy Jumna River. This was truly a wonderful evening which we will always treasure. I asked Mr. Dhamija to please tell Mother all the events of our evening, which he did late that night. As a parting gift, he gave us a copy of an ancient poem.

## Parting

Studying the same doctrine  
Under one master  
You and I are friends  
See yonder white mists  
Floating in the air  
On the way back to the peaks.  
This parting may be our last  
Meeting in this life.  
Not just in a dream  
But in our deep thoughts  
Let us meet often hereafter.

Kobo Daishi (774-835 AD)

When we left Vrindavan the next day, we stopped for our last darshan of Mother. On Her roof we bowed at Her feet. The ache in my heart was overwhelming as I clung to those last moments.

Mother held our Gopalji and said that when we do service to Gopal and He is pleased to accept it, Mother will be with us, that we will have Her as we did at that minute at Her feet. Mother said for us to send word to Her when we arrived safely. Reluctantly we backed toward the door and the stairway leading down. Other people had come for a private but Mother held us with Her eyes. Someone was trying to get us to leave, still we were locked in Her loving gaze. She leaned over to the side in order to see us as we were moved away.

Then the door was shut. It was as though my lifeline had been cut and I felt numb and unreal as we made our way down those narrow steps, through the squeaking screen door, down the few steps to the brick patio, past the garden and temple to the car waiting on the wide driveway which would carry us away from the Only Thing in this insane world that had reality.

## **Fifth Trip**

**(November 27, 1976 - February 1, 1977)**

### **Patna**

On November 27, 1976, we joyfully returned to Delhi. This was the beginning of our fifth pilgrimage.

Mother said that we could meet Her in Patna and gave us permission to follow wherever She might travel during our stay. There was to be a great Kumbha Mela at Allahabad in January, but Mother's program for that was not set. Our only purpose was to stay near Mother, so it mattered little to us where She might go as long as we could go with Her.

From Delhi we took a two-hour morning flight to Patna, arriving there at 8:30a.m. on November twenty-eighth. Mother was staying in a beautiful new mansion under construction by a local devotee. She never entered the home of a householder once it had been occupied, but sometimes She would bless devotees by staying in their new residence before anyone had moved in, such as on this occasion. A Bhagavat Sapta was being conducted daily in a pandal set just in front of the entrance to "Hatwa House," as the new home was called.

When we arrived by taxi, there was little activity on the grounds. I walked to the rear of the pandal and found Chitra there. What a joy to see her beautiful face after four years. She advised us to get a room at the hotel just next door, shower, and hurry back as Mother would be coming to the pandal about 10:00a.m. Brahmachari Ram, of Mother's Kankhal ashram, kindly accompanied us to the hotel where we were given very nice accommodations.

We were happy to see our friend Binuda Niyogi who had also come to see Mother. Swami Akhandanandaji was giving the Srimat Bhagavat discourse. He was seated in the center of a platform which dominated the end of the pandal nearest the house. Our Divine Mother sat just to his right.

There we saw Her after our eternal two-year exile, looking radiant in Her immaculate white cloth. Within Her aura the unreality of our existence in the west melted away and I was alive again. Always it was like that - a metamorphosis.

Garlands were available beside the pandal. We purchased two and went to the steps where Mother would come out. Chitra, Pushpa, Bishuddha, and Maitreyi greeted us with warm smiles, all telling Mother that we had arrived.

Mother allowed us to place our garlands gently upon Her shoulders and stood with folded palms as we bowed at Her feet. I lightly touched Her right foot with my fingertips. We followed as She walked toward the door of Hatwa House where She turned and stood facing us for a few minutes. I had been trying to learn a few words of Hindi and could not wait to try one of my favorites. Pronaming before Her I said, "Ma, ashish di gia" (Ma, please bless me by touching my head). My heart flooded with joy as Her sweet hand lightly touched the top of my head.

I was never able to learn many Hindi words, but those few were my treasure. In California Dr. Hemant Pathak had spent many hours trying to

teach me so I could speak with Mother. Alas! my poor mind made little progress, but on this day I had actually spoken to Her, by myself, with no translator.

That evening we enjoyed watching as Mother responded to questions asked by devotees seated in the pandal. She was delightfully animated and playful. I sat near Lakshmi and Gopalapriya who were staying in the hotel room right next to ours. At 8:45p.m. there was the usual fifteen-minute period of maun. I was always sorry that the lights were turned out for maun as then I could not see Mother.

The next morning there was a knock at our hotel room door. I was so surprised when I opened it to find our smiling friend Krishnapriya. She had just come from Calcutta and looked wonderful.

What an amazing thing, to find so many friends here at this relatively small function.

The next day, November thirtieth, was my birthday, so when I got the opportunity I told Chitra that I would very much like to ask for Mother's blessing on that day. Chitra said that it would be most difficult for me to get any time with Mother and that it might be a week or two before I could get a private with Her.

At 7:30a.m. I awoke and wondered what this forty-seventh birthday would hold for me. I bathed, washed my hair, and dressed. Satya was taking his shower when I heard someone at our door. I opened it to find Chitra who rushed in and said that I should come right then to have Mother's darshan for my birthday. She said to bring Gopalji and my mala. I almost forgot my glasses. Sprinkling some Ganga Jal on myself and Gopal, who was not yet dressed, I quickly gathered His clothes, jewels, and my mala, putting them and Him in His basket, forgot my purse, and ran out leaving poor Satya in the shower with the door to our room open.

Chitra led me hurriedly down the path to Mother's quarters. I told Her I had no money to purchase a garland for Mother. Stopping for a second by the flower vendor, Chitra told him to give me a garland and that I would pay him later. Garland and basket in hand, I breathlessly stumbled after Chitra. Krishnapriya was standing near the pandal and Chitra told her to come too. We all went inside the house to an enclosed courtyard which was open to the sky. A carpet was spread upon the recessed square of earth. Chitra left Krishnapriya and me alone there for a short time. We took our seats before the asana which had been prepared for Mother.

I tried to straighten my sari and dress Gopalji before Mother came. Satya had not arrived and I felt very bad because I did not know how he could find me. To think that he would miss this special darshan had me on the verge of tears. When Chitra returned I pleaded with her to send someone to get him. As always, she found a way, sending a young man to locate Satya and bring him to the courtyard.

Krishnapriya and I stood as Mother entered. She smiled so sweetly at Gopal and me as She moved to Her seat. Then She took Gopal, touching my hand as She did so. She allowed me to put my garland gently over Her head. As I bowed at Her feet, She placed the garland upon my shoulders. Mother also put a garland on Gopalji as He sat next to Her. She held my japa mala, touching it to Her heart and head before returning it to me.

Udasji brought a yellow towel and placed it in Mother's lap. Mother looked at one corner and commented that the towel was new. Then She laid it across Her lap, tucking it snugly around her legs, and said, "Now I have used it." She was smiling and I bowed before Her as She placed the towel over my back and shoulders. There was no one translating, but somehow I understood Mother. This happened on rare occasions, and it seemed so normal that I never questioned it.

I had told Chitra that Jayananda and Haripriya were each seeking Mother's permission to join Her in January. Mother replied that they could come for Kumbha Mela, but was unsure about their being with Her after that.

Another woman had come for a private with Mother, so Chitra said I should go check on Satya to be sure that he got the message. She said that we could join Mother after the private. As I was hurrying out the door I saw Satya coming up the walk with a garland in his hand. We went inside and stood at a place where we could see Mother without intruding. After the private we were allowed to go to Mother and pronam. Gopalji was still at Her side, but His garland must have been given as prasad during the private.

Satya placed his garland over Mother's head and pronamed as She then put it upon his bowed head. We sat with Her for some time as She talked with the few people who were there. It was a lovely relaxed atmosphere. When Mother started to get up, I asked again in my best Hindi, "Ma, ashish di gia?" and She touched the top of my head. Then I motioned toward Satya and said, "Mere Swami?" requesting that She bless him in the same way. Mother touched the top of his head too.

After that we stood to the side and watched as Mother walked around the courtyard and discussed the upcoming Gita Path to be held there in a day or so. Mother went to Her room and we spoke with Chitra briefly. Mother came back for a few minutes. Then She was gone again, leaving us standing intoxicated in the wake of Her enchantment and love. I floated out with Mother's towel and the garland still upon my shoulders as She had placed them. Gopal's basket was full of prasad and Gopal was in my hand.

When we returned to our room it was just as we had left it, unlocked and in disarray, but completely undisturbed.

The peach-colored sari I wore that day became my new favorite.

After breakfast we went again for Mother's darshan in the pandal then visited with Chitra, Bhaskarananda, and Swami Tanmayananda.

In the evening we sat with Mother for two hours, culminating in the maun period from 8:45 to 9:00p.m. Those few minutes were very powerful that night.

On December fourth Mother would go by night train to Ranchi. We could not get reservations in Her train but with the help of Sanjit, a new friend and Patna resident, Satya was able to get a coupe for that very night, December third. Thus we could meet Mother's train when it arrived the morning of December fifth in Ranchi.

I had just finished packing our things when Chitra came to our room for a last visit. She would not be coming to Ranchi but would rejoin Mother in January. We wanted to pronam to Mother before leaving that night. Chitra said that we would probably be unable to see Her, and we were very disappointed. Then she said, "Well, if we go now, we might be able to get in for a minute." Seizing that opportunity, we quickly went to Hatwa House,

purchased garlands, and following our "guardian angel" Chitra, entered into the courtyard where Mother was seated.

After offering pronams and garlands, we sat at Mother's feet for a few precious moments as She smiled at us and gave us each an apple. When Mother left the room we exchanged affectionate goodbyes with Chitra, went to collect our luggage, and took a taxi to the train station.

## Ranchi

Our compartment was comfortable and we slept until 6:30a.m. The train arrived in Ranchi at 9:30a.m.

With assistance from Dr. Roy of Mother's Ranchi Ashram we got a lovely room at the Raj Hotel which had a wonderful vegetarian restaurant. Our spacious room was bright and clean, with mosquito netting over the beds. After unpacking and settling in we ate, relaxed, and went to bed early. Mother's train would arrive the next morning and we wanted to be there to greet Her.

I awoke at 6:00a.m. Snug inside my sleeping bag, I looked through the mosquito netting at the soft light coming through the ornamental ironwork over our windows. Puja bells were ringing as Ranchi worshipped God and the day began.

Rickshaws carried us to the train station and we stood on the platform amid other devotees as Mother's train arrived. When the train stopped, Satya was standing at the window facing Mother's compartment door. He filmed as She came out and those pictures capture the joy of the devotees as Mother stepped from the train. One lady was waving incense gently doing arati to Mother, oblivious of anything but Her. A great wave of people followed in Mother's wake as She was escorted to Her flower-bedecked car.

I was staying back a little, holding our garlands. A very kind gentleman kept telling me to go forward and present the flowers to Mother. After urging me toward Her three times, and other people also making way for me, I approached the open car door where Mother sat. Looking into Her wonderful eyes I bowed before Her, presenting our garlands, then received Her blessing as She put them over my head and smiled at me.

We were so intoxicated with the mood that enveloped us that we stood on the edge of the street as first Mother's car left, then a car full of sadhus waved to us as they followed. Satya took movies as two more cars full of ashramites and devotees smiled as we waved to them while they drove away. Soon we awoke to find that we were the only ones left standing there and we had not arranged for a car. Laughing, we managed to get two rickshaws and proceeded to the ashram.

Mother was seated inside the temple near the Kali shrine. Many people were seated before Her facing the shrine. We found a side window where we could stand and have an unobstructed view of Mother. Nirvananandaji pointed to us and told Mother that we were there.

In the evening we returned for darshan on the roof outside Mother's room. Two staircases leading up were packed solid with people and once on the roof a surge of devotees moved toward Mother as She sat just inside Her doorway. Someone quickly shut Her door. We got to see Her through Her window for a while then everyone was made to go downstairs.

The next morning we came to the temple hall for darshan and stood at our same side window. Among those seated before Mother was a beautiful swamiji with long white hair and beard. His shining countenance drew my attention and I hoped for the chance to meet him. When the satsang was ended, the swamiji came out of the side door and walked straight to where we stood. He held me with his eyes, and when I stooped to touch his feet he caught my hands and I had to raise up in order not to have him bowing. He asked our names, then I asked his. "Swami Jnanananda Giri," he told me. Then he said, "We shall meet again," and he was gone. Where but India could such extraordinary things happen in a most natural and ordinary way?

Mother's presence had been requested at Rajratu Palace, the residence of the local Raja. A car was taking Her party there. We shared a taxi with our friend Shuddhananda, an American devotee, and set out to follow Mother. We were about thirty minutes behind Her. As we drove down a road some distance out of town we were all remarking upon the beauty of a peaceful little lake on our left. Ducks sat silently on the water and fishermen were casting their nets.

Suddenly Shuddhananda told our driver to turn around as Mother's car was coming from the opposite direction with two others following Her. They had driven beyond the turnoff to the palace and were returning. It was as though Mother had waited for us to reach that charming lake, then appeared to show us the way. Otherwise we would have missed the road to Rajratu Palace and the ensuing lila.

Our car fell right in behind theirs, going up a narrow dirt road across from the lake. Soon we came onto the palace grounds. Several young men dressed in yellow stood beside the driveway blowing conch shells accompanied by the sound of deep rolling drums as Mother's car entered. Further in, as Her vehicle arrived at the family temple, a red carpet was laid at Her door, stretching toward the temple entrance. As Mother stepped out, a lady spread rose petals upon the carpet before Mother as She walked to the temple.

Inside the temple an elegant seat had been prepared for Mother. She was draped in a lovely red sari and bedecked with an array of flowers as arati was done to Her. The conch and drum sounds were intensified by the Bengali ladies trilling salute to Divine Mother.

Upon leaving the temple, Mother was again seated in Her car. It drove a short distance then stopped. No one else approached as She waited. I went near Her window and stood watching as She toyed with the little red thread which had been tied around Her small left wrist. She instructed a young brahmachari to give prasad to us, accepted our pronams, and was driven away.

After lunch at our hotel we went to the ashram. I hoped to meet Swami Jnanananda again. We stood at our side window and could see Mother as She sat near the Kali shrine. The swamiji was seated in the hall facing Her. Darshan did not last long that day, and after Mother left the hall the swamiji again came out the side door near where we stood. I had my Polaroid camera with me and asked if I might take his picture. He gave his consent and I took two photos, but there was not enough light. He agreed that I could try again tomorrow.

"Swamiji", I asked, "will I attain liberation?" He said yes, that I would. "Do

you promise?" I urged. He hesitated a moment, then said "Yes." "When, Swamiji?" I pleaded. He smiled softly as he said, "In time." As he left he told us that he would return in the morning at 8:00a.m. His gentle voice and saintly nature were so compelling. It was a blessing to be in his presence. It was becoming difficult to get close to Mother as the crowds increased. I felt that She had kindly led us to meet Swami Jnanananda who spoke from the same one-pointedness as She.

The next morning, standing at our side window darshan spot, we saw Mother briefly then waited for Swamiji to come out. He asked if I wanted to take the photos. I was pleased to get several beautiful pictures of him, then he spoke with us about finding Mother within ourselves. I said, "Yes, this is the problem - how to do that?" He replied, "Japa." He said that the diksha Mother had given me would do it. I asked "How do you know that Mother has given me initiation?" He smiled and said that he could tell from my face. That the face was a reflection of the mind.

Swamiji suggested that I should learn Sanskrit, Bengali, and Hindi. I told him that I had tried to learn Hindi but that my small mind was unable to grasp it. He said that I had been in contact with some big minds now that would help me. I told him how Mother had once told me that I had not enough spiritual jnan and that *he* was my Jnan. Everyone laughed at the play on his name. Swamiji invited us to visit his ashram in Purulia, between Ranchi and Calcutta.

A lady came with a box of sweets that were Mother's prasad. Swamiji took one piece and broke it in half. He put one half in Satya's mouth and the other in mine. I was totally intoxicated as he spoke of name and form being the same, of how he would never forget us. Then turning and looking into my eyes, he said, "Forget me!" My eyes filled with tears as I assured him that I could not.

Slowly walking from the side, past the front of the building, we were drawn to enter the office door. There we found Swami Paramanandaji sitting with a gentleman called Manu Bhimani. Manubai had a most remarkable experience two years ago. He told us that his family members were devotees of Mother but that he had been a confirmed atheist when he was involved in a very serious accident. He had been taken to a hospital where distraught relatives could not accept the news when told that he had died, and they rushed to tell Mother. Mother told them not to remove his body from the hospital that day. His body remained lifeless for eighteen hours. When at last he opened his eyes he was no longer an atheist, and very much alive.

Manubai introduced us to his friends Mr. and Mrs. C. K. Somany from Calcutta. They kept a house in Ranchi and had requested Mother to come there. The family wished to do Mother's puja on the grounds of their lovely home. Mother had consented to go, and Manubai received Her permission for Satya and me to attend. It was a joy to have Mother's darshan in this peaceful setting and the Somany's did worship of Mother with great devotion. Afterward we went with the family and Manubai to a large hall for Mother's darshan and Matri Satsang. We basked in the luxury of sitting one hour gazing at Her as She talked with devotees.

Mother saw Swami Jnanananda sitting on the men's side and called him to come forward and sit with the swamis from Her ashram. He looked at Her lovingly all through the satsang.

When Mother left the hall we talked with Swamiji for a while, then he came with us to our hotel room. I was surprised and delighted that he would come into the hotel. The boys who worked at the hotel were very honored and rushed to bring chairs into our room. Swamiji said that he wanted to see how we lived. Then he asked me to tell him the details of my dream of Mother. I related the whole experience to him. He told us that he had a 9:30p.m. appointment with Mother. We walked with him to the ashram, ending a beautiful day.

The next morning, December eighth, Mother was shifting from the ashram to quarters at Rajratu Palace. She was to be there for four days. After breakfast there

was a knock at our door. When we opened it, a hotel waiter said "Swamiji!" and smiled as he pointed to the balcony window. I ran to the window and saw, standing below, Swami Jnananandaji and one of the two gentlemen who had traveled with him from Purulia. I pronounced and said that we would come right down.

Satya and I hurriedly locked our room and went to join Swamiji. He said that he was going to stay at Rajratu Palace. We walked with him to the road asking how we could find him in such a large palace. He said not to worry about it, that God would find us. The words he spoke were like echoes in my mind of things that Mother had said. I told him "Swamiji, you are Mother!" With his sweet gentle smile, he looked at me and replied, "The day will come when you will know the truth of that."

His rickshaw needed some minor repair and we stood with him while the driver was attending to it. Swamiji said that we should go on to the ashram. Reluctantly we started walking backwards, away from where he stood. My eyes filled with tears and I could not leave him in the middle of the street like that. We walked back to him and said "Swamiji, we cannot leave you." He smiled and assured us that we never could leave him, as we are all the same Atman. His eyes twinkled mischievously as he told us that a sadhu causes great suffering. From my heart I replied, "It is sweet suffering." The rickshaw was repaired and we watched as it carried him away.

Arriving at the ashram, we had Mother's darshan at "our" window then watched as She was seated in Her car and driven down the road toward the palace. Words are inadequate to describe the emptiness I always felt when watching Mother go away. Philosophically I know that She is never "away" or "separate" from me, as She and Swamiji both had said. But alas I have "not enough spiritual jnan," as Mother had told me. To this day I still yearn to see Her beloved form, and only She can change that in me if it be Her kheyala.

On December twelfth Mother was going by train to Kanpur. We had little time to arrange transportation for ourselves and of course we wanted to travel on the same train as Mother if it was at all possible. We sought reservations through a local travel agent. At one moment it would appear that we had accommodations and the next moment it looked hopeless. Ah! the delicious madness of trying to keep pace with our Divine Mother.

After going to the travel agent's office we took a taxi to Rajratu Palace.

There we waited until almost 6:00p.m. Then we were led upstairs to where Mother sat with a few people around Her. I took a seat in front near Mother as a beautiful bhajan was sung by a girl with the voice of an angel. Mother looked so wonderful. We were all spellbound by Her presence. I saw light emanating from Her form that was white, turning blue and golden. As I gazed in awe there was a positive and negative image interplay with light so intense that it was blinding - actually turning into darkness. She radiates not only light, but love and a most pure sweetness that is impossible to describe.

Darshan lasted about one hour I think, but time in Her presence is like an elastic band. It can stretch to many times its usual length, or snap out of your grasp by Her touch. Who can understand it?

Swami Jnanananda was at the darshan and we met him as it ended. He told us that he would be leaving the next day at about noon. We went with him to the little cottage where he had been staying. Both of the men who traveled with him were at the cottage, and they prepared tea, fruit, and some little pastries for Swamiji and us. It was a sweet blessing to sit and take food with this very saintly soul. The pastries were almost gone and I offered the last two small pieces to Swamiji. He ate one then fed the last one to me with his own hand. He walked with us to our taxi and watched as we left.

As we traveled down the country road, our taxi stopped. Some problem with the

'points,' Satya told me. He borrowed my nail file and with that got the taxi going fine - until we ran out of gas.

After a late dinner at the hotel restaurant we went to our room. We wanted to go in the morning to see Swamiji before he left.

I awoke early with a queasy stomach, took some medication, and we got ready to go to the palace. This time we went by motor-rickshaw (mini-taxi). This one broke down on the way and it took some time for the driver to fix it. When we arrived at Swamiji's cottage he was not there. We went to the satsang room and found him doing kirtan with Swami Tanmayanandaji.

Mother was in the hall with a young girl of the Raja's family who was receiving her diksha. We could see Mother through the window as She sat with lovely peacock feathers in Her lap. After kirtan Swamiji told us that Mother had invited him to take his noon meal there, so he would not be leaving until the next morning. As I did not feel well, we told Swamiji that we were going and would see him when we returned in the evening.

After a light lunch and one and a half hour's rest we went again to Rajratu Palace. It was two hours before Mother came out and She sat with us for only a brief time. When She left the room we spoke with Bhaskaranandaji and Nirvananandaji about our getting accommodations for Kumbha Mela. The chances sounded pretty slim and we were discouraged and saddened at the prospect of being separated from Mother at that time.

Swamiji walked downstairs with us and said that we should not worry, that there would be a place for us at the Mela. Shuddhananda came and walked with us down the dirt road. He was on the left side of Swamiji and I was on his right. Swamiji took my hand in his as we walked. I was very surprised and said, "Is it all right for you to do that?" (to touch a woman?). He chuckled and said, "Oh, yes, I am a swami. Besides, you were my mother in a past life and you were also his [Shuddhananda's] mother in a past life." If I had not been feeling so ill, I would have asked him about those lives, but such is the play. That was the last time we were to meet in this life but he will always be with me as he promised, and when I think of him sometimes I catch the aroma of his gerrua wool shawl. Feeling better after a long night's rest we went again to seek Mother's darshan. There Bhaskaranandaji called Satya to the side and told him that he had spoken with Swami Paramanandaji on our behalf regarding our accommodations for Kumbha Mela. Swamiji had said he thought it best that we stay at the camp in a Swiss cottage tent. He advised us to write for a reservation as there would be limited availability. He also said that we were to say that Swamiji had requested them to hold a tent for us. He added a few other comments which we were to include in our letter. Bhaskaranandaji gave the name and address to us. I later did exactly as he had instructed.

When we returned to the satsang hall, it was full. We went into the hall and had a perfect view of Mother. She was very animated and playful as some people were taking Her photo. When Mother came out of the room and into the hall She looked at me so sweetly and smiled.

There was only one full day left in Ranchi. It was difficult to see Mother as many local people had come for darshan. Due to the large crowd rushing to pronam, She stayed for only a few minutes then left the room.

We still did not have confirmed reservations on the train, but all we could do was to pack, go ahead with preparations, and trust that Mother would provide.

# Kanpur

Early in the morning of December twelfth we got word that we would have seats in Mother's car for the daytime leg of the journey but the only sleepers available were in open second-class bunks. That was a problem because there was really no place to keep our large amount of luggage in second-class. The travel agent told us that when our train arrived in the town of Mori it would connect with another train continuing on to Kanpur. Our chances of getting a sleeping compartment from Mori were very good, he said.

Someone suggested that we go by car to Gaya and try for train accommodations from there. We felt that we should stay on Mother's train and do the best we could with whatever we were given. So we took our seats for the three-hour ride to Mori. A very nice family had this compartment for sleeping, but during the daytime the upper bunks were fastened to the walls and four people could sit on each side.

As we sat on one side along with Shuddhananda, we were delighted when Nirvananandaji appeared at our door. He had been in a compartment with others of Mother's ashram and told us that it was very crowded. We extended the invitation to join us and were delighted when he accepted. What a wonderful opportunity for satsang.

I asked him, "How can I get more spiritual jnan?" He explained that to become mentally one-pointed would do this. That I must be able to sit in one position without moving for three hours. I should start by sitting for fifteen minutes and increase by one minute each day until reaching three hours. The mind should be centered on Mother, gradually going from Her full form to Her face and smile, to Her eyes, then one eye, going into the pupil, and ....

He said that I should always use the same asana and practice at the same time every day. I asked how japa beads were purified. He told me that this was done using a mixture of five things from the cow (panchagavya) along with certain mantras to be said over them. It would not be possible for us to do this and he said that we should just use Ganga Jal.

When Mother traveled by train I always wondered if there was anything special done to prepare Her compartment before She entered. It was well known that She did not step inside a householder's residence, so I asked how She could stay in a train compartment where all manner of people had stayed? Nirvananandaji told us that nothing special was done or needed. Of course they cleaned it of dirt as much as possible but it is not the same as a dwelling. It seemed to have something to do with the fact that it is a moving vehicle.

Then he told this story which Mother had related at Samyam Sapta.

In a peaceful pond a most beautiful lotus had grown. A fish whose home was in that pond had lived for many years around the feet of the lovely blossom. One day, a bee came for the first time to the lotus and asked the fish if the lotus had any honey. The fish felt that it was his lotus but knew nothing of any honey. The bee dove into the lotus and filled himself with her honey then flew away. That fish never knew the nature of the lotus.

I told Nirvananandaji that I believed there were a few smart bees who stayed around Mother as well as many fish.

He then stressed the dangers of doing mantras for a particular purpose (not japa), as not doing them exactly right can cause all kinds of illness and madness. He said only bhakti and japa are safe, and of course what Mother says for us to do.

I asked how we can be truthful and still observe ahimsa (harmlessness).

He replied that we should never hurt even an ant, and if the truth is hurtful to say nothing.

We arrived in Mori and Satya went to see if we could get a sleeping compartment. Panuda advised us to re-confirm our second-class sleepers. He had not been able to reserve anything on this train himself. He had even sent someone to Calcutta hoping to get a reservation from that point, but was not successful.

It took one and a half hours to connect the two trains and I stood on the platform with Nirvananandaji until Satya returned. Satya and Shuddhananda were smiling as they told us that we not only got sleeping accommodations, but that the three of us had been given a whole compartment to ourselves. Nirvanananda was amazed to hear our news. I said, "It was Mother's Grace." He added that it was because we had satsang all the way there and that Mother often referred to the effect of satsang on our lives. We thanked him for the wonderful things he had shared with us and for the boon of his company.

In my bunk that night I smiled at the wonder of India. I loved traveling on her trains and decided to record the sounds as we glided and clicked over the silver rails, the wonderful lonely whistle that pierced the quiet night, and the squeal of brakes amid the clamor when arriving at one of the many stations along the way. Secure as we moved through the night, Mother's train rocked me to sleep.

Our breakfast of tea and toast was finished, sleeping bags were rolled up, and all belongings put in order, when the train pulled into Kanpur station. Porters helped move our things to the depot entrance where we were delighted to find our friend Mr. Ranjit Basu. He had come to meet Mother. We all watched as Mother was seated in Her car and then driven away. As we prepared to hire a taxi, a gentleman approached us saying that he had brought transportation for Mother's devotees to the J.K. Temple (the magnificent white marble Radha-Krishna temple) and the adjoining ashram which Lord and Lady Singhanian had built for Mother's use. Our luggage was stowed in his jeep and once again we felt the warm embrace of Kanpur as we rode through the familiar streets and onto the ashram grounds. There we met Bhaskaranandaji and asked where we should go. We were delighted to find that preparations had been made for us to stay in the side compound. The younger Mr. Singhanian himself escorted us to our quarters to see that everything was in order. After settling in we were called to partake of a delicious meal.

That evening Mother came into the satsang hall about 5:00p.m. Soon afterward Swami Akhandanandaji joined Her. Mother was laughing and very playful. They talked about two hours as we basked in the joy of Her nearness.

The next morning at 10:00a.m. we entered the satsang hall just behind Swami Akhandanandaji. A few minutes later we were all taken by surprise when Mother came running quickly into the room, trying to reach Her seat before Swamiji stood up to greet Her. When he saw Her and tried to get up from his seat, She ran laughing and saying, "Baba, Baba, Baba," trying to keep him from standing. We were all laughing at Her play. Darshan was light and sweet as Mother and Swamiji enthralled everyone with their humor for about an hour.

That evening we hurried back, hungry for those intimate darshans. One lady had brought a few pieces of fruit and offered them to Mother. Mother gave two pieces back to her. After she pronounced, the lady moved near to me and stood between Mother and me for a couple of seconds, looking for a place to sit. Behind her, Mother was holding an orange. Trying to get it to me, She would lean to one side and then the other. I also was leaning trying to receive the orange from Mother. Then the lady moved away and Mother threw the orange right into my hands. She then sent two guavas through the air to two men and that was all. I was feeling sad that She had not thrown one to Satya but he was not near the front. Later I found that She had indeed sent a guava to him by Dasu. She sat with us for an hour before going to Her room.

After satsang the next morning Mother went to the little pandal on the lawn. We

were both taking pictures when Dasu motioned for me to come up front to photograph Mother. I took fourteen lovely Polaroid photos and Satya got to take wonderful movies as Mother sat before the colorful background of the pandal. Then She went to take Her food.

Later, after our lunch was served, Mrs. Singhanian came to check on us.

She was so charming and had a very good sense of humor. She watched as we all sighed with pleasure over the gulab jamuns which were brought for desert. This round brown sweet is served soaked in a thick syrup. Mrs. Singhanian told the man who was attending us to bring another serving for each of us. As I expressed my delight, our hostess with an amused twinkle in her eye bade that I be given yet another. We all laughed at her affectionate play.

That evening, as we sat for one hour with Mother, our young friend Babu came seeking solace at Her feet. His father had passed from this earth earlier in the year and the fun-loving boy we knew was now a solemn young man. After darshan he came to our room for a brief visit. We did not know that it would be the last time we would see him.

For the next morning's satsang I dressed Gopalji in a beaded silver dress with a peacock design. Before Mother came into the hall I placed Gopal next to and facing Mother's asana. Mother and Swamiji arrived together. After taking their seats, they talked about Gopal. I heard Mother say "Shraddha's Gopal." Then She turned Him around so that He was facing Swamiji.

When satsang ended, Mother took Her lunch. Then She came into the corridor where we were waiting to present a few things to Her. After offering flower garlands and some gifts sent by devotees in America, we presented a small white blanket for Her use. We had letters to be read to Mother, but they would have to wait until we could get a longer time with Her.

During the evening darshan Mr. Basu made mental note of a story which Swami Akhandanandaji had told and related it to us after we had left the hall and sat for our dinner. Swamiji had told of a couple who had gone on an ocean cruise. "During the voyage a big storm arose and the ship was being tossed and pounded by the violent wind and waves. Everyone on board was worried as they tried to think of how to save the ship. The husband, however, sat casually at a desk doing some writing. His wife came and asked, 'How is it that everyone is worried about the fate of the ship but you sit there calmly writing? Are you not afraid?' The husband took a gun from his pocket and pointing it at his wife said, 'Now-are you afraid?' Smiling, She replied, 'Oh no, I am not afraid. I love you so much and you love me so much, how could I be afraid of my husband?' He put the gun away and said sweetly to his wife, 'You see, I have a "husband" too!' Without Mr. Basu's kindness we would have missed many such divine stories in those days.

After a lovely hour with Mother the next morning, Satya and I strolled over to the majestic Radha-Krishna temple. We admired the mosaics at the entrance, the lotus pond at the side, and had walked to the rear of the temple where a graceful fountain was playing in the center of a large pool. On the ramp leading up to the open verandah which encircled the temple we saw Mother's car. She had made an impromptu visit to the mandir accompanied by Swami Paramananda, Bhaskarananda, Nirvanananda, and Udas. Quietly we waited near Her car and pronounced as She was escorted from the temple.

Swami Paramanandaji stepped to where I stood and from beneath his gerrua shawl drew a guava and a banana-prasad from the temple-which he lovingly placed in my hands. He chuckled softly at my surprise in receiving his blessing.

Upon returning to the ashram, we were further blessed to actually receive a little of Mother's bhoga (food from Her plate). I was wonderstruck by so much grace. Swami Akhandanandaji spoke in his usual sweet way that evening.

Mother sat with Her chin slightly raised and Her eyes closed, in a beautiful mood. I tried to absorb the joy of Her nearness, knowing that She is that prana (life) by which I exist, and also knowing that I can only see that when She allows me to see.

During our evening meal Mr. Basu told us this story which Swami Akhandananda had related during satsang. "There was a great king who had a very wise prime minister in his service. To everything that the king said, the prime minister would say, 'Very good.' When the king chose any course of action, the prime minister would invariably say, 'Very good.' One day the king was inspecting his favorite sword and accidentally cut his thumb quite badly. He said, 'Oh! See what I have done' The prime minister said, 'Very good.' This made the king furious. He called for his guards and had the prime minister thrown in prison. After some time, the king had forgotten about the prime minister and had gone hunting in the forest. Dacoits (robbers) came upon him there and took him captive. They thought that he would make a splendid sacrifice to Goddess Kali. He was made to bathe and was dressed in the finest silk. When certain rites were concluded, they prepared to behead the king. Suddenly, one of the culprits noticed his damaged and scarred thumb. 'Wait!' he said, 'He is not perfect and cannot be offered as a sacrifice to the goddess.' As he was released by the dacoits, the king looked at his thumb and remembered the prime minister's words, 'Very good.' He thought, 'Oh! How I have misjudged that poor man. He was very wise indeed. It was a very good thing that I cut my thumb that way, otherwise, I would have been killed today and he must have seen this.' So the king sent for the prime minister and had him restored to his former position. The king was expressing his deep regret at having imprisoned the man for such a long time. The prime minister said, 'Oh no! It was very good.' The king was astounded and asked, 'How can you say that being in prison is very good?' The man replied, 'Well, if you had not caused me to be imprisoned, I would have been with you on that hunting trip. And when the dacoits noticed your injured thumb, they would have looked for me to be their sacrifice. So, it was very good.'" We all laughed at this great story, so humorous and so full of meaning.

By Mother's grace Basuji helped us to share in a part of Her LiIa that otherwise would have been completely lost to us. He noted that it was like Mother always said: "Ja Hoyo Jay" - all happens according to God's will.

The next morning we entered the ashram and found Mother seated in the corridor on a big armchair. Her little stockinged feet did not reach the floor. Bhaskaranandaji was reading a letter to Her and She appeared very playful. She turned Her little toes up and swung Her feet like a small child.

In the evening after satsang we came with Her to that same chair. Her tiny feet were then bare as they dangled above the floor. We were to have a brief private. Sitting on a mat before Her, we asked questions about our sadhana which Mother answered. Then I asked Her to bless a few people whose photographs I had brought for that purpose. She held and looked at each one.

As we sat in the hall for the next morning darshan, Mother quietly slipped into the room and hid against the wall, waiting to surprise Swami Akhandananda. She held Her finger before Her pursed lips, signaling all of us not to give Her game away. It was difficult, but Swamiji appeared to be taken unaware and we all laughed at their charming play.

Our time in Kanpur was passing much too fast.

Just outside the ashram gate was a flower and garland vendor. We often purchased flowers there for Mother and for the altar we had in our room. The girl who made the garlands and bouquets was very young. She looked to be about fourteen years old and most days her infant son was with her. He was very quiet and appeared sickly.

I took a Polaroid picture of the girl with her baby and wished to give it to her as I

thought she might never get the chance to have her baby's photo otherwise. I needed to convey to her that the picture took about thirty minutes to fully develop, and any folding or cutting would destroy the photo. I clearly needed an interpreter. There was a gentleman standing nearby who was obviously capable of explaining my message to the girl. When I asked, he graciously agreed and took great care to be sure that she understood.

He introduced himself as Dr. Raj P. Bhasin. He had come for Mother's darshan. We walked with him to the ashram. Mother had just come from taking Her food and stood in the courtyard. I took Dr. Raj's photo as he stood beside Mother. After a little time with us She went inside to Her room.

This very kindhearted doctor took time from his busy schedule to see that we got train tickets to Delhi for the next day, put his car and driver at our disposal for shopping, had a lovely meal prepared for us in his home, returned us to the ashram, and arranged for his car to take us to the train station in the morning. He said that he would accompany us to the station if he was able to leave his clinic.

After packing our things that evening we went to see Mother. She was sitting in the corridor as devotees gathered near Her chair. Mr. Basu was there and I asked him if he would translate for us. He agreed and we asked for Mother's permission and blessing to go to Delhi on December twenty-first (the next day) and then to Hardwar on the twenty-second. Basuji asked so very nicely and Mother responded with many sweet smiles and loving looks. I could not foresee that this was to be our last meeting with our gracious brother Basuji.

On December twenty-first we awoke at 7:15a.m. After packing our bedding we were ready to leave. We went to pay our respects to the Singhanias but they had not yet come to the ashram. Swami Paramanandaji was in the courtyard. We told him that we were leaving and asked for his blessing.

Returning to our room, I wrote a thank-you note to Mr. and Mrs. Singhanias. Satya took my note and a small bouquet from the flower girl to the ashram. He left them with Dasu to be given to the Singhanias. We moved our luggage outside to await Dr. Raj's car.

As we stood there we were surprised to see Swami Paramanandaji walking toward our compound. We went to greet him. He asked when we would arrive in Hardwar. We told him the night of the twenty-second. He said Mother would arrive at 6:00a.m. on the morning of the twenty-third. We said that we would meet Her train. As he started to leave, he took a package from under his shawl and handed it to me saying, "Fruit, for your train trip." I could feel tears sting my eyes to think that this great soul would regard us so fondly. We stood together watching as he walked away down the dirt road and turned the corner toward the ashram.

Within moments, Swami Akhandanandaji came from around that same corner. He was en route to his cottage. We rushed to meet him. Pronaming and touching his feet, we asked for his blessing. I told him of our travel program. Swamiji smiled and blessed us. We were told to wait as he went into his quarters. Soon his brahmachari came out with an apple and a guava for each of us from Swamiji.

Returning to where our luggage was situated, we saw the little flower girl and another woman (perhaps her mother) walking toward us. With a sweet shy smile she gave us each a small bouquet as a farewell gift.

When Dr. Raj's car arrived we were sorry to learn that he was unable to join us. Our luggage was loaded and we took our seats. As the car slowly moved down the dirt road, people were standing on either side telling us goodbye. It was as if Kanpur knew that we would never return to her again.

## Kankhal

At the station, we learned that our train, the Assam Mail, was three hours late, which made for a very long day. By 7:00p.m. we arrived, tired and dirty, at our hotel in Delhi. After hot showers, dinner in our room, and a good night's sleep we were ready for a busy day in beautiful Delhi.

The sunrise filled the sky with gerrua as I stood on the hotel balcony overlooking a cluster of small houses. I had seen this same sight many times before and was drawn by its charm. I felt very much at home.

We did some shopping, then took a taxi to Mother's Kalkaji Ashram.

Brahmachari Nirmalanandaji was in charge of that peaceful haven and greeted us warmly. Very few people were there, so we were able to have a nice visit with him. Our friend Bhakti had made arrangements to have a special murti of Lord Shivaji held for her at this ashram. We had promised to bring the murti back to California for her. Brahmachari Nirmalananda took us to where the glorious Lord sat in meditative pose. Made in Madrasi style, he was perfect in every way. Thanking Nirmalananda, we carefully carried Lord Shiva with us back to the hotel.

After dinner we went to Ajmere Gate where we hired a private taxi for our journey to Hardwar that evening. It was close to midnight when we reached Hardwar and got a room at the Tourist Bungalow guesthouse. There was not much time to rest as Mother's train was due about 6:30a.m., we were told, so we would have to get up by 5:30a.m. to meet Her at the station.

It was very cold and windy when we set out in the total darkness that morning in search of a rickshaw. It had also been dark upon our arrival the night before, so we were unaware of the construction being done on the east road when starting out that way. Soon our torches (flashlights) revealed a miniature lake in the middle of the road and we went to the right of it, up an incline. The freezing wind tore at my wool shawl and the small blanket I had wrapped around me. I stumbled along, following Satya, when suddenly, at the top of the incline, we found that the road had not been completed. Our choices were to trudge back the way we had come or go down a steep sand hill to the other side of the road lake. We chose the hill. Sinking in the loose sand up to our calves, we staggered down to the bottom. There the workers had made camp. They must have all been awakened by the barking dogs that followed on our heels as we hurried across the field toward the bridge road.

On the bridge, which spans the Ganges, we met a kind gentleman who showed us the way to the train station. I smiled to myself, wondering what he must have thought of those two bedraggled westerners he had encountered that morning. After walking three or four more blocks, we found a rickshaw which took us to the station. It was 6:30a.m. There we learned that Mother's train was not due until 9:30 a.m. The whirlwind that we had been riding all morning suddenly stopped.

A hot cup of tea drew us into a little South Indian restaurant near the depot. There we relaxed, ate breakfast, and waited until time for Mother's arrival. Back at the station we saw an older gentleman holding flowers in his hands and softly singing to Mother as he walked across the platform. Seeing that we also had flowers, he asked if we were waiting for Mother. We told him that we were and introduced ourselves. His name was Mahendra. I looked at his eyes. They had such a wide blue band around the brown iris that the brown looked almost like it was the pupil. After some time, he said, "You are brother and sister." We laughed and I said "Husband and wife, but brother and sister." He said, "You used to be husband and wife, now you are brother and sister." I told him, "That is right." Then he asked, "How is it that I have just met you for the first time, but I can see this? It is because Mother has graced you." Such a beautiful soul, a devotee of Mother since 1936. He later said,

"We should only talk of Her. All other talk is useless."

As we waited other devotees, including Mr. and Mrs. Ram Panjwani, also came to meet Mother. Soon Her train arrived and we gathered around Her as She stepped out onto the platform. Mother stood with us for a short time as we offered our garlands to Her. Then She was escorted to an awaiting car where She sat with Her door open as devotees pronounced and gazed at Her beautiful smiling face.

When the door was closed, I stood by Her window until the car started moving. We followed by taxi as She was taken to the Kankhal Ashram. Mahendra and Swami Virajanandaji rode with us. At the ashram Mother went to the front of the Shiva mandir and sat, receiving pronams from the devotees waiting there, among whom were Atmanandaji, Gadadhar, and Ram.

Across the street that ran in front of the ashram was the site of a large new satsang hall. The construction of several other buildings had been started adjacent to that hall. All of this was an extension of the ashram and we had not seen any of it before.

After sitting for a few minutes, Mother stood and we all followed when She walked across the street to inspect the new buildings. As She stepped toward the satsang hall She took no notice of Her knitted knee warmers which started slipping down around Her ankles. Udasji hurried to take care of them before they could interfere with Mother's walk. She looked through the double doors into the hall, then proceeded through the gate towards the future temple of the Sacred Flame. All of the work was inspected by Mother before She came back across the street.

Mother smiled at all of us as we stood in the courtyard, then She went inside and upstairs to Her room. Bhaskaranandaji told us that there would be only one darshan a day at 6:00p.m. as Mother's health was not good.

When we returned at 6:00p.m. Mother was in Didima's mandir and we saw Her briefly before She again went to Her room upstairs. Devotees were standing in the little courtyard and I had a nice visit with Atmananda. As we spoke Mother came to Her window, pulled back the curtain, and looked down at us. That was one of those rare sweet moments when Her being engulfed me and I knew Her love. It was so intensely beautiful that it seemed my heart would cry. When She walked away someone closed the curtain, and I saw that all of us standing there had felt Her touch.

A moment later Mother again opened the curtain, just as I was brushing something from my forehead. It turned out to be a wasp or a bee, and as Mother looked it stung me. Then She left the window. Atmananda said to rub the spot with a lemon for ten or fifteen minutes. Gadadhar ran to his room and returned with a piece of lemon. In only a few seconds the sting was completely gone. Ram commented that it was interesting how that happened as Mother watched - as though to satisfy some karma of a hundred years or something. It well may have been so, as She does things in seemingly ordinary ways like that. Whatever it may have been, I was certainly blessed.

It was a long and wonderful day!

At 10:00a.m. the next morning we came to the ashram with hope of a brief darshan. Bhaskaranandaji said that Mother was not well, but was a little better than yesterday. He told us that we could see Her through the window. She sat by that window for a while then walked to another room where bhoga was offered to Her. Later She came to the roof terrace in the front of the building and was seated upon a chair. Some devotees went up the stairs to pronam but we stood below gazing at Her. It sounds strange, but at times like that I felt very protective of Her and wished not to cause the least burden to Her seemingly delicate health. At the same time I was in complete awe of Her irresistible power and strength which could, in a flash, produce such energy that not a living soul could keep pace with Her. So She plays!

After everyone had been sent down from the roof, Dr. Triguna Sen had a private with Mother, then he called my name. I thought he was calling someone else, but when I pointed to myself he nodded yes. We hurried up the stairs and Dasu opened the gate so that we could enter and perform a namaste to Mother. I said, "Ma," as I bowed and She smiled tenderly at us. Dr. Sen told us that Mother had asked him if there was anyone who had not been up. He replied, "The couple from America." Thus we were brought to Her feet for that special blessing.

In four days Mother was scheduled to leave Hardwar and proceed to Varanasi on the Doon Express. Satya went to the train station and got reservations and tickets for our passage on the same train. We were fortunate to get a coupe which afforded us privacy for the long trip.

At 5:30p.m. we again stood beneath Mother's window as She sat upon Her bed. About an hour later we were all given permission to go up to Her room. I had fashioned new eyes for our little Gopalji - big brown Indian eyes which looked, to me, more like a baby's eyes. After I had done that I began to wonder if I had erred in doing so and was quite anxious to ask Mother about it. Atmanandaji translated my concern to Mother and as the light was quite dim, Satya held his flashlight so that it shined upon Gopalji's little face. Mother gazed at Him saying that it was "tika" (all right) and He looked "very beautiful." I was greatly relieved. Dasu commented that He was a very special Gopal.

The next day was December twenty-fifth, Christmas. Some of the westerners there wanted to present gifts to Mother on that day. We were happy for the opportunity to have darshan and bought a large basket of fruit for Mother so that She could distribute it if She chose. By 10:30a.m. we were once again in the courtyard below Her window. Mother sent for us to come up and I got a few nice photos. Satya took movies but later was sad to learn that no film had been in his camera. After the gifts were offered we performed a namaste, went downstairs, then returned to the Tourist Bungalow where a special feast had been prepared.

The dining room employees had decorated the table with flowers and leaves in a very artistic way. The napkins had been folded to look like birds and were nested in the glasses at each place setting. The menu was varied and so nicely prepared. There was rice with raisins and spice, paneer with curry and mustard sauce, a vegetable soufflé, a soy curd dish, puris, fruit salad cream (my favorite), vegetable salad, tomato soup, rasgullas, and gulab jamuns. Also a cake made of "barfi" with "Happy Christmas" printed on top of it. There were seven of us at that table and we all ate until we were unable to move. It was grand!

The beautiful Shiva murti, waiting in our room, was scheduled to be shown to Mother today. We wanted to ask Her to bless Him for Bhakti. First we carried the Lord's murti down the steps of the ghat to the great Ganges River as it swept past the Tourist Bungalow. There, as the water lapped upon the lower steps, I placed the murti in that sacred stream and bathed Him in the very same waters which He had blessed as first they came to this earth.

According to the Puranas, when those sacred waters flowed from the toe of Lord Vishnu toward the earth, the force and power was so strong that the earth could not have withstood it. The merciful Lord Shiva moved beneath the flow and caught its force upon His brow and matted locks from which it harmlessly fell on the lofty Himalayas, and carries the blessing of His compassion down and across this ancient land to Calcutta where it becomes the sea. It is said that all of the water on this earth originated with the Ganges.

After His bath I wrapped Lord Shiva in His asana, placed Him in a basket, and we carried Him to the ashram. Brahmachari Nirvanananda, who had procured the Shiva murti for Bhakti, was to accompany us to Mother's room and translate. We waited about two hours, then Nirvananandaji sent for us to join him in Mother's

room. Atmananda came with us. There we saw that Mahant Sri of Nirvani Akhada and his brahmachari were sitting near Mother. He was waiting for private time with Her.

Nirvanananda told Mother about the Shivaji and I gave a garland to Mother as an offering from Bhakti. Mother placed the garland around Lord Shiva. She commented that He was Madrasi style. Satya held Him so that Mother could see His hair in back and then turned Him to face Her. The Mahantji was impressed with the beauty and grace of the murti. Before covering Him in plastic, I asked Mother to bless Him so that She would be the last to touch Him. I wished to tell Mother that He had been bathed in the Ganges and was able to use one of the words which I had learned from Hemantbai. I said, "Ma, Shivaji Ganga snan"-not phrased properly I'm sure, but the idea was conveyed and everyone laughed, especially the Mahant who repeated "Ganga snan" as he laughed. Mother caressed Shivaji with Her little hands, touching the entire murti front and back, then touched Her hands to Her forehead. Her loving kindness filled us as we pronamed and reluctantly left.

A light rain fell that evening as Satya went to fill two large jugs with Ganga Jal. We would take them with us when returning to America. Hoping to take a photo of Mother with the Shiva murti, I came in the morning with my camera. Gadadhar had kept Shivaji in his kutir for us and went to get Him. Atmananda told us that the others who were there had been to Mother's room for pronam earlier. When Mother saw us, we were told to come up.

Some people from another ashram were in the room with Mother. We did not know them. One large older lady sat just in front of Mother. Her head had been shaved and her sari was covering it. When I went to pronam to Mother I saw that the lady was holding Mother's hand in hers, looking at it and stroking it. She turned Mother's hand over, with the palm up, talking all the while to Mother. Then the lady placed Mother's hand upon her shaved head. I was watching Mother, Who looked at me and softly laughed.

Satya pronamed, and then we sat near the door with the camera ready, waiting for Gadadhar to bring Lord Shiva's murti. The person whom I had asked to translate for me declined and said that I should ask a certain lady there. I did not know her, and when I started to ask she interrupted me very curtly and said that Mother had asked her to tell us to go downstairs. It was like a slap in the face to me. Gathering the camera and other things we went downstairs. Now I realize how foolish I was to accept that Mother had turned me away when only a few minutes before She had called us to come to Her. How easily the ego is wounded - how small my faith.

That evening's darshan was canceled and we stood in the courtyard talking with Swami Virajanandaji. I asked him if he thought Varanasi would be better, with more access to Mother. He said that it would most likely be crowded there as Mother's program had been announced in advance. Then he offered these words of Mother's about such conditions, "If you want to take a dip in the ocean but you want to wait until all the waves have stopped, it is not possible. It will never happen. If you want to go in, you must plunge in as it is." He went on to say, "If life were as I would wish it, it would not be as someone else would wish it. But it is as it is and we must accept it."

The next morning I awoke with a miserable stomachache, and most of that day I spent in bed feeling sorry for myself. Satya stayed with me. Our friends came to our room that evening to see why we had missed the lovely darshan.

Our train trip was set for the following day. By Mother's grace someone gave me a new medication which enabled me to get up, pack our luggage late in the evening, and be ready to travel by 10:20a.m. departure time.

# Varanasi

At the station Panuda told us that there had been a mix-up. The coupe given to us was to have been Mother's. There were two coupes in that car and ashramites had boarded the train at an earlier stop to clean and make ready the compartment in which Mother would travel - the forward-facing one which had been given to us in error. We happily relinquished any claim to the coupe and were given the other one.

There were two reasons to be happy. The first, of course, was the chance to do a small thing for Mother, and the second was the realization that the two coupes touched on the bunk wall and we would be next to Her the whole way. It was our joke to say that one night Mother had stayed in our place. Mother graced us with a quick sweet darshan before retiring. I have never slept so well as on that night.

After breakfast the train pulled into the Lucknow station. A few devotees were waiting on the platform to pronam to Mother. We also were able to see Her briefly before the train continued on. Dasu gave us prasad: two bananas, a flower, and a large leaf plate holding aloo and puris (a potato dish and fried bread).

At 4:30p.m. we arrived in Varanasi. Satya went to get porters to take our luggage. I gazed out the window at Mother as She stood on the platform near me.

Our taxi took us to the same little hotel where we had stayed on previous visits here. It was very convenient for shopping and about a twenty-minute rickshaw ride to the ashram. As had been forecast, there were many people seeking Mother's darshan in this holy city.

Every day was busy . We purchased gifts for friends in America and also bought two small stones which were purported to be sacred Shalagrama. Those we took for Mother to see and check their authenticity. As we bumped over the cobblestone street in our rickshaws, the road became more and more packed with people. Then our drivers were unable to get through the crowd. We looked on in amazement as, in a clearing in the street, several men were twirling huge sabers in some kind of dance or ritual. They were quite adept at what they were doing but I found it somewhat unsettling. Someone told us that it was a Moslem holiday and the men were celebrating.

Stepping down from our rickshaws, we moved on foot through the edges of the crowd until we had passed the celebration and once again could proceed by hiring other rickshaws. It was a little after 5:00p.m. when we arrived at the ashram and were allowed into the room above the Gopal mandir where Mother sat for darshan. How beautiful She looked as She sweetly smiled at me.

The crowd was unorganized, and if I sat on the carpet I could not see Mother as a line of people going up to pronam blocked Her from view. We did get to pronam, then were asked to leave while someone had a private. Just outside the room I saw Didi Gurupriya. She was seated upon a wicker stool. Her health seemed to be somewhat better and I went to pronam to her and touched her foot. She smiled at me very sweetly. I feel most fortunate to have been in her great presence.

I showed my "Shalagrama" to Bhaskarananda and he said that he would ask Narayan Swami if it was genuine. Narayan Swamiji took both of our stones to Mother, Who by this time had completed the private. She asked for "Jyoti" (light) so I gave my torch to Her. Mother looked them over and over, holding them for a very long time. We sat at Her feet relishing the chance to be so near as She examined those two small dark stones. Then She said that they had none of the indications of genuine Shalagrama and handed them to Narayan Swami. He returned them to me. Satya and I agreed that it mattered little what they might be - they had been made holy by Her touch. Since that time, we have each kept our little stone in a special place.

Mother's darshan was ended and we went downstairs to have darshan of Her Gopalji. Afterwards we spoke with Panuda about our accommodations at the Kumbha Mela. It did not sound very hopeful, as there were to be about sixteen tents and many people wanted to use them. There were a few other suggestions for places to stay, but all in all I could not hold much hope for our cause. Nothing more could be done so we left for the evening.

Returning to the ashram around noon the next day, we spoke with Nirvananandaji about some places he had mentioned where we might stay during the mela, but it seemed that nothing was working out. Bhaskaranandaji was trying to get a place for us in another camp but, typical of Mother's play, we would not know anything one way or another until the last minute. In a couple of days Mother would leave for Allahabad, site of the great Kumbha Mela.

Daily the crowds grew and it was difficult to see Mother. That evening we were fortunate to get a clear view of Her and then after we pronounced She walked very close to where we stood. Her nearness can cause any care to vanish.

Downstairs we made arrangements through Patalda to hire a car for the trip to Allahabad. That way we could go in caravan with Mother's party. Our course of action was simply to go forward and "see what Bhagavani does."

Mother was always available for darshan each day - never for very long, but at least we got to see Her. Once, the electricity went off and someone brought a lantern. Her face looked so beautiful in that soft glow. Satya told me that Mother had smiled at me very sweetly as I bowed before Her in pronam.

That evening we were seeking Bhaskaranandaji to ask if any progress had been made in finding a place for us at the mela. He was not there, but we saw Swami Paramanandaji and asked if he knew. He said he was pretty sure that we would have a tent, but if not, he had arranged for us to stay in a room near him. We could not believe our ears. He explained that there were two rooms kept in Allahabad for his use. I asked him if we could have satsang with him if we stayed in that room. With a warm smile he replied, "Yes." We told him in that case we hoped the tent did not work out. He revealed that he had spoken to Mother about it. I asked what She said. He told us Her reply was that as he had said we would have a place, he should take care of it. Of course he had not promised anything to us - he had only told us how to request a tent.

There have been many accounts of this great sadhu's devotion to truth, and I have heard that Mother had commented upon this quality of his, saying he was so truthful that if he said something would happen or be a certain way, it would be so. For due to his perfect truthfulness the truth itself would serve him and anything he uttered was bound to manifest. So, going to the Kumbha Mela was no longer in question for us thanks to Mother's grace and Swamiji's compassion.

Nirvananandaji walked up and asked how we were. I smiled and said "Fine." Swamiji laughed, as he knew what was in my mind. I told Nirvanananda that Swamiji knew why I felt fine. Then Swamiji related our conversation to him.

The next day we were assured a tent or a grass hut at the mela grounds and the use of Swamiji's room when in town. It was impossible to see Mother that day and we spent most of our time getting packed and ready for the taxi trip to Allahabad. At midnight I was glad to be finished with all preparations and went to bed.

## **Allahabad**

To me no place on this earth is more beautiful at sunrise than India. And in India

no place is more beautiful at sunrise than the majestic Ganges.

It seems fitting that our very last day in holy Varanasi dawned as we stood on the steps of Anandamayi Ghat. There was a chill in the air as we watched the wide expanse of silver blue waters become pink and golden reflecting the sky. In the ashram compound Mother's thirty-year-old Kaiser automobile was covered with strings of marigolds. The roof rack was piled high with ashram gear. There were four cars preparing for the journey to Allahabad - Mother's car, a jeep, another car full of devotees, and ours.

We all stood in the compound waiting until Mother came out and took Her seat in the Kaiser. As our car pulled in right behind Hers I was thrilled to think that we could see Her as we traveled. This joy was short-lived however when our driver broke rank and pulled into a petrol station. I had forgotten that hired cars in India never start a trip with a full tank of gasoline, as the passenger always has to pay for the fuel. Of course we did not mind that and expected to pay the gas cost, but we were very disappointed to lose the spot behind Mother's car.

Our driver somehow managed to catch up with the others and all went well for a while. Then the car started making strange sounds and finally quit. The driver got the car off the road just as the jeep in the caravan went by but did not stop. We were in the country with no one around except a farmer in the distant field working his oxen to pull water from his well. I thought that we were stranded and stood by the car with Satya, wondering what was going to happen, if anything.

The driver untied a piece of rope holding our luggage on top of the car, and we watched with curiosity as he separated a few fibers out on the end. Placing them upon a rock, he hit them with another rock, severing them. With those few strands in hand, he tied something together under the hood, adjusted a couple of other things, and retied the luggage. He then started the car, which sounded fine, and with no further delay we resumed our trip.

It seemed impossible that we could ever catch up with Mother's caravan and we had no idea of where we were to go in Allahabad. Our driver spoke no English, so we could not ask his plan. I started inwardly telling Mother of our situation and asking Her to direct us. Before long we came into a small village. There, at a roadside chai stall, we saw Mother's car and the two others. The passengers were enjoying hot tea and stretching their legs as Mother had caused the caravan to wait for us there. I could not doubt that She had heard my inward plea to Her. As we drove up, one of the tires on our car immediately went flat. Bhaskaranandaji came to our window and asked how we were doing. I told him fine, except we did not have the address in Allahabad where Mother was going. He said it was Number Thirty-One, Georgetown.

Mother's caravan continued on as our driver changed the flat. After the tire change we soon caught up with the others on the road and followed Mother all the rest of the way into Allahabad.

Thirty-One Georgetown was a large home, set well back from the road on a circular driveway. A little cottage on the side had been constructed just for Mother's use. It had a nice covered porch and sat adjacent to a large cement courtyard. The family of the late Sri Monoj Mukherji lived there and had been devotees of Mother since about 1937. It was a very relaxed atmosphere. Soon Mother came out and sat on Her porch. Only a few ladies were there and we all sat near Mother until the Governor of U.P., Dr. Chenna Reddy, and his family came for Mother's blessing. We stepped back a little distance as his party pronounced and then sat at Mother's feet. Mother picked up a bouquet of flowers which lay near Her and tucked a single rose into the center before presenting it to the Governor. Each family member received flowers or Tulsi from Mother's hand. After they left we pronounced to Mother. She smiled at us, then arose to go inside Her cottage.

Satya had gone to book train reservations for our January twenty-fifth passage to Delhi. That was the scheduled date for Mother's departure from Allahabad and early booking was imperative due to the huge crowds which would be leaving the mela in those last days. He returned just as the Governor's party arrived and took some very nice movies of their visit with Mother.

Chitra had come to join Mother that day. She darted here and there like a little hummingbird, always busy. I managed to get a few words with her as she flew by and felt very happy to have her sweet company once again.

Soon after arriving we were taken to the room which Swamiji had arranged for our use. It was a little way down the road from Mother in the lovely home of the Pandia family. Two of Mother's brahmacharinis were also staying there Vasu and the Pandia's daughter, Aruna. We left our luggage there and returned to Thirty-One Georgetown.

It had been settled that we would have a grass hut on the mela grounds. So we thought that the room at the Pandia's was for our use only until the hut was built. When we spoke to Swami Paramanandaji about it, he laughed and told us that the room was for our use when in town and the hut was for while we were on the mela grounds with Mother. Such luxury! We could not believe it.

The next day was to be very special. We would all accompany Mother in procession from the city on a four-mile walk to the mela grounds. There upon vast sandy banks the three sacred rivers - the Ganges, Saraswati, and Jumna meet in confluence. We were served lunch and dinner at the Mukherji home, enjoyed satsang with our host, then went to our room for the night.

January 7, 1977 was Satya's fiftieth birthday and the day Mother would enter the mela grounds. We awoke at 7:00a.m. that day, bathed, dressed, and enjoyed a tasty breakfast thoughtfully prepared by our hostess. Just as we were leaving, a car drove up to the door. Swami Paramanandaji had come with Aruna, Gadadhar, and Ram. The brahmacharis were there to leave their luggage until they moved into the mela camp. After their things were placed inside, we rode back with them to Mother's cottage. Everyone there was wearing yellow handkerchiefs imprinted in red with the Anandamayi Ashram emblem. Mother had given them out earlier. Aruna had kindly put two back for us which we were to receive from Mother's hand when She again came out from Her little house. I was delighted to see Krishnapriya, who had just arrived from Calcutta with Chhabi Banerjee. She told me about her visit there to the beautiful Dakshineswar Temple of Sri Ramakrishna where she had darshan of the great Kali Ma and lovely Radha-Krishna.

Soon Mother came outside. Chitra took the yellow handkerchiefs to Her and then Mother gave one to each of us. We joyfully joined the other devotees with the yellow cloths tied around our necks, marking us as belonging to Mother. Mother sat on a chair in the courtyard. We all gathered around Her basking in Her sweet lively mood. She talked about the holy rivers' confluence, illustrating by drawing Her right index finger over the palm of Her tiny left hand. Her right hand then closed in a fist, softly striking the left palm, then gliding off before Her with fingers spread flat. I can still hear Her infectious laughter punctuating Her remarks. Behind where She sat was a clothesline holding many pairs of Her freshly washed little white stockings. The sun felt wonderful on our backs as we sat before Her for two perfect hours, absorbing Her nearness.

Dasu had, as usual, made his costume for the occasion. He was dressed in gerrua cloth with a turban. He carried a tall staff with a trident at the top and a pot of Ganga Jal hung just below the trident. He approached Mother, bowing at Her feet. She patted his back. Then he turned his face up to Her and She burst into laughter, seeing that he had covered it with ash. Playfully She gave him a couple of swats on the arm. We all laughed, enjoying that loving play.

The program was for Mother and Her party to go by car to a point in the business district of Allahabad where She would join the procession already in progress. From there we would all walk with Her for the remaining four miles to the mela grounds. We were sharing a car with Krishnapriya, Gadadhar, Ram, and Shuddhananda. Mother's car and the other ashram car were decorated with marigold garlands so we put three garlands on our car, too.

The cars would then follow after the procession and meet us at Mother's camp for our return trip.

It was time to leave, but Mother was still talking. Someone told Her and we all dashed for our cars as She moved toward Hers. Following the ashram car we were led to the parade route and the location from which Mother would join the procession. Mother was escorted through the doors of an ashram there. We followed Her into a courtyard. But when She entered the main building we could not follow, so we went back to the street to enjoy the festivities.

Bright colors were everywhere - on banners, costumes, horses, and magnificent elephants carrying great sannyasis and mahamandaleshwars who rolled back and forth with every step, high above the ground. The air was filled with so many different sounds: the blare of trumpets and tubas accompanied by drums as various bands passed by; the sweet sound of God's Name when kirtan parties sang as harmoniums and cymbals were played; a cacophony of loud speakers interspersed with the wave of voices from bystanders along the road. There was a procession of Naga Babas whose ash smeared bodies accentuated the powerful bhav which surrounded them. Seated upon a beautiful little pony was a small boy dressed in spotless gerrua and wearing a turban. A sadhu walked beside him. One great elephant thought that Satya's camera might taste good and reached for it with his trunk. Satya moved quickly out of his path.

Soon Mother's flower-adorned chariot arrived. It was a beautiful silver throne with lion figures as arm rests. A large white silk umbrella rose above it with sparkling silver trim shimmering around its edges. All of this sat upon a skirted wooden platform with wheels. In front was a tongue attached to a wide crossbeam where a row of men could pull it forward. In the rear there was a similar arrangement where a row of men would push.

Mother came to the street and a small wooden stepladder was placed at the side of Her carriage. Udasji was trying to assist Mother as She climbed the ladder. I felt my protective urge rising when I saw how difficult it appeared for Mother to reach Her seat. A tall gentleman devotee who had been assisting thoughtfully placed his hand over a projecting part of the throne just as Mother's side leaned into it. I was very relieved when at last She was seated with Udas ensconced at Her feet.

Swami Paramanandaji, Bhaskaranandaji, and the chief disciple of the Mahant Sri of Nirvani Akhada, who held a silver handled chowrie in his hand, took their places, standing just behind Mother's seat. Mother looked so incredibly beautiful it took my breath away.

Leading Mother's procession was a platform on wheels which carried the ashram kirtan party. Chhabi sat at the harmonium and her sweet voice led the praise of Bhagavan. Krishnapriya sat near her joyfully playing her cymbals and singing. Next in order was a palanquin bearing a small silver throne upon which sat the Shalagrama Sila watched over by Nirvananandaji who walked beside it. Then all the brahmacharinis of Mother's ashram followed, walking in pairs. By Mother's infinite grace, I was told to walk at the end of that group which put me directly in front of Mother's carriage.

I was glad that, by chance, I had chosen my yellow sari to wear that day.

With Mother's yellow handkerchief around my neck I was wrapped and branded with Her color. Naturally that yellow sari became my "favorite." Great happiness

filled my heart as I stepped forward with Her. I felt that my feet did not touch the ground.

The procession moved only a short distance at a time, then would pause.

This was the pattern for the whole way. At each stop, we would all turn and look at Mother. Right away Her eyes met mine and She filled my heart until I thought I would cry with joy. It seemed that She became more lovely each time I gazed at Her. Sometimes She would appear very regal and aloof, then the next time She would be playfully laughing or again radiating love and compassion with the sweetness of Her smile. My longing heart had waited an eternity for that darshan and as it was poured out upon me, I became intoxicated with the sheer mystery that is Mother. Overflowing with that rare amrita, I would often have to be told to move on because I was oblivious to my physical surroundings.

Satya had free rein to move around the procession and take movies. He came to where I was and told me that he had not yet taken my picture. He walked ahead a little way as I stood looking at Mother. She motioned for me to turn around, facing Satya. She held Her little hands like a frame in front Her face and nodded toward him, indicating that I was to turn and have my picture made. So of course I did.

Once along the way a sadhu, who must have been a very special soul, came to greet Mother. He easily bounded up the side of Her carriage to where She sat. She seemed very pleased to see him, and when he offered some spice to Her She opened Her mouth, joyfully receiving it from his hand. Both he and Mother were laughing as he jumped down to the street and vanished into the crowd. Sadhus and devotees were pronaming to Her along the whole route.

It took three hours to make that four-mile walk. I was completely ecstatic from the intensity of Her nearness and pure bhav. Then, as I stood looking into Her eyes, I mentally prayed for the most special boon that I could conceive. For some time I beseeched Her with intense longing. Her eyes never left mine during all that time. Then lifting Her hands, with folded palms and still looking into my eyes, She smiled, acknowledging with a gentle nod of Her head that She had "heard" me and, I believe, sanctioned my deepest yearning. Only by Her unconditional love and unending grace could I have received any of the miraculous things that She has bestowed upon me.

When we came to the summit of the last downhill road we saw the vast mela grounds spread out before us. Our eyes beheld a panorama of neatly laid out wide roads and well-organized camp settings. But there was little time to drink it all in as the immediate concern was getting Mother's carriage safely to the bottom of that steep incline.

Chitra spoke to Satya and Gadadhar, intimating that Mother had shown concern for the band of older men who were drawing Her carriage. She said the last hill was too difficult for them to manage and that the American men in the procession should be asked to perform the seva of easing Her carriage down that hill. Satya had always cherished the desire to drive for Mother, but knew the chance of chauffeuring Her car was not likely to happen. Now in Her own unique way She was making that dream a reality, and indeed he was to be a driver of Her chariot.

All of Mother's American male devotees, with Satya in the center, lined up in front of Mother's carriage. They took the tow bar in their hands and facing Mother, walked backwards down the hill, gently assisting Her entry into the mela grounds. Later referring to that sweet blessing and the rest of that magical day, Satya laughingly told Chitra, "I know it is my birthday, but I didn't expect Mother to give me such a big party." A big party, indeed!

All Kumbha Melas are grand, but this one was surely an event to stagger the imagination. The alignment of three planets in a most auspicious conjunction complete with the total eclipse of the moon on January nineteenth made that main

bath day and the whole mela an occasion that had not occurred on this earth in one hundred and forty-four years. It was said that the planetary configuration was as near to the original one as was possible.

Many people came from all over India, and some from the west as well, to participate in that mela. Some devotees with only a few paisa (pennies) in their hands withstood great hardship and walked long distances for the rare chance to be in the company of so many wise and saintly souls, all in quest of merging body and spirit with the Divine. Even reclusive sadhus from the Himalayas came down to bathe in the holy Triveni where the three sacred rivers - the Ganges, Jumna, and Saraswati - meet.

The well-planned grounds had separate camps for the vast array of ashrams and groups. Only after the mela were we to learn just how incredible the size of that gathering was. In America it was written up in *Time* magazine and listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the largest known gathering of people in recorded history. There were ten million people there on the main bath day and twenty four million had come during the whole mela. Saints of the highest caliber, holy men, women, and devotees - all gravitated to ancient Prayaga (Allahabad) where a bath at the confluence of the three rivers was said to grant liberation.

In the holy Vishnu Purana the story is told of the devas (gods) flying to the feet of Lord Vishnu after being conquered in battle by the evil asuras (demons). They implored Him to grant His mercy to them, restoring their powers and strength. He told them that their wish would be granted, but first they were to follow His instructions for producing a beverage, Amrita, which was the source of all strength and also immortality.

The Lord commanded the gods to unite peacefully with their enemies, the demons, and collect every variety of plant and herb in existence. They were to cast those into the sea of milk. Then they were to take the mountain, Mandara, as a churning stick. For a rope He said they were to use the serpent, Vasuki. Within the ocean Lord Hari Himself took the form of a tortoise and became the pivot for the churning staff. He assured the gods that the demons would share in their labor, but not in the immortal Amrita.

The gods did as Lord Vishnu had said and united with the demons to churn the sea of milk. Using the snake as a rope, they twirled the mountain upon Lord Sri Hari's tortoise back. First arose from the water Surabhi, the sacred cow. Then Varuni, goddess of wine. Next came Parijata, the beautiful tree of Paradise whose fragrance perfumed the world. The apsaras, celestial nymphs with perfect grace and loveliness, followed. Then arose the radiant Chandra, the moon, which Lord Mahadev took for his own. The terrible poison which came next was claimed by the Snake Gods. Then a pure lotus emerged bearing the Goddess Sri (Lakshmi), of peerless beauty; with Her was Dhanvantari, physician to the gods. In his hand, held up high, was a jug bearing the nectar, the Amrita longed for by the gods and demons alike.

The demons tried to capture the jug and might well have succeeded, for the gods were in a weakened condition. But true to His promise the Lord confused the evil demons as the gods drank all of the Amrita. When the demons assailed the gods, whose strength was renewed, they were quickly dispatched into the abysmal darkness, but in the struggle the jug was broken and fell to earth in four pieces. Where those pieces fell became the sites of what we know as Kumbha Mela, "Festival of The Jug." The names of those four holy grounds are Allahabad, Hardwar, Nasik, and Ujjain. The waters of these locations were blessed by the touch of that jug which had held the Amrita. At all Kumbha Melas devotees flock to those waters and with reverence enter into them for a spiritual bath on auspicious days. Kumbha Melas are held alternately at all four locations every twelve years and half-

melas every six years.

After arriving at Mother's camp area, we were shown to our little grass hut. Actually it was built just outside the railing around Mother's camp, on an emergency fire road, and sat but about fifteen feet from Mother's own large hut. It was a tiny duplex with a door for each side. We were delighted to learn that Krishnapriya would be our neighbor. The hut was not quite finished as it was due to get wiring for a light bulb and straw upon the ground. We were told that it would be completed by the next day.

The American brahmacharis would be staying in a sadhu camp just across the road. Swami Paramanandaji asked to use our car for transporting two ashram girls into town and to pick up the brahmacharis' luggage. We were pleased for the chance to do that small thing for him.

While waiting we took the opportunity to explore the area around Mother's camp. It was like a village with many little shops selling fresh fruit, vegetables, prepared food, and chai. There were even shops for puja articles and some clothing items such as shoes, dhotis, and chuddars.

The wide, well-maintained roads had streetlights all along them. At strategic locations tall platformed towers were built where camp guards could oversee large areas and control any difficulty which might occur. On main bath days that proved to be a good system, as when too many people were moving toward the rivers' confluence down one road, the guards would close that road to further traffic and divert the bathers to a less congested route. This prevented the deadly stampedes which had plagued some past melas.

Fresh running water was available to all from taps outside each camp. The grounds of Mother's camp held Her hut which had a nice-sized concrete porch with steps leading down into a small pandal before it.

Across from Mother's pandal was another larger one and some small huts.

One was used as an office and the others were sadhu kutirs. There was a kitchen and dining area. The rest of the grounds were covered with Swiss Cottage tents, such as we used on our first trip. More huts were placed in the back side for bathing and toilet use of those in the camp.

As we stood by Mother's pandal talking with friends, Dasu came and gave prasad to us. We were enjoying that when Bhaskaranandaji walked to where we stood and inquired of our well being. I smiled and told him that we were very happy and that Dasu had just given prasad to us. With a twinkle in his eye he softly said, "I have the real prasad." "Yes Swamiji," I told him, "I saw you receive it in the parade." In the procession, as I was standing before Mother, I had seen Bhaskaranandaji place a cloth near Mother's lips and receive from Her mouth the spices placed there earlier by that laughing sadhu who had jumped upon Her carriage. Never did I dream of receiving such a blessing, yet into my palm he placed one whole cardamom pod instructing me to share it with Satya and the others who were standing beside me. With utmost care, I separated the hull from the seeds, then divided the hull and the tiny seeds into equal amounts. Each of us shared in that most rare grace of Mother's "real prasad."

In the excitement of the day Satya had left his movie camera and five rolls of parade film in the glove box of our car. When Swamiji returned with the car we were elated to find the camera and the irreplaceable film just where he had left it.

Mother's latest program was to stay at the mela grounds for two or three days. So we planned to bring enough things with us the next day to live in our hut during that time. From childhood we had both dreamed of living in a grass hut, and now that dream was to come true. Returning to our room in Allahabad, we got a good night's rest. The next morning, with our minimal luggage and sleeping bags we returned to the mela.

Swami Swarupanandaji, who had done a grand job of organizing Mother's camp, arranged for us to hire a chowkidar, a trustworthy man whose main job was to guard our hut. A grass door is not much security, but with someone there we could leave our possessions without worry. The chowkidar was a very kind and willing man who did many chores for us. His name was Nandi Kumar, a Brahmin farmer and family man. We became quite fond of him, though he spoke not a word of English and of course my "Hindi" was pathetic or non-existent. We left our things in his care and went for Mother's darshan.

The railing around Mother's camp was no more than a few thin branches across small upright tree limbs. To go from our hut to Her pandal we had only to step over a branch and we were beside Her house. Now I can say that once I lived next door to Mother.

We stood at the rear of Mother's pandal as She sat upon a cot which had been placed on Her porch. Chitra was at Her feet. Chitra called us to come and pronam. As we did so, Mother smiled at us and asked, "Tika?"

I told Mother, "Tika!" and that Swami Swarupananda had found a chowkidar for us. Mother sent for Swami Swarupananda and asked who the chowkidar was and how we were situated. She seemed to approve of the arrangements. The Swamiji left and we were allowed to sit there at Mother's feet beside Chitra for two whole hours.

Krishnapriya had walked up behind us to pronam. Mother called, "Krishnapriya," and she came and sat next to me. She spoke to Mother in Bengali, asking if Mother felt better with all the mahabhava of Kumbha with japa and bhakta. Mother said, "Ah-Ha!" and, "Listen to her - she has learned something." I always loved to be there when Mother played with Krishnapriya. What a special relationship she has with Mother. Mother's great sweet love engulfed us as we sat there with Her.

A tiny flower petal was next to where Mother sat. She flicked it off and it came to rest by my knee. I quickly picked it up and later taped it on my diary page. Chitra told Mother of Satya's comment, that Mother had given him such a big birthday party yesterday, and Mother laughed. Most of the time we just sat quietly soaking up as much of Her blessed presence as we were able. Then we were asked to step down and Mother went into Her hut.

After having a cup of chai we went to settle in our hut. We put mats over the straw on the floor and I hung a sari around the inner wall to cut down the dust from outside. Our sleeping bags kept us warm upon the straw and we slept well.

Mother had told us that we had very good samskaras to be there, as it was a very auspicious mela. She said that we must be prepared to endure some inconvenience for it. We assured Her that we felt no inconvenience. The next morning I was not so sure about my starry-eyed response of the previous evening. Satya was to use the toilet facilities at the sadhu camp and a special unit had been constructed for me along the side, but outside, the ashram facilities on the fire road. The concrete basin, recessed into the sand, was fine, but it was a little more public than I was prepared for. Bamboo poles held a cloth around all sides but it was only about shoulder height and I could stand in there and watch the world go by. I soon adjusted to that, as the world ignored me, but bathing was a problem. We did the best we could and went for Mother's morning darshan.

She was absolutely radiant and sat with us for three hours. Such darshan without a function program going on was so rare. No words can describe the joy of sitting at Her feet in such a relaxed and holy atmosphere. The whole area was electrically charged with the powerful bhakta bhav of so many saints and devotees.

That afternoon the ashram had prepared a feast, and Nandi Kumar brought leaf plates of food to our hut for us. There was rice, dal, potato, fried breaded squash, sweet tomato, puris (bread) and khir (rice pudding).

After a short rest we went to Mother's pandal and found Her sitting on Her porch.

Some devotees were seated before Her on the large rugs spread there. We stood in the rear until Mother told each of us to sit down. For over an hour we sat with Her as kirtan was being sung. Then She went inside.

Swami Swarupananda surprised us by placing cots in our hut while we were gone. That was nice, as things could then be put under the bed and out of the way. The hut was just big enough for a single cot on each side and space to walk easily between them. At the end of each cot there was about one foot of space where things could be stored.

Mother's health was much improved in the holy mela atmosphere, so no plan was made for Her to leave the grounds.

The following day we hired a car for the afternoon, went into town, got more of our things, and did a little shopping. At the Pandia's home in town we luxuriated in hot baths, collected our things, and then went in search of a few needed items - some white cloth for the walls of our hut, a big plastic tub for my bath, a small table for our Gopal, and a lovely bucket with a lid. It was late when we got back, and we could only see Mother for a short time. We arranged our hut and at last had a nice little altar which was decorated with flowers and colorful silk garlands.

The nights were very cold, but for some unknown reason the water tap near our hut gave warm water early in the morning. At all other times, even in warm sunlight, the water would be cold. I was most thankful for that, since with a bucket of warm water I could stand in my plastic tub and have a good bath inside our hut. That is how I began the next day and each one for the rest of our time at Kumbha Mela.

At 10:00a.m. we went for morning darshan. Both pandals were being arranged for the visit of some sadhus who had been invited for a bhandara. Mother was sitting outside the large pandal in the sun. We all sat or stood around Her. After some time She went to inspect the preparations before withdrawing into Her house.

At noon Krishnapriya and I were standing near Mother's porch behind a short cloth partition that encircled Her pandal. Mother came out to see that the sadhus were properly cared for and everyone followed Her but us. We knew that She would be back soon. When She returned, several girls were with Her. Udas said something to Mother and motioned toward Krishnapriya. For two days Krishnapriya had been saying that she wished to receive the yellow cloth from Mother. That is the color that Mother's brahmacharinis wear. She had also confided that wish to Udas.

I, too, had a wish for several days that Mother would give me a sari. As I watched the play of Mother with Krishnapriya I thought, "I would rather have the white cloth like Mother wears." But I did not say anything. Then one girl brought a yellow cloth and we watched as Mother gave it to another woman. Then another cloth was brought. Mother took it and tossed it to Krishnapriya. She was totally ecstatic. Then suddenly from the corner of my eye I saw a blur of white as a sari came from Mother's hand through the air to me. I caught it up to my face and squealed with unexpected joy as I hugged it and said thank you to Mother. She laughed affectionately at me.

I was in tears, being so happy for Krishnapriya and feeling that special dart pierce my heart revealing once again how my relationship with Mother is subtle and within. There is absolutely nothing of me that is unknown to Her.

Mother told Krishnapriya to bathe in the Ganges, then dress in the yellow cloth, and then take food. Krishnapriya could not understand all the words and asked Mother again. Mother replied, adding a little English and said, "*First is snan [bath].*" "*Second is capra [cloth].*" Krishnapriya quickly left for the Ganges as Mother went inside.

At 3:45p.m. Mother came out again. Krishnapriya was seated with the girls doing kirtan, radiant in her new yellow cloth. Mother was seated upon a large dais at the side of the pandal. She sat up very straight. Her legs were folded with Her left ankle

resting upon Her right knee. She looked so elegant.

The visiting swamis came and took their special seats within the pandal.

There was a crowd all around the outer edge, but we stood on the side, behind the swamis and facing Mother. Each of the swamijis was given fruit, a book, blanket, flowers, and some other items. As we stood behind one very saintly looking swamiji, I commented to Satya, "This is so nice." The swamiji turned around to one side with folded palms to Satya, then to the other side to me. I felt he gave us his blessings.

There were a few talks and some chanting, then Mother went to speak to each swamiji. One was a lady swami. She and Mother embraced. Mother sat by her and they held hands. It was so lovely.

When all had left, Mother went to Her porch and we entered the pandal to sit with Her. She showered us with love and light until 7:00p.m. while the girls sang beautiful bhajans. That night we did not care for food. Mother had filled us completely.

The next morning, January twelfth, one of Mother's brahmacharinis was passing by our place and told Krishnapriya that Mother was going to the Ganges. I dressed in my "favorite sari," the white one which Mother had given me the day before. Then we went to the camp office and asked Swami Swarupananda where Mother's car would take Her. He directed us down the road south of the camp, saying that the girls had already gone there. It was quite a little walk, but we managed to get to that beach location before Mother arrived.

The reason for this special trip to the rivers was only known to us late that evening when Krishnapriya heard Mother tell it and then shared the story with us.

During the Kumbha Mela at Allahabad in 1966, when Mother went for a bath at the Triveni She saw the three goddesses of the rivers as they stood before Her. Mother, who was wearing a bathing dress, had the kheyala to offer Her sari to the goddesses. After doing so, She saw that one goddess took the sari and wrapped it around herself, but the other two were shivering. The occasion of this visit to the Triveni was due to Mother's kheyala to offer saris for those two who did not receive them at the past mela.

When Mother got out of Her car I noticed that Her lip was quite swollen and She sometimes held Her towel over Her mouth. In the past I had been told that things like that occurred as an allergic reaction or if something had been offered to Her which was not pure. It could happen even though She had not physically touched the offering or perhaps when it was offered by someone in a totally different location from Her body.

We walked with Mother and Her party across the sand to the water's edge where a boat awaited Her. That boat also carried Dasu, Udas, and Makhan (Mother's brother, known as Mamu). In a second boat was Nirvanananda, Bhaskarananda, and some others. There was also a large house boat which bore Swami Paramananda, Swami Swarupananda, and some of the ashram girls.

We watched as Mother directed the seating in Her boat. Satya stood in the water taking movies of Her, and suddenly found that he was sinking further and further into the sand. One shoe was lost to the river as he struggled to get out of the water and onto the shore.

There on the riverbank we met for the first time a very kind gentleman and sincere devotee from Ahmedabad, Dr. Shelat. He was staying in one of the tents at Mother's camp. Dr. Shelat and a couple of others walked down the beach and procured a boat for us. Among our party was Gadadhar, Ram, Shuddhananda, Krishnapriya, Dr. Shelat, Satya, and myself. There were three others whom I did not know.

Our boat was the only one to accompany Mother's three. We rowed out along

with Mother and stayed next to Her boat almost continuously. Dasu sat behind Mother playing a tambourine and chanting to the river goddesses.

At one spot in the confluence, the preparations were being made to do the puja, but officers pulled up in their boat saying that the water there was one hundred feet deep and it was not safe for us to stay there. We followed as Mother's boat moved to a different location. There the puja was beautifully done. We observed various articles being offered to the rivers. I saw two white silk saris with wide red borders, a leaf boat holding a flame, incense, and beautiful garlands. There may have been other articles which I could not see. It was a gorgeous sight and one that was our rare privilege to witness.

When we started back toward the shore, one young man on our boat retrieved a big garland of marigolds and gave it to me. After most of the water had dripped off of it, I divided it among the ten of us there. Realizing that I was holding in my hands flowers which Mother had offered to the holy rivers at this most auspicious Kumbha Mela, I became totally intoxicated. I was in such a divine mood that if I had been suddenly transported to the west at that moment, I could never have survived the weight of it. The atmosphere of that day was so light and heady, surely of a more spiritually refined plane.

Satya and Gadadhar enjoyed taking the oars for a quicker return to the shore and to Mother who had preceded us. Alighting from our boat, we hurried across the sand to where Mother's car was parked. Mother sat waiting for the slower-moving houseboat to bring the swamijis and the ashram girls to the landing. Watching the large boat approach, we saw Swami Swarupananda standing at the prow. He waved and asked Satya to take movies. We said, "Film hogia [finished]," but Bhaskarananda laughed and said he should just push the button and the clicking sound would make everyone happy. We all laughed as Satya "clicked" away. Soon Mother's car carried Her from our sight and we started the walk back. It was quite nice. We did not have to rush as we did to get there earlier.

Back at Mother's camp we went to see if She was sitting out, but She had gone inside. So we walked out of the front gate and there we found our dear friend Jayananda who had just arrived. He looked radiant and full of joy to again be with Mother. He had brought twenty rolls of movie film for Satya. It was perfect timing, for earlier when Satya had said, "Film hogia," it really was, for there was not a single roll left in reserve and a lot of time remained before the end of that trip. Jayananda went with the other young men to the sadhu camp where he would be staying. After settling his luggage and bathing, he would come to Mother's pandal.

At 5:00p.m. Satya came from the camp across the fire road where he had filmed their enactment of Ram Lila. We went directly to Mother's pandal and found Her sitting on Her porch with Chitra at Her feet. After some time I saw Jayananda standing at the back railing of the pandal. I told Chitra that he had just arrived and she sent me to bring him to Mother for pronam.

There was a large crowd in the pandal, but when he got near the front Krishnapriya cleared a path for him and he went up the three steps to Mother's porch and offered a lovely garland to Her. When Mother placed the garland over his head, She touched the top of his head, blessing him as She sweetly smiled. Chhabi started playing the harmonium. God's Name filled the pandal and Mother graced us with Her presence for about two hours.

That evening Satya made a wonderful vegetable soup cooked on our very nice little brass kerosene stove. The stove sat safely in a pit dug into the sand which sheltered it against the wind. Satya taught Nandi Kumar how to cook the soup as he fixed it.

Jayananda and Krishnapriya joined us and we all enjoyed the soup which was so full of great Indian vegetables that it was more like a hearty stew. After our meal

Krishnapriya went back to Mother's hut and found Her telling some sadhus the story of the saris offered that day to the two river goddesses. Then She sprinkled water from the rivers on the visiting sadhus and Krishnapriya. When Krishnapriya came back to the hut, she told us the story. With the holy water still upon her head, she rubbed it with her hand and then put her hand on my head. So I also shared that blessing. What a dear friend and true bhakta of our Mother. A lovely close to perfect day.

The following morning I awoke with a sore throat and had almost lost my voice. Darshan was in the large pandal and the warm sun felt good as I stood in the back gazing at Mother's beautiful face. Once again I mentally prayed to Her, asking to receive the same special blessing for which I had petitioned on the parade route. At that exact same moment She abruptly turned Her head and eyes to my direction. She gave me such a strong loving look that I could feel the electricity of it. I stood with goose bumps from head to toe as She held me with Her eyes for a very long time. How can such experiences be shaped by words? Lacking understanding of what She has given to me, my words fall like stones when I try to speak of Her gifts.

After darshan Mother was taken by car to visit another camp. I had a nice visit with Dr. Shelat then went to our hut for a rest. Besides having caught a cold, I had tripped on a tent support rope and hurt my left foot. The body was not as fortunate as the soul.

The next morning was the first "bath day" of the mela, but I was unable to go out in the pre-dawn cold nor was I able to walk very well. I awoke to the sound and vibration of many feet stampeding on the road just outside our hut. Jumping from my bed, I peered out the door and saw the police directing a great crowd down our road as they sought to reach the rivers on this auspicious day.

When we went to Mother's pandal we found that Bhaskaranandaji was on Mother's porch. There was a curtain across where he was performing puja of the beautiful Padmanav murti. Mother sat on the other end of the porch facing the murti, but within full view of us all as we sat before Her. At Mother's direction the fruit which had been offered to the Lord was cut up by the girls as they sat at Mother's feet. That way there was plenty for everyone there to have prasad. Mother went into Her house as the devotees formed a line to receive prasad.

Feeling weak, I could not stand in line and returned to our hut. I was sorry not to receive prasad, but a little later Krishnapriya brought some for me.

Satya and Nandi Kumar made soup that evening and I started to feel stronger. I awoke feeling better, and when we went to Mother's house we found Her sitting with Mahant Sri of Nirvani Akhada in the little pandal. No one was allowed to go in, but we stood with Jayananda by the railing at the front and could see Her quite well.

After lunch we walked down the road to the camp of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi where Mother was expected by the Maharishi's devotees. They had made very nice arrangements to greet Mother. When She arrived, She stepped onto a cloth which had been spread across the sand toward a large pandal. Girls in pink saris stood on each side of Her path and strewed flower petals before Her as She entered. Mother was escorted to Her seat on the platform in front of the crowd. She spoke a few words which were appreciated by the devotees - whose guru was not at the mela. When She left that camp we tried to find where She had gone but could not. Still not fully recovered, I retired early.

When we went to Mother's pandal the next morning, we found that Mother had gone to visit another camp. The large pandal across from Mother's house was being prepared for a sadhu bhandara to take place later that day. As we stood near Mother's house waiting for Her return, Dr. Shelat and Mr. Bal Krishna Gupta joined us.

A few days before, Dr. Shelat had promised to give me a few drops of the

precious water he had gathered from the glacial source of the Ganga. He had made that difficult Himalayan pilgrimage and only after doing the proper puja to Ma Ganga had he taken Her prasad. I told him that I had brought a small vial with me for receiving that rare blessing. Dr. Shelat laughed and said that he had the Ganga Jal with him. He was most generous as he shared his treasure with me and the few drops I had expected grew to fill half of the little vial I held in my hand. I shall never forget his heartfelt kindness and warm smile.

We all moved to the railing around Mother's smaller pandal, where asanas were placed for the sadhus who would be coming to the bhandara. As we stood there Mother's car arrived, and when She entered the pandal She came near where we stood to inspect the preparations. Afterwards She went briefly into Her house then came out again and sat before us for a few sweet moments. There was a beautiful coral-colored shawl around Her shoulders and a large garland of fresh flowers framed Her face. She looked radiant. Chitra saw that I had brought some things which I wished for Mother to bless. So when Mother went into Her house Chitra told me to wait. Soon Chitra came and took the things in to Mother. One special thing, an asana for our friend Chaitanya, Chitra lovingly placed beneath Mother's feet. All the other items were blessed by Mother including some flowers that I wished to place in the river on behalf of my Janaetaa (mother who gave me birth). She had died when I was just five years old. Also some flowers for my grandparents who were recently deceased. Chitra brought meditation shawls for Satya, Jayananda, and the other American men who were there. Mother's blessings showered upon us in great abundance.

When the food started arriving for the sadhus, we were told to move to the rear of the camp. Before long we left to take our lunch, and as we walked past the little pandal where Mother sat, She looked at us so lovingly, with almost a longing attitude, that it was very difficult to go, but we had no choice.

At about 4:30p.m. we came back to see Mother but the crowds, which had been growing daily, were becoming hard to control. The pushing and shoving made it impossible. We left for a while then tried again to see Mother. When Chitra saw me being pushed she had me stand in a more protected spot and we had a short darshan and received Mother's prasad from Chitra before She went inside for the night.

We had left laundry to be done in Allahabad and arranged for a taxi to take us into town the next day to collect it. When the driver arrived he was on foot and explained that the mela gate was closed to automobiles. He had to walk in but offered to go and pick up the laundry for us. Besides that much needed errand he also agreed to buy cough drops for me. Mother had not come out yet, so we shopped at some of the stalls which were set up on the mela grounds.

After lunch and a little rest we went to see if Mother was giving darshan.

She sat on Her porch with only a few girls and Swami Swarupanandaji. There was a crowd all around the pandal, but to our delight there were only four people sitting inside. It was a feast for the soul to sit with Her - even for a few minutes.

The following day brought more and more people. Pilgrims were camping anywhere they could find an empty spot.

There is a quality which I greatly admire in India and her people, something exceedingly rare in the west. That quality holds the spiritual as having the only true value and reality. Any discomfort of the physical is dismissed as the transient inconvenience, which is really all that it is. Many times I have seen how lacking is my endurance and how easily the prize is wrenched from my feeble grasp.

There at that most auspicious Kumbha Mela we both experienced an extremely intense spiritual current permeating the whole area. It was not only the mela itself, but we were also in such close physical proximity to Mother, Whose play it all was.

Progressively we felt as though there was less and less skin covering our bodies until our nerves lay bare before any experience that touched us. Whether positive or negative it was vastly exaggerated by that highly charged environment. Sometimes we would laugh and say that we were Mother's yo-yo's - up, down, up, down - all in the space of minutes and within a range of great opposites. We saw Mother very briefly that day and Satya was getting sick. I gave him medicine at bedtime.

The next morning, January nineteenth, was the main bath day. At about 3:00a.m. a rain drop fell on my face. Then another fell on my sleeping bag. Our roof was leaking. According to tradition the rain falling at that time made the day even more auspicious.

When our alarm rang at 4:30a.m., Satya was feeling worse. We talked about going to the bath, but the thought of a two-hour pre-dawn walk in the rain, followed by a cold dip, required more stamina than we had at that time. At 8:00a.m., returning from my short constitutional down the fire road, I found Jayananda at our hut. He had gone for the bath and brought a little bottle of that holy water back for us. He was soaking wet and muddy but was in very good spirits.

Krishnapriya came to our door and with a long stick carved little grooves in the mud from the door toward the fire road gutter. Laughing as she played barefoot in the mud, she said her engineering feat would drain the water away from our hut. Her shoes had been lost as she walked back from the bath in the mud. Nandi Kumar went to buy new ones for her as she sat with us and told us some of the wonderful experiences that she'd had with Mother.

The night before, as she sat with a group of people waiting for Mother to come out, she told them that if they wanted Ma they must call Her and She would appear - that She was not the V.I.P. Divine Mother, but Jagat (World) Divine Mother. To demonstrate, Krishnapriya started calling Mother and She came out for a ten-minute darshan. We can all take heart and learn from her pure example.

I loved to hear her stories and was blessed many times to see Mother's affectionate play with her.

Nandi Kumar brought the new shoes and Krishnapriya went to see if Mother had come out. Mother did come out for just a few minutes and She asked about us. Krishnapriya told Her that Satya had a stomach sickness and that I was also not feeling well. Krishnapriya returned to our hut with the sweet news that Mother had asked about us and She also brought Mother's prasad. To know that Mother had asked about us was a great joy and warmed our hearts.

That evening I cut some large plastic bags open, making long strips. Then I tucked those strips above our beds on the inside of our hut's slanted roof. That way any rainwater would be carried down and go out from the front. The electricity went out so we visited by torchlight when Gadadhar came bringing two sodas for Satya. He sat with us for a while, then as he was leaving Satya asked him to sing a little children's tune which we had heard him sing a few years before. As he walked off into the dark night we could hear him softly singing.

When we awoke from a good sleep we both felt better. Thanks to the rain the air was free of dust. Also for the last two nights the loudspeaker next door was silent for the first time since we arrived. We had not realized how healing a quiet sleep could be. After bathing I went to Mother's house for darshan. She did not stay out long as She had been out once before I arrived, but at least I got to pronam.

In the early afternoon I went again to see Mother, but the crowds around Her made it impossible to even glimpse Her. Brahmachari Nirmalananda was there and I had a chance to speak with him. He pointed out the joy of the eternal inner connection with Mother. When I saw Chitra I asked if a private was possible. She did not hold out much hope but said that she would ask Mother. Satya had gone to

the sadhu camp and returned to our hut at the same time I did. He brought cheese and crackers which someone had purchased for us in Allahabad.

At 5:00p.m. I got to see Mother briefly. She looked at me sweetly and my heart ached for more, more, more.

Gadadhar came to our hut in the evening. The loudspeaker next door came on at 6:00p.m. and we had to shout to hear each other. Satya and Gadadhar made two or three visits to that camp and finally spoke with a very compassionate swamiji who turned the speaker down and away from our hut. It was so nice, as then we could enjoy the beautiful bhajans which they broadcast.

The next morning at 9:30a.m. we watched as Mother's little pandal was made ready for a visit from the Mahant. At 10:30a.m. Mother came out and sat with us for half an hour. When She went inside we returned to our hut.

Jayananda had caught a cold before the bath day, and the long walk in the cold rain had made him pretty sick. He came to our hut and rested on Satya's cot for a while. Dr. Shelat arrived and gave him some medication. We sent Nandi Kumar to get fruit for him too. Then we had very good satsang with Dr. Shelat telling us some of his experiences with Mother. When he left I could hear kirtan coming from Mother's pandal so we went to see if we could have Mother's darshan.

Not many people were there and we stood at the railing. Mother sat on Her porch and some girls sat near Her. Two men sat on Her other side playing harmonium and drum while they sang sweet bhajans. As Chitra walked near where we stood I asked if we might come into the pandal and sit. She said yes, so we scurried close to Mother and joyfully gazed at Her. She was wearing her coral-colored shawl with a yellow towel at Her throat. She looked absolutely gorgeous!

It was an answer to our prayers to be with Mother as She just sat and enjoyed the lovely kirtan, not talking to anyone, looking at us, smiling, clapping, dancing with Her hands and swaying Her body. She would clap on one beat of the rhythm and then lay Her palms open for the next beat. This went on for a long time. When the men stopped playing, Mother asked a lady there to sing. We just soaked up all the sweetness for one and a half hours. As the darshan was ending, Governor Reddy came to see Mother. He was escorted into Her house as we were leaving. I was so intoxicated I could hardly walk.

The effect of that great spiritually charged atmosphere kept me bouncing like a rubber ball. By Mother's infinite grace I was a rubber ball with a cord attached and no matter how high or low, no matter into what I might fall, I could not be lost for the cord was, and is, safely in Her hand.

As I was bathing the next morning, a man came to our door and told Satya that Swami Swarupanandaji had sent him. He said that we should come to the campground by 9:30a.m. as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would be coming to see Mother then. The whole area around Mother's camp was teeming with the military. Intelligence agents were also mixing with the crowd, dressed as ordinary men and even as sannyasis. Some soldiers were spraying disinfectant along the edges of our fire road. Only by explaining that I was an asthmatic and by raising my voice a little was I able to dissuade them from spraying their chemicals inside our hut. When they left our area we went near Mother's house to await Mrs. Gandhi's arrival.

An orderly crowd lined both sides of the driveway leading into Mother's camp. A group of Indian photographers stood near Mother's pandal and Satya was given ashram permission to stand with them while taking movies. The lead officer decided that Satya might be a security risk and decreed that he should stand across from Mother's pandal on the other side of the road.

By Mother's grace he was in the best spot of all, for when the Prime Minister's convertible car entered the driveway it pulled up to where we stood. When Mrs. Gandhi's car door opened, Satya was standing immediately before her and took

some very nice movies of her arrival and then a short time later of her departure after having Mother's darshan.

I took Polaroid pictures of Bhaskaranandaji and Nirvananandaji who had that day shaved their heads and long beards. We had not recognized them for some time as they looked so completely different.

After the Kumbha Mela Mother was going to Modinagar where a Bhagavat Saptas was scheduled for the late Sri Rai Bahadur G. S. Modi. We planned to follow Mother there for the last few days of our trip. Bhaskaranandaji advised us to send a wire to Mrs. Modi requesting her assistance in locating accommodations there. Hiring a taxi, we went into Allahabad to send the wire and did a little shopping. It felt so strange to be in town. We had not left the Mela grounds at all in the last eleven days, and it had been fourteen days since we first entered there.

Happy to be back at our little hut, we put our things away and went to Mother's pandal in hope of seeing Her. A very large crowd was there making it impossible to see Mother at all. We went to our hut for a while then returned to Her and managed to have a short darshan. Mother went into Her house and we waited to see if She would come back out. A few people were allowed to go into Her room, then the Governor arrived and we knew that there was no chance of Her coming back out so we retired to our little hut.

On January twenty-third I awoke early, had a bath, and dressed in my pink rose sari (soon to be the latest "favorite"). As I sat upon my cot waiting for Satya, I was filled with a longing and sadness because I felt there was a great gulf between Mother and myself. I knew that She had showered us with many blessings, but I also knew that I could never be an Indian in this life and had been completely lacking in the ability to learn Hindi so that I could talk directly with Her.

It had been demonstrated to me on many occasions that Mother could raise and lower barriers with a mere flash from Her eyes. I knew that She could dissolve the wall of air which I felt unable to penetrate, and in my frustrated state I recalled how Krishnapriya had called for "Jagat Ma!" and She had appeared. I decided that in my own way I, too, would call for my "Jagat Ma!"

As I have tried to illustrate, the intensity of the whole mela experience had put me in a very tenuous state of mind. Many thoughts and feelings were spiraling to the surface. I wanted to cry out to Her but felt as though trapped inside a soundproof bubble.

Our only chance to have a private with Mother was in Modinagar and Chitra would not be there. Without her that private which we wished for was not possible.

I told Satya that I had decided to write a letter to Mother telling my innermost feelings, then ask Chitra to read it to Her.

Pouring my heart out, I wrote for both of us how sad and lonely for Her we felt. That it was not our nature to push and shove in order to catch a glimpse of Her who is our God, our Beloved, most intimate to us - not the curiosity which people came to gape at. We wanted to know why we could not just sit at Her feet during our short stay. Why, I asked, when others could come to Her were we kept out?

I told Her how that as a child I had cried, feeling that I was not with my people. Then, when coming to India I felt at home, but since then had seen that this was a double-edged sword for I will never be an Indian in this life - so I am a foreigner in the west as well as in the east. I told Her that I felt very sad that I was unable to tell Her these things myself. That without the compassion of dear Chitra I would not even be able to tell Her of my feelings. And if She had no further use for us, what should we do?

When it was finished I read it to Satya. He thought that it was correctly stated, so I told him that I would take it directly to Chitra. Near Mother's house I found Swami Paramanandaji and asked him where Chitra was. He said that She had gone into

Allahabad last night but would be returning at any moment. Satya joined me and we waited by the railing around Mother's pandal.

As a crowd started to gather, I saw Chitra and rushed to catch up with her.

I explained that I could not get the private I needed without her to translate so I had written a letter which I beseeched her to read to Mother privately because of its very personal nature. She took my letter, then asked if Shuddhananda was at the camp. She said it was his birthday and that she was trying to arrange a chance for him to pronam to Mother.

Chitra walked off by herself to read my letter as I waited. Shuddhananda arrived and I told him that Chitra had asked about him. Soon she returned and told him that she was working on his request. Then taking me aside she said it was impossible to get Mother alone and that my letter was so personal she would most likely have to take it to Varanasi with her and write Mother's reply to me. I felt as if my heart had fallen to my feet, and I am sure that my face must have shown it. She held out no hope to me.

We walked back to our little hut feeling down. I told Satya that many times in the past when I had asked Chitra something, she would say that it was not possible, but then when she tried Mother would have kheyala on me and grant my petition.

I had walked down the fire road and was returning to our hut when I saw Shuddhananda there at our door. He motioned for me to come there. I hurried, and Satya came out saying that Mother had called for us. Quickly I washed my hands, then we sprinkled Ganga Jal upon ourselves and ran to Mother's pandal. Mother sat near the center of the pandal upon a wooden bed. The Mahantji sat near Her. On the carpet, the American men and a few others sat before Mother. Shuddhananda was receiving his birthday blessing and the chance to pronam.

Chitra had given Mother a summary of my letter as She sat there, and Mother had responded by sending for us. Chitra told me to sit near Mother. As I bowed in pronam before Her, She threw a garland over my head and smiled at me. Then She threw another garland in my lap, followed by an apple, another garland, and then an orange. I was in tears.

Satya sat a little bit back and Chitra said for him to come and sit by me.

Mother said that the large yellow garland was for him. As I handed it to him, Mother threw another garland to him, then an apple, an orange, and yet another apple. We could not keep up with Her. She was smiling and looking so sweet.

Chitra told me that Mother had said, "If you had considered how busy I was, you would not have felt that way."

An Indian gentleman, whom I did not know, was there and he tried to translate Mother's words. He told me that when others are with Mother we should be happy that our brothers and sisters are with Mother. We told him that we always feel happy for them and get much joy from others' relationship with Mother. I told him that I did not understand why Mother would say what he was saying, as it had nothing to do with what I had written Her. Then I tried to illustrate my point of view to him and said, "How can a child be a foreigner to its Mother?" He seemed to have a better grasp of what I was trying to express and told something to Mother.

Mother's reply, as he interpreted it, was, "If there is any part [of you] left that does not belong to Ma, you can go that way." I wrote down his words as he tried very hard to express what Mother had said, but I felt confused and knew that something was missing. Mother stood smiling and nodding with folded palms as we all bowed before Her.

When She walked into Her house, Sri Ramesh K. Dutta, a photographer from Kashmir, came to where we sat and told me that he wanted to be sure we had understood Mother's words to us - that they were the most beautiful thing he had heard Her say to anyone in many years. He said that he had carefully kept Her words

because he saw that we were not getting a complete and correct translation.

Sitting there in that little pandal, next to Mother's seat, I carefully wrote as he gave me the wonderful words She had spoken.

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."

I shall be eternally grateful to that most kind and loving son of Mother's. He went over my notes and saw that they were correct and later confirmed their accuracy in a letter.

As the years have passed, those words of Mother's stand strong and solid like a beacon piercing the fog of this Maya, pointing out the only safe way on this journey home to Her holy feet. Sometimes when life seems overwhelming I recall that She said, "I can play with you any way I like." Then I smile and think, "Yes, and so She plays."

Rameshji gave us one more treasure that day. On January nineteenth, during the main bath, he had taken water from the rivers' confluence. Mother had put Her finger into that water which he had collected and he presented a small bottle of it to us. I still have a little of that precious gift.

That afternoon Satya and some of the boys went to visit a great sadhu whose camp was about a five-mile walk from Mother's camp and was situated on the other side of the Ganges. That sadhu's name was Brahmachari Yogiraj Deoraha Baba. He was a Naga Baba who always stayed in a hut built upon stilts about eight feet above the ground. He was reputed to be anywhere from one hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty years old.

Satya took his movie camera and photographed that beautiful saint. His smiling countenance was framed by heavily matted locks. There were no V.I.P.'s at his camp. Anyone who came to see him stood in the sand looking up to where he sat. A short cloth covered the railing surrounding a narrow porch outside his hut. As he squatted behind the cloth, he was constantly propelling fruit through the air to the awaiting hands of the devotees below. Like Mother, his aim was perfect and the fruit would sometimes come from his hand so rapidly that it appeared to have come from a catapult. All of this I saw only later in the movies which Satya took. I did not want to take the chance of missing Mother's darshan and so I had stayed behind at Her camp that day.

At 4:30p.m. I found Krishnapriya in Mother's pandal. I also went there and sat near where the girls were singing kirtan. Mother had not come out yet and by 5:30p.m. the whole front of the camp was filled with people waiting to see Her. For crowd control, Swami Swarupanandaji had closed off the regular entrance into Mother's pandal and constructed a narrow passageway with heavy bamboo rails on each side. It ran from the front of the pandal inward almost to Mother's porch. Pilgrims seeking darshan could pronam there, then the passageway turned and led back out to the camp exit road. The rest of the pandal was kept for Mother's devotees.

When it was announced that Mother would not come out until 7:00p.m., the crowd got angry and noisy because they had waited such a long time. So Mother came onto Her porch at 6:15p.m. There were people everywhere. I was close to the

front but on the side. Swami Swarupananda sat on Mother's porch between Mother and me. I kept leaning over to see Her. Finally, Mother leaned way over, around Swamiji, and smiling She looked at me for a long moment. It seemed that She was saying, "Are you happy now?" Smiling as I pronounced, my inner reply was, "Yes, Mother, I am happy."

When the crowd started rushing, Mother went inside and the curtains around Her porch were closed. Krishnapriya told me to wait and she went onto the porch. A lot of the people left. Mother then came back to the porch. Swami Swarupananda had the idea of opening Mother's curtain only on the left side and quickly moving the people down the passageway pronaming to Mother as they moved by. When the crowd threatened to rush, he would close Mother's curtain and they would settle down. That plan worked well and the crowd was getting smaller.

When the curtain was closed, I knew that soon She would again be revealed, just like Banki-Beharaji in Vrindavan. Then I moved up to the right and peeked in at Mother over Krishnapriya's shoulder. Soon Swami Swarupananda noticed me and said "No peeking." I stuck my lower lip out and asked, "What if I cry?" He, with mock sternness, replied, "Not even if you cry." I laughingly lamented, "Oh Swamiji, you have a hard heart!" He smiled as I touched his feet. The men close to where I was were all laughing, and told me peeking was not allowed. Then the curtain was opened and Mother smiled at me. She looked at me often. Once She turned Her sweet gaze toward me for a long time, smiling all the while. Chitra was near by me and I said to her, "Thank you for all that you did today." She replied that it was not her, and said, "You do not thank your own." I told her, "I cannot help it. I love you. Thank you!" She gave me a sweet loving smile and I knew that she understood how my heart was overflowing from the events of that glorious day.

Like a spoiled child I had cried for the Mother of my heart, and like the Perfect Love, which She is, She gave Herself to me who had no merit.

January twenty-fourth was a special day. It was the last bath day during Mother's stay on the mela grounds and our eighteenth anniversary. Saraswati Puja was to be performed in the large pandal after the bath that day.

We awoke at 4:00a.m. and within forty-five minutes had joined Mother's party for the trek to the rivers' confluence. The walk started from the camp across the road. Each group had its assigned place in the procession. We all walked behind Mother Who sat upon the same graceful silver throne which had carried Her into the mela grounds seventeen days before. Above Her was the large white umbrella with shimmering silver lace around its edge. The silver fluttered in the breeze, catching any light amid the darkness, reflecting it and dancing joyfully around Mother's head.

As we slowly moved across the sand, a pale pink dawn began to reveal the identities of devotees who had appeared as only shadows before. The quiet was suddenly rent by the wild sound of the mighty Naga Babas. They almost collided with our group as they rushed by in a double-file line clad only in ashes.

At the river the crowds were so intense that I just stood to the side hoping I would not be knocked down. Each group in the procession was allowed only a few minutes to bathe then had to move on so that the next ones could have their turn. I held our little bag of clothes and Gopalji's basket. Chitra asked me to hold her basket too. I thought that I would go to the river when Satya came back but I did not know about the time limit. Satya had gone into the river with Mother and took movies of Her and all the devotees surrounding Her in the water. He gave Gopal a bath and also dipped some shell garlands, which I had purchased, into the water. They were for friends in America.

When he returned, soaking wet, to where I stood, he handed me his camera bag, our wet Gopalji, and the dripping shell garlands. Dye from the pink tassels on the garlands played "Holi" on everything they touched. I believe that I sunk a few

inches into the sand as I juggled so many things and put Gopalji safely into his basket. There was no chance for me to take the blessed flower offerings to the river, much less for me to go into the water. Satya took the flowers, offered them for me and collected a small bottle of water from the river. As Mother's group left, we were the last ones out, for Satya had to quickly change from his wet clothes.

I did not mind being unable to bathe in the river that day, for my only salvation lay in Her. She was the sole reason for my being there. If She would not grant me liberation, then I would never have it.

Slowly the pink dawn turned to a warm coral and illuminated the festive colors that surrounded us. The road, which we walked, was cordoned off on both sides by heavy wooden railing. As we caught up with Mother's carriage I could hear people who were standing behind the railings joyfully calling out, "Jai Ma! Jai Ma! Jai Ma! - happy to catch a glimpse of Her as She passed. Mother smiled and greeted all with folded palms.

Satya took movies as Bal Krishna Gupta danced before Mother with arms held high. Dr. Shelat's face was beaming with joy, reflecting the mood of everyone who was blessed to be there that marvelous day.

I managed to walk just ahead of Mother for awhile and She graced me with several loving smiles. When we returned to Mother's camp, Chitra asked me to take a Polaroid photo of Mother before She got down from Her carriage. Then Mother went into Her house and we went to change clothes.

Chitra told us that Saraswati Puja would be at 9:30a.m. in the large pandal. We started to go there early, but Mother called for us and said to bring our cameras. Dressed in white silk with Her coral shawl and wooden puja chapals (slippers), She walked down the camp road to a more private area behind a barrier. We eagerly followed Her and both took pictures as first She stood, then when a chair was prepared for Her, took Her seat. Most people were told to stay in front of the barrier but a small group had already lined the sides of the road behind it. Mother motioned for us to come near Her. We took each other's photos kneeling by Her chair, then as I sat at Her feet She gently closed Her eyes and everyone fell silent. She sat that way, in a sublime bhav, as time stood still.

Looking at Her divinely beautiful face I wished that I were able to *really see* that which I beheld. Then Her nostrils slightly flared and She subtly shifted Her body. With eyes cast down She slowly opened them as I bowed at Her feet. What happened during those moments was known only to Her, but as She arose from Her chair I stood to follow Her and became aware that I was completely intoxicated.

Krishnapriya and I held hands as we moved behind Mother, insuring that She was not crowded as She made Her way through the many devotees and into the large pandal. The rare privilege of being allowed to do any small service for Her is a great boon.

Inside the large pandal a shrine had been erected. It held a graceful, life-sized image of the Goddess Saraswati. Brahmachari Nirvananandaji was making all the preparations for Her puja. When Mother entered the pandal, She was escorted into a small room next to the altar. There She was worshipped as She held the symbols of the Goddess. Afterward She came to an asana which had been prepared for Her next to the altar. The puja was beautifully done and we all admired the lovely Saraswati image. Afterward everyone stood as Mother left the pandal and went to Her house. Slowly the crowd dispersed and we went to our hut for lunch.

This would be our last full day on the mela grounds. We would then follow Mother to Modinagar for the last few days of our trip. Most of our western friends were scheduled to leave for Varanasi late that afternoon. Mother would be going there right after Modinagar. We were very honored when Swami Keshavanandaji came to see us. He was not sure if he would be going to Modinagar. Krishnapriya,

Gadadhar, Ram, Shuddhananda, and Jayananda each came to say goodbye. We were very sad to part from them as we had all shared a very special time together and now it was ending.

In the evening I went to Mother's pandal hoping to have Her darshan.

There was a great crowd pressing in around Her house and pandal. The curtain that hung around Her porch was almost completely closed so I was unable to see Her. I returned to our hut and got most of our things packed for the next day's travel. That was our last night at the grand Kumbha Mela, our last night on the sandy banks of the Sacred Triveni of Prayaga, and our last night in the little grass hut next door to Mother.

The morning sky was cloudy and the air was cold. We went to see Mother and found Her in the big pandal near the Saraswati image. The image would be taken to the river for immersion that day. Mother sat with Saraswati Devi for some time, then we followed Her when She went to Her pandal. It had started to rain. We prostrated to Mother and with Chitra's help asked Mother to bless us. We asked Her permission to go that night to Delhi, then to join Her in Modinagar on January twenty-seventh. Mother nodded Her head and said "Accha." Chitra brought an orange and an apple for each of us. Mother touched them, then She went inside Her house with Chitra.

The rain seemed to be dissolving the last vestiges of the mela. The roof of our straw hut had developed new leaks and there were no plastic bags left for patching it. We kept our luggage in the only dry spots and with a sweet sadness stood within those straw walls for the last time, reluctant to bid goodbye to our lovely little hut. When our taxi arrived we put all of our things in the trunk and asked the driver to wait.

Mother's pandal top was leaking and only a few people were there. We saw Bal Krishna Gupta and enlisted his aid in translating our words to Nandi Kumar who had been such a good chowkidar. We had a few gifts for him and wanted to be sure that he understood how much we appreciated him and his selfless devotion to service.

This was our last chance to see Chitra, as she was going to Varanasi from the mela. We called for her to come out and said that we must go. She shook hands with Satya, then held my hand and affectionately touched my face and shoulder. Lovingly she looked at me and said, "Please come to Varanasi for two days." Then she was gone. I felt sad, knowing that there was no way we would be able to do as she had asked.

Our taxi carried us into Allahabad where we collected the rest of our things. After a hot bath and delicious meal we rested until train time. At the station it took about an hour to finally get the coupe which we had reserved before the mela, but at last it was made available and we settled in for the night.

## Modinagar

The train arrived in Delhi on time at 10:30a.m. and we went to our usual hotel. Both of us were feeling peculiar and out of touch with our surroundings. We were in a sort of shock from suddenly leaving Mother's presence and the intensely high atmosphere of the mela, then dropping abruptly into the cold material vibration of worldly life. It was a great blessing that we had a few more days before returning to the west, as the contrast would have been too much to endure.

We ate in our room and rested most of the day. It seemed that I was always packing or repacking. That evening was no different. We would have only three

days in Modinagar and were taking just enough for that short stay. Our flight from India was out of Delhi, so we left the rest of our luggage in storage at the hotel pending our return.

The next morning we ran a few errands then hired a very nice car to take us to Modinagar. There at Modi Bhavan, a complex across from the magnificent Modi Mandir, we found that we were expected at the Gaylord Guest House. Our driver was told how to find the place and he took us to the north end of town where it was situated. Only in India could one leave an austere little grass hut and next be housed in the pampered comfort of a "Gaylord Guest House."

The room which we were given was very large, carpeted, and furnished as a suite. It had a dining table and chairs at the far end, a couch and coffee table, a desk, vanity, closets, and two double beds. The bathroom was white tile with all ceramic fixtures. There was even a refrigerator! Downstairs we found a small restaurant that would serve us either there or in our quarters. After putting our things in the room, we went by rickshaw to Modi Mandir in search of Mother.

Modi Mandir is the same beautiful red temple which I described in our 1972 trip. It was with great joy that we once again came to that holy place where Sri Hanumanji lives. All of the gorgeous images in that temple are alive, but I must admit that Hanumanji with great moist eyes had claimed me when first I had His darshan.

The Bhagavat Sapta was conducted by Sri Swami Vishnuashram of Suktal.

It was held near the temple in a building that was like a large room unto itself. Many people had filled the room, but Mother was clearly visible from the doorway. When we arrived and pronounced to Her from the door, She smiled at us and held us with Her wonderful eyes for a very long time. As we stood before Her during the ensuing one hour, She frequently graced us with Her loving look. We basked in the joy of Her nearness, smiling at our shared good fortune.

After the Swamiji concluded his talk, the people stood and began to leave the building. We were delighted to see Swami Keshavanandaji among them. He chuckled as he said that our wish had brought him there. Upon leaving Allahabad, at the last minute a ride became available and he was told to come. By Mother's grace we would enjoy his company on these last few days.

As we moved away from the building and through a pandal we met our friend Lakshmi whom we had last seen before the Kumbha Mela. She and her daughter, Gopalapriya, had recently arrived in Modinagar.

Mother was coming out of the building, and as She walked past us we stepped behind Her, following as She went to an awaiting car. From the temple grounds Mother went to Krishna Ashram where She would give a brief darshan. We took rickshaws to join Her there.

Krishna Ashram was like a graceful estate. Upon entering the gate, we followed a private road through surrounding orchards to a secluded spot where a house was nestled amid flowers and a green lawn. A small pandal was erected beside the house. This was not an ordinary house, but its construction was as such. The Modi family had provided this lovely spot for Mother's use during Her visit.

Dasu greeted us as we arrived. He gave us prasada from a basket of fruit which he held. Inside the front door we found a large carpeted room with a marble fireplace against the far wall. There were curved sectional sofas and in the middle of the room was a raised platform for Mother's asana. There were only a few people there and we sat upon the carpet near Mother as one lady sang for Her. Swami Keshavanandaji called for Satya to sit by him and Mother gave me another of Her sweet smiles as She looked tenderly into my eyes.

After sitting with Mother for a short time, we were asked to step outside as two privates had been scheduled with Mother. When we went to pronam before Mother,

She looked at us as though She was really glad to see us and said something to us twice which I could not understand. Nirvananandaji was near and I asked him what Mother had said. Without replying he handed an orange and a guava to Mother which She gave to us. As Satya pronounced, Mother looked at him with a very sweet and tender smile. We stood outside the screen door, looking in at Mother.

Before we left that day we were treated to a rare sight: Mother alone. She arose from Her seat, walked across the room, opened a door, and entered another room. It was so nice to see Her in such a peaceful environment.

We were told that the daily program began at 9:00a.m. with a Bhagavat discourse, and then at about 11:30a.m. there would be darshan at Krishna Ashram. In the evening Bhagavat was at 4:00p.m. and darshan about 5:30p.m.

That evening we enjoyed hot baths, a snack of cheese toast, and a good night's sleep. The nights were quite cold, but daytime was very pleasant.

The following morning we arrived at the mandir at 8:50a.m., but Mother did not come until about 9:45a.m. We sat with Her until 11:00a.m. then went to Krishna Ashram for darshan.

There were some things which we wished for Mother to bless. I had brought those things with me that morning and the time was perfect. Bhaskaranandaji called for us to come and sit before Mother. He kindly translated for us. First Mother blessed our japa malas, then we each gave Her a new Tulsi mala. The shell garlands which Satya had dipped in the river at Kumbha Mela received Her touch. She smiled as She held them. Gadadhar had given some Tulsi seeds to me and I asked Mother to bless them that they might grow. She held them in Her tiny fingers.

One friend in America had asked for an asana and a silk shawl. I asked that Mother place Her feet upon the asana. She not only touched it with Her feet, but scooted them all over it until I became hard pressed to think of parting with it! Of course I did give it, along with the shawl which Bhaskaranandaji had so nicely laid upon Mother's shoulders. She also held a beautiful sandalwood Narayana murti which we had purchased in Varanasi. Mother looked him over carefully and exclaimed, "Bhot accha" (very good). She smiled then touched him to Her heart, head, and eyes. Now he was truly beautiful.

Mother gave prasad to all of us there, then She stood and left the room as we pronounced.

Two young people who were from an ashram in California had arrived.

They were called Krishnapriya (the same name as our Swiss friend) and Ashok. They had come to meet Mother for the first time. We had a nice lunch and visit with those two at Gaylord Guest House, then we all returned to Krishna Ashram to see Mother. She was seated with the Modi family members and young children around Her. Mother was very animated and it was a joy to watch.

Brahmachari Nirmalanandaji had just arrived from Delhi, and after a long talk with Mother about pollution and the purification of sacrifice he sat near Mother's feet. We were sitting very near to him. Satya was very quiet and in a sad mood. Mother had noticed Satya and spoke to Nirmalananda in Bengali ("so that everyone would not understand," he later told Satya) saying, "Satya looks so sad, why?"

Two jolly Sadhus had arrived and took Mother's attention for the moment, so Nirmalanandaji was able to tell Satya what She had asked. Satya told him that he was sad because we had only one more day with Mother, then we had to go back to the United States. It was something we did not like to face and wished that we could have stayed near Her forever.

Mother and the two sadhus had everyone in the room laughing. It was great fun to see Her so playful. When the sadhus left, Mother went into an adjoining room and some devotees followed for a private.

As we visited with people there, a young man stepped near where I stood and

said, "Excuse me." I did not recognize Bhaskaranandaji's nephew, Kamal, until he smiled. In the two years since last we had met, he had gone from boy to young man. We all laughed that I had not recognized him, then I heard about the trick he and Bhaskarananda had pulled on Satya. Bhaskaranandaji had said to Satya, "You have room for another person where you stay?" Satya wondered what was happening, but said, "Yes." Then Bhaskarananda said, "Well, this young man will stay with you." Satya thought, "Oh my God! What is he saying, who is this stranger?" then Kamal smiled and Satya recognized him and had a good laugh at Bhaskarananda's sense of humor. We were delighted to see Kamal and enjoyed having his company in our large suite.

Nirvananandaji had arranged for us to have a private with Mother the next day and came to tell us that it would be in the evening. Our host, whom we only knew as Mr. Modi, had invited us to take tea at his lovely home. We enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and visited with his beautiful daughter who served tea and sweets to us. After a comfortable ride to our quarters in our host's car, we met Kamal who joined us for dinner. He then spent the night sleeping on the large couch in our room.

In the morning we went to the temple. Mother was inside where puja was done on this last day and a fire sacrifice would be performed afterward. Satya and I took that opportunity to have darshan of the magnificent Hanumanji. There was not much light, but I managed to get one photo of Him. When we came out of the temple we saw Mother as She accompanied the family to witness the fire sacrifice. After that rite was completed, Mother was driven to Krishna Ashram and we followed in rickshaws. She sat with us and talked with some people who had just come. Then She said that we would have our private. We did not expect it to be then as we had been told it would be in the evening, but with Mother the unexpected is the norm and truly exciting if a little unnerving at times.

Bhaskaranandaji and Nirvananandaji stayed to interpret as everyone else left the room. It was one of those times when the questions and answers did not quite mesh. But most of our important questions had already been answered by Mother. At one point She spontaneously told us, "Try to speak only the truth, speak of spiritual things only, and not of other things." Who can live up to those standards? We can only try, then pray for Her grace. We went for our noon meal and visited with friends until time to rejoin Mother.

I took our little Gopal, and when we entered Krishna Ashram I sat Him by Mother's seat. A man came to arrange Mother's pillows and placed one in front of Gopal. He started to move Gopal, but Nirvananandaji told him not to touch Gopal. He told the man to move the pillow instead, saying, "Small Gopal cannot see over the big pillow to see Ma."

Mother came and took Her seat. She talked with some of the family and others who had just arrived. We had a long lovely darshan. Mother spoke of how blessed the people were who had been at the Kumbha Mela. One man asked Mother how he could get the blessing of Kumbha Mela though he had not been there. Mother told someone to bring some of the Mela water. A clay cup of that holy water was brought to Her and Mother sprinkled that man. Then She sprinkled all of us. I asked Her to please sprinkle Gopalji too, but She did not hear me. So Nirvanananda told Her and She looked at Gopal for the first time that evening. She sprinkled Him and everyone laughed. Nirvananandaji looked at Gopal very lovingly and Mother did also. Then She picked Him up and touched Him to Her heart, head, and eyes, showering Him with Her grace. She gave us prasad and blessed us by touching us on top of our heads.

That evening I had my bath in the holy waters of Kumbha Mela, but most important to me was that it came directly from Her hand.

Soon we had to go outside as someone was there for a private with Mother.

We stood on the porch and gazed at Mother through the screen door until She finished the private and then left the room.

We asked Nirvananandaji if we could come in the morning to see Mother before we had to leave. He told us that Mother said for us to come at 10:00a.m. I asked if that was darshan time and he said no, it was just for us.

Swami Keshavanandaji was in front of the building and we had a last visit with him before going to our room to pack things for our morning departure.

When we awoke, we finished putting our luggage together and went to see Mother by 9:50a.m. One lady there said that Mother had been asking about us. Soon She called for us to come into the small room where She sat. Pushpa was the only one with Her and she interpreted for us. When we bowed, Mother gave us each a little yellow towel, some roses, a few sweets, and the two hibiscus blossoms which we had brought for Her. We started to place our heads next to Her knees and She smiled and made a little sound like "Tucka-Tucka-Tucka," which seemed to mean "wait just a minute." Pushpa laid a towel over Mother's lap and then we were allowed to put our heads there and she patted them.

Tears ran down my face as I asked Mother to bless us that we might return soon. I said, "I love you." She looked at us so sweetly and said, "Send word when you arrive safely." Moving reluctantly into the other room, we stood looking back at Her until the door was closed.

Our taxi, with luggage piled high upon the roof, carried Kamal, Ashok, Krishnapriya, and us to our hotel in Delhi.

Mother would be taking a train out of Delhi that evening, going to Varanasi. After our meal we went with the two young people to the train station for one last darshan. As our taxi moved through the crowded Delhi streets, Krishnapriya said, "Oh look, there is Swamiji ... Oh Ma!" We looked, and in a car that was right alongside us sat Mother with Bhaskarananda, Nirvanananda, and Udas. Mother was laughing and greeting us with folded hands. The others laughed and greeted us as we all pronamed and laughed at our sweet good fortune - a shining jewel to brighten our melancholy mood.

At the station Mother sat for some time in a chair on the platform. There was a great crowd pushing to see Her. Then She went inside the train to Her compartment.

We said goodbye to Swami Keshavananda, Bhaskarananda, Nirvanananda, and Dasu.

Just as the train was rolling away, we were granted one last glimpse of Mother and pronamed as we stood there watching the train carry Her from our sight.

Feeling the emptiness that is always left where once She stood, we did not move right away. Then slowly, as if in a dream, we did what had to be done and returned to the other side of the earth.

## **Sixth Trip**

**(November 18, 1978-January 6, 1979)**

### **Bhimpura**

It was November 18, 1978, when our sixth journey began. As usual, the dream time between those pilgrimages to Mother started melting away when the giant airplane lifted us from within that dream. By the time we touched India's sacred earth it was, once again, as though we had never left. The familiar sounds and smells that existed nowhere else in our world once again created that atmosphere wherein we awaken and our souls are nourished. It must be like that for creatures who hibernate during certain periods, or the caterpillar coming out of its cocoon of sleep and metamorphosis - a more conscious birth than the one that began this life.

We had received Mother's permission to join Her at the remote ashram of Bhimpura. We had never been in that area before and looked forward to the opportunity of being in a quiet place with Mother. Our friend Bhakti was traveling with us.

Getting to Bhimpura was not so easily accomplished due to airline overbooking, delays causing missed connections, and the wait in Delhi to be reunited with our luggage which had gone on to Hong Kong without us.

Our reservations to Bombay with connecting flight to Baroda had been missed. It was not difficult to get to Bombay, but the next daily flight to Baroda was booked solid. Our only chance was to go to the airport at flight time and hope that four people would not show up to claim their seats that day. We were numbers two, three, and four on the standby list. By Mother's grace there were exactly four people who did not claim their seats on that flight. We were very relieved as we finally climbed aboard.

In Baroda some very kind people assisted us in locating a car for the last leg of our journey. It was about a one-hour drive through the lush green countryside to a small village called Chandod. Chandod is situated on the peaceful and most holy Narmada River. The Bhimpura ashram is a short distance downriver and sits high above the Narmada's banks. There is a rough and bumpy dirt road from Chandod to Bhimpura which our driver traversed very carefully. When I think of rural India, the simple spiritual heart of the land, I see Bhimpura in my mind.

Little thatched grass huts were strewn along dirt paths sheltered by stoic banyan trees. Oxen, cattle, and goats roamed freely. Beautiful monkeys were playing along the riverbank and among the banana trees where the peacocks' shrill cry made me aware that they can, indeed, fly. Small chipmunks were darting among the trees and imperious crows with lusty voices expressed their critical opinions about almost everything.

Arriving at the ashram, we saw Swami Satchidanandaji, Dasu, and Triguna Sen. Then Mother came out accompanied by Bhaskaranandaji and Udasji.

Mother walked near where I stood as She proceeded toward the ashram's great Banyan tree. Around that tree was a concrete platform where Mother's asana had been prepared for Her.

She was so beautiful, sitting there high above the shimmering Narmada.

The sky was clear and blue behind the spreading banyan tree whose branches and leaves sheltered Her from the bright sunlight. Mother kept looking at me and graced me with Her sweet smile. My heart had longed for that moment, and how perfectly it was framed by Bhimpura.

We were sent to the Ganganath Temple Ashram, about a fifteen-minute walk down the narrow dirt road, where rooms were available for our use. Gadadhar, Melita, and Patrick (a doctor from Europe) were staying there.

The rooms were clean and the view was beautiful. The ashram, consisting of several buildings, had a nice ghat on the river and tropical garden on the other side. In the temple was a shrine for the fire god, Agni. An open hall held pictures of many saints. Among them was Sri Aurobindo whom, we were told, had spent some of his early years in a dark solitary underground room below the Saraswati Temple situated near the Ganganath Temple. (It is said that the ideal life of a sadhaka is to do sadhana on the banks of the Narmada, then to pass the last days in meditation by the Ganges.)

There was a long narrow room near the kitchen where we were served well-prepared meals daily. Opposite the other building, but also on the Narmada, was a large two-story house where the Mahant of this ashram lived. He was a very kind sadhu whose gentle nature was reflected in that beautiful place which was open to all who came there.

Bhakti's room was next to ours with a connecting door between as well as doors leading outside onto a large balcony where clotheslines awaited our laundry.

All three of us were exhausted from the four-day ordeal of impeded travel.

During the first three days there one or two of us would be forced to stay in our room to rest. And Mother would always ask about the missing one.

One morning Bhakti and I went to the ashram early. Satya was not feeling well, but said he would follow a little later. She and I sat beneath Mother's banyan tree near the Shiva Linga installed there. The peaceful beauty of Bhimpura seemed to slowly and gently untie all the knots in my being. Looking down at the holy Narmada, I watched as a sailboat silently glided by.

Mother was resting, so we visited with Bhaskaranandaji. He told us that many great sadhus and rishis had done their sadhana on the banks of the sacred Narmada. Everything about that area vibrates with the devotion of their lives. It is as though the place itself is in a state of meditation.

There was a delightful young man at the ashram whom we enjoyed and always looked forward to seeing. His home was in Nadiad. The Samyam Sapta had been held there from November seventh to November fourteenth at the Sri Sant Ram Samadhi Mandir. While Mother had been in Nadiad, that young man, whose name was Rajesh Patel, had been granted the rare privilege of traveling with Mother for some time. Because he was planning to come to America soon, he was granted that singular boon and allowed to perform service for Mother.

As we waited to see Mother that day, Rajesh brought a special prasad for us. We greatly enjoyed the chopped fruit mixed with small peppers which he told us had been prepared according to Mother's instructions. Normally he was kept quite busy and had little time for conversation. Only later in our trip did we have more opportunities to talk with him. Then we discovered that we had first met Rajesh in 1970 at Suktal. Before the start of every daily program there, Sandalwood tilak was placed upon the foreheads of all the devotees seated in the hall. This blessing was bestowed by a lady to the women and by a young boy to Satya and the other men gathered there. That boy was Rajesh. He had come to attend the Samyam Sapta with his parents and two brothers, all devotees of Mother.

Later I asked the ashram girls what Mother ate in those days. They told me that She took a little vegetable juice and some dal and rice, but in very small amounts.

Satya arrived, bringing our gifts for Mother, and soon we were allowed to go upstairs to the porch in front of Mother's room. There were large windows on the front side of Her room. She sat just inside on Her wooden bed which was covered with a white sheet.

We approached the front window and pronounced. Mother looked at me and asked "Accha?" I said, "Tika, Ma." Then we moved to the side window so others could pronam. Vasu took our gifts for Mother. Among them was a small white pure wool blanket with fringe on both ends. Mother asked who brought it and was told that we had. I was delighted that She had shown interest in it.

After a while we were asked to leave. Reluctantly we pronounced, said goodnight to Mother, and walked across the porch toward the steps. There we were treated to a panoramic view of a gorgeous sunset silhouetting the trees against the glistening Narmada and highlighting the Ganganath Temple where we were staying.

Downstairs we were very happy to find our friend from the Kumbha Mela, Dr. Shelat. He had just arrived from Ahmedabad. We had a brief visit and were pleased to learn that he would still be at the ashram the next day.

As the light of the day was slowly leaving Bhimpura, we walked down the dirt road toward Ganganath Temple and our evening meal.

While we were eating we could hear the voices of many people chanting and loud beating sounds. Melita asked the cook what it was and he told her that it was the people of his nearby village. They were doing a puja, "inviting" the snakes that were there to please go out from the village and into the forest. From the center of the village they started chanting and beating on the ground with sticks as they expanded their circle out toward the forest. It was a rather wild and frightening sound. If I had been a local snake, I feel sure that I would have been among the first to accept the "invitation."

What a wonderful day it had been!

In the morning I washed our clothes and hung them out to dry in the hot sun. Satya had put water in two large buckets, covered the water with dark plastic, and placed them in the sun. After about one hour the water was just right for bathing. If it sat in the sun for three hours it would be so hot that we had to add cold water before using it.

Kamal, whose home was in Baroda, had arrived for the day. He came to Ganganath Temple and joined us for lunch. Then as we were leaving for Mother's ashram we were greeted by Dr. Shelat's smiling face. He had come to meet us. We all walked along the winding dirt road together, full of joy to be in that wonderful place with Mother, removed from time and worldly care.

Bhaskaranandaji greeted us with a story which sent my heart reeling. He said that during the previous night, at about 2:00a.m., Mother had said, "Bring Shraddha's blanket." She used it for cover as She lay upon Her bed. For several years I had searched for just the right blanket for Mother but without success until finding that one just before our trip. Not only did She actually use the blanket, but remembered me in doing so. I was ecstatic!

Then beautiful Hansa, a very sweet girl in Mother's ashram, called me to follow her behind the kitchen. There she gave me prasad (water) from the meal which Mother had just taken. She allowed me to call Satya, Bhakti, and then Dr. Shelat, who all received Mother's prasad.

Soon we were permitted to go upstairs to Mother. We stood at the side window, very near where She sat. Mother asked if we were all well. I said, "Tika Ma." Then I asked a lady inside the room to ask Mother how She was feeling. Mother replied that She was not feeling well. I felt sad and helpless, knowing that She, who always inquired as to our well being, was Herself not feeling well.

The electricity was out, and as the sun set someone brought a candle to light Mother's room. She looked so beautiful in that soft glow. Mentally I told Her of my

love for Her and of what She is to me. Each time I talked to Her in my mind, She looked at me very intently. Some people were inside the room talking with Mother. Many times She would turn and look at us as we stood by that side window. She sat with us for a long time, but still I did not want to leave when the time came to pronam and go downstairs.

Dr. Shelat would be leaving the next morning, so we had a farewell visit with him. Then with the aid of our torches we walked back to Ganganath Temple.

The morning routine was pretty well set. We had tea and fruit or perhaps biscuits, then I did the laundry. There was a narrow ledge which ran along the side of our room with a door leading out onto it. The ledge overlooked the garden on that side of the ashram. I put my wash basin and a bucket of rinse water on the ledge. Sitting in the doorway, with my feet on each side of the basin, I washed our daily clothes. It was a good arrangement as I could dump the used water into the thick foliage below.

Satya was in charge of our water purification program. He filled a large plastic jug with water, then treated it with iodine tablets. After about 30 minutes, he then ran that water through a charcoal filter and into a second plastic jug for storage. The iodine destroyed any bacteria, but tasted terrible. The filter removed the iodine so the water was then good for tea or cooking. We used that system on all of our trips and never had any serious illnesses.

At darshan time, which was only once a day at 5:00p.m., we found that three busloads of school children had come to see Mother. They were very orderly as they filed up the staircase in line, pronamed, received prasada, and then came downstairs. Satya went up and took some movies of them as they met Mother.

Bhakti and I had not gone up yet and were given Mother's prasada. I was unable to call Satya as he was on the roof with Mother and the children. When we joined him there were very few people sitting before Mother. Her wooden cot had been placed on the porch just in front of Her window. Large grass mats were on the porch floor for the devotees' use. A beautiful young girl was near Mother and as she sang very sweetly for Mother, I remembered a phrase which Hemantbai had taught me: "Kokila Kaikarav," the voice of a nightingale. Mother listened as the girl sang, then spoke with her in an animated way and patted her arm. The girl was shy but her radiant face showed the joy she experienced in singing for Mother. Satya had been taking movies of that sweet play but then Mother put Her towel over Her head and made motions like holding a moving camera. Of course he immediately quit filming and put his camera away.

Bhaskarananda told him that Mother had said, "He is always taking movies." She had explained that when there was some event it was all right to take movies, but when we were just sitting together he should not be doing so. Naturally we were sorry to have less movies, but in another way I was glad. It seemed a shame that so much of his darshan was with a camera between his eye and Her direct presence. Mother had established a compromise.

We sat at Her feet in the dim evening light for a long time. She looked at me with lingering sweetness. I was content. When Mother arose to go inside, She sent special prasada to Satya. We pronamed and went downstairs. Bhaskaranandaji gave us some mail which had arrived for us. After a short visit we walked to Ganganath for our evening meal and then to bed.

The next day brought rain, so I had to hang the laundry in a vacant room next to ours. It rained all day and Satya cooked a lovely pot of potatoes, tomatoes, okra, and little green peppers. I had been fighting off a cold for several days and did not think there was much chance of seeing Mother, so we stayed in that day.

It was still cloudy when we awoke the following morning. We had tea, cocoa, and cookies while watching little birds that came into our room, unafraid, and ate the cookie crumbs we had put out for them. After lunch we had nice warm baths then went to the ashram about 4:00p.m.

It started raining again. We stood beneath the great banyan tree, looking at the river until the rain got quite heavy. Then we took refuge in the hall below Mother's room. When the rain stopped, we went outside to a nearby shrine of Sri Hanumanji where Dasu had the village children gathered in kirtan. The children always gravitated to Dasu as his playful nature made him like one of them. But beneath that playful veneer we saw a very serious bhakta of Mother who, even in play, was teaching the children to call God's Name.

At last we were allowed to climb those stairs that brought us to Mother. She was seated in Her room with our blanket covering Her feet and legs. When She saw me standing at Her side window, She lifted the corner of the blanket to show me that She was using it. My heart nearly burst with joy as I felt the embrace of Her compassion. Mother turned to face some devotees on the other side of the room, so Satya and I moved around the corner and stood in Her open doorway. From that place we could see Her very well. For about one hour we were blessed to be near Her. I always enjoyed watching Her expressive little hands, so beautiful and graceful. Then Her door and windows were closed as She retired for the evening.

The next day would be my forty-ninth birthday. I went to sleep hoping that Mother would bless me with a short private for the occasion.

When we arrived at the ashram that day we received prasad from Mother's plate, then went upstairs to see Her. Bhaskaranandaji had told Mother that it was my birthday. She greeted both of us with presents - a lovely piece of white cotton fabric for Satya and a sheer white sari for me. We were granted a brief private, but some questions She would not answer. They were things dealing with this maya. Mother said that those things were interesting but that we should turn our minds to the spiritual.

One thing which I asked, and Mother did answer, was prompted by a story I had read. A young woman, after being seriously injured, was in a deep coma. Her body was made to function by artificial means. Without being attached to certain machines she could not breathe and take nourishment. She had been in that vegetative state for about two years with the body slowly withering and no hope of awakening. I asked Mother, "What is the state of the jiva in such a case?" Mother replied that only a small portion is still there. I had the impression that it must be like a thin thread still connected, but She did not elaborate.

After darshan and our private, Bhaskarananda told us to see Swami Paramanandaji before we left the ashram. We went to Swamiji's room near the banyan tree. He invited us to come in the morning at 8:30a.m. when the inauguration of Mother's new house was to commence. We were also invited for the feast which was to follow. He said to tell the other westerners of the program and that they were invited. Back at Ganganath temple as we sat for our evening meal with Bhakti, Melita, and Patrick, we informed them of Swamiji's invitation to the celebration the next day.

It was very hot and humid. Even after a cool bath, it was hard to sleep. But that was a small price to pay for those wonderful days.

We awoke early on that first day of December and were at the ashram a little before 8:30a.m. The new house which had been constructed for Mother was a graceful little cottage situated next to the hall. To me, its most appealing feature was that it was on ground level. It always hurt me to watch as Mother painfully climbed the stairs to Her second-floor quarters. There were several rooms in the house which had a ramp at the entrance instead of steps. A concrete porch ran across the front with an ornamental iron gate enclosing it. Some of the ladies had decorated the entryway with traditional designs and a festive mood filled the atmosphere. Some people had come just for the occasion and all were engaged in the preparations. Mother's wooden bed had been placed in front of the house. She sat there, the center of all that went on around Her. We were very happy to have that opportunity for darshan and Satya took some movies.

A couple of cars arrived carrying local V.I.P.'s. It was time for the ceremony.

Mother stood and leaned upon Udasji and Bhaskaranandaji for a moment.

Then She moved with great difficulty due to pain in Her knee. Conch shells were blown and someone beat upon a tali (metal plate) as She entered the house. There was a surge of people at the door as Mother entered. Bhaskaranandaji, who was assisting Mother, silently and with a powerful look simply turned the palm of his hand toward the crowd for a split second and the rush melted into order. I was thrilled to witness that scene and see something in him that is very rarely shown. Inside, Mother was seated and a puja was done.

After some time a bus full of men who were devotees from the Sri Sant Ram Samadhi Mandir of Nadiad arrived. As previously mentioned, that was the site of the Samyam Sapta and Mother had been there just before She came to Bhimpura. The men who came were all happy for the opportunity to have Mother's darshan again. We were impressed by the light and joyful feeling which surrounded them.

Other people came by boat and on foot from Chandod. Many sadhus had been invited for a bhandara. Most of the people went into Mother's house. The westerners were not permitted to go in at that time, so Melita, Patrick, Bhakti, Satya, and I went to stand near a window of the room where Mother was seated. On that side of the house the earth sloped downward, away from the building. The place where we stood was a little below the window, but Mother's seat was right next to it and we could see Her very well. Mother turned and looked out at us. She smiled so sweetly, as though She was pleased that we were there. That loving look filled my heart and we were thrilled by Her tender regard. Often She turned to look at us as we stood there. Soon the others left for a while, but Satya and I stayed beneath Her window. Mother kept looking at us. We stood there for a long time as a Gita Path and other scriptural readings were done.

Suddenly Mother held a garland up to the window. We ran forward as She threw one garland out and then another. She held up four fingers, then threw the third and fourth garland into our waiting arms. She held up two fingers to signify that two garlands were for us and then holding up two more fingers, pointed toward Ganganath Temple to indicate that the other two were for Bhakti and Melita. We nodded that we understood. After a little while Mother stood, then went walking through the house. We slowly moved up to the front and talked with some of the devotees there. Bhakti and Melita came and we gave them their garlands from Mother.

As we sat beneath the lofty banyan tree, we were served a feast on woven leaf plates. There was kichuri, spicy fried potatoes, two or three different vegetables, puris, curd, dal, some kind of sweet and a lovely pot of khir. After so much food we needed the little walk back to Ganganath Temple. I did a few chores, bathed, and took a short rest. Then it was time to return for darshan.

When we arrived Mother was still in Her new house. Some people were going in and when we saw Melita enter, we followed her. The house was lovely. Mother sat in the main room which was of a good size. After we pronounced to Her, She gave each of us prasad (nuts and raisins) from Her own hand - a very rare treat in those days. We all sat near Mother as the men from Sant Ram Mandir sang lovely bhajans. With genuine respect and affection they came for Mother's blessings before returning to Nadiad. After their departure, Mother sat with us for a few more minutes.

When Mother got up to leave, we moved slowly behind Her. At the doorway She paused, turned back toward us, and said for us to stop there. As She faced us, She did something with Her hands that, to me, looked like an arati. Who can know what blessing She bestowed upon us as we stood before Her that enchanted day in Bhimpura.

Outside, Mother walked to the Hanuman shrine just beyond the ashram gate.

Dasu was there with the children doing kirtan. She stood with them for a few minutes, then walked toward the area near the banyan tree. There She was shown a new concrete seat which had been formed around a mango tree. After that I watched with tortured eyes as She slowly climbed the long stairway to Her second-floor rooms. I was told that Her new house was not yet ready for Her use.

We said goodnight, reluctant to let that beautiful day slip away. But it was not ours to hold.

When we came to the ashram the next day, Hansa gave us prasad from Mother's plate. Then we stood near the kitchen where we could see Mother through the side window of Her upstairs room. We could not see Her clearly, but just knowing that She was within view pacified us. Soon we were allowed to go upstairs. How lovely Mother looked in the soft evening light. Some people were in Her room and we watched as She spoke with them. A private was scheduled, so we were asked to go downstairs.

Panuda was in the courtyard and we told him of our travel plans. Mother's program was taking Her to Morvi for a Bhagavat Sapta and we had received permission to follow Her there. A taxi was already booked for our trip to Baroda the next day. The day after that we would go by bus to Morvi.

Dasu had all the village children and adults gathered around the little Hanuman shrine singing kirtan. I stood with my tape recorder and captured those sweet sounds for some time before we had to leave.

We felt sad as we walked down the dirt pathway that night, thinking it to be the last time we would do so. At Ganganath Temple we packed most of our things before going to bed.

Kamal was coming with our car in the morning and would accompany us to Baroda around noon. We enjoyed his company and friendship. His help was a real blessing on this trip and on previous trips when we had met at Mother's feet.

In the morning we finished packing our things. When Kamal arrived with the taxi we loaded the luggage and drove to the ashram to see Mother. While waiting for permission to go upstairs, we had the chance to visit for a few minutes with friends who would not be going on to Morvi.

When Udas called for us to come up, we found Mother sitting with Swami Virajananda at Her feet. We were told that he was checking certain details with Mother for a book he was writing. They were in a room next to the one where we usually saw Mother. There was a large window in that room, too, and we stood on the walkway gazing at Mother. We offered garlands to Her and received Her blessings for our trip. There was always a sadness about leaving Mother's presence even when I knew it was only for a brief period. An empty feeling came into my heart that would stay there until my eyes beheld Her again.

In Baroda we took a room at a nice little hotel. That evening we were the guests of Kamal's parents, Narhari and Sheela Dave, for dinner. We were delighted to meet his family and very much enjoyed the sumptuous meal.

Back at the hotel, Bhakti told us that she was going to stay in Baroda a day or two and then decide whether to join Mother in Morvi or return to California.

## Morvi

The next morning, December fourth, Kamal accompanied us and made sure that we got on the right bus which would take us to Rajkot. On that bus we met a sweet young couple from Bombay, and when we arrived in Rajkot the young man found a taxi that would take us on to Morvi. It took about one hour of bumping up the road to reach our destination.

Morvi, like Baroda and Bhimpura, is in Gujarat state, but unlike the latter two,

Morvi is in the peninsula. It is located about one hundred miles south of the Pakistan border and approximately twenty-five miles inland from the Gulf of Kutch. We found that area to be very interesting, but with a different feeling than any other part of India in which we had traveled.

The Bhagavat Sapta was being held on behalf of the young raja of the local royal family. He was the last male heir of their line and had been killed recently while in England. His mother, the Maharani of Morvi, had requested Mother's presence at the Bhagavat Sapta which was being held on the grounds in front of the "new palace." A large pandal had been erected there for the function.

The new palace was a grand structure, built upon a very large property. It had been constructed for the young raja and was not quite completed when he died. The maharani maintained residences in several other countries and was rarely in India. Her brother, Mr. Jhala, had come to Morvi from his home in Poona to assist with the preparations.

As none of the family was living in the new palace and no ashram of Mother's was nearby, it was difficult for those responsible to coordinate all the details and needs for such a large undertaking.

At some distance to the rear of the new palace was a large concrete area like a tennis court. There was also a tiered seating structure of cement running along the side of the court. It was shaped like very wide steps and at the top, the steps descended on the opposite side in like fashion. On that side a small pandal had been erected which enclosed the steps within it. Behind this area stood a small two-story building which appeared to be a clubhouse for the use of the tennis players. However for the Bhagavat Sapta it served as housing for Mother and some of the ashramites. There was another building nearby that was used for the brahmacharini's quarters.

When we first arrived there was some confusion about where we were to stay, but after one night in a remote guest house we were shifted to one of the most interesting places that we have ever stayed. As the name "new palace" implies, there was an "old palace." The old palace was across the river from the new palace, and was its opposite in most every way. It appeared to be ancient, and its construction was reminiscent of a medieval castle, though not so much in size as in style.

One section of the building was kept more or less as it had been when it was inhabited. It was there that we were situated for the balance of our eleven days in Morvi.

Coming into the gate off a street in the business district was like stepping into another world or, more correctly, another time. There was a large lotus pond in the center of the courtyard where one single lotus blossom was floating. It must have been beautiful at one time. There were palace structures on either side of the yard. Occasionally peacocks would fly up on the roof and stand silhouetted against the sky as they called to each other. To the left was a wide walkway which led into an adjoining courtyard, then a more narrow path into yet another courtyard. All were surrounded by walls and palace buildings. It was in that furthest section, on the second floor of the building, that we were housed. Our corner room had a windowed turret overlooking the street on the left and the long sloping bank leading to the river on the right. It was comfortably furnished with big soft beds and a good table for our puja.

To reach the bathroom we had to walk through a very long room which had photographs and large paintings of the family members covering the walls on both sides. We could sense a presence in the old palace that was really quite peaceful and did not seem to mind our being there.

In the hallway stood a former raja's favorite hunting dog. Preserved by the art of taxidermy, he stood faithfully guarding the past.

When Melita, Patrick, and Jean Claude (a French violinist) arrived, they were given rooms down the hall from ours.

Inside the main gate, across from the lotus pond, was a building used as an office by the caretakers. From those kind souls we received chai in our room every morning.

Bhaskaranandaji said that we were to take our meals at the new palace.

That turned out to be a very special treat. We are both fond of Gujarati food and the dishes served there were delightful.

Our first darshan of Mother after arriving in Morvi was as She was seated downstairs in the building provided for Her. When we went in to pronam I was shocked to find Her looking so tired. I had never seen Her look more exhausted. Because of Mother's condition we did not get to see Her very often. On the second day there was no darshan at all.

On that day, as we walked across a field by the new palace, I ran into a pipe sticking about six inches up out of the ground. I bruised and skinned my left ankle, twisting it as I stumbled. It is peculiar how I always seem to hurt that same ankle and foot.

The next day, as we stood talking near the front of the new palace, a lady wearing a long white dress and a simple brown shawl stepped out onto the side porch not far from where we stood. She sent a man to invite us inside. He said that she was the late raja's mother and had requested that we come in to speak about our experience of Mother.

We were shown into a comfortable room where the maharani sat with one of her daughters. She was very gracious and easy to talk with. Like any mother she was heartbroken at the loss of her son.

At her request I told of how I had first seen Mother in a dream. Then she shared a most unusual and terrifying experience which she had had just the previous night. In a dream she felt the whole palace shake. She thought that someone or something had come to the front gates of the palace and had grabbed and was violently shaking them. It was so real to her that she sent a servant to check the gate. Later, in the morning, Mother sent for the Rani and told her that She had seen a creature like a lion. It was devouring everything. Mother screamed for it to go away.

I asked the Rani if Mother had made any comment on that. She said that Mother told her some evil was eating up the men of the family and Mother told it to go away. Her husband, his brother, and then her son had all died in young age. The beautiful maharani had seen great suffering in her life. I was pleased to meet her, awed by her experience, and filled with compassion for her sadness.

That evening we stood below Mother's window hoping to see Her. We were delighted when She pulled back the curtains from the large double windows of Her upper room. She was seated there upon Her bed and we could see Her quite well. She smiled so sweetly and we were grateful to have the opportunity for darshan. In the little pandal Swami Satchidanandaji started reading from the Ramayana. Mother motioned for everyone to go in and listen as he read. She closed Her curtains, for no one was willing to leave as long as they could see Her.

After the reading Mother opened Her curtains and also the large windows which were hinged like shutters. We gathered beneath those open windows

and She lovingly sat with us for about one hour. The sun was setting as She bade us goodnight.

The Bhagavat Sapta began the next day, December seventh. We watched as the pandit and the Srimat Bhagavat arrived. They were greeted by Mother and the family, then escorted into the big pandal. Mother entered from the side and took Her seat on the platform to the pandit's left. The maharani sat on the floor beside Mother and the young raja's photograph was placed near the pandit. A puja was performed and then the pandit spoke for an hour.

I was able to sit in the front on the ladies' side, not far from Mother. She looked right at me and smiled. Later as kirtan was sung She lightly clapped Her little hands

and graced me with another smile as I joined Her in clapping. After that lovely time with Mother, Satya and I met by where we had left our shoes. We were given prasad and asked if we needed a ride to the old palace. Happily accepting, we were directed to a funny old bus. There were only two seats in it - one for the driver and one just behind him, facing the back of the bus. Two side doors and the rear end were wide open.

About fifteen children climbed in through the rear and rode as far as the dining area. There a bunch of women piled in for a ride to their homes near the old palace. They were very sweet and when we got out at the palace gate some said, "Goodnight," in English. That was unusual in Morvi, as English was not as widely spoken here as in other parts of India where we had been.

There was no transportation to be found the next morning so we decided to try crossing on a footbridge which was suspended over the river between the old and new palaces. The distance was not bad, but the swaying motion caused my injured ankle to twist too much so I could not go that way again.

Our friend Madhavananda arrived in Morvi that day and we had our afternoon meal together.

After 5:00p.m. we saw Mother briefly as She got into a car accompanied by Udas.

Rajesh Patel was outside near Mother's building and we got a chance to have our first real visit with him.

Mother's car returned and She went into the pandal for the daily program but She did not stay long.

We spent some time talking with Bhaskaranandaji before returning to our room for the night.

The next day we waited near Mother's building until She came out, and followed as She was taken to the pandal. Inside I got a spot close to the front and sat for some time, just content to be near Mother. Suddenly a little girl next to me made a gesture in front of me and a lady on my other side quickly moved. Then I saw a small snake move swiftly past her, and all the women started getting up. Some men came and caught the snake. They put it in a little brass pot. I heard that Mother said not to harm it, but I do not think that it survived.

After that incident I waited outside for Mother, then followed as She went to the little pandal in the rear. There we could sit very near Mother while Swami Satchidananda read from the Ramayana. Afterward Mother told Bishuddha to recite from what I took to be the Gita. As Bishuddha recited, Mother looked at me for a long time. I felt in such a high mood that I could not even smile as Mother's eyes penetrated into my heart. Satya sat near me and Mother looked at each of us in that long special way. I cannot possibly describe those eyes and can only hint at how they have affected me.

Another girl also recited for quite some time. It was so lovely because Mother continued to look at us during the recitation. As Pushpa began to sing, Mother spoke a few words to Bhaskarananda. Then, as we pronounced, She went to Her room. We just stood there for a while, not wanting to go, then slowly we left the empty pandal so intoxicated that we could not have moved quickly even if we had wished to.

The little pandal was being prepared for a special puja when we arrived there the next day, December tenth. The steps had been covered with cloth and a beautiful long altar had been created. In the center was Lord Narayana's picture and on each side were nine Iotas (pots), representing the eighteen chapters of the Bhagavat Gita. There were leaves and a coconut in each pot. Bhaskaranandaji was assisted by Bishuddha in preparing for the Gita Jayanti which he would perform.

Mother arrived in a car accompanied by the maharani. She carefully examined the altar before taking Her seat. Satya took movies as Bhaskarananda did the puja.

Mother sat with us for about an hour and a half. She seemed to feel a little better that day. After the puja everyone gathered around Mother giving gifts to Her and receiving prasad. Some ladies of the family had brought many photos of Mother and asked Her to "autograph" them. Graciously She marked all of them.

There was a little box with four sweets in it sitting by Mother. She said for me to take it and give to the westerners. The only ones there were Jean Claude, Satya, and myself. One piece was left over so I decided to give it to the first westerner of our group that I saw.

When Mother left the pandal, we walked to the dining area, had a delicious lunch, then went to the old palace for a short rest. Patrick came to our room, so I gave the last piece of Mother's prasad to him and asked him to share it with Melita.

That evening the pandit came to the little pandal and spoke on the Gita.

Mother came and sat with us for about an hour. She was very animated and appeared to be in better health. We were each given yellow handkerchiefs and prasad. The girls sang and the darshan was wonderful.

When Mother went out of the little pandal I followed Her. She went into Her building and sat just inside the door on the left side. I walked to a spot where I could see Her and She greeted me with folded palms. Bishuddha came and told me that Mother said I could come to the door and pronam. I joyfully hurried to Her door where two young men that I did not know threw their arms out in front of the door and, blocking my way, shouted "No! No!" I said that Mother had sent for me, but they would not relent. Finally Mother or one of the girls made it clear to them and they stepped back, but not very far.

I bowed at Mother's feet and then She asked in English, "Husband?"

Quickly I went in search of Satya but could not locate him. After running around all over the grounds like a mad woman, I checked the little pandal for the third time and there I found him talking with devotees. I told him that Mother had called for him. He rushed to where She had been patiently waiting all that time and bowed at Her feet. Mother then summoned Jean Claude. When he came to bow before Mother the two young men who had tried to block me told Jean Claude, "Don't touch!" Just as Mother stepped back into the room, She imitated the two men's English, saying, "Don't touch." Everyone laughed. We did not stay for the evening meal and just took tea in our room.

We had acquired a dependable rickshaw driver for our two trips to the new palace and back each day. As we came to the gate to meet him the following morning we saw a car just leaving with Mother in the back seat. Later we learned that She had come to see a temple on the old palace grounds.

After the morning program Mother went to Her room and we watched as Her bedding was brought outside and spread in the sun. I was delighted to see the white wool blanket which we had given to Her. We had talked about it earlier and I wondered if She was still using it or if it had been left in Bhimpura. We were very happy to see that She was using it.

Rajesh was arranging the things in the sun when I noticed a strand of Mother's hair on the white blanket. I asked Rajesh to please let me have that treasure and he kindly complied. Of course I still have that precious gift.

Mother did not come out again so we returned to the old palace. Satya assisted Madhavananda as he moved into the room next to ours and we all retired for the night.

When we came to see Mother the next morning Bhaskarananda told us that She would not be out until in the evening.

From Morvi Mother would go to Bombay and then continue on to Poona for a few days. We had permission to follow Her there. The maharani's brother, Mr. Jhala, offered to arrange for our plane tickets from Rajkot to Bombay and a car to drive us to Rajkot at a fair price. We were most grateful as those bookings were hard to

accomplish even if you knew how. Madhavananda would be traveling with us when we left Morvi on December fifteenth. We had only to wait for the tickets and pray that they actually manifest.

That evening in the big pandal a very large replica of Mount Govardan had been made and was covered with little cups of fruit and sweets. A picture of the little black Krishnaji was enshrined at the mountain's top. It was very nicely done. The crowd was so great that we only stood on the side and watched as Mother arrived and later as She left the pandal.

We visited with Rajesh, who by that time we were calling by his more familiar family pet name of "Raju." That day and on several other occasions we sat upon the tiered seats beside the tennis court as we visited with Raju. It was refreshing to meet such a young man whose greatest interest was God. Another rare quality was that he was unhesitatingly open and truthful. We always enjoyed the chance to talk with him.

Back in our room Satya made one of his wonderful vegetable soups. Jean Claude and Madhavananda had chai with us while Satya cooked, then we all enjoyed big bowlfuls of the delicious soup before retiring. Mr. Jhala had told Satya about a large celebration which the family was sponsoring the next day. There was to be a group wedding ceremony where many local couples would be united. Mr. Jhala asked Satya to take photographs of the event. I was not feeling well that day so Satya went alone to the new palace. He took about two rolls of pictures during the ceremony and later those color slides were sent to the family. Our airline tickets had arrived that day and were given to Satya. We were very relieved to know that we could meet Mother in Bombay and then continue with Her to Poona without any delay.

On December fourteenth we were privileged to witness a remarkable occurrence. By Mother's grace we "happened" to be in the front courtyard at noon when Her car arrived at the old palace. She was accompanied by several ashramites, some family members, and a brahmin priest.

(The following details were told to us during the event by Triguna Sen. We were most grateful to him, as otherwise we would have missed the wonderful story behind what we witnessed.)

In a secluded area off the central courtyard there was a small family temple with a little stone Devi enshrined within it. A woman came daily and offered flowers and incense to the Devi. That was all that was done. Every day it would be noticed that the Devi's sari was wet, but no one could find the cause of it. When Mother came to the temple a few days before, She told the reason for that mysterious occurrence. She revealed that the little Devi was crying because no one ever came there and Her tears were making Her sari wet. Mother said that a Shiva Linga should be installed and a havan performed. She said that a brahmin priest should then do regular worship.

All of Mother's preliminary instructions were followed as we watched.

Satya took movies during part of the ceremony which required two and a half hours to complete.

The little Devi could be seen from outside the temple where we stood. I have often thought about that little stone Devi who cried, and of the Only One who could perceive Her tears.

We went to the new palace that evening, and after the Srimat Bhagavat Mother was asked to come to the little pandal for a while. She said that She would if the people went there and sat. Swami Tanmayanandaji led kirtan as we all waited to see Mother. Soon She came and sat for a few minutes. We all had the opportunity to pronam before She went back to Her room.

Raju spoke with us for a short time, then we walked to the dining area for our evening meal. Afterward we got our last ride to the old palace in the funny old bus. I packed most of our things as our car was scheduled to come for us the next morning

at 10:00a.m.

## Bombay

After having breakfast we got our things together and bade goodbye to the kind staff of the old palace. Along with Madhavananda, Jean Claude had decided to join us. We were all four to stay at the maharani's house in Poona at her gracious invitation. The car arrived at 10:30a.m. and all of the luggage was loaded. Satya spoke to the driver, reconfirming the fare established by Mr. Jhala. The driver said no, that he wanted more than double that amount.

Satya told him to drive to the new palace. Mr. Jhala was there when we arrived and still the driver refused to come down to the correct rate. Mr. Jhala was very displeased with him, had our things removed from his car, and dismissed that driver. Our luggage was placed in a family station wagon and we were driven to several locations before finding an honest man willing to drive for the proper fare. The luggage was moved into his car and the four of us settled in for the one-and-a-half-hour trip to Rajkot.

In Rajkot we had lunch then caught the 3:30p.m. flight to Bombay. On Juhu Beach we got a nice hotel room with a pleasing view of the Arabian Sea where palm trees grew along the white sandy beach. It was December fifteenth, but the heat and humidity were very oppressive to us. We were most appreciative of our air-conditioned room and slept soundly that night.

Darshan was scheduled for the following evening after Mother's arrival at the home of B. K. Shah. We enjoyed a late midday meal then took a taxi to the B. K. Shah residence. In the rear of that beautiful home a platform had been erected on the lawn. Mother was seated there and everyone could easily see Her. I got to stand quite near Mother for a long time. It was a very relaxed and comfortable setting. Following the darshan we pronamed and Mother went into a little cottage situated at the edge of the lawn. Flowers and plants gracefully lined the path to the entrance. That cottage had been constructed by the Shah family for Mother's use when She was in Bombay.

We visited with some people there for a while then went to our hotel and got to bed by 1:00a.m. It had been a lovely day and we would have one more evening with Mother in Bombay before going to Poona.

The next day was spent visiting with friends and devotees. Then at the allotted time we eagerly went to see Mother. The mood was light and once again my heart was appeased by Her presence. Satya and I stood by a lovely old tree near where Mother sat. She looked absolutely beautiful. We were relieved to find Her appearing to be in better health. She sat with us for about one-and-a-half hours as everyone had the opportunity to pronam. That singular joy which Mother radiates was poured out in abundance. How could any of us willingly leave? Only when She retired to Her little cottage did we slowly move away from that peaceful garden.

Mother was going by car to Poona the next day and we made arrangements to hire a taxi for that trip. According to a hint which we had received, Mother would most likely return to Bhimpura after going to Poona. We prayed to be with Mother wherever She might go, but Bhimpura was such a special place that we could not resist hoping to follow Her there. Based on that cue we went to the hotel travel agent and put in a request for two seats on Indian Airlines to Baroda for Sunday, December twenty-fourth or, as second choice, Saturday, December twenty-third.

## Poona

Our taxi driver was a very nice man who spoke English, did not smoke, and directed our attention to many beautiful spots along the way. The halfway point was a rest stop next to a clear mountain stream where local residents washed their clothes and children played. The water glistened in the sun as it splashed over rocks of all sizes along the river's winding path. Cars and trucks were parked along both sides of the road cooling their motors.

Before leaving Bombay we had purchased some fruit. It made a perfect light meal as we traveled. We each drank a cola and enjoyed watching the scene. From that point we climbed higher and higher up the mountain road leading to Poona. On one occasion our driver pulled off the road so that we could photograph the Rajmachi Waterfalls near Khandala Village.

By 4:30p.m. we arrived at Morvi House, the maharani's lovely house in Poona. We were given an upper room with adjacent deck overlooking the well kept gardens and lawn. Poona is a hill station and resort area due to its marvelous climate. The clean cool air was invigorating. This was our first visit to Poona and we were delighted to be there. Madhavananda and Jean Claude, who had made the trip by train, were there ahead of us. After a quick bath we four hired rickshaws to take us to Mother's ashram. Morvi House was some distance from the ashram but the ride was very pleasant.

When we arrived we found the ashram to be very beautiful, so clean and nicely laid out. Chitra was standing near the front of the building and she looked wonderful. I was most happy to see her again after two years. She sent us into the satsang hall to see Mother and said that we could talk after darshan.

Mother was reclining with Her head near where Didi Gurupriya was sitting. Chitra sat by Mother's feet. The feeling was like the days when first we came to Mother, very high and intoxicating. When Mother stood, we all pronounced and watched as She left the building. Near where Mother had been sitting was the shrine of a most beautiful Sri Krishnaji. I had seen photographs of that murti and always wished to see Him "in person." We pronounced, then stood gazing at Him for some time.

Outside, Nanduben, Raju's aunt who was in charge of that ashram, called us to take chai. As we sat in the lovely courtyard enjoying the tea Chitra chatted with us for a few minutes. She told us to come in the morning at 9:00a.m. when she would have time to visit with us.

That night Satya got no sleep due to an upset stomach so he did not feel like going out the next morning. I gave him medication before leaving. I walked down the driveway to the gate of Morvi House wondering how I would find a rickshaw in that residential area. When I reached the gate a rickshaw suddenly appeared and I was quickly on my way.

At the ashram I was able to have a nice visit with Chitra. She had gifts for our Gopal, for us, and some things to be taken for others in America. I told her about a few letters which I wished her to read before Mother, then note Mother's replies for devotees in California. She said that she would do that in Bhimpura. I also requested a pair of Mother's chapals for our friend Chaitanya.

Chitra had to go and take her breakfast so I walked to the road, got a rickshaw, and returned to Morvi House. Satya was feeling much better and we had tea and toast together. After a little more rest he felt able to go for darshan.

When we arrived at the ashram Chitra was outside and we spoke with her for a few minutes. She said that she had mentioned to Bhaskaranandaji our wish to follow Mother to Bhimpura. He said that it was not yet decided and that he would ask Mother. So she said that we should ask him about Mother's reply. Shortly after that we saw him and went to ask what Mother had said. Before we could say anything he answered our question. He told us that in Bombay Mother had said that no one could

go, then in Poona he had asked Her again. Because we would be leaving the first week of January Mother said that we could come. That was a great relief, for otherwise we would have lost our last two weeks with Her. We saw Chitra a few minutes later and told her our good news. She was smiling.

Didi Gurupriya had been quite ill and was resting in a room of the building next to Mother's house. Mother came out of Her house and we all followed as She walked down the path and across the patio to Didi's room. We waited at a little distance until Mother came out and again we followed Her as She walked to the satsang hall.

There were more people in the hall that evening than had been there the night before. Everyone was going up to pronam before Mother and it was not possible to see Her while seated on the floor. We moved outside on the porch and stood at the tall open windows facing toward Mother. We could look in and see Her easily. Actually we were only about two feet further back than we had been when seated inside, and the cool air felt good. Mother looked radiant and appeared to be feeling better. She sat with us for over an hour then threw prasada to the devotees as She used to do in years past. Everyone was laughing and happy. After that playful moment Mother went into the Krishna Mandir where puja was done. We all received the blessing of the flame, then one lady placed the depak (flame) in Satya's hand and he passed it among the others who were standing outside. When Mother retired to Her room we left the ashram and went to eat before returning to Morvi House.

Chitra had asked us to come at 10:00a.m. the next day to take pictures of some of the girls. It was so nice just to be at that ashram and everyone seemed to have the same feeling about it. I took photos of several girls, then Mother came out and went to the long porch of an ashram building where a twenty-four hour reading of the Ramayana was being done.

Mother was issuing some unusual instructions and we watched as She rearranged the seating of everyone there. First She had one rug that was in front of Her asana folded lengthwise. Then She called for Satya, Melita, and me to come and sit in a line upon that rug, in front of the steps. She pointed for me to sit on the corner. Two other men also sat on the rug. Mother made the ladies there sit upon the bare floor by Her left side. People doing pronam and arati had to line up on the steps. They could not go in front as She had placed us where we blocked their way. Mother motioned for us to scoot forward a little. I got up to move as She had indicated and Satya did too. Mother said, in English, "Sit down." She said it so sweetly and everyone laughed.

Mother was so incredibly beautiful that morning as She sat with us. We were blessed with Her presence for a long darshan and received several special looks from those wonderful eyes. Even when She was looking directly at me I always found it difficult to believe that She was actually *looking at me*. Perhaps it is because I am completely transparent to Her. Mother stood smiling at all of us and we pronamed. Then She left the porch and went to Her house.

One of the men who had also been seated on the rug took us aside and related the story behind Mother's play with the seating arrangement. His name was Mr. Cama. He said that some time back when Mother had come to Poona for a Bhagavat Saptam the devotees made him sit outside because he was a Parsi. Each day the weather got colder, then one day he did not come. Mother asked why and someone sent word for him to come. Mother asked him why he had not been there that day. He explained to Mother that he was not Hindu and the people did not want him to come inside. He said he did not mind that but it had just gotten too cold outside.

Mother asked the people why they treated him that way when he had been the secretary of that ashram for twenty years. Then She made a special seat for him at Her feet and told the others to sit back. Mother said that from that time on, in the

Poona ashram, there would be a special seat for him and any others. How fortunate we were to share the blessing of Mother's gracious concern for Camaji. Chitra brought prasad for us, and Sri Krishnaji's pujari also gave us prasad from that sweet Lord.

Another delightful surprise awaited us. We were invited to take our meal at the ashram where a sumptuous bhandar had been prepared. We sat on the patio and Raju kept us company as we ate. Then we went by rickshaw to our quarters and prepared for evening darshan.

When we returned to the ashram Chitra was busy and unable to talk with us before darshan. Bhaskaranandaji gave us the official news that Mother had granted permission for us to go with Her to Bhimpura. Melita was also given that privilege. We were very relieved and thanked Bhaskaranandaji for putting forth our earnest plea to Mother.

News had reached the ashram that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had been arrested. Riots had sprung up all over India. Two buses were burned and an airplane from Calcutta had been hi-jacked. Mother's departure from Poona was set for December twenty-first but She was being requested to wait one more day due to the unrest.

Mr. Cama told another story to us in connection with his relationship with Mother. At some past time, when he and his wife were at one of Mother's ashrams, some of the devotees would not let him come in when food was being served. Dr. Triguna Sen came and told him that those in charge of the meals requested him and his wife to take their food in their tent. Mr. Cama said that was no problem, and it was being done that way. Mother saw it and asked them why they were eating in their tent. They explained what had happened and Mother told them to come to Her kitchen. They were fed from Mother's plate as those same devotees stood in the door watching. When Mr. and Mrs. Cama were full and left Mother's kitchen, the devotees who had been watching rushed in and started eating what was left of Mother's prasad.

Dr. Sen laughed and said to Camaji, "See how Mother's lila is? First they did not want to eat in the same room with you and now they are eating your leftovers." Oh how She plays with all of us! None can escape Her mystical game that may just as easily cast us on one side as the other. Nothing in life has captivated me so completely nor caused me more joy as even in deep despair I hear Her laughter, beneath the muffling veil, echoing, "I can play with you any way that I like!"

We stood at the long windows on the porch again that night, at peace to be with Mother in such an intimate setting. She was very animated and I taped some of the beautiful kirtan that surrounded Her. After the darshan She sat in the Krishna Mandir during the puja. When She came out Her eyes rested upon both of us as She stood for a brief moment. We pronamed, then She slowly left the hall. We walked to the street, hired a rickshaw, and returned to Morvi House for the night.

By 10:00a.m. we were again at the ashram. Chitra said that Mother would not leave until the next day, December twenty-second. We would have time to arrange for a taxi, get our laundry back from the dhobi (laundry man), and pack our things for the drive to Bombay the following morning.

The Desjardins family from France had arrived that day to see Mother.

Their daughter had recently married and the young couple were there for Mother's blessing. Denise (Mrs. Desjardins) had a most beautiful relationship with Mother and has written her story in French.

Mother came to the satsang hall and was joined there by an aged Baba whom we were told was over one hundred years old. Mother had a seat prepared for him near Her. Devotees went up to pronam in a very orderly fashion, and when the newlyweds bowed before Mother She placed a large garland over their two heads together. After almost everyone else had pronamed at Mother's feet, Satya and I

approached Her. As I was on my knees in front of Her She asked, "Accha?" I said, "Accha-tika Ma!" Then I bowed in pronam. As I raised my eyes to Her face, She was smiling and I softly said, "I love you." And She nodded at me.

When Mother left the hall, She walked to Didi Gurupriya's room and then to Her cottage. We watched until She went through the door into Her room.

After having lunch we prepared to return for our last evening in Poona. It was 5:30p.m. when we returned and found Mother seated in a chair just outside of Her door. Her little feet did not touch the ground and She gently swung them like a small child would do. A car pulled up to Her gate and She was escorted to it. After She took Her seat, the car drove out of the grounds and did not return with Her until an hour later.

We sat on the steps to wait for Her. I told Satya that it was strange but that I was suddenly hungry. At that moment Raju walked to where we sat and asked if we would like to have some khir. He took us to the rear of the building and gave each of us a leaf cup full of delicious khir. It was especially good.

Mother returned, and after going to see Didi went into the satsang hall. We had two wonderful hours with Her. She looked at us in a very loving way as we stood at the tall windows facing Her. She looked at us so often that a lady seated just inside the window turned toward me, smiled, and commented that Mother was always looking at me. The pujari did arati to Mother as She sat receiving pronams. The kirtan was beautiful and the environment was so high that we did not want to leave. We would have been pleased if Mother had stayed in Poona for the remaining fifteen days of our trip, but that was not Her kheyal.

I packed our things that evening and we requested tea for the morning at 7:00a.m. and ordered a taxi for 8:00a.m.

## **Bhimpura**

In the morning, the 7:00a.m. tea did not arrive until 8:00a.m., and the 8:00a.m. taxi didn't arrive until 8:30a.m. But all in all it was not important and we were soon on our way to Bombay. When we came to the midway rest stop, a guard waved us on. I saw people standing grouped together with a flag. Satya asked our driver why we had not stopped and he replied that they were on strike. There seemed to be some connection with the state of unrest following the Prime Minister's apprehension. At the next rest stop it was the same. I asked if it was a demonstration. He said yes, but only on "this side." In a short time we came to a third rest stop and it was safe to stop there. We had colas and Satya ate some popcorn. As we continued on it was hard to believe that these were the same places we had enjoyed on our drive up to Poona, and amazing to see how quickly a calm setting could become volatile. Nothing much was actually happening, but the air was churning all around us.

In Bombay we had to change taxis at the station. Some cars are licensed for out-of-town trips and others for city driving. Our city taxi took us to the travel agent who was trying to get airline tickets for us to Baroda. We found that she had nothing for us, and we were eleventh and twelfth on the waiting list. The problem was that almost everyone working in India had the Christmas holidays off and they took that opportunity to travel and visit family. All airline seats were booked. The agent said that she would call us at the hotel that evening to report on our status.

Mother was to stop at B. K. Shah's home that evening. Satya went there for a brief darshan and to ask Bhaskarananda when Mother would leave Bhimpura so we could arrange for our return airline tickets. I stayed at the hotel waiting for the travel agent's call. Satya returned to the hotel at 8:30p.m. with the news that Mother would be in Bhimpura until January twelfth or fifteenth-well past our departure date. He

said that Mother was leaving Bombay that night.

The travel agent did not call and there was nothing further that we could do that late.

Madhavananda and Jean Claude came to our room. We ordered some food and visited until past midnight. They planned to go on a pilgrimage to see Mother Krishnabai at the Papa Ramdas Ashram and to meet another saint of whom they had heard. They hoped to rejoin Mother in Poona. We would see Madhavananda again in California, but that was the last time that we saw our friend Jean Claude.

When we called the travel agent the next day she had no news and asked us to call back at 2:00p.m. It was December twenty-third and every delay made our chances even more remote. Instead of calling we went to her office, then ended up going to the Indian Airlines office with our agent. It was a last desperate attempt to get tickets, though we actually knew it was for naught.

The place was a complete madhouse and reminded me of pictures I had seen of the New York Stock Exchange. I felt sorry for the young lady who had tried everything she could to help us. She was able to get our return tickets for January seventh with no problem. So we collected our refund from her, got a taxi, and started back to the hotel. We pondered the idea of hiring a car to Baroda but that was a long trip and we did not know how to find a trustworthy driver. At wit's end, I suggested that we consult the only devotee we knew of in Bombay, B. K. Shah. The taxi took us to his door.

We had been to his house before but had never met him. He had been quite ill and was actually recovering from a heart attack. If we had known that, we would not have considered taking our problem to him. When he learned that we were there, he came downstairs to speak with us. It was 6:00p.m. and he said that we should go by train. There were two trains that night going to Baroda: the Dehradun Express at 10:00p.m. and the Baroda Express at 10:30p.m. Of course he was not able to accompany us to the train station, but called his nephew to see that we got on one of those trains. Then that very kind gentleman sent us in his car to collect our luggage from the hotel and return with it back to his home. Nowhere but in India have I ever found such gracious hospitality. We will never forget his genuine concern for us.

Rahoul, Mr. Shah's nephew, met us at his uncle's house and we were soon on our way. We were delighted to have his company and the conversation was about Mother, God, and India as the car drove us to the train station that night. There we purchased two tickets then tried to upgrade them to first class but it was not possible. The station was full of people trying to get seats on the train. After making every effort that he could, Rahoul finally had to tell us that our only chance would be second-class and that we might have to sit up all night. We assured him that we just wanted to get to Mother and sitting up all night was not a problem.

He hired two porters who asked for a cloth belonging to us. We could not imagine why they wanted it, but gave them a little green towel which Satya had. The porters then went up the track and jumped on the train before it came into the station. They found two places on one of the wooden bench seats in a second-class car. They laid Satya's green towel on the bench to hold the seats and guarded them for us.

When the train came into the station, Satya went into the car to hold our seats. I stood with Rahoul beside the luggage until the porters put it all inside. Then with great difficulty I managed to push through the crowd and found my way to our seats beside a window. Rahoul came to our window and we thanked him profusely for all of his help and sent our deepest pronams and gratitude to his kind uncle. Without the efforts of those devotees of Mother we could never have succeeded in getting on that train.

People were packed into every open space of that coach. A young man who had the bunk above our heads offered to let us put one of our bags in his bunk. We

crammed as much as we could under our seats and put a duffel bag beneath our feet. The bench seat was very hard so we put a small thin air pad down and sat on that. People were sitting and lying on the floor. One baby slept on some baggage at her father's feet. There was a little platform about a foot square that folded down from the wall like a tiny shelf. It was near the ceiling and opposite where we sat. A small man was actually perched upon that for the whole trip. The wonderful thing was that everyone there was happy, laughing at our shared condition and trying to be helpful to each other in any way they could.

We had our window open and at one station along the way some people were trying to get an old man on the train by picking him up and putting him through our window feet first. Everyone inside was laughing and saying, "No, no - there is no place!" But they kept pushing him in. He was on top of the people sitting across from us when Satya and another man picked him up and put him back out the way he came in. Everyone was still laughing as we quickly closed our windows. We were so happy to be going to Mother and knew that we would never forget the adventure and magic of that train trip.

At 6:00a.m. we arrived in Baroda, went to the hotel and got a little rest, did some shopping, and hired a car for the next morning to take us to Bhimpura.

It was December twenty-fifth when we returned to beautiful Bhimpura and found that the Mahantji was holding our former room for us at Ganganath Temple. We felt very much at home. The Desjardin party and Melita had rooms in the Mahant's house. We all took our meals together in that house. The mid-day meal was being served so we ate and then bathed before going to the ashram. With joyful hearts we walked along the narrow road leading to Mother. Just three weeks before, when we left Bhimpura, we thought it was most likely the last time we would walk along that road. I smiled, thinking of all that had happened and of how She plays with us.

When we reached the ashram it looked so peaceful. Hardly anyone was there except a few village people working on the grounds. Panuda greeted us and we sat with him beneath the great banyan tree. Chitra came out to gather the laundry from a small clothesline. Swami Paramanandaji stepped out from his room. He smiled as we pronounced his name. Melita arrived from Ganganath Temple and we talked briefly with her. A village man sat on the steps of the satsang hall with garlands for sale. We were his only likely customers, and he gave two garlands to us.

Soon we were allowed to come up the stairs and to the window of Mother's room. She sat upon Her bed near the window just as She had when last we were there. Satya and I offered our garlands to Mother as we pronounced His name. Udasji placed them together in a heart shape by where Mother sat. Mother touched them, then Udasji gave them to us. We moved to the side window where Mother and I had our usual intimate conversation. She asked, "Accha?" and I replied in my very best Hindi, "Tika, Ma." The breadth of our exchange was small in size, but the depth, to me, was infinite. Any personal attention from Her is a priceless treasure. I looked upon Her sweet face, soaking up the precious moments which She so lovingly gave to us.

Downstairs we talked with Bhaskarananda for a brief time then walked back to Ganganath Temple and had our evening meal before retiring.

Darshan was set for around 5:30p.m. We were so thankful to see Mother at all that we were careful not to interfere with the program.

On our second evening we sat before Mother's large front window for quite some time. Then everyone else who was there left the room. We stood up to leave and had stepped to Mother's door to pronounce His name. She kept holding us with Her eyes and we did not want to go. It was as though there was no creation outside of those eyes and no being outside of that embrace. Then we were asked to go downstairs.

We waited by the satsang hall to see Chitra. She was always busy and it was difficult to catch a minute with her. When she came to speak with us, she had a

beautiful cotton chuddar for me. She said that she would have Mother's chapals for Chaitanya and some other things after darshan the next day. Chitra was scheduled to leave Bhimpura on January first and I was very sad that she would be going so soon.

Following dinner at Ganganath Temple that night, Satya got a few vegetables from Datubai, the cook, so that he could make soup the next day.

After our usual breakfast, Satya made soup as I washed our clothes. We had the delicious soup for lunch, bathed, and leisurely walked toward the ashram. In the distance over the gently rolling countryside we saw small, brightly colored kites soaring and dipping against the clear blue sky. We could not see the children who held the kite strings, but I remembered reading Paramhansa Yoganandaji's account of his childhood adventures with his kite. I envisioned his small hand clutching the line as he gleefully guided the playful kite to do his bidding.

It was 4:30p.m. when we arrived at the ashram to meet Chitra. She had brought Mother's chapals for Chaitanya and a pair of Mother's little white socks as well. Chitra took the letters which I had asked her to read to Mother. She would return them to me later along with Mother's replies. Even though she had many duties to perform, Chitra always took a few minutes to talk with us.

Darshan that day was on the roof. Mother's bed had been placed outside near the corner. We sat on grass mats before Her. She wore dark glasses and held a towel in front of Her mouth. After darshan there was a private then Chitra called for us to come back upstairs. I had brought some cymbals and silk scarves that Mother blessed for me. I tried to ask a couple of questions but was unable to communicate my thoughts and was sorry that I had tried, for what more could I possibly have to ask? On the walk back to our room I became aware of being very tired.

The next evening at 5:00p.m. other people were upstairs having a private.

Mother was in Her room and we could see Her from where we stood near the kitchen. Satya took some movies and Mother kept looking out at us. Soon Chitra called for us to come upstairs. Satya and I stood by Mother's door. She had been in a very serious mood for the last two days, but still She looked at us lovingly. We sat down by Her door and I could feel a certain remoteness.

After darshan we talked with Chitra for a while. She told us that everyone was feeling Mother's serious mood. Even Udas complained because Mother was not calling her by name. We could not deny that Mother seemed to be making less and less of an outward play. It was not something which we liked to think about. As we walked to our room that night, a serious mood enveloped us, also.

Panuda was sitting beneath the banyan tree when we arrived at the ashram the following evening. We sat with him and talked for some time.

Quite a few people found out where Mother was and came there even though Mother had requested that no one do so. She was given no chance to rest because they were there all that day. When we went upstairs Mother was sitting in Her room. About seven people were sitting on the floor at Her feet. Someone did arati and sang to Mother. She sat with Her beautiful little hands folded. Once Her tiny toes poked out from under Her cloth. The bottom of Her foot and toes looked like a baby's foot - so fresh and new looking, not like they had been on this earth for eighty-two years. I reflected sadly that this would be the first trip when I had not touched those holy feet. Not only did that prove to be true, but neither did we receive the kripa of Her touch during those days.

Earlier Chitra had offered prasad to everyone there. I had wished for an orange but was given a banana. Later as we stood at the side window, Mother sent Udas into another room to get a basket of oranges. She blessed them and had them given out with special instructions that we were to receive oranges. Udas even came to where we were to see that we got them. Mother knows every thought that I have and takes notice of even the trivial ones.

Mother looked at us and I gazed at Her beautiful face in the dim evening light.

Fragrant incense filled the air and the devotees sang beautiful bhajans. I so wished that moment would never end. But a moment was all that it was and it will never return.

We decided to walk into Chandod the next day. There were two ways to get there: the road upon which we first arrived by car, or a walk along the sand by the river. We chose the river. It was a little longer walk, but definitely the more attractive. We saw women doing their laundry upon the rocks at the water's edge, some little goats scampering up the embankment, and handsome monkeys of light color whose faces looked as if they wore small dark masks. It was not a long distance but the noon heat left me exhausted.

We purchased some soap, biscuits, and fruit but there were no oranges. Chandod was a charming village with a beautiful wide ghat. Satya took movies of the timeless scene. It could have been two thousand years in the past as we watched women with shiny brass pots walk down to the water's edge, fill their pots with the sacred waters then climb the steps balancing the full pots upon their heads. How graceful they looked, almost regal as they walked with perfect posture.

There were sailboats for hire at the ghat and we engaged one to carry us down to Ganganath Temple. A gentle breeze filled the sail for our short voyage. At the bottom of the Ganganath Temple ghat we saw Ram Sevak, an ashram servant, washing Mother's clothes. After greeting him, we climbed the approximately one hundred and fifty-three steps of the ghat. Then I was truly ready for a short rest.

A German girl named Heidi had arrived the day before, and when we got to the ashram she was having a private with Mother. When it was finished we went to stand at Mother's window. It was a great blessing to actually look at Her while addressing Her in prayer. How natural it felt to do so - and how extraordinary it really was. The electricity went off for a few minutes and She sat illuminated by the pale moonlight until the lights came on once more. After darshan we all pronamed and started to go downstairs. Then I heard someone call my name. Mother was calling for me. I quickly came back to Her door and She tossed a dhoti to me. Chitra had told Her that I wanted Her dhoti for my puja. I caught the cloth and touched it to my head. Pronaming, I bowed to Mother with joy at receiving that treasure.

Downstairs we saw Chitra briefly. I held Mother's dhoti close as I thanked Chitra and said good night. As we were leaving we were delighted to see Raju, who had received permission to rejoin Mother and had just arrived. We had missed him and were very glad to see him again.

During the next day we were able to visit with several friends and devotees.

Most of the day was spent on the ashram grounds. In the evening we stood at Mother's door as She blessed us with several loving looks and smiles. When darshan was over we all pronamed at Her door, then Satya and I stood back a little and just looked at Mother as the others pronamed. Everyone else then went downstairs and a lady who was attending Mother asked if we were finished. I said, "Yes, if one can ever be said to have finished." She smiled and walked away, leaving us there. We expected to be asked to leave at any moment, but for some reason no one did. Mother looked so sweet, and She did not seem to mind our being there. Udas and a brahmachari brought two Shiva Lingas in for Mother to see. She ran Her fingers over them as She made some comments.

Chitra came into the room and Mother indicated that something was wrong with the index finger on Her right hand. After Chitra got a flashlight she and Udas looked at Mother's finger. Then Udas got another flashlight and turned off the overhead light. Mother, Udas, and Chitra all three looked at that little finger by the light of the two flashlights. I do not know if they found the problem or not. Udas came to the door and pronamed to us. We pronamed to Udas and then to Mother. It was 7:10 p.m. when we went downstairs. It had been heartwarming to share in those few intimate minutes with Mother.

We did not take our evening meal and went to bed early.

The next day was January first, 1979, New Years Day and Chitra's last day in Bhimpura. She was in the kitchen when we came to the ashram at 9:00a.m. After taking lots of photos of Chitra and others there we were permitted to go upstairs to Mother. She gave Satya a special Tulsi mala and allowed him to take some movies. Her lip was swollen and She held Her cloth in front of Her mouth. A Shiva Linga sat beside Her and She held a small golden Gopal as I took Her picture. Then She gave a dhoti to us for Bhakti.

Chitra took us downstairs and gave us something to eat. She had prepared fried flat rice with peanuts, some sweets, and pappam (very thin bread).

Once again we went upstairs to pronam, and gave Mother two roses. She had come outside for a private with the newlyweds. Satya took some more movies and we came back downstairs. A family had arrived from Ahmedabad and I took Polaroid photos of them and a few others who were there including Kanti, a little orphan boy from the village. That child was quite unusual and had a very spiritual quality.

It was midday and very hot as we walked to Ganganath Temple for our meal.

After a short rest and a bath we returned to the ashram at 5:00p.m. Chitra was taking laundry off of the line, then took it upstairs. Swami Virajanandaji was seated beneath the banyan tree. He looked so nice there that I asked to take his picture. All of the trees of a Panchavati were growing around the ashram. I asked the Swamiji if he would let me take leaves from each of them and help me write their names correctly. Where I was living I could not hope to grow those five trees, but I could put the leaves in a frame surrounding pictures of Mother, and in that fashion have my Panchavati. He agreed to help me and it was done. That beautiful Panchavati is still with me.

When we were allowed to go upstairs I stood at the front window. Mother looked at me as I inwardly spoke to Her. Then She looked over at Satya who was standing by the side window. Chitra came into Mother's room and sat on the floor near Mother. I could not see her from where I was, so I moved to the side window next to Satya. From there I could see Mother and Chitra.

Chitra was so beautiful. I will always remember Her sweet face and lovely eyes as she sat gazing at Mother. She looked exactly like her Krishnaji. Mother looked tenderly at Chitra for a very long time. My eyes filled with tears at the thought that I might never see either of them again. As darshan was ended we each pronamed at Mother's door then slowly left the roof.

Chitra came down just behind us. We said our goodbyes at the bottom of the steps. I could not help crying. Chitra held my hand, then patting my head and shoulder said, "God knows when we shall meet again". She asked me to write to her before I left India, then she went back up to Mother.

We were given khir which Mother had told the girls to hold back for us. Panuda came to tell us goodbye. We did not know that he was leaving and told him how much we had enjoyed the chance to visit with him.

It was about 7:30p.m. and all the other westerners left the ashram. We waited to see Chitra one last time before she left. When she came downstairs she went to say goodbye to Swami Paramanandaji then got into the waiting car. As the car slowly drove out of the ashram I could see her face through the rear window. Her eyes were turned up toward Mother's room, and I saw her pronam as she was carried off into the night.

Chitra had always been very special to me, much more than a friend. Many of my most intimate moments with Mother were as Chitra sat at my side. I could not help crying that night, for the probability was that I would never see my dear Chitra again.

Raju and another boy walked part of the way to Ganganath with us. We did not

feel like eating that night.

The next day was filled with chores and cleaning. About 5:00p.m., when starting for the ashram, we saw Denise and her husband putting their luggage in a taxi. They were going to see Mother and then would be leaving Bhimpura.

At the ashram we talked with Swami Virajananda for a while. He told us about the Saraswati temple where Sri Aurobindo used to meditate. The temple was near where we were staying. We decided to visit that place and take some pictures.

When we went upstairs for darshan only a few people were there and I stood at Mother's front window. Her wonderful eyes embraced me completely. Never in this life have I known such a caress as Hers. Sublime and pure, beyond this realm and surely beyond my ability to express it. Those times passed so quickly - too quickly for me.

After breakfast the following morning we walked a short distance beyond Ganganath Temple to where the Saraswati temple stood. The room in which Sri Aurobindo sat for meditation was like a cellar and could be entered only by crawling through a little tunnel and then dropping down into utter darkness. It was awe-inspiring to think of his great love for God and the intense yearning necessary to pursue such tapasya. The mandir was locked but we had a grand view of the river and surrounding countryside from the upper portion of the temple.

We visited the beautiful gardens of Ganganath Temple also. That was the first time I had ever seen how bananas grow from under each petal of a flower on the tree.

In the evening when we went upstairs to Mother, the little boy Kanti came with us for darshan. He stood at Mother's window with his little hands held in pronam and his eyes locked onto Mother's face for the whole hour we were there. Even the tempting sweets and fruit prasad which he received did not distract him from Her. It was wonderful to meet such a child. Many times I have wondered about him and how he grew up. I feel sure that his meeting with Mother was something he would never forget.

The next evening Kanti joined us again. Satya took him to get a garland for Mother, then we went upstairs. He stood holding his garland with hands in pronam, gazing at Mother. Udas was very sweet to him. She asked him some questions, then took his garland, touched it to Mother's hands, and put it over his head. He was so pleased. Udas gave him prasad sweets and Raju did also. His little hands were full but still in pronam. Then Mother told Raju to place another garland over his head. He stood very still for the whole time.

Later Mother had oranges given to each of us. We had been craving oranges and were delighted when She pointed to us, telling someone to be sure that we received them. Everyone else went downstairs except Satya and me. Raju was inside Mother's room and Her front window was closed.

Raju interpreted as Mother asked if we were leaving tomorrow. We told Her no, that we were leaving the next day. She asked what time we would go and we told Her that our taxi was ordered for 10:00a.m. Then She asked when a French couple who were there were leaving. I said, "Tomorrow." Raju asked, "What time?" They were standing at the bottom of the steps below where I stood, so I called down to them and asked what time they were leaving. They said at 6:00p.m., and as I was repeating that, Raju told me that Mother said, "I did not say that you should ask." That was a good lesson. Both Raju and I learned that we should never anticipate Mother. But at the same time I was thrilled that She would scold me. It was another indication of my relationship to Her.

When darshan was ended, we went to Mother's door and pronamed. We talked with Raju for a short time then walked to the Ganganath Temple.

In the morning I began the process of repacking luggage and sorting out things which we would leave behind. I did the laundry for the last time in Bhimpura. Then

we got ready and went to the ashram. Dasu had arrived and we were happy to see him again before we had to leave.

Satya sat with Bhaskaranandaji under the banyan tree. When I joined them, I bent down and touched Bhaskarananda's shoes which were on the ground in front of him. He laughingly said, "You know my rule." I replied, "But that rule is for touching your feet, and I only touched your shoes." He was in a warm mood and we felt very fortunate to have his counsel on our sadhana.

Some of what was said he told us not to repeat but his other comments I feel it must be all right to share.

When meditating, he said to watch the mind's thinking and try to see or be aware of that small space or void between thoughts, then try to expand that. He spoke about the atom and its parts as it is divided. The part which can no longer be divided is "That." He told us that the part and the whole are the same. "If you can catch hold of the part, you have the whole."

About the ego, he said that as the "I" identity goes, the outer activities go.

Even in spiritual practices to think "I do these things" is the ego or separation.

Then he told us that there are many sounds one hears from physical to spiritual, and that we are unaware of most of the experiences which we have, as we are so distracted.

He asked about our daily routine, how we spend our time, and what we ate. We felt very blessed to have that saintly soul advise us. He moved around never calling attention to himself. Always near Mother, but staying in the background. Visible, but for the most part unseen.

The young French couple had been upstairs saying goodbye to Mother. They came down with Mother's gifts in their hands and we spoke with them briefly before they left.

Soon we went up to see Mother and stood by Her side window. No one was there to interpret as Mother turned toward me and said, "Murriel...," and then something which I did not understand. I looked puzzled and Mother repeated what She had said in a more firm tone. Petrified, I took a guess that She was asking if Murriel had left and I said, "Murriel jaiea" (Murriel has gone). Mother nodded and said, "Tika." Thank goodness my guess seemed to have been correct.

Mother was in a light mood. Talking with some ladies who had come, She laughed and was very animated. Once She gave us a long sweet look and a loving smile. Some devotees arrived with a large basket of oranges and bananas for Mother. She told Raju to distribute the prasada and motioned toward us. When Raju brought oranges for us, I asked if we might have one for Gopal who had not received fruit for two or three days. Raju asked Mother and She told Shanta to bring an orange to Her. Then Mother threw that orange to me Herself. When the lovely darshan ended, we pronounced at Mother's door then went downstairs.

Swami Paramanandaji was there and we pronounced to him. He asked when we would be leaving. We told him that our taxi was coming at 10:00a.m. He said that we should have our meal in the ashram at noon. It was always a blessing to have the concern of that great soul, and we told him we would come to the ashram as soon as our luggage was loaded into the car.

We talked with Raju for a few minutes, then took our last moonlit walk down the narrow road leading to the Ganganath Temple.

The evening meal was nice. Datubai cooked in the room where we ate. With only Melita, Heidi, Satya, and me there, the meal had an intimate feeling and we enjoyed the company.

At 9:00a.m., January sixth, our last day in Bhimpura, we went to the ashram. Raju was in the kitchen and Satya took some pictures around the grounds. When Raju came out and joined us we told him that there were things which we wished for Mother to bless. I wanted Mother to hold Gopal, but for no one else to touch him. It

was a problem as we were not allowed to go into Mother's room. Raju told Udas and she very sweetly went to tell Mother of our desire. Soon Raju called for us to come upstairs.

Mother was seated on the corner of Her bed as Udas gave Her something to drink. We pronamed at the door and waited. Mother told Raju to bring Her little stool. He placed it just outside Her door on the roof. Udas put Mother's asana on the stool then Mother came out and sat with us. We drew near and bowed at Her feet. She had a birthday present for Satya. She gave it to him one day early as we would be in Baroda when that day, January seventh, arrived.

Her gift was a graceful picture made of small peacock and other little feathers pasted in the shape of a heart. In the center of the heart, bright red seeds were pasted to form the Sanskrit word "MA." Below the heart was a beautiful poem about The Name. (Later I framed that special gift and hung it where we see it every day.)

I had made a new double frame for the picture of Lord Narayana standing within the OM. That was the picture which Mother had singled out on our first trip and told us to always carry when we travel. The other side of the frame held Mother's photograph. When I handed those framed pictures to Mother, Raju mentioned the story of the traveling Narayana to Mother. She said, "Accha ... Accha ... Accha." While holding the frame, She ran Her hand over the Lord's picture, bowed with folded hands to both pictures, then ran Her hand over Lord Narayana's picture again. That frame has grown old, but I would not dream of changing it.

Mother then blessed my mala and a locket which I wear. She allowed Satya to take movies as She held our little blue Gopal. When I placed Gopal in Her hands, She looked at him and said something to Udas. Mother held him to Her head, eyes, and then to Her heart. She told Swami Virajananda and Raju that he was "Sundar Gopal" (Beautiful Gopal). She said that several times and I knew that was then his name. He is truly Sundar Gopal.

After Mother placed Gopal in my hands, along with a small cloth which She had been holding, She gave Satya a little yellow towel. We had each laid a garland at Her feet and She sat with one foot touching each one. As we pronamed at Her feet, unbeknownst to each other we both silently said a special prayer to Mother, one which we had just recently learned. Mother put a garland over each of our heads with Her own hand and blessed us in that way. She gave us permission to come to Her once more just before leaving.

Dasu walked with us to the Ganganath Temple. Our taxi was there and we loaded all of our luggage. Some things were given away which we no longer needed. We said goodbye to our friend Melita, to Heidi, and those who had made us so comfortable and welcome at the Ganganath Temple.

It was almost noon when we returned to the ashram. Bhaskaranandaji had a few small things for devotees in America. We were pleased to take them for him. It is always a blessing to carry such things. He went over something he had told us the day before, then we sat beneath the great banyan tree one last time and were given our food there on leaf plates.

Actually it was more like a banquet than a meal. The dishes were fried squash, aloo (potato), panir (soft cheese), rice, dal, cabbage, cauliflower, puris (bread), and our favorite khir for dessert.

Swami Paramanandaji asked me to take his photo for a boy who had asked for it. He stood barefooted in front of his room as I took that picture as well as a second one for myself. Then we pronamed and touched his holy feet. A very rare blessing.

Bhaskaranandaji asked if we ever got holidays off together. He suggested that we should go off into the forest together on retreat. In my diary I wrote of that incident and commented that, "His words are powerful and we know there is a reason for his saying that to us." As I write this now, we are retired and have found a small place in the forest where we live.

Raju called for us and we went upstairs for the last time. Mother was seated in the back room. Swami Virajananda sat on the floor near Her, working on his book. We walked to Her window and my breath was taken away by Her beauty. Her hair fell loosely around Her shoulders and Her mood was exquisitely sweet.

She took an orange and threw it to Satya saying, "Gopal." Then She threw one to me and one to Satya for himself. Mother gave a bag of rock candy to us for offering to Gopal. Then She said that as the next day was Satya's birthday, we should offer Gopal His orange on that day and then divide that prasad between us. We said, "Accha," and though it was only in English, told Her of our love for Her and pronounced. Mother said for us to let Her know when we arrived safely.

Reluctantly we went down the stairs to where Bhaskaranandaji and Raju stood. With full hearts we bade them goodbye.

As our taxi drove out from the ashram we held onto the last glimpse of that room on the second floor where, as far as I was concerned, my life ended until I could return to Her again.

## Seventh Trip

(March 2, 1981-April 15, 1981)

### Vrindavan

From the very beginning of this seventh trip, our last to Mother, there was a different mood from any of our previous trips. A shadow of unreality seemed to stand between me and many of the events which unfolded during those days. Often I felt as though I were merely an observer, somehow removed.

When our plane arrived in Delhi we were told that all of our luggage, except what we carried, had been left in Frankfurt. Fortunately our kind friends in Delhi, Brij and Manju Vaish, helped us find a good tailor who made some clothing for us. They did everything they could to make our three-day delay in Delhi comfortable and productive. Their company was always a true delight.

On March fourth the airline office had received three pieces of our luggage and said that we could pick them up after 10:00a.m. The fourth piece, a duffel bag containing our bedding among other things, could not be located. At the airport we met a young man, Mr. Roy, who was in charge of the office. We explained to him that we could not wait any longer for our duffel bag but must go on to Vrindavan where we were to meet Anandamayi Ma. His face lit up when he heard Her name and he said that he had seen Her. He asked how we had learned of Mother. After telling him of my dream, he shared a lovely memory of his with us.

When he was younger, he used to visit a great saint. Sometimes he would stay all night and talk with the saint. One night as he went to spread his bedding on the floor, the saint stopped him and said, "Tonight you will sleep on the bare floor with no cover or bedding." It was in December and the night was quite cold but the young Mr. Roy, without hesitation, agreed to do as he was bade. The saint asked him, "How will you manage it?" The boy replied, "That is not my problem, you have told me to do it and I know that if you tell me to do something, that it is you who will make it possible for me to do it," and he lay down on the floor. He told us that it was like lying in a feather bed, warm and comfortable. He said that it still filled him with such a good feeling each time that he thought about that experience.

I had to smile at Mother's lila. There we were, in the middle of an irritating situation, when suddenly a door opened into reality and in that unlikely place we had satsang.

We were given our three bags and Mr. Roy told us that when our duffel bag arrived it would be brought to us in Vrindavan. He said that if at all possible he would bring it personally and have Mother's darshan. Unfortunately the duffel bag was never located and Mr. Roy did not come to Vrindavan.

It was March sixth before we got all the business taken care of in Delhi and went by taxi to Vrindavan. There we met Swami Dhirananda for the first time. He had been put in charge of Mother's Vrindavan ashram. From him we learned that Mother was expected to arrive from Bhimpura about 9:00a.m. the following morning.

Swami Dhirananda accompanied us to the Neem Karoli Baba Dharmasala.

We had stayed there on our last visit to Vrindavan in 1975 and hoped to do so again. The host there, Mr. Pujari, remembered us and our little Gopal. He made us most welcome and gave us a lovely clean suite of large rooms looking out onto the

beautiful rose garden and lavish bougainvillea surrounding the courtyard.

After putting our things in order and bathing, we returned to the ashram to see Swami Paramanandaji. It was wonderful to be in his presence again. After a brief visit with him we went to the marketplace in search of some kind of bedding. We were fortunate to find two sleeping mats which a merchant had left over from a special order and there were lightweight cotton chuddars to use as sheets. We bought bath towels and some grass mats for the floor. I found a pretty cloth for the table where Gopal would sit. That took care of our immediate needs and we returned to the dharmasala.

While on that first shopping expedition we had the good fortune to find a rickshaw driver named Bhagavandas who was a most exceptional young man. He was not only dependable, but completely honest. The dharmasala was quite a distance from the ashram, so we hired Bhagavandas for the whole month that we were in Vrindavan. He transported us twice each day, did shopping and ran errands. We never had to worry about any of those things. That was no small blessing!

The next morning, we were up by 6:00a.m., did a few chores, then arrived at the ashram shortly before 9:00a.m. As we walked up the wide road leading to the temple entrance, a car drove past us. We saw that it was Mother's car and hurried to greet Her at the temple steps. My heart was pierced when I saw how tiny and frail She looked. It took quite some time for Her to get out of the car and then She stood for a few seconds before starting up the stairs. She moved with apparent difficulty.

Inside the temple She stepped to each shrine and stood before it with folded hands as She greeted the beautiful deities there. We followed behind Her with mixed feelings. It was, of course, our greatest desire to be near Her, but I could not escape the great sadness of seeing Her look so fragile. After greeting the deities, Mother sat with us for a few minutes. We took the opportunity to pronam at Her feet, and when we did She asked how we were. I replied, "Tika, Ma," though I could not shake the melancholy mood which enveloped me.

Mother then stood, and we followed as She went out the door and down the temple steps. There She was seated in an invalid chair and carried to Her house in the rear of the compound.

We saw Bhaskaranandaji, Nirvananandaji, Biluji, Maitreyi, Panuda, and Swami Satchidanandaji. Bal Krishna Gupta, Manju's father, was also there. When he learned of our lost bag, he said that he would send some things for us to use while we were in Vrindavan.

Darshan was to be at 6:00p.m., so we went to our dharmasala for the afternoon. When we returned that evening we walked down the path toward Mother's house. She was staying in a downstairs room instead of on the roof as She had in the past. Mother came out of the door and stood on the small porch of the house. Everyone there stayed back a little ways, respectful and quiet.

When Mother spoke, Her voice wavered and I found it painful to see Her standing even for the short time She was there. After She went inside, we all sat on the patio where we had been standing and observed maun from 6:15p.m. to 6:30p.m.

Bal Krishna then took us to his house where we saw his beautiful temple and met Mrs. Gupta who was a lovely lady. They treated us to chai and some of their favorite foods. He arranged for us to get boiled milk from their house each day. Later he showed us around their large home. We saw childhood photos of their daughter Manju (our friend in Delhi) and Shailendra (Dimpie) their son, of whom we were so fond in California.

After a pleasant evening we returned to Neem Karoli Baba's Dharmasala and found Gadadhar waiting there for us with startling news. He told us that about 10:00p.m. Mother had suddenly left for Varanasi taking Bhaskarananda, Panuda, Dasu, and Udas with Her. She was not expected to return until the eleventh or twelfth - in four or five days.

I could hardly believe my ears. We had been in India for five days and had only that day seen Mother for the first time in over two years. Then She went away and it would be several days before She returned. I felt a strange emptiness inside and sensed the shadow of a loss which I could not see. I thought about how fragile Mother appeared and the strenuous trip She was making. Mother's lila could never be grasped by human evaluations.

Gadadhar said that he was going to Kankhal for a few days, but then changed his plans and stayed in Vrindavan.

Earlier that day Shuddhananda shared a story with us told to him by someone who had heard Mother tell it.

Mother said that She was walking, and a young girl was following Her. When Mother stopped and turned around, the girl also stopped. She smiled at Mother and laughed. When Mother would again start walking, the girl also walked, following Mother. Each time Mother stopped, the same thing would happen. Mother said that She did not know where She was going - then suddenly She knew that She was going back to where She had come from and the young girl was Her Shakti.

I did not ask his source for this story, but hearing it only reinforced my feeling of foreboding.

The next morning at the ashram we saw Nirvanananda and he told us about Mother's going away the night before. He said that She had the kheyala to do so while in Bhimpura but told only Panuda, who made the reservations.

We spent the day with friends then went to the market before returning to the dharmasala.

Mother's sudden departure left us stunned. There was no interest in doing anything. I mechanically performed my duties but had little energy.

After a good night's sleep, I was in a somewhat better mood. Satya made vegetable soup and in the afternoon we went to the ashram. Nirvanananda and another sadhu were just going out for a walk. Inside the satsang hall Biluji was putting decorations up for a Bhagavat Sapta which was to start on the twelfth.

We walked down the side path toward Mother's house, then across the patio and into the garden. There we found a nice seat beneath a large tree and sat for some time in that peaceful spot doing japa. It seemed that the seat to which we were drawn had been made for Mother's use and we were told that, in a very nice way, by Dr. Ghosh, who found us there. He spoke with us at length and said that he had been a dentist before coming into the ashram.

When we walked out of the garden we saw Swami Paramanandaji. He smiled so sweetly at us and we prostrated at his feet. As I touched his foot, he reached over and patted me on the shoulders then lovingly stroked and patted my head. I felt so blessed by his holy touch. It seemed that he could see into my heart and was consoling me. He spoke with us for a little while, then we left the ashram and went to our quarters.

That night I was blessed with Mother's darshan in a dream. How sweet is Her touch in any realm of consciousness. All else may change, but She is always the same.

Next to the dharmasala was the ashram of Neem Karoli Baba. He was a very remarkable saint and great devotee of Hanumanji. A most beautiful murti of Sri Hanumanji was enshrined in front of the ashram. He was life-size and elaborately adorned.

We had been invited to come to the ashram and meet the saintly Siddhi Ma.

She was Neem Karoli Baba's devotee, and after he had left his body ("Central Jail," as he called it), she became the head of his ashram.

When we arrived the Hanuman Chalisa (hymn in praise of Sri Hanumanji) was being recited before the beautiful white marble temple of "Maharajji," as Neem Karoli Baba was called by his devotees. The doors to the temple stood open and an

image of the saint could be seen in the shrine. On the eaves above the entrance were several small monkeys. It was said that monkeys could always be seen around that temple. A slightly raised platform of earth faced the temple. The surface had been purified with cow dung and a thatched roof shaded the whole platform.

Siddhi Ma's asana faced the temple, and the man who chanted the Hanuman Chalisa sat at the front with the devotees behind and around him. We were very glad to attend the Hanuman Chalisa and meet some of the Maharajji's devotees.

Afterward we were invited to enter Siddhi Ma's room, pronam, and sit with her for a brief time. She was very kind and made us feel most welcome.

The room used by Neem Karoli Baba faced onto the courtyard of the temple and we were permitted to enter that room also. There were many photographs of the saint upon the walls and his simple bed was covered by a dark plaid blanket of the type which he favored. Flowers were artistically arranged upon the blanket in a graceful pattern. After arati was done, we pronamed and left the room.

A strong wind arose very suddenly, accompanied by lightning and thunder, foretelling the shower which came just as we reached our door.

Mother was expected to return the next morning. I wondered how Her health would be after such a long trip with no rest. Actually, She had been traveling since leaving Bhimpura on March sixth.

It was not easy to close my eyes that night. At 5:30a.m. the alarm clock sounded and we prepared to go to the ashram. There we purchased garlands and sat on the short wall near Dasu's display of books and photographs, waiting for Mother.

When Her car arrived, we hurried to watch as She stepped out. We followed Her up the steps and into the temple where She greeted the deities in each shrine. Then She sat with us for a short time. We offered our garlands hoping to be received, as in the past, by Her look and sweet smile. She was engaged in short conversations with various ashramites who were getting things ready for the Bhagavat Sapta, and did not seem to notice that we were there.

She stood, walked to the front of the Chelia (Krishna) Mandir, stopped, and related a few details of Her four-day train trip. Mother had been to Calcutta as well as Varanasi. It was good to see Her so animated. How strange is Her lila She appeared stronger than before making that long journey.

Behind the Chelia Mandir was a room where Mother would stay for the next two days. When She went into that room, we left the ashram. Darshan was to be around 6:00p.m., so we went to the dharmasala until that time.

The Bhagavat Sapta which would commence the next day, March twelfth, was being performed for the benefit of our dear friend Binuda Niyogi. He had passed away November 23, 1979, in a most auspicious way, and as he had wished, in sacred Kashi (Varanasi). Up to that time we had not known for whom the Bhagavat Sapta was being conducted, and were glad that by chance we were there during those days.

Binuda's wife and son had arrived. We were glad to meet his son for the first time as he seemed to have much of his father's sweet nature. Anindita, Binuda's daughter, had come with her family. They stayed near us at Neem Karoli Baba's dharmasala. I have written about her and Binuda when we were together in 1975, also in Vrindavan. They had a very special bond and I could feel her sadness at his loss. We would always remember our special times with him. His love of Mother was always central to his conversations with us and we were blessed to have known him.

That evening we sat in the satsang hall observing maun from 6:15p.m. to 6:30p.m., then Mother came out and sat with us for about twenty minutes. She looked more like She had two years previously, as though Her health was better than when She arrived in Vrindavan five days ago.

After darshan we were delighted to receive a telegram which had come for us at the ashram. It was from the American Swami Nirmalananda, telling us that he and

one brahmachari would be arriving in Vrindavan on March fifteenth. We had spent many wonderful days together with Mother, but it had been a long time since last we had met, and I was very pleased to know that our reunion would take place where our hearts had always been together - at Her Holy feet.

While having breakfast the next morning, I spilled something on my sari and had to change. That was an unfortunate delay, as when we got to the ashram at 7:20a.m. Mother was already sitting in the satsang hall. Melita said that Mother had been there for about forty-five minutes. Only a few people were there and I was able to sit quite near Mother. She was so beautiful, looking even younger and stronger than She had the day before.

The final preparations were being done for the Bhagavat Sapta and Mother was supervising the arrangements. She looked at me several times, usually when I was praying. She sat with us for about one hour.

As on one previous occasion, I felt an urgency to study Her features, burning every detail into my mind and heart. Desperately I thought, "One day I will not be able to gaze upon those Divine features and behold Her graceful form."

I traced with my eyes the gentle line of Her forehead, remembering (from when we did Her puja) how incredibly soft Her skin was. The tilt of Her small nose, those wonderful dark eyes possessing all colors within them. Her smooth high cheeks, how the corners of Her mouth always held a smile, and the strength of Her chin jutting forward. The soft darkness of Her fine hair falling gently down Her back. Hands moving like little birds, fluttering then quietly nestling in Her lap. Tiny feet peeking from below Her dhoti, so beautifully formed, the soles having a pink blush. Each little toe was delicately perfect. I watched Her point Her toes to touch the floor as She leaned forward, then stood. We all pronamed as She left the hall.

Outside we spoke with Melita who told us that Swami Akhandanandaji would be arriving at 10:00a.m. It was only a little past 8:00a.m., so we went to the dharmasala for a short time.

When we returned it was just past 10:00a.m. Our rickshaw carried us to the temple steps. Gadadhar was standing there, and Satya asked him if Mother was in the hall. Gadadhar said that She was in the building, but had not come out of Her room yet.

Gadadhar suggested that we purchase garlands so that we could do pronam. As we stood together talking, some of our frustration began to come out. On the previous morning, when we had offered garlands, Mother appeared not to notice us and one of the girls took our garlands, touched them to Mother's wooden bench, and then returned them to us. Satya speculated that if Mother did not receive the offering then it must be just symbolic, so why do it? We created great "symbolic" offerings and laughed at our foolishness, but I could not deny that the feelings which Satya openly expressed were within my heart as well.

Then we purchased our garlands and went into the satsang hall to see Mother. Her seat had been placed before the front windows on the left as we entered the hall. A few people were doing pronam and we stood in line to wait our turn. The same thing was happening where different ashramites would need to speak with Mother and She would turn Her attention to them as people bowed before Her.

Satya had been observing that, and had reconciled himself to being "ignored." When his turn came, he could see that Mother was again speaking with someone standing near Her. As he bowed he held his garland toward Mother. She, in one great sweeping motion, turned from Her conversation, took Satya's garland from his hand, placed it over his bowed head, and looked squarely at him when he raised his eyes. Smiling over Her folded hands, She asked him, "Tika?" Choked with emotion, he murmured softly, "Tika, Ma." He had not escaped Her notice whether at Her feet, outside the building, or halfway around the world.

How can we ever think that She is unaware of us? How can we imagine that She

is bound by our human limitations? She has said, "I am always with you." If an ordinary person makes such a remark, we think, "Yes, that person has a special remembrance of me," but when Mother says "always" that is not a conditional term. Is it possible to comprehend "*always*"?

What that experience means to Satya is, of course, his alone. But I also find great solace in that revelation.

Mother sat with us for a long time before Swami Akhandanandaji arrived.

When he entered the hall, Mother greeted him warmly. Soon the two of them had everyone feeling jubilant as they talked and laughed together. I was delighted to see Mother in that light mood. It was as if She had turned time back to earlier days. That wonderful darshan filled my heart with sweetness and intoxicated my mind.

Swami Akhandanandaji spoke for some time about the Srimad Bhagavat and I simply basked in the joy of Mother's presence. After the discourse we all pronounced and then stood as Mother walked to Her room.

The Bhagavat Sapta was to start at 4:00p.m., so we went to the dharmasala for our mid-day meal and a short rest.

It was not yet 4:00p.m. when we returned to the ashram. Mother had come into the hall early and few people were there. I was able to sit quite near Mother and had a full view of Her from head to toe. I watched as one of the girls removed Mother's knitted leg warmers and slipped Her little white stockings onto Her feet.

Mother was very attentive to the beginning of the Bhagavat Sapta which was conducted by Sri Narayan Goswami. After about thirty minutes some people came and Mother went with them into Her room.

We went outside and were told that darshan would be at Mother's house by the garden after 6:15p.m. maun. That was a lovely spot for meditation, so we went there and sat at the garden's edge on the patio facing Mother's house.

I was enjoying the meditation in that beautiful spot and feeling very peaceful when Satya suddenly poked me on the arm. I opened my eyes and saw Mother on the roof. She was seated back a little from the railing.

At 6:15p.m. Mother stepped up to the railing and stood with us. Her wonderful eyes beheld all who stood below on the patio. Twice She looked right into my eyes for a long time. It was one of those instances where She made time stand still.

Brahmachari Nitai came to where Satya and I stood. As he gave prasad to us, Mother walked out of our view.

We were both so intoxicated that we felt a little giddy. As we stood there, Satya told me of the blessing which he had just received. He said that during maun, while his eyes were closed, he heard Mother call his name from the roof. Opening his eyes, he looked up and saw just the top of Mother's head, then as She stepped closer to the railing, Her face came into view. She was looking straight at him and smiling. Later, when Nitai came with prasad, he walked to Satya first. With a wink and a smile he said, "This is especially for you."

I was unaware of any of that when it was happening. It is a perfect example of how Mother could have a very intimate play with a devotee while in the midst of a crowd - still no one but Mother and the devotee would perceive it.

That wonderful day was like a lush oasis in the arid desert. We simply reveled in the pure nectar of Her sweet compassion, forgetting about the desert.

The next morning we went to the ashram about 9:30a.m. I did japa as we sat in the peaceful atmosphere near Mother's house. Brahmacharini Vasu came over to where we sat. She spoke with me for a little while and made us both feel most welcome. At noon we went to do some errands, and then to the dharmasala.

In the evening we returned to Mother's house for darshan. Mother came out onto the roof at 6:15p.m. and seemed to take special notice of each one of us below on the patio. Two times I received the blessing of being held by Her gaze.

When Mother went to Her room, we stayed and talked with Nirvananandaji for a

while. He told us a little more about Mother's sojourn to Calcutta six days previously. Some time ago Mother had a vision in which an old lady was doing Sri Ramakrishna's puja and all of his old devotees were there. While in Bhimpura, Mother had the kheyala to go to Belur Math, the monastery and headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission. When Mother arrived at Belur Math, She was there for only an hour. Her return train trip was difficult as the train had problems and Mother's car was on a side rail waiting for several hours. How strange is Her lila. I wonder about the mystery behind that story.

When we came to the ashram the following morning we sat and did japa near Mother's house. Binuda's family was on the roof with Mother. They very kindly requested permission for us to come up and pronam. Mother looked wonderful and She told Biluji to give prasada to us. A private was scheduled, so we had to go back downstairs, but those few minutes were a great joy to us.

At 5:00p.m., as our rickshaw carried us to the ashram, the wind was blowing and the sky was gray. A little rain fell and it was cool. We enjoyed it very much. After sitting for a while to do japa, we moved to the patio under Mother's roof. The other devotees came and we observed maun. At 6:15p.m. Mother came and sat in Her chair on the roof. It started to sprinkle a little and someone held an umbrella over Mother's head. She did not stay long but looked at all of us. With folded hands She indicated that She did not want us to stand in the rain. We would have stood there as long as She stayed with us. Of course She knew that, and soon went to Her room.

That evening Anindita came to our room for a while. We got to hear some stories about her dear father and of his last days. It was truly Mother's grace that he arrived in sacred Kashi just at his time to leave this world.

Satya was catching a cold or some virus, so he took medicine and went to bed hoping to feel better in the morning. When morning came he felt even worse and not up to doing any marketing. So we sent Bhagavandas to buy curd and a few other things. When Bhagavandas returned, we were delighted to find that he had Swami Nirmalananda and Brahmachari Prangopal with him.

It was with great joy that we met Swami Nirmalananda after such a long time. The gentle nature and devotion of Prangopal had long endeared him to us and we were pleased that he had accompanied Swami Nirmalananda on this trip.

After exchanging warm greetings, we talked for a long time, catching up on each other's news. Mr. Pujari had saved the rooms next to ours for them, and they went there to rest for a while before darshan.

At 5:30p.m. we all went to the ashram. There was a light rain falling and we sat under the trees for maun. Afterward people were allowed to go upstairs to pronam. Instead of letting everyone come up and sit before Mother for a few minutes, a line was formed going up the narrow winding steps as devotees crowded to get in and then had to push to get out as no one was allowed to stay upstairs.

It looked like a very long wait and Satya was not at all well, so we asked Swami Nirmalananda to please tell Mother that Satya was not well and ask Her to bless him. I went with Satya back to the dharmasala. After having Mother's darshan, Swamiji and Prangopal came to our room. Bhaskaranandaji had interpreted Satya's message to Mother.

During the night we could hear people shouting as they walked in parikrama around sacred Vrindavan. They continued into the next day, March sixteenth. The week of Holi had begun. Holi celebrates the lila of the Lord, Sri Krishna, as the playful boy who showered his friends with the colorful pollen of flowers. Nowhere in India does this festival reach the heights that it does in Vrindavan, the home of that enchanting Lord. Children delight in throwing brightly colored powders or squirting colored water on everyone they can catch and few, if any, escape.

That day we went to the ashram but were unable to see Mother. When we returned to our room I could tell that I had caught Satya's' sickness and spent the rest

of the day in bed. In the evening Swami Nirmalananda came to our room. He had seen Mother and told Her that we were sick. She sent special prasada with him for us.

The next morning we felt better and by evening were able to go to the ashram. It was not quite 6:00p.m. when we arrived. For maun we took seats in the garden back from the patio. Afterwards everyone was allowed to go upstairs and pronam to Mother.

I was so thankful to see Her again. She looked wonderful and smiled at me very sweetly, as though She was pleased to see me there. We were allowed to stand on the roof looking at Mother for a few minutes. Then everyone was asked to go downstairs because a private was to take place. Reluctantly we went down the staircase, left the ashram, and went to our rooms for the night.

To avoid the enthusiastic Holi revelers, we sent Bhagavandas to do our shopping the following morning. Swami Nirmalananda suggested that we have cheese sandwiches. When Bhagavandas returned with the needed items, Swamiji created sandwiches for the four of us.

We sat in our room and spoke of the strange feelings which we all shared on that trip. Over the years Mother seemed to be leading us away from our attachment to Her physical form. It was very sobering to actually speak of the implication. Swamiji said, "Truth is our only armor in this world, and the time is coming when everyone must choose good or evil, darkness or light. Only Mother can love everyone, good or evil, but we who are in the maya of this world must choose. We must live the values which we hold dear, not just talk about them."

At 5:30p.m. we went to the ashram and walked back to the patio area. As we stood there waiting, Satya suddenly said, "There's Krishnapriya" We ran to meet her and she met us halfway in the garden. She looked great. It was a lovely surprise to see her again. In our conversation with her she brought up her observations about the difficult times coming and that many people were not going to be prepared for them. She expressed many of the same thoughts and feelings which we had discussed earlier. Several old friends were there on the patio and we greeted each other briefly then sat for maun.

Mother came out to the railing of the roof and stood with us for a few minutes. When She went to Her room we stayed and spoke with Triguna Sen and a few others who had just arrived. Nitai brought us a letter from Chitra.

A few days past, Satya had complained to Nitai about our not being allowed to go up to see Mother. Saying that Mother had told us during Kumbha Mela we could be there whenever She was sitting out. Nitai told Mother this, and Mother told him to bring us upstairs. But we were sick, and could not come there for two evenings. Then the next night it was impossible to bring us up because of the huge crowd. He said for us to wait a few minutes as he went into Mother's house. After a short time Nitai called for us and the few others there to come upstairs.

Mother looked so lovely, and I was grateful to be near Her as I pronamed.

We quietly sat on the roof for a short time, then were asked to go downstairs. There were some "VIP's" on the roof when we arrived and they were not asked to leave. I took comfort in the knowledge that it was Mother who had invited us to come up.

We returned to the dharmasala, and Satya made boiled vegetables with butter. Prangopal was not well and he went to rest. Gadadhar joined Swamiji and us for our meal. After a little conversation they both left and we retired for the night.

As I did my household chores the next morning I sighed as I thought about the nice pair of rubber gloves that I had so cleverly packed in our lost duffel bag.

It was 5:15p.m. when we went to the ashram. Mother was sitting in the satsang hall for that last day of the Bhagavat Sapta. We sat with Her for about one hour. A puja was done to Mother and then we all moved with Mother to the front of the Krishna Chelia Mandir where a grand puja was done. I stood in a good spot during

the puja and felt very uplifted by the atmosphere - but most of all by Mother's presence there. When the puja was completed, Mother went into Her room behind the mandir and we went outside. Melita told us that there would be akhanda kirtan at 8:30p.m.

A four-sided altar was made in the center of the satsang hall. There were pictures of the Lord Sri Krishnaji on all sides leading from a wide base to a point at the top. It was elaborately decorated by the men who were creating it and was not completed until 10:00p.m. Krishnapriya called for me to sit near her. Satya kindly went to our dharmasala to get my cymbals and tape recorder for me. I could clearly see the asana where Mother was to sit.

A professional video crew arrived and were setting up to film Mother and the devotees as they celebrated. Satya asked the photographer for permission to take movies while the lights for making the video were on. The gentleman said that he would not mind, so Satya made a second dash to the dharmasala to retrieve his movie camera. Arati was done before the newly made altar and everyone was in a happy mood.

Satya returned just as Mother was coming out of Her room. A wooden bed had been prepared as Her asana. She took Her seat there and was draped with several beautiful saris. After puja was done to Her She reclined upon the bed, covering all but Her face, as the kirtan grew in intensity.

The men in the kirtan party moved in a close circle around the altar as they sang God's Name. A harmonium was tied in a sling around the neck of the man who played it as he led the procession. Others played cymbals, a drum, or clapped their hands as everyone joined in the wonderful rhythmic response to the leader's chant.

It was wonderful to sit near Mother. There are no words to describe the feeling of complete security and fulfillment I experienced at such times. I have never known that feeling in any other circumstances in this life. I will never be satisfied until She grants me the boon of *knowing* Her eternal companionship. She has affirmed that She is always with me, but until I know it too, I will be in want.

After about thirty minutes, Mother sat up. She looked incredibly beautiful as Her long dark hair hung loosely upon Her shoulders. She stood, and as we all pronounced She went to Her room.

At 11:45p.m. when we left the ashram and walked to the gate, there were no rickshaws in sight except Bhagavandas. He made two trips that night to take Swami Nirmalananda, Prangopal, Satya, and me to the dharmasala.

We had been told that Mother would "play Holi" on the following morning. I had only seen pictures of Her doing that, as we had never before been with Her at the time of Holi celebration. It was something that we did not want to miss.

There was a holiday atmosphere at the ashram when we arrived at 9:15a.m. Mother was inside the Chelia Mandir and we sat gazing at Her through the gates. About fifteen or so people were waiting to receive diksha at Mother's feet when we moved outside. The air was filled with God's Name as the akhanda kirtan continued.

Many devotees had come to the ashram for this special day, and we were happy to see Mr. Dhamija and meet his lovely wife for the first time. Mr. and Mrs. B. K. Shah, who had been so kind to help us on our previous trip, were there and Bal Krishna Gupta, who had just returned from Bombay that morning, was there with Mrs. Gupta.

Someone said that Mother would be coming to the raised patio beside the temple, so we all moved to that area - the ladies on one side and the men on the other. After some time we were told that Mother would not be coming there but would sit on the large porch in front of the temple. Everyone moved to that place and in a very orderly manner took seats upon the porch facing Mother's asana which was placed on the left side of the entrance.

Then Mother was carried out in Her chair to the opposite side of the porch and all bedlam broke loose. Suddenly everyone was pushing and shoving, trying to get close to Mother.

Finally we were able to sit down. I sat with Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal. Satya was taking movies, and to get above the crowd he stood on the railing which ran along the sides of the porch. From that angle he could capture Mother's play and all of the devotees around Her as well.

Mother told one man who was seated near Her to take four oranges to us. It was the sweetest thing in all creation to receive something from Mother's hand unasked.

Nirvanananda handed a pump gun full of colored liquid to Mother. She shot a high wide arc of red color above our heads and it softly rained down upon us. That was the start of a wild lila. She directed the next stream of color so high that it made a long mark across the ceiling. I have always hoped that Her mark was left untouched by paint in the ensuing years. Everyone got a little of the spray.

A plate heaped high with red powder was then given to Mother and as She threw handfuls of it everyone got very excited. Mother motioned for all to sit still. She got a little more playful with each handful of powder. Sometimes She would act like She was going to throw one way, then quickly let the powder fly in another direction. At one point She even poured some onto the yellow towel which was over Her head. She was covered with all colors as more powder was given to her. Bhaskarananda was at Her feet along with Nirvanananda and Udas. They all looked like rainbows.

As Mother's play got more intense the people started rising to their feet and pushing wildly forward. I managed to stand before getting stepped on. Prangopal and I helped Swami Nirmalananda to get up, then we all helped Bal Krishna assist Mrs. Gupta to her feet.

Mother had the play moved to the wide steps in front of the porch. She sat at the top of the steps as we gathered around Her. She drenched all of us with colored water and powders intermittently. We laughed so much as She played with us. A very mischievous expression would come over Her face as She marked us all with Her color.

Satya took five rolls of movies and ran out of film just before Mother moved us to the steps. He sent Bhagavandas to our room to get more film, but before he returned with it Mother had finished that lila. She left us all dazed and laughing as She went to Her room.

Satya then got movies of the aftermath in all its glory. I had a beautiful lavender mark in my white hair which I managed not to wash out for some time. Krishnapriya looked wonderful as she stood on the porch with hands raised. Bright bursts of color adorned her from head to toe. The Dhamijas were also covered with the beautiful colors as were Anindita's children as they frolicked with Dasu. Mr. and Mrs. Dhamija were guests at Neem Karoli Baba's ashram and drove us to our rooms at the adjoining dharmasala.

I had developed a very bad migraine headache and nothing seemed to make it go away. It was not possible for me to go back to the ashram that evening. I lay on my bed and prayed that it would be gone by morning. It was a great loss, missing Mother's darshan, as I was told that She sang that night.

Thankfully I was much better when I awoke. Anindita and her family were about to leave for Bombay. I made a couple of Polaroid pictures of them and Satya took movies. My memories of Anindita and her father, Binuda, will always be dear to me.

When we went to the ashram Krishnapriya showed me where she was staying. It was in a lovely new room built in the back side of the garden.

We went to Mother's patio and She came out on the roof. She stood at the railing and looked directly at me as I pronamed then stood with folded palms while I prayed

to Her. In a short time, She went to Her room and we returned to the dharmasala. Satya and Prangopal made soup. We were all very tired that night.

It was about 11:00a.m. when we went to the ashram the next morning. Some people who were leaving had been given permission to go upstairs and pronam to Mother. Happily we were allowed to accompany them. After a short darshan we pronamed to Mother then had to go back downstairs.

We had brought our cameras because Nirvanananda wanted me to take a Polaroid picture of Mother with Sri Narayan Goswami, who had conducted the Bhagavat Sapta. I told him that I would be happy to and that my price was that we be allowed to take a few photos and movies of Mother for ourselves. He laughingly agreed to my terms.

Nirvanananda got things organized for the picture taking and we followed him and the pandit up to the roof. Mother sat on Her wooden bed and the pandit sat at Her feet. I took two photos for Nirvanananda. Satya was taking movies. Then Satya and I took each other's photos sitting at Mother's feet. I also took some of Mother alone. We were thankful to get the photographs and movies but I must admit that I felt uneasy about it - as though Mother was simply enduring our desires. I felt that perhaps I was being a burden to Her, or maybe She did not approve of my bartering. After pronaming at Her feet, we walked downstairs then went to the dharmasala. We had not been there long when Krishnapriya arrived for a visit.

It was always a joy to hear her tell stories about Mother. That day she related Mother's words as She spoke to some devotees. Mother said, "Now is the time to be doing heavy sadhana, for the time will come when I do not recognize anyone. But when that happens, then I will give something inside." I pray that by Mother's grace Krishnapriya's words have been recorded correctly here. They are just as I wrote them in my diary that very day.

Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal had also come to our room. We all discussed the concerns which were always with us in those days, for each of us could feel Mother withdrawing.

At 5:00p.m. we returned to the ashram for darshan. A beautiful sadhu, Sri Swami Gangeshwaranandaji, had arrived and went upstairs to see Mother. He stayed for only a few minutes. When he came down Mother stood at the railing of the roof. Darshan was lovely as Mother talked with the pandit and some of the girls.

Krishnapriya was leaving the next morning for Dehradun. She was then going to Calcutta and expected to be in Hardwar the first week of April. Unfortunately she did not meet her schedule and that was our last time together at Mother's feet. However, in my heart, that is where I will always see her.

Melita was also leaving. She was going to Germany for two months. We were happy that we had been able to spend a little time with her on that trip and were sorry to see her go. I would have loved to hear her tell stories about her experiences with Mother. I am sure they would have been wonderful.

We bid both of them goodbye with pronams and "Jai Ma!" then went to our room for the night.

Stopping at the ashram in the morning, we were pleased to find it quiet and hoped that was a sign that Mother would get some rest. It was a nice thought, but when we returned at 5:30p.m. we found that was all that it was. People were being crowded up the stairs in tens and coming down in fives as certain ones were allowed to stay while others were made to leave.

On a previous trip Triguna Sen had told us about the "temple guards." They were those who stood at the temple gates and made the decision as to who would be allowed to go in to see the god and who would not. He laughed as he explained that one must gain the favor of the temple guards.

At the dharmasala Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal came to our room and we talked about Mother. Swami said that through the years Mother had told about a place where there was a great temple or hall of sandalwood, with a ceiling so

high you could not see it. There She and some others were instructing souls in certain mantras and other things. From that place they attained liberation. Surely there would be no temple guards there.

Satya and I had some shopping to do in the morning, so Bhagavandas took us to several places. Since my beautiful Gopal was here in his "hometown," I thought that I should get something nice for him. At one shop I found a very ornate red dress and mantle. They also had the perfect jewelry to go with it. I purchased a necklace, earrings, bracelets, and crown made of ruby-red stones and small pearls. A tiny pair of silver padukas (God's shoes) to set before his asana completed the costume. He looked gorgeous in those things and Mrs. Pujari told me to take roses from the dharmasala garden for him. I took his photo there in our room surrounded by their lovely roses.



At 5:15p.m. we went for darshan and were allowed upstairs with Mother for about fifteen minutes. We appreciated that time with no distractions. Mother looked at us

lovingly and told the girls to give oranges to us. After darshan we went with Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal to the Banki Bihari Temple before going to the dharmasala.

The following evening we went to the ashram at 6:00p.m. In about thirty minutes we were told that we could go up to Mother. She looked so sweet. I prayed mentally that She let me see Her in all things - to see *only* Her - pleading that I never forget Her and that She never withdraw Her feet from me. Mother looked steadily and lovingly at me as I prayed. The darshan was too short, but I had received Her touch. What more is there?

At noon the following day, Swami Nirmalananda and his "party" (Prangopal and us) were invited by the Banki Bihari Temple to take prasad there. I could hardly believe that such an honor was to be given to us.

We four arrived about 11:30a.m. at the temple and sat for about two hours visiting with the men who were in charge there. When arati was done to Bihariji, we all stood before His beautiful form as many offerings were made. The heady aroma of incense filled the great temple. A crescendo of bells and gongs culminated in the resonate blowing of the conch as the worship was ended.

After the arati we were taken to an alcove on Bihariji's right and seated there. The prasad which was served included three kinds of rice, aloo, dal, chapatis, pappars, and sweet rice. The prasad was followed with pan (spice wrapped in pan leaf). It was a very rare experience and we felt blessed to have been included in the invitation. From there we went to visit Mr. and Mrs. Bal Krishna Gupta, and then to our rooms for a brief rest before darshan.

A welcome surprise awaited us when we got to the ashram at 5:30p.m.

Swami Dhirananda and Triguna Sen had told Mother that we wanted to have fifteen minutes of maun sitting with Her. Mother agreed to that request and it was simply wonderful. Everyone sat so quietly, and a tranquil mood filled me as I gazed at Mother. She looked at me for a long time. I tried to focus on Her within my heart, and then as That which contains my being, but I did not want to give up that sweet form which first I had seen so long ago in a dream. Our short time was ended, but the sweetness of being with Her in that peaceful setting was very comforting.

The day which followed was one that must have been fated to happen, as it fulfilled a prophecy made in jest. Before the first trip, and each succeeding one, we had to fill out papers requesting a visa. This always included the question as to what was the purpose of our going to India. Not wanting to be misunderstood, I only wrote about certain things such as "to see some of the country, travel by train, do some shopping in Delhi, and perhaps to see the Taj Mahal." My report was not untrue because we did see part of the country, travel by train, and shop in Delhi. We told ourselves that if we were ever in Agra we would certainly see the Taj Mahal.

Up until that seventh trip, we had never been to Agra. And after writing that so many times without it happening, we began to say, in a joking way, that if we ever did actually visit the Taj Mahal, it would probably be our last trip.

One day, Swami Nirmalananda suggested that we all hire a car, go to Agra, have lunch and return in time for evening darshan. I felt a little uneasy about it but shrugged it off as superstition on my part and we made arrangements to go at 10:00a.m. The driver said he would actually come at 9:00a.m. We were pleased and thought we would get an early start.

9:00a.m .... 10:00a.m .... then 11:00a.m. passed, and he had not come.

Finally Mr. Pujari got a car and driver for us. It was 12:30p.m. There was still plenty of time, so we took the short trip of around thirty miles to Agra.

After a lovely meal we talked about seeing the Taj Mahal. It was still early, and we felt that we should go there as long as we were in Agra. When we arrived at the gate, we saw that many people were there. We had expected to pay for admission, but it was a free day and that explained the crowd.

The building was very beautiful with fine inlay work and artful carvings.

Satya took lots of movies there as we walked around the well-kept grounds and graceful pool. A guide led everyone through the inside and we heard about the human love story which had created that work of art. I felt sad to see the empty inside of the great edifice, and the air was stifling. I was glad to get outside again.

When we started back to Vrindavan we still thought we would be there in time for darshan. That was before our car was stopped for some kind of "transportation check." Our driver had to fill out some papers and it took quite some time before we could continue.

It was 7:30p.m. when we got to the ashram. Swami Dhirananda and Bhaskarananda greeted us and said they had wondered where we were. We explained our delay and assured them that we would be there the next evening.

We had finally seen the Taj Mahal, and that was indeed to be our last trip to see Mother.

I was exhausted but did not sleep well and awoke with a cold. Satya made our favorite: "potato surprise"- boiled potatoes with the surprise being whatever we had extra to throw into the pot.

At 5:45p.m. we went to see Mother. She looked at me several times and watched as I put a cough drop in my mouth. I did not want to disturb the other devotees by coughing during maun.

Mother looked so tiny and tired. The darshan seemed painfully short but perhaps it was just that I was not well, or because I could not shake the ominous feelings connected with the last day's trip to Agra.

After returning to the dharmasala, Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal came to our room for a few minutes before retiring.

When I awoke my cold was worse and I did not go out that day. Satya was also feeling unwell and we did not go to the ashram.

Swami Nirmalananda asked Bal Krishna Gupta to tell Mother that we were sick. When he did so, Mother gave two bananas to Swamiji for us. He brought them to us as soon as he returned. It was amazing, but we both felt better after we ate them and slept well that night.

There was a delightful rain the next day, and to our surprise hail fell in large chunks upon the garden. It had been so hot that I would not have imagined it could hail.

By 5:30p.m. the rain had stopped and we went to the ashram. We saw a lot of uniformed guards there and were told that the Governor of U.P. had come to see Mother. (That was a new Governor and not Dr. Chenna Reddy, whom we had met on several occasions.) He stayed until almost 8:00p.m. When he left, Mother came to the railing of the roof and greeted us. Then She went to Her room.

The electricity had gone out when we returned to the dharmasala.

Bhagavandas went to buy candles for us. After about an hour it came back on but we were ready to go to sleep by then.

In the morning I did a few chores then made a new summer nightgown for Gopal. After eating, we got ready to go to the ashram.

Mother sat with us for the fifteen-minute maun, then we were allowed to stand at the back while some people were having a private. We felt very blessed to have seen Mother for thirty minutes that night.

At the dharmasala the electricity was off again, but this time we had candles. There were many mosquitoes in the room so Swamiji sprayed for us. Without the ceiling fan it was very hot and humid.

We still did not know when Mother was leaving Vrindavan. Everyone was speculating. We could only wait and see.

During the night Satya got very sick at his stomach. He was up and down all night. The raw salad he had eaten earlier seemed to be the culprit. When morning

came he was sore all over from his ordeal and spent the day resting and recuperating.

I do not believe we ever had so much sickness in India before. By Mother's grace our ailments were never serious but they certainly kept us in our rooms a lot. We were beginning to question our dream of one day living in India. But then we were often subject to extreme opposite feelings when around Mother, sometimes so rapidly that we would laugh at our fickle emotions.

We did not go out that day and Satya's problem was gone by that night.

The next day was beautiful. The weather was mild and Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal made macaroni and cheese with hing spice. It was a great meal and afterward we had satsang all afternoon.

In the evening we learned of Panuda's return, and that Mother would be leaving Vrindavan in four days. She was going to Delhi by car, then taking the train to Kankhal.

After darshan we talked about arranging our mode of transportation to follow Mother. Then we had satsang in our rooms until 2:30a.m.

Five hours' sleep was all I needed after such good satsang. We were all anxious to have a private with Mother while in Vrindavan and there was not much time left to do so. We were told that Bhaskaranandaji was in charge of those arrangements. Prangopal asked him when it might be possible for the four of us to have private time with Mother and he said that Saturday would be best.

I had written our questions out so that they could be more easily translated to Mother. Actually it was more like a letter than a list of questions. We had asked Panuda to translate for all of us. He said that he would translate if Mother approved.

For our trip to Delhi we requested a taxi. The driver came to the ashram after darshan that evening to finalize the details. Just knowing that we would get to speak with Mother the next day did a lot to lighten my mood, and I went to bed early.

After a pleasant day we went to the ashram at 5:00p.m. Panuda was there and we spoke with him about our private. He read our questions to be sure he understood what we wanted. When he read my "letter," he told me that many of Mother's old and close devotees had felt the same thing. They talked about having the same experience of which I had written.

When it was time for darshan, we went upstairs. The fifteen minutes of maun passed very quickly and then someone announced that a private was to be held. Slowly people went to pronam and go downstairs. Two or three ladies had short privates with Mother. Then we were surprised to see that the whole roof, even Mother's room, was devoid of people. Not a soul was there except Mother, Panuda, and the four of us. Ordinarily there would be a few people standing around the edges, but we were most grateful that it was not so at that private.

We moved forward near Mother and presented our garlands. Then I took Gopalji from his basket and handed Him to Mother. He wore his new red dress and jewelry. Mother held him to Her head, eyes, and heart. She smiled as She held Him for a while, then gave Him back to me.

Panuda asked for our questions, and I gave my letter to him. He read to Mother what I had written: "Through the years we have known a special lila with Mother. There was first an inner lila of which we were unconscious, then came an outer play in which we participated with great joy, while increasingly becoming aware of the inner lila. Now it seems that Mother has no more kheyala on the outer play or on our trying to come and sit at Her feet for darshan. We love to have that sweet play relationship with Mother, but trust Her completely to do what is needed for our spiritual awakening. What we would like to know is what this change indicates? We know that Mother's health is delicate and we do not want to be any bother or burden to Her, only to know and try to do Her bidding. It takes years of work at our jobs to pay the cost of our short visits. This we are privileged to do for that touch which

only Mother can give to our yearning hearts. She is the only light in our journey through this dark world. But if Mother says that this is to be no more, then please have kripa on us and tell us what we are to do."

Mother smiled as this was read to Her.

Panuda had very carefully translated everything to Mother. When She replied, he translated thus: "Many have asked as you have. Because of Mother's health in these past days, Mother has not been able to act in the way She had in the past. From Mother's point of view, there is no difference, no change, everything is the same. Mother is very much aware of the difficulty you have in coming and knows that you come only to be with Her. That shows the special qualities in you, but She is unable to give anything in return."

Satya said, "We come from so far, but we do not want to be a bother or burden to Mother."

Mother's reply was, "Mother knows that you come only for Her; to sit quietly and be with Her. The way that you feel about Her (concern for Her) shows the special qualities in you."

Satya asked, "Is there anything we can do for Mother's health?"

Mother's reply: "Whatever each one feels. Mother could not say about this." Mother's words pierced my heart. Once again I felt how completely useless and unworthy I was. I knew that grace comes without the condition of worth, but when She praised the deep yearning which always pulled us back to Her feet I wanted to cry, for it is She who gave me the boon of endless longing and it is I who have nothing to give in return.

Mother graciously blessed some shawls which I had purchased for friends, and I asked Her to please accept pronams from Raju, who by that time was going to school in America.

We had letters for Mother from Jayananda and Jyotipriya which Panuda would read to Her later and return to us with Mother's replies.

Panuda then read Swami Nirmalananda's questions to Mother and gave him Her replies.

At one point Mother said, "Continue on in the way that you are doing [the path that you are on]." Then She added, "That is for all four of you."

We pronamed at Mother's feet and then stepped back as a swamiji from Swami Akhandanandaji's ashram came for a short darshan. His smiling face and easy laugh was like Akhandanandaji's. We enjoyed seeing how sweetly he regarded Mother.

As those precious moments ended, we slowly went down the stairs. My mouth was dry and I was completely intoxicated. It appeared that we were all in pretty much the same condition as we stumbled down the dark road to the gate. Each of us held a flashlight and could hardly walk straight.

Satya said, "I just love India!" And I looked up at the millions of stars in the sky and said, "There are more stars in India than in any other place in the world!"

In the morning I started getting our things together and packing for our trip to Delhi the next day. Swami Nirmalananda made "Anandamayi Ma Kichuri," from Mother's own recipe. It was delicious.

At 5:30p.m. we went for darshan. Mother was so beautiful that night and several times She looked at me lovingly. After the fifteen-minute maun Mother was talking and laughing with one devotee who sat near Her. It was so wonderful to see Her that way, like She was in past years.

It was almost 9:00p.m. when we got to our rooms and I packed until midnight.

We got up at 5:00a.m. Satya got things together for returning to Bal Krishna Gupta. The taxi arrived at 5:45a.m. and Bhagavandas came just past 6:00a.m. He was going to return the things to Bal Krishna's house for us. Bhagavandas was such a fine young man and we were sad to leave him.

Satya and Prangopal loaded all of the luggage into the taxi. We expressed our

sincere gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Pujari for their warm hospitality.

All things were done and by 6:40a.m. we left Vrindavan. I felt a tug on my heart, knowing that I would most likely never walk on that sacred ground again.

## Kankhal

Our car and driver were excellent and we arrived in Delhi by 9:30a.m.

Once we got to our hotel, I called Mr. Roy at the airline office to see if our missing duffel bag had turned up. He said that it had not and that we should come to the office the next day to fill out claim forms.

That and other business in Delhi was taken care of that following day. It was late when we returned to the hotel. Swamiji and Prangopal had hired a very nice air-conditioned car for our trip to Kankhal the next morning. It would come for us at 10:00a.m.

I repacked our things so that four bags could be left at the hotel. We would return to Delhi for our departing flight in eight days and would not need those bags in Kankhal.

The hotel employees had gone on strike and we were unable to get breakfast there before leaving. When our driver arrived, we asked him to take us to a very nice vegetarian restaurant where we had a sumptuous meal.

It was extremely hot that time of the year and we appreciated the air-conditioned car.

In Hardwar we stopped at the bank of Mr. Ram Panjwani. Swamiji had spoken with him about our staying at his dharmasala and he had saved two rooms for us. We took our things to the dharmasala and put them in our rooms. Satya and I had a downstairs room which was air-conditioned. Swamiji and Prangopal had a room upstairs and it had no air-conditioning. It was a nice place to stay and rickshaws were readily available just outside the door.

After situating our things, and getting ready, we went to see Mother.

Hardwar was beautiful and I enjoyed the ride down the familiar streets to Mother's ashram. There we saw several old friends.

We were greeted by Swami Tanmayananda, Atmananda (just arrived from Dehradun), and Swami Keshavananda, who lived at that ashram. Brahmachari Nirmalananda was there and several of Mother's girls that I had not seen for a long time.

When we walked back to Mother's little house we found Her sitting on the side porch. A small group of devotees stood there with Her. We moved to an open spot by the porch railing where we could stand near Her. As we pronounced, I saw that Mother appeared to be very sick. She looked into my eyes as though to tell me how ill She felt. It was exceedingly painful to see Her like that and be completely unable to do anything. I could not even touch Her. She sat with us for a short time, then went into Her house.

We spoke with Atmananda for a while and met Swami Vijayananda.

Bhaskaranandaji gave us the letters which Panuda had read to Mother for us. Gadadhar gave us a letter from Madhavananda, and Swami Keshavananda had Chitra's letter for me.

It was so good to see everyone again, but my heart was heavy with concern for

Mother. I knew that She said from Her point of view, "There is no difference, no change. Everything is the same." But from my viewpoint, in maya, there was a great change; and I dreaded with all my being the profound darkness which I knew was coming. How strange it was that in spite of our "knowing," it seemed that we were like actors in a drama and had to act our parts as though they had validity.

After eating at a restaurant we went to the dharmasala for the night.

At 9:00a.m. we were back at the ashram but Mother did not come out. We went to see the satsang hall where a Bhagavat Sapta was to be held. It looked beautiful. Then we walked across the street to the old part of the ashram where we had spent many happy hours with Mother on our earlier trips. Didima's Samadhi Mandir and the Shiva Mandir were on that side. We went to pronam at each one. Bhaskarananda, Atmananda, and Swami Keshavananda were outside. We talked with them for a while then left to go for our noon meal and to do a little shopping.

Darshan was to be around 6:00p.m., but we went a little early. There were a few people waiting to see Mother including a young brother and sister, Roy and Shirley Hilson, who had come to India from South Africa. They had been to see Mother Krishnabai and Satya Sai Baba, and wanted to have Mother's darshan before going back to South Africa in a few days.

Before long Mother came out onto Her porch. Once again we were blessed to stand at the railing less than four feet from Mother.

Mother's darshan that evening was so powerful and personal to me that any words are inadequate to describe it. Again, Mother looked at me with such sad suffering eyes but, at the same time, they were filled with such sweetness that I felt as if my heart would break. As She looked into my eyes that way, I came the closest I ever had to remembering that blissful experience which She gave to me with those same eyes in my first darshan, my dream. If She had held me with that gaze for even a moment longer I feel that I would have swooned.

The rest of that darshan was wonderful. It seemed that I was breathing the lofty air of Mother's divine realm. My mouth was completely dry and joy filled my being. Mother stayed with us for a long time. When She left, it was with another sweet look from above Her folded hands.

What a blessing to love that perfect lover. She is everything to me. Without Her, there is only darkness.

After breakfast the following morning we went to the ashram. Mother was sitting in the long room which was just inside the door of Her house. The room was like a wide hall or enclosed porch with windows all along the two outside walls. It was very much like the room upstairs in the old ashram side. Mother's bed was against the back wall, parallel to the bank of windows next to the entryway. Those windows, which were hinged like shutters, had been opened, and while standing next to them the four of us were able to see Mother quite well. Soon we were joined by Atmananda, then Ram and his bride Parvati also came there.

For about an hour we stood like that enjoying the lovely darshan. Mother kept looking out at us. There were people inside on the floor beneath the windows. They sat facing Mother and were having some conversation with Her. During that time Mother often looked toward us and smiled as we stood at the windows. Then She told the girls to bring prasad out to us. We were given dried coconut and rock crystal candy.

When darshan was ended we talked with Atmananda for a long time. She told us about some young school girls who had just come to Mother and how She had instructed them as to conduct and doing mantras.

Atmananda also told this story which Mother had related to those inside Her room as we were standing at the windows. "Some mahatma had come to a place where a king, queen, and others were. They invited him to take food, but he refused, saying, 'I cannot take food here as you are not having satsang and I will only take

food where there is satsang.' Then he started walking away. The king, queen, and all started walking just behind him. The mahatma asked, 'What are you doing?' They replied, 'We have heard that when people walk in the footsteps of a mahatma, they are having satsang.' The mahatma then returned and took food from those devotees."

We appreciated knowing that story of Mother's and thanked Atmananda for telling it to us. Then we went to the dharmasala for a rest before evening satsang.

Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal had already gone to the ashram when Satya and I left the dharmasala at 5:15p.m. When we arrived Mother had not yet come out. We took pictures of the ashram grounds, Mother's house, and the site of the great Ati Rudra Mahayajna which was to take place from May sixth to May sixteenth. Then we visited with friends as we all waited to see Mother.

It was quite late when Mother came out onto Her porch. She looked so sweet, and again we were blessed to stand up front near Her. She gave us many loving looks and I felt so grateful to simply be there.

After that wonderful darshan we went to eat, then Roy and Shirley Hilson came to our room for a short visit. It was midnight when I went to bed.

The next day when we came to the ashram Mother had already given darshan and was back inside Her house. We went to a side window and peered in to where She sat upon Her bed. She smiled and looked at us lovingly for some time. Then She sent an orange and a banana to each of us. Someone had come for diksha so we pronounced to Mother and walked to the outer courtyard.

In a little while we saw Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal coming from the old ashram side. We all went again to Mother's house and were able to see Her for a few more minutes, then left for the afternoon.

That evening Mother was going to the Purnananda Ashram and we planned to accompany Her there.

At 5:20p.m. we returned to the ashram. I had a swollen ankle and sat by the Yajna Kunda mandir to rest it. Satya walked across the road to where the old Ganges flowed and filled a large bottle with that holy water. We would take it with us when we had to leave in a few days.

Dr. Ghosh came to where I sat and asked if something was wrong with my foot. I told him that for some unknown reason my ankle was swollen. He left for a minute and when he returned he had some Ayurvedic medicine for me to take. He said that it would reduce the swelling. I was very touched by his kindness.

Satya came back with our Ganga Jal, and as he did Dasu drove Mother's car to the edge of Her house. On the hood was a beautiful little white silk flag with fringe all around it. In the center, sewn with sequins, was MA in Sanskrit. We stood near the car so Satya could take movies, then we intended to get a rickshaw and follow Mother.

While we stood waiting, Mr. and Mrs. Ram Panjwani arrived in their car.

We spoke with them and thanked him for our nice accommodations. He asked if we would like to go in their car, with them, to follow Mother. We were delighted to accept.

Mother came out and Satya filmed Her getting into Her car. Then we quickly got in the back seat of the Panjwani's sedan and he followed Mother's car for some time. Mr. Panjwani asked if we would "like to arrive there ahead of Mother?" "Oh, yes!" we replied, so he took a short cut getting us there just ahead of Mother. Satya got to film Her arrival and the sadhus of the Purnananda Ashram as they welcomed Her.

A "Vedanta Sammelan" was being conducted. Mother was carried in Her invalid chair into a large pandal and down the long aisle through the center of the assembled crowd. A wide platform faced the gathering where asanas had been prepared for the speakers and a special asana was waiting for Mother. Next to Mother was a sannyasini who spoke for some time and led the devotees in chanting.

We stood on a slightly elevated area to the side so that we could see Mother.

She looked at us several times.

The people there were very respectful of Mother. After each sadhu had spoken for a few minutes, the last one told everyone that Mother was now leaving and to please not make it difficult for Her. He asked them to stay seated until She was gone. Mother turned and looked at us, smiling. We quickly moved next to the exit and waited there for Mother to go past. Everyone kept their seats as requested and Mother was taken to Her car. We were very impressed by that ashram and the devotees there.

Mr. Panjwani had to go to his office so we took a rickshaw back to Mother's ashram. When we arrived Mother was sitting in the large satsang hall. There was plenty of room and I was able to sit just behind the girls very near Mother. The darshan was wonderful and unhurried. We all pronounced, then stood as Mother left the hall and went to Her house.

Mr. and Mrs. Panjwani had invited the four of us for dinner. We went to the dharmasala to get ready, then walked the short distance to their lovely home. Their son was very fond of kirtan and asked us to join him in singing God's Name. We enjoyed the kirtan and then were served a very delicious meal. Afterward we sat on their large balcony and were treated to coconut ice cream as we visited with our host. It was a lovely evening and did not end until about 10:30p.m. We walked back to the dharmasala tired but filled with the joy of that day.

Swami Nirmalananda came to our room the following morning and we decided that we had better do our shopping for incense and a few things which we wanted to take back to California with us. I did not want to think about it, but time was slipping away.

We went to the Bara Bazar shopping area of Hardwar near Harki Pauri.

The narrow winding lanes between the shops were extremely crowded. Someone said that the next day was a holy day when many people would come to bathe in the sacred Ganges.

Hanuman Das Gupta's shop was in Bara Bazar and we went there to buy incense and a few other things.

That evening we went to the ashram a little after 5:00p.m. It was "Rama Navami," the birthday of the Lord Sri Ram. Many people had come that day from Delhi as well as local people.

Mother did not come out until about 7:00p.m. She was very sweet and sat with us for a little while then went inside with the Mahant Sri of Nirvani Akhada and we returned to our rooms. Satya got ice cream for the four of us and we talked until about 9:30p.m.

Hanuman Das Gupta came to our room in the morning just before 9:00a.m. He had some things we had ordered. We had a short visit then got ready to go to the ashram.

Mother was in "Room #6." That was in the wing north of the satsang hall.

Gadadhar was preparing to do Mother's puja. We went there and stood on the verandah with Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal. Gadadhar brought all of his puja articles and Ram came with him. Gadadhar said that Mother would sit on the verandah, and Satya was going to take movies.

Mother did not come out, so Gadadhar and Ram went into the room. The "temple guard" of the day would not allow us to go in. Gadadhar had asked twice that we be permitted in, but the answer was, "NO!" After the puja, Gadadhar brought prasad and gave us Amul chocolate bars and mangos.

We waited for a while and then Mother came into the hall. She greeted the pandit and the sadhus who were seated there, then took Her seat. The Mahant sat to Her right.

Mother lay on Her side. I sat right in front and had a wonderful view of Her. Behind Her asana, hanging on the wall, was a truly remarkable piece of artwork. On

a long panel of white satin someone had appliquéd beautiful figures of the Lord Sri Krishna and Sri Radha. Their colorful costumes and all the work was simply lovely.

As I looked at Mother I prayed to Her mentally, telling Her of my love. She looked into my eyes for a very long time. I felt as if I were melting into that infinite ocean of love which is Mother. Tears of that love washed my face, still She looked into my eyes and held my heart. There is nothing in this life without Her; She is my life, my love, my pran. I shall never know that love except in Her, the Self of my Being.

Twice She blessed me with that look which enchanted my soul.

Later, when Mother had gone to Her house, we came to the dharmasala. I rested while Satya went to take movies of the bath at Harki Pauri.

It was 6:15p.m. when we returned to the ashram. Quite a few people were waiting at Mother's gate. She had not yet come out. We sat with Bhaskarananda, Gadadhar, and Swami Vijayananda beneath what was left of the great banyan tree in the courtyard. Atmananda joined us.

After some time the gates were opened and we got a glimpse of Mother. The crowd pushed a lot but soon it thinned out and we could see Mother well. She looked at each of us and told the girls to give us fruit and went into Her house.

Satya and I moved to a side window which was open. We could see Mother as She sat with the Mahant. It was a pretty good view. Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal joined us and we stood there for a long time. Nirvanananda told others there to move away but did not say anything to us.

When the Mahant left, Ram Panjwani and his party arrived. We got to continue our little clandestine darshan while they were in Her room. As I stood there a certain knowing settled upon me and I saw that it does not matter in what way She chooses to play with me, I am completely Hers. I have no more choice in any way with Her. She can pet me, scold me, or ignore me. I am Hers and that is finished.

After Mr. Panjwani left, Mother asked if we had received handkerchiefs.

We said no, we had not. Aruna brought four yellow handkerchiefs, Mother's prasad from the Bhagavat Sapta.

We looked at Mother again for a while, then She was ready to retire and we left, completely filled by Her loving touch.

April fourteenth was our last full day with Mother and, in the Bhagavat Sapta, the day commemorating Sri Krishna's birth.

It was close to 9:00a.m. when we reached the ashram. Swami Nirmalananda was not well that day and stayed in his room, but Prangopal came with us. We talked with Atmananda, Gadadhar, and Ram for a while, then asked Bhaskarananda about having a last private with Mother. We did not actually have anything "private" to speak about, but did wish to have Her blessing on a few things. Bhaskaranandaji said that could be done at 11:00a.m.

Then Panuda came to speak with us. At an earlier time we had told him that we would have an extra seat in our car if someone from the ashram needed to go to Delhi. He asked, "Is that seat in your car still available for someone of Mother's choosing?" Satya said, "Of course, if it is someone of Mother's choosing." Panuda then said that Mother's brother, "Mamu," was in need of a ride to Delhi. He was to leave that day, April fourteenth, but as it was the Bengali New Year, Mother told him to wait one day. He had no way to go the next day, but Panuda told Mother that he had a seat in our car and was sure Mamu could use it. Of course we felt greatly honored to have Mother's brother share our car.

About 9:30a.m. Mother came out of Her house and sat in Her invalid chair.

Satya had climbed up on a high place facing Mother's door and took movies as Udas put little white stockings on Mother's bare feet. A yellow towel was placed upon Her head and Bhaskarananda held a large umbrella above Her. Four young men lifted Mother's chair by the extended poles and carried Her the short distance

into the satsang hall. We all followed as Mother took Her seat to the pandit's left. I sat just behind Atmananda and could see Mother perfectly. It made me sad to think that the next day at that time we would be leaving.

Mother sat with us for at least one hour as the pandit recalled the event of Lord Krishna's birth to the devotees seated there. A puja was done to Mother and the family performing it gave a tiny silver rattle to Mother. She smiled and held it as She looked at me.

Bhaskaranandaji quietly stepped to where Satya was and gave him a special prasad. Then he came to tell me that after darshan Mother would go to Room #6 and we would have our private there.

When the Bhagavat discourse was finished Mother stood, then walked from the hall and onto the verandah leading to Room #6. Satya had gone there ahead of Her and took movies as She walked slowly toward him. Mother went into the room for a few minutes. When She came back outside, She sat in a chair to the right of the door.

We bowed at Her feet, then each offered rose garlands to Her. Mother put the garlands over our heads. I placed Gopalji in Her hands. She held Him to Her head, eyes, and heart then returned Him to me. Satya held Him while I gave some beads to Mother for blessing. Then I presented a lovely little golden image of Lord Chaitanya for Her to touch. This special murti was for our good friend, in California, whose name is Chaitanya. Mother held Him to Her head, eyes, and heart as She had done with Gopalji.

Satya asked for Mother's blessing on his movies and for permission to take movies as She sat there with us. He was allowed to do so.

Those few minutes at Her feet were sweet and sad at the same time because we soon had to leave. Mother asked when we were leaving. Bhaskarananda told Her we were to leave at 9:00a.m. the next morning.

When Mother stood we all pronamed, and She walked into Her room. Moving back down the verandah and through the satsang hall, we went into the courtyard. There we talked for a while with friends.

Then Atmananda called to us saying that Mother was back in the satsang hall. We went there to sit with Her, but soon She left to inspect the arrangements made for feeding sadhus.

We returned to the dharmasala to check on Swami Nirmalananda. He was feeling better so we all went to eat then went back to our air-conditioned room for a rest.

At 5:45p.m. we four went to the ashram. Mother did not come out until about 7:00p.m. We stood right next to Her as She sat on Her porch. The Mahant was seated just inside Mother's door so She did not stay out very long. Before She went inside, She told the girls to give laddus to us.

We stood looking at Her through the windows. About 7:45p.m. the Mahant left and Mother asked for some water. The lights in Her room were dimmed as we pronamed and stepped away.

That night I packed our things before going to bed.

In the morning, by 9:00a.m., our luggage had been put into the car. Swami Nirmalananda and Prangopal rode with us to the ashram for our last darshan.

Some people were in Mother's room having a private when we arrived.

Bhaskarananda, Udas, and Ram Panjwani were just outside Her door. We spoke with Bhaskaranandaji for a few minutes and expressed our appreciation to Mr. Panjwani for all of his kindness.

Gadadhar, Ram, and Parvati came to talk with us while we waited. Soon Bhaskarananda went inside. In a little while he called for us. Mother came out onto the porch with Udas so that we could pronam one last time. We laid our garlands at Her feet as we bowed. Mother instructed that we be given two oranges each and a little plastic bag full of nuts, dried fruit, and crystal rock candy. She said for us to let

Her know when we arrived safely.

At first Mother kept looking everywhere except at us. I wondered why She evaded my gaze. After standing for a while, She did look into my eyes as I mentally told Her of my love. It was like our first trip in that I knew She would not leave me if I did not turn away. This time I did not turn away, and She stood looking deep into my eyes. I could not move.

After a while Satya got worried about Mother standing for so long and he asked, "Darshan hogia?" As if by permission, Mother and Udas then stepped through the door and were gone.

A sense of unreality enfolded me as slowly we left that empty place where She last stood.

Taking our seats in the car, we were silently carried down the dirt road away from Kankhal.

The magic lila was ended, and there can be nothing to equal it in this life.

Yet, She can never be lost to me, as She Herself told me many years ago, "I am *always* with you wherever you are. I *always* see you sitting at My feet."

Sometimes Mother blesses me by coming in a dream. This story began with a dream and I shall end it with one which came to me three years after She left Her body.

I sat at Mother's feet and She had blessed me. It was so wonderful to be with Her, when suddenly I remembered that She had left Her body and I knew that I was dreaming.

Instantly, I had the *knowing* that She was no less real in that dream state than in this dream state which we call "life."

She has said that there is no place where She is not, that there is not even room for Her to turn over.

This Maya belongs to Her, not She to it.

MA

How can I call Your Name  
So dear to me  
That I dare not breathe It  
Lest It go  
From me  
Only within the quiet of  
My heart  
I sit in meditation  
And chant Your Name  
Where It may  
Not escape  
Unheard by any save Thee  
My own  
Enshrined within my heart  
I gaze upon the wonder of  
Your being  
In complete surrender  
I have always  
Loved you

Shraddha

For the album of photographs from our trips – click here (6.3 mb).  
<http://www.anandamayi.org/books/Shraddha.pdf>

## Glossary

AGNI - Vedic God of Fire.

ACCHA - The Hindi word meaning "good" in the sense of "fine," "all right."

ALOO - Potato.

AMRITA - Nectar of the Gods - Immortality.

ANNAPURNA - Divine Mother who feeds the soul as well as the body.

ARATI - Worship done by waving of light, incense, etc. before a deity.

ARDHANARESHWARA - Murti whose body is Lord Siva on one side and Goddess Parvati on the other.

ASANA - Individual mat or seat. Also a yogic posture.

ASHRAM - A dwelling place for monastics where they live under the direction of their guru or teacher.

ATMAN - The true Self.

BAL - Baby - A name for infant Krishna, Bal Gopal.

BARFI - Sweet nut squares

BHAGAVAN - Supreme God

BRAGAVAT SAPTA - Seven day discourse on Srimat Bhagavat Mahapurana.

BHAJAN - Devotional song.

BHAKTI - Devotion and love for God.

BHANDARA - Feast.

BHAV - Divine mood.

BHAVAN - House.

BRAHMACHARI - Male renunciate.

BRAHMACHARINI - Female renunciate.

BRAHMA - The God of creation.

BRAHMAN - Supreme reality. The Absolute.

BRAHMIN - The priestly caste.

CHADDAR - Cotton shawl.

CHAI - Indian tea.

CHAITANYA - Great Bengali saint considered by many to be an incarnation of Lord Krishna.

CHAKRA - Disk - A weapon of Lord Narayana. Also pertaining to the seven chakras or centers of consciousness in the spine.

CHAPALS - Shoes.

CHELIA - The Tricky One, a name of Krishna.

CHOWKIDAR - Guard - caretaker.

CHOWRIE (CHAMARA) - A whisk of yak tail hair, usually bound into a tapering silver handle, and waved in the worship of a deity.

DAL - Lentils.

DARSHAN - The blessing of seeing and being in the presence of a deity or saint.

DEVI - A goddess.

DHARMASALA - Haven for pilgrims.

DHOTI - Long cloth wrapped and folded at the waist in such a way as to form a garment covering the lower half of the body.

DIKSHA - Initiation into the spiritual life given by the guru to the disciple.

DIWALI - Festival of lights.

GANESHA - The elephant headed God, son of Parvati, and keeper of the thresholds of time and space. He is petitioned to bless the beginning of any new undertaking.

GANGA JAL - Ganges water.

GHAT - A landing place at the water's edge, usually having many very wide steps going into the water.

GITA - Bhagavad Gita, the Song of God - The eighteen-chapter section of the Mahabharata which reveals Lord Krishna's teachings to Arjuna.

GITA JAYANTI - Celebration of the inception of the Bhagavad Gita.

GITA PATH - Non-stop reading of the Gita, usually aloud before a group of listeners.

GOPAL - Lord Krishna in infancy.

GRIHASTA ASHRAMA - Householder stage of life.

GULAB JAMUNS - Syrupy sweetmeat.

HANUMAN - The Monkey God and the most perfect devotee of Lord Rama.

HARI - "He who steals the heart away." A name for Lord Krishna.

HARMONIUM - Small organ with hand-pumped bellows.

HAVAN - Fire sacrifice.

HOLI - A festival commemorating Lord Krishna's play of showering the colored pollen of flowers upon His childhood friends.

JAGAT - World.

JAI - Victory.

JAL - Water.

JAPA - Repetition of a mantra or a Name of God as directed by the guru.

JI - Added to any name as a term of respect.

KALI - "The Black Goddess" - Shakti - Divine Mother in Her terrifying form - Destroyer of evil.

KARMA - An act and its result upon the actor in time.

KHEYALA - In Mother this is a spontaneous upsurge of Divine Will.

KICHURI - Rice cooked with dal, sometimes other ingredients are added.

KHIR - Sweet rice pudding.

KIRTAN - Chanting and singing of God's Name.

KRISHNA - The sweet Lord of Vrindavan whose later teaching became the Bhagavad Gita.

KUMBHA MELA - Festival of the jug.

KURTA - Indian-style shirt.

KUSHA GRASS - Sacred grass used to weave mats for meditation.

KUTIR - A small house.

LAKSHMI - Goddess of good fortune, Consort of Lord Narayana.

LILA - God's play.

MAHANT - Head of a Hindu religious organization.

MAHAPRABHU - Great Lord.

MAHARAJA - Great king.

MAHARANI - Great queen.

MALA - A rosary, beads used in performing japa, also a garland of flowers.

MANDIR - Temple.

MANTRA - A Sanskrit word or sound formula of great power. A Name of God given by the guru to the devotee at initiation. The mantra is the seed of all illumination planted by the guru; it is nourished by the devotee's silent repetition and not to be revealed to others.

MAUN - The practice of observing silence.

MAYA - Illusion.

MURTI - Divine image of a deity. The focal point of worship.

NAGA BABA - Literally "naked father." A sadhu who has renounced all possessions including garments.

NAMA YAJNA - Continuous reciting of God's Name.

NAMASTE - "Honor unto you." A greeting.

NARAYANA - The Primal Being reclining on Shesha Naga, the serpent, as he floats upon the cosmic ocean. The lotus emerging from his navel holds Lord Brahma the creator.

NITYANANDA - Disciple and companion of Lord Chaitanya.

PADMANAV - The beautiful silver murti of Lord Narayana which IS worshipped in Mother's ashram.

PANDAL - A tent roof with or without some side enclosures.

PANIR - Homemade cheese.

PARIKRAMA - The clockwise circumambulation of a shrine or holy place.

PRANA - Vital energy, breath.

PRASAD - Food or anything offered to a deity which is accepted by that Lord is prasad. The prasad is then taken by the devotee as the Lord's blessing.

PRONAM - Obeisance - Salute with folded palms meaning "I bow to the God within you."

PUJA - Ceremonial worship.

PURANAS - Eighteen ancient scriptures classified in three categories according to the aspect of God to whom they give worship. Six each honor Lord Vishnu, Lord Siva, and Lord Brahma.

PURIS - Puffed bread.

RADHA - A gopi of Vrindavan and the perfect bhakta eternally united with Lord Krishna.

RAMA - Avatar of Vishnu. Beloved King, hero of the Ramayana.

RAMAYANA - The scriptural story of Lord Rama.

RASA LILA - The pure divine love of Lord Krishna and Sri Radha. Their union is symbolic of the union of the supreme with the human soul that has attained the state of Mahabhava (highest self-dedication).

RASGULLAS - Syrupy sweetmeat.

RISHI - A truth-seer, a sage who sees the true law of being by direct inner vision. One to whom mantras are revealed.

SADHANA - Spiritual practices.

SADHU - A holy man.

SAMADHI - Total one-pointed concentration of the mind (Savikalpa Samadhi) or cessation of the mind's function where only pure consciousness remains, self-revealed (Nirvikalpa Samadhi).

SAMSKARAS - Impressions or tendencies left in the mind after any experience in this or former births.

SAMYAM SAPTA - In Mother's ashrams this is a yearly function where devotees observe a seven-day period of renunciation.

SANNYAS - Renunciation of all worldly ties.

SARASWATI - The goddess of music, literature and speech. Consort of Lord Brahma.

SATSANG - The practice of the presence of God by keeping the company of truth seekers, the holy, and the wise.

SATYA - Truth. That which is. Reality.

SEVA - Service.

SHAKTI - Divine energy, the female principal of God.

SHALAGRAMA SILA - A unique stone with very special natural characteristics, worshipped as a manifestation of Lord Narayana.

SIVA - The Lord of dissolution and regeneration. Destroyer of the unreal.

SIVA LINGA - A unique stone with very special natural characteristics, worshipped as a manifestation of Lord Shiva.

SHRADDHA - Faith, zealous devotion to truth.

SITA - Wife of Lord Rama. Incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi.

SNAN - Bath.

SRI - An honorific prefix to Names of Gods and those of high esteem, including books.

SRIMAD BHAGAVATA MAHAPURANA - One of the eighteen main Puranas concerned with the life of Lord Krishna and other Avatars of Lord Vishnu.

TAPASYA - Austerities done for spiritual development.

TIKA [TIK-HAI] - The Hindi word for "all right," "fine," or sometimes "yes."

TILAK - Red powder, sandalwood paste, or other colored substance applied in a dot to the forehead between the eyebrows.

TITHI - Celebration of the actual birthday according to the Hindi calendar.

TRIVENI - Point where three rivers meet.

TULSI - Plant sacred to Lord Krishna. A variety of basil.

VISHNU - The Lord of preservation.

VEDAS - Sacred Hindu scriptures.

YAJNA - Sacrifice, often fire sacrifice.

YASHODA - Wife of Nanda, foster mother of Lord Krishna in Vrindavan.



Lord Narayana