

CHERISHED MEMORIES

(Recollections of devotees)

Editors

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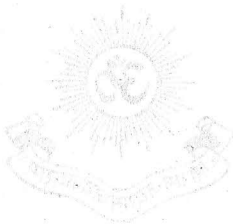
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Publisher's note

It was the ardent desire of the late Sri U S Ramachandran, a veteran among the devotees, to bring out a book entitled CHERISHED MEMORIES carrying recorded impressions of some long time devotees of Beloved Papa and Mataji. He along with Sri A Ranganna had almost completed the compiling and editing. Before it could be finalised and given to the press he passed away in 1997. In loving memory of Sri Ramachandran, this book is being brought out on the occasion of his first death anniversary. The contents of the book, we feel, emphasise the benefit of total surrender to the holy feet of Sadguru.

Part I carries articles which bring a fresh approach to the portrayal of the human yet divine personalities of the Illumined Ones, with delightful candour adding interest and value to their narration. An edited version of the reminiscences of some devotees lovingly recorded by Mrs Janaki Alexander is included in CHERISHED MEMORIES.

Part II holds within it short passages which recount to us the beneficent ways of Beloved Papa and Mataji and the wonders worked by the Divine through them for deepening the faith of their devotees.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Saints help and protect us in quiet ways. They feed us with spiritually sustaining food. They alter our behaviour, change our character and transform our consciousness and pave the way for the blossoming of our spiritual life. The power that brings about this sea-change stems from their *Atma-Shakti*.

May this book be instrumental in reaffirming faith in the all-loving Master which is a pre-requisite for our spiritual progress.

ANANDASHRAM

November 6, 1998

DEDICATED

to

Beloved Papa and Pujya Mataji

in

eternal gratitude and love

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PART I

1

SWAMI SATCHIDANANDA

It is a great privilege to move closely with saints and more so to have opportunities to serve them. On such occasions we see how the actions of saints are spontaneous and natural. Such actions make an indelible impression on those who witness them.

Beloved Papa and Mataji, after having reached the supreme goal of a human being i.e. the realization of their oneness with the Supreme Being and the entire manifested world, chose to make Anandashram a field for putting into practice the universal love they both had experienced as a result of their universal vision.

For them, doing anything to anybody was to serve God. For them any situation, however apparently good or bad, was brought about by God alone as God is the sole doer. An ordinary man, whose vision has not expanded into Infinity, would be shaken when something very unpleasant happens. But the wider vision helps the saints to stand firm and unshaken, whatever may happen.

In the early days of the Ashram, till around 1960, the monthly donations, which was the only income, were always less than the expenditure. It was a joy and great lesson to see Beloved Papa and Mataji handling such situations. One day's incident: Large amounts were due to the provision merchants. Wages to workers were overdue. During those days, it was a daily practice to wait for the postman to see how much money he brought by

way of Money Orders and cheques contained in letters. Mataji was not interested in cheques as they would bring cash only a day or two later through the Bank. That particular day, she took directly from the postman Rs.350 being the total value of all the money orders. Many workers were waiting. The provision merchants were waiting. She told the merchants, "Today we have received only three hundred and fifty rupees. I have to give something to the workers today. So, two of you will get a hundred rupees each, towards the amounts due to you." She distributed to the workers five rupees each against the wages due to them. Beloved Papa was also told of the situation. Papa had left everything to Mataji and therefore was blissful as ever.

Mataji's face showed absolutely no worry of any kind for the large amounts due and the meagre amount received by post, making it possible only to give almost negligible amounts to the merchants and workers. Persons of lesser calibre would fret and fume, get angry and make the situation very unpleasant. She saw to it that whatever amounts were received through cheques were used for payment to the workers.

One day a tile merchant telephoned to enquire if the three hundred rupees due to him would be paid immediately. The amount was outstanding for over three months. The tiles were bought for a house of one of the workers. Though the financial position was very tight, she took up the construction of houses for the poor if they were badly needed. I answered the phone and told Mataji the details. She said she would herself talk to the merchant

and took the phone from me. She said, "I know the amount is due to you for a long time. Our position at present is that amounts received are very little and the amounts due to be paid are larger. You can be sure the amount due to you will be paid to you sooner or later according to the availability of funds. But if you are too much in a hurry, you are welcome to take back all the tiles which are already on the roof." This she spoke so naturally that there was not a tinge of anxiety over the situation. The answer from the merchant was, "All right, Mother. I shall wait till you are able to make the payment conveniently." Placing back the receiver of the phone, she was laughing like a carefree child.

The most important turning point in my life was when I was talking to Papa about my inability to maintain equanimity while engaged in activities and therefore about my craving for a solitary life. Papa immediately understood my condition and suggested that I might go to Rishikesh and adopt Sannyas, stay alone, doing meditation. Next day he himself got a couple of sets of clothes dyed in red ochre along with a woollen shawl. The dyeing was done in the Udyog Shala under his personal supervision. At the time of leaving, he gave me the clothes and shawl and said, "Have a clean shave, bathe in Brahma Kund and discarding the white clothes, put on ochre robes. Take the oath of Sannyas and find a suitable place for stay and Sadhana. You may take the Sannyasa-name either as Satchidananda or Anantananda."

Mataji was not happy when she heard from Papa that I was advised to leave for Rishikesh and adopt Sannyas.

She asked why I should go anywhere as, according to her, serving the Guru is a better Sadhana than any other. Here the real Mother's heart was revealed. But as I was inclined to go and Papa also supported it, Mataji reluctantly agreed.

Another important event in my life was when I was sitting with Papa during my first visit to the Ashram and explaining to him my then state of mind and my prayer that he should not push me back into worldly life. Papa seriously thought for a few minutes and said very lovingly, "Ramdas is thinking of keeping you here in the Ashram. But the right time has not come yet. You may now go home and Ramdas will call you when the time comes." This assured me of a place close to Papa and Mataji and I rejoiced over it.

Travelling with Papa and Mataji in trains and cars is another experience. Papa was always jovial and would crack jokes often. On the other hand Mataji did not enjoy travel at all. Yet she saw to it that Papa was served as best as possible under the conditions prevailing during train travel. She was the real Mother and Papa and myself were two children for her. She did not limit the service to the two of us. Everybody in the compartment also got the same treatment.

The days of travel with Papa and Mataji are really unforgettable. Travel life was very different from the routine life in the Ashram. Visiting different places, seeing different faces and coping with different programmes would be a refreshing experience in itself. From early morning, devotees would be visiting Papa who would greet them

with great joy and spend sometime with everyone, talking about various matters. Papa used to be in an ecstatic state always and during the talks with the devotees there used to be a lot of fun and laughter. Papa was not concerned about anything as Mataji managed everything, with assistance from me. Needless to say those were fragrant, unforgettable moments.

Even after remaining with Papa for one or two hours, the devotees were not in a mood to leave. Mataji then would come and stand near the door facing Papa. Taking this as a signal for them to leave, the devotees would leave one by one. Even in Papa's bedroom the members of the family of the host and some close friends would sit near Papa's bed. Papa would crack such jokes as would make them laugh and laugh, sometimes they had to hold their sides lest they should split.

During the tour, Papa and Mataji would usually stay at the house of a devotee who would be in a position to make arrangements for other devotees to take part in the Satsang programmes in the same house and also outside somewhere. The devotees would start pouring in right from early morning. Some of them would return home after spending a few minutes with Papa and Mataji. Many would stay on. Mataji saw to it that each and every devotee present there was given breakfast, lunch or dinner. So the people in the kitchen would be busy preparing food for the innumerable devotees coming to have Papa's Darshan. With the Satsang on one side, and the feeding of the many on the other side, the house wore a festive look.

In the beginning some of the hosts, who had not seen such mass feeding at such short notice, were nervous. But Mataji gave them courage and they also were very happy that Papa and Mataji used them as instruments for such Seva to devotees. So wherever Papa and Mataji went, a festive atmosphere was created and it was all joy—a feast for the soul and a feast for the body.

The most elevating experience when we are with saints is to see them meeting other saints. This happens rarely. I had the privilege of witnessing Papa and Mataji meeting Sri Swami Anandashram, Sri Swami Parijnanashram, Sri Bhai Vir Singh, Sri Shankaracharya of Puri, Sri Vinoba Bhave, Sri Taki Maharaj, Sri Punit Maharaj, Sai Sattar Shah, Sri Rama Devi, Ma Anandamayi, Godavari Mata and many others. Papa's humility, Papa's joy and Papa's reverence for them cannot be put into words. It has to be seen and enjoyed. They meet joyfully like children and converse with each other so lovingly and guilelessly that those blessed to witness the same are transported to higher planes of consciousness.

These are the special blessings we enjoy when we have the privilege to live and move with saints. Such blessed moments cannot be had anywhere else.

2

KRISHNA R HALDIPUR

This was in April 1948. A ruddy sunset glow suffused the western horizon, as our train screeched to a halt in Kanhangad Station. From there we got into a Jutka which

mercilessly jolted us as it went along shady cobbled lanes, below the canopy of coconut and arecanut palms, interlaced with green creepers, giving out a mild aroma.

I had heard so much about Anandashram from my husband for whom this was a real home ever since he came with his uncle in early 1939. I was yearning to see this place; and in 1948 I had my first visit after marriage. As we neared the place, the peace and serenity were indescribable.

It was dusk when we reached the Panchavati. Papa, who had been waiting for us there, greeted us with great joy. "Come, come. We were wondering what happened to you." He called out to Mataji. As we made pranams, she said, "You must be very tired. Have a bath, then go to the kitchen and have something to eat and drink."

These words were a balm to our ears. It was like coming to the parental home. Mataji had a personal touch, a feeling of concern, which made one feel that she loved you and loved you only but it took a short while to observe the simplicity and openness of her nature. She had the same love and concern for every one. Universal Love and Service was a part of her being—natural and spontaneous. She is called Vishwamata, but we could perceive her deep humility. She had great compassion, especially for the distressed, the needy and deprived. Ramabai CT in her foreword to the book KRISHNABAI by Swami Ramdas says, "Her's is the life of a seraphic soul who combines at once the divinity of the Mother with that of a radiant child of God—pure, innocent and ever blissful." She had the penetrating insight into the depths of the human mind, its strengths, feelings, frailties and foibles.