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Divine Names of Arunachala

20. ॐ ज्ञानसंबन्धनाथाय नमः

om jñānasambandhanāthāya namaḥ

Prostration to the Lord who blessed the saint Jnanasambandha.

Once, some one thousand five hundred years ago, in the Tamil country when Jainism and Buddhism had the upper hand, a child-saint was born of Brahmin parents anxious to see the Saivite faith restored to their land. One day, while his father was immersed in the Temple tank, alone, he cried out in fear and saw a vision of Siva on His mount with Parvati who, commanded by the Lord, gave the child a golden cup of milk from her breasts mixed with Divine Wisdom. From the tender age of three, then, ecstatic poetry spontaneously sprang from his heart, and he was called Jnana Sambandha, the one who had contact with Divine Knowledge. Throughout his lifetime, Sambandha visited hundreds of shrines in Tamil country and infused them with new life, not based on philosophical tenets but on Divine Love, a path for every man.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana, who first read about Sambandha in the *Periya Purāṇam* shortly before His death experience in Madurai, lovingly told stories about the child-saint to His devotees. Once, while Sambandha was worshipping the Lord in the Arayaninallur Temple at Tirukoilur, Siva appeared to him first as a blazing light (as He did to Bhagavan much later), then as an old Brahmin. To Sambandha's surprise, the old man informed him that Arunachala was not far from Tirukoilur, agreed to take him there, then disappeared. Overwhelmed with joy, Sambandha worshipped Arunachaleshwara, singing a hymn that begins with the words, "You are a dense mass of *jñāna*, capable of removing the 'I-am-the-body' idea from Your devotees!"¹ After recounting stories to Suri Nagamma, "Bhagavan assumed silence, with his heart filled with devotion and with his voice trembling with emotion".²

— BKC

¹ Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§529.

² Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 30 January, 1947.

Self-Reliance

With the death of the ashram president, V. Sundaram Ramanan, and the appointment of his son, Venkat S. Ramanan as the new president; with the closing of the ashram gates for the first and only time in 100 years, due to the coronavirus, a new chapter in ashram history has begun. The management had maintained the ashram in such a way that devotees could freely come and receive *darśan* at Bhagavan's Samadhi for some 15 hours a day. Not anymore. We as devotees are now left to rely on our own inner resources. There is nothing to be done but to wait patiently until the covid-19 is brought under control and people can once more move freely.

What the covid-19 virus has done is make us acutely aware of the evanescent quality of our lives and has brought to our attention that there is no permanent security socially, mentally or financially. We are all at the mercy of an invisible enemy whose touch can be fatal. The many who survive the attack do not necessarily return to their previous normal health. For some there is long-lasting internal damage. For those of us who are lucky enough not to be infected there is still the possible danger and the nuisance of recalibrating our lives to stay safe.

What we are learning through this current epidemic is the lesson of restraint. We are learning to be much more aware of our behaviour

and how there could be immediate repercussions if we recklessly fail to follow guidelines because “it won’t happen to me” or “if I get it, I get it, so what, as I have a good chance of recovery.”

Every moment of our lives we are faced with choices. Do we turn right or left; do we choose to react calmly or angrily; the possibilities are endless.

When we make a decision to follow the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi we are making a decision to deny ourselves certain experiences so that our time and energy are focused on that which we decide is more important. We all have realised that to engage unrestrictedly in personal desires is to spread ourselves in a hundred directions that ultimately result in no sense of permanent satisfaction. Quite the opposite, we become fragmented and lose our sense of purpose and balance.

Once we decide to focus our attention on one target all else in our lives slowly adjusts itself around this effort. But it is never easy. Self-restraint is a fiery anvil. For what we are doing is going against the grain of society and the modern drive to consume more and more. To expand in every way, to accumulate at all costs. People bemoan that they have no time anymore but quite often when they do have time, they do not know what to do with it. They waste it on trivialities.

With the covid19 challenge we are faced with a dilemma. What is this freedom to-do-as-we-choose within the accepted limits of society? When we consider it, our so-called freedom is fairly limited. Not just physically but also emotionally and mentally. Few of us are geniuses however much we may wish it; few of us have the limitless opportunities of fantasy fulfilment. We mostly are rather small, ordinary people. But we do enjoy one significant advantage: we are alive. The joy of being alive is generally taken for granted except for those rare moments when say, we survive a severe illness and wake up feeling healthy. The sun shines and minor irritations are seen for what they are — irrelevant in the greater scheme of things.

Imagine that sense of gratitude, of feeling alive. It doesn’t matter how much money a person has or how powerful they are in the social or political world, all of it counts for little if one does not have a healthy mind and body. Contentment is such a rare quality that it seems to

be a luxury. Some months ago a man aged 55 in the USA committed suicide by jumping from the 27th floor of the high-rise building in which he lived. As a young man his grandfather bequeathed him at least six hundred million dollars. He became a Hollywood producer and had some success. He donated generously to the Democratic Party and various charities. His personal life was complicated and dissipated. We can quickly draw inferences from this melodramatic tale: too much of anything is not good for us. Deluded, we don't feel it relevant to the scale of our own lives until we experience too that bitter taste of excess say, in consuming something as simple as too much sugar. The consequences of excess can be calamitous. It is all a matter of degree not of kind and of training in restraint and a clear, strong resolve. Who knows, we may be blessed in ways of which we are not conscious, by not being wealthy!

Years ago I lived in Palakoṭhu and would observe Annamalai Swami whose ashram was there. He led a restricted, meagre existence at his ashram and frequently in the evening he would go for walks near Arunachala. Every so often we would pass each other without a word said. It never occurred to me that he was discontented; on the contrary, he demonstrated a one-pointed completeness that never seemed to vary in its intensity. He was not jealous of the good fortune of others, he was not envious, not greedy, not lustful, not angry, and not proud and self-satisfied nor was he lazy. Can we aspire to that simplicity and be nobody special? To be grateful for what we have?

Returning to the question of money, it is not to say money is evil. It is not so much how much we have as what we do with it, for without money we would not have the time say, to come to Sri Ramanasramam, nor have the privilege of not being anxious as to where our next meal would come from. We use the resources given to us wisely. Everything in moderation. The middle way as the Buddha teaches.

What covid-19 is teaching us is moderation and restraint. There is an odd notion that the pandemic interferes with people's freedom to do what they like. And that includes aberrant behaviour that could endanger the health of others. It is a perverse logic grounded in selfishness and instant gratification. For example just because a face mask may be uncomfortable doesn't mean you have the right not to

wear one. What affects others affects us as well. Those lines from the English poet John Donne about death have never rung truer:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.

This equally applies to the living.

One of the baffling incidents during the pandemic that shows obstinate, short-sighted behaviour was the gathering of motorbikers in a town in South Dakota estimated at over 100,000 without virus mask-protection nor other important strategies such as washing hands and keeping social distance. This was a deliberate provocative act endangering themselves and others based on the delusion that they were invulnerable. The danger inherent in the act generates an excitement so intense that they feel passionately alive, daring and courageous, and besides that, they think: who is someone else to tell us what to do? This is dangerous, stupid, shortsighted pride and nothing good can come of it. We should not be so smug as to think it only happens elsewhere. This attitude is happening the world over in various expressions of conduct. We all are affected by each other's behaviour however close, however far.

Bhagavan asks us to be self-reliant as much as possible. If we can do something we should do it ourselves and not expect others to do it for us. In this time of covid 19 more and more we are obliged to do things we had previously delegated to others. The covid 19 is not the end of the current crisis. It is rather a precursor of events to come if we do not put our house in order. Though the origins of covid 19 are still in dispute it seems that a major contributing factor is the destruction of grasslands in China and the encroachment of wild animals such as bats into human spaces. The population explosion, the increasing financial inequality between the haves and the have-nots, the depletion of the ocean fish stocks, the destruction of forests, and the increasingly erratic weather patterns are telling us that there is an imbalance in the earth's ecosystem. We continue to ignore this rising threat at our peril.

People can say there is nothing I can do. Yes, there is something you can do: be responsible for your own space, respect the space of others and do not impose on them. ▲

Fear of Death

V.S. ANANTHANARAYANAN

In a recent video message, a well-known spiritual speaker pointed out that the current fear about the rapid spread of the vicious coronavirus has its root in the fear of death prevailing in our minds ever since our birth. All the efforts in our lives are focused on maintaining our body and saving it from inevitable destruction. As we get older, or as we face life-threatening situations, this fear grips our minds more than ever. In this context, it is spiritually beneficial to recall Bhagavan Ramana's compassionate advice to us in *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, where he tells us how those who thought deeply about the root of the fear of death are freed from death for ever by following the path of total surrender to the immortal Supreme Power, Maheśa. Such a surrender roots out the ignorance born out of ego¹ (*ahaṅkāra*) and results in the freedom from the cycle of birth and death for ever. Bhagavan's advice is contained in the second of the two invocatory (*maṅgala*) poems of

¹ The term ego or *ahaṅkāra*, is used here to denote the 'I'-thought and the term 'mind' is used here to indicate the collection of thoughts that originate from the 'I'-thought; the mind by nature is restless. The source of ego is the True 'I' or the Self: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§106.

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Uḷḷadu Nārpadu. An English translation of the original Tamil verse is given below:

“Those who know intense fear of death seek refuge only at the feet of the Lord Who has neither death nor birth. Dead to themselves and their possessions, can the thought of death occur to them again? Deathless are they. (*The Mountain Path*, October 1964.)”

This verse starts with the Sanskrit phrase *marāṇa bhayam* which means the fear (*bhayam*) of death (*marāṇa*). We will, in this short note, examine how the means of overcoming death can be found by an examination of the concept of time, denoted by the word *kāla* in Sanskrit. The same word is also used to denote Yama, the God of Death. Lord Siva, who saved the young devotee Markandeya from the grip of Yama, is called *kālakāla*, the destroyer of time. Siva has neither death (*marāṇa*) nor birth (*bhava*) and is referred to in Bhagavan’s poem as *marāṇa bhavam illā Maheśan*. He thus shows us how those who completely identify themselves with Siva, the *Maheśa*, would become deathless by crossing the boundaries of time.

Time always results in change. Thus, the deathless state is a changeless state. The universe and its contents come into existence and operate only when a change from one state to another occurs. *This change, caused by time, is perceived by our mind only when it moves from one thought to the next.* As Bhagavan Ramana points out, the sequential procession of thoughts is what constitutes the mind. These thoughts connect us with the outside world and allow us to experience the passage of time and the resulting changes. This experience constitutes our worldly life, *samsāra*. When the mind becomes devoid of thoughts, time, change and association with the world, all cease to exist. As a result, the mind gets resolved into ego, the origin from where the very first thought (termed as the I-thought) arises. Without the support of additional thoughts, this single thought is unstable by itself and the ego returns to its original state (*adhiṣṭānam* or root cause) of the everlasting Self, akin to a wave merging back into the ocean. In our daily routine, we experience the thought-free, time-independent state in the deep sleep state (*susupti*) but only for a limited duration and that too without our being conscious of our being in that state. In *susupti*, one experiences the bliss of being devoid of thoughts. As pointed out earlier, cessation of thoughts amounts to crossing the barrier of time. Thus, one remains in the deathless, *susupti*

state without, however, being conscious of it. This is in contrast to the state of a *jñāni* who remains in the immortal state with full Awareness of the Self. The *jñāni* may be regarded to be in a perennial state of ‘sleepless sleep’.² Prior experiences (*vāsanā*-s) force us back from the *susupti* state to the waking state and thoughts reappear in the mind, shackling us with the framework of limited time; the physical world and its names and forms reappear again and we are drawn back into *saṁsāra*. Even during the waking state, when the mind is fully absorbed in any act such as listening to a soul-stirring music or getting totally absorbed in work, the experience of time and space ceases, as happens in the *susupti* state.

Time, as we experience it, requires the two boundaries of past and present; space (which is intimately linked with time) is also experienced only when confined between two boundaries. The illusionary character of the boundaries will become obvious when one tries to define the ‘present’ time or the narrowest space. In order to arrive at it, one has to make the boundaries infinitely closer which would result in the disappearance of time and space from our sensory experience. That sense of time is mere imagination has been pointed out by Bhagavan Ramana: “*Even the present is mere imagination, for the sense of time is purely mental. Space is similarly mental. Therefore birth and rebirth, which take place in time and space, cannot be other than imagination.*”³ The time-and-space-bound Universe comes into existence when the ever-present and all-pervading Brahman (which resides in all as the Self) appears fragmented into forms by the action of the illusory power, *Māyā* which is inherent in Brahman as Unmanifested Energy. Our mind cannot exist without holding on to these time-and-space-bound forms, as pointed out by Bhagavan in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*.

In the two invocatory (*maṅgala*) verses of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, Bhagavan Ramana shows us that the ego can be made to return to the timeless and hence deathless state either by Self-Inquiry into the origin of thought, or by taking refuge in the ever-pervading and ever-present *Īśvara*. In both cases, the mind becomes devoid of thoughts liberating itself from the illusion of our being limited by time and

² Op.Cit., Talk§13.

³ *The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, ed. by D. Godman (Penguin Books), p. 189.

merging into the Self, the state of Absolute Existence. It is interesting to note that both the Sanskrit word, *satyam* and the Tamil word, *uṇmai* which are used to denote truth mean ‘that which exists’; *sat+yam* and *uḷḷa taṇmai*. In the larger context, both point to the time-and-space-independent Absolute Existence and are attributes of the Self, Brahman. Bhagavan’s repeated use of the word *uḷḷadu* in the first verse should be understood as pointing to the timeless, spaceless Existence.

While commenting on Bhagavan’s second *maṅgala* verse of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* Sri Sadhu Om Swamigal (who has made an incisive analysis of Bhagavan Ramana’s teachings) points out that, besides Bhagavan Ramana, there have been others like Nachiketa, Markandeya, King Parikshit and Buddha who had conquered death either through Self-inquiry or through Surrender to the Supreme. The earliest among them are Nachiketa and Markandeya who, like Bhagavan Ramana, had face-to-face encounter with Death in their childhood. Nachiketa, who is the main character in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*,⁴ obtained Self-Realization through his penetrating questions to Yama about the nature of death and the means of overcoming it. Yama, acting as his guru, taught him how to obtain the knowledge of the timeless brahman. Nachiketa is a good example of a seeker who follows the path of Self-inquiry, prescribed by Bhagavan Ramana in the first *maṅgala* verse of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*. On the other hand, Markandeya, (whose story is described in *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*),⁵ obtained deathlessness through total surrender to the birthless and deathless Lord Siva (*Maheśa*). Similarly, King Parikshit, when faced with imminent death by a snakebite (as a result of a curse from a brahmin), was also shown the path of Surrender to Lord Vishnu by his guru, Sukhabrahmam. Parikshit’s story is elaborated in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.⁶ In more recent times, Prince Siddhartha, like Bhagavan, took to the path of inquiry into the origin of death and reached the deathless state of *nirvāṇa*. In all these cases, situations that led the individuals concerned to face death, it led them

⁴ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*: <http://www.vedarahasya.net/katha-1.htm>

⁵ *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇam*: <http://kamakoti.org/kamakoti/details/markandeya%20purana%20home.html>; Markandeya had such an absolute faith in Lord Siva that he could declare ‘When I have surrendered to Lord Siva, what can Yama do to me?’ (in *Candraśekhara Aṣṭakam*).

⁶ *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*: <http://srimadbhagavatam.org/>

to understand the origin of death and the path to overcome it and to attain immortality or establishment in the Self. In recent times, Eckhart Tolle⁷ describes the dreadful feeling of extreme depression that led him to experience the permanence of Time in the form of the present and realise the source of thoughts in the mind.

To sum up, death is caused by the passage of time. Time, in turn, has its origin in the succession of thoughts in the mind. Thoughts have their root in ego, the limited self. Cessation of thoughts occurs when the ego returns to its origin, the Self. The paths of Self-enquiry and Total Surrender, advised by Bhagavan in the first and second *maṅgala* verses of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, will make us experience the time-independent Absolute Existence. ▲

⁷ Tolle, Eckhart, *The Power of Now*. Yogi Impressions, 2001.

Under The Ilupai Tree

Geetha Ravichandran

It's only when silence
locks out noise –
that the red filament rises,
to weave a pattern
out of fragments of thought
and shards of feeling.

Then, you sat us down
– under the gnarled tree
and spoke of giving freely,
and of the old master
who sprinkled a sacred stillness,
in the crowded marketplace.

From the canopy of green light,
rises a quiet shade
and in its expanding circle,
all fevers are fanned away.



பிரதோஷநாயகன்
Pradosha Nayagan

சுவாமிநாதர்
Sivam Nathar

சுவ சுவ
Suv Suv

சுவ சுவ
Suv Suv

Tiruppuṅṅir Nandi off-centre

Nandan, the 'Morrow Goer'

Reinvented by
Gopalakrishna Bharati

P. RAMASAMY

Ayye, adi sulabham! (Lo, so easy it is!)
– *Self-Knowledge*, Bhagavan

Ayye, metta Kaḍinam! (Lord, so difficult it is!)
– *Nandanar Charitra Kīrttanai*, Gopalakrishna Bharati

Bhagavan and the Bharatis

B*Self-Knowledge*, by Bhagavan, is a short hymn on how to realise the Self. Beginning “*ayye adi sulabham, āṇma viddai!*” (Lo, very easy is Self-Knowledge!), this hymn on the Self is as delightful as it is instructive, as mellifluous as it is sublime. Chanted at Bhagavan’s shrine every Wednesday evening during Tamil *parayana* (group chant), we have this invaluable gift today thanks to Sri Muruganar

Dr. P. Ramasamy is serving the ashram since his retirement in 2011 as a professor of English. He had the good fortune of being introduced to the ashram by his father in the mid 1950s. His father had visited and conversed with Sri Bhagavan. Four generations of his family are devotees of Bhagavan.

who extracted the poem, as it were, from Bhagavan. Such was his devotional fervour in obtaining the best of Bhagavan's poesy. Bhagavan never really cared to publish nor propagate. Every one of his literary gems came at the request of devotees whose ardent wish he could not refuse. In particular, Muruganar this time wanted a literary imitation of a very popular lyric starting "ayye, metta kaḍiṇam (Lord! So difficult it is). The author of this lyric was Gopalakrishna Bharati and it is a part of his *Nandanar Charitra Kīrttaṇai*, a book-length musical discourse belonging to the Hari Katha genre of South Indian languages. This musical discourse is performed on a dais by a single narrator-singer. Bharati's script was also made into a film and released in 1942, making the above lyric a hit.

The context of the original lyric is as follows: Nandan, an Untouchable by caste, happens to be an ardent bhakta of Śiva, Lord Nataraja in particular. Living in Adhanur village, some 25 kilometres from Chidambaram, and obsessed by a pious passion, he despairs that his yearning is just a dream. It can never be realised because Untouchables were not allowed entry into temples. A farm hand, Nandan voices his anguish to his landlord-master through a lyric that "indeed it is very tough" for him to gain entry into the Chidambaram temple to enjoy *darśan* of the Dancing Lord.

Muruganar wanted a song from Bhagavan in an identical tune, but with the drift of its refrain reversed, "Lo, it's easy. Self-Knowledge is easy indeed." Composing the three opening lines of refrain plus prelude on a piece of paper, Muruganar submitted it to Bhagavan. Ever compassionate, Bhagavan did oblige him by finishing it with a brilliant piece of philosophic lyric, and exactly conforming to the musical metre of its original. And thus we have the Song of *Self-Knowledge*.

There were three Bharatis who studied the galaxy of Tamil Nadu's illustrious sons. Subramania Bharati, the poet-nationalist's fame is far flung and he needs no introduction. There is Suddananda Bharati, author of *Ramana Vijayam* the first biography of Bhagavan in Tamil, in addition to his enormous literary output and other accomplishments as a philosopher and yogi. These two had had *darśan* of Bhagavan. The third one Gopalakrishna Bharati (b.1816, date of demise not known) is the subject of the present article. One common strand of all three is their renown as literary composers.

Borrowing a Plot

The bard of Avon, Shakespeare, famously borrowed all his plots. And he threw the Three Unities of Drama to the winds, sacrosanct rules of classical theatre norms. His great tragedies were peppered with subplots abounding in vulgarisms, double entendre, and outright obscenities, to relieve the oppressively agonizing tragic moments of the main plot. Had he not taken these liberties, he would have been either forgotten, or relegated to the literary backyard into the annals of dusty history books. In the Indian tradition, the best example is the various regional re-creations of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whose authors brilliantly deviated from the original Valmiki plot to create masterpieces of their own flavour.

There was such a creative author in the heart of the Tamil country, in the town of Mayuram in Thanjavur region. His name was Gopalakrishna Bharati, a gifted poet and musical composer, a wordsmith of talent and originality. He took the barely skeletal but all too well-known legend of Nandanar, one among the sixty three Saivite saints glorified in the *Periya Purāṇam*. Even as Shakespeare did, he worked upon a sparse outline, and created a full length musical discourse. Bharati transformed Sekkizhar's sketchy 37-stanza tale into a non-elitist, 120-page musical discourse.

Sekkizhar's Storyline

Nandan, an Untouchable, makes his living by tanning cattle hides and making membranes and leather straps for percussion instruments, processing cattle gut for stringed instruments and extracting *gorojanam* (yellow, sticky fluid obtained from a dead cow's intestine, a traditional medicine item, used in *pūjā*-s as well.) His life's ambition is to have *darśan* of Chidambaram Nataraja. His is a profession that belongs to the Untouchables, who all live in the *cēri* (rural ghettos outside the bounds of every village proper, and earmarked as such). Realising the futility of his ambition, yet not losing hope, he keeps declaring every day, "I'll make it to Thillai tomorrow!" His daily repetition of this phrase earns him the nickname Tirunālaippōvār (Mr. Morrow Goer!). Finally Nandan does make it, his body and spirit merging with the Lord of Thillai.

In his synoptic account, Sekkizhar includes just one episode: ever pious, Nandan keeps visiting nearby shrines of Śiva, handing over

MOUNTAIN PATH

his animal products needed there and worshipping those deities from the street. An Untouchable, he is denied entry inside any temple. So, standing at their portals he offers worship to the deity inside. Once, at Tiruppuṅgūr, a neighbouring village, Nandan stands in the street at the entry gate of the Śiva temple. Like in all Śiva temples, Nandi, the bull, installed in front of the Lord in a straight line from the entry door, impedes his view. The Nandi idol of this temple, being very huge, obstructs entirely his view of the Lord in the sanctum. Nandan cries out in anguish. The Deity inside, taking pity on him, orders the stone bull to move aside slightly, so Nandan could have unobstructed *darśan*. The stone moves! Nandan, fervent and thrilled, is filled to his heart's content by the *darśan* he gets.

Nandan on street Nandi in between Siva in sanctum

Before



After



Jubilant at this miraculous boon, Nandan starts for Thillai, singing and dancing all the way with newfound hope. The Lord there wants to demonstrate to all Nandan's true devotion: he appears in Nandan's dream and commands him to go through a fire ordeal and merge into Him. Likewise appearing in a collective dream of all the Thillai dikshitaras the Lord bids them start a sacred fire for Nandan to enter, which they do. Without the least hesitation, Nandan jumps in and lo! Instead of burning up, he emerges as if from a tank of holy water, wearing the sacred thread and tuft of hair, accoutrements of high-caste dikshitaras! Nandan literally emerges victorious in his trial-by-fire! He thus joins the ranks of the 63 canonized Saivite saints. This is Sekkizhar's brief hagiographic 37 stanzas account in a massive epic of 4,250 stanzas.

It would be relevant to recall at this juncture how a casual reading of Sekkizhar's *Periya Purāṇam* left a deep impress in the young Venkataraman's mind and heart. He had chanced upon a copy lying at home and, perusing it, was deeply moved by the unswerving piety of the 63 Saivite saints, or Nayanmars as they were reverentially known. Thereafter, while walking under the open sky, Venkataraman would turn his gaze skywards, in the hope that Śiva and Parvati would appear riding their bull mount just as they had appeared before the Nayanmars chronicled in the epic. While formerly he used to go to the temple with friends in a mood of play (the vast temple was a favourite playground for sporting children), he now started going alone, and became deeply absorbed in the sacred atmosphere. He would stand before the lineup of idols of the 63 saints, among whom Nandanar was one, and would tearfully pray for the *bhakti bhava* towards Śiva, like that of the Nayanmars. This experience was perhaps a foretaste of Bhagavan's later emotive involvement, one that he could not contain, while recounting the lives of the Nayanmars to devotees seated around him in Ramanasramam. His eyes would turn misty and he would bring his narrative to its end.

Reinventing Nandan

Reworking this straight line tale, Bharati transforms it, creating a dramatic plot of some 120 pages of musical discourse (*kīrtanai*). To make it a successful play, he needed to infuse it with 'box office' ingredients. So Bharati invented a 'villain', not found in Sekkizhar; a villain who is really a foil to Nandan. The villain/foil is the character named Vedhiar, a high caste Brahmin landlord. Bharati's foil is intensified by pairs of opposites; poverty versus wealth, slave versus master, humility versus arrogance, revolutionary versus reactionary.

In other words, Vedhiar is all that Nandan is not. Bharati also turns Sekkizhar's hide-working Nandan into a farm hand, one among the labourers in master's large holding of 40 *velys* (250 acres). Bharati's Nandan also takes upon himself the mission of converting his other toddy-drinking, folk-god-fearing farm labourers of his *cēri* into *sāttvic*, pious beings. Being their overseer, he uses his authority, resorting even to slapping and biting them until they mend their ways!





Oppression succeeds not only because of the domineering oppressor, but also due to the willing subjugation of the oppressed. This truth is presented by Bharati by creating yet another character, Periya Kizhavan, who is a minor foil to Vedhiar. Periya Kizhavan is the ‘grand old man’ among the *cēri* clan. All the time he downs full pitchers of toddy, as well as offering it and meat to their fierce, vengeful deity, Karupannan. He argues that Nandan’s God (Śiva) is a false deity, since their own hoary ways of folk religion and worship cannot be false. His is the collective voice of the *cēri* dwellers whom Nandan is trying to convert to gentler ways by making them chant *namaśivāya*. Periya Kizhavan and his drink-mates pooh-pooh Nandan’s new-fangled reformatory ideas, much as the upper caste landlord does.

Nandan’s stubborn devotion and *sāttvic* ways leave both the Vedhiar and Nandan’s social peers at their wit’s end. Nandan could have run away from his master and headed for Chidambaram but doesn’t, for he is no renegade. Instead he wails, in helpless despair, “I am but a bonded slave to you!” Indifferent to his despairing cries, the Vedhiar decides to play his trump card and rhetorically asks Nandan, “How can you go, shirking responsibility, when the 40 *velys* of fallow land is waiting to be transplanted?” He thus reminds Nandan of the enormous, pending task at hand. Gullible, Nandan believes that if somehow all the land could be transplanted, that would please the Vedhiar who would then let him go to Thillai. He is at the same time aware of the enormity of the task and hence anguished that the all-consuming dream of Thillai *darśan* is not for him in his present lifetime. That night Lord Śiva sends down His heavenly minions who carry out the superhuman task. At daybreak, the Vedhiar, as well as Nandan, are astonished that 250 acres of fallow land have been planted overnight with paddy saplings, a job involving hundreds of labourers and several weeks’ time. Not only that, the crops have grown up overnight and matured with long ears of paddy, a growth process that takes some months. Seeing this miracle, the Brahmin salutes the Outcaste. In veneration the master falls at the feet of the slave. He now lets Nandan proceed Thillai-ward. This ‘dramatic tension’ is all Bharati’s invention.

Musically Recreated

Bharati's forte was musical composition. In addition to the conventional use of Carnatic tunes, he was the first to employ Hindustani tunes in Tamil drama. Unlike in Sanskrit or Telugu, no *kīrtana*-s were available in Tamil for the *harikatha* exponent. Bharati was the pioneer to remove this lacuna. His is a retelling – a singing anew – of the *Periya Pūrṇam* story of Nandan to suit contemporary times and his own artistic sensibility. And he set about it by creating new *rāga*-s (tunes). Also, he was the first to introduce third person prose passages into this genre, interspersing the poetry text by embedding prose links in the plot. This liberty endowed him with the power of an omniscient author, as in the novel. Disputations and arguments too are included by Gopalakrishna Bharati to provide 'tension' and heighten perspectives. Nor did he fight shy of using slum idiom in dialogues among the *cēri* dwellers. Even nonsense rhyme is grist to his poetic mill: when Nandan tries to persuade his clan to convert to *sāttvic* ways they resort to grotesque parodies. Their comic retort heightens what follows immediately, a mellifluously devotional hymn, '*Kanakasabhāpati darisaṇam oru nāḷ kaṇḍāl.*'

Nandanar Charitra Kīrttaṇai Makes Waves

Bharati's heady mixture made *Nandanar Charitra Kīrttaṇai* a 'blockbuster'. The maiden performance, staged in Nagapattinam town in 1861-62, went on for three days. Its immediate success led to repeat performances, held in several homes by demand from affluent and influential patrons. *Vidwan*-s congregated, audiences arrived from as far as Karaikal, the French Indian enclave 20 kilometres away. "Some expressed wonder at his description of the *cēri*, while some lauded his storyline, some others appreciated his humour, while some marvelled at the Vedantic thoughts he had expounded, some just enjoyed its simplicity of style, while others were transported by simply hearing in this part of the country hitherto unheard Hindustani classical tunes."¹

The nightly performance of the musical discourse had an amusing fallout in the neighbouring French Indian enclave of Karaikal. Mr. Cysse, the region's Collector, a Frenchman, found his office staff

¹ Iyer, U.Ve. Swaminatha, *Gopalakrishna Bharathiar*, Chennai, 1936. p.42.

dozing off at their desks during work. Curious, he began enquiring. He discovered that, slipping out to Nagapattinam, they had spent the entire night watching the stage performance of a musical discourse! Hence their nodding off at their office desks the following day. His interest quickened, Cysse arranged for a performance of it in Karaikal. What is even more strikingly unusual is that, though being a French man and thus a cultural outsider, he undertook the print publication of the text. Thus came out the very first print impression of *Nandanar Charitra Kīrttanai*. A second edition was printed within a year, at a time when books normally were not reprinted and certainly not within a year of the first impression. The hitherto little known Tiruppungur temple and the *homa kuḷam* of Chidambaram from which Nandan is said to have emerged became favourite pilgrim destinations. New bhajan groups were started for singing hymns on Lord Nataraja. And *Nandanar Charitra Kīrttanai* was performed by several renowned *harikatha* exponents, notably by Krishna Bhagavathar, the most renowned of them all.

Bharati was recognized as a poet's poet. Thanks to his extraordinary work, his hero Nandan became an icon of piety. Bharati became a celebrity, whipping up jealousy among his literary peers. A composer from Koorai Nadu near Mayuram produced an imitation, Appar Charitram, to rival *Nandanar Charitra Kīrttanai*. It was on Appar, the Saivite saint, whose life is also chronicled in the *Periya Purāṇam*. This imitation, with its rigid adherence to grammatical accuracy, failed to arouse audience appeal. Embittered, like the Augustan Age English poets, he ended up writing a satirical poem on Bharati, degrading his work.

Bharati's musical virtuosity and creative versatility were indeed unmatched. Still, to ward off adverse criticism, a pupil of his suggested that a benedictory verse, by way of foreword from an esteemed scholar, would help. This would nullify critical attacks on the liberties Bharati had taken with the original text, and also the unconventionalities of his poetic idiom. With a view to obtaining one, Bharati took his text to Mahavidwan Meenakshisundaram Pillai, an outstanding scholar of Tamil, a poet-savant, and teacher to none less than U. Ve. Swaminatha Iyer, besides other illustrious Tamil scholars. Pillai happened to be a conservative grammarian and

a literary puritan. It was his conviction that pure poetry, a literary genre, ought not to be corrupted by music. With his pet aversion for music, he at first refused to oblige Bharati. But the latter did not lose hope and repeatedly kept approaching Pillai for the purpose. One afternoon, without announcing himself, Bharati sat on the *thinnai* of Pillai's home and started singing '*Kanakasabhāpati*', a lyric out of the text. Pillai, listening to the whole song from inside the house, was enthralled despite his strong bias against music. He came rushing out and expressed regret for his delayed response to Bharati's request. And at once he provided a verse of benediction on the author, which Bharati included at the beginning of his text. Such was the sublime nature of Bharati's composition.

The Nandanar story went through three film productions. Of these, the 1942 film production Nandanar became a huge success. Bhagavan himself saw this film, which was brought to the ashram by his devotee Framji, who owned a cinema house in Chennai. In addition to perpetuating the public memory of saint Nandanar, it immortalized some of Bharati's songs, sung by Dandapani Desikar who plays Nandanar. There have been several, more recent, retellings of the Nandanar legend across various literary genres but they pale into insignificance before the brilliance of Bharati's masterpiece.

Gopalakrishna Bharati, the Person

Bharati lived most of his life in Mayuram, with frequent visits and intermittent stays in Chidambaram for *darśan* of his beloved Lord Nataraja. The choice of Nandan legend served him a threefold purpose and eminently suited his sensibilities. First, it is the story of Nataraja's *līlā* (divine sport). From his young age Bharati had been keenly drawn to Nataraja. He never failed to miss a visit to Chidambaram to witness the six annual *abhiṣekam*-s of this Lord. Second, in addition to being a story of Śiva, the Nandan legend was equally the story of a devotee who was drunk with madness for this Lord, much like Bharati himself. Thirdly, it was the story of an Untouchable who reached the very pinnacle of religio-spiritual heights, literally merging in Śiva. Thus the Nandan story served the author's revolutionary stance against the prevailing social curse of untouchability in Hindu culture. Devotion to Śiva combined with a veneration for Nandanar ignited Bharati's

imagination. And he alone, as a member of the Brahmin community, could do it. Had an author of a lesser caste attempted it, he and his work would have been hounded out by orthodoxy as sacrilegious and heretical. Orthodoxy is best defied by someone from the orthodox class. So much so that the Nandan character becomes the spokesperson for his author's religious and spiritual values.

In his early life Bharati had given himself up to intense study. He grounded himself thoroughly in classical music, and went on to become a versatile composer in a wide variety of ragas. The versatility of his musical genius is borne out by the following episode: Bharati once went to visit Saint Thyagaraja, the musical maestro at Tiruvaiyaru. When he arrived there the saint-composer was singing and a group of persons sat listening. By nature self-effacing, Bharati sat amidst the audience incognito. At the end of it, with everybody gone, the saint saw him still sitting and enquired where he was from. When Bharati replied that he was from Mayuram, the saint queried if he knew one Gopalakrishna Bharati, a fine composer, residing in Mayuram. Bharati replied that it was indeed he himself. It was a moment of delightful surprise for both. During their conversation, Saint Thyagaraja queried him if he had ever created a composition in the tune of *Ābogi*. As the reply was negative Bharati remained silent and then left. Next day he called on the saint again with a copy of a composition, done overnight, on Lord Nataraja – in *ābogi* tune! This song, to this day, remains one of Bharati's best loved devotional hymns. In addition to music, Bharati mastered Vedanta and Yoga *sastra*, and became a practitioner of *dhyāna* and *prāṇāyāma*. He studied Tamil classics and devotional poetry texts too. He also learnt Hindustani music, which he was later to employ in *Nandanar Charitra Kīrttaṇai*, another pioneering inclusion of his. He even learnt how to play the violin.

Having decided to remain a bachelor Bharati lived by begging for his food, getting *darśan* of Lord Nataraja and composing hymns on Him. While inside the Chidambaram temple, he would be singing hymns, sitting in devotional fervour close to the Nandanar idol therein. He was particularly fond of Nataraja because not one, but three members of the Untouchable caste, could attain *mukti* in the *sannidhi* of the Dancing Lord. Bharati was a man of few needs and sought the

company of the poor rather than that of the wealthy. Staying mostly in Mayuram, he lived on a small *thinnaï* outside the house of one of his devoted pupils.

Musical composition was in his blood. He would readily compose a song for any social situation. To his poetic sensibility no theme was too trivial. For instance, he has a composition on how one should be prudent while lending money! He created it extempore when a friend complained to him that he could not recover the money that he had lent to someone. There is one describing the *giripradakṣiṇā* scenario, composed on the occasion when he had come to Tiruvannamalai during Kārtikai Deepam.

Such was his popularity that Bharati had a steady stream of visitors – among them, well-known singers, *vidwan*-s and *pandit*-s. So much so that whenever he composed a new song, within a short while it would reach all over the Tamil country. Music *vidwan*-s coming to Mayuram would never fail to call on him to find out if he had composed anything new. If so, they would listen to him sing it, learn it by heart then and there and then go on to render it in various venues in their own places. Bharati regularly gave musical performances on the legends of Śiva and the seed of an idea of a full length drama on Śiva was perhaps first planted in his mind by his fans, either musical maestros or wealthy patrons. He was also called in to perform concerts on Lord Śiva on social occasions like wedding ceremonies for a fee. Bharati thus came into some money. With his sparse living, he could make a lifetime savings of three thousand five hundred rupees, a tidy fortune a century and a half ago. He gave away a part of it to one of his well-wishers who was in financial straits. And he gave away three thousand rupees towards the funding of *naivedya* (ritual offering of food to the deity at a temple) to the deities of Mayuram and Chidambaram temples and for the feeding of poor devotees.

U.Ve. Swaminatha Iyer, whom Bharati had tutored in music for some time, provides a physical description of Bharati as broad footed, thin legged, fat kneed, thick waisted, hunch backed, grey eyed, with unkempt thin hair, and his lower garment above the knee.² Added to this, he had a thin neck, a protruding Adam's apple and brown eyes.

² Ibid., Swaminatha Iyer, p.62

His ungainly features and simple attire grossly belied the personality of this extraordinary author-composer, yogi and passionate devotee. And he was known to be always joyful, humorous and entertaining, even while being an erudite conversationalist. Much to the delight of those around him, he was a spur of the moment storyteller. At the casual mention of a single word by someone in conversation, he would recount a whole legend centring on that single word. He is reported to have lived up to 95, probably due to his yogic practices and his frugal food habits, during times when the average life expectancy in India was very low.

Bharati also composed two other musical discourses, one on Iyarpagai Nayanar and the other on Tiru Neelakanta Nayanar, two saints also chronicled in the *Periya Purāṇam*. They did not become famous, and only a few stray lyrics from them survive today. One cannot but agree with what U.Ve. Swaminatha Iyer states: “*Nandanar Charitra Kīrttaṇai* lives among the musical wealth of Tamil literature. Undoubtedly Bharati’s fame would live on forever and words are inadequate to fully express his glory.”³

This article has been adapted from U.Ve. Swaminatha Iyer, *Gopalakrishna Bharathiar*, Kesari Press, Chennai, 1936. TVA-BOK-0000122.

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³ Ibid., Swaminatha Iyer, p.103.

Celebrating the Life of Appa

ANAND RAMANAN

As I sit down to write a tribute to Appa,¹ I cannot help feeling how embarrassed he would have been reading the glowing tributes his friends and fellow devotees have written about him. For he was the humblest human being that graced my life for six and fifty years. He claimed no special privileges accorded to him by his birth order. He would say that everyone is Bhagavan's child. He was a strict disciplinarian raising his children and would often not so gently remind us to represent Bhagavan well. He had an excellent sense of humour and growing up with him was an incredibly happy experience. He loved reading books and would put my mother's monthly budgets in a hole by visits to bookshops. This habit of his ensured that his three children were never bored growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. A few incidents with Sri Bhagavan, seemingly routine happenings in the Ashram, had a profound impact on him and shaped the direction of his personal life forever. Proof that every word uttered by Bhagavan was impactful for the individual concerned.

¹ Appa means 'father' in Tamil.

Anand Ramanan is the president of Sri Ramanasramam.

Appa was raised by Bhagavan's sister Alamelu especially as a toddler as his mother was busy taking care of an extended joint family. She used to take Appa to see Bhagavan every morning when he was a toddler. When she would put him on the ground and ask him to do *namaskaram* (prostration) to Sri Bhagavan, Appa would start crying and ask Alamelu Atthai to pick him up. Bhagavan would smilingly tell Appa in Tamil, "*Un namaskaram ellam vendam. Nee azhama irunda porum.*" I don't need your *namaskaram*, just don't cry. Appa used to say that due to that blessing of Sri Bhagavan, he never felt the need for anything, nor did he ever cry in his life. When my brother Ravi died in 2010, after performing his cremation without shedding a tear, Appa was the one consoling my mother, relatives and friends.

Appa as a young boy once went to the kitchen early morning when Sri Bhagavan would grind chutney for the morning breakfast. HE would give small amounts for tasting to the devotees' present. Appa received his share and saw Bhagavan stretch his hand towards him with some more chutney. Reflexively when he tried to have one more helping, he was chided by Sri Bhagavan: "*Hmmm.*" Bhagavan was offering the serving to someone standing behind Appa. This act of Sri Bhagavan ensured that Appa never aspired for anyone's possessions and was never jealous of anybody's material prosperity.

Once he wrote down an article dictated to him by his teacher Sundaresa Iyer, who made him write the name of the authors as 'Sundarams'. Bhagavan after enjoying the article, asked Sundaresa Iyer about the significance of 'Sundarams'. When he pointed to Appa and told Bhagavan that it was handwritten by Appa, Bhagavan smiled at Appa and complimented him on his good handwriting. His good handwriting needless to say lasted through his lifetime. He would meticulously copy Bhagavan's works in Tamil, Sanskrit and English and give it away. He would also say that Bhagavan recommended that as the best form of memorization.

Another incident is proof of how Bhagavan prepared him for future incidents to soften the impact of unpleasant happenings. In 2008 when my brother Ravi had neurosurgery for a brain tumour, he was given a book *Chasing Daylight* written by Eugene Kelly. This is a book detailing the last days of a Wall Street executive who is diagnosed with brain tumour and how he faces the deadly tumour with grace



Sri Venkataraman Sundara Ramanan (1934-2020)

while having spiritual ‘I am not the body’ experiences along the way. He dies before finishing the book.

Appa liked that book and read it slowly taking in every word. He loved reading out passages from the book saying that the author is having Advaitic experiences. After reading the book he never asked me about Ravi’s prognosis or about his survival chances. I feel that Bhagavan by giving him the book where the author who had the same brain tumour as Ravi, had prepared him for his demise. At the time assuring him that it was possible to face such a dreaded disease in a happy, spiritual manner as the author of the book did. Appa also liked a passage in the book wherein the author quotes an Italian saying to the effect that the legacy of one’s life is not how your children turn out, but how productive and ethical human beings your grandchildren turn out to be.

The city Baroda in Gujarat, India was the place Appa achieved his professional success for over 20 years. It is one of the few places mentioned by Sri Bhagavan when he said looking at the white peacock gifted by the Maharani of Baroda, “Where is Arunachala and where is Baroda?”

The three devotees who made the most impact on Appa’s life were Cow Lakshmi, Sivaprakasam Pillai and Chinna Swamigal. Appa used to say that Cow Lakshmi was Bhagavan’s best devotee as she only knew and loved Bhagavan and no one else mattered to her. He used to go around her shrine twice a day with tears praying for the same devotion. He had a picture of Sivaprakasam Pillai in his office room and used to pray for similar one-pointed devotion to Bhagavan. He was fond of quoting some of his poetry where he implores Bhagavan for HIS Grace. He was fond of quoting how Bhagavan on hearing about the devotee’s death said, “*Sivaprakasam Sivaprakasamaanaar.*” (He became the effulgence of Siva).

Chinna Swamigal was the model for Appa while he performed his role as the Ashram president. Appa used to say how hard it must have been for him to be working away from Bhagavan’s hall, doing routine work involving the day to day running of the Ashram, while amazing spiritual experiences were happening in a room a few feet away. Chinna Swamigal had to do several unpleasant administrative duties, which made him unpopular at times. He did it fearlessly with honesty with a sense of surrender to Bhagavan.

All three devotees were unique in their complete surrender to Bhagavan. The latter two made no attempts to show their scholarly prowess.

Appa's life glorifies the living presence of Sri Bhagavan. It is an inspiration for a man or woman busy with worldly responsibilities, that they can practise Bhagavan's teachings, performing both such acts perfectly. A disciplined effort at the practice of Sri Bhagavan's teachings mixed with an attempt to lead the daily life as close as possible to the way Bhagavan lived HIS, is surely going to merit HIS Grace and a merger with HIS Lotus Feet. One must be only true to oneself.

In conclusion we are all as Appa would say every day like prey trapped in the Tiger's jaws. Bhagavan will take care of us. ▲

Response of Sri Ramanasramam in the Covid Pandemic

India has been under the scourge of the COVID pandemic since March 2020. Following the directives of the Government of India, the Ashram has been in a state of lockdown since that time. All our visiting devotees have returned to their home town or countries. The routine activities of the Ashram, including the daily *Pūjā* and *Nārāyaṇa Seva* are going on as usual. Strict implementation of social distancing, wearing of facial masks, spraying of anti-infective natural chemicals are being implemented strictly. Unfortunately, one of our volunteer devotees Sri G. Kannan contracted the virus in the community setting and passed away from its complications. After that, strict contact tracing measures were implemented and fortunately only two cases were detected and sent for quarantine.

The reopening of the Ashram will happen only when it is safe for devotees to come to the Shrine safely with social distancing protocols. We will follow the WHO and government of India and Tamil Nadu guidelines while considering the decision. The health of devotees comes first and we will be very careful in taking the decision to avoid anyone from contracting the disease.



Independence Day 15th August. Raising the Indian Flag at the Ashram

Beloved Sundaram Anna

SIVADAS KRISHNAN

In 1992, during one of my periodical visits to the Ashram that followed my first ever visit in 1978, I happened to meet a soft spoken person with a genuine smile on his face whom I came to know later as Sri Sundaram Anna¹ (the eldest son of the then President, the late Sri T.N. Venkataraman). Sundaram Anna, after his retirement as general manager of Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Limited, Baroda, settled at the ashram to assist his father and eventually became the next president of the ashram.

We had common links through his friends in the Neyveli Lignite Corporation Limited, Tamil Nadu, who settled in Sri Janaky Matha Ashram, Thanjavur after their retirement. Sundaram Anna invariably enquired about them whenever I visited the Ashram. Another unusual common interest between us was the novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas, for which both of us had a passionate liking.

¹ Anna means ‘elder brother’. A term of respect in Tamil.

Sivadas Krishnan serves in the Ashram administration. He is closely associated with Janaky Matha of Thanjavur since 1969, from the age of 16.

We used to discuss at length the incidents and characters in the novel on our regular daily walks decades later, after I joined the services of the Ashram.

The outstanding traits of Sundaram Anna noticeable to all who spent time with him were his modesty, gentle ways, his genuine love and affection, and utmost honesty and straightforwardness.

Bhagavan's Grace made me join the services of the Ashram as a full time *sādhak* in 2009 by taking voluntary retirement from my profession in the banking sector. Well before that in one of the visits, Anna told me smilingly, "If you have any plans of taking voluntary retirement, you have to report to me the next day." Such is the intuitive skill that he possessed to identify the earnest seekers. The prompting from his pure heart later became true in my life when I felt the call.

Holding the office of the president had a different meaning for him. He always said only Bhagavan is the president of the Ashram and he, Sundaram was meant to be a servant of the visiting devotees, to wash their feet and give them the opportunity to plunge in *sādhana* during their blessed visits here, and to sign the obligatory papers for a smooth administration. He meant this statement in all sincerity and led his life accordingly.

When I asked him in one of our walks whether he felt proud of being the president of the world-renowned spiritual organisation, he quipped that Bhagavan is the president of the Ashram always and when he is only a tool to perform administrative actions, where is the question of feeling proud of the post.

He is best known for his decency and candour. Once, after dictating a letter to a fellow devotee who was very close to him once and estranged eventually, in the ending he said, "Yours affectionately". Before I finished typing the letter, he came to my desk and asked me to change the ending note as 'Yours sincerely', and said with a smile, "I don't want to lie." It is one of the examples of how he always meant what he said even in small matters.

When he has something to convey, it was always in a straightforward manner. He never beat around the bush. You always knew where you stood with him.

He could make intuitive quick decisions born out of his total surrender to Bhagavan. The various building projects undertaken and

the purchases of large plots of land during his tenure as president of the Ashram bear testimony to this.

The following is a note that he dictated to me for his personal file speaks of how he surrendered to Bhagavan altogether, which eventually led him to drop his desire for personal control, wipe his entire being from interfering and to remain a clean slate and lived only in Bhagavan to his last days.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

16.12.2012

Since mid-March 2009, I have committed myself to be in the Ashram with the conviction that everything within the Ashram is performed by Sri Bhagavan only and even imagining that the so called inmates function as ordained by Him. He is the only one within the precincts of the Ashram. Nobody can treat anyone else well or ill here, for He is the only doer here.

Since March 2009, I have also begun to practice to live in the NOW as He has declared everything is ordained. Such a practice, I feel, will keep me ever at His Feet.

As was his custom, he lived up to this to the letter and spirit and was peacefully absorbed in Bhagavan as gently as he lived, with his characteristic sweet smile on his lips.

The less one speaks of oneself, the more one abides in Bhagavan, the greater is the impact that he leaves on others, resulting in them aiming to live up to the high standards that he sets. Such is the silent, veiled glory of beloved Sundaram Anna, the impact of whom makes me aspire to and engage in the spiritual *sādhana* to get liberated as he undoubtedly did! ▲



SRI RAMANASRAMAM
ஸ்ரீரமணசுரமம்



NO PARKING

NO PARKING

Ashram Front Gate. Lock Down.

D. Thyagarajan

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Thirty Five

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

7th December 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om: When we follow the spiritual path, *māyā*, which is nothing but our own mind, tries to distract us in so many ways in order to divert our attention away from ourself. Even in the case of such a great soul as Buddha it is said that shortly before he attained *nirvāṇa*, *māyā* appeared before him in the personified form of the demon Māra and tried to entice him by offering him various sense pleasures and even lordship over the whole world in order to distract him from his effort to turn deeper within. However, despite all the efforts of Māra to divert him from the path, Buddha used his keen

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

power of *vivēka* [discrimination, discernment or clear judgement] and his steadfast *vairāgya* [desirelessness] to avoid being swayed by any of Māra's temptations or threats.

That is, because of his keen *vivēka* he clearly recognised that true happiness lies only within and that we can therefore experience it only by just being, without rising to experience anything else, so as a result of this clarity he had steadfast *vairāgya*, which enabled him to cling unwaveringly to self-attentiveness and thereby avoid being distracted by anything else.

What this story signifies is that though Buddha had cultivated a strong *sat-vāsanā* or liking just to be, so long as ego survives its *viṣaya-vāsanās* will persist to a greater or lesser extent, so he still had a residual liking to rise and experience things other than himself. However, instead of allowing himself to be swayed by his *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s, he clung firmly to self-attentiveness and thereby eventually merged back forever in the source from which he had risen.

That is, until ego is eradicated, at every moment we are faced with the choice either to just be by remaining keenly and steadily self-attentive or to rise and be aware of things other than ourself. The more persistently we cling to being self-attentive, the more forcibly our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s will sprout in the form of thoughts, but to the extent that we persevere in being steadfastly self-attentive, thereby not allowing ourself to be distracted by anything else, our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s will be weakened and our *sat-vāsanā* will be strengthened. However, like a wounded tiger trapped in a corner, our weakened *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s will make a final desperate attempt to fight back by forcibly drawing our attention outwards, as is graphically depicted by the story of Māra attempting to distract Buddha from his efforts to turn within so deeply that he would merge forever in *nirvāṇa*, the state in which ego is extinguished along with all its *vāsanā*-s.

When even at the final stage of his spiritual practice Buddha had to ward off the attempts of *māyā* to distract him from turning within, it is natural that other spiritual aspirants find themselves being dragged this way and that by their *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s, and therefore have to learn to ward them off as he did by clinging firmly to self-attentiveness with the aid of *vivēka* and *vairāgya*.

8th December 1978

Sadhu Om [in reply to someone who asked ‘Why are some people able to sit for hours together in meditation, whereas others are not able to do so?’]: The term ‘meditation’ is used in various senses, but generally it means trying to fix the mind on one thing. That one thing can be either oneself or something else. If one tries to meditate on anything other than oneself, it may be possible to train the mind to remain fixed on that one thing for a prolonged period of time, because the existence of the mind is not threatened so long as it is grasping anything other than itself.

However, if one tries to meditate on oneself, the mind begins to dissolve back into its source, which is the pure awareness ‘I am’, and if one meditates on oneself so keenly that one thereby ceases to be aware of anything else whatsoever, the mind will die, because its dissolution in pure awareness will be complete and permanent. Therefore, until we are willing to surrender ourselves completely, whenever we try to attend to ourselves alone an internal conflict will arise between our liking to subside back into our source and our liking to rise and experience other things. The more we try to attend to ourselves, the more forcibly our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s [likings or inclinations to be aware of other things] will rise to divert our attention away from ourselves.

Therefore in order to succeed in the practice of self-attentiveness a gentle but persistent approach is required. We cannot force ourselves to be keenly self-attentive for a prolonged period of time, so rather than trying to do so, we need to try as frequently as possible to turn our attention back to ourselves. Every time we try, we will be able to hold on to self-attentiveness for a short while before our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s again draw our attention away from ourselves towards other things. However, every attempt we make to be self-attentive will gradually strengthen our *sat-vāsanā* [liking just to be as we are] and weaken our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s, so it is only by gentle and patient perseverance that we can succeed in this path of self-investigation.

Therefore if we are following this path taught by Bhagavan, sitting for prolonged periods of meditation is not necessary. Even if we are able to sit for a long time, we will not be able to keep our attention fixed firmly on ourselves, and the longer we struggle to do so, the

weaker our attempts will become. Rather than struggling for a long time, therefore, trying frequently in the midst of other activities will be more effective. If we have a busy life, setting aside brief periods to try to go deeper within may be beneficial, but we should try to take advantage of every opportunity we have to be self-attentive, no matter how brief each opportunity may be.

When practising self-investigation, our aim is to be so keenly self-attentive that we thereby cease to be aware of anything else, because when we succeed in being aware of ourself alone, we will be aware of ourself as we actually are, and thereby our mind will be annihilated. However, if one practises meditating on anything other than oneself, one cannot thereby achieve *manōnāśa* [annihilation of mind], so those who practise such meditation generally seek to achieve only a relative calmness of mind.

That is, the mind becomes tired by wandering about in ceaseless activity, so if it is trained to meditate on just one thing, it can thereby rest in a state of relative calmness, and eventually it may become so calm that even its activity of meditating on one thing ceases, whereupon it will subside in a sleep-like state of *manōlaya* [temporary dissolution of mind]. However, the amount of time that the mind is active and the amount of time that it can rest is determined by *prārabdha*, so no one can sit calmly in meditation or remain in *manōlaya* any longer than is allotted in their *prārabdha*.

Moreover, no matter how long one may sit calmly meditating on anything other than oneself or even remain in *manōlaya*, one cannot thereby attain *mey-jñāna* [true knowledge or real awareness]. To understand why this is so, we need to understand what is meant by the term *mey-jñāna*. When used on its own, in some contexts the term *jñāna* may refer to *mey-jñāna*, but in other contexts it can refer to other kinds of knowledge, such as *bhautika-jñāna* [knowledge of the physical world], *saṅgīta-jñāna* [knowledge of music] and *auśadha-jñāna* [knowledge of herbs and medicine]. However knowing anything other than oneself cannot be *mey-jñāna*. Knowing oneself as the one ever-existing reality alone is *mey-jñāna*, whereas knowing anything else is only *ajñāna* [ignorance]. Therefore to attain *mey-jñāna* we must attend only to ourself and thereby cease knowing anything else, as Bhagavan implies in verse 16 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

Leaving external phenomena, the mind knowing its own form of light [the light of pure awareness, 'I am'] is alone real awareness [true knowledge or knowledge of reality].

According to your *prārabdha* you now have to engage in the hard work of running a business, and you may not be able to free your mind immediately from all its attachments, so until your mind is given rest by *prārabdha* you should try to practise self-attention whenever you can in the midst of your busy life. You cannot avoid doing whatever work you are destined to do, but you should not for that reason forsake the practice of self-attention. No matter how much work you are destined to do, if you are sufficiently interested in knowing your real nature you will be able to find enough time to practise self-attention, even if it is only for brief moments here and there. Until and unless you are relieved of the burden of responsibility for business and family, your mind will come and go in and out of self-attentiveness, but so long as you are trying to be self-attentive as much as you can, you need not be concerned about how much time you spend in meditation.

The *prārabdha* we experience in each life is a selection of the fruits of the countless actions that we have done in previous lives, and it is selected by Bhagavan for our own spiritual benefit. That is, Bhagavan is our real nature, and as such he just is and does not do anything, but in his role as God and guru he allots whatever *prārabdha* will be most conducive to our spiritual development.

He is always guiding us from within, but so long as we allow our attention to go outwards we are ignoring his guidance, so to the extent that we follow his path of self-investigation and self-surrender we are thereby yielding ourself to his guidance. This is all that is required on our part, because by yielding ourself to him we are allowing his grace to work unhampered, and it will do all that is necessary to loosen the bonds of our attachments.

Therefore the more we surrender to him, the more our mind will be purified, and in a purified mind peace will naturally prevail, so there will be no need to sit in meditation in order to be inwardly at peace. Whatever activities your mind and body may be engaged in, your peace will remain undisturbed. When your surrender is complete, what will remain is only your own real nature, which is infinite and

eternal *sat-cit* [existence-awareness]. This is the state of *mey-jñāna* [true knowledge].

It is said that the activities of the body and mind of the *jñāni* will continue until the *prārabdha* of that body comes to an end, but that the *jñāni* is not affected by such activities, because the identification with the body and mind has ceased. Just as a fruit remains attached to the tree so long as it is unripe and falls down only when it ripens, the body and mind will remain attached to the *jñāni* until the *prārabdha* that brought the body into existence at birth comes to an end at death, whereupon they will drop off. However, this seems to be the case only in the view of the *ajñāni*, because in the clear view of the *jñāni* there is no body or mind at all, so even when the body and mind seem to be attached to the *jñāni*, the *jñāni* is not attached to them. For the *jñāni* there is neither any *prārabdha* nor any activity but only the eternal peace of *sat-cit-ānanda*.

Therefore if you want to experience peace and be free from activity, sitting for a long time meditating on anything other than yourself is at best only a temporary solution. In order to experience eternal peace and freedom from activity, even in the midst of worldly activities you need to surrender yourself by turning your attention within as much as possible. ▲

Drenched

Suresh Kailash

A silent river
from two clear lakes
fills my heart,
douses all thought,
cascades down my face,
and washes my mind away,
when your eyes hold mine
in their still, steady gaze.
And I, Ramana, I just sit,
getting drenched in your grace.

KEYWORD

Darpaṇa/ādarśa: Mirror

Part Three

B.K. CROISSANT

Like other spiritual texts, the Tripurā Rahasya alternates entertaining stories and anecdotes with philosophical discourses that appeal to logic and reason. So, after the wonderful tale of Hemalekhā and Hemachūḍa, Chapter Eleven takes us to the realm of argumentation. Paraśurāma says to his guru Dattātreya that he is deeply perplexed. His mind cannot grasp the illogical concept that the world we see as objects is nothing but Pure Consciousness. How can that be since Consciousness is without objects and cannot be seen? Accepting that notion would have to be entirely a matter of faith (*śraddhā*)! Out of compassion, Dattātreya launches into a spirited demonstration that attempts to resolve the mental turmoil of his devoted student (as well as our own!) and that, not unexpectedly, is crafted with many uses of the mirror.

B.K. Croissant first encountered Bhagavan in 1993. She retired in 2006 after serving as a senior administrator in the arts and humanities at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Since then *sādhana* has been her highest priority and greatest joy.

Dattātreyā's demonstration begins with the bold assertion that the world we see is absolutely nothing other than perception. But he pulls down immediately from that elevated perspective and grounds his argument in the notion of cause and effect. The world we see, he says, is the effect of some unseen cause. Deftly he rejects the views of those who see the origin of the universe as accidental (materialists), caused by the nature of infinitely small atoms (the Vaiśeṣika doctrine) or brought into existence by the absence of equilibrium among the three *guṇa*-s (the theory of Sāṃkhya philosophers). In the case of an unseen cause whose nature cannot be resolved by the debate of finite beings, however, we can ultimately take refuge in revealed Scripture that speaks with authority about inscrutable matters.

From there the discourse becomes an inspiring and majestic statement on Creation. We are told in several powerful and poetic reiterations that before Creation there was a great conscious Maker alone. From his abundant and absolute freedom of Will (*svātantryabhāravaibhavāt*) and without the aid of any material, He playfully brought into being the picture of the world painted on the screen of his own Self. The picture is painted on Himself because at any time and place absolutely nothing else exists. The world does not occur existing somewhere outside. Pure Consciousness shines as the Whole. As waves do not exist without the ocean or rays without the sun, the world does not exist without Pure Consciousness. This world was born from Him, is established in Him, and is absorbed in Him. Think of the mirror!

तथा च दर्पणाभोगे प्रतिबिम्बवदेव हि ।
जगदुन्मीलितं देवे चैवं सर्वं समञ्जसम् ॥
tathā ca darpaṇābhoge pratibimbavadeva hi |
jagadunmīlitam deve caivaṃ sarvaṃ samañjasam ||

So thus the universe surges forth
from the depths of divine Consciousness,
Like reflections in an infinite mirror.
It all becomes clear.¹

¹ Chapter 11, verse 40. All translations of Sanskrit verses are by the author in consultation with Marcia Solomon, a dedicated and inspiring Sanskrit teacher and scholar who resides in Boulder, Colorado.

So, the message has been delivered, but it is still not sufficiently digestible. Consequently, the rest of Chapter Eleven sets out to highlight various aspects of the proclamations Dattatreya invoked. To illustrate the concept of the world as images painted on the screen of the Self there are frequent comparisons to the tricks of magicians with their hallucinations, the power of accomplished *yogi*-s who can create alternative worlds, and the ability of our own minds to bring forth fantasies in the dream state or daydreams in the waking state replete with people and objects of all kinds. God's creation is also likened to a city of fancy (think of the first verse of Ādi Śaṅkarāchārya's *Hymn to Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti!*). The image of the mirror, as a recurring motif, is used in many different and distinct ways.

After the mirror as embodiment of Vedic truths on Creation, comes the mirror as illustration of the world as nothing other than Pure Consciousness, bringing us back to the inquiry that opened the dialogue between Paraśurāma and his guru. Dattātreyā explains that Tripurā is without form. Time and space cannot divide Pure Consciousness because they depend on It for existence. Do time and place exist without Consciousness anywhere at all? Inert objects are not self-evident and cannot shine without depending on Consciousness. Only Consciousness shines without the need for another. It is not otherwise.

यथा हि प्रतिबिम्बानां सत्त्वं दर्पण एव हि ।

तथा चितिर्जगत्सत्ता ततः सर्वं चितिर्भवेत् ॥

yathā hi pratibimbānām sattvaṁ darpaṇa eva hi |

tathā citirjagat-sattā tataḥ sarvaṁ citirbhavet ||

As surely the existence of reflections

is indeed the mirror alone,

So the existence of the universe

is Consciousness; Consciousness must be all.²

Pure Consciousness as a mirror is contrasted with other reflecting surfaces to explain Its true nature. Hardness and purity of the surface affect the quality of reflections. Reflections from a hard surface are more distinct than those from water, for instance, and the purity of

² Verses 53(b) and 54(a).

MOUNTAIN PATH

Pure Consciousness exceeds any other reflecting surface. But even more importantly, Its reflections require nothing external to Itself.

जडत्वाद् दर्पणादेस्तु स्वातन्त्र्यपरिवर्जनात् ।

बिम्बापेक्षा चित्तेः स्वच्छस्वातन्त्र्यादनपेक्षता ॥

*jaḍatvād darpaṇādestu svātantrya-parivarjanāt |
bimbāpekṣā citeḥ svaccha-svātantryādanapekṣatā ||*

But due to the lifelessness of a reflecting surface
which has no free Will,

A reflected object is necessary. Not so for Consciousness
which is pure Self-effulgence.³

Those who know the nature of reflections define them as appearances that appear on account of something else. In that way too, the image of a mirror can explain the world relative to Pure Consciousness.

स्वतो न भासते क्वापि भासते च चिदाश्रयात् ।

अतो जगत् स्यादादर्शप्रतिबिम्बसुसम्मितम् ॥

*svato na bhāsate kvāpi bhāsate ca cidāśrayāt |
ato jagat syādādarśa-pratibimba-susammitam ||*

The universe manifests nowhere by itself.

It shines from the substratum of Consciousness.

Therefore the world very much resembles
a reflection in a mirror.⁴

The image of a mirror illustrates Pure Consciousness as a witness unaffected by objects in the realm of relativity.

चित्तिर्विचित्रान्यभावैरुपरक्तापि भासिनी ।

स्वरूपादप्रच्युतैवाददर्शवल्लेशतोपि हि ॥

*citirvicitrā'nyabhāvairuparaktā'pi bhāsinī |
svarūpādapracchutaivādarśavalleśato'pi hi ||*

The wondrous Supreme Consciousness shines
even though influenced by other images.

Like a mirror, It does not deviate in the slightest
from Its own true nature.⁵

³ Verses 56(b) and 57(a).

⁴ Verse 61.

⁵ Verse 62.

Furthermore, it illustrates that there is no world without Consciousness and that the world is not separate from It. The world is superimposed on Consciousness like the snake on a rope.

दर्पणप्रतिबिम्बानां दर्पणानन्यता यथा ।
चिदात्मप्रतिबिम्बानां चिदात्मानन्यता तथा ॥

darpaṇa-pratibimbānām darpaṇānanyatā yathā |
cidātma-pratibimbānām cidātmānanyatā tathā ||

Just as a mirror's reflections are
not other than the mirror itself,
So, reflections in Pure Consciousness
are not other than the Self.⁶

The last use of the mirror involves investigation of the world (*vicāra*) and discrimination (*viveka*) between the real and the unreal. Dattātreya enjoins Paraśurāma to examine the difference between the two.

सत्यासत्ये विभागेन भासेते सर्वतोखिलम् ।
प्रतिबिम्बादर्शभानम् इव तत्प्रविचारय ॥
आदर्शो ह्यचलस्तत्र चलं हि प्रतिबिम्बकम् ।
तथा जगच्चलं संविदचला सर्वभावितम् ॥

satyāsatyē vibhāgena bhāsete sarvato 'khilam |
pratibimbādarśa-bhānam iva tat-pravicāraya ||
ādarśo hyacalastatra calaṁ hi pratibimbakam |
tathā jagaccalam saṁvid-acalā sarva-bhāvitam ||

The real and the unreal appear
quite differently everywhere.
Examine that closely, like the appearance
of a reflection in a mirror.

Certainly the mirror is unchanging;
it is only the reflection that fluctuates.
Thus the universe is changing, as everyone knows;
only Pure Consciousness is constant.⁷

⁶ Verse 63.

⁷ Verse 77 and 78.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Once the difference between the real and the unreal is seen and understood, absorption becomes possible. This message is concisely expressed by Bhagavan in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

D: The mind is admitted to be changing and unsteady (chanchala and asthira).

B: It is also said in the same place that the mind is to be introverted and made to merge in the Self; that the practice must be long because it is slow; and must be continued until it is totally merged in the Self.

D: I want prasād, i.e., Grace, for it.

B: It is always with you. All that is required of you is not to confound yourself with the extrovert mind but to abide as the Self. That is prasād.⁸

Absorption takes us back to the parrots' song, which closed the tale of Hemalekhā and Hemachūḍa and brought about the mental doubts Paraśurāma expressed so poignantly to his *sadguru*. The song culminates with a challenging conclusion that says it all: "Giving up delusion, focus one-pointedly on Pure Consciousness alone."

Thus ends Chapter Eleven. Dattātreya tells Paraśurāma that the nature of the world and Consciousness having one essence (*jagacchidekātmarūpam*) has been explained to him (and us) properly.

APPRECIATION

I offer my sincere thanks to Christopher Quilkey and K.V. Subrahmonyan who encouraged and supported me throughout this project. I am indebted to their kindness and example as exemplary devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Thanks also to Marcia Solomon, who graciously answered all of my questions about the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar and who keeps me from going off-track when we work through translations together. Thanks to Samvid, whose edition of *Tripurārahasya* is both brilliant and practical mirror image, driving home the Truth expounded by Hemalekhā to her Beloved. ▲

⁸ Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§382.

Sri Mahaswami

The Sage with Eyes of Light

Part Eight

SERGE DEMETRIAN

We continue the series of extracts from a manuscript titled Śrī Mahāswami, The Sage with Eyes of Light that relates the direct experiences of the author with Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhādhipati Jagadguru Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvati Svāmī which took place from 1968 until the mahāsamādhi of Śrī Mahāswami in 1994.

Later this year Indica Books of Varanasi will publish the complete written record of the author's experiences with Śrī Mahāswami.

Kārvetinagar, Sunday 12th September 1971

Śiva as the Destroyer

This morning I woke up early and immediately started reading the XVIII chapter of the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*, as I had heard it yesterday in front of Śrī Mahāswami. By 6.30 am I was at the hermitage. Swamiji had not yet come out to give *darśan*. I was told he is in *anushtāna*. I was also tired after the seven hours spent yesterday in his presence and did not persist.

In the afternoon, Śrī Mahāswami came out after 2 pm. He was in a terrible mood. What a difference from the days when he came from his *anushtāna*, vaporous, almost translucent, with the lineaments of his face extremely refined, after his dip in the waters of the Infinite!

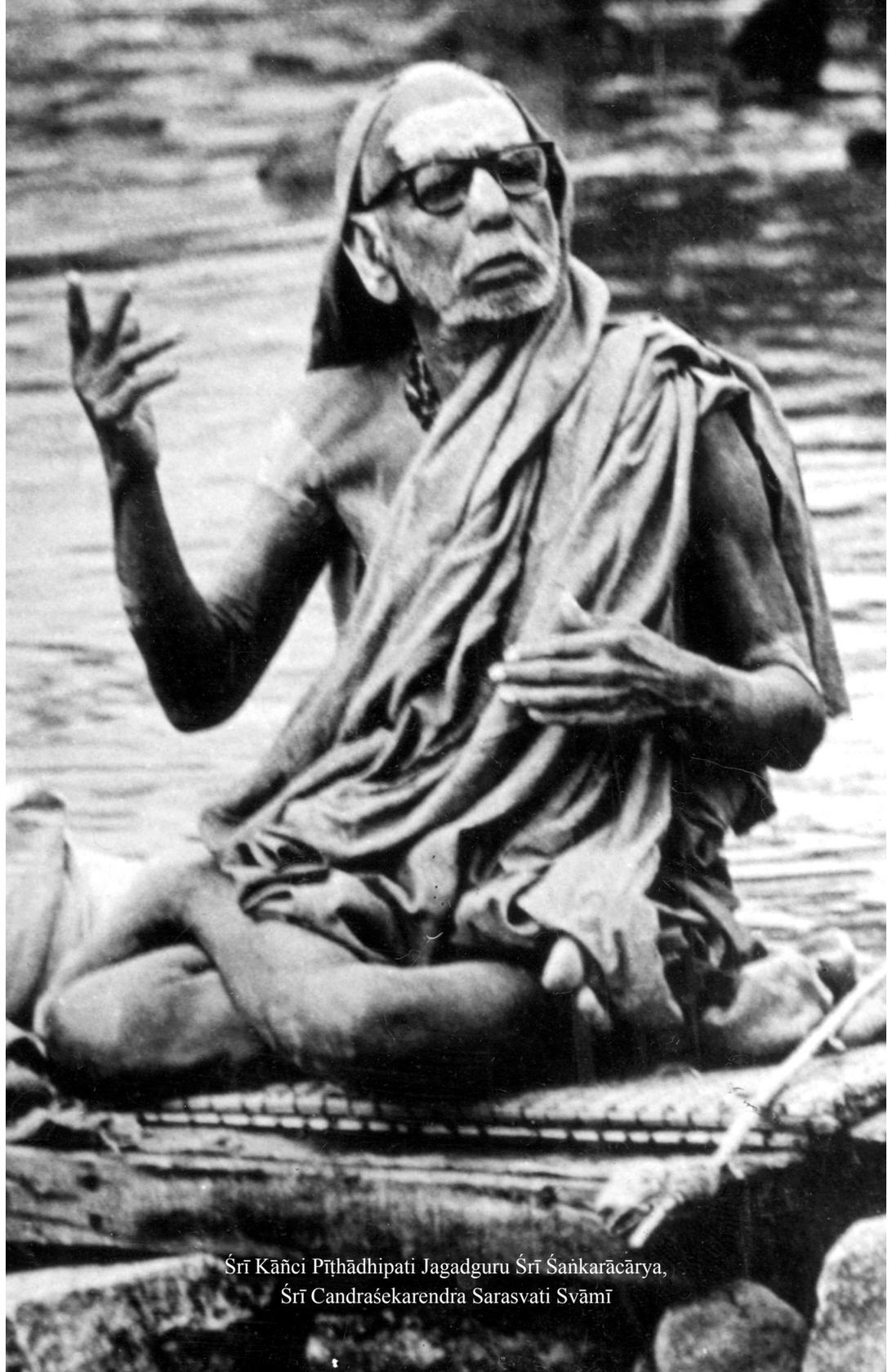
This time he was Śiva, as the Destroyer ...

The swarm of worlds that waited for their annihilation in some corner of the Universe was only known by him, as he was the Black Hole. Surrounded by a purplish haze, with severe and tense features, but devoid of hate or cruelty, he simply accomplished his duty. He had become nothing more than an aged man. The legs covered with wrinkles, the skin generally like matt gold, the gleam of health having become greyish and purplish, he was old, ancient as the Time. Only the eyes were the same, for how could they change, his eyes, the perceptible proofs of the Infinite? His eyes were limpid and open, with the window of the pupil leading one towards the Ocean of azure light behind them. His eyes were partially also my eyes, but his ones had arrived at the last accomplishment of Perfection, that is far, almost out of sight by comparison to mine.

He perceived my trouble and searched for me above the black heads of the visitors covered with coconut oil. I felt several times the short but palpable gentle touch of his look: a very fine silken brush. I observed how he continuously moved his lips. I would have liked to prostrate but I had not space enough as the traditional prostrations are celebratory: one needs place and time. He felt this and straight away he entered the hut: an infallible means for scattering the visitors. Aware of his habits I patiently waited; after sometime he reappeared and gave me the opportunity to throw at his feet all my suffering. I remained a few minutes, kneeling before him, the hands in prayer; I am the only person to act this way, after the customary prostration. He looked at me for a long time, glancing several times from my head to my knees, until the light of my heart appeared and chased away the clouds of ashes, which darkened my mind and hindered the life of my body. He allowed me to stand up only when he was sure that the beauty he had planted in my heart would no more be stifled by the miasma of doubts and fears.

I had already seen him this way, some time ago, and here also at Kārvetinagar.

On that day, towards evening, around the hermitage there prevailed a heavy fog, black, foul-smelling, which was deadly suffocating. Out of the overheated soil burst, in minute fractions of seconds, short flames that were imperceptible to the normal sight, but not less real. Śrī



Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhādhipati Jagadguru Śrī Śaṅkarācārya,
Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvatī Svāmī

Mahāswami, unrecognisable, stood concealed behind an impenetrable façade so that one should not see his face; he did not speak, he did not reply to the prostrations. Round him and the hermitage everything was sombre and menacing. The air had become heavy and it almost smelt like overheated pitch. The sun concealed itself, frightened by the impending disaster, but around the Lotus Pond there still lingered a faint phosphorescent light which made the hut look as if carved out of a rotten tree-trunk. The night swooped down before the normal hour; it was reddish with an intensity which emanated from the enflamed earth. With ghostlike jerky gestures, assistants and devotees had tried to prostrate to him. What else could they do? I had been able to accomplish a prostration perhaps with greater courage borne out of my desperation: only Īśvara as the Destroyer could still cut the chains that bound me to the transitory world of the Illusion.

The second day, always in the evening, for two or three hours, Śrī Mahāswami has uttered only the name of Īshvara in series of four, articulated two by two: Śiva-Śiva, Śiva-Śiva. His name was completing his own work. Where was the cluster of galaxies that had to be erased, dried, scattered in some corner of the Universe known only by the one that had brought it to life by drawing it out of nothingness?

Everything finished as it has started, without anybody having observed it. Īśvara dressed in human body abandoned his fearful outlook before someone could guess what it was. Those who were round Śrī Mahāswami, the assistants and visitors, did not notice anything of the terrific aspect he just showed perhaps to me, as he knew I would not be afraid. What for had I to be frightened of? Pleasing or terrifying forms, are these not engendered by the same Author, Īśvara? The forms react among themselves; the One who created them remains indifferent and is beyond the variegated aspects of His own Creation. In our essence we partake of the steady, eternal nature of Īśvara, the Creator, and his nature is Brahman. Where is there the place for terror?

Śrī Mahāswami appeared like this, after having, temporarily lent to me the necessary sight, for he knew that I will properly utilise this opportunity. And it is really what 'this one' tried: he absorbed to the smallest fraction everything of what was being shown to him, being

convinced that Śrī Mahāswami had to take on a fearful aspect in order to destroy some obstacles on the path of this devotee of his.

Kārvetinagar, Monday 13th September 1971

“Of the Size of a Thumb, Puruṣa...”

This morning, after a quiet and restful night, I reached the hermitage by 7 am. Śrī Mahāswami was still inside, performing his *anushtāna*. The entire hut where he stayed seemed to float above the ground. I went round it by the right several times until I stopped and moved in under the northern shed, without being seen, where Śrī Mahāswami’s small carriage, the red rickshaw was parked. I was less than two metres from Śrī Mahāswami and I diligently repeated the divine names, knowing he was so close. The wall, which was a mat made out of grey-brown bamboo was as if painted in white smoky chalk. After some three quarters of an hour I heard him move inside; I quickly went to the main door on the eastern side, but he had come out through another door on the southern side, by the service yard. He already was walking down the flight of stairs in order to take his morning bath. It was quite late as his usual hour was 5 or 6 am. I am tempted to think that he had been waiting while he prepared me inwardly for the today’s encounter. Before reaching the last step he stopped and stood for a long period, facing south, as if he had expected something from me: I hurried to prostrate before him. Then only he went down to the water.

Following the Hindu traditional texts, the Guru should face the south when he receives the prostration of his devotee, as then he identifies himself with Śiva under the aspect of Dakshinamūrti, Śiva who looks towards the south to counter Death, the South being considered the direction where Death sojourns.

Śrī Mahāswami entered the Lotus Pond; I followed him into the water, to his right, at a respectful distance of eight to ten metres, in order not to irritate the traditionalists. As usual, I sprinkled myself with some drops of water, sanctified, in my opinion, as touched by the body of Śrī Mahāswami. After his rather elaborated bath, he came back to the bottom step, sat down and started the ritual for purifying his *daṇḍa*. I was still in the water, up to the knees, at his right. The Sun, my friend, was half concealed behind thick clouds: it

was impossible not to accompany Śrī Mahāswami in the meditation that followed after he had applied the ashes on his forehead, arms and chest. My meditation lasted more than one hour and it has been a total success: this happens when I am receptive, the exterior conditions are favourable and the preparation is sufficient.

It had been possible, due to the presence of Śrī Mahāswami, to quit the body and the ordinary mind almost instantaneously. I became a little *śiva-liṅgam* of white solar matter, warm and good, sitting in the middle of the chest, exactly as it is described in the Upaniṣad:

“Of the size of a thumb, Puruṣa, the indwelling Self
Is ever (seated) in the heart of men as (already) explained.¹
One should unerringly separate Him from one’s
body like a stalk from the muñja grass.
Him one should know as pure and immortal,
Him one should know as pure and immortal!”²

This marvellous experience had been possible for Śrī Mahāswami entered into me and perfectly protected me.

Soon after this event all my Great Friends,³ whom I had called upon and who had made a fleeting appearance at the beginning of the meditation, came back in force when recalled by Śrī Mahāswami. They cut the ties between the Puruṣa and the physical body with its ordinary mind.

The Queen Kāmākshī of whom I was thinking with joy for the last few days, Ādi Śaṅkara who resides in the heart of Śrī Mahāswami, and Śiva as the *sphaṭika-liṅgam* from the heart of Ādi Śaṅkara, suddenly showed themselves around me. As soon as their names were pronounced, they at once appeared from their own will on the stage of the mind. The Queen, especially, a gracious young girl of some sixteen years, has come all clad in white, but hardly was her exquisite shape sketched when it glided and disappeared in the thought-form of *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*: the fire-pillar positioned in front of the vertebral column in the longitudinal axis of the body. I noticed, without any

¹ Explained in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II.1.12-13.

² *Anguṣṭha mātrāḥ... Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II. 3.17.

³ Śrī Mahāswami, Ādi Śaṅkara, Śiva in human form or as *śiva-liṅga*, the Great Goddess Kāmākshī.

doubt, that the *Puruṣa-śiva-līṅgam* and the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* are one and the same. As I knew that the awaking of the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* and its rise could be accompanied by *siddhi* (psychic powers), I intensely asked not to be loaded with this weight: what I am in need of was *mokṣa*, the Final Liberation and nothing else.

After some time, I felt that I could transcend these images (*Puruṣa-śiva-līṅgam* and *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*). It was possible to meditate on one of my favourite verses:

There is no joy but in the Infinite; there is no joy in the limited.

The joy is Infinite, only one should have the will to know the Infinite.

I want, oh Master, to know the Infinite.⁴

Suddenly I remembered one of the major experiences of non-duality of Rāmakrishna Paramahansa. His Guru at that moment, Totapuri, had ordered him to meditate on a piece of glass he had fixed between the eyebrows. I silently addressed Śrī Mahāswami, “If I but proceeded the same way?” I felt Śrī Mahāswami flying round me as a mother-eagle round its new hatched brood. There was no sense of opposition. Nevertheless, where to find a piece of glass, here, in the Lotus Pond, with water up to the knees?

“And if I meditated on the sun?” ... Immediately the Great Friend of mine, the sun, who seemed prepared for this eventuality, showed himself despite the cloud covered sky: a silver-coin among the haze of clouds. I recalled four or five times the bright image lent to me by the sun and I mentally pressed it in between my eyebrows. Then I do not know what happened. All the images that were helping me disappeared. I found myself alone with simply the consciousness of my existence and nothing else. The ‘I’-thought lingered awhile then it perished.

I suppose that on the shore of the Ocean of azure light a thought existed still. If one could name it ‘I’ or ‘I’-thought it would be for convenience, as how can the Unnameable be named? After a while this last thought also perished.

Who would take a decision for the next step? Someone had already taken it, and he stood in front of me: Śrī Mahāswami. He

⁴ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VII, 23, 1.

was meditating, his hands in *añjali* turned towards east, on the last step of the Lotus Pond. He was completely transfigured, a pole of solidified wax-like light.

At his order, the idea of 'I' came back and made return the consciousness of this body rather quick. It was possible to move. All this time my eyes were closed with hands in *añjali*; I was unmoving, in water up to the knees. Śrī Mahāswami, as if to console me, sent a perfumed wave of bright air: it was his own image. My breath seemed to be willing to come back. Then only I observed that I had stopped breathing. How was it possible? Hardly had the question arisen when the reply followed: the breath stopped completely, without feeling any difficulty. Then the breath came back, by itself, but very tenuous, threadlike, while the movements of the chest could not be felt: as if someone from outside would have blown in my nostrils exactly the necessary quantity of air. Was it really air or was it something else, so that the body could keep its structure and the thought patterns could run their course.

I totally became one with Śrī Mahāswami, and he is made of light.

He is light. He is composed only of a brilliant, transparent substance;

He is the origination of the ray that shoots out minuscule fire-glow from his pupil.

He is the origin of the continuous scintillation that punches the night with fine and straight dazzling lines;

He is the cause of iridescent brilliance that has become a caress in order not to hurt the eye that seeks his blessing;

He is the source of the steady stream of lightning shafts which can transform the iris into an enflamed wheel with the pupil made of lightning at the hub; lightning bolts that change the eyes into an indescribable gate that opens up towards the Infinite ...

He is this and much more ...

How long did it last, this becoming conscious of a fragment of the nature of Śrī Mahāswami? Well, as long as he had shown it to me. He had uncovered it, and then he concealed it.

I watched him become less and less transfigured. He was visibly reabsorbing his real nature; or perhaps he was reassembling the thick surface of his ordinary aspect to cover his real nature. The fact is

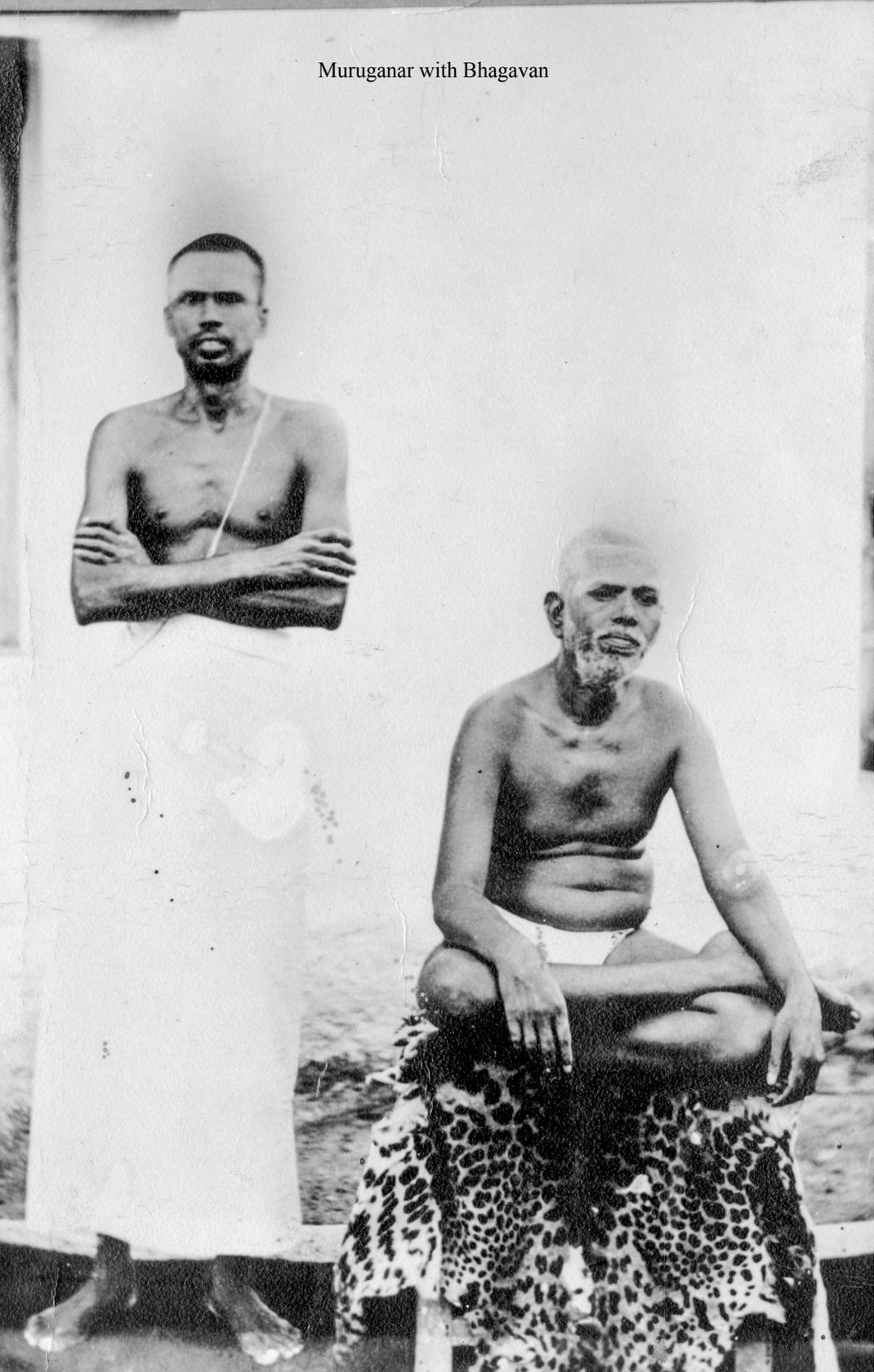
that his features became mobile and his limbs gained the necessary hardness corresponding to his intentions. He took in his hands the *daṇḍa* and the *kamandalu* and stood up with those smooth movements that are his. Without hurrying and without any apparent effort, he headed towards his hut climbing the stairs at a brisk pace.

As soon as he left, I came, as usual, near to the step where he sat and touched the stone with my hand; I drank also a few drops of the liquid touched by him. I had also another aim: to recover out of the water a small sandal-bead from the row he had kept on his head and round his neck. I had noticed how the bead had come away and slipped down in front of the last step. I had the joy of finding three beads in front of the step: the friendly waters had not swallowed them up into the obscure coolness of the reservoir. I respectfully took them and kept them close to my heart, tied in a corner of my shawl.

Another joy was waiting for me. Mr. Varadakutti, the retired principal of the local high school, came to my house and gave me a clear resumé in English, of a talk by Śrī Mahāswami held last Saturday evening. It had lasted until midnight and concerned the three principal schools of the Vedānta philosophical system. How much I would have liked to hear him! In not allowing me to come to the talk, Svāmiji wanted, no doubt, to show me that in my case the teaching through Silence is more important than the one through words.

I came back to the mill, almost floating. This time the so-called ‘return-wave’ or the shock of the return to ‘normal’ that can follow some elevating experiences did not happen: Śrī Mahāswami has permitted me to stay continuously connected to him. It is enough to think of him, but this is not possible if he does not think of you! After longer sessions, like today, nothing is impossible: annihilation of the ‘I-thought’, tearing off the connections with past and future, effacement of the malevolence of the personality, everything becomes so easy! But once admitted in the hospital of God, can a patient still dictate his preferences? ▲

Muruganar with Bhagavan



Disciplines Essential in the Spiritual Aspirant

MUGAVAI KANNA MURUGANAR
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

Introduction

Although in the end the truth will foster certainty, it will not necessarily be equally pleasing to all when they first hear it. That is to say, the final truths here expressed may not in some cases, upon a superficial examination, accord with the views of those of every persuasion. Therefore they should be treated with indulgence, even by those who here and there are tempted to disagree with them and reject them.

— Mugavai Kanna Muruganar

1. Of the two forms of God, that which is termed ‘with form’ or ‘with attributes’ is the product of pure *māyā*; it is not the Supreme. The term ‘transcendental’ is applied to it only in a metaphorical sense.
2. For those who know [the nature of] consciousness there is no danger.
3. For those who have come to know the Truth, the Truth itself will foster certainty.
4. Empty disputation is like dry bones. Knowledge born of experience is worth a thousand gold pieces.

5. Eradication of the ego is the state of immortality. Therefore the renunciation of the ego is that which is most rare and precious.

6. Other than for the obtaining of alms, it is quite inappropriate for *sādhu*-s to pay regular visits to the houses of their acquaintances and even less appropriate for them to remain there, associating with them in a convivial fashion.

7. For *sādhu*-s to be seen in such places as ‘the talkies’ or ‘the cinema’ is the kind of shameful sight that will be viewed with disgust by the wise.

8. Awareness of oneself, one’s real nature, which is the foundation (*adhiṣṭhāna*) that shines naturally in the place where the superimposed ego is eradicated, alone is the meaning of what is called ‘grace’.

9. Delusion (*maruḷ*) is that which masks grace (*aruḷ*). Delusion is the mental awareness known as ‘ego consciousness’, consisting of the two states, consciousness *sakalam* (the waking and dream states) and *kevalam* (the deep sleep state, unconditioned consciousness, which is falsely identified by the *jīva* as unconsciousness). These equate to thinking and absence of thought. That which is free of these two is the pure state, *cuttam* (*śuddha*), which is known as *turiyam*. From the ordinary perspective in which the ego consciousness is believed to be real, the knowledge of the Self, the Śiva-consciousness in which the former (ego consciousness) is annihilated, is described variously as ‘emptiness’ or ‘a void’. This idea is expressed in the compositions of the great ones in such statements as:

Lord, you who in deepest darkness perform your cosmic dance!
In the darkness I grasped you and held you tight.¹

10. He only is a Brahmin (Seer) who knows the Supreme Reality.

11. The ego-self (*jīva*) is an imaginary appearance in the Self, like the snake [erroneously perceived] in the rope.

12. Because of the love for oneself that naturally shines in each and every *jīva*, the Self is the very form of bliss (*sukha-svarūpa*). For those who know the Self (*ātma-svarūpa*) as it is when the ego is eradicated, [there arises] a naturally heart-melting love for the Supreme which shines as that Self. It is because of this love that knowledge of the

¹ The Tamil quotations are from Māṇikkavācagar’s *Śiva Purāṇam*, l. 89. and *Piḍitta Pattu*, v. 4, l. 4.

Self (*ātma-jñāna*) is also known by the other name of supreme love (*parabhakti*). Therefore supreme love and directly intuited knowledge [of the Self] (*aparokṣa jñāna*) are not different.

13. It behoves *sādhaka*-s to abandon the [reading of] newspapers and periodicals which lead to delusion.

14. Apart from consciousness, nothing else whatsoever exists.

15. There is no deceit which we can conceal from our own heart.

16. All the other three [virtue, wealth and pleasure] are contained within [the fourth, which is] liberation.

17. There is no state more sublime than liberation.

18. Regard others as if they were yourself.

19. There is nothing so unstable as the mind. Its appearance is entirely untrustworthy. The mind's very nature is to deceive and mislead. At the very first opportunity it will hog-tie the *sādhaka* and plunge into the world of phenomena. As long as it exists its nature will never change. Therefore it must be destroyed at the root through unrelenting meditation based on enquiry. Until it is thus eradicated no wise person should be at ease, assuming that his task is complete.

20. What is called birth and death is a dream born of ignorance. See how Māṇikkavācaḡar in his Tamil Veda speaks of, 'The confusion of the mental flux known as birth and death,' and 'the delusion of these two known as birth and death.'²

21. The form of the primordial God is the undivided, non-dual, infinite expanse [of consciousness]. Therefore He knows nothing that is other than Himself. The real nature of divine grace is only that all-embracing, pure awareness that is his very nature.

22. God and guru (in reality the two are not different) are of the very form of grace. There is therefore not the least necessity for them to intentionally bestow divine grace upon devotees through thought (*saṁkalpa*).

23. That those who refuse to joyfully bestow their affection upon the beings they see and meet at first hand should melt and dissolve in love for a God who cannot be seen is indeed the wonder of wonders!

24. To whatever extent they drive from their hearts thoughts of 'I'

² The Tamil quotations are from Māṇikkavācaḡar's *Tiru-k-kōttumbi* v. 6, ll. 2 & 3. and v. 9, l. 3.

and 'mine', to that same extent shall they turn towards the Lord and draw near to Him.

25. Those wicked ones who would deceive the Lord deceive only themselves. If no one can deceive himself, then it follows that no one can deceive the Lord either. Why so? Because there is no evil deed which we can conceal from our own heart and equally because the Lord exists as the witness of that heart.

Praise to the One who exists as the witness in the heart,
the heart from which no evil deed can be concealed!

— *Sri Ramana Sannidhimurai*.³

26. Those who live in expectation of the Lord's grace must needs harbour love for the beloved creatures who share his form.

27. Although God usually appears in a human form as the embodiment of grace, on occasion He will impart the true knowledge of Reality dwelling within formlessly as the consciousness of consciousness itself. This depends upon the degree of fitness of the aspirant.

28. It is entirely fitting for those who possess a pure mind that has been thoroughly reformed to conduct themselves taking that mind as their witness.

29. The Heart alone is the temple where the Lord dwells.

30. The first lesson that true *sādhaka*-s must learn is to conduct themselves with a firm resolve to maintain their purity of heart.

31. Whatever abilities they may possess *sādhaka*-s should not flaunt them in the least degree. If they do so, it will remain to the very end a great obstacle to their *sādhana*, their most important endeavour.

32. To maintain that women and others should not repeat the holy syllable Om (*praṇava japa*) is like prohibiting someone from contemplating the Self.

33. Excess should be altogether avoided by the wise. Even ambrosia, taken to excess, is a poison.

34. The life lived in detachment is the noblest life.

³ The quotation is from *pirārttanai-t-tiruvagaval*, ll. 287-8, the sixth poem of *Śrī Ramaṇa sannidimurai*, Muruganar's long series of poems in praise of Sri Ramana, which is modelled loosely on the format of the *Tiruvācagam* of Māṇikkavācagar.

35. Conduct yourself in this world as if in a drama, without attachment and without agitation.

36. A measure of rice to eat and four cubits of cloth to wear [is all we need].⁴ Is it for just this that we endure such suffering in the world?

37. Do not speak harshly to, ignore and reject anyone. An unruly bullock will come to bear a [greater] burden, (i.e. he will not escape punishment).

38. Self-control is much more important than knowledge. How we act is more important than what we think.

39. He who reviles another reviles himself.

40. Shine with the true awareness that all is one's Self, free of individuality, which consists of the ego which is an amalgam of the sentient (*cit*) and the insentient (*jada*).

41. Should anyone scorn you and spread slander about you, your attitude should be one of gratitude towards them for giving you the opportunity of recognising and correcting some fault that you might otherwise not easily have noticed yourself. The wise will be aware that, if, conversely, you cling stubbornly to that fault and hate and disparage that person, these are sure presages of the ruin that is destined soon to overtake you.

42. The reason false imagination arises is to reveal the reality that transcends those imaginary appearances by instigating the enquiry as to wherefrom did they arise and what is their source.

43. That which deludes people into thinking that the 'death' in which one dwells as the nature of the Self is true death is the perverse, erroneous understanding whose nature is the ego-consciousness whose form is the mind. Is it not so, therefore, that as a prerequisite for gaining that liberation, whose nature is pure consciousness, or Śiva consciousness (consciousness of the Supreme), it is necessary to destroy that false understanding? Know that that which the scriptures praise as the means for final liberation, using such synonyms as 'the destruction of the ego', 'the offering up of one's self', 'the loss of one's self', 'the annihilation of the mind' and 'the destruction of inherited predispositions (*vāsanā-s*)' is only that 'death'. The decad,

⁴ The first part is a quotation from verse 28 of Auvaiyār's *Nalvali* which begins *uṇbadu nāli uḍuppadu nāngu muḷam*.

‘I have not died’ in the *Tiruvācagam* illustrates this point. Saint Pattinattar too in a similar vein sings, ‘Go about as ones who have died.’ Such expressions by the great saints are too numerous to count.⁵

44. People of integrity should exercise great moderation both in what they write and in what they say. Otherwise, it is certain that, knowingly or unknowingly, they will deviate from the truth. Excessive speech will give rise to nonsense.

45. To express one’s thoughts clearly using just a few words⁶ is the ornament of wisdom. Excess verbiage will only highlight one’s ignorance.

Many words they’ll delight to use, who have not learned
to make their point with just a carefully chosen few.

– *Tiru-k-kuraḷ* v. 649.

46. You should not contradict yourself. Even at risk to your very life, you should behave strictly in accordance with the words you have spoken. [However] it is not possible for anyone to behave with such firm resolve regarding anything whatsoever unless they have perfected the practice of saying something once only after thinking it over twice.

47. It would seem that the beauty and usefulness of learned commentaries (*bāṣya*) is that they take extremely, brief, practical texts, suitable to be easily and clearly understood by all, and vastly expand them into convoluted sastraic tangles that are useful, on rare occasions, only to the learned. How good. How good indeed.

48. Rather than promising as a kindness something they are not able to deliver and then renege on their promise, the wise will refuse in the first instance, saying that it is not within their power, even at the

⁵ *cettilā pattu* – I have not died is hymn 23 of the *Tiruvācagam*, composed after Lord Śiva, in the guise of a Saivite guru, had departed for Mount Kailash after giving the saint initiation. The verse of Pattinattu Adigal here referred to is as follows: ‘Foolish heart, even if life and body both are lost, do not earn for yourself the name of ‘sinner’ in the world. Whether great wealth or misfortune befalls, be not concerned. Move about like a walking corpse.’

⁶ The words *curuṅga colli viḷaṅga vaiittal* are a slightly emended version of the first line of verse 13 of the grammatical work *Nannūl*, which lists the ten beauties of style, of which these are the first two given.

cost of incurring disgrace on that account. Such is the excellence of the wise whose actions are aligned with moral virtue.

Maid whose arms are stacked with bracelets, there is nothing wrong in refusing to give that which is not within one's power to grant. That is the way of the world. But to continually offer something without actually giving it, until the person requesting it gives up the desire for it, is equivalent to the sin of one who forgets a good deed done to him. – *Nālaḍiyār* v.111.

49. The wise person should restrain and control completely the frenzied state of mind that courts disaster. Not only that, he should behave with extreme caution towards those who are under its control. Otherwise he may needlessly come later to regret it. Therefore he should take the attitude that the best plan is to avoid such people altogether as far as it is possible.

50. Just as in worldly affairs nothing can be obtained without paying the appropriate price for it, so, in the realm of the supreme Reality, no one can realise the nature of the supreme Self, being-consciousness-bliss, the source of all that is, without offering up his own self, which is the support of all things [in the world]. Compared to the greatness of the supreme Self which is thus attained, the price of the sacrifice of one's own self that is paid for it in return, is, when we think about it, an exceedingly small one.

You gave yourself to me and in exchange that gained by you was only me. Then who, O Sankara, is wiser of the two?
That which I obtained was utter and unending bliss,
but what one thing did you obtain from me in this?⁷

We may judge from such expressions by the great saints exactly how profitable an exchange made on such terms will be.

(Here we are speaking in the language of duality. The advaitic point of view states that, upon the abandonment of the imaginary ego consciousness, the realisation of the eternal Self must occur, just as the Tondaman king appeared once more as a king, once he had removed the disguise of a servant, which he had assumed for a certain purpose. (Personal (*jīva*) consciousness is the awareness of individuality, which

⁷ The quotation is from hymn 22 of the *Tiruvācagam*, *koyil tiru-p-padigam* – *The Sacred Temple Lyric*, v. 10, ll. 1 & 2.

is of the form of the ego which says 'I'. Due to the attribute whereby it is not continuous but arises and subsides, this is not in its nature real). The 'bartering' of oneself must mean the 'destruction' of oneself, because of the objection that, [from the advaitic point of view] upon the offering up of oneself, there exists nothing equivalent which is fitting to be accepted in return.)

51. Like an untamed horse, unrestrained speech also will bring calamity upon a man. Therefore always draw tightly on the bit called self-control, never loosening your grip for a second.

Whatever else you fail to guard, guard your tongue. Or else,
through a slip of the tongue, much misery will be felt.

– *Tiru-k-kuraḷ* v. 127.

52. Those who are expansive in speech will shrink in knowledge.

53. Those who speak at length conceal their intent.

54. There is no greater ornament than self-control.

55. By consuming the intoxicating liquor of delusion, which is the mind, human beings, who are in reality immortal, become mentally confused, and, alas and alack, live and die as mortals. The moment they are free of that intoxicating liquor of delusion, they at once recover their former immortality, which is their true nature and glory in it. The truth that our great rishis revealed is that the mind is simply the death which takes the form of forgetting our true nature. The first humans, Adam and Eve, disobeyed the command of the Lord who had created them in his own image, lusting after and relishing the vile fruit, which for their own good he had forbidden them to taste. As a result not only they but their descendants also lost their divine nature and fell from grace for all eternity. The vile fruit referred to in this story from the Old Testament of the Bible is this very mind.

The Vedas strongly enjoin mankind to obey their command exactly as they command it, without asking why. But the mind possesses a wondrous power of delusion (*māyā śakti*), which causes it to associate with that which is forbidden and deceives us into thinking that what is good is bad and what is bad is good. It is for this very reason that it is impossible for anyone employing only such a mind to grasp what is the nature of the eternal lore (*sanātana dharma*), which is difficult for anyone to grasp. Therefore we might say that in a number of ways man's association with the mind is entirely to be rejected.

56. No one who occupies himself in *pūjā* to god and service to *sādhu-s* and so on with a very active and wandering mind, sacrificing in so doing the calm peace of the Supreme within his heart, will be able to reap the benefits that are the true purpose of those activities. They will be useless like sacrificial offerings poured onto cold ashes. Therefore in all situations the first duty of the wise is to preserve a clarity of mind that is not affected by the least disturbance.

57. Unless its veiling delusion is destroyed the mind's wandering will not cease. Therefore it is indispensable always to incessantly perform the inward enquiry into true knowledge, which takes the form, 'Who am I?'

58. A thrifty lifestyle will yield great riches.

59. The high-minded are those that adorn themselves inwardly. The low-minded are those that adorn themselves outwardly.

60. Before the mind can be purified one's speech must be purified.

61. Impetuous and extravagant speech will not mask the mind's ignorance but only advertise it.

62. It is only when one has had enough of charitable works, wealth and pleasure that the true desire to gain liberation will arise in the heart.

63. Since at a certain point hearing the truth (*śravaṇa*) and reflecting on the truth (*manana*) become a hindrance to abiding in the truth (*nididhyāsana*), it is proper for those who desire liberation to recognise when that time has come and abandon them.

64. 'Sweet Fruit of the wish-granting tree of paradise, consumed by the learned ones!', 'Lord who dwells not in the heart of the unlearned!' — statements such as these by the great ones regarding learning and the lack of it refer, according to the context in which they appear, either to the direct, unmediated experience of knowledge and ignorance or else to the indirect experience of knowledge and ignorance revealed by the scriptures. They do not refer at all to the worldly knowledge and ignorance which takes the form merely of the reading and writing in which those statements are expressed. That which is referred to euphemistically as 'learning' in the world of the mind, which is purely a mental creation, is in reality only ignorance. It was on realising this misunderstanding and desiring to correct it

that the noble Māṇikkavācagar rejected that knowledge and those who learn (only) that, declaring, ‘I have no desire for the company of the learned. Of what is to be learned, I know enough already!’⁸

65. He who has conquered desire has conquered all.

66. It is a virtue in the learned to base their actions on their own experience. However, realising that one man’s sweetmeat is another man’s poison, the wise will not find it appropriate to insist on their own point of view whilst rejecting that of others.

67. An undisturbed mind is a sign of true knowledge.

68. Patience is an adornment.

69. Avoid disputation.

70. Do not consume intoxicating beverages.

71. When people who are already naturally held in delusion by the egoic principle (*āṇava malam*) take opium, ganja and other intoxicating substances and experience happiness as a result, that is the source of ceaseless suffering in both this life and the next.

72. That which is actually being experienced by all in the many and varied sensory experiences that occur continuously, one after the other, is in reality only one, the bliss of the Self, whose nature is peace. Only those *jñāni*-s who have attained the peace [of the Self] will realise this, not those who wallow in sense impressions as if possessed.

73. Unless the thought that one is not experiencing the bliss of the Self is totally eradicated, that experience will not become manifest. It can only be experienced as one’s own authentic nature. It cannot, like the pleasure derived from sense objects, be experienced in conjunction with the movements of the fraudulent mind. The latter is a barrier to the former.

74. Just as there is no need of a mirror to see a *nelli* fruit in the palm of the hand, neither is there any need of any external knowledge to know

⁸ *kaṛṛavar viḷuṅgum kaṇṇiyē* is the first line of the second verse of Cēntaṇār’s homage to Śiva at Tiruvīḷimiḷalai, *Tiruvīḷimiḷalai Tiruvicai-p-pā* from the 9th *Tirumurai*. The second quotation is from Jñāṇasambandhar, 3:40:3:

The Lord dwells not in the heart of those that have not studied [Him].

We shall not remain with those who speak not [his holy name].

The reference to Māṇikkavācagar at the end is from v. 3 of *tiru-p-ulambal* – *The Sacred Lament*.

that one is oneself the light of consciousness, the Self, *Ātma svarūpa*.

75. The vast proliferation of holy scriptures is like a broad, dense forest that extends without limit. Therefore those who desire liberation should leave that forest, which is the cause of their mind's delusion, learn the truth from a realised sage (*tattva ṅāṇi*) and gain release from worldly bondage.

76. A contented mind is a golden panacea.

77. Do not 'wag your tail' (act pompously, put on airs), forgetting our all-pervading, all powerful Lord and God.

78. Human beings, being very weak and lacking the ability to reform their own defective minds, attempt to mould the events of the outside world to suit their desires, even though these events are the sole property of the Lord, whose powers are without limit. Initially it may happen that, unknown to them and quite by accident, the will of the Lord and their own desires coincide, like the crow and the palmyra tree (the story in which the palmyra fruit happens to fall just as the crow alights on it). But by and large such attempts are fruitless and lead only to disappointment.

79. The essence of the personal self (*jīva*) is the mind whose form is the ego. The essence of the Self is the Heart, whose form is consciousness.

80. Birth and death (arising and subsiding) are attributes only of the mistakenly perceived individual (*puruṣa*), not of the underlying substratum. In the same way, worldly bondage and liberation are attributes only of the imaginary personal self (*jīva*), not of the true Self, which is eternally free of all defilement.

81. The loss of true knowledge is the loss of all that is.

82. Since there exists nothing apart from itself for it to know, to know consciousness is to know everything.

83. To restrain the awareness that wanders hither and thither, so that it remains still and unwavering within one's Heart – that is *yoga*.

84. True wealth is the blossoming of awareness.

85. It is within the Śiva līṅgam that the personal consciousness (*jīva*) is absorbed.

86. To whatever degree you possess right knowledge, to that degree will your peace be profound.

MOUNTAIN PATH

87. 'Good deeds' fall into two categories, those that constitute austerities (*tavam*) and those that are a waste of time (*avam*). To free the personal self (*jīva*) from its worldly bondage in due fashion by such means as maintaining purity of mind and performing service to the Lord through selfless actions which occur in one naturally constitutes *tavam*, austerities. But since selfish actions, designed solely to be of benefit to oneself, whether in this life or the next, only further tighten one's fetters, they are in the highest spiritual sense *avam*, a waste of time.

88. Those who desire to perform prolonged *sādhana* in the prescribed manner until they accomplish their object should proceed treating the body in a moderate manner, being neither indulgent and over-pampering it nor mistreating it by harming it unnecessarily.

89. For those of refined intelligence who have gained full mastery over their mind, the mind is a faithful servant, worthy of being employed by them.

90. No one exists separately from the Lord.

91. Wherever you place your attention, there the Lord is.

92. All phenomena that possess form exist in the formless space, not only upon their arising and subsiding but also during the intervening period of their existence. Therefore all are in reality of the nature of that space only.

93. No one can have the direct experience of the Supreme Reality other than by abiding as that Supreme Reality (*tanmaya niṣṭhā*).

94. Alas for the fate of those people who have the time only to gather dry leaves but no time to [light a fire and] fend off the cold.

95. What might we say of the state of those people who in old age, during their final moments, when even their wife and family consent to it, refuse to renounce the world even on their deathbed (*āpad sannayas*)?

96. The nature of the supreme consciousness will manifest only upon the destruction of the individual consciousness (*jīva*) which is the reflection of that supreme consciousness in the faculties of mind, sense and action. ▲

The Legacy of J. Krishnamurti

Bud to Blossom: Blooming Creativity in Life and Education

K.V. SUBRAHMONYAN

This article has been written after reading S. Gopalan's book *Bud to Blossom: Blooming Creativity in Life and Education* which seeks to understand 'the living teaching of J. Krishnamurti'. This is not written in the format of a review. It is more reminiscential. The book has been published by Mind Mingle, 2019. This is a very important book written by an expert and has been reviewed very competently by highly qualified people in the Foreword and Appendix to the book. The author Gopalan and Shobha Gopalan have been deeply committed to Krishnamurti's revolutionary and liberating approach to school education, love the students as their own and have served in Krishnamurti Schools for nearly four decades with self-abnegatory dedication. This book should be read by all who are interested in Krishnamurti's original approach to Reality in general and his deeply creative ideas on education.

Annie Besant and Leadbeater of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, saw in the teenage lad Jiddu Krishnamurti (K), a shy, slightly built

and strikingly handsome, the future Messianic World Teacher, whose advent the Theosophists all over the world had been waiting for, and publicly announced him as much. A few decades had to pass before they were proved both right and wrong. Wrong because K did not end up as the World Teacher of their prediction, that is, as a vehicle of the Maitreyi Buddha, and right because K did flower into a totally original, revolutionary Teacher admired globally, into one of the wisest men in history who travelled round the world year after year as a free man neither bound by nor exercising any authority, talking about living a life free from authority, conflict, fear and sorrow. Such a life will naturally be one of love and happiness. The words which K used were stunningly fresh, clear, concise, beautiful and powerful and bore the stamp of actual experience. There was not even the slightest reference to any book and the only book he recommended was the Book of Life. When he referred to the holy books of the major religions of the world, it was only to declare them just books with no holiness about them.

K, who never married, lived in Ojai, California in the USA, where he founded the Oak Valley School. He went round the world giving annual public talks at Brockwood Park, UK, where too there is a K School, Saanen, Switzerland, Vasanta Vihar, Chennai, and at Bombay. He had also given talks at Delhi, Varanasi, Kolkata and Colombo. K's teachings are preserved in tapes, videos and books. There are K Schools also in Rajghat, Varanasi, Rishi Valley, Andhra Pradesh and Thazambur, Chennai.

In his talks, K spoke of the human condition, the deeply conditioned human mind, the chimerical psychological time, the chaos in the world, of conflict, sorrow, suffering, anxiety, jealousy, distrust, competitiveness, relationship and so on. He also spoke of caring, trust, attention, listening, looking, learning, seeing the false as false, death, love, dying and living from moment to moment, living in the present free from the shadow of the past, wholeness of perception, inward flowering, the need for a totally new mind, the urgency of transformation, true creativeness, education and awakening of intelligence which is different from intellect, flowering into a good human being, etc. At the end of K's talk, one would feel a sense of immense inward peace. The deep called to the deep.

One wonders if any religious – I use the word in the beautiful, deep sense in which K used it – teacher before K had gone year after year from Continent to Continent, talking to the general public with such passion and sense of urgency about attention, listening with one’s whole being and learning, about relationship and love. It seemed that he was saying that man’s only problem is his inattention. No wonder that in K schools students are helped to see what a wonderful, transformative, liberating thing listening is and a whole period is devoted to silent listening by teachers and students.

K asked people to be totally free from what is known, for the moment one knows a thing, it is not knowledge, and knowledge is always in the unknown. He would even say knowledge ruins learning. To learn, one should have the sense of not knowing. How chokingly full are the Inboxes of our minds! It was a wonderful sight to see K arrive for sessions of dialogues with eminent scholars, philosophers and scientists from different parts of the world with nothing but his uncluttered mind and flaming attention. One could then see the grandeur and wisdom of not knowing, of the great vastness of a free mind.

K never dropped names nor quoted from any author. The only times I heard him mention names was when he said ‘Mrs Besant who heard that I attended a political meeting, called me and said ‘Krishna, no politics,’ and I never again attended a political meeting,’ and when he referred to his friend Aldous Huxley telling him during a walk in Ojai, ‘Krishnamurti, I have read so much about so many things...But I have never been able to see anything exactly as it is.’ Huxley’s last novel *The Island* begins with the words “‘Attention’, said the bird.” K would say that if we can see a thing as it is without naming or describing it that is all, it is reality. Who else than K has put it so bluntly that once we know, that knowledge has become ignorance and knowledge is always in the unknown and freedom is from the known.

K would at times ask his audiences in India ‘Sirs, is there love in this country? Don’t ask me is there love in other countries. When I go there, I shall talk about what I see there. The question is, is there love in this country? There is respect, *bhakti*, but is there love in this country?’ He would also say ‘You are secondhand people, deeply,’ ‘You are mediocre,’ ‘You are professional listeners.’ ‘Sirs, I don’t want

to make you my disciples, it isn't worth it. Sorry.' Such utterances would make some people take K to be arrogant, egoistic. Nothing was farther from the truth. K was a humble, shy man, hesitant to open a conversation with a stranger. He did not care for his reputation. It meant nothing, was 'nonsense' to him. He would say, "This is not my teaching. This is the teaching...These words come from your own Self." He involved his audience so deeply in his talk that one felt that both were talking and listening. The speaker and the audience were one.

A few times K made sweeping remarks about great epochal men who too were indeed world teachers like Adi Sankara and Mahatma Gandhi. Achyut Patwardhan, Gandhian Socialist and Quit India hero, who became an associate of K with the whole-hearted consent of Gandhiji after India became free in 1947, told K: "Krishnaji, you are a great man but not perfect. You have many likes and dislikes...You talk dismissively of great men without having known them. I have been with Gandhiji. He was a very great man." While it is true that K was not an astute judge of men, in this instance he was not belittling Sankara and Gandhiji. He wanted his associates and others to live their own lives and not of others however great they may be. K exhorted his listeners not to be conditioned by others and he followed it to the hilt. It is another matter that Gandhiji himself asked his followers to give the leadership to Truth and not to him.

Though K would tell his audiences, "Sirs, you worship intellect and deny love", he admired outstanding intellect wherever he found it. He admired the rare brilliance of David Bohm who had learnt from and worked with Albert Einstein. Once he told teachers of a K School, "You should have a good brain...Take Einstein. My God, where is Einstein and where am I?"

Once K said that in his schools in India there were teachers who were very brilliant and others who were ordinary and the rest fell between the two. I was working at the office of The Valley School, Bangalore, at that time and I felt that when he spoke of the first category, he must have had in mind, to name only a few, young teachers like Amarendra Roy, Kabir Jayatirtha, Gopalan, Shubha Neelakanta and others of the Bangalore School and of Shailesh Shirali, Rajesh Dalal, Dr.Radhika, Dr.Kumaraswami and others of the Rishi Valley School.

Being a truly humble man, K may have rated them higher than him. Kabir invited me to try classroom teaching but I declined knowing my limitations. I had suffered from ‘functional disorder of the brain’ from 1952 following a nervous breakdown and I knew I would easily fall in the second category with grace marks. What wonderful teachers of the primary classes were Kamala Subramanian and others, how deeply and naturally did unassuming and scholarly Viju Jaitirtha bond with her students and how creatively Usha Mukunda ran the School Library.

Once in 1984 Achyut Patwardhanji of Krishnamurti Foundation India told me, ‘Mani, Krishnaji’s words are like *sūtra*-s (aphorisms).’ I nodded in assent. Mentally I started making a list of such words but I knew that there was no way of putting them in Sanskrit because my knowledge was grossly inadequate and more importantly I knew that K, though he liked chanting, scrupulously avoided the use of Sanskrit words though I won’t say that he was allergic to that beautiful language. English was his vehicle of expression and he used it with amazing precision. Though he knew French, Italian and Spanish (he once gave a talk in French over the French Radio), he seldom used words in those languages when speaking in English.

Here are some of the aphoristic statements of K which I recollect: Truth is a pathless land; Truth cannot be organized; Knowledge is always in the shadow of ignorance; Knowledge ruins learning; Better is the enemy of good; Tradition is *trahison* (French for betrayal); The past betrays the present; Be simple, don’t get complicated; Be like a fool, you will get along well; Get lost; If you don’t take care of yourself, life has an extraordinary way of caring for you; Sirs, you worship intellect and deny love; If you fear death, it means you are not living rightly; Live and die from moment to moment; You should invite death, that does not mean you jump into the nearest pond; Beauty cannot be on the face, it is when you are not; Reputation is nonsense; Can you be a clean slate, not allowing your mind to register anything?; Cultivation of humility is arrogance; Lay first the foundation in human virtue; Disciples destroy the master; One has to be extremely honest with oneself. Mind should be empty and the heart full of love; In meditation there is no premeditation; Truth is always in the unknown; End of sorrow is the beginning of wisdom;

Attachment to one is the denial of love for all; The word is not the thing; God is disorder but when there is perfect order, love, it is God; You are the world and the world is you; Listen without accepting or denying; The observer is the observed; Time is sorrow; The first step is the last step; Be vulnerable but don't get hurt psychologically; Innocence is not to get hurt; Be choicelessly aware; See yourself in the mirror of relationship.

Those who find some of these statements enigmatic would do well to read Gopalan's *Bud to Blossom* for he has explained them with great insight and clarity. In fact, he has written *bhāshya*-s (commentaries) for K's *sūtra*-s.

Dr. Sunandaji Patwardhan, who was the Publications Secretary of KFI, once told me, 'Mani, much of what Krishnaji has said has been said before except what he says about relationship.' I said, 'Madam, Krishnaji has spoken from his own experience and used his own words in a manner totally new.' She said, 'Of course.'

Agehananda Bharati, an Austrian sociologist from Syracuse University, USA, and one-time monk of Sri Ramakrishna Mutt and author of the controversial book *Ochre Robe* once wrote: 'Ramana Maharshi and J. Krishnamurti are the two original teachers of our age, the former within tradition and the latter from without.' How right he was. In truth, K did not seek to destroy tradition. Quite on the contrary. He was an aesthete extraordinary and was the last man to miss the beauty in anything. He showed the extraordinary importance of *śravaṇa*, listening, the basis of Vedantic learning and of being free from all conditioning, call it *vāsanā*-s if you will. Neither K nor Ramana claimed to be a guru. In Ramana there is perfect immanence and transcendence. Nothing is rejected and there is freedom from everything. K said that none can take you to Truth while Ramana said there are no two, one to guide, the other to follow. Saint Kabir sums it up inimitably: He who engages in two has not yet found the Sadguru. The Sadguru is Pure Consciousness. Said Rumi: There is only One (*Wahadat*) there, how can there be partnership (*sherkat*)? K was so intensely and incessantly passionate about freeing people from fear that it would seem that he wouldn't shed his body before he saw at least a few people so freed. Addressing audiences in tents, halls and open spaces in different places, he would say, "Sirs you

should be TOTALLY free from fear by the time you leave this tent/hall/meeting.”

In his Schools, there is an ambiance in which students learn to deal with fear and get over it. Gopalan discusses fear and insecurity with great clarity. Wherever fear is rational, K termed it as intelligence which helps one to steer clear of it. There was great beauty, elegance, order and simplicity in whatever K did. He had a slender but healthy body and he took meticulous but non-fussy care of it, went to very good doctors and dentists but was not attached to his body and life. Of course, he was not one of those rare people who were totally free from the sense of the body. K was not attached to anybody or anything though his love flowed towards one and all. He would say, “Attachment to one denies love for all.” He was not an ascetic and did not believe in letting his mind become a battleground. A great lover of nature and incomparable in his description of it, K was not one who would overdo going against nature. As noted psychologist Sudhir Kakar wrote, “Krishnamurti was human. No man can ask for a better epitaph.”

K’s love for the students was beyond measure. Few sights are more beautiful than that of K having dialogues with the students of his schools as a friend, as a fellow-inquirer. He would tell them the same truth as he would the parents and other grown-ups. He would tell them God is disorder but when there is perfect order or when you give all your love to something, that is God. Not to fear anybody, any authority or god but to flower in love and goodness. He wanted to give the students the finest education in an excellent environment. He preferred at least hundreds if not thousands of acres for his schools amidst lush greenery far away from the din and dust of the roads. While Vedanta defines *vidyā* or knowledge as that which serves to liberate, K wanted his students to flower into good human beings. Only a free man can be good. Outwardly and inwardly. One who has no clue to his real nature and gropes around cannot be good in the sense K used the word.

Gopalan, who has an excellent and insightful understanding of K’s teaching, especially of the original, revolutionary and practical nature of his vision of school education, shows with admirable clarity and attention to every detail and nuance of K’s vision of education,

how teachers and students in K schools grow in true creativeness and flower into freedom and goodness. He shows the gross inadequacy in the kind of education offered in conventional schools with all emphasis on development of skills and technique and little or none on encouraging creativeness in the student.

Gopalan's explanation of the process of conditioning of thought is most lucid. He shows how K's uniqueness lies in making thought, intellect turn the spotlight on itself. The sections in the book on Attention, Self-knowledge, Unknown, Holistic knowledge, Choiceless awareness etc. are simply superb.

Being a very practical man, Gopalan has not omitted to give very useful tips on teaching in a school like K's. These are the fruits of four decades of successful tenure as a dedicated teacher in K schools.

I feel that K's most original and enduring contribution to mankind, even more than his books of great beauty and depth, rightly called by the renowned filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt in a moment of great perceptivity in the wake of K's passing away as 'the best in English language', are his schools in three continents. I cannot do better than asking the reader to go through Gopalan's *Bud to Blossom* to understand the reason for my assertion. K often used to say 'The word is not the thing, the word god is not god.' K's words, however fabulously beautiful and insightful, might seem utopian as a pie in the sky to some people. Many statements, aphoristic in form, of K have puzzled many and his teaching has even been termed as abracadabra by some very wise men. Such people are sure to change their views and realize, to use a pet phrase of K 'the depth, beauty and timelessness' of his teaching and thoughts on education and the amazing manner in which they are translated into action by highly gifted and totally committed teachers. ▲

The Maharshi and Mantra

Part Three

KAYS

The Entire Sweep of Vedanta in a Single Mantra

The five year old Indira, daughter of Bhagavan's close devotee Gurram Subbaramayya, is probably the youngest ever to receive 'mantropadeśa' direct from Bhagavan. As the unique recipient of extraordinary Grace she, indeed, was the most blessed child. As she was turning the pages of the Telugu translation of *Upadeśa Sāram* in the presence of Bhagavan, she picked up and read aloud the first words printed in bold type in the four lines of the Sanskrit verse composed by Bhagavan, namely, 'deham-naham-koham-soham' (This body-I am not-Who am I?-He I am). On hearing it Bhagavan exclaimed, "Very good. That will do. You need not read the rest of the stanza. What you've read is the quintessence of wisdom. Make it your MANTRA."¹ Every time Bhagavan saw her he would ask her to repeat her mantra so that she soon knew it by heart. The glory of this mantra was commented upon by Bhagavan Himself once thus: "The whole Vedanta can be compressed into the four words."²

¹ Subbaramayya, G., *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, p.94.

² Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, *Day by Day With Bhagavan*, 23-1-1946.

Sadly two years later she was released from the shackles of *samsāra* when she succumbed to smallpox. Her father, Subbaramayya, was prostrate with grief. But a letter sent to him from the Ashram had this to say: “Who can describe the feeling of ONE who is at once the Father and Mother of His devotees?” Does not *Guru Gītā* sing in tune with this?

“He is the Father, He is the Mother, He is the Relative and (our) God, to free us from the delusion of *samsāra*. Prostrations to our Guru!”

स पिता स च मे माता स बन्धुः स च देवता।
संसारमोहनाशाय तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः॥³

The tomb erected over little Indira’s grave had the ‘mantra’ taught to her by Bhagavan inscribed on it.

A Mantra for Life and Light Eternal: The *Akṣaramaṇamālai*

There is yet another *mahāmantra* – the most sacred and therefore the richest gift – that Bhagavan has bestowed on humanity out of His infinite compassion. Besides being the greatest mantra, *Akṣaramaṇamālai* is also a rosary of 108 beads. Each bead – a mantra in the form of a couplet – is a *cintamani* gem capable of yielding whatever is desired. The omnipresent and omnipotent nature of this *nāma-mantra* can well be gauged when Saint Namdev’s statement is pondered over: “*ātmasākṣātkāra* is the means to *nāma sākṣātkāra*. Ask the saints.” Springing from the splendour and silence of the Self and couched in the terms of mystic love, this pure and sublime hymn reveals the secret incorporeal Heart where the lover of God holds heavenly converse. The intertwining of the spiritual strands of *jñāna* and *bhakti* make each couplet – each mantra – a nectarine drop from the inner bliss of union with the Divine and the effulgence of identity with the Supreme. Hence for the attainment of Enlightenment or the bliss of Union, the mantra par excellence is this hymn.

As a ‘*nāma japa*’, it is beyond compare for the Name is *Parabrahman* and It frees the soul from bondage and takes it to the

³ sa pitā sa ca me mātā sa bandhuḥ sa ca devatā |
samsāramohanāśāya tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ || *Guru Gītā*, v. 66.

consummation of spiritual life. When the sacred name of Arunachala, which is the name of God – the Self – is chanted along with the refrain, the rosary gets repeated many times over with this supreme name. The hallowed name of Arunachala is highly extolled as ‘*jñāna pañcāksharī*’.⁴ Bhagavan has explained the meaning of the name ‘Arunachala’ as follows: “‘*A*’ in ‘Arunachala’ means ‘That,’ ‘*ru*’ means ‘Thou’ and ‘*na*’ means ‘Art’.”⁵ Thus ‘*Aruna*’ means ‘That Thou Art’.

In the *guru-sishyā* tradition the guru initiates the disciple by instructing him on the *mahāvākya* and explains its content. In verse 2 of *Navamaṇimālai*, Bhagavan has openly bestowed the ‘*mahā mantra*’ of Arunachala on all devotees, declaring its content and the fruit of repeating it or meditating on it: “It has an import exalted and perfect. Besides being *sat cit ānanda*, the union of *jīva* and *para*, it is also the content of the *mahāvākya*, ‘That Thou Art’ (*Tat Tvam Asi*). It has the supremely benign quality of granting deliverance the moment it is thought of.”⁶ Bhagavan’s devotees who desire a mantra can regard with certitude this Name, ‘Arunachala’, to be the mantra given to them directly by Bhagavan. The *Aruṇācala Purāṇam* affirms that the name ‘Arunachala’, chanted just once, equals the chanting of the *pañcāksharī* three crore times.

The remedy for any malady, as prescribed by tradition, is *maṇi* (magic gem) mantra and *oushadam* (medicine). The mother of all maladies, namely, transmigration/rebirth, may require all the three and Bhagavan has indeed affirmed that the ONE Name is all the three.⁷

Any mantra imparted by a Guru carries with it the power of that Guru’s penance and his personal experience of the power of divine consciousness embedded in the mantra. Bhagavan Himself was one who took this Name or, rather, **he was taken by IT**. He declares that right from his innocent childhood his heart was pulsating unceasingly with the luminous throb of this holy mantra.⁸ The severity and duration of tapas that must have preceded this wonderful mystical phenomenon

⁴ *Pañcāksharī* refers to the Five Lettered mantra *Om Nama Śivaya*.

⁵ *N.R. Krishnamurthy Iyer, Power of the Presence, Vol.I p. 143.*

⁶ *Śrī Aruṇācala Navamaṇi Mālai, v. 2.*

⁷ ‘Fiery gem’ (v.18). ‘Mountain medicine’ (v.76) and ‘Medicine for the madness of maya’ (v. 66).

⁸ *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam, v.1.*

is beyond our ken. Evidently Bhagavan belongs to the class of those who, even in their embryonic state, have had ‘Śivahood’ conferred on them (கருவிலே திருவுடையார் – karuvilē tiruvudaiyār). This renders the mantra the holiest of all holy mantras and a spiritual dynamo that charges a mighty spiritual current in one. It becomes vibrantly alive when repeated by us with an attitude of adoration with the mind, with the mouth or a rosary with beads. As this Holy Name of ‘Arunachala’ is Love, Light, Power and Joy. It has become the emotional treasure, highly precious to Bhagavan’s devotees. The repeated chanting of it or the hearing of it chanted in tender piety lulls the noisy ego-mind into perfect stillness – the prayer of stillness – which is the best prayer of all and which is indeed the goal of both devotion (*bhakti*) and *vicāra* (investigation/self-inquiry). Bhagavan Himself endorsed its status as a ‘mantra’. When devotees requested Him to explain its meaning, he emphatically said, “Reciting it repeatedly is its meaning.”⁹

It has been said, ‘Grace alone can dissipate the darkness of delusion and show the way to Deliverance’ (இருளுக்கு மாறு அருளே – iruḷukku māru aruḷē).¹⁰ Just as the man standing on the mountain beholds not the mountain, though we are swimming in the sea of both Arunachala and Bhagavan we are usually unaware of this. Grace is the Life and the Illumination of our souls. Hence this power within us of Holy Grace needs to be awakened and nurtured to engender our receptivity to It.

Bhagavan Himself has told us, “‘Holy Grace’ is a celebrated name for the Lord, for Grace is His very nature. ‘Lord’ means the Self or *Ātman*; Grace means the revelation of Eternal Presence.”¹¹ Its operation is two-fold. On the one hand God, Who is Pure Love, makes Himself accessible to our pure love. “Behold! He lets Himself be caught in the net of devotion!”¹² sang the great poet-saint Māṇikkavācakar.

Sivam Beyond! O Effulgent Grace!
 Thou Art the Hill caught in Love’s Hold,
 The Monarch of humble entry into Love’s Hut,
 The content Beyond caught in Love’s Net,

⁹ *Commentary on Aruṇācala Stuti Pañcakam* by Smt. T.R. Kanakammal, p.27.

¹⁰ *Tiruvaruḷ Payaṇ*, (The Yield of Holy Grace) by *Umāpati Sivāccāriyār*, Chapter II.

¹¹ *Spiritual Instruction*, Bhagavan’s answer to Question 7, Chapter On Practice.

¹² *Tiruvaṇḍappagudi*, Line 47, Māṇikkavācakar.



The Nectar seated in the Palm of Love,
 The Ocean abiding in the Pot of Love
 O! Being Awareness, resplendent Light called Love,
 Residing within the atom of Love.¹³

The welling of ecstatic love in our hearts for the Guru/God/the Self is but Grace impelling Grace to bestow Grace.

On the other hand, “He Himself weaving His web of Grace wide,”¹⁴ claims for Himself, by His divine intervention,¹⁵ all those ripe souls who yearn for Release, He devours the ego-self and grants supreme knowledge. Either way, the sweet breeze of Grace is ever blowing, calming and cooling us. We have only to unfurl our sail to avail of this sweet Grace. Bhagavan exclaims, “The wonder of THY Grace is beyond understanding! (நின் அருள் சித்ரம் என்னே!)”¹⁶

The hunger for this Grace makes the hymn resound with the burden of hymn “Grant Thou Thy Grace!” (Next to Arunachala it is the most repeated word). And Bhagavan pleads, speaking on our behalf. Sri Muruganar’s apt clarification summarises Bhagavan’s teachings. “Know the Supreme through Grace; they say ‘Know that Grace Itself is the Supreme’.”¹⁷ ‘Grace’, it becomes clear, is merely another name for the Lord, which is why it gets invoked and repeated over and over again in this sublime Hymn. And the *Upaniṣad*-s proclaim, “Grace is gained by him who chooses It alone. To him the *Ātman* reveals Its true nature.”¹⁸

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तन्नूँ स्वाम् ॥

When this mantra-hymn of Grace (*Arul*) is chanted by us with fullness of heart, mind and soul it is certain that we will gain access to the whole mystery of Grace by being led to the One who is the Indweller in the Lotus of our true Heart, our Guru and our God.

At the very outset in the hymn, we invoke Lord Ganesa. This is a traditional must, for Lord Ganesa is customarily regarded not only

¹³ *Tiruvāṟṟpā*, Rāmaliṅga Aḍigal.

¹⁴ *Śrī Aruṅācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, v. 91.

¹⁵ தடுத்தாட்கொள்ளல் (Taḍuttātkoḷḷal).

¹⁶ niṅ aruḷ citram eṇṇē!, *Śrī Aruṅācala Navamaṇimālai*, v. 9.

¹⁷ Śrī Murugaṇār, *Śrī Ramaṇa Anubhūti*, v. 654.

¹⁸ yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyastasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūm̐ svām, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II-23.

as the remover of all impediments but as the very embodiment of Grace himself. Bhagavan elsewhere defines Ganesa as the form of OM and the first rising of the *Ātman*. Even the ocean, when it surges up, swallows without distinction a tiny blade of grass and a huge, full grown tree. To surge up and overwhelm is the very nature of Grace. And therefore we can be confident that He, in His Infinite Grace, will reveal “*Sadaśiva* in sound (*nāda*) and *Śiva-linga* in *cit*”¹⁹ (Being) not only to highly competent seekers like Auvaiyar but also to His devotees like us, with meagre or no competence.

Finally, as Arunachala and Bhagavan are one and the same, *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* is also a mantra-hymn addressed to Bhagavan, seeking His Grace. Bhagavan, Who is the Mountain of Effulgence of *Jñāna* (ஜ்ஞாநிக் குன்று – *Jōtik kundru*) – simply melts into Love, supremely Divine, taking us along.

With the repetition of this mantra-hymn or meditation on it, the mind gets stilled in fathomless silence. This is the goal, indeed, of all our *sādhana* (practice). The fact that it was to the loud chanting, by his heartbroken devotees, of this mantra-hymn, that Bhagavan, with tears of ecstatic love rolling down his cheeks, got absorbed in Arunachala in 1950, assures us that this divine hymn will indeed lead us to our perfect spiritual fulfilment.

Let us therefore never leave the chanting of this mantra-hymn, especially verse 96, where Bhagavan, speaking on behalf of all of us, implores Arunachala, “Bless me, that I may finally give up my body with full remembrance of Thee!” If we remember this, during our final moments of sojourn on this earth, then, assuredly, we will be led, “from untruth to Truth, from darkness to Light, from mortality to Immortality.”²⁰

Sri Ramana Saptāksharī

There is yet another powerful mantra on Bhagavan. This is called the Guru mantra, or the *Ramaṇa Saptāksharī*. It invokes His immediate Presence. It is also the one mantra to the chant of which oblations are offered into the holy fire during ‘homa’ rituals on special occasions like the *Kumbhābhisheka*m in the Ashram. This potent mantra, “*Om*

¹⁹ Auvaiyār, Vināyakar Agaval.

²⁰ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.3.28.

Vachad Bhuve Namaha!” is one of the 1008 names of praise of Bhagavan composed by Sri Jagadeeswara Sastri.

When devotees approached the Maharshi for elucidation of the import of this mantra, he sent them to Ganapati Muni who considered this mantra to be highly potent. Besides giving the tantric meaning of this mantra in the 10th verse of the 18th chapter of his *Śrī Ramaṇa Gītā*, Ganapati Muni also penned a lengthy commentary on it, entitled *Guru Mantra Bhashya*.

He explains that the ‘*Om̐kara*’ is the Supreme Brahman, and ‘*vachad*’ stands for both speech and Agni (fire). Therefore one meaning of this mantra is: ‘Salutations to the Supreme Brahman, which is the Silence of Perfect Stillness, whence emerges the Word.’”

The Vedas equate the Self with Fire and Bhagavan Himself is regarded as the Incarnation of Agni, because legend tells us that initially the Holy Hill, Arunachala, appeared as a pillar of fire. Agni/divine fire is described as the ‘Effulgence/Light of Truth’ (*ritasya presha*). This is exactly the same as ‘*Ātma Sphurana*’, which, as devotees know, is a keyword in Bhagavan’s teachings. Thus another meaning of this mantra is: “Salutations to the Fire of Awareness, the embodiment of which is Sri Bhagavan!”

Lord Skanda or Subrahmanya is born of Agni with the Power to destroy all the negative forces of the ego and ignorance, symbolized in legends by the demons Taraka and Surapadma. Thus a third meaning of this mantra would be: “Salutations to Lord Subrahmanya, Who is born of Fire!” ‘Skanda’ refers to the *sphurana* (throb) of the Supreme Lord that emanates as the unbroken, infinite form of Light.

Ganapati Muni was a great mantric Seer, and he not only identified Bhagavan with Skanda, but also spoke of the unity of Skanda and Agni and identified Bhagavan with Agni – the Sacred Fire of Wisdom that burns away our ignorance. He states in his *Agni Devata Tatva Nirupanam* (The Elucidation of the Truth of the Deity Agni) that, “Agni, Vaishwanara, who dwells in the cave of the Heart is indeed Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa is not different from Kumara (Skanda).” According to Ganapati Muni, the mantra therefore means, “I enter (or ‘plunge into’) Bhagavan who is the incarnation of Skanda,” and who is the true form of one’s Self.

The potency of any mantra is increased manifold by the chant of a *dhyāna śloka* – a couplet that aids meditation – that precedes it, delineating the name, form and character of the deity who is to be invoked. Arising out of divine inspiration or direct experience, a *dhyāna śloka* is revealed by a great Seer. Genuine aspiration with sincere devotion renders the *dhyāna śloka* a vibrant vehicle in crystallising the presence of the deity, which is immediately sensed. Who can gauge the immensity of the gift bequeathed to mankind – a *dhyāna śloka* in Sanskrit by Bhagavan Himself to T.K. Sundaresa Iyer on his request.²¹ Later he translated it into Tamil. The *dhyāna śloka* that Bhagavan gave us runs as follows:

तमो विनिध्नन्तमकल्मषाणां गुहम् गुहावासिनमप्रमेयम् ।
ज्योतिर्मयं विश्वसृजः कुमारं प्रज्ञानशक्त्यायुधवन्तमीडे ॥

Meaning: ‘I adore Guha, the Dweller in the Cave of the Heart, the Divine Son of the Projector of the Universe, for He is the Pure Light of Awareness, beyond thought, the wielder of the weapon of *jñāna-śakti* (wisdom-power) and the remover of the ignorance of blemishless devotees.’²²

This *dhyāna śloka* along with the mantra “*Om Vachad Bhuve Namaha!*” and with the customary rituals of *anganyasa* and *karanyasa* (assigning the various parts of the body and the heart to the deity) was written by Bhagavan Himself in Malayalam and given to Mr. K.K. Nambiar, an ardent devotee²³ under the heading *Skanda Saptāksharī mantra*. Invoking the Maharshi’s Presence with the chant of this mantra preceded by this *dhyāna śloka* and then surrendering oneself totally, without any holding back, to that ineffable Presence is certain to render one’s progress along the new trail of self-enquiry, blazed by the Maharshi, easy and successful.

The Tamil Translation rendered by Bhagavan is as follows:

அறவோ நிருளை யழிப்போன் குகையில்
உறையோ னளத்தற் கொணாதோன் – நிறைவொளியோன்

²¹ “Assorted Verses” by Bhagavan and also referred to by Sri Viswanatha Swamy in his ‘Foreward’ to his commentary in Tamil on 108 names of Bhagavan.

²² tamo vinidhnantamakalmaṣāṇāṁ guhāṁ guhāvāsinamaprameyam |
jyotirmayaṁ viśvasṛjaḥ kumāraṁ guhaṁ prajñānaśaktyāyudhavantamīḍe ||

²³ *Swarna Hastham* (The Golden Hand), Malayalam ed. Bhagavan’s writings, p.367.

MOUNTAIN PATH

ஆதிசேய் ஞான வயிலோன் குக ரமண
நாதனை யேத்துவோம் நாம்.

aravōr iruḷai azhippōṅ guhaiyil
urāivōṅ aḷattark koṇādōṅ – niraivoḷiyōṅ
ādicēy jñāṇa vayilōṅ Guha Ramaṇa
nādanai ēttuvōm nām.

There was an incident when Bhagavan, while initiating Smt. Madhavi Ammal into this *śloka*, endorsed the content of the *śloka* by bestowing a vision exactly befitting the description it depicts. She, out of her persevering adoration, almost wrested this vision from her guru. On all earlier occasions Bhagavan’s usual reply had been, “There are no two – no Guru and no Sishya (disciple). There is but the one Reality. It is within you and it can neither be given to you nor taken from you.”²⁴ On that red-letter day of Madhavi Ammal’s life, there was none but Bhagavan’s assistant, Madhava Swami, by Bhagavan’s side. Bhagavan, who was reading the newspaper, on hearing her persistent request, laid aside the paper and sat in *padmāsana*, quietly absorbed. She, meanwhile, sang *Akṣaramaṇamālai* and *Guru Stuti*. Bhagavan then turned to Madhava Swami and said, “She has done her prayer to Arunachala.” This remark kindled her hopes. On Bhagavan resuming his state of absorption, she pleaded further, lamenting her own lack of competence and that she had no refuge to seek except Bhagavan, her Guru. Immediately a bright light emanated from Bhagavan’s holy face and this effulgence filled the entire Hall. Only the brilliance could be seen, not even his body. This vision lasted for two seconds before disappearing. Bhagavan then took a piece of paper, wrote this *śloka* and gave it to her, saying, “You can make use of it in your meditation.”²⁵ What a blessing was hers on that day!

To conclude, let us recall what the *Guru Gītā* v.55 says:

यस्य स्मरणमात्रेण ज्ञानमुत्पद्यते स्वयम् ।

स एव सर्वसंपत्तिः तस्मात्संपूजयेदुरुम् ॥

yasya smaraṇamātreṇa jñānamutpadyate svayam |

sa eva sarvasampattiḥ tasmātsampūjayedgurum ||

²⁴ Madhavi Ammal, ‘Light Gives Light’, *The Mountain Path*, 1972 January. p.40.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.40.

“By the mere remembrance of whom, knowledge (of the Self) dawns in one automatically; He (the Guru) is one’s entire wealth. Therefore, the disciple should unceasingly worship his Guru.”

And to quote the *Guru Gītā* again:

गुरुनामसमं दैवं न पिता न च बान्धवाः ।
गुरुनामसमः स्वामी नेदृशं परमं पदम् ॥

“There is no God, no father, nor even any relative, to equal Guru Nama (the name of the Guru). There is no Lord to equal *Guru Nama*. There is no status to equal this *Paramam Padam* (The Ultimate State).”²⁶

The all-seeing Flame in the Heart – the True Guru of us all – assumed the wonderful outer manifestation of the form of Bhagavan Sri Ramana in our world. Our awareness grows by offering our ego-mind to this Eternal unextinguishable Flame within us. Let us keep alive this Flame continually offering up our ego and *vāsanā*-s to it, for it to destroy.

Hence hailing Bhagavan as मन्त्राणां मन्त्रगा भवान् (*mantrāṇām mantragā bhavān* – ‘Thou art the secret import of all the mantras’), let the final word rest with Sri Muruganar: “Know that the mantra true is but devoted worship of the Guru’s Feet.”²⁷

That this will let the True ‘I am’ reverberate as the silent *paravāc* (supreme word) in the egoless Heart-space in due course is beyond doubt. ▲

²⁶ *gurunāmasamaṁ daivaṁ na pitā na ca bāndhavāḥ |
gurunāmasamaḥ svāmī nedṛśaṁ paramaṁ padam || Guru Gītā, 340.*

²⁷ *Guru Vācaka Kōvai, v.204.*



Doorway leading from The Mother's Temple to Bhagavan's Samadhi

The Tree of Samsāra

M.R. KODHANDRAM

In a previous article in January 2020 the author cited the opening verse of the 15th Chapter of the Śrī Bhagavad Gītā, in which Lord Krishna uses the metaphor of an Ashvattha or Peepal tree to explain the world of creation. The Peepal tree symbolises the tree of life.

He goes on to write, “Lord Krishna says that the primary root of this tree of Samsāra arises from the Supreme Brahman. The roots of a tree arise from the seed. From a tiny seed, this huge Peepal tree arises. If we break this seed and see what’s in it, we will find that there’s nothing in it. Only from this nothing, the whole tree arises. What we call as nothing is in fact everything. It’s the Supreme Brahman. It’s the source of everything in this world including ourselves. This Source is not visible to our eyes as it’s too subtle. So to reach the source of this tree of Samsāra, we have to trace it to its roots. When we reach the root and cut it off, the whole tree of Samsāra collapses and our life cycle comes to an end.”

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Let us try to understand this tree of life further: From the seed of Ignorance rises the tree of life which has its roots in the ‘I am the body’ idea. The trunk is the passion/attraction/desire, and all the other emotions form the branches. The leaves are the various karmas we generate because of the emotions. The flowers produced give rise to the seeds of rebirth. Thus, the life cycle continues.

When a tree grows, the seed cannot be seen. When the seed is there, the tree cannot be seen. So are our karmas. When you sow the seeds of karmas, you can’t see how they will grow into a tree and when they will bear fruits. When the fruits come, you cannot see the seeds which caused it. Thus, we should be careful not to sow bad seeds because when they bear fruit, we can’t see the seeds and the fruits will be many times more than the seed you had planted. Thus, we have to lead our life very carefully so as not to create more karmas in ignorance. And Karmas created will give rise to fresh births.

Everyone can understand the seed but not ‘that’ from which the seed itself has arisen. It is the Self. From the Self, the seed has come. It is like how moss is formed in a pond. The moss arises from the water and covers the water completely. So too does the darkness of ignorance hide the Reality or Self from us. The Śakti from the Self (*prāṇa*) causes the seed to first grow into a root which is the ego and from this the trunk and the rest of the tree manifests. For everyone, they operate as the seed only and not the Self which is hidden and which is the Cause for the tree. So we have to go back to the Source and destroy the seed of ignorance which is the source from which everything has come about — I and Mine, the five *kośa*-s, three *guṇa*-s, *vāsanā*-s, attachments, desires and the rest of *samsāra*. Even though we don’t see the Self which is the Source from which this tree of ego and ignorance has come about, everything is only the Self and its modifications. The Self is covered by five layers or *kośa*-s like cabbage or plantain flower.

The ego, at the beginning, is like the sprout of a small banyan seed. From this, it grows into a big banyan tree over the *janma*-s. How to cut such a giant tree? We have to climb and first cut the top branch, then the side branches. Then the trunk must be cut little by little. Finally, the stump can be cut with an axe or a power saw and the roots too can be destroyed. But you cannot cut the whole banyan tree

at the roots all of a sudden. That's why, through a change of lifestyle and contemplation with an open mind, we have to correct our faults, conquer our emotions and reactions, and thus cut the ego little by little. Finally, it will become like a small stump; then it can be cut off fully through *ātma-vicāra* and meditation. But straightaway, if you try to meditate, you won't be able to do it. Thus, a lot of preparation is required for a number of years before you succeed.

How does the tree of ego grow so big that we find it difficult to cut? When we have no work, the mind will feed on so many negative thoughts. This will only fatten the ego. When the ego becomes fat, we behave like a devil. That's why we say that an idle mind is a devil's workshop. So we have to be active so that the mind will be diverted. You can do your duties, work, do *sevā*, study, ponder etc., but you should not remain idle. Suppose you are travelling in a train, you won't have any work. You can't even walk. So you will keep eating whatever items that are sold even if they are not good, like old reheated *samosa*. Thus, you will only fatten the body. Similarly, without work for the mind, the ego will only get fattened. The ego which is like a small plant when you are young, grows into a big tree and thus it will be difficult to cut it off. So we should try to overcome it when it is still small by listening to our elders, parents and guru and by correcting our faults. The ego is like a small snake initially but it will grow into an anaconda later on if we do not check it.

Thus, we should develop the right understanding of the nature of this phenomenal world and strive to overcome all our attractions which occur due to the power of *Māyā* through enquiry and discrimination. Also, we should alertly overcome all the negativities that arise in the mind through enquiry and prayers so that the ego is progressively destroyed. How can we dehypnotise ourselves from the worldly attractions and come out of their clutches?

We have to first know about the true nature of the world as only a projection of the mind. It is like how the film is projected on a screen. The pictures are unreal while the screen alone is real. The screen was there in the beginning, in the middle and in the end also. The pictures come and go, but due to the power of *Māyā*, we think they are real and get attached to it. When an ordinary film show can attract and hold us for three hours, imagine what this phenomenal world which

is only another film show can do to us? The film show we see in the theatres is only two dimensional or three dimensional. But its impact is so great that we take the reel to be real and get so involved with it. Whereas the pictures of the world projected on the screen of the Self are seen by us through five dimensions or five senses. How much more powerful will their impact be on the mind? That's why we think that the world is real as it is so captivating or deluding.

So we have to understand the unreal nature of the world and try to overcome its pull through repeated enquiry and understanding. Every time we are attracted to the objects, we have to remind ourselves of their unreal nature and withdraw the mind from them. It doesn't mean that we don't buy anything in the world. We can surely buy whatever we need for our life. But we should not give room for undue desires and get bound to them. Withdrawing the mind from the world is called *vairāgya* or detachment. Also, we have to surrender to the Lord and pray. This is the way to loosen the grip of the world on the mind. Then over a period of time, the mind running into the world will slow down and this is when our real spiritual practice can commence. Also, we should overcome all our faults, reactions and negative emotions through enquiry and prayers and make the mind pure and ego-free.

We have so far learnt about the unreal nature of the manifested world. And for the manifested world, the source lies in the Self or the pure consciousness. If we want to end our life cycle, we have to go to the source of this tree of *samsāra* and cut it at its roots. It means we have to shift the focus of our attention from the objects of the world to the subject or substratum which is the Self. But is it possible for us to go to the source of the world which is invisible to our eyes?

We cannot go to the root or source of the world by projecting the mind externally just as Brahma did and failed. We have to only follow the way of MahāViṣṇu who went inwards and succeeded through *sādhana* and surrender. This is the story of the Arunachala given in the ancient scripture *Śrī Aruṇācala Māhātmyam*. When Brahma projected his mind outside, he only increased his ego and started lying. Whereas, MahāViṣṇu when he went inwards, his ego began to reduce and he became humble. He could then surrender to the Lord fully and reach the source within.

Thus we have to internalise our mind and go inwards towards our Source and cut off the ego at its roots. Then our whole tree of *samsāra* will come to a permanent end. This is the most important *sādhana* we have to undertake which Bhagavan calls *ātma-vicāra* or Self-enquiry.

Each of us have our own tree of life whose source is within us. All these trees have arisen from the same Source which is the Self or pure consciousness. At the periphery, all the trees may appear to be different. But at the level of the source, they are all ONE. All these different trees are mere appearances or superimpositions on the screen of the Self. These diversities are all unreal and mere pictures passing on the screen of the Self which is unmoving and permanent. Suppose we see everybody as different from us by seeing their caste, creed, religion, wealth, social status, appearance, colour etc., or if we see that all of us are ONE at the core, which of these two perceptions will give us greater happiness? Will considering everybody as different and apart from us give us happiness or considering everybody as ONE with us will give us happiness? Only considering all as ONE will undoubtedly give us greater happiness!

Thus we have to go away from the periphery where all the differences lie and learn to see at the level of the core or source where all are one. Dvaita *bhāvam* will always give misery whereas the Advaita *bhāvam* will give us true and lasting happiness. That's why the great poetess Avvaiyar says in one of her poems that seeing 'all as one is true seeing'. One who sees thus is a true Mahatma. This state of oneness is our true state or our natural state of being. It is our Real and permanent state. All other states of existence are unreal and transient. It is like the difference between the waves and the ocean. The waves are many and different and exist at the periphery. At the level of the wave, everything is different but at the level of the water, everything is one. At the level of the wave there will be only ups and downs, happiness and misery. The wave that gives happiness initially will also give misery when it pulls your feet into the water. But at the level of the water deep inside, there is always steady peace. The wave is only a transient state but the water is a permanent state. Thus, only by abiding in the permanent and natural state, can we get lasting peace and happiness.

Thus, we should not stagnate at the periphery where differences exist but discover and abide at the core where all are one. The core is the real and permanent state. And we will never find lasting happiness in transient states. That's why we are constantly seeking happiness in life as whatever happiness we get in the world does not last. After some time, the happiness vanishes and we are back to our normal state of unhappiness. This is because we are seeking happiness in the wrong place, in the world of transient objects. When we realise that the happiness we get from the objects of the world are only short-lived, and the source of supreme and permanent happiness is only within us, then true *vairāgya* will develop in us. Then we will try to internalise our mind and seek our own Self. This will take us to our source and we will be able to unite with it and experience supreme Bliss which will liberate us from the cycle of birth and death once and for all.

In the world there is only duality and it cannot give us true happiness which comes only through non-duality. Therefore, if we ponder and understand the true nature of the world which is only a product of *Māyā*, we will no longer be enchanted by the world as we know it to be only a mental projection. What is important is to see the underlying reality which is the Brahman upon which the whole world of creation has been projected by the power of *Māyā*. When we realise this, we will be able to distance our mind from the world and instead turn within towards our own source which is the seat of all happiness and knowledge.

Our real nature is *sat-cit-ānand*. Reaching this state, we will be able to unite and become ONE with the Supreme Self which exists as our *Ātma* in our own Heart. It is like the river merging into the ocean and losing its individuality and attaining its original state. Similarly, we too have to end our individuality and differences and reach our original state of oneness with the Supreme Being. For this, we have to go inwards and cut off all the roots that bind us to this world. It means we have to cut off all our attachments in the world which are like ropes with which we tie ourselves to the world. This is the *vairāgya* we have to develop. This *vairāgya* comes only through *vivēka* or discrimination between the real and the unreal. After developing *vairāgya* or non-attachment, we have to internalise the mind and seek our Source within. This is done through Self-enquiry which is to ask oneself the question 'Who am I?' Through the *sādhana* of

Self-enquiry, we will be able to take the mind inwards through what is known as the *paranadi* and cut off the primal root which ties us to this world. This primal root is the Ego. When the ego is cut off at the roots, the whole tree of life collapses and we will become one with the Self and regain our original nature. This union will end our life cycle once and for all and we will return no more to birth. We will also attain supreme happiness or Bliss which is the nature of the Self. This is the supreme goal of life for all. And we are born again and again only to achieve this grand goal of life. Till we achieve this goal, we have to come again and again to this world of impermanence and misery.

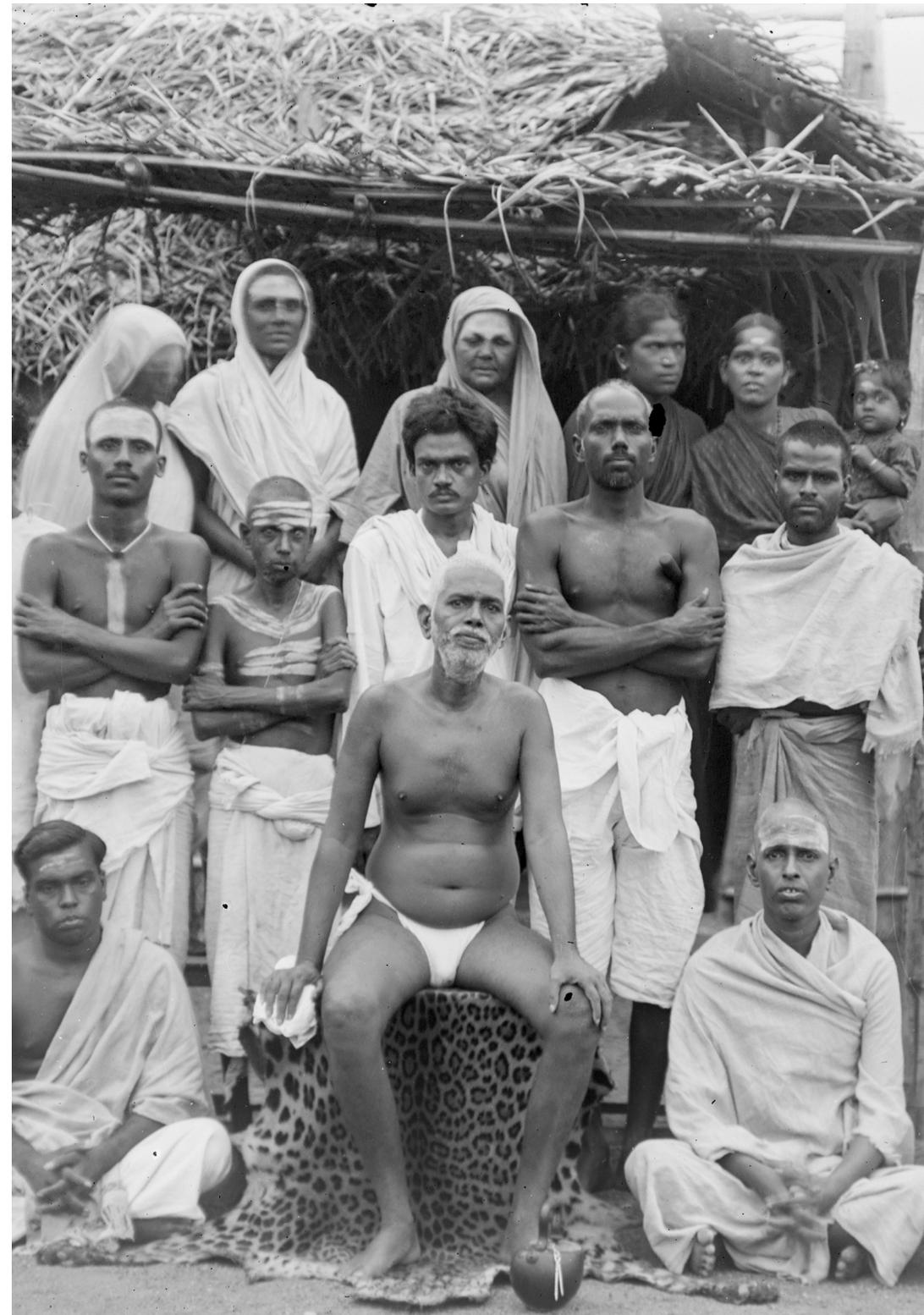
May Arunachala and Bhagavan help us to strengthen our mind and understanding and to strive hard in the path without any slackness! May we all achieve the goal of life in this very birth and never come back! ▲

I Am That One

Alan Jacobs

Pure, as the mountain stream after a fall of April snow
Conscious as he who wakens from deepest sleep, aglow
Aware as the cat who senses all before she prepares to go
Blissful as a babe in arms fondled like an endearing doe
Alone, I AM
Self-existent

Here in the Heart from where I AM is found
Now, in the Heart from where I AM is ground.
I am space for this beautiful place to happen in, and
My Earth is a grain of sand on Being's strand
Whatever's on the screen, whatever wave the spectral band,
Goodly Air, stormy Sea or merely mediocre Land
All is in me, this I truly recognise and understand.
I am not a tortured victim in a tormented world
A twin-holed meat ball, hairily curled,
I am no thing, no name, no body, no word,
I am single-eyed and feeling very headless
There's no thing on these shoulders, mind's no longer restless
Where I'm seeing from is a boundless window, frameless.



Bhagavan with group including Annamalai Swami who is on the far left of the middle row. He has a *rūdrākṣa* tied round his neck

'Shadow' Bhagavan

ROBERT BUTLER

The source of the incidents described in this article is an interview with Annamalai Swami, recorded on behalf of Arunachala Ashrama in New York in 1989. The full interview can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYdDsWlnYcY&t=1152s>.

ANnamalai Swami came to Sri Ramanasramam in 1928 and for the next 10 years or so, under the tutelage of Sri Ramana himself, was responsible for planning and supervising the construction of many of the ashram's most important buildings, including the imposing dining hall and *gośala*, or cowshed. At a certain point, however, the events of his life began to be, as it were, orchestrated in such a way that they led irrevocably to his decision to leave the ashram, with Sri Ramana's hearty approval, it may be added, and to go and live in solitude in an area of land adjoining the ashram called Palakottu, where a number of *sādhu*-s and devotees of Sri Ramana lived. There is little doubt that Sri Ramana felt this to be the best course of action for Annamalai Swami or that he felt that his own physical presence (or rather the presence of an embodied form that bore the label 'Sri Ramana Maharshi') had become by then an impediment to Annamalai Swami's further spiritual progress. Should any doubt linger as to this however, the following incident, surely puts paid to it.

Swami (as we shall refer to him henceforth), in spite of his self-imposed exile, did not become a stranger to the ashram and to Bhagavan (as we shall henceforth refer to Sri Ramana). On the contrary, he would regularly go over to the ashram at around 8 o'clock, after his evening meal to have Bhagavan's *darśan* and would remain there until around 9 o'clock, before returning to resume his solitary *sādhana*. Bhagavan, to use Swami's exact words in the aforementioned interview, *ānandamā, piriyamā mugam kuḍuttu pēcuvāru* – *would turn his face to me and speak to me with happiness and love*. A time came, however, when all that changed. One day, immediately upon seeing Swami, Bhagavan covered his entire face up to the eyes with a cloth, in the manner of a Moorish or Muslim woman and did not speak a word. This continued for two or three days, according to Swami's own account, before he plucked up the courage to question Bhagavan about his conduct towards himself. Bhagavan's reply was curt, to say the least, *nan civaṇēṇṇu kiḍakkirēṇ. eṅkiṭṭa edukku pēccu koḍukkira* – *I am lying here like Śiva (minding my own business – a colloquial expression)*. *Why are you trying to chat with me like this?* Swami attempted then to gain some further clarification of his new, no doubt somewhat surprising, equation with Bhagavan. 'Why? You seem to be saying that I should not come here?' he ventured to ask but to no avail. Bhagavan remained silent.

Swami got up and left the Hall and went to stand in a corner of the flower garden nearby, where it began to dawn upon him ever more clearly that his supposition regarding Bhagavan's motive was indeed the correct one and that he should henceforth confine himself to Palakottu and his solitary *sādhana*. There was no one about by now. Suddenly Bhagavan called out, 'Annamalai Swami!' Swami returned to the Hall. 'If someone, at the time of spiritual maturity, thinks that he and god are different,' Bhagavan said, 'he will meet the same fate as an atheist (*nastigan*), who does not believe in god.' Swami was now convinced of Bhagavan's meaning and ended his regular visits to the ashram. Convinced of his meaning certainly, but perhaps (and this is only supposition on the part of the author of this article) not quite realising the full implications of Bhagavan's words, as the next incident we are about to relate suggests.

We now fast-forward to a later time, possibly some years later, Swami does not say. A film has been made featuring Bhagavan and

is to be shown in the ashram in the presence of Bhagavan for the entertainment and edification of the ashram inmates. The ashram postman, Raja Iyer, hails Swami, in some excitement no doubt, and tells him about the showing of the film. Although quite aware of Bhagavan’s interdiction on ashram visits, Swami feels that this is after all a film about Bhagavan, a pious endeavour of sorts, hardly a dereliction of his *sādhana*. In any case it will at least give him a pretext to make a rare prostration to his beloved Bhagavan. In short, he convinces himself that it will be acceptable to Bhagavan for him to attend.

We shall leave Swami there for now and consider Bhagavan’s conduct towards him in a little more detail. We know that, for the entire duration of Swami’s stay in the ashram, some 10 years or so, Bhagavan had discouraged any attempt on his part to engage in solitary meditation or contemplation of any kind but, on the contrary, had handed him project after project, never allowing him any respite, insisting, however, that this work be performed in the conviction that he was not the ‘doer’ of those actions but that they were all performed by the Self. It seems that Bhagavan now judges that Swami has reached a degree of spiritual maturity where he might profitably devote himself to a solitary *sādhana* and, moreover, that (in Swami’s case at least) his own physical presence can only be a barrier to further progress. To quote Bhagavan,

The meditation on the guru’s face or form is only for beginners.
The advanced disciples should concentrate inwards on the Self –
this is equal to meditating on the guru, for he is one with the Self.¹

Swami’s mental conditioning, *vāsanā*-s, to use the traditional term, had now been attenuated, as we might assume, to the point where intense dwelling upon the Self, the ‘I’ current, could now be fruitfully undertaken. Swami here recalls Bhagavan’s words to him when he first relocated to Palakottu: *eppavum eṅgayum pōgādē. irunda idattilē iru. aḍutta rūm kūḍa pōgāde. eṅgayum pōgāde – Don’t go anywhere, ever. Stay where you are. Don’t even go to the next room. Don’t go anywhere.* In the same section of *Conscious Immortality*, Bhagavan describes the process to be undertaken as follows:

¹ Brunton, Paul, *Conscious Immortality*, Chap.16, ‘Sagehood as an Ideal’, p 131.

By repeated practice one can become accustomed to turning inward and finding the Self. One must make incessant effort always until one has permanently realised. After that all effort ceases, the state becomes natural, the Supreme takes possession of the man with unbroken current. Until it has become permanently natural, your habitual state, know that you have not realised the Self, only glimpsed it.²

Bhagavan is here referring to the effort of dwelling on the sense of being, the ‘I’ sense, otherwise known as *ātma-vicāra*, self-enquiry. To return to our little vignette of ashram life, when Swami rolls up at the ashram to watch the picture show, Bhagavan’s demeanour, as one might imagine on reading the previous quotation, is less than welcoming. In fact he is angry, anger feigned, no doubt, for the benefit of the hapless Swami. In Swami’s own words, ‘*ō niḷal paḍam, niḷal bhagavāṇai pākka vanduṭṭiyā, pirattiyakṣa bhagavāṇai viṭṭuṭṭu, appaḍiṇṇu bhagavāṇ kōvamā pēciṇāru – ‘Oh, a moving picture. You’ve come to see the moving picture Bhagavan, have you, abandoning the real (pratyakṣa) Bhagavan!’ Bhagavan said angrily.* Bhagavan uses the words *niḷal paḍam – shadow picture* to mean *film, movie*. Prior to the invention of cinematography a form of primitive animation was created by skilfully manipulating flat, articulated cut-out figures between a source of light and a translucent screen, an art which still survives today. Presumably the term *shadow picture* was applied to movies in their early days. Swami doesn’t say if he stayed to watch the film but he does say that he suddenly became aware of the unruly crowd in attendance and that after that he never visited the ashram again. Reading between the lines, one might conjecture that he was not a little disgusted with himself and the entire situation he had put himself in.

Our initial reaction is to think that Bhagavan was chiding Swami for paying more attention to the celluloid Bhagavan than to the real, flesh and blood, one. But we soon realise that, given Bhagavan’s state, merged with the Self, this cannot be the case. When Bhagavan uses the words *niḷal bhagavāṇ* he must, by implication, be referring to both Bhagavans, the celluloid one and the ‘flesh and blood’ one, both of which are entirely, and equally, unreal from the point of view of the

¹ Ibid., p.133.

Self. There is a certain irony in the situation. Bhagavan was fond of using the metaphor of the cinema screen and the film playing upon it to describe the relationship between the Self, the underlying reality, and the unreal world picture projected upon it by the ego-mind. We read in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§13:

Yes. It is like a cinema-show. There is the light on the screen and the shadows flitting across impress the audience as the enactment of some piece. Similarly also will it be, if in the same play an audience also is shown. The seer, the seen, will then only be the screen. Apply it to yourself. You are the screen, the Self has created the ego, the ego has its accretions of thoughts which are displayed as the world, the trees, plants, etc., of which you are asking. In reality, all these are nothing but the Self. If you see the Self, the same will be found to be all, everywhere and always. Nothing but the Self exists.

Somewhat comically, it seems that not only has Swami committed the error of taking that first picture to be real, along with the image of ‘flesh and blood’ Bhagavan playing upon it, he has compounded his error by coming to observe that unreal Bhagavan in the processing of observing another unreal ‘shadow’ Bhagavan, projected upon another screen within that original one. Shades of an infinite regression here! Having referred at first, ostensibly at least, to his image on the screen as ‘shadow’ Bhagavan, we now see that ‘flesh and blood’ Bhagavan refers to himself as *‘pratyakṣa Bhagavan’*. In philosophical terms *pratyakṣa* means basically ‘that which can be directly verified by the senses.’ But is this what Bhagavan means here? Both Bhagavans, the ‘flesh and blood’ one and the ‘shadow’ one, are *pratyakṣa* in that sense, are they not? One verifiable by all the senses and the other by two only, sight and sound. This is how the *ajñāni* sees things. But to Bhagavan, a *jñāni*, what is *pratyakṣa*? The only ‘sense’ he has is the sense of being and the only thing verified, Self-verified, in fact, is the Self. We might imagine that Swami here did a ‘double-take’, as the full implication of Bhagavan’s words dawned upon him. He had indeed abandoned the real Bhagavan, the Self, and gone running after ‘shadow Bhagavans’, celluloid or otherwise, in direct contradiction of his master’s earlier express advice. We may assume that he retreated, as they say, ‘with his tail between his legs’, a chastened and wiser man.





Ānandamayī Mā holding the *vighraha* of Lord Padmanābha-svāmi

Ānandamayī Mā and the Mahārājah of Travancore

JACQUELINE HIRST

Dr Jacqueline Hirst, in her fascinating paper titled Negotiating Secularity: Indira Gandhi, Ānandamayī Mā and the Eliya Rājah of Travancore, (<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs11407-016-9189-2.pdf>) explains the intricate, multi-layered interlinks between politics and the state, religion, and spirituality in modern India. In doing so she uses examples to illustrate the inner workings and complex interleaved operation of this modern form of religio-politics, rapidly advancing, yet seeing itself as deeply rooted in tradition and the past. This article is an abstract focused on the Eliya (or Iḷaiya, meaning ‘younger’) Rajah of Travancore.

We have deleted many of the footnotes for space considerations but readers may refer to the original well-researched article online for any clarification and elaboration. We thank Dr. Hirst for permission to reprint part of her lengthy article.

In February 1971, Indira Gandhi’s new Congress Party withdrew the privy purses granted to the rulers of the erstwhile princely states after independence in 1947. On December 28 1971 this became law. It was in this context that, in early July 1971, Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma and his family flew to Delhi. The Eliya Rajah, as Marthanda Varma was known, was the younger brother and successor-

in-waiting to the, by then, titular Maharajah of Travancore in modern Kerala. With his family, he went by car first to the Hardwar *āśrama* and then two days later to the Dehradun *āśrama* of the famous female ‘godwoman/saint’ Ānandamayī Mā. This is the account that the Eliya Rajah later wrote of what happened that night:

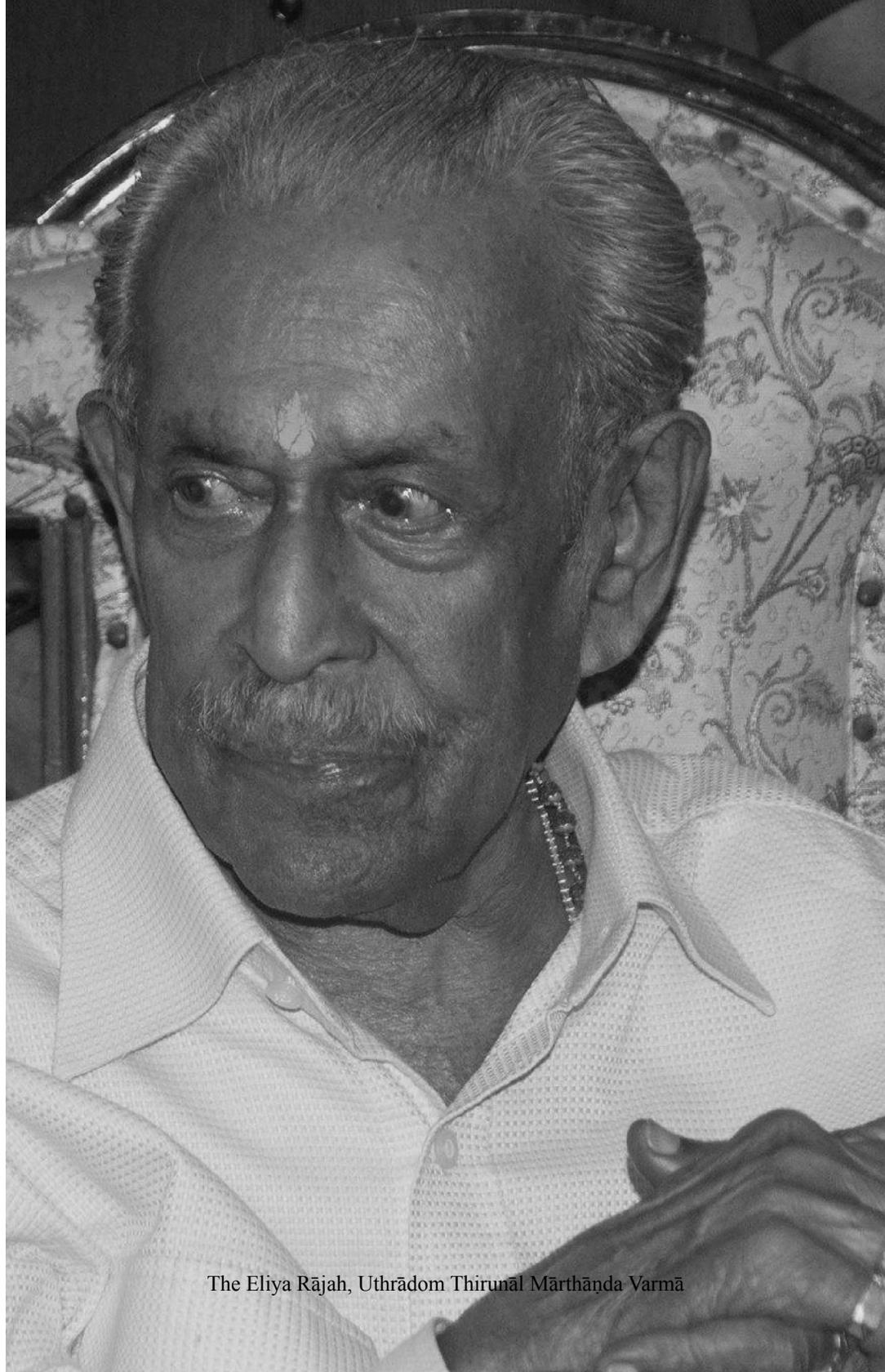
I retired for the night by about 9-30 p.m....It must have been around 11-30 or 12 midnight that I became wide awake for some unknown reason. I am absolutely certain that all vestige of sleep had left me. There was a glow outside my window. I sat up and looked out and beheld: “The entire space as far as the eye could see was a brilliant blaze of light.” I recollected the words of the 11th chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*...: ... “The space between the heavens and all the quarters are filled by you alone.” The experience is very clear in my mind but I struggle to find words to convey what I saw. This wondrous sight was Mother—encompassing the boundaries of my vision fully and completely; Mother, magnificent, lustrous and universal; Mother in Her *Mahimā* form but as always seen by us, and most remarkable was the radiance in and around Her hands in which She held Padmanābha Bhagavān.¹

Padmanābha Bhagavān, seen in this vision, was the state deity of Travancore, South India. In the great Padmanābhasvāmī temple in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), he takes the form of Lord Viṣṇu lying on the cosmic snake Ananta. The creator deity Brahmā emerges from the lotus in his navel (*padma-nābha*), and his right hand indicates the deity Śiva in the form of a small *liṅgam*. From 1750 on, Padmanābha had been not only the deity but the legal head of Travancore. While steps were being taken to remove the nineteen lākḥ rupees’ annual privy purse from his family, it was this protector of their realm whom the Eliya Rajah saw in his vision, held safe in the cosmic lap of Mā. She herself appears as “that Mighty Being” from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Krishna as Viṣṇu in his universal form.²

In 1750, an earlier Marthanda Varma (1706–58) put the ancient ruling lineage of Travancore on a new footing. In the act of ‘*thrippadi*

¹ Varma, Marthanda H.H. ‘Our Mother: The Wonder of Ma.’ *Ānanda Vārtā* 30,4 (1983), pp.319-20.

² *Ibid.*, Varma, p.320.



The Eliya Rājah, Uthrādom Thirunāl Mārthānda Varmā

danam’, laying down his state sword and other emblems of royalty on the holy step of the sanctuary, he donated the state to Lord Padmanābha-svāmi, the tutelary deity of Travancore, and declared that henceforth, the deity would be the legal ruler and all subsequent rājāhs his *dāsa*-s, or servants.³ At the accession of each, the new incumbent would present himself to the massive image of the deity in the Trivandrum temple and emerge bearing the laid-down sword of state which symbolized his (or indeed her) servanthood. Either a Brahmin or the ruler himself carried that sword when he went to the temple for his worship.⁴ Our Marthanda’s brother followed this ritual practice from his accession in 1931. When he died in 1991, our Marthanda, now simply the titular head of the family, did the same. Moreover, both during his lifetime and in his recent obituaries (he died on December 16, 2013), Marthanda Varma, “known for his simple lifestyle and humility”, was widely eulogized not just as a servant in name, but in all that he did: his personal and daily devotion, asceticism, and commitment to his people – a worthy successor to those heads of what was regarded as one of the most progressive of the former princely states and true “servant of the lord.”⁵

As ever, there are other sides to the story. Vocal opponents saw Marthanda Varma as ‘servant’ of nothing more than his family and personal interests, siphoning off riches from the incredible wealth of the Padmanābhasvāmi temple vaults and ordering that the contents of those vaults be photographed back in 2007, while claiming divine sanction against the opening of Vault B in particular when the Kerala High Court ordered the opening of all Vaults A to F in January 2011. The Supreme Court having given an order to open all except Vault B in July 2011, further objections were made when the expert

³ Lakshmi Bayi, Princess Gouri. *Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. 1995. p.113-16.

⁴ See, for example, p.136 of Lakshmi Bayi.

⁵ *Deccan Herald*, July 2, 2011. *The Hindu*’s report was headlined, ‘State Mourns the “King” of Humility and Simplicity’ (December 17, 2013), a quote from the (Christian) Defence Minister A.K. Antony, one of the many politicians and religious leaders across the religious and political spectrum to acknowledge his austerity and outreach to all. Available at: www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Thiruvananthapuram/state-mourns-the-king-of-humility-simplicity/article5469670.ece.

committee appointed by the apex court recommended the opening of the infamous ‘Vault B’ in March 2012. Marthanda Varma’s position in the ruling family and his intervention, leaked by a disgruntled temple servant, was portrayed as depriving the poor of Kerala of wealth that duly belonged to the state and its people. By contrast, Narendra Modi, aspirant prime minister of the Bharatiya Janata Party, visiting the temple in September 2013 as part of his long run-up to national election victory in May 2014, accepted a picture of the temple and a ‘crown’ of gold and red silk, meeting the Eliya Rajah as the guardian and servant of a, perhaps even the, Hindu state, while the president of Guruvayoorappan Bhaktha Samithi drew the Rajah and temple into the well-known Hindu right narrative of Hinduism under attack. It is, however, via the continuing Supreme Court case over the temple – since it is a case in which the deity himself participates as a legal minor – that we turn to the complicated background relating to discourses of servanthood and secularity in the Indian nation-state since Independence.

In June 1947, with the Independence of British India approaching and the position of the princely states still contentious, the secretary of a new states department, V.P. Menon, had the task of negotiating accession to the Union with the 562 princely states. However, on June 11, 1947, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, the Dewan of Travancore, had declared it would constitute itself as a sovereign independent state, the Nizam of Hyderabad following suit the next day. While Travancore did accede at the eleventh hour, Menon’s problems with integrating it were not over. In early March 1949, in one of Menon’s meetings with Travancore and Cochin about their future, the Maharajah explained his resistance to integrating with Cochin: “he governed the State on behalf and as a servant of Sri Padmanābha and... attached great importance to this position being maintained... [If] the Government of India still insisted on the integration of the two States he would rather abdicate than act against his convictions.”⁶ Menon comments: “The devotion of the present Maharajah to Sri Padmanābha borders on fanaticism; he rules the State not as its head but as a servant of the tutelary deity.”⁷

⁶ Menon, V.P. *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*. Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1961 [1956], p.265.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.267.

The discourse of servanthood is seen to stand obstinately in the way of full integration into a democratic secular state, by contrast with the ready agreement of the ruler of Cochin who was “prepared to efface himself completely in order that his people might enjoy a larger life.”⁸ Clearly, in Menon’s strongly Congress view, service should be to the people, not to a deity. However, to achieve the Union of Travancore and Cochin, on July 1, 1949 Menon was able to negotiate a form of wording parallel to clause 159 of the Constitution and agreeable to Chithira Thirunal, the then ruling Maharajah of Travancore. He would not be forced to take the clause’s unacceptable oath of allegiance to the Government of India, but only be required to give his “solemn assurance” to uphold “the Constitution of India and that of the United States of Travancore and Cochin” and to “devote [him]self to the service of the people of India.”⁹ This was servanthood to the people of the secular state, so far as Congress was concerned; a continuing ability to act as servant of Padmanābha for the good of his own land and people, in the Maharajah’s eyes.

Paradoxically, even after 1971, the deity, tacitly derecognized, continued to be allowed to act as a legal petitioner in the Indian judicial system, right up to the Supreme Court, and under Hindu law to be recognized as a legal person, “a live entity capable of owning and possessing property.”¹⁰ At the very least this graphically shows the ambivalent relations between religion and secularism which those who interpret the latter in a more explicitly anti-religious way find hard to stomach.

A Prince and a Guru: A Royal Devotee

In her book on the Padmanābhasvāmī temple, Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, the Eliya Rajah’s sister’s daughter, clearly identifies Mā as his spiritual guide:

⁸ Ibid., p.269.

⁹ Ibid., p.267.

¹⁰ *Report of the Amicus Curiae* II.41, compare Recommendation III.F.19, by Gopal Subramaniam, October 29, 2012, submitted to the Supreme Court of India (Civil Appellate Jurisdiction), SLP (Civil) No. 11295 of 2011. Available at: www.thehindu.com/multimedia/archive/01262/Report_of_the_amic_1262649a.pdf (accessed November 11, 2015).



Lord Padmanābha-svāmī *vigraha*

The present Valia Thampuram [senior-most male member of princely clan, that is, Marthanda Varma] does daily Puja to his personal idol of Śri Padmanābha on Ananta. It is a living miracle that this silver idol of amazing brilliance was seen gaining in weight. His Guru, Sree Sree Ma Ananda Mayee, explained that devotion is the food of Gods and his depth of devotion had led to this enhancement in weight.¹¹

After Mā's death in 1982, *Ānanda Vārtā* published numerous eulogistic articles about her, including a three-part account of his fifteen experiences of Mā written in English by 'H.H. Marthanda Varma' himself.¹² Through these, it becomes clear that after the vision of July 1971 with which we started, both his wife and he became ardent lay devotees of Mā. The pair traveled to be with her for as much time as possible, attributed many miraculous rescues both large and small to her power, and enjoyed visiting key Hindu pilgrimage places and bathing with her at the 1977 Allahabad Kumbhmelā in association with visits to her *āśrama*-s. They were particularly pleased when she gave them personal *upadeśa*, the teaching which showed she had accepted them as her lay disciples. As members of the princely elite who enhanced her profile of devotees and at the same time humble followers who slipped from the limelight into the crowds, their personal dedication and service to her seems to have been without question.

The Gift of Padmanābha

That this dedication was triggered by Marthanda Varma's July 12, 1971 vision of Mā holding Lord Padmanābha is clear. It was strengthened two days later when Mā invited him to take his 'Deities' to her room before he left for Delhi. He unpacked the *vighra*-s, or 'Concrete External Presences as Form', which he kept in a special *pūjā* box so he could worship them when traveling. Mā "adored" all the 'Bhagavāns'. Next morning, she was found on her bed lying "just like Padmanābha Bhagavān on Ananta,"¹³ and on July 24 the Eliya Rajah

¹¹ Op. cit., Lakshmi Bayi. p.187, n.381, emphasis added; compare Varma, 'Our Mother: The Wonder of Ma.' *Ānanda Vārtā* 31,2 (1984), pp.111-12.

¹² Op. cit., Varma. 'Our Mother: The Wonder of Ma.' Parts 1-3. *Ānanda Vārtā* 30.4 (1983), 31.1 (1984), 31.2 (1984).

¹³ Op. cit., Varma. 'Our Mother.' Part 1, p.322.

was asked to arrange for Mā to have a Padmanābhasvāmī *vigraha* for herself. Her *kheyāl* was that it should be installed on September 29, 1971, the ninth day of Durgā Pūjā in North India that year. This was a key festival for Mā, for it was at Kālī/Durgā Pujā in Bengal that she first manifested as the Goddess in a *bhāva* in 1925.¹⁴

The Eliya Rajah recalls: “Permission was taken from my brother to be absent at the Dussera as the installation (*chal pratishta*) of Padmanābha Bhagavān was all important.”¹⁵ Nambudiri Brahmins were sent from Trivandrum to perform the installation correctly and to instruct Mā and her followers in the exact ritual requirements for the *sevā* of the deity. After the image was placed on the Durgā Pūjā platform for consecration, the Eliya Rajah duly carried the deity in procession, first to Mā in Panchavati, then to the Kalyanvan cottage which no one had been allowed to stay in “after Padmanabha had graced it with His presence last July.”¹⁶ This became his temple, in which Mā took daily interest, walking up and down the steep hill to attend to the deity’s needs. As it happened, because of a difference in the North and South Indian religious calendars that year, the Eliya Rajah was able to be back in Trivandrum for the Vijayā Dashmī all-important tenth day celebrations of Dussehra, which had long been connected with the celebration of royal power in the erstwhile princely states.

Ritual and Regional Identity

In January 1972, following the installation of Padmanābhasvāmī the previous Durgā pūjā, Mā was invited by the Eliya Rajah to take part in the Lakshadeepam celebrations in Trivandrum. Lakshadeepam is a fifty-six-day festival for the prosperity of the kingdom culminating in the lighting of thousands of lamps, now marketed for tourist purposes as coming from “God’s own country.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Hallstrom, Lisa Lassell. *Mother of Bliss: Ānandamayī Mā (1896–1982)*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1999, p.44.

¹⁵ Op. cit., Varma, Part 1, p.323.

¹⁶ *Ānanda Vārtā* 18.4 (1971), p.191.

¹⁷ See “Travancore Maharaja on Temple Treasure,” YouTube video, 4:20, posted July 13, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=do2Ur9BCBkg (last accessed August 10, 2020).

In 1972, it was controversially lit by electricity for the first time, the Maharajah having reluctantly sought astrological permission from Padmanābhasvāmī before making this change, which was necessary to cut expenditure. Lakshmi Bayi noted the privy purse withdrawal as background to this need. Portentously the princess declared, “It has to be stressed here that on the 31st of December 1971 midnight, the Indian Government passed yet another enactment abolishing the Privy Purses promised to the Ex-Rulers. With one stroke, Chithira Thirunal lost Rupees eighteen lacs annually,”¹⁸ most of which was used by him for the temple’s upkeep. It was in this context that the Maharajah and his brother led the processions, stopping on each circumambulation to honour Mā after Padmanābhasvāmī. For her devotees, it was a clear sign of their Mother’s transfixing power; for the Eliya Rajah, it was the opportunity in a private ceremony later to place his own ‘twin’ *vighraha* of Padmanābhasvāmī in Mā’s lap, replicating the vision.

Interviewed nearly forty years later, with the temple wealth under consideration in the Supreme Court and the subject therefore *sub judice* under “western systems of jurisprudence”, he would gently but firmly refuse to answer the interviewer’s questions, according to “the tenets of the principles of somebody else’s law”. While complying with these, he clearly implied that his allegiance remained elsewhere – to Manusmriti and to the deity whose service was in the “past tense, the present tense, and, we hope, the future tense”.¹⁹ Highly educated, keen photographer and scholar, patron of cultural and religious charities, Mercedes Benz fan, and devotee of Mā, the Eliya Rajah negotiated the discourses of the secular courts, his deity’s service, his spiritual goal, to the end of his life.

Between the Eliya Rajah and Indira Gandhi, a secular leader who kept her personal visits to Ānandamayī Mā secret except where they promoted her public role, Ānandamayī Mā was an ambiguous common link. Both Indira Gandhi and her family and the Eliya Rajah contributed to the prestige of her elite networks. This ‘flow’ confirmed Mā’s power as the one who advised rulers and leaders to seek the One beyond the mere sociopolitical. Her transcendence of

¹⁸ Op. cit., Lakshmi Bayi, p.173.

¹⁹ “Travancore Maharajah on Temple Treasure,” 3:26; 1:05.

worldly concerns could be seen to be vindicated in that rulers with such different political interests were nonetheless attracted to her and at different levels placed their affairs, in the Eliya Rajah's case literally, in her hands. Yet, as this shows, her claimed transcendence of the sociopolitical belied her deep embeddedness within it. Moreover, her connections with multiple politicians were largely confined to Congress, even if, over time, different Congress factions were involved.

It was at Mā's birthday celebrations in May 1979 that the paths of all three crossed. Over the years, these celebrations had become elaborate extended affairs and were often hosted by prestigious followers. In 1979, the Congress (I) state governor of Karnataka, Govind Narain, and his wife, who with his family had been long-term devotees of Mā, were honoured to joint-host the celebrations in Bangalore. Their co-hosts were the Eliya Rajah and Rani, at whose family estate at the Maharaja Gondal Palace Mā stayed in a specially built secluded cottage. The Eliya Rajah and Rani were present throughout, from May 5th to the 16th.

That year, Mā's birthday ceremonies were opened by the Śrī Sañkarācārya of Dwarka, one of the four main *Sañkarācārya*-s who had just met together in Sringeri on Sankara Jayanti, 1st May, for the first time for centuries. In a statement, the *Śrī Sañkarācārya*-s declared their support for the Freedom of Religion Bill going through Parliament, spoke out against conversion, commended the Janata prime minister Morarji Desai for bringing cow protection high up the political agenda, and encouraged weddings for all Hindus with full Hindu rites but otherwise little expenditure. Their statement was apparently anodyne and inclusive; actually, it encoded a discourse strongly linked with an 'India as Hindu' platform, a view which was instantiated in other contexts by Mā's links with key Hindu ascetics. Indira Gandhi, who sent apologies if she was unable to make it to Mā's birthday ceremonies, this year did attend, probably on May 11 when she was in Bangalore to address a meeting of her own Congress (I) supporters. From her point of view, it would seem to have been a private visit to Mā to seek solace; perhaps, though, it was also to ensure that she continued to grace such gatherings as the face of Congress (I), given their weight of potential support. She was, of

course, at this juncture out of power as prime minister and had also been expelled from the Lok Sabha as member for Chikmagalur, Karnataka, in December 1978, shortly after Devraj Urs, the chief minister, facilitated her election. Her political situation was, to say the least, fraught.

In viewing Mā as a modern guru, we see a discourse of spirituality and cultural heritage rooted in the nineteenth century which strongly contributes to an ‘India as Hindu’ picture, while emphasizing Mā’s transcendence to it. Yet, throughout her life, the accounts of her Mātri Līlā and the many publications of her followers constantly stressed her worldly links with secular politicians and princely families, as well as with notable *sadhu*-s. In the diary of her life, given on the Ānandamayī website, the simple presence of these notables was enough to bear testimony to her divine power, showing how this eclipsed secular, princely, and religious power of lesser kinds, Indira Gandhi’s and the Eliya Rajah’s included.

However, the links uncovered in the original article between these three protagonists and the broader networks in which they participated demonstrate clearly their transactional nature as a form of mutual legitimation even in the secular state. They also suggest an oscillation necessary to maintain mass public support: for Indira Gandhi, an oscillation between scrupulous secularity and appeal to Hindu repertoires, not in themselves communal, but drawn on by those with such agendas; for Ānandamayī Mā, an oscillation between transcendent spirituality and the rich resources of Hindu devotion, themselves the source for those *svāmī*-s with a more ‘India as Hindu’ orientation too.

The Discourse of ‘Service’

Examination of these figures also points to a range of subtle ways in which they all operated a discourse of ‘service’ across the religion-secular divide – a discourse in which contesting discourses of secularity, spirituality, and servanthood met and continue to do so. One scholar, Aya Ikegame, shows how *sevā*, under a liberalized state, has taken new forms in, for example, the social service enterprises of the Karnatakan *maṭha*-s. The Eliya Rajah’s understanding of servanthood and the Anandamayee Sangha’s *sevā* in medical and educational institutions show older forms of such a political culture of religion.

The Eliya Rajah's approach was inextricably linked with the political structures of Travancore and older beliefs that the people and land prospered when the king ruled well. It was, of course, primarily rooted in his service to Padmanābha. When he no longer held political power in the modern state of Kerala, he continued to perform that service in many ways: through devotional *sevā* to his deity, sanctioned by Ānandamayī Mā; through personal acts of patronage to his people; and through support of state and third sector welfare organizations, the focus of much modern *sevā*. *The Deccan Chronicle*, for example, records the story of a head load worker named Pushparaharan who was unable to work after heart surgery. Each morning the Eliya Rajah drove past him on his way to worship Padmanābha. One day he stopped, and on discovering his circumstances found Pushparaharan a post in the royal palaces. At the news of Marthanda's death, the president of India stated: "His contribution towards the welfare of the people of Travancore as patron of numerous hospitals and charities shall always be remembered."²⁰

For Ānandamayī and the Sangha too, the discourse of service had many shades of colour. Although the Sangha's approach undoubtedly drew in part on Christian and colonial precedents, Mā's own Bengali heritage included a significant Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava strand where *sevā* to the divine involves service to others. While Hallstrom distances Mā herself from a social service model of *sevā*, Mā's letters to Indira Gandhi connect service to the nation with service to the will of the divine. In the early days of the Kanyapeeth girls' school, for example, Mā emphasized that *sevā* to the divine helps purify the mind and should infuse all activity, and Alexander Lipski records Mā as saying: "Whenever you have the opportunity, give to the poor, feed the hungry, nurse the sick...do service (*sevā*) as a religious duty and you will come to know by direct perception that the person served, the one who serves and the act of service are separate only in appearance."²¹ More recently, the Kanyapeeth's webpage emphasizes, in somewhat old-fashioned terms, that its Sanskrit foundation, "modern curriculum",

²⁰ *Mathrubhumi*, December 18, 2013.

²¹ Lipski, Alexander. *Life and Teaching of Śrī Ānandamayī Mā*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1977, p.52.

and teaching of sewing, music, and cooking were intended “to make the [students] the ideal women of this country in the future.”²² Service and the nation remain conjoined.

Indira Gandhi’s Congress-based understanding of service to the nation also had roots in Bengal in the political discourse of service to Mother India in the struggle for Independence. Indira’s own view was strongly influenced by her relationship with Mahātmā Gandhi during her formative years and was energized throughout her life by contact with ‘the masses’, the crowds of ordinary people who took her to their heart, even after the Emergency. It was encouraged by Mā whose high view of Indira’s service must have heartened her greatly. Importantly, her publicly stated commitment of service to the nation at key points in her office refused the monopoly of that term to political opponents with what she saw as partisan religious alignments. *Sevā* was not to be the sole prerogative of the Sangh Parivar and its associated political organizations in their continuing aim of building a Hindu nation, nor was it to be left to the institutions of civil society. In this, in intent, if not in execution, she followed her father’s Congress in seeing Five-Year Plans and legislation as the key to appropriate service.

The discourse of service resists a sharp demarcation between the realms of politics and religion. Understandings of what service does and should mean in a modern ‘equidistantly’ secular state remain fiercely contested. To what extent the concept can resist too strong a dye from certain shades of Hindu or indeed Christian *sevā* is a moot point and further study of its current employment in alternative Hindu, Indian Islamic, Indian Christian, communist, dalit, and other political contexts is a desideratum. However, while many might rightly want to separate (secular) politics from religion because of the deleterious effects that politico-religious communalizing has, the vignettes above and their interweaving discourse of service – spiritual and secular, to deity, kingdom, guru, or nation – show that driving a wedge between the two is not analytically helpful in seeking to understand the complexities of negotiating secularity in India today. ▲

²² See <https://www.anandamayi.org/sangha-schools-and-institutions/> (accessed August 10, 2020). [The 2006-7 report is no longer available, but the same quotation can be found on this page.]

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

The Lord Performs the Marriage of Namdev

Chapter Three

NABAJI SIDDHA

“O come my friends, O Siddhas! Listen to the wonderful events in the life of Sant Namdev.

“The wheel of time rolled on and life in Damaseth’s household was flowing on smoothly and joyfully. One day the Lord appeared in the dream of Damaseth and said, “O Dama, Nama is already sixteen years old. It is time to perform his marriage to a girl by name Rajabai living in this village so he can attain greater felicity.”

Dama immediately woke up and said to Gunabai, “O dear woman! The Lord came in my dream and said to me, in His nectarine voice, that we must choose a girl who is called Rajabai and get Nama married to her. Do you know of this girl?”

Guna replied, “Yes, I do. This girl, though belonging to our caste, is from a wealthy family. It will be considered ridiculous if we approach the girl’s family to ask for her for our son. This family is most certainly above our station and is out of reach for us.”

However, since the Lord had instructed him to do so, Damaseth finished his morning rituals and worship and went to Rajabai’s house

and sought her hand for his son. The father of the girl replied that if he arranged to bring one thousand gold coins to fix the engagement, they could proceed with the matter.

Damaseth was overcome by shame and humiliation and on returning home told Guna, “Even if we toiled hard for years and saved all the money we earned, we would not be able to save one thousand gold coins. Whom can we approach for such a big amount? How are we going to arrange this marriage? Let us resort to the Lord and pray to Him!” Later in the day, he went to the temple and complained to the Lord in an aggrieved tone, “O Vittal! By Your grace, I am blessed with Nama as our son. Now, You have bidden us to get Nama married to a rich girl. But we are not able to carry out Your command for want of resources. Utterly poor as we are, how can we ask for the hand of a millionaire’s daughter for our son?”

When he returned home, he could find no peace. Assailed by worry, he was not able to sleep that night. Restlessly he was turning in bed, despairingly thinking that one who has no wealth is as good as dead. He was also calling upon the Names of God. But at that very moment Lord Panduranga, who was waiting outside Damaseth’s house with a sackful of gold bricks, was getting vexed, as he could not place it in the house while Damaseth was wide awake. Exasperated, he threw a brick over the roof, making it land in the central courtyard of the house.

On hearing something heavy being flung from outside, Damaseth became much agitated. His nerves were already highly strung with worry. Now, this vandalism added fuel to the fire. Shouting in an angry voice, he said, “O damn! Who is this rascal who is throwing stones into our courtyard at this hour, disturbing our sleep?” He got up to check what was going on.

The Lord listening to Dama’s expletives accepted joyfully the abusive title, and continued to toss the gold bricks one by one. Damaseth who was by now thoroughly exasperated by this new trouble, hurled more abuses at the stone-thrower, “O evil man! O scoundrel! Why are you persisting with this vandalism? Who are you?” The miscreant broke into a loud laughter and quipped, “Why don’t you address me as ‘you noble lord’ instead of calling me names?” and saying this, he threw one more brick into the courtyard.

THE LORD PERFORMS THE MARRIAGE OF NAMDEV

Damaseth replied sarcastically, “O noble lord, please stop your wicked act and come face to face with me. Don’t take cover behind darkness and play roguish games, harassing innocent people!” And driven by fury, brandishing a stick in his hand, he leapt at the figure. Hearing the commotion, Gunabai also came out. On seeing a figure in the dark and her husband wielding a stick, she screamed in fear, “Thief, thief!” Now hearing her calling him ‘thief’ twice, the Lord hurled two bricks at a time now. Damaseth lost his mind in anger and rushed towards him saying, “By God, I am going to kill this evil-doer right now.” The Lord then ran away at great speed, as if afraid of Damaseth, and Dama chased him in the thick of the night. At a junction of roads, the Lord disappeared. Damaseth returned home bragging about his heroism. Soon, overcome by fatigue, he fell sleep.

Gunabai woke up in the morning and started sweeping the courtyard. She was startled to find the courtyard strewn with gold bricks. She checked each and every brick and finding them all to be made of gold, was utterly astonished. She cried out, “O..O! What great fortune has come our way! O Swami, come and see this miracle!” Dama also came out and beheld the incredible treasure. He realized immediately what had happened and that it was God’s sport. He sang the Lord’s glories with profound gratitude and devotion. He glorified the Lord as Purushothama again and again, with the same tongue that had abused Him a few hours earlier. Then the couple hid the gold bricks safely away in a secret place.

Meanwhile, Lord Panduranga and His consort Rukmini Devi, taking the forms of Damaseth and Gunabai reached the girl’s residence in the morning and called upon the rich man. When he came out and saw them, he ridiculed them in a loud voice, “O! So you have come again! You must be great indeed, if you have managed to arrange for such a sum overnight. On the other hand, if you have come with empty hands, you have no business to frequent my house!”

The Divine Couple replied, “Please listen patiently. We have arranged for ten thousand gold coins towards making jewellery for your daughter and another twenty thousand towards the expenses of the marriage. We will send these coins with our trusted servant. We came here to inform you of the matter as a courtesy. Today itself, you may look for an auspicious date and start making preparations for an early wedding.”

After uttering these words, they didn't wait for any response from the astonished man. They walked away quickly from the house and disappeared into the idols after reaching the temple. A little later, the Lord sent through a messenger thirty thousand coins which immensely pleased the wealthy father of the bride. He proceeded with the arrangements. After some time, the Lord assuming the guise of a Brahmin, went to the bride's father and said, "Damaseth has sent me to conduct you to his house."

When they reached Damaseth's house, the Brahmin rushed forward to the hiding place and scooped out the gold bricks, while the couple witnessed this sudden intrusion in a shocked condition. Soon the situation dawned on them and both rushed to the Brahmin. Naturally, He was too quick for them and placing the treasure before the bride's father, the Lord addressed him thus, "O millionaire! Just as a truly noble man remains humble while a braggart shows off; just as big diamonds are secured in iron chests while small diamonds are brought to the shops for sale; just as the virtues of a chaste woman and of a great devotee remain concealed, while a prostitute, a humbug and a hypocrite flaunt themselves in public; so also is Damaji. In spite of immense riches he remains so simple that no one would ever take him for a wealthy man, whereas people like us brag about what little we cling to."

The wealthy man, somewhat abashed at the Brahmin's dig at his previous conduct, told Damaseth, "O Swami, I am fortunate indeed to seek this connection with you. Your son is as handsome as Manamatha, the god of love and beauty. My daughter is very blessed to be married into such a noble family." He took the couple and the Brahmin to his house and honoured them with due courtesies. He made many gifts to Namdev and his parents. The generosity and compassion of the Lord overwhelmed Damaseth. The couple was drowned in their waves of joy and wonder. They invited the bride's family to their house and returned the honour. Damaseth made prostrations to the Brahmin and honoured him with special gifts. The marriage took place a few days later and people praised the grand ceremony and the great feast to which all the village folk and relatives had been invited. Needless to say, Damaseth's heart was awash with deep gratitude to the Lord who had lifted his burden in a trice." ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Krimi Nashini Mantra

Daily recitation of the *Krimi Nashini* mantra from the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* of the *Krishna Yajur Veda* started on 9th July. *Krimi Nashini* mantra is designed to destroy (*nasha* means to ‘destroy’) germs (*krimi*) and viruses. The Ashram Veda Patasala teacher, Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal is committed to maintaining the recitation for the duration of the pandemic.

Events in Tiruvannamalai: Local Coronavirus Update

The ashram has remained firmly locked to all visitors and devotees from late March. There is no immediate prospect of the ashram opening its gate in the short term.

As we go to press Tamil Nadu has had some 4,000 new cases each day. Some four lakhs cases were active with some three and half lakh cases discharged. The total number of deaths is over 7,000. In Tiruvannamalai with some 10,000 active cases, some 9,000 recovered and 156 deaths, containment measures remain largely in place but every effort is being made to allow basic services and essential activities to continue. A lodge, Siva Sannidhi near the ashram, had a small outbreak followed by Ramanasramam when one of its volunteer devotees was hospitalised and died. A second Ashram inmate was hospitalised with covid-19 and is recovering. After contact tracing and testing, a third person was also diagnosed. It has been a fraught time for devotees in the Ashram. Fortunately, testing samples showed the infection not to be as widespread as feared.

V.S. Ramanan Resigns as Ashram President

In 1994, V. S. Ramanan was appointed president of Sri Ramansamaram after his father who was president since 1953 years retired and took *sannyas*. V.S. Ramanan who was working with IPCL, Baroda and Indian Vaccine Corporation, New Delhi, after retirement, came to the Ashram in 1992 and slowly learnt how the ashram functioned.

In 2010 the President suffered a major personal setback with the death of his younger son. The experience affected his health and gradually he found himself unable to actively serve the Ashram as president. For this reason, he informed the Board of Trustees that his eldest son, Dr. Venkat

S. Ramanan, known as Anand, being the male lineal descendant entitled to succeed the Presidentship according to Bhagavan's Will, would be succeeding him. Other lineal male descendants, namely, his brothers, V. Ganesan and V. Subramanian, conveyed their disinclination to assume the post due to advanced age, both now in their eighties. Thus in 2018, the President nominated his only surviving son, Venkat S. Ramanan to take over the Ashram as President.

Venkat S. Ramanan Appointed Ashram President

In the midst of a global pandemic, Venkat S. Ramanan managed to get a flight to India from the USA to administrate the Ashram and look after his ailing father. He was subjected to all the covid-19 tests, which he passed, and arrived in India on 13th June 2020. On the morning of the 17th, he was installed as Sri Ramanasramam's fourth President. The requisite papers were signed at 5.30am in



front of Bhagavan's Shrine. The signing was followed by a brief ceremony in the presence of his mother and other family members under the *iluppai* tree, a place where Bhagavan sometimes stood to receive guests. The following day, 18th June, in honour of the newly ordained President, a *homa* was performed in the New Hall.

Obituaries

Sri Venkataraman Sundara Ramanan, the third president of Sri Ramansramam, was absorbed in Arunachala on the 21st July. He was born to T.N. Venkataraman and Nagalakshmi on 29th May, 1934 (*jyestha nakshatra*). He came to live in Tiruvannamalai at the age of three when his father started service in the Ashram. He had the good fortune to spend his formative childhood years in Bhagavan's presence. At that time, the family was living in town but by July 1949, they moved to their newly constructed house in Ramana Nagar. Early photos with Bhagavan reveal the rich lives the children had in the presence of Bhagavan.

Sundaram studied engineering and obtained a B.E., (Electrical Engineering) from Madras University, in 1957. He married Susila in 1960 and went to Germany in 1965 where he got a diploma in

power engineering with special reference to chemical plants and worked for Siemens. He later served at the Neyveli Lignite Corporation (1957-71) and in Indian Petrochemicals Corporation, Baroda as General Manager from 1971-1992.



After he was appointed president he made it a priority to reorganize the publications department. He encouraged translators, editors and writers to revive the many works about Bhagavan that had not been reprinted for many years or were untranslated.

He made the bold move at the time to digitalize the Ashram management records as well as the book department and created an easily accessible link for people around the world to contact the ashram that now serves to link devotees worldwide.

The Ashram prospered under his guidance and he oversaw the establishment of the Ashram Archives, built to house and preserve the 1,500 photographic negatives of Bhagavan, among other precious items. Over time, the demand for more accommodation led Sundaranna to construct the Post Office quarters and the accommodation for devotees nearby, as well as Achalam just a few doors down from the President's compound. By the mid-1990s, the old Dining Hall was no longer able to serve the growing number of visitors on ordinary weekends except by multiple sittings and so the decision was taken to make an extension. Abutting the old Dining Hall on its northern side, the new annex was completed in the middle of 1998.

Sundaranna also oversaw the renovation and expansion of Morvi Compound in 2010. By 2009 he established a modern dispensary in the Ashram proper as well as the new library and auditorium. Meanwhile, construction projects and renovations in various locations included Bhagavan's birth house in Tiruchuzhi as well as the Tirukoilur and Tiruchuzhi Temple renovations and Mahakumbhabhishekams.

Sundaram's first order of business was service to devotees and the Ashram. He took it to heart and sought to carry out this sacred duty with utmost sincerity.

Sundaram surrendered to Bhagavan and wiped clean the slate of his past life in order to live only in Bhagavan. He was absorbed in

Bhagavan as gently as he lived his life, at 9.21am on the 21st July, wearing his characteristic sweet smile. He is survived by his wife Susila, his son Anand, his daughter Aruna, his son-in-law, Ramkumar, his two daughters-in-law, Nitya and Ranjani, six grandchildren and two younger brothers, Ganesan and Mani.

Though we knew his time had come nevertheless it was a shock for all who had the privilege of coming in contact with this kind and humble servant of Bhagavan.

For those who may not be aware there is a wonderful tribute in the Saranagathi Special Newsletter for July 2020. The link is: https://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/saranagati/Saranagathi_eNewsletter_August_2020.pdf

Sri Margabandhu Sastrigal attained the lotus feet of Arunachala on 18th July, 2020, in Chennai. Born in Tiruvannamalai District, he attended the *Maha Nirvana* of Bhagavan Ramana on 14th April, 1950. *Sattvic* by nature, he was respected by all for his humility, faith, silence and unassuming nature. He regularly participated in the *Sri Chakra Puja*, *Sri Vidya Havan*, *Navaratri* and *Ashram Kumbhabhishekam*-s over the last fifty years. He recited along with other pundits the liturgy for the 2019 *Sri Vidya Havan*.



Alan Jacobs, the much-loved President of the Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK, died at 10.45 pm UK time on the night of 25th July. We understand that his death was quick and painless, and his funeral was held 4 days later on Wednesday 29th July.

He was born into a Jewish family in London on 9th September 1929 and he would have been 91 years old on 9th September this year. He was a pivotal figure in the UK Foundation for the past 30 years.

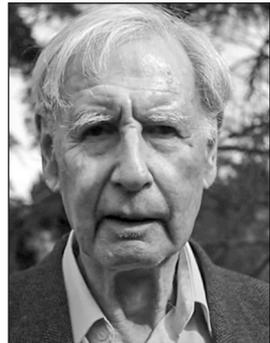
He became chairman in 1993 and remained so for the next 13 years until December 2005 when he retired to live in the Ashram for the rest of his life – or so he hoped – but he became ill in Tiruvannamalai and returned to England, after which he remained President as well as continuing to lead most of the *Satsang*-s and other activities until he became too ill to carry on doing so.

He was interested in religion and spirituality from a very early age. His father was head of a prosperous clothing firm. He was educated at Malvern College, an English public school (for public read private) after which he did his years National Service in the Army Intelligence Corps. His own wish after that was to go on to Oxford or Cambridge, but his father needed him in the family firm.

Then, after his father died, he found himself, for various fortuitous reasons as it turned out, in the world of art dealing, which suited him at that time, and he eventually opened his own gallery in London's West End specialising in Dutch Landscape Painting. He wrote a book on this subject which became a best-seller in that field.

He had by this time met and married his first wife, Claire, and they had a daughter and 2 sons. It was a very happy marriage. They both became interested in J. Krishnamurti in 1967 and set up a Krishnamurti study group in Hampstead. However, sometime after this, Alan went down with hepatitis and, while he was recuperating, Claire brought him a *Yoga Journal* with a picture of Ramana in it, which had such an effect on him that he re-dedicated his life to Bhagavan.

Sadly, however, his wife Claire died, unexpectedly, in 1981, leaving Alan utterly bereft. Now on his own, Alan moved from his family home to Hampstead, and began to chair a small Ramana group which formed the nucleus of the present UK Foundation. This group first meet in St Johns Wood and later in Brondesbury, until 1996 when the *Satsang-s* started at the Friends (Quaker) Meeting House in Hampstead. In July 1990, Sri Ganesan, a grand nephew of Bhagavan, came to London to set up the present Foundation. The inaugural meeting was held on the 12th August 1990, almost exactly 30 years ago.



Alan had a charismatic, gentle and quietly graceful way of leading the *Satsang-s* with his pleasant, soft voice and his patient way of answering questions. However, his health began to deteriorate after he returned from his spell in India, such that he had to live in old peoples' homes in north London. There were several longer periods in hospital before he was eventually transferred into a Care Home in February of this year, just before the lockdown began in March.

Alan was the author of a number of books, including one on Gandhi, another on the Dalai Lama and another one on the legend of Jesus in India. He also wrote and published a lot of poetry and wrote various articles, including ones for *The Mountain Path* and the UK Newsletter. Alan was a wise, gentle and compassionate person, a man of many parts who is sorely missed by all of us.

Sri G. Kannan, known to all devotees as the person who energetically served rice in the Dining Hall, passed away on 20th August at the relatively young age of 68. After his retirement from the local branch of ING Vysya Bank in 2010, he devoted his full time in serving the Ashram voluntarily, mainly in the Dining Hall and Kitchen. When he was working in the local bank, he used to take care of all Ramana devotee's banking requirements. He was good in controlling the crowds during feeding of thousands in *Jayanti* and *Aradhana* celebrations. Serving Ashram was sort of gene-embedded in him. His father Ganapathiraman and mother Ananthalakshmi are grandchildren, former by mother's side and later by father's side, of Bhagavan's mother Alagamma's brother Ramachandra Iyer. Ganapathiraman, after retirement from banking services, impeccably served as Cashier in Ashram from 1983 to 2007, till the last day of his life. Much earlier, Kannan's grandfather Srirama Iyer, who had knowledge of legal matters did valuable service for a decade or more by being with the then President T.N. Venkataraman, who was battling many court cases. Kannan is survived by wife Radha and daughter Ramya.



Smt V. Rakshaben the wife of T.S. Vaidyanathan, who is in charge of Ashram publications, passed away on August 28th after a short illness at the age of 73 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. She was a bhajan singer for All India Radio and a deep devotee of Bhagavan. She had a particular interest in reciting the Sanskrit Works of Bhagavan, *Sundara Kāṇḍā* and *Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Stotram*. ▲