

From Mother Saraswati to Maha Saraswati (1954 to 2004)

Following Sri Ramakrishna, during his Sadhana period in the late thirties and forties Bandhu Dharmapal (formerly Babubhai Shah, a Sthanakavasi Jain by birth) was praying to God as the Supreme Mother. He did not keep before him the picture of Kali - the Mother of Sri Ramakrishna. Instead, there was a picture in his room of Shiva with the face of Parvati which he secured from Kanpur Chitrashala, Kanpur on which he concentrated as his Divine Mother. He prayed to Mother to appear before him in some form as She wished.



Sri Gautam Dharmapal

Time passed on, Bandhu continued to pray to his Mother in the picture of Shiva. Then one day in early morning, he saw in a dream-vision a beautiful form of his Divine Mother. The day was 8th February, 1954. It was the day of Saraswati Puja and the form of the Mother that he saw in his dream was that of Goddess Saraswati seated on a lotus, playing on Veena with a Book in Her hand and the other hand in the 'mudra' of Blessing. We were then staying at 18/4 D, Fern Road, Kolkata-19.



Shiva with the face of Parvati - worshipped by Sri Bandhu Dharmapal

The same day i.e. on 8th February in the morning in the Amrita Bazar Patrika appeared two pictures of Goddess Saraswati - one in standing position and the other sitting on a lotus almost in the form as Bandhu saw in his dream-vision. But nothing was mentioned as to where these images were being worshipped.

The next day, on 9th February, some more pictures of Mother Saraswati appeared in the same paper, one of them being the same that appeared in the previous day, that of the Mother Saraswati sitting on the lotus in Padmasana posture. It was also mentioned that this particular image was being worshipped by the students of the N.R.S. Medical Col-

lege near Sealdah.

The same afternoon, we went to the college premises with a photographer friend. But when we reached there, the image was being put on a lorry for immersion. It was impossible then to take the picture. The students told us not to worry as they had taken many pictures and asked us to come next day.

Next day - again we went there, but none of the pictures satisfied Bandhu. We were told that the idol was made by the famous sculptor Ramesh Pal. Straight, we went to Ramesh Pal's studio in Baghbazar, but the photo that Ramesh Pal had taken of that idol of Mother Saraswati did not satisfy Bandhu. Anyway, we took a few copies from Ramesh Pal and returned home with a remorse for not going to N.R.S. Hospital early in the morning!

Our photographer friend Asim Pramanik then started working on the picture that we procured. Copies after copies were developed till Bandhu was a bit satisfied and got a bigger version framed and placed on a pedestal for his worship. Smaller copies were distributed amongst friends, one of which still adorns my table and is placed along with a Murti of Mother Saraswati on the Saraswati Puja day every year.



Mata Saraswati

Another important event happened during this period. Sri Anirvan came to our house at 18/4D, Fern Road for the first time to meet Bandhu Dharmapal. After several meetings with Anirvanji, Bandhu decided that he (Anirvanji) is and will be the Acharya of Dharma Sangha, which actually happened by the end of the next year.

We shifted our residence from 18/4D, Fern Road to 6H, Keyatala Road on 31st August, 1954 and Bandhu passed away suddenly on 6th August 1955 due to cerebral stroke in his meditative mood before his beloved divine Mother.

Sri Anirvan consented to come and stay at our Keyatala Road house and the famous Upanishad and later (from 1965) Veda discourses began from November, 1955 by the grace of Mother Saraswati.

On 13.07.58, Anirvanji wrote from Shillong to

Sandhya Das (now Lahiri) who was then staying with us temporarily for her M.A. Exams, "Gautam will reach (Kolkata) tomorrow. He passed one month in Sadhana here staying as if in a cave, I feel, he is going back with joy and bliss in his heart. He goes from one Haimavati to another Haimavati. I did not know that he is a worshipper of Divine Motherhood, even before his birth grace of Divine Mother is on him. I hope my dream of Kumarsambhava will be fulfilled through him. True men are scarce in our country. There is a lot of noise outside, but when I think of the poverty, scarcity of true men in our country, tears flow from my eyes. I feel some hope, some joy in my heart when I see somebody devoting whole heartedly to spiritual Sadhana, passing his days in constant Tapasya... Bandhu's Chosen-Deity - ista devata - was Saraswati whom he saw in his dream. You must have surely seen the picture of that Deity in their meditation room. Saraswati and United India were objects of Meditation and Mission for them. Bandhu's dream has to be fulfilled. That responsibility is as much mine, so it is of all of you."

Thus passed many years Sri Anirvan came over to Kolkata from Shillong in November, 1964. After staying a few months at Keyatala Road, he went to stay at Narendrapur in May, 1965 where a new Haimavati was built for him and came over to Fern Road, his last Haimavati in February, 1971 after staying for a brief time at 9/3, Central Park, Jadavpur. Sri Anirvan passed away on 31st May 1978 and we continued to stay at 9/3 Fern Road, our Home-deity Griha-Devata remaining the same Mother Saraswati of Bandhu's dream. Saraswati and Haimavati are one and the same devata, different only in name.

Many more years passed. I was merrily continuing my Sadhana, occasionally visiting Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry and Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir, Haridwar - my main places of pilgrimage. Then a great thing happened. Maha Saraswati came down.

I and Gouri were at Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir, Haridwar from the first week of April, 2004. My 81st Birthday was celebrated at the Mandir on 14th April, 2004. All the time, I was in the meditative mood. On 21st April, I was sitting as usual in the meditation room of the Yoga Mandir, sometime gazing at the picture of Ma Mira and sometimes meditating

keeping my eyes closed. And the thing happened.

I clearly saw the Himalayan peaks - something like Neelkanta at Badrinath or Kanchanjanga over Drajeeling. Seven streams coming down joining the main river Saraswati - forming 'maho arnah' - mighty flood that is Saraswati. From the waters of River Saraswati arises a Brahma Kamala - a big white lotus on which is seated in Padmasana, the mighty gracious Beauty - the great Goddess Maha Saraswati - Chaturbahu - Trinayana - with four hands and three eyes - one hand playing the Veena lying by her side - another hand holding the mighty Vajra; the third hand holding Chakra - symbolising Dharma Chakra or Kala-Chakra - the Wheel of Dharma or Time. The fourth hand is in the blessing posture.

Along with the whole image, a mantra rang in my mind.

"ॐ वज्रधारिणीं वीणावादिनीं वेदवासिनीं महासरस्वतीं वन्दे ॥"
"Om Vajradharinim Veena Vadinim, Veda Vasinim Maha Sarasvatim Vande."

I bow down to the great goddess Saraswati, holding in one hand the mighty Vajra - the destroyer of demons, another hand playing the Veena, the Mother who enlightens the Vedas - the storehouse of knowledge. She is moving the wheel of Time, Creating, Maintaining and Destroying universe after universe.

After an hour or so, I came out of my meditation, went to our room, told Gouri about my vision and wrote it down in my diary. I remained absorbed in my vision all the time we were at Haridwar. In the Yoga Mandir, I told only Shivkumarji about my vision.

Since that day Maha Saraswati is haunting me, playing hide and seek with me. On 10th October, 2005, when we gathered at 9/2, Fern Road to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee day of the establishment of Dharma Sangha in Ahmedabad, I told about my vision to many friends. Now, first of all, I yearned for a picture of Maha Saraswati according to my vision. Some prominent artists were approached. Dibyendu Mukherjee requested Sri Ajit Ghosh, former principal at Art College. Through Krishna Rai Mahashaya, Sri Mondal, a former teacher in Art College who was then repainting or repairing the famous picture of the Divine Mother as seen by Mahayogi Bijoy Krishna Chattopadhyay, was also approached. He even came once to our

place to discuss about the proposed picture of Maha Saraswati. None of them could give me my Mother's picture.

In October, 2006, I fell seriously ill with heart and prostrate ailments and was released from Repose Nursing Home on 23rd December, 2006. The maids who were looking after me at the Nursing Home came to Fern Road too to look after me. Roma, who looked after me at night, said, "my grand son is a good artist. He paints as well as makes idols of Gods and Goddesses too." I talked to her about my vision and gave her the written description of the image of Maha Saraswati.

On Wednesday 6th June, 2007, Roma and her grand son Utpal Gayen came together with a picture of Maha Saraswati. Everything was beautiful, the natural scenery with the Himalayan Peaks, the streams flowing down and merging in the lake-like Saraswati River and Brahmakamal rising up with Maha Saraswati sitting on it as described above. Everything was fine, but for the Mother who looked more like a Kishori - 16 years old girl playing on Veena. A young artist drawing the picture according to his vision! On the whole I liked the picture and accepted it as Mother's gift. Where big artists could not or did not succeed - a young boy brought to me a good picture of my Maha Saraswati!



The picture of Mata
Maha Saraswati drawn
by Sri Utpal

But I waited for a better picture of the Mother! Utpal's picture on Gouri's table remained for about one and half years. None came! Came January, 2009. From Utpal's picture of Maha Saraswati, the Mother was looking at me as if saying "how long will you keep me like this." At once I decided to get the picture framed. I brought it down from Gouri's table, kept it, pressed for a few days under the Books of Vedas and then on 21st January I took it to Ramakrishna Book & Photo Binders to get it framed along with a picture of Ma Mira of Aurobindo Ashram which Gouri liked very much but was kept in a file unframed so far! What a co-incidence! I got the vision of Maha Saraswati in the meditation room of Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir, Haridwar before the Darshan Day i.e. 24th April before the picture of

Mother Mira and another picture of Ma Mira goes for photo framing along with the newly found picture of Maha Saraswati nearly five years after! Today is 24th April, Ma Mira's final arrival day to Pondicherry in 1920 from Japan after receiving the call from Sri Aurobindo!

Is there some sacred search behind all this? Before going into it, let us complete our present pilgrimage with the present picture of Maha Saraswati. The framed pictures of Maha Saraswati and Mira-Ma came on 28th January. We had decided to place and worship Maha Saraswati on the Saraswati Puja day that fell on 31st January along with the picture of Saraswati and the idol of Saraswati which was worshipped since 1988 and kept with us - no immersion since 1988! Meanwhile Gouri had written to Sree Sree Maa Sharbani of Akhanda Mahapeeth, Shibrampur (near Behala) about our Saraswati Puja and requested her to come if possible. Thus Maha Saraswati was installed and worshipped for the first time on 31st January 2009 between 11:30 am to 12:30 pm.

Our daughter Rohini and grand son Rik had nicely decorated the place with Alpana, flowers, etc. since early morning. Mother Mata Saraswati was placed on the big chair used by Sri Anirvan till he fell ill, in the middle. On Her left was placed the Picture of Saraswati - as visualised by Bandhu Dharmapala and on Her right was placed the earthen idol of Saraswati that is being worshipped in our house since 1988.

Now another wonder. Many friends and relatives knew about our Saraswati puja. Many were even informed about the time of the puja. A disciple of Maa Sharbani had informed by phone, that they have received Gourima's postcard - Maa with some



Sree Sree Maa with Smt Gauri and
Gautam Dharmapal that their Fern
Road residence

Shishyas will come to Fern Road by 12 noon! But what a wonder! Apart from we two only one person, that too a new acquaintance Mrinalini Tankashalwala - who conducts

the website on Anirvan was present at the time of

Puja. Even Rik, his mother and father who had prepared the puja place were not present during the actual puja. They had gone to attend the Puja at Jagadbandhu Institution - Rik's school! Amongst our house maids, only Pratima was present. Maa Sharbani - with her 'fauj' consisting of Arnab, Arijit, Partha Pratim and Subrat came just after 1:00 pm after the puja was over! She was held up by the children of the Ashram!

In a way it was good. We could attend to her fully. She was coming to our house for the first time! We knew about her only since last year that too in a round about way - which will again show how the Divine - the Universe - is so far and so near! "tad dure tad-n-antike."

Mrinalini had started a website on Sri Anirvan since last April (2008) when she was in USA with her daughter, prompted by one Goutam Bhattacharya - living in Ithaca (USA). Through Mrinalini's website Arijit and Arnab working for PhD on Computer Science at Kharagpur IIT got our address and telephone number! Then one fine evening on 27th July, 2008 to be exact, Arnab, Arijit, Subrat and Ansuman, the "Chaturvyuha" came to see us with some books of Maa Sharbani. Thus for the first time we heard about her - as a Teacher of Kriya-Yoga and her lineage! The relation increased on 12th January, 2009 during the Gayatri Mahayajna, a five day celebration performed by Maa Sharbani. We went to Akhanda Mahapeeth, Behala and met her personally for the first time and were highly impressed by the spiritual atmosphere created by her and her Guru Maharajas around her.

So we highly appreciated her arrival to our place on the Saraswati Puja day when the Great Divine Mother, Maha Saraswati was invoked and installed at 9/2 Fern Road. We feel the occasion was sanctified by her presence. We took her upstairs to our small temple - puja and study room situated on the terrace. She talked about Maha Saraswati for a few

minutes. She called Her Narayani. After four-five days, one next Sunday, pictures of both Saraswati and Maha Saraswati were taken upstairs to the temple room and were placed on my table where I am writing this article.

Devi Saraswati is the only Goddess that is being worshipped in Bharat i.e. India from Vedic times to Puranas and Tantras. In Chandi alone she is addressed as Maha Saraswati in the Dhyamantra in chapter 5 as the destroyer of Shumbha and other demons - "Shumbhadi-daitya-rdinim". In all other mantras she is worshipped as Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge. Sri Aurobindo, in his book "The Mother", specifically talks about Maha Saraswati as one of the "Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of Her leading Powers and Personalities that have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in Her dealings with the terrestrial play." The four great Mothers, He calls Maheswari, Maha Kali, Maha Laxmi and Maha Saraswati bestowing Wisdom, Strength, Harmony and Perfection. About Maha Saraswati, he writes, "Maha Saraswati is the Mother's Power of Work and Her Spirit of Perfection and Order. The youngest of the four, She is the most skilful in executive faculty and the nearest to physical nature... The Science and craft and technique of things are Maha Saraswati's province" - By and large, she too is the Goddess of Knowledge, human as well as divine.

But our Maha Saraswati is both the Goddess of Knowledge and Power. She is the bestower of Knowledge, of all Arts and Sciences as well as the giver of strength and power - physical, vital, mental and spiritual. She is the destroyer of Darkness and Ignorance as well as the destroyers of Rakshasas and Asuras, Demons and Devils that dwell in us as well as in the Universe - in jiva as well as in jagat and help us in being divine - in becoming Ribhus and gods.

“ॐ वज्रधारिणीं वीणावादिनीं वेदवासिनीं महासरस्वतीं वन्दे ॥”

- Sri Gautam Dharmapal

Notice

The continuing article "My Life with Anirvan" is not being published in this issue. Its publication will resume from the next issue.

Forthcoming Events

Dolpurnima (Holi) :- 28th February, Sunday.
Ram Navami :- 24th March, Wednesday.
Poila Baisakh (Bengali New Year) :-
15th April, Thursday