

at pains to see at least this boy return to the Math; but fidelity to the group dragged him also to Banaras.

In the meantime, Swami Shivananda guessed that the Brahmacharis had gone to Jayrambati, and he appraised the Mother of the whole situation by a letter. In answer, the Mother also informed him of all that had happened at her place. Swami Shivananda now wrote to Chandra Maharaj (Swami Nirbharananda), head of the Advaita Ashrama of Banaras not to shelter these insubordinate Brahmacharis who had defied all including the Mother. This order was followed by all concerned, except Bholanath (afterwards Swami Amareshananda) who found himself stranded and prayed for the Mother's indulgence to permit him to stay at the Advaita Ashrama. Bholanath's letter moved the Mother and she said, 'Alas, he has become a prey to his group! Now he realizes how painful it is. Anyway, let us write to Chandra so that he may find refuge in the (Advaita) Ashrama itself.' And to Bholanath she wrote, 'I have written to Chandra about you; and to you I say, now that you are at Banaras, if you can live in the Master's Ashrama serving Chandra and the other monks for life, it will be to your own good.' A similar message was communicated to Swami Shivananda, who obeyed the decision unquestioningly. Bholanath fulfilled the Mother's expectation by spending the rest of his life at the Advaita Ashrama, where he breathed his last on February 4, 1948.

We now come to deal with the preservation of the Master's birth-place and arrangements for a temple to be built on it, in settling which questions the Mother had an important part to play. When she was at the 'Udbodhan' for the last time, the Master's nephew and niece, Ramlal and Lakshmi Devi, and Ramlal's daughter came to see her on their way to Entally where they were going to attend the birthday celebration of the Master. In the course of conversation they adverted to the question of the Master's birth-place and the proposed temple on it. Lakshmi Devi wanted to know, 'When that (temple) is constructed, will

it be in our keeping, and will their (Ramlal's and Shivaram's) children themselves carry on the worship etc., and live there?' The Mother replied, 'How can that be? These are monks and devotees. Do they observe caste regulations? Innumerable people, and many foreigners from diverse countries will be going and living there and partaking of the *prasada*. We have to deal with all sorts of devotees, whereas you are householders; you have your society, your marriages for your children. How can you live with them?' The conversation proceeded in this way, and the Mother suggested that the monks of the Belur Math should take charge of the birth-place as also of the future temple, and that they should build houses with roofings of corrugated iron sheets for Ramlal and others, and a permanent brick temple for the family deities, Raghuvir and Sitala, whose worship, however, should continue to be entrusted to the family itself. But she also emphasized that Ramlal, Shivaram, and Lakshmi should live in the temple precincts and partake of the *prasada* from there whenever they chanced to stay at Kamarpukur. All present endorsed the Mother's proposals heartily and Swami Saradananda, too, was pleased to hear of this arrangement.<sup>1</sup>

We have already referred to the arrangement made with regard to the Mother's birth-place and the trust deed registered in favour of Jagad-dhatri. According to the Mother's wishes and the relevant deeds, the trustees of the Belur Math are the absolute managers of all these properties.

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1. In accordance with this settlement, the birth-place was handed over to the trustees of the Belur Math, by a document dated the 27th of July, 1918, which was signed by the Holy Mother and others. A little earlier, on December 14, 1917, a small piece of land contiguous to the birth-place was secured by the trustees. The construction of the temple began only after the acquisition of the Master's house on July 16, 1946. The stone temple built on the birth-place was dedicated on May 11, 1951. The trustees have built a permanent structure for the family deities, and have paid adequate sums to the descendants of Ramlal and Shivaram towards the cost of their separate houses.

## MOTHER

Finding the Mother engaged in cleaning the orts, sister Nalini, caste-ridden as she was, cried out in horror, 'Ah me! She's removing the leavings of a multitude of castes!' To this the Mother retorted, 'What if they are from various castes? They are all my children.' How could differences have any significance in her eyes who looked upon all as her children? That all-comprehending affection embraced all people—high and low, rich and poor, brahmin and non-brahmin.

The daily removal of orts was a part of the daily routine of the Mother. She would not allow the devotees to do this, assuring them that there was no lack of hands for the purpose; and then behind their backs she herself would undertake it. One day at Jayrambati, Swami Vishweshwarananda was on the point of carrying away his plate after meal when the Mother stopped him and took it away herself. The monk protested, 'Why should you carry it? I shall do it.' But the Mother said sweetly and persuasively, 'What indeed have I done for you? A child even soils its mother's lap and does so many other things? You are rare jewels to be sought for by gods.' The other women who lived with the Mother never did such a thing; on the contrary they argued, 'You are born in a brahmin family, and are a guru to boot, while these are your disciples. Why do you remove their leavings? That may bring evil on them.' The Mother answered in her own artless manner: 'Well, I am their mother. If a mother shouldn't do it all for her children's sake who else should?'

A devotee of the yogi (weaver) caste felt some hesitation in moving about freely in the Mother's house. The Mother said to him one day, 'Do you hesitate just because you are a ougi? What of that, my son? You belong to the master's fold—you are of his family, and you have

come here.' She further explained that the very fact of her not inquiring about his caste at the time of initiation showed that he just belonged to the Mother's home; and that though rural societies were caste-ridden, nobody would raise any question at Jayarambati, nor need he be fussy about it at all.

At one time during the second day of the Durga worship, which is considered specially holy, the devotees were offering flowers at her feet after entering her room. One man, however, stood aloof. The Mother learnt from inquiry that he came from Tajpur; and though he belonged to the lowly Bagdi caste, she asked him to offer flowers just as the others had done. The man complied cheerfully.

When any devotee came to the Mother, she removed his hesitancy in the twinkling of an eye—so powerful was her motherly affection. Brahmachari Rashbihari lost his mother in his childhood, and not being used to call anyone mother, he felt shy in uttering the word. One day, as the Mother wanted to send a message through him to a cousin she wanted to be sure of his having grasped her meaning and so asked him, 'Will you repeat what you will say?' Rashbihari replied, 'She has directed me to say such and such things.' 'You will say, "The Mother has directed"', said she and laid sufficient emphasis on the word 'Mother' to impress it permanently on his mind.

The Mother was once lying ill at Koalpara and a Brahmachari lived at Jayarambati. As he was very indifferent about his food and other requirements, she called him to Koalpara and asked him to be more attentive to his physical needs. He was quite young then, and yet was reserved in his dealings with the Mother; moreover, his own health was bad and he feared that this might infect the Mother. Hence he stood at a distance while talking with the Mother. The Mother asked him to come closer; but even so he kept himself at a considerable distance. The Mother, therefore, chastised him saying, 'What's that! Feel my body to see how I am.' The Brahmachari then

sat by her and the Mother talked to him tenderly. At that time they used to send milk for her from Jayrambati. She said, 'Sufficient milk is available here; don't send any more milk, but you yourself should drink it plentifully.'

In fact, the relationship between the Mother and her sons seemed divinely regulated, and its expression was truly wonderful. There was the same depth and intimacy as in ordinary relationships without their concomitant bondage or attachment. There were tears and smiles, as also unruffled placidity. Sri Dwarakanath Mazumdar got his *mantra* at Jayrambati and on his way home fell ill with dysentery at Koalpara, to which he succumbed calling on the Master with folded hands to the last moment. When the news reached the Mother, she wept bitterly like any bereaved mother and said, 'A jewel of a son of mine is gone. Alas! This was my son's last birth.' She would not call her sons by their monastic names, saying by way of explanation, 'It's just because I am the mother, it hurts me to call them by their Sannyasa names.' Sannyasa means separation from all, including parents; and the Mother could not entertain that idea even in thought. Noticing this, Swami Vishweshwarananda once asked her, 'How do you look upon us?' 'As Narayana,' replied the Mother. 'We are your sons;' argued the inquirer, 'if you consider us as Narayana, you can no longer think of us as your sons.' 'I look upon you as Narayana, and as sons also,' said the Mother. As in this synthesis, the Mother's conception of sonship consists in a fusion of the human and the divine, so also in another case we get a harmonization of the finite and the infinite in her conception of motherhood. A devotee asked one day, 'I call you mother; but I want to know if you are my mother as a matter of fact.' 'If I am not your real mother,' answered the Mother, 'what else am I? I am really the mother.' 'You may say so,' argued the unconvinced devotee, 'but I don't fully understand. Why don't I have the same genuine feeling of motherhood towards you, as I have spontaneously toward my own

mother?' The Mother first deplored saying, 'Alas, what a pity!' And then she added, 'The same entity is the parent of all, my child, the same has taken shape as fathers and mothers.' It is perhaps sad that the truth did not dawn on the devotee, but that was no reason why her own universal Motherhood should not be clear as daylight to herself. The Mother that was in her, 'the divinity that manifests itself as mothers among all beings' (*Chandi*), satisfied in the forms of the finite mothers the cravings for love in the hearts of finite beings. This infinite and all-embracing Motherhood of hers spoke so sweetly through every word, every movement and every act, that a mere touch of it melted the hardest heart.

Radhu had a pet cat for which the Mother provided half a pound of milk every day. She lay quietly and fearlessly at the Mother's feet; and even if for silencing others' complaints she feigned to drive it away with a stick, the cat took shelter, between her feet nevertheless, so that the Mother had to throw away the stick and smile, and the others too had to follow suit. Cats are given to stealing. But this did not annoy the Mother who said, 'To steal is their nature, my boy; who will feed them fondly?' But Brahmachari Jnan declared a war against the cat. One day, when he flung her away, the Mother looked pale with pain. Beating the cat also was a common occurrence. In spite of this dislike, the family of this cat throve through the care bestowed on it by Radhu and the Mother. And then came the time for the Mother's departure for Calcutta. The Mother called the Brahmachari to her and said, 'Jnan, you should cook rice for the cats, so that they may not have to go to other houses; for then people will abuse us, my boy.' This was a common argument, by which, the Mother knew, the lot of the cats might not improve overnight. And hence she added, 'Look here, Jnan, don't beat the cats; for even in them am I.' That was enough; the Brahmachari could no longer lift his hand against the cats. And he went so far

as to arrange for a regular supply of fish for them, although he himself was a strict vegetarian!

In one sense she was the Mother of all the devotees, and in another she herself was all; her infinite motherhood left none outside its all-comprehensive grasp. Brahmachari Rashbihari asked her one day, 'Are you the Mother of all?' 'Yes,' replied the Mother. 'Even of these lower creatures?' pressed the inquirer. 'Yes,' answered the Mother.

But the mother in her was not satisfied even with so many children. She was often heard calling in a low tone, 'Come to me here, my children.' When Swami Vishweshwarananda reached Jayrambati, the Mother said eagerly, 'So you have come, how fine! I have been calling you for the last few days—when calling Rajen I have been uttering your name.' The Mother was careful never to show her emotion; and that is why this anxiety could often find but partial expression. Yet the little that came out revealed a world of hidden feeling.

As Swami Maheshwarananda was returning to the Belur Math from the 'Udbodhan', the Mother gave him a rupee to be handed over to Swami Premananda, and said, 'This is to be spent for the Master's worship, and for offering *tulasi* (holy basil) leaves for the welfare of Sarat, by name.' Swami Saradananda was then down with fever.

The Mother once heard from Sri Prabhakar Mukherji of Arambagh that his son was suffering from measles. When the devotee was returning home from Jayrambati the Mother gave him a rupee, saying, 'Offer worship to Sitala at Kamarpukur on your way.' That was meant for invoking the goddess's grace for the boy.

Noticing Bibhutibhushan Ghosh eating lustily at the Mother's house at Jayrambati, his mother Rohinibala remarked, 'Bibhuti seems to eat here heartily; but at my place he eats only this much (indicating a small quantity with the fingers).' The Mother at once protested, 'Don't you be casting an evil eye on my son! I am a beggar; whatever I offer to my sons, they eat with avidity.'

In fact, in her words and manner there was such a genuineness and cordiality that a new-comer felt at once drawn to her. When a woman devotee came to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' (February 1911) the Mother said, 'How are you? How is my daughter-in-law? You didn't come all these days, and I was wondering if you had fallen ill.' The devotee wondered how a single meeting for a few minutes could ripen into such intimacy. The matter did not, however, end there. With the greatest affection the Mother made her sit near her on the cot and said, 'It seems, my daughter, as though I have seen you many a time as though it's an acquaintance of long standing.' As the time for the devotee's returning home approached, the Mother brought her some *prasada* and holding it to her lips said, 'Eat.' The devotee felt rather shy, but the Mother said encouragingly, 'Why be so shy? Take it.' So the devotee took the food in her hands. When at last she bade adieu the Mother inquired, 'Will you be able to go down? Shall I accompany you?' And she went to the staircase to see her off. The same devotee came to the Mother in the summer of that year, tired and perspiring. The Mother said eagerly, 'Take off your blouse and let your body be cooled;' and as she spoke, she took down a fan and tried to comfort her. The more the devotee protested, 'Give me the fan, I shall move it myself' the more the Mother said with affection, 'Don't you mind that, don't; be a little cooled.'

The same devotee came in October 1912, and after partaking of the *prasada* at noon began fanning the Mother, who, however, said, 'Fetch a pillow from there and lie down by me. I don't require any more breeze.' Thinking it to be sacrilegious to use the Mother's pillow, the devotee no sooner fetched one from Radhu's room than the Mother laughed and said, 'That's the mad one's (Radhu's mother's) pillow, my dear; bring the other one; there's no harm in this.' And to Radhu she said, 'Radhu, you too come, and lie down by your sister.'

A woman devotee of the Vaidya caste was permitted to cook and bring from her home some dishes for the Mother. One day in August 1918, as she stepped in with those preparations, the Mother said, 'Look here, my dear, with how much trouble she has come with all these!' 'Why, it is you who want them! That's why they bring them,' ejaculated Nalini Devi, rather critically. 'Well,' asserted the Mother, 'why should I not ask what I want from them? They are my daughters.' The Mother was pleased on tasting those preparations that night; and even Nalini, so notoriously squeamish was forced to say, 'What wonder! Though I can't relish anybody's cooking, yet I don't feel any repulsion when eating her preparations?' At this the Mother said with pride, 'Why should you? For she is my daughter, to be sure.'

A young man sat in front of the Mother on the northern verandah of her room at the 'Udbodhan' and confessed, 'Mother, I've suffered quite a lot in the world. You are my guru, you are my chosen deity, I know nothing else. In truth I've committed so many wrongs, that I blush to speak of them even before you. And yet I continue to live by your grace.' The Mother caressed his head tenderly as she said solacing him, 'A son to a mother, a son!' That melted the man's heart and he said, 'Yes Mother! But may I never think that your grace is so cheap, just because I have got so much of it from you.'

Some devotees, after reaching the Koalpara Ashrama at sunset during the Janmashtami holidays (Krishna's birthday in August), 1913, decided to reach Jayrambati that very night. It was dark and it began to pour heavily on the way. When they reached Jayrambati, the Mother was not informed. Next morning as they saluted her, she reproached them saying, 'My sons, the Master has saved you. In that darkness, slush, and downpour, you must have trampled over many a snake. It pains me to see one walk in that way. It is no good walking recklessly.' The devotees tried to explain that their leave was short and

their desire to see her was great, and that these compelled them to be a bit rash.' The Mother still persisted, 'It's natural to be so on your part; but it pains me.' She recollected the incident two and a half years later, when the wife of one of these devotees arrived at the 'Udbodhan' (December 25, 1915). That day at about nine or ten in the morning, the Mother sat on the floor with some crisp-fried-rice and other fried things in the folds of her cloth, from which she took a handful now and then and also offered some to the new-comer saying, 'Take it, my daughter-in-law, take it.' That evening when the devotee came to take his wife home the Mother, alluding to the Jayrambati incident, said, 'It's not good to walk about recklessly.' The devotee assured her, 'No, I shall not do so any more.' The Mother understood this to mean that he would not go to Jayrambati, and so she quickly interposed, 'Why should you not go? My son, if a thorn pricks your foot, it hurts me like a spear entering my heart.' And turning to the devotee's wife, she said, 'Daughter-in-law, dear, you should keep a watch on him, so that he doesn't walk in this way.'

A baby who slept by the Mother's side at the 'Udbodhan' soiled her blanket. As the baby's mother proceeded to clean the blanket, the Mother snatched it from her and washed it herself. When the child's mother objected, 'Mother, why should you wash it?' the Mother replied briefly but feelingly, 'Why should I not? Is she (the baby) a stranger to me?'

The number of devotees is swelling. They come to the 'Udbodhan' at all hours of the day; their tastes differ and needs vary. The Mother has no rest, and inconveniences multiply. This enrages the outspoken Golap-Ma, who criticizes her saying, 'What's this that has come upon you, Mother? You put forward your feet to anyone who approaches you and calls you Mother!' The Mother pleads, 'How can I help it, Golap? I can't contain myself when one draws near me and calls me Mother.'

This affection of the Mother was not confined to devotees alone; it transcended the limits of all social and family barriers and submerged everybody in its resistless tidal rush. The Mother while dictating a letter to Sri Bholanath Chatterji, uncle-in-law of Radhu, said without the least hesitation, 'Write "My dear son".' 'How is that, my dear?' interrupted Radhu's mother. 'He is certainly related to you otherwise through Radhu.' Not the least abashed the Mother said, 'Let that alone; he loves to call me Mother, and I also am so to him.' Her sisters-in-law, Indumati Devi and Suvasini Devi, also addressed her as Mother.

The villagers, too, had a share of this overflowing love. Once, after the Mother's recovery from an illness, some people wanted to sacrifice a goat before Simhavahini; but the Mother offered *rasagollas* (juice-balls) worth some rupees. In the afternoon, no sooner was the bell rung twice from the Mother's house than the villagers, who had become trained in such matters by that time, flocked to the place and sat in rows on either side of the road. The monks served the *rasagollas* to them and the Mother looked on with a sweet smile on her lips.

The devotees had evidences of her motherly heart in every little detail of life, so much so, that they found no difference between her and their own mothers. At the very first contact she became acquainted with each one's taste and attended to him or her accordingly. Nalin Babu sat at meal at Jayrambati with about fifteen other devotees, and thinking all the while that the Mother was most attentive to his needs, felt a little uncomfortable. But on comparing notes with others after meal, he found to his surprise that they too had felt the same tender concern of the Mother for each of them.

At the time of distributing *prasada*, it was noticed that she gave each one the particular thing he liked most. The first one that came got the best that he could think of; similarly the second one, and so also the third. Everybody was satisfied that the Mother loved him the most.

And she fulfilled one's desire before one could open one's lips. The Mother was at her meal when a certain monk arrived at Jayrambati. It was his cherished idea to have the Mother's *prasada*, left from the Mother's own plate. But such was her habit that she sat for meal after feeding all her sons. So the monk had not got any opportunity so far. This time, as soon as he arrived, the Mother sent him some light refreshment and tobacco, for she knew that he smoked, and when she had finished her meal, she called him in and said, 'Sit down, my son. I have eaten from those leaves.' She had used *sal* leaves and all the eatables were there arranged properly.

The Mother treated all her sons with equal tenderness, for no man is entirely guiltless. Once a direct disciple of the Master was so offended with the conduct of a certain devotee that he requested the Mother not to allow him to get anywhere near her. But she replied, 'If my son wallows in the dust or mud, it is I who have to wipe all the dirt from off his body and take him to my lap.'

Hundreds of sufferers came to her with their burdens of sins and woes. Their touch often produced pain in her feet, but she bore this knowingly and willingly. One afternoon, when the visitors had left, Brahmachari Rashbihari saw the Mother washing her feet up to the knees again and again. When asked for the reason she said, 'Don't allow anyone any more to salute me by laying his head on my feet; thereby all the sins enter there, and my feet burn, so that I have to wash them. That's why I fall ill. Ask them to salute me from a distance.' But she changed her mood immediately saying, 'Don't tell these things to Sarat (Saradananda), for he will then stop salutation altogether.'

It was palpably evident to her that the touch of a sinner was painful; but though evident, how could she, a mother, refuse her own sons to touch her feet? Besides, she could not so much as see anybody's fault. One evening she said to Brahmachari Varada, 'When G. and

others came to pay their respects to me this morning, they made certain reflections against A. and said that he had quarrelled with the monks at Rishikesh and was trying to give them trouble. And casting some more aspersions against him they added, "How could he have such an evil propensity after having lived with you and served you so long?" I can no longer see or listen to anyone's defect, my son. It shall be as each has earned in his past lives. If they were destined to have a deep wound, they must have at least the prick of a pin. They talked of A,'s fault to me! Where were they in those days? How serviceable he was to me! In those days I boiled paddy and did all kinds of work in my brother's family. He started working with me from the morning without caring for sun or rain, and with his body covered with soot he took down big vessels of paddy from the oven. Many are there now who come here as devotees; but whom had I then? Should we forget it all? And yet, mind you, people are not really to blame. Formerly, I also took notice of a lot of other people's drawbacks. Then, by praying for long to the Master with tearful eyes "Master, I can no more bear finding fault" could I at last get rid of the habit of picking holes in other people's clothes. When I was at Vrindaban, I used to visit Vankubihari (Krishna in a bent pose) and prayed to him, "Your form is bent, but Your mind is straight—kindly straighten the windings of my mind." Mark you, even though you might have a hundred times benefited a man and then happen to do him one wrong, he will take umbrage. People can easily discover others' defects but few can recognize merit. One should appreciate merit.'

An educated young man belonging to a well-to-do family of a neighbouring village had the good fortune of receiving initiation from the Mother. He used to come to her very often. Through his help an Ashrama was started in that village. But as ill luck would have it, he became involved in a love affair with a near relative who was a

widow from her early age. Now, scandals have wings; and the Jayrambati devotees came to know of this very soon. In their anger they appealed to the Mother to stop his coming to her house. The Mother was visibly moved at this lapse of her son; but to their request she replied, 'How can I, who am his mother, forbid him to come? Such words will never pass out of my lips.' The young man continued to come as usual. Not only this, he brought the girl also one day. The Mother reproached her for enticing her son and warned her for the future; but she was as unwaveringly affectionate with her as with any of her other daughters.

We allude to another incident which happened much earlier. The Mother then lived at the 10/2 Bosepara Lane house. A servant had been driven out by Swami Vivekananda for stealing. The man was poor and his family depended on him. Now he found himself in a most difficult position and ran to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' for shelter. The Mother kept him there and fed him. That very afternoon, when Swami Premananda happened to go there to pay his respects to her, she said, 'Look here, Baburam, this man is very poor. He was impelled by his poverty to do as he did. Should Naren on that score scold him and drive him out? The world is full of misery. You are monks who realize very little of it. Take him back.' Swami Premananda tried to impress on her that this would displease Swami Vivekananda. The Mother then said with some emphasis, 'I say, take him.' As Swami Premananda entered the Math compound at dusk, Swami Vivekananda burst out, 'Look at Baburam's thoughtlessness; he has brought that fellow again!' Swami Premananda then explained everything, which silenced the great Swami.

As it became known that even rebellious minds bowed down before the might of her motherly love, the weaker parties defeated in life's struggles used to seek her intervention, and it was found that the stronger ones accepted with alacrity whatever decision she arrived at. One day as she was seated on a cot under a tamarind tree at Koal-

para, there came a woman of the sweeper caste who complained that her paramour had suddenly deserted her. She had been living with him after having cut off all her moorings, and now she was stranded. The woman wept bitterly as she related her tale of woe. The Mother was moved very much and sent for the sweeper and rebuked him gently and persuasively, saying, 'She came to you leaving everything behind; and you have accepted her services so long. If you desert her now, you will incur great sin, you won't find a place even in hell.' The man's heart was touched at these words, and he took the woman home.

The Mother's infinite love transcended all limitations of caste or colour, merit or demerit, in fact, of all conditions of life. Any one that took refuge in her, was treated kindly, helped with medicines and other necessities, and filled with sympathy. She consciously ignored people's frailties and foibles, and asked others also to do the same. The result was that even criminals behaved decently and sometimes changed their habits.

Mulberry was once widely cultivated and silk-worms reared in many villages of West Bengal. But foreign competition tolled the death-knell of this industry at the beginning of the present century, as a consequence of which many Mohammedan families at Shiromanipur were reduced to penury. No honest means of livelihood being open to them, the hapless Mohammedans took to stealing and robbery, which earned for them the appellation of 'mulberry-robbers' (*tunte'-dakat*). They were a terror to the neighbouring villages, including Jayrambati. Naturally, they were studiously shunned by the Hindus. And to add to the misery of these wretched families, a famine raged in those parts. Just then, the new house of the Mother was being built, and the monks who supervised the work engaged some of these famine-stricken people. The villagers did not take this kindly and often grumbled that the monks were courting trouble for themselves and the

villagers. Nonetheless they had to change their opinion soon and declare, 'Ah! By the Mother's grace, the robbers too, are becoming devotees!' How this happened can be realized from the following few anecdotes.

One day, one of these 'mulberry-robbers' brought some plantains to the Mother and said, 'Mother, here are some plantains for the Master; will you accept them?' The Holy Mother stretched out her hands for acceptance and said, 'Certainly I will, my dear; hand them over. Why should I not, since you have brought them for the Master?' A woman devotee who hailed from a neighbouring village and happened to be there, was taken aback by this strange behaviour of the Mother, and she said warningly, 'These are thieves, you know. Why should his things be offered to the Master?' The Mother, apparently unperturbed by this rude interference, deposited the fruits in the store and ordered some fried-rice and sweets for the man. When he had gone, she turned to the woman and administered a stern rebuke, 'I know who is good and who is not.' Her mission was to uplift the spiritually fallen, and she used to say, 'To err is human; but how few know, how to lead an erring man?'

Amzad was one of those 'mulberry-robbers' who had a hand in erecting the mud walls of the Mother's house. One day the Mother seated him on her verandah for his meal. Nalini Devi served him, but owing to caste prejudices she stood at a distance on the courtyard and tossed the food on to the man's leaf-plate. This displeased the Mother, who said, 'Can one have any relish for food if it is served in such a fashion? If you can't serve him properly, I shall do it.' When Amzad had finished his meal, the Mother cleansed the place herself. At this, Nalini Devi loudly denounced the act saying, 'O dear aunt, you lose your caste thereby!' But the Mother cut her short, 'Amzad is as truly my son as my Sarat (Saradananda) himself is.'

The next incident followed soon after. The Mother was down with fever, and many visited her in her sick-bed.

One morning, at about nine or ten o'clock, the Brahmachari on attendance saw a Mohammedan of dark appearance, emaciated body, ragged clothes, and sad looks, tottering into Mother's compound with the help of a staff. From his unhesitating movements it was apparent that the man, though unknown to the Brahmachari, was quite a familiar figure there. But curiosity urged him to follow the man. The Mother was inside, lying on a cot in her room, and the verandah in front was covered by a thin screen of plaited bamboo slips, so that the cot was not easily visible. The man tiptoed to look over the screen. Suddenly the Mother's eyes turned in that direction, and she accosted him in a low endearing voice, 'Is that you, dear Amzad? Come in.' With beaming eyes and a happy countenance Amzad stepped on to the verandah and standing on one side of the door thrust in his head to enter into an intimate conversation on matters of everyday life. Finding the Mother and her son thus engaged, the Brahmachari went about his own duties.

Not long after, the Brahmachari was called in to offer food to the Master. The Mother herself used to do this when she was well; but now she could not move about, and so the Brahmachari had to undertake this ceremony, which, however, was a very simple one. In the Mother's room, under the Master's seat, was kept some Ganges water which had to be poured into a small ceremonial vessel, technically called *panchapatra* and with this water the food in the kitchen had to be sanctified for being offered to the Master. The Brahmachari came to take the *panchapatra* but was in a dilemma finding the Mohammedan standing in the only doorway. He could not be told to move away, lest this should offend the Mother. At the same time, to pass closely by a Mohammedan, with the holy water in hand militated against caste prejudices and conventions ingrained from childhood in this Brahmachari who was a brahmin by birth. He hesitated for a moment and then decided to carry out his duty without minding the man's presence.

depending on the Mother to dissuade him if there was anything wrong in his move. He took the *panchapatra* and stepped out. After the offering he returned with it and placed it where it was. Amzad was all the while at his post. The Mother noticed everything but said nothing. As Amzad was leaving, in the evening, the Brahmachari noticed that the man's face was lit up with a happy smile, and he was altogether a changed person. He had bathed and rubbed oil all over his rough skin; then he had a full meal; and now he chewed betel and areca-nut as he walked home. In his hand was a phial of indigenous medicine, and in his bag were many titbits. The Mother told the Brahmachari, 'Amzad's brain has become heated as a result of taking stimulants. He has no sleep at night. I had with me for a long time a phial of Narayana oil, which I have given him. By using it his brain will be cooled; it is a very efficacious oil;' Amzad soon recovered from his illness and was always at the Mother's service. If anything had to be done, the moment word was sent to him, he would faithfully carry it out. For instance, when the Mother lost her appetite as a result of protracted fever, her physician recommended pineapples, which were by no means easily available in those parts and in that season. So Amzad's services were requisitioned, and he soon brought the pineapples, as if by magic.

But in spite of this divine affection of the Mother, Amzad could not free himself wholly from the habit of thieving and robbing; and so the people of Jayrambati were afraid of him, though, as a matter of fact, that village remained free from the attention of those 'mulberry-robbers', evidently through Amzad's good offices. Often enough he was in jail, when his wife would run for help to the Mother who would give her whatever lay at hand. This love was heartily reciprocated by Amzad. Once after his release from jail, he found on returning home a number of gourds hanging down from his thatch. He plucked some of them and proceeded to Jayrambati. The Mother, delighted

to see him, said, 'I have been anxious because of your long absence. Where were you?' Amzad explained that he had been arrested on a charge of cattle-lifting, and so he could not visit her. Unmindful of the explanation, the Mother said with a sigh. 'Ah me! I have been really worried.'

When the Holy Mother was in Calcutta during her last illness, the news reached her that Amzad had been apprehended on a charge of robbery after having absconded for some time. At this information she said, 'Ah me! Look here, my dear, I knew that he was an adept in robbery.' It is said that after the passing away of the Mother, Amzad received a cut from a sword in an act of plundering. This wound developed into a sore and ultimately caused his death. The Mother knew this man's character well enough, and she also knew it to be her duty to protect her household and her village from people of his trade. But the method she adopted consciously through the promptings of her motherly heart was not only unique but also effective. It won the robber's heart and brought for her a result that even mightier people with ampler resources would have failed to achieve. She did not rely on arms or man-power, but on the power of love which softened the hardest criminal and which brooked no interference from caste, prejudice, or fear.

If we illustrate the Mother's life merely with citations from her relationship with cultured, intelligent, and affluent devotees, some may think, 'This is not very extraordinary.' Hence it is that we have dealt with Amzad a little elaborately. In support of our view, we shall continue to draw some more examples from common life.

Shortly after the construction of the Mother's house at Jayrambati, a devotee purchased a milch cow for her and arranged for its maintenance as well. At his cost, again, was engaged for tending the cow, a boy named Govinda (or Gobe), aged about eleven or twelve years. He was well-behaved and ever cheerful. But in a few days itches

spread over his whole body, defying treatment and causing pain. One night the pain became so excruciating that he had not a wink of sleep and wept all the while. Next morning the Mother sat on her verandah with a grinding stone on which she prepared a paste with green *neem* (margosa) leaves and turmeric, and making the boy stand before her asked him to apply it to the different parts of his body according to her direction. Govinda obeyed cheerfully and unhesitatingly as he would have done before his own mother; and this treatment cured him ultimately.

Haridas Vairagi of Desra used to sing, in accompaniment of his violin, religious songs which enkindled devotion in the hearts of his hearers, among whom he could count Girishchandra Ghosh, Swami Saradananda and others. But as he grew old, it became increasingly difficult for him to maintain himself. One day he came to the Mother's house a little before noon. The Mother gave him oil for rubbing over his rough skin before bath. When he returned after a dip in the tank, she gave him some fried-rice molasses and *prasada*. As he ate these, the Mother sat by him, talking on familiar things and preparing betel rolls. The First World War (1914-18) was raging at that time causing great scarcity of cloth. The old man said that he had no clothes. The Mother had spread in the sun after her morning ablution a new piece of cloth which she had worn but a couple of days. She got up at once and handed it over to the Vairagi. Haridas was overpowered with that evidence of the Mother's affection, and touching the cloth reverently to his head he bade her farewell with wet eyes.

We may mention in passing that this love of the Mother extended to dumb creatures as well. One day a calf was restlessly bleating, which made all infer that it had some pain in the stomach. The Mother, satisfied as she was with the little she had, was against multiplying the vexations of a household by purchasing cattle; and hence when the question was put to her, she gave her un-

willing consent with a view not to wound the feelings of the proposer, and then said to Brahmachari Gogan (Swami Ritananda), 'Mark you, what desire!'—as though she was witnessing from a distance, without any personal concern, the intricate workings of people's minds engrossed in worldly dealings. And when the cow came, she remarked, 'He has only left us in greater trouble by purchasing the cow.' Nonetheless, she meticulously supervised everything concerning it and its calf. The calf went on making an uneasy noise which set everybody athinking and they tried various remedies without success. The bleating brought the Mother also there; she sat by the calf holding it in both arms and softly pressing its navel and patting it, as though it were her own child. A little later it calmed down and all returned to their respective places.

In the Mother's house there was a maina (a talking parrot) named Gangaram. The Mother herself daily washed the bird, gave it water and food, cleaned its cage, moved it from place to place and talked with it tenderly. Every morning and evening she went to him and said, 'Dear Gangaram, do talk!' The bird articulated, 'Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Krishna, Krishna, Rama, Rama.' Hearing the names of the Brahmacharis from the Mother's lips, Gangaram learnt them well enough. And now and then it shrieked out, 'Mother, O Mother.' The Mother immediately responded with, 'Here I am, my son, here I am,' and she went to it with gram and water, for the bird's call meant that it was hungry. As far the Mother's love for cats, we have mentioned the fact before.

Now, we return to the devotees. In every word and movement, her motherliness was so strikingly evident that any one who happened to come within its orbit had some of his life's wants removed at once without any effort, Brahmachari Rashbihari, having lost his mother as a child, felt an inexpressible void in the deep recesses of his heart. Other children called on their mothers affectionately and had their feelings reciprocated; but he had none to turn

to. When as a young man he came to the Mother, he felt as though she had been waiting there all the time with a heart full to the brim with affection for him. A little touch of it changed his whole life.

Cases were not rare when young boys, coming to her, found her features exactly like those of their own mothers. True it is that this was not a matter of daily occurrence with them; but the first, and might be, the single vision spread a lasting influence over the whole of a man's life. When Swami Mahadevananda saw the Mother at Jayarambati he thought that his own mother was seated in front of him. Sri Panchanan Ghosh once went to see the Mother in his boyhood. As he was entering the Mother's room for saluting her, he chanced to look at her feet, which, to his utter amazement, were exactly like those of his mother; and the two hands on her lap with the golden bracelets resembled those of his mother who had then just been widowed. Past memories and present identity crowded over his mind to make him half-conscious. He drew slowly towards the Mother, step by step, urged by an unknown impulse. Once in front of the Mother, he looked again at her full figure, from the feet upwards to the face—all was exactly the same. The Mother noticed his emotional transformation and said affectionately, 'Why are you looking so, my son? What has happened to you, my dear? Come here, my boy, come.' Panchanan sat quite close by her and the Mother passed her affectionate hand over his back. That blissful touch made the boy's hair stand on end, and he felt as though he had met his own mother after a long interval.

A certain young devotee came, and finding the Mother none other than his own mother in every way, took it into his head like a child to sit for meal by her, and not stopping at that he said capriciously that he would not eat unless she fed him with her own hand. The Mother yielded to his importunity. Then he demanded that her veil must be removed before he could eat. Again she complied and

also talked with him about his family in the most endearing way. Such an occurrence was not rare. We have related earlier how Nag Mahashaya was fed.

When Swami Prashantananda saw the Mother's picture after the death of his own mother, he came to believe that there was an identity between the two. And hence he behaved towards the Mother accordingly when he first met her at Jayrambati. At that time he was a mere boy, and a doctor used to come on horseback to the Mother's place every day. Prashantananda began clamouring for a ride on that horse which was a naughty one, and, therefore, the Mother demurred. But Prashantananda's impertunity compelled her to take the doctor's permission, which being readily given, Prashantananda sat astride the horse. But to control a naughty animal was no job for a stripling. No sooner was he in the saddle than the horse bolted homeward. At long last when he returned with the animal to the Mother his cloth was found torn and his body bleeding from scratches received while dashing past thorny trees and bamboo groves. The Mother was looking out all the while in great consternation; and when this wilful child returned she chid him and brought out for him a new piece of cloth.

Though the relationship between the Mother and her devotees was regulated by affection, yet the indiscretion of some devotees made it very often taxing, nay, even painful, to the Mother, who, however, bore it all in silence without changing her mood towards the person concerned. A Brahmachari saw one day that two devotees who had come to Jayrambati, were going to the Mother to worship her with water, flowers, *bel* leaves, etc. The Brahmachari forbade them to pour water or offer *bel* leaves on her feet since her legs were rheumatic and she had just recovered from an illness; besides, she did not like *bel* or *tulasi* leaves being offered at her feet as these were sacred to Siva and Vishnu respectively. The devotees treated his warning lightly and proceeded to do as they had planned.

At this the Brahmachari was forced to stop them rudely; but then he was afraid that the Mother had taken it amiss. She, however, told him afterwards, 'You should be near me and keep an eye on everything. At the "Udbodhan" they save me carefully from trouble in so many ways.'

We shall relate an incident in 1909, when Swami Saradananda was at Jayrambati. A young man turned up one day to see the Mother. The Brahmachari who had accompanied the Swami conducted the young man to the Mother. The stranger saluted her and then began pulling her legs under the foolish impulse of holding her feet on to his chest. Fortunately she then stood holding a post of the cottage and so did not fall down. The Brahmachari quickly took hold of the crazy man and led him out. When Swami Saradananda heard the whole affair he remarked. 'Yogin Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) never bowed down to the Mother while she was in a standing position; when she left, he took the dust from the place and put it on his head.'

Such queer behaviour was not confined to that remote past. Subsequently, too, some devotee might come to Jayrambati and demand immediate interview defying all persuasion to wait for the Mother's convenience. She had therefore to come out and stand on a low wooden stool like an image to accept the devotee's floral offering after which she had to hurry back to the kitchen to cook some food for that inconsiderate man himself.

A devotee expressed a desire that since he would be leaving for home in three or four days, he would like to have some rice from the Mother's plate, dry it and carry it home as her *prasada*. In due time the Mother showed him the rice *prasada* and said, 'That's yours, my dear.' The food was in a brass plate, and the devotee put it in the sun for drying. The Mother warned him, 'Mind you that the crows don't peck at it.' The devotees assured her that he would be returning immediately to watch it, and he went to the outer apartment for a smoke, in the course of

which he forgot everything and then fell asleep. When he woke up at three in the afternoon, he remembered the plate and hurried inside to find, to his utter confusion, the Mother still sitting by it. 'Didn't you have any rest today, Mother?', faltered the devotee. 'No, my son', replied she. 'I kept watching, lest that thing of yours should be pecked by crows.'

A woman, when taking leave of the Mother, bit her big toe. The Mother shrieked out in pain, 'Hello, my dear, what kind of a devotion is that! If she wants to bow down, let her do so; but instead, she holds my toe in her teeth!' 'It's just to make you remember', explained the woman. 'I never saw', said the Mother, 'such a device for making one remember.'

Some devotee might hold fast the Mother's feet and plead, 'Mother, do promise me that you will show yourself to me at least at the time of my death.' The Mother replied, 'Very well, I shall pray to the Master that he may vouchsafe his presence.' But the devotee still kept his firm grasp on her feet till at last the Mother found no means of escape but to say, 'Yes, my son, it shall be so.'

Brahmachari Varada had gone to a distant village to procure fuel. When he returned to Jayrambati at night-fall, he found the Mother lying on a mat in the verandah. As the Brahmachari approached her she said ruefully, 'You all are here; and yet you have to go out on business. To day there came a man, somewhat advanced in age. Seeing him from a distance, I entered the room and sat on my cot. He saluted me from outside and then became eager to take the dust of my feet. The more I said, "No, no," with modesty, the more he pressed. At last he took the dust almost by force. From that time I am suffering from a burning sensation in the feet and a pain in the stomach. I washed the feet three or four times, but still the pain and the burning sensation persist. If you had been nearby, you could have ascertained my wish and forbidden him. The strictness that they enforce in Calcutta with regard

to the devotees cannot wholly be dispensed with. You are too young to understand what diverse kinds of people come.'

The Mother was not entirely free from this kind of unwelcome visitors even in Calcutta. One day, as the Mother rose from her seat after finishing her worship a devotee came with some flowers to offer them at her feet. As the man was a stranger, she covered herself fully with a wrapper and sat on a cot with her feet hanging down. The devotee got his opportunity and began worshipping her to his heart's content with all the elaborate processes and *mantras* that the scriptures enjoin, unmindful of the fact that the Mother was perspiring all over, though she could not utter a word. It was nothing unusual to see a devotee offer flowers at her feet, and hence the ever watchful Golap-Ma was a little off her guard when she saw the man enter the room. Without due notice, she went away to attend to her own duties. But when returning after a long time, she found him still there, she became irritated at the man's silliness and said with her naturally loud voice, 'Are you here before a wooden image that you should invoke her with all your ceremonies (with their meditation on letters<sup>1</sup> and control of breath)? Don't you see that the Mother is sweating uncomfortably?' And she sent the man out.

It was at the 'Udbodhan', again, that a devotee, while bowing down to the Mother, struck his head so hard against her big toe that she had to utter a cry of pain. The others present there asked the man, 'What's this that you have done?' The man replied, 'By thus saluting the Mother I leave her with some pain in the feet, and she will remember me as long as the pain is there.' The Mother used to regale her attendants with such funny stories when they massaged her rheumatic legs with oil.

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1. An image has to be awakened by establishing mentally its identity with the worshipper through certain processes, one of which is Nyasa consisting partly in thinking that the different limbs of the Deity are composed of various letters of the alphabet; She being thus none other than an embodiment of

At times, the Mother was so unbearably uncomfortable that, notwithstanding her forbearance, she could not but give vent occasionally to her irksomeness to the Master or the faithful attendants. One morning some well-dressed gentlemen came from Calcutta with some fruits, which through negligence had become rotten and so created a problem for the Mother as to how and where they were to be placed. They had forgotten to bring their towels with them; and as the ordinary ones which the Mother's household could boast of could not be offered to these genteel people, she had to search a long time for some presentable ones. And, then, it transpired that they had brought no strings for their mosquito nets, and so Brahmachari Hari had to run about for procuring some. Hard put to it, the Mother was heard soliloquizing. 'How pestered I am by all these people! I am fed up with it all. Some of the boys come and my household seems to be filled with peace; I have nothing to worry about. They eat without murmur whatever comes to hand and then get up taking along with them the leaves on which they eat. And look at these others! I am all agog from the morning. And now the problem is, what curry should be cooked for the night? Master, do you mind your own family. I am no longer able to cope with this. Radhu is trouble enough and here are these others in the bargain.'

Are such reactions indicative either of a disgust mixed with affection or of demonstration before the attendants of the difference between two types of devotion, the one which delights in show and reveals its ineptitude at every turn and the other which though quiet and undemonstrative, yet consists in pure love mixed with faith? Before we arrive at any conclusion let us deal with some more incidents of a similar type. Apropos of this, we may say that under similar circumstances, the Master's attitude also differed in accordance with the mental states of the

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knowledge as expressible in thought and words, or in other words identical with consciousness as embodied in human beings.

devotees. Moreover, those who are not fully acquainted with the Jayrambati life of the Mother, will not realize how the Mother, who was adored on the one hand as the Universal Mother by many and who directed the destinies of innumerable others, had yet to court untold physical labour and undergo mental worries, even in her old age, all for the sake of making others contented. And in particular, we have to remember that the incident cited last happened at a time when the passing away of the Mother was not far away, and when she dropped hints off and on about that sad day. It is not difficult for any intelligent reader to see that, though the above soliloquy apparently expresses her vexation, yet below the surface is the covert forewarning of her impending departure. In the chapters 'Radhu' and 'In A Domestic Setting', we have seen how she had been praying to the Master for release from her earthly mission. The concluding sentences of the above soliloquy only underline that sentiment.

Almost contemporaneously with the above incident, one day, in early winter, a devotee came to Jayrambati with his wife and four daughters. They had started from Garbeta the previous afternoon, by bullock-carts, and after having reached Jibta in the morning, had walked to the Mother's home, a distance of a mile and a half, with the help of a guide. All the children were very young and one was a suckling baby suffering from malaria. The devotee became perplexed in the new place under such circumstances, and extremely worried that he might be causing difficulties to the Mother. She, however, welcomed them with such love and care that they got over their hesitation in a trice, the wife of the devotee began to behave as freely as if she were in her father's house. With deft hands the Mother made all possible arrangements for them in her little home, and even the baby had its milk and a place to lie down in. At the time of bathing, the devotee's wife went to the tank with other women of the household and returned with a pitcher of water at her waist. The couple

were initiated by the Mother after the morning worship. The party had to go to Talit in the Burdwan district, a long way from Garbeta which it takes three nights to cover. So they started on their journey after their midday meal and a nominal rest at Jayrambati. At the time of departure they, as also the Mother, shed tears, and the Mother called on goddess Durga for their safety on the way; and then stood at the place looking out after them till they went out of sight. Then she went inside and sat on Nalini Devi's verandah, saying regretfully that, though her children had come from a distance facing all the troubles of the journey, they had to leave quickly without rest, or even a little hearty talk, or any good food. Just then somebody saw a bath towel left there by mistake. The Mother said with sorrow, 'It's so natural to forget! They couldn't stay even for a night, and didn't have a chat—does the mind want to go away like this? And so mistakes are inevitable.' Seeing the Mother sad, Brahmachari Gopesh suggested that as the devotees could not have gone far, he could catch them up and give them the towel by walking fast after them. He did so with the Mother's consent. But on returning he found a second problem had cropped up. A woman of the household had found a cloth-piece of the devotee's wife-drying in the sun on the tank behind. She brought it in and then went on cutting jokes at the expense of the forgetful wife. A childless woman joined in the joke saying, 'which one should she take care of—so many are her brood!' The Mother saw the cloth piece and heard the pungent remark; but she said with a heavy sigh, 'Dear me! My child will be missing her cloth tomorrow after bath; when she will be searching for it she will recollect, "I left it at the Mother's house."' Gopesh volunteered to go with the cloth once again, but Nalini Devi disapproved of the idea. The Mother, however, seemed pleased at the idea. So he walked up to Jibta, and caught up with the party just as the carts were starting.

There came a group of devotees from Mymensing, of whom the leader was an initiated disciple of the Mother.

As he was in indifferent health and knew that the party's long stay at Jayrampati would inconvenience the Mother, he decided to leave for home soon after visiting the Master's house at Kamarpukur. But as ill luck would have it, he fell ill at Jayarambati just after the Kamarpukur visit. The Mother's attendants concluded that they should send him by a palanquin to Koalpara to ensure better medical care and to free the Mother's house from an avoidable encumbrance. The Mother was informed after the plan had taken shape. She heard all this without a word, creating thereby the unmistakable impression that though she disliked the idea she would not stand in their way. She had recently recovered from an illness, and was under strict regimen. She was given the juice of one pomegranate every day; but as the after-effects of the First World War had made these fruits difficult to procure, they were brought from Calcutta and kept in the custody of the attendants; for it was the habit of the Mother to give away anything that lay at hand. Today she had the desire to give one of the fruits to the ailing disciple. The attendants' protests went in vain; the disciple had the pomegranate and along with it all the good wishes of the Mother.

The plan was to carry away the patient after the midday meal. But Swami Vidyananda came with a palanquin a little before evening. There appeared at this time a small patch of black cloud in the sky; still the party for Koalpara started with the patient. Not long after, a thunder squall broke out. The Mother had been taking rest after the day's occupations. But the storm raging outside and the rain pouring in torrents startled her. She rushed out to the verandah helter-skelter and said, 'Ah me! What will happen to my child!' The attendant persuaded her to re-enter the room. There, again, she went on praying piteously, 'Master, do save my son.' As the storm abated, her ferment, too, was somewhat assuaged. But as the squall shrieked again with redoubled fury, the Mother, too, made for the verandah and prayed.

with a choked voice and tearful eyes, 'Prithee, Master, do be a little gracious, save my child.' The whole night passed in anxiety. Next day, when Vidyananda came to inform her that they had taken shelter in somebody's drawing room at Desra during the storm, so that they had no trouble whatsoever, then only was the Mother's heart composed.

Devotees came with diverse demands, and the Mother with her resourceful ministration and never-failing love, satisfied all these capricious children. Their childish whims were mostly in evidence at Jayrambati, where the Mother freed herself from all the unnatural restrictions of a cultured urban society, and the devotees found her more readily accessible than at the 'Udbodhan' where a strict vigilance was enforced. Many devotees, therefore, kept themselves informed of the Mother's movements and flocked to her village home when she happened to be there.

From the point of view of the Mother, there was a difference between Calcutta and Jayrambati. In Calcutta the monks and Golap-Ma and others had charge of household duties and of looking after the comforts of the devotees. Thus the Mother was not directly occupied with these duties. At Jayrambati on the contrary, everything rested on her. The devotees came to take *mantra* or see the Mother; but she had to keep a constant eye on all kinds of provision for their food, accommodation, conveniences, and necessities. This service of the devotees became something of a second nature with her. It might not have appeared as anything extraordinary; but we wonder how unassuming and diligent is the life of that unique personage who was none other than the Universal Mother, who was adored as such by thousands of devout people, and through whose mind and body was enkindled in the beginning of the twentieth century a mighty force which has addressed itself to the task of human regeneration and is calculated to be so occupied for ages. And how charming does that life become through a unique mixture of rural simplicity with unquestioning love! In the field of spirituality this is

altogether a rare phenomenon. Facts are indeed stranger than fiction.

The devotees came at odd hours, and that also without notice. Often enough they were strangers, though their dress and bearing revealed their culture and high social status. The villagers would look on them with amazement or hang on them with curiosity. But the Mother who was the centre of that mighty force that attracted all these high personages was oblivious of the commotion around her; and like the village girl that she was, she was ever engaged in various duties for them in and about her little cottage. Some of the new-comers were accustomed to taking tea soon after leaving bed, and so she would limp about with her rheumatic feet to get some milk from somebody's house whose cow may have been milked by then. Vegetables were not easy to procure in that hamlet. The little that she had collected from distant villages would sometimes run short because of the sudden influx of devotees. The Mother would go on searching from house to house for some more for immediate use. In the remote place nothing more could be had for refreshment than mere fried-rice and molasses. The Mother, therefore, would carefully stock semolina (soojee) with which she prepared *halva*. And after offering this preparation in the morning to the Master together with some fruits, she would deal out the *prasada* in small cups for the breakfast of her children. Whenever her stock was exhausted she would hand over to them cupfuls of fried rice, cucumber, and molasses. The cultured devotee would protest, 'What's this stuff that you give me to eat, Mother; I am n't used to it.' The Mother would persuade him saying, 'Nothing else is available here, my son, this is all that can be had. Do eat this, it won't do you any harm. I shall feed you more nicely when I go to Calcutta.' The devotees from East Bengal were used to eating fish which, however, was difficult to obtain at Jayrambati. Still there would be no end to the Mother's effort. If she could not procure it, she would feel sad and say, 'I could not

feed my child well.' And though she was ever busy in this way, there was no disgust, rather she would say to her sisters-in-law with pride, 'Hullo, my dear, I have no trouble on account of my children. Even though a hundred of my children should come, I can tackle them all single-handed.'

Her motherliness defied all limitations of caste, country and community. Even during the days of the boycott of foreign goods (1905-11) when people's prejudices against the Britishers ran high, the Mother was heard to say, 'They too are my children, to be sure.' The authorities of the Kankurgachhi Yogodyana once invited her to visit the place during the Janmashtami celebration and she gladly agreed. But someone who had taken some umbrage against the people there, did not like the idea and told the Mother so. At this she said, 'It's your quarrel, my dear; but am I not their mother also?' A doctor's wife prayed after saluting the Mother, 'Mother, kindly bless me so that your son (my husband) may have a good practice.' The Mother gave her a straight look and said sternly, 'My dear daughter-in-law, to think that I should pronounce such a benediction,—that people should fall sick, that they should suffer! Well, dear, I can never do that. Let all be well, let the world prosper.' When saluting the Mother of the Universe after bathing, the Mother could be heard to pray, 'Dear Mother of the Universe, do grant happiness to the world.' The mad aunt was full of abuse for the Mother who, however, totally ignored her vagaries. But one day the aunt happened to say, 'Thou ruiner of all!' The Mother at once warned her, 'Whatever else you may call me, don't you call me ruiner of all. My children are spread all over the world; such a curse will be harmful to them.' We have come across many an incident illustrative of this all-comprehensiveness of her Motherliness so far as people of this country are concerned. Let us now turn to a few foreign devotees.

At Jayrambati, in 1906, she said to the young Brahmachari Girija, 'Mark you! The Master entered into spiritual

trance very often. One day, as he came down from a long *samadhi*, he said, "Listen, my dear, I went to a land where the people are all white. Ah! How sincere is their devotion!" Could I imagine then that these—Ole Bull<sup>1</sup> and others—would become devotees? I was at a loss to think who these white persons could be.' It might have been incomprehensible to a girl brought up in an inaccessible village amidst rural simplicity and ignorance; but her all-comprehending motherliness, liberal outlook, and stately courtesy soon elevated her to a level where distances and colours were obliterated, yielding place to only an unquenchable affection.

Though a brahmin widow, she could mix freely with the foreigners, even to the extent of eating with them. Swami Vivekananda writes in his letter of March 1898, 'Shri Mother is here, and the European and American ladies went the other day to see her, and what do you think, Mother ate with them even there! Is not that grand?'

When Sister Nivedita returned from her Kashmir tour, she 'insisted on being the guest of women' so that she might become a part and parcel of Indian society, thereby becoming a fit instrument for the uplift of the country. This was no easy problem for Swami Vivekananda to solve. But the Holy Mother promptly came to his rescue. Nivedita was accepted as a daughter and accommodated in the Holy Mother's House in Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> Whenever Nivedita came to the Holy Mother, the Mother seated her by her side and there was no bar to the exchange of genuine feelings which create their own vehicles of communication. One day, when Nivedita came and sat by the Mother, the latter presented to her a woollen fan and said, 'I made this for you.' The gift delighted Nivedita so much that she sometimes touched it with her head, sometimes held it

1. She was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda and helped him in his work in various ways. She was very much attached to the Mother.

2. *The Master as I Saw Him*, VII Edn., p. 143.

to her bosom, and said, 'How fine, how charming!' Her happiness made the Mother say, 'Do you see how glad she is at getting that insignificant thing. Ah! How simple is her faith, as though a veritable goddess! How devoted she is to Naren (Vivekananda)! She has come here after giving up everything and is working here just because Naren was born here. What a devotion for the guru and what a fondness for this land!' Sister Nivedita presented to the Mother a nickel case, in which she kept the Master's hair, and she used to say, 'Nivedita said, "Mother, we were Hindus in our previous birth. We are born over there, so that the Master's message may spread."'

The Mother carefully preserved the gifts she got from her children and said, 'After all, what's a thing worth by itself; it's the memory that counts.' We refer to a much later incident. When Rammay (Gaurishwarananda) was taking out the clothes from the Mother's box for sunning them, he came across a fold—rotten wrapper of *endi* (Assam silk), and said, 'Mother, what's the need of keeping this one? It's all gone; let me throw it away. But the Mother said, 'No, my son; it was given me by Nivedita with great love; let it be there.' With these words she took the wrapper in hand, inserted black cumin seeds in its folds as a preservative, laid it by carefully and said, 'The very sight of the cloth reminds me of Nivedita. What a wonderful girl she was, my dear! At first she could not talk with me, and the boys acted as interpreters. Later on she picked up the Bengali language. She loved my mother very much.'

When Sister Christine visited the Mother with Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School, a few days after Nivedita's demise the Mother remembered the intimate friendship that Christine had with Nivedita and said to Sudhira Devi 'Alas! They two lived together. Now it will be so sad for her to live alone!' And to Christine she said, 'Considering how even our hearts feel so intensely for her, yours will do so all the more, my dear. What a personality she was!

And how many are now weeping for her!' And the Mother began shedding tears. Then she made Christine tell her many things about the School.

From the conduct of Miss MacLeod<sup>1</sup> one evening we can get a glimpse of the kind of absorption the Mother's love could bring about. That day Swami Nirbhayananda had escorted her in a boat from the Belur Math to the 'Udbodhan.' When they returned, the evening service at the chapel was in progress. Miss MacLeod made her obeisance at the shrine, meditated for a while, and then started for her own quarters at the guest house of the Math. As it had become dark, Swami Dhirananda asked a Brahmachari to accompany her with a lantern. Miss MacLeod had already advanced a few steps ahead. When the Brahmachari drew near her, she was heard repeating to herself, 'I've seen her, I've seen her.' Suddenly she was aware of the Brahmachari's presence, and bringing her face to his ears she whispered with great emotion, 'The Holy Mother! I've seen her.' She covered a furlong in this mood of elation, hardly noticing where her footsteps fell or if her feet touched the ground at all; and every now and then she kept on uttering the word 'Mother' and making some soliloquy. In this connection we are put in mind of the high regard that Sister Nivedita had for the Mother. In a letter dated the 11th of December, 1911, written from Cambridge Mass., Nivedita acknowledges that when thinking of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Holy Mother's face flashes in her mind.

The Mother did not stop merely by showering her love on these foreign devotees; she sometimes picked up their customs wonderfully well. One summer afternoon in April 1920, when a European woman came to her, the Mother said, 'Come,' and stretched forth her hand in the

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1. A disciple of Swami Vivekananda who remained unmarried throughout her life and preached the Swami's message in and outside India through her saintly life and impressive talks. She and her sister Mrs. Leggett were called Jaya and Vijaya respectively by the great Swami.

European manner, caught hold of the woman's hand, and then kissed her in the Bengali fashion by touching her chin with the hand. The woman's daughter was ill, and so she came to seek the Mother's benediction. The Mother blessed her whole-heartedly, and then giving her some *bel* leaves and a lotus flower that had been offered to the Master she said, 'Touch your daughter's head with these.' The woman departed thanking her gratefully. The girl recovered; but the woman kept up her acquaintance with the Mother and took initiation from her in due course. The Mother loved her very much.

From Sister Nivedita we quote the following to illustrate the Mother's power to penetrate a new religious feeling or idea:

'I first realized this gift in the Holy Mother, on the occasion of a visit that she paid us in recent years, on the afternoon of a certain Easter-Day. Before that, probably, I had always been too much absorbed, when with her, in striving to learn what she represented, to think of observing her in the contrary position. On this particular occasion, however, after going over our whole house, the Mother and her party expressed a desire to rest in the chapel, and hear something of the meaning of the Christian festival. This was followed by Easter music, and singing, with our small French organ. And in the swiftness of her comprehension and the depth of her sympathy with these resurrection hymns, unimpeded by any foreignness or unfamiliarity in them, we saw revealed for the first time, one of the most impressive aspects of the great religious culture of Sarada Devi. The same trait came out again one evening, when in the midst of her little circle the Holy Mother asked *guru-bhagini* and myself, to describe to her a European wedding. With much fun and laughter, personating now the "Christian brahmin", and again the bride and bridegroom, we complied. But we were neither of us prepared for the effect of the marriage vow, "For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in

health—till death do us part,” were words that drew exclamations of delight from all about us. But none appreciated them as did the Mother. Again and again she had them repeated to her. “Oh the *Dharmi* words! the righteous words!” she said. (*The Master as I saw Him*, pp. 149–50).

## SPIRITUAL MINISTRATION

We have already spoken of how the Master revealed the Mother's identity with Saraswati, the goddess of learning, who had come down to impart wisdom. The wisdom that he spoke of had no worldly connotation, but it meant that flowering of the mind whereby it can have a life-transforming vision of Divinity. This awakening of a higher consciousness was one of the main functions of the Mother. But while we analyse this character and compose different chapters just because it suits our convenience to study a magnificent personality from different points of view, we must remember that it is an indivisible whole, which again draws its sustenance from and has its being in a more basic Entity. This ultimate Power defies all attempts at fragmentation; and so our limited intellect cannot grasp this Infinity. Still through our prismatic mind we try to understand Saradamani Devi as the mother, the guru, or the Deity. But a little thought will convince us that all these three aspects are inalienably blended in her finely integrated and harmonized life. Whenever she appears to us as the Mother, we get also a glimpse of her inherent power of imparting that true knowledge that dispels all ignorance; when we approach her as a guru, she draws us to her lap as a mother; and when we want to recognize the mother and guru in her, we find her seated transcendently in her divine effulgence. In fact, we cannot discern where any of these mutually dependent aspects ends and another begins. And yet, we have to proceed along this ingenious path of analysis, for man cannot do otherwise. To us, then, she is the mother, full of unquestioning affection; Sarada, the bestower of the highest wisdom; and the Deity (Devi), full of purity, glory, and supernormal powers, and granting salvation to all. Of the early manifestation of the power of spiritual ministration and its evolution in her life, we have already got

a glimpse. In the present chapter we shall visualize its consummation.

The power of imparting wisdom that we meet with in the Mother is only one phase of the Divine grace that took human form for the good of all. If we approach this from the point of view of ordinary spiritual relationship, we shall merely be depriving ourselves of a fuller comprehension. The true guru is a saviour, who through his unbounded love accepts the entire responsibility of his disciple. Not only this; often enough he transfers to himself the disciple's sins and physical maladies and suffers vicariously. He does this consciously; and though he suffers in consequence, he does not give it up. Such instances are plentiful in the Mother's life; but we shall relate only a few for satisfying the curiosity of the readers. During her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', the Mother communicated her inner feelings to a devotee<sup>1</sup> thus, 'Do you think that even though the Master does not spare this body, I can have any respite till any of the souls whose responsibility I have accepted is left unredeemed? I shall have to be by their side. I have accepted the burden of all their merits and demerits. It is no fun to impart initiation. What a burden one has to take upon one's shoulders, and how much thought one has to bestow on them! See, for instance, when your father died, I too felt sad. I thought, "What a trial the Master has now thrust this boy into!" My anxiety is, how you can struggle out of it. That's why I talked with you so much. How can you understand all this? If you could understand everything, my burden would be less heavy. The Master is making diverse people play in diverse ways; and it is I who have to bear the brunt. I can't possibly leave those whom I have accepted as my own.'

This relationship between the guru and the disciple is not established by any formal process for this present span of life; it is an obligation voluntarily undertaken by the

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1. He was then a Brahmachari, but left the Order after remaining in it for some years.

guru out of his compassion and lasts for all eternity. The Mother carried on a constant mental *japa*. In old age, when owing to physical weakness, she had to spend longer hours in her bed, the attendant noticed that she was doing *japa* even while in bed. At night her sleep was very light, so much so, that she responded to the first call. The attendant might ask in wonder, 'Are you not asleep, or don't you get sleep?' The Mother would reply, 'What can I do, my son? The boys come and entreat me eagerly. They take the *mantra* and go home. But nobody does any *japa* regularly. Some don't do it even once. Yet as I have shouldered the burden, should I not look after them? That's why I do *japa* and pray to the Master, "O Master, grant them enlightenment, grant them emancipation, and do you take on yourself their care in every way here and hereafter! This world is full of trials and tribulations. May they never have to come back again."'

Into a devotee's mind the Mother instilled these words of courage and assurance, 'What fear need you have, my son? Your thought comes to me well enough. You need not do anything; I am doing everything for you.' The devotee inquired, 'Do you have to work for all your sons wherever they may be?' The Mother replied, 'For all I have to work.' The devotee further asked, 'You have so many children; do you remember them all?' The Mother first admitted that she could not recollect all; and then she explained, 'I do *japa* for those whom I can recollect. And for those that I don't remember I pray to the Master thus, "Master, I have many sons in many places. Do you please look after those whose names I can't remember, and graciously grant that they may prosper."'

Out of a childish heedlessness, Swami Vishweshwarananda once suggested to the Mother that, since it was not possible for her to think personally of the welfare of each of her disciples, it was meet and proper to keep their number within practicable limits. The Mother met the accusation in her simple and guileless way by saying, 'As to

that, the Master did not forbid me. He explained so many things to me; would he not have forbidden this if he had felt the need? I entrust all the responsibility to the Master and to him I pray every day, "Do please look after every one of them, wherever they may be." And mind you, these *mantras* have all come from the Master—he gave them to me—and they are of proved efficacy.' In other words, the good of the disciples did not depend merely on their being remembered by the guru; the *mantra* had its own intrinsic power.

About the power of *mantra* and the taking over of sins, the Mother said to Brahmachari Rashbihari on another occasion (February 1913), 'Energy is transferred through a *mantra*—the guru's goes to the disciple and the disciple's comes to the guru. That's how sin is accepted through the imparting of *mantra* and the body gets so many diseases. It's a hard task to be a guru; one has to take over the disciples' sins. The guru has to take a share if a sin is committed by a disciple. If the disciple is good, the guru also is benefited.'

The Mother was at the Belur Math during the worship of Durga in 1916, when on the second day of the celebration many devotees saluted her by touching her feet. Subsequently Yogin-Ma saw the Mother washing her feet again and again with Ganges water, and she said, 'What are you at, Mother? You will catch cold as a result of this.' The Mother replied, 'How can I explain, Yogen? The body becomes soothed when some people touch my feet, while it is on fire as it were, when others do so, and I don't get relief unless I wash the feet with Ganges water.'

The Mother suffered, and she was aware of the cause of the suffering, and yet for the disciples' good she worked without wincing, though on rare occasions one could get an inkling of the real state of things from such casual remarks as this: 'My God! It's as though I am having all-day bouts of wrestling—the devotees come in a never-ending stream. It is too much for this body. As a result of my

prayer to the Master I have succeeded in keeping the mind constantly engaged here through thoughts of Radhu.' In reality, however, this was a passing mood in a mind that had willingly taken upon itself the task of universal welfare; and though such sentiments expressed her agonies, they never indicated bitterness. Once a devotee said, 'Mother, it's said that you have got rheumatism because of your acceptance of the devotees' sins. I have an earnest prayer to make—don't you suffer for my sake; ordain it so that I myself may suffer the consequences of my own work.' The Mother replied quickly, 'How can that be so, my boy, how can that be so? You keep well, and let me suffer.'

Although the Mother thus suffered for her disciples' sins, her outlook on sinners was one of pity rather than of hatred. A devotee was apprehensive that even after getting a mother like the Holy Mother he might not have his life's objective fulfilled. The Mother encouraged him saying, 'Why are you afraid, son? Know that the Master is ever behind you. And I am there. Don't fear so long as I am your Mother. For the Master has truly promised to me, "At the last moment I shall lead by the hand all those who will come to you." Whatsoever any one of you may do, and howsoever any one may behave, the Master will have to come at last to take you. The Lord has given (men) hands and feet (the senses); and sure enough, they will have their play.'

A woman of a respectable family, who had misbehaved through some evil impulse, became penitent and was led by good luck to the Holy Mother. She stood trembling with a sense of her guilt at the doorway and said, 'Mother, what will be my lot? I am not fit to draw nearer to you in this holy chapel.' The Mother stepped forward and throwing her holy arms round the woman's neck, said, 'Come, my daughter, come in. You have realized what sin is, and you are repentant. Come, I shall initiate you. Lay everything at the Master's feet; and cast away all fear.' The Mother

herself explained one day the cause of this unstinted love, 'Why, my dear, did the Master come only to enjoy *rasagollas*?'

In association with her vicarious suffering for the sins of others was to be found an unquenchable desire for doing good. If she had no new devotee at her place at Jayrambati, she would often be heard to say, 'There's no devotee today.' When Swami Gaurishananda was at Jayrambati, the Mother's rheumatism had worsened, making it difficult for her to move about freely. But even in that state the Swami heard her say one day to the Master, 'This day, too, is going in vain! No one has turned up today! Did you not say, "You will have to do some thing or other every day?"' She kept on looking out to see if anyone was coming, saying to the Master with fixed eyes, 'How is it, Master? Will the day go in vain?' The Mother's face brightened up when three devotees came the next day.

She used to say, 'I impart *mantra* out of pity. They become importunate, they weep, their sight fills me with mercy. Out of compassion I grant initiation. Else what do I gain? One has to take over sins by giving initiation. I think thus, 'The body will go anyhow: still let them have something.' A devotee one day (January 1912) communicated to the Mother a dream in which a certain man was begging her for initiation and she was refusing him saying, 'If I do anything to this man just now, then I shall not live, — my body will fall away.' The dreamer also forbade the Mother; still she did something to the man by touching his chest and neck while repeating those words of apprehension. Hearing of the dream the Mother said, 'I become so disgusted at times by the supplication of some people that I think, "This body will certainly fall off; so let it go even now; let me give him *mantra*."' At Banaras, the Mother said on another occasion (November 1912), 'I don't remember to have done any sin from my birth. I touched him (Sri Ramakrishna) when I was five years old. Even granting that my wisdom had not deve-

loped then, there's no denying the fact that he touched me. Why should I then have such ordeals? Others are becoming free by virtue of their having touched him; and is my delusion alone so exceptionally great? My mind that tries to soar high day and night, I keep down through compassion for these people.' At the Koalpara Ashrama, a devotee advised the Mother, 'Since the touch of your devotees makes you suffer, it is better to avoid it.' But the Mother replied, 'No, my son, it's for this that we came. If we don't take over the sins and sufferings, and don't digest them, who else will? Who else will bear the burden of the sinners?' She said, however, 'A pure man's touch brings joy.' But we are at present pursuing a different topic; now we are discussing the unquestioning love of the ever graceful Mother.

One morning three devotees came to Jayrambati with a letter of introduction from Swami Brahmananda. The Mother heard the letter read out and called in the devotees; but she sat with her legs folded, though it was usual for her, because of her rheumatism, to keep them stretched out even in the presence of devotees. After the devotees had saluted her, she was heard saying, 'So, at last Rakhal has sent me these!' She refused to initiate them and directed them to go to the Belur Math. The devotees obeyed her for the time being and went to the outer apartment. But their disappointment was too great to be easily assuaged; and hence they approached her for the second time to be more propitious. She, however, was inflexible and spoke to the Master thus, 'Master, I prayed to you yesterday that the day might not pass uselessly. And at long last you too bring these!' Inexorability was, however, against her grain; and she yielded at last saying, 'Master, let me carry on your work so long as the body lasts.' The initiation was duly finished. A few days later Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Shivananda, and Saradananda heard the whole incident sitting on the upper verandah of the Belur Math on the Ganges side. The

narration over, Swami Brahmananda sat without a word for a pretty long time. Swami Premananda heaved a long sigh and said with folded hands, 'Mercy, mercy! It's by this glorious compassion that the Mother is protecting us for ever. We can't express in words the poison that she has accepted. If we had done so, we would have been burnt down to ashes.'

Swayed by compassion, the Mother could not sometimes take care of her own health. Once when she had become very feeble owing to continuous suffering from malaria, and by Swami Saradananda's instruction interviews etc., had been suspended, there came a visitor from Barisal. Then ensued a discussion among the attendants as to whether he should be allowed to see the Mother. She, however, heard something of the talk that was going on and, coming to the door of the house, told Swami Parameshwarananda, 'Why do you prevent his coming?' The Swami replied, 'Swami Saradananda has ordered us to do so.' At this she said firmly, 'What has Sarat to say? That's why we have come. I shall initiate him.' And in truth she did initiate him the next day.

A devotee, however weak he might be, would have an accession of strength, courage and faith, if he could but come to the Mother. A devotee could not have peace of mind although he made *japa*. The Mother told him encouragingly that the mind would be pacified by practice. But this could hardly comfort him. He had heard that if a disciple failed to make *japa*, it harmed the guru; hence he wanted to return the *mantra* to the Mother. At this she said, 'Now see, how he talks! I lose my sleep in thought of you all; and the Master has blessed you long ago.' Tears rolled down her cheeks as she spoke; and with emotions she continued, 'Well, you need not make any *japa* of the *mantra* any more.' The devotee returned to his senses now, and in consternation he ejaculated, 'Mother, so you snatch away everything I had! What am I to do now? Am I, then, O Mother, condemned to hell?'

The Mother at once uttered these heartening words, 'What! You, who are my son, will be damned! Whoever has come here, whoever is my son is already redeemed. Destiny dare not throw my children into hell. Free yourself from all anxiety by entrusting your future to me. And remember this always, that there's one behind you who will come to you at the right moment and leads you to the everlasting domain.' In a similar position she cheered up another drooping spirit with the words, 'Whatever may be the position now (i.e., even though *japa* and meditation may not be very regular), the Master will have to come at last (to take you). He himself promised this; can his own words be meaningless? Do as it pleases you.'

On receiving a despondent letter at Jayrambati from a Sannyasin disciple in 1916, she said, 'How is that, my dear! Is the Master's name such an empty word as to go in vain? That name can never fail. Those who have come here with their minds fixed on the Master, will have the vision of their chosen Deity as a dead certainty. If they don't get this at any other time, they can't but have it at the time of death.'

In the foregoing assurance the Mother has drawn pointed attention to the need of strengthening one's faith for the chosen Deity or for both the guru and the chosen Deity. In the two illustrations we adduce, now, faith and reverence for the guru are more prominently emphasized. Sri Mahendranath Gupta, on his arrival at Jayrambati in 1915, imagined that any meditation or *japa* undertaken at the holy village of the Mother's nativity would lead to greater results. Therefore he overdid these a little one day. When he went to salute the Mother that day, she said, 'Now that you are with your mother, what's the need of so much *japa* and meditation? I, indeed, am doing everything for you. Now eat and live merrily, free from all care.'

In 1907, Swami Girijananda, then a Brahmachari, was told by the Mother at Jayrambati, 'My boy, it's not

proper to make any *japa* in the guru's house.' And yet a little earlier he had been told by her, 'The repetition of the *mantra* for at least one hundred and eight times in accordance with the guru's direction must be done by you every day without fail. Then, again, you are holy men; you will have to do *japa* always.' Finding the two instructions rather contradictory, Girijananda asked, 'Should I then forgo the repetition of the *mantra* even for one hundred and eight times?' 'You will repeat one hundred and eight times as instructed by the guru', corrected the Mother at once, 'but nothing more.'

In these invaluable talks one gets on the one hand examples of the promise of redemption coupled with generation of faith, and on the other hand indication of acceptance of the responsibility of the disciple and a fervent appeal for cultivating love for the guru and God. In this connection we recall — first, that the Master asked Girishchandra Ghosh to give up all formal practices and to execute a power of attorney, as it were, in favour of the Master to do everything in his stead; and secondly, that Jesus Christ indicated that as a marriage party spends the time in merriment in the bridegroom's company, so also if Christ's disciples cultivated real love for him rather than punctiliousness for formalities, they would be nearer Heaven. In the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (VI.23), love for the guru and god has been eulogized as an absolute necessity. In fact, how can one meditate upon another if one has no love for the entity concerned? And how can one have any faith in any wisdom, if one has it not for the teacher? Therefore it was that the Mother shouldered her children's responsibility, and loved them fondly, and in return expected them to love her equally and to accept her as the one guiding star of their lives.

But the above discussion should not make any reader jump to the conclusion that the Mother decried *japa* or meditation, or for the matter of that, any formal practice as such. If that were so, why did she initiate hundreds of

her disciples, and why did she train them in spiritual practices? In fact, the above examples are extraordinary, and they underline something more fundamental than meets the eye. We introduced them simply because uncommon examples more easily bring into prominence the essential qualities of a rare personality. But if we confine our vision merely to these events, we shall have at best a partial view of the character we are studying. She came for the generality of people and spent her life among them. Hence to understand her fully we must descend to this level of common man. We shall find her that for ordinary men she chose an integrated formal path of faith and devotion, into which she breathed a new life; and she made easy and enjoyable a strict spiritual discipline that was otherwise hard and horrifying.

After initiation, Sri Nareshchandra Chakravarty asked her, 'Mother, shall I have to become a vegetarian now?' The Mother replied, 'What a question! Why should you be a vegetarian? Why should my boys be vegetarians? You should eat plentifully and live cheerfully.' But when he asked again, 'Suppose I can't do *japa* of the *mantra* of my chosen Deity', the Mother said with a firm voice, 'What do you mean? You won't do *japa* of your *mantra*? What a suggestion! If you don't do the *japa*, you lose; that affects me not in the least!'

To a devotee the Mother said, 'How can one do without *japa*, and meditation? These have got to be done.' When the devotee complained that the impurities of his mind were not being removed in spite of these, she said, 'Through the practice of *japa* they will go. How can one afford to do without these practices?' Another devotee asked the Mother (1907) about initiation, 'Well, Mother, what's the need of taking a *mantra*? If instead of doing *japa* of a particular *mantra*, one simply goes on repeating "Mother Kali", "Mother Kali", (for instance), will that not be sufficient?' The Mother replied, 'The *mantra* purifies the body. A man becomes holy by doing *japa* of the

Lord's *mantra*... The *mantra* is necessary for purification of the body, if not for anything else.' On another occasion (February 1913), a disciple showed her a tiny seed of the huge banyan tree and said, 'Do you see, Mother, how small it is — tinier even than the tiniest seed we know, and yet what a huge tree sprouts from it!' The Mother said, 'Why should it not be so? Consider, for instance, how small the seed of the Lord's name is; and yet from this sprout in time divine moods, devotion and love.'

A disciple who had developed mental aberration, returned his rosary to the Mother. When a monk asked her whether he had returned the *mantra* also, she replied, 'Can that ever be? It's a living *mantra*. Can there be any giving back of it — the *mantra* that one has once received, the great *mantra* that it is? If one has but once a love for his guru, can he ever be despoiled of it?'

About the efficacy of *japa* the Mother once said, 'By *japa* and austerity is cut asunder the bondage of *Karma* (past action). But God can't be realized except through love and devotion. As for *japa* and such other things, do you know what they stand for? Through them the senses etc., become subdued.' On another day she said, 'One should perform *japa*, meditation, etc., at regular hours giving no room for laziness.' At other times she declared, 'If one can repeat the *mantra* fifteen to twenty thousand times every day, then it will show results. Let him do so first, if he does not get success, let him come and say so. But one has to practise a little attentively. Doing nothing and neglecting everything, they merely complain, "Why does not my *japa* bear fruit?", 'Work you have to do as a matter of course; work keeps the mind well. But *japa*, meditation, and prayer are specially needed; one should sit up at least in the morning and in the evening. That is like the helm of a boat. When one sits up for a while in the evening, there comes to one's mind for consideration what one has done throughout the day. Then one has to compare the

state of mind one has today with what one had yesterday. Then one should meditate on one's chosen Deity as one goes on doing *japa*. How can you know how you are conducting yourself unless you have *japa* and meditation every morning and evening side by side with work? 'It's very necessary to have a fixed time for *japa* and meditation.' Again, she instructed certain advanced souls to have a constant remembrance of God. At the time of returning home (April 1919) after initiation at Koalpara, a certain devotee asked her, 'Mother, what's the secret?' She pointed to a small timepiece in a niche, and said, 'As that timepiece is ticking, so also go on repeating God's name, that will bring you everything; nothing more need be done.'

In fact, *japa* occupied a very high place in her estimation. When instructing a gifted man about the path of knowledge, she might say now and then, 'That *japa* or muttering is meant for women; you have your knowledge;' but if we extend our search beyond such unusual utterances, we shall find her emphasizing the importance of *japa* again and again, and herself doing *japa* for the good of her disciples. Nevertheless, from a higher standpoint she unequivocally decried *japa* as a mere mechanical process when she said, 'These *mantras* and the like are nothing, my daughter; devotion is all. In the Master you will find your guru and chosen Deity. He is all.' And drawing attention to divine grace she said, 'You talk of having done so much of *japa*, or so much of work; but nothing will avail. Who can achieve anything unless Mahamaya opens the way. O creatures, surrender yourselves, just surrender yourselves. Then only will She be gracious and clear the way for you.' To another devotee she said, 'Through *japa* and austerity the bondage of *Karma* is cut asunder, but God cannot be realized unless through love and devotion. Did the cowherds get Krishna by *japa* and meditation or by talking to him chummily as "Come here, dear", "Take this, dear", "Eat this, dear"?''

Till one attains this attitude of surrender and this passionate love, no spiritual practice is to be neglected; any one aspiring to salvation must have recourse to one of these practices. A consideration of the Mother's instruction about the various disciplines will impress this fact on us. Sri Shyamacharan Chakravarty of Rangoon began practising the control of breath for about three hours a day in accordance with what he had read in the *Raja-yoga* of Swami Vivekananda. As a result, he began to have a buzzing sound in his ears of which he could not be cured, so that he had to take leave from his office. On his visit to the Belur Math during this leave, he came to know of the Holy Mother and proceeded to Jayrambati. As soon as he set foot in the village, his ailment left him. Afterwards when he apprised the Mother of his intention to practise *yoga*, she replied, 'What energy have you stored up in your body, my boy, and what have you in your mind that you want to practise *yoga*?' 'Have I no way out, then?' asked the eager devotee. 'I shall tell you whatever is to be done,' assured the Mother. After initiation she instructed him to do *japa* twice daily. Shyamacharan wanted to do it thrice and wished to know if anything more need be done. The Mother repeated her instruction about doing *japa* twice daily and concluded, 'That's enough for all you want.' 'What shall I do when on a journey?' inquired the disciple. 'It will be enough if you think mentally,' replied the Mother.

A monastic disciple asked her in Banaras (January 1913), 'I have been practising the control of breath a little; should I continue it?' The Mother replied, 'You may do it just a little; it's no good heating the brain by too much practice of it. And if the mind settles down of its own accord, what more need is there of the control of breath?' This monk told the Mother again (June 1919) at Koalpara, 'I have been practising *asanas* (postures) for some time for the sake of health. These postures help digestion and strengthen the vow of celibacy.' The Mother's

instruction was, 'You may practise after taking into consideration both sides of the question, namely, that the mind may become too much body-conscious, and the total giving up may ruin health.' This was her opinion about postures as resorted to for the sake of health. As for a suitable posture as a help to a long course of *japa*, she said, 'Practise some sort of sitting posture which will help you to sit for two or three hours. When you feel as if pins and needles are pricking your leg, you may change your position. In course of time you will have no discomfort.' She also urged on her disciples the need for such practices as worship. When the above devotee said in connection with the God Vishwanatha of Banaras, 'Mother, we have no longer any liking for a stone image of Siva', the Mother said with surprise, 'How is that so, my boy? What a number of great sinners are coming to Banaras and getting redemption by touching Vishwanatha! He is taking over everybody's sin without demur.' She also encouraged many to read the scriptural texts regularly, as for instance, some three or four verses from the *Gita* every day.

And yet it is true that she constantly warned the sentimental devotees against forgetting the ideals and sticking to rituals alone as the be-all and end-all of life. In a letter to Sri Rajendrakumar Datta (11-11-'16), she wrote, 'What need I tell you about your proposal to wear the sacred thread?<sup>1</sup> This is no bad thing, though a social institution. With regard to these matters you should do as you think best. If you take up the sacred thread, see to it that it is adequately utilized. Do not adopt anything as a mere fad. You may do *japa* of any *mantra* you like after finishing first the *japa* of your chosen *mantra*. True it is that there is no hard and fast rule about the time of *japa*, yet morning and evening are the favourable periods.

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1. Refers to a movement for the wearing of the sacred thread by certain classes of non-brahmins who assert themselves as really belonging to the twice-born castes—Kshatriyas and Vaishyas—though their forefathers discarded the thread for some reason.

Whatever the time be, you must do *japa* every day; it is not good to forgo it any day.' Once on seeing some one worshipping Siva, a woman devotee felt a hankering to do likewise. When she came to the Mother for instruction and approval, the latter said, 'All worship — of Kali, Durga, and others — can be performed with the *mantra* that I have imparted. But if anyone so desires, one can learn other *mantras* also for those purposes. You have no need of all that.' When the question arose regarding the offering of food to the Master in accordance with scriptural formalities, the Mother said, 'There's no great need of scriptural forms. Everything can be done with the *mantra* of the chosen Deity.'

From an examination of the times and places of initiation, as also of the persons receiving it, we are forced to the conclusion, that as the Mother had her eyes riveted on the one goal of life, viz., the realization of God, she could not possibly allow mere outward circumstances to interfere with her inner conviction. Any good means, be that enjoined by the scriptures, or adopted for the time being out of a sincere eagerness for excellence, that appeared to her as subservient to the main objective, she adopted without hesitation, and drew the disciples' attention to it. This view is substantiated by her directions to her disciples with regard to the social and religious customs of everyday life.

Orthodoxy requires that the morning prayer and meditation should be done before eating. But Sri Shau-ryendra Mazumdar could not sit for his *japa* or meditation until he had his morning tea. Hence after initiation he told the Mother of this difficulty and wanted direction. The Mother told him, 'My son, can a mother ever be step-motherly? You may, if you like, first eat and then begin *japa* and meditation.' Nalin Babu who had not finished his period of mourning, consequent on the death of his mother, hesitated to eat some cakes offered to him by the Holy Mother and asked for her advice, whereupon she said

‘What’s the harm in that, my son? I too am your mother. I offer it, and there’s no transgression here.’ As for food, she advised Shyamachran Chakravarty, ‘My son you can eat fish, meat, indeed anything you like. But the Master forbade eating the food connected with the first funeral obsequies following any death, or pertaining to a purificatory ceremony (after the main wedding).’

A woman devotee asked the Mother, if it was permissible for a woman to perform worship if she happened to be suffering under any temporary social disability. The Mother referred her to what the Master had said to herself under similar circumstances and then added, ‘Yes, my daughter, it is permissible if one has the requisite devotion for the Master..you can worship; but if you feel any compunction, then don’t do it.’ But when another woman raised the same question on another day, the Mother said, ‘How can one do any work for gods and goddesses when in such a state? Well, you don’t do it.’

Without ignoring settled norms, but rather giving an enlightened allegiance to them, the Mother wanted to draw the devotees to the path of fervent love. Her process of initiation, followed this middle course. In refusing initiation to a candidate she said, ‘You have your ancestral guru; you can as well have it from him.’ Again, there are instances where she kept intact the *mantra* of the family guru and adding to it a new one instructed the disciple to repeat first the former *mantra* ten times and then repeat the new one. Such variations accorded with the dispositions of the candidates as also the Mother’s own natural mood. About this double initiation Sri Kumudbandhu Sen one day heard the Mother speak thus at the Sarkarbari Lane house: ‘Sometimes people of little faith and of unsteady mind come for initiation. I mentally read their past history from their very appearance and behaviour and ask them whether they were previously initiated by someone else. When they

reply in the affirmative, I tell them, "Strange You have come again for initiation! You have no faith in the *mantra* already given by your guru. What is a *mantra* but the holy name of God. Why have you come for initiation again?" Then they beg to be forgiven and again implore me with tears in their eyes. I can't bear anybody's tears. I pray to the Master for strengthening their faith, and through his direction I give them initiation in addition to the *mantra* already received by them. This additional *mantra* is given for fresh stimulus and strength in order to increase their faith in the name of God.' (*Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1952, p. 261).

She made a distinction between the teacher who initiates and the teacher who instructs. About this she wrote to a devotee (January 1911) that one might have an instructing teacher for technical *yoga* processes etc., but the initiating teacher must not be changed. When the letter of an applicant for initiation was read out to her (March 1914), she remarked, 'The purpose of initiation is to try to realize God through sincere spiritual effort; it's not meant for stopping the allowances of the family guru. I can agree to initiate this boy on condition that he will revere his family guru as much as he will do me and that he will agree to increase the guru's monthly allowances according to his resources.' The applicant agreed to these conditions and he was initiated. About the initiating teacher, the Mother had very liberal views. On being told that a man who had not much of spirituality was giving *mantras* to others, she said, 'These holy men have something of professionalism. But mind you, even this is efficacious. Men will not do anything of their own accord; but the instruction of these people will induce them to call on God a little.' Yet, in spite of such generous feelings, she was not to be silenced by mere unreasonable demands or assertion of prescriptive rights. To Sri Taraknath Roy she wrote in a letter (March 1913), 'Pay to the family guru his annual allowance, and something

more also if you can afford; but where can you get the wherewithal to satisfy him with money?' When a woman devotee wrote that she had been cursed by her family guru on being informed of her having been initiated by the Mother, the Mother had it written in reply, 'Not even a brahmin's curse touches one who takes refuge in the Master. You need have no fear.'

One must have real craving for initiation. Granted that hankering, a way can be found out despite a thousand obstacles. A woman wrote to the Mother that she could not have her initiation because of the opposition of her husband's parents. The Mother intimated to her that God was omnipresent, and that He would respond to all people's calls. Another poor boy came to the 'Udbodhan', but went away disappointed without meeting the Mother because she was ill then. So he wanted to ascertain by means of a letter if he would be more fortunate when he turned up next time. The Mother remarked, 'The point is this: anyone whose time is ripe for getting beyond the world, will come away tearing off all bonds, nobody can keep him back even with fetters. Want of money, waiting for a reply, fear of returning disappointed — all these are meaningless.' The Mother permitted him to come. Before married women were initiated, the Mother made sure that they had their husbands' consent. If such concurrence was forthcoming she initiated the wife even though the husband might not be a disciple.

Those who came for initiation to her were seldom rejected unless it was physically impossible for her. If it was a pure soul, she gave the *mantra* even without being asked for, or she did so on the very first approach. Vaikuntha Babu of Cuttack met the Mother at Kothar. He had no idea of taking initiation at the time and therefore returned home after bowing down to her. But a strong attraction brought him back to Kothar in some four days. When he went to pay his respects to the Mother on the eve of his return this time, she said, 'Well,

stay here for the morrow and go the day after.' Later he was told that the Mother would bless him, and so he must get ready on the morrow. He understood nothing of this; still at the Mother's call he appeared before her the next day. She asked him, 'Will you take *mantra*?' Vaikuntha answered, 'Kindly give, if it so pleases you. I know nothing.' Then the Mother again inquired, 'Of which deity will you have the *mantra*?' Vaikuntha found no answer, for he had not thought over the matter. The Mother, therefore, chose the *mantra* for him.

The Mother was once staying in Calcutta recovering from a prolonged illness at Jayrambati, which had heavily told on her health. All interviews were, therefore, stopped. At that time there came a Parsi youth to meet her. He had read some of Swami Vivekananda's books and felt drawn towards Vedanta. Being impressed by him, Swami Saradananda allowed him to go upstairs to the Mother's presence. Once there, he implored, 'Revered Mother, give me some great *mantra* through which I may realize the Lord.' At this the Mother turned to Brahmachari Rashbihari and said, 'Shall I give? Yes, let me do so.' Rashbihari intervened, 'How can that be so! You have just recovered from illness, nobody is allowed even to see you! What will Sarat Maharaj think when he hears of this! Not now, it can be in future.' The Mother said, 'Very well, go and consult Sarat.' When the Brahmachari returned with Swami Saradananda's unquestioning consent, he found the Mother waiting ready with Ganges water and two small carpets spread for herself and the Parsi youth. After the initiation she said, 'He's a fine boy; he understood what I said well enough.'

In fact, the Mother imparted initiation because of a felt inspiration. She used to say, 'The Master is sending these (candidates),' or 'No, no; I am nobody. It's the Master who graciously blesses them. I am only his instrument.' During such initiation, difference of languages created no real difficulty. She spoke in Bengali, but the

disciples understood her. When she was in the South, the local people came and begged, 'Mantra, please!' 'Instruction, please!' There also she knew that to be the apt *mantra* for a particular candidate which welled up from her heart spontaneously. She used to say, 'As soon as I am about to impart a *mantra* to some people, there arises in the mind such a thought as "Give this", "Give this", whereas in other cases, it appears as though I know nothing, nothing comes to my mind. I keep on sitting. Then after a long cogitation I can visualize the *mantra*. In the case of a good aspirant the *mantra* springs up from the mind instantaneously.'

At times the Mother initiated small boys. A boy of twelve years began to cry after saluting her at the 'Udbodhan' saying, 'I want the Mother's grace.' Everybody threw cold water on such sentimentalism, considering it nothing more than a childish whim or imitation. Next day an attendant of the Mother saw the boy sitting on the veranda outside the building. Such a sight was nothing unusual. Therefore he went to the market without heeding him. But while returning, he became curious to see the boy departing with a smiling face, and on asking him the reason for this, he was intrigued to learn that the boy had been initiated. Returning to the 'Udbodhan', he learnt about the whole incident. The Mother had sent Radhu downstairs saying, 'You will find a boy sitting below the porch; bring him up.' And thus she had given him the *mantra*; and now the boy was on his way to the market to get some fruits and sweets to be offered to the Mother as *guru-dakshina*<sup>1</sup>. The attendant asked her, 'Mother, how strange it is that you have initiated such a small urchin? What does he understand?' The Mother replied, 'Howsoever that may be, my son, he is a boy; and yesterday he cried so much holding on to my feet! Tell me, whoever weeps for God? How many have such strong inclination?'

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1. Offering in kind or cash to be given to the guru after one's initiation.

Two or three days before the Janmashtami that followed the Mother's return from Rameswaram, a young Brahmachari of Koalpara wanted to take *mantra* from her. He was then thirteen years old and was a favourite of the Mother. But the proposal evoked great opposition from Golap-Ma, who said, 'Strange that such a small boy, who will forget the *mantra* in a couple of days, should want initiation even now! The Mother hails from your parts. Take the *mantra* later, after due consideration of everything, when she goes that side.' So saying she left the place. The Mother, however, said, 'See, how Golap talks! Does any one forget what one learns as a boy? Let him do whatever he can even from this time. And then I am there, to be sure.' The initiation took place on the Janmashtami day. Finding the boy making his *japa* exactly as the Mother had shown, she said, 'There you are! Why should not this little thing stick to his mind? It certainly will. In future when the need arises, I shall show you everything over again.' The initiation over, the Mother gave him two sweets to eat, which had earlier been offered to the Master, and said, 'Don't be shy; one should partake of some *prasada* after the initiation.'

And yet, this was not the general custom. One day when somebody raised the question of the initiation of a boy of some seven or eight years of age, the Mother said, 'He is too young still; how can there be any initiation now? The boy is a devotee. Let him have long life, let him be a servant of the devotees.'

We have said that if the candidate was a desirable person, and if the Mother felt the inspiration, she did not take time and circumstances much into consideration. A devotee from Shillong resolved within himself that he would not go to the Mother unless he saw her seven times in dreams which would establish for him her divinity. Having been blessed with the seven visions through the Mother's grace, he went to Jayrambati to see her. When he was about to take leave of her, she said, 'It is best to

‘Have your initiation before you go.’ The devotee suggested that it might as well take place in Calcutta. But the Mother said, ‘No, my son, let this thing be finished; it can be done even today.’ The devotee reminded her, ‘But I have partaken of *prasada*.’ The Mother did not consider that any bar to the initiation and imparted the *mantra*. In truth, the grace of a true guru cannot be delimited by conditions.

One evening, a boy who had just been released from police vigilance, came to Koalpara to seek initiation. The Mother took a natural pity on him and agreed to bless him the next day. But since the Koalpara Ashrama was then in the bad books of the police, and the harbouring of an erstwhile suspect would give them another excuse for harassing the inmates, he was lodged in a house outside. Early next morning as the Mother was going from her own residence, the Jagadamba-Ashrama, to Radhu’s house, the boy met her in the open field after his morning bath. Being ordered by the Mother, the Brahmachari brought for her a glass of water. Then it seemed as though she was searching for something to sit on. Hence the Brahmachari inquired, ‘Shall I bring carpets for you?’ ‘Never mind,’ said the Mother. ‘You need not go again; get some straw, and let us both sit down.’ Thus seated the Mother washed her lips ceremonially and gave him the *mantra*.

The Mother was waiting on the railway platform at Vishnupur for her train to Calcutta when an up-country porter discovered her and hurrying to her side fervently, ‘You are my mother Sita; what a long time I have been searching for you! Where had you been so long?’ And he began weeping. The Mother took mercy on him, consoled him, and asked him to bring a flower. The man offered that flower at her feet, and she gave him the *mantra*.

Under the eaves of her house at Jayarambati the Mother stood one day accepting the salutations of her sons. Last of all came one who held her feet and wept profusely without explaining why he did so. The Mother understood his

tearful prayer and signalling all to move away, gave him initiation, even while standing where she was.

From Ranchi there arrived a boy along with others to witness the Jagad-dhatri worship at the Mother's place at Jayrambati. But owing to the busy programme of the days of celebration, he found no opportunity to beg for initiation, nor did anybody else create any scope for him to do so, since he was considered to be too young for the purpose. When the day of bidding farewell came, the Mother was in indifferent health and remained indoors. The Ranchi boy, along with other devotees, went to the verandah of the room and waited there for his turn to go in and prostrate himself before her. When all had finished, he stepped in and began weeping so bitterly with his head on the Mother's feet that they became wet. The Mother lifted him up and asked, 'Why do you weep my son? What do you want? Will you take *mantra*?' The boy nodded. The Mother then closed the door and initiated him then and there.

The Mother had a girl-friend of her childhood days in the village. As they lay side by side one day, the Mother imparted the *mantra* to this friend.

Though it was true that under special circumstances the Mother forgot time or places, it is not to be inferred that such was the normal procedure. Usually she abided by tradition. For instance, she did not give initiation at Banaras, saying, 'Siva is the guru here.' She was not ordinarily willing to initiate anyone on the birthday of the Master, though she made exceptions to this rule. For instance, she initiated two persons on that day during her stay in Madras. On another occasion a sickly young man came to Jayrambati to be initiated on that day. He had not birth or wealth to back up his prayer. But the Mother looked into one's heart rather than at one's appearance; and when the man pleaded that unless he was initiated on that very day, he would consider himself extremely unfortunate inasmuch as he would not be able to come

again in his whole life, the Mother became gracious and although earlier she had intimated her unwillingness, and the attendant too now pleaded against her waiving her rule, she initiated the man that very day.

There are many examples to prove that the Mother selected the *mantras* in accordance with the mental make-up of the candidates. A young woman married to a cultured family went to her husband's house soon after initiation. There she meditated and did *japa* regularly; but she was ever in doubt as to whether the *mantra* was being properly pronounced. When she met the Mother after three years, she wanted to get the doubt resolved. Hearing of the difficulty, the Mother said, 'Well, my dear, that happened long ago. Can I have it in mind even now? Anyway you don't say anything, but wait a little; let me ask of the Master.' With these words, she entered the shrine, and coming out after a while said, 'Well, my daughter, did I give you this *mantra*?' The disciple admitted that she did. 'Then you repeat it,' said the Mother, 'there's no error in it.'

When Sri Rasiklal Roy approached the Mother for initiation, she wanted to ascertain from him his hereditary *mantra*. Rasiklal did not know this. The Mother kept quiet for a moment and then spoke, 'This is your family *mantra*,' and initiated him with it. On inquiry afterwards, it was proved that the Mother had not made any mistake.

When Sri Shashibhushan Mukherji of Bagda prayed for initiation in the *mantra* of the Sakti cult, the Mother corrected him by saying, 'My son, I see Rama in you. Do the people of your family do *japa* of Rama's *mantra*? Rama and Sakti are identical, to be sure. Then why should there be any hesitation in accepting the Rama *mantra*?' In fact, the whole family was devoted to Sri Ramachandra.

Though most often, family traditions and personal predilections coincided, in certain cases people ignored the

tutelary deities and chose other Gods; and in still others, family tradition differed from individual disposition. In such circumstances the Mother relied on her mind that was crystal clear, and as such correctly reflected for her the requisite *mantra*. Though the ancestors of Sri Saradakinkar Roy were worshippers of Sakti, he came under Vaishnava influence. Hence when he got a Sakti *mantra* from the Mother, he became a little perplexed. The Mother understood this and assured him that very afternoon out of her own accord, 'I have given you the right thing.'

In some cases the Mother asked the candidates about their preferences before the *mantras* were selected. If the candidates' choice tallied with her own, she used those *mantras*; otherwise her own vision got the pride of place. Sri Surendramohan Mukherji, when asked by the Mother, said that he had an attraction for Kali as seated on the lap of Siva. The Mother asserted, 'Can Sakti (Kali) ever exist without Siva, my son? Yours is the Sakti *mantra*.' After receiving initiation in that *mantra*, Surendramohan felt as though an electric current darted through his frame which began to quiver, so that he had no longer any doubt regarding the appropriateness of the *mantra*.

From Sri Karnatkumar Chaudhury we heard a charming anecdote which confirms much of what we have written so far. He had taken a *mantra* from another guru, but found no peace of mind. While in such a predicament he went to make obeisance to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' in 1914 before he started for an assemblage of Vaishnavas at Vrindaban. The Mother was then seated for worship in the shrine. As Karnatkumar saluted her from outside, she motioned him to enter the room and salute her by touching her feet. This done, the Mother blessed him saying, 'Govinda (Krishna) will bless you.' This put new strength in him; but his old doubts persisted. After that his first wife died and he married a second time. As this

wife was a woman possessed, he had her initiation by his own guru. This, however, had no effect. At last the couple came to the Mother at Calcutta in 1916 for re-initiation. The Mother agreed to their proposal. But Golap-Ma got wind of this and objected, so that Karnatkumar had to come to the Mother again for reassurance. The Mother raised her hand as a sign of re-affirmation and said, 'I have already given you the word.' On the day of initiation the wife got fever. Nonetheless, they bathed in the Ganges and came to the Mother. Karnatkumar got his initiation first. In the meantime his wife's temperature shot up and she began shaking all over. In that room there were Golap-Ma and Sudhira Devi with her. Seeing the condition of the wife, Golap-Ma began admonishing her in her blunt way, 'She has come to reject her old guru. She has forgotten her *mantra*, and to crown all, she has got fever. There can be no question of initiation at all.' The Mother waited in the shrine-room for some time for the wife to turn up, and in the meantime she heard all that Golap-Ma said. Unmoved by Golap-Ma's arguments and impatient of delay, she called out at last, 'Sudhira, do bring her.' Thus the wife also was initiated. After this she got rid of her trouble.

Sometimes people got initiation in dreams and approached the Mother for confirmation or re-initiation. When one such devotee came, the Mother heard from the person the *mantra* received in the dream, explained its meaning, asked him to use it in his *japa*, and then imparting a new one said, 'Then do *japa* of this one and meditate.' The Mother was seen meditating a while before explaining the dream *mantra*.

Another devotee got a *mantra* from the Master in a dream. The Mother told him, 'Repeat the *mantra* that the Master has given you. I shall give you something too,' and she gave him a new *mantra*.

A boy saw in a dream that the Master seated him on his lap and imparted a *mantra*. The Mother did not give

him any other *mantra* but said, 'You have succeeded in obtaining his grace. You will attain your goal through the *japa* of this *mantra* alone.'

As soon as a certain woman devotee uttered the *Bija* (seed) of a *mantra* she had received in a dream, the Mother said, 'Yes, you belong to that fold. Well, well, you are fortunate.' She did not add any fresh *mantra*, but instructed her to do *japa* of this very *mantra*.

But a *mantra*, just because it was received in a supernatural way, had no appeal to the Mother unless it conformed to scriptures and her own unerring vision. Sri Jatindranath Roy used in his *japa* a *mantra* he had received in a dream. The Mother said, 'Well, dear boy, can there be a *mantra* without a *Bija*?' So she gave him initiation again with a fresh *mantra*. Kusumkumari Aich desired to be initiated by the Mother; but one thing or another hindered her from doing so. In the meanwhile, she got a *mantra* in a dream, which, however, brought her no peace of mind. Hence she went to the Mother and related to her the whole history, on hearing which the latter said, 'Some being is trying to encompass your ruin and to that end has given you that *mantra* in the name of three deities. You need have no fear any longer. Try to forget those few words as early as you can.' Then she gave her initiation with an altogether different *mantra*.

Though she was ever merciful and her life's mission was to save and help people, yet for their own good she often made them wait for some time or refused them at first, so that their eagerness might be intensified or they might repent by detecting their faults through self-analysis consequent on dejection. Sri Nareshchandra Chakravarty went to Jayrambati at the middle of January 1920, with a candidate for initiation at the bidding of Swami Dhirananda; and with them joined another gentleman. As the *Paush-Samkranti* day is observed in Bengal with the eating of many kinds of cakes, and their visit

took place near about that time, there arose on the way a desire in Nareshchandra's mind to eat some cakes at the Mother's house; but he kept silent about the matter. After they had reached Jayrambati and finished their bath, the proposal for initiation was communicated to the Mother through Kishori Maharaj (Swami Parameshwarananda); but the Mother refused. And when she was told that Swami Dhirananda had sent them, she said with a little irritation, 'What of that? My health is extremely bad; should I initiate in spite of that?' This refusal made the two candidates weep, but Kishori Maharaj could not gather up courage enough to approach the Mother again. However, at meal-time at noon Nareshchandra saw that he had on his plate the desired cakes; but as soon as he thought, 'Why has Mother sent this dry stuff; could she not procure a little milk?' he heard the Mother saying, 'Kishori, why have you served dry cakes to the boys? Send them some milk soon.' This emboldened Naresh; hence after siesta, he himself went to the Mother at the suggestion of the friends and interceded on their behalf, whereupon she said, 'So you also advise me to initiate them?' 'Yes, Mother, I do so,' said Nareshchandra with some emphasis. 'But what of the extreme impurity of their bodies?' argued the Mother. And she herself added, 'Well, ask them to live here for three nights. A three nights' stay will purify their bodies; for verily this is Siva's domain.' And as she spoke, she turned her forefinger around to indicate the entire sacred area.

At the 'Udbodhan' when Sri Vasantakumar Sarkar's wife begged to be initiated just after her husband had been blessed with the *mantra*, the Mother directed her for initiation from some monk at the Belur Math. As Vasantakumar's wife persisted in her importunity, the Mother refused again with some annoyance and sat down for worship. This cut her to the quick, and she fell down on the floor with extreme grief and then began singing piteously,

Can She that is the stone-built mountain's daughter have any pity  
at heart?

Unless She were pitiless, could She kick Her husband on the chest?<sup>1</sup>

The sweet voice and pathetic tone distracted the Mother's attention from the worship. She ordered the wailing woman to sing a few more songs and then asked her to stop, for she could not begin worship so long as she sang. The worship over, the candidate made her request again, which was readily granted. The Mother fixed a date for the happy day and as a present put a betel roll in the devotee's mouth.

Another point to be noted is that, though the Mother was ever merciful, all frivolity and all irrational demands were silenced before her august presence. Sri Navadvip-chandra Roy Varman, who obtained permission for the initiation of two young men, produced them at the 'Udbodhan' on the appointed day. The older of the two was initiated first, and then came the turn of the younger one, who, however, was nowhere to be found. The Mother said sorrowfully, 'The poor fellow is unlucky!' Subsequently, being asked about this flight, the younger one said that his mind was seized with an inexplicable fear.

Sri Chandramohan Datta, who belonged to the salaried staff of the 'Udbodhan', did many odd jobs for the Mother such as going to the market, in which connection he had free access to her. One day in the morning, Swami Shuddhananda, while going to the Ganges for bath with Swami Prajnananda, said to Chandramohan, in mere fun, 'Well, Chandra, you go to the Mother often enough and get from her *prasada* to eat. I tell you something; can you put this to the Mother?' 'There's no question of not being able,' assured Chandramohan. The Swami said, 'Can you tell Mother, "Mother, I want

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1. Uma, identical with Kali in another form, was daughter of the god of the Himalayas, a heartless mass of rocks. Kali on one occasion stood on the chest of her husband Siva.

salvation ” ? ’ ‘ You wait a little,’ said Datta with bravado. ‘ I shall go forthwith and return in a trice after telling her.’ When he went up, the Mother was at her worship. Slowly he walked in, but he felt that for some reason his body shivered. Soon the Mother looked at him and wanted to know the reason for his coming. His heart still palpitated and something seemed to choke his throat. As a matter of sheer habit, however, he said, ‘ I want *prasada*.’ The Mother showed him by a sign the *prasada* kept covered under the cot and again engaged herself in the worship. It took him about an hour to get over that nervousness.

## A TRANSCENDENTAL PRESENCE

As a sign of cognizing the Lord when He incarnates Himself on this earth it is said in the *Gita* (X. 13):

All the saints declare you, as also does the divine saint Narada  
Thus also do Asita, Devala, and Vyasa; and you yourself admit  
this to me.

We saw how the Master worshipped the Mother as a goddess, how he showed reverence towards her in various ways, and how he pointed out her divinity to the devotees. This was also declared times without number by Swami Vivekananda and the disciples of the Master. We shall adduce one more illustration of Swami Vivekananda's respectful reference to her, and then pass on to a consideration of the admission of this fact by the Mother herself.

When seated for initiating Sri Surendranath Sen, the great Swami refused, saying that he had known from the Master that Surendranath would be initiated by one mightier than himself. A few days later, Surendranath dreamt that he was seated on the Master's lap and was receiving the *mantra* from a motherly woman. Long after this in 1911, Surendranath went to Jayrambati during the worship of Durga; and there he was initiated by the Mother. Finding the new *mantra* and the *mantra* of the dream identical and the woman of the dream the same as the Holy Mother in front of him, Surendranath almost lost his outer consciousness. Later, he told the Mother everything about his dream.

The Master spoke of the Mother as the goddess Saraswati come down to impart wisdom, of which we had enough proof in the last chapter. But though this may succinctly describe one of her very important aspects, her personality is by no means circumscribed by this. Generally speaking, she was shy and soft by nature; but at times she could be bold and hard too. This aspect cannot be

called terrific, but it can be described as 'softer than a flower and yet harder than flint', which phrase was used by an Indian poet to mark the characteristics of the supermen. In this connection the reader may remember the incident of the mad Harish, and a few more are presented here to make the point clear.

On a summer evening, the Mother sat telling her rosary on the upper verandah of the 'Udbodhan' overlooking an open space across the road in front, where some people of the labouring class had set up some huts for their families. In one of those huts a man was beating his wife mercilessly. He started with fisticuffs and slaps; then he gave her such a kick that she rolled down into the courtyard with the babe in her arms. There again came down upon her a volley of heavy kicks. The Mother's *japa* stopped. And though she was noted for her suavity and soft, low voice, which could hardly be heard from the ground-floor, she now stood up holding the railing and scolding the man at the top of her voice, 'I say, you wretch, will you kill your wife outright? Alas, what a pity!' The man had lost his balance out of extreme anger, to be sure; but a look at that motherly figure acted on him like a charm on a hooded snake; he lowered his head and retreated at once. The Mother's sympathy made the woman now burst into a torrent of tears. Her fault was that she had not cooked rice at the proper time. A little later, the man's anger subsided, and he came to the woman to console her. At this, all the people who had gathered there on the Mother's verandah, moved away to their respective duties.

Taking advantage of the absence of the Master's nephew Sivaram from his village, his wife wanted, in collusion with the village potentates, to marry her little daughter Panchi to a family supposed to be comparatively lower in social position; and lest someone should undo her plan, she kept the child locked up in a room. Finding Ramlal, the other nephew of the Master, in an embarrassing position, Sri Prabodh Chatterji of Arambagh and

another devotee of Jayrambati skilfully released the child and carried her to Jayrambati before nightfall. They had done this without the Mother's knowledge; but after arriving there, they related everything to her to free their conscience from the sense of guilt. The first thing that the Mother wanted to know from them was whether this had the support of her elder nephew Ramlal. When they replied in the affirmative, she said that they need not worry any more. In the course of the conversation Prabodh Babu expressed his misgiving that the village dignitaries might take offence and create difficulties in future about the construction of the temple of the Master at Kamarpukur. Of course, that was not a very serious matter in his estimation, for the Master did not care for temples and memorials; besides there was no dearth of either even in those days. This remark hurt the Mother, and she said, 'How do you speak, my dear boy? The birth-place of the Master is a sacred place, a seat of his constant presence, and a holy resort for pilgrims. Should one speak of it in such a strain?' Prabodh Babu again apprehended that brother Sivaram's wife might go off her head and set fire to the houses. This made the Mother remark in an unusually sharp, drawling tone, 'It will be fine if it happens; it will be fine if it happens! It will be just as the Master liked. He liked funeral places, and all will be turned into a crematory.' And she burst out into a peal of laughter, in which the others present also joined at first; but as it persisted for long and by stages developed into a side-splitting roar, the others, filled with a supernatural awe, stopped and looked on with trepidation. The very next moment she stopped and broached other topics to divert their attention.

Many are the devotees who were struck with wonder by the sudden expression of the Mother's transcendental moods in the midst of ordinary human preoccupations. These emerged so unawares, like flashes of lightning, and the Mother composed herself so quickly that the devotees

got hardly any time to fathom them adequately. And yet the impression became irresistible that divinity was the essential component of that extraordinary character over which there was a veneer of womanishness to make her life a going concern. Brahmachari Gagan (Ritananda) noticed more than once, that whenever her divine side had the upper hand, it created all around a supernatural atmosphere which by an irresistible magnetic force transported all within its orbit to a higher plane for the time being. One morning, at about nine o'clock, he sat on the Mother's verandah at Jayrambati, chewing some fried-rice, while the Mother swept the verandah. Just then somebody was heard calling from outside, 'Mother dear, may it please you to give me alms!' At this the Mother said aside, 'I can't finish my duties, working though I am with innumerable hands!' Attracted by an ethereally soft and compassionate voice, no sooner did Gagan look up at her face than she stopped her broom and bending forward with one hand on her knees she said with a beaming face, 'Look at the fun; I have only two hands; and here I speak of having infinite hands!'

The Mother's life of motherliness and spiritual ministrations may be considered from one point of view as only emanations from the basic fact of her divinity. True it is that the Hindu scriptures enjoin the worship of mothers and spiritual teachers as divinities. But in the life we are pursuing, the devotees came face to face with such superhuman pity, piety, purity, protective power, etc., that irrespective of what the scriptures might enjoin, they instinctively offered their heart-felt devotion and allegiance at the feet of this extraordinary personage who appeared to them as none other than the Universal Mother. Naturally, these expressions of love and adoration had nothing in them of deliberate formalities, but only of a spontaneous hankering for taking shelter under her and opening out their minds for her to read and to guide them as she would.

Some saw the Mother as a goddess in dreams, which, however, appeared to them nonetheless real on that account. A woman disciple named Sumati dreamt that she was worshipping the Mother as the goddess Chandi by offering her a cloth with a broad, red border. She then came to the Mother with such a piece of cloth, but as she could not express her desire out of shyness, she communicated the anecdote to the Mother through an intermediary. On hearing this the Mother smiled and said, 'The Universal Mother sent you the dream, don't you agree, my dear? Well, give me the cloth; it has to be worn anyway.' She wore it that very night (third week of October 1918) as it was holy to Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune. In the evening there came an old woman with all the accessories for the worship of the goddess and with these she adored the Mother, and then saluted her after offering an anna at her feet. The Mother said to the others present, 'Alas! She is in great tribulation, my dears, she is very poor.' The woman's only son had become insane after graduation and was nowhere to be traced; and the husband too was as good as mad because of that shock. The Mother blessed her sincerely.

Some may argue that though the Mother practically admits her divinity in the two foregoing instances, yet this avowal is so inextricably mixed up with her solicitousness for avoiding any disappointment in the minds of the devout or afflicted souls, that such examples should not be cited as indubitable proofs of her admission of divinity. Still we have to remember that we are engaged in this book in depicting the Mother's character in full; and we ask our devout readers not to leave this interesting pursuit all of a sudden, but to comprehend her personality in all its variety and amplitude. We are in the presence of a life above and beyond the human level, in the comprehension of which reverence is more helpful than rashness, and faith more than a frivolous display of one's intelligence. That is how our progress will be ensured, and we shall be vouchsafed more eloquent revelations.

The Mother was once coming to Jayrambati from Kamarpukur long after the passing away of the Master. Her nephew Sivaram, who was then very young, followed her with a bundle of clothes. When they reached the field in the vicinity of Jayrambati, some idea crossed Sivaram's mind and he stood still. The Mother, not knowing his mood, proceeded a little and then, missing the sound of his footsteps, looked back to find him motionless. She said with amazement, 'What's the matter, Sivu? Come forward.' 'If you tell me one thing,' said brother Sivaram, 'then only shall I proceed.' 'What's that?' inquired the Mother. 'Will you tell me who you are?' put in Sivaram. 'Who should I be? I am your aunt,' pleaded the Mother. 'Then go,' said Sivaram nonchalantly. 'Here you are near your house. I won't proceed further.' The sun was setting; and so in a worried tone the Mother said, 'Look at that! Who can I indeed be, my dear? I am a woman, your aunt.' 'Very good,' persisted Sivaram. 'You can as well go.' Finding Sivaram still standing at his post, the Mother said at last, 'People say, I am Kali.' To be doubly sure Sivaram asked, 'Kali? Truly so?' The Mother said, 'Yes.' That delighted Sivaram, and he said, 'Now, come, let us go.' Then he followed her to the village.

On hearing that the Mother would be starting for Calcutta in the middle of February 1920, Sivaram came to her one day at about eleven o'clock and told her after saluting her that he would not return that day to Kamarpukur, as he had finished all work for the day at the shrine of Raghuvira including worship and laying Him to sleep. This displeased the Mother, and she asked him to return that very day to do those things over again according to traditional form and in proper time. And she told Brahmachari Varada to pack up for him some fruits and vegetables. At three in the afternoon she called Varada again to instruct him to accompany Sivaram with the bundle up to the river Amodar. This he did. But a little later, Sivaram was seen crying with his head on the Mother's feet

‘Mother, tell me what will be my lot? Do tell me.’ The Mother said, ‘Sivu, get up; why should you worry? You have served the Master so much, and how greatly he loved you! What anxiety need you have? You are already free even in this life.’ But Sivaram persisted, ‘No, you take over my burden, and tell me if you are really what you earlier told me you were.’ The more the Mother consoled him and patted him touching his head and chin, the more he cried and said, ‘Assure me whether you have accepted all my burden, and whether you are Mother Kali Herself.’ The Mother had been moved by Sivaram’s tears and tenacity; now his yearning produced so great a change in her that it struck Varada standing by her, that she was at that moment no human being. In that elevated state she laid her hand on Sivaram’s head and said solemnly, ‘Yes, that’s so.’ Sivaram at once lifted his head and kneeling before her chanted with folded hands the *mantra* of salutation from the *Chandi*, ‘*Sarva-mangala-mangalye*,’ etc. The Mother kissed him by touching his chin with her hand; and he wiped away his tears and started for Kamar-pukur, his eyes beaming with delight, and the bundle of fruits and vegetables under his arm. At the Mother’s bidding, Varada went for the second time to help him with the bundle up to the river. Outside the village Sivaram turned happily towards Varada and said, ‘Brother, Mother is Kali Herself. She’s the wielder of people’s destiny; through her grace comes freedom. Do you understand?’

At this stage, the Mother declares her divinity not only indirectly through action, but also by word of mouth. If it be contended that even here the avowal is not voluntary inasmuch as it was occasioned by Sivaram’s obstinacy, then we may point out that the third person who happened to be there did not understand the Mother’s declaration as mere empty words for mollifying Sivaram. Rather he accepted it as a solemn and sincere avowal. Moreover, on the second occasion the Mother was not helpless; she could afford to deny; and such denials were

not quite unknown. Whenever a devotee's assertion seemed to be nothing more than idle fancy or baser sycophancy, the Mother never stooped to encourage such morbid sentimentalism, but rather denounced it severely, though there, too, a discriminating mind could discern the underlying truth that her depreciation was not tantamount to a denial of divinity, but emphasized her preference for playing the human role more thoroughly for some reasons best known to herself.

In her everyday dealings, the unassuming Mother claimed no higher position for herself than that of an ordinary mortal consecrated to the service of the Master; and that fact she impressed indelibly on all who came into contact with her. After initiation she pointed to the Master and said, 'He it is that is the guru.' In the course of conversation her divine mood might steal upon her surreptitiously; yet in the work-a-day world she never consciously allowed it any sway. When one day during her last illness, an old woman devotee began eulogizing her by saying, 'You are the Mother of the Universe, you are all', there descended on the devotee this burst of harsh rebuff, 'Tut, tut, "Mother of the Universe!" I am what I am just because he granted me refuge at his feet through his mercy. "You are the Mother of the Universe, you are such-and-such!" Get out of this place.' In fact, though she was too soft to touch anyone in matters of belief, she could never tolerate flattery.

One day at Jayrambati, the portion dealing with the Master's marriage was being read from the Bengali poetical work *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* before the Mother and some others, on the verandah of her house. As that portion depicted her as the Mother of the Universe and was eloquent with her praise, she left the place.

Before starting for the South, the Mother was, one noon, sitting absent-mindedly at Kothar and thinking alone about the miseries of the world and the Master's repeated incarnations for its redemption. When an attendant came

there, she said to him, 'So the Master comes again and again — the same moon every night. There's no escape, he is caught in it. As they say,

Coming many a time and oft, you get sorrows upon sorrows;  
And how long still would you endure this pain?

Is that the lot only of men? It is that of the Master as well. So I have been thinking. I see no end to this. What suffering for the Master! Who will understand?' The attendant suggested, 'Why of the Master alone, Mother? It's yours, too. The Master and you are really one.' 'Fie!' admonished the Mother. 'Should one utter such a thing, my foolish boy! I am only his servant. Did you not read, "You are the mechanic, and I the machine; you the housewife, and I the house; I work as you make me do"? The Master is all; there's none but he.'

Some readers may be thinking, 'This much is enough for us to draw our own inference: "The Mother did not think of herself as an avatar nor did she preach this. The Master alone is the avatar. But the Mother deserves a very high position in the religious history of the world by her being the consort of the Master, the spiritual guide of many, and a dynamic centre of inspiration for the life divine."' We would plead with such readers for a little more patience and indulgence; for the logic of events forces us further ahead. In illustrations of this we may cite the case of Sailabala Chaudhury who asked the Mother, 'Mother, you instructed me as to how I should do the *japa* of the Master's name; how shall I do yours?' The Mother replied, 'You may do so (thinking of me) as Radha or any other (goddess) — in fact, under any guise you find convenient. If you can't conceive of me as anybody else, it will do to think (of me) as simply the Mother.' On another occasion she said to a disciple, 'Now that you have come here, you must have done so with some special attitude; you might have come thinking (of me) as the Universal Mother.'

There are many instances of such tacit disclosures in the course of events or of conversations. In 1919, when

Varada was bringing Doctor Prabhakar Mukherji from Arambagh for the treatment of the mother of the widow of Navasan, then on her death-bed at Koalpara, Sri Manindra Bose of the same town accompanied them in a bullock-cart. The scorching midday sun made them all thirsty and so Manindra requested Varada to obtain from the adjoining village some cucumbers and watery roots. Varada searched from door to door, but failed to get these fruits or roots; and then he plucked some green mangoes from a wayside tree, which were so sour that none but village-folk could touch them. 'Where are the roots?' inquired Manindra. Varada replied in fun, 'When no cucumber or root could be had even after ransacking the village, then suddenly the memory of the Treta-yuga bounced upon my mind, and I threw stones to pluck the mangoes.<sup>1</sup> Now you can quench your thirst at will.' Needless to say, that without salt nobody could utilize those fruits. When they reached Koalpara and related the whole incident to the Mother, she smiled broadly and said, 'Yes, my boys, "Each belongs to his own (fold) and incarnates as such in every age." How can I have all these works of mine done unless they are there? Depending on them I have been living here in this forest, amidst dangers, with Radhu in her present condition.'

One day at the end of 1909, a monastic disciple was regretting to the Mother that even after so much of experience and experiment, he had not been able to believe her to be his own mother. The Mother assured him, 'If not your own (mother), why should you be coming so often? "Each belongs to his own (fold) and incarnates as such in every age." (I am) your own mother, as you will recognize in time.'

In domestic dealings or conversations with common people there were sudden disclosures of this real nature

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1. According to Hindu mythology there are four ages—Satya (golden), Treta, Dvapara, and Kali (iron). Ramachandra and his wife were born in the Treta-yuga and had the monkeys as their followers and soldiers. Varada here likens himself to one of those tricky monkeys.

of the Mother. During her last stay at Jayrambati, the woman who served as cook came to her one night at nine o'clock to say that she had touched a dog. As touching the dog is polluting according to the Hindus, she would have to bathe in that winter night. The Mother said, 'Don't bathe so late in the night. Wash your hands and feet and change the cloth.' But she protested, 'How can that suffice?' The Mother suggested, 'Then take Ganges water.' But as this too was not adequately purifying according to the cook, the Holy Mother, who was holiness itself, said at last, 'Then touch me.' This opened the eyes of the cook, and for the time being she was saved from her mania for purity, as also from an uncomfortable cold bath.

When the Mother was engaged in her worship at the 'Udbodhan', the mad aunt went on abusing her. After the worship, the Mother looked at her and said, 'What a lot of persons there are who meditate and perform austerity and yet can't get me; and you miss me even though you have got me!' At Banaras the mad aunt had cursed the Mother the whole night, saying, 'Let my sister-in-law depart, let my sister-in-law die.' With reference to this the Mother said in the morning, 'My youngest sister-in-law does not know that I am deathless.'

Self-revelation and self-concealment alternate in the unfolding of the Mother's life. From distant parts people pour in to worship her as a goddess and yet the villagers understand nothing of this — to them she is ever their aunt, their sister, or niece, and nothing more. Once a villager, put the question to her, 'So many people come to see you from such distant lands; and yet why can't we understand you?' The Mother replied, 'What does it matter, if you can't? You are my friends, and so I am yours.' The village watchman Ambika said, 'People call you goddess, deity, and what not; as for us, we understand nothing of that.' The Mother said, 'Why need you understand? You are my brother Ambika and I am your sister Sarada.' She

kept herself informed of the weal and woe of the villagers and identified herself with these. Once a monk, who had just returned from famine relief activities in the Bankura district, was giving to the Mother an account of the work done by the Ramakrishna Mission. After hearing him through, she moved her hand in a circle around and said, 'Mind you, my son, by the grace of Mother Simhavahini, there's nothing of all this (distress) within this area (Jayrambati).' The monk said, 'I know nothing of Simhavahini. It's because of your presence that there is nothing of that here.' The Mother kept silent.

Harassed by the tyranny of her relatives, she said one day at Jayrambati, 'I warn you, don't you molest me too much. If the being that is within this body should once raise its hood, then not even Brahma, Vishnu, or Maheshwara will have any power to save you.' At another time she said to a devotee with reference to Radhu's behaviour at Koalpara, 'I tell you, my daughter, know this body (pointing to her own) to be divine. How much more of mortification can this put up with? Can anyone but the Deity endure so much? I tell you, my dear, none of them will understand me so long as I am here; they will understand everything hereafter.'

How can mere mortals cognize the Goddess who descended as a woman, unless She Herself made it known? The Great Mother descends on earth to teach people love and devotion; but in consideration of the limited faculty of man, She has to cover up Her divinity sufficiently to make it appealing and comprehensible to the human heart and intellect. And as a result of the interplay of these opposing factors; She continues to be unrevealed to the generality of men; and only a fortunate few can understand Her. One day (September 1918) Nalini Devi asked the Mother before two women disciples, 'Well, aunt, people call you the Indwelling Entity; are you really so?' The Mother only smiled a little. But when Nalini pressed her question again, she said, 'They say so out of devotion. Who indeed

can I be, my dear? The Master is all. You pray to the Master so that I may not fall a victim to egotism.' This humility and attempt at self-concealment made one of the women devotees burst out laughing, and in the course of the conversation she remarked, 'There are many who call the Mother, the Universal Mother; but the Master alone knows how deep any one's faith is. In the mouths of unbelieving people this sounds like parrot-like repetition.' The Mother joined in the laugh and said, 'That's true enough, my dear.' The woman further said that none could understand the Mother unless she made herself known out of her mercy. And then she added, 'And yet the Mother's divinity consists in this that in her there's no trace of egoism. All mortals are full of self-conceit. See, for instance, how thousands of people prostrate themselves at her feet calling her, "You are Lakshmi, you are the Mother of the Universe." If the Mother were a mortal, this would puff her up with pride. Can a mere mortal digest so much of honour?' The Mother only cast a smiling glance at the devotee.

We now turn to an incident of the old Dakshineswar days. Yogin-Ma had then become very intimate with the Mother. One day the Mother asked her, 'Yogin, do you worship with dry *bel* leaves?' Yogin-Ma used to pluck green *bel* leaves from the trees at Dakshineswar and offer them in her worship even after they became dry; and hence she replied, 'Yes, Mother. But how could you know this?' Cheerfully the Mother said, 'This morning during meditation I saw you offering dry *bel* leaves to m...', and without completing the word she quickly concluded, 'during your worship.' The intelligent Yogin-Ma looked astonished at the Mother, who blushed and held her in a warm embrace. That created in the latter's mind the impression of her own daughter Ganu holding her in her arms; and not knowing what she did, she held the Mother fast to her bosom and kissed her. When she returned to her senses she saluted the Mother and took the dust of her feet. The

Mother also left the place and stood out on the verandah of the Nahabat.

When the inquirer belonged to a high level of spirituality, the Mother admitted her divinity without reservation. Once Swami Tanmayananda worshipped the Mother's feet at Jayrambati and placed them over his head. But the Mother forbade him to do so, explaining that the Master stays in the head, God Himself sits on the thousand-petalled lotus there. The Swami at once asked her, 'If the Master is God Himself, who are you then?' Without the least hesitation the Mother replied, 'Who else should I be? I, too, am the Divine Mother.'

In this connection we recollect her placing her own photograph by the side of the Master's at Koalpara and worshipping both, of which we have written earlier.

During the Christmas holidays of 1910, a candidate for initiation offered flowers at the Mother's feet at Kothar and then presented her a piece of cloth and a rupee. The Mother declined the gift saying, 'You are in straitened circumstances and have your own wants. Why, then, this offering?' The devotee explained that the money belonged to the Mother; and if a little portion of a son's earning could be utilized for the service of his mother, he should feel thankful.' At this the Mother said, 'Ah! What love, my dear, what love!' The devotee had heard from others, 'The Mother is Kali Herself, the Primal Energy, the Deity.' He wanted a confirmation of this from the Mother herself; for the *Gita* speaks of such a self-avowal. Hence he said to the Mother, 'I believe what I have heard of you. Yet if you yourself tell me so, I can be free from any lingering doubt. I want to learn from your own words, whether that is true.' The Mother said, 'Yes, it is so.'

In 1913, at Jayrambati, Radhu fell ill after Bhudev's marriage, and the Mother was by her side, feeding her with milk, when the mad aunt came and sat near by. Radhu did not want her 'Bad mummy' to be there and so she pushed her a little, when, as chance would have it, the

aunt's feet touched the Mother's hand slightly. This disrespect shown to the Mother, unintentional though it was, made the aunt uneasy, and instead of laying the blame on herself she shifted it to the Mother and said, 'Why did you touch my feet with your hand? Dear me! What will now be my lot!' The Mother laughed heartily at this queer expostulation. Brahmachari Rashbihari, who was there, said, 'Though the mad one abuses and dishonours the Mother, she is yet afraid of touching the Mother's hand with her feet!' The Mother explained, 'My son, didn't Ravana know that Rama was none other than Brahman in Its fullness — Narayana Himself; and that Sita was the Primal Energy — Mother of the Universe?<sup>1</sup> Yet he came to play that part! Does she not know me? She knows everything, and yet she comes to play this role.'

Out of consideration for certain devotees she seemed to be unconsciously revealing her true stature. When Vaikuntha went to see the Mother at Kamarpukur, Ramlaḥ and Lakshmi Devi were also there. At the time of bidding good-bye to the devotee the Mother suddenly said, 'Vaikuntha, call on me!' and the next moment she checked herself and said, 'Call on the Master; calling on him means calling on all.' Lakshmi Devi who heard it all, protested, 'No, Mother, should you speak thus? This is very wrong on your part. If you wheedle the boys thus, what will they do?' The Mother pleaded, 'Why, what have I done?' Lakshmi Devi replied, 'This very moment you told Vaikuntha, "Call on me," and again you say, "Call on the Master."' The Mother argued, 'Calling on the Master is certainly as good as calling on all.' Not silenced by the Mother's logic, Lakshmi Devi impressed it on Vaikuntha that what he had heard that day from the Mother was very valuable; it was a declaration as well as

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1. Ravana, the demon king of Sri Lanka abducted Sita, and Rama killed him. In his previous birth Ravana was a door-keeper of Narayana in heaven, but owing to the curse of an offended brahmin he fell and was born as Ravana. Narayana incarnated as Rama and killed him.

a direction by the Mother herself, so that Vaikuntha should call on the Mother. The Mother listened without further objection.

A woman devotee asked, 'Why can we not realize that you are the Goddess?' The Mother replied, 'Can all and sundry do so, my dear? There lay a piece of diamond on a flight of steps (of a tank). Every one took it for an ordinary stone, rubbed his feet against it after bath and went away. One day a jeweller came to those steps and discovered that it was an exceptionally large and priceless diamond.' How few discovered the real stature of the Mother! To whom, therefore, was she to disclose her identity; and even if she did so, who would believe her? Hence her references to this fact seemed, often enough, halting or ambiguous. And yet at times, there was no hesitation, she avowed her divinity then frankly enough. Kedar said once, 'Mother, nobody will care for the goddesses Shashthi, Sitala, etc., after you.' The Mother replied, 'Why should they not? They are only my own parts.' Another day, Kedar was talking with the Mother at the Jagadamba-Ashrama at Koalpara, when some people came to offer worship to Shashthi under a nearby banyan tree to the accompaniment of beating of drums. As this interfered with the conversation, Kedar said in disgust, 'Ah! Why don't you stop, my fellows!' The Mother at once interceded, 'How you behave, Kedar! I indeed am all! Why do you get irritated?'

Now we proceed to record some incidents from the Mother's life which were not only authentic evidences of her divine power according to the devotees who personally witnessed them but were calculated to intensify other people's faith and devotion and thus help their spiritual development. These may not appear as so very presentable or noteworthy to people who are swayed by modern rationality and so-called scientific outlook; they may be considered devitalizing and interdictable by the shrewd politicians who aim at basing society on mere ethics and

utility. We are also aware that in the lives and teachings of the Master, the Mother, and their blessed children, spirituality in its purest form had the pride of place while supernormal powers were considered as unwelcome intruders. Yet as impartial biographers, we cannot ignore these facts. While presenting these, we leave the readers free to evaluate them and ascertain their meaning according to their personal likes and dislikes. Such anecdotes are to be met with in superhuman characters all over the world and in all ages. People round whose lives spread such ideas and beliefs must have something unique in them. We frankly admit without any hesitation that we cannot prove to others' satisfaction the genuineness of these facts. But if some people cannot be convinced of the truth, there is no reason why we should reject the testimony of others. This is the only excuse under which we take shelter here.

Professor Gokuladas De, then studying for the B. A. degree, once fell ill and as a consequence stopped going to the college for some time. Master Mahashaya took this opportunity to teach him to read the *Chandi* in a sweet musical tone; and Gokuldas soon learnt it. One day, when out on the morning walk by the Ganges, he found the Mother sitting rapt in *japa* and meditation on the lowest of the steps leading down to the water. Gokuldas began chanting the verses of the *Chandi* in his newly acquired tune in such a low voice that there was no possibility of his being heard by the Mother from so far below. When he intoned the verse, ' *Saumya - saumya - tarasesha - saumye - bhyas - tvatisundari* '1, the Mother turned back to find the devotee there, raised both her hands in token of blessing, and then got merged in her *japa* again.

The professor records another experience thus: 'During the few years that I had acquaintance with her (Mother), she never asked me such questions as where

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1. 'Charming, more charming than all charming things; yea surpassingly beautiful.' *Chandi* (I. 81).

my house was, how I was engaged, how many brothers we were, or who my father was. But one day when I went to salute her, it was astonishing to hear her mention by names my two brothers and ask how they were. As she referred to one of them as Nalin instead of Lalit, I thought that it was a slip of tongue and I smiled. But when I told this fact to my mother on returning home, she said, "The Mother of the Universe has spoken correctly. His name as a boy was Nalin which was afterwards changed to Lalit".' (*Udbodhan*, Paush, December-January, 1937-38).

R. one day prayed, as he massaged the Mother's rheumatic feet with an oil, that the disease might be transferred to his body and the Mother be cured. The Mother smiled indulgently and said, 'What are you thinking, my boy? May you live long. I have grown old; how much longer should I live? Should one think like that? May the Master grant you a long life.' And she blessed him by touching his head.

At one time in 1918, Sri Lalitmohan Saha became so depressed in mind that, becoming angry with the Master and the Mother, he resolved not to visit the Mother any more. But pressed by friends, he had to go to the 'Udbodhan'. That day many devotees saluted the Mother, with none of whom she talked. Last of all she saw her petulant devotee and asked him, 'Are you well?' Ironically he replied, 'Yes, Mother, very well, indeed!' In answer the Mother smiled benignly on him and said endearingly, 'How's that, my boy! That is the nature of the mind. Should one behave like this just because of that?'

In 1915, when Sri Mahendranath Gupta reached Jayrambati, he had it in his mind to worship the Mother's feet with flowers and sandal-paste, though he could not imagine how he could procure these in an unknown place. Just then the Mother sent him some flowers and sandal-paste through a little niece of hers, through whom also she told him, 'If that boy wants to offer flowers, he can come now to do so.'

Swami Tanmayananda, while on his way from Koalpara to Jayrambati, thought within himself that if he could do some little service to the Mother he would be fortunate. Reaching there he found her sitting with her legs stretched and a pot of oil nearby. Tanmayananda began massaging her feet with the oil, and the Mother instructed him as to how each part of the legs was to be rubbed. When the devotee had served her in this manner to his heart's content for about twenty-five minutes, the Mother said, 'I hope you are now satisfied. Let me now go in for bath; I have to worship the Master.'

One afternoon, Praphullamukhi Bose found on reaching the 'Udbodhan' that the widow of Navasan was bringing in the Mother's quilt, mattress, etc., from the terrace, inserting them into their covers and then spreading the bed. She thought within herself, 'If I could but get this work to do!' As soon as the widow of Navasan left, the Mother entered the room and glancing at the bed said, 'Do you notice, my daughter, how she has muddled everything! She has used one cover for another. You, my good girl, change the covers and do the bed over again.' Praphullamukhi had her wish fulfilled.

One day, in July, Swami Mahadevananda went to Haldi-pukur at the Mother's bidding to purchase some kerosene oil, flour, etc., weighing altogether more than eighty pounds. As the Mother had not asked him to engage any bearer, he carried the load on his head. The road was slushy and slippery and the load seemed to become heavier at every step, till at last he could bear it no longer. Nevertheless, he resolved not to yield to any weakness; and astonishingly enough, as he stepped forward with this determination and cleared a hurdle immediately in front, the burden became lighter, so that he covered the remaining distance without any trouble. But this sudden change set him thinking about the cause; and as he entered the Mother's house in a pensive mood, he found her pacing up and down her verandah with a flushed face and scared

eyes, and saying to herself, 'Why did I not ask him to engage a porter?' When Mahadevananda took down the burden, she said, 'You should have taken a porter. What did it matter if I had not said so? Should one walk that way?'

Some incidents prove her foresight and premonition. When Vaikuntha was going away from Jayrambati after paying his respects to the Mother, she said, 'You go home straight from here; you needn't now go to the (Belur) Math or anywhere else. Go home and serve your parents; this is the time for serving your father.' At the time of leaving home Vaikuntha had seen his father in normal health; but on returning there, he found him on his death-bed. The old man passed away in a week's time.

Swami Mahadevananda went to Jayrambati from Koalpara with a basket of vegetables. When he was about to return, the Mother forbade him saying, 'Don't go; it will rain soon.' The Swami paid no heed and started after some light refreshment. The Mother followed him outside to show him the clouds in the sky; but there was not a single patch, Mahadevananda saluted her and laughed heartily as he walked on. But as he crossed the Amodar and was in the open field of Dessera he was caught in such a heavy shower that he was completely drenched and had to run for shelter into the house of a low-caste poor man.

The Mother was busy packing her things on the day preceding the Durga worship of 1912; for she was to start for Banaras just after the festival. At noon the sister of the poet-dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh came to make her obeisance. When taking leave she said, 'Good-bye, Mother.' Absent-mindedly the Mother replied, 'Yes, you can go.' As soon as she had descended the steps, the Mother thought, 'What an evil thing I have uttered, I said "go"<sup>1</sup>! I never speak to anybody thus.' As ill luck would have it, that lady passed away that very night. The news made the

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1. Indians, when taking leave, say, 'May I come now?' and the answer given is, 'Yes, you may come.' They do not use 'go' in this context under

Mother extremely sorry and she said, 'What a pity that such a thing slipped out of my lips!'

The Mother initiated Sri Hemchandra Dasgupta at Jayrambati and taught him how to keep count of the number of *japa* with the fingers. But as he could not master the process, she said, 'You will learn it from Suren.' Suren Babu then lived at Ranchi and Hem Babu would be going to his own post at Chittagong, the two places being diametrically opposite. Hence he said, 'How can that be?' The Mother simply said, 'Well, it will somehow come to pass.' And most astonishingly, they met each other in the steamer at Goalunda—Suren Babu was going from Ranchi to Dacca.

Before the passing away of the Master's disciple Purnachandra Ghosh, the Mother remarked at seeing his mother coming to her at the 'Udbodhan', 'There she comes. What does she mean by coming to vex me every day saying, "Mother bestow your blessing, cure Purna"? I know it as a certainty that Purna won't recover; yet to console them I have to say that he will.' That day, too, Purnachandra's mother saluted the Mother, repeated her prayer and had in return a few words of solace. When she left, the Mother remarked, 'The Master had warned. "He won't live long if he is married." She didn't mind it then; she hurriedly married him, lest he should become a monk.' Some days later, the Mother, Yogin-Ma, and others lay down for rest after the evening service, and the Mother fell asleep. Suddenly she started up and said, 'Is Purna dead, Yogin?' Much astonished, Yogin-Ma asked 'Who told you, Mother?' The Mother replied, 'I was asleep and I suddenly heard somebody saying that Purna had died.' Yogin-Ma then confirmed that the mishap had really occurred in the afternoon (November 1913) though she had not been informed. That night the Mother kept on sorrowing for this beloved disciple of the Master.

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the belief that to permit 'to go' is as good as asking one to depart from this life.

The Mother's blessing for her disciples was infallible. Sri Purnachandra Bhaumik was once in some great difficulty in his service, which might lead to his being gaoled. He related the whole affair to the Mother, who, however, held out the hope, 'There's no cause for fear; you need have no anxiety.' He soon overcame the difficulty.

Sri Surendranath Roy of Barisal was once attacked with a deadly disease which was diagnosed as tuberculosis and his life was despaired of. But he had a strong desire to see the Mother before he left this world. Accordingly, he invited her through a letter. In response the Mother sent him a photograph of hers with a bound volume of the Bengali magazine *Udbodhan*; and she wrote that though it was not possible for her to be personally present, he should look at her photograph and read the volume; furthermore that he would recover from the disease. Surendranath found the real Mother there in the photograph, which he kept at his head. He soon came round.

Owing to continuous drought the crops in the fields of Jayrambati and the neighbouring villages began to be scorched away. The helpless and scared farmers told the Mother. 'This year, Mother, there's no hope of keeping our children alive—all will have to die of hunger.' Their distress moved her, and she went with them to look at the fields. There she could not control her feeling of dismay, and supplicated with extreme humility, 'Alas, Master! What's this that you have done! Should every one die of starvation after all?' That very night rain poured down in torrents and the crop was so successful that year that the peasants had no such happy memory for many years past.

In November 1918, a Brahmachari from Koalpara came down to the groundfloor of 'Udbodhan' at about 10 p.m. at the call of Swami Saradananda to find Sri Napharchandra Kole of his village waiting to make obeisance to the Mother. According to the Swami's direction the Brahmachari informed the Mother and led the old gentleman to her. There Napharchandra held the

feet of the Mother with both hands and with his eyes full of tears said, 'Mother, I have come to you as I am in imminent danger. Some of my grand-daughters and a grandson have died of influenza. And now some more grand-daughters and the only surviving grandson are in precarious condition. Mother, you will have to so ordain it that my line is not broken.' The Mother said, 'Dear me! Why should you be so apprehensive? You are a blessed and fortunate man.' But he still pleaded, 'No, Mother, I don't want to hear such platitudes. May I not have to suffer the pangs of separation from my grandson.' Thus he spoke and wept holding on to her feet all the time. The Mother said, 'Don't you be overwhelmed; please get up. Very well, I shall pray to the Master.' Napharchandra still implored till at last the Mother uttered in a solemn voice, 'No, you need have no fear.' That comforted the gentleman; he wiped his tears and went down. The Mother sent two sweet dishes for him, which he accepted, and departed happily. He had his wish fulfilled.

Kshirodebala Roy was a widow from an early age. About a year before she became widowed, she was one day dressing some green papaw for the kitchen, when the juice of the fruits affected her fingers which had been injured a little earlier while getting the nails pared by a barber; so that the fingers became swollen and later developed sores which lasted for some twelve years. Though at times the sores seemed to subside a little, they flared up virulently when in contact with water. After she became acquainted intimately with the Mother she had one of those attacks. She decided, on coming to the Mother one day, that she would not touch her feet with the hands while bowing down to her. But as she noticed another lady wrapping up her hands with the hem of her cloth and touching the Mother's feet reverentially with those covered hands, she too decided to follow that method, though with herself this was a novelty. This unusual procedure, however, did not escape the careful eyes of the Mother, who questioned Kshirodebala

and found out the truth. But instead of taking offence, she said tenderly, 'My daughter, such is the condition with me nowadays, that I am ever engaged with myself and do not look much to your needs. You worship the Master with this hand, and that's why the sore persists. Anyway, come with me. Be quick, for they will soon carry away for throwing into the Ganges the flowers etc., that were offered to the Master and the water in which his feet were washed.' Going to another room she said, 'There you see, there are all those things in that *Kamandalu* (ascetic's water-pot). Insert the whole palm into it.' That being done she said, 'The hand will have no more ailment. But try to avoid touching fish, meat, garlic, and onion as far as you can; for you can't avoid touching these altogether.<sup>1</sup> If you handle these things, there may be a little recurrence of sores. You will be worshipping the Master daily, as a matter of course. When there are those sores, apply the water with which you wash the Master's feet.' Kshirodebala got cured by following this treatment. Whenever there was a recrudescence later on, the touch of the holy water cured her immediately.

When Brajeshwari Devi went to Jayrambati for initiation, she had on her arm a silver amulet as a preventive against hysteria. She had fits whenever anybody reminded her of the disease, which lasted for a week or so, the fits starting at evening and continuing long into the night. The sight of the amulet roused the inquisitiveness of the mad aunt. But, intervening, the Mother said that the devotee might have worn it because of some disease, and she should not be embarrassed by useless questions. Then she said to Brajeshwari, 'My daughter, you need not wear the amulet any longer. This disease will leave you even without your wearing it.' In fact, she had no attack after this, not even when attending cases of hysteria.

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1. She had to cook for her relatives, though she herself was a strict vegetarian like all orthodox widows.

## THE MOTHER AND THE MASTER

We have discussed how the Master looked upon the Mother. Now we shall try to understand how the Mother estimated the Master. For this we have no great need to turn back to the Dakshineswar and Cossipore days though for bringing out the essential idealogical factors we may have to retrace our steps a little. For the rest we shall keep our vision directed in front.

One day, as the Master sat on his smaller cot in his room at Dakshineswar, and there was none except the Mother who was sweeping the floor, she suddenly asked him, 'Who am I to you?' Without the least hesitation the Master replied, 'You are my Blissful Mother.' Again, when Hridaya one day asked the Mother banteringly, 'Aunt, don't you call my uncle your father', the impromptu answer came from her lips, 'Why do you speak of him as father only? He is mother, father, friend, relative, acquaintance, my nearest and dearest, and everything.' As the Master considered the Mother to be the Divine Mother, the Master was to her the embodiment of all the gods and goddesses; and this she once openly declared by saying, 'He is the goddess Manasa and Ganga, and all.'

It was the second week of June 1913. Dr. Durgapada Ghosh and Sri Surendranath Bhaumik were having a little talk with the Mother before leaving her village home. Surendranath submitted that he had a little difficulty in worshipping the Master, for though he had a vague idea about the identity of the Master with his own chosen Goddess, and so he could worship his chosen Goddess in the picture of the Master, yet he was faced with an incongruity every time he tried to utter the *mantra*, 'With your grace, O Great Goddess, etc.,' at the time of dedicating the fruits of his *japa* to the deity on the completion of the worship. The Mother replied with a hearty laugh, 'Well, my boy, he himself is both the Great God and the Great

Goddess. He is in all the deities and he dwells in all the creatures. One can worship all the gods and goddesses in and through him. You may as well call him the Great God as the Great Goddess.' Another day (end of March 1920), she said to a lady devotee, 'He is everything. He is the Purusha (the Supreme consciousness) and he is the Prakriti (the Primordial Energy). From him everything will flow.' At Jayrambati the Mother at the time of initiating a devotee, asked him to offer at the Master's feet all his works, virtues and vices, merits and demerits; and then pointing to the Master as his guru she gave him the *mantra*. But the devotee thought, 'If the Master is the guru, what is the Mother then?' For he could not realize that the two were but one. And hence he asked her, 'How am I to think on the Master?' The Mother solemnly reiterated, 'He is all—Purusha and Prakriti. If you think on him, you have thought of all.' To a lady devotee the Mother said, 'In the Master are all the deities—not even (the goddesses) Sitala and Manasa excluded.'

At one time they used to bring for her from the temple of Siddheshwari at Baghbazar the water with which the deity had been bathed. One day, after the worship of the Master, Swami Vasudevananda brought to the Mother in two separate pots, the bath waters of the Master and Siddheshwari. 'Why two?' inquired the Mother. When the matter was explained she said, 'It's all one.' As Vasudevananda still held before her the two pots, she said, 'Mix them up.' 'I shall do so from tomorrow,' said the Swami. But the Mother insisted on these being poured into the same pot then and there, and she drank that mixed water.

We read in several Bengali works<sup>1</sup> that though the Mother was so very shy that she never went to the

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1. *Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smriti-Katha* (p. 278), *Sri Sri Sarada Devi* (p. 56), *Sri Ma* (p. 81), which slightly differ in unimportant details.

Master's room when any gentleman or even a devotee was there, yet when the Master passed away at Cossipore, she could contain herself no longer, but rushed to the room and cried out, 'Mother Kali, dear, for what fault of mine have you left me?'

From such statements and incidents, it appears clear to us that the Mother did not look upon the Master as a mere husband or man, nor even as an ordinary immortal; according to her, he was none other than the all-pervading God Himself. Hence her instruction to the devotees was, 'The Master is everything—he's the guru, he's the chosen Deity.' And about one of her experiences she told Sudhira Devi, 'I was in such a state at one time that I could not even drive away an ant from the food offered (in front of the Master), under the belief that the Master himself was eating it.'

She identified the Master with all the deities and all creation, including even an ant. And her conception of him transcended all forms and ascended to the formless Brahman. Though the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati on the Himalayas is dedicated to non-dualism, the great Swami Vivekananda, during his visit there in early January 1901, found that a shrine-room containing the picture of Sri Ramakrishna had been established and that regular worship was being conducted with flowers, incense, and other paraphernalia. The Swami vehemently denounced this dualistic tendency but he did not order the discontinuance of the worship, as that would hurt the feelings of others. He rather believed that they would realize their mistake and rectify accordingly. The Swami's criticism had the desired effect, and the shrine was broken up. One who still doubted if it was right for him to profess himself a member of the Advaita Ashrama when he leaned towards dualism appealed to the Holy Mother as a final resort, only to receive the reply, 'Sri Ramakrishna was all Advaita and preached Advaita. Why should you not also follow Advaita? All his disciples are Advaitins.'

Just as the Master, though himself a doyen of Advaitins and ever established in non-dualism, found nothing incongruous in having apparently diverse attitudes towards Reality—non-dualistic, qualified non-dualistic, or dualistic—according to the level on which his mind worked for the time being, so also the Mother could offer worship to the Master at the same time that she knew him as the supreme Brahman. From her own account it appears that the first real worship of the Master originated with herself, just as the worship of Sri Chaitanya began with his wife Vishnu-priya who had the first image of her consort carved out of margosa wood and had it installed in a shrine. The Mother said that the first copy of the photograph of the Master that is now worshipped in thousands of homes, became so black that it had to be rejected and given to a brahmin of Dakshineswar at his request. When some time later the brahmin went away from the village, he left the photograph with the Mother, who placed it along with other deities and went on offering flowers and food. One day the Master entered the Nahabat and noticing the picture there, said, 'Hullo, dear, what's all this you are doing here?' The Mother, who was cooking under the staircase, came in, attracted by the Master's voice, to find him offering once or twice to that picture some of the *bel* leaves and other things that were there for worship. The owner of the picture never returned; and so it became the Mother's constant companion. It was dark at first, as we have said but gradually it became lighter. The Master got her daily worship. Even during long journeys, she had the picture with her, and made it a point to offer something to it. There was no sanctimoniousness about this worship, though there was enough of love and earnestness. At the time of worship it seemed as though she was sitting in his living presence and acting accordingly, with the greatest intimacy. We quote from one who witnessed this worship day in and day out:

'The framed photograph of the Master rested on a wooden seat in a niche in the wall; and by its side were the image of the child Gopala, and one or two more pictures of other deities. In the morning after taking a little of Ganges water in hand the Mother roused the Master from his sleep—kept erect the picture that lay in sleep. Under the Master's seat in a small brass *Kamandalu* was Ganges water, and near it were sandal-wood, a stone piece on which to make sandal-paste, a *panchapatra*, and some more paraphernalia for worship. After finishing the domestic duties, the Mother sat at about nine'o'clock in the middle of the room, placing the Master in front. She bathed and worshipped him there with offerings of flowers, sandal-paste, fruits, sweets, syrup of sugar-candy, and *halva* (a sweet preparation made with sugar, butter, and semolina). Then she sat erect in meditation for some time with her hands on her lap. She devoted more time to this worship whenever she had no other special engagement; but she never took too long. She seemed to lose her ordinary consciousness during meditation, after which she made her obeisance to the Master and kept his picture in its previous position. At the end, she took a little of the water with which the Master's feet had been washed, and little bits of *tulasi* and *bel* leaves, if there happened to be any. As flower was a rarity as Jayrambati she used them as often as she could get them. In the absence of flowers, *tulasi* leaves and water served her purpose. For *tulasi* she had a certain predilection which she expressed thus, "*Tulasi* is very pure; everything is sanctified if *tulasi* is there." At noon, rice, soup of lentils, and vegetable curries were offered in the Master's name in the kitchen. In the evening, again, she offered to him *luchi*, *chapati*, vegetable curry, milk, molasses, etc. There was no regularity as regards offerings in the afternoon. If any special thing came there by chance, it was offered at about four.'

This was all the formality. And then, as to intimacy, we learn that when she was leaving Koalpara for Calcutta

for the last time, Brahmachari Varada went to her room at five in the morning to find that she had finished worshipping the Master with fruits and sweets and was then saying to him while wrapping the picture with a cloth, 'Get up, it's time to start.' At another time, when the Mother was at Jayrambati, during Jagad-dhatri worship, a devotee found the Mother finishing the Master's worship early in the morning and then at the time of offering food to him saying, 'Mind you, Mother (Jagad-dhatri) is to be worshipped today. Do finish your meal early, for I shall have to go there.' On a third occasion, when there was talk of the Mother's going to her village from Calcutta, but because of the sickness of one or other of her retinue the date was being repeatedly deferred, she was heard saying to the Master, 'Let us go to Jayrambati. Don't you have any liking for the big tank and the *tulasi* leaves there?'

After the dedication of food to the Master, she actually saw him tasting it. When Dr. Lalbehari Sen was on a visit to Jayrambati in 1911, he fell ill. When convalescent, he was given a little *khichudi* as diet by the Mother. As the doctor hesitated, fearing that the food would do him harm, the Mother assured him that he need have no apprehension since the Master had partaken of it. At this the doctor queried, 'Can the Master be seen?' The Mother replied, 'Yes, nowadays he comes at times and wants to eat *khichudi* and cheese.' As somebody regretted at Koalpara that though food was offered to the Master, one could not know whether he accepted it or not, the Mother averred emphatically, 'There's no doubt that he does eat, my boy; if the dedication is made from the bottom of one's heart, he surely eats it.' And she added that when she calls the child Krishna for his meal, he goes to her jingling his anklets and eats with a childish clamour. In November 1914, a woman devotee on entering the chapel heard the Mother addressing the Master thus like a bashful newly married maiden, 'Come, come for food,' and

gentleman's doubts cleared up and he said with delight, 'Mother, now I have got it; you are the same as the Master—identical.' With the same serenity the Mother again said, 'Then eat.'

The Master comes down in every age and his Sakti, the divine Mother, accompanies him. She often pointed out this eternal relationship to the chosen few. Nalini Sarkar of Midnapore asked her once, 'Mother, did you come with all the incarnations?' 'Yes, my son,' replied the Mother.

When the Master comes to us again, his retinue will follow, and his Sakti, the Mother, will again incarnate, though this is by no means a happy development to contemplate. In the course of a conversation Gauri-Ma said one day (February 9, 1912) at the 'Udbodhan', 'The Master said that he would come down again twice; once in the form of a *baul*.<sup>1</sup>' The Mother confirmed her by saying, 'Yes, the Master said, "You will have in your hands (my) hubble-hubble." The Master will have a broken stone vessel in hand. Maybe, the cooking will be done in a broken iron pan. He walks on and on—neither looking to the right nor left.'

Ashutosh Roy, a devotee of Ranchi, had a vision of the Master, by whom he was called at night; and after opening the door he found the Master standing on the road with ochre cloth, wooden sandals on his feet, and a pair of tongs in his hand. A disciple reported the incident to the Mother at Jayrambati, in May 1913, and asked, 'Mother, why did he see him with wooden sandals on his feet and a pair of tongs in his hand?' The Mother replied, 'That's the outfit of a monk. For has he not said that he will come in the trappings of a *baul*? In the attire of a *baul*—with a

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1. *Baul* is derived from the word *vatula*, meaning crazy. The *bauls* are a community of god-intoxicated mendicants who sing mystic songs to the accompaniment of *ektara*, an one-stringed musical instrument. They wear long robes often torn to pieces and almost touching the feet; and they do not pay heed to social customs and fineness of manners.

long robe, matted hair on the head, and beard so long. He said, "I shall go home by way of Burdwan; somebody's son will be easing himself on the road; in my hand will be a broken stone vessel, and a bag dangling under my arm." He will be walking on and on, and eating all the time—without looking in any particular direction.' The questioner asked, 'Why the Burdwan road?' The Mother replied, 'The home lies that way.' Again the question was put, 'Is he a Bengali then?' The Mother said, 'Yes, a Bengali. Hearing him I said, "How strange, my dear! What a strange fancy you have!" He smiled and said, "Yes, you will have my hubble-hubble in hand."'

Being told that the Master would again incarnate together with his companions and associates, Lakshmi Devi, his niece, swore, 'I will not be coming again even though I be chopped to pieces like tobacco leaves.' At this the Master replied with a smirk, 'Where will you be if I come away? You will be ill at ease. It's like a float of (the interlocking aquatic plant) *Kalmi*; if one pulls at one end, the whole mass moves.' The Mother, too, disliked the idea. At Vrindaban, when the Mother and the devotees had alighted from the train and Golap-Ma was reaching out their belongings from inside the compartment, she found the hubble-bubble of Latu (Swami Adbhutananda) lying in a corner. So she took it up and handed it over to the Mother. At once Lakshmi Devi twitted the Mother saying, 'There you have already taken in hand the hubble-bubble.' The Mother, too, said, 'Master, Master, here I have finished holding the hubble-bubble,' and she dropped it instantaneously to the ground with a thud.

The Mother told the disciples, 'He (the Master) said that he will live for a hundred years with his children.' According to her, the golden age began from the advent of the Master. He came with some extraordinary souls as his esoteric circle. For instance, the Master himself told her that Swami Vivekananda belonged to the group of the great seven seers of old and that Arjuna came as Swami Yoga-

nanda. Ordinary people are born and they die; but these highly gifted and illuminated souls accompany an incarnation to advance his mission. About their extraordinary spiritual calibre, she said 'All those who came earlier have come again.' And to her hearers she spoke with pride about the devotees of the inner circle, 'Don't you notice how childlike is Rakhal's (Brahmananda's) behaviour; even now he is like a little boy. And look at Sarat (Saradananda); what a lot of work he does, how many difficulties he shoulders, and yet he never complains. He is a holy man; why should he be doing all this? If they want, they can keep their minds fixed on God day and night. It's only for your sake that they continue on a lower plane. Keep their characters before your eyes, and serve them.' She considered these direct disciples of the Master as her own sons and said, 'Rakhal, Sarat, and others — all of them issued out of my very body.'

From a very remarkable statement about the Master's life as a whole it seems as though in the Mother's estimation the three phases in the Master's life — his *Lila* (play) as an incarnation, his spiritual practices, and his mission after realization — could be arranged in a graded scale. Of these, the first seemed to occupy the pride of place and last came his mission. An incarnation plays out of the fullness of spirit and every word or movement of his is calculated to stir up similar underlying emotions in gifted souls. Here there is no motive, but only living inspiration for others. In the second phase of spiritual practices, his movements seem to be more concretely correlated to, and circumscribed and determined by, his environment; and hence though his divine glory cannot find free play here, the very fact of conformity to human standards makes his life more widely appreciated. In the third phase of encompassing the general weal, all kinds of human factors intervene to shut out and refract the inner light; and here, though his divinity becomes deeply overlaid with humanity, his real mission as the incarnation of the

age is more widely fulfilled. On these matters the Mother said one day to Swami Keshavananda, 'I tell you, my son, it never occurred to me that he practised all the religions with the express *motive* of preaching the idea of spiritual harmony. He was always in his mood of divine ecstasy. He practised all the methods through which the Christians, Mohammedans, Vaishnavas, and others worship God and realize truth, and thereby he tasted God's disports in diverse ways. Days and nights passed by him without any notice. But what you should note, my dear, is that *renunciation* is his special message in this age. Did any one see such natural renunciation any time before? As for the harmony of religions you speak of, that also is true. In previous incarnations, all other spiritual moods looked insignificant because of the emphasis on a particular one.' The truth revealed is higher and more fundamental than either its method of realization or its subsequent promulgation and application. On another day she said to a second devotee, 'Men are ever forgetful of God. And hence, whenever the occasion demands, He comes down now and then to show the way to the worldly by following it Himself. This time He showed renunciation.' In fact, no attempt at world-regeneration can succeed unless it has selflessness as its basis; and without it the realization of God can never be dreamt of.

## HER HUMAN PERSONALITY

It was April 1919. Seeing that the Mother wailed like the common people at the death of Maku's son, Neda, the minds of the devotees present at Koalpara were troubled with doubts. Hence, when saluting her next morning, Sri Narayana Iyengar, a great devotee from Mysore, asked her, 'Why did you cry like an ordinary mortal at the death of Neda?' The simple answer of the Mother was, 'I am in the world, and have to taste the fruit of this tree. That is why I cry.'

This world, which is a creation of God, has a way of its own that all embodied beings have to follow. The Master declared, 'When God incarnates Himself as a man, He has to behave just like any other human being. That's why it is difficult to recognize Him. He has all these, — hunger, thirst, disease, sorrow, and oftentimes fear — just as men have.' He further said, 'Caught in the trap of the five elements, Brahman moans.' (*Kathamrita*, IV. 56, III. 192)

This dual aspect of divinity and humanity was expressed through many talks of the Mother. At the 'Udbodhan' she said one day (September 1918), 'People call me Goddess, and I too think, "That may be really so. Or else how could there be all the strange things that have happened in my life?" Yogen, Golap, and others know much of this. If I should but think, "Let this happen", or "I shall eat this", the Lord somehow fulfils all these.' On another occasion (August 1919) the Mother was at Jayrambati with Radhu. One day she sat after evening to hear the letters being read out to her by a Brahmachari. In one of these, a woman devotee had praised her variously. Hearing this, the Mother said, 'Look here, sometimes it sets me thinking that since I am merely a daughter of Ram Mukherji and there are many other girls of my age at Jayrambati, how do I differ from them? Devotees

come to pay their respects from places unknown to anybody here. Besides, on questioning them I learn that some are magistrates and some are lawyers. Why do these come at all?' She simply drew attention to the problem, but suggested no solution. The Brahmachari, however, had no difficulty in diving deeper and discovering the truth. Hence he pushed the line of thought a step further and inquired, 'Well, don't you always remember your real stature?' The Mother replied, 'Can that always be so? How then could all these works be done? But even in the midst of work, whenever the desire arises, I can get the inspiration with a little thought and then the play of the Great Maya stands revealed.'

We turn back to an earlier time, February 1, 1907, when the Mother was at Jayrambati and a devotee wanted to know if the Master was the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness. As the Mother confirmed the view, the devotee put in again, 'As to that, all husbands are to their wives the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness.<sup>1</sup> I don't ask from that point of view.' The Mother replied, 'Yes, he is the ever-present Brahman in Its fullness — as a husband as also in that other sense.' The devotee then fell to thinking that just like the unity of Sita and Rama or of Radha and Krishna, there must be a unity between the Mother and the Master; and yet as a matter of fact he saw before his very eyes the Mother engaged in domestic duties. To remove his doubt he asked, 'Then why do I see you as though making *chapati* like any ordinary woman? What are all these? Are these *maya*?' The Mother replied, 'What else but *maya*? Why should I be in such a state if not because of *maya*? I should have been sitting by Narayana as his Lakshmi in Vaikuntha. It's just because the Lord likes to disport as a man.' The devotee again asked, 'Doesn't your true nature flash in your mind?' The Mother

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1. According to the Hindu belief, husbands are to be looked upon as Siva or Narayana and wives as Sakti or Lakshmi. They are all divine, for they are essentially Brahman.

replied, 'Yes, it does at times and then, I think, "What's this that I am doing? What's this I am engaged in?" Again all these things (pointing in front)—houses, children, etc.,—come to the mind and I forget my essential nature.' And as she had accepted that sport or *maya* out of her free will, she said, now and again, 'It's only by accepting an illusion that I am so', or 'This is nothing but continuing in the midst of an illusion.'

The disports of an incarnation are only apparently human. In the Master's life it strikes one that though he was ever in divine moods, all his activities on the normal plane had a charm and orderliness of their own. On whatever level of existence his mind might be at a given time, it only revealed moral and intellectual perfection of an ideal order to which others might well aspire to rise. This is a special gift to mankind from Sri Ramakrishna who finished his earthly *play* only a few years ago. In studying the Mother's life also, we are forcefully reminded of this fact. Furthermore, just as in the Master's life there is no lack of ideals for the work-a-day world in spite of his constant state of spiritual ecstasy, so also in the Mother's life there is piety, renunciation, selflessness, and divine afflatus and serenity. Alongside of these are her affection, service, liberality, modesty, humility, and other soft human qualities which bring into prominence a much desired corrective to the individualistic and self-centred civilization of the modern age. In fact, even a casual pursuit of this life makes it clear that while the life divine is ever dedicated to general goodwill, the life human is busy with personal welfare.

Bearing all these facts in mind, Swami Premananda once told Swami Keshavananda and other devotees, 'You have seen with your own eyes, how the Mother, who is in reality the Great Goddess ruling over those who wield the destinies of kings and emperors, has yet elected to become a poor woman plastering the house with cow-dung, scouring utensils, winnowing rice and clearing the leavings of the

devotees after their meals. She undertakes all these tasks to teach the householders their domestic duties. What infinite endurance, limitless mercy and absolute absence of egotism are there!' And in a letter he wrote, 'Who has understood the Mother? There is not the least trace of splendour. The Master had at least the brilliance of wisdom. But what about the Mother? For her even that glow is wanting. What a great power is that! Glory to the Mother! Victory to the Mother! Glory to the powerful Mother! The poison that we cannot assimilate, we pass on to the Mother. The Mother takes every one on her lap. Infinite power, limitless pity! Glory to the Mother! Not to speak of us, we have not seen even the Master do so. With how much caution and testing would he accept a man! And here? What do we see here in the Mother? Astonishing, astonishing! She is giving shelter to all, eating everybody's food, and assimilating all. Mother, Mother, victory unto the Mother! Remember that mercy of the Mother, that infinite compassion of the Mother, in weal and woe, in success and failure, in famine and pestilence, in wars and revolutions. Glory unto the Mother! Victory unto the Mother!'

The Mother, too, spoke one day in this very strain. When a disciple said, 'What an abundance of spiritual trances and ecstasies had those who went to the Master! But nothing of that is being done by you to us', the Mother replied, 'As to that, to how many indeed did he do such things, and how selectively at that? Even so his body fell down quite early. To me he has pushed on a line of ants. If I do just as he did, how long will my body last? What a number of children I have to tend!'

The fields of application for the spiritual power being different, a certain disparity will be noted in the behaviour of the two personalities. But close scrutiny will reveal their fundamental similarity, nay identity. The renunciation and selflessness which charmed all concerned by their unrestricted expression in and through the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who spent his days in the precincts of a

holy temple in the midst of devout souls, did also enlighten the dark labyrinths of domestic duties by being reflected in a thousand ways against the background of family relationships in and through the life of the Holy Mother. Whereas the Master resorted to such petty desires as 'I shall smoke', 'I shall drink water', in order to chain down to the common plane his mind that ever tried to be lost in transcendental heights, the Mother accepted Radhu for keeping within limitations a mind that would otherwise expand and merge in the Infinity beyond. This may appear as a bondage, but on closer observation we find it as a proof of the limitless will power of the Mother. The Master gave up gold, whose touch caused him pain; the Mother touched it with her head under the belief that it was nothing but the goddess of wealth and good fortune in another form. Rejection of a thing as non-Brahman, and acceptance of it as Brahman, are both fundamentally indicative of enlightenment and non-covetousness. In the light of all such spiritual truths we proceed to a study of the Mother's life in a purely human setting; and in doing so we remind the reader, again, that in any attempt at an analytical comprehension of this character, we must not totally lose sight of her divinity and accept the purely feminine characteristics as a measure of her greatness.

The facts that we shall consider in this chapter fall under two categories: some of them are interlinked with her life, while of others she is but a witness. Her personal acts, sometimes interpreted by herself, are very valuable indeed but the opinions she expressed from a distance are no less so, since any evaluation made by an extraordinarily gifted, cultured, and saintly lady, steeped in the age-old tradition of her race, has its own special appeal. And when we remember that her whole life was meant as a beacon to future generations, these illustrations, through life or comments by word of mouth become all the more significant.

For the little hamlet of Jayrambati, the Mother had a lifelong fondness. Once when she was on the point of leaving for Calcutta, her aunt said, 'Sarada, do come again.' The Mother said, 'It goes without saying that I will.' And to emphasize that promise she touched the floor of the house again and again and laid its dust on her head quoting a line from a Sanskrit verse: 'Mother and mother-country are superior even to heaven.'

She had some sort of relationship established with every villager, aged or young, whatever their social standing. Even people of other villages had a share in that love. On the day of the immersion of the image of Durga, when all came to prostrate themselves before her and to receive her blessing, she never forgot to inquire about and show the utmost consideration for her 'uncle' Kunja who belonged to a lower caste of a different village and was noted for his skill in making images of deities. In such social contacts she did not let her high caste stand in her way.

The great devotee, Girishchandra Ghosh, once declared that 'in the present age Sri Ramakrishna conquered all through his weapon of salutation (humility)'. The Mother's life too was eloquent of this attitude of being lowlier than the lowliest. When as a result of advancing years it became impossible for her to cook for all, an old brahmin woman was engaged in the kitchen. The Mother called her 'aunt'. When the Mother was about to salute this aunt on the evening of the immersion of the Durga image, the old woman protested saying, 'That's unthinkable, Mother! You're the Mother of the Universe; all salute you. I am an ordinary woman; I can't possibly pocket such high honour.' The Mother, however, could not be dissuaded; she saluted the cook and added, 'That can never be; you're my aunt, to be sure.'

There was not the slightest affectation in these dealings. Once Suryanarayana, a cousin of hers, found on reaching Vishnupur from Calcutta with her that he had

left back an article without which he could not go home. Accordingly, a telegram was sent to Calcutta advising its despatch by the next train. Till the thing came, the Mother refused to go away leaving behind her cousin alone, and said, 'Is Surya a stranger to me?'

We have mentioned earlier a number of facts concerning the Mother's attitude to caste. The Master once declared, 'Devotees have no caste.' The Mother seemed to follow this literally in the field of spirituality, though in social dealings she never advocated revolution, but rather conformed to the established norms. In refusing initiation to a certain candidate who had his own family guru, she said, 'One should follow one's family tradition; one has to observe caste so long as one is in society.' When during her last illness it was proposed to feed her with bread, she declined saying, 'My boy, don't you feed me with things touched by Mohammedans during these closing days.' Accordingly, she was given bread made by brahmins. Later on she agreed to eat milkroll loaves on being told that these had been prepared by machines. At this time she developed a distaste for food, so that she had to be allowed a little quantity of rice for which alone she had some appetite. One day Dr. Kanjilal happened to be present at the meal-time. Noticing that the quantity of rice was in excess of what he could allow, he took Sarala Devi, the attendant, to task and said that from the next day he would arrange for paid nurses as Sarala could not be relied on. When the doctor left, the Mother said, 'Forsooth, I shall accept the service of those women in shoes! Does he imagine I shall? I won't be able to do so. Please go on doing the work just as you have been doing.' Actually, the professional nurses never came.

If we are to reconcile the apparent contradiction between her conformity with caste restrictions and her loving relationship with Amzad and others, we have to scrutinize a few more incidents. The Mother had no

hesitation in showing honour to non-brahmins, who were otherwise cultured, highly placed, and respectable in every way. When Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati came to the 'Udbodhan' to examine Radhu (September 1918) the latter saluted the Kaviraj at the Mother's bidding. After the physician had left, some one present there asked, 'Is he a brahmin?' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'he is a Vaidya.' Again it was asked, 'Why then did you ask her to salute him?' The Mother posed the counter question, 'Why should she not?' and then explained, 'How very erudite! They are as good as brahmins. If she's not to salute him, whom should she?' A devotee of the Kayastha caste went to Jayrambati with four others. The Mother's new house was then under construction. She called Radhu and pointing to the Kayastha devotee said, 'Radhu, your elder brother has come; salute him.' The devotee then thought, 'What's this? I am a Kayastha, to be sure.' At the same time this assurance also came to his mind, 'The Mother won't certainly do anything harmful to me.' At last Radhu and the devotee both saluted each other. A devout woman came to the 'Udbodhan' to tell the Mother that she had been initiated in a dream. The Mother confirmed the *mantra* that the devotee had received. And then coming to know that she was the wife of a disciple of the Mother, the latter said, 'Why did you not tell me earlier. O Radhu, O Maku, come to salute the Manager's wife.' Dumbfounded, the devotee objected, 'Mother, what's this that you say? I am a Kayastha by birth, and how can they, who are brahmins, salute me?' The Mother said, 'One shouldn't speak thus. You're a pious soul; devotees have no caste. They stand to gain by saluting you.' When Radhu and Maku came, the devotees grasped their feet, and the Mother said, 'No need of that; she won't allow you to salute. Of a truth, they are devotees, and as such they see the Master in all beings.' On such a high pedestal she wanted to place all human relationships; but weak humanity could hardly have that divine outlook,

and hence adapted its dealings to social requirements even while in the house of God.

During the Christmas holidays of 1912, the Mother was at Banaras, and with her there was Bhanu-pisi of Jayrambati. When Golap-ma heard that two brahmin girls had touched the feet of Bhanu-pisi, she flew into a rage, because honouring a woman of the milkman caste (to which Bhanu-pisi belonged) in that fashion, was, according to Golap-Ma, tantamount to pampering the egotism of all low-caste people, as a result of which they would care little for others. When the Mother came to know of the whole incident she said to the girls, 'Look at Golap's thoughtlessness. When all should be happy on a festive occasion, here she is hurting other's feelings. Don't you mind this, my good girls. All can be saluted as devotees.'

As a solution for the mania for purity, the Mother took help of this same inward vision. Her niece, Nalini, came one day (July 1913) with a wet cloth and explained that she had to bathe since a crow had urinated on her cloth. To this the Mother said, 'I have grown old; I never heard of such a thing as urination by a crow! The mind doesn't become impure unless one has committed many sins, heinous crimes! Mania for purity! The mind baffles all attempt at purification!..As for this mania for purity, one can go on intensifying it without limit; in fact, all things go on multiplying in proportion as you allow them to do so.' On another occasion (July 1912) she said to Nalini Devi. 'In the village, I oftentimes tread on dry faeces. Then I utter (the Lord's name) "Govinda" twice, and at once everything becomes pure. All is in the mind—purity, as also impurity, is in the mind.'

There was no end to such problems that she had to face. In a changing society there are always unchanging customs of long standing which make life intolerable at every turn; and only progressive minds that are firmly rooted in spirituality and yet have a sympathetic vision stretched forward can show the way at such crises. The

Mother used to say, 'One should follow local customs.' But when she said so, she did not connive at brutally suppressing all human aspirations in the name of customs. In certain parts of Bengal, widows observe very stringent rules about food, dress, and other things. Coming to learn of such rigour in the life of a widow, the mother said, 'You should eat *chapati*, *parata* (*chapati* baked in butter), etc., at night. Take these after dedicating them to the Master.' In other words, if it was not allowable, according to local customs to eat rice, there should be found some other reasonable method for the sustenance of the body.

In this respect the natural sympathy and discriminating wisdom of the Mother must have been reinforced by what she saw the Master do one day. That was an *Ekadasi* day, the eleventh day of the moon, when widows of high castes refrain from cooked food in general. Yogin-Ma came with her old aunt to Dakshineswar. The aunt had been fasting that day without taking even water; and on the previous day also she went without food owing to some ceremony in the house. She was very old, and the fasting for two consecutive days made her extremely weak. Arrived at Dakshineswar, as they advanced towards the Nahabat, the Mother noticed the old aunt panting. So she came out to help her, and said, 'Shall I give you a little syrup?' The old lady shook her head in disapprobation. When she had recovered a little, Yogin-Ma led her to the Master's room followed by the Mother. As the old lady climbed the steps of the Master's room, he found to his great concern that she almost crawled. He hurried to the place, and taking hold of her, he asked Yogin-Ma, 'Why is she gasping for breath thus?' Yogin-Ma told the reason, whereupon the Master looked at the Mother and said, 'Could you not give her a little syrup to drink?' The Mother replied, 'I suggested it, but she declined.' The Master at once took down some sugar from a sling and mixing it in a tumbler of Ganges water held it before the

old lady saying, 'Drink.' She stared at him meaningfully for a while, then drank it without further ado. Then touching her bosom she said, 'My heart is cooled, father!' In later days, when Kshirodebala Roy, a widow from childhood, went to the Mother for initiation, she asked her, 'Dear girl, what do you eat on an *Ekadasi* day?' Kshirodebala used to eat sago at first; and then being told that it was adulterated with things that are banned for widows, she went without any food on those days. Such austerity told upon her health, and she looked emaciated. The Mother was moved on hearing her account, and she said, 'No, no, I tell you, you eat sago; this will help to tone up the system.' Later she added, 'My girl, you have practised enough of rigour; now I tell you, don't do so any more. Your body is now lean like a log of wood. If the body is destroyed with what will you undertake spiritual discipline, my dear?' Kshirodebala had her hair cropped short according to local custom. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma, out of their sympathy for her, argued against such unreasonableness. But the Mother intervened to say, 'It is good that she has done so. If one has hair, there creeps in a sense of luxury, one has to take care of it. However that may be my daughter, you have crossed over that bridge of hair and reached here. You have reached the goal for which all that austerity was needed. Now, I tell you, don't you undertake any more austerity.' What a fine combination we get here of pity with divine outlook, and of avoidance of luxury with eagerness for the protection of the body as an instrument for spiritual endeavour! The succeeding illustrations also are replete with the same spirit.

A devout brahmin widow of Chandrakona, who was a disciple of the Mother lived with her at one time at Jayrambati. Like the widows of old she wore a white piece of cloth without any border, cropped her hair short, and did not even chew betel, leave alone wearing ornaments; and yet she served the Mother silently and cheerfully. For this service, self-control, and avoidance of

luxury the Mother loved her and waxed eloquent in her praise.

Finding the child-widow Shavasana Devi intent on rigorous fasting, the Mother said to her, 'What will you gain by hurting the body? I tell you, drink water at least.' When Surabala Devi after her widowhood proposed to eat nothing for the rest of her life but simple boiled rice and butter, the Mother said, 'If the soul hankers after any food, that should be offered to it. Else you incur a sin. The soul cries out saying, "She has deprived me of food."'

Although the Mother did not eat rice on *Ekadasi* days, she took a few *luchies*. She was heard to say, 'Call on God when the body is calmed after eating.' Her companions, Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, also did not fast without food and water on those days. We noted earlier that under a belief that the Master could not die, the Mother did not discard fully the signs of her married life even after the passing away of her consort. Still her natural simplicity in food and dress, along with her reverence for tradition brought about an austerity that could not escape notice. Fish and meat she never tasted, bodice or jacket or any such thing she never put on, and instead of a cloth with broad and fabricated borders, she wore one with a very thin red outline.

The Mother's denunciation of child-marriage was unequivocal. There were two unmarried girls from Madras in the Nivedita School, who were of about twenty or twenty-one years of age. Referring to them the Mother said, 'Ah! How they have learnt arts and crafts. And as for our girls! The people of these wretched parts go on clamouring when a girl is hardly eight years old, "Send her to a new family! Have her married!" Alas! If Radhu had not been married, she wouldn't have come to grief so early.'

Uncle Kali married his sons Bhudev and Radharaman very early. Bhudev was tied in wedlock at the age of thirteen (May 7, 1913) and Radharaman at the age of

eleven. The Mother was then in Calcutta. When she got the intimation there, she remarked very caustically, 'He's marrying his little sons, and extracting money from me. He doesn't know that ultimately he will have to suffer.'

Knowing that in wedded lives there was a pitiable lack of self-control, she deplored that some people seemed to take the multiplication of their families as the be-all and end-all of life. In this connection she added, 'The Master suggested a controlled life after the birth of one or two children. Sense-control is a necessity. All those austerities enjoined for the widows are meant for sense-control.'

As she warned men against being lured by women, so also she cautioned women against men. To a woman she said, 'Never have any faith in men, not even if God Himself should come to you in the form of a man.' This was, of course, an extreme case. The woman concerned was beautiful and had become the owner of vast properties after her widowhood in the prime of life. On another occasion the Mother thus advised a woman devotee not to frequent monasteries or other places where holy men reside: 'Look here, my daughter! It's true that you will be going there with pious motives and devotion; but if that should affect their minds, you, too, will have to bear a part of the burden of the sin.' This, too, was an unusual case. But the trend of both the instructions is obvious.

The Mother had no literary education. But that did not curb her enthusiasm for making others learned. She educated her nieces Maku and Radhu in a general way, made them read out religious books for her, and had her letters written by them. Radhu was at a Christian school. As she was a grown-up girl according to contemporary opinion, Golap-Ma said that her attendance at school should be terminated. At this remark Radhu began to weep. But the Mother said, 'She's not quite grown up. Let her go to school. She can do immense good to others if she gets education and learns some useful arts from the

school. She has been married in a backward village. Through education she will not only improve herself, but will be able to help others.'

With the Nivedita School she had a sweet relation, and she was full of praise for the administrative capacity of Sister Nivedita. Sudhira Devi, who succeeded the Sister and dedicated her life for the bringing up of the girls in accordance with the ideals of her predecessor, earned the sincerest encomium of the Mother. Being told by a certain devotee that she was greatly worried because she had five unmarried daughters at home, the Mother advised her, 'If you can't marry them, why should you worry so much? Put them in the Nivedita School where they will learn and live well.' The woman did not act up to this advice; but the Mother's advice has its own intrinsic value.

She knew darning, embroidery, etc., and did not generally depend on others for such sundry things. She was full of appreciation when anyone brought her woollen fabrics, with patterns of temples and deities, for being hung up on her walls, or carpets, with creepers, trees, and flowers finely embroidered on them, for her to sit on. In fact, her admiration for the good qualities in others was very remarkable. Whatever appealed to her, she showed to others to heighten the estimation of the artist.

Speaking of the education of women she said one day at Koalpara that she had the greatest desire to see the girls of the village educated; but that the difficulty was about securing the right type of women as teachers. The few that were available were fashionable; and it is a human weakness to imbibe more easily the outward spruceness than the prudence of a teacher. Such a contingency would be more harmful than beneficial to a village.

She hated luxury. A woman whose husband was seriously ill, came to seek the Mother's benediction, dressed in her best trappings. The Mother asked her to bow down at a distance and dismissed her with a few sweet words. When the woman had left, the Mother remarked,

‘There’s such a calamity ahead of her, and she came to the Master. Whereas she should have made vows to him with sobs and tears, you noticed, how she came with perfumes and fripperies instead? Should one come to the shrine of any deity in this manner? Everything in these days looks so odd!’

In all her talks and deeds a godliness based on perfect self-discipline was what caught the eye of the most casual observer. Her life expressed itself through the rites, manners, and customs of her environment; but the touch of spirituality was unmistakable all through. After bathing in the Ganges, for instance, the Mother offered the priest there a mango, a plantain, and a pice and said, ‘I give the fruits to be sure, but the fruit of the gift is yours.’

Naturally, she set her face against social non-conformity. Yet instances are not rare of her overlooking customs when a more basic need demanded it. One day, as she was given a mango and some milk and sweets, she mixed them together, and then tasting a little of it said, ‘I leave it (as *prasada*) for my son’, and went out for washing her hands and mouth. On her return, she found a woman devotee eating the whole stuff and saying in a tone of wounded love, ‘Her sons will eat everything, while we shall starve!’ The Mother was taken aback at first, but without any protest, she ordered some rice, soup of lentils, and vegetable curry, mixed all these together, tasted a little of it, and said, ‘I leave it (as *prasada*) for my son.’ Another woman who stood by had then the doubt in her mind, ‘How could she, a brahmin woman as she is, eat twice?’ As the objection was not voiced in words, the Mother’s reply remained unknown. But in a similar case, another woman devotee could not help saying, ‘Well, Mother, how is it that, though you are a brahmin’s daughter, you have eaten rice twice and you have polluted your lips?’ The Mother replied, ‘I can do everything for the good of my children. No guilt is incurred thereby. And if it is *prasada* there’s no fault in taking it even five times;

for *prasada* is not to be classed as ordinary food. Don't you disturb your mind with such petty questions; these things make you forget the Master. In the name of the Master, do whatever you think right, notwithstanding what others may say.'

Still we repeat that, though such events were not infrequent, every act of hers in the social sphere was above criticism. Once, at Kamarpukur, a disciple wanted to take the impression of her feet on a piece of cloth. But as widows are debarred from painting their feet with scarlet dye, the Mother dissuaded him saying, 'This is not the proper place. All people don't look upon me in the same way as you do. For instance, many from the Laha family frequent this place; in consequence I shall have to hide myself, for there will be the colour of lac-dye under the feet.' During her stay at the 'Udbodhan' a woman devotee happened to bring for her a cloth with a broad red border. The Mother accepted it with a smile and wore it, but soon put it away saying, 'How can I possibly wear it, my dear? People will say, "The wife of the Paramahansa (Ramakrishna) wears a red-bordered cloth." Anyway, since you have brought it, I shall wear it when going to the Ganges for bath.' During her last illness, a monk came to see her at the 'Udbodhan'. The Mother was in her bed, and her head had no veil. The monk massaged her feet a little and went away. The Mother then turned to the woman attendant and said, 'I had no veil on my head; why did you not draw it down? Am I dead that you are behaving so even now?'

When the Mother was going to the Ganges for her bath, Golap-Ma advised her to apply oil to her body; but she said, 'I won't rub oil. If I do, others also will; it's not proper to go for a dip in the Ganges with the oil on.' When one day the Mother tied an amulet to Radhu's body and set apart a pice in the name of a deity, so that Radhu might recover from her sickness, a woman disciple was perplexed to see her behave thus, since the Mother could by her mere will cure Radhu without having recourse to such

means or intermediaries. The Mother explained to her, 'If any one falls ill, one can get cured by vowing things to deities. Besides, each should have his due.'

At that time (August 1911) the Mother bathed at the Raja's ghat, for Durgacharan Mukherji's ghat had not then come into existence. When returning from the Ganges, she carried some water in a small pot, a little of which she poured at the roots of the wayside banyan trees and saluted them. Once, when a devotee wanted to take her to Ranchi, she declined saying that one should not go anywhere in Chaitra (March-April). When a certain Kaviraj suggested to her, as a remedy for rheumatism, to take a piece of garlic boiled in milk, she said, 'No, my son, I shall not be able to eat garlic.' The Kaviraj argued, 'Mother, the garlic will have no smell when boiled in milk. This is an efficacious remedy for rheumatism.' The Mother still said, 'No, my son, I can't do that.' So the proposal had to be dropped.

Then we come to the Mother's social outlook and patriotism. The very topic may seem queer in this context. But people who live in society, who are nurtured by the food and air of a country, imbibe certain ideas consciously or unconsciously about society and country, which continue throughout life; and though they remain generally unnoticed, still they make their presence felt at crucial moments. We have had some acquaintance with this side of the Mother's character in connection with the Sindhubala incident, the agitation for boycott of foreign goods, and the relief of the poor and the distressed. We shall now briefly refer to a few more incidents.

A disciple of the Mother, who was noted for his quiet life and religious temperament, was unnecessarily harassed by the police. One day, just as he stepped out of his chapel, he was arrested and whisked away; he was not allowed time even to take a little *prasada* or to drink a glass of water. When the Mother heard of this, she said sorrowfully, 'Just see, how iniquitous the English are!

My honest boy! He has been oppressed for no reason whatsoever, and he has not been allowed to take a little of the Master's *prasada*. Can the rule of the English last?'

During the First World War, when there was a scarcity of cloth in the country, and the Koalpara Ashrama was busy plying its spinning wheels and looms, the Mother said encouragingly, 'Bring me a spinning wheel; I shall also spin.' When Swami Jnanananda was under police vigilance and was compelled to live in Dr. Aghorenath Ghosh's house at Katihar, he came to learn that the Mother was seriously ill at Koalpara and he visited her there. Fearing that his host, the doctor, who was a government servant, might be implicated by the police for this absence of the Swami, all at Koalpara advised Jnanananda to leave soon; but the Mother was unwilling to part from him so soon. At last she was prevailed upon to let him go; but at the same time she prayed for the eradication of that oppressive system. In 1913, when many people lost their all in the Damodar flood, the Mother, told one of her disciples, 'My boy, do good to the world.' At the Mother's behest the disciple girded up his loins for the service of the God in the form of suffering humanity and went to the Mother to take leave of her. On entering the room he was astounded to hear her saying to herself, 'Only money, money, money!', for he thought that the Mother had read his thoughts, which then centred round the problem of collecting funds for the service of the afflicted. The Mother perhaps understood the disciple's perplexity and explained, 'No, my son, money also is a necessity. Look at Kali, for instance; he only talks of money.' The Mother encouraged the members of the Ramakrishna Math to engage in social service. One day in 1916, she was resting at the house of Sri Sureshwar Sen at Vishnupur on her way to Calcutta when on that very day Brahmachari Varada arrived there to purchase rice for distribution among the famine-stricken people near about Jayrambati. His plan was to carry the rice in bullock-

carts which had brought the Mother and her party to Vishnupur. Now, finding the Brahmachari there, Radhu wanted him to accompany the party to Calcutta; but the Mother silenced her saying, 'So many people will have food only after he carries the rice from here; so many lives depend on him — have you any idea of that?' So Radhu was overruled, and Varada returned to Jayrambati.

The Mother was always busy, and liked to see others equally so. One evening Brahmachari Gopesh saw the Mother kneading some wheat flour on the verandah of Nalini Devi's house. At that time there was no lack of hands to give her relief from such jobs in her old age. And so the Brahmachari found no sense in the Mother's busying herself in this way. Accordingly, he asked her for the reason, whereupon she said, 'My son, it's good to be diligent.' And then she added solemnly after a little pause, 'Bless me so that I may work as long as I live.'

She kept herself constantly busy. At Jayrambati she tirelessly went through her daily routine. Looking to the comforts of the devotees, dressing vegetables in the morning for about two hours, taking out stores for the kitchen, arranging for the worship and then worshipping with her own hands, distributing the *prasada*, making at least a hundred betel rolls, kneading flour and preparing *chapati* and *luchi*, boiling milk, cleaning lamps, and such other works followed one another without intermission and without anybody else's help, as if they were duty alone. She used to say, 'On the one hand, the body is becoming weaker, and on the other, work is increasing.' During the rainy season one day the inmates of the 'Udbodhan' spread their wet clothes in the sun and then went about their own works or rested in their rooms below, when suddenly it began to rain and the Mother came out to take the clothes away. In spite of her rheumatism, she had to stand pretty long on the wet verandah, taking the clothes one by one, rinsing them and spreading them carefully to dry in a room. When somebody protested and reminded

her of her rheumatism, she simply said, 'Presently I shall stop, my boy; just a little remains to be done.'

Comin to know that certain monks were going out for austerity, Swami Parameshwarananda told the Mother, 'It doesn't seem good to continue in the midst of these works. Kindly permit me also to go out for austerity.' The Mother replied, 'How strangely you speak, my boy! You are doing my work, the Master's work. Is this anything less than austerity?'

At Banaras, the Mother instructed Swami Shantananda, 'Do the Master's work and undergo spiritual discipline. When one does some work, the mind remains free from vain thoughts. When one stays alone one may be subject to various thoughts.' Of course, she permitted suitable persons to undertake austerity; but here we are dealing with incidents of a different category.

Even trifling matters had a due share of her attention, and she could not tolerate disorderliness. One day at Jayrambati, a woman happened to cast away carelessly a broom after cleaning the courtyard. Noticing this the Mother told her that even such an insignificant thing as a sweeping mop should have the consideration due to it, that the smallest work should be done with proper attention and that nothing should be neglected as of no consequence.

She detested waste and extravagance. One day a servant brought some custard apples from Balaram Babu's house in a cheap wicker basket and having deposited the fruits in the shrine-room asked the monks below as to what he should do with the basket. Somebody said, 'What purpose will it serve? Throw it out on the road.' The Mother heard this from above and going to the verandah overhanging the road, she found it to be serviceable. She, therefore, condemned this wastefulness, and had the basket brought and washed for some future use.

Rammay used to go to Jayrambati from Badanganj every Saturday. Hence if any good food came to the Mother's house, she kept apart a share of it for him. One

day somebody prepared some delicious *kichudi* with plenty of ghee and other costly ingredients. When Rammay came, she gave him a great quantity of it. As he could not do full justice to it, he ate as much as he could and then wanted to throw away the rest. But the Mother said, 'My boy, don't throw away such good stuff', and directed him to call in a girl of the Sadagopa caste from a neighbouring house, who came and carried away the remaining food with great delight. Then the Mother said, 'Each should have his due. What men can eat shouldn't be wasted on cattle; what cattle can eat shouldn't be thrown away to dogs; what cattle and dogs can't eat can be thrown into ponds for the fish — nothing should be wasted.' As for herself, she kept even such useless stuff as waste vegetables and fruit peels for cattle.

Prone to follow tradition as human society is, there crop up strange problems for it which refuse to be fitted into any existing pattern, and hence society reacts either by ignoring or by suppressing them. But on the transparent hearts of supermen is reflected even under such circumstances a new light by which society is able to discover fresh avenues of approach to such baffling situations. In front of the Mother's house in Calcutta, there lived a man with his paramour. When the woman fell ill, the man tended her with the fullest care, and the Mother once said in praise of this man, 'How splendidly he attends on her, my dear! I never saw the like of it. This is real service, this is real love.' The person spoken to kept silent before the Mother, though she entertained the greatest repugnance for the pair and thought, 'Fancy, that there can be any such thing as service for a paramour!' It is naturally difficult for ordinary women to appreciate readily this catholicity of the Mother.

Up till now we have noticed the Mother in the midst of serene and solemn surroundings. But we should not conclude that there was no girlish simplicity or feminine joviality in her. In fact, her homeliness and conviviality

screened off her greatness so often that those who came in contact with her, thought of her more as a near and dear one than as one who was superhuman. Where others would resort to blustering for concealing their ignorance or ineptitude, the Mother readily admitted her shortcoming or inability to the extent of making herself the laughing-stock of all and joining heartily in the resulting hilarity.

During an early visit to Calcutta she found on entering a bath-room and opening a tap that a hissing sound issued out of the water pipe. This scared her away and she told others that some snake had entered into the pipe. At this, her hearers burst out laughing, for it is a common experience to the Calcutta people that when the water supply is cut off for some time, air enters into the pipes, and when the supply is resumed, the air pressed out by the water produces a hissing sound. Nothing abashed by that laugh at her expense, the Mother used to recount the incident to her disciples in later days and make fun of her own rural simplicity.

The hurricane lantern that the Mother had at Jayrambati was of an old pattern with some wire loops around to protect the chimney. As the Mother used the lantern carefully, the chimney had a long life. But to take it out of the encircling wires was difficult for her and she said innocently, 'There's too much of complicated mechanism; I can't take it out.' In order to praise the intelligence of a Calcutta girl she said, 'The daughter-in-law of such a family can wind a timepiece!', as though that was a very dexterous job. Mathematics perplexed the Master, and machinery puzzled the Mother. This peculiar attitude to science and its achievements of these twin souls, who incarnated to lead the modern world out of its psychological chaos, is worth serious notice.

Let us now look at her knowledge of conjugal relationship. One day her niece Radhu complained to her that her husband Manmatha had given her a slap. When the Mother inquired about the cause, Radhu said that she

had thrown a towel at Manmatha. At this, the Mother seemed to side with Radhu and find fault with Manmatha's conduct. But a woman devotee present there argued that if Radhu had flung the towel at her husband, it was nothing unnatural for him to retaliate with a slap. That changed the Mother's mood, who said, 'Is that really so, my daughter-in-law? Do you have such altercations? I had no such problem with the Master, and hence I have no experience.' And to Radhu she said, 'Listen! Now then, it is you who are to blame — that's what the daughter-in-law here says.'

Often enough she deliberately played the little girl with others. Though she had many attendants, she importuned a boy saying, 'Do pluck some flowers for me, my son — the fine, good boy that you are!' The boy refused again and again; and yet the Mother would not give in. At last she got the flowers plucked by him. She had many women disciples near at hand to attend to her personal needs, but she told an old village woman, 'My daughter, do massage my feet a little; there's a gnawing pain there.' The old woman would not agree under the plea that she had been working the whole day, and that there could be no question of massaging at that late hour in the night when her fatigued body wanted rest. The Mother still persisted, 'Do rub it with your hand a little; tell me, what else you can do now, my good girl!' The woman had to yield at last.

Rammay, then a young boy reading at Badanganj, came to the Mother's house on Saturdays, and went back on Mondays, spending two days there in doing all kinds of petty works for the Mother. The Mother initiated him and loved him very much. One day there were many devotees present at the house. The Mother and Rammay sat near the hearth preparing *chapatis* on small wood pieces with rolling-pins, while Nalini Devi baked them. Rammay could roll three pieces at a time and turn them round with the rolling-pin itself. The work progressed thus when Nalini

suddenly remarked, 'Aunt, Rammay's *chapatis* are getting better inflated than yours.' Like a petulant girl the Mother at once pushed off the rolling pin and the flat wood piece and said, 'Then I won't roll any more; let him do it all. I have grown old in the work, and he is just a suckling, from whose throat milk spurts out if one but presses it. Fancy, that he can roll better than I do!' Rammay also pushed off his rolling pieces and said, 'Mother, I won't roll unless you also do so.' And to Nalini he said, 'How could you know which is mine and which Mother's?,' The Mother then resumed her work.

There was no lack of fun either. One day Nivedita and Christine came to her. The former had mastered a few Bengali words with the help of which she said, 'Mother divine, you are our Kali.' Christine also repeated the same idea in English. Hearing them, the Mother said with a simper, 'No, my dears, I can't become Kali or any such deity. In that case I shall have to keep my tongue protruded.' When her words were interpreted to Nivedita and Christine, they said, 'The Mother need not undergo that trouble at all; we look upon her as our Mother. And Sri Ramakrishna is our Siva.' That being explained to the Mother, she tittered and said, 'That much can somehow be seen to.'

The Mother had fever at Jayrambati, and, therefore, while drinking sago she told the disciples, 'How is it, my dears, you seem to have no attraction for the *prasada* today.' On another day, as she sat inside uncle Prasanna's house with her legs hanging down, Prakash Maharaj went in and after prostrating himself said, 'Mother, don't make me ramble about any more.' The Mother replied, 'You could forget me and wander about so long, and should I not now make you wander a little more?'

The Mother might make fun; but when others ridiculed anybody for his foolishness, she did not unnecessarily add to his embarrassment by joining in the giggle; but rather she would show sympathy. During her last stay

at Jayrambati, some devotees from Ranchi came with many fruits for her. There sat by her a widow named Bhavini Devi who was distantly related to her as a cousin, and as such she was known to the devotees as aunt Bhavini. The aunt's old mother was then ill and hence the Mother had given the aunt earlier two pomegranates for her mother. Later came the fruits from Ranchi, out of which the aunt expected a good share. And so she said with a deep sigh, 'Alas! At first it was I who was proposed to be married to Paramahansa Deva (Ramakrishna). My father did not wed me then to him thinking that he was mad. If the wedding had taken place, all these things would have entered my house.' This made all laugh. There was a smile on the Mother's lips but it did not denote ridicule but rather friendship. She said to the aunt, 'Why, then, take whatever you want.' And to her attendant she said, 'O Hari, put aside something for the Master and then give some more papaws, pomegranates and other fruits to Bhavini.' To the aunt she said, 'Don't you give the papaws to your mother to eat; they are rather bad for her.'

Her ideas of money and ornaments differed somewhat from the Master's. As soon as these came to her hands she touched them to her head. If anybody happened to remind her of the Master's very different treatment of them she used to reply without any subterfuge or prevarication, and yet in words full of meaning, 'To compare me to the Master! My son, I am after all a woman! The Master himself went so far as to make me wear golden ornaments.' She had some regard for precious metals as symbols of the goddess of good luck. But she had no attachment for them. Once, before starting for Jayrambati from Calcutta, the Mother gave her attendant a ten rupee note for purchasing a wrapper for a poor woman in the village. The cloth cost two and a half rupees, so that the attendant wanted to return to the Mother the balance of seven and a half rupees. But she refused saying that she had given only a

five-rupee note. The attendant then wanted to ascertain how many five-rupee and how many ten-rupee notes she had in her box. The Mother did not remember. Then he asked, 'Do you at least remember how much money you had in all?' 'No,' replied the Mother. At last the attendant said, 'Now you can well realize the truth. Why should I be returning more? And where can I get the extra amount?' Only when the matter was thus pushed home to her, did she agree to accept the money.

This non-attachment was an inborn virtue. The Master then lived at Dakshineswar. Desiring that some provision for the maintenance of the Mother should be made, he arranged for a sum of two hundred rupees to be paid to the Mother. She tied it up in a piece of cloth and put it by in an earthen vessel meant for storing spices. The Master, coming to know of this, asked her, 'Is it wise to keep money thus?' Referring to this incident the Mother said smilingly to a disciple, 'And now, by his will, what a lot of money is flowing in and out!' In fact, the Mother was wholly a disinterested witness of the inflow and outflow of money. In the beginning she did not even touch the money offered by the devotees at her feet; Golap-Ma and others who happened to be near at hand looked after all that. Subsequently when for the good of this world, her mind was tied by divine ordinance to this plane through Radhu, and her household became larger, she was forced to take more active interest in the day-to-day management. Even during the first years of this new situation her brothers received all the money that came by postal money orders and she only fixed her thumb impression on the receipts when the occasion demanded it. Still later, one of her attendants wrote the Mother's name, while she put the thumb impression. She then picked up the amount as a whole without counting or examining the genuineness of the coins and deposited the sum in a box. She did not like giving too much of attention to money, saying as she did, 'The jingling of coins lures the minds

of poor people.' The money was kept in an ordinary box and drawn out of it without any account for receipt or disbursement. She used to hand over the key to her attendant and ask him to take out the necessary sum; or she herself opened it and said, 'Here it is, take it.' When any balance was returned after shopping, she kept it in the box without counting. Sometimes she herself purchased some vegetables from the mother of Satish Samui who came to her door with them. After the purchase, she took out a handful of coins and held them before the woman, so that she might count out her due. Sometimes there was an over-payment which the woman discovered after reaching home, and came back to return.

But this should not be construed to mean that the Mother was either a spendthrift or that she lacked worldly wisdom. Perfect indifference to mundane affairs might be ingrained in her; but she who had accepted the responsible duty of leading others in all walks of life could not afford to be wholly oblivious of worldly trends. Besides, after the construction of a separate home for herself at Jayrambati, she, as the sole mistress, had to pay more attention to everything concerning it.

The village committee fixed a tax of four rupees per annum on the new house. The tax for the first year was paid without her knowledge when she was in Calcutta. When the village watchman came to collect the tax for the second year, she instructed the attendant not to pay, but to try to get an exemption by applying to the village council. The attendant was a little surprised at this earnestness in the Mother for saving such a paltry sum, though he dared not speak out his mind. But in due course she herself explained, 'I am here now and I may be able to afford to pay the tax; but in the future there may be some monk or Brahmachari residing here, who may have to maintain himself by begging. Where will he get the money for paying the tax?' Howsoever that may be, the President of the council directed the tax to be paid for the second

year, as it was too late to grant exemption, assuring them at the same time that he would stop the levy from the third year. The gentleman kept his promise.

When Swami Jnanananda was at Jayrambati, he tried to procure pure milk even at a high cost. To the milkman he used to say, 'You can charge as high as a rupee for thirty-two pounds. But I want pure milk.' Hearing this the Mother said, 'What is this you are saying, Jnan? Here milk is available at a pice for a pound so that poor people also can drink it; and you are raising the rate thus! As for a milkman, it's his habit to mix water with the milk. If you raise the rate he will be tempted to mix more water for earning more money.' When the Swami lived at the Ashrama at Navasan, he procured one day some of his 'pure milk' at an exorbitant rate, for the Mother's house at Jayrambati. Brahmachari Gopesh went with the milk; but on the way, he found to his horror that there was a little fish in it. He then thought that as the milk could not be offered to the Master, he might as well throw it away. But on second thought he preferred to carry it to the Mother and abide by her decision. The Mother was told everything, but at the suggestion of throwing it away she said, 'Why should you waste it? If it can't be offered to the Master, there are the children who can drink it.'

One day a woman came to sell blankets at the 'Udbodhan', and Nalini Devi fell to chaffering with her. The woman demanded a rupee and four annas, whereas Nalini would not agree to more than a rupee. This went on for a pretty long time, when the Mother said to Nalini, 'You have been higgling for such a long time for a petty sum of four annas! Fie! She moves from door to door with the load on her head in the hope of earning a little money; and here you detain her so long for a trifling sum! Besides, what need have you of a blanket? You have everything and still you are out to buy one! It would have been better if one were given to my daughter-in-law (meaning her disciple Kshirodebala, who was there). She does not use anything

but blankets; of these, too, she has but one. Though she has to manage with that single blanket even in these cold days, still she doesn't beg from anyone.' Kshirodebala was moved to tears to think that the Mother kept herself so well-informed.

As vegetables were not easily available at Jayrambati, Satish Samui's mother procured them from other places and sold them to the Mother at prohibitive rates. When the Mother's attention was drawn to this she said simply, 'She is mindful of my needs; in times of difficulty we can get our requirements from her just for the asking. She is my store-keeper.'

The Holy Mother was the mother of all; her acts and advice were for all. Hence, though she was full of the spirit of renunciation in personal life, she asked her household disciples to earn money and accumulate it. We have already referred to Surendranath Gupta. There is also the instance of Prabodhchandra Chatterji, the headmaster of the Badanganj High School, who once came to the Mother with a good supply of fruits, sweets, and vegetables at a considerable cost. At this the Mother scolded him saying, 'Why did you spend so much money? You have your wife and children. You should lay by something for them. I am not in any want, thanks to the Master's grace.' This made Prabodhchandra sad, since he thought, 'Have I no right to serve her just because I am poor?' The Mother read his mind and said, 'What you have to consider, my boy, is that if you put by something, there will be some provision for your family and the future. Besides, you will be able to serve the holy men too. If you have nothing, what will you give to the holy men, my dear?' When he once proposed to buy a horse, the Holy Mother said, 'No, my son, don't! Buy a treadle-car (bicycle) instead.'

Now we turn to the Mother's social dealings. Srī Sajani Roy, a nephew of Sambhu Roy, a landholder of Jibta, was appointed in the charitable homoeopathic dispensary

attached to the Mother's house, as a salaried physician. At the time of his initiation he offered two rupees at the Mother's feet, who, however, refused this, though she used to gladly accept the greens and vegetables that he brought from his garden. The Mother realized that this behaviour appeared to her attendant as an enigma; and hence she explained the matter thus on that very evening, 'Mark you, I didn't keep Sajani's money. That he brings from his own garden certain things is altogether a different matter. If the people at his home come to know of our acceptance of money, they will be scared, lest I should ultimately lay my hands on their property. They are very worldly-minded people! They will naturally be suspicious.'

Brahmachari Gopesh while at Jayrambati, came to know that the devotees of Dacca had published an appeal for collecting one thousand and five hundred rupees to defray the expenses of the Mother's visit to East Bengal. Without mentioning the appeal for subscription, Gopesh casually asked her whether she was planning to go to East Bengal. The Mother replied, 'How can I say, my son? The Master knows where I shall go.' Then Gopesh informed her in a general way that the devotees of Dacca were making efforts to take her there. At this the Mother said, 'They will raise some money, to be sure!' After a pause she continued, 'They always have maggots in their brains. Look here, for instance, there's a new craze for the Master.'

When two Brahmacharis from Garbeta came to Jayrambati, the Mother gathered from them that they were going round collecting money from the big villages in the country-side. She at once cautioned them saying, 'Mind you, my boys, don't collect any money from this side in the Master's name, be it for a home of service or any other purpose. You can do as you like in a town or in far-off places.'

Sri Lalit Chatterji was present at Jayrambati during the ceremonial opening of the Mother's new house. Being enthusiastic about opening a charitable dispensary

and a free school there, he explained to the Mother, 'Mother, if an appeal is issued in your name to the devotees, the poor people will be immensely benefited.' Though the Mother disliked such a method of raising funds, she could not reject the proposal forthwith out of consideration for the gentleman's susceptibility. Just then Brahmachari Rupachaitanya (Hemendra) came there and condemned the idea with all the vehemence he could command. The Mother heaved a sigh of relief and told Brahmachari Rashbehari afterwards, 'Methinks he saved me like my Yogin (Swami Yogananda). Fie! For shame! To beg for money!' Subsequently Lalit Chatterji himself met the expenses for the dispensary.

Next we come to the Mother's courtesy. A young man of the Roy family of Jibta came to Jayrambati on some business at about two o'clock in the afternoon, and finding Rammay and others, who were of the same age and his old acquaintances, he sat in the Mother's outer house to have a chat. The Mother somehow coming to know of his presence, lighted the hearth and sat down to prepare a little *halva* with semolina. When Rammay protested 'Mother, he has not come to you; he is of our age and has come to confabulate. Why need you take so much trouble for him?' The Mother replied, 'How can that be so, my boy? They are our landlords, our rulers. We have to do something for them.'

The language used by the Mother and the method of her instruction had their own distinctiveness. When talking to the people of Calcutta, she adopted their vocabulary; but with her relative she talked in her native dialect. But the two forms of words got mixed up at times, and the rural accents were often easily discernible. Every word she spoke was soft and sweet. Instead of ordering a disciple to do this or that she would say, for instance, 'My boy, won't it be better to have it so?' But for the good of very young disciples she might often use such expressions as, 'I say, you do this.' At times she

lingered on some words in order to emphasize them. One day, as Bibhuti Babu was returning from Jayrambati it rained heavily and this made the Mother anxious for the whole day. When Bibhuti Babu next visited Jayrambati she said, 'So you went away. But it began to rain; and I thought my Bibhuti must be—crossing the river by—now.' She interjected charming proverbs into her talks, thus making them all the more impressive. Sri Akshay Kumar Sen, the composer of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*—in epic style, came to her one day and called her, 'Mother', to which the Mother replied, 'Yes, my son.' The poet then said, 'Mother, I called you "Mother", and you responded saying, "Yes." What more fear need I have?' The Mother corrected him saying, 'No, my boy, don't you speak thus. "He that is diffident wins in the end." ' One day the Mother was explaining to a woman devotee, that since human gifts do not last long, one should not beg from men, nay, not even from one's father or one's husband. Then she added, 'When the Master gives, it overflows all limits. The Master's gifts know no limitation. "He that begs gets nothing, and he that begs not, gets everything." ' In connection with Nivedita's death she said one day. 'He that is a great soul, for him cries the inmost soul.'

In addition to the command of such pregnant proverbs she chose and used her words with such skill, that, though they were simple, they always revealed a cultured and thoughtful mind. After the conclusion of the First World War, Jatindranath Ghosh one day tried to explain to her the fourteen clauses of peace as adumbrated by President Wilson of the U.S.A. After hearing some of these the Mother commented, 'Their protestation is only lip-deep (*mukhastha*, meaning memorized or resting on lips).' As he did not seem to have grasped the meaning, she elaborated her point thus: 'If it issued from their hearts (*antahstha*), it would mean a world of difference.'

And there were the apt analogies. In order to explain the idea that God-realization can come through His grace

alone, though spiritual discipline has its own worth inasmuch as it purifies the mind, she said, 'His grace alone avails. Yet one must practise meditation and *japa*. The impurities of the mind are removed thereby. As the fragrance of the flower comes out when it is moved about, or that of the sandal issues forth when it is rubbed, so also enlightenment dawns when one goes on thinking on God. By transcending desires, one can get it at once.' Coming to learn once of the misunderstanding between two persons, she said, 'There are times when everything has to be endured. At times (i.e., before sacrificing to gods) you have to offer flowers even at the hoofs of goats.' There were many devotees who regretted that though they had a rare guru like her, they had no enlightenment. She consoled such people thus, 'Whatever I had to give, I gave once for all at that very time (of initiation). But if you want immediate peace, you must take recourse to spiritual discipline; otherwise you will get it after death.' To explain the difference between this acquisition of grace and becoming conscious about the acquisition, she said to a devotee, 'Suppose, my son, that you are asleep on a cot, and somebody has carried you along with your cot. Will you be conscious of this fact just after awaking? Or will you realize that you have reached a new place only after fully shaking off your drowsiness?'

Extremely gentle by nature as the Mother was, she would not hurt anybody's feelings, and such was her nature that where people magnified others' faults, she took notice of the little bits of merit that there might be and waxed eloquent in recommending these to others. The devotees therefore, got nothing but blessing from her. A devotee brought some mangoes to the Mother's house in Calcutta depending on the recommendation of the dealer and without tasting them, since he thought it improper to eat from anything meant for the deities before they were actually offered to them. When they sat for meal at noon and *prasada*, including the mangoes, was served, none could

eat the fruits as they were extremely sour. None the less, the Mother tasted one of them and said, 'No, it is a good enough fruit with a mixture of sweet and sour tastes.' The Mother indeed had a bias for sour things; but that was not the only cause for her praising in this instance; the real motive was to save the devotee from embarrassment. Indeed, whenever the sweetmeats brought by the devotees proved to be bad, she tasted one or two by way of encouragement.

Whatever she had, she distributed with a free hand among the devotees. The *prasada* that was set apart for her breakfast, she used to give away to the devotees. And if she herself began distributing the *prasada*, then even the little syrup of sugar-candy that she had for her morning drink, would be exhausted or every little of it would be left over for her use.

Though she had no education in the modern sense of the term, yet her manners, and conversation were so dignified, liberal, instructive, and charming that a cultured foreign woman like Sister Nivedita once wrote about her: "To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Rama-krishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of woman may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate to give utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer. Her whole experience is of theocratic civilization. Yet she rises to the height of every situation. Is she mortured by the perversity of any about her? The only sign is a strange quiet and intensity that comes upon her. Does one carry to her some perplexity or mortification born of social developments beyond her ken? With unerring intuition she goes straight to the heart of the matter, and

sets the questioner in the true attitude to the difficulty.”  
 (*The Master as I saw Him*, p. 147)

We shall now give a brief account of the daily routine of her life. Her habit of leaving the bed in the small hours of the night persisted throughout her life. At 3 a.m. she woke up with the names of the deities on her lips and the first thing for her to do was to have a look at the Master's picture. After attending to her personal cleanliness, she woke up the Master and then sat for *japa*. This routine she followed even in ill health, though at times when the body appeared too weak, she lay down again after washing her mouth. About early rising she said, ‘Wherever I might happen to be, when it struck three at night, I felt as though somebody blew a flute near my ears.’ After arranging flowers, *bel* leaves, and fruits for the Master with her own hands, she sat down for worship at about nine o'clock. This would be over in an hour. Then she distributed the *prasada* for all on *sal* leaves. During the closing years of her life, the women devotees at the ‘Udbodhan’ helped her, and the monks performed the worship. If any one took too much time for worship and chanting of hymns, she expressed her disapproval saying, ‘After finishing the offering of food, let him chant the hymns as long as he can. What's this? People don't get their breakfast, it becomes late.’ She did all her duties quickly, diligently, efficiently, and in due time, and she expected others also to do likewise.

It struck two before her lunch was finished. Then she rested awhile. But that was also the time when the women devotees freed from household duties found opportunity to visit the Mother. The Mother talked with them as she lay on her bed. She got up at about 3-30 p.m., changed her clothes and offered light refreshment to the Master. Then she sat for *japa*, and talked with the women devotees at intervals. The men came at about 5-30 p.m., when the women devotees moved away to another room. The Mother, with a wrapper all over her body and her feet dangling from the cot on which she sat, accepted the obeisance of

her sons. If any one asked her, 'How are you, Mother?' she would indicate by a motion of her head that she was well, or say so gently in a low tone which was communicated more loudly, if it were necessary, by another who stood by her. If any devotee had any special problem, he waited till the last. If he happened to be intimately known, the Mother would answer him directly, but if a new-comer, she would take another's help. Before dusk, she would again sit for *japa* which would continue till after nightfall. Then she would be down on the floor till the Master was served with his night-offerings. As she lay there, some woman disciple would step in to massage her feet with oil. She usually retired to bed at about 11 p.m. after food.

She had some speciality about her food. Among greens she liked gram leaves and radish leaves. When she lost appetite after any attack of malaria, she was given radish leaves. She liked brinjals and other vegetables fried in oil with a thin coating of pasted lentils, or boiled potatoes. On winter mornings, the Master was often offered these things along with fried-rice and fried pulses. She also had a taste for sweet balls made out of *mug* or lentils. As she suffered from dysentery, Kaviraj Durgaprasad Sen prescribed for her *amrul* leaves, which she often ate in her closing days, and which Swami Premananda sent her from the Belur Math whenever he found an opportunity. Among the different varieties of *sandesh* (dry sweetmeats from cheese) she liked *ratabi* and among cakes *rasapulis*. In the morning she drank a little of the syrup of sugar-candy. Among mangoes she preferred those which had a bit of sourness rather than those that were all sweet, as for instance, *Pearafuli*, *Langra*, and *Alfonso*. Because she was rheumatic she did not take much of curds. On medical advice she drank milk twice daily. Each time she was given a pound of milk, half of which she drank, and left the other half with rice mixed with it as *prasada* for her children who came to see her. In the afternoon she took nothing but betels and water. Her night meal consisted of

two or three *luchis*, a little vegetable, and milk. She cleaned her teeth four times a day with a powder made of tobacco and cocoanut leaves burnt together.

So long as the Mother lived with her brothers' families at Jayrambati, she used to dress vegetables, sitting on the verandah, from seven in the morning till nine. The devotees sat by her then and talked while helping her with cleaning and sorting the greens and vegetables. After bath, she sat for worship at about nine o'clock and then distributed *prasada* among the devotees. They generally got fried-rice, *halva*, and sweets, to which were often added fruits and roots brought by themselves. This over, she entered the kitchen to relieve the cook for her breakfast. In curries she used salt, chilli, and spices very sparingly, as that accorded with the Master's taste.

Whenever a devotee went inside to bow down before her, she gave him a sweetmeat with a glass of water and at least two rolls of betel. Whatever the devotees brought from Calcutta or other places for her, she accepted with readiness and subsequently distributed these among the devotees as though they were meant for themselves only. The village people, too, came to pay their respects to their 'grandmother', and in return got handfuls of the good things brought from afar. Whenever Swami Saradananda and Krishnabhavini Devi, wife of the Master's devotee Balaram Babu, sent any good thing, she set apart the first shares for Simhavahini, Dharma, and other village deities. Her relatives and disciples also got their shares. Again, if any devotee happened to be absent, she kept his share reserved for him. During a festival some cakes were prepared in the Mother's house, some of which she kept away for Bibhuti Ghosh who used to come there regularly. But for some reason, he could not turn up at the expected time; nevertheless the Mother went on placing the cakes over the fire every day to keep them fresh, and every time she did so, she said, 'May be, he'll come tomorrow; if he does, then I shall be sorry to think, "Alas, he could not

get it to eat!"' Thus when after four days Bibhuti went to the Mother's house he found his own share still intact.

In the new house at Jayrambati, the tenor of her life was almost the same; any difference that was noticeable was owing to her old age and weakness. At that time she had to cut down her activity and spend more time in bed. But even so, her habit helped her to carry on her *japa* as usual. When the sun went up in the morning she came out, drank a little medicated water and then sat for dressing vegetables, talking the while with her disciples. At about nine o'clock, she sponged her body with tepid water and worshipped the Master and the child Krishna. Then she initiated any candidate that might be there. After that she distributed the *prasada* and supervised the kitchen. Then she prepared two hundred betel rolls in the manner which the Master had taught her. On some days the mail was read out at this time, and the Mother gave orally the answer to each letter, which the attendant then put down in writing. When the cooking was over, she invited the Master to his meal in the kitchen. After that she sat down for food with the attendants. As she suffered from biliousness which produced a burning sensation all over the body, she had a liking for a soup of black lentils. Here also she mixed some rice with milk, just as at the 'Udbodhan', for the devotees to eat as *prasada*. At about three in the afternoon she washed her hands and feet and sat down for dressing vegetables, during which time the village women gathered round her and poured forth the tales of their weal and woe. There was a brahmin woman cook; still the Mother cooked a few dishes with her own hands for her children, which she herself served. If on any day the daily mail could not be dealt with in the morning, it was taken up in the evening. At 9 p.m. food was offered to the Master by the Mother herself; or if she could not, through indisposition or illness, by somebody else. She could retire only at eleven o'clock after providing for the comforts of all.

## VALEDICTION

The Mother was at Jayrambati. The devotees decided to celebrate her birthday on December 13, 1919. To see the Mother on that auspicious occasion many devotees gathered there, while others sent offerings of clothes, flowers, fruits, and sweets. Owing to indisposition, she sponged her body with tepid water and wore the cloth sent by Swami Saradananda. When she had finished worshipping the Master, the devotees put vermilion and sandal-paste on her forehead and garlands round her neck. She sat there on her cot with her legs down, and the devotees came in one by one to worship her feet. It was not her custom to sit for her meal before her sons had finished theirs; but today she made an exception. At the request of all, she partook of the *prasada* after offerings had been made to the Master. Then the devotees and villagers were served with the *prasada*.

For some time the Mother had not been in good health. The strain of the birthday celebration brought about a relapse of the fever. At first all thought that it was her usual ailment which would soon yield to local treatment. But in spite of all that local physicians could do, the fever recurred intermittently and this made her extremely weak. It was noticed then that even a little temperature brought about complete prostration. Notwithstanding this, the Mother kept on initiating people during the intervals of the disease. As the devotees came from distant parts with great hopes, the Mother could not disappoint them even though such continuous strain drained away quickly her diminishing vitality.

Matters soon came to such a pass that no further reliance could be placed on local treatment and information had to be sent to Swami Saradananda, who, however, was then at Banaras in connection with some important work; and, as we have already mentioned, the Mother was loth to go the 'Udbodhan' in his absence. To add to

the difficulty of the situation, the Swami had to hurry to Bhuvaneshwar just after his return from Banaras. When he next came to Calcutta, he realized that the Mother's condition could brook no delay, and he, therefore, promptly sent Swami Atmaprakashananda with two others to Jayrambati to take the Mother to Calcutta. The Mother readily consented to accompany them, and it was settled that at ten o'clock on Tuesday, February 24, the Mother would start for Calcutta with Radhu, Radhu's mother, Maku, Nalini Devi, the widow of Navasan and Brahmachari Varada.

The Mother was then so weak that when she went to the chapel of Simhavahini two days before the day of starting, she became absolutely exhausted and said later, 'It made me perspire like one on one's death-bed.' On the day of journey, she fell down on the landing steps of the tank (Punya-pukur) behind the house. The arrangement was that the Mother and Radhu would travel by two palanquins, while others would walk up to the Amodar and get into bullock-carts on the other side of the river. But Radhu refused to get into one of the palanquins, which the Mother allotted to Maku and her child without further ado. Early in the morning of the appointed day all left for Vishnupur except the Mother and Maku. The Mother got ready to start after finishing the Master's worship. And then the villagers gathered round her and said with tearful eyes, 'Come back soon after recovery. Don't you forget us for long.' 'Everything is in the Master's keeping;' replied the Mother, 'can I really forget you?' And she wrapped the Master's photograph in a piece of cloth, put it in a box, made a last salutation, and stood up to start. Crossing the outer gate, she saluted with folded hands in the names of Simhavahini and other village deities and walked slowly westward by the houses of her brothers. She would get into the palanquin after crossing the bounds of the village, as out of respect for the village deities she did not use any vehicle within its limits. Uncle Prasanna's

wife was standing there at their door with a pot of water and a basin to wash the Mother's feet when she sat in the palanquin. The Mother said to her, 'You need not carry the water; hand over these things to Hari (Haripremamanda); he will wash my feet.' The aunt obeyed and went in to get a glass of water, some sweets, and some pasted betel, with which she proceeded towards the Aher, the irrigation tank of the village. The Mother saluted the deity Yatra-siddhi-raya at Ghoshpara and turning back saluted the village of her nativity. Then she sat in the palanquin, when Hari washed her feet and the aunt handed over the sweets, the glass of water, and betel. The Mother took all these, and gave one of her cotton wrappers to Hari, as a memento, saying, 'Hari, keep this.'

Varada moved along on a bicycle by the Mother's side, and he intended to proceed thus to Vishnupur. They went westward while the villagers looked on with wet eyes. As the river could not be forded at the usual place because of the flood there at the time, their way lay through Shihar, which meant some two or three additional miles. At Shihar the palanquin was stopped by the Mother, who then washed her hands and feet and went to bow down to Shantinatha (Siva) at His temple, where she made an offering of some sweets, sugar, and molasses. As many boys and girls had gathered there, the Mother distributed some of the *prasada* among them as also to Maku and others, tasted a little herself, and the rest she kept aside in her hem for Radhu. When they reached Koalpara it was past eleven o'clock.

As soon as they reached there, Varada was told that the money for their expenses on the way had been left by mistake at Jayrambati in the house of uncle Kali, from where he was expected to fetch it without the Mother's knowledge. After Varada's departure the Mother found a mosquito-net missing, for searching out which she wanted him. As he was nowhere to be seen, she asked him on his return as to where he had been. So he had to divulge

everything. The net, however, was not to be found. Hence the Mother said, 'All the signs appear to be inauspicious.' According to the belief in those parts, the losing of anything on the way forebodes some evil.

It had been arranged that five of the bullock-carts would leave for Vishnupur that afternoon, the two palanquins with the Mother and Maku would start next morning, and the sixth cart would follow them in the afternoon. Next day at sunrise the Mother went to the shrine-room at the Ashrama to salute the Master. Afterwards, when the attendant met her at the Jagadamba-Ashrama, she said, 'So you are here! Why are you so late? It will be hot. Take this flower as a blessing for the start.' And she picked up a flower from the feet of the Master, touched it on to her head and then giving it to him said, 'Tie it to a corner of your cloth.' When the attendant bowed down before her, she made a little *japa* on his head and chest and kissed him touching his chin. At last she took leave of all and got into the palanquin. She had in her hand a stick with which she had been walking. This she now gave to Gagan (Swami Ritananda) for handing it over to uncle Prasanna, for it belonged to him. She also gave him a mosquito-net for the uncle. And she said as she departed, 'My son, there's Sarat (Saradananda) to look after you all.' As Gagan found no occasion for such a remark in the present context, he went on musing over it with some apprehension.

The palanquin moved on. After passing Kotulpur the Mother called Varada to her side to say, 'Be always by my side, and keep your eyes open as you proceed. All the ornaments of Radhu and Maku are in the latter's palanquin.' This made Varada circumspect, and knowing as he did that the leader of the bearers was a devotee of the Mother, he called him to a solitary place to say, 'Mother is apprehensive; you will have to be cautious on the way, particularly in the forest near Vishnupur.' The leader said reassuringly, 'We are thirty-two strong with a stout staff for each under the palanquins.'

At Jaypur the Mother ordered the palanquins to be lowered. The hut in which they had cooked last time when on their way to Jayrambati, was now almost broken. The sight of it evoked a smile on the Mother's face and she said, 'Hey-day! That's our hut, my boy.' She went near it, sat on a blanket under a tree, and brought out two rupees for fried-rice for a light repast for the bearers. Then she heated the milk for Maku's son and went to the tank nearby to wash her hands and feet. Then she ordered a piece worth of fried-rice for herself and some more of the same stuff as also some fried things for Varada and Maku. When the fried-rice came, the Mother munched a little and then passing it on to others, she said, 'I can no longer chew it.' The journey was resumed after all had finished their meals.

The eight miles of the road from Jaypur to Vishnupur runs through such thick forest that one is afraid to pass through it even in the day-time. In the centre of the forest about four miles from Jaypur, there is a place called Tantipukur where a shop caters to the needs of the passers-by. When the party arrived at the shop they found some people of the labouring class chatting there. If they could get clear of the place somehow, they would come across scattered houses after another two miles, and hence there would be no cause for anxiety. But as soon as the Mother saw the shop, she said from her palanquin, 'Ask them to lower the palanquin for a while; my feet are aching because of sitting long in the palanquin. Get from that shop half a pice worth of oil in a *sal* leaf. Let me rub it on the feet.' Varada was alarmed to hear her speak thus, and he said in a whisper, 'Some doubtful characters are sitting there; you should not get down; you sit there; I shall bring the oil for you.' Then, again, Maku said, 'I am feeling thirsty by eating the fried-rice; I shall drink a little water.' The Mother said, 'Why not drink? Go and do so from yonder pond.' 'To think that she should drink that water!' remonstrated Varada

quickly. But the Mother said, 'So many passers-by are drinking there. It won't do any harm, go! You accompany her and help her to drink.' So they could leave Tantipukur only after purchasing the oil, and getting Maku's thirst quenched.

The party reached Sureshwar Sen's house at Gadadarja in Vishnupur at about two o'clock in the afternoon. Swami Atmaprakashananda and others had preceded them there by bullock-carts at about eight in the morning. They asked, 'Why this delay?' and began laughing at hearing that fried-rice eating was the cause; for the unusual liking for fried-rice of the people of Bankura is a matter of amusement for others. Sureshwar Sen had died a few months ago. The Mother said about him very feelingly, 'Alas! Whenever I came here, my Suresh used to keep standing there with folded hands; he never even got up on the verandah. How great was his devotion!' About him she used to say at times, 'Suresh was a second Girish Babu, as it were.' The party stayed there the next day also, and started for Calcutta on the third day. They travelled in a third class bogie and reached the 'Udbodhan' at about 9 p.m. on Friday, February 27.

Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma were extremely concerned to find the Mother's body reduced to a skeleton and accused her companions saying, 'Dear me! How thin she looks! We could never realize that the Mother's health was as bad as this.' Swami Saradananda made all necessary arrangement for treatment from the very next day.

Dr. Kanjilal treated the Mother with homoeopathic medicine from February 28; and the fever subsided on the fourth day. But on the seventh day the temperature again went up to 101°, and the treatment showed no results. Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati was called in on the fourteenth day. This new treatment bore fruit after about a week, from whence the Mother had no fever for a fortnight. This was extremely reassuring, so much so, that the devotees were one day allowed to come in and salute her. But

after fifteen days there was a relapse, and along with that there arose a new difficulty. The Kaviraj prescribed an infusion of several drugs boiled together which was to be taken every morning. This was so bitter that the taste lingered till noon, so that the Mother could not relish any food, and therefore ate very little. The Kaviraj being informed of this said that he was helpless since his system of medicines knew of no drug that was not bitter for this disease. As a last resort Dr. Bepin Behari Ghosh, an allopath, was entrusted with the treatment from April 8. He treated her for about a month; but as no definite result was visible, Dr. Prandhan Bose, a noted physician, was called in on May 1, and the help of Dr. Sureshchandra Bhattacharya and Dr. Nilratan Sarkar was also taken for a proper diagnosis of the disease. At last on May 16, Dr. Bose declared that it was a case of kala-azar. The doctor tried his best to bring the disease under control, but by June 1, it became apparent that the allopathic physicians had given up all hope of recovery. As a last resort, therefore, the indigenous system of treatment was resumed on that date by Kaviraj Rajendranath Sen who was helped by Kaviraj Kalibhushan Sen. Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati, too, came again. His pupil, Kaviraj Ramachandra Mallik, visited the Mother every day and prepared the medicine with his own hands. During the last three days Dr. Kanjilal administered homoeopathic medicines once again.

In fact, from the day that the Mother came to the 'Udbodhan', Swami Saradananda did all that lay in his power to get the Mother restored to normal health. Apart from medical treatment, he tried to enlist in the cause the supernatural agencies also. But there was no sign of improvement in her condition. Her temperature rose three or four times each day, and when it went very high up, she lost consciousness. It was summer, and the excess of bile produced such a burning sensation all over the skin that the Mother used to say, 'I shall dip my body

in the water of a pond covered with weeds.' The attendants cooled their hands over ice and passed them over her body. If there was no ice, the Mother placed her hands on the bare bodies of those who had low temperature. The continuous suffering turned her into a veritable little girl. As she felt no comfort on her bed, she called in her attendant Rashbihari one morning and said, 'Seat me on your lap.' Sarala Devi, another attendant was near at hand, and so Rashbihari said to her, 'Seat the Mother a little on your lap, you are a woman.' As she kept silent, a few pillows were arranged in a pile and the Mother was seated reclining on them; and she was otherwise consoled.

Even in the midst of this ordeal, her tender motherly heart was ever solicitous for the welfare of all. Indeed, it had an even more charming expression at that time. When the attendant came to the Mother in the morning, before going to the Kaviraj's house, to inquire about her condition, she would invariably say, 'Eat before you go; for you will be late in returning.' When the Kavirajas went down after seeing her, she used to say, 'Give to the grandson (Kalibhushan Sen) of the old man (Durgaprasad Sen) some refreshment — some sweets, some mangoes. Give to Ram Kaviraj, and the old Kaviraj (Rajendranath Sen).' The Mother showed the same affection to Drs. Jnanendranath Kanjilal, Durgapada Ghosh, and Shyamapada Mukherji whenever they came; and she made tender inquiries about them and their families. One day when Prabhakar Mukherji and Manindra Bose of Arambagh came, she asked them in a faint voice, 'Are you well, my dears? Shall I live? I can't eat anything and am very feeble.' Then she inquired about that part of the country, 'Has it rained?' Manindra Bose had sent some green palm fruits with a woman named Ramani who was known to the Mother. The Mother remembered the fact and said, 'I didn't know when Ramani came; I was unconscious owing to the fever. Tell her not to be sorry on that account.' Swami Adbhutananda (Latu) was then

seriously ill at Banaras. The Mother was aware of this, and hence she used to ask any one coming from there, 'How is Latu?'

Many were present at the 'Udbodhan' who would feel blessed if they could serve the Mother in any way; but the Mother avoided such service so scrupulously that it was hard to get an opportunity. One day, as she lay down to have a little rest after taking her noon-day diet, an attendant thought that to be an excellent opportunity for fanning her so that she might have a good nap. But he had moved the fan for some four or five minutes only, when the Mother said, 'It's no more necessary; your hand must be aching.' The attendant explained that a hand-fan does not tire one out so easily and that he would stop as soon as it became tiresome. But after a few minutes the Mother reopened her eyes to repeat, 'No, my son, your hand will ache; you stop; I shall sleep without it.' As the attendant did not stop even then, she said soon after, 'My dear boy, I can't have any sleep thinking that your hands will ache. You stop the fan, then I can sleep without any anxiety.' The fan had to be stopped at last; the attendant could serve hardly for ten minutes.

On his first visits Dr. Prandhan Bose was paid sixteen rupees daily as his fees over and above his taxi fare. One day somebody sent for the Mother plenty of fruits, flowers, sweets, and curd. When in the evening the doctor was talking downstairs with Swami Saradananda after examining the patient, some of these things were placed in his car according to the Mother's direction. The doctor looked happy in seeing these presents. Next day when he came for his daily visit, he looked round the room a little more closely to find a picture of the Master there. He was a Christian, but had a very liberal mind, which was moved by all he saw. Going down he asked Swami Saradananda as to who it was that he had been treating all those days. The Swami explained everything and in the course of the conversation told him that the

expenses were being defrayed by the devotees. From that day the generous doctor stopped charging fees; nay, when the treatment was changed a few days later, he kept coming every day, paying the taxi fare himself and spending a good deal of time at the 'Udbodhan' inquiring about his patient.

Equally with her kindness and politeness for all was noticeable her loving behaviour towards all her relatives during the early stages of her illness. In the middle of March, her nephew Ramlal came to see the Mother with his sister Lakshmi Devi and others while on their way to a celebration at Entally in Calcutta. After some time had elapsed in conversation, the Mother told Lakshmi Devi of Yogin-Ma's illness. Lakshmi Devi then went to see her and from there proceeded to Entally without revisiting the Mother, who had, however, been expecting her. Finding at last that they had departed, she told Brahmachari Varada, 'Look here! In the course of the conversation I forgot to give a cloth and some money to Lakshmi. You now go to Entally with Kestolal (Swami Dhirananda) to witness the celebration and give the cloth and money to her. They decorate the Master tastefully at Entally.' With this she ordered somebody to take out two rupees and a piece of cloth with a fine border to be handed over to Varada for presentation to Lakshmi Devi.

In the midst of this suffering, again, she helped her disciples in the path of spirituality and initiated at least one fortunate man. In these matters she paid no heed to warnings that she should not strain herself.

On her sick-bed she had to sustain three shocks. Swami Adbhutananda passed away on April 24, and Ramakrishna Bose, a disciple of the Mother and son of the noted devotee Balaram Bose, departed on May 14. It was decided that in consideration of the Mother's condition, the news should be withheld from her. But Golap-Ma inadvertently divulged it all, with the result that the Mother wept sending up her temperature. She had little sleep that

night. A week after the death of Ramakrishna Bose, uncle Varadaprasad succumbed to pneumonia at Jayrambati. This was also kept back from her. She knew that he was seriously ill, and therefore inquired now and then, 'How is Varada?' But after her brother's passing away, she put a different question. 'Is Varada no more? I saw him standing near the railing (on the verandah) and looking at me.' Then the truth had to be told. This was very poignant to the Mother; she could not control her tears at the loss of this beloved brother.

But we must not merely give attention to her tears and sorrow; we must also take note of her non-attachment. She wept for her brother; but from Brahmachari Gopesh we have an account of what happened only a few days later. Writes he: 'At that time I was very much surprised to hear what the Mother said one day. A few days earlier, uncle Varada had died. Although the Mother was momentarily overwhelmed with grief at that, she soon wiped it away from her mind. She passed on the news to me thus with absolute unconcern, "Did you hear? Varada is dead." At first I failed to understand whom she was talking about, for it was altogether beyond my imagination that she could tell of the death of her very dear brother without any emotion. So I kept on looking at her quizzically. Then the Mother explained, "Father of Fudi (Kshudi) of Jayrambati." The news made me extremely sad; but my surprise at the absence of any pang on the Mother's part was even greater.'

Some still more astonishing events followed to convince the devotees very rudely that the Mother was gradually gliding out of this world of attachment, and that the sweet snares, which she had voluntarily woven round herself, were being rent asunder one by one. When in the middle of March a devotee said, 'Mother, your health has deteriorated badly this time. I never saw your body so weak', the Mother replied, 'Yes, my son, it has become very weak. Methinks, whatever work of the Master was

to be done by this body is over. Now the mind hankers for him only, and likes nothing else. See, for instance, how I loved Radhu, and how much I have done for her happiness and comfort; but now my mood is changed. When she comes to my side now, I feel unhappy and I begin thinking, "Why does she come here to try to drag down my mind?" "The Master kept my mind bound down by all these things for the sake of his work, otherwise could it have been possible for me to stay on after he left?"

The mind was really getting detached. When tossing about in her bed owing to the intense fever, she was often heard to say, 'Take me to the side of the Ganges; I shall feel cooler near the Ganges.' It seemed as if she wanted to be freed from all old associations. Swami Saradananda searched for a house on the bank of the Ganges, and there was talk of taking her to Banaras. But the physicians said that removal at that stage was inadvisable.

So there could be no change of place. But that could not certainly prevent her from getting rid of entanglements. Gauri-Ma and Durga Devi used to visit the Mother every day while returning from their bath in the Ganges. They then sat by her for some time and fanned her. But one day as they came there, the Mother said, 'Don't touch me. Why do you come every day to annoy me—for what purpose, and to see what?' This unexpected indifference came like a bolt from the blue, and Gauri-Ma said imploringly, 'Mother, you are lying ill, and we find no peace of mind. We want to be always by your side, but cant find time. That's why we come once in a day to you.' The Mother still persisted in the same strain, 'What will you gain by coming to me? I can no longer bear to hear anybody's problems.' Then she cooled down and added, "Even if you come, don't enter my room. See me from outside that door and depart; and don't make me talk on any matter.' Gauri-Ma was thunder-struck! She could speak no more, but shed profuse tears and took leave with a heavy heart. From the next day they came at the usual

time, but without entering the room, sat for an hour at the place indicated by the Mother, and through silent tears communicated the grief in their hearts. The Mother saw all this, but remained remorseless.

Next came Radhu's turn. Yes, Radhu, too, was rejected, though this may sound unbelievable. A few days before the Mother passed into Life Eternal, she said to Radhu, 'Look here! You go away to Jayrambati; don't stay here any longer.' And to her attendant Sarala Devi, she said, 'Ask Sarat to send them to Jayrambati.' Sarala Devi inquired, 'Why do you want them to be sent? Can you live without Radhu?' 'I can do so well enough,' replied the Mother firmly. 'I have dissociated my mind (from her).' When Sarala Devi communicated this to Yogin-Ma and Swami Saradananda, Yogin-Ma asked the Mother, 'Mother, why do you want them to be sent away?' The Mother answered, 'In future they will have to stay there as a matter of course. Hari is going; send them along with him. I have withdrawn the mind, and there's no more need for them.' Yogin-Ma implored, 'Don't you be saying so, Mother. If you withdraw your mind, how shall we live?' But the Mother whose vision was now directed towards the Infinity beyond all delusion, said with disconcerting indifference, 'Yogin, I have discarded all attachment, no more of that.' What more could Yogin-Ma add where pleading was of no avail? Morosely she went to Swami Saradananda and related the whole affair. He drew a deep, heavy sigh and said helplessly, 'Then we can no longer hold back the Mother. Now that she has taken off her mind from Radhu, there's no further hope.' He then said to Sarala Devi who was near at hand, 'All of you try, if the Mother's mind can be brought back a little to Radhu.' But their efforts bore no fruit. On the contrary, understanding their motive the Mother said without any ambiguity, 'Know it for certain that the mind that I have turned back will not come down again.'

As days rolled on, this resolution of the Mother became all the more pronounced and filled everyone with

desperation. Soon after Brahmachari Hari left for Jayrambati, the Mother asked Varada, 'Why did not Radhu, Nalini, and others go away to Jayrambati with Hari? You escort them all there.' Swami Saradananda being informed of this development was quite at a loss to fix upon any course of action. Other devotees, too, thought, 'Radhu is dear to the Mother as the apple of her eye; she is so fond of Radhu that it is hard for her to live one moment without her. Even while on sick-bed she often inquired about Radhu and her son. And now she is eager to send them away to Jayrambati, even though her own condition is so very bad. It all passes one's imagination.' But if people could not understand the Mother's disposition at that time, or they refused to believe what they witnessed, in a short while her determined attitude dispelled all doubts from their hearts. Noticing the Mother's irritation, Nalini Devi dared not approach her any longer, and she shed silent tears. At last she said in dismay, 'If our presence is galling to aunt, we may as well go away. But what will people say? They will think, "Look at this! The Mother is so seriously ill, and these have come away deserting her at this time!"' Swami Saradananda therefore, pleaded with the Mother, 'It will pain them to go away during this illness of yours. They will leave as soon as you recover a little.' The Mother still persisted, 'Well, it will be better if they are sent away. In any case, see that they don't come to me any more. I have no desire to see so much as their shadows any longer.' So completely free had she become! For ten days before the final departure, the Mother slept on a bed spread on the floor. One day at noon when Radhu was asleep and an attendant was sitting by the Mother, nursing her, Radhu's baby Banu got up from sleep and crawling to the Mother's side tried to climb on to her breast, as was his wont, when the Mother said to him, 'I have totally freed myself from all fondness for you. Go, go, you can no longer succeed.' Then to the attendant she said, 'Lift him up and keep him on that side. I don't like these any longer.'

The attendant took the baby into his arms and left it with its grandmother in the adjoining room.

The Mother's condition was worsening. Her frame became so shrivelled that it seemed to be indistinguishable from the bed. The physicians gave up all hope and the Mother, too, realized this. When she suffered similarly on the previous occasion she had said, 'I shall have to suffer likewise over again.' This time, when her affectionate attendant supplicated, 'Mother, you can certainly stay on if you just wish to do so', she simply said, 'Who indeed wants to die?' She had no will of her own then, she had resigned herself entirely to the Divine wishes; and keeping her ears pricked up for the last call she said, 'I shall go, whenever he takes me.' She incarnated for the good of all; and in order to establish contact between her free mind and this world of small interests, she adopted Radhu as a medium with whom she had a tie of affection. Now that tie was cut asunder; and when Radhu came to the Mother's room one day, she said to her, 'I have let loose (my mind) from its post. What will you do to me? Am I a human being?' These were the last words she spoke to Radhu. As Radhu knew the Mother only as a mortal, she did not so much as try to comprehend the meaning of those words uttered so unexpectedly; and the Mother, too, gave her no opportunity to do so.

About a month before the last day, she asked the picture of the Master that she worshipped at the shrine to be removed to some other room, for she explained that it would be presently impossible for her to go out even when necessary, and that a sick-bed and shrine could hardly be in the same place. Her direction was obeyed.

Seven days before the passing away, she sent for Swami Saradananda at about 8-30 a.m. He came and knelt near the Mother's feet on the left side and tried to caress her hand with his. She promptly held his right hand under her left and said, 'Sarat, I leave them all with you', and as quickly drew away her hand. Swami Saradananda

suppressed his tears with difficulty and with a heavy heart moved out of the room, walking slowly backward and keeping his eyes fixed on her.

There were then two classes of attendants—the monks and Brahmacharis, and the women devotees. The monks went to the doctors, brought medicines, procured milk, prepared liquid diets, and fanned the Mother. The women cooked rice, administered the diets, washed clothes, cleaned the bed, and did other things in general. The Mother then behaved like a little girl—she was simple, importunate about trifles, and yet totally without any interest in anything. One midnight as Sarala Devi wanted to feed her, the Mother said petulantly, ‘I won’t eat. You have only two sentences, “Mother, eat”, and “Mother, apply the stick (thermometer)”.’ Sarala had learnt a trick to make her change her mood under such circumstances. She had only to suggest that it would be best to call in Swami Saradananda to rectify any defect that there might have been; and the Mother would at once become reasonable and behave like a good girl. So she tried the remedy tonight and said, ‘Mother, should I then call in Maharaj (Swami Saradananda)?’ The Mother still remained intractable and said, ‘Call Sarat. I won’t eat from your hand.’ Swami Saradananda came immediately. Making him sit by her, the Mother said, ‘Do pass your hand over my body a little, my son.’ And taking hold of both his hands she added, ‘See my son, how much they vex me; they can only say, “Eat, eat”, and they can only apply that stick (thermometer) under the arm. Tell her not to pester me any more.’ Swami Saradananda said softly, ‘No, Mother, they won’t vex you any longer.’ Having consoled her in this way, he said after a little while. ‘Mother, will you eat a little now?’ The Mother said, ‘Give.’ When the Swami asked Sarala Devi to bring the diet the Mother said, ‘No, you feed me; I won’t take from her hand.’ The Swami took the feeding cup in hand and held the nozzle to the Mother’s lips. When she had drunk a little

milk from the cup, the Swami said, 'Mother, rest a while and then drink again.' Greatly pleased at this consideration, the Mother said, 'Just see, how finely he speaks, "Mother rest a while and then drink again!" Don't they know how to speak such a simple thing? Just see how she has worried my son at this dead of night! Go, my son, and sleep.' And with these words she patted his back a little. The Swami arranged the mosquito-net and said, 'Good night, Mother.' The Mother said, 'Good night, my son. Alas, how my son has been disturbed!' Up till then the Swami had been cherishing a desire to render some personal service to the Holy Mother, whose shyness, however, stood in the way. But before she finally took leave of him, she gave him an opportunity to have his desire fulfilled.

That an infinite affection influenced all that the Mother did up to her last moment is proved by her extreme consideration for Swami Saradananda as revealed in the last incident. Her love for Sarala Devi was equally tender as the subsequent event proves. Sarala Devi could well understand the vexation of such a patient at being asked to take diet and to use the thermometer so frequently; and hence she suggested to Swami Saradananda to change the duties. He complied and accordingly Varada and the widow of Navasan did Sarala's duties for two days during which time Sarala Devi kept herself studiously aloof. The Mother did not fail to notice this and made constant inquiries about her. At last at noon of the second day the Mother had Sarala called to herself, and placing the latter's head on her bosom, she said, 'Are you angry with me, my daughter? Don't you mind, my dear, if I have said anything.' Sarala could say nothing, but began shedding tears, and she resumed her duties.

As a result of the disease, the Mother's hands and feet became swollen and she could not move out of the bed. Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School with her girl students stayed by the Mother's side by turns to fan her and help

the attendants in other ways. There were now only five days left, when a woman devotee known as Annapurna's mother came to see the Mother. But as admission was prohibited to outsiders, she stood at the door-way. Just then the Mother turned over to a side and noticing her there, beckoned her to enter. The devotee came in and said with a choked voice, 'Mother, what will be our lot?' In a very tender but feeble voice the Mother said, 'What fear is there? You have seen the Master. What fear can there be for you?' She stopped for a while and then added slowly and softly, 'But one thing I tell you—if you want peace, my daughter, don't find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.' These were the last words of the Mother of the Universe to those afflicted souls for lightening whose burden She incarnated Herself out of Her infinite compassion undergoing all these ordeals of life on earth.

For three days preceding the departure, she hardly spoke, but remained merged in her Self; she felt disgusted at any attempt to drag down the mind to the physical plane. Gradually she stopped talking altogether. To a weeping attendant her last consolation was, 'There's Sarat (Saradananda); don't be afraid.' At last at 1.30 a.m. on July 21, 1920, she drew a few heavy breaths and then entered into *Mahasamadhi*. The long disease had made her frame skeletal, the eyes sunken, and complexion dark. But in the peace and silence of the final departure her face became free from all signs of affliction and regaining its usual fullness shone with ethereal lustre which lasted even when the body became cold, so much so, that owing to that placid brilliance, many on-lookers could not believe that life had become extinct.

Next morning (July 21), under the leadership of Swami Saradananda, the devotees decorated the body with flowers and garlands and carried it on their shoulders singing in chorus the *Rama-nama kirtana*. The procession started

at about half past ten and proceeded from the 'Udbodhan' northward to Baranagore, just opposite the Belur Math. There they crossed the Ganges in boats and laid the body on the bank of the river at the Math. A large number of devotees had gathered there by that time. The women now took charge of the body and bathed it in the sacred water of the Ganges. The pyre of sandal wood was lighted at about three o'clock in the afternoon, on the bank of the Ganges, a few yards north of Swami Vivekananda's temple. The body was offered there as a sacrifice. In the meantime the other bank of the river was overcast with clouds. Then followed a shower. The devotees apprehended that this might interfere with the funeral fire. But nothing happened on the western bank till nightfall. When at dusk all was finished and Swami Saradananda poured out the first pitcher of Ganges water for putting out the fire, a heavy shower came down to extinguish it completely without any further human endeavour. The Mother's corporeal body was there no more, the fire was out, and the devotees slowly returned home with a natural shower of benediction pouring on their heads.

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On that sacred spot was erected a small temple and on the Holy Mother's birthday on December 21, 1921, it was duly consecrated. The Holy Mother is still there receiving daily adoration from her sons and daughters and attracting many others from countries all over the world and filling their hearts with bliss and plenitude.

Peace!

Peace!!

Peace

!!!

*If you want peace, don't find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.*

**APPENDIX I**

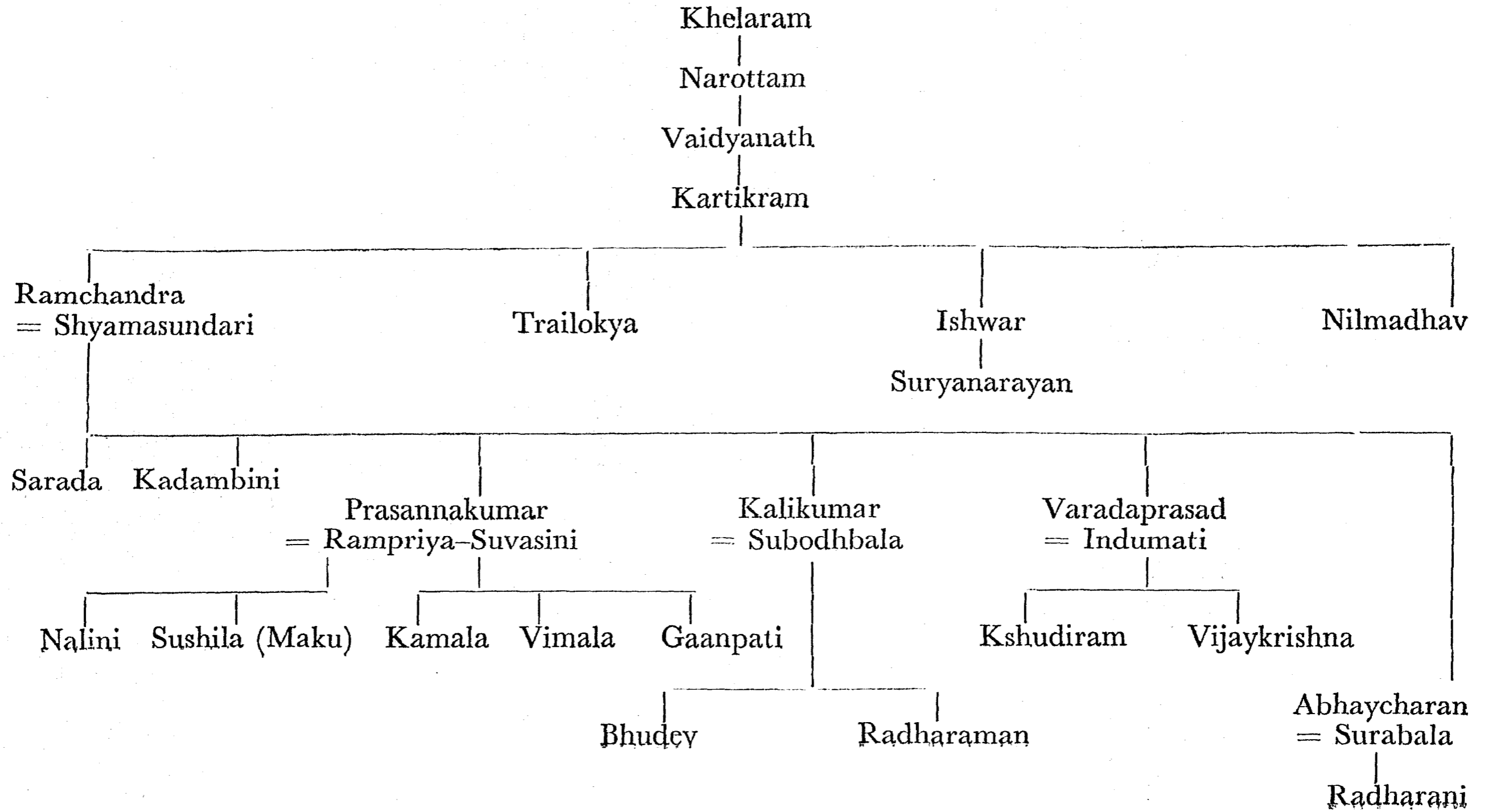
**CHRONOLOGY**

Birth	.. December 22, 1853
Marriage and first visit to Kamarpukur	.. May 1859
Second visit to Kamarpukur	.. December 1860
Third visit to Kamarpukur	.. May (?), 1866
Fourth visit to Kamarpukur	.. December 1866—January 1867
Fifth visit to Kamarpukur (With the Master there)	.. May—November 1867
First visit to Dakshineswar	.. March (?), 1872
Shodasi-puja	.. June 5, 1872
At Jayrambati	.. Middle of 1873
Death of her father	.. March 26, 1874
Second visit to Dakshineswar	.. Middle of 1874
At Jayrambati	.. September 1875
Severe attack of dysentery and awakening of Simhavahini	.. 1875
Commencement of Jagaddhatri worship	.. November 1875
Death of her mother-in-law	.. February 27, 1876
Shambhu Babu's donation of a house	.. April 11, 1876
Third visit to Dakshineswar (Meeting with robbers at Telo-bhelo)	.. January 1877
Fourth visit to Dakshineswar	.. February or March 1881
Hridaya left Dakshineswar	.. June 1881
Fifth visit to Dakshineswar	.. February 1882
Sixth visit to Dakshineswar	.. 1884
Seventh visit to Dakshineswar	.. March 1885
With the Master at Shyam- pukur	.. October 1885
With the Master at Cossipore	.. December 11, 1885
Vow of fast at Tarakeswar	.. During this period
Passing away of the Master	.. August 16, 1886
First pilgrimage to North India (mainly Vrindaban)	.. August 30, 1886

At Kamarpukur (for about nine months)	.. From September 1887
At Nilambar Mukherji's garden (Belur)	.. Up to October 1888
At Puri	.. From November 1888
At Kamarpukur	.. From February 1889
Pilgrimage to Gaya	.. March 25, 1890
At Ghushuri (Belur)	.. May-September 1890
At Jayrambati	.. October 1890
At Nilambar Babu's garden ( <i>Panchatapa</i> )	.. 1893
At Kailwar (two months)	.. 1894
Second pilgrimage to Vrindaban	.. 1895
To Kamarpukur and Jayrambati	.. May 13, 1895
At Sharat Sarkar's house, Calcutta	.. April 1896
At Sarkarbari Lane, Calcutta	.. 1896
At Bosepara Lane, Calcutta	.. 1898-99
Opening of the Nivedita School	.. November 12, 1898
Passing away of Swami Yogananda	.. March 28, 1899
At Bosepara Lane	.. 1901-2
Durga worship at Belur	.. 18th-22nd of October, 1901
In Bagbazar Street	.. 1904-5
Second pilgrimage to Puri	.. 1904-5
Death of Shyamasundari Devi	.. End of January 1906
Durga worship at Girish's house	.. October 1907
First visit to the 'Udbodhan'	.. May 23, 1909
At Kothar	.. December 1910
In the South	.. February-March 1911
Marriage of Radhu	.. June 10, 1911
Durga worship at Belur	.. 16th-21st of October, 1912
At Banaras	.. November 5, 1912-January 15, 1913

- At Koalpara .. August-September 1915  
In the new house at  
Jayrambati .. May 15, 1916  
Durga worship at Belur .. 3rd-6th of October, 1916  
At Koalpara (fever) .. March-April 1918  
In Calcutta .. May 7, 1918  
At the Nivedita School .. December 31, 1918  
At Koalpara with Radhu .. January 30-July 23, 1919  
At the 'Udbodhan' .. February 27, 1919  
Mahasamadhi .. July 21, 1920

**APPENDIX II**  
**GENEALOGY OF THE MUKHERJIS OF JAYRAMBATI**



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