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# Divine Names of Arunachala

16. ॐ मृगमदेश्वराय नमः

om mrgamadeśvarāya namaḥ

Prostration to the Lord of musk.

‘*Mṛgamada*’ means musk; ‘*iśvara*’ the Lord. In the perfume world, musk refers to a warm, sweet and extremely long-lasting scent attractive to females that was originally extracted from a gland of the musk deer. So it has erotic connotations, and, in this case, they are specifically related to Siva.

The context for the *Upadeśa Sāram* is well-known to devotees of Ramana Maharshi. Sri Muruganar was composing Tamil verses about rishis in the Daruka Forest who were practising austerities with the mistaken notion that the performance of rituals was the path to the Supreme. In that episode, Siva seduces their wives with an irresistible sexual attraction that is not unlike the effect of musk. “Thus did they follow after him, forgetting their integrity, forgetting their reputation, forgetting their very selves.”<sup>1</sup> The rishis, of course, were enraged and fought him with all the magic forces they could muster, until they realised the form was Siva himself and begged to be set aright. That’s when Muruganar convinced Bhagavan to write his much-beloved thirty verses. T. R. Kanakammal masterfully relates musk to the Ātman in the following inspired commentary:

*Bliss or happiness is the form of Ātman. Ātman and Bliss are not two but just one. There is no inherent happiness in the objects of the world. The jīva, out of ignorance, assumes that it comes from the objects. The musk deer carries the fragrant musk within itself. Unaware of this and assuming that it emanates from a source outside of itself, it wanders all over searching for it. Until the jīva knows that his own essential nature is matchless bliss he will, like the musk deer, be confused and misled.*<sup>2</sup> BKC

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<sup>1</sup> Verse 83 of Muruganar’s *Tiru Unthiyar*, translated by Robert Butler in *The Upadesha Unthiyar of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp.18-19.

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on Anuvāda Nūnmālai*, pp. 369-370.

# Responsibility

For those who had the great good fortune to be in the physical presence of Bhagavan it was often noted how orderly and punctilious Bhagavan was in the affairs of the world. He lived by a set timetable each day, was clean in personal hygiene and behaviour, and was courteous to all. He lived an open life where nothing was hidden. Each act, each exchange with those who came to see him, was fully conscious and entirely natural. He effortlessly demonstrated a life of harmony and well-being. He was so natural and simple that at first sight he seemed quite ordinary and unremarkable, that is until he gazed at you and saw into the depths of your heart with eyes of such piercing clarity that you could dive into them and never want to come back.

Part of the enigma of Bhagavan is that he had no ulterior motive: what he saw had no agenda of self-aggrandisement or one-upmanship. It is very hard to understand this for all of us who have to some degree a sense of impoverishment or entitlement. We swing between the two attitudes. Before such a person who needs and wants nothing, it defies our normal perception. The secret of Bhagavan's imperturbability is that he wishes good to all. He rejoices in the good of others and reaches out to those in pain with a heart as wide as the ocean. He spontaneously expressed a feeling of friendliness towards all. He can

do so because he sees no difference between himself and others. He did not just teach pure advaita vedanta, he validated it in every way in his daily life.

But what of us with our limitations and hidden agendas?

Whenever we think ill of others, it is immaterial whether our feelings actually hurt them, we nevertheless corrode our own well-being. There is a difference between being impartially discriminate, seeing evil or wrong doing for what it is, and the judgement that condemns someone with a sneer as though from a position of superiority. That is why the statue of Justice traditionally has its eyes covered. It neither approves nor disapproves. It actually does not judge, it simply states the facts. A judge who hears a case objectively according to the law is not polluted by the judgement reached. A person who is found guilty must publicly suffer the consequences of their actions. It does not mean forever and once the sentence is over he is free with a fresh sheet having presumably learnt his lesson.

We could argue that there is no injustice in the world, for events happen with a reason and purpose.<sup>1</sup> This belief however must depend to a certain degree on a belief in reincarnation and the evolution of the individual soul. The fundamental purpose of all justice is to rectify the hurt suffered, be it to society in general or by an individual. Whoever caused it must 'pay' in suffering, that is, deliberate deprivation, so that the scales of harmony are realigned. It is through our mistakes that we truly learn lessons that never need to be experienced again. Retribution comes impersonally; it is not up to us to exact justice as this implies a personal incentive or vendetta. The law of physics is infallible: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. On a human level we are reminded of that truism: what we do to others, will be done to us.

Though it appears otherwise, the suffering we experience is impersonal. We are not alone in suffering humiliation, misunderstanding or disgrace. We all know the sharp sting of disapproval and rejection. How are we to be free? It is to remove the dirt (*pāpa*), the actions which cause sorrow; those which obscure our intellect from discriminating

<sup>1</sup> There is the classic disagreement between Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr, both renowned physicists. Einstein famously declared that "God does not play dice" implying there is an intelligence behind every act, and not chaos, or to be more specific, anarchic indeterminism as implied by quantum physics.

between what is true and what is false. With our adherence to the truth it does not matter what others think or do. We all have experienced such moments when gossip and false perceptions are against us but we are untouched. Why? Because we know the truth and as a consequence, remain composed.

It would be foolish of us to think that Bhagavan does not see all our merits and faults. He sees beyond them to who we really are. Bhagavan never interfered with people's lives even if they endured suffering. Although he does give us the strength to tolerate and be cleansed by the turmoil of living, never would he take it away. Without conscious suffering we would not progress on the path. We should welcome the pain which comes to us unasked, and think that it has a purpose, for nothing in this world happens without a cause. Perhaps the greatest mental pain of all is the sense of purposelessness. It is like a cancer that eats us up and we lose hope and faith. If we have no reason to live what is the point?

Our search is based on faith (*śraddhā*) and its absence would render us anchorless and lost. We can see this with people who apparently have everything they need and more and yet are constantly restless. Faith is a deep sense of the Truth. How or why we really do not know but each of us has an in-built consciousness of what is right and wrong. Those who repeatedly do wrong have managed to suppress that 'feeling' while those who listen to that inner prompting are guided along the right path however hard. When our body and mind are attuned to a higher purpose they do not complain and in some mysterious way we thrive in adversity as our faith is strong and unwavering. Accepting responsibility for our own actions we remain calm for when we hear the Truth we know it with complete certainty.

When we meet Bhagavan on whatever plane of existence we know he is the Truth that we have been seeking. It is a certainty like no other but we would be unable to coherently explain it to anyone who has not had the same revelation. What a curious world we live in.

A modern example of a person who accepted suffering in a conscious manner and thrived on it was Mahatma Gandhi. He positively relished it when someone would justifiably point out a failing in his character. He was not afraid to question and to experiment. One of his earliest benefactors in South Africa where Gandhi began his experiments was Pranjivan Mehta, a Gujarati jewel merchant.

He observed that “‘The one virtue which distinguishes Mr Gandhi from all others is that he never puts forward an idea or extols an action which he himself would not be prepared to act upon when circumstances required him to do so. In fact, he himself first practises what he desires to preach to others.’ Once Gandhi had decided upon a particular line of conduct, wrote his friend, ‘no risk, nothing, will deter him from going on, on that path without in the least caring whether anyone else believes in it at all, or is prepared to follow him in his footsteps.’”<sup>2</sup>

How do we develop this determination to pursue, what after due deliberation, we think is right? First it calls for adherence to the truth and courage. More often than not it comes from the realisation that we have nothing to lose. We see this in the case of Gandhi. His early adult life before he went to South Africa on the request of a client to plead a case, was a failure. At school he was a mediocre student. His mother had pawned her jewels so he could travel to London and his decision to travel over the waters brought him disgrace with his own bania community. Orthodox Hindus at the time had a dread of travelling abroad, of losing caste by crossing the polluting oceans, the *kala pani*. In fact he was called to account before leaving by the Modh Baniyas of Bombay and was made to sit in the middle of an accusatory meeting and formally ostracised.

Gandhi wrote shortly after: “...hemmed in on all sides. I could not go out without being pointed and stared at by someone or other. At one time, while I was walking near the Town Hall, I was surrounded and hooted [at] by them.”<sup>3</sup> In London he managed to survive and it was here while studying law at the Inner Temple that slowly he met like-minded people including the influential vegetarian and animal rights activist, Henry Salt and began to develop his talents by writing for *The Vegetarian* magazine.

On his return to Bombay after successfully completing his degree, he was faced once again with excommunication by his community and failed to develop any type of practice at the Bombay Bar. Unknown to Gandhi, the call by a client to South Africa was the first tentative step in the development of his ideas of *satyagraha*, his food habits and his ideas

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<sup>2</sup> Guha, Ramachandra, *Gandhi Before India*, Penguin India, p.420.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

on how society should self-regulate which were crucial to his taking up the cause of independence in India later in life. Through conviction, and self-discipline he became a hardened warrior, fearless in his pursuit of the truth and the fair treatment of the dispossessed.

We can say, but that was Gandhi who developed those ideas what about the rest of us with all our shortcomings? Gandhi's reply to this objection was: "I am but an ordinary mortal susceptible to the same weaknesses, influences, and the rest as every other human being and that I possess no extraordinary powers."<sup>4</sup>

He made a remarkable statement about his fractious relationship with his eldest son Harilal, who was the bane of his life, which reveals his fierce and uncompromising commitment to the truth. It also gives a hint as to why so many were attracted to the man we call a Mahatma, for he could be relied upon to speak the truth however disagreeable. In a letter to his son Devadas he wrote: "I certainly did not drink but Harilal has made up for that. I sought my pleasure only with one woman. Harilal seeks his with many. It is only a difference of degree, not of kind."<sup>5</sup>

Who among us would accept the responsibility for our relationships and actions however humbling it maybe. Gandhi was never too proud to admit his own mistakes. In a letter to Rabindranath Tagore in September 1932, he wrote: "You have been a true friend because you have been a candid friend often speaking your thoughts loud. I had looked forward to a firm opinion from you one way or another. But you have refused to criticize. Though it can now only be during my fast I will yet prize your criticism, if your heart condemns my actions. I am not too proud to make a confession of my blunder, whatever the cost of my confession, if I find myself in error. If your heart approves of the action, I want your blessing. It will sustain me. I hope I have made myself clear."<sup>6</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi always made himself clear because he invariably acted from the deepest convictions and held himself fully accountable for his own actions. ▲

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<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford India Gandhi*, ed. Gopalakrishna Gandhi. p.270.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.336.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.345-6.



# The True Meaning and Method of Surrender

## Part Two

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA GIRI  
WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND GUIDANCE FROM  
SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

Withdraw within into the Shelter of Oneness with Me.

*Śrī Bhagavad Gītā, 18:66*

I came to feed on Thee, but Thou hast fed on me; now there is  
peace, Oh Arunachala! *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai, v.28*

**T**his second part on *saraṇāgati* will attempt to reveal how to cultivate surrender. In addition to bringing forth the practical aspects of spiritual practice (*sādhana*) taught by Sri Ramana Maharshi, we will seek guidance from the profound depths of cherished wisdom brought forth by Paramahansa Yogananda.

Many have mistakenly concluded that the Maharshi was unlike all other Spiritual Masters, in that he did not offer a teaching. This is

Swami Sadasivananada first came to Arunachala in 1970. After that initial darshan of Bhagavan he became a monk under the direction of Ananda Mayi Ma.

incorrect. He gave instructions on innumerable occasions about the practice of self-enquiry, and if someone said it was too difficult for them, he would give them advice on other spiritual practices such as japa if that was what they were capable of and wanted to do.

As aspirants who seek ‘union’ with the Divine, we are given by the masters of Yoga various types of yogic practice suitable to our temperaments. In the most traditional sense, Sri Ramana Maharshi, like all of the *jagadgurus* (world teachers), guides us along the time-honoured means of practice that is aimed at the highest attainment of spirituality.

To the question: “What is self-surrender?” we can say that it is ‘*pūrṇam*’ (perfection or completeness). The definition, perfection, is indicative of the method of attainment. By complete self-surrender we become *pūrṇa*.

“It is the same as mind-control. The ego submits when it recognizes the higher authority of the Atman. This is the beginning of surrender...”<sup>1</sup> “Complete surrender to God means giving up all thoughts and concentrating the mind on Him. If we can concentrate on Him, other thoughts disappear. If *mano-vak-kaya karma*-s, i.e., the actions of the mind, speech and body, are merged with God, all the burdens of our life will be transferred to Him.”<sup>2</sup>

Bhagavan often quoted, as a means of guidance, from the Bhagavad Gita. Let us now return to this very Song of God, seeking further clarification regarding the means by which we can cultivate surrender.

In Paramahansa Yogananda’s wonderful commentary The Bhagavad Gita – God Talks with Arjuna, we find a deep and mystical revelation that points us towards the direction by which a beginning foundation of ‘*śaraṇāgati / śaraṇam*’ can be laid. In further discussion of Gita 18:66 we are shown that:

“*Mam ekam śaraṇam vraja* literally means, ‘Become (*vraja*) sheltered (*śaraṇam*, ‘protected’ – from delusion) in oneness (*ekam*) with Me (*mam*).’ Lord Krishna says, ‘Always keep your consciousness in My sheltering Presence’; i.e., ‘Remember Me alone...’ indicating

<sup>1</sup> Cohen, S.S., *Guru Ramana*, 2006, p.56.

<sup>2</sup> Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Chap. 109, ‘Absolute Surrender’.

the practice of yoga. The Sanskrit may also be rendered as ‘Withdraw (*vraja*) into the Shelter of oneness with Me.’”<sup>3</sup>

What needs to be understood and absorbed is the essential ‘how to’, which Sri Krishna, as such a compassionate Lord, never fails to uncover for us. There is another secret ‘for those who have ears and eyes to hear and see’ which tells just ‘how to’, and is found in the beginning of verse 66.

*Sarvadharman parityajya* – which in a common translation renders for us something that even advanced practitioners find obscure, and is beyond normal comprehension. It is mistakenly said to mean: ‘Abandon all *Dharmas*!’ Actually, the right grasp of the verb (the action, ‘how to’ word) *tyaj* is crucial for discovering the actual key to right understanding. *Tyaj* – means ‘relinquish all but one!’

So the Lord is actually telling us how to ‘surrender’ to the safe harbour of rest in Him:

*Sarvadharman parityajya, Mam ekam saranam vraja* – means “Forsaking by relinquishment all other *dharmas* (lesser duties), remember Me alone!”<sup>4</sup>

Paramahansa Yogananda reveals the true import and the method to begin the first step, a partial surrender. True, complete surrender is deemed to be the highest achievement of human spiritual endeavour; the very basis of *śraddhā* (faith), which has been declared to be the cause of Self-realisation.

This counsel of Lord Krishna unequivocally advises the deeply motivated Arjuna, (and all true renunciants), to relinquish attachment to, although not necessarily the engagement of, all worldly duties entirely, in order to be single-pointedly one with God. “O Arjuna, forsake all lesser duties and fulfil the highest duty; find your lost home, your eternal shelter, in Me! Remember, no duties can be performed by you without powers borrowed from Me, for I am the Maker and Sustainer of your life. More important than your engagement with other duties is your engagement with Me; because at any time I can recall you from this earth, cancelling all your duties and actions.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Yogananda, Sri Paramahansa *The Bhagavad Gita, God Talks with Arjuna*. Yogoda Satsanga Society of India 2002. Vol.II, p.1092.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.1089.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

In Sanskrit, the word ‘*dharma*’, derived from the root verb *dhṛ*, means ‘to hold, to put on’, also literally as an imperative act, ‘to wear!’ Here we see the correlation with the command of Jesus in the Gospels: “Put on the armour of Righteousness... wear the robe of Salvation!”

“*Dharma*, therefore, is the cosmic law that runs the mechanism of the universe; and after accomplishing the primary God-uniting yoga *dharma* (religious duties), man should perform secondarily his duties to the cosmic laws of nature...he should observe rational conduct in all ways!”<sup>6</sup>

The masters and the scriptures which teach the ‘Life in the Spirit’ confirm that the beginning of partial surrender starts in the performance of virtuous *dharma*. We should begin our partial surrender by adhering to the *upadeśa* (spiritual teaching) of Devaraj Narada, who declared in his Bhakti Sutras: “Seek *satsaṅga* and abandon (relinquish) *dussaṅga*.”<sup>7</sup> The central point surrounding an understanding of ‘surrender’ is that the dual role of maintaining an inwardly God-pointed consciousness with an on-going movement (a seeking) of *satsaṅga* does not present a contradiction in terms of direction.

Srimati T.R. Kanakammal, a direct disciple of the Maharshi, has heard Sri Ramana define the true meaning of ‘*satsaṅga*’ by saying that the Sanskrit word ‘*sat*’ means ‘Being’, and the word ‘*saṅga*’ to mean ‘melt’. Thus to seek *satsaṅga* is conscious movement within by which we melt into Being!

Therefore, by implication, the meaning of *dussaṅga* is to melt through conscious external movement into non-Being (devoid of Godliness). This is brought about by habitually seeking *adharmic* (non-virtuous) pleasures that destroy intelligent discrimination. The end result of one such as this is clearly described by Sri Krishna in Gita 2:63: *Buddhināsāt praṇaśyati* – [Because of ] the destruction of discrimination, he perishes.<sup>8</sup>

The ‘melting within’ referred to by Bhagavan is a protracted process of *sadhana tapa*, a spiritual process of purification. It is not

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.1091.

<sup>7</sup> Chapter 3, Sutra 10. *dussaṅgaḥ sarvathā eva tyajyāḥ*.

<sup>8</sup> “For a person thinking of the sense-objects there grows an attachment for them;

a whimsical imaginative fantasy of drifting within to a so-called instant blissful awareness of ‘oneness’ with the Self. Bhagavan’s use of the word ‘Being’ undeniably refers to *jñāna* (direct Knowledge of the Self), the *vijñāna* Vedanta of the *Kaivalya Upanishad*, the direct experience of full awareness of Divinity within. The process of mind control (*tapas*) that induces the melting of impurities is a protracted meditative process of concentration, often empowered by contemplation (thinking of the Lord) or invocation through remembrance (*japa*) of God, which at the final stages culminates with *vichara* (reflection, enquiry). In direct reference to this truth, Bhagavan related how this is achieved:

“Know that the wondrous jnana vichara is only for those who have attained purity of mind by softening and melting within. Without this softening and melting away of the mind, brought about by thinking of the feet of the Lord, the attachment to the ‘I’ that adheres to the body will not cease to be.”<sup>9</sup>

For many, this guidance from the Maharshi inspires determination to forge ahead with a conviction that the end is glorious, even close. For others the condition precedent to *vicāra*, namely, attainment of purity of mind by softening and melting within, may make *vicāra* seem not a very practical proposition. For many of us, though there are many instances of people succeeding in *vicāra* quickly in Bhagavan’s presence, there may still be ‘mountains to move’ through personal effort before we could lay aside our tools of *sādhana*.<sup>10</sup>

A disciple of Bhagavan who remained under his direct guidance for 14 years writes as follows:

“To beginners as well as advanced sadhakas alike, this mind control appears to be a formidable feat, yet the Master encourages

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from attachments arises desire, from desire results anger, from anger results delusion, from delusion results confusion of memory, from confusion of memory results destruction of intelligence and the from the destruction of intelligence, he perishes.” *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, trans. Swami Vireswarananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1972. Ch.II, vv 62-3. p.72.

<sup>9</sup> *Pādamālai*, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 186. (Reference to *Sri Ramana Jñāna Bodham*, vol. 7, verse 340).

<sup>10</sup> *Sādhana* is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘*sādha*’, which means ‘instruments or tools’. *Sādha-na* therefore means the methods by which the tools are employed to achieve the desired goal.

them to go ahead and practise – at all events to make a beginning. He constantly dins into us the inspiring notion that we are already Self-realised and that, if we are not aware of it, the obstruction to that awareness should be removed by investigation – *vicāra* – which is as logical as it is simple.

“To hear it direct from him, this ‘Self-knowledge’, rather the way to Self-knowledge, is ‘the easiest thing there is’ (*Ātma Vidyā*); but, judging from the questions constantly asked of him, and later of his disciples, there appears to be the need for much spade work before its central idea takes a firm hold on the seeker. The Master’s obvious meaning seems to be that, even apart from the psychological efficacy of the *vicāra* proper, preoccupying the mind with a single theme to the exclusion of all others, if doggedly practised, will not fail to produce beneficial results. It will tend to reduce the distractions of the thinking processes, and thus render the mind amenable to concentration on the supremely important work which is to follow, which by itself is a splendid achievement. Finding the answer to the query ‘Who am I?’ is not the immediate burden of the practice in the beginning. Stability and fixity of the restless, mercurial mind is the first aim, and this can be achieved by constant practice and by frequently pulling oneself back to the subject of the meditation whenever the mind strays away. When the mind has attained an appreciable degree of concentration it will be time to think of the answer. Some *sādhakas* are fortunate enough to begin with a mind already accustomed to concentration, either ‘naturally’, or by training, or through intense fervour, so that they are able to go straight to the application of the *vicāra*, and thus make, without too much strain, more or less rapid progress according to the intensity of their determination. For the Master tells us that mental calmness, that is, controlled mind, is essential for a successful meditation.”<sup>11</sup>

Even knowing this, and even being graced with daily having the cherished gaze of the Maharshi rest upon you, still one succumbs to human frailty and a heart that cries out:

“Devotee: Surrender is impossible.

Maharshi: Yes. Complete surrender is impossible in the beginning. Partial surrender is certainly possible for all. In course of time that

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<sup>11</sup> Op.cit., Cohen, 2003, p.66-67.

will lead to complete surrender. Well, if surrender is impossible, what can be done? There is no peace of mind. You are helpless to bring it about. It can be done only by surrender.

D.: Partial surrender – well – can it undo destiny?

M.: Oh, yes! It can.

D.: Is not destiny due to past karma?

M.: If one is surrendered to God, God will look to it.

D.: This being God’s dispensation, how does God undo it?

M.: All are in Him only.

D.: How is God to be seen?

M.: Within. If the mind is turned inward God manifests as inner consciousness.”<sup>12</sup>

But to be instructed merely to ‘turn within’, hardly satisfies an aspirant who is engaged in an active practice of meditation. For they know from direct experience that what lies ‘within’ can, and usually does, contain more concentrated forms of a great danger – a powerful and destructive enemy. Lord Krishna warns Arjuna of this great foe to the realisation of the Self in the beginning chapters of the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*:

Arjuna said: “By what is a man impelled to commit evil, Varshneya [an epithet of Lord Krishna], seemingly against his own will, as if urged thereunto by force?” The Holy Lord said, “It is desire, it is anger, that’s born of the rajo-guna: of great craving, and of great sin; know that to be the enemy... The senses, mind and intellect are said to abide here ... thus restraining the self (here the use of ‘*atman*’ denotes the mind) by the Self, then destroy that enemy, hard enough to conquer, desire.”<sup>13</sup>

In the closing chapters of the Gīta the Lord clearly declares the means by which we can put His teaching into practice. Paramahansa Yogananda again helps to metaphysically clarify for us this oft-quoted sixty-sixth verse of Chapter 18, which although is deemed by the most learned scholars as the quintessential heart of the entire Gīta, is paradoxically the verse that receives the most varied and diversified interpretation!

Sri Krishna says: “O Arjuna, be a real renunciant! By the practice of yoga meditation withdraw (*vraja*) your mind, intelligence, life force,

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<sup>12</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§244.

<sup>13</sup> *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*, Chapter 3, verses 36-43.

and heart from the clutches of the ego, from the physical sensations of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and from the objects of sense pleasures! Forsake all duties toward them! Be a yogi by uniting yourself to My blessed presence (*mam ekam saranam*) in your soul. Then I will save you; by non-performance of the lesser duties to the senses under the influence of delusion, you will automatically find yourself free from all sinful troubles. If you remain in ecstasy with Me, fulfilling all divine duties as directed by Me, forsaking all ego-instigated duties, you will be liberated.”<sup>14</sup>

“The ordinary man’s mind is usually identified with external possessions and sense pleasures connected with the surface of the body. Therefore, physical consciousness is sustained by the mind, intelligence, and life force operating through the lower (rajasic and tamasic) centres of awareness. Thus, the searchlights of intelligence, mind, and life energy continually operate externally, feeding the nervous system and sustaining and revealing the sense pleasures and physical consciousness.”<sup>15</sup>

The yogi who persists in withdrawing awareness within through meditation (*akṣara japa*, repetition of the sound of the Name of God), or *ātma-vicāra* (enquiry into ‘Whence we came’) effectively reverses the searchlights of intelligence, mind, and life force inward toward the sheltering presence of the object of meditation – God! This is a protracted process, for through it the mercurial mind is first rendered steady, then ultimately still. For it is in stillness that man approaches the realm of the Spirit!

Sri Ramana Maharshi assented in full agreement with this understanding of the Gita’s teaching put into practice. With his lustrous gaze, communicating to us the very embodiment of divine stillness, and his voice emerging from pure consciousness, he declared:

“In the Bhagavad Gita it is said that it is the nature of the mind to wander. One must bring one’s thoughts to bear on God. By long practice the mind is controlled and made steady.”<sup>16</sup> ▲

(Concluded)

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<sup>14</sup> Op.cit., Sri Paramahansa Yogananda. p.1092.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.1092.

<sup>16</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§91.

# Tyagaraja and the Targeted Lyric

SUDHA EMANY

Tyagaraja's *modus operandi* was *bhakti*; his ultimate target was *mukti*. His musical compositions (as well as his life) bear ample testimony to this observation.

Interestingly – and indubitably – the former is a surefire way of achieving the latter. As explained by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi:

“Bhakti is not different from mukti. Bhakti is being as the Self (*swarupa*). One is always that. He realises it by the means he adopts. What is bhakti? To think of God. That means only one thought prevails to the exclusion of all other thoughts. That thought is of God which is the Self or it is the self surrendered unto God. When He has taken you up nothing will assail. The absence of thought is bhakti. It is also mukti.”

The consummate singer Swami Vivekananda, in his ‘Addresses on Bhaktiyoga’, says that in ancient India “music and dance...

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<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§91.

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are essentially religious in character and were used as a means of expressing devotion to and realising God.”<sup>2</sup> He then describes the requirements of a successful concert:

Assuming that the voice of the singer is sweet, good, and correctly tuned instruments... will undoubtedly increase the total effect. The whole concert will get a polished touch if the science and technique of music are suitably combined.

All this combination will be to no purpose *if the composition that is sung is not sufficiently poetical and is bereft of fine noble sentiments. If a really good composition is sung with feeling and in sufficiently clear tones so as to bring out the correct meaning and sentiments contained in it, the total effect will be marvelous.*<sup>3</sup>  
(Italics mine)

These brief remarks by Vivekananda contain the *totality* of ingredients of great music and a successful performance, viz. sweet voice, properly tuned instruments, original technique, sincerity of feeling, and *meaning and sentiment*.

This article focuses on the last ingredient – the poetry and the nobility of sentiment in music, as delineated in the lyrics of the Carnatic musician and saint Tyagaraja, and we will see how it achieves the dual aim of music, of “devotion to and realising God,” noted by Vivekananda above.

### **Targeted Lyrics**

Arguably, it is this ability of Tyagaraja’s directing his lyrics at specific persons, places, and things that gave him a slight edge over the two other members of the Trinity, Syāma Sastri (1762-1827) and Muthuswami Dīkṣitar (1775-1835). Every one of Tyagaraja’s songs was context-based and composed to address a specific life situation. This is the major reason for the perfect fit of his language to his music. His lyrics ennobled his music, even as his music energized his lyrics.

Tyagaraja (1767-1847) was not just another musician. Neither was he just a composer. He was equal parts composer, singer, *and* saint. The

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<sup>2</sup> Harshananda, Swami, ‘Music and Vivekananda’, *Vedanta Kesari*, Jan. 1965. p.467.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



Original Line Drawing of Saint Tyagaraja by Ghovi, Chennai

spiritual fragrance emanating straight from his heart and expressed musically in his lyrics set him firmly on the road to liberation. Not all musical writing can claim the same puissance, and neither do all composers who practice their craft primarily to please themselves care to be dropped at the doorstep of *mokṣa*.

Professor V. Raghavan, in his Preface to *The Spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja*, observes:

Tyagaraja was both a devotee and an artist; the combination of Vedanta, devotion and literary treatment in his songs naturally reminded one of the Bhagavata Purana...<sup>4</sup>

The primacy of *sāhitya* in music was hinted at as long ago as Valmiki's day in the *śloka* making obeisance to him: *kūjantaṁ rāma rāmeti madhuraṁ madhurākṣaram/āruhya kavita śākhāṁ vande vālmiki kokilam*. For Valmiki the *kokila* to sing, the melodious word Rāma was needed. Or it was as good as silent! The repetitive use of the epithet *madhura* leaves no doubt about the sweetness of the melody being intensified when the syllables *rā* and *ma* were sung, preferably in that order. Thus both the lexis and syntax of the lyric are showcased in music.

Tyagaraja's chosen path to attain to the Divine was destined to lie through his music and his devotion to Rama, both of which depended on his lyrical prowess. He bared his soul to the Lord through the innovative singing of his unique lyrics. His innermost feelings were laid at the feet of his Lord in the form of unheard-of melodies. The man was the same as his *bhāva*,<sup>5</sup> which was explored through his lyrics. His *bhāva* led him to his Lord and to his liberation, when it matured into renunciation and identification with Him.

### **The Many Concepts of Bhakti**

*Bhakti* is the over-arching target that Tyagaraja aimed his lyrics at. Any number of his lyrics extol the importance of *bhakti* as well as the incomparable happiness that a devotee derives from it. Besides

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<sup>4</sup> C. Ramanujachari, *The Spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja* (Mylapore, Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 2001). p. iii.

<sup>5</sup> A powerful term referring to the deepest sentiments felt by a writer, composer, or singer.

the time-honoured definitions of bhakti by Narada<sup>6</sup> and Sandilya<sup>7</sup> we have a pragmatic description of it by Sankara:<sup>8</sup>

That state of mind is called Bhakti (divine love) wherein all movements of thought go automatically to the lotus feet of the Lord and stick to them forever just as the seed of Ankola tree (on falling) gravitates to the parent tree, the iron needle to the magnetic stone, the devoted wife to her husband, the creeper to the tree and the river to the ocean.

Under the rubric of *bhakti*, we have a number of subcategories or sub-targets. According to Narada, bhakti can take any one of eleven different modes: glorification of the Lord's qualities; attachment to His beauty, His worship, or His reminiscence; attachment as a servant to his master (*dāśya*); as a friend (*sneha*); as a parent to his son (*vātsalya*), or as a wife to her husband (*madhura*); total surrender to Him (*śaraṇāgati*); complete absorption in Him (*sārūpya*); and extreme anguish due to separation from Him.<sup>9</sup>

Additional targets that the saint covered – and he covered any number of them – include: knowledge (*jñāna*) and renunciation (*vairāgya*), which have their own sub-targets of contempt for money and possessions, association with good people, desirelessness, and eschewing the company of wicked people. Furthermore, the saint also referred frequently to the “six enemies” within (*ari ṣaḍvarga*)<sup>10</sup> and the three *guṇa*-s.<sup>11</sup>

Due to limitations of space, we will try to illustrate here only the major nuances of *bhakti* that the saint dealt with in his lyrics with one or two examples each.

<sup>6</sup> *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, 2. Tr. Swami Bhuteshananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990). *sā tasmīn parama prema svarūpā. Bhakti is of the nature of supreme love for the Lord.*

<sup>7</sup> *Sandilya Bhakti Sutras*, I.1.2. *sā parānūraktir īśvare*, quoted by Radhakrishnan, p. 60, tr. Bhakti is supreme love for the Lord.

<sup>8</sup> *Śivānandalaharī* or Inundation of Divine Bliss of Śrī Śankarācārya, Tr. Swami Tapasyananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985). Verse 61, pp. 55-56.

<sup>9</sup> Op.cit., *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, pp. 190-192.

<sup>10</sup> *kāma* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (attachment, including physical attraction), *mada* (arrogance), and *mātsarya* (envy).

<sup>11</sup> *sattva* (serenity), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (ignorance, dullness).

It is clear from his compositions in all contexts, generally speaking, that Tyagaraja constantly aimed at inculcating *jñāna* and indifference to the world and its erroneous ways. In fact, it may be the conscious teaching that he emphasized that, regardless of the turbulence that constantly buffets the world, an individual can transcend its impact by leading a spiritual life, and the Lord is sure to provide succour to them.

The idiom he used was contemporary. The Telugu dialect that he drew upon was his own. He freely used a mix of Sanskritized lexical items, spoken as well as written vocabulary, and on occasion even obscure words. The combination must have been effective during his time and immediately after but, over time, some of the usages might appear a bit odd. But there has never been a diminution of the overall effect; the lyrics are as powerful today as the day they were written, and the appeal to the Lord as direct.

Tyagaraja never sat down on a fine morning and decided to write songs. The creative afflatus was constantly with him. He just composed and sang his songs impromptu when he felt the urge to do so. His disciples then recorded both the lyric and the music while he was immersed in the Divine. All his songs and their music were spontaneous, having been an instant response to specific emotional impulses.

In the following examples of the lyrics, immediately following the translated text, the raga and the first words are given in parentheses. The original songs, with annotations, are available online. The ‘translations’ are meant to convey the *bhāva* of each *kṛti* in user-friendly English and are not word-for-word renderings.

Tyagaraja might have honed his literary and poetic skills with his Sanskrit compositions, his very first composition being in Sanskrit. One of his perennially popular songs praises Krishna as he plays tantalizing music on his magic flute. Its brief import is:

O Lord with the stately bearing of an elephant—  
the Lord who exhilarates the hearts of sages  
who is beyond time,  
who is the master of music that emanates from the Vedas,  
who is merciful  
who is the eternal Om made up of the seven notes

who is born in the house of Yadus, who plays the magic flute—  
please take care of me.

(Hindolam, *sāmaja vara gamana*)

The popularity of the song however depends on the Sanskrit original and its linguistic features: the preponderance of the mellifluous *m* and *l*, the alternation of long and short syllables controlling the tempo, the series of long *ā* sounds throughout the song, and the prevalence of *d* in the last verse. The net effect is a leisurely trochaic<sup>12</sup> movement of the song, giving the audience time to soak in the meaning. Note that the very first word of the song, *sāmaja*, refers to an elephant, a term which evokes a stately, measured gait. The rest of the song elaborates the theme of sustained devotion to the Lord who plays haunting music made up of the seven notes derived from the Vedas.

It would seem that, since Sanskrit was dubbed a classical language not widely used by the general public by his day, he was trying to make up for that handicap with features like rhyme, sound effects, systematic alternation of long and short syllables, and select sounds designed to produce a specific *rasa*. This particular song fulfills all those requirements splendidly.

A prime example of the composer’s craftsmanship is the first of the *pancha ratna-s* (the “Five Gems”), *jagadānandakāraka*, in which the vocabulary, metaphors, sound effects, and connotations coalesce into a magnificent structure. There are some over a hundred instances of the sound *r*, which gives the song its characteristic lilting cadence. The next most used phoneme is probably *n/ṅ*. Also short vowels seem to heavily outnumber the long ones, giving the song a somewhat strident movement, but it is the opposition of the short and long vowels that maintains the tension in the song throughout. The other obvious feature of the work is its long compounds spilling over the musical phrases deliberately. The tempo evokes the majestic trot of an Arabian horse with a perfect rhythm. And then there is a contiguity of slow and fast movements. The net result of the combination of these and other features is that the listener is immersed in esthetic joy, *rasa*, the more immediate *ānanda* than the spiritual one.

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<sup>12</sup> A trochee is the reverse of an iamb, and is a foot consisting of a long and a short syllable in poetry (accented and unaccented in English).

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Tyagaraja not only transfers these tools to his Telugu compositions but adds, augments, and modifies them in myriad ways. In one song, he lists the various ways in which the devotee can worship his Lord.

Refuge of the sinful, life of the pure,  
Won't you speak to me and show your grace to me,  
As I show fortitude, hide my distress,  
wail, or wise up,  
meditate on you, worship you,  
adore you, and beckon to you  
behold you, sing your praises,  
subdue my pride, treasure you in my heart  
hold on to you, scold you  
and lay myself down at your feet  
sport with you, sing about you,  
beg you, and adulate you  
seek sanctuary with you,  
and scold you  
comprehend you, agree with you  
tire of looking for you, learn about your name  
greet you, or be grabbed by you,  
and exhausted, submit to you?

(Ārabhi, *palukavemi patita pāvana*)

Since the basis of all these modes of serving the Lord is *bhakti*, he begs Him to grant him unwavering devotion in a short lyric:

O Rama, I beg you to grant me  
bhakti of the highest order,  
that which lies behind the power  
of the Trinity and freedom from bondage.  
For learning of the Vedas and epics  
without it is like decorating a corpse.

(Śankarābharaṇam, *bhakti biccamiyave*)

### **Morality**

A powerful current of thought that undergirds the whole of Tyagaraja's life, devotion, and work is morality and ethics. He is convinced that, without a moral basis, human life is a total waste. It is almost criminal

not to make the best use of the invaluable opportunity that human life provides to help others and to evolve to the next level, getting ever closer to the Divine. Given that humans are rational beings, they have the choice: to grow into the Divine, or wallow in the mud like swine.

But even to resist the tendency to engage in unethical and immoral activity, one needs the grace of the Lord. Tyagaraja was well aware of that and in many of his songs explicitly asks for true knowledge:

Would you kindly impart true knowledge to me.

My mind is purified by the repetition of your name—

The knowledge that the individual self and the Supreme Self,  
the fourteen worlds, the celestials, and sages like Narada  
are all you, perfect and whole, the source of endless joy.

(Pūrvikalyāṇi, *jñānamosagarādā*)

For those who are unable to devote themselves full time to activities related to ritual worship, there is even a simpler way to happiness, namely, the repetition of His name:

To those who have a human form,  
repeating the name is itself joy,  
to those who are rāja yogis.  
By hearing Rama's name,  
One's mind is filled with His form  
and love for Him.

(Janaranjani, *smaraṇe sukhamu*)

The best way to understand Tyagaraja's moral instruction is as a kind of friendly advice rather than a harangue from on high. He laments the ostentation of people for the sake of eking out a living and getting ahead in the world, without at least trying to consider what a life of devotion is – and what knowledge is, if possible. He is clearly puzzled by human nature that acts as a barrier to understanding itself and its origins. How could anyone forget who they are and where they and the world came from? Worse still, how could they not see the path of devotion to the Lord that lies right in front of his eyes? Delusion worse deluded!

O Mind,

There is but one God, Rāma,

don't distract yourself—  
within the orb of the sun  
one devoid of qualities,  
He is dharma,  
impartial and just,  
the protector of all.

(Harikāmbhoji, *unḍedi rāmuḍokaḍu*)

### **Mind, the Monkey**

The next song presents a bare-knuckles approach to the wandering mind, without first controlling which no amount of *sadhana* does a scintilla of good. The first two lines of the last verse below deliberately provoke humour at the expense of the ritualists.

If the mind is not steady,  
impressive worship is useless.  
If a self-conceited person  
takes a holy bath in the Kaveri or the Ganga,  
the river cannot save him.  
The ritualist  
cannot qualify for heaven,  
if his spouse is attracted to other men.  
If the angry or lustful one  
practices austerities,  
he will not be saved.

(Ābhogi, *manasu nilpa*)

Mind is not an easy-to-grasp concept. Bhagavan provides a very clear picture of the elusive mind and its antics:

The mind is only a force operating on the brain. You are now here and awake. The thoughts of the world and the surroundings are in the brain within the body...The dream visions are in the dream brain which is again in the dream body. That is different from your present body. You remember the dream now. The brains however are different. Yet the visions appear in the mind. The mind therefore is not identical with the brain. Waking, dream and sleep are for the mind only.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§478.

Tyagaraja says well. The mind should be controlled. The question arises “What is mind?” He (Tyagaraja) himself answers in the next couplet saying that it is the “I-am-the-body” idea. The next question is how the control is effected. He answers again, saying “By complete surrender. Realise that I am not and that all is He.” The song is fine and compact.<sup>14</sup>

Here’s the song that Bhagavan was talking about:

The wise one who has his senses under control  
has no need of mantra or mysticism.

One who knows that he is not the body has no need of austerities.  
One who knows that the Lord pervades all has no stages of life.  
One who knows that objects are a delusion is not fooled by  
female charm.

One who forever follows right conduct has no fear of birth and  
death.

(Śankarābharaṇam, *manasu svādhīnamaina*)

### Reproachful Devotion

Tyagaraja did not hesitate to play the blame game when it suited his purpose:

O Rama,  
It’s not nice to ignore those  
who put their trust in you.  
It’s unfair to abandon those  
who from their early days have  
thought only of you,  
served and worshipped you,  
fixed your form in their hearts,  
and sang your praises,  
even while engaged in the world.

(Bhairavi, *nammina vārini*)

He questions the Lord whether He hasn’t seen enough of his public humiliation:

Haven’t you seen enough already,  
or do you need to see more?

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<sup>14</sup> Op.cit., Talks§448.

Is there a sin that cannot be erased by you?  
Not worshipping your feet,  
I was lured by greed and snared by the world.  
Those who are not afraid to sin  
envied my conduct;  
I cannot take it anymore,  
I have taken refuge at your holy feet.  
Fount of Mercy, no one other than you  
can provide me succour.

(Śankarābharaṇam, *īvaraku jūcinadi cālādā*)

### **Sensuous Love (*Madhura Bhakti*)**

When Rama asked Hanuman the ideal devotee what he thought his relationship to Him was, Hanuman said that, viewed as an individual, he was His servant; as a living entity, he originated from Him; as a deathless soul, he was the same as Him.<sup>15</sup> A perfect answer if ever there was one from a *jñāni* of a very high order.

On an earthly level, *Madhura Bhakti* is a tricky but time-honoured variety of self-surrender to the *Purusha*, the Cosmic Man, a genre celebrated in the Radha-Krishna narratives and in the pining of the shepherdesses for Krishna. The latter is explained as the fulfillment of the desire of accomplished sages in a former era for union with the Divine – the eternal quest of the *jīvātman* to return to its source whence it originated, *Paramātman*.<sup>16</sup>

We encounter here some very haunting compositions, in a familiar conversational tone of voice:

Whose prattle have you listened to,  
O Lord of Ayodhya, praised by the great sages?  
You don't talk to me like before,  
You have changed.

(Śuddha sāveri, *nīkevari bodhana*)

In another song, the lover employs a different tactic, one of blaming her fate, in a self-deprecatory vein, for best impact:

<sup>15</sup> *deha buddhyātu dāso 'ham, jīva buddhyā tvadamśakaḥ/ātmabuddhyā tvamevāham iti me niścītā matiḥ.*

<sup>16</sup> *Brahma Sutra*, I.i.2. *janmādyasya yataḥ.*

O Rama, with an enchanting name,  
brave as a lion, and living in Ayodhya!  
I am tired of waiting for you,  
no point in complaining.  
My mind, your sweetheart, is pining for you,  
but you don't hold her hand and solace her.  
I worship and worship you,  
but it's my fate that I am ignored by you.  
I made a lovely bed for you,  
without enjoying which you heckle me.  
(Darbār, *rāmābhirāma ramaṇīya nāma*)

### **The Ultimate Target: The Self**

Tyagaraja the lyricist never once strayed from his ultimate target, the Self. This song may be said to be in the back of his mind from day one.

O lovely blue-tinged Lord,  
O radiant Rāmachandra,  
Destroyer of demons, dwelling in the hearts of yogis,  
You are all the gods yourself on earth  
I am fond of you, and I am not other than you!  
(Dhanyāsi, *śyāma sundarāṅga*)

He thought of Rama when he was awake; he dreamt of Him when asleep; and when he worshipped Him, he became one with Him. He nevertheless wished to formally renounce the world and become a *sannyasin* toward the end of his life. Making himself the final target of his own lyrics, he sang:

Lord,  
I have done everything  
you assigned to me to do,  
sincerely.  
Time for me  
to return to you.  
(Gānavardhini, *dayajūcuṭakidi velara*)

As his end approached, Tyagaraja wished to formally renounce the world and become a *sannyasin*.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Paramahansa Brahmanandendra performed the rites and christened him Nādabrahmānanda. He duly gave his thanks to his Lord and acknowledged for one last time the dominion of the words and musical notes in his life:<sup>17</sup>

O Rama, thanks to your grace...  
I am now in eternal bliss,  
which is of the nature  
of primordial notes  
that adorn your form  
and words which drape you.

(Yadukula Kāmbhoji, *nī dayace rāma*)

If anyone still wondered whether this supreme devotee was also a *jñāni*, he described the qualities of the Lord in no uncertain terms in one of his last songs:

Know for sure  
the effulgence of the Lord  
who is all the gods,  
the elements, the creation;  
the qualified, the unqualified,  
the formed and the formless.

(Vāgadhīśvari, *paramātmudu velige*)

He then entered yogic trance and merged in his personal target. ▲

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<sup>17</sup> The chronology of the song may not be accurate.

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty One

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**29th November 1978**

**S**adhu Om: In verse 31 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* Bhagavan says:  
For those who are [blissfully immersed in and as] *tanmayānanda* [happiness composed of that, namely *brahman*, one's real nature], which rose [as 'I am I'] destroying themselves [ego], what one [action] exists for doing? They do not know [or are not aware of] anything other than themselves [their real nature]; [so] who can [or how to] conceive their state as 'it is' like this'?

However, people imagine that they can understand Bhagavan and the actions he seemed to do, and that he would have acted only as they would expect him to do. In many cases, however, he acted in

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

a way that most people would not expect and that few if any could understand. An example of this is the story of the fictitious Malayalam biography that Kunju Swami often narrates.

Before B.V. Narasimha Swami wrote *Self-Realisation*, the only published biography of Bhagavan was a Tamil poem by Sivaprakasam Pillai called *Śrī Ramaṇa Carita Ahaval*, so when a Malayali hagiographer visited the ashram and said he had written biographies of many saints and wanted to write one of Bhagavan, some devotees were eager to tell him all that they knew about Bhagavan's life. However, his main interest was in stories about miracles, so the stories he heard from close devotees did not seem to him to be sufficiently interesting, and hence he went to the town to ask local people for stories about Bhagavan, which he hoped would be more interesting. Having gathered stories of the kind he wanted to hear, he wrote a biography in Malayalam in a notebook, and when he finished it, he gave it to Bhagavan, who read it and corrected all the spelling and grammatical errors that he noticed in it.

Since the devotees who were there at that time saw him reading and correcting it, they assumed that he approved all that was written in it, so they wanted to read it, but Kunju Swami was away for a while and none of the rest of them knew Malayalam. However, after a few days he returned, so they told him about the biography and asked him to read it and tell them what was written in it. When he read it, however, he was horrified to see that most of it was entirely fictitious. For example, it said that Bhagavan was a lawyer in Madurai, married with three children, but that by doing intense *tapas* he gained supernatural powers, by means of which he flew from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, and then went on to describe many miracles that he had supposedly done after coming here.

Kunju Swami could not understand how Bhagavan could have read all of this and corrected only the spelling and grammatical errors without pointing out that the stories were not true, so he approached him, pointed to his corrections and asked, 'Bhagavan, were these corrections not made by you?', to which he answered, 'Yes'. 'But is all this true?' asked Kunju Swami, to which Bhagavan replied, 'Is all this true?' pointing to the surroundings, 'And is this alone false?' pointing to the notebook.

Seeing that Kunju Swami was puzzled by his reply, he explained further by asking, ‘If someone were to write that Ramana was the son of a lawyer, that he attained self-knowledge at the age sixteen and then travelled by train from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, would you say that that is true?’, to which Kunju Swami replied ‘Yes’. ‘No’, said Bhagavan, ‘even that would be false. So long as you mistake that body to be yourself and this body to be Ramana, whatever you think, see, hear, read or know about Ramana, or about anything else, is false. Because you mistake yourself to be a body, you mistake me to be this body and you mistake this world to be real, but none of these are real. What is real is only yourself. Know yourself, and you will see that nothing else is true.’

When they hear this story, some people say that it makes it seem that Bhagavan was showing a disregard for the truth, but if we think like that, it is we who are showing a disregard for the truth, because we are unwilling to accept the truth of his teachings. He is the truth itself, and he can never disregard himself. This world is just a mental fabrication, like whatever world we see in a dream, so if we take this world to be real, we are disregarding the truth.

Some people think a *jñāni* is someone who will always fight for what is right and against what is wrong, but the *jñāni* sees neither right nor wrong. He sees only himself, so he sees everything as himself. For him there are no others. People want Bhagavan to fit neatly into their limited conception of him. They want a Bhagavan they can understand, but who can truly understand him? He alone can understand himself, so only by losing oneself in him can we understand him.

When I first came to Bhagavan I received many shocks and disappointments. I saw that he often did not support what seemed to me to be right, and sometimes he even seemed to condone what I considered to be wrong. In this way he taught me that he is beyond our comprehension. He is unfathomable. He is beyond the mind. He sees only himself both in what seems to us to be right and in what seems to us to be wrong.

Lakshmana Sarma told me that Bhagavan pointed out to him many errors in both *Sat-Darśana* and *Sat-Darśana Bhāṣya*, but that whenever a dispute arose because he (Lakshmana Sarma) disagreed with the followers of Kavyakantha and Kapali Sastri about their interpretation of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* and other teachings, Bhagavan

looked on passively without interfering or supporting either side. Even when people asked him whose interpretation of his teachings was correct, Kavyakantha's or Lakshmana Sarma's, he would not take sides, but would reply: 'Each of them says what he believes. You may believe whatever you like'.

Bhagavan is the very embodiment of grace, and grace always shines equally on all, both the good and the bad alike, but each of us makes use of grace in our own way. Grace is his very nature, because it is the infinite love that he has for himself, and since he sees us all as himself, he loves each one of us as himself. How can we understand such love so long as we see multiplicity and otherness? His view is so completely different to ours that we can never understand him until we merge within and become one with him, after which we will see no multiplicity or otherness.

We use his grace according to our own likes and dislikes, so as long as we have even the slightest likes or dislikes we are misusing his grace. This is why he says in *Nān Ār?* (Who am I?): 'Likes and dislikes are both fit to be disliked'. To use his grace correctly, as he wants us to, we must surrender our will entirely to his will, which means that we must have no likes or dislikes of our own. However, so long as we rise as ego, we cannot completely avoid having any likes or dislikes, so to surrender our will entirely to his will we must surrender ourself entirely to him. Since he has infinite love for us as himself, his will is that we should merge in him forever, because only when we are one with him can we experience infinite happiness, which is our real nature.

Not only did he teach us that we must be free of likes and dislikes, but he showed us by his own example how it is to live without likes or dislikes. One particularly notable way in which he emphasised the need for us to give up all our likes and dislikes was that whenever anyone complained to him about the behaviour of some other person, he would always pass judgement against the person who raised the complaint, and would never say anything against the person they complained about, thereby indicating that the fault lies not in whatever we may complain about but only in the likes and dislikes that cause us to complain about it.

Once Devaraja Mudaliar raised an objection saying that sacred texts are not always fair and impartial, because they say, for example,

that *mukti* [liberation] cannot be attained without great dedication and effort, but they also say that anyone who looks at Arunachala or even thinks of it from afar will attain *mukti*. There are many bad people in Tiruvannamalai, he said, criminals and even murderers, and they must all have looked at and thought of Arunachala. ‘How can such people attain *mukti*?’ he asked, in reply to which Bhagavan smiled and said: ‘What is the loss for you? If you receive the Lord’s grace and attain *mukti*, what do you lose if others also attain it? It is *Śiva-vākya*m [a statement or command of Lord Siva]. He himself says that he will give *mukti* to all who think of Arunachala, so if he bestows *mukti* even upon bad people, will he not also bestow it on you?’

People say that Bhagavan was equal to all. It is true that he sees only himself in everyone, so he loves all equally as himself. However, he never said that the mind is equal in all, and he did not say that we should expect to see equality in the world. So long as there are minds and there is a world, there will always be inequality, because such is the nature of multiplicity. This is why he once said to someone who argued that there should be equality in the world: ‘Then go to sleep. In sleep all are equal’.<sup>1</sup>

In *ātma-svarūpa* [our real nature] there are no differences, but in mind there are. In terms of purity, some minds are superior, and others are inferior. To the extent that impurities are removed from the mind, to that extent it is elevated.

Sadhu Om [in reply to someone who asked what Bhagavan meant when he said in reply to a devotee who remarked that the world is like an ocean and that a salt-doll diving into the ocean will not be protected by a waterproof coat, ‘The mind is the waterproof coat’, as recorded on the first page of *Maharshi’s Gospel*]: He meant that the mind cannot save us from being lost in *samsāra* [the state of ceaseless activity and cycle of rebirth]. However, if we take *ātma-svarūpa* [our real nature] to be our waterproof coat and therefore cling firmly to *svārūpa-dhyāna* [self-attention], it will save us. It alone is our real refuge.

[On an earlier occasion Sadhu Om had said in this regard: Grace is the real waterproof coat that can alone save us from *samsāra*.] ▲

(To be continued)

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be a reference to a conversation recorded in section 507 of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.



Rohit Mehta

## KEYWORD

# *Timira*: Darkness

B.K. CROISSANT

The Sanskrit word ‘*timira*’ as an adjective means ‘dark’. As a noun, masculine or neuter, it means ‘darkness’, ‘partial blindness’ or ‘iron-rust’. It is one of many words that denote the opposite of light and are associated symbolically with ignorance, the opposite of knowledge. It appears in the *Guru Gītā* (‘Song of the Guru’), a Hindu scripture attributed to Vyasa and believed to be part of the *Skanda Purāṇa*.

अज्ञानतिमिरान्धस्य ज्ञानाञ्जनशलाकया ।  
चक्षुरुन्मीलितं येन तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः॥  
ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-śalākayā |  
caṅsur-unmīlitaṁ yena tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ ||

A salutation to the guru,  
By whom my eyes have been opened.  
For one blinded by the darkness of ignorance,  
A surgeon supplied the ointment of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translation by Marcia Solomon.

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.

One of the Holy Names of the *Śrī Ramaṇāṣṭottara Śatanāmāvali* or *The 108 Names of Sri Ramana* (#92) is *om antastimiracaṇḍāmśave namaḥ*, meaning ‘Blazing sun dispelling inner darkness’. The great poet, scholar and reformer, Sri Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni (1878-1936), a towering figure in his time and a preeminent devotee of Ramana Maharshi, uses it multiple times in his *Śrī Ramaṇacatvāriṃśat* or *Forty Verses in Adoration of Sri Ramana*.

यत्पूर्वं श्रुतिपारदर्शिधिषणो द्वैपायनोऽध्यारुहत्  
पश्चात् बोधकलाविधूततिमिरः शङ्कापहः शङ्करः ।  
तत्सम्प्रत्यखिलावनीतलजुषा माचार्यसिंहासनं  
देव त्वाम् प्रतिविक्षते नरतनो गीर्वाणसेनापते ॥

yat pūrvaṁ śrutipāradarśi dhiṣaṇo dvaipāyano’dhyāruhat  
paścād bodhakalāvidhūta timiraḥ śaṅkāpahaḥ śaṅkaraḥ |  
tat samprat yakhilāvanī talajuṣām ācāryasimhāsanam  
deva tvām prativīkṣate naratano gīrvāṇasenāpate ॥

The seat of highest honor, the Lion’s Throne,  
reserved for Teachers serving humankind on Earth,  
Once occupied by wise island-born Vyasa  
who beheld the other shore of the Vedas,  
Then by doubt-dispelling Sankara,  
destroyer of Darkness with a fraction of his Light,  
Now beckons You, divinity in manly guise,  
O Commander-in-Chief of heavenly hosts!

Verse 17

अन्तर्यश्च बहिर्विधूततिमिरं ज्योतिर्मयं शाश्वतं  
स्थानं प्राप्य विराजते विनमतामज्ञानमुन्मूलयन् ।  
पश्यन्विश्वमपीदमुल्लसति यो विश्वस्य पारे परः  
तस्मै श्रीरमणाय लोकगुरवे शोकस्य हन्त्रे नमः ॥

antaryaśca bahir vidhūtatimiraṁ jyotirmayaṁ śāśvataṁ  
sthānaṁ prāpya virājate vinamatām ajñānam unmūlayan |  
paśyan viśvam apīdam ullasati yo viśvasya pāre paraḥ  
tasmai śrī ramaṇāya lokagurave śokasya hantre namaḥ ॥

Salutations to Sri Ramana, slayer of grief  
 and Teacher of the Universe,  
 Who stands firmly on the other shore blazing,  
 even as he sees this earthly world,  
 One with the State in essence Light everlasting,  
 chaser of Darkness inside and out,  
 Supreme he shines, uprooting the ignorance  
 of humble souls who turn to him.

Verse 22

तिमिराणि न केवलं वचोभिः  
 करुणापाङ्गविलोकितैश्च नृणाम् ।  
 हृदये प्रसरन्ति मर्दयन्तं  
 भगवन्तं रमणं गुरुं नमामि ॥

timirāṇi na kevalam vacobhiḥ  
 karuṇāpāṅgavilokitaiś ca nṛṇām |  
 hṛdaye prasaranti mardayantaṁ  
 bhagavantaṁ ramaṇaṁ guruṁ namāmī ||

I bow to Lord guru Ramana who tramples  
 all Darkness pervading the human heart,  
 Not only by teaching with words  
 but by glances of tender compassion.<sup>2</sup>

Verse 33

Ganapati Muni intended to write one hundred verses in praise of Bhagavan, consisting of ten chapters or decads of ten verses, each chapter in a different metre. Unfortunately, only forty verses were composed before his death in 1936. These forty verses were personally arranged by Bhagavan in the order they were chanted in his own time and to this day. Verses 17 and 22 are found in the same chapter. K. Natesan recounts how the first eight verses of that chapter were written:

*An event of great significance took place at Pachaiamman temple at the foot of the hill during Maharshi's stay there along with Muni and other disciples for about three months from January to March 1908. One early morning Muni and*

<sup>2</sup> The author's translation.

*other disciples were all sitting before Maharshi, who was as usual indrawn. The Muni saw a sparkling light come down from the skies and touch the forehead of Maharshi six times. Immediately the Muni had the realisation that Maharshi was none other than an incarnation of Lord Subrahmanya. The seer-poet Ganapati Muni gave expression to this realisation through the famous eight verses (Ramaṇa Aṣṭakam) beginning with the words Yanayatra.<sup>3</sup>*

While verse 17 is part of the *Ramaṇa Aṣṭakam*, verse 22 was composed at a later date. Verse 33 was one of 15 verses that were included in letters written to Bhagavan after Muni left for Sirsi (present Karnataka State) in March 1929.

According to an etymology in the *Guru Gītā* for the word ‘guru’, ‘gu’ means darkness while ‘ru’ stands for light. Therefore, the guru removes darkness, thus revealing the light of the heart. In Muni’s three verses quoted above, the guru is champion of *timira*, ‘inside and out’ in verse 22 and ‘all darkness’ (*timirāṇi* is the plural of the neuter form) in verse 33. ‘Inside’ obviously refers to the enemies within, such as lust, anger, covetousness, delusion, pride and jealousy. As long as we identify with the body, the world outside of us also appears real.

In all times and in all places, darkness exists, and we are now living in the *kali yuga*, or Dark Age, according to various Western and Eastern schools of thought. In Muni’s *Forty Verses* he refers multiple times to the darkness of his own age. For instance, it’s the subject of verse 18 in which he describes the world in turmoil and longingly pleads for Bhagavan’s intervention.

*When righteousness has been destroyed, when the three worlds are confounded by evil, when people everywhere vainly bandy about words as true knowledge, and when the very existence of God the Father is in doubt and vacillation, who else but You could be the refuge of good people, O peacock-mounted One, disguised as a man?<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Natesan, K., ‘Genesis of Kavyakantha’s Sri Ramana Chatvarimsat’, *The Mountain Path*, Jayanti 2000.

<sup>4</sup> The author’s translation.

In our own time, the darkness of the world on a global scale can seem truly overwhelming and takes many forms, such as destruction of the environment contributing to climate change and massive immigration, exceedingly dangerous misuses of technology, profit over the well-being of others, concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, intense polarity blocking reasonable solutions to social as well as other problems, and the ever-present threat of nuclear war.

In verse 17, Muni aligns Ramana Maharshi, already identified in previous verses as Skanda, with other World Teachers and names him as successor to Sankaracharya. In a beautiful passage from his *Śrī Ramaṇa Darśanam*, Sadhu Natanananda points to the divinity of both.

*It is well known that Adi-Sankara, extolled as ‘the world teacher’, won over many famous pandits who professed the superiority of action [followers of karma kanda] and the bigoted adherents of various other cults by his superb intellectual power. With none to equal or excel him in advaitic knowledge, he ascended the sarvajna peetha [the seat reserved for the one who knows everything]. The power of grace that was seen as speech in Sankara, and which shone throughout the world, that same power of grace manifested in Sri Ramana as his divine look and shone as the supreme light that purified the world by a mere glance. Between these two, there is not the slightest difference in their divine nature.<sup>5</sup>*

Ramana Maharshi’s full glory as Commander-in-Chief, ‘chaser of Darkness inside and out’, is exalted in verse 22. It is inspiring, and Bhagavan must have been especially fond of it, since he deliberately placed it as the lead verse in a hand-written copy of Muni’s *Forty Verses* that exists in the archives at Sri Ramansramam.<sup>6</sup> The subject of verse 33 is ‘all darkness’ destroyed by Bhagavan’s teaching and

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<sup>5</sup> Sadhu Natanananda, *Sri Ramana Darsanam*, Sri Ramanasramam, 2005, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> The hand-written copy is reproduced as an appendix to S. Sankaranarayanan’s translation and commentary on *Forty Verses in Adoration of Sri Ramana*, Sri Ramanasramam, 2004, p.58.

the power of his eyes. Arthur Osborne, a fervent Western devotee and founder of *The Mountain Path*, is known for his advocacy of Bhagavan as the *jagat guru* of modern times and the creator of a new path.

*The task performed by Bhagavan Sri Ramana was to reopen the direct path of Self-enquiry which had become too arduous for our spiritually dark age. This path, with its theoretical basis of Advaita, stands, so to speak, at the source from which the various religions diverge and can therefore be approached from any side. Whether there are many or few who take it is not the question, only that it has been made open.*

*In itself, but for the Grace of Bhagavan, it would be the most inaccessible to modern man on account of its very simplicity and directness; and yet it is the most accessible, and in many cases the only accessible path, from the contingent point of view, since, because of its directness, it requires no ritual or forms of worship, no priesthood or configuration, no outer signs of special observance, but can be practised in the workshop or kitchen or city office as well as in the monastery or hermitage.<sup>7</sup>*

Here he explains the universality of the direct path.

*Not only Hindus, but Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Parsis, all came to him, and he never advised any to change from one religion to another. He prescribed the vichara for all alike. So long as any other observances, of whatever religion, helped a devotee, Bhagavan never advised him to discontinue them; but when the vichara is effectively practiced, it supersedes all other observances. "All other methods only lead up to the vichara."<sup>8</sup>*

He goes further to explain the power of the look.

*The very simplicity of Bhagavan's teaching makes it easy to repeat or expound, but it was only his tremendous power that could open it as a living path to mankind. It was only the silent impregnation with his Grace that could enable any to follow*

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<sup>7</sup> Osborne, Arthur, 'The Direct Path', *Ramana-Arunachala*, pp.34-35.

<sup>8</sup> Osborne, Arthur, 'Affinity with Buddhism', *Ramana-Arunachala*, p.63.

*him. This was given by a concentrated look of eyes shining with love and power to one who had the immense fortune of coming before him, and by silent transmission to all who turned to him in their heart from a distance.*<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere he states:

*The love that shone in his eyes, the luminous understanding, cannot be described. Some one has come to the Ashram broken down with the hopeless grief of bereavement, and Bhagavan, after hearing the story, has simply looked, no word spoken, and peace flooded the soul.*<sup>10</sup>

How can Ramana Maharshi help us deal with modern darkness? A knight in shining armour? Perhaps, but not exactly. Bhagavan came in human garb not so much to save us from our circumstances but to show us how to change our perspective.

*Devotee: The world is materialistic. What is the remedy for it? Maharshi: Materialistic or spiritual, it is according to your outlook. Drishtim jnanamayim kritva, Brahma mayam pasyet jagat. Make your outlook right. The Creator knows how to take care of His Creation.*<sup>11</sup>

*Devotee: May I know when this yuga is to end? Maharshi: I don't consider time real. So I take no interest in such matters. We know nothing about the past or the yugas which were in the past. Nor do we know about the future. But we know the present exists. Let us know about it first. Then all other doubts will cease... Time and space always change, but there is something which is eternal and changeless. For example, the world and time, past or future, nothing exists for us during sleep. But we exist. Let us try to find out that which is changeless and which always exists. How will it benefit us to know that the kaliyuga*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>10</sup> Osborne, Arthur, 'The Man Who Was Ramana', *Ramana-Arunachala*, p.18.

<sup>11</sup> Venkataramiah, Sri Munagala S., *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§240. The translation of the Sanskrit is "Having made one's vision full of knowledge, one should see the world as Brahman."

*started in such and such a year and that it would end so many years after now?*<sup>12</sup>

To whom is the world? To whom is *timira* or darkness? Realise, let the unreal disappear and be happy! ▲

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<sup>12</sup> Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 18-3-46.

### Notes on the Translation

1. The compound ‘*vidhūta-timirah*’, meaning ‘who dispelled darkness’, used in verse 17 to describe Sankara, occurs again in verse 22 as ‘*vidhūta-timiram*’, meaning ‘which destroys darkness’, to describe Ramana Maharshi’s elated state of being. In verse 33, ‘*mardayantam*’, a participle meaning ‘crushing, pounding, grinding, pulverizing, dashing to pieces’ is used with ‘*timirāṇi*’. This meaning is particularly suited to the image of Bhagavan as Skanda.

2. In verse 17, ‘*bodha-kala*’ is usually translated as ‘with a portion of his illumination’ or ‘with a fragment of his knowledge’. I have chosen ‘with a fraction of his Light’ in order to make more explicit the comparison between Sankara and Ramana Maharshi. In verse 22 Maharshi’s eternal state is made of Light (‘*jyotirmayam śāśvatam sthānam*’).

3. In verse 17, ‘*śruti-pāradarśi*’ is sometimes translated as ‘who classified the Vedas’ or ‘who saw the fullest extent of the Vedas’. I have chosen a more literal translation, ‘who beheld the other shore of the Vedas’ in order to emphasize the parallel between Vyasa and Bhagavan. In verse 22 Bhagavan is described as ‘*ullasati yo viśvasya pāre parah*’, translated as ‘shining on the other shore of the universe’.

4. In verse 17, ‘*prativikṣate*’ is usually translated as ‘awaits’. I have chosen a more active verb, ‘beckons’. The throne is the subject of ‘*prativikṣate*’ and is, in a poetic sense, ‘beholding, on the look out for (Ramana)’.

5. In verse 22, ‘*vinamatām ajñānam unmūlayan*’ is usually translated as ‘uprooting the ignorance of those who bow down to him’. I have chosen ‘uprooting the ignorance of humble souls who turn to

him’, since ‘*vi-nam*’, the root of ‘*vinamatām*’ can also mean ‘incline (towards)’. Arthur Osborne often refers to devotees of Bhagavan as those who turn to him.

6. In verse 33, the compound ‘*apāṅgavilokitaiś*’ literally means a side-long glance. It is sometimes translated simply as ‘glance’, which I have also chosen. This does not, however, take into account the many accounts of sincere devotees receiving powerful direct gazes that are in effect initiation by sight.

## **The One Who Becomes All**

Suresh Kailash

Vast and boundless like space,  
he became a net of grace  
to catch the wind, and calm  
the gale of thoughts  
I was caught in.

The blazing sun in a cloudless sky,  
he became cool, healing light,  
when I went to him,  
a bird with broken wings,  
a flailing kite without a string.

The inner flame, unshaken, still,  
he became the holy fire on the hill,  
illuminating from on high,  
— the ray of hope  
in my darkest night.

The waveless sea without a shore,  
he became the sheet anchor  
of my battered boat,  
the captain and compass  
of my tattered soul.

Compassionate Ramana,  
the One who became all,  
to take me home.



# Sri Mahaswami

## The Sage with Eyes of Light

### Part Four

SERGE DEMETRIAN

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

Kārvetinagar, beginning of March 1971

#### **The hermitage of Śrī Mahāsawami**

At the end of February 1971, Śrī Mahāsawami left Kāñcipuram on foot to travel for an indefinite period, and, after walking approximately eighty kilometres towards the north-west he arrived at Kārvetinagar which is in Andhra Pradesh.

I visited him at Kārvetinagar once for a few hours, shortly after his initial arrival at this village, in the beginning of March.

The village is a centre for local agriculture. It is situated in a valley and its long straight lanes are encircled by medium sized hills still covered with forest. The one square and imposing construction is the ancient palace of a rajah, now a public school, which dominates the village houses with their red roofs, composed of rows of round country tiles, similar to the scales of fish, which cover the tops of

the small white houses. The houses are generally peaceful and neat in appearance, with gardens at the back and open verandas facing the street. On each of the verandas are one or several large masonry benches with arm-rests at the ends. The inhabitants of the house spend considerable time on their verandas chatting with friends or conducting business.

At one end of the village is a beautiful and well maintained temple, dedicated to Śrī Krishna in his aspect of Venugopāla (the shepherd with his flute). In the precincts of the temple is an important shrine consecrated to Śrī Rāma. In its sanctum is a superb sculpture of the valiant prince leaning on his bow, and this is why the idol is named Kodandarāmasvāmī. At the other side of the village, at the end of a straight lane of about one kilometre, is a smaller temple dedicated to Shiva, the Great God. Further on, about two hundred metres outside the village is a large open space encircled with vegetation. In the middle is a magnificent reservoir of almost perfect proportions of about 120 by 80 metres. It was referred to as The Lotus Pond. On the four cardinal points are four flights of granite stairs carved with bas-reliefs of marine animals. The stairs descend towards the even surface of the water where white lotuses float.

There is a hut near the edge of the water on the western side. The walls are composed of panels made of woven bamboo fibres and covered with coconut tree leaves. There is a little yard on the southern side and a shed for Śrī Mahāswami's red tricycle on the northern side. Behind it, there is an enclosure with a drinking water well. Two screens divide the huts' interior into three parts: the southern portion opens through a door to the small service yard. This is where Śrī Mahāswami resides during his entire sojourn in Kārvetinagar. He occupies the first room situated on the northern side. The door to the hut opens directly towards the reservoir, to the east. There is a tall pīpal tree, with a stone platform round its trunk, on which are installed some small statues of deities, and it protects the hut which is near the north-western corner of the reservoir. Skanda Hill which is quite high and partially deforested rises on the southern side.

Śrī Mahāswami's hut at the foot of the tree near the side of the water tank is in the centre of a peaceful forest clearing which resembles the descriptions in the Indian epics of the forest retreats of the ancient

rishis. It is easy to imagine oneself living there alongside those revered sages. Śrī Mahāswami comes out of his hut in the very early morning, before the onrush of noisy visitors, or in the evening, after their departure. When he does, he then seems to be a figure from another age, the direct descendent of an august lineage who exemplifies the very best in the Hindu tradition. He descends around fifteen steps for his ablutions and sits down near the water level. He often remains immobile for long meditations. His legs are crossed on a small mat on the last step, while, one imagines, the nearby lotuses regret that they have not been chosen as a seat. “God abides in the lotus of the heart”, declare the Sages. Sometimes Śrī Mahāswami climbs up onto the platform that surrounds the tall pīpal tree and meditates among the statues until his physical form disappears as he merges with the gods who surround him as if he were one of theirs.

Kārvetinagar, end March 1971

### **Gandhi Ashram**

I arrived at Kārvetinagar on 15th March 1971 and after the darshan of Śrī Mahāswami, I asked for permission to remain in India as long as he wished, and to start with about ten days at Kārvetinagar. He approved both my requests and through his assistants he pointed to the place where I could stay, which was Gandhi Ashram, the office of an association whose aim was to preserve the cultural heritage of Mahātma Gandhi. It was a brick construction, painted in yellow, roofed by red tiles, and situated near the temple of Venugopāla. It had a simple hall of twelve by four metres, quite high, well ventilated by four windows, two on each side, right and left. The manager allotted me two square metres on the red cement floor in the right corner, which was near a window. My bed consisted of a mat and a blanket. I marked out the space with my luggage as the hall was also used by others.

The days flew by fast and the date of my departure was approaching. Three days prior to leave taking, I was resting in the hall in the afternoon, when the manager, accompanied by one of the assistants of Śrī Mahāswami arrived suddenly and addressed the some ten people scattered in the hall:

“Quick, quick, you have to vacate, Śrī Mahāswami will visit Gandhi Ashram, hurry up every one!”

As a foreigner I have not the right, as per tradition, to stay in a place which a sannyāsin enters. I jumped up, rolled up my bedding, took my luggage, which was usually half packed, and retreated to the exterior veranda that ran along the right side of the hall. There I settled at my corresponding place on the outside of the building.

Not more than five minutes later, Śrī Mahāswami arrived at the compound gate. I do not know how the wife of the manager had the time to clean the floor of the hall and the manager to be ready to receive him as per the rules concerning the sannyāsin: that is, keeping in hand a round bronze vessel full of water, with a bunch of mango leaves and a clean coconut covering the mouth of it. In welcoming Śrī Mahāswami, he and the assistants recite appropriate verses in Sanskrit.

Śrī Mahāswami took the coconut and gave it to one of his assistants, and then with the mango leaves, he sprinkled the place with some drops of water in order to purify it. Only then did he enter the hall. Through a window I observed all his movements and immediately understood that his intention was to stay there. I saw how he scanned the hall, starting from his left side, but nothing seemed to attract him. He had almost finished and I asked myself if he will not withdraw from the hall, but at that same moment, his scrutiny fell on the place I had just left: the two square metres surface on the cement floor, at a right angle of the hall. For some seconds, in an impenetrable dimension to others, he weighed the situation and then without hesitation he headed towards this spot. After having purified it with some supplementary drops of water that he drew from the wooden vessel he always kept with him, Śrī Mahāswami sat, crossed legs, exactly on the place I had occupied. He showed to his assistants that he intended to pass the night at Gandhi Ashram. Someone closed the shutters of my window towards the exterior gallery, which was of no importance to me, for just the thickness of the wall that separated me from Śrī Mahāswami.

I passed one of the most relaxing nights of my life. Next morning Svāmiji woke up at five o'clock and left almost immediately. I could hardly greet him the moment he came out of the hall. I was one of the first to re-enter. I regained my old place which was still warm with his Presence. There were some flowers and two bricks that the assistants had placed there as a pillow, which were left behind. I kept



them for a long time with me, these two blessed bricks, without ever being able to make the same use of them.

The minutest gesture of Śrī Mahāswami towards me is invariably commented upon. The fact that he had chosen to sleep exactly in the same place I had previously occupied, was considered as a mark of special attention and I started being treated with respect. The manager came on the eve of my proposed day of departure and suggested that if I stay I could move into the near-by hut in the yard. To live in one's own room in an Indian village is quite unusual.

I accepted his offer. The room was without a ceiling and I could hear everything that happened in the nearby room. My 'apartment' contained nothing but a floor of trodden earth. Taking into account the conditions, I considered the manager's offer as a sign, and, as nothing justified my departure, I asked for consent to extend my stay in Kārvetinagar. Śrī Mahāswami granted me permission.

I then proceeded to gather the necessities that would make the room habitable. Through a local shop I bought the necessary utensils for preparing very simple food. A kerosene lamp served as a cooker stove. As for a bed, I had a rice straw mat, a bed sheet and a thin rug spread out on the soil. As for furniture there were some cardboard boxes. The bathing place was in the open space near the well and there was also a very clean toilet, which was rare in these parts.

Kārvetinagar, April 1971

### **The heap of orange clothes**

One day, Śrī Mahāswami went for a walk further away than normal from the hermitage. He went beyond the temple of Venugopāla on the western side of the pond and returned towards the end of the afternoon. This time he was followed and surrounded by a dense and excited crowd, whose emotions were fast reaching excessive proportions. The people pressed very closely to Śrī Mahāswami and, without specifically wanting it, they could have harmed him, despite the efforts of his assistants to protect him. I was at the outer limit of the crowd when I observed how the agitation stopped in a flash as if disorientated by what to do next. With difficulty I reached the centre of the mass to ascertain what happened. I observed how the assistants and some persons close to the hermitage, some eight or ten people, had interlaced themselves with their shoulders and waists in a real

defence circle. I could read a determination on their faces that they were ready to protect Śrī Mahāswami, with the attitude ‘the guard dies, but never surrenders.’ I came up on my toes and searched the space behind them, where normally Svāmiji would be standing, but I did not see anything of him.

I thought, “He is a great yogi but he could not have flown off like this.”

I came nearer and asked an assistant: “But where is Śrī Mahāswami?”

As he was absorbed in controlling the crowd, he just nodded behind and down with his head. Through the slits in between the bare chests of the defensive circle I saw a heap of orange clothes like a large flattened ball, lying on the ground, with a short end of the danda sticking out, which indicated his presence. He was there, huddled up, in the dust!

I retired quickly in order to give an example to others, who then did the same. Little by little the group became less dense, Śrī Mahāswami stood up, seemingly unruffled, and left slowly towards the Lotus Pond followed from afar by some of his ‘besiegers’.

Later I was thinking about the attitude of Śrī Mahāswami. To enact death always impresses us as it reminds us of the real death. Some animals avoid corpses, while some leave another animal alone when it has remained absolutely still.

There are two important events in a person’s life: birth and death. When death occurs to someone who has an intimate connection with us, we find ourselves in a profoundly pensive mood. If one rejoices at the thought of birth, then death creates quietness, for we feel the mystery and limits of our own existence. Śrī Mahāswami’s manifestation provoked in me a sense of deep awe. His fearless demonstration showed me how to surrender and not be afraid.

Kārvetinagar, May 1971

### **The hurricane lamp**

This night should not have been special. I planned to sleep on the stairs of the Lotus Pond, and had stretched my mat and the blanket in the middle of the flight of stairs facing the hut where Śrī Mahāswami was resting. I had kept a lighted hurricane lamp behind my head on the same step. The lamp would scare away dogs and other animals

and also signal my presence to anyone who may come down from the hut to the reservoir on this moonless night. I peacefully fell asleep. Suddenly I woke up: someone, a man, stood nearby behind my head. He was on the next step up and was just bending over in order to lift up the hurricane lamp. Having taken it, this person then slowly walked away on the same upper stair right past my body from the head right down to the feet. He then brusquely turned and left. All the time, from the instant of my abrupt waking I lay paralysed, nailed to my mat by a force impossible to oppose and which overpowered me with a luminous insistence. Only when that person along with his force had passed beyond my feet and turned away, I came to my senses and understood.

It was Śrī Mahāswami! He strode up the stairs with my lamp in his hand! I jumped up from my resting place and still had the time to prostrate before he entered the hut. Too excited to return to sleep I passed a portion of the night in walking clockwise around the hermitage (*pradakshinā*). Finally, tired, I laid down on a step and slept until morning.

In the afternoon of the next day, an assistant handed back the lamp without any comment.<sup>1</sup> ▲

*(to be continued)*

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<sup>1</sup> I gave a lot of thought to find the sense of this event and I did not find any other than a similar event that happened in the life of the young Kabir. Being born in a Muslim family he could not be initiated by his master, a Hindu sage from Benares, in a traditional way, which is by touch and by word. He then used a stratagem: Knowing that his old master was coming down a flight of stairs up to the Ganges every morning at dawn as to take his bath, he laid down on one of the steps, in the way of his master's footsteps. His master, coming down, walked on Kabir and while touching him, uttered, out of surprise, the divine name 'Rāma'. Thus Kabir considered himself initiated. The next day he went to his master and confessed the truth. The master, impressed by the faith of the young man, accepted him as his disciple. Subsequently Kabir became a saint and a Guru.

# Sri Chakra Puja

## Part Three

KAYS

The Durgā Saptaśatī is a sacred Text of 700 verses recited before the Presence of Devi Durgā in the Ashram on all the nine days during the annual Navaratri festival. Though normally considered as a fierce aspect of Devi, She is most auspicious. Durgā means one who is beyond the capacity of the instruments of knowledge. This sacred text chronicles the battle royal between Devi and the divine forces on the one hand and demons (*rākṣasa-s*) on the other, and Her conquests over them and bestowal of enlightenment on pure and devout souls. The whole text is symbolic, rich with esoteric content, though minds that hold material existence in the physical plane as the sole reality, may regard them as mere mythological stories and thus miss the deep import. It stands for the fight between the *daivi sampath* (the divine qualities) and the *āsurī sampath* (the anti-divine) that is being forever waged in the human breast. It is the perennial war between the Spirit, the natural heir to Infinity and Light, and the Usurper, the parent of division and darkness, with its seemingly unstoppable might.

The demons that Devi vanquishes stand for *rajas* and *tamas*, ignorance coloured by flamboyant insolence. The demon Raktabhija stands for the human mind and like the mind which, if you cut

off a thought new thoughts arise, so too every drop of the blood of Raktabhija that falls on the ground gives rise to innumerable Raktabhijas. In short, the Text symbolises the life of *sādhana* where the spiritual forces have to face inimical forces. But Devi Durgā, the Divine Mother of Infinite compassion, bestows on seekers who laud and surrender to her, *vijñāna* (supreme knowledge), and then ferries them across the ocean of bondage to the shore of eternal freedom.

Right from the time in Tiruchuzhi, when his childish indulgence in an innocent prank invited the wrath of his father and refuge was sought not from his begotten mother but from Mother Sahāyāmba (Mother of Succour), the goddess of the Bhuminatha temple, the divine Mother was ever with Bhagavan tending to his needs and cares. While at Madurai, Mother Meenakshi, true to her celebrated name शिवज्ञान प्रदायिनी *śivajñāna pradāyini* (bestower of *śivajñāna*) bestowed on him the majesty of *śivajñāna* through the Death Experience in July 1896, causing the descent of Śakti, thereby conferring on him the honorific ‘*mahāśakti nipātena prabuddhāya namaha*’.<sup>1</sup>

His homeward journey from Madurai, the citadel of Śakti, to Arunachala, the Father, the eternal flame of Awareness, was momentous. It was the flight from *vyāvahārika* to *paramārtha*, the flight from prakriti to purusha. It was the divine gift of the Mother to Her beloved son. It is highly significant that the epochal descent of divine Śakti, establishing him in eternity should take place in Madurai. Madurai is called *dvādaśānta sthala*. Over and above the six chakras from *mūlādhāra* to *sahasrāra* there are six more. In the body of cosmic *purusha virāt*, there is a place corresponding to each chakra. Chidambaram is said to correspond to the *anāhata*, the chakra that represents the 12th and the highest is Madurai – the city sanctified by the 64 *līla*-s (sports) enacted by Siva, and called *dvādaśānta kshetra*. The deity of Devi who never steps out of the threshold of *sanctum sanctorum* of Siva (*paḍi thāṇḍā patthini*)<sup>2</sup> is called ‘*manonmani*’ meaning one void of *sankalpa* and *vikalpa* (wishing, willing, indecision and confusion). Thus fashioning him in

<sup>1</sup> The one who became awakened due to the descent of the Supreme Power.

<sup>2</sup> In every temple in the *sanctum sanctorum*, by the side of the Lord in a corner will be a small image of Sakti called *paḍi thāṇḍā patthini*, that is, “The One who never goes beyond the threshold of the sanctum.”



Sri Matrubhuteswara Shrine at Sri Raman Sranam

Her own mould, She steered him into the outstretched embrace of his Father. This finds explicit mention in the 15th *nāmāvalī* of *Ramana Ashtottaram* namely:

*om śrīmad dvādaśānta mahāsthale labdha vidyodayāya namaḥ*

Obeisance to he who gained enlightenment in the most holy city of *dvādaśānta mahāsthala*, namely Madurai.

Even though he left in search of his Father (as it was Lord Arunachaleswara's command), it was the Mother who executed the decree of the Father to care for him. Thus does the Mother in all compassion accomplish the divinely ordained mission of leading countless children to Light and Release through Bhagavan. While at Tiruvannamalai when Her son, the mountain-like sage, sat absorbed in *samādhi*, She<sup>3</sup> initially fed him with milk poured over Her in Her *sanctum sanctorum* at the Arunachaleswara temple and later through many mothers like Ratnammal, Desur Amma, Mudaliar Patti and Echchammal. She gratified Herself by feeding him in the guise of seven *matruka-s*<sup>4</sup> with a sumptuous feast on the hill. Through biting admonitions in the guise of a rustic woman she ordered him to stay in one place and not to roam around in the hot sun on the hill. The site of this incident was near the present ashram and reveals the solicitous concern of a Mother for her precious son and her compassion for humanity at large so that they may gain easy access to this rare *jñāni*. Mother sent Palani Swami, Gambhiram Seshayya and Ganapati Muni who were of a high calibre as Her instruments in acquainting Him with the language of Malayalam, Telugu and Sanskrit, the mastery over all of which came naturally to him.

And no less is the son's devotion to his Mother. The mountain of *jñāna* simply dissolves into a river of love and tender piety. While he read the account of Mother's arrival at Gautama's Ashram in Arunachala from *Arunachala Puranam*, a choked throat and streaming eyes made it impossible for him to proceed further. And a devotee records, "Bhagavan's tender visage moon-like would shine in light and shed tears of ecstatic devotion like Manikkavachakar and Nammalwar. When a bull born and bred in the Ashram was offered to the great

<sup>3</sup> *Apīta Kucāmbā*. 'The Mother whose breasts have never been suckled'. That is, She who is full of wisdom. In Tamil spiritual literature milk connotes *jñāna*.

<sup>4</sup> Literally, 'a group of goddesses'.

Temple of Mother Meenakshi at Madurai, where Mother had granted him his first and final Advaitic experience, the temple authorities, after accepting the gift had sent in return the prasada of sacred ash and vermilion along with a shawl. Bhagavan reverently accepted them saying, “Mother’s gift” with tears of ecstatic joy.<sup>5</sup>

Mother had his presence announced to the world as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi through her ardent *upāsaka* Ganapati Muni, the poet par excellence, and then made him over to Bhagavan as his foremost disciple. And the Maharshi in turn, consecrated a temple to the Lord (*Īśvara*) as the Universal Mother.

Once Santammal, who rendered service in the kitchen, had a dream wherein she saw a resplendent lady with a luminous face seated by the side of Bhagavan. When she disclosed her dream to Muruganar he said it was true and that she was Mukti Lakshmi – Goddess of Salvation. Muruganar had also composed several songs to this effect. When the dream was reported to Bhagavan he said when he was on the hill, the lady who used to bring food would set a second leaf plate by his side. When questioned who it was for, she used to reply, “The Mother”. She also had a similar vision. It is little wonder that to this day the Ashram with the Mother’s Temple, like the Hill towering high by its side, beckons devotees from far and near and lights up their lives with the promise of the bliss beyond. The miraculous coincidences countless in number, termed as ‘automatic divine activity’ by Bhagavan, were all the handiwork of the Goddess Parasakti, the goddess of all activity, the source of kinesis.

The Hill – *achala* – is hailed in the Puranas as the ‘centre spiritual’, of the earth piercing the cosmic egg.<sup>6</sup> It is also the very Heart of Lord Siva.<sup>7</sup> It is here that Devi who is all red,<sup>8</sup> *sindūrāruṇavīgrahām*,<sup>9</sup> *lākṣārasavarṇābhāyai*,<sup>10</sup> becomes one with Him, *achala* (stillness) thus together becoming Arunachala, and lovingly hailed by Bhagavan as ‘*cemmalaiyē*’<sup>11</sup> Red is the colour of dawn; the dispeller of darkness

<sup>5</sup> Nagamma Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 14.09.1947.

<sup>6</sup> *Aruṇācala Mahātmyam*. v. 1, *adu bhūmiyij idayam*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid. aduvē Śivan idayappaṭi*.

<sup>8</sup> *aruṇam. Dhyana sloka*.

<sup>9</sup> *Śrī Lalitā Sahasranāmāvalī*.

<sup>10</sup> *Śrī Lalitā Trīṣaṭi*.

<sup>11</sup> O! Red Hill. *Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam*. v. 2.

and harbinger of light. Bhagavan revealed to Paul Brunton that “Arunachala is within and not without. The Self is Arunachala.”<sup>12</sup> The mystery of the Hill is the mystery of the Self. Sri Chakra is also a mystic symbol and at the micro level it represents one’s own inner system and in the inmost point, it represents the spiritual Heart, for the *bindu* is the union of Śiva and Śakti. It is truly the Self, the Mother. Either by surrender to the divine and waiting for the descent of Grace in silence, or by Self-enquiry, tearing and transcending the veils (*āvaraṇas*), one by divine Grace arrives at the Self, the point (the *bindu*). A holy hymn handed down through generations describes the Holy Hill, Arunachala, as the very form of Sri Chakra. Copied in the Golden Hand of Bhagavan, this hymn has been presented for posterity. It runs thus:<sup>13</sup>

श्री चक्राकृति शोणशैलवपुषं (अरुणाचलाष्टकम्)

*śrī cakrākṛti śoṇaśailavapuṣam* (Aruṇācalāṣṭakam)

Sri Ganapati Muni also declares in *Uma Sahasram* that Śākta-s say that the form of Arunachala is verily a Sri Chakra.<sup>14</sup>

Bhagavan often used to draw the attention of the devotees to this fact. The Sri Chakra or Meru in the Matrubeswara temple was to Bhagavan the living representation of his dear Arunachala, the hill of resplendent effulgence, His own Self.

There is an interesting point to be noted here. In every Siva Temple, the final ritual before closing the temple for the day would be the taking of the idols of Siva and Devi to the bed chamber in a ritualistic procession accompanied by hymns and chant of Vedas. And the very first ritual the next morning would bring them back to their respective places in a similar manner. In most of the Siva temples, the idol of Siva that is taken to the chamber would be represented by His holy Feet. In the temples at Chidambaram and Rameshwaram, the idols of Siva conveyed are sculpted in gold. But it is only in Tiruvannamalai that a Meru-like figure representing the Hill is taken to the bed-chamber.

<sup>12</sup> Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§273.

<sup>13</sup> *Hiranyabāhu* (The Golden Hand), p.344.

<sup>14</sup> Canto 29, verse 14. तन्त्रविदो नवयोनि तु चक्रं शोणधरारूपमुशन्ति (*tantravido navayoni tu cakram śoṇadharādharūpamuśanti*)

The idol of Yogamba, the processional deity in the Ashram had been sanctified by the touch of Bhagavan from the time it was cast in 1942. The Sthapati, try as he might could not succeed in getting right the metal cast of the idol. Bhagavan, aware of the plight of the Sthapati, walked in and casually dropped some gold into the molten mixture. Instantly the idol figure came to a perfect shape. Sri K.K. Nambiar records that the gold so thrown in formed the beautiful *tilak* on the forehead of Yogamba.<sup>15</sup>

Goddess Meenakshi of Madurai is hailed by Sankara as ‘The empress of the city of Madurai, with the parrot of sweet chatter adorning thy beautiful hand.’<sup>16</sup> A lady called Yogamba gifted a golden parrot to Yogambika, the processional deity of the Ashram that is brought out of the *garbhagrha* during Navaratri, and it reminds us of the bestowal of grace by the divine mother on Her precious child and letting him leap into the extended embrace of the divine Father, Arunachala.

Many may feel that the worship of deity in a name and form may not be in tune with either *ātma-vicāra mārga* or with the impersonality of the perfect advaitic Master that pervades the Ashram. “But the idea behind the temple is that it is to be a centre of spiritual Force. The Maharshi said as much and would not have come down the hill if he did not intend it to be so.”<sup>17</sup> Further history bears testimony to this. Major Chadwick reminisces saying that the demonstratively active part that Bhagavan displayed in the construction of the temple and the installation of the Sri Chakra was singularly rare: “On an extremely hot night, inside the airless cave of the inner shrine, in the midst of three charcoal retorts for melting the cement, Maharshi sat for an hour and a half superintending the installation of Meru of 1½ sq. feet with proportionate height, telling them what to do.”<sup>18</sup> It may be worthwhile to recall here Bhagavan’s earlier experience in fixing the broken Sri Chakra at the Durgai Amman Temple, reportedly the site of the legendary Gauthama Ashram.

<sup>15</sup> *125 Years of Grace*, ‘Matrubhuteswara Temple’, 2004. p.78.

<sup>16</sup> मधुरापुरनायिके नमस्ते मधुरालापि शुकाभिरामहस्ते (*madhurāpurānāyike namaste madhurālāpi śukābhirāmahaste*)

<sup>17</sup> Sastri, Kapali, *The Maharshi*. 26-4-1949.

<sup>18</sup> Arunachala, Sadhu, *A Sadhu’s Reminiscences*, pp.54-5.

On the last night before the *kumbhabhishekam* he went in and stood for five minutes with both hands laid on the Meru in blessing. Since then, the temple and Ashram have become highly powerful transmitting stations of overflowing Grace. It is a Light beckoning all who seek a higher life and endowing them with the most rewarding spiritual experience of Peace and Awareness. The Ashram ran into severe financial straits after the *mahānirvāṇa* of Bhagavan. Krishna Bhikshu records that the Ashram has been witnessing the return and continuance of prosperity ever since the commencement of regular Sri Chakra Puja in the Ashram. Thus the beneficent power that Bhagavan brought on earth was inducted into the Sri Chakra by his sacred touch and the spiritual power it radiates ensures the continuance of that Grace in speeding up the spiritual transformation of those devotees who wish to realise the oneness of the Self and Brahman.

During the one time the Sri Chakra Puja was performed in Bhagavan's life time, Bhagavan evinced a keen interest in everything which occurred. When the dinner gong went he refused to go for dinner, instead he insisted on remaining a witness to the puja until the end. When someone remarked, "How good it would be if such pujas were performed regularly" Bhagavan replied, "Yes; but who would take the trouble?" Major Chadwick did take this trouble and thanks to him we now have Sri Chakra Puja six times a month.

"Neither I dwell in any sacred place of pilgrimage nor do I live in Kailas nor in Vaikunta nor in any other place. I dwell in the heart-lotus of a jñāni. Oh! Himalayas! Know that I am seen there where my jñāni resides." Thus does Devi emphatically declare.<sup>19</sup>

नाहं तीर्थे न कैलासे वैकुण्ठे वा न कर्हिचित् ।  
वसामि किंतु मज्ज्ञानिहृदयांभोजमध्यमे ॥

nāhaṁ tīrthe na kailāse vaikunṭhe vā na karhicit |  
vasāmi kiṁtu majjñānihṛdayāmbhojamadhyame || 18||

अहमेव स सोऽहं वै निश्चितं विद्धि पर्वत ।  
मद्दर्शनं तु तत्र स्याद्यत्र ज्ञानी स्थितो मम ॥<sup>20</sup>

ahameva sa so'haṁ vai niścitaṁ viddhi parvata |  
maddarśanaṁ tu tatra syādyatra jñānī sthito mama || 17||

<sup>19</sup> *Devī gītā* in *Devī Bhāgavatam*. Sk.7, Ch.36, v.18.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, v.17.

In the gracious words of Sri Bhagavan, “The Supreme, by His own supreme sakti, moves; yet does not move. This is the supreme secret which can be understood only by sages.”<sup>21</sup> Not only did Bhagavan alone understand that he is ever abiding in silence and stillness, and also demonstrated the spiritual paradox of silence and stillness being ceaseless eloquence and constant activity.

In the words of Ella Maillart, “The inactivity [of the Maharshi] is the basis of its corollary, activity. The useful wheel could not exist or move without a motionless centre; it is unnecessary to comment upon the verse of the *Bhagavat Gita* about seeing activity in inactivity and inactivity in activity, which proves that one can eventually be established beyond such a pair of opposites.”<sup>22</sup> She then quotes the *Tao Te Ching*, “The sage relies on actionless activity and carries on wordless teaching.”<sup>23</sup>

There are many incidents demonstrating Bhagavan’s dual poise of static Śiva and the dynamic Śakti. Once he said to Venkateshwar, brother of Krishna Bikshu, “I have at this moment twenty different bodies working in twenty different lokas.”<sup>24</sup> Another is what Bhagavan revealed to an English seeker Mr. Knowles. When Bhagavan was dwelling at length on this poise of a *jīvanmukta*, Mr. Knowles who could neither understand nor digest these contradictions wanted to know his state of being, whether it was the static poise of silence and stillness or talking to them? Sri Bhagavan looking at him sharply replied in a firm voice, “No, I am not talking to you.”<sup>25</sup>

God garbed in the body is the Self.

Disrobed He is the God Supreme.<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately Devi has to be meditated upon as the Self.

Therefore Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is He, the Self who is also She, the Supreme gaze other than That, is nothing else.

<sup>21</sup> *Sri Ramana Gītā*, Chap. 12, v.15.

<sup>22</sup> *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*: ‘The Sage’s Activity in Inactivity’. p.264.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.266.

<sup>24</sup> *Fragrant Petals*, 2000. p.144. ‘Reminiscences of Bhagavan Referring to the Self and the Lokas’ by Krishna Bikshu

<sup>25</sup> From T.K. Sundaresa Iyer. Meaning that Bhagavan was speaking directly to Knowles’ inner Self, not his personality whom Knowles mistook himself to be.

<sup>26</sup> *Kalpasūtra*, 1.5.

The lilting litany of Devi (*Lalitā Sahasranāmam*) hails her as the ‘very form of guru’,<sup>27</sup> while Kalidasa, a shepherd boy who blossomed into a *mahākavi* (a very great poet) by Devi’s Grace, hails her as “One who bestows *darśan* in the form of a Guru and reveals the Self in all its splendour.”

देशिकरूपेण दर्शिताभ्युदयाम् (*deśikarūpeṇa darśitābhyudayām*)<sup>28</sup>

And Ganapati Muni reminds us of this verity by beholding Devi in all her three aspects in the visage of Bhagavan.

देवी शक्तिरियं दृशोः श्रितजन-ध्वान्तक्षयाधायिनी  
देवी श्री रियमम्बुजाक्ष-महिषी वक्त्रे सहस्रच्छदे ।  
देवी ब्रह्मवधूरियं विजयते व्याहारगूढा परा  
विश्वाचार्य महानुभाव रमण त्वां स्तौतु कः प्राकृतः ॥

*devī śaktiriyam dr̥śoḥ śritajana-dhvāntakṣayādhāyini*  
*devī śrī riyamambujākṣa-mahiṣī vaktre sahasracchade |*  
*devī brahmavadhūriyam vijayate vyāhāragūḍhā parā*  
*viśvācārya mahānubhāva ramaṇa tvām stautu kaḥ prākṛtaḥ* ||<sup>29</sup>

The meaning is that Devi Durgā who destroys the ignorance of people who turn to Her has stationed Herself in the eyes of Bhagavan. Bhagavan’s face resembling a thousand petalled lotus is the abode of Lakshmi and Goddess Saraswati the consort of Brahma, holds sway as *paravāk* (the secret hidden in speech) in his face. Bhagavan by a mere look destroys ignorance and his face radiates beauty, harmony, peace, concord and charm all around and his words drive home the content of ‘*Tat*’. Hence, let us hail Him and Devi as follows:

या देवी सर्वभूतेषु गुरुरूपेण संस्थिता  
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै ममात्मने नमो नमः

*yā devī sarvabhūteṣu gururūpeṇa saṁstitā*  
*namastasyai namastasyai mamātmāne namo namaḥ*

To the Goddess who abides as the Guru, to Her, the Self, Salutations, Salutations, Salutations. ▲

(Concluded)

<sup>27</sup> गुरु मूर्तये Guru Mūrtaye 603.

<sup>28</sup> *Śrī Devī Śaṭkam*, v. 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ramaṇa Catvāriṁśat*, v. 37.

# Mahatma Gandhi

K.V. SUBRAHMONYAN

It is known to Bhagavan Ramana's devotees that Mahatma Gandhi had the highest regard for Bhagavan and that Bhagavan greatly admired Gandhiji. Once when some people compared him to Sri Aurobindo and Ramana Maharshi, Gandhiji demurred saying "Both Sri Aurobindo and Ramana Maharshi are known to be Self-realised beings, I am not yet one." He sent his followers like Babu Rajendra Prasad, Jamnalal Bajaj, Sankarlal Banker and others when they were inwardly weary to Bhagavan Ramana asking them to stay there long enough to imbibe peace and regain their energy in his totally tranquil presence which they did soon.

Once when Rajendra Prasad, while taking leave of Bhagavan, prayed for a message to the Mahatma. Bhagavan told him "When the heart speaks to the heart, where is the need for a message?" Sarojini

K.V. Subrahmonyan lives in Sri Ramansramam. His translation titled *Revolutionary Gandhi* of Pannalal Dasgupta's Bengali book *Gandhi Gabeshana* was reviewed in the *Mountain Path* in January 2012.

Naidu, Morarjibhai Desai, Kishori lal Mashruwal and other Gandhians had darshan of Bhagavan and went back feeling deeply blessed. The Gandhian O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiyar, known for his unfailing uprightness, was a devotee and visited Bhagavan often while in office as Chief Minister of the then Madras State, and later.

Bhagavan's poet-devotees Ganapati Muni and Sri Muruganar were admirers of Gandhiji. Both had praised Gandhiji in Sanskrit and Tamil verses respectively. Bhagavan's nephew T.N. Venkataraman (later Swami Ramanananda) who was Ashram's President for forty years and Ramanatha Brahmachari were Gandhi lovers. Bhagavan's great scholar-devotee Professor K. Swaminathan, was a Gandhian till the end and admirably piloted the editing, along with dozens of very able assistant and sub-editors of ninety of the one hundred volumes of the monumental *Mahatma Gandhi Collected Works* even as he continued to write articles and books on Ramana and made superb translations in English of Ramana literature, helped with the editing of the Ashram magazine *The Mountain Path* and made regular visits to the Ashram.

Some may ask why I talk in the same breath of Ramana who was *nishprapancha*, that is totally world-free, free as he was from mind, and Gandhiji who took the world to be real and was involved in so many struggles. They have a point. The great Gandhian Vinobaji deemed the world to be *pratyaksha* Brahman, that is, manifest Brahman. So did Gandhiji. So too, indeed all Vedantins, including the perfect jnani Ramana. However, Ramana sat *achala*, still, or as his devotee T.K. Sundaresan, who as a boy had seen him during his days on the Arunachala, said, "He sat and sat like a God," or as Muruganar wrote "Behold the wonder! He is so *achala* putting the *achala*, hill, to shame."

Whereas, Gandhiji was a man of incessant action. People who were with Gandhiji had told me that at times of crisis and there seemed to be no way out, Gandhiji would withdraw into himself and when he came out would act as only God could. Nirad Chaudhuri, the scholar extraordinary, wondered why Gandhi who was in the class of Kabir and Nanak should trouble himself so much with the conflicts of the world. As for Bhagavan, he once read out in the Old Hall a passage from Gandhiji's writings in one of his periodicals and remarked, "See, we are saying all this sitting here and Gandhiji says them living in the



midst of turmoil.” Bhagavan found nothing incongruous in Gandhi, the seeker of Truth and Self-Realisation being immersed up to his eyelashes in the Freedom Movement. He once said, “A Guru does not see what someone does or does not do. He only sees if he is free from the sense of doership.” If this is the litmus test, Gandhiji passed it literally with flying colours. He had as his life’s guiding formula  $I = 0$  is everything. That is, if you reduce your ego (I) to zero, then there is only the Limitless. Had he not in these words distilled the essence of Bhagavan’s life and teaching?

If Bhagavan was in the famous words of his devotee Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, the highly gifted poet and theatre personality, and brother of Gandhian Sarojini Naidu, “a Mighty Impersonality”, that is, total impersonality. Gandhiji too, was highly impersonal. He asked his followers to put themselves last and the cause first and advised them not to give the leadership to him but to Truth. If they thought that he swerved from truth, they should not follow him. It was well known that Gandhiji listened to criticism, even very adverse ones. Once his followers told him, “Bapu, we have found out one thing. If we want to win your approval, we have to blast you. We are always with you but you are full of praise for Jayakar and Sapru who don’t spin nor wear *khadi* clothes and never fail to criticize you.” Gandhiji said it was true but he praised them if they stuck to truth. Gandhiji never picked holes in others for he said, “I won’t judge others for I am far from perfect myself.”

Bhagavan, the perfect non-dual essence as K. Swaminathan described him, never critiqued others for there were no others for him. Gandhiji had only praise for even the harshest detractors. At the dawn of India’s freedom in August 1947, he prevailed upon Nehru and Patel to make Dr Ambedkar the Law Minister. He was Gandhiji’s bitterest ever critic, calling him “...unfit to be called a Mahatma and the most dishonest politician in Indian history.” Gandhiji conceded the learned doctor’s right to be bitter and admired his awesome erudition and his empathy with the depressed class. Ambedkar did a superb job as a minister and Nehru called him “Jewel in my cabinet.” The Kanchi Paramacharya of revered memory who, like Ramana and Gandhi, had the wonderful quality of seeing only the good in others and gave wholehearted praise to merit wherever it was found, once said, “Who

can return praise for abuse like Mahatma Gandhi?” At another time the holy pontiff said, “Why do people call Gandhi greater than even Rama and Krishna? Because he was a good man, selfless and truthful.”

Both Bhagavan and Gandhiji were paragons of simplicity in every sense and in the best sense of the term. On my first fleeting visit to the Ashram in 1977, (Dining) Hall Natesa Iyer, one of the staunchest devotees of Bhagavan told me, “Imagine the simplest of men. Bhagavan was much simpler than that.” Our main problem today is that we have become very complicated. Our individuality, our relationship at home and outside at office and in the community, our politics, religious life – everything is complicated. Where there is one, we see many, the other and there is division, conflict.

Bhagavan solved the questioners’ problems by asking them to find to whom was the problem. Simplistic? No, it is the simplest, profoundest and instant solution to all problems. Gandhiji was often misunderstood by well-intentioned critics because they were baffled by his utterly simple approach which seemed naïve, faddist, impractical, utopian or just crazy to their insular human minds weighted with all sorts of impressions and notions. Author V.S. Naipaul wrote that Gandhi had the rare quality of seeing the obvious. Historian Mukul Kesavan wrote a few decades ago, “Gandhiji was neither for the British nor for the Indians, neither for the Hindus nor for the Muslims. He was for truth.”

Truth is total simplicity for there is nothing in it but truth. If Bhagavan who was Chidakasa, the Consciousness-space, was openness itself, transparency itself, we see that Gandhiji, who worked for many causes big and small and related with ever so many people, wrote and spoke a lot with incredible clarity and as Kipling might say, could ‘keep his head when everyone around lost his’ was among the simplest of men.

As both Bhagavan and Gandhiji had the inexhaustible inner wealth, they did not have to possess anything. Gandhiji was inspired by the very first verse of *Isavasyopanishad* which says, “All this universe is covered by Isvara, the Almighty. Enjoy by renouncing, covet not anyone’s wealth.” He said that out of this one verse, he could distil the entire wisdom of the scriptures. He said that without *aparigraha* (non-possession) there cannot be *ahimsa* (non-violence, love) and

without ahimsa we cannot experience Truth. Sadhu Om, one of the most gifted and fervent devotees of Bhagavan, wrote “Gandhiji was a votary of Truth, Bhagavan is Truth.” Gandhiji said non-possession meant that he had no right over even his own body. It was as simple as giving up all one has and all that one is, in his own words, spoken to his closest followers. Bhagavan, of course was free of everything except and in the Self. As his close devotee Balaram Reddiar said Bhagavan was always in Brahman.

He, however, let devotees find the Self, one’s own true nature, in their own way. Rich and poor, high and low, learned and unlearned, strong and weak, Indians and non-Indians – all were not merely equal but one, transcending class, caste, creedal, religious identities – in his non-dual presence.

Gandhiji taught us the dignity and equality of labour. He sent his son Manilal, known as the most obedient, to Madras (now Chennai) to eke out his livelihood never divulging his identity. Manilal earned his keep by carrying on his back heavy rice bags, washing dishes, etc. Gandhiji would ask visitors to his ashram to clean the *sandaas* (toilet) and then come to him. Bhagavan and Gandhiji were great educators. The *vidya* (knowledge) that they offered was the one that liberates (*sa vidya ya vimuktaye*).

Gandhiji asked his followers not to let fame turn their heads. He said it was difficult to manage fame. Bhagavan defined fame as the ending of the ego. Once Bhagavan told some visiting Gandhians how Gandhiji acted without any sense of doership and that was the result of long and earnest *sādhana*.

Gandhiji taught his countrymen to be fearless. He said, “If you seek Truth, you should be ready to keep your head on the lap of Death.” He told his people, “Why do you fear? If the worst comes to the worst, there will be death. What is death after all?” He used to say “Death is my friend” and his follower Kakasaheb Kalelkar wrote a book *Mrtyu Mama Sakha* (Death my friend). As Gandhiji's grandson Gopalkrishna Gandhi writes, “Gandhiji scorned fear.” Those of us who are in our eighties and more, know how droves of men and women, armed only with smiles on their faces and love in their hearts, faced the lathis (inlaid with lead) of the British Government’s policemen all over India in the Freedom Movement.

If fear had no place in Bhagavan Ramana's Presence then as now, it is because Bhagavan's universe is a non-dual universe. The Upanishads say *Dviteeyaadvai bhayam bhavati*. (Fear arises when there is two.) Bhagavan showed us that the other is a projection of the phantom ego. When by Self-enquiry the phantom is put to flight, is not all fear driven away for good? Kunju Swami told us that by seeing the silent, still Bhagavan ever serene and tranquil under all conditions, the devotees conquered fear.

A sannyasi at Uttarkashi, who had been with Gandhiji for some time at his Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad and then with his consent, went to the Himalayas to live as a monk, told me in Hindi when I met him in the year 2003, a few months before he left his body at the age of 103: "Gandhiji was an incarnation of Dharma. He was greater than even Ram and Krishna. He was in samadhi (*vah samadhi mein the*)." Gandhiji was truly a man of very deep meditation in which he lost sense of body and the environs. It was from that turiya state that he took guidance and that was why some of his actions baffled followers and critics who were good people but functioned at the level of the conditioned human mind. That was why men of high spiritual state admired him at a very high level.

Eminent American psychologist Erik Erikson who came to India in the 1960s, visited Ahmedabad to study Gandhi's legacy and later wrote *Gandhi's Truth, The Origins of Militant Non-violence*, called him "the wholest of men." Indeed, the more holistic our view, the more do we understand Gandhi. Of course, Gandhiji never thought he was more high-souled than anybody else, even as Bhagavan told a devotee: "I am Bhagavan, all are Bhagavan." Ma Anandamoyee, who loved Gandhiji as if she was his own daughter, was asked by a devotee if she was really Durga as people say, she said, "I am Durga, you too are Durga." Gandhiji wrote: "It is my experience and conviction that no man is greater than anybody else." Did we not see that any duality had no place in Bhagavan's presence?

Gandhiji's amazing life strikes one as a little more than miraculous but he saw to it that there was no Gandhism created out of his life which was his message. The Archdeacon of Canterbury hailed Gandhi as the most Christ-like personality he had seen. Romain Rolland, the French savant, who first called him the reincarnation of St. Paul, the

greatest evangelist in the annals of Christianity, later likened him to Paul's Master. On hearing about Gandhiji's martyrdom, the eminent American novelist Pearl S. Buck called it the Second Crucifixion. Einstein talked about Moses, Jesus and Gandhi. It is said that a jnani is greater than an avatar because while the former is a complete manifestation of Truth, the latter is a partial manifestation of Truth, as Bhagavan himself had remarked. This truth is nowhere else more evident to us than in the case of the Mahatma and Bhagavan. That was the only time when Bhagavan seemed to make a comparison and thus engage in duality. It was not so. Ramana, whose eyes were illumined by *jñāna*, saw nothing except the light of *jñāna*. He was only making the point that the avatar aspect of a *jñāni* was partial. The *jīva*, the mahatma, the avatar, the *jñāni* are all the non-dual Brahman, the supreme Wholeness. ▲

## Before the Rain

Upahar

On banks of silence where I lay,  
clouds tempering the sun,  
my gaze fell inward, lighting most gratefully  
on half-remembered landscapes of the soul,  
familiar, sacred; fleeting, moving always out of reach.

What realm is this, veiled as if by nearness?  
Who waves the magic lamp, lets fall the shimmering curtain?  
Ah, love, had I the gift of understanding, I'd turn  
the key of every secret door to let you in, to let you know.

Could I but raise the ever-flowing chalice,  
I'd drown the world in beauty for your sake,  
and quench an immemorial thirst. But visions fade,  
and you alone remain, of every changing view  
the still and timeless mirror.

# A Talk with Luang Por Sumedho

## Part Two

### The Nature of Awareness is Love

CITTAVIMALA

**Q:** Talking about consciousness, about awareness, you once said, ‘The nature of awareness is love.’ What did you mean, Luang Por (Venerable Father)?

**Luang Por:** Well, awareness is peaceful, it’s love. Love is unconditional love – it’s not like the love that arises through attachments. It’s *metta*. What is *metta*? It’s unconditional love. That means that you have *metta* even for the fear or the complaining that arises in your consciousness, meaning that you’re not judging it, it is what it is! Complaining is ‘like this’, fear is ‘like this’ – you’re allowing it to be what it is. You’re not indulging in it or resisting it – and that’s unconditional love! So that’s the nature of pure consciousness. But when we identify consciousness as personal then we love somebody, and we hate somebody (Luang Por laughs) because the *personal* is very divisive. The whole conditioned realm of thinking is about division: about love and hate, like and dislike, good and bad and true and false.

**Q:** Luang Por, in the Christian faith and other faiths there is the notion that ‘God is love’. And this creates a difficulty: ‘If God is

love, why does God allow suffering?’ Is there an answer as to why there is suffering?

**Luang Por:** Well, when we identify with suffering, then we suffer! And all conditioned phenomena are impermanent. So, the *samana* or the mystic or the enlightened mind takes its stand with awareness, which is loving-kindness, non-critical. It isn’t judgemental. The word ‘love’ in English is used for so many things, and it’s a powerful word, you know, no matter how you use it. The Christian God’s love or unconditional love, *metta*, are similar to the *brahmaviharas*<sup>1</sup> – *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, *upekkha* – they’re from your conscious awareness, they’re not created by personalities or individuals. They’re natural states that relate to the here and now.

When you have *metta* retreats where you’re spreading loving kindness to everybody, that’s one thing, because it makes you feel good: it’s a positive and skilful means. But real *metta* is acceptance! And acceptance doesn’t mean liking – because in *metta bhavana*,<sup>2</sup> you’re spreading equal loving-kindness to the devils and to the angels (Luang Por chuckles), you’re not preferring one group to the other.

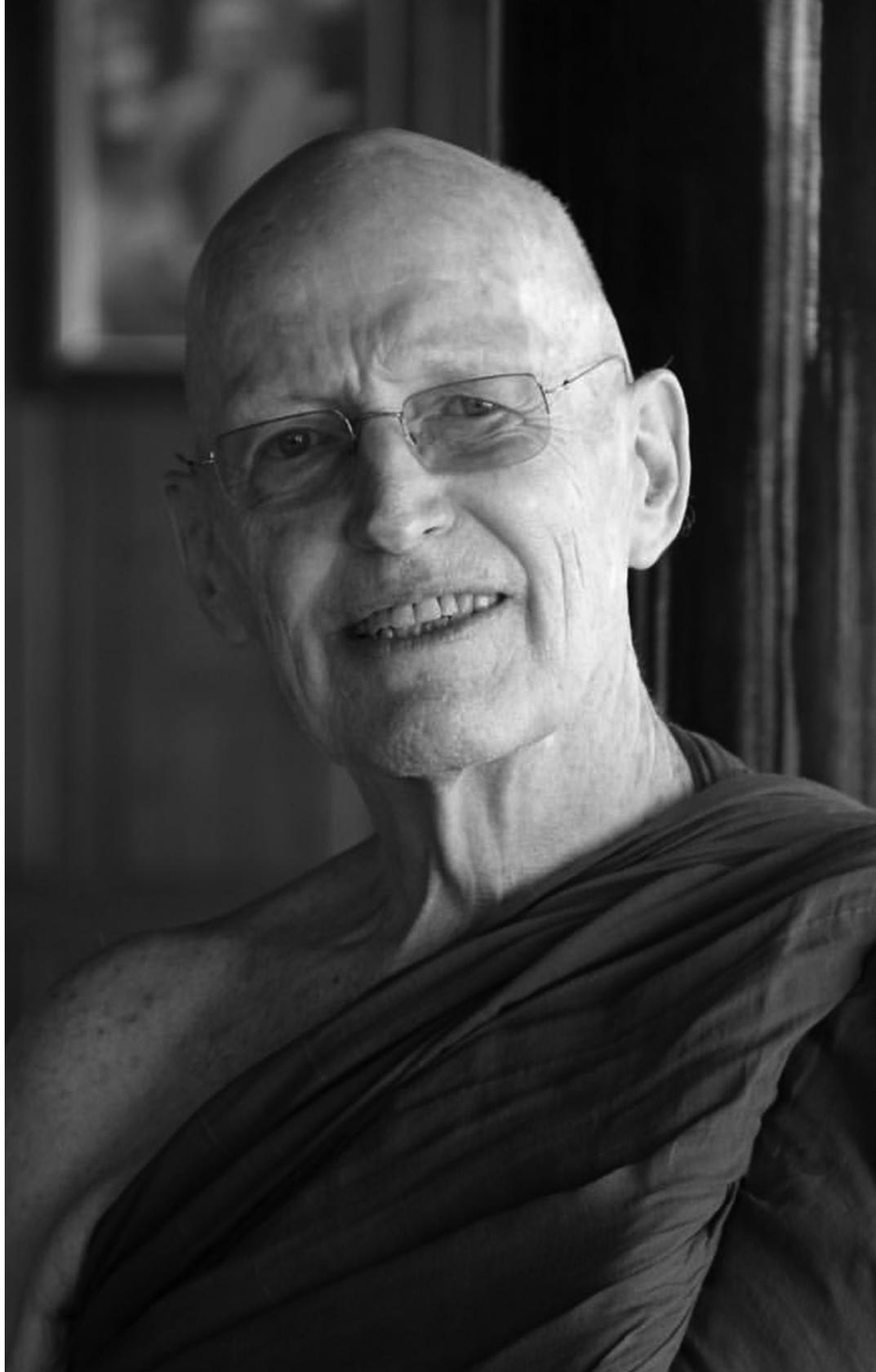
So ignorance of *Dhamma* is the cause of suffering, it’s the origin of suffering. But awareness is not ignorant – you’re not operating from ignorance any more, but from wisdom, from awareness. From an inclusive love, rather than from the discriminating mind which pitches one thing against another, comparing one thing with another. Love is peaceful, consciousness is peaceful. And, as we know, regarding human relationships, love is what holds people together. When they hate, then they separate. So love is the force in the universe that holds it together (Luang Por laughs). Unconditional love is immeasurable! When you love a person, but then hate them because they start criticizing you, that kind of love is very dependent on conditions. Real love isn’t conditional!

**Q:** Luang Por, what about resentment? How does one deal with resentment?

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘*brahmaviharas*’ are a set of four Buddhist virtues, namely, *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (joy for the good fortune of others) and *upekkha* (equanimity) and the meditation practices used to cultivate them.

<sup>2</sup> ‘*Bhavana*’ means ‘cultivation [of]’ or ‘practice [of]’; thus ‘*metta bhavana*’ means ‘practice of loving-kindness’.



**Luang Por:** Well, there's a lot to resent in life, on a personal level. Because these things happen – life isn't going to be fair and just to us all the time! I've had problems, being criticized and traduced! (Luang Por laughs.) And then you feel this resentment! But I've used it, as a reflection. It arises, it comes and goes. So, you know, trust yourself to be aware of it, know when it's present, when it's absent.

**Q:** Luang Por, how do you maintain a friendly attitude towards the person you resent? The person who's creating the problem?

**Luang Por:** Well, that's their problem, it's not yours! Don't make it yours! If someone is creating a problem, you're not forcing them to do this – and you're even trying to be a friend to them. But it's their problem! (Luang Por smiles) Don't make it yours! On a personal level, you can't help but resent it! But resentment is a condition, so it's another teacher, you're learning that resentment is impermanent, not self. I've found so much to resent in my life! Injustices or unfairnesses that I've experienced, but then, with meditation, I began to put them in the context of memory.

You know, I'd remember incidents that happened forty or fifty, sixty years ago! If I hold on to those, I have to make myself angry right now! Resentful of things that happened over sixty years ago (Luang Por laughs). And here I can, just by holding onto that memory, think, 'That was unfair! That should never have happened!' and I can make myself angry in a place that has nothing to do with the event sixty years ago!

The memory of a person or an incident that you resent – for the rest of your life, whenever you think of it, it will still feel like this! But whether you grasp it, or let it go, just take an interest, see what happens! But trust your awareness, not your thinking mind! You don't need to know why a person behaved badly towards you – but, instead, use it as a way of looking at resentment instead of seeing it in such a personal way. Because your personality wants to think, 'I should forgive people, and it happened so long ago.' You can be very rational about it. That's one approach, (Luang Por laughs) spreading loving-kindness and forgiving – but all these are very rational ideas!

Actually, right now, when you're thinking of that person, or that event, you feel resentment! So be aware of that! No matter how

irrational it might be. You can be very sensible and practical about it, saying, ‘It doesn’t matter!’ But with awareness, you’re not trying to be rational or sensible, but just observing! Because all it is, is actually nothing. It’s a thought in the moment, it’s like a memory. Where is it? Where did it go? So then you’re using your *vipaka kamma* – the past karmic conditions of your life – such as your memories, in terms of Dhamma, rather than just trying to suppress them or to be incredibly rational and sensible about them – or still letting them upset you!

**Q:** Luang Por, how does an ordinary person like me, living in the world, even if half the year at Ramana Ashram, live a more *samana*<sup>3</sup> type of life? Is the main thing spending time in formal meditation every day?

**Luang Por:** That helps a lot!

**Q:** You always said you enjoyed formal meditation.

**Luang Por:** Yes! That’s one of the gifts of the monastic life. Because it’s our lifestyle! But, still, in monasteries, you can be very busy! We have these sangha meetings every year in Ubon, which we’re going to in a few days. And you go to these meetings – I’ve been to some of them – where they just talk nonsense!

**Q:** You said you weren’t keen to go to Ubon at all, Luang Por!

**Luang Por chuckles:** One year they were talking about whether these little candies, coffee candies called Kopiko, are ‘allowable’! There’s two percent dairy cream in these little candies – and for two hours, I swear, they were arguing about whether this was allowed in the afternoon – and I got disgusted and I got up and left! And I went over to the dining hall and had a cup of tea, and as I was sitting there, in the dining hall, a young monk came up to me and said, (Luang Por puts on a very earnest voice:) ‘What do you think Ajahn Sumedho – is two percent allowable?’ (Luang Por laughs) I just thought this was so funny! You know, this is all monastic life – what we argue about is pretty... innocent! (Luang Por laughs.) It’s about what you can eat in the afternoon! Where lay life has much more serious things to have arguments about! But then I recognized that the meetings are more like this sense of being together as a *sangha* – and then, the

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<sup>3</sup> *Samana*’ means ‘monk’, ‘monastic’, ‘contemplative’.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

whole aim is to live in harmony. You do the bowing procedures and the whole thing ends with people living in harmony. And I thought that was a good example of sangha life, where the arguments are around innocent things, not about anything terribly important! (He laughs again.) How someone can get so heated about coffee candies! (Luang Por mimics an irate voice:) ‘You can’t eat this in the afternoon! It’s got two percent dairy cream! So it’s food!’ – And they get really indignant! (He is still laughing.) And I would watch my own reaction, being critical of the situation.

But then, on further reflection, I thought, ‘In lay life I had causes I was upholding. I was in peace movements – and with strong feelings about what’s right and what’s moral and what’s wrong – about what was wrong with the United States government! And what was wrong with the world!’ (He laughs.) And then, this ‘two percent dairy cream’ in a coffee sweet! (He laughs again) Something odd about that! But it’s not a terribly important issue!

Luang Por Chah was always trying to get us to see what we were doing – because we’d get very strong and righteous about Vinaya rules! ‘It’s gotta be like this or it’s wrong!’ You can be very absolute! So, our discipline revolved around learning to keep within the structure without blindly clinging to it, and to learn to see when we lacked sensitivity to time and place.

**Q:** I remember you telling us how you discovered him (Luang Por Chah) smoking! And how disappointed you were! (Luang Por laughs.)

**Luang Por:** And he liked chewing betel nut!

**Q:** So did Bhagavan!

**Luang Por:** Ramana Maharshi. Yes, in northeast Thailand, these old Krooba<sup>4</sup> Ajahns mostly chewed betel nut. I tried it, but I didn’t like it. But that’s the way the world is! There are always different opinions about politics or religion or anything! ▲

*(to be continued)*

We are grateful to Ajahn Amaro, abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in England, for the photos used in this series of three articles.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Krooba’ means ‘Venerable’.

# Australian Kailash Yatra 2018

## Part One

CHEENU SRINIVASAN

### **Our Karma, the Chief Enabler!**

September 2019 would be a year since my wife and I and fellow 'Kailash Yatrikas' returned home to Sydney, Australia. After a little over nine months of planning with the underlying dictum that preparedness is key, with HIS grace, our Kailash Yatra is a reality and verily, a dream come true.

Our group travelled from Sydney to Kathmandu, then by helicopter/road to the Nepal-Tibet border of Rasuwagadi, then on to Gyirong, Saga, Lake Manasarovar, Darchen, Dirapuk and Zutulpuk after which we retraced our journey back via Darchen, Saga, Gyirong, Rasuwagadi and Kathmandu. We left Sydney on Sunday 2 September and returned on Friday 21 September 2018.

All 19 in our team were able to complete the Yatra despite a few suffering health issues associated with high altitudes. Our fellow Yatra doctors-on-call went above and beyond to ensure we were all fit at all times. Their care of us was exceptional.

Cheenu Srinivasan lives in Sydney, Australia, was drawn into Bhagavan's orbit some fifteen years ago and visits Sri Ramansramam regularly. He feels blessed that he and his wife Soumya could bring waters from Lake Manasarovar and Gowri Kund for abhishekam at Bhagavan's shrine last February.

We all know that there is much written about the Kailash Yatra and many learned folks have contributed insightful and informative blogs to help others follow in their wake and avoid potential pitfalls.

Personally, we know of one lady from Sydney who decided in late May last year to go on her Kailash Yatra with hardly any preparation. She did her '*parikrama*' in July 2018 and was happily back home before we left for Nepal. Others in her group with many months of preparation were not able to!

To put it simply, some make it and some don't. But who are those who are able to undertake this walk (and/or with a pony) of 52 km at heights of 4500-5750m around holy Mount Kailash over three/four days?

For this, our Tibetan guide was closer to the mark than others. He said Tibetans believe in the Law of Karma and it is firstly your Karma that gets us to Mount Kailash. Secondly, one needs to have both mental resolve and bodily strength to bear, adjust and adapt to the rarefied atmosphere, extreme weather conditions and howling cold winds in dusty and dry conditions. Thirdly, we non-natives of Tibet need accessible medical care within our Yatra team as no one can predict who will be struck by high altitude sickness, injury and other ailments.

We could add a fourth that a co-operative and cohesive Yatra group led by an able and experienced person makes things a lot better provided the first three conditions are all satisfied!

But who decides on the first, our individual Karma?

Suffice it to say that one finds one's calling and responds to it according to their personal circumstance. In our case, we knew it was time to go on the Kailash Yatra despite its risks and tap into the unbounded rewards of a spiritual experience where mere words are inept.

There is much we write about a Kailash Yatra that resonates with other Yatrikas yet for each of us, our experience is truly unique. Many post pictures of their journey and we see them as in silent movies. From deep within, our minds chisel words out of the hard rock of silence while others visualise pictures from beautiful narratives of a Kailash Yatra.

## **Mount Kailash beckons**

The seedling of the thought that ‘yes, going on a Kailash Yatra would be a wonderful spiritual journey’ was planted in December 2017.

It was an informal dinner invite at a friend’s place. A stunning framed picture of Mount Kailash in their family room caught our eyes that evening. Unplanned, the conversation developed contours of their pilgrimage in 2011 and our hosts offered to introduce us to their Sydney based Kailash Yatra leader.

My wife and I met the Yatra leader, a Clinician by profession with high altitude expertise from three Kailash Yatras with whom we felt comfortable from the very moment we met him.

With the image of Mount Kailash firmly planted in our minds and with a leader introduced, all we needed now was to say ‘Yes’, we are committed and that we will join the leader’s 2018 Kailash Yatra, provided

- we meet all the pre-travel medical requirements;
- demonstrate our ability to work as effective team members;
- accept assigned task responsibilities.

## **Medical Tests and Fitness**

A Kailash Yatra we were advised is not like jogging in your familiar neighbourhood park! At heights of 4500-5650m, we were warned that even walking can be difficult in the low oxygen atmosphere and that everything takes an effort, even undoing a zip in your backpack may not be easy!

So it seemed only right that our team leader would ask each of us to provide our complete medical history including the results of heart stress test if one was over fifty years of age. Nothing was left to chance and that is exactly how it should be.

We were asked to provide name and contact details of our current doctor (GP- General Practitioner) so that the leader could speak to him/her if needed to clarify reports. In addition, the GP had to provide us a clean bill of health that we were indeed fit enough for the arduous task of walking say 20km on any day and that we were (relatively) free of any injuries that could impede our yatra and jeopardise the progress of others in our team.

Members of the group were assigned responsibilities such as Secretary/Treasurer, Team Doctor (we had six doctors in our group!), Food Coordinator, Walks Coordinator, Logistics/Transport Support, Team Photographer, Priest/Puja Support etc. In essence, we all had assigned roles to work with and those unassigned were co-opted on a needs basis.

Our diverse group of 19 people committed to the yatra had a wide geographic spread within Australia over the east in Sydney, Wollongong, Canberra and Perth in the west coast as well as San Jose (USA). Some were known to each other and a few of us were total strangers.

Long walks every fortnight in our respective locations provided both a focus on fitness as well as nurturing team building and communication skills. WhatsApp became the medium for messages (and the inevitable trivia!) without losing sight on the larger mission.

### **A Personal Check List is Essential**

Maybe it is my age, but I cannot emphasise enough that one must have a personal check list. I was advised early by my friend that at high altitudes as in a Kailash Yatra, we can become distracted, forgetful and even lose our cool and start yelling at people for no reason!

As preparedness is key, this is what we did:

1. Prepared a Will (people of Indian origin are not yet comfortable on this).
2. Reviewed travel plan with the family.
3. Carried US\$2000/- per head as cash is king as Tibet is no place for plastic cards! These we kept in a waterproof pouch that we hung on our necks and concealed with our passport and emergency contact numbers.
4. Ensured requisite level of travel and health insurance to cover high altitude trekking.
5. Travelled light with only essentials in a backpack and bum-bag for the '*parikrama*' with the rest left to the Sherpas for group transportation.

Our backpack contained a one litre refillable water bottle and Hydrolite tablets to ensure adequate hydration and salt levels. A notepad and pen, a spare set of spectacles, a Swiss Army utility knife, collapsible coffee mug, wet wipes, tissues, an extra set of gloves, a

pair of woollen socks, spare shoelaces, a head mounted torch with spare battery, a light weight rain jacket (or poncho) and a battery pack for charging phones and camera were all tucked into our backpacks. A numbered lock (to avoid losing keys!) was also kept in our backpack as the dorms need locking at places like Lake Manasorovar where one may find the need to sleep in shared accommodation.

The bum-bag was handy to keep small items that one needs to access more readily. Of the many brands available for headache relief, we found Axe Brand Universal Oil most helpful for the persistent mild headache which one may have at high altitudes. Vicks inhaler, eye drops, saline nasal spray, throat lozenges and protein rich nut bars found their home in the bum-bag.

Our team leader insisted that we all have a pony each even if the more fit amongst us preferred to walk during the *parikrama*. The pony hire is recommended even if costly as an insurance in the event one falls sick or gets hurt during the *parikrama*. Given the pony, a helmet (such as used in ice skating) was part of our essential gear along with trekking poles.

A muffler helped cover our ears and neck to counter the freezing cold winds that appeared and disappeared at random while a face mask was essential to keep the dust at bay and minimize aggravating the dryness of our nose. Sunglasses helped counter the glare and minimise dust entering our eyes and to keep them clean at times was not easy as they tended to fog up with our own breath!

The weather being totally unpredictable during the *parikrama*, one needs to be prepared from head to foot, whether walking and/or riding their pony. Waterproof ankle support trekking boots, the mandatory Down jacket to keep warm over layers of clothing are all essential parts of a Yatrika's travel gear.

You may have to sleep under the stars in a sleeping bag, face hail, snow, rain and howling winds and get used to open air for your daily ablutions. Or you may be a fortunate one to have mobile toilet tents and disposable bags for such matters. Whatever it is, be prepared that you may need to rough it out.

Personal hygiene matters most in confined spaces. A good quality deodorant is a must. Also cut your finger and toe nail as far back as you can as these grow fast and could bite into your toes particularly with tight fitting water-proof trekking shoes.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Travel light! Pack enough fresh clothes, 3-4 sets of thermals, light weight trekking pants and shirts, socks, jumper/wind-cheater. Even removing your thermals and inners can be a task! And mind you, accommodation is often in dormitories with 4-6 per room crammed into 'Container Boxes' with beds and so forget about privacy and heaven forbid, get used to the music of snoring!

The Chinese Government is paranoid about the books we have on yatra. Any publication (hardcopy) of Lonely Planet on China/Tibet could be confiscated at any of the checkpoints. In our interest and for that of our fellow Yatrikas, we avoided these books, including any featuring pictures of The Dalai Lama!

### **Off to Kathmandu!**

Sunday 2 September 2018 was a momentous day, the start of our Yatra, with 15 of us flying to Singapore and from there to Kathmandu. Two members joined us in Singapore flying in from Perth while two others from San Jose and Sydney respectively would join us at Hotel Vaishali in Kathmandu in time for our visit to Pasupathinath Temple the next morning.

It was a routine flight to Singapore with our group dispersed at different locations within the plane. I can't recall anything of significance on this flight other than yours truly catching up on some sleep and can only assume many others doing the same.

The Silk Air flight from Singapore to Kathmandu was boarding within an hour of our landing and hence the inevitable rush from one terminal to another was not without some angst. Our greater concern was whether all our checked-in baggage would make it on time for collection in Kathmandu and thankfully it did.

Landing in Kathmandu, we got the first taste of Nepal. A small airport tucked between hills, the facilities were bare minimum with confusion reigning on what forms to fill and before which counters to stand in line. We sorted out quickly that we each needed the 30 day multiple entry visa for US\$40/- (cash only!). Payment was at one counter and immigration at another for foreigners like us.

After what seemed to take ages, we were eventually cleared to collect our baggage and get through to waving hands and waiting vehicles. Even at 11 PM or so, there was dust hanging like a heavy shawl with the air moist and irritable.

We were formally received by our Nepali Tour Manager – Sri Wangchu Sherpa and his nephew Sri Tsering Sherpa. Every member of our yatra group was garlanded with the customary strung ‘*rudraksha*’ beads by young Somu Sherpa, the daughter of Wangchu Sherpa before being taken to waiting mini-buses.

A good hour later, we reached Hotel Vaishali, meandering through narrow lanes in a city that was by now in its early snores of sound sleep. We hastened to our allocated rooms and retired for the night.

Our Yatra had finally begun and we were all now at our starting block, anxious, eager and in high spirits. Day two of our Yatra would start in the morning with a visit to Pasupathinath Temple.

### **Kathmandu is our Base Camp for Two Days**

A visit to Pasupathinath Temple is a must for those going on a Kailash Yatra via Nepal. Our pious, dedicated and knowledgeable leader had made it very clear on what we all needed to do as a group on the morning of Monday 3 September.

After breakfast, we boarded two mini-buses and set off around 9 AM to the famous temple while Wangchu Sherpa and his folks worked with agents to get our Tibet travel permit. We were taken around to the main shrine for a darshan of Lord Shiva – Pasupathinath – and other shrines in the precinct.

The murky river was in full flow while at one of the funeral ghats a family was performing the last rites for their departed member. This temple visit like no other reminds us that life and death co-exist as two sides of a coin.

Post lunch, we were provided a very elaborate briefing by Wangchu Sherpa on what to expect during our Kailash Yatra as well as on the perils of high-altitude sickness and the need to acclimatize progressively at high altitudes over the next few days.

Having been advised prior to leaving Sydney that there was a recent landslide in a section of the only roadway from Kathmandu to Rasuwagadi on the Nepal-Tibet border, we were all forewarned that we may have to take a helicopter ride (US\$350/- for a 20 min ride across mountains – 160km) to the border town. As it turned out, this was now our only option while our luggage would be transported with transfer vehicles on either side of the landslide.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Prior to dinner that evening, our leader recited moving verses of a prayer he had composed for Lord Pasupathinath pleading for HIS grace that HE allow us to travel to Mount Kailash and that we safely return and seek his darshan again in Kathmandu. That many of us went teary and moist with emotion would be an understatement. It was a defining time of prayer from the heart, truly moving.

On Tuesday 4th September, we set off to assemble at Pasupathinath Temple for a Shiva Puja and recital of traditional Rudram and related prayers. With the prayers done and with our 'rudraksha mala' around our necks we assembled to have darshan of Lord Pasupathinath.

After lunch and a siesta, we packed all our clothes and other personal needs into a duffel bag given to everyone of us. These were organized into four groups to cover distinct stages of the yatra – to Lake Manasarovar, puja at Lake Manasarovar, the four day Kailash kora and the return leg from Darchen to Kathmandu.

The evening by all accounts was a quiet one after dinner. We all had much to organize and re-organize and take stock of what goes where and ensure that our yatra does not leave us wanting and looking for things tucked away and hidden or worse, lost and/or forgotten!

Wednesday, 5th September was just a night away.

### **Overnight at Rasuwagadi at Nepal-Tibet Border Crossing**

Information had come in early on Wednesday 5th September that the helicopter option was the only one and that travel in a convoy of jeeps was being ruled out due to anticipated long delays that could double an eight hour road trip and make us travel weary before the arduous yatra at high altitude.

There was little doubt that a copter ride would be exciting. Yet we wondered whether the scenic beauty of rolling green hills and its many waterfalls, landslides and slushy terrain under the wheels would rob us off a particular kind of travel excitement. Perhaps it was ordained that our cameras needed a rest as did our trigger happy fingers!

With helicopter travel now confirmed and some of us a touch nervous given it was going to be another first, we braced ourselves and set off to Kathmandu airport and its helipads. Our travel gear meanwhile had left early in the morning to make its way to Rasuwagadi, the border town in Nepal a few kilometres from the Tibet border.

The so-called Royal Estate in Kathmandu looked desolate and barring a few pictures of the once royal family in our hotel, that lot seemed to be consigned to the dustbin of history. It was all their karma, or was it just cold blooded murder that young Communists instigated a love torn prince? Or was this all woven in a traveller's fabric of stories, each version embellishing its previous one and hence moving even further from its epicentre of what really happened?

One could not miss observing that essentials such as security checks of our backpacks at Kathmandu airport were for all practical purposes a ritual act. We had to weigh ourselves with our bags to ensure that each flight of five passengers plus pilot was not overloading our helicopter. We felt good about this that this aspect of flight safety was being taken seriously.

Once the copter had landed and its whirring blades rested, a crowd of locals swarmed the craft and even before we could take our backpacks and gear, a few were busy scrambling to get in while young mothers with babies in their arms peered into us new arrivals radiating an innocence that only simple village folks untainted by the woes of commerce can provide.

From the hillside helipad to our overnight accommodation in the border town of Rasuwagadi would take us close to 90 minutes (or more if you had a burst tyre as one group of five experienced). This bumpy ride on what here in Australia we would call a motorable dirt track opened vistas of sheer hillside beauty, steep overhanging cliffs kissed by low hanging clouds and many a silvery waterfall.

Arriving in batches, we were treated to some hot tea while our logistics people sorted out rooming arrangements. Sunset was a few hours away and this gave us time to walk towards the Tibetan border and take some pictures of the many hues of green and grey in rapidly receding light. A roaring water fall on one side and a brown silt laden murky river in full flow on the other side was music to our ears.

The walk completed and our appetite worked up, a sumptuous local dinner was gratefully consumed as was our first intake of Diamox to combat high altitude sickness. ▲

*(To be continued)*



## BOOK EXCERPT

# Gandhi

## Essential Writings

GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

*Gopalkrishna Gandhi is a grandson of Mahatma Gandhiji. He is known for a distinguished career in public service. He has edited a collection of over 800 pages of extracts principally drawn from the massive The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. It encapsulates all the essential aspects of Gandhiji's life in one manageable volume. The extract is from the book's Introduction. It is published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi. pp.863, Rs.1,495.*

As we mark 150 years of his birth, Gandhi's transcribed word, whether written by him or taken down as he spoke, acquires a new significance.

'My life is my message', he famously said suggesting that he should be judged by what he has done rather than by what he has said. But we should demur both because of the great power of the content of his word and, equally, for its great literary worth. Gandhi wrote with seriousness as to content, diction, grammar, spelling (of course), and style. The result was writing of high quality. A compilation of his writings must note that.

It is difficult to single out a Gandhi statement as being his most effective or powerful or memorable. As with St Francis of Assisi, Tolstoy, Thoreau, Ruskin, the syntax and structure of Gandhi's written or transcribed words are influential rather than memorable, impactful rather than quotable. It is difficult to find a passage from Gandhi which

like Lincoln's Gettysburg address, Churchill's 'We shall fight on the beaches', or Nehru's 'Tryst with Destiny' speech gets glued on to our memories like a cerebral fresco-secco. His words are rather more like the *chunam* lime plaster of old Madras, made of the calcined shells of experience and then after being baked in the kiln of thought are rubbed by the closed fist of instinct into the finest paste for a clear, mirror-like surface of illumined text.

The lack of what may be called word-power, word-voltage or word-art makes Gandhi's literary style frugal rather than prodigal, sparing rather than demonstrative, prudent rather than indulgent. Nourishing rather than lavish, it seeks to convey rather than impress. Understatement with Gandhi is not a device, it is his *bani*. Non-exaggeration in words is a branch of the tree of his non-violence.

To be chronological, Gandhi's life with words started from the incident at school in Rajkot when, during an educational inspector's visit his teacher encouraged him through signs to correct a word – 'kettle' – that he had misspelt, and he refused. It continued to count to the last word he uttered – 'Rama'. Then comes the celebrated statement of confession to his father. Mohan was fifteen when he 'stole' a bit of gold from his brother's amulet to clear a debt the same brother had run into. The gold was sold and the debt cleared but Mohan, troubled by his guilt, wrote out a confession and presented it to his father who was seriously ill and in bed. "I wrote it on a slip of paper," he says in his autobiography "and handed it to him myself. He read it through and pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note."

I have wondered: Had that slip, its torn-up bits, survived, gone into a family box of such things, forgotten all about, then discovered decades later, by which time Moniya as he was called as a child had become Mahatma, then kept by doting amanuenses, then forgotten for some more decades, re-discovered in the post-Attenborough world by grasping fingers and sent to auctioneers in London, what a price they would have fetched!

But such is the alchemy of the man that the money would have turned, figuratively, to ash in the recipient's hands. Ashes? Why? Because Gandhi's words are public property. Not to be framed and worshipped but studied and reflected deeply on. I say this for the reason that Gandhi's word, written or spoken, had in it a strong content

and a distinct style. His written word may be said to be his *bani*, his very own in-house signature style.

Gandhi's Gujarati writing is his natural 'field'. He is not only using words there that are his for the asking but using them to differential effect, choosing one over the other, now descriptive, now interpretative, with deliberation and delectation. His style has this characteristic: a physical, factual, bare-bones description is followed by a reflection. The first autobiographical work of his, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, (first edition, 1928) which pre-dates his autobiography marginally (first edition, 1929), was written in Gujarati. Its very good English rendering by Valji Desai was gone over by Gandhi, making it, as it were, his. But the original is 'something else'. It is not just in his *bani*, but is his *bani*, pure and simple.

I will share but one example, that which describes a turning point in Gandhi's life, transforming him from a barrister no one noticed to a leader none could ignore. The 'train incident' as it is called, in Pietermaritzburg, has been vividly portrayed by biographers, illustrators, film-makers. Its dramatic core has been mined to the full, over-mined. But the protagonist himself devotes no more than half a dozen almost incidental lines to the episode's factual re-telling. In a chapter in his autobiography (written as you know, originally by him in Gujarati) that is called 'Pretoria Jatan', or 'On The Way To Pretoria', he says matter-of-factly that after he refused to leave his first class compartment, the disapproving railway official got a constable to move him.

*Sipai avyo.*

*Tene hath pakadyo ne mane dhakko marine niche utaryo.*

Mahadev Desai has rendered that, accurately, as:

The constable came.

He took me by the hand and pushed me out.

That is about all there is, in Gandhi's words, of the actual 'assault'. No drama, not to talk of melodrama. No tossing out, pitching out, hurling out, throwing out, tumbling down, no abusive words flung at him, no stoic silence in return described. Nothing of any hurt sustained, either or attire dirtied, torn. No description of trauma, shock, rage. No 'hu-ha'. Just those two austere lines. Typical Gandhi. Factual as factual can be. Actual as actual can be.

But there is art. Unintended again, perhaps, but there.

I cannot but point to the three yo-s in it.

*Avo. Pakadyo. Utaryo.*

With another *o* between them, exactly as in the sequence of happenings – *dhakko*.

That nine word line with its emphatic *yo* ending words gives in Gujarati Marconigram the entire episode, the experience, the outrage which not only saw a lawyer fall down and a leader rise in his place but road-signed the commencement of global de-colonisation itself. Truth does not need dramatization. It only needs narration. Truthful narration. A banyan grows from but one seed.

Part of a simple literary style's attributes has to do with the accessibility of its vocabulary. Gandhi's Gujarati leaned towards the language of daily speech, inclusively, rather than that of the library, exclusively. Opening his South African memoir at random, on page 172, I find the following words of what may be called Hindustani (Persian, Arabic or Urdu admixed) origin: *shahar, khabar, jang, lalach, nuqsan, nasib, marhum, bahosh, bahadur, salah, qaum, darya*. He could have, instead of these, used *nagar, samachar, yuddha, lobha, nashta, svargiya, sachetan, sahasi, mantrana, samaj, samudra*.

Why did he not do so? The point is that his style of vocabulary was not 'extreme this or that', not 'one way or the other'. It was as he was, in a contemporary phrase – inclusive, instinctively inclusive. He could move from one register to another depending on his instinct to pick the most effective, the simplest, the most natural conveyance. He was no pedant; he was, simply, Indian.

Gandhi also uses, to achieve his purpose, a technique that startles. This may be called as a technique of messaging, a precursor to the modern tweet. This is his genius for coining names for journals, institutions, movements, agitations. They are all brilliant passwords. Take, for instance, his description of the Great Salt March as an occasion for Right to put Might in its place. Right against Might as a three worded gentle inversion of the classical 'Might is Right' has the rhyme retained, with the message turned on its head.

Writing for an article or drafting a speech saw Gandhi's drafting abilities reach the acme of his style. His speeches at the Round Table Conference in London in 1931 show him at his best. The one towards the end, when he announced the talks' failure is a masterpiece of his *bani*. It has courtesy, it has strength. It has modesty, it has self-respect.

It should be read by all who value integrity of expression, of form and content. It was written in the wee hours of the morning after no more than a couple of hours of sleep. The revisions in it were minimal.

Gandhi's *bani* may be described as classical in the sense of being imbibed, assimilated, absorbed from old tradition, unsparingly adherent to the given matrix, the result of lessons, both pedagogically received and self-taught, learned through ardour and effort, not 'picked up'. Self-denyingly conservative in form it is audaciously original in content.

It may also be described as modest in the sense of being free of all opacity, having no sententiousness, avoiding of hyperbole, containing zero rhetoric or ornamentation. It is clear in the sense of being direct, using, invariably, the first person singular, is propositional, even when propounding a theory, moderate in the employment of quotations, economical if also telling and educative in the use of legal and Latin phrases.

It is also altogether masterful by packing large messages, deep thoughts, into few words, appealing to the reader's veracity, not vanity, stressing his own vulnerabilities, claiming no infallibility, stating his intention to proceed with or without the reader by his side.

Gandhi spoke or wrote because he needed to. He wrote because writing was part of the activities that grew around his convictions. Which is why Tolstoy, Rolland and Tagore were for him kith, rather than kin. His words, like those from the New Testament, ring true for they hold the reader's or listener's attention.

His instinct grew into a style. In his last year or two when age and a deepening depression about fellow Indian's actions grew upon him, he strayed from his 'classical' style to an untypical mode – rumination. For the most part however of his articulated life, that is, from when he started writing on public causes in South Africa till about the end of 1946, he became the creator, albeit unconsciously so, of an M K Gandhi style of choosing words when speaking or writing.

Gandhi's literary corpus for all its legal honing is formidable for a reason that he describes best in a letter he wrote to his "conscience-keeper", C Rajagopalachari. "If you act merely", Gandhi wrote, "as an advocate no matter how brilliantly but without conviction, the battle will be lost." And then gave a Gandhi clincher "I write not a line", he said in the same letter, "without deep conviction". ▲



Courtesy of Ella Maillart

# The Long Road to Bhagavan

## Tracing the Pilgrim Life of Ella Maillart

### Part Three

MICHAEL HIGHBURGER

Ella's days at the Ashram repeated a regular rhythm that centred on morning and evening darshan at the feet of the Maharshi. If in earlier years she had savoured the changing horizons throughout her long journeys, new discoveries equally welcomed her on a daily basis at Sri Ramanasramam. Though she hadn't known it, this was the journey she had wanted to make all along. To voyage in foreign lands, as it turned out, was not the ultimate undertaking, but rather a preparation for a discovery within. To the outside observer, her life now seemed routine. Yet in the presence of the Maharshi, universes were opening up and revealing vistas beyond any she had ever witnessed. She was now driven, not by an itch for novelty, but by the perfect longing for wholeness. Throughout this quest, she jotted down her experiences not necessarily with the intention of publishing them, but rather that she might reflect on them for her personal benefit in the years to come.

For perhaps the first time, Ella Maillart was writing for writing's sake. If she had previously expressed a dislike for writing, it had now

become enjoyable and, more than that, a spiritual practice. Her insights and observations were regular and often so numerous that she found she could not write fast enough. Like her interlocutor cat-companion Ti-Puss, writing became her interlocutor, a stand-in for the Maharshi when not interacting with him directly. She made every effort to note down all she witnessed:

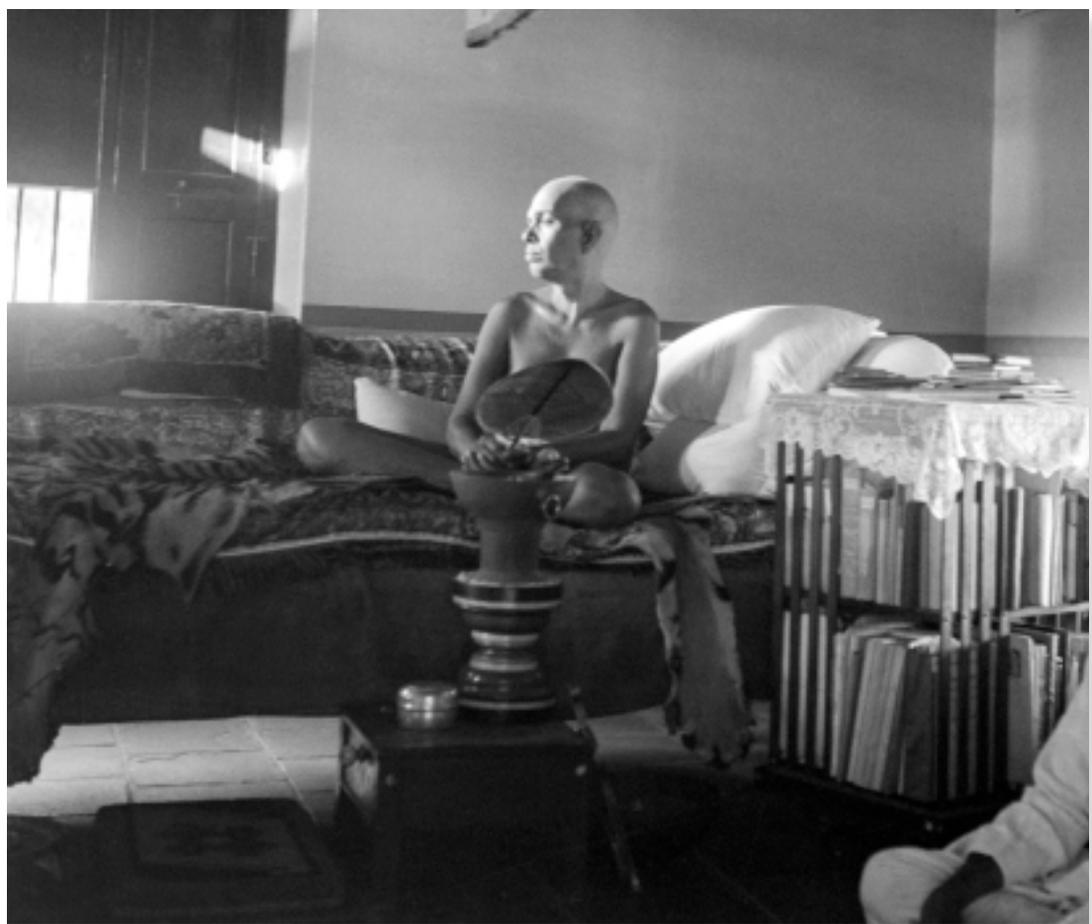
*His skin was the shade of walnut wood. White head and naked face, huge black eyes, intensely benevolent, which see through us with one glance. Near him, a small revolving library and a brazier in which burn [loads] of herbs against mosquitoes. He reads newspapers and magazines, corrects proofs and the letters brought by the silent secretary. Above him a fan is fixed to the ceiling. The room is long and simple like a classroom. Twenty or thirty people are there permanently, learning lessons in silence, sitting cross-legged on the stone floor, dressed in their two pieces of white cotton.<sup>1</sup> ... One early morning I found [Ti-Puss] near me as I was leaving my sandals by the door before entering the hall. She must have crossed the road behind me, and passing among the tombs of holy men, followed me by the old tank with the many stone steps leading to the water-level. I let her do what she wanted. As I greeted the Maharshi by joining hands, my cock-sure Ti-Puss jumped on the couch where the Sage spends all his time. Particularly kind to animals, feeding the squirrels, peacocks and monkeys coming to him, as well as Lakshmi the oldest cow of the Ashram who was fond of bananas, the surprised Maharshi put his newspaper aside, smiled at the thin kitten and touched her head.<sup>2</sup>*

### **The Natural Teaching**

Ella had been misinformed about sages and was surprised to see the Maharshi so human, earthy, humble and congenial. Deeply impressed by the absence of any haughty boasting about high attainments in Himalayan caves, she appreciated the simplicity and accessibility of his teaching that could be brought home to life in this world:

<sup>1</sup> *Cette Realite Que J'ai Pourchassée*, ('This Reality That I Chased'), Editions Zoe, Paris, Payot, 2013, p. 190-191.

<sup>2</sup> Ella Maillart, *Ti-Puss*, London, William Heinemann, 1951, p. 84-84.



*The Maharshi sometimes laughs, sometimes ignores everything, but always stands like a positive magnet ... He doesn't believe that it is necessary to shut oneself away in silence to learn concentration as we have to live and learn to be with God in the middle of everyday life. The Absolute we long for unconsciously is not in a silent cave; for a specially trained mind, it is part of everything around us, and more easily, it is found in our innermost [heart]. The Sage does not want disciples, does not take in hand the life of many creatures.<sup>3</sup> Each has to find the way that suits him. He is here to be seen, attainable for all.<sup>4</sup>*

Ella began to understand that her coming to Tiruvannamalai was no chance occurrence and that there was a deeper wisdom she should apprentice herself to which spoke to a longing that had been present, if indistinct, within her ever since her earliest days on the road:

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit., *Cette Realite Que J'ai Pourchassée*, ('This Reality That I Chased'), p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7111 B/2-6, Extraits de notes "Five Years in India".

*I wanted to live for a long period of time near a sage whose behaviour could help me understand that which my lack of intellectual preparation made incomprehensible to me.<sup>5</sup> I felt strongly at Tiruvannamalai that such great ones as the Maharshi are the salt of the earth. Something intangible emanates from these realised ones; they sanctify the land through their presence. The Sage has attained a certitude which makes him free from restlessness, free from fear, desire and doubt. He can do things none of us can do, because he is egoless. Those who live near him have the conviction that he knows what he was talking about, who knows the 'why and how' of what has been harassing them. They stopped worrying continually about problems they were never meant to solve. He is a link between what we call the concrete world and the Unmanifest. He is a living symbol of that knowledge without which the humanity of today is but a pitiful joke. He implants a lasting peace in the centre of every man's heart. What do we see in the West of today? Every moment adding to the despair of men lost in fruitless searches. Hopelessness gaining ground, each one being obliged to seek a solution along alleys most of which become blind. The Sage of the Vedanta symbolises a link between the unknowable ultimate and man. The Sage relies on actionless activity and carries on wordless teaching.<sup>6</sup>*

### **Teaching by Silence**

At first Ella had expected formal discourses, and visualised herself sitting with pen and paper copying word for word what the Sage said. Instead, she had to accustom herself to Bhagavan's teaching style which involved considerable periods of silence. Most of what he communicated, he did so without words and, paradoxically, this gave her even more to note down and reflect on. She thus had to understand what he more than once stated emphatically, that silence was the greatest of all languages. Summing up Bhagavan's position, she wrote:

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<sup>5</sup> *Travel Narratives of Ella Maillart*, Sara Steinert Borella, New York, Peter Lang, 2006, p.117.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Sage's Activity in Inactivity', Ella Maillart, *Golden Jubilee*, Sri Ramana-sramam, 3rd edition, 1995, p. 264.

*Does preaching consist in mounting a platform and haranguing the people around? Preaching is simple communication of knowledge: it can really be done in silence only. What do you think of a man who listens to a sermon for an hour and goes away without having been impressed by it so as to change his life? Compare him with another who sits in a holy presence and goes away after some time with his outlook of life totally changed. Which is the better? To preach loudly without effect or to sit silently sending out Inner Force? Again, how does speech arise? There is abstract knowledge, whence arises the Ego, which in turn gives rise to thought, and the thoughts to words. So the word is the great-grandson of the original source. If the word can produce effects, judge for yourself how much more powerful must be preaching through Silence.<sup>7</sup>*

### **Questions and Answers**

Though naturally disposed to silence, Bhagavan was not attached to it, being unburdened in every way and making free use of language, even humour, when the occasion called for it.

Describing an encounter in the Hill between her American friend Guy Hague and the Maharshi concerning Arunachala, Ella recorded Bhagavan's subtle insight about the mysterious mountain which had become her home:

*Siva lives in the Hill and Bhagavan is Siva. In the Puranas they say that the Vedas are chanted inside it. Bhagavan says that [on Arunachala,] trees can speak to grass; stones speak to stones. Everything is similarly alive, animated. One day, Hague, a metallurgical engineer, said to Bhagavan, "I know the secret of your Hill. There is magnetic iron in the middle." "Yes," Bhagavan said, "and it drew you here all the way from America!"<sup>8</sup>*

On another day, the sub-registrar Narayana Iyer asked why he was so lucky to be at Bhagavan's feet, having done nothing of the religious practices recommended in the literature. Bhagavan said: "Your past is so rich of lives that in some of them you did what was necessary to bring you here."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. <sup>9</sup> Ibid.

In time, Ella mustered the courage to acknowledge her confusion, such as when Bhagavan had repeated his classical admonition in response to a question in the Hall:

*Bhagavan: Enquire what is the mind, who it is who has a thought, to whom the thought occurs, get to the root of it, eliminate all thoughts until you merge into It and realise that thoughts belong to the conditioned world—of space, time and causality—and don't really matter. If you can't keep to the 'I'-thought, then use a mantra.*

*Questioner: But it becomes automatic noise.*

*Bhagavan: Practice again and again. All [sadhana]s are nothing but a study in concentration. You must reduce your higher mind to silence by merging it into It. Some sadhaks are more advanced and can understand different things. A man might come and ask: "Where is God?" If I see that his soul is ripe enough, I say: "You are God." And that is enough to give him realisation.*

*Ella: It means Bhagavan can see how ripe we are?*

*Bhagavan: For me, every soul is ripe. You are in bliss; we are all in bliss. You think you are in this Ashram, in Tiruvannamalai. You think you are this body. [But] this is [delusion]. You are free all the [while].*

Ella reflects on this exchange and comments:

*I had read such words; but to hear and see them pronounced by these true eyes, by these [grinning] lips, gave them such power that one [begins to] live their truth. Hence, the [common conviction] that oral teaching is necessary [for transmitting wisdom].<sup>10</sup>*

On another day, Ella asks:

*Tell us, Bhagavan, now that you have reached self-realisation, how do you see the world and us? Bhagavan said: "All of the unrealised beings are like the shadows moving on the screen. The only reality is the screen. The more darkness there is, the more the moving shades appear real. For me, there is no darkness."<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



### **Diving Deeper**

After gaining experience through sadhana and the discussions in the Hall, Ella began her own inner inquiry as prompted by Bhagavan. She reflected on God as the deathless, the formless, that which IS-NOT in respect of formal attributes. God is like space, she surmised, and the human form is strangely also like space. We say the human form, like all forms, occupies space, but might the human person just be space? In other words, instead of being a body in space, might I be space with a body in it? These were the kind of metaphysical ruminations that occupied her in the strange world of Bhagavan's advaita.

Thus in Bhagavan's presence, she found the deathless. The body that had always been her identity turned out to be just one aspect of her being. She began to see that she was also non-being—space, the formless and that which does not die. She understood God as beyond any image we might hold of Him.

Her questioning intensified as she began to grasp the subtler dimensions of his teaching. She had as an ally Munagala Venkataramiah, the compiler and editor of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, a devotee

who had trained in science, philosophy and Vedanta and who, to boot, was gifted with the knowledge of several languages.

Venkataramiah asked Bhagavan if the nature of the 'I-thought' is darkness or light, i.e. ego or the Self:

*Bhagavan: Though it is a veiling of consciousness that the 'I-thought' exists, nonetheless its nature is Light, reflected light. Now that reflected light—and to be reflected, it has to meet a surface—forgets its origin, thinks itself autonomous and then thinks that the objects it illumines—and creates—are also autonomous. So the world of subject-object is created.*

*Ella: But where does that surface come from?*

*Bhagavan: Who is it who is there to ask?*

*Ella: [I get your point] but my question is what does the Sage mean by the word 'surface'?*

*Bhagavan: When you reach the source of the 'I-thought', you come to that surface, and then only do you [see] that it doesn't [actually] exist: all is light; there can be no more darkness in which a reflected light can appear.*

*Ella: Then that surface is like a witness but when [reached], it vanishes?*

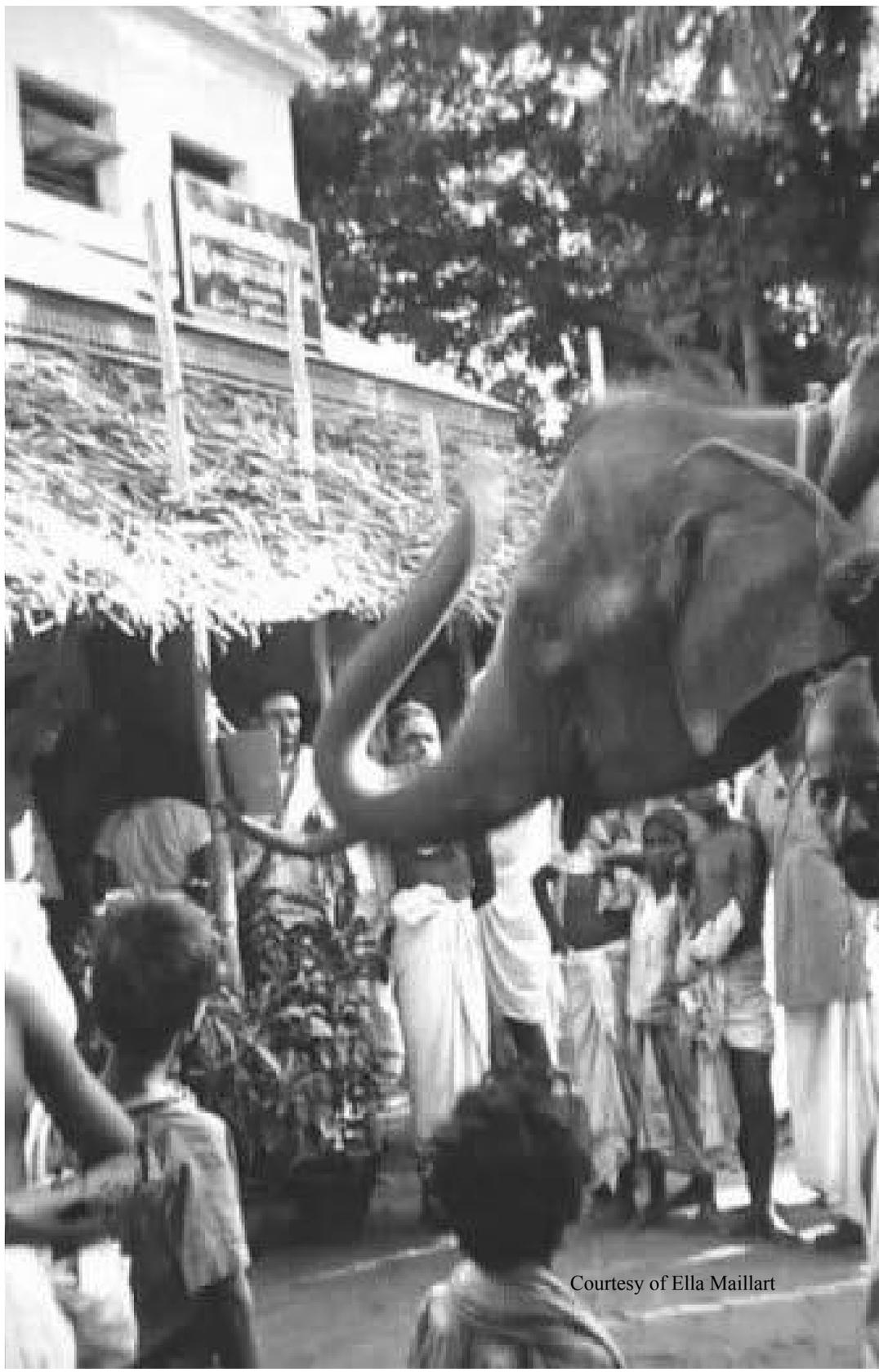
*Bhagavan: Yes, look at yourself in a mirror without pause: when you come so near your image as to identify yourself with the image, there is no more mirror. Now, when there is only light, there can be no more seeing. All is Being.*

Ella comments on the exchange:

*Venkataramiah's eyes were popping out [of his head], amazed by Bhagavan's kindness. Bhagavan's teaching exposed essence and [stood as a] perfect refutation of all other systems. Like a passenger in a steamer who thinks he is in [a single] place until he reaches [his] destination, Bhagavan's presence is an immense help to look inward: "When you wake up do you bother about the pain of your dream companions? It would be foolish. You woke from the dream to see there is no dream but only Reality."<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Compare with the recording by S.S. Cohen of the same dialogue in *Guru Ramana*, p. 62: "Professor M. Venkataramiah asked whether the light which gives the 'I'-sense identity and knowledge (of the world) is ignorance or *chit* (Pure Consciousness). Sri Bhagavan replied: "It is only the reflected light of



Courtesy of Ella Maillart

### Internal Darshan

As Bhagavan's teaching came to life, Elle began to internalise his voice and to take up what could only be called an intimate internal dialogue, intuiting with astounding insight Bhagavan's likely answers to her ceaseless questioning:

*I hear the next question: "Is this life to be considered an enjoyment or penance?" (That's an easy one!). "What is joy and penance? It is the same thing. There is joy in penance and penance in joy. Anyhow, what you mention is not real joy. You have it only in the Absolute."*<sup>13</sup>

She continues, ever attentive to what Bhagavan's response would be:

*What is yoga? "Even the effort towards yoga is yoga." It is foolish to say that Bhagavan concentrates (when correcting the proofs, for example,) because he is never diffuse; he has attained 'one-pointedness' of the mind. Therefore, he is perpetually in the utmost, master of his faculties.*<sup>14</sup>

A phenomenon many devotees testified to, she found she need only think a question and the reply would arise within:

*I hesitate to ask Bhagavan: You have freed yourself from causality. How is it you work [so many changes in] us, are still related to our conditioned world? The answer: The sun is [and works in the] places exposed to his rays. Though the sun belongs*

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*chit* that makes the 'I' believe itself different from others and create the objects. For reflection there must be a surface on which the reflection takes place." Ella Maillart asks Bhagavan: "What is that surface?" Bhagavan: "On realisation of the Self you will find that the reflection and the surface on which it takes place do not actually exist, but that both of them are one and the same *chit*. There is the world, which requires location for its existence and light to make it perceptible. Both rise simultaneously. Therefore, physical existence and perception depend upon the light of the mind which is reflected from the Self. Just as cinematographic pictures can be made visible by a reflected light, and only in darkness, so also the world pictures are perceptible only by the light of the Self reflected in the darkness of *avidya* (ignorance). The world can be seen neither in the utter darkness of ignorance, as in deep sleep, nor in the utter light of the Self, as in Self-realisation or *samadhi*."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

*to manifestation like us, Bhagavan is beyond...There are not two worlds. I am sobbing, have been shaken much by the glowing simplicity of [his] realisation.*<sup>15</sup>

Her silent reflections in the Hall doubled as prayers directed toward Sri Ramana who, it would seem, did not leave her petitions unanswered, but by the grace of his all-pervading silence, granted the requisite understanding, as the following entry indicates:

*I can only pray towards a Divine power which is searching for me... Bhagavan must give me the answer. Between "I dig, I dig until I meet the inner Sun which will consume my 'I'" [on the one hand,] and, [on the other,] "I surrender totally so that you can work in me", [there] is a big difference. The answer springing up in me nearly at once, is this: Surrender is necessary at first to make the inner earth-light willing to be penetrated... Abolish the outside world, look into the heart where the root of the 'I' is, this 'I' which is the residue (or beginning) of all thoughts. The more one [looks] inside, the more thoughts will vanish. Somewhere hidden in me there is a light shining continually. It is [up to] me to reach it. ... God is everywhere. Like the sun, we can see it or remain shut in; it is then our loss; the sun won't alter [his] ways. But if I get calm, I can realise [his] beauty and power; I can let [him] shine in me, enkindle my inner sun ...*<sup>16</sup>

She concludes her narrative saying, "These clear ideas don't belong to me [but] come down from above."<sup>17</sup> She closes with a petition that immediately receives Bhagavan's answer:

*Make light in me, open the shutters, make not only the mind-consciousness broaden, but the soul's too. Send your rays [down] to me so that they [illumine] me! Bhagavan [responds by indicating] that he [continually] sees in all of us the luminous Self. Thus, how could he [hope to] send rays to illumine [us]? [We] just need to see in [ourselves] what he sees in us. How simple!*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

She follows up an inner exchange between them, assimilating and seeking to extract its full worth:

*Yesterday I 'told' Bhagavan that I could do no more, that I had come so far, as far as his presence, and all the rest seemed unwanted darkness. Alone I can do nothing; with you, God can do everything. No, how wrong. I must first disappear, surrender absolutely, then you can do everything through me, if you want.*<sup>19</sup>

In Bhagavan's presence, Ella quietly admonishes herself, putting the teaching into practice:

*Make the surrender complete. Not to think that I do it to be free of worries—that is a selfish aim. I surrender because I don't exist, and I recognise [that]. There is something more real than this world and it is here with me all the time. I go to the 'Knower of the Field', the great one at the feet of whom all thought and action [is dispensed with]. As to the Knower of the Field, I have an appointment with him; and not with the mind [full of thoughts]; these shall be [discarded,] so that I [may] be alone with Him and drown in Him... What a silent teaching. The Self is without desire. Nothing else but this conquest of the Self matters.*<sup>20</sup> ▲

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

## His Longing Feet

Suresh Kailash

Shadows covering the sun,  
won't you move for me,

Clouds hiding the sky,  
won't you leave and reveal,

My love who waits patiently,  
my Ramana, his longing feet.

# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## Chapter Thirteen

### Kamal, Son of Kabir, Sets Out on a Pilgrimage

#### Part Two

NABAJI SIDDHA

**H**e kindled the zeal and curiosity of scholars, “O learned men! You are so wrapped up in theological wrangles! Do you ever enquire into the mysteries of life and death – what is the nature of *jīva*, the individual soul and who created it? From where it comes and where it goes? How did the *jīva* get into the body-mind complex and into bondage? By what means, it is freed from this bondage? What is salvation, is it of the present or distant future, is it of this world or of other realms like Vaikunta, Kailas? What is hell, what is heaven? What is meant by the birth and death of a *jīva*? Is *jīva* the body? Is the soul individualistic? Can we cut the space and fragment it? Won’t this futile attempt at separativeness, bring about despair in life?

Know that birth is bondage and birthlessness is liberation. Even at the time of great deluge, *jīva-s* do not attain liberation, unless the ‘I’ is annihilated and sense of individuality or separateness is broken. With the flight of the phantom of ‘I’ sense, *māyā* is transcended, one is united with the Absolute. When the sun rises, darkness flees. Likewise, with the exposure of ego i.e. ‘I’ness, ignorance is destroyed. When the

veil is removed, the eye of Knowledge opens to the divine vision of Unitiveness. Once the radiant, sublime vision takes over, can darkness of ignorance stand before it?

Maya is very powerful. The Lord himself seems, at times, to be captivated by it! The omniscient Lord Rama was unable to distinguish between Vali and Sugriva! The Almighty, Lord Siva enamoured by the beauty of Mohini pursued her! It is no wonder then that ordinary people forget their real *svarūpa* as Brahman, when victimised by the sense of I and you and enslaved by the demands of perishable body and senses! If one does ego-driven penance even for four Yugas, it cannot match a few minutes of abidance in true Silence. While the former bloats the ego, the latter effaces it.

“Trapped in attachment and desires one can do japa only in waking and dream states, not in deep sleep. Only the majestic swans passing through the three states unattached can do ajapa-japa and not those tossed by worldly desires and fickle mind. He who is deluded by body consciousness, indulging in sense enjoyments and harming other lives to nourish his perishable body, cannot escape the jaws of death. Leading such lives, they become forgetful of their sublime nature.

“The mind goaded by endless desires cannot be stilled by external karmas or rituals of holy bath, ceremonial worship etc. Detached action, righteousness and compassion rank higher than external karmas. But the highest is a mysterious path. The knot of ego can be undone only through subtle means. The Brahman is pure bliss. There is nothing other than Brahman. Brahman alone is.”

Thus, censuring dogmas and sects founded on hypocrisy and rituals practised in ignorance and quelling the doubts of scholars, Kamal drove home the truth of transient life on earth and exhorted them to obtain the blessings of saints. The splendour of Kamal’s glory shone like bright sun. Just as Hanuman upheld the fame of Rama in a foreign land in Ravana’s court or Prahlada extolled the glory of Hari to the demon Hiranyakasipu, the young crusader walked the length and breadth of alien lands spreading the fame and greatness of Kabir in all quarters.

Reaching the far off lands of pseudo-religions, Kamal thundered forth, “God can hear even the footfall of an ant. Then, why do you bawl out from temple towers and minarets? He is present everywhere. Why do you confine Him to Vaikunta or seventh heaven?”

“On the one hand, you talk about the actionless Absolute; on the other, you engage in endless action. You cannot realise the Absolute through ritualistic karmas without stilling the mind or dwelling in inner silence. You are immersed only in talking of the Formless. Your vain debates unmatched by dispassion, will lead you nowhere. Is salvation such an easy thing that mere words can become the passage to those lofty heights?

“By limiting one’s prayers, prostrations and recitation to a fixed number of times or specific days or facing only the west or east, are you not denying the omnipresence of God? Doesn’t He exist in the north and south as well as in the east and west?

“How did the nameless, formless, attributeless God convey the Word? Can words emanate without tongue, tongue without form? O non-believers, the name and form remain unmanifest in the Absolute. The *jñāni*-s, withdrawing their senses like tortoise and dwelling in silence, remain rapt in internal bliss and speak from their direct perception of Truth. If you listen without conceit, your stride towards Truth will be without pitfalls.

“A proud king, deluded by an illusory deer, chased it into the deep forest in enemy territory. Fatigued by the vain pursuit, he was resting in the shade. Mistaking him for a robber, the enemy soldiers imprisoned him. His limbs were severed as a punishment and he was banished to the forest. The king, subject to such a humiliation and violence, wandered in the forest shorn of all his pride and haughtiness. Such abject submission drew the grace of God and his lost limbs grew back. Narrow-mindedness breeds fanaticism and leads to downfall. You have been beguiled into partial truth, which shuts out sublime vision of the Whole.

“You are misled on the point of harmlessness also. It is a two-faced act to glorify God as the merciful and in the same breath, cut the throat of innocent animals as offering to God. You contend that God has created the lower forms of life for your enjoyment. Then when animals prey on man, should we take it that man is created for their enjoyment? As long as violence is practised, salvation is a far cry. A lifetime of rigorous penance is reduced to dust even by a single killing.” ▲

*(to be continued)*



# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

*The Biography of Sivaprakasa Swamigal concluded.*

On one occasion, whilst on his way to Kanchipuram in the company of Annamalai Reddiyar, Sivaprakasa met up with Santhalinga Swamigal who was mentioned earlier. Sivaprakasa greeted him warmly and asked what his purpose was in leaving his home in Porur. He replied that he was on his way to pay homage to Siva ñana Balaya Swamigal in his math at Bommapuram. Sivaprakasa decided to accompany him and the two continued their journey together. In the course of their journey, Santhalinga Swami requested that, since both desired to have the darshan of Siva ñana Balaya Swamigal, Sivaprakasa might compose some occasional verses in praise of him. Sivaprakasa refused, retorting, *nām narar stuti paṇṇukiṇradē-y-illai – I do not sing the praises of men.* However, that night Lord Murugan, seated on his peacock mount, appeared to Sivaprakasa in a dream. Placing some loose flowers in a dish, he said, ‘You should weave these into a garland and adorn me with them,’ and disappeared from view.

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*. A translation of the biography of Māṇikavācakar is now available at the ashram bookshop. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

The next day, when he related the dream to Santhalinga, Santhalinga suggested that, since Siva ñana Balaya Swamigal possessed such a deep devotion to Lord Murugan,<sup>a</sup> this was simply the God's way of pointing out his worthiness. Accordingly Sivaprakasa relented and composed two hymns in praise of him, a *tālāṭṭu* and a *neñcu vidu tūdu*. The two duly appeared before Siva ñana Balaya Swamigal, who imparted *jñāna upadeśa* to them and requested Sivaprakasa to give his sister Gnanambikai in marriage to Santhalinga,<sup>b</sup> a request with which Sivaprakasa complied. Sivaprakasa remained there for some time, having instructed Annamalai Reddiyar to return to Turaimangalam.

Some time later Sivaprakasa took his leave and made his way to Kanchipuram. There he composed *Prabhulinga Leelai*, a translation of a Kannada work that chronicles the life and deeds of Allama Prabhu, a 12th century Virasaiva saint and teacher. He also made translations of two other Kannada works, under the names of *Vēdānta Cūḍāmaṇi* and *Siddhānta Cigāmaṇi*. He continued to travel widely, composing works as he went. Amongst these is a refutation of the Christian religion, *ēcumada nirākaraṇam*, composed in response to an attack by the celebrated Tamil scholar, Father Joseph Beschi, an Italian Jesuit priest and missionary who later adopted the Tamil name of Vīramāmuniyar. Only three verses of this work remain extant.

<sup>a</sup> The biography of Sivaprakasa includes the rather long and convoluted story of how Śiva ñana Balaya Swamigal, or desikar, as some versions have it, came to have such a deep connection with Lord Murugan. He was, as the story goes, one of the leaders of Lord Śiva's heavenly cohorts on Mount Kailash, called Caṅkukannaṅṅa, but as a result of a misdemeanour was cursed by Śiva to be born on earth as a man. When he begged to know when the curse might be lifted, Śiva replied that he should remain on earth, teaching the Vedas and Śiva Āgamas and reviving the Saivite faith until such time as he encountered his son, Subramanya, and fought with him. At that time the curse would be lifted and he would after some further time attain oneness with himself. Accordingly, Caṅkukannaṅṅa was born on earth as a boy *siddha*, Bālasiddha. Eventually events transpired as Śiva predicted. Bālasiddha's curse was lifted and Śiva decreed that he should dwell with his son Subramanya on the mountain of Mayūrācala for a further 500 years before attaining oneness with Himself. Sivaprakasa's appearance comes near the end of the prescribed 500 year period, during which time Bālasiddha had travelled widely preaching the Saivite creed and acquiring in the process the name Śiva ñana Balaya Swamigal.

<sup>b</sup> Santhalinga subsequently abandoned the world completely and sent his wife to live with her brother.

Sivaprakasa died at the age of 32, according to some accounts, shortly after hearing of the demise of his guru in Bommapuram, whose 500 year sojourn upon the earth had reached its end.

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Except for those who daily  
grant the body food<sup>1</sup>  
only that it may offer *puja*  
and perform holy service  
to You and to the sapphire Maid,<sup>2</sup>  
will the vanquishing of Death  
be easy to attain?

Your glory's such that when Vishnu,  
many *yojanas* away,  
bows down before Mount Kailash,  
his homage there to pay,  
it's as if a heap of pure white rice  
were being offered up by him to you,<sup>3</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(55)

As I flounder in the sea  
of ever arising births,  
buffeted by waves  
of disease and misery,  
may you now vouchsafe  
to me your holy feet

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<sup>1</sup> The idea is that the body's sole purpose is to carry out service to Lord Śiva and his consort Umā and that the food we provide for the body should therefore be regarded simply as *kūli* – *daily wages* paid to that body for performing that service.

<sup>2</sup> *nīli* – *The Sapphire Maid* is a personal noun formed from the word *nīlam* – *blue, black-blue, purple, indigo, sapphire*. It refers to Umā-Parvatī as having that body colour, as in her ferocious aspect as Dūrgā-Kālī.

<sup>3</sup> The poet imagines that Sōṇasailaṅ is so massive that when Viṣṇu pays homage to snow-capped Mount Kailash, that mountain appears no greater than a small heap of white rice that Viṣṇu is offering up to Sōṇasailaṅ.

MOUNTAIN PATH

with ringing anklets girt,  
and bring me to [your farther] shore,  
before the crocodile of Death  
comes to swallow me.

Unlike some ordinary lamp,  
men praise you as the Light  
that, when we speak your name,  
be it just one single time,  
removes all darkness from the mind,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(56)

Tell me [Lord],  
though they dwell in caves,  
for food and drink  
take water and leaves,  
walk on their hands,  
feet in the air,  
for those who your true state  
do not know,  
will birth[']s thralldom] rare  
ever cease and go?

Upon your lofty crest  
the full moon comes to rest,  
as if he doth adorn you  
with a garland [woven]  
of jasmine blossoms  
from Indra's [heavenly] grove,<sup>4</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(57)

Should it upon my body fall,  
the dust stirred up

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<sup>4</sup> The heaven of Lord Indra, the king of the gods, is described as having heavenly gardens planted with luxuriant trees which have delicious fruits.

by noble feet of those  
 who piously around you walk,  
 with faces like flowers opened up  
 and hands closed together [like a bud],  
 my births too  
 will become mere dust.<sup>5</sup>

The Lord of Pugali<sup>6</sup>  
 with flowering groves  
 toured holy sites  
 in all the landscapes four.<sup>7</sup>  
 Yet all the hymns  
 with which he them adorned  
 are naught but homages to Thee,<sup>8</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (58)  
 Worse than any beast  
 that in the forest roams,

<sup>5</sup> Both the Tamil *Aruṇācala Purāṇam* and the Sanskrit *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam* extol the auspicious effects of the dust from the feet of those who have performed *pradakshina* of the holy mountain:

If the wind should carry a single speck of dust from the feet of those who have performed *pradakshina* of the Fire Mountain into any place, be it vile as hell itself, that place will attain the purity of Mount Kailash. Or, if a speck of dust from their feet should fall onto the body of any man, death will end for him, and close pursuing birth will disappear. How might I express in words the greatness of those who have performed *pradakshina*? — *Aruṇācala Purāṇam* v. 563.  
*asya pādarajaḥsparśāt pūyate sakalā mahī, padam ekaṁ tu dhatte yaḥ śoṇādrīśa pradakṣiṇe.*

The entire earth will be blessed by contact with the dust of the feet of one who takes but a single step in pradakṣiṇa of Śoṇādrī.

— *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam Pūrvārdha*, Ch. 9, sl. 35.

<sup>6</sup> *The Lord of Pugali* – *pugalikku iraiyaṅ* is Jñānasambandhar. See the note to v. 26 in Part Two.

<sup>7</sup> *nāl nilam* – *the four [kinds of] land* are the four kinds of landscape which feature in the Agam love poetry of the Sangam era, each having its own emotional properties, flora and fauna, artefacts, gods and so on. They are *kuriñci tiṇai* – *hilly tracts*, *mullai tiṇai* – *woodland and pasture*, *marudam tiṇai* – *cultivated land* and *neydal tiṇai* – *the lands by the seashore*.

<sup>8</sup> The text says *padigam doruṁ pugaḷ* – *praise[d] in every padigam*. A padigam is

I did not learn the things I ought;  
the senses' objects ruled my thoughts.  
No shame before the wise I showed.  
When, alas, shall I salvation know?

You who rise on high,  
a refuge to afford  
for those that gentle breeze afflicts  
that wafts from Podiyam's<sup>9</sup> lofty peak,  
which towers up the skies to reach,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(59)

The rule that says, 'Make haste  
to keenly follow virtue's path  
and so be saved!'  
I regarded with distaste,  
like an elephant fine and tall  
who rejects the balls  
of rice his keeper gave  
and uproots bamboo in a rage.<sup>10</sup>  
For such as me what end  
to births can ever be?  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where gathering storm clouds

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a poem consisting generally of ten verses, although Jñānasambandhar's *padigams* contain eleven, the final one being a *tiru-k-kaḍai-k-kāppu*. In Saiva tradition this mentions the benefits one would get from reciting the verses. The idea is that Sōṇasailan, in his true nature as the pure consciousness of the Self, free of all attributes, subsumes within himself all other representations of himself that are installed in the temples of the many *sthalas* visited by the saint.

<sup>9</sup> Mount Podiyam, is the abode of the sage Agastya, founder of the Tamil tongue. See v. 26, note 17 in Part Two. The wind referred to is *teṇ[d]ral*, the gentle southern breeze, which awakes passion in lovers and so on.

<sup>10</sup> *kaḷi cuḷi yāṇai* literally *an elephant [which] gets angry at bamboo*. Elephants in must are unpredictable and often violent. Here the image is of such an elephant capriciously refusing the tasty food offered and rushing off in a rage into the jungle to tear up and eat bamboo.

rise on high  
 like palls of smoke  
 that mask the skies,  
 your fiery form's truth  
 to proclaim aloud.<sup>11</sup> (60)

As music's fanfare resonates  
 by turns upon an elephant,  
 and then upon a palanquin  
 they ride about in high estate.  
 Yet even these [one day] as beggars  
 will to others wheedling praises give.  
 Thus I've learned that only those  
 who serve you truly live.

As if the jewel-shedding clouds<sup>12</sup>  
 crowned you  
 with a weighty ornamental arch,<sup>13</sup>  
 sparkling with the choicest gems  
 a curving rainbow spans you[r head],  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (61)

Of noble issue they may be,  
 excelling in all good qualities,  
 in countless learned works full versed,  
 and to fulfil pious vows ever keen,  
 but if for your band of devotees  
 no love they show,  
 salvation they shall never know.

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<sup>11</sup> After first appearing as an unfathomable column or mass of fire, Aruṅācala remained in that form for an entire *yuga*, before becoming pure gold, ruby and finally stone in successive *yuga*-s. See the note to v.27 in Part Two. Here the poet imagines that the dark storm clouds are mimicking a pall of smoke to remind people of the mountain's fiery origins.

<sup>12</sup> *maṇi mēgam* – jewel [shedding] clouds, also known as *camvarttam*, Skt. *saṁvarta*, one of seven types of cloud under the control of Indra, each shedding a different substance.

<sup>13</sup> *vācīgai, tiruvācīgai* – an ornamental arch placed over an idol.

You who lend your might[y chest]  
 to bear up the perfumed  
 mountain [breast]s  
 that sit above the tiny waist  
 of the Maiden clad in jewels bright  
 whom the Himalaya sired<sup>14</sup> and raised,<sup>15</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (62)

When I, poor wretch, at your feet  
 a refuge sought,  
 to the darkness that my heart obscures  
 this solemn oath I swore,  
 'With Unnamulai's Lord as my aid  
 I'll drive you out this very day!'  
 In grace,  
 let this promise be not betrayed.

when a doomed [white] yak<sup>16</sup>  
 goes tumbling down your side  
 as a [great] black cloud

<sup>14</sup> *imayam īṅṅru eḍutta kaṅṅi* – the maiden whom the Himalaya mountains sired and raised is Śiva's consort, Parvatī. When referred to in their personified form, as Parvatī's father, the Himalaya mountains take the name Himavat.

<sup>15</sup> The latter part of the verse may be an indirect reference to the incident alluded to in v. 50 and note, in which Śiva's chest softened to take on the imprint of Parvatī's nipples and bangles. Here it seems that his chest becomes even stronger to support the weight of her breasts, which her tiny waist is scarcely able to support. From some angles, Ādi Aṅṅamalai temple, for example, the peak of the mountain is seen to sweep down gracefully to a second lower, smaller peak, which might be taken to represent Parvatī, a view which suggests that Sōṅasailaṅ has his arm around her, tenderly supporting her.

<sup>16</sup> *vīḍu uṅṅum kavari* – a yak which perishes. The verb *vīḍu* means *to perish, be destroyed*. The yak would not normally be found outside the Himalayan region. Domestic yaks can be white but not wild ones. The poet paints the picture of a white yak losing its footing on the mountain and falling at the same time as a black cloud sails upward towards the summit, an image which suggests the idea that Brahmā and Viṣṇu, having failed to locate, respectively, the head and foot of Lord Śiva and, perhaps in desperation at their failed attempts, are each now adopting the opposite strategy and seeking the foot and head instead.

sails up into the sky,  
 it seems the swan and boar [of yore]  
 have reversed their former roles  
 and now  
 seek instead your feet and crown,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (63)

Will this love for maidens  
 with waists vanishingly<sup>17</sup> svelte  
 [ever] by the lotus flowers  
 of your holy feet be felt,  
 and will this fondness  
 for the fragrant paste,<sup>18</sup>  
 upon their form applied,  
 [one day] upon the white  
 of holy ash be placed?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 where parrots green in flocks  
 alight on fields of millet  
 ready for the scythe,  
 and as the young girls chase them off  
 rise swirling in the skies  
 like toranam festoons<sup>19</sup> [strung across  
 your holy mountainside]. (64)  
 My heart learned not to melt,  
 like ghee set on a flame.

<sup>17</sup> *aiya nuṅ maruṅgaḷ* – literally, [with] slender, doubt [inducing] waists. Highly fanciful references to the slenderness of women's waists are frequent in Tamil poetry. Here the waists are imagined to be so slender that the observer cannot be certain whether there even is one. Compare for example the *Tiruvilaiyāḍal Purāṇam*, ch. 60, v.2, in which the women are referred to as *maruṅgu ilādavar*; literally *those [maidens] without any waist*: *maruṅgu ilādavar vandu edir maṅgalam ēnda* – with *[maidens] without waists coming forth, proffering the [eight] auspicious items*.

<sup>18</sup> *kalavai* – *mixture* here stands for *kalavai-c-cantaṇam*, 'Sandal paste prepared with the addition of many aromatic substances,' (Tamil Lexicon).

<sup>19</sup> *tōraṇam* are 'Festoons of leaves and flowers suspended across streets and entrances

## MOUNTAIN PATH

With water and choice blossoms  
my hands no puja made.  
What recourse, pray tell,  
for me now remains?

Other mountains remedies  
for sundry painful ills afford,  
but these you put to shame, [we find]  
rising as the cure for birth  
for those who hold you in their mind,<sup>20</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(65)

*(to be continued)*

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on auspicious occasions,<sup>2</sup> (Tamil Lexicon). The poet paints an arresting image of the flocks of parrots rising up in swirling, bright green columns, resembling the plaited leaves of ceremonial festoons.

<sup>20</sup> *uṭkoḷvōr (uḷ koḷvōr) – those who hold [you] within or in their minds. uḷ can mean inside, that which is within or heart, mind, soul etc., as the inner aspect of man. The verb uṭkoḷ as a compound verb (uḷ + koḷ) means to take into the body, to eat. Hence there is a neat play on words with the sense those who consume the medicine of your grace, which consists of meditating upon you in the heart.*

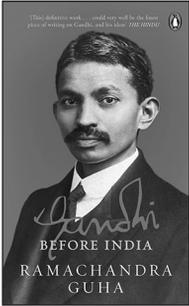
## The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

*Purvajaa*, first-born,  
in whose ancestral heart  
the first wish glinted,  
from which fervent sky tumbled,  
and we, into dark and light.

The poems are loosely based on the Japanese tanka form of five lines. A tanka is a haiku with two extra seven-syllabled lines. The lines have 5/7/5/7/7 syllables, in that order.

# BOOK REVIEWS



GANDHI BEFORE INDIA by Ramachandra Guha. Penguin Books, India. 2013. (SB) pp.673, Rs.599. ISBN: 978-0-143-42341-6.

GANDHI THE YEARS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD 1914-1948 by Ramachandra Guha. Penguin Allen Lane Imprint of Penguin Random House. 2018. (HB) pp.1129, Rs.999. ISBN: 978-0-670-08388-6.

It has been 71 years since the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and in the interim innumerable books and articles have been written. His influence on the political landscape of the world today is subtle but unquestioned. We have in fact heard so much about Gandhiji that we have lost track of the man and his ideas in the forest of words. In some ways, he has been reduced to series of clichés for the man himself and his unceasing evolution of ideas and practices is simply stupendous and cannot be reduced to banal sound bites. Here was a man who never stopped in his pursuit of what he believed was right. As a baby he was described as being “restless like mercury” because of his immense reserves of vitality. During his trip to London in 1905 to represent the Indian born domiciles in Natal and Transvaal he used as many as 5,000 penny stamps in two months to various functionaries in the British government espousing the cause. Even the some 100 volumes of his *Collected Works* are incomplete as new letters and papers are unearthed round the world.

We have entered a new phase in the status of Gandhiji in India. From uncritical adulation there has been a creeping reassessment of his place in the Independence movement especially in respect to his perceived responsibility for the Partition. Shockingly there are those who openly declare that his assassin Nathuram Godse is a patriot. From unquestioned saint and liberator, he has assumed in the eyes of some the role of a crank and sly self-promoter whose backward views on progress are a hindrance to India’s economic development.

The author of these two books under discussion, Ramachandra Guha, has exhaustively researched Gandhiji’s life over a decade and

has given us a highly readable and informative set of books. We are neither drowned in an ocean of minutiae nor does he foist upon us skimpy summaries. He has the happy knack of giving us the kernel of events and arguments. At times one does feel the weight of facts in the *Gandhi Before India* but they are important to show the struggle and heroism of Gandhiji, the natural leader and his brave followers. It considerably helps most of us who are ignorant of Gandhiji's life in South Africa, in revealing how crucial the years there were in the formation of his philosophy, in the fields of politics, religious relations, self-improvement through diet and naturopathy, and social reform particularly in the upliftment of women. If it was not for the battles he fought and won in South Africa we would not have seen the profound influence he had on the independence movement in India. The author drew on more than sixty different archival collections round the world for the book on the struggle in India, and for the South African, unpublished letters of friends and original newspaper reports. Though it has been a labour of love the writing is easy and agreeable. Both books are a long read but nevertheless are effortlessly engaging.

Part of the challenge of writing about Gandhiji is the question which Gandhiji are we talking about? In Guha's Prologue to *Gandhi Before India*, he quotes Henry Polack, who was an early friend and close associate in the struggle for recognition of the disenfranchised. Polack identified seventeen identities that Gandhi embraced: "South Africa is the grave of many reputations. It has certainly been the birth-place of a few, and one such is that of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. *Diwan's* son, barrister, stretcher-bearer, pamphleteer, cultured thinker, courteous gentleman, manual labourer, nurse, teacher, agitator, propagandist, sterling friend, no man's enemy, ex-convict, *sadhu*, chosen leader of his people and arch passive-resister."

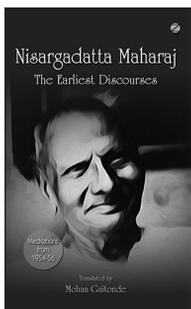
What struck me is how Gandhiji was continually underestimated by his opponents because his priorities were first and foremost his unquenchable quest for truth, *satya*. All followed from that overriding urgency and his, at times notorious flexibility, demonstrated this. Each day was new and its pressing problems were not always apparent to others. For example, Nehru and Patel would arrive at the Wardha ashram for an important meeting only to find Gandhiji first gave attention to the question of healing an inmate with naturopathy. We

are reminded of the well-known quote given by Guha: “I make no hobgoblin of consistency. If I am true to myself from moment to moment, I do not mind all the inconsistencies that may be flung in my face.” It would be a mistake to condemn Gandhiji because he does not conform to one image of who he was supposed to be or one policy in the pursuit of independence.

Gandhiji’s aim was not the accumulation of power nor for that matter, if truth be told, political independence, if it caused violence or corrupted individuals. Gandhiji’s basic question is what does it take to make a principled human being? All else follows from this fundamental idea.

Ramachandra Guha has woven a riveting, authentic story of the man, imperfections and all. He has admirably given us an inkling of how Gandhiji evolved from a seemingly unprepossessing youth from provincial Kathiawar to the giant that he became after a lifelong, incessant experiment with truth. I have now gone back to *Gandhi Before India* to read it again.

— Christopher Quilkey



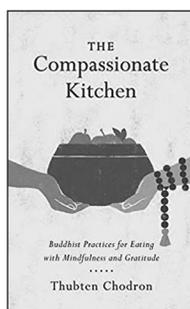
NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ THE EARLIEST DISCOURSES Meditations from 1954-56. Translated by Mohan Gaitonde. Zen Publications, Mumbai. 2019. pp.154, Rs.250. ISBN: 9-789387-242388. [www.zenpublications.com](http://www.zenpublications.com)

The English-speaking world first heard of Nisargadatta Maharaj with the release of the seminal *I Am That* edited by Maurice Frydman in 1973. However, Maharaj had been giving discourses from the early 1950s and was well known to the Marathi devotees from that time. The 45 recorded talks were given in the mid-50s. They contain important sentences and phrases rather than a complete transcription of the actual talks. There were some additions to incomplete sentences so that they made sense in the context. Nevertheless, they do give the flavour of Maharaj’s talks with their urgency as the transcriber was careful not to add his own interpretations. The talks were published in Marathi titled *Sadguru Nisargadatta Maharaj Yanchi Durmil Nirupane*. The translator, Mohan Gaitonde was responsible for translations of *Nothing is Everything* and *Self Love* published also by Zen Publications.

Nisargadatta Maharaj initially began his teaching career with explanations based on Eknath's *Bhagwat* and Swami Ramdas's *Dasbodh*, two classic Marathi spiritual texts. He then expanded the range of observations and included more of his own direct experiences of non-dual reality. All the familiar themes are there in nascent form: consciousness, the sense of I am, the unreality of the individual body and *jīva*. There is more emphasis on *bhakti* with references to Lord Krishna and in particular to the *Uddhava Gita*, his *paramaguru* Shri Bhausaheb Maharaj, his *sadhguru* Shri Siddharameswar Maharaj, and even the god Ganapati.

For those who are interested in Nisargadatta Maharaj this slim volume, though uneven at times because of the rough jumps in argument due to the limitations of the original transcription, is a must for their collection.

— T.V. Ramamurthy



THE COMPASSIONATE KITCHEN: BUDDHIST PRACTICES FOR EATING WITH MINDFULNESS AND GRATITUDE by Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron  
© 2018, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 4720 Walnut Street Boulder, CO 80301, [www.shambhala.com](http://www.shambhala.com), 137 pp.

Thubten Chodron, an American Buddhist nun of the residential monastic community of Sravasti Abbey in eastern Washington State, is the author of numerous books on Tibetan Buddhism, among them volumes she co-authored with the Dalai Lama (e.g. *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* and *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*).

The present short volume is born from a series of talks the author gave at the Abbey in May/June of 2016 (see <https://thubtenchodron.org/books/compassionate-kitchen>) and centres on eating as a spiritual practice, especially as performed in a traditional monastic setting.

While oriented to a Tibetan community, the text has applications beyond Buddhist monasticism, and offers useful suggestions for seekers and sadhaks from other traditions. Eating dharmically means not merely being mindful at table but expressing gratitude at each meal for all that went into making the meal possible — from the farmers

who worked the fields, to those who transported the food, to those involved in meal preparation.

Reciting verses before each meal is a means of consecrating the food and paying homage to universal forces at work in nature and humanity for the benefit of the receiver. Before taking food at Sravasti Abbey, among other things, a text from the great 3rd-century Indian Mahayana sage, Nagarjuna, is recited:

*By seeing this food as medicine, I will consume it without attachment or complaint, Not to increase my arrogance, strength, or good looks, But solely to sustain my life.*

Residents at Sravasti Abbey regularly express their gratitude to those who donate the provisions that sustain the community by reciting in the presence of their benefactors verses such as the following:

*Your generosity is inspiring, and we are humbled by your faith in the Three Jewels. We will endeavor to keep our precepts as best we can, to live simply, to cultivate equanimity, love, compassion, and joy, and to realise the ultimate nature so that we can repay your kindness in sustaining our lives. Although we are not perfect, we will do our best to be worthy of your offering. Together we will create peace in a chaotic world.*

The *Vinaya*, the Buddhist monastic rules and regulations, provides a framework for healthy eating: working with attachment to food, maintaining mindfulness while cooking, eating and cleaning up, avoiding the temptation to snack between meals and expressing gratitude.

Part of the community's gratitude practice regarding the food it receives is supporting the nourishment of all people everywhere, seeing nutritious food as a 'human right that is recognized', as the author points out, 'in the United Nations' 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 25) and affirmed in the 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (Article 11).' Thus, Sravasti Abbey's residents are enjoined not to waste food but to share what they have with others. Hence the community's surplus food is made available to the broader local community for distribution among the poor.

A guide for the spiritual seeker in everything related to the kitchen, Thubten Chodron's little book is convincing and engaging, and contains insights on teaching relevant for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

— Michael Highburger ▲

# ASHRAM BULLETIN

## **Vedapatasala**

The Ashram Vedapatasala has gone from strength to strength under the stellar stewardship of our Vedapatasala 'Adyapak' Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal, and is now recognised as a centre for Vedic education in Tamil Nadu. On the evening of the 28th July, Vedic students from around South India arrived at the Ashram to undergo three days of examinations (29th-31th) in *Rig Veda*, *Krishna Yajur Veda*, *Shukla Yajur Veda*, and *Sama Veda*. *Moolam*, *Kramam*, *Samhita*, *Padam* and *Ghanam* were among the examinations given. *Pariksha* is the ancient means for ensuring faithful transmission of the various Veda pathas across generations. Certificates affirm and authenticate a Vedic student's training and ability.

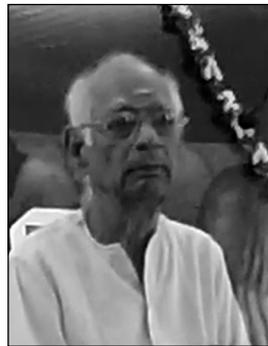
## **Advent**

It is the 123rd Anniversary of Bhagavan's Advent at Arunachala. It is a special day in our calendar for it was Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala that heralded the beginning of a new path, *atma vichara*. It was Bhagavan who made us all aware of the greatness of Arunachala. On the 1st September there was *Mahanyasam* and *Rudrabhishekam* for the Ramaneswara Mahalingam. There was a festive atmosphere in the ashram because each year some 60 to 80 devotees from Madurai arrive for two days to celebrate the occasion. On the 1st September, a Sunday, they chanted *Aksharamanamai* at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine from 5.30 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. and in the afternoon at Matrubhuteswara Temple. The next day again at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine from 5.30 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. They also chanted at the Arunachaleswara Temple, Skandashram and Virupaksha Cave. A feeling of a family celebration pervaded the ashram. At the Arunachalaeswara Temple, special *abhishekam* and *puja* were performed in the morning on behalf of the Ashram, as it was to his 'Father' young Ramana reported on arrival at Arunachala.

## **Obituaries**

**Sri Pingali Surya Sundaram** was born in Chennai on 17th October 1930. His father, Sri Pingali Lakshmi Kantham, a Telugu literary giant, was doing *Sundara Kanda Parayana* at the time. The boy was

therefore named Surya Sundaram. Educated in Guntur and Visakhapatnam, Sri Sundaram served in the Central Government, before retiring as the Deputy Accountant General in Hyderabad in 1988. It was during his service in Chennai that he became interested in the teachings of J. Krishnamurti and attended numerous lectures. He was transferred to Kolkata in 1984, and attended one last lecture. At its conclusion, J. Krishnamurti abruptly walked towards him and holding his shoulders, looked deeply into his eyes for a full minute. They were never to meet again.



In Kolkata, a neighbour gave him a picture of Sri Ramana Maharshi. He got it framed, and thus started his association. After retirement, he settled down in Hyderabad and wrote several works related to spirituality. It was also during this time that he sought out the Ramana Kendram in Hyderabad to further his knowledge of Bhagavan's teachings and made the acquaintance of Prof. K. Subrahmanian, whose book *Uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan* he translated into Telugu.

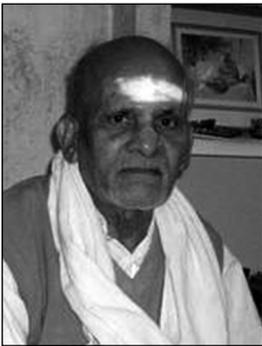
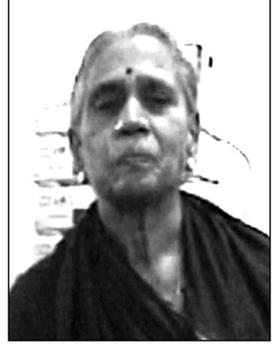
He first visited the Ashram in 1993 and was deeply drawn to Bhagavan and the Ashram during this trip. During several trips he categorised the Telugu works in the Ashram archives. His life became dedicated to Bhagavan, as he translated many books into Telugu, either about Bhagavan, or ones recommended by Him for reading by His devotees. Numerous health problems, including a serious heart ailment, did not deter him.

In 2002, he was awarded the Central Sahitya Akademi award for his Telugu translation *Atma Sakshatkaram*, a work on the life and teachings of Bhagavan based on the English *Self-Realisation* by B.V. Narasimha Swami.

Sri Sundaram merged in Arunachala on 25th May 2019 in Hyderabad. He is survived by his devoted wife, Prabhata Kumari, and two children.

**Smt. Dharmambal** of Tippirajapuram had the darshan of Sri Bhagavan when she was eight years old. Her father and all her relatives used to regularly visit the Ashram already from Bhagavan's

Virupaksha days. Her father Rama Iyer of Koneri Rajapuram and her father-in-law Krishnaswami contributed to the renovation of Pali Tirtham (adjoining the ashram) to facilitate water supply needs of the early days of Ramanasramam in the 1920s. Dharmambal had the rare opportunity of serving devotees of Bhagavan like Muruganar, Ramanatha Brahmachari and others when they came to visit her house in Tippirajapuram (near Kumbakonam). On April 14, 1950 at 8.47pm, Dharmambal and her mother-in-law saw a bright light shining forth from the family photo of Sri Bhagavan. Shortly after that they got the news that Sri Bhagavan had left the body. By such an experience they were convinced that Bhagavan was ever with them. Her husband Balasubramanyam too started visiting the Ashram from the age of eight (from 1934) and the entire family — sons, grandsons and great-grandsons — continue to visit the Ashram to this day. Dharmambal was absorbed in Bhagavan on 28th July 2019 at the age of 85. She is survived by her husband and three sons.



**Sri Siva Deenanathan** was absorbed at the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan on 1st August 2019 at the ripe old age of 93. Sri Deenanathan took refuge in the Thanjavur Ashram of Sri Janaky Matha in 1943 at the age of 17. Mathaji, having had spiritual enlightenment by the grace of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, founded the Ashram to support devotees to practise sadhana of Bhagavan's teaching. A school teacher by profession, Deenanathan remained a bachelor throughout his life and impressed his students with his purity, punctuality and dedication to the spiritual life. Many of his students who later went on to be active professionally, maintained contact with him to their spiritual benefit. Soaked in Guru-Bhakti, Deenanathan's devotion to Bhagavan was beyond the pale and set an example for others. He authored several acclaimed books, among them, *Ramana Virundhu* and *A Concise Commentary on Kaivalya Navaneetham*. ▲