



In the Service of Love. Part XX



ALL ARE AMMA'S CHILDREN

Bri. Gayatri

The Krishna Bhava was almost over. Several hundred devotees, myself included, were standing with joined palms before the glorious sight of Amma in the divine mood of Sri Krishna, slowly dancing to and fro in front of the kalari shrine. One could see clearly from Amma's face that She was intoxicated with bliss, Her smile glimmering with a hint of

supreme ecstasy as we all chanted the divine names of the Lord. Amma's father, Sugunanandan, was standing a few feet in front of me, like the others, immersed in devotion. Amma gave one last loving glance to Her devotees, and then stepped back into the temple, the doors gently closing behind Her. The music came to an end, and the whole scene gradually became still.



e were all standing in silent prayer, immersed in love and devotion for Amma.

Or so I thought. Suddenly, like a thunderclap in a clear sky, a rough looking man in front of me started shouting something. He appeared to be somewhat drunk — I guessed he was probably one of the local villagers, many of whom were hostile towards Amma. Rallying around their leader's command a few other ruffians came forward from the back of the crowd and surrounded Amma's father. They began shoving him back and forth, knocking his glasses off. Sugunanandan became furious, shouting at them to save the property. Suddenly, the leader of the gang pulled out what appeared to be a deadly home-made weapon: a belt with heavy metal weights attached to one end. It looked like he was about to hit Amma's father on the head. Without pausing to think, I quickly dashed forward and ripped the weights out of his hands, running fast to appease the hoodlums' wrath. Several devotees sprang forward to protect me from the bullies, and within moments, a brawl ensued. I somehow managed to escape from the thick of the fight, quickly ran and closed the latch on the temple door, locking Amma inside, fearing that She would come out if she was attacked by one of the ruffians. Running around to the back of the temple, I spied a stack of old boards

and making sure no one was watching, I hid the weapon behind it. I then quickly ran around to stand guard at the temple door. I was startled to see that within a minute, half the youths in the village had converged on the spot, ready for a brawl. The devotees, usually a peaceful lot, were now proving themselves willing to do battle for Amma's sake — before long, about fifty men were fighting it out to the accompaniment of the anxious cries of the women. It looked like a scene out of the Mahabharata.

Not having had much exposure to the local community affairs, I really had no idea what was happening or why — I was simply trying to make sure that Amma was protected, and, if possible, keep myself out of the conflagration. After 20 minutes or so, the fight somehow subsided and the villagers began to disperse. Although many devotees and family members had sustained minor injuries, to my relief no one had been seriously hurt. When I opened the temple doors, Amma came rushing out, expressing concern for anyone who had been injured. She lovingly caressed those with bruises and black eyes, which included a few of Her own relatives. She then addressed the group.

"Children, many of the local people are very hostile to Amma, and are looking for some way or another to destroy Amma and the Ashram. Due



to their ignorance and jealousy, the youths from about twenty houses joined together tonight in a hateful scheme to attack Amma's relatives and kill Amma. About two weeks ago, Amma warned Sugunanandan about the possibility of such an attack, advising him not to remain outdoors for too long. She also advised him to avoid picking quarrels with anybody, because Amma felt that the people were looking for some provocation."

Amma turned to Sugunanandan, and said with great love, "Even if people abuse you, you should learn to maintain your peace and equanimity. We have surrendered ourselves to the Supreme Self. Therefore, we should learn to see everyone as God in all circumstances. We should learn to accept praise and abuse with the same detachment." Sugunanandan seemed a bit astonished, replying, "But a couple of those scoundrels were here in the morning saying they were hungry — and we gave them money! Yet tonight they returned to beat us!" Amma answered, "They are only displaying their *samskaras*. No matter how they behave, we should adhere to our dharma, and try to see the divine Oneness within all."

Amma again addressed the devotees. "Children, we should look upon this event as an opportunity to study our own minds. We should not over-react or start jumping at shadows.

Our actions should not depend on the words which come out of these hoodlums' mouths. The diamonds of peace we have obtained through our sadhana cannot be forfeited for peanuts. Spiritual life is meant to break the shell of the ego that covers our Self, not cultivate it. In difficult circumstances like these, great faith and patience are required. God is our protector. If we rely on Him alone, He will take care of us. If we catch hold of the queen bee, all the other bees in the hive will serve and protect us."

"Children, we must all be very careful now. We should try to avoid circumstances in which we are likely to lose our balance. Let us keep our hearts open and trust in God. If we try to conquer their ignorance by force, they will only come again with greater vengeance. Remember, children. Hatred never ceases through hatred, but only through Love."

Having comforted the devotees with Her ever-peaceful presence, Amma then went back into the temple to begin the Devi Bhava. I wasn't sure if it was just my imagination, but I felt Devi was even more compassionate than usual that night, as if expressing Her appreciation for the courage the devotees had displayed.

Naturally, this brawl immediately became the prime topic of conversation among the villagers, and rumors abounded. We soon learned that many

e were laying all the blame on a. It seemed like a good time to within the Ashram grounds and the village completely if ble. In those days, even in any circumstances, some of the pers would seize every tunity they could get to harass a. Whenever She would pass by houses, they would tell their en to hoot at Her and pelt Her stones. To prevent this, the lies asked Amma to avoid taking walks through the streets, but ouldn't agree.

1 weekends, Amma would y go to visit the home of one of evotees, a few miles from the n, taking myself and Rukmini

This time, however, Amma sted it would be best for me to ehind. Of course, this made me ad — I could not bear to be away Amma for even a few hours, let two days. What was worse, ini, who had no part in the brawl, eing permitted to go. This made ck with jealousy. Seeing my ise, Amma said, "Be patient, ter. It would be a sin for us to ke them into doing wrong. It is o avoid trouble that Amma is ; you not to come." My jealous however, was deaf to Her of wisdom. I became quite and started crying, declaring n impetuous child that I just

wasn't willing to stay behind. Seeing my determination, Amma reluctantly gave permission for me to come, but added a word of warning: "If we are not able to obey the Guru's instructions, then bitter experiences must be our teacher." I stubbornly insisted on coming.

There were two routes from the Ashram to the devotee's house. The fastest way was to proceed straight through the village by the main road. The second route was not only more round-about but also more discrete, passing behind several houses and through long stretches of paddy fields. Wanting to avoid being seen as much as possible, Amma, Rukmini and I set out on the more circuitous route. Nonetheless, when we did pass houses and people along the way, many nasty-sounding comments were being shot in our direction. It then occurred to me that because of my white skin and blonde hair, people were immediately recognizing us, and that if I had not insisted on coming along, Amma would have been able to travel much less conspicuously. I began to regret my stubbornness.

When we finally reached the house, the devotees informed us of many strange rumors which people were spreading about the fight. In fact, they were quite surprised to see me because they heard I had received a broken leg in the brawl and was in

the hospital!

After spending a couple of days at the devotee's house, it was again time for Amma to come back to the Ashram for the Sunday Krishna and Devi Bhava Darshans. Before departing, Amma gave me a strong look and stated that She and Rukmini would be returning by the roundabout route, and that I should go with another Indian girl through the main village. I protested briefly, but this time Amma was adamant, so I had no choice but to obey. Intellectually I understood; but my jealous feeling blinded me, my mind spinning into a whirlwind of bitter complaints. 'Because Rukmini has dark skin she's allowed to travel with Amma, while I, like an outcaste, have to travel separately with some other girl. Just because I'm a Westerner, I have to suffer like this! How unfair!'

As this other girl and I began walking along the road towards the village, I began feeling more and more dejected. Off to the right, in the distance, I occasionally caught glimpses of Amma and Rukmini slowly making their way across the paddy fields. Seeing them together made me even more upset. The circumstances made no difference — the fact was, Amma had cast me aside for another. Hadn't I given Her my life? Was all my service for nothing? My mind began seething with anger, a

string of jealous accusations arising one after another. 'Amma, why are You being so cruel? You claim to be impartial, but obviously Rukmini is Your favorite! Is it only because I'm white that I have to suffer like this? Are You prejudiced as well?' By the time I made it back to the Ashram, I had reached an extreme state of anger and bitter sorrow. I dumped myself onto the sandy floor of the hut, my despair growing by the minute. Finally, I said to myself, "If my white skin is separating me from Amma, then let it come off!", and I dug my fingernails into my arms and started trying to scratch off the skin.

About ten minutes later, Amma arrived with Rukmini. Sitting in the corner of the hut with my head in my lap, I was surely the picture of dejected misery. Amma immediately came over and sat down next to me. She lifted up my arms and looked at the bleeding scratch marks. She looked at me for a moment, and then embraced me, slowly rocking me back and forth as if I were a little baby. My suffering began to slowly dissolve in that Ocean of Peace.

After a while, Amma lifted up my chin with Her finger so that my eyes met Hers, and Her compassionate smile shone deep into my heart. "Poor baby, my crazy, crazy darling daughter.... Didn't Amma suggest that you stay back this time?" I nodded,



ting my lip. "And yet", Amma said tenderly, "because daughter was determined to disobey, Amma allowed you to come." She laughed softly for a moment before she continued. "But what happened, daughter? While we are travelling, the people easily recognized you, and then began making nasty comments towards Amma. Because you had not obeyed Amma, those people incurred a sin. This is the reason daughter had to suffer today." Tears began slowly sliding down my cheeks. Amma continued, "It was only to prevent these people from incurring sin that Amma avoided going through the village. Amma is not affected by anyone's comments, and is never afraid of anything. Amma's only thought is to protect the villagers; but daughter was only thinking of her own

pleasure."

I sheepishly realized what a foolish mistake I had made. I silently vowed to never again disobey Amma, and to accept Her every suggestion and follow it without question. By this time, several other disciples had gathered around us. Amma lifted up both my arms for all to see, laughing wholeheartedly at my foolish ways. She said, "Gayatri thinks because her skin is white I have less love for her. But I don't look at the color of the skin. Amma sees only the heart, and it is daughter's heart that I love. The color of her skin makes no difference to Amma. White, brown, black, yellow, tall, short, fat, skinny — none of this matters at all. No matter what they may have done, or who they may be, all are Amma's children. All are Amma's children." ❀



Gokulastami Celebrations at Amritapuri