

*G. V. Sarveswara Rao*

HOLY MOTHER  
SRI SARADA DEVI

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA



SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH

11, RAMAKRISHNA MATH ROAD  
MYLAPORE MADRAS - 600004 INDIA

1977

Published by

© THE PRESIDENT

SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH

MYLAPORE, MADRAS - 600004

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Third Edition

3M3C—1—1977

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PRINTED IN INDIA

AT AMRA PRESS

MADRAS - 600041

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## PREFACE

THE first comprehensive life of the Holy Mother was published by us in English in 1940 under the title *Sri Sarada Devi*. It ran into a second edition in 1949. As one of the items of its programme, the Central Committee of the Holy Mother Centenary Celebrations at the Belur Math Head Quarters resolved in 1953, to bring out a standard volume on the life of the Holy Mother in English, Bengali and other languages. The task of writing this Life devolved on Swami Gambhirananda. Accordingly, he wrote in Bengali the Life of the Holy Mother entitled *Sri Ma Sarada Devi*. This was published by the Udbodhan Centre, Calcutta, on December 27, 1953, the first Centennial anniversary of the birth of the Holy Mother. The learned author has left no stone unturned to make the Life exhaustive and interesting by incorporating as many facts and incidents of the Mother's life as could be gleaned from all reliable sources, oral and documentary. The main narrative is profusely interspersed with conversations of the Mother and, consequently, the book ably fills the place of an authentic volume on the Life of the Holy Mother.

The Central Committee had also decided that the English Life should be published by us. It was at the request of the Central Committee that Swami Gambhirananda himself translated the Bengali book into English. We are happy to present this book to the public as the fulfilment of a resolution adopted in August 1954, by the Holy Mother Birth Centenary Committee, Madras. The original intention was to publish this book during the Centenary year, 1954. But, mainly owing to the preoccupations with the Centenary Celebrations in the city, the plan could not be given effect to in time.

Some footnotes of the original work have been omitted from the present volume, and many have been added to

explain Bengali manners and customs. A few facts that came to light after the publication of the Bengali book have also been included in the body of this volume.

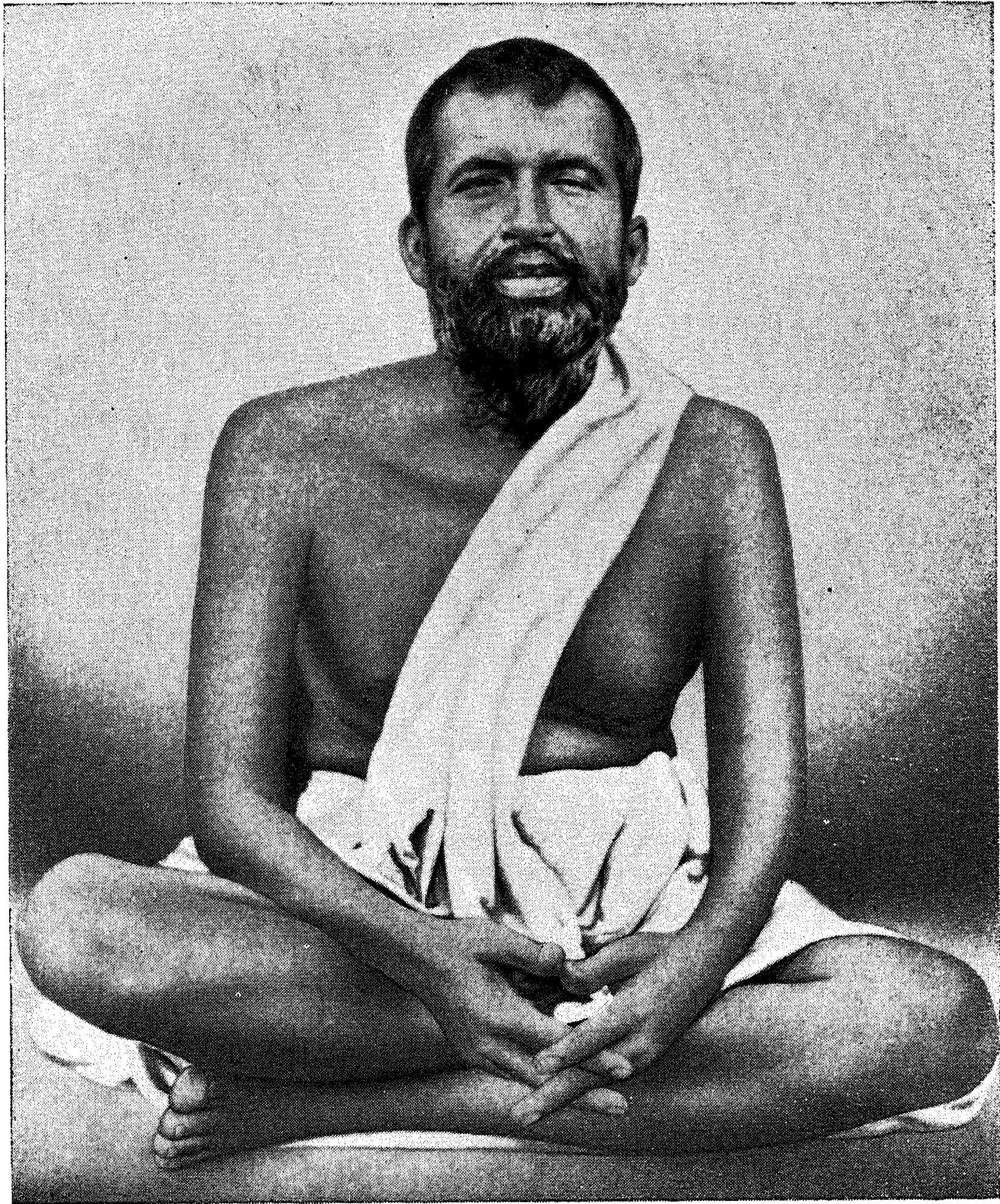
The life of the Holy Mother serves as a beaconlight lighting up the obscure pathways of spiritual life and as a fountain at which humanity can slake its thirst for a higher life. We earnestly hope that the interest awakened in the hearts of the public by the Centenary Celebrations will assure us a wide circle of readers.

We are deeply beholden to Prof. Sudhanshukumar Sen Gupta, M.A., Ph.D. (Leeds) and Prof. S. Ramaswamy, M.A., for carefully editing the manuscripts of the book.

November, 1955

P U B L I S H E R.





SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA



## PRELUDE

God, as associated with His Power, is alone able to set in motion a new cycle of social and spiritual regeneration; else it is impossible to conceive of the Absolute Brahman as involved in any process of evolution. When God incarnates as man, He invokes this Power and then employs Her for the good of men. Divine Power, thus propitiated by the Lord Himself, becomes gracious and suitably rearranges the factors concerned for the advancement of erring and perplexed humanity. Not only this, when God comes down as man, Divine Power also accompanies Him most often as a woman. The descent of Sita with Ramachandra, Sri Radhika with Krishna, Yasodhara with Buddha, and Vishnupriya with Sri Chaitanya emphasizes this fact. In truth, Divine Power, whether on the spiritual or on the material plane, or as the consort of an incarnation, helps Him immensely in His mission. Divorced from Power, His divine drama cannot be enacted, nor can it be comprehended by us.

Swami Saradananda, writes, 'Having discovered the eternal association of Power with Consciousness, the Rishis of India worshipped in all exceptionally energetic things and everywhere the Deity Who dances on the prostrate body of Siva. This incomparable Deity Who promises both blessing and protection with Her hands at the same time that She wears a necklace of heads, was discovered by them as a reality and as such worshipped reverentially in the guru who is the spiritual guide, in women who fascinate the world and in such elevating and degrading qualities as knowledge, forbearance, peace, delusion, torpor, error, etc. Having thus themselves attained all that men can aspire after, they taught others how to be blessed by treading the same path' (*Bharate-Shakti-puja*, p.20).

Again, Swami Vivekananda realized that this Sakti (Divine Power) had been awakened by Sri Ramakrishna

for the rejuvenation of the present age; and hence he sent forth this clarion call: 'Just imagine in your mind the acme of that resurgence with whose first stirrings the whole world is now resounding, and give up all vain doubt and weakness to which slave nations easily succumb.' That formless and eternal Power of Brahman which inheres in everything has again descended as the consort of the incarnation for the present age. She has on the one hand helped Him to fulfil His mission, and on the other has spread Her influence on various fields of human relationships, thereby removing obstacles and setting India, and, along with her, the whole world, on a new road to progress. Therefore it is that Swami Vivekananda who was blessed by them both, salutes them thus: 'A slave am I to both of you; and to both do I prostrate myself.'

Not only has the descent of God a particular technique of its own, but the manifestation of His Power also has its own mode. Or to put it otherwise, though the time and the purpose are the same for the incarnation of God and His Power, which are inseparable like fire and heat, yet the objective is attained through the masculine body in one way and through the feminine in another. Thus it is that even though the entity cannot be split up, there is a special value in following separately the events that accompany the feminine counterpart.

In the *Chandi* (XI. 54-55) the Goddess says: 'Whenever there arises any obstacle from the demons, I shall come down in this way to destroy the enemy'. In olden times there was constant need for destroying the demons, as they oppressed good and bad men alike. Their destructive power is not however confined to the physical plane. The constant conflict that rages in human hearts between good and evil tendencies is also described in the Upanishads as a battle waged by the demons against the forces of goodness. In the present age, this struggle has assumed the form of a challenge thrown out by disbelief, materialism, and sensuality to belief in

God, faith in the immortality of the soul, and adherence to godliness. It is in consequence of this challenge that there has been a growth of irreligion, envy, enmity, and passion which are a constant source of war resulting in the loss of innumerable valuable lives.

The conflict on the psychological plane in the modern age is even more devastating than the old mythological war between the gods and the demons. The old antagonism seldom overstepped the limits of the physical world; but the present struggle has originated in the mental plane and is spreading to all spheres of everyday life, thus laying the axe at the very root of humanity. Hence the action of the Divine Power under existing circumstances has to be mainly on the mental plane. Above everything else, the present-day world needs moral progress and spiritual enlightenment. If faith, purity, and devotion can once attain supremacy, the outer world is bound to change. The incarnate Divine Power is, therefore, now engaged in fighting internal enemies. The victory may come either by liquidating the sinner together with his sin or by transforming him through the natural attraction of genuine good feelings. The conversion of a heinous heart through moral excellence, presupposes a greater strength than is necessary for killing an enemy outright. So in the present incarnation there is no clanging of weapons or the din of war; but there is an abundance of modesty, humility, purity, goodness, practical love, and spiritual experience. Moreover, the Deity has not only to remove obstacles. She has also to establish new goals and create fresh aspirations; and this is a tremendous task. God Himself need not come down for removing all hindrances from the path of His devotees. This can be accomplished by an inspired soul or by a partial divine manifestation. As the whole of humanity has to be raised to a higher pitch of realization, Divine Power Herself takes the field.

The emergence of the Divine Power today on the hoary background of Indian culture is indicative of a unique reanimation. Particularly is it bound to be so

among women, the need of whose advancement is admitted on all hands. We cannot do better than echo the words of Swami Vivekananda who was convinced that India cannot prosper without revitalising her womanhood, just as a bird cannot fly with one wing: 'And therefore it is that when God incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna, he worshipped God as Kali, the Mother, accepted a woman as his guru (spiritual guide), assumed the role of a woman in some of his spiritual strivings, took upon himself the responsibility of educating and training his own wife, and preached the Motherhood of God'.

In the middle of the last century the womanhood of India was faced with a tremendous problem. India then was being swept off her feet by foreign ideals. A craze for imitating the West set in at the cost of indigenous values. The plan of educational reform envisaged in the despatch of Sir Charles Wood, dated 19th July, 1854, gave only a vague indication of the kind of training that Indian women would get. True it is that India was not entirely wrong in welcoming foreign ideas and practices. On the contrary, it is quite in keeping with Indian tradition to enrich her life by assimilating foreign ideas while still retaining her own individuality. There is need for energizing our womanhood by drawing a little on foreign sources in order to make national life more vigorous and fruitful, at the same time that the West also learns something of our veneration for motherhood, so that Western civilization may have a stronger spiritual basis and a longer lease of life. But though each civilization has much to learn from another, it will spell disaster if the basic distinctions are ignored. For, though women are honoured everywhere, that honour very often appears in the form of chivalry and appreciation of feminine charms. But India eulogizes chastity and motherhood, since the ideal aimed at is spiritual freedom which has for its foundation absolute self-control. Our ideal specimens of womanhood are Sita, Savitri, and Damayanti. There is an evident conflict between the two standpoints; and

future world civilizations have either to choose sides or seek a rational rapprochement. The problem has assumed an urgency which it never had a hundred years ago. And yet the forces governing the destiny of India foresaw that unless Indian culture was saved from the deluge of modern ideas, the world would have no sure foundation on which the future Eastern and Western social edifices could be erected, while allowing for individual differences. There was need for providing a dependable model in the combined figure of guru, mother and deity from which all could draw the necessary inspiration.

Considered from all points of view, this task of resuscitating and perfecting the Indian ideal could be accomplished by none other than the Mother of the Universe Herself; for in the middle of the last century no other force could succeed in making India conscious of her grand destiny and the world cognizant of her revitalizing message. This is the age-old tradition of India's spiritual ministry. Truly God's advent has been strictly in proportion to the moral degradation during the period beginning from the eighteen fifties and ending with the nineteen twenties. The greater the degradation the greater is the Divine Power's response to the challenge of the times. The new advances of world civilization will commence with the worship of the guru, mother, and goddess as manifested in the recent past.

Sri Krishna hints in the *Gita*, that though God descends to the human world for the general good, men through the poverty of their intellect fail to gauge His real stature, hidden as He remains under His assumed mundane limitations. And thus, paradoxically enough, the conditions of Divine descent were frustrating His gracious intention. Notwithstanding this drawback, it is only through those human bodies that God can reveal to erring and suffering humanity the means by which life can be made divine; for sunk as men are in their petty selfish pursuits, there is no other method for reinvigorating them for higher achievements. This transmission of fresh vigour and

the communication of revitalizing power may follow different channels. In some cases the highest perfection of human ideals may be visibly demonstrated or they may be made more sublime and enduring through achievements of personal life or through grandeur of instruction; in other cases new paths may be opened up by divine decree; while in still others, human hearts may be more powerfully attracted towards cherished traditional human norms through charming divine disports. While all this is true, we must not jump to the conclusion that the mission of an incarnation is confined to a mere heightening of sublimity, or the establishment of fresh ideals, or the attraction of human hearts. For, though we may try to understand his contribution analytically, we have to remember that it is beyond human capacity fully to comprehend or formulate in words the significance of an incarnation, inasmuch as he is the embodiment of all kinds of spiritual moods. Besides, a power that is released for ages, cannot be assessed by contemporary history. Nevertheless, we accept these three standards as a basis for an intellectual apprehension of the life of the Holy Mother, wherein we shall see the qualities of motherhood in their superhuman perfection, and we shall come to know how they acted in the present age for evolving new spiritual values. We shall also see how in her life the feminine virtues consequent on such positions in the family as daughter, sister, wife, or matron, reached their ideal states, and above all, how her pristine purity was itself an inspiration to others.

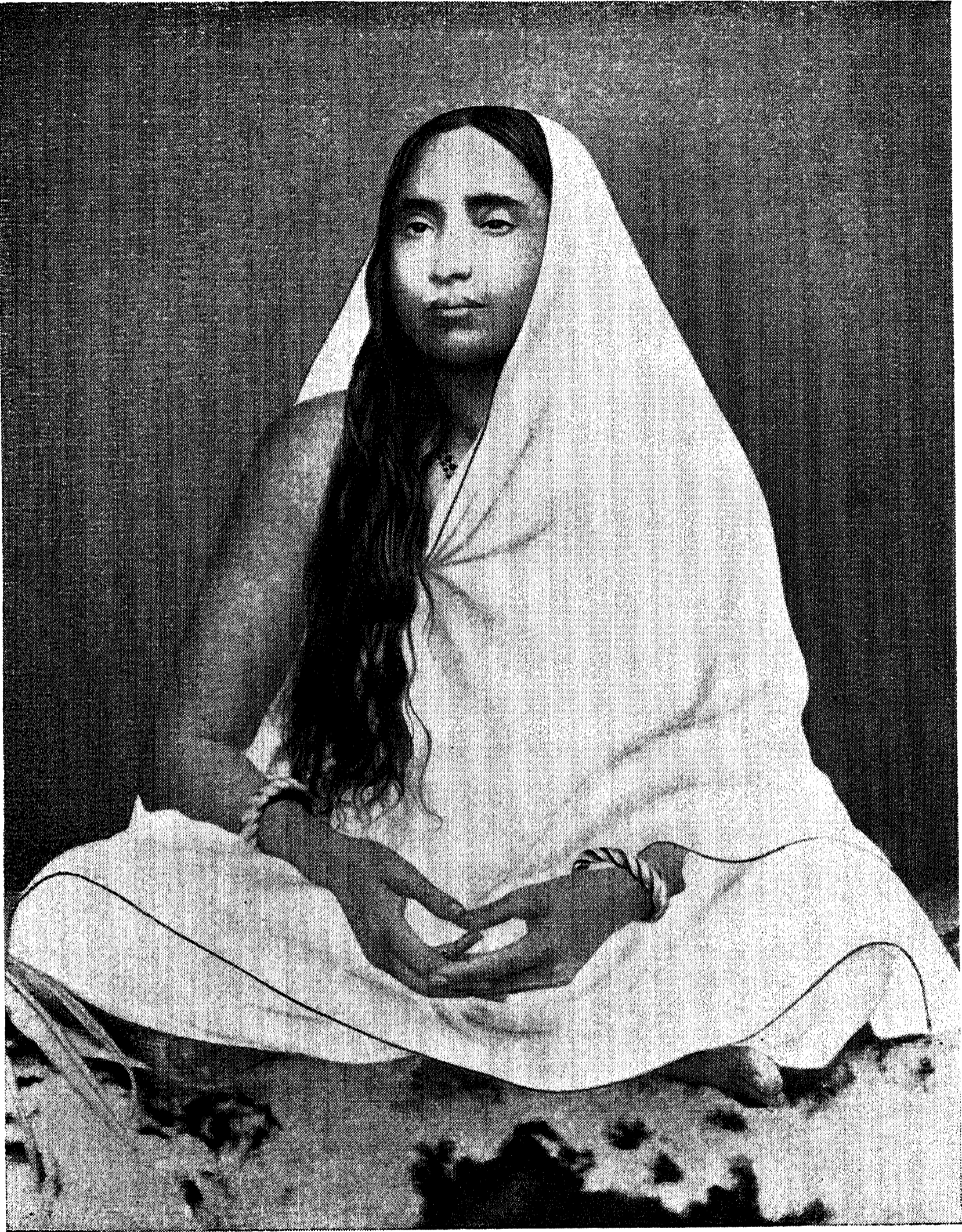
Is this all sentimental ebullition or a faint hint at reality? We invite the reader to raise this question again after finishing this biography; but we are convinced that he himself will discover the truth ere long and be freed from doubt. But he must be forewarned that the life we are dealing with is in many respects extraordinary, and it must be evaluated accordingly. The Holy Mother does not belong to that class of dazzling personalities who suddenly emerge in contemporary history and after assuming

superhuman proportion for a while vanish for ever, nor to that category of people who through bustling activity, flaming oratory, or the clatter of arms imperil human civilization and blacken history for ever. She belongs to that galaxy of great characters who by concretizing the human ideals in their lives raise world civilization to a higher level and whose influence, though seemingly inconsiderable to their contemporaries, lasts longer and expands for ever. In fact, she is to be classed with such memorable figures as Sati and Sita whose advent purified human life and blazed the path for a fresh resurgence.

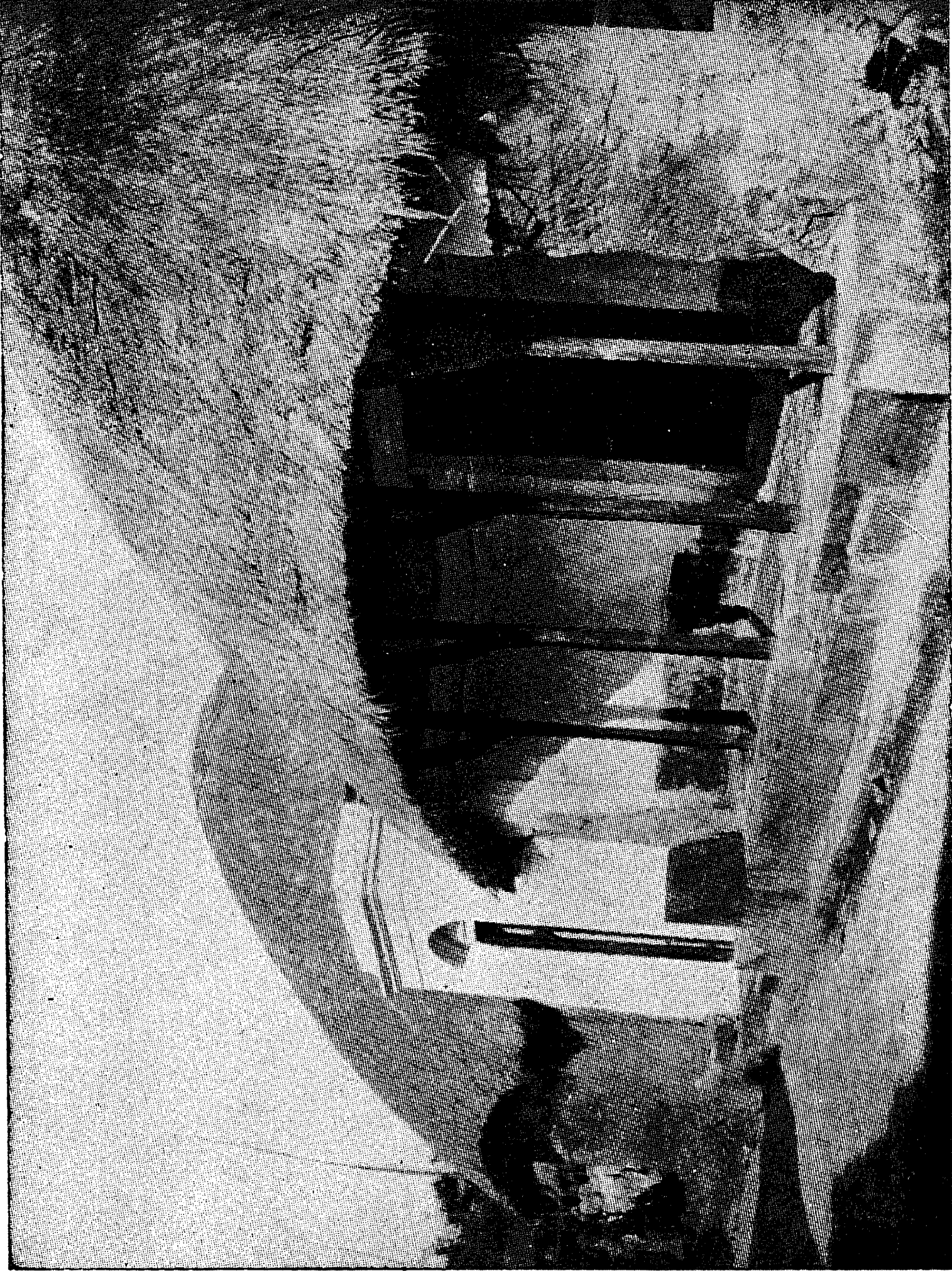
All this is unquestionable. But still another question remains: 'If the Power descended for the world as a whole, why should it have selected for its field an insignificant remote hamlet like Jayrambati, detached as it is from all modern influences?' Who can answer such a question? And, in fact, how many of those questions can we answer that arise in connection with the unpredictable movements of that inscrutable Power that ever creates, sustains, and dissolves the world? And yet human intellect, though aware of its limitations, cannot desist from the quest. So we cogitate, 'Had Jayrambati any speciality, because of which it had such a proud privilege?' Even a close scrutiny does not reveal any such, though the pages of history bear witness to the facts of Krishna's advent in Kamsa's prison and his childlike and boyish disports among cowherds, of Jesus's birth in a stable and his early training in a carpenter's house, and the descent of Ramakrishna in a husking shed and his subsequent life as a poor temple priest. And sociology points to the fact, that when under the impact of an aggressive foreign culture, the learned and moneyed classes in the towns are swept off their feet, indigenous culture maintains a precarious existence in the poor surroundings of remote villages. Moreover, Indian culture discovered a peculiar mode of self-perpetuation by entrusting itself into the hands of indigent Brahmins and penniless gurus. Had Jayrambati these factors in abundance?

## THE BLESSED HAMLET

Bankura, though it belongs to the fertile province of West Bengal, is comparatively barren and subject to frequent famine. But the little village of Jayrambati, lying at the south-east corner of the district, is more fortunate and ever smiles with the crops of paddy, wheat, sugar-cane, and vegetables which the industrious farmers grow in its fields. It is about three miles west of Kamarpukur, the native village of Sri Ramakrishna, and is under the Siromanipur outpost of the main police station at Kotulpur within the Vishnupur sub-division of the District. From the north-western corner of the hamlet the small, perennial rivulet Amodar, with its transparent water, meanders eastward for a mile like a playful child, demarcating the northern limits of Jayrambati; then taking a south-easternly turn it washes the boundary of Mukundapur which forms a part of Kamarpukur, and then flows southward. The narrow and shallow stream forms whirlpools here and there, which are deep and full of fish, so that small alligators are often attracted there. In the northern side of the village, the streamlet forms a beautiful peninsula, triangular in shape and raised in the centre. The green grass and tall trees which cover it make it a cool retreat for those who want a shelter from the day's heat, and the solitude is heightened by the signs of cremation here and there, inviting those who are sick of the worries of the world. Resounding with the chirping of birds and decorated with fruit and flower trees as it was, it was a favourite place for Swami Saradananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and others who after a dip in the brook sat under the *amalaka* (*emblic myrobalan*) tree which adorned its centre in those days; and there they meditated or read the *Gita* or the *Chandi* for a considerable time. The Mother in her younger days took her ceremonial bath in this stream on special days.



THE HOLY MOTHER



HOLY MOTHER'S PARENTAL HOME AT JAYRAMBATTI

The natural situation of Jayrambati is very fine. It is surrounded almost on all sides by extensive fields. The land between the Amodar and the village is about half a mile in width and is very fertile. Such staple crops as paddy, pulses, chilli, and turmeric, as well as ordinary vegetables, are raised on this and adjacent lands by a diligent peasantry whose wants are few. Cotton, too, used to be cultivated and the ponds had plenty of fish. It is said that the hamlet began to have such abundance only after the birth of the Holy Mother. It had then no shops; and yet the people did not depend on other villages. They were satisfied with what they got from their fields. Whenever necessity arose, they went to the market at Kamarpukur which supplied them with sweets, or to Kotulpur, six miles to the north, from where they got clothes, salt and spices, or to Kayapat-Badanganj, five or six miles to the south-west. At Shihar (or Shiod, as it is locally pronounced), one mile to the west, there were some grocer's shops, and there was another at Pukure, about a mile and a half away, which helped the people of Jayrambati in an emergency. North of Jayrambati, on the other side of the Amodar and across a vast field, is a large village called Desra (pronounced as Deshda). On the east, too, across a vast stretch of paddy fields, one comes to the bank of the Amodar, after crossing which one has to pass through Amarpur to reach Kamarpukur. The track has now been made wider and easier for traffic, and it is dotted on either side by big shady trees under which the cow-boys and pedestrians can take rest or shelter.

The Mukhopadhyaya (or briefly Mukherji) family in which the Holy Mother was born, settled in this village long ago. Apart from these Mukherjis and the Banerjis who are related to the former, there is no Brahmin family there. The rest of the villagers are non-Brahmins bearing such family titles as Vishwas, Mandal, Ghosh, and Samui. The Brahmins, together with a few families of milkmen, one of barbers, one of sweetmeat makers, one of

blacksmiths, and a few families of Bagdis, inhabit about a hundred small mud houses where they live their unostentatious rural life. We are not aware of any indisputable theory about the origin of the name of the village, though one may guess that it might have been derived from the name of the tutelary deity or of an ancestor of the Mukherjis.

The villagers used to bathe in and draw their drinking water from the big tank with tall palm trees on its banks called the Badujye-pukur (or the tank of the Banerjis) in the southern part of the village. Further south there is an ancient tank with blooming lotuses. On the western side of the village is a big tank called the Aher on which the cultivators depend for water for irrigation. An old pond, called the Punya-pukur, occupies a central position. On its western bank is the 'new house' of the Holy Mother, built in 1916. On that bank again at the northern side is a small thatch opening to the south which is the old chapel of the Mukherjis. In one of its rooms there is an emblem of the deity Dharma<sup>1</sup> called Sundara-Narayana, which is of the form of a tortoise and which the Mukherjis worship by turns. The other room is called the Kali-mado where the goddess Kali used to be worshipped every year. This worship ceased subsequently as a result of family differences. In this room, again, sat the village school where the little boys and girls gathered, with leaves for writing under their arms and crisp scorched rice (*mudi*) for tiffin tied at the ends of their clothes. At the north-east corner of this room was a black-stone, the emblem of the goddess Shashthi who grants children to worshippers and protects them. Newly married couples used to come to salute this deity; and we fancy that Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother, too, did so. Shashthi now sits in Sundara-Narayana's room. On the southern side of the village road that runs over the southern bank of the Punya-pukur is the Modal-pada, the quarter of the

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1. Literally, virtue or right norm, deified in Buddhism.

Modals; and to the south of this place is the shrine of Simhavahini<sup>1</sup> who along with two of her female companions—Chandi and Mahamaya—occupies a seat, a separate seat being provided for Manasa, the serpent goddess. The Mukherjis are the hereditary priests of all these deities. At the time that we are writing of, Simhavahini was housed in a thatch; but now she sits in a more substantial house with a cement floor and a corrugated iron sheet roof.

On the southern bank of the Punya-pukur is the homestead of the Banerjis. From the old brick-built temple, parlour, etc., it can be inferred that they were once in an affluent state. But now all these are in ruins.

The main road of the village runs north and south by the western side of the Mother's new house and the Kali shrine, both of which are on the Punya-pukur. As we proceed along this road a little northward, there stands on our left the white brick-built temple on the birth-place of the Mother. Here was the ancestral home of the Mukherjis who, however, spread out south-west with the growth of the family. Their houses lie to the west of the village road and open to the east. The ancient homestead had a thatch on the eastern side, which was divided into two parts, the outer one serving as a drawing-room. On the south were the kitchen and husking sheds. On the southern side of the present dwellings of the Mukherjis there is another road which, starting from the main village road, runs westward along the northern bank of the Kalu-gede (or Kalu's pond) and the southern side of the Ghosh-pada (Ghosh quarter) to join the road to Shihar on the northern bank of the Aher. On the extreme west of the Ghosh-pada is the brick-built temple of Dharma, known as Yatra-siddhi-rama, whose symbol is a small low stool with four legs.

Of the villages round about Jayrambati, with which the memories of Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother are specially associated, mention may be made of Shihar, Koal-

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1. i. e. one riding on a lion, an epithet of Durga.

para, Anur, and Shyambazar. At Shihar was married Hemangini Devi, the daughter of the paternal aunt of Sri Ramakrishna. It is also the birth-place of Shyama-sundari Devi, the mother of the Holy Mother. These common ties often attracted both the Master and the Mother to this village even from their childhood. The Mother used to halt at Koalpara when in later days, she passed through Vishnupur on her way to and from Calcutta. Anur is known for its shrine of the goddess Vishalakshi, on the way to which the Master while still a child passed into ecstasy. At Shyambazar he once joined a *kirtana*<sup>1</sup> party which sang the glory of the Lord continuously for seven days and nights. To the east of Jayrambati, on the other side of Amodar, is the big village of Tajpur; to the south is Jibta which houses the landlords of Jayrambati; to the southwest is Masinapur (or Masnepur); and to the west is Shihar. All these villages are within a mile of Jayrambati. West of Shihar is Shiromanipur which is inhabited by Mohammedans and which boasts of a police station.

Jayrambati, though not very far from Calcutta, is not easy of access, and roads were more difficult in the times we are writing of. In those days people trudged on through village roads and open fields, frequently infested with robbers. Only the rich few could afford the luxury of carts, palanquins, etc. One of these paths passed through Kamarpukur, Arambagh, and Tarakeshwar, the last place being noted for its Siva temple. Between Arambagh and Tarakeshwar lay a vast field called Telo-bhelo which was not safe even during daylight, so that people never crossed it alone or after nightfall. This was the shorter of the two routes usually followed by the people, the distance by it between Calcutta and Jayrambati being about sixty miles; and this was the path that the Holy Mother usually trod on her way to meet the Master at Dakshineshwar.

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1. A particular type of religious songs sung singly or in chorus, with musical instruments like cymbals and drums to keep time.

The other route through Burdwan, which is a railway station, was a much longer one and withal not free from robbers. People now proceeding to Jayrambati usually travel by a night train from Calcutta to Vishnupur where they can get buses which ply up to Jayrambati in the dry months and up to Kotulpur in the wet, with the rest of the way, a distance of about six miles, to be covered on foot or by a cart according to convenience. A modern all-weather road up to Jayrambati is now (1953) under construction which may ultimately be extended to Kamarpukur.<sup>1</sup>

Jayrambati, though thus shut out from modern civilization, does not lack in festivities. It has its rounds of annual celebrations. In autumn there is a three-day special worship of Simhavahini, the presiding deity of the village, which draws people from all parts. Besides, other days sacred to other gods and goddesses are duly observed with much eclat. On the Sivaratri day the villagers go to Shihar to offer worship at the temple of Shantinatha (Siva). There are also *kirtana* songs continued for twenty-four hours at a stretch and rural dramas on mythological subjects which are highly appreciated and largely patronized.

And above all, Jayrambati has been blessed by the advent of the Holy Mother, which has converted it into a place of pilgrimage where people from all over the world come to draw inspiration. The white dome of the temple, flying its metal pennant with the Bengali word 'ma' (mother) engraved on it, announces the glory of the village to distant passers-by. The temple was consecrated on the 19th April, 1923 (Akshaya Tritiya, according to the Hindu calendar), which day is still observed and is made joyous by the presence of hundreds of devotees hailing from different places. The worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri, which was initiated by the Holy Mother's mother and for which the Mother herself made permanent arrangements, is also

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1. This has since been extended to Kamarpukur.

performed annually and is equally popular with the devotees. The establishment of the branches of the Ramakrishna Math and of its sister institution the Ramakrishna Mission, which cater to the spiritual, mental, and physical needs of the villagers, has also enhanced the popularity of Jayrambati, and easier accessibility is gradually converting it into a centre of attraction. It is a miracle that by the birth of the Holy Mother this insignificant hamlet should have leaped into such prominence within such a short time. The Mother herself placed on her head the dust of this hamlet and saluted it with the Sanskrit adage '*Janani janmabhūmischa swargadapi gariyasi*' — mother and mother-country are superior to heaven itself.

## THE ADVENT

We do not know when the Mukherjis came to Jayrambati. From two old documents it appears that sometime in the middle of 1669 a certain King of Vishnupur, named Sri Chaitanya Simha, gifted about six acres of land, free of all rents, to one Khelaram, a forefather of the Mukherjis, for the maintenance of his family and for carrying on the worship of Dharma. From this it appears that the Mukherjis had been worshippers of the deity even earlier and might have come to the village in that capacity. This was perhaps during the transitional period in the history of Bengal when Buddhism was being absorbed into Hinduism together with its deities of whom Dharma, under various names, was one. But once the Mukherjis had set their feet in the village, they became the family priests of the Hindus near about and thus gradually established the supremacy of Hinduism, owing to which Simhavahini, the Hindu deity, whom too the Mukherjis worshipped, became the presiding goddess.

The site occupied by the Holy Mother temple was perhaps the first place where the Mukherjis settled. This is borne out by the Siva image in black-stone which was found underground when the foundation for the temple was being dug. This must have once been worshipped by the Mukherjis. The Mother lived here till she was nine years old, and this was also the place which witnessed her marriage. 'My marriage was celebrated in the old house,' she recounted. 'We shifted to the new house (which later fell to her brother Varada's share) when I was nine years old—when the old house became too small.'

Ramachandra, a worthy descendant of the Mukherjis, whose tutelary deity was Rama, was respected at Jayrambati for his godliness, suavity of temper, and compassion for all. He married Shyamasundari Devi, daughter of Sri Haridas Mazumdar of Shihar. The wife, too, vied with

her husband in the practice of virtue. Her purity, simplicity, and fortitude were the talk of the village. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was born of this pious couple. The few sentences which occasionally dropped from the Mother's lips with regard to her parents go to show how virtuous they were and in what veneration she held them. 'My parents,' she said, 'were very good. My father was a devout follower of Rama. He was very orthodox and would not accept any gift from people of other castes. How kind my mother was; how she would feed people, and how she took care of them! And how guileless she was!' And she added, 'My father liked smoking. But as he smoked, he was so simple and humble that he would address in a friendly way any passer-by who crossed his door, and would say, "Sit down, brother, and have a smoke." And then he himself would fill up pipe after pipe for him. Will the Lord be born where the parents are not self-composed?' About her mother she said, 'My mother was Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) herself, so to say. Throughout the year she would gather all sorts of things and keep them in order. She would say, "My household is for God and His devotees...". This household was, as it were, a part and parcel of her being. What pains did she not take to keep it in order!'

Ramachandra had three younger brothers—Trailokyanath, Ishwarchandra and Nilmadhav—all of whom lived together. This family was never prosperous and somehow made both ends meet with the little that was earned by farming and priesthood; and yet Ramachandra was unstinting in his charity, of which we shall have some proof in due course.

Once when Shyamasundari Devi was living with her father in the northern part of Shihar, she had occasion to sit in the dark beside a potter's oven under a bel (*bilva*, *aegle marmelos*) tree. There suddenly issued a jingling sound from the direction of the oven, and a little girl came down from the branches of the tree. She laid her soft hands round Shyama-

sundari's neck, whereupon she fell down unconscious. She had no idea how long she lay there thus. Her relatives came there searching for her and carried her home. On regaining consciousness she felt as though the little girl had entered her womb.

Ramachandra was then in Calcutta in search of some means of earning money for his family. The thought of his family's poverty weighed heavily on his mind. One day, before he had decided to start for the city, he was engrossed in that thought. Then he fell asleep and dreamt that a little girl of golden complexion embraced him from behind by throwing her delicate arms round his neck. The incomparable beauty of the girl, as also her invaluable ornaments, at once marked her as out of the common run. Ramachandra was greatly surprised and asked, 'Who are you, my child?' The girl replied in the softest and sweetest of voices, 'Here am I come to you.' Ramachandra woke up and the conviction grew in him that the girl was none other than Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, whose appearance implied that the time was auspicious for him to go out in quest of money. Accordingly he left for Calcutta. We do not know how far Ramachandra was successful in his quest. All that we know is that after returning home he heard what had happened to his wife, and, spiritually-minded as he himself was, he readily believed everything. Henceforth this holy Brahmin couple lived the purest of lives in expectation of the divine child. Ramachandra had the highest regard for his wife and never touched her person till the birth of the Holy Mother. Shyamasundari Devi was conscious of her unique fortune, and long after she said to Yogin-Ma,<sup>1</sup> 'How beautiful I looked when I was in the family way, how thick were my tresses, and how many pieces of cloth were presented to me during that time!'

Gradually the time of confinement approached. Autumn had now passed, and it was the beginning of the

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1. A lady devotee of the Master, and later a constant companion of the Mother.

month of Paush when winter had just set in. This was one of the happiest times in Bengal villages. The harvest was over and the granaries were full. The fields around again began to smile with the shooting forth of the summer crop. The new harvest festival had just been finished, and the little children were counting the days for the festival of the month-ending<sup>1</sup> when they would have a feast of cakes. The Christian world was eagerly waiting for the merry Christmas day. The Tantrikas were busy paying visits to the Kali temples, especially as such visits were thought to be very meritorious in that month. And it was the day of winter solstice when the longest night was over and the sun was beginning its northward course—the day on which the Hindu gods and goddesses wake up from their long slumber of six months. During such a time, a little after Thursday evening, on the 8th Paush (22nd December, 1853) when the night had spread her star-spangled cloth over the village of Jayrambati to lay it asleep after the day's labour the blowing of conchshells from Ramachandra's house announced the happy news of the advent of Sri Saradamani Devi. Soon an astrologer was called in and in accordance with the disposition of the stars and planets at the time, the child was ceremonially named Thakurmani. Her more popular name was, however, Saradamani.<sup>2</sup>

Sarada was the first child of her parents. She was followed by a sister named Kadambini and then by five brothers named Prasannakumar, Umeshchandra, Kalikumar, Varadaprasad and Abhaycharan. Kadambini died childless.

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1. Paush Samkranti, roughly corresponding to the winter solstice.

2. It is customary to have two names, one for astrological and the other for common use. We have it on the authority of Swami Gaurishwarananda, who had it from the Mother herself, that Kshemankari was the actual common name she was given. But her mother's sister, who had lost a daughter called Sarada, requested Shyamasundari Devi to change her child's name to Sarada, so that the bereaved lady might imagine that the new child was none other than her own, though in another form.

soon after her marriage with Sudharam Chakravarty of Kokanda. Umesh, too, died before marriage at the age of eighteen or nineteen. Abhay died just after passing out of a medical school, leaving behind him a widow and a daughter, of whom we shall have much to say in future. The other brothers grew up and set up separate houses and reared their own families. Uncle<sup>1</sup> Kali built his house south of the ancestral home. Uncle Varada's house was to the north-west of uncle Kali's. South-west of this house was the Kalu-gede (Kalu's pond) mentioned earlier, which was used by the Mukherjis for cleaning the household utensils. South of the Holy Mother temple and north of uncle Kali's house was the house of uncle Prasanna. The Mother spent a long part of her life in the cottage of uncle Prasanna, which has since been purchased by the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math and added to the Holy Mother temple properties, in which also are included the Punya-pukur and the new house of the Mother. North of this cottage was the gateway of the house of uncle Surya who was the son of Ishwarchandra Mukherji, one of the uncles of the Holy Mother. Her eldest uncle Trailokya was a Sanskrit scholar; but he died in youth soon after his marriage. The youngest uncle, Nilmadhav, remained a bachelor and never parted from Ramchandra.

After the death of Rampriya Devi, his first wife, uncle Prasanna married Suvasini Devi. He had two daughters—Nalini and Sushila (or Maku) by his first wife; and by his second wife he had two daughters, Kamala and Vimala, born during the Mother's life, and a son, Ganapati, born after her demise. Uncle Kali had two sons, Bhudev and Radharaman, by his wife Subodhbala Devi. We have already said that uncle Abhay left behind him his widow Surabala and an only daughter Radharani, affectionately called Radhu or Radhi. Uncle Prasanna had a moderate

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1. The devotees of the Holy Mother consider her brothers and brothers' wives as their own uncles and aunts. And so also her nieces are their cousins whom they call 'sisters'.

supplementary income from his priestly services in Calcutta. Owing perhaps to an early life of poverty, he was very frugal in his ways. With the money he saved, he purchased paddy fields and bullocks and thus improved his condition. Kalikumar was irritable by nature. It is said that before his birth his mother became very much overwhelmed by the loss of some children, when with the help of some medicines given by a woman who worshipped the goddess Kali and with her blessings too, she got Kalikumar as her son; and that accounted for the boy's irascibility. Kali stayed at Jayrambati, and as an orthodox Brahmin he attended to his daily worship and the observance of ceremonies, so that he was greatly respected. Uncle Varada generally stayed at Jayrambati, though he often went to assist Prasanna at Calcutta.

The Mother spent her early days in a poor family; but poverty was in a sense a boon and made life sweeter by providing greater opportunity for her to reveal her affection for all around. Ramchandra could not raise enough paddy from his lands to meet the expenses of the family; so he grew some cotton also. Shyamasundari Devi would carry the little girl Sarada to the cotton field where she would lay her down and go to pluck the cotton pods. When Sarada grew up to be a little girl she would help her mother in this work as also in spinning sacred thread with the cotton, which would fetch some cash for cloth and other family requirements. Sarada had also to look after her brothers. 'I used to go with them,' she said, 'to bathe in the Ganges, that is, in the Amodar, which was our Ganges<sup>1</sup>. After finishing our holy bath, I would eat with them some fried-rice there, and then bring them home. The Ganges had always an uncommon attraction for me.' As for other engagements, she said, 'As a girl I would plunge inot neck-deep water to cut grass for the cattle, and walk to the fields with fried-rice for the labourers. During

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1. The popular belief, supported by scripture, is that all streams become as sacred as the Ganges at holy moments.

one year when locusts had nearly destroyed the crop, I went round the fields gathering paddy.' As regards her education she said, 'I sometimes accompanied Prasanna, Ramnath (a cousin), and others when they went to school in their boyhood; and thus I learnt a little.'

In addition to these brief and casual references to her childhood days, some information can be gathered from her contemporaries. Thus Sri Raj Mukherji's sister Aghormani Devi, a companion and playmate of the Mother's girlhood days, said, 'The Mother was very simple by nature; she was simplicity incarnate. Nobody had any altercation with her during childhood sports and games in which she very often played the master or the mistress of a house. She, of course, made dolls and played with them; but she preferred worshipping with flowers and bel leaves Kali and Lakshmi in images fashioned by herself. When other girls fell out, she would mediate, settle their quarrels, and re-establish cordial relations. Once during the worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri, Sri Ramhriday Ghoshal of Haldepukur was present. Finding the Mother lost in meditation before the deity, he kept his eyes fixed on her for a long time; but as he could not make out as to who was the deity and who the Mother, he left the place in fear.' Other old people would say, 'From her young days, Sarada was as diligent in her work as she was intelligent, quiet, and well-behaved. She had never to be asked to work. Of her own accord and with her own resourcefulness she would meticulously perform her duties.'

The self-identification of the Mother with Jagad-dhatri in her meditation which became pronounced enough to awe a casual observer was not an isolated event in this unique life. The girlhood days of the Holy Mother were made surprisingly singular by a strange combination of divinity and humanity, with a predominance of the former, as it were. Whatever others might think of her in her later life, she then generally revealed herself in her human role. But at the time of which we are writing, it seems as

though she stood at the meeting point of heaven and earth and could not decide as to which side she should lean, fresh as she was from the world above; or it might have been that it was ordained from above that those early days should be divinely encompassed. So it is that the Holy Mother said with reference to those days, 'Mind you, my dear, as a girl I saw that another girl of my age always accompanied me, helped me in my work, and frolicked with me; but she disappeared at the approach of other people. This continued till I was ten or eleven years old.'<sup>1</sup> When she went into the water to cut grass for the cattle, there would appear a girl of the same age to assist her in the work. No sooner the Mother return from the shore after depositing a sheaf cut by the new girl, than she would find another sheaf kept ready in the meantime.

We have now an idea of how busy the Mother was in her early life. From her reminiscences of those days we also gather that she had off and on to undertake such hard tasks as cooking. But though she was a precocious and painstaking little girl, her hands were not strong enough for the whole arduous process, and so she had to call in her father for taking down heavy utensils from the fire-place. She had to fetch pitchers of water from the tank for domestic purposes, and she took this opportunity to learn swimming with the help of the pitcher.

When she was eleven years old (1864), the country-side was ravaged by a terrible famine. Her father had garnered some paddy; and though he was by no means affluent, he was moved so much by the appalling misery around that he opened his granary and started a free canteen. The Holy Mother described it thus: 'What a dire famine raged there once and how many starving people came to our house! We had stocked the previous year's produce. My father had the paddy husked into rice and got potfuls of *khichudi* (hotch-potch) cooked by mixing it with black len-

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1. Much later, after the passing away of the Master, she had another vision of a similar girl (see the chapter on 'With The Devotees').

tils. "Everybody in this house will eat this," he said, "and offer it to whoever may come. Only for my Sarada, a little rice of good variety will be cooked and she will eat it." On some days the number of people became so great that *khichudi* ran short. Cooking would restart at once. No sooner was the hot food served on the leaves, than I would fan it with both hands so that it might cool quickly. For, alas, the hungry stomachs could not brook delay! One day came a girl of either the (lowly) Bagdi or the Dome caste. The hair on her head had become shaggy for want of oil and her eyes were bloodshot like those of a lunatic. She ran to the tub where some rice-dust was soaked for the cattle and began gulping that. She wouldn't heed the people who were crying out, "Come in and eat the *khichudi*." Only after swallowing some rice-dust did she hear that call. Such, so dreadful, was the famine! After learning the bitter lesson of that year, people began to garner their paddy.'

From the vivid picture drawn up by the simple, unvarnished, and incomparable words of the Mother we find how busy she was seeking to cool by fanning with her soft, delicate hands the hot food for the starving people, she who in future would reign in the hearts of hundreds with the irresistible claim of a mother! And how full of affection for that tender darling of a child was the poor Brahmin! The Mother's life then was like that of any other girl in the village. But in the midst of this rural simplicity, now and then a sudden divine flash dazzles us. This interplay of light and shade could not perhaps entirely escape the notice of her brothers or of her parents who wanted to hug to themselves their small sister or smaller daughter as any other human being did. Perhaps because of the unforgettable impression of such moments of light, Shyamasundari Devi, mother of the Holy Mother, said in later life, 'My child, I wonder who you really may be, my dear! How can I recognize you, my daughter!' The daughter, of course, then brushed this compliment aside with apparent dislike,

saying, ' Who am I? Who can I be? Have I grown four hands (like any deity)? If so, why should I have come to you? ' What Sarada Devi did as a sister becomes clear from a talk that she had one day with her mother. Shyamasundari Devi said, ' Sarada, may I have a daughter like you in my next life! ' The daughter replied with a show of anger, ' You will drag me down again! To think that I should come again to bring up your children! ' With the memory of the quiet diligence of her affectionate daughter still fresh in her mind, Shyamasundari Devi repeated with an obvious appeal, ' May I, indeed, get you again, my darling! ' Uncle Kali, too, once reiterated this compliment when he said, ' Our sister is Lakshmi incarnate. She spared no pains to keep us alive. Husking paddy, spinning sacred thread, supplying the cattle with fodder, cooking,—in short, most of the household work was done single-handed by our sister. '

## FORETASTE OF LIFE DIVINE

We have followed Saradamani Devi at Jayrambati up to her eleventh year. In the meantime an important event occurred to which we have now to revert.

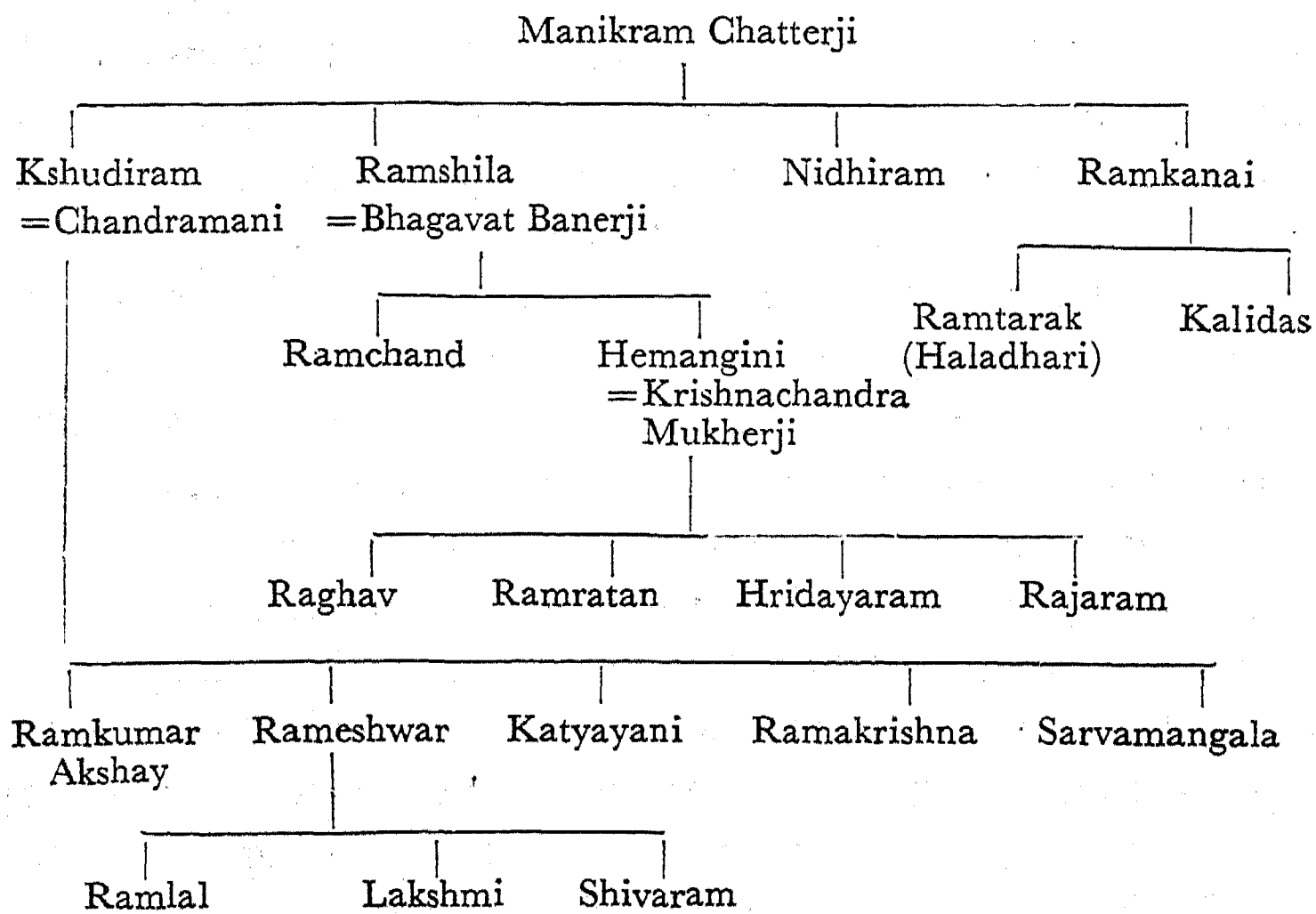
Sri Ramakrishna's nephew Hridayaram Mukherji lived at Shihar, and the Master often went there. In the same village lived the maternal uncles of the Holy Mother. Besides, Shihar had the distinction of possessing a stone temple, built after old architectural patterns and dedicated to Siva under the name Shantinatha. The annual celebrations attracted the villagers from far and near who came to hear *kirtana* music or to witness open air country theatres called *yatra*. During one such *kirtana* at Hridaya's house a strange thing happened. Sarada Devi, then a mere child, sat in the lap of a woman who asked her in merriment, after the *kirtana*, 'Whom among the great number of people, assembled here, would you like to marry?' Sarada Devi at once lifted her two tiny hands and pointed to Sri Ramakrishna sitting not far away. At that time she had no idea of what matrimony was; but the unseen power that guided those little hands saw to the fulfilment of the wishes of that unerring heart.

The Mother had then completed her fifth year and entered the sixth; and there at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna, then completing his twentythird year, was caught in the maelstrom of a spiritual fervour preparatory to the formulation and articulation of his special message for the age. Ignorant people then thought that he had been swept off his moorings and had lost his head. When exaggerated stories of his strange behaviour reached his mother Chandramani Devi at Kamarpukur, the venerable old lady who had hardly got over the shock of losing her eldest son Ramkumar,<sup>1</sup> had Ramakrishna brought home and

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1. The Chatterjis of Kamarpukur.

had witch-doctors engaged for curing him of his malady. But although medicines and medicine-men failed, Sri Ramakrishna became a little composed owing perhaps to the repeated spiritual visions that were vouchsafed to him at this time. Chandramani Devi was a little reassured thereby; but along with others she diagnosed the cause of the disease to be his apathy to worldly matters. And so with the help of her elder son Rameshwar, she set about searching for a bride for him; but their efforts were of no avail. At last Sri Ramakrishna came to know of this and, strangely enough, he evinced no rebellious distemper, but rather said with boyish acquiescence and gaiety, 'Go and find the bride marked out with a straw<sup>1</sup> in Ramchandra Mukherji's house at Jayrambati.' Following this meaningful hint the bride was soon found out, and the wedding day was fixed for a suitable date in early May, 1859. On the appointed day Rameshwar went with his brother to Jayrambati and the marriage was duly celebrated.



1. A figure of speech from the rural custom of marking out a fruit for gods, or a seed by tying a straw round its stem.

With regard to her marriage<sup>1</sup> the Holy Mother said, 'I was married when the dates ripen. When I went to Kamarpukur within ten days, I picked up dates there. Dharmadas Laha (the landlord of the village) came and said, "Is this the newly married girl?" Surya's father (her uncle Iswar Mukherji) carried me to Kamarpukur in his arms.'

On the evening after the day of marriage, the groom's party returned to Kamarpukur with the married couple. When they reached there, Chandramani Devi welcomed them home with due ceremonies. The marriage celebration ended with some minor domestic observances and feeding of relatives as a matter of form, on a small scale, for, the poor Chatterjis could not afford to have anything big. Hardly were these over when a sad thought began to oppress Chandra Devi. The Chatterjis paid three hundred rupees as bridal money; moreover, decency and honour demanded that the bride should be duly adorned, for which purpose Chandra Devi took on loan some ornaments from the Lahas, the village landlords. These had now to be returned; and yet Chandra Devi could not think of depriving the person of such a lovable and guileless child as Sarada. Sri Ramakrishna understood his mother's difficulty and assured her that during the little wife's sleep, he would imperceptibly remove the ornaments. This he did so deftly that Sarada Devi could not perceive anything. But next morning when she found her body unadorned, she said pointing to her various limbs, 'Where are the ornaments gone that were here and here?' Chandra Devi was moved to tears by these simple words of the child, and placing her on her lap consoled her saying, 'My darling, Gadai (meaning Ramakrishna) will give you better ornaments in future.'

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1. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (p. 554) relates, 'When women went round with twenty-seven burning sticks, the auspicious thread coloured with turmeric and tied round the Master's arm caught fire and was burnt away. The Master's acts were all inscrutable. Accepting his permanent Power (meaning the Holy Mother) he got his thread burnt by a trick, as it were.'

The girl was consoled somewhat by this, but her uncle who came the next day became infuriated and carried her back to Jayrambati.

This time Sri Ramakrishna stayed at home for more than two years. Some two years after his marriage, he once went to his father-in-law's house. About this visit the Mother said, 'When I was seven years old, the Master came to Jayrambati. You know that a married couple go together for a second time to the groom's house. He told me then, "If anyone asks you when you were married, say that you were married at the age of five. Don't say seven."' The Master perhaps warned her thus, lest she should think of this second visit together to Kamarpukur as the marriage itself. The Mother also remembered that the Master's nephew Hridaya, too, came with him and the latter searched out his little aunt and worshipped her feet despite her shyness. Sarada Devi's thoughts were still immature; and yet, without being instructed by anybody, she washed the Master's feet and fanned him, which added to the mirth of the people around. From Jayrambati the Master went to Kamarpukur with Sarada; and not long after, he returned to Dakshineswar to dive headlong into the sea of austerities for the realization of God. Sarada, too, came to Jayrambati and resumed her life under the tender care of her mother in the midst of rural beauty and simplicity.

Her third and fourth visits to Kamarpukur were when she was thirteen and fourteen years old. The Master was then at Dakshineswar, where also lived Chandra Devi, his mother. At Kamarpukur the Mother found Rameshwar and his wife and other relatives. Some five or six months intervened between these two visits. During the second visit she stayed at Kamarpukur for a month and a half. After that she spent about three or four months at Jayrambati till in 1867 news reached there that the Master had come home with Hridaya and Bhairavi Brahmani (the lady who guided him in his Tantrika spiritual practices), so that

it became necessary for her to go there. The Mother went and lived there with the Master for seven months.

This long stay amidst the quiet natural beauty and healthy surroundings of Kamarpukur improved the shattered health of the Master, and he returned to Dakshineswar with fresh vigour and drowned himself again in spiritual striving. When calm prevailed again, he resumed his visits to his native village, spending the rainy season there every year up till 1880, in accordance with the advice of physicians who condemned that season at Dakshineswar as too bad for his delicate health, undermined as it had been by long and strenuous disciplines. It is no longer possible to ascertain how many times the Mother went to Kamarpukur or what happened there during this long period from 1867 to 1880. Moreover, it is impossible to determine the exact dates of the few incidents that were related of this period by the Mother and others. Hence we shall relate some of these without any attempt at chronological sequence, and then we shall return to the anecdotes of the Bhairavi Brahmani.

The devotees heard from the Mother of a supernatural incident that happened to her when she was at Kamarpukur at the age of thirteen. Just behind the Master's house was a village road to which a backdoor opened for the use of women. Farther away lay the big Haldar-pukur (the tank of the Haldars) to which they went for bathing and for fetching water. The way lay across the village road and near some houses. In those days women, particularly young women of high caste families, were not allowed to move about freely, so that for the Mother who was shy by nature, it was a problem to traverse this distance alone. Stepping out of the backdoor she mused, 'I am a newly married young woman; how can I go alone for my bath?' As she stood perplexed, she saw eight girls approach her. So she stepped on to the road. Four of those girls walked in front of her, and four behind. Thus they all went to the tank and had their dip; and then they

returned in the same manner. This happened during the whole time that the Mother was there. The thought often crossed her mind, 'Who are these girls who come every day at the time of bath?' But she could not make out anything, nor did she ever ask them who they were.<sup>1</sup>

We have already spoken of the Mother's keenness for study during the Jayrambati days, notwithstanding poverty and pressing duties. And we have to remember that in those days even well-to-do families did not think in terms of high academic attainments for their daughters. Sarada Devi's efforts thus bespeak of a wonderful enthusiasm for learning, which was kept up even in the more adverse circumstances while she was in her father-in-law's family. 'At Kamarpukur,' said the Holy Mother, 'Lakshmi<sup>2</sup> and myself used to read the first primer a little. Nephew Hridaya snatched away my book saying, "Women should not learn to read and write; will you ultimately turn to reading novels and dramas?" Lakshmi did not part with her book, for being a daughter of the family she clung to it with determination. I secured another copy secretly for one anna. Lakshmi learnt her lessons at the village school and then taught me.' In passing, we may refer to the Mother's reminiscence to show that this ardour lasted even into her youth. 'I got real education,' said she, 'at Dakshineswar. The Master was then at Shyampukur for treatment; and I was absolutely alone. A girl of the family of Bhava Mukherji came to bathe there. She stayed long and often with me. Every day as she came for bath, she imparted lessons and tested me at them.'<sup>3</sup> I gave her plenty of greens,

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1. The Hindu belief is that the Mother of the Universe has eight maids on attendance.

2. The Mother was older by about ten years than Lakshmi Devi, her niece (daughter of Rameshwar Chatterji).

3. From an account in *Shri Shri Lakshminani* it appears that at the Master's instance, a boy named Pitambar Bhandari, who was of eleven or twelve years of age, taught Lakshmi Devi and her aunt, the first and second primers, after which the lessons stopped, as that would be enough for enabling them to read the sacred epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In the recorded talks of the Mother we have no reference to this.

vegetables, etc., which came here to me from the (temple) garden.' As a result of this education the Mother could read such books as the *Ramayana* (Story of Rama), but she could not write much; and at the end of her life she could not even sign her name. In later days a disciple wanted to have an autograph from her, and she agreed to it in a way. But in a vain attempt to sign her name she scrawled and scrawled, and then, failing to produce anything readable, gave up the attempt.

In all references in her talks to the Kamarpukur family there was a genuine ring of love and respect for her mother-in-law and father-in-law. With regard to the latter she said with pride, 'The father-in-law, I had, was a spirited and orthodox Brahmin. He would not accept gifts indiscriminately. There was a standing order to refuse anything even though it might be brought to the house. As for my mother-in-law, however, if anybody brought anything to her secretly, she would accept it and then cook and offer it to Raghuvira (Ramachandra, the family deity), and distribute the *prasada* (sanctified food) to all. My father-in-law became very angry if he happened to learn of it. But he had a fiery devotion. Mother Shitala (another family deity) ever moved with him. He used to go out plucking flowers long before the day dawned. One day, as he entered the garden of the Lahas, a girl of nine said, "Father, come this side; the branch this side has plenty of flowers. Well, I shall hold it down and you shall pluck them." He inquired, "Who are you, my child, here at this time?" And she replied, "It is I, I of this Haldar house." It is just because he was of this nature that God (the Master) was born in his house.' Sarada Devi served her mother-in-law like a dutiful daughter, and during that service learnt many anecdotes of the Chatterji family, as also about its various ups and downs. Thus equipped, she contrasted one day the orthodoxy of her father-in-law, of which she came to know when rubbing oil on the back of her mother-in-law, with the liberality of the Master and

remarked with a smile, 'The Master was born in such a strict family, and yet he became the priest of a Kaivarta<sup>1</sup> (i.e. Rani Rasmani)!'

During the stay at Kamarpukur, the Mother made perfect what she had learnt earlier about swimming, singing, sewing, embroidery, and cooking. Village girls in those days did not get any training either in these and allied arts, or in cultural subjects in general. They picked up what they could by themselves, and the social set-up was eminently fitted for such self-education. There were the Bauls (a class of mendicants) and beggars who sang from door to door many songs of the highest religious import, and dramas on mythological subjects were frequently staged, through which rural people had their spiritual edification and temporal enlightenment. Many such factors contributed to the early education of the Mother. But the finishing touches came from the Master himself. Her talks with the disciples in later days bore the unmistakable imprint of such a simple but efficient training and the contact of a great personality during the most impressionable and formative period of her life.

When the Mother came to Kamarpukur, the Master began teaching her many things—both temporal and spiritual. He first conquered the heart of the girl through love and then poured into it all that he had learnt through long experience. On the one hand he held before her an integrated life made impeccable through the influence of the renunciation of all thoughts of enjoyment, and he trained her step by step in reaching that glorious pinnacle through a steady moulding of character and heightening of aspiration; and on the other hand he taught her how to perform the daily duties, to serve the deities, the Brahmins, and the guests, to be respectful to superiors, affectionate to the younger members of the family, and in everyway serviceable to the family as

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1. Strictly speaking, Rasmani was not a Kaivarta, but belonged to the higher caste of Mahishya, though neither caste could ordinarily expect to have the aristocratic Chatterjis as its temple priests.

a whole. And by basing his instruction on the common sense view of adaptability according to time, place, and person, he taught her how to deal with others, whether within the family or outside it, how to be careful when getting into or out of a conveyance so that nothing might be left behind; and even such petty matters as trimming lamps, spicing curries, preparing betel rolls, were not left out of that comprehensive and wonderful curriculum. The feeling of elation that Sarada Devi, simple, pure, spiritually-minded and full of faith as she was, felt from those delightfully instructive contacts which were full of zest and yet free from all selfishness and passion, can be better understood from what she once told some woman devotees: "From that time onward, I always felt as if a pitcher of bliss was kept in my heart. I cannot convey any idea of how much and in what manner my mind feasted on that steady, unchanging divine joy."

Lakshmi Devi once drew before a monk a picture in these words of how the ever-joyful Master taught the Mother: "The Master always alluded to the unreality of the world and its troubles and tribulations, and told the Mother, "Detachment and devotion are the only things that matter." He said, "What would one gain by bearing children, like bitches and vixens?" The Holy Mother's mother had many children, some of whom had died. The Mother had brought them up in her lap and had witnessed her parents lamenting the death of some of them; she too had had her share of the sorrow. The Master drew attention to all these and said, "You too have had much first-hand experience, and you must have realized how painful it all is. Why all this fuss? Without all that, you are your own mistress and will ever remain so." The Mother was ever busy at work. One morning she was bedaubing the ground inside, with a paste of mud and cowdung,<sup>1</sup> and the

1. A practice common in villages where they do not have cemented floors and courtyards. Every morning the housewives mix earth and cowdung in water and then overlay the ground with the paste with the help of a handful of rags.

Master was cutting jokes while brushing his teeth with a twig. To the Mother he said, "You may dance and sing bedecking yourself with ornaments at the first rice-eating ceremony of your son but you will writhe in agony when the son dies." The Mother, had been listening to the talk in silence; but when the Master went on alluding repeatedly to the death of sons, she at last blurted out in a low tone, "Will all of them really die?" Hardly had the words escaped her mouth when the Master said loudly, "Ah me! Here indeed I have trampled on the tail of a deadly snake.<sup>1</sup> Dear me! I thought she was good-natured, and innocent of everything, but she seems to know a lot! How she says, 'Will all of them really die?' " The Mother left the place in a hurry.

Being free from the constrained manners and artificial courtesies of urban society, the Master felt a spontaneous ease at Kamarpukur and moved freely with people. One day the Mother wanted to go with another lady of the house to an open air religious drama (*yatra*) which was being staged in a neighbouring village. The Master did not like the idea; but then realizing that they were feeling disappointed, he enacted the whole drama before them without anybody else's help. He had seen it only once; but so sharp was his memory, so realistic his histrionics, and so sweet his music, that the ladies soon got over their sorrow and sat spell-bound for a long time, as though they were witnessing the real performance.

About the Master's disposition at Kamarpukur, the Holy Mother said, "I never saw him morose. He rejoiced in everybody's company—be he a boy or an old man. Certainly, my dear, I never found him gloomy. Ah! At Kamarpukur he would say after leaving his bed every day, "I shall have this green today for my meal, please cook that." Overhearing him, we (i.e., Holy Mother and Lakshmi Devi's mother) would get together some greens and cook

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1. A venomous snake reacts furiously when trampled on, whereas a non-venomous one tries rather to escape.

them. Sometime later he said, "Bah! what has happened to me? From early morning I think of eating only! Fie on this!" And to me he said, "I have no more desire for any particular dish, I shall eat whatever you cook and whatever you offer." He used to go to the country for recouping his health; for he suffered very much from digestive troubles at Dakshineswar and said, "Pooh! The stomach is a store of filth which keeps on flowing out!" All this made the body repugnant to him, and he took no further care of it.'

The Master was very fond of cutting jokes. One of his jokes is particularly enjoyable. 'Lakshmi's mother and I,' said the Mother, 'cooked at Kamarpukur. One day the Master and Hridaya sat for meal. Lakshmi's mother was a good cook. Tasting the dish that she had prepared, the Master said, "O Hridaya, it is the Vaidya Ramdas who has cooked this." And tasting the dish that I had cooked, he ejaculated, "And this has been cooked by Shrinath Sen." Lakshmi's mother was Ramdas Vaidya, and I Shrinath Sen—a quack. At this Hridaya added, "That is true; but your quack will be ever ready—even for massaging. She has only to be sent for. As for Ramdas Vaidya, his fees are high, you cannot have him at all times. Moreover, people call in the quack first,—he is ever at your service." The Master said, "It's true, it's true. She is ever there."'

The Master had a curious boyish liking for seasoning spices. One day, he ordered his niece Lakshmi Devi, 'Lakshmi, buy an anna worth of flavouring spices.' And to the Mother he said, 'Cook a soup of mixed lentils and season it with the spices in such a way that the sound will be like the grunting of a pig.'<sup>1</sup> Another day he heard Lakshmi Devi's mother directing the Holy Mother, saying

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1. Cumin (jira), aniseed (mauri), fenugreek (methi), black cumin (Kala jira), and caraway (randhuni) are singed in oil or clarified butter (ghee); and then the cooked curry or soup is poured on the spices while the pan is still on fire, the reaction being a great sound which can be heard from afar.

that as the store was empty of seasoning spices, the cooking was to be done without them. Overhearing this the Master cried out, "How is that, my dear! If the spices have run short why don't you get a pice worth of them? It won't do to eliminate any ingredient from anything. It was for the smell of your seasoning spices that I left my delicious dishes at Dakshineswar and came here; and you now want to deprive me of this!" Put to shame, Lakshmi's mother at once ordered the spices.'

In 1867, after a long spiritual discipline Sri Ramakrishna came to Kamarpukur and the Holy Mother too came there. Though he had been formally initiated into Sannyasa, his teacher Totapuri had told him, 'That man is really established in Brahman whose self-abnegation, detachment, discrimination, and realization remain fully unaffected even in the presence of his wife. He is a true knower of Brahman who can ever look upon both men and women as the Self and deal with them accordingly. Those who are conscious of the difference between the sexes may be treading the path of realization, but are as yet far removed from the goal.' Totapuri, who was a seer himself, added that if a man of the highest realization like Sri Ramakrishna performed his duty towards his wife without any mental deflection, he lost no spiritual value thereby and incurred no demerit. So one can easily understand why a simple, truthful, and bold experimenter in the spiritual field like Sri Ramakrishna accepted his wife with all love when she came to Kamarpukur; and yet this intimacy never affected his mind in the least. But this affected the Bhairavi Brahmani very adversely.

Her first reaction to the Mother's coming was one of love. The Mother was very young then, and respected the Bhairavi as much as she did her mother-in-law, though fear had, perhaps, something to do in the matter. The Bhairavi who hailed from East Bengal, would use chillies abundantly in the curries, as was the habit in those parts, and she would offer these to Lakshmi Devi's mother and the Holy Mother

and await their reaction. The former would say bluntly, 'Forsooth! how terribly hot it is!' But the Mother, afraid of the Bhairavi's anger, would say, 'Good indeed!'—while tears trickled down from her eyes. Unmindful of these the Bhairavi would say to Lakshmi Devi's mother, 'But my daughter-in-law (Holy Mother) here says that it is very savoury. To you, my dear, nothing is good. I shall never again give you any curry.'—The Mother used often to relate the story with a hearty laugh. The Bhairavi one day decorated the Master like Sri Gauranga<sup>1</sup> with garlands and called in the Mother to see how charming he looked. The Mother, when she came, found him in a state of divine inebriation which frightened her a little, but when the Brahmani asked, 'How does he look?' she replied, 'Fine,' and left after a hurried prostration. Perhaps, she was both shy and nervous; for we have to remember that the Holy Mother was still a veiled maiden who could not yet afford to be bold in her relation with her husband in the presence of an elderly lady like the Bhairavi Brahmani; besides, the Mother who was naturally modest entirely lacked such frivolity.

Though the Mother had no lack of awe and reverence for the Bhairavi, the latter still became jealous because of the Master's free association with her. Quite a number of families there are which are made unhappy by this unnatural relation between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. Be that as it may, the Bhairavi, finding no occasion to have a fling at the Mother, gave vent to her jealousy in other ways. She became apprehensive of Sri Ramakrishna's future and warned him that by freely mixing with his wife he was but jeopardizing his spiritual welfare. A man of realization like Totapuri could see no harm in the free play of the blazing fire of Sri Ramakrishna's pure heart; but blinded by her love, the Bhairavi wanted to keep it under her fostering care, not knowing that she would

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1. A 15th century Bengal saint, noted for his unique 'ecstatic love of God and venerated as an Incarnation.

herself get burnt in the process. She refused to realize that the scene was rapidly changing; the little Sarada was steadily but surely coming to the front to take her place as the inheritor of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual achievements and the propagator of the glory of motherhood in the world. Sri Ramakrishna, too, fully aware of her life's mission, was preparing her accordingly. Failing to grasp the divine plan behind it all, the Bhairavi ran counter to them, thereby heaping miseries on herself and making life intolerable for all. The truth, however, dawned on her at last, and finding herself in the wrong, she confessed this to Sri Ramakrishna, took leave of him, and went away to Banaras. She was henceforth totally blotted out of the Mother's life.

After the departure of the Bhairavi Brahmani, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar and the Holy Mother after a long period of seven months of unalloyed joy, went back to her mother at Jayrambati (November, 1867). 'We can well understand that henceforward there came a change in her bearing, in her talk and general conduct, etc. But it is doubtful if this was noticed by the ordinary people, for this made her quiet rather than flaunty, introspective rather than obstreperous, and selflessly loving rather than self-centred; and through creating a feeling of unruffled contentment under all circumstances it made her sympathize with people in their trials and tribulations. It thus transformed her into a veritable embodiment of kindness' (*Lilaprasanga, Sadhaka-bhava*. pp. 343-44).

## THE GREAT AWAKENING

Arrived at Jayrambati, the Mother found the village still the charming old place she had known it to be; the love and affection of parents, brothers, and cousins, and, in fact, of all relatives were as deep as ever; the daily life with its work and recreation, talks and discussions, still flowed on as before; yet in the depths of her heart could be felt the stirring of some muffled sorrow. At Kamarpukur she enjoyed a divine bliss, the memory of which remained for ever fresh in her mind; but finding nothing corresponding to it in the outside world, she turned inward with disappointment, converting life into a brooding, wailing dream. Autumn was followed by early winter, and then came chilly days. But for ever the Holy Mother kept her ears pricked up for any chance news trickling into this village despite the barriers of transmission and rural indifference. Thus passed four long years.

In the meantime some stray pieces of news broke into the quiet sublimity of Jayrambati and stimulated gossip. The villagers concluded from what they had heard that Sri Ramakrishna had lost his mental balance. The Mother had now neither zest in work nor solace in imagination; she only went about her daily round of duties mechanically. The ever-present pang of separation from the Master gnawed at her heart and cast a gloom over her face which drew the instinctive sympathy of the village women. But they, however, owing to their ignorance or narrow outlook, talked in a way that intensified rather than assuaged her agony. Their companionship became intolerable rather than welcome. Though they seemed to share her sorrow, they really pointed to her husband as an object of ridicule. And quite a few said pointing to her, 'That's the wife of a madman,' or under the guise of consoling her, inflicted on her a cruel wound by saying, 'Ah me! Shyama's daughter has been married to a

lunatic.' Loathing such company, the Mother avoided visiting any house and kept herself constantly engrossed in work. To a loving, faithful wife, any criticism of her husband is intolerable. She kept to her home all the time. And when this became oppressively monotonous, she would go to aunt Bhanu's<sup>1</sup> house and there on a verandah she would spread out her cloth and lie down.

The pure-hearted aunt Bhanu had an insight by which she got a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna's hidden greatness. She said to Shyamasundari Devi, 'Well, sister-in-law, your son-in-law is Siva,—none other than Krishna Himself. I prophesy that in future you will believe what you don't now.' When the Master came to Jayrambati for the second time to take his girl-wife to Kamarpukur, aunt Bhanu reminded of the divine couple Siva and Parvati, sang merrily, 'As thou art beautiful, my little child (Sarada) hast thou got a groom who is both mad and naked.' We have to remember that in those days the Mother's complexion was bright and fair. Aunt Bhanu recognised even in those early days, and in her own way, the Master and the Mother as Siva and His consort. But people regarded her as too emotional in her nature, and nobody heeded her. Her house was the only place where the Mother got shelter and mental composure.

But obviously a whole life could not be spent thus. True it was that she did not believe in all the gossip that was going on about the Master. For, it was incredible that the Master could be mad,—he whose holy company had conferred on her immeasurable bliss only the other day, whose divine fervour infected her also to some extent and brought about an indescribable elation in her, whose

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1. Aunt Bhanu or Bhanu-pisi was born at Shihar and married in a Ghosh (cowherd) family at Jayrambati. The Mukherjis were their priests at Jayrambati and the Mazumdars, of her father's family at Shihar. Pisi means father's sister, and though this non-Brahmin woman could have no family ties with the Mother, this relationship was established between them according to rural custom. The Master also called her Bhanu-pisi.

selfless thought for others had charmed her, and whose wise discourse and witty remarks held all spell-bound for hours. But, all the same, the ignorant village people could not evaluate his afflatus; and so their unbridled imagination raced apace, and their criticism was unchecked. The dutiful wife, therefore, came to think at last, 'When all people talk thus, let me once go and see him.' At the beginning of 1872, many people of the neighbourhood were going to Calcutta for bathing in the Ganges on an auspicious day<sup>1</sup> which was near at hand. The Mother wanted to accompany them, and yet through fear and bashfulness she could not speak out. At last no longer able to suppress her idea, she divulged it to a woman who communicated everything to Ramchandra. The old noble-hearted father took it in the best of spirits and said, 'Does she want to go? Very good.' And he himself escorted her.

Along with other pilgrims the father and the daughter had to travel about sixty miles on foot. On either side of the track there were open fields covered here and there with green crops and dotted now and then by villages shaded by clusters of trees. They came by big tanks with sparkling water, and now and again they took rest under huge shady trees. Some two or three days thus passed uneventfully. The Mother was full of enthusiasm for reaching Dakshineswar soon, but unfortunately her health was not equal to the task. That part of the country was infested with malaria from which she had often suffered.

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1. The *Lila-prasanga* takes this to be Dola-purnima which fell on 25th March, 1872. But it might have been the Chaitra-samkranti day which is widely observed as an occasion for holy bath. The Mother never spoke of Dola-purnima, but vaguely referred to 'some sacred day.' She also said, 'The Master worshipped me as Shodashi a month and a half after my arrival there.' If Dola-purnima is accepted as the auspicious day in question, the period intervening between the Mother's arrival and the Shodashi worship would be two and a half months instead of one and a half. The Mother was not likely to forget such an important event in her life. In this, as also in subsequent narratives, we take her version as the most authoritative.

Besides, she was not used to making such long journeys. But, for fear of causing her father and others anxiety and inconvenience, she kept quiet about her growing indisposition for two or three days. At last, she had fever and the temperature rose so high that it was impossible for her to proceed. Ramchandra took shelter with her in a nearby hut. It can well be imagined how great was the Mother's disappointment. Fever was nothing new to her; so she had no worry on that score. Neither had this unknown place any terrors for her. But what caused her the greatest dismay was the delay interposed by all these events in meeting the Master for whom she had been pining away.

A divine vision came to her in this hour of dejection, and cheered her up. As the Mother lay unconscious on the bed, she saw a dark woman of peerless beauty sitting by her caressing the Mother's head and body with her soft, cool hands. It seemed to remove all her pain. The Mother asked, 'Where do you come from, my dear?' The stranger replied, 'I come from Dakshineswar.' The Mother wondered at this and said, 'From Dakshineswar! I thought I would go there, see him, and serve him. But as I am laid down with fever on the way, I fear this may never come to pass.' The dark woman said, 'Don't you worry! You will certainly go to Dakshineswar; you will recover soon and see him. It is for you that I have been holding him there.' The Mother said, 'Indeed! How are you related to us, my dear?' The woman said, 'I am your sister.' The Mother said, 'Indeed! That's why you have come!' After this conversation the Mother fell asleep.<sup>1</sup>

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1. On another occasion the Mother related the incident thus: 'Once, when on my way to Dakshineswar in my early years, I had fever. I lay unconscious, when I saw a dark-complexioned girl with dusty feet sitting by my bed-side and stroking my head. Seeing her feet full of dust I asked, "Dear child, did not anybody offer you water for washing your feet?" She replied, "No, mother, I shall leave forthwith. I came to see you. Don't be afraid, you will recover." And truly, I did recover gradually from the very next day.'

Next morning she found that the fever was off, and that the divine vision had put fresh zeal and vigour into her. Hence when her father suggested that instead of waiting helplessly in that unknown place it were better to proceed slowly, the Mother readily agreed. Then they moved on. Fortunately, a palanquin was available nearby. She had fever on the way again, but it was not very severe. Besides, she was not then as helpless as before. So she kept quiet without adding to the worry of her father by telling him of her predicament. Slowly, the long journey ended, and by crossing the Ganges, they reached Dakshineswar at nine o'clock in the night.

As the people from Jayrambati were landing from the boat, the Mother heard the Master saying, 'O Hride(Hridaya), I hope the time is not inauspicious. This is her first visit.' The Mother had no worry on that score as she knew that she had passed the inauspicious time in the boat itself. That apart, those few words of the Master had such a touch of sincere love in them that, moved by them, she went straight to his room, while others went to the Nahabat (i.e., the orchestra block or the concert house)<sup>1</sup> or other places. As soon as he saw her, the Master said, 'Ah! You are here at last! That's well done.' Then he ordered some one nearby, 'Spread a mat for her.' A mat was spread on the floor of the room. The Mother sat on it and talked with the Master. When the latter learnt that she was ill, he became very anxious about her treatment and comfort and said with extreme regret, 'Alas! You have come so late! Would that my Mathur were there now to serve you! My right arm is broken now, as it were.' Mathur who was the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, the

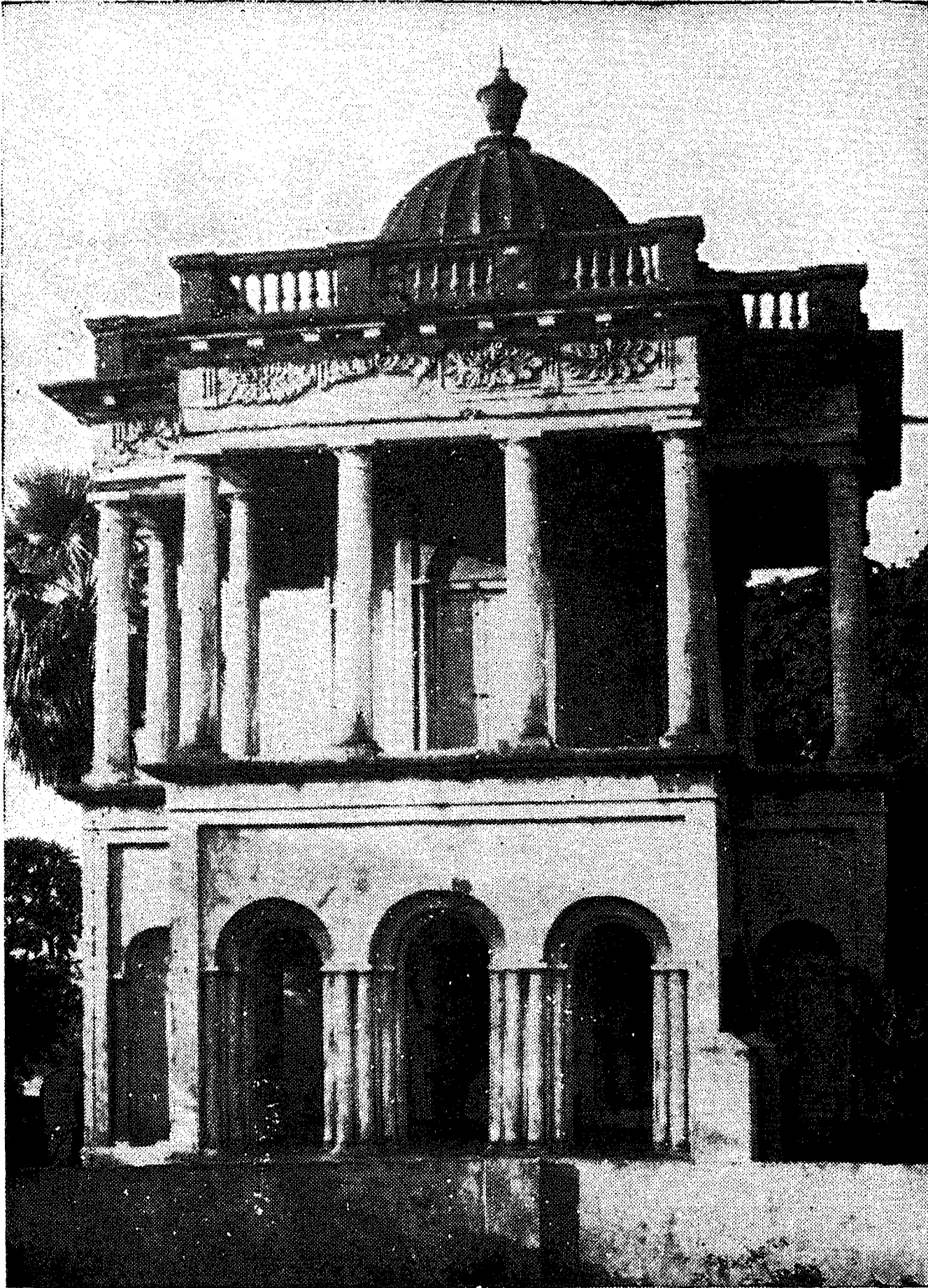
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1. There are two detached two-storeyed structures on the Ganges on either side of the main temple compound. They were originally meant to be used for playing temple music at stated hours, particularly, early morning and evening. We are concerned only with the northern one, which does not seem to have been used for this purpose. The Master's mother Chandra Devi first used the upper storey as a dwelling room. Later the Holy Mother took up residence on the ground floor.

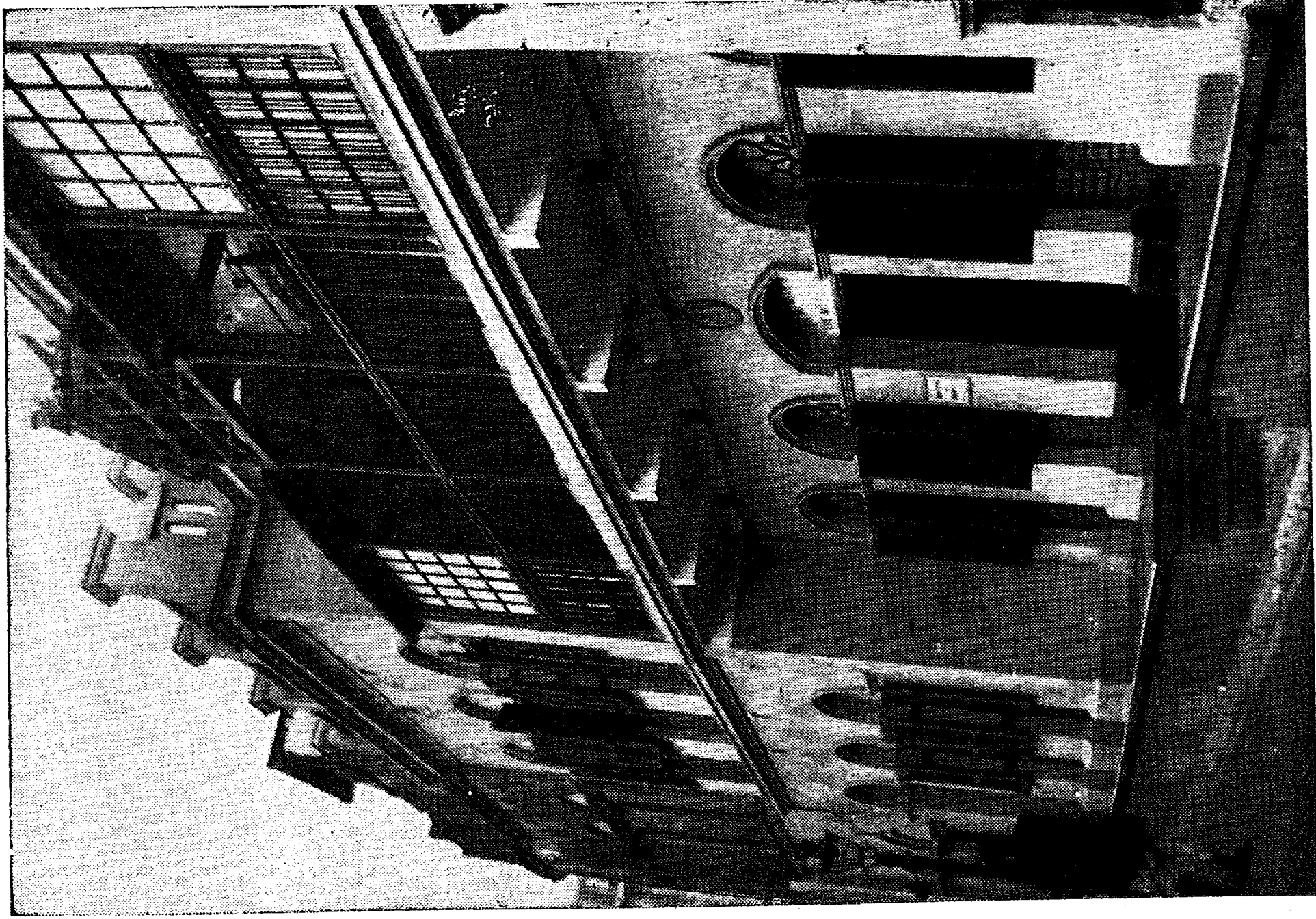
foundress of the Dakshineswar temple, and who was the first supplier of the Master's needs, had died only a few months before (16th July, 1871).

After the first greetings, the Mother wanted to go to the Nahabat. But the Master said, 'No, no, it will be difficult to arrange for treatment there; you stay here in this room.' So a separate bed was spread for her; and it was arranged that a woman companion of the Mother would also sleep with her. The temple staff had just then finished their meals, leaving no surplus. Hridaya, however, brought some fried-rice for the two. Next day, at the Master's instance, a physician was called in. Through proper care the Mother came round in three or four days, after which she went to live in the Nahabat, where her mother-in-law lived. When the old lady came to Dakshineswar, a room in the building where the proprietors of the temple lived was allotted to her. But a few months before the demise of Mathur, Akshay, a nephew of the Master, died in that room; and as Chandra Devi did not like to live there in the midst of old painful associations, she shifted on to the Nahabat, saying, 'I won't live there any longer. I shall stay in this Nahabat-room, and shall keep my eyes fixed on the Ganges. I have no need of that bungalow any more.'

Any suspicion that might still be lingering in the Mother's heart about the Master's mental aberration and apathy towards her, was set at nought by direct communication. What exaggerated tales had indeed been circulated among the ignorant villagers! There a god had been equated with a lunatic! And not only so, the gossips had been persistent and vigorous enough to impart even to such a faithful heart as the Mother's a slight touch of doubt! But now she saw that her god was just as he had been. Far from forgetting his wife, he seemed to be even more concerned about her. So it did not take her long to decide; she stayed on at the Nahabat serving both him and his mother out of the fullness of her heart. Her father also,



THE NAHABAT



THE UDBODHAN OFFICE

being reassured by the Master's love for his daughter and respect for himself, returned home cheerfully.

Taking his cue from the words of his guru Totapuri, the Master, while at Kamarpukur, had proceeded to test the strength and genuineness of his knowledge and to fulfil his duty towards his wife. After that his mind had been engaged for four years in visiting places of pilgrimage and undergoing austerity. Now, finding his wife again by his side through some divine dispensation, he resumed both the unfinished tasks. But in this he was not guided by the requirements of any commonplace conjugal relationship. He rather took his stand on the spiritual relationship subsisting between the teacher and his disciple or that between the Universal Mother and Her votary, and thereby he brought down to the world a new value by assimilating which humanity could move higher up. All this we write by way of introduction to the worship of the Mother in the form of goddess Shodashi. But before we actually come to that important event, we shall do well to understand more fully the mutual esteem which inspired the conjugal life of this unique couple.

During this time, the Master instructed his wife about everything ranging from such worldly affairs as domestic duties, dealing with relatives, good manners, and the need for adaptability under varying conditions, to spiritual practices like religious music, meditation, service, and self-abnegation. From her talks with him the Mother formed a clear conception of the aim and purpose of human life. For instance, the Master one day told her, 'Just as the moon is equally lovable to all, so also is God the nearest one to all. Everyone has an equal right to call on Him. If you invoke Him, you too will see Him.' And he did not stop with such instruction; he saw to its fulfilment in the everyday conduct of the Mother. The Mother spent the day at the Nahabat attending to her duties; but at night she had the Master's permission to share his bed with him. During one of these intimate moments, the Master, by way

of examining her, suddenly asked, 'Well, my dear, have you come to drag me down to the worldly level?' The Mother replied without a moment's hesitation, 'No. Why should I drag you to worldly ways? I have come to help you in your chosen path.' The Mother, too, while massaging his feet one night asked, 'How do you regard me?' The Master said in reply, 'The same Mother that is in the (Kali) temple, gave birth to this body and now resides at the Nahabat, and she, again, is now massaging my feet. Truly do I see you as a veritable form of the Blissful Mother!' The reader now can very well realize what supernormal characters we have undertaken to paint, and how hard the task is. If we are to follow these holy lives with an amount of understanding, transcending as they did all sensual relationships and carnal contacts, we on our part must for a while free our minds from worldly preconceptions and concentrate on eternal verities.

The Mother, for aught we know, slept every night with the Master. But this was no ordinary matrimonial love. The Master was then in the full vigour of his manhood and the Mother in the prime of her youth. The fiery ordeal that they now undertook, or rather the drama that they were now to enact for the edification of the world throws into the shade the hardest trial recorded in history. The Master, free from all sense of body-consciousness, spent the whole night in a state of divine afflatus. During one of the intervals between such moods of ecstasy he looked at the youthful, charming person of the Mother lying asleep by his side, and he engaged himself in a self-examination thus: 'O mind, this is what is called a female form. People think of this as a thing of supreme enjoyment and wistfully run after it. But if this is accepted, one becomes enmeshed in body-consciousness and cannot attain God who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Don't be insincere to yourself: don't have a hidden hankering and yet make false profession. Tell me truly, do you want this or God? If you want this, then here it is before you; take

it.' With such self-inquiry no sooner did he stretch his hand to touch her body than his mind suddenly recoiled and got lost in the higher reaches of ecstasy; it never returned to the ordinary plane that night. Next day it was possible to bring his mind down only after repeating the Lord's name for a pretty long time.

The Mother slept with the Master continuously for eight months. During this long period not only did the Master's mind soar high, but the Mother's also was lost in thinking of eternal verities. So there was no occasion for physical hankering on either side. The Master was so deeply impressed by the immaculate purity of the Mother's character that in later days he bore witness to it in these words: 'If she had not been as pure as she really was, if she had lost self-control and seduced me, then who can say if I too might not have lost self-control and come down to the physical plane? After my marriage I prayed earnestly to the Mother (of the Universe), "Mother, do please totally eradicate all passion from my wife." Living with her at this time I realized that the Mother (of the Universe) had really responded to my importunity.'

Whatever the Master might have said by way of a lesson to others, we know for certain that there was no possibility of Sri Ramakrishna's succumbing to feminine fascination. For, had he not fully established himself in transcendental poise after being freed from earthly cravings? And what need could there be of any solicitude for the purity of the Holy Mother who was purity itself? But there is some meaning in all this when we look at it as a deliberate attempt at setting up a model; and then also the need for a public declaration of a secret truth becomes comprehensible. For only the husband and the wife know each other thoroughly; and so from the worldly point of view a certain intrinsic value attaches to the evidence of each for the other.

Although the mutual relationship of the Master and the Mother found expression in various ways, it reached its

acme in the Shodashi<sup>1</sup> worship. This is not the occasion for understanding the mystic import of this rite from the Master's angle of vision. Our endeavour will be to study its implication from the Mother's side.

The Master had accepted the little Sarada as his wife and given her a foretaste of divine love at Kamarpukur; and at Kamarpukur and Dakshineswar he had equipped her mind for domestic as well as divine life. Now was the time for awakening and making active the divine in the woman. Moreover, on the Master's part, there was need for raising her in the estimation of the world by offering his own sincerest worship, so that she might naturally take up the threads of his unfinished task after him; and it was necessary, too, to make that deity conscious of her real stature. That was the meaning of this worship.

After the Master had been assured of Sarada Devi's purity by living with her for a month and a half, he proceeded to offer her his heart's adoration. The new-moon night of 5th June, 1872, was the auspicious time for the worship of Kali in her aspect as Phalaharini (destroyer of the effects of past deeds). In Sri Ramakrishna's mind grew the desire of worshipping that night the Mother of the Universe as Shodashi.<sup>2</sup> The worship was not

1. Shodashi is the Mother of the Universe in the form of a most beautiful woman in the prime of her youth, exquisitely attired, and seated on a throne. She is otherwise known as Tripura-sundari or Sri-vidya. In this instance the Master accepted the Holy Mother as a symbol for the deity, to start with, and ultimately established her identity with the deity. This worship of the Mother in human form is sanctioned by the scriptures, though the usual symbols are pictures, pitchers, earthen images, *yantras* (ritualistic drawings), etc.

2. The *Lila-prasanga, Sadhaka-bhava* (pp. 353-54) fixes the date for this ceremony as the 25th May, 1873 or more than a year after the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar. The Mother herself put this as one month and a half (*vide* foot-note on p. 41); and in *Sri Ramakrishna Deva*, a biography of the Master by his direct disciple, Shashibhushan Ghosh, we read that the worship was performed 'within three months of Sri Sarada Devi's reaching Dakshineswar' (p. 331). The Mother also says that she returned to Jayrambati one year after the worship (*Sri Sri Mayer Katha*, II, 130).

to be performed in public, but secretly in the Master's room according to his own wishes. The Master usually relied on Hridaya for such odd jobs. But that night, Hridaya had to perform the special worship at the Kali temple; and he left for the temple after doing what little he could. Then Dinu,<sup>1</sup> the other priest, came to the Master's help after finishing his daily task at the Vishnu temple. All the accessories of the worship were now duly arranged; and there was in front of the Master an artistically decorated low wooden seat for the deity, though no image had been brought. At last when everything was in order, priest Dinu left the place at nine o'clock.

The Master had asked the Mother to be present at the worship; now she entered the room and looked on intently as the worship proceeded. The Master sat near the western door-way facing eastward. With the chanting of appropriate *mantras* he sanctified the accessories of the worship and after finishing the preliminaries, he beckoned the Mother to the decorated seat. The Mother had become semi-conscious through spiritual fervour as she had been watching the worship, and now not knowing what or why she was doing, she moved forward as though under a charm and sat on the allotted low stool facing the Master. The Master took some sanctified water from the pitcher and sprinkled it on her body. Then, after uttering the *mantras* appropriate to the occasion, he prayed to her, 'O Thou eternal Virgin, Thou Mother Tripura-sundari, the Source of all power, do Thou open the gates of perfection. Sanctifying her mind and body, do Thou manifest Thyself through her (the Holy Mother) and ordain all good.' Then he mentally identified the different limbs of the Holy Mother with the corresponding parts of the Deity with appropriate sacred formulae (*mantras*), and considering her as none other than the Deity Herself, worshipped her duly with the usual sixteen kinds of

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1. He belonged to Mukundapur and was the son of a cousin of the Master.

offering. At last the votary took up some sweets in hand and put them in the mouth of the Deity. By and by, the Mother lost all outer consciousness and the worshipper, too, as he proceeded with his ceremonies, gradually lost himself in beatitude. On that level of ecstasy the Deity and the devotee became identified. In this way hours passed; and when midnight was long over, there were signs of the Master's recovery from his absorption. As soon as he regained sufficient consciousness, he offered himself to the Deity; and then laying himself, the fruits of all his disciplines, and his rosary at the feet of the Goddess, he uttered the salutation: 'O Thou, the most auspicious goodness among all auspicious things, the fulfiller of all aims, the refuge of all, Thou the three-eyed, golden hued consort of Siva, Thou the power of Narayana, I salute thee.' The worship was over; and this adoration in a human figure of the Divine Mother who is the source of all enlightenment, ended the long course of austerity that the Master had undertaken. And for the Holy Mother too, was opened the door leading to the highest achievement that humanity conjoined with divinity can attain. After the worship she returned to the normal plane and saluting the Master left for the Nahabat.

The Mother had then completed the eighteenth year of her age and entered the nineteenth, though by mistake she often said, 'I had then commenced my sixteenth year.' We now put in brief the other details of this incident that the curious women devotees gathered from the Mother. When the Mother said that at the commencement of the ceremony, the Master painted her feet with liquid lac-dye, put vermilion on her forehead, clad her with a new piece of cloth, and put betel and sweets into her mouth, Lakshmi Devi asked with an amused smile, 'You are so shy, my dear, how did he put clothes on you?' The Mother simply replied, 'I was not quite myself then.' The Mother sat facing the jar of Ganges water which used to be kept at the north-west corner of the room and to her

right were the materials for the worship. A night-long festivity was going on outside, and nobody knew what was happening within the closed room, nor did noise from outside reach them. There were only two persons sitting facing each other—the Master and the Mother. Towards the end Hridaya came in. After the adoration, the Mother was faced with a problem,—what was she to do with the conch bangles, cloth, etc., which she had received as offerings. She referred the matter to the Master, who after a little reflection said, ‘Well, you can give them to your mother; but mind you, when making them over, do not think of her as a mortal, but rather as the Universal Mother.’ The Holy Mother did accordingly.

In a state of divine afflatus the Mother accepted the worship as also the result of all the spiritual disciplines of the Master. In fact, she inherited the richest spiritual wealth without any corresponding conscious endeavour on her part; and in addition, she learnt how to look upon all beings as manifestations of the Universal Mother. The Master, too, felt himself quite at ease after discharging the highest duty to his partner in life.

The Mother continued to share the Master’s room for about six months more even after this ceremony. This was not for her, however, an unmixed boon; for not being fully familiar with the divine moods of this unique personality who constantly got lost in trances and raptures, she off and on spent sleepless nights sitting by him and anxiously watching the startling, unfamiliar, physical changes. ‘Words can’t describe,’ she said, ‘the spiritual states in which the Master remained merged. Often in his divine ecstasy he would be talking of many things; sometimes he would laugh and sometimes weep, and sometimes he would be totally lost in trances. This went on for the whole night. How deep a fervour it was and what an absorption! My whole body trembled at the sight, and I waited eagerly for day-break. I did not then understand much of divine afflatus and ecstasies. One night, seeing his

*samadhi* continuing interminably, I began weeping in fear and called in Hridaya with the help of Kali's mother (the maidservant). He went on repeating the Lord's name in his ears, till after quite a long time he returned to the conscious plane. Learning next day that I suffered from this kind of fear, the Master himself taught me, "If you notice such a kind of mood in me, then utter such a name; and if such another, then this other *Bija* (mystic syllable)." After this I was not so afraid; he regained consciousness when those names were uttered. Quite a long time passed in this way and then as he came to know one day afterwards, that in apprehension of his moods I sat up for the whole night and could not sleep, he asked me to sleep apart at the Nahabat.'

But wherever she might be, whether in the Master's room or at the Nahabat, she considered the service of the Master and his mother to be the one duty of her life. The old lady was then too feeble to move about freely, and so she depended much on the Holy Mother, who was well aware of this. Hence, whenever the old lady called her, she rushed to her side. If any one warned her that by such heedless dashing she ran the risk of striking her head against the low door-frame, she would reply, 'What if I do? She is my superior and my mother. Alas, she is old! If I don't hurry up, it may inconvenience her and so I run.' The old lady then lived upstairs and the Holy Mother on the ground floor of the Nahabat.

Equally whole-hearted was her service of the Master. The companionship that she had through this medium of service, she considered to be a fortune for herself. The communion through service was not confined to the physical plane alone. Whenever the Master came down to the conscious plane during this period, he was swayed by a feeling of womanliness within himself, so much so that he considered himself, as also the Holy Mother and others, as the maids or handmaids of the Universal Mother. The Mother then clothed and adorned him like a woman and felt

elated at the thought that just like the Master, she too was a maid of Kali. Again, she asserted no independence and showed no self-will in this act of service; she felt satisfied by doing the little the Master wanted and that in the manner he favoured.

A year after the Shodashi worship, the Mother fell ill. Shri Shambhunath Mallick had then succeeded Mathur Babu as the supplier of needs (*rasad-dar*, as the Master put it) for the Master. He called Prasad Babu, a physician, to treat her, but there was no relief. Realizing that then at Dakshineswar, she could be of no use to others and that on the contrary she would be adding to their anxiety, she left for Jayrambati.

## IN A MOOD OF SELF-SURRENDER

About a year after the Shodashi worship, the Holy Mother returned to Jayrambati (about June, 1873) and visited Dakshineswar for the second time in May, next year. In the meanwhile Kamarpukur and Jayrambati were subjected to two grievous losses. In the second week of December, 1873, the Master's elder brother Rameshwar passed away. Next year, on the holy Rama-navami day (26th April), the Holy Mother's father Ramchandra Mukherji who was a staunch devotee of Sri Rama, breathed his last. That was a stunning blow to the Mukherji family. The incident was all the more poignant because it happened just on the fourth day after uncle Kalikumar had been invested with the sacred thread. To the Holy Mother, who was the first child of her father and had had his affection in abundance, the grief was unendurable; and soon after, she left for Dakshineswar perhaps to free herself from that poignant grief.

The extreme indigence of the Mukherjis might have had something to do with hastening this departure. The bereaved family had no money on hand; the boys were all very young; priestly service, which was a source of supplementary income, had become closed for the time being. Farming suffered because of lack of proper supervision. Though Ishwarchandra, Ramchandra's brother, earned something through priesthood in Calcutta, he had not much to send home after meeting his personal expenses. Finding herself in such straitened circumstances, Shyamasundari Devi became despondent and in utter helplessness proceeded to maintain the family with physical labour. The Banerjis of the village were better off at that time. Shyamasundari husked their paddy in her own house in return for one fourth of the rice produced. In giving some idea of her toil, she told Indumati Devi, one of her daughters-in-law, 'Leaving the rice boiling on the fire, I went to Shihar to get vegetables.

I cooked simultaneously on sixteen ovens put in a row, all for a potful of boiled rice and a basketful of uncooked rice.' Even then she could not earn enough for feeding the family and educating the boys. Accordingly, the boys took shelter in the houses of relatives in neighbouring villages. Prasanna went to Jibta, Varada got shelter in the house of Hareram Bhattacharya at Shihar, and Abhay went to his maternal uncle's<sup>1</sup> in the same village. The Holy Mother, perhaps for the same reason, went to Dakshineswar, where she took shelter in the Nahabat along with her mother-in-law.

Dakshineswar of those days was an unhealthy place, where dysentery prevailed during the wet season. The Mother suffered from it soon after her going there. Shambhu Babu arranged for her treatment, but she did not recover quickly. Nevertheless, the Holy Mother did not leave the place, for that would deprive her of the opportunity of serving the Master and his mother. She continued there for a full year although still ill.<sup>2</sup> At last when she was a little better, she left for Jayrambati (probably in September-October, 1875). But the dysentery returned a short while after, and it took such a serious turn that she became bed-ridden, nay, her life itself was in danger. When the Master got news of her sad condition, he said sorrowfully to Hridaya, 'What is it all coming to, O Hride! Is she destined only to come and go, and not do anything worthy of a human birth?'

During the period of relapse the Mother had to go out again and again and her body was very weak and emaciated. She laid herself down on the bank of the pond, Kalugede. Once when she saw in the water of the pond the reflection of her body reduced to skin and bone, she thought: 'Bah! Fie on it! This indeed is the body! Why fuss about it? Let it lie down here, let me leave it!' In later days she said, 'I was ill then; the whole body was swollen

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1. They had five uncles Rambrahma, Ramtarak, Kedar, Shripati, and Vaikuntha and one aunt, Dinamayi. The family is now extinct.

2. 'I had returned to the country after suffering for a year at Dakshineswar' (*Sri Sri Mayer Katha*, II, 131).

and liquid matter flowed down from the nose and ears. Umesh (a brother) said, "Sister, there is Simhavahini here; will you make a vow of fasting before her?" It was he who made me agree and led me by the hand there. To me, then, a full-moon night was as dark as a newmoon one—I had lost sight through continuous tears. Going there I lay down on the basement of the shrine. To crown all, I had the dysentery; three or four times I had to crawl on all fours to go out. There was a woman whom I called 'god-mother'; her house was near at hand. She cleared her throat off and on, so that I might not get frightened. A little while later, She (the Deity) appeared to my mother in the form of a blacksmith girl of the age of Radhu (twelve or thirteen years) and said, "Go quick, hasten; raise her up and bring her. Give her this medicine; this indeed will relieve her." Besides, She said to me, "Apply to the eyes drops of juice of the gourd flower made into a paste with salt; that will relieve you." Then I took the medicine that mother had received, and applied to the eyes drops of juice of the gourd flower. As soon as I did so, all the foul matter fell off from the eyes. The eyes were cured that very day, and the swellings in the body subsided. I felt greatly relieved. I recovered. To every enquirer I said, "Mother (Simhavahini) gave the medicine." From that time on the Mother's fame spread around. I got the medicine, and the world also was blessed. Formerly nobody knew the Mother so much. My uncle made a vow of fasting before the Mother. But She let loose so many big ants that he was not allowed to stay. She appeared to my mother in a dream and said, "I am now in sleep;<sup>1</sup> why has he taken the vow of fasting now? He is a Brahmin; does he not know all this? Go quick, hasten; raise him and bring him." My mother said, "You have said so many things. Why shouldn't you have revealed the medicine also?"

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1. The gods and goddesses sleep for six months following the summer solstice, and keep awake for six months after the winter solstice.

When life was despaired of, the Mother came round miraculously by taking refuge in the goddess. Humanity has here a demonstration of the infallibility of divine intervention, though it is not possible for all to rely absolutely on it; only those like the Holy Mother, whose hearts are full of devotion, succeed in this. But if the deity can once be made propitious through the supplication of such rare souls, weaker persons can share in the good fortune. The Holy Mother had a lifelong and incomparable devotion to Simhavahini. With full faith she took some earth from the basement of the shrine, kept it in a case, put some of this in her mouth now and then, asked her niece Radhu to do so, and related the legends of Her greatness to others. Encouraged by the Mother's success, others too offered vows to the Deity and got their wishes fulfilled thereby. This, as also the efficacy of that earth in curing diseases, spread the fame of Simhavahini all around, drawing even to this day numbers of pilgrims to Her shrine.

Chandramani Devi, the blessed mother of Shri Ramakrishna, passed away at the age of eighty-five on the 27th February, 1875, the birth-day of the Master. As the last moment drew near, the old lady was taken to the Ganges, and the Master offered flowers, sandal paste, and *tulasi* (holy basil) leaves at her feet.

The Holy Mother, was then at Jayrambati. She seemed to have fallen on evil days; because, hardly had she recovered from dysentery and family bereavement, when she had an attack of malaria with enlargement of the spleen. For treatment of the spleen trouble, she had to go to Kayapat-Badanganj where it was singed. This was a queer remedy of a bygone age. Its curative effect was disputable, but the suffering of the patient was indescribable. After ablution, the patient was made to lie on the ground and held down by some strong persons, so that he might not escape. Then the medicine-man would take in hand a burning piece of jujube wood and rub it on a plantain leaf laid over the region of the spleen. The skin

would get burnt and the patient would shriek and scream. It is said that the Master, too, had his spleen treated thus at the market-place of Kayapat-Badanganj. When Shyamasundari Devi went to the local Shiva temple with her daughter, some other people were undergoing the treatment; and the Holy Mother saw their plight and heard their screams. When her turn came, she stepped forward to the place after bath, and some persons advanced to hold her fast. But she said, 'Nobody need hold me; I myself shall lie down quietly.' And in fact she went through that ordeal in silence. The spleen shrank up for some reason and she regained her health.

It is an admitted fact that when God or any of His Powers incarnates, the avatar does not forthwith begin a frontal fight with adverse forces in the shape of existing institutions, but rather diverts them to new channels of usefulness, reorientates them, divests them of their malignant incrustations, or manifests his glory despite them. By thus demonstrating the force of spiritual ideals before erring humanity, the avatar encourages men to make fresh attempts for progress. We do not know what motives prompted such actions of the Mother; but she herself declared, 'I have done much more than is necessary for setting an ideal.' From such a standpoint of setting an ideal should we understand some of these anecdotes in the Mother's life, which otherwise seem to us—moderns, as irrational.

Religious writers agree that God becomes merciful through our devotion. We had a verification of this in the awakening of Simhavahini. Religious people are also agreed that any act or process that is taken recourse to by a holy man for the fulfilment of his objective, acquires such an extraordinary potency, that through it is achieved some result which could not otherwise have been predicted. In the contraction of the spleen we had a demonstration of this. The scriptures also declare that if the devotee is really earnest, God becomes gracious and abides for ever in

his house. This will be proved by the worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri in Shyamasundari Devi's house at Jayrambati, to which event we shall now turn.

But before we actually do so, we shall have a peep back at the natural disposition of the Holy Mother. It is astonishing to think that an uneducated village girl like the Mother should not have lost her head or been puffed up with pride either at the sight of her husband being adored as an incarnation by the rich and cultured society of Calcutta, or by herself being worshipped by that most revered saint, who was the doyen of all spiritual giants in that city. On the contrary, she became all the more considerate towards her old acquaintances and more devoted to her village gods and goddesses. Her husband was not resourceless at the time but even so she did not worry or embarrass him by asking for monetary help even in the worst days of her privation. She preferred to endure her lot amidst the poverty of her paternal home; only at times did she lift her heart in prayer to God. It was no wonder, then, that where there was a combination of this absolute surrender on the part of the daughter with the unquestioning devotion of the simple-hearted mother Shyamasundari Devi, the worship of the powerful goddess Jagad-dhatri was possible in a poor mud-house.

Once, at the time of the Kali worship, Nava Mukherji, as a result of some village feud, did not accept the gifts of rice and other things from Shyamasundari Devi, which were her contribution to the joint endeavour at worship. She had gathered together these things with the greatest effort and the utmost sincerity; but another man's cruelty now deprived her of the chance of offering them to the Deity. Her sorrow was so painful that she spent a sleepless night and went on repeating, 'This rice I prepared for Kali, and this has not been accepted! Who will now eat this? Indeed, it is Kali's rice, and nobody else can eat it!' Then a Deity appeared to her in a dream and awakened her by patting her body. Opening her eyes, Shyamasundari Devi saw the

Deity, red in hue, sitting near the door with one leg placed over the other, who said, 'Why do you weep? I shall eat Kali's rice. Why do you worry?' Shyamasundari inquired, 'Who are you?' The Deity replied, 'I am the Mother of the Universe: I shall accept your worship as Jagad-dhatri.'

Next morning, Shyamasundari Devi said to the Holy Mother, 'Dear Sarada, who is that Deity with red hue, resting one leg on the other?' The Mother said, 'She is Jagad-dhatri, to be sure.' Grandmother then said, 'I shall worship Jagad-dhatri.' She went on talking about that worship off and on. She secured from the Vishwas family about 400 lbs. of paddy. It was then raining incessantly. Grandmother said, 'Mother, how shall I worship you? I can't so much as dry the paddy.' But through the grace of the Goddess it so happened, that though it rained all around, grandmother's mat, on which the paddy was spread, had plenty of sunshine; and she got it husked and converted into rice. The clay image of the Deity had to be painted after drying it under fire. Uncle Prasanna went to Dakshineswar to invite Sri Ramakrishna for the celebration. But he said, 'Mother will come, aye! Mother will come! That's excellent. But weren't you in very straitened circumstances, my dear?' Uncle replied, 'You have to come, I have come to take you.' The Master said, 'I am as good as already there. It's fine. Go, and have the worship. It's fine indeed! It will do you good.' The worship was duly performed. Many people from far and near were invited and heartily fed. The rice was enough for all. At the time of the immersion of the image grandmother whispered in the ears of the Goddess, 'My dear, Jagai, do come again next year. I shall be making arrangements for you all the year round.'

Next year, grandmother said to the Holy Mother, 'Look here, dear, you too should contribute something; my Jagai (Jagad-dhatri) will be worshipped.' The Mother remonstrated, 'I can't bear all that trouble. It's enough that you had the worship once; why rake up troubles again? There's no need; I can't do it.' Then she saw

three figures in a dream at night—Jagad-dhatri, with her maids Jaya and Vijaya—who said, ‘Well, shall we go then?’ ‘Who may you be?’ the Mother queried in surprise. ‘I am Jagad-dhatri,’ said the Deity. At this the Mother said with great consternation, ‘No, where will you go? No, no, where will you go? Do stay on, I didn’t ask you to go.’ Thenceforth the worship continued uninterruptedly for some years. The Mukherji family had not then enough hands to help in the festival. So the Holy Mother had to be present every year for scouring the utensils and doing some other odd jobs.

As the day of immersion of the image on the first occasion happened to be a Thursday sacred to the goddess of fortune, the Holy Mother objected to bidding farewell to Jagad-dhatri on that day. The next day was the last day of the month, and the next the first day of another month. Hence the immersion took place on the fourth day.

The worship in the first four years was performed in the name of Shyamasundari Devi, in the second four, in the name of the Holy Mother, and in the next four in the name of her uncle Nilmadhav. The Holy Mother felt no need for continuing the worship after twelve years, because all had had their names formally proposed as worshippers. That very night after she had made the declaration, the Deity appeared to her in a dream and intimated that the family of Madhu Mukherji’s aunt had it in mind to worship Her, and asked her three times, ‘Shall I go then?’ The Holy Mother realized that Jagad-dhatri wanted to leave her after getting her affirmation; and so she took hold of the feet of the Deity and said eagerly, ‘I won’t let you go any more, I shall worship you every year.’ With this determination in mind, she later on secured about three and a half acres of paddy land with which she made a trust for the continuance of the worship.<sup>1</sup> With the income from this land and some contributions from devotees, the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, perform the worship every

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1. The deed of trust was registered at Koalpara on 7-7-1916.

year with due pomp, at the Mother's temple at Jayrambati. And as in the first year, so now too, the worship continues for three successive days—on the first day with all ceremonials but on succeeding days not so elaborately as was the custom during Mother's lifetime. One on each side of the main Deity Jagad-dhatri, are placed images of Jaya and Vijaya. The devotees of the Holy Mother believe that as the Mother was none other than Jagad-dhatri Herself, when the latter is worshipped the Holy Mother too is adored as a matter of course.

## IN LIGHT AND SHADE

The Mother continued to live at Jayrambati for some time after recovering from malaria and spleen trouble. Perhaps, she returned to Dakshineswar in the winter of 1877 following the first Jagad-dhatri worship. We noted earlier that Providence had led Shambhu Babu to step into the shoes of Mathur Babu as the supplier of the Master's needs, and that he had been serving the Master and the Mother with whole-hearted devotion. His wife, too, adored the Master as God himself; and whenever the Holy Mother happened to be at Dakshineswar, the lady took her to her house every Tuesday to make offerings at her holy feet as she would have made at a deity's. It did not take long for a warm and generous-hearted man like Shambhu Babu to realize that for the Holy Mother who was used to the ease and freedom of the village, living in a small place like the Nahabat, which was nothing better than a cage, would be very uncomfortable. So he purchased for Rs. 250/- a small plot of rent-free land near the temple premises, on which he planned to build a thatched house for her. Coming to learn of this, Captain Vishwanath Upadhyaya, who was a staunch devotee of the Master and was in charge of the timber yard of the Nepal Government at Belur, across the river, offered to supply free of cost, the *sal* wood necessary for the purpose. And so three *sal* logs were sent with the flow-tide to Dakshineswar. But at night another high tide carried away one of the logs. Hridaya read a bad omen in this and castigated his aunt saying, 'You are ill-starred.' He made also some other uncharitable remarks. But Captain Upadhyaya, unmindful of the loss, sent another log. The house was thus completed, and the Mother took her residence there<sup>1</sup> with a maid-servant, engaged to keep her

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1. For the sequence of events here we rely mainly on the Holy Mother's own account. She says, 'Then (at the time of Chandramani Devi's death) I was ill—I had gone to my village home after suffering for a year at

company and help her in her domestic duties. And soon after, Hridaya's wife also joined her there.

The Mother cooked the Master's food there according to his taste and needs and carried it to his room, where she sat till he had finished. For looking after the comforts of the Mother or for her satisfaction, the Master, too, often visited the cottage during the daytime and spent some time with her. One day it rained so heavily just after his arrival there, that unable to return, he had to finish his meal there and then lie down for the night. From the bed he said to the Mother laughing, 'This is as though I have come home like any priest of the Kali temple going home at night.'

The Mother could not live in this thatched shed for long. She had to return to the Nahabat for attending on the Master who, as we said, had a bad attack of dysentery. As the Master became too weak to walk far away from the room, the Mother used to come from the new house to help him. Just then, fortuitously enough, an aged woman came to the Kali temple from Banaras. Little or nothing was known about her past, and we know even less of her life after the Dakshineswar days. She came like a flash of lightning for fulfilling a divine duty, and disappeared completely when it was over. The Holy Mother searched in vain for her when she went to Banaras. This aged woman volunteered to serve the Master, but realizing that for various reasons she was not equal to the task, she told the Mother, 'It's odd, my dear, that you should be staying here when he is so ill there!' The Mother replied, 'How can I help it? How can my nephew's wife be left alone? My nephew Hridaya is there with the Master.' The woman said, 'Let them carry on as best as they can. Does it befit you now to be

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Dakshineswar. After I had visited (Dakshineswar) twice or thrice...Shambhu Babu had the house constructed...In that house I stayed for some days...At last an aged woman from Banaras persuaded me and had brought me to the Nahabat from the house...Next time (fourth time) myself, my mother, Lakshmi, and some others came to Dakshineswar.' Shambhu Babu gifted the house on 11-4-1876 and he passed away in 1877.

away from him?' The Mother admitted the force of this and shifted to the Nahabat to engage herself in the Master's service more completely.

Up till now the Mother had remained veiled before the Master. The Banaras woman one night took her to the Master and in his presence removed her veil. The Master, who was in an ecstatic mood, went on discoursing about divine things which kept them spell-bound. It was dawn when he stopped and they took leave of him.

It is not known when the Mother went again to Jayrambati. But about her return to Dakshineswar for the fourth time, she herself said, 'Well, the next time my mother, Lakshmi, myself and some others went to Dakshineswar. I made a votive offering of my hair and nails at Tarakeswar for recovery from my last ailment. As (my brother) Prasanna was with us, we first went to his rented house in Calcutta. It was perhaps in the month of March (1881). Next day, we all went to Dakshineswar. No sooner were we there than Hridaya for some reason best known to him, said, "Why have they come? What have they got to do here?" He showed his disrespect to them in this way. My mother made no reply to all this. Hridaya was a man of Shihar and my mother too was a girl of that village. Hridaya utterly ignored my mother when she said, "Come, let us go back home; with whom shall I leave my daughter here?" For fear of Hridaya, the Master kept mum all through. We all left that very day. Ramlal called a boat for crossing the river.'

With the deepest disappointment the Mother left,—she could not stay at Dakshineswar even for a day! Apart from this solitary grievance, the unassuming selfless wife had no complaint against the Master at all, or any ill-feeling towards her nephew. But all her sorrows and all her complaints were laid at the feet of the Almighty whose will rules everywhere. And so at the time of departure, she told Mother Kali Who dwelt within her mind, 'Mother, I shall revisit this place only if You will have me here again.'

If the Almighty rejected a supplicant who had absolutely surrendered herself, whom else could she implore for righting the wrong? The futile fourth visit thus ended abruptly.

Hridaya, in the pride of his heart, transgressed the limits of courtesy. May be, he had some satisfaction at this apparent triumph. But the unseen hand of destiny was shaping his future in another way. This was not the first instance of his rudeness to the Holy Mother. On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna who noticed such misbehaviour reprimanded him saying, 'My dear Hride, you may be talking to this (pointing to his own body) slightly, but don't you do so to her. If the one that is in this (body) raises its hood, you may still be saved; but if the one that is in her raises its hood even Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara cannot save you.' Egotistic as Hridaya had become, the warning made no impression on his hard heart; and so, through the force of circumstances he had to leave the temple precincts for good to clear the way for the Mother's return. Through his foolhardiness he worshipped on the anniversary day of the opening of the temple (June, 1881), the little daughter of Trailokyanath, a son of Mathur Babu, as the divine Gauri;<sup>1</sup> whereupon Trailokya fearing that some evil would befall the girl, dismissed Hridaya from his service.

Then the Master's nephew Ramlal succeeded Hridaya as the priest of Kali. On getting this promotion he was elated with the thought, 'How grand! I have become the priest of Mother Kali,' and became unmindful of his duty towards Sri Ramakrishna. The Master used to be very frequently in *samadhi*, so that unless somebody reminded him of the *prasada* sent from the temple and coaxed him to eat it, it would lie in his room uncared for and become stale or dried up. There was none besides Ramlal who

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1. It is usual to adore little brahmin girls as symbols of the divine Mother. Trailokya a non-brahmin feared that the worship of his daughter by a brahmin would spell ruin.

could really serve the Master with devotion. So, the Master suffered, and he sent word to the Mother through people who happened to go to those parts, to rejoin him at Dakshineswar. Thus through Lakshman Pain he sent the message: 'I am suffering here; Ramlal has joined the other priests after becoming the priest of Mother Kali, and he does not now look after me properly. You must come, be it by a *doli*<sup>1</sup> or a palanquin; and I shall meet the expenses, be they ten rupees or twenty.' This earnest call made the Mother at last come to Dakshineswar (probably in February-March, 1882). This was her fifth visit after staying away for about a year.

The next time she went to Jayrambati, she spent there some seven or eight months, coming back to Dakshineswar in January-February, 1884. It was at this time that the Master tumbled down when in a state of ecstasy, and as a result had a bone in the left hand dislocated. As soon as the Mother entered the Master's room and saluted him, placing the bundle of clothes on the floor, he inquired, 'When did you start?' Ascertaining from her reply that she had started in the afternoon of a Thursday, which is regarded as extremely inauspicious, he said, 'There it is! I got my hand injured because you started on Thursday afternoon. Go back; go and make a fresh start.' The Mother wanted to leave that very day; but the Master said, 'Stay today; you can go tomorrow.' The very next day the Mother left for her village home to recommence the journey on a more auspicious day.

It is not known when the Mother went home from Dakshineswar again, nor when she returned. But it is a fact that she was at Kamarpukur at Ramlal's marriage in 1884 and returned to Dakshineswar in the beginning of the next year. From this time on, most probably she did not visit Jayrambati again during the Master's lifetime.

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1. A litter, being a cheaper and smaller prototype of the palanquin.

We have tried to be as accurate as possible about the number and times of the Mother's journeys between Jayrambati and Dakshineswar; but in getting a more accurate idea, we have to take another factor into consideration. During the period beginning with the date of completion of the Master's austerity up to the year 1880, he used to go to Kamarpukur every year during the rains and spend there three or four months. His physicians advised him to go to the country at that time of the year to recoup his health which had been impaired by austerity. It is known that when steamers began to ply from Calcutta to Ghatal on the river Rupnarayana, the Master once went home with the Mother and Hridaya along that route. They got down from the steamer probably at Bandar and then proceeded by boat to Bali-Dewanganj which lies about eight miles south of Kamarpukur. That was a Vaishnava village. A merchant of the Modaka caste of that village cherished the idea of accommodating some saintly man in his new house for three nights. After the arrival of the Master and the Mother, the weather became so inclement that they had to spend three nights at the house. On the fourth day they went to Hriday's village, Shihar. It was during this visit that the Master inspired the people around by joining the *kirtana* parties at Shihar and Shyambazar, who sang continuously for days.

The Master visited Jayrambati quite a number of times. Whenever he happened to be at Kamarpukur, he used to be taken to Shihar, and he would visit Jayrambati on the way stopping there sometimes for more than a week. During one of these nights at Jayrambati, when all were asleep, the Master suddenly got up and said that he was hungry. The women of the house were in a quandary, for as a consequence of a feast that day, no food was left over except a little rice soaked in a pot of water. The Mother passed on the information to the Master with not a little hesitation, for that was not the kind of food to be offered to a guest at that hour of the night. But the

Master said, 'Fetch it.' 'But there's no curry,' put in the Mother. 'Why not make a little search?' suggested the Master. 'Do see, if even a little of the curry you prepared is left in the pan.' The Mother found a little bit of curry and placed this before the Master which made him very happy and he satisfied his hunger with the food thus got together.

The Mother usually covered the distance from Jayrambati or Kamarpukur to Dakshineswar on foot. Once when some village women started for Calcutta for a dip in the Ganges on some sacred day, the Mother, too, accompanied them with her nephew Sivaram and her niece Lakshmi Devi. Her idea was to stay on at Dakshineswar after the holy bath. It was settled that their first halt should be at Arambagh which was eight miles from Kamarpukur; for in front lay the uninhabited, notorious stretches of fields called Telo-bhelo which were infested with robbers. People would not cross them alone even in daylight. As a reminder of those fearful days there is still the terrible image of the goddess Kali in the heart of Telo-bhelo which the robbers used to invoke before engaging in their nefarious activities. The image is still called the robbers' Kali. On the day we are speaking of, the party from Kamarpukur decided after reaching Arambagh that there was plenty of time left for a moderate walker to reach Tarakeswar before it became too dark and that it was not wise to waste a day for rest which was not really wanted. The Mother was well-known even from her early age for her unobtrusiveness; if need arose she would endure discomfort to make it easier for others. In the present instance too, she restarted with them, though she knew well enough that her tired legs could not bear such prolonged strain. Soon she began to lag behind others. Her companions halted three or four times to allow her to

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1. From a foot-note on p. 12 of the 2nd edition of the fifth part of the *Kathamrita* it seems that at this time the Master stayed in those parts from 3rd March to 13th October, 1880.

catch up with them. But when at last they were convinced that she could not keep pace with them and that such slow movement would expose all to inevitable danger or even death, and when on top of all this the Mother asked them not to worry about her but to go forward, they quickened their steps and were soon lost to sight, while the Mother trudged on all alone.

When the sun set and the darkness of night began fast enveloping everything around, the Mother was still plodding on across the solitary fields of Telo-bhelo, full of anxiety, but finding no way out. Just then she noticed a tall figure emerging out of the darkness and approaching her. When the figure had drawn sufficiently near, the Mother saw that it was a man of deep dark colour and thick long hair who had a stout staff on his shoulder and silver bangles round his wrists. She knew that he was a robber, and terror-stricken, she halted at once. The man had no difficulty in understanding her mind, and with a view to terrifying her all the more he said in a harsh voice, 'Hullo! Who is that standing there at this time? Where would you go?' 'Eastward,' said the Mother. 'This is not the way there; you have to go that way,' said the man. The Mother still made no movement, and the man came very close. But as he looked at the Mother's face, there came a sudden change in his demeanour, and the cruel man-hunter said softly, 'Don't be afraid; I have a woman with me who has fallen back.' At this the Mother's eyes were taken off the immediate danger and extended further off where, sure enough, a woman was moving up. Then she got encouraged and said, 'Father, my companions have left me behind, besides, methinks, I have lost my way. Will you kindly take me to them? Your son-in-law lives in the Kali temple of Rani Rasmani at Dakshineswar. I am on my way to him. If you take me to that place he will treat you very cordially.' The woman came up before the Mother had finished and the latter took hold of her hand with full confidence and affection and said, 'Mother, I am your daughter Sarada; I was in a terrible

plight having been left behind by my companions. Fortunately you and father appeared; otherwise I can't say what I would have done.' This simple behaviour, extreme confidence, and sweet disposition conquered the hearts of the robber couple who belonged to the lowly Bagdi caste. As a result they forgot the gulf of social difference that separated them from a brahmin woman and consoling her as though she was truly a daughter of theirs, did not allow her to proceed further because she was tired. They took her to a little shop nearby, where the woman improvised a bed for her with her clothes and other things and the man brought some fried-rice for her to eat. Then she was laid to rest with extreme affection, the man keeping guard at the door with his staff.

At dawn, when they were on their way to Tarakeswar, the Bagdi mother picked up green peas from the field for the Holy Mother. The latter accepted the affectionate gift like a little girl and put them in her mouth. They reached Tarakeswar about an hour and a half after sunrise. Here the Bagdi woman said to her husband, 'My daughter had nothing to eat at night; finish the worship of the Lord Tarakeswar (Shiva) soon, and bring some good things from the market; she has to be fed properly today.' When the man was out, the companions of the Holy Mother who had been out in search of her came to that place and were delighted to find her safe. Then the Mother introduced them to her Bagdi mother who had given her shelter on the previous night and said, 'If they had not appeared and saved me, I don't know what I would have done last night.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. There is a little controversy in the printed literature whether the Mother had any companion with her. The *Lilaprasanga*, *Divyabhava* (pp. 260-64) says categorically that there was none. The controversy seems to have arisen because of the Mother's reluctance to be adequately communicative about the circumstances of the incident. Once when she was questioned about this before Swami Ishanananda, the Mother avoided a direct answer and then told the Swami in confidence, 'See, what a fuss they make about hearing this robber story again and again. I don't want to talk. Lakshmi, Shibu, and

It is no longer possible to ascertain how this event was viewed by the pilgrims from Kamarpukur who were uncultured and steeped in caste prejudices. Nor can we gauge how far they realized the full import of that extraordinary drama of affection that was enacted on the solitary field at nightfall, and the intimate relationship that was established between the robber couple who belonged to a very low caste and the brahmin girl who was picked up at that odd hour from a very odd place. Nor do we get any inkling of any light having flashed across the minds of those ignorant villagers with regard to the victory of that sacred, though as yet unfolded motherhood over the cruelty of the robber, or the supremacy of light over darkness when the two came into conflict. As unbiased witnesses, we only find the Holy Mother, the robber couple, and the Kamarpukur pilgrims co-operating like a family in a common endeavour for their noon-day meal, and after finishing it in a very cordial atmosphere, starting for Baidyabati on the way to Calcutta.

The Mother and the Bagdi couple had drawn so close to one another during that single night, that all the three began to shed profuse tears at the thought of separation. As the pilgrims moved onward, the Bagdi couple accompanied them for some distance, and the woman picked up some peas with eager hands from the fields and tying them to the hem of the Mother's garment said in a choked voice, 'Dear daughter Sarada, when you chew your fried-rice at night, add these to it.' At last the Holy Mother got a promise from the couple that they would visit Dakshineswar and then managed to take leave of them. The couple kept their promise visiting Dakshineswar more than once with various gifts for the Mother. Sri Ramakrishna, coming to know the whole

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others, though they were with me, left me. Now if that question arises they would feel sore and look small. Howsoever that might have been, they are my nephew and my niece. If I go on repeatedly narrating the incident they become dishonoured. So I avoid the point. Others don't understand it. It's no good asking me again and again.' In fact, the Mother did not admit the presence of anybody else.

incident behaved with them like a true son-in-law. The Mother, however, when relating the incident to the devotees ended it with this significant remark: 'Though my robber parents were so simple and well-behaved, still it strikes me that they did commit robbery off and on in their earlier days.' In other words, she never looked upon that thrilling incident on that lonesome plain of Telo-bhelo as an ordinary event.

It is beyond our capacity to imagine an adequate reason for the sudden change of mind of the robbers. It might have been that the uncommon guilelessness of the Mother and her immaculate holiness exerted an irresistible influence on their minds or it might have been that some supernormal factor was at work. That the second surmise is not baseless is apparent from what the Holy Mother told a devotee in the course of a conversation. It had reached the ears of the devotees that when the Mother once asked her Bagdi parents, 'Why, my dears, are you so attached to me?' they replied, 'You are not, in fact, an ordinary mortal, for we saw you as Kali.' 'How you speak my dears! How could you have seen me so?' remonstrated the Mother. Unabashed they said in an aggrieved voice, 'No, Mother, there was no mistake about what we saw. You want to hide this from us since we are sinners.' To this the Mother said indifferently, 'Who knows? I am not in the least aware of it.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. Shri Ashutosh Mitra in the Bengali book, *Shri Ma* (pp. 31-32) depicts the concluding portion of the event thus: The Mother says, "The Man was a Bagdi by caste. With a harsh voice like that of a robber he demanded, "Who art thou!" and he kept on looking at me with his mouth wide agape.' A devotee inquired, 'What did the robber see as he looked at you thus?' The Mother said, 'He talked afterwards of having seen me as Kali.' The devotee said, 'Then you revealed yourself to him as Kali. Speak out, Mother don't hide it, Please.' The Mother said, 'Why should I reveal it? He said that he saw me as Kali.' The devotee said, 'That's all the same—you revealed yourself.' The Mother said with a smile, 'You may take it that way if you like it so.'

## A LIGHT UNDER A BUSHEL

Whenever the Mother was at Kamarpukur or at Dakshineswar, she usually had with her either her mother-in-law, or the Bhairavi Brahmani, or her sister-in-law, or Hridaya, who regulated her movements in many ways. Hence, though her relation with the Master was most intimate, its outer expression had some extraneous influence imposed upon it. Now we shall study the divine relationship between the Master and the Mother unencumbered by any extraneous influence whatever. And yet in their free and sweet interchanges there was no meaningless sentimentalism, no mere emotional exuberance. In everything she did, the Mother was calm and collected without being lifeless, and bright and transparent without being blinding. It requires the closest attention to comprehend fully the different forms that the purity and modesty of the Mother took in the midst of this self-regulated freedom.

Apart from the few days that the Mother lived in the thatched house built by Shambhu Babu, she spent the rest of her Dakshineswar days in the small Nahabat<sup>1</sup>. Those were extremely uncomfortable days; and the Mother, too, felt similarly. She said, 'When I was at the Nahabat for serving the Master, in what discomfort I had to live in that small room, and what a lot of things lay huddled together there! Sometimes, I was all alone...Golap, Gaur-dasi and others stayed there now and then. Ex-

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1. The Nahabat is a two-storeyed brick structure, about 75 ft. north of the Master's room. It is on the Ganges, on the way to the Panchavati where the Master used to meditate. The room downstairs is octagonal in shape, each wall measuring 3' 3" inside and the maximum distance between the walls across the floor being 7' 9". The floor area is a little less than 50 sft. Round the room is a verandha 4' 3" in width more or less. The only opening, a door on the southern side, measure 4' 2" x 2' 2". On the eastern side of the verandha is the staircase leading upstairs. Under this the Mother had her kitchen. During the Mother's stay, the verandah was surrounded by a thin screen of plaited bamboo chips.

remely small though the room was, yet in it were carried on cooking, sleeping, eating,—why, everything. Cooking was done for the Master, for often enough, he suffered from poor digestion, and the *prasada* of Kali did not suit him. There was cooking for the devotees too. Latu was there; he came there having quarrelled with Ram Datta. The Master said, “This is a fine boy; he will knead the dough for you.” There was no end to cooking, night or day. Ram Datta, for instance, came there and called out as soon as he alighted from the carriage, “I shall take today gram soup and *chapati*<sup>1</sup>.” No sooner I heard this, than I started cooking here. There used to be *chapatis* made out of six to eight pounds of flour. Rakhal stayed here (with the Master); very often *khichudi* was cooked for him. Surendra Mitra used to pay ten rupees every month for the expenses of the devotees. Senior Gopal used to get things from the market.<sup>2</sup> ..In the beginning my head would strike frequently against the door-frame as I entered the room; one day I even suffered a bad cut. But gradually I got used to it, and my head would bend as I approached the door. Fat women from Calcutta used to come to visit me, and standing at the doorway and holding the door-frame on either side with both hands, they would say, “Alas! In what a room our dear good lady is living—it’s like living in banishment” ..I used to bathe at four in the morning. Whenever there was a little sunshine on the steps in the afternoon, I used to get my hair sunned. There was only one room on the ground floor of the Nahabat, and that was stacked with

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1. Indian bread made of wheat flour flattened into round discs and baked in fire.

2. Of the persons mentioned here Golap (or Golap-Ma) and Gaur-dasi (or Gauri-Ma) were women devotees of the Master, the former afterwards becoming a constant companion of the Mother. Latu, Rakhal, and Senior Gopal (or Gopal-dada) renounced the world, assuming the names Swami Adbhutananda, Swami Brahmananda, and Swami Advaitananda. The last named was older even than the Master and hence had the epithet ‘Senior’. The rest were all lay disciples.

goods. Overhead were slings on which were hung potfuls of domestic titbits...The worst source of inconvenience was inadequacy of the facilities for bathing and personal cleanliness.<sup>1</sup> Through forced confinement I developed physical trouble...And those fisherwomen were my companions. When they came for a bath in the Ganges, they kept their baskets on the verandah and went down for their dip. They talked a lot with me and took away their baskets when returning home. At night I heard the fishermen sing as they caught fish.'

The Mother lived on the ground floor of the Nahabat and cooked below the staircase. She was too shy to come out during the daytime. Yogin-Ma thus described the Mother's daily routine at the Nahabat: 'Finishing her bath before four o'clock in the morning the Holy Mother sat for meditation; for the Master used to insist on meditation. Then she commenced her worship after finishing her other duties. The worship, *japa* (telling of beads), and meditation would take about an hour and a half. Then she sat for cooking under the staircase. When the cooking was over, if she got the opportunity, she would rub oil on the Master's body with her own hands before his bath. The Master sat for his dinner between half past ten and eleven. Whenever he went for his bath, the Mother hurriedly prepared betel rolls for him as she kept on watching for his return. When he returned, the Mother would spread a small carpet for him to sit on for his meal, and keep ready a glass of drinking water. Then she would carry to him a plate of food. As he sat for his meal, she would converse on various topics just taking care lest his meal should be spoiled by any upsurge of spiritual emotion. None but the Mother could prevent such sudden upsurges during meal time. When the Master had finished eating, the

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1. There was no bath-room. When Yogin-Ma, a woman devotee of the Master and later a constant companion of the Mother, visited Dakshineswar, she noticed all this and took up the matter with the others. As a result there was some minor improvement.

Mother would hurriedly take something herself and drink a glass of water. Then she would make betel rolls. That over, she would sing in a low tone, and that very cautiously lest she should be overheard. Then when the mill blew the whistle at one o'clock, she sat down for her food, so that her lunch was never finished before half past one or two. After food she would take some nominal rest and then would sit down on the steps at about three for drying her hair. Then she would turn to trimming the lights and doing other odd bits of work, and then get ready for evening duties after somehow washing her body and clothes with the little water she kept in the Nahabat. When evening came, she would light the lamps and after waving the censer with the burning incense before the deities, sit for meditation. This was usually followed by cooking for the night, and the Mother would have her supper after all had finished. At last she would lie down after a little respite.'

Once, before dawn, when she was getting down the steps for a bath in the Ganges she almost trod on a crocodile which taking alarm at the Mother's approach jumped into the river. Thenceforth, she never went for a bath without a lantern.

Numerous inconveniences and handicaps, heavy duties and troubles were there; but the Mother never really worried about them. In later days, when casually alluding to all these troubles, she would sum up saying, 'Yet I knew no other suffering..No discomfort could touch me if it was for his (Master's) service. The day passed on joyously and quietly amidst everything.' Some may fancy that there was nothing unusual in this her sense of joy. (For was it not really good luck to live near the great Master, that fountain of bliss who drew large crowds to Dakshineswar, and whose sweet words charmed thousands into forgetting all the worries and anxieties of life in his presence? This attitude may appeal to those who do not care to look at the matter more deeply. But how many in real life feel that kind of attraction for the Master even after knowing

so much of his greatness? How many even during his life did so, and how many among those who felt that love stayed on at Dakshineswar? We have also to remember that the Holy Mother whose life revolved round the Master alone, had seldom even a distant view of him. She said, 'Sometimes even during as long a period as two months, I could'nt see him even once. I composed myself by saying "O mind, what merit have you earned that you will get his *darshan* (sight) every day?" Standing erect (behind the screen of plaited bamboo chips, with which the verandah of the Nahabat was surrounded), I used to hear the lines that he sometimes added extempore to the *kirtana* songs. This produced rheumatism.' Would but one stop to consider for a while the absolute purity of heart and incomparable love that are necessary for standing long hours behind a screen just for the sake of having an incomplete glimpse of the Master through a hole and deriving pleasure thereby! Though the Mother was then physically separated from the Master, her heart ever hovered around him. The number of devotees visiting the Master at that time was quite considerable, and throughout the day and till late into the night there was a continuous flow of music solo or choral, dancing, and ecstatic moods. The Mother saw and heard these and thought within herself, 'If but I were one of the devotees over there, I would then be ever so near the Master, and would hear so many things!' Here on one side is the new Incarnation giving free and varied expression to his message for the age, and on the other side is the Mother of the Universe keeping herself under the voluntary restraints of a monotonous life; on the one side is sparkling disport and on the other eager gazing—this is altogether a rare phenomenon! Those days might have had their ups and downs. Near as she was, she was still very far; and yet in the memory of the Holy Mother the troubles and tribulations of those days were obliterated as she looked back lingeringly at the bliss that suffused her life as a whole in spite of all impediments; and she said, 'In what bliss I was! What a

curiously mixed crowd of people came to see him then! Dakshineswar used then to be a mart of joy!'

The Master was not, of course, unmindful of her comforts; on the contrary he tried to keep her happy in every way. He called that little room a cage, surrounded as it was by bamboo chips. Lakshmi Devi, his niece, too, often stayed there. The Master called them in fun a pair of parrots. When Mother Kali's *prasada* was sent from the temple to the Master's room, he said to his nephew Ramlal, 'Hullo! There is that pair of parrots in the cage. Carry to them some gram and fruits.' New comers naturally thought that there were some real birds; even Master Mahashaya<sup>1</sup> laboured long under that wrong impression. When Lakshmi Devi was not there, the thought of the rheumatism and loneliness of the Holy Mother worried the Master very much. He said to her, 'If a wild bird lives in a cage it becomes rheumatic; you should go out now and then to have a stroll in the neighbourhood.' He did not stop with this. When visitors had left the temple premises at noon, he would go to her and ask her to walk out through the backdoor to spend some time with the wife of one Sri Pandye. The Mother used to return after the evening services when the Panchavati side became quiet again.

Sometimes the Master created funny situations as though to impress on others the unique intimacy of the relationship that he had with the Mother. Once when a discussion arose whether the Master or a certain devotee had a fairer skin, the Master appointed the Mother as the umpire. He told her that she would have to watch them and formulate her opinion as they walked by the Nahabat northward of the Panchavati. The Master's colour was at that time fair and bright like pure gold and could hardly be distin-

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1. Mahendranath Gupta, the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in Bengali. As he was a teacher in a High School, the devotees called him Master. Mahashaya means a dignified man, and is equivalent to 'Mr'.

guished from the gold amulet on his arm. Yet, the Mother, an impartial judge, pronounced her verdict in favour of his rival.

In fact, the current of love of this divine couple was equally strong at either bank; the Master was as warmly attached to the Mother as she was to him. Gauri-Ma once said, 'Though these two sometimes did not see each other for six months together, in spite of being only about seventy-five feet apart, how deep indeed was their love for each other!' Once when the Mother had a headache the Master felt extremely anxious and went on asking Ramlal again and again: 'O Ramlal, why does that headache trouble her?'

The Master saw to it that the Mother was not needlessly overburdened with work, busy as she was the whole day. Once while on a walk with Rakhal in the garden of Beni Pal of Sinthi, he came across some ghosts who implored him to leave the garden, as the holy atmosphere he diffused around him was too strong for them to bear. It had been arranged earlier that he would spend the night in the garden; but the importunity of the spirits made him change the plan at once. He called a carriage and returned to the temple premises at dead of night when the gate was closed. He got it opened and walked in. The Mother, whose mind was ever eager for any opportunity of service to him, got up at the sound of his steps and said to the maidservant, 'O Jadu's-mother, how shall we manage?' They were talking in the Nahabat; but the Master's careful ears caught the sound. He sized up the situation at once and said, 'Don't you worry, my dears, we have had our meals already.'

The question of the Mother's maintenance after his passing away was also present in his mind. Though detachment from worldly affairs was a point of faith with him, he asked the Mother, 'How much money would you require for your personal needs?' The Mother replied, 'I can manage it with, say, five or six rupees.' Then he inquired, 'How many

*chapatis* do you eat in the evening?' The Mother blushed at this personal question and hung her head in shame without answering. But the Master went on repeating his question and she had to reply at last, 'Say, five or six.' On that basis the Master calculated and said, 'Then it'll be quite enough if you have five or six hundred rupees.' Afterwards he deposited that amount of money with Balaram Babu<sup>1</sup> who invested it in his own estate and sent her thirty rupees every half year as the accruing income.

It is a wonder to think how a god-intoxicated soul like the Master could keep his attention fixed on so many things. Adored as God by devotees who were ever at his beck and call, he could never be unmindful of her prestige and independence. As for his courtesy towards the Mother, we get an attestation from her own words: 'I was fortunate to be wedded to a husband who never addressed me as thou (*tui*). The Master never hurt me even with a flower, never called me "thou" in place of "you" (*tumi*).'<sup>2</sup> One day the Mother carried to the Master's room his scanty dishes consisting of very thin pieces of cake (made by spreading liquid flour on a flat frying pan) and *soojee* (semolina) porridge. As she was leaving the room after placing the dishes at the proper place, the Master thought it was his niece Lakshmi and called out, 'Mind, thou (*tui*) shuttest the door.' The Mother said, 'Yes, here I close it.' Recognizing the Mother's voice, he became greatly embarrassed and apologized, 'Ah, it's you! I thought it was Lakshmi. Don't you mind this.' Nay, that unintentional disrespect upset him so much that the very next morning he went to the Mother's door and said, 'Look here, my dear, I had no sleep last night, because of brooding over my rudeness to you.' As an illustration of the honour in

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1. A staunch devotee of the Master and one of his *rasad-dars* (suppliers of needs), who lived in Calcutta but had estates in Orissa.

2. In Bengali *tui* (thou, Hindi *tu*) is used for addressing inferiors or little ones, *tumi* (you, Hindi *tum*) for friends, equals, parents, brothers, sisters etc; and *apani* (Hindi *ap*) for respected persons.

which the Holy Mother was held by the Master who regarded all women as the veritable manifestation of the Mother of the Universe, he told the devotees that he saluted the Mother after she had rubbed his feet with her hands. On another occasion he said, 'I wanted to go to a certain place. When Ramlal's aunt (the Mother) was consulted she forbade me; so I gave up the idea.'

Though the Master thus honoured the Mother and treated her with utmost consideration, he knew that there was a wide difference between them in age and experience. Moreover, there was none else to instruct the Mother either about worldly matters or about spiritual practices. So he himself gladly shouldered the duty. For instance, he said to the Mother, 'One has to work; women should not sit idle, for if one sits idle, many vain thoughts, nay evil ideas, may crop up.' The Mother once said, 'He brought me some raw jute and said, "Twist this and make slings for me; I shall keep (in them) sweets, etc., for the boys." I twisted it into strings and made slings; and with the waste fibres and a piece of thick cloth I made a pillow. I used to spread a coarse mat over a piece of hessian and put that pillow under my head. I slept as soundly on those things as I do now on these (cots, etc.)—I don't find any difference, my child!'

In fact, owing to her own nature and the teaching of the Master, she followed his instruction, 'Adapt yourself to time, space, and person,' so perfectly, that even the Master once said to Hridaya in wonder: 'O Hridu, I had great apprehension, lest she, a village girl, should, by her rustic behaviour incur public criticism and put us to shame. But as to that she is so cautious that nobody knows her movements; even I never saw her going out.' The Master undoubtedly meant this as a compliment. But the Mother became very much worried, thinking, 'Ah me! The Mother of the Universe actualizes for him whatever idea crosses his mind; and now, methinks, I shall catch his eyes whenever I go out.' To avert this she prayed, 'O Mother,

kindly protect my modesty.' That prayer was so fully granted that though she lived at Dakshineswar for a long time, she escaped public gaze so completely that the cashier of the temple, the chief resident officer, when asked about her said once, 'I have heard that she is here; but I have never seen her.'

Though the Mother was very shy and effaced herself completely, subduing herself to the will of the Master, yet in one respect she maintained her independence and that was in the domain of her motherhood. Of this we shall have many instances; for the present we shall deal with three only. The Mother had not many companions then; the fisherwomen came frequently; a maid-servant too, was there for some time; and at times there would be a few women visitors from Calcutta. The number of devotees was not very large. At that time there used to come to her an old woman who had lived a somewhat loose life in her youth; but now like a devotee she prayed to the Lord and came often alone to the Mother who talked in a friendly spirit. Noticing this, the Master said one day, 'Why is that woman here?' The Mother expostulated, 'She talks now only of Hari. What's the harm in that?' The Mother knew that human nature changes, that even evil characters repent and become good. On the other hand, the Master's sense of duty warned him that the Holy Mother should be protected from the company of persons who might come with impure motives. Besides, intimacy with such undesirable people might rouse adverse criticism from worldly-minded visitors. So he said with disdain, 'Pooh, pooh! a public woman! To think of chatting with her, whatever the extenuating factors! What a nasty idea!' The Mother certainly understood the need for caution. Whatever might have been her past, she now trod the path of virtue and looked upon the Holy Mother as her own mother. How could the Holy Mother then drive away one who wanted to be comforted—the Mother whose life was to be a solace to thousands of sinners and spiritual wanderers? And all that cruelty she

was to show for the sake of mere social propriety! The conversations, therefore, went on as before even after the Master's observation. The Master too, intuitively understanding the Mother's feeling, did not refer to the matter again.

Subsequently, when visitors became more numerous and fruits and sweets and other offerings were placed at the feet of the Master in plenty, he used to send these to the Nahabat. It was found, however, that apart from the little that was needed for the Master, the Mother did not care to retain them, but gave them away freely to the women and young devotees and the children of the neighbourhood who came to her. Her mother's heart would not allow her to send away any visitor or devotee without giving him or her some fruit or sweet. In this she was liberal to a fault. One day when she had thus used up everything, Gopal's Mother<sup>1</sup> cried out, 'My dear daughter-in-law, why have you not reserved anything for my Gopal!' The Mother hung her head in shame. Just then Navagopal Babu's wife alighted from a carriage and handed over to her some sweets and saved the situation. The Mother did not learn her lesson still, or perhaps it was impossible for her to change her nature. The Master too, knew of this extravagance, and just because he knew he argued with her one day in his room, 'How can it be managed if there is such extravagance?' At this the Mother quietly turned her back and walked away to the Nahabat. The Master now was in a quandary and said to his nephew, Ramlal, 'Hullo Ramlal, go and pacify your aunt. If she gets angry, everything will be undone with this (pointing to his body).' This was a voluntary defeat of the Master before the blossoming motherhood of Sarada Devi.

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1. An old lady disciple of the Master, who worshipped Krishna in His form of a little child. At the end of her long practice she was blessed with a constant vision of the Divine Child whom she subsequently identified with the Master. The Mother thus became her daughter-in-law.

The Mother was one day recounting the memories of those old days to Yogin-Ma and others, when Yogin-Ma suddenly inquired why the Mother seemed to be so wilful in certain matters, even against the Master's advice. The Mother said with a smile, 'As for that, Yogen (Yogin-Ma), can any one obey another in everything?' And she added after a little reflection, 'Well, my dear, whatever you may say, I shan't be able to turn away anybody if he addresses me as Mother.'

One day, she made this abundantly clear to the Master himself. In this last incident there is not only an example of selfless service at its highest, but it is also full of the fragrance of motherhood in its first bloom. As the Mother felt too shy to come into the Master's room in the presence of others, the room was cleared of people at night to enable her to serve the Master his food. One night when she had just stepped on to the verandah of the Master's room, a woman devotee suddenly came up and snatched away the plate of food saying, 'Give it to me, Mother, give it to me!' The woman placed the plate before the Master and left as quickly. The Master sat down for his meal; the Mother too, sat by him. But he could not touch the food and said looking at the Mother, 'What's this you have done? Why did you give it into her hands? Don't you know her? She is immoral. How can I now eat what has been defiled by her?' 'I know all that,' said the Mother, 'but, do please take this tonight.' The Master would not still touch it, but at the Mother's importunity said, 'Promise that you won't hand it over to anybody else hereafter.' With folded hands the Mother replied, 'That I cannot, Master! I shall certainly bring your food myself, but if any one begs me by calling me "Mother", I shan't be able to contain myself. Besides, you are not my Master alone, you are for all.' That cheered up the Master and he began eating.

## WHEN HEART CALLS HEART

We have followed the Mother's doings as she moved about busily within the precincts of the Nahabat contented with glimpses of the Master from afar. That self-content with her work and association with the Master was only one side of her life, and not a very important one. She lived at Dakshineswar only for serving the Master meticulously, any personal benefit being only incidental and never her main objective. If that were not so, her mind would some day or other revolt against the monotonous drudgery and the rigid routine of the Nahabat, and would search for an escape from it. The remedy was not quite beyond her reach; for at Dakshineswar itself, not far away, there was the house built by Shambhu Babu, and none at the temple premises could object seriously if she chose to relax herself a little from the shackles with which she voluntarily bound herself. But we are not concerned here with a discussion of the possible means of the Mother's personal happiness; we want to delineate the kinds of service that she rendered primarily to the Master, and incidentally to his devotees as well. With this side of her life we are already partly acquainted, and we shall get more evidence of it as we proceed. We shall confine our attention mainly to the period beginning with the coming of the devotees and ending with the final illness of the Master.

Prior to the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar and her dedication to the service of the Master, life was rather uneventful with him. But when towards the end of his austerity his power of digestion suffered, the Mother came upon the scene as if through divine direction, Hridaya left the temple premises, and the Master's health improved as a result of the most devoted service of the Mother,—all these factors made the Master depend more and more on her. If she happened to go anywhere, the childlike Master felt helpless, and would become extremely

anxious to bring her back. Such solicitude on the part of one who was ever absorbed in spiritual experience, may appear enigmatic to many; but from the Mother's point of view we easily realize that her service was so successful that it could rivet on her the attention of the mightiest spiritual giant that history has witnessed. The Mother massaged the Master's feet even as does Lakshmi sitting at Lord Narayana's feet; before bath she rubbed oil on his person; and prepared nourishing and palatable dishes for him according to his taste and condition of health. In short, she then forgot herself in him. And it was not perhaps possible even for a detached mind like that of Sri Ramakrishna's to be oblivious of such consecrated service, instances of which, as also of the Master's dependence on her, are numerous.

The Master had a weak liver. So the Mother cooked for him soups and curries that were easily digestible. Now, according to Hindu custom, a wife may not do so during certain days when her person is considered impure. During those few days the Master ate whatever came to him as *prasada* from the Kali temple and suffered as a consequence. So he asked the Mother one day, 'Look here, dear, my trouble has increased because you did not cook my food during these days. Why didn't you do so?' The Mother explained, 'Women can't cook for anybody during the days of their impurity.' 'Who says, they can't?' asked the Master, 'Do it for me, you won't incur any sin thereby. Would you explain, which part of your body is impure—skin, flesh, bone, or marrow? Know that purity and impurity reside in the mind; there's nothing impure outside.' After that the Mother always cooked for him. The Master, highly delighted at this, said, 'See, my dear, how healthy is my body by taking your dishes.'

Another account of this service the devotees heard from the Mother. Once Kaviraj<sup>1</sup> Gangaprasad Sen of

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1. A physician who treats in accordance with the old Indian system of medicines called Ayurveda or science of life.

Kumartoli, Calcutta, was called in to cure the Master of an ailment. The Kaviraj asked the patient to give up water altogether during the treatment. Childlike as the Master was, he went on asking everybody, 'Well, dear, shall I be able to manage without drinking water?' The Mother said to him encouragingly, 'Most assuredly you will.' Still the Master said, by way of caution, 'Water has to be wiped off even the pomegranate seeds. Try if you can.' The Mother assured him, 'Well, that depends on how Mother Kali will have it. By Her grace I shall try my utmost.' Then he resolved to give up water. The Mother offered him plenty of milk daily and increased the quantity gradually without his being aware of it. The milkman who came to the temple-garden gave her the extra milk left unsold, and said, 'If I leave the milk there, those people will carry it home after it has been offered to Kali, and will give it to all kinds of people; whereas, if I leave it here, he (the Master) will drink it.' In exchange he got from the Mother all kinds of sweets and other things that lay at hand. The devotees used to bring those things plentifully, and so there was no dearth. She then condensed the milk to two or three pints by boiling. When the Master asked her, 'How much milk is there?' she referred only to the thickened milk and said, 'How much, indeed? It may be two or two and a half pints.' Not convinced, the Master would say, 'No, why then is there that thick layer of cream?' The Mother nevertheless coaxed him to drink the whole quantity. One day Golap-Ma was present at the meal time and the Master asked her, 'Well, my dear, what is the quantity of milk there?' Golap-Ma, unaware of the purpose behind the question gave out the quantity of the unboiled milk. Startled at this, the Master said, 'Ah, such a lot of milk! That's why I get indigestion. Call her, call her!' The Mother came and the Master inquired again, 'How much is the milk?' The Mother gave her usual reply. But the Master persisted, 'Why then Golap does speak of there being so much?' Unabashed, the

Mother explained, 'Golap knows nothing. What does Golap know of our measurement here? How can Golap know how much a pot contains?' The matter ended there that day. But on another occasion the Master again inquired of Golap-Ma and she said, 'One bowlful of milk from here and another from the Kali temple.' The Master started and said, 'Ah, what a quantity! Call her; ask her.' As soon as the Mother entered, the Master inquired, 'How much milk does the bowl contain—how many quarts and pints?' The Mother replied, 'I know nothing of quarts or pints. Who indeed cares for so much calculation?' The Master pleaded, 'Can any one digest so much? As it is, I shall have indigestion.' And, in fact, he had it that afternoon, so that he had to forgo his evening meal. The Mother gave him only a cup of sago. Noticing the action of the Master's thoughts and beliefs on his body, fully established in truth as he was, Golap-Ma told the Mother regretfully, 'Mother, you ought to have warned me. For, his meal is spoiled.' The Mother explained, 'A white lie for feeding one has nothing bad in it. I feed him by cajoling him thus.' That is, to say, the Mother's attention was fixed not so much on formal veracity as on the improvement of the Master's health; and as a matter of fact, she found that he was putting on weight by drinking milk in plenty.

A word or two may be necessary by way of explanation for people who are wedded to a mere meticulous observance of conventional standards. When the Mother asked the Master not to be insistent about ascertaining the exact quantity of milk, she was, perhaps, following his own line of thought. Once the cashier of the temple paid the Master less than his monthly allowance through some mistake. When the Mother heard of it she suggested that it might be rectified by bringing it to the notice of that officer, at which the Master simply said, 'Bah! bah! To think that I should calculate!' In the present case too, the Mother, perhaps, wanted to defeat the Master through

his own psychological approach in order to make him drink the milk. Secondly, when we are discussing this topic, there flashes before our mind's eye the picture of a mother coaxing some dear, specially helpless, unthinking children, to take wholesome food. What a lot of irrelevant talk and fanciful stories they indulge in for feeding their dear little ones! In such cases no one dares charge them with lying or prevarication, nor does such a preposterous idea cross the mind. And what is morality after all? There is nothing absolute about it. We pronounce something good after referring it to a certain background for a comparative study. The rose is not all good, it has its thorns. And yet the blooming flower with captivating fragrance and with dew drops on the soft petals that reflect the morning light, makes us oblivious of its drawbacks and thus leaves only a sweet memory which is ever a source of delight. The loving words of mothers and other dear ones too are only a source of comfort and happiness and their memory also is equally charming. The Holy Mother did not end with mere endearing words; she used to press the rice with her hands to make the quantity appear less, so that the mere sight of it might not scare the Master. So long as the Master's mother was alive, he used to go to her and eat his food sitting before her. But, later on, the food was carried to his room by the Mother.

Whatever the motive of the Holy Mother might have been, her devotion to the Master's service often came into conflict with his naturally high-toned morality and uncompromising practical veracity; for though the two hearts beat in unison, they had to express their feelings through complex human media. And yet such apparent disharmony produced certain remarkable situations which were full of deep import for others. We have noticed how the truthful Master suffered physically on coming to learn that he had been taking more milk than he thought he was actually doing, though as a matter of fact the diet had

been improving his health all the time. We adduce another instance of this kind. One day the Master saw that the pouch in which were kept for him some digestive spices to chew at will, was empty, and he went to the Mother to get some. The Mother handed over to him a pinch of aniseeds and *ajowan* (lovage, *ptychotis Coptica*) and gave him a little more in a packet of paper saying, 'Take this.' He took it and started for his room; but as a man of renunciation he had vowed not to stock anything for the future. Hence this slight infringement had an adverse effect on him. Some unknown force carried him to the southern Nahabat on the Ganges. Not finding the way to his room, but rather the river in full tide, he said, 'Mother, should I drown myself, should I?' That was in the early days of the Mother's life at Dakshineswar. She was in a predicament, for being extremely shy, she could not rush to his rescue, nor could she stand quiet. Just then a brahmin of the temple happened to pass that way, with whose help she called in Hridaya and had the Master taken to his room. We should ponder a little to realize how difficult it was to serve this god-man. While men have their own methods of being pleased, and the gods have their hymns and worship, in the case of God in human form such as was the Master it seemed as if only a divine woman like the Holy Mother could meet all his requirements.

Though the Mother made the service of the Master the one goal of her life, she did not deprive others of the privilege; on the contrary, when occasion demanded, she made way for others, though such forced separation from the Master meant insufferable desolation for her. She used to carry his food to his room at night. But once the Master asked Golap-Ma to do so. From that day on, the Mother entrusted Golap-Ma with the task. The Mother could hitherto meet the Master at least once in a day; but the new arrangement deprived her of that opportunity. Golap-Ma's nature was such that, though she was a spiritual soul of a high order and had intense devotion for

both the Master and the Mother, she could not understand the feelings of others but was led by her own sentiments, and this to such an extent that, even when she meant no harm but rather tried to do a good turn to others, she in fact hurt people's feelings. Once she said to the Mother, 'Mother, Manomohan's mother<sup>1</sup> was complaining: "He (the Master) is very ascetic, and yet the Mother wears these ear-rings and other ornaments. Does that look nice?"' Defeated by worldly wisdom, the Mother laid away that very day all her ornaments except a pair of bangles. When next day Yogin-Ma came and argued against such false sentimentality, she put on one or two pieces, but she never again wore all of them; for, soon after the Master developed cancer in his throat, so that her mind could no longer think of personal adornment. Be that as it may, let us return to the topic of serving food. Golap-Ma used to be with the Master long after evening, sometimes she returned to the Nahabat at ten o'clock. This caused much inconvenience to the Mother; for she had to keep watch over the food in the verandah of the Nahabat. One night the Master heard her saying, 'It doesn't matter if a cat or a dog eats the food; I can't go on watching it.' He realized the difficulty of the Mother and warned Golap-Ma. But she followed her own line of thought and said, 'No, Mother loves me very much and addresses me as she would her own daughter.' It was not strange, therefore, that it took a woman of her temperament quite a long time to understand the feelings of the Mother and to entrust the duty to her again. For this long period the Mother kept her misery all to herself, remaining content with the glimpses she had of him from afar.

Absolutely selfless though this extraordinary service was, not all could appreciate it. Not only that, but it gave

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1. Manomohan Mitra and his mother were devotees of the Master. Rakhal married Manomohan's sister before he renounced the world and became Swami Brahmananda.

rise to jealousy in the hearts of worldlings, which at times found expression in words, and hence such ignorant criticism did not totally escape the Mother's ears. Once a woman asked her bluntly, 'Why do you go to the Master?' The innocent Holy Mother took others' words at their surface value; moreover she ever tried not to be a cause of annoyance to others. Thus with a view to composing others' minds, she often invited unnecessary mortification on herself, and this she bore without a murmur. In the present case she readily understood that the woman sought an opportunity of serving the Master, and accordingly she refrained from her part of the work for some time. Those were painful days, for she had then nothing more than fleeting glimpses of the Master as he passed at nightfall by her door on his way to the *jhau* (tamarisk) grove in the north; and at times that privilege too was denied.

Nonetheless, life at Dakshineswar rolled on merrily; but Fate would not however allow this. In June 1885, there were symptoms of the Master's throat trouble which the doctors later diagnosed as cancer. The devotees realized that the disease could not be treated properly unless he was removed to Calcutta where alone proper medical care would be available. The Master, having consented, was taken to a rented house in Durgacharan Mukherji Street, in the Baghbazar area of the city. But the sight of the house repelled the Master who left immediately for Balaram Babu's house; for being used to the open spaces of the temple-garden on the wide river, he could not be persuaded to squeeze himself into those dingy rooms. Within a week another house was rented in Shyampukur Street, and the Master took his residence there in the beginning of October.<sup>1</sup> He was placed under the care of the well-known Homoeopath, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar.

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1. The *Lilaprasanga Divyabhava* (p. 257) puts it as the beginning of September. But in the *Bengali Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, he is found to be present at Dakshineswar on the 24th September, and at Shyampukur on the 18th October. So we put it as the beginning of October 1885.

The Mother continued her desolate life at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was not there, the opportunities of service had disappeared, and she was constantly put in mind of the evil prognostics the Master had made about his passing away. Four years before the cancer the Master had told her, 'When I eat indiscriminately from everybody's hand, spend the night in Calcutta, and partake of my food after offering part of it to someone, you will know that my last day is approaching.' Before the disease began, these omens had been coming true one by one. The Master had been going to various houses on invitation and partaking of all food except cooked rice served by all kinds of people; he had been spending nights now and then at Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta; and when Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) once failed to visit Dakshineswar for a long time on account of some alimentary trouble, the Master had him brought there and made him partake of some portion of the soup and rice cooked for himself, the remaining portion of which he himself took afterwards. When the Mother objected and wanted to cook again, the Master said that he felt no hesitation in partaking of food of which a portion had been offered earlier to Narendra, and that the Mother need not apprehend any evil consequences or cook again. The Mother observed all this. But when the Divine Dispenser turns the wheel of fortune at His pleasure, others, though aware of the consequences and the remedy, can only watch and shed helpless tears. We can well realize how extremely forlorn the Mother felt at Dakshineswar when the Master was not there; we can understand that now and again the hard question was agitating her mind, 'Well, then, is he intent on ending his play here?' But who can believe an unpleasant truth? And even if there were no truth in the omens, what could she after all do in that helpless state? When the beloved disciples of the Master, with his own approval, made the arrangement for his cure, what else could the Mother do but silently smart under that ordeal. But her affliction was not to last long.

Soon after the Master was at Shyampukur, it became clear to the devotees that, side by side with medicines and personal attendance, there must be adequate arrangement for preparing diet. The young disciples could serve but not cook. And so the only way out of the difficulty was to bring the Mother there. But then, there was another insoluble problem. The house had no inner apartment for women; it really formed the outer apartment of a bigger house belonging to one Gokulchandra Bhattacharya. The devotees were at a loss to think how the Mother could live there; and remembering her preference for extreme seclusion, many doubted whether she would come at all. The Mother who avoided being seen by anybody in spite of her long residence at the Nahabat, could not be expected to get over this habit of privacy all of a sudden and live and move freely among men. And yet they had no alternative. Consequently the matter had to be put before the Master and his opinion sought. He too reminded them of the Mother's habit and said, 'Will she be able to come and live here? Anyway, you may try. If she agrees to come after knowing everything, let her do so.' The Master and his devotees based their misgivings on what they had known of the Holy Mother's temperament, but they forgot her wonderful power of adapting her life to the necessities of circumstances and her readiness to sacrifice all comfort and privacy for the sake of the Master. And as a matter of fact, as soon as the call came, she moved on to Shyampukur with alacrity and took up her duties there.

The house, No. 55, stands on the northern side of Shyampukur Street which stretches from east to west. As one entered the gate northward one found on either side a platform for sitting and a paved terrace. Further ahead on the right side were the stairs leading to the first floor and in front a courtyard, on the eastern side of which there were two or three small rooms. Going up, one found on the right a long room extending north and south, which was allotted to visitors. And on the left was the passage

leading to the rooms. The first door that one came across, as one proceeded along the passage, led to the big room in which the Master lived. It had verandas on north and south, and on the west two small rooms, one of which was the bedroom of the Holy Mother and the other of the devotees. On the eastern side of the passage to the Master's room was a staircase leading to the roof; and by the side of the door opening to the roof was a covered quadrangular terrace, where the Mother cooked for the Master and spent the whole day.

In that house there was only one place where bathing was possible and all had to bathe there. The Mother would finish her ablutions at three o'clock in the morning and go up the terrace on the second floor. When the diet for the Master was ready, she would send word downstairs through Gopal-dada (or Gopal-da) or Latu, and the visitors would then be asked to go out so that she might come down and feed the Master; or if that was not possible the young devotees would carry the food downstairs. The Mother would rest herself on the terrace at noon; and when all were asleep, she would come down to her own bedroom at about eleven o'clock at night. There she would sleep up to 2 a.m. This was her heavy and exacting routine for days on end in the service of the Master. But the wonder of it is that though hers was the most important part of the nursing, she carried on her work so silently in an unseen corner that not even the regular visitors suspected her presence.

After about two and a half months at Shyampukur, the doctor found that the Master's disease was increasing rather than decreasing, and he advised that he should be taken to some spacious garden house outside the city. Accordingly the devotees hired the premises No. 90, Cossipore Road, from Gopalchandra Ghosh; and the Master, along with the Mother and the young disciples, shifted there on the 11th December, 1885. The garden house lay on the eastern side of the Cossipore Road which runs northward from Calcutta. Almost at the middle of the northern boundary wall of the garden there were some three or four

small rooms meant as kitchen and store. In front of these, on the other side of the garden path, stood a two-storeyed dwelling house which had four rooms on the ground floor and two upstairs. Of the lower rooms, the one in the middle was like a hall. North of this were two small rooms side by side, the western one of which had a wooden staircase leading up to the rooms above, and the eastern one was the Mother's bedroom. The big hall, which extended east and west, and the room on the south of it, which had a small verandah on the east, were used by the devotees as bedrooms and sitting rooms. Over the hall there was another big room of equal dimensions, where the Master lived. South of this was an open terrace with a parapet all around where the Master sometimes sat or strolled. North of this was the roof over the stairs, and a room over the Mother's of equal size which was used for the Master's convenience or as a bedroom for some young devotees on duty.

Needless to say that the Mother felt more happy here inasmuch as she could serve the Master while not being hampered by as many constraints as before. The young devotees too continued to attend on the Master, and their number gradually swelled. Thus the malady of the Master became an occasion for the crystallization of the future Ramakrishna Order, at the centre of which naturally sat the Holy Mother as the presiding deity. Here, too, her daily routine remained almost the same; the slight changes that were made were for making it more convenient for the Master. Here also she cooked the usual things. If any special diet had to be prepared, Gopal-da or some one else with whom she could talk freely learnt the process from the physician and duly instructed her. A little before noon and a short while after evening, she carried the food to the Master and returned to her own room when his meal was over. At this time Lakshmi Devi was brought there to help her in the work and keep company. Besides, the women devotees who came to visit the Master, spent some time or lived with the Mother for a day or two. It is not known exactly

when Lakshmi Devi came there; it is also doubtful if the women devotees visited the Master frequently enough or if they stayed for any considerable period. The following incidents rather go to show that usually the Mother had no one to assist her even in an emergency.

The distance between successive steps of the wooden staircase mentioned earlier was so great that it required some effort even for healthy people to negotiate the ascent, while for weaker people it was a task. One day as the Mother was going up with a bowl containing four pints of milk, her head reeled and she fell down, thus spilling the milk and spraining her ankle. Stunned by the fall she lay on the ground; then Baburam (Swami Premananda) who happened to be there, lifted her up. The ankle became swollen, making it impossible for her to climb the steps. The Master was pained to hear of the mishap; moreover as he depended on her for many things, he became not a little nervous. But he was always noted for his good humour, so that his anxiety and sympathy found expression in words that made the young devotees forget their sorrow for the time being. He started by saying to Baburam, 'Now that matters have come to such a pass, Baburam, what will turn up next? What about my food? Who will feed me?' The Master was then given rice paste to eat, and the Mother cooked and fed him with it. She wore a big nose-ring (*nath*) at that time. Hence the Master put his hand to his nose and circling a finger round in imitation of the ring, told Baburam with a gesture: 'O Baburam, can you carry in a basket on your head that person who is such and such?' That made Narendra and Baburam laugh until their sides almost split. Three days later, when the swelling on the ankle had subsided a little, the young devotees helped her to limp up the steps; during these three days Golap-Ma, who was brought there for the purpose, prepared the rice paste and fed the Master; for the Master did not accept cooked rice from any non-brahmin.

When the Master was completely bed-ridden at Cossipore, the young devotees on attendance planned one evening to drink the juice collected in an earthen pitcher by tapping a date palm at the southern boundary of the garden. The Master knew nothing of this. At the appointed hour, Niranjana (Swami Niranjanananda) and others proceeded towards the tree in a group. Just then the Mother suddenly noticed the Master darting down like an arrow. Startled at this, she thought, 'Is that possible at all? How can one, who has to be helped even to change sides on his bed, rush down like that?' And yet she could not totally disbelieve her eyes. Accordingly she had to go to his room to be sure of the matter; but he was not there, the room was empty. In great consternation she searched for him here and there, but failing to find him, went to her own room with extreme confusion and apprehension in her mind. After a while she saw him darting up as swiftly as he had gone down. To satisfy her curiosity she asked the Master about it later and he said, 'Did you indeed notice that? The boys who have come here are all young. They were proceeding merrily to drink the juice of a date palm in the garden. I saw that there was a black cobra there which is so ferocious that it would have bitten them all. The boys did not know this. So I went there by a different route to drive it away; and I told it, "Don't enter here again." ' He warned her not to divulge this to others. The Mother was overwhelmed by these happenings.

From a minor incident we can have an idea of how respectfully the young devotees looked on the Mother even in those early days. The Master once said to them, 'I have a desire to eat the food you get by begging.' At this Narendra and others leaped with joy. But before they started on their mission they decided that the first person to be approached should be the Holy Mother. And when they begged her, she dropped full sixteen annas,<sup>1</sup> into their begging pot. Thus in every

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1. Sixteen annas make one rupee and the full moon is supposed.

undertaking they sought her blessing; and she, too, had the sweetest and kindest of words for them. If the young men became upset at the continuous emaciation of the Master's body, it was she who consoled and encouraged them, and when any problem about the Master's service cropped up, her advice helped them to solve it. In fact, behind everything there were the loving, spoken words, the blissful, unseen hands of the Holy Mother which put life into every heart.

## SILENT PREPARATION

We have given many illustrations to show how courageously the Mother freed herself from conventions and prejudices when duty or occasion demanded it. Such changes often resulted from the advice of the Master, but quite as often the Mother spontaneously made the necessary adjustments; for the single aim of her life was to please the Master. But these remarks relate only to matters of daily routine. In regard to the higher life, the two souls were so similarly attuned that even independent of each other they produced but the same charming strains; in that field the Mother had no effort to make and the Master had no direction to give. This side of their lives has also been partially depicted. Now we shall relate some incidents not discussed earlier.

A great Vaishnava festival, called the Danda-mahotsava, is held at Panihati on the eastern bank of the Ganges, a few miles above Calcutta, every year in the month of Jyeshtha (May-June). The festival for the year 1885 was near at hand. The Master had taken part in it several times before he had any 'English-educated' devotees at Dakshineswar, but latterly he had not gone there. In 1885 the Master told a group of his devotees, 'The festival will be a mart of divine joy and you will find the Lord's name bandied about freely. You "young Bengal" have never witnessed such a thing. Let us all go along and see this.' Accordingly twenty-five devotees reached Dakshineswar in two hired boats at about nine o'clock on the morning of the festive day. A third boat lay anchored in the stream for the Master. Some women devotees reached earlier in the morning for preparing food and all got ready to start at ten. After the Master had finished his meal, the Mother inquired through a woman devotee, whether she too might join the party. The Master told the devotee, 'If she wants to, she may.' Hearing the Master's words, the Holy Mother said to the devotee, 'Quite a number of persons are

going with him; besides, the place will be filled with people. It will be difficult for me in that great crowd to get down from the boat and see the festival. So I won't go.' The women devotees took leave of her and got into the Master's boat and left for Panihati. When the Master's boat returned from the festival at 8-30 p.m., the women devotees decided to spend the night with the Mother; and then coming to learn that on the ensuing full moon day there would be elaborate worship and much merriment in commemoration of the consecration of the Kali temple, they decided to stay on till then. When the Master sat down for his supper that night, he said to one of the women, 'It was so crowded; moreover, all had their eyes riveted on me because of my divine inebriation; she (Mother) did well not to come with us. If people had seen her by my side, they would have said, "A pair of swans<sup>1</sup> has come!" She is very intelligent.' When the women reported this to the Mother, she said, 'From the way he gave me leave to go in your party in the morning, I knew that it was not a hearty permission. If he had wanted me to go, he would have said, "Yes, surely she can come too." When without doing so he left the decision to me with the remark, "If she wants to, she also may," I decided that I had better give up the idea.'

The Master that night told the women of another instance of her intelligence: 'When the Marwari devotee (Lakshminarayana) proposed to give me ten thousand rupees, I felt as though my head was under a saw. I said to Mother (Kali), "Mother, Mother, dost Thou come to tempt me again after so long a time?" At that time I called her (Holy Mother) to test her mind and said, "Listen, my dear, this man proposes to give me money. As I have refused the offer, he proposes to give it to you. Why don't you accept this?" At this she replied instantaneously, "How

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1. *Hamsa-Hamsi* in Bengali. Hamsa means both swan and soul. The word Parama-hamsa means a great soul, and is applied to the world-renouncing monks like Paramahansa Ramakrishna. Hence *hamsa-hamsi* means, by a pun, Ramakrishna and his wife.

can that be? The money can't be accepted. If I receive it, it will be as good as your receiving it; for if I take it, I shall spend it on you; and hence it will amount to your own acceptance. People respect you for your renunciation; therefore the money can never be accepted." At these words of hers I felt intensely relieved.'

It was not only in worldly affairs that these two hearts beat in unison, in spiritual matters too the Mother kept in step with the Master. During the Shodashi worship we had a visual demonstration of the essential identity of their outlook. In the Nahabat and in the Shyampukur house we were struck with wonder by a glimpse of the Mother's self-effacement in the service of her husband, exhibiting spiritual discipline of the highest order. Not content with all this, the Mother converted her whole life into a series of austerity in the same way as the Master did. Now, any intense religious pursuit is supernormal, and specially so was it in the case of the Mother. Hence if we study this phase of her life from a mere normal point of view, the reader may well ask: 'What are you about? At the end of the Shodashi worship, the Mother had received as a free gift from the Master all the fruits of his own long spiritual discipline. Her disposition was naturally so sweet and charming, that even if she had had no background of austerity, she could not have failed to impress others; and her physical suffering and strenuous life were in themselves a telling example of great spiritual striving. Is not a life that comprises all these at their best, already established in the highest state that a human being can aspire to? Is it not then unreasonable to say that spiritual progress is dependent on a formal course of discipline as prescribed by the scriptures? What indeed are you aiming at?' But we reply, 'Let us not lose our patience. As impartial biographers, we shall state all the facts in the life of this unique character; it is not our function to judge their worth or interpret their purpose; the readers, both of the present and of future generations,

may attempt that task. But we feel sure that no effort of a divine woman like the Mother is wholly without meaning. Such an effort flows from a fullness of heart rather than from social need or impulsion. Because of this, each of her acts has a natural splendour and a novelty, which though not obvious to modern minds make them worthy of being recorded. Unfortunately most of the incidents of her silent discipline have fallen into oblivion or are only imperfectly known. For instance, the Mother undertook a vow (perhaps on the 20th May, 1883) called the *Savitri-vrata*, which is mentioned in the notes of Swami Saradananda and the memoirs of Master Mahashaya, but of which we know nothing apart from these casual references. Yet such hints are invaluable in reconstructing our picture of that unknown side of the Mother's life.'

A living touch with spirituality comes through association with those who actually tread the path. The Mother lived virtually in the centre of a spiritual concourse at Dakshineswar, and the lessons she imbibed were many. Not to mention the hundreds of ardent and advanced devotees who gathered round the Master, there was a constant stream of adepts and aspirants, both men and women, who stopped at Dakshineswar on their way to Gangasagar and Puri. About most of these we know next to nothing. And about the other well-known personalities who have been dealt with more fully in other books, we may keep silent. We have referred to the Bhairavi Brahmani, one chapter of whose life became closely linked with that of the Mother. There is mention of another Bhairavi<sup>1</sup> too. One day the Master said to the Mother, 'A Bhairavi will come today. Get a piece of cloth suitably dyed; we shall give it to her.' That Bhairavi came that day after the worship at the Kali temple was over, and entered into a long conversation with the Master.

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1. Bhairava is an aspect of Siva. In dress and outer appearance he is terrible; but he is also a protector of the supplicant. Bhairavas and Bhairavis are mendicants who follow his cult.

She then stayed on at Dakshineswar for some days. She was somewhat hot-tempered. She not only took on herself the duty of protecting the Mother, but also warned her, 'Do thou keep ready for me some rice soaked in water overnight; if thou dost not, I shall leave thee dead here by piercing thee with my trident.' The Mother was terrified at this; but the Master said, 'Don't you be afraid. She is a real Bhairavi and hence her temper is a little high!' On some days the Bhairavi obtained so much by begging that it lasted her for a week or more. The chief officer of the temple said to her, 'Mother, why should you go out for begging? You can get it all here.' The Bhairavi replied, 'You are my uncle Kalanemi<sup>1</sup>! How can one depend on your words?'

When the Mother and Lakshmi Devi lived together at the Nahabat, the Master on his way to the northern *jhau* grove in the small hours of the night would wake them up saying, 'Get up, O Lakshmi, get up. Awaken your aunt. How much longer will you sleep? It's nearly morning now. Wash your face with Ganges water and call on the Mother (Kali); begin your *japa* and meditation.' If the Mother and Lakshmi Devi were already awake, they would leave their beds at once. But in winter, even though the Master called, the Holy Mother, with a view perhaps to ensuring a longer period of sleep for Lakshmi Devi, would say in an undertone, 'Do you keep silent! His eyes are sleepless. It's not as yet time to get up; the birds aren't chirping as yet. Don't you respond!' If the Master got no response or had reason to think that they did not wake up, he would, out of fun, pour water over the door-sill; and they jumped up for fear of the beds on the floor getting wet; sometimes their beds did thus get actually wet. As a result of this, Lakshmi Devi became an early riser. The Mother, of course, was always an early riser.

One day the Master wanted to test the Mother's capacity to appreciate his deep spiritual moods. That day he

1. Maternal uncle of Ravana.

asked Mother to prepare betel rolls, tidy up his bed, and sweep the floor; and then he proceeded to the Kali temple to prostrate himself before the goddess. The Holy Mother had nearly finished her work when the Master entered the room unnoticed, with red eyes, staggering gait, and fuddled speech like those of a man in a state of intoxication. The Mother was so engrossed in her work that she did not notice him even though he came within reach. Then he suddenly pushed her from behind and said, 'Hullo, my dear, have I drunk wine!' Though the Mother was taken aback by this unexpected sight, she promptly replied, 'No, no, why should you be under wine?' 'Why do I then wobble?' argued the Master. 'Why am I fuddled in speech? Am I tipsy?' In haste the Mother replied, 'No, no, why should you have drunk wine? You have drunk of the nectar of Mother Kali's love?' Highly delighted, the Master said, 'You have spoken rightly indeed!'

Sometimes the Master imparted to her high spiritual truths. Once after relating the life of Sri Krishna to the Mother and Lakshmi Devi, he said to the latter, 'You both should discuss between yourselves what you have heard from me. What the cattle eat in the day, they chew over again at night. If you and your aunt discuss these incidents in Krishna's life, you will not forget them. You will remember them well.' Another day he drew for the Holy Mother on paper a diagram of the six plexuses<sup>1</sup> to illustrate the lessons he was giving her on yoga.

The Master knew that the Mother loved his *kirtana*; and accordingly, before the music began he asked his nephew Ramlal to keep open the northern door of his room, saying, 'Should they not witness the divine afflatus and spiritual moods that will find expression here? Should

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1. Much later, when the Mother was asked about it, she replied quite innocently, 'Ah, my dear, could I imagine that events would take such a big turn! That thing was mislaid and I couldn't trace it.' We must remember that during the Master's illness and after, the Mother was in such great trouble that she could not take care of her personal belongings.

they not hear. (the *kirtana*)? How will they learn else?' They watched through a hole in the screen of plaited bamboo strips. As this hole gradually became bigger, the Master noticed it and remarked humorously, 'Hullo Ramlal, your aunt's screen there has got a split, it seems.' Unable to appreciate the Master's joke, Ramlal replied that the Master alone was to blame for that unwelcome development; for while Ramlal wanted to keep the northern door closed, the Master directed otherwise.

The Mother once learnt an occult formula for curing certain diseases. The Master coming to know of this, asked her to surrender it at the feet of her chosen deity, so that her spiritual life might be absolutely pure. She related the incident to Yogin-Ma when the latter got into an imbroglio, in the Master's presence, on that very score. It was like this. One day, when the Master had rinsed his mouth with the water poured by Yogin-Ma on his palm, he suddenly turned to her and said, 'Hullo, my dear, I have a pain in my throat. Please utter the *mantra* that you know for its cure and pass your hand over the affected part.' Yogin-Ma did as the Master directed. Then she came to the Mother and said, 'How did he know that I had this formula?' At this the Mother replied with a smile, 'Well, dear, he knows everything, and yet he does not hate any one for what one does with sincerity of purpose. You need not have any fear. I too learnt that *mantra* before I came to him. When I told him of it after coming here, he said, "There's no harm in it. Now you lay it down at the feet of your chosen deity."'

He looked after the Mother with very great care. About this the Mother herself said, 'When I was at the Nahabat, the Master forbade even Ramlal to meet me though he was my nephew.' One morning at nine o'clock, Hriday went to the Nahabat to give the Mother and Lakshmi Devi the fruits and sweets offered in the temples, and spent some time in talking and laughing aloud with them. After his return, the Master reproached him saying

‘You shall return soon after handing over such things. I warn you not to tarry any longer in future.’<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this kind of direct training, instruction, and preservation of a suitable atmosphere for her inner unfolding he also encouraged her in all her voluntary endeavours. The Mother could sing well. One night she and Lakshmi Devi, while singing in a low tone a religious song of a high spiritual order, became absorbed in its soul-enthraling appeal. The Master heard them and told the Mother the next day, ‘You were much enraptured by that song yesterday. Well, that was very fine!’ Another afternoon the Mother collected some jasmine and red *rangan* (*ixora coccinea* or *purviflora*) buds with which she strung a fine stout garland and then put it in a bowl of water for the petals to open out. Then she sent it for being put round Kali’s neck, which was done soon after the Master arrived at the temple, and he was so charmed by the beauty that he kept on repeating: ‘Ah! How fine it looks against the black colour (of Kali)!’ When on inquiry he learnt that it was strung by the Holy Mother, he said, ‘Ah! Have her brought here once. Let her see how beautiful the Mother (Kali) looks with this garland on.’ Coming there with the maid-servant Brinde, she found Balaram Babu, Surendra Babu and others going to the temple. So through her shyness she hid herself behind the hem of the maid-servant’s garment and proceeded to climb to the high basement of the temple by the steps at the rear. At this the Master called out, ‘Don’t you climb up that

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1. Bengali society, in those days, did not allow high-born women to leave the inner apartments or talk and sing loudly. That was a matter of propriety and family honour. The Master was here showing his respect for the local custom. Similarly, when at Kamarpukur a big hole wide as a window was made in the bedroom wall, he ordered it be closed at once, since it opened on the public road behind. But the same Master asked the Holy Mother to walk from Dakshineswar to Calcutta to see the ailing wife of Balaram Babu; and at another time sent two ladies to the market place to buy some vegetables. Besides, he arranged for the Mother’s literary education. He came to fulfil and not to destroy.

side, my dear. The other day a fisherwoman slipped down, when going up that side and died. Why don't you come up by the front steps?' Hearing this, Balaram Babu and others moved away, and the Mother had a hearty look at Kali from the front door.

The Holy Mother and Lakshmi Devi received the sacred *mantra*<sup>1</sup> of Sakti<sup>2</sup> from an up-country sannyasin named Purnananda, who was stout, fine in appearance, and quiet in temperament, and who happened to be then at Kamarpukur. Later on, when the Mother was at Dakshineswar, the Master wrote something on her tongue, which process is a well-known form of higher initiation. Next day the Mother said to Lakshmi Devi, 'He wrote on my tongue yesterday. Why don't you also approach him?' Some time thereafter the Master wrote on Lakshmi Devi's tongue the secret letter (*Bija*, lit., seed) of Radha and Krishna, and even though he was told that Lakshmi had previously got the Sakti *mantra*, he said, 'Let that be so; I have given her the true *mantra*.'

The Mother left her bed every morning at three o'clock and sat in meditation facing south on the western verandah of the Nahabat. This was almost a rule with her. But one night she felt a little out of sorts and was late in getting up; and this lethargy continued for some days, nay, the time of leaving the bed began to be further put off, till the Mother realized that if one means to do a thing properly, one must have intense earnestness and must apply oneself heart and soul to it. And so she never faltered

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1. A *mantra* for *japa* consists of two parts, the seed (*Bija*) or the special secret letter of the particular deity and a very small prayer or salutation in Sanskrit to the deity concerned. The initiated disciple goes on repeating this *mantra* at stated hours of the day. The number of repetitions varies according to circumstances, but a thousand or two thousand repetitions are quite common.

2. Literally means power, God conceived as an expression of energy, in all planes of existence—physical, vital, mental, moral and spiritual. Kali, and others are particular manifestations of this Sakti.

again. The number of times she made *japa* of her *mantra* was very great. One day she told her niece Nalini in the course of a talk, 'What a lot of a work I did when I was of your age! And yet, in spite of all that work, I repeated my *mantra* a hundred thousand times.' Along with such meditation and *japa*, there went on in her mind a constant prayer. When the moon appeared in the sky at night and was reflected on the placid waters of the Ganges, she prayed to God with wet eyes, 'Even the moon has its spots—may my mind have no spot at all.'

Through the practice of meditation, her mind, which was naturally turned inward, became fully concentrated even in those early days. She herself said, 'One has to be up and doing; can anything be achieved without diligence? One should find some time even in the midst of domestic duties. What to speak of myself, my child! I used to begin my *japa* in those days at Dakshineswar after leaving the bed at three in the morning, and lose all consciousness. One night, when all was absolutely calm around, I sat for *japa* near the steps of the Nahabat. I did not know at all when the Master went to the tamarisk grove (as he used to do every night at that time). On other nights I used to hear the sound of his slippers. I was deep in meditation. My appearance was not like this then<sup>1</sup>—I had ornaments and a cloth with a red border. The end of the cloth covering the upper part of my body was being blown down; still I was not conscious of it. Boy Yogen (Swami Yogananda), who came with a waterpot for the Master, found me in that state. My daughter, what fine days those were! On moonlit nights I looked up at the moon and prayed with folded hands "Make my heart as white as your rays!" Ah! What a mind I had then! The maid-servant, Brinde, one day (pushed and) set rolling a plate of bell-metal before me, the sound of which seemed to pierce my heart.' The Mother's mind was

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1. She said on another occasion, 'Do you think my complexion was like this before? I was very beautiful at one time. At first I was not very stout; then (after the Master's passing away) I became so.'

then so deeply concentrated that the jarring sound shocked her like a thunder peal.

As her own mind began to be more concentrated through meditation and *japa* and as she noticed the deepening of the spiritual emotions in others, the desire grew in her to have something of their inebriation. Particularly was she impressed by the devotional fervour and emotional outbursts in the life of Gauri-Ma. So she conveyed her request for this to the Master through Lakshmi Devi. But the Master dismissed the idea saying, 'She (Gauri-Ma) is a girl of Kalighat; she can withstand all that.<sup>1</sup> Women, who are naturally mild and weak, prosper and succeed through softness. Women should be meek and sober; modesty is their forte; otherwise there will be public calumny.'

The Mother often had her moods of rapt absorption, but we do not know whether along with that self-forgetfulness there was any external expression known to herself or others. It would seem, however, that even if there was such a manifestation, she was not aware of it or it was not as overflowing as Gauri-Ma's. Perhaps such exuberance of spiritual ecstasy was kept in check because of the Master's condemnation of it. But for one who would in future become the consoler, guide, and inspirer of many in her aspects of mother, teacher and divinity, there was need for manifestation, though in a secret recess, of that higher type of emotion through which alone common men can measure spiritual heights. So that the desire was not suppressed for ever in the Mother's heart, but it cropped up again; and God, too, it seems, realized that the time was opportune for revealing her spiritual power for the fulfilment of her life's mission; and therefore it is that we find the Mother commissioning Yogin-Ma again with these words: 'Pray to him, so that I have a little of spiritual ecstasy. I don't get the

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1. Kalighat is the quarter where the well-known Kali temple in south Calcutta stands. Pilgrims visit the place in large numbers, and many girls of the priestly families become extrovert by frequent contacts with such strangers and by being worshipped by them as emblems of Sakti.

opportunity of telling him, because he is always surrounded by people.' Yogin-Ma, in her innocence, took these words at their face value; she could not imagine that no mediator was really necessary for giving concrete shape on the physical plane to the strong, though unseen, spiritual line of communication that subsisted between these two souls; nor could she realize that even from her childhood the Mother's mind was so high-strung that, though others might be unaware, she was ever in the presence of the Lord. Yogin-Ma simply thought, 'It may be so, since the Mother wants this, I shall tell the Master.' Next morning she found the Master sitting alone on his cot and broached the subject. The Master heard her but kept silent. As no one dared talk to him when he was in such a mood, Yogin-Ma prostrated herself before him again and left the room silently.

When she returned, the Mother was engaged in her daily worship, and the door was ajar. Through the opening she noticed the Mother laughing—laughing and then again weeping by turns—while tears flowed down profusely. After passing a while in this way she became quite silent, merged in *samadhi*. Yogin-Ma, then shut the door and walked away. When she returned there after some time, the Mother asked her, 'Are you just come (from the Master)?' Yogin-Ma now got an opportunity for twitting the Mother for sending her on a useless errand and said, 'How so, Mother? Didn't you say you didn't have spiritual ecstasies?' The Mother smiled bashfully to cover up the exposure.

At times Yogin-Ma spent a night with the Mother. She preferred to have a separate bed; but the Mother drew her to herself, so that they both shared the same bed. One night somebody was playing on a flute. The Mother was in the grip of a spiritual mood produced by that music, and she sat up and began laughing by fits and starts. Yogin-Ma, too, sat up and withdrew herself to one corner of the bed thinking, 'I am a householder; I should not touch her now.' The Mother came round after a long time.

## ON THE COMMISSION

Gradually it became clear after the Mother's arrival at Dakshineswar that the Master, by imparting transcendental as well as secular wisdom, by deepening her life of divine aspiration, and awakening her dormant power of spiritual ministrations, was preparing her for taking up and fulfilling the mission that had just commenced in his own life. We have read of the invocation of the deity at the Shodashi worship, when the Mother received the adoration of the great awakened soul and became conscious of her own divinity, though she did not even then decide whether or not to take up what was to be her life's work. Moreover, that worship took place at dead of night in a closed room. The people probably heard of this long afterwards, but they could not grasp its full import. Now came the time for a clearer call to the Mother to enter into her own domain and to bear witness before the devotees as to her real stature. And hence we find that during the closing years of the Master's life, his work in this field followed a well-defined course. He had been trying to arouse her sub-conscious potentiality through veneration, adoration, and direct references to her divinity. He had been equipping her mind for her future task of guiding spiritual aspirants by teaching her various powerful *mantras*, pulsating with the life he had breathed into them through his own experiments with them, and telling her of the levels of life for which each *mantra* was suitable. And he had been creating a field for the expression of her motherhood and vivifying it by introducing his devotees to her and telling her how to deal with them. And as a last step he invited her off and on, in no uncertain terms, to co-operate in the task willingly and at the same time he apprised the devotees of the course of future development. We shall now proceed to a study of these events.

Before we do so, however, we must be careful about one thing; we must not commit the blunder of thinking that the Holy Mother's present-day glory is entirely due to the Master's training and endeavour. It is a basic truth of the art of teaching that unless a student has some latent powers of a very special or high order, the best teacher and the most valuable instruction cannot make him surpass the ordinary run of mankind. And along with those powers is necessary the willing and eager co-operation of the taught. But the Mother was willing even in those early Dakshineswar days to make the Master's effort a success, just as the Master, fully cognizant of her essential divinity, was extremely eager to make her begin her mission.

The Master one day told Golap-Ma, 'She (Mother) is Sarada, Saraswati<sup>1</sup>; she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest unregenerate people should come to grief by looking at her with impure eyes.' On another occasion he said, 'She is the communicator of knowledge, she is full of the rarest wisdom. Is she of the common run? She is my Sakti (power).' And to his nephew Hriday, he said, 'My dear, her name is Sarada, she is Saraswati. That's why she likes to put on ornaments.' The reader may have in mind that when the Holy Mother came to her father-in-law's house as a child and began crying at the sight of her person denuded of ornaments, Chandramani Devi, mother of Sri Ramakrishna, placed her on her lap and consoled her saying that Ramakrishna would adorn her afterwards. The Master had that scene ever before his eyes, and accordingly told Hriday, 'Just see how much money you have in your safe. Have a pair of gold armlets made for her.' The Master was then ill; still he ordered those armlets to be made at a cost of three hundred rupees. But the actual

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1. Sarada means Saraswati, the mythological goddess of Learning; and etymologically Sarada means 'the giver of sara or essence', *i.e.*, knowledge of Brahman.

cost came up to two hundred rupees only, and so the balance was paid to the Mother in cash. When the Master had been going through his austerity in the early days, he had a vision of Sita at Panchavati when he noticed that her bracelets had diamonds cut on their surface; hence he had such bracelets too, made for the Mother<sup>1</sup>; and then he humorously remarked, "That's my relationship with her."

It was not easy to recognize the Mother, behind her rural simplicity, lack of modern culture, and absence of pelf and power. Sri Ramakrishna himself knew that the modern world, rolling in wealth and steeped in enjoyment, could not easily appreciate a character that was made up of the purest material and had nothing of the flash and flourish which appeal to a modern mind; and hence he spoke about the Mother in fun, 'She is a cat under ashes.' As the true colour of a cat covered with ashes escapes the notice of a careless observer, so also does the true stature of the Holy Mother elude the ken of ordinary men. Swami Premananda wrote about her in a letter: 'Who has understood the Holy Mother? There's not a trace of grandeur. The Master had at least his power of *vidya* (knowledge) manifested, but the Mother?—her perfection of knowledge is hidden. What a mighty power is this! Glory to the Mother! Glory to the Mother! Glory to the powerful Mother! A poison that we can't assimilate we pass on to the Mother. She draws everyone to her lap. An infinite power—an incomparable grace! Glory to the Mother! Not to speak of us; we haven't seen the Master himself doing this. With how much caution and what testing he accepted any one! And here—what do you see here at

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1. Yogin-Ma says, 'At that time the Mother lived at the Nahabat like the most revered Sita. She wore a piece of cloth with broad red borders, and vermilion at the parting of her hair. Her thick black tresses almost touched her knees. She wore a gold necklace, a big nose-ring, ear-rings, and bracelets, those which Mathur Babu gave the Master when he took to spiritual practice by assuming the role of a handmaid to the Divine Mother.'

the Mother's place? Wonderful! Wonderful! She grants shelter to everyone, eats food from the hands of almost any one, and all is digested! Mother, Mother, victory unto the Mother!' And the world-renowned Swami Vivekananda wrote: 'Brother, I shall demonstrate the worship of the living Durga, and then shall my name be true..Brother, I tell you, I am a fanatic in this matter. Of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, you may assert that he was God, man, or whatever you like; but fie on him who is not devoted to the Mother.' When we read such invaluable appreciations, our pen suddenly stops and in bewilderment we ask ourselves, 'Are we not engaged in a task entirely beyond us?' And yet once we are in it, we have to proceed with the Mother's grace as our only strength.

Before proclaiming the divinity of the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar, the Master hinted at it at Kamarpukur, though the uneducated and uncultured village women did not, perhaps, comprehend her greatness. The Mother was then a mere girl of fourteen. When the Master talked to the village women of higher things, the Mother often fell asleep. The others then tried to wake her up and said, 'What a pity; she misses these fine things! She has fallen asleep!' But the Master said, 'No, my dear, no; don't awaken her. Don't think she is asleep without reason. If she hears these things, she will fly headlong away.' The women later reported this to the Mother. The Master alone knew what he exactly meant by those words. Probably, he wanted to convey the idea that the Mother's mind had such an innate repugnance for this world and was ever so attracted towards transcendental verities, that if she became engulfed in such high thoughts before an adequate environment was ready for the divine part she was destined to play, the very purpose of her birth in this world of ours would be frustrated.

Howsoever that might have been, this much will suffice for the present as an introduction to the comprehension of her divinity. As we proceed further in the

delineation of this unique personality we shall find that though her character evolved wonderfully amidst strange surroundings, it reached perfection in one particular field. Though she was divine, the world has seen in her an all-loving Mother. This is a very important phenomenon in human history. In the *Srirama-purva-tapani Upanishad* (verse 7) it is said, 'For fulfilling the purpose of the aspirants, the formless Brahman assumes forms.' In the *Gita* (IV.11) Sri Krishna declares, 'In whatsoever way men approach me, even so I reward them.' And in the *Chandī* (XII.35) the Rishi (Seer) says, 'O King, that Divine Mother, though birthless, yet manifests Herself again and again for the protection of the world.' And hence from time immemorial men, particularly Indians, have been worshipping Her in diverse symbols and images. Her hymns and songs too, are innumerable. She is with us under various guises and in multifarious forms. She bestows wealth and wisdom. She removes ailments and grants health, and She affords us protection and kills our enemies. When pleased, She grants faith, devotion, and even emancipation; but when offended She liquidates the sin and the sinner. We have been adoring Her from time of yore in Her aspects as women, as sources of inspiration, as divinity, or as mothers. Drawn by the devotion of mortals She comes down now and again. We meet Her in the person of a Sati, Sita, Radha, or Andal<sup>1</sup>. A pathetic cry from a helpless child like the poet-mystic Ramprasad makes Her leave the heavenly throne and come down as a small girl to help the devotee in mending his dilapidated fence. In the forms of daughters and mothers She consoles Her devotees in their trials and tribulations. Men have thus established the sweetest of relationships with the Transcendental Entity. And yet the Devi still remained

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1. Sati and Sita were consorts of Siva and Ramachandra respectively; and both of them were noted for their unparalleled devotion to their husbands, Bhu-devi, consort of Vishnu incarnated in South India as Andal (or Kodai), illustrating the *madhur bhava* (looking upon God as one's nayaka or husband).

in Her lofty aloofness as ever. In spite of brief appearances for granting the desires of particular devotees, or Her descent with the Lord as Sita or Radha, She did not incarnate fully as the Universal Mother for bringing about a world regeneration through Her personal endeavour. In the life of the Holy Mother we arrive at the culmination of this line of descent. The deity here is fully recognized as a living human personality receiving the worship of Sri Ramakrishna and being identified by him with Mother Kali in the temple and his mother Chandramani Devi in the Nahabat.

Why did man want the Devi in this particular form and why did She grant the prayer? We have stated that unless the Devi incarnated as the Mother, there would ever have remained a gap in the spiritual world. Man comprehends higher and newer truths in terms of what he already knows. The mother holds the child in her womb and suckles it after its birth. On opening the eyes, the child finds the mother as a sure and the most unique source of all affection, nourishment, happiness, beauty and security. In the field of spiritual striving, too, the aspirant wants to visualize the Deity as the embodiment par excellence of all those fine human relationships. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The attitude of looking on God as Mother is the highest form of spiritual discipline.' Swami Vivekananda eulogizes motherly love thus: 'The position of the mother is the highest in the world, as it is the one place in which to learn and exercise the greatest unselfishness. The love of God is the only love that is higher than a mother's love; all other love is lower.' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Edn. VIII, Vol. I, p. 66.) If it is the aim of the aspirant to merge the sense of 'I and mine' in the universal ego of the Deity, and to taste the bliss of consciousness through unquestioning dependence and refuge in that one reality, then in the motherhood of the Deity lies the guarantee for such a consummation. Through the different attitudes of quietude, service, and sonship to God, we do of course get

an increasingly greater degree of intimacy with Him; but the absolute self-absorption of the unquestioning child, perhaps, transcends even this.

And the aspirant wants that the Lord should, through His mercy, forgive all his weakness and inability and draw him to His lap with the fullest affection; he wants to be assured of his future by visualizing in the face of his Deity this dear and dependable smile of affection. From childhood he is used to this kind of assurance; why should he be deprived of this in the field of spiritual advance? The selfless *guru*, out of his compassion, imparts to the disciple the knowledge of higher things, whereby he can withdraw his mind from the enjoyment of worldly things. The infinitely glorious Deity, endowed with the best of all qualities and transcending the lapses and limitations of life, holds before the aspirant an unsurpassable ideal whereby he is inspired and energized to attain that state. The ever-loving and ever-smiling Mother melts the heart of the child with a touch of affection, wipes away from his mind all traces of past failures and dejection, and exerts an irresistible pull whereby he gets dissolved in an ocean of bliss and freedom from cares. Furthermore, in this transparently pure attitude of the aspirant, there is no room for any bad thought; and there is no touch of selfishness and meaningless emotionalism. This figure of the Mother, shining in Her self-collected poise and compassion is absolutely without a parallel. The aspirant, sitting fearlessly in Her lap or holding on to Her apron, can easily get across this wilderness of the world. God's incarnation as Mother was necessary for fulfilling these needs. And above all, it was necessary for the Deity to come down as the Holy Mother, so that the present sensuous and materially-minded world might be raised to a higher state of aspiration and experience. Humanity is, therefore, fortunate today in having this living and life-transforming Motherhood in a concrete form and in intimate touch with all the ramifications of life.

The Master was aware of this significance of the Mother's life and he apprised her of this. Subsequently, when an inquisitive disciple of the Mother asked her, 'Mother, other incarnations survived their Saktis (consorts)<sup>1</sup>; but why did the Master precede you this time?' The Mother said in reply, 'My boy, you must be aware that the Master looked upon all in the world as Mother. He left me behind for demonstrating that motherhood to the world.' On another occasion she said, 'When the Master departed, I too felt like going away. But he appeared and said, "No, you stay on; there's much still to be done." In truth, I find at long last that there's much to do.'

One day at Cossipore the Mother noticed the Master looking at her for a long time, as though wishing to say something. And she said at last, 'Why don't you speak out what you wish to?' The Master said in an aggrieved tone, 'Well, my dear, won't you do anything? Should this (pointing to his own body) do everything single-handed?' The Mother, conscious of her helplessness, said, 'I am a woman. What can I do?' The Master at once corrected her, 'No, no, you'll have to do a lot.' When the Mother slipped down from the stairs at Cossipore, thereby spraining her ankle, she took rest barely for three days out of sheer necessity, and then, impelled by an extreme desire for service, she went up the Master's room with his food. Finding the Master reclining with his eyes closed, she said, 'It's time for your diet; get up.' The Master seemed to have returned from some far-off land and while still in that mood of aloofness, he said, 'See, the people of Calcutta appear to be crawling about like worms in the dark. Do look after them.' The Mother pleaded, 'I am a woman. How can that be?' The Master pointed towards his body and continued in the same strain, 'What after all has this one

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1. This is not strictly correct. The questioner perhaps meant that the Saktis of the incarnations did nothing tangible after the incarnations had passed away.

done? You'll have to do much more.' The Mother wanted to change the topic and said with some emphasis, 'That will take its own time. Do take your food now.' Then the Master sat up.

Even before this, the Master used to sing:

To whom to explain the difficulty  
 I courted by coming here?  
 The wearer best knows where the shoe pinches  
 How can others know?  
 A maid am I in a foreign land  
 Where I blush to show my face.  
 I can't state, can't explain  
 What a handicap it's to be a woman.

And at the same time he told the Mother, 'Is this my trouble alone? It's yours too.'

The Master did not rest content with reminding her of her real nature and inviting her openly to shoulder the responsibility; he also presented his devotees to her and thus created a field for the expression of her latent motherhood. At the time of sending young Sarada (Swami Trigunatitananda) to the Mother for initiation he quoted a Bengali couplet to put faith in him:

Infinite is the maya of Radha which defies definition—  
 A million Krishnas and a million Ramas have birth, and  
live, and die.

The Mother did not certainly initiate Sarada on that day, for she herself declared Swami Yogananda to be her first disciple, and his initiation took place at Vrindaban years after this. But Sarada's brother, Sri Ashutosh Mitra, maintains that the Mother initiated him. Perhaps, the Mother gave him as well a *mantra* after she had done so to Yogananda. Be that as it may, for the present we are not studying the Mother's reaction, but rather the Master's efforts at inducing her to active ministrations.

With the growth of the Master's circle of devotees the Mother's domestic duties in the form of cooking, preparing betel rolls, etc., began to grow apace. Just then Latu had come to Dakshineswar to live with the Master.

At first he spent most of the day sitting at Panchavati and other places made holy by the Master's austerity. One day when the Master was proceeding to the tamarisk grove he noticed the Mother kneading the dough and a little further on he saw Latu in his meditation. He at once called the young man and said by way of correcting his mood, 'Hullo Latu, you are sitting here, and she over there can't get any one to make bread out of the dough!' Then he conducted Latu to the Nahabat and said, 'This boy is very pure of heart. When you have need of anything tell this boy; he will do it for you.' From that day Latu became a member of the Mother's family.

When Rakhal, the spiritual child of the Master, came to Dakshineswar, the Master introduced him to the Mother; and when Rakhal's wife came, he sent her to the Mother with the instruction, 'Let her (Mother) see her daughter-in-law's face after giving her a rupee.'<sup>1</sup> At the Master's direction Gopal-dada did all the marketing for the Mother and Yogin helped her in various other ways. When Purna, as a boy, began frequenting Dakshineswar, the Mother was one day asked to feed him. As desired by the Master she dressed the boy with garland and sandal paste and then sat by him to feed him most affectionately with the various dishes she had cooked for him. After the meal she poured water on his palms for washing his mouth. All this time the Master kept on pacing the small distance between the Nahabat and his room. He approached the Mother and gave some instruction as to how Purna was to be treated, then he walked away; but before he had gone far, some fresh idea occurred to him and he retraced his steps to communicate it to the Mother. Thus it went on till the end. As for the Mother, it seems that through this endearing contact with Purna, she had not only her motherly love partially satisfied, but she also learnt how to worship a boy as Narayana.

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1. It is an old Hindu custom.

The Master always took pains to establish abidingly sweet relationships among the devotees and the Mother. When his devotee Balaram Babu's wife fell seriously ill, the Master told the Mother, 'Go, visit her.' The Mother was used to long walks and a distance of about five miles from the Kali temple to Balaram's house was not at all too long for her to cover on foot. But then, part of the way lay through the thickly populated city, and the Mother's sense of propriety told her that it would not be commendable for the Master's wife to be seen walking in the streets of Calcutta; and hence she said, 'How am I to go? There's no conveyance.' The Master replied, 'What! You won't go when my Balaram's family is facing disaster? You will walk; go on foot.' But the Mother had not to walk; for a palanquin was hired and she went in it to the devotee's house. It may be added in passing that during her stay at Shyampukur she visited Balaram's ailing wife once again on foot, and that of her own accord.

There is a funny incident suggestive of the Master's witty way of getting his own ideas expressed and executed through the medium of other people. Gauri-Ma was then a constant visitor to Dakshineswar, and she sometimes spent the night with the Mother at the Nahabat. One day the Master went there and asked her in the Mother's presence, 'Tell me, Gaur-dasi (Gauri-Ma), whom do you love more, me or her.' That sprightly lady avoided a direct answer and with a view to adding to the gaiety of the situation, sang in a sweet voice:

You aren't greater than Radha (your sweetheart), O Fluteplayer  
(Krishna),  
 People in danger call on You as Madhusudana;  
 But when it's Your turn to cry, You make Your flute call,  
' O thou Radha, thou young maid.'

The meaning of the song was very clear. The Mother pressed Gauri-Ma's hand in sheer shame, and the Master left smiling in utter discomfiture.

We get another illustration of a similar nature from the *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (pp. 353–355). One day Sri Kalipada Ghosh's wife came to the Master with a sorrowful face and a heart full of distress to tell her tale of woe. Her husband had fallen into bad company and was bringing ruin on the whole family; if the Master could prescribe some remedy, she would be saved from a life of torment. Kali Babu had not visited the Master up till then; and the people of Calcutta had not as yet come to recognize in the Master a prophet of the highest spiritual order who was absolutely free from any show of supernatural powers. Not knowing much of this unsullied saintliness, the lady wanted some kind of charm from him. This was galling to the Master, but for some reason best known to him—it might have been through sheer fun, or real pity for the lady or some inscrutable design—he did not dismiss her outright, but advised her to go to the Nahabat saying, 'There's a woman there. Tell her everything without reserve, and she will give you the real remedy. She knows such *mantras* and charms, and in this matter her power is greater than mine.' The Holy Mother was then at worship with her mind soaring in a domain of extreme compassion. She heard the woman with full sympathy, but did not do anything forthwith; for it appeared to her that the Master was only having a little fun. And yet unwilling to disappoint such a distressed soul, she said, 'What, after all, can I know, my child? In truth, he knows the charm; do go to him.' Finding the woman returning, the Master, perhaps concluded that the fun had worked; accordingly, to add more zest to it, he sent her again to the Nahabat. When the lady had thus been tossed between the Master and Mother thrice, the Mother took pity on her. She did not want to reduce the whole affair to a merry joke, thus adding insult to injury. Accordingly, she consoled her and taking a *bel* leaf out of the offerings made to the deity, handed it over to her saying, 'Take this with you, my child; this will fulfil your desire.' The lady received the leaf

with the greatest reverence and took leave of the Mother. In due course Kalipada Ghosh's mind took a turn for the better, and by stages he became one of the staunch followers of the Master. Through this small incident the Master made the Mother open out her heart in practical benevolence.

Thus as days rolled on, the Mother was becoming consciously or unconsciously more and more intimately associated with the Master's mission of spiritual regeneration, though the mode of expression of her infinite power was naturally orientated by her predominant mood of motherliness.

A yearning for children is deep-rooted in the hearts of women. In most cases, motherhood centres on one's own children, thus making it indistinguishable from selfishness. In some cases other children, too, are associated with one's own, when motherly love takes the form of philanthropy. Sometimes, though rarely, this affection transcends physical relationships and expands over the whole of creation, thereby rendering divine the life of the mother. Even more rarely it comes down in the form of spiritual inspiration in the life of a godly woman who remains absolutely untouched by the world, and whose words and acts open up all closed hearts and lead them Godward. But the motherhood with which we stand face to face in the life of Sri Sarada Devi is of a higher order, being coextensive with Divine love, and hence truly unique and incomparable. And yet from a rational point of view there is a gradation in its manifestation; and a rational comprehension presupposes an analytical study of it in stages. But while we try to grasp its working on any particular level, we must not lose sight of the basic unity running through this life as a whole, in the light of which alone these stages have to be traversed.

When and how was this pure and selfless yearning for divine motherhood first kindled in the recesses of the Mother's heart? Perhaps she had it in her to the fullest

extent even before she was aware of it. This is the natural psychological process. As a matter of fact, we noticed that in her girlhood she attended on her younger brothers, and helped to cool by fanning the food served to famished people. Events of a similar nature have forced themselves on our attention when studying her relations with the devotees at Dakshineswar. But here we are thinking more of the conscious rise of that sentiment and its operation, rather than its hidden working.

She heard her sympathetic friends condemning all childless women as unfortunate and inauspicious. Her mother too, lamented at times thus: 'To what a mad son-in-law have I married my daughter! Alas, she has no family life, no child, and does not hear any one calling her "mother".' The Master one day heard this and said, 'Dear mother-in-law, you need have no disappointment on that score. Your daughter will have so many children, you will see in the long run, that the distressing call of "mother" will make her bewildered.'

The Master's prophecy apart, the Mother herself related how by constantly listening to others, the craving for children woke up in her heart: 'I heard, ever and anon, both here and at Kamarpukur; that a woman, unless she has become a mother is not fit for any (auspicious) work. A barren woman cannot take part in any auspicious work. I was very young then. These words set me thinking sorrowfully, "Of a truth, should even a single son be denied me?"' When I went to Dakshineswar, the question once arose in my mind. When I first had the thought, I did not tell anybody; but the Master said spontaneously, "Why do you worry? I shall leave you such jewels of children as one can hardly get even if one performs the severest of austerity, to the extent of cutting off one's head. You will find in the end so many children calling you 'mother', that you will be unable to manage them all.'"

Women have been cherishing this desire for children in their hearts from time immemorial. True it is that the

Mother had some taste of this motherhood even during the lifetime of the Master; but that did not satisfy her infinite yearning. The Mother herself has spoken of her feeling of disappointment: 'When the Master departed, I thought in solitude—I was then at Kamarpukur—"I've no son and nothing else; what will be my lot?" One day the Master appeared and said, "Why do you worry? You want one son—I have left for you all these jewels of sons. In time many will call you mother."' The Master talked of things lying in the womb of futurity. But at present we are studying how far this longing of the Mother and this assurance of the Master bore fruit when the latter was still in the world.

The Mother treated the young devotees at Dakshineswar as her own children and felt a strong affection for them. When the need arose, she could protect them more tenderly than even a mother could or did. A crazy woman used to come to the Master at Dakshineswar. At first all took her to be merely insane and so treated her kindly. Afterwards it turned out that she belonged to that class of spiritual aspirants who consider God as their sweetheart. As she identified Sri Ramakrishna with God, she mentally developed that peculiar attitude towards him. As contrasted with this, the Master regarded all women as veritable manifestations of the Universal Mother. Without considering seriously the consequences of such a contradiction, the crazy woman ventured one day to speak out her mind to him. As a reaction to such an antagonistic sentiment, the Master was thrown so violently into a fit of childlike protest that he jumped up from his seat instantaneously, his cloth dropped down from his loins, and he began to pace the room like a madman, cursing such a relationship in the strongest terms he could muster. The Mother heard all this from the Nahabat. Feeling humiliated by this insult to her daughter, she said to Golap-Ma, 'Just look at this! If she has been unthinking in her talk, should he not have sent her to me? What's the meaning

of abusing her like this?' She sent Golap-Ma at once to call the crazy woman to her, and when the woman came, she said affectionately, 'My daughter, you may as well not go to him, since your presence irritates him; you can come to me.'

In those days, many of the young devotees spent some nights at Dakshineswar practising spiritual disciplines under the Master's guidance. As overeating hinders concentration of mind, he kept a strict eye on their regimen, and instructed the Holy Mother to give Rakhal six *chapatis*, Latu five and Gopal-dada and Baburam four each. The Mother, however, could not tolerate this kind of limitation to her own field of motherly care; and hence she gave to each according to his need, much in excess of the Master's prescription. One day the Master discovered on enquiry from Baburam that he got five or six *chapatis* at night, and that the Mother was responsible for this. He accordingly went to her and tried to impress on her that she was spoiling their future by her heedless affection. But the Mother protested saying, 'Why do you get upset because he had just two more *chapatis*? I shall look to their future. Don't you take them to task for this matter of eating.' The Master said nothing by way of reply, but in his mind he saluted that all-conquering motherliness and left the place with a smile. He must have been delighted that day to find the Mother consciously entering on her future field of activity.

From Yogin-Ma we learn that the Mother welcomed the women devotees with the utmost affection and this pleased the Master. When that devout lady went to Dakshineswar for the first time, the Master came to learn that she was going without any food; and so he sent her to the Nahabat saying, 'There's some rice and vegetables inside; go and have your food.' The Mother hurriedly placed before her all that was available—rice, *luchi*,<sup>1</sup> vegetables, etc., and fed her with great care. That first meet-

1. Flat pieces of cake made with flour and fried in clarified butter.

ing ripened into intimacy, so much so, that when a few days later the Mother got into a boat to cross the Ganges for going to Kamarpukur to be present at her nephew Ramlal's marriage, Yogin-Ma kept on looking as long as the boat could be seen and then began to weep. The Master found her in that state and consoled her. When the Mother returned, he told her, 'That girl with big eyes who comes here, loves you very much. The day you left, she wept at the Nahabat.' The Mother said, 'Yes, her name is Yogen.'<sup>1</sup> The Mother had so much affection for and faith in Yogin-Ma that she consulted her at every turn. After Yogin-Ma had dressed her hair, the Mother would not untie the chignon for three or four days together and would say, 'No, it was dressed by Yogen; I shall untie when she comes again.'

Yogin-Ma, one day, noticed the Mother putting spices in some betel rolls, while others were prepared without them. Curiosity impelled her to ask, 'Mother, why did you not put cardamom and other spices in these? For whom are those meant, and for whom these?' The Mother replied, 'Yogen, these (the spiced ones) are for the devotees; I have to make them my own through love and care. And those are for the Master; he is already my own.'

There was then a constant flow of devotees and religious singing in groups or singly was the order of the day. The Mother who had consecrated her life for the service and happiness of the Master, and consequently of the devotees, had no rest. Cooking went on day and night. And yet in the midst of all this, her mind was ever at the feet of the Master. Owing to this incomparable concentration of mind, she seemed to know the Master's thoughts even before he opened his lips, and she arranged accordingly. Sarada, Purna, and others might not have the money to return to Calcutta either because of poverty or because

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1. The Mother called both Swami Yogananda and Yogin-Ma by the same name Yogen; and to distinguish between the two she often added son or daughter before the name.

their guardians were opposed to such visits. Therefore, the Master directed them to take the necessary money from the Mother. The fare from the Baranagore bazar to Beadon Square in Calcutta for a seat in a hackney carriage in those days, was one anna. The Mother knew that Sarada needed money since he had to come surreptitiously eluding his father's vigilance. So whenever Sarada came she kept in advance a one anna piece on the steps of the Nahabat for him to find at the time of departure. As soon as she heard the Master telling Narendra on his arrival, 'You will stay here today,' the Mother at once began boiling gram and preparing *chapatis*, for Narendra liked thick *chapatis* with gram soup. When the Master came to instruct the Mother about Narendra's food, he found that he had been anticipated. If women devotees came to Dakshineswar late in the evening, it became a problem for the Master to accommodate them during the night. Knowing as he did that the Nahabat was a cramped place, he used to ask them to sleep on the covered terrace outside his room; but the Mother assured them that there would be sufficient space for them in the Nahabat itself. The devotees had their food at the Nahabat and then went to the Master for a little talk. On returning to the Nahabat they found to their amazement that single-handed the Mother had cleaned up the whole place and spread beds for all. Moreover, she drew them all to her side so cordially that they felt no need to go elsewhere.

In this way, the great desire of the Master to give shape to his message on the one hand, and the deep affection of the Mother for her children on the other, combined to attract her more and more to the field that was eminently her own. Through this joint effort, too, the inner circle of devotees of the Mother was selected even in those early days. We have already referred in passing to some of her young sons who became monks afterwards. We have also on occasions referred to Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma who

were the Jaya and Vijaya<sup>1</sup> of the Holy Mother in the present incarnation. We shall refer to some more interesting and illuminating incidents about these two devout souls before we pass on to other topics.

After the Master went to Shyampukur for treatment, the Mother, left behind at Dakshineswar, was passing her days in great sorrow and anxiety. Just then Golap-Ma happened to tell Yogin-Ma casually in the course of a talk, 'It strikes me, Yogen, that the Master left for Calcutta because he was angry with the Mother.' When the Mother came to learn of this from Yogin-Ma, she could not control her tears. She at once proceeded to Shyampukur in a carriage and asked the Master, 'Is it true that you have come here because you are angry with me?' The Master replied, 'No, who told you so?' 'Golap,' replied the Mother. The Master flared up at this and said, 'Is that so? Did she make you cry by saying so? Does she not know who you are? Where is Golap? Let her come!' Fully consoled, the Mother came back to Dakshineswar. When Golap-Ma next appeared before the Master he reproached her saying, 'What's this that you said to make her cry? Don't you know who she is? Go at once and beg her pardon.' Golap-Ma forthwith walked to Dakshineswar and with tears in her eyes said, 'Mother, the Master is very angry with me. I said it all in sheer thoughtlessness.' The Mother made no direct reply, but with a laugh she patted Golap-Ma's back thrice saying, 'O dear Golap!' Golap-Ma's heart was instantly lightened.

When Golap-Ma first went to Dakshineswar, she was overwhelmed with grief for her only child, a daughter, named Chandi. The Master received her warmly and after more intimacy told the Mother; 'You should feed her (Golap-Ma) to her heart's content; if the stomach is full, the sorrow will be assuaged.' On another occasion he told

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1. Jaya and Vijaya are the two maids of the Mother of the Universe. The Holy Mother sometimes referred to Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma as her Jaya and Vijaya.

the Mother, 'You should take care of this brahmin girl (Golap-Ma). She it is who will be your constant companion.' Needless to say that the Mother accepted her with open arms, and Golap-Ma too, took up her position as the Mother's maid from that very time. There were slight differences of temperament between the two as we have noticed but they did not ever so slightly ruffle the surface of their lives,—so intimately bound to each other did they become.

We now turn to Yogin-Ma. When the Master was ill at Cossipore, she longed to go to Vrindaban for practising austerity, and she informed the Master accordingly. At this his face brightened up and he said encouragingly, 'So you want to go to Vrindaban! It'll be excellent. Do go there; you'll find everything there.' The Mother was then present in the room with his diet. He turned his eyes to her and asked Yogin-Ma, 'Did you tell her? What does she say?' 'Whatever was to be said has been said by you already,' intervened the Mother. 'What is there to add?' The Master did not seem to heed this, but advised Yogin-Ma again, 'My dear child, go after obtaining her consent—you will get everything.' Unmindful of this, the Mother picked up the empty bowl and started going downstairs. Yogin-Ma followed her.

Next morning Yogin-Ma came to Cossipore to take leave before starting on her pilgrimage. After making her obeisance to the Master she went to the Mother to bow down to her. The Mother then laid her hand on Yogin-Ma's head and as a blessing made *japa* of her *mantra*, counting it on her fingers. Two days later Yogin-Ma went to Vrindaban and took shelter in Kala Babu's Kunja (grove) on the Yamuna, which belonged to Balaram Babu's family and which was dedicated to a deity that received their regular worship.

## IN UNDYING UNION

It was fast becoming clear from the steady deterioration in the health of the Master that after entrusting the task of spiritual regeneration to the worthy hands of the Holy Mother and the chosen disciples, he was fast approaching the day of final departure. But the Mother could not accept this as inevitable. She had experienced the grace of Simhavahini in her own life, had seen the economic condition of her father's family improve through the favour of Jagad-dhatri, and had received signs of the Lord's mercy in many ways and many a time in the days of stress and strain. Would not that compassionate God cast His benign look at them in this critical hour? Would not the Divine heart melt at the tears of a faithful wife? After long deliberation, the Mother decided to go to Tarakeshwar and lie there fasting day and night at the temple of Siva who is known as the fulfiller of all wishes; for once, at least, she must try and see if the inexorable Divine law had not an exception, if Providence could not be moved by the piteous wail of a creature in distress.

Five years earlier the Master had indicated the omens that would precede his passing away — he would accept food indiscriminately from any one, would spend the night in Calcutta, and would eat food a part of which had been given to somebody earlier — which had all come true even before he left Dakshineswar. On his return to Dakshineswar after spending the night at Balaram Babu's house during the car festival (*ratha-yatra*) of 1885, he told her of another sign, 'When you find many people accepting, honouring and adoring this (pointing to himself) as the Deity, you will know that the time of disappearance is near at hand.' That portent too, the Mother might have taken as having been already fulfilled; for were there not quite a number of devout souls who looked upon the Master as God incarnate? And while at Cossipore she got a concrete

illustration too. A few devotees went with some sweets one day to meet the Master at Dakshineswar. But to their dismay they learnt that he had gone to Calcutta for treatment; so they offered the sweets to the Master's picture and then took the *prasada*. When the news reached the Master, he said, 'Why did they make the offering to the picture instead of to the Mother?' The Holy Mother and others became upset at the news of this offering to a picture of the Master even while the Master was in flesh and blood; for such adoration of a living person augured ill for him. But the Master removed their consternation by emphatically asserting, 'Don't you be worried, my dear! I shall be worshipped in every house hereafter; I say this upon oath, so help me God.' Therefore it became very clear that not only was destiny against her, but that the Master also was determined to bid adieu. From that point of view, in fact, there was nothing to cheer her. And yet hope lingers though belief passes away; and nobody can keep silent without calling on God who is our only source of solace amid blank despair.

The Mother went to Tarakeshwar; the Master did not object. It is not known who were her companions. Perhaps Lakshmi Devi and a maid-servant went with her. She lay down there for two days without food and water — but there was no sign of Siva's blessing. On the second night, the Mother continued there as before, craving the Lord's mercy, when she heard a crackling sound much resembling the sound of some earthen jars piled up together being broken with a stick. That woke her up, and the thought took possession of her mind: 'Who is a husband in this world and of whom? Who is related to whom here? For whom am I sacrificing my life here?' It was as though a distant rumbling of the horn of Rudra, the great Destroyer, was ushering in the dissolution of the world, rending asunder all earthly ties, and creating in every heart an incomprehensible vacuum. The Mother got up from her bed and somehow felt her way to the basin behind the temple where

the holy water offered to Siva, had accumulated, and taking up a little of it in her hand she quenched her thirst. Then she felt relieved. Thus foiled in her attempt to save the Master, she left next day for Cossipore. The finite human mind sometimes shoots upward through some divine inspiration to lose itself in the infinitude of the cosmic mind getting thereby a new and all-encompassing outlook, as a result of which the old worldly ties look ephemeral and meaningless and are, therefore, automatically discarded. This immersion of the microcosm into the macrocosm is what we call renunciation. Through the influence of that overpowering self-abnegation the Mother was deflected from her resolve and returned disappointed to Cossipore. The Master knew all this, and in good humour he said, 'How now, my dear? Did you get anything? — nothing at all!'

The time of the Master's passing away was fast approaching—to prevent it was beyond human capacity. Mother had premonition of this in various other ways. She said, 'The Master too saw in a dream an elephant going out to get a medicine. Just as the elephant began digging the earth for the medicine, Gopal came and woke him up. He asked me, "Do you have any dream?" I saw Mother Kali with her neck turned aside, and asked Her, "Mother, why are you in this posture?" Mother Kali replied, "Because of his that thing there (pointing to the Master's sore in the throat) I too have it."' The Mother at once realized that if Mother Kali could not or would not cure the Master in spite of her suffering equally with him, then what could mere human beings do? Moreover, the Master also gave an explanation of his disease which was calculated to raise the Mother's mind above worldly considerations to a level of universal compassion. He said, 'I am being subjected to all the sufferings that there can be; none of you need have it again. I have suffered for all in the world.' It became quite evident to the Mother that that was the real explanation of the Master's martyrdom; otherwise why should such a sinless body have undergone such torture?

The month of August (1886) was well advanced. Through words and deeds the Master went on dropping hints that the day of final departure was at hand. But human hearts recoil from contemplating the poignant. Hence the devotees refused to believe their eyes and ears; and the Lord too, lifted the veil of that mortifying future momentarily and then covered up the devotees' minds in a shroud of mystery. One day the Master sent for the Mother through Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda), remarking that she was very intelligent and would, therefore, understand his condition. On her arrival, he said, 'Look here, my dear, I don't know why thoughts of Brahman are ever stirring my mind.' What answer could the Mother make? The sight of that frail, emaciated body was too heart-rending for her; hence she uttered a few consoling words and then turned her face round to wipe off her tears. How helpless she felt! It was impossible to hold back the Master's mind in its headlong rush to the quietude of Brahman.

On the day of passing away, the Master sat on his bed leaning against the pillows. It was a sick-bed, and the light of hope had been extinguished; and so all round there was a dark pall of sadness. All thought that the power of speech had left him; but when the Mother and Lakshmi Devi came, he said, 'So here you are? Look here, it seems I am going somewhere—all through water to a far-off place.' The Mother began weeping. But the Master continued, 'You need have no anxiety; you will be just as you have been so long; and they (meaning Narendra and others) will look after you and do for you as much as they have done for me. Do have an eye on dear Lakshmi.'

The sub-conscious of the Mother had been fluttering with trepidation at the black shadows of the imminent calamity passing over it. Everything around her seemed to be out of hinges and full of evil portent. She had been cooking some *khichudi* for her sons engaged in the Master's service; the bottom portion of it got burnt. She served the upper portion to the boys and ate the lower

portion herself. She had spread a piece of cloth on the roof for drying; it was not to be found. There was an earthen goblet; it fell and broke into pieces in the process of being lifted up.

Then came the midnight of the 15th August; and midnight passed into the small hours of the 16th. It was two minutes past one o'clock. That garden house dotted with shrubs and trees, on the outskirts of the city, was steeped in absolute silence; only the devotees sitting by the bed of Sri Ramakrishna kept a helpless vigil as they found him immersed in *samadhi*, which lengthened into hours till there was no possibility of a reawakening. The physician came to announce that all hope had been shattered. Next day the holy body was consigned to a sacred fire at the cremation ground on the Ganges at Cossipore; and when all was over, the ashes were gathered in a copper vessel which was carried to the garden house and placed on the Master's bed.

In the evening the Mother sat to remove her ornaments one by one; and when at last she was about to take off her gold bracelets, the Master suddenly appeared in his body just as it was before he had the disease, and taking hold of her hands said, 'Have I died that you are removing the signs of a married woman from your wrists?' She then desisted from doing so. Balaram Babu had brought a white piece of cloth without any coloured border, to be worn by her as a sign of widowhood. When he gave this to Golap-Ma to be passed on to the Mother, Golap-Ma said with a start, 'By Jove! Who is going to hand over to her the white cloth without coloured borders?' Later, when she went to the Mother, she found she had torn a portion of the broad border of her own cloth to make it very thin. From that day she wore clothes with thin red borders and not the absolutely white ones. For, there is really no end to the everlasting play of the Master; and there is really no separation of the Mother from him.

On the third day, food was offered before the reliquary. Now, the older devotees decided that after the Master had shuffled off his mortal coil, there was no meaning in retaining the garden house. But the young devotees like Narendra wanted to continue the lease for sometime more, so as to allow sufficient time to the Mother to get over the shock and to have a place for keeping the Master's ashes. But as they had no monetary backing they could not stand up against the older people. Therefore the final decision was that the house would be given up on the expiry of the lease, the urn containing the ashes would be removed before then to the Kankurgachhi garden of Ram Babu, which the Master had once made holy by a visit, and the Holy Mother would go elsewhere. But some of the young devotees did not readily agree to part with the ashes. For both the lay and the monastic devotees had settled at first by common consent that the copper urn would be interred in a plot of land to be purchased on the sacred Ganges. Considering, however, the great expenditure involved and for other reasons, the householders changed their view afterwards. As this new decision did not appeal to the young devotees, they removed more than half of the ashes and the pieces of bone to a separate vessel which was then sent to the house of Balaram Babu (*vide Udbodhan*, Vol. XVII. p. 440). Then they heartily co-operated in interring the first copper jar at Kankurgachhi on the 23rd August, which was the holy birthday of Sri Krishna.

The Holy Mother, who heard much of this controversy, took no sides in it because of her extreme mood of indifference consequent on the stunning blow; and she said to Golap-Ma with a sigh, 'Look at these bickerings, Golap; that precious person, worth his weight in gold, is gone, and they are quarrelling about his ashes!' How far removed from partisan consideration, indeed, was the clear vision of the Holy Mother even in that moment of agonizing grief! Soon she became ready to leave Cossipore. At

the invitation of the great devotee Balaram Babu, she went to his house on the afternoon of the 21st August. It can be well understood that at the passing away of the Master and the thought of her helpless condition, she was very much overwhelmed. Though subsequently she had a direct vision of the Master's permanent divine body and heard the call 'Mother' from the lips of her children, and though this assuaged her agony a little, yet the terrible physical separation was not easy to forget. At every turn, and with every thought the Mother was being reminded that the Master was not there just as he used to be. The devotees too, knew of this state of her mind. And they, therefore, planned to send her on a pilgrimage to places which had been sanctified by the Lord in his previous incarnations and on which He had impressed His indelible marks, so that by coming face to face with these indubitable signs of the Lord's undying presence she might forget the pangs of separation and by being far away from the places so fresh with the Master's memory, she might somewhat recover from that agonizing grief. Accordingly, she started for Vrindavan on the 30th August, 1886, accompanied by Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, Master Mahashaya's wife, Swami Yogananda, Swami Abhedananda, and Swami Adbhutananda.

On the way they got down at Deoghar to worship Vaidyanatha (Siva) and then they proceeded to Banaras, where they stayed for some eight or ten days worshipping Viswanatha (Siva), goddess Annapurna, and other well-known deities. The Mother climbed the tower of Venimadhava, from which could be seen the city of Banaras. One day, during the evening services at the Viswanatha temple, her spiritual fervour was so highly enkindled that unconscious of what she was doing she walked to her dwelling place with unusually heavy steps. Questioned about this, she explained, 'The Master had led me by hand from the temple.' Along with others she visited Swami Bhaskarananda one day. The Swami was naked and He

said to them, 'Mothers, don't you feel shy, for you are all forms of the Mother of the Universe. How can any shame arise?' About her impression of the Swami the Mother said, 'What a poised, great soul! In heat and cold alike he sits uncovered!'

From Banaras they all reached Ayodhya, the birth-place of Sri Ramachandra, where they visited some places associated with his divine disport. On the way to Vrindavan from Ayodhya, the Mother got another vision of the Master under peculiar, circumstances. On her arm was the gold amulet which the Master wore in the name of his chosen deity. She was reclining with that arm uppermost near the window of the railway compartment in which she was travelling. The Master peeped in through the window to say, 'Mind you that the amulet is with you; see that it is not lost.' She at once took it off and put it into the tin box in which was kept the picture of the Master that she worshipped daily. She never wore it again, but worshipped it along with the picture. On arriving at Vrindavan they put up at the Kala Babu's grove, belonging to Balaram Babu's family, on the Yamuna.

It was about the middle of September when the rains were over and the woods of Vrindaban looked fresh and smiling. The trees had thick green foliage; the ground was covered with grass; the air was saturated with the sweet smell of flowers; all around could be heard the cry of peacocks and the lowing of cattle; there were deer grazing fearlessly by the wayside and taking to flight with raised ears at the sound of human steps; and the Yamuna, full to the brim, was coursing down with a murmuring sound. Vrindavan had still its wonted beauty and those associations of old—the Nikunja grove, the dust made wet by Radha's tears of separation, the fields of Vraja hallowed by the longing lingering looks of the cowherd girls searching for Krishna—all these were there, and everywhere the deep indelible impression of Krishna enkindled an irresistible desire to see him; but he himself was nowhere to

be found. So after arrival at Vrindavan, there welled forth from the heart of the Mother, bleeding from the recent wound of separation, an excruciating moan of agony. Before this, she had visions of the Master at least three or four times. But the lack of an inalienably tangible union with him to whose feet all the strings of her heart were tied, oppressed her mind and aroused in it the endless question, 'Where is he?' After coming to Vrindavan the Mother was ever in tears, and to these were added the tears of Yogin-Ma who had preceded her there. When the two met, the Mother clasped Yogin-Ma to her heart. Having heard everything from others and having the mournful Mother before her very eyes, Yogin-Ma also began to bemoan the loss continually. Then the Master appeared to them one night and said, 'Well, my dears, why do you weep so much? Here am I. Where indeed could I have gone? It's just like walking from this room to that.'

Following this vision and assurance, the Mother's flow of tears lessened; but the pangs of separation were still there, and they now found expression through a different channel. In the section of the *Bhagavata*, called the *Gopi-gita*, we read that when Krishna suddenly disappeared from the field of his amorous disport, the cowherd lasses, overpowered with grief and forgetful of everything around, began a long search for him; but baffled in this and therefore lost in anxious longing for him all the more, they gradually came to identify themselves mentally with the object of their intense love, so much so that they started impersonating him in various ways. In the body and mind of the Mother also was now to be seen a similar self-absorption. Forgetful of herself she sometimes walked across the vast sandy shore to the waters of the Yamuna unknown to anybody and she had to be searched out and persuaded to return. One does not know, she might have then thought of herself as Radha, the sweetheart of Krishna, and of Sri Ramakrishna as Krishna, and was thus lost in the bliss of union in the Vrindavan of her heart! It is said that she

once told a devotee, 'I, indeed, am Radha.' At times, again, rapt in the thoughts of the Master, she became one with him. One day she lost all outer consciousness in a deep *samadhi* from which she could not be roused in spite of Yogin-Ma's repeating the Lord's name in her ears for a long time. Then Swami Yogananda made a similar attempt, when there appeared signs of reawakening, and she said, 'I shall eat,' just as the Master used to say after a deep *samadhi*. When some food, water, and betel were held before her, she took a little just like the Master; nay, she chewed the betel just like him, after biting off the conical portion with her teeth. At that time Swami Yogananda put several questions to her, to which she replied in the Master's manner. In fact, all her gestures and postures at that time resembled those of the Master. After coming back to the normal plane, she herself admitted that the Master had engulfed her for the time being.

The Mother being thus occupied with the thoughts of the Master, her talks and movements appeared to be unrelated to the actualities of life and rather like those of a simple child. One day, on seeing a dead body, covered with flowers and garlands, being carried to the cremation ground with music, she said with some eagerness, 'Look there, look, how the man (by dying in Vrindavan) has attained (the eternal) Vrindavan. We came here to lay down our bodies; but we never had so much as fever for a day! You can well calculate how old we have grown — we have seen our fathers, and the elder brothers of our husbands!'

Yogin-Ma and others burst out laughing at this and said, 'What a strange thing you say Mother: you have seen your father! Who ever does not see one's father?'

The Mother lived at Vrindavan for about a year. A month later Master Mahashaya's wife was attacked with malaria and she had to leave for Calcutta with Swami Abhedananda. Swami Adbhutananda also went to Calcutta after six

months on getting some sad news from Ramachandra Datta's house.

The long stay at Vrindavan had the effect of bringing to some extent the Mother's mind down to the normal plane. The Master ultimately granted her a continuous flow of bliss in proportion as he had previously given her grief. She went round the temples daily, seeing the different images and sitting for meditation at suitable places. She must have been blessed with many visions at that time, though she never gave them out. Only of one of these incidents did she tell Yogin-Ma. That day she had been to the temple of Radharamana where she had a vision of the wife of Navagopal Ghosh (both husband and wife being devotees of the Master), standing by the deity and fanning Him. On her return home she said, 'Yogen, Navagopal's wife is very pure. I had such and such a vision.'

Some time during their stay there the Mother and her party undertook a ceremonial circumambulation of Vrindaban for more than a fortnight. During this walk the Mother seemed to be looking at the roads, fields, and forests of the place with intense interest; at times she stopped altogether lost in her reverie. To Yogin-Ma and others it was clear that she was in a spiritual mood and was having some visions too. So now and then they put questions to her out of curiosity. But the Mother put them off with a simple answer, 'No, that's nothing; move on.'

Here the Master got one of his unfinished tasks accomplished through the Mother; and in the Mother's life too, a new chapter opened. The Master appeared before the Mother and said, 'Give this *mantra* to Yogin.' on the first day the Mother thought that it was a mere phantasy and so did nothing. Besides, she felt ashamed, thinking, 'People will say, "Mother has begun to have disciples within such a short period (of her mourning)"' She did not also pay heed to a second vision of this kind.

On the third day she remonstrated with the Master, 'I don't so much as talk with him (Yogin); how can I impart the *mantra*?' The Master suggested, 'You tell daughter Yogen; she will be present.' He also told her the *mantra*. The Mother inquired of Swami Yogananda through Yogin-Ma whether he had his initiation. He said, 'No, Mother, the Master didn't give me any particular *mantra* of any special deity. I repeat one according to my own choice.' He further let her know that he too had been asked by the Master to be initiated by the Mother, but he could not make the request because of his natural modesty. At last the Mother agreed to initiate him. On the appointed day, the Mother had an onset of spiritual fervour as she sat in worship before the picture and the physical remains of the Master. She called in Swami Yogananda and while still in that ecstatic mood, imparted the *mantra*, which was uttered so loudly that Yogin-Ma could hear it from the adjoining room. Swami Yogananda was the Mother's first disciple.

Towards the end of this period of stay at Virndavan, the Mother once went to Hardwar with Swami Yogananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and Lakshmi Devi. On the way Swami Yogananda was suddenly attacked with high fever in the train. When Yogin-Ma was giving him pomegranate seeds, the Mother saw as though the Master himself was being fed. In a state of unconsciousness resulting from high temperature, Swami Yogananda saw a terrible form standing in front of him and telling him, 'I would have seen you through but I am helpless. There's the order of Paramahansa Deva (Sri Ramakrishna), and I have to quit at once.' When departing, the figure pointed to a deity with red clothes and directed him to offer some *rasa-gollas*<sup>1</sup> to her. The fever abated at once. At Hardwar the Mother bathed at the Brahma-kunda and visited the

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1. A Bengali sweet made with balls of cheese boiled in syrup, to make them spongy and juicy; whence the name *rasa-golla* or juice-ball.

temples. She had with her some nail-parings and hair of the Master, a portion of which she intended to offer in the holy water of the Ganges at Hardwar. This she did at the Brahma-kunda. Besides, she crossed the Ganges to climb the Chandi hill and worship the goddess Chandi there.

Then with her companions she went to Jaipur. After they had seen the main deity Govindaji, they went on visiting the other deities, when suddenly they came to a goddess, on seeing whom Swami Yogananda cried out that this was the very deity he had seen during his last fever. She was Sitala, the goddess of small pox. The goddess was offered half a rupee worth of *rasagollas* which were fortunately available near the temple gate. From Jaipur they went to Pushkar where the Mother climbed the Savitri hill. Though her right leg had become rheumatic at Dakshineswar, she could still move about freely, so that it was not too strenuous for her to ascend the Savitri and the Chandi hills and walk round Vrindavan for a fortnight.

After spending a year in the holy places of the north, they proceeded to Calcutta by way of Allahabad, where at the sacred confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, the Mother offered the remaining portion of the Master's nails and hair. Of this the Mother said, 'Is the Master's hair an ordinary thing? When I went to Prayag (Allahabad) after his demise, I carried with me his hair for immersion in the holy water. As I took up the hair in hand with a view to offering it in the placid water of the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, a wave leaped up unawares and took away the hair from my hand and hid itself again in the placid water around. That holy place snatched away that thing from my hand for its own sanctification.'

At this place Lakshmi Devi, a widow as she was, had her head shaved clean according to the custom of the place; the Mother did not do so. Before her mind's eye

was being played then the drama of her constant union with the Master and through the physical eyes, too, she was having frequent visions of him. Accordingly, she could not remove her hair just as she could not take off her ornaments earlier. Thus brimming with the happiness born of visiting the most sacred places and the repeated visions of the Master, she returned to Calcutta, where she stayed in the house of Balaram Bose.

## IN HER HUSBAND'S COTTAGE

The Holy Mother stayed at Balaram Babu's house for about a week and then went to Kamarpukur. Before starting for the place, she visited Dakshineswar to bow down before all the deities and have another look at everything associated with the Master. Swami Yogananda, Golap-Ma, and some others accompanied her up to Kamarpukur. They went to Burdwan by train, from where they walked the rest of the way for lack of money. The first phase of their journey from Burdwan to Uchalan, a distance of about sixteen miles, tired out the Mother very much, and she felt hungry. At Uchalan, Golap-Ma managed to cook a little *khichudi* on tasting which the Mother said, 'O Golap, what a delicacy you have prepared!' Swami Yogananda and others left for their places after staying at Kamarpukur for a few days. Then began the Mother's sorrowful life at that village, during which time she was practically alone, as she had none to sympathise with her or even to talk to her, barring some two or three old acquaintances.

When during the Master's illness at Cossipore, his nephew Ramlal came to see him one day, the Master told him, 'You will serve Bhavatarini (Kali at Dakshineswar), and so you will not lack anything. He then turned to the Mother and said, 'You will live at Kamarpukur, and look after Lakshmi a little. You will not have to provide for her food; but see that she does not leave home to go elsewhere! The devotees will have as much veneration for you as they have for me.' To Ramlal, again, he said, 'See that your aunt stays at Kamarpukur.' Ramlal replied, 'She will stay wherever she wills.' The Master easily saw through the meaning of that statement, and he reproved him saying, 'How is that, my boy? Why have

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1. She became a widow soon after marriage and stayed in her father's house at Kamarpukur.

you been born a man?' Lakshmi Devi had been to Vrindavan with the Mother, but she did not go to Kamarpukur, preferring to live with her brothers at Dakshineswar. As for Ramlal, he not only refused to shoulder any responsibility for the Mother, but also created a tremendous difficulty for her. Trailokyanath Vishwas, son of Mathuranath and grandson of Rani Rasmani granted a small allowance of seven rupees for the Mother. But during her stay at Vrindavan, Ramlal dinned it into the ears of the cashier of the temple that the devotees of the Master were looking after her, and that there was, therefore, no need for an allowance from the temple. So that contribution was stopped.<sup>1</sup> Swami Vivekananda and others argued against such a step, but to no effect. When the Mother heard of it, she said with extreme indifference, 'If they have stopped it, let them have their way. When even the Master is gone, what shall I do with money?' The devotees of the Master had decided that they would contribute ten rupees a month for the maintenance of the wife of their guru. But that pious wish did not materialize. Hence the life of the Mother at Kamarpukur was not only solitary, but also one of privation.

Sri Ramakrishna once said to her, 'You will stay at Kamarpukur; you will grow pot-herbs, eat your rice with greens, and call on Hari.' This was not an order, but it was a wish of the Master, a hint of a means of her livelihood. As though to fulfil those words, the Mother had to follow that very pattern of life in those days. There were times when she boiled some rice, but had no salt to savour it with. When after some days the state of affairs at Kamarpukur became known in Calcutta, the devotees took her there. But that was long after. In the meantime the Mother

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1. The Holy Mother said: 'Trailokya used to give me seven rupees. After the Master's death, Dinu, the cashier, and all others conspired to stop that money. My relatives, too, who were there, treated me as an ordinary mortal and joined with them.' (*Udbodhan*, Vol. XXVII, pp. 11-12). See also *Sri-Sri Lakshminani devi*.

continued to suffer, without even informing anybody, in the very mud hut which the Master had bequeathed to her; for even then was ringing in her ears that counsel of the Master, 'Mind you, don't put forth your hand to anybody even for a dime. You will have no lack of coarse food and cloth. Once you put forth your hand for a dime from any one, you sell your head to him . . . . Even living on charity is preferable to living in other people's houses. Even if any one of the devotees should offer to keep you in his house with love and respect, you should not give up your own home at Kamarpukur.'

Let us for a moment stop here to look around the Kamarpukur of those days. The Kamarpukur of the boyhood days of the Master must have changed a good deal with the change of time, as is quite natural; still the village did not, in all probability appear new to the Mother's eyes, though there is a world of difference between the Kamarpukur of the later part of 1887 and the Kamarpukur of today (1954). To the south of the Master's house at that time, and contiguous to it, was the house of Shuklal Goswami, known popularly as the Gosain-mahal, which looked something like a land-holder's office establishment with high brick walls around and a brick house in the middle. Near the present well south of the Master's temple was the entrance of the Gosain-mahal which opened to the road on the west. South of the mahal was a small pond on whose bank was the memorial of a suttee of the Pain family. Further south was the guest house of the Lahas. East of the dwelling house of the Lahas, in the centre of the village, is a big pond called the Kamarpukur (tank of the Kamars), on the south-west corner of which the Kamars (lit., black-smiths) still live. Dhani Kamarni, who acted as the midwife at the birth of the Master was born among these people. North of the Master's house is the big pond called the Haldar-pukur or the tank of the Haldars, who no longer live in the village, but have shifted to other places. In the Mother's time the two storeyed

brick house of the Lahas was still habitable and the family was well off. Near the Master's house there were many sweetmeat sellers and starting from the north-eastern corner of the house up to the market place there were rows of shops on either side of the main village road. The Dome (sweeper) quarters along the road, to the north-west of the Master's house, had not been vacated then. And the Yugis (weavers) still had their homesteads between the Master's house and the Haldar-pukur, and they still conducted worship at their Siva temple. The mango grove of Manik Raja had not been denuded, and the tall palm trees still reflected themselves on the calm and transparent waters of the tanks and ponds scattered everywhere.

The Master's homestead then consisted of three mud houses for dwelling purposes, with thatched roofs, standing in a line on the southern side of the village road running from east to west. The house on the east outside the courtyard, served as a parlour. The house in the middle, which was the largest and over which another storey was raised later, was used by Rameshwar, the elder brother of the Master. The westernmost house was used by the Master, and in this was spent the Kamar-pukur phase of the life of the Mother. Between these two dwelling houses was a small door leading to the northern road. At right angles to the Master's bedroom was the shrine of Raghuvira built of mud and straw. The kitchen house along the southern boundary wall had three rooms, one of which was used by the Mother. In the middle of the eastern wall was the entrance to the court-yard. Along this wall, between the entrance and the kitchen was the husking shed where the Master was born.

The altar of Raghuvira and other deities that existed in those days was built by the Master's father Kshudiram Chattopadhyaya with earth carried by himself on his head. At present there are four deities—the image of

Gopala installed by Lakshmi Devi, the white stone emblem of Rameswara Siva brought by Kshudiram from Rameswar, the Raghuvira stone which he got in a dream and a pitcher filled with water, painted with vermilion, and holding mango leaves on its top, which represents the goddess Sitala. About Sitala the Mother said, 'She, indeed, is our family deity. I heard it related how my father-in-law saw in a dream that the Great Mother, in her form of Sitala—a little girl with a robe red as vermilion, was sweeping away all calamities, all the refuse, with brooms in her hand, and holding a pitcher at her waist, sprinkling ambrosial water with the (mango) leaves, thereby bringing peace to all beings by removing all cares.<sup>1</sup> Sitala is only one of the aspects of the Great Mother; that's why there's that pitcher painted with vermilion and containing water for bringing about peace. The water is changed on special days.' The Mother also stated that Raghuvira was the same as Ramachandra whose birthplace was in the north-west; and so the Master's father offered him *khichudi* to suit his north-western taste.

Kamarpukur was then a flourishing, populous, and busy village; and because it was so, it frightened the Mother, full of modesty as she was. Moreover, these people without culture, without liberal ideas and sympathy, remained unmoved at the helpless condition of this widow, and at the same time they lacked any curiosity for imbibing higher ideas from her. It was natural, therefore, for her to be faced with many problems. She continued to wear her bracelets, in obedience to the bidding of the Master. But the rural critics unmindful of such a vision, became increasingly vociferous; and she took these away from her hands. Her second problem was, how to live so far away from the Ganges, a love for whose holy waters

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1. In Bengali 'Shital Karchhen', making cool or removing the heat. Sitala is feminine of Sital. Sitala is generally the goddess of pox or similar calamities; but the Mother here gives the word a higher meaning, equating Sitala with the Universal Mother.

was ingrained in her. We saw her going on sacred occasions with village women to the Ganges for a dip, not to speak of her stay on its bank at Dakshineswar for a long thirteen years. Such maladjustments made her a little nervous, and she thought she would one day go for a bath in that river again. Just then she saw the Master approaching along the road in front, followed by Narendra, Baburam, Rakhai, and other devotees. From his blessed feet gushed forth a stream of water which moved before him in waves; and so she thought, 'I see that he himself is everything; from his blessed feet springs the Ganges!' Hence she plucked handfuls of red china-roses from near Raghuvira's shrine and laid them as an offering on the waters of this Ganges. Then the Master told her, 'Don't remove the bracelets from your hands. Don't you know the Vaishnava Tantra?' The Mother replied, 'What is Vaishnava Tantra? I know nothing of it.' Gaur-dasi will come this afternoon,' said the Master, 'you will hear from her.' That very afternoon came Gauri-Ma, who explained to the Mother with the help of the Vaishnava scriptures how there can be no such thing as widowhood for her, since her husband's body was not material but spiritual; furthermore, she was none other than Lakshmi herself, the goddess of fortune and the consort of Vishnu. For her to be without ornaments would mean the deprivation of the whole world of its good things.<sup>1</sup> Later on, when Yogin-Ma went to Kamarpukur, the Mother while describing that incident to her added, 'The Master then stood at the foot of yonder peepul tree. I saw at last the Master disappearing in the body of Naren...Eat the dust of the place, bow down.' When this news travelled from mouth to mouth and reached Swami Vivekananda, he said that it would have been better for him not to have heard of the entry of the Master into his body. However that might have been, one

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1. Some Bengali books, for instance, *Gouri-Ma* (pp. 110-12) place this incident at Vrindavan. But the Mother recounted it as we have presented it (*vide Sri Mayer Katha*, part II, p. 148).

cannot but note that the incident made a tremendous impression on the Mother's mind about the mission of the Master and the sanctity of Kamarpukur. She got over the fear of idle gossip and put on the bracelets again; and her cloth also continued to have a thin red border instead of being wholly white. These she never discarded till the end.

The rural critics too, became silent. Such problems like these agitate most the womenfolk, and the solutions also emerge from them. When hostile gossip about the Mother reached the ears of Prasannamayi, daughter of the village landlord, Dharmadas Laha, who had been a widow from early life and was respected by all around for her virtue and wisdom, she folded her hands respectfully and touching her forehead with them in token of salutation, said, 'Gadai (Ramakrishna) and Gadai's wife—they are divine.' The scurrilous women of the village never afterwards opened their mouths.

Although the two problems of the Mother, viz., wearing of ornaments and living near the Ganges, were thus solved, the other complicated ones defied solution for sometime. Soon after she came to the village, she sought the help of Prasannamayi and Dhani Kamarni for securing a companion to be by her side. Prasannamayi gave her the assurance: 'As to that, my dear, you need have no anxiety; my maid-servant will sleep with you at night.' If the maid-servant failed to turn up, Dhani's sister Shankari slept in her house at night, and one of their brothers helped her at odd jobs. Prasannamayi always looked after her needs, and the Mother too, relied on her for advice. Prasannamayi then lived in the Gosain-mahal. She was very devotional in temperament and liked to look after the comforts of guests and brahmins. So she and the Holy Mother spent long hours in talking over religious matters.

In spite of this casual help and oral sympathy, the Mother still felt very lonely and unsafe. She was well prepared to spend her days by tying her worn-out cloth in a hundred knots, digging the earth with a spade, and

growing pot-herbs for her food; but over the uncertainty of the future, family differences, and social indifference and oppression, she had no control whatsoever. True it was that from the psychological point of view she was quite free from such fears after the Master's vision, as she herself said, 'Then, as I began to have visions of the Master, that fear gradually subsided.' These visions again were intimate. One day the Master appeared and said, 'Feed me with *khichudi*.' The Mother thought that as Raghuvira was identical with Ramakrishna, though they differed in form, it would be enough to offer the *khichudi* to the former. She did so, thinking all the while in a spiritual mood that the Master himself was having his meal. But despite this spiritual sublimity, the environmental antagonism continued just as before and caused not a little anxiety.

The question crops up here, 'When the Mother was in these circumstances, what were her people at Jayrambati doing?' We know that they were not particularly well off. Her mother, Shyamasundari Devi, was having a very hard time. Still, when she heard of her daughter's distress, she sent her son, Kalikumar, to Kamarpukur to bring her to Jayrambati. But the Mother refused to go just then. When she did go after some time, Shyamasundari could not check her tears at the sight of her extreme poverty. We like to fancy that this visit was during the annual Jagad-dhatri worship, for which the Mother had an innate attraction and as such, would not have liked to miss the occasion. Shyamasundari Devi took this occasion to hold her back, but the daughter replied, 'Now, I am going to Kamarpukur, Mother. Afterwards it'll be as He ordains.'

In the course of a short time, a great change came over the Kamarpukur family. The Mother's nephews, Ramlal and Shivaram and her niece, Lakshmi Devi then lived generally at Dakshineswar, though they very often came to their village home to stay there for short periods. We have noted that Ramlal (or Ramlal-dada) was somewhat indifferent towards the Mother. But this cannot be said

about Shivaram or Shibu-dada, as he was generally called. Shibu-dada received from the Mother his first alms after his investiture with the sacred thread, and so he regarded her more as his god-mother than as an aunt and the Mother too, treated him as a son. Long after, when the Mother was permanently residing at Jayrambati, Shibu-dada sat for his lunch at Kamarpukur one day; but when he had half finished, the desire grew in him to eat something from his god-mother's hand; and so he walked to Jayrambati and after having been fed by Holy Mother returned to Kamarpukur with a betel in his mouth given by her. We have many such instances of the Mother's affection for all of them.

Once during this period, Lakshmi Devi and many others were present at Kamarpukur. Till then the family was a joint one. But as misfortune would have it, the family was broken up by partition. Lakshmi Devi was a Vaishnava by temperament. Sometimes she sang Vaishnava songs inside the house with a sweet voice, which attracted people of a similar faith. The Mother could not be quite easy about this. She remembered that when Lakshmi Devi sang in this way before the Master, imitating fully the gestures and postures of professional singers, the Master, while enjoying it, was amused; but he warned the Mother, 'That's Lakshmi's temperament; don't you tread on her footsteps and throw your modesty to the winds.'<sup>2</sup> Besides this difference, the divergence of outlook in daily talks and actions between the Holy Mother and the rest of the family became more pronounced as days rolled on. The Mother preferred to spend the rest of her days peacefully in the thought of the Master, while around her others swirled the currents and cross-currents of the world into whose vortex they wanted to draw the Mother as well. The Mother remained unperturbed and unruffled, never uttering a word of protest. But the Chatterji family did nothing to avert the split that is usual under such circumstances. Thus, despite the passivity on the one side,

the aggressiveness on the other threw the Mother out of the main body. One day, on her return from Jayram-bati, the Mother found that Ramlal-dada had left for Dakshineswar with the others after making some arrangement for the daily worship of Raghuvira. To her share had fallen the little cottage of the Master; she entered therein determined to keep up its sanctity.

On a study of the Mother's life we come to learn that commencing from her arrival at Kamarpukur in September 1887, she lived there for about nine months (up to April, 1888), after which the devotees brought her to Calcutta. From Calcutta she again went to Kamarpukur in February next and lived there almost for a similar period. Most probably, the subsequent periods of her stay there were never so long, though she came to live there quite a number of times.<sup>1</sup> It is not possible to determine definitely the time of various incidents that took place during those periods of stay. In the account so far presented, we have made no attempt to date the incidents exactly; and in what follows, too, we shall not try to do more than indicate the dates in a general way.

During the Mother's stay at Kamarpukur, the visits from the devotees were few and far between. Of course, most of them were too poor to undertake the pilgrimage; but the few who went there were received heartily by the Mother, for the meetings of persons that are akin and familiar were always delightful. Such visits rather relieved the monotony of her otherwise dull village life. But all visits were not welcome; on the contrary, some were a source of trouble. Once at least, the Mother had to face such an embarrassing situation. Harish, a devotee of the Master was a constant visitor at the first Math of

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1. From the notes of Master Mahashaya we gather that she lived at Kamarpukur during the following periods: End of October 1890; February, and July to October 1891, July of 1892, January and July of 1893; 13th May 1895; November 1895 to January 1896; May, and Durgapuja days (September-October) of 1897.

the Ramakrishna Order at Baranagore, and this frightened his wife. With a view to counteracting this tendency to renunciation, she surreptitiously applied drugs and charms, which brought about a certain derangement of his mind. While still under the influence of those drugs, Harish visited the Mother at Kamarpukur. The Mother could at once see through the mind of the man and hence wrote to the Math to take him away. Accordingly, Swamis Saradananda and Niranjanananda started for Kamarpukur. But before they could reach there, Harish's lunacy grew out of control, and the Mother had to devise her own remedy for this. We present the incident in her own words:

'At this time Harish came and stayed at Kamarpukur. One day, I was returning from a neighbouring house. As I stepped into the courtyard, Harish began chasing me. Harish was not in his senses then; his wife had drugged him and madness had followed upon it. There was nobody else in the house; so where could I escape? In a hurry, I began circling round the barn of paddy (near the Master's birthplace). But he would not give up the chase. After going round for seven times, I could run no longer. Then I stood firm working myself up to my full stature (lit., assuming my own form). And then, placing my knee on his chest and taking hold of his tongue, I slapped him on his cheeks so hard that he began to gasp for breath. My fingers became red.'

It is difficult now to ascertain in what sense the Mother used the words 'my full stature.' Many believe that since the Mother was an incarnation of the Mother of the Universe, it was possible for her to assume all kinds of divine forms and attitudes; and in the present context, she became Vagala to punish with heroic hands the demon in the person of Harish.<sup>1</sup> There is no reason why a devotee should not believe this; but even

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1. *Vagala* is one of the ten *Mahavidyas*, forms of the Great Mother. In that form she killed a demon in the very same way as the Mother punished Harish.

a matter-of-fact man will be surprised to see how the Mother, who was noted all along for her modesty, meekness and mercy, could at a critical moment be on her mettle. When we look more closely into such incidents of her life, it strikes us that the poet who penned the line in the *Chandi*, 'Of all beings in the three worlds (heaven, earth and hell), in you alone, O goddess, is seen a kindness of heart combined with heroism in fight,' was truly a seer. That punishment cured Harish not only for the time being. Later he fled to Vrindaban on the arrival of Swami Niranjanananda, and there became fully normal after some time.

One winter morning, in the beginning of 1888, Krishnabhavini Devi, wife of the great devotee Balaram-Babu, and her mother Matangini Devi, came to the Master's birthplace from Antpur with a brahmin girl and a faithful man as escort. As devout Hindus they knew that their guru's household, and that of a brahmin too, should not be burdened on any account, and hence they placed sufficient money in the Mother's hands for making a suitable offering to Raghuvira, whose *prasada* only they would eat. The Mother made suitable arrangements for their comfort, and on the fourth day she took them to Jayrambati, where, too, they spent three nights and then left for Calcutta by way of Kamarpukur<sup>1</sup>.

In the midst of fear and poverty, the Holy Mother kept burning the lamp of her spiritual ministry. It was probably during her second stay at Kamarpukur. There lived a monk from Orissa in a cottage attached to the

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1. The incident had an important bearing on the Mother's subsequent life. It can be inferred that, though the Mother tried her utmost to hide her poverty and helplessness from the devotees, their loving eyes penetrated into the truth; and therefore, after their return to Calcutta they told the other devotees all these facts. As a result the Mother was soon brought to Calcutta. The other version is that uncle Prasanna, who then lived in Calcutta, divulged the facts to Ramlal, Golap-ma, and others, and thus the devotees were stirred to action. In any case, Golap-Ma took a leading part in this matter.

outer wall of Gosain-mahal, inside which dwelt Prasanna-mayi who looked after the monk's needs. He had incurred the displeasure of some hot-headed and well-connected young men of the locality, so that he was on the point of leaving the village, when the Mother came to his help. The monk commanded the respect of the common folk; and thus with their help she proceeded to build for him a cottage at the south-west corner of Haldar-pukur. The rainy season was then imminent and the sky looked threatening. Hence the Mother prayed fervently with folded hands, 'O Lord, kindly forbear, kindly forbear! Let his thatch be completed and then you can pour as much as you like.' After the monk had been given a place to lay his head in, the Mother used to supply him with his foodstuff, though she had hardly sufficient for herself; and inquired of him every morning and evening, 'Father monk, how are you, dear?' But the monk did not live there for long; for, as Providence would have it, he expired soon in that cottage.

Though the Mother was in extremely indigent condition in the beginning, matters improved a little in course of time. The devotees, coming to know of her difficulties, organized what help they could. In addition, her share of the land at Shihar, left as a trust by Master in the name of the family deity, and the Lakshmi-jala land which came down from the Master's father, Kshudiram, as a heritage, yielded sufficient paddy not only for herself but also for some charity. Towards the end of the period we are discussing now, there was a maidservant named Sagarer Ma (Sagar's mother) who helped the Mother in her domestic work. From her it has been gathered that she used to do the shopping for the Mother. A portion of whatever the Mother cooked at noon, she kept in a pot for Sagarer Ma, and when the woman came, she handed it over to her saying, 'Put this in your mouth first and drink some water, and after that begin your work.' During the three days that the goddess Durga is worshipped annually in Bengal,

special worship was done and offerings made to Sitala by the Chatterjis at their Kamarpukur house. Brahmins were fed on this occasion. When the time for the feast came, the Mother used to say, 'Shibu (Shibu-dada), you spread the leaf-plates and serve salt and water, while I serve rice on all the leaves for the brahmins.' Sagarer Ma further says, 'Hers was the store of Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), as it were; nothing ran short. Whatever surplus there remained, she lovingly gave away to us the next day.' Over and above all this, the Holy Mother fed a number of guests.

We have noticed the Mother's diligence at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur and Cossipore. At Kamarpukur too, the same assiduity was in evidence, rather it increased because of the manifold responsibilities she was burdened with. She got together all that was necessary for cooking food, cooked it, and offered it to Raghuvira with all punctiliousness. If Shibu-dada happened to be at Kamarpukur he performed the worship, otherwise somebody else did it. Before the daily worship commenced, the Mother finished her bath in the Haldar-pukur and started cooking on two ovens, and this was finished before the sun moved away from the verandah (i.e., before noon), it being unbecoming to offer food to the deities after mid-day.

Of a truth, the Mother tried her best to follow the Master's wishes—she was ready to wear herself out at Kamarpukur through toil, tears, privation, and disease. But there is a limit to endurance whether physical or mental. Where the environment is wholly unhelpful or antagonistic, one with a sense of self-respect cannot continue spiritual practices long in a course of strenuous adjustment and compromise. Differences of outlook were there to be sure; in addition, the moral and spiritual atmosphere of the village was unbearable for her. The way in which the influential young men of the village misbehaved towards the monk from Orissa, disregarding the intervention of such a venerable lady as Prasannamayi,

set the Mother thinking much about her own future. And on top of all this came the insistent calls from her children in Calcutta, which ultimately proved too strong for her affectionate heart. Ultimately, Kamarpukur ceased to be her main place of residence. This does not, however, mean that she neglected her husband's bequest; it only means that she took up her task in a wider and more effective sense. And though she did not permanently stay at Kamarpukur, she spent money for the proper maintenance of the Master's cottage. If any devotee went that way, she reminded him of its sanctity and advised him to spend the night in it, so that he might imbibe some of its holiness. She helped her nephew Ramlal with money in putting a new storey over their own dwelling house. And she bestowed particular care on the worship of Raghuvira and spent money for the purpose.

Her latter-day disciples were curious for details about her leaving Kamarpukur and plied her with various questions. One devotee asked her, 'Mother, you don't so much as visit the Master's house; when you come to the village from Calcutta, you go straight to your father's house. Are you, in this, treading in the footsteps of your predecessors?' The Mother laughed heartily and replied, 'Not so, my son! Can I forget the Master's house? Shibu is my god-son. But the Master is now no longer in the physical body; I am pained if I go there. That's why I don't go.' The irremediable pangs of separation was there to be sure, but to that were added the external maladjustments owing to the antagonism, negligence, and inequities of the people around her, of which she seldom spoke as it hurt her to expose others' faults. On rare occasions only she opened out her mind a little. To a boy devotee who attended on her, she said, 'When after the Master's passing away I moved about here and there for sometime and then went to live at Kamarpukur, my relatives seemed to be indifferent towards me. And coming to learn of the high-handedness of the villagers, my

mother brought me here (to Jayrambati); she did not allow me to live at Kamarpukur any more. From that time on I have been living with my brothers through stress and strain. And now, again, they complain, "She does not look after us." The human mind is strange indeed.'

## WITH THE DEVOTEES

It took quite a long time for the news of the Mother's misery at Kamarpukur to percolate to the Calcutta devotees. The young monks were then travelling here and there impelled by the desire for a life of absolute surrender to Providence; they, therefore, knew nothing of this. Swami Saradananda said afterwards, 'We could not then imagine that the Mother could not even get a pinch of salt.' After eight or nine months, when the devotees learnt the true state of affairs, they finalized their plan to accommodate her in Calcutta and then transmitted their request to her. The Mother knew what was in the hearts of the devotees. She was aware of the irrationality of rejecting the call of such loving followers and continuing in the adverse atmosphere of Kamarpukur. Yet she could not make up her mind without considering fully a few intricate questions. The Master had reminded her off and on that modesty is the highest virtue of a woman. Would she be able to maintain her habitual seclusion in the new surroundings?

The second question was more serious, or rather it was the first question in a more complicated setting. Her travels between Jayrambati and Dakshineswar were nothing uncommon from the social point of view, so long as the Master was there. But now that he was no more, could the Mother proceed to Calcutta overriding the prejudices and narrow notions of village folk? The Mother herself related how the problem was solved: When my coming here (Calcutta) was being talked of, after the Master's passing away, I was at Kamarpukur. Many there said, "Good heavens! They are young boys, how can you possibly live with them?" I knew in my heart, of course, that I would live here. Still one has to take account of public opinion; and so I consulted many. Some again, said, "Why, of course, you should go; they are all disciples."

I simply listened to all that they said. Now, there is an old widow (Prasannamayi) in our village whose opinion is respected because she is very virtuous and intelligent. I went to her at last and asked, "What do you say?" She replied, "Fancy! You will certainly go. They are disciples, as good as your sons. How can such a question arise? There can be no two opinions about your going." Hearing of this, others also consented. Then I came.'

Sometime in May, 1888, the Mother came to Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta. Either at this time or near about this, we get a profound insight into the inwardness and God-absorption of the Mother. That day, as she sat for meditation on the roof of Balaram Babu's house, she entered into samadhi. When she emerged from it, she said to Yogin-Ma, 'I saw, I was in a far-off place. All were treating me there with the utmost love. I became very beautiful. The Master was there, and with great tenderness they made me sit by his side. I can't describe the bliss that I enjoyed. When I regained my consciousness a little, I saw the body lying here. Then the thought came to me, "How can I enter into this ugly body?" I had not the least desire to resume it. At long last, I managed to get into it; and then consciousness returned to it.' It appears to us as though, the discord between the intrinsic divinity of the Mother and her physical vestures became intensely vivid through that vision, at the same time that she became more fully aware of her real identity and felt that through God's dispensation she had to work for the good of the world in and through such uninviting environment.

In a few days, the garden house of Nilambar Babu on the Ganges at Belur was engaged by the devotees, and the Holy Mother went there with Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and some monks as her companions and attendants. She stayed there for six months. Her meditateness was as intense now as before. One day, as she sat in meditation on the roof with her two woman companions, she became merged

in deep *samadhi*, so that her companions, on rising from their seats, found her body stiff and motionless. After a long time she said while descending to the normal plane, 'O Yogen, where are my hands, where are my feet?' The companions, while pressing her hands and feet to make her conscious of them, said, 'Here, indeed, are your hands and here your feet.' Still it took quite a long time for her to regain normal consciousness. When the term of the lease expired, the Mother returned to Balaram Babu's house at the beginning of November, 1888, from where she started for Puri after a couple of days.

This pilgrimage attracted quite a number of devotees; and Swamis Brahmananda, Yogananda and Saradananda, as also Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma's mother, and Lakshmi Devi went with her. The coastal railroad had not yet been constructed; hence they went by steamer from Calcutta to Chandbali (7th November), from where they proceeded by a launch to Cuttack, and by cart to Puri. Arriving at Puri, they visited Lord Jagannatha immediately, for an inauspicious period would commence from the next day. Then the Holy Mother and the women went to live in a house of Balaram Babu, called the Kshetra-basir Math or a resort for the dwellers in the holy place; the monks had their own separate place. The Mother stayed here for a little more than two months, returning to Calcutta in the middle of January next year. We shall relate here some incidents of the Puri visit.

As the Master had never been to Puri, the Mother carried his picture under her cloth so as to show him Jagannatha by showing the deity to his picture; for she believed that 'the picture and its prototype were the same.' About Jagannatha she said, 'I saw Jagannatha as the best of all persons sitting on an altar of gems with myself serving Him as a handmaid.' At another time she said that she saw the god as Siva.<sup>1</sup> On her visit to the temple, she

1. There are divergent theories about the identity of the image. It seems that the temple changed hands and the deity too, was differently conceived.

was delighted to see the great concourse of pilgrims; and with tears of joy she thought within herself, 'Hey-day! good luck! so many people will be freed (through this vision of the Lord)!' But the next moment it occurred to her, 'No, only those rare few who have no worldly desire will be freed.' When she shared her thought with Yogin-Ma, the latter, too, concurred.

At Puri the Mother's characteristic humility was revealed in bold relief. Govinda Shingari, the Panda<sup>1</sup> of Balaram Babu's family, thought that in keeping with the honour of that family a palanquin should be arranged for carrying their guru's wife to the temple. When he placed this proposal before the Mother, she said 'No, Govinda, you will walk in front as a guide and I shall follow you as a poor humble woman to visit Jagannatha.' It was thus that she visited the temple. She also visited all the noted places at Puri, and she spent long hours regularly in meditation at the temple of Lakshmi.

From Puri she returned to Calcutta on the 12th January, 1889; and the next day, she bathed in the Ganges at Nimtola. She visited the Kali temple at Kalighat on the 22nd. On the 5th February she went with Swamis Vivekananda, Saradananda, Yogananda and Premananda, as also Master Mahashaya, Sannyal Mahashaya and many others to Antpur, the birth-place of Swami Premananda. After spending about a week there, she left for Kamarpukur by a bullock-cart. Master Mahashaya and some others accompanied her.

Her stay at this time at Kamarpukur was almost as long as the first one. Then she came to Calcutta, and took up her residence on the banks of the Ganga at Belur in the rented house of Raju Gomasta. From there she went on the 5th March (1890) to Master Mahashaya's house at

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1. A brahmin who guides the pilgrims and officiates as their priest at a holy place.

Kambuliatala (Calcutta), from where she went on a pilgrimage to Gaya with the old Swami Advaitananda. After the passing away of his mother, the Master had asked the Holy Mother to go to Gaya to offer oblation at the well-known Vishnu-pada (Footprints of Vishnu). The Mother now carried out that command. She took this opportunity to visit Baidyanatha on the way, and from Gaya she went to Bodh Gaya also. On the completion of this pilgrimage, she returned to Master Mahashaya's house on the 2nd April.<sup>1</sup> Just then Balaram Babu lay gravely ill. The Mother remembered well his services to the Master and the latter's love for him; and, therefore, she shifted to his house to be at his bed-side during his last days. The great devout soul passed away on the 13th April, 1890.

A month later she moved over to a rented house on the Ganges at Ghushuri (Belur), near the local crematorium. When she was there, an irresistible desire to go out in quest of the Unknown was roused in Swami Vivekananda's heart, and he decided to leave the monastery and wander about the country for some time in quest of illumination. But he felt strongly inclined to seek the Mother's blessing before he started. Coming, therefore, to her one day in July, he made a long and reverential prostration, sang to her some devotional songs, and then expressed his heart's desire: 'Mother, if I can become a man in the true sense of the term, then only shall I return; otherwise this will be my last farewell.' Taken aback, the Mother said, 'You don't say so!' The Swami said, 'No, no, by your grace I shall soon come back.' The Mother could understand the depth of her son's aspiration, and to her divine vision appeared clearly the picture of his bright future; hence she blessed him heartily and asked him to return after enlightenment and fulfilment of his mission.

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1. The sequence of events from Puri onward, follows the unpublished memoirs of Master Mahashaya, with which the foot-note on p. 154 of *Shri Shri Mayer Katha*, part I, as also the account in it on pp. 317-18, are strikingly in accord.

Immensely inspired by her good wishes, Swamiji left for a tour of the holy places of India.

The Mother lived in that house till the month of Bhadra (August-September). Then she had to be taken to Saurindra Thakur's house at Baranagore across the river for treatment for dysentery from which she was suffering. The then Ramakrishna Math was not far from this house, so that it was easier for the monks to arrange for her comfort and medical care. After she became well she went to the house of Balaram Babu, preparatory to her departure for Jayrambati by way of Kamarpukur after the Durga worship (sometime in October). Of the events of her stay there,<sup>1</sup> the details available are not very clear, though an account of what happened during the Jagad-dhatri worship that year (10th November, 1891) shows clearly that the Mother had then been fully established in her Motherhood, and that her divinity, too, had become acknowledged among intimate acquaintances. At that time Swami Saradananda went to Jayrambati to attend the worship of the deity, and with him went Sannyal Mahashaya, Haramohan Mitra, Kalikrishna (Swami Virajananda), Golap-Ma, and Yogin-Ma. They reached Burdwan by train and went from there to Kamarpukur by bullock-cart. After they had seen the Master's birth-place, they covered the rest of the way to Jayrambati on foot. The Mother's joy knew no bounds at the sight of her beloved children. She was ever busy attending to their needs. Every day she dressed the vegetables and prepared special dishes for them, and then served the food and sat by them to see that they were fully satisfied. Her affection touched the deepest chords of their hearts. She was more particularly attentive to the young novitiate, Kalikrishna, who

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1. Some more accounts will be given in our chapter on *Girishchandra Ghosh*. A letter dated the 3rd Falguna, 1297 Bengali era, (or February, 1891), written to Master Mahashaya from Kamarpukur, reveals that the Mother had been there even earlier and had been hearing the *Gita* from her brother Abhay, while her niece Lakshmi Devi had gone to Dakshineswar for a dip in the Ganges.

was still in his teens. She received him as a veritable son and kissed him by touching his chin.<sup>1</sup> He ran errands for the elders and had free access everywhere. He had often to go to the inner apartments to fetch betels, tiffin, or fire for their tobacco pipes. As it is not customary to hand over fire directly to a son,<sup>2</sup> the Holy Mother placed the burning charcoal or cow-dung cake on the ground for him to pick it up with a pair of tongs.

Shyamasundari Devi was addressed by them as grandmother. She was simple and diligent; there was no end to her daily round of duties. Tending the cattle, feeding the labourers, husking paddy, and such other tasks closely followed one another; and yet she was all smiles for everyone—there was no sign of anger or annoyance. The Mother, also, was always at her side. Grandmother looked upon the devotees as her grandchildren for whose welfare she was extremely solicitous. The call 'grandma' pleased her as nothing else. This natural love for the grandchildren continued all through her life; and even those who went to Jayrambati much later, had an unforgettable touch of her warm heart. Throughout the year she would be busy laying by things for her grandchildren and declaring, 'Mine is a family of God and His devotees.'

At that time grandmother narrated many incidents of the Master's life to her grandchildren Kalikrishna and others. One day Haridas Vairagi, a roving minstrel of Desra, came and sang to the tune of his violin:

What a delightful news it is, O Uma (dear daughter)!

(Dear me)! I hear from people—say if that is true,

O Siva's wife—

That you've got the name Annapurna (filling all with food) at

Banaras,

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1. The Bengali mothers touch the chins of their grown up children with the tips of their right hand fingers, and then kiss those fingers. The Holy Mother followed this custom in the case of very young disciples. The word kiss in this volume means this only.

2. A dead body is cremated by setting fire to it. Because of this evil association mothers do not directly hand over fire to their children.

O Aparna (Uma), when I married you (to Siva),  
 Siva went about begging for morsels.  
 Today what a delightful news I hear, O giver of fortune!  
 Are you the Goddess of the Universe seated at the left of the God  
 of the Universe?

Mad and eccentric they called my naked one (Siva),  
 Abuses galore have I endured thereafter in houses innumerable;  
 Now sit door-keepers at the naked one's door, they say;  
 And Indra, Chandra, and Death get no interview.

Siva had the Himalayas as his abode;  
 Days there were when begging brought his daily food;  
 Now he rolls in Kubera's wealth.

Has fortune smiled on him by your good luck?

There's indeed more affluence now, methinks,  
 Else how is Gauri (Uma) so proud?

She opens not her eyes at her own son,  
 And turns her face at Radhika's (poet's) name.

The song was, so to say, an exact replica of the Mother's life; and so every one heard it with rapt attention. Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma who were in the inner apartment wanted to hear the song again, and it was sung again. When at last the beggar left with some presents, grandmother commented, 'Forsooth, my dears, in those days all called my son-in-law mad, cursed my Sarada's fortune, and flung many a hard word at me; so I felt like dying. And see today, what a number of boys and girls of good families are worshipping at Sarada's feet thinking her to be a goddess!'

In accordance with the custom of the family the worship of Jagad-dhatri continued for three days. The Mother was ever busy cooking and doing other works. But at the evening service every day she stood with folded hands before the Deity or fanned Her with the *chamara* (yak's tail). People from all around were fed on these days, and on two nights there were *yatras*.

Three days after the worship was over, Swami Saradananda and others were laid up with malaria. The Mother became greatly anxious and went on repeating,

‘Mother gracious! What’s in store? The boys are all suffering in their beds.’ During her moments of leisure she stood at the door-way looking silently at her sons. Milk could not easily be had in that village; still she moved from door to door collecting it by ounces till she got enough for their diet. As soon as they recovered, they decided that, since their continued stay was so very taxing to the Mother, they had better start for Calcutta without further delay. But the Mother expostulated, ‘You’ll go only after fuller recovery and after gaining more strength.’ Nevertheless, they started in bullock-carts on the appointed day. As they were leaving, the Mother looked on wistfully from the backdoor with tearful eyes. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma, too, could not restrain their tears; and from Kalikrishna’s eyes a few drops rolled down unawares. After they had gone some distance he looked back to find that the Mother had followed them and was standing on the bank of the Badujye-pukur with eyes fixed on them. The wheels of their carts crackled on till the Mother was totally out of sight. Kalikrishna kept on thinking all the way, ‘Whoever could imagine from what one heard that the Mother is really such a mother, that she would take by storm one’s heart and soul in this way and make one dearer than the dearest! I loved my own mother very fondly to be sure; but here is one who was and will be a mother for all lives past and future—one’s own mother for all time.’

From the October of 1891 to the middle of 1893, i.e., for about two and a half years, the Mother stayed in the country-side; and then she came to live at Belur in the garden house of Nilambar Babu, where among others Swami Trigunatitananda attended to her needs. He was very mindful of his duties to the minutest detail. For instance, he used to spread a clean cloth below a *shephalika* (weeping nyctanthes) tree, so that the flowers dropping from it at night might not get spoiled by touching the ground. He then collected these together for the Mother to be used during her worship.

One of the foremost events of this period was the performance of the *panchatapa* (five-fire) austerity by the Mother. After the Master left the body, the Holy Mother's dislike for life became so very strong that though she performed her duties mechanically, she kept on thinking that as the Master was no longer in flesh and blood, her life was altogether a meaningless thing. She had no taste for anything, nor any liking for gossip. In order to remove that sorrow, the devotees took her to different places of pilgrimage. When she was at Banaras, there used to come to her a nun who hailed from Nepal and who was versed in diverse esoteric practices. Studying the Mother's mental condition she advised her saying, 'Mother, you undertake the *panchatapa*.' That directed the Mother's thoughts to a new channel. It occurred to her that if the outer fires could be made unendurably hot, the internal fire might be subdued a little. Moreover, the belief began to grow in her that, after all, her life might not be quite useless; for in her ears were still ringing the words of the Master, 'You must not die; you have to stay on.' She was still in that vacillating frame of mind when supernormal visions or divine directions egged her on to undertake that austerity. At Kamarpukur she had seen with open eyes a girl of eleven or twelve years of age moving about her—sometimes in front of her and sometimes behind, with hair unkempt, and with an ochre cloth and a necklace of *rudraksha* beads on her person. It looked, as though the Mother's extreme abhorrence for the world consequent on the Master's demise had taken the form of that young nun. The Mother had another vision, also very frequently; a monk, with clean shaven face and head, suggested to her to undertake the *panchatapa*. At first she ignored such visions; but the Sannyasi (monk) persisted in his advice, till at last the desire for *panchatapa* became active in her mind during her stay at Belur. She did not know what it meant actually; and hence she consulted Yogin-Ma, who said encouragingly that she too would undertake it.

Arrangements were accordingly made for both of them. The roof of the one-storeyed portion of their house was covered with earth, and over this at intervals of about seven and a half feet (five cubits) four big fires were set ablaze in a square with cow-dung cakes, and overhead was the fiery summer sun. The Mother bathed in the Ganges and then came to the fires, the sight of which filled her with some dismay. But Yogin-Ma cheered her saying, 'Get in Mother, why are you afraid?' So with a silent prayer to the Master she got in, and Yogin-Ma sat by her. Once she was there, it seemed as though the fire had lost its heat. Meditation and *japa* continued within the circle of fires, till the morning sun slowly reached the zenith, poured down its scorching rays awhile, and then as slowly sank below the western horizon. The Mother and Yogin-Ma then came out. This went on for seven days till the scarred skin of the body looked quite black. The mental fire was then appeased a little; and the ochre-clothed girl departed for ever.

The Mother stood the terrible fiery ordeal. But when speaking of this incident in later days, she did not seem to attach any great importance to it. For instance, when a devotee asked, 'What's the need of austerity?' The Mother answered, 'Penance is necessary. Even Parvati did it for Siva. These are undertaken for the good of the people. Otherwise they will say, "Why, she eats, drinks, and lives just like any other person." As for *panchatapa* and such other things, these are feminine practices, just like the observance of vows, you know. The Master undertook all kinds of practices. He used to say, "I have made the die; you now shape your metal on them." ' An intimate devotee asked, 'Where is the need for your doing so much penance?' The Mother replied, 'For the sake of you all, my son. How can the boys do so much? Hence I have to.'

The *panchatapa* might have mitigated to some extent the internal grief; but still the need for continuing in the body