

, the 'Grotto Kirtan', Nov 11 1984.
This kirtan took place just after Ambikananda's fiftieth birthday.

Nov 17/18, 1984

Wales kirtan (Gayatri, Sarasvati, Marian)

For this kirtan, held unusually late in the year for a Welsh venue, Ambikananda had asked the Eithin devotees to make a reconstruction of St Bernardette's grotto at Lourdes. This had been put together in realistic fashion in Eithin's barn/studio by Satram and Brahma, professional artists and stage designers. The grotto was installed in a corner of the vast space where they worked. Ambikananda had asked for a play to be performed at the kirtan featuring the apparition of the Virgin Mary to Bernardette Soubirous in 1858. Satram's daughter Durga Mai was to play the Virgin, and Sri Lakshmi St Bernardette.

Also at the request of Ambikananda, a massive wooden cross had been erected inside the barn. As soon as Swamiji arrived, after a difficult journey from the other side of England, he immediately subjected the work to a thorough inspection. It soon became clear that he was in a critical mood as he pointed out deficiencies in the preparations, and proposed corrections. At his direction, the devotees attached a pair of kitchen gloves to the crossbar, one at each end, thus adding a disconcertingly lifelike, almost bizarre, element to the cross.

The devotees assembled in the barn, where the kirtan now began with a song to Ramakrishna from Raja Ram, accompanying himself on his powerful new ZX3 Yamaha synthesizer. Raja Ram was followed by Sita Dev, who sang her memorable version of Ramprasad's poem to the Divine Mother from the GSR:

*'All creation is the sport of my mad mother Kali:
By Her maya the three worlds are bewitched.
Mad is She and mad is Her Husband, mad are her two disciples!
None can describe Her loveliness, Her glories, gestures, moods,
Siva, with the agony of the poison in His throat,
Chants Her name again and again.
The Personal does She oppose to the Impersonal,
Breaking one stone with another;
Though to all else She is agreeable.
Where duties are concerned She will not yield.
Keep your raft, says Ramprasad. Afloat on the sea of life.
Drifting up with the flood-tide, drifting down with the ebb.'*¹

Ambikananda commended Sita Devi's song, but seemed dissatisfied with the music of Raja Ram's synthesizer, saying that what he wanted was 'just acoustic, not too much artificial'. He was even heard to mutter that this kind of music 'rotted the children's brains'. There was a pause, and he then called on Mahayogini, asking her to sing a Shiva bhajan. Soon he was dancing, joined by the devotees, and the mood of the kirtan improved dramatically..

Next came the play set in the grotto at Lourdes where the Virgin appeared to Bernadette Soubirous. It was very well received by Swamiji and devotees.

¹ Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 619

As night fell the devotees moved from the barn to the kirtan room in Gayatri's apartment, which had been beautifully decorated with a big shrine centred on an image of the Divine Mother, flanked with pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi.

Swamiji again called for 'natural music'. 'It is the Goddess Herself who plays,' he told devotees. After further bhajans from Shiva Shakti, Sati was asked to contribute, and sang two of her own songs.

At length mahaprasad was served. A long, almost silent, period of time went by, with Swamiji appearing to be in a strangely withdrawn mood. Occasionally he would speak a little in a very quiet voice, his words barely reaching the ears of the devotees. This interrupted discourse continued for more than an hour, at which point he suddenly rose to his feet and abruptly threw a white cloth over the shrine, covering it completely.

The writer was able to glean the following from Ambikananda's discourse:

'The third eye is the Goddess: the eye of wisdom: the Goddess Sarasvati. But the same eye of wisdom can be fishy as well. Vidya [knowledge], avidya [ignorance], Mahavidya [divine knowledge] - all this is the Goddess Sarasvati... All is part and parcel.

'Sarasvati's vina is knowledge. One bowl² of the vina is the sun, one is the moon. She holds sun and moon to illumine our minds... Without grace it is hard to grasp. Grace is the one thing you need... Babaji, Lahiri, sages, all this, all is nothing but Sarasvati...'

A long silence, then:

'Day and night, let your body be an instrument. When a man becomes nil, an instrument to express the Will, then he becomes a sun flower that illumines... If you keep yourself in darkness, it is your own fault.

'When you speak of love, love is always giving, love is never selfish, love is always receiving the blows, blow after blow, and is always giving. It is the quality of light to shed its brilliance around. You cannot separate light and its brilliance, love and its quality, love and light. We are not receiving light enough, we are not being practical in the way... If you were full of love, full of devotion, your vein would be lucid, you would have a lucid body, lucid mind. The gods are attracted to these, they do not care about your dirty hands or body, or whatever, not in the least, they come and alight in this body of light. Light merges with light. That's why one man who is so bad, so battered, still he is having so much experience.³ He cleans the cave of his mind-body-soul. You must work your karma, in fact karma, hard work is his God. That's where God is hidden.

'A man must have intimate relationship with his Beloved. When you have this intimate relationship you work with signs; you are so close to the Person that millions of little things awaken your understanding. Then words are unnecessary. Stillness, meditation, acquaintanceship with love - man is a baby, and that baby grows and expands with light and love. You understand that? And God is another baby, and that Eternal Baby blesses, touches, certifies, wards off - he does everything good that you can conceive. The Baby and the blanket!

'It can be born in man, it can be born in woman, or in anyone regardless of age, creed, colour, isn't it? It's beyond this. What I am saying is beyond our ways - it's His ways. But for this way

² The vina has two 'bowls' or sounding boards

³ i.e. Ambikananda. He was now just 50, and his health was beginning to deteriorate.

you have to have perfect relationship, you have to have an acquaintanceship, an attitude, to establish, to make Him as your own. Make him as your family and relatives. That's in scripture: God is my relative - *Twameva Mata* – my mother, my father, my real Mother. It's not a bad idea, instead of a God as "God", think, "God has become my mother, God has become my family, God has become my father, God has become my all-in-all." Or as a friend. Look on Krishna as a friend....'

A long pause, then Swamiji spoke again, very quietly:

'Mind is a receiver and a talker, both. He receives God and also he talks with God, silently. Rising above the three lower planes, up, up, up, up, he realizes more than one... Where the mind thinks – there I AM... But talk also is a hindrance. Talk is a break on the speed of realization.

'Music is a finer form,. But you can't keep to all these notes, all these octaves. Music has the possibility and the power to telecommunicate sounds to realms in different lokas. First gross realm, then spirit realm, then finer, until at the end where sabda Herself, where Omkara comes. The Goddess of Vak, of sound, that Sarasvati, beyond mind and speech...In body but superconscious, transcending body, supersensuous. Her vahana⁴ is a swan, symbol of dispassion.

'The Goddess is very severe... All women are part and parcel of the Divine Mother...

...[*Reading from GSR*]: 'Master: "At dusk put aside all duties and pray to God... A Mussulman [*Muslim*] puts aside all activities and says his prayers at the appointed time... [*Devotee*]: Is it good to practise japa? [*Master*]: Yes. One attains God through japa. By repeating the name of God secretly And in solitude one receives divine grace"...

'...When the man⁵ wants to catch up he sends hundred thoughts, ideas, more than his breath. In one breath he sends hundreds of *So-Hams*,⁶ faster than the beat of your heart when you run... What is the secret? The secret is that the man has a fast, dual conscious, transcendental well of light existence, even while he is ordinary looking, existing, eating, sharing. He is young but already stammering, stumbling, shaky, wavy. Watching, observing, witnessing, carrying the luggage patiently. Sitting there with his luggage and your luggage, trying to help you when you are ready; when you have had enough of your *papapapapapa* and *brouhahaha*, he will carry it along, he will put your load in his luggage when you are willing. Where there's a will there's a holy man waiting, and more than one holy man waiting. The Master....'

After another long silence Ambikananda asked Sri Lakshmi to read from the GSR. She read:

'...The Master was humming some of the songs he had heard that evening during the recital of the *Chandi*. He sang softly:

"Who is there that can understand what Mother Kali is?

Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her..."

Sri Ramakrishna sat up. With intense fervour he began to sing about the Divine Mother:

"All creation is the sport of my mad Mother Kali;

By her maya are the three worlds bewitched.

Mad is She, mad is Her Husband, mad are Her two disciples!

None can describe Her loveliness, Her glories, gestures, moods;

Siva, with the agony of the poison in His throat,

⁴ Vehicle

⁵ i.e. himself

⁶ The 'ajapa' or breathing mantra

Chants Her name again and again... ”

The Master was quite overwhelmed with the song. He said that songs like these denoted a state of divine inebriation...’

After Sri Lakshmi had finished reading there was another very long silence.

At last Swamiji said: ‘Where your mind is, that is where you are. Don’t ever be a hypocrite. God loves truthfulness. Truth is the austerity of this age, our Guru Dev has said. Though truth hurts sometimes.’

*Then Swamiji stood up and walking over to the shrine covered it with a cloth. Next he performed a ceremony with camphor, which ‘burns and leaves no trace’.*⁷

The writer failed to record what Ambikananda said after this point, until the time came for the kirtan to end.

‘This kirtan is supposed to be for children,’ he said, ‘For Bala Shiva [*son of Sati and Tryambaka*], for all children – all these divine children are celebrating today... End of the year anyhow. Next kirtan will be perhaps March or February...’

The kirtan drew to a close on this strange note.

Next day Swamiji expanded his discourse:

‘..... [Last night] the Master sat in front, and there was the Mother also. Both were there. Shrine dematerialized. The living god was present. “They want inspiration?” So Ramakrishna said’ “All right, roll the sleeves up, get in your meditation form. Invoke.” Sarada Devi is in the palm of my hand. And *bang bang*, clap the hands – negative, positive, both work – clap together to make one sound. So two hands are the pair of the one form. When She claps it is “Hallo, come in!”

‘So get cracking, get the fingers styled up and down, sometimes in the 7th plane, sometimes in the very lowest plane – in the 14th plane. The presiding circumambulating deity of the 14 planes is Gayatri. The Gayatri friend, the schoolmate. Everyone has the family Gayatri. You have to have acquaintance.

It’s no good just reading the scriptures. Reading without knowing is climbing hills. But GSR gives you full, it’s shoreless, you can never empty it. It’s all gods in one. The GSR is the effect of God. If you want to know anything it is the effect. But it’s good to have the Author. The book is the book, but there is no comparison between the Book and the Author. The Book comes from the Author, but the Author is the releaser, there is much more in the Author. The Book is limited in one way... Sri Ramakrishna discovered that “experience has gone beyond the Vedas,” and the Vedas are the Breath of God. So he has gone beyond the Breath – Breath has stopped in *kumbhaka*.⁸

⁷ He quoted Sathya Sai Baba.

⁸ Retention of breath

‘Scripture cannot describe God. So scripture is the light of a beginner, a torch for schooling. When Lord Krishna came⁹ he said, “Don’t you go to the School of the Cow any more? Then the Master laughed and we laughed. If you take the Sankhya, jnana, Six Philosophies and all this, it rinses you, whacks your mind up and down, and now Lord Krishna has come and says, “How about the School of the Cow?” And Sri Ramakrishna chuckled and made such a laugh about it.

‘It is good to know God intimately. God may be only a child person, not what you’re expecting, something completely different.¹⁰ It is you [*points*], it is you, it is *your* form. It is *this* lady, it is *that* lady, it is *this* boy, it is the lot of you. It is Him become you. It is all this bric-a-brac. The netherworld even is Himself. Vishnu went there Himself, got entangled in the Nagas’ plane.

‘Sri Ramakrishna said, “Scripture shows you the way. When you know the way you close the scripture.” God is there, now why take God to banana? One Baba in your library is called Awkward Baba! You have to have intimate relationship. This breaks barriers, breaks monotony, brings harmony, brings perfection. You must be perfect in your words. in your steps, in your ways, in your dealings, in your love. You must have perfect love. Love cannot swindle. Love is God, and God is everperfect. God loves everyone, but does everyone respond to that love? You speak of *jnana* knowledge; love can receive *jnana*, but the *bhakta*’s devotion may challenge the *jnani*’s faith – to him it’s a sacrilege. *Bhakti* itself is *jnana*, is light. Love is compassion, compassion is Mother. And Mother is love beyond Father. Father is a *jnani* like, strict, disciplined. But Mother doesn’t calculate. Holy Mother said to Sri Ramakrishna, “Listen, I don’t know how many seers of milk are in your cup, you are here to drink your cup, just drink it!”¹¹

‘When the Mother has chosen the loved one, it is the Mother who has become the daughter, it is the Mother who has become the devotee, it is Mother and Father, blended in physical union, that is a microbe of spermatozoon, a microbe of your vital force. That union is a flicker, a spark of the fire. That has become you, you, unified, unisex dress. Unified with the Mother, the drop goes back to the ocean, gets lost. So there must be some oars, some *rames*. Some *Dame* to take you across, the Mother is empress helmsman. . It’s not just a gesture to keep company, not just “Save me, save me.” The room yesterday was like a ship, a deck.

‘Meditation is the very entry. If you don’t meditate you are not entering the door. What is meditation without concentration? And what is concentration without contemplation and detachment? What is this contemplation and concentration without a spark? If you don’t do this, how will you have a flint, an iota of an idea of what we are saying? And what is all this unless the heart is warm? The Mother’s heart is very warm for the child at any time – in pleasure, in pain, in feeding, in sleeping. She goes over without disturbing. So sleep is another form of trance. Sleep and trance are the same [except] one is experiencing, the other is asleep in ignorance.

‘All the paths are slippery in sleeping. It’s the same bed, the same house – but dream and visitation are different. Certain dreams have not materialized, but they are still coming. The dreamer’s dreams have not reached the sleeper – the second dreamer. When you are ready to

⁹ Presumably in vision to Ambikananda

¹⁰ 16 feb 1985

‘... Jesus is not the son of Mary, he is God, God born through the Word. But I tell you, nor is Mary Mary. If Jesus is not the son of God but is God, I tell you Mary is not Mary. Mary is an incarnation of OM! Everything comes from OM, and as a Swami [Shivananda] has said [singing], “Om Jesus, Om Buddha, Om Virgin Mary.” ...

¹¹ Sarada Devi used to get Sri Ramakrishna to drink more milk than he wanted by little tricks.

receive the dream you will start dreaming. And the dream is coming, it's waiting for the right time. It was a thought, you pick the wave. I was not meditating but all of a sudden there was a flashing. I was not thinking – maybe of garaging or car, mind was very far. Now, what a shame! Flash came! A flash more powerful than the meditation flash. If I had been meditating I would have said “of course” - but I was not meditating.

‘You don’t know when He is coming, and that put me to shame. While I was floundering, all of a sudden this came. And it was very important. We keep such a company. And the company of God is so wonderful, so genuine, it straightens a man’s back, straightens a man’s ways of awkwardness, straightens the spine – that’s why you sit erect [in meditation] – it straightens everything - breath, life, sight. Meditation, concentration, experience. Constant company. Meditation becomes a shrine, but here the meditator, meditation, and the object of meditation blend. Here there is a bit of the wish-fulfilling tree of meditation.

‘It’s so vital, this temporal crossing here. A few lives. That’s why perhaps the real birthday starts at 50.¹² So when you are 50 you’re one year old...As soon as you are over 50 that’s it, you are a child of God completely. Now positive. God needs 12, 20, 25 years of continuous practice. [Then] He has had enough of your call. [He says,] “Now I am going myself.” He Himself is calling in you. When you call and call –*He* calls. And when He calls it’s completely different. You have to be still, receiving, absorbing. One visit of God – how many aspects it covers of sadhana!

‘Life has to change, ways have to change. I am celebrating my junior jubilee in God, jai ho! Reborn in God. Otherwise what to celebrate? To rejuvenate in God, to make your vow - another year to work, another year to pension. So if possible our dark ways have to go. But dark ways are like an unremoveable stain, a black dab on our white soul. This has to be removed by some stainless agent – Niranjana.¹³ So if a man has great faith and keeps to the same word, the one word becomes his life. He has changed. God is at hand. Though in the mist, in the cold, in the heat, in trouble, in war – He is there. Krishna Himself is guiding the war. Quite contradicting to what you have heard: “From epoch to epoch I incarnate Myself and change My law...”

‘There was a manifestation of Christ last night. The Christ is the presiding deity of the Word, which is *Vak*, so the Christ is not different from Goddess Sarasvati, presiding deity of *Vak*. So this Christ, then Virgin, then Ramakrishna. It’s full. ...Last Friday heaven celebrated. Insisted on by the Goddess Sarasvati Herself. All this is a rough duplicate, a putting together of what is already done.

‘Believe me, there is a higher satsang. You are body-confined here, all that you know is here, and home. But Ramakrishna was universal, he realized different religions. So we, after this, in the same place, with the same people, have got more meetings, more satsangs. Your monk¹⁴ has more satsangs with genuine seekers, he interrogates more devotees. Your spirit evolves, which means you are not new, you are only what you have been.... Now you are confined here which is again another maya – not “I am only this, I have this, I have my family.” No, no. Thou [*points*] art verily Sarasvati, verily Sati, verily SadaSiva.¹⁵ Thou art really that to come. No one is omitted.

¹² Ambikananda would reach his fiftieth birthday on November 2, two weeks before.

¹³ Sanskrit ‘stainless’

¹⁴i.e. Ambikananda

¹⁵ Spiritual names of devotees at the kirtan

Now you are confined, you are like a bird caught in a cage. That's all. You don't have gathering of universal realized truth.

'All waters go to ocean. All rivers go to the sea. All are going there. Therefore it's a beauty when all gather. The English monk giving the Hindu kirtan, These are real genuine monks, you can't see them, maybe they don't exist now in earthplane... That was one gathering, genuine. And there were three or four... There was much more, much more. But we were all there. Yet we are confined here, our sight is blurred. When it's foggy you don't see very far, you have to have foglamps, go steady and slowly. But we have come to marry you, take you back to the Father-in-law. I'm asking your hand. ...This business is union. But how to explain this child union of supersensuous? It may look worldly to the worldly-minded. But a philosopher sees it in a philosophical way, in a supersensuous way!

'According to yourself it will manifest. What you eat, that will you belch. But things are in a ripening state. It's very funny, the closing down of the world and the ripening at the same time. Darkness, enlightenment and light, and this going out. He is reinforcing, not to destroy your house but to fortify, to sanctify, to purify, to holify it.

'God dwells in your very wall. He dwells in the wall of divinity. When God is realized, material side also will come. He supplies, He sees to the needs of the people He has sent. He knows them all. He sends one to make known, He uses one to receive, and clear, and make everyone ready before it's too late. Otherwise everyone will be scattered. I pray not. It will be very difficult to see us hereafter, even when we are not confined in body. As I am telling you, we are not confined here.

'You have satsang; you come here but you also have satsang. How do you know that others do not have greater meeting, greater work? This is one work in one world. Do you know how many worlds there are, how many callers there are for God? You are lucky that the Master¹⁶ comes from room to room, from barn to kitchen, to shed tears. He said last night, "Put shrine aside. Cover shrine. Now I am here. Talk to me. What do you want?" You wanted inspiration last night, when we moved to Gayatri's shrine [from the barn]. All right, we complied. If you are interested God is much more interested. God can be heard, personally, like when someone has a telephone, person to person. But you can have a means, an amplifier, that many can hear it also. That's how He entered into the devotees.

'There are greater worlds, greater gatherings. You have to be ready for these. If you're not ready you will not get entry. I tell you, Goddess Sarasvati stands where I have been. "Where duty is concerned She will not yield."... Holy men know about who is true and who is not true. This Goddess Sarasvati and her sister are present in human form. And they also assist. They gather. If great rishis come, don't you go and see them? We ourselves tell you, 'Listen, a great person is coming, go and see him.'

'This is like a boat. The ocean is full of sharks, alligators, but there are many ways. Many ways, but they are slippery, full of thorns, of ramparts. Where we reach the height I'm talking about, it's cliffed. If you fall down from the spiritual path, if you get your spine crooked, your kundalini is difficult to raise. But those who are not attached to the physical, they don't abide by body ways, posture, they abide by existence, which is *Sat*. *Sat* is no-pain Existence. "I exist everywhere. Pain is in me but I am not in pain. I am beyond pain and pleasure. It is my great

¹⁶ Sri Ramakrishna

pleasure to come and take pains to inform. I take the pain to be here.” The lord comes, over and over.

‘The only great moment of the kirtan perhaps was the song to Mother Kali, “*Mad is She, mad is Her Husband*” – Ramakrishna loved these things. And then Sri Lakshmi. opened the GSR at: ‘All creation is the sport of my mad mother Kali...’¹⁷ It was not arranged like that... She sat there like a little beacon of light.

‘When I come I expect to hear a lot of perfection. Where’s your lot of harmony? The Lord came twice. Kirtan was finished and He came back and covered the shrine, and was sitting there like a human being, , and, “Now,” he said, “Talk. We are here.” First Mahapurushji¹⁸ came, The messenger to make clear the room. Then Ramakrishna, then the Divine Mother, not holy Mother but Kali Mai ... Now this one [he points to Holy Mother’s picture on the shrine] is shedding tears and looking at the devotees. You see, God is invisible, and this is happening, now, this shedding of tears is love. Love manifests in God. God hears. This is satsang. Tears shed while listening cleanses the soul. And God is shedding tears, listening and cooking [?] it there.

‘So it’s very important what we do and say. And it’s more important onward, because over 50 we can’t beat about the bush. Yes for yes, straightforward. Truth hurts but it has to be spoken, has to be straightforward. Straightforwardness is a great key to the doorway.’

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¹⁷ First line of song just alluded to.

¹⁸ Sri Ramakrishna’s disciple Swami Shivananda