

An embodiment of love

*Sachhidananda
Mohanty*

**PRATIJNA DEVI,
THE SPOUSE OF
AUTHOR MANOJ
DAS, PASSED
AWAY AT SRI
AUROBINDO
ASHRAM
OCTOBER 3. A
'SON' OF DEVI
RECOUNTS HIS
EXPERIENCE OF
HER ANGELIC
LOVE**

Known universally as Apa, Pratijna Devi, the spouse of the award-winning litterateur and professor Manoj Das, was truly angelic and out of the world with matchless love and generosity showered upon those who came in contact with her.

It was the good fortune of boarders such as myself to have been brought up under the care of Pratijna Apa and Manoj Das in the "Home of Progress", known as 'Orissa Boarding' since 1966. The dining and the reading rooms were on the ground floor. The children lived on the first and the second floors.

We had food, studies and games on the ground floor. The House was self-contained. We played pranks and completely forgot the backgrounds we came from. I received the first prize in cleanliness from Apa.

Her room on the first floor was Open House. We entered and exited merrily at our own sweet will oblivious of her need for sleep and rest. She never complained.

Manoj babu had his study-cum-bed room on the second floor, where the older boys lived. Every night, inside the mosquito curtains, we waited for the approaching footfall



of Manoj babu. He would make sure all of us were asleep. During the daytime, when he did not step out for work, he was lost in the world of his books and writing. It is doubtful if our parents had taken such care of us at bedtime.

At Orissa Boarding, we forgot our parents, such was the divine ambiance.

Most of us never visited their parents in Odisha during vacations. It was also the Mother [Sri Ma's] wish that children should not be influenced by outside forces during their study at Ashram School. Apa instilled in us the need to follow the

Mother strictly. We had the Darshan of the Mother on the anniversary of the 'Home of progress'.

At 'Home of Progress', we learned the value of freedom and discipline; imbibed the best of Odia culture with the cosmopolitanism of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.

Apa nurtured our body and soul; she kept in close touch with our parents. She treated all with a deep sense of equality and affection, and took interest beyond our stay at Pondicherry.

She would unfailingly call us on our birthdays and ask: "Hope you are

at Pondicherry. You must come home for dinner. I will wait for you. What time are you coming?" We remained her children even in our fifties.

Apa was aristocratic by temperament, but like her own mother Ratnamali Jema of Kujang in Jagatsinghpur district, a noted Gandhian and freedom-fighter, known to all of us as 'Mama', Pratijna Devi was absolutely down to earth although she came from a princely background.

On the terrace of Orissa Boarding, on holidays, we had storytelling sessions. Apa would read out words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and immortal parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and Swami Vivekananda. She instilled in us the importance of a moral and spiritual life, the value of courage of conviction and the need to be frank, upright and honourable. She was never given to any claptrap; she discarded all forms of pretentious behaviour.

We offer our salutations to Apa. We shall always cherish her memories till the end of our life.

*The author is the
Vice-Chancellor of Central
University, Koraput.*