

Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

Before I begin my subject—Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play—I shall say something about Swami Bhuteshanandaji, as this is his endowment lecture. I met the swami in 1960 in Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, and I was closely connected to him till 1998. I still remember hiding his shoes, or sometimes soaking his clothes in soap water, so that he would not go away to Belur Math. He would say, ‘You are naughty. I am supposed to go to Belur Math, and you are preventing me from going!’

We loved to hear from him. I sometimes become very emotional when I think of him. Tulasidās said: ‘I bow down to the holy and the unholy. Why? Because both give me pain. When the unholy person comes near me, I get pain; and when the holy one leaves me, I get pain. So I bow down to both.’ That is how I feel about Swami Bhuteshanandaji.

There is another *dohā* from Tulasidās: ‘*Tulsi, jab jag me āyo, jag hāse, tum roye; aisi karne kar chaloki jab tum hāse jag roye*’—‘O Tulasi, when you came to this world, you cried and the world smiled. You do such things in your life that when you die, you will smile and let the world cry for you.’ That couplet is true about Swami Bhuteshanandaji, the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Order.

I have so many stories about him. One day I said to him, ‘Maharaj, it is a big mistake that we made you the President of the Order.’

‘Why?’ he asked.

I replied, ‘You did not finish your

discourses on the *Kathamrita*.’ (Indeed, the way he interpreted *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is unique in the Ramakrishna Order. Perhaps, you have seen the seven volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Prasanga* in Bengali published by Udbodhan.)

Responding to my quip, he said, ‘You are right. When I was at Kankurgachi, I was the Vice President and I used to give class every week. But they made me the President of the Order and now I give only initiation and *darshan*! I have no time to give classes.’

When I met him in 1997, I said, ‘Maharaj, what kind of a guru are you? Thakur said that the *uttam vaidya* (best physician) put his knee on the patient’s chest and forced in the medicine. So, can you put your knee on the chest of your disciples [who are like diseased persons] and give them the knowledge of Brahman?’

He quipped, ‘*Āmār to dui hāntutei byathā*, both of my knees are afflicted with pain!’

What a humorous person! His humour, his fantastic memory, his knowledge of the scriptures, and erudition, as well as his love and compassion for monks and devotees, were phenomenal. I have many stories about him that I shall never forget.

About the book

Now, I have to talk about *Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play*. This book is an exhaustive, updated, authentic, and comprehensive biography of the Holy Mother, Sarada Devi, the wife of Sri

Ramakrishna—the spiritual phenomenon of this age. This book consists of 876 pages and 125 photographs. It took me seven years to complete this book with the help of a team of editors.

Let me tell you a little bit about the Mother's life. Holy Mother Sarada Devi was born in 1853 and passed away in 1920. The first book on her, the first part of *Sri Sri Māyer Kathā* came out in 1926. The second part was published in 1936. In 1937, Akshay Chaitanya wrote the first Bengali biography of the Mother. In 1940, Swami Tapasyananda wrote Mother's biography in English. In 1954, Swami Gambhirananda translated his Bengali book on Holy Mother, *Srimā Saradā Devi*, into English. In 1962, Swami Nikhilananda wrote *Holy Mother*, published by the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre in New York. After that, many books about Holy Mother came into existence, including: Swami Ishanananda's *Mātri Sānnidhye*, Swami Saradeshananda's *Sri Sri Māyer Smritikathā*, and Swami Parameshananda's *Sri Sri Mā O Jairāmbāti*. I myself edited a book—*Mātri Darshan*—that contains 49 reminiscences of Holy Mother. Swami Purnatmananda edited four volumes in Bengali titled *Sri Sri Māyer Padaprānte*. After that came Pravrajika Bharatiprana's reminiscences of the Holy Mother. Much valuable information is in these books—so much that I felt we needed an updated biography. I started working on *Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play* in February 2009, and I finished it in September 2015.

Three sections of Holy Mother's life

We can divide Holy Mother's biography into three sections: First, *Ādi lilā*, or the early lilā, which comprises events from 1853 to 1886; second, *Madhya lilā*, the middle lilā, which includes events from 1887 to 1909; and third, *Anta lilā*, or the final lilā,

comprising events from 1910 to 1920.

Holy Mother was born in Jayrambati in 1853. She was five years and five months old when she was married, and the Master was twenty-four. Of course, this was not a real marriage; it was a kind of betrothal. At that time child marriage was popular. I sometimes make joke and say that the dowry for a grown-up girl was very expensive, so the Master paid only 300 rupees for a little girl!

Be that as it may, as Holy Mother gradually grew up, she became tormented by village gossip. The village women remarked: 'Aha, Sarada's husband is mad. Shyama arranged her daughter's marriage to a lunatic.' At that time, Ramakrishna was in a God-intoxicated state in Dakshineswar. There is a saying that gossip spreads faster than the gospel. As it happens, people showed lip-sympathy, but nonetheless she was hurt. Although she avoided those village women, it was hard for her to digest the criticism voiced against her husband. But what to do? She confined herself to her room. However, in 1872, she decided to go to Dakshineswar to see for herself. She travelled with her father and some village women who were going to Calcutta to take a holy bath in the Ganges during the *dol-purnimā*, or Holi festival. Sometimes I visualize Holy Mother walking sixty-four miles with bare feet, carrying a bundle with a spare sari, one *gārchā* (a towel), *muri* (puffed rice), molasses, bananas, and a little money to pay the ferryman. She had to cross five rivers—Amodar, Dwarakeswar, Mundeshwari, Damodar, and Ganges—to reach Dakshineswar. Sometimes I visualize her bathing in a pond or in a lake on the way, fully clothed, and allowing her sari to dry on her body because there was nowhere to change her cloth. When she was tired, she took rest under a tree, and she passed the nights in roadside inns.

Sarada Devi was a village girl, but she was extremely intelligent and had strong common sense. On this first journey to Dakshineswar in March 1872, she had no jewellery; later the Master gave her some, which she hid in puffed rice during her journeys so that robbers could not find them. She and her party arrived in Dakshineswar at 9 o'clock at night. Sri Ramakrishna said to his nephew: 'O, Hriday, this is the first time she is coming. Did she consult the almanac?' That was the first sentence the Mother heard from her husband, and she thought, 'My husband is a loving and a caring person.'

The second sentence she heard the moment she entered the room: '*Esecho, besh korecho*—It is good that you have come.' The third sentence: '*Ore, mādur pete de*—Spread a mat for her.' There was no furniture in the Master's room. The moment the Master heard that she had a fever, he anxiously said: '*Uh! tumi eto deri kore ele, āmār Mathur chole geche*—You have come too late; my Mathur has passed away.' Rasmani's son-in-law, Mathur, died in July 1871, eight months before the Mother arrived. Referring to Mathur's death, Sri Ramakrishna regretted that his right hand had broken (*āmār dān hāt bhenge geche*). By this he meant that if Mathur were alive he would have taken good care of her, and he was sorry. That was the fourth sentence.

Hriday then brought some puffed rice (*muri*). Mother ate the *muri* and drank some Ganges water. Then, of course, she wanted to go to Chandramani Devi, who was staying in the Nahabat. But Sri Ramakrishna said, 'No, no, no, don't go there. You stay in my room. It will be difficult for the doctors to treat you there.' A bed was then made on the floor of Sri Ramakrishna's room. Another woman slept next to Mother.

Sarada Devi had two fears in mind when she left Jayrambati. First, her husband could

be mad. However, when she arrived she was surprised to see that her husband was not mad, but rational, caring, loving, and conscientious—a wonderful person altogether!

Second, she was worried that he might reject her. Sri Ramakrishna took *sannyāsa* in 1864, and it was now 1872. When Mother came to Dakshineswar, however, she found that her husband did not reject her. History says that Buddha left his wife, Yashodharā. Chaitanya left his wife, Vishnupriyā. But Thakur did not leave Sarada Devi. Every *avatār* comes with his Shakti, such as Rāma with Sitā, Krishna with Rādhā, Buddha with Yashodharā, Chaitanya with Vishnupriyā, and Ramakrishna with Sarada. Swami Vivekananda said: 'A bird cannot fly with one wing.' Both wings are necessary. Both man and woman are necessary to form an ideal society.

The married life of Ramakrishna and Holy Mother spanned about twenty-seven years, but they lived together for nearly ten years. During her lifetime, the Mother travelled 29 times from Kamarpukur-Jayrambati to Calcutta, and from Calcutta to Kamarpukur-Jayrambati.

Who started the worship of Ramakrishna? It was first started by Holy Mother when she lived in the Nahabat in Dakshineswar. One day when she was worshipping the picture of the Master, he came there and said, 'Hello! What are you doing?' Then he himself worshipped his picture. So it was Holy Mother who first started the worship of Sri Ramakrishna in the Ramakrishna Order.

I began visiting Udbodhan when I was fourteen. I used to meet the swamis there and served them. One day as I went to bow down to Swami Shantanandaji, he said, 'You bow down from a distance—don't come near me.' I was surprised because no swami had ever said such words to me! Why

was he talking that way? I wondered. Later I heard he had tuberculosis, so he had asked me to stay away from him for my safety. When I was going to America in 1971, the swami told me: ‘*jap koro, practise japa.*’ That was the message he gave me.

I shall tell you an incident that Swami Sridharanandaji told me. In 1940s medicine for curing tuberculosis had not been invented—that came in the 1950s. So, when Swami Shantananda had tuberculosis in Varanasi, he was kept in isolation. He received food from the ashrama kitchen and that was all. He was a little puzzled by this arrangement because no one told him that he had tuberculosis. Salil Maharaj (later Sridharananda) was his attendant. Swami Virajanandaji arranged a bed for him in the George VI Tuberculosis Sanatorium at Simla. When Shantanandaji went there, he discovered that he had tuberculosis, which disturbed him immensely. He became very grave and indrawn. He was not concerned about himself, but for his attendant. He began to pray to Holy Mother, his guru, and his prayer was answered. I shall read to you from *Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play*:

Mother had once told Swami Shantananda how to receive her command: If there is any crisis in your life, remember me. Isolate yourself from others for a few days, and practise japa and meditation intensely. Pray wholeheartedly and ask me, ‘Mother, what shall I do?’ During that period, eat less and keep your body and mind pure. Try to maintain silence and speak only if it is absolutely necessary. Don’t let other people know what you are doing. Continue your prayer and sadhana in this way with a one-pointed mind. Never lose patience. If you see that you are not receiving my command, still you should not give up hope. If you find that no response is coming, then know for certain that your mind has not risen high enough to receive my command. You will definitely receive my command if you call

on me with a wholehearted faith and devotion.

This is a gospel of hope. When you have trouble or difficulties in your life try to get this command from the Mother. It is wonderful.

Mother appeared before Swami Shantananda and asked, ‘What do you want?’

The swami said: Mother, ‘I may die, but that doesn’t matter. See that this young man who is serving me may not get tuberculosis. That is my only prayer to you.’

Mother said, ‘Let it be so.’

The stories told by Mother’s disciples

I met several disciples of the direct disciples of the Master and Mother. Among them were at least two persons who had seen Sri Ramakrishna: Bhavatarini Devi, wife of Upendra Mukherjee, and Ramendra Sundar Bhattacharya. Swami Vishuddhanandaji, a disciple of Holy Mother, said: ‘I gave a name to Holy Mother—*Gandibhāngā Mā*, the barrier-breaking Mother.’ He continued:

Here are Ram’s mother and Shyam’s mother. Ram’s mother thinks Ram came from her body. Ram is her son, her possession. Similarly, Shyam’s mother thinks Shyam came from her body and is her son. When Ram is sick, Shyam’s mother does not feel and when Shyam is sick, Ram’s mother does not feel. But Holy Mother sees Ram, Shyam, Ram’s mother, Shyam’s mother and all the beings came from her cosmic body. ‘I am the Mother of all, I am the Mother of the Universe’, she declared. There is no barrier.

Somebody asked Swami Vishuddhanandaji: ‘*Mā bado nā Thakur bado?*—who is greater—the Master or the Mother?’

Maharaj laughed and said: ‘I do not know who is greater, but the Master worshipped Holy Mother. Now, you decide who is great.’

I will tell you a very interesting thing: Sri Ramakrishna saw Holy Mother from three angles, and Mother also viewed the Master from three angles. The Master saw Sarada as my wife, my disciple, my *Ishta*, Jagadambā. Mother saw the Master as my husband, my guru, my *Ishta*. Their relationship is divine and amazing. In other incarnations, we find Shakti is neglected, ignored, ill-treated, and underappreciated—witness the situations of Sitā, Rādhā, Yashodharā, Vishnupriyā. Shakti was neglected and humiliated in those incarnations, but not in Ramakrishna and Holy Mother's incarnations. Here, Shakti is worshipped, adored as *Shodashi*, the Divine Mother. Holy Mother said: 'The Master has left me behind to demonstrate the universal Motherhood of God. I am the Mother of all.'

In 1959, I was in Varanasi and stayed at Advaita Ashrama. I was close to Swami Haripremanandaji, Mother's disciple. I remember that the moment I arrived, he said: 'Hello! Young man!'—I was young then—'If you go to any place you must remember two things: First, where is the bathroom? And second, where is the drinking water? These two things are very important for a visiting guest.' The disciples of the Mother were very practical.

The swami took me to the temple of Vishwanāth to have His *darshan*. We put some flowers and Ganges water on the image and stayed very briefly. The temple was so crowded that you didn't have to make any special effort to get into it: The pilgrims just push you in and push you out. Anyway, after the *darshan*, Maharaj took me outside and asked me to sit with him on a marble bench. He told me to repeat the mantra and think of Lord Vishwanāth. We sat there for 15 minutes. I learnt from this sadhu how to visit a holy place, and how to visit a deity. When you go to Dakshineswar or visit Belur Math, you may not get a

chance to sit in front of the Mother or the Master for a long time, but you can sit in a secluded corner after receiving *darshan*. Then you can meditate and feel their presence in your heart.

Here is a story from Swami Haripremanandaji, which he told in his memoir: Radhu, Mother's niece, was not well. Mother took her to Bankura to Vaikuntha Maharaj (Swami Maheswarananda), for treatment. Hariprem Maharaj accompanied them. Vaikuntha Maharaj was a good homeopathic doctor. One evening Radhu was lying on the bed and the Mother was seated there. There was a kerosene lantern nearby. The Mother suffered from arthritis in her legs, and someone would rub on some medicated oil in the evening. Hariprem Maharaj was rubbing her feet. The Mother was then an elderly woman and her feet were full of wrinkles, veins and sinews. Maharaj was thinking: 'People call her the Divine Mother, but I see she is an old lady!' Gradually he saw the Mother's feet began to change. They became beautiful and well-developed, just like those of a young girl! Maharaj was bewildered. Then he looked up and saw the four-handed goddess Jagaddhātri. He uttered 'Mā,' and fell down unconscious. After a while, Holy Mother said: 'O, Hari, ki holo go? Otho, otho—O, Hari! What has happened to you? Get up, get up.' Maharaj then regained his consciousness and again he saw the same old Mother sitting in front of him. She had revealed to him her true nature.

I met Swami Parameshwaranandaji in 1962, during my first visit to Jayrambati. Parameshwaranandaji used to tell us many stories about the Mother. One of his stories in particular touched me: During Holy Mother's time, there was no electricity in Jayrambati, and no running water. The villagers would use the water from

Banerjee's pond. People used the same water for bathing, washing clothes, drinking, and cooking. Naturally, in the rainy season the polluted water caused stomach problems. As a result, Mother sometimes suffered from a form of dysentery.

Swami Parameshwarananda sought to solve the problem by fetching drinking water from the Amodar river, where he used to go to take his bath. The swami collected water in a pitcher and carried it to the Mother to drink. On the first day, she forbade him to bring water from Amodar river. But the swami paid no heed and did what he wanted to do. On the second day, Mother again forbade him, saying: 'I am your guru, but you don't listen to me.' On the third day, the same thing happened. When she forbade him from doing what he had been doing, the swami said: 'Mother, I go there for bath and I shall bring water. If you wish, you drink, or do whatever you like with that water, I don't care.'

The Mother said: 'My son, that water is really helping me. Do you know why I asked you not to bring water? Because you will have to carry a heavy pitcher of water from such a long distance. That is the reason I am asking you not to bring water for me.'

This is the sign of real love. It is the true expression of love, not the mere verbal form of love—'I love you, I love you.'

I remember, when I was going to America in 1971, Barada Maharaj (Swami Ishanananda) gave me some of Mother's hair and some other things. I have all those mementos. One day I asked him: 'Maharaj, in my home I have mother, sisters, aunts—so many women in our family. What is the difference between Holy Mother and them? She is also a woman.'

He said: 'Have you seen any person who is completely desireless? The Mother was *nirvāsanā*—desirelessness'.

All human beings have desires. Those of

you who have read Shankara's Vedanta will find that all human beings cycle through three states: *avidyā* (ignorance), *kāma* (desire), and *karma* (action). Ignorance brings desire, and desire brings action. Why do you work? Because you want to fulfil your desires. Why do you have desires? Because you have ignorance. Mother was *Bhagavati*—the Goddess. She had no desires. Moreover, the Mother was *Kaushambi*, a married woman with unbroken chastity (which is also an epithet of Durgā).

Barada Maharaj had a footprint of the Holy Mother that had been taken in 1919 at Koalpara. Wherever he went, he carried that footprint wrapped in a red cloth. Barada Maharaj passed away in Varanasi in 1973. In 1986, I went to Varanasi and saw that footprint, which was then with Rajani Maharaj. I knew him when he was in Gadadhar Ashrama, Calcutta. He was a very simple and loving monk. I said to him: 'Maharaj, do you remember how much affection you had for me? You used to bring sandesh prasad for us.'

'Yes, yes,' he replied.

Then I said, 'Maharaj, will you please give me this footprint?'

'Aha! You will get it after I am dead.'

'Maharaj, when you will die I shall not be here. You better give me this footprint right now.'

With a smile, he gave me that footprint. I brought it to St. Louis and had it framed on an acid-free cloth. Now the Mother's original footprint, taken during her lifetime, remains under the altar of Sri Ramakrishna in St. Louis.

I stayed with Swami Prabhavananda for five years in Hollywood. The swami had met Holy Mother, and he told me that her mind never went below the *vishuddha*, the throat *chakra*. Anybody who visited her felt her to be his or her own mother. It was an amazing phenomenon.

In 1977, I met Swami Saradeshnanandaji in Vrindaban. I said: 'Maharaj, you were in Jayrambati for many years. You served Holy Mother. What speciality did you see in her? What were her characteristics? Please tell me.'

He said: 'I saw in Mother *nirabhimānatā*—humility. She was completely egoless.'

Human beings have an ego but God doesn't. Ego comes from ignorance. God has no ignorance. Mother was a goddess.

People become proud if they have a lot of money or beauty or learning. One becomes egotistic. Indeed, ego is the wall between the finite and the infinite. The moment ego dissolves, one becomes one with God. Sri Ramakrishna said categorically, '*āmi mole ghucibe janjāl*, all troubles come to an end when the ego dies.'

One of Saradeshnanandaji's stories really inspired me. One evening Mother was kneading dough in Jayrambati. He said: 'Mother, we can do that. You work so hard!'

Mother said: '*Bābā, āshirbād karo jeno shesh din porjanta kāj kore morte pāri*'—'Bless me, my child, so that I may go on working till the last day of my life.' Mother was a real karmayogi.

It is important to remember that it was not possible for Sri Ramakrishna to demonstrate *gārhasṭha dharma*, the ideal life of the householder. Because he had taken monastic vows, and was an embodiment of renunciation, he was absorbed in *samādhi* most of the time. Although Holy Mother did not take any formal vows, she was an ideal nun in her white sari. She demonstrated both the monastic ideal and the householder's ideal in her day-to-day life. Her household was '*khepār hāt bāzār*—a mart of crazy people including her unbalanced nieces, greedy brothers, and eccentric disciples.' Of course, she also was surrounded by some wonderful

monks and devotees. It is amazing how she maintained her equanimity. *Gitā* says that yoga is equanimity of the mind. The Mother loved and served all equally, and she demonstrated practical Vedanta.

Truly, while Ramakrishna's life was one of condensed spirituality that may be compared to the snow in the Himalayas, Holy Mother's life was one of flowing spirituality like the water of the Ganges. Melted snow turns to water, but they are the same substance: one is solid; the other is liquid. We cannot see the physical forms of Ramakrishna or Holy Mother, but their lives and teachings are living in the hearts of countless people all over the world.

Swami Saradeshnanandaji narrated this story in his reminiscences: One midnight in Jayrambati he saw the Mother, with a kerosene lantern, picking up broken glass and chips in the courtyard. He asked, 'Mother! What are you doing?'

She replied: 'You see, some people have come from Calcutta with their children and they walk barefoot. They may cut their feet. That is the reason I am removing these things from the courtyard.'

Just imagine! She was doing this at midnight so that no one would see her. This action was an expression of her boundless love.

In 1986, I met Bishesh Maharaj (Swami Satyaswarupananda) in Varanasi. I asked him: 'Maharaj, what did you see in Holy Mother?'

He replied, 'Mother never hurt anybody with harsh words.'

We make friends as well as enemies through our words, dealings, and our behaviour, and through our actions. We are not born with friends and enemies; we make them. But Mother was *Ajātashatru*, a person whose enemy has not been born. She never hurt anybody.

One day Golap-ma was shouting:

‘Mother, here nobody listens to me! It is your house. So everybody listens to you.’

Mother said quietly: ‘This is not my house. This house belongs to my children and I only live here. If you have anything to complain about, go to Sharat (Swami Saradananda).’

Bishesh Maharaj told me another interesting story: The Mother was preparing to leave Udbodhan for Jayrambati. Swami Saradananda told Rashbehari Maharaj and Ashok Maharaj to help Mother pack. So they came to pack Mother’s trunk, bedding and other things. They were to go to Jayrambati with the Mother’s entourage, which included Radhu and others. Sharat Maharaj had bought a new mosquito curtain for her. They took the train from Howrah station to Vishnupur, and travelled from Vishnupur to Jayrambati (a distance of twenty-eight miles) by bullock-cart. These two brahmacharins carried Mother’s luggage to her room, then they went to their room. Mother opened her trunk and began to unpack. Meanwhile Uncle Kali (Mother’s brother) came to see her. When he saw the new mosquito curtain, he said: ‘Didi [sister], I shall take this mosquito net.’ Saying so, he took it and left. Mother kept quiet. When the two brahmacharins returned that evening to set up the mosquito curtain for the Mother, they could not find it. They asked her: ‘Where is the mosquito curtain? We packed it in the trunk!’

Mother at first kept quiet, and then said: ‘My son, Kali came and took it.’

They replied, ‘Mother, that is not right. Sharat Maharaj gave the net to you and you have not used it even for a single day!’

‘My son, what to do? You just set up my old mosquito net and that will be enough.’ So they followed her order.

In the meantime, Uncle Kali was coming back to Holy Mother’s cottage. The two

brahmacharins confronted him in the courtyard. They grabbed his hands and demanded: ‘Uncle, you have taken away the Mother’s mosquito curtain, return that right now.’

‘No, no, Didi gave it to me,’ said Uncle Kali.

‘No Didi did not give it to you; you took it away. You will have to give it back.’

Then Uncle Kali shouted: ‘*Didi, tomār bhakterā āmāke mere phello go!*—Sister, my life is at stake in the hands of your devotees!’

Mother came out of her room, and Kali freed himself from their grip and ran away. Mother said: ‘You are monks. Why do you fight for this petty mosquito curtain? Forget it.’

One should remember that Holy Mother was acting in her divine drama: she needed both good and bad characters in her play. A drama cannot be interesting if there is no friction between good and evil. The more the hero or heroine of the play is opposed, persecuted, and ill-treated, the more that character shines and inspires affection in the audience. For example, in a performance when Sitā is abducted by Rāvana, or Duhshāshan publicly humiliates Draupadi, the viewers’ love and sympathy wells up for Sitā and Draupadi, and at the same time they are filled with anger and abhorrence towards the villains. In her own drama, Holy Mother selected bad and worldly roles for some of her relatives and good and spiritual roles for her devotees—just as Ramakrishna had done before her.

In the midst of her family

In the chapter on ‘Holy Mother in the midst of her family,’ we see Radhu kicking Holy Mother on the bullock-cart and the Mother taking the dust of her own feet and blessing her with it. Incredible! However, Radhu did a wonderful job: she helped to

keep the Mother in this world for twenty years.

Radhu was born in 1900 and died of tuberculosis in 1940. Mother died in 1920. After reading this chapter, the reader might wonder why Holy Mother endured all these trials. Why did she surround herself with selfish, jealous, quarrelsome, and greedy relatives? She could easily have had a joyful and comfortable life in Calcutta with her wonderful devotees and disciples. This is her divine play.

The Mother said that after the Master's passing away her mind was soaring high. She thought: What was the purpose of living anymore in this world? It was better to leave—but she had a mission to fulfil. She conducted Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual ministry for thirty-four years after the Master's passing away.

Mother travelled across eight states in India. Thakur did not travel so much. Swami Ramakrishnananda used to say, 'I wanted to sanctify the whole of South India. Thakur could not come. Mother and Brahmananda will sanctify the South.' How the disciples loved the Mother! To them, her word was final.

In 1912, Mother was in Varanasi. She used to live in Lakshmi Nivas, which was opposite to Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama. One day she entered the temple in Advaita Ashrama and closed the door. She put her own picture in a niche behind the Master's marble image and offered a couple of flowers to it. Then she came out and said to Swami Nirvarananda (Chandra Maharaj): 'Chandra, offer a few flowers to this picture everyday.' Thus she installed herself in Varanasi. Then Chandra Maharaj told Swami Shivananda about this: 'Maharaj, Mother has put her own picture in the temple.' Mahapurush Maharaj hurried to the temple to see it, then immediately informed Swami Brahmananda: 'Maharaj, Mother has

put her own picture in the niche of the temple of the Master.' Swami Brahmananda gravely remarked: 'Tarakda, this is not a good sign. She is probably planning to depart from this world very soon.' Swami Turiyananda was also there. He said, '*Mahāmāyār icchā*—it is the will of Mahāmāyā. Who can stop her wishes?'

Life stories of Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and the disciples are still fresh and inspiring. Sometimes I imagine the Mother shopping at Rameswaram, buying some pictures of Shiva and a pencil for Radhu. One day she gave a picture of Lord Rameswar to Swami Keshavananda for Koalpara Ashrama. Mother asked him to frame the picture and put it in the shrine. The swami said, 'No, Mother, we have too many pictures already.' Nevertheless, she insisted, 'No, no, I have brought it from Rameswaram. You frame it and at least put it on the wall.'

After composing a hymn to the Mother, Abhedananda expressed his desire to recite it to her. She was startled, and asked: 'What kind of hymn? Whose hymn?'

Abhedananda humbly replied, 'Mother, I composed a hymn on you.'

Amazed, the Mother asked, 'My son, what is the need to compose a hymn on me?' However, when Abhedananda sincerely repeated his request, the Mother calmly listened to the entire hymn. When the swami recited '*Ramakrishnagata-prānām*—whose soul is absorbed in Ramakrishna,' the Mother became completely motionless. When he recited '*Tannāma-shravana-priyām*—who loves to hear the Master's name,' tears began to roll from her eyes. When he said '*Tadbhāva-ranjitā-kārām*—whose mental state is saturated with the Master,' he saw that the Mother was no longer there: The Master was seated in her place.

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