

Mother compassionate and divine

"Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, I have a mother," said Sarada Devi whose 150th birth anniversary is being celebrated. LAKSHMI DEVNATH writes.

"Do you want to drag me down into Maya?" Sri Ramakrishna questioned his young wife Sarada Devi, soon after her arrival at Dakshineswar from Jayarambati in March 1872. "No," came the prompt reply. "Why should I do so? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life." The question was strange coming as it did from a husband who was seeing his wife after a gap of almost five years. But then Sri Ramakrishna and Mother Sarada Devi were no ordinary persons. The Master had verily incarnated on earth to fulfil a divine purpose and it is a well-known fact that when divinity manifests itself on earth, he or she bring along with them their full entourage to help them fulfil their mission. Otherwise, how can one explain the circumstances that led to the marriage of this pair?

"She who is marked for me," declared the twenty-three year old Sri Ramakrishna in an ecstatic state of mind when the topic of his marriage was broached, "is waiting at the house of Ramachandra Mukherjee at Jayarambati." That "She" was Sarada Devi, five-year of daughter of Ramachandra Mukherjee and Shyamasundari Devi of Jayarambati. She was born on December 22, 1853. This divine marriage that took place in 1859 was very much in accordance with the plan of destiny. Of this there can be no doubt for, on an earlier occasion during a temple festival in the neighbourhood of Jayarambati, an infant Sarada on being teasingly asked as to whom she was going to marry decisively pointed to Sri Ramakrishna who was there in the crowd.

Thirteen years after their marriage an eighteen-year old Sarada Devi one day in March 1872, arrived unannounced at Dakshineswar. Since their wedding, she had visited Kamarpukur now and then but this was her first visit to Dakshineswar and she had come there this time to stay. Sri Ramakrishna though taken aback by her unexpected

arrival, welcomed her warmly for he recognised in his wife, a fellow seeker in his spiritual quest; it was through her that he was going to proclaim to the world at large the Motherhood of God. Sri Ramakrishna could not have found a better channel for his divine mission for Sarada Devi was verily an incarnation of hallmark purity. Even as a child her constant prayers were, "Oh Lord, there is stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind." Her prayers must have been answered for in later years, Sri Ramakrishna affirmed, "Had she not been so pure, who knows whether I would not have lost my self-control? After marriage, I had prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother! Remove even the last trace of carnality from the mind of my wife. When I lived with her, I understood that the Mother had really granted my prayer.' And a significant thing happened on the night of the Phalaharini Kali Pooja.

On that auspicious day, the Master in an ecstatic mood, beckoned Sarada Devi to sit on the seat set apart for the deity. He then worshipped her with all the sixteen services offered to a deity. Similarly, to the Holy Mother, the Master was none other than the all-pervading God. In fact her primary instruction to the devotees was, "the Master is everything; He is the guru; He is the chosen Deity."

To the Mother the Master was not only her spiritual mentor but also her guide in secular matters. Right from the method of rolling wicks, through methods of efficiently performing domestic activities to the art of choosing the right friends he gave her systematic and detailed training. She was his first disciple. Intrinsicly pure, the Mother's spirituality enhanced manifold under the guidance of the Master and made her fit to carry on his work after his departure in 1887.

For fourteen years, from 1872, the Holy Master stayed in a small room nine and a half feet by eight feet. It was her provision store, kitchen and reception and was



grandiosely termed the Nahabat. From here she could get a view of the room in which the Master lived and from a distance joyfully participated in his spiritual ecstasies. Her day began at 3 a.m. She woke up always with the names of deities on her lips and her first act was to have a look at the Master's picture. About her early rising she said, "Wherever I might happen to be, when it struck three in the morning, I felt as though somebody blew a flute near my ears."

Her day began with Japa and meditation but the rest of her waking hours was taken up in performing services for the Master like cooking, cleaning his room, washing his clothes, etc. She attended on the Master's mother with meticulous care and devoted the remaining hours to cooking for her children and catering to their physical emotional and spiritual needs.

Yes, in several aspects, the Mother's life was an oxymoron. It is interesting that on one occasion, Shyamsundari Devi, mother of Sarada Devi lamented, "My Sarada has been married to an ascetic. She will never know the happiness of being addressed as mother." The Master who heard it remarked, "Your daughter will have so

many children that she will be tired of being addressed day and night as Mother." And verily, countless indeed were this divine couple's spiritual sons and daughters! Again, illiterate though the Mother was in the recognised sense of the word, her profound wisdom emanated from source: far beyond the realms of human perception.

The Mother was indeed an incarnation of compassion. She loved all without any discrimination. She would aver, "I am the mother of the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous. Never fear. Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, I have a mother." In fact, it was this compassion that led her to initiate all those who pleaded for it. Speaking on the efficacy of the Mantras used she said, "I have received all these Mantras from the Master himself. Through these one is sure to achieve perfection."

But having given the initiation she also took up the responsibilities of errant devotees. Once when she was ill, a devotee found her practising japa at 2 a.m. Her reply was, "How can I sleep my child? They (the disciples) do not do anything at all. But since I have taken their responsibility should I not see their welfare? Therefore I do

japa for their sake." Her life from 1888 till her earthly demise in 1920 was one of active spiritual ministry. The Holy Mother encouraged the members of the Ramakrishna Math to engage in service to humanity. She was also vociferous against waste and extravagance.

Intensely practical, the Holy Mother was a spiritual giant as well. Many were the occasions when she had the experience of total absorption in God. Yet, when a devotee asked about her exalted experiences she appeared abashed and was reticent even to talk about in for hers was a self-effacing personality. In fact, the Holy Mother once beautifully remarked, "What else does one obtain by realisation of God? Does one grow a pair of horns? No, our mind becomes pure, and through that pure mind comes enlightenment."

It was now the year 1920. The Mother was only sixty-seven years old but her end was imminent. Sri Ramakrishna, in his last days at Cossipore, had once feelingly remarked, "Well, won't you do something? Am I to do it all?" The Holy Mother replied, "I am but a woman. What can I do?" But the Master replied, "No, no, you have much to do." Taking his words as a command, the Mother had since tirelessly devoted herself to the establishment of the Ramakrishna Math at different locations and on a firm footing. It was now time for her to depart. She handed over the relay baton to her 'son' Sarat (Swami Saradananda) and reassured her crying devotees with the words, "Sarat will take care you."

The epithet of Holy Mother to Sarada Devi describes her personality in full. Once, when Swami Tanmayananda asked her, "If the Master is God Himself who are you then?" Without the least hesitation the Mother replied, "Who else could I be? I too am the Divine Mother." On her deathbed and in intense physical pain she would yet compassionately tell her tearful devotees, "Eat before you go for you will be late to return to your house." Her last message to humanity reflected her life's teachings. "If you want peace, don't find fault with others. But find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world you own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear, the world is yours."