

# Sri Sarada Society Notes

Dedicated to Holy Mother

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## MEETING MOTHER

*Continuing Sreemati Mukherjee's translation of Lavaya Kumar Chakraborty's reminiscences of Holy Mother, originally published in Bengali in SRI SRI MAYER PADAPRANTE Vol III, compiled by Swami Purnatmananda and published by Udbodhan Karyalaya in 1997.*

It was the month of November in the year 1912. I had arrived at Kasi (now Varanasi). The evening after my arrival I went to the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram to find revered Master Mahasay (M) reading aloud to a group of devotees seated around him. Slightly further off, Swami Turiyanandaji was pacing the floor and listening to M's readings.

As soon as his eyes alighted upon me, M questioned me with his habitual courtesy, "Hello, how are you? Take a seat now, and we'll talk later." I sat down at his request. After the completion of what he had been reading he asked me again, "Have you read the *Gopi Gita*?" I replied, that I had made scattered readings but had not read it in a systematic or consistent manner. He urged me to read it, avowing its excellence. I told him that I would read it and smiled to myself. Of course the *Gopi Gita* was a wonderful text and more so to him, Sri M, who had been, as Sri Ramakrishna said, a part of Sri Krishna's *brajaleela*. After a few mutual inquiries, Sri M told me that Holy Mother was residing nearby, in a house called Lakshminivas, and I should go and make my pranams to her.

When I set out to meet Holy Mother, evening was almost drawing to a close and night was commencing. After crossing Cantonment Road I started walking towards Lakshminivas. I passed a newly developing area...Lakshminivas was a little further, and I continued down a narrow lane, where I met Brahmachari Rashbehari Maharaj. He was going from Lakshminivas to Advaita Ashram. We exchanged a few words, after which he asked me about Master Mahasay and inquired whether I noticed any change in him. When I failed to add anything on that point, he offered me some information himself. He said that a girl that Master Mahasay had been very

fond of, had recently died in Bombay of cholera. Apparently the telegram informing Sri M had arrived three to four hours ago, but he appeared quite undisturbed. The Brahmachari added, "I've renounced the world, but if I were to hear about the death of a dearly loved one, I would not be capable of such composure so soon after receiving such news. Although Master Mahasay has not technically renounced the world, this incident gives us an index of his greatness." I absorbed this piece of information with a deep feeling of awe.

Rashbehari Maharaj gave me directions about how to reach Mother's house. As I departed, I noticed I was being followed by two young men who were on a travel tour of India.

I arrived at my destination but found no one there.

Rashbehari Maharaj had told me that Mother would be on the upstairs mud verandah, but there too, I found no one. At one corner of the verandah, I noticed a creature completely covered in rough clothing. Estimating that this must be Mother, I made my pranams to her and left with a heavy heart. I resolved to visit the Visheshwar Temple and the banks of the Ganges, to make up for my heavy feeling of loss and disappointment.

Entering Vishwanath Lane, I encountered Master Mahasay coming from the opposite direction. Putting a friendly hand on my shoulder, he asked me if I had had Mother's *darshan*. I sadly told him that I had simply seen a bundle of clothes. He listened quietly while I narrated my entire experience. After hearing the whole story, he asked me if I had been alone. I replied that there had been two other youths with me. Sri M asked if I knew them and I replied that I did not, and that they had perhaps conceived the idea of visiting Mother, overhearing his instructions to me at Advaita Ashram.

Sri M laughed and told me that I had been deprived of



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**IN MOTHER'S WORDS:** "Suppose one of my children has smeared himself with dirt. It is I, and no one else, who shall have to wash him clean and take him in my arms."

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*darshan* because I had been in the wrong company. He said, “Although, you had gone with the intention of paying obeisance to Mother, those youths had simply gone to see what Paramahansa’s wife was like. After all, you know, Paramahansa is a pretty famous man!” I too laughed when I heard that.

He then told me, “Tomorrow in the morning, take your bath in the Ganges, get flowers, bel leaves, fruits and sweets, and visit her *alone*.” The last word he uttered in an undertone, as though he were saying something very profound and significant. Once again he repeated, “If you see someone following you, create detours and go to see her alone.” After this conversation, he went back to the Advaita Ashram and I went towards the temple of Vishwanath.

Early next morning, when I got lost on my way to Daswamedh ghat and arrived at Prayag ghat, I found the memorial to a sadhu whom I had known and revered, and who had passed away two years back. I had searched in vain for this memorial in many places, but stumbled upon it today. After my ablutions I acquired some flowers, bel leaves and sweets and made my way towards Lakshminivas. Thankfully, I had no unpleasant experiences on the road this time. As I was about to enter the narrow lane leading up to Holy Mother’s house, I noticed a woman standing at the main entrance, in a somewhat forlorn posture, a veil covering half her face. I wondered to myself, “Is that Mother?” I remembered the incidents of the previous evening and noted to myself the difference between yesterday and today! Is it possible that such good fortune should be mine? Mother’s posture seemed to suggest to me that she was waiting for her children coming from afar. Almost in a trance I arrived before her, and asked, “Are you Mother?”

“Yes, my son, I am your Mother.”

“Truly, my mother?”

“Yes, I am the Mother of you all.”

“Our Mother?”

“Yes, son, the Mother of this universe.”

I thought to myself that she truly was *Jagadamba*, the Mother of the Universe. As she noticed that I was about to make my obeisance or pranams to her she said, “Wait, not now.” Instead, she turned to call someone, “Kestlal, 0 Kestlal.” Krishnalal Maharaj (Swami Dheerananda) came running. Seeing me, his face broke out into a smile. He knew me from before, and like many others associated with Mother, felt a deep happiness if he noticed someone receiving Mother’s grace. Mother gave him orders: “Here, take all that he has brought and keep it in the puja room. I’ll take a quick bath in the Ganges and then use all this for puja and Thakur’s *bhog*.”

After I put everything in Krishnalal Maharaj’s hands, I tried

to touch Mother’s feet. Once again she said, “Just wait a little, my son.” Turning to Krishnalal Maharaj she said, “Please fetch some Ganges water in a tumbler.” Quickly depositing all that I had brought in the puja room, Krishnalal Maharaj returned with a small tumbler of Ganges water. Mother instructed, “Pour some on my son’s hands.” I knew that I could now touch Mother’s feet, and I put my whole heart into the action. I was filled to the brim with happiness. Yet, a small feeling of doubt remained—why had Mother insisted that I wash my hands with Ganges water before I touched her feet? Was it because she discerned some impurity in me? The all-knowing Mother read the unhappy question in my heart and assured me, “Son, you brought things for Thakur’s puja with those hands. How could I allow you to touch my feet with those very same hands? That is the reason why they had to be washed.”

I was left speechless. I didn’t try to restrain my tears.

## REMEMBER...

*Paritosh Kaul shares his thoughts about this significant reminder: “Remember you are a child of Mother.”*

On “**Remember**”—We often tend to forget who we are, and there are multiple reasons for forgetting. We are so engrossed and entangled in our own webs of Maya that the truth often is hidden from us. More correctly, we are not perceptive enough to see the truth or perceive it. If we can be always aware of who we really are, then we are slowly but surely clearing the web of Maya.

On “**You**”—This is perhaps what touches me the most. The fact is not about someone else but me. It is specifically about me. As people, and unlike Mother, we see the world through our own “colored glasses” and we make judgements according to our nature. Yet, with whatever the prejudices we have and whatever we think is right or wrong, we continue to have an eternal relationship with the Mother.

I would like to stress these words. The all-accepting nature of the Mother is such that She accepts us as Her children, with our imperfections. We play in the world, fall and stumble, yet She is always there to help us every step of the way. This help is personally directed to each of us. Reading “you” in “Remember *you* are a child of Mother,” I am aware that it is *me*—Paritosh, with my faults—who has a relationship with the Mother.

On “**Child**”—Trust, faith, and dependence on the Mother are some of the characteristics of a child. If we develop these feelings of total surrender to the Mother, then each of us becomes a Girish Ghosh who has given the “power of attorney” to the Mother. When there is total surrender we cannot take a wrong step, since every step will be taken with the Mother in *Continued on page 3: “REMEMBER...”*

## A LIFE GRACED BY SERVICE

*As part of our continuing series on women who have contributed to the Vedanta Movement, Josephine Lazarus, of Phoenix Arizona, shares her remembrances of her friend, Wendy Taylor.*

In May 1989, I accompanied a fellow spiritual seeker to Zimbabwe, South Africa, where the Swami Nishreyananda resided and had established several centers of the Ramakrishna Order. When I arrived in Harare, I was transported to the compound that served as the Mission. There was Swami glowing with light and energy like a diamond. The household consisted of Swami, an African manservant, Mrs. Tunmar, and Wendy Taylor. Mrs. Tunmar was about Swami's age and worked in the drapery department of a downtown store. Being the two younger women, Wendy and I gravitated together. She shared her story with me.

A girlfriend had brought Wendy to a lecture given by Swami. She found Swami to be a brilliant and exciting speaker. His love of the Divine Mother and spiritual wisdom were contagious. Wendy told me that from the first meeting she knew this was her path. Over time, her commitment to the center deepened and she quit her job, taking residence with Mrs. Tunmar in the other half of the house.

She supervised the running of the ashram: answered phones, typed letters, edited talks, organized the library and saw to the care and feeding of the ashram household. It was Wendy who made sure that Swami's food was prepared as needed, that he had his rest after meals and that transportation arrangements to and from devotees' homes were made.

It was a blessing for each family to have Swami in their home. They spend all day preparing wonderful South Indian food. The vegetables used in the preparation were often grown organically in their gardens, gardens that Swami had himself supervised the planting of during the troubled times of revolution and civil war.

The house and grounds of the ashram needed constant maintenance. She arranged for devotees to come and do simple work or arranged for them to do larger projects.

Together with other devotees she dressed the images and cared for the shrine. Swami only wore clothing cast off by Ramakrishna! (Cloth which had draped his shrine statue.) He slept on a simple bed behind the altar to Ramakrishna as his father had done as temple keeper. She also arranged for devo-

tees to have time with Swami so no one felt excluded. One day she took me aside. She was very concerned. As she put it "Each devotee wants to serve the Swami, it is not right if one disciple serves him so much that others cannot."

Her sweet nature and Swami's unvarying routine of worship and prayer gently guided the day, which began each morning at 4:30 or 5:00 AM. My friend Karen stayed with Swami and Wendy at a house in New Jersey. She remarked to me how very present Wendy was with her service. Wendy's being was devoted to him and she served him with her every breath.

Swami loved to travel and tour. Although Wendy was a European, she was accepted in all the households, Asian or European, to which they went. Swami loved seeing new things and people and when he couldn't go himself he sent Wendy as his eyes and ears. A tour was arranged for me to visit Victoria Falls and a game park and Swami required a full report of my actions and impressions. The entire time I felt he was there with me.

Wendy was with Swami at his mahasamadhi, as were many devoted friends, all chanting the *Gita*. After he passed she returned to South Africa and spent her last days compiling small books of Swami's writings and talks. To the readers' delight, these retained the freshness of his speech. She and I kept in touch but in these pre-email times correspondence took a long time. My husband and I tried to bring her to our home for a while but she declined. Her spirit seemed to be ebbing away.

We came to know she had a brain tumor, and grieved to learn she had passed on to be with Swami. A lot of questions remain about whether he cared for her or she him. But surely her short life was sweet with service to Swami and the Mother.

*Continued from page 2 : "REMEMBER..."*

mind. Even if we perceive it to be a mistake, we should all be aware that the Mother is taking care of us and, hence, we will be fine.

On "Mother"—All of Mother's children have personal experiences and a relationship with the Mother. Moments of silent communication, when we felt no one else was listening to the inner cries of our heart, are those special times when we felt Mother was with us. Each one of us has felt it. May we remember and reflect upon these experiences.

*Mother, bless us that we may understand the true meaning of the words, "Remember you are a child of Mother."*

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Book Review  
**SAINT SARA**

*SAINT SARA: THE LIFE OF SARA CHAPMAN BULL, THE AMERICAN MOTHER OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA* by Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, published in 2002, by Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta, 498 pages. Reviewed by Janet Walker.

This remarkable book, written by an American-born nun of Sri Sarada Math, sheds important light on the spiritual development and mission of Sara Chapman Bull (1850–1911), whose spiritual, administrative, and financial support were crucial to the growth of the Vedanta movement from the mid-1890s to her death. It also illuminates the remarkable group of people from America, Britain, and India, all of them students and associates of Swami Vivekananda, who nourished the Vedanta movement in its early years in those three countries.

Sara Bull is a less colorful personality than the two other Western women who were important students and friends of Swami Vivekananda and supporters of his mission in the West and in India—Josephine MacLeod, the socialite, and Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita), the educator and Indian freedom-fighter. But Swami Vivekananda had so much confidence in her intelligence, her conviction, her vision, and her judgment that he put her in charge of the fledgling Vedanta work in America shortly after he met her. Sara Bull's closest friends called her "Saint Sara," recognizing that she possessed the qualities of spiritual steadiness, wisdom, and forbearance. This book sheds important light on Sara Bull, demonstrating how she worked quietly and steadily, with intelligence and vision and using her superb administrative skills and her inherited wealth, to help spread Vedantic ideals among American intellectu-

als and to further the Vedantic ideal in India. When Sara Bull met Swami Vivekananda in 1894, this insight enabled her to see him immediately as a spiritual teacher of the highest order, and she became his disciple, taking on also the role of mother to him. A letter written in 1895, near the beginning of her service to the Vedanta movement, reveals the spiritual insight that underlay Sara Bull's life and work:

*The experience of my life has taught me that back of all differences of thought, of ideals, of individual conceptions of duty and morals, there was something, for me, divine in each sincere human soul with whom I came in contact, if I held to the high purpose of its discovery. (And this [practice] constitutes to me the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God)...*

The major events of Sara Bull's spiritual life were clearly her becoming Swami Vivekananda's disciple in 1894; her co-organizing the Greenacre Conferences in Maine from 1894 onward and her organizing of the Cambridge Conferences at her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1894 onward; her friendship with Josephine MacLeod and Sister Nivedita, and the idyllic days they spent in spiritual companionship with their teacher Swami Vivekananda in Kashmir in 1898; her meeting with Sri Sarada Devi in 1898 (Sara Bull was the one who had the photograph of Holy Mother taken that is worshipped around the world); and the receiving of sannyas from Swami Vivekananda in 1899. The book allows us to see Sara Bull as a multifaceted person striving for spiritual illumination throughout her adult life, whether as the young wife of the famous Norwegian violinist and patriot, Ole Bull; as the forbearing mother of a difficult daughter; or as the devoted student, friend, and mother of Swami Vivekananda.

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