

CONTENTS

DIVINE NAMES OF ARUNACHALA	2
EDITORIAL: MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MEDITATION	3
TAMIL SIDDHAS A BRIEF SURVEY P. Raja	9
POEM: TO FIND A CHILD Suresh Kailash	24
TRANQUILLITY Bharat M. Mehta	25
POEM: BY HEART Upahar	29
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION Sadhu Om	31
KEYWORD: <i>AVADHŪTA</i> PART THREE B.K. Croissant	37
POEM: HAPPILY BLIND Suresh Kailash	45
BOOK EXCERPT: SRI MAHASWAMI THE SAGE WITH EYES OF LIGHT Serge Demetrian	47
POEM: INTO MY HEART Alasdair Black	53
THE MAHARSHI AND THE MOTHER PART TWO Kays	55
FROM THE ARCHIVES: WANDERING THROUGH INDIA Thelma Rappold	61
SANKARA'S <i>ŚIVĀNANDALAHARĪ</i> I.S. Madugula	75
THE FREUDIAN PLAGUE Samuel B. Sotillos	83
BOOK EXCERPT: SHOWER OF GRACE Nisargadatta Maharaj	91
PURUSHA AND PRAKṚTI PART ONE M.R. Kodhandram	101
MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM: THE LORD SERVES NAMDEV AS A LABOURER Nabaji Siddha	107
VAIRAGYA CATAKAM Tavattiru Santhalinga Adigal	113
BOOK REVIEWS	119
ASHRAM BULLETIN	126

Divine Names of Arunachala

23. ॐ श्री स्मृतिसर्वाघनाशनाय नमः

Om śrī smartṛsarvāghanāśanāya namah

Prostration to Him who removes the impurities of those who remember him.

‘*Smartṛ*’ is one who remembers or recollects; ‘*sarvāgha*’ is all faults, misdeeds, sins, impurities; and ‘*nāśanāya*’ is derived from the root ‘*naś*’, to be destroyed, removed.

The operative word here is ‘remember’. Who remembers? Not Lord Arunachala but the seeker, the one who wants happiness always. The onus is on him. In *Who Am I?*, Sri Ramana Maharshi says, “God and the Guru will only show the way to release; they will not by themselves take the soul to the state of release. Just as the prey which has fallen into the jaws of a tiger has no escape, so those who have come within the ambit of the Guru’s gracious look will be saved by the Guru and will not get lost; yet, each one should by his own effort pursue the path shown by God or Guru and gain release.”¹ When Arthur Osborne’s daughter was returning to school, Bhagavan was asked to remember her. His response was, “If Kitty remembers Bhagavan, Bhagavan will remember Kitty.”²

Why remember Him? We have forgotten our natural state with no mind to obscure it. How do we remember Him so that the impurities get removed? By sinking the mind into the Heart and firmly abiding there with no other thought than Him.

“Giving one’s self up to God means remaining constantly in the Self without giving room for the rise of any thoughts other than that of the Self. As thoughts arise, destroying them utterly without any residue in the very place of their origin is non-attachment. Just as the pearl-diver ties a stone to his waist, sinks to the bottom of the sea and there takes the pearls, so each one of us should be endowed with non-attachment, dive within oneself and obtain the Self-Pearl.”³

— BKC

¹ *Who Am I?* Translated by Professor T.M.P. Mahadevan.

² Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p.108, 2002.

³ *Who Am I?* Translated by Professor T.M.P. Mahadevan.

Misconceptions about Meditation

A few months ago the BBC website published an article entitled *How Too Much Mindfulness Can Spike Anxiety*.¹ In the article the author-practitioner writes of his increasingly uncontrollable anxiety as a result of his practice. He does not mention the meditation technique but one may presume from his description that it is either Satipatthana or Vipassana Buddhist meditation. These ancient methods are both reliable and safe, and they are recommended for anyone wishing to start meditation practices in order to help calm a troubled mind and develop the power of attention.

The problem the practitioner has encountered after some time is that “Rather than relaxing, my heart would begin to accelerate, or my inner monologue would take a nasty turn, as unpleasant memories and feelings of failure and hopelessness flooded my mind. These events became so frequent that I now only use mindfulness occasionally.”

The article then goes on to describe the experience of others who felt “that they no longer feel extreme joy or happiness. In extreme cases, this can result in the unsettling sense of ‘disassociation’ from their life.”

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210202-how-mindfulness-can-blunt-your-feelings-and-spike-anxiety>

MOUNTAIN PATH

One authority quoted, an assistant professor in psychiatry and human behaviour at Brown University USA who stated that “Similar to attention-enhancing drugs like coffee, Ritalin and cocaine, meditation can increase focus and alertness,But when taken too far that can lead to anxiety, panic and insomnia, because there is both neuroanatomical and neurochemical overlap between attention and arousal systems in the brain. You can only crank up your attention dial so far before you start feeling anxious or stop sleeping.”

It is clear from these statements that there is a genuine problem here for some people and this editorial tries to address it.

All the various traditional schools of yoga are safe if practised according to the guidelines set in place. The question is what school of yoga is right for a specific individual. To give an extended metaphor: In athletics there are all types of games and competitions. The muscles required by a 100 metre sprinter are different from those who run a marathon. A swimmer does not have the same muscle composition as a track and field athlete.

Similarly, on the spiritual path, there are specific requirements and training practices for the aspirant. A person who is highly emotional would be better suited to a path where those emotions are challenged in such a way as to transform them in a positive direction. *Bhakti yoga* would be suitable in this case. A person who is identified intensely with their body would be well advised to practise *hatha yoga*. By stretching their muscles, the tensions that accumulated in the body would slowly but surely be relaxed and the *bandu-s* (psychic knots) in the various parts of the body are freed of accrued negativity. This allows the person to focus their mind much more easily.

The path espoused by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is *jñāna yoga*. This path encompasses all the other paths as stepping stones to the final practise of *ātma-vicāra*, ‘Who Am I?’.

Bhagavan encouraged all who practised mantra, *pranayama*, vedic rituals, temple worship, and any other legitimate practice to continue their observances. Why? Because he understood that each person is on their own unique path and that is their *prārabdha*, (destiny). Bhagavan was not interested in creating an army of robotic souls who marched to the same tune. He did not believe in uniforms,

proselytizing or creating powerful organizations with numerous participants.

If a person comes to Bhagavan with a sincere heart, slowly like water trickling along rugged terrain, the devotee will find a route to the destination. Within all our apparatus of mind, heart, body,² there is what one could call a magnetic device. Much like those amazing geese who fly thousands of miles in one uninterrupted journey to a destination with the aid of an internal compass, we too have a similar device. Some may call it a conscience, others identify it as *buddhi* (higher mind). In each of us is an ability to attune ourselves to a higher purpose. The Christians objectify it as an angel who whispers in our ear.

Inevitably when we meditate, unpleasant memories and painful thoughts will arise. It is natural as we face our unresolved fears and desires. Let us again use the metaphor of the athlete. If someone wants to be physically fit they perform regular exercise to stretch and strengthen the muscles of the body. The muscles become supple and can quickly recover from an exertion or say a fall that may otherwise incapacitate a person who has not exercised and whose body is stiff. An athlete can become fit by running around a field track endlessly but not actually going anywhere. Likewise a person can follow a meditation procedure and get the expected result again and again, but no more, no less.

There is a famous statement from the 1960s by Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian philosopher. He stated, “The medium is the message.” One interpretation simply put, is that it implies that according to the medium you will get a particular result. If, say, for example a person performs *kundalini yoga* and does it right, sooner or later, psychic experiences connected with the *kundalini chakra-s* will manifest. A person who worships Lord Krishna will, eventually according to the intensity of their practice, see a vision of Lord Krishna or something directly related to this deity.

Maybe the problem of despondency encountered by the writer and others in the article referred to at the outset, is that he has not extended

² *annamaya kōśa* (food sheath), *prāṇamaya kōśa* (vital air or energy sheath), *manōmaya kōśa* (mental sheath), *vijñānamaya kōśa* (intellectual sheath) and *ānandamaya kōśa* (bliss sheath).

MOUNTAIN PATH

himself beyond the limits of who he thinks he is. He endlessly follows a formula and does not look beyond it. It is similar to taking a painkiller for an illness but not addressing the cause. Instead of launching beyond the narrow confines of his conditioned mind, he repeats the mental exercise and fails to follow through on the implications of why he is doing it.

Who would not feel dispirited if they continually ran around a track or repeated the same meditation exercises with no obvious positive result? There is no joy in sitting for hours watching the breath or the mind if there is no breakthrough away from the tired old obstructive habits and memories. We are required to be patient, but to the degree of our aspiration for a higher ideal or purpose with our life. With the momentum we generate, we will one day burst through in elation. Here devotion is paramount. Devotion to something greater than oneself: a universal ideal, a saintly sage, a loving, wise deity, a worthy cause. Devotion is the energetic delight, the refreshing taste that makes the food of experience enjoyable.

It is here we need to understand a very important point. We not only need to purify our minds and hearts with spiritual practices but we also require a will (*icchā*). There are times when nothing we do or say appears to make the slightest bit of difference to our ignorance or pain. In the face of apparently overwhelming odds and confusion, we must energise our will to overcome the challenge whatever the cost. It is not pretty. In fact, at times it is quite ugly as we fight our way out of insupportable situations and an apparently insoluble dilemma in our own mind. Like Arjuna in the battlefield facing his relatives or in our interpretation, our *vāsanā*-s and *saṃskāra*-s, we cannot retreat but must fight to preserve our integrity. It is not a question of triumphing but rather of fighting *per se*, for in the end there are no winners. Everyone pays a price. The question is: is it worth it? If it frees you from a chain of blind ignorance and complacent acquiescence, then yes.

There is a famous quote attributed variously to several historical personages: "I'd rather die on my feet than live on my knees." In a way this should be our attitude as we enter the spiritual path. In other words, in our case, no compromise with untruth; that we should follow our *svadharma*, our specific allotted path. However one hastens to

add that it does not make it justifiable to be rigid and harsh to others. Quite the contrary. Through our own travails, we develop compassion for others who are suffering. A sharp intellect, a tender heart.

We can look to Arjuna who was paralyzed at Kurukshetra before the battle. He did not want to fight, much the same way we do not want to fight but when there is no choice but to do our duty to ourselves, we do fight. We do it every day when we wake up as negative thoughts and habits spring up and try to influence our choice of thought and action.

The practitioner that we mentioned at the beginning of the editorial observes that meditation after years of practice does not bring him peace but anxiety and he has ceased to feel any joy. Instead of creating flexibility the meditation has fashioned a fixed sense of objectivity, an instrument of neutral witnessing that has separated him from life. He feels 'alienated'. Such a practitioner has divided him or herself into two and as a consequence feels empty and without meaning.

This is a normal stage of development in meditation. Until such time as we develop discrimination, we endure a laborious education honing our mental strength so as not to be sucked into transitory desires and not to be intimidated by the usually illusionary fears, or if they are real enough, gather the courage to face them down. This split between an observer (our sense of who we think we are) and an observed (our thoughts and feelings) can take years of refinement until we can consciously let go and trust the spontaneous outpouring (*sphurana*) that comes from the heart in either the form of subtle thoughts or feelings. In spiritual literature through the ages it is generally referred to as the 'dry period' or 'the journey across the desert'.

Finally, the writer mentions that if the attention is cranked up too far it is dangerous. We would agree with this. This is a major challenge. We have seen it in the ashram people who go too far too quickly without establishing their purity of mind and heart, and equanimity properly.

However, we often see those who come for a short time spend an inordinate, intense amount of time in the Old Hall or walking round the hill at all hours. We could say, to extend the sports analogy, they are running a 100 metre dash. We should remember that those who are

MOUNTAIN PATH

so intense, their time is limited and for the rest of the year they survive on the blessings received in that narrow window. A type of feast and famine. When what they received has been absorbed correctly they are ready to come again.

For those who are here much of the year, they are running a marathon and as a consequence their pace is slower and more methodical. Patience is essential for there are times when nothing seems to happen and one is bored and frustrated. It is a phase that will pass as one's physical and subtle bodies adjust to the spiritual practices which ejected the negative *samskara*-s lurking in the *bandu*-s on the nervous system and *nadi*-s. Physical illness is a common, normal result of the expulsion of the mental and emotional dirt.

For those who are at the ashram more regularly there is the challenge of how open and concentrated one can be to receive the divine grace. Again, an analogy. We all live on various types of food. There is gross food that we eat two or three times a day to maintain our energy-levels and body. There is subtle emotional food when we communicate on a deep level with a friend or listen to say, inspiring music or hear the Vedic chanting. There is mental food when we exchange stirring ideas and gain a rare insight. Or it might be a book that contains a profound perception that buoys us up throughout the day. Like any type of food, Bhagavan's Grace cannot be endlessly ingested. There is a time when we have to go away and integrate that invisible 'heart to heart' communication. Those who continue to stuff themselves regardless of whether they are hungry or not will suffer severe spiritual indigestion. In rare cases it can unbalance them, sometimes permanently.

Bhagavan may appear to be a sweet old man ready and willing to hand out sweets but this is but part of the picture. Bhagavan is also a fiery tiger who will burn any falsehood mercilessly. Bhagavan's brother would at times advise people who first came to the ashram during Bhagavan's lifetime, "Be careful. He is Siva. He is fire!"



Tamil Siddhas

Part One

A Brief Survey

P. RAJA

The matted long hair sits up like a crown on his head. The red *tilak* at the centre of his ash-smearred forehead resembles the third eye – the eye that opens when one has attained the faculty of subtle vision. His human eyes sparkle with grace and wisdom. The thick growth of hair from below his eyes to the lower regions of Adam's apple hardly makes his face visible. But there is a divine glow in the visible portions of his face. A string of *rudrākṣa* beads adorns his bare torso and, but for his loincloth, he is naked.

This is the traditional picture the word *Siddha* brings before our mind's eye.

Who is a *Siddha*? The advanced stage of a *bhakta* (devotee) is a *Siddha*. A *bhakta* is one who longs to see God and a *Siddha* is one who has seen and realised God. He is a seer, a highly evolved and realised soul. He is the one who is conscious of the Divine Presence in the psyche. Everything else appears to him absolutely without importance. His entire life, all his activities, all his movements continue, if circumstances so arrange things, but they all seem to him profoundly unimportant. He has one aim, one desire, and one goal: to know the Divine and to unite with Him, by every possible means and

Dr. P.Raja may be contacted at rajbusybee@gmail.com and his website is: www.professorraja.com

MOUNTAIN PATH

with the help of faith. To attain his goal, a *Siddha* renounces everything in this world. In fact Pattinattar, a renowned *Siddha* considered even his loincloth a burden. What Robert Bridges in his *Testament of Beauty* sang of a mystic:

“And mystic vision may so wholly absorb a man
That he will loathe even pleasure, mortifying the flesh
By discipline of discomfort so to strengthen his faith...”

is applicable to *Siddhas* for they are none but mystics and yogis.

The *Siddha*, as the word denotes, is a truth-perceiver. It is a derivative of the interrelated words *chit* and *chitta* meaning ‘the essential conscious force of a conscious being’, and ‘the truth-perceiving conscious vision and knowledge’ respectively. Hence the *Siddha* is a mature person. He is the one who believes that the outer apparent man has to become the inner real man. He is the one who asks: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”, he alone knows how to exorcise the devil that dwells within.

The longest and the most rewarding journey is the journey inward. In that journey home, the *Siddha* is explorer and pioneer. In short, a *Siddha* is one who frequently wishes and prays: “Lead me from the unreal to the Real, from the darkness to the Light, from death to immortality”.

It is commonly believed that only those who have attained the *ástama siddhi* (eight kinds of occult or supernatural powers achieved by penance and constant practice), are called *Siddhas*. The *Yoga Shastras* call the *ástama siddhi*, the eight boons from the Divine. They are:

anima – the power to become the size of an atom.

mahima – the power to become mighty and huge as a mountain.

laghima – the power to become light like air.

garima – the power to become heavy like gold.

prapthi – the power to gain entry into the seven worlds.

vasithvam – the power to have control over kings and gods.

prakamyam – the power to disembodify and enter into other bodies.

isithvam – the power to do and enjoy whatever one wishes.

It is also believed that one who masters *kuṇḍalinī yoga* is a *Siddha*. *Kuṇḍalinī* is the coiled and sleeping serpent of Energy within. It lies in the bottom root vessel or chamber, *mūlādhāram*, the pedestal, earth-centre of the physical nervous system. It can be struck only by the freely coursing breath, by the current of life which enters into searching for it. Once kindled it awakes and rises flaming up the ladder of the spinal cord. It forces open centre after centre of the involved dynamic secrets of consciousness till at the summit it finds, joins and becomes one with the spirit. When it meets the Divine Consciousness above, then the force of the Divine Consciousness can more easily descend into the body and be felt working there to change the nature. *Kuṇḍalinī* is the way, the door, the key to the inner real man. But according to Tamil tradition, Siddhas are not mere occultists or persons with mere supernatural powers.

Siddhas are those who live in yoga and see divine power and light through such yoga.¹

Man longs for union with the Divine. Every *bhakta* longs for the great hidden light described in the *Rig Veda* as *gudham jyoti*. The moment the *Siddha* perceives the hidden light, he is in a state of spiritual delight – a delight that is eternal. The experience of this Light is actually an experience of Reality.

This Light, as Sri Aurobindo says:

A light not born of sun or moon nor fire,
A light that dwelt within and saw within
Shedding an intimate visibility,
Made secrecy more revealing than the word:
Our sight and sense are a fallible gaze and touch
And only the spirit's vision is wholly true.²

He who perceives this light becomes a *jīvanmukta* – one who is liberated while alive in this body. Thirumoolar, the Tamil arch *Siddha*, pronounces this blissful state of the final realisation of God and communion with Him thus: “Dead is the ‘I’, withered are my attachments. God and I have become one...”

¹ Thirumoolar, *Thirumantiram*: verse 1490.

² Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (Centenary edition, vol.29), p.525.

The *Siddha* is not one among those who are unaware of the fleeting nature of earthly beauty. To him everything seems to be ephemeral except the love of the Divine. He strongly holds the view that the main purpose of man's earthly life is to find out his true self and identify himself with it. Sri Aurobindo opines: "To discover the spiritual being in himself is the main business of the spiritual man and to help others towards the same evolution is his real service to the race."³

Tamil Siddhas

Tradition has it that the Tamil *Siddhas* are eighteen in number. Eighteen is a very popular number among Indians. There are eighteen *puranas*, eighteen sub-*puranas*, eighteen *Mel-kanakku* and eighteen *kizh-kanakku* and so on. According to Tamil tradition, the war between Devas and Asuras went on for eighteen years. Hence Tamil literary historians think that that should have been the reason for numbering the *Siddhas* as eighteen in all. But the statuettes of twenty-one *Siddhas* installed in the temple of Lord Nataraja (Siva) at Chidambaram serve as visual proof that the *Siddhas* were not confined to just eighteen in number. Further, several lists that name the eighteen *Siddhas* are available. But no two lists tally with each other. From the varied lists available to us, we come across the names of fifty-eight different *Siddhas*, which only serve to prove that they were not only eighteen, but many more. The different anthologies of *Siddha* poems and their several editions confirm this statement.

The Tamil *Siddhas* were masters of autology, the science of the self. They stressed the need for each individual to develop his own psychic powers by Yoga and see and experience God within himself. To them God ceases to be an idol and becomes an experience. If man could find and experience God within himself there is little need to go in search of Him in temples. The *Siddhas* did not consider outward show essential to inner religious life. They believed that the outer apparent man has to become the inner real man, for within man is the 'soul of the holy'. There is nothing comparable to the effort of the human mind to grasp the "divine essence or the ultimate reality of things" and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the Highest.

³ *The Life Divine* (centenary edition, vol.19) p.885.



Top Picture: Pattinattar's Jiva Samadhi in Tiruvottiyur
Bottom: Pattinattar and his disciple Badragiriyar

Almost all the *Siddhas* chose the mountains and forests as their abode and believed in the omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience of the supreme God, whom they called Lord Siva.

These *Siddhas* were also men of letters who expressed their perceptions and experiences in a highly enigmatic language. The authentic *Siddha* pattern was to express their mystic ideas with numerals and these 'people of the hidden' have a code of their own. In the following words Sri Aurobindo confirms this point: "... the spiritual aspiration and experience of the mystics was usually casketed in secret formulas and given only to a few initiates: it was conveyed to the rest or rather preserved for them in a mass of religious or traditional symbols".⁴

The poetry of the *Siddhas*, which is free from the complicated poetics of the post-Sangam ages, is religious, philosophical and mystical. In assessing the common qualities of their poetry, A.V. Subramania Iyer, a Tamil critic writes: "A brevity that is sometimes elliptic, a terseness that is seldom without a sting and a symbolism that is epigrammatic and enigmatic, if not totally obscure, characterize their thought and style... their poetry is often deep in thought and powerful in expression."⁵

The *Siddhas* were in a sense rebels. They pooh-poohed idol-worship and preached to the common folk that God cannot be found in temples or in the *sanctum sanctorum* or in the stone images therein. God can be known and realised only by intense concentration of the mind weeded of all its grossness of desire and attachment. "They rebelled against the nauseating caste system, sickening superstitions, foolish fanaticism, repelling rituals and the loathing interpretations of the *Vedas, Agamas, and Mantras* by the brahmins and the intimidating tales they wove to admonish any free thinker".⁶

These rebels believed that all religions perpetuate ignorance. Religion has always tried to establish a dogma and the established dogma only created confusion. The value of religion lies in the effect

⁴ Ibid., p.870.

⁵ *The Poetry and Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhars* (Manivasagar Noolagam, Chidambaram), p.1.

⁶ Guna, *Tamil's Philosophy* (Podhumai Veliyeedu, Madras), p.279.

it has on us and the extent to which we believe in it. If we cling to them we do not and cannot know the truth of the spirit that lies beyond all codes and dogmas, wide and large and free. Religion is always a limitation for the spirit.

A few individuals, the *Siddhas*, who were capable of thinking freely made it clear to the ignorant masses that their teachings are above religions and exhorted them to strive towards a universal truth. Their words illumined the consciousness and prepared it for the future realization. They taught the common people to enter into direct relations with the Divine.

Dubbed as madmen, imposters, necromancers, uncouth ascetics and even atheists, these *Siddhas* hurdled all obstacles which only fortified them all the more and strengthened their moral fibres. In spite of all the opposition from the religious orthodoxy they were able to survive and had admirers from certain classes of people. Thanks to those admirers, who jotted down the songs the *Siddhas* sang in the streets when begging for alms, we have them now.

The service of the *Siddhas* to the society remains a significant component of the religious and cultural history of the Tamils. In fact they were the eye-openers in a world of darkness. Through their acquired wisdom and immense knowledge, they helped men come out from darkness into light, from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to happiness and from mortality to immortality and divine beatitude. The *Siddhas* are true mystics – their views are cosmopolitan; their teachings universal.

The Early Siddhas

Siddhas like Thirumoolar, Sivavakkiyar, Pattinattar and Badragiriyar belong to the period that stretches from the sixth to the tenth century A.D., popularly known as the Hymnal Period.

“Arch-*Siddha* or the supreme mystic and pontiff of yoga in all Tamil Literature”, Thirumoolar, is considered to be the ‘Father of Tamil *Siddhas*’. He lived in Tiruvadaturai and wrote a masterpiece on yoga called *Thirumantiram*. It consists of 3000 stanzas divided into nine unequal cantos called *tantirams*. It is also a treatise on *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*. Several of its stanzas are difficult to decipher, though he frequently uses the common speech of the people. His message is

“love is God”. In his poems he uses the mystic language of allegory though never the language of mystic eroticism.

Thirumoolar informs us that human love is symbolic of divine love. All love is actually a shadow of the great love. He remarked: “Only an ignoramus distinguishes between Love and Lord Siva”,⁷ and again: “When man develops sufficient earnestness and intense concentration he need not wander in search of Him elsewhere”.⁸ He scoffs at the caste system and the differences based on race, and pleads, “mankind is one as God is one”.⁹

Every word is a thing of beauty in this work. Though all the verses are in the same metre, there is a variety in the rhythm, following the very rhythm of his ideas. Thirumoolar is among the greatest poets of symbolism in Tamil literature. The want of variety in his metre is amply compensated by an enjoyable variety in his symbolism.

Second in the list of the early *Siddhas* is Sivavakkiyar, a revolutionary to the core; in the five hundred and twenty-seven stanzas ascribed to him, he rebels against religious orthodoxy and sacerdotalism (the power of the priests to intercede on one’s behalf). In a fiery language he repudiates the authority of the *Vedas and Agamas*, the sanctity of temples and the value of worship in them. Regarding idol-worship he banters: “Why should you garland a stone god and make rounds and rounds around the planted stone all the time reciting *mantras*? How do you expect the stone to speak when God Himself is within you?”¹⁰ And again in another stanza: “Neither a real temple nor a sacred pond exists in the outer world. Listen to me, O Ignoramuses! They in reality exist within you”.¹¹ Philosophical in outlook, the whole poem is written in the speech of the common man and the style is at times termed ‘vulgar’. Being a rebel against the established order of his age, he assails the brahmanical way of life: “how fluently the lies inspired by books spring from you! But what use are books when you fail to trace the place before your birth or after death?”¹² He asserts

⁷ Thirumoolar, *Thirumantiram*, stanza 270.

⁸ *Ibid.*, stanza 2550.

⁹ *Ibid.*, stanza 2104.

¹⁰ *Sivavakkiyar Pādal*, stanza 481.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, stanza 30.

¹² *Ibid.*, stanza 459.

that God is in each soul just like the lightning in the sky which appears in a flash, spreads and disappears.

Using symbols here and there for conveying mystical knowledge and experience in the authentic manner of the *Siddha*, Sivavakkiyar uses the common man's language that is at once direct, lucid and forceful.

As the most widely read *Siddha* in the Tamil language, Pattinattar is better known to the Tamils than Thirumoolar and Sivavakkiyar. He was a very rich man of the tenth century A.D. who drew the moral of life through an eyeless needle and turned an ascetic, thereby renouncing his riches to be distributed to the poor. It is believed that he left home with a broken pot in one hand and a palm-leaf manuscript of *Thirumantiram* in the other. His simplicity of style and clarity of thinking contribute to his immense popularity among the Tamils. Almost all Tamils know his famous songs by heart.

Pattinattar defines a true *Siddha* as "one who wanders like a spirit, renounces everything like a corpse, eats whatever is available like a stray dog, roams about like a fox, looks upon women as mothers and is like an innocent child".¹³ And doubtless it was the way he led his life. He instructs people to believe in the one Supreme and shun the riches.

Though the poems of Pattinattar are free from the violent denunciations of idol worship, temples, rituals, castes, *Vedas*, *Agamas*, etc., it is not to be wrongly construed that he was a believer in them or in religious institutions and customs of his age. There are a number of his poems that jeer at people who smear holy ash and recite *mantras* and yet do not know where God is. Much of his poetry concentrates on the folly of man and guides him in a moving language to have complete control over the senses and direct his inner life Godward. He very much regrets having wasted his early life without understanding the abode of the Supreme. "You were within me and out of myself I searched for you here and there and everywhere".¹⁴ Pattinattar chooses to take people Godward by telling them of the vanity and egoism of men and the ungodly and tempting nature of women. As a poet of the

¹³ Pattinattar, *Tiruveikambamaalai*, stanza.III, 9.

¹⁴ Pattinattar, *Poornamaalai*, verse 30.

first order, Pattinattar has used a variety of metres and shown a lively awareness of the poetic art.

Badragiriyar was a king of the Tuluva country (Karnataka) converted to asceticism by Pattinattar. He was a futurist who expected a great change to come; a dreamer dreaming of a Utopian world. His poem *The Lament of Badragiri* has 231 couplets. Most of the couplets are closely modelled on the style of Pattinattar.

All his couplets are in the form of questions and in every couplet he is outspoken in his views. He believes that only through constant struggle can man attain his goal. He instigates the poor, the down-trodden and the ignored to rise in revolt. He dreams of creating a new world by shedding away the superstitious beliefs. He asks: ‘When will the time come for one to realise that the parents, children and brothers are no relatives at all?’¹⁵ Longing for the eternal bliss, he laments: “When will the time come for us to drink nectar and bid goodbye to opium and toddy?”¹⁶ Craving to see his inner light he asks: “When will the Light in me glow like the sun rising from its hiding place in the depth of the sea?”¹⁷

During the hymnal period, religion had the upper hand. It commanded the devotion of large sections of the people “by the nascent fervour of the teachings of the great saints and seers and by the influence that radiated from the temples, which beginning as places of worship, developed into centres of art and culture that vitalized popular religion”. The everyday life of the people was very much determined by the religious leaders. It was a time when the caste system had a wide social acceptance and the low-caste people were treated as slaves. And the *Siddhas* true to their tradition raised their voice against the domination of religion and social order.

During the centuries that followed the hymnal period, religion became more and more institutionalized and authoritarian in nature and sectarian in outlook. Rigid dogmas were established, religious rules came into being and one could not but bow down before the tables or indicts of the law. And people blindly followed religion by

¹⁵ *The Laments of Badragiri*, couplet 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, couplet 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, couplet 166.



Pambatti Siddhar

social habit in order not to get into the bad books of others. Rituals and ceremonies were rampant. Too many saints and seers paved way for various systems of intellectual philosophy, which only divided the people into rival groups. Since each group spent much of its time in defending itself against its rival ones in matters relating to sectarian religion and philosophy, the genuine moral and spiritual values were ignored.

The plurality of opinions about God and religion led to the intensification of the movement of revolt, which was under the surface awaiting its proper time to emerge. It was time for the latter *Siddhas* to voice their protests against the dog-tailed society.

The Later Siddhas

Agappei, Azhuguni, Idaikkadar, Kaduveli, Enati, Kālai, Kudambai and Pambātti are considered to be the later *Siddhas*. Not only are their real names shrouded in mystery but also the age in which they lived is not conclusively established. Considering the broader dimensions of the *Siddha* line and the *Siddha* tradition extending over a vast time span from the very early times, as also the absence of historical evidences as to their individual movement and creativity, it is reasonable to say that the important exponents of this movement flourished during the medieval period of Tamil literature around the tenth to the fifteenth century A.D. Again it is possible that some of them lived beyond the fifteenth century as the influences of the *Siddhas* were seen alive and vibrant in such poets as Thayumanavar (1706 –1744 A.D.), who is considered a direct descendant of the *Siddha* proper.

These later *Siddhas* differed in no way from the earlier ones, except that their poetry was much inferior in quality but their poetry is easier to understand than that of the earlier *Siddhas*. Undoubtedly, these later *Siddhas* sang their songs for the masses by using the common speech and adopting a simple style.

Agappei got the name since he sang of the devil in the human mind. The moment ‘ego’, symbolized as a devil, enters the human mind, the mind becomes restless and uncontrollable. It can only be exorcised by Self-realisation. The mystic and yogic ideas are brought to life in his poem of ninety stanzas through his classical way of putting things. He sings: “The moment you know yourself,

you will cease from loving other things. And I'll tell you how to realise yourself".¹⁸ He believes that to illuminate this dark world, the Divine Light is essential. To realise that Light of Love, one should break open the mind's eye through the path of yoga. He stresses that unless one realises his nothingness he will never reach the delights of immortality: "Nothing in this world is as blissful as God-realization. A river of nectar is his whoever realises Him".¹⁹ The mind is to be changed, spiritualized, and transformed ultimately into its original principle of Truth-consciousness. It is the mind that makes man what he is and places him at the head of the march of spiritual evolution. The root of all unspiritual traits like anger, jealousy, violence, etc. lies in desire and ego. Desire denied provokes anger, depression; the claims of ego unrecognized or unfulfilled lead to dark reactions. To tackle the problem at the roots of desire and ego is the radical solution. In short this *Siddha* scoops out the 'ego' from the mind and plants the lamp of Love. He is sure that as long as the ghost of desire is in the heart, the happiness of love cannot grow.

When the heart is heavy with disappointment or frustration one has to weep it out to another in order to lessen the burden of grief. Azhuguni (the weepy one) unburdens his grief through his 32 musical pieces addressed to a child named 'Kannamma', the supreme power of Sakti.

Man in his ignorance develops an attachment and clings to the relationship which snaps – physically or otherwise – in time as all human relationships do. And he laments, grieves over a development the real meaning of which he misses. This *Siddha* feels that in the spiritual journey man should be alone with his Maker. For him all other relations are irrelevant or at best secondary. The true and only relation of consequence is between himself and the Divine. The Divine constitutes the whole world for him and all is part of it, permitted or taken away by the Divine Will. He weeps: "How foolish I was to believe that my parents and relatives would remain a great comfort and support to me! When they go away from this world where can I find solace?"²⁰

¹⁸ *Agappei Pādalkal*, stanza 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, stanza 58.

²⁰ *Azhuguni Pādalkal*, stanza 19.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Set in the form of a dialogue between two shepherds, Tandavarayakkonar and Narayanakkonar, the 130 poems of Idaikkadar are highly realistic in tone. Both of them stress the need for man to understand himself fully and ridicule those who ignore the Light within and wander with an oil lamp in hand only to fall into the deep sea of ignorance. In a powerful yet simple language he expresses his mystic ideas: “Whatever your eyes see are mere dreams. Be sure that the world will perish and your body doubtless will decay. What is everlasting is only the Divine”.²¹ His poems suggest that the seeker of the Divine must leave behind the over-trodden tracks of ignorance and falsehood and walk on the path of Truth and Light. The Divine is present within him, around him and above him. The seeker has to awaken to its presence, link himself to it and learn to live in it. Only then can he safely walk through the new and newer regions of the spirit that open out before him.

Kaduveli in his 34-stanza song of joy, sings of the glory of truth and points out that the purpose of this life is to find out the Truth. One can renounce anything in this world but at no cost the truth. Every stanza advises us what we should not do on this earth in order to enjoy the Eternal Bliss. He compares the human body to a “beaded bubble on the surface of water that would burst” and instructs everyone to “abstain from smoking and drinking but read books relating only to the Divine in man”. He tells all the men to love their wives and never insult them on any ground and above all never be impostors. The song on the whole is a bundle of practical advice from a man of wisdom. He is very much remembered for his most famous stanza that speaks of the soul, body and creator: “There once lived a monk in a garden of bliss. He prayed to the potter (god) continuously for ten months and brought a pot (body). Overjoyed he danced to his heart’s content and jumped up and down. But alas! The pot fell down and got smashed to smithereens.”²²

Kudambai addresses all his 32 songs in a simple but symbolic language to a woman wearing *kudambai* (a sort of ear stud worn by women in olden days). In the presence of the Supreme Being all

²¹ *Idaikkadar Pādalkal*, verse 77.

²² *Kaduveli Songs*, verse 4.

are one. Everyone lives for himself and it is only He who lives for others. Conscience is our guide; Wisdom is the best teacher; World is the university and the best friend is God Himself. He pleads that for the one who had realised himself, all other things in this world are trivial and insignificant. He questions: “Why does one need the external appearance when one has conquered the Lord of Death?”²³ To him the body is the slough of the soul. Man is a soul having a body. Man is essentially a spiritual being. Man lives because in essence he is the spirit or the soul. His innermost essence is the *atma* or the Divine Spirit. His true nature is God. Death is not the ultimate end. The working agent is the soul in the body, Consciousness is eternal and persists beyond death.

Enati and Kaalai are the least known of the later *Siddhas*. “The poems of these *Siddhas* are very scanty and as such remain in palm leaf manuscripts and have not gone into print”.²⁴

The last and yet the most famous in the list is Pāmbātti, the snake charmer. The expression *Aadu Pambe* (Dance, O Snake) is a refrain at the end of each stanza of his poem of 600 lines. Through this poem he raises the *kuṇḍalinī* force that lies below like a snake. He eulogizes his tribe and boasts of their supernatural powers. He puffs up his chest and says: “We can control all the five elements; destroy this great universe and create a new one”. In fact he is the only *Siddha* who boasts of the eight kinds of occult or supernatural powers. He denounces caste differences and bawls: “We will set fire to the disgusting caste system”. One’s caste, culture, physical appearance, birth possessions and occupation do not matter. He who has dedicated his all at the feet of the Lord and who constantly remembers the Lord, succeeds in attaining God-consciousness, no matter whether he is a high-born or a low-born. He rails at the four *Vedas*, the various kinds of *puranas*, *sastras* and *tantras* by calling them rubbish, and sings of Lord Siva as the Supreme Power of the Universe. Above all he warns all men against lusting after women.

²³ *Kudambai Pādalkal*, verse.26.

²⁴ M. Arunachalam, *History of Tamil Literature through the Centuries: XV century* (Gandhi Vidyayalam, Mayuram), p315.

MOUNTAIN PATH

The belief that the *Siddhas* are immortals and that these “People of the hidden” continue to live in places like caves in the mountains and jungles that are beyond the reach of man is prevalent even today. Though such beliefs are not supported by any evidence, we cannot but believe that the *Siddha* tradition is an enduring one.

The *Siddhas* were real mystics and it is no wonder that they were rebellious in a society that was exploiting the ignorance of the masses. Through their inspiring songs they tried to show the way of the world to the ignoramuses and instilled into their minds courage and faith. It is no exaggeration to say that these *Siddhas* remained and will remain as guiding spirits to all those who grope their way in darkness.

(Note: All the translations from the poems of the *Siddhas* quoted in this essay are free renderings done by the author.) ▲

To Find A Child

Suresh Kailash

A simple joy when I was a child,
Was to be on the roof or lie outside,
On lazy days and summer nights,
And be lost just gazing up at the sky.

As I grew older, the lazy days dried.
Became hours, minutes, seconds, life,
A whorl on the turning wheel of time,
On a daily race to catch the nine to five.

Now, a tiny thing invisible to the eye,
Though forcing me to being confined,
Opens the door and helps me unwind,
To find the child I once lost in the sky.

Tranquillity

BHARAT M. MEHTA

In the long run, nothing can prevail over Nature. It works silently. It works unnoticed. But it is relentless. It is capable of unimaginable power and fury, but it can still be very forgiving. No matter how much man may progress in technology, Nature cannot be subdued, let alone be overpowered. It may seem strange, but Nature works on just one simple principle, Balance. Everything in its place, in the right proportion, at the right time and all this can only be ensured, if every living species right from the inconspicuous amoeba to the highly evolved man, respects one another's place in the entire organization.

This planet has been in existence for millions of years. It has gone through metamorphic changes in every epoch. The dinosaurs that once roamed the earth became extinct and in their place another species emerged, only to get destroyed and make place for yet another to come into being. Obviously, a hidden force controls this perennial cycle of destruction and regeneration that sweeps across the earth and finally restores a certain balance for a new set of life forms to evolve. This constant shuffle is nothing but Nature in its eternally vigilant role while

MOUNTAIN PATH

it oversees the life cycle of all species on the planet. Any disturbance in this equation, causes Nature to step in and with ruthless efficiency to restore order and balance. So with this background, the question naturally arises – how sure are we about the success of our species, the humans? Success sadly does not have the usual connotation we have ascribed to it. It does not mean acquisition of possessions, indulgences, status etc. Success here means survival! Can the human race live a life justifying its position as the most intelligent life form or are we doomed to extinction like the dinosaurs?

Let us go back to some basics to better understand how life on this planet survives. All life on earth depends solely on how it can satisfy the most essential requirement for sustenance, namely nutrition. Put in a cruder way, how does it fulfil its hunger? This is the first activity any living being needs to perform to survive and how each species goes about fulfilling this need says a lot about its responsibility in the overall ecosystem where millions of others are similarly engaged in the same crucial pursuit for survival. With no specific direction, every living being is able to source its staple food, without denying another of their share. It forages to quell its hunger. There is no other long-term consideration involved.

But man is a different animal. He has a mind. He also needs to eat to satisfy his immediate need like others. But man differs here. After satisfying his hunger pangs, he indulges in storing food beyond his present need, because of greed. This is the first sign of a disturbance in the natural balance between availability of food and peaceful coexistence among all living inhabitants of the earth. It is well known that squirrels, beavers and other animals cache food in times of plenty to survive through the harsh months of winter when food may be scarce or unavailable. But the intention is to meet the limited needs of personal survival and nothing beyond. Man on the contrary, tries to disturb the supply chain by hoarding thereby restricting the supply with a selfish intention of pushing the prices higher to reap a bigger profit.

By hoarding food man displays a contempt for all other life forms because stored food indirectly denies others of their rightful share. As Mahatma Gandhi very aptly says, “The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed.”

This callous indifference that man exhibits towards other life forms, becomes a strong trait of his nature. It manifests in other ways. A sense of superiority over others becomes very noticeable as he aggressively asserts dominance over fellow human beings on unjustified notional factors, even though all human beings are at par, in so far as our physiology is concerned. The Holocaust is a stark example of this paranoia. Almost ten million people were exterminated by the Nazis, including around six million Jews, on the outrageous claim, by the Nazis, of their “racial superiority”. Carnage of this magnitude can only happen in a society that is vitiated by an extremely narcissistic outlook and a host of vices.

A closer look at ourselves in the last 40 odd years shows how humans have dominated life on earth with utter contempt for all other life forms. At a personal level we notice a blind pursuit of an insane ambition, unlimited greed and an obsessive craving for a materialistic way of life. Humans have plundered forests. Humans have built sprawling cities encroaching on nature.

Each city comes with hundreds of kilometres of asphalt roads, monstrous cement skyscrapers, vehicles spewing noxious fumes, industries releasing untreated effluents into rivers and lakes and belching poisonous smoke and fumes into the atmosphere. The destructive trail of this enormous carbon footprint has brought in its wake a global warming. This ‘corrective’ mechanism comes with a host of repercussions, each expressing in a very obvious manner that there will be a severe price to be paid for this indiscriminate exploitation of nature. The ice caps are melting. Ocean levels are rising. Low lying cities face the threat of being submerged. Rivers are in uncontrolled flood. At the other end, we have successive famines, forest fires that devour hundreds of thousands of acres of flora and fauna, and earthquakes that destroy living cities.

As if this is not enough, diseases are on the rise, incurable and highly contagious. The Coronavirus, insignificant in size, noticeable only under a powerful microscope, a lifeless RNA strand, is so potentially powerful that it can take a human life. Even these diseases can be attributed to the degenerative lifestyle of people namely: wrong dietary habits, sedentary lifestyles, and indulgence in unnatural stimulants like alcohol, nicotine and drugs, immoral associations,

unethical business practices, impatience to project an image of success and a disdain for family life. The destruction to both economic and human life caused by the Coronavirus, has been attributed to the eating habits of certain Chinese populations.

We are at a crossroads. We still have the luxury of a choice before us. Let's make a deliberate decision, before we are denied this option. The only solution that appears to restore balance in Nature is to address the disconnected state of consciousness that is the bane of modern civilisation. We imagine ourselves to be at the centre of the ecosystem and that every other life exists for us to utilise for our personal gain. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In an ideal ecosystem there is no centre. Plants, animals, humans etc are all equally a part of it. But in reality, what we notice is a conceited form of 'social distancing' based on arrogance, because of which we disconnect ourselves from the whole. We break the sacred mantra of interdependence as we blindly trample on life. The food chain is a very good example that teaches us how all species can live together in harmony.

Everything that dies, from plants to animals, finally decays to form part of the soil. Plants derive nutrition from the soil that has been enriched with decomposed animal remains. A healthy plant then becomes food for a herbivore, which in turn is devoured by a carnivore. The carnivore in turn, due to infighting, succumbs to injuries from a fight. In this way a certain balance works relentlessly and life in the forest survives and thrives. All exist and perish at regular intervals. Interdependence ensures balance. Life goes on.

Take another example. The respiration process in plants causes plants to give out oxygen and take in carbon dioxide in the day. In the case of humans, it is the reverse. The waste secreted by one is life-giving for the other. This again is simply balance at work. The same exists at a macro level in the world.

We need to reset our lifestyle. Let us start by accepting the fact that we are part of the ecosystem, equal with every other form of life. Taking an overview, we notice that despite the diversity of living creatures, life is a unitary phenomenon. We are each a distinctly different species, but in the overall ecosystem, these different life forms are nested in each other. Each life form is complimentary to the other. In this way life works as a whole. Each life is a fixed proportion

of the whole. If there is a temporary imbalance, the inexorable workings of nature will set about restoring balance. With our superior intellect and discipline, why should we wait for nature to intervene? We can preempt that and make corrective changes to restore the order that guarantees the survival of all life forms on this planet.

So, what do we need to do to correct ourselves? We need to recollect and emulate what the previous generation did for a living, who were grounded in tradition, before this current craze of materialism. We need to appreciate the virtues of prudence and thrift. We need to reach out to all life forms, with respect and reverence. They, like us, are temporary visitors to this planet. Instead of only taking, which has been our attitude, let us give. Let us give for the common cause, which is the well-being of our planet that can still sustain us, if we act in time.



By Heart

Upahar

Under the radiant Hill,
 bright red flowers cluster and hang,
 mirrored in the lonely morning pond.
 This moment has no precedent, no outcome.
 Heart keeps its watch and smiles, without desire.

Bathed in the rising sun,
 the pilgrim climbs with joy Your rocky pathway.
 Trees whisper sounds of love, and the grey hawk
 circles above in an eternal Now.
 Heart breaks into a song, heart simply breaks.

The flowing moon, wreathed with wild stars,
 spreads healing rays. The beauty and the sorrow
 unite within. A natural state prevails.
 Heart wishes well, wishes all ever well;
 sees all things only, and already, well.



The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Thirty Eight

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY **MICHAEL JAMES**

18th December 1978

Sadhu Om: Just as there are certain fundamental principles on which the practice of self-investigation is based, there are also certain fundamental principles on which the practice of self-surrender is based. The fundamental principles on which the practice of self-investigation is based are that the nature of ego is to rise, stand and flourish to the extent that it ‘grasps form’ or attends to anything other than itself, but to subside and dissolve back into its source to the extent that it attends to itself, as Bhagavan points out in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, and that it will therefore die only when it attends to itself so keenly that it thereby ceases to be aware of anything else whatsoever.

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.

Likewise, the fundamental principles on which the practice of self-surrender is based are that God or *guru* is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving. Since he is all-knowing, nothing can happen without his knowledge, and since he is all-powerful, nothing can happen without his consent, so whatever happens is according to his will, and since he is all-loving, whatever happens is what is best for ourself and all concerned. Only when we are able to recognise clearly and without doubt that such is the nature of God will we be willing to let go of everything else and entrust ourself wholly to his care.

4th January 1979

Sadhu Om: In the first verse of *Ēkāṇṇma Pañcakam* Bhagavan says:

[After] forgetting oneself, considering a body alone to be oneself, and taking innumerable births, finally knowing oneself and being oneself is just [like] waking up from a dream of wandering about the world. See.

When reading this verse we need to consider carefully to what extent knowing oneself and being oneself is like waking up from a dream. Our present state and any other state in which we are aware of ourself as a body and are consequently aware of other forms is a dream, so when we know and remain as our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*), this and all other dreams will come to an end. It is in this sense that knowing oneself and being oneself is like waking up from a dream of wandering about the world.

However, there is an important difference between knowing ourself as we actually are and waking up from a dream. When we wake up from a dream we are often able to remember what we dreamt, because we are waking up from one dream to another dream, and the dreamer of both these dreams is the same, namely ego, whereas when we know ourself as we actually are, ego is thereby eradicated, so since it was only as ego that we experienced this or any other dream, there will be no one remaining to remember what ego experienced.

When we wake up from the state of ego into the state of pure awareness, which is what we always actually are, we will know nothing other than ourself, because there is nothing other than ourself for us to know, as Bhagavan says in verse 27 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

Only knowledge [in the sense of awareness] that is devoid of knowledge and ignorance [of anything other than oneself] is [real] knowledge [or awareness]. This [alone] is [what is] real [or true], [because in one's real state of pure awareness] there is not anything to know [that is, there is nothing other than oneself for one either to know or to not know].

Therefore as pure awareness we will have no memory of having once dreamt, because as pure awareness we have never dreamt. What dreams any dream is only ego, not pure awareness, so when ego is eradicated, all its memories of its dreams will be eradicated along with it. This is why Bhagavan once said, 'Everyone who comes here says they have come only for *mōkṣa* [liberation], but if I show even a small sample of *mōkṣa*, all the crows will fly away and I will be left sitting here alone'.

When people come here and say they want to know about Bhagavan's path, I sometimes wonder whether they would still want to know about it if they understood that in order to follow it to its conclusion we must be willing to give up everything other than the mere awareness 'I am'. If we truly embrace his path, we are stepping straight into the jaws of a tiger, a tiger who will never rest till he has swallowed us entirely. By the death of the body we do not really lose anything, because we are sure to project another body and world and thereby dream other lives like this one after another, whereas by the death of ego we lose everything completely and forever.

Therefore in order to console people and avoid frightening them off, Bhagavan sometimes said things that implied that the *jñāni* knows names and forms and experiences dyads and triads just as an *ajñāni* does. However, the truth is that the *jñāni* is nothing other than *jñāna* [pure awareness], and *jñāna* does not know anything other than itself. It is the state of perfect happiness, but this does not mean that it experiences happiness as something other than itself, because it is itself infinite happiness.

6th January 1979

Sadhu Om: A true devotee of Bhagavan will never think 'I must be an instrument of his grace' or 'His grace must work through me for the benefit of others', because as ego we ourselves are the primary obstacle

to his grace. If we want his grace to flow without any obstruction, we need to subside, because to the extent that we subside we are thereby removing all obstacles that obstruct the working of his grace.

This is why he always recommended the simple practice of attending to the first person, ‘I’, because the more we attend to the first person, the more we will thereby subside; the more we subside, the more freely his grace will flow; and the more his grace flows, the more love and strength we will gain to attend only to the first person. On the other hand, if we rise thinking ‘His grace must work through me and my actions’, we would thereby be obstructing the flow of his grace.

This can be illustrated by a popular story about Alexander meeting a sage in north India. Having heard that a wise man lived in a cave in some nearby hills, Alexander went to meet him early one morning. When he arrived he saw an old man crouching outside the mouth of a cave, so he approached him and said, ‘I have conquered half the world, so I am the most powerful emperor the world has ever seen. I can give you whatever you want, so just ask and I will give it’. The old man ignored him and just kept quiet, so he repeated his offer twice, and after the third time the old man simply waved his hand indicating that Alexander should step aside. Alexander then said, ‘What is this? I offered you anything you want to ask for, and you just ask me to step aside’, to which the old man replied, ‘I don’t want anything you could give me, but I am an old man and it is cold sleeping in this cave at night, so when the sun rises I crouch here to warm myself in its light. But you came here and stood between me and the sun, so all I can ask you to do is to step aside and thereby stop obstructing the sunlight’.

Just as Alexander was obstructing the sunlight by standing in front of the old man, thinking he could help him, we obstruct Bhagavan’s grace by rising as ego, so all that we need do is to subside back within. Doing anything else whatsoever is not aiding grace but obstructing it.

Sadhu Om [when asked some questions regarding the portion of chapter 8 of *The Path of Sri Ramana* in which he discussed how the awareness ‘I’ that is spread throughout the body through the *nāḍīs* is withdrawn back to the heart when we attend to ourself]: Though it is described there how the awareness ‘I’ is withdrawn through the

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

nāḍīs, we should not try to see how this happens, because if we allow ourself to attend to anything other than ourself, the awareness ‘I’ will again spread out through the *nāḍīs*. Its withdrawal will occur only to the extent that our attention is fixed firmly only on ourself.

If we walk towards the sun, our shadow will follow us, but if we turn round to see it following us, it will stop. Likewise, so long as we are keenly self-attentive, the awareness ‘I’ will be withdrawing through the *nāḍīs*, but if we try to verify that this is happening, our attention will thereby be diverted away from ourself towards the body, and hence the withdrawal will be interrupted.

In order to investigate ourself, we need to attend only to ourself, the first person, and so long as we are attending to ourself we will not notice whatever may be happening in the body. If we try to see what is happening, our attention will thereby be diverted away from the first person towards second and third persons, so we will end up knowing neither our real nature nor what happens in the body as a result of our being self-attentive.

You ask how it can be known that this withdrawal is actually happening. It cannot and need not be known by most of us, but to a few sages like Bhagavan and Patanjali such things are revealed even without their seeking to know them, because they have a divine mission to guide others.

Moreover, it is important for us to understand that all such explanations are only as true as the body, and if we want to know what is real, we need to give up the idea that there is actually any such thing as a body at all. The body seems to exist only in the view of ego, so all explanations about *nāḍīs*, *cakras*, *kuṇḍalinī* and what happens in the body as a result of self-investigation or any other form of spiritual practice need not concern us if our only aim is to know what we actually are and thereby eradicate ego. The body is just a mental fabrication, like all other objects, so we should not be concerned with knowing anything about it at all. In order to know what we actually are, we need to withdraw our attention entirely from the body and all other phenomena by focusing it only on ourself, the first person.

Question: Why then did you write about this subject in *The Path of Sri Ramana*?

Sadhu Om: Different levels of explanation need to be given to suit people of different levels of spiritual maturity, and also to suit those who have come to Bhagavan's path from different backgrounds. Some who come to his path have previously practised *yōga*, so they ask questions about such matters, and this explanation about the withdrawal of the awareness 'I' through the *nāḍīs* needs to be given to satisfy them that whatever can be achieved by *yōga* practices is achieved more effectively and easily by means of the simple practice of self-investigation. It was therefore in answer to questions asked by such people that I gave these explanations, which later came to be included in *The Path of Sri Ramana*.

Bhagavan also sometimes gave such explanations when questioned by people who were interested in such matters, as has been recorded, for example, in chapter 9 of *Śrī Ramaṇa Gītā*, in his answers to questions 12 and 16 of the second chapter of *Upadēśa Mañjari*, in some portions of *Vicāra Saṅgraham* and in *Day by Day* 14-9-45. ▲

(To be continued)

COVID and Ashram Live Streaming

With India still in lockdown and with international flights to India restricted, the Ashram is making every effort to upgrade its technological hardware to allow for regular high quality broadcasts of events from the Ashram. At the moment, all live streaming is on hold given the current government restrictions for gatherings. But at the appropriate time, the Ashram will resume its thrice-weekly Tamil Parayana live streams.

Ramana kendras around the globe are taking up the challenge and are carrying on with live Ramana satsang functions. Dr Venkat S. Ramanan, president of the ashram, is closely monitoring the situation in India, and elsewhere around the world, and feels that Tiruvannamalai could continue to suffer disruption from the pandemic up until the end of the year. It is hoped that the majority of India's population will have been vaccinated by this time.

KEYWORD

Avadhūta

Part Three

B.K. CROISSANT

In Chapter Two as in Chapter One of the *Avadhūta Gītā*, Sage Dattātreyā captures our attention in large part by the artful use of various literary devices. Dynamic changes in rhythm is one of them. The Chapter opens with two verses in the *vasantatilakā* metre (14 syllables) that emphatically warn us not to be deceived by the external appearances of a guru. Then the poem reverts back to the familiar *anuṣṭubh* metre (eight syllables). Stirring verses follow that extol the Self and affirm the *avadhūta*'s complete identity with It. Then the tone becomes didactic, and the focus turns to instruction on how to attain the highest state where the mind, through constant practice, no longer

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.

clings to any object whatsoever. After the yogi who realises the Self is exalted, the rhythm changes from eight syllables to 15, bursting forth with an ecstatic verse in *mālinī* metre that summarizes the state of one who sees his true Self, free from taint, actionless and never bound. From there we are carried on the wings of *jagatī*, a class of metres with 12 syllables, that keeps us aloft to the end of the Chapter. Joining the upward thrust is the first appearance of a refrain, another literary technique, that persists for eight verses, landing us on the final verse that asks how can there be instruction by a teacher where the mind is unable to grasp Brahman and speech unable to express It?¹

Chapter Three, a hymn of 46 verses, begins with use of ‘*katham*’ (how), a kind of weapon frequently seen in Chapter One to prod us into shaking off the mind. In the first verse, the Absolute is described as beyond duality, pure and all-pervading. If that is indeed the case, then how (*katham*) shall I worship Śiva? The following verse further describes the *Ātman*, states ‘I am that Brahman’ and then asks the very same question in the *vasantatilakā* metre, the poem’s predominant rhythm. Next comes verse 3. It shifts gears and begins a stunningly beautiful string of verses in which the poet’s mastery of hypnotic repetition shines. The last line of this verse is the first instance of the Chapter’s beautiful refrain, ‘*I am the nectar of Knowledge, constant throughout like the sky*’, which has all the power of a *mantra* and occurs no less than 40 times!

निर्मूलमूलरहितो हि सदोदितोऽहं
निर्धूमधूमरहितो हि सदोदितोऽहम् ।
निर्दीपदीपरहितो हि सदोदितोऽहं
ज्ञानामृतं समरसं गगनोपमोऽहम् ॥

nirmūla-mūla-rahito hi sadodito’ham
nirdhūma-dhūma-rahito hi sadodito’ham
nirdīpa-dīpa-rahito hi sadodito’ham
jñānāmṛtaṁ samarasam gaganopamo’ham. (verse 3)

*Neither having a root nor lacking a root, I am perpetually present.
Neither obscured nor unobscured, I am perpetually present. Neither*

¹ See *Croaking Frogs* by Les Morgan for a thorough treatment of Sanskrit metrics and figures of speech.

*illuminated nor unilluminated, I am perpetually present. I am the nectar of Knowledge, constant throughout like the sky.*²

[As in previous chapters, note how simply duality is handled. A noun is stated and then restated with its absence indicated by the prefix ‘nir’. ‘Rahito’ and ‘hi sadodito’ham’ occur three times in the same place. Chant the first three lines to see for yourself how gracefully they trip off the tongue and how profoundly they resonate. This pattern of repetition, or a version of it, is a common feature of the poem.]

In succeeding verses we are continuously told that ‘I am not this’ (*neti neti*), and the Brahman’s perfection is described. The disciple and reader are evoked but not often or emphatically. In verse 33, however, Dattātreyā the *avadhūta* abruptly attempts to put us to shame. In four remarkable verses (34-37) he asks why indeed, since we are That, do we weep? This time he uses ‘*kiṃ nāma*’ (why), instead of ‘*katham*’ as a weapon to awaken us.

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न जरा न मृत्युः
किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च जन्मदुःखम् ।
किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च ते विकारो
ज्ञानामृतं समरसं गगनोपमोऽहम् ॥

kiṃ nāma rodiṣi sakhe na jarā na mṛtyuh
kiṃ nāma rodiṣi sakhe na ca janma-duḥkham
kiṃ nāma rodiṣi sakhe na ca te vikāro
jñānāmṛtaṃ samarasam gaganopamo’ham.

(verse 34)

Friend, why do you weep, unaffected by senility and death? Friend, why do you weep, unaffected by the sorrow of rebirth? Friend, why weep? You are changeless! I am the nectar of Knowledge, constant throughout like the sky.

Swami Chetanananda begins the preface of his translation of the *Avadhūta Gītā* with the following tribute to ‘*rodiṣi*’ (from ‘*rud*’ meaning to weep), which we have already seen in Chapter One.

“Why do you weep, my friend? In you is all power. Summon up your all-powerful nature, O mighty one, and this whole universe will lie at your feet. It is the Self alone that predominates, and not matter.” When I was a boy of fifteen, I read this beautiful message of

² These verses were translated by the author with Marcia Solomon, a Sanskrit scholar who lives in Boulder, Colorado.

MOUNTAIN PATH

*Vedanta in one of Swami Vivekananda's letters. "Why do you weep, my friend?" – this line struck my mind so forcefully that even today I remember it vividly. And it is that same timeless message of Vedanta which is restated throughout the Avadhuta Gita, or The Song of the Ever-Free. That is what inspired me to translate this ancient scripture from the original Sanskrit into English.*³

Returning to the poem, in verse 43 the metre switches from *vasantatilakā* (14 syllables) to *mālinī* (15 syllables), and the familiar refrain is dropped. If I, the Supreme One alone exists like space, how can I say that Reality is blissful? How can I say It is blisslessness? How can the Supreme possess either knowledge or ignorance? The following verse summons us to know Consciousness with certainty and to realise It. Then the rhythm changes again, this time to *triṣṭubh* (11 syllables), and a magnificent verse bursts forth. Chant it aloud to fully experience its resonance!

न शून्यरूपं न विशून्यरूपं
न शुद्धरूपं न विशुद्धरूपम् ।
रूप विरूपं न भवामि किञ्चित्
स्वरूपरूपं परमार्थतत्त्वम् ॥

na śūnya-rūpaṁ na viśūnya-rūpaṁ
na śuddha-rūpaṁ na viśuddha-rūpaṁ
rūpaṁ virūpaṁ na bhavāmi kiñcit
svarūpa-rūpaṁ paramārtha-tattvam.

(verse 45)

My nature is not void nor is voidlessness my nature. My nature is not pure nor is impurity my nature. I am not in the least form or formlessness. My nature is my own essence, the Supreme Truth.

Finally, the Chapter ends with one last verse in the *anuṣṭubh* metre (eight syllables). We land in familiar territory and are told to renounce, renounce some more and then renounce renunciation. Give up the idea of shunning or accepting the world. You, the Self, are pure, immortal and immutable! Can you feel the breeze on the mountain top?

Chapter Four, a song of 25 verses, is in the *triṣṭubh* metre (11 syllables) except for the last verse. Like the previous Chapter, it begins

³ *Avadhūta Gītā: The Song of the Ever-Free*, translated from the Sanskrit with Notes and Introduction by Swami Chetanananda, p. vii.

with shock therapy, asking how (*katham*) to worship the formless Absolute in which both unity and diversity are merged. In verse 3 the refrain, ‘*Nirvana* is my very essence, beyond all ills’, which is repeated 22 times in the poem, first appears. ‘*Katham vadāmi*’ (how can I say) also appears, and this version of Dattātreyā’s weapon of awakening occurs 17 times in all!

अबोधबोधो मम नैव जातो
 बोधस्वरूपं मम नैव जातम् ।
 निर्बोधबोधं च कथं वदामि
 स्वरूपनिर्वाणमनामयोऽहम् ॥

abodha-bodho mama naiva jāto
 bodha-svarūpaṁ mama naiva jātam
 nirbodha-bodhaṁ ca katham vadāmi
 svarūpa-nirvāṇam anāmayo’ham.

(verse 5)

Knowledge and the absence of knowledge do not apply to me. My own nature is not born of knowledge. How can I speak of knowledge or lack of knowledge? Nirvana is my very essence, beyond all ills.

The poem remains centered on the *avadhūta* as ‘I’ until verse 23. Here the disciple and reader are clearly invoked and told repeatedly to know who we really are with total certitude. The ‘I’ in the refrain can mean the Absolute, the Master or the disciple and reader separately or all of them as One.

असंशयं विद्धि निराकुलं माम्
 असंशयं विद्धि निरन्तरं माम् ।
 असंशयं विद्धि निरञ्जनं मां
 स्वरूपनिर्वाणमनामयोऽहम् ॥

asamśayaṁ viddhi nirākulaṁ mām
 asamśayaṁ viddhi nirantaraṁ mām
 asamśayaṁ viddhi nirañjanaṁ mām
 svarūpa-nirvāṇam anāmayo’ham.

(verse 23)

Without a doubt, know me as serenity. Without a doubt, know me as endless. Without a doubt, know me as immaculate. Nirvana is my very essence, beyond all ills.

[The effect of repetition is especially strong, with only a slight difference in the words before the refrain in the last line, which links

the verse to most of the other verses in the song. Not only is the verse beautiful to pronounce, it is also easy to memorize!]

While verse 25 enjoins us to give up all meditations as well as all good and bad deeds and to drink the nectar of renunciation, the Chapter's concluding verse negates the poem itself and all efforts to express the Self in words. *"When the knower truly knows nothing, then verses like these cannot be. Immersed in the One-in-all, his mind pure, the avadhūta prattles about the highest Truth"*.

Chapter Five, the fifth hymn strung on a thread, contains 32 verses in the *toṭaka* metre (12 syllables). It is a masterpiece that can stand alone and bears reading, chanting and contemplating over and over again. It begins, like the other poems in the *Avadhūta Gītā*, with a short invocation. This time the persistent question of how to worship the formless, undivided and eternal Absolute is framed in terms of OM, but the meaning is the same. In other words, since the Absolute is All, its realization negates all relative realities. Who is there to worship and how? The second verse invokes the Vedas, specifically the great dictum 'That Thou Art', and states the poem's refrain for the first time, *'Why do you, the Self, same-in-all, have a mind that weeps?'*, just a small step to Ramana Maharshi's *brahmāstram* 'Who am I?' or, in this case, 'Who is weeping?'. This song is Dattātreya's most powerful and poignant attempt to provoke us into shaking off the mind. Unmoving like a mountain, there are no changes in metre, just shock therapy using 'kimu' as an instrument 30 times in the refrain. There is also relentless repetition within words, between words, within lines, between lines, among verses and even among poems. The Master is propelling the disciple and the reader to finally merge into the Self.

Here is a beautiful verse at the beginning of the poem.

अध ऊर्ध्वविवर्जितसर्वसमं
 बहिरन्तरवर्जितसर्वसमम् ।
 यदि चैकविवर्जितसर्वसमं
 किमु रोदिषि मानसि सर्वसमम् ॥

adha ūrdhva-vivarjita-sarva-samaṁ
 bahirantara-varjita-sarva-samam
 yadi caikavivarjita-sarva-samaṁ
 kimu rodiṣi mānasi sarva-samam.

(verse 3)

If the Self, same-in-all, is devoid of above and below, inside and out and even the sense of one, why do you, the Self, same-in-all, have a mind that weeps?

[Note that ‘sarva-samam’ (Self, same-in-all) occurs in the same place four times. ‘Rodiṣi’ first appears in Chapter One, verse 17, then in Chapter Three, verses 34-37 and finally in Chapter Five, verses 2-31.]

Here is another verse, exquisitely balanced, that truly sings!

न हि मोक्षपदं न हि बन्धपदं
न हि पुण्यपदं न हि पापपदम् ।
न हि पूर्णपदं न हि रिक्तपदं
किमु रोदिषि मानसि सर्वसमम् ॥

na hi mokṣa-padam na hi bandha-padam
na hi puṇya-padam na hi pāpa-padam
na hi pūrṇa-padam na hi rikta-padam
kimu rodiṣi mānasi sarva-samam.

(verse 19)

No state of liberation, no state of bondage! No state of merit, no state of demerit! There is no state of plenty and no state of void. Why do you, the Self, same-in-all, have a mind that weeps?

Verse 31 brings us full circle, back to the Vedas that declare the universe is like a mirage. The last verse of this magnificent poem repeats the last verse of the previous poem. “*When the knower truly knows nothing, then verses like these cannot be. Immersed in the One-in-all, his mind pure, the avadhūta prattles about the highest Truth*”.

Chapter Six or song six begins where the previous Chapter ends, that is with the Vedic statement that everything we see before us is simply a mirage. The poem’s refrain, ‘*If the undivided Absolute in all is One, how...*’ appears in the first verse followed by ‘*ca katham*’. In verse 2, ‘*ca katham*’ appears twice, like the beating of a drum. The verse’s recurring subject, how to offer obeisance to the Self, is a familiar one!

अविभक्तिविभक्तिविहीन्यरं
ननु कार्यविकार्यविहीनपरम् ।
यदि चैकनिरन्तरसर्वशिवं
यजनं च कथं तपनं च कथम् ॥

MOUNTAIN PATH

avibhakti-vibhakti-vihīna-param
nanu kārya-vikārya-vihīna-param
yadi caika-nirantara-sarva-śivaṃ
yajanaṃ ca kathaṃ tapanam ca katham. (verse 2)

The Supreme is beyond separation and non-separation. The Supreme is beyond activity and non-activity. If the undivided Absolute in all is One, how can there be worship? How can there be penance?

Most of the rest of the 27 verses in the poem follow the pattern of the first and second verses in which concepts are negated, the refrain is thunderously asserted, and then additional concepts are negated. ‘Yadi’ can appear once or several times in the same verse, and ‘katham’ may appear once or twice with or without ‘ca’. As in the previous song, the *toṭaka* metre does not change except for the last verse. There is a steady procession of rejected figments of the imagination until verse 22. Suddenly, the tone changes, and a new refrain appears like the grand finale of a great spectacle. It is two lines long, the first affirming that ‘I am truly the Absolute and supreme Reality’ and the second asking ‘Now to whom can I offer obeisance?’, and is triumphantly repeated five times!

त्वमहं न हि हन्त कदाचिदपि
कुलजातिविचारमसत्यमिति ।
अहमेव शिवः परमार्थ इति
अभिवादनमत्र करोमि कथम् ॥

tvam ahaṃ na hi hanta kadācid api
kula-jāti-vicāram asatyam iti
aham eva śivaḥ paramārtha iti
abhivādanam atra karomi katham. (verse 22)

Look around! There are no ‘you’-s or ‘I’-s here. Concepts of family and caste are pure fantasy. I am truly the Absolute and supreme Reality. Now to whom can I offer obeisance?

Here all distractions have been removed in the vision of the Self. The ego is dissolved and the inexpressible Truth remains. Again the final verse of the Chapter repeats the final verse of the previous Chapter, and then Silence. The *Avadhūta Gītā* has taken the disciple and the reader closer to the Self, and in that singular purpose rests its great power and magnificent beauty.

So, has the mind dropped off yet? Does the world appear as a mirage? Does the One alone prevail? Śrī Śaṅkarācārya tells us that if we surrender deeply enough, we will awaken to the realization that we are That, after which we will never turn back again.

*He whose manifestations – which are themselves nothing but the Reality – appear as the objects of the world; He, who imparts to those who have surrendered to Him, direct enlightenment, through the Vedic commandment “That Thou Art”, and after the direct experience of which there is no more any return to the ocean of worldly existence, to Him, the divine teacher, Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti is this prostration.*⁴

In our own time, Ramana Maharshi ends his much beloved *Upadeśa Saram* with the authoritative declaration that the greatest penance of them all, the only one that will give us real Peace is shaking off the mind.

*The shining of the Self free from the ego – that is real tapas. This is Ramana’s teaching.*⁵

Find out who is weeping and be happy! ▲

⁴ Translated by Swami Chinmayananda.

⁵ Translated from the Sanskrit version of the poem by N.A. Mohan Rao, v.30. See *Upadeśa Saram (The Essence of Spiritual Instruction): The Complete Version of Four Languages Composed by Sri Bhagavan with Transliteration, Word-for-Word Meaning, Paraphrase and Commentary*, published by Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai.

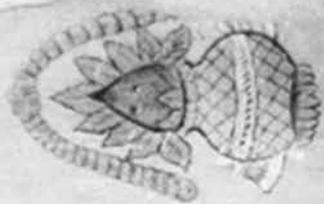
Happily Blind

Suresh Kailash

The dust of your feet has cleansed
the dust from my eyes,

It doesn’t matter anymore to me
if clouds cover the sky,

I’ve seen the sun that shines inside,
and now, Ramana, I’m happily blind.



BOOK EXCERPT

Sri Mahaswami

The Sage with Eyes of Light

SERGE DEMETRIAN

Due to persistent requests we will present further extracts from the Śrī Mahāswami, The Sage with Eyes of Light that relates the direct experiences of the author with Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhādhipati Jagadguru Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvati Svāmī, which took place from 1968 until the mahāsamādhi of Śrī Mahāswami in 1994.

Indica Books has published the complete written record of the author's experiences with Śrī Mahāswami. The price for PB ₹1,095/- & HB ₹1,500/-; pp.816. ISBN: 978-93-81120-20-0. The book is available in Amazon and other webpages. If Indica Books is emailed at indicabooksindia@gmail.com they will send the book by post.

Karvetinagar, 30th August 1971

The Ocean of absolute Light

A second major event was waiting to happen. The activity of widening, purifying and strengthening my physical eyes continued for the next two days. On the morning of the third day, after a peaceful sleep on the carved granite stairs at the reservoir, I came to know that Shri Mahaswami had already left for the Venugopala temple. I hurried, hoping to find him there. But I arrived too late as he was just coming out of the temple in order to return to the hermitage. I strode behind him among some twenty other people along the

kilometre of road up to the hermitage, trying to be as near to him as the rules permitted.

From the beginning of that walk, I understood that Shri Mahaswami had the intention to look at me. He stopped under different pretexts and, with his eyelids largely open, he gazed at me for a long time and with growing intensity. I understood this ploy which he often utilised when he wanted to bless me. In these cases, I look into his eyes as if they were two wells full of the Water of the Paradise. I do not lose any opportunity to open my heart to him through the windows of my own eyes. This time I observed that he did not allow anybody to interject themselves between us. I was very near to him in that ineffable atmosphere that encircles him and follows him when he walks, like the tail of a comet.

After several stops, we reached the hermitage of the Lotus Pond. It must have been about 9 am when Shri Mahaswami halted for one last time, but before entering the hut, he changed his mind. He turned and ordered a traditional scholar of the maṭh who was in his entourage to come near. He was a tall and thin elderly paṇḍit; a pleasant person who, unfortunately, stuttered severely. The man was skilfully placed by Swamiji between himself and me. Then Shri Mahaswami raised one of those complicated doctrinal questions of which he possesses the secret, and the paṇḍit launched into an elaborated explication in Tamil, stammering with great difficulty, in spite of his obvious good intentions.

I stood just in front of Shri Mahaswami and could perfectly see him from a close distance over the left shoulder of the paṇḍit. I could even keep my eyes in the same horizontal plane as his eyes. My hands in *añjali*, I repeated a holy name and concentrated on the point between his eyebrows. Shri Mahaswami seemed to have waited just for this. Taking advantage of a moment when some twenty people were around, who were held spellbound by the exposition of the genial stutterer, whose stream of words exploded again and again after each agonising interval, Swamiji went so near to him, that he almost could have touched the 'barrier-shoulder' which invariably came between Swamiji and me.

From my side I did the same: for fifteen to twenty seconds we were in parallel separated by just some thirty centimetres. His eyes were wide open: they were two blue globes spreading fine rays. They

seemed less brilliant perhaps because we were both in broad daylight. However Swamiji's irises, usually of brown colour, had lost their colour and were rendered transparent by the azure ethereal radiation coming from inside Swamiji. I was able to see clearly that in place of the black pupils there were the two spots of a blinding clarity, two living lightning rods which were ready to burst out. These two light-serpents were kept at bay by the same will that had projected them; otherwise my poor eyes would have been doubtlessly long since shattered into splinters of glass.

This interval of fifteen to twenty seconds was enough. A peaceful light arose in the centre of my heart from where it flooded the entire body like a liquid cloud. I was suffused by a feeling of inexpressible happiness; I dwelt in a state foreign to me, which first stood there, then moved free of laws by which I was now no longer bound. In these cases, when this happens, the reasoning mind (*manas*) still works, and knows that one should not move but concentrate on the inner vision in the heart, only repeating the name of the Guru or a sacred formula. That is, if one is still capable of remembering something.

This time, hardly had I directed my attention to the heart, when I observed how the peaceful light which had invaded me was slowly strengthening itself. After having filled the chest and stopped the breathing, it diffused itself without encountering any obstacle throughout the entire body. I had still the time to wonder how I could stay alive without breathing. The limbs and the organs lost their structure and became a mass of faint azure light. I tried to identify them but these familiar objects, which habitually formed 'my body' were no longer in their usual places.

This state did not worry me... I was telling myself: "If one could live without the body, it would be one load less." The head was the portion which was the slowest to disappear; it finally perished as the last. I remained alone with a vague feeling of individuality without any precise location.

The only perception was that of Shri Mahaswami: a kind of pillar — an entity made of goodness and stability — that was on the other side of the shoulder of the paṇḍit. From somewhere there suddenly appeared a question:

"What shall I do now?"

MOUNTAIN PATH

“One can stay as such,” a lazy thought suggested. It appeared, I do not know from where, and was located in an indeterminate spot.

“And if one would progress? You know well that it is possible,” said another thought, a more courageous one.

The lazy one, not admitting defeat, called an ally to help. It was the thought of fear:

“What will you gain, standing here, alone, among unknown people and you will fall, and fracture a leg. Shri Mahaswami will be displeased if you make a spectacle with these departures for the Infinite!”

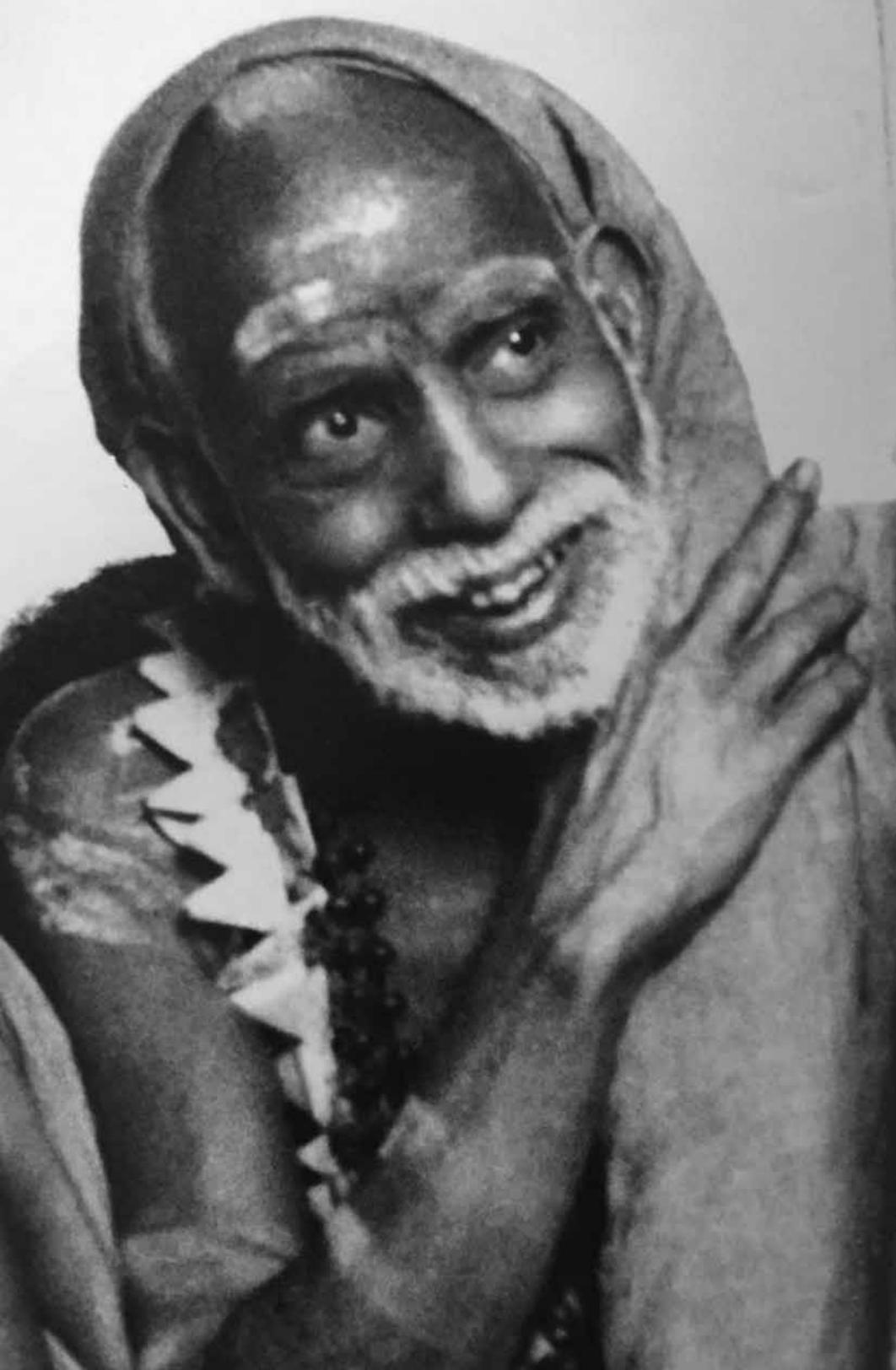
The frail idea of ‘I’ hesitated, and then it turned towards Swamiji:

“He is still there... If he had wanted me to return he would have shown how... As he did not, I therefore dive...”

Before saying goodbye to this beautiful world, as in this case one never knows what will happen, I still heard the high pitched Tamil outburst coming in torrents from the stammering scholar. I had forgotten him although he had continued his peroration right in front of my nose.

Every idea of a body and every other thought evaporated. In the heart, where everything started, the gentle faint azure light became in succession orange, yellow then liquid gold and more and more an ethereal white, until it impassively glided towards the Ocean of the luminous Presence. The minute ‘I’ was standing on the shore of this waveless immensity. The shore, or better still, an island or a continent floating on the Ocean, appeared in an inexplicable manner, as the Ocean spread up, down, in front, behind... everywhere.

We could call it the Immensity of an ineffable luminosity, but it was beyond the luminous that can only be pointed to by the term ‘light’, as it cannot be compared to anything else. The one characteristic of this immensity was that it existed. It resulted in a feeling of ultimate Joy. I felt that I had arrived at the limit of all knowledge, as if I had reached the end of reason and the expression of all that can or could have been conceived... at the end of everything..., the perfect stability in the Felicity. As if the world, the worlds, the Universe, with its infinite variety of forms and relations from its origin and beyond that too, behind and also in front, in the time and out of time, everything had been justified by the existence of this Immensity... the Ocean of absolute Light.



MOUNTAIN PATH

The onlooker 'I' was reduced in dimension to a mere idea that hurriedly plunged in the smooth Immensity of luminous Felicity and was dissolved without trace. It had found its origin, the primordial Reality of which it had been but a speck. Thus the 'I' had perished. Was it for ever, or for a fraction of the human time scale? What happened was a mystery of which nobody was there to bear witness about. Who could have said it, and for whom and for what? Finally a decision has been taken. By whom? This also remained unknown... And then the temporary was preferred. The idea of 'I' had to reappear: it reappeared...

The 'I' thought, the thought of an individuality, that signified the separation from the oceanic Immensity manifested itself as a form of froth that arises in the Waters of light. This particle was carried away by discreet waves to a shore, which was the same place it came from. A shore which could have been from a continent or an island gliding on this Ocean of the Infinite, both of them being also in the form of froth, though slightly more hardened. They were floating in it, like the stars and the galaxies in the Immensity without the limits of the interstellar space. How approximate and vague are these terms!

Whatever it may be, the grain of naked individuality seemed possessing nothing else than the consciousness of its own existence. It was different, apparently separate from the Infinite from where it just came out. Little by little it reappeared and on it hung in successive strata, the old reason with its memory and the ideas of good and bad; then the sense of judgement with its doubts and convictions, with its law of logic; then the humble instinctive mind, which silently takes care of the corporeal factory of the organism. And of what was to become the body, the consciousness of the head, which was the last to disappear, now was the first to come back, followed one by one by the five senses. These began to appear first in their subtle form, then quickly sustained their existence and reached the sense organs. Next appeared the tenuous forms of the limbs culminating in their gross manifestation. The air started moving in the nose, and the chest puffed out. I observed that during the journey that just ended I had forgotten to breathe. That means I had rejected everything, the body as well as the mind, like some cumbersome clothes. And then, I took back everything that I had abandoned.

The memory returned and submitted me its report: I was standing close behind the left shoulder of the paṇḍit. Swamiji stood on the other side of this left shoulder. I was in the middle of a group of about twenty people, dressed in the fashion of the south, on the western shore of the Lotus Pond, near the hermitage, at nine in the morning.

I took a chance to open the eyes — when did I close them? I am on the same spot, without anybody around me. The sun is high in the sky and it should be near noon, which means that ‘this one’ had been standing here for about three hours. I am protected from the heat pouring down from the sky by the shade of coconut leaves on the north side of the hermitage. Shri Mahaswami had stopped in the shade right at the very beginning, intentionally, I am sure. I try a look on my right side, on my left. Swamiji had retired to his hut. When? I could not say. Two or three people from the group are still there, but are farther away. They talk among themselves and feign to ignore me. I observe that I was standing the whole time. Why did I not fall?

I try to move my legs, they respond. I slowly leave, very slowly towards the place where I am staying. The eyes of Shri Mahaswami are accompanying me: in the head, in the heart and round me; on the vegetation that was passing on the hedge that lined the dusty and scorching trail. Their presence helps me to bear the heat that is burning my naked feet. If only I could nevermore forget his true eyes, his Eyes of Light... ▲

Into My Heart

Alasdair Black

Into my heart
 An air that revives
 From some fair region blows.
 And it flows from my heart
 To that other sad part
 That calls itself my mind.
 But are they apart,
 My mind and my heart,
 And that other fair region —
 Who knows?



The Maharshi and The Mother

Part Two

KAYS

The earlier pronouncements of Bhagavan recorded in *Ramaṇa Gītā* were prophetic and decided the issue of the final honours due to the revered body. The Maharshi instructed the disciples to carry the body to the foot of the hill to be buried quietly in a no man's land. Again, the hand of the Divine was discernible in this event also. The serendipitous acquisition of long bamboos left behind on top of the hill by someone just four days before and collected by two devotees with no specific use in mind, came in handy to carry the holy body down to the banks of Pāli Tīrtham. The spot chosen belonged to one Bavaji Mutt but as there was no one then to represent the mutt it had become a no man's land, so permission from the town administration to use the land was procured with ease.

The body after '*abhiṣhekam*' was lowered in an underground chamber of brick and mortar constructed as per the injunctions in *Tirumantiram* and filled with camphor, holy ash, salt and other aromatic materials and covered with a slab of granite. Bhagavan sat by throughout as a silent witness. And by some coincidence a Śiva Liṅga from Kāsi arrived just then.¹ It was placed atop the *Samādhi* and named *Mātrbhūteśvara* (Śiva manifesting as the Mother). Ganapati

¹ Sri Krishna Bhikshu, *Ramana Leela*, p. 168.

Muni hailed the event. As the news had spread, hundreds of people had come with their offerings and all of them were fed. From then on daily *puja* with *abhiṣheka* and *naivedya* was performed. Water for *abhiṣheka* had to be brought from Pāli Tīrtham. When the devotees dug at a place pointed out nearby by the Maharshi, water gushed forth from a spring and became the sacred Tīrtha for use in the Samādhi Shrine. This inspired the born poet Ganapati Muni to burst forth in a hymn:

Here is the new Tīrtha, remover of all blemish, at the Samādhi of Mother Saundaryāmbā, like the stream of nectar from the two lotus hands of Ramana Maharshi.²

May the holy Mother of Maharshi shine forth!

May her Samādhi shine forth! May the Lingam installed on it by the Maharshi shine forth! May the new Tīrtha shine forth as the remover of all imperfection.³

The Maharshi, who visited the Samādhi again and again, one day came down the Hill and stayed on that night, thus ending His long stay on the Hill. Subsequent history proved it to be an epochal event and the Divine Play of it all was acknowledged by the Maharshi Himself when He declared that He came down, not of His own accord, but “Something told me I should not go back but stay on here. It was as if my legs refused to get up. And I stayed on.”⁴ For did He not in rapturous joy proclaim earlier, “O! Lord and Life of my life! Thy will is my will and pleasure.”⁵ From that day onwards, the influence of Mother, the constant and vivifying *śaktī*, accomplishing the fulfilment of His mission, became evident and its first manifestation was to change the face of the Ashram. Thus, the credit of placing on the Hill top the Light of Bhagavan, that had been hidden in a bushel, belongs to the mother. May our obeisance be to her!

Initially there were just two simple thatched huts; one over the Samādhi of the Mother and the other for staying in. Mudaliar Granny built a narrow *pial* (raised platform) for Bhagavan on which he used to sit or recline. Sri Ramaswamy Pillai did yeoman service removing the cacti that the entire area was overgrown with. The flowering plants first

² सौन्दर्याम्बा निर्वाण षट्कम् – *Saundaryāmbā Nirvāṇa Ṣaṭkam*.

³ *Nirvāṇa Ṣaṭkam*, verse 5 & 6.

⁴ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *My Recollections*, p. 135.

⁵ Verse 2, *Aruṅācala Padikam*.

planted by Amritananda blossomed into a full-fledged flower garden, while Veera, a tireless worker, exemplifying Bhagavan's teaching of humility and selfless devotion, helped the devotees overcome the water shortage, by carrying water to quench the thirst of humans and plants. In the initial days, during the winter evenings, the few devotees present used to sit around a smouldering charcoal brazier. At those tranquil periods, pearls of wisdom would drop from His lips and each felt Bhagavan was his own.

Another seemingly accidental occurrence was the discovery of bricks abandoned by a brickmaker near the site of the Samādhi. All the devotees joined in this work, and Bhagavan Himself helped transfer the bricks to the Ashram and the next day a wall was built around the Samādhi. Bhagavan did all the masonry work on the inside of the wall while a professional mason worked on the outside.

Two parallel buildings, a kitchen and a dining hall, came up where Bhagavan's Samādhi shrine stands now. Bhagavan moved to the Old Hall which was completed in 1928. When Niranjanananda Swami became the Sarvādhikāri in 1930, the Ashram construction activity registered a spectacular growth. The *gośāla* (cowshed), the dining room, the kitchen, storeroom and the Vedapāṭhaśālā all came up between 1929 and 1938. When the storeroom was completed, Bhagavan drew a picture of Arunachala with its three peaks, a bas-relief of which he wanted to be made out of lime and mortar over the entrance. When Annamalai, the devotee-mason, could not figure out the technique, Bhagavan Himself climbed the scaffolding, sat before the wall and helped him to do it. This, and another identical bas-relief over the inside of the entrance to the storeroom can still be seen today, an evidence of his hallowed touch bespeaking his *jñānottara bhakti*, a devotion rendered supreme by resplendent *jñāna*. This was but in tune with His habit of drawing the outline of the Holy Hill or writing Its sacred name Arunachala (அருணாச்சலம்) before commencing any new work, or even when starting to use a new pen or pencil.

Soon after Bhagavan's settling down near the mother's Samādhi, Ganapati Muni came down from the Mango tree cave to settle in the vicinity of Bhagavan's presence in a grove to the west of the Ashram called Palakkottu and engaged himself in intense *tapas*. A few fortunate visitors also came to settle down there. The effulgence

of Arunachala, centered in the corporeal frame of Bhagavan, was largely unheralded and not widely known at that time.

True, even earlier, while Bhagavan was at Skandasramam, another spiritual personality of eminence, the great social reformer, Sri Narayana Guru, after seeing Bhagavan had announced Him to be the 'King Cobra' (*Raja Sarpam*) to his band of disciples and had hailed His Sahaja state in his poems *Nivṛtti Pañcakam* and *Municaryā Pañcakam*. Another earlier visitor, Achutadasa, author of Vedantic songs of Advaitic content, had spoken of Him in reverential wonder to his disciples. Seshadri Swami, of course, guided many a disciple to Him, praising His Supreme Presence as automatically purifying all those who came near: “மஹரிஷி தர்சனம் பரம பாவனம்” – *Mahariṣi darśanam parama pāvaṇam* (most purifying is the *darśan* of Bhagavan).

But in the divine scheme of things, the mission of announcing this Revealer of Light to the world belonged to Sri B.V. Narasimha Swamy who came in 1929 and settled in Palakkottu. His book *Self-Realization*, was the first ever biography of Bhagavan. Reading it, came Paul Brunton and Buddhist Bhikkhu Prajñānanda, both of whom settled down in Palakkottu.⁶ Paul Brunton, in turn, announced the presence of the Maharshi not only to seekers outside India but to many within the country as well, through his famous book, *A Search in Secret India*. Then came Suddhananda Bharathi, the divinely inspired Tamil poet, who also settled in Palakkottu and wrote *Ramana Vijayam*, the biography in Tamil.⁷ Then birds of the same feather from various directions flocked here after hearing the fame of his *Tannarum svāṇubūti taraiyelām maṇakka* (rare realisation spreading fragrance all over the earth) in the words of Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer. Satchidananda Swami of Kerala, two disciples of Anandamayi Ma, Yogi Ramiah, Viswanatha Swami, Munagala Venkataramaiah, Krishna Bhikshu, Swami Satyananda, Muruganar, and Kunju Swamy joined this band at various times and kept to the calm and meditative tenor of that cool, sequestered life. This tribe slowly expanded to include Major Chadwick, S.S. Cohen and others. The good Samaritan, Ramanatha

⁶ Biographies by others followed. Those by M.G. Shanmukam in Tamil and in Sanskrit by Ganapati Muni are incomplete. Krishna Bhikshu wrote one in Telugu, while his brother Venkateswarulu wrote one in Hindi. One in Kannada is by Swami Pranavananda.

⁷ Two more biographies in English followed, authored by Arthur Osborne and M.S. Kamath respectively.

Brahmachari, who gave service unasked to all these *sadhu*-s, endeared himself to all. Thus, Palakkottu, a veritable Tapovanam, exhaling the aroma of *tapas* inhaled the fragrance from the *Jñāna Vanam* of Bhagavan's precincts and it was protected and facilitated by the silent guidance and solicitous care of Bhagavan who walked through it every day during his daily strolls. Palakkottu thus became a veritable Heavenly Abode, Swargashramam itself.

By 1930, the Ashram had become a beautiful, peaceful and sacred retreat with its lovely flower gardens and lucent pool (Pāli Tīrtham) surrounded by trees, greeting visitors like familiar friends. The tranquil atmosphere was pregnant with serene peace, pulsating with the Grace raining from Bhagavan, Whose Joy of Awareness and Bliss of Being made the Ashram a divine space, the very approach to which filled the mind with a professed repose.

Kapali Sastry claimed, "The idea behind the Samādhi of Sri Maharshi's mother, and the construction of the temple of Matrubhuteswara later on is that it is to be a centre of spiritual force. The Maharshi said so much and would not have come down the Hill and stayed where he had been staying [at the newly founded ashram, if this had not been the case]."⁸

Bhagavan's attitude to the mother's Samādhi and the construction of her temple are summed up in His aphoristic statements, such as, "'Where has mother gone?' She is here."⁹ What did he mean? Saundaryamba, the individual mother, becoming the Universal Mother, ever abided as Bhagavan, the embodiment of Pure Awareness. Prof. N.R. Krishnamurthy Iyer records an important anecdote: in a dream he perceives Bhagavan and he prostrates, after which Bhagavan asks him "Do you know who Mother is?" When he answers, "Mother is Bhagavan and Bhagavan is Mother," Bhagavan promptly answers, "That is correct."¹⁰

When Sri Kapali Sastry submitted his commentary on *Ramana Gita* for the Maharshi's perusal, Bhagavan turned to the end of the book, and read out the twenty couplets of the Epilogue, emphasizing the last line: *Mātr̥bhūtamaheśāya Ramaṇāya Namō Namaḥ* (Obeisance

⁸ Sastry, Kapali, *The Maharshi*, p. 84.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁰ *Power of the Presence*, D. Godman, page 168.

to the Lord who became the Mother and Ramana). It looked from the manner of his reading as if he was transmitting a truth.¹¹

Bhagavan's new life near his mother's Samādhi was a historical landmark because it provided far a greater access to His holy Presence. He was willing to see and be seen by everyone, denying access to none. This in turn, perhaps provided the stimulus for Him to be drawn out and to be responsive to those who needed His help and guidance. His sparingly used voice now spoke far more frequently, blessing seekers with a wisdom that no sacred book could provide. His eloquent looks bestowed silent initiations on those around Him. His glances, His gestures and His incredible smiles, so full of love and light, provided answers to the deepest questions. But most of all it was His Silence that became the magical touch opening the inner eye of wisdom in those who sought Him. The power of the Ocean of Being and Consciousness of the Guru, who had realised the Self-nature of all existence, cascaded in the all-encompassing *Ramana Lahari* (waves). It reached all the nooks and corners of the quarters of the globe and entered the hearts of true seekers, constituting 'the call divine'. Spiritual experiences began to happen to seekers all over the world, irrespective of their competence, their inclination, their training or their ethnicity. Many who had not even heard of Bhagavan had His *darśan* in their dreams. And of those earnest devotees who were fortunate enough to come, many could not tear themselves away from the presence of Bhagavan and therefore started to settle around the Ashram, giving rise to the area called Ramana Nagar today. In due course, the Ashram became a powerful university of soul-science disseminating the art of the inner life – *Ātma Vidya* (Science of Self-Realisation) – to all who wished to come.

In the prophetic utterance of Satyamangalam Venkatramayyar, Bhagavan, Pure Awareness Perfect and Whole, "fully aware of the primal cause and its effects," was the totally unattached chief architect of all that happened ('*Ādi kāraṇaṇ*', *Ramana Sadguru*). Thus, creating a new scripture for a new age, when any person could choose to be a disciple and not fear being excluded by caste or gender or creed, "the Dharmasastra of Bhagavan shines victorious, yea, victorious".¹² ▲

¹¹ Op. cit., *The Maharshi*, page 45.

¹² *Śrī Ramaṇa Gītā*, Commentary by Kapali Sastry, verse 10, chapter 13.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Wandering Through India

Part One

THELMA RAPPOLD

Introduction

Thelma Rappold was born in Akron, Ohio in 1905, the eldest of three daughters, and had a comfortable childhood. In 1935 she and her sister Marge traveled around the world first class for many months with money inherited from their grandfather. Thelma was clearly motivated by a spirit of adventure, and both of them experienced the pleasures enjoyed by socialites. All of this she methodically recorded in a diary. After her return, she ended a brief marriage and encountered Mahasiddha Satchitananda, a guru whose goal was to spread Indian spirituality in the West. His teaching inspired in her a deep desire to travel to India. She worked with him for seven years, organizing his classes in various locations and preparing herself for the greatest adventure of her life.

When she boarded the S.S. Falcon in New York in September 1947, her dream to find a guru who would lead her to self-realization began. On the ship and once arrived, many kind and knowledgeable souls advised her on how to proceed, and after absorbing the mystery of the Taj Mahal and the thrill of holy places like Benares, she found herself at Pondicherry where Dilip Kumar Roy had made arrangements for

MOUNTAIN PATH

her lodging. Although the Mother was gracious and earned Thelma's admiration and respect during the month she stayed there, something was missing. Among others Dr. Syed, who was there at the time, advised her to visit Ramana Maharshi in Tiruvannamalai.

Thelma decisively found her guru at Sri Ramanasramam and lived for a little over two years in what she calls the 'Jungle Ashram' surrounded by well-known permanent residents as well as crowds of devotees. After Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi and further travels in North India, she returned to the United States and married Samuel Rappold, whom she had met at the Ashram and with whom, at almost 47, she had a son named Ramana. She lived in northern California for many years when, in her nineties, she was discovered by spiritual seekers who encouraged her to compile her memoirs in a book. That she did, using her diary, notes and letters. They also included her in a documentary about Ramana Maharshi called 'Abide as the Self'. Surrounded by loving family members, she died peacefully at age 94 on November 23, 1999.

Excerpts from her book on travels to India begin with her arrival in Tiruvannamalai. In an effort to capture and preserve Thelma's spirited and colourful personality, very little editing has been imposed on the text. For instance, the use of capitalization and hyphens as well as other apparent irregularities, which she uses expressively, have been virtually untouched. Spelling was changed only to clarify the meaning. The text stands on its own, unique, bold and deeply touching. Her book and photographs from India were happily provided by her son and his family.

1948 Thu Feb 26

Tiruvannamalai

What a long day! Got up at 4:00 to get a 5:00 o'clock bus that didn't leave until 6:10 o'clock. When the rickshaw man got me to the Bus Station, the bus driver was still asleep in his bus and was very indignant to think that he had been disturbed. Even when we did get started we poked along at snail's pace, stopping every few miles for repairs. We took nearly seven hours to go 60 miles over HOT dusty roads. In India a person either has to learn patience or go mad in an attempt to get places on schedule.



MOUNTAIN PATH

The bus appeared to be a remodeled ante-diluvian Indianized truck, i.e. it had been stripped of all of its comforts. The seats were long narrow wooden planks with an even narrower mislocated back board. The seats looked and felt as though they had been designed for Egyptian mummies. Men, women and children were crammed to overlapping. Those who couldn't be squeezed inside the bus rode on top of the bus with feet dangling over the sides, thus the legs and feet obstructed the window view of the insiders. The floors are matted with squalling children and squawking parents.

Paved roads in this particular section of the country are non-existent and so we had to go bumping along at the hair-raising speed of 1 to 20 miles per hour over these rocky rutty roads. Not only was it a rough ride but a dusty one; over dirt roads that hadn't seen rain for many long months.

At the bus terminal in Tiruvannamalai a coolie loaded all the luggage in one of the two-wheeled horse-drawn covered wagons called a bundi.¹ A person must be prepared to get a good shaking in one of these contraptions. He either has to squat or let his legs dangle out the back of the bundi. I've seen natives ride these funny looking things, but never dreamed I myself would one day be riding them. About the only thing I can say in their favor is that they do protect one from the sun.

Raja, the Ashram Postmaster and receptionist was on his bicycle ready to come to meet the bus, when the bundi pulled through the Ashram gate.

Raja took me to the dining hall. Lunch is served at 11:00 o'clock and all had finished long ago. Everything is done in the simplest way. The floor serves as a chair and table. A banana leaf is a plate and the fingers are used as knives and forks. The food is very hot, highly seasoned and strictly Indian. No bread and not even any chapatis, only rice. The walls of the dining hall are decorated with pictures of the Maharshi and other great souls.

Raja said this was Bhagavan's resting hour but he took me to him anyway. ... One look ... and those Great BIG OCEANIC eyes stopped

¹ Presumably this is a spelling of the Tamil *vandi*, meaning vehicle. A more precise word for 'cart horse' in Tamil, is a *jetka*. — Editor.

all motion. He penetrated every atom of my being. My tongue lost its power of speech, even thoughts were momentarily at a standstill. What happened? He alone knows! I just stood there as if transfixed to the spot until Raja suggested it was time to go.

The most startling thing once I came down to earth was that it was Bhagavan's face that had appeared to me so vividly during one of the apparent catnaps on the way from Pondicherry.

How exhilarating to know that the search for a guru has ended and that I am here to stay for a long time, regardless of the primitive surroundings and glaring physical difficulties ahead. To be able to drink-in Bhagavan's presence is all that matters now. The most wonderful part is that we are allowed to spend almost as much time as we like in Bhagavan's presence – thus giving absorption a free hand.

Raja says Bhagavan reads, writes and understands English but doesn't like very well to speak it and so he usually uses an interpreter.

Raja took me over to one of the Ashram guest rooms for some much needed rest. Tea is served at 2:30 and then everyone assembles in the meditation hall. The men on one side and the women on the other side.

Bhagavan sits on a well cushioned divan at one end of the hall with an attendant at his side. All he has ever worn for many years, summer or winter, is a kowpin, an abbreviated loin cloth. About 4:45 o'clock after reading the outgoing mail which is brought to him, he goes for a short afternoon walk. While he is away someone prepares another divan under the pandal outside the meditation hall.

At 5:30 o'clock a group of Veda boys chant the five hymns which Bhagavan wrote to Arunachala. At 6:00 o'clock the ladies have to eat their dinner so as to be out of the Ashram by 6:30 o'clock. The rule is, no women after 6:30. I wonder if women are supposed to be poison to spiritual aspirants after the witching hour of 6:30?

Mrs. Osborne, one of the Western devotees, said I might occupy Dr. Sujata Sen's cottage until she returns from Madras. Mrs. Osborne invited me to her small but very homey place for some green mango desert and warm milk.

1948 Fri Feb 27

Mr. Henry and Prynns Hopkins arrived from Pondicherry at 9:30 am, which meant playing hostess for the day. 'Hoppy' and I went in

search of Major Chadwick, a tall broad shouldered, handsome 6'2" Englishman who has been here for 12 1/2 years. His well furnished little hut has a very quiet peaceful atmosphere about it. Mr. Chadwick and 'Hoppy' really had a few mental tussles. Poor Mr. Hopkins is so intellectually inclined he can't understand what he sees with his eyes, much less things of a fourth dimension.

Bhagavan eats in the same dining hall as everyone else. There is a partition down the center of the room. Brahmins sit on one side and everyone else sits on the other side. Bhagavan has a special place on one side where all can see him.¹ All eyes rest on Bhagavan and no one would think of starting to eat before he did.

In the afternoon 'Hoppy' besieged Bhagavan with questions of an intellectual nature. Bhagavan has a delightful sense of humor and can bring his answers straight to the point by his interesting and sometimes humorous illustrations. Again Mr. Hopkins' intellectuality reared its ugly head high in the air, but Bhagavan very subtly and gently, but FIRMLY drove him inward. Everyone got such a kick out of the discussion. It was too bad 'Hoppy' had to leave just when things seemed to be taking effect. He expects to write a book on Indian philosophy about which he appears to know nothing.

It is interesting to note the contrast between Sri Aurobindo's Ashram and the Sri Ramanashram. The Pondicherry Ashram is the most modern and Westernized Ashram in all India; operated with an efficiency known only to the West. Sri Ramanashram goes to the opposite extreme. It has often been referred to as the 'Jungle Ashram' which it truly is. It is operated strictly according to old orthodox customs.

Ashram guest rooms are open to men only for a few days after which each must make his own arrangements in the little community that has clustered near Bhagavan. Women are not allowed in the men's guest room and are left to shift for themselves. To come here means leaving one's home with all its pleasures and conveniences to live a simple primitive life. One can easily be content with the bare necessities of life in exchange for the rare and blessed privilege of being with a great Rishi like Bhagavan.

² Bhagavan sat with his back against the wall equidistant between the two sides divided by the partition. His place is now marked by a brick and mortar block with a photo on top of Bhagavan. — Editor.



1948 Sat Feb 28

Arose at 4:30 o'clock this morning to go hear the Veda parayana. Sometimes the boys are out of tune and off beat, but even so the chanting steps up the vibrations and has a very quieting effect on the restless mind, especially in Bhagavan's presence. It was surprising to see so many turn out at 5:00 o'clock in the morning. After parayana, Bhagavan takes his early morning walk.

Mrs. Osborne suggested going up the Hill to watch the sunrise - what a magnificent sight! We went barefooted, found a small plateau looking out over the city below. The Eastern horizon was a blaze of color, hawks glided down the mountainside from their homes on sacred Arunachala and all was Peace and Quiet.

According to geologists, Arunachala was old before the Himalayas came into existence. It is the sacred Hill of Lord Siva. To the casual visitor it may appear as only a barren rock-studded hill but to sit quietly in meditation on the crest of one of the hillocks is to feel the fiery magnetism that pulsates from the innermost depths. Until recently Bhagavan used to climb the mountainside three times a day, morning, noon and night.

1948 Sun Feb 29

Raja Gopal, one of Bhagavan's attendants said he would arrange for a private meeting with Bhagavan for tomorrow while he was on his afternoon walk. 'No privacy' seems to be one of the prices of fame - Bhagavan can't even go to the 'John' without someone wanting to talk with him. Inasmuch as today is Sunday there was a steady stream of visitors and so there was no opportunity to talk with Bhagavan alone.

1948 Mon Mar 01

4:30 o'clock comes very early these mornings. Dressing in the dark is becoming a habit. It seems much easier than going through the struggle of trying to light the lantern. The privilege of being with Bhagavan is well worth all the effort of getting up early. Everything is so quiet in the morning. In that 'Thought-free' atmosphere, Bhagavan's presence penetrates the very heart of the soul. And watching the sun rise from the margosa tree prolongs the beauty of the hour.

At 8:00 o'clock Bhagavan's radio is turned on for the morning

news. From all indications the radio is there for the benefit of the devotees, as Bhagavan seems quite indifferent to it.

Today for the first time my hair went up in a knot on the nape of the neck. When Bhagavan returned from his 2:30 stroll he noticed the change immediately and he remarked about it to one of his attendants, making very amusing gestures concerning the hair. Western ‘hairdos’ with tresses flying in the breeze are very unkempt in the eyes of an Indian. They are used to the center part; hair slicked down with oil and either braided or rolled in a knot on the back of the head.

1948 Mon Mar 01

Raja Gopal took me out to the Post Office steps to wait for Bhagavan until he returned from his walk. Raja left me standing there while he hurried out to tell Bhagavan what I wanted to ask him. When Bhagavan came around the corner and LOOKED at me and spoke to me in English, it was as though my entire being was enveloped in a sea of dazzling light – his compassion and love is so far-reaching. To feel Bhagavan’s presence is to chase all thoughts to the four-winds.

1948 Tue Mar 02

How thrilling it is to walk up the village lane in the moonlight at 5:00 o’clock in the morning. Only this morning did I learn that the strange sound I’ve been hearing in the night is but the friendly call of the wild peacocks who have also taken up their abode near the Ashram.

After the Vedas I walked up to Skandashramam seven furlongs up the Hill – a glorious time of day for climbing. The big temple in the town of Tiruvannamalai is very imposing from high on the hillside. The valley below seems to stretch out to infinity.

Miss Merston said Major Chadwick has visiting hours from 4:00 to 5:00 o’clock only, and so at 4:00 o’clock I took leave of Bhagavan and went to see him. He was strolling about in his garden as if expecting someone. He gave me some very helpful hints about getting into the swing of Bhagavan’s teachings.

Mr. Chadwick took delight in relating the little drama of *The Agitated Asan*. It seems that Mr. Hopkins and I disturbed his meditation when we called on him a few days ago and then to make matters worse ‘Hoppy’ planked himself down on Chadwick’s meditation mat (strictly

MOUNTAIN PATH

a MUST NOT DO) and in spite of all Chadwick's efforts to get him to sit elsewhere, 'Hoppy' insisted, "No! No! this is quite good enough for me". Poor Chadwick, he said he nearly had apoplexy, but took it with a philosophical smile in the light that it was good for his ego.

He also told an interesting incident of Somerset Maugham's visit here. Mr. Chadwick had been delegated to see that Maugham and his party were well taken care of. To Chadwick's dismay the gang brought their own lunch including liquor, meat and a few other items that are strictly taboo at the Ashram. Chadwick having once been a man of the world himself, used his ingenuity to keep the rest of the ashramites from knowing what was going on. During the festivities Maugham became unconscious from too much sun no doubt. He was taken to Chadwick's quarters and laid on the bed.

Chadwick then went to Bhagavan and related the whole story to him and inquired what should be done as Maugham had come on a long journey just to see Bhagavan. Arrangements were made for Bhagavan to come to Chadwick's cottage at 2:30 o'clock. Just as he was coming up the path, Maugham came out of the cottage in his big black leather boots (another taboo).

All went back into the cottage where Maugham and Bhagavan sat looking at each other for 45 minutes. Not a word was spoken. Finally Maugham blurted out, "Is it necessary to say anything?" to which Bhagavan answered, "No, silence is much better". Bhagavan glanced around in his child-like way and said, "I'd better be going or they will be missing me".

According to reports, this is where Maugham got his material for the movie *The Razor's Edge*.

When I returned to the meditation hall Mr. Rappold came up and introduced himself. He is considered the most handsome man in the Ashram. His clear-cut features and high forehead remind me of someone from ancient Greece or Rome.

1948 Wed Mar 03

After the Vedas Raja sent a guide to show me the way to Skandashramam. Bhagavan lived there for twelve years. First in the natural cave itself and then later in the ashram that the devotees built for their Master. His mother also lived there with him for several years and she died there.



MOUNTAIN PATH

Surrounding the place are mango trees, jack fruit, coconut palms, amar fruit and many other kinds of tropical trees and bushes. It is an ideal place for meditation. One gets the feeling of looking down on a toy-world below. The people appear no bigger than ants.

In the meditation hall some people sit and watch Bhagavan, some appear to be more interested in what is going on about them, others close their eyes and sit in meditation, while still others do some reading or writing in his presence. I started to read *Self Realization*, the story of Bhagavan's life. Being in his presence helps one to think more clearly and to understand better what is being read.

Raja announced that Dr. Sen would be returning on March 7, and that I could have a room at Dr. Syed's place if that was satisfactory with me. Bhagavan knows that I want to stay and so surely something will work out in spite of the crowded conditions.

1948 Thu Mar 04

Finished reading *Self Realization* in the meditation hall this morning. Bhagavan says, "Self Realization is an easy thing, the easiest thing there is". If we were only fully aware of that fact, how wonderful.

Today was someone's birthday. One lady brought two big trays of prasad and was very much disappointed when it wasn't distributed in the hall. Lunch was a very festive occasion with all sorts of delicacies. Whenever there is a special event, devotees bring large trays of goodies for Bhagavan because he won't take any unless all share alike.

This afternoon one of the devotees started a very interesting discussion about light and power. He tried to get Bhagavan to declare himself on the subject which Bhagavan of course refused to do. It is interesting to watch Bhagavan's eyes light up like two pools of liquid luminosity whenever he gets into a discussion and to see how subtly he can subdue the most unyielding intellect.

1948 Fri Mar 05

These are glorious days attending the early morning Veda parayanas, followed by an hour's meditation beneath the favorite margosa tree in full view of Arunachala, the ever changing One. Days fly by like minutes in Bhagavan's presence.

It is a symphony in motion to watch the graceful gestures of Bhagavan's long tapering fingers while eating. Not a grain of rice is left on his banana leaf plate. Rarely is a word spoken during mealtime.

At 3:00 o'clock I cut across lots to go to Dr. Syed's Tea. He is a Mohammedan and a retired professor from Allahabad University. He also invited Miss Merston. He said he would have taken me for a Kashmiri lady, but certainly not for an American because I seem much more like an Indian lady than a Westerner.

1948 Sat Mar 06

At breakfast today the famous writer, poet, actor, musician and dancer Harindranath Chattopadhyaya came up and introduced himself. It was his radio broadcast on Gandhiji's death that Bhagavan was listening to so intently a few days ago. He sometimes gets swept away by the drama of his own creations.

1948 Sun Mar 07

In the hall this afternoon Harindranath wrote a poem to *The White Peacock* given to Bhagavan by the Maharani of Baroda. It enters the hall the same as other devotees. Bhagavan always greets it with such loving tenderness and calls to the attendant to bring the peacock's little green plastic bowl and some ground nuts, which are reserved especially for the peacocks, squirrels, monkeys and other birds and animals that come to get Bhagavan's darshan. The peacocks like the slices of mangoes best. The white peacock is the only one that ventures into the meditation hall. The others are a little more shy. They wait for food to be brought outside to them.

The white peacock is also provided with a specially built cage. At night after parayana when he comes for his evening meal, the attendant directs him to his shelter for the night. Many times Bhagavan coaxes the peacock to enter his cage, much as a loving father would coax a hesitant child to do his bidding. During the daytime the white peacock goes about as freely as the other birds, and yet he seems to know he has special privileges. In fact, the other peacocks will have nothing to do with him. Bhagavan loves animals of all kinds and actually seems to pay more attention to them in many instances than he does to humans.

(To be continued)





Sankara's *Śivānandalaharī*

I.S. MADUGULA

This article is a digest of the author's just published book, *Sankara the Poet: Śivānandalaharī*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. 2021. ₹350 (PB), pp.xiv, 163. ISBN: 978-93-90713-61-5 (HB) ISBN: 978-93-90713-69-1 (PB). Website: www.mlbd.in

Self-realised souls, themselves godlike, sometimes pray to God in order to set an example for the rest of us to follow the relatively accessible path of devotion as a means of invoking Grace.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi offered his *Aksharamaṇamālai* to the Lord of Arunachala. Sankara offered his *Śivānandalaharī* to Mallikarjuna of Srisailam. Both are offered to us to help us lead meaningful lives.

There is a connection between Bhagavan and *Śivānandalaharī*, too.

He selected ten of the one hundred of its verses as being the *crème de la crème* for devotees to focus on. Of the ten, verse 61 distills the essence of bhakti:

*aṅkolaṃ nija bīja santatir ayaskāntopalaṃ sūcikā
sādhvī najja vibhuṃ latā kṣitiruhaṃ sindhuḥ sarid vallabham
prāpnot iha yathā tathā paśupateḥ pādāravinda dvayaṃ
ceto vṛttir upetya tiṣṭhati sadā sā bhaktir ity ucyate*

That is *bhakti* when the mind flows to the Lord's feet
like the seeds of the *ankola* revert to the tree, the needle is attracted

to the magnet, the devoted spouse thinks of her husband,
the vine seeks the tree, and the stream the ocean.

An important corollary to this is that deep devotion is enlightenment *per se*. A devotee blessed by the Lord is also blessed with spiritual knowledge, *jñāna*. Verse 91 says:

*ādy āvidyā hṛdgatā nirgatāsīd
vidyā hṛdyā hṛdgatā tvat prasādāt
seve nityam śrīkaram tvat padābjam
bhāve mukter bhājanam rājamaule*

My primal nescience has vanished,
thanks to you, replaced by knowledge;
I will now revere your auspicious feet
and partake of the bliss of *mukti*.

It would appear that Sankara was attempting a novel approach to hymning Siva, in which selfless devotion would first grant instant bliss, then makes room for ritual worship, and finally lead to Self-Knowledge—all through the medium of inspired poetry.

On one of their cross-country tours, Sankara and his retinue arrived at Srisailam as the sun was setting, light clouds were gathering, and the peacocks were dancing amidst the flowering trees on the hills surrounding the ancient temple of Mallikarjuna and Bhramaramba by the Krishna River gorge. The ambiance was so serene and uplifting that they decided to camp there for a while soaking in the unearthly beauty of the place. Music and poetry seemed to be wafting in the very air. The birds supplied the music. It was up to Sankara to produce the poetry.

Swept up by joy and devotion, Sankara wrote the one hundred verses of *Śivanandalaharī*, as a tribute that only a saint could pay, a realised soul pouring out his heart, a consummate devotee laying himself down at the feet of the Lord in self-surrender, and a worshipper prepared to cover the Lord's image in the fragrant blooms of his incomparable verses. Each one of the verses exudes the essence of Sankara's non-dualistic philosophy, as outlined below in a somewhat simplistic manner:

We are all *that* Self that permeates existence and part of the divinity that indwells all creation.

To understand and experience this, we have to ask ourselves,

“Who am I?”

Though our true nature is bliss, due to *avidyā*, we think we are miserable.

We have to look upon everyone and everything as the work of the same Almighty that has created us. In other words, wherever we look, there's nothing other than Brahman, the Supreme.

Perform your duties without expecting any reward; you are not the agent, you are only an instrument.

It is the mind that is the root cause of all our troubles. Get rid of it, and you are happy.

Reform yourself before you reform others.

Sankara used poetry in his teaching manuals and hymns (*stotras*), using lofty technical prose in his great commentaries. He must have wanted the common people to memorize the prayers and instructions so that they would be on the tips of their tongues as they went about their daily lives. He was an elitist in thought and bold in his writings. He would never settle for second best. He exhorted people in commanding yet compassionate tones.

In his introduction to *The Bhagavad Gītā* Radhakrishnan makes a clear case for *bhakti*:

Bhakti or devotion is a relationship of trust and love to a personal God. Worship of the unmanifested (*avyaktopāsanā*) is difficult for ordinary human beings, though there are instances of great advaitins (non-dualists) who have given to the Impersonal Reality a warm emotional content. Worship of the personal God is recommended as the easier way open to all, the weak and the lowly, the illiterate and the ignorant...

The Supreme is not a God who sleeps in serene abstraction while hearts heavy-laden cry out for help, but a saving God of love believed and experienced as such by the devotee. He bestows salvation on those who believe in Him.¹

Further, there is a significant difference between the poetry of Sankara's *prakaraṇas* and that of his *stotras* for obvious reasons: the audiences are different. The former speak to the seekers and

¹ *The Bhagavad Gītā*, tr. S. Radhakrishnan. 16th impression (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2001). p. 58-59.

the latter to unquestioning devotees. We will point some of these in our discussions later on. Also, compared to his other long poem *Saundaryalaharī* describing the divine effulgence of Siva's consort Śakti, *Śivānandalaharī* has afforded him greater latitude to exercise his poetic skills.

The one hundred verses are grouped under three heads: Bhakti as bliss; Bhakti as worship; and Bhakti as *jñāna*, with each section displaying its own characteristic approach to devotion.

Bhakti as Bliss

Verses that identify bhakti with *ānanda* without recourse to ritual or special spiritual knowledge are included in this section. That is, true bhakti can make you feel blissful *ipso facto*.

Introducing *Śivānandalaharī*, Swami Tapasyananda says that it is: noted as much for its literary beauty as for its devotional fervour. It is attributed by tradition to the Ācārya Śankara, the commentator on the Vedānta texts and the main architect of Vedānta philosophy...²

He later waxes eloquent in the last paragraph:

In the *Śivānandalaharī*, the devotee-poet uses all devices of the poetic art to depict this sentiment of Bhakti, and highly suggestive metaphors follow one after another in succession presenting the various aspects of devotion in a highly artistic form.³

The poet here is content to immerse himself in the pure joy of describing the majesty of the Lord, His eternal glory, and His compassion. Just by describing His exploits and commemorating His qualities, he partakes of His bliss. No favours are asked, no boons are wished for. Let's look at a sample verse (v.2) to make our point:

*galantī śambho tvat carita saritaḥ kilbiṣa rajo
dalantī dhī kulyā saraṇiṣu patantī vijayatām
diśantī saṁsāra bhramaṇa paritāp opaśamanam
vasantī mac ceto hṛda bhuvi śivānanda laharī*

² *Śivānandalaharī*, tr. Swami Tapasyananda (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985). p. v.

³ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

The bliss of the Siva inundates my heart
 from their holy accounts channelled
 through my intellect as it washes away my sins
 and alleviates the agony of incarnations untold.

A justification of the title *Śivānandalaharī* is furnished in the second verse after the invocation with a series of feminine forms of present participles: *galantī, dalantī, patantī, disantī, vasantī*. They agree in gender with the last word *laharī*, inundation. The flood of bliss is caused by the ambrosial accounts of the Lord's exploits.

The purport of the *stotra* is hinted at in the third line, namely to mitigate the ceaseless struggles of reincarnation, *samsāra bhramaṇa paritāp opaśamanam*. Make no mistake, this is not just any *stotra*, it will put an end to your eternal misery of cyclical births and deaths. You will not stop at praising the Lord; you will stop only when you transcend the human condition and realise your identity with the Supreme Self. Sankara always broadcast this message from rooftops, in a manner of speaking. And it is memorable because it comforts us as we cycle endlessly through samsara.

Other sentiments expressed in this set of verses include (the numbers refer to the *ślokas* in the text):

One does not have to be skilled in some art or proficient in a branch of learning, because the omniscient Lord who created the world knows all about you and is ready to ignore your shortcomings if your devotion is firm. (v.5)

It really doesn't matter what physical form one takes, as long as one's heart always enjoys the bliss of the Lord. (v.10)

The Lord belongs to a true devotee whose heart is filled with thoughts of Him all the time. (v.11)

The Lord spreads *ānanda* even as the worlds end during the Great Dissolution. (v.34)

If we cultivate bhakti in our hearts, we reap immense benefits all the way up to the Lord's bliss and emancipation from the cycle of samsara.

Mother Bhakti will take excellent care of the baby *bhakta*.

Bhakti as Worship

Included in this section are the verses that praise the Lord, or talk about His *pūja*, or other forms of honouring Him. And there is no Lord like Śiva, when it comes to granting the devotee's wishes, as described in verse v.4.

*sahasraṁ vartante jagati vibudhāḥ kṣudra phaladaḥ
na manye svapne vā tad anusaraṇaṁ tat kṛta phalam
hari brahm ādīnām api nikaṭa bhājām asulabhaṁ
ciraṁ yāce śambho śiva tava padāmbhoja bhajanam*

Gods there are a thousand
granting petty favours:
I will not seek them even in my dreams,
it's your holy feet, Siva, that are my refuge.

The first two lines amply stress the devotee's disdain for the benefits that minor deities confer, fixing his mind solely on the Lord who is difficult of attainment even by Hari and Brahmā. The vocabulary vividly connotes that he has scant regard for them or their favours. By contrast, the devotee seeks refuge in Śiva, whom even the other members of the Trinity cannot know. So he asks for His grace and firm devotion to Him. Thus, the ideal devotee:

- Shuns lesser gods and their favours; the ideal way for him is the worship of the Lord to obtain release from *samsāra*. (v.4)
- Need not learn esoteric subjects in order to qualify for the Lord's grace. (v.6)
- Knows that rituals are for the dull-witted. (v.9)
- Claims that, as the foremost among the wretched, he is the first in line to be saved. (v.14)
- Knows that the world is full of snares for the immature devotee. (v.20)
- Feels that the jobs of Brahmā and Vishnu are less attractive than being in the presence of Siva. (v.23)
- Wishes to offer the Lord who has everything just his mind. (v.27)
- Is happy listening to the Lord's exploits. (v.40)
- Wants nothing other than taking shelter at the Lord's feet. (v.45)
- Knows that the Lord is easy to please, dwelling in his own heart. (v.70)

Knows that one who is absorbed in the Lord, worshipping His feet, praising Him, or listening to His accounts is liberated in this very life. (v.81)

Claims that Siva is the foremost among the gods. (v.100)

Bhakti as Jñāna

This section contains the verses that directly or indirectly touch upon the non-difference between *bhakti* and *jñāna*, a spurious distinction sometimes made without logical validity. The following verse (v.3) explains in a nutshell the glory of Siva, the Primordial Being.

*trayī vedyaṃ hṛdyaṃ tripura haram ādyaṃ trinayanam
jaṭā bhār odāraṃ calad uragahāraṃ mṛgadharāṃ
mahādevaṃ devaṃ mayi sadaya bhāvaṃ paśupatiṃ
cid ālambaṃ sām̐baṃ śivaṃ ati viḍambaṃ hṛdi bhaje*

In my heart of hearts, I adore
the omnipresent Siva, decked out
in His matted hair and strands of serpents,
the Primordial Being that's *cit* personified.

This verse might as well be the invocation opening the hymn, since it directly states the nature of the Lord that is being hymned: He is none other than *cit*, Supreme Consciousness itself. There is nothing beyond that. And He is known only through the Vedas (v.3). These verses share the following concepts:

Anyone whose inner self is firmly established in the Lord can be a great devotee staying in his own home, i.e. there is no need for one to go to the hills or forests to meditate on Him. (v.12)

The devotee sees the Lord in all. (v.28)

One is totally purified when the Lord resides in one's heart; it's the dawn of supreme knowledge. (v.39)

Devotion to the Lord is itself the result of one's accumulated merit. (v.68)

Bowing to the Lord's feet will dispel the darkness of our minds and makes us qualified for liberation. (v.91)

Sankara's Versecraft

Every poet has their preferred or 'pet' usages in the matter of the various elements that make up their work. So, too, Sankara. Not that he could not have found alternative versions for them, but it's natural

to have a predilection for certain ways of saying things. That's what also sets him apart as a poet.

Sankara's conceptualization of a verse is unique. He may start with a statement, a question, an exhortation, or a supplication. He would then segue into other types of phrases or sentences that lead to his main thesis usually in the last line.

Based on our analysis of the one hundred verses, we can confidently say that his *bhakti* is synonymous with *jñāna*.

It is a given that the average devotee asks for specific favours of the Lord from a long list of material benefits, such as wealth, progeny, or mundane happiness. Sankara never once asks for any such thing. He just asks the Lord to dwell in him, to take charge of his simian mind, and grant him the ultimate liberation — *mukti*.

Metrically speaking, while primarily depending on mainstream metres like *Śārdūlavikrīḍita* and *Śikhariṇī*, the poet shows his mastery over a variety of other meters such as *Śālinī*, *Mālinī*, *Gīti*, and *Aupacchandāsika*. There is also one instance of the complicated *Sragdharā* (v.98).

He never lets an opportunity go by without repeating a word with different connotations, without deploying a rhyme, or at least without giving the words the fire power that they need to make an impact on the audience. And he is fond of repetition of consonants resulting in *anuprāsas* (rhymes, sound effects) of various kinds: *ghaṭo vā...paṭo vā*, *guhāyām gehe va*, *vaṭur vā...jaṭī vā*, etc.

His metaphors are unique and variegated: *mohātavi*, *cetaḥ puṣkara*, *hṛt kedāraḥ*, *manaḥ kāntāra*, *mano durgah*, *bhakti dhenuḥ*, *manas taṭākah*, etc. Most of his sound effects are based on the repetition of the consonant *ṭ*: *sphuṭa paṭa kuṭīm*, *sphuṭa ghaṭita...Anjali puṭaḥ*, *vaṭutvā...jaṭī vā*, etc.

It is fairly obvious at this point that Sankara has saved his high-powered poetic arsenal for *Śivānandalaharī*, though some of the characteristics are adumbrated in his minor poems as well.

When all is said and done, only one criterion remains paramount: does the work please its readers and leave them in an exalted state of mind? Do they come back for seconds and even more helpings?

Yes, and yes. The answers in the case of *Śivānandalaharī* are without a doubt positive. ▲

The Freudian Plague

SAMUEL BENEDECK SOTILLOS

*The following article is a synopsis of a book by the author on Freud. It was initially published as *Psychology Without Spirit: The Freudian Quandary* (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications, 2018); and now is published as *Dismantling Freud: Fake Therapy and the Psychoanalytic Worldview* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2020).*

Freud's arrival in the New World on August 29, 1909, on the steamer *George Washington* in the New York Harbour, accompanied by his onetime disciples Sándor Ferenczi (1873–1933) and C.G. Jung (1875–1961) marks his quintessential attack on Western civilization unapologetically attempting to undermine it at its core, at its metaphysical and spiritual roots, when he made the providential pronouncement: “They don’t realize we’re [the psychoanalytic movement] bringing them the plague.”¹ It was Freud’s first and only visit to America to deliver five introductory lectures on psychoanalysis at the invitation of G. Stanley Hall (1846–1924) for the twentieth anniversary celebration of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. It needs to be remembered, as he disclosed

¹ Sigmund Freud as remembered by C.G. Jung, quoted in Jacques Lacan, “The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 336; See also Octave Mannoni, *Freud: The Theory of the Unconscious* (London, UK: Verso, 2015).

in a confidential letter, that he said: “I regard myself as one of the most dangerous enemies of religion, but they don’t seem to have any suspicion of that.”² The particular plague that was and continues to be disseminated by the psychoanalytic movement is not a plague that is lethal to the physical body, but that is lethal to the human soul and is more dangerous as it spreads insidiously and goes undetected within the collective psyche.

The twentieth century has been heralded as the Freudian century, and while the originator of the doctrine of the ‘talking cure’, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), has long since passed, his theory lives on. No matter how astonishingly and calamitously wrong and harmful his ideas have been, even to the degree of being diabolical in nature, it is certainly clear that *Freud is not dead*, as his work continues to bear influence in that it has erected the foundation upon which all contemporary approaches to therapy, mental health, and psychology have been constructed. For this reason, contemporary psychology finds itself in a quandary, if not in a crisis, and at an impasse that is often undetected or minimized, as it is situated on an erroneous ontological and epistemological foundation that is an assault on the human microcosm, having uprooted and eclipsed the metaphysical and spiritual domain.

The powerful implications of the Freudian colonization of the human psyche are made known through his triumphant pronouncement: “it was no small thing to have the whole human race as one’s patient.”³ Freud, in no uncertain terms, was aware of the nefarious and destructive implications of his theory that was cloaked in the dress of modern science, which would come to challenge the very foundations of Western civilization. Freud unabashedly acknowledges the antinomian roots of his doctrine: “it [psychoanalysis] is calculated to undermine religion, authority and morals.”⁴

Freudian psychology reached a turning point in 1908, becoming a

² Sigmund Freud, “Letter to Marie Bonaparte – April 26, 1926,” quoted in Ernest Jones, “Fame and Suffering,” in *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 3: The Last Phase, 1919–1939* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1957), p. 124.

³ Sigmund Freud, “The Resistances to Psychoanalysis” (1925), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), p. 261.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Psychoanalysis” (1922), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), p. 249.

totalizing Weltanschauung (worldview). The open-ended application of psychoanalysis beyond the couch was stressed by Freud himself: “nothing that men make or do is understandable without ... psychoanalysis”⁵ and “we have so often been obliged to venture beyond the frontiers of the science of psychology.”⁶ Additionally, Freud asserts: “There was ... a scientific duty, to apply the ... methods of psychoanalysis, in regions far remote from its native soil.”⁷

It needs to be very clear from the outset that the psychoanalytic movement was not only seeking to expose how the human psyche was governed by the unconscious and its inner conflicts, but how Freudian therapy can be applied across all disciplines, human endeavours, and behaviour. Freud explains in his own words how psychoanalytic theory initially began with the study of the mind and how it expanded its inquiry, making connections across wide-ranging fields. Freud informs us,

Its original significance was purely therapeutic: it aimed at creating a new and efficient method for treating neurotic illnesses. But connections which could not be foreseen in the beginning caused psychoanalysis to reach out far beyond its original aim. It ended by claiming to have set our whole view of mental life upon a new basis and therefore to be of importance for every field of knowledge that is founded on psychology.⁸

We can see from this that Freud recognized the importance of the psychoanalytic doctrine beyond the discipline of psychology. It in fact opened the door to how the human psyche can be manipulated by taking Freudian therapy beyond the psychoanalytic couch to the state of being a tool for mind control and engineering public consent on a mass scale.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, “Explanations, Applications and Orientations” (1933 [1932]), in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), pp. 179–180.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, “The Psychical Apparatus and the External World” (1940 [1938]), in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), p. 52.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Psychoanalysis and Religious Origins” (1919), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books,

⁸ Sigmund Freud, “The Resistances to Psychoanalysis” (1925), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 253–254. 1963), p. 224.

The Freudian revolution was an attempted overthrow of medieval epistemology that defined knowledge as “*adaequatio rei et intellectus* — the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known.”⁹ This is to say that in the traditional or premodern world were included Spirit, soul, and body and their corresponding degrees and modes of reality. Knowledge and being are inseparable from each other, as knowledge is necessary to fully realise the human condition. There is a distinction made between reason (*ratio*) and relative knowledge and Intellect (*Intellectus*) and knowledge that is supra-sensible and that is transcendent in nature. This transpersonal faculty immanent within the human being, known as the Intellect, enables him or her to know the fullness of what can be known. In contradistinction, the ontological and epistemological quicksand of psychodynamic theory is made apparent by Freud: “Since the criterion of truth ... is absent, it is entirely a matter of indifference what opinions we adopt. All of them are equally true and equally false.”¹⁰

It is essential to situate the Freudian revolution within the broader historical context to see how it aided modern science in overthrowing the traditional cosmology of the Great Chain of Being that was a universal norm across the cultures.¹¹ Freud’s assault on medieval cosmology must not be minimized and does not in any way legitimize the emergence of psychoanalysis. Freud misconstrued medieval cosmology’s erudite understanding of the human being’s place within the Great Chain of Being that was transcendent yet included all life forms.

In framing the Freudian revolution as the heir of the revolutions of Copernicus and Darwin, Freud’s messianic mission to attack and ultimately surmount the domain of religion so as to deify himself becomes blatantly clear. *The desacralization of the ‘science of the soul’ or psychology that severed the human psyche from Spirit was certainly a revolution, as it turned the perennial psychology found across the*

⁹ Quoted in E.F. Schumacher, “‘*Adaequatio*’: I,” in *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 39.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, “The Question of a *Weltanschauung*” (1933 [1932]), in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 217.

¹¹ See Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

cultures on its head. The phenomenon that is psychoanalysis becomes intelligible when situated within the gradual decline of religion and spirituality in which it arose that is inseparable from the emergence of the modern world.

Psychoanalysis is in many ways an attempt to fill the spiritual void—the loss of the sense of the sacred—both in the outer world of society and the inner world of the human being. Freud and his disciples were fully aware of the weakening of the Christian tradition in the West and the spiritual crisis in their midst, as Freud noted: “religion no longer has the same influence on people that it used to.”¹² Again, the marginalization of faith in the modern world gave rise to the notion of “homo psychologicus” or psychological man, which in many ways is a dominant feature of the present day.

By undermining and reinterpreting the traditional exegesis of the world’s religions at their innermost level, Freud was then able to appropriate metaphysics, and in its place, establish his metapsychology. Freud’s doctrine provides him with free reign to speculate on all and everything, further emboldening his totalizing worldview. He attempted to codify his own brand or privatized version of science and epistemology, regarding them as ‘our science’¹³ and ‘our knowledge,’¹⁴ which are key facets of his psychoanalytic worldview. Freud declares his unwavering allegiance to scientism or scientific fundamentalism: “No, our science is no illusion. But an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere.”¹⁵ Sacred science, which is rooted in metaphysical and spiritual principles, and profane science, rooted in a materialistic worldview, could not be further apart.

The emergence of psychoanalysis is inseparable from the vacuum created by the marginalization of the sacred, and yet psychoanalysis was also complicit in systematically undermining religion and was

¹² Sigmund Freud, ‘Chapter Seven’, in *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 48.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ‘Chapter Ten’, p. 71.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, “The Psychological Apparatus” (1940 [1938]), in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 14.

¹⁵ *Op. Cit.*, Freud, ‘Chapter Ten’, p. 71.

itself an attempt to fill this void. We recall an often-quoted passage from *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) that underscores Freud's extreme contempt for religion, interpreting it as mental illness. This view is powerfully expressed here: "Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity."¹⁶ Freud's assault on religion is well known and documented; however, the way in which psychoanalytic psychology attempted to substitute itself for the role of religion to become a secular pseudo-religion in its place is less known and requires more attention. Freud minces no words when suggesting the complete overthrow of religion by modern science by his psychoanalytic 'talking cure'. On February 6, 1899, he wrote: "the religion of science ... is supposed to have replaced the old religion."¹⁷ Although it is not commonly known, Jung is more extreme than his one-time master on this point, and is arguably more dangerous, as he asserted that only a religion—even if this meant supplanting traditional religions with the secular pseudo-religion of modern psychology—could replace the human need for the sacred, an assertion that he conveyed in a most revealing letter to Freud on February 11, 1910: "Religion can be replaced only by religion."¹⁸

For those who are sitting on the fence or are ambivalent about the doctrine of the 'talking cure', the verdict on psychoanalysis has been rendered once and for all and made explicitly clear by Frederick Crews: "there is literally nothing to be said, scientifically or therapeutically, to the advantage of the entire Freudian system."¹⁹ We are reminded about the ill-fated prognosis that confronts the shaky foundations of modern psychology: "Psychoanalysis is the disease

¹⁶ Op. Cit., Freud, 'Chapter Eight', p. 55.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Letter to Wilhelm Fliess—February 6, 1899," in Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris (eds.), *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1954), p. 276.

¹⁸ C.G. Jung, "Letter to Sigmund Freud—February 11, 1910," in William McGuire (ed.), *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*, trans. Ralph Manheim and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 294.

¹⁹ Frederick Crews, "The Verdict on Freud," *Psychological Science*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (March 1996), p. 63.

of which it pretends to be the cure.”²⁰ It is not as simple as selecting what is good or useful from the ‘talking cure’ and discarding with what is not. The situation is more complex and dire. Comprehension and discernment is needed, as Freud’s ideas make up the very bedrock of modern psychology and continue to assert influence within the therapeutic and mental health structures that exist today, and they cannot be easily purged without bringing into question the entire edifice of contemporary psychology.

Perhaps it is impossible for someone to be wrong about everything all the time, and while this rule applies to Freud, it is at the same time thought-provoking and no less challenging to determine what was accurate about the psychoanalytic doctrine. If the question is posed the other way around, and we ask not what is wrong, but what is right about Freudian theory, the answer depends on the point of view taken. It is worth noting that in this topsy-turvy era in which *the normalization of the abnormal* continues and the divine Norm has been supplanted, if not inverted, the suggestion that Freud was dangerous is not taken very seriously; or else it is taken as an additional sign of the modern world’s conquest of religion and spirituality and the rise of secularism. However, we are reminded of the Apostle Paul who warned: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world” (Colossians 2:8). As a result, Freud is regarded as the founder of the greatest revolution in psychology, while for others he is irrefutably “the greatest con man in the history of medicine.”²¹ Ultimately, it is up to every individual to decide for him or herself, whether the Freudian doctrine of the ‘talking cure’ is a plague or a panacea; yet when all things are considered, there is nothing neutral about Freud or his psychodynamic theory. ▲

²⁰Thomas Szasz, “Kraus and Freud: Unmasking the Unmasker,” in *Karl Kraus and the Soul-Doctors: A Pioneer Critic and his Criticism of Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p. 24. “Psychoanalysis is an illness that pretends to be a cure.” (Frederick S. Perls, “A Life Chronology,” *Gestalt Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2 [1993], p. 8).

²¹Quoted in Raymond Greene, “Forward,” to E.M. Thornton, *The Freudian Fallacy: An Alternative View of Freudian Theory* (Garden City, NY: Dial Press, 1984), p. vii.



BOOK EXCERPT

Shower of Grace

NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ
TALKS TRANSCRIBED BY JAYASHRI MOHAN GAITONDE

A new collection of recorded talks with Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj has been published in English. It is a translation of the Marathi book Amrutvarsha. The talks were recorded by Jayashri Mohan Gaitonde who attended Maharaj's satsangs during the last years of his life. A humble, sincere person she meticulously recorded the teachings without any embellishment or deviation from what Maharaj taught. It is a valuable addition to the literature. Shower of Grace is published by Zen Publications, Mumbai. ₹350, pp.282. ISBN: 978-93-87242-74-6.

Author's Note

For over two decades Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj gave discourses every evening at his home in Mumbai. In the last three years they were restricted to Thursdays and Sundays. They were so interesting that I made it a point not to miss a single talk. During those days, there was no tape-recorder in the Ashram and so the talks were not being recorded. Hence I thought of meticulously noting down Maharaj's words for my own use. After Maharaj passed away I got busy jotting down the discourses in a notebook. My husband's elder brother, Late Shri Narayan, happened to read the notes and was deeply impacted by them. He gave me his blessings saying, "One day these notes will turn out to be a valuable book which will be welcomed by all lovers of Maharaj."

During these talks, which were in Marathi, no foreigners were present since there was no one to translate. Only Indian disciples and visitors attended the talks. Maharaj never bothered about the number of the listeners present; he didn't cancel the talk even when there was just a single person present. This reminded me of Lord Krishna narrating the Bhagavad Gita to a single listener, Arjuna.

Hearing the words emerging from the mouth of Paramatman is a rare phenomenon and I was fortunate to be in the audience. Those same words are equally effective when read in the form of this book. We cannot deny Maharaj's presence even now, as he was never his body and is present in each one of us, as our very being. The benefit we derive by reading these words depends upon our faith and absorption. Maharaj's words are so powerful that they have the capacity to transform the reader. As Maharaj is within us, the only thing that can come in the way of our realization is our own disinterest.

Once I had asked Maharaj whether I could realise my true nature in this life. In response he had put me a counter question: Was I ready even to die for it? Now, as an old woman, I am ready to die, but at the time when I was asked that question by Maharaj I was young and wanted to live. Remaining intact as an individual I wanted realization as an additional achievement. That is the normal worldly habit of getting more without paying the proper price. I was not prepared to surrender my body-identity to Maharaj. Hence I preferred to remain ignorant by sacrificing nothing. Now I feel that my going to Maharaj was not my action but more due to his magnetic attraction. The desireless and fearless state in which Maharaj existed was very tempting to me, but beyond my capacity to attain. Sage Tukaram once said that he was eager to meet Lord Vitthala irrespective of whether the body remained or dropped. He was ready to pay the price... and he got what he wanted.

Maharaj was a very simple person and never posed to be different from others. He always tried to convince us that we were like him and not what we imagined ourselves to be. Our ignorance was the result of succumbing to incorrect knowledge and his words tried to erase that out so that the Truth could resurface. Only proper listening was needed and no action of any kind – neither any kind of practice nor any ritual. He had no expectation of any kind from the listeners

except seeing them totally free of ignorance. He proffered to them whatever he knew, without any reservation. Maharaj often said that this simple and direct knowledge was made to appear complicated by “owners of spiritual shops” who could not afford to lose their audience by telling the Truth. People who came to Maharaj for boosting their ego were frustrated to see his equal treatment of all visitors. I find no necessity to prove how Maharaj’s teaching was different from that of other Gurus, as the same becomes clear by reading any book of his.

During one discourse Maharaj noticed some Western seekers in the audience. He didn’t tell them to leave just because there was no one translating the talk. Out of his compassion he asked my husband to translate the talk for them. Mohan was nervous and expressed his inability to do so since he was a newcomer in the field and had just started learning how to translate. But Maharaj insisted on Mohan translating the talk, sentence by sentence, for the benefit of the foreigners. Maharaj would speak one sentence, which Mohan would translate into English and only then would Maharaj speak the next sentence. This continued until the end of the discourse and the visitors were very happy with the special treatment given to them. Little did we know then that the same process would be repeated years after the passing away of Maharaj. Some years ago, Dr Vanaja, a close disciple of Maharaj, requested Mohan to translate recorded discourses of Maharaj from Marathi into English. Mohan gladly translated all 52 selected discourses, sentence by sentence, with Maharaj’s voice followed by the English translation in Mohan’s voice. When you listen to these discourses, you feel the same scene repeating: Maharaj speaking and Mohan translating, sentence by sentence. What Maharaj had once done for the benefit of those Western seekers attending his discourse has now been repeated again for the benefit of Vanaja and many other seekers.

On another occasion, Maharaj noticed two males sitting amongst the female disciples. In India, men and women traditionally sit in separate sections during a satsang. Maharaj stopped talking and asked those Western seekers to get up and sit with the males. As they were sitting close to me I had noticed their presence. But, as it turned out, they were in fact girls posing as males to avoid nuisance from goons on the crowded pavements of Mumbai. They had done the makeup so

adroitly that no one, including Maharaj, suspected them to be girls. Maharaj noticed that they wore a maala, a necklace of rudraksha beads, with their Guru's photograph as a pendant. He told them that it was unfaithful to leave their Guru and go to another Guru. But when they told him that their Guru had permitted the visit he advised them not to bring along their maala to the talks.

Only after meeting Maharaj did I realize the purpose of my existence. If I had not met him, my life would have been meaningless without knowing why it was so. I cannot explain this in words just as an alcoholic cannot explain to a teetotaler the lightness and freedom he feels after a drink. A Sage's disciple is fortunate to receive the highest blessing that any human being can receive from someone who is truly God-like. Meeting Maharaj was like meeting Rama or Krishna who are now worshipped as Gods in temples. But while they lived on the earthly plane they too had faced all the problems related to daily living, like the rest of us. The fact that they were Self-realized was not of much significance to the masses. They were accepted as great beings simply because they had vanquished evil.

Being in the company of Maharaj changed our lives and gave meaning to our existence. Now I am convinced that I was born so that I could sit at his feet. Those five years in Maharaj's company were heavenly and filled with blessings. I was fortunate to meet Maharaj, but I am deeply moved by the faith and devotion of the many who never met him personally but are yet transformed just by reading his books or by listening to his recorded talks. For me, this is proof that Maharaj is available to us right now as our own being. I am convinced that these talks have the potential to transform our lives and help us attain the highest state a human being can attain.

Mr Bertrand Russell once commented that he found the concept of liberation in Hinduism most unacceptable. When asked why, he said that such a state would be utterly boring. Unfortunately there was no Guru to guide Mr Russell in this matter. However our own experience with Maharaj may shed some light regarding the condition of a jnani or a liberated one.

We generally visited Maharaj at five in the evening. One day we got the bus easily and happened to reach the Ashram thirty minutes earlier. We found Maharaj sitting alone, with his eyes wide open.

When we touched his feet, he spontaneously mentioned that he had cognized his existence only after that touch. A jnani has no 'I Am', which is the cause of all the nuisance. In the mother's womb and as an infant there was no 'I Am' and hence, no trouble. In deep sleep we are at peace as there is no knowledge of our being. We never saw Maharaj being bored at any time because for him there was no sense of being. Maharaj once pointed out to us that each one of us has had the experience of that state of not knowing our existence.

What were we prior to our conception? We were the Absolute, our eternal existence. Did we get bored any time then? Not at all. Our boredom started only after we became around five years old with the arrival of 'I Am-ness'. Maharaj's teaching is only to free us from this false 'I Am-ness'. Our true nature is the whole or alone or all-one. In that state there are no 'others' and no 'you'. If there is no 'you' where is the scope for 'me' to exist? Maharaj's words have the potential to purify our consciousness, erase all falsehood and all our suffering. He resides within us to guide us. Let us chant 'Jai Guru' and benefit by his 'Shower of Grace'.

1. Love of existence departs with Self-realization

From the lowest life form such as a worm to the highest, a human being, all exult in the feeling of the phenomenon of living. But they do so with the idea of the body being its true nature. Mind, intellect, ego and the I-consciousness arising within us, are the aspects of the life-force (prana). The one who is the knower of prana is truly nameless and indescribable.

The one who firmly believes in the teachings of a realized master and cognizes the truth as his or her own intuitive experience, is on the proper path to liberation. That one is always the timeless Self. Just as one needs no reminding that he or she is a male or female, so should one need no reminder about being the changeless principle witnessing all phenomena, including one's own individuality. One should dwell with the deep-rooted understanding of one's true nature in all aspects of life.

The mantra (I Am That) that is chanted attains oneness with the prana. The primal knowledge is the pure knowledge of existence – the feeling that 'I exist'. When this knowledge gets hold of a name and

form, it also inherits birth and death. The true aspirant, an earnest seeker of this knowledge, is not bound by the names and the forms as he is established in the pure awareness prior to the mind. What is prior to knowingness is known as *nirguna* – the One free of all attributes.

The experience that I exist in the body does not belong to the body or the mind, but to the pure awareness, which is also called as God or Vasudev. The fragrance of this knowingness is due to Paramatman – the Supreme Self. In terms of the absolute, the experience of the outside world is just a waking dream. The knowingness is the source of the states called waking and dreaming. Where there is no dreaming, there is no world outside. Where there is an experience of ‘I Am’, the world is bound to appear. Once the true nature is revealed to the individual, he or she does not continue to be a sadhaka, a seeker, who needs to seek in order to be united with the Self. The experience of being, ‘I Am’, is time-bound since it needs this perishable body, which is nothing but a product of five elements that are necessary for its sustenance. The knower of this truth transcends time. The constant awareness of our consciousness being Ishwara is the real worship of God, the only effective sadhana. Our love to exist is due to ignorance. This ignorance finally ends up being the Self-knowledge.

3. Our consciousness loves to continue its existence

This book [in my hand] is *Dāsboḍh* and is for a true disciple who has totally surrendered to the Guru and has complete faith in his words. The disciple is not separate, but a part of Guru’s infinite nature.

Seeing God is realizing one’s own true and eternal nature. True devotion to the Guru is knowing one’s true nature through the Master. One who listens to the words of the Master and verifies its truth by his or her own intuitive experience, is a true and worthy disciple. This talk today is meant for such worthy disciples. The feeling that ‘I exist’ that occurs spontaneously within each of us is veiled by the body and thus has become ego. The Sadguru now has taken up the task to awaken the disciple from this dream.

The parents gave this body to the child, but the Guru will now provide liberation or realization of being brahman. A mother says to her child, ‘You are a boy or a girl with so-and so name’ In giving the name to a child, the parents have merely made him the owner of

a few letters of the alphabet. The mind immediately identifies itself with those letters and becomes one with this label. This knowingness was dormant in the womb and arises a few years after the birth.

Only when the Guru provides the mantra – ‘You are That’ – is the seed of jnana sown in the heart of the seeker. The firm concept that ‘I am born and will die one day’ disappears. Even while being in the body, the seeker who follows this mantra realises the fact that he is the unborn and the unchanging principle that merely appears as the body-mind complex due to ignorance. By the all-powerful grace of the Master, the ignorance of the mind is warded off and replaced by jnana. This jnana or the pure knowledge, is the light that illumines all other knowledge. This knowledge illumines the mind but is incomprehensible by it. This knowledge shines forth and gives rise to all that is.

Just as the tongue, itself being tasteless, enables us to correctly judge different tastes, pure consciousness is untouched by concepts but enables us to conceive everything.

Rare is the one who with complete faith and surrender to the Guru’s words, sees this Truth as one’s own inner Self and becomes one with Parabrahman. This is the result of correct understanding of the teachings of the Guru. True devotion is having complete faith in Guru’s words.

22. Now is the time to know your consciousness

Whatever exists, is only the Parabrahman. It is also known as *vastu* – that which exists. We call Him God and in order to gratify the mind, we describe His virtues and qualities in countless ways. But the Parabrahman or the Paramatman is without a beginning and human beings have just arrived recently. Hence, we are unable to describe it adequately.

The *moolamaaya* or the Primordial Ignorance arises from the manifestation. From that arises the mistaken identity along with this body and the world outside. The five elements and the three gunas arise simultaneously from maya. The source is Parabrahman which is like a screen where this show is played. What we see as the Universe is nothing but the game of that maya, the illusion. How then can we describe brahman in a language and vocabulary of this illusory universe?

And yet, the Universe provides pointers to that Reality. The five elements, that have no consciousness in themselves, which constitute this universe, also run it automatically without any needed activity of brahman. As the five elements are without consciousness, whatever happens is spontaneous.

The entire flora and fauna, from worms to humans, all bodies are made-up of the five elements including sattva of the earth. Consciousness manifests in the living beings as the sense of being, the sense that 'I exist'. Everything around us changes, ages and gets destroyed but this consciousness does not change. It is necessary to understand the origin of this consciousness. What gives rise to this sense of being? How to cognize it? Knowing it is tantamount to sanctifying ourselves.

It is accomplished by knowing one's true nature. To do this, one must lose the attachment to the mind, which means our being absorbed into ourselves. That state is full of happiness. When no words can describe that experience, it is said to be the state of Samadhi. Mind still exists there, but its agitation is silenced. This state brings about true happiness in life. It is life without the turmoil caused by the agitating mind, since in this state there is a permanent awareness of one's being unaffected by the vicissitudes and ups and downs of life. The state in which the mind is silent and devoid of agitation is known as *unmani*. Whereas deep relaxation of mind during sleep that is induced by yoga is known as *yoganidra*.

Once the source of consciousness is known, even while dying, the person remains undisturbed by the process. For he knows, what arises, shall also set.

We enjoy the things that a mind can grasp. But one must witness that which witnesses all this grasping, understanding and liking. That which illumines the mind and intellect must be cognized as our true nature.

That you and I exist is satya, a fact within the realm of mithya, the unreal. Reality is omnipresent and is accessible to all but is not evident to everyone. Reality is eternal, infinite, and yet, it is not aware of itself. Only when it has the sense of being, it is able to recognize its own presence – the awareness that 'I exist'. The Truth is eternal and infinite but is not conscious of its own existence. Sometimes

there is witnessing of its existence, but it is untouched by memory. It is different from all other experiences.

Brahman is Absolute and entirely non-dual. The five elements give rise to the apparent duality of Purusha, the Infinite Awareness and Prakriti, the universe and everything in it. From these rise the living beings with gunas, the qualities. These qualities enable a being to witness the happenings. But there is no gain or loss. It's our identification with the body that provides the feeling of gaining and losing.

Gunas stir the universe but to the Pure Awareness, that which is a mere witness of these events, there is nothing to gain or lose from the happenings in the universe. The Universe is bound to end, but the Seer of the Universe is immortal and eternal.

We believe that we act due to our mind. However, the actions are due to the mental modifications that flow in the presence of consciousness while the knower of this consciousness is eternal. The knower of this fact receives grace from the power of consciousness. One's identification with the body is the cause of helplessness and fear. One must know that we are the knower of consciousness due to which we know that 'we are'. Our being is always surrounded with the world and the actions are due to mental modifications. Your child consciousness stays with you until the end, and then it disappears.

The waking state is no more, and one dissolves into the true and eternal state – that which existed prior to appearance of consciousness. One must not identify with the body but must know that the body is the food of one's consciousness. One's purpose of existence is then attained, and his consciousness becomes tranquil.

True selfishness is to know one's Self and to abide in that awareness. One who does that, loses all fear in life. Various unfound worries that torment you throughout life vanish if you remain in the state that you were in before your birth and shall remain after you leave the body. Befriend that formless child-consciousness and chant Jai Guru. Then his grace enlightens your being and roots out the evil of ignorance. That Guru, who is in reality the formless Self, is the Lord of this Universe. Never forget that. He is the formless Gopala, the cowherd who takes care of the entire Universe. ▲



Purusha and Prakṛti

The Two Entities That Govern Our Lives

Part One

M.R. KODHANDRAM

There is a stanza in the 13th chapter of the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* which we will use as the basis to study this subject that is important for understanding our life.

कार्यकरणकर्तृत्वे हेतुः प्रकृतिरुच्यते |
पुरुषः सुखदुःखानां भोक्तृत्वे हेतुरुच्यते || 13:20||

kārya-karaṇa-kartṛtve hetuḥ prakṛtir ucyate
puruṣaḥ sukha-duḥkhānām bhoktṛtve hetur ucyate

In the context of performing an activity, the body, the instruments and the doer are involved and Prakṛti is said to be the cause; and in the experience of joy and sorrow, Purusha is said to be the cause.

Prakṛti is the energy or Śakti of the Īsvara that creates everything in the world. All the forms, all the manifestations, including the body, the five elements, mind, intellect, prana and all the qualities which manifest as pleasure, pain, delusion, hatred and other mental states

M.R. Kodhandram is a postgraduate from the IIT, Madras, who settled in Tiruvannamalai 19 years ago to do *sādhana*. He has translated into English and written commentaries on Andal's *Tiruppavai*, Bhagavan's *Upadeśa Saram*, *Bhagavad Gita Saram*, *Atma Bodha*, *Aksharamanamalai* and *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, and the great Tamil scripture *Tirukkuṛaḷ*.

arise from Prakṛti which is also known as Nature, Māyā and the Cosmic energy. This Prakṛti is eternal.

In this verse, the word ‘*kārya*’ means body, act, effect, result. ‘*Kartrutvam*’ means doership or the agency that makes us perform the act. ‘*Karana*’ means instrument. Thus, the first line of the verse shows the three things involved in the performance of any activity: the act itself, the instrument which is the means used to perform the act and the agency or the doership which is responsible for the act to take place. These three are involved in the performance of any act or work. It is the Prakṛti that is the Agency referred to here. It is that which initiates the act and also produces the result. The act is the result of some karma done by us in the past which is the destiny. Accordingly, we are made to perform acts by Prakṛti or Nature. Every act we perform has a consequence which is experienced by us as joy or sorrow. This also is created by Prakṛti, which is the creator of both matter and the qualities which are listed in the earlier verses of the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* that state that the entire *samsāra* is the combination of these 24 items (*tattva*-s) of matter. These include the five elements, mind, intellect, ego, the unmanifest *vāsanā*-s, the ten senses (*karmendriya*-s and *jnanendriya*-s) and the five objects of the senses (sight, taste, smell etc.).¹

In verse 6, Lord Krishna lists the effects of these on the mind or the *jīva* present in the body, which is the *kshetra* or the field in which we experience everything. Thus, both matter and its effects are created by Prakṛti. Through these gross and subtle instruments, we are made to perform actions and also reap their consequences as pain and pleasure. Pain results from not getting what we want or getting what we do not want.

Though Prakṛti creates desire, hatred, delusion, anger and pain and pleasure according to our *vāsanā*-s, Lord Krishna, says that it is the Purusha or the Self who makes us experience these in the mind (*manas*). Purusha alone is the conscious element in all living beings. Lord Krishna calls this his higher nature or higher Prakṛti. The matter

¹ *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*, Chap.13, v.5 & v.6. “The great elements, egoism, / Intellect and the unmanifest / The senses, ten and one, /And the five objects of the senses. / Desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, / the body, intelligence, steadfastness/ this briefly is described as the field / with its modifications.” Translation by Winthrop Sargeant. *The Bhagavad Gita*, SUNY, New York. 1994. p.533-4.

and its qualities are his lower nature or lower Prakṛti and they are all inert.²

The same cosmic energy or Prakṛti creates all the things of the world which includes the gross, subtle and the causal bodies, the qualities and the very life in us, which is the Self. The mind by itself is inert, but due to the consciousness flowing through it, it is able to experience pain, pleasure and other emotions. Thus, the Purusha is the cause for us to experience the fruits of all our actions. And Prakṛti is the one who creates all actions and effects as per the Law of Karma. It is through this Law of Karma that we are made to experience the fruits of all our actions, which include both the body and the mind.

All these experiences and emotions belong to the level of the mind. We create all these *vāsanā*-s when the mind operates from the level of the head, which is the seat of the ego. It is from this level, that we transact with and experience the world through the senses. To go beyond all these emotions is possible only by taking the mind from the head to the Heart the ego can be destroyed at its root.

At the level of the Heart only bliss exists. It is the state which no pain or pleasure can touch. Prakṛti creates pain and pleasure, desire, hatred etc. in the form of *vāsanā*-s. They are the seeds and not the fruit. When *vāsanā*-s rise in the mind, they are experienced as pleasure, pain, desire, hatred due to the consciousness. These are the fruits of our past *karma*-s. The purpose of Purusha is to make us experience in our mind the resultant pain and pleasure. As long as we have *karma*-s to be fulfilled, Purusha is bound to the Heart, the root of our being, as the Self. How can one come out of this vicious cycle of cause and effect?

Returning to the function of Prakṛti, It has also created the Intellect or Buddhi to control the mind and the emotions. So when desire or hatred arise in the mind due to the *vāsanā*-s, if we use our intellect, we can cut them off so that they don't lead to action. This is possible only through enquiry. Suppose we see something that we like and the desire to own and enjoy it arises in the mind. We may not have a need at all for this item which may be an ice cream, a new gadget etc.

² Ibid., vide chap.7 verse 5. "Such is My inferior nature, / But know it as different from My highest nature, / the Self, / O Arjuna, / By which this universe is sustained." Trans. Sargeant, p.323.

This desire is just a sudden occurrence as per our *vāsanā*-s. Now, the choice before us is whether to fulfil the desire or control it. If we fulfil it without any discrimination, even when there is no need, then the desire is strengthened and leads to more of such actions in the future. This is not good for our evolution as the *vāsanā*-s strengthened will only lead to more births (*janma*-s). This is what Bhagavan Ramana mentions in the *Upadeśa Sāram*.³ But if we consider for a moment whether we require the item and ask ourselves why should we buy new clothes when we have no need or even space to keep at home, why should we eat an ice cream when our stomach is full, then the force of our desire will reduce and we can take the right decision and not be subject to the whims of the mind.

Thus, through timely enquiry, we can cut off these *vāsanā*-s before they act. Then, these *vāsanā*-s will begin to weaken and our life would become more and more peaceful due to fewer agitations.

Finally, through *sādhana*, we can destroy all these *vāsanā*-s completely. In this manner, as and when *vāsanā*-s rise in the mind due to our *prārabdha* – which are activated by the power of Prakṛti – we should enquire see through them and end them. It means we will not react to the situations we face in life. The fire of knowledge kindled through this enquiry will destroy all the *vāsanā*-s, and sense and mind control will become spontaneous. This is how a wise man leads his life. Self-control will lead you to immortality (*mukti*) whereas the lack of it will plunge one into the dense darkness of misery.⁴

Prakṛti deals with all that is material in nature. It makes us perform acts employing the body, mind and intellect, which by themselves are inert. And Purusha is the agency which makes us experience the fruits of our acts as pain or pleasure. Only Purusha or Consciousness can give us the power of awareness. Purusha is the Supreme Being. Here it refers to the Īśvara who is the *saguṇa* Brahman. It is the one which bestows upon us the fruits of our *karma*-s. It makes us act through its Śakti which is the Prakṛti. It is the real *karta* or doer. It

³ *Upadeśa Sāram* v.2. kṛti mahodadhu patana-kāraṇam / phalam-açāçvatam gati-nirodhakam. “The fruit of action passes. / But action leaves behind Seed for further action / Leading to an endless ocean of action; / Not at all to moksha.” Translation by Prof. K.Swaminathan.

⁴ *Tirukkural*, v.121.

does everything as per our karmas. Thus, it is the Ordainer, the creator of our destiny. Verse one of *Upadeśa Sāram* states: Actions bear fruit only as ordained by *karta* who is the Īśvara. It bestows the fruits of our karmas in accordance with the Divine Law. Thus, Purusha is only an agent who gives wages according to the labour done.⁵

The real Brahman is *nirguṇa*, that is, without attributes and does not move or act. Like a king who does everything through his ministers (here, it is the *sagūṇa* Brahman), it has already programmed the system and created the Law and the results will be only in accordance with the program. We cannot say what the result would be and when they would happen. That's why Bhagavan says that actions by themselves are inert as they cannot produce a result of their own. The result is ordained by the Lord. This is the reason why sometimes, even when we do everything right, the result may be a failure. The śakti of the Īśvara makes us act using our body, mind and senses as its instruments and the Purusha or Self makes us experience the fruits of the act through the mind which is reflected Consciousness.

The most important insights of this verse from the *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā* are as follows:

In the performance of any act, we should not think that we are the doer. Though the acts are performed using our body, mind and senses which are the instruments, we err if we think that 'we' are doing anything. Here 'we' refers to the ego or the individual soul. We are NOT the cause or doer of anything. It is the Prakṛti, which is a part of the Supreme Being, that is the real doer. This is the source from which everything is being done. When this aspect is properly understood, we will be able to perform all the acts that are destined for us without the sense of doership, which is the ego. We should just do whatever has to be done without thinking 'I am doing all these'. Then all the acts we are destined to do will be performed smoothly and automatically through the agency of Nature or Prakṛti without the intervention of the ego.

It is just like the way we daily focus when we brush our teeth or have our bath without any thought. We don't think why or how we

⁵ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*. Letter 57. 11th August, 1946. *Karturagnaya Prapyate Phalam* (Fruits of Actions are Ordained by the Creator).

MOUNTAIN PATH

should bathe or brush our teeth; we just do it with minimal application of mind but we are very much present. The moment we start thinking, 'I am' doing this, 'I am' doing so much, why should 'I' do that, 'I' will do it later etc., then all the problems will arise and such thoughts will affect the proper performance of our duties and may leave a residue. It is the thought which arises due to ego that is the impediment. Therefore, it is best to fulfil all our duties diligently as and when they manifest without the intervention of any negative thoughts.

Thus, Lord Krishna, in this verse is telling us that whatever we are doing, we should realise that it is Prakṛti or Nature which is doing everything using our body and the instruments. It is the real doer. We are just the instrument in its hands.

There is a song of Saint Pattinattar which also mentions this truth in a verse in response to the local king who mistakenly thought he was a robber and had condemned him to death:

என் செய லாவது யாதொன்றும் இல்லை இனித் தெய்வமே
உன் செய லேயென்று உணரப்பெற்றேன் இந்த ஊனெடுத்த
பின் செய்த தீவினை யாதொன்றும் இல்லைப் பிறப்பதற்கு
முன் செய்த தீவினையோ இங்ஙனமே வந்து மூண்டதுவே⁶

The saint is saying that he has realised that everything is done by the Lord and is based on the karmas done by him in the past. So whatever situation he was facing now namely being impaled in a stake (கழுமரம்) and set on fire due to an error of judgement by the king who mistook him for a robber, was only due to his bad karmas of the past. Due to this understanding, he was able to face his situation without any agitation by holding onto the Lord in surrender.

Of course, just in time, by the Grace of God, the king Bhadrageeri realised his mistake and put out the fire and released the saint. He begged pardon from Pattinattar for his blunder, renounced his kingship, became his disciple and accompanied him. ▲

(to be continued)

⁶ Pattinattadigaḷ, *Tiruppaḍal Tirattu*, *Podu*, v.22.

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Five Part Two

The Lord Serves Namdev as a Labourer

NABAJI SIDDHA

“However, the transformation that came over Damaseth and his wife didn’t last long when they were impoverished again. They regretted their omission to secure secretly a few wisps of gold-straws for the rainy days. Damaseth, once again, resumed his trade of stitching clothes in his old age to fend for the family. Meantime, Rajabai’s rich father learnt of the treasure attained by them on the birth of the child and how Namdev gave a grand feast to all etc. He came to their house and after obtaining the permission of the couple, took the young mother and the infant with him to stay in his house for some time.

After a few months, when it was time for tonsure and ear-piercing ceremony for the child, the grandfather fixed an auspicious day and sent an invitation through a messenger to Damaseth’s family to attend the ceremony. However, this news plunged the couple in sorrow as they had no resources to buy appropriate gifts like silk clothes, jewels and sweetmeats and other items which are offered ceremonially on that occasion by the paternal grandparents. They cursed their wretched condition, worrying about how to handle the situation.

The All-compassionate Lord, knowing their miserable plight, willed to help them out of the predicament. He took the form of a

merchant and along with an assistant reached Damaji's house. After enquiring into their welfare, He said, "Some years back, though a merchant, I had come to Namadev disguised as a Sadhu and received ten thousand gold coins in charity. With that blessed money, my business flourished and I became a millionaire. This has prompted me to share my bounty with my benefactor and be of some service to his family. I heard in the town about the ear-piercing ceremony of your grandchild. I am very happy to have come at the right time and you can put this money to good use on the occasion of your grandchild's tonsure and ear-piercing ceremony." Turning to the assistant, he instructed him to go to his house, collect ten thousand gold coins from the accountant and hand over the same to the couple. After dispatching the servant he spoke a few more sweet words to the old couple which delighted their hearts and took leave of them.

Playful that He was, the Lord went straight to Namdev to test him. He beckoned him to the sanctum and said, "O Nama, tomorrow is your son's tonsure ceremony. Your parents are worried about how to meet the expenses and redeem their honour before your in-laws. Go home quickly and find some way of saving the situation."

Namdev returned home and found his parents looking worried, though they nursed a secret hope in their heart due to the promise made by the merchant about sending money. However, they turned their wrath and grief on Namdev saying, "Tomorrow is the tonsure ceremony. We have no money to buy gifts and other things. How can we attend the ceremony? You also have come home empty-handed. You are irresponsible and unfit to be a householder."

It is at this time that two assistants came to Damaseth and tendered two bags full of coins and asked Damaji to count and check the amount. Surprised at this, Namdev looked at his parents and asked, "O father, who has sent these coins?"

Damaseth remained silent. The assistants said, "O Swami! Our master in the guise of a Sadhu had come to you a few years back and received ten thousand coins from you in charity. Investing that money in business, he became prosperous. When he came to know of your reduced circumstances, he said, "This is the right time to be of service to them. Money in the hands of noble people is always put to righteous use."

On hearing this, Namdev closed both his ears with his hands and said in an anguished tone, “O my God! What dreadful sin we were about to commit by taking back what was given in charity earlier? O messenger! Please leave this place right now with your money bags.”

“O Nama! It is very rude to behave in this way towards the messenger and return what is meant in goodwill. You should not break the heart of people who have come forward to help us in our distress,” said Damaseth.

Namdev replied, “O father, it is not befitting us to accept even a little of whatever has been given away. There are a number of examples in the lives of noble kings who had chosen to undergo untold sufferings rather than coveting what has been given away to another. I reiterate that if we wish to enjoy again that object which is given away in charity, we will meet with the fate of going to hell.”

The son consolingly said to the father, “O father, when the Lord of the universe is on our side, why should you get agitated? He knows how to take care of us. Cast all your burden on His capable shoulders.” Namdev now requested the messengers to take back the money. As it was too late, Namdev stayed at home and spent the night in the sweet remembrance of the Lord by praising His glories. The parents listened to his melodious songs with great joy and then overcome by the events of the day they slipped into to sleep.

The two messengers arrived at the temple and reported the happenings to Lord Panduranga and sang Namdev’s praises before the Lord. The Lord was very pleased. At dawn, in the midst of drumbeat and cymbals and accompanied by demi-gods, celestial sages, heavenly musicians and damsels singing hymns and dancing and Brahmins chanting Vedas amidst the shower of lotus petals, fragrant blossoms and gold dust from the sky, the Lord reached Namdev’s residence and called out his name. On hearing the nectar-like voice, Namdev came bounding to the entrance. He was wonderstruck to see the Lord in his courtyard with all paraphernalia. Waves of bliss washing over him, he broke into loud praises. The Lord beckoned him near and clasped Nama to His bosom lovingly and said in charming accents, “O Nama! My divine form will be visible only to your eyes. For others, I will appear as a merchant. Therefore, don’t give room for confusion. Get ready soon with your parents in all splendour of fine jewellery and silk clothes. Let us get going in My chariot to your in-laws’ house in time for your son’s ceremony.”

MOUNTAIN PATH

The procession of the retinue continued amidst the sound of music and instruments of various kinds, summoning the attention of the townsfolk who came running to the street from all corners. They were dazed at the grandeur of the ceremonial procession, their eyes becoming wide with amazement. The melody of music, the celestial dancers and the divine fragrance emanating from the chariot made them wonder if it was real or a magic show! On top of all this, when they enquired about the merchant, He said, “My name is Kesava Saukar and I am from Vaikuntapuram!” Everyone rejoiced to hear His nectar like voice and beholding His unparalleled beauty gazed on Him and were transported with joy. Yet, their eyes and ears remained unsated.

The party reached the residence of Namdev’s in-laws in that regal way and presented valuable gifts of gold coins, silk clothes and ornaments of nine gems to Namdev’s wife, his son and in-laws, who were overpowered with astonishment at the magnificent scene. A sumptuous feast for the entire village was arranged. At the end, offering exquisite garlands and fragrant unguents, the merchant said in a humble tone, “Kindly accept these presents, though they are not much to speak of! Be gracious and honour me by accepting these simple gifts. I couldn’t make it to Nama’s wedding. Now I feel gratified to be here at least on this occasion.” Then, taking leave of them, the Lord left with His party.

The mental state of Rajabai’s father was beyond description. He was completely baffled, to say the least. Gradually, coming to his senses, he praised Damaji for facilitating such a grand ceremony. He made them stay in his house for a few more days. All of them immersed themselves in great bliss by singing the praises of the Lord. Namdev spent his days and nights in worshipping and remembering the Lord.

One day, the Lord told Nama teasingly, “Nama, you are well aware that setting aside important work, I came running to your hut in the torrential downpour to repair your roof. You have not paid My wages yet. I have spent thousands of gold coins on you for the various functions. But you are not taking any steps to repay even a part of the money. How long am I to wait?”

When Namdev heard these words, with tears rushing to his eyes, he bowed at the Lord’s lotus feet and said in faltering accents, “O Peerless Master! O Champion of those who seek refuge in You! There is none

THE LORD SERVES NAMDEV AS A LABOURER

equal to You in pure renown and generosity. You confer wonderful and inconceivable boons on Your devotees. When everything is Yours and Yours only, what can I give You? It doesn't behave You to put me in the place of a master and Yourself as my servant. There is a limit to Your teasing. Can I match Your repartee and put an end to Your wordplay? I am Your possession, Your bond slave. While so, don't pain me by separating me from You. I am all Yours, my Lord of lords, my Master Supreme, I have offered myself to You long back. Just because You are trying to treat me as an outsider, will I become a stranger to You? How do You have the heart to treat me as if I am no one to You, when I have become solely Yours in body, mind and soul?" His eyes were filled with tears welled. His voice was choked, and he couldn't utter anything more.

The Lord reached forward swiftly, embraced Nama and held him close to His chest. With a beautiful smile adorning His lotus-like face, He said mischievously, "Nama, don't become unhappy. I didn't want to take your devotion for granted. I had to find out for Myself."

Namdev replied, "O Self-effulgent Lord! Wielder of Maya! You who pervade all and permeate everything like the butter in milk and oil in oilseed, don't You know what is in our minds? O blue-bodied One! O Lover of devotees! O Lord glorified with thousands of Names! Even the great Gods like Brahma and Rudra cannot comprehend Your mind. Then, how can I see through Your mysterious and deceitful ways! You and Your ways are unfathomable indeed!" Lord Panduranga praised Nama for his artless and deep devotion and blessing him, vanished into the stone idol.

Even while narrating these scenes to his listeners, Nabhaji was inundated with waves of joy and he could hardly proceed. After a while, he resumed in a mellow voice, "O Siddhas! Needless to say that Namdev remained immersed in rapturous joy and love. What words can describe his sublime devotion? Completely unaware of the external world, Namdev spent his days and nights in the temple singing the praises of the Lord.

"Now I will briefly outline the various wonderful deeds that Namdev performed during his pilgrimage with Jnaneshwar.

"He revived a cow that was killed by a Muslim king who wanted to put Namdev's fame to test. This transformed the king into a faithful follower of the Sant Namdev.

“Once when Namdev and Jnaneshwar were traveling in a desert, they were overcome by thirst. Namdev appealed to the Lord and caused a fountain of water to spring in the desert.

“In the Siva temple in Nageshwar, when he and Jnaneshwar were barred entry by the Saivite priests, anguish and longing in Namdev’s appeal melted the heart of Lord Siva and the whole temple made a complete turn from the easterly direction to the west facing Namdev who was wailing at the backside of the temple.

“The love of the Lord for Namdev was so great that on Namdev’s return from his pilgrimage, the Lord went forward to the outskirts of the village to receive Namdev. He locked him in a fond embrace with tears of joy of reunion glistening in His eyes. The Lord Himself was pining for the return of His friend and devotee Namdev. Panduranga hosted a great feast to celebrate the return of Namdev.

“The dispassion of Namdev was so amazing that he once tossed the invaluable philosopher’s stone belonging to a king into the river Chandrabhaga. When the owner became distraught and angry, Namdev led him to the middle of the river and scooping out a handful of the precious philosopher stones, offered them to the distressed king. This wrought such a transformation in the king that he became a life-long devotee of Namdev.

“On one occasion, the Lord persuaded Namdev to seek the company of a Guru and be initiated by him into the Knowledge of Brahman. With this, Namdev attained final Beatitude realizing the presence of God everywhere within and without.”

Epilogue

Sri Venkatas who composed the stories of Lord’s devotees in Tamil, based mainly on the *Bhaktamala* of Sant Nabhadhas concludes the story of Sant Namdev thus, “O Lord of the universe! You are without beginning and end! Just as You conferred on the little child Dhruva the immortal world, the Polestar, You have bestowed on me, the undeserving receptacle without any talent or scholarship, the blessing of narrating the stories of the great Sants. I fall at Your lotus feet and offer my prostrations. I also bow low at the lotus feet of Sridevi seated on Your chest, and offer my prostrations mentally to Your devotees. O Lord! I beg of You to continue to bless me to complete this mission successfully! I bow at Your lotus feet again and again!” ▲

The story of Namdev is concluded.

Vairagya Catakam

The Hundred Stanzas on Dispassion

Part Three

TAVATTIRU SANTHALINGA ADIGAL
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

You did not free yourself from doubt through the realisation, 'The deeds that I do are in reality the five divine operations,¹ and I myself am of the form of Lord Śiva'. Mind, why do you suffer each day, caught up in the arrogance of the 'I'? Though I earnestly entreated you saying, 'The truth that we are not the five bodily sheaths is as plain as a *nelli* fruit in the palm of the hand,' you did not understand.² (29)

¹ See *Oḻivil Oḍukkam*, v. 33:

The five divine operations are nothing other than the five states of the soul. Clearly understand the wondrous dance in which they ceaselessly delude you, spinning you endlessly like a whirling firebrand through these five states. You are like a clear crystal in which the five colours are reflected.

The five divine operations can be related to the body-mind and senses in that the world and its objects *arise*, *persist* and *disappear* with the mind and senses,

Robert Butler has been a devotee of Sri Ramana for 40 years. He has published, independently and through Sri Ramanasramam, a number of translations and commentaries on works by Sri Ramana, Muruganar and earlier authors of works in the Tamil advaita tradition. Translations by him, including *Ozhivil Odukkam* and *Sonasaila Malai*, have been serialised in previous editions of the *Mountain Path*.

MOUNTAIN PATH

For the *jīva* clear understanding is only the illumination vouchsafed by the Lord, and delusion is only the masking of that understanding. The death of the body is Destruction, the experiencing of pleasure and pain upon the earth is Preservation and birth is Creation.³ This being so, mind, you are like an arrow fretting [even though there is someone to fire it],⁴ interrogating yourself and others and

corresponding to *creation, maintenance and destruction*; *veiling* corresponds to the *delusion* in which the mind identifies with the world and its objects, and the *granting of grace* to the *soul's realisation of its true nature*. When a firebrand is whirled round in a circle, its single point of light, its red flame or ember, appears as an unbroken, continuous circle of red light. In the same way, the states which veil the pure consciousness of the individual soul, or *jīva*, succeed each other in an apparently unbroken series, such that the individual perceives them as permanent, whilst remaining unaware of the underlying pure consciousness, which is compared here to a clear crystal. Just as a clear crystal appears to take on the colour of its background, whatever colour that may be, the pure consciousness, whilst remaining unchanged, appears to be modified by the succeeding states of waking, dream and deep sleep.

² Only when the mind is directed inwards and merges with pure consciousness, the Self, can it grasp the simple truth of its own nature. When it is outward turned, it is like a mirror, reflecting an endless plethora of outward phenomenal appearances, none of which are real. See Muruganar's *Cāḍakarkkuriya cattāna neṟigal*, 74; *Just as there is no need of a mirror to see a nelli fruit in the palm of the hand, neither is there any need of any external knowledge to know that one is oneself the light of consciousness, the Self, Atma svarupa.*

³ It was noted in regard to the previous verse that, since in our fundamental nature we are not other than Lord Śiva, the Five Divine Operations are not other than the various mental states we experience. In the same way those operations of birth, preservation and destruction can be equated with the birth, worldly experiences and death of the body-mind.

⁴ Just as an arrow need not be concerned about providing its own means of propulsion when there is a bowman to fire it, the *jīva* need not be concerned about the actions that itself or other *jīvas* perform, knowing that all actions are in reality only the work of Lord Śiva, the Self. TCS cites *Tiruvācagam, Kuḷaitta Pattu*, v. 8:

Lower than a dog, was I, O Three-eyed Lord,
but you gave me love and made my yours.
This delusive birth is in your hands alone.
Is there aught else I need to know?
Does the burden of this upon me fall?
So put me in a mortal frame, you may
or place me 'neath your holy feet to stay.

experiencing heaviness and lightness of heart. You forgot the
beneficent Lord Siva. (30)

The wise say that *anavam* and *maya*⁵ are respectively the causes of masking (of awareness) and of thought and that the eradication of these principles is liberation, in which there is neither night nor day. If you aspire to attain the state in which they are eliminated, it will be attained only through supreme devotion and supreme knowledge.⁶ Regarding these my mind, if our deeds are annihilated through lofty devotion and we ourselves, the ego, are annihilated [through supreme knowledge], nothing else whatsoever will remain [other than that supreme devotion and supreme knowledge]. (31)

⁵ In this verse the word *āṇavam* (which in Siddhānta signifies the egoic principle to which the *jīva* is eternally subject), is said to be the source of the state of undifferentiated consciousness, *kēvalam*, as in deep sleep, which is falsely identified by the *jīva* as unconsciousness, and the word *māyai* is said to be the source of the waking and dream states, *sakalam*, in which the *jīva* projects an imaginary world which it believes to be real.

⁶ To abandon the sense of doership and to see all our actions as belonging to the Lord is *para bhakti* – *supreme devotion* and to track the ego to its source and destroy it by turning the mind inward and bringing it to dwell upon the sense of being, the ‘I’ sense, is *para jñāna* – *supreme knowledge*. The two are simply different ways of describing the same process and both lead to realisation. See Muruganar’s *Vritti Urai* on Sri Ramana’s *Aruṇācala Akṣara Maṇamālai*. In the commentary on v. 41 he says:

[Unlike *bhakti*], *parabhakti* – in which one dwells with the Lord as one’s own nature in the infinite peace of the Self – is not different from *jñāna*. Due to the loss of the personal self, there is in it no trace whatsoever of the ego, the individualised ‘I’, nor of the desire to reach the Lord on the dualistic level, as if he were other than oneself, nor of the fatigue that arises from that. From the point of view of actual experience *parabhakti* is one with *jñāna*. It should be realised that the disparity in names has arisen through the different methods of spiritual practice, which are devotional in nature [in the case of *bhakti*] and through apparent differences on the dualistic level, which occur only in the perception of others, due to their being under the influence of conditioning factors (*upādhis*). Thus the difference between the two is in name only. There is not the slightest difference whatsoever in their actual meaning. Both are the blossoming of pure love, manifesting within the Self as one’s own nature, through the experience of identity with that Self, which is being-consciousness-bliss.

Mind, nothing is of our own doing. But here on earth, because of our delusion, we go again and again to be immersed in the ocean of births. If you enquire with clarity into what is the deepest delusion, know that it is the error of saying that it was 'I' who performed the twofold deeds. If you eliminate this one error, who will be your equal?⁷ (32)

Argument

Vivēkam warns the mind that, even if realisation is gained, the *prārabdha* – destiny of the body must necessarily continue to play itself out for the remainder of its current birth.

In this world, no ill befalls us that is not as decreed by the incomparable One who in his infinite knowledge, fully understands it and ordains it as our destiny. Mind, who can prevent this, if he should so ordain it? A branchy tree has no attachment to its form, yet does it not still remain in the grip of its *karma*? Therefore realizing that the desires ordained by destiny will not abandon it, give up your concern for the body and end your inner torment. (33)

⁷ In this verse the author elaborates further upon the point made in the previous verse when he speaks of *nam ceyal aral* – the destruction of our deeds, a phrase which signifies, as indicated in the gloss to that verse, the destruction of our sense of doership. As the next verse will show, the Self, as the manifest universe, will unfold as it must regardless of any attempts on our part to influence it one way or the other. Our only option is to remain detached in our impersonal being and allow it to unfold. See Nisargadatta Maharaj in *I Am That*, Talk 75:

M[aharaj]: All happens by itself. Neither the seeker nor the Guru do anything. Things happen as they happen; blame or praise are apportioned later, after the sense of doership appearing.

Q[uestion]: How strange! Surely the doer comes before the deed.

M[aharaj]: It is the other way round; the deed is a fact, the doer a mere concept. Your very language shows that while the deed is certain, the doer is dubious; shifting responsibility is a game peculiarly human. Considering the endless list of factors required for anything to happen, one can only admit that everything is responsible for everything, however remote. Doership is a myth born from the illusion of 'me' and 'mine'.

⁸ See the following song 20 of *ñāna rasa kīrtanaigaḷ* by Āvuḍai Akkāḷ, which describes the power of destiny even over the *jñāni*'s incarnated physical being, the body. This theme is taken up again in verses 35 and 36:

Argument

Vivēkam explains to the mind that what it requires is not that the mind should cease to exist but that it should abandon its habit of identifying itself with the body.

Mind, even though I have you as a companion,⁹ must I remain, my head bowed, unable to escape the clutches of death, whilst those who have gained liberation enjoy unceasing spiritual bliss? Do not say,

Even though *jīvanmukti* is gained,
 must we not consume our *karma* as long as the body remains?
 The Sun from his daily rising gains no surcease,
 Great Viṣṇu of repeated births endures the grief,
 and even supreme Lord Śiva goes abegging
 the pangs of hunger to relieve.
 Thus the experience of *karma*, glorious, proceeds famously.

⁹ *ninṇai tuṇaiyā koṇḍum* – even though I have you as a companion. It is not mental activity, thoughts, which are the problem for *vivēkam* but the ego, which arises out of identification with the body and labels the arising thoughts as its personal ‘mind’, over which it believes itself to have control. In fact, far from being its enemy, mind is the one tool which, if wisely employed, can bring it to the realisation that it seeks. Therefore when the mind says, *nanṇru nāṇ idarku eṇ ceygēṇ. cāvēṇā* – *So be it. What can I do about it? Must I die?* the answer is that it must die as ego, that it must immolate itself, merging in its source, the Self. This ambiguous nature of the mind is described in v. 152 of *Oḷivil Oḷukkam*:

The sage who drank the ambrosial milk of non-dual bliss from the breast of Parvati [in a cup of gold], said, ‘In the state of true knowledge there is neither suffering nor happiness, and in the state in which that true knowledge is lost, suffering and happiness manifest, causing delusion. You are the androgynous knowledge which embraces both of these.

TCS in his commentary to that work glosses as follows:

He (the author) calls *jīva* (*pacu*) *knowledge*, *androgynous knowledge*, because, unlike the *knowledge of god* (*pati*) – *male knowledge*, and *knowledge of the bond* (*pācam*) – *female knowledge*, it exists as god-knowledge when it unites with god-knowledge, and as bond-knowledge when it unites with bond-knowledge, in the same way that the hermaphrodite embraces both the male and female forms.

Thus the *jīva*, the individual soul, comes into existence simply through its identification with the world, and since it has no existence in itself, that *jīva* ceases to exist once that identification is ended. Accordingly the realised sage, in whom that identification has ended, is not other than Śivam itself.

MOUNTAIN PATH

‘So be it. What can I do about it? Must I die?’ No, but do one thing: abandon your attachment to this excrement filled hovel of a body and Lady Uma’s Lord will grant you liberation. (34)

The intent of the Pure One is to grant us liberation. To this end he brings us into contact with *maya*.¹⁰ But why embrace that *maya* with thoughts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’? When we examine the matter, the one who protects us in deep sleep from the fear [of losing our body and possessions] and the desire [to hold on to them] is the same one who according to our destiny protects us from them also in waking and dream.¹¹ Realising this, Mind, you should remain in the state in which the body has been abandoned. (35)



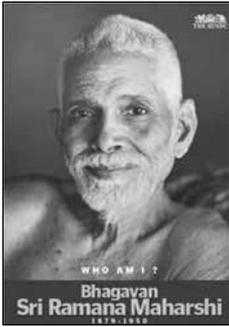
¹⁰ TCS states that the use of the word *māyā* here is an instance of *kāraṇa-v-āgupeyar*, a figurative use in which a noun which is the cause of something is used to signify its effect, in this case the body, organs of sense and action, the world and its pleasures, which are the fourfold products of *māyā*.

¹¹ In deep sleep the *jīva* remains in a state of unconditioned awareness which it mistakenly identifies as unconsciousness, but at least it is free of the products of *māyā*, mentioned above. When it awakens it fails to realise that the Real, the unconditioned substratum of pure awareness, has not abandoned it but has simply been masked by the *jīva*’s identification with those products of *māyā*, as ‘me’ and ‘mine’. Once it realises that those effects of *māyā* are simply aids provided by the Lord, the Self, to enable it to realise its true nature, it will turn to the Lord, abandoning its attachment to the body, and merge with pure awareness, thus freeing itself from the harmful effects of *māyā*, just as it was in the deep sleep state. TCS quoted the following verse by Jnansambandhar, *Tēvāram*, 5:19:5, to exemplify this state:

He who shares his form with her who bore
our *kadamba* wearing Murugan,
He who dwells in the holy temple of Karakkōyil
in southern Katampūr –
his duty is to be the support of me, his devotee
and my own duty is to ever at his service be.

Couched in the language of poetry, this is a simple affirmation of the fact that if we trust in the Lord (in modern terms, if we allow our ego to be swallowed up and destroyed by the Self), then the Lord (the Self) will take care of all our worldly activities.

BOOK REVIEWS



SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI; THE HINDU GROUP, Chennai. pp.168, ₹399. ISBN: 9789387791619. <https://publications.thehindugroup.com/bookstore/>

This is an excellent book that delves into the life, teachings and legacy of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. The publisher, The Hindu, has always had a historical and deep connection to Bhagavan with several articles appearing in the newspaper during and after Bhagavan's lifetime including its editorial three days after Bhagavan's *mahasamadhi* imploring, "The age of the atom bomb will also go down as the age of the Mahatma and the Maharshi. If humanity is not to be submerged in the chaos of its own making, it must give more heed to its sages and seers."

The content in the book significantly differs from the previous biographies and reminiscences of Bhagavan in its presentation. The content curator, Mr. T.S. Subramanian, has meticulously researched the narratives and checked them with the current devotees of Bhagavan. A good part of the photo collection is exclusive, courtesy Sri Ramanasramam and the photographs by Mr. S.R. Raghunathan are admirable.

The first forty pages of the book are devoted to the biography of Bhagavan, interspersed with vivid descriptions of his birthplace, the school he studied, the house in Madurai where he had the death experience, Bhagavan's various residences in Arunachala and the current Ashram. The magnificent presentation has several colour photographs, tastefully interspersed with older photographs taken during Bhagavan's time. This section ends with a two-page timeline of major events in Bhagavan's life and also provides the year in which Bhagavan wrote most of the philosophical works. The next ten pages contain the teachings of Bhagavan.

The next few pages are devoted to how the current administration preserves the ashram's aura of spirituality and how the legacy is preserved in the library and the archives of the ashram. The ample free food offered to sadhakas and the poor every day (even during the lockdown) indicates the importance given by the ashram to *seva*. The meagre articles used by Bhagavan during his lifetime have been

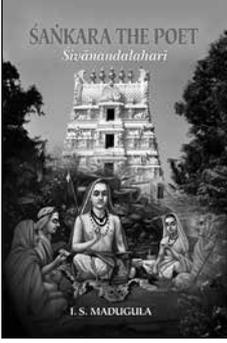
MOUNTAIN PATH

carefully preserved and the photographs of these items are nicely presented in the book. There is a brief description of the *veda pathasala*, *gośala* and the kitchen.

The next section is on Arunachala, the wonderful divine Hill. If Bhagavan was attached to anything in his life, it was this Hill. The hill is one of the oldest mountains in the world and dated as 1.65 billion years old (though erroneously mentioned as 3.4 billion years old in the book). Numerous saints have made this hill their holy abode and Bhagavan never ventured more than a kilometre away from the hill in 54 years. That itself is a testimony to the divinity of the Arunachala hill. Visited by nearly ten million people per year, with the crowds increasing every year, it is a wonder how the hill attracts so many people.

The well-known aspects of his life such as his compassion for all living beings, the unique bond that existed between Bhagavan and animals that gave Bhagavan an endearing dimension are nicely presented. The interview with the administrator of the ashram, Mr. V. Subramanian, is very interesting and he reveals a few not popularly known incidents of Maharshi's life and emphasises the role of the administration in maintaining the sanctity of the ashram with Bhagavan's grace and guidance. The emphasis of ashram on thrift, cleanliness, punctuality and the modern initiatives of solar power, water harvesting etc. are mentioned. The interview with the current president, Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan, brings out the importance of utilising the social media not only to spread Bhagavan's teachings but also allow the current devotees to interact with each other seamlessly. He correctly highlights the need for virtual *satsangs* in the modern age where travel is both easy and restricted at the same time. Both of them point out that finance of the ashram was never planned. The ashram continues to be one of the very few organisations wherein donations cannot be made either in the shrine or even online directly on the website.

The book then has several other interviews with and articles about the devotees of Bhagavan. The pre-final section is on the articles published by the newspaper, The Hindu, on Bhagavan before and after his *mahasamadhi*. The final section is on the famed majestic Arunachaleswara temple complex at Tiruvannamalai, its inscriptions and murals. It would have been helpful to have included a list of books for further reading. Nevertheless, this book is a memorable labour of love, delightful to read, and a collector's item. — M.Giridhar



ŚAṅKARA THE POET: ŚIVĀNANDALAHARĪ
by I.S. Madugula. Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi
- 110028. First Ed. 2021. ₹350 (PB), pp.xiv, 163.
ISBN: 978-93-90713-61-5 (HB) ISBN: 978-93-
90713-69-1 (PB). Website: www.mlbd.in

Adi Sankara has been widely acclaimed as the beacon light of Hindu philosophy. His works have contributed significantly to our understanding of the elite principles of advaita. Every researcher worth his name, has mentioned his works in his analysis of philosophy in general and Indian philosophy in particular.

However, it is surprising, and indeed unfortunate, that not much study has been done about his poetic abilities. He has established himself as a great exponent of Sanskrit poetry in his prolific writings, a fact that has been generally overlooked. The grandeur of his stunning intellectual accomplishments probably eclipsed his formidable literary credentials. The author I. S. Madugula in his book *Śaṅkara the Poet: Śivānandalaharī* has attempted to address this important aspect of Sankara's writings with a great deal of research.

He starts his work with the above question in mind and says:
“Apparently, his enormous contributions to philosophical thought fostered a neglect of his unique poetical accomplishments. Individual poetical works have been commented upon as philosophical manuals or stotras, but hardly anything has been said about his unique craft of poetry.”

The work starts with the broad question of what constitutes literature. The author takes upon the help of thinkers of various hues, ranging from Aristotle, Voltaire, T.S. Eliot, Coleridge and others to establish the canvas of poetry and fine tunes the concept with the help of immortal poets of the English language like Milton, Keats, Wordsworth and Shakespeare to provide a framework on which he could study the work of Sankara as a poet and not merely as a philosopher.

For the purpose of his study, the author chooses the approach called *vakrokti* (a deviant approach) as opposed to the more straightforward *svabhāvokti* (straight approach) because it enhances the joy of the readers who derive greater pleasure with the deviant approach.

The author selects only a single work of Sankara for his research. It is *Śivānandalaharī*, a work extolling the greatness of Lord Siva. Through this work the author tries to establish the poetic capabilities of the renowned philosopher. He has apparently great admiration for Sankara and considers him second to none in the art of poetry, as well as a great thinker and a non-compromising writer. He pays him rich tributes in these lines, “Sankara was an elitist in thought and bold in his writings. He would never settle for second best. He exhorted people in commanding yet compassionate tones.”

The book consists of eight chapters through which he analyses three aspects of Sankara’s work namely ‘Bhakti as Bliss’, ‘Bhakti as Worship’ and ‘Bhakti as *Jñāna*’. Besides, he makes a detailed study of the prosody and reviews the various literary nuances adopted by Sankara and their relevance in the given context.

He studies selected verses from the following perspectives—Lexis, Syntax and Impact on the readers. This gives a neat framework, though at times lends to repetition. He also brings out the rhythm and the sound of music in Sanskrit (*śabdālaṅkāra*) along with the exalted concepts (*arthālaṅkāras*) at the appropriate places.

Let us take the very first verse *kalābhyām cūḍālaṅkṛta śaśi kalābhyām....* The majestic sound of the rhyming words such as *kalābhyām, phalābhyām, śivābhyām, bhavābhyām, anubhavābhyām* brings before the mental eye the cosmic dance of the eternal Lord. The gentle grandeur of the *Śikharinī vṛttam* (metre) elevates the ecstasy of the divine feeling to greater heights.

Similar joy can be experienced in the 10th verse as well.
naratvaṁ devatvaṁ naga vana mṛgatvaṁ maśakatā paśutvaṁ kīṛatvaṁ.

Who can dispute the great mastery of the saint over the prosody of this immortal language? Not just the language, but the meaning is equally profound. In the words of the author, “The verse starts with the names of different life forms all the way from a mosquito to a demigod. The poet asks and answers the important question at the end of the verse, *kim tena vapuṣā?* He is telling us to ignore the body and make sure the heart belongs to the Lord...”

If this looks direct and straightforward, here is another verse where Sankara excels in analogies. The God dwells deep inside the devotee, which is filled with fearsome animals. In His own interest (to make

His dwelling place clean), He should come out as the hunter to wipe out the wild beasts. Just have a look at sloka 43:

*vartante bahuśo mṛgā mada juṣo mātsarya moh ādayas
tān hatva mṛgayā vinoda rucitā lābham ca samprāpsyasi.*

How nice! It places the responsibility upon the Lord to remove our inner darkness. Not only that. He is invited to do it in a manner that delights Him, for He is a hunter. This is poetry at its best!

If the above verse looks at the Lord as a mighty hunter, we can see a total reversal of roles in verse 62. Here He is shown as a caring mother nurturing the child Bhakta (*jananī bhaktārbhakaṁ rakshati*). What all she does for her beloved baby? Says the author “She bathes him in tears of joy; places him under clean warm sheets; nurses him with the elixir of the accounts of the Lord’s exploits; smears his body with holy ash; and decorates it with the *rudrākṣa* beads, as a means of providing him all-around protection.”

The above are just a few examples from the chapter Bhakti as Bliss. The book abounds with such interesting paintings on the canvas drawn by a true *rasika* of an incomparable poet.

The author devotes a whole chapter on the poetic aspects of the text. Titled Principal stylistic features, chapter 6 of the text deals with a variety of features of Sankara’s work.

Prosody in Sanskrit plays an important part in elevating the quality of its literary value. It is an extremely well developed science with each metre having peculiar attributes and has to be carefully selected. Kalidasa is famous for his choice of metres. His skill in handling varied metres is a delight for the discerning reader. (The author also quotes from Kalidasa’s use of a verb to start a *sloka*, which is unusual, but is warranted as the situation demands it.) Sankara has mainly used what the author calls as “mainstream metres like *Śārdūlavikrīḍita* and *Śikhariṇī*.” Besides “the poet shows his mastery over a variety of other metres such as *Śālinī*, *Mālinī*, *Gīti*, and *Aupacchandāsika*. There is also one instance of the complicated *Sragdharā*.” The interesting point to note is that these metres differ significantly from each other. Purely from the point of view of length, *Śālinī* has 11 syllables for each quarter, *Mālinī* has 15, *Śikhariṇī* has 17 and *Śārdūlavikrīḍita*, a very long metre has 19. This shows the versatility of the poet and his felicity in handling different metres with consummate skill.

Asking the question ‘How many analogies can we think of at any given moment to describe the mind?’ the author gives a long list of such metaphors: A few examples using the term *manas* are – *mānasa kapiḥ* ; *manaḥ kāntāra sīmā*; *mano durgah*; *manaś cātakah* ; *manas taṭākah*; *manaḥ karī*. It is not just phrases with difference in words; it has a profound relevance in each case.

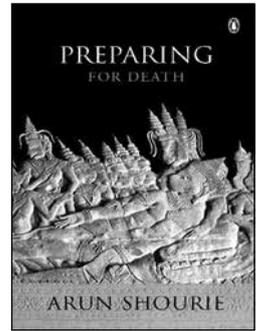
It is interesting to note that Sankara seems to prefer some unique usages, which is common for all poets. The author underscores - ‘ṭ’- as his favourite consonant and gives several examples to prove it.

He pays handsome tributes to Sankara in these words, “Sankara’s conceptualization of a verse is unique. He may start with a statement, a question, an exhortation, or a supplication. He would then segue into other types of phrases or sentences that lead to his main thesis usually in the last line.” He uses the sense of *vismaya* or wonder to underscore some aspect of devotion. Speaking about *kannappar* the devotee who applied his own eyes upon the Lord, he ends the *sloka* with a question “What devotion cannot do? Oh a simple forest dweller achieves the status of the greatest amongst His devotees. What a wonder?” (*bhaktiḥ kiṁ na karot aho vanacaro bhaktāvatamsāyate*)

We come to learn about the various hues of classic literature of Sankara’s one work from this well researched book. It will be a great treat to the intellectual readers if the author extends it further to discuss the other texts of this great poet-philosopher as well. — S. Ram Mohan

PREPARING FOR DEATH by Arun Shourie; Penguin Viking (October 2020); ₹799.00 (HB) pp.528 ISBN-13 : 978-0670092390

Death is a perennial subject that is often the elephant in the room during discussions. However, given the current circumstances — millions having died from Covid-19 — it is a very topical and important subject. Arun Shourie examines death by looking at the final days of the Buddha, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharshi, Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. He looks at how a jnani, bhakta and karma yogi embrace death. He uses his own experience with the death of his parents, his concern for the future of his differently-abled son and bed-ridden wife if he predeceases them.



The one certainty in life is death – but we are the least prepared for that. By definition, in our final days, we will lose control over our bodies. The only thing that may be under our control is the mind (unless we are afflicted by dementia). Can we do so with the help of some ritual or mantra in our last days or hours? Or must we learn in our early years? The condition of the mind at death is largely a product of what we have done, the thoughts and emotions that predominated life. The Buddhist saying, “I will not die this year, in any case not this month and certainly not today” is relevant. We procrastinate learning techniques to control our mind and, possibly, realise something beyond the mind. We must, instead, cultivate a state of equanimity with our mortality. As death can come at any moment, the time to begin is now.

The refusal to acknowledge the imminence of death and our impermanence is a fundamental cause of ignorance that leads to attachment and prevents spiritual progress. The assets we have acquired, honours won, high positions held – nothing will save us or accompany us. We over-indulge in self-importance and seek approval even from those who do not like us. Thus, the first step is to control the mind and erase the ego. For which, erasing attachments is necessary that leads to the discovery of the true nature of the mind. Being aware that perpetual change and absolute uncertainty are the only constants and being a witness to whatever happens, whatever arises, without searching for the antecedents or speculating about the consequences is the right path.

There are many repetitions and on p.268, it is incorrectly mentioned that Bhagavan left Arunachala when there was plague. However, this book is studded with insights, novel interpretations and practical suggestions from religious texts and great meditation masters. The book impressively marshals a variety of sources, from the *Bardo Thodol*, the great Buddhist saint Atisa’s teachings, the advaitic approach to attain peaceful dissolution of our minds at the moment of dying. All throughout, the book is laced with judiciously selected poetry from various sources such as Atisa, Guru Nanak and Kabir.

When our body is loaded on the rails of the crematorium, the button is pushed, the body is engulfed and roasted in the flames – our only hope is that the mind has already been baked in the flame of knowledge. For that to happen, the mind has to be trained to let go and disappear NOW.

— M.Giridhar ▲

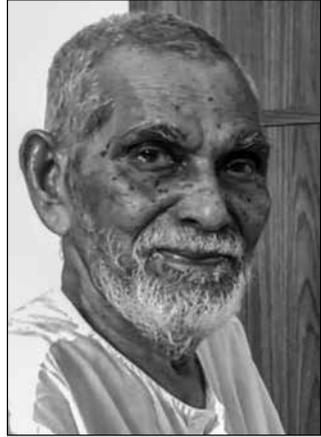
ASHRAM BULLETIN

Bhagavan's Aradhana May 2021

Bhagavan's 71st *Āradhana* Day was shown online on the 9th May starting at 5.30 am IST. Owing to pandemic restrictions, celebrations were kept to a minimum and only a few staff members were present at the functions. The live-streamed event began with the chanting of *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* and *Uḷladu Nārpadu* followed by Milk Offering at 6.45 am. At 8 am *Rudrābhisekam* and *Vedapārāyaṇam* took place and at 9 am the *Alankāram* (songs) by devotees sung and the *ārāti* performed at Mother's Shrine. At 9.30 am at the Sri Ramaṇeśvara Mahāliṅgam there were songs by devotees and at 9.45 am the final *ārāti*. On the following day, 10th May, the pujas were conducted and these were live streamed starting at 9.30 am at both shrines followed by 'Ramaṇa Pāda Pañcaratnam' of Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine. For videos of the events, see: <https://youtu.be/v5U16rvhv48> and <https://youtube.com/c/ArunchalaAshrama>

Obituaries

Sri Lakshmana Swamy. On the sacred day of Magha Pournami, February 27, 2021, at 5.50 am, in Aruṇācala Hṛdayam, Tiruvannamalai, Sri Lakshmana Swamy peacefully left his body and attained *Mahānirvāṇa*. According to his wish, under the direction of his appointed successor Mathru Sri Sarada, Sri Swamy's body was laid to rest in a samadhi inside Aruṇācala Hṛdayam compound. The final ceremonies were conducted with reverence and gratitude under close supervision of Mathru Sri Sarada. Due to coronavirus restrictions, only close devotees were present.



He was born on Dec 25th, 1925 at Gudur, Nellore District. His first darshan of Bhagavan was in March 1949. His second visit was during the Navaratri festival of 1949. On Vijayadasami day, sitting in the presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, he attained Self

Realisation. He wrote thus about this great experience: “In 1949, I sat down in the presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and followed the quest ‘Who am I?’ Sri Ramana Maharshi killed my ‘I’ and shines within my heart as infinite wisdom, truth and bliss, without beginning and without an end.”

After many years at an ashram set up in his name at Gudur, he returned permanently to Arunachala later in life. He rarely gave darshan and lived a reclusive life. When anybody asked for darshan, he used to often say: “A *jñāni* living in body is itself enough. All the worlds benefit from this. The energy of the *jñāni* is everywhere. This is absolutely true.”

Sri S. Krishnaswamy (1928-2021) was an ardent devotee of Bhagavan for more than forty years. He served as a chartered accountant in Bangalore, and was formerly a visiting professor at National Law School, IIM, etc. His thirst for knowledge astonished friends and family alike. He served as the Secretary of RMCL, Bangalore and had a clear knowledge of the centre’s vision and mission and continued to guide and serve it even after the absorption of his close friend A.R. Natarajan. In answer to a family prayer in his last days, he replied from the hospital bed: “My Ramana Always”. He was peacefully absorbed at the lotus feet of Bhagavan on Friday 16th April 2021, at the age of 92.

Jiri Vacek (25th May 1931 – 27th April 2021) was active as a teacher of yoga, mysticism and non-dualistic philosophy Advaita Vedanta in the Czech Republic. His spiritual practice is based on the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. He translated a number of works from various fields of spiritual literature into the Czech language, especially, the teachings of Ramana Maharshi as well as many other foreign works. He significantly influenced the local spiritual scene in Prague.

We regret to announce the demise of numerous devotees in the month of May mostly due to COVID, and offer brief glimpses into their lives.

Sri Sethu Ramanan (1953-2021) was the great-grandson of Bhagavan’s uncle Nelliappier. Amiable and helpful, he visited the Ashram each Jayanti and Aradhana to do service. He was working in a printing press in Chennai and for some time printed the Ashram’s Tamil publications.



Smt. Lakshmi Venkataraman (1945-2021) was granddaughter of the pioneer of Nature-Cure in south India, the Sanskrit scholar, Lakshmana Sharma, who translated Bhagavan's Tamil works into Sanskrit with Bhagavan's close guidance. Lakshmi recently built a house near the Ashram and despite severe vision impairment, visited regularly and brought out a book of Sanskrit verses by her grandfather. She was known for her cheerful, gentle disposition.

Sri S. Krishnamurthy (1948-2021) was generally known as SBI Krishnamurthy as he worked in the local SBI bank and helped in handling Ashram accounts. He came to Tiruvannamalai in 1969 and initially stayed in the President's compound. His father Subbiah was distantly related to, and a boyhood friend of Swami Ramananda, served as the Ashram storekeeper for many years.

Smt. V. Lalitha Rajeswaramma (1931-2021) was daughter of Apītakucāmba and granddaughter of Gambhiram Seshaiyah. Bhagavan used to ask her mother to sing Subramanya songs and Bhagavan listened with great devotion. She was blessed to have Bhagavan's darshan on numerous occasions and even had the darshan of Bhagavan on the day he attained *Mahānirvāṇa*.



Sri Kondal Raj, aged 63 years, a silent devotee of Madurai reached the lotus feet of Bhagavan on 5th June 2021. It was an *anāyāsena maraṇam*. Kondal's physical end was sudden without suffering.

Kondal Raj did his higher education in Madurai Thiagarajar College where later he served as a Tamil *pandit* for seventeen years. He did his Master of Philosophy on the life of Bhagavan. Kondal also got a Ph.D. degree on the works of Tattvarayar, a *jñāni* often referred to by Bhagavan. He named his only son Ramanan and the family visited the ashram frequently.

He was a pillar of support for the Madurai Ramana Mandiram and Kendram. He and his wife Nitya were ever ready to help Ramana devotees. Though he did much service at the Mandiram, he was interested only in silent contemplation and kept himself aloof as often as possible. He is survived by his wife Nitya and son Ramanan. ▲