



My Memories of Holy Mother

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I HAVE very little to write about my memories of Holy Mother, yet I feel they are worth recording. Most probably it was in 1908, when I was a lad of fourteen years old, that I had the fortune to touch the blessed feet of Mother. I was then a school boy at Bishnupur. To go to Jayrambati, her native village, she had to get down at the railway station at Bishnupur and from there to go to her village, about eighteen miles, by bullock cart. And then at that time there were no devotees who knew her at Bishnupur, with whom she could stay.

One afternoon, as I was going out for a walk with a friend of mine, we happened to notice a swami in a *gerua* robe seated on the porch of an inn, surrounded by women. We criticised him as we passed by, saying, "Look at that so-called holy man surrounded by women. What sort of holy man can he be?" On our way back we saw him again. We went on towards our home. But something from within me was drawing me back. However, as I had joined my friend in criticising the holy man, I did not want my friend to know this. So we parted, he going towards his home and I

towards mine. Then I turned and came back to the inn and prostrated before the swami. The swami immediately asked me, "Do you wish to prostrate before Holy Mother?"

I became excited and said, "Holy Mother! You mean the wife of Paramahansa Deva?" I had read two books at that period of my life concerning Ramakrishna. One was *Sri Ramakrishna Upadesh [Words of the Master]* by Swami Brahmananda, and *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita [Vol. I. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by "M"]*. So I was, in a way, acquainted with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

The swami replied, "Yes, there she is." She was sitting a few feet away from him. I bowed down to her and touched her feet. She kissed me the way a Hindu mother kisses her son; that is, she touches his chin with the tips of her fingers and then kisses them. Then she asked me, "Son, haven't I seen you before?"

"No, Mother," I replied, "this is the first time I have seen you."

Many a time, as I recalled this scene, I thought to myself, "Well, Mother, you know your own children; but the children, blinded by ignorance, do not recognise their own Mother." Perhaps Mother knew that I would one day be a swami myself, surrounded by women devotees, and it made her smile that I had criticised the holy man!

Two years later, after I graduated from high school, I was studying in a college in Calcutta. Whenever Mother came to visit Calcutta, men were allowed to visit her once a week at her residence at the *Udbodhan* Office. Every week I used to take advantage of this; not because I had any great reverence or attraction for

Holy Mother at that time, but because I used to have a very pleasant experience every time I touched her big toes with my two fingers, the middle and the index ones. I used to feel as if I were receiving an electric shock, touching a live wire, as it were; and it was a thrilling experience. My fingers would tremble for a few moments and then there would come a soothing feeling in my whole being.

I HAD been reading the *Kathamrita—The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—even before I met Maharaj. The name “Rakhal” attracted me, and later I met him and received his grace.

While still continuing my studies in Calcutta, I made acquaintance with a friend named Pares, who also joined the monastery the same day I joined. He also became a disciple of Maharaj, and became known as Swami Amriteswarananda.

Pares and I, while students, made up our minds one day to visit Holy Mother in her village, Jayrambati. When I used to go to bow down at her feet in Calcutta, she would be completely veiled; only her blessed feet were visible to the devotees. But in her village, she did not veil her face. On our way to Jayrambati, Pares was our guest in our house at Bishnupur. Then we hired a bullock cart and left for Jayrambati. All night we travelled in the slow-moving cart. In the morning we reached Koalpara, where there is a branch center of our Mission; there we stopped for a while. Then we both walked towards her village. We were a little late for lunch. But we were later told by Rashbehari Maharaj, an attendant of Holy Mother, that she had told him to save lunch for two of the children of Rakhal,

who would soon be arriving there. We had no way of letting her know that we were coming. I was already initiated by Maharaj, and he had agreed to initiate Pares. But no one was supposed to know this at that time; yet she knew it.

Yes, meals were ready for us. We went first to bathe in the pond at Jayrambati—where, in a separate *ghat*, there were women still bathing. And they were saying to one another (we could overhear them) that these are Sarada's disciples.

As we came back from our bath, we were served meals by Holy Mother herself on two leaf plates. She sat near us, without any veil. She looked to me like my own mother, and like my own mother she was entreating us to eat heartily. She began to pile up the particular foods that we liked best. And I still remember, how, as it were, I was tasting nectar. All the time Mother was seated beside us and talking to us as a mother would. After we had finished our meal, I was about to take the leaf plates and clean the spot. Mother stopped me and said, "What are you doing?" Pares was shy; I was the one who was chatty. I said, "But Mother, we can't leave these unclean leaf plates here." Mother asked, "What would you have done if your mother were present?" Without a word we left.

We stayed there for three days and three nights. She used to send breakfast food to everybody in the outer house. The rest of the meals we had in her house, and she would be personally looking after our comfort.

The day we left, as we prostrated, she kissed us the same way as our own mother would kiss us. And she watched us from her door until we were out of sight.

The last time I saw her was after I joined the mon-

astery. As Maharaj was sending me to Mayavati, he asked those of us who were going there to receive blessings from Holy Mother, who then happened to be in Calcutta, at the *Udbodhan* Office. So Prajnan Maharaj, Brother Satyen [Atmabodhananda], and I went to receive her blessings. She used to sleep in the shrine at the *Udbodhan* Office, and her bed was there. We prostrated before her. She had no veil. She kissed us and then took a flower from the shrine for each of us and offered it to each one.

That was the last time I saw her in physical form.

Once I heard Maharaj say that it is very difficult to understand the greatness of Holy Mother. Only he to whom she reveals herself knows it. And this truth I have testified to during my long life on earth. She is the embodiment of grace.