MEMOIR

By Swami Prabudhananda

Sri Brahmajna Ma was born in a village in the District of Tipperah (East Bengal) on the Ekadasi day of the bright lunar fortnight of the month of Falgoon (corresponding to the middle of March) sixty years ago. She was born in a Brahmin family of moderate means but highly respected in the village and neighbourhood on account of their piety and goodness as well as their social position. She was, like our Bhagavan, the second child of Her parents and was their pet. Her father regarded Her from Her birth as a Goddess dislodged from Heaven by some curse or other (Shapa bhrasta Devi). She was married at the age of eight and Her husband died within one and a half years of their marriage. She continued to live with Her parents generally, but when She grew up, She mostly lived in Her husband's house all alone, as the brothers, who were living together as a joint family, separated and She was given a separate hut. Her husband's brothers looked after Her landed property. Her ways were entirely different from those of the ordinary run of people and She was unable to remain long in the company of girls of Her own age and position. She was of a meditative mood and grown up men would be struck by Her conversation, which was like that of a philosopher even before Her marriage. Two instances are given of this.

Once a terrible hurricane passed over the village and all the men of Her house were very much afraid, fearing that the huts would collapse and that great damage would be done. While it continued they had spent all the time praying to God, while She stood by, watching quite unconcerned. When once the hurricane was over, all became happy once more and

returned to their daily occupations quite cheerfully. She was very much struck by their now taking life so lightly and asked Her father:

"How can you be so happy when you know that a similar catastrophe may happen at any moment? Is there no way to go beyond these troubles?"

Her father was unable to give any adequate reply.

On another occasion an old lady died and when she was being cremated Mother was sitting within sight. Others were standing nearby talking about the old lady. Mother asked,

"Why do you say 'She passed away?', If she is not the body who is she? Where has she gone? Whence did she come?"

Bystanders were surprised at such precocity.

Goddess Kali used to be worshipped in the house at the time of Dewali (Deepavali). Mother could not understand why men should worship an idol made of clay according to their own imagination and then take it for a deity. She could not be induced to bow down before the idol. She never had any devotion to a personal God. She was a thorough *Jnanapanthi*. In the same way as Sri Bhagavan says "Know thyself," She used to say, "Know your ownself or get hold of your ownself." (Nij or Apan—own, words often used by Her in early days).

She learnt the Bengali alphabet and read a few elementary books before She was married. Long after Self-realization, when people came to Her, she learnt from them the vocabulary of religious literature such as Atma, Brahma, etc. When some of the Upanishads and Vedanta literature were read aloud to Her she liked them very much and said, "They seem to me like the sayings of friends with whom I once travelled, about what we all saw on our journey." She was so confident of Herself that if anybody should say, "Shankaracharya or Buddha says just the opposite to what you say"

She would reply, "I can't help it—What I know and see for myself I believe. They must have been misunderstood."

She liked Shankara and Buddha very much and also Asthavakra, and She never had reason to differ with them on on any important subject. But She was more liberal than Shankara.

She has described the stages of Realization in Shatchakra, a chapter in the book Brahmanja-Mayer-katha and it is believed that She had the fullest Realization at about the age of 32. Thereafter She used to mix with others and discuss with them ordinary subjects also so-called religious customs. Several photographs were taken of Her between 32—40. She was at that time quite indifferent. But thereafter She would not sit for one at all. The college students and intelligent and educated men of the neighbouring villages used to come to Her and all became Her devotees, and some of the educated young men never took up any temporal activities and are now either Brahmacharies or Sannyasins. It is a peculiarity of Her life that She used to have a favourite disciple always with Her, on whom She used to depend very much. But they would change one after the other like the British Prime Ministers. After I came to Her I became Her favourite and for four years remained Her personal attendant till She passed away five years ago. Some months before I came to Her She used to say, "One more man will come to me and then my work will be finished."

She came to Calcutta several times and seemed to be waiting for some body. Many visitors came to see Her but She said that none of these was the man She was looking for. After I met Her She said, "This is the last man to come to me." I knew nothing at all of all this at that time but when I took the garb, after renouncing my temporal activities within a year after I met Her, I was informed all about it.

Mother was credited with wonderful powers and when I went to Her native village with Her, many people related

stories of these. I questioned Mother but She replied, "I did not do anything. I am always in the same condition. Others get the benefit of their own faith and wonders are worked through the faith of the people concerned. I do nothing but ever remain like the Sun."

After I met Her she became very retiring, and would not receive any visitors; we also had instructions not to talk to anyone about Her, and we lived in places where no one knew who She was. Many thought She was my own mother and as She used to wear the white cloth usually put on by Bengali widows, no one used to take Her for a Saint. When anyone came and talked to Her she would carry on the conversation without giving any hint of Her speciality, as when travelling in a train. But everybody would be struck by Her intelligence. When visitors came and asked questions, Her attitude of putting counter-questions was very much like our Bhagavan's. She had a wonderful memory. A song which She liked She could remember with intonations if She heard it sung but once, and She could repeat it months afterwards. I composed some songs and sang them to Her. Sometimes She would ask me to sing a particular song and if I could not remember She would always help me. She was also a poet by nature. She could dictate songs and poems as if She was quoting from memory.

She seemed to be of opinion that a man who sought Self-realization should give up all other pursuits and devote his whole time and attention to this alone. That is why happy-go-lucky aspirants could never find favour with Her. She was a strict disciplinarian and would not tolerate anti-Sannyasin tendencies. She never encouraged reading. She would say, "The Gita and Vivekachudamani are enough." She would also say, "Mere reading is good for nothing. Get hold of some passage and translate it into action. If knowledge of books could do anything, all the Pandits would have been liberated long ago. But they are still where they were,

and some of them go downwards because they develop the additional sin of pride."

While describing the stages through which She passed, She said that at one time She developed the power of seeing what was in other people's minds. No one could hide anything, but She was very much disturbed by this. Her mind would not be still and She found Herself spending Her whole time studying the thoughts of others, whether She liked it or not. After some time this stage passed and She was glad.

At another time She found Herself always in a state of happiness. She liked this stage for a few days, but She soon thought, "This happiness is being felt by the mind; so it is in the region of duality; so I don't want it." Thus She passed beyond it.

When we discriminate and reason our conclusion does not make a permanent impression and we have to go through the process many times before it becomes a part of our nature. Not so with Mother. Once She reasoned, the impression was lasting.

When She came home after Her husband's death She became very meditative and people thought it was on account of Her husband's death that She was worried. But that was not the case. Actually She was quite unaffected by it. One day Her father asked Her what She would like to do in order to be happy. She said, "I would like very much to keep on looking at that big palm tree over there." None understood what She meant by this. She told us later that She had meant that She wanted to keep Her mind fixed on something still.

Even when She was a child, sometimes She would have visions of the future, and She was always confident that there was no possibility of mistake. When Her husband was going away from home for the last time a sudden thought flashed across Her mind that he would never return. After a few days a telegram came to say that he was seriously ill. A brother went to him but She told the others, "What is the

good of going? He will not recover and probably he is already dead." This proved to be only too true.

Once Mother was bitten by a snake. Afterwards She would often see snakes coming to bite Her. Hearing Her call-out, others would run to Her aid but were unable to see anything. She would say, "Don't you see the snake binding my hand with its tail? Oh! there it is biting me." But the others could see no snake at all, though strangely enough the marks of the snake's tail would be visible on Her hand as also the marks of the bite, from which blood would ooze out. This continued for some time, but the bite never poisoned Mother. We asked Her later what was the reason for all this. Mother said it was the solidification of Her imagination. At first She had had no idea what it was, but when She found the reason it stopped. From that time onwards people would call Her Manasha Thakurani (the presiding Goddess over snakes). A separate hut was erected for Her and they started regular pooja. The pooja was still being carried on daily when I went to visit the place, at Her husband's house, eight years ago. Mother remained indifferent to these demonstrations but from that time She commanded great respect and was also called "Siddha Thakurani," or the lady who has been successful in her Sadhana. Thereafter She would remain sometimes within closed doors for several days at a time, never coming out at all. Nobody would venture to disturb Her on these occasions.

When I met Her She told me that She had been during these long years in a state of trance. This trance would some—times become deeper and she would fall into "Samadhi". But I only saw Her in this state of "Samadhi" on three occasions, and then not for long. Physicians would be surprised on feeling Her pulse. We noticed one peculiarity in Her fingers, on both hands the thumb would come across the palm until it touched the base of the ring finger. When she passed away, slowly the thumbs began to bend towards the same place until they finally became fixed.

Mother would say that when an aspirant becomes desirous of powers it clearly indicates that he has forgotten the object of his activities. His object was originally to go beyond the world of *maya*, but powers are in the domain of *maya*, and in striving to get these he must of necessity want to remain where he is already. She would also say, "How foolish people are to strive for some of these powers which are possessed by some of the lower animals and birds. A special kind of spider can walk on the water, birds can fly, so if a man wants to obtain these powers, where is the wonder in them? It may impress fools but does no good to the seeker after truth except to drag him down."

At Deoghar once a Sadhu came and said he could tell everybody's thoughts by looking at their faces. I told this to Mother and suggested to Her that he might be asked to tell Hers. She did not say anything and so I called the Sadhu to Her room and said, "Let us know what is passing in Her mind." The Sadhu stared at Her eyes for a very long time and as Mother did not turn Her gaze he himself eventually closed his eyes and said, "She is not an ordinary lady. I cannot tell what is passing in Her mind."

Once a palmist came and Mother's palm was shown to him. He looked at it for a few moments and then prostrated before Her, saying, "She is a great Sadhu—I never saw such a hand before in my life."

Mother had a very strong sense of humour and sometimes She would relate stories with gestures and keep us laughing for hours together. Generally however She was reserved and would only listen, rarely speaking.

When a visitor came to visit Her She would talk to him and listen to him for some time. Within a short time She would know him so thoroughly that he could hide nothing from Her.

Within a year of meeting Her I gave up my temporal pursuits. During that year I used to visit Her as often as I could. At Benares She told me one day, "You have some

good minor qualities suitable for a Sadhu but the principal quality (viz-Brahmacharya) is wanting". She said "For you the path cannot be expected to be very smooth, as you dedicated the best portion of your life to Satan for Mammom worship, and God may not easily accept your offer. So you must be prepared to fight hard." A few months after I took the garb, one day she said suddenly, "The sex impulse is very strong in you even now."

I said nothing and began to search in my mind for the explanation of this remark, but failed, Next day, when I was alone with Her, I said that I could not find out the reason of Her previous day's remark. She replied, "It is clear. I see that you become angry sometimes. What is anger? When desire is checked, anger takes shape. As you become angry you must still have desires, and when you have desires the strongest, namely the sex impulse, must also be in you, though it may be in a latent state. The three principal enemies to the pacification of the mind are, sex impulse (Kama), anger (Krodha) and the feeling of want (Lobha). The first is the last to go, so when the second and third are visible it is certain that the first is also present."

From that time I started the habit of looking upon any and every woman I had occasion to meet as an image of the Divine Mother and if I had occasion to talk or write to a lady I would address her as mother. This has helped me a good deal.

We had one great difficulty with Mother. She would not tell us specifically what to do and what not to do. She expected us to be guided by Her general instructions, adapting them to specific cases by discrimination. She said one day, "This is a very slippery path, you must be wide-awake and be guided by discrimination, keeping the goal always in mind. What is the good of my telling you now what to do and what not to do? I shall not be with you always. Stand on your own legs!"

She was dead against the mode of living of modern

Sannyasins, and She would for hours together point out how they had forgotten the object of Sannyas and were busy with temporal activities—how some wanted a large number of disciples, some the reputation of a *Jnani* without becoming one, while some wanted to impress upon others how much religious literature they knew. She would say, "All these are self-created wants and bonds whereas the Sadhu's goal is to conquer want and go beyond it." Mother would say, "If you want emancipation in this life, give up all other activities and devote your whole time and attention to Self-realization."

She did not encourage part-time activities and this was the reason why the ordinary person could not take up the ideal. She would say, "I don't want many sons, let there be only one son, but let him be a true son."

One day an elderly villager came to Her and said, "My son is leading a profligate life. Mother, why don't you turn him in a good direction?" The son came to see Her and She began to talk to him. He was so much impressed that within a few days he became Her devotee and wanted to take sannyas. The father got scent of this and came to Mother and said, "Mother, I did not want you to make a Sadhu of my son—he is my only son—who will look after us if he becomes a Sadhu?"

The son left the village and took the garb and is still a Sannyasin. Most of the brilliant boys of school and college of the neighbouring villages were Her devotees. And some of them did not marry, and though some of them have not actually renounced, they all try to live a life of plain living and high thinking.

In the selection of men Mother never cared for caste or creed or sex. An illiterate Mahomedan used to come to see Her and eventually became a sannyasin, and when I met Her She said, "He is the best of the lot". During the last few years of Her life he and myself were always with Her. He was the cook. When Mother became very weak and could

not move without assistance it was suggested that a lady devotee might come and help Her. She enquired, "Why?" "Can you not help me yourself?" She asked me. I said I was ready to be of any assistance I could, but as help was necessary at the time of answering the calls of nature also, a woman might be better as She might otherwise feel some delicacy. She smiled and said, "What is the difference between a man and a woman? If I am going to feel delicacy I shall feel it even if the attendant is a woman. So there will be no necessity for a woman if you take charge." So I used to help Her in answering the calls of nature, and had to apply an enema when necessary. I noticed that She never felt the slightest delicacy, but She forbade others to come whether a man or a woman. I had never attended a patient before but I found that I could attend to Her like an expert and She would not even accept a drink except from my hands, as She would say others could not give it properly. I was very diffident before I undertook the task and others were sure that I should fail to satisfy Her, as I was so inexperienced, but probably Her blessings made me efficient, for I would myself be surprised at my own expert ways of attendance.

When I first came to Mother I had a part-time job in the Government Commercial Institute, where I had to work in the evenings for about sixty to eighty hours a year giving lectures, for a salary of nine hundred rupees a year. Some people suggested that if I kept the job I could then maintain both myself and Mother. She was very much annoyed at this suggestion. She said, "You have to beg for food, clothing and other necessities if you become a Sannyasin." So I tendered my resignation and gave away all my money and clothing, and whenever I required anything I had to beg for it. It was very difficult for me at first but gradually I learned to put up with insulting remarks and bad treatment from people whom I had to approach. Mother was of opinion that begging helps a good deal in checking the ego, and She always wanted me to beg for my necessities. Some of my

friends and relatives suggested that they would like to pay a monthly contribution for me, but I refused to accept.

Mother used to be asked whether it was not neglect of duty on the part of a son to become a Sadhu, leaving his parents to shift for themselves in their old age. She replied that if such a sense of duty was predominant it was not the time for the son to renounce. She would say, "To a man seeking Liberation there is no duty to anyone. To liberate himself is his first and last duty to himself and to mankind as well."

Congressmen would often come to Her and suggest that young men ought to try and improve their countrymen and free their country from bondage. Mother would say, "Certainly it is very good to work for one's country and countrymen, but the real Swadesh is Atma and no work is nobler than finding that Swadesh."

I was fortunate to hear Her meeting the arguments put forward in favour of Vaishnavism and Dwaita-Adwaitaism. She was almost illiterate and had read no books, but Her arguments and reasoning were so sound that everyone was struck by them. She would say, "I am sure my predecessors must have advanced some such arguments in support of Adwaita. If you look you will certainly find it recorded in the literature."

Many religious organizations try to get intelligent and educated men to preach their creed in India and abroad. They become talkers but have no knowledge of the practical side. Mother used to say, "These preachers will only waste their time and energy and no effect will be produced. They are like the blind trying to lead the blind. It is a pity that all this is being done in the name of religion." About the disciples of Saints, Mother used to say, "Chaitanya-Dev had some very good disciples. Saints come and go, but there are very few to reach the goal by following them. Men are eager to pass for Sadhus but do not like to *be* Sadhus. After a Saint departs his followers sometimes form themselves into

a sort of mutual admiration society and advertize their greatness, but it is very difficult, to hide the truth."

Some of Her first disciples wanted to start another organisation like the Ramakrishna Mission and preach about Her teachings and enroll followers. She was very much against it, and this strong attitude of Hers put an end to the enthusiasm. She said, "You are always with me, you are always hearing my views and getting instruction—how far have *you* profited by these? Why do you expect others will be highly benefited by getting second-hand and sometimes distorted instruction from you? Do good to yourselves first."

Mother generally liked only two people to live with Her at one time, and would not tolerate more than three of us. The usual practice was that when household duties did not cause us to be busy elsewhere we would all sit in Her room. Sometimes there would be no conversation but occasionally we would have very interesting ones. Mother had an unending stock of anecdotes and stories to illustrate and impress any point. Her object was always to make it clear to us how in spite of the fact that there were innumerable Sadhus, only a very few were in earnest; how they would forget their object only to wander down into bye-lanes, passing the whole of their lives in slumber, as it were. She would say, "I always tell you about the pit-falls so that you may avoid them. If a seeker proceeds along the right path, however slow he may be, he will surely reach the goal—it is because he keeps on wandering down the bye-lanes that his journey never ends. It seems to me that these Sadhus are like pilgrims who intend to go to Benares, but instead of taking the road to Benares put their luggage on their heads and roam about in the streets of their own city. All this is *maya*." Mother would never criticize outsiders except before a chosen few. She would say, "A religious organization on a big scale is bound to fail because good aspirants are not as cheap as blackberries." She also said, "There are many Gurus but a very few good disciples. I rarely

come across a Sadhu who seems to be following the correct path. All Sadhus are moving in the domain of *Avidya* but no one can be called a Sadhu if he is not earnest in getting beyond this domain."

A very well-known Sadhu in Bengal—a highly educated Sanskrit Pundit clothes himself like a female, puts on ornaments and calls himself a female friend of Krishna. One gentleman went to see him and on his return related all that he had seen and all that he did there. After his departure Mother laughed at this ludicrous and unnecessary way of Sadhana adopted by this Sadhu. She said: "So much energy is being directed to foolish fancies. It is generally with the object of creating an impression on others that most of these people while away their time on such absurdities."

Sometimes people would come and tell us about some thing well-worth seeing. Mother would ask me whether I would like to go and see it too. I said to Her once, "Mother, I have seen enough of the world—probably I have spent more than twenty-five thousand rupees in travelling and living abroad far beyond the means of a man of my position; so no object of curiosity can impress me any more, but if you are going I would like to accompany you. On my own, or in the company of others, I do not want to go." When I was alone with Her afterwards, She said, "I am very glad that you have no longer any curiosity. Why should a Sadhu want to see anything but Brahma?"

When I went with Her to Her native village (that was on Her last visit) one elderly mahomedan accosted me and said: "Babu Sahib, I have heard all about you but I am sorry for you. Our Thakurani (meaning Mother) is a miser. She never gives anything to anyone. Some people served Her for years but got nothing. They sacrificed but in spite of it were unable to obtain Her favour. I am afraid that you will also suffer the same fate." At night when no one was nearby, I related this story to Mother. She laughed

and laughed. "Are you dejected?" She asked me. I replied, "I am sure that there will be no injustice in this case. To be successful I shall have to work. No work—no reward". Mother said "Proceed honestly, nothing can make you fail. Even if you commit mistakes, sincerity of purpose will make you detect your error. A man can not even die if he is determined to reach the goal in this birth."

During the period that I was in principal charge of Mother's camp, I was always in Her favour. I was the oldest of the attendants and probably the worst *adhikari* but She used to give me so much preference that I considered myself very fortunate. When Mother fell ill, for want of funds it was decided that I should go to Cuttack, leaving Mother at Puri, and try to raise funds. I had an intimate friend (an M.L.C.) at Cuttack in whose house I stayed for about three weeks while I raised some money. When I returned I found that Mother would not even look at me. I began seriously to ask myself what mistake I had committed but could not discover. The others could not help me either. My mahomedan friend was in sympathy with me, He said, "Mother did not like your going away from Her to raise money. Mother always likes Her favourites to remain beside Her. Your going was a mistake." However in a few hours I was restored to favour, but she never told me why She had been annoyed with me.

Mother used to say, "Personal service and attendance on a Saint elevate the mind of the devotee and can be regarded as a good form of Sadhana. There are three classes of attendants. The first and best class act according to the wish of the Master by studying His mind; the second and intermediate class act according to the wish of the Master from His tacit or verbal hint or instruction; but the third or last class never try to follow the Master's instructions even if distinctly given. The second class will gradually rise up to be in the first class, but the third class gain nothing

by the so-called service and attendance and in all probability go further from the goal."

She would say, "You attendants want me to act according to your wish, forgetting that thereby you want to play the role of my master. This is no service. It is rather lording it. The spirit of surrender must be in you if you really want to profit by doing personal attendance to a Saint."

After I came to Mother I tried to be guided in everything by Her and within a short time I found I did not have much trouble. My practice was to confide in Her all my physical or mental troubles and never give a thought to them afterwards. I found that She would do what was necessary Herself or direct me to do or not to do something, which instruction I would unhesitatingly follow. When she fell seriously ill and we all knew that She would not live long, I asked Her, "What shall I do when you are no more here to help me to get over my troubles and difficulties?" She smiled and said, "If you sincerely want direction you will get it somehow or other."

Two years after She passed away I was very much worried over a personal matter, but could not decide what to do. I went to the room in which Her photograph was placed and where She used to be worshipped daily and submitted my difficulty to her. After an hour or so it seemed to me that Mother was telling me, "When I was alive I used to help you by verbal advice, but now I have given up the body and you have put up a photograph to represent me, why do you expect me to guide you? Take your advice from the photograph. Look at it, it is indifferent to whatever you may do and taking the hint, be indifferent to whatever may come to you according to your *prarabdha*, always keeping your mind fixed on your real purpose. Do not worry, it won't help you at all." I was very much comforted that day and from that time I have tried to follow the advice I then got. It has made me more indifferent than I was, and I am far better for it.

Many would ask us point-blank, "Please tell us some episodes in your Mother's life so that we may have faith in Her too." I could never reply to these people, as my faith was not based on any miracles she had done or extra-ordinary material powers displayed by Her in my presence. On two or three occasions I received some personal benefit from the very touch of Her hand, but when I tried to make the touch responsible for the benefit, Mother would not have it at all. She said, "I am always the same, I do nothing, like the Sun—others get the benefit according to their capacity and receptivity".

Once a gentleman came and accused Mother of not helping us all to be like Herself. Mother replied, "You are like a boy who tried to collect all the water of the ocean in a tea-cup, and when he found the cup could only hold a few drops accused the ocean of niggardliness; whereas the remedy was to come with a bigger container so that he might be able to hold all the water of the ocean in it. The Saint is here to give, but alas! where is the deserving person to take? One Saint can help millions to get Liberation but can scarcely find one fit to receive the benefit."

I met Mother at the beginning of my thirty-eighth year. From the very first day I wanted to be of service to Her though I felt diffident of offering myself. However I never missed an opportunity of trying to do something for Her and when I found anything for Her was waiting attention I undertook it and did it as carefully as I could. Sometimes Mother would say, "There's no hurry, they will do it." But I would reply, "I am not of any use here, please let me do something." This would silence Her. As time went on I began to relieve others of work when I was there and took upon myself the responsibility of some petty service. When I was nearby I would keenly watch how others attended on Her and would wonder whether I could not improve on the way they attended to Her. Mother was an invalid at that time but would not ask for any

any service if She could do it Herself, and it was always my aim not to allow Her to do anything for Herself if I could do it instead. So when I renounced, a year after I met Her, I took upon myself some jobs which She had formerly done Herself, such as cleaning Her false teeth, preparing betel leaves, cutting betel nuts etc. To keep Her room neat and tidy was also my work. Gradually I was pleased to find myself foremost of Her personal attendants. I had never cooked in my life; so preparing food for Her was left to others, as I thought that I might not be able to prepare it properly. I found She liked my work and if for any reason I could not do it She would do it Herself.

When She fell seriously ill, if any service was necessary and I was not nearby, She would send for me. About a month before She passed away She became so weak that She could not turn over without help, and as I knew that She did not think others could help in these matters to Her satisfaction, I made it my first duty to be nearby day and night, always at Her beck and call. I used to sleep in the next room, but my ears would be always in Her room, as it were, and the slightest noise, a sneeze or a cough, would awaken me and bring me to Her side.

Long after She passed away I would wake up at the sound of a cough or a sneeze and would imagine that I was wanted, but would soon realize that She was no more. But this habit of noticing want of attendance has not disappeared entirely. When I sit in the Hall I notice sometimes that some service for Bhagavan awaits being done and I feel very uneasy, but yet do not venture to do it myself. One attendant seems to be always watching these things, and I find that when any service is necessary he does it. However, as soon as it is done I feel much happier.

Mother had sometimes pain in Her legs, particularly the left one. Occasionally She used to press the muscles of Her legs Herself. One day I offered to massage them and declared that I was an expert in the art during my boyhood, as

I had liked to do that sort of service for my father; Mother would not let me do it, but on several occasions afterwards I insisted on Her giving me permission. She agreed. Thereafter I would very often be at the job when I had nothing else to do. Mother sometimes used to sit on the bed with Her legs hanging down. This I would take as an invitation to massage Her legs, and I would be quickly at work. Though I was the oldest of the attendants and had known Her for the shortest period, of all of us none could be so free with Her as I ventured to be. When travelling in trains ladies would come to the conclusion that She was my own Mother. In this connection I have to admit that my relationship with Mother was two-fold. I lost my own mother at two and though all my relations tried their best to compensate for the loss by showing extra-favours and attention to me, I had a secret feeling of want in the core of my heart which nothing could satisfy. Mother bestowed on me the attention a son receives from his mother and so She played with me, as it were, the double role of Guru and mother. So when I joined Her after leaving my relations, their attraction could not divert me much.

Mother had some favourite pithy sayings which She used to repeat as occasion required. One of these was 'Guru is *suru* (beginning)." She would say that unless a man can find a Guru in whom he can place the fullest faith he can not be said to have begun a religious life. Of course this is for ordinary people, not for those extraordinary people who reach the goal naturally without the help of any Guru. Many would come to Her and request Her to give *diksha* by *mantra.* Mother's reply would be, "I do not know any *mantras.*" One person who was Her devotee since childhood insisted on having some *mantra* and refused to be put off. So Mother said, "Tell me which *mantra* you like." So he went through a booklet containing *mantras* for *diksha* and selected one. Mother said, "Very well, go on with this

mantra, if you like it." This is the only instance of Her giving a *mantra,* if it can be called such.

Another favourite saying of Mother's was, "First the association of a Guru and then absolute dis-association." She would say that devotees leave their previous associations on renunciation and then form a new association. So She would suggest that *sadhakas* should practise alone.

To a *sadhaka* Mother would say, "You will have to court death sooner or later. When it is certain that you must die one day, why don't you die now when you are still alive, (*i.e.* let all your likes and dislikes be dead to you and remain as you really are, devoid of all *vasanas*). If you do this you will not have to die hereafter, and you will be in perpetual Bliss and Existence."

One favourite disciple of Mother fell seriously ill and when Mother went to see him, he said, "Mother, you asked me to die while I was still alive, but I could not. Now I am going to die at death. What a pity I did not follow your advice in time."

On many occasions the usual question about the comparative strength of Predestination and Free-will was put to Her. She would always reply with special reference to the mentality of the questioner. So I found it very difficult to understand what Her opinion really was. Once I questioned Her, saying, "Your answers to different persons have confused me." She replied, "Tell me what you think about it yourself." I said, "I look at it thus: In order to make an earthen pot both potter and clay are necessary. Clay is predestination and the potter is free-will. If both are good, the best results will follow, but the excellence of one can only partly make up for the deficiency of the other".

Mother said, "Yes, you are right. But you see all these questions—in fact all questions—relate to, and are only possible in the domain of *Avidya.* This matter-of-fact world is no better than a dream. So what can be the standard of truth here? All questions have to be answered

so that the questioner may be helped to disillusion himself and extricate himself rfom the region of *Avidya.* So direct your energies to knowing and finding yourself." Questions about Creation etc. would always be tackled by Mother in the same way without troubling to go into details.

Shortly after I met Mother I passed one month with Her at Benares. While returning and waiting for the train at the station I received my first lesson in Self-enquiry. Mother asked me, "Tell me who you are." I replied, "You know all about me, what more do you want me to tell you?" Mother said, "I know all about you, but do *you* know who you are?" I paused, understanding that the question was not of the common run, and with some hesitation and after a few minutes' deliberation, I replied, "I am a *Shakti.*" "What is the nature of that *Shakti?*" She asked again. But I was unable to reply. Mother said, "You are a grown-up man and are given credit for being an educated and intelligent person; is it not a shame that you do not know yourself?" I pleaded guilty of ignorance. Mother said, "Pursue the enquiry and find out yourself." This set me thinking for a few days, but after I returned to Calcutta and became once more absorbed in various material pursuits I forgot. So the enquiry was not seriously taken up before I became a Sannyasin.

A few months after my taking the robe, one day Mother asked me "What do you do when you sit for meditation?" I replied, "I try to realize that in the world there is nothing to deserve my attention, so that I may thus obtain peace." Mother said, "You are attached to the world, and this *asakti* must be put an end to by *viraga.* This is the second stage. But you must not stop here, you must not be attached to *viraga* either, it is but a means to an end. You must go higher up and beyond both these and observe indifference. The object in view is to make the mind waveless so that on the calm mind you may find the image of *Atma* reflected."

Mother used to say, "*Vichara* and *Vairagya* must go hand-in-hand, the object in view being to make the mind calm. Sometimes Sadhus make the show of *Vairagya* the be-all and end-all of their lives; they do not pause and reflect where all this is leading them. A Sadhu, though he may be looked upon as full of *viraga,* may be attached to some new object of attachment such as clotted hair or flowing beard or even the orange robe. If these make him proud and he becomes fully occupied with the thoughts of these things, he is no nearer the goal in spite of his so-called renunciation."

In order to make the mind quieter Mother would advise us to avoid temporal topics of conversation and would not tolerate us reading newspapers. She did not even encourage much reading of religious literature. She would say, "You are all self-realized, only a veil is obstructing the view. There are and may be thousands of ways of removing this veil, but one way is good enough for you. Take your hint from the *Guru* and follow one path alone. Knowing how to proceed to the goal in a dozen ways does not take you any nearer. You would be nearer by following one path alone. Read one or two books and follow the instructions contained therein."

The Bengali word "parah" has a double meaning, "to read" and "to fall". She would pun on this word thus: "You are always falling (or reading); is not the time ripe for you to rise up now?"

Some Saints are credited with practising different kinds of practices for reaching the same goal. Mother would say, "There may be many ways from the plain leading to the summit of the hill, but if anyone goes by one path to the top he can discern all the other paths from above. So a Saint will be able to tell all about the different *Sadhanas,* but it is not necessary that he should have practised the others in order to be able to advise on them."

Mother used to teach different ways of *Sadhana* to

different people. She would, however give prominence to *Jnanamarga,* the path of Self-enquiry. One of Her first devotees, after having received his first lessons, went to the Himalayas and on his return said: "I am He, who will practise and what?" When this reached Mother's ears She sent for him and took him to task for trying to pass for a realized soul and thereby defraud people. Mother would never tolerate any of Her devotees trying to pass for a *Jnani* and would at once expose them. She used to say, "Now-a-days Sadhus read a few pages from the standard authors, commit to memory some verses and with this stock-in-trade start a campaign for making disciples. There is no hope for such cheats."

Mother was a strict disciplinarian. She would not so much mind devotees in temporal pursuits doing something wrong, but would not at all tolerate it if we, who had renounced the world for Self-realisation, should violate Her definite instructions. It is for this reason that very few devotees could remain in Her good grace for long. She would say, "People do not come here for Self-realization, they come for other objects, and if you study their habits you will soon find that sincerity is wanting." To an aspirant for Self-realization She would say, "Make up your mind and *jump;* do not look to the left or right, but *swim straight* to the opposite bank, which is your goal." Sometimes aspirants think that after Self-realization they are going to do this or that thing; for these, Mother held out no hope. A favourite disciple of Mother's once said to Her, "Mother, your standard in very high, this will attract very few, you are not likely to have many followers. Like the shrewed peasant you should mix some oil-cake with the straw to make it seem attractive to the cattle." Mother replied, "If anyone asks me I tell him the truth unalloyed. I don't care if I have a following or not. I know this much, that if any one is desirous of Peace he has no other alternative but to follow the path chalked out by me."

What I have related above cannot be said to be a few pages taken from Mother's life, it is rather an unsystematic statement of my impression of Her. She used to say, "How can anybody else write the life of a Saint? A Saint's life is the history of how his mind gradually merged in Brahma. The Saint alone knows this, so there can be an autobiography but no life written by another."

An attempt was made by a disciple to write Her life and when this came to Her knowledge She tore the mss. to pieces, remarking, "You are trying to imitate the disciples of—. His life is full of absurd statements. In trying to make Him look larger they only succeeded in making Him a pigmy. You need not preach or tell others about me. If only one of you realize, that will be better than hundreds of preaching campaigns."

In the booklet containing Her sayings, it was suggested that a short sketch of Her life should be included. She Herself dictated* a few lines, saying afterwards:

"This is in short my life. Never attempt to write the life of a Saint before you realize the Self. You are sure to commit mistakes and only mislead others. The end (*i.e.* period after Self-realization) of a Saint's life comes to the notice of the public and His previous history is related, principally from conjecture or imperfect information. This is the reason why a Saint's life is full of misrepresentation."

May my Mother forgive me if I have made any wrong statement herein.

* See page 27 para. 2.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mother was a poet by nature and She could dictate poems and songs as freely and as quickly as if She were reciting ordinary compositions. Of course some of them would not stand the test of grammar or metre, but at the time of dictation nothing would be noticed. On request She would also sing the songs correctly without reference to what She had dictated already. She had defective eye-sight when I met Her and could hardly read or write though she wore glasses.

It is a pity that these songs have not been preserved. They were unadulterated versions of Her opinions on many subjects. After I met Her I collected those composed in my presence during the last few years of Her life, some of which are given below. The occasion for the composition of a song would arise generally when giving advice to a devotee. For example one devotee wrote that in spite of coming in contact with Her he was still engaged in removing hunger and thirst and the other material wants of his family. Mother dictated the following song in reply:

"Ponder deeply and there will be no hunger.
You are in reality the great Brahman and exist as the Whole.
You exist ever free, you are never bound, you are always fully conscious—look at your true nature.
You have no desire, anger, avarice, hate, shame or even fear of death—you are pure *Atma* full of knowledge.
You have lost knowledge of Self in duality—your ignorance is your own creation and you are in it.
You have got no work to do, there is no virtue, vice, *dharma* or *adharma* for you, neither birth nor death, because you are changeless.
You have no mind, no intellect, no spite nor ego, you have no father, mother, wife, son nor family;
You are befooled by the shadow of your mistake, and forgetting yourself by your own mistake you have kept your ownself away from the Self."

Another disciple wrote to Her that he had been passing his days in a monotonous domestic life, having neither courage to give up these duties nor to take them up in right earnest and forget Her teaching. To him She replied;

"See and judge for yourself what you are doing in this wilderness of *samsar*, finding no pleasure in it;
Day by day the end is drawing near, what have you done to prepare for it?
You have read the *Vedas* and *Shastras* have heard about the Truth,
But your mind, illusioned by *maya,* is not yet awake and you have forgotten your own Self.
By your own mistake you are playing the role of *Jiva* and courting birth and death times without number.
Know for certain that you will surely die if you are born,
No one lives eternally.
So when there is yet time, be acquainted with your own Self and put an end to fear and death.
Day is ending, give up play, and by disclosing your own nature destroy the darkness.
There is no pleasure in desiring sense-object,s; fame, position and wealth are all sapless.
Touch the real source of happiness and thereby destroying the monotony; drink the nectar of contentment which is your Self.
There is an abode of *Shanti* where you can have rest. March on and on—Now is the time."

In reply to a song by a devotee which says that the "I" is always eluding his grasp, Mother dictated the following song:

Ascertain who you are—
Always you are speaking of yourself as "I", "I", "I".
Are you the five elements, including the *akasha,* or mind, intellect, body or the vital force?
What is your name, what is your form and where do you reside?

Tell me whether you are desire, anger, avarice or illusion;
Give me your acquaintance—are you *purusha* or *prakriti*, who is playing on the dramatic stage of *maya*? It is yourself who is playing and creating other players, father, mother and relations.
Always the insatiable fire of desire is burning, hope is not quenched by sprinkling on it the water of enjoyment, the fire of *tritap* is always ablaze.
You are pure, conscious, free and always exist; body, intellect and ego are your illusory imaginations,
You are yourself Brahman by nature—see it by opening the eyes of knowledge."