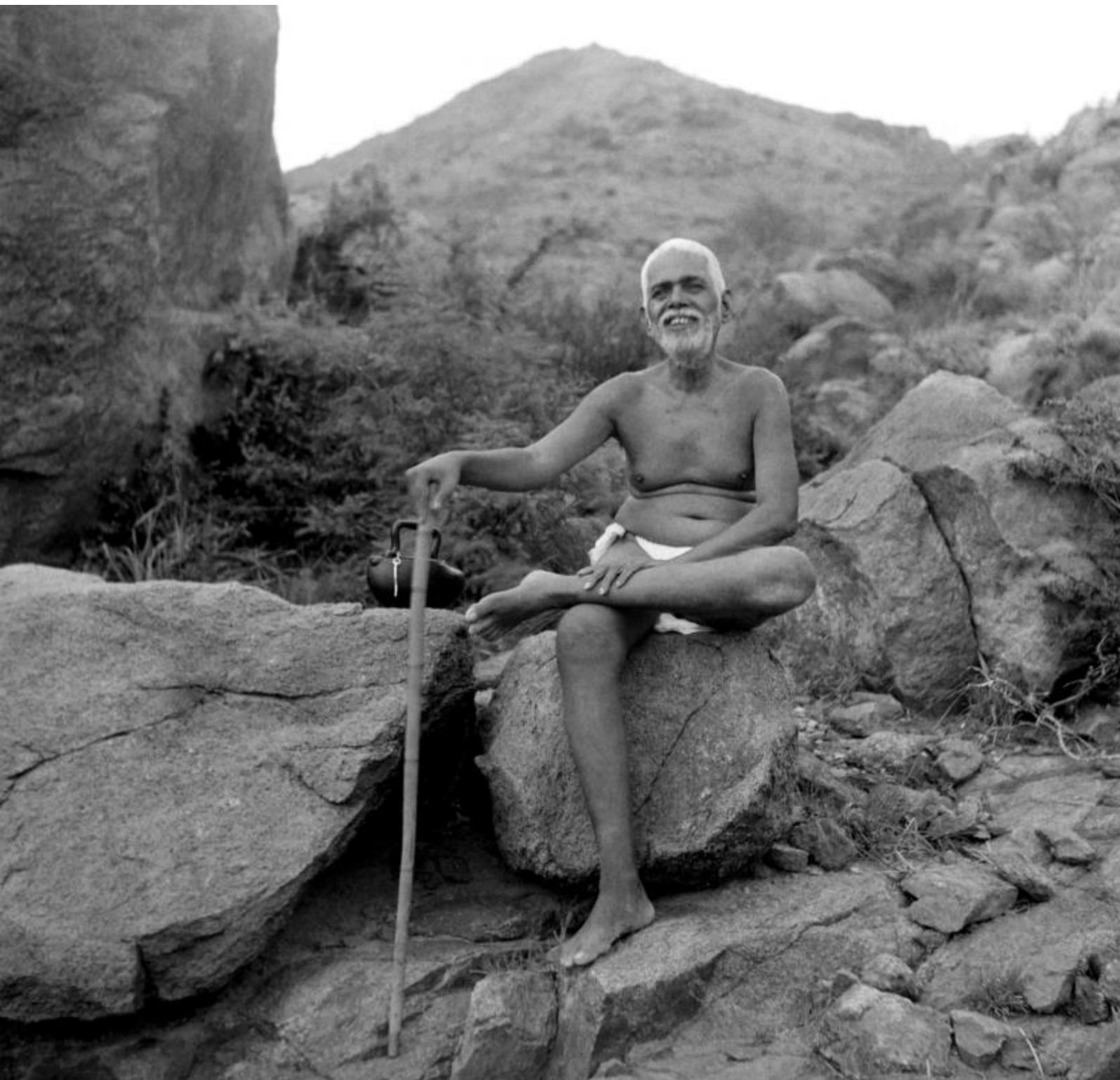


# RAMANA PERIYA PURANAM

(Inner Journey of 75 Old Devotees)



V. Ganesan

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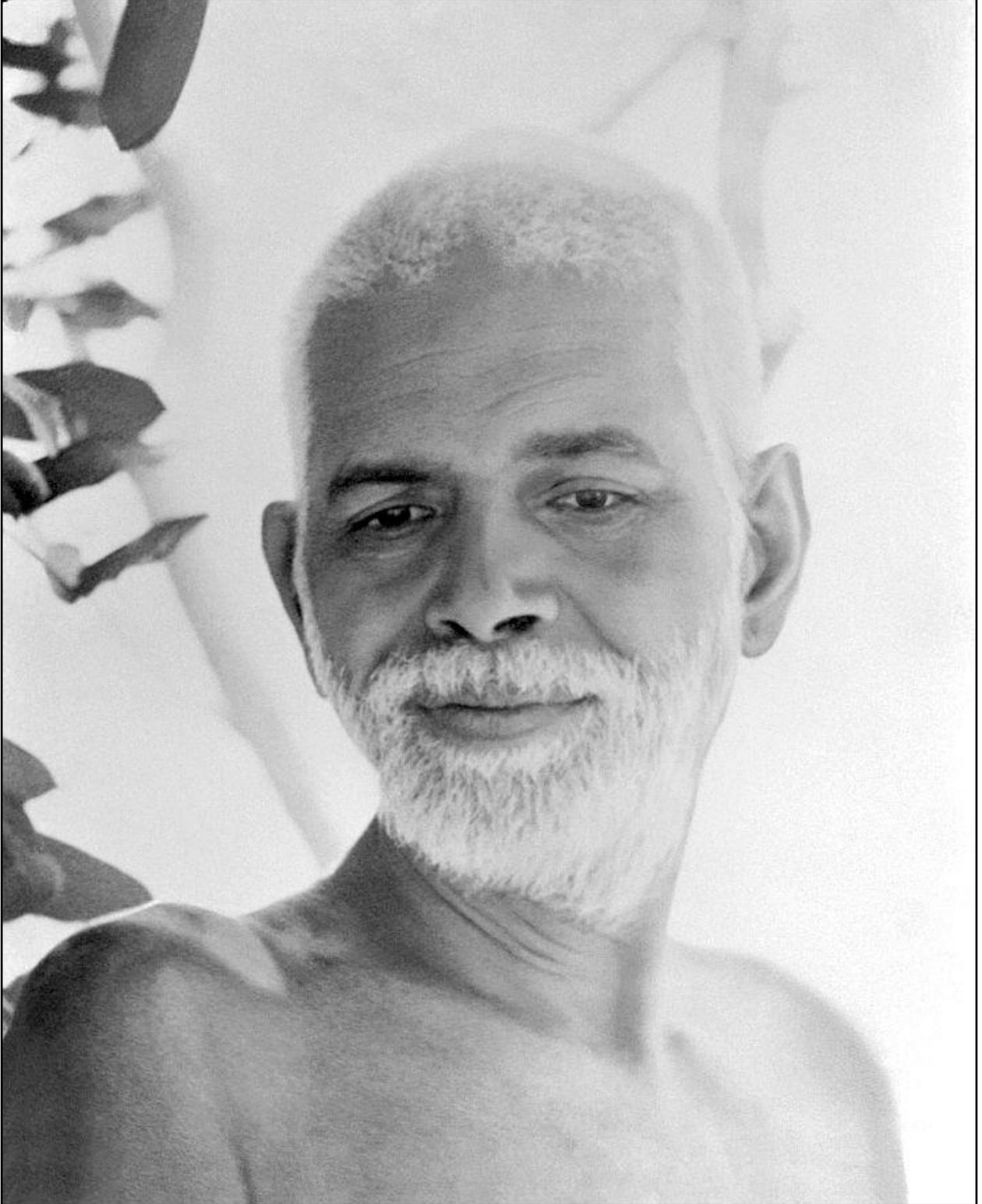
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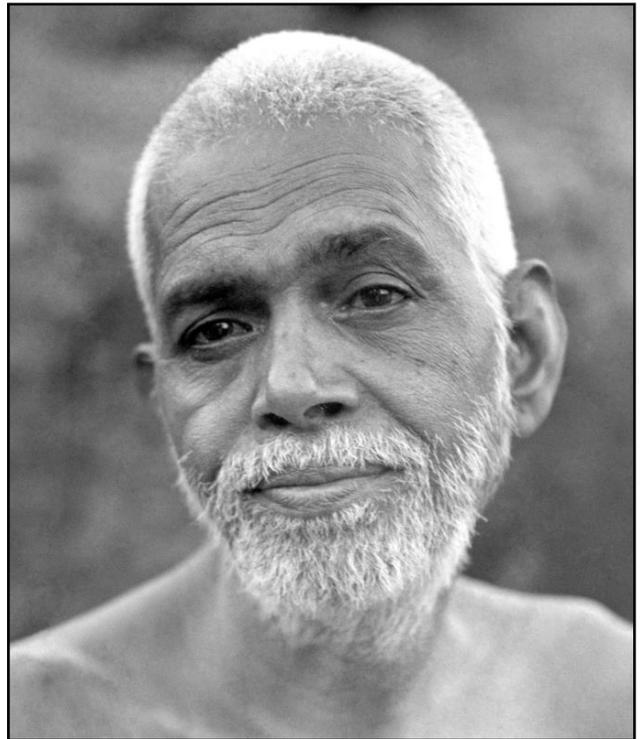
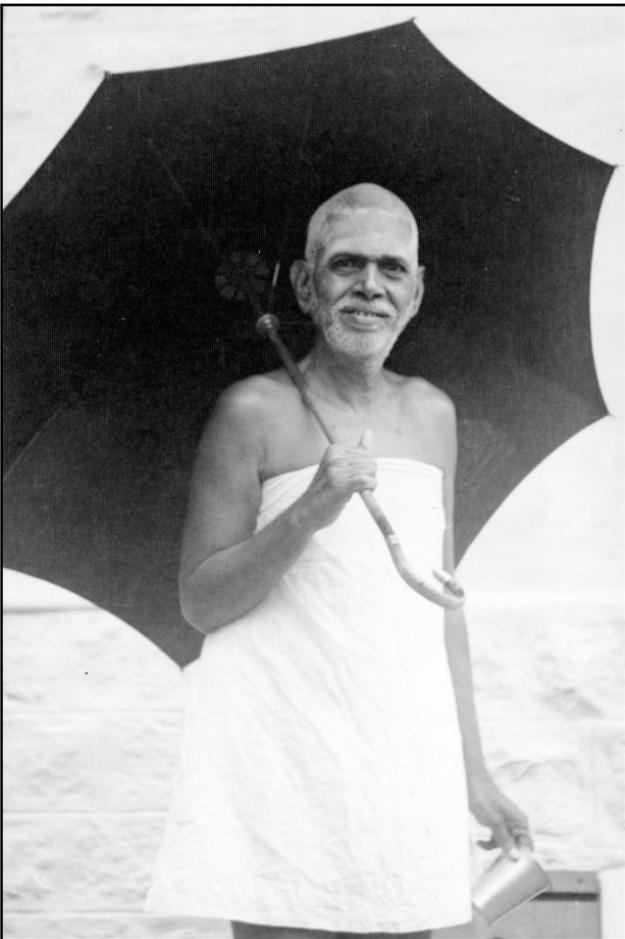
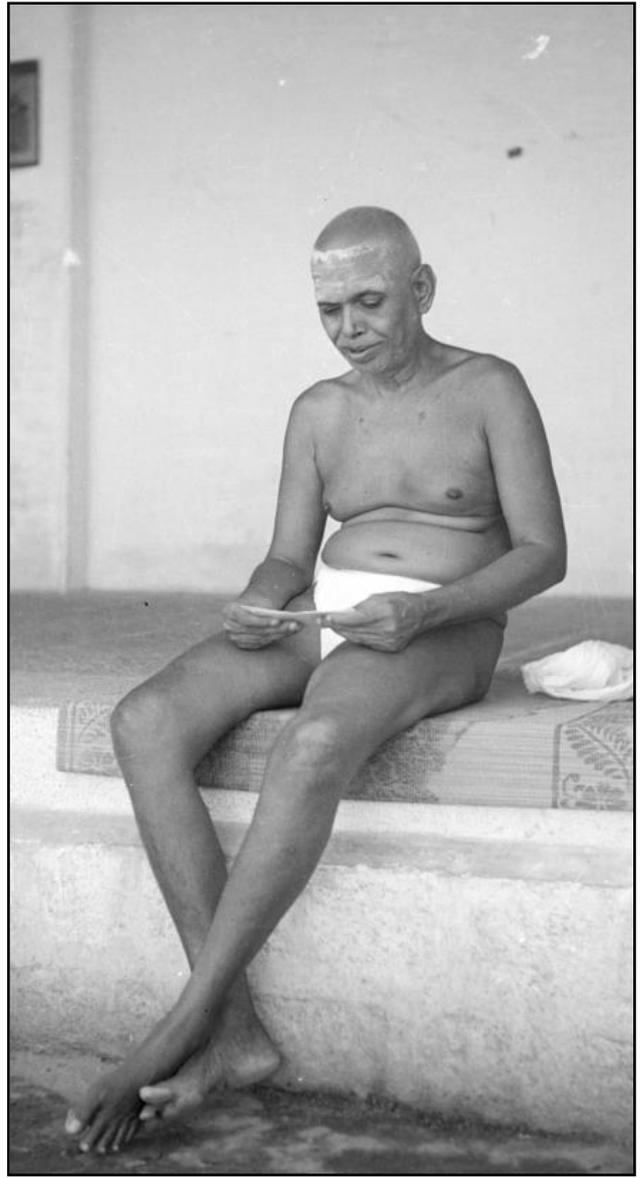
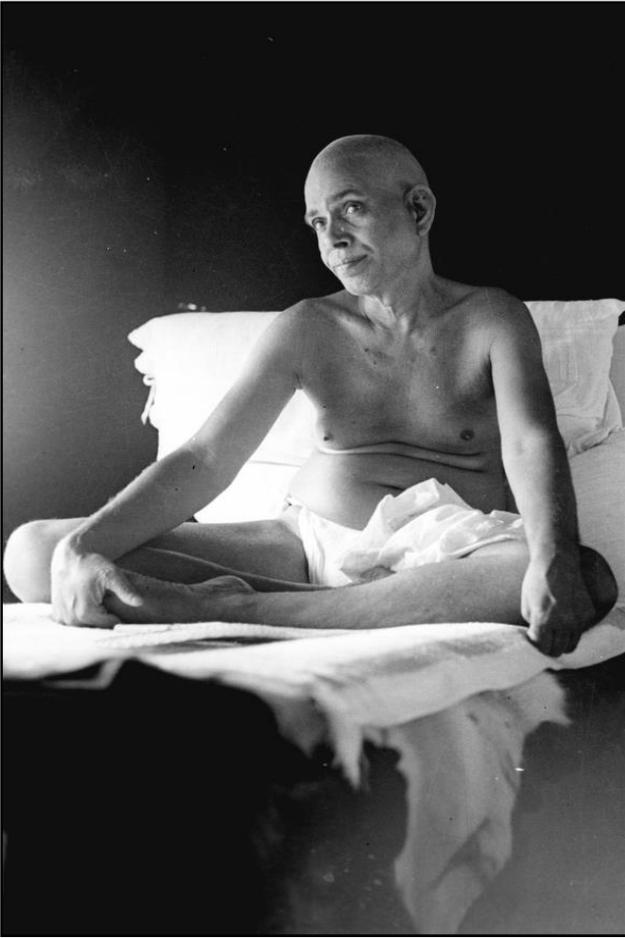
**Cover Photo:**

**“Dakshinamurti” : Sri Bhagavan seated on a boulder at the Holy Hill (1940-42)**

## **Dedication**



**Prostrations to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi,  
who has come in so many forms to bless us all.**



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## Editor's Note



The title of this book has been inspired by the *Periya Puranam*, an ancient Tamil text that recounts the stories of the *Nayanmar*, the exalted devotees of Lord Shiva, and their moving and uplifting devotion to the Lord. *Ramana Periya Puranam* is therefore, a particularly apt title for this book as it is about the old devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and their devotion to Bhagavan - Arunachala Shiva in human form.

It was while editing *Ramana Periya Puranam* that I first went around the holy hill by its inner path. We started one early November morning from behind Ramanasramam. Skirting the base of the hill, twisting, turning, climbing, tumbling, the path reveals every now and then, a completely different but fascinating view of the hill and its beautiful, wild green slopes. Seen from this close, the different facets of the peak appear more vivid, grander, yet at the same time, more intimate.

And then, one starts noticing something that is practically invisible when going around the hill by the outer path: individual rocks and boulders. To start with, they are the ones by the trail that have arrows drawn on them to guide those on the inner path. Soon, other rocks and boulders start radiating their silent presence: rocks of every size, shape and shade, some rough and angular, many smooth and rounded. In the silence of the inner path, these rocks and boulders seem to sit in a deeper silence still. Now, the realization that these silent sentinels and Bhagavan's old devotees are the same becomes blindingly apparent. Bhagavan being Arunachala, his old devotees are its rocks and boulders - not in just a metaphorical sense, but in a physical, tangible way.

The words in this book are verbal symbols of the hill's rocks and boulders. Reading it is walking the inner path. Indeed, this was confirmed many a time while editing this book - when its words absorbed one into silence.

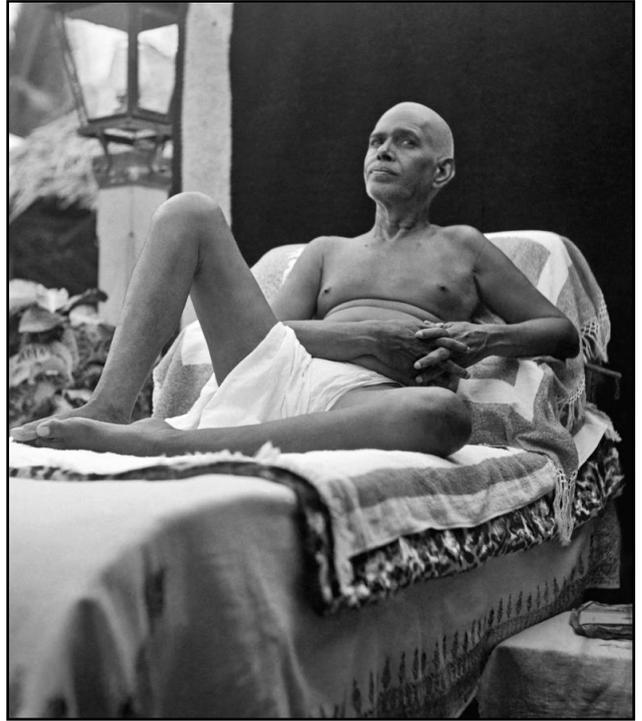
The unique power of these words is because Sri Ganesan got them from the horse's mouth - directly from Bhagavan's old devotees. In addition, his interactions with the old devotees are also very instructive to aspiring, earnest seekers on their march towards Truth. Sri Ganesan himself strived for it and experienced it. This, is the lodestone that gives *Ramana Periya Puranam* the stamp of authenticity and participation.

Another uniqueness of this book is that it is perhaps the only one where the old devotees have been presented in a chronological order. That is, their introduction is according to the year they arrived at the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan and not based on their spiritual maturity, erudition, scholarship, greatness or any other external factors. With one notable exception: Though it starts with Bhagavan's mother Azhagamal - the *Matrubhuteshwara* who bore Bhagavan - it ends, not chronologically, but appropriately, with Nagalakshmi, the author's mother and *upaguru*, who first introduced him to Bhagavan, the *satguru*.

On Bhagavan's direct path, these devotees are signboards on the inner path that gently, but firmly, guide us to the centre, the Heart. When we read about these rocks and boulders, or sit on the inner path in silent communion with Arunachala's rocks and boulders, we come in union with them - and with the *satguru*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Suresh Kailaash

*Sarvam Sri Arunachala Ramanarpanamastu*



## Introduction



Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, it is said, had no name that he called his own. However, he did have a name and he revealed it, not once, but thrice. The first time was in his hymn *Aksharamanamalai, The Marital Garland of Letters*. In its very last verse, Bhagavan sings, "Place your garland around my neck and wear the garland strung by this Arunachala Ramanan." The second time was some days later. A devotee at Virupaksha cave wanted to know who Bhagavan really was. He wrote a verse on a piece of paper, "Oh Ramana, who are you? Are you the highest God, Hari, or a *rishi*, or a celestial being? Who are you?" He then left the note on Bhagavan's stone couch when Bhagavan had gone out.

When Bhagavan returned and saw the note, he wrote behind it, "I am Arunachala Ramanan, dwelling in the Heart of every being, beginning with Lord Hari to the so called lowest being. If with devotion, you plunge into the cave of your Heart, your inner eye will be opened and you will see this truth as the fullness of non-dual Awareness." The third time was when Viswanatha Swami wanted to write a verse on Muruganar, another senior devotee. Unable to compose an entire verse in Tamil, he wrote two words, "Mugavapuri Murugan." When Bhagavan was not there, he left the paper on Bhagavan's seat and slipped away. When Bhagavan came back, he completed the verse, "Arunachala Ramanan who resides in the Heart lotus of every being, gave Mugavapuri Murugan a look and destroyed all his tendencies. This enabled him to come out with thousands of spontaneous verses, the beauty of which is comparable with those written several centuries back by the saint Manikavachakar in *Thiruvachakam*."

So, what was the purpose of Bhagavan Arunachala Ramanan's advent on earth? In his hymn *Necklace of Nine Gems*, Bhagavan reveals it: "Arunachala commanded me to make known his true state of Awareness all over the world as the Self in each one's Heart, and thereby destroy the false identity that one is the body." Arunachala Siva, the infinite flame of *jnana* manifest in the form of a holy hill, incarnated as Ramana to talk to us in our language. After all, who would be able to understand a hill if it were to speak? Its language is *mounam*, silence.

I once shared this with Bhagavan's old devotee, Professor N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer, a physics professor and scientist. He exclaimed, "How wonderful! This is true! Arunachala did come as Ramana; but Ganesan, add another sentence to that." He continued, "It is true that Bhagavan is Arunachala, but we, his devotees, are the rocks and boulders of Arunachala, part and parcel of the sacred hill." This revelation thrilled me. Professor Iyer added, "Whenever a great being appears, he comes with his retinue. When Bhagavan incarnated on earth, we too came to serve him. Once our service is over, we will go back to the source."

Though it was Arunachala's command that his message be spread around the world, Bhagavan did not move an inch from Arunachala for fifty-four years. The fact is that Bhagavan did not need to move - the world came to him. Frank Humphreys was the first westerner to visit him. Many like Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, Muruganar and Arthur Osborne followed. Their only purpose was to record the message of the master. Great masters like the Buddha and Christ would have remained as just names but for the retinue that came with them. Their devotees gathered and preserved their teachings as well as their answers to seekers' questions - questions that can occur to any spiritual seeker. Consequently, future generations continue to reap the benefits of their teachings. It is to fulfill this noble purpose that the great masters come with their retinue.

Another example of a great master who came with his retinue of devotees is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. When no disciple had yet come to him, at times intoxicated with divine bliss, he would stand on the bank of the river Ganges and shout, "Mother, where are the children you said you are sending? They have not yet arrived!" The divine Mother eventually sent eighteen great disciples. Later, when he had cancer and was to drop the body, he announced, "I will be born once more. I am going to be born as a beggar in my next life to alleviate the suffering of the people." To this, his wife the Holy Mother Sarada Devi said, "I might not be coming." Ramakrishna Paramahansa replied, "You have no choice. When I come, all my retinue will be born too." He gave the example of a weed in a pond. It comes out with all the weeds around it when pulled out by its roots.

Bhagavan had many devotees. Some of them are well known and some are not. The human and sacred relationship of these devotees with Bhagavan was never formally recorded in one book. The reminiscences in books like *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, *Letters from Ramanasramam* and *Day by Day with Bhagavan* mainly contain answers given by Bhagavan. However, there were precious few records of Ramana Maharshi's life from the devotees' point of view. I longed to record the intimate nuances of their *satsang* with the master. From 1956 onwards, I constantly questioned the old devotees. "How did you interact with Bhagavan? How did he treat you? What was your relationship with him like?" They would humbly reply, "We are nobody. All is Bhagavan. Ask us about Bhagavan and we will tell you."

In 1960, I moved to live in Ramanasramam. I worked hard at my ashram duties but somehow I was not completely happy. I could not put my finger on what was missing. Though I received a lot of well meaning advice from the elders at the ashram, my heart was not satisfied. My teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer then told me, "If you are not satisfied with our guidance, you should go and get it from an acknowledged *jnani*." He directed me to Swami Ramdas of Anandashram in Kerala who in turn sent me to his spiritual heir, Mataji Krishna Bai, a realized saint. I asked her, "How should I serve my master? What is my *sadhana*?" She said, "Old devotees of Bhagavan have already left the ashram. Go bring them back, attend to them and serve them till their last day. This is your *sadhana*. This *seva* to them is your *sadhana*." I was taken aback. I had closely studied eastern and western philosophy. Nowhere had I heard of serving the guru's devotees as a form of *sadhana*. She added, "Another important thing is that since you are related to Ramana Maharshi, everybody will tell you that you are already liberated. They will tell you that according to Hindu treatises, a realized master's relatives are already realized beings. That, the seven generations preceding him and the seven generations succeeding him are blessed with emancipation - freedom from karma. Do not believe it. You have to earn your bread - your spiritual bread. God is absolutely impartial and if you have to attain salvation, you have to strive hard like everyone else. Practice Ramana Maharshi's teachings, pursue Self Enquiry." Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task before me, I cried, "Mother, I am leaving and you will be far away!" "You have been entrusted to me by Papa. I am going to guide you," she reassured me. "You are hundreds of miles away from me! How are you going to guide me?" I looked at her questioningly without voicing it in words. She smiled and said, "Don't worry about that. I will be guiding you every moment." Sure enough, her continued guidance is palpable to me even now.

When I came back to Ramanasramam, I acted on Mataji Krishna Bai's counsel very sincerely. I started searching for old devotees, bringing them back to the ashram, serving them and putting Bhagavan's teachings into practice. In the beginning, neither did I always succeed nor did I have a complete grasp of it. Nevertheless, I did not give up. I kept wondering why she had said that to serve the devotees was my *sadhana*. The answer came to me like a flash: I was being called to record the reminiscences of Bhagavan's old devotees and their relationship with him - something that had not been done. I began working on this task with enthusiasm. Veneration goes to those old devotees who proactively started sharing their memories of Bhagavan. Most of these were recorded by me, which were published periodically as Ashram publications and regularly in the Ashram journal, *The Mountain Path*. I owe much to 'boulders' like Kunju Swami, Annamalai Swami, Ramaswami Pillai, Devaraja Mudaliar, Suri Nagamma, Major Chadwick, and others for coming forward with beautiful recollections of their meetings with the master.

For instance, whenever Ramaswami Pillai met me, he would begin narrating some incident involving Bhagavan. He once pointed to a coconut tree and said, "Once I was standing right there and plucking coconuts using a long pole with an iron clamp. Bhagavan saw me on his way up the hill and said 'Why can't you use a bamboo clamp? The metal clamp will hurt the tree. It is already offering its fruit to you unconditionally.' I actually made the mistake of thinking that I was really wise - while Bhagavan could offer spiritual advice, perhaps he was not practical. After all, I had to pluck so many coconuts! If I used a bamboo clamp, it would break. Therefore, I continued using the iron clamp. When Bhagavan returned from walking on the hill, I was still at work. Suddenly, a coconut fell on my nose and it began to bleed. Bhagavan stood next to me and gently rebuked me, 'You doubted my words. Now do you understand how your wrong actions will hurt you? Now do you understand?'"

A deluge of reminiscences came down from him and other devotees. I begged all of them to write these down. "Please share your memories of Bhagavan, your interactions with him, his interactions with the earlier devotees - everything. Whatever you say will be direct from the source." And they graciously

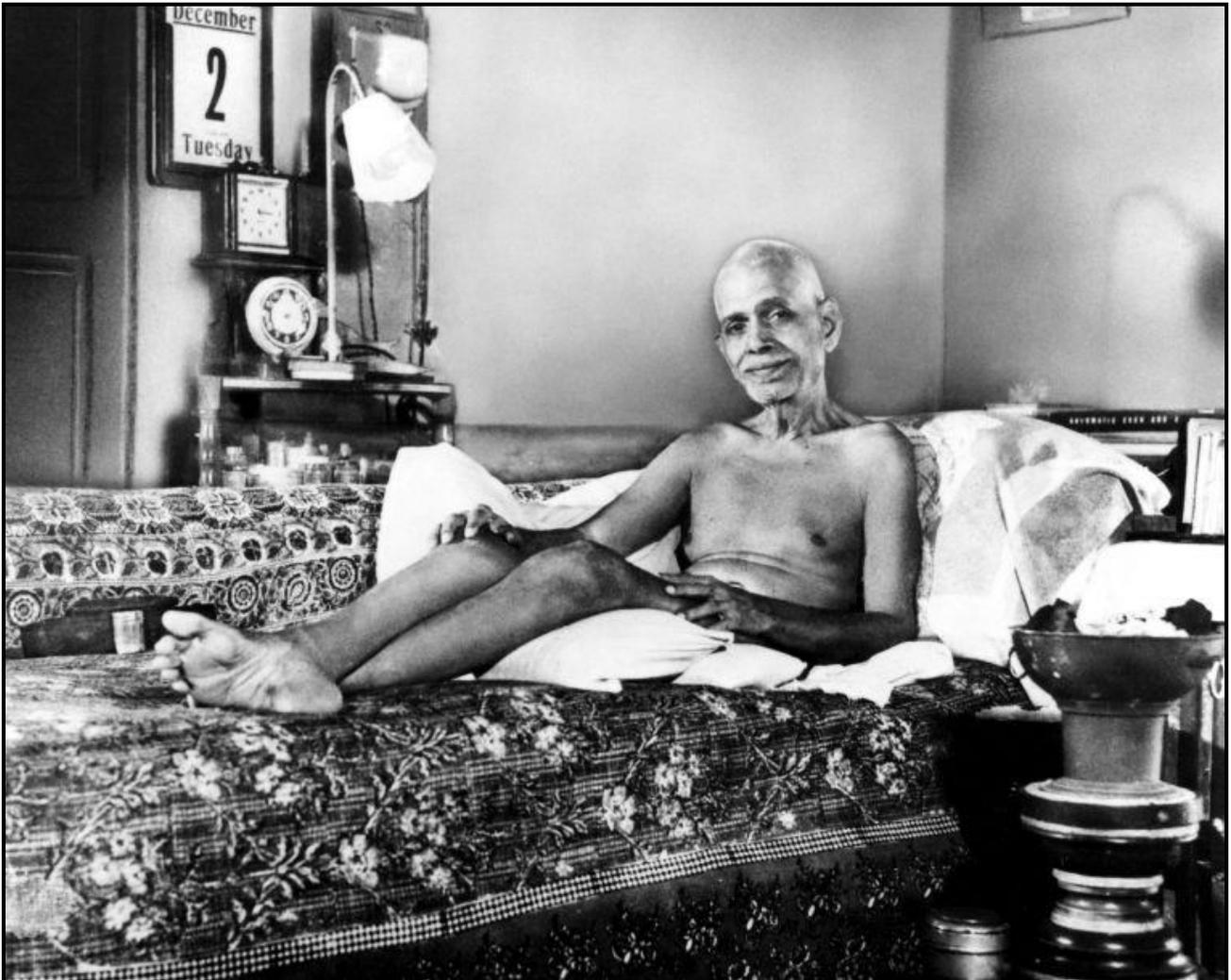
responded. In the thirty-seven years I was in Ramanasramam, it was my association with the old devotees of Bhagavan that gave me the greatest joy and learning. For many years, it has been my heart's wish to share this joy and learning with fellow seekers. Each devotee had a significant role to play and this forms the basis of this book. Its purpose is to bring to light how Bhagavan Arunachala Ramana's devotees, his 'rocks and boulders', came together gracefully and naturally to support the master in his work.

I am deeply grateful to the AHAM Retreat Centre, Asheboro, NC, and the AHAM ashram in Arunachala, for hosting talks on the old devotees of Bhagavan. The bulk of this book has been culled from these talks that were recorded on CDs by the editorial services of good friends. To them too, I owe a deep sense of gratitude.

My humble request is to allow the words to fall away, leaving the essence of one's own pure understanding to bloom, blossom and flower within one's Heart.

"Grace is always there."

V. Ganesan



*Bhagavan in the Old Hall*



*Arunachala*

## Mother Azhagammal



The year is 1879. The place, Tiruchuzhi, a small, obscure village in Tamil Nadu, South India. It is the day of Ardra Darshan. A festival which celebrates that ancient, eternal moment when Lord Arunachala Siva appeared from a primordial, infinite, fiery pillar of light to destroy the egos of warring gods and give them enlightenment.

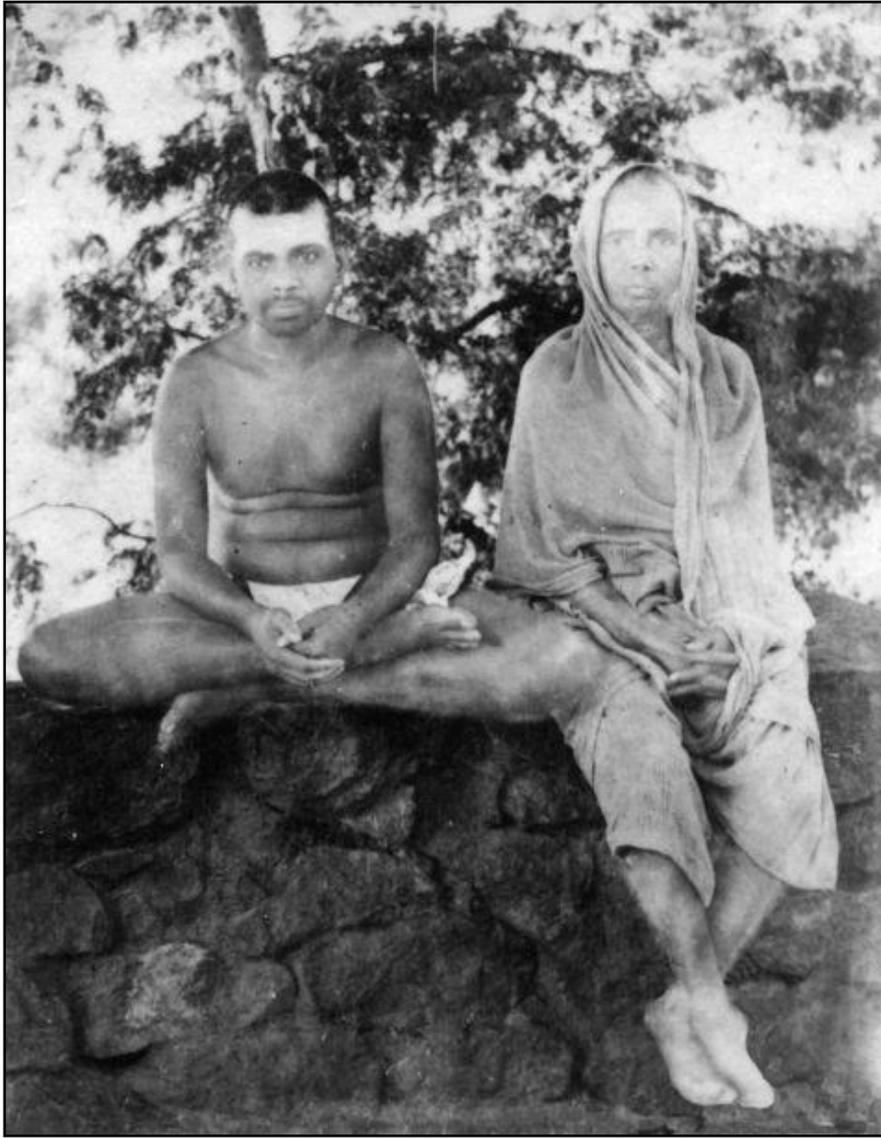
At midnight on this auspicious day, just as the idol of Siva returned to Tiruchuzhi's legendary Bhoominatheshwara temple, a wail of an infant was heard in a humble home on its northern street. Mother Azhagammal had just given birth to a baby boy. A baby boy who, in time, would be known the world over as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Named Venkataraman as a child, the history of Bhagavan clearly proves that the aspects of fire and light were very important throughout his life. His mother conceived many times. It was only when she was bearing Bhagavan that she had a burning feeling in her stomach. To soothe it, a traditional paste of *neem* and *bilva* leaves had to be applied daily on her stomach. Later, when the child was born, the blind midwife saw a brilliant light.

From his years of innocence, Venkataraman could hear the sound, 'Arunachala, Arunachala,' within himself. The sound stayed with him all the time but he did not know what it was. Later, when he became a great master, he was asked about it, "If you could hear the sound all the time, why did you not ask people about it? Why did you not seek an explanation for it?" Bhagavan replied, "Would someone go about checking with people if they breathe? It was built into my system and I thought everyone could hear it too. I did not know it was an aberration." (Similarly, Swami Vivekananda used to see a blue light between his eyebrows from his childhood. When asked why he did not ask anyone about this strange occurrence, Swami replied, "I thought everyone was seeing the light.") Other than this, Venkataraman seemed to be an ordinary boy. Nothing spectacular about him suggested that he was to become a great *rishi*.

After his father died, the family had to split up. Bhagavan's widowed mother went to stay in her brother-in-law's house in Manamadurai. Venkataraman was sent to study in Madurai, about thirty miles from Tiruchuzhi. In Madurai, Venkataraman studied in the American Mission School. Strangely enough, he had not read any Hindu scriptures. He had only read *Periapuranam*, a devotional composition on the lives of the sixty-three saint-devotees of Lord Siva. He himself later said, "I did not know any terms from philosophy or spirituality - *Brahman*, *atman*, *samadhi*, *jnana*, Self, mind - nothing."

In Madurai, at the age of sixteen, he had a death experience. Father Arunachala wanted Venkataraman back in his fold and so gave him a death experience in which he felt his body and mind being symbolically burnt. He 'saw' his body being carried to the cremation ground and burnt. The burning feeling continued till he ran away from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, entered the Arunachaleshwara temple, embraced its *agni* (fire) *lingam* and said, "Father, I have come at thy bidding. Thy will be done."

After Bhagavan left home, nobody knew where he was. When his mother heard the news, she was grief stricken and made desperate efforts to find him. Reports trickled in that he had moved far south to Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. Someone else also sent news that a young Brahmin boy was seen roaming the streets there. She packed her things and left for Thiruvananthapuram. On spotting the boy there, she begged him to come with her or at least look at her. However, he ignored her and fled. She was sure that he was her Venkataraman. She continued to grieve until one day somebody informed her that he had met a person in Tiruvannamalai who wrote his name as 'Venkataraman of Tiruchuzhi'. Encouraged by this news, she sent her brother-in-law, a soft-hearted man, to look for her son in Tiruvannamalai. On his return, he confirmed the news, "Yes, I saw Venkataraman. He is totally absorbed



in meditation. I pleaded with him to come back, but he did not even reply. There was no response; he was just like a rock.”

Confident that he would not reject her pleas, Mother Azhagammal decided to go and beg him to return. It was 1898, two years after Bhagavan had left Madurai and come to Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan was seated on a rock at Pavazhakundru, a small hillock in Tiruvannamalai. On reaching there, his mother pleaded with him, “Come back home. I will not disturb you. I will feed you because you are uncared for here. I will attend to your body. I will not interfere in your life. You can continue your spiritual life there. Please come back.” There was absolutely no response from Bhagavan. Rock like he remained, motionless and still. (Muruganar used to say, “Even a big boulder on Arunachala may move sometimes, but Bhagavan will not move. You cannot move Bhagavan.”)

One day, some residents of Tiruvannamalai who had been seeing this old woman crying all the way up the hill and down, reproached the young ascetic, “Why don’t you give a reply? Either accept or decline! We have been observing this lady cry for the last three days and you do not even reply!” Relenting, Bhagavan wrote a reply on a piece of paper. This reply to his mother is his first written teaching. He wrote, “The Ordainer, prevailing everywhere, makes each one play his role in life according to his karma. That which is not destined, will not happen despite every effort. What is destined to happen is bound to happen. This is certain. Therefore, the best course is to remain silent.”

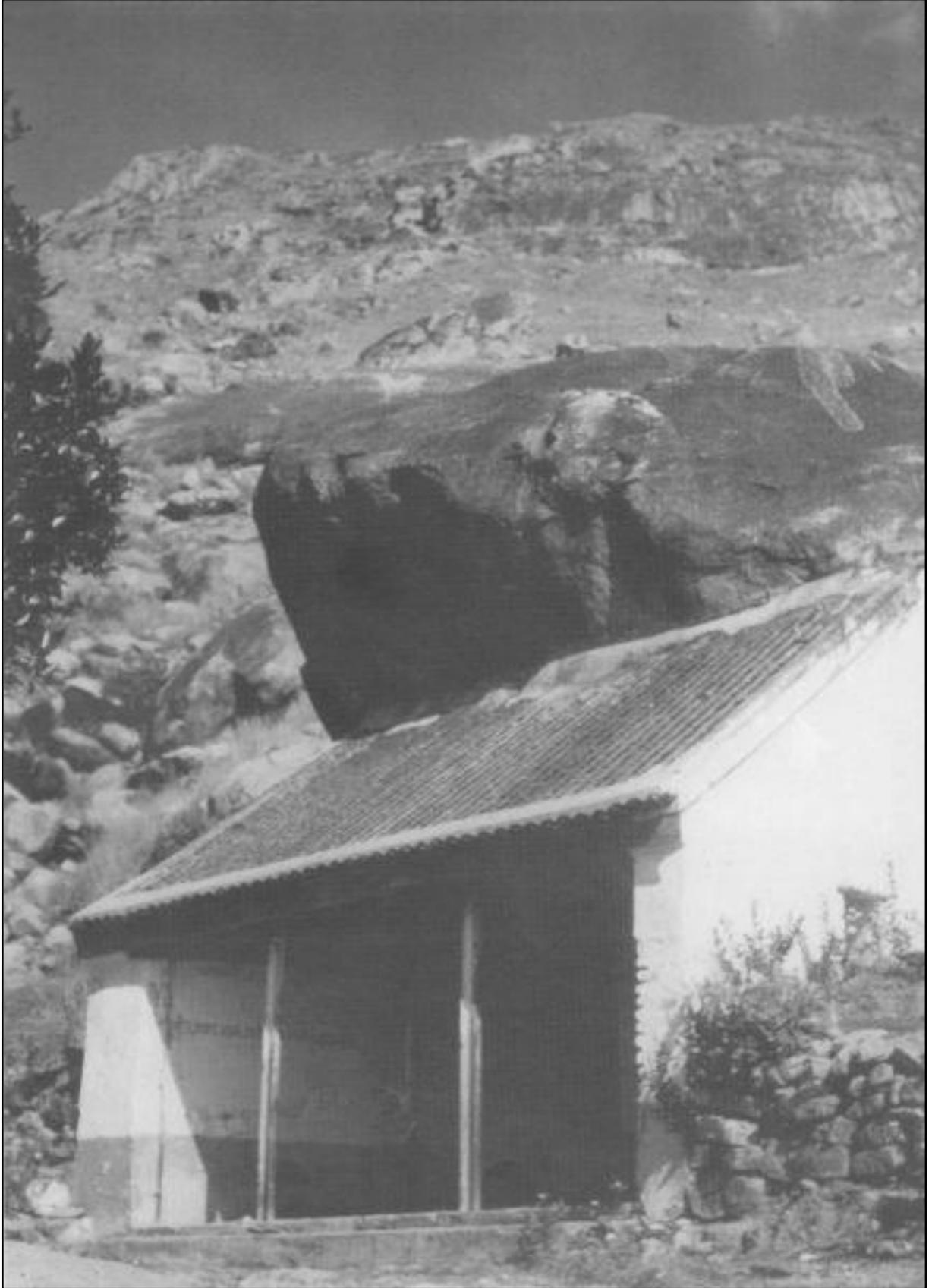
At face value, this looks like a reply rejecting his mother's pleas. However, these words bear a deeper meaning. *'That which is not destined, will not happen despite every effort. What is destined to happen is bound to happen.'* Then, what is the role of an individual? If everything is predestined and everyone is acting according to how he or she is being directed to act, then what is the reality of the individual? This doubt raises the fundamental question, 'Who am I?' With the next sentence, *'This is certain,'* Bhagavan gives a stamp of authority, certainty, for the mind needs the anchor of certainty. The last sentence is, *'Therefore, the best course is to remain silent'.* To remain in silence is a positive step towards surrender. The first step is to surrender. Surrendering in silence is the guiding force that helps one begin the quest for the Self. One cannot do this with a disturbed mind. We all need to contemplate on the hidden wisdom in this first *upadesa*. When we read about the life of a saint, not like a novel or a historical narrative, but with reverence and devotion, a sentence, even a word, can guide us. This first teaching which Mother Azhagammal brought out from Bhagavan Arunachala Ramana is a most important and powerful one.

Jesus Christ said to his mother, "Woman, what have I got to do with you? I have come to do my Father's business." Bhagavan, through his note and his action, seems to be similarly telling his mother, "I have got this work of my Father, to spread his message that his true state is the silence which is hidden in the Heart of everyone and that humanity has forgotten it. I have to remind them that Arunachala is the unconditioned awareness of 'I AM' in each one's Heart. The mind clouds it now. Therefore, it has to be removed so that the Heart shines forth in all its splendour. This is my Father's business. So, oh mother, you too accept it."

Bhagavan's mother went back home disappointed. Though Bhagavan had given the highest teaching to his mother in 1898, for nearly fifteen years after that, she was too entangled in family affairs. Then, in 1913, disaster struck: she lost all her close relatives except her youngest son and daughter - Bhagavan's younger brother and sister. Mother Azhagammal was immersed in sorrow. It seemed there would be no descendants. Bhagavan's elder brother had married, but had died at the age of twenty-two, leaving his wife a childless, teenage widow. Bhagavan was not married, and his married sister did not have any. Bhagavan's younger brother, my grandfather, was married but his wife Mangalam, was childless. In 1913, Mother Azhagammal took her to Bhagavan in Virupaksha cave and begged him to bless his younger brother and wife with a son. The very next year, a child was born. In gratitude to Bhagavan, he was named Venkataraman. He was then the only descendant of Bhagavan's family.

In 1914, while still in the clutches of family entanglements, Mother Azhagammal came to visit Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave. She came down with a raging fever. It was diagnosed as typhoid. Bhagavan pleaded with Arunachala, "Oh Arunachala, fire of wisdom, enfold my mother in your light and make her one with you!" Needless to say, his mother was saved. This plea of Bhagavan is not for his mother alone but for each one of us. When we take to Self Enquiry, we too will be engulfed in the fire of wisdom of Arunachala.

In 1916, Mangalam passed away, leaving her child Venkataraman, my father, to be looked after by Bhagavan's sister. Bhagavan's mother, now fed up with the world, returned to Bhagavan to stay with him for good. It took eight years for Bhagavan to make her spiritually mature; there are interesting stories on how he did this. For instance, being a Brahmin, she was steeped in orthodoxy and Bhagavan had to release her from her prejudices. According to Brahmin orthodoxy, a Brahmin's clothes, kitchen, food and personal items could only be washed or touched by Brahmins. Else, they were considered impure. If touched by a dog or a person from a 'lower caste', an orthodox Brahmin had to have a purifying bath. Dogs touched Mother Azhagammal all the time because there were many at Skandashram and Virupaksha cave. Consequently, she sometimes ended up bathing ten times a day! Taking pity on her, a scholarly devotee Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni told her, "According to the Hindu scriptures, if you touch a *jnani*, a realized soul, all pollution and sins drop from the body - you need not bathe then." From then on, whenever Bhagavan saw his mother approaching he would know why she was coming to him. After she touched him and went away, he would give a mischievous smile and say, "Some dog must have touched her." Brahmins would not even eat onions or garlic. One day, Bhagavan brought a small onion to his mother and gently teased her saying, "Be careful, this will be standing there at the gates of heaven to push you out." With comments like these, he slowly freed her from the grip of her prejudices.



*Virupaksha Cave (an early photo)*

Her attachment to relatives had gone but her maternal attachment to Bhagavan remained. She knew Bhagavan liked *appalam* (a thin wafer like crisp, only much bigger) and she would ask people to bring the ingredients to make it. One day, when she was trying to make *appalams*, she called out to Bhagavan, "Why don't you come and help me? I am going to make *appalams*!" Blinded by her attachment to him, she wanted to satisfy his childhood desires. Understanding this, Bhagavan replied, "You make your *appalams* inside the cave and I will make my *appalams* outside." This is how the *Appalam Song* came about. In it, the process of making *appalams* is a metaphor for the process of attaining liberation. Bhagavan interpreted the song in the light of every ingredient used, "Let the ego be crushed in the quern of Self Enquiry, seasoned with *satsang*, good company, softened and flattened, fried in the ghee of Brahman and then eaten by the Self." The song asks, "How should one's soul be ripened? How should one's ego be pounded, like the flour is pounded?" The answer is, with the enquiry, 'Who am I?' This song touched the depth of his mother's soul and transformed her.

She was very possessive about her meagre belongings. Bhagavan transformed this quality in a beautiful way. One day, a pious renunciate and resident of Skandashram called Sabapati was wearing a torn cloth that did not cover much. Mother asked him, "Sabapati, why are you wearing this torn cloth?" He playfully replied, "You are wearing a long sari. It is nine yards long, why don't you give me some of it?" She immediately tore two yards from her sari and gave it to Sabapati. Her detachment from her few possessions had begun.

Another day, some woodcutters came to Skandashram and cried, "Bhagavan, we are all hungry." Mother Azhagammal would not share the food with others until she had eaten first; she believed that food became polluted if others ate it first. Bhagavan knew this. Still, he told Kunju Swami, "Ask mother to bring the food she has cooked and give it to them." She was hesitant. "Tell Bhagavan that I have not yet eaten," she protested. When Kunju Swami reported this to Bhagavan, he went to her and reproached her, "Oh! That is the reason. You think they are all different from you. Come and look. They are all standing down there. Do you know who they are? Look at them." She looked at them and Bhagavan said, "They are all Arunachala *swaroopam*, the forms of Arunachala." He did not use the word 'untouchables'. From that moment on, she saw only Arunachala in everyone - there was no difference between her and anyone else.

Bhagavan fulfilled his duties to her as a son. Though already an acclaimed master, he had only a few people to serve him. They would fetch water for him and carry it painstakingly uphill. However, for his mother, Bhagavan himself brought the water. He would carry two big vessels filled to the brim, make her sit and pour water over her to bathe her. He also washed her clothes. While he attended to her physical needs and was affectionate to her, he could also be stern when he had to effect a change. Over eight years, slowly but surely, he weaned her away from the limiting confines of narrow mindedness, orthodoxy, superstition and social customs. However, despite being in the presence of a great master like Bhagavan who with all filial affection had the intention to mature his mother, it took eight years. The beauty of their relationship is that Bhagavan's mother surrendered to it all and allowed the transformation to take place. (The lesson for us here is that we should not get disappointed if we see no progress after a few years of *sadhana*.)

One day, Bhagavan's sister came and said, "Mother, you are not well. Come, I have a comfortable house." She refused and turning to Bhagavan told him, "I want to die only in your arms. After my death you may even throw away my body into some thorn bushes, it does not matter." Soon after this, she fell seriously ill. On the day of her passing away, from early in the morning, Bhagavan sat next to her with his left hand on her head and his right hand on the right side of her chest. He remained like that for nearly eight hours. The devotees who had gathered there knew that her end had come. They observed the beauty and sanctity of a son elevating his mother's soul to the Infinite. Kunju Swami who was present later said that the devotees observing this felt it was a physical demonstration of the soul's journey to the Absolute; it was like heat and light spreading from a flame. When he was sure that the soul and mind had merged in the Self, Bhagavan took his hands off and then said, "When the soul merges with the Self and is completely annihilated, a soft ring like that of a bell can be felt."

It was a common practice that after witnessing a death, all those present must bathe. However, Bhagavan said that in this case there was no need as there was no pollution. "She did not die. She is absorbed in Arunachala," he stated. Later, the devotees who were there enquired, "Bhagavan, what did you do by keeping your hands on her head and her chest? What exactly took place?" Bhagavan



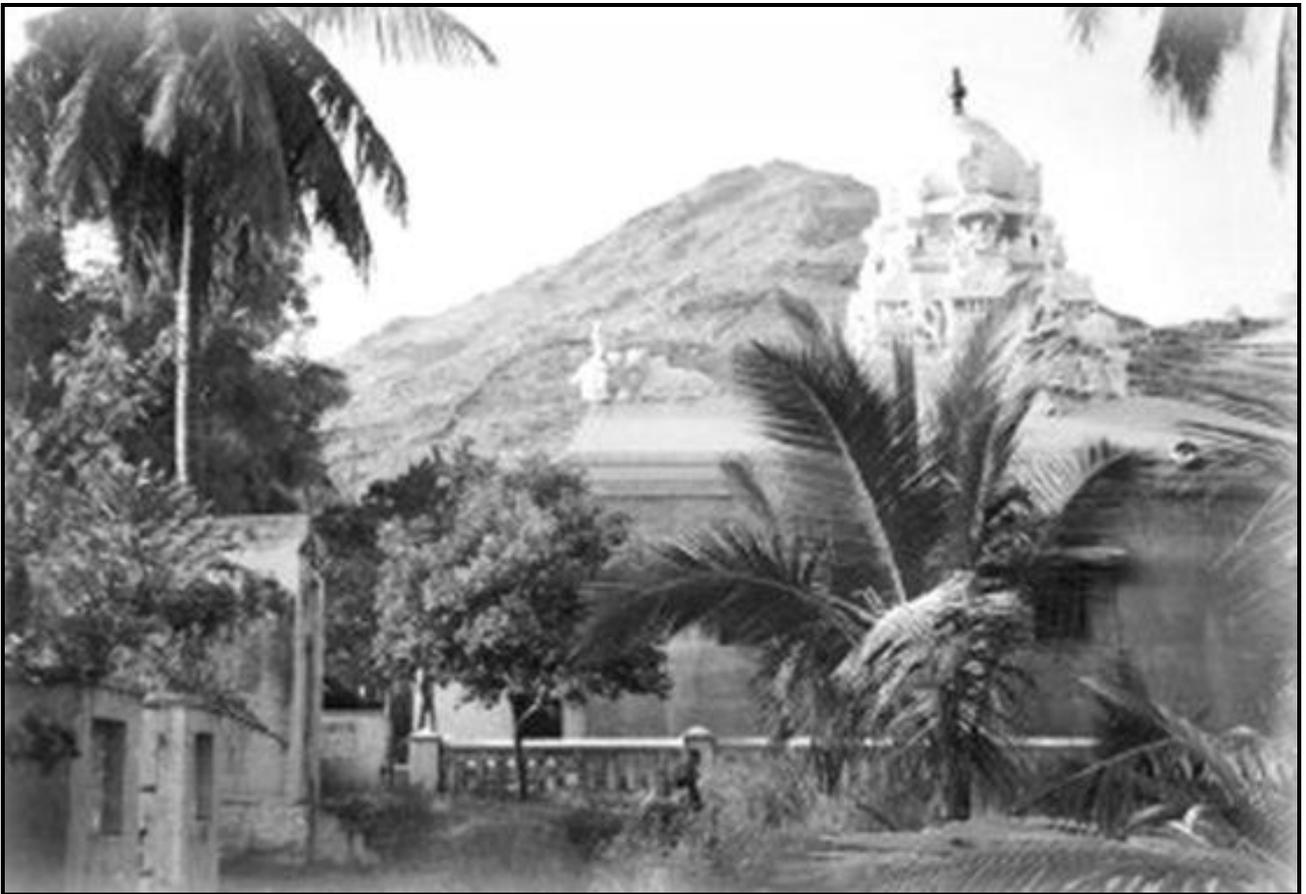
*Skandashram in earlier days*

explained, “Innate tendencies and subtle memories of past experiences that lead to future possibilities became very active when my hands were placed on her. Scene after scene rolled before her in her subtle consciousness. The outer senses had already gone. The soul was passing through a series of experiences, thus avoiding the need for rebirth and making possible the union of the mind with the Self or the Heart. The soul was at last disrobed of all subtleties before it reached its final destination, the supreme peace of liberation from which there is no return to ignorance.”

What is the precept that Bhagavan laid down before us through Mother’s example? When asked what the essence of his teaching was, Bhagavan would reply, “Either ask ‘Who am I?’ or surrender. They are two sides of the same coin.” Bhagavan clearly demonstrated the nuances of ‘Who am I?’ in the lives of many devotees. However, through the example of his mother, he taught the aspect of surrender - for his mother had surrendered completely. Mother’s example also shows us what happens when one immerses in Self Enquiry and reaches a state of silence: an experience like the one during Mother’s death takes place. *“Innate tendencies and subtle memories of past experiences leading to future possibilities become very active.”* When one is immersed in Self Enquiry and silence, this begins to happen. At this point one is tempted to give up and say, “I am not able to proceed.” *“Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness. The outer senses had already gone.”* When one enquires deeply, the inner doors open. *“The soul was passing through a series of experiences thus avoiding the need for rebirth and making possible the union of the mind with the Self or the Heart.”* When one progresses in Self Enquiry, there is a struggle for the mind to merge with the Heart. The guidance and grace of the guru are very essential to push and pull the mind into the Heart. *“Once the soul was disrobed of all subtleties, it reached the final destination, the supreme peace of liberation from which*

*there is no return to ignorance.*” This teaching is a clear example of the imminent experience that awaits us all. Mother Azhagammal has shown us the way. Have complete faith. Either take up the path of Self Enquiry or surrender to the higher power. In both cases, Bhagavan has said, “Ego has no place.” When there is no ego, neither ‘I’ nor ‘mine’ - that which rules is only Arunachala. As Bhagavan has said, “Arunachala is the Heart, the Self, the ‘I AM’.”

Reaching Arunachala is not in space or in time. It is constantly here and now. It is not going to enter your Heart. It already is the Heart. You only have to turn your attention to it. Mother Azhagammal turned her attention to Bhagavan. Bhagavan once said, “The purpose of the outer guru is to give a push and that of the inner guru is to pull.” Arunachala is the outer guru who gives us the push while Bhagavan remaining in the Heart as our Self, pulls us like a magnet. So what is our role? We just have to submit. Wherever we are, we should live in our Heart. Sacredness means that we should go into silence. Wherever and whenever we are in silence, we are in sacredness - and that sacredness is Arunachala. Arunachala is not a Hindu god. It is reality, space, existence itself. Since we have identified ourselves with our bodies and thus have limited ourselves, Arunachala has come to remind us: “There is no you, there is only ‘I AM’.”



*Mother's Temple with Arunachala in the background*

## Palani Swami



Bhagavan declared to Arunachala on the first day of his arrival at Tiruvannamalai, "Father, I've come at thy bidding. Thy will be done." From that moment on, his whole life was surrendered to the Self. In the six months of his stay in the Arunachaleshwara temple, Bhagavan was always immersed in *samadhi* (deep, bodiless repose). Astonishingly, until then he had never heard the word *samadhi* or any other term to describe what he was experiencing. In Pathalalinga, a dark, dank, underground niche in Arunachaleshwara temple, insects and vermin feasted on his body as he sat unmindfully blissful - absorbed in the Self. Could Father Arunachala tolerate this torture to his son's body? He sent the saint Seshadri Swami, Venkatachala Mudali, Uttandi Nayanar and Annamalai Thambiran to give relief to Bhagavan.

Seshadri Swami had the young Swami's body lifted from the underground cave, without disturbing his *samadhi* state. However, crowds of ignorant people continued to disturb Bhagavan in the temple. Consequently, Bhagavan was taken to Gurumurtam, a shrine of a saint on the outskirts of Tiruvannamalai that was owned by Annamalai Thambiran. Strangely, Gurumurtam too was infested with ants and other insects. Bhagavan though, was completely oblivious to the body. His body was unwashed, his hair had grown long, thick and matted, and his fingernails were long and curled over. Since he hardly ate food, his body was emaciated and terribly weak. How could Arunachala bear all this? He therefore sent Palani Swami, his Nandi, to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. (On the southwest slope of Arunachala is a rock that looks strikingly like the head of Siva's bull, Nandi. The old devotees like Viswanatha Swami and Kunju Swami used to point it out and say, "That is Palani Swami - the Nandi of our Bhagavan.")

Palani Swami was a reclusive ascetic who religiously worshipped a stone image of Ganesa on the banks of a pool in Tiruvannamalai. Every day, he ate a simple, single meal of boiled rice without salt or side dishes. This simple ascetic had but one aim, and that was to recognize the truth. One day, one of his friends told him, "What is the use of worshipping this stone image? This will not give you anything. At Gurumurtam, God is there in flesh and blood. Like the five year old Dhruva of the Puranas who did penance standing on one leg, there is this young ascetic totally absorbed in *samadhi*. Go and serve him. Your life's purpose will be achieved."

Palani Swami went to Gurumurtam. As usual, young Bhagavan was totally immersed in *samadhi*. The very first sight of him shook Palani Swami to his roots. He saw not just God but his guru as well. From that moment on, there existed no world other than this supreme ascetic for Palani Swami. Being an ascetic himself, he could perceive the young saint's depth of spiritual surrender. He vowed to himself, "I will serve this saint until death."

He began to serve Bhagavan. While Bhagavan was in *samadhi*, people would come and touch his body, shake him and try to talk to him. Palani Swami's duty was to protect this physical form and ensure that this highest spiritual state was not disturbed. He saw to it that even insects did not bother the master. He would feed Bhagavan one cupful of whatever food was collected. This way, Bhagavan had at least some food every day. He even raised a fence with a gate around Bhagavan and whenever Palani Swami had to go out, he would lock the door so that nobody could bother Bhagavan. In this manner, he attended on Bhagavan for eighteen months - night and day.

Sometime later, Bhagavan had to move out of these premises. In the next compound was a mango orchard. Its owner requested Bhagavan and Palani Swami to come and stay there in a thatched hut made of coconut leaves. Palani Swami and Bhagavan stayed there undisturbed for six months as curious visitors were strictly prohibited from entering by the orchard's owner. This was the time when another facet of Bhagavan opened up. Palani Swami was thirty years older than Bhagavan and held a fatherly affection for him. Like a caring father, Palani Swami would go to the town and get books for his 'Godson' to read. This was how Bhagavan first read *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, *Vedanta Chudamani*, *Adhyatma Ramayanam*, *Yoga Vashistam*, *Prabhulinga Leelai*, and many other works. On reading some of these books on *Advaita* and *Vedanta*, he recognized that these books were describing what he had experienced at the age of sixteen. This was where he learned words like *samadhi*, *atma*, *maya* and *samsara*. It was the will of Arunachala, the still and omniscient Self, that Bhagavan abide in his state of

awareness and reveal to humanity that it is the same, nameless Self, existence or Heart, which always is in every being. In order to communicate this, such an education was indispensable. Bhagavan's fluency in scriptures and Vedantic language had its roots in this phase of his life.

Sometime later, the owner of the orchard wanted them to vacate the premises. They moved to the Arunagirinathar temple. There, Bhagavan told Palani Swami, "You go begging that way and I will go begging this way." Bhagavan himself has described how he would go stand in front of a house, clap his hands twice and wait. If the house owner gave him some food, he would receive it in his hands and eat it immediately. Then, without feeling the need to wash his hands, he would wipe them on his hair. Later, Bhagavan recalled, "When I was doing that, I felt I was the single, sovereign monarch of the world." That is why Bhagavan declares that true renunciation is not only rejecting the notion of ownership, but also not feeling dependent on anyone or anything. He would not beg a second time from the same house. Consequently, he ended up begging in almost all the streets and houses in Tiruvannamalai!

In Arunagirinathar temple too, crowds of people began to harass him. They could not understand why Bhagavan was in *samadhi* all the time. When Palani Swami was not present, they would disturb him. Palani Swami noticed a small hillock called Pavazhakundru and moved Bhagavan there. Throughout Palani Swami's relationship with Bhagavan, he was always in the background because his duty was to preserve the physical body of Bhagavan and see that his *samadhi* state was not disturbed. He never interfered with the other activities of Bhagavan. Gradually, the reputation of Bhagavan spread through the town and a few people started gathering at Pavazhakundru as well. Palani Swami went in search of another place and noticed Virupaksha cave on Arunachala's slopes. Bhagavan later on said, "When we went to Virupaksha cave for the first time, there was nothing there except an earthen pot." A few years later, some woman devotees started serving food there during daytime. Other attendants like Perumal Swami, Ayya Swami and Kandaswami also joined him in the course of the years, but Palani Swami always remained the primary attendant.

It was here that Bhagavan learnt Malayalam. Palani Swami had taken a vow that he would eat his single meal of the day only after reading a page from the Malayalam version of *Adhyatma Ramayanam*. He followed this self imposed restriction all his life. Though Palani Swami's mother tongue was Malayalam, he could not read it fluently. So it took a long time before he finished his daily reading. The other devotees and Bhagavan used to wait for Palani Swami to finish before they all sat down to eat. One day, Bhagavan asked Palani Swami whether his vow to read a page a day had the stringent stipulation that he himself should read it or whether it was enough that he listened to someone reading it aloud for him. Palani Swami consented to the latter and Bhagavan himself undertook this daily task. Bhagavan had no knowledge of Malayalam, as his mother tongue was Tamil. Bhagavan therefore requested Palani Swami to teach him Malayalam. Within no time, Bhagavan picked up the language well enough to read, write and understand. From then on, thanks to Bhagavan, Palaniswami got his daily dose of *Adhyatma Ramayanam* and everyone got to eat in time! (Kunju Swami told me that Bhagavan was an *ekagrahi*, which in Sanskrit means 'one with one pointed observation'. Just as the negative of a photograph gets imprinted with an image when once exposed, Bhagavan had a photographic memory. Once he looked at a passage, there was no need for him to refer to it again.)

One day, someone put a statue of Ganesa in a niche inside Virupaksha cave. Overwhelmed, Palani Swami requested Bhagavan, "Why don't you make some offering to Lord Ganesa?" Bhagavan's way of making an offering was not through food, garlands or flowers, but through verse. This was the first verse composed by Bhagavan: "Lord with a big and fat belly residing in the niche, you who allowed your Father to go around begging, at least now shower your glance of grace on me, who too is the son of that Father."

In the evenings, Bhagavan's attendants would beg in the streets to collect food. The traditional song they sang to collect alms was by Adi Shankara: "Samba Sadasiva, Samba Sadasiva, Samba Sadasiva, Samba Sivom." When the people of the town heard this refrain, they would be ready with food knowing that Bhagavan's attendants were coming. Knowing this, some miscreants began to go ahead of them, sing the same song and collect the food instead. So Bhagavan's attendants requested him, "Please compose a song we can sing exclusively to collect alms." Bhagavan, in his usual manner, kept silent. The next day when they were going around the hill, Palani Swami called Ayya Swami, the most literate among them aside, "Bhagavan is murmuring something, perhaps he is composing some verses. Take this paper and pencil." During that one circumambulation, Bhagavan composed one hundred and eight

verses. Ayya Swami faithfully took these down. Titled *Aksharamanamalai* or *The Marital Garland of Letters*, it is one of the most spiritually moving, devotional hymns ever written. (Arthur Osborne told me once that he had read three thousand books of poetical verses in English, many of them devotional in nature. He said none excelled these verses in devotion and wisdom.)

After a while, Bhagavan moved up to Skandashram, a higher cave. Palani Swami spent a few days there. However, due to the weakness of old age he could not climb up daily to this cave. With Bhagavan's permission, he stayed on at Virupaksha cave. Every day, Bhagavan would go down and spend some time with Palani Swami. One day, while in Skandashram, Bhagavan noticed a peacock flying up from Virupaksha cave making abnormal noises. He immediately rushed down saying, "This is the end of Palani Swami." When he reached Virupaksha cave, Palani Swami was already breathing very hard. Like a son, Bhagavan kept Palani Swami's head on his lap until he dropped the body. (In Hindu tradition, when the father is dying, the son must keep the father's head on his lap as his final duty. According to the scriptures, if a father gets such an opportunity he goes to heaven.) For many years, Palani Swami had selflessly served his master. Now it was time for Bhagavan's 'Nandi' to return to Arunachala, the silent Siva.



*Gurumurtam*

## Perumal Swami



Perumal Swami was a rough edged 'boulder' with a robust body and a tough demeanour. He came to Bhagavan in Virupaksha cave in 1914. He was well known in Tiruvannamalai town and had many wealthy friends. Perumal Swami could have lived very affluently even as a *sadhu* because his friends would have looked after him very well. The first meeting with Bhagavan left him awestruck. He accepted Bhagavan as his guru and chose to beg for him in the streets of Tiruvannamalai.

He prevented many untoward things from happening to Bhagavan. Once, when he and Palani Swami had gone to town leaving Bhagavan alone in the cave, a group of fierce looking *bairagi sadhus* arrived with swords and spears. They said, "We are from the Podhigai hills, the kingdom of the *siddhars*. The head of the *siddhars* told us that there is a ripe soul in Arunachala who needs the final initiation. He commanded us to bring you there. Whether you accept it or not, we are going to

physically remove you to the Podhigai hills." Bhagavan sat silently, unmoved. Some of the shepherd boys heard the commotion and rushed to report to Perumal Swami. He ran back to Virupaksha cave and in one look sized up the situation. He told the *bairagis*, "I come from a nearby village. Last night, I had a dream in which the chief *siddhar* of the Podhigai hills appeared and said, 'My disciples will be coming to Virupaksha cave tomorrow. Go there and ready a cauldron of oil. Fry them in that cauldron and bring their fried bodies to me.'" Then he ordered the shepherd boys, "Hey! Go and bring the firewood. I will go into town and bring a cauldron and some tins of oil so that we can fry these people." The *bairagis* fled and that was the end of the story!

Perumal Swami had the managerial qualities that Palani Swami did not. However, being a forceful man had its drawbacks. When Bhagavan's mother came to stay at Virupaksha cave, Perumal Swami disliked it and shouted, "Get out! You cannot stay here." Though deeply hurt, she obeyed. Tucking her one sari or so in a bundle under her arm, she walked out sadly. Bhagavan, who was seated outside, got up, took the bundle from her with tender affection and said, "Come, let us go away from where we are not needed." Perumal Swami fell at Bhagavan's feet and requested them to stay.

When Bhagavan went to Skandashram, Perumal Swami also went along. Among Bhagavan's attendants, there was one Yazhpani from Sri Lanka. (Sri Lanka was also known as Yazhpanam and so he was called Yazhpani.) He was a scrupulously clean person. He would sweep Skandashram daily and keep everything spic and span. His reputation was equally spotless; whenever Bhagavan returned to the Skandashram and leaves were scattered about, he would ask, "Is Yazhpani not here?" Once, Yazhpani spread a paste of cow dung on the rough, soft earth of Skandashram to make the ground smoother and harder. When Perumal Swami who was like the manager of Skandashram came and saw it still wet and slippery, he became livid and shouted, "Yazhpani, get out of Skandashram!" Yazhpani was a very sincere devotee of Bhagavan. He could not leave Bhagavan but also wanted to obey the orders of the manager. Being a clever man, he tried to find a way out. Inside Skandashram was a tall coconut tree that protruded outside its grounds. He quickly climbed to the top of the tree and stayed there. Now, he was technically 'out' of Skandashram without leaving it! Everyone pleaded with him to come down but he refused. At lunch, Bhagavan noticed that Yazhpani was missing. The other devotees then related what had happened. Bhagavan got up, went to the coconut tree and gently said, "Yazhpani, why not come down and share the food." He spoke so softly that this man came down like a child and started eating his food. Another day, Bhagavan was heard saying, "I had a notebook in which I had written some verses. A person from Uttarkashi has taken it but has not returned it. It is several months now. I needed that notebook." Yazhpani disappeared for many days. He went to Uttarkashi, got the notebook back from that person and presented it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan was very happy. Yazhpani told the other devotees that it had taken him several days without a minute's rest to fulfill his guru's wish. That was the one-pointed devotion he had for Bhagavan.

There was another sadhu living at Skandashram called Sepoy Swami. ('Sepoy' means soldier and he was called so because he was a retired army man.) He was therefore habituated to military etiquette. Very devoted to Bhagavan, he expressed his devotion by guarding Bhagavan as he felt it was his duty to be Bhagavan's bodyguard. Whenever Bhagavan was in Skandashram, Sepoy Swami would come with a

long stick that was supposed to be his rifle and stand in attention next to Bhagavan. Every minute that Bhagavan was there, he would stand guard silently, not looking at anybody else and completely immersed in meditation! One day, Perumal Swami was vexed with him and shouted, "What are you doing? Are you enacting some drama here? Get out of Skandashram!" This man wanted to obey but could not go away from Bhagavan. Therefore, he stood outside Skandashram, guarding Bhagavan from there just as he had been doing from within its walls. Some days later, he felt that Bhagavan was not being properly honoured. To Sepoy Swami, his master was the sovereign monarch of the whole universe who people were not honouring appropriately. His feeling of veneration led him to decide that Bhagavan must have horses. He went home, sold all his property, bought some horses and brought them to Skandashram. As he did not know how to maintain them, the horses died one after the other in the course of time. If you do not go into the logic of it, you will admire the devotion of poor Sepoy Swami.

Though Perumal Swami disliked Bhagavan's mother, when she passed away in 1922, he helped carry her body to the present day Ramanasramam. After placing the body down, he went into town and got all the things necessary for building her *samadhi*. However, when Bhagavan began staying there in a simple, thatched shed built over the tomb of the Mother, Perumal Swami did not like it. He also intensely loathed Bhagavan's younger brother Niranjanananda Swami (Chinna Swami). When the management of Ramanasramam was handed over to Chinna Swami, he stoutly opposed it. He went to court, filed a suit against Bhagavan and tried to drag him to court. He even created a statue of Bhagavan, started another Ramanasramam in town and proclaimed it the real one. Further, he declared himself the secretary of this institution. However, Chinna Swami was the secretary of the original Ramanasramam. Whenever the mail arrived, there was always a tug of the war in the town post office. Then Bhagavan solved it very simply. He said, "Let all the letters go to Perumal Swami. Whatever he wants to take let him take and whatever he does not want let us take. Where is the need to quarrel?"

When Perumal Swami was thus frustrated and agitated by Bhagavan's response, Bhagavan sent word through Kunju Swami, "Tell Perumal Swami that he should not swerve from spiritual *sadhana*." Perumal Swami did not listen, but Bhagavan never gave up on him. When he lost the court case, he felt humbled and soon fell ill. He sent word to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I want to come and apologize. I have committed a sin." The rest of the people in the ashram said, "No! He is the person who went against you, Bhagavan. He should not be allowed to come inside." When Bhagavan heard this, he said, "Why do you say so? He may have created trouble ... filing court cases and so on, but we should think of old days. He served me so devotedly when I was on the Hill. Let him come." When Perumal Swami came, everyone looked at him with 'acid' eyes. He broke down before Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I have committed a terrible sin. I will surely go to hell." Bhagavan smiled at him and said, "Will I not be with you even there?"

That was a turning point for Perumal Swami. He chose a small cave near Seshadri Swami Ashram and started living there in meditation and contemplation. Even after Bhagavan dropped the body, he felt he must have *prasad* from Ramanasramam. So, Kunju Swami used to bring rice and *rasam* from Ramanasramam for Perumal Swami twice a day. That is how Bhagavan took care of him. He may have been a rough edged rock, but Bhagavan took care of him. We can be sure that he too was absorbed back into Arunachala, the divine stillness.

## Ramanatha Brahmachari



Bhagavan once said, "I am afraid of only two people. One is Ramanatha Brahmachari and the other is Mudaliar Paati." He said this because these two ascetics served Bhagavan with utter, selfless devotion.

Ramanatha Brahmachari was a student of the *Vedapatashala* (school for Vedas) in town. When he met Bhagavan, his mind and heart opened up and he felt his whole being immersing in silence. Then and there, he decided to be with Bhagavan for as long as possible. Though the *patashala* provided free food and lodging to its students, young Ramanatha preferred to stay with Bhagavan. He begged for food on the streets and took that food to Bhagavan in Virupaksha cave. Whatever Bhagavan shared with him, he ate willingly. Such was the beauty and surrender of this ascetic. Bhagavan's mother allowed him to serve her because he was a Brahmin boy and Bhagavan's mother was still following her orthodox ways. Ramanatha would help wash her vessels as well as her clothes, and she would call out his name, "Ramanatha, Ramanatha," for every errand. Hearing her, Bhagavan would

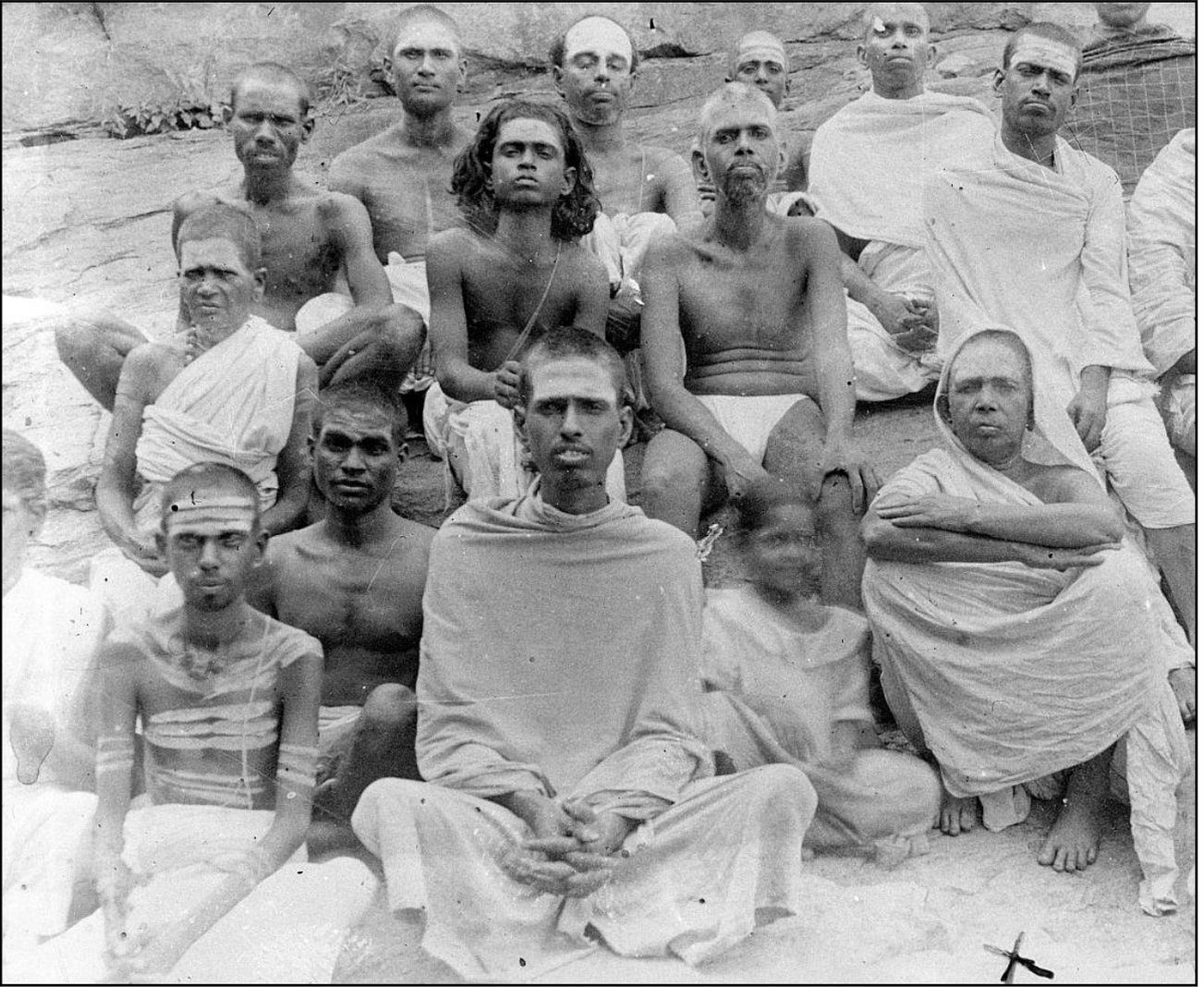
humourously remark, "The *japa* of my mother has started again!"

One day, Bhagavan told Ramanatha that he had realized the Self. Ramanatha could not believe it. He sought confirmation from Bhagavan repeatedly. Bhagavan reassured him many times, "Yes, Ramanatha, you have realized the Self!" Nevertheless, Ramanatha was still incredulous. Bhagavan got up and rapped his head with his knuckles and repeated, "Yes, Ramanatha, you are realized." This simple devotee went into ecstasy and ran out of the room telling everyone he met, "This is the place where Bhagavan knuckled me!" He was not excited to be told that he had attained Self realization. Bhagavan's knuckling him was greater than Self realization for him!

This innocent disciple also served the other devotees of Bhagavan. When he started living at Palaakothe, Kavyakantha, Muruganar, Paul Brunton, Cohen, Viswanatha Swami and Kunju Swami were some of its other residents. Their only purpose was to be with Bhagavan for as much time as possible. This would have been denied to them had they been working in the ashram office. Every evening, of his own accord, Ramanatha Brahmachari would sweep all their huts and clean their oil lamps with dedication and devotion. In the daytime, he would go to the town to obtain their simple requirements from the shops. Despite doing all this, Ramanatha Brahmachari found enough time to come and sit in Bhagavan's presence. Bhagavan was his all.

The residents of Palaakothe did not report to Bhagavan about what a great help Ramanatha Brahmachari was to them. One day, Viswanatha Swami received a post card in which the post-script read: "Please convey my prostrations to the Palaakothe *sarvadhikari*." Bhagavan would sometimes distribute letters received by post to the recipients. He gave a broad smile before handing it over to Viswanatha Swami and exclaimed, "Who is the Palaakothe *sarvadhikari*?" Ramanatha Brahmachari who was seated in the farthest corner of the hall, got up with folded hands and said, "Bhagavan! They call me Palaakothe *sarvadhikari* since I do all their daily errands. They permit me to do this service to them and express their approval of it by calling me *sarvadhikari*!" Bhagavan looked very pleased and said, "A true *sarvadhikari* (ruler) should be like this."

On another occasion, Dandapani Swami, a tall and sturdy resident who demanded obedience from others, picked up a quarrel with Ramanatha Brahmachari. Despite his fragile body, Ramanatha Brahmachari was not relenting. Dandapani Swami pushed Ramanatha Brahmachari down and looking down at him shouted, "Do you know who I am?" obviously referring to his physical strength. Ramanatha Brahmachari, lying on the ground replied humbly with folded hands, "Dandapani Swami! Have we all not got together here for the noble purpose of finding out 'Who am I'?" On hearing the words, 'who am I', Dandapani Swami gained his composure and apologized for his misdemeanour. Then, both went to Bhagavan and Dandapani Swami himself narrated what had happened. Bhagavan nodded with a benign smile.



When a man arrived at the ashram with a calf, which Bhagavan named Lakshmi, there was nobody to look after her. Since there was danger from panthers and tigers, Bhagavan remarked, "There is nobody to look after Lakshmi. Else, she could have been kept here." Then, the diminutive, four and a half feet high Ramanatha said, "Bhagavan, I will look after Lakshmi." This was the beginning of the Ramanasramam *goshala* (cow-shed).

As the train came in only at eight thirty in the night, most of the out station devotees would invariably arrive late. In Ramanasramam, almost everyone went to sleep by seven thirty after dinner at seven. Bhagavan wanted the visitors attended to. Nobody offered to look after them. Ramanatha said, "Bhagavan, I will look after them." Every night, he would stay awake attending to the visitors. The next day, Bhagavan would give him a big smile and affectionately say, "Oh, so you received them and attended to their needs? Good, good, good!"

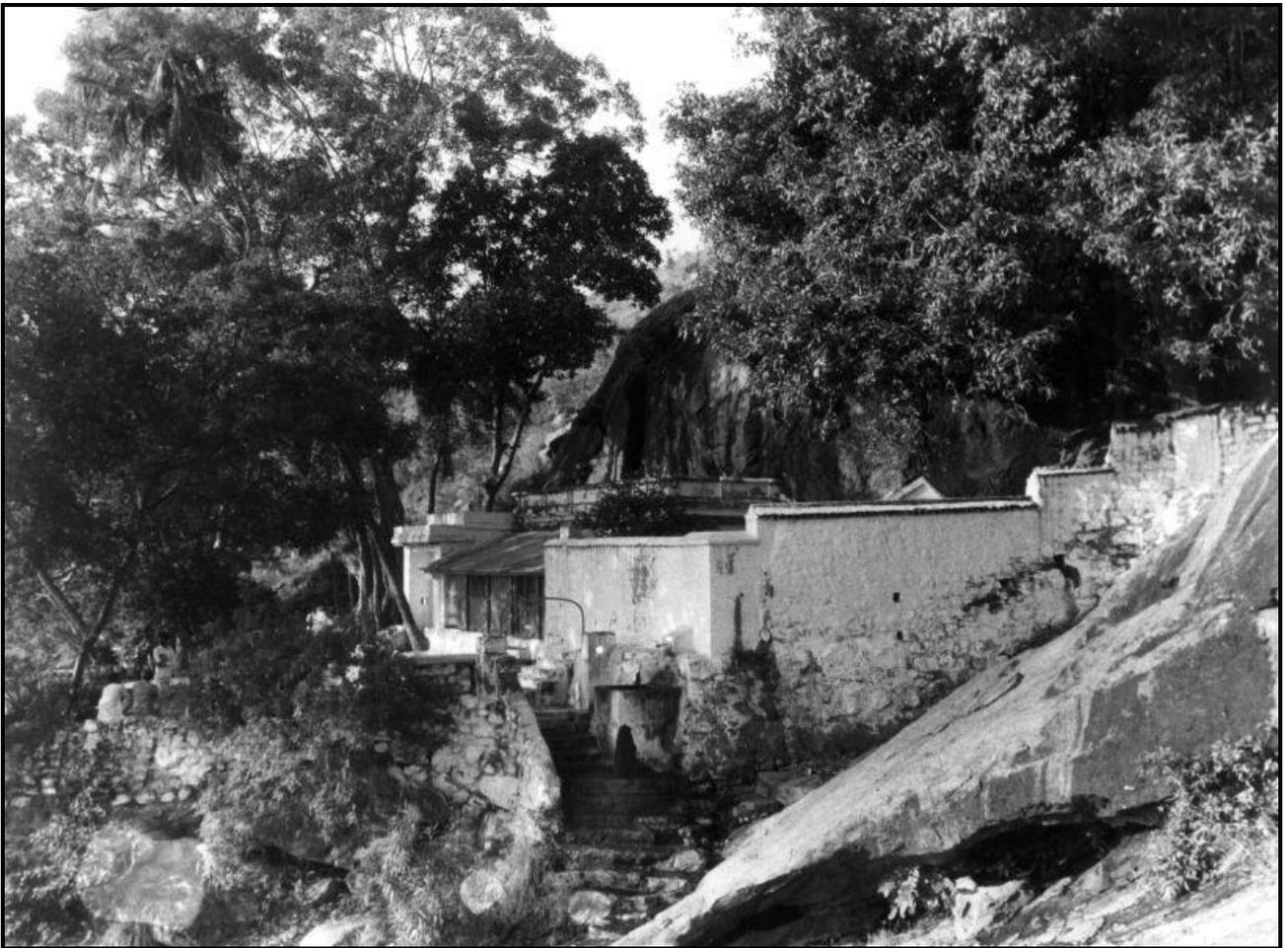
One day, when Bhagavan was going around the hill with Ramanatha and other devotees, each one was asked to speak on a spiritual topic. Ramanatha, in an ecstatic state, compared Bhagavan with Lord Siva and his devotees with the *bhutaganas* i.e. Siva's attendants. Later, at the request of Bhagavan and the others, he wrote it down in Tamil verses. The first verse means, "I saw the Lord of Tiruchuzhi and got fixed without returning again." This means, "I achieved realization, no more have I the body. My Lord bestowed on me this Self realization."

My mother, an ardent devotee of Bhagavan, loved Ramanatha Brahmachari. I once asked my mother, "Which song do you like of all the songs by Muruganar, Sadhu Om, Sivaprakasam Pillai and the rest?" My mother replied, "The song I like most is the one composed by Ramanatha Brahmachari." The song is as follows: "I have seen Tiruchuzhinathan (the lord of Tiruchuzhi) and unable to turn back, I stood there

transfixed. He is the lord who dances in Chidambaram, who protects the helpless and is merciful to them. The same Tiruchuzhinathan manifested himself as God, in Virupaksha cave on the hill in sacred Tiruvannamalai. *Jiva* was ruling unjustly in the town of Kayapuri (the body) with the *karanas* (the sense organs and the organs of action) as his subjects and *ahankara* (the ego) as his minister. After some time, *jiva* took up the sword of God's grace and cut off the head of his minister, *ahankara*. Having so cut off the minister's head, *jiva* stood with God who was dancing all by himself in the cave called Daharalaya (the Heart's abode). He is this Tiruchuzhinathan; I saw him and stayed there being unable to get away."

In 1946, he fell sick. He was taken to Madras (now called Chennai) for treatment but passed away. When the news reached Bhagavan he observed total silence, which in 1946 was very rare. Hundreds of people were around, but he was totally absorbed.

Devotees like Ramanatha Brahmachari show us how to surrender to a *jnani*, a realized person and get liberation in this life itself.



*Skandashram*

## Gambhiram Seshayya



In Hinduism, the first function of the Lord is creation. To fulfill this, Arunachala Siva chose to create itself in the image of man, in the form of Arunachala Ramanan, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. For the second function, preservation, he sent boulders like Palani Swami, Mother Azhagammal, Ramanatha Bramhachari and others to look after Bhagavan's body and his environment.

The third function of the Lord is destruction of ignorance through the teaching of the highest wisdom; this removes all obstacles to Self realization including the 'I-am-the-body' notion. To accomplish this, Arunachala drew two intellectuals to Bhagavan - Gambhiram Sheshayya and Sivaprakasam Pillai. In fact, according to the *Vedanta Choodamani*, a Tamil book on *Vedanta*, which Bhagavan loved to quote, one of the most important duties

of a devotee is the preservation of his master's teachings.

Gambhiram Seshayya came into Bhagavan's life for this function. Bhagavan once said, "Gambhiram is not his name. Gambhiram is a title given to his family. His great grandfather was serving a king and was given the title 'Gambhiram', meaning 'majestic nobility', because of his uprightness. That became their family name." On the first or second day Bhagavan went begging in Tiruvannamalai, he happened to stop in front of a house where four people were gambling with playing cards. When as usual he clapped his hands for food, the house owner went in and shame facedly brought out some food for Bhagavan. This man was Gambhiram Seshayya's brother Gambhiram Krishna Iyer. From that day, he never gambled again.

Gambhiram Seshayya, a government officer, was well read in philosophy. In 1900, he was transferred to Tiruvannamalai where he heard of an ascetic Brahmin boy who lived in Virupaksha cave. Propelled by his own philosophical interests, he paid the ascetic - none other than Bhagavan - a visit. Just one glance from Bhagavan, and Gambhiram Seshayya was captivated. He saw before him in human form all that he had studied in the scriptures and a reflection of the very truth he was seeking - the Self.

He had studied many books on yoga and philosophy - particularly those of Swami Vivekananda - and had many doubts. He brought these books to Bhagavan and asked him to review them and answer his questions. He assumed that Bhagavan was observing silence. Therefore, he always wrote his doubts on a piece of paper. Bhagavan gave his answers too in writing after looking carefully through these texts. Much later, Bhagavan humourously remarked, "They said I was in silence though I never took a vow of silence. I never took a vow of fasting. Nobody shared food with me, so I was without food. Then they said, 'Our swami is fasting.' Nobody talked to me, so I kept quiet. And then they assumed, 'Swami is in silence, do not disturb his silence.'"

Gambhiram Seshayya not only put forth excellent questions but also requested Bhagavan to condense some complicated passages that he found difficult to grasp. Bhagavan did this too. Many subjects were discussed and everything was explained in the light and nomenclature of the Hindu scriptures. While some of these questions were based on Self Enquiry, most were on different aspects of Hindu philosophy: *yoga*, *sadhana*, concentration, meditation, God, the world, *ego*, liberation, *pranayama* and *ashtanga yoga*. Of these, Gambhiram Seshayya was most interested in *ashtanga yoga*. While Bhagavan did explain the intricacies of other paths including the path of *ashtanga yoga*, he never swerved from affirming *jnana marga*, the path of wisdom, as the direct one. In fact, Bhagavan has remarked that while yoga is like taming the turbulent bull of the mind by forcibly yoking it, the path of wisdom is like gently taming the bull by calming it with some grass and then yoking it.

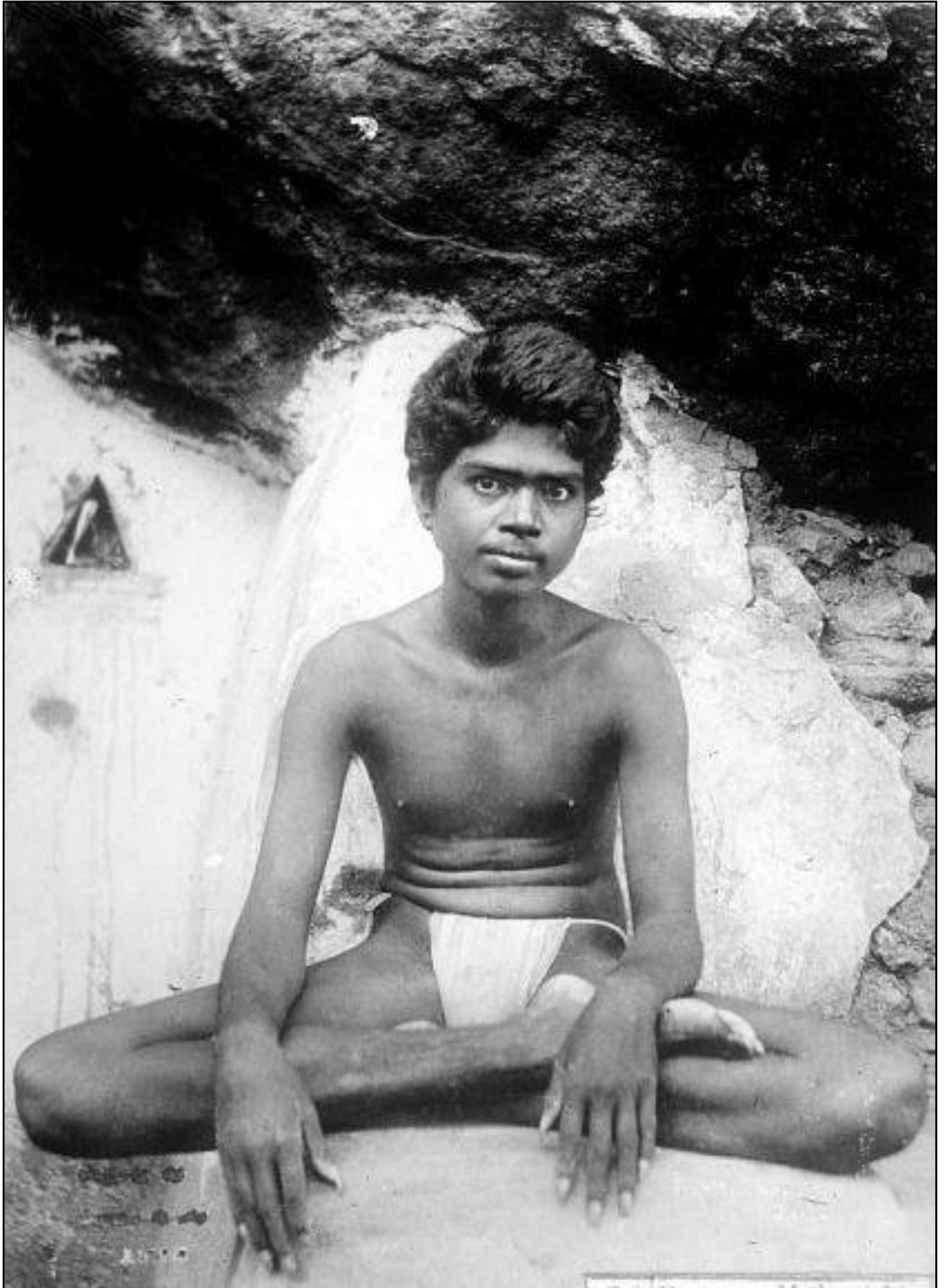
Gambhiram Seshayya served to provide Bhagavan the opportunity to read books on yoga, philosophy and other paths. With all this information, Bhagavan became like a university of philosophy. This was just as well, for he was to soon meet and compare notes with intellectuals like Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, a scholar well versed in the *Vedas*. He was also to meet learned men of other nations and

religions such as Paul Brunton, Frank Humphreys and Dr. Hafiz Syed, the last an authority on Islam. Gambhiram Seshayya served as a means of helping Bhagavan fulfill this function.

Gambhiram Seshayya was also instrumental in making the content of those slips of paper and notebooks with his questions and Bhagavan's answers available for future devotees, eventually published as *Vichara Sangraha*, the first book on the teachings of Bhagavan in Tamil. It was later translated into English and titled *Catechism of Enquiry*. Afterwards, its title was changed to *Self Enquiry*.



*Ayankulam Tank where Bhagavan threw away his belongings on reaching Arunachala*



*First known photograph of Ramana Maharshi*

## Sivaprakasam Pillai



When Sivaprakasam Pillai came to Bhagavan in 1902, he was, like Gambhiram Seshayya, a government officer who had studied philosophy. Even while in college, he would introspect and ponder, “Who am I?” Sivaprakasam Pillai later said, “I thought it was a fleeting thought.” He visited Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave. As with Gambhiram Seshayya, just one glance of grace from Bhagavan and he was totally enthralled. He could see his God and guru in Bhagavan. Being a very practical and clear thinking person, his very first question was, “Swami, who am I?” This question opened the floodgates of the teaching, which to this day is saturating cultures across the world. His approach to Bhagavan’s teachings was practice oriented. Sivaprakasam Pillai posed fourteen questions to Bhagavan, who wrote the answers on a slate and on the sand. The answers were erased eventually. Sivaprakasam Pillai wrote the answers to those questions from memory.

Sivaprakasam Pillai: “Swami, who am I? And how is salvation to be attained?”

Maharshi: “By the incessant inward enquiry, ‘Who am I?’ you will know yourself and thereby attain salvation.”

“Who am I?”

“The real ‘I’ or Self is not the body, neither any of the five senses, nor the sense objects, nor the organs of action, nor the *prana* (the breath or vital force), nor the mind, nor even the deep sleep state where there is no cognizance of these.”

“If I am none of these, what else am I?”

“After rejecting each of these and saying, ‘This, I am not’, that which alone remains is the ‘I’, and that is consciousness.”

“What is the nature of that consciousness?”

“It is *sat-chit-ananda* (being-consciousness-bliss) in which there is not even the slightest trace of the ‘I’ thought. This is also called *mouna* (silence) or *atma* (Self). That is the only thing that is. If the trinity of world, ego and God are considered as separate entities they are mere illusions - like the appearance of silver in mother-of-pearl. God, ego, and the world are really Siva *swarupa* (the form of Siva ) or *atma swarupa* (the form of the Self).”

“How are we to realize that reality?”

“When the things seen disappear, the true nature of the seer or subject appears.”

“Is it not possible to realize that while still seeing external things?”

“No, because the seer and the seen are like the rope and the appearance of a serpent therein. Until you get rid of the appearance of a serpent you cannot see that what exists is only the rope.”

“When will external objects vanish?”

“When the mind which is the cause of all thoughts and activities vanishes, external objects will also vanish.”

“What is the nature of the mind?”

“The mind is only thoughts. It is a form of energy. It manifests itself as the world. When the mind sinks into the Self, then the Self is realized; when the mind issues forth, the world appears and the Self is not realized.”

*“How will the mind vanish?”*

“Only through the enquiry, ‘Who am I?’ Though this enquiry also is a mental operation, it destroys all mental operations, including itself, just as the stick with which the funeral pyre is stirred is itself reduced to ashes after the pyre and corpse have been burnt. Only then comes realization of the Self. The ‘I’ thought destroyed, breath and the other signs of vitality subside. The ego and the *prana* (breath or vital force) have a common source. Whatever you do, do without egoism, that is without the feeling, ‘I am doing this’. When a man reaches that state, even his own wife will appear to him as the Universal Mother. True *bhakti* (devotion) is surrender of the ego to the Self.”

*“Are there no other ways of destroying the mind?”*

“There is no other adequate method except Self Enquiry. If the mind is lulled by other means it stays quiet for a little while and then springs up again and resumes its former activity.”

*“But, when will all the instincts and tendencies (vasanas), such as that to self preservation, be subdued in us?”*

“The more you withdraw into the Self, the more these tendencies wither and finally drop off.”

*“Is it really possible to root out all these tendencies that have been soaked into our minds through many births?”*

“Never yield room in your mind for such doubts, but dive into the Self with firm resolve. If the mind is constantly directed to the Self by this enquiry, it is eventually dissolved and transformed into the Self. When you feel any doubt, do not try to elucidate it; but try to know who it is to whom the doubt occurs.”

*“How long should one go on with this enquiry?”*

“As long as there is least trace of tendencies in your mind to cause thoughts. So long as the enemies occupy a citadel they will keep on making sorties. If you kill each one as he comes out, the citadel will fall to you in the end. Similarly, each time a thought rears its head crush it with this enquiry. To crush out all thoughts at their source is called *vairagya* (dispassion). So, *vichara* (Self Enquiry) continues to be necessary until the Self is realized. What is required is continuous and uninterrupted remembrance of the Self.”

*“Is not this world and what takes place therein, the result of God’s will? And if so, why should God will be thus?”*

“God has no purpose. He is not bound by any action. The world’s activities cannot affect him. Take the analogy of the sun. The sun rises without desire, purpose or effort, but as soon as it rises, numerous activities take place on earth: the lens placed in its rays produces fire in its focus, the lotus bud opens, water evaporates, and every living creature enters upon activity, maintains it, and finally drops it. But, the sun is not affected by any such activity as it merely acts according to its nature, by fixed laws, without any purpose, and is only a witness. So it is with God. Or, take the analogy of space or ether. Earth, water, fire and air are all in it and have their modifications in it, yet none of these affect ether or space. It is the same with God. God has no desire or purpose in his acts of creation, maintenance, destruction, withdrawal and salvation to which beings are subjected. As the beings reap the fruits of their actions in accordance with his laws, the responsibility is theirs, not God’s. God is not bound by any actions.”

Later, Sivaprakasam Pillai put forth fourteen more questions. Bhagavan answered them too. These twenty eight questions and answers make up the booklet *Who am I?*, which embodies the core of Bhagavan’s teaching and is an essential guide to seekers. It enables us to realize that we are the same Self, the same awareness that pervaded Sri Ramana Maharshi and still pervades all of creation as the pristine truth. The essence of Bhagavan’s answers to the fourteen other questions is below:

That, which arises in the physical body as ‘I’, is the mind. The ‘I’ feeling arises from the Heart or core of being. By enquiring ‘Who am I?’ the attention goes within and hence is diverted from thoughts.

Perseverance in this practice gives strength to the mind to go to the source and be absorbed in the Self. Following *sattvic* (pure) principles such as eating simple, nutritious food in moderate quantity, and observing simple rules of good conduct, is most conducive to the development of pure qualities of the mind. This in turn helps one to pursue Self Enquiry without hindrance and without giving room to any form rising in the Self. All *vasanas* (tendencies) will be dissolved. One should firmly and unceasingly focus on the one Self. One should unswervingly put the teachings of the master into constant practice. Self is bliss. Whenever the mind experiences happiness as in deep sleep, *samadhi*, or when a desired object is obtained, it is due to the mind relinquishing its desire and being the bliss of the Self. Like a wise man who never leaves the shade, thus avoiding the scorching sun, one should always be absorbed in the Self and not allow the mind to be externalized into activity. The Self, like the sun, is unaffected by any activity of the forms of life it sustains. To keep the mind constantly turned inward and to be thus as the Self, alone is *atma vichara*, or Self Enquiry. If the mind subsides, all else will subside. To be and to remain in the Self, or one's true nature, alone is liberation or *mukti*.

Sivaprakasam Pillai exemplified these teachings. He showed how seekers should sustain themselves in the Self after Self Enquiry. He adored Bhagavan, assimilated whatever he said and then put it into practice. However, when practicing Bhagavan's teachings, a devotee may misunderstand. For instance, when Bhagavan extolled renunciation, Sivaprakasam Pillai assumed that Bhagavan meant *sannyas*. He went home, shaved his head, and donned a single piece of cloth. He even discarded the sacred thread that he wore all the time. Bhagavan looked at him and asked, "Why have you shaved your head? Go grow your hair and wear your sacred thread." He then understood that Bhagavan had meant inner *sannyasa* which is *Jnana* and not external symbols. Attachment to the world or to its objects was to be relinquished from within.

He stayed quite often with Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave and at Skandashram. He began to mature spiritually because of his proximity to the master and imbibing his teachings. He then wanted to give up his job and devote himself fully to Self Enquiry. Bhagavan did not give him permission to do so. However, three years later, he told Bhagavan once again that he could not go to work anymore - even at work he was immersed in Self Enquiry and consequently not able to attend to his office duties. This time, Bhagavan permitted him to resign and asked him to go back to his village and pursue his *sadhana*.

He stayed alone in the outskirts of his village in an old Ganesa temple or sometimes in nearby forests. He constantly practiced enquiry. During this period, his state of consciousness and behaviour suddenly altered. He started laughing for no apparent reason, loudly chanted sacred hymns in Tamil, prostrated to all forms that he came across, and wore a long loincloth with a bag of sacred ash tucked into it. Bhagavan had given him this bag a few years earlier and had asked him to smear its contents on his body. (This is the only case I have encountered where Bhagavan had specifically instructed a devotee to smear sacred ash.) Sivaprakasam Pillai covered his entire body with sacred ash, carried a small staff, forgot caste restrictions and started frequenting the cremation ground and other areas occupied by the so called outcastes. In this state, he also walked all the way to a nearby temple town and back. He accepted gruel and sour food offered to him by anyone. When he returned to his village, he regained his normal consciousness. Thereafter, he visited Bhagavan many times in a year, each time staying for about fifteen days. Through all this time, the outer guru was pushing him in, while the inner guru was pulling him further inwards to *atma vichara* for longer periods. Often, in a state of ecstasy, Sivaprakasam Pillai composed many poems. Bhagavan appreciated and approved them. He even included some of them in the daily *parayana* or recitation in the ashram.

These are four of Sivaprakasam Pillai's poems:

"From dawn to dusk I spend my day in vain talks. Not even for a moment do I think 'Who am I?' My lord, you have told me if you speak one word, it will multiply into many words. Ramana Deva, I am only pretending to be your devotee and not conducting myself as one."

"I am a sinner who wastes most of his time listening to others' misdeeds and talking about them. I have many defects myself, but if others mention them, my mind boils with rage. Thinking that there is no harm in it, I do not hesitate to utter small lies. O Ramana Deva, is it not high drama to fall at your feet as if I am your devotee?"

“Though I have become old and suffer from various diseases, I have not destroyed the desire for women. The ghost of my mind desires to see their beautiful faces, converse with them and listen to their honey-like speech. Even though I give advice to the mind, it does not subside but wanders after them. Ramana Deva, when will this delusion end and my mind become firm?”

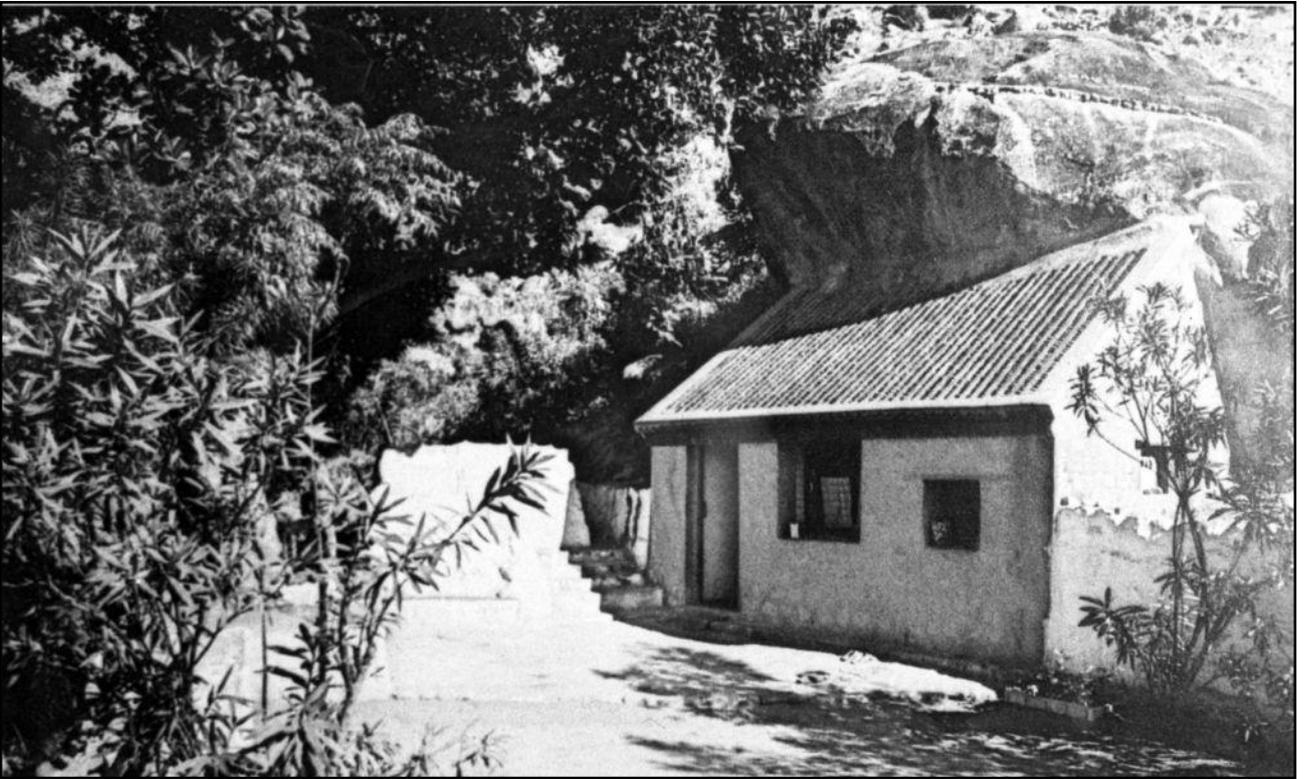
“You know that my qualities and character are poor. You also know that among the ignorant full of defects, I am the worst. Though you know all this, you still sought me and took possession of me. Ramana Deva, how can I explain this wonder?”

A devotee once asked Bhagavan, “Bhagavan, Sivaprakasam Pillai was such a great ascetic. He unswervingly put your teachings into practice. Reading his poems, I wonder where I stand! If he is in this wretched state, what will happen to me?” Bhagavan responded with a beautiful reply: “When extolling God, Adi Shankara, and other sages have berated themselves and said the same thing. This is how sages guide others and warn seekers.”

Viswanatha Swami told me that once he asked Sri Bhagavan to show him Sivaprakasam Pillai because he knew that he was seated somewhere in the hall. The hall was crowded with devotees - perhaps it was a festive day. Bhagavan pointed his finger toward the farthest corner and said, “There, you see! With both arms covering his bare chest and seated unobtrusively like a rustic villager. That is our Sivaprakasam Pillai. He sits here like a domesticated cat. One should see him at his office. There, he is like a wild lion. His uprightness, honesty and hard work mark him out and cause everyone to approach him with awe and respect.”

Coming to know that Sivaprakasam Pillai had become old and sick and was unable to travel from his village, my father, who had not seen him, urged Kunju Swami to take him to his village near Chidambaram. The austere appearance of Sivaprakasam Pillai and his humility were outstanding. His body used to shine like molten gold with spiritual maturity. While introducing Sivaprakasam Pillai to my father, Kunju Swami wholeheartedly and reverentially lauded him as the most humble, scholar-devotee who had brought out Sri Bhagavan’s direct teaching. Sivaprakasam Pillai, in all humility and with fervent love, held the hands of Kunju Swami and put them on his eyes and on his head. With tears flowing from his eyes, he said, “These sacred hands had the great good fortune of touching and serving the holy body of my master. That merit I never had in my life. You are very blessed and infinitely greater!” After narrating this incident, Kunju Swami said, “This is how truly great people put themselves down to enhance the glory of others. Where are the ‘others’ for them? Every one is the same, single Self only!”

When Sivaprakasam Pillai was to drop the body in 1948, the news was reported to Bhagavan. Bhagavan went into a very long silence. Later, when the news of his passing came, Bhagavan affirmed, “Sivaprakasam *Siva prakasam aanaar*,” which means ‘Sivaprakasam has merged with the Light of Siva’. Yes, this beautiful human being had returned for eternity to Arunachala Siva.



*Virupaksha Cave*

## The Mother Principle

In the book *Who am I?*, Bhagavan says that one who operates without egoism, will look upon every woman as the Universal Mother. So, how did the Universal Mother look after her son?

After his death experience in Madurai, Bhagavan often went to the Meenakshi temple there. He would stand in front of Mother Meenakshi's idol for hours together, looking at her eyes. Tears would flow from his eyes. Significantly, Meenakshi means 'one with fish like eyes'. (The Hindu scriptures describe three kinds of spiritual initiations. One of them is the way of the fish. The fish is said to have the power of hatching its eggs by just looking at them. Therefore, the inner meaning of the name Meenakshi is 'the mother who blesses or initiates with her eyes'.) The unique gift that Mother Meenakshi gave her son Venkataraman was the power to initiate and bless his devotees with just his look. In fact, almost every devotee of Bhagavan has talked about how the very first look from him, pushed them inwards and gave them a never before experience of joy, peace and silence. This was why, even on his last day, Bhagavan insisted that devotees be allowed to have his *darshan* - to give each one of them his final look of blessing.

After he came from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, Bhagavan was in a state of unbroken, natural *samadhi*. While he was absorbed thus in Pthalalinga, the dark, dank, underground niche in the Arunachaleswara temple, his body was feasted on by insects and vermin while he himself remained without food or care. The Divine Mother, by her grace, first sent Ratnammal.

## Ratnammal



Ratnammal was a young dancer who was looked down upon by society. One day, Ratnammal saw some urchins throwing stones into Pathalalinga. She went inside and saw a dim figure sitting with a faint halo surrounding it. Concerned about how this young ascetic could sustain himself, she brought food and fresh clothes and left them at the entrance. Her offerings remained untouched as Bhagavan was lost in *samadhi*.

Later, Seshadri Swami discovered Bhagavan, brought him out and instructed the temple priest to give milk to Bhagavan. This priest brought milk, not from Father Arunachaleshwara's shrine, but from Mother Apeethakuchambal's shrine next to his. This milk, poured on Mother's idol along with turmeric, soap nut powder and ghee, was the first *prasad* Mother gave him. As Bhagavan was still in *samadhi* and not outwardly conscious, the priest opened his mouth and poured in 'Mother's milk' - the first food that sustains. When Bhagavan resumed body

consciousness, he stayed under an *illupai* tree in the temple premises where he remained in *samadhi*, only rarely coming to outward consciousness.

Once, when Ratnammal was on her way to a dance performance, she noticed Bhagavan seated there. Turning to her mother she said, "I will not eat until we have served this ascetic some food." They tried to wake Bhagavan up, but in vain. So, they opened his mouth and put the food in. Sometimes he would swallow it. At other times the food would remain in his mouth and they would clean it up the next day. Bhagavan later on said, "This is the Universal Mother represented by Ratnammal." He also once told Suri Nagamma, "Ratnammal was pure." Bhagavan has never used such a description for anyone but Ratnammal. He explained that this was not a moral or physical purity he referred to, but to the fact that even in those days she had the capacity to recognize the divine before her. The Universal Mother was sustaining him. When Bhagavan was moving from the temple to Gurumurtam, he told Ratnammal, "Why go through the trouble of coming there? It is too far." She agreed and obeyed.



Towers within Arunachaleswara Temple

## Meenakshiammal

When Bhagavan went to Gurumurtham, a lady named Meenakshiammal started serving him. Although her outward appearance was like that of a *rakshasi*, a demoness, her heart was clean and pure. Every day, she would go around the hill, go home, cook food, and bring it to Bhagavan and feed him. She would bring along a few other ladies as well. Each one liked to give food to Bhagavan, to the extent that he felt it was excessive. Bhagavan never liked to waste anything. Soon, he moved to a mango tree grove in the next compound. Its owner prevented everyone other than Palani Swami and Bhagavan from coming inside.

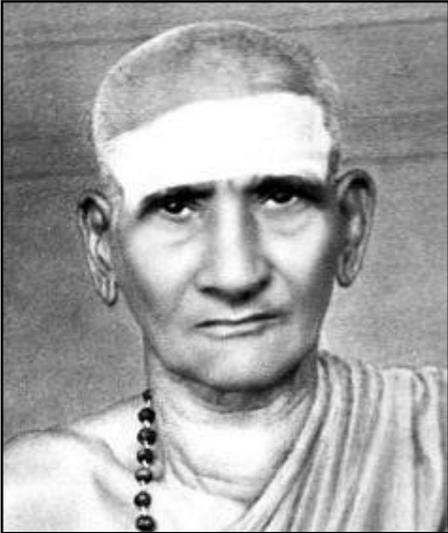
Meenakshiammal holds the honour of being the first person to give an oil bath to Bhagavan after he came to Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan related how one day when he was in Gurumurtham, Meenakshiammal brought a vessel and started boiling water. Bhagavan said, "I thought she was going to cook. She then opened her bag, took out some oil and soapnut powder and said, 'Swami, come, I want to give you a bath.'" Bhagavan kept quiet in his usual manner,. She pulled him by the hand, made him sit down and forced the oil bath on him. Bhagavan very humourously puts it, "When she touched my hair, there were stones and dust in it!" One and a half years after coming to Tiruvannamalai, this was the first proper bath that Bhagavan had. His whole body had been unwashed and dirty. Sent by the Universal Mother, Meenakshiammal gave this bath to Bhagavan.

Later, when Bhagavan was still in Gurumurtham, he told Palani Swami that they should go their separate ways while begging for their food. He would go through the streets of Tiruvannamalai, stand in front of a house and clap his hands. In response, the woman of the house would come out with food. Day after day, house after house, street after street, Bhagavan begged for food. He received food from every woman of the house. Without doubt, it was the Universal Mother looking after her son.



Gurumurtham

## Desurammal



When Bhagavan was at Virupaksha cave, a lady named Akhilandammal came from a village called Desur. Bhagavan and the others began to call her Desurammal, as Akhilandammal was a bit too long a name. Desurammal had seen Bhagavan in 1896 when Bhagavan was in a state of *samadhi* and the priest had poured milk into his mouth. Desurammal witnessed it and went back to her village without getting Bhagavan's blessings as his eyes were closed. Not being able to stay away, she came back to Tiruvannamalai after seven years. She was a very devout person and served food to all the *sadhus*, including Seshadri Swami and Swami Vithoba of Polur.

It was 1903 when she returned. She was plucking flowers at the foot of Arunachala. A crowd was going up to the banyan tree cave which is below Virupaksha cave. She asked, "Where are all of you going?" Someone replied, "Oh, there is an ascetic boy who does not talk, doesn't even move, but there is such peace, such grace

there!" Desurammal also went to the cave. She saw Bhagavan seated there. This is what she had to say about Bhagavan: "Even though he was unwashed and covered with dust, his body had a golden glow. On seeing this ascetic with his body frame so lean that it exposed his bones, my heart melted and tears welled up within me. The young Lord then opened his eyes and graciously directed them at me. Instantaneously, I surrendered myself totally and took a vow to serve food to this *jnani* all my life." When Bhagavan moved to Virupaksha cave, she served food to him there. Bhagavan rarely ate alone. So, she brought food for others like Palani Swami and Perumal Swami as well. Earlier, they begged for food. After Mother Desurammal came, there was no dearth of food during lunch for Bhagavan. She was so captivated by Bhagavan's presence that she came with food every day without fail.

Later, two other ladies, Echammal and Mudaliar Paati, also started feeding Bhagavan. Assured that Bhagavan would be regularly fed, Desurammal went back to her village and started a Ramana center there in 1914. It was called Ramanananda Madalayam. Her devotion was so deep that she was always there, observing Bhagavan's teachings and giving expositions about them from the depth of her own experience. Whenever any of the devotees of Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave fell sick, she would take them to Desur, give them medical aid and take care of them. When they had fully recovered, she would escort them back to Virupaksha cave.

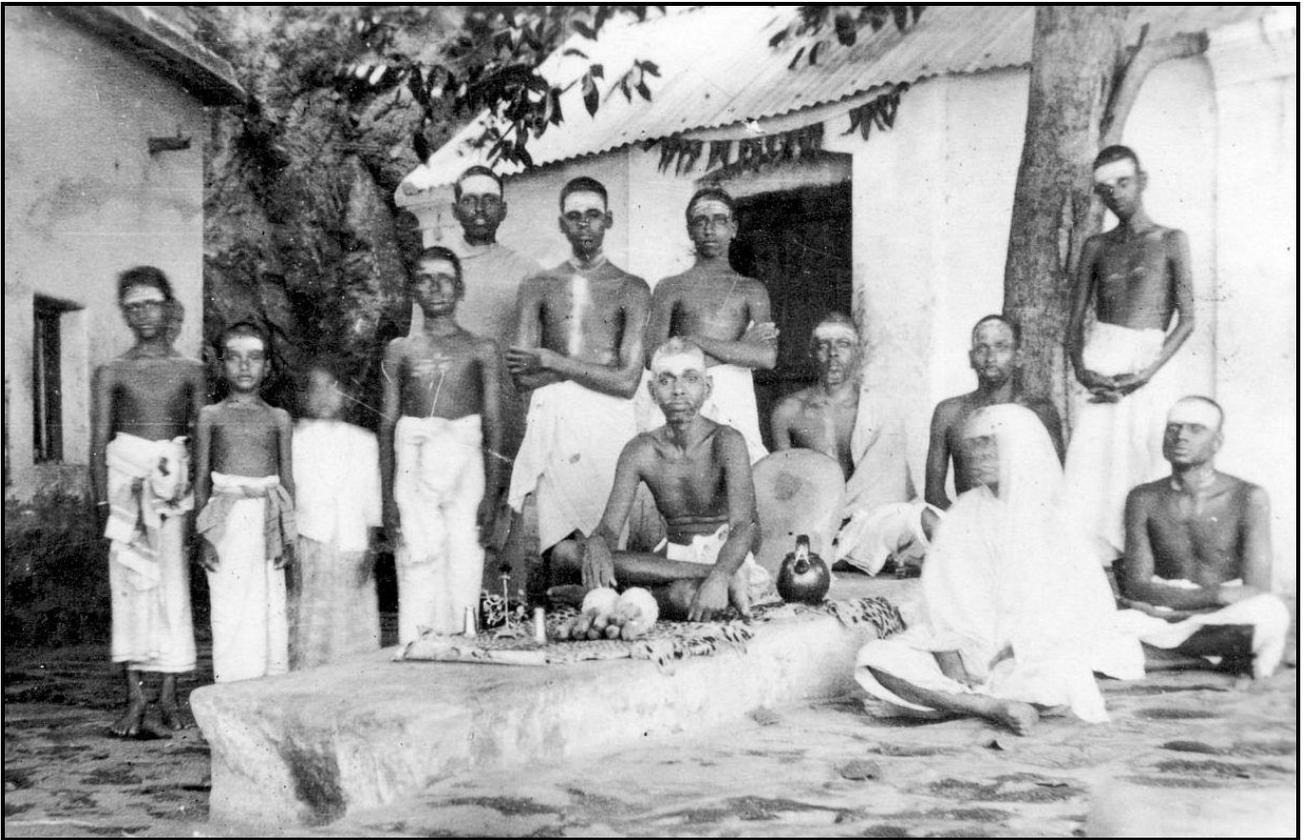
Kunju Swami told me that whenever Desurammal came to Arunachala, in addition to whoever had been feeding Bhagavan, she would also feed them. Bhagavan was very pleased with her. Her first observation about Bhagavan was that he was the only saint she had fed who shared his food equally with others. The second thing she noticed was that the food was shared equally, not only with just the people around him, but also with dogs, monkeys and birds. She narrated a humorous incident about Nondi the monkey. He was always given a seat next to Bhagavan. While she was serving the master one day, Nondi snarled at her. Bhagavan chided him, "Hey! She is one of us. She belongs to our clan, keep quiet!" The monkey then accepted her as one amongst them!

Kunju Swami impressed on me that Bhagavan did not merely express gratitude to everyone who fed him. Bhagavan shared with them the purest teaching - one that would completely release them from bondage. Once, when Desurammal came to Skandashram, a *sadhu* told her, "Today is a full moon day. It is the most powerful day for getting initiation. In Bhagavan you have a perfect *jnani*. So, ask Bhagavan for initiation today." Induced by this *sadhu*, she prostrated before Bhagavan who rarely gave initiation. He asked her, "What do you want, Desurammal?" "Bhagavan, you have to initiate me with some mantra." "Oh! You want a mantra." he replied. Then, becoming serious he sat down and said in Tamil, "*Unnai vidaadhu iru*," which means, 'remain without leaving your Self'. Desurammal said that he did not just say that and leave. He looked at her and transfixed her with his silent grace. Riveting his look on her for nearly an hour, he also gave her the inner knowledge of how to remain without giving up the experience of the Self.

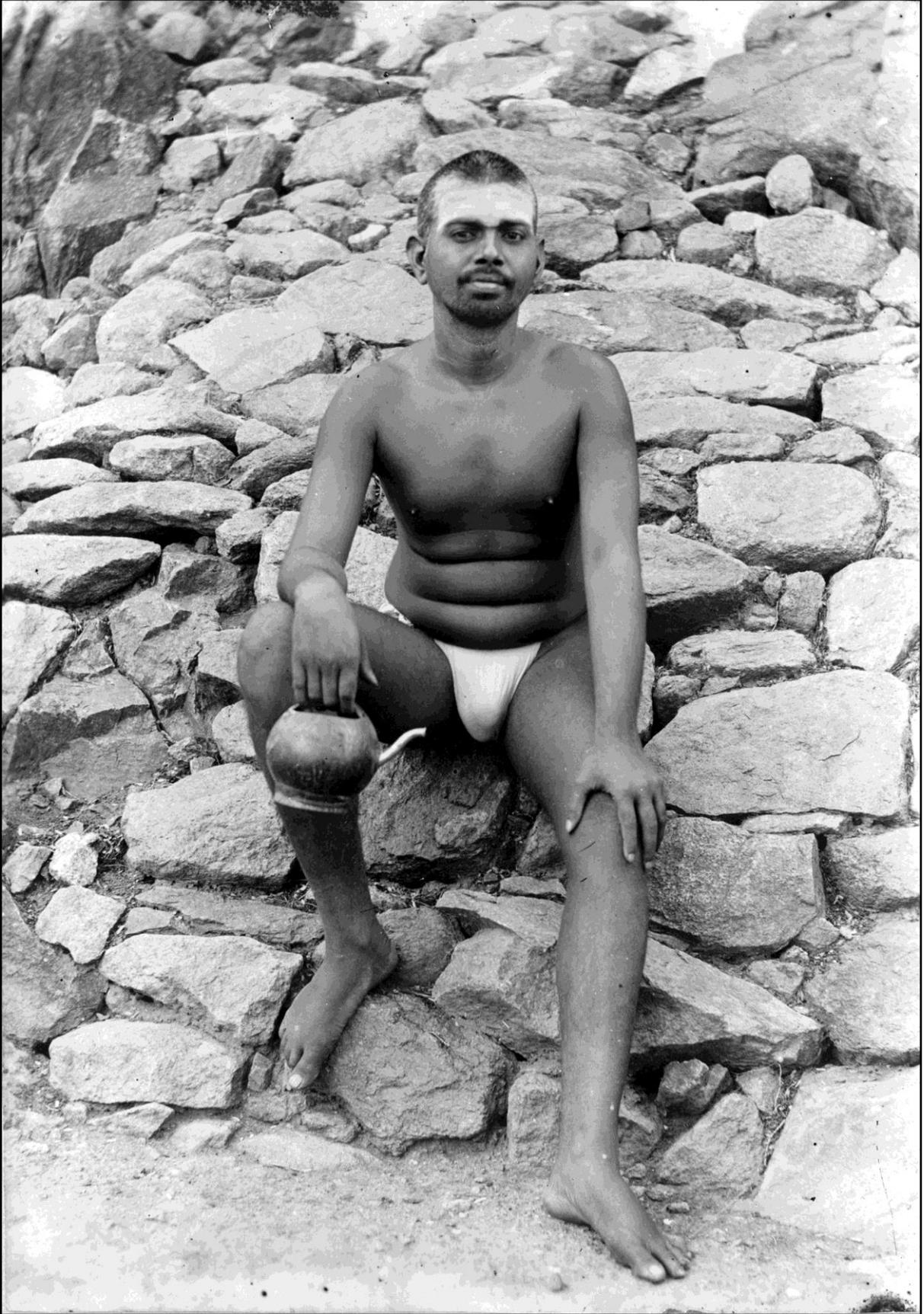
Even after Bhagavan came down to settle at the foot of the hill, she used to bring food every day. One day, Bhagavan told her, “Desurammal, there is enough food here.” Beseechingly she said, “Bhagavan, I want to feed you.” He replied, “Bring your provisions and leave them in the kitchen. They will cook and we will all share.” From then on, whenever she came, she would bring some rice or *dal* and leave it in the kitchen.

During the last days of Bhagavan, when Bhagavan was to drop the body, Desurammal was quite old and very infirm. Yet, since she could not remain without having a last *darshan* and a last look, this Mother went to him. Bhagavan was in what is now called the Nirvana Room. Nobody recognized Desurammal because the whole management had changed. She was prevented from entering. Fortunately, Kunju Swami recognized her and told Bhagavan, who exclaimed, “Desurammal! Bring her here, bring her inside.” When she went in, she wept seeing Bhagavan’s physical condition and Bhagavan said, “Why do you feel sorry for this mortal body? *Naan Yeppozudhum Un Bhagavan thaaney* – Am I not always your Bhagavan?”

These words of solace were not only for Desurammal. For whoever turns to Bhagavan as the image of father, mother, guru or God, the assurance that he is their saviour, is ever present.



*Sri Bhagavan at Skandashram*



*Sri Bhagavan seated outside Virupaksha Cave*

## Echammal



Echammal lived with her children and husband not far away from Tiruvannamalai. One night, she had a dream in which a young ascetic with a loin cloth and clean shaven head said something which she could not understand. Within a few days after the dream, she lost her husband, her son and one of her two daughters. A few days later, the same boy appeared again in her dream and recited a Sanskrit mantra which she could not follow. When she went to dream interpreters, all they would say was, "God is blessing you." Feeling utterly lost, she wanted to go back to the village of her childhood with her only remaining daughter. When she was leaving, the third dream came. In the third dream, this same boy said, "Please return to the hill and disappear. You have lived your lives. Your three lives are over." Even before she came to him, Bhagavan cleared Echammal's three apparent births through these three dreams!

After she went to her village, her second daughter who was ten or eleven also died. She could no longer bear the burden of her sorrow. Some of her relatives advised her to go on a *yatra* - a pilgrimage. Searching for solace, she left for North

India. There she met *sadhus*, served them and gave them food. One of the *sadhus* initiated her into *ashtanga yoga*. He gave her a mantra and told her to concentrate on the tip of her nose. However, none of these worked. She still felt burdened with sorrow. When she returned to her village, a relative said, "At Arunachala, there is a young ascetic. He may not speak, but by serving him and being in his proximity you will receive his grace." The very next day, she went to Tiruvannamalai. It was 1906 and Bhagavan was in Virupaksha cave. She went to have his *darshan* and Bhagavan looked at her for nearly an hour. She stood in front of Bhagavan with tears rolling down from her eyes. He had tears streaming down his own face as well. Not a single word transpired between them, but she felt an immense power, a mysterious force that seemed to keep her immobilized. Miraculously, there was not a drop of sorrow left in her. She felt the grace and took a vow that she would feed this ascetic all her life.

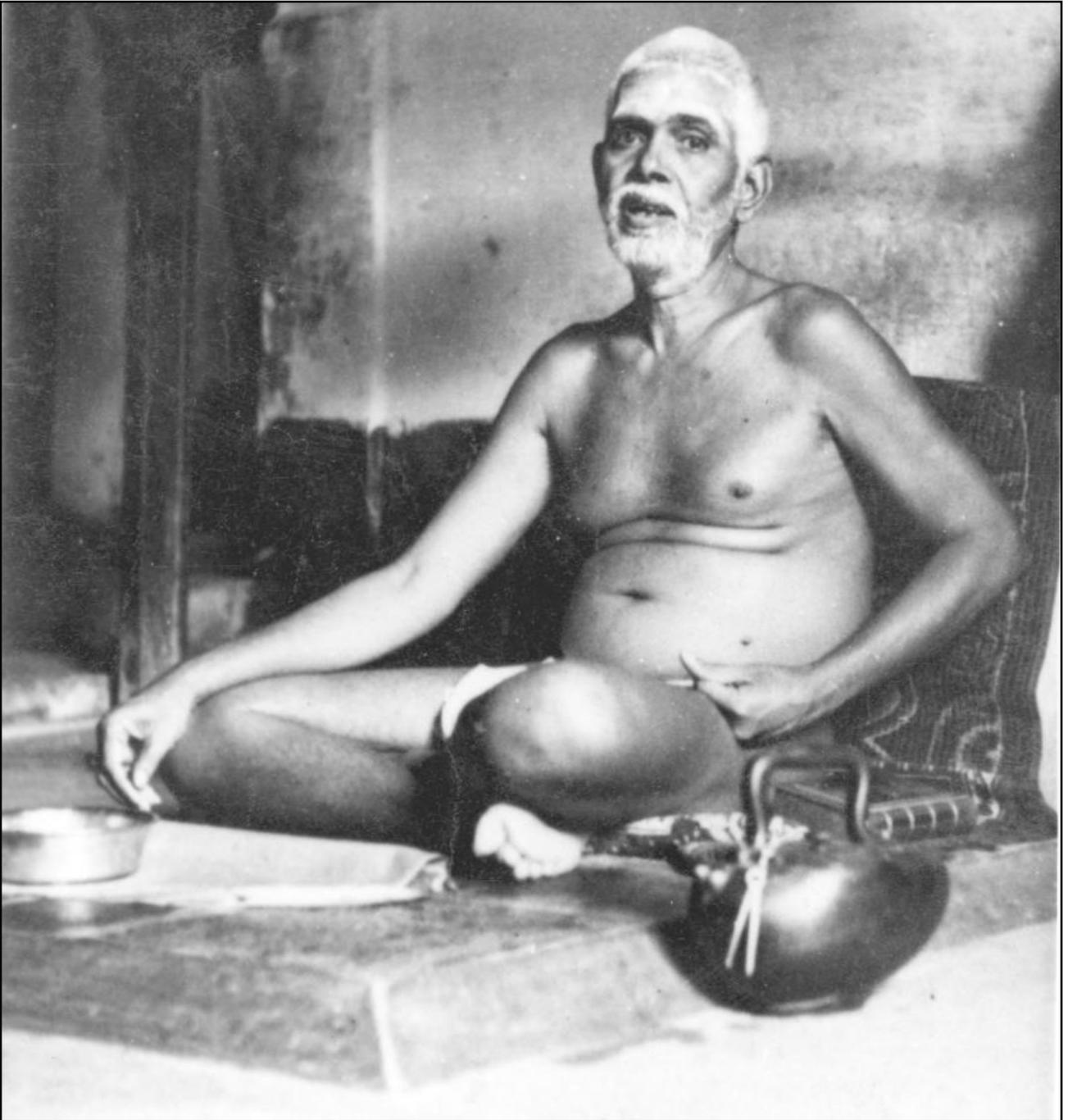
Every day, without fail, she served Bhagavan. However, she still had a little worldly attachment. She wanted to bring up a girl, and with Bhagavan's permission she adopted a girl named Chellammal. Echammal would often send Chellammal to deliver food to Bhagavan. One day, when taking food to Bhagavan, Chellammal found a piece of printed paper with something written in Sanskrit. She took it to Bhagavan. When it was time to eat she refused her meal, saying, "No, no! I will not eat today. I am observing *ekadashi vrata* (a vow for Hindus). My mother said none of us should eat." Bhagavan, without reacting, casually asked her, "What do you have in your hand?" She gave him the paper which had a *sloka* in Sanskrit from *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Translated, it meant: "When one has learnt to love the company of sages - *satsang* - why follow all these rules of discipline? When the cool, southern breeze is blowing, what need is there for a fan? When you are in *satsang*, no ritualistic injunctions need to be followed." Explaining the verse to her, Bhagavan coaxed Chellammal to eat. As time went by, Chellammal got married and had a son she named Ramana. When the child was born, Echammal placed him on Bhagavan's lap and sought his blessings. Unfortunately, Chellammal passed away sometime later. Though deeply affected, Echammal had by now steadied herself through her association with Bhagavan.

One day, Bhagavan told her, "Just meditate." She was following the meditation of *ashtanga yoga* and told Bhagavan, "When I meditate, I see lights." In response, Bhagavan gave her these instructions: "The objective lights that you see are not your real goal. You should aim at realizing your Self and nothing

short of it." From that day on, Echammal started taking to Self Enquiry and meditating under Bhagavan's guidance. Nevertheless, her *vasanas* were difficult to renounce. Once, she took a vow to pluck one hundred thousand leaves from a *bilva* tree and offer them to Bhagavan's picture. Able to pluck only fifty thousand leaves, she complained to Bhagavan, "I wanted to complete this ritual but I could only manage to find fifty thousand leaves." "Did you try all the trees?" asked Bhagavan. "Yes Bhagavan, I tried all the trees but I could pluck only fifty thousand leaves." Bhagavan's face changed, "Then why don't you pinch your body and offer that instead?" Echammal thought Bhagavan was joking. She said, "How can I pinch my own body? It will hurt." Bhagavan then turned to her, "You are plucking leaves from the tree. Will it not hurt the tree?" "How could I know that?" she replied. Bhagavan retorted, "When you knew pinching your own body is painful, why did you not recognize that the tree will be equally pained if you rob it of its leaves? Do I have to tell you that?" Bhagavan's strong words went home and Echammal changed herself.

She continued to feed Bhagavan in Ramanasramam as well. One day, when Echammal brought food for Bhagavan, she was informed that her services were not needed anymore. Feeling deeply disappointed, she said, "Bhagavan, I have grown grey. I have given everything of mine to serve you. Is this the reward I get? Like Arunachala, have you too turned into stone? What can I do but go back?" Saying this, she went back to her home. Back at the ashram, they rang the bell for lunch. Bhagavan was on the sofa as usual. Everyone waited for him to get up and go to the dining hall - five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes - but he did not get up for lunch. Bhagavan sat smiling and then one of the intelligent attendants understood. He informed the office and they rushed to Echammal, begging her to forgive them. When she refused to come with them, they pleaded that without her Bhagavan would not eat. Hearing this made her rush back to Bhagavan immediately! Another day, Echammal sent food for Bhagavan through someone else as she was unable to go herself. It was kept in the kitchen and they forgot to serve it to Bhagavan. In the dining hall, it was the custom to serve everyone first and Bhagavan last. Then Bhagavan would nod his head, and the others would begin eating. As usual, everyone was served including Bhagavan. Bhagavan kept sitting quietly. As he did not give the customary nod, the intelligent attendant asked the cooks, "Have you served Echammal's food?" They said, "No, we forgot!" Only after Echammal's food was served, did Bhagavan begin to eat.

Towards the end of her life, Echammal was unconscious for two days. The first day when she was struggling to breathe, Bhagavan sat for five hours like a rock on his sofa, deep in *samadhi*. Many remarked that they had never seen Bhagavan sit like that. Later on, they came to know that at that time Echammal was struggling. According to the doctors, she went into coma after that. No doubt she was already absorbed into inner felicity by the grace of Bhagavan. The next day, when she was to drop the body, some women around her wanted to test her. In a loud voice, one of them said, "It appears that food has not reached Bhagavan." Suddenly, Echammal opened her eyes wide. She could not speak, but with the expression of her eyes asked, "What happened?" They replied, "No, no! We were joking. The food has already gone to Bhagavan." Hearing this, she closed her eyes and dropped her body with a peaceful smile. When Bhagavan was informed, he commented, "Echammal has shed her whole load, but my load is still remaining."



*Sri Bhagavan seated in old dining hall after his meal*

## Mudaliar Paati



There was another adorable lady named Mudaliar Paati (Paati means grandmother). She lived in a village with her son and daughter-in-law and was serving a *sadhu* there. When he was about to die, she asked him what they should do now. He told her, "Go to Arunachala, there is a saint there. Serve him. Your life's purpose will be fulfilled."

Mudaliar Paati was very old even when she came to Bhagavan. She saw Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave in 1910. The very first glimpse of Bhagavan gave her an exhilarating spiritual experience. On the spot she took a vow, "I will serve food to Bhagavan until my last day." Whenever she was able to, she would get money or provisions from the village. She gradually sold all her property so that she could serve Bhagavan. When she had nothing left, she bought sesame seeds from the market, which she crushed into oil and sold in the market. Whatever little profit she made, was spent on provisions to make food for Bhagavan.

Bhagavan once said, "I'm afraid of two people - Ramanatha Brahmachari and Mudaliar Paati." What is this

fear? It is not really fear; Bhagavan was a slave to selfless service, total surrender and unlimited devotion. These two people came under that category. There are many instances in Mudaliar Paati's life that display her deep devotion. Even after Bhagavan came down to the present Ramanasramam, she insisted on serving food to Bhagavan with her own hand. She had become half blind due to old age. One day, when serving Bhagavan's food, she stepped on the leaf on which his food was served. An attendant standing close by scolded her, "Hey! You have such poor eyesight, why do you come? When you cannot see Bhagavan, why do you come and disturb everyone?" Mudaliar Paati replied, "How does it matter if I can't see him? Bhagavan sees me; his grace is on me, that is enough."

When she heard that Bhagavan's health was deteriorating after his first surgery, she wanted to see him. She had gone totally blind by now but still insisted on seeing Bhagavan. When she was brought to the hall, she strained her eyes to see. Bhagavan consoled her, "Paati, I'm all right, my body is all right." She was not fully satisfied. She stepped outside and stood by the entrance of the hall. When Bhagavan came out, she said, "Bhagavan, stop!" She then ran her hands over Bhagavan's body from head to foot. She is the only lady whom Bhagavan allowed to do so. After she had 'seen' Bhagavan to her heart's content, he asked her, "Are you satisfied now?"

This remarkable lady spent the last days of her life in Ramana Nagar - a little away from Ramanasramam. Kunju Swami, Viswanatha Swami and Suri Nagamma were sent by Bhagavan to look after Paati and her health. They built a hut for her in Ramana Nagar. Bhagavan enquired about her daily. By 1949, Mudaliar Paati had grown very old, gone blind and had lost her daughter-in-law, everything. Yet, she continued cooking for Bhagavan. Even on her last day, she cooked a meal and made sure that it was taken to Bhagavan. She insisted on being informed when Bhagavan had finished eating her food. When that was reported to her, she blissfully closed her eyes and dropped her body. Bhagavan gave instructions to Kunju Swami and others that she should be buried like a realized being (just as he had done earlier in the case of Seshadri Swami and Mother Azhagammal). On a previous occasion - the day when Echammal passed away - Bhagavan had remarked, "Still, Mudaliar Paati is alive." When Mudaliar Paati passed away, Bhagavan declared, "A big responsibility has been taken off my shoulders."

The Universal Mother took the form of mother Azhagammal and gave Bhagavan his body. In the forms of Ratnammal, Meenakshiammal, Keerai Patti, Desurammal, Echammal and Mudaliar Paati, the

Universal Mother fed and nurtured Bhagavan's body. Bhagavan too expressed his gratitude towards them by granting them realization. Soon after Mudaliar Paati dropped her body, Bhagavan's health deteriorated further. Within a few months, he too dropped his body.

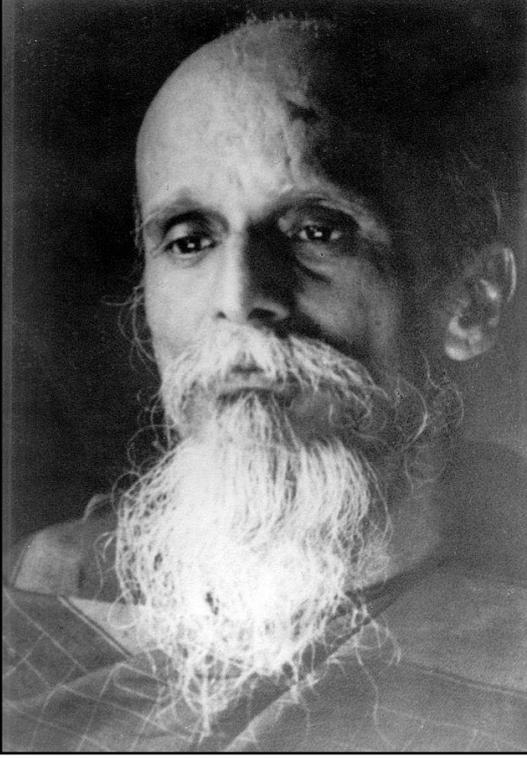


*Mudaliar Paati with daughter-in-law*



*The Maharshi with Kavyakantha*

## Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni



It is late nineteenth century, Navadveep, Bengal. A fourteen year old boy sits amidst a group of scholars: mathematicians, poets, a music maestro and an astrologer, among others. The mathematicians give him a six digit number to be multiplied by another six digit number. One poet recites the last two lines of a Sanskrit verse and challenges the boy to compose the first two lines in the same metre and complete it. The other poet, meanwhile, gives him a subject to immediately compose a four line Sanskrit verse on. The astrologer places before him a complex pattern of planetary positions and asks him what the consequence will be. The musician hums a few notes of a particularly obscure *raga* and asks the boy to identify it. Another man rattles off a random date, like February 18, 1756, and asks what day that was. As if all this weren't enough, another man stands behind the boy and throws tiny pebbles on his back while the others throw their challenges. The boy is expected to simultaneously keep count of how many pebbles were thrown. The boy answers all of them, instantaneously, correctly, brilliantly, to the tumultuous applause of a wonder struck audience.

This boy wonder, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, ('*muni*' means one who is steeped in *manana* - contemplation)

soon won acclaim all over India. He was to later become one of the foremost devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Before he was born, his pious parents had no children. His father went to Benares and prayed at the Ganesa temple there. He had a vision of the idol of Lord Ganesa coming to life and merging with him. At the very same time, back in his village, his wife saw the idol of the goddess in the local temple turn into light and enter her. Soon after, a son was born to the couple. They named him Ganapati in gratitude to Lord Ganesa.

However, to their utter disappointment, the boy could not talk at all. Until the age of five he remained mute and expressionless. Moreover, he was plagued with many diseases including epilepsy. In a desperate attempt to cure him, they resorted to the age old practice of branding him with a red hot iron rod. This treatment had far reaching effects. The shock unleashed the boy's latent talents and he became exceptionally brilliant. His retentive power, his concentration, his capacity to imbibe whatever he read, and quote it verbatim increased manifold. By the age of nine, he had mastered Sanskrit literature and by the age of eleven he had memorized all the four *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. When he was fourteen years old, Ganapati composed a drama in Sanskrit which is acclaimed even today as one of the best in that language.

The ancient scriptures mention that the *rishis* of yore did penance and God appeared before them and granted boons. Strongly influenced by these texts, Kavyakantha sought to achieve the same. He got married when he was eighteen years old but his fervour to have God's *darshan* became more intense. He embarked on a long pilgrimage, visited temples as well as all the sacred rivers like the Ganges and did penance. His penance was rigorous: he remained silent and motionless for long periods and went without food. Though he meticulously observed all the rules of traditional penance, God did not appear before him.

When he failed to find God through one method of penance, he tried another method with equal sincerity. With every method failing, Kavyakantha finally took the last resort: doing penance in the five holy places dedicated to Lord Siva, representing the five elements - earth, water, fire, air and ether. One must visit each place in a particular order and arrive finally in the place dedicated to fire, Arunachala, where the devotee's penance (*tapas*) is said to be rewarded. Kavyakantha followed the necessary rituals in each place and finally reached Arunachala in 1904. During the course of his

penance in Arunachaleshwara temple, Kavyakantha once went up the hill and saw Bhagavan sitting with eyes closed, absorbed in *samadhi*. Disappointed by Bhagavan's continued silence, he came away.

He took up a job as a teacher in a neighbouring town called Vellore and continued his *sadhana*. In 1907, he became dejected and felt that his life was futile. Though he had mastered the scriptures and experienced *kundalini*, he still hadn't found a method that gave him permanent anchorage in the source of *shakti* that he called God. He decided, "I am going again to Arunachala, the final destination for one's search for God according to the scriptures. If I do not attain God this time, I am going to proclaim that the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and all the Hindu scriptures are just exaggerations of poetic minds." With this resolve, he returned to Arunachala.

A Siva shrine is located at each of the eight cardinal directions on the circumambulation route around Arunachala. Determined to perform his penance to the best of his capacity, he went southwest to the Nirudhilingam shrine. It was surrounded by forests at that time. He took shelter in the hollow of a large, dead tree and resumed his severe penance of being silent and going without food. After the fifth or sixth day, the divine Mother spoke to him: "Until you have a guru, you cannot achieve your goal. Your guru is up there on the hill. Surrender at his holy feet and you will get his grace. Go now!"



*Kavyakantha at Virupaksha Cave (seated to the right of Bhagavan)*

Kavyakantha leapt out of the hollow. It was one o'clock in the afternoon, and the sun was beating down hard. The Karthikai festival was on and hundreds of people thronged around the hill. Undeterred, he ran up the hill to Virupaksha cave and found Bhagavan sitting alone outside. Bhagavan directed his glance of grace at Kavyakantha. Like many devotees before him, he was transfixed and could not take his eyes off Bhagavan. Kavyakantha, an erudite scholar and an inspired poet, had never prostrated himself before any human being. Suddenly, he found himself flat on the ground in front of the young ascetic. He held Bhagavan's feet tightly and cried, "I have read all that has to be read. I have fully read *Vedanta*, I have performed *japa* to my heart's content, yet I have not understood what *tapas* is! Therefore, I have sought refuge at your feet. Pray, enlighten me as to the nature of *tapas*." The word '*tapas*' in Sanskrit literally means 'striving for the realization of truth through flaming penance and austerity'. However, Bhagavan imparted its deeper meaning to Kavyakantha. Helping him rise to his feet, Bhagavan looked into his eyes and after some time slowly replied, "If one watches from where the notion 'I' arises, the mind is absorbed into that. That is *tapas*." And since Kavyakantha had himself revealed that he

practiced mantra *japa* - repeating mantras thousands of times every day, the master added, "When repeating a mantra, if one watches the source from which the sound is produced, the mind is absorbed in that. That is *tapas*."

These revelations thrilled Kavyakantha. He finally understood how to be in touch with the truth through a practical method. Wave after wave of ecstasy flooded through him for hours in the presence of the ascetic. At last, when he opened his eyes, he asked the attendant, Palani Swami, for the ascetic's name. Though he was then called Brahmana Swami, Kavyakantha learnt that his real name was Venkataraman. Kavyakantha took 'Ramana' from his name and since he had seen God in this ascetic, he named him 'Bhagavan'. Bhagavan in Sanskrit means God. As he had also given a revelation about *tapas* which no scripture had ever explained so clearly before, to Kavyakantha, Bhagavan was also a Vedic *rishi*. (*Rishi* means sage and is derived from *drashta*, which means seer - one who has seen with the inner eye. A *rishi* is he who is ever connected to the original, inexhaustible source of wisdom.) But, to Kavyakantha, Bhagavan was not only a *rishi* but a *maharshi* - a great *rishi*. Therefore, he named the ascetic Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. This name, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, the chanting of which has guided countless people to the silent, still truth, was given by this man of rare genius, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni.

At that time, he had over two hundred disciples of his own, including noble scholars like Daivarata and Kapali Shastri. He wrote a letter to them saying, "I have found my guru. Henceforth, it is not I but Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi who is our guru." The next day, he went to Bhagavan and said "Bhagavan, please accept me." Bhagavan graciously conceded to his request and said, "Stay in the cave that is adjacent to Virupaksha cave." Called Mango Tree cave, its proximity to Virupaksha cave allowed the guru and disciple to visit each other every day. Bhagavan continued to pour his grace and help Kavyakantha mature spiritually.

Bhagavan held Kavyakantha in high esteem and addressed him with much respect. One day, Kavyakantha held Bhagavan's feet and begged, "Please Bhagavan, do not address me respectfully! I am your disciple and your child. Do not address me in such reverential terms!" But, Bhagavan continued to do so. He then learnt from his other disciples and Kavyakantha's admirers that they referred to him as 'Nayana' which means 'father' in Telugu. Bhagavan told Kavyakantha, "Hereafter, I will call you Nayana." Nayana accepted this because in Telugu the word also meant disciple or child.

It is interesting to note that Kavyakantha was a staunch devotee of Siva , the formless father aspect of God. He had never worshipped God in the aspect of the Mother. However, from the moment the Mother showed his guru to him, he became Her devotee as well. (The side of the hill in front of which the Arunachaleshwara temple is located is called the front of the hill. The stretch from Nirudhilingam to the Eshanyalingam, south-west to north-east, is the back. A little known secret about Arunachala is that the front is the Father aspect while the back is the Mother aspect. All miracles and powers - psychic, spiritual, physical or worldly - stem from the Mother aspect. In the lives of Bhagavan's devotees, miracles and visions took place between Nirudhilingam and Eshanyalingam. With Kavyakantha too, it was at Nirudhilingam that the Mother aspect guided him to his guru.)

He wanted to express his gratitude to the Mother by composing a thousand Sanskrit verses in her praise. He surrendered to Bhagavan and began the work after getting his permission. He chose a sacred day to complete the thousand verses. Unfortunately, he fell ill and could write only around seven hundred. The night before his self imposed deadline, he approached Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave with his problem. Bhagavan encouragingly reassured him, "Do not worry, I will come and sit with you."

It was a wonderful sight: The young master sitting, radiating silence, his older devotee dictating extempore verses in a torrential flow and his disciples writing them down late into the night around the lantern light. Genius that he was, Kavyakantha started dictating the first line of the first verse to the first disciple, the first line of the second verse to the second disciple, the first line of the third verse to the third disciple and so on. Then, he proceeded without stopping to dictate the second line of the first verse to the first disciple, the second line of the second verse to the second disciple, the second line of the third verse to the third disciple...until at one thirty in the morning, the thousand verses were complete. Bhagavan, who until then was sitting with eyes closed in rock like silence, opened his eyes and asked, "Have you taken down all that I dictated?" Kavyakantha fell at his guru's feet and cried "Yes Bhagavan, they are your verses!" This anthology of verses is called *Uma Sahasram*. Uma is the divine

Mother, while 'sahasram' in Sanskrit means 'thousand'. Therefore, the title can be translated as 'thousand verses in praise of the divine Mother'. Kavyakantha revised the first seven hundred and odd verses many times but left the verses that he dictated that wonderful night, verses which he felt came from Bhagavan, untouched.

When I came back to Ramanasramam, some people for whom I had a lot of respect often spoke ill of Kavyakantha. They claimed that his accounts were figments of his imagination. I was influenced by their views. I approached Munagala Venkataramaiah, a great scholar and one of the recorders of the talks with Bhagavan. Munagala had not seen Kavyakantha and was therefore neutral about him. "Why do people pull down Kavyakantha so much?" I enquired, listing out all the transgressions he was rumoured to have made. "Ganesan, stop!" he exclaimed. "How did you know all this?" I revealed the names of the people who told me this. He replied, "They have given an opinion and you have received it. Are you sure it is the truth?" I was puzzled. "How can we know which opinion is correct?" I asked. Munagala then said, "Ganesan, don't you know the secret? Whatever Bhagavan says is correct. Whatever everyone else says is an opinion. "

I was still not satisfied. I had read an argument that Kavyakantha was not a Self realized soul because he had so many *sankalpas*. His detractors often quoted this and I was convinced by this logic. I put forth my argument to Munagala. He told me, "I asked Bhagavan the same thing - how come it is written in such and such a book that Kavyakantha was not Self realised. Bhagavan told me, 'That is not what I said but what the recorder must have expected me to say.'" Munagala then advised me, "Go by whatever Bhagavan has said and you will be near the truth. Do not go by opinions, particularly if they divide people - whether about saints or anyone else. Do not pay heed to them. Seekers should never be carried away by negative statements made about any saint. In order to progress, this is the first rule to remember. What detractors say are just opinions and if we believe them we fall victim to the mind."

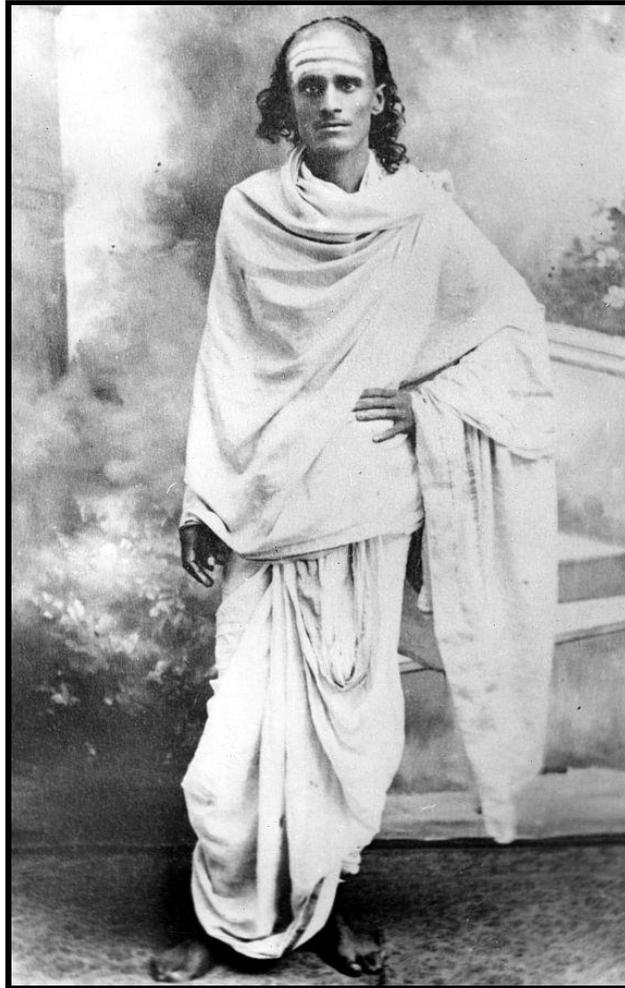
It is true that Kavyakantha had very high ideals. However, they were not *sankalpas* but *satya sankalpas*. A *sankalpa* is a concentrated desire of wanting to achieve something. A *satya sankalpa* is that *sankalpa* which comes to you - not that you have a desire for it. In 1908, Kavyakantha had asked Bhagavan, "Is seeking the source of the I-thought sufficient for the attainment of all my aims, or is mass incantation, mantra *japa* needed?" Bhagavan replied "Seeking the source of the I-thought will suffice." Though this was the initial advice Bhagavan gave him, Kavyakantha pressed on with his argument, "What about my aims and ideals?" Bhagavan replied "It will be better if you throw the entire burden on the Lord. He will carry them and you will be free. He will do his part." Munagala told me, "People quote only these sentences. But, Bhagavan told me what happened afterwards. At first, Kavyakantha could not grasp the inner meaning of Bhagavan's counsel. After a few years he came to Bhagavan and said, 'Bhagavan, I am surrendering all my *sankalpas* at your holy feet.' There was no greater God than Bhagavan for him."

Kavyakantha and his disciples plied Bhagavan with questions. Though the answers were not immediately noted down, Nayana had such a clear memory that he later condensed Bhagavan's answers into verses and recited them, saying, "This is from the third chapter of *Ramana Gita*," or, "This is the eighth verse from the second chapter in the *Ramana Gita*." He had not yet written *Ramana Gita* and people used to wonder at his claims. Finally one day, he sat down and wrote the entire *Ramana Gita* of three hundred verses. He wrote the questions with their answers and showed them to Bhagavan, who verified each one of them and remarked, "Perfectly correct."

In *Ramana Gita*, one of Bhagavan's answers about women is most revealing. Nayana questions Bhagavan, "Are not women equal to men?" Bhagavan answers, "What is woman or man? It is based on the body. For the soul there is no difference." Then Kavyakantha asks "Is it possible for women to master the scriptures?" Bhagavan replied, "Without a doubt." Nayana went on, "Can women get Self realization? Do they become *jnanis*?" "Without a doubt," the guru said. "For the soul which has to achieve realization there is no difference."

In 1922, when Bhagavan's mother attained *mahasamadhi*, it was not Bhagavan who wanted to entomb her, glorify her or build a temple for her. It was Kavyakantha who told Bhagavan, "According to the scriptures and your words in the *Ramana Gita*, she is a realized soul. She should be entombed with all sanctity." He administered this task and it was over her *samadhi* that the Matrubhuteshwara temple was constructed. Kavyakantha even assigned the temple its name: Matrubhuteshwara, meaning 'the

Lord who has become the mother'. Thus, the idea of the temple, the nucleus around which Ramanasramam was built, came from Kavyakantha.



*Kavyakantha in his younger days*

Kavyakantha was a great man. Due to his intense penance, his *kundalini* rose. According to the scriptures, when the *kundalini* goes to the *sahasrara*, the crown of the head, its power passes through the head and reaches the sun. Kavyakantha did not want this to happen. Being Bhagavan's disciple, he wanted Bhagavan to place his hand on his head. Kavyakantha later said, "The moment Bhagavan put his hands on my head, it was like cool moon rays raining down on me. The pain completely subsided." Prior to this, some of Bhagavan's other devotees reported seeing a faint vapour like substance rising from the top of Kavyakantha's head.

My teacher T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, Kunju Swami, and Viswanatha Swami experienced another incident involving Bhagavan's grace upon Nayana. At one time, while doing penance in a Ganesa temple in Tiruvottiyur near Chennai, Kavyakantha felt he was unable to progress spiritually. He prayed to Bhagavan, "Help me! Help me!" In response, he felt Bhagavan appearing before him, putting his hand on him, releasing him from his spiritual stagnation and then disappearing. Kavyakantha immediately told his disciples about what happened. At about the same time in Skandashram, Bhagavan collaborated, "I was lying down and all of a sudden my body started floating. I heard the word 'Tiruvottiyur' and walked down the main street. I saw a Ganesa temple and entered it. Then, I was suddenly back at Skandashram." T. K. Sundaresa Iyer asked, "How did this happen, Bhagavan?" Bhagavan replied, "It is the *sankalpa* of Nayana. It was not my desire to go." He continued, "With this experience I also understood how *siddhas* - legendary sages and saints - travel in the astral realm. Perhaps it was the same for me. Still, it was not mine but Kavyakantha's desire that made it happen."

One day, when Bhagavan was coming down the hill along with Nayana, Sundaresa Iyer and other devotees, he suddenly stopped and said, "Nayana, look at me right now! The sun, moon, stars and planets are revolving around my waist." The onlookers could not see the spectacle but they did see Bhagavan's body glowing with a brilliance. Overawed, the devotees prostrated in front of the master and chanted the sacred *Purusha Suktham*, a chant sung by ancient sages praising the Lord of the Universe where the sun and the moon are described as the two eyes of the Lord.

Bhagavan vouchsafed that after the *kundalini* and Tiruvottiyur experiences, an electric current had begun to pass through Kavyakantha's body. Consequently, he could not walk barefoot on the earth without getting an electric shock. He began to wear wooden slippers but would reverently take them off in his master's presence. Bhagavan would compassionately say, "Nayana is coming. He cannot walk barefoot. Place a non-conductor, a wooden plank, for him to sit on. Give him also a woollen blanket that he can walk on."

We must respect Bhagavan's relationship with Kavyakantha. How the master looked upon his disciples is more important than how a fellow disciple looked upon another. A sage like Bhagavan admired Nayana - that is what seekers and devotees of Bhagavan should consider. Devotees of Bhagavan are indebted to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni: Firstly, he was the one who gave the master his celebrated, sacred name. Secondly, he was the first person who persuaded our master to start talking. Before him, Sivaprakasam Pillai, Gambhiram Seshayya and others assumed Bhagavan was in formal silence and received Bhagavan's answers only in writing. It was to Kavyakantha that Bhagavan started giving answers orally. He was also the one who insisted that Bhagavan write a poem in Sanskrit in the *arya* metre. Bhagavan replied that he knew very little of Sanskrit and its metres. Kavyakantha explained the rules of the *arya* metre and repeated his request. A day later, Bhagavan presented to an amazed Kavyakantha, two flawless verses. Then, on the following day, he presented three more. It seems that the Muni exclaimed to his disciples, "Can any of us write like this?" These five verses form a hymn - *Arunachala Pancharatnam* - that is chanted daily in front of Bhagavan's *samadhi*:

*"Ocean of nectar full of grace, engulfing the universe, universal splendour, Oh Arunachala the supreme Self, be thou the sun and open the lotus of my Heart in bliss.*

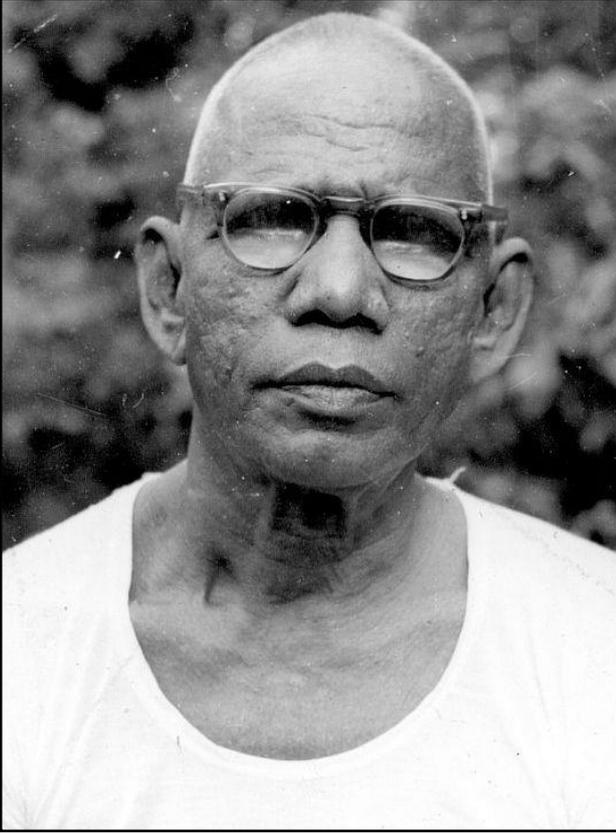
*Oh Arunachala, in thee the picture of the universe is formed, has its stay and is dissolved. This is the sublime truth. Thou art the inner Self who dances in the Heart as I-I. Heart is thy name, my Lord!"*

*He who turns inward with untroubled mind to search where the consciousness of 'I' arises, realizes the Self and rests in thee Arunachala, like a river when it joins the ocean.*

*Abandoning the outer world, with mind and breath control to meditate on thee within, the yogi sees the light, Oh Arunachala, and finds his delight in thee.*

*He who dedicates his mind to thee, and seeing thee always beholds the universe as thy figure, he who at all times glorifies thee and loves thee as none other than the Self, he is the master without rival, being one with thee, Arunachala, eternally in thy bliss."*

## Sadhu Natanananda



While Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni was a colossus, Sadhu Natanananda can be compared to the tortoise in the hare and tortoise story. An unlikely spiritual giant, he rose from being an ordinary, elementary school teacher, to a man of deep wisdom and realization. Sadhu Natanananda is the compiler of *Spiritual Instruction*, one of the most important books for spiritual seekers.

This simple teacher had studied Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and the scriptures. He understood that it was through a true guru's guidance that he could know exactly what truth is. Therefore, he yearned for a guru. His friends told him of a young ascetic up on Arunachala hill who could guide him. Natesa Mudaliar, as he was known then, visited Bhagavan at Skandashram and seated himself near him. Since he was well versed in the scriptures, he thought he should talk only after the guru talked to him. However, Bhagavan very rarely spoke unless someone asked him a question. After spending hours in silence with Bhagavan, Mudaliar went home disappointed. "Perhaps, he is not a saint," he thought, "I will go to other saints." He visited many other saints and sages but returned disappointed.

His friends reproached him, "Why did you give up? Go again to Bhagavan!" He started writing letters pleading to Bhagavan to shower his grace on him. He even sent a registered letter wherein he wrote, "If you are not going to give me grace, I will die without realization. In my next birth I will demand grace from you again and you will have to be born once more just to give me realization. You might as well give it to me now!"

Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream and said, "You are demanding grace from me. You must first worship the Lord seated on the bull." In his small room there was a picture on the wall. It was that of Lord Siva seated on Nandi, his bull. Natanananda worshipped the image for a few days but was still not happy. He went again to Tiruvannamalai and visited Arunachaleshwara temple. "Perhaps, Bhagavan has guided me to this in the dream," he thought. This time, some people tried to dissuade him saying, "Do not go to that silent ascetic. He will not talk to you!" However, he was a stern, serious, persevering man. So much so, that even Muruganar remarked that austerity was Natanananda's armour.

Without giving up hope, this school teacher went to Bhagavan again and pleaded, "Bhagavan, I want to experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfill my prayer!" Bhagavan looked at him for a full fifteen minutes. When a question was put to Bhagavan, he would not usually answer immediately. Instead, he would prepare the questioner with silence and only then give the answer, so that it remained with the questioner as direct experience. He was more interested in the questioner than in the question. He gazed at Natanananda and said, "Is it the body in front of me which desires to obtain grace or is it the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not looking upon itself as the body and making this request? If so, let the awareness first of all recognize its nature. It will then automatically recognize God and grace. The truth of this can be realized even now and here." Wave after wave of pure ecstasy pulsed through Natanananda and he stayed in Bhagavan's presence for hours. He was blessed by Bhagavan's glance of grace.

Natanananda once told me that even Bhagavan's glance did not completely fulfill him and that there were some residual tendencies despite his leading a strictly austere life. Once, when he was in Bhagavan's presence, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni and other scholarly devotees were sitting with Bhagavan and speaking in Sanskrit about Hindu scriptures. Utterly dejected that he could not follow a

single word about the lofty subjects that were being discussed, he sat silently with tears streaming down his cheeks. When he opened his eyes, everyone had left and only Bhagavan was there. Bhagavan looked at him compassionately and asked, "Why are you so dejected? If you were really unfit to realize the Self in this life, you could not have come to this place at all." (This applies to all of us.) Bhagavan continued, "The power that drew you here will make you realize the Self. If not today, then at some other time it is bound to fulfill its commitment. There is no reason why you should be dejected." This dissolved all imperfections in Sadhu Natanananda and drove out all his ignorance. With this, he too became a Self realized sage.

The day he understood his realization, he went incognito. The outward symbol of his becoming Self realized was his obscurity. He lived alone - happy to be immersed in the Self all the time. After Bhagavan's *mahasamadhi* in 1950 and until 1967, many did not even know if Natanananda was still alive. Though he stayed in a cottage in Tiruvannamalai, no one knew where he was. Like most of the old devotees, I too thought that he had passed away.

I had spent seven years in the ashram when suddenly one day my friend Dorab Framji asked me, "Do you know Sadhu Natanananda is alive?" I jumped with joy because I loved his book, *Spiritual Instruction*. I paid him a visit. He was an austere man with nothing in his room except for a few loin cloths. He blessed me and asked, "What are you doing? Are you practicing Self Enquiry?" I replied, "I am not capable of doing Self Enquiry. I only chant Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva." His face was red with rage. I was taken aback because this was my very first meeting with him and I was accustomed to people indulging me whenever they met me. Not Natanananda! He was a stern and serious man. He raged, "What a fool you are! What do you think you have come to Bhagavan for? For what function has he chosen you? It is only to make you like him! Read his *Forty Verses on Reality*, practice Self Enquiry, be the truth. That is why you have been chosen!" I was stunned in disbelief.

He refused to come into the limelight or even stay at the ashram. Dorab Framji found a cottage next to Osborne's house for him. Natanananda stayed there till 1981. I was very fortunate that he allowed me to visit him and talk with him whenever I liked. Once, I drew him out of his reticence by asking him to give me an article for a souvenir I was bringing out for the ashram. He obliged and handed it over to me. Unfortunately, I misplaced it. I assumed he would have a copy. I went to him and said, "Swami, I am sorry but I lost your article. Please give me your copy. I will very carefully note its contents down and then return it." He laughed and said, "Look around you, Ganesan. My environment gives you an idea about me. Look at my room, there is nothing here - no books, no clothing, no utensils, nothing." Puzzled, I asked, "What do you mean, Swami?" He replied, "Ganesan, you must have come to know that I have written many verses on Bhagavan. However, do you see any book here, even though they were all printed? The moment I wrote my adoration about my master either in verse or prose, I would place it at my master's holy feet. As far as I was concerned my job was done. After Bhagavan dropped the body, a few people asked me to write for them just like you have. I complied by writing and submitting it to the management. There ended my responsibility." However, he did oblige me by writing that article again, which one can find in the *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir* published in 1967.

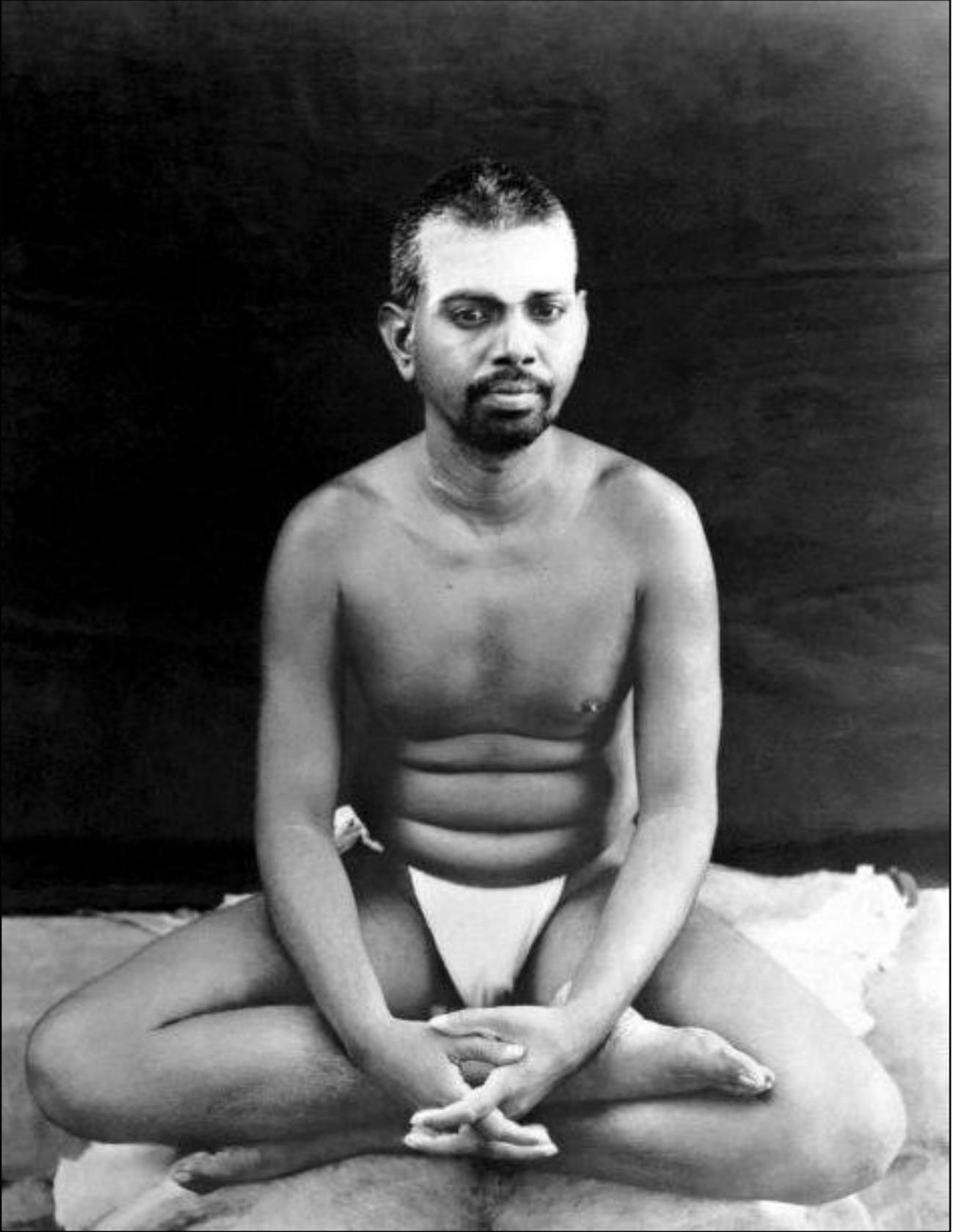
I once took a family which was popularizing Bhagavan's name to meet Natanananda. He was told about the work they were doing for spreading Bhagavan's name. Natanananda became furious, "You talk such nonsense, thinking you are going to spread our master's fame! The only way you can do it is by becoming the truth yourself. Put the teachings into practice right here right now, that is the best way you can serve the guru. Our master is the teaching. The best way to express your devotion to Bhagavan is by putting his teaching into practice." This family got frightened and never again went to Natanananda.

In Natanananda's last moments, Sadhu Om, Kunju Swami, a few others and I prayed before him. In every devotee's death that I witnessed, the one common factor was that none was bothered about his or her body. Just before he dropped the body, I asked, "Swami, how do you feel?" "I am happy," he replied. Physically, he was suffering deeply. Every doctor that I took to him, diagnosed him to be severely ill. Yet, he said he was happy. I asked, a little surprised, "What do you mean by happy?" Natanananda replied, "Look at Bhagavan's picture and you will understand." Those were his last words. He directed my attention to Bhagavan and then happily closed his eyes and passed away. It was a

privilege for me to help build the *samadhi* for this *jnani's* body inside the compound of Dorab Framji's residence.

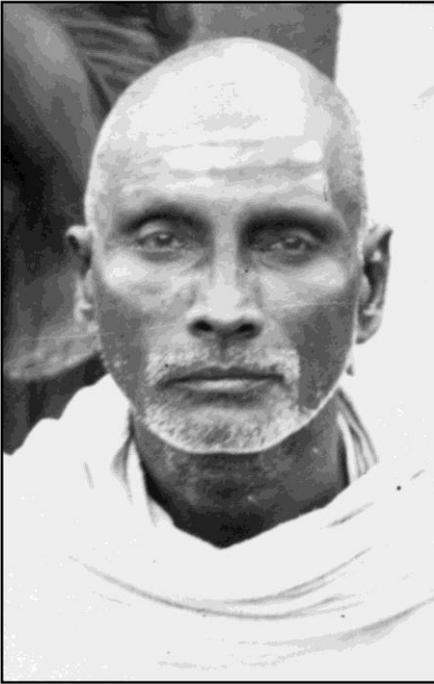


*Ganesan paying tributes to Sadhu Natanananda (seated to his left)*



*Bhagavan seated on a deer skin at Virupaksha Cave*

## Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer



“In 1908, my father and I visited Arunachala. The town was crowded as the Karthikai Deepam festival was on. On hearing about Brahmana Swami, a saintly *sadhu* living in Virupaksha cave on the hill, we went there. When we reached the cave, a person at the entrance stoutly refused us permission to go in and see the *swami*. I challenged his authority to deny us permission. Fortunately, the *swami* came out just then. I was thrilled to see him. Something inside me made me appeal for relief from the physical ailments and mental anguish that were constantly troubling me. The *swami* replied, ‘I am neither a medical doctor nor a soothsayer,’ and started walking away. Not giving up, I followed him and retorted, ‘I came to you hearing about your great spiritual attainment. Maybe I am not destined to find relief.’ The *swami* suddenly stopped walking, turned to me, and looking at me with piercing eyes said, ‘Develop an attitude of accepting such challenges with inner determination. Nothing can shake you.’ Then, he raised his right hand in blessing. I felt pure rays of light emanating from it and enveloping me. This filled me with the confidence to accept challenges in the future with the attitude that the higher power will assuredly protect me.”

This remarkable devotee was Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer. Born with a challenging nature, he never accepted no as an answer ever in his life. It was this innate quality of his that Bhagavan strengthened in their very first meeting. As spiritual seekers, physical challenges in the form of illness and mental challenges in the form of doubts are sure to assail us in life. Two things are important. We must have the courage to accept every challenge squarely and boldly. Equally, we must have the faith that the higher power - call it guru or God - will guide and protect us.

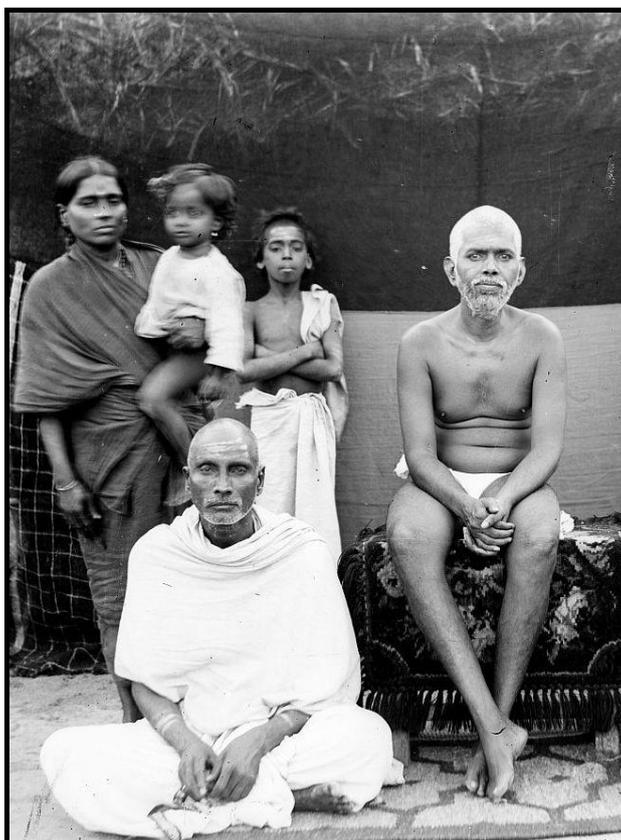
That visit of Iyer was very significant for him. He had come just as a visitor. But when he got down from the hill, the four towers of the temple, the sacred mountain and the sage residing there with his unmistakable spiritual power, impressed him so much that he decided to shift his residence and stay there permanently. He started visiting Bhagavan every evening, staying with him at night. There were only one or two people with Bhagavan then and so there were no restrictions. Coming to know of Iyer’s interest in music, Bhagavan taught him the nuances of how to compose *kritis*, a form of lyric. It was the beginning of a different kind of puppet show! In a normal puppet show, the puppeteer pulls the strings to make the puppet dance to his tunes. In this puppet show, the master pulled the strings resulting in Iyer not dancing but composing *kritis* of remarkable musical value bringing out the greatness of Bhagavan and Bhagavan’s teaching.

After work one day, Iyer came as usual to Virupaksha cave and asked Bhagavan in English, “Swami, Jesus Christ, the Buddha and other sages came to the world to redeem the sinners. Is there hope for me?” Bhagavan looked at him steadily and answered, in English, “Yes, there is hope.” Visibly moved and thrilled to the core with this answer, a Tamil *kriti* bubbled out from Iyer: “Ramana, you are my sole refuge, I have none else to turn to.” This song is popular among Tamil devotees of Bhagavan to this day.

One night in Virupaksha cave, Bhagavan focussed his attention on Iyer for almost half an hour and he experienced a burning current entering him. His mind turned inwards and got merged in the Heart. For the first time, he understood that Bhagavan was not just an ascetic *swami* but a spiritual dynamo. This spiritual experience gave him implicit faith in Bhagavan. Iyer had a chronically poor digestion. When he told Bhagavan about this, Bhagavan again focused his eyes on him. Iyer immediately felt his brain cooling down. Within a few days, in celebration of some festival, Echammal brought many varieties of rich food and sweets made of ghee and sugar for Bhagavan. Bhagavan, who always shared his food with anyone around, told Echammal to call Iyer. Apprehensive because of his dyspepsia, Iyer declined and told Echammal, “Please ask Bhagavan to forgive me. I cannot eat such rich food.” But Bhagavan insisted, saying, “Come, share it with me.” Obeying Bhagavan, he ate the food without any further

thought. After this, his chronic dyspepsia disappeared completely. His gratitude to Bhagavan for curing him came out in the form of his second song, "How do I express my gratitude for the cure graciously bestowed on me?" His family who stayed in the town and objected to Iyer spending every night with Bhagavan, heard about this miracle and started reposing faith in Bhagavan.

Iyer was soon transferred to Berhampur, a town in Eastern India. It was with a heavy heart that he went there. While there, his feet became covered with painful sores. Even after extensive treatment, including a surgery, there was no relief. However, despite the intense pain, he had to go on official work. He prayed fervently to Bhagavan for help. The very next morning, there was a knock on his door. When he opened it, there were two *sadhus* standing outside. They told him, "We are on a pilgrimage and have come from Arunachala. Before we left, Bhagavan told us to come to Berhampur and meet you." He received them warmly. Noticing that Iyer was suffering from painful sores, the *sadhus* prepared an ayurvedic paste from tamarind and *sambarani* (a kind of common Indian incense) and applied it on Iyer's sores. The very next day, Iyer was totally cured. His emotionally charged devotion to Bhagavan at this miracle, gushed out of him as a song called *Saranagati*, a perennial favourite with Bhagavan's devotees: "I surrender to you. To whom else am I to surrender? You who are perfect in Arunachala which endows one with ultimate release, oh Ramana, rain cloud of compassion, is this not the appropriate time for granting me your glance of grace? If you delay what am I to do? My beloved, remove my sorrow and grant me bliss. I cannot bear this indifference any further. Oh, you who are Brahman itself, I surrender to you."



*Bhagavan with Manavasi's family*

I was very close to Iyer and once he told me about this song, "See the beauty, Ganesan, it is not because of this song that the cure took place. The cure had already taken place and if at all I had to sing a song with my brain I would have only sung a song of gratitude thanking Bhagavan for curing me. Look at the song - it says, 'Is this not the appropriate time for granting me your glance of grace? If you delay, oh, what am I to do? My beloved, remove my sorrow and grant me bliss. I cannot bear this indifference any further.' This is after the miracle had happened." He started quoting from sages and saints like Manikavachakar, Meera and Tukaram where they pray, "Bless this wretched dog," when God has already blessed them. It was not the other way about. Then he quoted from Bhagavan's eleven

verses to Arunachala: "Oh Arunachala, drawing me with your cords of grace although I had not even dimly thought of you, you decided to kill me outright. How then has one as weak as I am offended you that you now leave the task unfinished? You have not killed me. You have left it half done. Why do you torture me keeping me suspended between life and death? Fulfill your task of killing me now and long survive me all alone, oh Lord!" He continued, "That has already been done to Bhagavan, but still, he writes this as prayer. Why should Manickavachagar sing, 'I am the worst sinner, please save me'? It is not because of the prayer that the Lord came and saved him. In his *Aksharamanamalai*, Bhagavan says, 'Bless me that I may die without losing hold of you, otherwise miserable is my fate Arunachala. Place your sacred hand upon my head and make me partake of your grace. Do not abandon me, Arunachala. Oh Arunachala, unite with me to destroy our separate identities as you and I and bless me with the supreme state of ever vibrant joy.' It looks like a prayer. Many people have had this doubt and asked Bhagavan, 'You are a *jnani*. So why did you write, 'Save me, do not allow me to be condemned?' The answer is that it had already been done. We should have prayed first to get God's grace. But God, being great, gives his grace first and then accepts our prayer - even if we do it later!"

In 1922, Bhagavan saved Iyer from definite death. Kapali Shastri, an eye witness to that miracle, has written in his book: "Maharshi was living on the hill in Skandashram. A few of us used to accompany him during *giri pradakshina*. On one such day before starting our *giri pradakshina*, we got word that supervisor Ramaswami Iyer was taken ill suddenly and was lying at Virupaksha cave. The Maharshi went down the hill to the place where Iyer was lying. Iyer was having violent palpitations of the heart. Maharshi sat near him placing his hand on his head. Within five minutes, Iyer got up and looked quite normal. Maharshi kept sitting - he did not get up even after an hour. I had in my bag in Skandashram olive oil, which I went and brought and rubbed on Maharshi's head. Then, we all went back to Skandashram. When I asked Bhagavan, he simply replied, 'Well, Ramaswami Iyer got up and I sat down. I was conscious when the oil was rubbed, it was very pleasant.' He did not say he performed a miracle or anything like that."

Later, in 1942, Iyer was once again saved from certain death. One day, his wife came running to Bhagavan and prayed that her husband who was unconscious in their house be saved. At that very moment, Iyer woke up. Years later, when I heard about this, I was a little skeptical. So, I went and challenged Iyer, "How is it that all the time you fall sick and Bhagavan saves you from death?" He answered, "What to do, Ganesan, it is not only me that Bhagavan has saved. He also saved other sincere souls from the throes of death." He then gave me a list - his own daughter, his friend Subramani Iyer's daughter, Jagadisa Shastri, Bhagavan's own sister's husband and a few other names that I did not know.

Iyer had five daughters and one son. Bhagavan took keen interest in Iyer's family and every member of his family was totally devoted to Bhagavan. When I came to ashram, I wanted to know more about them and their relationship with Bhagavan. So, I went to Mumbai where one of his daughters was staying to interview her for *The Mountain Path*. Her name was Lalitha Venkataraman and she was a noted musician. She shared with me the unique relationship all of them had with Bhagavan from his Virupaksha cave days. For all of them, Bhagavan was God. Every time the family had to leave Arunachala, they would stand in front of Bhagavan and sing the song *Saranagati* in chorus. Consequently, this song was sung repeatedly in Bhagavan's presence for nearly two decades. Lalitha Venkataraman told me "In fact, my father was popularly known as Saranagati Ramaswami Iyer or Saranagati Thatha." She continued, "Since my husband was employed in North India, I could come to Tiruvannamalai only on rare occasions after my marriage. Whenever I was in the ashram, I used to sing and accompany myself on the veena and Bhagavan would listen keenly with a smile. One day, when I entered the hall after a long absence from Tiruvannamalai, he remarked, 'Look, only this morning we heard her voice on the radio and here she is now.' I had recorded two songs on Bhagavan and one of them must have been broadcast that day."

"As a child, I have played with Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave. However, it was my elder sister Rajam who as a child was petted by Bhagavan. He would plait her hair and they would play together with her toys. My sister was so fond of Bhagavan that whenever she got something tasty or interesting to eat at home, she would rush to Virupaksha cave and share it with him. Once, a special type of paddy was brought and hand pounded in our house. Its bran was very sweet, tasty and healthy. When the lady who was pounding it mentioned this to my sister, she took handfuls of the bran and ran to Bhagavan. Noticing Rajam's appearance at that odd hour, Bhagavan asked her whether she had brought something for

him. She gave him the bran and both ate it. Bhagavan then told her how that bran would be tastier if eaten along with certain other ingredients. My sister enjoyed great privileges with Bhagavan. But she was always aware that she was moving with God. She worshipped him every moment of her life.”

After a pause, she said, “My elder sister Rajam was a good painter. Though she never learnt painting from anyone or from any art school, her drawings and painting had a special, real life quality in them. When she grew up, she did paintings of goddesses. She would show them to Bhagavan and he appreciated them very much. Once, Rajam did a beautiful painting of Goddess Varalakshmi, an aspect of the mother goddess worshipped by married women. When she showed it to Bhagavan, he suggested that she print it and distribute it. Rajam begged and borrowed money and had it printed. In the 1940s and 50s, many *pooja* rooms of orthodox Brahmin families had this picture.” Lalitha Venkataraman then took me to her *pooja* room upstairs and showed me two lovely paintings by Rajam - one of the goddess Madurai Meenakshi and another of the saint Thyagaraja. Then I remembered the painting of Bhagavan seated on a peacock with the signature Rajammal at the bottom that was in Skandashram.



The painting of Goddess Varalakshmi

All his life, Iyer was a devout *bhakta*. He would start shedding tears at the very mention of the word ‘Bhagavan’. In 1922, Iyer had the rare privilege of being present when Azhagammal attained liberation in Skandashram. Iyer was chanting Lord Rama’s name when Bhagavan sat keeping his sacred hands on Azhagammal’s head and Heart to liberate her. He was a witness to Bhagavan’s act of grace. Iyer was also one of those who carried Azhagammal’s body down to where it is now interred. He was with Bhagavan all the time till the interring was completed. On the tenth day, a *linga* was installed over the tomb. Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni composed an extempore Sanskrit hymn in praise of Azhagammal as being even greater than the mothers of the Buddha, Jesus Christ and Adi Shankara. Seated in a corner amongst the crowd, Iyer was listening to it with rapt attention when Bhagavan called him and inspired him to compose a *kriti* in Tamil. Though Iyer was sorrow stricken, he obeyed. Spontaneously, a *kriti* came to him. He noted it down on a paper and gave it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan asked him to sing it. While singing it, Iyer was amazed to see how perfectly the *kriti* had turned out.

When Bhagavan attained *brahmanirvana* in 1950, Iyer saw the  *jyothi*  of Bhagavan move as meteor like light and merge with Arunachala. Close admirers of Iyer like the Tamil scholar Ki. Va. Jaganathan adored Iyer as a *jnani*. A very popular writer in Tamil Nadu during the 60s, Ki. Va. Ja. asked me to take him to Iyer’s residence. Iyer was then sick and bedridden in a house opposite the ashram. The moment he saw Iyer, he put his hands together above his head and went round and round his bed shedding

tears and chanting, "Ishwara, Ishwara, Ishwara." He then started singing extempore verses praising Iyer. It was truly a wondrous sight. I have only heard about people becoming emotionally ecstatic and shedding tears. That day, I witnessed it. On our way back Ki. Va. Jaganathan blessed me, saying, "Adore him, Ganesan! Seek Iyer's blessings. He is a Self realized, holy man hiding behind a veil of ordinariness. Do not miss this opportunity to receive his blessings. It will take you a long way on your spiritual path." Thanks to this advice, I was fortunate to receive Iyer's blessings.

Iyer passed away in Chennai and his last moments were very peaceful. His palms over his chest and ecstatic tears shedding from the outer corners of his closed eyes, clearly showed that he was seeing Bhagavan in his Heart. Slowly, gently, his breathing became still. Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer was now absorbed forever, in Arunachala.



*Painting by Rajam of Bhagavan seated on peacock*



*Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave*

## Frank Humphreys



Once, a man came to see Bhagavan in Virupaksha cave. He stayed only for a week. During that time, he composed and sang four songs in praise of Bhagavan. He said his name was Venkatrama Iyer and that he was from Sathyamangalam, a small village close to Tiruvannamalai. Later he sent a fifth song, the famous hymn *Ramana Satguru*. When Bhagavan read the five songs he was struck by their beauty. Ever since then, many Tamil speaking devotees of Bhagavan have been singing them. Strangely, when some of the old devotees went to Sathyamangalam to meet Venkatrama Iyer, nobody in the village knew anything about him. Later on, while devotees were discussing this, Devaraja Mudaliar remarked, "While at Virupaksha cave, Bhagavan had written five hymns in praise of Arunachala." To this, Muruganar replied, "Father Arunachala wanted to express his gratitude. So, he came in a human form as Venkatrama Iyer and sang five hymns on Bhagavan."

One of the verses in *Ramana Satguru* proclaims that Bhagavan has hoisted his flag of wisdom to lead billions of beings to liberation. What is a billion? One followed by many zeroes. If you remove all the non-existent zeroes that the billions of individual egos in reality are, what remains is only the one. That one is Arunachala, that one is Ramana and that One is what every one of us really is. And not the Rams, Rahims and Ronalds we think we are.

Bhagavan came to make us remember our original, divine nature. No one was excluded from his grace - be it man, woman or beast. Until now, all his devotees were Hindus. It was time for the teaching to spread across the divide of nations and religions. And spread indeed it did, without disturbing the faith of the thousands who came seeking from all corners of the world.

Frank Humphreys was a young British police officer and a Catholic. Transferred from England, he arrived in Bombay, now Mumbai, with a high fever and had to be admitted in a hospital.

A psychic possessing occult powers, Humphreys used these powers to get relief from the intense pain he was suffering while in the hospital. He then transported his subtle body to Vellore, a town near Tiruvannamalai where he had been posted, and saw one Narasimayya who was to teach him the local Telugu language. Later, when he arrived in Vellore, Narasimayya introduced himself, saying, "I am your Telugu tutor." "I know," replied the Englishman. "How do you know?" asked the puzzled tutor. "I have seen you though you have never visited Bombay. I travelled in my astral body and met you," replied Humphreys. Narasimayya had tutored many Britishers, most of whom were spiritually disinclined. He presumed that this man was just crazy.

Humphreys then requested Narasimayya, "I would like to read a book on Hindu astrology in English. Can you help me?" Narasimayya presumed that this was yet another crazy question from him and ignored it. Seeing this, Humphreys continued, "Are there any *mahatmas* here?" (*Mahatma* means great soul). This last question startled Narasimayya. He wanted to test Humphreys. He left without giving any reply. The next day, he returned with a number of photographs of sages and saints and went to Humphreys' room. Seeing no one there, he left them on the table and went away. When he came back, Humphreys had returned as well. Taking one photograph from the pile he asked, "Narasimayya, is this not your guru?" He was referring to a photograph of Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. Kavyakantha was indeed Narasimayya's guru. Thrilled, Narasimayya concluded that Humphreys was genuine, or there could not have been so many amazing coincidences. Humphreys revealed, "Last night, your guru came into my dream. He sat next to me in my bed and said something in a language that I could not understand." This convinced Narasimayya.

Unfortunately, Humphreys soon fell sick and had to be taken to Ooty, a hill station where he stayed for a few months. When he returned, he told Narasimayya, "Last night, I had a dream. Since you might not

believe my verbal description, I am going to draw what I saw.” He then drew a hill, a cave on it, a small waterfall beside it and a *sadhu* standing there. It was the pictorial depiction of Virupaksha cave and Ramana Maharshi. Narasimayya was speechless, “This is my master’s master!” Completely convinced now about Humphreys, he wanted to take him to Bhagavan. First, he introduced him to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni who was then at Vellore. Kavyakantha was surprised to see this Britisher who was just twenty one years old and already a superintendent of police. There was a Theosophical Society conference in Tiruvannamalai in which Kavyakantha was to take part. The three of them left for Tiruvannamalai.

Upon reaching their destination, Humphreys became restless; he wanted to see the saint whom he had seen in his dream. They went to Virupaksha cave and seated themselves in front of Bhagavan. Bhagavan’s gaze was fixed on Humphreys for a long time. This is what Humphreys has recorded of his first encounter with Bhagavan: “At two in the afternoon, we went up the hill to see him. On reaching Virupaksha cave, we sat before him at his feet and said nothing. We sat there thus for a long time, and I felt lifted out of myself. For half an hour, I looked into the Maharshi’s eyes which never changed their expression of deep contemplation. I began to realize somewhat that the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. I could feel that this master’s body was not the man; it was the instrument of God, merely a sitting, motionless corpse, from which God was radiating terrifically. My own feelings were indescribable. The Maharshi is a man beyond description in his expression of dignity, gentleness, self control and calm strength of conviction. You can imagine nothing more beautiful than his smile. It is strange, what a change it makes in one to have been in his presence.”

This was the young man’s first experience of Bhagavan. Later, Kavyakantha suggested that he put some questions to the master. Humphreys, being very young, enthusiastic, and wanting to serve the world, readily agreed. His very first question was, “Master, can I help the world?” Bhagavan: “Help yourself and you will help the world.” Humphreys: “I wish to help the world. Shall I not be helpful?” Bhagavan: “Yes, by helping yourself you help the world. You are in the world, you are the world. You are not different from the world. Nor is the world different from you.” Humphreys, after a pause: “Master, can I perform miracles just as Sri Krishna and Jesus Christ did?” Bhagavan: “Did any one of them, when he performed them, feel that it was he who was performing the miracle?” Humphreys: “No, master.” This was the first hint Bhagavan gave him that he should not be captivated by his occult powers and sense of doership.

He was unable to stay for too long in Vellore. He returned whenever he could, often travelling fifty miles under the hot summer sun on his motorcycle. When he reached Virupaksha cave, the first thing Bhagavan invariably asked him was, “Have you eaten? Are you not hungry?” Humphreys was usually hungry. Bhagavan would immediately arrange for food to be given to him. Bhagavan knew westerners ate with a spoon. So, he crafted a spoon made out of a coconut shell for Humphreys. This thrilled Humphreys even more. Once, Humphreys was still hungry after finishing his meal. Bhagavan remarked, “You are still feeling hungry.” He then asked somebody to give him more food. After lunch, the young Englishman was feeling very thirsty, thanks to the burning tropical heat. But, his innate British reserve prevented him from asking for anything. Knowing this, Bhagavan immediately looked at one of the other devotees and said, “Give him lemonade. He is very thirsty.” All this impressed upon him that Bhagavan’s love was not only that of a spiritual master, but also that of a nurturing mother. Many a time, he saw small children at the cave - neither talking nor playing, but just sitting peacefully. He was baffled. He had never seen children sit so silently, so peacefully, and for so long. The truth was that these children could also feel the spiritual peace of Bhagavan and responded in a like manner.

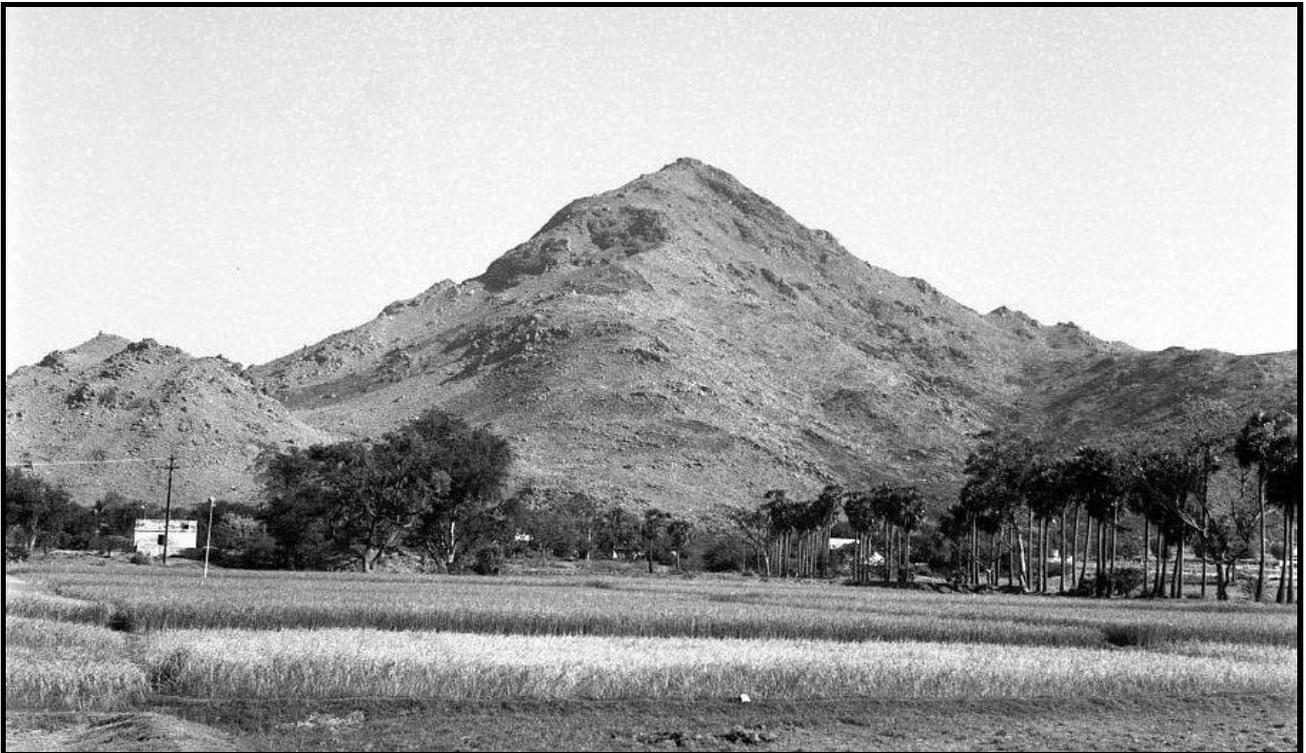
Bhagavan knew of Humphrey’s inclination to occult sciences and dissuaded him. “Pursue that which is superior to all the occult powers,” he told him, “Your aim should be higher than this. Not only higher, it should be the highest, and the highest is to recognize that you are the truth. All these occult powers will delude you. Give them up!” Bhagavan helped Humphreys get weaned off from using occult powers. Humphreys was a very strong man. Just as he had the capacity to acquire occult powers, he also had the strength to practice his master’s teachings. When he relinquished his chosen vocation, the occult sciences, Bhagavan directed him with the teachings of Self Enquiry and surrender, and taught him to go within.

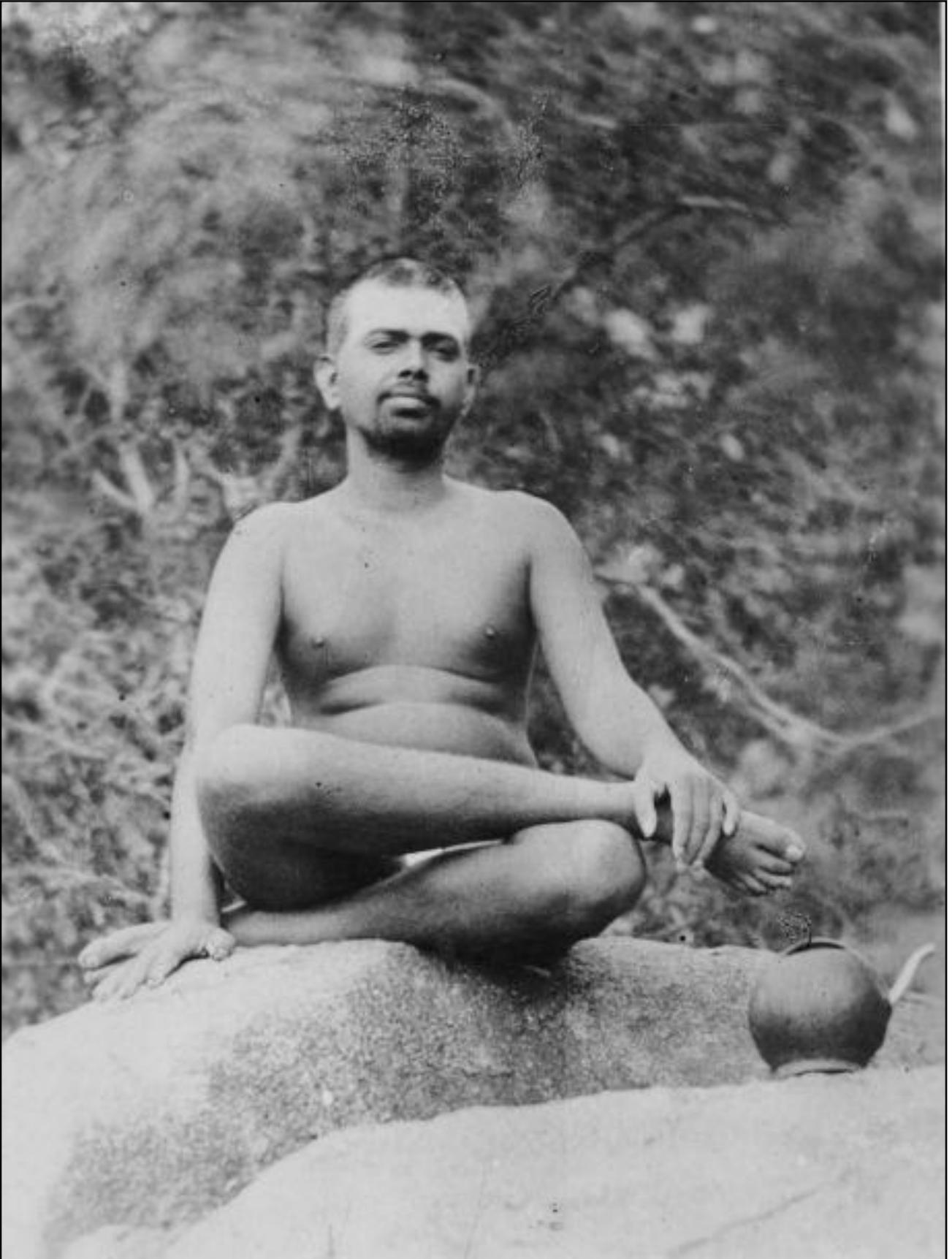
His descriptions of the master, which he recorded in a letter and sent to his friend in England, were published in the *International Psychic Gazette*: “The phenomena we see are curious and surprising - but

the most marvellous thing of all we do not realize, and that is that one and only one illimitable force that is responsible for all the phenomena we see and the act of seeing them. Do not fix your attention on all these changing things of life, death and phenomena. Do not think of even the actual act of seeing them or perceiving them, but only of that which sees all these things, that which is responsible for it all. This will seem nearly impossible at first, but by degrees the result will be felt. It takes years of study and daily practice, but that is how a master is made. Give yourself a quarter of an hour a day. Try to keep the mind unshakably fixed on that which sees. It is inside you. Do not expect to find that 'That' is something definite on which the mind can be fixed easily - it will not be so. Though it takes years to find that 'That', the results of this concentration will soon show themselves in four or five months time - in all sorts of unconscious clairvoyance, in peace of mind, in the power to deal with troubles, in the power all around, always unconscious power. I have given you these teachings in the same words that the master gives to his intimate disciples. From now on, let your whole thought in meditation be not on the act of seeing, nor on what you see, but immovably on that which sees."

What powerful instructions! How blessed was young Humphreys to receive this teaching! Humphreys received everything after getting established in the Heart. He found it difficult to cope with his job and pursue meditation as well. He came to Bhagavan, who advised him to stay on longer. (The master can recognize when one is completely ready. Bhagavan, the master cook, needed to 'cook' him for sometime longer!) After a few months, he came again to Bhagavan. This time, Bhagavan said, "Now, you can go." Humphreys has recorded, "I went back as a better and deeper Catholic." There was no conflict in him at all.

After some time, he turned away from all worldly things, entered a monastery and became a monk. Established in the Heart, there was no Hindu, Christian or Muslim; there was no male or female, just pure being – just as Jesus would want a follower to be.





*Bhagavan seated on a rock at Virupaksha Cave*

## Masthan Swami



Masthan Swami was a staunch Muslim. His parents, who observed all the religious codes, rituals and disciplines rigorously, brought Masthan Swami up in the same manner. Even as a child of eight years, Masthan would enter into *samadhi* without knowing what it was. He had the natural ability to be detached from people and things from childhood. This remarkable devotee followed all the Islamic injunctions and was very much devoted to Allah and Prophet Mohammed. His natural inclination towards the *samadhi* experience coaxed him to start reading and picking up Tamil. Soon, he was studying books like *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and *Sukar Vashistam*. The simple Tamil poems of the nineteenth century Sufi mystic Gunangudi Masthan, which are *vedantic* in nature, were also a powerful influence. But, though Masthan Swami participated in Muslim festivals like Ramzan, Id, etc., his mind and heart were tuned to the inner Self, going into *samadhi*, and reading and singing Thayumanavar's songs. (Thayumanavar's songs were extolled by Bhagavan because they dealt purely with the truth. Other saints have brought in Siva and other gods, but Thayumanavar stuck to the teaching of going into silence, and Masthan Swami was well versed in that.)

In 1914, Masthan Swami lived in Desur, a village forty miles away from Tiruvannamalai and from where Desurammal hailed. Being two of the only people in that village who shared a similar spiritual 'madness', the two became friends. One day, she told him, "Masthan Swami, you must meet my guru." She then brought him to Bhagavan in Virupaksha cave. Masthan, a staunch and devoted follower of Islam describes his first *darshan* of Bhagavan: "He was seated like a rock. His unswerving gaze was filled with grace, compassion and steady wisdom. I stood by his side. After giving me a look, he opened the gate of my Heart and I was also established in his state in the very first encounter. Just one look from Bhagavan and I stood like that for eight hours, absolutely without fatigue and filled with total absorption and peace. In those days, at Virupaksha cave, Bhagavan would open our Heart with a single, gracious look and we would be transformed. There was no need for any questions, since by his look he made us like himself."

What a wonderful man Masthan was! On this very first encounter itself, he took Bhagavan as his guru. He had already read about the qualifications and marks of a guru. He could see that seated in front of him in human form was not only his guru but God as well. When he returned, Masthan Swami experienced some conflict within himself. Until then, his master had been Prophet Mohammed. Though Allah was God, and Prophet Mohammed was his guru, here was a living guru, Ramana Maharshi. "Am I disloyal to my other guru, Prophet Mohammed?" he wondered. He was filled with Bhagavan's presence, but as he was brought up in the Islamic tradition he had this feeling, "Am I brushing aside my master Mohammed because he is no more in the body?"

Fortunately, he was bold enough to go to Bhagavan and confess, "Bhagavan, this is my problem. Please help me." Bhagavan looked at him for sometime: Bhagavan was never interested in the question. Instead, Bhagavan was always interested in the questioner. He looked at Masthan Swami and showering all his grace, replied, "Do you take this body to be Bhagavan? Do you think the Prophet is dead? Then, is the Buddha dead? Is Jesus Christ dead? Are they not guiding hundreds of thousands of people even today? Are they not living in the Heart? A living guru means the one living in one's Heart as a guru. A living guru does not mean somebody living in a body at a given historical time and in a given geographical space. The guru lives eternally in your Heart. Heart is Allah, Heart is Jesus Christ, Heart is Buddha and Heart is Bhagavan. Live in the Heart as the Heart by diving into the Heart."

These words were recounted to me by Viswanatha Swami. I could not grasp them immediately, so I requested him, "Please explain it so that I can understand." He said, "The guru is always timeless. To talk of the guru in time, you bring in death, birth, living, all this. There is only the guru principle which is the Heart of every one of us." I said, "Swami, how do you say this?" He replied, "A devotee once came from Lahore. Tiruvannamalai and Lahore are more than one thousand miles apart. In the 1930s and 40s, travel was almost impossible in India. He could only stay for a month or so. When he was to leave, he wept before Bhagavan, 'How can I leave you and go Bhagavan?' Bhagavan said, 'Where are you

going? Can you go away from Bhagavan? Bhagavan is always with you, Bhagavan is in you. In fact, you yourself are Bhagavan.' See the beauty of the answer. When Bhagavan says you yourself are Bhagavan, how can a Ganesan or a Viswanathan be Bhagavan? It is the 'I AM' in Viswanathan and Ganesan that is Bhagavan; the living master is always in the Heart as awareness. This awareness that is in you, in me and in every one of us, is Arunachala Ramanan, God, Self, Heart, Allah, Jesus, Buddha... We can give it any name."

Masthan Swami was a multi-faceted personality. He was a weaver. It was said of him that he was the Kabir of Bhagavan. He was totally devoted to the master just as Kabir was devoted to his. He began coming regularly to Bhagavan. He relinquished weaving as a profession and wove only to make loin cloth and towels for Bhagavan. Being a total ascetic, he never married. He begged in the streets of his own village. When he came to Tiruvannamalai, he would often come with Desurammal. Desurammal had money and brought lots of food because she wanted to feed Bhagavan. Masthan Swami would carry the rice and *dal* on his head and walk the long distance from Desur happily. It was not a burden for him because he was going to meet his master. At Arunachala too, he would beg for alms.

Masthan had many conversations with Bhagavan. Of one such conversation, Masthan Swami recounts, "Once, while I was on my way to see Bhagavan, I prayed for his grace. On arrival at Virupaksha cave, he asked me, "Do you like *saguna upasana* - worship on God with form - or do you prefer *nirguna upasana* - worship of the formless God?" I replied, 'I choose *nirguna upasana*.' Bhagavan then gave me this beautiful instruction, 'Fix the mind in your Heart. If you keep your attention on the source from where all thoughts arise, the mind will subside there at the source and reality will shine forth.' Though I have come across similar teachings in other books, these words of wisdom coming in the holy voice of my guru penetrated my Heart and implanted themselves as the way for me. After this meeting with Bhagavan, I had no further doubts about this. In fact, no doubts arose at all after this." Bhagavan thus guided him to be established in the Heart.

Many a time Masthan Swami went around the hill with Bhagavan. Once, when he was divinely intoxicated, Bhagavan asked him to sing songs of the Sufi saint, Gunangudi Masthan. Bhagavan loved those songs. Masthan says, "I sang in the highest voice because it was my master who had made the request." Another interesting incident Masthan relates is about Bhagavan and a large, golden coloured mongoose. That it was golden coloured was very unusual, considering that these shy creatures are normally grey in color. It was the Karthikai Deepam festival time. Hundreds of people were climbing up the hill. Running through the crowds, this mongoose went into Virupaksha cave. It began searching every nook and corner of the cave. At that time, Palani Swami was not there as he was taking a bath in a stream nearby. Not finding Bhagavan inside, the mongoose went outside and licked Palani Swami's feet. Then, it started climbing up further to Skandashram where Bhagavan was. On reaching Skandashram, the mongoose fearlessly jumped onto Bhagavan's lap and sat gazing at him. Bhagavan caressed it and looked at it, pouring his grace. The ashram was crowded and the only attendant present was Masthan Swami. He took care that the creature didn't get hurt and didn't hurt the peacocks there. Wherever the mongoose went, he followed it. After a while, it disappeared. When the ashram manager Perumal Swami returned, Masthan related what had happened. Perumal Swami said, "You should have caught that mongoose and kept it tied down here!" Bhagavan smiled at them, "Can you catch him? Can you tie him down? He is a *siddha purusha*. Arunachala is home to many *siddha purushas*. One of them wanted to come and spend some time here. So, he came here."

During Bhagavan's lifetime some of the serious seekers were living in Palaakothu, a grove of jack fruit trees near the ashram. Sometimes, they would decide to go to other towns to beg and sing praises of Bhagavan. Whenever they went to Bhagavan to get his permission for doing so, Bhagavan would enquire, "Where are you going? Where will you stay?" They would reply, "Bhagavan, we are not concerned about that. We are going to lead the lives of *parivrajakas*, begging for food and staying without shelter." Bhagavan would not be very happy about this until they said, "We shall inform Masthan Swami about where we plan to go." This was because Masthan Swami would then go after them, give them food, or beg for them and make them take rest. They would go to Polur, Desur, Chengam or Gingee, all within a radius of thirty to forty miles. Masthan Swami would follow them or go ahead, wait on them and serve them, saying, "I am the devotee of devotees," in the most genuine way. They would ask him, "Masthan Swami, you serve us so well. What can we do for you?"



Lord Arunachaleswara and Mother Apeethakuchambal

“You can do one thing for me.” he would reply, “Narrate to me without omitting a single word, whatever our master spoke in my absence.” That was the only reward this devotee wanted. Masthan Swami was very humble. Bhagavan himself said that except for Kunju Swami and Viswanatha Swami, no other devotee knew who Masthan Swami was. He preferred to remain unobserved. The words ‘humble, devoted and pious’ aptly describe him.

Once, a robbery took place in the Old Hall at Ramanasramam while Bhagavan, Masthan Swami and some others were present. There was no reaction from Masthan Swami though one *sadhu* actually took a crowbar to hit the robbers. Bhagavan stopped him and said, “We are all *sadhus*, our duty is to keep quiet; the robbers’ duty is to rob. Let us follow our *dharma*. Let them follow theirs.”

When Masthan Swami became ill, he moved from his village to another village because he did not want to give anyone trouble. Rarely did Bhagavan go out of his way for anybody, but in this case Bhagavan called Desurammal and said, “Wherever Masthan Swami goes, be with him and look after him.” I have rarely heard of Bhagavan giving this kind of instruction for the sake of any other devotee. Masthan Swami’s last days were very beautiful. After he dropped his body, Desurammal came to Bhagavan and narrated, “Bhagavan, in his last days we thought he was in delirium. He was saying, ‘Nandi has descended and Siva’s celestial devotees, the *bhutaganas*, are dancing, saying, ‘Masthan! Come, come, come to us.’” She continued, “Perhaps, he was blabbering in his delirium. But Bhagavan, in his last moment he stood up. It was absolutely impossible for him to stand up in that state. He stood up and then with tears in his eyes said, ‘Apeethakuchambal has come to receive me, I am going Desurammal,’ and he dropped dead.”

On hearing this, Bhagavan commented, “Maybe the Universal Mother personally came to take him. All his descriptions tally with the world of Siva described in the *Puranas*. Masthan Swami was an unassuming devotee. He had a wealth of hidden spiritual experiences.” Not only did he extol Masthan Swami, the master thanked Desurammal as well, “It is a matter of gratification that he passed away in your care, under your supervision.” He did not stop there. After this, Bhagavan picked up a copy of the two thousand five hundred year old Tamil book, *Tirumandiram*. In it, are instructions on how a realized being’s dead body should be buried. Bhagavan marked those passages and sketched out how the tomb had to be built and the body entombed with sacred ash, camphor and other ingredients. Following these clear instructions, the *samadhi* was built.

The whole village turned out that day despite a pouring rain. The local temple, even though it was a simple one, gave the temple chariot in which God’s image was carried to carry the corpse of a Muslim. Most Hindus can feel the profundity of this. On that day, the rain was so heavy that the water was up to hip level. Amidst chanting, the body was carried into the *samadhi* built according to Bhagavan’s

instructions. It is said that whoever goes there and offers prayers at the *samadhi* has his wishes granted. Let us offer our salutations to one of the most beautiful devotees of Bhagavan. Masthan Swami was the simplest soul one could meet, but Bhagavan paid the highest tribute to him. He said that, of all the people who came to him, Masthan was the ripest. One look and the fruit fell!

Masthan Swami had a disciple named Sambhandam, from whose notebook these details were gathered. Sambhandam has written a song about his master, Masthan Swami: "Oh Masthan, the liberated sage who lives in Desur, you are ever a good and pure renunciate, who remained forever like a child, who roamed like a ghost, and who lived without a trace of worldly desires. Precious gem, who obtained the sacred grace of *satguru* Ramana adored by all, praise to your fullness and salutations at your holy feet."

From Masthan Swami, we learn the definition of a living guru. We observed that Masthan had almost three explosions of enlightenment. Thrice his Heart opened up with some feelings of doubt. In this process that he underwent, lies a lesson for us too - never get discouraged. Self effort and Self realization are nouns. Self realizing is a verb because it is always happening. Masthan was an example of this. His third process of enlightenment occurred when Bhagavan asked him if he would like to follow the form or formless way of worship. Masthan Swami chose *nirguna* - formless worship. Bhagavan already knew that Apitakuchalambal would come to take him. He asked him to choose worship in form or formlessness and Masthan Swami chose the latter. Yet, his ultimate liberation came from form, which means only one thing: God alone decides. We have the liberty only to make effort, the result is always in the hands of God and it is always for our good.

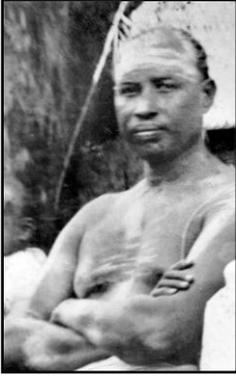


*Arunachaleswara Temple viewed from the Hill*



*Madurai Mariamman temple tank*

## Vilacheri Ranga Iyer



Love has many facets: it is supreme and expressed in many dimensions. A *jnani*, a person of spiritual wisdom, is an inexhaustible repository of love. All his actions reflect the myriad aspects of his unconditional love. In Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's relationships with his devotees, we see many different aspects of this love. With devotees like Vilacheri Ranga Iyer, we see the guru in his aspect of a loving friend.

Even as a toddler, Bhagavan had the traits of nobility - equal sharing, accepting responsibilities and keeping promises. Back home after playing outside, he would bring a few of his playmates to drink milk from his mother. Usually children are jealous, but Bhagavan would go out of his way and bring his friends home, saying, "Come on, let us have milk." What a strong bond of friendship and sharing this

created!

One of these friends, Meenakshi, was just one and a half years old and lived in a neighbouring house. After some years, Meenakshi married but did not have a very happy married life. However, all the while, she kept worshipping Bhagavan in her heart. She never came to see Bhagavan because she could not. In the 1940s, when she was bedridden with age, Bhagavan simply appeared where she was, just as he did for Nayana. Sitting by her bedside, he touched Meenakshi. She was in coma, but regained consciousness at his touch and exclaimed, "My God! My Lord! Ramana, you have come to bless me!" These were her last words. This is the highest example of friendship: though they shared mother's milk way back in infancy and never met after that, Bhagavan remained a loyal friend and remembered Meenakshi in her last days.

Lakshmi was another fortunate friend of Bhagavan who shared milk with him at the age of two. She was eventually widowed and led a life tattered by pain and suffering. Bhagavan's name and recognition had spread by then. One day, Bhagavan was seated in the hall surrounded by well known devotees and scholars. Lakshmi, thin, dark and unrecognizable in her sixties, stood in front of him among two hundred people and demurely asked, "I do not know whether Bhagavan recognizes me." "Why not," Bhagavan replied, "Are you not Lakshmi? Did we not drink milk together?" The master recalled his childhood friend even after sixty years.

Bhagavan personified wisdom and was like a diamond. We value a diamond because its clarity shines from every angle we examine it. Any page taken out of Bhagavan's life and teachings sparkles with this clarity. Many people who pay attention to Bhagavan's teachings, would do well to be aware of Bhagavan's aspect of friendship. His relationship with his devotee-friends is a revealing one. While they viewed him as an enlightened sage, Bhagavan viewed them as his friends from childhood. Two of Bhagavan's prominent devotee-friends had two factors in common. They were steeped in family life and deeply attached to their worldly duties. It is inspirational to see how Bhagavan related to these people. He didn't ask them to give up their family ties and take up a spiritual life - instead he went along with them. But, when they became tired and exhausted with their worldly attachments, he gently drew them to himself. His friends came to him with complaints about their family life. In spite of the mundane nature of their problems, the young Bhagavan listened and solved them as a true friend. He did not just offer them counsel, but actually took upon himself the responsibility of removing every suffering as if they were his own.

Vilacheri Ranga Iyer - also known as Rangan - lived in Tiruchuzhi, Bhagavan's birth place. He was Bhagavan's classmate and childhood friend. Bhagavan's family and Rangan's family moved to Madurai around the same time and the two boys continued to be close friends until Bhagavan ran away to Arunachala. It was 1903 when Rangan first came to know about Bhagavan's whereabouts in Arunachala. However, being tied down by family responsibilities, he could not come and see him immediately. After a few years, when Bhagavan was at Virupaksha cave, he finally paid him a visit. Sri Bhagavan greeted Rangan with an affectionate gesture of friendship - a punch to his shoulder! At first, Rangan could only view Bhagavan as his friend Venkataraman. He demanded, "Hey Venkataraman! Even the evening before you left Madurai, we were playing football. I am supposed to be your closest friend. Why did you not tell me that you were going away the next day?"

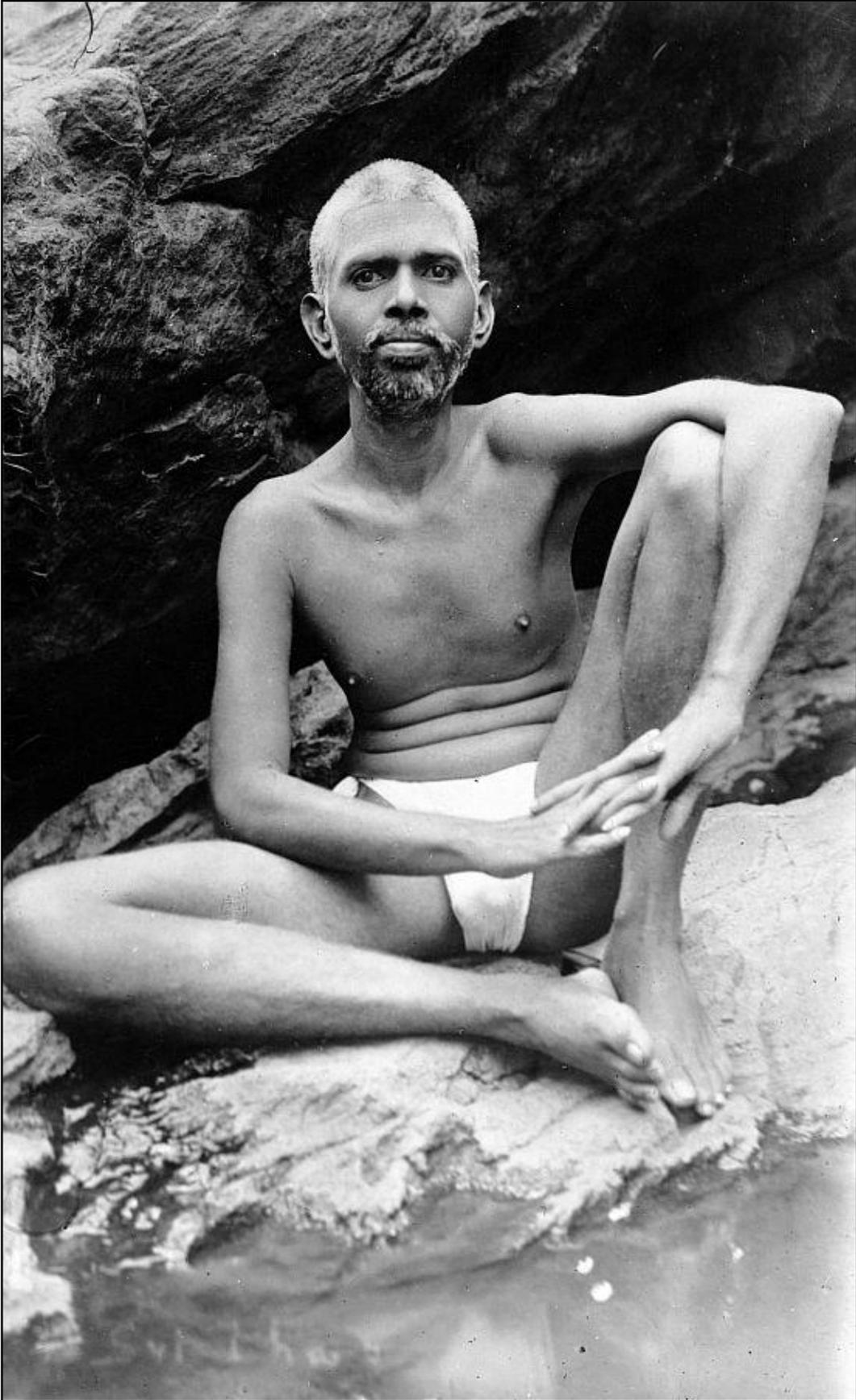
Bhagavan replied, "Ranga, did I travel like a normal traveller with baggage and all that? It was a supreme force which drew me that day to Arunachala. Where was there room for any formalities to be observed?" Bhagavan looked steadily at him and immediately Rangan could see that he was no more just Venkataraman, his friend, his classmate, the football player, or his mate in the swimming pool. Bhagavan had been an excellent swimmer, football player and wrestler. Those who have seen Bhagavan then, say that Bhagavan was a six footer and had a very strong physique. Bhagavan was very well built for a Brahmin boy. Until the age of sixteen, when Bhagavan had the ego-death experience, he never had a headache, stomach ache, or any ailment - so robust was his body. However, after his Pathalalinga experience in Arunachala temple, his body was worn by neglect. Ranga could see this change in Bhagavan. The master had by now become somewhat legendary and a few devotees had already gathered there. Yet, when Rangan came to Virupaksha cave, Bhagavan treated him with the same love.

Their relationship was beautiful: it was that of a fully awakened man, a sage of wisdom, and an ignorant man steeped in family sufferings, not spiritually inclined, but with a deep love for Bhagavan. The master appreciated the depth of that friendship and would sit next to his friend by his bedside. Seeing him tossing and turning, weighed down by his problems, Bhagavan would pat him and ask gently, "Hey Ranga, what is bothering you?" One day, Rangan told him about his troubles. "Have you given enough to your family to live on, while you have come away here?" Bhagavan enquired. Rangan was silent, too embarrassed to admit his inability to provide for his family. "So you have some financial problems," Bhagavan surmised. "Is it enough if you get ten thousand rupees?" This was a huge amount in those days and it surprised Rangan to hear Bhagavan talking about money. Bhagavan pressed on, "Will it solve all your problems if you get ten thousand rupees?" Rangan remained quiet and after a few days took leave of Bhagavan and went to Chennai. He managed to get a sales job, selling trucks and buses. When he got his commission, it was exactly ten thousand rupees!

Once, his son was bitten by a snake and people thought he was dead. He remembered that Bhagavan had given him sacred ash. (Probably, Rangan would have asked Bhagavan for some *prasad* and Bhagavan would have offered him sacred ash - Bhagavan rarely gave anything as *prasad* of his own accord.) He told his grieving wife and relatives, "Do not worry, my Bhagavan, my friend is there." He smeared the sacred ash on his son, while chanting, "Ramana, Ramana, Ramana, Ramana." The boy recovered. Then, there was the incident when his eldest daughter became mentally imbalanced. Her husband could no longer take care of her and left her in Rangan's care. Rangan had one solution for all his problems - Bhagavan! He wrote a letter to him and soon received a reply from the ashram saying, "Your letter was shown to Bhagavan, and he held it for a long time. He asked us to write back that she will be all right." On another occasion, his other daughter fell into a well. When they got her out, she was thought to be dead. Everyone began to weep, except Rangan who had faith in his friend. He had the 'cure all medicine' - Bhagavan's sacred ash. He smeared it on her and sure enough, she recovered.

Once, Rangan's wife Chellammal went to Ramanasramam to have Bhagavan's *darshan*. All the devotees proceeded from the ashram to walk around the hill. Chellammal left the hall with the others, but came back only to go around the Old Hall a few times. Bhagavan was surprised. "How come you returned so quickly?" he asked. She replied, "No, Bhagavan. All the others have left for *giripradakshina* but I could not join them as I have a problem with my back. I thought that I will do *pradakshina* of you instead." Bhagavan arranged for an injection to be given by the ashram doctor, Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer. The doctor advised Chellammal to rest in the guest house. However, she could not resist being in Bhagavan's presence for even a few minutes. She managed to slowly reach Bhagavan's hall, making her husband really worried. Bhagavan just lifted his hand in blessing, and Chellammal was healed of her back pain. It never came back again. This aspect of Bhagavan was unique because he had rarely done these things for anyone else - talk about money, give sacred ash, and raise his hand to heal. He came to these realms for a true friend. What is friendship? It is a deep facet of love. And what is love? Love is wisdom, *jnana*, and Bhagavan was the king of *jnana*. Rangan was very special, indeed.

His friendship with Rangan was not limited to the experiences at Virupaksha cave. At times, while Rangan lay in bed, Bhagavan would wake him up at two in the morning and say, "Come on, let's go for a swim." (Before the present Ramanasramam was built, there was a small pool behind.) Thus, with Rangan, Bhagavan sometimes became Venkataraman again. In their childhood days in Madurai, Bhagavan would tease Rangan with a sharp underwater kick on the thigh.



*Sri Bhagavan at Skandashram*

Being a very strong boy then, Bhagavan's kick would sting Ranga like he was being hit with an iron rod. When they went swimming now, Bhagavan playfully kicked Rangan again. But this time, Rangan held his foot, put it to his eyes and then on his head and said, "Bhagavan, how is it that your leg has become so soft? When you did this to me in Madurai, it used to be like being hit by an iron rod. Now, your foot feels soft like a rose petal." Bhagavan replied, "Is it so Ranga? Maybe spiritual perfection changes even the body."

Once, when Rangan was going around the hill along with Bhagavan, he stepped on a thorn. Bhagavan bent over and removed the thorn himself. Rangan had not noticed Bhagavan's feet until then but after walking for a little while, he saw Bhagavan stepping on a thorn. He cried, "Bhagavan, Bhagavan! There is a thorn in your foot! Please sit down, let me remove it." Bhagavan sat down to oblige his friend. However, when Rangan took a look at Bhagavan's foot, he saw not one, but innumerable thorns. Bhagavan wryly remarked, "Ranga, which thorns are you going to remove - the old ones or the new ones? Let it go." "Bhagavan, how can you walk?" Rangan protested. Bhagavan calmly gestured, "See? When a thorn goes into the foot, just rub it on the earth and everything will be all right."

Rangan once had the opportunity to physically embrace Bhagavan. He was again amazed that the master's skin was silky and soft as a lotus petal. When he had known him in Madurai, his skin had been very rough. So much so, that if he rubbed against somebody else, it would hurt. He asked Bhagavan in wonderment, "Bhagavan, how come the texture of your skin has changed?" Bhagavan responded with the same reply, "Spiritual perfection changes everything." Another time, as a friend, he took the liberty to ask the guru, "Bhagavan, why does your head shake all the time and why do you need a walking stick?" Bhagavan confided in his friend, "Ranga, this is not because of old age. When I came to Tiruvannamalai after the death experience and took shelter at the foot of Arunachala, this head started shaking." "Why?" Rangan enquired, looking puzzled. Bhagavan replied, "Can you imagine a violent, wild, mad elephant entering a small thatched shed? What would happen to the hut is what has happened to this body. It will go to pieces." This is how the immensity of Bhagavan's spiritual experience had affected his body.

Rangan once consulted an astrologer who said he would have insurmountable problems for one year. He wrote to Bhagavan, telling him of what the astrologer had said. Bhagavan at once asked his devotees to write back to Rangan to come and stay with him. This was the only instance we know of where Bhagavan did something like this. The moment Rangan arrived, Bhagavan said, "Do not remove yourself any time from me. Be with me all the time." A friend from Chennai came to stay with them for a couple of days. The day he was supposed to leave, Rangan offered to go with him to the railway station. Bhagavan cautioned him with strict instructions: "Ranga, take him to the station, put him on the train and come straight back to me. Do not go anywhere else, do not spend the night in town - just come back and stay with me." Finally, after a few months had passed, the day came when Bhagavan told Rangan he could go back. When he did so, he found that all his problems had been solved.

Rangan revealed some fascinating stories about Bhagavan's childhood. Bhagavan's father was a lawyer and had stored many important legal papers in a loft at home. Once, when they were playing together, Bhagavan pulled out those papers and made paper boats with them and floated them in the temple pool along with his friends. Though his father loved him very much, he was understandably livid when he found this out. He ordered his wife, Azhagammal, "Undress him, shave his head, make him wear just a loin cloth and drive him out of the house." Many years later, when Rangan met Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave, he recalled, "Venkataraman, do you remember your father predicted your ascetic state many years ago?"

When Bhagavan was at Skandashram, Rangan would visit quite often. One day, he saw Bhagavan was lying inside. So he left the room, closing the door quietly behind him. To his astonishment, he saw Bhagavan talking to somebody outside the room when he had seen him lying down inside the room just a second ago. He ran and opened the room door and saw Bhagavan lying there with closed eyes. He told Bhagavan what he saw. Bhagavan brushed it off humourously, saying, "You should have caught that thief you saw outside and we could have dealt with him!"

Once, Rangan asked, "Bhagavan, you attained enlightenment while you were still in Madurai, isn't it?" Bhagavan replied, "When I was studying, Arunachala entered me most powerfully, though apparently I was unaware. It is his grace that he revealed himself to me. I felt like my whole body was burning. From

that moment on, I was in *samadhi*. Though I continued to play and talk with you, I was in *samadhi* all the while." Bhagavan revealed this only to Rangan.

One day, Rangan noticed that one of Bhagavan's teeth and his gums were very dark. "Bhagavan, you used to have a very healthy body and good teeth," Rangan remarked. Bhagavan said rather nonchalantly, "Yes, but once when I was here alone, a person gave me poison and asked me to swallow it. I did so. It did not kill me, but it destroyed my gums and my teeth." Bhagavan was given poison three times. Strangely, this has happened to many sages. For instance, Yogi Ramsuratkumar too was given poison twice.

It was not just his friendship, but also his teachings that Bhagavan shared with Rangan. Rangan often felt that he could not stand up to the demands of spiritual practice because he was entangled in his worries about his family, money and other worldly problems. Bhagavan would tell him, "Throw your thoughts out. You will enjoy freedom only in a state where there are no thoughts." Unfortunately, Rangan found it difficult to follow this counsel. Feeling that it was impossible for him to progress spiritually, he asked, "How many times will I be born again before I get *jnana*?" Bhagavan gave a beautiful answer: "In reality, there are no factors like time and distance. In one hour, we dream that many days and years have passed by. In a movie, don't you see mere shadows being transformed into vast seas, mountains and buildings? The world is not outside you - all happens within you; like in the movie show. The small world that is in the mind appears as the big world outside." Rangan complained later, "Bhagavan, your grace is not on me." Bhagavan smiled graciously and replied, "Ranga, you are speaking like one who is standing neck deep in the flood waters of the Ganges, complaining that he is thirsty and says that he wants water from the tap of his house to be brought to quench his thirst!"

In Kumbakonam, in South India, there is a huge religious festival that is held every twelve years. Millions of people throng to this festival. Rangan wrote to Bhagavan that he and his entire family were going to attend it. Yet, on the day of the festivities, he unexpectedly paid Bhagavan a visit. Surprised, Bhagavan asked him, "What are you doing here? While everyone else is going to Kumbakonam for the festival, why have you come here?" With the deepest devotion Rangan replied, "I came here because I recognize that the God here is greater than the God at Kumbakonam." After a few days stay, it was time to depart. Rangan was overcome with the pain of separation from Bhagavan and wept bitterly. Bhagavan consoled him: "Ranga, you are imagining that you came from Kumbakonam and are now going to Madurai. In reality, you are where you always were, that is, in the same place - with me. Being with me you are in a state of jubilation, but when you reach the state of the Self by your own effort, you will realize that there is nothing special in me. You will recognize that you too are that Self." Sometimes, Bhagavan would say, "I am where there are no words." To this, Rangan asked, "Then, why do you talk?" "Out of compassion," was the master's reply. Once, Ramaswami Pillai, another devotee, lost a bunch of keys. He came to Bhagavan and said, "I have lost my keys." Bhagavan's replied, "The keys are where they always were. They were never lost; only your memory is lost. *Atma* is always everywhere, the Self is always everywhere. But, due to ignorance, we spend all our time searching for it."

After coming to the present Ramanasramam, Rangan saw many imperfections in the residents there. Remarking on this, he said, "How is it Bhagavan, that your devotees have growing egos even though they are living around you?" Bhagavan replied, "How else can the ego be destroyed? It has to come out of the individual. Therefore, this is only a cleansing process, not a growing process." Another time, Rangan asked Bhagavan, "Why do you always extol this stone filled hill as God?" Bhagavan said, "Do you think Arunachala is merely a heap of boulders? Many holy people and yogis live even now in its caves. Arunachala is God, it is Siva, it is Self, that Self which is your Heart."

As it happens between friends, humorous banter also took place between Rangan and Bhagavan. Once, Rangan asked Bhagavan, "Have you got anything to be achieved in life?" Bhagavan said, "Everything is achieved. There is nothing which is left out." "Which means what, Bhagavan?" his friend enquired. "I can be anything I like." Rangan had come with his grown up daughter. So he said, "Can I bring a girl and get her married to you?" Of course," Bhagavan retorted. Later, Bhagavan smilingly said, "For twenty years, I was afraid whenever Rangan came, whether he would bring a girl and get me married! I was quite literally afraid of Rangan!"

Rangan was soon steeped in troubles again: his wife was sick, his daughters were not married, he had lost his job and he could not pay the mortgage for his house. Bhagavan said, "Come and stay with me."

This time, Bhagavan was very stern, because Rangan kept complaining. "Bhagavan, you are answering others' questions, but you are not even talking to me. How friendly we have been! I am lamenting over my problems, but you do not even show the slightest compassion to me." This was Rangan's constant grouse. Bhagavan remained like a rock. For nearly a month or two, day and night, this continued. Rangan's constant lamentations were met by Bhagavan's stoic silence. One summer night, Rangan could not bear it anymore. He fell at Bhagavan's feet and cried, "I am not going to let go. You have to answer me. I am suffering! Help! You do not even look at my face! Please!" Bhagavan helped him to his feet and pointed to the sky. In Tiruvannamalai, on clear, summer nights, the stars shine brightly like diamonds strewn all over the sky. Bhagavan proceeded to give him a deep insight through the following dialogue:

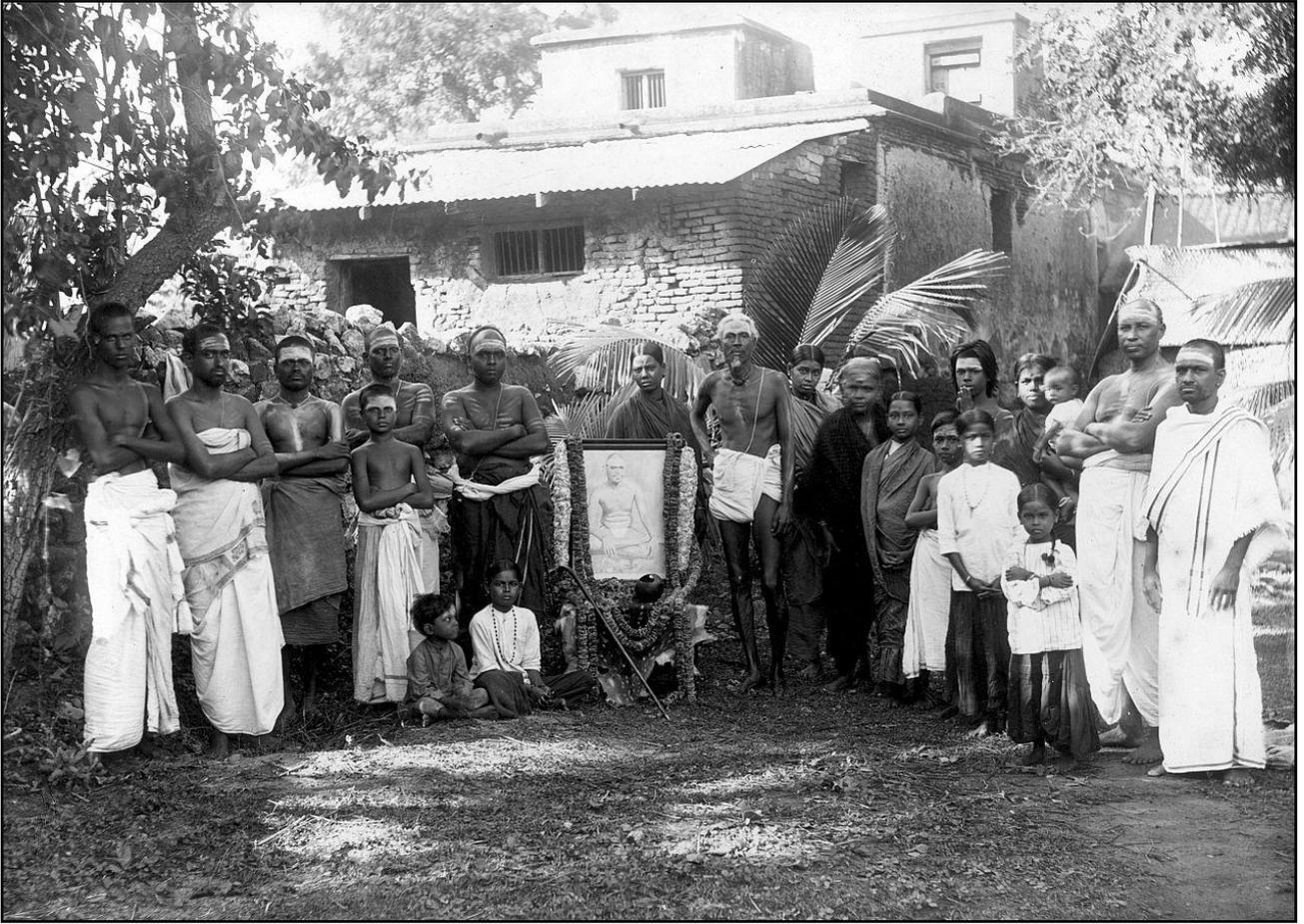
Bhagavan: "Look up, see the smallest star there in our universe. The sun is a large star, and compared to it, our earth is very small. However, compared to that small star there, our sun is very small. Do you understand?" Rangan: "Yes, Bhagavan." "So, when compared to that star, if even the sun is so small, how small is the earth?" "It is very small, Bhagavan." "When compared to that star, how big is Asia?" "It is even smaller, Bhagavan." "When compared to that star, what is India like?" "Bhagavan, it is like a tiny dot." "When compared to that star, how small is Arunachala?" "It is a very tiny dot, Bhagavan." "When compared to that star, how about Ramanasramam?" "It is an even tinier dot, Bhagavan." "Compared to that star what are you?" This proved to be an eye opener for Rangan. "All the time you think about you, the tiniest spot." Bhagavan concluded. This immediately opened the floodgates of Rangan's Heart; he prostrated before Bhagavan and wept profusely. With Bhagavan's grace, he had the ecstasy of enlightenment.

Rangan could not sleep the next day. While he was lying next to Bhagavan, the master asked him to go home. When he went back, he discovered that all his problems had been solved. Bhagavan, the true, compassionate and merciful friend that he was, had saved him. Not only were his worldly troubles dissolved, but he was also blessed with spiritual awakening. When a sage attracts a devotee to himself, in many cases, he attracts the devotee's entire family with his love and wisdom. In Rangan's case too, his mother, wife and brothers were caught in the net of Bhagavan's love and became completely devoted to him.

Rangan had a brother, who had also been Bhagavan's classmate. Though his name was Mani, he was nicknamed 'Pokkiri' Mani ('Pokkiri' means 'rogue' in Tamil). He was a tall, tough man who intimidated people wherever he went. No one dared to pick a fight with him and gave in to his every whim. His mother was deeply devoted to Bhagavan, even though she had seen him only as a child. When she saw Bhagavan later at Virupaksha cave, she was totally transformed. Unfortunately, her son did not share her spiritual aspirations. Once, while travelling to Tirupati, the train passed through Tiruvannamalai. Mani's mother begged him, "Let us get down here and see our Venkataraman!" "I do not believe in all these fake *sadhus*. I won't come," he rasped. He took her to Tirupati, but on the way back she begged again, "I can't proceed further. I must see my Venkataraman!" 'Pokkiri' Mani finally complied. "I will take you there just out of pity. But, do not expect me to prostrate or talk politely before him. I will be the same 'Pokkiri' Mani. I do not respect these 'spiritual' people. In fact, if you do not have any objection, I will just screw his ears, pull him back to Madurai and leave him with his mother. Renouncing at this tender age? What utter nonsense!"

At Virupaksha cave, Rangan's mother prostrated before Bhagavan, while Pokkiri Mani stood there obstinately. Then, Bhagavan just looked at him. The next moment his body was flat in front of Bhagavan! He did not know what hit him. After sometime, he got up and looked at Bhagavan. This time he was a changed man - something had happened! His mother asked, "Bhagavan do you know who he is? Do you recognize him?" "Ah! Why not! He is our Pokkiri Mani," Bhagavan replied. The transformation was so profound that Mani swung to the other extreme: he became a more ardent devotee than Rangan. He took Bhagavan as the Lord himself and had much reverence for him. He had such reverence that he would sometimes stand outside Bhagavan's cave, send somebody inside telling them, "Please tell Bhagavan that Brahma has come." What he meant was, Bhagavan was Siva, the most powerful God, and he was Brahma, a lesser god, but nevertheless a god!

On one occasion, his entire family was initiated into a mantra by the Shankaracharya. However, Mani

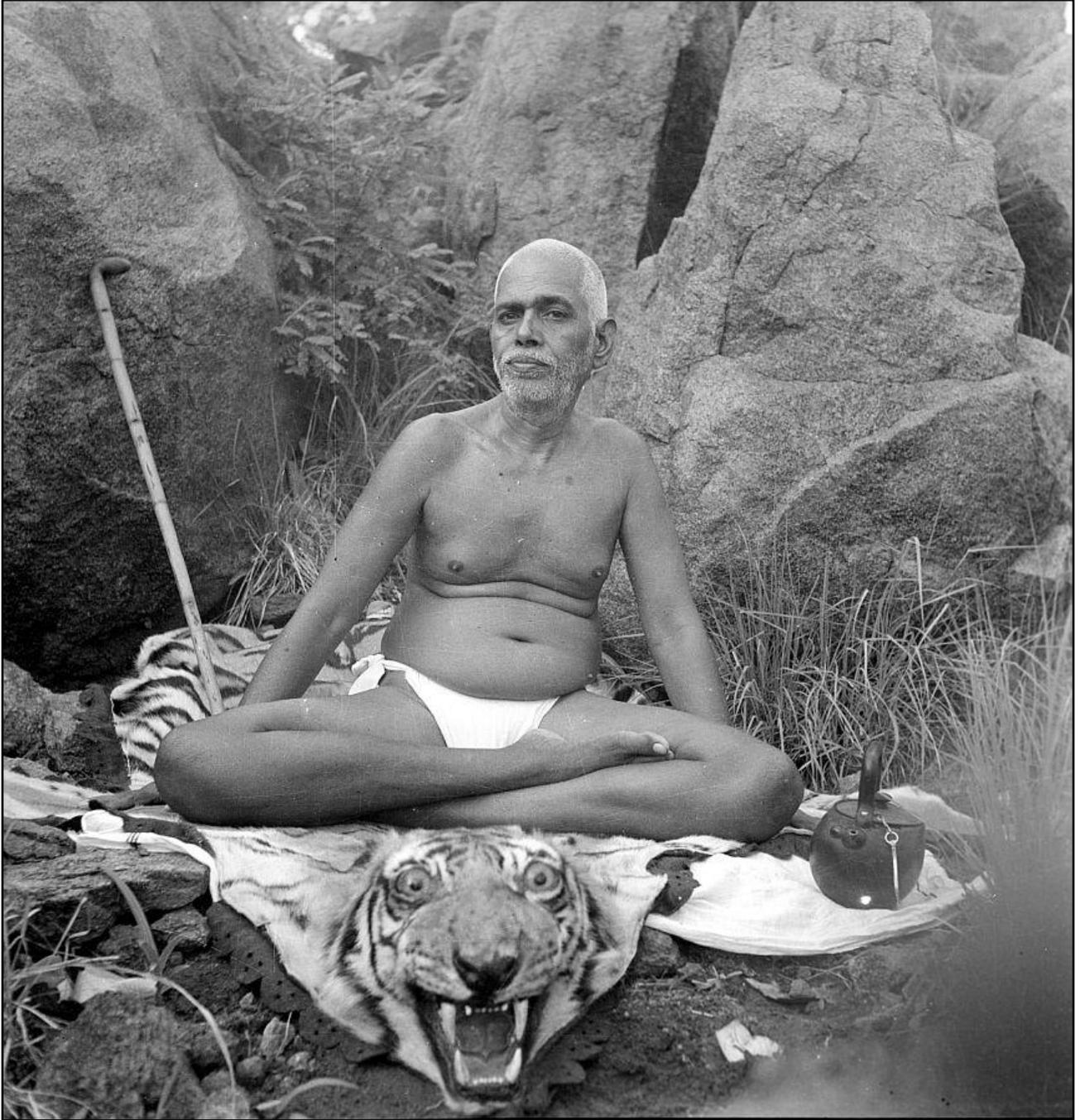


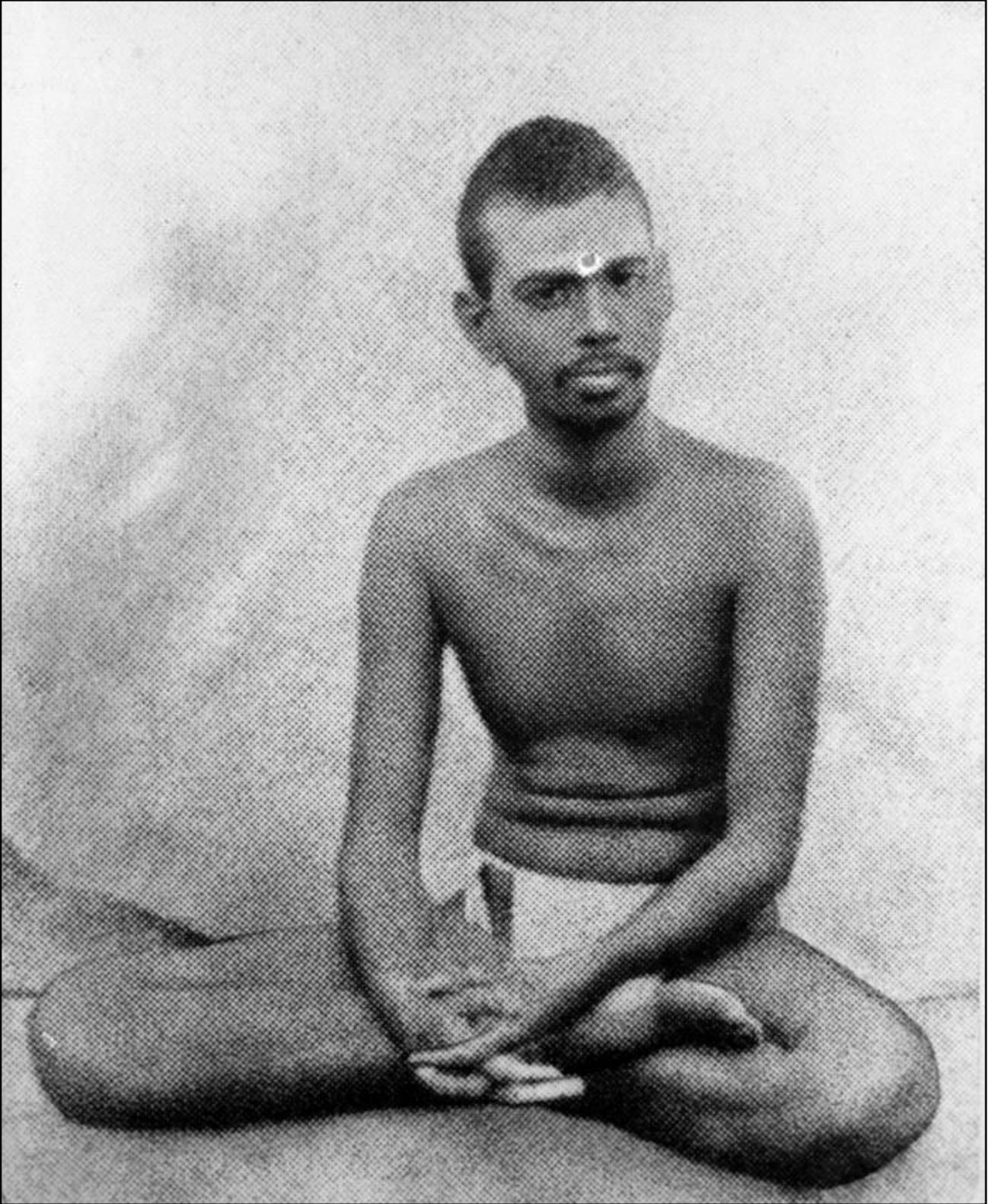
*Rangan Iyer and family celebrating Bhagavan's Jayanthi  
(‘Pokkiri’ Mani is standing next to Sri Bhagavan's picture with his hand on his hip)*

refused to follow them and said, “I will not receive initiation from human beings. You may say that they are holy people. But I will only get initiated by God and my God is Ramana Maharshi.” He caught the next train to Tiruvannamalai and told Bhagavan, “All our family members have gone to the Shankaracharya to be initiated into a mantra. I told them that I will get direct initiation only from Bhagavan and hence I have come to you.” Bhagavan began to laugh. Looking at Bhagavan’s response, Mani said, “This won’t do, I will not go away from here until you give me a mantra.” Bhagavan remained quiet and smiled. But Mani was adamant. Finally, Bhagavan looked at him and said, “Siva, Siva .”

From that moment on, he constantly chanted the holy name, “Siva, Siva ,” and was completely transformed. Though his physical body suffered from tuberculosis, he chanted his mantra every minute of the day. His family members soon observed that this erstwhile rogue now had a face that shone with lustre. When he was about to die, he told them, “I must have my God’s *darshan*.” He was brought to the present Ramanasramam, where he told Bhagavan, “Bhagavan, I am going to leave this body. Therefore, let this body have your blessings.” Bhagavan was always amused with Pokkiri Mani - one never knew what he was going to do next. He got down on the floor and rolled around Bhagavan’s seat three times and said, “Now, the journey of this body is over.” He went home chanting, “Siva, Siva, Siva, Siva.” Just before he dropped his body, he told his grieving wife, “Do not worry. I am not leaving you. I will come back and take you with me after forty days.” His wife died after exactly forty days!

The moment the grace of the guru falls on you, you are transformed for sure. Who could have imagined that Rangan and Pokkiri Mani would be so magically changed!





## Saab Jaan



Another special friend in Bhagavan's life was Saab Jaan, a Muslim classmate of Bhagavan. I had the opportunity to meet him and get a direct experience of his devotion to the master. He lived in Neyveli where my brother Sundaram was working. I was thrilled to receive a message one day from Sundaram, "My co-worker says that his father was with Bhagavan." I immediately left for Neyveli. Saab Jaan studied with Bhagavan from the fourth grade to the sixth grade and also played football with him. He was now ninety years old and blind. However, the day when I was to go to his house, he told his son, "My classmate Venkataraman is coming today. He is coming to see me." When I greeted him, he called me, "Venkataraman," even though his son repeatedly corrected him, saying, "This is Ganesan. Father, this is Ganesan." "Yes Venkataraman, come," Saab Jaan continued. He touched me, embraced me, made me sit next to him and tearfully said, "This is how my friend

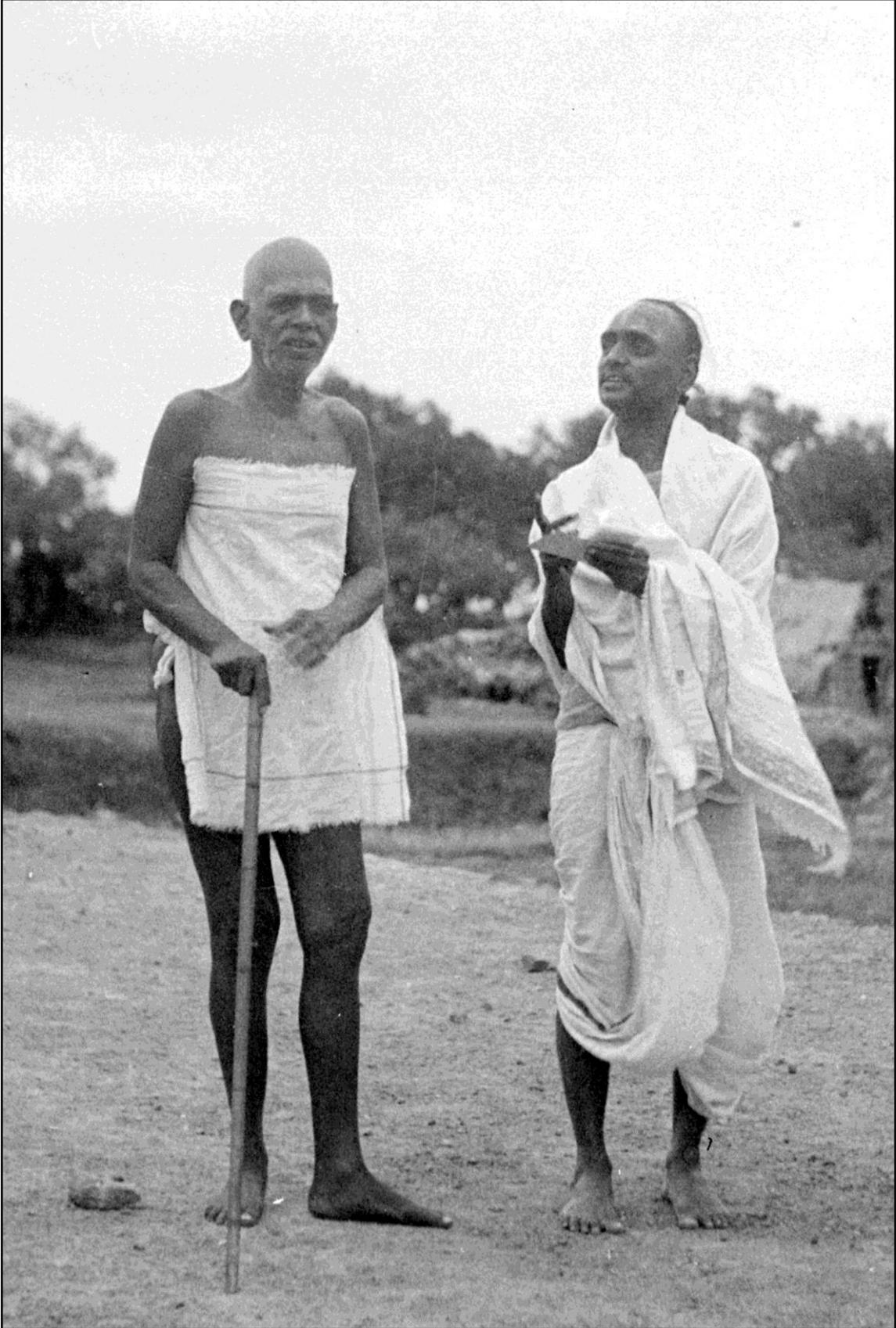
Venkataraman allowed me to touch him, make me sit next to him and feed me. He has come to take me, to bless me. My friend is a true friend."

After prostrating to him, I requested him to tell about his precious classmate. A floodgate of memories opened: "Venkataraman was very learned in Tamil and stood first in the class. He was particularly well versed in aphorisms of Tamil grammar. Our Tamil pundit, John Balakrishna was very fond of him. He was not very good in English. In other subjects, he was above average. In general, he was not much interested in his school books. He was very fond of playing games, particularly football. Even as a student, he was very religious and would go round the Lord Subramania temple at Tirupparankunram with fervent religious ecstasy. He used to take me with him several times and make me go round the temple saying, 'God's creation is alike. God is the same; the apparent differences in gods are created by men.' Because of such a universal outlook implanted in me by him in those days, I could become an ardent devotee of Lord Varadaraja Perumal of Kancheepuram.

When Venkataraman disappeared, it was a shock to me that he did not tell me about running away from his home. Later, I enlisted in the police department. In 1903, in one of the shops at Uttaramerur, I was surprised to see a portrait of Venkataraman, but completely different in appearance. I was anxious to know how the shopkeeper happened to possess the photo. I was told that it was the photo of one Brahmana Swami living in Tiruvannamalai and that the *swami* was in silence then. I was eager to meet my old friend and went to his abode. He was pleased to receive me although he did not speak. He simply nodded his head with a radiant smile. I was thrilled to meet my classmate, who was all the more beautiful and resplendent with a mark of saintliness.

Again, I went to him at the present ashram when I was the Inspector of Police at Tirupathur. At that time, I was very sad as my father had just passed away. Sri Ramana showed me his mother's tomb, which consoled me. I understood from his action, that death was inevitable as far as the body was concerned. After that I went to see him many times and on all occasions he gave special attention to me and introduced me to whoever was present. He used to make me sit by his side while taking food in the dining hall, which I later came to know, was quite unusual for him. From being his friend, I was transformed into being his devotee. The inward change brought about by him is the greatest boon he has showered on me. He manifested his greatness once through a dream in which he showed signs of my wife passing away and in a mysterious way consoled me and prepared me for the shocking incident. It took place very soon and my wife passed away as predicted. But, by the grace of Sri Maharshi, it did not affect me very much."

I was touched by his love and devotion for Bhagavan. I spoke to him only a little, but after I left he told his son, "My Venkataraman is a true friend. He has come to bid me goodbye." Two days later, he passed away.



*Sri Bhagavan - T.K.Sundaresa Iyer*

## T. K. Sundaresa Iyer



Every second we spend hearing or reading about the old devotees of Bhagavan, we naturally walk in their footsteps. And we move closer to that same Arunachala, the Self, in whom they were reabsorbed. Hearing about them from old devotees like Viswanatha Swami, Kunju Swami, Annamalai Swami and others, dissolved me into states of silent ecstasy. To experience this ecstasy, all we need to do is listen to Bhagavan: "Shift your attention from unreality to reality. Unreality is the body-mind complex and the world." Let us shift our attention from the unreality of thoughts to the reality of living in the immortal presence of these glorious devotees.

In the Hindu culture and tradition, we are all familiar with the term 'guru', its meaning and significance. Nevertheless, a few may not recognize the significance of an *upaguru*. We owe equal respect to the *upaguru*, the one who points us to the guru. The *upaguru* may be a book, a tree, or a friend; it does not matter. The *upaguru* and the guru are to be looked upon with equal regard and reverence. We are as indebted to the *upaguru* as we are to the guru.

I happen to have two *upagurus*. My first *upaguru* is my mother. My first memory is of the time when I was one and a half years old. I was in the cradle and my mother was singing a lullaby - a Ramana lullaby. Every time she wanted to make me sleep, she sang that Ramana lullaby. When I close my eyes and pay attention to my Heart, even now, I can hear my mother singing that lullaby. She sowed the seeds of my devotion to my master. When I was a crawling baby, she would seat me in front of Bhagavan. When I grew up, she would tell me every day, "Go and prostrate before Bhagavan. Look at his eyes and receive his blessings." When I began school and shared any episode with her, she would say, "Go and tell Bhagavan." If I got a new pen, my mother would say, "Go and show it to Bhagavan, place it in his hand and receive it back." Until she died, this loving mother's one commandment to me was, "Bhagavan is enough for you. You need nothing else."

My second *upaguru* is my school teacher T. K. Sundaresa Iyer. We used to call him TKS. His humility was exceptional and his simplicity extraordinary. He was my teacher in the sixth grade and paid a lot of attention to me. Every day, he would come to Ramanasramam. He took particular interest in me. He would call out, "Ganesa, come here, a holy man has come. Prostrate before him." Or, "Ganesa come here, a lady saint has come, prostrate before her," or, "This *swamiji* has come from the Shankara Mutt, prostrate before him." He would prostrate and command me do so as well. So much so, that some people in Ramanasramam, would object to this and say, "TKS is a crazy man, and he is making Ganesa crazy too. He makes him prostrate before eccentric people, saying that they are all holy saints and sages." I believe it is the extraordinary grace of my master, Bhagavan, which guided me to TKS, my teacher.

Later, when I grew up, it was he who introduced me to the sages and saints of India, either in the body or without the body. It was he who directed me to Swami Ramdas. TKS had this intuition that Swami Ramdas would guide me. Swami Ramdas saw that his spiritual heir, Mother Krishna Bai, was the one to guide me all my life. There were a few living saints, like Tiruchi Swami; even when he was almost unknown, TKS would make me prostrate before him. When Yogi Ramsuratkumar was absolutely unknown in Tiruvannamalai, he would sit in silence with TKS for hours. One day, TKS pointing at Yogi told me, "Ganesa, here is a *siddha purusha*, give him some food, he is hungry." I ran to the kitchen, brought food and offered it to Yogi.

The only process by which the spiritual Heart opens up is that which my master Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi described, "It is like a lotus bud in which the petals have to be opened. Only when the petals open, can you have spiritual experiences." Reading scriptures or practicing spiritual disciplines cannot

open these petals. No yoga can open it. Only the look, the proximity and the blessings of holy people who have already trodden the path works; just by one look they can make one petal open in your heart. This is not just a euphemism. For me, each petal was opened by contact with a particular master.

Once, I asked TKS, "When we have Bhagavan as our teacher, why are you directing me to saints?" He gave me this beautiful clarification, "Bhagavan is the vast ocean. He is the cosmic consciousness, while all the sages and saintly people are like rivers. Where do you stand Ganesan? I want you to be at least a drop of water. You come to know yourself to be a drop of water only when you recognize the love of the rivers, rivulets and streams that actually take you to the ocean. The ultimate end of all movement of water, our scriptures say, is to reach the vast ocean from where it comes. It is a cycle. To be a part of the ocean you must become conscious that you are already a drop of water. That drop of water has to merge with rivers to reach the ocean. A drop of water will not otherwise be able to be the ocean." This teacher taught me humility, silence, and the greatness of sages and devout people. Without recognizing the greatness of saintly people, humility will not come, because one will be dominated by the worldly mind. It was he who revealed to me for the first time that Arunachala is Ramana and Ramana is Arunachala, the Self.

In the early days of my life as a resident of the Ashram in the 1960s, I realised by dint of my study of Sri Bhagavan's books on 'Self-Enquiry' ; and, thanks to my association with the direct disciples of Sri Bhagavan, the uniqueness of His ' Direct Teaching' of 'Self-Enquiry. However, in my youthful fervour and enthusiasm, I began to think poorly of the efficacy of other less direct paths, such as 'Bhakti ', 'Karma ' and 'Yoga '. Little did it occur to me that Sri Bhagavan Himself has often spoken in praise of such systems, though He always taught that they ultimately merge in 'Self-Enquiry' !

The watchful and caring eyes of my teacher T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, did not miss all this. He came to me, one night, and gave me an Ashram Library book : " The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa " by his 'Eastern and Western Devotees' [ 400 and odd pages ] and insisted that I read it. By the time I had read 50 pages, my whole being bowed down before this Great Saint of Dakshineswar ; and, my spiritual life attained a new dimension ! From then on, Sri Bhagavan's "Vachanamrutam" [ "Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi" ] and Sri Ramakrishna's "Kathamrutam" [ "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" ] became my supreme spiritual guides. During my spiritual Inner Journey, I could meet with nearly thirty Mahatmas, who opened one inner window after the other in me !

I understood the immense wisdom and importance of what Sri Bhagavan once declared : "What I preach is 'devotional enquiry' !" and " The absence of thoughts is ' Bhakti ' . It is also ' Mukti ' . The ' Jnana ' method is said to be ' Vichara ' (Enquiry) . That is nothing but 'Supreme Devotion' ( 'Para Bhakti' ). The difference is in words only." – [ "Talks " No.650 ]



*Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Mother Sarada Devi*

TKS came to Bhagavan in 1903, when Bhagavan was in Virupaksha cave. He was then just twelve years old. One of his relatives told him, "Lord Arunachala himself is seated in human form in Virupaksha

cave.” In those days, Bhagavan was mostly in silence. Rarely would he utter a word or two. When TKS came, Bhagavan, who had his eyes closed, opened them and blessed him with a glance of grace. Later, TKS told me, “It was not a human body that I saw. It was a living statue of burnished gold. Bhagavan looked at me. There were about ten people around him singing Tamil songs when Bhagavan very compassionately looked at me and asked, ‘Won’t you sing a song for me?’ It was a surprise for everyone else because Bhagavan was mostly in silence and rarely asked for anything.” A thrilled TKS sang a song by the saint Sundarar, one of the sixty three saints about whom Bhagavan had read in *Periapuranam*. The translation of the song is, “No other support do I have except your holy feet, oh Lord, by holding onto them I shall win your grace. Ancient sages have sung your praises. Oh Lord! Grant me the boon that my tongue should constantly repeat your sacred name even if my mind strays away.” When TKS finished, Bhagavan was very happy. He said, “Yes, yes, that is what should be done.” This became the first *upadesa* for this twelve year old boy. All his life, until his last moment, he carried with him three or four books containing hundreds of Tamil songs composed by saints and sages. This first *upadesa* was his guiding light.



*T K Sundaresa Iyer immersed in Silence*

Every day, this boy would go to Virupaksha cave and spend time with Bhagavan. In the course of time, he became a teacher. He began to have doubts about his spiritual development. One day, he felt, “Why should I go and be with this saint? I am not improving at all. There is no perceptible change in me.” For three months he did not go to Bhagavan. One night, he woke up and saw his pillow wet with tears. He felt, “Oh, I miss my guru!” Early in the morning, he ran up the hill. Bhagavan, who was now staying in Skandashram, stepped out just then and waited for TKS. When TKS saw Bhagavan in the distance, he could not control his emotions. He ran crying, fell at his feet and drenching them with his tears said, “Bhagavan! Please forgive me!” Bhagavan lifted him up and said, “This is the hundredth day.” Bhagavan, had been counting. “It is hundred days since you came. What happened to you?” TKS replied, “Bhagavan I am sorry I have not come, I have done a foolish thing. But, Bhagavan, I did not see any improvement within me and I did not feel any benefit by coming and sitting with you.” Bhagavan said, “Well, that is all right. You did not see any benefit, but did you not feel the loss?” Recollecting this, TKS told me, “We go to Bhagavan not to have any benefit from him. Without him, we have no life whatsoever. We should not miss the opportunity of having this bliss within our Heart, otherwise we will miss that.”

Because of his meagre income as a school teacher, TKS could afford to take only a small quantity of sugar candy or puffed rice as an offering to Bhagavan. One day, he did not have even that much. Sad, he went empty handed and fell at the feet of Bhagavan, “Bhagavan, I am so unhappy. I do not have any money, so I could not bring you any offering.” Bhagavan smiled and said, “Why, you brought the most important thing. Everything else is unimportant.” TKS was puzzled. “You brought yourself!” declared Bhagavan. The case in point here is that you should never exclude yourself from the spiritual journey. It is very easy to extol the guru and his teachings. In the process, you should never exclude yourself - you are equally important.

As the days passed, he was often filled with doubts. Once, he asked Bhagavan, “What is that one thing Bhagavan, knowing which all doubts are resolved?” Bhagavan replied, “Know the doubter; if the

doubter be held, the doubts will not arise. Recognize for certain that all are *jnanis*, all are realized beings. Only a few are aware of this fact. Therefore, doubts arise. Doubts must be uprooted. This means, that the doubter must be uprooted. When the doubter ceases to exist, no doubts will rise. Here, the doubter means the mind.” TKS asked, “What is the method, Bhagavan?” Bhagavan answered sharply, “Enquire ‘Who am I?’ This investigation alone will remove and uproot the doubter mind and thus establish one in the Self, the transcendental state.”

On another occasion, TKS had another doubt. He was a pundit, a traditional man, who had read many scriptures. Thus, the six *chakras*, the psychic centres, *kundalini* and so on, fascinated him. He asked Bhagavan about them and Bhagavan replied, “The Self alone is to be realized. *Kundalini shakti*, visions of God, occult powers and their spell binding displays are all in the Self. Those who speak of these and indulge in these have not realized the Self. Self is in the Heart and is the Heart itself. All other forms of manifestations are in the brain. The brain itself gets its power from the Heart. Remaining in the Heart is realizing the Self. Instead of doing that, to be attracted by brain oriented forms of disciplines and methods is a sheer waste of time. Is it not foolish to hold on to so many efforts and so many disciplines that are said to be necessary for eradicating the non-existent ignorance?”

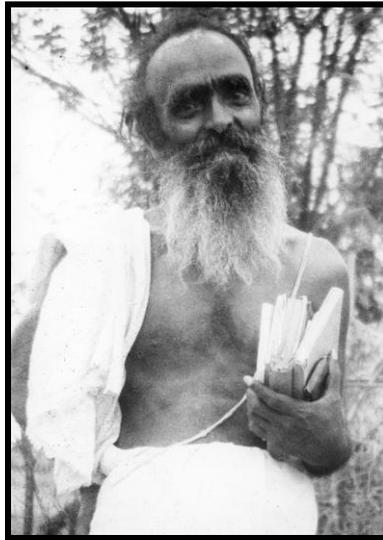
In 1920, Bhagavan introduced TKS to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni who was then living in the Mango Tree cave. Every day, TKS would visit Bhagavan, so Bhagavan told him, “Go to Nayana. Learn the *Rig Veda* and other scriptures.” When TKS met Nayana, he was spellbound by his brilliance, his aura and his tremendous achievements in traditional knowledge. He submitted himself as a student and started learning the scriptures. Every day, both Nayana and he would go to Bhagavan, and Bhagavan would give them guidance. But TKS at that tender age was overwhelmed by the magnitude of Nayana’s erudition. One day, he expressed this, but Nayana corrected him. He said, “Sundaresa, without Sri Bhagavan’s grace the intricacies of the scriptures are beyond one’s power of understanding. One word from Bhagavan makes everything clear.” He then understood what tremendous respect Nayana had for Bhagavan.

We saw three events in the chapter on Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni - the extraordinary experience of the rising of his *kundalini*, the remarkable manner in which *Uma Sahasram* was completed and Bhagavan declaring to Nayana that the sun, moon and stars were going around his waist. TKS had the golden opportunity of being present on all the three occasions. He affirmed to me that they were the rarest gifts showered on him for being close to Nayana.

Kavyakantha had about two hundred odd scholarly devotees. To all of them he said, “From now on, I am not your guru; Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is.” Sometime after Bhagavan had come down from the Hill to the present ashram, these scholars, well placed in the world, felt that the future of Ramanasramam was looking bright. They felt that if Nayana ultimately became the manager of Ramanasramam it would augur well for the ashram’s future. There was another group who wanted Bhagavan’s brother Niranjanananda Swami to become the manager. One day, Nayana and his devotees went to the hall and Nayana’s devotees appealed to Bhagavan, “Bhagavan, we all feel that Nayana should become the manager.” Bhagavan, after a long silence, instead of replying to the devotees, turned to Nayana, “Nayana, why do you get involved in such things? Let him take over and suffer.” In Tamil, he used the words ‘*avane kattindu azhattum*,’ meaning, ‘let him hug this and cry.’ Nayana prostrated before Bhagavan, got up and declared, “Bhagavan, from now on, Chinna Swami will be the manager.”

When he took leave, the other devotees also came out. Nayana told TKS, “From today, all of us must give unconditional support to Chinna Swami to manage the ashram.” TKS took this very seriously. By that time, Nayana had already started a huge society with over ten thousand members to work for the independence of India. They intended to chant mantras all over India. TKS was the general secretary and Nayana was its president. But when Nayana said, “You will extend full support to Chinna Swami,” TKS started working in the ashram office. A deeply spiritual man and a scholar in the *Vedas*, TKS was also a pundit. He knew three languages - Sanskrit, Tamil and English. He was therefore entrusted with the ashram correspondence. He took that opportunity to be in close contact with Bhagavan. He would take every spiritual seeker’s letter that came to Bhagavan and ask for his suggestions. Bhagavan would explain what was required and he would write it, come back again and show it to Bhagavan for his approval before sending the reply.

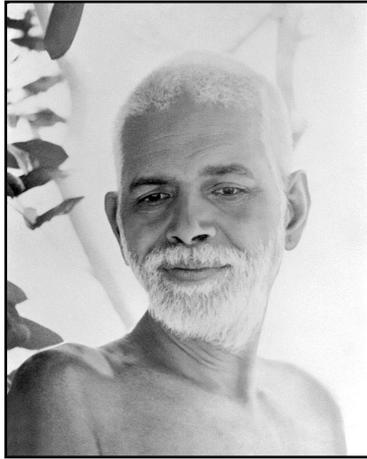
Bhagavan had already written many verses and teachings like *Who am I?* and *Self Enquiry*. Some of the scholarly devotees wanted everything to be collected and brought out as the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. They gathered all the Tamil works of Bhagavan and sent it to the press. But a preface still needed to be written. Muruganar and Natanananda were both Tamil scholars, but they backed out saying, “How are we qualified to write a preface to Bhagavan’s original writings?” There was much hesitation in the ashram and the preface was thus pending. One day, TKS came very late at night from the town. When he entered the hall, Bhagavan told him, “Why don’t you write the preface yourself?” He was shocked but he knew that whatever came out from Bhagavan was the truth and a commandment. He said, “Bhagavan, how can I write? But with your grace, what is not possible?” Bhagavan said, “Write it. It will come all right.” He sat down, looked at Bhagavan and the writing flowed. When he completed it, he placed it at Bhagavan’s holy feet and Bhagavan read it. Since Bhagavan had read it, TKS started to leave. But Bhagavan called him back, “Come. Why have you said ‘It is hoped’? Why not say, ‘It is certain’?” So saying, he effected one change in the last sentence of the preface: “It is hoped that Sri Bhagavan’s grace, in the form of these collected works, will give liberation and bliss to all seekers who take these collected works into their Heart.” Bhagavan changed ‘It is hoped’ to ‘It is certain’. The Tamil word was ‘*nambugiren*’, ‘it is hoped’. Bhagavan changed it into ‘*thinnam*’. ‘*Thinnam*’ in Tamil means ‘absolutely certain’. After Bhagavan’s correction, the preface ended with this assurance: “It is absolutely certain that Sri Bhagavan’s grace in the form of these collected works, will give liberation and bliss to all seekers who take these collected works into their Heart.” (To this day, there are many who are being guided by this book, and many whose life breath is the collected works of Bhagavan, either in the original Tamil or in translations. My friend, philosopher and guide, Arthur Osborne, used to swear by *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*.)



“My teacher” TKS holding ‘Nool Thirattu’

The collected works were originally only in Tamil. Arthur Osborne felt that it should be translated into English and made available all over the world. He had already found a publisher in London. Only a few verses had been translated into English. There was much work to be done but nobody was assisting Arthur Osborne. It was my teacher, TKS, who sat along with Arthur Osborne and helped him. When Osborne went home, TKS would dictate to me and I would type it and give it later to Osborne. Thus, it was left to my great good fortune to type out the entire text of this most sacred work.

My teacher TKS was also a very good poet in composing Tamil verses. He wrote six verses glorifying *satguru* Ramana. When he placed these poems at the feet of Bhagavan, again Bhagavan corrected only one word in verse 5. Instead of “whose grace is flowing, blessing all,” he changed it to “whose grace is directed, blessing all.” TKS explained to me that grace is the divine power always available to all. In the relationship between the teacher and the taught, it is the guru who helps channelise the grace to be imbibed by the disciple. The change that Bhagavan made was from ‘*payum*’ (‘is flowing’)



to 'paichchum' ('is directed'). What a subtle yet sublime transformation!

In 1963, there was a German mystic, Lucy Cornelsson, who studied Tamil while staying in Germany, because she wanted to translate Bhagavan's collected works from original Tamil to German. She translated it and wanted a verification of it. So, she came to the ashram but nobody helped her. Again, it was TKS who told me, "She is a mystic, prostrate before her." (Lucy became Lucy Ma for me.) The collected works in German were verified and perfected with the help of TKS. Though an erudite scholar, he was the epitome of simplicity. Many people did not know about TKS because he was so unobtrusive.

Once, when I was typing a long passage dictated by TKS in the office, Duncan Greenlees, a westerner devoted to Bhagavan's teaching came in. "What are you typing? May I read it?" I said, "Yes, of course." It was a beautiful passage of Bhagavan's teachings. He said, "Can you tell me who wrote this?" I replied, "My teacher TKS." "Do you have any more of his writings?" he asked. I replied, "I have got six or seven files." Duncan Greenlees pleaded with me, "Will you please give me these files? I will take them and edit them." This much acclaimed book that Duncan Greenlees edited so ably is *At the Feet of Bhagavan*. When Greenlees brought the manuscript, he asked me, "What title can we give it?" I suggested that it be called *At the Feet of Bhagavan*. TKS was very happy and said, "Go and place it at the feet of Bhagavan." I took the manuscript to Bhagavan's shrine.

I spent hours with TKS. Most of the time, he would be silent. He would take me around the hill or up the hill to Skandashram. Sometimes, when he spoke, he would say things of tremendous interest. He once told me, "Ganesan, when I was with Bhagavan he once told me, 'Siddha purushas living in Tiruvannamalai, India, and elsewhere in the world, all come to Arunachala to go around the hill. Sometimes, they come in the form of light.'" Bhagavan told TKS and some others that he had seen this light. He continued, "If one has true devotion, one can see the light." TKS told me, "Many of us old devotees have seen that light moving around Arunachala. Have a longing, Ganesa, but do not expect, do not put a time frame, do not even say it must be seen and do not have arrogance. Have complete, prayerful humility and it will be revealed."

I would like to share with you that I have seen this light not once, but three times. The first time I was alone and the second time I was with a Japanese group. I was sharing with them that this light could be seen; they sincerely asked, "Can we also see it?" I looked and it was there. All of them saw it and all of them prostrated before it. The third time was in 2003. It was around 6.30 p.m. when I was going round Arunachala with a group of devotees from Madurai (around 60 of them), Nochur Venkataraman and a few others around the hill. As we were approaching the *pancha-mukha* darshan spot, we decided to sit on a rock. As we sat, the Madurai devotees realized that it was getting late for dinner at the ashram. Saying so, they left us. I suddenly remembered that T.R. Ramachandran, a close friend of mine, used to chant the Shivopasana Mantra (*....sadyo jaatam prapadyaami sadyo jaataaya vai namo namah...*), whenever we sat on this rock. I asked Nochur Venkataraman whether he could chant that. He chanted the mantra, while we sat there listening to it. Soon after the chant, we prostrated and as we got up, we all saw the light.

One day, some Vedic scholars along with TKS, were going around the hill chanting the *Sama Veda*. They suddenly saw four or five tigers seated in the middle of the road. Petrified, they stopped chanting. For a long time, the tigers looked at them and then got up and disappeared into the forest. Bhagavan was at Skandashram. TKS ran to him and told him what had occurred. Bhagavan said, "Why did you stop chanting the *Vedas*? They were *siddha purushas*, eager to listen to your chants. You should have continued chanting the *Vedas*."

TKS told me that inside the mystical Arunachala, there are vast realms. He said that Bhagavan had shared this vision with him. Thrice, Bhagavan had visions of being inside the hill. TKS said he had also had that experience. I would like to reveal that I have also had this experience of being inside the hill. Have faith, trust the mystery, have devotion, be humble, and surrender. If a person is elder to you even by a day, prostrate to him or to her and then humility will come, and you will enjoy this spiritual freedom. Prostrating to another person is not enslavement. It is freedom, blissful spiritual freedom. However, it is more important to have 'Arunachala' in our Heart - 'agamey ninaippavar' (அகமே நினைப்பவர்).

Bhagavan was very kind. Once, Chinna Swami had a quarrel with TKS because he had gone and prostrated before a saintly lady. "When Bhagavan is here, why did you go and prostrate before someone else?" shouted Chinna Swami. TKS was upset and so did not have his food. Early next morning, when he arrived, Bhagavan was making *idlis* in the kitchen and saw his disturbed face. He said, "Come on, sit down and eat some *idlis*." TKS replied, "Bhagavan, I have to rush to the school, I have classes." "Hey, the cat is out of the bag! Today is Sunday, which classes are you teaching? Come on, sit down." Bhagavan brought a leaf and put it there. "I have made some special *sambar*." Bhagavan sat next to him and piled up the *idlis*. TKS later said, "I have never eaten so many *idlis* in my life!"

In his earlier days at Ramanasramam, Bhagavan would dry his towel on a clothes line at the farther end of the hall. There was a sparrow's nest with three or four eggs there. One day, while Bhagavan was pulling out the towel, one egg fell down and cracked. Bhagavan was taken aback. He told the attendant, "Look, look! See what I have done today!" He took it up and looking at it tenderly, exclaimed, "Oh, the poor mother will be so sorrow stricken; perhaps even angry with me for causing the destruction of her expected little one! Can the cracked eggshell be pieced together again? Let us try!" He then put a wet cloth around the egg and said, "I hope Arunachala will save me from this sin." He put it back and every few hours he would come and change the wet cloth. After seven days, he saw that the crack had healed and said, "Look! What a wonder! The crack has closed, and so the mother will be happy and will hatch her egg. Arunachala has freed me from the sin of causing the loss of a life!" One fine morning, the egg hatched and the little young one came out. With a gleeful face, Bhagavan took the chick in his hand, caressed it with his lips, stroked it with his soft hands and passed it on for all to admire.

Once, TKS narrated to me a special dimension in Bhagavan's solicitude: "Bhagavan's solicitude towards the wives of those serious seekers who chose to be with Bhagavan at Arunachala and serve him, was extraordinary." He referred to many incidents that took place in the lives of Muruganar's wife, sub-registrar Narayana Iyer's wife and my mother Nagalakshmi. In that light, he unfolded a page from his life's book. TKS had lost his wife, leaving him with a son. This plunged him deeply into spiritual striving. But, his elder relatives pressurized him to marry again. TKS stoutly refused. One day, unable to deal with their continued pressure, he went to Bhagavan's presence. Bhagavan was up on the hill. Looking at him, Bhagavan said, "Allow life to take its own course. Do not resist. All will be well at the end." He further added, "When one is directly under the sun, can darkness ever creep in?" TKS agreed to marry again. His second wife bore him two children. Bhagavan was extraordinarily kind to TKS's second wife, paying special attention to her whenever she happened to be in his presence. TKS told me that many of the scholar devotees and affluent devotees ignored him. He reasoned it out by saying, "Perhaps, their dislike was due to my being very poor and not possessing any academic qualifications. They used to openly insult me saying, 'After all, you are only a school teacher!'" When I became morose and sad on hearing this, TKS patted me on my back and said, "Bhagavan always treated me with extraordinary love, affection and care. Can there be a more fulfilling treatment meted out to me than Bhagavan's solicitude?"

In 1933, at the age of thirty six, TKS still felt incomplete. So he prayed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, show me your real form." Bhagavan said, "Sit down there," and directed his glance of grace. TKS's Heart opened, and he closed his eyes in ecstasy. Bhagavan told him, "Whatever you want to see, see now." TKS's chosen form of God was Rama, so he asked to see Rama. For two hours, he had the *darshan* of

Rama crowned, seated on the throne with his wife Sita, surrounded by his brothers and with Hanuman, the monkey devotee, at his holy feet. When he came out of ecstasy, Bhagavan asked, "What did you see?" TKS shared the description of what he had seen. Bhagavan said, "Go and bring *Dakshinamoorthy Ashtottaram*." (*Ashtottaram* means one hundred and eight names). "Read the fifth verse. In it, the name given to Dakshinamoorthy is '*Yoga Pattabhiramaya Namaha*', which means Dakshinamoorthy is Rama. It is said that Rama's capital city, Ayodhya, has eight corners and nine gates. Tiruvannamalai has eight corners and nine gates; Tiruvannamalai is Ayodhya and Rama is Arunachala (Dakshinamoorthy)." TKS said, "I wanted a God, a scripture and a *devata* (a god in form) to be worshipped. Bhagavan became my universal God, his collected works became my scriptures and Rama was my *devata*; Bhagavan proved that he was Rama by giving me Rama *darshan*."

Once, I asked him, "How did you compose the mantra *Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*?" TKS was kind enough to share the following: "From my early childhood, I was deeply devoted to Lord Krishna. Generations after generations of our family were initiated into the mantra, '*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*.' Vasudeva is another name for Sri Krishna. Hence, I read with great interest and delight the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam*. I longed to have the vision of Sri Krishna. One day, a line from the *Bhagavad Gita* where Lord Krishna declares, "*Jnani tu atmaiva mey matam...*" meaning, 'The *jnani* is my own Self', went deep into my heart. I thought, while I have at hand Bhagavan Ramana, who is himself Vasudeva, why should I worship and long to have the vision of Sri Krishna separately? Thus, I contemplated: 'I want one single mantra, a single God and a single scripture, so that there is no conflict of loyalties.' Suddenly, it dawned within my heart, '*Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*'. My Heart continued resounding with it without a gap. I ran to Bhagavan and told him of the advent of the sacred mantra. He bestowed the mantra with his full approval. Later, I counted the syllables in the new mantra. It was twelve. The Vasudeva mantra too, contained twelve syllables. I was delighted. Coming to know of Bhagavan's full approval of the mantra, the ashram management accepted it so fully that they even altered the original ashram crest so that beneath the symbol of 'Om' the words '*Sri Ramanasramam*' was replaced with '*Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*'."

Before coming and settling down permanently at the ashram, I had worked in two different firms. I had divided my first month's salary from each firm into two and sent it to my two *upagurus* - my mother and my teacher, TKS. Those were the last days of my revered teacher. He was very seriously ill and bed ridden in a house opposite the ashram. I was visiting him every day. It was his last day. He said, "Ganesa! These people who look after me are very poor people. So, please utilize the amount in this envelope for my funeral expenses. I want you to carry my body, chanting 'Arunachala Siva' all the way to the cremation ground."

Though I was crying all the time, I asked him, "How did you get so much money?" He smiled graciously, and said, "You remember, twice you had sent me your first month's salary for my daily expenses. I did not spend it; they were so dear to my heart. Now, you yourself can spend it on my last journey - back to Arunachala!" He gave me a pat on my head and said, "This is my blessing to you! See! I am giving you my all!" Can anything else in the world equal the beauty and splendour of that single touch of wisdom?!

"Oh Lord! Grant me the boon that my tongue should constantly repeat your sacred name even if my mind strays away".



Bhagavan inside the old Mother's shrine



*Bhagavan at Skandashram where Shastri Mama first met Him*

## Venkatesa Shastri



Legendary masters, right from the Vedic *rishis* to Bhagavan, left their teachings so that we regain the natural state of being that they are established in. The fact is that whoever listens to or reads the teaching should intend to be that - not through an act of change, but by just 'being'. A significant teaching in *Who am I?* is detachment or desirelessness. This is not different from wisdom. Desirelessness is refraining from turning the mind outwards to any object. Wisdom means the appearance of no object. In other words, not seeking anything other than the Self is detachment or desirelessness; not leaving the Self is wisdom.

One of Bhagavan's ardent devotees, a simple and humble man, practiced these two - absolute detachment and shining wisdom - in a very natural and remarkable way. He was none other than Venkatesa Shastri, or Shastri Mama as we fondly called him. (*Shashtra* means scriptures and one who has mastered the *Vedas* is given the surname

Shastri. *Mama* means uncle in Tamil.) He lived in the world, but was untouched by it. Soaked in wisdom at all times, he showed that there is no contradiction between work and wisdom.

Shastri Mama was Bhagavan's distant cousin. His mother passed away when he was very young and his father married a second time. Though his stepmother often tortured and ill treated him, he suffered her atrocities silently. When he was three years old, she twisted his hand and thrust it into the kitchen fire. His fingers were permanently deformed, but he bore the scar of the horrific incident uncomplainingly. His father, unable to mend his wife's ways, took him further south to Kochi in Kerala where he thought his son would be happier. He enrolled him in a residential school of ayurveda which also taught astrology. Fortunately, the mentor of that school was the head of the royal family of Kochi, an impressive astrologer and ayurvedic doctor himself.

Shastri Mama was exceptionally brilliant. Within a year, he mastered thousands of Sanskrit verses which normally took over fifteen years to learn. The teacher was so impressed by this boy's genius that he decided to mentor him personally. He took his protégé back with him to his palace and told him, "Ordinary astrology is not your subject. I am going to teach you *prashna*, the highest form of astrology." The literal meaning of the word *prashna* is question. In ordinary astrology, when a child is born, a horoscope is cast based on the planetary alignments at the time of birth. The horoscope is referred to throughout the child's life and his or her future is predicted through an intellectual interpretation of planetary alignments in the horoscope. On the other hand, a person who has mastered *prashna* does not need the horoscope; instead, he mentally draws the birth chart based on mathematical calculations using the time of questioning, the name, the direction which the questioner is facing, the place from where he hails, his father's name, his mother's name, the first letter of the sentence of the question, the first word of the question, etc. He then taps into his well of higher intuitive knowledge and waits for an answer. The predictions come from within. Needless to say, they are accurate because they come from the intuition, inner understanding.

When Shastri Mama completed his course, he was obliged, as per Hindu custom to give his teacher *guru dakshina* - an offering made in gratitude for knowledge imparted. The teacher was very proud of him but knew that Venkatesa Shastri was too poor to give him anything. He said, "I am going to ask you for *guru dakshina*." "Whatever you want, my master, please let me know," his disciple replied. The teacher gave him a picture of Lord Subramania, the second son of Lord Siva. Subramania is the god of wisdom, silence and absolute detachment. "Worship him and he will guide you all your life. This is the *guru dakshina* I want from you," the teacher said. Shastri Mama took his teacher's gift as his blessings

and went back to his village. He became a renowned and prosperous astrologer whose predictions were always accurate.

One day, one of his uncles brought him a picture of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Shastri Mama placed the picture with reverence in his *pooja* room, next to Lord Subramania's picture. One morning, when meditating, he opened his eyes and saw the picture of Bhagavan transforming into the Lord's picture and the Lord's picture turning into Bhagavan's image. Unsure whether it was a dream or vision, he observed this transfiguration for nearly half an hour. He felt that perhaps his teacher had wanted him to have Lord Subramania in human form to be his guide all his life. So, in 1917, he came to visit Bhagavan at Skandashram. As soon as he arrived, Mother Azhagammal recognized him as her relative. Bhagavan too, concurred, "Yes, I know, he is Subbu's son." Before meeting Bhagavan, most of his devotees had only heard his name and had no idea of his spiritual stature. Therefore, none had any preconceived notions of his significance. But, all realized it in their first meeting with him. Similarly, when Shastri Mama saw Bhagavan, he realized he had found his Lord and guru - the Lord of renunciation, wisdom and silence - even though Bhagavan had not yet spoken a single word to him.

He was convinced that *prashna*, his chosen branch of astrology, was the most perfect science. He mustered courage, approached Bhagavan and in all humility, yet with full conviction, put the following question: "Bhagavan! Is not astrology the best and most accurate of all sciences?" Bhagavan looked at him intently for some time. Slowly, but firmly, he replied, "The science of the Self is superior to all other sciences." Shastri Mama was at the height of his career and every prediction of his was very handsomely rewarded. He was thus earning a lot of money, amassing wealth. These conclusive words from the master sowed the seed of renunciation in him. He felt it was futile to live in an ever changing world and decided to live with his master. But, according to Hindu custom, if an elderly relative is present, one must take guidance from him or her. So, he went to Bhagavan's mother and said, "I want to renounce the world and stay with Bhagavan." "How can you do that?" she exclaimed. "We have decided on a girl for you right from your childhood and she is waiting for you. You must honour this commitment and marry her. How can you come away here?" Shastri Mama glanced at Bhagavan. Bhagavan gave a smile of approval. Shastri Mama went back to his village, married the girl - her name was Visalakshi, and she was called Sala. He then lived very happily for a few years as a successful astrologer.

The following is an example of his mastery of *prashna*: After his marriage, he spent much of his time in his *pooja* room. Once, when he had a visitor, Sala informed him, "Nagappa Chettiar has come." Shastri Mama replied without even getting up, "He has lost his diamond ring and suspects that his servant has stolen it. Tell him he should not suspect anyone. While Chettiar was washing his clothes in his courtyard, his diamond ring slipped from his finger and now lies underneath the banana tree near the well." The prediction proved to be absolutely accurate. This was the precision with which he worked. Not surprisingly, even the police came to him for assistance in tracking down criminals!

After some time, a son was born to them. He drew his son's horoscope and to his terrible shock realized that his son was destined to die in his teenage. The horoscope also said that he would not have another son. He did not tell his wife this, but overcome with grief, he sought refuge in Bhagavan at Ramanasramam. While Bhagavan was going up the hill, Shastri Mama followed him and told him about his son's horoscope and its dire prediction. After walking some distance, Bhagavan turned to him and said, "You have been in Kerala, in the far south. In Kochi, you must have noticed plenty of jackfruits." A jackfruit is a tropical fruit bigger than a watermelon and its uniqueness lies in the fact that the fruit comes out of the trunk of the tree, and not from the branches. At the time of bearing fruit, many shoots spring out, but only a few survive while the rest wither and drop away. The tree finally bears only a few fruits. Bhagavan continued, "To give room for the bigger and healthier fruits, the other shoots, almost fifty or sixty of them around one big fruit, drop off."

Shastri Mama immediately understood that Bhagavan was not going to rescue his son. He prostrated before Bhagavan and went back to his village. Before leaving, he held Bhagavan's feet, wept and said, "What is the refuge for me? Give me courage!" Bhagavan then quoted the verse *Hridaya kuhara madhye* which he had composed in Virupaksha cave: "In the centre of the Heart-cave, there shines alone the one Brahman (pure awareness) as the 'I', the Self. Reach the Heart by diving deep in quest of the Self, or by controlling the mind with the breath, and stay established in the Self." Hearing this, Shastri Mama was established in the complete trust and faith that he had two courses which were in

fact complementary - to do Self Enquiry and to completely surrender. To do Self Enquiry one must completely surrender and to surrender one must do Self Enquiry.

On his return, he told Sala and his son, "I have decided to go and live with my master, but I will not leave you in the lurch. I will earn enough for both of you to live comfortably. I will provide for you and then go. My decision is final." His wife, though a simple, illiterate villager, gave a prudent reply, "If you are going to a place, giving up all of this, then that world must be better than this. Why don't you take me along with you? Why do you want to leave me in a lesser place? Shastri Mama asked in surprise, "But what about our son? I thought you will want to stay here and bring him up." To this, his wife replied, "I will leave him with my younger brother and come with you." In Hindu families, relatives gladly step in to help and such responsibilities are not considered burdens.

Shastri Mama warned her: "I am going there as a beggar. I will not pursue my profession in astrology and won't earn money. I am going to live with my master, completely without desire, absolutely detached and aspiring for wisdom. I will do whatever my master says and don't even know how I'm going to get food or shelter." Resolute, she insisted, "Whether you experience pain or pleasure, success or failure, achievement or failure, I'd like to share it with you." According to Hindu laws, a wife has the right to demand this share from her husband. As she was prepared to undergo any austerity with him, Shastri Mama could refuse her no more.

They reached Ramanasramam and since in those days women could not stay at the ashram, Chinna Swami, Bhagavan's younger brother and manager, told Shastri Mama, "Do *pooja* in the shrine of the Mother and let your wife stay in town with my son Venkatoo's family. Let her serve and be with Bhagavan's sister and Venkatoo's wife, while you serve here." Shastri Mama communicated this to Bhagavan. Bhagavan kept quiet for some time and then turned to him saying, "Attend to the purpose for which you came." Shastri Mama understood what Bhagavan meant. His function was not to do *pooja* and work for food. The reason for which he came was to give up everything, be without desire and discover wisdom - after all, desirelessness and wisdom are the same.

He took his wife with him to Adi Annamalai, a remote village halfway around the hill and lived in a shelter there. Every morning, the couple would walk around the hill to spend the day with Bhagavan, with no thought of food from the ashram. In the evening, they would complete their circumambulation of the hill and return to the shelter. People in the village began to notice this simple couple and took pity on them. They had no vessels, no rice or lentils to cook. So, the kind villagers started bringing bananas, peanuts, as well as some roots and begged them to eat; they supported the pious and simple couple like this for many years. Being in Bhagavan's presence every moment, austerity became deeply rooted in Shastri Mama and Sala. Both lived on peanuts and bananas, or whatever the compassionate villagers placed before them. Though the ashram served delicious food, they were not tempted. They forgot what it was like to eat rice, wheat, pulses and other things in the staple Indian diet, and yet, they were completely happy.

Whenever Bhagavan wanted some explanations from the *Vedas*, in Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni's and Jagadisa Shastri's absence, he would take Shastri Mama's help. Shastri Mama, who was also a gifted poet, would give him the answers in Sanskrit verses. One day, Bhagavan asked him, "You give such beautiful answers; does Sala recognize the content of these verses?" "Bhagavan, she is a villager and almost illiterate. She does not know the content because I don't share this with her," he replied. Bhagavan persisted, "No, you should raise her to your level. Does she not know Tamil?" "Yes, Bhagavan, she knows." "Then, translate whatever you write for me in Sanskrit into simple Tamil which she can understand, and teach her."

In my childhood, I knew that Shastri Mama had written many songs based on Bhagavan's teaching because my mother would sing them to me. The verses were simple but beautiful. One song that I particularly liked went like this: "*Kalkandu vangiduvir guru para kalkandu vangiduvir, Kalkandu vangiduvir guru para kalkandu vangiduvir...*" *Kalkandu* means 'sugar candy'. When translated, the verse means 'Get freely this sugar candy which comes from the holy feet of the master. This sugar candy is the nectar of wisdom and it pours forth from the holy feet of the master. By falling at the feet of the master, get this nectar which is always available to you'. As children, we were very fond of this song because we loved sugar candy!

Shastri Mama's son, Balu, came to Tiruvannamalai once in a few years to be with his parents. By this time, Shastri Mama was teaching Sala how to be detached but had not told her that their son was going to pass away in his teens. This boy was a little older than Sundaram and me. During one of his visits, we even had a group photograph taken with Shastri Mama, Sala, my parents, Sundaram (my elder brother), Mani (my younger brother), Bhagavan's sister, Balu and me. This photograph can be found in the ashram's archives.



(l to r) Nagalakshmi, TNV, Athai (with baby Mani), Pichu Iyer (with child Ganesan), (front) present President Sundaram, Balu, (back row) Sala and Shastri Mama

During Bhagavan's illness, Shastri Mama performed a special ritual called *Mrityunjaya japa* along with some pundits. *Mrityu* means death and *jaya* means victory. Therefore, this translates as victory over death. According to this Hindu ritual, if the mantra is chanted several thousand times, a person whose horoscope predicts an early death can be saved from dying prematurely. Bhagavan seldom agreed or disagreed with the wishes of his devotees; he just cooperated with them. The chanting was to be done in the school for the Vedas, in front of a pot of water. Chanting is said to charge the water with the powerful vibrations of the *japa*, which is then given to the afflicted person to drink. One day, the recorder of *Talks with the Maharshi* wondered why an illumined master like Bhagavan was drinking this water. Bhagavan looked at him, looked at the sun, then pointed to the right side of his own chest and quoted a line from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, "*Sa yaschaayam purushe yaschaasau aaditye sa ekaha.*" (II.12). This translates as, "The energy which is in me and the energy which is in the sun is the same one." With this, Shastri Mama understood that Bhagavan was not taken in by these mantras but only cooperated with his disciples for their peace of mind, so that they could feel they were doing some service for their master's well being. By the time he had been with Bhagavan till his last days, Shastri Mama had had glimpses of the Self. He was already a master of austerity and absolute desirelessness, but needed to be blessed with complete wisdom. This was accomplished when Bhagavan blessed him with a divine look.

I had the good fortune of moving closely with them, particularly with Sala Mami. She was always very kind to me. When all my relatives were worried that I was not married, though my parents never forced me or even insisted that I should get married, Sala Mami sat me down one day and said, "What are you

going to gain by getting married? Even this one body is a burden. What is the use of getting another body? And it is an absolute fallacy that this other body can give you pleasure. The pleasure, the happiness comes from within, from the surrender of the body. In sleep, you are very happy because then, there is no awareness of the body. Why do you want to have one more body to take care of, thinking that it is going to give you happiness?" Her wise counsel helped me steady myself. This is the advantage of *satsang*.



Shastri Mama and his wife, Sala, with Ganesan

After Bhagavan dropped the body, Shastri Mama's son, Balu, who was studying in a far off village, completed his schooling. My grandfather, Chinna Swami, asked him to be brought to the ashram. He got him a job in the district office in town. After some time, he expressed a wish to have his parents live with him, so Chinna Swami asked Shastri Mama and Sala Mami to do so. Shastri Mama knew the exact date and time when his son was going to pass away and that it was only a few months away. Three days before the fatal day, Balu came down with a raging fever and died at exactly the predicted time. This is what Shastri Mama himself told me, "I thought Sala would not be able to bear this, so I didn't tell her of Balu's imminent death. On the contrary, the way she received her son's death is remarkable. She is greater than me - she did not shed even a single tear. Instead, she consoled me saying, 'He has gone back to Arunachala. We are so fortunate that he came here and gave up his body to be united with Arunachala.'"

After their son's death, they lived in a cottage in front of the ashram. My father, Venkatoo, requested Shastri Mama, "Why don't you come and help me in managing the *pooja* at the ashram?" Shastri Mama, now a man of deep wisdom, undertook the *pooja* in Bhagavan's shrine. This is how I got to know him. For some reason, he was very deeply drawn to me. From the moment I moved to the ashram, he paid special attention to me. He told me, "For us, Bhagavan is God, Bhagavan's form is Truth, and Bhagavan's name is Truth." I asked him what he meant by that. He replied "Do you recognize who Bhagavan is? Bhagavan is *arivunmai nishtan* - he is truly a Self-realized being; *aanma vittaavaan* - established ever in the Heart, as the 'I AM', and *arivaal pulan chettraan* - he has already won over the dictates of the five senses through inner wisdom." I asked him, "What should I do? How can I serve?" "Venerate him and share his name and reputation. Share the teachings with other people so that they can discover this inner joy and this inner wisdom," he said, adding, "And what should you adore him as? *Arivangiyaavan*. Do you recognize who he is? He is a flame of wisdom. Tell the world Ramana is not just

a body, not just an individual. He is pure wisdom. He is *arivaan gulisattaan*. *Gulisattaan* means 'thunderbolt', the most powerful weapon that destroys the enemy's ignorance. Our Bhagavan is that thunderbolt that will destroy all forms of ignorance. He is *kaalakaalan*, the conqueror of the time-space concept and *chaavinaimaai veeran*, a colossal hero who has conquered death." Bhagavan has written these words in *Ulladhu Narpadhu Anubandham, Reality in Forty Verses Supplement, v.28*.

Shastri Mama talked to me all the time about Bhagavan and made me experience his presence. By this time, Shastri Mama had taken up a job at the ashram. He was an assistant to Kittu and Appuchi, who were young priests. They would instruct him to fetch things for them, and he would run their errands. It pained me deeply that this realized *mahatma* was assisting two priests who were younger than him, uncomplainingly, while they did not even recognize his spiritual stature!



Shastri Mama at Bhagavan's Samadhi shrine (extreme right)

The Nagappa Chettiar prediction of Shastri Mama that we shared earlier was only what I heard from him. Though I totally believed it had happened, I needed to feel for myself the impact of such miracles. Shastri Mama did perform a number of 'miracles'. Since my brain or intellect could not grasp the logic behind them, I was thrilled when such happenings took place right in front of my own eyes!

A French lady, Edith Deri, was a chief accountant of an international French bank in Paris. Every year, she would come to the ashram to spend the three or four weeks of her annual holidays in meditation. After finishing her work for the day at the bank, she would directly go to the airport, board the plane in Paris, alight in Mumbai, catch a train and come straight to Tiruvannamalai. She used to plan her return journey just as meticulously to make sure she spent maximum time at the ashram. Every minute of her stay at Bhagavan's ashram was that sacred for her!

On the year of her retirement from her bank job, sometime in the 1970s, she bought gifts for me and every other resident of the ashram. So, in addition to her usual, single piece of baggage, she was carrying an extra bag that trip containing all the gifts. She was to arrive at the ashram on a particular day but did not. I was very surprised as this had never happened before. One day, as I was standing in front of Bhagavan's shrine, attending the morning milk offering *pooja*, I felt two hands resting affectionately on my shoulders from behind. It was Edith Deri, my 'French Mother'! She whispered into my ears, "I have lost my gift box. That is the reason for the delay." Something made me move towards Shastri Mama who was participating in the chanting of the *mantras*. When I went very close to him, spontaneously he turned towards me and said, "Nothing is lost. She will get it back!"

After the *pooja*, I introduced her to Shastri Mama. She gave the details, “Usually, I travel only by Air France. This year, being my retirement year, I took Kuwait Airlines as it is cheaper. When I reached Mumbai, I discovered that the bag containing all the gifts was missing. The airline assured me that I would get it by their next flight. I waited for a day. But, even after repeated searches, they could not locate my lost bag. The airline has assured me that they will somehow find it and forward it to our ashram address.” Using his *prashna* expertise, Shastri Mama declared that her missing bag was neither lost nor stolen and that she would get it back.

A few days later, the airlines sent her a letter apologising for not being able to locate the box and promising to compensate her if she gave details of the contents of the box and their cost. She was disappointed with Shastri Mama’s prediction. When we met Shastri Mama the next day, she expressed her feelings frankly. He was visibly irritated, “What? She doubts the prediction? I see her box right in front of my eyes, in a large room, untouched by any one!”

A week after Edith Deri left the ashram for France, I got a letter from her in which she was all admiration for Shastri Mama: “Your astrologer saint is truly great! His prediction was hundred percent correct! At Kuwait airport, as there was a lot of time to catch my transit flight, I chanced to enter a big hall where all the baggage is stored. And what do I see? My missing bag, by the entrance on the floor. That too with no tag. All the other bags had their tags and were neatly arranged in rows of shelves! Except mine! I happily reported it to the office and they apologized for the oversight. They, however, did explain to me that they had repeatedly verified the bags on the shelves for my missing bag, but had inadvertently ignored the bag lying at the entrance door. Good news for you all ! I am coming next month just to give my gifts to the ashram workers!”

One of the first instances of Shastri Mama’s guidance came to me when I was reading a book on the miracles of a living saint. Neither could I put the book down, nor sleep the entire night. I felt I must meet this master and that I too must possess the power of performing miracles. After the day’s *pooja*, while I stood in front of the old office about thirty feet away, Shastri Mama suddenly said, “Ganesa, stop! Stay there!” I obeyed him. “I order you not to have any thoughts,” he commanded. He then held out a bunch of grapes and said, “Now tell me how many grapes are there in this bunch.” “Thirteen,” I replied. “Come here and count them,” he commanded again. My guess turned out to be accurate. “How did you say thirteen?” he asked. “I don’t know,” I answered, puzzled. “Don’t say that. You cannot get away by saying that. Tell me how you thought there were thirteen grapes?” he pressed. This time, I kept quiet. “You know I told you to stay without thoughts,” he said. “Why did you not say fifteen or ten or eleven? How did you say exactly thirteen? When you were without thoughts, I put that number into your mind. I had already counted them. A miracle is nothing but a stronger mind occupying a weaker mind. Never get distracted by a miracle.” I was amazed. I had never spoken to him about the book. He said, “I am not saying this without support.” He quoted from one of Bhagavan’s verses, “To enquire into and abide as the Self, which is the ever present Reality is alone the true attainment, the greatest *siddhi*. All other *siddhis* or occult powers are equivalent to powers enjoyed in the dream state. When the sleeper awakes, are the dream powers real? Can those who stay in the state of Self, thereby casting off all forms of unreality, ever be deluded by indulging in the *siddhis*?” At one stroke, Shastri Mama wiped out for ever any inclination I might have had for *siddhis* or occult powers!

Shastri Mama was the most profound, yet simplest man with whom I have interacted. In the *Vedas*, it is said that the ultimate truth is smaller than the atom and bigger than all the cosmos put together. With no one was this truer than with Shastri Mama. It was he who chose my present home, ‘Ananda Ramana’. When this house came up for sale, I told him that I wanted Anuradha to buy it. He was totally blind at that time. He instantly said, “No. You should own it.” He added, “Take me to that land.” I took him around every inch of the land. At one spot, he stopped and asked me to describe the location. I said, “There are two trees here - one a *peepul* tree and the other a *neem* tree.” Before I could say anything more, he interrupted me and smilingly said, “Yes, Lord Ganesa has chosen this spot. The *peepul* tree represents the Father aspect and the neem tree the Mother aspect. Lord Ganesa is the son of Lord Siva and Mother Parvati. Make a shrine for the idol of Lord Ganesa in between these two trees. Since Lord Ganesa himself has selected the spot, I have named him Samartha Vinayakar - auspiciousness showering Ganesa.” In accordance with his guidance, I bought ‘Ananda Ramana’ with the help of a friend and constructed a shrine for Lord Ganesa at the spot Shastri Mama had indicated. On the day of the house warming, he himself guided all rituals, including the *pooja* to Samartha Vinayakar. When I prostrated to him and sought his blessings, he was very gracious to tell me, “The

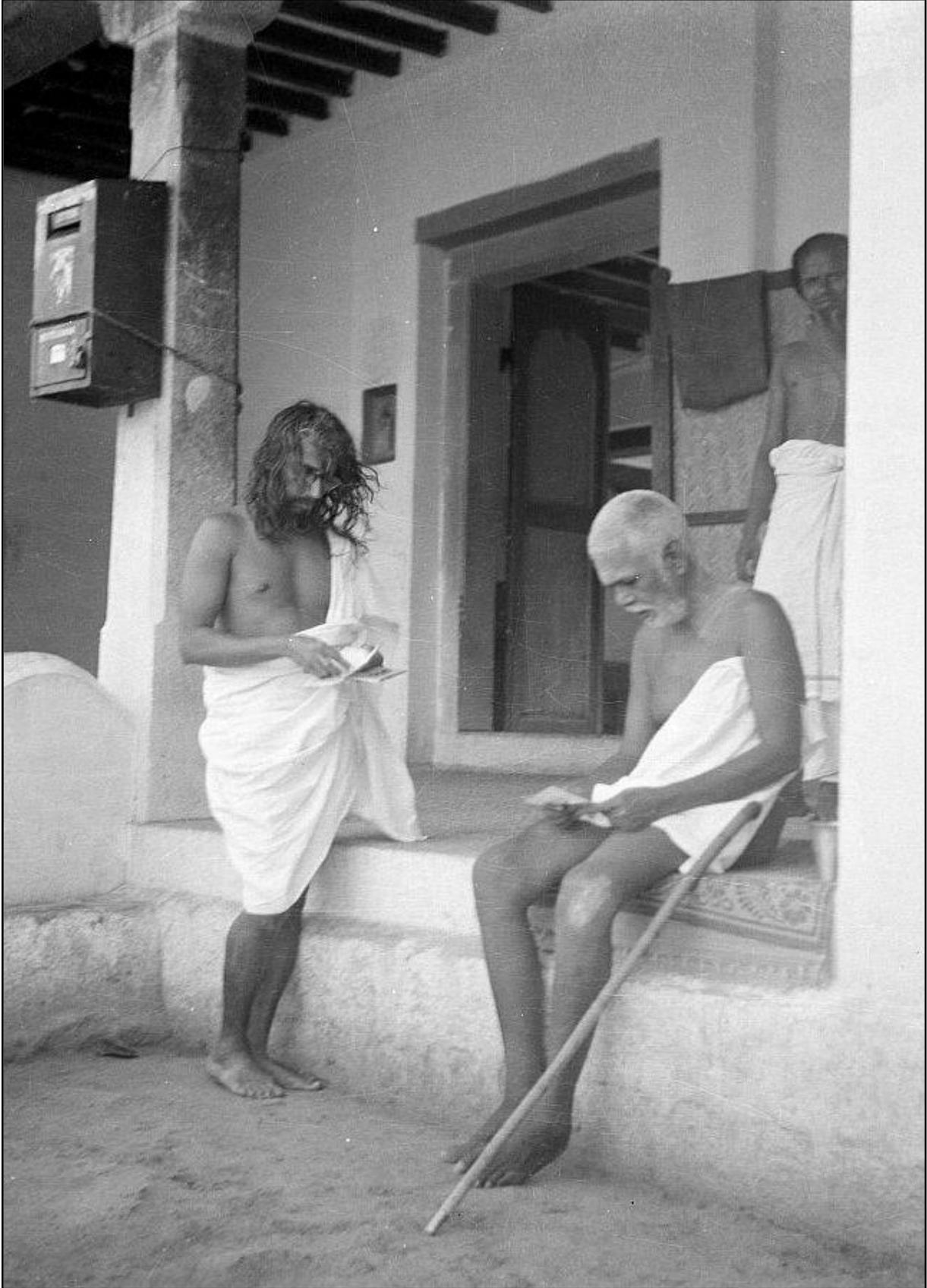
world around you will ignore you and give you up. But, don't worry. Samartha Vinayakar will protect you and guide you. I will also initiate you today into a special Ganesa mantra which should neither be written down nor chanted loudly. Do the *japa* of it only inwardly, within your Heart. Ignore the world. Turn inward and always be submerged in that *japa* in your heart. You are ever blessed by Bhagavan!"



Shastri Mama entering the Old Hall assisted by Hugo Maier

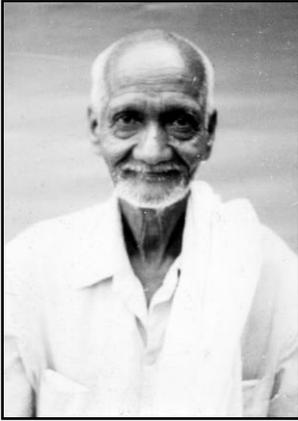
In his last days, Shastri Mama fell from his cot and broke his hip. Hugo Maier, who helped many devotees in their last days by attending to them and giving them homeopathy medicines, examined Shastri Mama and said, "He is too old to undergo any surgery." Shastri Mama only said, "Why pay attention to the body? It is going to die anyhow. How does it matter whether it goes in pain? I am not the body." "Mama, *kaal romba valikiradhaa?* is your leg hurting terribly?" I asked. Smiling despite the obviously excruciating pain he was going through, he replied, "*Kaalai yedhukku paarkirai? Mukkaalai paaru. Anandamaa irrukaen.*" In Tamil, *kaal* means leg and it also means 'a quarter', while *mukkaal* means three quarters. By punning on the word *kaal*, he was in effect telling me, "Why are you focusing on the small quarter portion, the body? Focus on the larger portion, the Self. I am in absolute peace, in absolute bliss". Though his body was in pain, he was all the time in ecstasy.

I intuitively felt that his last day had arrived. I took along my friend Anuradha to receive the blessings of this wonderful saint. I held his holy feet and requested, "Please bless me, Mama." He humbly replied, "Only Bhagavan gives blessings." "No. You must put your hand on our heads and bless us," I insisted. He finally agreed. I asked him if we could do anything for him. "Ask Anuradha to sing Bhagavan's *Arunachala Pancharatnam*," he answered. While Anuradha and I sang that sublime hymn of Bhagavan, Shastri Mama kept his palms together on his chest. Tears of ecstasy flowed copiously from the outer corners of his eyes. Soon, Shastri Mama merged consciously in the Self.



*Bhagavan reading letters in front of Ramanasramam Post Office*

## Raja Iyer



Raja Iyer was known as the Post Master. He was a simple and deeply religious man, devoted to singing *bhajans* and other devotional songs. He came to Bhagavan in 1911 when Bhagavan was in Virupaksha cave. By nature, he was a wanderer who went wherever his feet took him. He stayed with Bhagavan whenever he came to see him and his own aunt who lived in Tiruvannamalai. Even as early as 1911, this woman discerned Bhagavan's greatness. It was her custom to make sweets and offer them to Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave. Whenever Raja Iyer was there, he would tell her, "I will take it to Bhagavan," and so she would send the sweets through him. When Raja Iyer first met Bhagavan and gave these sweets as offerings, he could not comprehend anything of the spiritual teaching of Bhagavan; however, he did appreciate the experience. He said, "I liked the harmony of the evening hours at Virupaksha cave; the aromatic breeze of the holy hill and the stillness

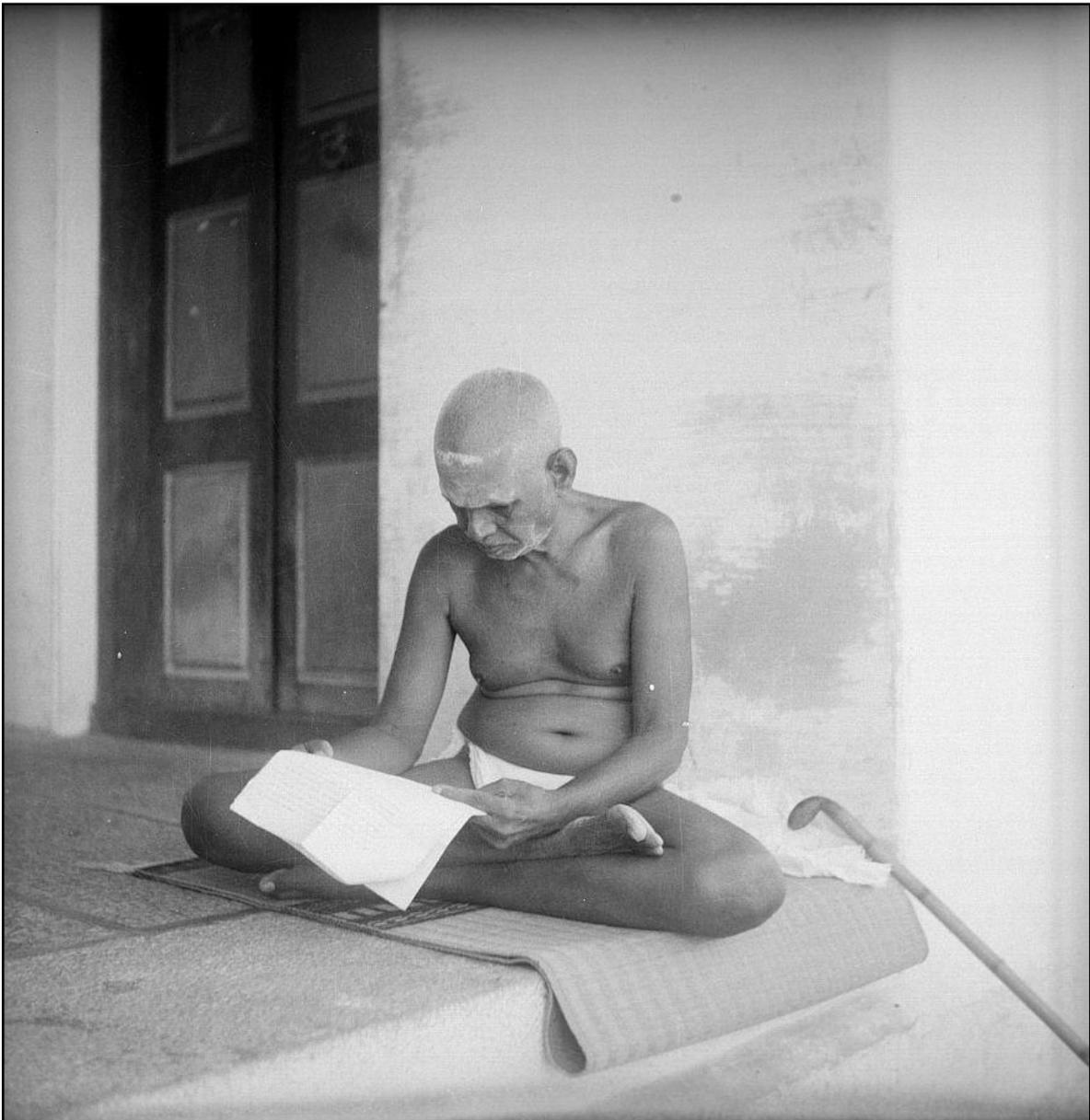
emanating from Bhagavan were indescribable. I enjoyed drenching myself in all that natural beauty. Added to this, whatever was brought to Bhagavan was shared equally with the others." Since Raja Iyer was a nomad, there were times when he could not get enough food. Therefore, Bhagavan would keep some food items for Raja Iyer knowing that he enjoyed eating. Any time he went to Virupaksha cave or Skandashram, he always got something to eat. Raja Iyer commented, "I am not at all ashamed to confess that I went to Bhagavan only to eat sweets!"

One day, when Raja Iyer was going to Skandashram, he met Echammal carrying food to Bhagavan. At the same time, a group of devotees were coming down from Skandashram looking terribly disappointed. Echammal looked at the expression on their faces and asked, "What happened?" The group replied, "We went to see Ramana Maharshi but we could not find him." Echammal exclaimed, "What? You could not find him?" They replied, "No, we couldn't." She then asked them, "Was nobody there?" The group said, "There was only one person. He was arranging some stones and patching up a wall. Other than him, there was nobody." Echammal said, "Did you ask him where Bhagavan was?" They replied, "Yes, he said Bhagavan had gone up the hill." Perplexed, Echammal and Raja Iyer enquired, "What did the person look like?" The group answered, "He was wearing a loin cloth and had a cloth wrapped around his head." To this, Echammal and Raja Iyer asked, "What about his complexion?" They replied, "He was very fair." Both Echammal and Raja Iyer understood that the person was none other than Bhagavan. Echammal and Raja Iyer told the group, "Come, we will take you to Bhagavan." By the time they reached Skandashram, Bhagavan had completed whatever work he had been doing and had returned to his usual place. He was sitting so serenely that when the group entered and saw him, they immediately said, "This is not the man, it was somebody else." At this, Bhagavan laughed. Echammal then confronted Bhagavan in the presence of Raja Iyer, "Bhagavan, why did you say that Bhagavan had gone up the hill? These people were so disappointed!" Bhagavan asked Echammal, "Do you want me to put a placard on my forehead saying that I am Bhagavan?" The point is that Bhagavan admitted that he was Bhagavan when he asked whether he should place a placard on his forehead indicating that he was indeed Bhagavan! When Raja Iyer narrated this incident to me, it was both amusing and revealing.

In 1927, during one of his wanderings, Raja Iyer came to a small city called Reddipalayam. By this time, Bhagavan had already come down the hill to the spot which later became Sri Ramanasramam. Since there was no electricity in those days, a devotee of Bhagavan arranged for a *punkah* or an improvised fan. This consisted of a long cloth attached to a light board suspended from the ceiling. By pulling a long rope attached to the fan, the cloth would circulate cool air. One night, Bhagavan appeared in Raja Iyer's dream. Bhagavan was seated in the hall under the *punkah*. When Raja Iyer entered into the hall, Bhagavan said, "Come and pull this *punkah*." So, in his dream, he pulled the *punkah* and Bhagavan enjoyed the cool breeze. A few days later, Raja Iyer went to Tiruvannamalai. When he entered Bhagavan's Old Hall, he saw exactly the same *punkah* that he had seen in his dream! He prostrated before Bhagavan, and Bhagavan said, "Raja, go and pull the *punkah*." Raja Iyer did what he was told. Five minutes later, Bhagavan called out to him and said, "Raja, that is enough!" Raja Iyer felt a great sense of responsibility and understood that Bhagavan wanted him to serve. Bhagavan had never before asked anyone to either pull the *punkah* or stop it. Since Bhagavan seldom actually told anyone to do

anything, Raja Iyer took this as a sign that Bhagavan wanted him to serve him. He came to Ramanasramam permanently.

When Raja Iyer started staying in the present Ramanasramam, he was very often invited to sing *bhajans* in the town. There are different kinds of *bhajans* sung about different deities. For example, on the birthdays of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, *bhajans* are sung throughout the night. Sometimes, an oil lamp is lit and placed in the middle of the room. People go round the lamp as the *bhajans* are sung. Raja Iyer was once invited to participate in a *bhajan* ceremony on the occasion of Lord Rama's birthday - Sri Rama Navami. He communicated this to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, they have invited me and I will have to go there." Usually, Bhagavan would nod his head to indicate his approval, but on that day he didn't. Just then, Chinna Swami the *sarvadhikari* came into the hall and said, "Somebody has sent money with the specific request that Sri Rama's birthday be celebrated in Ramanasramam in the same manner in which it is celebrated in his village." Bhagavan looked at Raja Iyer and said, "See, you will stay and do the *bhajans* here." So, on that day, Raja Iyer performed the *bhajans* at the ashram. The *bhajans* went on for six or seven hours into the night. Raja Iyer often became ecstatic when singing the *bhajans*. Bhagavan too enjoyed the *bhajans* in his own way. Bhagavan did not participate physically in the *bhajans* by singing and dancing; but he would comment in Tamil, "*Paithyam*, they are all mad!" And then he would add very significantly, "How I wish everyone was mad like that!" I too have had the luck of seeing Raja Iyer sing and dance - it was wonderful!



One day Chinna Swami told him, "You can neither stay inside the ashram nor eat here unless you do some kind of service." Raja Iyer went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, listen to what Chinna Swami is saying." Bhagavan suggested, "Raja, why don't you make *idlis* in the morning?" *Idlis*, or rice cakes, were made in the ashram every morning as it is to this day. Raja Iyer said, "Bhagavan, I do not know how to make *idlis*." Bhagavan said, "I will teach you." Making *idlis* was not easy because it involved a lot of work. Rice and lentils had to be ground the previous evening and it had to be done manually since there was no machinery. That evening Bhagavan said, "Raja, come," and taught him. (In fact, Bhagavan himself ground the rice and lentils for many days with Raja Iyer to teach him.) The next morning, Raja Iyer told Bhagavan nervously, "Bhagavan, I do not know how to steam the *idlis*." Bhagavan volunteered, "I will come and help you, Raja." Bhagavan showed him how to cook the *idlis*. But, the next day, to Raja Iyer's dismay, he found that all the *idlis* he had made had crumbled. He dashed to the hall desperately and reported, "Bhagavan, all the *idlis* have crumbled and I do not know what to do. I am very nervous." Bhagavan asked him, "Before making these *idlis*, I told you that you should make an offering to the fire. Did you make a pledge that you will offer the first set of *idlis* to the fire?" Raja Iyer admitted, "Bhagavan, I forgot to do it." Bhagavan said, "Go and do that. Tell the fire that the first set of *idlis* will be offered to it." Raja Iyer told me he continued to make this offering even after Bhagavan passed away. He continued making *idlis* till the late seventies and the first offering was always to the fire.

This was the same Raja Iyer who visited Bhagavan at Skandashram and Virupaksha cave because he was fond of eating. He was still so fond of food that he would go into the kitchen and eat anything, whether cooked or raw. One day, a devotee complained to Bhagavan saying, "Bhagavan, what is all this? The man is uncontrollable; he eats whatever he wants!" Bhagavan smilingly said, "You are complaining about Raja." The devotee said, "Yes, Bhagavan. It is not according to the rules of the ashram." Bhagavan questioned, "Are you sure that it is a mistake on the part of Raja Iyer?" The devotee said, "Yes, Bhagavan." Bhagavan continued, "Can you be clearer? Why do you also not go into the kitchen and eat like that?" The devotee answered, "No, Bhagavan, I cannot do that; I just cannot." Bhagavan told the devotee, "It is not his constant eating that is bothering you but the fact that you are not able to go inside and eat as often." In this manner, Bhagavan taught the devotee that there are no others. Our opinion about others is based upon our own shortcomings. The devotee was unable to eat as much as he wanted because he was afraid of Chinna Swami and therefore he was complaining. But Raja Iyer was not afraid of Chinna Swami. Raja Iyer told me years later that he had received many a berating from Chinna Swami, but this did not deter him from going into the kitchen and eating! Bhagavan then advised the devotee, "There are no others; whatever you see outside is your own reflection. Your mind is creating all this."

In 1937, the Ramanasramam post office was started and Raja Iyer was made its first Post Master. The post office was near the cow shed. On the first day of its operation, Raja Iyer asked Bhagavan to come to the post office. When Bhagavan came, Raja Iyer gave him the seal and requested him to put the seal on all the letters received. He requested Bhagavan to come again in the evening so that all the letters that were being dispatched could also receive the seal from Bhagavan. So, on the first day in Ramanasramam post office, all the letters were blessed by Bhagavan since he put the seal on all of them.

There is a famous temple in Tiruvannamalai called Pachaiamman that the villagers frequented. In his early days, Bhagavan too had stayed there. Raja Iyer was so devoted to Bhagavan that when Bhagavan had sarcoma, he felt that the vermilion powder from this shrine could cure Bhagavan. This was the intense belief of all the villagers and of Raja Iyer. So Raja Iyer performed a *pooja* in the temple in the name of Bhagavan and took the *prasad* to him. But the doctors had given strict instructions that no one be allowed inside Bhagavan's room. Bhagavan was inside the room with the doctors and a few other people. Raja Iyer lamented to himself, "I am unable to give this to my Bhagavan! If only he takes this *prasad*, he will be cured!" A few days later, someone suddenly called Raja Iyer and said, "Bhagavan is calling you." Raja Iyer, who was constantly carrying the *prasad* in his pocket, was surprised. When he went to see Bhagavan, Bhagavan looked at him and enquired, "Raja, do you have anything to give me?" Raja Iyer remembered the *prasad* and said, "Bhagavan, this is the *prasad* from Pachaiamman temple. I prayed that you get cured, Bhagavan. Please take this *prasad*." Bhagavan smeared some of the *prasad* on his forehead and said, "Give it to all!" He also added, "This Pachaiamman is very powerful and this *prasad* has real power." Raja Iyer told me that Bhagavan knew that every devotee could feel the love which Bhagavan had for him and Bhagavan knew how to communicate this love unfliningly.

Raja Iyer used to look after the westerners who visited the ashram. Bhagavan appreciated the way Raja Iyer performed this duty. When I came to Ramanasramam in 1960, until 1972 or so, it was Raja Iyer who instructed me on how to conduct myself in the presence of westerners and how to take care of them. Hugo Maier and I thought that since Raja Iyer was so passionate about food, he would suffer a lot in his last days. We thought that he would constantly demand something to eat. But an extraordinary thing happened; one week before he passed away, he suddenly stopped eating. Two days before his end, he said, "I will drink only water." It is not that he had any kind of disease; he just died of old age without any disease. In my own experience, I have only seen two people die of old age, where the body simply shrinks. The other person was Sama Thatha.

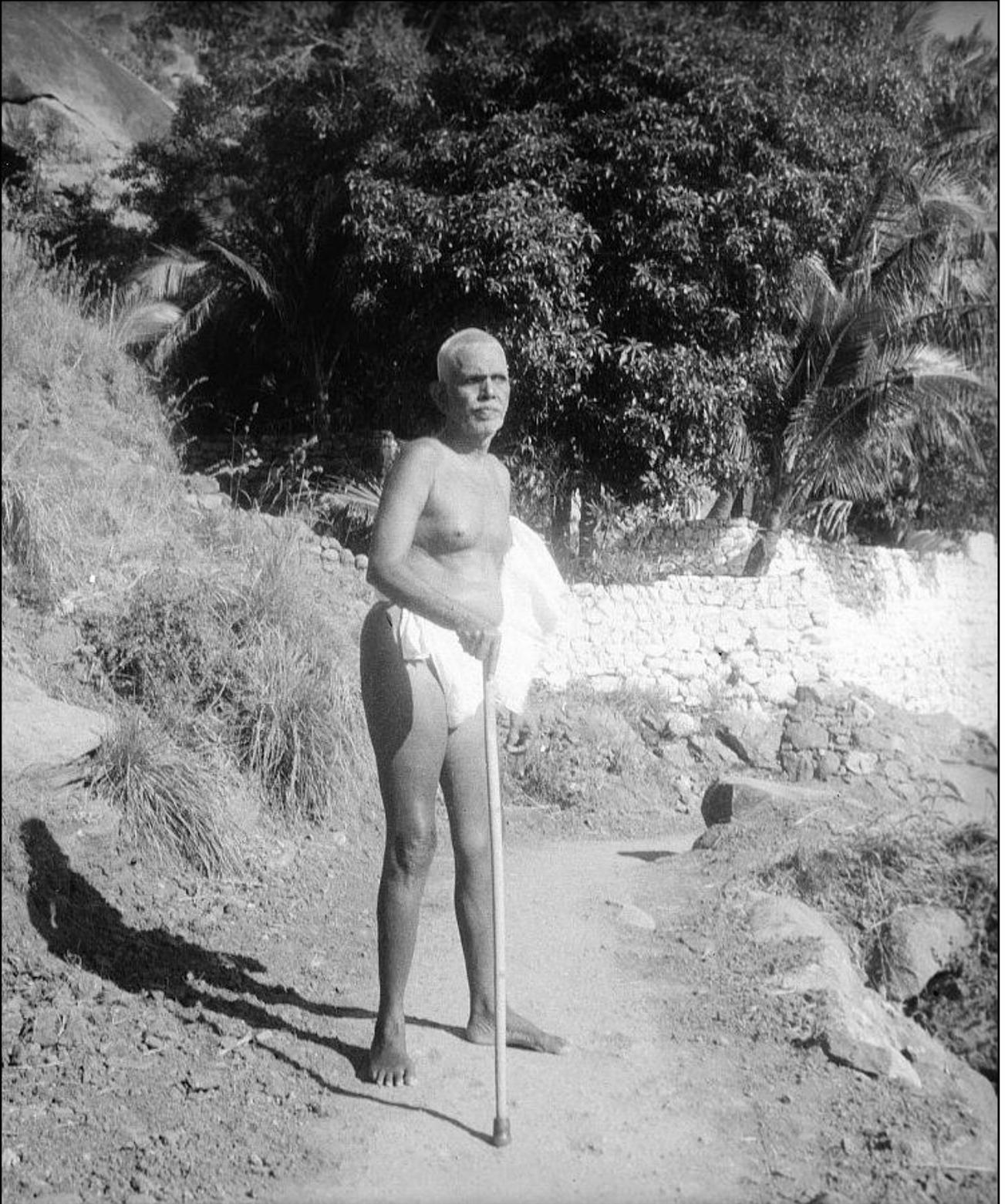


(front row) Raja Iyer, Ganesan, Mrs. Osborne and Miss Ethel Merston  
(back row) Major Chadwick, Terence Gray (Wei Wu Wei) and Arthur Osborne

(Sama Thatha was the fortunate one to bring food off and on to Bhagavan in Virupaksha cave and Skandashram occasionally. Later, he resigned his job and started assisting Bhagavan's mother in cooking. He made breakfast in the present Ramanasramam till his physical strength failed him. When he was asked to leave the ashram because he was too old to continue working there, he went and sat in the hall immersed in sadness. An attendant drew Bhagavan's attention to the plight of Sama Thatha. In the hall, there was a government officer to whom Bhagavan turned and asked, "Is there not a system called pension for one who has served for twenty five years in a government office?" Taking the cue, the attendant ran to the office and reported it to Chinna Swami. Chinna Swami came to the hall and requested Sama Thatha not to leave the ashram and added that he need not do any work. Instead, Chinna Swami pleaded that he stay and remain happily and quietly in the presence of Bhagavan all the time. In the 1960's, when Sama Thatha was on his death bed, I attended on him and felt privileged to do so. There was no disease - he was merely melting away due to ripe old age! On the last day, since he wanted me to cremate him, he called me and taught me how to cremate *sadhus* who die at the

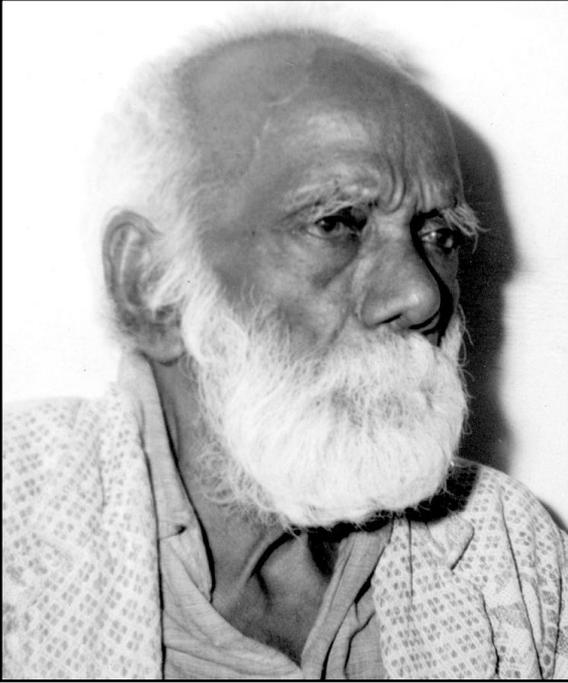
ashram. My initiation in this service started with this blessed man who secured 'pension' from Bhagavan so that he could stay and drop his body in Bhagavan's abode!)

On the day Raja Iyer passed away, I went and touched his feet. I also said, "Raja Iyer, please bless me." He replied, "No, that is Bhagavan's duty." He continued, "Bhagavan is here. Take his blessing." However, I insisted, "I will take Bhagavan's blessing, but you must bless me too." I then told him, "Raja Iyer, you know me very well. I will always do my best. If you have any wishes, please tell me. I will fulfill them. You know that I will do so." Raja Iyer replied, "Ganesan, I have no desire. I have no thought at all. No thought comes to me. Look! Bhagavan is here! Bhagavan is here!" He kept repeating it over and over again. Finally he said, "I am in bliss, absolute bliss. See! Bhagavan is here." His final words were, "Bhagavan is calling me!" I always tell my friends that Bhagavan took Raja Iyer not by ordinary but express post!



*Bhagavan in front of Skandashram*

## G. Ramaswami Pillai



There are certain old devotees who may not seem that well known, important or significant - only because they chose to remain in the background. But in their relationship with Bhagavan and in their understanding and practice of his teachings, they are deeply significant. Although some of them were not very popular, and alas, to some extent even disliked by others, their relationship with Bhagavan was as wonderful as those of other better known devotees.

Ramaswami Pillai came from a family of non-vegetarians. However, even as a child he could not bring himself to eat meat and so he became a vegetarian. Seeing this, the rest of his family too became vegetarians. He studied the Bible thoroughly and read the Buddha's teachings. He once told me, "I have been to the mosque many times and offered prayers just like Muslims do. When they said, 'Allah,' I could feel God." He never looked upon it as something alien or different. Such was his background.

Ramaswami Pillai studied in Chidambaram, ninety miles away from Tiruvannamalai. One day, his teacher showed the class a picture of Bhagavan and said, "This is the picture of a great sage living in Arunachala." Of the forty students in the class, Ramaswami Pillai was the only one to be so magnetized by the picture that after class he went to his teacher and asked "Sir, may I have a picture of that saint?" The teacher was only too glad to give him the picture. Recollecting this, Ramaswami Pillai told me, "Before I went to Bhagavan, Bhagavan came to my room." Many people who have had a similar experience have told me, "Before I could go to my master, my master came to me." After receiving this picture of Bhagavan, Ramaswami Pillai had a strong urge to meet Bhagavan. He soon made his way to Tiruvannamalai where he found Bhagavan seated on a rock in Virupaksha cave. Ramaswami Pillai said his very first *darshan* made him think, "Here sits the single, sovereign monarch of the universe, a maharaja, a *chakravarty*." This feeling did not come to him on the first *darshan* alone. He said, "Every time I looked at Bhagavan, no matter how many times a day, all those years until he passed away, I felt that here is the single sovereign monarch of the universe."

By then, Bhagavan had already composed *Aksharamanamalai*, a hymn with one hundred and eight verses. It took the young Ramaswami Pillai just a little more than an hour to learn the verses by heart. From then on, even though just a schoolboy, he chanted the verses constantly. Ramaswami Pillai's second visit was when he was in college. Bhagavan had by then moved to Skandashram. That day, when he visited the master along with his friend, Bhagavan was going around the hill. He was taking the inner forest route that winds around the base of the hill. As he and his friend followed Bhagavan through the thick woods, he felt that Bhagavan was like a monarch marching ahead with his army following him.

The *giri pradakshina* had such an impact on him that the very next day he wanted to do it again, but this time alone. But on the forest path he lost his way and did not know what to do. When he turned around, he found the ashram dog Kamala behind him. Kamala, realizing that he was lost, started walking in front leading him through the forest. Wherever he rested, she too lay down. Whenever he stood up, she resumed walking; she did not leave his side for a minute. In this manner she led him until he reached the town and then disappeared. When he returned to Skandashram, Kamala was already there! While the dog was leading him, his feeling was that this was not just a mere dog; it was Bhagavan himself who had come in this form. When he returned to Skandashram he looked at Bhagavan and Bhagavan gave him a very beautiful smile. "At that moment," Ramaswami Pillai said, "I was more than convinced that

Bhagavan would guide me through the unknown paths of life.” That was his first real experience in the presence of Bhagavan.

He started visiting Bhagavan often. On one such visit, he yearned to witness a miracle performed by Bhagavan. One evening when he went into town, somebody gave him a coconut and some broken rice. He brought these things to Bhagavan. Bhagavan said, “We can make a very nice porridge out of this. Find out if we have some sugar candy or sugar.” He was thrilled that Bhagavan - who usually never asked for anything - had asked for sugar candy. During the time Bhagavan was in Skandashram, there were only a few earthen pots used for storage. Finding all the pots empty, Ramaswami Pillai was distressed that he could not offer sugar candy to Bhagavan. He felt like running to the town for sugar candy, but it was dark and raining torrentially; the rocks were sure to be slippery. Not wanting to tell Bhagavan that there was no sugar candy, he quietly went to the entrance and waited for the rain to stop so that he could run to the town and buy some. Suddenly, he heard a knock on the door. It was a young man looking thoroughly drenched. He came inside and took out some sugar candy and a bunch of bananas from a cloth bag. Ramaswami Pillai recounted, “I already knew something extraordinary was happening. I was excited and was bold enough to go to Bhagavan. Bhagavan looking at me, said, ‘See! The sugar candy has come. We will make some porridge. As for the side dish, we now have bananas as well. Come! Let us have a feast today.’ Bhagavan was a pure *jnani*, always in a state of pure awareness. There was no need for me to crave for a miracle. Miracles happened in his presence. Bhagavan’s presence was magnetic. Just as iron filings are automatically attracted to a magnet, so too miracles were always happening in his presence without him even noticing it.” He asked Bhagavan, “I longed for a miracle and this happened. How did it happen?” Bhagavan replied, “This happened because of *sannidhi vishesham* - the power of presence, of awareness. There is no interlude of thought or desire involved in this *sannidhi vishesham*.” Then, Bhagavan added, “This is the first time in one year that I have had a second meal in a day.” Narrating this to me, Ramaswami Pillai’s eyes moistened as he concluded, “Never can I forget that day. Bhagavan had it indelibly imprinted on my mind.”

When Bhagavan’s mother passed away, Ramaswami Pillai helped in not only bringing down the body from the mountain but also in the burial. He was a hard worker and gave up everything else in life to stay with Bhagavan right from the Skandashram days. He painstakingly planted all the big coconut trees that we see today in Ramanasramam. Bhagavan had already given Ramaswami Pillai the teaching of ‘Who am I?’ But he still continued chanting ‘*Arunachala Siva*’ while engaged in gardening or cleaning the ashram premises. It was Ramaswami Pillai who established the custom of cleanliness in the ashram grounds that you see today. He used to work for almost eighteen hours a day, engaged either in gardening, sweeping or digging pits. There was only one bicycle in the ashram. When the office staff needed certain things to be got from town, Ramaswami Pillai was the only one who would offer to go on the errand. Thus, he came to be known more as ‘Cycle Swami’ than Ramaswami Pillai.

One day I asked him, “You were always away from Bhagavan’s presence; you were always working in the garden. How did you like it?” He replied, “Why Ganesan, from a distance I could see Bhagavan’s form and I was always chanting his name. Bhagavan was always in my heart. Bhagavan was perfection itself and because of his perfection, when we looked at him or chanted his name, the perfection came to us. As he was always in a state of bliss, we too were in a state of bliss.” In support of his statement, he quoted from tradition saying, “Ganesan, understand that in our scriptures this is called *guru turiya*. *Turiya* is the *samadhi* state - the fourth state transcending the three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping. When you are working very hard and looking at the master or chanting his name, he transports you to this state, which is not to your credit; it is because of his grace on you; hence it is called *guru turiya*. The *samadhi* state that we get established in is because of his blessings.”

Though others seldom saw Ramaswami Pillai, Bhagavan and he were working together telepathically almost all the time. Bhagavan was continuously blessing him with his presence and Ramaswami Pillai was always chanting Bhagavan’s name while doing his work. One day however, he had misgivings about his progress. He wondered if it was a mistake not to actively participate in any of the other activities of the ashram, such as chanting, *pooja* and festivities. So he asked, “Bhagavan, am I doing the right thing?” Bhagavan replied, “Do Self Enquiry - it embraces all other activities.” Even while he was working in the garden or going to town by cycle, he was consciously doing Self Enquiry. (Whenever I met him in the ashram after 1960, he would advise me very fervently, “Do not get involved in any of these *poojas* and other activities. They will not take you anywhere. Do only Self Enquiry.”)

Once, on losing his keys, he went to Bhagavan saying, “My keys are lost, Bhagavan.” Bhagavan smiled and said, “The keys are not lost; they are where they are. You have forgotten where you left them.” Then as he often did, Bhagavan supplemented what he said with his teaching: “It is just like the Self. It is always where it is. We forget it and take so many paths searching for it, saying, ‘I am not able to find the Self; I don’t know what the Self is or where it lies. We are searching for it even though it is always here. The Self is not lost, it is only forgotten.’” With the help of such anecdotes, Ramaswami Pillai used to give me Bhagavan’s teachings.

Those who have been to Ramanasramam and Skandashram must have seen the well levelled, rock paved path connecting the two. It was laid single handedly by Ramaswami Pillai. In an English version of Bhagavan’s biography, there is a mention of this path: “A path paved with smooth rocks was laid from Ramanasramam to Skandashram single handedly by a devotee.” Later, it was (mis)translated in a French edition: “It was laid by a man who had only one hand.” Ramaswami Pillai would say, “See! I have two hands but this French book says I have only one hand and yet I laid the path with it!”



*The rock paved path leading towards Skandashram*

Wherever Bhagavan walked, Ramaswami Pillai would silently spread sand evenly like velvet. Every day, even under the hot noon sun, he would go and even out the paths Bhagavan regularly walked on. He was so unassuming that many people neither recognized him nor knew anything about him. One day while Bhagavan was going up the hill from Ramanasramam, he scratched his foot on a rock. Bhagavan was unmindful of it, but one of the attendants noticed it and told Ramaswami Pillai. From the next day on, Ramaswami Pillai started taking still greater care to even out a soft path for Bhagavan.

Rarely did he go into the hall where Bhagavan sat. He would normally prostrate before Bhagavan early in the morning and leave for his long, gruelling day of work. He had a unique sense of humour. One day when he came into the hall, he found two groups of traditional Hindus having an animated discussion. One group affirmed that according to the scriptures, Siva , the male God, reigns supreme. The other group asserted that Siva’s wife, Shakti, is supreme. (Shakti means power. As a matter of fact, one section of the scriptures says that even Siva gets his power from Shakti.) The two groups kept arguing in Bhagavan’s presence while Bhagavan looked on uninvolved. Bhagavan’s interest was aroused when he saw Ramaswami Pillai because he was a humourous and frank devotee. When Ramaswami Pillai learned what the argument was about, he said, “Oh! This is very simple. The female group is strongest because,” he said, quoting in English, “HE is contained in SHE. So SHE is the most powerful. What is the problem?” The entire Shakti group clapped and exclaimed, “Ah! We have won!” But, Ramaswami Pillai continued, “Wait! Wait! Wait! HE can remain independently as HE. But SHE cannot remain independently as SHE. HE has to be there; otherwise SHE can’t exist.” The Siva propagators applauded and exclaimed, “Oh! We have won!” Bhagavan laughed uproariously, admiring Ramaswami Pillai’s sense of humour. Whenever he came into the hall, Bhagavan would take great interest. Bhagavan liked unpretentiousness and this was Ramaswami Pillai’s greatest quality.



An early group photograph taken at the ashram garden

With all his humour, he used to din into my ears, “You must do Self Enquiry. In the presence of Bhagavan, we could feel that the mind was only a shadow, a shadow of the Self. The ego, the mind, is only a shadow of the Self - an unwanted accretion, a state of ignorance.” Then he would say humourously, “Nothing will be lost by its destruction. This falseness has to be and can certainly be dissolved by steady enquiry into one’s Self. Such enquiry itself is the *grace* of the *satguru*. All other efforts are definitely a waste of time.”

As we saw earlier, from the very first day he met Bhagavan he had started memorizing Bhagavan’s written works and verses. As the days went by, Bhagavan wrote many more verses. All the verses were mainly four line verses. In the evenings, *parayana* or chanting was done by two groups. One group would chant the first two lines and the other group would sing the next two. The *parayana* was set to a particular *raga* or tune and everyone was expected to follow it. But Ramaswami Pillai was a very excitable man. He would suddenly take off on a tangent and then start shouting the *parayana* in a totally different tune. This created a problem for the people in his *parayana* group. They approached Bhagavan and complained, “Bhagavan, Ramaswami Pillai does not follow the group. He goes off on a tangent. Please solve this problem.” Bhagavan replied, “What is the problem? He has got such a stentorian voice. Let him sing alone on one side while all of you sing on the other side as one group.” Ramaswami Pillai continued to shout out his own tune while the rest stuck to the tune of the *parayana*!

During his last days he could not eat the ashram food as he had lost all his teeth. He would eat only Mumbai *halwa*, a sweet made out of wheat and sugar. Since it was soft like jelly, he could easily swallow it. The *halwa* was his only source of nourishment. I used to provide him with it. He was staying inside the ashram and I had assigned him a room with an attached bathroom; I also appointed an attendant to look after his needs. On one occasion, the yoga guru T.K.V. Desikachar came from Chennai along with his group of teachers. He was a yoga teacher of repute and had taught me yoga and *pranayama*. I had invited him to Ramanasramam. My friend Anuradha and I took the group round the ashram and also to Skandashram. On the way, I was telling Desikachar that the path we were walking on was laid by a sturdy man who was now more than one hundred years old. Desikachar’s father, Sri Krishnamachari, was a great yogi who lived for hundred and one years. On coming back from

Skandashram, Desikachar asked us, "Could I meet the hundred year old man?" I took him to Ramaswami Pillai's room. As always, he was excited when he saw me. "Ganesan," he said, "Come! Why have you come alone? Bring your father, brothers Sundaram and Mani; also, bring everyone in the ashram and in Ramana Nagar! I want to see them all!" I was quite surprised as he was not a friendly or social person.

It was time for him to have his *halwa*. When I put out my hand, he gave it a pat and said, "You are my child; you are asking me by holding out your hand! Come here." Saying this, he started feeding me *halwa* as if I was a child. This happened in 1995, more than fifteen years ago - when I was nearing sixty years. I was not a child, but he was feeding me! He then distributed the *halwa* with his own hands. Desikachar enjoyed the scene and then said, "You used to say that he does *parayana* and has a beautiful voice. Could we hear him sing some songs?" I said, "Ramaswami Pillai, they want to hear you sing. Please sing some song of Bhagavan." At this he got very angry and declared, "What do you mean by some song of Bhagavan? For me there is only one song and that is Bhagavan's *Aksharmanamalai*." He sang in his powerful voice. When he came to the tenth verse, he started panting. I immediately embraced him affectionately and pleaded, "Ramaswami Pillai! Please stop! That is enough." "Oh! You want me to stop? Yes, I will stop," he responded. It was three thirty in the afternoon when we took leave of him. As soon as we left the scene, he started singing *Aksharmanamalai* from where he had stopped. His attendant later said that he sang until five in the evening. Then he told the attendant, "Sit me up on my bed." He continued singing with full consciousness until he dropped the body. I was not present at that time. But the next day, we laid him to rest within the ashram premises, singing *Aksharmanamalai* as wanted by him. All the residents of Ramanasramam and Ramana Nagar were there. I made the arrangements and interred him. Ramaswami Pillai, a very sturdy rock, had merged with Arunachala. I love him because Bhagavan loved him and he loved Bhagavan. He served not only the ashram but also every devotee of Bhagavan. The path to Skandashram will remain for hundreds and hundreds of years and every rock will talk about Ramaswami Pillai. Whether we human beings are grateful to him or not for the service done by him, every coconut tree in Ramanasramam will remain grateful to him.

After Ramaswami Pillai's *samadhi* was completed, the ashram President asked me to surrender the keys of the room that I was occupying. Mother Krishna Bai whispered in my ears, "Bhagavan is giving you pension. Surrender the keys and be free." After thirty seven years of service, that was the day that I walked away from *karma yoga* and the ashram. I pay homage to Ramaswami Pillai.

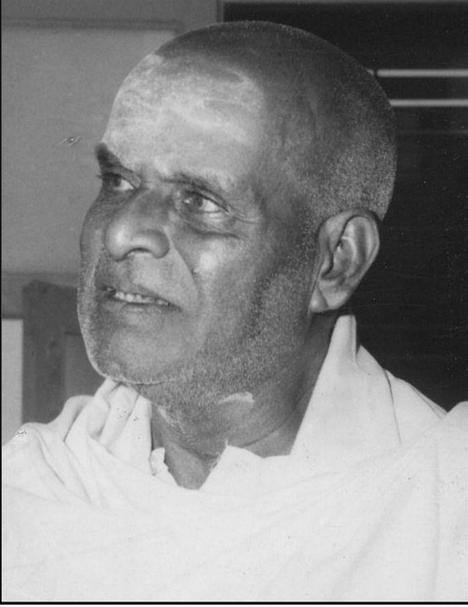


Sri Ramaswami Pillai is being brought from his room to the Sacred Shrine of SRI BHAGAVAN on SRI BHAGAVAN's JAYANTHI day - by Anuradha and Ganesan, supporting Sri Pillai by holding his hands. He had already completed and crossed over 100 years of age ! When he reached the Shrine, he sat ( exhausted ) on the steps of the Shrine (which except for the priests no one is permitted ). The priests were chanting. Sri Pillai majestically turned back to the Linga and in his stentorian voice prayed aloud : " Varumbadi Solilai Vandhu Yen Padi Ala " = " Did You not Command me to come ? NOW, take me ENTIRELY into Your fold ! " Very soon, Sri Pillai consciously died, after asking the servant make him sit on his bed cross-legged and loudly chanting SRI BHAGAVAN's " Marital Garland of Letters " ! What a powerful prayer by the devout disciple and how the Great GURU - RAMANA - fully responded to it by absorbing him into HIS FOLD !



*Sri Bhagavan and Kunju Swami feeding the monkeys*

## Kunju Swami



The *Mundaka Upanishad* says, “The *Atman* (Self) reveals itself to those the *Atman* chooses.” Whenever I meet a devotee, either in Ramanasramam or outside, I always ask, “How did you come to spiritual life? What made you turn to this?” The sole purpose behind the question is to make them aware that they have been called. Even if this became a physical reality through the chance reading of a book or suggestions from a friend, the truth is these things happen because we have been called. One important purpose of studying the lives of sages and saints and the early devotees of Bhagavan is to examine how each one of them had a turning point.

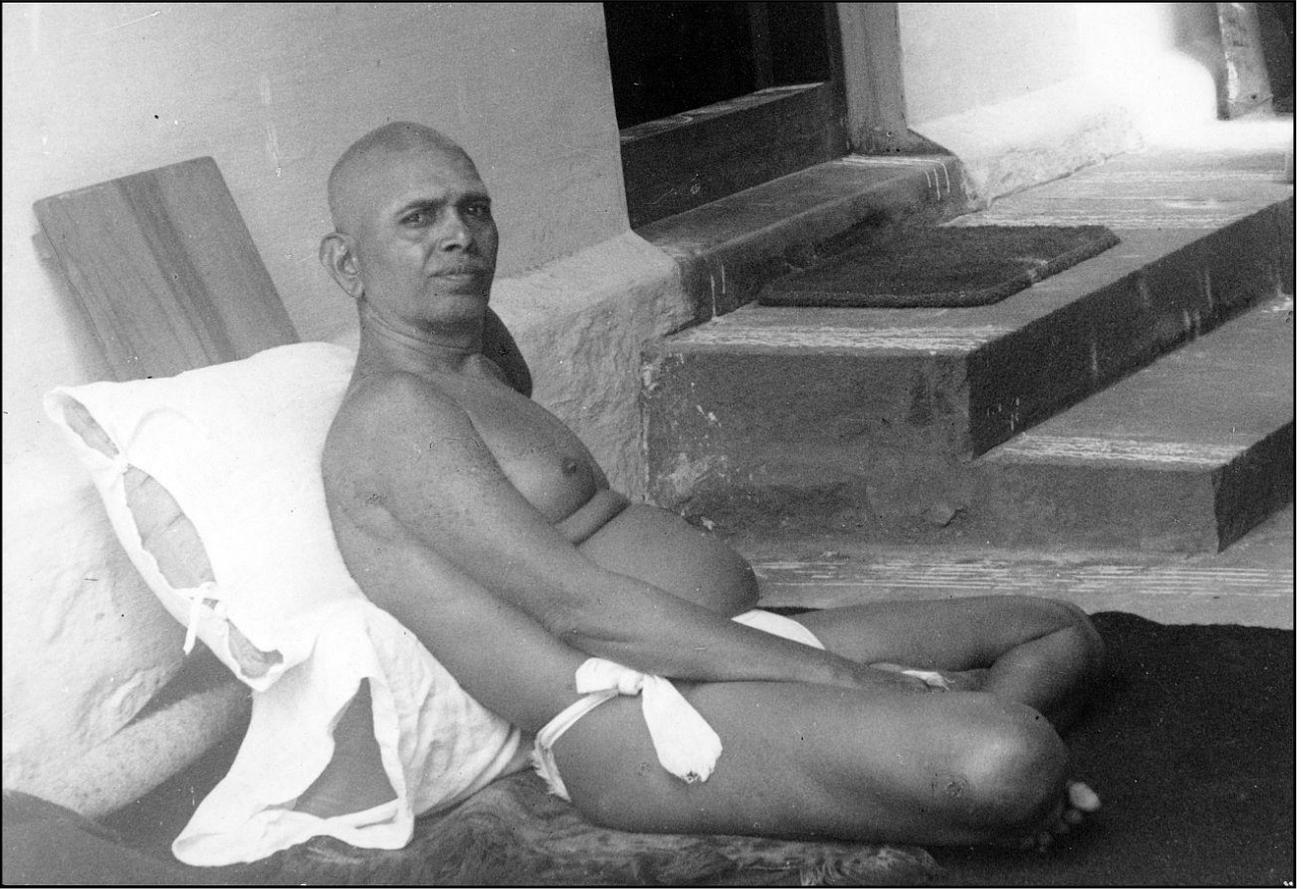
Kunju Swami was one such remarkable saint. Kunju means ‘baby’ in Malayalam, and he was so precious to his parents that they named him Kunju. He was chosen by the Self just as the Self has chosen each one of us. Do not exclude yourself because if this was not true you would not be reading this. Kunju Swami resided in joy, cheerfulness, friendliness, happiness; in fact, no one has seen him in any other state. Any

devotee who met Kunju Swami could never forget him. Much of the knowledge I have about old devotees - particularly those I could not meet - was given to me by Kunju Swami. Often, I had the honour of receiving his kind hospitality. “Swami, whenever I go abroad to give talks, you are the one who feeds me,” I would say gratefully. He used to enjoy saying. “Yes, all this information I give you is *vishaya daana*.” In Sanskrit, *vishaya daana* means giving information and also giving food. He was utterly devoted to Bhagavan right from when he came to him at the age of nineteen until his last days in Ramanasramam where he passed away at the ripe ‘young’ age of ninety six.

He was born in a lower caste family. According to the then existing caste system in India, people from lower castes were ostracized from society. At birth, when Kunju Swami’s horoscope was cast, the astrologer predicted that this child was divine and advised that special care be given to him. The parents paid heed to this counsel and out of their five or six children, gave him the most attention. Kunju Swami was very fond of his father and accompanied him wherever he went. He would often go with him to bathe in a small pool. By the time he was three years old and was able to understand things, he observed Brahmins and *sannyasins*, standing waist deep in water and doing *japa* of mantras.

“Father, may we also chant a mantra like them? Why don’t you teach me one?” he asked eagerly. His father shook his head, “No, we are outcastes. Mantras are meant for Brahmins - the highest caste - and *sannyasins*. We cannot repeat them.” The little boy was utterly dejected and secretly shed tears. That night, Lord Siva appeared to him in a dream and said, “My child, I am initiating you into a mantra. Chant *Om Namah Sivaya*.” The boy started chanting this as soon as he woke up. After a few days, when he was again taken to the pool, he saw people taking sacred ash from a small cloth bag and smearing it on themselves. He told his father excitedly, “Father, I would also like to have a sacred ash bag like that!” “No, my child, we are all outcastes. We are not supposed to wear sacred ash or carry those sacred ash bags,” his father replied. Once more, Kunju Swami was really upset on hearing this. Lord Siva appeared to him in a dream again and showed him a tree and said, “My child, go to that tree and underneath you will find some coins. Take them and buy a bag of sacred ash.” The next day, he rushed to the spot and found three quarter *annas* (the Indian currency then). He showed them to his father and told him what happened. “Then it is Siva’s commandment,” his father said, “Go to the shop and buy that bag.” Kunju Swami obeyed happily.

After a year, five year old Kunju Swami felt he must have a rosary. Hindus, particularly *sannyasins*, use a rosary made of *rudraksha* beads (seeds of a tree found mostly in Nepal) and consider it very sacred.



He was afraid to tell his father for fear of being told he could not have it because they were outcastes. He fervently prayed to Siva , “Please give one to me.” One day, while returning with a friend after a bath in the pool, his friend suddenly remembered that he had some work and had to go back. Kunju Swami continued walking alone and suddenly noticed a strange sight - a lotus in full bloom on the street. He bent to pick it up, and in the lotus flower there was a *rudraksha* bead necklace held together with a golden thread! He ran back home excitedly and showed it to his father. His father now fully convinced that this child was special, happily put it around Kunju Swami’s neck with his own hands.

By the age of ten, this boy was totally absorbed in his devotion to Siva . His father took him to the next village to listen to the stories of Siva , called *Thiruvilayadal Puranam*. *Thiruvilayadal* means ‘holy play’ in Tamil and these stories related everything the Lord did, including how he played with devotees and blessed them. Kunju listened to them intently, soaking in every word. On returning home, his father would ask him to tell his mother what he had heard and the boy could repeat the stories verbatim. His family was flabbergasted at his extraordinary memory. His father gathered the villagers the next day and the boy stunned them with his recital. Soon, the other villagers would take him along to attend spiritual discourses and he began to perform the role of a human tape recorder! Even more astounding was that he could recall speeches not only in his mother tongue, Malayalam, but in any language including Tamil and Sanskrit.

His father became increasingly concerned with the miraculous occurrences that surrounded Kunju’s life. Feeling that he must be properly trained, he took him to one Kuppandi Swami who had come to their village. Kuppandi Swami ridiculed these *siddhis* and told Kunju, “Do not indulge in these. They are not going to help you. This is not the purpose for which the Lord came to you in your dream and gave you all this.” The boy fell at his feet and begged, “Please guide me.” Kuppandi Swami, a master of several arts like magic, astrology, medicine and *Vedanta*, acceded. He told the child, “Choose any one art and I will teach it to you.” “Swami, you choose for me,” the child humbly replied. The teacher said, “I won’t choose for you. You must be involved.” They finally wrote the subjects down on chits of paper and drew lots. The child drew *Vedanta* and that became his subject of study. (To me, this is firm proof that the Lord guides you - only, you must have faith.)

The Swami started teaching him *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, which means 'the churned butter of emancipation'. (Bhagavan was very fond of this book.) Knowledge is like yoghurt. When we churn it enough, we get butter. Therefore, when anything we read including the scriptures is understood and faithfully put into practice, it gives us the real 'butter' or the truth through direct experience. Kunju Swami studied meticulously and because of his phenomenal memory, could learn twenty verses on the very first day. Within five days, he had memorized the entire book. But his father said, "This is not enough. You must know its meaning." Kunju went back to Kuppandi Swami and was taught its meaning. When Kuppandi Swami had to leave, he entrusted Kunju to another *swami* who was well versed in *Yoga Vasishtha*. His new teacher taught him this and advised, "It is not enough if you memorize and understand it. You have to practice it too."

He began putting these teachings into practice; yet, he did not feel fulfilled. After a few years, Kuppandi Swami returned from his pilgrimage and found Kunju in a depressed state. "Why are you like this?" he questioned Kunju. "Swami, what I practice is not giving me satisfaction. I have read in the scriptures and in our *puranas* that in the ancient *Vedic* period there were many *maharshis* who with just one look gave an experience of the Self. Are there not any such *maharshis* now?" Kunju inquired. Kuppandi Swami said, "Yes, there is one such sage, now. His name is Ramana Maharshi." The moment Kunju heard the name Ramana Maharshi, he went into a state of ecstasy. After a few minutes he collected himself and asked, "Swami, have you seen this Ramana Maharshi?" "Yes, I went to Arunachala and saw him," the teacher replied. "I would like to go there," Kunju stated.

Kuppandi Swami was a highly advanced teacher and had hundreds of devotees. He had a premonition that after two years he would go into *jiva samadhi*, entombment while still alive, and that Kunju should close his tomb. So he told Kunju, "Please wait until then. I have chosen you to do this because you have got the blessings of Lord Siva. Until then, I will be teaching you." During that period, Ramakrishnan, one of his friends from the next village, came to see him. Kunju told his friend, "At least you go to Ramana Maharshi and see him first. I will give you directions to get there." Finally the day for Kuppandi Swami to enter into *jiva samadhi* arrived. Hundreds thronged the site in anticipation of the miracle that awaited them. The pit was dug and the teacher told Kunju to place the slab over the tomb. "How will I know when to put it?" Kunju asked. "After I enter into *samadhi* you will see my head will suddenly start to shake. That will be your clue to put the slab on the tomb," Kuppandi Swami instructed. "When will I see that?" Kunju asked. "It will happen half an hour after I enter into *samadhi*," his teacher replied. Half an hour passed; then one hour, one and a half hours, two hours, and still nothing happened. Suddenly Kuppandi Swami arose from the pit and ran out with Kunju in tow. After running for almost a mile, Kuppandi Swami stopped under a tree. Kunju fell at his feet, "Swami, what happened?" "I don't know! I am not trying to cheat anyone. I had this premonition and the time was fixed - it was not by me. It was ordained. Something has gone wrong, which means I will do some more *sadhana*. I will go on a pilgrimage and I will not come back. Go to Ramana Maharshi. I bless you my child." Then the teacher parted from his disciple.

The Swami's failure to enter *jiva samadhi* became sensational news. Soon, the excitement died down. Kunju was heartbroken that his *upaguru* had failed and had gone away. His father took pity on him and said, "Son, you have been with Kuppandi Swami. Do you owe any money to anyone?" "Yes father, I owe someone five rupees," he replied. "Here, take this money and return it." His father pressed five rupees into his palm. Kunju felt that it was Lord Siva himself giving him the money to go to Tiruvannamalai.

By this time, around January, 1920, Kunju was very popular in his village, as well as in the surrounding ones. Wanting to avoid the idle curiosity of people, he waited until night to slip away. He ran to the railway station and waited there, but missed the train. He hid himself and caught the next train to Katpadi. On reaching Katpadi, he learned that he had again missed the train to Tiruvannamalai. The next train was at six in the evening and he had to wait the entire day. At five, when he went to buy a ticket, he was told that a bubonic plague had broken out in Tiruvannamalai and therefore nobody was allowed to get off there. Dejected, he asked a man standing next to him, "What do I do? I want to go to Tiruvannamalai." "Tirukoilur is the next station after Tiruvannamalai. Get a ticket to Tirukoilur and when the train reaches Tiruvannamalai, jump off the train. That is the way," the stranger advised.

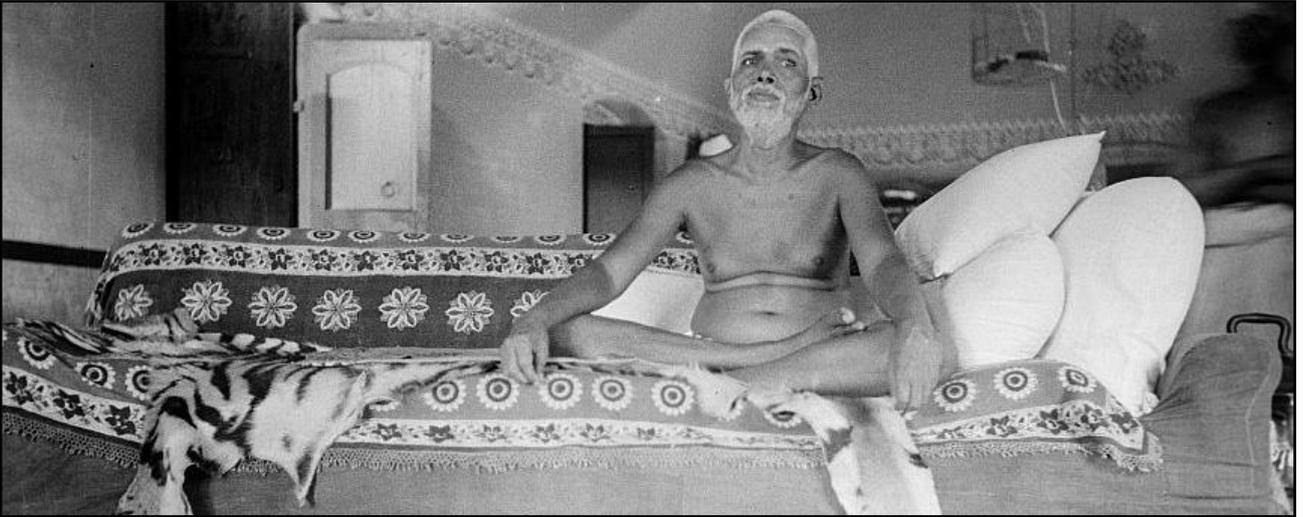
But when he went to buy the ticket, Kunju realized that he had just enough money to get to Tiruvannamalai. He needed four *annas* more to buy a ticket to Tirukoilur. Frustrated and not knowing what else to do, he began to pray to Bhagavan. He looked down and his eye fell on the rails in front of

him. Between the two rails lay a four anna coin. Overjoyed he picked it up, bought his ticket and finally got on the train to Tirukoilur. They were to arrive at Tiruvannamalai station at nine thirty in the night. Being a law abiding and truthful young man, Kunju Swami was apprehensive about breaking the rule of getting off at the forbidden station. Suddenly the man seated next to him held his hand and said, "I am getting down at Tiruvannamalai. You must also get off," and pulled him along. The two men slipped away into the night. Later on, when Kunju Swami recounted how the whole thing worked out, he said, "Had I not missed the morning train, I would not have been able to slip into Tiruvannamalai. Everything was perfect: I did not want to break the rules, but somebody held my hand and compelled me to get down. I followed him into town, to an open temple porch where we both fell asleep. When I woke up early the next morning, the man who helped me was gone. Who else could it have been except my Bhagavan?"

Kunju Swami was directed by passers-by to climb up the hill to reach Bhagavan. There were three paths and he did not know which to take. (This is symbolic for all seekers: when we want to reach the truth, we encounter doubts, problems and obstacles. However, if we are steadfast in our faith, this too will be resolved by the truth itself. What we need is perseverance, one-pointedness and faith.) He chose one of the paths and met a *swami*, a hefty man with long, matted hair and beard. Kunju Swami felt a little frightened because he had read in mythological stories about *rishis* who only gave curses. He ran back and encountered a stranger who asked him where he wanted to go. "I want to go to Ramana Maharshi," he said. "Take this path," the stranger pointed. As Kunju Swami walked up, at a spot a little above Virupaksha cave, he saw a small hut. Mudaliar Paati, who used to feed Bhagavan every day, lived there. On seeing this youth, she asked, "Where are you going?" "I want to have *darshan* of Ramana Maharshi," replied Kunju Swami. "Go this way, take a dip in this stream and then go to Maharshi. We shall be bringing food for Ramana Maharshi and we will bring some for you also." On the way, before reaching Skandashram, he wondered, "How can I pay my homage to my master? I am going to see him for the first time!"

On reaching there, he saw Bhagavan sitting and three people prostrating before him. One of them was his friend Ramakrishnan. The other two were Perumal Swami and one Swami Akhandananda. "This is the way I too will pay my homage," he told himself. He too prostrated to Bhagavan and waited, because he had read in the *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and *Jnana Vasishtha* that the guru will speak first and give an *upadesa*; until then one must not speak to him. At that time, Bhagavan turned to a lady who was weeping profusely and asked her, "Why are you weeping? You are weeping because you lost one son, but another son has come now." The lady was none other than Bhagavan's mother, Azhagammal. Much later, Kunju Swami learned that a man called Annamalai Swami had died that morning due to the plague and Bhagavan's mother had been very fond of him as he had been of much service to her and to the others in Skandashram.

After some time, Bhagavan brought a charcoal stove, a small vessel and some ingredients. Kunju Swami had read that sages make magic potions and just by drinking them one could attain *moksha*. He thought, "What a fortunate boy I am! My master Ramana Maharshi is going to make a magic potion and give it to me on my very first day here." Bhagavan made the potion, waited for it to cool and lifted a basket that was nearby. Four puppies lay huddled under it. The potion Bhagavan had made was just gruel for their feed! As the puppies ran helter skelter, Bhagavan turned to Kunju Swami and said, "Catch hold of all four of them." Kunju obeyed, while Bhagavan readied to give them gruel on a small plate. Later, Kunju Swami said, "This was my first *upadesa* - by which I understood that I had to hold on to the four *mahavaakyas*." (There are four scriptural statements which all Hindus revere as the highest wisdom. They are called *mahavaakyas*. They are *Prajnanam Brahma*, *Aham Brahmasmi*, *Tat Tvam Asi* and *Ayam Atma Brahma*. *Prajnanam Brahma* means 'Consciousness is Brahman'. *Aham Brahmasmi* means 'I am the awareness'. *Tat Tvam Asi* means 'That thou art' and *Ayam Atma Brahma* means 'I am the awareness that is both individual and cosmic'.) "Now, let them go one by one," the master instructed. Kunju let the puppies go one by one. Kunju Swami understood this second *upadesa* to mean that having absorbed the four *mahavaakyas*, he should let each statement drop off until only the true state of the Self remained. He was ecstatic that his master had given him the highest teaching. Each puppy lapped up its gruel. When its stomach was full, one puppy urinated and Bhagavan brought a gunny bag and cleaned the floor. Another puppy wandered around and did the same. Then, Kunju Swami thought, "Bhagavan should not be doing that. I would like to do this service." Bhagavan turned to him and said, "Do you want to clean it? Go ahead." So the third *upadesa* he got was to 'clean it'.



Kunju Swami understood it to mean, 'Always keep your mind clean.' He diligently followed these rules all his life and found much joy.

He had stayed with Bhagavan for eighteen days when one day the master asked him, "What are you doing as *sadhana*?" "I am doing the *panchakshari* mantra, *Om Namah Sivaya*," Kunju Swami replied. "Continue doing that," Bhagavan said approvingly. Kunju Swami followed this for eighteen days and felt that in Bhagavan's presence he had experienced the Self. He felt he should not be a burden to the ashram and so decided along with his friend Ramakrishnan to go back home and live there in this state of bliss. However, when they went home the bliss slowly started fading and they were back in their previous state. They realized that they must go back to the physical presence of Bhagavan. When Kunju Swami left for his first journey to Tiruvannamalai, he had done so without telling his parents, but this time he took their blessings.

In India, we have deep faith in serving the guru, being in close proximity to him and awaiting his instructions. When Kunju Swami and Ramakrishnan went to Skandashram, they too longed to serve their master. Fortunately, Perumal Swami, Bhagavan's personal attendant, told them to take over his duty as he was going on a pilgrimage. Perumal Swami's duty was to massage Bhagavan's feet and bathe him. Kunju Swami was delighted that his prayers were being answered and resolved that come what may, to never leave his master and do whatever service his master entrusted him with.

He asked Bhagavan, "Why was it that I lost the state of bliss and became unhappy again when I went back to my village? What should I do to get over my confusion and thereby gain clarity?" Bhagavan listened to his questions with a smile and replied, "You have studied *Kaivalya Navaneetam*; one of the verses says that if one enquires into and comes to see the individual self and thus transcends it to its substratum, the eternal Self, he becomes the substratum, the Self itself. Remaining always as the Self, there will be no more births and deaths." "How can I know my Self?" Kunju Swami asked. "First recognize who you are," the guru answered. Kunju Swami inquired, "How can I recognize who I am?" "See from where thoughts arise," Bhagavan said. "But how is this to be done?" Kunju Swami pressed. Bhagavan replied, "Turn your mind inward and be the Heart." Then with his gracious look fixed on Kunju Swami, he reverted to his natural state of silence. At that very moment, Kunju Swami's agitation and confusion ceased. He experienced a peace and bliss he had never experienced before.

Kunju Swami asked again, "But how and why did I lose the experience of bliss when I went back to my village?" Bhagavan quoted again from the *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, "The experience of the Self as a glimpse can occur in the presence of the guru but it may not last. Doubts will rise again and again. In order to clear them the disciple should continue to study, contemplate and practice. Studying or listening is *sravana*, contemplation is *manana*, and then practicing it is *nididhyaasana*. *Sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyaasana* should be done until the distinction between the known, the knower and the knowing no longer rises. There should be no difference, no other at all." After Bhagavan had explained this to him, Kunju Swami decided to stay in his presence and to carry out the practices he

prescribed. He found that if any doubt arose in his mind, it was cleared by merely listening to Bhagavan's answers to others' questions. He rarely had to ask a question himself.

The day in Skandashram used to begin at four in the morning. Bhagavan's mother would get up and sing devotional songs. At five, Bhagavan would come out and all devotees would sing *Aksharamanamalai*. Either Sama Thatha would cook or Echammal would bring food. At eight, everybody would eat. The rest of the time was spent meditating, reading *Ribhu Gita* or the *Kaivalya Navaneetam*. Bhagavan would remain mostly in silence. Kunju Swami has told me some interesting facts about Bhagavan. According to him, Bhagavan never lay flat or on his side. He always reclined. Bhagavan was also very frugal. Tooth powder was made every day and put into a packet for Bhagavan and given to him in the morning. If Bhagavan found that there was a little more than he needed, he would put it back in the same packet and expect it to be given to him the next day. Kunju Swami said that Bhagavan's frugality continued even while bathing. Bhagavan used to take a little oil, put it in his palm, add hot water to make a paste of it, and then rub it all over his body. Since he could not reach his back, Kunju Swami would oil it for him.

At Skandashram there is a little platform facing Tiruvannamalai town - there was only a stone at that time. Bhagavan would sit on it and brush his teeth. It used to be very cold and Bhagavan wore only a loin cloth. Kunju Swami felt that he should not sit there in the early morning cold, yet Bhagavan continued to do so. He found the reason for this only later: There was a lady called Sowbhagyamma who used to come to Skandashram every day. She had become old but had taken a vow that she would not cook, eat or even bathe, without having Bhagavan's *darshan* first. She did not come one day and Bhagavan asked her, "Why did you not come yesterday?" She replied, "Bhagavan, I had the great fortune of having your *darshan* from my house. When you were seated outside on the stone slab, I could see you." From that day onwards, whether it was raining or cold, Bhagavan sat on that rock so that Sowbhagyamma could have his daily *darshan*.

Every single day was a holy day at Skandashram. Bhagavan introduced Kunju Swami to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. Kunju Swami actually witnessed Kavyakantha's *kapala bheda*. A hot vapour emanated from Kavyakantha's head and he placed Kunju Swami's hand there. He found it very hot. Kavyakantha, in order to alleviate the discomfort caused by this intense heat, took Bhagavan's hand and placed it on his head. This made him feel the coolness, thus relieving him of the pain and discomfort. Later in reference to this incident, Bhagavan told Kunju Swami, "He has told us about this experience. But who could I have told?" Then someone asked, "Bhagavan, did you also have this experience?" Bhagavan just grunted, neither accepting nor denying the fact.

Nayana described Bhagavan's spiritual status to Kunju Swami as being that of a *sahaja nishta*. He explained that according to the scriptures, all spiritual seekers eventually grew from either power or peace. Many sages like Meera, Adi Shankara and Swami Vivekananda developed power, and not able to contain themselves, ecstatically expressed it through their songs and speeches. Bhagavan, on the other hand, was one who was rooted in peace and refused to move even a little from Arunachala. And that is the mark of *sahaja nishta*: to remain as one is. That is why K.K. Nambiar, an old devotee, called Bhagavan '*Malayai Muzhungi*' - one who swallowed a mountain!

During this time, there lived a sage in Kerala called Narayana Guru, who was so renowned that even Mahatma Gandhi thought it a privilege to spend a few moments with him. This sage rarely went anywhere. In fact, other saints came to him to pay their respects. Yet, he visited Bhagavan at Skandashram along with his disciples. Bhagavan spoke in Malayalam, cordially received him and invited him to share lunch. Narayana Guru replied gladly, in Tamil, "Oh yes! We will share the Maharshi's *prasad*." Bhagavan then bestowed his glance of grace and for a long time they both sat sharing an ecstatic silence. When it was time for him to leave, Narayana Guru, looking at Bhagavan's state of *sahaja samadhi*, said in Malayalam "Let it be so." This statement was interpreted as a prayer for *sahaja nishta*. But according to Narayana Guru's devotees and his works he was already in that state. Right there, Narayana Guru wrote five verses in Sanskrit called *Nirvritti Panchakam* extolling the state of the *sahaja nishta*.

When descending the hill along with his disciples, Narayana Guru was in ecstasy. He turned to his disciples and declared joyfully, "The Maharshi is a *raja sarpam*, a king cobra." In the Hindu religious and spiritual parlance, saints are often referred to as *sarpams* or cobras. Narayana Guru, a saint himself,

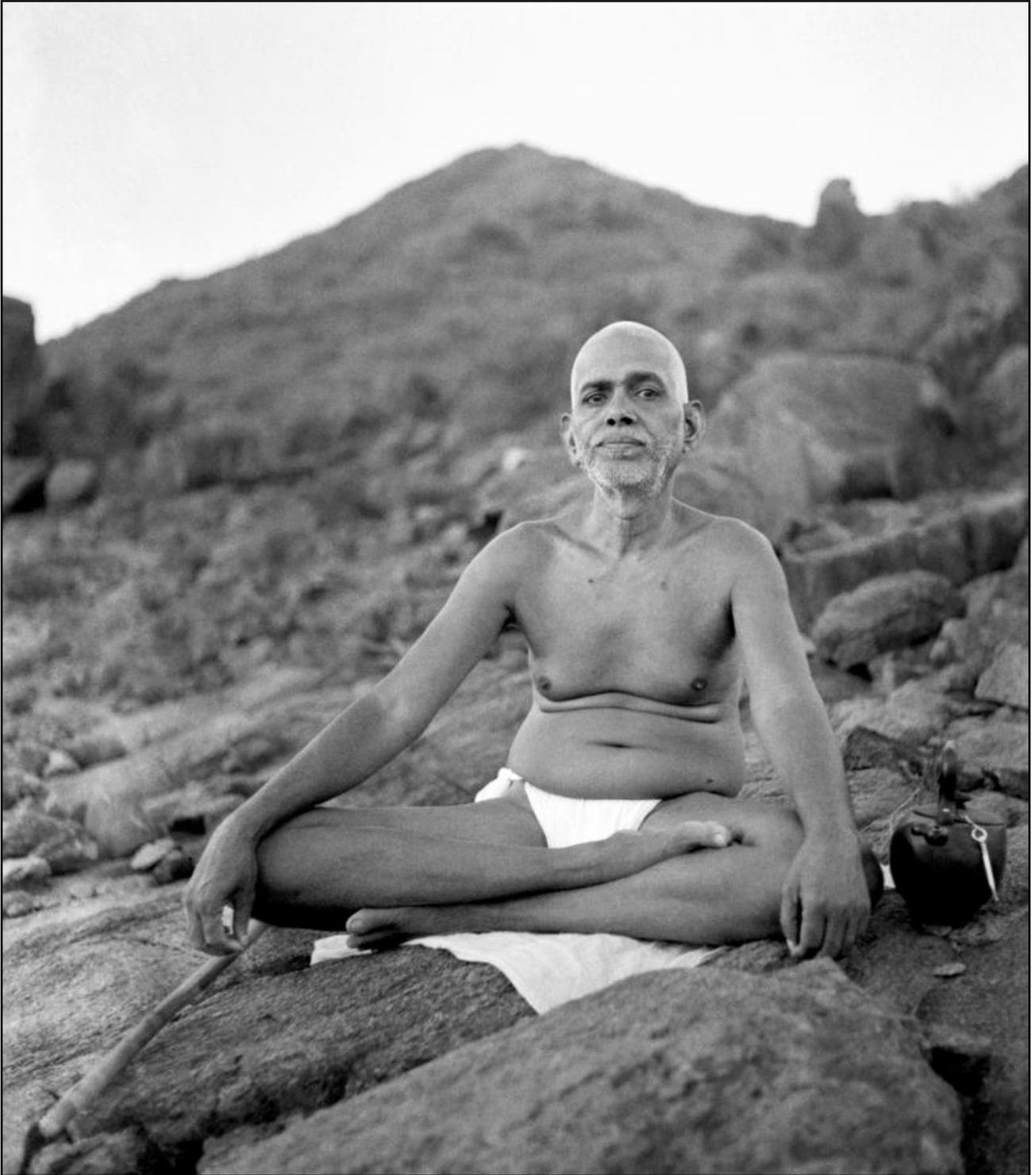
did not categorize Bhagavan as yet another cobra; instead he gave Bhagavan the exalted status of a king cobra. This truth emanated from his Heart. He summoned two of his disciples, one a wealthy man, the other an erudite scholar and said these beautiful words: "Maharshi's spiritual state is such that even a single glance from him is enough to liberate anyone. Now he remains unknown to the world, like a lamp hidden in a pot. He should be recognized so that this spiritual treasure is plundered by many seekers. Both of you should stay here for six months and make necessary arrangements for food and accommodation for visiting pilgrims, thus letting many visit the Maharshi every day and benefit spiritually. Allow Maharshi's awakening to be known in the circles of scholars and earnest seekers by going to them and speaking about the awakening." So captivated with Bhagavan was he, that when he went back to Kerala he wrote another five verses called *Municharya Panchakam*.

On his return, Narayana Guru fell ill. Coming to know of it Bhagavan sent Kunju Swami with a lemon, saying, "Go and give this to him." Narayana Guru received it and reverentially put it on his eyes, head and chest. He was in tears that Bhagavan had sent this *prasad* for him. Whenever he had a visitor from Tamil Nadu he would ask, "Have you had Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's *darshan*?" If the answer was no, he would raise his voice and say, "Why did you come here? You must go back and have *darshan* there." Knowing that Narayana Guru was to attain *mahasamadhi*, Bhagavan also instructed Kunju Swami about how Narayana Guru's body should be preserved. Narayana Guru was a *jnani*, a realized saint, and Bhagavan wanted his tomb to be built accordingly. Kunju Swami was to give Bhagavan a report on whether the tomb was built satisfactorily. Later, when the news of Narayana Guru's passing away reached Bhagavan, he said, "Narayana Guru is *purna purusha*, a fully blossomed one."

Kunju Swami said that Bhagavan was very natural and spontaneous with him. Many a time, Bhagavan would go into *samadhi* from which it was very difficult to bring him out. When this happened, three or four people would blow conches in Bhagavan's ears, until after a long time, Bhagavan emerged from his *samadhi*. This practice continued until sometime after Bhagavan moved to Ramanasramam. The scriptures state that there are two means of influencing the mind: by blowing a conch and by ringing a bell. The conch brings out the subdued mind. This can even be tried on people with insanity - to bring their minds back to a state of normalcy. The ringing of a bell turns the mind inwards. This is why temples and churches have bells; it is not merely a ritual but a method to calm and turn the mind inwards.

When Bhagavan's mother passed away, Kunju Swami along with the others brought the body down to the present Ramanasramam. Where Mother's body was buried, a thatched shed was erected and Bhagavan's brother Niranjanananda Swami and Dandapani Swami stayed there. Sometimes they would get together ingredients for *dosas* and send word to Kunju Swami to stay over and eat *dosas* with them the next morning. Such fresh preparations were considered a luxury in Skandashram. They would send some for Bhagavan as well. Kunju Swami would wake up early, join them and begin to wash the vessels. One day, a person wrapped in a cloth stood behind him and asked, "Is there any food for a guest?" Kunju Swami turned around and saw that it was none other than Bhagavan joking with him. Kunju Swami replied respectfully, "Bhagavan, you have come at the right time. We are making *dosas*, please stay here."

There was another lady who began her daily routine only after Bhagavan's *darshan*. When she came to know that Bhagavan had come to the present Ramanasramam, which was only a thatched shed at that time, she insisted, "Stay here. I want to cook for you and feed you." Bhagavan complied. The next day somebody else said, "We want to give you *bhiksha*." (In Sanskrit, *bhiksha* means giving of alms but its literal meaning is giving a feast.) It was customary for the persons who gave the *bhiksha* to request Bhagavan to go around the hill with them. Bhagavan used to walk slowly and therefore it took the entire night to go around the hill. Soon people started asking him to stay at the present Ramanasramam. Once when people had offered *bhiksha* on five consecutive days, Kunju Swami tried to stop the next person because Bhagavan had already gone for *giri pradakshina* for five consecutive nights. Bhagavan looked at him sternly to indicate that he must not tell anyone that he had been without sleep for five nights. Finally, when seven days had passed, Kunju Swami could bear it no longer. He went to Bhagavan and protested, "Bhagavan, you have not slept at all. Don't you need rest? Why do you prevent me from stopping these people?" Bhagavan looked at him graciously and said, "What is sleep? Sleep is only to give rest to the mind. Only if the mind exists do you need to give it rest. Where is the mind? Of course, I understand that if the eyelids are open for twenty four hours at a stretch they get strained and



the eyes will ache. If one remains with eyes closed for some time this too is taken care of. Therefore, where is the problem?"

After Bhagavan came down to the Mother's *samadhi*, the devotees from town continued to give him *bhiksha*. Kunju Swami and Ramakrishna Swami who were assigned to guard Skandashram, began to wail Bhagavan's long absence. "We came here for Bhagavan, not just to guard a building up on the hill," they thought sullenly. They would therefore sneak down the hill to be with Bhagavan. Noticing this Bhagavan said one day, "Let us all go around the hill." After going around the hill with Bhagavan, Kunju Swami and Ramakrishna Swami returned to Skandashram, while Bhagavan and a few others came back to Ramanasramam. After an hour or so Kunju Swami and Ramakrishna Swami came running to Ramanasramam crying, "Bhagavan, thieves have entered Skandashram and robbed everything! Whatever was left there is all gone!" Unruffled, Bhagavan replied, "That's good. Now nobody need guard

that building; you can also come and stay here.” This is how Ramanasramam began to develop. It began as a mere thatched shed with a low platform on which Bhagavan would lie. Six or seven devotees would lie down near him on mats made of coconut leaves. Kunju Swami used to say that those were the most magnificent days because they could be close to their guru while he shared with them pearls of wisdom all through the night.

On the flip side, there were many days when they did not have food to eat. Bhagavan’s brilliance had just begun to spread and many did not know of his existence or bring any offering of food. Bhagavan was in his early forties, while Kunju Swami and Ramakrishna Swami were young men in their early twenties. They were all energetic workers but often went hungry. According to Hindu custom, one has to observe a complete fast on *ekadashi*, the eleventh day of every fortnight. It is compensated by a feast on *dwadashi*, the twelfth day. Whenever they did not have any food Bhagavan would amuse them by saying, “Today we will celebrate *ekadashi*.” When after a day or two some devotees brought them ample food Bhagavan would then say, “Today we will celebrate *dwadashi*.” On some days there would not be enough rice but ten people to feed. Bhagavan would encourage them by taking them to the forest. He knew about all the varieties of greens and would ask the disciples to gather them while he told them about their medicinal properties and how to cook them. In South India, rice is eaten as the main preparation and vegetables are eaten as the side dish. Bhagavan would say, “Why should rice always be the main dish? Today we will have these greens as the main dish and eat rice as the side dish!”

Kunju Swami said that they never felt tired even if they didn’t have their creature comforts. Bhagavan inculcated in them his own equanimity. Like most highly advanced beings, Bhagavan was never mindful of whether there was enough to eat or not. But the beauty about Bhagavan was that he bestowed on his disciples that state of *titiksha* (tolerance) too. Kunju Swami said, “Bhagavan came away from Madurai as a sixteen year old boy straight out of school. He could not have had a chance to acquire too many skills, yet he was specially gifted. He knew how to make beautiful garlands with flowers and stitch plates out of dry leaves. He also had excellent culinary skills and could cook a vast variety of dishes.” Kunju Swami often wondered where Bhagavan had learnt all these.

When people began to give *bhiksha*, they would give five rupees in those days and some rice, *dal* and vegetables. Their only condition was that Bhagavan had to walk around the hill with the person who had given him *bhiksha* that day. Every one thoroughly enjoyed this, including the seven or eight residents of the ashram. To them, accompanying Bhagavan on *giripradakshina* meant walking along with God. Kunju Swami once said to me, “We did not feel that we were walking with one of our friends or a saint, but with the supreme God himself walking on two legs with two hands and a head.”

The Old Hall which is now used for meditation in Ramanasramam was built in 1926. Kunju Swami was very happy because Bhagavan could be given a couch, though Bhagavan himself did not like it. Bhagavan said, “I prefer to sleep on the rock.” When the disciples placed a new velvet cushion on it, Bhagavan said, “This velvet cushion is pleasurable and enjoyable only to you. It is a bed of thorns to me. I prefer to sit on the rock.” Even so, Kunju Swami said he was very happy that Bhagavan could have the comfort of the couch. Here too, the devotees slept in the same hall as Bhagavan.

There were a few dogs at Ramanasramam and Kunju Swami admitted that none of them were fond of the animals because they were a nuisance. The hall where they slept was also the kitchen, the dining room and the audience hall. These dogs too lived there. Bhagavan knew of some of the disciples’ discomfort with the canines. So, Bhagavan made them sleep below his couch. At night, he would take them for a walk and then bring them back and tell them, “Get under the couch! The others will get angry if you stay outside. Go in!” Bhagavan also worked along with his devotees. All the ashram chores, including gardening, chopping vegetables, cooking, cleaning, and even masonry work, were done by Bhagavan too. He would bring rocks and mix water and mud for mortar to build walls. When the master accompanied his disciples in their work, they felt rejuvenated and happy.

One day, when Bhagavan was seated in the midst of his devotees, he suddenly got up and strode quickly towards the hill. Kunju Swami said, “I was very curious. Bhagavan usually never did anything unpredictable. On the rare occasions that he did, there was always some significance behind it.” Kunju Swami was waiting for Bhagavan to instruct him to come, but the guru went alone. From a distance, he could see Bhagavan surrounded by monkeys. After half an hour or so Bhagavan came back with his

eyes swollen from shedding tears. “We were alarmed and asked what happened.” Bhagavan replied, “These monkeys have been searching for me at Skandashram. When I left, they searched all over the hill putting their lives in peril. Monkeys live in kingdoms and if they wander into another territory they could be killed by rival monkeys. These monkeys have come with their children risking their lives and are begging me to come back to Skandashram because they miss me there. It took me a long time to persuade them. I explained my situation and asked them to go back. I gave them my assurance that they will get back safely.” Whenever Kunju Swami narrated this anecdote he would weep copiously because it would bring before him and us, Bhagavan’s poignant unity with the animal kingdom. Bhagavan would often point out, “What is the difference between animals, birds and us? Birds wear the bird body, animals wear the animal body and we wear the human body. We all wear different bodies like different shirts, but in reality we are all the same being.” Kunju Swami loved animals and noticed Bhagavan’s relationship with them. He was therefore the source of all stories of the master’s relationship with animals and birds.

If you go to Ramanasramam, you will see four tombs for four animals. Bhagavan treated animals just like he treated human beings, there was absolutely no difference. Just as he bestowed liberation for his mother, so he conferred *mukti* to a deer, a dog, a crow and Cow Lakshmi - and these are only the known instances. Moreover, when Bhagavan was at Skandashram, (Kunju Swami told me that he himself had seen this), as soon as a baby monkey was born, the entire group of monkeys would come to Bhagavan and place the newborn with blood and all on his lap. Bhagavan would wash it and return it to the mother. This is indeed a remarkable phenomenon because usually if a human being were to so much as touch a newborn monkey, the whole herd would reject the newborn. He also cared for the delivery of the ashram pups. Squirrels used to complain to Bhagavan who would often mediate between them if they quarreled. He even would attend to cats whenever they were ill. There was one cat that had a diseased eye. Bhagavan kept a towel with which he would wipe its eye clean to the chagrin of his attendant. Bhagavan respected his attendant’s feelings too, so he would wash this towel himself.

Bhagavan rarely asked anyone for anything. Once, a stranger sat in his presence in the hall. Bhagavan looked at him and asked, “Next time, will you please bring me some cashew nuts?” Everybody was surprised. Bhagavan was a shy person and not one known to come forward to talk to new visitors. Here, most extraordinarily, he was not only volunteering to talk to a stranger but almost begging him to bring something for him. Soon everyone knew the reason. It was for the squirrels. They would not eat peanuts and were partial to cashew nuts. The ashram management felt differently: “They are only squirrels. If they are hungry, they will eat anything. We can feed them peanuts.” But they never touched the peanuts. Six or seven squirrels stood complaining in front of Bhagavan. That is what Bhagavan said, “They are cajoling me and asking me where their food is.” World War-II was going on at the time and cashew nut production had been nationalized, making them unavailable in the market. There was no cashew in the ashram kitchen and the store had only a few which the cooks wanted to save for their cooking. Bhagavan sent for cashew four times, but they said, “These few cashew nuts are for making sweets.” Finally, Bhagavan’s boundless compassion won over his natural restraint and taciturnity to get cashew nuts for the squirrels through the visitor. Bhagavan could often be seen breaking the cashew nuts into small pieces and keeping them in a small box. The only thing he asked for was cashew for the squirrels!

Snakes and peacocks also frequently found their way to Ramanasramam. The great master gave us an example of his compassion even in his last moments. Just before Bhagavan dropped the body, he asked to be helped up into *padmasana*. A white peacock was making sounds outside. After five minutes, Bhagavan opened his eyes and said, “He is hungry, feed him.” (In India, animals and birds are usually referred to in the neutral gender as ‘it’. But Bhagavan always attributed referred to them as ‘he’ or ‘she’.) These are one of the last few sentences he spoke. Bhagavan’s compassion to animals and birds cannot even be called extraordinary, because he treated every being alike. It is only because we perceive the difference between the animal kingdom and mankind that we glorify Bhagavan’s love for animals. Bhagavan was not paying any special attention to them - he was paying equal attention to all.

Dandapani Swami was the cook and Bhagavan assisted him. Every morning, Dandapani Swami would bring a type of cactus, which had to be ground or else it could not be eaten. Bhagavan would grind it and this eventually caused blisters on the fingers of his right hand. Bhagavan of course did not mind. But it irked Kunju Swami. He told Dandapani Swami, “Do not bring that cactus from now on.” “I am the

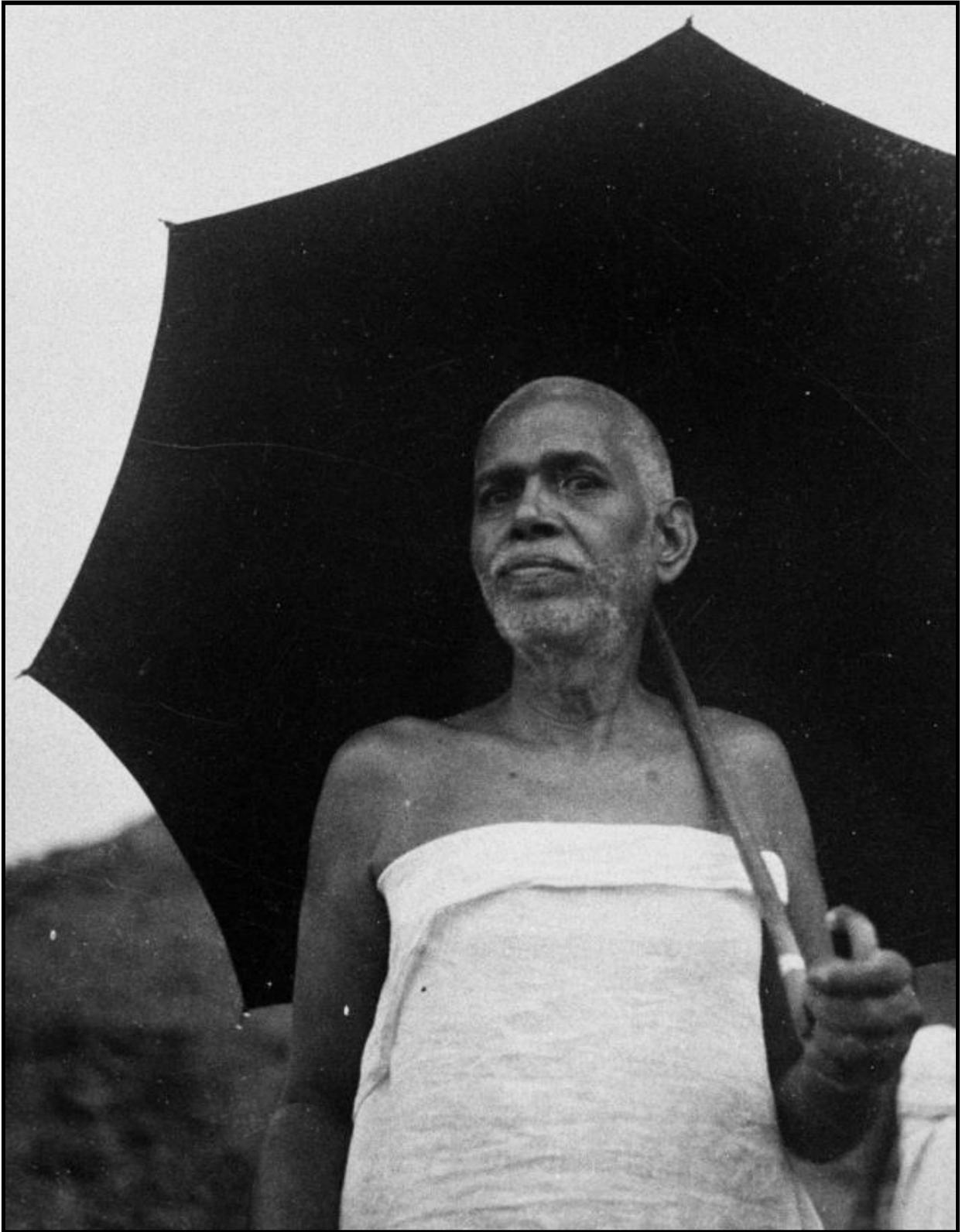
cook. Do not interfere in my job,” Dandapani Swami shot back. Kunju Swami went to Bhagavan and complained, “Bhagavan, I have told Dandapani Swami not to bring this cactus but he insists on bringing it and this has caused you blisters. I will not eat if you grind it!” Nothing changed the next day, so Kunju Swami refused to eat. Bhagavan noticed this and said, “What freedom do I have when I have to obey whatever anyone says? If I do not obey them they say that they will not eat. Where is my freedom?” Kunju Swami was deeply hurt. Bhagavan continued taunting him, “Kunju, may I get up? I have eaten now.” Or, “May I enter?” “May I read this book? If I read this without your permission you will not eat.” “May I go out? I want to take a walk on the hill. May I, or you will not eat.”

This plunged Kunju Swami into depression. After experiencing this for three days, he told Bhagavan, “Bhagavan, I am going to Tirupati. My train leaves at six thirty.” Tirupati is a pilgrimage centre in Andhra Pradesh, nearly a hundred miles from Tiruvannamalai. After lunch, Bhagavan suddenly said, “I am going around the hill, let us all go.” Ramakrishna Swami told Kunju Swami, “Your train is at six thirty. We will all go around Arunachala with Bhagavan. When we approach the town you can catch your train.” Kunju Swami agreed and decided to take the opportunity to walk around the hill. But on that day, Bhagavan deliberately walked very slowly - so slowly that by the time they reached the outskirts of the city, the train had already left. Bhagavan said, “See Kunju, your train is moving, go and get on!” Then he consoled Kunju Swami, “You cannot even eat the ashram food. You find the *sambar* and *rasam* so spicy that you dilute them. In Andhra, everything is made with chillies, how can you eat there?” Kunju Swami prostrated at Bhagavan’s feet. He recounted later, “I served Bhagavan day and night and became a little proud of my proximity to him. I had begun to think that I was superior to all because I had been close to Bhagavan and that I was his best devotee and servant. Bhagavan just played a *leela* and snubbed me in his most natural and beautiful way.”

Ramakrishna Swami had a younger brother called Vasu who was studying in a college four hundred miles away from Tiruvannamalai. One day, he got a letter from his family that Vasu was following a *hatha yogi* who had taught him the practice of concentrating between the eyebrows. Vasu was so obsessed with doing this that he had almost turned mad. He was not able to eat or sleep and was in a pitiable condition. But he would not listen to his family’s advice to desist. Ramakrishna Swami told Bhagavan who knew all the family members, “Bhagavan, if I go he will not listen to me.” Then Bhagavan said, “Kunju, you go and tell him about the teaching.” Ramakrishna Swami had only five rupees to give Kunju Swami. It was enough to buy a train ticket but not for food on the way. They didn’t know how to tell Bhagavan this. Finally Kunju Swami said, “It doesn’t matter. Bhagavan has asked me to go, so I will go. It is all right even if I remain hungry.” His train was at half past six in the evening.

At three that afternoon, a visitor brought *pooris*, an Indian fried bread. Bhagavan used to eat two if they were small, or one if they were bigger. Bhagavan practiced equal sharing: if there was only one *poori* and many people to share it with, he would make it into smaller pieces and distribute them equally to everyone. But on this day, when *poori* was served to him in the hall, he did not stop with one. The visitors gave Bhagavan two *pooris* and waited; then three and waited expectantly; then four, then five, then six; only then did Bhagavan say, “Enough.” Everybody was surprised that Bhagavan had accepted six *pooris* when he would normally eat only one. He then slowly and neatly packed five *pooris* and called Kunju Swami who had not yet told him of his problem. The master told him, “You have got money only for the ticket, but what will you eat? Take this to eat on the way.” Kunju would narrate this incident with great emotion. Bhagavan’s tender, loving and caring ways are so beautiful!

Kunju Swami too, was very caring. Over the next two days, he ate only four *pooris*. He kept one as *prasad* because Bhagavan himself had packed it. He took this *prasad* to Ramakrishna’s family and fed it to Vasu first. Then he took a little time to divert Vasu from his path of *hatha yoga* to Bhagavan’s Self Enquiry. After staying for a few days and ensuring that there was improvement, he returned to the ashram and reported this to Bhagavan. Before he could return a letter had already reached the ashram saying that Vasu had relinquished all *hatha yoga* practices and was now practising meditation as prescribed by Bhagavan. Vasu later joined the army and became an officer of high rank. I met Vasu after he retired from the army. He was a hefty six footer with a very simple heart. That little *prasad* of *poori* and of course, Self Enquiry had transformed him.



Kunju Swami used to narrate many stories. There was a man called Kandaswami in Tiruvannamalai who was a murderer and abhorred by all. One day, he fell gravely ill and people drove him out from the town. His only shelter was a *mantap* in front of Ramanasramam. He stayed there and sent word to Bhagavan that he was hungry. Bhagavan made gruel and sent it across every day. Before we proceed with the story, it must be known that Bhagavan never ever commented disparagingly about any person. Whenever Bhagavan received news that a devotee had passed away, he commented on what a good man or woman that person was. Even if the said person had hundreds of faults and only a few good qualities, Bhagavan dwelt only on the positive traits. When his devotees heard that Kandaswami had died, they were sure that even Bhagavan wouldn't be able to find a single good quality to talk about this

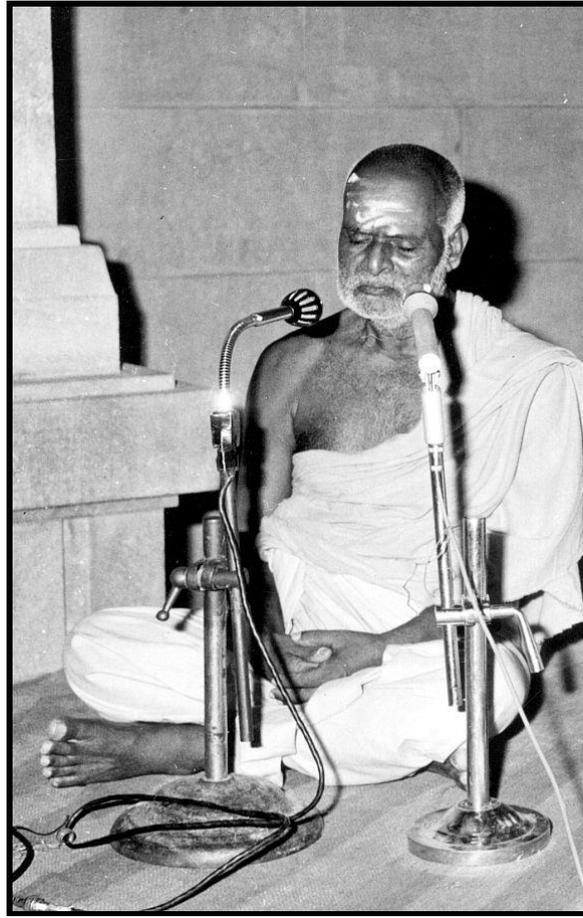
abysmally wicked man. Expectantly, they went and informed Bhagavan of his death. “Bhagavan! Kandaswami has passed away,” Bhagavan said : “Is it so? He used to keep his body and clothes very clean even though he did not use soap or soap nut powder. He used to bathe and clean his *dhoti* for hours together and keep it spotlessly clean.” “Bhagavan, we are all defeated,” they said in unison. “What is the matter?”, Bhagavan asked. They replied, “We thought that even you would not be able to find a single good quality about this man but we have failed. Bhagavan, you have defeated us.”

Kunju Swami also gave us many instances of Bhagavan’s humour. When letters arrived, they would be taken to Bhagavan in the hall and the devotees would observe Bhagavan’s face as he read them. From his expression, they would know if there was something interesting in the letter. Once, Bhagavan held a post card in his hand and then kept it aside, with a smile. Kunju Swami ventured to ask, “Bhagavan, I know that you have read something interesting in that post card. Will you please share it with us?” There were six or seven people present. Bhagavan said with a smile, “Worldly people have attachment to the body only as long as they live. But some of these *sannyasins*, these monks, who are supposed to have renounced the world are attached to their bodies even after they die.” The listeners did not understand. Bhagavan continued, “This post card is from a *sannyasin* who is eighty years old. He has appealed for funds saying, ‘I may die any day. Since my body has to be placed in a *samadhi* which has to be built well, please send me donations.’”

In the 1930s, when Bhagavan was in his early fifties, an old man in his nineties came to Bhagavan. He looked very pious and prostrated several times before Bhagavan, crying all the while. He said, “Bhagavan, I have only one prayer.” Bhagavan as usual looked at the speaker without asking him to continue. The old man said, “Bhagavan, you should live for a hundred years. I should see that you live for a hundred years.” Everybody was moved with his prayer which was almost like a blessing that Bhagavan should live for a hundred years. Bhagavan hid his smile. Kunju Swami being a humorous person himself, knew that Bhagavan was amused by the humour of it all. After an hour, when this old man had gone away, he went near Bhagavan and asked, “Bhagavan, I noticed that you smiled. What was the reason?” Bhagavan, amused, said, “You are all moved, isn’t it, that he asked that I should live for a hundred years? Do you know what that means? That he has to live a hundred and forty years, because he said, ‘I want to see you live for a hundred years.’”

When people from different branches of philosophy asked Kunju Swami questions, he found he had no answers. Many people from Tamil Nadu, especially those who followed the path of *Saiva Siddhanta* plied him with questions. There was a *mutt* where they held classes on *Saiva Siddhanta*, so he decided to go there and learn it. He went to Bhagavan and informed him, “Bhagavan, I am going to this place to learn *Saiva Siddhanta*.” “Oh! Why?” Bhagavan asked. Kunju Swami replied, “When people come here they have so many questions. If I learn, then I can answer their queries.” “Oh! That is very good, so you are going to learn *Saiva Siddhanta* so that others’ questions can be answered. Suppose someone comes with questions on *Advaita Vedanta*, what will you do? You will go and learn *Advaita Vedanta* and if someone comes and talks to you in Sanskrit, what will you do? You will go and learn Sanskrit. If westerners come to you, speaking in English, how will you answer them? Then will you go and learn English too?” By now Kunju Swami realised what Bhagavan was meaning to impress on him. He said, “Bhagavan, please pardon me. I am not going anywhere. Please teach me. It is only because of love that I want to help the others.” Bhagavan then gave him a gracious look and said, “If you learn to remain in the Heart as ‘I AM’, the answers to any questions that are put to you will emerge like an echo from within and they will be the correct answers. Learn to remain within your Heart as ‘I AM’.”

In another incident, there was a group of people trying to disturb the ashram management. Kunju Swami happened to enter the Old Hall and since everyone stood there, Kunju Swami too stood there. Bhagavan looked at him, “What business have you got here? Why have you joined these people?” Kunju Swami did not know what to say; he had not come to join them. Bhagavan asked again, “With what aim did you come here?” “Bhagavan, I came for getting your grace,” Kunju Swami replied. The master rebuked him, “Then attend to that. Why are you standing here?” That day, Bhagavan taught him the lesson that we must attend only to the purpose for which we all have come. It is to recognize the truth. It is not just for Kunju Swami that Bhagavan said this, but for everyone. This is Bhagavan’s direct teaching and as Kunju Swami confirmed to me a sound and practical one that we should not interfere in others’ affairs.



In 1932, after serving Bhagavan personally day and night for twelve years, Kunju Swami wanted to intensify his practice of Self Enquiry by keeping himself aloof from the ashram. He trained a young man called Madhava Swami to attend on Bhagavan. Kunju Swami waited for the day to tell Bhagavan that he was retiring from service and that he would be staying in Palaakothu in the next compound. He was hesitant as he did not know how to break the news to his master. While still in this dilemma, one day as he entered the hall he heard Bhagavan explaining to others that real service to him did not mean attending to his physical needs but practicing his teachings. Once before he had said, "It is no use in saying, 'I have been doing personal service to the guru.' One should abide by the teaching of the guru every day." A few days later on another occasion, he heard Bhagavan say, "The best service to the guru is engaging in Self Enquiry, meditation and other spiritual practices with purity of body, speech and mind." He kept chancing upon Bhagavan saying this morning and evening for several days. He had been hesitating to tell Bhagavan of his plans, but Bhagavan himself had taken the cue and given him an answer. Another day when he entered Bhagavan's hall, Bhagavan was quoting from the *Kaivalya Navaneetam* wherein the disciple asks the guru how he can repay him for the grace he has received from him. The guru replies, "The highest return the disciple can render to the guru is to remain fixed in the Self without being disturbed by obstacles and outward distractions."

This finally emboldened Kunju Swami. He prostrated before Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I want to go and live in Palaakothu and pursue Self Enquiry." Bhagavan was delighted and exclaimed, "Oh good! It is enough if the mind is kept one pointed in *vichara*, *dhyana*, *japa* and *parayana*." (*Vichara* is enquiry, *dhyana* is meditation, *japa* is chanting a mantra and *parayana* is repeatedly singing the works of the master without aspiring for anything else.) Kunju Swami again prostrated before Bhagavan and pleaded, "Bhagavan, please bless me. I am going to be alone, away from you. Guide me." Bhagavan looked at him graciously and then said the most beautiful thing: "Make Self Enquiry your final aim, but also practice meditation, *japa* and *parayana*. Practice them relentlessly. If you tire of meditation, take to *japa*, if you tire of *japa*, take to Self Enquiry, if you tire of that, do the chanting of verses. Do not have a gap between them. Do not allow the mind to sway from your task. Practice this faithfully, and in the end you will be established in Self Enquiry and find culmination in Self realization." This is an assurance, not

just to Kunju Swami but to every listener of this profound statement by the master. Be assured, Self Enquiry will establish you in the truth that you already are.

Kunju Swami lived in a small hut in Palaakothu and did not earn money or beg for it. Whatever provisions he had was exhausted - there was no food to eat. Bhagavan would visit Palaakothu after lunch where he would take a walk around the small pool there. He would invariably meet Kunju Swami and ask, "How are you? What are you doing? Are you doing your meditation? Are you doing your Self Enquiry?" Kunju Swami never told him of his plight, feeling that it was quite petty to tell his master about his physical problems. Did he not already know? On the third day after Kunju Swami had shifted to Palaakothu, one Gounder, a wealthy devotee of Bhagavan, came and prostrated before him in the hall. He was Kunju Swami's friend, so Bhagavan commented, "Oh, you have come to see your friend." He replied, "Yes, Bhagavan. I was exhausted yesterday after a whole day's work and was fast asleep. You visited me in my dream and said, 'You are sleeping peacefully while your friend is hungry for the last three days. Is it proper on your part to sleep like this?' So I immediately got up and caught a train to come here." "Go and see your friend," Bhagavan told him. When he met Kunju Swami, he realized that his friend had in fact not eaten for three days and there was nothing in his humble abode. He gave Kunju Swami some money for provisions and fed him. He then had to go back, but vowed in Bhagavan's presence, "Bhagavan, I will not allow him to go without food. I will send him five rupees every month." In those days, five rupees was more than enough to meet one's monthly needs. Kunju Swami said, "I had nothing - no utensils, nothing. Another friend saw this and he immediately bought me a stove and provisions." Years later, Gounder even built a house for Kunju Swami opposite the ashram. Kunju Swami used to say, with a lump in his throat, "When you have surrendered to the master, that is to the truth, do not try to exert yourself by even making a prayer. He knows everything. It will happen in its own time."

During his stay in Palaakothu, Ramanasramam grew rapidly and many visitors started coming to the ashram. Kunju Swami needed Bhagavan to talk to him every day, even if it was only one sentence. However, with Bhagavan becoming very busy this was becoming increasingly difficult. Kunju Swami recalled gleefully, "I am a very clever man. Every evening, we had *parayana* of the Tamil verses composed by Bhagavan from the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. I used to deliberately miss one line while singing and Bhagavan would say, 'Hey, Kunju you have missed that line,' or I would mispronounce a word and he would say, 'No, no, Kunju, it is not like that. Pronounce it properly.' I would be so happy that he spoke to me. Every day, whenever I wanted Bhagavan to talk to me, I knew the trick!"



*Kunju Swami expounding Bhagavan's teaching  
(Kanakamma, Anuradha and Ganesan seated among the audience)*



Tamil Parayana with Kunju Swami (seated in the centre)

The *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* in Tamil was released in the form of a book. Unfortunately, many *sadhus* could not afford to buy them from the ashram. So Bhagavan arranged with a devotee to write it all down in a notebook and hand it over to Kunju Swami. A small printed picture of Bhagavan was pasted there in it. Now, Kunju Swami wanted his copy of the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* to also have a picture of Arunachala but he could not get hold of one. While he was still thinking about it, Bhagavan called out to him, "Kunju, bring your note book." He then drew a picture of Arunachala in it. Kunju Swami left this notebook with Anuradha, another devotee, as a legacy. It contains a lot of Bhagavan's handwriting and the picture drawn by Bhagavan. She has now handed over this precious treasure to the ashram archives.

Bhagavan used to correct all the proofs of his books himself. He would ask for two sets of proofs. One he would correct and send to the press, and the other he would keep with himself. There were often so many errors that the same proof would be sent to the press four or five times. Bhagavan carefully kept a copy of every proof and would finally bind four or five copies and distribute them. He kept the proof with the maximum errors for himself while he would give the better ones to Kunju Swami and those disciples who could not afford to buy these books. This is how kind and compassionate Bhagavan was.

Once, Kunju Swami felt he could not continuously meditate or pursue Self Enquiry and stay in the Self. He confessed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I am not able to do this. The flow gets interrupted." Bhagavan said, "Why? It is very easy. Before you go to sleep, meditate and go into the Self. Then when you fall asleep, your whole sleep will be a meditation of staying in the Self. The moment you wake up in the morning, again go into meditation for a few minutes and remain as the Self. Throughout the waking state, the undercurrent of remaining in the Self will be there even though you are working, arguing or quarreling. This substratum will always keep you in the Self." Kunju Swami said, "This is the most beautiful and practical teaching I have received from Bhagavan."

During Bhagavan's last days, the management of the ashram had to face many problems. The devotees did not know how to continue with their activities. So along with Kunju Swami they approached Bhagavan. He told them, "How is the management being carried out now? Do you think it is you or somebody else that is managing it? There is a higher power which is managing all this. The same higher power will continue to manage." When Bhagavan was to drop his body, the devotees again wanted guidance. "What should we devotees do?" they wondered anxiously. Kunju Swami and twenty other

devotees went to Bhagavan and prayed, “Bhagavan, please guide us.” Then he gave his last message, which is not only to those twenty devotees but also to all of us: “Put the teaching into practice.”



*Kunju Swami with Anuradha*

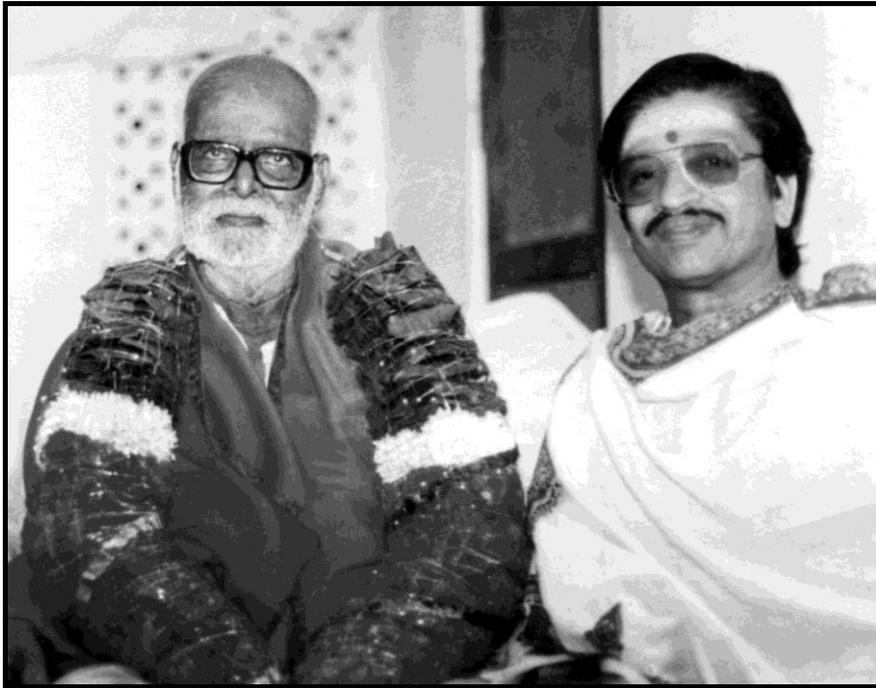
He would enthrall us with stories of the master and whatever I am sharing with you is *prasad* from Kunju Swami. It is Kunju Swami who has given us a wealth of information, all the reminiscences about other devotees, about Bhagavan’s relationship with them, his beautiful relationship with monkeys, animals, men, trees, plants, with the hill, with its rocks, even with its sands! We are all deeply grateful to Kunju Swami. I can never forget his solicitude to me. I had given Kunju Swami Chadwick’s old room. He said, “Ganesan, come and stay with me in the next room.” Even though I was an adult and held a responsible position in the ashram, he looked after me as if I was a child. He was so kind!

I had appointed two attendants to look after him as he experienced a lot of physical pain. These attendants did their duty very well, but sometimes they made blunders. Kunju Swami never complained. One day I asked him, “Swami, are they all looking after you properly?” “They are looking after me very well. In fact, today I wanted to call and tell you that I would like to break some good news to humanity.” Puzzled by his words, I asked, “Swami, what are you talking about?” “Do you know these muscular pains can be cured with a massage using honey?” replied Kunju Swami. “I still don’t understand, Swami.” I learned later that there was a jar of honey kept next to the jar of brown oil which was to be massaged onto Kunju Swami’s body to relieve his muscular pain. His attendants, mistaking the honey for the oil, had been massaging Kunju Swami’s body with it. It obviously did not prove useful but all Kunju Swami said was, “I wanted to announce a medical breakthrough, but it did not work.” He used to get his point across indirectly without complaining, despite being in so much pain.

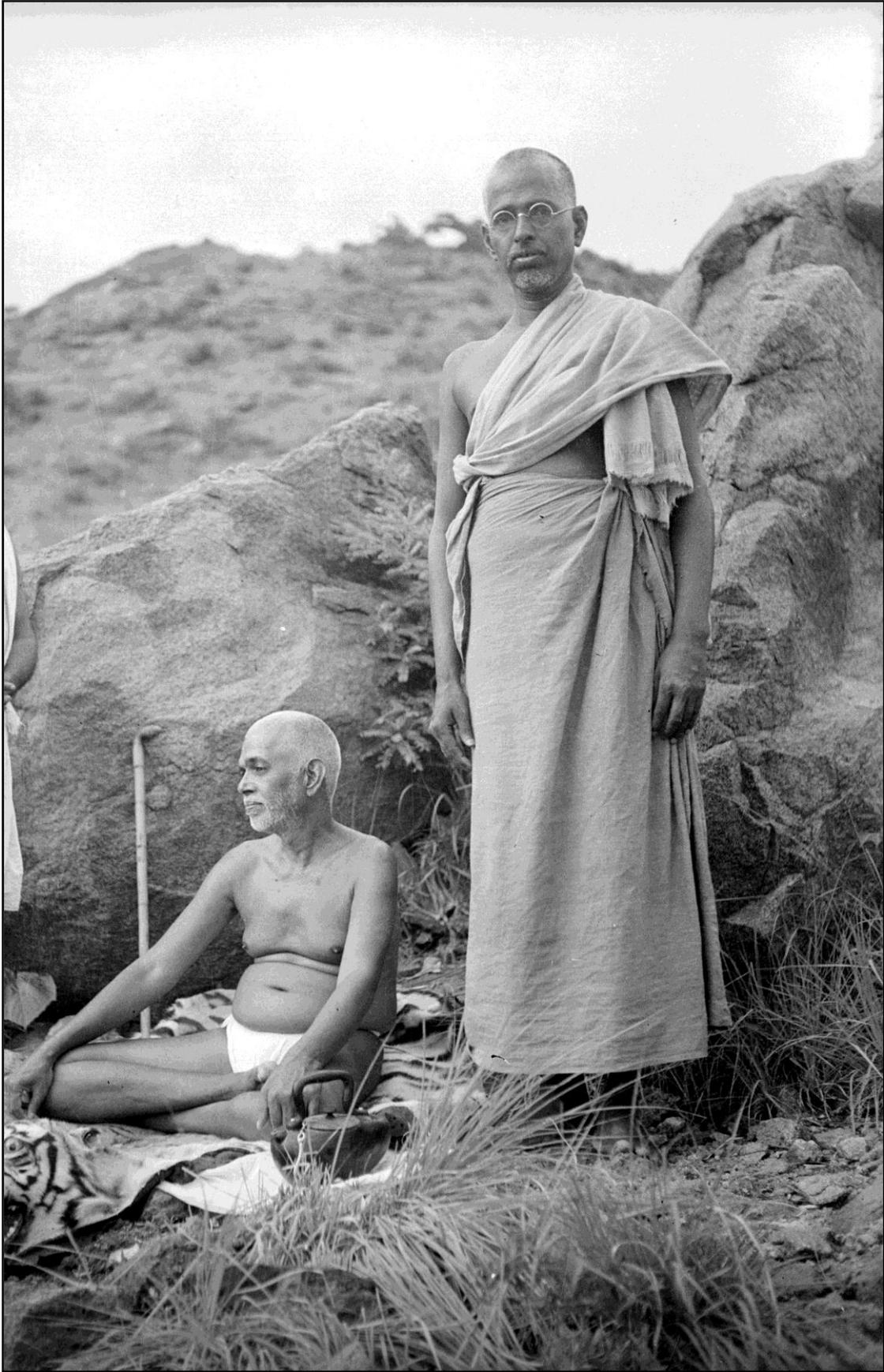
Towards his end, he was almost bed ridden. He could not even sit up. Anuradha, a few others and I would visit him and try to amuse him. We used to ask him to tell us something about Bhagavan’s verses and he would come alive. Anuradha’s son, Shankar had finished school and was soon to leave for America to study medicine. He was very fond of Kunju Swami because he had been almost brought up by him. He knew that when he returned from America the next time, Kunju Swami would no longer be among us. This saddened him deeply. Kunju Swami wanted to cheer him up, while we tried to amuse him. I put a question to Kunju Swami, “In Bhagavan’s Tamil translations of Sankara’s works, which song do you like?” Kunju Swami steadied himself and looked at me. I continued, “Swami, I like the song

where it is said 'I am the Self, I am awareness' and Anuradha likes the song where it says 'You are the Self, you are That'. Whose side are you going to be on?" Kunju Swami said, "Let her sing first." The first song she sang was *Hastamalaka Stotram*, which says 'I am That (*avvaanmaa naan*)'. Then she sang *Guru Stuti*, which says 'You are That (*avvasthu andro needhaan*)'. I asked Kunju Swami, "Swami, to which party do you belong? Do you belong to 'I am That' or 'You are That'?" Kunju Swami smiled at us, "What is the difference between 'You' and 'I'? In 'You are That', the important word is 'are', not 'You' or 'That'. Both get merged in the 'are'. In 'I am That', the important word is 'am', not 'I' or 'That.' Be the 'I AM'."

He passed away a few days after listening to those beautiful songs. On his last night, he asked his attendants to remove the cushions from his wooden bed and help him sit in *padmasana*. "I am going to meditate," he declared. He remained in deep meditation while his attendants slept. After two hours, when they awoke and touched him, his body was cold. He had passed away in that silence. His Heart will always be in Arunachala, at the feet of *satguru* Ramana.

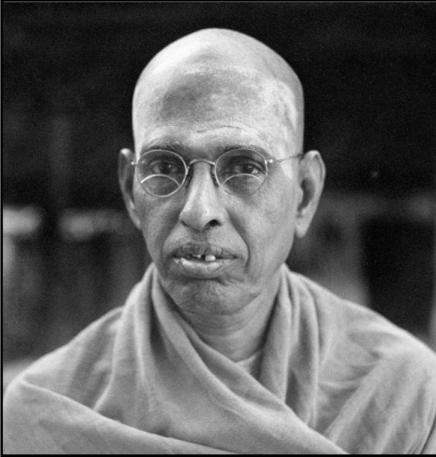


*Ganesan felicitating Kunju Swami on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday*



*Sri Bhagavan with Chinna Swami*

## Niranjanananda Swami (Chinna Swami)



A great saint called Tiruchi Swami once blessed and guided me: “For spiritual fulfillment, one should possess a heart that is soft as a rose petal and as hard and impenetrable as a piece of iron. The seeker should use the ‘iron heart’ while dealing with the world. Worldly activities should be performed with non-attachment and with the clear determination that any work one undertakes - either on a daily or long term basis - should be completed irrespective of any problem that may arise. For this, what is most needed is perseverance. On the other hand, the spiritual seeker should use the ‘rose petal heart’ for total, selfless surrender and service to the guru. In addition, such a seeker should melt with devotion to attain the truth and also help others to grasp the essence of the master’s teaching. Patience is most needed for this.” He added, “Keep both sides of the coin within you - perseverance and patience.” Niranjanananda Swami’s total dedication and devotion

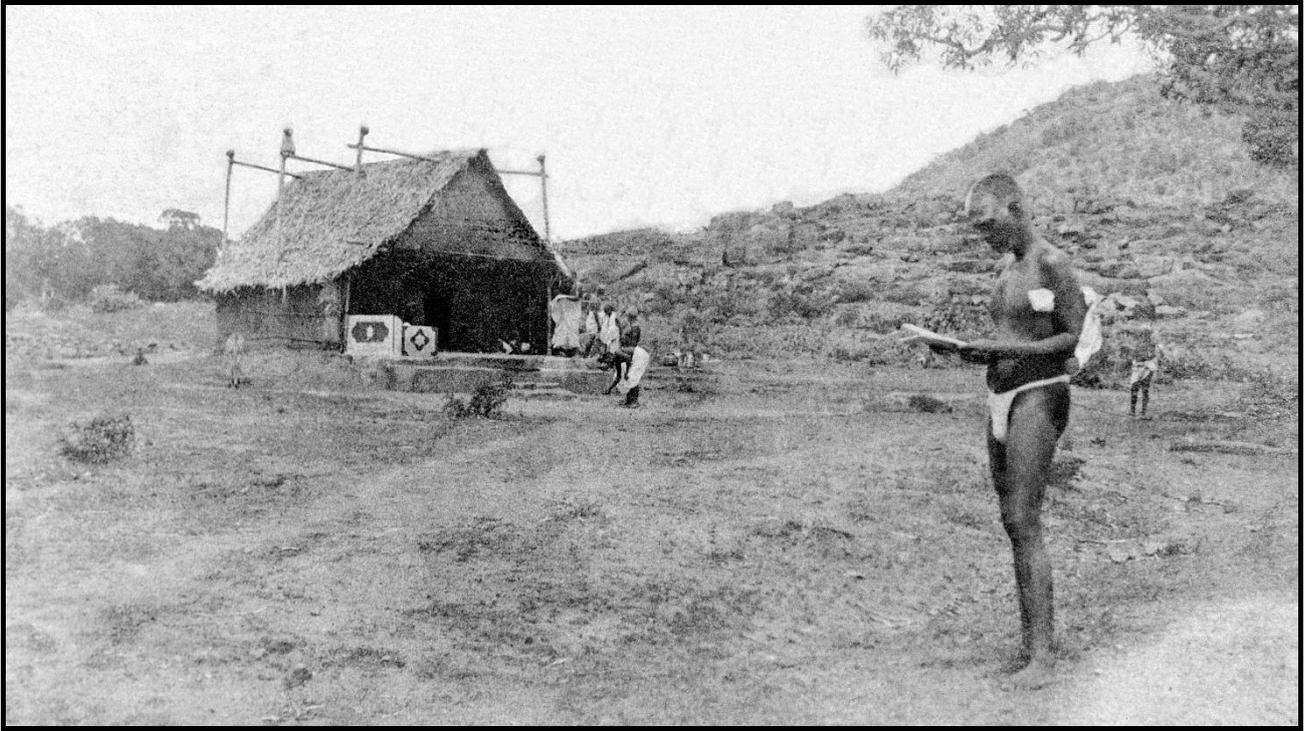
to Bhagavan was the expression of his ‘rose petal heart’. While the boldness with which he bore the burden of managing the ashram, despite all problems and opposition, showed his ‘iron heart’.

In the Hindu scriptures, whenever God came to earth as an avatar like Rama or Krishna, he came with his brothers. In Rama and Krishna’s case, it was Lakshmana and Balarama respectively. Even saints like Jnaneshwar Maharaj and Ramakrishna Paramahansa had brothers. These brothers, perhaps, might not have been perfect beings, yet the avatars and saints accepted them and corrected their flaws along the way. Their brothers were important in their mission of spreading virtue and goodness in the world, and therefore played an important role in the divine drama. Likewise, Bhagavan kept his brother Niranjanananda Swami unconditionally by his side. It is important that when we look at the brothers of great saints, we see them with an unbiased mind. This is because, while they might have committed mistakes, they were significant in the larger divine plan.

Bhagavan had two brothers and one sister: an elder brother Nagaswami, a younger brother Nagasundaram and a younger sister Alamelu. When their father Sundaram Iyer passed away, the family was split up. Nagaswami and Venkataraman came to Madurai while Mother Azhagammal took Nagasundaram and Alamelu to her brother-in-law’s house in another town, Manamadurai. At the age of sixteen, Bhagavan had the death experience and moved to Arunachala. In 1902, the family traced Bhagavan to Arunachala. Nagasundaram came to see his elder brother. Bhagavan was then known as Brahmana Swami and was living in Sadguru Swami cave below Virupaksha cave. When Nagasundaram saw his elder brother in ascetic attire and in total silence, he embraced him and wept. He observed that his elder brother was not subject to emotions any more. Bhagavan remained in silence and Nagasundaram felt that he should stay with him and help. But, Bhagavan knew that Nagasundaram had many worldly commitments and so, even though he offered to stay, Bhagavan did not reply. A disappointed Nagasundaram came back home.

We do not have too many details about Nagasundaram’s boyhood or later years. We know that he got married and got a job as a clerk. Then a series of unfortunate incidents started taking place in his life. His eldest brother Nagaswami died suddenly when he was only twenty years old. Within a short span, their ancestral property was auctioned off and they lost everything. Nagasundaram also lost his wife suddenly, leaving behind a little boy (my father, T. N. Venkataraman). Nagasundaram’s only source of comfort was his mother Azhagammal, but she too had gone away to Arunachala to stay with Bhagavan. These incidents shocked him and drove him to a state of surrender, submission and service. He gave up whatever he had left, including his son who he left with his sister. At that time like an oasis of hope, his mother sent word for him to come and live with her and Bhagavan. Thus, he left for Arunachala and Bhagavan accepted him, perhaps, due to his mother’s influence. Mother Azhagammal told her ascetic son, “My third son Nagasundaram is not very intelligent. He is a little rough and tough and it is very hard for him to live in the world. You have to take care of him.” Bhagavan obeyed her and only later revealed the purpose of supporting his brother all through. T. P. Ramachandra Iyer told me that once there was an altercation in the management and Niranjanananda Swami was involved in it. That day, while going

up the hill, Bhagavan repeatedly muttered under his breath, “What can I do? I have given my word.” Ramachandra Iyer could not understand and asked, “Bhagavan, what are you saying?” Bhagavan replied, “When my brother came here, my mother took an assurance from me that I will not leave him and that I will protect him and keep him here with me. What can I do?”



Earliest known photograph of Ramanasramam. Bhagavan seen reading a letter.

When Nagasundaram came to Skandashram, having been beaten by life’s trials, he too became an ascetic. He took to austere living and begged in the streets of Tiruvannamalai for food. By that time, Ramana Maharshi had written *Who am I?* and *Five Hymns on Arunachala*. These were the popular texts on which most devotees meditated or sang from. Nagasundaram contemplated, studied, and lived a reclusive life. Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni had already named and glorified Brahmana Swami as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. When he met Nagasundaram, he could see that Bhagavan was paying attention to him. He too, therefore wanted to assist in saving him. “Why don’t you take the traditional step of taking *sannyas* and donning the ochre robe?” he suggested. Nayana also gave Nagasundaram the name Niranjanananda Swami, meaning ‘an immaculate person’. Given the complicated name, everybody started calling him Chinna Swami, meaning junior swami, as Bhagavan, his elder brother, was the senior swami.

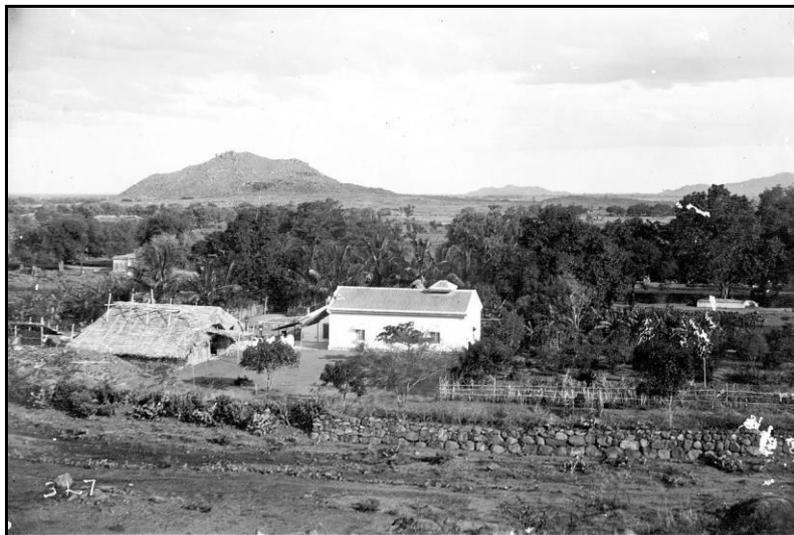
When Azhagammal passed away, Chinna Swami was among those who carried her body down the hill and brought it to the thorny, bushy place which is now Ramanasramam. With help from the others, he buried her body in the *samadhi*. Kavyakantha insisted that Chinna Swami perform *pooja* for it. As was customary, a *lingam* was placed over her body. But, while this is usually taken off after some time, they let it remain there. Kavyakantha said, “You must perform *pooja* with all rituals because this is not just a tomb. It is a temple since Bhagavan has liberated your mother and she is no more an ordinary person; she is God.” Kavyakantha named the temple Matrubhuteswara, meaning God in the form of the mother. In this way, Chinna Swami was influenced to stay there and do *pooja* every day while Bhagavan stayed on in Skandashram. One day, Chinna Swami sent word to Bhagavan that he was going to make *dosas* the next day. It was considered a delicacy and he said he would bring it to Skandashram. Early the next morning, Chinna Swami heard a sweet voice, asking, “Is there any food for an *athithi*?” *Athithi* means a wayfarer or a guest. It was none other than Bhagavan, identifying himself as a guest.

*Ramana Periya Puranam*

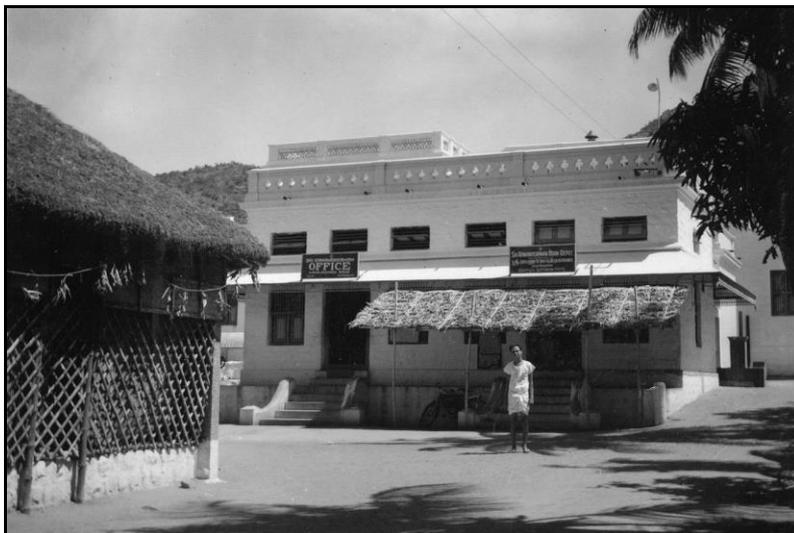
**Gradual growth of 'Sri Ramanasramam' under Chinna Swami's management -1**



**Entrance to Ashram**



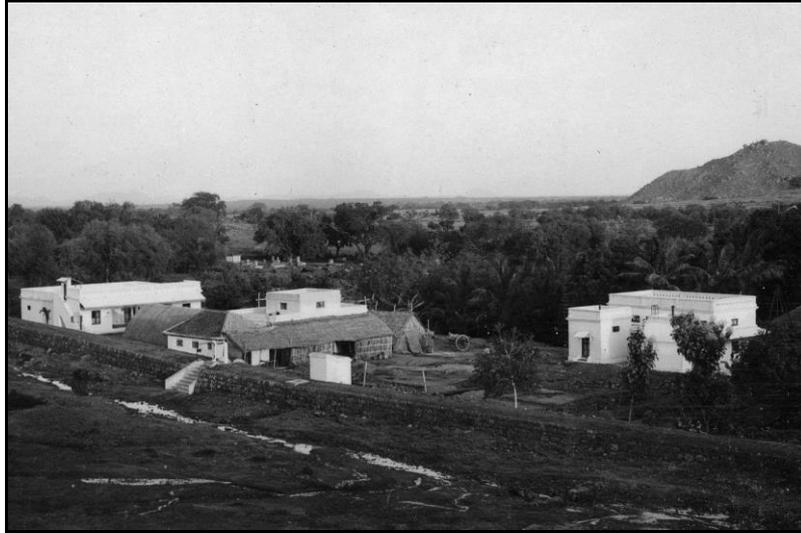
**Bhagavan's 'Old Hall' (1926)**



**Ashram Office and Book Depot**

*Ramana Periya Puranam*

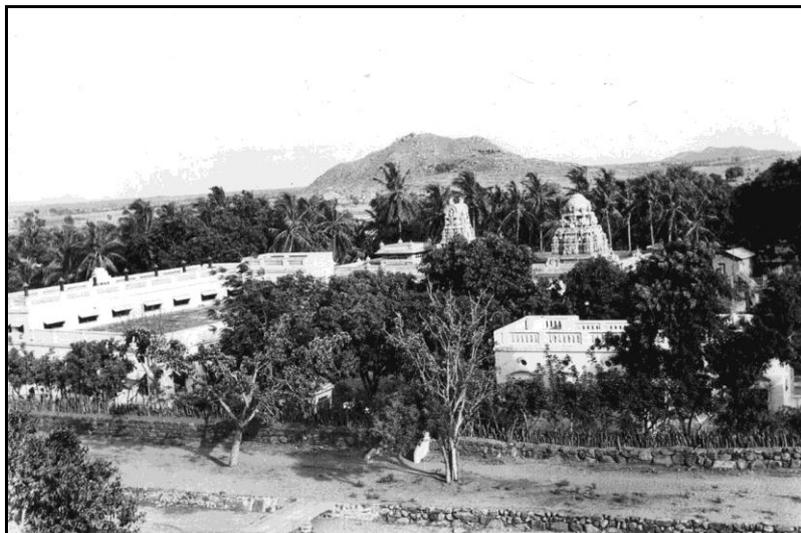
**Gradual growth of 'Sri Ramanasramam' under Chinna Swami's management -2**



***Goshala, Dining Hall and Dispensary***



***Matrubhuteswara Temple***



***Sri Ramanasramam (1948)***

The Mother's shrine was the nucleus for the present Ramanasramam and Bhagavan stayed there, never as the owner, but as a guest until his last day. It was always someone else who managed the ashram. In 1929, after Sheshadri Swami passed away, some lawyers told Bhagavan that there were a lot of litigations that had to be managed. They advised that someone should be officially appointed as the sole manager of Ramanasramam. Everyone wanted Nayana to don this mantle. But Bhagavan turned to Nayana and said, "It seems Pichai (Chinna Swami's childhood pet name) wants to do this. Let him become the manager and take the burden on himself." Many devotees thought Nayana would have been an ideal manager as he himself was a spiritual giant. But time proved Bhagavan's perfect selection. Niranjanananda Swami, being a person without any spiritual opinion, showed his strong will in the ashram's management. But he was an unobtrusive prism for Bhagavan's teachings.

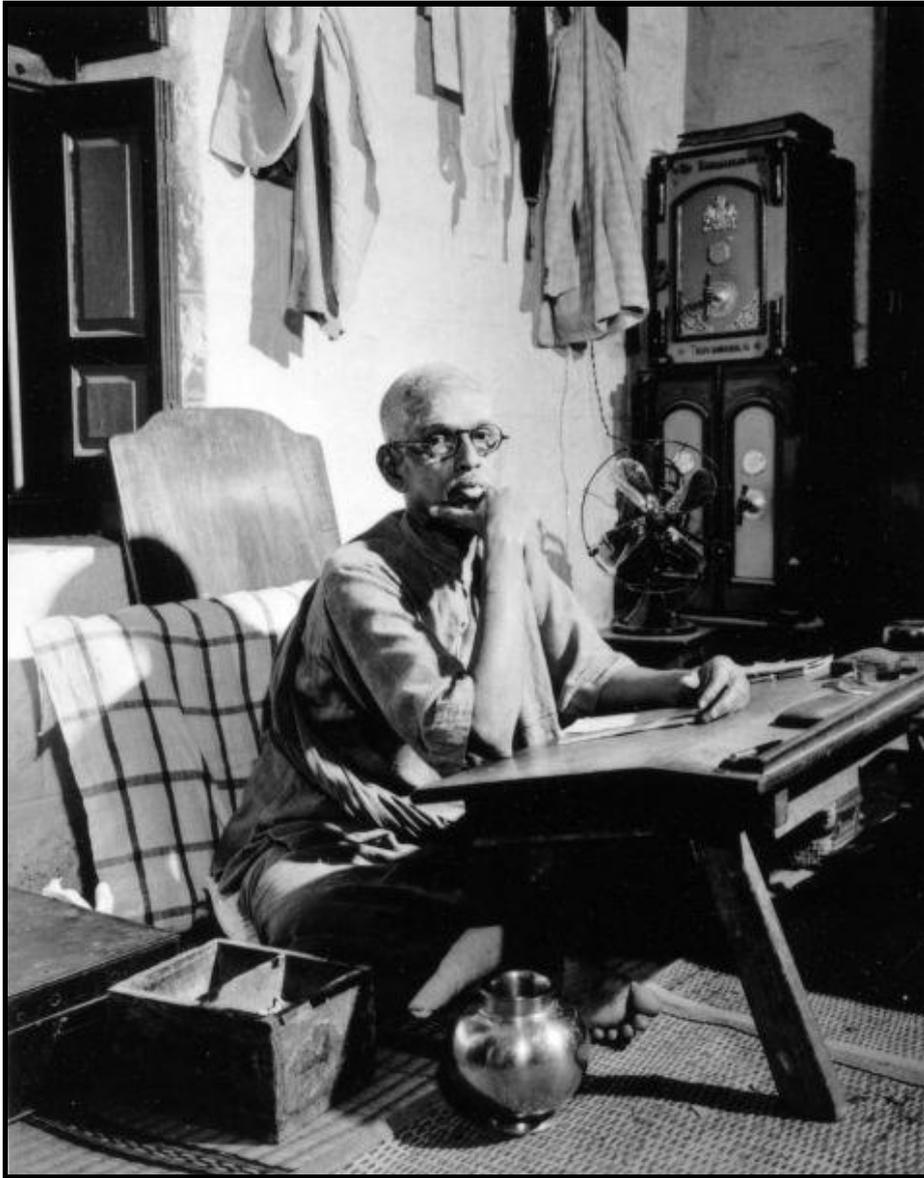
Kavyakantha told all his devotees, "It is Bhagavan's injunction and we should support it." From that day on, Nayana's disciples always supported Chinna Swami in his role as manager. In 1930, Bhagavan was asked to execute a will which stated that the family of Niranjanananda Swami would manage the material aspects of the ashram and that it would not have any spiritual successor to Bhagavan.

Chinna Swami was very austere, disciplined and strict. It is this strictness which earned him a bad name. However, he never cared about that. He was so austere that he never spent a single penny from the ashram funds for his personal use. He had two friends (devotees of Bhagavan, of course) who provided for his little needs like toothpowder, hair oil, betel leaves, betel nut and an umbrella. At that time he was the sole manager, the *sarvadhikari*, managing all the funds with no board or trust to verify the accounts. Yet, he never compromised on his honesty. The old devotees said he was so austere that when his clothes tore, he mended them himself and wore them again. He could have bought new clothes, but he would wait for months until some wealthy man came and distributed clothes to the residents of the ashram. Even then, he would take only one cloth for his personal use. Long before anyone was employed, he was the sole cook at the ashram and attended to all the ashram needs. (These are all facts reported by those who had earlier complained against him.)

Once, Jackie, Bhagavan's favourite dog, was gravely injured while fighting a pig. Its intestines were exposed and it lay in immense pain. It was Chinna Swami who carried Jackie in a basket on his head to the veterinary hospital and had it attended to. Jackie recovered and lived many more years. By 1938, Chinna Swami needed assistance in the ashram. So he sent word to his son - my father - and the whole family to join him. I was two years old when my father brought me to Ramanasramam. Chinna Swami was just as strict with his son. He never favoured him; so much so, my father was always disappointed and disgruntled with him. When gifts like cycles were given to the ashram, my father would ask for one - only to be refused by Chinna Swami. If my father pulled a long face, he would tell him, "Venkatoo, we are commanded by Bhagavan to manage this ashram. We are his slaves and have to do this, generation after generation. But we do not have any special rights over this place. We should dedicate ourselves to do service with the attitude of a dog guarding a haystack. The dog will not eat the hay and it will not allow the stray cattle to eat the hay either." My father, T. N. Venakataraman, followed this instruction meticulously and so did my two brothers and I. The third generation now manages the ashram and it is Chinna Swami's blessing that generation after generation looks after the ashram, not like dictators or sole managers, but like dogs guarding a haystack!

Chinna Swami rubbed many people the wrong way with his blunt manner, but, as many devotees say, those stories must be looked at impartially. It is important that we see both sides of the story. Chinna Swami's problem was a practical one: If all the residents preferred to sit with Bhagavan in the hall, how could the daily routine activities of the ashram - cooking, gardening, managing the store, letter correspondence, receiving visitors, cash transactions, printing of books, and general upkeep of safety measures to protect the property, buildings and residents - be carried out? So he stipulated the strict condition that one should assist the ashram management in some form if one wanted to stay inside the ashram. People who refused to comply with this condition were asked to leave the ashram. It is to be noted that those who were hurt by Chinna Swami's disciplinary action spoke only about his harsh treatment but not about this reasonable stipulation put by him.

Muruganar, Ramaswami Pillai, Chadwick, Viswanatha Swami, Annamalai Swami, Kunju Swami, Devaraja Mudaliar, Suri Nagamma and Munagala Venkataramiah were a few of the old devotees in the long list of Chinna Swami's victims.



Chinna Swami as 'Sarvadhikari' in his office

When I referred to this unpleasant matter, they unanimously agreed, “Chinna Swami’s harshness did affect us and at that moment we were obviously hurt. There is no doubt about it. However, in later years we understood that unless he had treated us like that we would have continued to be immersed in management activities and would not have pursued our spiritual practices. In hindsight, we could see that even Chinna Swami’s harshness was only Bhagavan’s grace.”

Muruganar told me, “Chinna Swami repeatedly slighted me and even refused me food at the ashram. I had to go out on the streets and beg for food. The reason for Chinna Swami’s refusal was that he wanted me to continue performing *pooja* in the Mother’s shrine and also assist him with the correspondence in the office. I did not do that, so I had to leave. But Ganesan, I assure you, my going away gave me two great spiritual boons. I tell you honestly, but for Chinna Swami’s harshness I might have still been doing *pooja* in Ramanasramam and assisting in writing letters.” “What are those two boons?” I asked him. “I could get the proximity and presence of Bhagavan any time, day or night. Had I been committed to management work, I could not have had that. The second boon was that I was so ecstatic that I only wanted to write poems. I wrote nearly forty thousand verses on Bhagavan and Bhagavan’s teaching. These were written in silence and seclusion. With external activity, this could not have happened. Chinna Swami was a vital instrument in my gaining these two boons.”

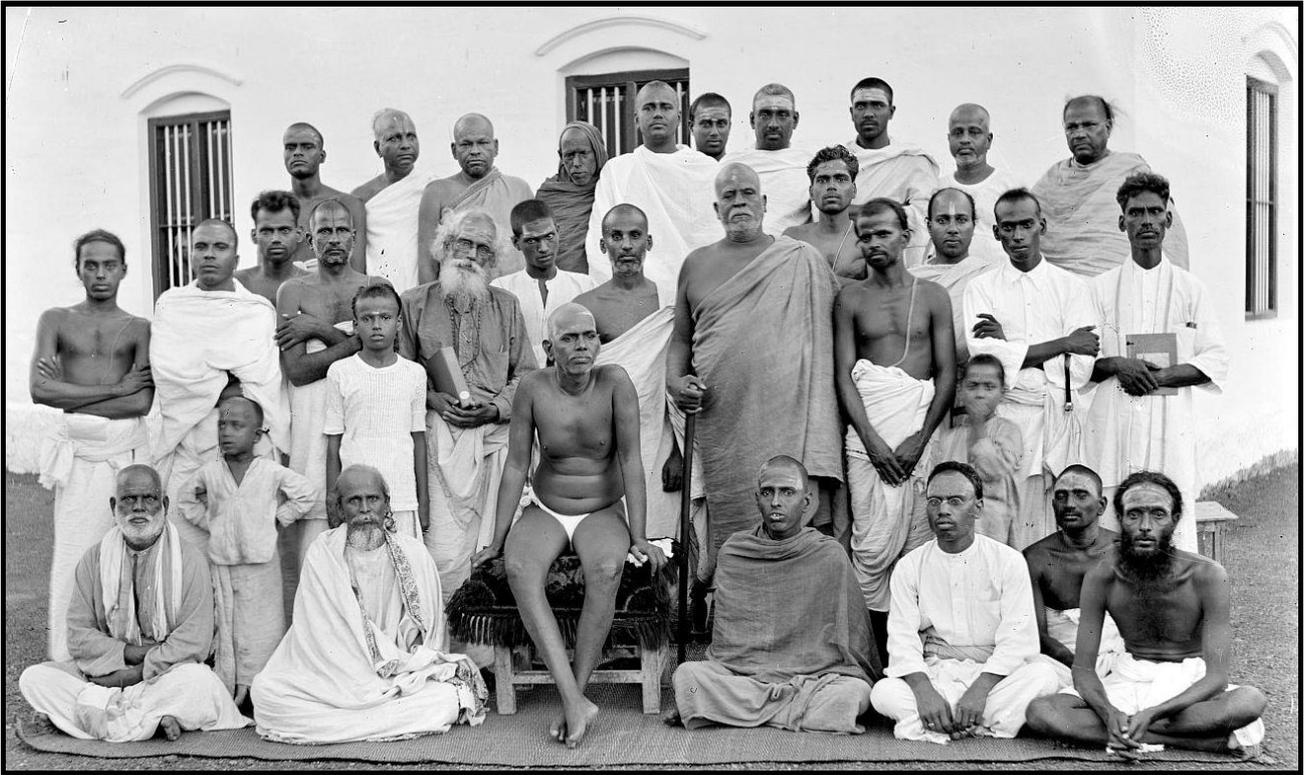
One of the kitchen assistants Subbalakshmiammal told me that Chinna Swami was used by Bhagavan like a washerman’s stone to clear the devotees’ ‘dirt’, their *vasanas*, and make them devote all their

attention to spiritual *sadhana*. To fulfill this role, Chinna Swami perpetually earned a bad name. Balarama Reddiar told me, "Though there were defects in Chinna Swami's management, it is a fact witnessed by me repeatedly that Bhagavan always supported him. When I once complained to Bhagavan about Chinna Swami, he instantly corrected me and I steadily stood by that correction all my life in the ashram. Bhagavan curtly asked me, 'Have you come all the way to sort out lapses in the ashram management? Attend to the business for which you have come. Find out who from within raises these complaints. Leave the rest to the higher power. Be still.'"

In 1973, Viswanatha Swami was the editor of *The Mountain Path*, the ashram journal, and I was assisting him as its managing editor. I spoke to him about the iron side of Chinna Swami with great feeling. Viswanatha Swami, on the other hand, quickly turned my attention to the soft, 'rose-petal' side of Chinna Swami by pointing out, "It is easy to stand in judgment of others, but who judges whom? A mind judges the play of another mind." (This awoke in me, a great reverence for Chinna Swami and for everyone in the world, because when you look at people as 'I AM', there is no question of praise or blame.) Viswanatha Swami continued, "Ganesan, Chinna Swami was one of the biggest boulders that rolled down from the holy hill to give support to our *satguru*, Bhagavan. It is entirely due to his hard work and diligence that our dear Bhagavan was physically made available to us at a fixed place, twenty four hours a day. Undisturbed, we all got *hridaya vidya* - the truth of the Heart - in Bhagavan's presence and straight from Bhagavan himself. In the Old Hall we experienced Bhagavan showering on us the truth, the wisdom of the Heart, day and night. How could it have been possible without a strong base, a material center and an institution like the ashram? Naturally, running an institution needed a strong, iron willed man like Chinna Swami to manage it all twenty four hours. Because of this, Bhagavan could sit silently, permitting both the horizontal and vertical expansion to take place simultaneously. Horizontal expansion includes establishment of the ashram as an institution, its daily management, printing books, serving food to the visiting devotees who flocked to be with Bhagavan, and other outward activities. At the same time, the much more important step of emphasizing vertical expansion, the need for one's own inner spiritual growth had to be imparted too. This includes imbibing the guru's grace in his presence: Self Enquiry, self attention, meditation, ascetic and reclusive living. The horizontal aspect includes multitudes of people and multifarious activities. The vertical aspect emphasizes only the individual, the inward experience of the truth in oneself. Bhagavan created an atmosphere for both the horizontal and vertical expansion to take deep roots in the ashram that was painstakingly raised by Chinna Swami." He added, "In this divine play of Arunachala, Chinna Swami played a very vital role. Hence, Bhagavan gave him continued support in the affairs of the management. At the same time, Bhagavan guided each of us in our inward spiritual *sadhana* - whether we lived in Palaakothu or inside the ashram."

This gave me the clarity that as seekers, we should remain in the awareness that we are all in the reverential presence of the truth - not just for one hour in the morning and evening, but every moment of the day. Call it Bhagavan or Arunachala - it does not matter by which name you call it. And we must also feel grateful to those who made this truth available to us. Not only Chinna Swami, but devotees like Devaraja Mudaliar, Annamalai Swami, Viswanantha Swami, B. V. Narasimha Swami, Muruganar, Paul Brunton and others who, between 1922 and 1940, formed important links in the ashram's horizontal expansion. Yet, it is also true that for each one of these devotees, the vertical expansion of attaining Self realization was equally bestowed by Sri Bhagavan. The horizontal and vertical expansions have to happen together. "Like a train running on two rails," as Muruganar once said.

Four principles are given as to how a devotee should have a relationship or contact with the guru: The first is that the devotee should look after the guru and his needs. A guru like Bhagavan may not look after his own body at all. We have seen how Arunachala took the form of many mothers and started taking care of Bhagavan's body. Otherwise, when it was in Pathalalinga, the underground niche, Bhagavan's body would have wasted away and it would not have been able to spread the message of the Self to us. The guru will never ask for his needs to be fulfilled. People close to him should know what they are and take care of them. The second principle is to look after the premises where the guru lives, keep it clean and secure it from problems. The third is to collect and preserve the guru's teachings. The fourth is, after having done all this or while doing one or all of this, the devotee should put the teachings into practice and attain the truth and also help others attain it.



*Kayakantha, B.V.Narasimha Swami, Yogi Ramiah, Chinna Swami and other devotees*

The first three - looking after the body of the guru, looking after the premises and preserving the teachings of the guru - are included in horizontal expansion and are activity oriented. The last one, putting the teaching into practice, is vertical expansion. Bhagavan, very compassionately, patiently and silently sat in the ashram twenty four hours, giving equal importance to horizontal and vertical expansion. Those who were involved in the activity of preserving the rights of the ashram, printing books or collecting Bhagavan's teachings, might have served only in horizontal expansion. But Bhagavan bestowed upon them too, the blessing of vertical expansion, the attainment of the truth.

Chinna Swami's life should be seen in the light of these four principles. Chinna Swami assumes great importance because he concentrated exclusively on the first three principles. He was needed because he looked after Bhagavan's body and Bhagavan's needs. Mistakes might have been made. However, a constant twenty four hours a day, seven days a week attention had to be given. In this way, he contributed to the preservation, maintenance and continued presence of Bhagavan's body for all of us. Secondly, he had to fight to preserve the property of Ramanasramam. It is because of him that we can conveniently stay there now. He also religiously collected Bhagavan's written works. When Bhagavan was up on the hill in Virupaksha cave and Skandashram, most of his writings which were on small slips of paper were lost. Bhagavan himself admitted this. After coming to Ramanasramam, under the management of Chinna Swami, not a single word that Bhagavan wrote has been missed.

Since Chinna Swami attended very scrupulously to the first three principles and had therefore no time to spend on individual *sadhana*, Bhagavan bestowed his blessings on him. In his last few days, he expiated for all his mistakes. His body suffered greatly. Then, Bhagavan gave him release. Viswanatha Swami was witness to this. In his dying moments, Chinna Swami put out his hands happily and Viswanatha Swami said, "I could feel it - Bhagavan came and took him and helped him get absorbed in Arunachala."

It is perhaps appropriate here to quote what three remarkable devotees of Bhagavan told me about Chinna Swami. This is what S. S. Cohen told me: "Chinna Swami joined the master in 1917 at Skandashram with a view of dedicating his life entirely to the service of Bhagavan. In 1930, he was made the *sarvadhikari* of the ashram and managed its temporal affairs. Since then, and until his death in 1953, he worked tirelessly and with exemplary devotion for the welfare of the ashram. This necessarily meant that Chinna Swami had to stand firm and struggle hard to save the ashram's rights during litigations and court cases as well. The present Ramanasramam and all its contents owe their

existence entirely to his labour and iron determination. How thrifty he was in the ashram's interest can be judged from his last message given a day before his death to his successor and son T. N. Venkataraman. Chinna Swami said, 'I am departing with a clear conscience and clean hands. I have not used a penny from the ashram funds for my own benefit. Everything here belongs to Bhagavan and should be guarded with care and vigilance. Devote yourself heart and soul to the service of Lord Ramana and in return, I assure you, he will shower his grace on you. Be sincere and truthful to the core of your being. Uphold our revered, ancient traditions with the working of this ashram as I have upheld them all my life.'

This is what Major Chadwick, who stayed in the ashram from 1938 till his last days, told me: "Without Chinna Swami, there could have never been a Ramanasramam at all. He raised it from a grass hut to an ashram of solid stone. He was full of zest and worked hard and tirelessly. His one joy was to feed the devotees visiting Bhagavan with good and nourishing food. For us ashram residents, he was like the protective metal shield used by soldiers fighting in the battle field. Therefore, unmindful of the happenings in and around the world, like wars and earthquakes, we plunged into our inner *sadhana*, undisturbed, thereby getting purified day and night in the spiritual presence of Bhagavan."

Arthur Osborne always stayed outside the ashram because he lived with his family. Since Chadwick lived inside the ashram, I felt at that time that as a resident he would probably support the management. So I went to Arthur Osborne for a more objective view. Arthur Osborne told me, "For me there can never be a better management than that of Chinna Swami, for he was my gracious master Sri Bhagavan's choice." In his devotion to Bhagavan, he did not evaluate Chinna Swami's management. Instead, he went one step further and said, "Since he is my master's choice, my mind does not work on evaluating whether it was good or bad; there simply cannot be a better management for me."

With great reverence to Chinna Swami, I want to share some of his unique achievements. Bhagavan's birth place at Tiruchuzhi is a very sacred place and it was lost because it was auctioned off. When Chinna Swami became the manager, he took great pains to secure that house and make it a shrine for Bhagavan and Bhagavan's parents to be worshipped. He named it Sundara Mandiram and it is still there in Tiruchuzhi. Another achievement which we cannot forget is that he managed to obtain the house where Bhagavan attained Self realization through his death experience. He struggled very hard to buy it and finally converted it into a shrine named Ramana Mandiram. *Mandiram* means most sacred shrine. Both these places are now pilgrim centres for devotees of Bhagavan to visit.

Fifty years after Bhagavan arrived in Arunachala, Chinna Swami wanted to celebrate the occasion in a grand way. Thousands and thousands of people were fed. Great scholars from all over the world came and paid their tribute to Bhagavan. The best musicians were called in too. Chinna Swami's wish was that Bhagavan should have the best of music, food and everything because Bhagavan had not moved from Arunachala. Details of these celebrations can be found in *Letters from Ramanasramam*. I was ten years old at that time and witnessed it all and I have memories of some of the incidents.

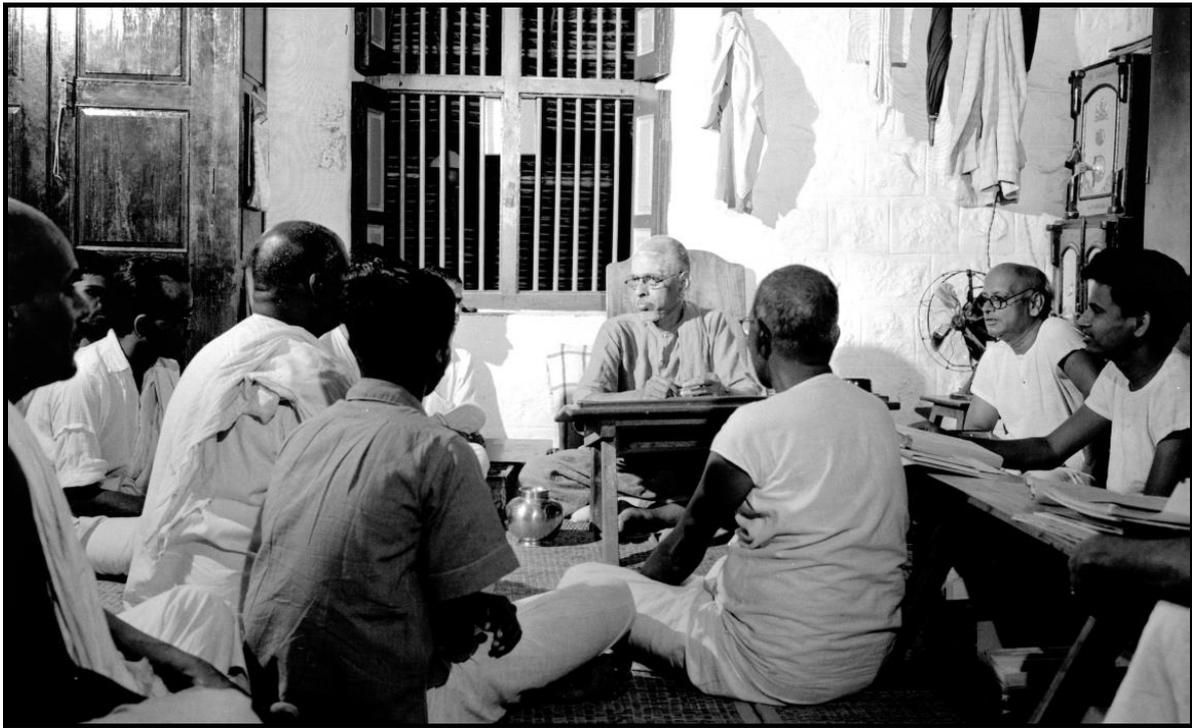
Chinna Swami's greatest achievement, according to me, was that on the golden jubilee of Bhagavan coming to Arunachala, he got the temple elephant to bestow the temple honours on Bhagavan. Why the temple elephant? Among all those present on that golden jubilee day, that temple elephant was the only creature that was with Bhagavan when he arrived in Tiruvannamalai. There is a thousand pillared hall in the Arunachaleswara temple where no one used to go because it was dark and frightening. An elephant was tied there and this was where Bhagavan was seated. At first, many urchins troubled Bhagavan in his meditation; therefore he chose this secluded spot. Bhagavan used to say that the elephant was his sole companion in all those months. Chinna Swami, remembering this, brought the elephant to pay him its respects.

In 1949, another devotee brought the elephant again and an American devotee took a photograph of Bhagavan with the elephant saluting him. When he went back to America, he sent that picture with these beautiful words written behind it: "A big Self which does not know the body (meaning Bhagavan) and a big body which does not know the Self (meaning the elephant) are both in one place." Bhagavan read it out much to everyone's enjoyment.

In 1949, Chinna Swami performed the *kumbhabishekam* - the consecration ceremony - for the Mother's shrine. Though Bhagavan had no liking or aversion to ceremonies, he actively took part on the request

of his devotees. This ceremony went on over four days and was beautifully organized. Thousands of people were fed and after its completion, Chinna Swami distributed gifts to all those who had worked for the success of the celebration. One group of people, who used to adore Chinna Swami, brought him to Bhagavan's presence and placed a chair for him in front of Bhagavan. As Hindu admirers are emotionally wont to do, they wanted to wash his feet and adorn them with flowers. When Chinna Swami saw this, he refused to sit on the chair. He cried angrily, "This *pada pooja* can only be done for one who is not aware of the body. I am not fit for this. I still have body consciousness." He pointed towards Bhagavan and said, "Here is Bhagavan; he is the greatest. No one here deserves any credit except our master, Bhagavan."

There are some interactions between Bhagavan and Chinna Swami which throw better light on their close relationship. Once, Bhagavan's birthday was to be celebrated and on the day before the celebration the residents realized that there were no provisions in the store. Hundreds of people had already arrived and Chinna Swami was unnerved. He did not know what to do - there was no money and no time. He began to panic and ran from pillar to post. Bhagavan was in the hall with his devotees. At midnight, a big bullock cart arrived and unloaded rice, lentils, oil and vegetables and drove away. However, all the residents were asleep and there was nobody to cut the vegetables and cook the food. Bhagavan understood this and with his wooden staff gently prodded all the sleeping residents awake, saying, "Chinna Swami is struggling there like a cat that has put its mouth into boiling milk. Let us help cut the vegetables." Bhagavan and others cut the vegetables and cooked meals for the next day. Needless to say, Bhagavan's birthday celebration went off beautifully.

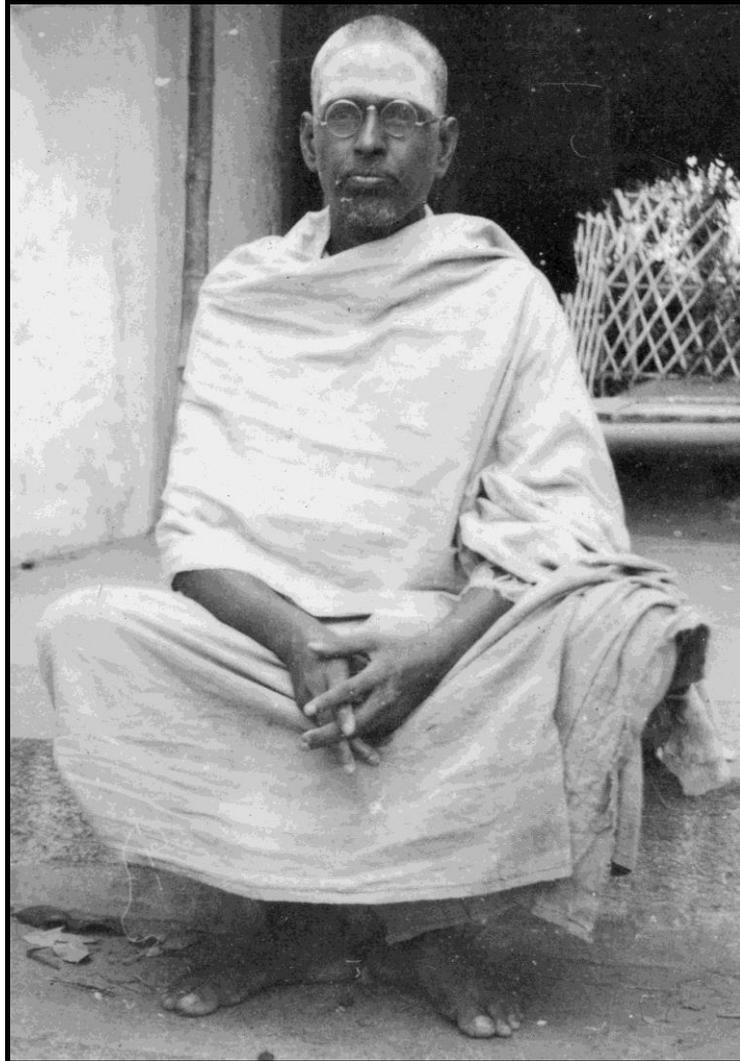


*Niranjanananda Swami active in office*

There is some controversy surrounding Paul Brunton, Munagala Venkataramiah and Chinna Swami which I would like to clear. It is recorded that Chinna Swami rudely stopped Paul Brunton from recording conversations in the hall. He is said to have done the same thing to Munagala Venkataramiah who recorded the talks which are now compiled in *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, a must read for all devotees. It is true that Paul Brunton was stopped by Chinna Swami. This was because Brunton had started taking notes in Bhagavan's presence and was selling them without even mentioning Bhagavan's name. He even made statements that Bhagavan was popular because of his book. When Chinna Swami got to know of this, he marched straight to the hall where Paul Brunton was seated and told him point

blank, “Stop it. You do not carry the right to do this anymore.” Brunton was furious and he turned indignantly to Bhagavan and asked, “Is this the view of Bhagavan also?” Bhagavan was silent.

Similarly, when Munagala Venkataramiah took down Bhagavan’s talks in a notebook, he would gather a group outside the ashram and try to impress them. When this came to Chinna Swami’s notice he came into the hall and stopped him in Bhagavan’s presence. Munagala Venkataramiah was deeply hurt on being insulted in the glare of public eye. Later, when Munagala was with Bhagavan, still feeling slighted, Bhagavan said, “The greatest form of ego for an individual is to present himself as a teacher and become a guru.” Understanding that this message was for him, Munagala immediately prostrated before Bhagavan and begged him for his forgiveness. Bhagavan saved him and Munagala himself later said, “When a true seeker becomes a teacher, the first casualty is his own advancement in *sadhana*.”



I was in touch with Brunton and he admitted that he went to Bhagavan and apologized. How beautifully Bhagavan corrected them and nudged them back into their *sadhana*! Both Paul Brunton and Munagala Venkataramiah attained Self realization in their later years, because this was Bhagavan’s purpose. Horizontal expansion took place when Munagala Venkataramiah and Brunton popularized Bhagavan’s teachings and Bhagavan gave them vertical expansion. For this, Chinna Swami was used like a rough, washerman’s stone to beat away their flaws. This is something that Munagala himself told me, “He used Chinna Swami as a washerman’s stone. We all blamed Chinna Swami, but it was Bhagavan saving us through him.”

There are so many instances I could share, but one concerning Annamalai Swami is especially important. Annamalai Swami was responsible for masonry at the ashram but could construct only ordinary buildings. When Chinna Swami began the construction of a temple, specialists were brought in from all over South India. After the construction started, there was a technical difficulty which Annamalai Swami could not resolve. But, he still wanted things done his way. The temple specialists and Chinna Swami did not agree with him and he was told to leave. This is what Annamalai Swami shared with me later, "For all outward purposes, it is true that Chinna Swami quarreled with me and dispensed with me. But I realized later that I needed this treatment. Otherwise I would have been an eternal builder inside the ashram all my life. Recognizing this, Bhagavan commanded me not to come within the ashram premises any more. The fact that it was not a reprimand from Bhagavan was proved when Bhagavan visited me almost every day at my residence in Palaakothu and encouraged me in my austere living, *sadhana* and seclusion. What a blessing it was to have Bhagavan personally instructing me alone in my cottage! All this, I can honestly say, I owe to Chinna Swami for firing me. I plunged inwards and had the inner vision that our Bhagavan is truly the 'I AM'."

Viswanatha Swami explained to me why all the senior devotees went to Palaakothu. "We did that so that we could pursue our *sadhana*. Bhagavan approved of this. He would ask us, 'In which way are you going to build your hut?' Bhagavan would also encourage us to go to the streets and beg for food. This enabled us to be with Bhagavan all the time and made us what we are today - in a state of realization. This was possible only because we left the ashram. Bhagavan wanted things this way."

Viswanatha Swami was the worst affected by Chinna Swami's tough demeanour. He once had to go without food for three days. One of the kitchen assistants took him inside the dining hall through the kitchen and made him sit along with others. When he was about to eat, Chinna Swami came in and pulled him out. Bhagavan witnessed all this without objecting to it.

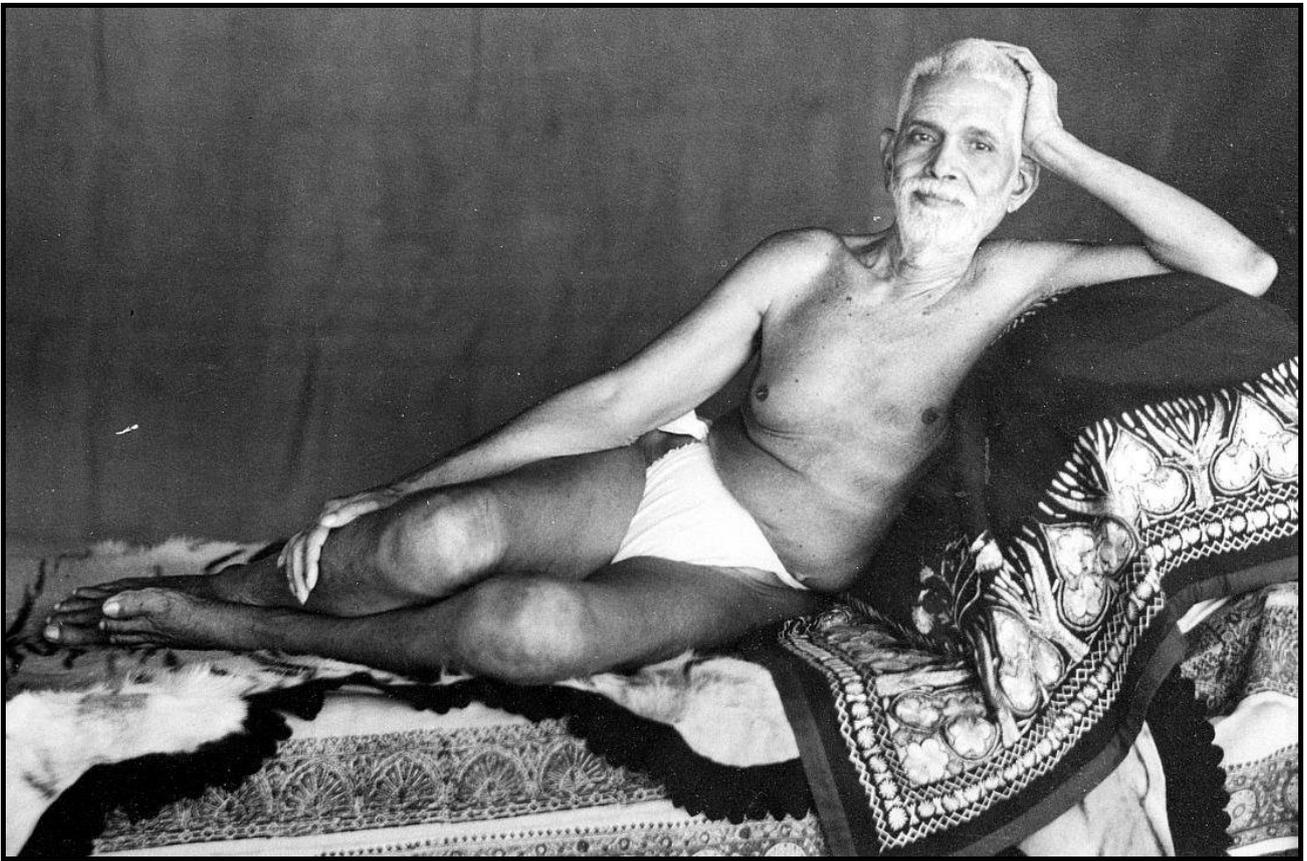
Strangely, during Chinna Swami's last days, it was none other than Viswanatha Swami who assisted him. Surprised, I asked him, "How could you do that after being so deeply hurt and insulted?" He replied, "When I was in Dindigul, Bhagavan appeared to me in a dream and asked me to come to Ramanasramam. I immediately left for the ashram. It was 1953 and Bhagavan had already dropped his body. I had no idea why Bhagavan asked me to come. When I arrived, I found Chinna Swami fatally sick and with nobody to attend to him. I felt that this was the purpose for which Bhagavan had asked me to come. I waited on him day and night, nursed him and bathed him. One day, Chinna Swami held my hand and begged for forgiveness. It is sad, but Chinna Swami suffered gravely for his actions. Bhagavan had noticed all his mistakes and made him physically suffer and expiate. Chinna Swami spent his last two days looking at Bhagavan's picture, all the time chanting, 'Ramana, Ramana, Ramana.' At the time of his death, he stretched out his arms with his eyes closed, his face serene, happy and luminous. Bhagavan had come to take him and get him absorbed in Arunachala."

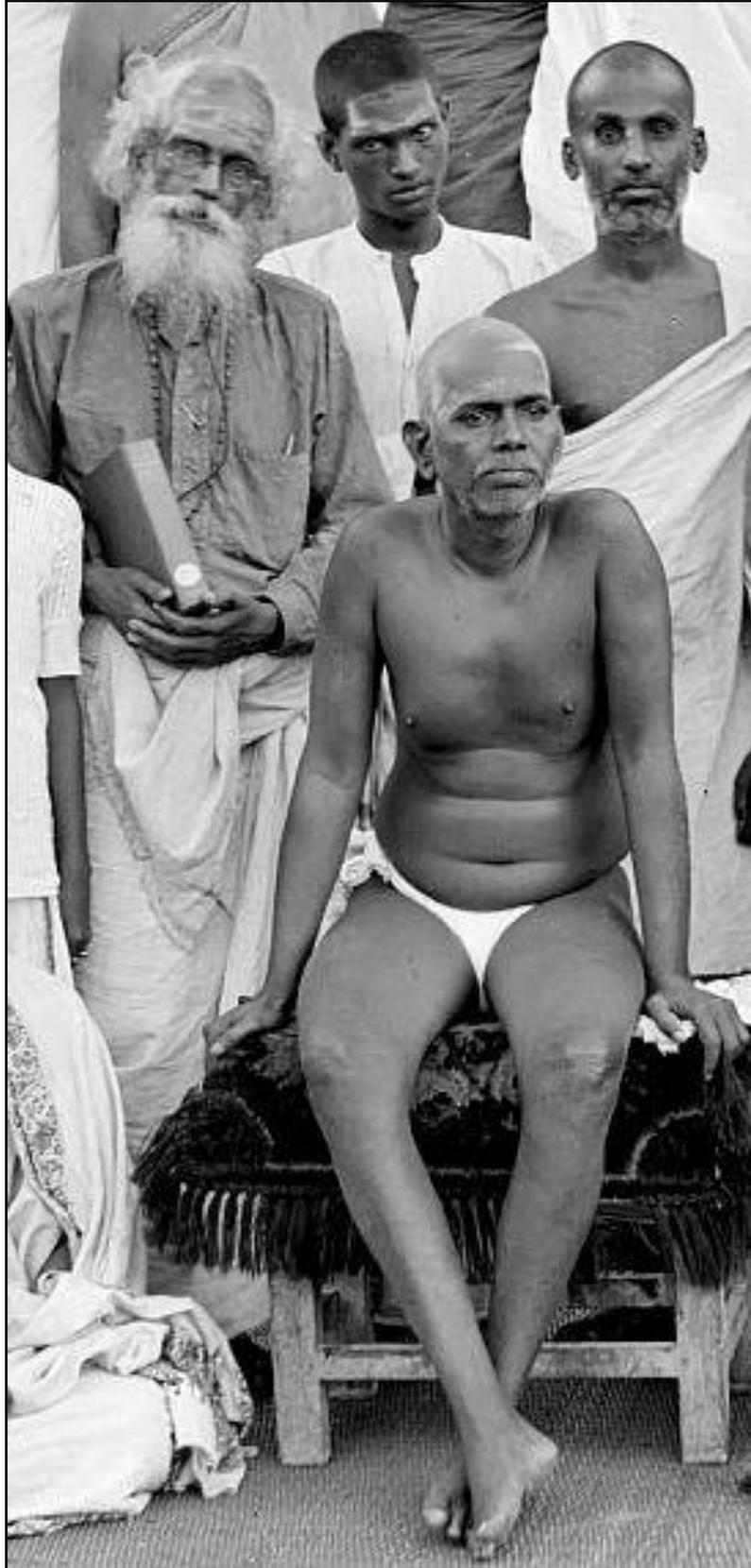
Personally speaking, Chinna Swami has always been very kind to me. He would brush my teeth every morning, take me to Bhagavan and make me prostrate before him, saying, "Here is Bhagavan, our God." I am grateful to him for taking me to Bhagavan's presence, the sacredness of which I didn't understand then, but which I now gratefully remember. When I was four or five years old, I used to run away from home and go to Ramanasramam all alone. In those days, the streets were dark and desolate. The first time I did this, Chinna Swami was taken aback. He asked me, "Why did you come?" "I had a disagreement with my father, so I walked away," I replied. He immediately took me to Bhagavan and said, "He has walked all the way alone without fear." He hastened to add, "I have already informed his father." Bhagavan looked at me and gave a mischievous smile which I remember very well, but which I could not understand then. Chinna Swami then took me to the office where he used to sleep on a comfortable bed and offered it to me. "Why did Bhagavan smile at me?" I asked. "When you were two years old, you got into a empty bullock cart which was yoked to a bull. Its driver too wasn't around. Startled by a visitor suddenly opening an umbrella, the bull sped away with the cart into the town. We frantically searched for you in the ashram, but you could not be found. We went to Bhagavan and informed him that you were missing. Bhagavan said, 'What can we do? Running away from home is built into our family.'" "What did he mean by that?" I asked, puzzled. "Bhagavan's father had an elder brother called Venkatesa Iyer. He had also run away from home on a spiritual quest." Chinna Swami informed me.

When I was in charge of constructing Bhagavan's *samadhi* hall, I encountered many problems. One day, Mrs. Taleyarkhan told me, "All these problems will be solved." I looked at her questioningly. She continued, "Last night, Bhagavan appeared to me in my dream and said, 'Tell Ganesan to take up the construction of Chinna Swami's *samadhi* alongside and everything will be alright'." With Bhagavan's grace, I managed to construct his and Niranjanananda Swami's *samadhis* simultaneously. The consecration ceremony was done in 1967 of all three *samadhis*: Mother Azhagammal's, Bhagavan's and Chinna Swami's.

Being involved in building Chinna Swami's *samadhi*, I was going to place a stone tablet which would simply read, 'Niranjanananda Swami', with his birth and death dates. Instead, the stone cutter sent me a tablet on which was etched: 'Niranjanananda Swami - absorbed in Arunachala on 29.01.1953'. This thrilled me, and later in the fifteen *samadhis* that were built, I used a similar tablet for each devotee. For example, 'Absorbed in Arunachala - Muruganar', 'Absorbed in Arunachala - Kunju Swami', 'Absorbed in Arunachala - Major Chadwick'.

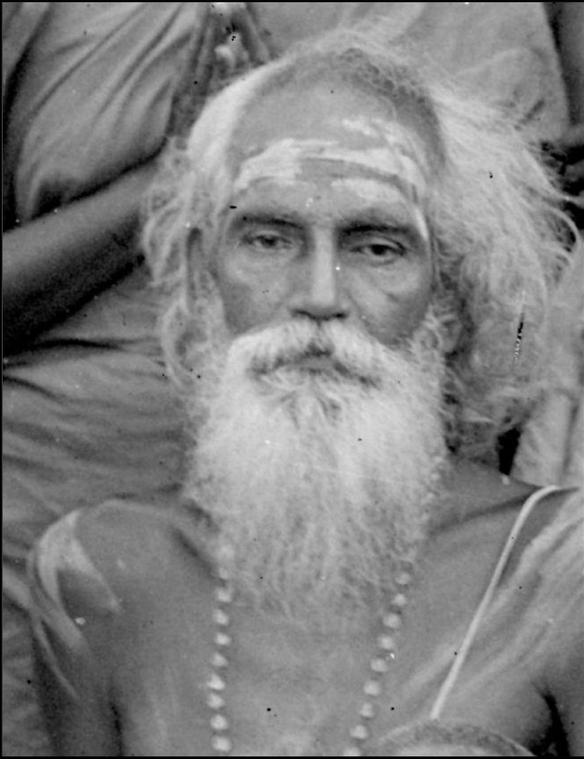
Let us remember Chinna Swami, one of the biggest boulders that rolled down from Arunachala to serve our master; the master whose only mission (if at all he had a mission) is to make his own state available to all of us - the state of 'I AM'.





*Sri Bhagavan with B.V.Narasimha Swami (holding a book)*

## B. V. Narasimha Swami



There is a profound beauty in how the sequence of events unfolded in Bhagavan's life. This was a divine pattern that unraveled itself steadily and by immersing ourselves in it, we will realize that it is not merely external. This pattern begins to take place within us too. This is the beauty of being with a saint or learning about his life.

Our beloved Bhagavan stayed at Skandasramam between 1916 and 1922, during which time serious spiritual seekers started slowly streaming in. It was during this glorious period that Bhagavan with a single glance of grace, established each one in inner solitude. It was also during this time that Narayana Guru, a great saint from Kerala, visited him. So impressed and ecstatic was he about Bhagavan's exalted state, that he summoned two of his disciples and told them, "Both of you should stay here for six months and make necessary arrangements for food and accommodation for visiting pilgrims, thus letting thousands visit the Maharshi every day and benefit spiritually. Let Maharshi's greatness be made known in the circles of scholars and earnest seekers by your going to them and speaking to them, thereby

spreading Maharshi's glory."

Before the act of spreading Bhagavan's glory and message took place, Father Arunachala saw to it that two preparatory steps were accomplished. The first step of recognizing Bhagavan's greatness and giving him a name was accomplished by Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. Arunachala chose the greatest scholar of that time to name the young Brahmin boy as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. As the second step, the teachings had to be organized. For this, Bhagavan enunciated the teaching of 'Who am I?' through Sivaprakasam Pillai, *Self Enquiry* through Gambhiram Sheshayya and the *Sri Ramana Gita* through Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni.

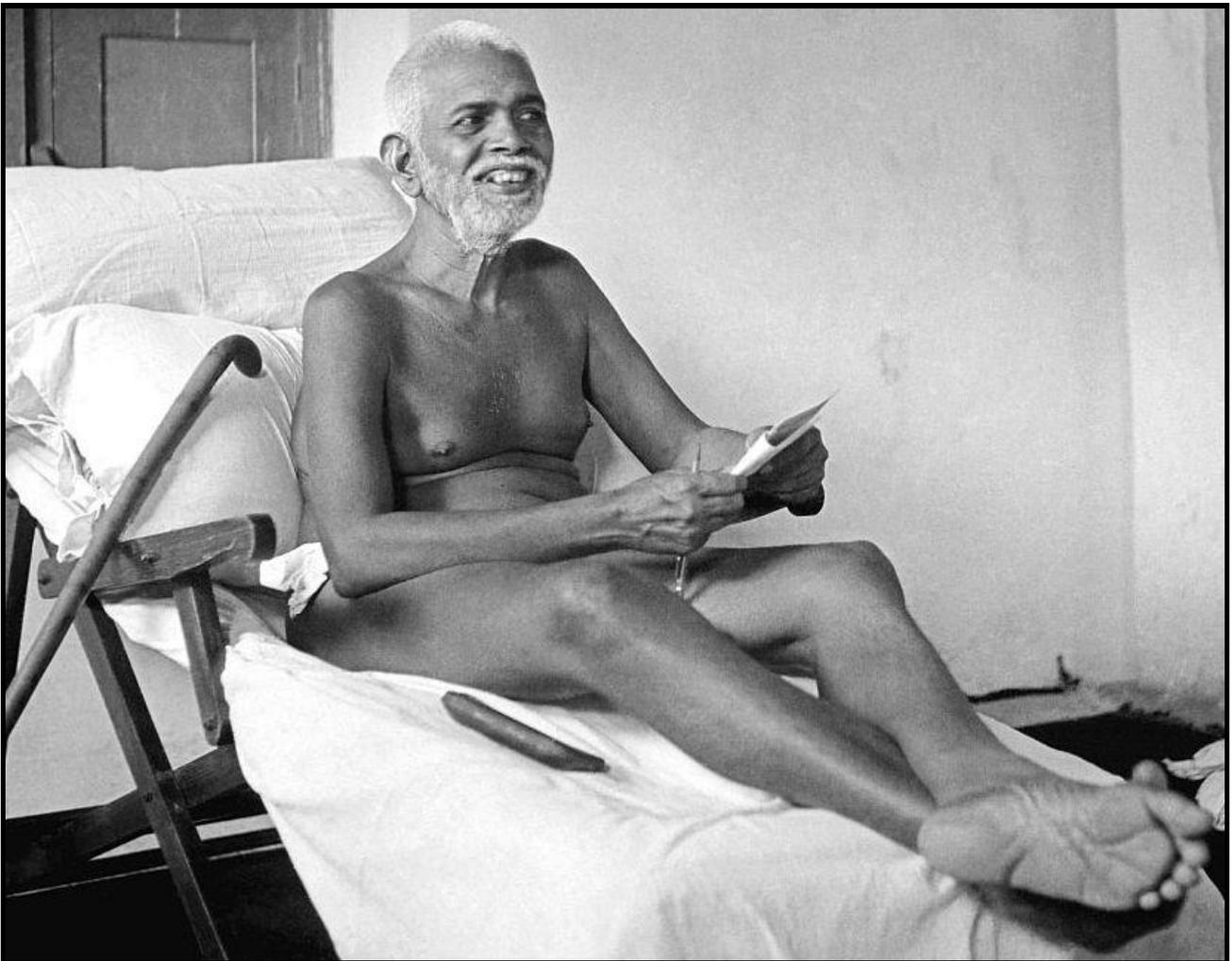
This accomplished, Father Arunachala sent his son, Bhagavan, down from his lap to his feet because the time had come for the message to spread. For the third step of spreading the message, Arunachala sent three boulders: B. V. Narasimha Swami, Suddhananda Bharathi and Krishna Bhikshu. These three scholars were sent to write the biography of Bhagavan containing all his teachings. Today, if we all know about Bhagavan and his teachings it is in a great measure thanks to their dedication and hard work.

B. V. Narasimha Swami, wrote *Self Realisation: The Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*. This was the first book on Bhagavan's life. B. V. Narasimha Swami (BVN) was unique because he was the first person to dedicate himself to writing Bhagavan's biography in English. He gathered information that ran into two thousand pages and skillfully cut it down to a concise and readable form spanning two hundred and fifty pages. It was published in 1930. It was after reading *Self Realisation* that Paul Brunton, Krishna Bhikshu, Pranavananda, Swami Madhava Tirtha, Suddhananda Bharati, Swami Sivananda, Swami Ramdas and an array of spiritual giants came to Ramana Maharshi. While it is true that it was Paul Brunton's book which made Bhagavan well known in the West, it is a fact that it was BVN's book that drew Brunton to Bhagavan.

BVN was a brilliant lawyer in Salem, ninety miles from Arunachala. He was a very famous politician, a great orator and writer with a razor sharp intellect that drove straight into the heart of a subject and extracted its truth. It is thanks to his questioning mind that we now have this brilliant book which attracted an audience of communicators who became the west's gateway to *Advaita Vedanta*.

God's divine play (*leela*), however, is unpredictable and a mystery. When he was at the zenith of prosperity, name and fame, a massive family tragedy gave BVN a rude shock. Two of his children drowned in the well in his very own yard right before his eyes. All he could do was watch helplessly without being able to save them. Unable to bear his grief, he resigned from the Bar Council and gave up his political career. He disappointed many Indian leaders, because talented, dedicated individuals like him were needed for India's freedom struggle. He came to know of Ramana Maharshi and headed straight to Ramanasramam. On seeing Bhagavan, he fell at his holy feet. Bhagavan accepted him with a single glance, directed him to a cave and asked him to meditate there.

As a good disciple, he unquestioningly abided by his master's instruction. He spent three years in seclusion, in complete contemplation and meditation. However, he realized that there was something which was drastically needed: a book on Bhagavan's life. "I must bring out the biography of Bhagavan, a living sage. Nobody knows about his life, except for a few instances which may even be factually incorrect." This was a demanding responsibility because even though Bhagavan was not under a vow of silence he did not talk much and then too, rarely about himself.



BVN sought Bhagavan's permission and Bhagavan graciously consented. He started the process of asking Bhagavan questions. Bhagavan did not always respond because sometimes he did not feel like talking. However, BVN was persistent. He doggedly followed Bhagavan wherever he went; even slept next to Bhagavan at night. Whenever he asked a question, his whole attention would be focused on receiving an answer. He has recorded, that sometimes it would take days, a week, or even more, to get one simple answer from Bhagavan. But BVN remained relentless. His persistent determination made

him unique, and that is why even the mention of his name draws so much reverence from every old devotee of Bhagavan.

He not only questioned Bhagavan, it was his nature to elicit details straight from the source. Therefore, he travelled to Tiruchuzhi, Madurai and Dindigul to speak to Bhagavan's associates and kin. Whenever he received any information about Bhagavan's relative or friend in some village, he would go there immediately. He would ply them with questions; however, perfectionist that he was, he would verify every fact with Bhagavan. Therefore, everything written in the book is accurate and the truth. One of the most important things that old devotees told me was that we owe the vivid account of Bhagavan's death experience at Madurai to B. V. Narasimha Swami. His incessant questioning drew from Bhagavan every minute detail of the experience he had had when he was a sixteen year old boy. Bhagavan said there was no time and space in his transformation that made him abide steadily in the Self. B. V. Narasimha Swami condensed these details and presented the final draft to Bhagavan, who approved it and titled the book, *Self Realisation*.

Once this was done, Narasimha Swami put up a hut next to his cave for cooking. He wanted other *sadhakas* to build similar huts and helped them in this. He also trained them in a simple way of cooking to save them time and money, which allowed each *sadhaka* to spend the maximum time in Bhagavan's presence. Through his meticulous *sadhana*, he set an important example of how the master's teaching was to be followed. It was he who actually formed the Palaakothu community.

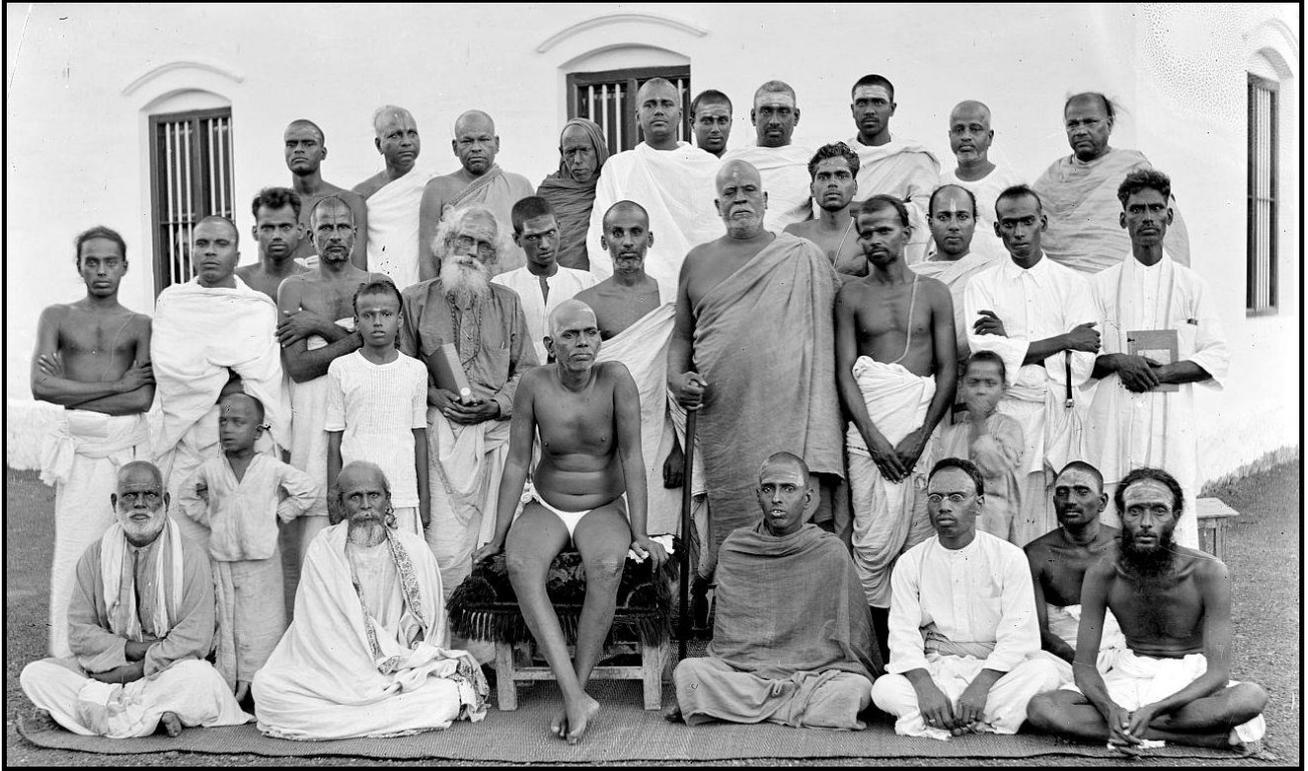
When this was over, he cultivated his natural tendency, a *vasana*, for singing *bhajans* and dancing emotionally for God. He kept pleading with Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, this is my nature. Will you please guide me? I would like to sing *bhajans* and follow the devotional path." Bhagavan kept postponing his reply, but BVN did not give up. Finally, Bhagavan advised him, "Go to the west of India to pursue your path of devotion." BVN left Arunachala and went towards Mumbai. During his travels, he met many saints on the devotional path but was disappointed with all of them. Even a great sadhu like Upasani Baba tried to help him, but he was not satisfied. However, it was Upasani Baba who finally told him to go to Shirdi.

He obeyed and went to the tomb of Shirdi Sai Baba who had passed away ten or fifteen years ago. At night, (this is done to this day) devotees gathered to sing *bhajans* with devotion. When he stood in front of Sai Baba's *samadhi*, the saint's inspiration came to him from within, "Child, I am your guru. Stay here and write my biography." BVN then started meeting those people who lived with Sai Baba and compiled a six volume biography of the celebrated sage. On its completion, Baba told him, "Spread my name and spread this teaching." He then came to Chennai and started a Sai Baba center. He also built a temple there and spread Shirdi Sai Baba's name all over India.

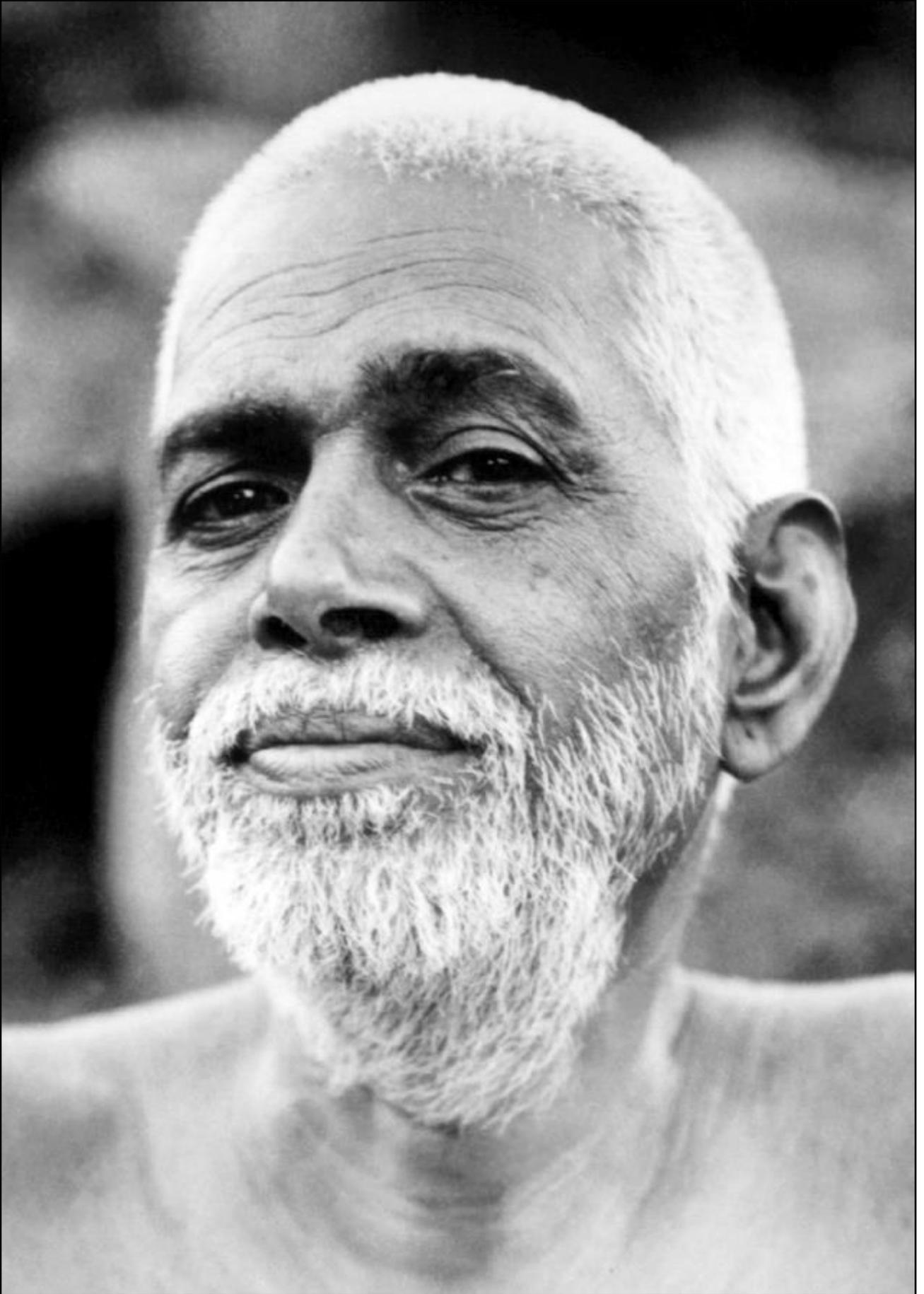
When I came to Ramanasramam in 1960, I was pained to hear that such a remarkable man had left Bhagavan and gone somewhere else. One day, I asked T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, another old devotee, "Why did Narasimha Swami leave Bhagavan and go elsewhere?" T. P. Ramachandra Iyer replied, "I am happy you put this question to me because I was hesitating to share with others a fact I know." In late 1955 or early 1956, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer boarded a first class compartment on a train in Tiruvannamalai to go to Vellore. He was surprised to find B. V. Narasimha Swami with a fractured leg in a big cast seated in the same compartment. Like every old devotee who held B. V. Narasimha Swami in high esteem, he was thrilled to see him. "I raised the same question before B. V. Narasimha Swami that you put to me, Ganesan. I asked him, 'Why did you leave Bhagavan and go?' B. V. Narasimha Swami told me, 'Bhagavan specifically directed me to do so. When we both were alone, I pestered him about my inclination to sing *bhajans*. Taking pity on me, he said 'Go to Shirdi.' He told me in unmistakable terms that I should bring out the biography of Shirdi Sai Baba. He added that I should make Sai Baba known all over India. It was Bhagavan who said this, so I agreed. It was Bhagavan's graciousness and compassion that he wanted such aspirations of mine to be channelised through another saint, instead of getting involved in mere display of emotional dancing and singing. I did not go straight to Shirdi, though Bhagavan asked me to go. I admit my folly in not strictly obeying Bhagavan's commandment. I went to other living saints, as I doubted that Sai Baba, no longer in body, could guide me. This was my mind coming into play. All my efforts to be with the living saints, in due course, deeply disappointed me. Finally, it was at Shirdi that Sai Baba revealed himself as my guru, took me into his fold and blessed me with his grace. For directing me to Sai Baba, I am eternally grateful to Bhagavan. I did not reveal that I was guided by Bhagavan to go to Sai Baba as I felt people would not understand the spiritual content of

the entire episode. This is the truth.” T. P. Ramachandra Iyer recounted that there were tears in BVN’s eyes.

When I was studying in college, I would visit the Sai Baba shrine in Chennai, and also B. V. Narasimha Swami’s *samadhi* shrine behind it. *Pooja* is offered there, and even now above it hangs a big picture of Bhagavan. Since it was Bhagavan who directed B. V. Narasimha Swami to go to Sai Baba, I would prostrate before Sai Baba’s shrine, receive his blessings, and then prostrate before B. V. Narasimha Swami’s *samadhi*, as he was one of the greatest devotees and a superb biographer of Bhagavan.



*Kayakantha, B.V.Narasimha Swami, Yogi Ramiah, Chinna Swami and other devotees*



## Suddhananda Bharati



Suddhananda Bharati was a Sanskrit scholar, outstanding Tamil poet, song writer, linguist and *hatha yogi*. He spent thirty years in pure silence. During the last five of these, he travelled across India and visited many saints because he wanted to see the truth face to face. Yet, he did not have the direct experience of the truth as extolled in the Vedas. In that hour of suffering, he chanced upon the book *Self Realisation* and came to know about Bhagavan Ramana at Arunachala. That very night, he had a vision of Bhagavan in his Heart. He soon started for Ramanasramam. On arrival, he approached the mother's shrine which was then just a hut. He saw Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni at its entrance and then heard a sweet voice from inside, saying, "Let Bharati come in." It was Bhagavan. Before entering the ashram, the *siddha purusha*, Seshadri Swami, met him at the foot of the hill and said, "Go, go,

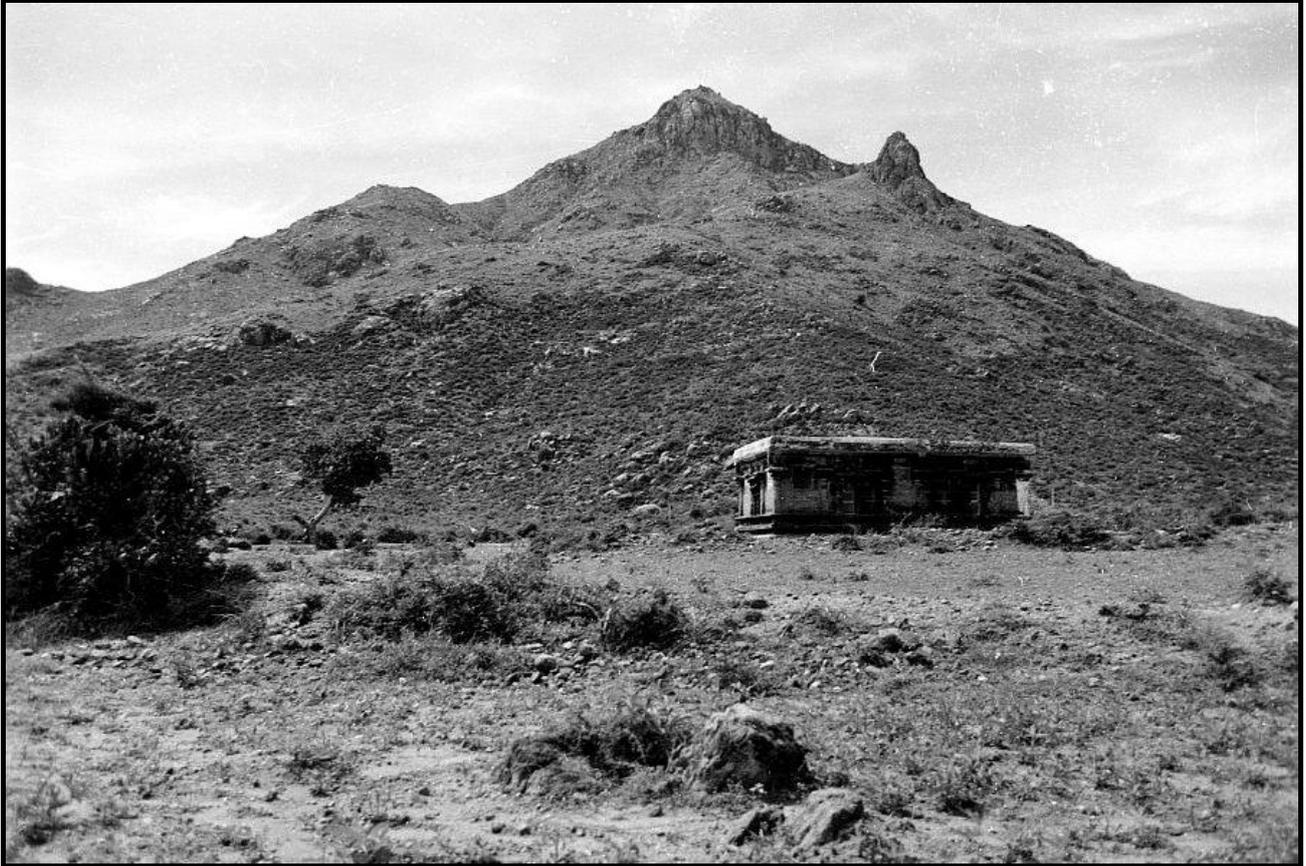
go, Suddhanandam! Get going until you go deep inside." Later, the same saint urged him, "Run, run, Suddhanandam! Ramana awaits you! Go inside!" Suddhananda took one look at Bhagavan and fell at his feet in total surrender.

This is how Suddhananda Bharati describes his first glimpse of Bhagavan: "I saw no human form. I felt dazed, effulgence enveloped me and Bhagavan dissolved me into silence. Bhagavan implanted grace in me and my eyes involuntarily closed themselves. I felt I was entering into the inner cave of my Heart. An hour passed like a moment and when I opened my eyes, I noticed that Bhagavan Ramana's lotus eyes were riveted on me. A voice from within said, 'Now, you have felt it. The cave is open. The 'I AM' is the truth.' After many years of intense *sadhana*, now, here at the holy feet of Ramana Maharshi, I experienced for the first time, the truth as my own inner reality, and caught hold of his holy feet and shed tears of joy remembering the sacred words of the saint Manickavachagar: 'Today, you have risen in my Heart as a sun destroying all forms of darkness. I am swimming in ecstasy.'"

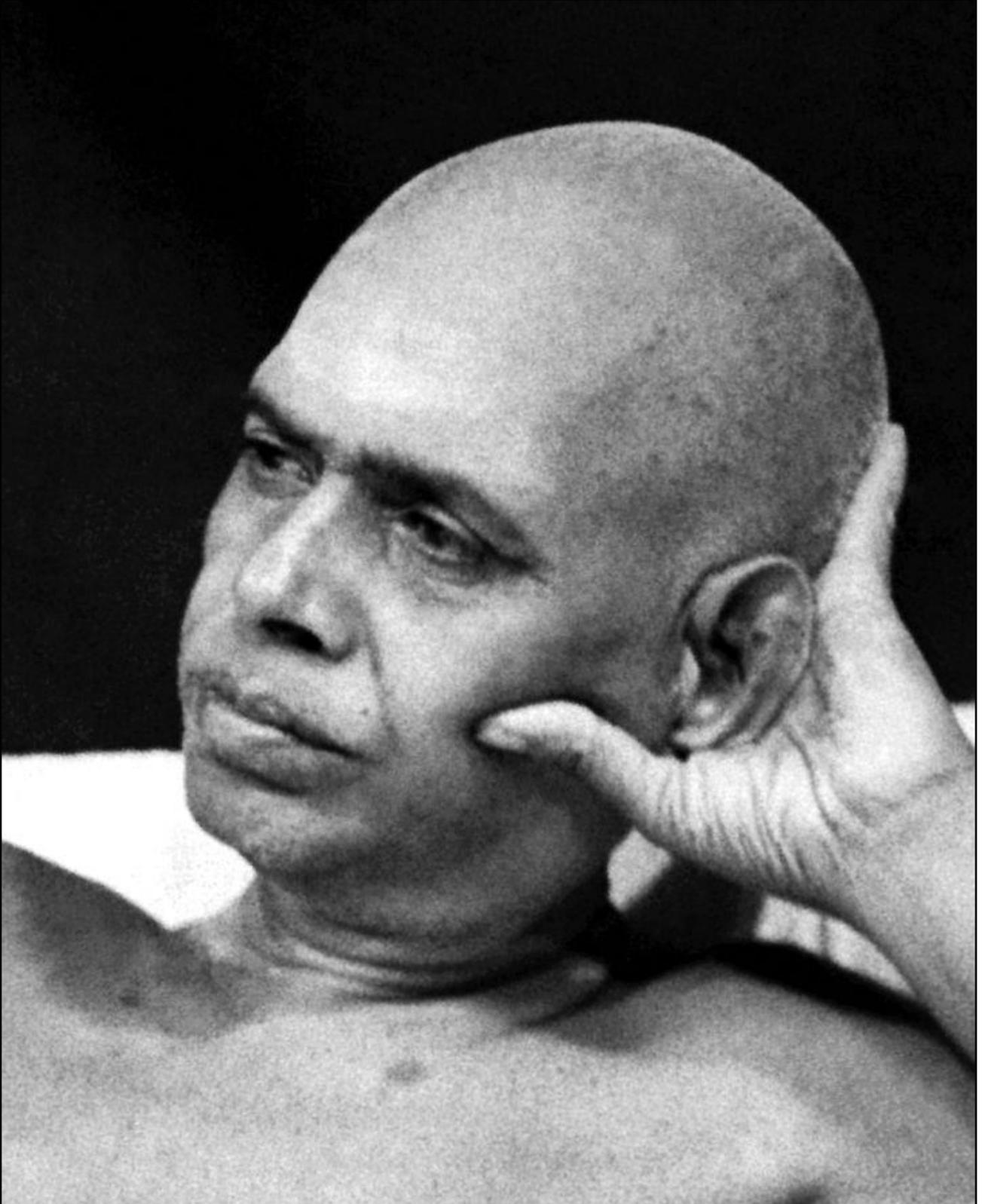
Bhagavan guided him to be in silence again and live in Virupaksha cave. Later, Bhagavan used to say, "Bharati can survive many days without food or even just living on a few neem leaves and a few peanut kernels." By this time, Suddhananda Bharati, a writer himself, was inspired by B. V. Narasimha Swami's book, *Self Realisation*, to write a biography of Bhagavan in Tamil. However, this advanced yogi also had a strong urge to visit another saint - Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. He pleaded with Bhagavan insistently, "I feel like going to Sri Aurobindo. Please, please, guide me." Bhagavan gave him his assent. He spent twenty five years in the care of Sri Aurobindo, where he wrote the Tamil biography of Bhagavan called *Sri Ramana Vijayam*, meaning 'The Advent of Sri Ramana'. The Tamil speaking population in India came to Bhagavan after reading *Ramana Vijayam*. Bharati subsequently went on to write many other biographies and became a well known writer.

He came to Ramanasramam in 1970 to write the biography of Annamalai Swami. I received him and served him for a few days. Before leaving, he invited me to stay at his ashram in Chennai. I accepted his offer and found him to be most kind and affectionate. One day, he made me sit next to him and shared with me something that is very important for all of us. He said, "Ganesan, I saw you managing the ashram and bringing out *The Mountain Path* efficiently. People will praise your capacity in management. I too am willing to give away this ashram to you. I will do it right now if you are willing. But remember, even vast volumes of possessions will not help you erase and annihilate the possessor. I see clearly with my inner eye that your spiritual fulfillment is waiting at your doorstep. Do not fall into the trap of

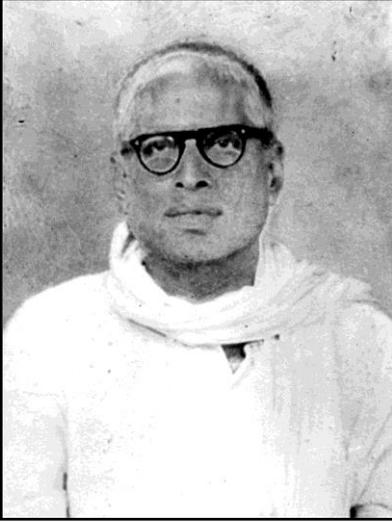
any possessions or any management thrust on you. You are ever free. Be the Self, plunge within, be the dust of the holy feet of Bhagavan who is now in your Heart. He is the universal Heart. The kingdom of God is within your infinite Self. Repose in the Heart. That is the truth.” He further added, “Do not make the same error that I did. I focused on the glory of writing hundreds of books, building an ashram and chasing fame. Don’t do that. Stand by Bhagavan and obey him always. Remain at Arunachala as dust at Bhagavan’s holy feet.”



*“O Arunachala, in you the picture of the universe is formed, has its stay and is dissolved. This is the sublime Truth. You are the inner Self who dances in the Heart as I-I. O Lord, Heart is your name.”*



## Krishna Bhikshu



Venkata Krishnayya was a Sanskrit and Telugu scholar. He was popularly known as Krishna Bhikshu, meaning 'Krishna the mendicant'. As a child, he went to his uncle's house where he saw a picture of Ramana Maharshi. He was irresistibly drawn to it. His uncle had been with Bhagavan in Virupaksha cave and was one of the first questioners in *Sri Ramana Gita*. Krishna Bhikshu too had a copy of *Sri Ramana Gita* which he started reading with keen interest even at that young age.

When he was studying in the Law College in Chennai, he happened to meet Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni at a friend's house. He observed Kavyakantha's oratorical skills, poetic genius, humility, erudite scholarship and his powerful presence and was immediately drawn to him. On that day, Kavyakantha was extolling and adoring his guru Ramana Maharshi so beautifully that Krishna Bhikshu wondered that if this man was so great, how much greater his guru should be! This

encounter instilled in him a yearning to go to Ramanasramam.

He finally arrived in Ramanasramam with a friend and saw that Bhagavan was simplicity itself. An atmosphere of homeliness always surrounded Bhagavan. He asked the master, "Please give me spiritual guidance. But before that, let me tell you what I currently practice. I do the *Gayatri japa* and *pranayama*, but some of the breathing exercises are upsetting my health. Please guide me." Bhagavan's words to him were: "Stop everything. Always have *advaita drishti*, a non-dual outlook." Krishna Bhikshu did not understand the full meaning of this at that time, but he visited Bhagavan again in 1930. During this period, Bhagavan was available at all times. Devotees would sit around listening to Bhagavan tell stories, answer questions, joke and laugh. Krishna Bhikshu told me that those were the golden days in his life.

There was a time when B. V. Narasimha Swami, having completed the draft of his book, forwarded it to Krishna Bhikshu for his suggestions. Bhagavan smiled when he saw Suddhananda Bharati, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni and B. V. Narasimha Swami, because all three were together in the political field. Now, giving up politics, they were together in the spiritual field. Bhagavan laughed about how the three were once more coming together, this time, for spiritual reasons. Inspired by B. V. Narasimha Swami's work, Krishna Bhikshu felt that he too should write a biography in Telugu, his mother tongue. He did so within a month, basing his material on B. V. Narasimha Swami's *Self Realization*.

Krishna Bhikshu's relationship with Bhagavan was unique. "Bhagavan was a very great and fatherly person. I trusted him totally. I meticulously followed his guidance as I was sure that I was in the safe hands of Bhagavan. I had no cares. I just loved him with the whole of my being. I lived my life by his side, eating in the same room, sleeping in the same hall, chatting and joking - but all the time being tied fast by his immense love and attention. Day and night, I felt that he was watching over me, keeping me on the lap of his stupendous awareness and letting me grow in spiritual stature by his sincere interest in me," he affectionately recalled.

One day, when Bhagavan was chopping vegetables in the ashram kitchen, Krishna Bhikshu asked his permission to help. He took up the knife thrice, but each time Bhagavan insisted that he put it down. When Krishna Bhikshu protested, Bhagavan asked him, "Do you cut vegetables at home?" "No, I do not need to do it at home," he replied. Bhagavan smiled and shot back, "Well, are you not at home here?" This simply meant that, while doing arduous *sadhana*, one should give up the idea of doership in every activity and abide as the Self. Then you are always at home, in the Heart, in the state of 'I AM'.

On another occasion, Krishna Bhikshu appealed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, formerly whenever I thought of you, your form would appear before my eyes, but now it does not happen. What am I to do?" "You can remember my name and repeat it," Bhagavan advised. "Name is superior to form and in due course

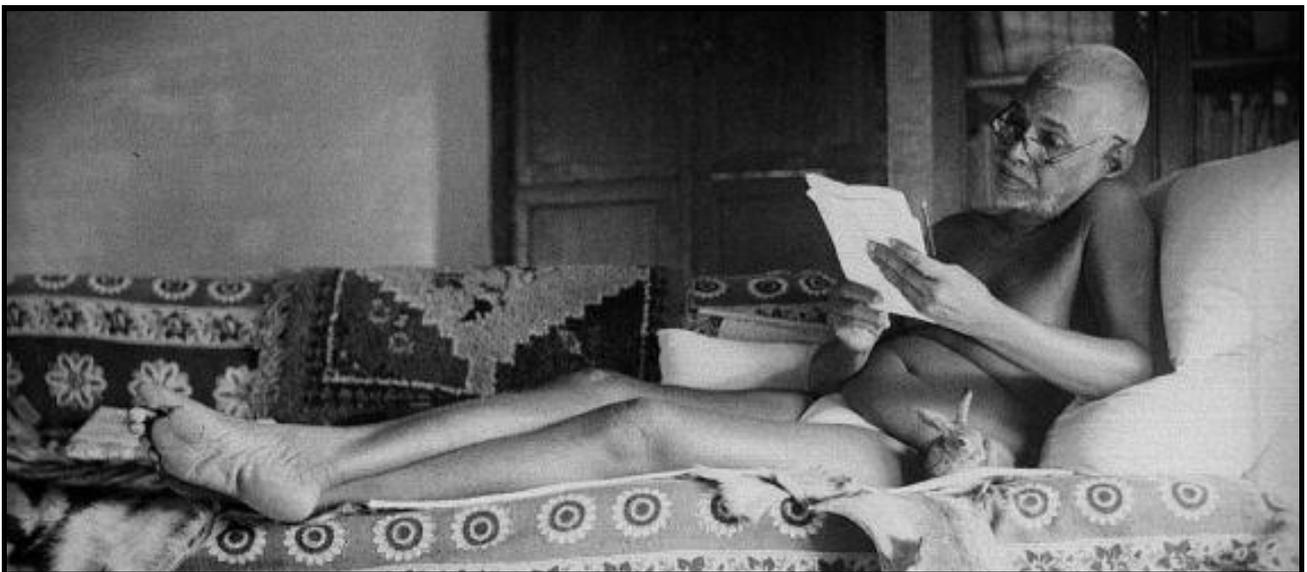
even the importance of the name will disappear. Continue your spiritual pursuit and then the pure 'I' alone will throb resplendently in your Heart of its own accord." While Bhagavan was not rejecting the efficacy of name or form, at the same time he was proclaiming the importance of the eternal Truth of 'I AM'.

After Bhagavan dropped the body, like all the old devotees, Krishna Bhikshu left the ashram and wandered from one city to the other, staying with some friends who generously offered their hospitality. When I came to the ashram and began calling back all the old devotees, someone suddenly suggested, "How about Krishna Bhikshu?" On hearing the name, I thought he was a Buddhist monk and must have passed away during Bhagavan's life time. Then, I learned that he was Munagala Venkataramiah's son-in-law's brother. I wrote to Munagala's daughter, Kamakshi, got his address and invited him to Ramanasramam. When he arrived, he admitted, "Ganesan, I do not have any money." "That is immaterial sir, please stay here," I replied.

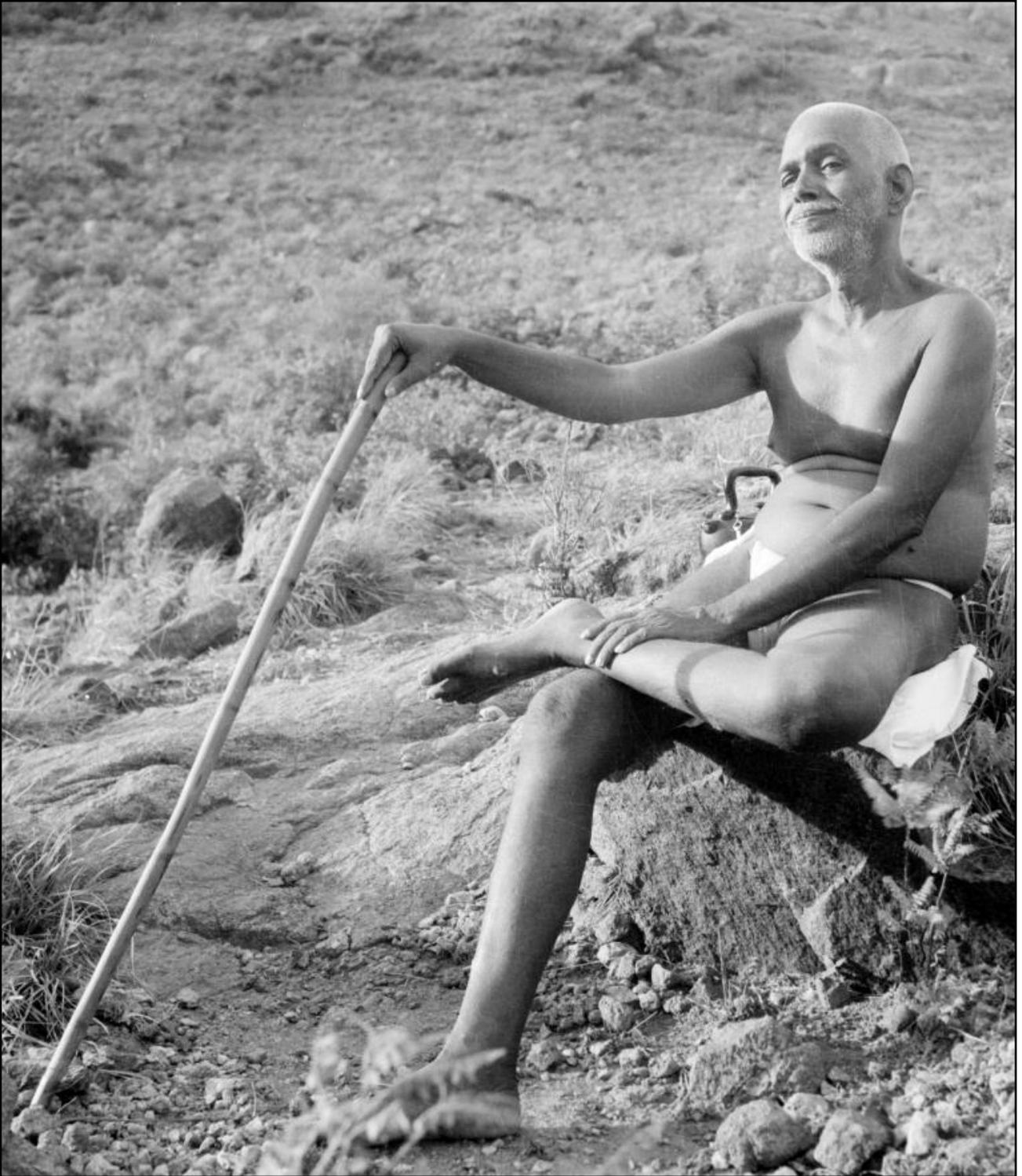
His integrity was truly awe inspiring. He used to receive a money order of twenty seven rupees every month, sent by some kind friend. He insisted on giving twenty rupees to the ashram and kept seven rupees for himself. My regard for him grew in leaps and bounds. This austere man was a jewel in the Ramanasramam crown, but many people took no notice of him because of his simple appearance. Yet, this exalted man had written Bhagavan's Telugu biography, *Sri Ramana Leela*, 'The Play of Ramana,' and had lived with the master from 1928.

At one time, the trustees' board of the ashram was about to pass a resolution that the permanent residents of the ashram must pay a minimum of thirty rupees if they were not doing any service in the ashram. Krishna Bhikshu came to me and said sadly, "I am leaving the ashram, Ganesan." "Sir, why are you leaving," I asked in surprise. "I cannot afford that amount." Appalled, I marched straight to the trustees and gave them a piece of my mind. "What is this nonsense? He is a genuine gem in the ashram!" I exclaimed. They condescended to cancel that resolution. Krishna Bhikshu shook my hands and embraced me. I will never forget that sweet embrace.

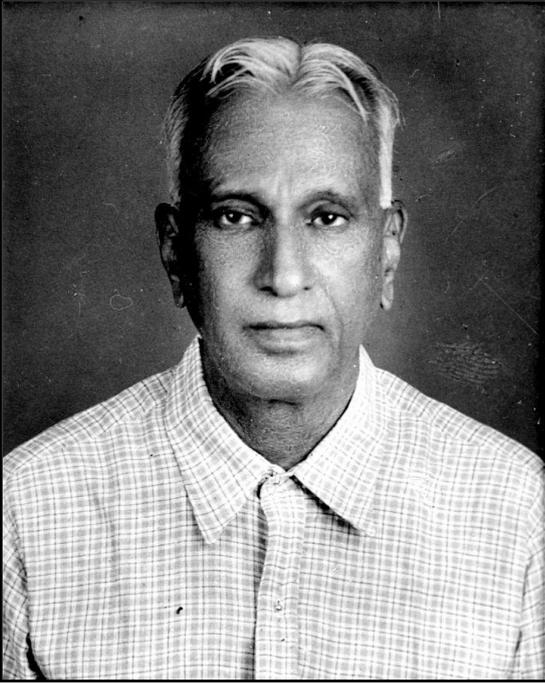
He fell ill at Ramanasramam and decided to leave, saying, "My friend is a doctor. I will go to him. He will treat me." As he left, he embraced me and blessed me. I never thought that this was the last time I would see him. Later on, I received the news of his passing. Describing his last days, his doctor friend wrote to me that Krishna Bhikshu had been fully conscious and had continuously chanted, "Ramana, Ramana, Ramana, Ramana." At the final moment of dropping of the body, his face shone with a gentle light and he uttered, "Yes, I am coming!" Bhagavan seems to have come to take him in his embrace and back to the source - Arunachala - for time and space are no constraints for Bhagavan and Father Arunachala.



*Bhagavan reading the proofs*



## Devaraja Mudaliar



Once, a stranger stood in front of Bhagavan in the Old Hall. Bhagavan instantly recognized him and introduced him to everyone, "He had come twenty years ago when we were staying up on the hill." When Muruganar told me about this, I immediately asked him, "Does this mean that Bhagavan had a phenomenal memory?" Muruganar countered this with another question, "Does a mirror make an effort to reflect an image? In the presence of a *jnani*, a realized person, everything is automatically revealed. There is no time delay or any other process in an interaction a *jnani* has with a person." He added, "Bhagavan being a *jnani* could effortlessly cognize whoever stood before him." Then he hurriedly told me, "Do not mistake this for thought reading or clairvoyance. These belong to the realm of the mind. A realized sage is beyond the mind; he is in the spiritual state. That perfect spiritual state may include the apparitions of body and the mind, not vice-versa." Bhagavan himself has once said, "A *jnani* is like a mirror. Whatever is placed before it will be reflected exactly as it is."

Every devotee engaged with Bhagavan, played a different role by the dictates of their nature and Bhagavan responded similarly. For instance, Muruganar saw Bhagavan as Lord Siva and Bhagavan treated him like saint Manikavachakar, a surrendered poet-devotee of Lord Siva who lived several centuries ago. Major Chadwick looked upon Bhagavan as the mother, Professor G.V. Subbaramayya could treat Bhagavan as the father, and my own grandfather Chinna Swami saw guru and God in Bhagavan. At the same time, there was no difference in Bhagavan's loving embrace for each devotee.

There was yet another devotee with a unique personality. His approach to Bhagavan was like that of a child, or a baby crawling towards his parents, pure innocence. He was A. Devaraja Mudaliar, the 'A' standing for Arcot, the place where he hailed from. In the core of his heart, and also when he addressed Bhagavan or wrote letters to him, he always called Bhagavan *ammaiappa* - a Tamil word for mother-father. Mudaliar styled himself as *Ramana Sei*, the child of Ramana. Bhagavan too, treated him like a baby. Some of the senior devotees did not approve of Devaraja Mudaliar because of his childish, though innocent, approach.

Yet, Mudaliar was an embodiment of surrender. Bhagavan has said, "There are two ways to realize the truth. Ask, 'Who am I?' and trace the 'I', the ego, to its source, the Self, and allow it to dissolve. The second way is to surrender the 'me' that is the ego to the Supreme which is the state of 'I AM' within you." Mudaliar's life also exemplifies another teaching of Bhagavan which says, "The devotee's effort and the guru's grace are synonymous and simultaneous. There is no time lag there. When one makes an effort, simultaneously, grace is activated. The seeker's effort and God's grace are synonymous." (In fact, Bhagavan has emphasized that effort itself is only because of grace.)

Devaraja Mudaliar was associated with Bhagavan for almost fifty years. It is an association that is perhaps longer than any that the other devotees enjoyed. In 1900, four years after Bhagavan came to Arunachala, hundreds of people came to Tiruvannamalai for the Karthikai Deepam festival. Devaraja Mudaliar was among those present. Though Bhagavan at that time was completely absorbed in the Self and sat with eyes closed, his grace was upon Mudaliar. Out of the hundreds of people there, it was Mudaliar who was captivated by this young Swami. By 1914, when he visited Arunachala again, he had already become a reputed lawyer in Chittoor. Bhagavan was now living in Virupaksha cave. Travelling in those days was very tedious. Driven by his devotion, Mudaliar came to Tiruvannamalai again in 1917. Bhagavan was then in Skandashram. He experienced Bhagavan's graciousness and felt that he should surrender and offer his prayers to him. He returned fully convinced that here was a master to whom he should pray. He prayed inwardly and never orally.

Between 1918 and 1922, he could not visit Bhagavan due to professional pressures. In 1922, he travelled again to Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan was now in Ramanasramam, which at the time consisted of a few humble huts. He prostrated before Bhagavan, while another ardent devotee, Ramaswami Pillai, was singing *Tiruppughazh*, a Tamil song, in a stentorian voice that drowned out the steady sound of the torrential rain. At lunch time, there were four or five people present. Bhagavan turned to Mudaliar and said, "We follow a particular pattern of eating here. If you are used to something different, you are free to eat it." Mudaliar had brought with him *chapatis* made with wheat. Bhagavan's attention melted him. He joined in and enjoyed a meal with the others forgetting the *chapatis*.

He started coming to Bhagavan more regularly and posing more and more questions. One of the important things that he shared with me was that he had been an atheist. He never believed in God, disliked going to temples and had a deep disdain for rituals. In contrast, all the other devotees were devoutly religious, visited temples and talked about God. In 1922, he put his views before Bhagavan. The master said, "It is all right. There is nothing wrong with that. God is always within you; turn your mind inward and meditate on awareness. That is sufficient."

I had the privilege of keeping company with this stately but very simple man. He once told me, "The uniqueness of our Bhagavan is that he accepts everyone as they are. Other gurus expect one to reform or they reform you and only then do they accept you." He told me about an incident when he sang a song by a poet-devotee of Lord Muruga one day. The song narrates how Lord Muruga finally reformed the singer and saved him. Mudaliar replaced Lord Muruga's name with Bhagavan's and began chanting it. Muruganar, who was present, immediately chided him, "You think highly of this poem, but I do not agree with you. It does not represent the real acceptance of our Bhagavan or his munificence. Bhagavan never waits. He instantly accepts whoever comes into his presence. There is no need, no gap, and no form of expectation."

From 1922, he started visiting Bhagavan more often and mentally offered prayers for relief from the problems he had. He explained to me, "You have every right to pray to your God or guru - but without any condition attached. It may be fulfilled, it may not be fulfilled. Your mind should not agitate either happily when it is fulfilled, or unhappily when it is not fulfilled." Bhagavan once told him, "Your duty is to surrender, and then just be. Whether I fulfill it or not is not your concern."

Those days in India, it was difficult to get a daughter married but Mudaliar prayed and his daughter's marriage was performed without any obstacles. In 1930, his wife, whom he dearly loved, fell seriously ill. He rushed to Bhagavan and prayed for her recovery repeatedly. She passed away in 1933, giving him a great shock. But, he never got angry or disappointed with Bhagavan. He said, "That was also Bhagavan's blessing to me, Ganesan, because after that shock, my mind and my attention turned completely to the spiritual quest. I saw powerfully, the futility of worldly attachments and relationships." After his wife's passing, he came to Ramanasramam and sat before his master. The sorrow at the loss of his wife, which was oppressing him deeply, disappeared. He attributed this cure entirely to the gracious presence of Bhagavan.

At lunch time, he was invited as usual, but demurred saying that he had an allergy. His cousin Dr. Guruswami Mudaliar, a respected doctor in Chennai, had told him that there was no medicine for his allergy; prevention was only possible by avoiding rice altogether. On that day, Bhagavan asked, "Where is Devaraja Mudaliar?" Someone told Mudaliar that Bhagavan had called for him. He went to Bhagavan and the master instructed him with a powerful look, "Sit here." Mudaliar quietly obeyed. Rice is served in abundance in Ramanasramam and as it was being served to him, he hesitated and looked at Bhagavan. The guru suggested eating and immediately Mudaliar began to eat, finishing all the rice. He later told me, "I obeyed my master's command. The 'incurable' allergy was instantly gone."

No one at the ashram knew who Mudaliar was because many different people came there every day. Bhagavan asked the residents, "Do you recognize who he is?" All of them shook their heads. "Oh, you do not recognize Devaraja Mudaliar!" Bhagavan exclaimed. "He has often come to visit us. How different he looked in those days! He used to wear a European suit then, but now see how simple he looks." Devaraja Mudaliar tearfully narrated this to me saying, "Look at the guru's attention on me. He accepts you as you are, whether you are in a European suit or in ordinary clothes, whether you are a believer in God, or pursuing a particular spiritual practice; these are immaterial to him. The devotee is much more important to the guru than what the devotee believes or does." From 1933, Mudaliar

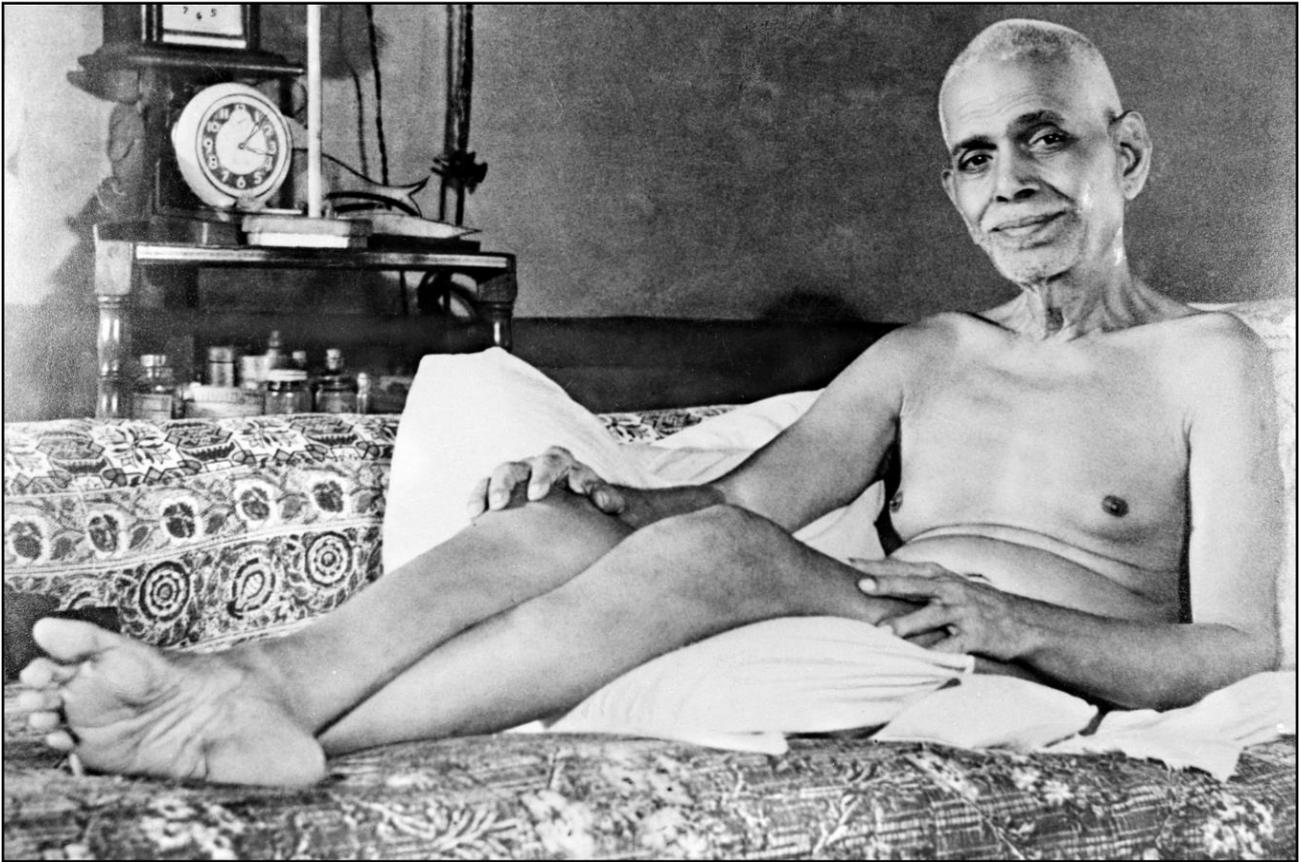
started going to Bhagavan even more frequently. This is very important; in Mudaliar's own words, "It is very important for spiritual strengthening to continue to have contact with the truth, whether it is a person, a teaching, an institution, a temple, or a church. This continuum, without a gap is imperative." (The wonder and beauty of the guru's love is that he wins the devotee over step by step, not through instructions, but just by going along with the devotee.)

In 1936, the ashram management was in an embarrassing predicament. A lawsuit was filed in the local magistrate court against Bhagavan, Chinna Swami and most of the ashram residents. Chinna Swami rushed to Sundaram Chettiar, a retired high court judge who was also Bhagavan's devotee, and sought his guidance. Out of all the reputed lawyers in Tiruvannamalai and other areas, the judge suggested the name of Devaraja Mudaliar, who was then in Chittoor, a hundred miles away. When Devaraja Mudaliar narrated this to me, there were tears in his eyes, "Look at the master's grace." According to the Indian Penal Code, when one is summoned by the court, one is required to appear before it; it seemed that there was no other way out. But Devaraja Mudaliar managed to get the case dismissed in the initial stages and so no one needed to go to court. The complainant took his appeal to a higher court, but there too Mudaliar managed to get the case dismissed. (There was a higher purpose behind Bhagavan choosing Mudaliar for this. He was to become one of the boulders to disseminate Arunachala's teaching of 'I AM' throughout the world. Therefore, it was not enough that the guru accepted him - the management, including Chinna Swami, had to accept him too. This incident helped Mudaliar win his critics over.)

In 1939, Mudaliar felt the attraction of Bhagavan's grace to be so powerful, that he wanted to quit his profession and be permanently seated at the holy feet of his master. No one in those days was allowed to build a room for himself in the ashram. The two exceptions were Major Chadwick and Yogi Ramiah. Many others had tried, but the management refused, saying, "We do not want it to be a residential ashram. We want it to be small, with limited residential facilities." Mudaliar said, "Bhagavan influenced me in my heart to write to Chinna Swami asking for permission to build a hut inside the ashram. The reply came quickly in the affirmative." (The disciple desires to be with the guru and the guru also responds in the same way. I love the example of Devaraja Mudaliar because he is a practical demonstration of the active relationship between the guru and disciple.) It took two years to construct a hut and wind up his affairs in Chittoor. In 1941, he came to stay permanently in Ramanasramam. Thereafter, he was with the master daily. Yet, Mudaliar had a deep desire to have Bhagavan's holy feet step into his room. Bhagavan laid out a simple stipulation, "I will come to your room, but no fanfare, do not invite anyone, and do not make it a big deal." Again, Mudaliar narrated this to me with moistened eyes. Bhagavan stepped inside his room and blessed him. Mudaliar said, "This event signified the fulfillment of my own spiritual emancipation. It was not just a visit." He added, "Ganesan, do not take this lightly. Every movement between Bhagavan and me was very significant."

Bhagavan very rarely spoke English and in the 1940s, after the publication of Paul Brunton's book, many seekers from the west started showing up. Interpreters were required to help them converse with Bhagavan. Devaraja Mudaliar, Munagala Venkataramaiah and many others played the role of translators. Once, Bhagavan made a remark, which not only Mudaliar, but other devotees too have told me about: "All others interpret when I talk, only Devaraja Mudaliar translates exactly what I say."

I spent hours listening to Devaraja Mudaliar's narrations about his time with Bhagavan. It was music to my ears and also a part of my *sadhana* to listen to stories of his relationship with the guru. Mudaliar told me, "Bhagavan never expressed strong views on ethical or worldly matters, save two exceptions. One was his total disapproval of non-vegetarian food and the other was his dislike for external renunciation: donning the ochre robe, shaving the head, taking on another name and taking *sannyas*." In 1936, while seated in the hall in the presence of Bhagavan, Mudaliar strongly felt that Bhagavan would like him to be a vegetarian. Though Bhagavan did not actually say this to him, he sensed it. However, he also remembered that he had anemia, for which Dr. Guruswami Mudaliar had advised him to eat plenty of meat, eggs and liver soup. Mudaliar was frank enough to admit, "I was also very fond of non-vegetarian food and here, seated in front of my guru, this strong urge comes that Bhagavan wants me to be a vegetarian." Faced with this dilemma, he went up the hill with Bhagavan and told him, "Bhagavan, I feel your influence on me to be a vegetarian, but this is my medical condition." Bhagavan smiled and told him, "Vegetarian food contains all that is necessary for health and strength." Mudaliar was very happy to hear this and replied, "I have courage now, Bhagavan, to embark on this eating experiment."



*Bhagavan reclining on the couch in the Old Hall*

I know I can live even on thin air if you said it is enough to support me.” By sheer grace, he said his health did not suffer at all from the change in diet nor did he experience any craving later.

Once, Mudaliar clarified for me the difference between faith and belief. “Belief is a thought - ‘I believe in Christianity, though I am a Hindu.’ Faith is complete; there is no question of accepting or rejecting.” “What do you mean by that?” I asked. He replied, “Ganesan, if Bhagavan had shown me a crow and said, ‘Here is a white crow,’ I swear I would have seen only a white crow. No contrary thought would have crossed my mind. I would never have thought that I have never heard of a white crow, that it is impossible, or question why Bhagavan said so. It is not accepting because belief is thinking ‘Yes, when the guru says so, then it must be a white crow’. But faith is seeing only that white crow.” The approach of Devaraja Mudaliar was that of one who surrenders. In surrender there is no ‘me’. The ‘me’ has belief and ‘me’ can never know what faith is. With the thought of ‘me’, we would have tried to delve into the ‘white crow’ logic and said, “This is nonsense. Bhagavan would never have said that,” or something to that effect.

The other precious teaching that Mudaliar has given us is the answer to the age old confusion of every spiritual seeker about destiny and free will. Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and other eastern religions generally believe in destiny. You are now a woman because you were destined to be a woman, not because you have chosen it. That is destiny. Whether you are wealthy or poor is destiny. But if everything is destined, then why should we do any spiritual *sadhana* at all? This was a dialogue between Mudaliar and Bhagavan one day: “I can understand, Bhagavan, that the external factors in a man’s life such as his nationality, family, profession, marriage, death etc., are all predestined according to his *karma*. But, can it be that his entire life down to the minutest detail is already predetermined? Now, for instance, Bhagavan, I have put this fan in my hand down on the floor. Is this also already predestined?” Bhagavan replied very firmly, “Certainly. Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it has to pass through is already determined when it comes into existence.”

Mudaliar did not stop. He put forth further questions: “What becomes then of man’s freedom and responsibility for his actions?” Bhagavan, looking graciously at Mudaliar answered, “The only freedom

man has, is to strive for and acquire *jnana*, wisdom, which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. Man is free to free himself from body identification and that is the only freedom he has. Identified with the body, man has no freedom from destiny at all. The body will go through all actions already enjoined to it to be done.” (Just the thought, “I do not identify with the body,” is not enough, because it is merely another thought. This is why we have to do *sadhana*. To cut off our identification with the body, we must have *jnana* by being steady in the Heart.)

Devotees and seekers often talked about the importance of the Arunachala hill, going around it, and staying in its vicinity. At various times, Mudaliar asked Bhagavan the significance of going around the hill. Bhagavan once said, “Going around the hill is very good for everybody. It does not even matter whether one has faith in this *pradakshina* or not. Just as the fire will burn all who touch it, whether they believe it or not, likewise, the hill will do only good to those who go around it.” Once, Mudaliar was pestering Bhagavan on the same issue, and Bhagavan smilingly said, “Why are you so concerned with all these questions about the efficacy of going around the hill? Whatever else you may or may not get, you will at least have the benefit of physical exercise.” Mudaliar scrupulously started doing circumambulation of Arunachala regularly and every time he went, he took Bhagavan’s consent. The master’s way of giving his consent was to ask, “Who else is going with you?” Mudaliar would say the name of his companions, if any. Once, while responding to the same question, he said, “Today, Bhagavan is accompanying me, nobody else.” Bhagavan gave a broad smile and blessed him.

As for staying at Arunachala, Bhagavan had translated from *Arunachala Mahatmyam* a Sanskrit verse which says: “Lord Siva gave a commandment stating ‘I ordain that residence within three *yojanas* (thirty miles) of the hill is, by itself, suffice to burn off all defects and even render union with the Supreme in the absence of any form of initiation.’” Bhagavan, while extolling this verse had said, “Anyone or anything that is found in, on and around Arunachala, automatically gets liberated without need for any form of religious or spiritual practices.” Mudaliar as usual, persistently questioned Bhagavan, “How can the criminals, non-believers, animals, birds, trees and stones found here get liberation?” Bhagavan graciously replied, “Who are we to say anything, much less to question it? It is the decision declared by the Privy Council!” During the British regime, which had colonized much of the world, the Privy Council in London was the highest court of appeal. Bhagavan used these legal terms, because Mudaliar was a lawyer. Devaraja Mudaliar said, “I am a lawyer. So that this truth could go deep into my heart, Bhagavan used the term Privy Council for Lord Siva !”

He felt that he was simple and was incapable of progressing spiritually. Therefore, on many occasions, he appealed to Bhagavan, “You should save me. I cannot save myself.” One day, Mudaliar came across a Tamil song in which the poet laments that he is not like a tenacious young monkey that can hold on to its mother tightly, but rather like a purring kitten that must be carried by the neck in its mother’s jaws. The poet prays God should therefore take care of him. Mudaliar showed the song to Bhagavan and told him, “My case is exactly the same. You must take pity on me, Bhagavan, hold me by the neck and see that I don’t fall and get injured.” Bhagavan’s answer was characteristic, “That is impossible. It is necessary both for you to strive and for the guru to help.” Mudaliar then pleaded that even scriptures recognize the two methods of the baby monkey and the kitten - *Markata Nyaayam* and *Maarjara Nyaayam* - as being suited to seekers with differing capacities. But despite all his pleading, this was the only answer he got from Bhagavan. (The endeavour of the disciple is the grace of the guru. There is no lag and no difference. The devotee’s effort and guru’s grace are synonymous. We have to hold on tightly to the guru like a baby monkey and the guru will take care of us like a mother cat!)

Mudaliar’s greatest contribution was from the period of 1945 to 1947, when he noted in a diary everything that transpired in Bhagavan’s presence. This was published by the ashram, as *Day by Day with Bhagavan*. I have seen the diary covered in a few notebooks. They all had Bhagavan’s handwriting in a few places. Only a small number of pages had corrections; and they were all minimal in nature. While one finds in *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, Bhagavan referring to traditional Sanskrit treatises, in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, we see Bhagavan profusely quoting ancient Tamil devotional texts.

In the late fifties and early sixties, it was my pleasure to prod Mudaliar to write down all stories and incidents that he had narrated to me, in a book form. He was kind enough to consent without hesitation and the result was his book of reminiscences of Bhagavan, titled *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*. After I graduated from college, I stayed for two years in the ashram. I was trying to get a job because my family was not financially well off. I was the first graduate in my family. People like Major

Chadwick and Mrs. Taleyarkhan were helping me find a job. While living in the ashram working in the office, Bhagavan's grace made me persuade the old devotees to narrate to me incidents that took place in the presence of Sri Bhagavan. Major Chadwick and Mudaliar always obliged. When they narrated these stories, I requested them to write them down. These were the first two books of the reminiscences of Bhagavan. When I came to Ramanasramam for good in 1960, there were not many old devotees still living there other than Major Chadwick, Devaraja Mudaliar, Ramaswami Pillai and Kunju Swami. Mrs. Taleyarkhan and S. S. Cohen stayed outside the *ashram*. I used to spend a long time with Chadwick, Kunju Swami and Mudaliar, delighting in their stories about Bhagavan and yearning to hear more.

Mudaliar's social status was not that of an ordinary man; he belonged to the elite class. The British government even honoured him with the title of Rao Bahadur, which recognised him as an important man in society. He was a reputed lawyer with a good intellect. Yet, he surrendered everything to Bhagavan. He said, "Spiritual surrender means we not only surrender by word. The 'me' has to surrender to the silent state of 'I AM'." He recalled how Bhagavan had accepted the 'me', the 'good-for-nothing me' and revealed the precious, priceless 'I AM'.

It may have been some time between 1961 and 1963. The ashram's funds were very limited. There was only one male cook in its employ. Food was cooked for less than fifteen people and it was ration time. There was only 'cupped-rice', *kuzhambu* without *dhal*, watery buttermilk and pickle - no elaborate *bhikshas*! I was attending to all the ashram work, including the needs of the dining hall. Mudaliar was excited that his granddaughter was coming immediately after her marriage, along with her husband. I had arranged for their stay at the Morvi Guest House, their return bus ticket and a horse cart to bring them from the bus stand. Since I had to go to town in the morning to see the ashram lawyer, I assured Mudaliar that I would return in time to attend to the newlyweds.

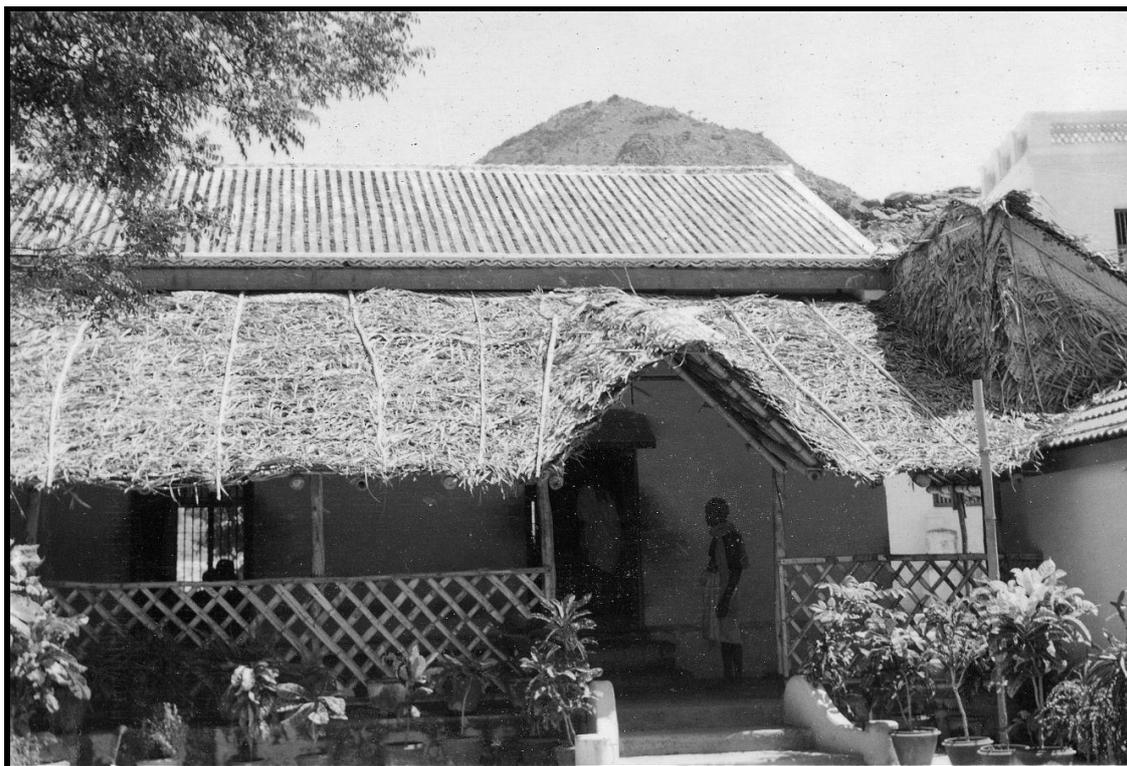
There was a little delay and hence on return from town, I rushed to Mudaliar's room to apologise. The young couple was in the Old Hall. As I was leading Mudaliar and the couple to the dining hall, he held my hand tightly and told me with great emotion, "See! I miss Sri Bhagavan's physical presence tremendously! He would have been delighted to see, talk to my grandchildren, feed them as if they were his own and would have given special, personal attention." He became too emotional to continue the conversation. It was 10.30 - earlier than the usual lunchtime - when I took the couple inside the dining hall, accompanied by Mudaliar. I was naturally surprised to see banana leaves spread for the couple. (Mudaliar always ate only at the usual lunchtime.) What was served to them was a veritable feast, with *vadaï*, *payasam* and *appalam*! Just then, the ashram cashier rushed in and reported to me in whispers, "You were away in town, from early morning. A telegraphic money order came with instructions that an elaborate *bhiksha* should be organized for the sender's granddaughter and her husband. So, without your permission I arranged for all these...please pardon me!" The couple was very happy! After we saw them off, Mudaliar gave me a big hug with tears of joy in his eyes and exclaimed, "Ganesu! What a big fool I am! Though I did not express it openly to you, I was feeling miserable that we would have to feed them our daily dry food and that if Sri Bhagavan were here, he would have ensured a big feast for them. See Ganesu! To remove my misery, Bhagavan has induced someone to send a telegraphic money order! What a great good feast on banana leaf with *vadaï*, *payasam* and *appalam* our compassionate Bhagavan has arranged!" Saying this, he sobbed and sobbed joyous tears in great elation and ecstasy!

Mudaliar was always neatly dressed, pleasant and polite and never got angry. Once, I asked him, "How is it that you are always happy and pleasant?" In response, he shared with me three teachings: "Be light. Never feel heavy hearted at any time. Jesus Christ said, 'Be a light unto yourself.' That's it. Do not involve yourself in complications. Look at me, how happy I am. Do not make anything an issue. Remembering the past creates issues. Likewise, worrying about and projecting the future creates issues. Refrain as far as possible from brooding over the past and the future. Remain in the now." He added, "God is within you. Who looks through your eyes when you look through your eyes? Who hears? Who eats? Who digests? Who makes you go to sleep? This inner power, which Bhagavan called the higher power, is God. This inner power is truly who you really are. Abide in silence, abide in the simple 'I AM'. Be happy, always." The third thing he told me was, "Bhagavan is the truth. Do not try to define the truth, for the mind cannot. Nobody has ever done it. If you surrender your 'me' to the 'I AM', the truth will reveal itself in your Heart. You will recognize it intuitively, spiritually. I bless you."

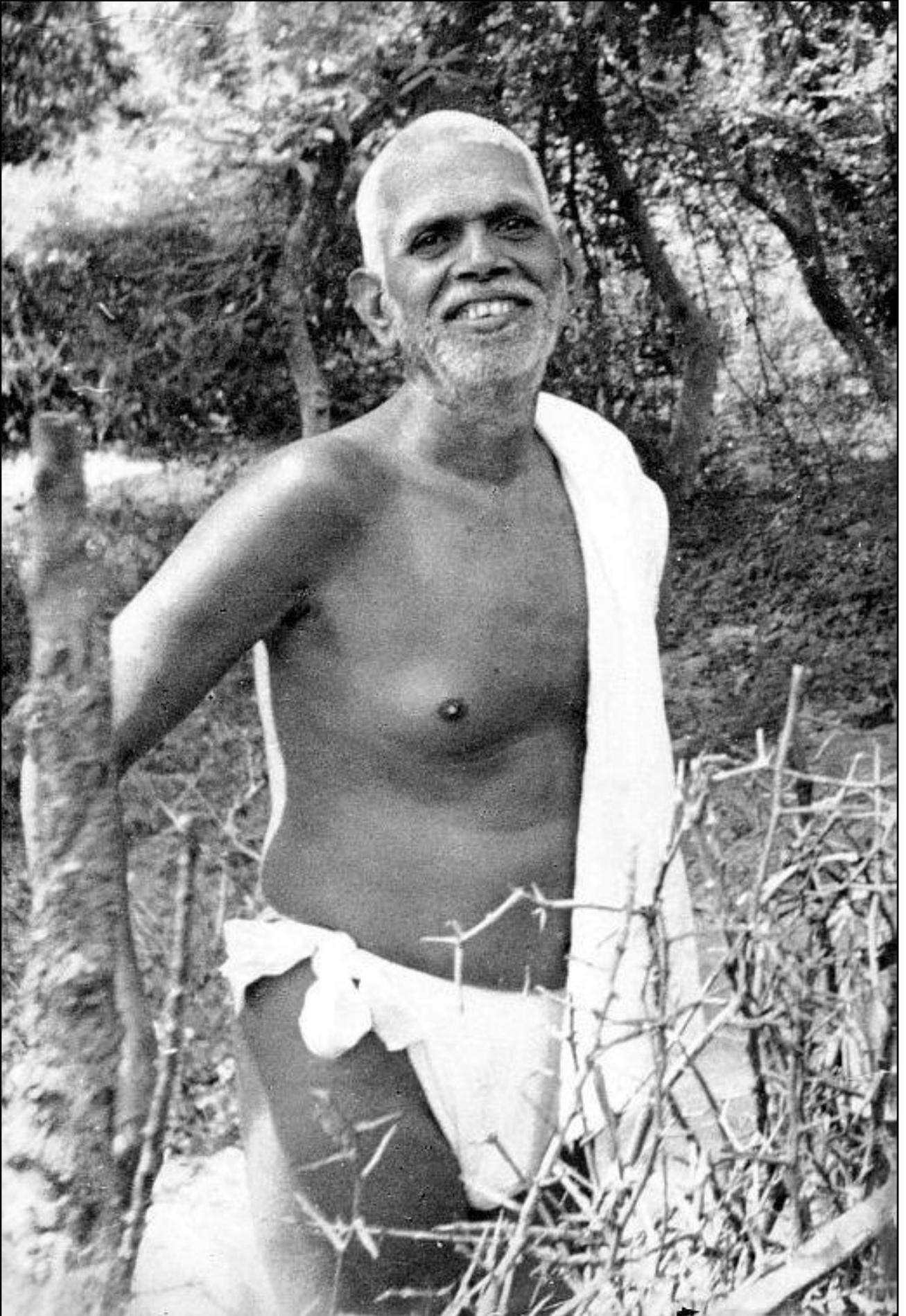
In 1964 or 1965, he had to leave the ashram in his last days because his family members wanted him to live with them. I arranged a farewell celebration in which all the devotees participated. He moved to Kancheepuram with his children and chanted Bhagavan's name continually. I directed a newspaper correspondent - who had come to interview the ashram residents - to Mudaliar, telling him about this gem of a devotee living in Kancheepuram. One of the questions this journalist put to Devaraja Mudaliar was: "It was you who elicited from Bhagavan that even a stone, a bird or a tree residing in Arunachala is liberated. Why are you then staying away from Arunachala in Kancheepuram?" That same correspondent later told me Mudaliar's reply. Mudaliar told him, "That is what you say. Did I say I am ever away from Arunachala? Now that I am in Kancheepuram, is it any different for me? Bhagavan is always with me and I am always in Arunachala. Wherever the feeling of 'I AM' is, there is Arunachala." The teaching of 'I AM' spreads in this way!

I had once asked him why he kept chanting Ramana's name and he said, "I asked Bhagavan, 'Bhagavan, I sometimes chant your name without even thinking about you. Is it all right? Do I get marks for this? Personally, I think I ought to get, maybe not many, but at least one or two marks. Is it not so, Bhagavan?' Bhagavan smiled and replied, 'Yes, you will get marks for this.' I continue to say 'Ramana, Ramana' and have full faith that as he told me, he will give me marks for doing so in the final examination."

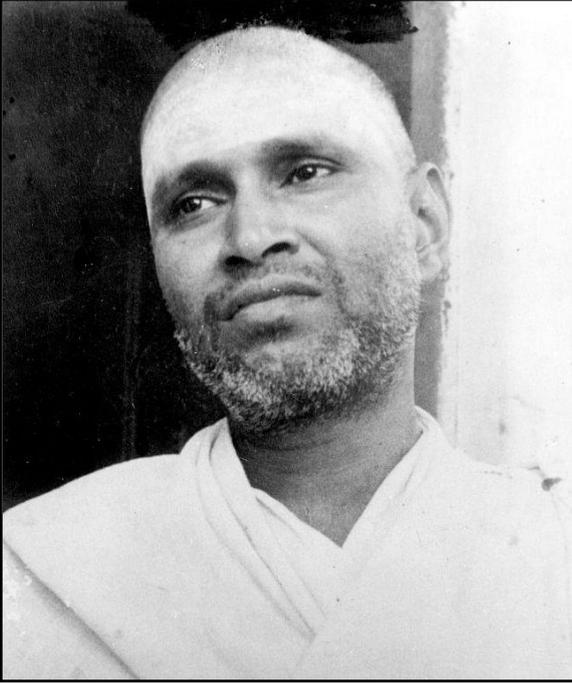
His relatives told me his last days were most peaceful. Until his last conscious moment he kept chanting, "Ramana, Ramana." Chanting 'Ramana Ramana' is not just a mantra, a repetition or a ritual. Remembrance is being in that divine presence. When you chant 'Ramana', you are already established in the 'I AM', the powerful and pure presence.



*Old Hall in earlier days (South view)*



## Viswanatha Swami



Bhagavan's mother Azhagammal's brother lived in Dindigul. His wife died soon after giving birth to a son. Bhagavan's parents brought the orphaned child, Ramaswami, to their home and raised him with much affection and care. Just before Bhagavan was born, Mother Azhagammal told the midwife, "I am very excited, I want this to be a girl who can be the wife to my brother's son!" That night in Tiruchuzhi, when Bhagavan was born, the blind midwife shouted, "Azhagu! It is a boy! Be happy! I saw a brilliant light. Azhagu, rejoice!" Azhagammal was disappointed that it was not a girl. And in her disappointment, she overlooked this remarkable incident of the blind midwife seeing a brilliant light.

In his later years, Ramaswami became a lawyer known for his upright character. He was also a strict disciplinarian who was held in high regard because of his service to society. One of his sons was Viswanathan. Like his brothers, Viswanathan was brilliant and gifted with a sharp intellect. Along with his

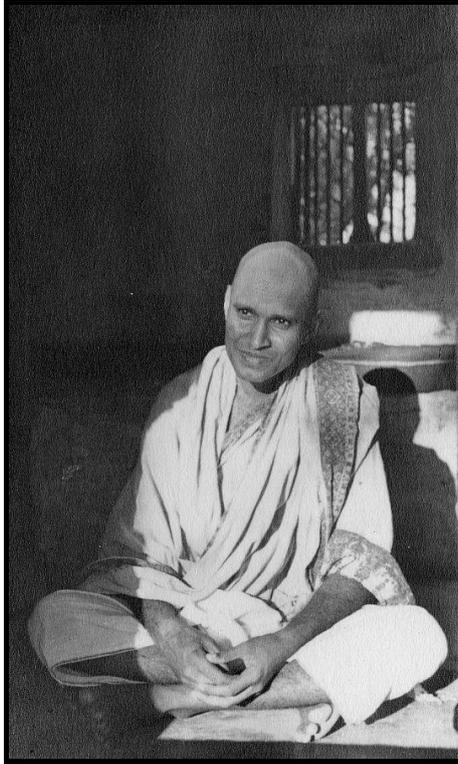
brothers, he too was deeply involved in India's freedom movement. In 1921, when still in college, he was arrested for opposing the British government. The university examinations were to be held, so his father bailed him out. But, instead of going to his house in Dindigul, he got off at Tiruvannamalai to meet his uncle, Venkataraman, now known as Ramana Maharshi.

This is how he describes his very first encounter with Bhagavan's glance of grace: "Bhagavan was standing in an open space in front of Skandashram. When I first laid eyes on him, I saw in him something quite arresting which clearly distinguished him from all the others I have seen. He seemed to live apart from the physical frame, as though quite detached from it. His look and smile had a remarkable spiritual charm. When he spoke, his words seemed to come out of an abyss. One could see immaculate purity and non-attachment in him and in his movements. I sensed something very refined, lofty and sacred about him. In his vicinity, the mind's distractions were overpowered by an austere and potent calm. In his presence, the unique bliss of peace was directly experienced. This, I would call *Ramana Lahari* - the blissful atmosphere of Sri Ramana. In this ecstasy of grace, one loses one's sense of separate individuality and there remains something grand, which pervades all and devours all. This indeed is the spirit of Arunachala that swallows up the whole universe in its gracious effulgence." It is no wonder that after this experience of ecstasy, Viswanathan stayed on for a few days.

Bhagavan's mother, Azhagammal, and Bhagavan's brother, Chinna Swami, were also present. They knew Viswanathan from his childhood days and were aware that he was a Sanskrit scholar even at that tender age. So, they asked him to recite some holy Sanskrit verses. When the recitation was over, Bhagavan slowly turned his attention to Viswanathan and said, "You have learned all this; this was not so in my case. Before I came here, I knew nothing, I learned not a thing. Some mysterious power took possession of me and induced a thorough transformation. Whoever knew then that this would happen to me! Your father, who intended in his boyhood to go to the Himalayas to perform *tapas*, became the head of a large family, and I, who knew nothing, have been drawn and kept here for good. When I left home in my seventeenth year, I was like a speck swept away by a tremendous flood. I knew neither my body nor the world, whether it was day or night. It was difficult to even open my eyes; my eyelids seemed to be glued down. My body became a mere skeleton. Visitors pitied my plight because they were not aware of how blissful I was. It was only years later, when I happened to look into some of the books on *Vedanta* which were brought to me, that I came across the term *Brahman*. I was amused and asked myself, 'Is this experience known as *Brahman*?'"

Viswanathan had to leave. As he bade farewell with a heavy heart, Bhagavan handed him a copy of *Sri Ramana Gita*. (It contains Bhagavan's answers to questions put by Kavyakantha and his disciples, and is invaluable to every seeker.) While giving it to him, Bhagavan said, "Give it to your father and ask him to read it." Viswanathan studied it thoroughly in Dindigul. He was immersed in studying it, particularly chapter eighteen, wherein Bhagavan's greatness is extolled in exquisite Sanskrit poetry. This moved Viswanathan so deeply that he decided to give up the world and go stay at the holy feet of Bhagavan.

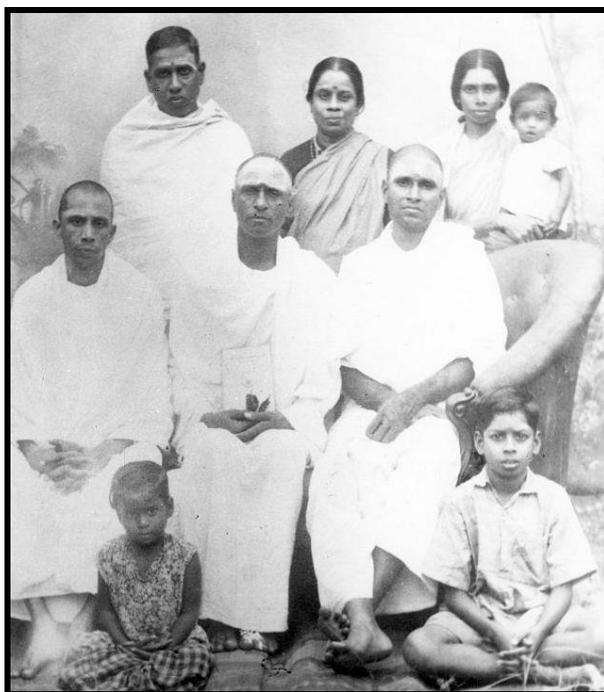
In January 1923, he went back to Tiruvannamalai without informing his parents. By this time, Bhagavan had already come down to the present Ramanasramam. When he presented himself, Bhagavan's first question was, "Did you leave any letter or tell your parents about coming here?" Viswanathan shook his head. "I did it when I left my home, why did you not do it? Now, write a letter to your parents that you are here safe and sound," Bhagavan instructed. Bhagavan then permitted him to stay. Viswanathan discovered that Bhagavan's power and presence were so strong, that he did not need any formal *sadhana* (spiritual practice). But still, he studied Bhagavan's works thoroughly and worked in the ashram in Bhagavan's inspirational presence. The more he studied Bhagavan's teachings, the stronger his conviction became that the mere presence, the mere proximity and company of Bhagavan, was more than enough. His conviction grew even stronger when he later read one of Bhagavan's verses in *The Supplement to Forty Verses on Reality*, "When one associates oneself with the company of a sage, there is no need for religious and spiritual practices, just as there is no need for a fan when the cool, southern breeze blows."



Viswanatha Swami in his hut at Palaakothu

After a few days, Bhagavan asked him what mode of spiritual practice he was ready to take up. Viswanathan replied that from childhood he was drawn to the *Gayatri mantra*, one of the holiest Hindu mantras, and that he had been chanting it. Bhagavan replied, "That is very good, but you must practice it sincerely, every day at a particular time, totally attuning yourself with it." Bhagavan then took Viswanathan behind Ramanasramam, to a small cave on the hill. If one sits there, one can view Arunachala on the eastern and western sides, without the discomfort of the burning sun. Bhagavan told him, "There is a particular time when you should do the *japa*. I will come and inspect your practice, so be very disciplined about it." Viswanatha Swami actually took me to that cave and I was elated when he said, "Bhagavan did come and check, those were not merely words." However, being completely engrossed in his *japa*, Viswanathan was not aware that Bhagavan checked many times to make sure that he was capable of fulfilling his commitment.

Viswanathan lived with Bhagavan from 1923 to 1927, doing arduous practice. This was the period of effulgence and of effort. The guru bestows his grace when the disciple sincerely makes the effort. Viswanathan was not sure how far he had progressed and so he asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, how can I rise above my present animal instincts? My own efforts have proven futile. I am convinced that only a superior power can transform me." Bhagavan replied with great compassion, "Yes, you are right. It is by awakening a power higher and mightier than the senses and the mind that these can be subdued. If you awaken and nurture the growth of that higher power within you, everything else will unfold mystically. One should sustain the current of meditation uninterruptedly. Moderation in food, and similar restraints taken up studiously and judiciously, will be helpful in maintaining inner poise." Bhagavan added, "Viswanatha, do not mingle with people who come here. Do not waste time socializing, talking with people and also getting attached. Keep your talking to the minimum." Viswanatha Swami devoutly adhered to Bhagavan's words, so much so that whenever he spoke, his voice was almost inaudible. He restricted his movements to going to the town to beg for food. Some old devotees told me that Viswanatha Swami was known for his soft spoken demeanour and restrained movement.



Viswanatha Swami with Ramana Padananda  
and the family members of Somasundaram Pillai

I want to share a very interesting incident which Viswanatha Swami described to me about this important stage of his life. After four months of him coming to Bhagavan, a letter arrived from Dindigul stating that Viswanatha Swami's father was coming for a visit. Viswanatha Swami showed this letter to Bhagavan, who said, "Viswanatha, your family is also coming. Go to the railway station, receive them, but do not talk to your father without my presence. Receive them and drop them in the town where they have arranged for a house to stay in. As for you, go back to your cave and keep doing your *japa*. I will send word for you, but even then, do not talk to your father. Come and prostrate - not to me, but to your father - and stand in silence. I will look after the rest." Viswanathan's father, Ramaswami, did not know Bhagavan's spiritual stature. He knew him as Venkataraman, a runaway relative who had taken to ascetic life. At that time, the Old Hall at Ramanasramam was being built and so Bhagavan and the others had moved to a *mantap* across the road. When Viswanatha Swami's father went there and saw Bhagavan, he could at once sense his spiritual stature. The next moment, he prostrated before him in absolute awe and devotion.

Then, Bhagavan sent word to Viswanathan. As advised, he came and prostrated before his father and stood next to him with folded hands and bent head. Ramaswami was very angry. He turned to

Viswanathan and said, "All this is enough. Now, pack up and come with me. That is why we have come - to take you back to Dindigul." A stony silence pervaded the *mantap*. Bhagavan looked at Ramaswami and said, "Viswanathan has taken to the path of surrender and self purification." Ramaswami was not fully satisfied. Bhagavan reasoned with him, "Allow Viswanathan to stay here. It will do him good." This word worked like magic and the father melted. He looked at Bhagavan and his paternal instincts influenced him to plead with Bhagavan, "If Bhagavan takes the responsibility of Viswanathan's spiritual fulfillment, I will have no objection in leaving him here." There was complete silence again. Viswanathan never expected this and everyone looked at Bhagavan. Bhagavan compassionately turned and made this declaration in public: "Yes, I will take the entire responsibility of Viswanathan's spiritual growth." In Chinna Swami's case, Bhagavan assured his mother in private that he would take the responsibility for Chinna Swami, but with Viswanatha Swami, he declared this in public. However, these are not two isolated instances. When we sincerely dedicate ourselves to practice, it is Bhagavan's assurance, even now, that he will take the entire responsibility of each one's spiritual fulfillment. Remember Bhagavan's holy words: "The effort of the seeker and the grace of the guru are synonymous and simultaneous." Our part is only to make the effort.

Viswanatha Swami was extremely happy - his arduous practice had begun. Bhagavan took him along during his walks and explained to him the verses that he had composed on *jnana* (wisdom) and *bhakti* (devotion). Bhagavan took complete care of him. Viswanatha Swami later told me that being alone with Bhagavan and having his words explained exclusively to him were the greatest boons that he received from Bhagavan. One day, when Bhagavan and Viswanatha Swami were cutting vegetables, Bhagavan told him, "You should be capable of making use of even dust. At the same time, you should also be able to reject the entire cosmos as nothing but mere dust."

The relationship between the guru and disciple was deepening and Bhagavan perhaps felt that Viswanathan needed a firm rooting in scriptural studies. Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni was then staying up on the hill. So, in 1927, Bhagavan sent Viswanathan to Kavyakantha to study the scriptures. Even when Kavyakantha came down in 1929 to stay in Palaakothu, Bhagavan specifically told Viswanathan, "Nayana is staying in a hut in Palaakothu. Go stay with him, serve him and learn from him." Every day Bhagavan visited that hut. He would always enquire, "Nayana, how is Viswanathan?"

The guru showed him the teacher and this encouraged Viswanathan. His study of Sanskrit scriptures helped him create verses extempore. Once, he wrote five verses and placed them at Bhagavan's feet. Bhagavan read them and he said approvingly, "They are very good. Why don't you continue to write? But first, show them to Nayana and get them verified." Both Viswanathan and Kavyakantha, thus worked together and put together the one hundred and eight names of Sri Bhagavan, called *Sri Ramana Ashtottaram*. It came from the hearts of Viswanathan and Nayana, and was approved by Bhagavan, the Heart and hence it is eternal. It is a treatise, an unfading sacred flower about which Viswanatha Swami later told me, "I was fortunate enough to place this at the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan." Viswanatha Swami continued his spiritual practice and the years rolled by. One who lives the truth, lives in and as the eternal now. To such a one, time doesn't matter because time is an illusion - Viswanatha Swami was in timeless ecstasy.

He got a rude shock when Bhagavan's health failed and he had to be operated on. This caused him deep pain. He went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, permit me to serve you day and night and to be with you." Bhagavan turned to him and said, "You have work to do." Saying this, he politely declined his request. On Bhagavan's last day, there were a few people, including myself, inside his room. Outside, Bhagavan's devotees were chanting *Aksharamanamalai*, the heart melting verses composed by Bhagavan on Arunachala, the Self. Bhagavan had already requested the attendants to help him sit up. The louder the chorus 'Arunachala Siva , Arunachala Siva ' became, the more were the tears of ecstasy that rolled down from Bhagavan's eyes. Viswanatha Swami was witnessing the exalted spiritual splendour that was unfolding. He suddenly felt the gracious look of Bhagavan falling on him. He saw lightning flash within himself and the core of his Heart opened. He felt Bhagavan pouring grace into his Heart and was overwhelmed with ecstasy. The next moment, he saw Bhagavan smile and give a nod of approval as if to say that what Viswanatha Swami had experienced was the real state. Bhagavan had awakened spiritual realization in the son in accordance with his word to the son's father, Ramaswami. This is how Viswanatha Swami recounted that moment of ecstasy: "Having received that grace, the climax of my own spiritual experiences in the proximity of Bhagavan took place during those last moments. As I stood in that small room, everything became shadowy, enveloped by an invisible, pure

awareness, the one and only, ever present Reality. There was not the least feeling of separation from Bhagavan or the least vestige of sorrow on his physical death. Instead, there was a positive ecstasy and elation of spirit, which was nothing but the natural state of the Self.”

After Bhagavan attained *Mahanirvana*, Viswanatha Swami received a call from Dindigul that his mother was ailing and bedridden. There was nobody to attend her. Viswanatha Swami went home and saw that there was nobody to even serve her food. He attended to her day and night. He cooked for her, bathed her and nursed her for months. During this time, he remembered what Bhagavan had said: “You have work to do.” His mother always kept a small and special notebook with her. Before she passed away, his mother opened her notebook in which Bhagavan himself had written *Sri Ramana Ashtottaram* in his small, beautiful handwriting. She had been chanting the names every day. In her last moments she said, “Viswanatha, I bless you,” and gave him that notebook. Sometime after this, when he was still at Dindigul, he had a dream in which Bhagavan appeared to him and asked him to come to Ramanasramam. When he went there, he found that Chinna Swami was ailing. For the next six months, he attended on him day and night. When Chinna Swami died in 1953, Viswanatha Swami disappeared from Ramanasramam.

Knowing Viswanatha Swami’s greatness, I kept searching for him after I came to Ramanasramam in 1960, but he was nowhere to be found. I could not find his whereabouts. One day, I was walking on the streets of Chennai when an old friend of mine met me and told me in great joy, “Ganesa *anna!* I am so happy because I am just returning from a meeting with Viswanatha Swami.” My joy knew no bounds. “Viswanatha Swami is here?” I asked incredulously. My friend provided me the address and I immediately went there. He was living in his brother’s rented house. When I walked in, he was in the kitchen, cooking for the family. I prostrated before him right there in the kitchen. I cried, “Swami! Is cooking your job? Is not your place in the abode of Bhagavan? Is not Ramanasramam your home?” He replied, “Ganesan, what is wrong in being a cook? We need only a little food for the stomach. That, I get here by working here. The inner food, Bhagavan has already given.” I begged him to come back to the ashram and he did.

Serving Viswanatha Swami was one of the most fulfilling functions in my life. Viswanatha Swami’s presence actually enhanced the sweet fragrance of the ashram’s ambience. Slowly, other devotees came back. In those days, before the large hall was built, Bhagavan’s *samadhi* was merely a thatched shed with an open space in front. I used to sleep there on a mat on the floor. Some nights, I would feel the poke of a walking stick. I would wake up to find Viswanatha Swami standing next to me and silently beckoning me to follow him. He would have me walk in silence to the cemetery near Yamalingam, two kilometers away from the ashram on the *pradakshina* road. We both would sit on a raised platform, behind which all the dead bodies are buried or cremated. He would draw my attention to the hill, and we would sit in silence for two or three hours and then walk back. This happened a few times. It was later that I understood this saint’s insight. It is next to Yamalingam, that my house, ‘Ananda Ramana’ is now situated. These walks to Yamalingam took place in the 1970s. In 1986, this house was given to me and I moved to stay permanently there in 1995. Just as Bhagavan cared for Viswanatha Swami, Viswanatha Swami, whom I cared for, took care of me and my spiritual practice. He has thus cared for many others, even as other devotees, graced by Bhagavan, have taken care of ever so many aspirants. It is thus, the beautiful chain of grace continues to link us to the truth that is ever present as Bhagavan.

Viswanatha Swami was a symbol of utter simplicity and that is why I refer to him as the superman of simplicity. When I was young, many visitors who were emotionally upset or mentally imbalanced would come to the ashram. I did not know how to handle them. Viswanatha Swami would volunteer to take care of them. On many occasions he would take them individually up the hill, around it, or to the temple, talking to them softly and seeing that their problems dissolve. His perfect way of imparting the nature of truth was by making them experience and transcend the limitations of mind and body.

I had just read the Bible and I was talking to a friend about it. I did not like the story of Moses where he touched a rock with his staff and water flowed out from the middle of the rock. I said, “At least, they could have written that Moses touched the ground and then water flowed out. How can water come out of a rock?” As I was saying this, a hand took hold of my arm. It was Viswanatha Swami. He led me straight to Skandashram put my hand between two rocks and made me feel the natural spring oozing out from there. Then, he said, “Bhagavan brought me here, put my hand beneath the rocks and showed me the water. Bhagavan touched this rock and this water flows perennially.” He solemnly added, “Never

doubt a sage's statements or actions. How can you doubt that Moses was not endowed with that grace by God to bring water from that rock? Be careful, Ganesan." This corrected my spiritual thinking, because he brought my mind back to the Heart. If you again go to the mind, the intellect, you will continue to doubt how water can come out of a rock. Even now if you go to Skandashram, though it has been hidden, you can put your hand and feel the spring coming right from the bottom of the rock and not from the sand. Moreover, below it lies another flat rock.

Arthur Osborne managed the journal, *The Mountain Path*, single handedly for six years. I was the managing editor when he suddenly passed away in 1970. I did not know what to do. Mrs. Osborne came forward, saying, "Ganesan, do not worry. I will take it over." For two years she shouldered that responsibility. However, because of ill health and other problems she requested me to find someone better equipped to handle the responsibility. She brought bundles of unedited articles and put them on my table. I was completely perplexed. The next day, Viswanatha Swami walked into my office and beckoned me. He spoke very sparingly. He took me to the forest behind the ashram, brought me back and then took me to his room. He smiled at me and said, "I feel instructed by Bhagavan to help you. I will take over the editorship. Honestly, Ganesan, I do not know the subtle art of editing, but it should not bother you. I will learn it. Send all those unedited articles to Professor K. Swaminathan who is an expert editor. He edits with red ink. When the edited articles come in, I will study them and learn." Being a realized person, he picked it up in no time at all. Professor Swaminathan, himself the editor of a leading newspaper in India, and, much later, hailed by a renowned publicist, as the finest book editor of India, said, "Viswanatha Swami's editing is remarkable!"

Coming to stay permanently in the ashram at a very young age gave me the advantage of staying in close contact with the old devotees. Their proximity gained for me the unseen spiritual benefit of effecting in me true all-round maturity. I could earn their wealth of *jnana* by just serving them. How true is the scriptural declaration: "Through service to *mahatmas*, a seeker gains spiritual benefits which cannot be got by study of scriptures or, by any other discipline." The greater reward that I got through such proximity was the possibility of my persuading them to write their reminiscences. Though I could not succeed in this with Viswanatha Swami, I was immensely satisfied that I could persuade him to translate *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* into Tamil. One solid reason for my strong pleadings with him was that Sri Bhagavan had himself made Viswanatha Swami translate most of the Sanskrit texts selected by him into Tamil. This was how, in the 1970s, the first volume of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* was first brought out in Tamil as *Bhagavat Vachanaamrutam*. It was an instant success! After some time, the comprehensive volume too was published. The special feature of this book is that the Swami having been present when the talks took place, has used mostly the very words used by Bhagavan.

In 1979, both Viswanatha Swami and I planned that for Bhagavan's birth centenary in 1980, we needed to work together and bring out issues dealing exclusively with the direct teachings of Bhagavan. Unfortunately, Viswanatha Swami had a sun stroke. He came to my office and said, "I am ill. Come to my room." I followed him into his room, where his behavior was alarmingly abnormal. He kept standing and sitting restlessly, like a clockwork toy. I was shocked and upset, not knowing what to do. "Do not pay attention to my body. I am inwardly in a blissful state. Attend to the inward state of mine," he counseled. "Send a telegram to my brother. I will not give you trouble to nurse me for long. The second day I will drop my body. Bury me in the simplest way - I want no rituals. But come in the evening at four, I have a message for you." I went at the appointed time.

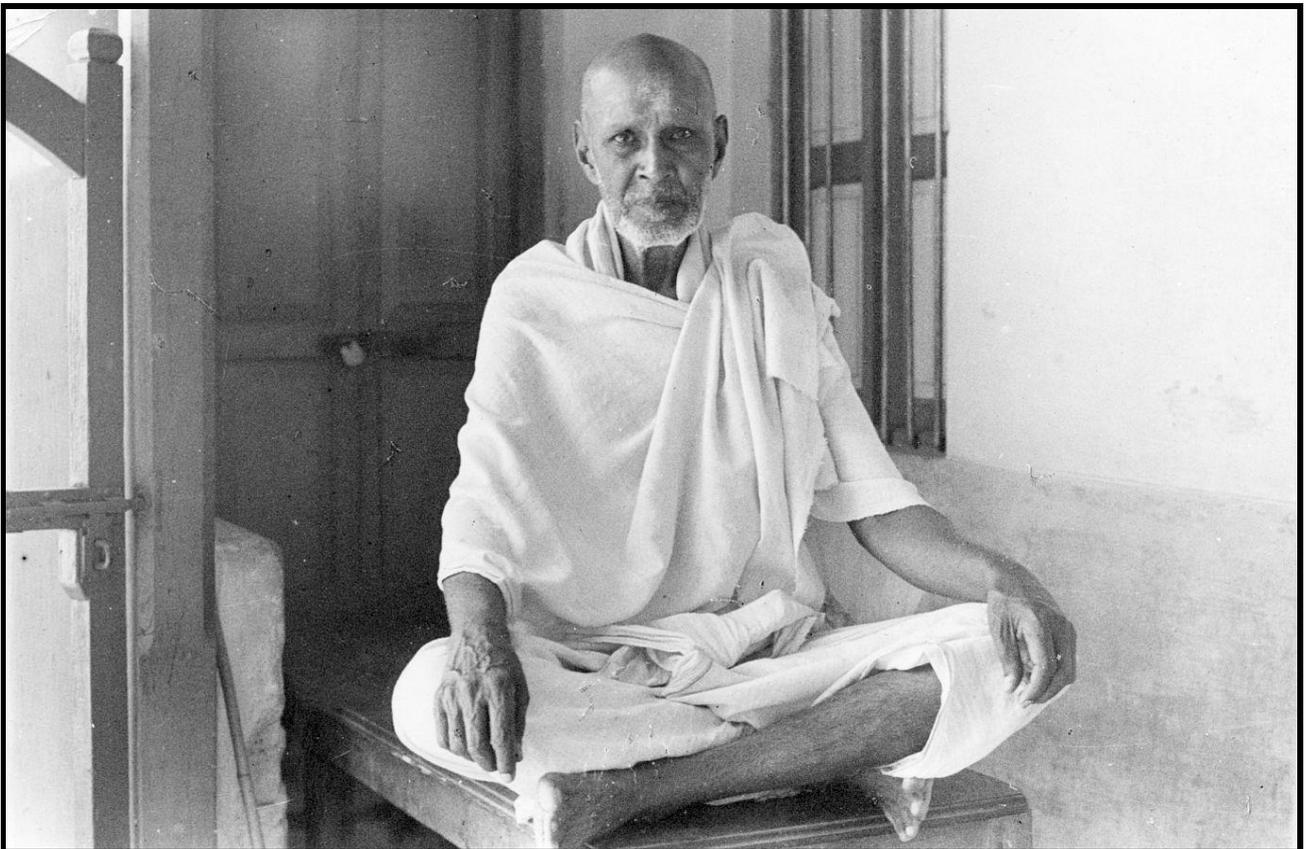
In that seemingly restless state of standing and sitting, he again told me, "Do not pay attention to the body. Listen to what I am saying." This is Viswanatha Swami's message and it has been guiding me very powerfully: "The body is affected, perhaps the mind also. But, the spirit, the Heart, is unaffected, and the Heart is speaking through me. Though there is so much of confusion, turbulence and misery in manifestation, all of that belongs to the realm of the mind only - the ignorant mind split as object and subject. All experiences of life are relative, related to the experiencer who is nothing but a shadow having no intrinsic reality of his own. The reality in every person is the ultimate, pure existence which is the pure state of 'I AM', the awareness-absolute, which does not split into subject and object. It is the only thing that matters. If the ego and all its experiences are dismissed as passing shadows, the ever present, ultimate reality alone will be self evident. If one even intellectually is convinced of this truth, one will gain detachment and mental peace. We should now and then, stop for a while, stand aloof and experience this immutable and immaculate awareness-absolute, the still 'I AM', which alone matters,

which alone is, despite the manifestation of endless variety of experiences. The Buddha, Jesus Christ, Adi Shankara and Bhagavan Ramana are a few standing monuments affirming the reality which is our very own being. The very sight of these pillars of light reminds us of this reality and brings us the peace that passes the mind's understanding. Only the finite mind, the 'me', has to be relinquished to merge and dissolve in the ever-present, infinite reality of 'I AM'. I bless you Ganesan."

I prostrated before him, one of the blessed devotees who came to Arunachala drawn by the Grace of Bhagavan, basked in the sunshine of his Presence, gained Self-Knowledge of 'I AM' and guided earnest aspirants to gain it, by Self-Enquiry. From him I learnt that it is not enough if we just read some books, and get convinced intellectually by the statements in them. I also learnt that we must experience these teachings as states of one's own inner peace and stillness.

Let us pay homage to Viswanatha Swami by remembering a few verses from his *Sri Ramana Ashtottaram* glorifying Sri Bhagavan: "Prostrations to one who dwells ever in the Self of pure awareness! Prostrations to one who is self-luminous like the sun, dispelling the darkness of ignorance! Prostrations to one who is the embodiment of unbroken awareness! Prostrations to one who is the light of awareness! Prostrations to one whose birth is for the purpose of spiritual awakening! Prostrations to one whose advent is for giving salvation to the whole world, to enable every being to recognize itself as the eternal 'I AM'!" Though the literal meaning and purpose of the above verses looks like adoring Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, the true inner meaning is much more significant and important - to pursue the inner path by staying in the Heart as 'I AM'. Bhagavan said that one can write a whole biography out of these 108 verses.

Viswanatha Swami, as predicted by him, dropped his body fully conscious and peacefully on the second day. His *samadhi* inside the ashram, close to Arunachala, is a place of serenity, the same serenity his physical presence emanated all his life - a peace filled boulder!

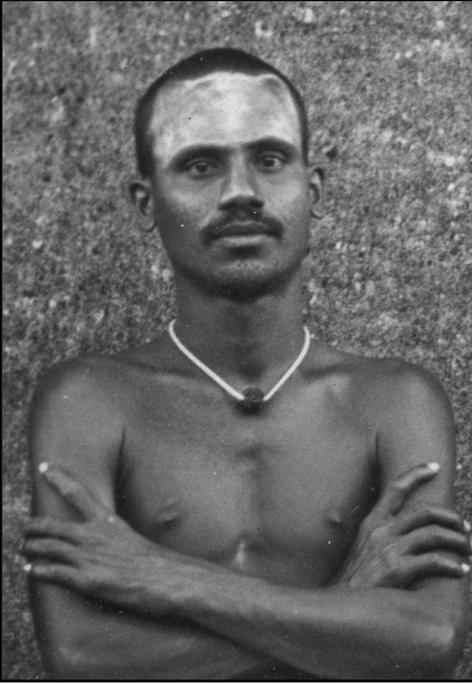


*Staying at the Ashram, Viswanatha Swami guided spiritual seekers on the direct teaching of Sri Bhagavan*



*Sri Bhagavan – Annamalai Swami*

## Annamalai Swami



Fire is a very significant symbol. Its nature is twofold: as heat, it can destroy and as light, it reveals. Bhagavan is the *jnana agni*, the fire of *jnana*. He destroys our destiny and reveals the light of wisdom that is already there in each one of us. This twofold operation of his grace, can be most vividly seen in the life of this remarkable devotee. His name was Chellaperumal.

When he was born, his father had his horoscope prepared. It predicted that Chellaperumal would become an ascetic, a *sadhu*, and that he would not lead a family life. His father wanted to prevent it. So he did not send Chellaperumal to school, thinking that if he studied he might chance upon some spiritual text which would influence him to become an ascetic. Being a farmer, he started taking his son to his paddy fields, always keeping him by his side with this one-pointed aim that he should not study anything. But Chellaperumal's keenness in learning was so intense that he taught himself how to read a full word through slowly reading every alphabet in that word! Throughout his life, he had this gift of perseverance not interrupted by failure !

One day while going with his father, Chellaperumal noticed a few *sadhus* dressed in ochre robes. He was so fascinated that he visited one of them on the sly and started studying spiritual books. There was also a lady in a neighbouring village whose piety drew him. This lady took him to her house and gave Tamil books on *Advaita* like *Kaivalya Navaneetam*. As she could not read, she asked Chellaperumal to read and explain these texts. When he started reading them, though he had no prior knowledge of any *Vedanta*, some power from inside made him understand and explain everything albeit in a childish way.

Soon, at a particular time every day, he would run away from home without his father's knowledge to this lady's house, read a particular spiritual text and then explain it. His spiritual talks started attracting the woman's neighbours. In a matter of a few months, his talks had become so popular that the pious woman invited him to stay in her house. The next six years, he was away from his father and it was a golden period for Chellaperumal. He started wearing sacred ash and *rudhraksha* beads, prostrating before pictures of deities and meticulously following traditional religious practices. One day, when he was giving a spiritual talk, his father came stealthily in. He was stunned on seeing his son's transformation. But he still did not encourage him.

Despite that, Chellaperumal was determined to become an ascetic. Though only a teenager, he took *sannyas*. And because traditional people would not initiate him into *sannyas*, he did it himself. When he came back to the village, some of the villagers, noticing his greatness, started helping him. Inspired by the late and famous saint, Ramalinga Swamigal, who taught that one should serve humanity, he started giving water from an earthen pot to travellers in summer. Soon, he was distributing gruel to the poor from a small hut that the villagers helped him build. However, though his mind was bent on helping others, he continued his religious practices. One day, he came to know that the Shankaracharya of the Kanchi Mutt was coming to a neighbouring village. When he went to meet him, the Shankaracharya told him, "Come to the next village, I will meet you." He went and met the Shankaracharya there and begged for spiritual guidance. The Shankaracharya gave him the mantra '*Sivaya Namaha*', and asked him to chant it one hundred thousand times.

Soon after this, a wandering *sadhu* gave him Bhagavan's book *Upadesa Undiyar, Thirty Verses of Instruction*, in Tamil. On seeing the photograph of Bhagavan in it, he was certain that this was his guru. He knew nothing about Ramana Maharshi nor could he understand *Upadesa Undiyar*, but he felt that this was his guru. So, he went around the village proclaiming, "I have found my guru and he is in Tiruvannamalai. I have to go to him". The villagers, knowing that he was a *sadhu* with no money, gave him some for his journey to Tiruvannamalai. Just when he was to leave, he came to know, that the

Kanchi Shankaracharya was once again camping in a neighbouring village. By this time, Chellaperumal knew that this was the same Shankaracharya who had sent Paul Brunton to Ramana Maharshi. He went to the Shankaracharya, prostrated and requested him, "Please bless me. I am going to Ramana Maharshi". The Shankaracharya gave him sacred ash, eleven silver coins and blessed him saying, "You are going on a good errand, go."

Thus, in 1928, at the age of twenty one, Chellaperumal came to Tiruvannamalai. On his way to Ramanasramam, he saw a big crowd around a small *mantap*. He asked someone the reason for the crowd. The man answered, "The *siddha purusha*, Sheshadri Swami, is inside the *mantap*. The crowd is waiting for him to come out and give them his blessing. You can also go see him and receive his blessing." Chellaperumal, peeping through the crowd, saw Sheshadri Swami inside with a *ladoo*, an Indian sweet, in his hand. The crowd, because of the awe and respect it had for the Swami, was afraid to go inside. Chellaperumal, not having any previous knowledge of the Swami's reputation, went in and prostrated. Sheshadri Swami took the *ladoo* near his mouth and then threw it at the crowd, all of whom took it as *prasad*. Then, turning to Chellaperumal, he started abusing him, "You fool! Why have you come to Arunachala? Why have you come to Tiruvannamalai? What is there here for you to come?" Shocked at this outburst, Chellaperumal beat a hasty retreat. Fortunately for him, a *sadhu* standing outside stopped him and reassured him, "Sheshadri Swami is a *siddha purusha* who blesses through abuses. When he says, 'You fool, why have you come to Arunachala?' it means what a great person you are to have come to Arunachala! And, 'What purpose have you come here for?' means that whatever purpose you have come here for will be fulfilled." Reassured by this abusive blessing, Chellaperumal came to Ramanasramam.



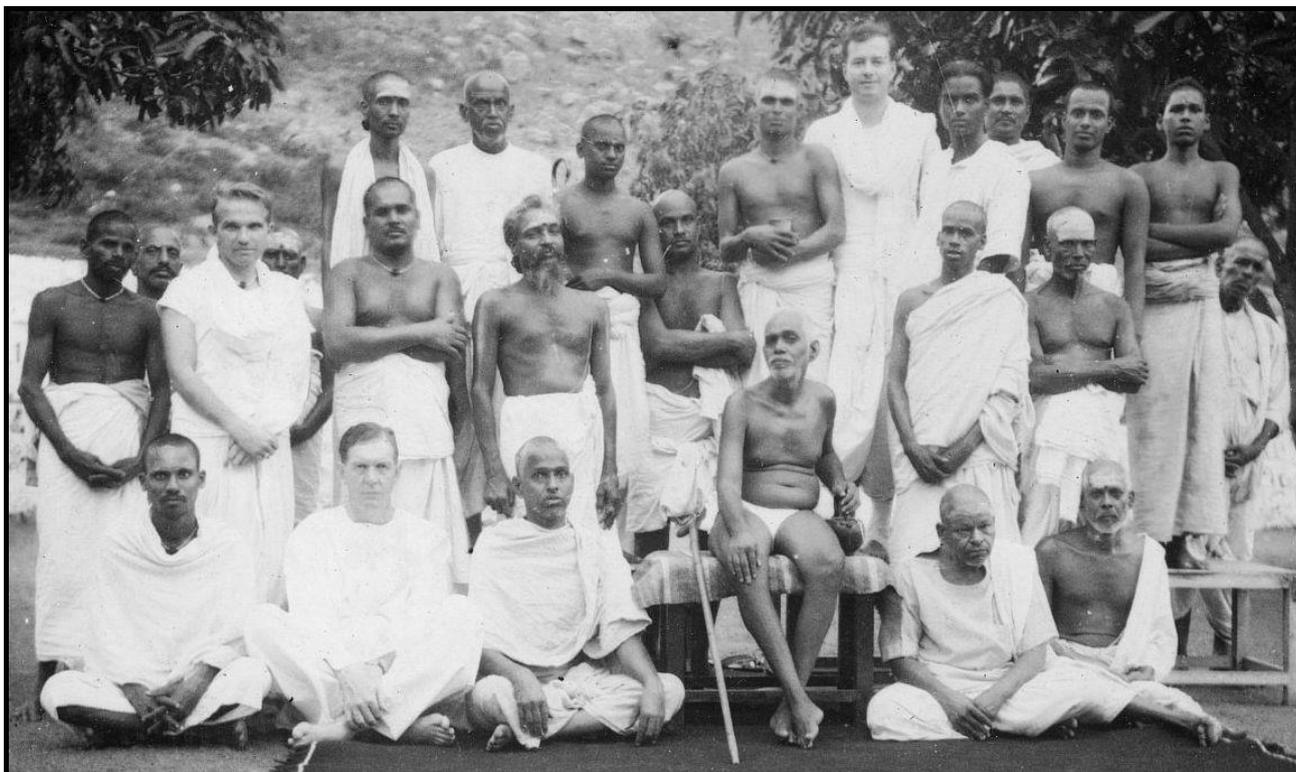
Sri Bhagavan washing his feet

When he entered the ashram, he saw Bhagavan walking down from the hill to the Old Hall. After washing his feet, Bhagavan entered the hall. Chellaperumal was thrilled! Before he left his village, Bhagavan had appeared in a dream in which he walked down from the hill, washed his feet and then entered the hall. Look at the beauty of the Lord accepting this simple man! As he entered the hall, Chellaperumal noticed that he was alone with Bhagavan. He placed a small packet of raisins that he

had taken with him for Bhagavan, and with emotions welling up in profuse tears, prostrated to him. When he got up, he saw Bhagavan eating the raisins. For Chellaperumal, it was as if Lord Siva himself was accepting his offering. For nearly fifteen minutes thereafter, Bhagavan directed his glance of grace on him and Chellaperumal was thrilled. When, many years later, I asked him how it felt, he replied, "I felt a wonderful coolness pervade my body as if I was immersing myself in a cool pool after being outside in the hot sun." The beauty is that his first experience of Bhagavan's grace had a connection with what he was going to do during his future life in the ashram - work in the hot sun. After this, he went up to Chinna Swami, the *sarvadhikari*, to request him to assign him some work. He was told to go into the hall and be an attendant of Bhagavan. Thus, he got this exclusive opportunity of not only being with Bhagavan but also serving him.

Bhagavan himself named him Annamalai Swami, which is significant. For instance, Bhagavan used to call his brother by his family nickname, Pichai, even after he took *sannyas* and changed his name to Niranjanananda Swami. Viswanatha Swami was called Viswanatha and Kunju Swami was called Kunju. Of course, if someone named Kesava Swami came, Bhagavan would not hesitate calling him Kesava Swami. But, the only person he renamed was Annamalai Swami. I asked Annamalai Swami how this happened. Annamalai Swami recounted, "The very next day after I came to Bhagavan, he casually mentioned that I reminded him of a man called Annamalai Swami, an attendant of his at Skandasramam who passed away in 1920. Bhagavan started to use this name as a nickname for me. When the other devotees heard this, they too followed suit. Within a few days, my new identity was firmly established." Because his surrender to Bhagavan was total, Bhagavan gave him his complete attention. The *jnani* is like a mirror - the way he responds to you reflects the way you approach him. If you surrender totally, the blessing is total.

One day, he asked, "Bhagavan give me some *upadesa*." Bhagavan answered, "Go, go inwards and always hold onto the Self. Identifying with the body and the mind causes misery. Dive deep into the Heart, the source of being and peace. Be established thus - always in your being." Look at this first



Annamalai Swami (extreme left) seated next to Major Chadwick

*upadesa* of Bhagavan to Annamalai Swami. It is very important because Annamalai Swami himself later told me, "At that time, Ganesa, I did not know the significance of these words. The rest of my life is based on this very first *upadesa*. I did not know or grasp the main meaning of this teaching. My *vasanas* came up and I started noticing others around Bhagavan at a very early stage. They were all gossiping and I did not like that." See the power of *vasanas*, the latent tendencies. He felt, "Yes,

Bhagavan is great. But, the people around him are going to distract me. So I will not stay here. Instead, I will go and do my spiritual practices elsewhere.”

Without even telling Bhagavan, he walked away. After nearly twenty miles, he felt very tired and hungry. At two hundred houses he begged, but nobody gave him even a morsel of food. Finally, when he did not know whom or where to turn to, somebody asked him, “Hey, why are you suffering? Where are you coming from?” “I am coming from Tiruvannamalai.” “From where in Tiruvannamalai?” came the next question. “From Ramanasramam,” Annamalai Swami replied. He was reprimanded, “You have come here from Ramanasramam and you are suffering? Fool, go back.”

“Fool, go back!” At that moment, he decided to go back to Bhagavan. Immediately, everything started happening miraculously. An hotelier called him and gave him food. He then boarded a train to Tiruvannamalai without a ticket. The ticket inspector checked all the others in the compartment, except him, for tickets. Many things like these happened on his return journey to Tiruvannamalai. Falling at Bhagavan’s feet, he revealed everything and begged him for forgiveness. And Bhagavan’s glorious reply? “How can you escape? You have work to do here. If you try to leave without doing the jobs destined for you, where can you run away? Stay here.” Once again, Annamalai Swami fell at Bhagavan’s feet. “Bhagavan, whatever you tell me, I will do, I will not leave your presence.”

The very next day, when Annamalai Swami was serving Bhagavan, he turned to him, “Annamalai Swami, a wall is being built near the water tank. Go and see what work the mason is doing.” He thought Bhagavan wanted information. So he went to the mason and questioned him. The mason replied, “I am building this wall.” He came back and reported to Bhagavan, “The mason says he is building a wall.” Five times Bhagavan sent him back to find out what the mason was doing. The mason got really annoyed: “Are you a fool, are you an idiot? How many times do I have to tell you that I am building this wall?” Then, Annamalai Swami woke up. “Why does Bhagavan send me repeatedly? Perhaps he wants me to supervise this work.” First, he had thought Bhagavan wanted him to do some easy work. But when he held on to Bhagavan’s earlier words, he understood that a cascade, an avalanche of work, was going to come. One after another, one after another, came in work which was impossible for any one man to complete by his own effort. But complete a stupendous amount of construction work Annamalai Swami certainly did! Today, people going to Ramanasramam can still see what this one man managed to accomplish.

Work after work, physically painful work, came. He had to often stand under the hot, tropical sun next to where lime mortar, which produces intense heat, was being made. To add to his acute discomfort, the people around him, instead of appreciating his efforts, constantly ridiculed, chided and insulted him. The only relief he got was when Bhagavan came to see how he was doing. Every time Bhagavan came, he exhorted him, “Annamalai Swami, you are not the body, you are not the mind, you are pure consciousness - the all pervasive Self. Be aware of this all the time, even while you are working.” Why did Bhagavan assign all this almost impossible work to Annamalai Swami? Earlier, he had tried to run away because he did not approve of some of the people in the ashram. But he had to return because as Bhagavan told him, “You have work to do.” This was not just the external construction work. It was also the internal work of washing away his destiny. Each of us creates our own destiny. And our individual destinies can be washed out only by each one of us. Nobody else can do it for us, however sympathetic he or she might be. Destroying our destiny is very important because our destiny carries with it the *vasanas* which influence us. So, whenever Annamalai Swami got agitated by people criticizing him or not cooperating with him, Bhagavan used to go there and forcefully remind him, “You are not the body, you are not the mind, you are pure consciousness, the all pervasive Self. Pay your attention to that. Be aware of it all the time even while you are working.” Annamalai Swami later told me, “I held steadfastly on to that.” He was affected by all the criticism but in the fight between his destiny and Bhagavan’s grace, he held on to Bhagavan’s saving words, “You are all pervasive, you are the awareness. Hold on to that while you are working.”

When I am at Ramanasramam, I often go and lay my head on the walls of the buildings built by Annamalai Swami under the guidance of Bhagavan, and feel blessed! One of the first constructions that Annamalai Swami undertook was a revetment behind the ashram. Bhagavan told him “Build a wall and see that it is like the China Wall.” It is a long, wide, stone wall built to prevent the floods from the hill coming into the ashram. When that was done, Bhagavan told him “Go and construct the store room.” You should go and see all these places, the cow shed, Bhagavan’s bathroom, Valli the deer’s *samadhi*,

Jackie the dog's *samadhi*, the huge, old dining hall, the kitchen, the *Vedapatashala*, the stone steps to the ashram tank, Major Chadwick's room and finally, the ashram dispensary. Many have asked me, "How is it that all these were built without cement? How were they built?" And they found it impossible to believe when I replied, "A simple, uneducated man from a village built them." In the later years, when Annamalai Swami used to walk into the hall, Bhagavan used to humourously say, "When you walk in, it is as if the buildings are walking towards me."



*Sri Bhagavan standing at the entrance of the cow shed built by Annamalai Swami*

Just imagine how much physical and mental pain Annamalai Swami must have suffered! Standing in the sun and toiling away with everyone around ridiculing, betraying and insulting him! But he just held on to Bhagavan's first *upadesa*: "You are not the body, you are not the mind; you are the Self." So, whatever destiny his body and mind had to undergo, he knew that Bhagavan was washing it away. Then, one day in 1938, after all this was built, Bhagavan looked at him and said, "You are now a free man. All your *karmas* are finished." Annamalai Swami fell at Bhagavan's feet with tears of gratitude. Yogi Ramaiah, another devotee, begged him, "Bhagavan, Annamalai Swami has been working very hard and his health has been affected. Why do you not ask him to take rest?" Bhagavan said "Yes, I will do that." Not only did Bhagavan give him rest, he hugged Annamalai Swami, which he has never done to anyone before or afterwards, and put a full stop to his destiny. With a hug he changed the entire life of Annamalai Swami from destiny to grace!

Many years later, when I asked Annamalai Swami about this life changing hug, this is what he told me: "One day, I went to Bhagavan's bathroom to help him with his morning bath. Madhava Swami and I gave him his usual oil massage. When the bath was over, Madhava Swami asked, 'Bhagavan, people who take *ganja lehiyam* (an Ayurvedic medicine whose principal ingredient is marijuana), they experience some kind of *ananda*, bliss. What is the nature of that *ananda*? Is it the same *ananda* the scriptures speak of?' Bhagavan replied that eating *ganja* is a very bad habit. Then, laughing loudly he came over to me, hugged me and exclaimed, '*Ananda, ananda, ananda, ananda!* This is how these people who eat *ganja* behave.' It was not a brief hug. Madhava Swami told me later that he held me tightly for about two minutes. After the first few seconds, I completely lost all awareness of my body and the world. Initially, there was a feeling of happiness and bliss. This soon gave way to a state in which there were no feelings and no experiences. I did not lose consciousness. I just ceased to be aware of anything that was going on around me. I remained in that state for about fifteen minutes. When I recovered my usual worldly consciousness, I was standing alone in the bathroom. Madhava Swami and Bhagavan had long since left for breakfast. I had not seen them open the door or leave. Nor had I heard the breakfast bell. This experience completely changed my life. I knew that my working life at

Ramanasramam had come to an end. I knew that from now on, I would be living outside the ashram and spending most of my time in meditation. The very next day, I told Bhagavan, 'Please bless me. I am going to live in Palaakothu.'

Bhagavan then came close to Annamalai Swami and blessed him with a brief, light hug. The choice of the place in Palaakothu, the design of his cottage, what he was doing every day, what was happening - he reported everything to Bhagavan. Bhagavan visited him almost every day, guiding him spiritually. Then, the time came when Bhagavan felt that Annamalai Swami should be established totally in the Self. He advised Annamalai Swami, "You are now established in your inner poise. There is no need for you to come to Ramanasramam, even for *darshan*." He added, "Do not move from your place in Palaakothu and go towards the road. You are free to walk on the hill." Once, when Annamalai Swami did not have any food Bhagavan told him to go into the forest, cut leaves of a particular herb, make some gravy with it and eat it with a little rice which was always provided for him. Bhagavan never instructed anyone to eat this or not eat this. For Annamalai Swami alone, everything was by his instruction. To many other devotees, including his brother, Bhagavan specified even which street to go and beg for food. For Annamalai Swami, he did not do this. Our scriptures say that there are two ways of living - either like a honey bee that goes from flower to flower gathering food or like the python which does not move but swallows food that comes its way. For Annamalai Swami Bhagavan did suggest the python method - he did not even allow him to go and beg. Instead, he saw to it that everything was provided.

Established in the Self, Annamalai Swami started teaching Self Enquiry. A misconception prevalent at that time was that Self Enquiry was only for intellectuals and scholars, and that lay men did not have the capacity or alertness to turn their attention inwards and do it. Annamalai Swami taught even ordinary village folk how to do Self Enquiry. It is very thrilling how he taught them: "Since you say that you have forgotten your real Self, the only way is to go back to it. If you keep the light on all the time, darkness can never enter your room. Even if you open the door and invite the darkness to come in, it cannot enter. Darkness is just the absence of light. In the same way, the mind is a self inflicted area of darkness in which the light of the Self has been deliberately shut off. So, go back to your own Self." Somebody said that since Self Enquiry was very difficult he was wondering whether he should practice some other path like devotion or *karma* and then come to Self Enquiry. Annamalai Swami was very categorical: "If you have some interest in the path of Self Enquiry you should follow it even if you feel that you are not very good at it. If you want to do Self Enquiry effectively and properly, you should stick to that method alone. Other methods may be good in their own right but they are not good as preparations for Self Enquiry. If you are serious about becoming a good violin player, you take lessons from a good teacher and practice as much as you can. If you encounter some difficulties, you do not switch over to clarinet for a few months! You stay with your chosen instrument and keep practicing till you get it right." See the simple, but vivid, example he uses! The best preparation for Self Enquiry is the practice of Self Enquiry. Even now there are villagers who guided by Annamalai Swami, are practicing Self Enquiry.

When I was working in Ramanasramam, we used to go walking in the forest with Kunju Swami. Often, we would take a detour and step into Annamalai Swami's ashram and bask in his presence. He used to give us ginger tea, which too we enjoyed very much. Every time I went, I would prostrate to him. While getting up and I was still in the kneeling position, he would put his hand on my head, ruffle my hair and then put his head on my head. I thought then it was just his way of greeting me. A few days later, when I was there with my friend Anuradha, he did the same thing. Anuradha asked him why he was ruffling my hair and putting his head against mine. He replied, "In 1938, Venkato's family was brought to Tiruvannamalai. This Ganesan, his second son, was just a toddler. He had a peculiar habit when he was taken to Bhagavan's hall. He would climb down from Bhagavan's sister's lap, crawl towards Bhagavan's sofa and try to climb up. Bhagavan's attendant Krishna Swami would stop him and place him back on Bhagavan's sister's lap saying, 'Do not try to establish any special family relationship here.' One day, Bhagavan had sent Krishna Swami on some errand. This baby Ganesan very quickly crawled up to the sofa and climbed on it. To prevent him from falling off the sofa, Bhagavan pressed baby Ganesan down into the sofa with his left leg, and placing his right leg on his crown, ruffled his hair. My master's holy foot is there, Anuradha. I put my head not on Ganesan's head - I am putting my head on my master's holy feet!" And Anuradha asked, "Please swami, tell us some other story." Annamalai Swami said "No, today only Ganesan's story."



*Annamalai Swami extols Bhagavan's greatness to Anuradha*

He continued, "When he was a two year old baby, he was very chubby, like a ball of butter and I was his vehicle. I carried him wherever I went - even when I was supervising construction work. In fact, if you go and see the old photo albums of the ashram, in a few group photographs, you will see me holding baby Ganesan." He was in a mood to talk that day. "I was very fond of this baby, not only because he was a baby, but because Bhagavan paid so much attention to him. When Ganesan was six years old, he was holding on to me one day when I was supervising the construction of the dispensary. That day, Bhagavan came and sat on a big rock nearby. Ganesan ran up to Bhagavan and sat leaning on his knee. Seeing this, my 'attendant *vasana*' came up! You see, all the attendants of Bhagavan had been instructed not to allow anyone touch Bhagavan's body!" (Even though Annamalai Swami was not an attendant then, he was humourously telling Anuradha, "My 'attendant *vasana*' came up.") "So, I went and tried to stop Ganesan from leaning on Bhagavan's knee. Bhagavan held him back between his legs and told me, 'What is it to you? Annamalai Swami, what is it to you? Go and attend to your business.' That is why this baby is special to me even now." At the time of this conversation, this baby was sixty years old!

In 1995, when I resigned from the ashram management, I went to Annamalai Swami's ashram, with a copy of the last issue of *The Mountain Path* I had helped bring out. I gave that copy to Annamalai Swami who was upstairs drying some herbal leaves. I prayed to him, "Swami, give me your permission and blessing so that I can totally retire from all the activities that I was involved in with the ashram management." He jumped up to his feet, came and gave me a hug. A hug from one who was once hugged by Bhagavan - I felt thrilled and blessed! He told me, "You have made my heart very happy. This is the greatest service you can do to Bhagavan. Till now, Ganesa, we were only friends. From now on, we are brothers. My blessings are always with you." He hugged me again and then put his head on my head. When I walked out, my heart was flooded with bliss. He was so happy that he left his work behind and accompanied me down the stairs. He presented me with a few saplings of a herbal plant called *iruvaatchi* (*Bauhinia Tomentosa*), saying, "Bhagavan showed me this herbal plant in the forest and

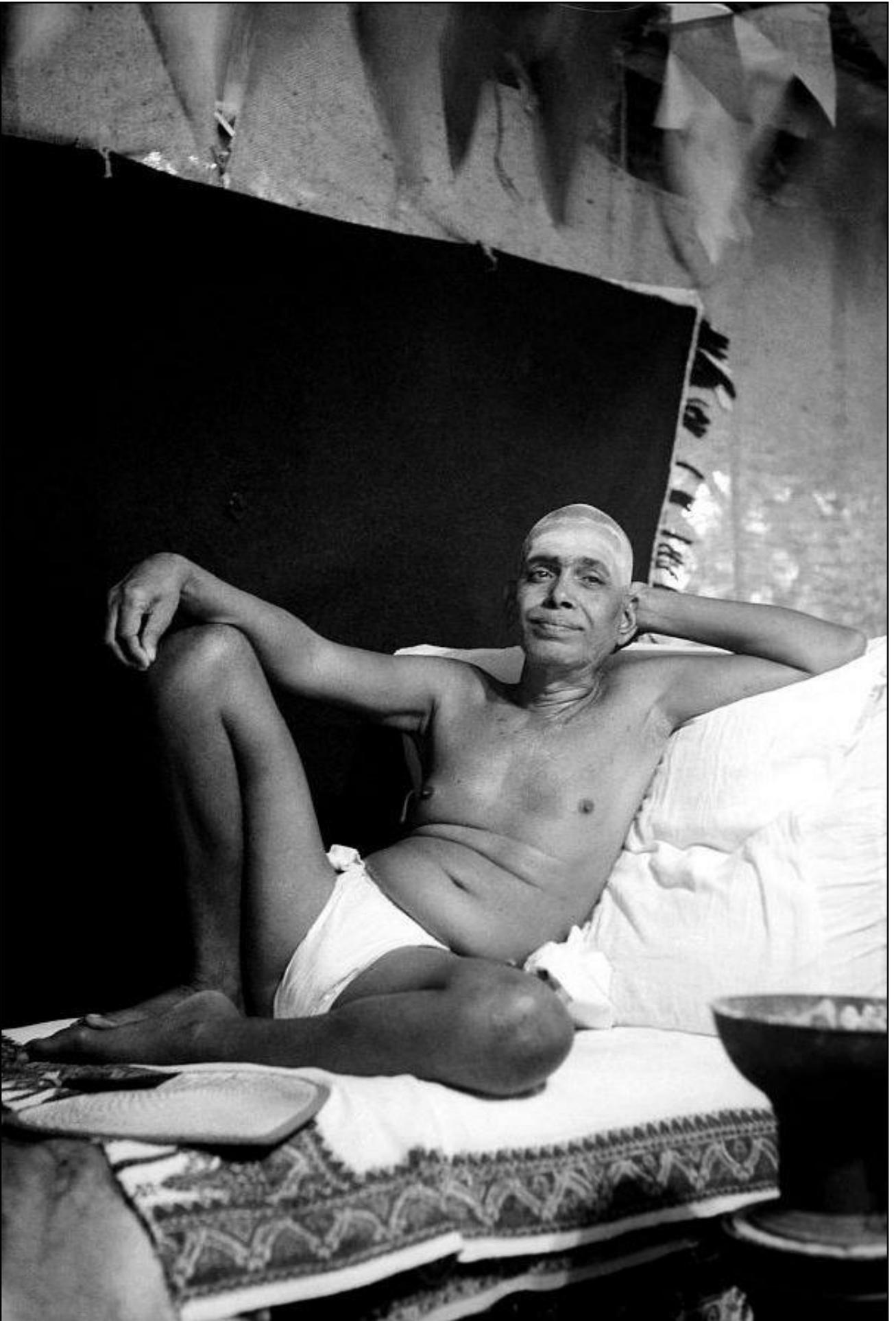


*Annamalai Swami blessing Ganesan*

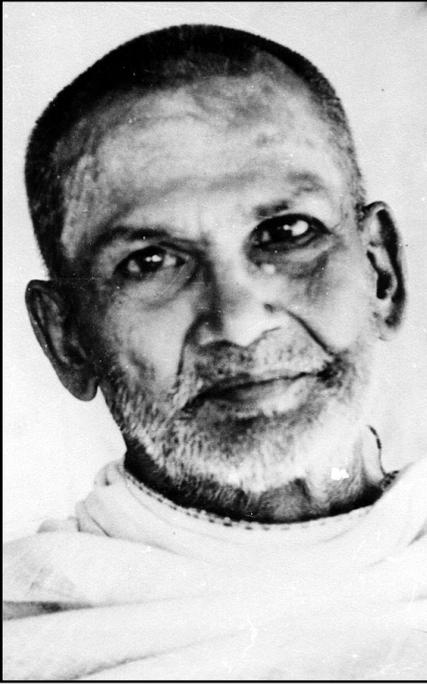
told me to pluck its flowers and leaves, mix it up with rice and eat it. I have been doing it since then. Now, as *prasad*, I am giving these four or five plants to you.” These plants have now grown into big trees in my garden in Ananda Ramana.

When Annamalai Swami dropped his body, it was interred in his ashram. I was distressed because this great devotee’s *samadhi* was not in Ramanasramam. By Bhagavan’s grace, I had managed to build the *samadhi* of many old devotees within its precincts. But in the case of Annamalai Swami, this was not to be. That was the reason for my anguish. But look at Bhagavan’s grace! He has now included Annamalai Swami’s ashram and *samadhi* in Ramanasramam. The deep and yearning wish of this childish fool has been fulfilled by Bhagavan. He has absorbed this gem of a devotee’s *samadhi* into his ashram. This herculean, super builder is now eternally there, as a dust at the holy feet of his *satguru*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Intellectual clarity is important to thwart destiny. Melting of the heart is the next step. If you want to flower into wisdom, melting of the heart is absolutely necessary. Then comes surrender! Surrender the ‘me’ as done so totally by Annamalai Swami. We have seen how at every step Annamalai Swami obeyed his master. Thus, the mason attained the final goal of human life. This is a great lesson for us. Melting is not crying or rolling on the floor: It is surrendering the ‘me’ - deliberately, willingly and with great ease. And when you do this, what a joy it is!



## Muruganar



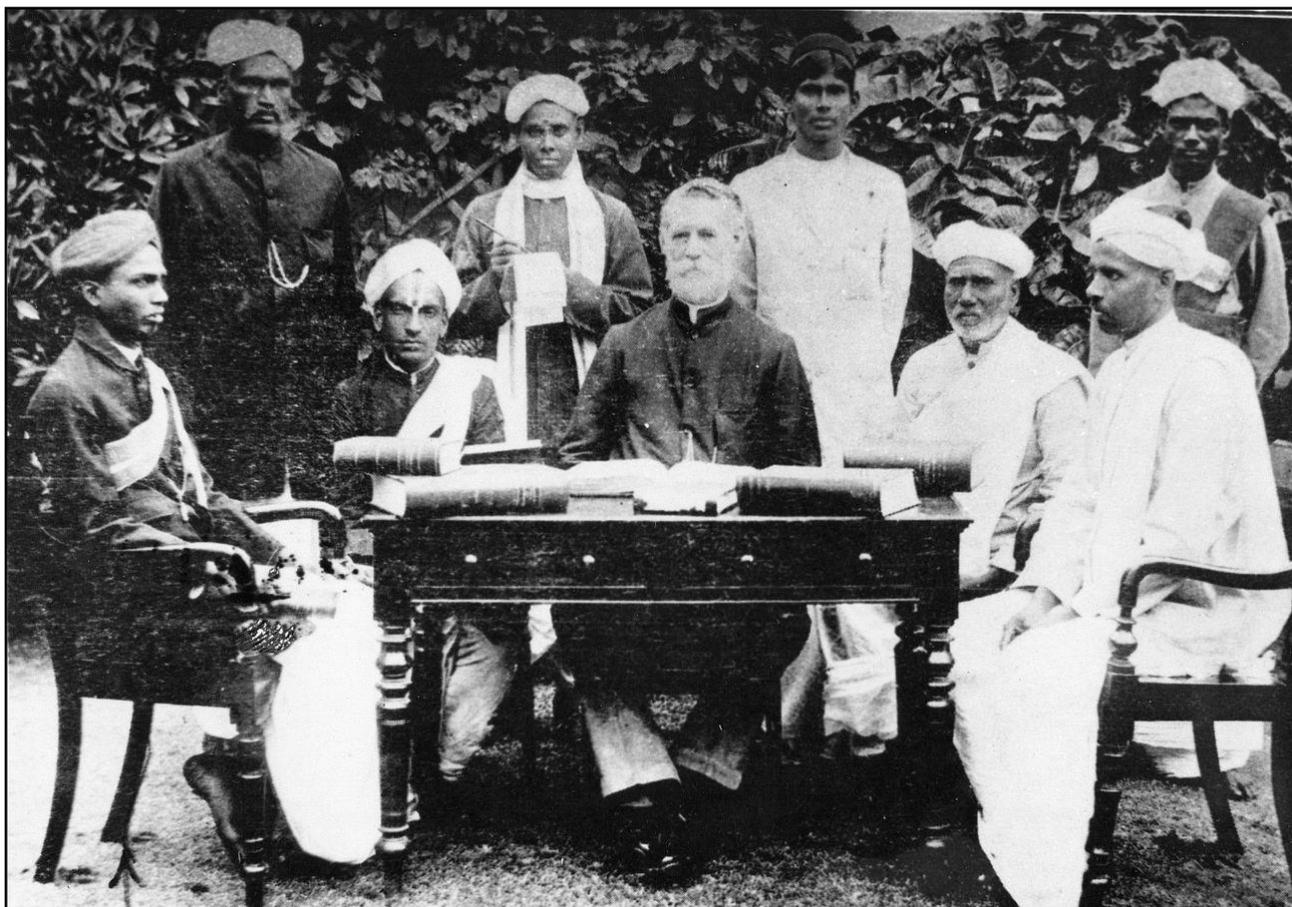
History has recorded the illustrious lives of saints like Jnanasambandar, Meera Bai and Andal, whose time on earth culminated in their being absorbed into a flame and merging with the Lord. However, one of Bhagavan's devotees, a remarkable poet-saint, began his spiritual life with the *darshan* of a huge flame on his very first meeting with his guru in 1923 at Ramanasramam. In subsequent days, whenever he looked at Bhagavan, he saw a luminosity surrounding the holy form. This devotee was Muruganar, a Tamil poet who was held in the highest esteem by the Tamil community. As a renowned Tamil teacher and scholar, he actively served in a committee of Tamil scholars who were engaged in the tremendous task of preparing volumes of the first Tamil lexicon.

Muruganar was deeply devoted to Lord Siva . He spent much of his time reading *Thiruvachakam*, a poetic outpouring of ecstasy experienced by Manikavachakar, a saint and devotee of Siva who lived seven hundred years ago. Whenever he read it, he would yearn for the same ecstasy and fulfillment that Manikavachakar felt in his Siva *bhakti*. It was around this time that his father-in-law, Dandapani Swami, presented him with two books written by Bhagavan: *Who am I?* and *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, the former a work on *jnana marga* and the latter an outpouring of

devotional songs drenched in *bhakti*. He read them many times over and soon learnt from his friends that Bhagavan was in a state of constant non-dual state of *Jnana* that was unheard of in recent times. Muruganar felt a deep longing to visit and serve this saint, and receive his blessings in the form of divine ecstasy. He left for Tiruvannamalai and as soon as he reached the Arunachaleswara temple, he wrote eleven extempore verses in praise of Bhagavan, addressing him as Siva. He then went to Ramanasramam which in September 1923 was only a few thatched sheds. Just as auspicious events are heralded by signs, before he went in Bhagavan himself came out.

This is how Muruganar describes his first *darshan*: "When I looked at the entrance I saw a brilliant light, a  *jyothi*, a huge flame, which blinded my eyes. Ecstatically, I tried to read out the verses I had written, but profuse tears prevented this. Then, from the flame emerged a human form - Bhagavan. He asked me to hand him over the paper I was holding. Bhagavan read the poems aloud and remarked, 'This reads just like *Thiruvachakam*. Why not continue writing like Manikavachakar?' Bhagavan then looked deeply at me. After a while, I returned to normal consciousness. With devotion welling up and in all joy and gratitude, I looked up at Bhagavan. Those gracious eyes of Bhagavan pierced through me, opening me instantaneously into a state of bliss that I had never experienced before. That look of Bhagavan unleashed ecstatic poetry in my Heart. From then on, hundreds and hundreds of poems began to gush forth. I would place them before Bhagavan and he would edit them." Muruganar was choked with emotion when he narrated this to me. (It was a great spiritual experience for me that day.) "Instantly," he added, "Bhagavan became my God, my master. I was wholly convinced that Bhagavan was a manifestation of Lord Siva himself. And as my new owner, he made my eye and my mind his own. In the same way that wax melts on encountering fire, on seeing Bhagavan, my mind dissolved and lost its separate form. Like a calf that has found its mother, my heart rejoiced at his holy feet. Devotion surged in me like an ocean that has seen the full moon." It is a truth to be rejoiced over by serious seekers that the divine communion between the illuminating guru and the illustrious disciple was sealed and sanctified that day by the Lord. For Muruganar, this instantaneous communion was the inauguration of his spiritual life, at a very high level.

He worked in Chennai as a teacher to support his mother and wife and had to go back to work. After three months, he returned. When he looked at Bhagavan, he again had the vision of luminosity enveloping his form. By this time, Muruganar was completely enveloped in the ocean of Bhagavan's grace. But he still had to travel between Arunachala and Chennai because of his responsibilities. He was deeply attached to his mother.



*Muruganar (extreme left) along with other members of the Tamil Lexicon Committee*

Muruganar once told me that he was torn between his devotion to his master and his affection for his mother.

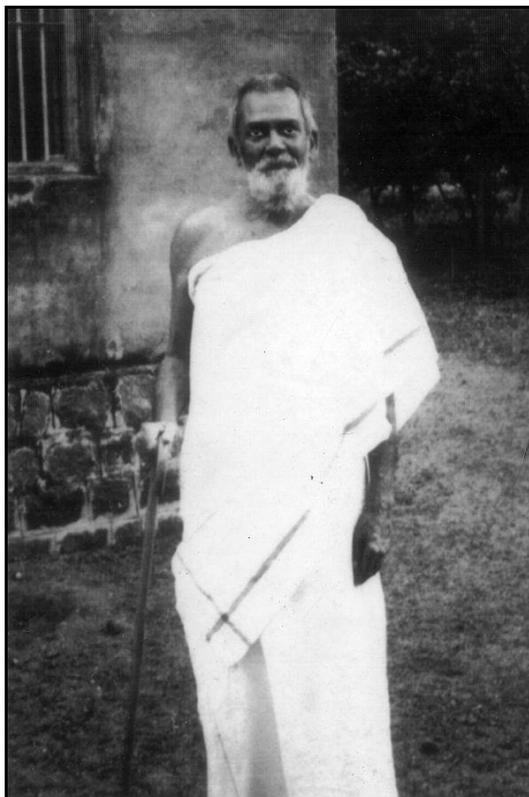
It was literally quite difficult for him to be on time to catch the train back to Chennai - lost as he was in his state of ecstasy! Sometimes, with tears of bliss streaming down his face, he would literally walk backwards the three miles from the ashram to the railway station and roam about on the platform. The train would arrive and depart, with him being blissfully unaware of it. On being told by a porter or the station master that the train had left, he would come back to Bhagavan, his eyes brimming with tears of ecstasy! When Bhagavan saw this was happening repeatedly, he asked Kunju Swami or Viswanatha Swami to accompany Muruganar with specific instructions, "Put him on the train and return to the ashram only after the train leaves."

Muruganar's mother passed away in 1924. He performed the last rites, took some portion of the ashes in an urn and came to Bhagavan. When Bhagavan saw the distressed Muruganar, he enquired, "How were you able to complete the last rites in this state?" Muruganar broke down on hearing this, so touched was he by his master's solicitude. Someone mentioned that the ashes were kept in an urn outside. Bhagavan then directed Muruganar to immerse the ashes in Agni Thirtam, a pond near Ramanasramam. Muruganar got highly emotional as he told me about Bhagavan's compassion. He resigned from his job and cut off all worldly ties and came to Bhagavan in 1926, totally surrendering himself. Bhagavan welcomed him wholeheartedly. From then on, a new chapter in Muruganar's life began.

Muruganar tried to assist the ashram management in its day to day activities. He tried his best to perform his worldly tasks efficiently, but his whole attention was turned inwards, towards practice. He felt he was not fit to do any worldly work and wondered if he should just leave the ashram and live independently. When he expressed this, Bhagavan encouraged him to move to nearby Palaakothu.

From then on, Muruganar spent most of his time at Bhagavan's feet, leading an austere life and freed from worldly duties.

"I think I should beg for food," he suggested to Bhagavan one day. Bhagavan gave his consent in a beautiful and natural way. In Muruganar's case, he did not say, "All right, go and beg." Instead, he gave him the names of the streets where he should and the one street he should not beg! Muruganar felt greatly blessed. He would beg for food and then bring it to Palaakothu. Being very fastidious, he would go to the pool there, wrap the food in a cloth, tie it to a tree and then go about elaborately washing his hands and feet. On many occasions, monkeys stole his food and he went hungry. Yet, he never complained; on the contrary, he was happy to starve.



*Muruganar during his days of austerity*

Bhagavan's presence inspired the poet in him. He composed hundreds of verses along the lines of *Thiruvachakam*, as Bhagavan had inspired and instructed him to do. These poems were collected by other devotees and a private publication called *Ramana Sannidhi Murai (Prayers and Praises in the Presence of Ramana)* was brought out. The beauty of this book is that it has one thousand eight hundred and fifty extempore verses, seen, edited and titled by Bhagavan. What is the importance of this book? Muruganar himself declares, "Know that the function and purport of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* is to abide at the feet of the bounteous guru, Ramana, so that the darkness, the delusion of egoism may cease, being dispelled by the illumination of Lord Ramana's grace."

When Muruganar came to Bhagavan, he had not read any *Vedantic* text. So, he was all the more receptive to Bhagavan's teachings and was able to imbibe them more easily, particularly the direct teachings of Bhagavan's Self Enquiry. Whenever devotees put questions to Bhagavan and he answered them, Muruganar would return to his hut and write down those answers as poems. Those questions and answers formed the content of well over a thousand verses and were collected and printed as *Guru Vachaka Kovai (Garland of Guru's Sayings)*. Here too, every verse was edited, titled and approved by Bhagavan. Both of these books have been translated in English. What is the substance of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*? One of the verses explains it: "Give up the thought that this frail body is you; pursue the Self within which is eternal bliss. This body which you think you are, is not true, is not you. The real you is within you as the truth. Pursue it. Do Self Enquiry and find it. You go from *asat* (unreality) to *Sat* (Reality)"

Muruganar went on to write many excellent works like *Ramana Deva Malai*, *Sri Ramana Charana Pallandu*, *Sri Ramana Anubhuti* and *Sri Ramana Jnana Bhodam*. The spiritual function behind all his books can be categorized under three heads: Prayers and praises, the pure and direct teaching, and the inner ecstasy of spiritual experience. It was to accomplish these that our beloved Bhagavan blessed him with poetry. As Muruganar said, "I had no other thought while writing these books. Bhagavan being the truth, he occupied my Heart so completely that I wrote only on Ramana, my ecstatic devotion to him, and the affirmation of his direct teaching."

When his first book *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* was released, it met with much opposition and criticism. So much so, that it was banned from circulation. The reason this book was so vehemently opposed by the ashram management was a verse in the book which said, "Directing his supreme grace with a single intense glance, Bhagavan Ramana rooted out my ego and bestowed on me, in exchange, his own state of supreme bliss." This was an extempore verse. It created a furore because its opponents thought it was Muruganar's egoism that made him claim that he was equal to Bhagavan.

One day, when seated in the hall in Bhagavan's presence, Viswanatha Swami observed Muruganar lost in devotion, gazing at Bhagavan in absolute ecstasy, almost as though he were devouring Bhagavan's love. This moved Viswanatha Swami deeply and he thought, "He has met with so much disappointment and yet, he is able to transcend it by looking at Bhagavan and getting lost in his devotion." Without realizing what he was doing, he began to repeat Muruganar's poetic name, "Mugavapuri Murugan," under his breath. Bhagavan heard him and turned to him, saying, "Viswanatha! What is the use of repeating his name so many times? Why don't you compose a verse with those two words?" Viswanatha Swami promptly took a piece of paper and tried to compose a verse with those two words. But however much he tried, he could not write more than those two words. After several unsuccessful attempts, he finally gave up. He placed the sheet of paper with those words before Bhagavan and left the hall.

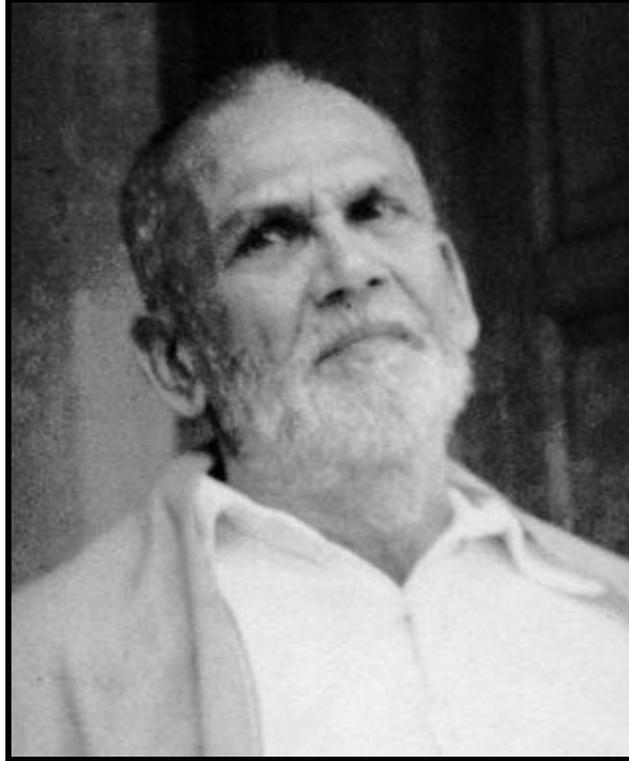
When he returned, he found that Bhagavan had completed the whole verse and had written 'Viswanathan' under it, even though he had contributed almost nothing to it. Bhagavan wrote the verse as though it was Muruganar speaking: "Arunachala Ramanan, the one who resides in the Heart lotus of all, smiled at my ego and destroyed it completely with a single glance of grace. He thus showered his blessings on me, Mugavapuri Murugan, to enable me to enlighten the entire world with my work *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* which is comparable and equal to *Thiruvachakam*." This verse is very important because it was written by Bhagavan himself. Unasked, Sri Bhagavan has declared in this verse and revealed that his real name was, is, and will ever be Arunachala Ramanan. Then, Bhagavan assures us that he ever resides in and as each one of us equally, in the Heart. His glance of grace, even from his picture, has the power to dissolve the ego idea. Bhagavan goes on to reveal that the sole function of his advent in our midst is to re-establish enlightenment throughout humanity and not just on chosen disciples. This verse is proof of this and therefore very important.

Muruganar, in his very first encounter with Bhagavan, received his glance of grace and had an ecstatic spiritual experience. However, as sincere seekers, we must bear in mind that this ecstasy takes time to stabilize. When this verse was written, Bhagavan again looked at him. This established him in a state from which poured forth hundreds of verses spontaneously. Muruganar yearned to be in that ecstatic state all the time. He prayed silently, that in addition to the time he was spending with his master, he would have a personal audience with him, so he could be permanently established in divine bliss. However, he did not reveal his innermost longing to anyone, including Bhagavan. So he thought!

In those days in the ashram, a group of devotees would go into the forest to pluck leaves from certain trees to make leaf plates. One morning, a group was planning to go to the forest. Bhagavan shot Muruganar a significant look. Muruganar understood its purport and hurriedly followed Bhagavan out of the hall. The group started to follow, but Bhagavan took him so quickly into the woody interiors of the forest, that the others were left far behind. Bhagavan sat on a big log and signalled Muruganar to sit beside him. No words were exchanged between them. Bhagavan then looked at him piercingly and established him in a state of inner felicity. When Muruganar opened his eyes, dusk had fallen and he found himself alone. He had been in ecstasy for several hours. From then on, Muruganar remained in that state of inner bliss and quietude.

"Having egotistically identified myself with the filthy body, I had slipped down into a desolate state. Now, having been awakened by him who is pure, divine, gracious wisdom, I have attained the supreme life of

silent, natural consciousness and I am ever flourishing as the perfect, pure Self. The science of Self experience, which surged forth when the rising ego was destroyed, has filled my Heart. Having blossomed me as bliss, by the light of the fully blossomed glance of his grace, guru Ramana made me, this fool, flourish and live as the Buddha.” From ancient times, sages and saints in all their devotion and wisdom have written thousands of poems extolling gods and goddesses in varied meters and styles in the Tamil language. Perhaps for the first time, in Muruganar, we have one single poet who put down forty thousand verses in different meters, in chaste Tamil, but on one single master - Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. This spiritual wonder is unique to Muruganar.



Muruganar expounding his works on Bhagavan's teachings.

We also respect this poet-saint because he elicited the direct teaching from Bhagavan. But for his efforts, we would not have Bhagavan's direct teaching in three remarkable treatises which can easily be considered as modern *Upanishads* on Self Enquiry and Self realization. These three works are *Ulladu Narpadu*, its supplement, *Anubandam*, *Upadesa Undiyar*, and lastly, a poem on wisdom *Atma Vidya Keertanam*. All three guide us on how to experience the reality of the limitless Self.

The genesis of these three treatises is very interesting. Before Muruganar came to Bhagavan in 1926, Bhagavan had written many stray verses which had not been collected and preserved. With Muruganar's natural inclination for poetry, he researched Bhagavan's poems and found twenty one stray verses. He collected them and found that they were not on a particular theme and therefore sat with Bhagavan analyzing those verses. The theme that he chose was reality and the nature and experience of it. He was intent on this, because by living with Bhagavan and leading a life of pure spirituality, he understood the importance of living the truth. He wanted Bhagavan to write about reality and practical ways to actually be one with it. Some verses did not go with the theme, so he omitted them and requested Bhagavan to replace them with fresh verses, based on his own experience. This went on for twenty days. In Tamil literature, one form of poetry restricts a single theme to forty verses. Muruganar proposed to Bhagavan to adhere to this norm. Bhagavan himself titled the collection *Ulladu Narpadu (Reality in Forty Verses)*. While editing this work, Muruganar wanted to preserve some verses that had been omitted and requested Bhagavan to write more and made an anthology of another forty verses called *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham (Supplement to Reality in Forty Verses)*.

On another occasion, Muruganar was in the middle of a spontaneous flow of writing poems, on the play of gods and goddesses, where each of them was presented as Ramana. On completing seventy verses, he found that he was stuck where Lord Siva gives spiritual instruction to sages performing penance in the forest. Since he adored Bhagavan as Siva himself, he pleaded with Bhagavan, "You are Siva himself. Here I am, stuck and unable to go on. Please give me the next thirty verses as Lord Siva's teaching to the accomplished sages." In response, Bhagavan wrote *Upadesa Undiyar (Thirty Verses on Spiritual Instructions)*, a step by step guide on how to be the truth. Someone once complimented Muruganar on *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* saying, "This is the best work you have done, Muruganar." Muruganar with tears in his eyes replied, "In India, the *Mahabharata* is considered as one of the greatest epics because it contains Lord Krishna's direct teaching in the form of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Similarly, if you people consider *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* as my best work it is because *Upadesa Undiyar* by Bhagavan is embedded in it."

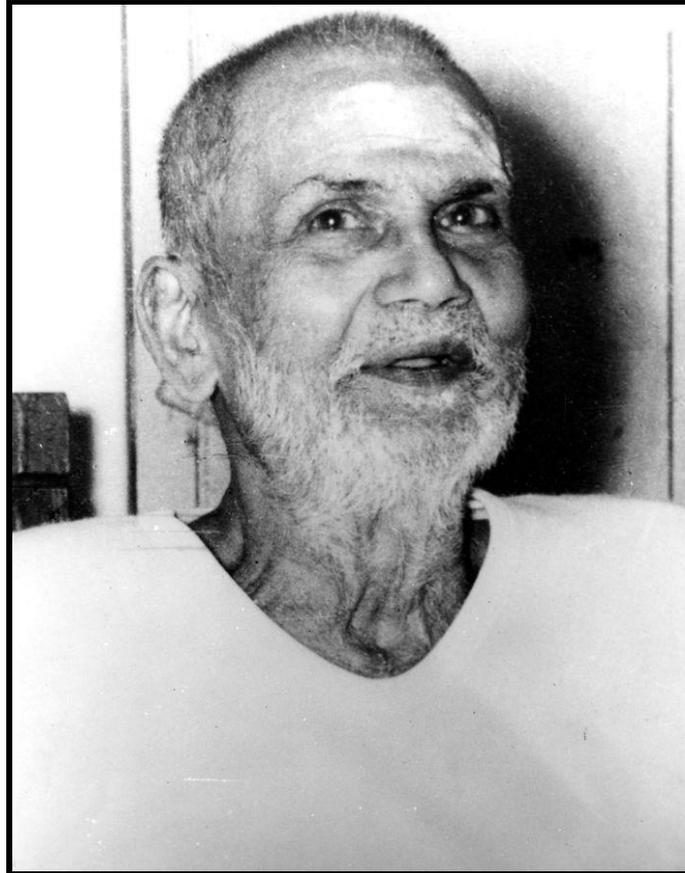
A reputed poet who lived hundred and fifty years ago had written a few verses saying that the hardest task for man in the world is Self realization. Muruganar was very upset with this. "It should be the easiest. How can Self realization be the most difficult?" he reasoned. He began writing in Bhagavan's presence, "Self knowledge is the easiest thing there is." However, he could not go further because he did not know how to put it convincingly. He left the sheet of paper on Bhagavan's sofa and walked off. When he came back, Bhagavan had written the *Atma Vidhya Keertanam*, a few verses on Self knowledge, which described Bhagavan's own state of experience and how it is easy for every one of us to attain: "Lo, very easy is Self knowledge, lo, very easy indeed. Even for the most infirm, so real is the Self that compared with it a gooseberry in one's hand appears a mere illusion. The thought 'I am the body' is the thread on which various thoughts are strung together. Diving within enquiring, 'Who am I and whence am I?' all other thoughts vanish, and as 'I-I' within the Heart cave, the Self shines of its own accord. Such Self awareness is the only heaven, stillness and abode of bliss." If we examine Bhagavan's relationship with Muruganar, it will be found that Self realization is indeed the easiest to attain. For Muruganar, there was no God except Bhagavan, no path except Self Enquiry and no other purpose in life other than abiding in the Self, in the silence. The crowning brilliance in his life was not just his books and his bringing out the truth from Bhagavan - it was the fact that he actually lived every word that he wrote.

Impressed with his poetic skills, he was offered wealth and luxury by kings if he would only grace their courts. But he chose to be a beggar in the streets of Tiruvannamalai and to be in Bhagavan's shadow - only to live the truth. Muruganar lived the teaching every day, every hour, every minute. Since he was with Bhagavan all the time, he earned the nickname 'shadow of Bhagavan'. The relationship between Muruganar and Bhagavan is the practical demonstration of the *guru-shishya* relationship that is extolled in Hindu scriptures. All Hindu texts are written in question and answer format, with the disciple asking the question and the guru giving the answer, even on ethical issues. We will soon see how beautifully the guru-disciple relationship is brought out in the Hindu culture when we examine the rest of Muruganar's life.

Muruganar communicated with Bhagavan all the time. Bhagavan was not a well read person, whereas Muruganar had read Tamil literature extensively. Sometimes, when Bhagavan was alone with him, he would ask Muruganar to give him the essence of a book. One day, Muruganar was in ecstasy and he started sharing with Bhagavan the essence of some great books. Many books were discussed on that day with Bhagavan, who was a good listener. Then, he turned to Muruganar and said, "Ultimately, the essence of all these books is only one truth. There is just one destination, but the routes and road maps are all very different. There are various paths, scriptures, texts, descriptions, examples and illustrations, but the sole essence is one single truth." Muruganar was so thrilled that he eagerly responded, "Yes, Bhagavan, it is true! Now, I feel that reading all those books was a waste of time." Bhagavan hastened to correct him, saying, "You should not look at it that way. It is because we have read all these books that we have understood that their essence is one truth. Had we not read all these books, the mind would have kept tempting us with the thought that there is a new revelation in some other book. Therefore, reading also serves a purpose. It is the same for rituals and *poojas*," he added. "There are multifarious rituals and *poojas*, and the function of doing them all is to recognize that there exists one single, simple truth. The rituals and *poojas* themselves are not that important for Self realization."

Another day, when Muruganar entered the hall, he saw in front of Bhagavan an array of garlanded books, with *pooja* that had been offered to them, on the occasion of Saraswati Pooja. Muruganar

prostrated before Bhagavan and gave a mischievous smile. Bhagavan just looked questioningly at Muruganar, as if to ask what he was smiling about. Muruganar said, "Bhagavan, I am very amused that the very truth is seated here," - he gestured towards Bhagavan - "and these books are merely the chaff. People have worshipped the chaff instead of the essence." Being a poet, he then gave this example, "Bhagavan, imagine that the best of sugarcane was squeezed to get sugarcane juice and that was crystallized to make sugar. A human figure was then made out of that sugar. You are that sugar and these books are like sugarcane waste. Instead of paying respect to you, the sweet sugar, people are paying respect to the waste." Muruganar smiled, and so did Bhagavan.



*" Filled with 'Inner Bliss' "*

Muruganar and Bhagavan had such a close relationship that Bhagavan would wait for him to arrive. The moment Muruganar walked in, Bhagavan would pose a question to him even before he could prostrate. Muruganar's senses and attention were always fully attuned to Bhagavan and his words. He would receive the question from Bhagavan and start answering while prostrating, lifting his head up like a chameleon. The devotees of Bhagavan called this 'lizard-talk'! Muruganar himself told me that sometimes this would go on for a long time and he would not even realize that he was still lying down on the ground. Viswanatha Swami was amused and asked him to stop his 'lizard-talk', at least when he came to the Old Hall. Muruganar recounted, "I knew that people were amused, but at the time of prostrating I was so absorbed in giving answers to Bhagavan that I would not be aware that I was lying on the floor. As I was lying down, my voice would not be clear and Bhagavan would have to strain to listen to me. None of this mattered, because for me, nothing existed except the fact that Bhagavan had asked me a question and that I had to answer him!"

Sometimes, when he was seated in front of Bhagavan, poetry would gush forth. Bhagavan would go up the hill or to the cowshed. When he came back, Muruganar would still be seated, engrossed in his writing. Bhagavan would ask him a question and wait for an answer. He would stand next to Muruganar, who would keep writing busily and even answer his questions without realizing he was talking to Bhagavan. The others would be shocked, because according to Hindu tradition it was a sign of

disrespect for a disciple to be seated while his guru stood before him. Moreover, Bhagavan could not stand for long after the Pathalalinga days.

Muruganar tried to assist the management in Ramansramam because it insisted that anyone living there or having meals there had to do some service. He tried his best but failed because he was so absorbed in his *sadhana*. Therefore, he finally had to move next door to Palaakothu, stay in someone else's verandah and beg for food to sustain his body. Bhagavan poured his grace on Muruganar all the time but at the same time never interfered in the management of the ashram.

On many days, the inspiration for writing poems was so strong that he would forget he had not eaten and that it was time to go to beg. One day, he had gone without food the entire day and hadn't even realized it. It was the festival of Maha Sivaratri, a day on which Hindus observe a strict fast for twenty four hours. When he went to Bhagavan the next day, Bhagavan gestured to him to accompany him around the hill. Muruganar followed him with enthusiasm, but was quickly fatigued because he was hungry, having been without food for two whole days. After covering some distance, Bhagavan noticed Muruganar's tired face and enquired compassionately, "Did you not eat yesterday? Were you fasting because it was Sivaratri?" It was then that Muruganar remembered that the previous day had been Sivaratri. "Yes, Bhagavan, I haven't eaten," he replied. After their circumambulation of the hill, Bhagavan asked Muruganar to follow him and have a full meal at Ramanasramam. He also appointed one of his attendants to go into the kitchen and supervise the serving of food to ensure that Muruganar would have a good meal there. When Muruganar narrated this to me, he shed tears of emotion on recollecting the solicitude of the master. Tears of joy had become an integral part of this incomparable devotee of Bhagavan.

However, this solicitude was an isolated incident. There are many instances when the opposite also took place. One day, sub-registrar Narayana Iyer told me - it has also been written in an article published by the ashram - that he and another devotee, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, wanted an explanation from Bhagavan of the sixth verse of Bhagavan's *Eight Verses on Arunachala*. When they entered the hall with the book open, they saw Muruganar prostrating before Bhagavan and taking leave to go into the town to beg. One of the attendants reported, "Bhagavan, we just ground a jackfruit to make a dessert for lunch. Muruganar gave us money for the *bhiksha* because it is his mother's anniversary. We feel terrible that Muruganar has to still go to the town and beg." Bhagavan's expression changed and he replied coolly, "Yes. Whose responsibility is it to invite Muruganar to stay and eat with us? It is the duty of the authorities." Muruganar went to beg. The intention here is not to point out the harshness of the management but to illustrate how Bhagavan was solely concerned with Muruganar's spiritual emancipation. Whether he had eaten or not, or whether physical comforts were available or not, was immaterial. Bhagavan's whole attention was focused on seeing that Muruganar led an austere life established in the truth.

Muruganar is the link between Bhagavan, the truth, and us, ignorance. If it was not for his living example, we would have thought Bhagavan to be an unattainable ideal like Buddha or Jesus Christ. Had Muruganar not lived a whole life of austerity, purity and Self knowledge through Self Enquiry, however much we try to intellectualize and understand Maharshi's teaching of Self Enquiry as the direct path, we would have missed the point. Muruganar lived the teachings and showed us that though he was just like us, it was possible to lead a pure life totally dedicated to the teaching. And the master poured all his grace on him.

There are a few more incidents to show us the closeness of Muruganar with Bhagavan. There was not only harsh discipline but humour too in their relationship. Muruganar and Bhagavan would cut vegetables in the morning along with the other *sadhus*. One day, they were chopping spinach. Bhagavan was very careful to cut the root and separate the leaves from the stems. He cooked each part differently and made sure that nothing was thrown away. Bhagavan started talking about his days up on the hill, particularly about an ascetic lady who lived there too. She was called Keerai Paati, meaning 'Spinach Granny', because she collected various kinds of spinach for cooking. Bhagavan narrated how knowledgeable she was about every herb on the hill, knowing its name, content and benefit. When Bhagavan had finished, he observed that Muruganar's chopping of the spinach was shabby. Bhagavan wryly observed, "Your skill in chopping spinach is as striking as your success in running your household." Muruganar had run away from family life and hence felt a bit hurt by Bhagavan's words. He then wrote a poem and placed it before Bhagavan who was very amused on reading it. All the onlookers

curiously asked Bhagavan what he was smiling at. Bhagavan read out the poem: "Oh Ramana! You are an extraordinarily efficient person. Yes! Why don't you then marry an equally efficient young maiden and set up home? Why should you be wandering around as a mendicant in a loin cloth begging food, when you could easily have set up an ideal household?" Bhagavan laughed heartily and the others joined him in his mirth.

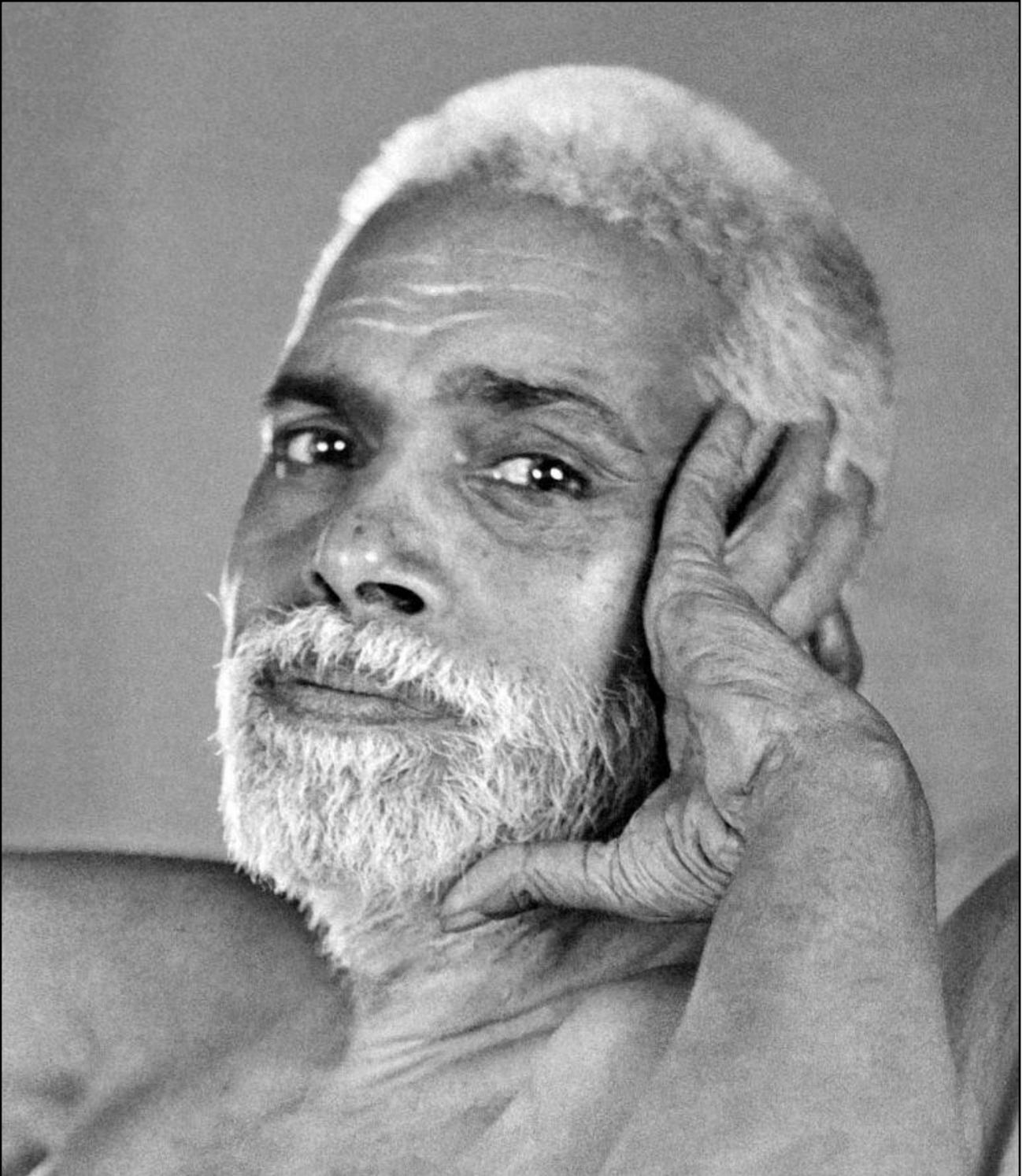
Once, an herbal oil was being made at the ashram. When it was ready, it had to be filtered by pouring it on a cloth spread across a large vessel. Bhagavan held the cloth and asked Muruganar to pour the oil into it with a ladle. Bhagavan was talking about these herbs, some of which could even make one disappear from one place and appear in another. So rapt was he by Bhagavan's stories, that Muruganar continued to pour the oil without noticing that it had begun to overflow. Bhagavan was attentive and efficient, so he chided him saying, "Stop! What are you doing? You are spilling the oil. You are so careless!" Then, to pacify him, he added cajolingly, "Come now, take the spilled oil and smear it on your head. Who will give you such good, costly, herbal oil? Go on and put it on your scalp." Muruganar's attention was still riveted on Bhagavan, and so, instead of taking the oil, he scraped up mud from the ground. Bhagavan quickly said, "Hey stop! I asked you to put the oil on your scalp, not mud!" This is the guru-disciple relationship: the guru's grace not only awakens the highest wisdom but also oversees the welfare of the devotees.

By 1926, Muruganar had left his wife Meenakshi in Chennai to join the ashram. Gentle, innocent Meenakshi was an uneducated lady who had no means of supporting herself. Not knowing how to tackle the world, she would stay with her father for some time, and then come to Tiruvannamalai to beg Muruganar to live with her. Whenever this happened, Muruganar would disappear up the hill and it was always a tough task for even Bhagavan to find him. Each time, he had to send four people after him for three whole days to bring him back! Finally, Bhagavan pleaded with Muruganar to comply with Meenakshi. Muruganar was so stubborn that he ran away into the hill once more. So, Bhagavan found another way to soothe Meenakshi. He took special care of Meenakshi. When I met her, she told me of many instances of her direct experiences with Bhagavan. I requested her to put them all in writing, which she did in Tamil, in a notebook that is now in the archives of the ashram.

One incident mentioned in the book particularly touched my heart: One day Bhagavan asked Meenakshi: "Meenakshi what can I do for you?" Meenakshi showed him her torn sari. "Bhagavan, look at my sari! What do I want? I want clothes and food to eat, which have been denied to me because my husband is not taking care of me." Bhagavan was so moved that he said, "Meenakshi, I assure you that all your life, there will not be a dearth of these two things - clothes and food." Bhagavan did not stop with just this verbal assurance. He sent Kunju Swami to the head of the Isanya Mutt in town, to ask for a sari. A master in a loin cloth, who seldom asked anything for himself, sent a *sannyasi* to another *sannyasi* to beg for a sari for a devotee's wife! He then offered it to her with the repeated assurance, "Meenakshi, you will be happy. You will be provided with clothes and food all your life."

When she narrated this in the 1960s, I started taking care of her. I would send her two saris every year. She was not a spiritually inclined person and could not stay in Ramanasramam. She preferred to stay in Chennai. So I arranged for her to be given food in seven houses - one for each day of every week. When I came to know that Meenakshi was on her death bed, I went to Chennai to spend some time with her. She blessed me profusely. I asked her, "Meenakshi Amma, how are you?" Her stomach was swollen. She said, "I am very happy." I could not believe her. She added, "Bhagavan is with me all the time and has fulfilled his assurance to me through you. I have no dearth of clothes or food. Ganesa, Bhagavan is God himself." Meenakshi could not have a happy life as Muruganar's wife. But she was always happy until her last moments as Bhagavan's pet child. It was a privilege for me to interact with her and be of some service to her.

During Bhagavan's last days, Muruganar composed a poem every day, ending with, "Bhagavan, you should live a hundred years." Muruganar then trained a devotee, Padma Venkataraman, to sing these every evening in Bhagavan's presence. She told me one day, "Muruganar was very particular about correct pronunciation and using his exact words." One day, the song she sang had the words, "*Jnana bhandara nayaka*," which in Tamil means 'the custodian of the treasury of wisdom'. While singing with emotion, she involuntarily sang '*bhokkisham*', which also means 'treasury' instead of '*bhandara*'. As soon as the singing was over, Bhagavan told an attendant, "Go and ask her if Muruganar used that



*Muruganar's favourite bust picture of Bhagavan*

particular word.” Bhagavan knew Muruganar’s style so well that he knew that Muruganar would not have used the word ‘*bhokkisham*’ there. Bhagavan was as particular as Muruganar that the exact word was used!

All the devotees were distraught because Bhagavan was going to drop the body. They wondered what they would do without him physically before them. Under Muruganar’s leadership, they sent a mission to Bhagavan to ask him for a message. Did Bhagavan not know what they were asking for? His last words were, “Put the teachings into practice.” It was Muruganar, who elicited from Bhagavan the direct teaching of wisdom, through the three treatises mentioned earlier, and, more importantly, Bhagavan’s final message of putting the teachings into practice. Muruganar had written many verses on ‘I-am-not-the-body’. Yet, when Bhagavan dropped the body, he could not contain his grief. He was inconsolable.

Since 1956, I grew quite close to Muruganar. I had completed my graduation and remained for two years in the ashram. I observed Muruganar, Devaraja Mudaliar, Munagala Venkataramaiah and a few other old devotees like sub-registrar Narayana Iyer. I was taken in by their pure living. When I came back in 1960, this helped me dedicate myself to these old devotees. I could begin to see the depth of their understanding. Muruganar was still begging, though he did not go to the town; he would come just before lunch time to the ashram, stand at the entrance to the kitchen and extend his upper cloth, and the cooks would put some food in it. I observed his movements - so silent and beautiful! On one of those occasions, I had a small camera. “Swami!” I called out. As he turned and looked at me, I snapped a picture (seen at the beginning of this chapter). Muruganar blessed me, even though he reprimanded me later saying, “Don’t do it again.” Viswanatha Swami told me, “A scolding from great sages is much more powerful than their blessings.”

When Muruganar visited Bhagavan’s *samadhi*, it was an elevating sight. It would seem, there was walking but no walker - the worshipper lost in worship! I once asked him, “Muruganar Swami! What is your attitude when you come and prostrate here?” “There is only Bhagavan, there is nothing else,” he replied. For him, there was only Bhagavan, no Muruganar, no Ramanasramam, not even prostration. Bhagavan was everything, everything else was not!

Muruganar was sometime resident at Madras (now Chennai). Once an admirer asked him how come such an outstanding devotee of Bhagavan was not resident at the Ashram. He said : “Look here, where I am, that is ‘Ramanasramam’.”

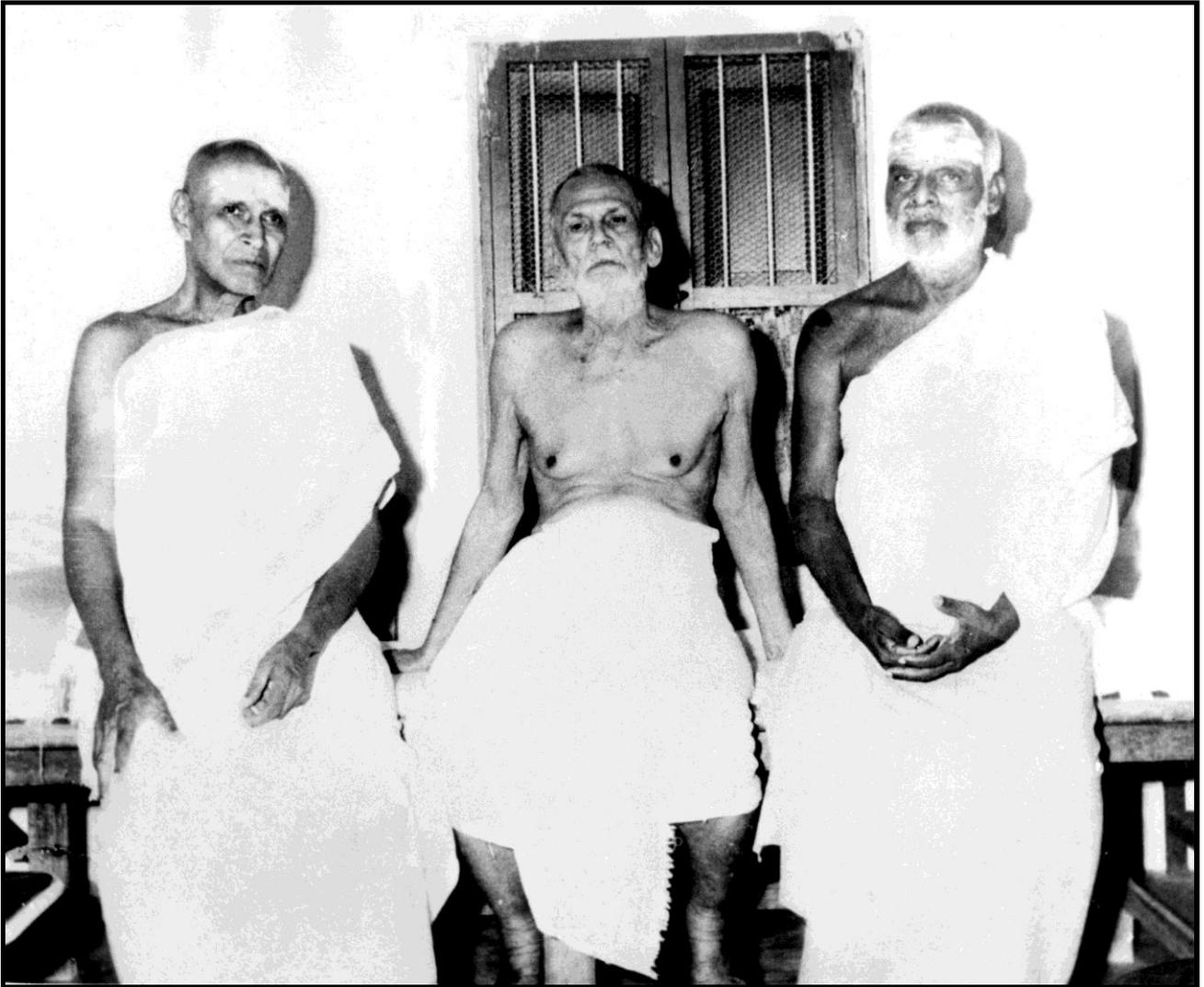
I didn’t know about Muruganar’s two stupendous works then - *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and *Guru Vachaka Kovai* - both edited and approved by Bhagavan. I had brought Muruganar into the ashram and was looking after him with some other friends. My sister would sing some of his songs and he would often ask her to sing those from *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, hearing which he would be reduced to tears. On enquiring about the reason for his tears, he replied, “I was in the presence of Bhagavan one day and he was looking at a girl child intently. I asked him, “Who is this baby who has received so much of your grace and blessings?” Bhagavan replied, ‘Do you not know? *Idhu namma Lakshmi* - This is our Lakshmi.’” Muruganar then again shed tears and said that when Bhagavan uses the word ‘our’, it implied a shared spiritual experience.

I asked him to tell me more about *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. “When it was privately published, the management refused to sell it in the ashram. Many incidents of protest took place - it is good that you are not aware of them,” he recalled. “But I want to tell you this. One day, I was very upset about this when I prostrated before Bhagavan. When I stood up, Bhagavan said, ‘Have no worry, we will publish it ourselves.’” I ran back to the office and tried to get a copy of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, but couldn’t find it. It wasn’t available in the library either. I spoke to some devotees in Chennai and got a copy of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and had it printed. When I presented it to Muruganar, his eyes moistened as he gratefully said, “Look, Bhagavan has fulfilled his prophecy.” This happened a few weeks before he passed away. Then he told me about *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, a book which had the guru’s sayings and which was edited and titled by Bhagavan himself. With great enthusiasm, *Guru Vachaka Kovai* was also brought out by the ashram as its prestigious publication. My heart beamed with joy that Bhagavan’s assurance, “We will publish it ourselves,” was thus successfully fulfilled!

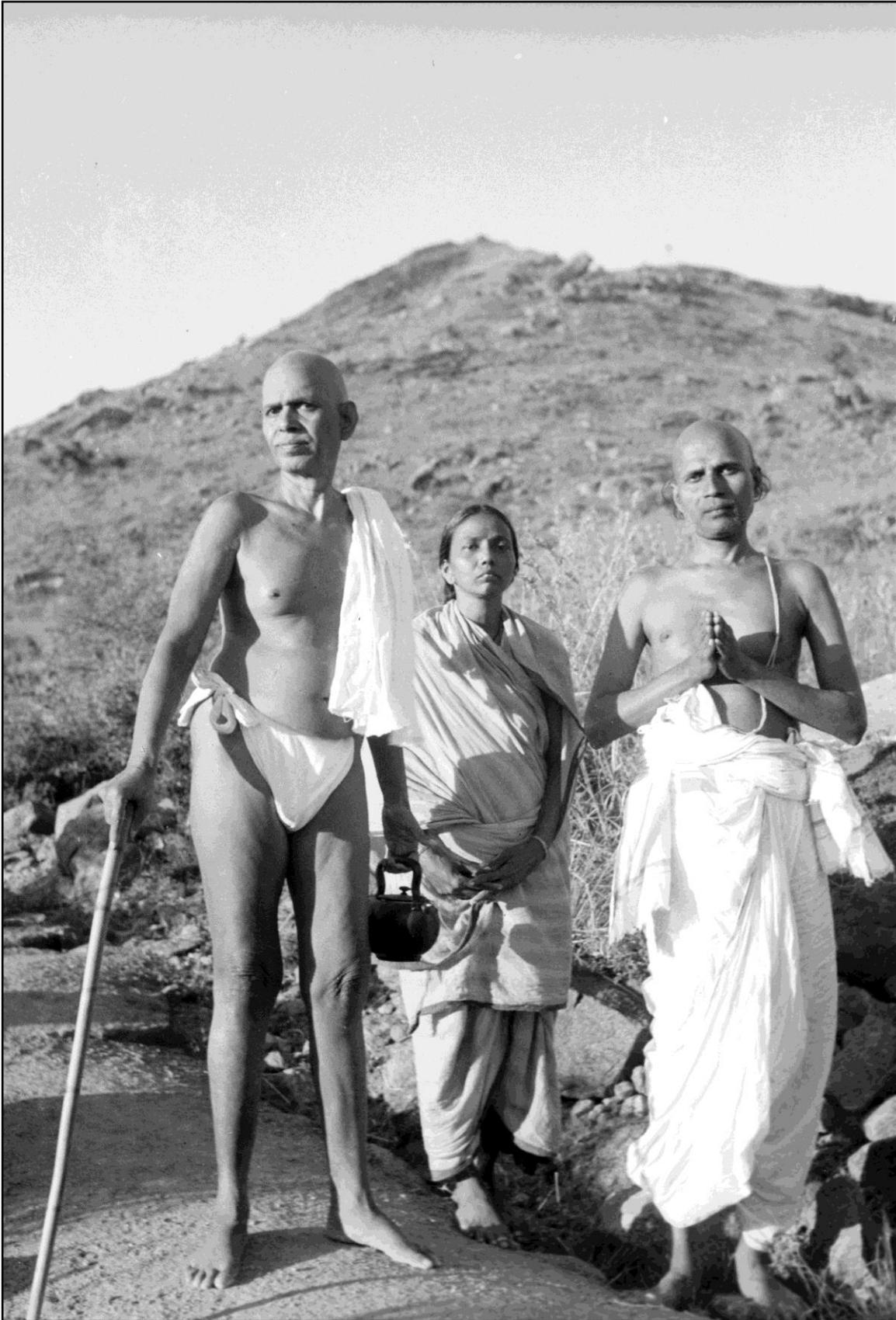
When Muruganar was dying, the doctors said he was in a coma. Dr. Hugo Maier sent word, “His breathing will stop any moment. Come here quickly.” It was three in the morning. I stood close to

Muruganar. Hugo and the other doctors told me, "He is in coma. He is not going to respond to you." "No, I will sing *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*," I said firmly. Despite their repeated objections, I leaned close to Muruganar and whispered into his ear, "Swami, I want to sing *Aksharamanamalai*." The body was still, but his eyebrows went up. This was witnessed by Hugo and the other doctors. Maybe they were right too. The body was in coma; but the Heart - in its state of spiritual ecstasy - responded out of compassion, by making the eyebrows move. We all sang *Aksharamanamalai* continuously. In a state of spiritual ecstasy, Muruganar merged with Arunachala. We carried Muruganar's body out and laid it in *samadhi* worthy of a Sage or a Saint. His *samadhi* shrine is situated in between Arunachala and Bhagavan's Old Hall. On his *Samadhi* day, *puja* is offered; and devotees chant *Aksharamanamalai* and sing selected verses from his *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*.

The story of Muruganar is a never ending one because he is eternal like his Master, his only God, whom he did not forget even for a moment and whose glory and message he sang all his life.

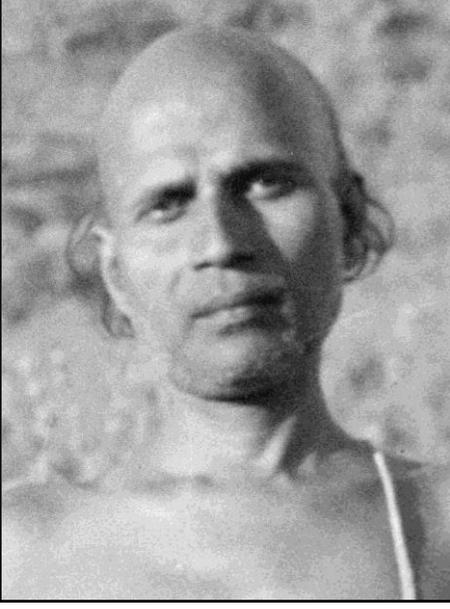


*'The Golden Trinity' : Viswanatha Swami, Muruganar, Kunju Swami*



*Sri Bhagavan, Jagadisa Shastri and wife*

## Jagadisa Shastri



Bhagavan always addressed all living things with reverence, even animals and plants. He rarely addressed the devotees in a familiar way or by their first name. However, there were a few exceptions. One of them was Jagadisa Shastri, whom he used to address as Jagadisa. He came at a very young age to Bhagavan when he was in Virupaksha cave. Bhagavan was very fond of him.

There are two very remarkable and instructive incidents involving Bhagavan and Jagadisa Shastri. He and his wife had put up a hut in front of Ramanasramam and were living there very happily when doctors diagnosed him with having terminal cancer of the stomach. The family members reconciled themselves to the inevitable end. The local doctor, also a devotee of Bhagavan, even predicted that the end would come in a matter of hours. At the eleventh hour, Jagadisa Shastri offered prayers to Bhagavan. Since he was a Sanskrit poet, he composed eight verses - *Prapatti Ashtakam (Eight Verses of Surrender)* - extolling Bhagavan's glory and power as the *satguru* and appealing for his

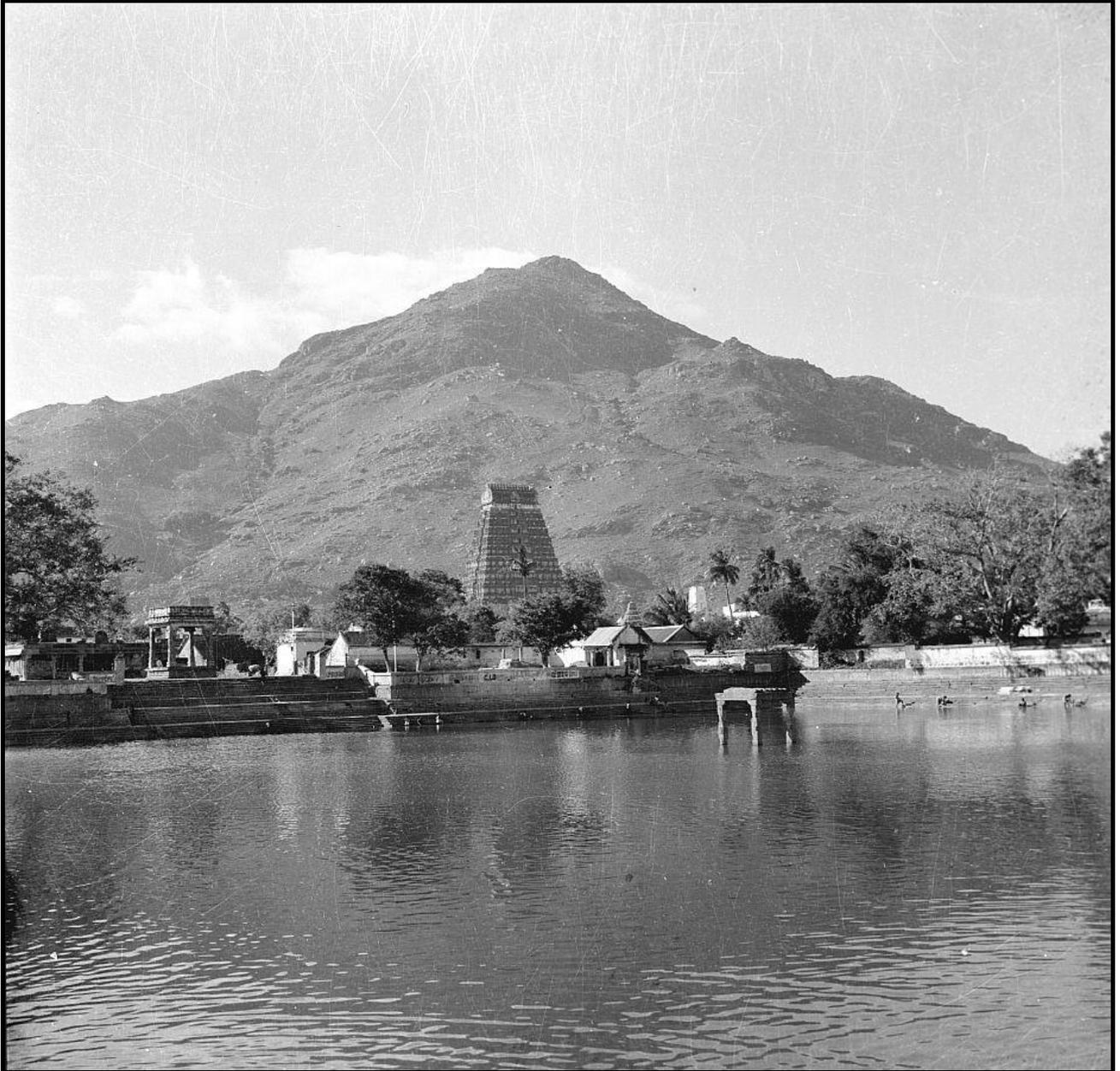
grace. Bhagavan was so moved that he saved his life. This happened in 1945. Jagadisa Shastri went on to live to the ripe old age of eighty nine and died only in 1983.

The second incident came a few years later. Jagadisa Shastri's hut was on a piece of land belonging to a westerner. Unfortunately, that westerner underwent some financial strain and had to sell the land. He offered to compensate Jagadisa Shastri for whatever amount he had spent on the hut, but asked them to vacate it. Jagadesa Shastri was devastated as he had no other place in Arunachala. Vacating the hut would mean that he had to leave Arunachala. Taking the money offered by the westerner, Shastri ran to Bhagavan and dropped the money into his lap. Like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Bhagavan never touched money after he donned the loin cloth as according to him he could not eat money! But now, Bhagavan's compassion for his devotee made him keep the money till Jagadesa Shastri was composed enough to take it back from him.

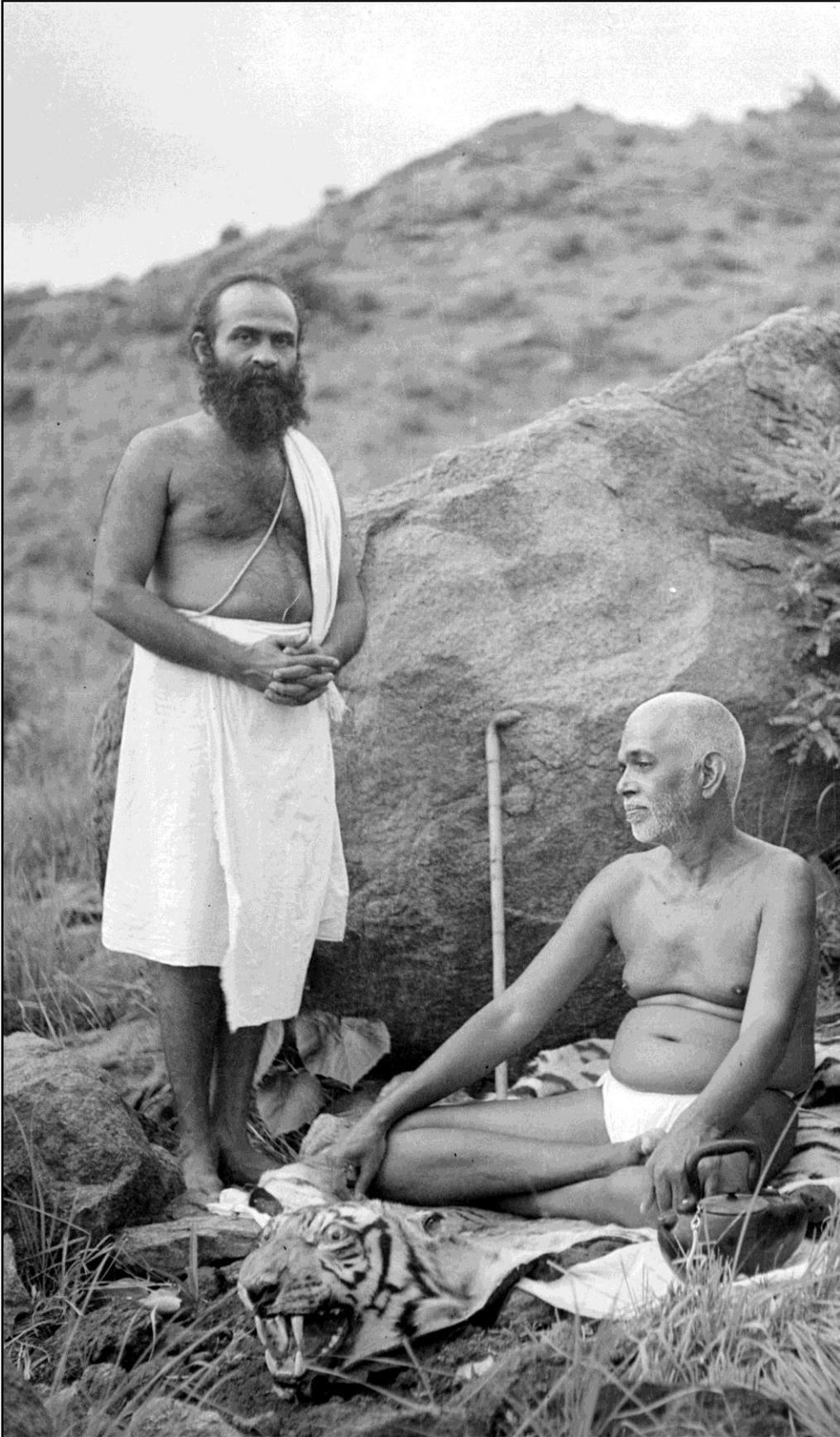
Being a Sanskrit scholar, and having moved very closely with Bhagavan, Jagadisa Shastri was able to write lucid commentaries in Sanskrit on Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saram* and *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*. The former is Bhagavan's seminal work giving step by step instructions on how to abide in the Self while the latter is a collection of five spontaneous poems praising Arunachala. Jagadisa Shastri also wrote *Ramana Sahasranama Stuti*, verses praising Bhagavan in thousand names. He was also instrumental in getting Bhagavan to write what is perhaps the most important Sanskrit verse on his teachings. This was an accidental occurrence. Shastri was once murmuring a phrase '*Hridya kuhara madhye*', and trying to compose a verse beginning with these words. Not succeeding, he wrote these words, left it on Bhagavan's sofa when Bhagavan was not in the hall and went out. When he came back, Bhagavan had completed the verse signing off as 'Jagadisa'. When Sastri returned, he was delighted to read the verse, but was intrigued that his name had been mentioned as the author. However, he told Bhagavan, "Are you not '*Jagadisa*' (Lord of the Universe)!" This is the verse which is inscribed in the new hall behind Bhagavan's statue.

Although Jagadisa Shastri had to shift his residence to Chennai due to compelling family constraints, he dedicated the rest of his life to teaching *Vedanta* in its original Sanskrit commentaries. For his service in teaching the knowledge of the Self - *Atmavidya* - he was conferred the title *Atmavidyabhushanam* by the great Shankaracharya of Kanchi, Paramacharya Chandrashekarendra Saraswati. I had the good fortune of meeting Jagadisa Shastri in 1956 while doing my post graduation in philosophy. My professor in the university was Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan, a great devotee of Bhagavan. Once, he was celebrating Bhagavan's birthday at his residence in Chennai. The celebrations went on for three days. Many eminent people came and gave talks. One of the talks was given by Jagadisa Shastri. His talk, in which he expounded the uniqueness and greatness of Bhagavan, was spell binding. It not only conformed to

the scriptures, it also revealed how Bhagavan was more concerned about you and me, and how we could also have a link with the Self. That day he quoted a verse that expounded the truth about the three karmas - *sanchita*, the karma accumulated from our past lives, *agami*, the new karma we create in our present life, and *prarabdha*, the karma to be worked out in this life. According to the scriptures, for a *jnani*, *sanchita* karma and *agami* karma get nullified but he still has to experience *prarabdha* karma. Bhagavan has rejected this by a humourous analogy. He says, "When one is beyond the control of the mind and the body, it is not possible to say that two karmas are nullified and that one karma alone will stick to him. Imagine that a man is married to three wives. If he dies, all the three will become widowed, not just two of them. Just as none of a man's wives can avoid becoming a widow on his death, so also when the doer is gone, none of the three forms of karmas survive after that."

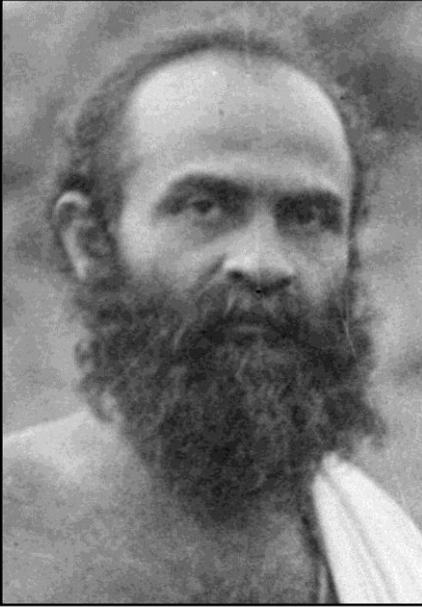


*Jagadisa Sastri adored ARUNACHALESWARA : Holy Hill, Sacred Temple and Blessed Ayyankulam Tank*



*Sri Bhagavan - Daivarata*

## Daivarata



Daivarata was revered as a Vedic *rishi* and master by people like Madan Mohan Malviya, Vinoba Bhave, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, and India's first president, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. In fact, Vinoba Bhave directed all those who approached him with doubts on the Vedas to go to Daivarata.

Daivarata came and stayed with Bhagavan at Skandashram. Bhagavan was very fond of him. Being a very austere saint, he would stay with Bhagavan, but go to the town to beg for food every day. He would bring whatever food he got to Skandashram and place it before Bhagavan saying, "*Indraya swaha*," meaning, 'I am offering this to the Lord of lords.' Only after Bhagavan took something from it, would he eat the balance.

In 1917, he was seated in front of Bhagavan in Skandashram along with Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni and six other great scholars. They plied Bhagavan with beautiful spiritual questions. All these questions and answers have been recorded and brought out as *Sri Ramana Gita*. Daivarata asked Bhagavan a crucial question demanding a definite answer. He asked, "Bhagavan, what is the

paramount duty of a seeker?" Bhagavan replied, "Discovering one's own true nature is the paramount duty."

From his childhood, Daivarata was interested in singing *bhajans*. He used to dance while singing them. In those days, Bhagavan used to go around the hill along with the devotees. Whenever he saw Daivarata, Bhagavan would look intently at him and Daivarata would start singing and dancing from one side of the road to the other. Devotees too, would start singing and dancing. Daivarata was so captivated by Bhagavan's beauty that he writes, "His eyes always glitter with spotless light - full of peace and pure love. Like God's, his eyelids too do not close. Even though his eyes are so wide open, they remain steady and introverted. To sit and gaze at his countenance is by itself true worship. People become so engrossed in his *darshan* that they do not like to leave his divine presence."

Daivarata is the only person who has described Bhagavan's voice. No one else has spoken on how Bhagavan's voice sounded. He says, "Maharshi's voice is melodious and soft as that of a child. It is exceedingly sweet. At times, it is so soft that it is not even heard clearly. It must be listened to with attention. When we hear his voice, we feel as if we are hearing a divine and subtle voice coming across the firmament. His is the form of divine speech so vastly extolled in the Vedas."

Daivarata's original name was Ganesa Shastri Kosoimani. He was called Ganesa and sometimes Gajanan. How he came to be known as Daivarata is an interesting story by itself. In Hindu culture, we live our life as initiated by the sages. It so happened, that he once met a saint from Ujjain who initiated him into *bhakti marga*, the path of devotion. After a few days, another saint came along and trained him in *hatha yoga* practices. He spread *bhakti* and *yoga* all his life. Next, Gajanan met Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. Kavyakantha, being a great Sanskrit scholar, naturally attracted Gajanan. He asked him, "What is your name?" When he heard that it was Ganesa Shastri Kosoimani, popularly known as Gajanan, Kavyakantha said, "From today, your name is Daivarata." Kavyakantha was adept at changing names. He had already changed Venkataraman into Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. It was Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni who brought Daivarata to Skandashram. At the very first sight of Bhagavan, Daivarata was swept away by Bhagavan's spontaneous abidance in the Self, a state extolled in all the four Vedas. Bhagavan permitted him to stay with Kavyakantha up on the hill and wherever Kavyakantha went, Daivarata followed him.

Once, Daivarata was staying with Kavyakantha at the Padaiveedu Renukamba temple. He was doing severe penance in the vicinity of the deity. One day, some verses started emerging from his lips. After observing this for two days, Kavyakantha realized that it was a Rig Vedic metrical expression. Daivarata

was revealing some of the lost mantras of the Rig Veda. As Daivarata was in ecstasy, some words were not audible. But most of them were taken down by Kavyakantha. These verses along with a commentary on them written by Kavyakantha was later published under the title *Chandodarsana*.

Kavyakantha passed away in 1936. Having lost his mentor, Daivarata left for Nepal. He felt that Nepal was the place where he could satiate his thirst for Vedic knowledge. Moreover, he felt comfortable in Nepal as its king supported him in his quest for Vedic knowledge. But wherever he went, he was in constant touch with Bhagavan through letters. Bhagavan would wait for his letters and would respond to them by writing, by thought, or simply by communicating his grace. In every letter that Daivarata wrote from Nepal, the last line would be, "Always at the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan."

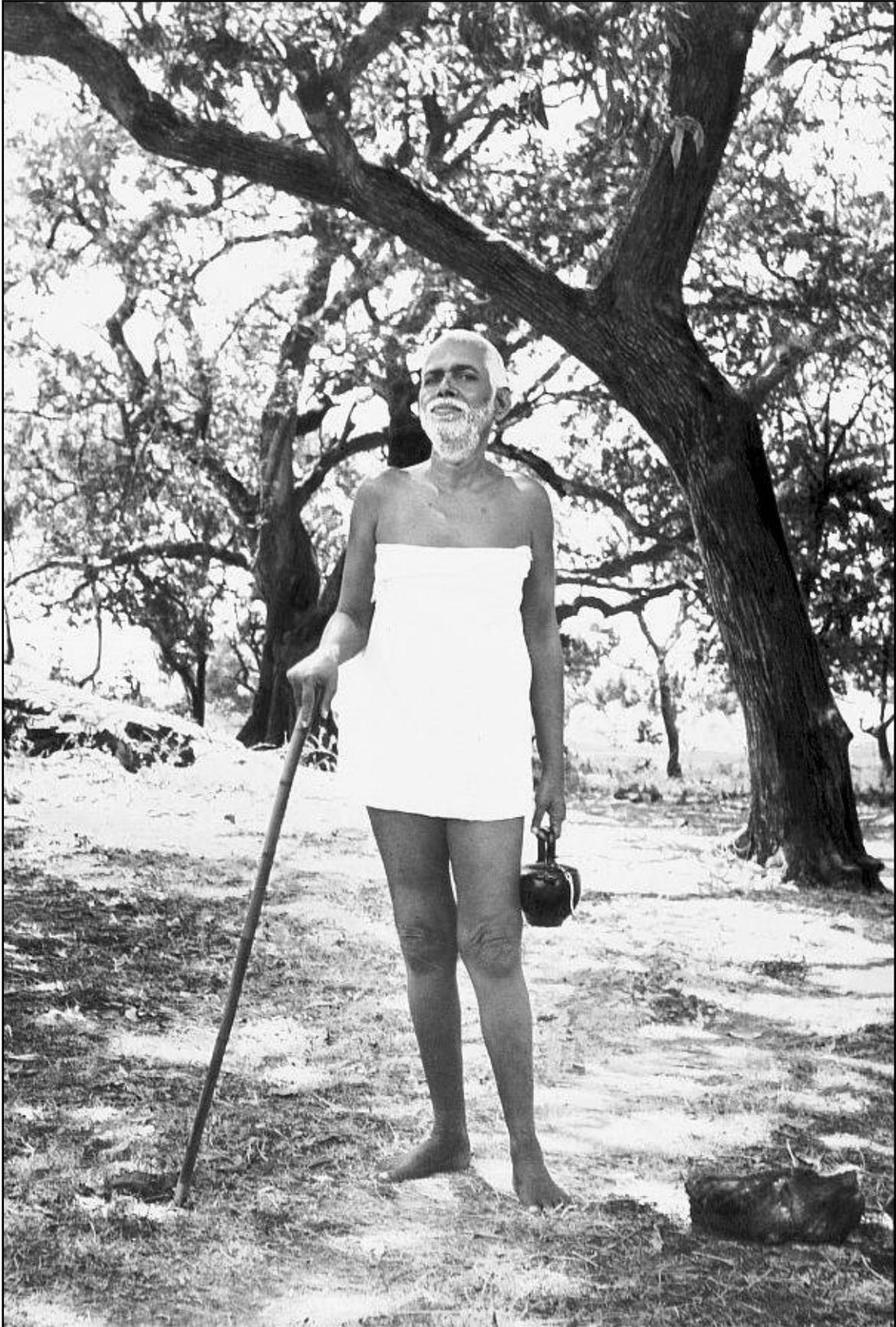
I had the great good fortune of receiving this holy man at Sri Ramanasramam in 1960. One sight was enough for me to see that here was a Vedic *rishi*. Although at that time he was also called a *maharshi*, he did not use that title at Ramanasramam. Yet, I could feel that he was a *maharshi*. I had the good fortune of serving him though his wants were very few. Being a staunch Hindu, he revered cows and used to drink cow's urine. With just a cup full of cow's urine and some margosa leaves he could live happily for days. So much so, that Bhagavan himself has talked about Daivarata's austerity.

Having renounced the world by then and being very young, I wanted to know more and more about Bhagavan. This great man was so child like, it was easy for me to approach him and ask anything. "Swami, you have to tell me all about Bhagavan as a man and also Bhagavan as God." He smiled at me - perhaps he was laughing at my ignorance - and uttered just one sentence, "Bhagavan was God living in the garb of a man." He had described Bhagavan as man and God in one sentence.

He went on to say that Bhagavan had tremendous powers but was hiding them. Immediately I asked, "What do you mean by that? Can you give an example?" Daivarata said, "Yes, I can tell you but can you understand that?" I replied, "Tell me and I will try." He said "Bhagavan has the power to go back to the past and alter the past." I replied, "Not only can I not understand, I do not even know what you are talking about." He was kind enough to share with me what he had experienced: Once, in 1940, he was wandering around the snowy peaks of the Himalayas, immersed in meditation. Suddenly, he noticed tears dropping from his eyes and wanted to know the reason for it. Then, some force or power from his Heart revealed to him that it was his separation from Bhagavan that was causing this anguish. Immediately, without any preparation, he headed straight for Arunachala. The journey took him fifteen days. As soon as he came, he went and stood in front of Bhagavan with tears of joy. On seeing him, Bhagavan said, "Just a few moments back I thought of you and had a strong urge to see you, and now you are here!" Daivarata called me his namesake as he was also Ganesa. He said, "Hey, my namesake, have you understood?" I said, "No, I have not understood." Daivarata explained, "Though Bhagavan had said 'just a few moments back', it travelled fifteen days back and gave me a push to start my journey towards him. He even made me shed tears and realize that he was calling me. Bhagavan then went walking on the hill and I followed. Bhagavan told me, 'Abide in the Heart. Remember the Heart is Arunachala.' Bhagavan had called me to him all the way from the Himalayas to give me this last message. Ever since then, Bhagavan constantly lives in my Heart as Arunachala."

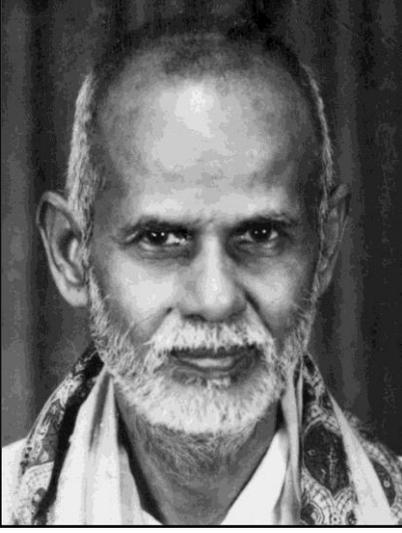


Tank at Palaakothu



*Bhagavan at Palaakothu*

## K. Lakshmana Sarma (Who)



Extraordinary Sanskrit poets like Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, Jagadisa Shastri, Kapali Shastri and Daivarata were devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. So was Muruganar, arguably, one of the greatest Tamil poets of the last millennium. There was another equally great poet and scholar who became a devotee of Bhagavan. He was great not because he was famous, but because he completely renounced recognition for himself. So self effacing was he, that he wrote *Mahayoga*, a masterly treatise on Bhagavan's Self Enquiry, under the pseudonym 'Who'. Only in the more recent editions of *Mahayoga* do we find his name - Lakshmana Sarma.

A lawyer and a naturopath by profession, Lakshmana Sarma came to the ashram in 1928. One look from Bhagavan was enough to mesmerize him. One day, Bhagavan asked him, "Have you read *Ulladu Narpadu*?" *Ulladu Narpadu* consists of forty verses composed by Bhagavan in classical Tamil. The work embodies Bhagavan's teachings on reality and the path to abide in it. Lakshmana Sarma

replied that he hadn't read the work, adding, "I do not know classical Tamil." Being an ardent and astute seeker, he was quick enough to suggest, "If Bhagavan teaches me, I will learn it." Truly has it been said that if we take one step towards God, he takes ninety nine steps towards us. Lakshmana Sarma's response made it evident that he was making the effort and taking the first step. Therefore, the master gave him private lessons in classical Tamil. Bhagavan explained to Lakshmana Sarma the nuances of the Tamil language and he absorbed the teaching almost effortlessly. Soon, Bhagavan started explaining *Ulladu Narpadu* and its supplement, *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*. The relationship between the guru and the disciple is extraordinary because the *satguru* does not actually pass on information that the disciple does not know; what he does is, make the disciple aware that he is the truth and this is what *Ulladu Narpadu* reveals.

Bhagavan was as compassionate as ever and the daily sessions with Lakshmana Sarma were long and in depth. Later on, when the book was published - Lakshmana Sarma never intended for it to be a book - he described the sessions that he had with Bhagavan and how he worked on what Bhagavan taught him. During this time, Lakshmana Sarma lived in a hut in Palaakothu. Since he was a Sanskrit scholar, when he returned to his hut at night, he would compile all the knowledge that he had gathered into a verse in Sanskrit. He would show the verse to Bhagavan the next day and Bhagavan would read it and correct it. Occasionally, Bhagavan would respond with a look of dissatisfaction and then Lakshmana Sarma would rework that verse. Bhagavan never believed in criticizing anyone or pointing out their mistakes, but close devotees could read the expression in his eyes or on his face. This rigorous routine continued, not for a few days or a few months, but for three years. In today's age of computers, we want everything, including truth, to be explained with the click of a mouse. But look at the enormous toil of Lakshmana Sarma in his attempt to unfold the truth!

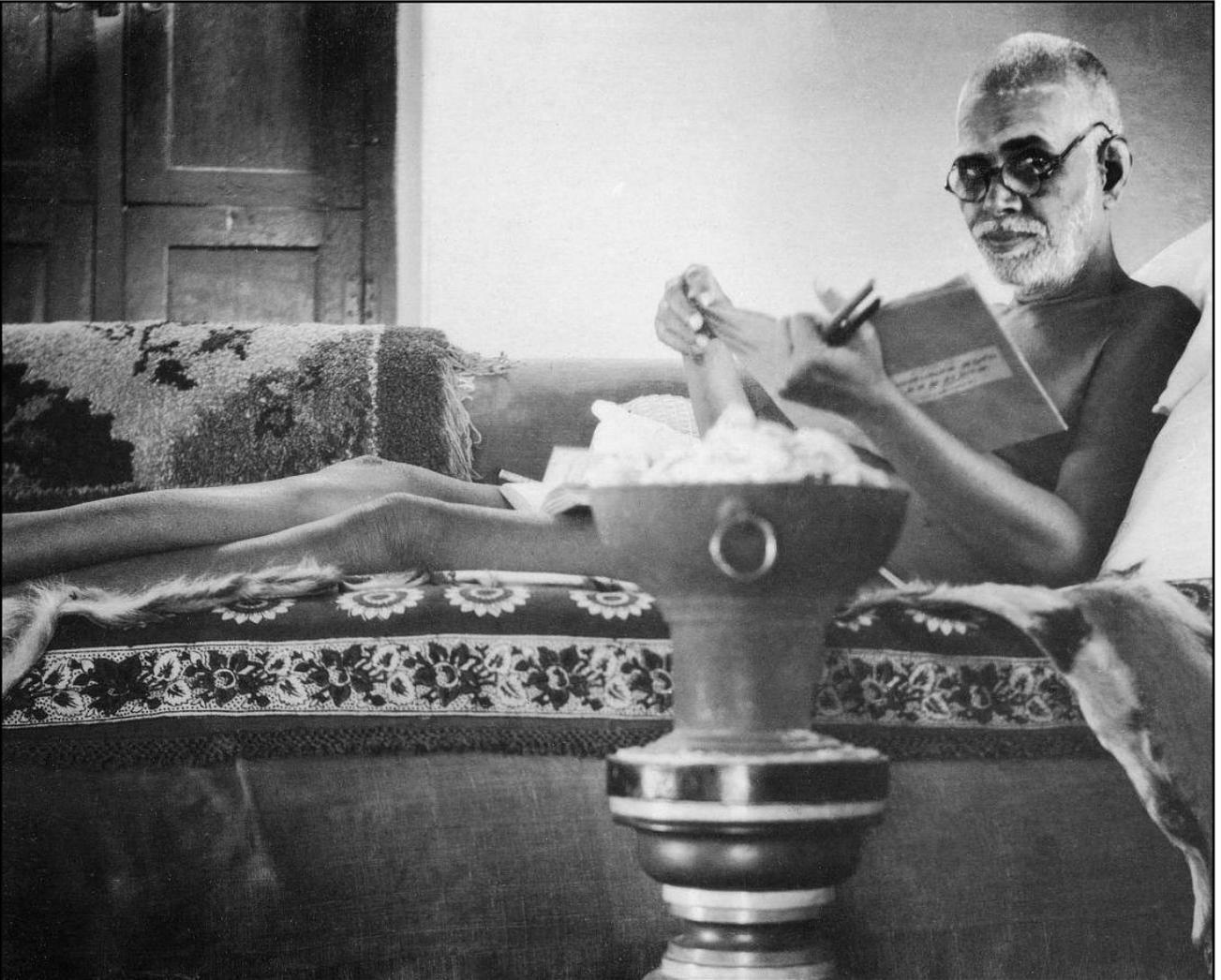
To quote Lakshmana Sarma: "Bhagavan began to teach me. I needed to proceed slowly, going from one verse to another. I had to make sure that I understood what Bhagavan had taught me. So I composed verses in Sanskrit that embodied the meaning that he had imparted. Before proceeding to the next verse, I would submit the verse to Bhagavan to make sure that I had faithfully translated what he had said. If I didn't get quite the approval I wanted, I would work on the verse again and again until he was satisfied. This is how I studied all the verses and translated them into Sanskrit. I was unable to stop with the first translation because *Ulladu Narpadu* had taken complete possession of me and I felt compelled to keep on revising the Sanskrit verses. After translating the first forty verses, I went back and reworked them. It seemed to me that no amount of time and labour would be too much for achieving the end I had in mind." The Sanskrit text was given the title *Sadarshanam* (*The Vision of Reality*). Lakshmana Sarma put in such relentless work that Bhagavan, who rarely commented on people, observed, "For Lakshmana Sarma it is *tapas*. He revised the work again and again and lived by it." The almost perfect and flawless rendering into Sanskrit was what Lakshmana Sarma strove for and achieved.

Around the time when Lakshmana Sarma had almost completed the Sanskrit verses, Kapali Shastri was also in the ashram. When he was asked to read the verses, he remarked, "I will send it to my master Kavyakantha Ganapathi Muni. He will go through the Sanskrit and suggest changes, if necessary." The work was sent to Kavyakantha who was in Sirsi at that time. Kavyakantha was struck by the profundity of the subject matter in the forty verses. Being an extempore poet without parallel, he composed verses afresh, instead of editing what had been written. Some of his admirers had these new verses printed as a book titled *Sadarshanam* and sent it to Kapali Shastri who then wrote a commentary on it. This happened sometime around 1930. Though Bhagavan appreciated the poetic quality of Kavyakantha's verses, Lakshmana Sarma found that the translation was not accurate. He went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, the translation has deviated from the original in many places." Having worked for three long years on the content, both in Tamil and in Sanskrit, he was very convinced of what he was saying. Bhagavan's attitude always was that it was better to state the correct facts than point out mistakes in something or someone. He told Lakshmana Sarma, "If you feel you can expound the teaching more faithfully, why not write your own commentary?" This encouraged Lakshmana Sarma to write the commentary based on the elaborate notes he had taken down while listening to Bhagavan.

The editor of a Tamil monthly magazine wanted to publish the commentary as a series. Every time the magazine came, Bhagavan would cut out the pages of the commentary and with keen interest, paste these pages on a sheet of brown paper and preserve them. Once the entire commentary had been published, he himself stitched these pages into a book. When the devotees noticed Bhagavan's great interest in the commentary, they decided to get it printed. However, for some reason, the ashram was unable to print the commentary. So Lakshmana Sarma himself brought out a private edition of the book called *Ulladu Narpadu Urai*, not for personal reasons, but because of Bhagavan's interest.

Soon after the commentary was published, an interesting incident took place. One day, Bhagavan's brother Chinna Swami, the manager of the ashram, was busy in the ashram office with some clerical work. He was so absorbed in it that he did not observe Bhagavan patiently waiting to get his attention from behind a window. Bhagavan could have very well called out to him, but he would never do that. After some fifteen minutes, someone else noticed Bhagavan and told Chinna Swami, "Bhagavan is waiting for you behind your window." Bhagavan then said, "Pichai," (that was the way Bhagavan addressed his brother), "Everyone acclaims Lakshmana Sarma's commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu* as the best so far. Nobody has studied the text the way Lakshmana Sarma has. I think it would be fitting for the ashram to publish the work." Chinna Swami took the hint and the ashram published it immediately. Chinna Swami himself studied the work and recommended it to everyone, saying, "Please read *Ulladu Narpadu Urai*. It is a true reflection of Bhagavan's teaching." *Ulladu Narpadu Urai* was acclaimed the best publication of the year. Even today, it is considered a great Tamil edition.

Muruganar once told me, "Lakshmana Sarma lived *Ulladu Narpadu*." When I asked him what he meant by that statement, he clarified, "Whatever was conveyed by the master in *Ulladu Narpadu*, Lakshmana Sarma practised to the core." He lived, breathed and thought only about those forty, glorious and sacred verses. Since he was a scholar of English, Tamil and Sanskrit, he constantly kept translating the verses into these languages. The introductory sentences of his translation reveal the great adoration he had for the master: "The ancient lore, the *Upanishads*, has received a striking confirmation from the life and teachings of the sage of Arunachala - Bhagavan Ramana. To all his disciples, both from the east and the west, the written and oral teachings of Bhagavan are the primary revelations. The ancient lore is of value because it is found to be in full accord with the teachings of Bhagavan. But, even for those who look upon the ancient lore as the primary authority, the teachings of a living sage must be profoundly interesting. In these pages, a systematic presentation of the old and new revelations is sought to be given." His English translation of his original Tamil book was titled *Mahayoga*. For many years, this remained the only English book that was an authentic rendering of Bhagavan's teaching of *atma vichara* or Self Enquiry. It was only after Bhagavan's *mahasamadhi* that other English publications such as Arthur Osborne's books and Munagala Venkatramiah's *Talks with Ramana Maharshi* were made available in English. These books gave the English reading audience greater access to the direct teachings of Bhagavan.



*Bhagavan with glasses reading final proofs of 'Ulladu Narpadu'*

What made Lakshmana Sarma give the book such a title? Towards the end of chapter nine of the book, a beautiful chapter called *The Quest*, Lakshmana Sarma reveals why he called it *Mahayoga*. “Bhagavan once said that the question ‘Who am I?’ is the quest that one has to undertake. Since all the yogas are included in the question ‘Who am I?’ it is called *mahayoga*.” As usual, Bhagavan did not buy the published version of the book. He said, “Who has the money to buy it?” As was his wont, he bound the final proofs of the manuscript and preserved it since he himself had spent many hours correcting the proofs. Around this time, while going through the ancient *Kurmapurana*, Bhagavan found a Sanskrit verse which he transcribed at the bottom of the ninth chapter. The Sanskrit verse read, “The yoga in which one sees the Self and which Lord Siva declares is ‘me’, the one immaculate, eternal bliss, is considered to be *mahayoga* pertaining to the supreme Lord.”

Lakshmana Sarma and Muruganar were both great friends and ardent devotees of Bhagavan. These giants came to Bhagavan without any knowledge of *Vedanta* or *Advaita*. So, they could imbibe whatever Bhagavan told them. Muruganar had already written *Guru Vachaka Kovai* or *The Garland of the Guru’s Sayings* in the form of Tamil poetry. Muruganar and Lakshmana Sarma selected three hundred verses and the latter translated them into English prose. He named the work *Guru Ramana Vachana Mala*. Lakshmana Sarma also wrote *Sri Ramana Hridayam* in Sanskrit; he translated this into English and published it under the title *Revelation*. All these English books are of great value to those who know only English as it gives them direct access to Bhagavan’s teachings. When someone asked why he wrote all his books under the pseudonym of ‘Who’, he replied, “These books contain all that I have learned from my master Bhagavan and my friend Muruganar. So ‘who’ wrote them?”

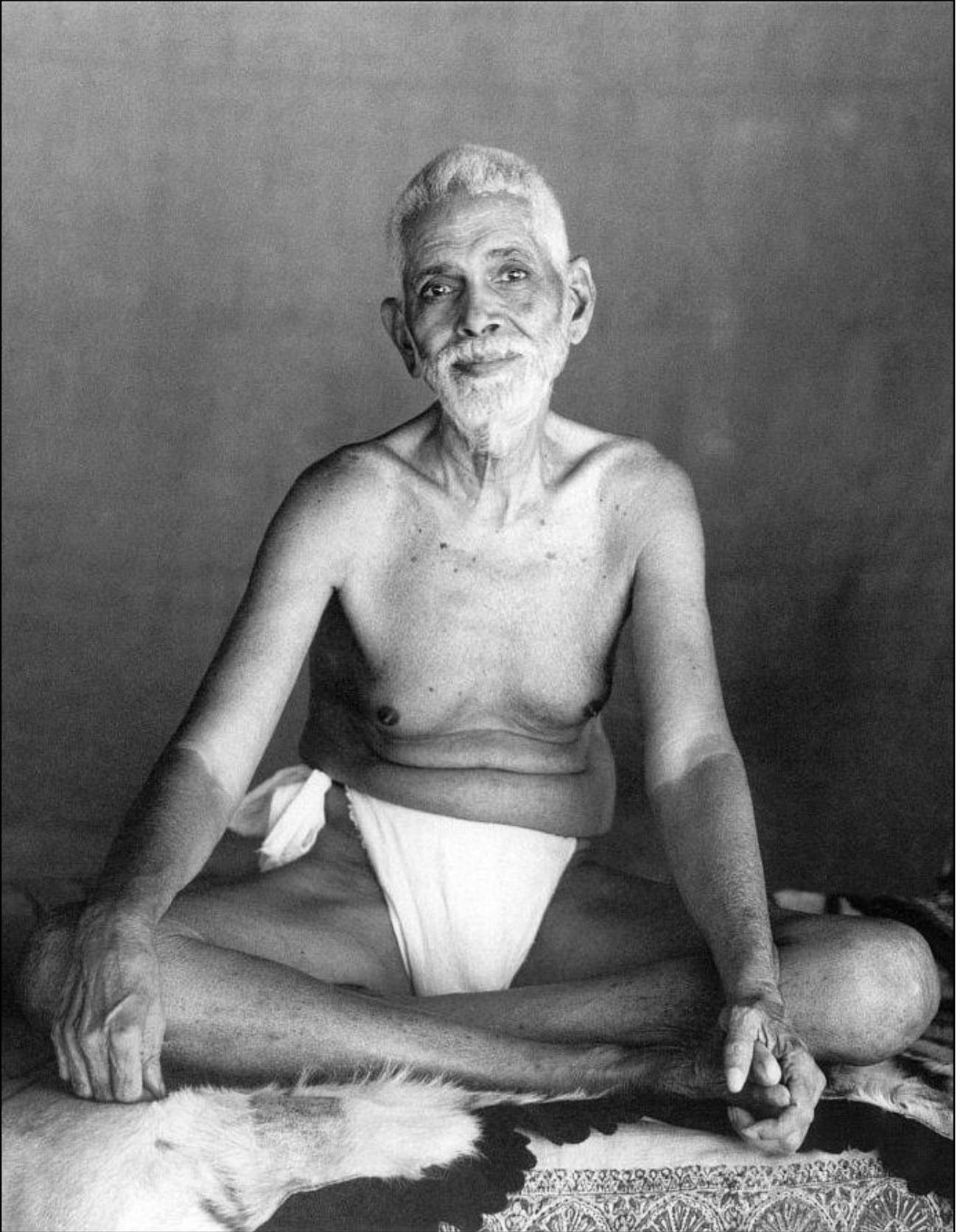
Lakshmana Sarma believed in naturopathy and went back to his village in order to treat people. His book *Nature Cure* dedicated to Bhagavan is considered the most authoritative book on the subject. He also wrote a Sanskrit book on nature cure called *Svadeena Svasthya Mahavidya*. He is considered to be the father of naturopathy in India. Yet, his mind was always tuned to the teachings of Bhagavan. Even after Bhagavan gave up his body in 1950, he continued composing Sanskrit verses on the teachings of Bhagavan and gave his collection of 700 verses the title *Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad*. The ashram brought out the book in English. This ‘Upanishad of Supreme Knowledge’ is a boon to Ramana devotees. The following verses from *Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad* composed by Lakshmana Sarma, embody the teachings of Bhagavan beautifully:

*Verse 479: “Just as waves are only the ocean and the dream world is only the seer of the dream and nothing else, so the whole world is only my Self and nothing more. This perception is the merging of the world in the Self.”*

*Verse 504: “Since the ancient declaration, ‘You are That’ settles one in one’s real Self, disentangled from the veiling sheaths, one is ever the supreme reality (the impersonal being) alone. Only through the quest of the Self, one experiences the identity of one’s Self and the supreme reality.”*

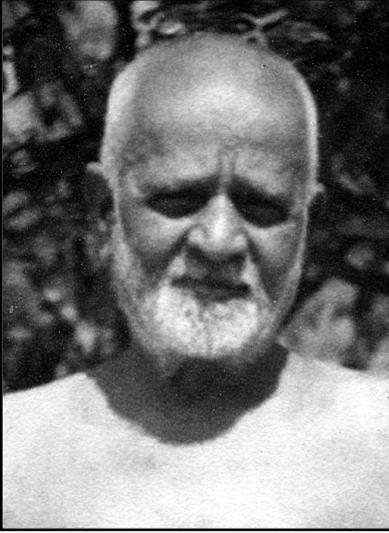
*Verse 505: “When through Self Enquiry one gives up the notion, ‘I am the body’ and seeks the Self, one becomes fully aware of one’s true nature and thus is firmly established in the Heart, where the Supreme Being shines as one’s true Self.”*

*Verse 506: “The quest of the Self alone is the direct path to right awareness of the Self. Meditation is only a preliminary aid to this quest by way of making one transcend the hurdle that one is the body.”*



*Sri Bhagavan in the Old Hall*

## Munagala Venkataramiah



In September, 1896, a young school boy who was studying in Madurai, went home to his mother and reported, "Mother, a Brahmin boy from a neighbouring school has run away from home." Little did he know that destiny would bind him to that same runaway boy, his namesake, that he would meet this boy, now an acknowledged sage, at Skandashram in 1918, and that from 1930 onwards, he would remain his constant companion till the end. This young school boy was S. Venkataraman, later known as Munagala S. Venkataramiah, the compiler of *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, a book that is almost a bible for all sincere devotees of Bhagavan.

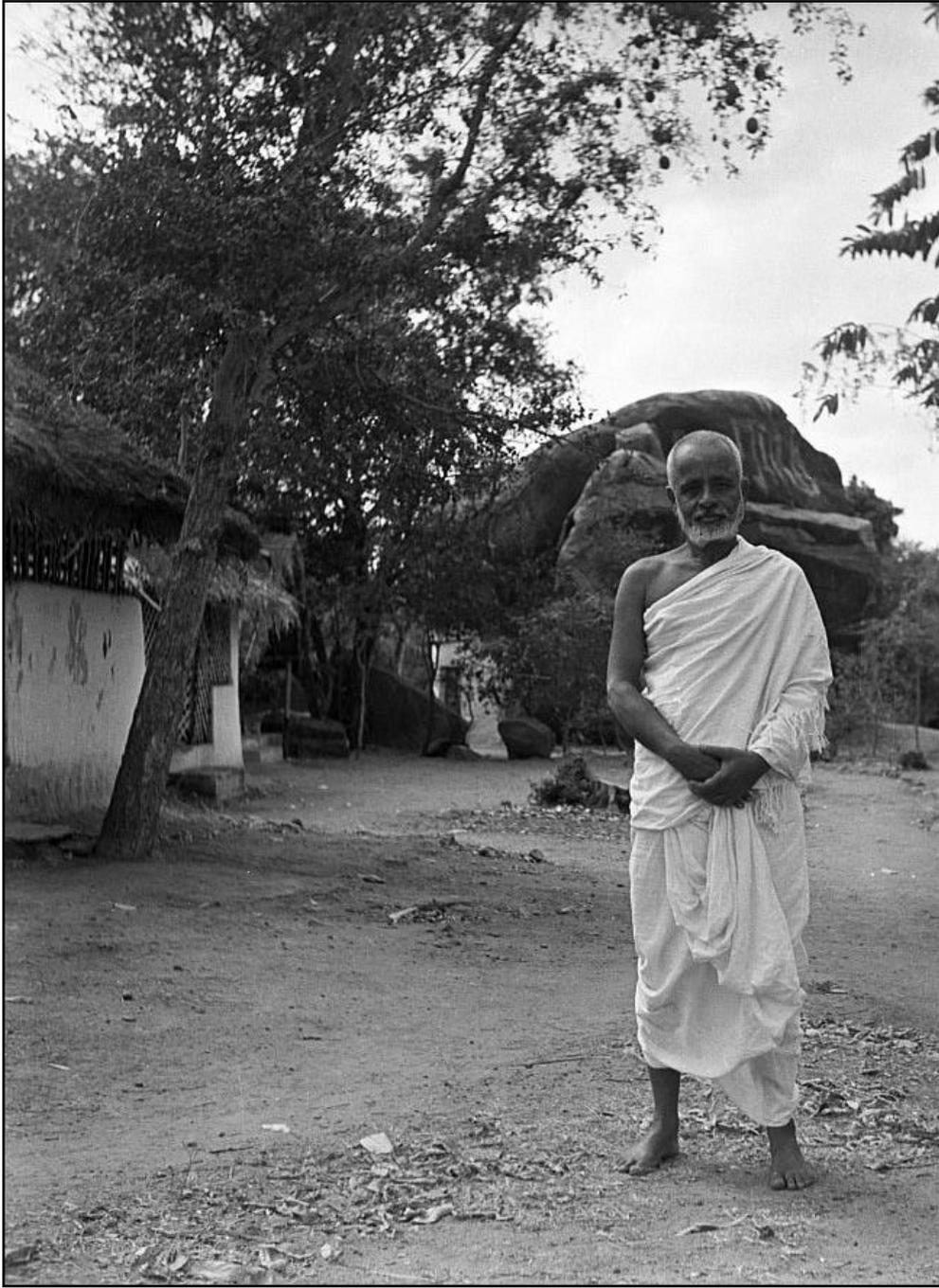
Munagala Venkataramiah came from a village called Sholavandan. His ancestors and his own brothers studied the *Vedas* in the *Veda patashala* there. He knew Sanskrit well, but chose to go to an English school in the next town. Subsequently, he went on to study in a college. He got married even as he was studying. Since he was research oriented, he found himself a job in a laboratory in Mumbai. A

daughter was born and though he was extremely fond of his daughter, he focussed all his attention on his research work. After doing extensive research for ten years, he went back to college. He graduated from Presidency College with a gold medal and then taught in one of the prestigious colleges in Chennai from 1912 to 1918. Even during this period, he led the life of an ascetic. Professors were given huge houses to stay in on the campus. He requested his wife and daughter to stay in the huge house, while he himself lived in the small outhouse meant for the watchman. Such was his simplicity. Even in those days, Munagala Venkataramiah was eager to pursue the spiritual life. He met a *mahatma* who taught him the ten *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Brahma Sutra*. (The *mahatma* told Venkataramiah to read the *Upanishads* every day and this is exactly what he did till the end of his life. He had all the *Upanishads* on his table and any time he felt inclined to, he would read them.)

Some time later, his daughter, whom he loved very dearly, passed away. He was plunged in grief and inconsolable. Restlessly, he started wandering, seeking peace. He reached Arunachala in 1918. He was told of a sage who lived in Skandashram. When he went there, he came to know that the sage was the very same runaway boy of his childhood, now known as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. However, he had to leave as his service to the *mahatma* near Chennai could not be interrupted. In 1922, the *mahatma* passed away, plunging Venkataramiah in greater sorrow. The *mahatma's* last words to his student were to continue reading the *Upanishads*. Munagala Venkataramiah continued studying these texts for the next five years. He visited Bhagavan once again in 1927 at Ramanasramam. During this visit, he recognised fully that Sri Ramana was his *satguru* and from then on stayed at the ashram. These are Munagala's own words: "In a very critical and distressing period of his life, a humble devotee (referring to himself) sought the presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi for his own peace of mind, and lived in the ashram with the kind permission of Sri Niranjanananda Swami."

One day, he got a letter from the Government of India extending a job offer as head of the research department in Delhi. The job was a very lucrative one and would have given Munagala both name and fame. The offer was in recognition of his discovery of a chemical that helped ink from solidifying. Prior to this discovery, people found it extremely difficult to write with a pen because the ink would constantly dry up. Munagala showed Bhagavan the job offer. Since Bhagavan's reaction did not seem encouraging, he turned it down. In the presence of and under the guidance of Bhagavan, Munagala plunged into *sadhana*. He started living at Palaakothu.

Telugu was the mother tongue of Venkataramiah. He spoke English and Tamil fluently and was well versed in Sanskrit. However, he felt it necessary to be acquainted with literary Tamil. Bhagavan then introduced him to Tamil works, especially Saiva Siddhanta treatises written by Saivite saints.



*Munagala Venkataramiah at Palaakothe, in front of his cottage and the cave he meditated in*

Bhagavan himself taught them to him. These were essential for one who was later to become the compiler of *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*. To quote Munagala (again, putting himself in the third person): “The seeker took it upon himself to note down, as occasions arose, the sweet, refreshing and enlightening words of the master. This self imposed task was undertaken for the purification of his own mind, and better understanding of the subtle and profound words of Sri Bhagavan.”

When Bhagavan answered the question of a seeker, it was not the number of words that made the answers so intense but the fact that the words were charged with a deeper meaning. Hence, translation took time. Sometimes, seekers asked questions in English or other languages and this had to be translated into Tamil for Bhagavan; Bhagavan would then give the answer in Tamil and Munagala would translate the answer into the language concerned. He had to be totally faithful to the translation.

Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan writes in his foreword to *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, “We cannot be too grateful to Munagala S. Venkataramiah for the record that he kept of the ‘Talks’ covering a period of four years from 1935 to 1939. Those devotees, who had the good fortune of seeing Bhagavan, reminisce and recall with delight their own mental record of the words of the master. Despite the fact that the great sage of Arunachala taught for the most part through silence, he did instruct through speech also, and that too, lucidly, without baffling and beclouding the minds of his listeners. One would wish that every word that he uttered had been preserved for posterity.”

Major Chadwick in his introduction to the *Talks* writes, “The four years that are covered in *Talks* were the days when the ashram reached the summit of its glory. Maharshi’s health was on the whole good and the hall where he sat was open day and night to welcome one and all. Visitors flocked there from every corner of the world; there was hardly a country that was not represented at one time or another. Sri Bhagavan glowed like the sun, and even those who did not understand him or agree with his words were fascinated and could not help but be elevated by his presence.”

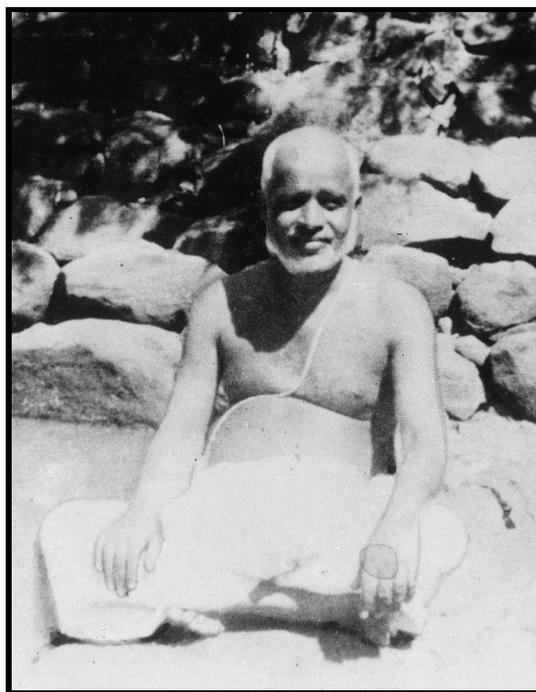
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa had Mahendranath Gupta, ‘M’, a school teacher, as his English interpreter. Here, Munagala was Bhagavan’s ‘M’. Munagala kept a record of whatever he interpreted. He would then take the notebook to Bhagavan, who would edit or correct what had been written. That is how we have *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*. I have seen the original manuscript myself, in the form of note books, with Bhagavan’s corrections. I also had the honour of typing some of those handwritten manuscripts along with devotees like ‘Typist’ Kittu and Ramamani. The whole typed bulk was submitted to a committee of selected devotees, most of who were staying in Chennai. When the edited bulk was returned, it was handed over to Munagala and Chadwick for further verification. Pages after pages were struck off with red ink, with one repeated remark on the margin, “Repetition”. When Chadwick saw those deletions, he got so upset and angry that he rushed into the office and shouted, “Who are these people to delete passages quoted from Bhagavan? Bhagavan has a special purpose in repeating the same passage worded differently. It is to suit each seeker’s individual understanding capacity. Not a single word should be removed. They were all verified and approved by Bhagavan.” His exhortation was carried out. We owe the present full version of *Talks* to Chadwick. Major Chadwick had the highest respect for the veracity of Munagala’s capacity. So much so, Chadwick once humourously said, “Munagala is the English mouth of Bhagavan.”



*Family of Munagala Venkataramiah : wife, and daughter Kamakshi*

Bhagavan sensing the intelligence and enthusiasm of his disciple, asked Munagala to translate ancient texts like *Tripura Rahasya*, *Advaita Bodha Deepika* and *Kaivalya Navaneetam*. It is an interesting story how *Tripura Rahasya* came to be translated by Munagala into English. Once, Daivarata, who was staying at Nepal, sent Bhagavan a hand copied manuscript of a Sanskrit text entitled *Tripura Rahasya* that he had read at the royal library. Bhagavan was happy reading it and expressed that a translation of it in English would help seekers who could not read Sanskrit. Munagala volunteered to undertake that work. On reading the English version, Chadwick was so happy that he offered help to type it and arrange for a special black leather cloth binding for it. It was then presented to Bhagavan, who kept it in the revolving library shelf next to his couch. It was lent to serious seekers who were keen to read ancient Advaitic texts. Bhagavan appreciated this English translation by Munagala so much that he encouraged him to translate *Kaivalya Navaneetam* (Tamil) and *Advaita Bodha Deepika* (Sanskrit) into English. They were also typed, leather bound, and kept in the library next to Bhagavan's couch. Only later were they printed as ashram publications. With the cooperation of David Mclver, Venkataramiah had already translated into English, Bhagavan's *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* - five heart melting Tamil poems to Arunachala. This was the seed and foundation for the future edition of Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi that was edited by Arthur Osborne. The close association between Bhagavan and Munagala is a paradigmatic example for true *guru-sishya* relationship.

Munagala was a personification of peace, calmness and inner happiness. A welcoming smile always adorned his serene face. He hardly mingled with the crowd. Except for worship at the shrine of Bhagavan and coming to have food at the dining hall, he was rarely seen in the public. The rest of the time, he was inside his room reading the *Upanishads*. He inspired many seekers, not through preaching but by his quiet, spiritual life. I was fortunate enough to come in close contact with him and be inspired by his exemplary life. That is the marvellous spiritual trait I have observed in all old devotees - they inspired the younger generation through their own living as the truth, rather than preaching about truth.



*Munagala absorbed in his relentless daily sadhana of immersion in 'Inner Silence' at Palaakothu*

Two significant incidents in my own life show how Munagala guided young seekers: When I settled at Ramanasramam in 1960, a few old devotees criticised Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni to me. They claimed that many of Kavyakantha's accounts were merely figments of his imagination. I felt distressed. I approached Munagala, who had not seen Kavyakantha and was neutral about him. When I asked him why well read devotees slighted the veracity of Kavyakantha's accounts, he told me, "It is not good for you to accuse any one, especially devotees of Bhagavan. How did you come to know about the

accusations against that great man? Were they not the opinions of others? Opinions sprout from the mind. Truth sparkles only from the Heart. Whenever you have doubts, turn instantly your attention to Bhagavan and do not take to other's opinions. Bhagavan will guide you. Bhagavan has extolled Kavyakantha's immense capacity for knowledge and dedication to truth. For instance, one day Bhagavan spoke appreciatively of Kavyakantha for about an hour - how he wrote *Uma Sahasram* and *Hara Sahasram*, how he taught his students the ancient scriptures, how meek and humble he was though so learned and capable; how austere he was in doing *japa* and how well he achieved what he aspired for. Also, when the news of Kavyakantha's passing away reached Bhagavan in 1936, he remarked, "When are we going to see another like Nayana?" I thanked him from within my heart for this soul elevating explanation.

Another day, a lady saint named Mother Rama Devi came to the ashram. She had a lot of followers. She would go into a trance whenever some verses were sung. One evening, Munagala came to my room and invited me to attend a *bhajan* session of Rama Devi. I told him that I was not interested and added, "I have my Bhagavan. That is enough for me." Munagala turned to me with childlike innocence and said, "You have read books on Ramakrishna Paramahansa, haven't you?" "Yes, Swami," I replied. "You must have read about the fact that Sri Ramakrishna used to go into a state of *bhava samadhi*. We have only read about it but have never experienced the state. Rama Devi goes into that divine state. This is not a psychic state; it is a purely spiritual state. To my knowledge, and to the knowledge of others, after Sri Ramakrishna, only Mother Rama Devi is able to attain that spiritual state." Munagala then took my hand and gently led me to the hall and made me sit next to him. The *bhajan* was going on and Rama Devi was deep in meditation. In the midst of the *bhajan*, she got up abruptly. Munagala told me, "She has gone into *bhava samadhi*. Keep looking at her and be reverential." The *bhajan* was about the mother goddess destroying the demon. Rama Devi enacted the scene, dancing as if she had the sword in her hand and was slaying the demon. Rama Devi was big built. So, it was astonishing to see her quick, swirling movements. Finally she went into a *samadhi* after slaying the demon, just like the *Puranas* say. She stood on one leg, holding the imaginary head of the demon in one hand and the sword in the other. Munagala whispered to me, "With that kind of built, it is virtually impossible to stand on one leg. It is only the Lord who supports her in that position." I have always been attached to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and have wondered about how *bhava samadhi* looked like. Now, through Munagala, this wish of mine was fulfilled. I was in some kind of muddled state and Rama Devi released me from that.

Whenever I went to Munagala's room, he would be reading the *Upanishads*. One day, I asked him, "You are the direct disciple of Bhagavan. Why are you always reading the scriptures instead of practising Self Enquiry?" Munagala's voice almost melted as he said, "This *parayana* is what my teacher told me to do. I asked Bhagavan whether I should take it up as my *sadhana* and Bhagavan confirmed that I should read these every day, all the time. Reading the scriptures is a fully authentic *sadhana* for a serious seeker. It is pure joy to be with *Upanishads*!" (*Parayana* is done only to recollect the Self which is ever attained. Sri Bhagavan had already revealed the ever revealed Self to him.)

Munagala had another daughter - Kamakshi. She was a child prodigy and was a Sanskrit scholar. By the time she was nine years old, she had mastered almost all the great Sanskrit works. While still in her teens, she would confidently enter into debates and hold dialogues with scholars on those subjects and win. In spite of her youth, she seemed to be more knowledgeable. Bhagavan was compassionate enough to turn her intellectual knowledge into devotional wisdom. (Once, a devotee asked Bhagavan, "Is your teaching not merely intellectual?" Bhagavan replied, "I preach devotional enquiry.") Early one morning, Bhagavan called Kamakshi into the hall as she was passing by. He gave her *Srimad Bhagavatam*, a book of supreme wisdom soaked in devotion mostly dealing with the life and teaching of Lord Krishna. He indicated a place in the hall and asked her to sit there and read the book. When people started coming into the hall, he called her, asked for the book, marked the place that she was at with a book mark and told her to come the next day. He asked her to come every day until the book was finished, until she had imbibed the *Bhagavatham's* fusion of wisdom and devotion.



On another day, he called her and gave her a small slip of paper. On it was written the mantra, 'Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya'. She read out the mantra in her beautiful, stentorian voice. Bhagavan looked at her intently and so Kamakshi asked, "Bhagavan, should I chant this every day?" Bhagavan

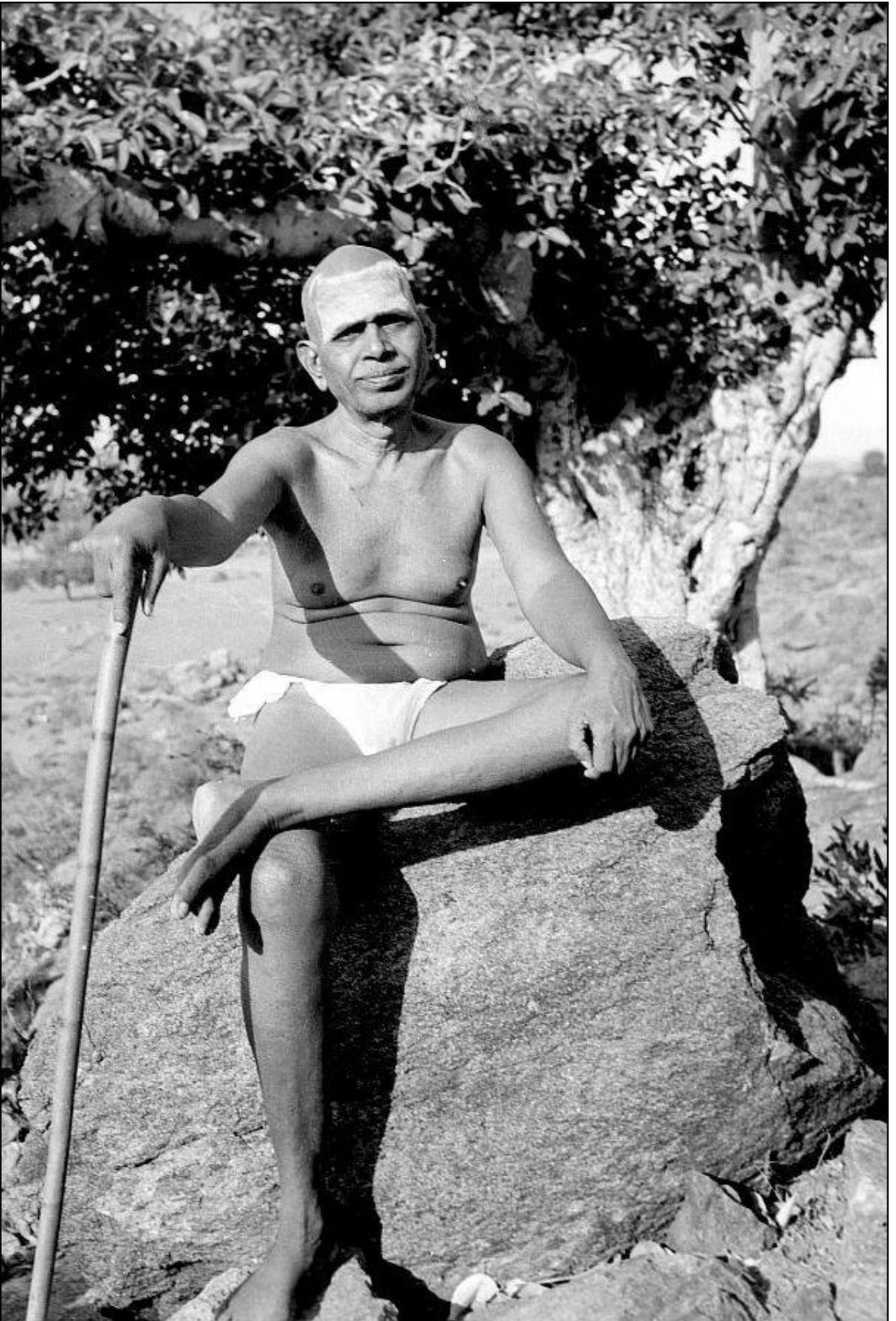
replied, "Always." He took back the slip from her and put it in the stove which was burning in front of him. This act signified that an oath had been taken and Kamakshi had chosen to abide by what Bhagavan had said. 'Om Namo Bhagavathe Sri Ramanaya' means 'obeisance to Bhagavan Sri Ramana'. Kamakshi told me that that act of grace of Bhagavan giving her the mantra completed and fulfilled her devotional approach to perfection. All her life she was chanting this sacred mantra.

In Ramana Nagar, opposite to the ashram and next to Arthur Osborne's house, Kamakshi had a piece of land on which a small house was raised. She could occupy it only after her husband, Dr. Ramachandriah, retired from his professorship in the university. The few years that she lived in that house with her husband were the happiest years of her life. She then fell sick and was taken for treatment, where she was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She preferred to spend her last days, not as medically advised in a far away hospital, but in her own home, at the foot of holy Arunachala and near her *satguru* Ramana's sacred shrine. Every day, I spent a few hours with her. Due to the heavy medication she had to take, her body started to shrink. Kamakshi, a beautiful lady, was unrecognisable towards the end. One day, I broke down and cried, "Why hasn't Bhagavan saved you?" She replied, "You pay attention to my exterior appearance instead of my inner state. I have told you many a time, I am not the body. The gracious glance which Bhagavan bestowed on me, on the very first day of my *darshan* of him, established me in the Self. I rarely identify myself either with the body or the mind. The body has come and it has to go. I am eternally the Self. Release yourself from the illusion of taking the body to be true. I am always happy. I am in bliss." With a gracious smile she added, "I bless you. Totally surrender to Bhagavan. Bhagavan will guide you." Kamakshi passed away within a few days. I was blessed to carry her body to the cremation ground and offer it to the flame of flames - Arunachala.

Lakshmana Sarma and Munagala Venkataramiah are unique in that each of them was totally humble and shunned publicity of any kind. While Lakshmana Sarma hid himself behind the pseudonym 'Who', Munagala did not publish any of his works until Bhagavan's *mahasamadhi*. Many years after the *mahasamadhi*, Munagala showed me the manuscript of his English translation of *Tripura Rahasya* and asked, "Have you seen this?" It was just a comment, not a request to publish it. These two devotees had erased, obliterated, their egos totally. When the book was to be brought out, I told him that I did not understand the meaning of the title. He felt it was very clear. I explained to him that the meaning would not be apparent to all. But he said, "This is what I showed Bhagavan. How can I add something now?" I told him that it would be better if it could be done for the sake of other people. He then added the subtitle *Mystery beyond the Trinity*.

When Bhagavan passed away, Munagala left the ashram and went to stay with his children. However, he was invited to come back to the ashram. In 1955, he took *sannyas* and took on the name Swami Ramanananda Saraswati. When he was absorbed in Arunachala in 1963, in accordance with his specific instructions, his body was interred inside the compound of Kamakshi's house. Munagala Venkataramiah lives eternally as a glowing flame in the raging fire of wisdom - Arunachala Ramanan.





## K. K. Nambiar



In 1932, K. K. Nambiar, a Malayalee civil engineer working for the government, laid the roads in Tiruvannamalai. The first tar road was laid by him from the hospital to Ramanasramam. He was not bothered whether the government would question him on this act. Such was his devotion!

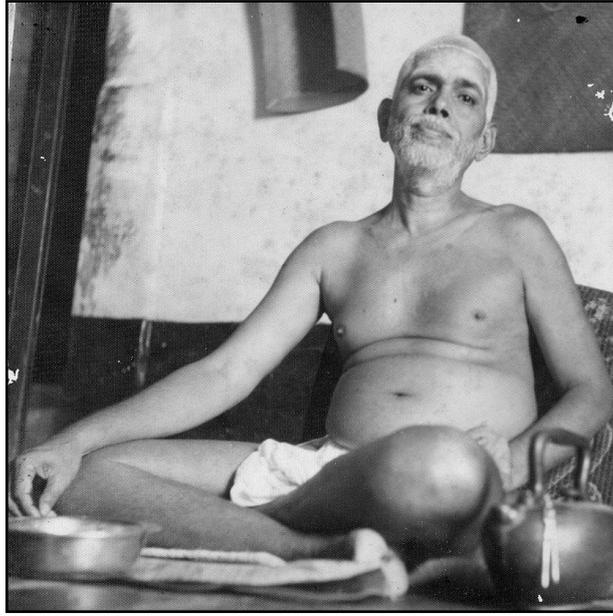
Prior to his visit to the ashram in 1932, a Malayalam translation of the book *Who am I?* came into his hands. The phrase, 'the living Maharshi' caught his eye and he laughed out loud because he thought that *maharshis* had lived maybe thousands of years ago. He felt that the statement was incredible. He mocked the entire writing and refused to believe it. But, the very next day, another friend of his told him, "Do not make a mistake. I have seen him myself. He is a real *maharshi*. Let us go there." This is how he came to Bhagavan. The minute Bhagavan directed his glance at him, he was captivated. When he had to leave after one hour, this is what he felt: "On leaving

the ashram, I felt my heart was being irresistibly attracted to a mighty spiritual magnet, towards that divinity in human form." Grant Duff had earlier described such an experience, but Nambiar had not read the account. He spoke from his own experience.

Nambiar could visit Bhagavan repeatedly from then on because of the grace of the guru. Nambiar's sister's husband was a government medical doctor who was posted in Tiruvannamalai. Nambiar made use of this pretext to visit Bhagavan. Nambiar's brother-in-law was an atheist and referred to all *sadhus* as 'rogues' and 'lazy people'. But again, look at the grace that was flowing! Bhagavan had a toothache and he needed to be attended on. Nambiar's brother-in-law was on duty at the hospital and he had to attend on Bhagavan. He, however, said firmly, "I will treat him only like a patient." The doctor, P. C. Nambiar, with whom I later interacted, said, "Ganesan, I was very arrogant and disrespectful. I told Bhagavan when I went to extract his aching tooth, 'Bhagavan, *vaaya thora*,' meaning, 'open your mouth!' But the touch of Bhagavan brought about a great change; a complete transformation took place and this atheist became a devotee!"

In 1936, K. K. Nambiar himself was transferred to Tiruvannamalai. By this time, his bond with the master had become deeper and stronger in every sense of the term. During a function at the ashram, K. K. Nambiar wanted to have food in the presence of Bhagavan. He kept telling himself, "I would like to see Bhagavan while eating." There was a long queue. But such was the fervour of the devotee, and the grace of the guru, that he found himself seated exactly opposite Bhagavan! When rice was being served, he swelled up with pride and told himself, "How my prayer has been answered!" In Ramanasramam, rice is carried in a big vessel and served. Just as Nambiar was thinking about how his prayers were answered, a ball of rice that was being served to him, rolled down from the plate. Bhagavan looked at Nambiar and said, "*Adu thaanaa vizhundhadhu - thaaney vizhundhadhu*," meaning 'it rolled down by itself'. What he was trying to imply is that one should not indulge in egoistic thinking that one prayed for something and therefore got it. Nambiar told me, "From that very moment when Bhagavan said, 'It rolled down by itself,' a series of miracles started taking place in my life and everything was like a dream."

One day, Bhagavan appeared in his dream. He showed Nambiar a notebook bound in black cloth; he also showed him the thickness of the book, the size, as well as the number of pages. Bhagavan said in the dream, "I want this notebook." Nambiar woke up abruptly and pulled open his drawer. Inside the drawer lay exactly the same book! He grabbed the notebook and ran to Bhagavan, saying, "Bhagavan, you appeared in my dream and asked for this book!" Bhagavan turned to his attendant and said, "I have been asking you for this very same book for the past three days, I have been giving you these specifications. See, Nambiar has brought it!" Bhagavan had been asking the attendant for such a book because he wanted to write down *Ramana Gita* of Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni in Malayalam script. Look at how Nambiar brought the book to Bhagavan! But Nambiar remembered and said, "*Adu thaanaa vizhundhadhu*," meaning that it happened by itself and therefore one must not attribute it to a miracle;



*"Adu taanaa vizhundadhu - taaney vizhunduduthu"*

it happened because of grace.

On another occasion, Nambiar had an even more vivid dream. He dreamt that Bhagavan was seated in the Old Hall where there was a yogi called Sridhar doing *pranayama*. He was so focused on doing *pranayama* that sparks were emanating from his body and even from his head. The yogi was suffering terribly. As Bhagavan looked at Sridhar, he pleaded to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I am suffering. Please help me." Bhagavan immediately replied, "Stop all these gymnastics. Pursue Self Enquiry. That is the safest, simplest, most direct and powerful way of getting to the truth." Nambiar woke up and went to Ramanasramam. He ran into the hall and prostrated before Bhagavan. The yogi, Sridhar, was also in the hall. Nambiar signalled to Sridhar to come out. He narrated his dream and Sridhar very gratefully said, "Thank you. I was suffering so much. I wanted to ask Bhagavan, but I could not gather the courage to do so and I was also not in a condition to ask him. Thank you once again." Nambiar understood from the dreams that one should not be drawn towards miracles, but towards the direct path of Self Enquiry.

Nambiar grew stronger from within because he understood intuitively that God is seated in one's heart. During such moments of realization, he would recall the verse of another great saint, Sadasiva Brahmendra, "Oh Lord, I am not asking anything new from you. Oh Lord, you need not give me anything new. Give me only my own blissful state." Nambiar would constantly repeat it. This induced him to seek *satsang*. When he was in Ramanasramam, he sought out the company of old devotees like Chadwick, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, Munagala Venkatramaiah, Kunju Swami and Viswanatha Swami. As a matter of fact, he would even persuade them to accompany him to Chennai.

Chinna Swami, Bhagavan's brother, sought Nambiar's assistance in managing the ashram. Nambiar went to Bhagavan. Bhagavan gave his approval. From then on, Nambiar lent a hand in the official matters of the ashram. He was able to pursue the path of Self Enquiry and at the same time involve himself in mundane matters. He started his career from the bottom of the rung and reached a very high level. He dealt with colleagues, superiors and subordinates, politicians, government officials and all this must have involved a lot of energy, effort and even conflict. Yet, he is an outstanding example of an individual totally involved in Self Enquiry while at the same time leading an active external life. For him, as Bhagavan told Paul Brunton, "There is no contradiction between the work and wisdom."

Nambiar relied on Bhagavan every second. He used to tell his friends, "Bhagavan is looking after me." During the war, he was stationed in Chennai along with his family. He was a government officer, but even for him, it used to be very difficult to return to Chennai from his travels because the trains would always be full since the military was on the move. People could not reserve tickets. One of Nambiar's friends challenged him one day by asking, "How are you going to return to Chennai? The entire train is full!" Nambiar replied with full conviction, "My Bhagavan will look after me." His friend mocked,

“Including your children, there are five of you. If there was only one person, we could push that person into a compartment.” Nambiar however continued saying, “My Bhagavan will look after me. Do not worry.” Nambiar travelled up to Villupuram and waited for the express train. When it arrived, it seemed to be totally packed. His friend who had come to help them board the train commented, “I told you so!” However, Nambiar staunchly said, “You have no idea about Bhagavan.” Saying this, he walked right up to the engine. Next to the engine, was a new and locked first class coach. Since he was a government officer, he approached the station master and requested him to open the coach. The family occupied the entire compartment! Whenever he shared this incident with me, his face would beam and his eyes would be moist. He would say, “Have complete faith in Bhagavan even when it comes to mundane things, like getting accommodation on a train. Ganesan, it is not a miracle; it is pure faith and compassion.”

K. K. Nambiar went on official tours to both England and America, and in all these travels he was guided by Bhagavan and met devotees of Bhagavan. The incidents are very interesting and he has captured these reminiscences in his book, *The Guiding Presence of Sri Bhagavan*. When returning from America, he brought with him a movie camera, something that was a marvel for people in India in the 1940's. It was not only a marvel, but a big boon because it enabled him to shoot films of Bhagavan. That is why we have them now. Besides, he also brought back a Charlie Chaplin film and showed it to Bhagavan. I was sitting next to Bhagavan who as he watched it, laughed heartily. He enjoyed it so much that I too became a Charlie Chaplin fan!

Nambiar played an active part in the construction of the Mother's temple. A temple is normally constructed with the help of a *sthapathy*, a traditional Indian engineer. Vaidyanatha Sthapathy was entrusted with the construction. But Nambiar was also called. He went to Bhagavan and stated, “Chinna Swami wants me to assist in the construction of the temple. I do not know anything about it.” Bhagavan replied, “Doesn't matter, help him.” When the temple was constructed and the celebrations were over, a photographer was called and a photo was taken of both. On seeing the photo, Bhagavan made the comment: “The traditional engineer, Vaidyanatha Sthapathy and the modern *sthapathy*, Nambiar, are together!”

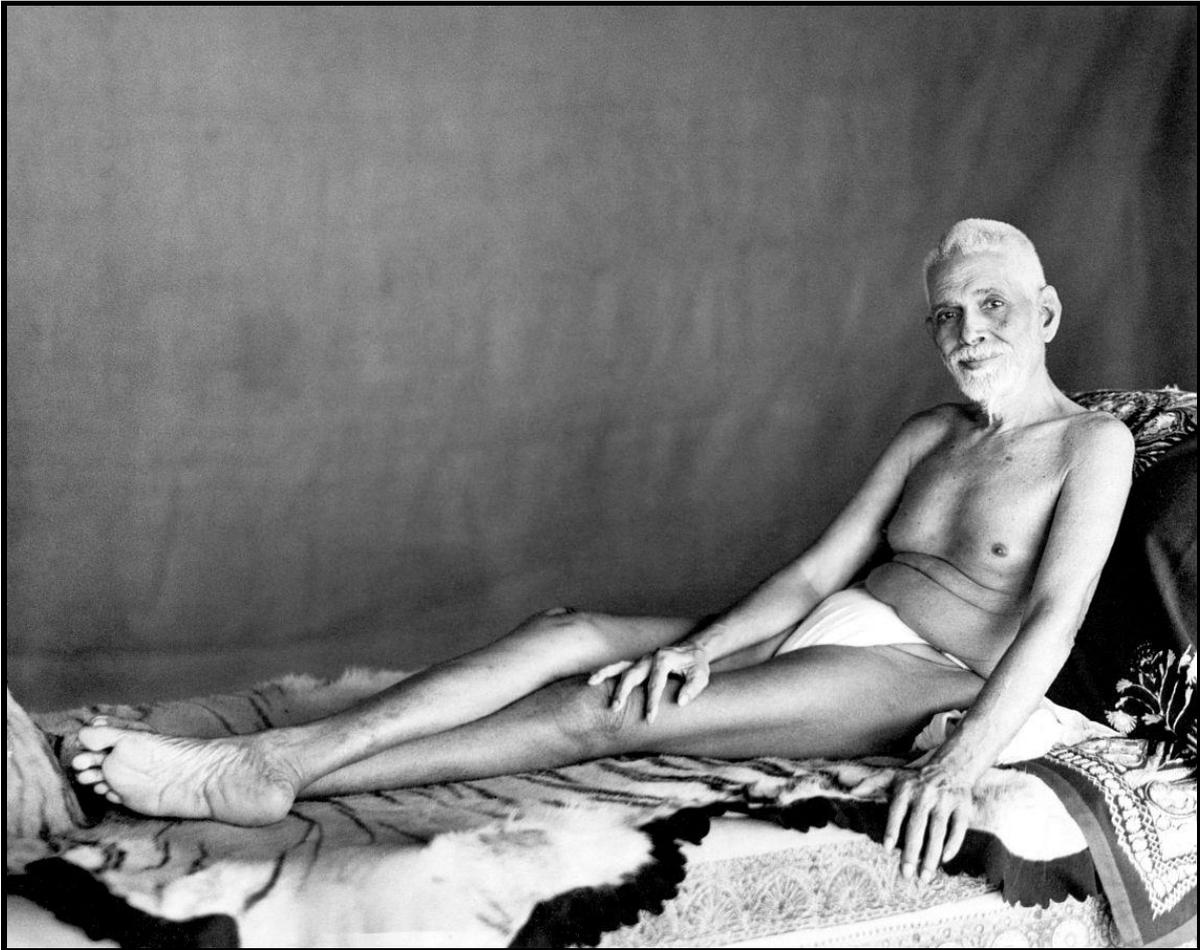


*Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine adjacent to Matrubhuteswara Temple*

In April, 1950, when Bhagavan's condition was deteriorating, there was a controversy on where Bhagavan's body should be interred. Though Bhagavan had expressed no opinion, it was almost like he had made up his mind about the spot, because on the very night that Bhagavan dropped his body, Nambiar had a vivid dream. He dreamt that Bhagavan had a closed door meeting with my grandfather, Niranjanananda Swami, and my father Venkatoo. However, the door was ajar. Nambiar, who was standing outside, could hear Bhagavan calling out, “Call Nambiar in.” Bhagavan then made a drawing and took all of them to the spot where Bhagavan's *samadhi* is now. Though this was not the spot that had been chosen originally by other people, with the aid of his stick, Bhagavan drew exactly where his

*samadhi* should be! Nambiar woke up from his dream and narrated the dream to my grandfather and others. They brushed him aside, saying, “You and your dreams! We will not care for your dream. We will have it on the spot that we have decided on. Do not interfere and do not tell others about your dream.” They ridiculed him about his dreams because they could not comprehend the power of the ‘rolling ball of rice’. My grandfather also challenged him, “You can have the *samadhi* there only over my dead body.” But the important people of the town with Annamalai Pillai as their leader came to the ashram and for no reason at all pointed out the very place that Nambiar had dreamt about! My father was also in favour of that spot. Everyone had to comply with their choice, even my grandfather.

There is something personal that I want to share about Nambiar. When I was working in Mumbai, I had a strange spiritual experience. I resigned my job and ran away to Benares. Nobody knew where I was and everyone wondered about me. For six days, I was unconscious. Nambiar, who was working as chief engineer in a private company in Mumbai, had a dream. Bhagavan appeared in his dream and showed him that I was lying on my stomach and that there was a big abscess on my back. Bhagavan placed his hand on my back and said, “Nambiar, look at Ganesan. He has this and I am going to save him.” When he removed his hand, the abscess was gone. He then said, “Nambiar, go tell Venkatoo that Ganesan will be all right. I have saved him.” That is exactly what happened. It is Bhagavan’s grace that I am able to extoll those old devotees who extolled the holy feet of the master. I pay my humble homage to Nambiar.





*G.V. Subbaramaya with Bhagavan ( standing extreme right - 10 June 1947)*

## Prof. G. V. Subbaramayya



G.V. Subbaramayya, the principal of a college, was a remarkable person. Spiritual seekers are greatly indebted to him, because he extracted from Bhagavan an assurance that he will protect and emancipate all of us. Bhagavan dropped his body on the fourteenth of April, 1950. Around April seventh or eighth, Professor Subbaramayya and sub-registrar Narayana Iyer, went to see Bhagavan. They wept inconsolably. Bhagavan asked Subbaramayya, "What do you want?" Subbaramayya replied, "*Abhayam yivale*," meaning 'give me protection'. Bhagavan looked at him and said, "*Ichchanu*", meaning 'it is given'. By this, he meant not only protection, but also liberation. Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer who was also weeping, questioned, "Bhagavan, is it only for Subbaramayya?" Bhagavan turned to him and replied, "For everyone!"

In 1960, only two or three visitors used to come to Ramanasramam and they were not even aware of Bhagavan's teachings. Today, Bhagavan's message is spreading everywhere. It is not just the teaching as a philosophy that is spreading, but the essence of the truth about oneself. Everyone is waking up to this and this is the *abhayam*, the protection and the liberation that Bhagavan promised. Bhagavan once said that every being has to eventually come to Arunachala - not to the physical Arunachala, but to the Arunachala within. Everyone has to awaken to the teaching of 'I AM'. Bhagavan's *abhayam* is ever there, but we owe it to the Professor that Bhagavan gave a verbal affirmation a week before he dropped the body!

Subbaramayya came to Bhagavan in 1930 in a state of grief. He was overwhelmed by sorrow at the loss of his two year old son and was wandering around India. On one of these wanderings, someone advised him to go to Ramana Maharshi. Another person, coincidentally, gave him Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saram* in Telugu around the same time. His immediate response was that if a Tamilian could write such great spiritual poetry in Telugu, then he must be a spiritual giant. So, he visited the Maharshi, still weighed down by great sorrow.

Bhagavan's very first look was filled with such grace that it made his sorrow vanish. According to Subbaramayya, "The pole star of my life is, of course, my *satguru* Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. At a time of distress, I was drawn to him and the very first *darshan* plunged me into the ocean of peace and bliss. Ever since, he has been the light of my life. He is my mother. Bhagavan is my father, Bhagavan is my guru, Bhagavan is my own, Bhagavan is my all in all and in him my little self and all its moorings were consummated and sublimated. In a word, he is the embodiment of grace. At every step, even with the least incidents of my life, I have come to feel with a growing consciousness, the guiding hand of that divine grace that is named as Sri Ramana."

However, even after this look, Subbaramayya was besieged by a sincere doubt. He questioned, "Bhagavan, the *Bhagavad Gita* says that mortals cast off their worn bodies and acquire new bodies, just as one casts off old clothes and wears new ones. How does this apply to the death of mere infants whose bodies are fresh and new?" Bhagavan looked at him with compassion and replied, "How do you know that the body of the dead child was not worn out? It may not be apparent; but unless it is worn out, it will not die. That is the Law of Nature - 'ஈஸ்வர நியதி'." Straight away, Subbaramayya's sorrow and misery disappeared.

Subbaramayya, a good conversationalist, was also a scholar of Sanskrit, Telugu and English. He started translating Bhagavan's works into English. His translation of the *Ramana Gita* is appreciated even today. Earlier, he had met a *mahatma* who had initiated him into a mantra. He was chanting the mantra very diligently. After coming to Bhagavan and having his *darshan*, he couldn't continue with the mantra. He felt rather guilty and wondered whether he had done something wrong. He went to Bhagavan with his problem, "Bhagavan, suddenly the mantra has stopped. I am afraid." Bhagavan responded, "You have done a lot of *japa* using the mantra. The fruit of the mantra has brought you here. Why do you need to fear?" At a much later date he asked, "What is the difference between *japa* repeated in the mind and meditation?" Bhagavan replied, "They are the same. In both, the mind is focused on one

thing - either on the *japa* or on the Self. *Mantra, japa, dhyana* and *vichara* - all are different names only. As long as they require some kind of effort, we give them these names. When the goal is realized, they go on effortlessly. What was formerly the means now becomes the goal.”

Some time later, Subbaramayya had a different kind of problem. He had been practising breath control as taught by Swami Rama Tirtha in his works. Subbaramayya continued the practice at a particular time every day. One day, he suddenly felt a terrible sensation as though his head would crack and break into pieces. In spite of stopping the practice, the sensation kept recurring at the usual time of his practice. One night, when Bhagavan was alone, he approached him with his problem. Bhagavan said, laughing, “What? Are you again seized by fear? These are the experiences that people have when they practise yoga without the immediate guidance of a guru. But you have come to me, so why should you fear?” Then in an undertone, Bhagavan added, “Next time you get that sensation, think of me and you will be all right.” These words are to be inscribed in our hearts in gold. Whatever form of *sadhana* you are following, whenever you are in pain, think of the name of the master. Subbaramayya personally told me that there was never a next time!

Subbaramayya was also told very clearly by Bhagavan how seekers should offer their prayers. Should one pray for mundane help from the guru or should one ask for spiritual emancipation alone? Subbaramayya had a daughter who was two or three years old. The child lived in the village and would often have fits. Once, she became unconscious and it seemed as if she would die. Subbaramayya sent an express telegram to Bhagavan declaring, “Bhagavan! My child, Indira, is suffering. Please help her.” As advised, he also called for two ayurveda doctors to come. At seven that night, Subbaramayya’s brother-in-law who was staying in the next village happened to bring sacred ash that he had received the previous year from Ramanasramam. “Apply this on the forehead of the child,” he said. The ash was applied and to the wonder and delight of everybody, the child was declared cured by the two ayurveda doctors who had also just arrived. The very next day, there was a letter from the ashram confirming the receipt of the telegram. “Bhagavan saw your telegram at seven in the night. Everything will be all right.” To Subbaramayya, it was indeed a miracle! During the next holidays, which happened to be for Christmas, he visited Bhagavan. Like all intellectuals, he too faced the problem of accepting what had happened. Subbaramayya questioned Bhagavan: “Did you think you should save my child?” Bhagavan clarified to him that even the thought of saving the child is a *sankalpa*, a desire, and a *jnani* has no desires whatsoever. The moment a *jnani* looks at anything, the divine force comes into action automatically. We only have to pray and hope that the master’s glance falls on an object so that divine intervention takes place automatically. Think of Ramana, think of Arunachala and at once divine intervention occurs!

Every time Subbaramayya visited Ramanasramam, Bhagavan would wake him up at two thirty in the morning and take him along with sub-registrar Narayana Iyer and Kalyana Sundaram Iyer to the kitchen. There, they would prepare *sambar* or chutney. Bhagavan would do the actual cooking, while these people assisted him. Whenever Subbaramayya saw Bhagavan perspiring because of the summer heat and the heat from the stove, he would pick up a fan to fan Bhagavan. Bhagavan, who never liked any special favours, would always say, “Stop!” Once, Subbaramayya crept up behind Bhagavan when he was deeply involved in the cooking and fanned him. Bhagavan noticed it and said, “So, you want to do it stealthily? Well, even that you are not able to do properly! Come, let me show you.” Bhagavan held Subbaramayya’s hand and showed him how to use the fan correctly. Subbaramayya said, “It was a divine moment when Bhagavan touched me!” They would then go to the next room to grind the chutney. Subbaramayya did not know how to move the pestle to grind the chutney. Once again, Bhagavan held Subbaramayya’s hand to show him how, sending him into ecstasy. After the chutney was prepared, Bhagavan would taste it and also give it to the others to taste. If their hands were occupied otherwise, he would say, “Open your mouth!” He would make a small ball of the food and pop it into their mouths. Subbaramayya commented, “I was in heaven when Bhagavan did this!”

Once I asked Subbaramayya, “What is so unique about Bhagavan?” Subbaramayya said, “One outcome of the originality of Bhagavan’s Self realization was that his approach to the problems addressed to him was equally original because his death experience was also original. He did not imitate. He did not quote from books; all his answers and actions were absolutely original and unique. His answers to questions were never bookish. They were simple and direct. Like Jesus Christ, he spoke with authority. His words were the result of firsthand knowledge and experience rather than bookish knowledge and hearsay. He went to the root of every question and simplified it.



Bhagavan reading one of G.V. Subbaramayya's letter

He did not use confusing terminology when he spoke. He would cite only concrete illustrations along with his answers, making his meaning crystal clear.”

When G.V. Subbaramayya spoke about the clarity of Bhagavan’s utterances, he would always be in raptures. Bhagavan once told him, “When a person enquires, ‘For whom is this Self realization?’ the individuality goes and the delusion that the Self is yet to be realized disappears. This alone is the grace of the guru. The guru can only dispel the delusion that the Self has not been realized. Granting Self realization is impossible not only for the guru, but for God himself. Praying to the guru to let you have Self realization is like asking, ‘Give myself to me.’ We identify the body with ourselves because we have the delusion, ‘I am an individual.’ This creates another delusion that the guru is also an individual and is therefore other than myself. The guru is actually not someone different from you.”

During the last days of Bhagavan, Subbaramayya wrote a few verses and submitted them to Bhagavan. One of these verses is of utmost importance to us seekers, since he has made a commitment to Bhagavan on our behalf as well. The prayer is: “We take an oath to keep your teachings constantly in mind, to watch your movement attentively, and learn the lessons thereof to dispel the delusion of the ego and abide firmly in the Self like you ever are. This is the service which all of us devotees would render to you, my beloved *satguru*, oh Ramana.” We do have a duty towards our master. It is not enough to proclaim that Ramana is the greatest guru. We have to stay committed enough to constantly retain the teachings in the mind. During the last moments of Bhagavan, Subbaramayya cried inconsolably. Bhagavan’s last words to him were, “Do not worry. Be at peace. Everything will be well. To be is our nature. Coming and going is the trick of the mind. Our commitment is to be pivoted to the silence and the peace within us.”

Two other important experiences in the presence of Bhagavan were shared by G.V. Subbaramayya.

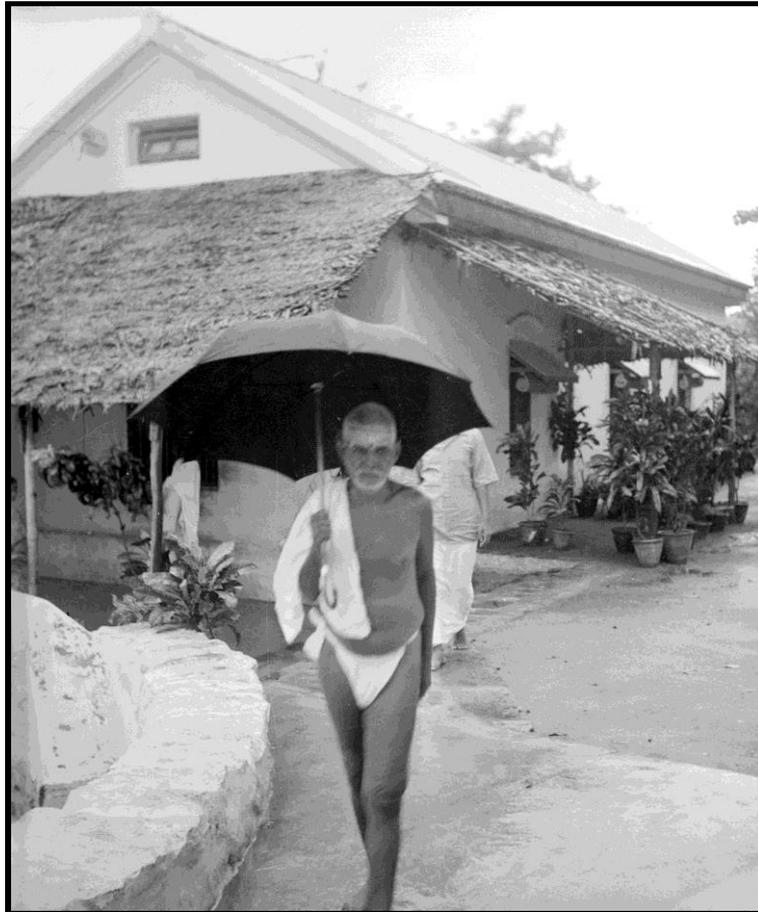
B. Ananthachari took great pains in printing the *Ramana Gita*. His help was appreciated in the preface of the book. He pleaded earnestly with Bhagavan to have his name removed. Bhagavan responded with, “Why do you worry? To ask for the omission of your name is as egoistic as to desire its inclusion! So, let it be. After all, who knows who Ananthachari is?” Most of us understand humility to be withdrawal from recognition. We seldom understand that accepting things as they are is the pinnacle of humility.

Pannalal, I.C.S., Commissioner of the Allahabad division, once visited the ashram with his family. He complained to Bhagavan that though he had riches, enormous power and material comforts, he did not have peace of mind. Bhagavan asked him, “Why do you want peace? Why can’t you be as you are?”

Pannalal replied, “Because I am not happy otherwise.” Bhagavan answered, “Then it is like this: a man who has a headache will not rest until he has taken the right medicine and has got rid of his ailment because health is our true state and not illness. Similarly, peace is our true nature. Indeed, we are at peace but we forget that and seek peace from external sources. This is an impossible quest and creates all these problems. The moment you withdraw your mind from external objects and turn it inwards, it then takes to real peace and feels happy.”

Once in the early hours of the morning when Subbaramayya visited Bhagavan, Bhagavan talked about how we have a glimpse of our real Self every day. Between the state of sleep and waking, there is a moment of twilight. The waking consciousness begins with the thought of ‘I’. Just before the upsurge of this thought, there is a fraction of a second of undifferentiated pure consciousness. So, first there is unconsciousness, followed by pure consciousness and then creeps in the thought of ‘I’. It is during this state that we become conscious of the world around us. We can sense pure consciousness only if we are alert and watchful for the state.

The beauty of Bhagavan’s teaching is that it is simple, direct and natural. We are fortunate to be able to read about these sacred relationships between the supreme master and his old devotees. In the process, our own consciousness becomes purified. It becomes equipped to focus on the truth. We automatically turn to our brain, our memories, our desires, because we feel that security is there. One must have total faith. Arunachala means *Aruna-achala*. *Aruna* is being, aliveness, and *achala* means ‘unmoved’. When the mind remains unmoved, then it has no other choice but to dissolve itself in the Self, in Self awareness, in other words, that which is called ‘unmoved’. That is what Bhagavan meant when he said, “Everyone finally has to come to Arunachala.” If you want the truth you have to keep the moving mind immobile.



*Sri Bhagavan near the Ashram well ('Ramana Theertham')*

I was close to Subbaramayya and I once visited his home town. He then showed me the horizon and said, "Ganesa, Arunachala is there. Can you not see Arunachala?" Naturally, I could see Arunachala and I can tell you that it is not a miracle. When the mind says, "I do not see Arunachala," you are paying attention to its immediate projection of non-seeing. Reject the mind's false projection. One's faith in oneself is Truth. He showed me Arunachala from a distance of four hundred miles and I could see it. K. K. Nambiar, whom I was acquainted with in Bombay right from 1960, was also soaked in truth. He was the managing director of a very big company and lived in a palatial house facing the ocean. He asked me to come to his house for dinner. I used to feel a little shy to enter his house. He set me at ease and took me to his upstairs patio and showed me the ocean. He then said, embracing me, "See Ganesan, look Arunachala is here." Again, on that day, I saw Arunachala on the surface of the ocean. Only later on, did I stay in Arunachala and experience its depth.

"Everyone has to come to Arunachala," are the holy words of Bhagavan. One must have faith not only in these words, but in our Self. We have to turn within to ourselves as we are the truth. There is truth everywhere. Do not turn to the brain or the mind because it will only project the untruth and lead you to believe that such things are untrue and false. This is what two great devotees, K. K. Nambiar and Professor G. V. Subbaramayya, imparted to me. They did this by showing me Arunachala. They showed me the Arunachala outside so that I would turn within and experience Arunachala within me - every moment. Each of these old devotees of Bhagavan has come from Arunachala, because Bhagavan is Arunachala and they are its rocks and boulders. They have gone back to Arunachala. N.R. Krishnamurthy Iyer, also a great devotee, once said to me, "Ganesa, you are also one of the rocks. I am also one of the rocks. You are going back. Let us go back consciously, not unconsciously." I am only a speck of dust, not even a rock. Maybe you are a rock, a big rock. K. K. Nambiar was a rock. Kunju Swami once pointed to a rock up on the hill and said, "This is our Muruganar." When going round the hill, I enjoy looking at these rocks because the relationship between the guru and the disciple is vital for plunging within.

Subbaramayya once said this to me: "There are many guidelines for going outside. We have doors and there are road maps to guide us. But for going within, there is no map and there is no guide. Just as the *Upanishads* say, 'The bird has no path; where the bird flies is the path. The fish has no path in water; wherever it swims is the path.' Similarly, you have to dive within and find your path. None of the scriptures can help you; none of the theoretical knowledge that you have will help you. You can achieve it by having complete faith in yourself. How beautifully the bird flies! Does it worry about the path? Does the fish hesitate? Then why do we hesitate? Plunge within! My master Ramana always said, 'Dive within, plunge within and go inwards.' Dive within with full faith in Bhagavan and you are sure to find the inner guru waiting for you with open arms."

G. V. Subbaramayya had two daughters, Lalita and Indira. They used to come to see Bhagavan regularly even though it was very difficult for them to travel the distance. On one visit, Indira turning over the pages of the then new Telugu edition of *Upadesa Saram*, picked up the first two letters of bold type in the four lines of a Sanskrit verse by Sri Bhagavan, and read them together aloud as *Deham-Naham-Koham-Soham*. The words together meant, "I am not the body. Who am I? I am He." On hearing this Bhagavan said, "Very good! That will do. The rest of the stanza you need not read. What you have read is the quintessence of wisdom. Make it your mantra." Thereafter, every time Bhagavan saw Indira on this visit, he would ask her to repeat this mantra. Soon, she knew it by heart. On the final day of their visit, the two of them were taking leave of Bhagavan just as he was ready to go for his usual walk up the hill. They approached him and said, "Bhagavan, we have to go home." Saying this, she cried. Patting Indra most lovingly Bhagavan said, "You go to your place, while I go to my place," pointing to the hill. Significantly it proved to be Indira's last leave taking. After reaching home, both children wrote to Subbaramayya. Lalita wanted him to convey her salutations to Sri Bhagavan and inform him of her promotion to the next class. Indira wrote that she was constantly repeating the mantra and meditating on Sri Bhagavan. On perusing these letters, Bhagavan looked most graciously pleased. Sometime later, little Indira passed away. Subbaramayya had a *samadhi* built for her, on which was inscribed the mantra *Deham-Naham-Koham-Soham*.



*Sri Bhagavan's assurance : "Abhayam Ichchanu" ( Fear not. I am with you. )*



*Paul Brunton seated to the left of Sri Bhagavan*

## Paul Brunton



Spiritual wisdom couched in words has always been available through the Vedas, the Upanishads, Dhammapada, Tao Te Ching, the Bible, the Torah, the Koran, the Zend Avesta, the Bhagavad Gita and scriptures of other spiritual traditions. But the word is not the thing. The word 'water' is not water. It will not quench our thirst. On the other hand, if you have a sip of water the miracle takes place. Apply the same analogy to spirituality. You can pride yourself on book knowledge but this is like holding on to the word 'water'. How then can we experience the truth and what is the purpose of all the scriptures? Sages and saints would not have left behind those holy words without a purpose. A sage lives the truth every moment of his life. And people from all over the world, attracted to him by his teachings and life in truth, live in the proximity of that truth, imbibe that truth and finally experience that truth. Because, in that particular human frame, they see the truth of what the scriptures describe.

When we read about the lives of Bhagavan's old devotees, we see that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, like Jesus Christ and the Buddha, lived the truth every moment. He was available all the twenty four hours and there were no rules and regulations. His doors were always open. And his old devotees lived in his proximity, witnessed the truth walking on two legs, talking with its mouth and looking through its eyes. I am indeed fortunate that I could live with them and see how they too were steeped in the truth. When reading about them the truth seeps into our heart, perhaps imperceptibly. That is the only way you can have a link with the ultimate truth which otherwise looks unattainable.

The next devotee is a luminary who came to make the whole world know that the darkness is not true. He was Raphael Hurst, the first western devotee of Bhagavan who openly declared that by the grace of Ramana Maharshi he was blessed with the inner vision of illumination. Popularly known as Paul Brunton, he was a great writer who went through many ups and downs in his spiritual life. You will be surprised how much it is like our own life. Sometimes, we feel we are on a spiritual peak and at other times as if we are in an abyss. But when we depend on and surrender to the higher power, there is never a failure.

Paul Brunton wrote, "My own final illumination happened in 1963. There was this bomb like explosion of consciousness. It came of itself and I realized that the divine had always been with me and in me. The word 'I' was pronounced in me. I saw that it was the only reality. 'I AM' is the foundation of truth and reality of the whole existence. Although I had descended deep into my being and experienced timelessness, I was still able to live in my surface being and experience time. The two experiences went on side by side and I saw my body as a mere shell and all the other people's bodies as shells. I felt like a bird free from all desires and really detached from everything. I was not the body and felt so free of it that I knew I could not die. And that in the real 'I', I would always be able to live for 'I AM' is God. Deep down within my heart, I lived in an everlasting now." What a consummate, inspiring summing up of one's inner realization! That Self realization can be attained by you and me through Self Enquiry is amply proved by Paul Brunton's life.

The way Paul Brunton was guided by the higher power throughout his apparent struggles, how whenever he was falling down, the higher power was helping him up - all of it is a great fillip for us and a pointer to every seeker that if you surrender to the higher power which is the 'I AM' within each one of us, within each one's Heart, that higher power will lead us through. He adhered to that and followed the instructions so arduously that he was led to a state of perfection. That is why when I first read about his attainment in 1963, I was convinced, "It is possible!" It is a very strong force which we have to imbibe in our own spiritual life.

When Brunton was in school, his geography master's voice uttering the word 'India' sent quivers of joy through his body. Later, when he located it on the world map, he again experienced quivers of joy. This sound 'India' and his locating it in the map was the beginning of his quest for the true Self, for the truth.

This strong urge to go to India, at that tender age was not just a fleeting thought - it was the higher power guiding him.

In his adolescence, Brunton felt a widening chasm between himself and his surroundings. He even wanted to end his life. But the very thought of ending his life aroused in him a curiosity to know what is death and what is after death. From where could he have got this urge to know, except from the higher power? He then went to the British Museum's library and studied all the theories on death. He pored through texts and treatises on occultism, mysticism, Rosicrucianism, Buddhism, Christian mysticism and yoga. He was so interested in knowing more that he joined the Theosophical Society. Within two years, he got disappointed with their claims. However, Theosophy induced in him a great urge to know more about occidental and oriental mysticism.

Strangely enough, he soon dropped his interest in mysticism and occultism and put all of his attention into learning journalism. This was again the higher power guiding him, this time to be a great writer. He started writing powerful passages that attracted the attention of commoners and scholars alike. For instance he wrote, "What did Jesus Christ mean when he rebuked those who sought to enter the kingdom of heaven like thieves breaking in over a wall? Jesus meant that they were trying to enter without giving up their ego, without denuding their consciousness of ego's rule. Who are these robbers? They are the seekers of occult powers."

But, even while he was becoming well known for his incisive writing, there was this conflict lurking in his mind: "Should I continue with journalism and become famous or pursue spiritual practices?" This was the struggle within him. He met two teachers, Allan Bennett and Thurston. They tried to point him in the right direction. But, it was a turbaned Indian who influenced him and encouraged him to go and do research in Indian yoga.

There was another change in his life. He got married and also had a son, Kenneth Hurst. (I had the good fortune to meet Kenneth and get from him some of Brunton's unpublished manuscripts which were later published under the title, *Conscious Immortality*. After Brunton passed on, Kenneth brought out sixteen volumes of his father's writings.)

A significant turning point in Brunton's life came in 1930 when he was thirty two years old. There was a strong urge in him to know and investigate what Indian yoga was. He soon sailed to Mumbai, determined to find out about the greatness of India's seers, sages and saints and their centuries old wisdom. He travelled throughout India, meeting, questioning and observing sages, saints, messiahs, mystics and astrologers, all of which resulted in the famous, awe inspiring book, *A Search in Secret India*.

During these travels, he came to Chennai. There, in the hermitage of a silent sage, a man named Subramanya accosted him and insisted that Brunton come with him to meet his master on 'the hill of the holy beacon'. Brunton refused. Not put off, Subramanya told Brunton that he would come and see him the next evening. After he returned to his hotel, Brunton went to see an author called Venkataramani to whom he had a letter of introduction. The next morning, Venkataramani took him to his guru, the Shankaracharya of Kamakoti Mutt, the pontiff of many Hindus in South India. On being asked about any genuine spiritual master that he could meet, the Shankaracharya extracted a promise from Brunton that no matter what, he would go to the hill of the holy beacon and meet Ramana Maharshi. When he returned to his room that evening whom would he see there but Subramanya, waiting to take him to his master Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi!

It is absorbing to read about how his first encounter with Sri Bhagavan took place. There is no logical support for it. It is as if it was mystically planned. In the divine's scheme of things, Paul Brunton's coming to India was to reveal to the world the great spiritual splendour that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was, is and always will be. It was left to Paul Brunton to open the dark passages hiding the truth through his powerful writing. He threw open the doors for seekers all over the world to know that there is light.

Paul Brunton came to the Maharshi in 1930. Being an intellectual and a journalist he had prepared thirty two pages of questions to put to the Maharshi. These were well thought out questions because he had also studied mysticism thoroughly. But when he looked at the Maharshi and the Maharshi looked at him, he was drawn into a silence unfathomable to the mind. Not a word could surface either from his

mouth or from his mind. He was filled with a silence and peace which he had never experienced before. He felt: "There is something in this man which holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I could not turn away my gaze from him." Later, when writing about the great significance of this first encounter with the silent, pure presence of the Maharshi, Paul Brunton wrote: "I became aware of a silent, resistless change taking place within my mind. One by one, the questions which I had prepared in the train with such meticulous accuracy dropped away. For, it does not now seem to matter whether I solve the problems which have hitherto troubled me. I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me; that a great peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being and that my thought tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest."

Soon, he returned to North India in his quest for spiritual masters. One of those he met was a traveling yogi called Chandi Das. The moment he saw Paul Brunton, he gave three predictions. All the three predictions came true. The third one was particularly significant; Chandi Das told him "You will return two more times to India and you will fulfill *karmic* ties with a sage who is waiting for you." This sage waiting for Paul Brunton was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The strain of all his travels took a heavy toll on him. He fell ill and was terribly affected by that. His ill health troubled him so much that he wanted to go back immediately to England. Fortunately, there was a tug of war within his mind. Even during that illness, the images of all the sages, saints and mystics he had met kept flashing inside him like in a slide show. On evaluating all of them, it was Ramana Maharshi's image that shone out.

Now, look at this strange phenomenon. Here is a person who is determined to go back to England. By some freak chance, this slide show takes place within his heart and he decides to go back to the Maharshi. Immediately after, a letter arrives from B. V. Narasimha Swami, a biographer of Ramana Maharshi, asking him to return to Arunachala and the master! Then, when he arrives in Chennai from Mumbai on his way to Bhagavan, the author Venkatramani meets him and tells him about what the Shankaracharya had told him: "Your friend will travel all over India. He will visit many yogis and listen to many masters. At the end, he will have to return to the Maharshi only." How prophetic this was! Because of this, after Ramana Maharshi dropped his body, Brunton would send his friends to India, telling them, "Go and see reality living in human form. Go and see the Shankaracharya of Kamakoti Mutt. But, most importantly, go to Tiruvannamalai and experience the unseeable force of the great sage Ramana Maharshi, though he is not physically available."



Paul Brunton (rightmost) with Sri Bhagavan and Paramahansa Yogananda

For the second time, Paul Brunton came to the Maharshi, which is to our benefit. Otherwise the look of grace that Paul Brunton received would have submerged with him. But the whole world had to know about the Maharshi. The whole world had to receive the message of 'I AM'. So, the higher power guided him back to the Maharshi. He came back determined to experience the truth. He had interviewed many sages and saints, all of whom were talking about the truth. Now, he wanted to experience it. A determined Paul Brunton arrived in Arunachala. Seeing his determination, B. V. Narasimha Swami and the other devotees helped him to build a hut in Palaakothu, a compound next to Ramanasramam. He decided to give his all to experience the truth at the holy feet of Ramana Maharshi. Paul Brunton's perseverance, determination and total faith are qualities which we all have to imbibe.

He had many interviews with Ramana Maharshi, short and long. He was always seen following the Maharshi with a notebook and a pencil. He put searching questions to the Maharshi and till he understood the direct teaching of Self Enquiry thoroughly, he did not leave the Maharshi. The Maharshi was also determined to give his everything to Paul Brunton because this teaching had to spread all over the world. After understanding it in depth, he included it in his book *A Search in Secret India*. It was the first time in the world, that the guidance to turn one's attention to the inner light, the truth that 'I AM' is God, flowed from a western pen. The same truth that the Bible expresses: "I AM THAT I AM," and "The kingdom of God is within you." Through his powerful words, he was able to communicate that when each one of us turns within, the inner light is available to us, not in the future but right now.

His lucid words brought not only many westerners, but also a host of Indian scholars to the Maharshi. Major Chadwick, S. S. Cohen, Maurice Frydman, Dr. Hafiz Syed, Dilip Kumar Roy and many others came to Ramana Maharshi only after reading Paul Brunton's book. Even the heads of many Indian religious institutions, came to know about the Maharshi only after reading *A Search in Secret India*. In the Maharshi's poem, *Navamanimalai, Necklet of Nine Gems*, he reveals that Arunachala gave him the task of spreading the truth of 'I AM' all over the world. How could this happen when he himself would not even move an inch from Arunachala? So, a Paul Brunton had to come to make it known all over the world. Brunton became instantaneously popular. True seekers, who were suffering in many parts of the world, saw the glimmer of light through this book. The emphasis on individually turning one's attention within to experience the truth: That is the secret which influenced both scholars and laymen.

To quote Brunton, "The words of this sage of Arunachala still flame out from my memory like beacon lights. Roy Emerson wrote 'I pluck golden fruits from rare meetings with men.' It is certain that I plucked whole baskets full with my talks with the Maharshi. Our best philosophers in Europe could not hold a candle to him. One cannot forget that wonderful pregnant smile of his with his hint of wisdom and peace. He was the most understanding man I have ever known. You could be sure that some words from him would always smooth your way a little and that word always verified what your deepest feeling already told you."

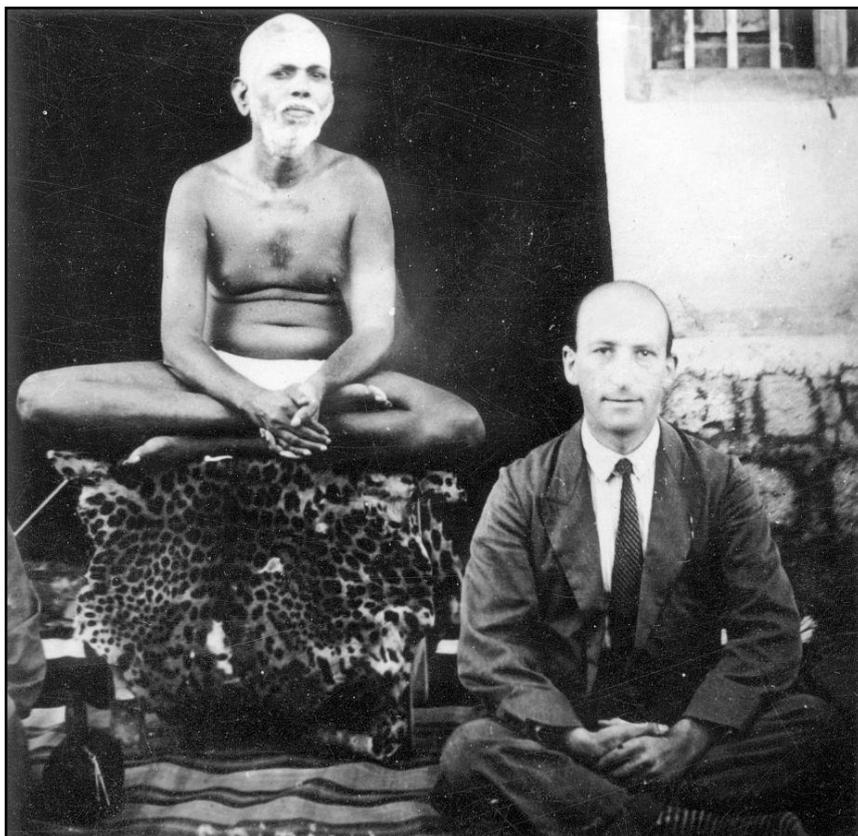
In memory of Paul Brunton, I would like to quote more from his book.

*Brunton:* "What exactly is this Self of which you speak? If what you say is true there must be another Self in man."

*Bhagavan:* "Can a man be possessed of two identities, two selves? To understand this matter it is first necessary for a man to analyze himself. Because it has long been his habit to think what others think, he has never faced his 'I' himself. He has for too long identified with the body and the brain. Therefore, I tell you to pursue the enquiry, 'Who am I?' You asked me to describe the true Self to you. What can be said? It is that out of which the sense of the personal 'I' arises and into which it will have to disappear."

*Brunton:* "Disappear? How can one lose the feeling of one's personality?"

*Bhagavan:* "The first and foremost of all thoughts, the primeval thought of every man is the thought 'I'. It is only after the birth of this thought that any other thoughts can arise at all. It is only after the first personal pronoun has arisen in the mind that the second personal pronoun 'you' can make its appearance. If you can mentally follow the 'I' thread until it leads you back to its source you will discover that just as it is the first thought to appear so it is the last to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced."



*Brunton:* "You mean that it is possible to conduct such a mental investigation into one's self?"

*Bhagavan:* "Certainly it is possible to go inwards until the last thought 'I' gradually vanishes."

Another time, Brunton asks, "What path do you advise? We need your grace."

*Bhagavan:* "Be still, do not think, and know that 'I AM'."

*Brunton:* "Should I meditate with eyes open or closed?"

*Bhagavan:* "You can meditate with eyes open or shut whichever suits you best. It differs with different people. Seeing is when the mind looks through the eyes, but if it is not looking because it is focused within, it does not see even if the eyes are open. It is the same with sounds. If you pay attention to them you will hear them, but if you persistently focus only on the Self within you will not hear them. So too with the postures. Postures are immaterial for this path of wisdom. Posture really means steadfast location in the Self. It is internal. The best posture is to be in the Self."

*Brunton:* "Should we make effort?"

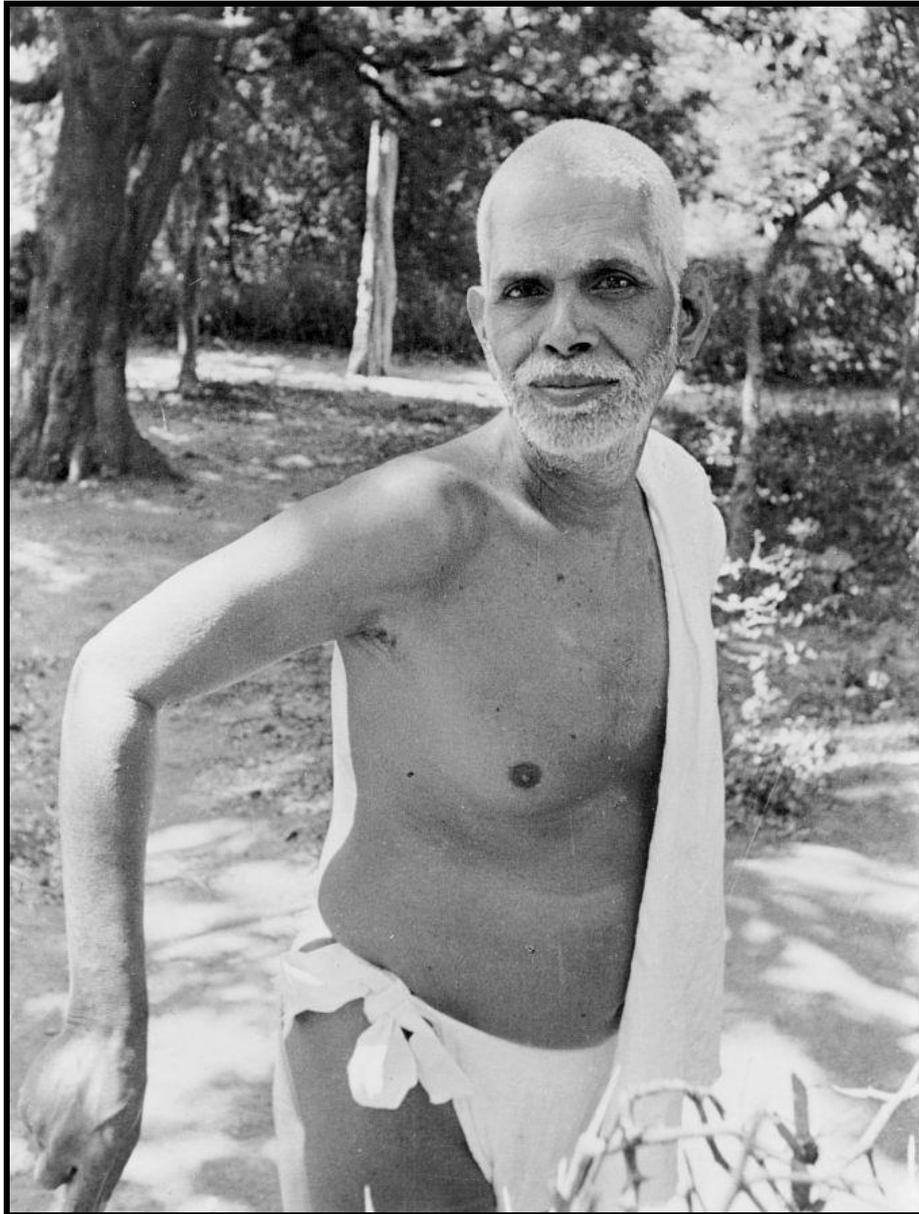
*Bhagavan:* "No one succeeds without effort. Mind control is not one's birthright. The successful few owe their success to perseverance. When attention is directed towards objects and intellect, the mind is aware only of these things. That is our present state of suffering. But, when we attend to the Self within, we become conscious of it alone. It is therefore all a matter of attention."

*Brunton:* "How should we meditate?"

*Bhagavan:* "All you need to learn is to close your eyes and turn inwards. That which you seek is inside yourself."

*Brunton:* "Is the thought 'I am God' helpful?"

*Bhagavan:* "'I AM' is God and not thinking. Realize 'I AM' and do not think 'I AM'. Know it and do not think it. 'I AM THAT I AM' means that one must abide as 'I'. One is always the 'I' alone and nothing else." At that time a pet squirrel was awaiting an opportunity to run out from Bhagavan's sofa. Bhagavan caught it and said "All wish to run out and rush out. There is no limit to going out. Happiness lies within and not without."



When Brunton was in a quiet village near London, Bhagavan appeared to him in a vision and asked him to write his second book *The Secret Path*. Then, by the grace of Bhagavan, a cascade of writing followed, resulting in nine books. Of these, *The Quest for the Overself* is of paramount interest because he has shared all that he experienced in the presence of Bhagavan as guidance to seekers and how it can be put into practice.

In the year 1938 or 1939, there was some misunderstanding between Paul Brunton and the Ramanasramam management because of which he couldn't take down notes in Bhagavan's hall. He was so angered by this that he could not even live anywhere near the ashram. He left. Supported by the king of Mysore, he stayed up to 1947 in India. But he never stopped being in contact with Bhagavan. His devotion and surrender to Bhagavan was complete and he was in constant connection with Bhagavan through ecstatic letters.

In one of his letters he wrote, "Bhagavan is 'I AM' - all the time meeting in the inner space of my Heart, where Ramana Maharshi always resides." Bhagavan was also very affectionate towards Paul Brunton. One day, in his hall, Bhagavan openly said, "Paul Brunton's thought comes to my mind. I am sure Paul Brunton is also thinking of Bhagavan." At that very moment, half way across the world, Paul Brunton was paying his obeisance to Bhagavan before giving a talk!

Another time in the hall, Bhagavan received a pamphlet by post in which there was a quotation from Paul Brunton. He read it out, saying, "Paul Brunton writes: 'I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of who I am and what is occurring. The Self still exists but it is a changed radiant Self. Something that is far superior to my unimportant personality rises into consciousness and becomes me. I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light. I sit in the lap of holy bliss. Divine grace descends and acts only when it is invoked by total surrender. It acts from within because God resides in the heart of all beings. Its whispers can be heard only in a mind purified by self surrender and prayer. Rationalists laugh at it and atheists scorn it but it exists. It is a descent of God into the soul's zone of awareness. It is visitation of a force unexpected and unpredictable. It is voice spoken out of cosmic silence. It is cosmic will which can perform authentic miracles under its own law.'" This incident has been mentioned in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*.

In 1952, after the Maharshi dropped the body, Paul Brunton came to Ramanasramam. And it was beautiful because he did not feel any difference. When he was there earlier, in the physical presence of the Maharshi, it was the master's spiritual presence that he was soaked in. He writes: "The death of the master's body had not ended our relationship or barred our communication. He still existed in my heart as a veritable force, an entity bereft of flesh, but clearly present." He adored the Maharshi as a pure channel for the higher power.

When he was requested to give a message for young seekers he said, "Pursue the enquiry 'Who am I?' relentlessly. Analyze the entire personality. Strive to find out from where the 'I'-thought arises. Continue your constant meditation. Keep turning your attention within. One day, the wheel of thoughts will slow down and intuition will mysteriously arise. Follow the intuition and let your thinking stop and it will eventually lead you to the goal of unwavering and perpetual Self awareness."

After his illumination in 1963, Paul Brunton became a gentle, irresistible power house of peace. The radiant beauty of his inner light attracted many seekers. His never say die spirit can be seen through his years of search for a genuine spiritual experience. Though he got this for the first time in the presence of the Maharshi on their very first meeting, it remained latent within him for many years. He had to go through the rough and tumble of the spiritual path before he could make it his own. In all his encounters with fresh seekers, he used to emphasise that one has to pursue the quest within by implicitly putting into practice the sacred words of the master. He wrote: "I had all the human failings. I had fallen by the wayside several times. But it is also true that I picked up myself each time, and at last achieved the goal."

In the 1970s, Apa Pant was the Indian ambassador to England. Thanks to the influence of Maurice Frydman, he was already a great devotee of Bhagavan. He wanted to express his gratitude to Bhagavan by unveiling his portrait at the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan in London. A big gathering was expected. As part of the celebrations, a souvenir was brought out. From its conception, I was consulted. I advised them to invite Paul Brunton to participate in it and give the principal talk. Brunton instead sent an article for the souvenir. It was a glorious adoration of his guru Ramana. Later, I had it printed in the ashram journal, *The Mountain Path*: "Forty years have passed since I have walked in his abode and saw the Maharshi half reclining, half sitting on a couch. After such a long period, most memories of the past become somewhat faded. If not, they lose their existence altogether. But I can truthfully declare that in this case nothing of that kind happened. On the contrary, his face, his figure, his surroundings are as vivid now to me as they were then. What is more important to me is that, at least during the period of meditation, the feeling of his radiant presence is as actual, as vivid today, as it was on the first day!" A remarkable devotee extolling a remarkable master!

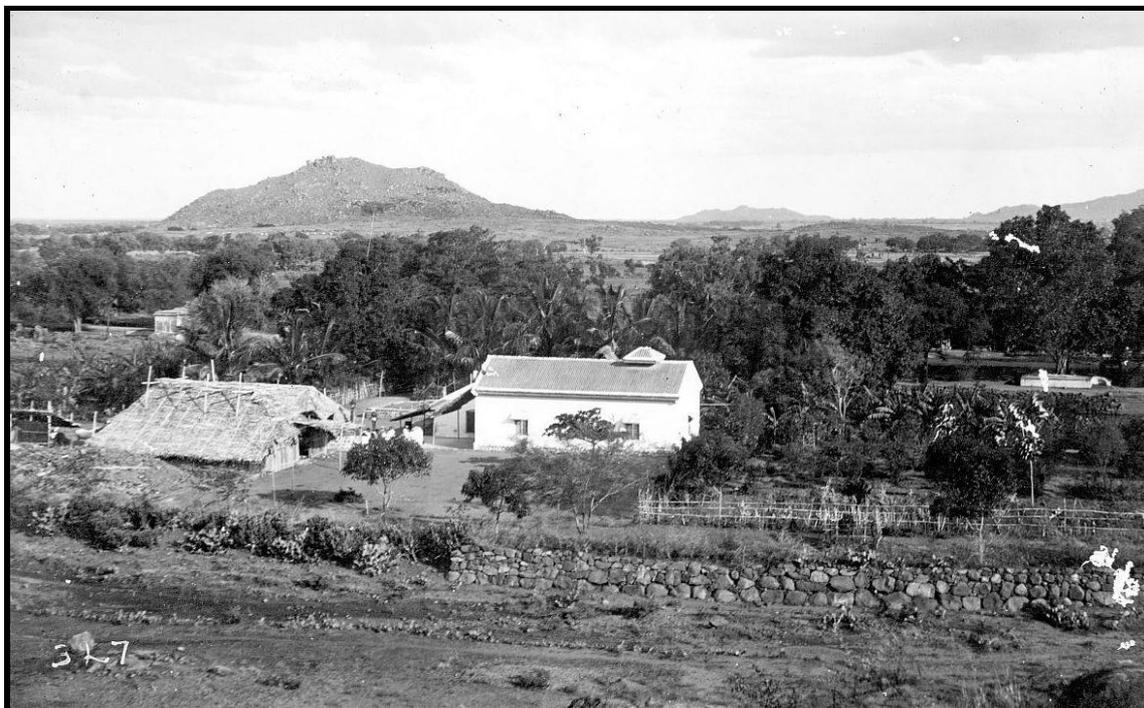
In 1960, I was in charge of visitors to Ramanasramam and I used to take them around like a guide. Westerners used to come very rarely and I loved them because I was so eager to be in the midst of seekers. Just as I was very eager to serve the old devotees I was very excited to be with young seekers who were coming in search of the Maharshi and his message. Quite a few of them revealed to me that they had been directed by Paul Brunton to come there. His advice to them invariably was, "Go to the Kanchi Shankaracharya, he is the reality in the flesh. But more importantly, go to Ramanasramam. The reality without flesh is there and that is what you have to experience."

I used to communicate with Paul Brunton because I wanted guidance from a devotee who made Bhagavan known all over the world. Though I wrote many letters inviting him to come and stay in the

ashram, no reply came. But I persisted in sending him letters through his friends who were visiting. In one of them, I raised this question: "Brunton, you had asked Bhagavan about work and wisdom. When you told Bhagavan, 'You are in a jungle ashram, but I have to go back into the world and work to earn my livelihood. So, how can I live?' Bhagavan replied, 'There is no difference between work and wisdom.' Since Bhagavan told you directly that there is no contradiction between work and wisdom, you will have clarity on this matter. Please share that with me." He replied with a short, beautiful letter which he sent through a friend: "Things happen to you, don't they? Now you think that things are being done *by* you. It is wrong. Things are done *through* you. Alter the attitude 'done *by* me' to 'done *through* me'. Ramana Maharshi was the pure channel for the higher power to pass through. All these sages, saints and messiahs were channels for the higher power to pass through. You and I are also the same. There will be no difference between work and wisdom, if like the sages we too allow ourselves to be the channel for the higher power to pass through." The moment you have the attitude that things are happening 'through you', you will see everything becomes light. Jesus Christ said, "Be a light unto yourself." What is the heaviness in you? It is the sense of doership, thoughts and memories of the past and the future. Give up that and accept and surrender to the higher power. You will be surprised how light you feel!

Though he never accepted my many invitations to come and stay in the ashram, a month after he dropped the body I received a letter from his secretary. She wrote, "Sorry Ganesan. I had to attend to so many things that I couldn't write to you earlier. A few hours before Mr. Brunton left his body, he called me and said, 'Please write a letter of thanks to Ganesan.'"

Later, I had the great fortune of visiting Brunton's institution, Wisdom's Golden Rock, near New York. They wanted to name it after him but he didn't agree. An Indian named Damiani, having arranged for Brunton to give a talk there, had a large photograph of Brunton hung in a place of prominence. Now, Brunton had this habit of visiting the place where he had to give a talk the previous evening to look into the arrangements. When he saw his photograph, he said, "Remove that and put my master's picture." Spiritual seekers all over the world owe a deep debt of gratitude to Paul Brunton. Even though it has been said from the time of the Vedas, "Turn within, you are That," none of us knew what to do. Even when Jesus Christ said, "The kingdom of God is within you," few could understand what it meant. Now, through Paul Brunton we get Bhagavan's message, "Turn within. Be still and know that 'I AM' is God."



*Sri Ramanasramam in the 1930s*



*Major Chadwick with Bhagavan in front of Ashram Office*

## Major Chadwick



Frank Humphreys was the first westerner to come to Ramana Maharshi. He went up the hill in 1911 and seeing Bhagavan on a rock outside Virupaksha cave wrote, "From that human body, God radiated terrifically." The second westerner who came to Bhagavan was Paul Brunton in 1930. Brunton looked upon Bhagavan as a 'Guru', a spiritual master. He elicited Bhagavan's direct teaching of Self Enquiry, wrote several books on it and spread it all over the spiritual world. Reading Paul Brunton, a third westerner came to Bhagavan.

There is an eternal triangle - God, guru and man. Frank Humphreys saw Bhagavan as God, Paul Brunton saw Bhagavan as guru and the eternal triangle still had to be completed. So, the third westerner had to come. This third westerner too, came from England and he saw the most natural, the fullest human being in Bhagavan - as the wonder of wonders - and, stayed put. This westerner's name was Allan W. Chadwick. The old devotees of Bhagavan endearingly called him 'Satvic'. The Sanskrit word *satvic* means 'pure' or one who is free

from worldly passions and attachments. (Paradoxically, this *satvic* man had been a major in the British army and had participated in killing its enemies in the First World War.)

In Ramanasramam, A. W. Chadwick was known as Major Chadwick. He came in 1935 to Arunachala after reading Brunton's book. Eleven years before he came to Bhagavan, he had already formulated his own form of meditation which he was scrupulously following every day. Chadwick said, "I had argued with myself that since God had created this world, it was only out of himself that he could have done so, for if there was some other apart from him then he could not be God, the undisputed and omnipotent power. So, I decided that the seeker himself was God. My method of meditation thus was to make the mind cease from thinking as an individual and just rest in its pristine Godhead. Do not think. Just be." How prophetic! Even before coming to Bhagavan his form of meditation was to stop thinking and just be.

Major Chadwick read Paul Brunton's book, *A Search in Secret India*. In it, three chapters were dedicated to Sri Ramana Maharshi and it also had his photograph. These three chapters, and especially the picture of the Maharshi, totally captivated him. He felt, "Arunachala is my home and this Maharshi is my spiritual master." At that time, he was in Majorca off Spain. He immediately disposed of whatever matter was pending, gave up his house and possessions in Majorca, went home to England to spend some time with his sisters whom he was very fond of. Then, he gave up his home there and started his journey to India. He never returned to England. He was the first westerner to stay permanently in Arunachala at the feet of his chosen master. The thing that we seekers have to notice is - something I felt very deeply during my association with Chadwick - there was no gap between his determination and his action. After reading these three chapters, there was no wavering or indecision. He knew that Arunachala was his home and Ramana Maharshi his spiritual master. And the next step he took was to renounce. He went home to England to fulfill his sisters' wishes and then took off to Arunachala, never to return.

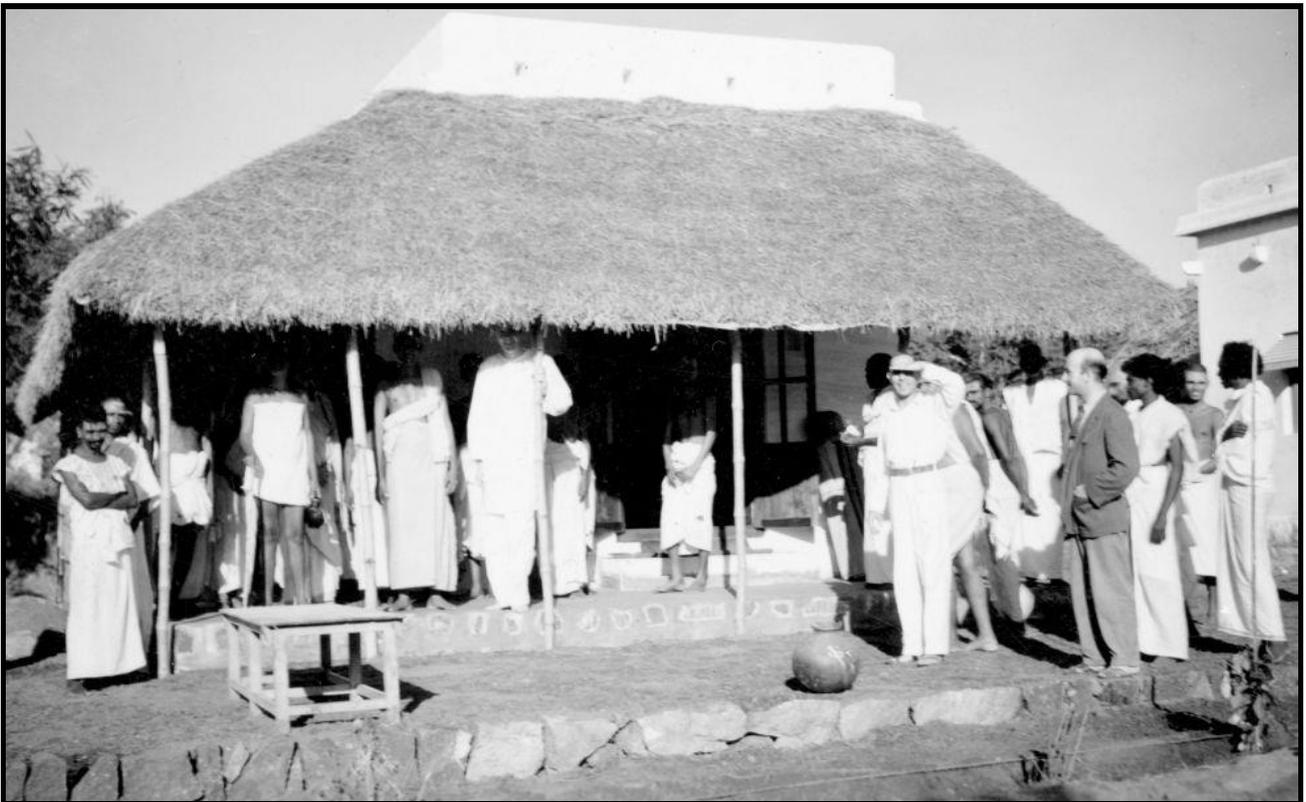
After a long journey, he arrived in Arunachala. Standing in front of Bhagavan, who he was seeing for the first time - his master in flesh and blood - he felt he was seeing, in one form, God, guru, and the perfect human being. When asked how he felt, Chadwick said, "I felt the tremendous peace of his presence and of his graciousness. It was not as though I was meeting him for the first time. It seemed I had always known him. It was not even like the renewal of an old acquaintanceship. It had always been there though I had not been conscious of it till that time. Now I know."

Chadwick became a soldier of God, gave up his all. He cut off all relationship with his friends, relatives and fellow officers. To be an unknown *sadhu* in an unknown land! This is the kind of determination, renunciation and decisive action that we seekers have to imbibe. We are right in front of the truth -

Arunachala and Bhagavan Ramana. Arunachala is not a hill and Bhagavan Ramana is not a person. They are the one truth, the 'I AM' which Hindu scriptures speak of and which God declared to Moses.

The powerful presence of Bhagavan made Chadwick decide then and there to stay permanently with his master. There was no wavering in any form. He never altered his decision, never questioned it. When such a remarkable disciple surrenders totally, how does the master respond? The master takes complete charge. The rest of his devotees thought it strange, because Bhagavan took very special interest in Chadwick. He told the management, "He has given up his all and come. We have to look after him. Food should be prepared for him without spices." In Ramanasramam, they make a special vegetable and soup for foreigners called *dhoraï kootu* and *dhoraï rasam*. It was formulated by Bhagavan for Chadwick in 1935. In those days the westerner, the white man, was addressed as *dhoraï*, meaning 'master'. Naturally, Chadwick was also addressed like that. The vegetable dish and the soup were named *dhoraï kootu* and *dhoraï rasam* after Chadwick. Even today, these bland dishes carry the same names. Thank you, Major Chadwick!

Breakfast in the ashram invariably was, and still is, *idli*, a steamed rice and lentil cake served with chilli powder and oil. Chadwick's appellation for that chilli powder was 'gun powder' because for him, it was explosively hot! So, Bhagavan ordered ghee and sugar to be served to Chadwick along with his *idli*. This practice continues to this day for foreigners. And in the night, because he could not eat the spicy *rasam* and chutney, Bhagavan arranged for some milk and fruits to be given to him. So, in every matter, Bhagavan paid special attention to Chadwick. Everyone, including the *sarvadhikari* Chinna Swami, noticed this. Consequently, Chadwick was permitted to construct a personal room within the ashram, something without precedent in the ashram's history. Many years later, Yogi Ramiah, Balarama Reddiar (not N. Balarama Reddiar, but a disciple of Yogi Ramaiah) and then Devaraja Mudaliar were permitted to build three such rooms - adjacent to Chadwick's.



Sri Bhagavan ( head hidden) at the house-warming ceremony of Chadwick's cottage.  
S. S. Cohen (with left hand covering his eyes) and Paul Brunton are also seen.

While his room was being built, Chadwick stayed in a tile roofed shed adjacent to ashram's store room. Sometimes, during his morning walks, Bhagavan would enter this shed like a friend and approach

Chadwick's table. Chadwick would be seated on a chair in a corner, reading a book. Bhagavan would pick up his wallet and take out photos, identity cards, everything, and question him, "What is this? And this?" Bhagavan moved that closely with Chadwick. Even after Chadwick moved to his newly built cottage, Bhagavan used to occasionally visit him. After lunch, every day, Bhagavan would take a walk around the pond in Palaakothu. Chadwick's room was very close and was separated from it by a fence with a wicket gate. Sometimes, Bhagavan would open it and come to Chadwick's room.

While paying special attention to Chadwick's physical needs, Bhagavan was also guiding him spiritually. On the very first day of Chadwick's arrival, Bhagavan talked to him so freely that Chadwick who was very tired after a long journey felt at home and at ease. After his rest in the afternoon when he came, Bhagavan sent word for a copy of *Who am I?* and gave it to Chadwick. And he didn't just hand it over. He said, "Read it and practice it." Through this spiritual gift, Bhagavan commenced showering his special spiritual blessings on Chadwick. Within a few days, he called Chadwick again and gave him B. V. Narasimha Swami's *Self Realization*, the first biography of Ramana Maharshi in English. Again, he said, "Read it and practice it." Chadwick told me that he formulated his spiritual practices based on the study of these two books.

Chadwick's whole attention was pivoted on Bhagavan and Bhagavan's teaching. Chadwick understood the seriousness of his responsibility as a true disciple. Thus, being very attentive, contemplating, understanding and living by the teaching and experiencing the glory of the proximity of the guru, were given paramount importance by him. He was very meticulous. Either he would meditate in his room or on Arunachala, or if he wanted some relaxation he would read spiritual books. The rest of the time he was seated in front of his master, Bhagavan Ramana.

When I asked him why he was all the time seated in front of Bhagavan, he said, "I felt that here is God and guru in human form. When I am able to be near him in his presence and his proximity, will I miss this golden opportunity? Am I a fool to have come here to while away my time?" Chadwick was one person who not only stayed permanently in Ramanasramam but didn't waste a minute. There were no attractions or distractions for him even when other westerners came. They used to go to Pondicherry, Bangalore, Ooty or some cool place during summer.



*Chadwick with his meditation belt on*

Chadwick told me that he rarely left Bhagavan's presence, because he always felt, "Here is my master!" I used to be moved when he spoke like this about Bhagavan.

Chadwick was a towering personality. Tall and handsome, he was a very disciplined man. He had a welcoming smile and was friendly towards everyone. While meticulously attending to his *sadhana*, he was also very supportive of the ashram management. He even became part of it. After Bhagavan dropped the body, when the ashram had to face litigations, financial problems and internal squabbles, he stayed on in the ashram, supported the management and stood by them. Unlike Paul Brunton and Frank Humphreys, Chadwick listened extensively to the dialogues the master had with devotees and visitors. Books like *Talks with Ramana Maharshi* and *Day by Day with Bhagavan* were verified by Chadwick and Bhagavan. In *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, he has written a beautiful introduction where he says, "Not only were they shown to Bhagavan but the questions there were all verified from the questioner himself - whether it has been properly noted down. And Bhagavan verified them after it was written on the notebook." So, while Brunton was the sail that spread Bhagavan's teaching in the world, Chadwick was the anchor giving us confidence that every word recorded was authenticated by the master himself.

I would like here to share a few incidents that took place at Sri Ramanasramam in which I too was involved. In a way, these were all connected with Chadwick. After my graduating from college in 1956, my father asked me to study further. I refused saying I would rather work and earn some money, as our family was then going through some financial difficulties. From 1956 to 1958, I was staying in Tiruvannamalai and trying my level best to get a job. Major Chadwick and Mrs. Taleyarkhan also tried to get me a job. But the higher power had a different scheme for me.

During those two years, I moved closely with all the old devotees who lived in Tiruvannamalai - Chadwick, Arthur Osborne, Muruganar, Cohen, Devaraja Mudaliar - and a host of others like Professor G. V. Subbaramayya who used to regularly visit the ashram. Something about them aroused in me tremendous awe, wonder and interest. I used to pester them, "What did you talk to Bhagavan? What was Bhagavan's relationship with you?" Sometimes, they condescended and took some time off to tell me. I used to get excited and would feel impelled to request them to write all these precious gems down so that they wouldn't get lost. Many of them demurred, saying, "Who am I and what can I say?" I used to plead with them, "Who is going to be worried about you? It is about what Bhagavan told you and what his relationship was with you. You owe a responsibility to posterity by preserving these remarkable reminiscences. Please note them down."

I am very grateful to Chadwick because he was the only person who encouraged me. On many a day, when there were no crowds or much work to be done at the ashram, he would make me sit next to him and narrate a thrilling incident. I did not know then, that after narrating each incident, he was going to his room and noting it down in a notebook. In 1958, I went away from Tiruvannamalai to take a two year post graduate course in philosophy. Before I left, Chadwick told me, "Thank you. I have noted all of these reminiscences in a note book." After my post graduation, I worked for a few months and came back in 1960 to live in Ramanasramam. The very first thing that I did was to go straight to Chadwick's room and tell him, "Give me your *prasad* - that notebook in which you have written everything." This note book of Chadwick's was the first book of reminiscences that was published. A few days after the book was released, I received a letter of thanks from Chadwick, in which he wrote: "There is no tradition in our ashram to dedicate the book to a person of one's choice. For, every book is an offering to Bhagavan - '*Ramanarpanamastu*'- dedicated to the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan. If there would have been such a custom, I would certainly have dedicated this book to you, dear Ganesan."

By that time, I had become so close to the old devotees that another person, G. V. Subbaramayya, listened to me and said, "I am writing my reminiscences in my mother tongue, Telugu." I replied, "What is the use if you write it only in Telugu? You are an English professor. Translate it into English too." This was the second book of reminiscences. He had it published outside. I pleaded with him and subsequently got its future editions published by Ramanasramam. A cascade of reminiscences followed: T. K. Sunderesa Iyer's *At the Feet of Bhagavan*, Devaraja Mudaliar's *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Suri Nagamma's *My Life at Sri Ramanasramam* and then those of Kunju Swami, Balarama Reddiar and Kanakammal. The spiritual food was theirs. I was the lucky one, blessed

to be the spoon that served it to hungry spiritual seekers! No doubt it was Bhagavan's Grace that such things should happen!

If the teachings of the Buddha, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna were not recorded by their chosen devotees and disciples, how could we have known them? If these reminiscences about Bhagavan Ramana are with us today, it is primarily thanks to Chadwick. And then to all the other devotees who acceded to my fervent and persistent pleas to record them. These books of reminiscences bring out the relationship between a Sat-Guru and his surrendered disciples. They are very precious because the true stories contained in them bring the teaching closer to us. How does one put that verbal teaching into practice? We need a lot of encouragement to practice the verbal teaching. Otherwise, one *Bible*, one *Koran* and one *Bhagavad Gita* would have been enough. That is why the reminiscences of these old devotees, how they lived with the master, and how the master through his pure living taught the truth is important to us.

Chadwick had a unique relationship with the master. "Tell me what Bhagavan looked like when you saw him and moved with him. What was it that struck you most?" When I asked him this, his reply was the same that he wrote later in his reminiscences: "Bhagavan was a very beautiful person who shone with a visible light or aura. He had the most delicate hands I have ever seen with which he could express himself. One might almost say that he could talk with his hands. His features were regular and the wonder of his eyes was famous. His forehead was high and the dome of his head the highest I have ever seen. In India, this is known as the dome of wisdom and it was only natural that it should be so with our beloved Bhagavan. His body was well formed and of only medium height but this was not apparent as his personality was so dominant that one looked upon him as tall. He had a great sense of humour and while talking, a smile was never far from his face. He had many jokes in his repertoire and was a magnificent actor. He would always dramatize the protagonist of any story he related. When people came to him with their family stories, he would laugh with the happy and at times, shed tears with the bereaved. In this way, he seemed to reciprocate the emotions of others always. He never raised his voice and if he did occasionally seem angry, there was no sign of it on the surface of his peace. Talk to him immediately afterwards and he would answer calmly and quite undisturbedly. He did not speak unceasingly and unnecessarily. His apparent silence only showed how much foolish chatter usually goes on amongst us. He preferred every sort of simplicity and preferred to sit on the floor, but a couch had been forced on him and this became his home for most of the twenty four hours of the day. He would never allow any preferences to be shown to him. He would wander out on the hill a few times a day and if any attachment to anything on earth could be said of him, it was surely an attachment to the hill. He loved it and said it was God himself."



*With Bhagavan on the Hill*

Chadwick moved closely with Bhagavan. He did not take any action simple, small or big without consulting Bhagavan. Although Bhagavan never approved or disapproved verbally, all the old devotees of Bhagavan could tell from Bhagavan's expression what his response was. If he approved, he would nod his head. If he disapproved, he would go into his royal silence. Once, Chadwick had a bad toothache. In those days, Pondicherry was the closest town where one could find a good dentist. He went and told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I have a very bad toothache. May I go to Pondicherry to have a dentist treat it?" There was that royal silence and Chadwick did not go. Within three days, his toothache miraculously disappeared. He told me, "One should always be in tune with the master. His answer is there. It doesn't have to be a verbal 'yes' or 'no'. If you adhere to that, then even if his answer is in the negative, a positive action of healing flows from it."

As we saw earlier, Chadwick followed a strict regimen of meditating, reading spiritual books and sitting in front of Bhagavan for long periods of time. A six foot two inch man, he could not sit cross legged for long on the floor and used to struggle. Observing this, Bhagavan advised him to have a meditation belt. In his reminiscences, Chadwick writes about wearing a cotton meditation belt around his body while sitting on the floor keeping his knees vertical. With it, he didn't have to recline on the wall or stretch his legs. He could sit for hours on the floor without any problem. From then on, Chadwick could be invariably seen sitting in a corner of the Old Hall wearing his meditation belt. Chadwick once told me that this idea was given to him by Bhagavan. I queried about why his reminiscences didn't mention that it was Bhagavan's idea. Chadwick replied, "I didn't write it because Bhagavan told me not to." I persisted, "At least you could have left a hint that Bhagavan gave it to you. That way, we would have had a glimpse without you directly disobeying him." He replied, "I have left a hint, read it carefully." On close reading, I discovered that Bhagavan had told Chadwick about how his father had used a similar belt. Though his father used it rarely, Bhagavan remembered it on seeing Chadwick struggle to sit on the floor and advised him appropriately. How meticulously Bhagavan looked after his devotees' physical and spiritual needs!

There is another incident told to me by Cohen that Chadwick has not written about in his book. The person who was attending to English correspondence in the ashram office had to go away. Helpless and not knowing what else to do, my grandfather Chinna Swami called Chadwick and requested him to come to the office and take care of the English correspondence. Chadwick refused and went to his room. But his conscience started pricking him: "All of them, particularly Chinna Swami, have helped me a lot. But when he needed a little help from me, I refused." When Cohen came in the evening, Chadwick told him about his dilemma. Cohen suggested that he go to Bhagavan and get his advice. On hearing about Chadwick's dilemma, Bhagavan kept silent for some time. Then, he turned to Cohen and said, "Chadwick is doing Bhagavan greater service by meditating."

Many seekers, as their meditation progresses, experience an intense and inexplicable fear. This happened to Chadwick too. He went to Bhagavan and told him about it. Bhagavan reassured him, "The fear is not for you. The fear is created by the ego and the ego has to face this fear. Ask who is facing this fear? When you ask this, the fear will drop off. The ego will bring in, particularly in meditation, many obstacles. Whatever the nature of the obstacle, immediately ask who am I? To whom is this trouble? To whom is this problem? It will immediately drop. And in raising this question 'Who am I?', if you notice the silence instead of looking for an answer, that silence will dispense with the ego instantly." Chadwick's ripeness was such, that at the very moment he listened to Bhagavan he got completely rid of the fear. He never had fear in his meditation again.

Once, Chadwick was reading a book in which it was declared that one look of grace from the guru was enough to get liberation. Chadwick had a doubt, "If one look can give liberation to anyone, then why is everyone not liberated?" He went to Bhagavan and started telling him, "Bhagavan, this is what the scriptures say." Not allowing him to go any further, Bhagavan uttered three words: "Coal, charcoal, gunpowder." Puzzled, Chadwick asked, "Bhagavan, what do you mean by that?" Bhagavan replied, "The look of grace of the guru is always there and has the same power all the time. But, to receive it, the seeker has to have the same intensity and be on the same wavelength. That is why seekers are said to be like coal, charcoal or gunpowder. Coal takes a long time to ignite, charcoal takes less time and gunpowder ignites instantly. So, some seekers get it instantly, some seekers take more time and those seekers who do not listen to the teaching of the master and practice it, take a long, long time." When Bhagavan told Chadwick, "Ask 'Who am I?' when fear comes and the fear will go," at that very instant

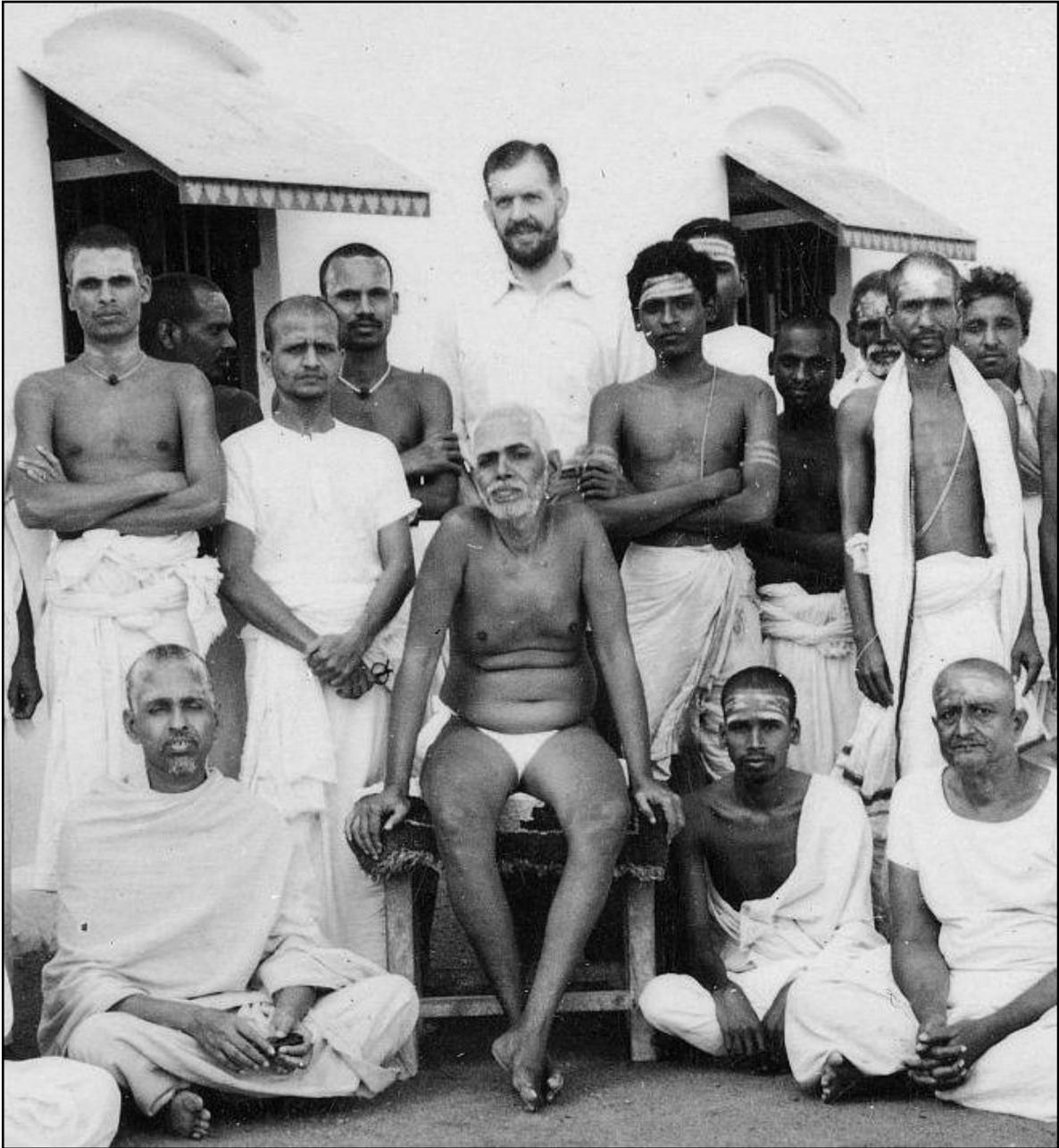
Chadwick put it into practice and the fear was gone forever. Like gunpowder indeed was Bhagavan's military disciple, Major Chadwick!

Knowing that Chadwick was very interested in reading spiritual books, Bhagavan asked Munagala Venkataramiah to translate traditional texts like *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, *Tripura Rahasya* and *Advaita Bodha Deepika* into English. Once the translations were done, Chadwick would have them typed and sent to a binder he knew with instructions to have two copies of each book bound with black leather cloth. He would give one copy to Bhagavan and keep one for himself. Bhagavan kept these copies in his mobile library. Whenever serious seekers, who did not know Sanskrit or Tamil, like Dr. Mees, Miss Merston, Uma Devi of Poland, W.Y. Evans-Wentz and Maurice Frydman came, he would hand these out to them. It was because of Chadwick's interest and Bhagavan's compassion for him that these translations happened.

Chadwick also used to have a lot of fun with Bhagavan. In those days, there were no ceiling fans in the Old Hall. Instead there was a *punkah* - a manually operated Indian ceiling fan made of a long, stout wooden stick attached to an equally long strip of cloth. When the rope hanging from it was pulled, the *punkah* would move to and fro, sending down a pleasant breeze. In the Old Hall, the *punkah's* rope hung down behind Bhagavan's sofa. One day, when no one was in the hall, Chadwick somehow folded his six foot four inch frame and hid himself behind the sofa. Then, when Bhagavan came in and sat on the sofa, he stealthily started pulling the *punkah*. Bhagavan was surprised because there was nobody in the hall but the *punkah* was moving with full speed! Since Bhagavan could only turn around very slowly, by the time he tried to find out who was pulling it, Chadwick would stop pulling the *punkah* and hide. Seeing nobody, when Bhagavan turned away, Chadwick would again resume pulling the *punkah*. This happened a few times, until finally Bhagavan called out, "Chadwick, I know you are there!"



Chadwick under his cottage roof



*Bearded Chadwick standing behind his 'Guru'*

Bhagavan shared many of the secrets of the holy hill with Chadwick. Once, while they were in the hall, he addressed Chadwick, "Chadwick, when I was going around the hill, I was suddenly transported into the hill. I saw many cities, waterfalls, rivers, temples and people there. These people who are here now were there, and hey, Chadwick, you were also there!" After Bhagavan expressed this, Chadwick, Munagala Venkataramiah, Osborne and many others, independently had experiences in which they suddenly found themselves inside the mountain and saw waterfalls and cities with sages and saints meditating. It may look mysterious, but it is a true spiritual experience. The 'I AM' that we have to awaken to, is the same 'I AM' which is inside the hill.

Chadwick asked Sri Bhagavan to tell him more about Arunachala. Bhagavan told Chadwick about how he had roamed over the hill so much that not an inch of space on the hill was untouched by his feet. Bhagavan then narrated to him what happened once when he was roaming about the hill, during his stay at Pachaiamman temple, situated in the forest at the foot of the hill. On that day, Bhagavan happened to look up and saw a huge banyan tree on top of a steep cliff. It struck him as possibly being the mythological tree under which Lord Dakshinamurthi sat as Arunagiri Yogi. Bhagavan wanted to

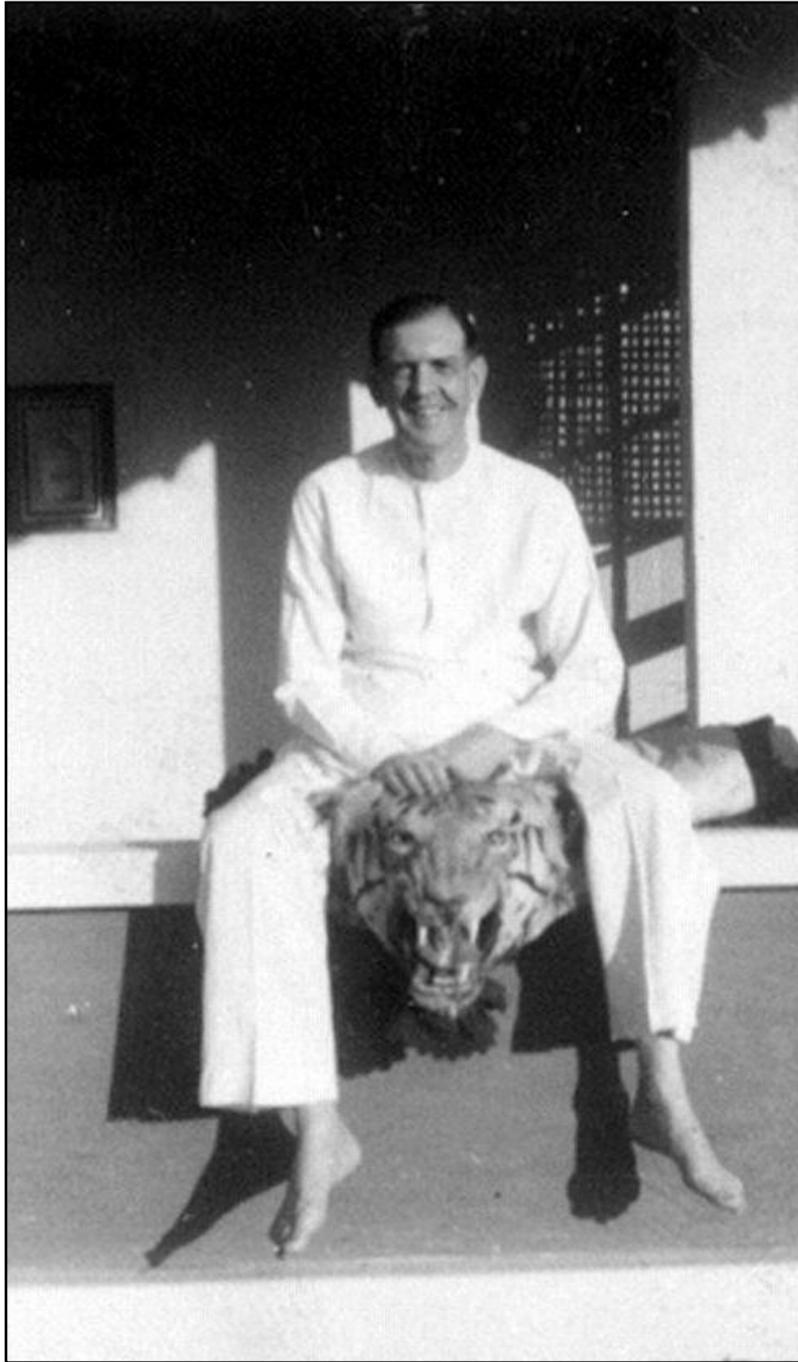
climb up towards it. On the way, his leg accidentally disturbed a hornet nest on a bush and was stung badly by the nest's now angry occupants. Bhagavan said that everything he saw suddenly disappeared. He returned to the temple with a swollen left leg. Later on, Bhagavan warned devotees not to attempt to climb to that banyan tree. After narrating this incident to me, Chadwick said, "It is a great blessing to us that Bhagavan returned to the temple on that day without further pursuing his efforts to go up. Otherwise, we would have lost our Bhagavan on that day itself for Bhagavan is Arunachala himself and he would have merged with Arunagiri Yogi. Just as the light from Bhagavan's body travelled up to the hill top and merged with it when he dropped his body on April, 14, 1950."

Bhagavan once openly talked about how Chadwick was amongst 'us' previously. However, he had a great desire to be born in the west. So, he was born as Chadwick and had now come back to 'us'. When Chadwick told me this I was not so very happy because Bhagavan never talked about reincarnation or previous births. Chadwick then pointed out, "The true import of Bhagavan's statement is not to have any desires. That is the important thing and not whether I had a previous birth or am reincarnated." This is an indication for us seekers never to have or develop desires. The one thing that we should always meditate on is the 'I AM', the awareness within us.

It was Chadwick who came closest to making Bhagavan indicate, albeit indirectly, that he is the Guru. Bhagavan never accepted the duality of guru and disciple. He never announced that he is the guru and others are disciples. But at a particular stage, Chadwick had a problem with this: "You never declare that you are the guru. But you also say that a disciple cannot get liberation without a guru. So, where do I stand Bhagavan? Am I to go in search of a guru?" Bhagavan tried to tell him that there was only the Self and there cannot be a separate guru. A true guru cannot declare himself to be a guru as distinguished from the disciple. He was trying to say that there is only one Self in everyone, but Chadwick was not happy with the answer. Noticing this, Bhagavan turned to the others, "Chadwick is not satisfied with what I have said. Ask the sub-registrar to bring a legal document that declares this. And ask the office to send their seal so that I can stamp it and then give it to him!" This is how Chadwick got Bhagavan to admit that he is indeed a guru!

Chadwick shared with me that a few days before Bhagavan was to drop the body, he went inside Bhagavan's Nirvana Room and wept bitterly saying, "Bhagavan, you are leaving." There also, Bhagavan revealed that he indeed is the guru through his reply: "The prime duty of a guru is to establish the certainty of his existence in the hearts of his disciples and having done that, he is free to leave." He had already implanted the truth in Chadwick and the others and that was why he was dropping his body.

Once, I asked Chadwick, "Are you realized?" I have put this question to all of the old devotees like Muruganar, Cohen, Osborne, Sadhu Natanananda, Devaraja Mudaliar and others. None of them either said yes or no - all smiled. When I asked him whether he was realized, he did not say yes or no. Instead, he told me, "I will tell you what happened. After many years of my stay with Bhagavan - four or five years, I committed the mistake of trying to evaluate how much I have progressed spiritually. This is a thing any seeker should not do. I felt that I have not progressed. Many who saw me in Ramanasramam, looked at me like I was a sage or a saint saying, 'Oh! He is so fortunate. He is so close to Bhagavan. He meditates so much. He is already in that state.' This created a contradiction in me as I personally felt that I was not progressing spiritually. However, having left the material life I could not go back to a worldly life either. I felt caught between the devil and the deep sea. I was sorrow stricken. I ran to Bhagavan's hall. He was alone. I told him, 'Bhagavan, this is my plight. I am neither here nor there and this causes much sorrow in me.' Bhagavan looked at me compassionately and said, 'Chadwick, who says all this?' Immediately, there was a current like shock in my body and I literally ran to my room, shut the doors and went into a neutral state. I was not bothered whether I was spiritually maturing or whether I would be able to stay in the world. I was in a neutral state of silence. A few days passed like that wherein I was neither happy nor worried." The only luxury that Chadwick allowed himself was taking his bath in a bath tub which he had in the verandah of his cottage. One day, shortly after the above incident, something happened unexpectedly. As Chadwick told me later, "I was taking my bath and very honestly Ganesan, I was not in a spiritual state or in a prayerful mood when it suddenly dawned - the 'I AM'!" He experienced it - not just as words. He was so ecstatic that he did not even dry himself. He just wrapped a towel around his waist and ran to the Old Hall from where a few days back he had run away. Fortunately, this time too, Bhagavan was alone. In this spiritual ecstasy of experiencing the 'I AM', where there was no Chadwick, just the 'I AM', he asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, is THIS it?" Chadwick



*Sadhu Arunachala seated on a tiger skin*

recounted, “Bhagavan gave me the most glorious smile, and then confirmed, ‘Yes, Chadwick, THIS is THAT!’ I then asked him, ‘Bhagavan, is it so simple?’ Bhagavan replied, ‘Yes it is that simple.’ Since then, I’ve never had any doubt.”

Once, Chadwick advised me, “Ganesan! Do not try to gather more knowledge, because finally, knowledge itself will become a great hindrance to Self realisation. When I made an effort to learn Tamil and sought Bhagavan's permission for it, his response was revealing. He said, ‘Why do you want to acquire one more dead weight? All knowledge will have to be finally given up to experience the truth. You have to plunge within to experience the truth, through the relentless practice of the enquiry, ‘Who am I?’ The key to Self realisation is practice, practice and practice only.” I took that opportunity to seek one more clarification from him as to why westerners were drawn more to Bhagavan's teaching. Chadwick's reply was significant, “Bhagavan’s message certainly is much appreciated in the west. His purely rational arguments and the lack of sentiment in his teachings have great appeal. He never preached or laid down the law. Instead, he always concentrated on turning the seeker back into himself

and pointing out to him that it was entirely up to him, since the guru could only indicate the way and guide him. For, no one can give Self realisation to another.”

When Bhagavan’s will was drawn and executed, Chadwick fully supported it. He was there on that day when Bhagavan drew a line in lieu of his signature in the presence of a high court judge and a court official. Later on, when some people started contesting it, Chadwick went to every relevant government office, testified that he was there when Bhagavan executed his will and that the management of the ashram was left to the family. According to Chadwick, “Instead of any Tom, Dick and Harry, if the family was made the managers, whatever happens, they will not leave the ashram. Bhagavan’s choice is the best choice.” When my grandfather Niranjanananda Swami passed away, my father Venkatoo became the manager as he was next in the hierarchy.

From 1956 to 1958, I was staying in Tiruvannamalai and trying to get a job. Finding no success, I was very sad. On one such day, Chadwick called me to his room. When I went there he said, “Ganesan, during Bhagavan’s lifetime itself, Osborne, Cohen, Munagala Venkataramiah and I were four people who were very much interested in astrology. Munagala Venkataramiah and I believed in Hindu astrology, whereas Cohen believed in western astrology. Osborne trusted I Ching, the ancient Chinese science of divination. We knew that according to the will, the next president will be the eldest son of Venkatoo - your elder brother Sundaram. But, among the three grand nephews of Bhagavan, who will be the one that spreads his spiritual teachings? This was our question. Each of us consulted our preferred divination method. All of us arrived at the same conclusion: you are going to be the one, Ganesan, to spread and pass on the teaching.” He said this in 1957 when I had no inclination to take to spiritual life or stay on in Ramanasramam. Chadwick told me, “Why do you want to go seeking a job when your place is here? Stay here!” But I did not stay and went away - only to come back in 1960. As I know now that talking on the teachings is only one way of spreading it; it became clear to me that they meant I would be the one to give talks and satsangs, even by travelling to other countries!

Chadwick was a pillar of strength for me when I came back to the ashram and started helping with its management. Whatever problem I had, whether financial or legal, Chadwick stood like a rock behind me. Once, it happened that my father was away - the year was 1961. I had been in the ashram for one year and in the absence of my father I had to take up the responsibility of taking decisions and making arrangements. The annual ten day Karthikai festival of the Arunachaleswar Temple was on. The climax of the festival was the lighting of the Karthikai Deepam by the temple management, a huge flame, on the summit of the holy Arunachala. During his lifetime, Bhagavan would be seated outside the hall from where the *deepam* could be seen. The moment the *deepam* was lit on the hill, a lamp of ghee would be lit in front of Bhagavan. After Bhagavan dropped the body, it was the ashram practice to keep a picture of Bhagavan and light the ghee lamp in front of it as soon as the *deepam* on the hill was lit - a tradition that continues to this day.

That day in 1961, it started raining heavily. I was agitated because we could not keep the picture and light the lamp outside as it was traditionally done. Seeing this, Chadwick came to me and said, “Ganesan, do not be agitated. We can take the picture inside the dining hall and light the lamp there.” I expressed my concern, “Though Bhagavan was never interested in rituals he was very particular on witnessing the Karthikai Deepam. How can I deviate from the ashram tradition? My father is not here and I do not want to do something that breaks the tradition.” He reassured me, “During Bhagavan’s lifetime, it rained one year just like this. Since he was keen on seeing the *deepam*, Bhagavan suggested that we go into the dining hall and open the big door through which one could see the hill’s summit. I was next to Bhagavan. I told him ‘Bhagavan, we will not be able to see the *deepam* because it is raining heavily.’ Bhagavan took his binoculars and looking through it, exhorted, ‘Watch, watch!’ And at the moment the *deepam* was lit on the hill, see the miracle Ganesan, I was watching eagerly, the rain stopped, the clouds dispersed for a few minutes and we got a glimpse of the *deepam* as it was lit. Immediately, Bhagavan said, ‘Now light the ghee lamp. The *deepam* has been lit.’ We too will follow suit.” I was a little skeptical because it was pouring. I anyhow followed Chadwick’s advice. Chadwick sat next to me and eagerly said, “Watch, watch!” And exactly the same thing happened. At the time of lighting the *deepam* on the hill, the rain stopped and the clouds dispersed. And we lit the ghee lamp in front of Bhagavan’s picture inside the dining hall - just before the clouds gathered again and hid the *deepam* from our view!



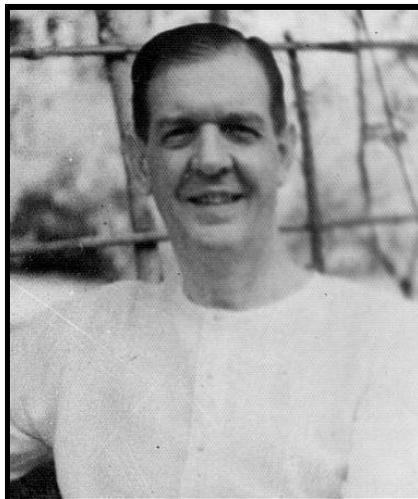
Due to financial problems, some of the activities of the ashram had to be stopped after Bhagavan dropped the body. The *Vedapatashala*, the school that taught the *Vedas* which was started in 1938 in Ramanasramam, had to be closed down. The *pooja*, ritual worship, was not being done properly. Then, Chadwick pitched in with his customary meticulousness. He restarted the *Veda patashala* with the help of my teacher T. K. Sundaresa Iyer and regulated the daily worship in the shrines of Bhagavan and the Mother. It was he who started the regular performance of the Sri Chakra Pooja in the Mother's shrine. A fully surrendered devotee staying like an anchor in Ramanasramam, his very staying helped the teaching to be spread. People like Somerset Maugham, Spaulding and many other famous people who came, all talked to Chadwick. And Chadwick convinced them of the greatness of Bhagavan.

He was also instrumental in spreading Bhagavan's teaching in a more solid way by correcting *Talks with the Maharshi* and *Day by Day with Bhagavan*. All the conversations that we now read in these books were corrected by Chadwick. When *Talks with the Maharshi* was to be printed, there was a committee who took the manuscripts to Madras and some scholar or the other struck out many pages saying they were repetitions. It was brought to the ashram before sending it to the press. I was in the office at that time and it was given to Chadwick for his approval. He came back after going through it with his whole face red with anger: "Who has struck out all this - my master's words? How do you know? Why do you use mere intellectual knowledge and see the repetition? The repetition is absolutely essential." This is what he writes in its introduction, "The repetition is meaningful. Not a single word has to be taken off because every word has been seen by Bhagavan and approved by Bhagavan." If today we read 'Talks' and 'Day by Day' as they were recorded, it is all thanks to Chadwick. Otherwise we would have only a truncated portion of the *Talks with the Maharshi*, *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and other talks with Bhagavan. In this way, Major Chadwick had a major role in communicating the message.

During his last days, he became very ill and was taken to the Christian Medical College Hospital in Vellore. The illness was the result of a hernia operation he had in Tiruvannamalai which became septic. He did not want to go away from Arunachala. All of us pleaded with him to go to the hospital in Vellore and get treated. So, there he was, when his doctors sent us a message that his end was imminent. I was very eager to go but my father, Mrs. Taleyarkhan and Hugo Maier, a German doctor, told me to stay back and look after the ashram while they went and rendered whatever help they could. When they reached the hospital, the doctors said that Chadwick was in a coma and could not talk. Mrs. Taleyarkhan, moved on seeing Chadwick lying down helpless with tubes sticking out from his body, announced, "Chadwick, we have come from Ramanasramam." Pat came the reply, "Welcome, Ganesan." He thought that I had come. They said, "Ganesan could not come." And then, he uttered these words, "Today is Easter." Hugo Maier corrected him, "Chadwick, today is not Easter. Easter is one week hence." Chadwick replied in an assertive tone, "For me, today is Easter."

After he passed away, his body was brought to the ashram. There were many who were opposed to interring him in the ashram. Countering them, I gave my firm view, "Chadwick is the child of Bhagavan and his body should not be sent out." Next to his room on its southern side, his body was interred. You will be surprised to know that on the northern side of the same room, his ego has a *samadhi*. In 1938, he was digging a small grave there. When a few puzzled devotees asked him, "Why are you digging?" he looked at them and said, "It is a *samadhi* for my ego." Bhagavan once visited it, I am told.

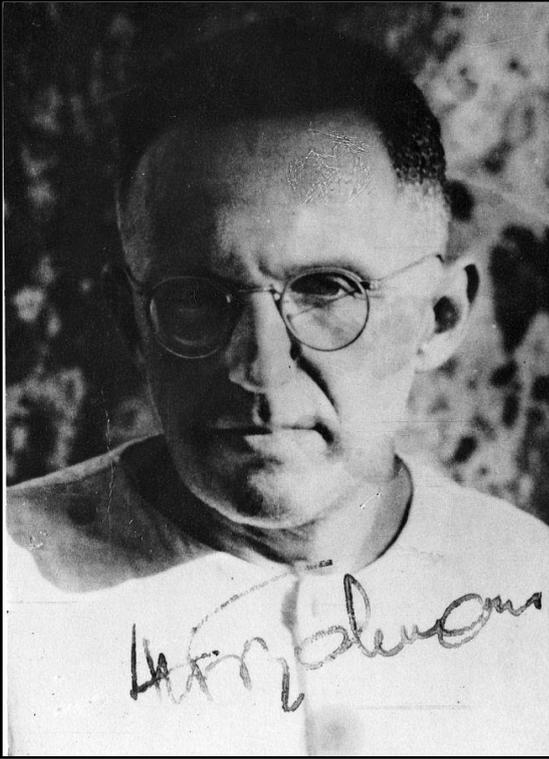
This remarkable devotee, after serving his master Bhagavan Ramana, went back to the source and merged there. Today, we can only see the *samadhi* of his body and ego. If you want to see the real Chadwick you can see him here and now. Turn within, to your Heart and you will find Bhagavan there, Arunachala there and my most revered friend Chadwick there. Every day, he would greet me, "Ganesan, *salaam aleykum*." It is the way that Muslims greet each other. It means, 'peace be unto you'. Yes! Major A. W. Chadwick staying in the Heart is still saying the same thing to us all, "*Salaam aleykum*, peace be unto you."





*Maurice Frydman (in suit) seated on the left side of Maharshi*

## Maurice Frydman



Maurice Frydman was a genius out of the ordinary. He was born in a Jewish ghetto in Poland. He came from such a poor family, that he tasted white bread only at the age of thirteen. He could read and write Russian, Hebrew and Cyrillic by the age of ten, and could speak fluent Russian, Polish, French, English and Hebrew. He stood first in his class right from his school days to the time he was a student of electrical engineering. Highly inventive, he had nearly a hundred patents for his engineering inventions by the time he was just twenty.

At the age of twenty five, Maurice had a strong inner urge to seek God. In the process, he gave up Judaism and took to Russian Orthodoxy. He became a monk, leading an austere life in a solitary monastery. On one of the rare occasions he ventured out, he found himself on top of a mighty waterfall. Here, Satan tempted him by saying, "If you have real faith in Jesus Christ and if you really love the church, jump into this waterfall." Maurice, very characteristically, jumped immediately into the deep chasm, wearing his monk's robe. Would Arunachala let him go away so soon? His robe got entangled in some of the shrubs on the precipice, and he was saved! Proof, that when there is earnestness, a thirst to know the

truth, the truth will guide us.

All the orthodox dogmas he was practicing failed to lead him to the truth and he became vexed. He sought freedom from bondage of every kind. This quest led him to the Theosophical Society and to Annie Besant. The meeting with J. Krishnamurti impressed him the most. All these meetings took place in 1926. Krishnamurti declared, "Truth is a pathless land." And that truth can be arrived at only by applying oneself diligently without being dependent on any kind of external authority. This approach appealed to Maurice and he had lengthy dialogues on the subject with Krishnamurti. It is on record that Krishnamurti always obliged Maurice whenever he wanted to talk to him.

Maurice had a seething desire to see God and know the truth, but all the while, from 1928 to 1934, he continued working in the electrical industry. He became the general manager of a well known electrical goods manufacturing factory in France. Yet, his aspiration to know the truth never left him and he started reading the French and German translations of *Vedantic* treatises like the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. 1935 proved to be the turning point in his spiritual life. This was when he started reading Paul Brunton's books. The teaching "Who am I?" proved to be tremendously enlightening. The teaching that truth exists within oneself, rather than outside of the Self made him turn within. Paul Brunton's books kindled his burning desire to visit India and meet the living sage, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. In all this, Providence guided him. The *diwan* of Mysore (a *diwan* is akin to the chief minister of a state or even, the prime minister of a country) wanted to modernize his state and was touring Europe and England to learn more about the facilities available in these countries. One day, he visited the factory that Maurice Frydman was in charge of. He was so impressed by Maurice's sincerity, application and hard work that he requested him, "Will you please come to our state and advise us on how to develop our state?" In the 1930's, India was in a very backward condition and technology had really not found a place here. Maurice shot back characteristically, "My bags are packed, sir. I am prepared to leave for India with you." That was Maurice!

Maurice Frydman arrived in India, the country of his dreams in 1935. He was put in charge of setting up a big electrical goods manufacturing factory since he was an expert in the field. His aspiration, however, was to meet Bhagavan. Despite his busy work schedule, he went to meet him. From the very first instance, he was prepared to surrender himself to Bhagavan. He would work day and night at the

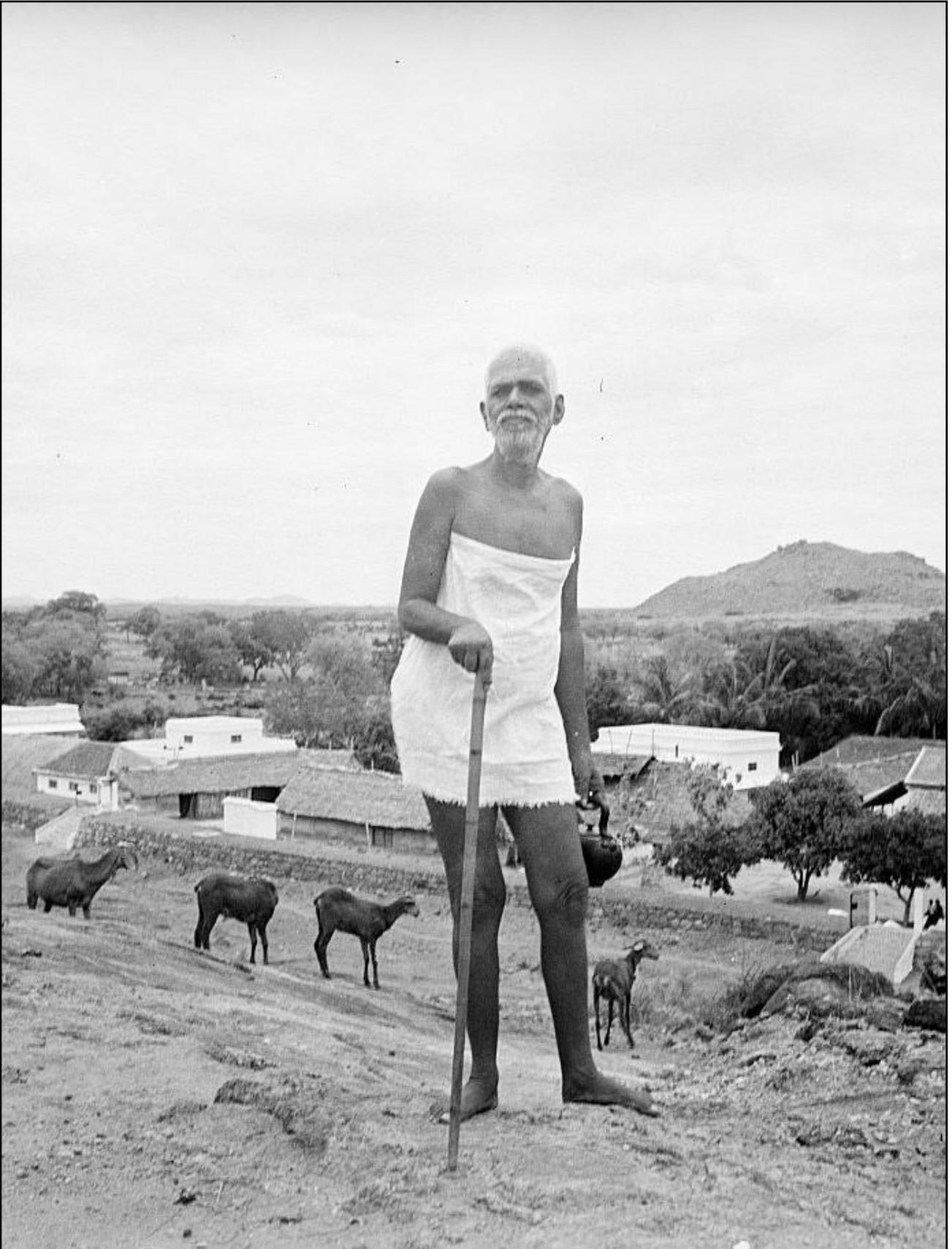
factory. So much so, he became very successful within a short time. On weekends, he would go to Arunachala, where people would greet him with, "Here comes our Maurice." During his sojourn, he would talk to his friends and to Bhagavan, questioning Bhagavan often, and Bhagavan would patiently answer. Bhagavan was spontaneous and natural, reflecting you like a mirror. When someone was totally immersed in spirituality, he too responded by giving himself to them. People in Ramanasramam commented on his frequent weekly visits, "Maurice, why do you not come once a month or maybe once in two months? You have to spend so much to come here." Maurice would reply, "What can I do? My battery can take only so much. Within a week it dries up. I have to come here every week to be in Bhagavan's presence and get it recharged!"

Maurice was very close to and free with Bhagavan. He gathered as much as he could about *Vedanta*, had discussions with others and read up as much as possible about the Hindu scriptures. He had heard that if one wanted final emancipation, one had to take *sannyas*. He approached Bhagavan and enquired, "Bhagavan, this is what the Hindu scriptures say. Will you please give me *sannyas*?" Bhagavan remained silent - but you know our dear Maurice. He was persistent in his appeal. One day, he approached Bhagavan on the hill and said, "Bhagavan, give me *sannyas*. I want to renounce the world and strive towards enlightenment." Bhagavan, in a very compassionate tone, answered, "*Sannyas* is taken from within; not from without." Maurice's face fell at the response. Bhagavan, like a mother, looked at Maurice and explained, "You are already a *sannyasin*. Why do you want to take up ochre robes?" Maurice did not give up. He kept asking Bhagavan for *sannyas*, and Bhagavan kept telling him, "There is no need for *sannyas*." So, what did Maurice with his ingenious, inventive brain do? He went to Swami Ramdas - a realized soul - in Anandashram. Somehow, he convinced Swami Ramdas to give him *sannyas*. Swami Ramdas gave him the outward *sannyas* that he so desperately desired. Maurice was given a new name. He was called Swami Bharatananda, which means 'one who delights staying in India.' Maurice became close to Swami Ramdas. Once, Swami Ramdas told him, "Maurice, Swami Bharatananda, this is your last birth." Being a great saint, he could see the spiritual merit of Maurice Frydman.

One day, while Bhagavan was coming down the hill, Maurice came and stood in front of him, dressed in the ochre robes and beads of a Hindu monk. Maurice was rather anxious because he wanted his master to approve of what he had done. Seeing him, Bhagavan started laughing. Then, Bhagavan smilingly said to his attendant, "Hey, he looks like a buffoon in a circus." Maurice understood. All his life he had been a true *sannyasin* from within. Consequently, his attachment to wearing ochre robes continued only for a few more years. That is what Bhagavan meant when he said, "*Sannyas* is to give up attachment," because Maurice never had any kind of attachment.

Even while working in the factory, Maurice led a very austere life. He refused to accept his monthly salary of three thousand rupees - a princely sum in those days. He declined the amount, saying, "I do not want it. Give it to the workers' fund." As for sleeping, once the shops closed for the night, he slept on the porch of one of the shops. And what did this big boss, this top man working at the factory have for lunch? While all the other workers trooped into the dining hall to eat the lunch that they had brought from home, Maurice would stand at the dining hall's entrance, clad in his ochre robes and with his begging bowl in his hands. This was in the spirit of a true *sannyasin*. The workers, who loved him very much, would first put something in the begging bowl before going into the dining room to eat. Not only that, Maurice stitched his own clothes. He wore only *khadi* pyjamas and *kurtas* made out of cloth from the yarn that he himself had spun on the *charkha*, a traditional, Indian spinning wheel. Even his footwear was stitched by him! He led a remarkably simple life, but he was happy and content. He didn't gloat about his way of life or relent from it - he was just tremendously happy.

Maurice's association with Bhagavan remained close and regular. Just like the child questions the mother, so too, Maurice posed a lot of incisive questions to Bhagavan on the practical aspects of *sadhana*. It was not to satisfy his intellectual curiosity that he asked them. Bhagavan would patiently answer his questions. Bhagavan said, 'Frydman is asking these questions for the sake of others !' Maurice used to record these exchanges and then show the record to Bhagavan and get it corrected. This was later published as *Maharshi's Gospel* on the occasion of Bhagavan's sixtieth birthday in 1939. From that year onwards, this book has been guiding true seekers. Even today, it remains an excellent guide for serious seekers. I always recommend three books to sincere seekers for study - *The Maharshi and His Message*, *Words of Grace* and *Maharshi's Gospel*.



It was during such close interaction with Bhagavan, that Maurice wrote a series of moving verses. Bhagavan read them with great interest. In two of these verses Maurice says: "So long I have been on this stage to please thee. My eyes are blinded by the light of thy play. My ears are deafened by the

rolling thunder of thy laughter. My heart is turned to ashes by the flame of real sorrow. My lord, to please thee I have made a fool of myself. And now I am unable to stop the agony of the play. My lord, drag me down from this stage. Master, I have forgotten the way in and the way out.” Bhagavan was happy to read through the verses. He said that this was exactly what had been written by Appayya Dikshitar, a sage who lived in the sixteenth century A.D. His verses in Sanskrit were written on palm leaves and many people were not aware of them. Bhagavan said that Appaya Dikshitar’s verses describe the situation of the court dancer performing in the presence of the king. She cannot stop dancing unless it pleases the king to tell her to stop. The dancer’s limbs may ache but she cannot stop of her own accord. She cries, “Oh lord, I am weary of the many births and deaths that I have endured. One glance from you, oh lord, is sufficient to put an end to this dance of birth and death and grant me release.” Bhagavan paused before saying, “Maurice Frydman belongs here. Somehow, he was born abroad but he has come here again. Otherwise, how is it possible for him to compose verses similar to Appayya Dikshitar?” Bhagavan made Maurice continue his dance by not asking him to come down. As we are going to see, he had to continue performing on the world stage because he was a *karma yogi* who still had a few more amazing deeds to perform. So, Maurice flowed along with the state of things and continued working busily in the factory.

Apa Pant, the prince of Aundh in Maharashtra, who had studied in England, was sent to the Maharaja of Mysore for training in the art of governance. In the course of his training, he was asked to visit the factory in which Maurice was the managing director. When he went to the factory, Apa Pant, himself a perceptive, calm and collected person, could not help being drawn to Maurice’s brilliance and dedication. Likewise, Maurice too took a great liking to Apa Pant and started guiding him spiritually. He also impressed upon the young prince the need to focus on development in the villages of his state and to take science and technology there, so that life became easier and smoother for the peasants. Apa Pant then told Maurice, “Please come to our state and stay there for at least five or six months and guide us.”

One fine day soon after this, the prince found Maurice in his palace. Maurice told the prince, “I have come to you. I have resigned my job in Bangalore. I would like to serve the villages of the Aundh state!” The poor prince (poor, not literally) did not know what to say. He could only say, “This state cannot afford to pay an engineer like you.” Maurice, in his very characteristic manner said, “I will sleep on the floor in that room. Just give me an Indian desk to work on. I have got legs to walk and I will take you on my walks. We will both work together in the villages of Aundh. Now, if you could give me some food, I am hungry.” Maurice was always telegraphic, but very, very clear!

Wherever he was, Maurice remained in correspondence with Bhagavan. We have to understand that inwardly he was all the time in the presence of Bhagavan. In one of his letters to Bhagavan, he wrote, “The Maharshi is with me not only when I think of him, but also when I am not thinking of him. Otherwise, how do I live?” Apa Pant and Maurice started working together. You will be surprised to know that Maurice’s office was under the shade of a huge tree in a village. He lived in the villages he visited and worked very hard for them. Maurice heard about Mahatma Gandhi’s deep interest in bringing decentralized democracy into the villages in order to empower them. He set out to meet Mahatma Gandhi to learn more about the process. Mahatma Gandhi took to Maurice immediately; he addressed Maurice only as Bharatananda; everyone in his Sevashram addressed him in the same manner. Gandhi found that Maurice was not only a hard worker but also an inventor who was using the Indian *charkha*. By way of blessing, Mahatma Gandhi asked Maurice, “Why do you not invent something by which we can produce yarn more quickly?” Maurice immediately created a new *charkha* called Dhanush Takli. The extraordinary thing about it was that one could produce three times the yarn with the same energy that was spent on the traditional *charkha*. Mahatma Gandhi was, needless to say, extremely pleased!

Whether Maurice was with Bhagavan, Mahatma Gandhi or J. Krishnamurti, his method of first questioning, experimenting and experiencing the truth at every level, and only then accepting and following it, remained the same. Such was his nature. This is exactly how he led the seventy five villages that he was reforming. He loved the poor, uneducated villagers and was so compassionate towards them that they felt purified in his presence; in fact, they addressed him as ‘Swami’. Maurice was successful in his venture in the villages and very soon the whole of India became aware of the kind of life Maurice was leading. By this time, Bhagavan and Mahatma Gandhi had dropped their bodies. This was a great setback for Maurice but he decided to rededicate himself to the cause they had taken up because he felt he was still on stage and had to play the outward game.

Maurice went to Varanasi to stay in the Krishnamurti institution there. He implemented the reform programmes in the surrounding villages. Krishnamurti's followers were also great admirers of Buddhism since the teachings of the Buddha and Krishnamurti were similar in many aspects. Senior followers of Krishnamurti like Achyut Patwardhan became very close to Maurice. This also happened to be during the Tibetan turmoil, when the communists in China were in the mood for seizing power. When Maurice heard about the tumult, he swung into action because at that time Apa Pant had just become the governor of Sikkim. Without wasting time, he immediately went to Sikkim and met Apa Pant. He told Apa Pant, with gusto, "You are going to be of great use to me! We have an important mission to accomplish here because we have to save His Holiness the Dalai Lama, all the old Buddhist manuscripts and thousands of Tibetans." Characteristic of him, Maurice immediately took Apa Pant to Delhi to meet Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India. Maurice, the diligent worker, already had by this time the road map to successfully carry out the rescue plan. Both Maurice and Achyut Patwardhan related to me how they had worked a plan for the escape of His Holiness. It was eventually the blueprint laid down by Maurice that Nehru followed in getting His Holiness out of Tibet. They fed the Chinese government with wrong information on the flight of His Holiness and thus, the Tibetan Guru and his devotees were saved.

The day His Holiness escaped to India, so did hundreds of fellow Tibetans. His Holiness came with many old Buddhist manuscripts, now preserved in the museum in Sarnath. Thus, thousands of priceless manuscripts were saved from the destructive hands of communist China. When the Dalai Lama entered India, Maurice planned it in such a manner, that Achyut Patwardhan would meet the Dalai Lama and give him the details. Yet, there is no mention of Maurice in any of the books related to either the Dalai Lama's escape or the smuggling in of Buddhist manuscripts from Tibet. I have never seen a person as self effacing as Maurice. Similarly, there was no mention of Maurice's name in the *Maharshi's Gospel* originally; only now is his name being mentioned. At the time of the Tibetan struggle, Jawaharlal Nehru very bluntly said, "My hands are tied." Maurice immediately travelled all over India, spending his own money, in order to find refuge for hundreds of Tibetan refugees. Maurice sought cooler places for the refugees and established five settlements. If the Tibetans enjoy a peaceful existence in India today, it is because of this Polish mystic saint, whose name is not mentioned anywhere!



*The wonderful dialogues recorded in 'Maharshi's Gospel' took place in the Old Hall.*

Discovering the capability of this man in bringing a semblance of order even in the most chaotic situations, Nehru requested Maurice to take over the *khadi* movement. It had initially been started by Gandhi, but was later in total disarray. This meant that Maurice had to go to Mumbai. Here, he stayed with an old friend of his, Miss Petite. By Bhagavan's Grace, I had the opportunity to meet Maurice in Mumbai. I had earlier met him at the ashram in the 1960's during the rare visits that he made. Again, I met him when I went to Mumbai in the 70's to collect funds for the advertisements for Ramanasramam's journal, *The Mountain Path*. Maurice then told me, "While your body is engaged in running the ashram, your heart should be totally settled in that pure awareness of truth. Never miss that, whatever you are doing."

We used to have beautiful private conversations. Once, Maurice confessed to me in all seriousness, "The burning regret for us is that probably full advantage was not taken of those happy and precious days when Bhagavan was with us physically - eating, talking, laughing and openly available to us all. Reality was there in abundance in our midst for the taking, and anyone could take it. But, we enclosed ourselves in our false humility, in procrastination, and false excuses. We took therefore, a cupful, when the ocean was at our feet!" On yet another occasion, he prodded me on, just to give me a push: "See, Bhagavan is not the person. He is the teaching. As the teaching, he is fully available to you. In addition to whatever work you are doing, plunge within and taste awareness inwardly. That awareness is our Bhagavan."

Maurice used to take me for long walks in Mumbai. He would tell me, "I will not provide you with a car; I will not even take you by bus; you have to walk wherever you go, along with me. Are you prepared?" With hands folded in a *namaste*, I would answer, "Would I hesitate to be in the proximity of the truth of reality?" Maurice was a spiritual giant, but physically he was less than five feet tall. Surely no one would hesitate to walk next to him! On one of these walks, Maurice said, "Ganesan, today I am going to take you to the place where I met a simple man selling *beedis*." As we were walking towards the place, Maurice narrated, "I saw a group of people smoking *beedis*; they were relating their woes of life. This simple man answered them exactly in the manner of Bhagavan. Had Bhagavan spoken in Marathi, it would have been the same! I stopped in my tracks and listened intently. It was astounding to see an ordinary man selling *beedis* talking so spontaneously! I started going to the place every day and noting down what he said. I would then go home and translate all the questions and answers into English."

However, Maurice was ridden with guilt because he had not sought the permission of this person. He informed the man what he had been doing and read out all his writings, translating them into Marathi. The man was delighted and told Maurice, "Go on recording, go ahead!" This was later published as *I am That* - a publication that shook the entire spiritual world. This man was none other than Nisargadatta Maharaj. Later on, after I had met Maharaj, I told Maurice, "Whatever you say is absolutely true. I can feel Bhagavan's presence in his presence. The teaching of Bhagavan comes from him spontaneously." Maurice always used to encourage me, "Come on and narrate to me the dialogue that you had with Maharaj." He would add, "Being a spiritual seeker, associating with sages and saints will deepen your understanding; it will help you go deeper and experience it. Reading improves only intellectual understanding. This experience oriented understanding will happen, whether you have understood it or not, only in the presence of realized masters." Saying this, he encouraged me to go to Maharaj.

I was unable to be with Maurice Frydman in his last days. But I was happy to understand from a devotee of Bhagavan who was also Nisargadatta Maharaj's devotee, that Bhagavan himself looked after him. The devotee told me about a nurse in Mumbai who normally charged a huge fee for her services. This nurse had a dream, in which a *sadhu* wearing only a loin cloth told her very clearly, "My devotee is suffering. Go and attend on him." The *sadhu* also gave her precise directions to reach Maurice's residence. The nurse went to the place described in the dream the next day and found Maurice Frydman in bed. Miss Petite was older than Maurice and she too was helpless and unattended. The nurse immediately offered her services. Maurice's austere attitude would not allow him to accept her services and so he refused. Disappointed, the nurse was leaving the room when she saw a picture of Bhagavan there. She turned to Maurice and exclaimed, "This is the *sadhu* who appeared in my dream." Maurice, visibly moved, said, "So, my master has come to look after me." The nurse served him till the end.

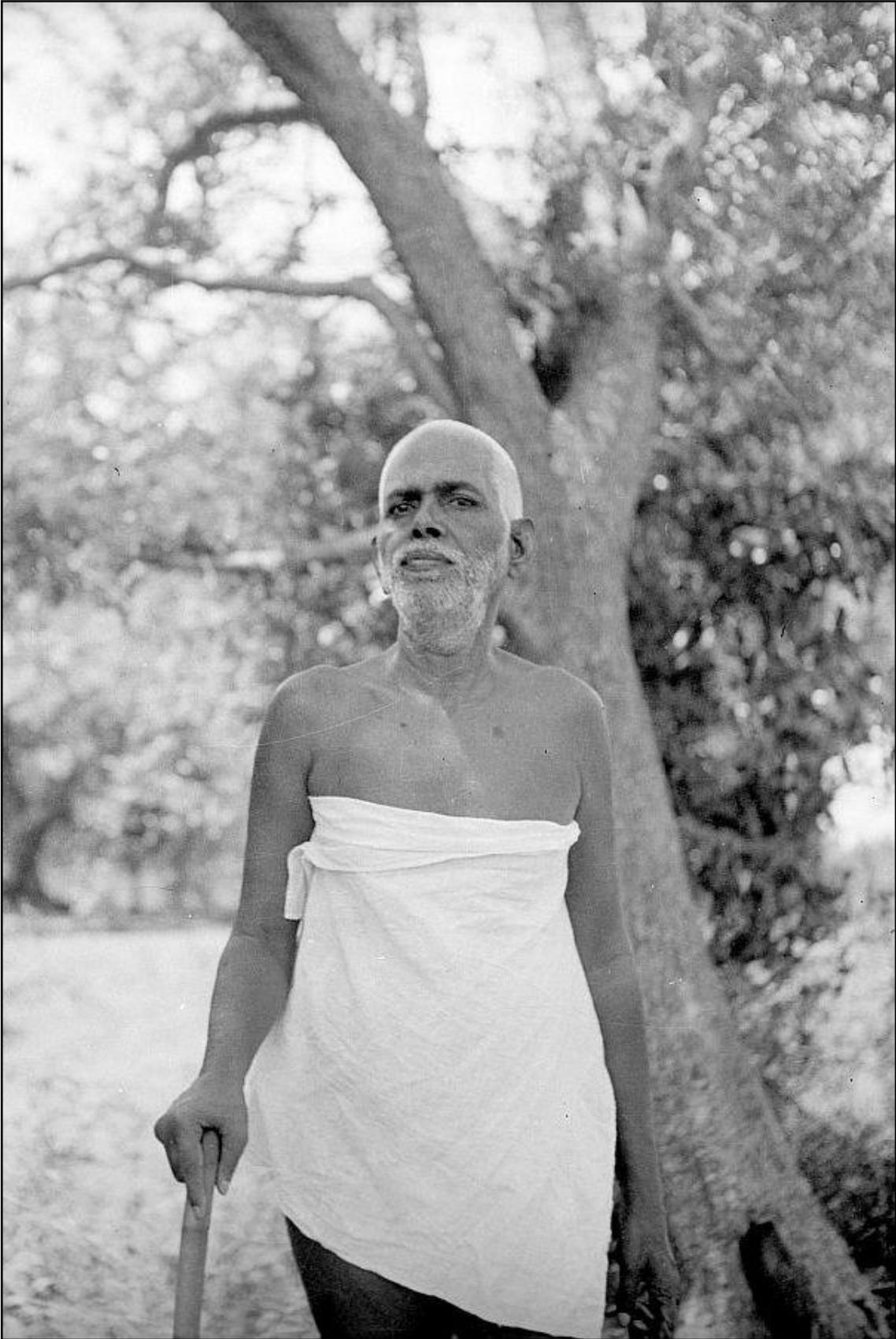
Apa Pant, who looked upon Maurice as his guru, was present during Maurice's last days. I would like to quote Apa's own words: "The sage is dying," whispered a soft voice over the phone from Mumbai. "The

sage is asking for you. Apa, come as soon as you can.” When I arrived, Miss Petite, the doctor and the nurse complained to me that Maurice was refusing to eat and take medicine. They implored me to make Maurice eat and take medicine - as if anyone could make Maurice do anything that he did not want to! There he lay in his familiar room, with everything meticulously clean and in its proper place. As I approached him reverentially, he shouted, ‘Apa, who is dying?’ The next day, he drove everyone out of the room, ordering them to leave him alone with me. Then, he said beautifully, ‘Apa, I hear music. I see the bright light. Who dies? No one is dying. This diseased body is keeping me away from that harmonious beauty. Do not let them keep me in this body. Go now in peace.’ The next day, we were all at his bedside as he breathed his last. Three breaths, “*Hari Om, Hari Om, Hari Om,*” and he was gone. Nisargadatta Maharaj was also at his bedside, so I asked him, ‘Maharaj, where is Maurice going? What is happening to him?’ Maharaj replied, ‘Nothing is happening. No one is dying, for no one is born.’ Then I asked him, ‘Then why this sorrow, this emptiness, this loss, Maharaj?’ Maharaj graciously turned to me and said, ‘Who is feeling the sorrow? Who is feeling the emptiness? Who is feeling the loss?’ I remained silent.” Within hours, in the presence of Nisargadatta Maharaj, the remains of what we called Maurice Frydman were consumed in the fire. The remains had returned to their original order. The great devotee, Maurice Frydman, had returned to the source, Arunachala.

Once, I went to Nisargadatta Maharaj’s house because he had asked me to stay with him. I stayed there for eight days. In the morning, from eight to ten, he would ask me to be seated while he did *pooja*. There were photographs of saints such as Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Ramana Maharshi, and yes, even Maurice Frydman, in his room. Maharaj would apply sandal, vermilion powder and perfume to the photographs and garland them. As he was doing this ritual one day, I was asking myself, “Why is he doing this?” He turned to me and said in a compassionate tone, “Maurice Frydman was a *jnani*. He was a saint, a sage.” This is undeniably true. Maurice Frydman has blessed us all by bringing to us the essence of the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj. How fortunate we are to be able to share the life of such a great person, one who did amazing things but wanted to remain unnoticed and unseen. So much so, that the first edition of *The Maharshi’s Gospel* compiled by Maurice did not even bear his name! We sincere seekers of truth must cling to him in our Heart.

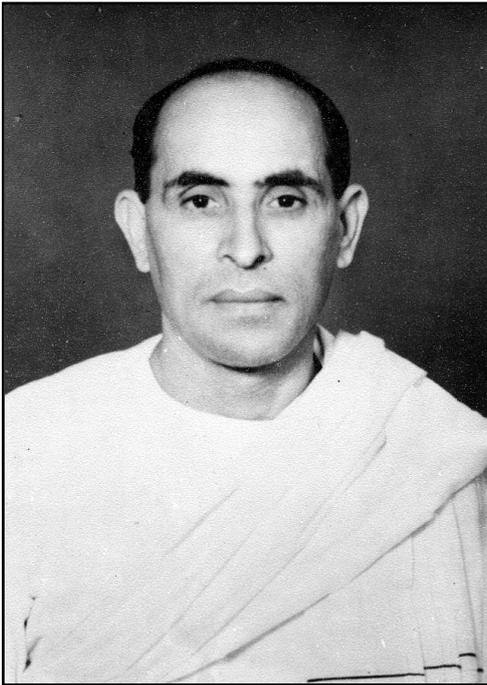


Nisargadatta Maharaj, interpreter and Maurice Frydman



*Sri Bhagavan taking his noon walk at Palaakothu*

## S. S. Cohen



S. S. Cohen, a Jew from Iraq, was one of the keenest intellects who came to Bhagavan. At the age of eighteen, he came across an esoteric book that detailed miraculous happenings in the life of yogis. Determined to go in search of the truth, he felt he should sacrifice everything and his all to meet a life transforming spiritual sage.

The First World War took place at that time. It taught him the great lesson that peace can never be attained outside, only inside. Even though a teenager, this conviction born of the heart, told him that the key to the mystery of his life lay in India. As providence would have it, his close friend in Mumbai fell seriously ill. (We call it providence or coincidence when we have such experiences, but it is only the guru's grace. In a seeker's life nothing happens as coincidence.) This friend was a millionaire, until one day his stocks and shares crashed. All of a sudden, he was on the streets, a pauper, and deeply depressed. He wrote to the one true friend who could help. Cohen felt that this friend who was drowned in depression should read the same esoteric book which helped him so much. He also felt this was an opportunity to go to India

though he belonged to a very poor family. He was the eldest of eleven children and his father was just a cleaner on a ship. The father loved his son very much. When he came to know of his son's inward longing, he went to his boss and requested that he give his son a deck hand's job on a ship that could take him to Mumbai. Cohen was soon on his way to India. Cohen's father was so poor that he could give him only one coin for his journey. He put that one coin into his son's pocket and lovingly blessed him, "Go, and may you be successful in your spiritual search."

He went to meet his friend. The book helped his friend to come out of his depression. But both of them were utterly poor. Relatively rich, Cohen at least had that one coin. Cohen, who was always a hard worker, hunted and found a job as a shop assistant in Mumbai. With his keen intellect, he observed that there were two sets of people. One set was happy and comfortable while the other set was unhappy and always complaining. He figured out that the people who were happy had two qualifications. They had lots of money and knowledge. Those who were unhappy did not have money or knowledge. Cohen decided to be a man of knowledge and earn money. He wanted money only so that he could do spiritual *sadhana*, without the distraction of want. He got a job with a shopkeeper who was not a very wealthy man. He trained Cohen in accounting. Seeing that Cohen was brilliant, he entrusted all his accounts to him. He also recommended him to the other shops around. Cohen began keeping their accounts and became very well known among the shopkeepers of that neighborhood as a good accountant.

While this was going on, his friend who he helped save from depression, became a member of the Theosophical Society and started taking Cohen to some of the Society's meetings in Mumbai. There, Cohen met its president Annie Besant. Her keen intellect, total dedication to work and perfect execution of it attracted him. Again, as providence would have it, Annie Besant was looking for somebody to help her with the accounts whenever she came to Mumbai. By that time, Cohen felt drawn to her. He already had had a few private meetings with Annie Besant. Consequently, she asked him to assist her with the accounts. She was so satisfied with his work that she took him to Chennai, the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. Cohen was there for five years and made full use of it. The library of the Theosophical Society in Chennai, is one of the biggest libraries in India. There he studied *Vedanta* and other branches of philosophy. This is how God guides us. The sages say, "If you take one step towards God, he will come nine steps towards you." Cohen was almost in tears when he told me, "I was so near to Bhagavan for five years! Yet, I did not even hear about him."

During this time, one of his other friends living thousands of miles away sent him a book by post. That was the turning point in Cohen's life. The book he received was Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*. Reading it thrilled him because his life's ambition to sacrifice everything to be with a life transforming sage was about to be fulfilled. On reading the book describing many masters, Cohen's mind, like Major Chadwick's, was attracted only to the three chapters on Ramana Maharshi. His inner voice told him that this was the sage he had been yearning for. He packed his bags and left for Tiruvannamalai with seven thousand rupees in savings. He came to Ramanasramam in February 1936, dressed in western attire. He was ushered into the dining hall where Bhagavan was finishing his breakfast. Bhagavan, without even lifting his head, invited the stranger in a most sweet voice, "Please come and have breakfast." When Cohen later recounted this, he was literally in tears, "That was the beginning and the end of my spiritual journey." When he went in and saw Bhagavan seated wearing a loin cloth, he immediately had the ecstatic feeling that he was in front of truth in human form. While Cohen was still in a state of ecstasy, Bhagavan went for his usual walk on the hill.

When Bhagavan came back to the Old Hall from his walk, Cohen entered and sat in front of his guru. He could not control his emotions which were welling up as spiritual ecstasy. This is what Cohen said, "I was alone in the hall with Bhagavan. Joy and peace suffused my being. Never before have I had such a feeling of purity and well being at the mere proximity of a person. My mind was already in deep contemplation of Bhagavan - Bhagavan not as flesh, although that was exquisitely formed and featured - but as an unsubstantial principle which could make itself so pronouncedly felt. After a while, I became aware of my environment and I saw Bhagavan looking at me with large penetrating eyes wreathed in smiles rendered divinely soothing by childlike innocence." This is how Cohen was trapped!

Seated in front of Bhagavan, totally lost, he suddenly realized he still hadn't changed his dress. He also remembered the fruits he had put into his suitcase to be offered to the master. But when he searched for his suitcase keys in his pocket, he couldn't find them. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Resigned to the turn of events, he sat with his eyes closed when he suddenly felt the clinking of keys on his lap. One of the devotees, Ramaswami Pillai, had gone to the railway station on ashram work. The station master was waiting with the bunch of keys, expecting somebody from Ramanasramam, because a passenger had handed them to him saying, "Sir, these keys were found on an empty seat from which a westerner alighted. Perhaps, you will be able to hand them over to him." The station master gave them to Ramaswami Pillai. When Ramaswami Pillai came back and told Bhagavan this, Bhagavan pointing to Cohen confirmed, "Whose keys are these? Indeed, they are his!" Ramaswami Pillai then dropped them in his lap. This was one of the series of 'miracleless' miracles that the master was going to perform. Cohen had embarked on his journey to India to find the key to the mystery of life. And now, he was sure that he would find it.

Cohen had also brought with him a letter for Paul Brunton who was staying in Ramanasramam at that time. As he went in search of Brunton to hand him the letter, he saw a westerner seated at a table reading a book in one of the rooms. Thinking this was Brunton, he greeted him, "Mr. Brunton, good morning!" The westerner replied, "I am not Paul Brunton. I am Major A. W. Chadwick." Chadwick and Cohen became friends instantaneously. Chadwick continued, "Paul Brunton has gone away. He will return in two days." When Paul Brunton came back, Cohen had a beautiful *satsang* with him and Chadwick, talking for hours about the master and trying to get some of their doubts clarified. Now, Paul Brunton, was also Jewish and an intellectual like Cohen. This, of course, resulted - as it usually does - in heated discussions. That day the topic was celibacy. Paul Brunton did not believe in celibacy. However, Cohen maintained that it was vital for a spiritual seeker. He was convinced that for seekers, practices like *sattvic* food, celibacy and *satsang* were all helpful. Brunton was unmoved. Then, Chadwick told them, "Why are you going on arguing? Let us go and ask Bhagavan." They went to Bhagavan and Chadwick asked him, "Bhagavan, is *brahmacharya*, celibacy, necessary for spiritual seekers?" Bhagavan's method of answering was never just to solve the problem. His answers were always focused on dissolving it. He replied, "To remain unmoved in *Brahman* is *brahmacharya*. The very word *brahmacharya* indicates that you should not move away from *Brahman*. So, staying unmoved in the 'I AM' is very essential for seekers."

This answer of Bhagavan, which led to instantaneous dissolution of the problem, made Cohen feel that he must study all the works of Bhagavan. He stayed in the ashram, became a permanent resident and started studying all the books of Bhagavan. What he especially liked about Ramanasramam was that it was free from any form of control. Nobody was forced to attend meetings, classes, *bhajans* or rituals.



*Western devotees on the Hill with Bhagavan (Cohen is standing behind Him)*

The absolute freedom given to the seeker by the institution captivated Cohen's heart. When he turned to Bhagavan, Bhagavan, too, gave absolute freedom. There were no instructions from Bhagavan such

as, "This should be done! This should not be done! This is more important! This is less important!" There was none of that for the simple reason that Bhagavan knew that each person knows what is best for him and no one else could know it better. Cohen was very much attracted to the ashram, but even more to Bhagavan who was free from all forms of control. He has said, "Bhagavan was the most liberal of gurus. At no time did he feel the need to form rules and regulations to control the lives of his disciples. Neither did he believe in a common enforced discipline, because he himself had attained the highest without them and had discovered the self evident truth within himself. It was his experience that at the right time Self realization surges up from within by a free impulse, like the budding and blossoming of a flower."

At that time, Cohen was staying in the ashram's common guest room. As a serious seeker, he felt he needed solitude for his *sadhana*, which the crowded room could not offer. He went to Bhagavan and asked, "Bhagavan, may I stay in a hut outside the ashram to pursue my *sadhana*?" Getting an affirmative answer from Bhagavan, he had a hut built in Palaakothu. Since Cohen was a chronic asthma patient, Bhagavan took care that he should not go into a wet hut by advising him, "Wait for it to dry up." Cohen told me, he often wondered how Bhagavan knew that he was an asthma patient. For the house warming ceremony of his hut, Cohen invited Bhagavan and the other devotees. When Bhagavan entered Cohen's hut, he told him, "Do not put a chair for me or anything." Then, he sat on a mat on the floor along with all the others. After the ceremony, when Bhagavan was leaving, Cohen followed him, and full of emotion prayed to him, "Bhagavan, you have given a home for this body. Will you please give me an eternal home for my soul also? It is only for this that I have come here severing all ties with family and worldly affairs." Bhagavan kept walking and after a little time, turned to him and said, "Cohen, your firm conviction brought you here. Where is the room for doubt?"

Cohen's only income was the meagre interest that he was getting from his savings of seven thousand rupees. While living in his hut at Palaakothu, he would cook a little rice and vegetable every morning after which he would go to the ashram to be with Bhagavan. He would come back only for his lunch. Cohen told me that all through his life, he had never been attracted to variety in food. He ate only to appease his hunger, not his palate. One day, a wealthy man happened to offer an extensive and huge feast in Ramanasramam. Cohen was not invited for that. When he went to his hut that day to have his meagre meal, for the first time in his life he was troubled about food. Cohen told me, "I never thought about food any time before or after. But on that day, I was suffering. They were all eating such rich food there, and here I was eating this meagre meal." When Bhagavan passed by his hut that afternoon, he asked Cohen whether he had eaten his lunch - something he had never done before. Cohen replied that he had eaten just a little rice and vegetable. To which Bhagavan replied, "Rice and vegetable? That is very good. When I was in Virupaksha cave, for days there would not be any food. On some days, somebody would bring some rice. I would add water to the cooked rice and then eat it without salt. You have got rice, vegetables, salt and yogurt on top of it." Cohen told me, "After that day, not even once was I distracted by any thought of food." He added, "That is the advantage when you stay with the master - every defect is rooted out once and for all. Living with a master is itself a spiritual *sadhana*."

He was with Bhagavan the whole day and sometimes in the nights, too. He would say, "When staying with the master, you have to imbibe his spiritual energy. In the night, when only a few of the serious seekers were around him, Bhagavan would tell us about the lives of ancient saints, sages and mythological stories. But, whether Bhagavan talked or was silent, his presence was surcharged with spiritual energy and we loved to look at him and soak in that spiritual energy." He once said that such proximity to the master was very rewarding to him in that stage of his *sadhana*. When I asked him how this was so, he replied, "It healed those wounds I had from wasting energy on foolish expectations and upholding false values and hollow ideals. Bhagavan was pouring his grace on me. I was suddenly gripped by an overwhelming urge to surrender unreservedly to him to guide me in my spiritual hunger, abandoning all the methods I had previously followed and all the beliefs I had built my hopes on. That very moment, I passed on my fate and all that I was to the sacred hands of my master, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi."

Three years of austere *sadhana* followed. He started going on the eight mile circuit of the hill every alternate day. On being asked why, he told me, "During those three hours of walking round the hill, there is no thought - only Self attention. There are no physical or mental distractions. The holy hill helps you focus attention on yourself without volition and with greatest ease." This helped him strengthen his inner silence and solitude. When external activities started attracting and distracting him, he went to

Bhagavan and said, "I want to intensify my *sadhana*. To do that, I want to go on a *yatra*, a pilgrimage." Bhagavan asked him if he had made any arrangements for it. Cohen replied, "Bhagavan, I have not made any arrangements. I am going as a *sadhu*. I will dress like an Indian, eat vegetarian food, visit temples and sacred places, keep myself secluded, focusing my attention on myself."

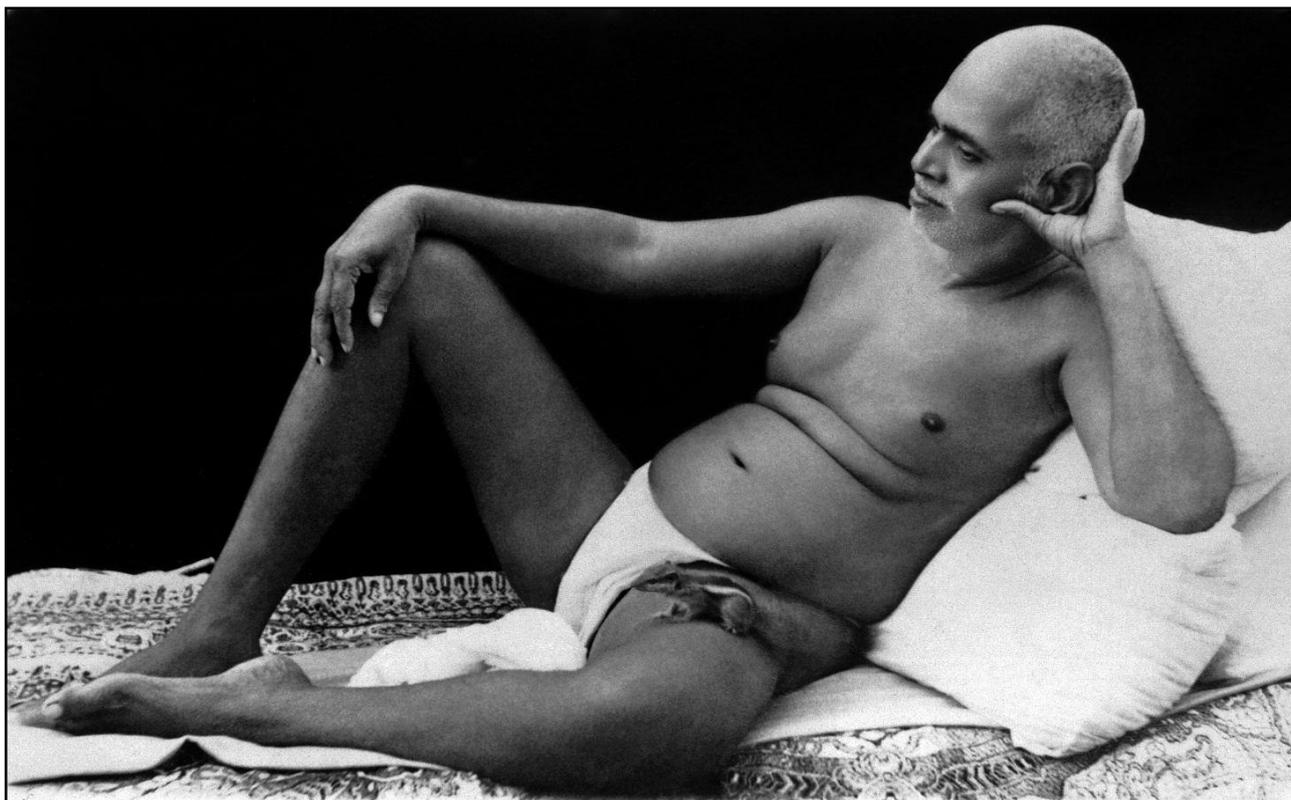
Cohen toured all over south India. He visited many temples. Cohen, like Maurice Frydman had a deeply questioning and logical approach to spiritual pursuit. Initially, Cohen was very intellectual. The intellect being the eye of the mind, can take a seeker to a state of perfect theoretical understanding of the Self. But it can never provide the seeker even an iota of the taste of it. At this stage, a true seeker gets frustrated and disappointed. He can at the most experience only a vacuum. This produces in him a 'dry' state. The sage recognizes this void and helps the seeker to move forward. One way is to guide the seeker to go on a pilgrimage. During such travels, the seeker gets ample opportunities to recognize within himself the actual movement from theory to practically experiencing the truth. Bhagavan helped Cohen to achieve this transcendence by approving his pilgrimage across South India. This brought about a tremendous change in his spiritual life. This is how Cohen interpreted to me his transformation from 'dry' saturation in theory, to his pulsating experience of the Self within as the Heart.

During his pilgrimage, he met Swami Ramdas at Anandashram in Kerala. Swami Ramdas was full of joy, always singing Ram's name. In the presence of Ramdas, who had his realization in the presence of Ramana Maharshi, joy permeated the very air. For the first time, Cohen understood the real nature of *bhakti* - pure, inward joy. When he walked out of Anandashram, he walked out as a happy, joyful man still pursuing *jnana marga*. He went to Kanyakumari where he started feeling his separation from Bhagavan. Cohen told me, "That emotional pining for Bhagavan was the gift of Swami Ramdas to me." Lying down on the sands by the ocean, he started crying, "Oh Bhagavan, how mighty you are and how sublime and all pervasive is your immaculate purity. With what tender emotions do we, your disciples, think of your incomparable qualities, your gentleness, your serene adorable countenance, your cool refreshing smile, the sweetness of the words that come out of your mouth, the radiance of your all pervasive love and your equal vision towards one and all - even towards diseased, stray animals!"

Thus pining for his guru, he came back to Ramanasramam. He started noting down the conversations and dialogues between Bhagavan and his devotees. Since taking notes in the hall was not permitted at that time, he would memorize whatever conversations took place there and then go to his room and write it all down in his notebook. It was this notebook that was later published as *Guru Ramana*. He was also the only person to note down, in his diaries, the last two years of Bhagavan's illness. Being a homeopath, he was able to write accurately about the various treatments tried and the surgeries performed. Meanwhile, he was starting to see glimpses of the bliss which Bhagavan had said was the very nature of the Self. It had taken a long time for Cohen, but being an intellectual, he still had doubts. He had read in the scriptures that the ultimate realization is always instant and sudden. He went to Bhagavan and asked, "Bhagavan, the scriptures say that the final realization is a sudden and instant event." Bhagavan smiled at Cohen and said, "Yes! But it should not be forgotten that before that there must be a maturing which is a slow process like the ripening of a fruit on a tree."

He records as on April 12, 1950, two days before Bhagavan's Mahanirvana : "It looks like we are on the eve of doomsday. The eve of the day on which we are destined to be deprived of everything we hold worth living for - our refuge, our love, our hope, the greatest treasure, the precious life of our great master. Maharshi is still conscious, and at times speaks. But, till the last, he asks for nothing, expresses no opinion on what should and should not be done for him, does not complain of any pain, except when lifted or touched on a painful spot. Then, and then only, as if to give a piece of information, he would remark, 'There is not a spot that is not painful to the touch.' Then, the attendant takes greater care in handling him - especially today, when the pain is so severe."

After Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, there were a lot of quarrels and feelings of enmity towards the management. Most of the old devotees had left. From 1950 to 1951, the situation was so precarious in the ashram that there was no breakfast, tea, or coffee, only lunch and dinner. Soon, the *sarvadhikari*, Niranjanananda Swami, also dropped the body. My father became the next president. He did not know English. Cohen supported my father by writing the many letters and defense affidavits required for the



Notice the baby squirrel on Bhagavan's lap

numerous legal cases against the ashram. Cohen was immensely helpful in getting the ashram back on its feet. Being the true renunciate that he was, when everything was almost settled, he passed on his small cottage to Mrs. Taleyarkhan, another devotee with whom he was sharing it. He also had a small piece of land next to my father's land. He bequeathed it to my father without any condition. Not wanting to be a burden to the ashram, he went and settled in Vellore. When I asked him why he left Arunachala and settled in Vellore, he replied, "My asthma became worse. The weather in Vellore, though just fifty two miles from here, is more conducive."

When his book *Guru Ramana* was ready, since Ramanasramam could not publish it for want of funds, he published it himself in 1952. I wanted to bring it out as an ashram publication. I went to Vellore and made a request for its publishing rights. He agreed. When in 1962 I brought out the second edition of *Guru Ramana*, for no known reason, I sent a copy to Dorab's elder sister who was an equally staunch devotee of Bhagavan. At that time, she was having very serious family problems. She had a small room with Bhagavan's picture which she used to worship. Her family and relatives objected and wanted to throw away the picture of Bhagavan. She told them, "You can do anything to me. Just give me half an hour to worship Bhagavan." When she was denied even that, she decided to question Bhagavan and take him to task by locking herself in that small room. She prayed, "Bhagavan, prove to me that you are there, that you are my Guru."

I have visited her in that big apartment. Between the front door and the floor, there was a gap of an inch or two. Her meditation room was in a straight line from the front door. The meditation room's door too, had a similar gap. The postman whisked the parcel I had sent her through that gap. It went straight into her room and hit her forcefully. The parcel was also amazingly open in such a way that when she looked down, she could see the title, *Guru Ramana*! Even today, I do not know of all people what made me send the copy to that particular lady in Mumbai.

In Vellore too, Cohen led an independent life. He never asked for help or money from anyone and lived very frugally. When seekers visited his house, he would fill them up with stories about Bhagavan and his teachings. One of the devotees, Dorab Framji, visited him regularly. On one such visit, Cohen was not to be seen. Searching for him, he found Cohen lying down in his bathroom. He had been lying in the

bathroom for seven hours as he could not get up. Dorab put him up in his house at Ramana Nagar opposite to the ashram with the request that I send him food. After a year, he again fell in the bathroom and was not discovered for many hours. Fortunately, Dorab came that day to Tiruvannamalai and found Cohen lying down in the bathroom. He came running to me saying, "We cannot leave him without assistance. Let him stay in the ashram." In the ashram, he fell one night from his bed and thought that he had broken his legs. I brought both orthopedic and *ayurvedic* doctors to examine him. After checking him, they found that nothing was broken. But Cohen had convinced himself that his legs were broken and that he could not walk. I got him a wheel chair and appointed an assistant called Kannan to serve him till the end.

Cohen was very kind to me. If by five in the evening I was still in the ashram office engrossed in work, he would come by and urge me to stop for the day. If I protested, he would scold me, "What is all this work? You have come here for *sadhana*. We have come here for our master. All this service to the institution, to the master, these will all bring you name, fame, popularity and comfort, but you will be nowhere near emancipation. Wake up, Ganesan! Wake up as I did. I did enough service and then went into solitude. Go into solitude. Plunge into *sadhana*." He told me repeatedly, "Do not be duped by all these imaginary convictions that you are serving the guru or helping the institution."

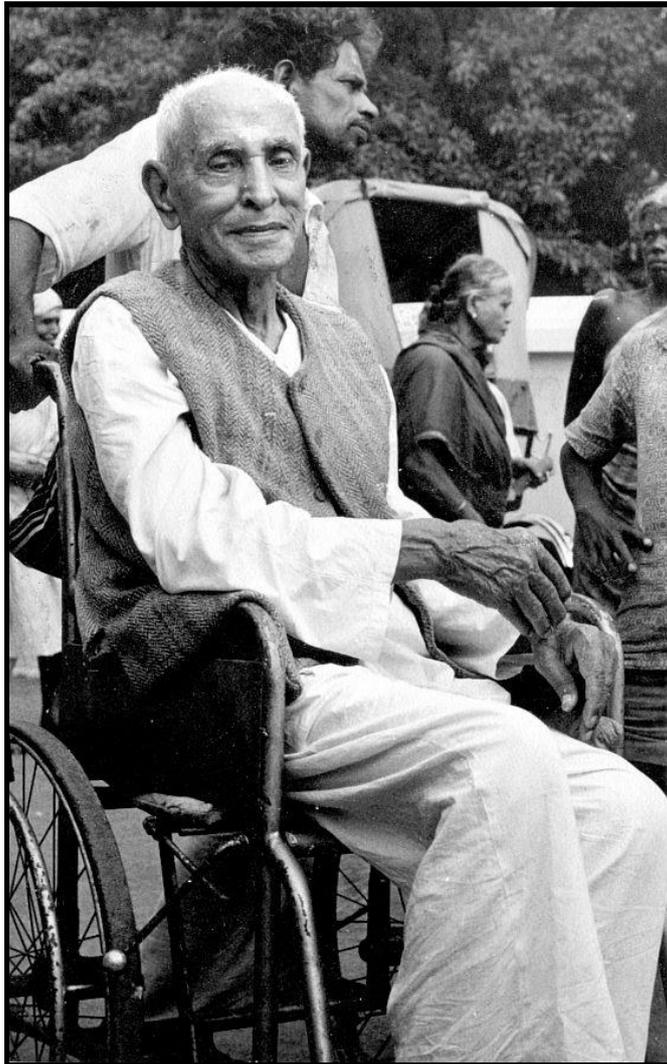
Whenever I went to his room after my work at the office, he would tell me again and again, "Beware! Beware! Go back and do *sadhana*. All this work is of no use to you. I am interested in you, Ganesan. You have come for emancipation." Cohen alternated between hallucination and normalcy towards his last days. Immediately after saying this, he would continue, "Your father has put me on the seventh floor. I have no legs, so how can I climb to the seventh floor?" The first time this happened, I was shocked: "Cohen, you are one of the greatest intellects that has come to our master. What are you talking about? There is not even a first floor in Ramanasramam!" Since he continued to blabber, I shook him to get him out of what I thought was his delirium. At this, his eyes brightened and he said, "Ganesan, just as in old age the body goes out of control, the mind also sometimes loses control. But, since we are neither the body nor the mind, it does not matter." I asked him, "What state are you in?" Cohen replied, "I am in bliss. I am in total bliss." The next minute, he started blabbering again, "You appointed only one attendant, Kannan. But there are nine Kannans in my room. How can I sleep alone in the room?" When bewildered I shook him again, he looked at me steadily and said, "Why do you listen to my mind? These are all in my mind. I told you not to listen to my mind." Since the intellectual aspect was very important in his life, his mind was now playing tricks. When some of the old devotees had to go through intense physical suffering in their last days, I have asked them, "Why should someone like you get such a disease?" They would invariably reply that it was because they had paid too much attention to the body and its comforts and now it was returning the favour! Cohen was the first devotee I saw who actually demonstrated the bliss that was beyond even the mind. When I asked him why he blabbered, Cohen answered, "When I turn my attention outwards, it blabbers. When I turn my attention inwards, it is bliss, Ganesan. I bless you that you should never have this affectation of the body and the mind. I bless you."

And sometimes when he cried, I would console him, "Cohen, why do you cry? You will pass away smoothly, as peacefully as you slip into deep sleep." A very humorous man, he would then give me a smile and say, "I know Ganesan, why you say this. You are saying this because after I die you can tell everyone else that Cohen died exactly as you predicted!" For some reason, Cohen was very particular that his body be buried in the ashram. My father and I assured him it would be done. Cohen even showed me the spot where he should be buried. Sometimes, when I was not at the ashram, he would take Kannan to that spot and instruct him, "Dig a pit here and drop my body into it, now. Then, fill it up with earth." Frightened, Kannan would shout, "Oh, no, no! That is a sin!" Cohen would plead with him, "It is all right, Kannan! Don't worry. This is the place where I will be buried when I am dead. I am only asking you to do it now when I am alive. That's all! No sin will come to you!"

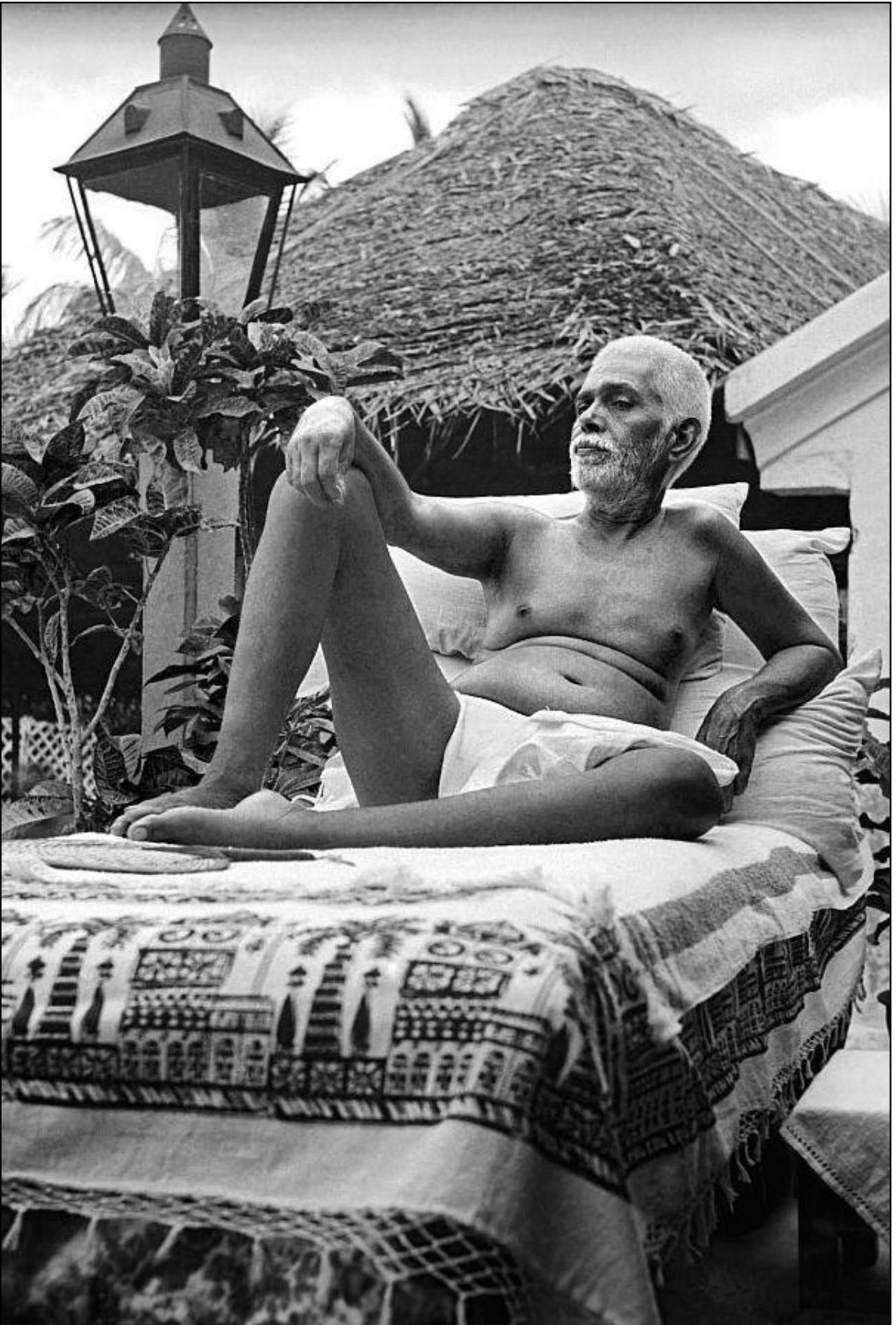
Sometime in 1980, I had to go away on ashram work. At that time, Cohen dropped the body. We don't know why Cohen wanted his body to be buried in the ashram. Unfortunately, despite the assurance given to him, his body was taken outside and given a common burial. When I came back from my tour, I said, "Cohen was one of the greatest devotees of Bhagavan. He is a spark from Arunachala! Could we not fulfill this small wish of his?" I do not know how many will approve of it, but the fact is that I had his body exhumed and buried in the ashram where his *samadhi* now is. That night, I slept happily knowing that Cohen's wish was fulfilled.

Cohen was no ordinary person. We should not waste our thoughts on why he asked to be buried in the ashram if he was beyond his body and mind. Instead, we should look at how it happened. When he was in Vellore, he had given money to a Christian institution to take care of him during his last days. What forced him to fall in the bathroom and then brought back to the ashram? It would have appealed to his sense of humour that though he wanted his body to be buried in the ashram, it was buried outside at first. Then, the higher power played another trick and brought his body back to be buried inside the ashram. This very bright spark had gone back to the 'Hill of the Holy Fire'. Samuel Suleiman Cohen had been re-absorbed into Arunachala.

Cohen's life is our life. It is like breathing. Breathing is common to all. But, it is individualized. In the same way, Cohen's *sadhana* oriented life is every one's life. Reading about him and absorbing it, awakens in us that pure awareness which Cohen aspired for and lived all his life.



*Cohen in his wheelchair*



## N. Balarama Reddiar



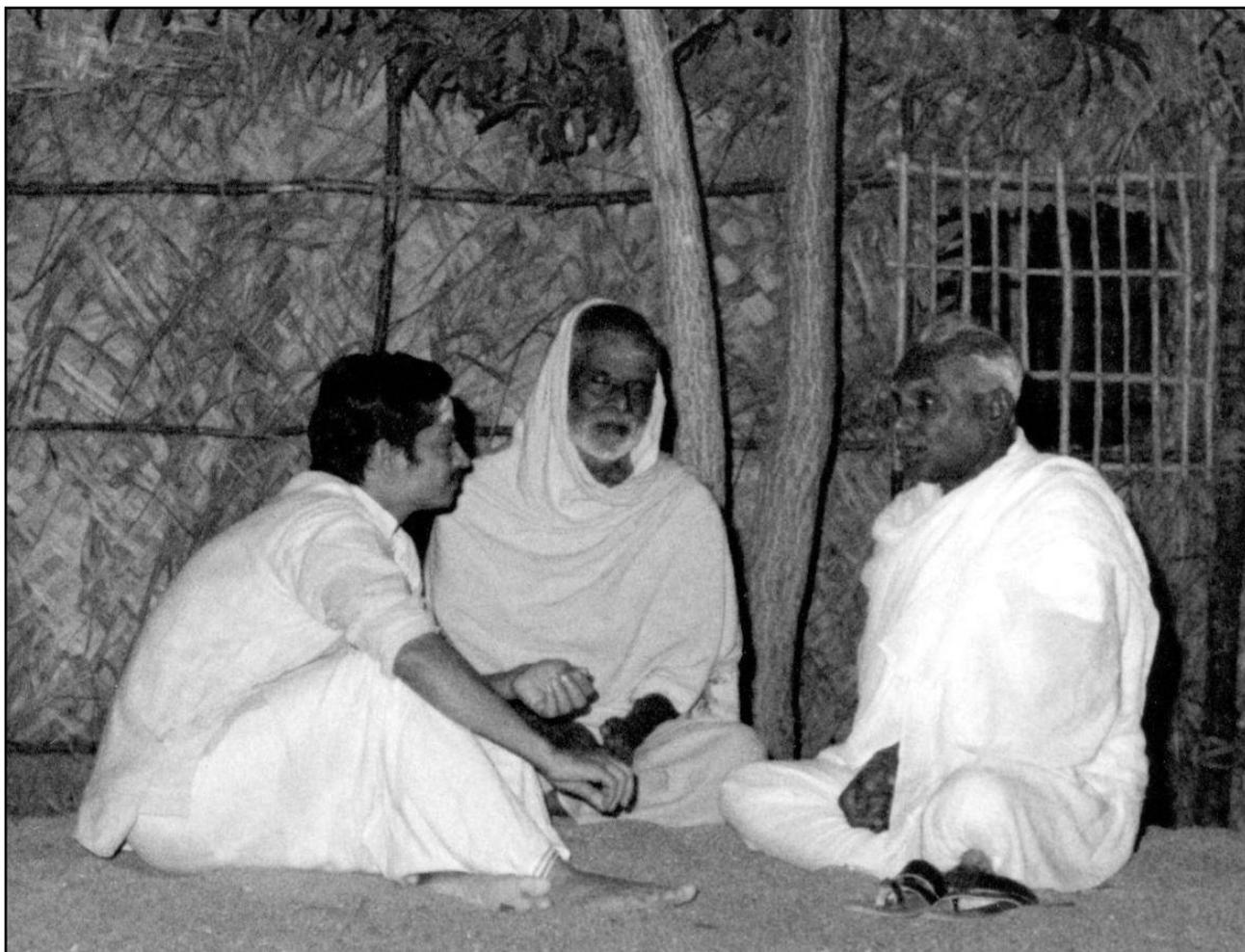
“Oh Lord. Oh guru! You are the reality who remaining as my innermost Self ruled me during all my countless births. Glory to you who put on this human form in order to redeem me through your *upadesa*. I do not see how I can repay your grace in helping to liberate me. Glory, glory and more glory to your sacred feet.” These lines from *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, quoted very often in *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, are a reflection of Bhagavan’s teaching which states that when a person has not re-cognized his Self, then the Self takes the human form of the guru, who in turn leads that person on the path of Self realization.

N. Balarama Reddiar came to Ramanasramam in 1933. Unlike other people who came there in search of a guru, Balarama Reddiar had already found a master in Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry and was a resident of his ashram for five years. The residents of the ashram in Pondicherry abide by strict rules and regulations. Balarama Reddiar did not find this an inconvenience since he had been raised by devout parents, and his father had been a particularly illustrious seeker. He had seen his father touring all over India and observing silence for a whole year. Since he wanted to do spiritual practice like his father, he volunteered to do gardening for two hours in the afternoon so that he could have time to himself. All the while, he was also reading extensively. He read about Ramana Maharshi for the first time in B. V. Narasimha Swami’s book *Self Realization*. The Sanskrit scholar Kapali Shastri, also a resident of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, paid frequent visits to Ramana Maharshi. Kapali Shastri’s accounts of Ramana both intrigued and fascinated Balarama Reddiar. So, when Kapali Shastri urged Balarama Reddiar to visit the great sage at least once, he made up his mind to go.

Balarama Reddiar arrived in Ramanasramam on an early morning in March 1933. Delicious *idlis* were being served for breakfast and he was invited to join. By the grace of a higher power he was seated not only next to the Maharshi but also to the right of him. Once food had been served, it was the Maharshi’s custom to give a nod to the person seated to his right. This was a signal for everyone to start eating. The Maharshi’s simple gesture of nodding made Balarama Reddiar feel elated. He found it to be a beautiful and pure experience because it enabled him to have a glimpse of the spiritual radiance within him. He was also overwhelmed by the pervasive freedom in the ashram.

Ramana Maharshi rarely asked anyone who came to the ashram questions such as, “Who are you? Where do you come from?” or “How long will you be staying?” As Balarama Reddiar had come only for one day, he went to Bhagavan in the evening to take leave of him. The feeling of awe and wonder had still not left him. Bhagavan asked him, “Where do you come from?” Balarama Reddiar was reminded of Adi Sankara’s famous question, “*Kutha ayatha?*” meaning, ‘where do you come from’. Balarama Reddiar was thrilled by the question. It pulled him inwards to the source of thought and he got a taste of spiritual bliss. This is an example of the *Shakti*, the higher power, bringing the seeker and the guru together.

On his return to Pondicherry, he once again started reading the book *Self Realization*, this time paying greater attention. He read that it was possible to change one’s guru; to Balarama Reddiar, this seemed a little contradictory. He decided to go to Ramanasramam once again. On his second visit, too, Balarama Reddiar was captivated by the spiritual presence and peace that permeated the ashram. Yogi Ramiah, ardent devotee of Bhagavan, received him, took him to Bhagavan and introduced him, “Bhagavan, I know his father. This is Balarama Reddiar.” Bhagavan looked at Balarama Reddiar and this encouraged him to clear his doubt. He asked, “Can a person change his guru?” Bhagavan responded with a beautiful reply. He said, “Yes, certainly! One can change his guru. What of that?” The question, “What of that?” implied that Bhagavan had already changed the guru in Balarama Reddiar’s case. Balarama Reddiar did not quite grasp what Bhagavan had said, yet he felt a sense of profound



*(l to r) Ganesan, Kunju Swami and Balarama Reddiar  
during Bhagavan's Birth Centenary celebrations*

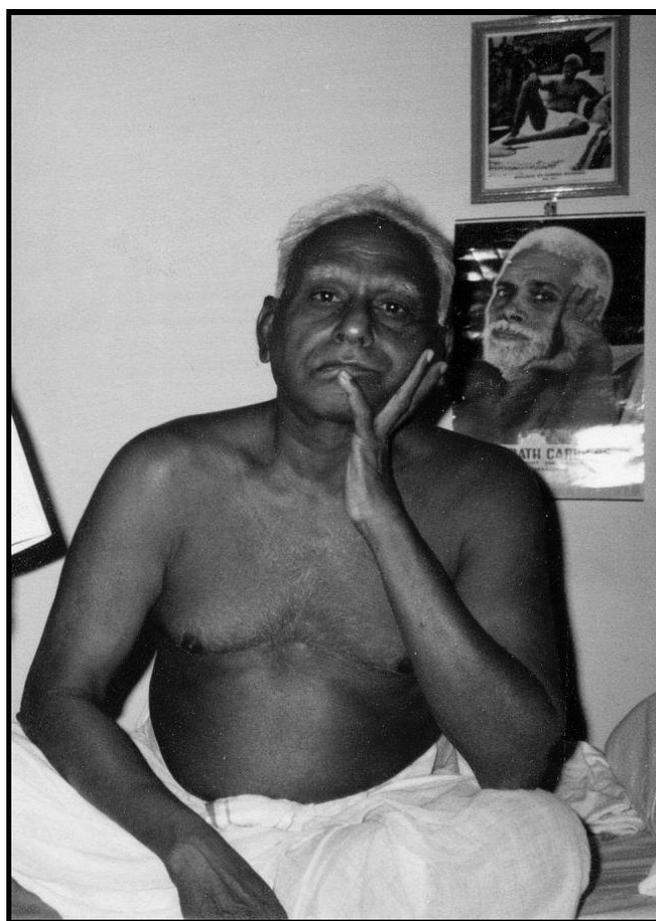
peace just sitting beside Bhagavan. He felt liberated at the ashram because it did not have the rules and regulations of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. There was a natural air about Ramanasramam that was elevating. He lost interest in everything, except the Maharshi and his presence. He felt that he was being guided even though there was no one to tell him what to do or where to go. Even years later, Balarama Reddiar would emphatically state, "The power of the presence of the Maharshi is the guiding force." He was well aware that the guidance had come from within.

Balarama Reddiar stayed at the ashram for three days and during this time, he was even more convinced that Bhagavan was his guru and Ramanasramam his home. On the third day, when he went to take leave of Bhagavan, he found Bhagavan alone. What happened next strengthened his conviction further. He said, "In order to take leave of the Maharshi, I approached him while he was sitting on his couch which was outside in the verandah. His feet rested softly on the ground. He had just returned from an afternoon stroll after the midday meal. I fell to my knees and prostrated before his holy feet. I was aware of the ashram rules which prohibited devotees from touching Bhagavan's body. I kept myself at a slight distance, but just look at the beauty! As I lowered my head near his feet, in the twinkling of an eye, Bhagavan's feet ever so gently rose and the big toe of each foot very lightly touched my closed eyelids. It all happened in an instant. I was thrilled!"

Balarama Reddiar went back to the Aurobindo Ashram. While there, he visited his village. Whenever he was back in his village, he would not stay in his house. Being a very austere man, he stayed in a small cottage on its grounds, continuing his practice and sustaining himself with whatever food was sent to him from his house. A year later, he came to Ramanasramam for the third time. This time, there were no rooms available. He had to stay with others in the common guest room which is still there. One day, he had the strong desire to go to the top of the hill. Without consulting anyone, he started climbing up.

After some time, he found himself in a very precarious position on a very steep rock face with no way up or down. There was nothing to hold on to. He prayed to Bhagavan and suddenly found himself grasping at a root. He used it to pull himself up and to his surprise, found that he was on top of the hill. Bhagavan had saved him as soon as he thought of him. This strengthened his conviction that there is a divine power. The experience made him understand that Bhagavan was his master and his place was holy Arunachala. While sitting, in the Old Hall in front of Bhagavan, he told himself, "This is Sarveswara ! " [" Lord of the Universe."]

Balarama Reddiar returned to Aurobindo Ashram, determined to take leave of Sri Aurobindo. At Aurobindo Ashram, the custom was for seekers to correspond daily with the master. Everyone had their doubts cleared by putting them in writing and depositing the slip of paper in a box. The next morning, Sri Aurobindo would have given the answer to the query. Balarama Reddiar wrote, "Master, you begin your teaching with Self realization; Ramana Maharshi dwells only in Self realization. Give me permission to go to Ramanasramam and attain Self realization." Quick came Sri Aurobindo's reply: "You can discover Self realization here. There is no need for you to go anywhere." This response disappointed Balarama Reddiar. He was not ready to give up because he was drawn irresistibly to the presence of Ramana Maharshi. He wrote again to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo replied, warning him, "If you go away, whatever work we have done on you until now will all be undone. So, we will not give you permission." Balarama Reddiar knew that he could not argue or quarrel with such a towering personality like Sri Aurobindo, but the divine power was such that he was compelled to write for the third time. He was determined to leave, whatever the reply. Such was his resolve to go to Sri Bhagavan's abode at Arunachala. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo understood Balarama Reddiar's yearning and granted him permission, albeit with a lot of hesitation. The rule in Aurobindo Ashram is that all correspondence from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to a seeker, once read, must be torn or burnt. Balarama Reddiar did this with all his letters but kept with him the last letter of permission. There was a divine reason for this, as we shall see later.



*Balarama Reddiar attentively listening  
to visiting devotees questions*

Balarama Reddiar came to Ramanasramam in 1937 on Ramana Maharshi's fifty seventh birthday. It was a most auspicious occasion for this determined disciple and the guru to bond. Balarama Reddiar came with the intention of doing practice, and dedicating and surrendering himself to the master. The ashram had no private rooms at that time and Balarama Reddiar wanted privacy to pursue his practice. He was advised to take a room in town and come and meet Bhagavan every day. He would arrive at three in the morning, stay till eleven and then go back for lunch. He would again visit the ashram at three in the afternoon and stay on until eight at night. Meeting Bhagavan every day was vital for him. As he said, "The presence and proximity of the master is very important for the seeker." This arrangement made it easier for Balarama Reddiar to spend the time just looking at the Maharshi. The Maharshi guided him through words, gestures, acts of kindness and the expression of love in silence.

Although he had given up Sri Aurobindo and had come to embrace Bhagavan as his master, there was still this gnawing doubt, "Have I done the right thing?" Sri Aurobindo's physical, intellectual and psychic influence were so overpowering that he could not easily extricate himself. He felt that he had to get it clarified that Ramana Maharshi was his guru and that moving away from Sri Aurobindo had been the right decision. He intended to get the issue clarified by Bhagavan, but look at the master's consideration for the devotee! While reading the newspaper, Bhagavan happened to read a review of Sri Aurobindo's *Light on Yoga*. Someone seated in the hall said, "Balarama Reddiar has that book!" Since the Maharshi had not read about Aurobindo's philosophy, he asked for the book and read it. Why? It was not for himself but for the sake of his devotee who was soaked in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

One day, when Balarama Reddiar was alone with Bhagavan, he sought the answers to two questions: had he done the right thing by coming away and is it possible to attain physical immortality like Sri Aurobindo was proclaiming? Whenever this topic of physical immortality was discussed, Balarama Reddiar would argue for its possibility with Chadwick, Cohen and the others. However, he could never argue this topic with Bhagavan because he felt that the answers were coming straight from the Heart. The lingering doubt about physical immortality remained, until one day Bhagavan told him after reading the newspaper in the hall, "You know, in Kumbakonam, there was a C. V. V. Rao, a yogi. He professed the knowledge of an herbal elixir that would ensure physical immortality. He said he could help people attain physical immortality. Great personalities like Tilak and Annie Besant wanted to meet him. But C. V. V. Rao died at the age of thirty six!" Bhagavan showed Balarama Reddiar the newspaper announcement and put his mind to rest on this issue.

Balarama Reddiar showed Bhagavan the final letter that he got from Sri Aurobindo. Bhagavan found it difficult to read Sri Aurobindo's handwriting and therefore requested Balarama Reddiar to read it. Sri Aurobindo had written, "You are determined to follow a path in which you can achieve only partial realization. We give you blessings; if you stayed on here and pursued your practice, both the Mother and I could have helped you." When Balarama Reddiar came to the part about 'partial realization', Bhagavan interjected, "Partial realization! If it is partial, then it is not realization. If it is realization, then it is complete - there are no parts to it." This settled all his doubts. He gave up all thoughts of continuing as Sri Aurobindo's disciple and decided to follow Bhagavan's path of Self Enquiry. He looked on Bhagavan's devotees as his family and Bhagavan as his guru; a guru who was available all the time to guide and bless him.

It might seem to onlookers that Bhagavan was not interested in the affairs of others. But, according to Balarama Reddiar, "Bhagavan was keenly interested in sincere seekers, and this only the seeker would know." When I asked him if Bhagavan had helped him, he said, "Bhagavan has helped me personally and also in strengthening the depth of my practice." I asked him to share some of these experiences with me.

He shared with me the struggles he experienced. When Balarama Reddiar was in Sri Aurobindo ashram, there was a young Hindu girl who was in love with him. The girl's parents came from the same state as Balarama Reddiar and they too wanted him to marry their daughter. The parents met the Mother at Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the Mother told him, "Yes, marry this girl. She is for you. It will be wonderful." However, Balarama Reddiar's mind was more drawn to spiritual practice. He liked the girl, but he felt marriage would be a distraction. The girl and her parents pursued him to Ramanasramam. In a weak

moment, Balarama Reddiar wondered whether he should marry her, but he wanted permission from Bhagavan first. That was the remarkable thing about Balarama Reddiar. Before making a decision, he consulted his master who was available twenty four hours a day. He wrote a note to Bhagavan asking, "Should I marry this girl?" Bhagavan read the note, folded it and then put it under his pillow. Whenever Bhagavan agreed with something, he would nod his head and return the note. Otherwise, he would keep quiet. In this case, he kept quiet. A few months after this incident, as Balarama Reddiar entered the hall, Bhagavan gave that day's newspaper to him. The newspaper mentioned the marriage of this girl to a politician. Balarama Reddiar's question was answered. Bhagavan loved his disciples like a mother, protected them like a father, guided them like a teacher, and moved with them like a friend. He constantly guided them and loved them. It was possible to ask him anything. One only had to surrender the doubting mind to him and accept him as master.



*Balarama Reddiar and Ganesan receiving Yogi Ramsuratkumar and leading him to the Samadhi Shrine of Sri Bhagavan (Anuradha seen behind Reddiar)*

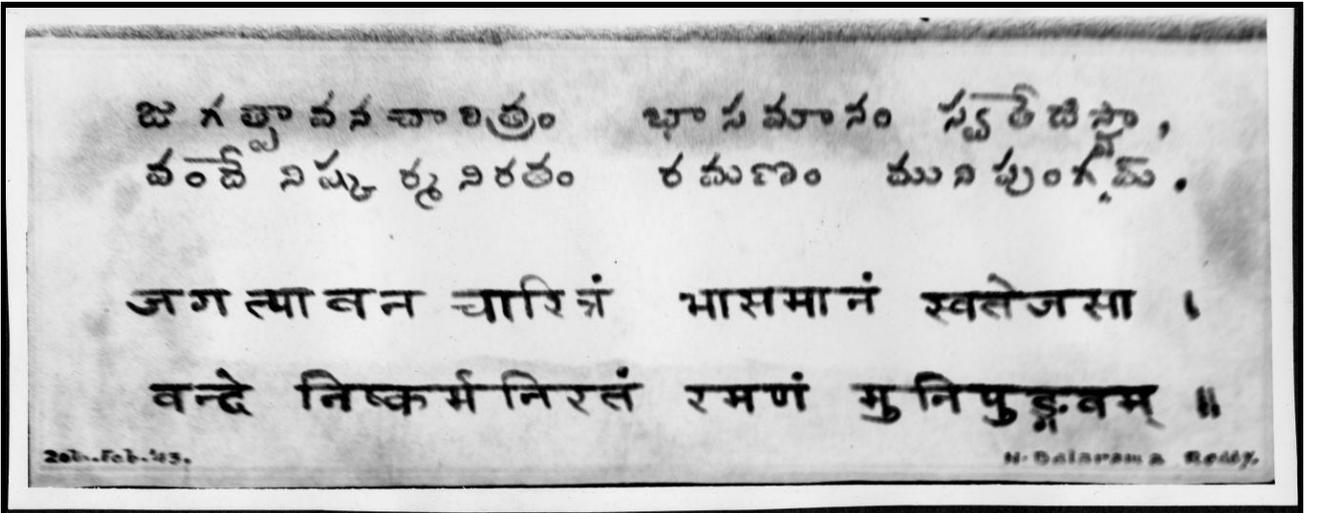
Once, Balarama Reddiar went to Almora in the Himalayas. After coming back to Arunachala, he informed Bhagavan, "In Almora, it was so cool and pleasant! Here, it is so hot!" Bhagavan immediately said, "Real coolness lies within. If we have that coolness, it will be cool wherever we go." That was the beauty of Bhagavan's guidance. Bhagavan very rarely commented on the weather. This comment helped Balarama Reddiar to be unmindful of the weather. From then on, he too did not allow the weather to affect him.

Balarama Reddiar would come to the ashram in the morning, afternoon and evening to be with Bhagavan and sit before him. The ashram became crowded in the afternoons. Balarama Reddiar stopped coming at that time. Noticing this, Bhagavan gestured to Balarama Reddiar when he came in one evening and said, "Professor G. V. Subbaramayya asked me this afternoon whether Balarama Reddiar was here." Balarama Reddiar understood this to be an indication for him to come in the afternoons also. However, the next afternoon too, he did not go to the ashram. The next day, as usual, Balarama Reddiar was at the ashram at three in the morning. At that time, Bhagavan would be just getting up from his couch. Normally, Balarama Reddiar would fold the shawl that Bhagavan covered himself at night with and then keep it in its right place. But that morning, Bhagavan folded the shawl himself and put it under his pillow, refusing to give it to Balarama Reddiar. Balarama Reddiar later

wrote, "Bhagavan taught me to attend the afternoon session too, because being in the presence of the guru is absolutely important. Not even one minute should be wasted." From that day on, Balarama Reddiar was with Bhagavan, his guru, all the time.

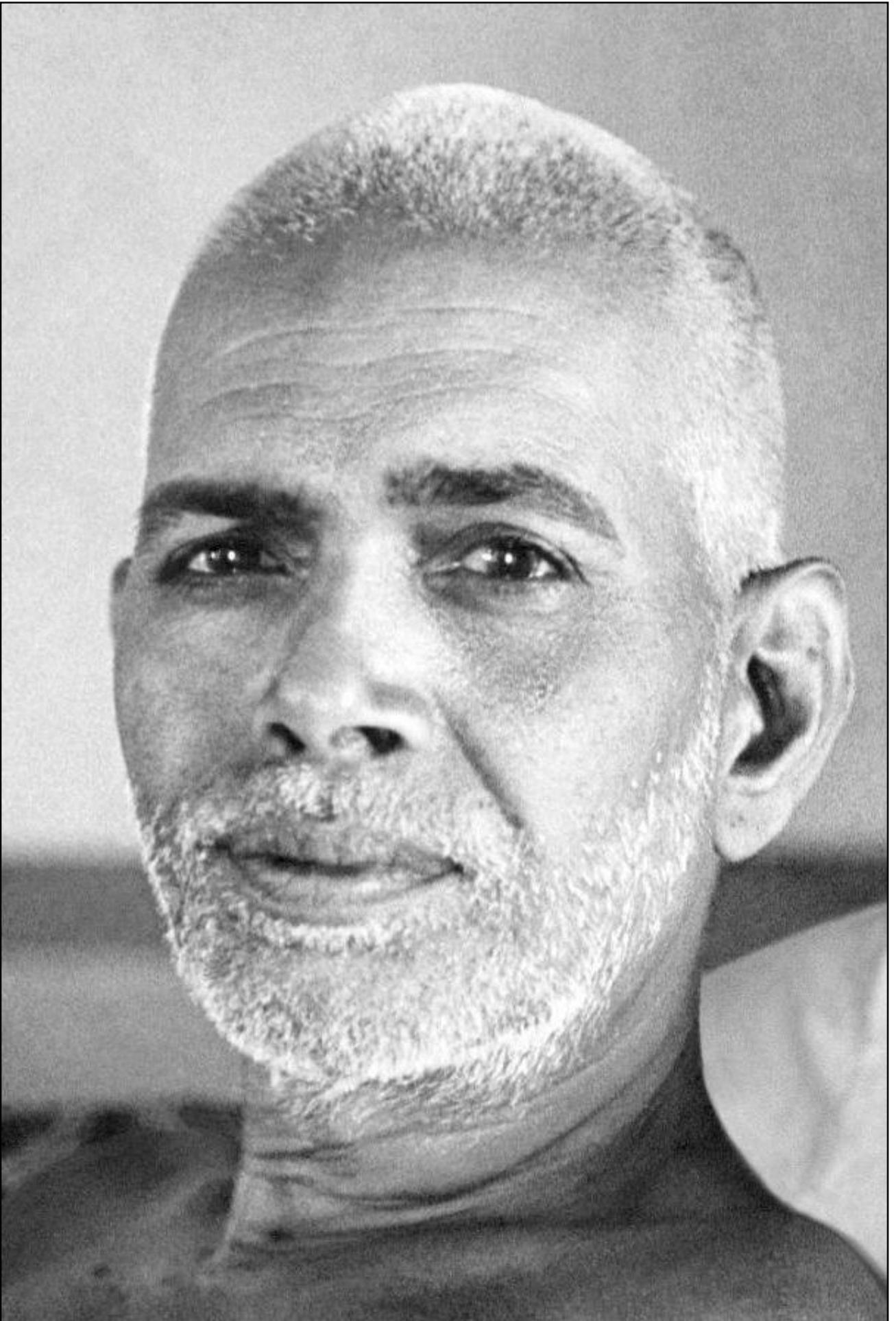
Once, when he was going around the hill, Balarama Reddiar suddenly felt like observing silence. Unknown to Bhagavan, he started observing silence the very next day. At the time, he was staying with S. S. Cohen in Palaakothu. Then, sometime later, Viswanatha Swami got a letter from Swami Ramdas saying, "I am very happy Balarama Reddiar is observing silence. It will do him good. Congratulate him on my behalf." Viswanatha Swami handed over the letter to Bhagavan. Balarama Reddiar was also present at the time. When Bhagavan read out the line, "It will do him good," he looked at Balarama Reddiar. Balarama Reddiar believed that this confirmed the fact he should continue to observe silence. Balarama Reddiar observed silence for one year. Towards the end of the year, Sadhu Vaswani, a saintly man, visited Ramanasramam. Not many people knew him, but Balarama Reddiar had met him in the Himalayas. Sadhu Vaswani sat next to Balarama Reddiar in the hall, but did not talk to him there. He thought he would talk to him outside. But Balarama Reddiar had to go somewhere urgently and by the time he came back, Sadhu Vaswani had already left. Bhagavan asked, "Did you know that Sadhu Vaswani had come?" Balarama Reddiar nodded his head. Bhagavan then said, "You should have spoken to him. He is your friend." It dawned on Balarama Reddiar that the guiding hand of the master was instructing him to break his silence since it had served its purpose.

Balarama Reddiar was a very affluent man. He owned lands which his family looked after and his elder brother was sending him money. One day, he got a letter from his brother saying, "I can't take care of your land any more. You have to come here and supervise your land." Balarama Reddiar was downcast because this meant that he would have to leave the ashram and visit Bhagavan only once in a while like many others. He gave Bhagavan the letter and he read it, laid it aside and kept quiet. Balarama Reddiar refrained from asking him anything. Three days later, Balarama Reddiar got a letter from his mother, also a spiritual person, saying, "Do not come here. It is your good fortune that you are able to stay with such a holy person. I will take care of your land. I will send you money. Do not come away." Bhagavan smiled at the letter indicating that he need not go back for the sake of money. The master does indeed protect his devotees in every respect!



Sri Bhagavan's handwriting from Balarama Reddiar's notebook

During Bhagavan's last days, devotees like Balarama Reddiar rarely visited him because they did not want to cause him any inconvenience. One day, accompanied by Balarama Reddiar, his friend, Sitarama Reddiar, a minister in the Madras government, called on Bhagavan in what is now called the Nirvana Room. Balarama Reddiar noticed a halo around Bhagavan which made him ecstatic and thrilled him to tears. He wondered whether it was his imagination playing tricks on him. But, when he came out of the room, the minister asked him, "Where did the brilliant glow in the room come from? There was no electric light in the room!" This was the exquisite spiritual aura that saturated Bhagavan's presence in his last days.



Once, Balarama Reddiar's sister came to the ashram with her husband and their baby. The ashram gave permission to his sister and her baby to see Bhagavan, but her husband had to wait outside. Before prostrating, his sister happened to put the baby down on the floor on the left side of Bhagavan, the side that was excruciatingly painful for him to move due to the surgery on his left arm. The baby started to cry. Bhagavan, with visibly great difficulty, extended this hand to pat and console the baby.

The night that Bhagavan dropped the body, Balarama Reddiar, Viswanatha Swami and a few other senior devotees like Subba Rao went outside. They sat under the light of the moon. "Our master has gone," they said and wondered, "Will we ever see the ocean of compassion in human form again?" Thousands of people had sat before Bhagavan and had their lives transformed. He had showered grace on them like the sun. No one will ever know how many lives he touched and how many hearts blossomed like a lotus on account of that grace. Bhagavan had given them everything they needed to rise to the supreme heights of spiritual awareness. Such were their feelings as they sat under the moon.

Balarama Reddiar returned to his village and continued his practice there. He would come to the ashram for Bhagavan's *Jayanthi* and *Aradhana*, but would go back to his village. Many changes were taking place in the ashram. My father, who was then the president of the ashram, and I were asked to invite all the old devotees to stay in the ashram. We persuaded Balarama Reddiar to stay. He was given no work to do and no donation was taken from him either. Balarama Reddiar would lock himself up in his room and constantly pursue his spiritual practice. I had an attendant waiting on him and taking food to him so that he could focus on his goal. Some people in the ashram mistook his seclusion and deep meditation for arrogance and said, "Why can't he participate in the functioning of the ashram like other people? Does he think he is supreme?"

Being in close contact with him, I once asked him, "Could you tell me about the uniqueness of Bhagavan?" Balarama Reddiar said, "Once, I asked Bhagavan if he would describe his state of *jnana*, the state of Self realization, in which he was rooted. He replied, 'In this state, it is as difficult to think a thought, as it is in bondage to be without thoughts.'" Balarama Reddiar added, "The greatest features of Bhagavan were *saameepya* and *sowlabhya*. *Saameepya* is proximity, nearness, accessibility. *Sowlabhya* means not having any feeling of duality. Bhagavan was so close to us! There were so few rules and restrictions that it improved and encouraged our practice. We could do almost anything we wanted before Bhagavan. Sometimes, we would read the newspaper in his presence and at other times we would even discuss political matters. It was beautiful! Reddiar would say that Bhagavan was always in '*Brahman*'.

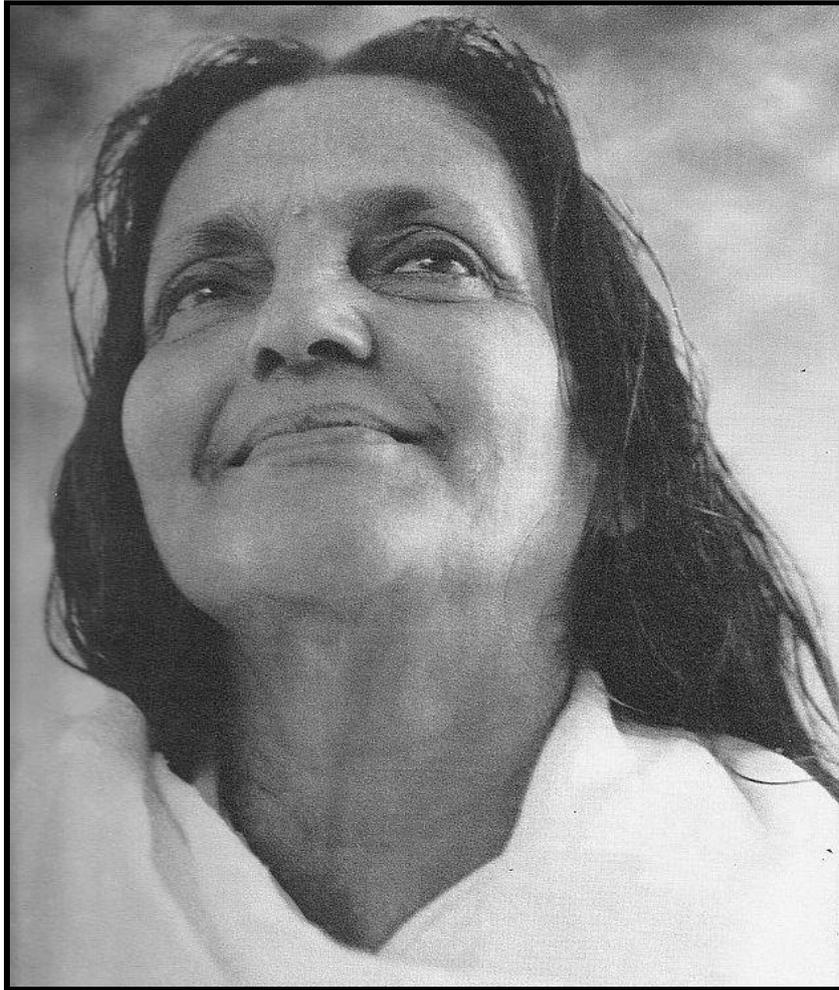
On another occasion, Balarama Reddiar wanted his doubt about Self realization clarified. He was well versed in the *Bhagavad Gita*. In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna says that it will happen '*bahunaam janmanaam antey*,' (at the end of numerous births). When Reddiar mentioned this to Bhagavan, he got seemingly angry and declared, "What *bahunaam janmanaam*? I say it is here and now!" As he said the last sentence, he raised his voice and everyone assembled in the hall including Balarama Reddiar experienced the state of Self realization at that very moment. Reddiar said, "That is the beauty of a master being present - the experience is given directly and instantaneously. There is no demand for maturity."

Balarama Reddiar too, played an important role in my life. Many years ago, my family and the people of Ramanasramam thought I was lost. There were reports in the newspaper of my disappearance. My father was naturally very concerned and turned to Balarama Reddiar for advice. Balarama Reddiar comforted my father and told him that they could perhaps consult Anandamayi Ma, a wonderful saint, whom Balarama Reddiar revered. Anandamayi Ma was then in Bangalore. My father, Mrs. Taleyarkhan and Balarama Reddiar went there. The saint smiled when she heard about why they had come. "Do not worry," she said, "My Ganga Mata is protecting him." My father was puzzled because he thought that he would get a specific answer. On returning to Ramanasramam, they found a telegram from one Dr. S. Nath of Benares: "Ganesan is here in Benares."

When Ma Anandamayi Ma came to Chennai, Balarama Reddiar insisted I come for her *darshan*. I was a fervent devotee of Bhagavan and therefore hesitated, but he compelled me to go with him. There was a huge audience and it was impossible for me to have a personal meeting with her. Reddiar did not give up. He took me to the railway station and we met her on the train as she was leaving. She was alone in

her compartment. Balarama Reddiar said, "Prostrate before her," and I did so. He introduced me to her as Bhagavan's brother's grandson. She was delighted and blessed me profusely. She also gave me an orange as *prasad*.

Before his end came, he was involved in a car accident that injured his back. He was admitted to a hospital in Bangalore. I sent Natesan, his attendant at the ashram, to look after him. Reddiar was in the hospital for nearly two months. Before departing from the world, he called out, "Natesa! Natesa! Look, Bhagavan has come. Bring a chair!" Natesan said, "Swami, Bhagavan is not here. He is in Ramanasramam. Tomorrow, we are going there." Balarama Reddiar retorted, "You fool ! Bhagavan is standing here. He is straining himself. Give him a chair." These were Balarama Reddiar's last words. The very next moment, he collapsed with a blissful smile on his face. Bhagavan had come for him! This unique rock of a devotee had gone back to Arunachala!



*The Grace-filled Ma Anandamayi Ma*



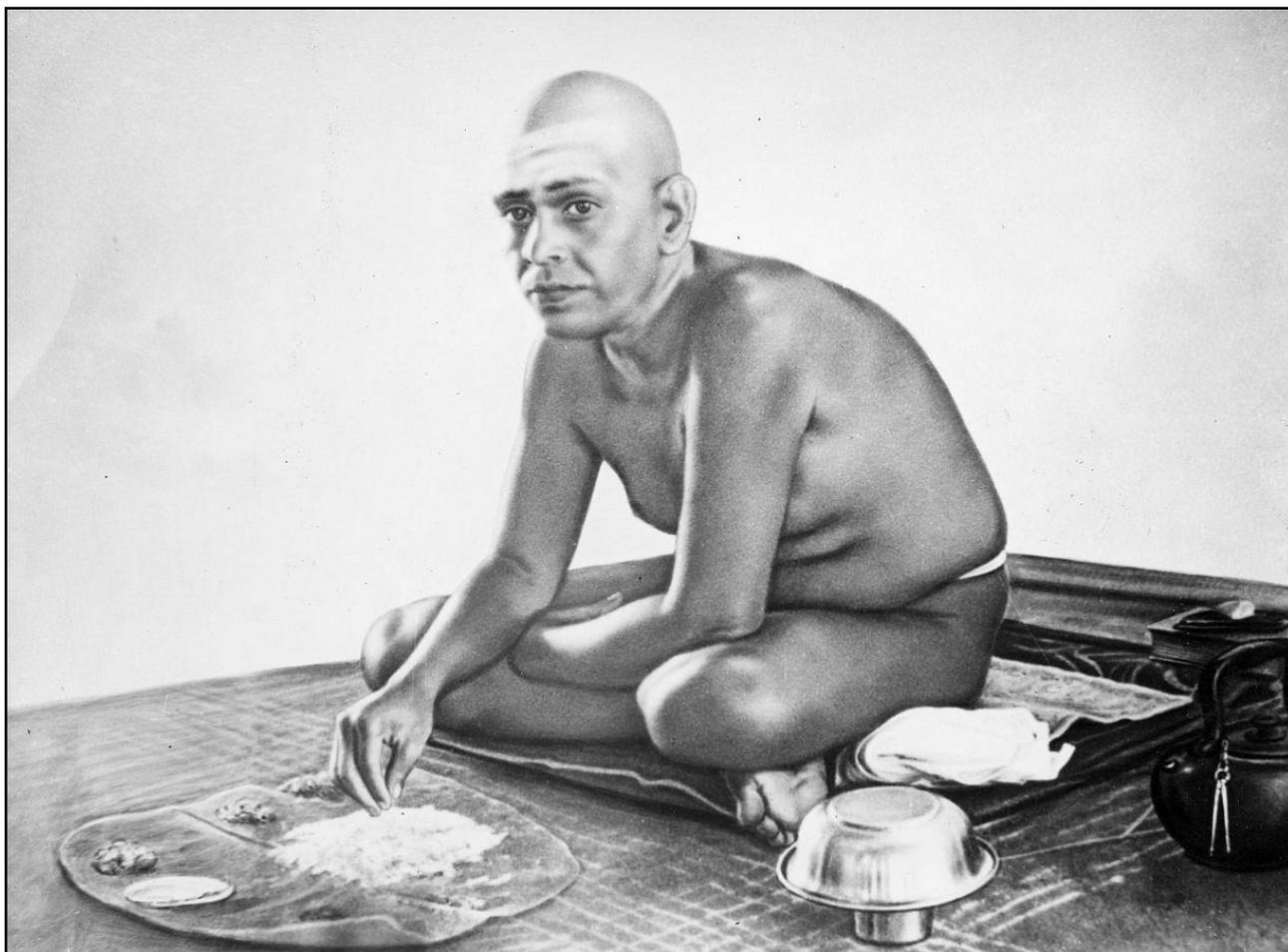
*Ashram lady cooks along with Sri Bhagavan and ashram residents*

## Ashram Lady Cooks

Throughout Bhagavan's life, there were two things he was emphatic about: Self Enquiry, and not allowing a single seeker to leave the ashram unfed. On reading *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, it is interesting to note that anyone who came to the ashram was first asked to go to the dining hall. In fact, some devotees questioned Bhagavan on why he always insisted that every devotee should first be fed - regardless of the time of day. Bhagavan simply replied, "I know what hunger is." Bhagavan gave importance not only to feeding but also to cooking - being an excellent cook himself. Sadhu Sundaram, who later became Swami Trivenigiri, assisted Bhagavan in the ashram kitchen for some time. He reveals, "With time, I realized that working with Bhagavan in the kitchen was not mere cooking, but definitely a form of spiritual practice."

A valuable lesson that Bhagavan taught by entering the kitchen and participating in the cooking was that one has to rely on and completely abide by divine will. To surrender and accept how the divine guides us is grace. As Annamalai Swami who served as a kitchen assistant for a short time recalled, "One morning, when there was virtually no food in the ashram, I saw Bhagavan take what little ingredients we had and begin to cook a meal. He had enough faith that Arunachala would send more before the cooking was over. It was about five thirty in the morning when Bhagavan began to clean a handful of broken rice. He washed it in a pot, removed all the small stones from it and started cooking it on a charcoal stove. I found his activities rather strange and perplexing as the rice would not even be sufficient for one person. As the rice came to a boil, a devotee appeared with two litres of milk. When the rice was cooked, Bhagavan put a larger vessel on the stove and began cooking the rice and milk together. A few minutes later, another devotee came with an offering of raisins and sugar candy. Bhagavan washed the offering and put it in the pot. At about six thirty, when the cooking was almost finished, a party of devotees arrived from Kumbakonam, bringing with them a big pot containing *idlis*, chutney, *vadas*, special hill bananas and some cups made of dry banana leaves. These dried banana cups were what we needed to eat Bhagavan's homemade *payasam* (rice pudding). At seven, after Bhagavan had taken his bath, we all sat down and ate a sumptuous breakfast."

Gudipatti Venkatachalam, or Chalam, a very famous Telugu writer, was responsible for recording what is about to be shared. Without his efforts, we would have lost the ashram's kitchen chronicles, and hence, the opportunity to pay homage to the blessed cooks of Ramanasramam. Coming to know Chalam had recorded all of this in Telugu, Maurice Frydman, who was in Mumbai, arranged for its English translation. He himself rewrote the manuscript and brought it to me. Such a saintly man he was that he left the manuscript without a word, knowing fully well that the ashram was in a financial strait and would not be able to publish it.



*Sri Bhagavan having his meals on His Jayanthi (birthday)*

In 1979-80, Bhagavan's birth centenary was to be celebrated and I was sent by the ashram all over India to meet devotees and collect funds. One of the means of raising money was to bring out a souvenir with advertisements from various sponsors. My respected friend, T. S. Nagarajan, a sound businessman, graciously offered to take charge of this project, but found that there were not enough articles for the souvenir. I requested him to search the archives, not remembering that Maurice Frydman had left the kitchen manuscripts. He located the articles and printed them in the souvenir. I am very grateful to all these three devotees - Chalam, Maurice Frydman and T. S. Nagarajan - because of whom these humble ashram cooks came to be known.

The reader must remember that these are not just stories or anecdotes. They are experiences shared by people who lived with God. As one of the lady cooks said about her time with Bhagavan in the kitchen, "Bhagavan would sit in the middle of the kitchen, watching and offering suggestions. The kitchen was small at that time and every time I needed to move I had to go around him. Thus, I would perform numerous *pradakshinas* of Bhagavan during the course of the day. Was he not my God? Was I not fortunate to have him in the middle of my kitchen?" She continues, "Bhagavan would taste all the food before it was served. As a result, the food was consecrated and sanctified for all." Even today, the food that is being served in Ramanasramam is sacred because Bhagavan's touch is always present.

## Santhammal



We now come to Santhammal, with whom I have had the privilege of moving very closely. Though I cannot claim that at that time I understood her greatness, I now realize how blessed I was to have her *satsang*. It was only after reading Maurice Frydman's manuscripts that I could comprehend her spiritual grandeur. Bhagavan came down from Skandashram to Ramanasramam in 1922. At that time there were only four or five residents, including Bhagavan's brother Chinna Swami, who was the head cook from 1922 to 1928. Others would come and help for a few days at a time and then return home. Santhammal came in 1928 to Ramanasramam to assist Chinna Swami and never left.

Santhammal was a widow who had lost her husband as well as her three sons. She was left with only one daughter, who she gave in marriage with great difficulty. Tragically, during childbirth, she also died. Santhammal was left with no one and nothing to hold on to. Being utterly poor, she went to various relatives' houses to assist in the kitchen. One day, in her brother-in-law's house, in the midst of boiling rice, she felt an inner prompting: "What are you doing with yourself? Your children are dead. Why have you forced on yourself these responsibilities? Whom are you serving? Who are you?" These were not thoughts but her future guru's commandment that she was feeling so intensely. She left her brother-in-law's house and went to Ramanathapuram where her friend Muruganar was staying. Upon entering his house, she went into his room and saw Bhagavan's picture for the first time. It captivated and beckoned her. "Here is my God," she thought. "How is it that I did not know about him until now?" She yearned to go to Arunachala, but alas, she did not have enough money for the journey. Fortunately, in 1927, a group of people from Ramanathapuram were going to Arunachala for the Karthikai festival. They gave her money for her ticket and took her along.

She arrived in Arunachala and stayed for forty days along with the group. Every day, she went to Ramanasramam and basked in the presence of Bhagavan. She prayed, "The dream of my life has come true. Today I am blessed, for here is my God. In your presence, I am in heaven. But when I am away, grant me that my mind troubles me no more." Bhagavan, being shy by nature, turned to Muruganar who was standing next to him and said, "Ask her to find out whether there is such a thing as mind. If so, what is its form? Does it have a moustache and a beard?" Hearing this Santhammal stood still. Muruganar had to intervene and say, "Do you not recognize that Bhagavan has initiated you into the search of the Self?" She could not immediately grasp the deep spiritual content of the statement but she was overwhelmed by a feeling of immense devotion and started singing a verse from *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*. The meaning of the verse is, "O Bhagavan, your spiritual splendour fills the universe with its fragrant perfume. Attracted by the aroma, numerous beings turn their heart to you. I too grew restless and sought you eagerly. 'Where is he?' I enquired and now I have come to you." This verse written by Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer at Virupaksha cave in the 1910s very aptly fitted her situation and applies to each one of us as well. In the now, we have this opportunity to be in contact with Bhagavan. He is nothing other than the inner silence, the direct experience of the Self. When Santhammal went to take leave of Bhagavan, he said, "*Upadesa Saram*, a book containing thirty verses of the essential teaching, is coming tomorrow. If you stay one more day, I will give you this book." She stayed one more day and got her copy of *Upadesa Saram* from Bhagavan. At the time of her departure, Santhammal started crying profusely. Bhagavan consoled her saying, "Do not cry. You are not leaving Arunachala. Go and come soon."

Unfortunately, Santhammal could not return to Arunachala for one year. Meanwhile, in Santhammal's absence, preparations were underway for the celebration of Bhagavan's *Jayanthi* - birthday. Calling the *sarvadhikari*, Bhagavan asked him to send an invitation to Santhammal. At that time, Santhammal was a 'nobody', a poor, uncared for widow. Santhammal was deeply moved by the master's concern in bridging the gap between the guru and disciple. She begged for money and finally came to the ashram in 1928 for good. When she entered, Bhagavan was explaining *Ulladu Narpadu*, *Forty Verses on Reality*. He stopped, looked at her and asked, "Have you received a copy of this book? I had asked them to send it to you."



Santhammal standing behind Sri Bhagavan

Santhammal was greatly touched by the compassion and personal attention that Bhagavan was showering on her. She vowed, "I will stay with this master, without going anywhere and I will cook for him."

The next day, she appealed to Bhagavan, "As long as I am with you, Bhagavan, my mind is at peace. Away from you, I am restless. What am I to do?" Bhagavan said, "Stay here until your mind becomes restful." The following morning, Chinna Swami had to go away for some days to Chennai for medical treatment. In Chinna Swami's absence, the ashram would be left without a cook. Santhammal was requested to take up the cooking. She replied that it was her dream to stay with Bhagavan and cook for him. This turned out to be a golden opportunity. When Santhammal entered the kitchen, not wanting her to be left alone for the first time, Bhagavan joined her and started helping her. Apart from being a master cook, Bhagavan was like a *coron bleu* spiritual chef, an expert in cooking his devotees egos and feeding them to Arunachala! In fact, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni has sung, "O Bhagavan, you are the perfect cook. But, you are a non-vegetarian cook. You cook all of our egos and then feed them to your father Arunachala!"

Once, Santhammal encountered some difficulty because she could not find a replacement for an oil vessel that was leaking. She reported this to Bhagavan saying that things would be much easier if she could get another vessel. Bhagavan did not answer. Within ten days, six huge jars were delivered from the railway station to Ramanasramam without the sender's address! Even now it is not known who sent the jars. Bhagavan called Santhammal and said, "Santhammal, you wanted a jar. Here are six." Another time Santhammal needed some money. Within three days, she got a money order for the exact amount that she needed. It was sent by someone named Srinivasa Rao who had read an article in the newspaper about Ramana Maharshi. When he read that a lady cook named Santhammal had come to the ashram to serve Bhagavan, he had an urge to send her some money. Santhammal later told me that these two incidents proved that complete faith in the guru was enough.

One day, Bhagavan and Santhammal were cooking in the kitchen. Bhagavan was stirring the vegetable stew continuously when he suddenly stopped and looked at her. Santhammal immediately became still. Everything disappeared, leaving behind only complete silence and pure joy. She was experiencing the highest beatitude. After sometime, Bhagavan started moving and Santhammal came back to her senses. He looked at the stew and said, "This has boiled fully and become noiseless. Now, you can add the spices." Santhammal understood this to mean that she should make the mind noiseless and in that state add the spice of wisdom to it. This is how Bhagavan incorporated the teaching into daily activities. On another occasion, Bhagavan entered the kitchen just as Santhammal finished cooking a dish. She requested Bhagavan to taste it. Bhagavan jovially answered, "You know, the kings have food tasters whom they pay enormously for doing this job. Santhammal, this is what you are asking me to do. What is the payment that you will give me?" Santhammal replied, "Bhagavan, I am a beggar. I can only give you myself." This surrender was whole heartedly accepted by the master. Santhammal's cooking was loved by all, not only because it was extremely tasty, but because it was done by a fully surrendered soul.

Santhammal narrated an interesting incident that took place in the hall, "There was once a stranger, a European, who came to the ashram in a horse cart and went straight into the hall. There, he gave Bhagavan a piece of paper he had written something on. Bhagavan read it and looked at him. Immediately, the man closed his eyes and became quiet. After sometime, Bhagavan too closed his eyes and they remained together in silence. A few people around them were also submerged in that peace. The lunch bell rang as usual at eleven, but Bhagavan and the European were unmoved. At twelve, both opened their eyes. The European left, ecstatic." Bhagavan once said, "With whichever vessel you go to the ocean you can get only that much water. If it is merely a cup, you will get a cup of water. If it is a bucket, you will get a bucket. Go and loot the whole ocean." This European came to loot the whole ocean! Santhammal told me what a fortunate person the European was to have received that grace.

Another interesting incident that Santhammal has recorded involves a Hindu monk. Once, an aged North Indian monk came to Ramanasramam and stayed there for a few weeks. On the last day, he came to Bhagavan and stood in front of him and said, "Bhagavan, everything in Ramanasramam has given me great satisfaction. Now, I am ready to leave. Fulfill my heart's desire." Bhagavan did what he has perhaps never done before or after: He stood up, walked up to the monk and touched him. Both stood like this for some time until the monk fell at Bhagavan's feet with tears flowing from his eyes. Getting up with an exquisite smile on his face and filled with ecstasy, he left Bhagavan's presence.

One more happening shared by Santhammal and not found in any other book on Bhagavan involves the Mysore maharaja. During the British regime there were over three hundred kingdoms within India, each one having a king, queen, palace and army. Among these, two of the biggest were Hyderabad and Mysore. The Mysore maharaja was a scholar and patron of the arts and culture. One day, wishing to be unnoticed, he came to Bhagavan in the dead of night and stayed until early the next morning. He wanted a private audience with Bhagavan, but Bhagavan had never obliged anyone before. There were always devotees with him in the hall or when he went walking up the hill. So, Bhagavan permitted the maharaja to meet him in the eight by eight foot bathroom where he bathed. Santhammal told me that Bhagavan revealed to her that the maharaja fell at his feet, and wept so profusely that his tears drenched Bhagavan's feet. . The maharaja then got up and said, "Bhagavan, they have made me king and forced me to sit on the throne. For this reason I am not able to come and stay with you and be in your presence. These few moments are the only precious few in my whole life. After this, I will not be able to come. Please bless me." When Santhammal asked Bhagavan about the maharaja, Bhagavan said just one sentence: "He is a ripe fruit."

Every year in Tiruvannamalai, the Karthikai festival is celebrated in a grand manner for ten days. Lord Arunachala's idol is taken on a procession around the town and thousands of devotees flock to watch this grand sight. Among these devotees, many were beggars, *sadhus* or *sannyasins* and they would come to Ramanasramam to have their food. Though they would all be served, the ashram workers felt that the crowd was unmanageable one particular year. The decision was made to stop serving food to them. The night this decision was made, Santhammal had a dream. She was sitting in Bhagavan's hall when suddenly she saw something like an insect flying next to him. Slowly it became bigger and bigger and transformed into a huge red horse with wings. It went first around Bhagavan, then around the entire ashram, finally came back to Bhagavan and then disappeared. The next day, curious as to the

significance of this dream, Santhammal approached Bhagavan. Bhagavan explained, "During the Karthikai festival the gods and celestials come to Tiruvannamalai in the guise of beggars and *sadhus*, so it should be a privilege to feed them." The following morning Santhammal reported this to Chinna Swami who immediately arranged to give food to all the beggars and *sadhus* on those ten crowded days.

Santhammal used to have visions of bright lights. She shares, "When I first came to Bhagavan, I saw a bright light like the sun with Bhagavan in the midst of it. Later on, I used to see a light between my eyebrows. On another occasion, I saw a big light come out of Bhagavan's head and fill the whole hall. In that light, everything disappeared including Bhagavan, and the feeling of 'I' remained floating like a luminous void. When I related this to Bhagavan, he affirmed that such visions do occur. He said, "To know how one looks, one must look into a mirror. However, the person should not take the reflection to be oneself. What is perceived by the senses and the mind is never the truth. All visions are mere mental creations and if one believes in them spiritual progress ceases. Enquire to whom the visions occur. Find out who is the witness. Stay in the pure awareness, free from all thoughts, and do not move out of that state."

Another incident related by Santhammal is as follows : Once, a person from the northern corner of India came to the ashram and stayed for weeks. On the day of his departure, he stood before Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I am going far away and I do not know when I shall be coming back. I am much less fortunate than those who have the benefit of your constant presence. How can you help me, a sinner in a distant place, unless you think of me? I implore you to give me a place in your mind." Bhagavan answered, "A *jnani* has no mind. How can one without a mind remember and even think? So, how can I remember all of these prayers? I shall transmit your prayer to the Lord of the universe. He will look after you. It is his realm." Later on, after the devotee had left, Bhagavan turned towards us and said, "People imagine that the devotees crowding around a *jnani* get special attention. If a guru shows partiality, how can he be a *jnani*? Is he so foolish as to be flattered by people's attention on him and the service they do? Does distance matter? The guru is pleased with one who gives himself up entirely and abandons his ego forever. Such a man is taken care of wherever he may be. He need not pray. God looks after him unasked." Then, Bhagavan gave the example of the frog that lives constantly at the base of the lotus stem in the water. Though the frog is constantly in the proximity of the flower, it is the bees that get the honey. They fly down from long distances, get the honey and then fly back. They are indeed blessed.

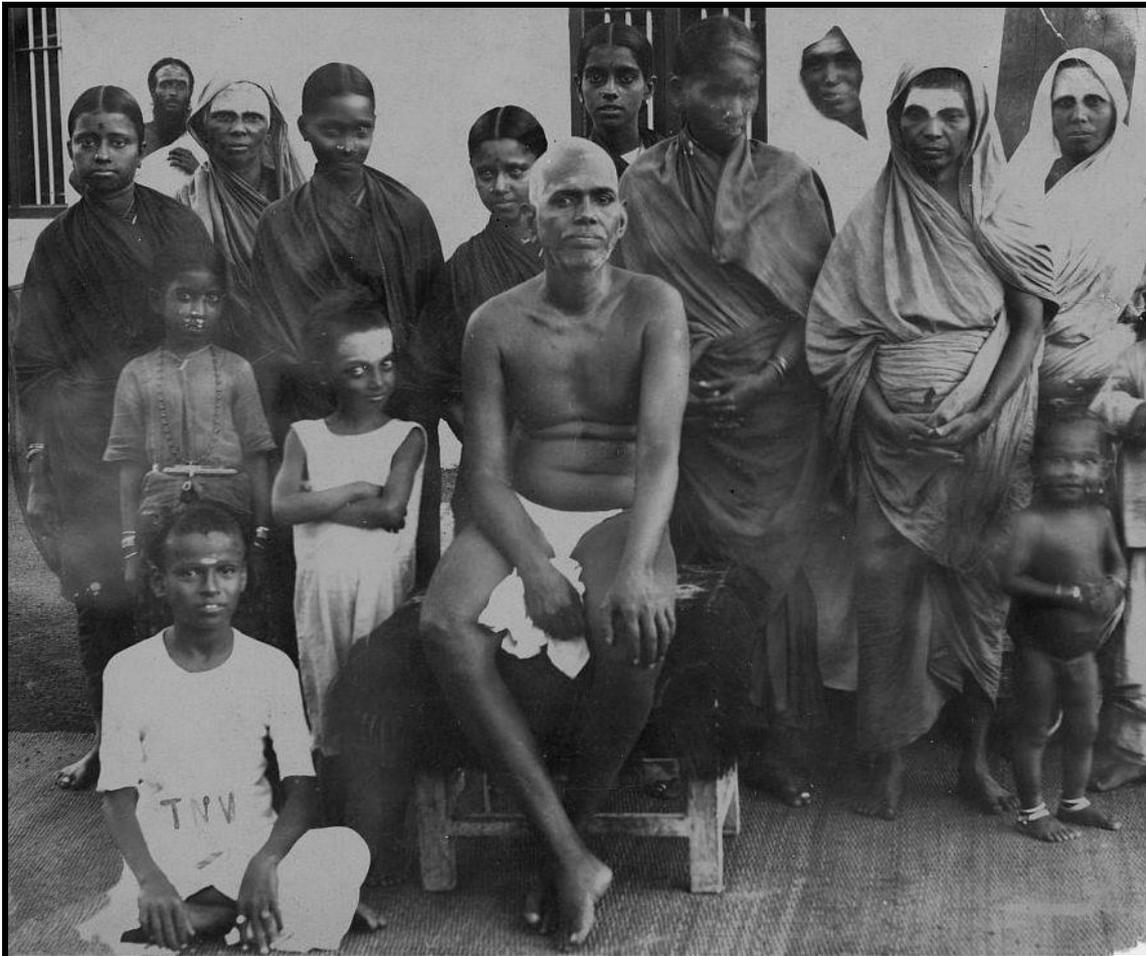
Another time two ladies from the far south came to Bhagavan. One pretended to be the guru and the other the disciple. When they came to the hall the disciple spread a huge seat for her guru and made her sit on it. After going to Bhagavan to get his blessings, she came back to sit in front of her guru. Again, she went back to Bhagavan and asked him to teach her the path of salvation in order to achieve liberation. Bhagavan kept silent. The disciple felt hurt as it was nearing evening and they had to leave on the night train. "Swami, please instruct us," she begged. "It is getting late." A few minutes later, she again reminded Bhagavan. Finally, exasperated, she asked, "Swami, at least tell us something. All people speak of ignorance. What is ignorance? Please explain that to us." Bhagavan turned to Muruganar who was seated next to him and compassionately said, "Ask her to enquire within who is ignorant." Muruganar turned to the ladies and replied, "Now you can go, for your initiation is over." Both ladies left, disappointed. Later, Bhagavan remarked about this incident: "Everything has to be done in a hurry. Everybody has some train to catch. They visit this *swami* in a rush and want to carry away a parcel of liberation and salvation. They read something here and there and they think they are learned and ready for liberation. Who wants salvation? To whom is the liberation? Instead of simply turning within and being the silence which is saturated within the Heart, they roam about outside and remain agitated without peace. Everything is already within. The one who searches is the very thing one is searching for! Stillness is the truth." Without Santhammal's diligent recordings, incidents such as these would not have been available to seekers!

In addition to being a wonderful cook, Santhammal was a very strong woman. One day, as a big pot of *sambar* (lentil stew) was boiling, Bhagavan suddenly entered the kitchen. The pot was so big, that it usually took three men to handle it. As the *sambar* was boiling vigorously, Bhagavan recommended the pot be lifted off of the fire and went away. Santhammal, seeing no one else around, effortlessly lifted it and put it aside. After doing so she exclaimed, "This is a miracle performed by Bhagavan. Ordinarily, no

single lady would even be able to touch it, but because Bhagavan uttered it, I was able to lift the pot and put it away.” Such was her faith !

Santhammal was very kind and helpful to the *sadhus* living in Palaakothu. They had to cook their own food, so she used to supply them with the things that they could not get, such as pickles and even some of the sweets and other delicacies that were made in the ashram. She did all of this with Bhagavan’s knowledge. Once, *aviyal*, a South Indian delicacy with a lot of vegetables, was being served in the ashram. Muruganar was living in Palaakothu. Bhagavan called Santhammal aside and told her, “Muruganar loves *aviyal*. Who will give *aviyal* to Muruganar?” Santhammal immediately ran to the kitchen to make a parcel of *aviyal* for Muruganar. With this, she ran to Palaakothu, but Muruganar was not there as he had left for town to beg for his food. She caught up with him on the road and told him that Bhagavan had sent *aviyal* for him. Muruganar wept profusely thinking of this great act of compassion of his master.

As she became older, Santhammal felt that she could no longer do physical work for the ashram. Not wanting to be a burden, she wanted to leave. That night, Bhagavan appeared to her in her dream and said, “Where will you go, Santhammal? Who will look after you?” Indirectly, Bhagavan was saying that he would look after her. Santhammal remained peacefully in the ashram till she was Absorbed in Arunachala.



*Sri Bhagavan with lady devotees (Santhammal seen on extreme right)*

## Sankarammal

There are no records of Sankarammal. We know that she was a child widow who became a cook. All child widows in India were advised to think about God, to read about God and to visit temples. Sankarammal was a brilliant girl. She discovered for herself that to seek God meant to seek the truth because although there are innumerable gods, there is only one universal truth. This is what she felt even as a very young girl.

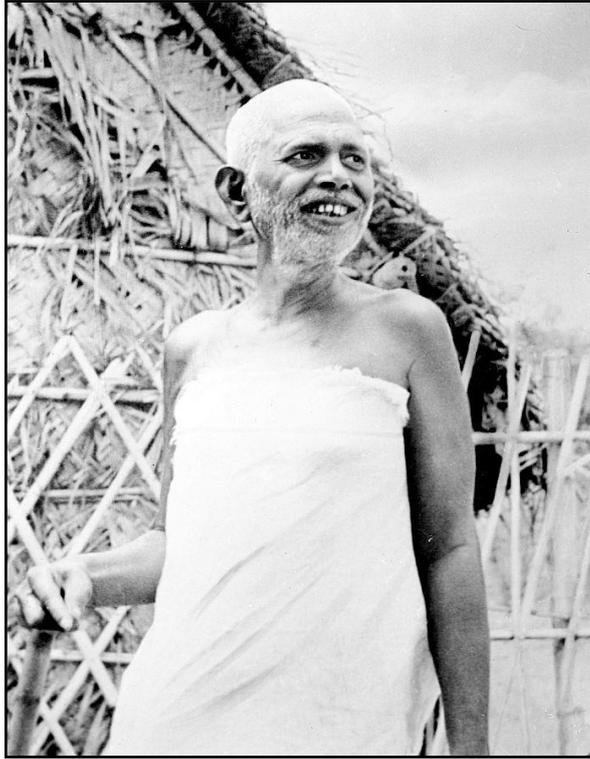
When in her teens, her brother, the only sympathetic and understanding person in her house, introduced her to spiritual texts like *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and *Yoga Vasishta*. These texts confirmed her staunch conviction that although there are hundreds of gods and goddesses according to Hindu teachings, there is only one truth. The texts also confirmed her belief that one could have access to truth only with the blessings of a guru. Sankarammal also gained an insight into the *Advaitic* exposition that truth always exists as awareness. This insight induced her to go within herself to experience it.

Sankarammal visited many temples and holy places. However, she was pining to experience the truth and this she knew would be possible only when she reached the feet of a guru. She was not in a position to communicate this yearning or this knowledge to anyone. However, could her guru Ramana make her struggle any more? Soon, her brother took her to Arunachala to visit the temple of Arunachaleswara. And what happened there? The brother and sister were in the sanctum sanctorum worshipping the Lord in the form of a *linga*, when a priest, out of the blue, commented, "Oh, so both of you have come to pay homage to Ramana Maharshi." Sankarammal was hearing the name for the first time in her life. Yet, she felt ecstatic and lost all sense of body consciousness for a few moments. Her brother realized this and took her to Ramanasramam.

When Sankarammal stood before Bhagavan, he looked at her with a gracious smile which seemed to ask, "Did it take you this long to come to me?" Many other old devotees have also confirmed that this was what Bhagavan's gaze communicated to them. Sankarammal found in Bhagavan all the attributes of a *jnani* or a realized soul as described in *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and *Yoga Vashishta*. With the very first gaze, she knew that this was God in the form of a human being. When Bhagavan smiled at her, she felt certain that he was also her guru. She had longed for a guru in order to experience the truth, and here she was finally in his presence. This kind of ecstasy has been described in *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and *Yoga Vashishta* as the highest state of realization, for it is a state in which there are no thoughts - only the thoughts given by the master. Sankarammal decided that she would stay on at the ashram and serve her guru for the rest of her life.

Sankarammal had never asked for anything in her life; she had never asked even her brother for anything. It was at his behest that they visited the various temples and sacred places. She had followed the dictates of Hindu culture, which says that a sister must obey her brother. Now, for the very first time in her life, she felt that she had to ask for something. She told him, "Brother, please leave me here to serve my guru." Sankarammal's brother understood her yearning to be with a guru and serve him. He at once went to the ashram office. The *sarvadhikari* Chinna Swami was there looking rather worried and discussing a serious matter with the members of the ashram staff. They were saying that Santhammal the ashram cook was going away from the ashram for some time. They were wondering who would do the cooking with so many visitors around and with other VIPs also expected. This was Bhagavan's grace! When Sankarammal's brother told Chinna Swami that his sister wanted to stay in the ashram, he immediately asked, "Will she cook?" Sankarammal joyously agreed and stayed on at Ramanasramam.

Sankarammal had many chances to remain in the vicinity of Bhagavan because he often visited the kitchen. She was delighted because Bhagavan was the fitting example of a *jnani*. His every movement was beautiful and perfect - his look, his gait, his gestures, even the way in which he kept down a cup. Sankarammal's state had always been one of inner felicity, and she kept a low profile. That is why her name is not mentioned in any of the records. When the kitchen assistants were individually interviewed and photographed by Chalam, she didn't permit him. It is however worth pointing out that she remained in a state of perpetual joy, be it while attending to her work or sitting quietly in a corner in the kitchen. She was always in a state of peace.



After my graduation in 1956, I stayed on in Ramanasramam till I found a job. I was twenty years old at the time; two years went by, and I still did not have a job. Bhagavan made me his apprentice! I was asked to attend on the devotees, the sages and saints who came to the ashram. My school teacher, T. K. Sunderesa Iyer took on himself the task of giving me this training. He not only introduced me to saints and sages, he also introduced me to the old devotees of Bhagavan. It was then that I noticed Sankarammal who was then in her sixties. She was always seated in a corner. She hardly uttered a word. (In fact, she didn't even speak much with Bhagavan when he was still in the body. There was a reason for this. Bhagavan poured his grace on her by his mere glance, so there was no necessity for words.) Physically unattractive, she was a thin, dark skinned lady with a dour demeanour. As she was not sociable, nobody approached her. In spite of all this and perhaps because of Bhagavan's grace, I was always attracted towards her. I would sometimes enter the kitchen and sit next to her, but she would remain silent. Finally, one day, I told her, "Tell me about Bhagavan." I persisted till she ultimately opened up.

She said, "Bhagavan's silence was his direct teaching. He taught Self Enquiry to those who could not comprehend his silence; so Self Enquiry actually takes a secondary place as far as his teaching is concerned. He imparted his teaching of silence by his mere grace filled glance. This is the look that Muruganar and others refer to as his glance of grace. There was never a need to talk to Bhagavan. He made me mature gradually and steadily. All of Bhagavan's devotees extol Bhagavan's look of grace; however, even that look was an external expression of his inner silence. Silence was the state of Bhagavan and his direct teaching was only through silence. Those who received his message of silence had no need whatsoever to talk to him, much less a need for his instructions. How can I possibly express in words the mysterious working of Bhagavan through silence?"

I was not prepared to leave her in peace. I was drawn towards her like an iron filing to a magnet. I noticed that she was always tranquil and quiet. She did a meticulous job in the kitchen and never stirred out of it. I was insistent in my questioning. I always asked her, "What state are you in? You are not in a state of *samadhi* because you are very active. You are open eyed, yet in a state of silence. What is that state? Will you please tell me?" Sankarammal was not only astute, but stern. She was totally lost in her work. She did her work with great care and focus. She was never found talking to anyone. These made others avoid her, but it had the reverse effect on me. I was strongly drawn towards her. The more I became acquainted with her, the more I came to hold her in high esteem. I was convinced that she was an extraordinary person, and therefore I requested her to tell me the secret of her perfect

equipoise. After several persistent efforts, she finally relented. She revealed, "I was myself puzzled at this inner felicity that I have and which is extolled in our scriptures. I was doubtful about this state because you see I am an ordinary woman. The scriptures state that even sages and saints perform penance for years before attaining this blissful state. I wondered, am I really in that state?" Boggled down by such doubts, but unsure of whom to ask, she waited for the opportune moment. One day, after breakfast, she found herself alone with Bhagavan. She was pondering on how to find out from him whether she was genuinely in that extraordinary, tranquil state. But, how does one ask? A truly realized soul will not put forth questions like, 'Am I in that state of realization?' As Sankarammal prostrated before Bhagavan, she felt a verse of *Kaivalya Navaneetam* spring from within her. The verse was the one in which the guru asks his disciple to come out with what he has understood. The disciple addresses the guru with folded hands thus: "O Lord! You are the reality, the truth, remaining as my very innermost Self, ruling me during all my countless births. Glory to you, who have taken a human form to redeem me through your teaching and grant me this perfect state of inner felicity. I do not see how I can repay your grace for helping to liberate me. Glory, glory, more glory, to your holy feet!"

When she recited this verse, Bhagavan looked at her with compassion and said, "What is there to doubt?" and then continued, "Yes! Yes! The reply is in the very next verse." The next verse says that the guru was ecstatic after listening to the explanation of the disciple. The guru bid him to come near and embraced the disciple and said, "To stay fixed in the Self, in the state of this inner felicity without experiencing the three obstacles of ignorance, uncertainty and wrong knowledge is the highest recompense you can pay me." (There is a translation of this book in English. I would strongly recommend that everyone read this dialogue between the guru and the disciple. This small book is in two parts. The first part describes the guru giving instructions to the disciple about the 'I AM' experience, and the disciple grasping it. In the second part, the guru asks the disciple to explain to him what he has understood. The explanation given is not an intellectual one, but an experiential one. That is why *Kaivalya Navaneetam* is so important.) Sankarammal looked at Bhagavan, and Bhagavan again looked at her steadily for a few minutes. Sankarammal's eyes were teeming with tears as she repeatedly prostrated before him. She told me, "Ever since, I have been in that state. There are no thoughts."

No matter how much we read - whether it is about the teachings of Jesus Christ, or the Buddha or Ramana Maharshi - we always maintain a distance from the teachings because we think that it is not possible for us to follow the teachings. This is the intellectual limitation of human beings. We tell ourselves, "It is possible for Jesus Christ, the Buddha and Ramana to be so, but do I stand any chance?" I had the good fortune of being in the proximity of Sankarammal till her end, so I was able to imbibe much from her. She lived the truth, and therefore I received a lot of clarity from her.

Once, I requested Sankarammal to select some significant verses composed by Bhagavan to help me in my *sadhana*. Instantly, she sang two verses in Tamil from Bhagavan's *Marital Garland of Letters*: (v.79) "Let me not like a ship without a captain flounder in the storm. Guard me with your grace, O Arunachala!" (v.81) "Don't be a mirror held in front of a noseless person. Lift me up and embrace me, O Arunachala!" Even before I could ask her about their significance, she explained, "Initially, seekers feel two deficiencies in themselves. One becomes conscious of the lack of perfection in oneself, and secondly, one doesn't understand how to overcome the insurmountable obstacles one faces while doing *sadhana*. Both plunge the seeker into desperation. With these two verses, Bhagavan removes such apparent fears. Total surrender to the higher power is the only panacea for all spiritual illnesses. If wisdom is compared to pure milk or nectar, surrender is the vessel which holds it, preserves it and makes it one's own. Surrender helps one plunge into one's inner being."

Sankarammal was fully conscious when she died. She closed her eyes and gave up her body with a smile! Death did not terrify her. When she was asked to give her blessings, she smiled and said, "What is this talk of giving and receiving? Remain in the state of inner felicity that you already are, and always are in."

## Subbalakshmiammal



Bhagavan's relationship with the cooks was unique. He interacted with them - mostly child widows - like a friend. It was a simple, warm relationship, but at the same time, he imparted to them the same high teaching that he shared with great scholars. He enabled them to experience the real depth of the teaching. This is a sure sign that the true guru has always been, is, and will forever be, impartial in imparting the highest teaching to one and all.

Varanasi Subbalakshmiammal became a widow at the age of sixteen. Her only support was her mother who was also a deeply spiritual person. They lived in a village near Nellore. They often went on pilgrimages to temples situated in other places. On one of their pilgrimages, they happened to come to Arunachala. When they heard of a young ascetic staying at Virupaksha cave, they paid a visit to the cave. As soon as Subbalakshmiammal saw Bhagavan, she had the conviction that Arunachala himself had come in human form. In her own words, "He was about thirty at that time; he was bright and shining like burnished gold; his eyes were blooming like the petals of a lotus. An immense peace surrounded the *swami*."

When she was thirty one years old, she came again to Bhagavan. By now, he had come to the present ashram at the foot of the hill. She could spend only a very short time. A year passed. She longed to be in the presence of Bhagavan, and waited for the opportunity. One day, she had a dream in which a learned pundit, well known to her, told her, "Where is the need for you to search elsewhere? Entrust yourself to Bhagavan Ramana. He is God himself. He will lead you to salvation." Along with her friend, Nellore Parvatamma, she reached the presence of Bhagavan. Both of them had planned to travel to Varanasi (Benares) and settle down permanently in that holy city. Before embarking on such a vital pilgrimage, she wanted spiritual guidance from Bhagavan. She asked Bhagavan, "What is *atma*, the Self? Is it the limitless ether of space or the awareness that cognizes everything?" Bhagavan looked at her intently and said, "Abide in the Self free from thoughts, instead of enquiring about the nature of the Self." Subbalakshmiammal felt her mind melting away. No thought arose - only the feeling of immense peace pervaded her whole being.

Subbalakshmiammal forgot about the Varanasi pilgrimage, and instead stayed in town and came to the presence of Bhagavan every day, immersing herself in the silence and peace. Then, at the request of Bhagavan's sister, Alamelu Ammal, she agreed to help with the cooking in the ashram. The presence of Bhagavan guiding them in the kitchen gave her a fillip to continue her services. Her attachment to the strict orthodox way of life and the heaviness of work demanding her whole attention, made her go back to her village. As time passed, she started feeling a vacuum in her meditation. The anguish caused by staying away from the guru made her come back to the ashram. She experienced peace and was even happier to learn that on that very morning of the day that she arrived, Bhagavan had told Santhammal to reserve some food for Subbalakshmiammal who was arriving that day. This deep love of Bhagavan and his paying special attention to her even in her absence, made her stay with Bhagavan and serve him the rest of her life.

Again, she started feeling that the load of work thrust on her in the kitchen was preventing her from meditating. The master understood her anguish and told her one day, "It looks as if you are still hankering after meditation." She replied, "Yes, Bhagavan! But what have I got except endless work in the kitchen?" Bhagavan smiled at her and said, "Your hands may do the work but your mind can remain still. You are that which never moves. Realise that, and you will find that work is not a strain. As long as you think that you are the body and that you are doing the work, you will feel your life to be an endless toil. In fact, it is the mind that toils, not the body. Even if your body keeps quiet, will your mind keep quiet too? Even in sleep, the mind is busy with its dreams!" She asked, "Why can't I always remember that I am not the body?" Bhagavan smiled and replied, "Because you haven't had enough of it!"

Subbalakshmiammal used to fast very often, as she had read in one of the ancient texts, "He who wants to know himself and yet pays attention to his body, is like a man who trusts a crocodile to take

him across a river.” She showed this passage to Bhagavan. He replied, “It does not mean that you should starve. You need not torture the body. It only means not giving the body more than what it needs. With your mind, hold on to the enquiry and just keep the body going so that it does not become a hindrance. For this, pure, fresh food simply prepared and taken in moderation is a great help.” On another occasion, when she asked Bhagavan’s permission to put on the *sannyasin’s* orange robes and beg for food, Bhagavan sternly told her, “Will coloured clothes give you renunciation? First learn what *sannyasa* means.”

One day, a group of people sat in front of Bhagavan and sang a hymn in praise of the guru. Bhagavan got up in the middle of the recitation and went away, saying, “Prayers and praises will not take one far. It is the merciful look of the guru that bestows true wisdom.” Subbalakshmiammal felt proud that she had received Bhagavan’s grace of glance fully, not once, but many a time. But, the next day, Bhagavan turned to her and spontaneously said, “Unless one becomes like a six month old baby, there is no hope for one in the realm of true wisdom.”

Subbalakshmiammal recalled, “Living in the presence of Bhagavan, by itself, was a true *sadhana*. It was ever like this with him. Whoever went to him, he would go down to their level; his words and gestures, even the intonation of his voice, would adapt themselves to the level of the people around him. With children, he was their playmate; to family people, a wise counselor; to pundits, a well of knowledge; to yogis, the god of victory. He saw himself in them and they saw themselves in him and their hearts would be bound to his feet in everlasting love. He radiated an overwhelming sense of unity by his mere presence - just as fire spreads light.” She added, “Bhagavan was the very embodiment of wisdom and kindness - though he did not mind our faults and mistakes, he made us follow his instructions to the letter. We had to do the same task again and again until it was done to his complete satisfaction. Did he do it for himself? Of what use was it to him? He wanted to prove to us that we could do things right and that only lack of patience and attention causes a mess. He sometimes seemed to be severe, even harsh, to make us do something correctly, for he knew what we did not know - that we can act correctly if we only try. With experience comes confidence and with confidence, the great peace of righteousness. What a noble teacher of work and wisdom Bhagavan was!”

To describe the depth of their relationship as guru and disciple, Subbalakshmiammal said, “In his presence, every moment, we felt that he was God. Even that feeling we owed to his grace, for he would from time to time let us see him as he really was - the Lord Almighty and not the human frame to which we were accustomed. It was our love for him, a reflection of his love, that chained us to his feet and made us stay. For him, we gave up hearth, home and all our earthly ties. We only knew we were safe with him, that in some miraculous way he would take us to our goal. He himself was our goal - our real home.”

I was fortunate to be very close to her. I was a chubby, two year old child at the time. Unlike my brothers who were shy, I was rather fearless and had no hesitation in approaching members outside the family. Hence, these cooks would play with me and fuss over me. One day, Subbalakshmiammal took me outside the kitchen, sat me on her lap and fed me my lunch. I was holding two mangoes tightly in my hands. Suddenly, a huge male monkey that had seen the mangoes made its way towards me. Out of fear, I turned my face towards Subbalakshmiammal. She came to my rescue. Wrapping her arms around me, she protected me from the monkey. She was fully aware of the danger she was exposing herself to, and sure enough, the monkey in his wrath bit off a chunk of flesh from her arm. Bleeding profusely, she handed me over to someone. All feared rabies, since there was no antidote for rabies at that time. But by god’s grace, nothing happened to her. She was hospitalized and bore a deep scar on her arm for the rest of her life. I, of course, forgot about the incident.

When I was older and I saw the scar on her arm, I asked her out of curiosity, “What is this scar on your arm?” I felt very disturbed when I was told that it had occurred when she was trying to protect me. However, Subbalakshmiammal comforted me by saying, “No! No! Do not feel sorry. I am very grateful to you because for many, many days after that, Bhagavan’s attention was always on me. He would constantly enquire, ‘How is your wound? Has it healed?’ His mere look saved me from rabies. So, I am grateful to you.” As I touched her holy feet, I said, “You acted like the protective mother principle. How can I express my gratitude?” Subbalakshmiammal was very moved because I had used the phrase, ‘mother principle’. She answered, “Bhagavan’s devotees are all protected by this mother principle.”



*Child Ganesan holding mangoes  
(l to r - Nagalakshmi, Venkataraman, Balu, Bhagavan's sister Athai, Sundaram)*

Even Bhagavan himself has referred to it quite a few times. However, the people who write about Bhagavan conveniently ignore this phenomenon because they cannot understand it. Bhagavan has referred two or three times to the mother principle operating in his life, and influencing it.”

She narrated to me what Santhammal had told her. Santhammal had a dream one day. She dreamt that Bhagavan was seated in the hall, and next to him was a beautiful female deity whose brilliant light was dazzling. At the same time, she also saw a similar female deity going round the ashram and discharging her duties. She was puzzled by the dream and therefore told Bhagavan the details. Bhagavan almost seemed to confirm her dream. He nodded and said, “Yes, even when I was up on the hill, it was a woman who used to come and give me food.” This person was of course Akhilandammal (Desurammal). Bhagavan said of her, “While serving food, she would place an extra leaf next to me. She would also serve food on the extra leaf. One day, I ventured to ask her, ‘For whom is the extra leaf?’ She replied, ‘It is for the Mother.’ Bhagavan paused and then added, “Akhilandammal had a dream similar to yours.” Subbalakshmiammal continued, “I have been a witness to another incident involving another devotee, Appu Shastri’s wife. In those days, coffee was a rare luxury and therefore many devotees who came to the ashram brought coffee with them, little realizing that Bhagavan did not particularly like coffee. Appu Shastri’s wife brought a big vessel of the choicest coffee to Bhagavan. Bhagavan said, ‘You know that I don’t like coffee.’ Appu Shastri’s wife said, ‘What am I to do? I had a dream wherein Mother Parvati stood in front of the temple and beckoned me. She said, ‘My son goes without drinking coffee. Make some coffee and take it to him.’ Do not blame me; these were Mother’s instructions.’ Bhagavan had no choice but to accept the brew. He however commented, ‘Mother has no other task than to interfere in my life and come in the way. This happened once even when I was up on the hill.’”

I asked Subbalakshmiammal to recount the incident, which of course now is recorded in the Ashram books: "Bhagavan was staying on the hill. There was no set routine. At eight in the morning, everyone gathered there would share the *bhiksha* food. The food would invariably be cold rice. Once this was done, they were all free to do what they wanted. Bhagavan would roam on the hill all day. So much so, he once commented, 'There is not even an inch of space on the hill that remains untouched by my feet.' On one such day, he found a rustic looking woodcutter woman blocking his path. The woman had her legs stretched across the path Bhagavan was walking on. Bhagavan stood there, hesitating. The woman did not pull back her legs; Bhagavan did not jump over the legs either since it is against the Hindu custom. As Bhagavan stood hesitating before her, the woman hurled accusations at him and asked, "Why are you roaming around relentlessly? Why do you not stay put in one place?" Bhagavan took her words to heart and thereafter never moved from Skandashram! Later, of course, he came down to Ramanasramam. Even there he never stirred from the place except to take his occasional walks." Noticing my eagerness to query her further, Subbalakshmiammal added, "When we asked Bhagavan who that rustic woman was, Bhagavan said, 'Who else is it except the mother principle?'"

Emotional devotion welling up in me, I humbly requested her to recount how she felt about Bhagavan. She remarked, "To me, Bhagavan is the mother. It is easier to hold on to him firmly if one approaches him as one would approach one's mother. He was undoubtedly the most compassionate mother I have ever come across. Would there have been any hope of emancipation for me, an uneducated widow, cast aside by society? He saved me from my state of lowliness by lifting me up with his grace and thus emancipating me." These outpourings of Subbalakshmiammal thrilled me, because even today this protective mother principle of Bhagavan is evident for the followers of Bhagavan. One only has to have ears to hear and eyes to see in order to understand this protective mother principle.

Once, alluding to Lord Krishna she told me, "Eons ago, the Lord came as a cowherd and liberated the simple milk maids. In a similar fashion, Bhagavan took to cooking in order to save us ignorant women." I was moved by her approach to Bhagavan. I asked her how she was able to love Bhagavan with such devotion and totality. She said, "Do you know that even *yogis* and *rishis* of yore had to undergo severe austerities and penance in order to attain the state that Bhagavan would vouch us just by having us work near him in the kitchen? The small tasks that we did every day used to give us total bliss and light. We experienced ecstasy in mundane tasks such as grinding, cooking and serving the devotees in the dining hall. How was this possible? He blessed us with his proximity, and because of this blessing we reached the state where the mind merged in the Heart. Our hearts were with him and in him, and he was in all the work that we did. A person who has not had this ecstatic experience cannot possibly imagine how much bliss a human heart can contain." She clapped her hands in complete adoration of her *satguru* Ramana and said, "Bhagavan himself was our true goal, our home. To us, he alone existed. His radiant form was enough for us. One had to live and work with him in order to know what a great teacher he was. He taught us *Vedanta* - the highest truth in life - through the trifles of daily life. We were changed to the very roots of our being, without being aware of the depth and extent of his influence. He led us to absolute wisdom through his infinite kindness."

I prostrated before Subbalakshmiammal, who at that moment was a symbol of the mother principle. She saved this body, and because of all the sharing that she did, she gave me a glimpse into the realm of the kingdom of God.

## Sampurnammal



Bhagavan, who rarely drew any comparisons, said of Sampurnammal, “She is our best lady cook.” *Sampurnam* literally means ‘a sweet filling’. But its spiritual meaning is ‘complete bliss’. Sampurnammal was born in a village next to Tiruchuzhi, Bhagavan’s village. She had heard about young Ramana’s death experience, his departure to Tiruvannamalai and how he had come to be known as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Her family followed each occurrence with a great deal of excitement and wanted to have his *darshan*. The family invited Sampurnammal. She declined because she wanted to devote her time to her husband and relatives. After some time, Sampurnammal lost her husband. She was in inconsolable sorrow and pain. Her family wanted to help her out of this depression and invited her to visit Bhagavan as they strongly believed that only Bhagavan could help her regain normalcy. However, she only wanted to wallow in her grief and turned down the invitation once again.

Yet, look at Bhagavan’s grace! One day, while she was in the Meenakshi temple in Madurai offering prayers at the shrine, a bright young Brahmin boy interrupted her prayer. He asked rather firmly, “Will you not cook a meal for me?” This was a strange request! When asking for alms, mendicants only request for food. However, here was this strange and bright young man asking, “Will you not cook a meal for me?” Sampurnammal, who had almost finished her prayer, told herself, “Here is a good opportunity for me to feed a Brahmin. I am so happy!” But the young man suddenly vanished. She searched for him all over. Then it dawned on her that he might be none other than Bhagavan who had come in search of her.

So, in 1932, Sampurnammal went to Tiruvannamalai with her sister and brother-in-law, Dr. Narayana Iyer. She was still grieving. But one look from Bhagavan and she was transformed. The look was soothing. She continued to look at Bhagavan and Bhagavan too gazed at her. The result was magical. The three of them stayed on at the ashram for twenty days. Sampurnammal had been physically very active and therefore she had never known what it was to meditate. However, when she sat in the presence of Bhagavan, she was taken to the meditative state effortlessly. When she was in his presence, she had absolutely no thoughts; when she was away from him in the town, thoughts cramped her mind. The next day, when she was in the physical presence of Bhagavan, she again experienced a thought free state as he continued to look at her. Bhagavan wanted her to understand that this was a spiritual act and not a psychic one, and therefore gave her a copy of *Who am I?*

Twenty days later, Sampurnammal went back to her village and found that she was restless. She realized that the tranquility she had experienced in the ashram was because of Bhagavan’s presence. She made up her mind to go back. Her uncle understood her plight and escorted her to the ashram. Once there, she found that Santhammal, the cook, was leaving. She was thrilled when she was asked in the presence of Bhagavan, “Will you go and take up the cooking so that Santhammal can go?” As Bhagavan looked at her, she said to herself, “Oh, so this is your trick!” Thus, it fell on Sampurnammal’s shoulders to take on that responsibility. She cooked that day’s meal and as she was serving Bhagavan she realized that this indeed was the young Brahmin who had asked her in the temple whether she would cook a meal for him. By serving her very first meal, she not only began her spiritual quest but also ended it. She realized that she was not just feeding an individual Brahmin, but that she was feeding *Brahman*, the God in each one of us. She stayed on at the ashram, making food for Bhagavan.

Though Sampurnammal knew how to cook, it was Bhagavan who tutored her on the nuances and niceties of cooking. He taught her not only the variety of ways in which pulses, grains and vegetables could be cooked, but he also filled this time with stories. He began with stories of his boyhood and gradually went on to talk about *Vedanta*, leading finally to an emphasis on Self-Enquiry. He taught her that the supreme state of truth is the state of ‘I AM’. Bhagavan also gave Sampurnammal the *Ribhu Gita* and explained its significance. This was not the only thing Bhagavan taught. Sampurnammal said,

“Bhagavan also taught us that work is love for others. By his very presence, he made us understand that all of us are in the presence of God, and that all the work we perform is in his service. He used cooking to teach us philosophy and spirituality. For instance, Bhagavan told me once, ‘You must cover the vegetables when you cook them. Only then, will they retain their flavour and be fit enough to eat. It is the same with the mind. You must put a lid over the mind and let it simmer quietly. Only then, will a man become food fit enough for God to swallow.’ These meticulous instructions given by Bhagavan about cooking could leave a stranger with the wrong impression that Bhagavan loved good food and ate heartily. On the contrary, when Bhagavan was served food, he would mix up the little food that he allowed us to serve him. He would mix the sweet, the sour and the spicy together and gulp it down indifferently, as if he didn’t consider the taste of the food at all! When we pointed this out to him sometimes, Bhagavan would smilingly say, ‘Enough of multiplicity! Let there be unity!’ On another occasion he said, ‘Why this separateness? Should not everything be one undistinguishable whole?’”



*Inside the old Ashram Kitchen*

Sampurnammal has given all of us a clue on how a spiritual seeker can mature quickly, easily and effortlessly. This is possible only because of the guru’s grace - as it has been vouchsafed in the Hindu scriptures. The higher state of inner felicity is possible because of the guru’s grace from which there is no escape. She said, “Bhagavan too, worked hard. He cooked diligently. He knew the exact proportion of the ingredients to be used. He was always correct and he would advise us do likewise. All we had to do was obey his instructions. If we thought of him as we cooked, our dishes would turn out to be delicious that day. In this manner, we learned to first think of him and then put in the necessary ingredients in order to make our dishes tasty. Gradually, we extended this process of thinking about him before the actual cooking to thinking of him before embarking upon any activity - no matter how mundane or trivial. We found that the end result was always successful. Hence, thinking of him became an integral part of our lives, and we learned to focus on Bhagavan. Whenever we were afraid, anxious, or in pain, we only had to think of him in order to feel his helping hand descend on us.” Quoting Bhagavan to affirm her statement, she added, “For coming to the ashram and also for returning home, I had to walk through a jungle path all alone. This was at the foot of the hill. I was sometimes a little afraid. When Bhagavan came to know of my fears, he said, ‘Why are you afraid? Am I not with you?’ He confirmed this fact once again when Chinna Swami asked me one day, ‘Why are you coming alone? Are you not afraid?’ To this, Bhagavan replied, ‘Is she alone? Am I not with her all the time?’” As Sampurnammal said, if we focus our attention on Bhagavan, he is with us all the time, guiding us, and making us more and more mature.

I would like to share three beautiful reminiscences given by Sampurnammal, wherein she revealed how Subbalakshmiammal was taken to the highest spiritual state just by experiencing mundane, every day

events. Bhagavan had been advised by doctors to eat yoghurt rather than buttermilk. But there was not enough yoghurt for everyone and Bhagavan would not take something special for himself. One day, while Subbalakshmiammal was serving Bhagavan buttermilk, she did something that she thought was very clever. She secretly carried a ladle of yoghurt in the bucket of buttermilk and served Bhagavan. Bhagavan stared at her and said in an agonized tone, "Subbalakshmi! Do you know what you have done? You have served me poison! Showing any kind of discrimination between me and the devotees is sheer poison." Subbalakshmiammal panicked so much that she had fever for three days. Shantammal went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, you are angry with Subbalakshmiammal. The poor lady has high fever. Will you please pardon her?" Bhagavan smilingly asked, "Did I get angry with her? I got angry only with her behaviour." The fever started subsiding!

The second incident too is very beautiful. Sampurnammal said, "Once, I sought Bhagavan's permission to go on a pilgrimage with some friends to Benares. Bhagavan made fun of me and asked me, 'What do you expect to find in Benares that you cannot find here in Arunachala?' He then continued, 'Vishwanatha, the Lord of Benares is here. Why do you go in search of him when he is here with you?' He was referring to himself, for he said, 'Why go in search of him when he is here with you? He is with us, in every one of us here. He is here.' I gave up the idea of the trip since Bhagavan did not grant me permission. But just look at the compassion of the master! The very next morning, Bhagavan told me, 'Sampurnammal, I had a dream last night. I saw you worshipping in the temple of Lord Vishwanatha in Benares.' I wondered whether it was just a dream. I felt he had taken me there and brought me back in order to give me a chance to worship in the temple." Bhagavan was certainly very compassionate towards Sampurnammal. Those around her could only see the frailties in her character. But Bhagavan overlooked all this and paid singular attention to her so that she could be lifted out of these imperfections and be elevated to that state of spiritual perfection.

The third incident is extraordinarily unique in that it brings out Bhagavan's incomparable love and care for human beings. In addition it reaffirms the ancient conviction that "in spirituality the human being comes first and that compassion is the supreme law".

During their periods, women were not given Ashram food to eat or allowed to enter the Ashram. One month none of my relatives were there to help me, nor could I arrange for my food elsewhere, and I was starving. I sat in a stone shed in front of the Ashram where beggars usually spent the night. Bhagavan enquired about me and was told that I would not be coming for three days.

"Where is she?"

"In the *mantapam* in front of the gate," was the reply.

"Bring her in and feed her decently," ordered Bhagavan.

Everybody was shocked, for it was a clear breach of all rules and customs. "But she is impure," they protested.

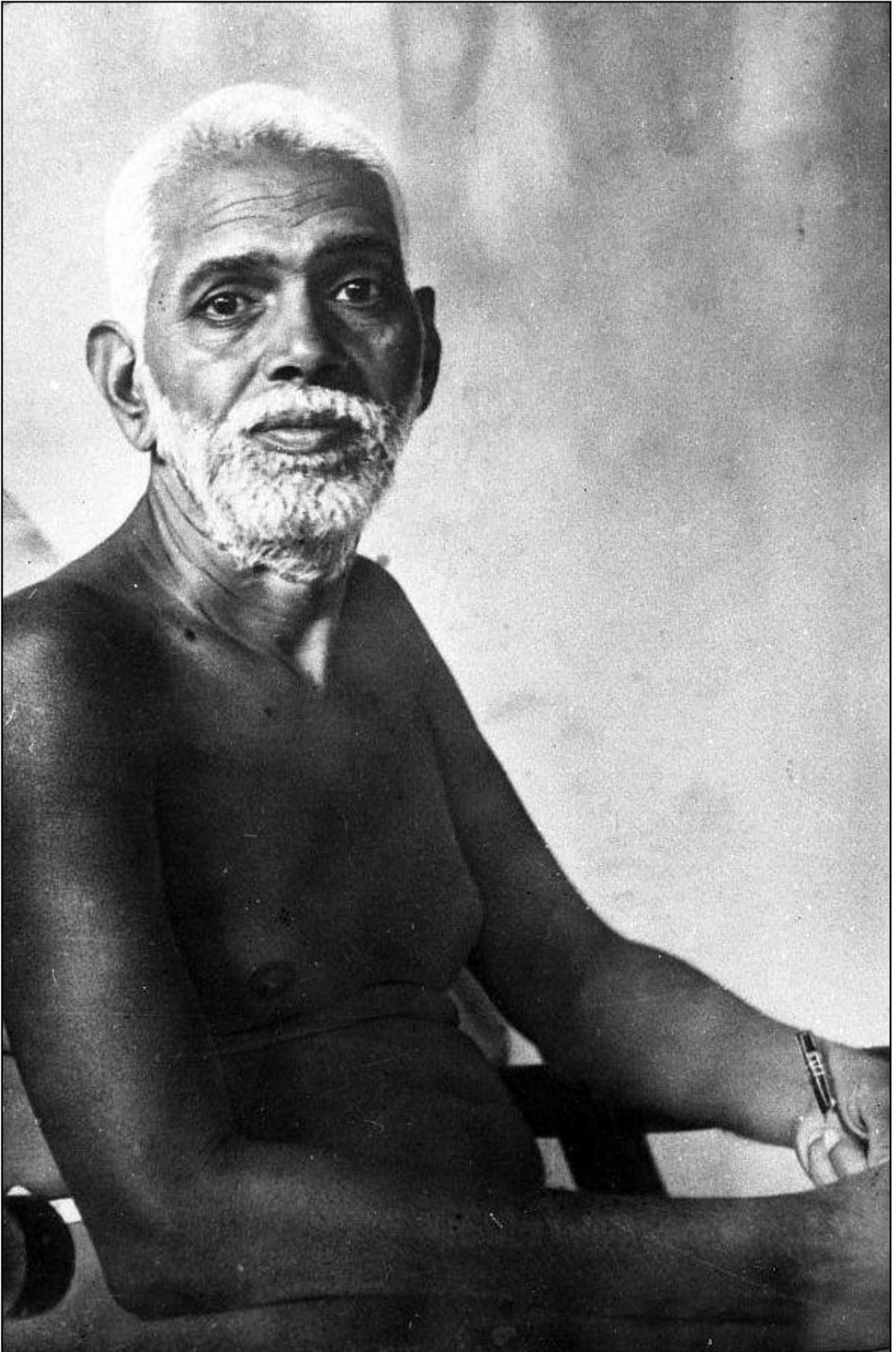
"Who is pure and who is impure? All are one, all are the same!"

One need to know the South Indian *Brahmin* to understand what a crisis Bhagavan had created.. The rules about women in their periods were severe and rigidly enforced. To break them would mean to pollute the entire Ashram and face a public outcry.

It speaks a lot for the devotion of the inmates that they very reluctantly called me in. Bhagavan wanted to go to the kitchen to bring some food, but they asked him to wait. They brought some food and fed me in front of him. An ancient rule was broken and he sanctified the breach with his presence. He wanted to teach us the entire lesson that in spirituality the human being comes first and that compassion is the supreme law. Some understood, but many looked daggers at me or scolded me for polluting them all, by causing them to feed me.

Entering the Mother's Temple one day, Sampurnammal, with her face beaming, exclaimed, 'He has scattered so many diamonds before us!' Bhagavan had given her the eyes to see those diamonds!

Sampurnammal died at the ashram on Bhagavan's *Aradhana* day. I had the privilege of taking her body to the cremation ground and seeing to it that her sister's son lit the pyre . This is another blessing that Bhagavan bestowed on me.



## Lokammal



Lokammal, like all the other cooks, was totally overwhelmed by her very first *darshan* of Bhagavan in the 1930s. Just one look from him was enough for her to surrender to him completely. When she was a young girl, her uncle, a holy and pious man, initiated her to the *panchakshara* mantra, the five holy syllables, 'Om Nama Sivaaya'. From childhood, her attention was on God.

Lokammal became a child widow and was looked down upon by both family and society. Her only friend in the village was Tenammal, also a widow. The two of them would exchange information about spirituality. Tenammal, who had been to Arunachala and had met Bhagavan, would constantly narrate incidents about Bhagavan. Lokammal began to wonder, "Will I also not go to Bhagavan and sit at his holy feet?" But she belonged to an affluent family who did not allow her to do so. Her pleas fell on deaf ears. But could God ignore her sincere

prayers? One day, a woman pointing to a newspaper told Lokammal, "Hey Lokammal, your saint in Arunachala is no more." Lokammal was heartbroken and wept continuously. However, what the lady was referring to was the news of Seshadri Swami dropping his body. Soon after this, when she was alone one day, Lokammal had the vision of Bhagavan walking in her direction and calling out to her. She pleaded with her brother to take her to Arunachala and finally he relented. She accompanied some ladies who were going on a pilgrimage to Tirupati, a place close to Arunachala.

When she reached Arunachala, like the other women in those days, Lokammal too had to stay in town. Those were the days when the ashram served only rice gruel or coffee instead of the *idlis* served today. On the very first day, when she went into the ashram, Bhagavan called out to her, "Here they serve only rice gruel or coffee. Which do you prefer?" Immersed in Bhagavan, she answered, "Whatever it is, it is all the same." Saying this, she followed him into the kitchen because she had decided to be in his physical presence. In the kitchen, she assisted Bhagavan while he cooked. While in the hall, she would sing melodious *Vedantic* Tamil songs, which Bhagavan appreciated. Lokammal was well known for her singing. Bhagavan would tell her to sing one song or the other.

In the meanwhile, the group of women returned from Tirupati and this meant that she too had to go back to her family. As she was about to take leave of Bhagavan, he asked her very affectionately, "Are you going away?" Lokammal was moved to the core. Bhagavan gave her a copy of *Upadesa Saram*. Lokammal cried endlessly. She told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, but for you, I have no one of my own to hold on to. My relatives are cruel to me. I do not want to leave, but they are all compelling me to. I pray that somehow you will pull me towards your holy feet. I will remain a slave at your feet. Please shower your grace on me." Bhagavan looked at her very compassionately for a long time, and that look remained with her.

The look that he gave the lady cooks in the first *darshan* captivated all of them. He bestowed on them his personal affection. What is marvellous about Bhagavan is that although he had so many devotees, he gave unique individual attention to each one of them. He also gave each of these five women a book which would induct them deeply into spirituality. To Santhammal and Lokammal, he gave *Upadesa Saram*; to Sankammal he gave *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and to Subbalakshmiammal he gave *Ribhu Gita*; Sampurnammal got a copy of *Who am I?* Ultimately, he gave each one of them the opportunity to experience the truth of 'I AM' in the Heart.

Bhagavan finally drew Lokammal back to him. She tore herself away from her family and started cooking at the ashram. This is something that Bhagavan appreciated. One day, when he came into the kitchen, he noticed that the *sambar* was boiling and he asked Lokammal, "Is it still on the fire?" to which Lokammal replied, "Yes, it has to boil further." Bhagavan replied, "Only Lokammal appreciates

me and listens to me. She makes sure that the *sambar* is completely boiled. Everyone else in their haste to complete the cooking prepares food that is half cooked.”

Women in those days had to stay outside their house every month for the first three days of their menstrual cycle. They had to stay out of sight on these three days. Only plain food was served to them. They were not allowed to eat with the rest of the family and were not given the same food either. In one sense of the term, they remained untouchables during those three days. One morning, when Bhagavan entered the kitchen to see whether his instructions were being followed, he found Tenammal preparing a lentil dish. He commented, “This was not discussed in the morning. What is Tenammal making?” Tenammal was forced to reply, “One of us has the menstrual cycle. She has been confined to a different place and needs to be served separate food.” Bhagavan became upset and angry. “Why should she eat separately? Why can’t she eat the food that is being served to others? What does it matter if she is not well? Do not differentiate; serve her the food that has been prepared for all. Let her have the rice, *dal* and curry from the common kitchen.”

In spite of Bhagavan’s instructions, there was resistance from a lot of people in the office and in the ashram. They were not prepared to accept these new rules. This made Bhagavan flare up occasionally. He would say, “The ashram gives food to all. There are no untouchables here. Those who do not like it this way may eat elsewhere. There was the same kind of hassle at Skandashram with my mother. Here the problem is menstruation, while there it was the problem of untouchables. She would refuse to give food to the man who brought us our firewood because she was afraid that he would pollute us. She would insist that I eat first; then she would eat, and finally she would give the leftovers to him. Even this, he would have to eat on the grounds outside the ashram. However, I would be adamant and insist that the man be fed honourably. At first, she refused to eat, and would instead weep constantly; but seeing how resolute I was in the matter, she too came to understand that it could not be any other way. What is the difference between one man and another? Is it not correct to see only God in all?” Lokammal said, “Bhagavan lifted each one of us up from our state of lowly ignorance. The state he elevated us to is that of supreme equality and oneness.” Like all the other cooks, Lokammal too ripened spiritually because of the instructions and directions of Bhagavan.

Today, we eat *idlis* for breakfast at the ashram because of Lokammal. As I have stated earlier, previously there was either rice gruel or coffee. At the time of Lokammal, the village Patakuruchi had fertile soil that produced the right kind of grains to be made into parboiled rice. This is the kind of rice that is needed to make *idlis*. Lokammal’s brother sent this rice to the ashram on one occasion. Bhagavan ground the rice himself and made *idlis* from the rice. They turned out very tasty. Bhagavan appreciated the rice by saying, “How good this parboiled rice is!” Lokammal at once wrote to her brother and relatives, “You need not do anything for me, but please continue sending parboiled rice because of the comment Bhagavan made.” From that day onwards, *idlis* became the staple breakfast in the ashram.

In her final days, Lokammal stayed in a cottage in the Ramana Nagar. I attended on her, as I did on other devotees. Lokammal was a ripe individual, but her *prarabdha* was that she remained an irritable person till the end. She once said to me, “You must send a maid to attend on me.” She was so difficult to please that I had to change her maids eighteen times! Each of them pleaded to me with folded hands, “Please do not ask us to serve Lokammal.” When I went to see her the next morning, Lokammal scolded me, “I was alone. I was afraid. You did not send a maid.” I was afraid of her abrasive tongue and ran away. Even for that one night, I couldn’t get any maid for her. The next day I entered the cottage with great trepidation. But I found her face all aglow. She asked, “Is it Ganesa?” I replied, “Yes, *amma*.” I thought she was going to scold me because I had not sent another maid. She said instead, “Come here, my child. Come.” She held my face tight, kissed my forehead and said, “Because of you, I had the *darshan* of Bhagavan. Last night, I scolded you. But look at Bhagavan. Here is the picture that Bhagavan gave me when I once told him that young men are troubling me. He at once got up from his sofa and gave me this picture. He gave it to me saying, ‘From today onwards, you will not face this problem.’ Just look at me, Ganesa. I am ninety years old! After that day, I have never had any problems from any man. Last night, as I was scolding you, I heard Bhagavan say, ‘Lokammal, Lokammal!’ And you know, Bhagavan seemed to come alive in that picture and say, ‘Have I not told you that I am always with you? When I am with you, why fear. Be happy!’ Bhagavan spoke to me because of you.” I was delighted. Next day, Lokammal passed away. I lit her funeral pyre. What a blessing! It doesn’t matter whether the cooks were ordinary people or great people. They were all transported to the highest state of ‘I AM’.



*Sri Bhagavan is all joy being led by a playful child into the dining hall*

While in the kitchen, Bhagavan once told Santhammal, “Not an inch of space in the whole of Arunachala hill has been untouched by my feet.” Is this physically possible? What he implied was that he is Arunachala himself. All these rocks we have shared about are extraordinary, as they are all rocks of Arunachala. You and I also belong to Arunachala, perhaps not as boulders or rocks, but as grass or pebbles. The author knows very well that he is just a speck of dust on Arunachala. This speck has been blown around by whirlwinds many a time. But, because of good fortune, it has always been blown in the direction of the hill and not away from it. That is grace. Grace is not something which is not understandable. It is happening around us all the time. We only need to recognize it.



**Sri Bhagavan at Skandashram (1945), TPR is seen seated on the floor to Bhagavan's right (Boy Ganesan is seen standing to Bhagavan's right)**

## T. P. Ramachandra Iyer



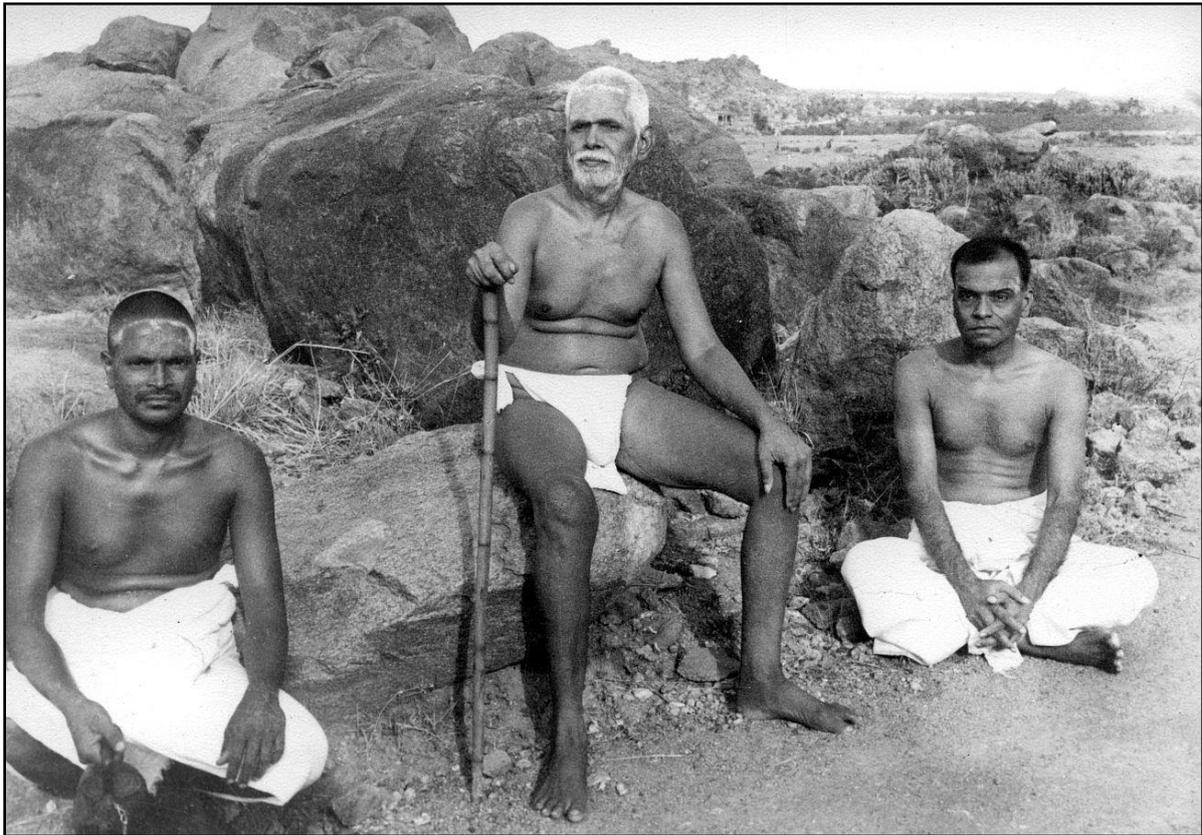
Santhammal was very helpful to seekers who wanted to have contact with Bhagavan in the kitchen. She came to the aid of many seekers who could not open up and speak in the hall in the presence of everyone else. Similarly, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer or TPR, who was one of the attendants of Bhagavan, was very helpful to seekers in the hall. He was congenial by nature, and understood the suffering of seekers who flocked to Arunachala in quest of solace and clarity in their spiritual struggle. When the ashram grew bigger in the 1940's, a lot of people came thronging to see Bhagavan. Soon, rules and regulations naturally came into play to ensure that Bhagavan was not unduly disturbed. Genuine seekers who found it difficult to approach Bhagavan with their personal and spiritual problems would approach TPR for help. He was the bridge between these seekers and Bhagavan and helped them have contact with Bhagavan in some form or the other. Bhagavan sometimes allowed both Santhammal and TPR to flout the ashram rules because they were only trying to help seekers.

TPR was born in Tiruvannamalai and he grew up at the foot of holy Arunachala. His family had stayed there for generations and they were devoted to Arunachaleswara, the temple deity, and his *shakti*, Mother Apeethakuchambal. When TPR was a boy of six or seven, he had the *darshan* of Bhagavan many times in Virupaksha cave. He used to run to Virupaksha cave, but he was honest enough to admit, "I went to Bhagavan because he gave us sweets like sugar candy and raisins." However, he also came under the imperceptible spiritual influence of Bhagavan and received his blessings. The impact of these experiences became obvious when he was a youth and went to school and college. He became passionate about the study of religion and philosophy, and in college he chose philosophy as his subject much against his family's wishes. Perhaps he needed the theoretical knowledge of the scriptures of all religions for him to understand and put into practice Bhagavan's direct teaching. In his later years, he became an affluent lawyer in Chennai.

In 1938, Ramanasramam had some litigation problems, all of which he attended to. His wife passed away in 1939. He was very fond of her. Her death shook him so deeply that he became like a rudderless boat. His only solace was the presence and proximity of Sri Bhagavan. Bhagavan guided TPR to come to him with the result that he took voluntary retirement in the 1940's and settled down in Arunachala. After 1946, he became the personal attendant of Bhagavan. Imagine, such an intelligent and erudite scholar leaving his all to be with Bhagavan and attend on him!

I was very close to TPR during my childhood and even later on. In fact, I was fascinated by him. Now, looking back, I can very clearly see why I was attracted to him. On the last day when Bhagavan was to drop the body, family members, along with the doctors and other important people of the ashram, were inside the Nirvana Room. Bhagavan was lying down. During the last moments, doctors advised everyone to leave the room. We all got ready to leave. I too was going out, when TPR held on to my hand tightly and made me stand at the entrance. Had he not forced me to stay on, I would have missed the glorious opportunity of seeing the light that emerged after Bhagavan dropped his body. I did not see the light travel to Arunachala though. The *Life* magazine photographer, Henri Cartier Bresson, saw the light merging with the top of the hill. He was opposite the ashram at the time. It was he who marked the time as 8.47 p.m.

Bhagavan, through TPR, had granted me the *darshan* of this divine light. Now, I understand why I have always been drawn towards him. Even when studying in college, whenever I came to the ashram, I would seek him out. We would spend time together. In 1960, after I had worked in Mumbai for seven months, I gave up my job and returned to the ashram for good. Because of this, I was in close touch



*Valkuntavasar, Sri Bhagavan and TPR*

with all the old devotees, including TPR. All this happened on account of Bhagavan's blessings. When a person is dedicated to the truth, God guides him through sages and saints. A lady saint gave me a duty to perform. She said, "Bring back all the old devotees who have left the ashram. Bring them back and serve them. Make them live comfortably inside the ashram." This is how perhaps everyone, including TPR, came back.

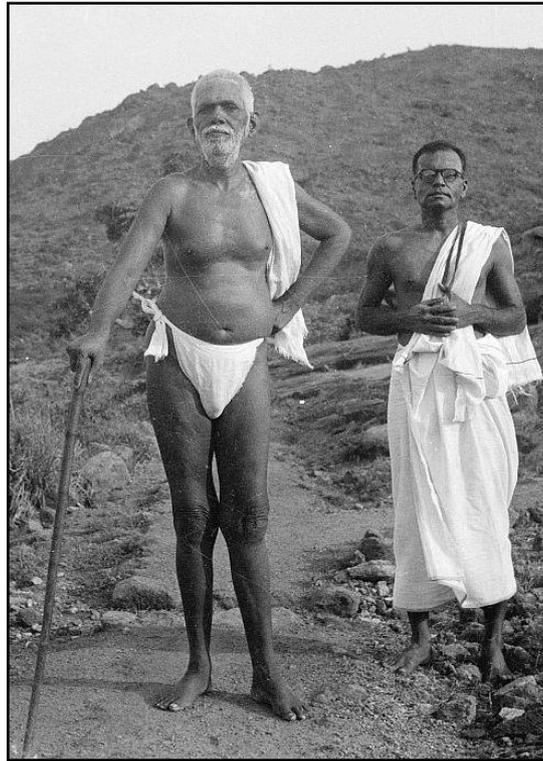
One day, when I was walking to the ashram, TPR tapped me on the back and said, "I too studied philosophy like you. I took philosophy as a special subject in college. I liked it immensely. When I had just become a lawyer, I came to the ashram on one of my frequent visits. Once, there was a discussion going on in the hall about the nature of the Self. Since my mind was still afresh with all the bookish knowledge that I had gathered, I freely gave vent to all that I had learnt. I talked about the various grades of consciousness that exist in the different systems of philosophy. I also used terms such as 'super-consciousness', 'sub-consciousness' and 'unconsciousness'. I boasted before Bhagavan. He listened to my enthusiastic and elaborate explanations, and then reacted suddenly and sharply, 'It is only with reference to something, that one can postulate a super, a sub or an unconscious state. Consciousness being the truth, any form of postulation of it is ignorance, even though it may be very appealing to the intellect. Truth is very simple and direct; it needs no variation. What exists is only consciousness. Call it by any name - *Atma*, *Brahman*, Awareness, Absolute, Arunachala. It is pure consciousness.' These powerful words of Bhagavan made me instantly dive within, into that one and only consciousness. I was submerged in bliss for a long time." What TPR said next was beautiful. "This is the advantage of living near the master. What takes one volumes to understand, takes just one knock from the master - it makes you go into that state to experience the truth instantaneously. This was not the only knock I got, because when you live close to the master, you get many knocks. Each knock takes you within, not without."

TPR commented one day, "Even though I was closely associated with Bhagavan, there were doubts that assailed me. The cause of these doubts was centered on the misunderstanding of scriptural texts." He had this problem because like me he too had studied philosophy. When one reads too much, contradictions and conflicts are bound to arise. I said, "Please be more explicit. This looks exactly like my problem too." TPR explained, "There was always a confrontation within me between knowledge and wisdom. Is all knowledge of the scriptures really so useless that one can attain wisdom only by giving it

up, or does one go beyond this framework? This was the dilemma I was in. I wondered whether learning the scriptures were a mere waste of time. I therefore put this question across to Bhagavan. Bhagavan then calmly explained, 'Arunachala is the centre of unlearning. Everything that one has learnt has to be given up here for the final culmination of spiritual perfection. Unless one has learnt something, how can one unlearn it? The scriptures equip us with learning. Does unlearning denote denying or removing the scriptures from one's memory? How is that possible? On the other hand, unlearning means releasing oneself from the mere intellectual knowledge of the scriptures and plunging oneself into the experience of the truth, i.e. making it one's own and not keeping it outside as something other than one's Self. What is conveyed in the scriptures should become one's own experience.' Arunachala makes one perfect by giving the cream of all the scriptures as one's own experience in which theoretical knowledge is transcended. In short, the individual 'I' or the ego is the learning. This learning, this knowledge is in the head, while the throbbing of the 'I' is in one's Heart. It is wisdom. Where is the contradiction then? Bhagavan has clearly stated, 'Descending from the head to the Heart is the beginning of spiritual *sadhana*.'

Very often, I would go to TPR's room outside the ashram and wait for him. One day, as he came out of the room, he was murmuring, "The grandfather sowed; the grandson is reaping." He kept muttering it repeatedly. I asked him, "What are you saying?" He then gave me a beautiful explanation, "One day, a devotee offered a huge *bhiksha* - a traditional feast given in honour of a saint - to Bhagavan in the ashram. While I was expressing joy to my friend over the feast, Bhagavan walked in. He had heard our exchange. He smiled and then turned in my direction and said, 'Thinking about *bhiksha*? Your grandfather's house was the only one I entered to eat after coming to Arunachala. Every day, your grandfather would regularly visit the temple. He was a staunch devotee of Lord Arunachaleswara. A tall and heavy built man, he adorned himself with a *rudraksha* garland and other beads. In those days, around 1896, I used to stay inside the big temple near the Gopuram Subramanya shrine at the entrance of the Arunachaleswara temple. Every day, your grandfather would sit in front of me for a while without saying anything. I was a young boy of sixteen. He was an elderly person, but he too kept silent when he was with me. He was a well known person in the town and a lot of important people used to be his guests. One day, a very important person came home and arrangements were made for a feast. Even on that day, after your grandfather came to the temple to have the *darshan* of the Lord, he came to me and sat down. After a while, he got up and then, abandoning his usual silence, said to me, 'Get up! We will go to my house, have *bhiksha* and come back.' I was not used to talking in those days. I made signs to indicate my unwillingness. He did not heed me. He was big and strong, while I was thin and weak. He repeated his request. I persisted in signalling 'no'. Since I didn't budge even a little, he bent down, linked my arms to his, forced me to get up and follow him. I was thus forced to enter his house. He made me occupy the most important place and spread in front of me a leaf much larger than the other ones. He himself served me. After I finished my meal, he ate. In those days, I never had a bath. My body would smell, and so nobody would come close to me. Yet, your grandfather used to come unflinching and sit close in front of me. Many people in town came to see me and then went away. Your grandfather alone realized that though young, what was in this was fullness.'" TPR had tears in his eyes when he narrated this. He concluded, "Ganesan, it is solely my grandfather's devotion to Bhagavan that is now enabling me to enjoy his holy presence and experience the inner felicity which Bhagavan is showering on me every day."

Another day, I asked TPR, "Can you tell me about the compassion of Bhagavan? Many people talk about Bhagavan's compassion as his greatest attribute." He replied, "There are two sides to Bhagavan's compassion. If someone is afflicted, he goes down to the level of that person to lift him up and bring him back to normalcy. In such cases, he will even break his strict adherence to his own teaching of Self Enquiry. The other side of his compassion goes even deeper. He will not just alleviate the person, but completely transform him." I persisted, "Please explain with some anecdotes." I was always eager for 'Bhagavan stories'. TPR said, "Once, an important officer came to Ramanasramam when the post office inside the ashram compound was being opened. He came into the hall with tears in his eyes. He melted when he looked at Bhagavan. He said, 'Bhagavan, I have lost my only son. My wife and I have neither been peaceful nor happy after the death of our son. We have been wandering around aimlessly in life since then.' Bhagavan looked at him with great compassion. The man continued, 'We have only one desire, Bhagavan. You have to fulfill this. We want to see our son in our next life.'"



TPR continued, “We devotees in the hall knew what reply Bhagavan would give. Bhagavan indeed gave the very same answer. Bhagavan looked at the man very compassionately and posed a question, ‘Who is the father? Who is the son? What do you mean by relationship between father and son? What do you actually mean by rebirth? If you understand all this, you will understand the depth of what you are asking for.’ The man prostrated before Bhagavan and said, ‘I do not understand all this, Bhagavan. I only want one thing. I want to see my son.’ Bhagavan then did something remarkable and unusual. He got up from his seat, raised his hands and said, ‘Yes, I will give it to you. I will make you see your son. You will see your son in your next life, as clearly as you have seen him in this.’ The officer became extraordinarily happy and fell at Bhagavan’s feet several times. Feeling highly elated, he left the hall.”

The others in the hall, including TPR were concerned and worried. TPR asked, “Bhagavan, how could you give him such an answer? This is against your own teaching. Your teaching postulates that there is no birth and rebirth. When even this body is not born, where is the question of rebirth?” Bhagavan turned to TPR and said, “What am I to do? Had I not given him this answer, he would have been shattered.” TPR complained, “I am not happy because you should not have condescended like this.” Bhagavan, noticing their unhappiness and disappointment, suggested, “Go and get the *Bhagavad Gita*.” Bhagavan chose a passage from it and asked TPR to read it out aloud. In that passage, Lord Krishna says that knowledge should be given according to one’s ability to grasp it. If one teaches philosophy to those who are not ready to receive it, their faith will be totally shattered. TPR concluded by saying, “This is Bhagavan’s compassion.”

I then prodded him to tell me about the other kind of compassion - the transforming one. This is what TPR recounted: “Aravind Bose was an industrialist; he was also an intellectual and an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. He was drawn towards Bhagavan’s teaching of Self Enquiry. He began an industry in Bangalore which is well known even today. He came to visit Bhagavan every week and would also bring along some of his friends. Bose had a son who was around twenty years old at the time. He was a brilliant young man. Bose wanted to hand over the management of the factory to him and then settle down at the holy feet of Bhagavan. However, the boy suddenly died and Bose was inconsolable. Many of us went from Ramanasramam to console him. We talked about all the theoretical aspects of Bhagavan’s teaching but it was of no avail. We felt that he had to be brought before Bhagavan. Since, very rarely were there people in the hall between twelve and two in the afternoon, I brought Bose to Bhagavan then. Bhagavan instructed Bose to sit close to him and continued looking at him. Bose was in physical and mental anguish. He was very restless; he could not even open his eyes. Bhagavan focused

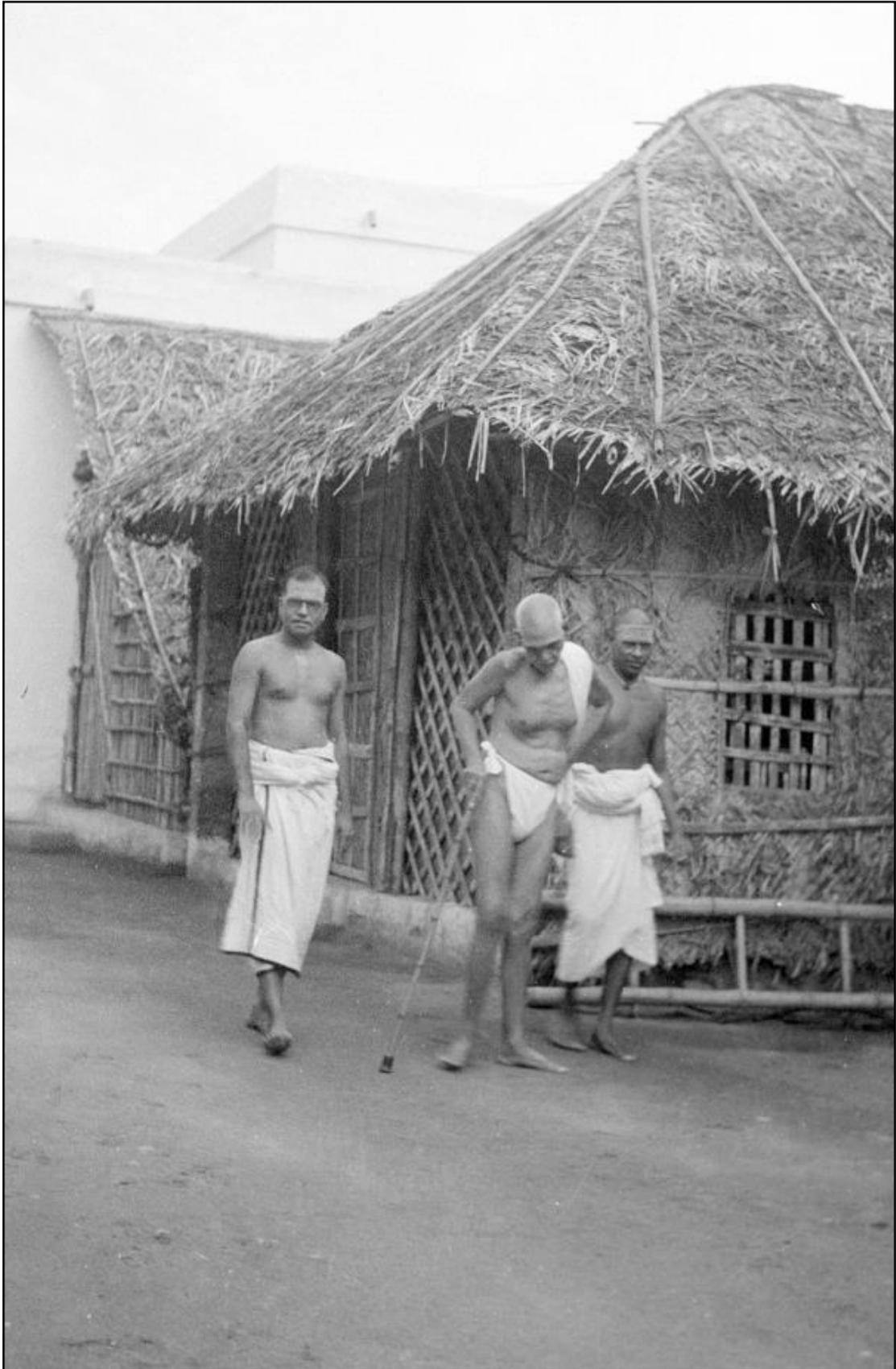
on him and ultimately Bose opened his eyes. He managed to look at Bhagavan and Bhagavan continued looking at him. After some time, this shook him up and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'Bhagavan, is there God?' His voice was filled with the pain and agony of his loss. Bhagavan continued to look at him. Then, Bhagavan said, 'Bose, your question itself has the answer.' He had shouted, 'Is there God?' There is God. For five minutes, there was absolute silence. Bhagavan continued to look at Bose and Bose too looked at Bhagavan." TPR observed all this from outside the window. He noticed a change in Bose. He became his normal self and prostrated before Bhagavan. Bose smiled for the first time, and said, "Thank you, Bhagavan." TPR said, "This is the compassion of Bhagavan. We cannot understand what took place between Bhagavan and Bose. He asked the question, 'Is there God?' and Bhagavan answered, 'Your question itself has the answer.' The answer was intellectual, but the compassion was overwhelmingly healing and absolutely solid." Bose remained a great devotee of Bhagavan. He had already built the Bose Compound which has many cottages for devotees to stay in. Even TPR stayed there during his last days until I brought him back into the ashram.

Bhagavan used to get up at three thirty in the morning. He would go up the hill around five or five thirty in the morning. He would take his bath around six. He would have his breakfast at six thirty. At eight, he would be in the hall. At eleven, he would go for lunch. He had a routine. So I used to tell TPR, "Our Bhagavan is very predictable, whereas all the other great masters like Sheshadri Swami and Ramakrishna Paramahansa were not." TPR said, "Do not talk like that. You can never predict a *jnani*." He added, "I am going to narrate some incidents. I want you to analyze whether you have understood them or not. There was once a *swami* from North India. He was old and had stayed on for a few weeks. He must have been a very ripe soul because people could see an aura around him. On the day he was leaving, he stood before Bhagavan. I too was beside Bhagavan. The *swami* said, 'I am very happy Bhagavan that I got all that I wanted after coming to Arunachala and to your ashram. But I need two more things to be fulfilled and they can be done only by you.'

All of us in the hall thought that the *swami* was going to get a very rude shock from Bhagavan. We waited with bated breath. Bhagavan, with a movement of his head, signalled the *swami* to continue. The *swami*, with folded hands, said, 'My first request is that I want to place my head on your holy feet and melt. I want to wash your feet with my tears.' Bhagavan waited, without uttering a word. 'The second thing, Bhagavan,' continued the *swami*, 'you have to put your holy hands on me and declare that you have given me *atma sakshatkar* - liberation.' We all laughed within ourselves because the *swami* had put forth such requests to Bhagavan. But a miracle took place. Bhagavan got up from the sofa and stood in front of him, pointing to his feet. The *swami* fell at Bhagavan's feet. We saw his tears drenching the feet of Bhagavan. After a while, Bhagavan lifted him up, put his hands on his shoulders and declared, 'I have given you *atma sakshatkar*.' Though his eyes continued to shed tears, the *swami*'s face glowed with fulfillment as he took leave of Bhagavan!"

TPR continued, "An American came to the *ashram*. We did not know his name. The tall, handsome American entered without announcing his name. From the moment he entered, Bhagavan's gaze was on him. He sat before Bhagavan for three hours. Some kind of communication was going on between them during this time. There was such deep silence; no words were exchanged. The American got up and left. He never came back. I asked Bhagavan, 'How is it that this man came and was here only for three hours?' Bhagavan replied, 'He got what he wanted. His mission is over. Where is the need to stay on further? Everything ends in the now.'"

"Then there was an aristocratic lady from America who sent a telegram stating that she was coming to India just to be with Bhagavan. She said she was reaching Bombay by ship on a particular date and then taking the train to Madras. She had also written that she would be taking a special train and coming to Arunachala on a particular date. She sent a telegram from Bombay confirming her programme. She gave another telegram from Madras. She was disappointed that there was no one to receive her at the railway station when she arrived. At Ramanasramam too, there was no one to receive her. She came into the hall on her own. Bhagavan was holding up the newspaper and reading it - she couldn't even see his face. Major Chadwick and Munagala Venkataramiah had been requested to look after her since she was coming from such a long distance and was making a special trip. She was fuming at the treatment she had received. She said, 'I am a lady. What have I done wrong?'



*Sri Bhagavan walking towards goshala, TPR to his right*

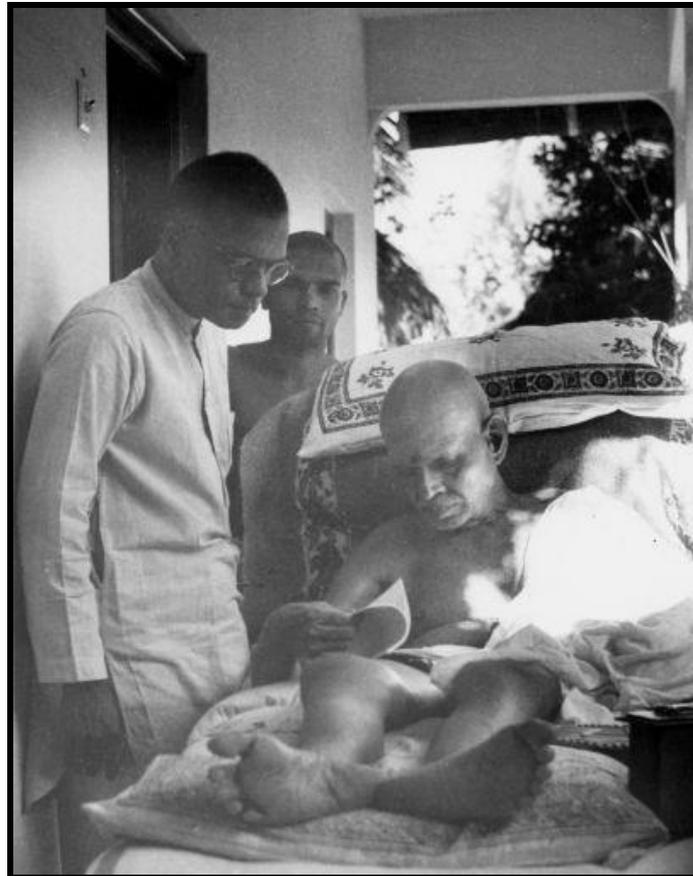
I have taken all the correct steps and come here. Nobody gives me any respect here, and this Ramana Maharshi doesn't even look at me.' She was terribly angry. She told Chadwick and Munagala Venkataramiah, 'Come to my railway car at four o'clock. I want to talk to you.' She left the ashram abruptly. When they went to meet her, she demanded, 'Why did Ramana Maharshi not even extend to me a common courtesy? What did I do wrong? I did everything perfectly but he does not know how to respect or even receive a lady.' They said, 'Do not talk ill about our master. We will go and report everything to him.' She said, 'That is the reason why I am saying it. Go and tell him. Let him learn something.' The two fearfully reported the incident to Bhagavan. Bhagavan listened with great interest and coaxed them to give him a detailed account. Finally, he assumed his usual poise and said, 'Did she say all this? Then, this itself will work.' That night, the lady had a dream. In the dream, Bhagavan said, 'Come back.' The next day, she came to Ramanasramam, but this time unannounced. From eight onwards, Bhagavan's eyes were looking at the entrance to the hall. She came at ten and Bhagavan showered her with his smile. She became a devotee of Bhagavan. Later, she said, 'We can never judge a master or how he will act. From his action, you cannot decide anything.'

TPR gave not just an account of these incidents but also an insight into Bhagavan's teachings. He once told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I came to you not because I adored your personal form. Your teaching 'Who am I?' was so logical that it attracted me to you. Although I am practicing it, I am still not getting anywhere. I am not able to experience it." Bhagavan looked at him steadily and said, "The man who wants to catch a fish attaches a very tempting worm to the fishing rod. Does he want to feed the fish? He only wants to catch it." The eleven page gem of a book, *Who Am I?* is only meant to catch us all and put us in the tiger's mouth, once and for all !

I asked TPR, "Did you ever get any clarifications from Bhagavan on his texts?" TPR said that he once asked Bhagavan about the meaning of the Tamil words '*aar oli*' which means 'shining light'. The phrase appears in the first verse after the first two benedictory verses of the *Forty Verses on Reality*: "Since one actually sees the world, one has to accept there are varied forms of multiplicity. Yet, all that is seen, the names, the forms, the onlooker, the screen, the light that illumines all these - verily all are that one principle, the awareness 'I AM'." I asked Bhagavan, "What is this light that illumines? What does it refer to?" Bhagavan replied, '*Aar oli* means all pervasive brightness. It refers to that light of the mind in which we see the entire world.' Only with a particular kind of mind are we able to see the world, both the known and the unknown. Even the psychic phenomenon is seen only through the mind. The known we see; the unknown is the vision of God that we long to have. The white light is what we call the Self and what Jesus Christ called fire. The white light is the light of the Self which transcends both light and darkness. No object can be seen in this light. Here, there is neither a seer nor the seen. Just as we do not see any objects in deep sleep, here too we do not see anything. However, the Self reflects a light, which is the light of the pure mind. This is the light which gives room for the existence of the entire world to be seen. What is seen cannot be actually seen in total light (as in enlightenment) or in total darkness (as in deep sleep). It can be seen only in this subdued or reflected light and this is the light that is being referred to in the verse."

Once, I pleaded with TPR, "We seekers also have commitments, so how do we balance worldly responsibilities and spiritual aspirations? It seems like a contradiction." TPR replied, "I can tell you what happened to me with Bhagavan. I pleaded with Bhagavan to save me from the grips of *samsara* as however much I turned my mind inward, the pull of commitments in the activities of life was still insurmountable. I wanted a way to tide over these involvements. Bhagavan turned around and said with great love, 'Be like the tiniest chip of wood that is thrown into a river in spate.' " TPR then explained to me, "The external life of action and involvement of daily life is unavoidable, both for the spiritual seeker and others. Assuming that they are very important, men strive for name and fame, and hence they face a lot of problems and strife. One must understand that true spirituality is not the avoidance of action, but involving in action without giving importance to the doer. In other words, one should be like dust thrown into a floating flood while indulging in any kind of action. The sense of being the actor is to be given up, but not the action itself." I questioned TPR further, "How can I give up the sense of being the actor? I am the actor!" TPR explained, "I too, asked Bhagavan this. Bhagavan showed two practical ways of erasing the importance given to the actor. One is by not 'reacting' to the action that takes place around you. One should 'act', but not 'react'. The other is to understand totally and experientially that things and actions happen *through* you and not *by* you. It is being done by a higher power. Actions, whether good or bad, are being done *through* you and not *by* you. Reaction is mental work. The mind always binds us to the action. If you do not react to the action, then it dies."

During his last days, I pleaded with him to come to the ashram. It was he who first occupied Chadwick's room. No one other than Chadwick had occupied it before. Soon afterwards, he had a stroke. I took him to Pondicherry where Bhagavan's devotee and my friend Dr. Bhaskaran attended on him. Within a few days, he was able to speak. I paid a visit to the hospital and said, "Please bless me." He put his hands on my head and said, "Follow the direct teachings of Bhagavan; follow the direct teachings of silence and Self Enquiry. Do not swerve towards any other method. Be silent at times when you have nothing else to do; at times when you do something, always ask yourself, 'Who is doing this?' Raise this Self Enquiry constantly, and it will take you back to the state of '*summa iru*'." ('*Summa iru*' in Tamil means 'be still'. It does not mean being quiet physically.) TPR continued, "I did not understand that then, Ganesan. Being still is the link between the seeker and Bhagavan. Whenever you are silent and doing nothing, focus your attention on the inward silence, on the 'I AM'. Then, you are always communing with the ultimate truth - Bhagavan, Arunachala, Jesus, God, - whatever name you want to ascribe to it. You are then established in that truth." TPR passed away in Bangalore. His last words were reported to be, "Write to Ganesan that I am blessing him." It was not a blessing for this individual alone. It is a blessing for all seekers. Let us pay homage to these devotees as they are the rocks and boulders of Arunachala, the ever living truth. By sharing their lives, we too are being established in the truth.



*TPR with Sri Bhagavan outside 'Nirvana Room'*

## Swami Madhavtirtha



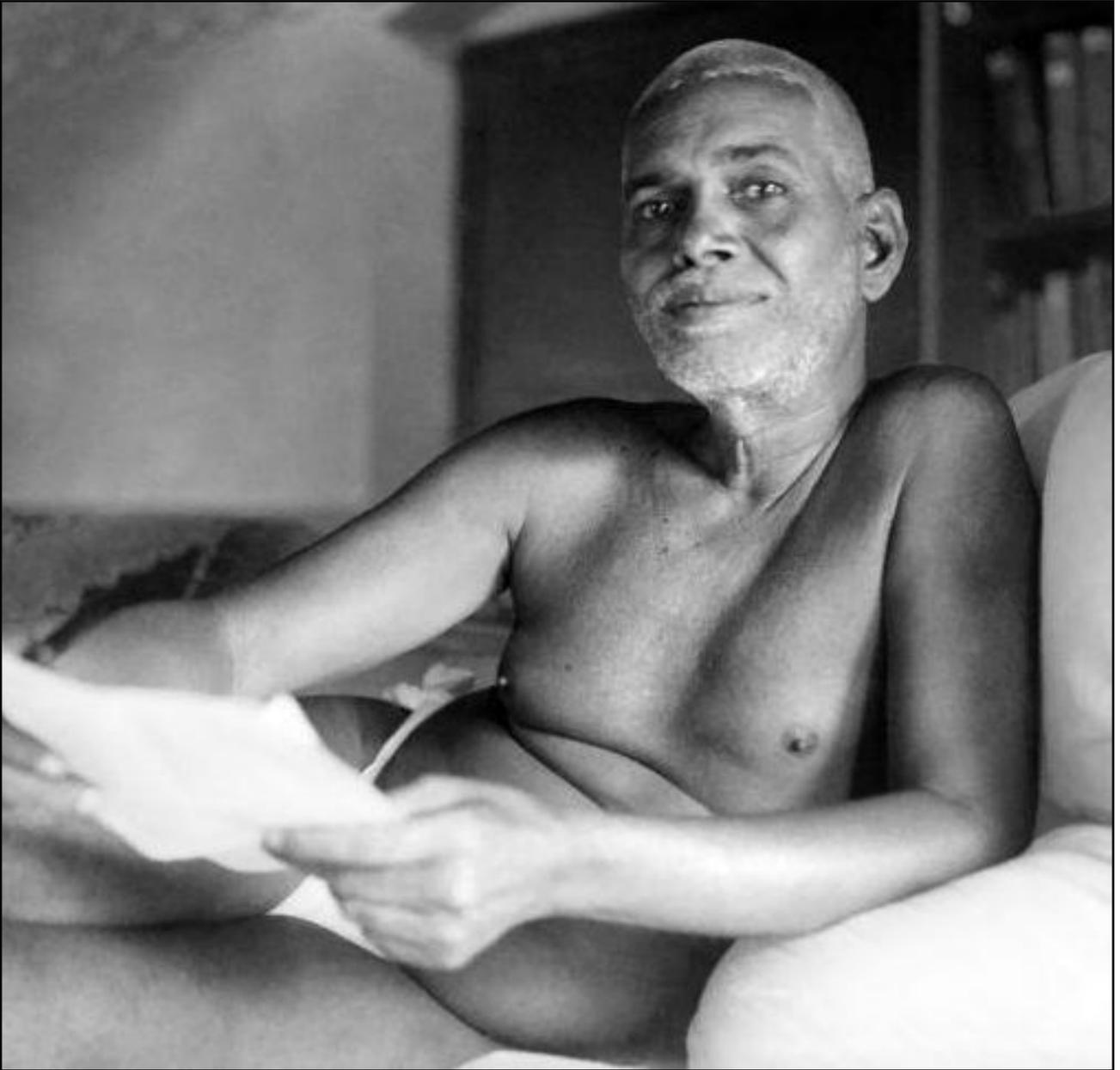
Of the next two devotees of Bhagavan, one was a skeptic and the other a scholar and philosopher. Bhagavan turned both these different metals into gold through the alchemy of compassion, love, attention and illumination. The process of transforming each of them may appear to differ, but the end result was the same: spiritual emancipation. When one reads with utmost attention about these devotees, about how the master descended to their level and removed their obstacles, thereby inspiring them to attain final emancipation, each one of us also receives the effect of that spiritual emancipation - whether one is conscious of it or not. It is like fire which will burn your finger if you touch it - whether you are aware or ignorant of the fact. Likewise, if one reads with one pointed attention, the transformation will take place within oneself, whether one is conscious of it or not.

Swami Madhavtirtha was a celebrated saint. From his childhood days, Motilal (Swami Madhavtirtha) used to ponder deeply over the mystery of death. He pestered

everyone he met, especially wandering *sadhus* and *sannyasins*, "Please explain to me. What is this mystery called death?" He learnt Sanskrit and studied all the scriptural texts he could lay his hands on - his favorite being *Srimad Bhagavatam*. He was also very well read in modern science and was especially interested in the theory of relativity, as he found many parallels in it to *Vedanta* and Adi Shankara's exposition of the theory of *maya*. He started giving talks in schools and colleges on the theory of relativity and its parallels in *Vedanta*. A very popular speaker, in the course of his tours, he was able to meet sages and saints like Anandamayi Ma. In the 1920's, direct contact with Sri Aurobindo, the well known seer of Pondicherry, sent him on the true spiritual quest.

In 1939, he took *sannyas*. After this, he was called Swami Madhavtirtha. As a *sannyasin*, he travelled extensively. He was popular not only for his scholarship but also for the way he applied what he studied into his personal life. He was a prolific writer and had written over a hundred books. Yet, his quest for spiritual fulfillment continued unabated. This unquenchable thirst for the truth drew him to Arunachala and Bhagavan in 1944. He stayed for fourteen days - each day filled with study and experience. Also, since he was a scholar, he noted down his experiences, his questions to Bhagavan and the answers. The very first day, when Swami Madhavtirtha was introduced to Bhagavan in the dining hall, Bhagavan looked at him with a glance full of grace. About that first look, he wrote, "I found in the glance of the Maharshi, the sizzling brilliance of the sun. My breath seemed to stop and my mind was elevated into some spiritual realm of unutterable peace and happiness." Whoever met Bhagavan, with his very first look, he graced them with his own highest state. It was *darshan* in its truest sense. Whether one was capable of receiving it or not, the master was always radiating his fullness. Fortunate were those like Swami Madhavtirtha who could receive it.

He made every minute of the fourteen days of his stay useful for himself, and thereby for all of us. Swami Madhavtirtha wrote, "While sitting in the hall, I observed the Maharshi silently resting on the couch, wholly unconcerned with what was taking place in his presence, and yet, I could easily discern in him, the attitude of oneness with all, *abhinna bhava*, through which he touched the inner being of the seeker who was thus able to feel within himself the presence of the Supreme transcending thoughts - just by a silent look." He added, "I would venture to suggest that the reciprocal relationship with the Maharshi in his *abhinna bhava* and the seeker sitting in his presence is analogous to that of a radio transmitter and a receiver. Maharshi's spiritual influence was transmitted unceasingly like the sun shining, as far as he was concerned, but from the point of view of the seeker such continued beneficial influence exercised by the sage would have no apparent effect until the seeker himself was prepared to receive it. The seeker's preparedness to receive it is called operation of grace.



How often has Bhagavan not assured us, 'Grace is always there. Now receive it.' ?”

Swami Madhavtirtha had earlier sent his book called *Maya* to Bhagavan. In it, he had logically presented how Adi Shankara's concept of *maya* was fully vindicated by modern science's theory of relativity. When asked for Bhagavan's views on the book, Bhagavan was gracious enough to point out a mistake in the Swami's treatment of the subject and how he had based his arguments on a wrong presumption. The theory of relativity maintains that time and space are purely relative notions dependent entirely on the conditions governing the observer and the object under observation and that there is no such thing as objective time and space. It proves this by demonstrating how two observers in different points of space perceive the same event differently. The Maharshi pointed out to him that the very presumption of two observers being situated at two given points is in itself an unwarranted assumption and not true. Bhagavan says two observers put in different situations is itself a theoretical notion. In other words, the space between one observer and another being relative and unreal, there cannot be more than one observer. Swami Madhavtirtha at once recognized the error. It was a revelation to him that the Maharshi could judge off hand, as it were, such modern theories based entirely on his own experience of the supreme Advaitic Truth.

Swami Madhavtirtha put all questions based on his study of *Vedanta*: "If the world is nothing but the divine, why does the *Isavasya Upanishad* direct the seeker to renounce the world?" Bhagavan's

answers were, naturally, based on his own experience: “One is commanded to renounce only the wrong knowledge that the world exists as an objective thing other than the divine. One must give up the notion that there is duality and multiplicity, and whatever manifested existence that may appear to be true.” Swami Madhavtirtha persisted, “If the notion of duality is to be given up - no duality, no multiplicity - what place is there for the scriptural injunction to surrender to the divine?” Bhagavan answered, “The custom prevalent among some people in South India is to offer *pooja* to the idol of Lord Ganesa before their daily meal. Once, a poor traveller was carrying jaggery and flour as food to have on the way. He had to do *pooja* to Lord Ganesa before he could eat. He took out a portion of jaggery and moulded it into a lump, identifying it with the Lord. Now he had to offer food to that Lord. Not finding any jaggery left, he took a pinch from the same jaggery Ganesa and then offered it to him. By doing so, he defiled the image. Your idea of self surrender is nothing better than the offering made by the wayfarer. By presuming your existence apart from the Supreme Being, you have merely defiled it. Whether you have surrendered yourself or not, you have never been apart from that Supreme Being. Indeed, at this present moment, at this very moment, even as in the past or in the future, the divine alone exists. The divine alone is.” This story of the ‘jaggery Ganesa’, took place at the end of the fourteenth day of Swami’s stay. Before taking leave of Bhagavan, Swami Madhavtirtha put before Bhagavan a lot of fruits. Bhagavan smiled at him benignly and said, “So, you are offering jaggery to Lord Ganesa.” Swami Madhavtirtha later revealed that these words of blessing from Bhagavan instantly transformed him.

I would like to quote some of the important spiritual instructions that Swami Madhavtirtha elicited from Bhagavan during his short stay: “Do not reply to questions of the mind, like, ‘Should I say I am Siva’, or, ‘I am not the mind’, ‘I am not the intellect’, etc., while pursuing Self Enquiry. Pursue the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ relentlessly and the Heart will reveal the answer by itself. The state of the silent ‘I’, behind the speaking ‘I’, is the greatest mantra. This ‘I’ state is the greatest mantra. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says that the first name of God is ‘I’. *Om*, the primal sound and vibration, came into existence only later. There is no *japa* at all without the doer of the *japa*. All do the *japa* of ‘I’ only. How many times we say ‘I-I-I’ in our lives. Be as you are. Reality, pure awareness right now, is the real *japa*. *Japa* and God are one and the same. You are perfect. Abandon the idea of imperfection. There is nothing to be destroyed. Ego is not a real thing. Just as it is not necessary to kill the snake which one imagines to be a rope, there is no need to destroy the mind. Knowing the form of the mind benumbs the mind and makes it disappear. One cannot destroy what is eternally destroyed. Stability in the Self is the real posture. Be steady in that real posture.”

“You ask what book I should read. The Self is the real book; life, the written pages. You can glance anywhere in that book. Nobody will take away that book from you. Whenever you remember, turn towards the Self. This is true book reading. Keep your attention introverted. Keep the mind still. That is enough. When the mind becomes still, the power of the Self will be experienced. The aim of all practices is to give up all practices. The Self is all pervading. If the mind is in peace then one begins to experience the peace of the Self. Gaze at your own nature. One is everywhere. It is all the same whether you keep your eyes open or shut during meditation. Turn within and meditate on the I-ness, your true nature. Be as you are. The whole world is in you, not the other way around. Therein is all truth and happiness. Worries do not belong to you. Dive into the silent source of the mind where worries simply cease to exist. Seek the Self and all misery will come to an end. Introvert your mind and turn inside out. You will then come to know that a higher power is functioning everywhere. Know that one seer, your Self, and all will be well. Just as the sun has never seen darkness, the Self has never seen ignorance. The Self is unknowable, but it can be experienced by direct perception. The state of such experiencing is called Self illumination. Whatever is to be in the future is to be understood as impermanent. Learn to understand properly what you are now, what you have now, so that there will be no need of thinking about the future.”

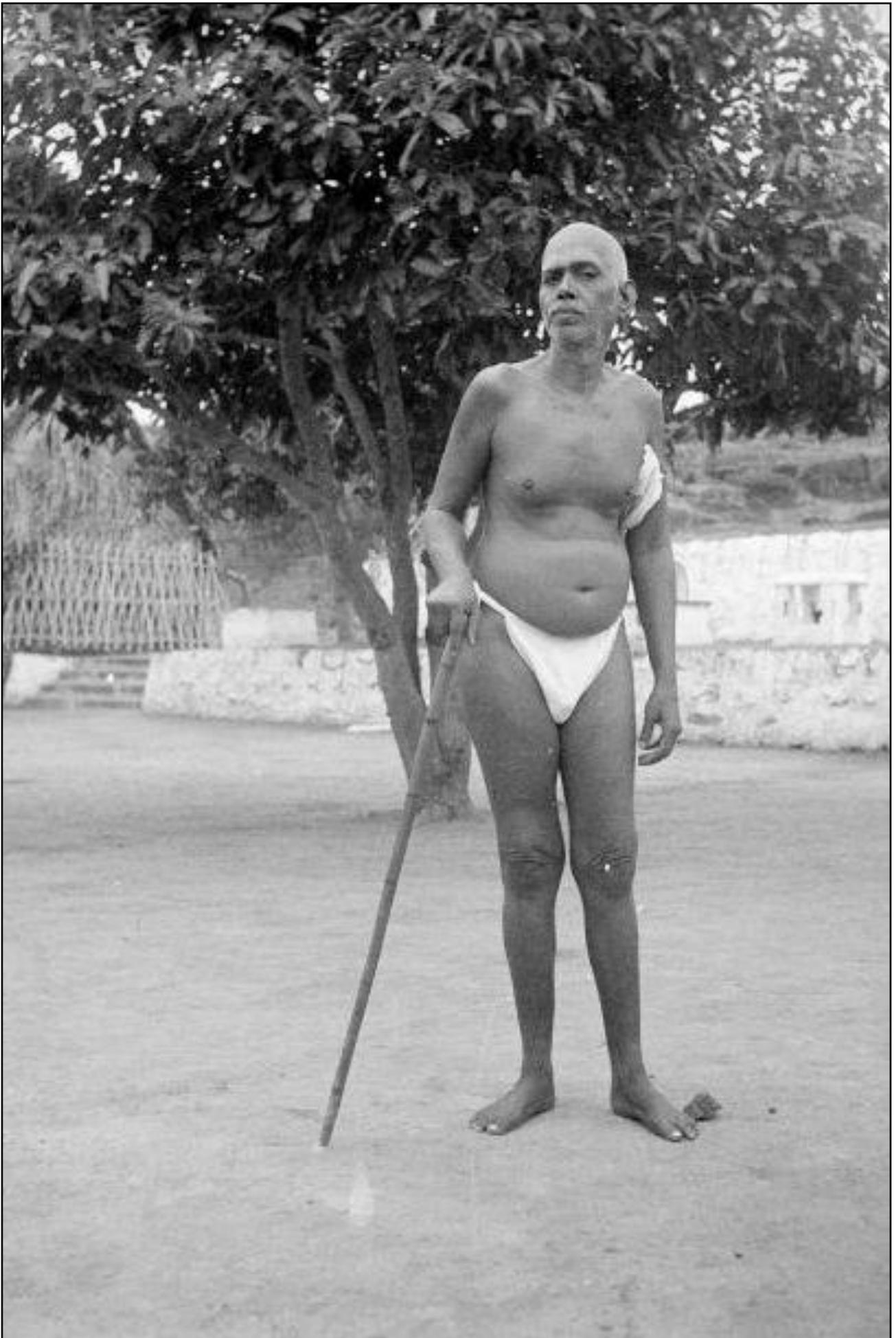
Swami Madhavtirtha asked Bhagavan for personal advice, Bhagavan told him, “Reduce travelling and giving talks.” He obeyed it without question. He went back and founded the Vedanta Ashram on the banks of the Sabarmati River in Gujarat. All of Gujarat’s elite, scholars and saints, knew him well and came to him for spiritual solace. He would relentlessly advise all the serious seekers, “Go to Ramanasramam. Be with Ramana Maharshi. Spend some time in his presence. Whatever you think I have got, is given to me by Ramana Maharshi.” These people started coming to Ramanasramam because of Swami Madhavtirtha. At times, because of this, Ramanasramam was filled with Gujaratis.

In 1956, Swami Madhavtirtha came to Ramanasramam with sixty devotees. He was already renowned as a saint. He stayed for a few weeks in the ashram, while his devotees stayed outside in the ashram guest house. At that time, I was managing the Ashram, as my father was away on a long journey. Senior devotees like T. K. Sundaresa Iyer were guiding me. These old devotees advised me, "Swami Madhavtirtha had his Self realization in the presence of Bhagavan. Spend some time with him." On the day Swami Madhavtirtha was to leave along with his devotees, the duty of seeing them off fell on me. I arranged twenty horse carts for them to reach the railway station. The horse cart for Swami Madhavtirtha was waiting at the entrance of the ashram. When I entered his room, the Swami was in an ecstatic state with tears flowing from his eyes. His devotees handed over to him his sandals and an umbrella as it was raining heavily. I told him, "Swami, it is time for you to go to the train station. All the horse carts have come. Your devotees are waiting. Please come." He followed me. But he refused to wear his sandals and also rejected the umbrella. Instead, he walked in the pouring rain unmindful that he was getting drenched. We reached Bhagavan's shrine which was a thatched shed at that time.

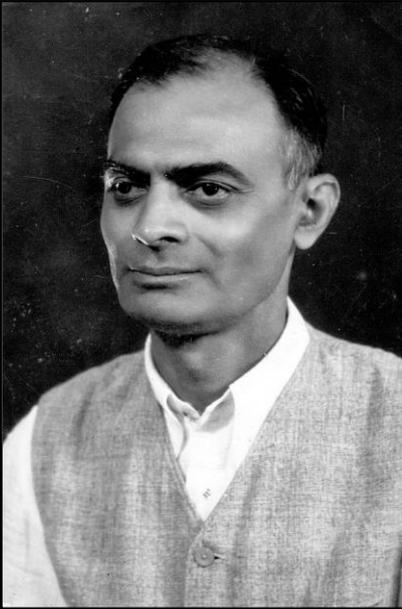
For the first time in my life, I saw the thrilling sight of a radiant, six foot, elderly *sannyasin*, falling like a cut tree at the entrance to Bhagavan's shrine and crying like a baby. He uttered the following prayer to Bhagavan, "I am like a suckling baby, Bhagavan. I cannot leave you. Yet, I have to go." We had to literally pull him up and supportively drag him to the cart. He refused to get into his horse cart inside the premises of the ashram. We had to walk with him outside to where all his devotees and the other horse carts were waiting. All through, Swami Madhavtirtha was crying in ecstasy, submerged as he was in the state of surrendered devotion to the master. The devotees were about to help him into the cart. A pious and mature old devotee, B. M. S. Naidu, who was fully aware of the greatness of the Swami, advised me, "He is a saint. Place your head on his holy feet." I obeyed. Swami Madhavtirtha put both his hands on my head and blessed me. I went into ecstasy! That was my very first spiritual experience - the experience of going beyond the limitations of one's body and mind! I felt blessed. It was B. M. S. Naidu who helped me commence my true spiritual journey, though at that time, I was not aware of its true significance. It is all Bhagavan's grace!



*Sri Bhagavan's Sacred Samadhi Shrine*



## Chaganlal V. Yogi



Swami Madhavtirtha the saint had to travel to Arunachala for receiving the grace of Bhagavan. In contrast, with the skeptic Chaganlal V. Yogi, the master went to him! Chaganlal V. Yogi was a confirmed atheist. He denied the existence of God, scoffed at sages and saints, and was convinced that because of them the world was filled with corruption, inequality and misery. As a young man, he was a hard worker. In the metropolitan city of Mumbai, he was recognized as such and had a good reputation. He owned a printing press and as he was a very entertaining conversationalist, he had many friends. But all their efforts to make him give up his skepticism met with no success.

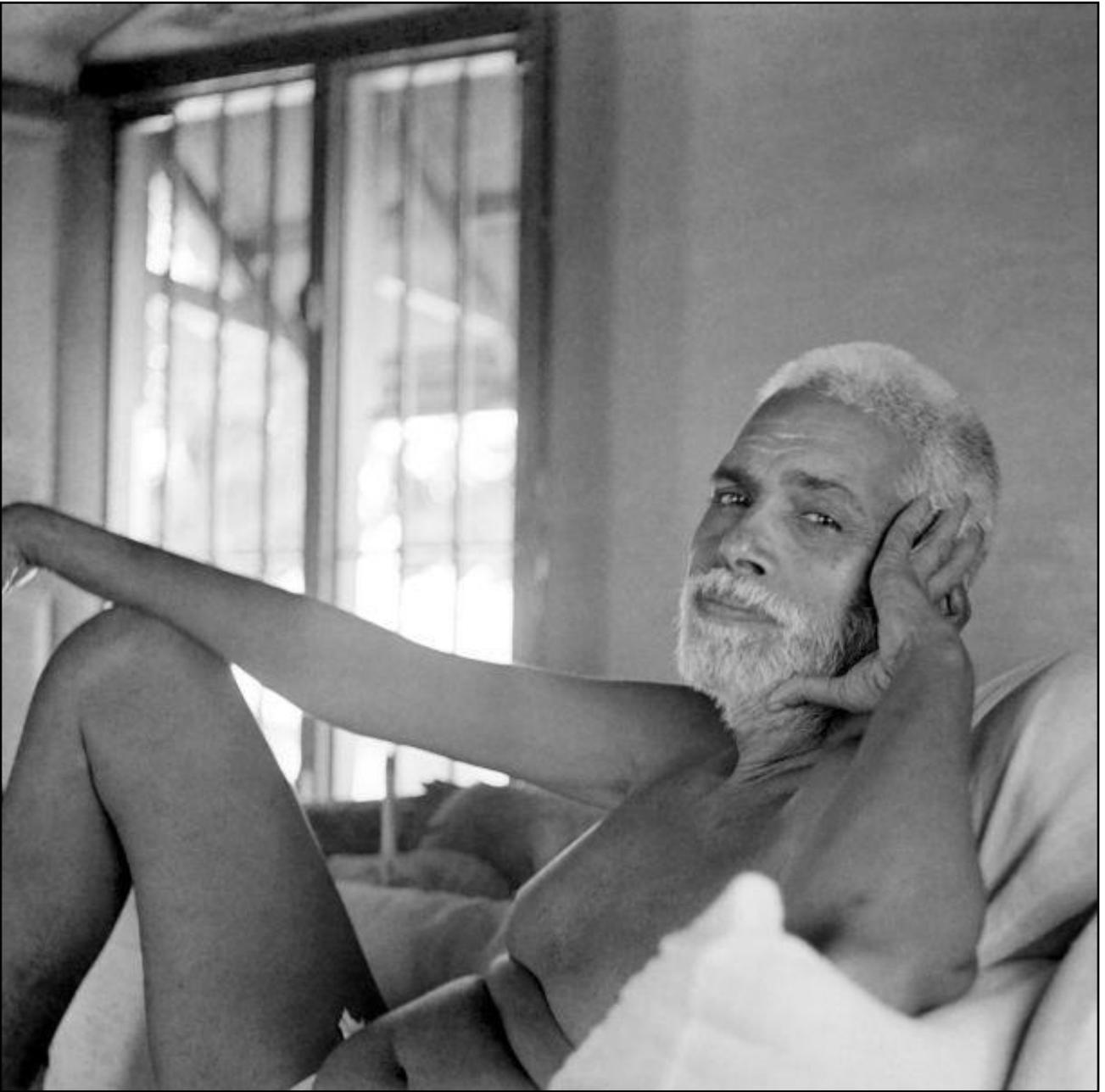
One day, when Chaganlal Yogi was commuting by a local train, one of his close friends who had been to Ramanasramam and had the *darshan* of Ramana Maharshi told him about his greatness and how he was God in human form. Chaganlal laughed at him, though with sympathy and pity. The friend persisted, "Here, I have brought *vibhuti*, holy ash, from Ramanasramam, from holy Arunachala. Please apply a little on your forehead." Chaganlal would have none of

it. A few days later, another friend who had also been to Ramanasramam, gave him a beautifully illustrated book, *Sri Maharshi*, and said, "I am coming from Ramanasramam, Chaganlal! Believe me, the Maharshi is God! Go to Arunachala and see Ramana Maharshi. You will then definitely change your skeptic views. Or else, at least read this book." Being a printer, Chaganlal felt he had to go through the attractively printed book. Through yet another friend, he then received a copy of *Self Realisation*, the authentic biography of Ramana Maharshi by B. V. Narasimha Swami. Chaganlal was surely but slowly falling into the tiger's jaws! When he started reading *Self Realization*, many doubts started rising in his mind. He still had no opinion of Ramana Maharshi, but he wrote to him about his doubts. Though the replies he got were logical, Chaganlal felt they were merely intellectual. Still, he had to concede that there was some depth in them. "This mere intellectual knowledge and understanding is not sufficient. I must have direct experience." Propelled by this strong feeling and the persuasion of his friends, Chaganlal the skeptic set off for Tiruvannamalai in December, 1938.

When he came to the presence of Bhagavan, he felt Bhagavan focussing his look on him. Immediately, Chaganlal started feeling the peace of Bhagavan's spiritual benevolence. He now felt that the presence, the affection and the compassion of Bhagavan were all very genuine. Chaganlal himself has recorded what exactly happened to him at that moment, "The darkness in me that had been heavy and unbearable before, gradually lightened and melted into a glow within. My erstwhile sadness disappeared completely leaving in my Heart an inexplicable joy. My limbs appeared to be washed in an ocean tide of freedom. The colour of the world changed for me and the light of the day now took on an ethereal aspect. I saw the foolishness and futility of turning my gaze on the dark side of the life. Bhagavan, the strange magician, had opened before me a fresh new world of illumination and joy. Thus, I was caught in the tiger's jaws."

He went there for just a day, but he could not release himself away from that benevolent influence. It was neither hypnotism nor mesmerism, but pure love, compassion and peace. He returned to the presence of the Maharshi again and again. Once, in a dream, Bhagavan held his hands and took him to the top of Arunachala. Chaganlal Yogi deeply felt that this was a symbol of Bhagavan's assurance that he would attain the goal of life. (Many other devotees too, have had this same dream of Bhagavan appearing before them and taking them to the top of the holy hill.)

Chaganlal Yogi could no more bear to be away from Bhagavan. He wanted to always be at the holy feet of his master. He was prepared to give up the world and make Arunachala his permanent abode. But he was also conscious that he had to maintain his family. Despite this, in 1945, he decided to sell his printing press in Mumbai and come to Bhagavan for good. When he was wondering how to sell his printing press quickly,



*"His Glance of Grace"*

Bhagavan appeared to him again in a dream. In the dream was also one of his friends who had never been to Ramanasramam. Bhagavan pointed to this friend and told Chaganlal, "Sell your press to him." In reply to this, in the dream itself, he asked Bhagavan, "I have to maintain my family. At what price should I sell it to him? He must buy my press, so that I can come to Arunachala." Bhagavan wrote on the wall, a five figure amount which was satisfactory to him. On waking up from his dream in the morning, when he went to his press, the very same friend who was in the dream was waiting for him. Chaganlal told him details of the dream. His friend immediately agreed to buy the printing press at the price Bhagavan had indicated in the dream!

However, his friend advised him, "Go to Tiruvannamalai every week. But continue with your profession. Put a printing press in Bangalore and stay with your family there. That way, you will be able to visit Bhagavan often and also be of help to the ashram in printing their publications." Chaganlal went to Bangalore. There, he identified a big press which had not been operating for six months. When he asked its price, its owner quoted a price which he could not afford. But by now, this skeptic turned devotee knew the way out. He requested the printing press owner to come with him to Ramanasramam. Though the man had never heard of Ramana Maharshi, he went with Chaganlal. In the Old Hall, Bhagavan was told about the problem. Before he could answer, the owner of the press

agreed to sell it to Chaganlal at the originally offered price! This, of course, was the magic of the presence of Bhagavan. The press was soon bought. On Chaganlal's request to give it a name, Bhagavan named it 'Aruna Press'. Soon, the publications of Ramanasramam were being printed there.

Bhagavan's devotees wanted to celebrate the golden jubilee of his advent to Arunachala on September 1, 1946, as he had come there fifty years ago on September 1, 1896. They also wanted to bring out a fine souvenir to commemorate the event. And of course, they wanted Aruna Press to print it. It was a big book with lots of illustrations. Chaganlal knew that there wasn't enough time to complete the printing. But he could not say no because it was for the ashram. Faced with this dilemma, he went to Bhagavan and told him how it was physically impossible to complete the printing within the stipulated time. Bhagavan listened for a few minutes and then went into silence. After some time, Bhagavan told him in English, "Do your work." Chaganlal took it as a command and blessing. He worked day and night along with his enthusiastic workers. A few days before the celebrations, maybe in the last week of August, he took copies of the *Golden Jubilee Souvenir* and presented them to Bhagavan - much to the delight of the devotees who had assembled at the ashram in large numbers.

Chaganlal Yogi narrated two beautiful incidents on Bhagavan's sense of equality. Chaganlal Yogi affirmed that he had met many sages across India, and Bhagavan's sense of equality and sharing things equally was unmatched. He narrated how one day when he was seated in the hall, Bhagavan received a big parcel from far away Punjab. It contained *chyavanaprash lehiyam*, an ayurvedic health tonic. The devotee, who had sent it, had requested that Bhagavan should eat a little bit every day for two months, as it would improve his health. Bhagavan simply smiled. The next morning at breakfast, there was a little portion of that tonic on each one's leaf plate. The entire portion was equally shared and finished in one day! An anxious devotee asked, "Bhagavan! It was meant to be taken by you every day, for two months. You have exhausted the whole thing in a single day." Bhagavan gave a benign smile and said, "Yes. Do you think Bhagavan has just this one mouth? All these mouths are Bhagavan's only." Bhagavan did not transgress the wish of the devotee who had sent the tonic. Bhagavan had eaten the whole thing - but through the mouths of everyone there!

Seeing Bhagavan's poor health, a devotee made Indian bread with a lot of ghee and brought it along with a cup full of milk and another cup full of orange juice. He took all these to Bhagavan in the hall and said, "Bhagavan! You should take this for your health." Bhagavan did not even look at it. Bhagavan never liked any special treatment extended to him. Not understanding this, one of the ladies in the hall pleaded, "Bhagavan! Just because we requested you to sit on the sofa, did you not oblige us by sitting on it? Like that, why don't you take this too? This is only for your health." Bhagavan said, "Yes. What you say is true." To everyone's shock, he then got down from the sofa and sat on the floor. They all begged, "Bhagavan, Bhagavan, please sit on the sofa." The poor lady who had tried to persuade Bhagavan, entreated him with profuse tears in her eyes, "I am sorry Bhagavan. I did not mean this to happen." With a glorious smile on his face, Bhagavan replied, "Why are you sorry? You have told me the right thing to do." He refused to get up from the floor. Fortunately, an attendant with long years of service took the bold step of lifting Bhagavan and putting him back on the sofa. Bhagavan did not resist being lifted up. He also didn't insist on sitting on the floor. Chaganlal Yogi also told me that once an American came with a single slab of chocolate and gave it to Bhagavan. There were thirty six people in the hall at that time. Bhagavan said, "Cut it into thirty six pieces." After the tiny pieces were equally distributed, Bhagavan took the last piece. "Bhagavan was that brutally firm about sharing things equally!" said Chaganlal Yogi.

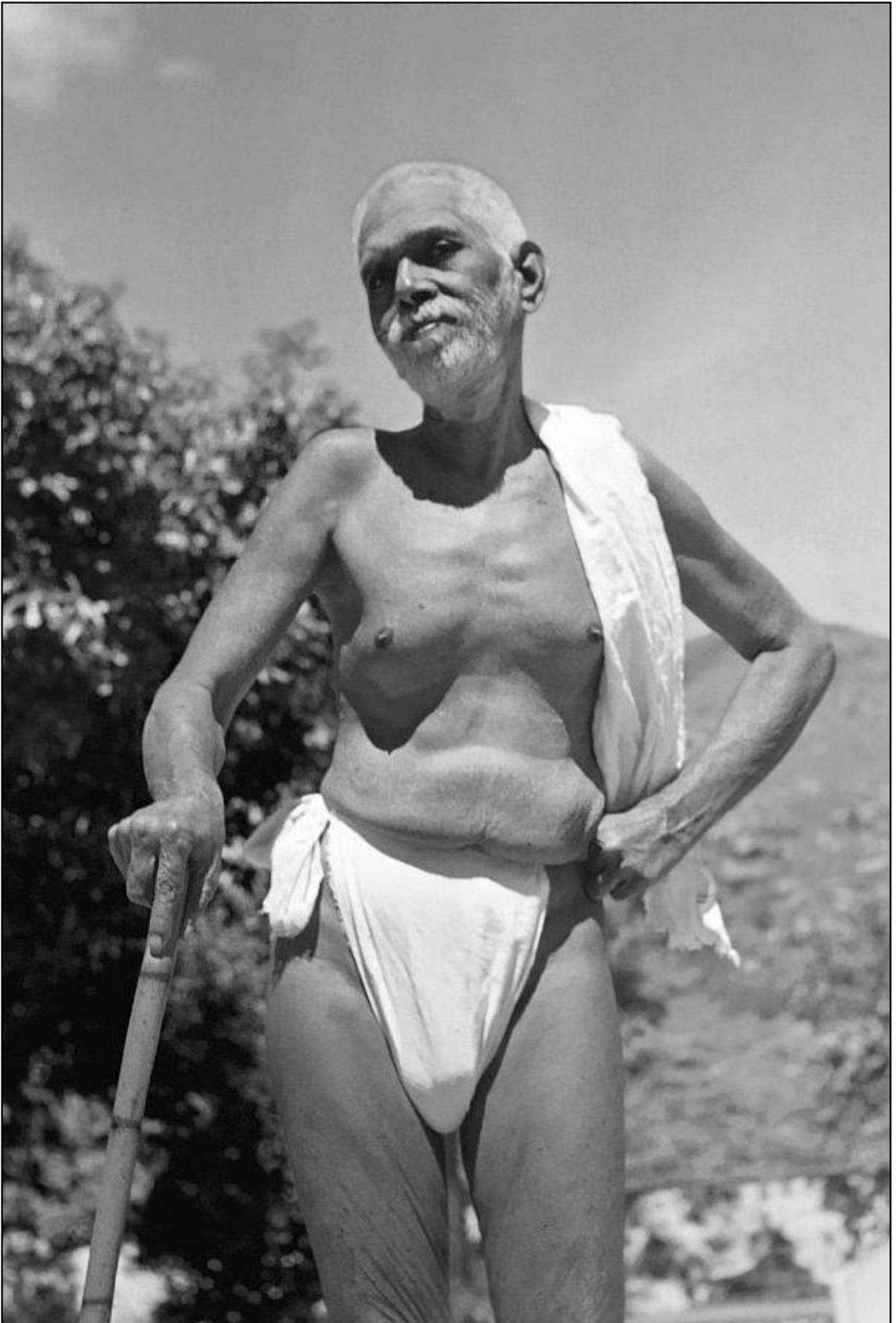
Once, there was a *swami* who came to Arunachala and took shelter in a *mantap* on the *pradakshina* road going around the hill. The *mantap* was just a little away from the ashram. Soon, he became known for curing sick people with holy ash. Hundreds and hundreds of people started flocking to him. It was a great sensation at that time. On their way back from the *vibhuti swami*, some of them would come to the ashram too. At that time, Bhagavan had rheumatic problems with his knees. When he wanted to get up, he had to apply a little ayurvedic oil on both knees. One day, he did not apply it on one knee. Consequently, when he tried to get up he could not. He sat back on the sofa and started applying oil on that knee. At that time, a huge group of people came after having *darshan* of the *vibhuti swami*. Seeing Bhagavan massaging his knee, they went away with a disappointed look without even prostrating to him. Pointing to himself, Bhagavan smiled and said, "What must they be thinking about this *swami* who is massaging his own knee? Perhaps they must be thinking, 'How can this *swami* heal others when he cannot even heal his own knee ailment?'" Chaganlal Yogi observed that Bhagavan could make a joke

about his own inability. Even when miraculous cures did happen on account of a devotee's faith in him, Bhagavan never accepted any responsibility for such cures. Instead, Bhagavan would say, "All these things take place automatically and are part of the natural activity of one's Self. One's attention has always to be poised on one's Self."

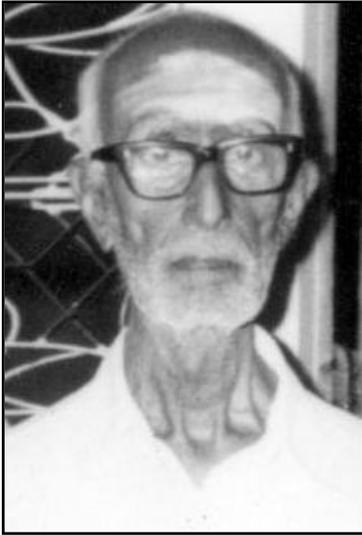
Chaganlal Yogi had a daughter and a son. When the daughter came of age, Chaganlal Yogi's wife was worried about her marriage. She approached T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, who promptly took her to Bhagavan. Another devotee had just come into the hall. When they informed Bhagavan, he pointed to that devotee and said, "Why do you worry? Here is Bhatt. Approach him." Bhatt had a son for whom he was trying to find a match. The betrothal was settled in the presence of Bhagavan. That couple live happily in Chennai to this day. Years back, Chaganlal Yogi wanted a son to be born to him. A son was born and Bhagavan named him 'Arun'. The whole family was completely devoted to Bhagavan. In *Bhagavad Gita*, there is a verse wherein Lord Krishna declares, "Anyone surrendering to me, the burden of their entire family I take over and look after them." This skeptic surrendered to Bhagavan and Bhagavan took complete care of the whole family. Later in his life, Chaganlal Yogi settled down at Anandashram in Kerala. There, continuously chanting the name of Ramana, Chaganlal V. Yogi passed away peacefully and consciously in the presence of two saints, Swami Ramdas and Mataji Krishna Bai.



*Mother Krishnabai and Swami Ramdas*



## Prof. N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer



N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was a scientist who believed only in the intellect and doubted everything else. Bhagavan enabled this doubting Thomas to experience inner felicity, directly and tangibly.

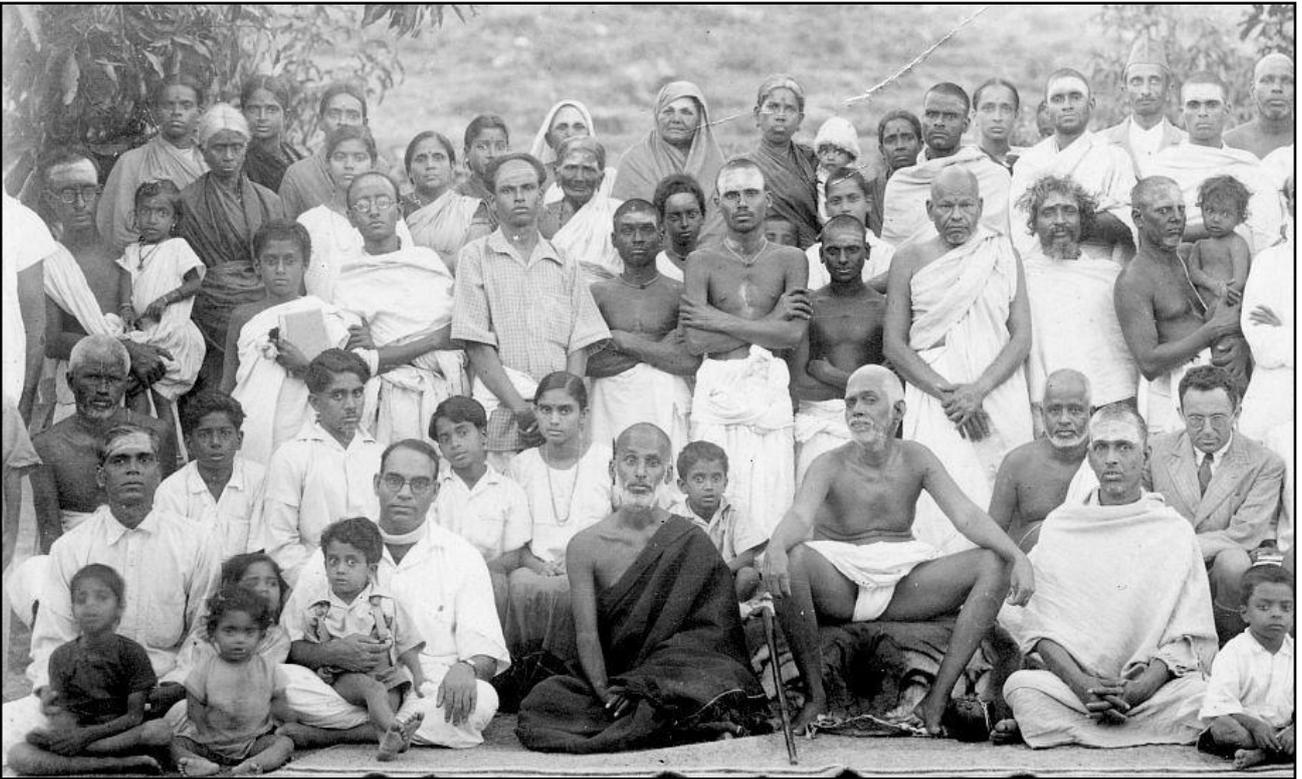
N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was a brilliant professor of physics. He had studied under Dr. C. V. Raman, the Nobel laureate of international repute. Known as NRK, he would pick a fight with anyone who ignoring the practicalities of life focused only on God and the spiritual side. He had to have a scientific explanation for anything before accepting it. Though a Hindu, he felt that not only was it superstition to prostrate before anyone, it was also degrading oneself. In 1922, NRK came to Tiruvannamalai to meet his sister who stayed there. NRK's brother-in-law Kuppaswamy and his friend T. K. Sunderesa Iyer, who were just leaving to see Bhagavan, told him, "We are both going to Ramana Maharshi. Krishnamurthy, you also come along with us." NRK agreed but on the condition, "Do not expect me to prostrate before the one whom you call the Maharshi." The friends smiled - they knew beyond

doubt what was in store.

At that time, Ramanasramam was just a thatched shed built over the Mother's *samadhi*. The three entered the thatched shed and then something strange happened. Without even being aware of it, the professor found himself flat on the ground, prostrating before the Maharshi. The two friends smiled broadly when they witnessed this, because this was exactly what they had anticipated. For, there is no need to persuade a skeptic to do something; spiritual power itself is potent enough. Bhagavan was totally focusing on NRK. After a few minutes, NRK got up, taken aback by what he had done. He then decided to have a debate with Bhagavan so that he could make amends for his spontaneous act.

NRK narrated to me what happened next: "I asked Bhagavan, 'Seated like this, what is your next state?' My idea was to elicit the reply that the soul survives the dissolution of the body and later gets united with the Self or God. I wanted to have a verbal war with him in order to disprove him. But, it was not to be. Several minutes passed after I raised my question. There was no reply. There was absolute silence as our eyes interlocked in a steady gaze. A thought arose within me: 'Is this man taking shelter in silence to avoid answering an inconvenient question?' At that very moment, Bhagavan's resounding voice rang out, 'You said *'sthiti'* (state); what do you mean by *'sthiti'*?' This sudden counter question made me feel that I had to answer him. So, I began to think. I did not ask him about the body that will be buried or burned; what I was thinking about was the thinking apparatus inside the body called the mind. It is about this that I had asked. Now, if I said that the question was about the state of the mind then he would ask me to define the mind. I had to have a ready answer to this question. Therefore, within myself, I raised the enquiry, and this of course was because of the power of his look. I could, however, find no answer to the question. My mind was paralyzed; the thinking power was dead. I became helplessly mute. I noticed the fierce glow in Bhagavan's eyes. They locked mine in a tight grip. Then, a radiant smile of triumph spread over the Maharshi's face. I lost all awareness of both the body and the world as the insignificant 'I' in me was swallowed up in the pure awareness of being, in which all names, forms, time and action were utterly lost. It was a state of immense silence, without a beginning or an end, but aglow with the self-effulgent 'I AM'. When I recovered consciousness of my body and its surroundings, with the inner glow still effulgent, there were no more questions to be asked or answered. Revelling in the joy of that defeat, I quickly prostrated and ran out."

"That was the beginning of the end of the 'me'. After having given the experience of spiritual explosion within myself, Bhagavan invited me. He said, 'Come in and have lunch.' It was just a thatched shed, so everything - *darshan*, food, and sleep - took place there." NRK continued, "Ganesan, I will tell you the secret behind the offering of food. To sustain the spiritual experience, Bhagavan always nourished the body, which had been so very strongly and deeply jolted, with food. Many do not understand this mother principle or the compassion of Bhagavan.



Sri Bhagavan and Prof. NRK with his family members  
(NRK standing extreme left holding baby daughter)

Granting the spiritual experience is the father principle; to sustain it in one's self, Bhagavan compassionately extended the mother principle of feeding the body with food. That day, when I was thoroughly shaken up by Bhagavan spiritually, physically too he showered his grace on me through food. A leaf plate was placed on the bare ground. Two courses of rice with *sambar* and buttermilk were served. Though simple, it was the food of the gods. This *Prasad* solidly bound me to the sacred feet of my *satguru*, Bhagavan Ramana."

Professor N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was born in 1898 in a village near Trichy. His father Ranganatha Iyer was a reputed lawyer in the city. His uncle Appachi Iyer would often visit their house and talk about Bhagavan. NRK did not understand much at the time as he was only fifteen years old. Fortunately for him, the entire family of twenty members went on a pilgrimage to Tirupati. Tiruvannamalai happens to be one of the stations on the way. Since NRK's eldest sister who was married lived in Tiruvannamalai, they halted there. This happened around 1914 or 1915, when Bhagavan was in Virupaksha cave. All of them went to Virupaksha cave with the fifteen year old NRK and the other boys and girls. When they prostrated before Bhagavan, Bhagavan's attention was on this boy of fifteen. NRK, however, did not pay any heed to the focused attention of Bhagavan because he was too interested in running around the cave. He told me there was a big, white conch that the children blew into; he was elated that the children were allowed to play around so freely.

In 1919, NRK visited his sister again. He paid a casual visit to Skandashram to have the *darshan* of Bhagavan. From 1915 to 1922, when he was in school and later in college, he had many, many experiences, sending him into silence. However, he was not able to attribute these to that first look of Bhagavan. He had no answer to what was happening to him. When the professor of his college asked the students to write an essay or an article in English, everyone else would write endlessly, but NRK was not able to write even a single word because his mind was blank. In those days, he never attributed these unexplainable spells of inner silence to that glorious look of Bhagavan. But, when he shared the experience with me later on, he said, "I recollected that the entire route of my inward spiritual journey began from that single look of Bhagavan."

In 1930, he had a tonsils operation. The doctor made a mistake and removed more flesh than necessary, resulting in incessant bouts of coughing which lead to acute asthma. He took allopathic

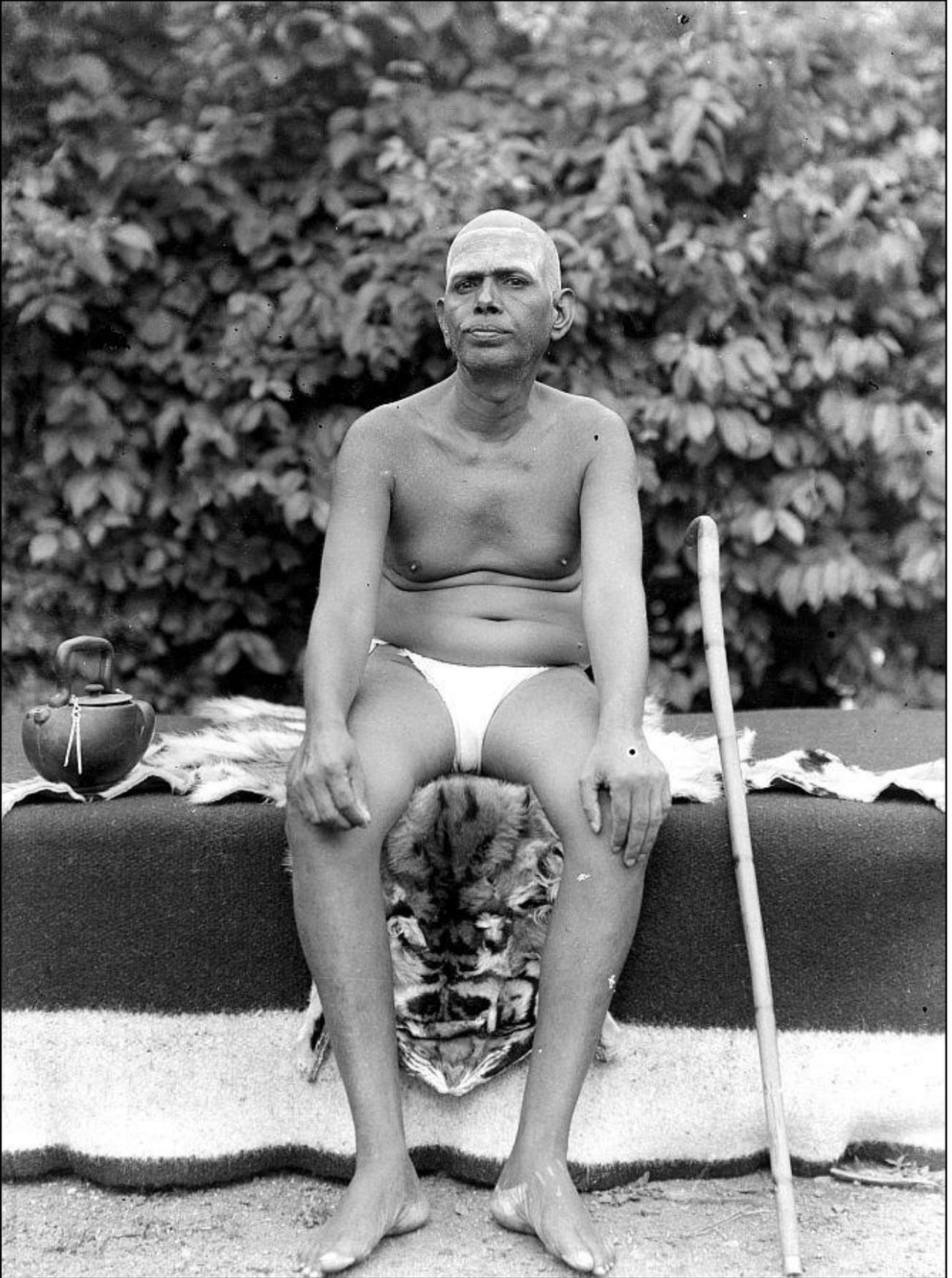
medicines, but these did not provide any relief. He then tried ayurveda, *unani* and other such systems of treatment which forbade him from consuming tamarind and chilly. During this time, he visited Bhagavan with his uncle Appachi Iyer and his brother-in-law. Bhagavan again invited them for lunch. They all sat down and food was served. It was the same rice, *sambar*, *rasam* and buttermilk that are served in Ramanasramam even today. NRK hesitated when he saw the *sambar* being poured on the mound of rice because of his diet restrictions. Bhagavan, who had been looking at him all the while, said, "Having come here to be rid of all your illnesses, why are you hesitant? Eat!" This was a divine commandment. He hoped that the commandment would cure him and it did. It was not a miracle that happened immediately; it took a few months, but he was completely cured.

In addition to this, another beautiful incident took place on the same day. Bhagavan's brother, Chinna Swami, called him and presented him with a big picture of Bhagavan at the age of twenty one. He also gave him two Tamil books - *Sri Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* (five hymns in praise of Arunachala written by Bhagavan) and *Sri Ramana Stuti Panchakam* (five hymns in praise of Bhagavan written by a mystical devotee of his). An elated NRK took these to Bhagavan and placed them on his lap. Bhagavan picked up the books, corrected the printing mistakes in them and returned them to him with the photo. NRK prostrated before Bhagavan and received these as *prasad*. He preserved and treasured these all his life.

It did not stop here. A beautiful dialogue between the guru and the skeptic disciple had already taken place. It happened again in 1922 when the skeptic scientist had become the disciple of Ramana Maharshi. NRK said, "I prostrated before him and said, "Bhagavan, I am doing Rama *japa*; I chant, 'Rama, Rama, Rama'. Is not chanting, 'Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva,' superior to that?" 'No! No! No!' said Bhagavan vehemently. 'Both are the same. *Ra* means 'that which is' and *ma* means 'you'. In 'Arunachala', *A* means 'that', *ru* means 'you' and *na* means 'are'. Thus, both mean 'That thou art' - you are that. Using your mind as the mouth, let the name Rama revolve continuously like Lord Vishnu's *chakra* (a discus like weapon). Nobody needs to know that you are doing *japa*.'" NRK, who was a professor of physics, interrupted, "If I spend all my time like that, what will happen to my teaching job? Will not my job be in jeopardy?" Bhagavan looked at him graciously and replied, "The one whose name you repeat will take full charge of that. You need not be concerned about it. Keep repeating the Rama mantra." This assurance from his guru inspired him to chant the Rama mantra eighty million times in the course of five years.

In 1934, NRK visited Ramanasramam with his wife and three children. Two of Bhagavan's classmates, Venkataramiah and Narayana Iyer, also accompanied them. NRK was in touch with the classmates and playmates of Bhagavan. (It was NRK who later interviewed them at my request.) Even during this trip, he had a series of experiences in Bhagavan's presence. One day after dinner, they were seated in front of Bhagavan when Ramachandra Rao, a gentleman from Bangalore, started reading the *Ribhu Gita* aloud. Bhagavan advocated it to all serious spiritual seekers. Each verse ends with '*Aham Brahman*', meaning 'I am *Brahman*', or as God in the Bible says to Moses, "I AM THAT I AM." When this was being recited by Ramachandra Rao, NRK became ecstatic. Vibrations of pure consciousness shook him up. He lost body consciousness. He was aware that all else looked like shadowy objects. In this state, he decided that he would renounce his family and the world. In those days, Arunachala was like a forest, so he decided that he would disappear into the forest. Bhagavan looked at him and only him - this was the guru's grace - and said, "Krishnamurthy! Go back to Madurai with your family. The salvation that you want to gain as a *sannyasin* in the forest is what you will get even as a householder in your profession. I say, return home!"

NRK told me, "Just like the repetition of '*Aham Brahman*' took me to the heights of ecstasy this specific command of Bhagavan woke me up." He prostrated and obeyed his master. He only asked, "Would you please give me a copy of the *Ribhu Gita*?" With the book in hand, he took his family home. He became a very serious *sadhaka*. He kept aside time for his professional work and his duties towards his family. Other than that, he was always chanting the Rama mantra or reading the five hymns in praise of Arunachala and the five hymns in praise of Ramana. He also memorized most of the *Ribhu Gita*. This is how we have to apply our master's teaching to our daily routine. And when we do so, the guru leads us step by step in the journey inwards as Bhagavan did with NRK.



In 1941, NRK, who was a professor at Madurai, received an invitation from Ramanasramam for the Navaratri festival. The Mother Goddess is worshipped and celebrated for nine nights during this period. I was five years old then and my *aksharabhyasam* was going to be conducted according to tradition on Vijayadasami, the tenth day. (*Aksharabhyasam* is the ceremonial initiation of the child into the practice of writing. *Akshara* means the letters of the alphabet and *abhyasam* means practice.) My grandfather, Chinna Swami, invited NRK to attend this function. When NRK received this invitation, he felt that since he too was the child of Bhagavan, he should also have his *aksharabhyasam* done. In Sanskrit, the word *aksharabhyasam* can also mean 'the silent practice of the eternal Self'. He felt that since he would be in the presence of Bhagavan at that time, he would also get silent initiation into the Self. He left for Ramanasramam immediately. (Around 1962 or 1963 he told me, "We two are brothers. Remember your *aksharabhyasam* when you were inducted into formal education in the presence of Bhagavan? I picked up the practice of Self attention in the presence of Bhagavan at the same time. So, we are brothers. We are always together and will always be together. That is how Bhagavan has meant it to be.")

For nine days, he participated in the Navaratri celebrations holding on to the *Ribhu Gita*. The other two books were already committed to memory and so there was no need to carry them around. He held on to the book and looked at his master. Bhagavan asked, "Why are you holding on to that book?" NRK explained how he had given the book to Bhagavan and Bhagavan himself had given it back to him. He became very emotional at Bhagavan paying such attention on him. Gathering courage, he asked Bhagavan, "Please choose for me the most important lines to recite every day." Bhagavan indicated chapter twenty six, saying, "The recital of these lines is itself *samadhi*."

This is a teaching for all seekers. A book is not something that is just to be read and kept aside. It has to become a part of us. It has to become an integral part of us like any other limb of the body. This is an instruction that we have to take our master's directions seriously. NRK always carried these books with him. He recited the verses tens of thousands of times and the *Ribhu Gita* became as much a part of him as his breathing. When I once asked him why he had read these books so many times, he replied, "These are not just books; they are not just verses. They are mantras - the sacred and holy words of the master." When I appeared a little hesitant or disbelieving, he said, "I once asked my guru to explain the five hymns of Arunachala. He replied, 'Repeatedly reading it is the meaning.' That is why I have read them so many times." Just look at this skeptical scientist. He would have probably read it many more times after that meeting. The guru transmuted him into gold. A scientist reading verses thousands of times even though the meaning is simple! He also recited the Rama mantra. Though a brilliant scientist, he could go beyond his brain.

In 1944, NRK came to Bhagavan for his final initiation. During the interval, he was in a state of total *sadhana*, because he had received the special grace of Bhagavan. On that day, Bhagavan was coming down the hill and NRK prostrated before him. Gathering courage, he asked Bhagavan, "With your grace, how can I experience the Self? Please let me know how I can be in a state of *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi* (a temporary trance-like state of the Self in which outer awareness is lost) even in a state of sleep. How can I at other times be in a state of *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi* (the state of complete enlightenment in which one can function normally and naturally)? I would like it to be there even when I sleep. When I get up, the state should continue." Bhagavan replied, "Sleep is a God given state. You cannot do anything while you are asleep. But, at other times you must practice the enquiry 'Who am I?' The ripe fruit that you so desire will come to you automatically and of its own accord." NRK told me, "I got my final *upadesa* from the blessed lips of my beloved lord and master, *satguru* Ramana. I had nothing more to ask from him. I knew that I had to work hard to achieve my objective and there was nothing else for me to do."

NRK dedicated himself totally to *sadhana* and after retirement in 1955, became a regular visitor to the ashram. I was amazed to find that he was constantly in the state of deep inwardness and yet he never claimed that he was a realized person. That was a revelation to me. As a matter of fact, none of the old devotees claimed that they were realized. I was close to NRK because he used to come frequently to the ashram. Since I stayed permanently at the ashram from 1960, I would incessantly ask him to narrate some of the reminiscences.

From 1960 onwards, whenever he came, he would stay for long periods of time. It was he who gave information about the classmates of Bhagavan. When Bhagavan's family was at Tiruchuzhi, they stayed

next to a family where there was a small girl called Lakshmi. Lakshmi narrated the following to NRK: "When Bhagavan was in the womb, Azhagammal experienced an incessant and unbearable burning. Hence, a paste of neem leaf and *vilva* leaf was applied on her stomach every day to provide some kind of relief." We get this information only from Lakshmi, who was supposed to be close to Bhagavan's mother. She has also said that when she was two, Bhagavan and she would suckle from Azhagammal at the same time. As a matter of fact, Bhagavan had mother's milk till the age of six and Lakshmi attributed his strong physique to this!

Bhagavan's classmates have also disclosed that though it is stated in the biographies that on September 1, 1896, when Bhagavan got down from the train, he went straight to the temple, this is not how it happened. The train arrived at six in the morning. Bhagavan was in a state of sheer ecstasy. He did not go straight to the temple. He wandered in the streets of Tiruvannamalai and only around twelve at noon did he enter the temple. The doors of the temple were locked, but when Bhagavan entered, every door opened. When he went inside, he found no one. Bhagavan embraced the *lingam* and declared, "Father, I have come at thy bidding. Thy will be done." Everything was Arunchala's will; it was not Bhagavan's plan.

I asked NRK about the personal habits of Bhagavan. NRK replied, "Not only have I observed them, but I have tried to follow his example all my life. One noticed in Bhagavan's daily life, personal cleanliness, tidiness of dress, the equal sharing of all food with those around him and a strict adherence to a time schedule. He did useful work however 'low' it may be. He never left a work unfinished, never asked another to do something which could be done by him and never considered himself as superior to others. He always spoke the truth or kept a strict silence if his expressing a truth would hurt or lower the reputation of others. Finally, he never worried about the future. Bhagavan taught us devotees by example. We should follow his example in body, spirit and mind.

Once, in 1980, I lamented to NRK, "You have been doing *sadhana*. Even now you are continuing your *sadhana*, Professor. I am burdened with ashram work. I have no time to do *sadhana*. I feel miserable when I look at you." He replied, "Why worry? It is immaterial whether you do *sadhana* or service. Fully recognize that you are a part of Arunachala. That is enough." Puzzled, I asked, "What do you mean that I am part of Arunachala?" NRK took me from my office to the foot of the holy mountain. He reverently pointed the mountain out to me and said, "Arunachala is the pure Self, the 'I AM', the nature of *Tat Tvam Asi* - That Thou Art - you are that. The *Vedas* also declare this truth. Humanity has forgotten that Arunachala is the same 'I AM' in each one of us, that Arunachala is the essence of *Vedas*. In order to make humanity recognize and re-establish the truth of 'I AM', Arunachala itself has taken the human form of Ramana Bhagavan. When Arunachala took the human form to spread the truth of 'I AM', all the rocks and boulders from the hill also took birth as devotees. So, be assured Ganesan, you and I are also rocks and boulders of Arunachala. Just as Bhagavan went back to Arunachala in the form of a meteor like light which we all saw, we too, when we drop our bodies, will go back to the holy mountain. Keep this truth deeply embedded in your heart. Share and announce the greatness of these rocks and boulders. Be happy, Ganesan; you have this work to do. I feel Bhagavan wants you to do this."

I was very fortunate to have been able to persuade NRK and his wife to stay in Ramanasramam for a long time. This gave me the great opportunity of receiving his blessings. Once, around 1981 or 1982, I requested him to grant me the state of ecstasy that he and other old devotees experienced in the presence of Bhagavan. He was overjoyed at this request of mine. He said, "Yes, not only you Ganesan, but anyone who listens to this incident will melt into Ramana's silence inwardly and shed tears of ecstasy outwardly. Listen to this. One day, Bhagavan was seated cross legged on a bench close to the thatched mud hut that had been built over the Mother's *samadhi*. Bhagavan's classmate Rangan, Ramaswamy Pillai, and other old devotees were sitting on the floor before Bhagavan. They all started singing the five hymns in praise of Ramana called *Ramana Stuti Panchakam* in Tamil. Rangan was on the floor close to Bhagavan. His head was only a couple of inches away from the bench. The verses concluded with 'Pray! Place your soft, holy feet on my head.' As this line was being sung, one of Bhagavan's feet descended, came into contact with Rangan's head and stayed there for quite some time. The whole group, including Rangan, was hypnotized at this remarkable spiritual experience and continued repeating the same stanza again and again."

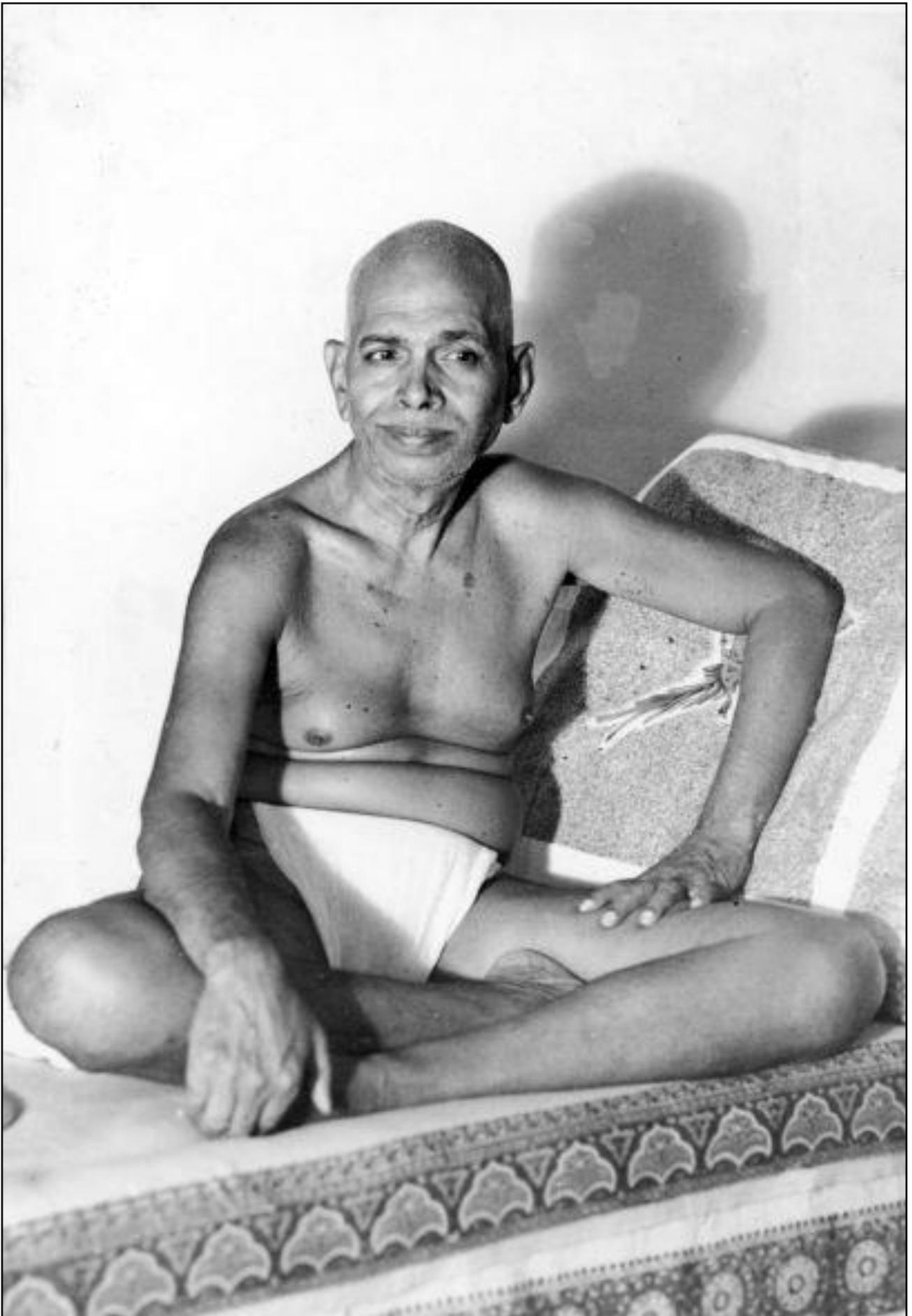
NRK later moved to Madras and passed away there. His sons told me that even though the doctors declared he was unconscious and in coma, his lips were moving as if reciting something. It must have

most certainly been the five hymns to Arunachala, the five hymns to Ramana and the twenty sixth chapter of the *Ribhu Gita*.

The head bowing to the Heart is the final physical act of our losing our ego in the Self. It has to merge with the Self. This is the symbol of taking the guru's holy feet on one's head. Prostrating before someone or placing the head on someone's feet - all these have a spiritual significance. Please understand and experience it. I have put my head on the holy feet of thirty masters. I was also a skeptic like many. But, believe me, when you put your head at the holy feet of the master, something else transpires. What is that something else? Your ego bows down to the all pervading Self. There is no other way. Mere reading and undergoing training will not help. The touch of the master's holy feet is enough. Bhagavan said, "The holy feet of the *satguru* is in one's Heart. Any time you bow your head to the Heart, you are being blessed by the *satguru*'s holy feet."



*Prof. NRK and family in front of Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine*



## Hall Attendants

Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* says, “Out of thousands, perhaps one strives for spiritual perfection. Out of those who strive, perhaps one knows me as I AM.” There is also an ancient saying that goes, “Many are called, but only a few are chosen.”

The inner aspiration to seek the truth, or *mumukshutva*, is a very rare and extraordinary trait. One needs the grace of God to be a seeker. It is also said that it takes a great deal of struggle and many years of striving in order to arrive at the truth. But, for Bhagavan it was as easy as reading the letters of the alphabet. Why was this? It is because he was none other than Arunachala reincarnated. Hence, the rocks and boulders in the form of Bhagavan’s devotees also followed suit and attained bliss. There was no necessity for them to strive in the conventional way because they had already seen the truth. This was Arunachala *leela*, the divine drama. To quote Bhagavan, “It is a great game of pretending.” That is the way all his devotees did *sadhana* and finally got absorbed in Arunachala. In other words, they came from the truth; they lived the truth, and then went back to the truth.

Three kinds of people came to Bhagavan: Seekers who came to meditate and contemplate before Bhagavan, focused on personal *sadhana*. To this set belonged Muruganar, Munagala Venkataramaiah, Viswanatha Swami and others. The other kind came to serve at the ashram office. The ashram could only function with various people doing their duty, and these people carried out their duty with the approval of Bhagavan. For instance, my grandfather, Niranjanananda Swami was the *sarvadhikari*, the storekeeper and also held other responsibilities. The third kind of people who came to the ashram became personal attendants of Bhagavan. These attendants were all men and they stayed within the ashram so that they could dedicate their entire time to the service of Bhagavan.

Kunju Swami, himself a personal attendant of Bhagavan right from the days of Skandashram and later on at Ramanasramam, gave a beautiful account of the kind of interaction between Bhagavan and his personal attendants: “Bhagavan would sleep on the sofa in the hall; the other attendants and I would sleep near the sofa. It was Bhagavan’s habit to get up at three thirty and go out. As soon as he got up from the sofa, one of us would hand him the torchlight; not once was it necessary for him to call out to us by our name or wake us up for the torchlight. The minute he got up, we too seemed to get up automatically and without any effort on our part. Bhagavan’s glance in our direction transmitted a brilliant light within us and we would wake up at once. Bhagavan never gave us orders. He liked to do things himself, but being his attendants we would always anticipate his needs in advance and do what was necessary.”

These individuals were not doing just physical work; Bhagavan was also focussing on the improvement of their personal *sadhana*. About this, Kunju Swami said, “I once asked Bhagavan permission to stay outside the ashram so that I could devote all my time to spiritual *sadhana*. I told Bhagavan that just doing service did not give me complete satisfaction. Bhagavan commented, ‘Real service does not lie in washing my clothes, but in cleansing the mind.’ As far as spiritual practices were concerned, Bhagavan once remarked that the practice of Self Enquiry was mandatory. Everyone should practise contemplation or *dhyana* whenever there is time. If this is not possible, they could practise *japa* or the

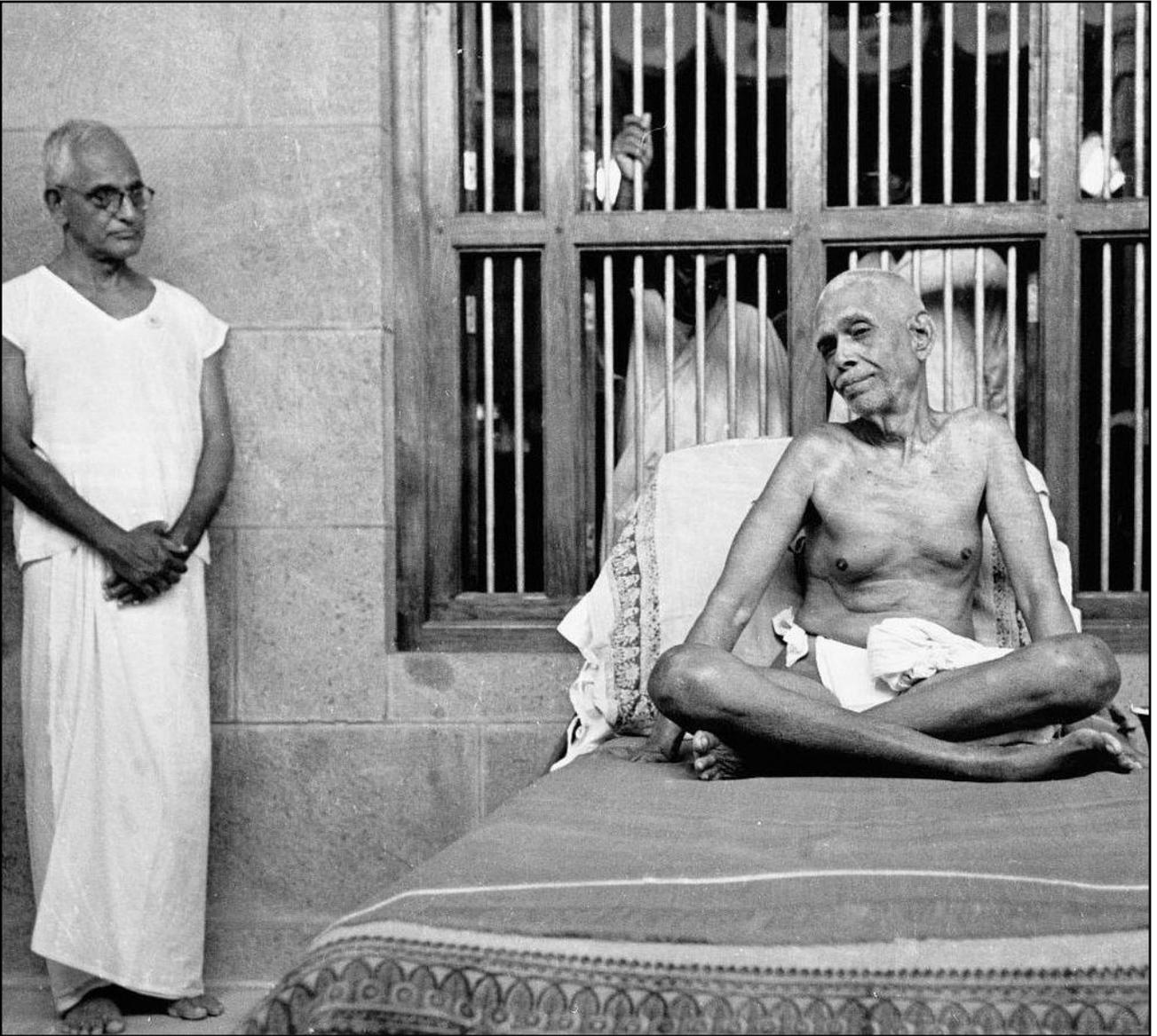
repetition of the sacred name. If even this is difficult because of distractions, a person can always recite sacred verses from the scriptures or verses composed by sages and saints. A person should be engaged in practising one of these four things.”

Once Kunju Swami started staying outside the ashram, other personal attendants came to serve Bhagavan. These attendants were blessed to the core because they served Bhagavan day and night. The relationship between guru and disciple is rather unique. Being Arunachala himself, Bhagavan was in a constant state of perfect poise and inner felicity since he was *achala* or ‘unmoved’. He was forever in that state, but these rocks of Arunachala who came in the form of devotees were constantly reminded about who they were so that they could regain their inner identity of ‘I AM’. Such were the blessings showered on these devotees by Bhagavan. This was the kind of real drama being enacted in this Arunachala Ramana *leela*. Bhagavan remained in that state so that he could constantly remind others that this was the state they should seek and remain in.

For many years, I did not understand why I had the good fortune of being so closely associated with Bhagavan’s attendants, receiving their limitless love and affection. I wondered what I had done to deserve it. Today, I know: I received this boundless love and warmth so that I can share these gems of Bhagavan with all of you. The great thing about these devotees is that no matter what their involvement was with the outside world, they never lost touch with the inner truth.



*Hall Attendants - (l to r) Rangaswamy, Satyananda Swami, T.P.Ramachandra Iyer, Venkataratnam, Ramakrishna Swami, Subrahmaniam, Sivananda Swami*



*S. Doraiswamy Iyer with Sri Bhagavan inside the 'New Hall'*

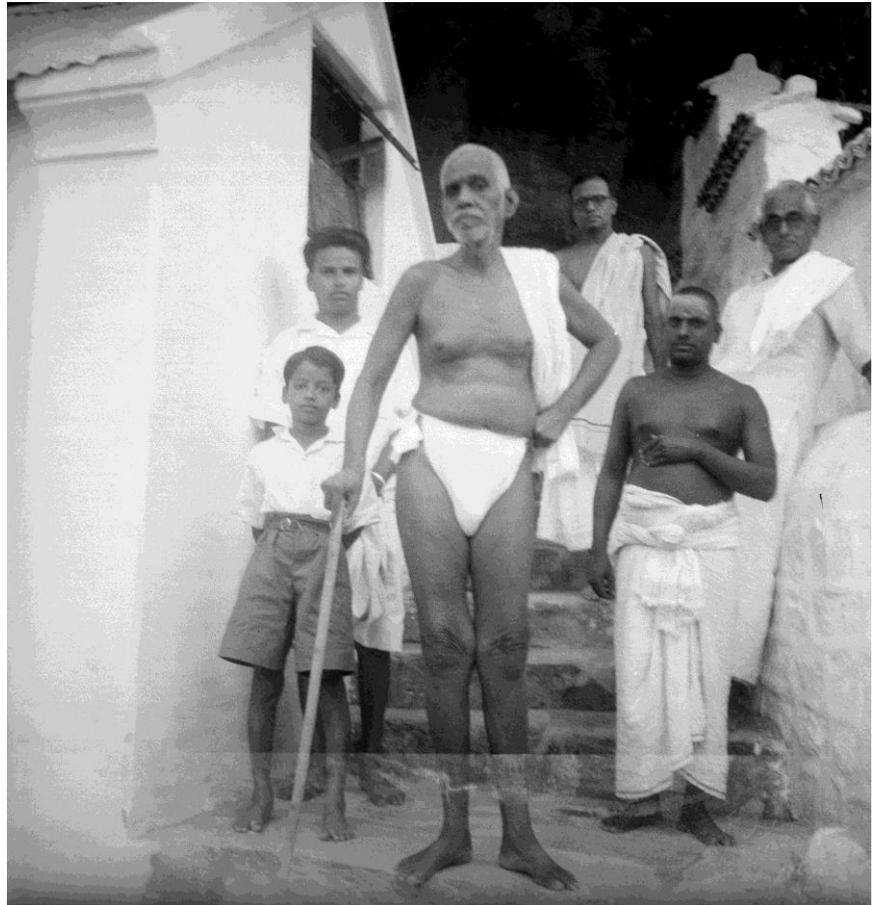
## S. Doraiswamy Iyer



Doraiswami Iyer, a scholar, first saw Bhagavan in the early 1920's in Skandashram. He later became an illustrious lawyer. But, would Bhagavan let him wander in 'dazzling' darkness in the form of fame? He drew him back into his fold to serve as one of his hall attendants between 1948 and 1950. By this time, Doraiswami Iyer was a very well known figure and had powerful contacts in the government. He used his remarkable influence at the time Bhagavan had to be treated for cancer. He saw to it that the necessary instruments and specialists were brought to Tiruvannamalai to treat and serve Bhagavan.

The mere thought of S. Doraiswami Iyer makes my heart melt with gratitude. It was my good fortune to meet him at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry in 1960. This was where he was living at the time. I went there to interview him for an article in *The Mountain Path*. He generously shared with me a sacred secret: "When I was in Skandashram in the 1920's, I found

myself alone with Bhagavan one day. I was totally aware that Bhagavan was divinity itself in human form. This was something that was recognized by all the old devotees of Bhagavan. That Bhagavan was not a mere saint or ascetic was the firm belief of all his devotees from the west and the east. No matter what method or faith they were following, they had no doubt that Bhagavan was divinity in human form. However, for some reason I was overcome with a powerful spiritual urge that compelled me to mentally pose a question, 'Bhagavan, who are you in reality?' No words had been uttered. But Bhagavan seemed to have heard the question. He looked at me, stood up and came in my direction. He held out his hand, took my hand in his and almost dragged me further up the hill. We reached the top of the hill with amazing ease. The all prevailing presence of Bhagavan and his close physical proximity made me feel so ecstatic that I fell prostrate at his holy feet. Even from that position, I could see that he was sending his piercing glance of grace directly into my Heart. He said, 'Who else is Arunachala than 'I AM'? Look within; you too are Arunachala. Plunge inwards.' He then bent in my direction and touched my Heart with his hand. At that very moment, I experienced Bhagavan as Arunachala and felt that I was none other than the rock on which I was seated.



*Sri Bhagavan at 'Skandashram'  
(Doraiswamy Iyer is on His left, leaning  
on the wall)*

Arunachala alone pervaded everything as truth. I prostrated again at the holy feet of Bhagavan."

Doraiswamy Iyer was in an ecstatic state as he completed this extraordinary narration. He shook me by my shoulders and said, "Ganesan, even now I experience Arunachala all the time. Stay in Arunachala, stay with Bhagavan's teaching, and everything will end well. I bless you." The narration moved me so much that I was in tears. I fell at his feet and requested him to bless me. He gave me a beautiful smile and as he lifted me up, suggested, "Ganesan, go! Search! Look all around this room! Except for this single framed photo of Bhagavan, you will not find any other photos. I look at it all the time. To me, it is very real. Bhagavan personally gave it to me in 1938." Choked with emotion, he could continue no further. In Aurobindo Ashram, every room has the picture of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Yet, this resident of Aurobindo Ashram had only the picture of Bhagavan in his room. These spiritual giants are also nothing but Bhagavan. A few weeks after this incident, Doraiswami Iyer dropped the body.



*'Nirvana Room' : Where Sri Bhagavan spent His last days*

## Sivananda Swami



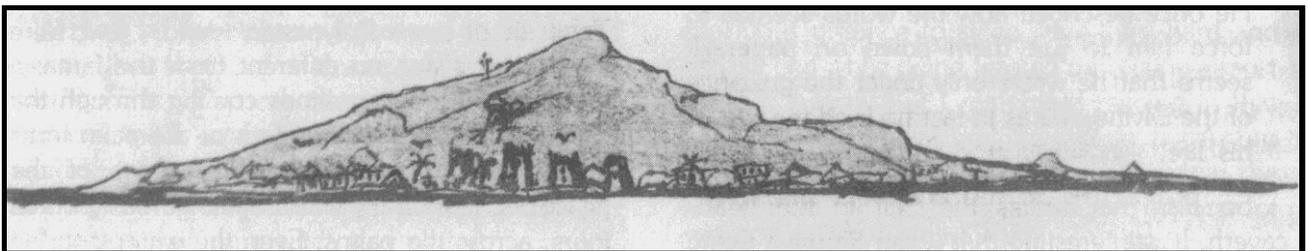
Doraiswamy Iyer was a very well to do and educated man who was blessed by Bhagavan. In contrast, the next attendant was ignorant, innocent and humble. Sivananda Swami was known for his childlike innocence. It was perhaps because of this innocence and inner purity that Bhagavan blessed him, not just once, but on two occasions.

The original Tamil version of the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* had just been published. It was published under the title *Nool Thirattu*. The book was available in the ashram bookstore. Some of Bhagavan's attendants could afford to buy the book. But Sivananda Swami, a complete renunciate, had no money in his possession. My grandfather, the *sarvadhikari*, being the strict disciplinarian that he was, would not give the book free of cost to anyone. Could Bhagavan leave his humble devotee without this precious book? Bhagavan had an unused notebook. In this notebook, he copied the entire collected works in Tamil. He never revealed what he was doing - he only kept writing for long periods of time. When the task was completed, he called out, "Sivanandam, come here. Where will you go for the money to buy the book? I have myself copied the whole work. Keep it."

Sivananda Swami felt so ecstatic that he wanted to plunge into *sadhana* that very instant. However, understanding that he needed Bhagavan's help to achieve this, he approached Bhagavan, and with childlike innocence asked, "Bhagavan, will you give me a mantra or a special *upadesa* by which I can emancipate myself?" Bhagavan smiled and replied, "*Unakku nee unmaiyaaga iru*". Though, it literally means, 'Be true to yourself', its true spiritual content is 'Abide always [in you] as Awareness'.

Bhagavan called him again after a few days. During this time, Sivanandam, having turned inwards, sensed that Bhagavan was Arunachala. He wondered to himself, "Is it true? Is Bhagavan Arunachala?" The very next day, Bhagavan called out to Sivanandam and said, "Bring me your notebook." Sivanandam brought the notebook that Bhagavan had given him. Bhagavan kept the notebook for a couple of hours, and then opening the notebook to a particular page asked, "Where is the doubt? Are you satisfied?" Bhagavan was pointing to a sketch of Arunachala that he himself had drawn because Sivanandam had the doubt whether Bhagavan was Arunachala or not. Sivanandam was delighted to receive this clarification.

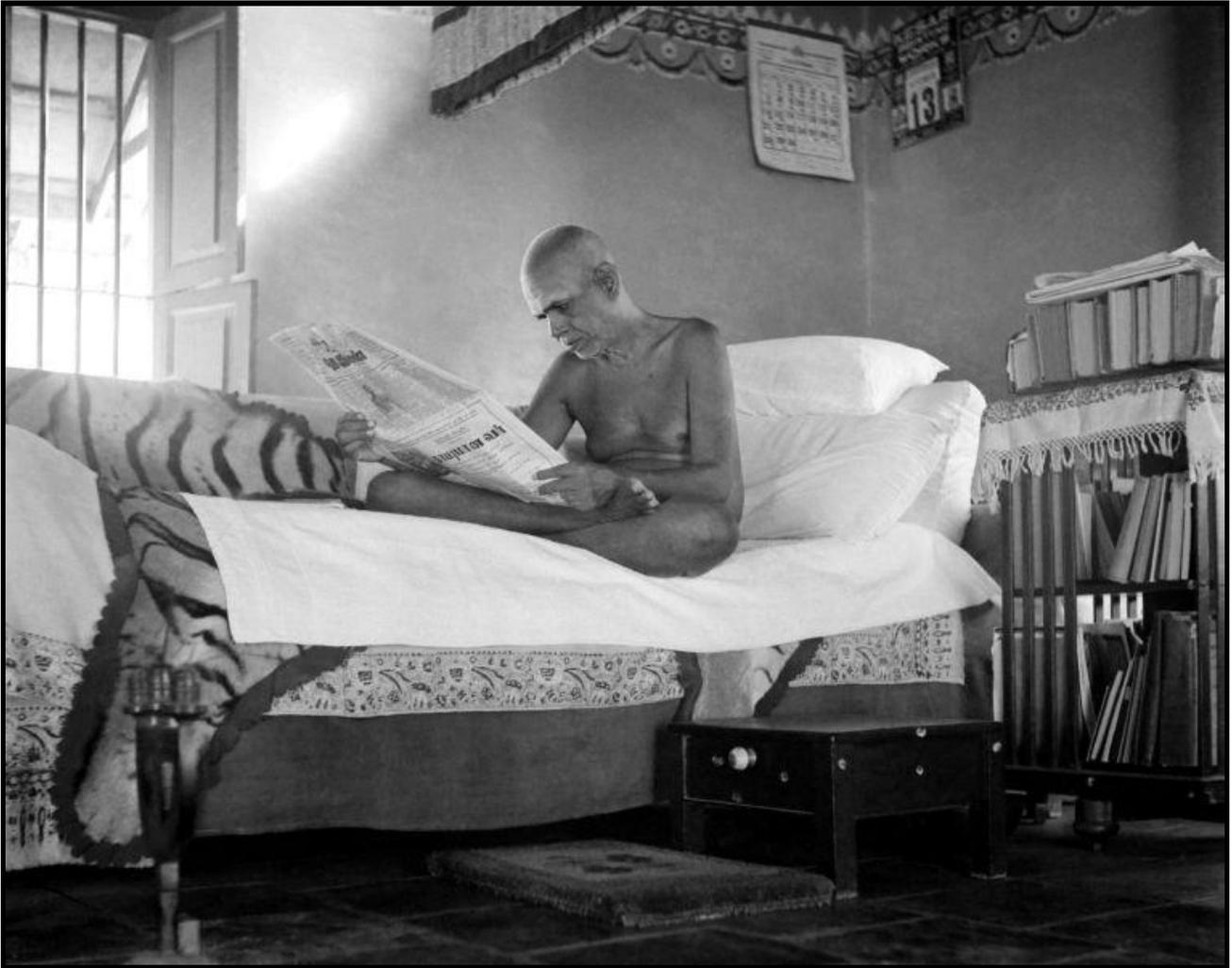
Sivananda Swami had another wonderful experience on the very night that Bhagavan dropped his body. When Sivananda Swami was in the Nirvana Room in the early hours of the morning, Bhagavan called out to him. Sivananda Swami went up to him and Bhagavan said, "*Santhosham*," meaning 'I am happy'. Everyone else in the room was already tense and anxious because it was obvious that Bhagavan would shed his body at any moment. They all wondered why Bhagavan had said '*santhosham*' because this definitely was not a happy situation; in fact, many people were in tears. Bhagavan looked at Sivananda Swami and explained, "The English people say 'thank you' to express their gratitude; we have no such substitute except '*santhosham*'." The marvel of it was that at that very moment, Sivananda Swami experienced happiness and bliss.



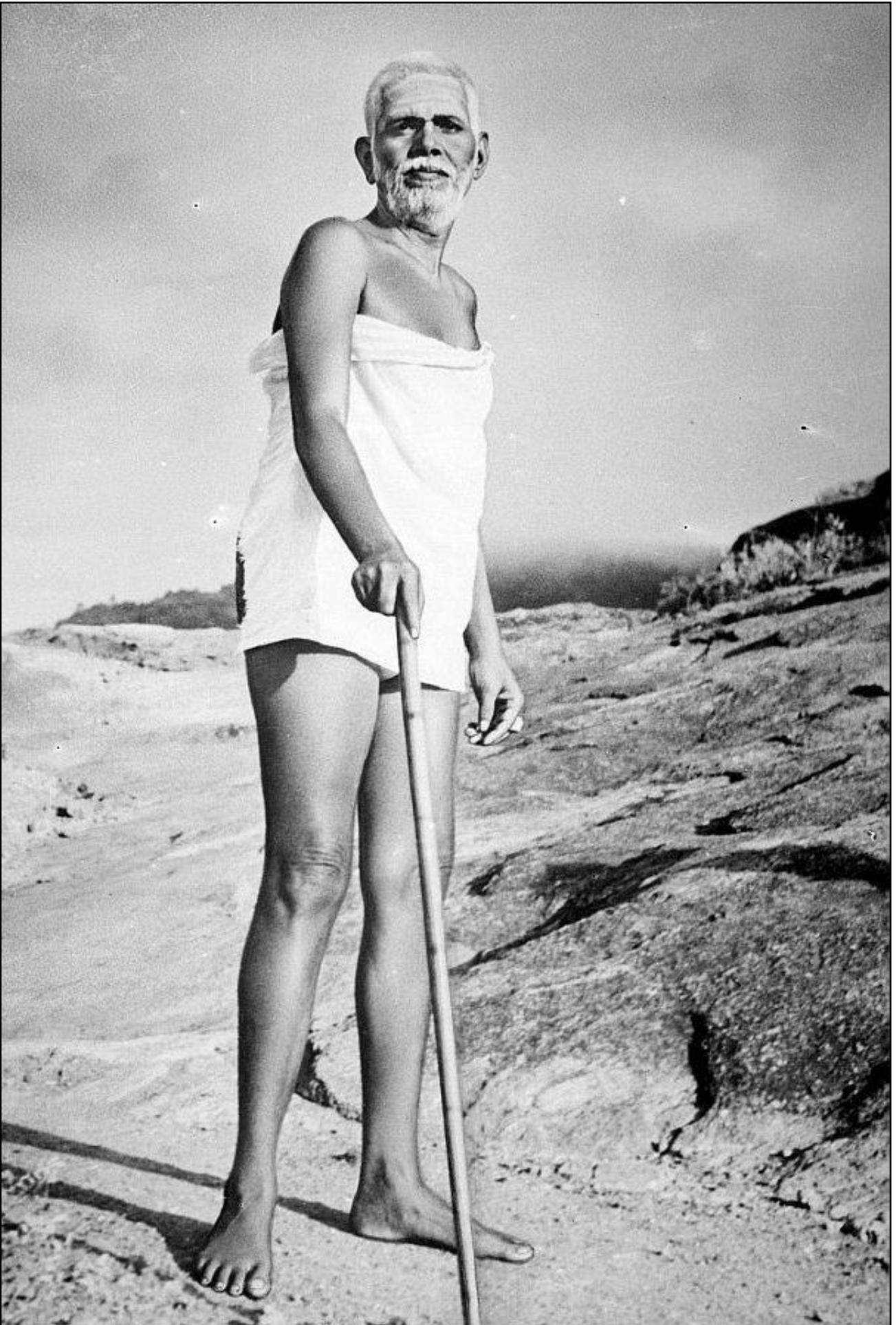
Sri Bhagavan drew Arunachala as the frontispiece for Sivananda Swami's notebook

I developed a very close rapport with Sivananda Swami during the 1960's and 1970's. He once told me, "Ganesan, a few days before Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*, I was alone with him. Gathering courage, I asked him, 'Bhagavan! The Saints say that God exists and many have even seen God. Is there God? If so, can I see Him, experience Him?' Bhagavan looked at me smiling and pouring his munificent Grace on me, said, 'Sivanandam! You say you breathe. Who breathes?' Instantaneously, I was consumed in the 'Presence of God'!

This same, humble and innocent attendant blessed me saying, "Ganesan, the core of Bhagavan's teaching is that happiness is one's true nature. Outwardly, Bhagavan is Arunachala, and inwardly Arunachala is happiness. Remain in that state of happiness. I bless you."



*Sri Bhagavan in the 'Old Hall'. Notice His reference library on wheels, next to Him.*



## Ramakrishna Swami



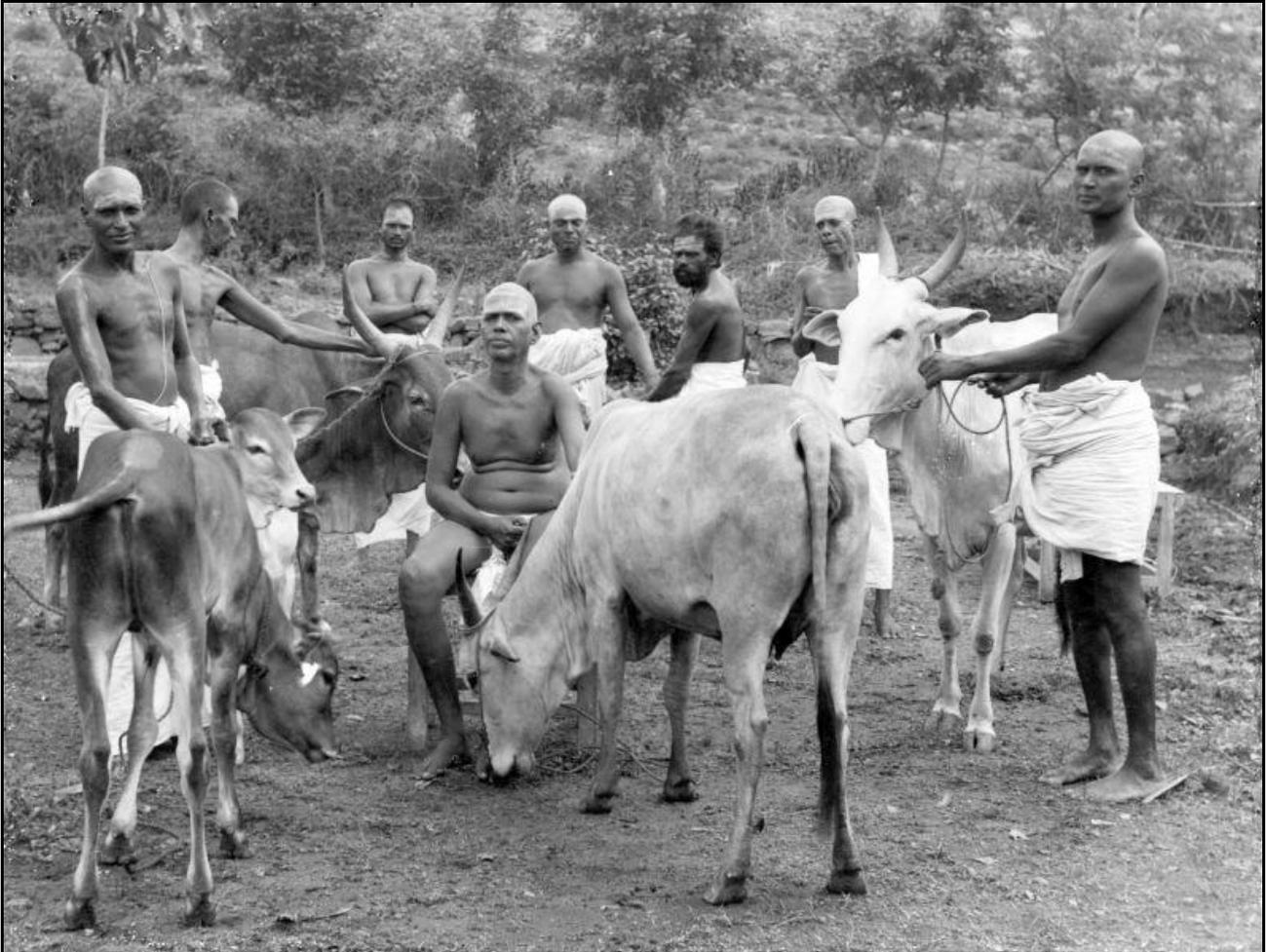
Ramakrishna Swami and Kunju Swami lived in neighbouring villages. In fact, it was Ramakrishna Swami who persuaded Kunju Swami to visit Bhagavan around 1920. Kunju Swami was serving Bhagavan, but when he decided to go to Palaakothu to do *sadhana*, he brought in Ramakrishna Swami to take his place. Ramakrishna Swami was a remarkably intelligent man; he was also innocent like Sivananda Swami. He served Bhagavan with such attention and alacrity that he pleased both Bhagavan and Niranjanananda Swami. Desperately needing help in running the stores and maintaining the ashram gardens, Niranjanananda Swami requested Ramakrishna Swami to assist him. With the permission of Bhagavan, Ramakrishna Swami served the ashram management with total dedication and devotion. Niranjanananda Swami remained ever grateful to this devotee and always spoke highly of him.

Ramakrishna Swami was very kind to me. He narrated many incidents relating to Bhagavan and himself. One day, while serving Bhagavan in the hall, Ramakrishna Swami approached Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I want to devote myself solely to contemplation and meditation. May I go to Virupaksha cave for this?" Bhagavan looked very pleased and said, "Go and stay there." Ramakrishna Swami found bliss within a week. One day, while he was in deep meditation, he found that he had, in his mind's eye, travelled far away to the famous Nataraja temple in Chidambaram. He had a vision of the sanctum sanctorum; he also saw that the curtain next to the shrine was on the point of catching fire. The vision was so distinct that he woke up from his trance with a jolt. That evening, the entire town was talking about a fire accident that had taken place in the Chidambaram temple. Ramakrishna Swami was highly pleased with himself. Thinking he had spiritually evolved a lot in just one week, he ran to Bhagavan in order to narrate the incident. Having listened to him intently, Bhagavan burst out in annoyance, "Ramakrishna! Did you go to Virupaksha cave only to see a vision? Did you not go there to intensify your meditation? Seeing anything outside of oneself with either physical eyes or the psychic eye is a sure sign of interruption in the smooth flow of meditation. The attainment of any kind of *siddhi* or supernatural power is an obstruction to one's spiritual journey. Enough of your isolation and meditation! Come down!" Bhagavan's words came as an awakening to Ramakrishna Swami. He never indulged himself in visions from that day onwards. He fully understood that the proximity of the guru was necessary to activate the meditative current in his heart. So, he plunged into work, both in the garden and in the store. The ashram garden blossomed because of Ramakrishna Swami and Ramaswamy Pillai. The store too, became more efficient because of Ramakrishna Swami's presence and hard work.

Ramakrishna Swami was subject to epileptic fits from childhood. Sometimes, while working in the store, he would be attacked by a fit that would leave him unconscious for hours. He would then be carried to the ashram dispensary for which they had to go through a narrow passage that passed by Bhagavan's Old Hall. Once, Bhagavan happened to look at this sight through his window. When Ramakrishna Swami became all right, he went to Bhagavan and prostrated before him. Bhagavan enquired, "Hey, Ramakrishna! How did you feel?" What Bhagavan was actually asking about was how he had felt in the state when he had fits. Ramakrishna Swami replied, "Bhagavan, I did not know anything. I lost consciousness of the body and the surroundings. I knew nothing." Bhagavan told him, "No, no; it should not be like that. You should hold on to the inner awareness all the time. Even if you lose *pragnya* (outward consciousness), you should never let go of *gnyapti* (inward awareness)." Ramakrishna Swami understood what Bhagavan meant. And what was the impact of the teaching? He never had epileptic fits again!

This was the explanation that Ramakrishna Swami gave me about *gnyapti*: "*Pragnya* refers to the consciousness that we have of the body and its surroundings. What we see or experience is *pragnya*; *pragnya* is outward awareness. *Gnyapti* refers to pure, inward awareness; it is one's state of natural awareness. For instance, when a person wakes up, there is a state of alertness or awareness when he understands that he has woken up and is no longer asleep. This takes place in a short span of time. We

all experience this state. Though it is a spiritual experience, since we do not pay pointed attention to it, it passes unnoticed every day . We do not allow the experience to last because of our compulsive urge to jump out of bed and get into our routine. This state of awareness when there is no movement or preoccupation, which is yet to descend to the level of consciousness, is the state of *gnyapti*. This is a state that can be experienced by anyone.” (Nisargadatta Maharaj made a clear cut distinction between the two by saying, “When awareness catches hold of an object, it becomes consciousness.”)



*Sri Bhagavan showering His Love on Ashram cows. Cow Lakshmi is offering prostrations by surrendering herself at His feet. (Ramakrishna Swami is standing at extreme right).*

## Vaikuntavasar

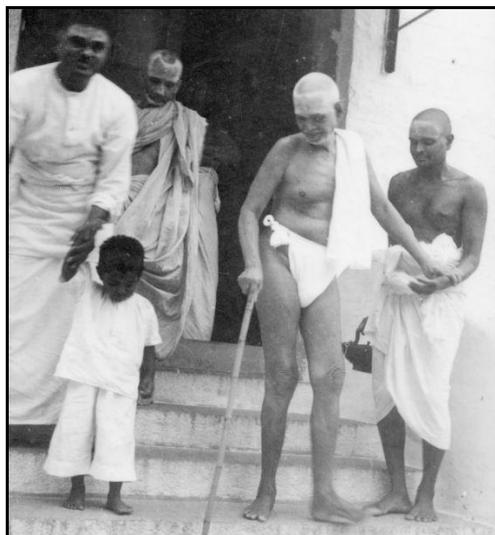


Vaikuntavasar was another simple person. From his association with saints and their elucidation of the scriptures, he understood that guru seva, or service to a master, is the surest way of attaining spiritual perfection. He went in search of a master to whom he could dedicate himself. Since he was not a learned man, he could not understand the scriptures on his own. So, what did Bhagavan do? He pulled Vaikuntavasar towards him. Bhagavan's single look was enough to convince him that here was his master. In Vaikuntavasar's own words, "He was God in human form. I was delighted when I was selected as Bhagavan's personal attendant. Every moment, I was aware that I was serving God and not a human being."

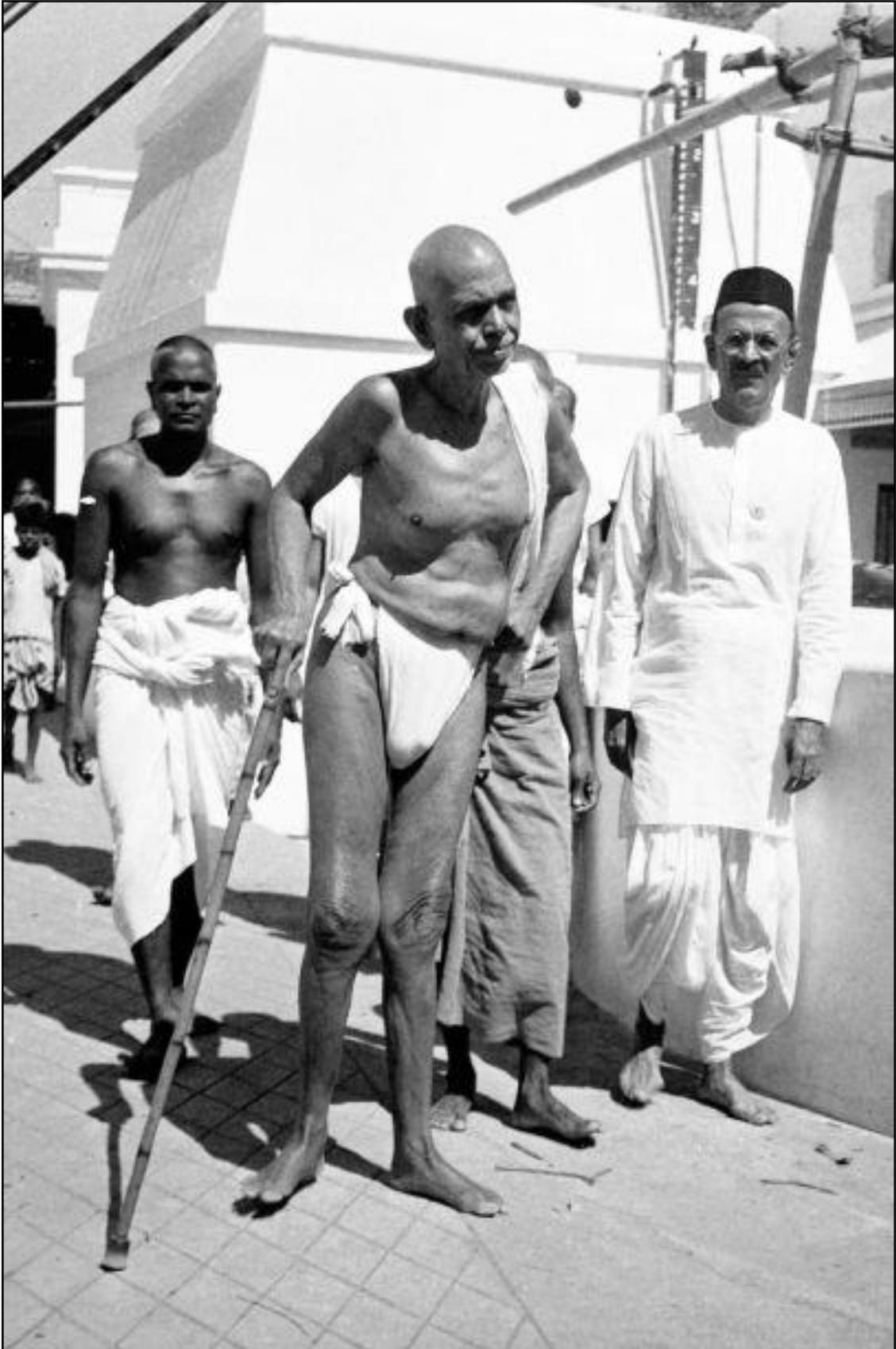
But, though Vaikuntavasar saw Bhagavan as God, it was not as though their relationship was devoid of lighter moments - far from it. One early morning in the Old Hall, when Vaikuntavasar picked up his mat from the floor to roll it, he found a snake coiled under it. In sheer fright, he exclaimed, "Bhagavan, snake, snake!" Bhagavan looked at the snake and then told Vaikuntavasar with a calming smile, "Why fear Vaikuntavasar? It is only your mattress that has come looking for you!" Bhagavan was alluding to Adishesha, the five hooded serpent who is popularly depicted as the bed on which Lord Vishnu, also known as Vaikuntavasar, reclines. This humorous remark instantly dissolved his attendant's fear.

When I became more closely associated with Vaikuntavasar, I ventured to ask, "Can you give me instances from your life when Bhagavan actually showered his grace on you?" Vaikuntavasar said, "Once, at one o'clock in the night, I found Bhagavan walking out of the ashram, and moving towards the hill. I followed him. There was a bed of sand between Bhagavan and me. It was pitch dark, and I was trying to concentrate on the path that Bhagavan had taken. Suddenly, I heard the sound of wooden clogs moving closer and closer; the sound became louder and then went on past. Despite the sound, no one was visible. I was awestruck because I recollected Bhagavan saying that an invisible *siddhapurusha* lived on top of the hill, and that he was Arunachala himself. I broke into a sweat. When Bhagavan looked at me, he said, "So, you heard it!" He continued, "The *siddhapurusha* who resides on top of the mountain is none other than Arunachala. He can rarely be seen. It is good that you could hear him."

These devotees of Bhagavan did not offer just physical assistance to Bhagavan. They received Bhagavan's blessings to the fullest so that they could regain the state of perfection within themselves.



Bhagavan is holding Vaikuntavasar's hand. The child is 'Ramana', son of Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami. Eknath Rao and Amrithanatha Yati are also seen.



*Walking near the Ashram well (l to r) Vaikuntavasar, Sri Bhagavan, Dr. M. Anantanarayana Rao*

## Dr. M. Anantanarayana Rao



Bhagavan once remarked, "For the physical body to drop, it has to catch some kind of disease." Bhagavan was afflicted with sarcoma on his left elbow. Sarcoma is one of the most painful forms of cancer. This was, in a way, the beginning of the end. What is fascinating is the way Bhagavan drew top specialists to him. Bhagavan had to bring all these doctors together because the final scene of the drama had to be enacted - it was time for Bhagavan to drop his body.

Dr. Anantanarayana Rao was a well established veterinarian. In 1929, he was traveling by train from Bombay. He was to get down at the next station when the person sitting beside him gave him a small picture of Bhagavan and told him, "This is a great sage who lives in Tiruvannamalai, South India." Since Dr. Rao held sages and saints in great respect, he accepted the photograph with gratitude. Dr. Rao left for London in 1930 for further studies and forgot all about the photograph. But, would Bhagavan let him forget? In 1932, the government appointed Dr. Rao to conduct a medical study in South India. When he came south, he remembered the photograph that he had been given on the train. He told his wife, "We are going to meet a saint." He arrived in Tiruvannamalai with his wife and his friend, Dr. Siva Rao, who also served Bhagavan.

Dr. Anantanarayana Rao had constantly been associated with saints and sages. However, when he saw Bhagavan in 1932 the thought flashed vividly through his mind, "Here is God in human form. This is what the scriptures have described about the *satguru*, the *jivanmukta*, the *siddha purusha* and the *jnani*." He started frequenting the ashram as often as possible. On his second visit, he not only understood the divinity of the Maharshi but also gained an insight into the teaching of Self Enquiry. Sitting in the presence of Bhagavan, he attained the state of quietude almost effortlessly. Whatever he had read about the state of inner bliss and inner perfection, he experienced by merely sitting before Bhagavan. With this experience, began his constant practice of Self Enquiry.

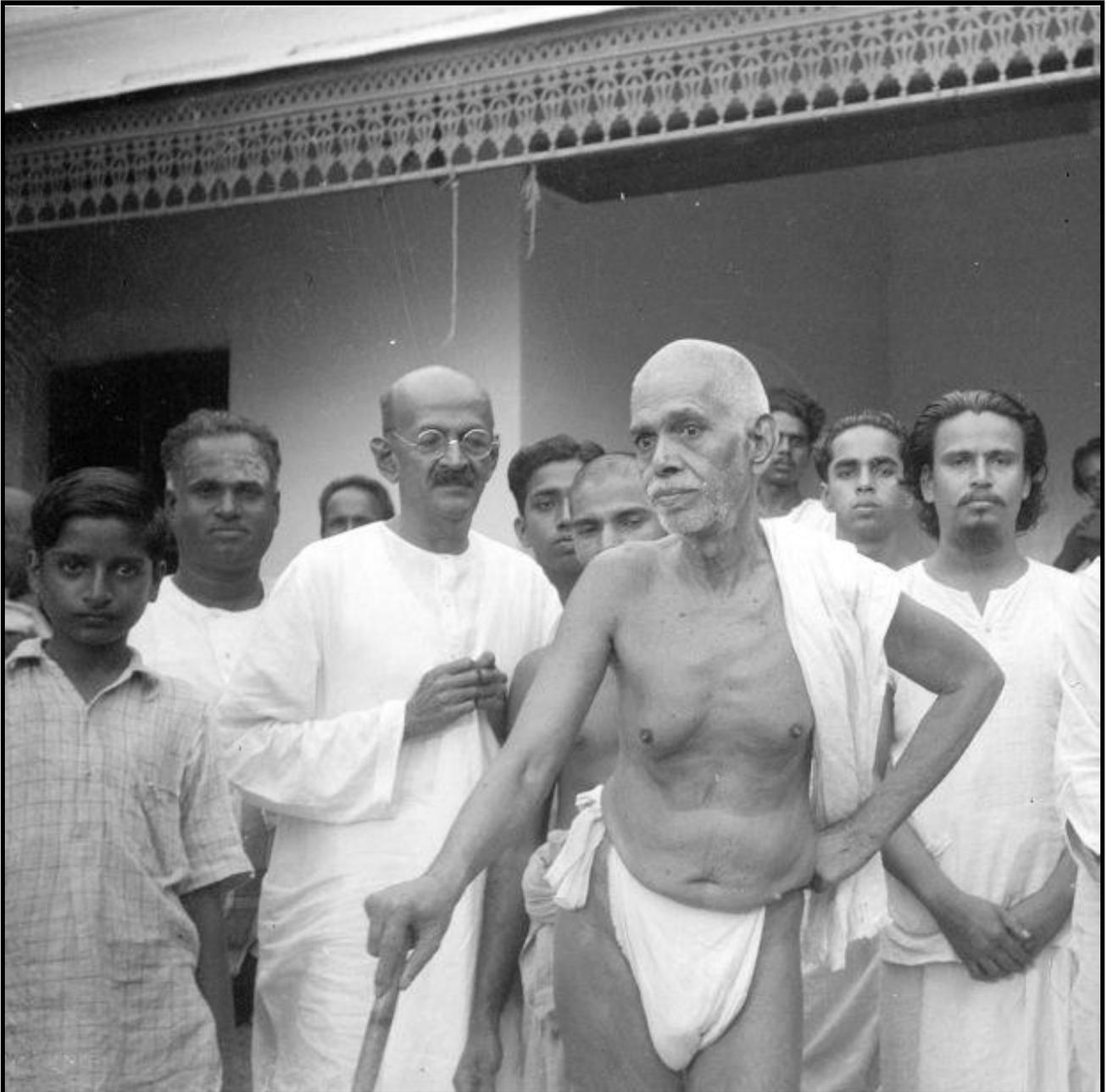
In 1943, he constructed a house opposite the ashram and lived there. He maintained a garden within the compound of his house where he grew special fruit trees that would yield fruits quickly. The first fruits of these trees were always offered to Bhagavan. Bhagavan would cut the fruit into pieces, take a piece and then ask Dr. Rao to distribute the rest of the pieces among the other devotees gathered there. The strange thing about it was that for almost three years, the doctor himself never got a single piece of fruit as *prasad*. On one such occasion, he returned to Bhagavan with the empty plate after distributing the *prasad*. With anguish in his heart, he thought, "Why haven't I yet received *prasad* from Bhagavan?" Just then, Bhagavan called out, "Anantanarayana Rao, come here. I have observed that in all these years you have always distributed fruits to everyone, but you have never got a single piece of fruit." Then, taking out a slice of fruit that was near his own slice, he said, "I have kept a piece for you. Come and take it." Dr. Rao was thrilled! Recalling the incident, Dr. Rao told me, "Bhagavan gave it with his own hand. I received it and ate it; it was a spiritual experience because Bhagavan put me in that state."

As a seeker, he learnt two lessons from this. Firstly, a seeker should be able to give away everything, without the feeling of having to hold on to it. Then, one should wait for the *satguru's* grace. Having imbibed these two spiritual lessons, he prayed, "Bhagavan, I want to serve you personally." By this, he meant that he wanted the opportunity to massage the feet of Bhagavan because the Hindu scriptures say that one gains a great deal spiritually by touching the feet of a holy person. He had this good fortune in 1948 when Niranjanananda Swami asked him, "Can you be Bhagavan's personal attendant?" He was told that as a personal attendant it would be his duty and privilege to massage the limbs of Bhagavan. Dr. Anantanarayana Rao was deliriously happy!

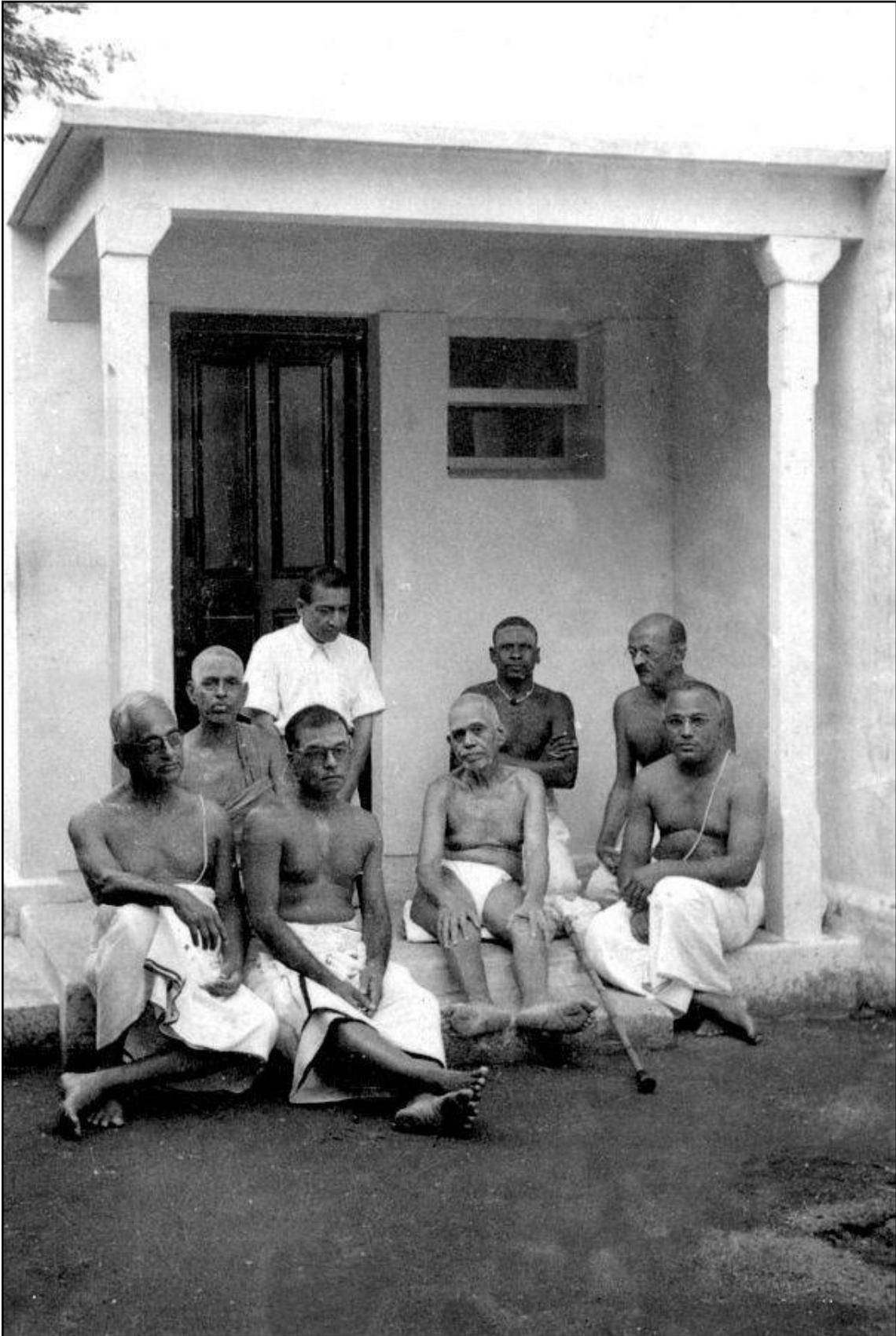
However, Bhagavan distributed even the parts of his body equally as he did everything else! He would let one attendant massage his right arm; the other would attend to his left arm and so on and so forth. Dr. Rao felt that even these small actions of Bhagavan had great significance. "Every word, every gesture, had the greatest significance. The ultimate truth would be there. It was not just a momentary,

fleeting experience.” It was not without reason that Dr. Rao was given not Bhagavan’s feet, but his left arm to massage. This was the arm that was affected by cancer. “Even in this, Bhagavan was so compassionate,” commented Dr. Rao, “He gave me his left arm so that I could bandage it till the last day.”

He was there when Bhagavan took his last breath. I too had the privilege of being in the presence of Bhagavan then. During the last few moments, since they wanted to administer oxygen to Bhagavan, the doctors requested everyone to leave the room. Everyone left - my grandfather, my father and Bhagavan’s sister. I was standing outside the Nirvana Room. T. P. Ramachandra Iyer told me, “Hey, stay here.” In this manner, I was blessed because I could see the ‘light’. Dr. Anantanarayana Rao, along with Dr. R. Subramaniam and Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami were also there.



*(l to r) Sundaram (present President of the Ashram), Dr. Anantanarayana Rao, T. N. Venkataraman.*



(l to r) S. Doraiswamy Iyer, TPR, Sri Bhagavan, Dr. Subramanian (Sadhu Brahmaniam)  
(second row) Niranjanananda Swami, Dr. Shankar Rau, Sivananda Swami, Dr. Anantanarayana Rao

## Sadhu Brahmaniam



Bhagavan had already undergone four surgeries under the best of doctors. How did all these doctors come? That is the beauty of Bhagavan's direction. Dr. Subramanian who was named Sadhu Brahmaniam after he took *sannyas*, went abroad in 1930 at the request of the Government of India. His mother, an ardent devotee of Bhagavan, stayed in Arunachala during this period. When Dr. Subramanian returned from his stint abroad, he came to Arunachala to meet his mother. Being an intellectual, he first visited the ashram bookstore and bought whatever books were available. On entering the hall, he placed the set of books before Bhagavan and prostrated. Bhagavan bent forward and touched each and every book. Before returning the books to Dr. Subramanian, Bhagavan turned to the doctor's mother and enquired, "Is this your son?" Then, he looked at Dr. Subramanian. With that one look of grace, a doctor who had no spiritual aspirations and who had just returned from abroad got the realization, "Here is God! Here is the *satguru*." Soon, he started coming to Bhagavan every week.

I became closely associated with Dr. Subramanian, especially after he took *sannyas*. He told me that this one look of Bhagavan transformed him radically. The set of books that he placed before Bhagavan became very precious to him

because Bhagavan had touched them. He no longer regarded them as mere reading material. He placed these books in his *pooja* room and offered worship to them, not as a ritual but because he believed that they were special. He bought another set of books to read and started practicing Self Enquiry.

I asked Sadhu Brahmaniam, "Did you ever ask Bhagavan any questions?" He looked at me, patted me on the back and answered, "Ganesan, there was no need. Bhagavan's one look established me in that state of inner felicity. In order to make myself firm and steady in that state, I have his books. These books give you all the intellectual elucidation you need to go to that state. Bhagavan already gave that state to me. That look of Bhagavan and these books are more than enough. There was no doubt in my mind." After this experience, Dr. Subramanian was made the Director of Medical Services and Public Health, the highest post in the Government Health Department. Referring to this, he would often laugh and comment, "Do not worry. Bhagavan will not only give you the highest spiritual state but also look after your physical and mental needs."

He continued, "How beautifully Bhagavan gave me that post! On account of my position in the government, I was able to procure all the necessary instruments for Bhagavan from the various hospitals in Chennai. When the small tumor on Bhagavan's arm recurred after its removal in April 1949, S. Doraiswamy Iyer asked me to bring a specialist from Madras. I acted immediately. Dr. Rajan, the Minister of Health, was a good friend of mine, and he gave me a free hand. I was able to operate within the framework of the rules and regulations laid down by the government. Radium treatment, the best treatment for cancer at that time, was offered to Bhagavan at the ashram. The best of surgeons came, and I felt blessed that I could offer this kind of service to Bhagavan, my one and only God and *satguru*. I was able to continue this service till his *mahasamadhi* on April 14, 1950. He was ever so compassionate! He gave me an opportunity to serve him because I prayed for it. He gave me this opportunity till the last breath of his life." Sadhu Brahmaniam could continue no longer because he became emotional on narrating his experience.

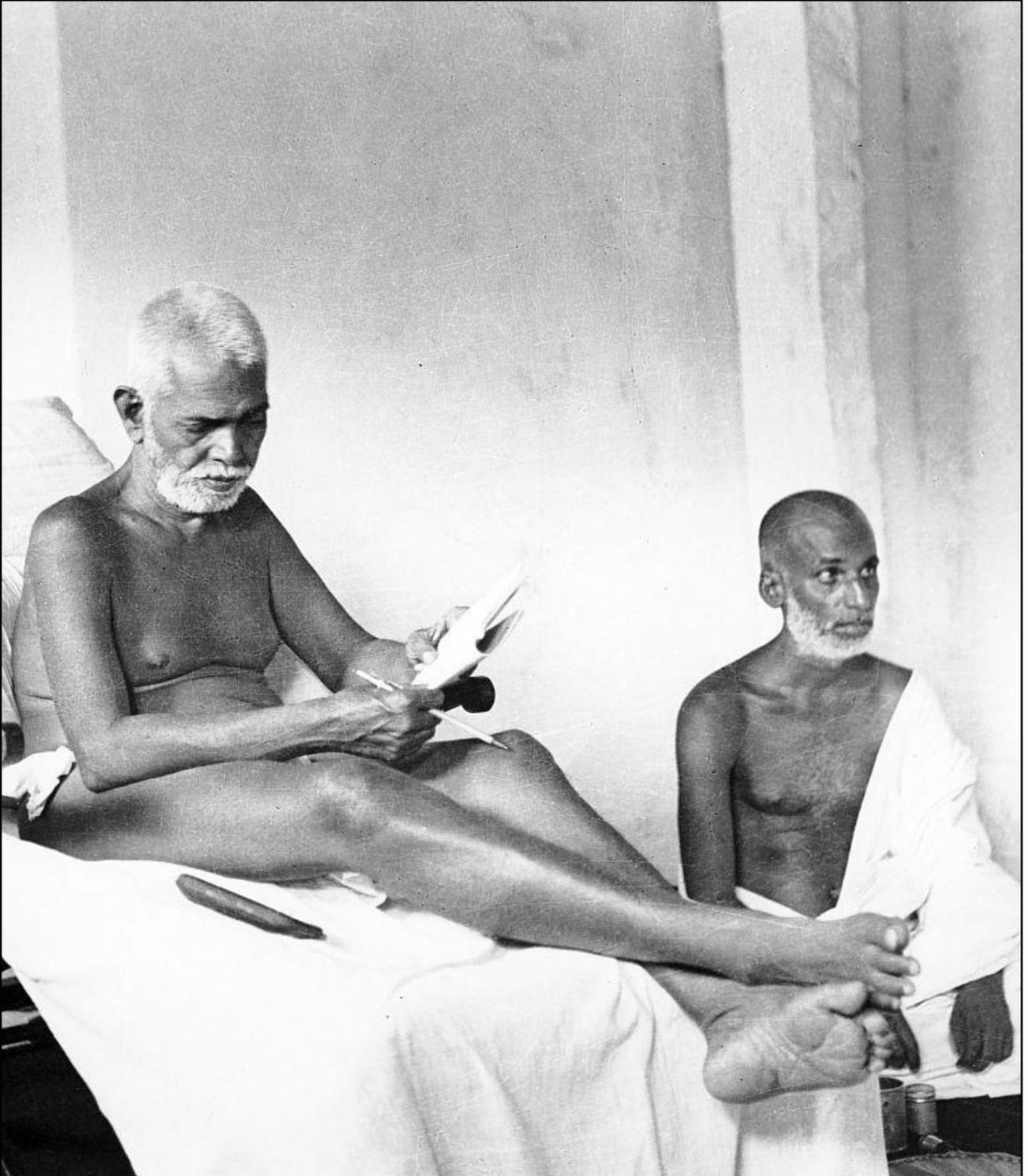
After Bhagavan gave up his physical body, Dr. Subramanian too retired. He dedicated his life to the pursuit of Self Enquiry. He built a cottage and named it Ramana Kutir. When I entered the cottage the first time, he said, "Ganesan, come, come!" He led me to the *pooja* room and ordered me to prostrate.

And before what did I prostrate? Yes, the books that Bhagavan had touched and given him! Two days before Bhagavan was to give up his body, many ardent devotees, led by Muruganar approached Bhagavan. Muruganar was the spokesman of the devotees. They wanted to find out from Bhagavan how they should continue living once he left them physically. They could not say this in so many words, so they asked him, "Bhagavan, please shower your blessings on us." Would the master not know what they meant? He gave them a beautiful smile and said, "Put the teaching into practice." He did not refer to which teaching, and neither did he talk about it as *his* teaching. He only said, "Put *the* teaching into practice."

So, what are we all waiting for? Bhagavan will take us to the peak as he did with his attendants because everyone is included in his fold. God has no partiality and neither does the *satguru*. Bhagavan was gracious to the physicians who attended on him. Bhagavan stretches out his hand to one and all, no matter at which altitude the person is standing. He will take us to the peak in order to give us that spiritual elevation. Are we ready to reach out to that extended hand of Bhagavan?

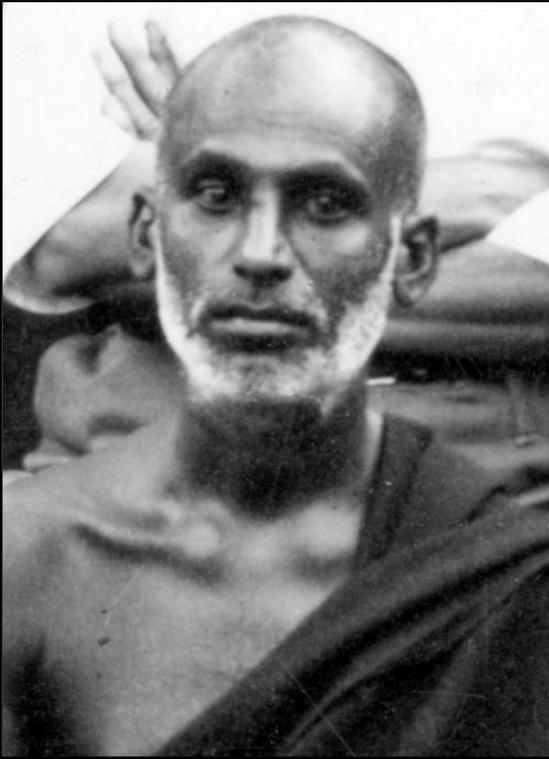


*Last photo of Sri Bhagavan, inside the 'Nirvana Room' (ten days before His Mahanirvana)*



*Sri Bhagavan – Yogi Ramiah*

## Yogi Ramiah



Paul Brunton's dramatic introduction and subsequent high praise for Yogi Ramiah in his book, *A Search in Secret India*, made him very popular among Bhagavan's devotees across the world. It was in the 1930's. Paul Brunton was entering his hut when to his horror and loathing he saw a cobra with a raised hood inside. As he stood frozen and helpless outside the hut, a well built man, like a graven Buddha, came and took in the situation with a glance. Raising both his hands to calm the cobra, he entered the hut. In response, the cobra put down its raised hood near the man's feet. The man then calmly bent down and stroked the cobra's tail as it slithered out of the room. Surprised Paul Brunton asked, "Are you not afraid?" The man replied, "What have I to be afraid of? I approached it without hatred and with love in my heart for all beings." Thrilled with the man's actions and words, Brunton asked him for his name. "Yogi Ramiah," was the reply.

Yogi Ramiah's parents were devout and very wealthy. Consequently, he was more interested in enjoying the good things in life than paying attention to his studies. At the age of eighteen - this is how the divine operates - he happened to read a book on saint Kabir. On reading it,

the unreality of the world exploded like a bomb in his face. He had been taking the world to be real. But, after reading about Kabir's life and teachings, he was a changed man. Now, thirsting to know what the truth is, he started searching for a guru. One day, he met a guru who advised him to chant the name 'Rama', five thousand times every day if he wanted to know the truth. So intense was the young man's thirst for truth that he countered, "What if I chant more?" The guru replied, "The benefit you reap will be greater." Not letting up, Ramiah persisted, "What will happen if I chant it continuously?" Thrilled by the young man's question, instead of replying, the guru embraced him and initiated him into the Rama mantra. From that moment onwards, whatever else he was doing, he was chanting the mantra without interruption. During this time, another guru initiated him into the breathing techniques of *hatha yoga pranayama*. The intense practice of these two further deepened his conviction that the world was unreal.

He now wanted to go to Benares and spend the rest of his life there. Look at the divine intervention: on the way, he happened to meet the same guru who had given him the mantra. On being told that he was going to Benares, the guru told Ramiah, "Go back to your village and pursue your *sadhana* continuously in your garden." Without hesitation, Ramiah obeyed and returned home to do his *sadhana*. In due course, he had the vision of Lord Rama. On pursuing it even more intensely, he experienced the disappearance of the external Rama. Instead, he started feeling God within as the Self. Puzzled, he went and queried scholars, "Can the subject and the object be the same? Can they remain indistinct as one?" Their answer that the subject is different from the object did not satisfy him. So, he went on searching for someone who could solve his doubt. One of these searches led him in the thirties to the Old Hall in Ramanasramam. Obsessed with his doubt, he asked, "Can the subject and the object be one?" Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, who was also in the hall, answered, "Of course not, the subject is different from object." Pained, Ramiah looked at Bhagavan. Disagreeing with Kavyakantha, Bhagavan clarified, "The subject and object are distinct in the phenomenal world to the ordinary man. But in the experience of *samadhi* they merge and become one."

This answer dissolved Ramiah's doubt. He instantly took Bhagavan as his *satguru* and decided to stay on in Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan gave him a lot of attention because Ramiah lived like a real yogi. At ten in the morning, he would have the only meal of his day - a limited amount of lentils that he himself cooked. Otherwise, he was either in a rock cave in Palaakothu pursuing his *sadhana* or spending hours together in front of Bhagavan. He was the only person who was freely permitted to be with Bhagavan



Group of devotees with Sri Bhagavan on the Hill. Yogi Ramiah is seen last but one from extreme right.

anywhere and at any time. He loved Bhagavan's direct teaching of Self Enquiry and Bhagavan loved him. Since Ramiah knew only his mother tongue, Telugu, Bhagavan of his own accord translated *Upadesa Saram* and *Ulladu Narpadu* into Telugu to help him pursue Self Enquiry.

He had beautiful conversations with Bhagavan, some of which are printed in *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*.

**Yogi Ramiah:** A master is approached by a seeker for enlightenment. The master says Brahman has no qualities nor stain nor movement etc. Does he not speak as an individual? How can the seeker's ignorance be wiped off unless the master speaks thus? Do the words of the master as an individual amount to the truth?

**Bhagavan:** "To whom should the master speak? Whom does he instruct? Does he see anything different from the Self?"

**Yogi Ramiah:** "But the disciple is asking the master for elucidation."

**Bhagavan:** "True, but does the master see him as different? The ignorance of the disciple lies in not knowing all are Self realized. Can anyone exist apart from the Self? The master simply points out that the ignorance lies there and therefore does not stand apart as an individual. What is realization? Is it to seek God with four hands bearing conch, wheel, club etc? Even if God was to appear in that form, how is the disciple's ignorance wiped off? The truth must be eternal realization. Direct perception is the ever present experience. God himself is known as directly perceived. It does not mean he appears before the devotee as said above. Unless the realization is eternal, it cannot serve any useful purpose. Can the appearance with four hands be eternal realization? It is phenomenal and illusory. There must be a seer. The seer alone is real and eternal."

Bhagavan goes on to say, "Let God appear as the light of a million suns. Is it direct perception? To see it, the eyes, the mind, etc., are necessary. It is indirect knowledge whereas the seer is direct experience.

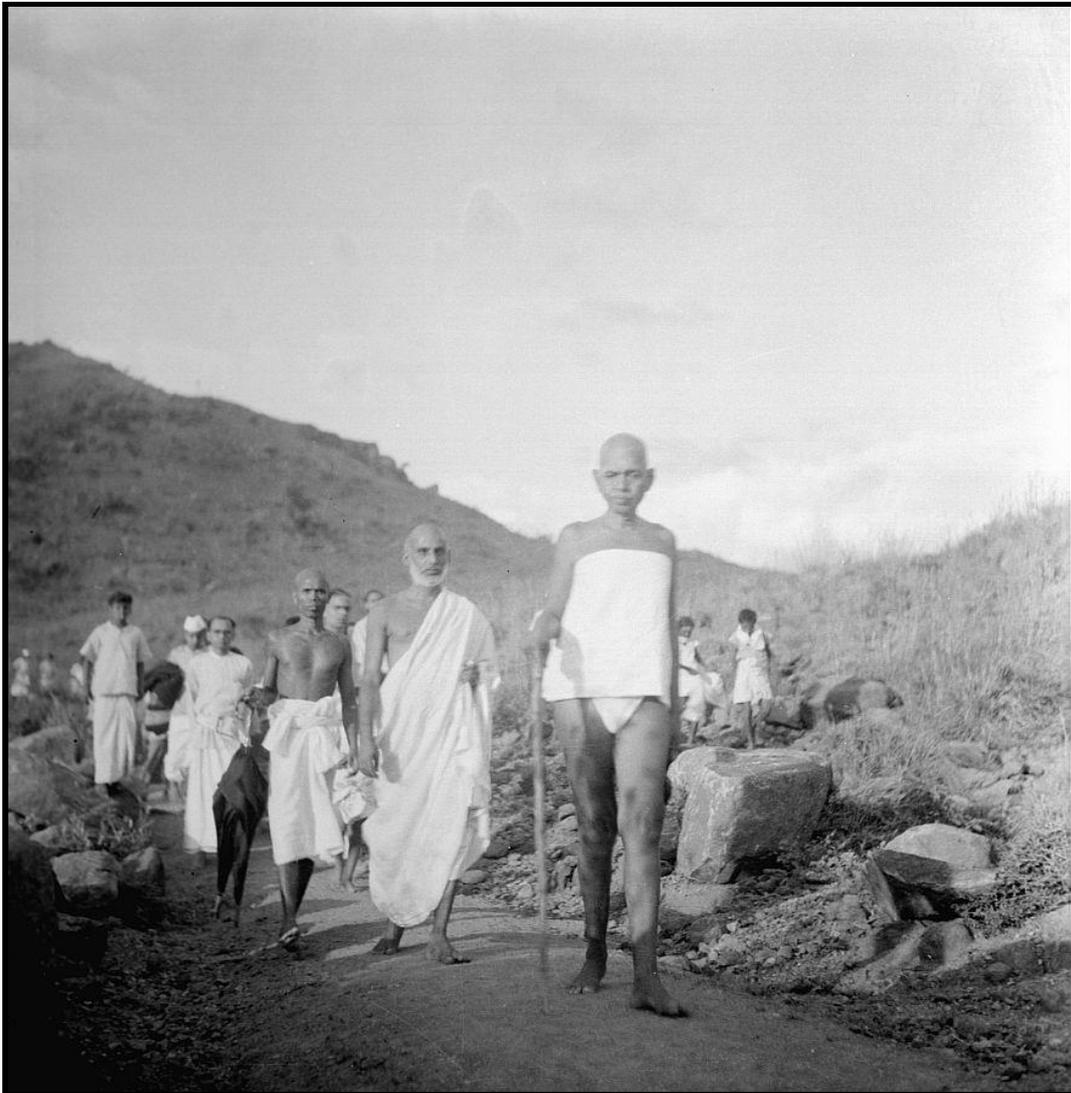
The seer alone is *pratyaksha* - direct perception. All other perceptions are only secondary knowledge. The present superimposition of the body as 'I' is so deep rooted that the vision before the eyes is considered *pratyaksha* but not the seer himself. No one wants realization because there is no one who is not realized. Can anyone say that he is not already realized or that he is apart from the Self. No, evidently all are already realized. What makes him unhappy is the desire to exercise extraordinary powers. Man knows that he cannot have those powers so he wants God to appear before him, confer all his powers on the devotee and keep himself in the background. In short, God should abdicate his powers in favour of the man."

*Yogi Ramiah*: "It is alright for great sages like Sri Bhagavan to speak out so plainly. Because the truth does not swerve from you, you consider it easy for all others. Nevertheless, the common folk have a real difficulty."

*Bhagavan*: "Then, does anyone say that he is not the Self?"

*Yogi Ramiah*: "I meant to say that no one else has the courage to put things straight as Bhagavan has done."

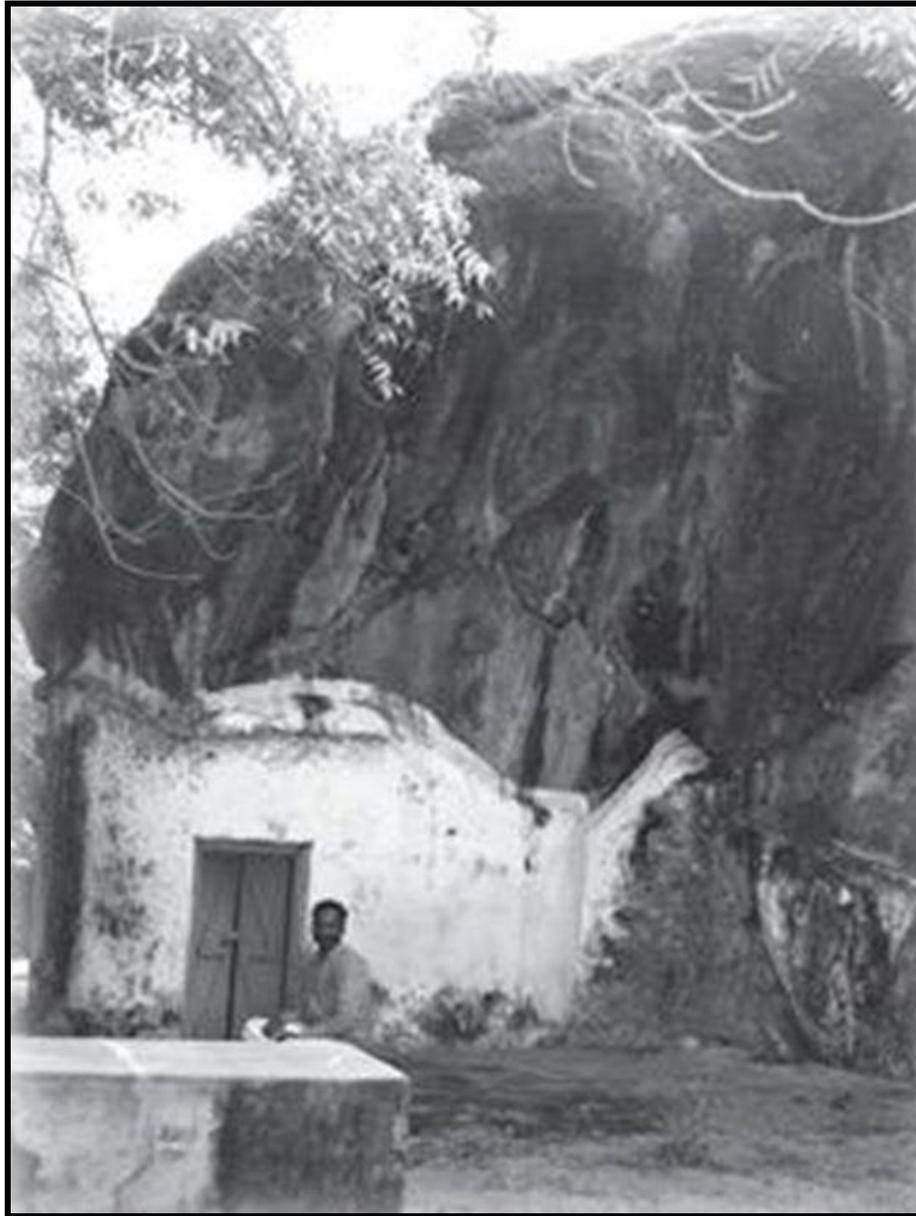
*Bhagavan*: "Where is the need for courage for saying things as they are?"



Once, I asked Yogi Ramiah, "Will you please tell me how you felt in the presence of Bhagavan?" He replied, "Sitting in the Maharshi's presence brings peace of mind very easily and effortlessly. I used to sit in *samadhi* for three or four hours together. Occasionally, I felt my mind taking a form and coming

out from within. But by constant practice and deep meditation, I made it re-enter the Heart until it merged there. When the mind is absorbed in the Heart, the Self is realized. The result is peace.”

After Bhagavan’s passing away, Yogi Ramiah spent most of his time in *tapas*, *yoga* and *mounam* at his village – Annareddy Palam, near Nellore, A.P. Finding peace in his presence, many people used to spend time in his proximity. Those who stuck around were invariably taught Self Enquiry and advised to follow the path of Bhagavan. His last days were very peaceful. He was fully conscious till the last moment. Those who were with him then, told me that his face was suffused with yogic brilliance. His lips were constantly uttering the name of Bhagavan Ramana till he breathed his last. A *samadhi* shrine was built where his body was interred. Since then, this shrine has become a place of worship.



*Yogi Ramiah stayed in this rock cave (built by B.V. Narasimha Swami)*



*"Glance of Grace"*

## Dr. M. R. Krishnamurti Iyer



Delving into the depths of spirituality requires much more than intellectual conviction. A great deal of effort is necessary in this journey, because until you go within, you have to travel almost endlessly in order to reach your destination. But once you turn within you do not travel, for the truth is there within you as your own Self. It has been there all the time and it is there now. There, no movement is necessary in time, space or causation. We are all humans who belong to different religions. This is the seed of causation. If it was possible for you to remove yourself from the clutches of all forms of identification as you do in deep sleep, then peace, silence and quietude will flower. To be in this state, where there is no room for time, space or causation, diving within is essential.

Volumes have been written about the ascetic devotees of Bhagavan like B. V. Narasimha Swami, Muruganar, Sadhu Natanananda, Kunju Swami, Viswanatha Swami and also about great scholars like Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, Dr. Mees, Grant Duff, Duncan Greenlees, Banning Richardson, Munagala S. Venkataramiah, Arthur Osborne, Maurice Frydman, S. S. Cohen, and others. But, it is only rarely that one hears about the normal *grihastha* (family man), totally soaked in the life of a householder, yet an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. Bhagavan showered his grace on all equally.

It is strange but true, that devotees who have been immersed in the family have not really been brought into the limelight. Perhaps, the fault lies with the traditional Hindu perspective that identifies spirituality with austerities, renunciation and knowledge. I personally feel that this kind of segregation will not result in a correct understanding of true spirituality. Hence, even before coming to Ramanasramam in 1960 for good, I paid a great deal of attention not only to those who had renounced everything, but also to those who still attached a great deal of importance to their families. In the process, I got 'attached', and I use this word intentionally, to a few such devotees who seem to have been ignored. The more I became associated with them, the greater was my regard, respect and adoration for the intensity of their relationship and their total surrender to the master. I was thrilled at the extraordinary attention and grace that Bhagavan showered on these devotees. True, these devotees were still attached to the family, but I had no doubt in my mind that they were *jnanis*. Can there be any doubt when you are constantly in the company of Ramana? As Immanuel Kant has said, "When you wear green coloured glasses, you will see only green everywhere." Similarly, if you are ignorant, then all you will see is ignorance in all places. You will also be under the illusion that only Bhagavan, the Buddha and Jesus Christ are *jnanis*, though they themselves looked upon everyone as enlightened or divine .

Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was popularly known to the early devotees as the 'ashram doctor'. He sowed the seeds for the future Ramanasramam Dispensary by keeping his medicines in a small wooden box which he kept locked in a cupboard. (This cupboard can be seen even today beside the ashram's old dining hall entrance.) Hailing from a reputed family in Mondri, Thanjavur district, M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was an excellent gynecologist. He had a good professional reputation and was ranked among the elite. In spite of his intense spiritual search, he could not control his volatile temper. The emotional turbulence in him subsided only after he met Bhagavan in 1927. For the first time, he found peace and solace in his spiritual pursuits. (The fact that mature seekers came to Bhagavan exhilarates me. They just needed the right switch to be turned on. As the Buddha said, "I have taken you to the threshold of truth; now, you have to walk in." Bhagavan gave that push for them to pursue true spirituality. That is the reason why most of the old devotees were spiritual slaves to Bhagavan Ramana, who himself was totally independent. Being a liberated person, Bhagavan liberated everyone, while each of them adopted an attitude of a spiritual slave.)

Relieved of his turbulent outbursts, Krishnamurthy Iyer began visiting Bhagavan regularly. His association with Bhagavan led him to look upon Bhagavan as his *satguru* - in other words, truth in human form. In 1933, he finally came to Tiruvannamalai to settle down there. Being a family man, he took a house in town. "In those days, every day was a unique spiritual day for me. It was not just the experience of spending twenty four hours in a religious place like Tiruvannamalai. Every moment was a

spiritual experience to me, thus making it very precious and sacred. Bhagavan, the silent sun, was like the pole star, directing my every moment of existence,” said Dr. Krishnamurthy. He added, “I could never feel any monotony. I took each moment as an invaluable gift of God, who is none other than Bhagavan Ramana.” Apart from this spiritual side, he was a well known doctor both in town and in the surrounding villages. He was a busy man, working all the time. But every Sunday at two in the afternoon he would come to meditate at the feet of his master. So much so, people at the ashram started calling him ‘Sunday Doctor’. Bhagavan himself would be happy when he saw Krishnamurthy. He would say, “Oh, today is Sunday!”

Like Jesus Christ, Bhagavan was also a Good Shepherd who tenderly tended all his devotees. He gave comfort and solace not only to Krishnamurthy Iyer, but to his wife Subbulakshmiammal and to every one of his family members. Consequently, Subbulakshmiammal and her children became totally dedicated to Bhagavan. Before meeting Bhagavan, the family lived in a tiny village. Being already dedicated to Bhagavan, Krishnamurthy would often escape to Arunachala, leaving his wife and his family alone in the village. During this time, Subbulakshmiammal was constantly in a state of panic because she was afraid that her husband would renounce the world and take *sannyas*. One night, this fear gripped her heart so much that she cried as she went to bed. Bhagavan appeared in her dream and said, “Subbulakshmi, have no fear; I am taking care of Krishnamurthy. Allow him to pursue his mode of *sadhana*. I am protecting you. Give up all your worries.” After saying this, Bhagavan put out his hand and blessed her. The couple visited Bhagavan the next day and narrated the dream. Bhagavan gave a gracious smile of approval. From that night onwards, Subbulakshmiammal dedicated herself wholly to Bhagavan and led a happily married life, totally freed from doubt and fear.

After moving to Tiruvannamalai, the family stayed in town. Subbulakshmiammal was busy educating her children. She hardly had time for spiritual *sadhana*. The entire family worshipped Bhagavan as God, yet she found no time for *sadhana*. Bhagavan was most undemanding. For those like Subbulakshmiammal who could not come to him, Bhagavan himself moved towards them in different ways. One day, there was a huge procession in town. A large picture of Seshadri Swami was being taken through the town to the accompaniment of drums and other musical instruments. Subbulakshmiammal had a look at the picture and thought, “If only I had at home a similar large picture of Bhagavan - who I cannot visit every day - I could have offered *pooja* and garlands to him.” With such thoughts, she went inside the house and bolted the door. At once, there was a knock on the door. Someone with an equally large picture of Bhagavan was standing at the doorstep. The man said, “I come from the village of Polur. I have been instructed to leave this photograph at your house. I am on my way to the ashram. I will return after having the *darshan* of Bhagavan.” Needless to say, Subbulakshmiammal’s joy knew no bounds when she saw the picture. She reverentially took the picture inside, garlanded it and performed *pooja*. When the children returned from school, they were equally thrilled. They rejoiced, “Oh, Bhagavan has come to our house!” When the children saw their father returning home, they rushed to the street and declared, “Father! Bhagavan has come to our house!” Krishnamurthy was equally excited and wondered how it arrived. Subbulakshmiammal said, “I thought you had sent the man!” Before Krishnamurthy could reply, the man who had given the picture arrived. He said, “I am an electrician. One day, I was called by Major Chadwick to do some electrical repairs in his room. I saw this photograph there. When the work was done, he gave me money. I told Chadwick to give me this photograph instead of money. I was delighted when he did so and took the photograph to Polur. Every day, I performed *pooja* to the photograph with great reverence. However one day, something possessed me and I said, ‘I have to go to Tiruvannamalai to Avarangattu Street to give this picture to Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer.’ That is why I am now leaving it behind.” The entire family narrated the incident to Bhagavan who listened to it with great interest and wonder - as if he had nothing to do with it!

Dr. Krishnamurthy’s surrender to Bhagavan was total and unconditional. He focused more and more on *sadhana*. Consequently, he could not devote much time to his medical profession and earn money. Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, the Health Minister at that time, was his classmate and a good friend. Dr. Rajan came to meet Krishnamurthy - he had heard of his financial state and wished to offer help. He suggested, “I can get you a job in a government hospital. It will get you a regular income.” Krishnamurthy replied, “The spiritual force which brought me to Arunachala will take care of my future welfare.” Such was his unshakeable belief in Bhagavan! As if to match his faith, Bhagavan brought upon himself two health conditions, which Krishnamurthy could treat.



Bhagavan had hiccups that just would not subside. Krishnamurthy treated him with the best of medicines but it was to no avail. Bhagavan's deteriorating health became a cause of grave concern. Krishnamurthy felt that Bhagavan would not survive. With tears in his eyes, Krishnamurthy prayed within his heart, "Bhagavan, help me save you." That night, Bhagavan appeared in Subbulakshmi's dream and said, "Why is Krishnamurthy crying? Ask him to give me this ayurvedic medicine which is prepared with a particular herbal leaf." Even in her dream, Subbulakshmi was puzzled. Bhagavan continued, "It is there in your courtyard. Pluck it, fry it in ghee, add some jaggery, pound it and bring it at four in the morning." In those days, women were not allowed to come into the ashram before five in the morning. Bhagavan wanted Subbulakshmi to come to the ashram at four. When his wife hesitated, Krishnamurthy said, "Bhagavan has asked us to go to him. We must." Krishnamurthy and his wife went together. Bhagavan was waiting for them. He extended his hand and took the medicine they had made. The hiccups stopped!

The second incident is even more significant. When Krishnamurthy was studying medicine, he had a professor named Srinivasa Rao. In later years, Dr. Srinivasa Rao stayed at the ashram as a personal attendant of Bhagavan. He was rather dominating. Once, when Bhagavan had a serious pain in the stomach, perhaps hernia or appendicitis, he pronounced that it needed surgery. He approached Niranjanananda Swami and convinced him that a surgery was necessary. Both of them wrote to Dr. Pandalay, a famous surgeon in Chennai and asked his opinion. Krishnamurthy, who was a traditionalist, was unhappy. He thought to himself, "A *jnani's* body should not be mutilated. No surgical instruments should be used on the physical body of a realized person because it rejuvenates itself. Every cell is divine." He pleaded with the other doctors to desist. But his pleas fell on deaf ears. He resorted to prayer. He prayed in his heart, "Bhagavan, help me save you from this difficult predicament." That very night, Bhagavan appeared in his dream. He said, "Why are you worried, Krishnamurthy? Mix these three ayurvedic oils together, bring it in the morning and that will be the cure." Krishnamurthy and Subbulakshmi prepared it in the night. They took it to Bhagavan early the next morning and he drank it. When Dr. Pandalay and Dr. Srinivasa Rao examined Bhagavan the next morning prior to performing the surgery, they found that there was no symptom of the ailment! They were puzzled and wondered how it could have happened. Bhagavan let out the secret by saying, "This morning, Krishnamurthy gave me an ayurvedic oil. Everything has become all right." He spoke about it as if he had nothing whatsoever to do with the outcome. Krishnamurthy said of the incident, "This earned me more dislike from my teacher Dr. Srinivasa Rao because he thought I had vetoed his plan."

Bhagavan respected Dr. Krishnamurthy as a professional. He would always consult Krishnamurthy before taking a medicine, even if another doctor had prescribed it. Such was his implicit faith in his devotee. But Krishnamurthy was no longer consulted because he had opposed the surgery move of the senior doctors. This however, proved a blessing in disguise to Krishnamurthy Iyer, who from then on applied himself more and more to inner *sadhana*. In later years, when Bhagavan was diagnosed as having cancerous sarcoma on the left arm, Krishnamurthy Iyer was not even invited for consultation about the mode of treatment.

Three surgeries had already been performed on Bhagavan's arm. Krishnamurthy was in anguish because the Bhagavan's body was being mutilated and he could not prevent it. For the fourth and final surgery, a major one, Dr. Raghavachari and other famous surgeons came from Chennai. They stood before Bhagavan and announced, "Bhagavan, this surgery has to be done. The equipment is coming from Chennai." Bhagavan looked at them and asked, "Have you informed Krishnamurthy Iyer?" All the surgeons, including Dr. Srinivasa Rao, went to Krishnamurthy's house. Dr. Rao sternly told him, "Do not prevent the surgery. There is no other option. They have all come for that. I know what Bhagavan's intention is when he asked us, 'Have you informed Krishnamurthy?' It means that we have to have your permission for the surgery. So, come along with us, but do not say 'no' to the surgery. Tell Bhagavan that it has to be done." Krishnamurthy cried, "How can I do that?" The doctors had to almost physically drag him to the ashram. Krishnamurthy himself narrated what happened then. Bhagavan gave him a look that seemed to communicate that he should not say no. Krishnamurthy acceded to it, but he was in great turmoil. He requested the doctors to go ahead with the surgery. When the doctors left, he was alone with Bhagavan. Bhagavan communicated with Krishnamurthy not through words, but through the silence of the Heart. Bhagavan seemed to be saying, "What can be done, Krishnamurthy? Things have to happen, as they should. It is the will of Arunachala. His will be done." However, Bhagavan openly and audibly told Krishnamurthy Iyer, "Stay with me until everything is completed."

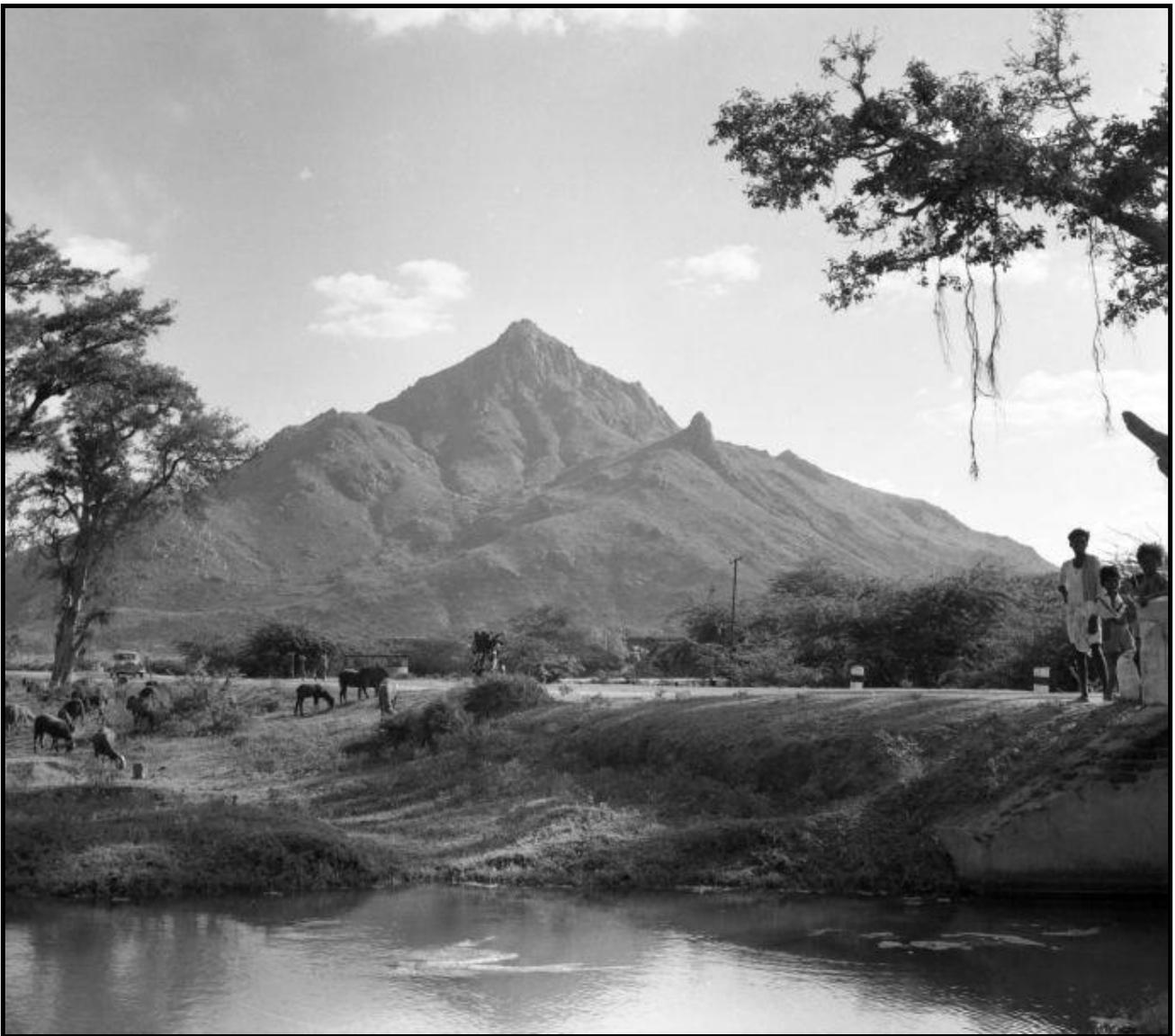
The fourth surgery took place on December 19, 1949. From that day, till the day Bhagavan dropped his body on April 14, 1950, Krishnamurthy was with Bhagavan every night. He may not have been in the immediate presence of Bhagavan, but he was always in the vicinity of the hall, always alert, always available. When everyone else had gone to sleep, he would be with Bhagavan throughout the night. He said, "Every night, I would go through heaven and hell. To be with Bhagavan, my guru, was heaven; to see his body suffer, was hell."

Dr. Krishnamurthy's medical skill was deepened by his innate spirituality. I want here to narrate an incident involving me. When I was in Benares, the problem in my back became septic. My father came to Benares and took me to Chennai. The doctors recommended surgery in order to prevent paralysis. Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami told me, "You have to undergo surgery immediately." However, I stated, "I will be treated only by Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer." I do not know what urged me to say this. My father said, "We are not on talking terms with Krishnamurthy Iyer. We haven't been in touch with him for over a decade now. How can I go and ask him to attend on you?" I replied, "I don't know." My father took me home and my mother said, "Go to Krishnamurthy Iyer." My father was reluctant. He said, "How can I possibly face him?" However, my father went, and Krishnamurthy said, "Yes, I will come, but under two conditions. When I am treating him, no one should enter the room. And you should not give me a time limit. You should also not question me on the treatment and the nature of the medicines I am giving him." Krishnamurthy Iyer treated me for two months. While I was lying all the time on my stomach, he applied medicines on the deep sores on my back. More importantly, during those moments, he shared with me his mystical relationship with Bhagavan and Arunachala. It was very elevating and healing. I felt that more than the potency and curing power of his medicines, this spiritual sharing effected speedy healing and cured me fully. In one of those sharings he said, "Arunachala and Ramana are the same. Bhagavan has left the key of Self Enquiry in Arunachala. The Bible says, 'Ask, and it shall be given; knock, and it shall be opened.' That is literally true. If you ask Arunachala, he will give you the key to Self Enquiry. Self Enquiry is to dive within."

Krishnamurthy Iyer started going round the hill daily. He was also seen walking around the Arunachaleswara temple and sometimes wandering in the streets in an ecstatic state. People in the town openly said that he had gone mad. Daily, he would visit the ashram while doing the *giripradakshina*, stand ecstatically in front of Bhagavan's *samadhi* shrine and sing songs on Bhagavan and on Arunachala at the top of his voice. I would prostrate to him and he would give me a smile of

recognition, but would also point out to Bhagavan's shrine, indicating that Bhagavan alone deserved the prostrations. I could feel that he was having waves and waves of mystical experiences all the time.

During his last days, he had an extraordinary experience. He said that Arunachaleshwara had informed him that the wheels of the big chariot on which the deity is taken during festival days would break and that he should ask the temple's committee to repair it. The committee members did not pay attention to the doctor's words because they thought he was insane. However, when the chariot came near his house, it did break down. For three days, Krishnamurthy was on the terrace of his house looking at the chariot intently, unmindful of the scorching heat of the sun. He locked the terrace door and did not come down. On the third day, for some strange reason, I had the inclination of visiting him when I was going round the hill. His wife said, "What can we do? We have not seen him for three days. He is upstairs and we dare not even knock on the door." As his wife was talking to me, Krishnamurthy entered and queried, "Has Ganesan come?" He asked his wife to leave us alone. I prostrated before him. He was tanned dark. He said, "Ganesan, Arunachala has called me. I am leaving. I bless you. Do not swerve from this path. Arunachala will save you. Stay here." He passed away after a few days. Arunachala had absorbed him in his Heart!



*"Arunachala holds the 'key'!"*

## Dr. Hafiz Syed



A few mysterious appearances in Bhagavan's life, like the *moulvi* in the train in August 1896, the man who brought a bundle of books which included *Arunchala Mahatmyam*, while Bhagavan was in Virupaksha Cave, one of the tamarind thieves around the Gurumurtham days who stopped his colleagues from blinding Bhagavan's eyes. At last, but by no means the least, was the hitherto unknown author of the marvellous *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*, Sathyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer, who wrote the *Five Hymns in Praise of Ramana* - four on the spot and the fifth (and last) mailed later.

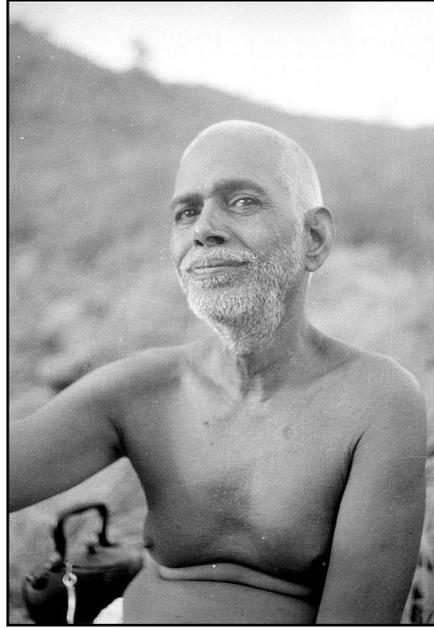
One of the *Five Hymns* extols Bhagavan thus: "Oh, *satguru* Ramana! Though you are now in a Brahmin's body, you are the reality that transcends both caste and creed. People all over the world are going to flock to your feet, irrespective of differences in caste, religion and faith. They will flock to you because they will see you as reality." The verses were composed and sung in 1910 when there were hardly any people around Bhagavan. But in 1922, when Bhagavan came to Ramanasramam and people from all over the world belonging to different races and religious sects started coming to the ashram, the verse's prophecy proved true.

Dr. Hafiz Syed was one of the staunch Muslims who came to Bhagavan. He was a professor and the Head of Islamic Studies at Allahabad University. Although he bore no hatred towards other religions, he was convinced that Islam was the greatest religion in the world. One day a friend gave him Paul Brunton's book, *A Search in Secret India*. He was so delighted when he read the book that he felt a strong desire to meet this great Hindu master. He wondered how the sage would receive a Muslim. He happened to meet Maurice Frydman who encouraged him saying, "Yes, my *satguru* is Bhagavan Ramana. He is the ultimate truth. Go and meet him." He not only made the suggestion, but also made arrangements for Dr. Syed's stay in the ashram. And who received him at the jungle ashram? None other than Paul Brunton himself! It was Paul Brunton who took him inside to Bhagavan.

Being a mature religious person, one look at Bhagavan confirmed to him that Brunton and Frydman were right. It was a very short visit. He had to leave after that. As he was leaving, he felt that if at all he was ever able to attain any kind of spiritual perfection or fulfillment, it would take place only in the proximity of Ramana Maharshi. This first meeting took place in 1935. He came again in 1936. In 1937, when he visited the ashram, Dr. Syed became sick and was bedridden for a month. Bhagavan showered his love on Syed like a mother would on her child. Once, he went into the kitchen and prepared *upma* with his own hands for Dr. Syed. This gesture of love was enough to melt Dr. Syed's heart and soul. However, his professional commitments prevented him from staying on in the ashram for a prolonged period. In 1943, he built a house near the ashram so that he and his wife could be in the presence of Bhagavan at least during vacations. Bhagavan's presence meant everything to him.

One day in January 1936, Dr. Syed was filled with happiness and he addressed Sri Bhagavan, "I hesitated at first on arrival. I wondered if I would be permitted to approach you and converse with you. My doubts were soon set at rest. I find that all are equal here. You have established an equality among all. I dined with you and others. If I should say so to my people in Uttar Pradesh, they would not believe it. The Brahmin would not drink water with me, nor chew *paan* with me. But here, you have taken me and others like me in your fold. Though Gandhi is striving hard he cannot bring about such a state of affairs in the country. I am very happy in your presence." ["TALKS" - No. 125, p.112]

It is not possible to talk about Dr. Syed without mentioning his wife. She was a devout Muslim lady in *purdah*. She meticulously followed all the dictates laid down by Islam. Like her husband, she too was drawn towards this Hindu sage. She longed to see him, but she felt that her religion's dictates did not allow her to see any other man.



So, she came to the ashram and quietly sent word through her husband to Bhagavan. She would say, "Master, please come and see me." Bhagavan too obliged by going to where she was waiting and standing before her. She communicated with Bhagavan through her husband since her religion would not allow her to have direct communication with the opposite sex. Bhagavan blessed her. He did not attempt to change her, but the change took place of its own accord. Slowly, this staunch Muslim woman in *purdah* willed herself to come to the hall where Bhagavan was.

Dr. Syed's wife was overwhelmed by a strong desire to invite Bhagavan home and feed him to her heart's content. At that time, the couple was staying in a rented accommodation next to the ashram. When she told her husband about her longing, Dr. Syed, who was well aware of the ashram rules and Bhagavan's way of life, said, "No, he cannot come out of the ashram and visit us. He has never had food outside the ashram." However, his wife remained adamant. Finally, Dr. Syed conveyed the message to Bhagavan when he was going up the hill. Bhagavan heard him out, smiled and continued walking. But look at what happens when devotees persevere! When it is the brain that perseveres, it is arrogance. When it is the heart that perseveres, then it is something totally different - it is devotion. Bhagavan would go up the hill every day. One day, she stood on the way with her husband, and communicated through him, "Bhagavan, you must come to our house and have food." Bhagavan smiled once again and kept walking.

That night, Bhagavan appeared in her dream and told her, "Why are you so obstinate? You know I cannot come. I can dine only in the dining hall with all the others. People come from long distances - I cannot disappoint them. Are you going to keep asking me to come?" But then, see how compassionate Bhagavan is! The next thing he said was, "If you feed three *sadhus*, it is like feeding me." Bhagavan was not vague about who these *sadhus* were either. In her dream, she also saw three people who were living in the ashram at the time. They were Dr. Melkote, Sadhu Prabuddhananda and Krishna Bhikshu. Dr. Melkote was a married man, Prabuddhananda was a *sannyasin*, and Krishna Bhikshu was a *brahmachari*. Mrs. Syed fed them to her heart's and their stomach's content. The fact that she looked on them as Bhagavan was proved by the fact that she offered them betel leaves after the feast. A Muslim lady is allowed to offer betel leaves only to the husband and not to any other man, not even to her father or her brothers. However, Islam allows a woman to offer it to a *fakir* or a saint. She handed each one of them betel leaves, and they understood to what status she had elevated them. The three of them went back to Bhagavan and narrated the incident in detail. Bhagavan listened with appreciation. He never expressed his appreciation in words; his devotees understood it through his gestures and look.

I once asked Dr. Syed what it was that attracted him so strongly towards Bhagavan. He replied, "Bhagavan's sense of humanity was as great as his sense of pure spirituality." Dr. Syed was convinced

that the more spiritual a person was, the more humane he became. He also said, "The main teaching of Bhagavan, on which he laid much emphasis, was surrender to God or the guru because Bhagavan himself had surrendered to the divine and reaped its benefits. However, the dominant feature of Bhagavan's philosophy was the unity of life and the oneness of the divine essence. I have repeatedly heard Bhagavan say that there is the one who governs the world and that it is his task to look after the world. It is he who bears the burden of the world and not us. According to Bhagavan, devotion means turning the mind inwards to the Self."

Dr. Syed had long and learned conversations with the Maharshi, which you will find in *Talks with Maharshi, Day by Day* and *Letters from Ramanasramam*. I asked him why he questioned Bhagavan all the time. To this he replied, "When a sage is available, humanity has to make full use of him by eliciting from him the ways and means of attaining God. Hence, I was never hesitant in putting forth questions to Bhagavan."

The following dialogue is taken from *Talks with the Maharshi*.

Dr. Mohammed Hafiz Syed, Professor of Islam, University of Allahabad asked, "What is the purpose of this external manifestation, Bhagavan?"

Bhagavan answered, "This manifestation induced in you the question."

*Dr. Hafiz Syed:* "True, I am covered by *maya*. How to be freed from it?"

*Bhagavan:* "Who is covered by *maya*? Who wants to be free?"

*Dr. Hafiz Syed:* "Master, being asked who, I know it is the ignorant me, composed of the senses, mind and body. I have tried this enquiry after reading Paul Brunton's book three or four times and I have felt elated, but the elation lasted for some time and then faded away. How can I be established in the 'I' or the 'I AM'? Please give me a clue and help me."

*Bhagavan:* "That which appears anew must also disappear in due course."

*Dr. Hafiz Syed:* "Please tell me the method of reaching the eternal Truth."

*Bhagavan:* "You are already that. Can we remain other than the Self? To remain as your Self requires no effort since you are always that."

On another occasion Dr. Syed asked, "I have been reading the five hymns Arunachala which you wrote in praise of Arunachala, and I find that the hymns are addressed to Arunachala by you. You are an *Advaitin*. How do you then address God as a separate being?"

*Bhagavan:* "The devotee, God, and the hymns are all the Self."

*Dr. Hafiz Syed:* "But you are addressing God; you are specifying this Arunachala hill as God."

*Bhagavan:* "You can identify the Self with your body. Should not the devotee identify the Self with Arunachala?"

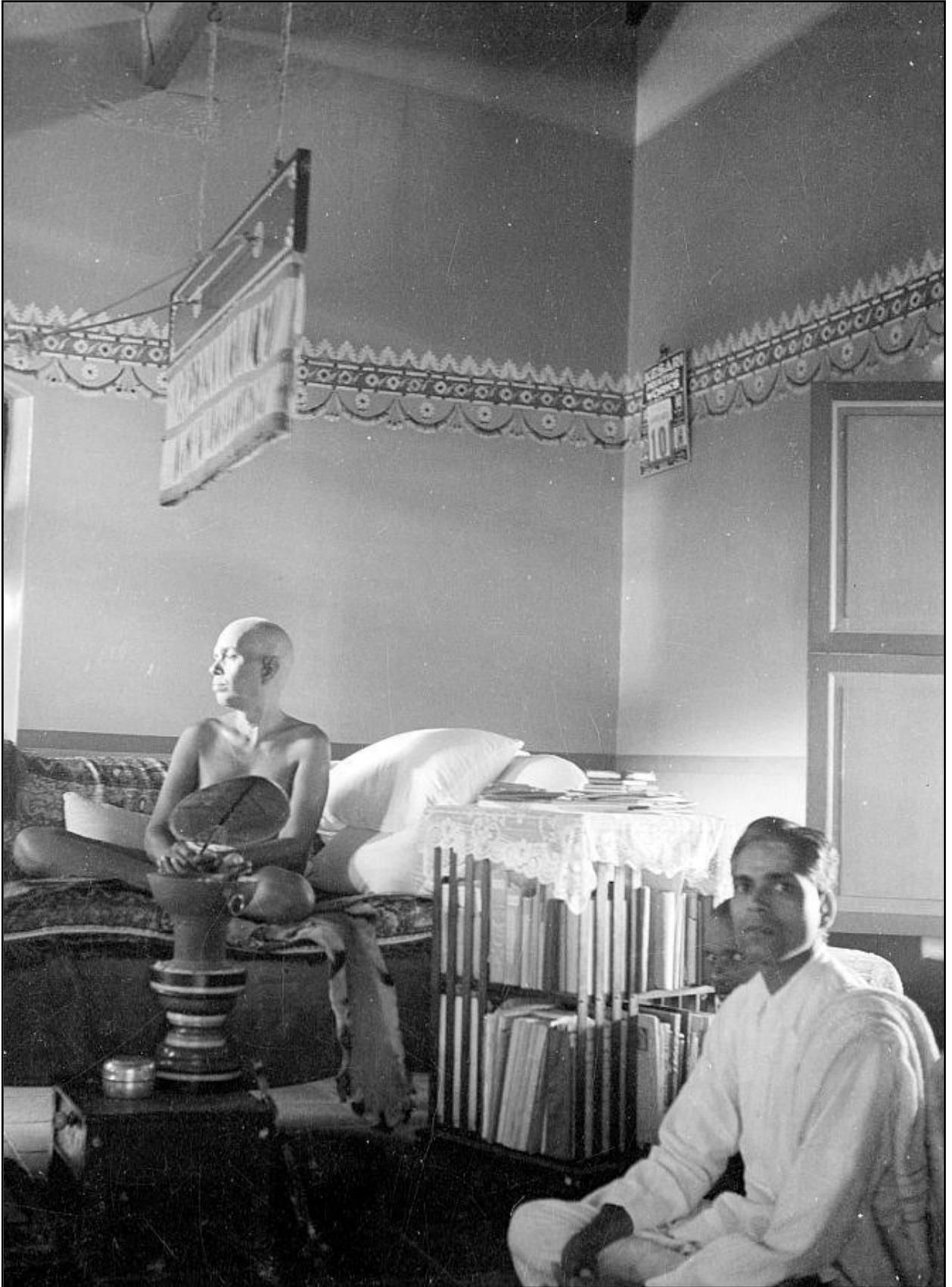
*Dr. Hafiz Syed:* "If Arunachala be the Self, then why should it be picked out from so many other hills? God is everywhere. Why do you specify him as Arunachala? Why do you specify God as Arunachala?"

*Bhagavan:* "What has attracted you from Allahabad to this place? What has attracted all these people who are seated here?"

*Dr. Hafiz Syed:* "You, Bhagavan."

*Bhagavan:* "How was I attracted here? By Arunachala! The power of Arunachala cannot be denied. Again, Arunachala is within and not without. The Self is Arunachala."

Dr. Syed stayed at the ashram with his wife till Bhagavan dropped the body. He once told me that Arunachala and Bhagavan were the same; they were not different entities. Once Bhagavan left the body, he could not stay on because of health and other reasons. He returned home to practise Self Enquiry and meditation. He knew that Arunachala was in the Heart. As Bhagavan says, "Oh Arunachala, Heart is thy name!" Dr. Syed's last days were very peaceful. Bhagavan absorbed him in Arunachala. The message of Arunachala is to stay in the Self. The Self is silence.



*"To see God is to be God"*  
*(Sri Bhagavan – Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer)*

## Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer



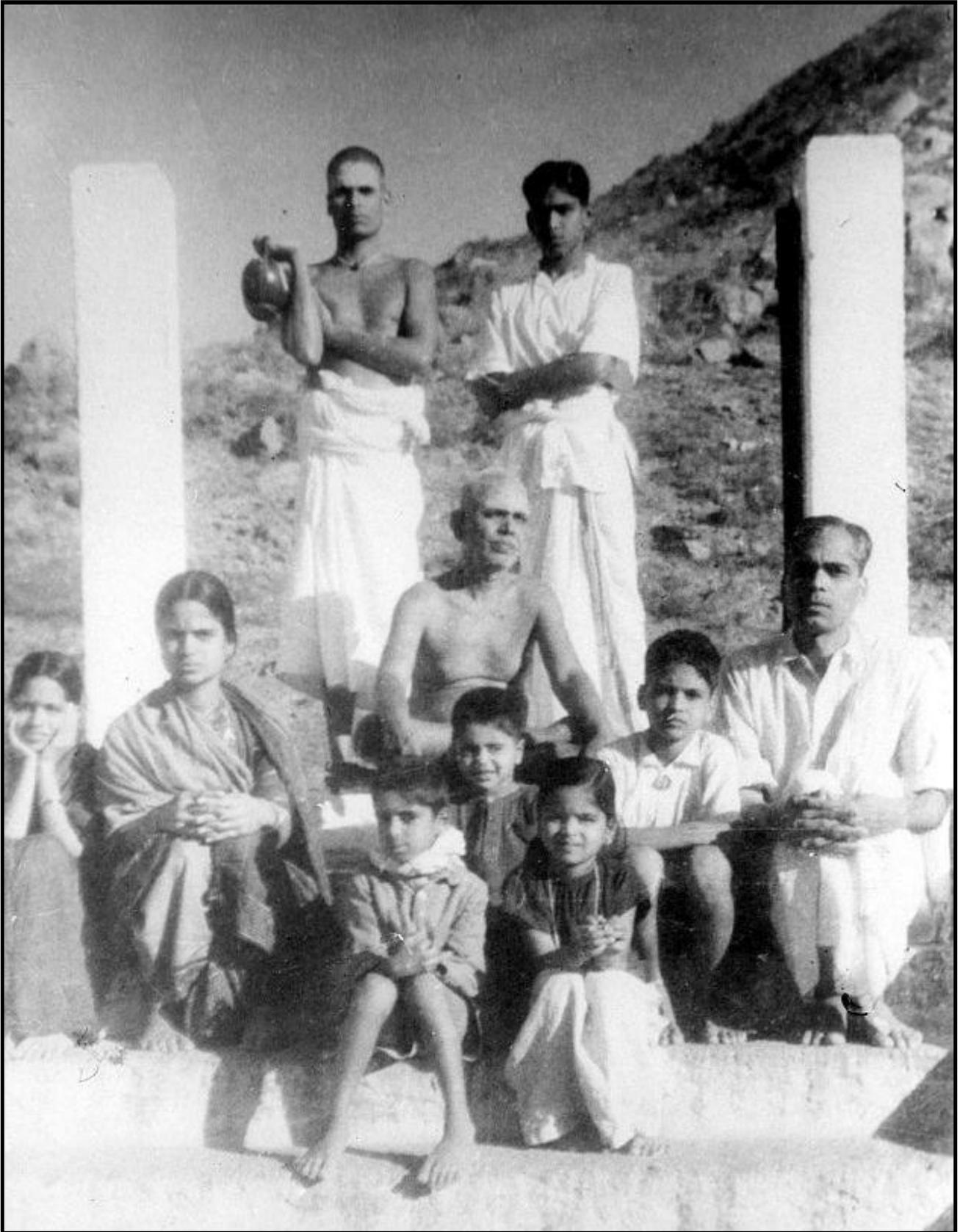
Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer was a fortunately blessed devotee of Bhagavan who received unimaginable and inexplicable attention, care, love and blessings from him. In my opinion, he was one of the favourite devotees of Bhagavan. In 1928, Narayana Iyer was employed as a sub-registrar in Chetpet, about thirty miles from Tiruvannamalai. He was a free thinker, a confirmed skeptic who scoffed at *sadhus* and *sannyasins*, referring to them as 'the parasites of a healthy society'. It was however his good fortune that he had a trustworthy and religious friend, Dr. V. Ramakrishna Iyer. Ramakrishna Iyer was the son of Tiruchuzhi Lakshmi Ammal. Lakshmi Ammal was a playmate of Bhagavan during his childhood at Tiruchuzhi. So it was only natural that when her son Ramakrishna Iyer grew up, he became an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. Ramakrishna Iyer was an upright government doctor. He was also an entertaining conversationalist, known for his humour and light hearted nature. No matter where he was posted, he would visit Bhagavan as often as time and work permitted.

One day in 1928, Ramakrishna Iyer asked Narayana Iyer, "Why don't you come to Arunachala with me for the Karthikai festival?" (In those days, Tiruvannamalai was called Arunachala; in fact, even the railway station was named Arunachala.) Narayana Iyer answered, "You know, Ramakrishna, I really do not like this paraphernalia of carrying of images of jewelled gods and goddesses and parading them on the streets. I do not like such foolish things. But, since you are my bosom friend, I will oblige you and come along." When they arrived in Tiruvannamalai, Narayana Iyer found that there was not an inch of space to either sit or stand, on account of the huge festival crowd. Narayana Iyer said, "Ramakrishna, you said that you were going to Ramanasramam. An ashram means lots of open space with lots of trees. I will come with you on condition that if your so called *swami* happens to come in front of us, I will not prostrate before him." Ramakrishna Iyer, whom I knew very well, later recounted, "I knew that all the while Bhagavan was putting a big noose around Narayana Iyer's neck!" So, without hesitation, Ramakrishna Iyer took him along.

In 1928, the ashram consisted of only three thatched sheds. Was it just sheer coincidence that just as the two friends arrived, Bhagavan was coming out of one of them? When he saw Ramakrishna Iyer, he paused and enquired, "Ramakrishna, how is your mother? How is your family?" During the conversation, Narayana Iyer, in accordance with the British custom, did not even turn towards Bhagavan as they had not been formally introduced to each other. Ramakrishna Iyer then introduced Narayana Iyer to Bhagavan. Narayana Iyer was at once captivated by the calm, serene and compassionate countenance of Bhagavan. The very next moment, he fell flat before Bhagavan's holy feet, unmindful of the uneven ground strewn with stones. However, he was in a state of dilemma because he had all along ridiculed *sadhus* and *sannyasins*, and here he was prostrating before one! He steadied himself thinking, "I have met two great people in my life - Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Neither of them can compare to this strange man whose compassionate look is so arresting and bewitching that I can hardly take my eyes off him. I must keep myself in check because I do not want to get trapped by this man's looks. However, let me give a chance to this *swami*. I will read some of his books."

He went to the book store, which at that time was only a small, open shelf. Bhagavan's *Ulladu Narpadu* (Reality in Forty Verses) in Tamil had just been published. He bought the book and thought he would read it and evaluate the *swami* he had just met. He wanted to find out whether this *swami* was worthy of his admiration! When he read the first verse, he couldn't understand a single word. He wondered what was happening. He thought to himself, "When I look at him, something is kindled within me; it is beyond my control. I don't know what is causing it. When I want to evaluate him, I cannot understand even a single word of what has been written by him in Tamil." He asked someone who was passing by,

“Do you know *Ulladu Narpadu*? Do you know the meaning?” The person said, “I also do not know the meaning. But, Bhagavan is going to read out the verses and explain them tonight. Why don’t you stay?” Narayana Iyer told himself, “I will stay and give the *swami* another chance.” The noose was tightening !



*Sri Bhagavan with Subregistrar Narayana Iyer and his family*

That night, Bhagavan read out the verses in the most musical tone, making every word so simple and easy to understand, that Narayana Iyer was left wondering if he was being hypnotized. "Whatever he is reading now, I can understand; previously, I couldn't understand a single word," was his thought. While his mind was in this state, Bhagavan focused his attention solely on him in the midst of his reading. In the earlier days, there was only a small intimate group around Bhagavan. People started thronging to the ashram only in the 1940's. Before that, Bhagavan would often look directly at the person he had chosen. Narayana Iyer was mesmerized, both by Bhagavan and the verse that he was reading. Narayana Iyer recalled, "While explaining verse twenty one Bhagavan said, 'God can neither be seen with our eyes nor with our senses. To see God is to be God. This is what the verse is saying.' From the audience, a person called Dandapani Swami asked rather boldly, 'Is Bhagavan saying this out of his own experience?' This blunt question was answered calmly and with candour by Bhagavan, 'Otherwise, would I dare say so?'"

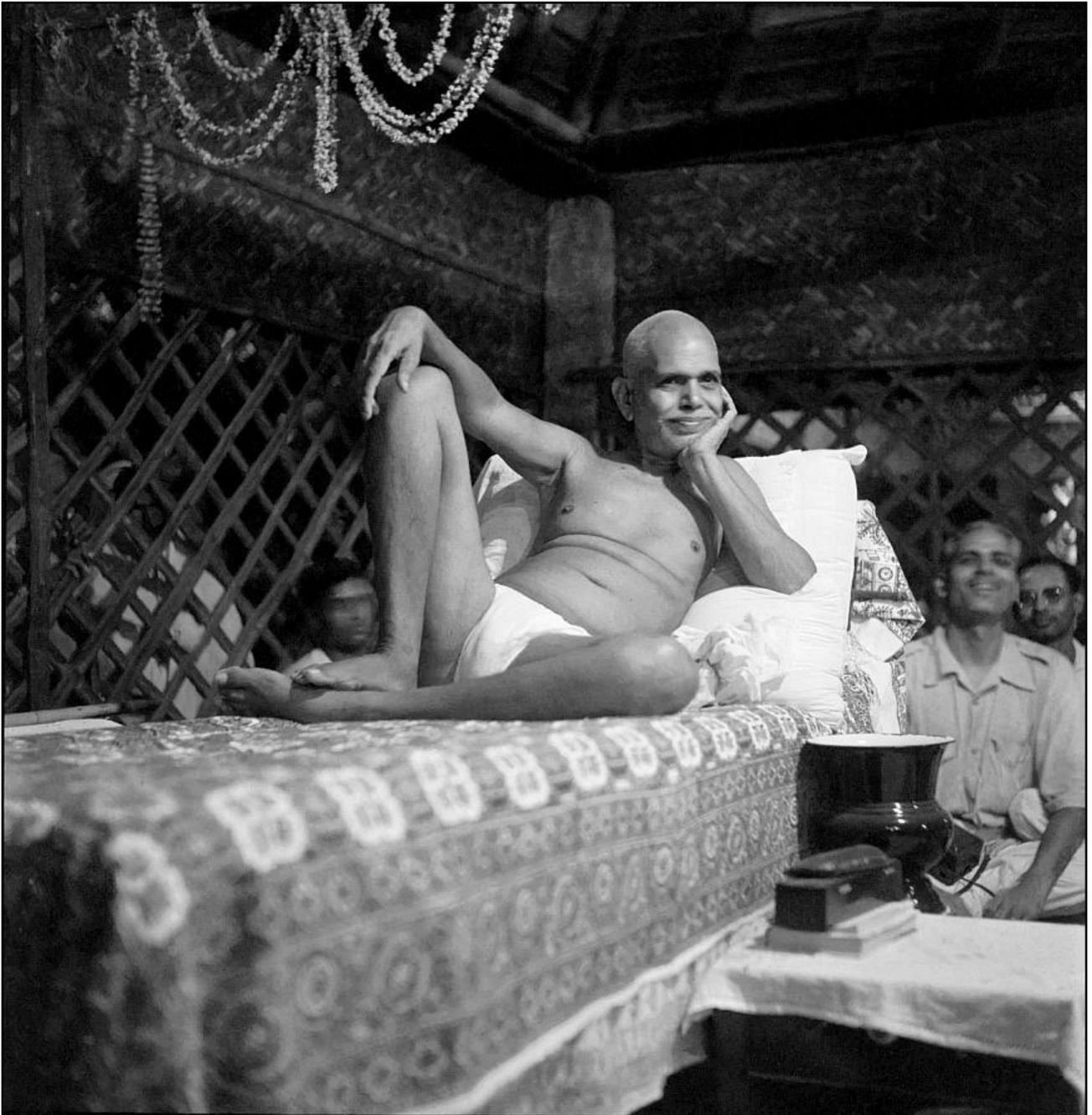
On hearing this declaration, a strange sensation overtook Narayana Iyer. His entire frame quivered and when he looked at Bhagavan in that state, he saw a glorious and luminous aura around him. Narayana Iyer had the experience, 'to see God is to be God'. The thought that Narayana Iyer had was, "If he, who all religions acclaim to be God, were to appear before me in flesh and blood, here he is!" Narayana Iyer had an inner experience that affirmed that Bhagavan was God himself. Narayana Iyer said, "From that moment onwards, it was not my decision; I had become a slave of Bhagavan." Narayana Iyer explained to me, "Ganesan, I had refused to succumb to any form of intellectual conviction about God. Hence, Bhagavan had to give me the experience that he is God." I teased him, saying, "In Bhagavan's words, Narayana Iyer became God to experience God!" He embraced me and said, "Yes, that is the truth! To know God, one has to become God. There is no other way."

I think it was purely due to the blessings of Bhagavan on me that Narayana Iyer narrated to me some of his experiences with Bhagavan. Perhaps, Bhagavan wanted it all to be shared. On many occasions, Narayana Iyer would come to the ashram office, drag me outside and lead me to the cow shed or to the foot of the hill. He would then share his experiences with me; his refrain always was, "I did not deserve such pointed tenderness from Bhagavan. Perhaps, I did some good deeds in my past lives; in this life, I have neither done *pooja* nor *sadhana* to deserve such special attention and love from him."

Once, I asked him to clarify what he meant and how he felt when he declared that for him Bhagavan was God. It was not that I doubted Narayana Iyer's experience; I just wanted to hear it in his own words. He said, "Bhagavan is God himself and in saying this, I do not refer to any God of any religion, but to the universal principle of pure consciousness. I would not like to compare him to any of the past personages as there is no meaning in comparing the incarnation of that one principle which has no second. However, for our understanding, if we need to, then the comparison can be done only with the Buddha or Jesus Christ." Narayana Iyer said, "Whenever I was talking to Bhagavan or sitting in his presence, there was the feeling that here is God sitting and talking. It is our greatest fortune that the supreme consciousness, appearing in the garb of a human body, graciously undertook to come down to our level of understanding and interpret to us the truth of *atma vidya* - the wisdom of the Self. Such thoughts always made me understand Bhagavan and his teachings more clearly."

I told Narayana Iyer that when I came to the ashram for good I really did not have a full grasp of *Vedanta*. I was twenty four years of age at the time. Though I was equipped with an M.A. in philosophy and acquainted with both eastern and western philosophy, I could not grasp *Vedanta*, the crux of Hindu religion. I struggled because it was complex and vast. Some inmates of the ashram had told me, "Learn Sanskrit and study the works of Adi Shankara, then you will be able to grasp the teachings of Bhagavan." Narayana Iyer asked, "And, what was your response?" I replied, "Narayana Iyer, I felt that doing *sadhana*, whatever kind of *sadhana*, was more important than gathering knowledge about different kinds of religions and philosophies."

Narayana Iyer said, "I was exactly in this state when I put forth questions to Bhagavan. Listen to how Bhagavan solved my problem in a trice. Once, some very learned scholars were sitting in the Old Hall, discussing portions of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and other scriptural texts in Sanskrit. Bhagavan gave an illuminating explanation and it was indeed a sight to behold, remember and adore! While watching, I was also aware that these knowledgeable people were fortunate enough to be sharing this kind of learning with Bhagavan; they had a zest for learning and at the same time a keen understanding of the subject.



What was I compared to them? I was a zero as far as scriptural knowledge was concerned and that made me feel miserable. These were the thoughts in my head. After the scholars left, Bhagavan turned to me and said, 'What?' As he said this, he looked deep into my eyes, as if reading my thoughts. Without giving me an opportunity to respond, Bhagavan continued, 'This is only the husk. Book learning and the capacity to repeat the scriptures by rote are of absolutely no use. To know the truth, you need not undergo this torture of learning.' Then, he uttered the most beautiful sentence: 'Not by reading do you arrive at the truth. Be quiet - that is the truth. Be still - that is God.' Then, very graciously, Bhagavan turned to me again. This time there was an immediate change in his tone and attitude, 'Narayana Iyer, do you shave yourself?' I was surprised by this sudden change to a question of a personal nature. I answered in the affirmative. Bhagavan then continued, 'You use the mirror for shaving, don't you? You look into the mirror and then shave your face. You do not shave the image in the mirror, do you? Similarly, all the scriptures are meant only to show you the path to realization. They are meant for practice and attainment. Mere book knowledge and discussions can be compared to a man shaving the image in the mirror.' This was tremendous relief for me. After Bhagavan said these words, my inferiority complex left me once and for all. The other positive thing about Bhagavan's statement was that, since then I was able to be still and quiet. It almost became my property." While I was listening to Narayana

Iyer, I was also transported to that state of quiet stillness. I too gave up the craze for accumulating knowledge and instead took to plunging inwards. "Be quiet - that is the truth. Be still - that is God."

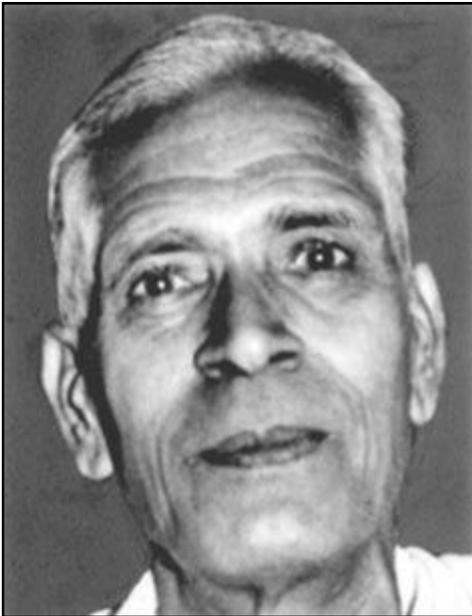
As far as Narayana Iyer was concerned, I was an insatiable questioner. I wanted to know if he received any *upadesa* (a special teaching) from Bhagavan; I wanted to also know whether he had lived up to that teaching. Narayana Iyer said, "Ganesa, Bhagavan did give me an exclusive *upadesa*. The personal instruction of Bhagavan has always been of absolute value to me; it has become my second nature, as it were." What he then said is very significant. "I cried to Bhagavan that I knew nothing of *Vedanta*. I also could not practice certain austerities since I was a householder. I prayed to Bhagavan to help me by showing the way to reality, or reality itself. I also frankly told Bhagavan that his own method of Self Enquiry was too difficult for me. Bhagavan graciously turned to me and said, 'Narayana Iyer, do you know *Ulladu Narpadu*? It imparts pure truth. It deals with pure truth and explains pure truth. Continue reading it verse by verse. The words of the verses will in due course vanish and pure truth - *sat* or *ulladu* - alone will shine like the snake shedding its skin to emerge shining.' This is my *sadhana*, Ganesan, and I have been doing it repeatedly. I chant *Ulladu Narpadu* whenever I have any free time." I listened spellbound.

I once asked Kanakammal (an old devotee of Bhagavan who dropped the body on Bhagavan's *jayanthi*, January 1, 2010, in Bhagavan's *samadhi* hall) about Narayana Iyer and she had the following to say about him: "Narayana Iyer was born in a rich family, but he was perfectly humble. Narayana Iyer's wife shared his views and lived her life as her husband wanted her to. When he was at home, he would often be reciting *Ulladu Narpadu* at the top of his voice. He tended to the cows and did gardening since these were matters that interested him deeply. The moment a cow gave birth to a calf, he paid total attention to both cow and calf. As the cow was giving birth, he would recite *Ulladu Narpadu*. In a lighter vein, Narayana Iyer's wife once told me that the exclusive privilege of receiving Narayana Iyer's attention during delivery time was given to the cows but never ever extended to her, the mother of eight children!"

Narayana Iyer's dedication to and practise of Bhagavan's teaching and instructions was meticulous and total. I once asked him, "Did you ever have any doubt that Bhagavan erased completely?" He was compassionate enough to narrate the following incident: "I was sitting near Bhagavan's couch. I felt puzzled by the ancient teaching that everything you see is *maya*, an illusion. I wondered how Bhagavan sitting on the couch, and the wooden barrier between him and me could be false. I asked Bhagavan whether all of us could be unreal and non-existent. Bhagavan laughed and asked me whether I had had a dream the previous night. I told him that I had had one in which I had seen several people asleep. Bhagavan then said, 'Suppose I ask you to go and wake all those people up in the dream and tell them they are not real. Will that not be absurd? That is how it is to me now. Be assured that there is nothing but the dreamer. So, where is the question of the people in the dream being real or unreal? Still more, of waking them up and telling them that they are not real! We are all unreal. Why do you doubt it? THAT alone is real.' After this explanation, I had absolutely no doubts about the unreality of the world. I could constantly feel its unreal nature." Another day, Bhagavan told Narayana Iyer, "Everything is unreal, like dream objects. However, at a certain stage, there exists truth, or reality, and the world of unreality. There, the realized man's *jnanam* awakens 'others' to the fact that what they see and feel is unreal, and reality is one's own being. This can be compared to an elephant dreaming of a lion and suddenly waking up to find that the lion is unreal and the elephant alone is real. The elephant is the individual (*jiva*), the dream is the unreal world, and the lion is the guru or the *jnani*. The guru is the link between the real and the unreal." On another occasion, Narayana Iyer told me that Bhagavan said, "There is no *jnani*, no realized person. Wisdom alone is. There is only *jnanam*."

Narayana Iyer was posted as sub-registrar in a place away from Tiruvannamalai. That meant that he could not go to Bhagavan whenever he wanted; he was like a suckling baby, longing to be back with the mother. As there were hardly any taxis or buses in those days, Narayana Iyer sometimes hitchhiked on lorries as a mode of transport to reach Bhagavan and even to go back home. Once, he came to the ashram at eight thirty in the night. He had a house opposite the ashram. He hurried into the ashram without even taking his bath or his food. He stopped at the ashram office to pay his respects to Niranjanananda Swami, the *sarvadhikari*, who was having a discussion with some people. Narayana Iyer was surprised because normally the people in the ashram went to bed by eight. The *sarvadhikari* called out to him and said, "Narayana Iyer, come here! Bhagavan has had an accident. He has broken his collar bone. So we have shifted his bed outside the Old Hall, in between the Old Hall and the small

well. Prostrate to him from a distance and then go away. Do not disturb him.” Narayana Iyer recalled, “Had they not mentioned that Bhagavan had a fracture, I would not even have gone there. But knowing that Bhagavan had a fracture, how could I not go there?” Obeying Niranjanananda Swami’s instructions, he went in stealthily like a cat and prostrated to Bhagavan from a distance. But Bhagavan called out to him, “Narayana Iyer, come here!” He was surprised because he thought no one could hear him. Bhagavan then added, “Narayana Iyer, I can see that you are trying not to make any noise!” Then, lying on the couch, he said the strangest thing, “Narayana Iyer, come and sit next to me.” Perhaps, he was the only other person to have ever sat next to Bhagavan on his couch. (The other person was me, but I was only an infant - perhaps I was one and a half years old when I did so). Bhagavan said, “The native doctor has said that the bandage should not be moved; I want to talk to you. Sit by my side.” Narayana Iyer was afraid that the *sarvadhikari* would flare up if he saw him sitting on Bhagavan’s couch, but in a fraction of a second he overcame that fear and went to Bhagavan. As he sat down, Bhagavan continued, “This morning, I was going up the hill. A dog was chasing a squirrel and so I put my walking staff between the two of them. I then slipped and broke my collar bone. A devotee, who is also a native bone setter, made a paste of leaves and black gram and applied it with the plea that I do not move my arm.” Narayana Iyer was very moved about how Bhagavan paid as much heed to the plight of the squirrel as he did to the plea of his devotee, the bone setter.



Narayana Iyer rarely missed coming to the ashram on Bhagavan’s birthday. Once, he was sixty miles away. He travelled by one lorry after another and at last reached the ashram at one in the morning. He had to leave the ashram at five that same morning because he had to report for work at nine. While taking leave, he prostrated before Bhagavan, who held out his hand and said, “Come, Narayana Iyer, you should have something to eat.” Bhagavan took him to the kitchen. They both looked into the vessels but there was nothing there because everything, including the floor, had been cleaned with water the previous night. Bhagavan went into the small room inside the kitchen and looked into all the pots and pans. Fortunately, he found a handful of almonds. As he came out, he noticed that the kitchen fire was almost out, so he put more firewood into the fire and then set a frying pan on it. He poured some ghee into the pan, then added the almonds and roasted them. He also added some salt and chili powder. He put the almonds on a leaf and gave it to Narayana Iyer, saying, “How can you go without eating anything?” It seemed heavenly to Narayana Iyer though he could not believe what was

happening. He obeyed Bhagavan automatically. Then, Bhagavan got up, looked for a newspaper and another leaf and wrapped up the rest of the almonds in them. He packed it beautifully, just like they do in restaurants. He gave it to Narayana Iyer, saying, “When you go home, Lalitha (Narayana Iyer’s wife) and your children will ask, ‘What have you brought us from Bhagavan?’ Take this and give it to them.” As Narayana Iyer narrated this, he wept copiously and said, “How can I not remember these special acts of love? Who will believe it when I talk about it?”

When Narayana Iyer’s eldest daughter was to be married, Narayana Iyer had no money for the betrothal. According to Hindu tradition, there is a ceremony and a *pooja* for which a few things are necessary. Narayana Iyer’s wife said, “Why don’t you go and appeal to Bhagavan?” He replied, “I will never go and appeal to Bhagavan for material things.” She prayed to Bhagavan silently, telling him of the importance of the betrothal. The couple then went to see Bhagavan and prostrated before him. They did not breathe a word of the matter. The next morning, the postman arrived with a money order of fifty one rupees. (I myself have seen the counterfoil of this money order - Narayana Iyer has shown it to me.) It had come from Ahmedabad, which is a good thousand miles away from Tiruvannamalai. There was a message saying, “Letter follows.” The couple bought whatever they needed with the money. The prospective groom came and was received well and the wedding date was fixed. The couple waited anxiously for the letter that was to follow. The letter arrived later from a Gujarati gentleman in Ahmedabad. The couple did not know him at all. He wrote, “Dear Narayana Iyer, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi appeared in my dream and told me that I have to immediately telegraph a money order of

rupees fifty one. He also gave me your address. I do not know you and I do not know what the money is for. Please accept it." (I have seen that letter too.) Narayana Iyer, his wife and their daughter went before Bhagavan. They wept and prostrated before him and said, "Bhagavan, what grace are you showering on us!" Bhagavan read the letter as though someone else had showered the grace! He then focused his attention on both of them and said, "Why doubt? Why should you not ask me?" This is what I want to share with you. It is not just for spiritual fulfillment that we have come to the master. When the supreme master is capable of granting you the highest thing, which is Self realization, will he not fulfill your prayers for mundane things?

In a similar context, Devaraja Mudaliar once asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, you have praised Arunachala, your father, as being gracious, compassionate and powerful enough to give *atma sakshatkar*. Does this mean that I can even make pleas for my daughter's marriage or my own employment?" Bhagavan smiled and answered, "If a person can grant Self realization, is it difficult for him to grant your simple prayer like getting a job or getting a son? If you have a lakh of rupees, is it difficult for you to give ten?"

One evening in the Old Hall, Sri Bhagavan very forcefully stated that whatever that is seen is untrue and that the seer alone is true. The next noon, when Sri Bhagavan was alone, Narayana Iyer sat in front of him and asked him, "Bhagavan! Is everything untrue? Are you, who is the Lord Himself, untrue? Is the sofa on which you are seated, untrue? Is this hall untrue? Is this wooden barricade untrue? Am I who sees these untrue, Bhagavan?" Sri Bhagavan gave a beautiful smile of assurance and said, "Where is the room for any doubt? Everything is untrue. Assuredly, all that is seen is wholly untrue, a lie! But, the inner *vastu* within you that sees all these, that is the only TRUTH! Everything else is untrue!" (In the original Tamil, this dialogue is both more poignant and emphatic. Narayana Iyer asks, "*Bhagavaney! Yellaam poiyya? Neenga saakshaat Ishwaran - neenga poiyya? Neenga okkandhirukkara sofa poiyya? Indha hall poiyya? Indha thaduppu poiyya? Paarkara naan poiyya?*" Bhagavan replied forcefully, "*Idhiley yenna, oi, sandhegam? Yellaam poi! Paarkaradhu yellam poi than, oi! Yellaathaiyum ulle irundhu paarkaradhey oru vastu, adhu onnu than mei! Meedhi yellaam poi!*")

Narayana Iyer once told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I have been here many years. People meditate and then go into *samadhi*. I close my eyes for a minute, and my mind travels round the world ten times. And so many forgotten thoughts leap up. I suffer, Bhagavan." Upon hearing this, Bhagavan said, "Why do you concern yourself about others? They may meditate or sleep or snore. Look at your Self. Whenever the mind goes astray, bring it back to the quest. There is a verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* which says one should check and bring back the mind to the Self no matter to what side a restless and unsteady mind wanders." However, Narayana Iyer was not convinced about Bhagavan's reasoning. Then, Bhagavan, the mother, further elaborated, "The child who was woken up and given milk after it has gone to sleep, says the next morning, 'Mother, you never gave me milk last night.' Similarly, you too have had your fill." Bhagavan's assurance to Narayana Iyer is also an assurance to each one of us.

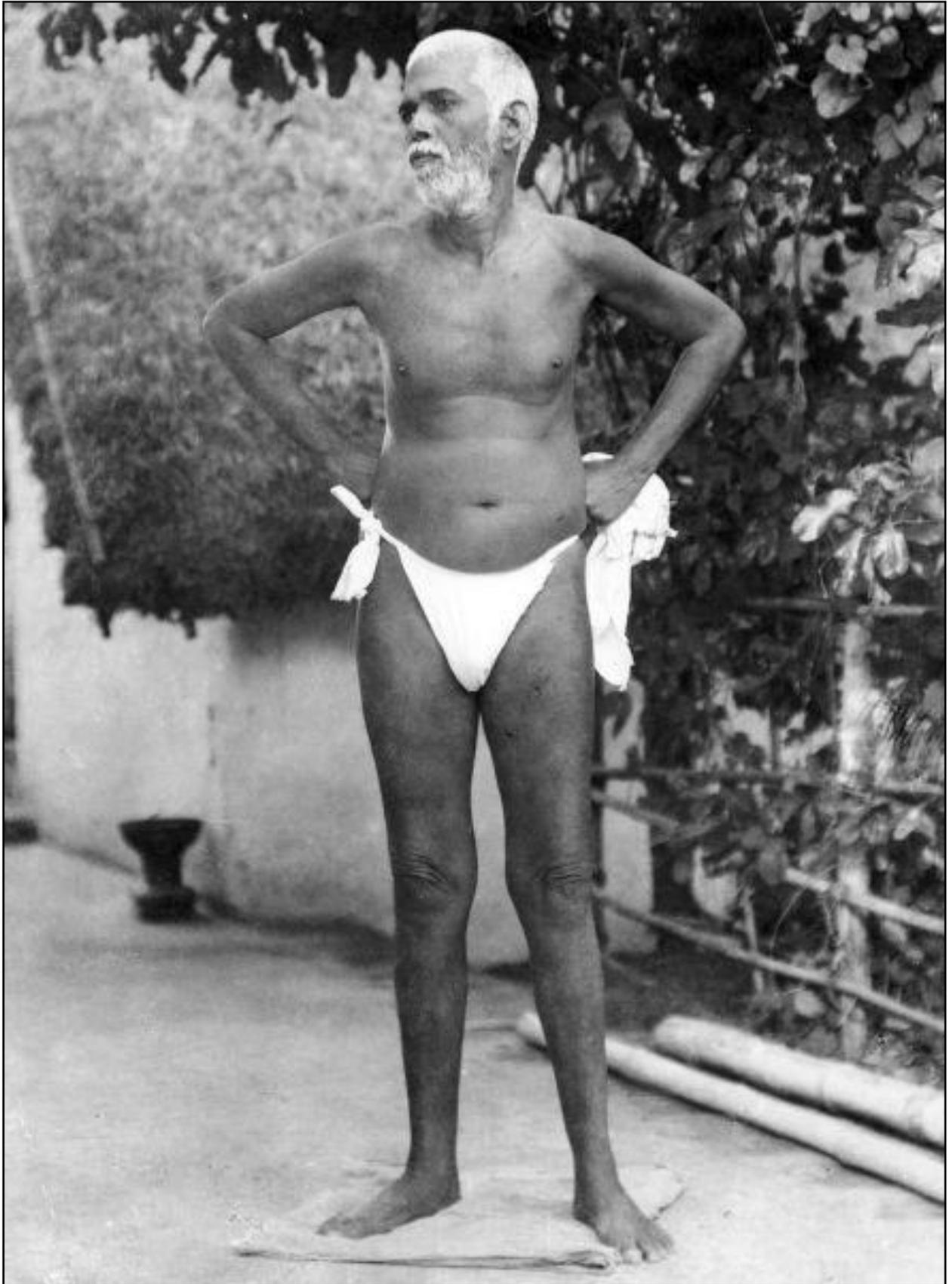
During the celebration of Bhagavan's first *aradhana*, the first anniversary of his *nirvana*, I was in the company of many of these old devotees who were crying. They were crying because the calm form of Bhagavan had left them. Narayana Iyer sobbed and wept profusely. I embraced him and said, "Narayana Iyer, what is it that you are feeling?" He replied, "I cannot speak now." I told him to write down his feelings. He sat at the foot of the hill and wrote. These thoughts were published in *The Mountain Path* and also in the book, *Moments Remembered*. The following is the moving account of what Narayana Iyer wrote on the occasion of the first anniversary of Bhagavan's *nirvana*: "Bhagavan! Bhagavan! Oh dear Bhagavan! Is this the day that you left us? I vividly remember the day when Sri Muruganar and I were last in the queue to see you on the evening of 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1950. Can I, like Saint Manikkavachakar or Saint Thayumanavar, exclaim that my hair stood on its end? *Kadharinen* - I cried unashamedly. *Vidirvithirthen* - I wept in spasms of uncontrollable breath. My friend Muruganar and I were the only ones when we saw you. When I saw your prostrate body with closed eyes and upturned face, I didn't know what to do. But you turned and cast your look on the grief stricken people who were weeping before you. Then you turned and closed your eyes. We were still weeping there. Lo, you turned towards us and looked at us again. Was it a look of farewell, oh Lord? Was it the last, the very last one? The recollection of your consoling words, 'Where can I go? I am here,' are the words of eternal wisdom that have sustained us. How can I ever forget the thousand instances of your love? The almonds that you specially fried for me by lighting the fire yourself and the groundnut *kootu* that you asked Venkataratnam to keep for me are still sweet on my tongue. When my friend Professor G. V.

Subbaramayya pleaded with you to help me out of my official trouble, he said, 'Poor Narayana Iyer. Can Bhagavan not do anything for him?' did you not say, 'What want is there for him?' During one of your last days, G. V. Subbaramayya implored, 'Give me protection, Bhagavan.' In one word, you said, 'I have given.' At that time you saw me linking my arm with his, implying that I too was joining in the request. Countless are the instances of your grace to me. Lord, how can they go in vain? How many pages I have written that are smudged with tears! My obeisance to you, Bhagavan - I am ever at your holy feet with loving thoughts. My heart throbs along with the heart beats of those who have assembled here to offer eternal love."

Bhagavan's advent to Arunachala was to save us all from the ignorance to which we are bound and because of which we are suffering. As long as we attach ourselves to the body, the suffering will continue. But, if you raise the question, 'Who am I?', and listen to the silence, that silence is Arunachala, that silence is Ramana and that silence is our true nature.



*'Old Hall', in early days*



*"The first photo"*

## Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami



Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, or Dr. TNK, was perhaps the only devotee for whom Bhagavan's physical body meant everything. He was also the person to whom Bhagavan revealed that the whole of Arunachala hill was sacred and was the Lord himself. Dr. TNK describes how this happened: "One day, I was walking up on Arunachala behind Bhagavan. He stopped and picked up a small stone from the path and held it out to me saying, 'Someone from abroad has written asking for a stone from the most sacred spot on the hill. He does not know that the whole hill is sacred. Just as we identify ourselves with the body, Lord Siva has chosen to identify himself with this hill. The stillness of Arunachala is pure wisdom when approached with faith. It is out of compassion to those who seek the Father that he has chosen to reveal himself in the form of a sacred space visible to the eyes. The seeker will obtain guidance and solace by staying near the hill.'"

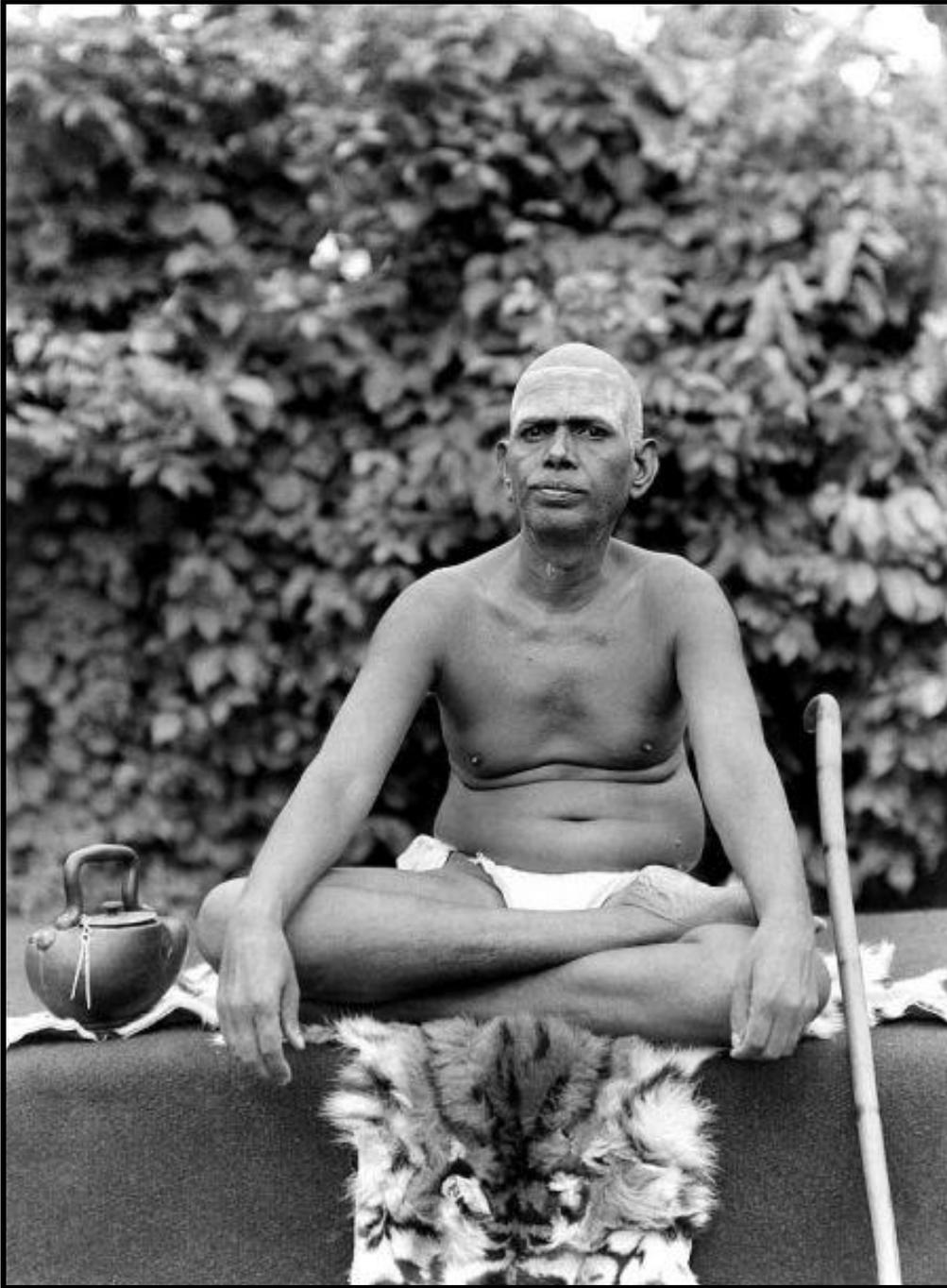
A very successful physician in Madras (now Chennai), Dr. TNK was not only instrumental in getting this revelation about Arunachala for us. He was also the photographer who captured most of the photos we now have of the master. How he was drawn to Bhagavan is a fascinating story. In the 1930s, Krishnaswami was preparing for his final year medical exams. To take a break from the long and intense study hours, he and some of his classmates went to Vellore to take photographs of the ancient fort there. When he reached Vellore, he was very disappointed as he did not find the fort such a fascinating subject for his camera. Seeing this, a local there told him, "Why are you disappointed? Go to Tiruvannamalai. There is an ancient and majestic temple there. It will be a feast for your eyes and your camera." So he proceeded to Tiruvannamalai along with his friends. While photographing the temple, someone told him about a saint living at the nearby Ramanasramam and suggested, "Why don't you go and take photographs of him?"

Krishnaswami wasn't convinced that a *sadhu* could be a fascinating subject for his camera. Nevertheless, he came to the ashram with his friends. A photographer was very rare those days in Ramanasramam. Seeing him, a resident of the ashram, Seshu Iyer, requested him to wait awhile and take some photographs of Bhagavan. Meanwhile Bhagavan, who had gone up the hill, was just returning. Seshu Iyer went up to him and said, "This group has come from Madras. They are waiting to take a photograph of you." Bhagavan looked at them and in particular at Krishnaswami and replied, "Is that so? Then let him." Bhagavan even posed for him. That was Krishnaswami's first photograph of Bhagavan. In the later years, innumerable photographs followed. But this very first photograph he took of Bhagavan was Krishnaswami's favourite one.

As the group started leaving, an ochre robed *sannyasin* came running after them and told Krishnaswami, "We do not have proper photographs of Bhagavan in the ashram. Since you have taken one, why don't you send us some prints so that we can make them available to devotees?" Krishnaswami returned to Chennai, developed the photos himself and sent the copies to the *sannyasin*. Krishnaswami was so fascinated by the *sannyasin* that he acceded to all his requests and commands throughout his life. This *sannyasin* was none other than Niranjanananda Swami, the younger brother of Ramana Maharshi and the *sarvadhikari* of the ashram. This first photograph must have been the *sarvadhikari's* favourite too, for he had this particular photo hung on the wall in his office.

Dr. TNK, whom I interviewed in the 1960s, described the very first look of Bhagavan: "I thought I had successfully captured Bhagavan inside a metal camera. Very soon I realized it was Bhagavan who had captured me in his Heart from where I could never escape." I continued, "How did you feel when you first saw Maharshi?" He answered, "The Maharshi did not seem to take notice of anything around him. He wore a calm and distant look. His eyes were shining and there was something divine about his countenance."

A few days after Krishnaswami had sent his first photo of Bhagavan to the ashram, they wrote back to him requesting him to come and take a group photograph of Bhagavan with some devotees. Dr. TNK later recollected, "I had already forgotten about the first photo, because as a student I had many attractions and distractions. So, when this letter came, I felt it was becoming a nuisance." Strangely, he soon found himself seated in the train to Tiruvannamalai with his camera. When he entered the ashram, Bhagavan looked at him with a most beautiful, welcoming smile and said, "They want a group photo and they want you to take it for them." Feeling flattered, he happily took the group photograph. Then, something prompted him to ask, "Bhagavan, will you please pose for a portrait?" Bhagavan agreed and sat in *padmasana*. In the 1930s and 40s, this photograph adorned the homes of many of Bhagavan's devotees. Soon after this, Krishnaswami completed his medical course and became a reputed and successful doctor in Chennai.



*"Bhagavan agreed and sat in padmasana"*

From then on, visiting the ashram became a regular routine. On one such visit, when he entered the hall, Bhagavan said, "Just now we were talking about you. They have written you a letter they may have

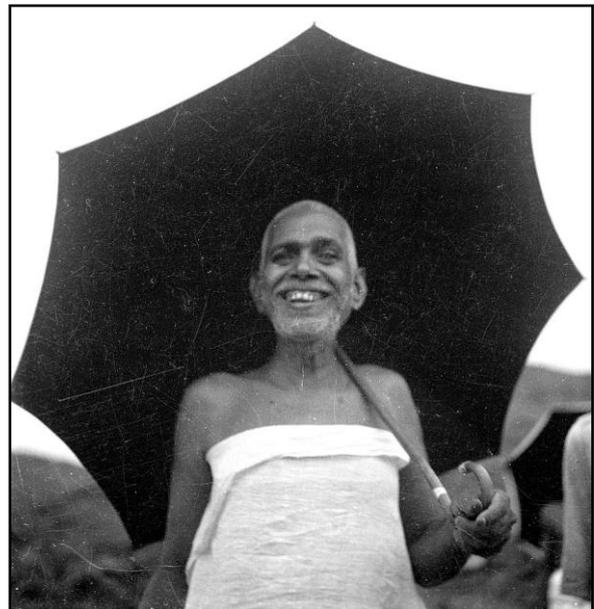
not even posted yet - perhaps you can receive it personally.” Dr. TNK told me, “There were many coincidences like that. Week after week, month after month, year after year, I would take my camera, go there and take photographs of Bhagavan from morning to evening.” (Today, almost eighty percent of the photographs that we see of Bhagavan were taken by him. In the later years too, other photographers - for instance, G. G. Wellings from Bangalore - were only rarely permitted to photograph Bhagavan.) Bhagavan drew Dr. TNK to him again and again like a spiritual magnet. I asked him, “What made you keep returning to Bhagavan?” He countered it with another question, “What makes a baby go to its mother? Bhagavan was like a mother for me. That is how I felt and so I kept going back again and again.”



Dr. TNK was known as the ‘ashram photographer’. When asked to narrate of how he took photographs, he said, “Whenever I went to the ashram, though I usually stayed there briefly, I made it a point to accompany the Maharshi from morning to evening and take as many pictures of him as possible. I used to wonder if such doggedness on my part would vex the Maharshi. I have snapped him walking, sitting, eating and even cleaning his feet. I have also snapped him smiling, bursting into laughter, smiling at a child, in a meditative mood and in *samadhi*. Once, he was going up the hill when there was a light drizzle and he was offered a typical farmer’s umbrella made from palmyra leaves. I took a picture of him wearing this on his head. I also took another picture of him using an ordinary umbrella. As I began to take that picture, the Maharshi looked at me with a very broad smile.” Every photograph had a story behind it, and not many of them had been recorded. So, every time I met Dr. TNK, I pestered him for more such stories.

Once, the ashram was bringing out a book titled *The Maharshi*, with a hundred and seventeen illustrations. By

then, the ashram had plenty of Bhagavan’s pictures taken by Dr. TNK. But they did not have a single proper photo of the hill. So Niranjanananda Swami requested him to take a good picture of the hill for that book. For Dr. TNK, Bhagavan was father, mother, guru, God - everything. He approached Bhagavan and appealed, “They have asked me to take a photograph of the hill. What should I do?” Bhagavan replied, “Before the railway tracks from the south, reach Tiruvannamalai, there is a railway bridge. From there, if you look at Arunachala, the top of Arunachala and the temple’s main tower fall in a straight line. That view is especially striking. Take that!” Recounting the incident, Dr. TNK posed me a question which he himself answered, “Ganesan, how do you think Bhagavan knew that? Put yourself in Bhagavan’s position: Only once had he travelled that way by train - as a sixteen year old boy running away from home in ecstatic search of his Father. And yet, just a glimpse of the hill and the temple’s main tower from that bridge got so deeply imprinted in his Heart that he could bring it out vividly and immediately years later!



A sage’s every movement, word and gesture has great significance because for a sage everything is in the now.” Dr. TNK is an important link in the history of Ramana Maharshi. Whenever I went to Chennai, I used to go to his house, prostrate to him and pester him, “Tell me more about Bhagavan!” In addition, I would collect the innumerable negatives of the photos he had taken of Bhagavan. On one such visit, I

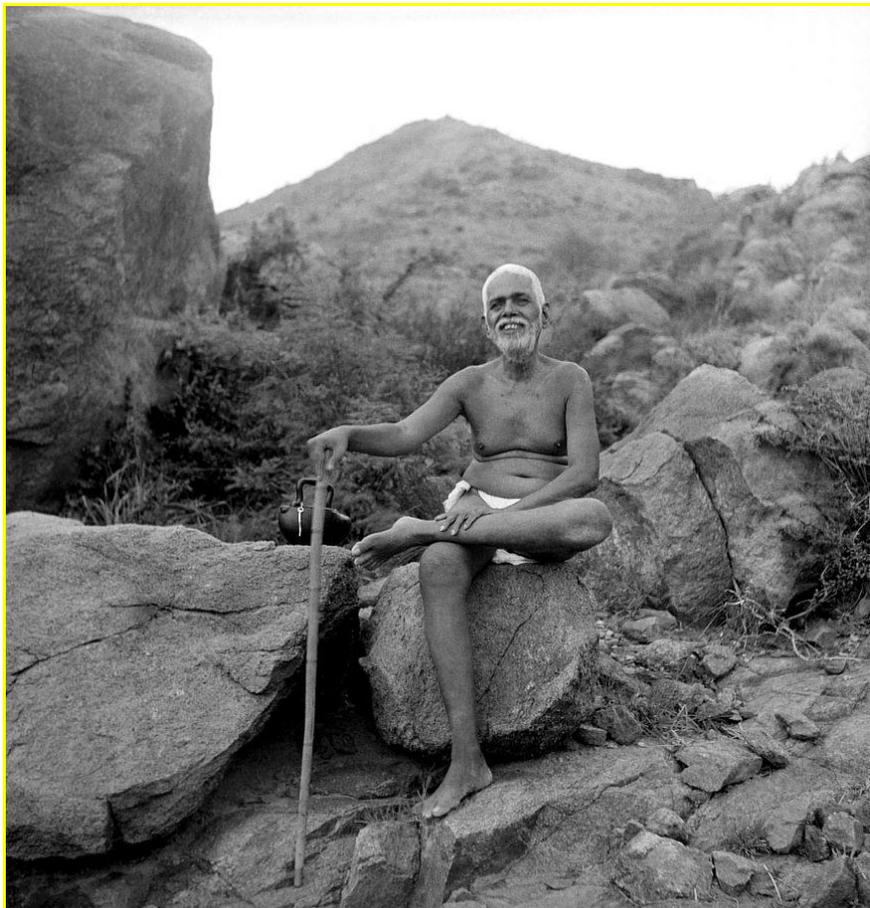
gathered literally hundreds of these negatives, bundled them in a big cloth and brought them to the ashram.



One day, Dr. TNK seemed to be in a blissful mood. He turned away all his patients who were waiting for him and asked me to come upstairs to his room. There, with eyes brimming with tears of joy, he talked about the glory of Bhagavan, the grandeur of Bhagavan, the majesty of Bhagavan. He recounted, "Not once did Bhagavan tell me, directly or indirectly, through Niranjanananda Swami or any attendant, to stop taking photos. On the other hand, he unhesitatingly stood or sat in whatever pose I asked him for. No one will believe if I tell now that I used to ask him, 'Turn your face this side, look up, look sideways, keep the arms down or keep the arms like this,' and that he acceded to my requests instantly. Up on the hill when I was taking photographs of Bhagavan, no one was allowed except the attendants. If anyone had been there and seen Bhagavan obeying me, they would have mistaken Bhagavan to be obsessed with being photographed. The real truth is that he, as my guru, was fulfilling my desires, my insatiable longing to photograph him and that was all. Has he not fulfilled every prayer of every devotee all his

life?"

He continued, "Niranjanananda Swami once asked me to take a photo of Bhagavan sitting with one leg over the other in the traditional Dakshinamurti posture. Bhagavan agreed. For his seat, we adjusted a rock so that the top of the hill formed the backdrop. Before Bhagavan sat on the rock, he asked the attendant and me which leg should be up and which leg down. We were puzzled as we weren't sure. "Does not matter," Bhagavan said, "Take two photographs - one with the right leg up and the other with the left leg up." A relieved Dr. TNK took the photos as suggested!



*"... traditional Dakshinamurti posture "*

Once, I asked him, “Have you ever taken any picture of Bhagavan stealthily, without taking his permission, without his knowledge?” He said, “I always sought his permission before taking his photo, except this once. I wanted to take a photo of his holy feet as the feet of the *satguru* are highly extolled in our scriptures. I requested the attendant to sprinkle a few flowers in front of Bhagavan’s feet as he reclined on his couch. Hiding my camera from Bhagavan’s vision, I pretended to bend down and prostrate. Suddenly, I raised myself and took the photo.” He added, “Bhagavan’s figure was out of focus, only the feet were clearly focused. When I tried to slip out, Bhagavan beckoned me to his side. As he looked at me, he had a knowing smile dancing in his eyes which seemed to say, ‘Do I not know the mischief you are up to?’ This is for the first time I am sharing this incident. I have all along been hiding that photograph. I have been exclusively venerating it. Now, I feel like giving it to you. I will give you the negative. Maybe, Bhagavan wants his holy feet to adorn the homes and hearts of his devotees.” This was in 1967. I was thrilled because the ashram was about to bring out the *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir*. Needless to say, because of this wondrous turn of events, I was able to give this one and only photograph of its kind, the pride of place on the very first page of the souvenir.



I once asked him, "Haven't you ever felt that just taking photographs was not enough?" Dr. TNK confessed, "Sometimes, I used to wonder if it was not ridiculous of me to pay so much attention to photographing his form when Bhagavan's teaching was 'I am not the body'. Was I not chasing the shadow and trying to perpetuate it? Somehow, so long as I was seeing him with my eyes, the teaching did not assume any importance to me. His person was seen by me and I felt drawn and attracted to him. It gave me immense pleasure to take photographs of him. He was more important to me than his teaching. Every little movement, every one of his acts and gestures, was highly valued by me and they always carried some divine fragrance. Simply to watch him, no matter what he was doing, was highly gratifying."

As mentioned earlier, Dr. TNK was not only a good photographer but also a very successful doctor. He was the doctor to many of Chennai's elite, particularly reputed movie actors, famous classical singers and other popular citizens. But, having come to Bhagavan, and having served him, would Bhagavan leave him spiritually unrewarded? Would he leave him to be merely a good photographer and a successful doctor with a roaring practice? So, in the last days of Bhagavan's illness, he made Dr. TNK stay with him and serve him.

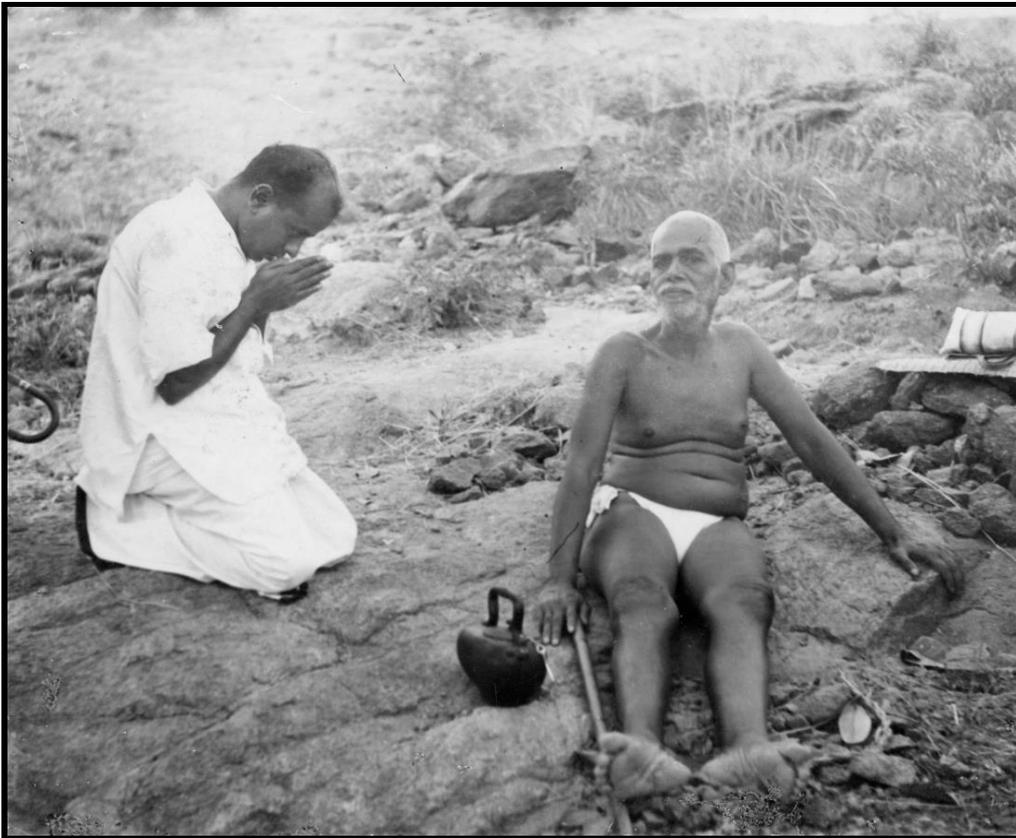
Years later, I asked him to describe the last moments of Bhagavan's earthly life. Tears flowed down his cheeks and he was choked with emotion. He could not utter a single word. So, I asked him to write it down and give it to me. This is what he wrote: "I had the rare privilege of being allowed to stay with the Maharshi during his last days. Knowing fully well that his end was near I was inquisitive to watch and see if he would leave any message for us. Would he not speak words of solace? Would he not leave behind some directions for us? It was sad indeed to look at the suffering of the body but the mystery was his attitude to it. He described all the pain and suffering as though the body belonged to somebody else. The question arose whether he was suffering or not. How could he describe the pain and suffering so accurately and locate it in the body and yet remain unaffected by it? 'There is a severe, intolerable headache,' he said as his kidneys started failing. The Maharshi never described the symptoms in a subjective manner. On the evening of the last day, the Maharshi asked to be propped up in a sitting posture and he assumed something like a *padmasana* posture. His breathing was getting strenuous and heavy. The attending doctor put the oxygen mask to his face. The Maharshi brushed it aside. There was a heavenly chorus of 'Arunachala Siva , Arunachala Siva ' being sung outside the room. The gathering stood speechless. Would physical death dare touch him? No! It is impossible. A miracle will happen. That is what everyone thought. The atmosphere was tense with emotion, fear and expectation. There was some weeping. Very gently, the Maharshi seemed to gasp a little and the body became still. Synchronizing with the Maharshi's last breath, a meteor was seen to trail across the sky. We could scarcely realize what had happened. The physical form had left us once for all. No more the beatific smile to greet us. No more the graceful form to adorn the ashram."

Whenever I met Dr. TNK in his residence, he would take me upstairs and talk about Bhagavan. "What did you do after Bhagavan dropped the body?" I asked him. He replied, "Bhagavan's body, which I had worshipped, was no more to be seen. This gave me a severe jolt. I was shocked. Had I missed the opportunity of a lifetime to imbibe the direct teaching from the enlightened one? I had done nothing in the direction of spiritual practice. Had I wasted all my time taking photographs while I should have engaged myself in trying to understand and practice his teachings in his very presence? No, I said to myself, this cannot be true. I was sure I had obtained some grace from the Maharshi. He is somehow still here - only we have to learn to feel his presence as the substratum without form. We will never be forsaken, for he has himself assured us that he was not going away. He is omniscient. Then, I turned to study his teachings. I began to see the truth in them. Some of the sentences touched me and made me feel that I was in his presence, listening to him. I took heart. The more I read the more intimate the Maharshi became to me. His teaching pulsed with life. I began to understand it and it mixed with my being and became my own." When he said this, I immediately prostrated to him, held his feet and said, "Doctor, bless me!" I knew that he was in that immaculate state of inward repose, peace and perfection, though he was dressed in a western suit and had a stethoscope around his neck.

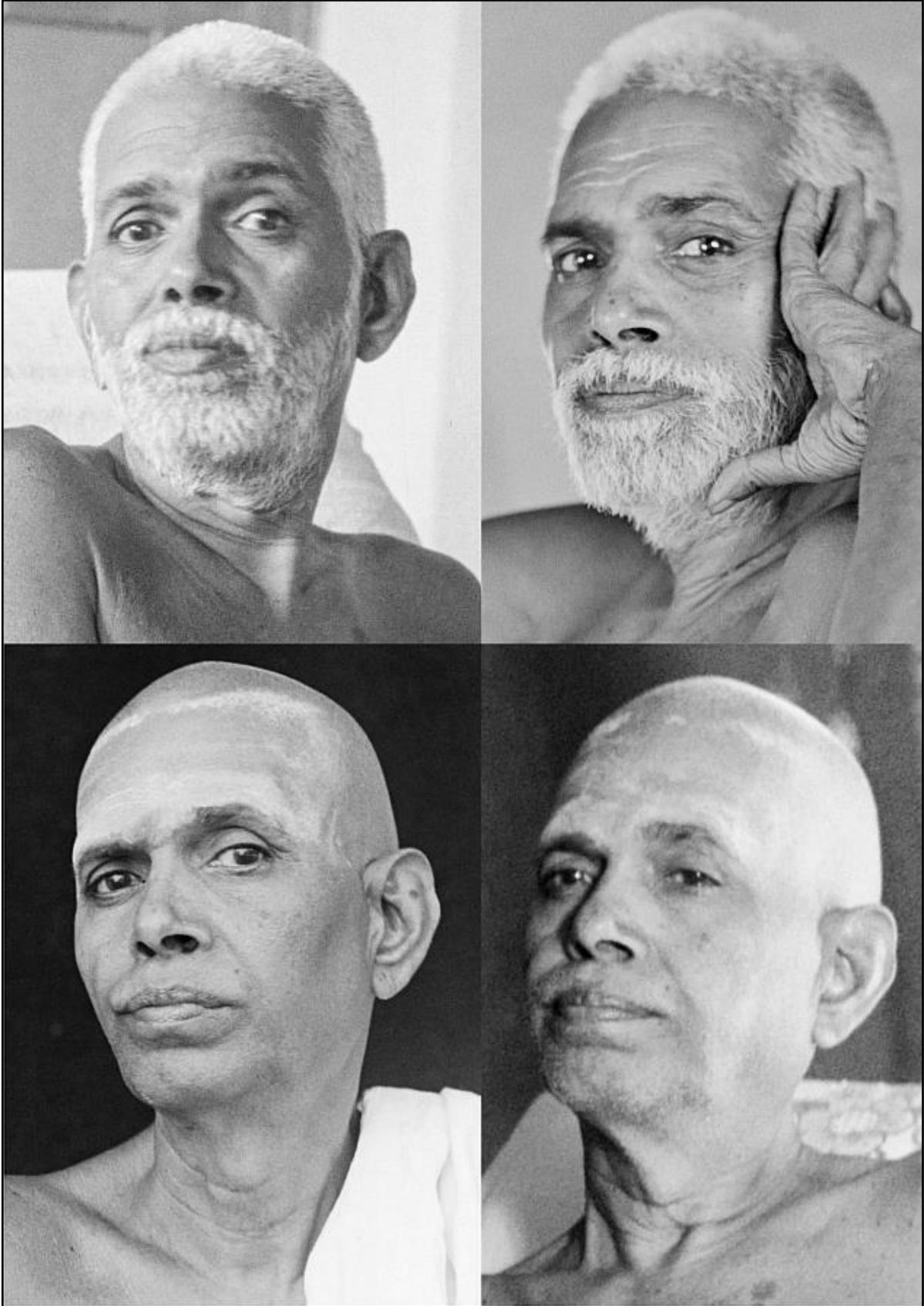
Once, a couple came to the ashram from New York. They wanted to know if there were any realized beings after Bhagavan. I replied, "I can show you one, but will you recognize him as the Self realised one?" They answered that they would try their best. I told them that he was not here in Ramanasramam but in Chennai and that he does not wear ochre robes or have a clean shaven head. I also forewarned them that he would be dressed in western attire. Not deterred, the couple asked me to take them to

see him. I took them to Dr. TNK's residence in Chennai. The moment I saw the doctor, I prostrated to him. His whole house was filled with Bhagavan's pictures. He showed the couple around and offered to give them any picture they wanted. They chose a picture that has never been seen in Ramanasramam before. Dr. TNK immediately removed it from the wall and gave it to them. Then, he told us, "There is a story behind it. For the naming ceremony of my second son, a celebration and *pooja* was arranged. I wanted to name him Ramana. My wife objected to that. She said, 'By tradition, you should give him my father's name, just as you have named our first son after your father. As I could not object to that, I reluctantly agreed. The function was going on and as per tradition I covered my second son under a cloth and was about to whisper my wife's father's name in his ear. Suddenly, this framed picture fell off from the wall on to my back. For me, it was as if Bhagavan himself was telling me, 'Give him my name.' So, I named him Ramana!"

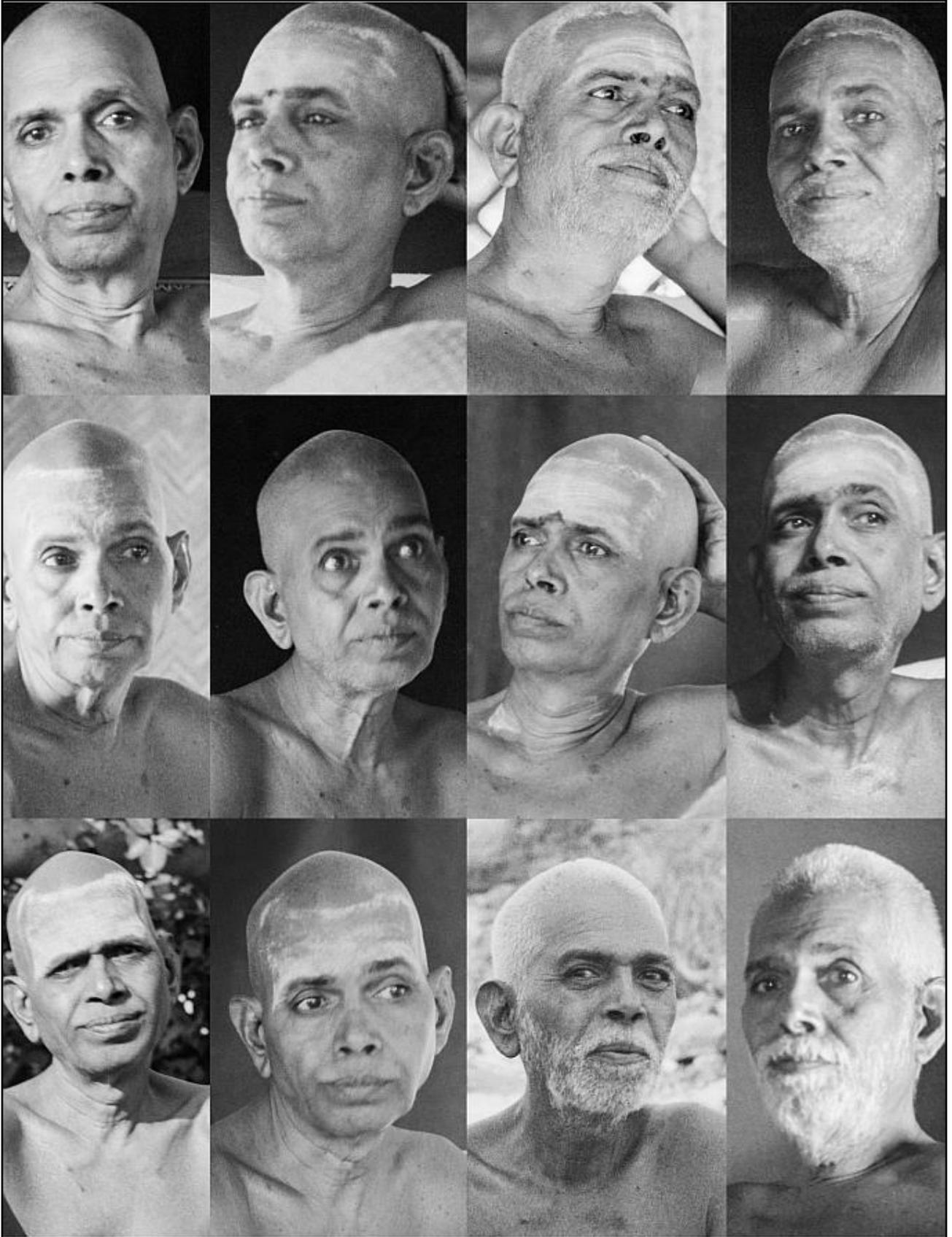
When Dr. TNK was on his death bed, I went to see him. Seeing him, I wept. He chided me, "Is this your understanding of Bhagavan's teaching? Look at me. I am looking at Bhagavan beckoning to me. I am going to him. Why should you cry? Come on, wake up." I said, "I have one doubt, doctor. You are a millionaire. You have acquired many properties. People say that you are a cheat pretending to be a devotee, but that actually you are only after money. You own sixty houses in the city and have millions of rupees in many bank accounts." Dr. TNK smiled at me and said, "Yes, I own all these but they do not own me." He continued, "I am advising you. Do not pay any attention to anything outside of your Self. Property or no property, they are all untrue. The silence within you is the only truth. Focus your attention on truth. Bhagavan is calling me. Bhagavan blesses you, Ganesan." He then lay with his eyes closed for some time. A few minutes later, he turned to me with great affection and said, "Opposite to the ashram, I have a building in which I requested Muruganar to stay. I am bequeathing that building to you. I know you do not have any money or property to lean on. You are rendering surrendered service to Bhagavan. You should not suffer in the future for want of anything. Please accept it." Reverentially accepting his offer, I touched the feet of Dr. TNK and took his leave. (Very recently, I surrendered this building to Ramanasramam.) After a few days, Dr. TNK, 'Bhagavan-photographer', merged fully conscious with Ramana Arunachala.



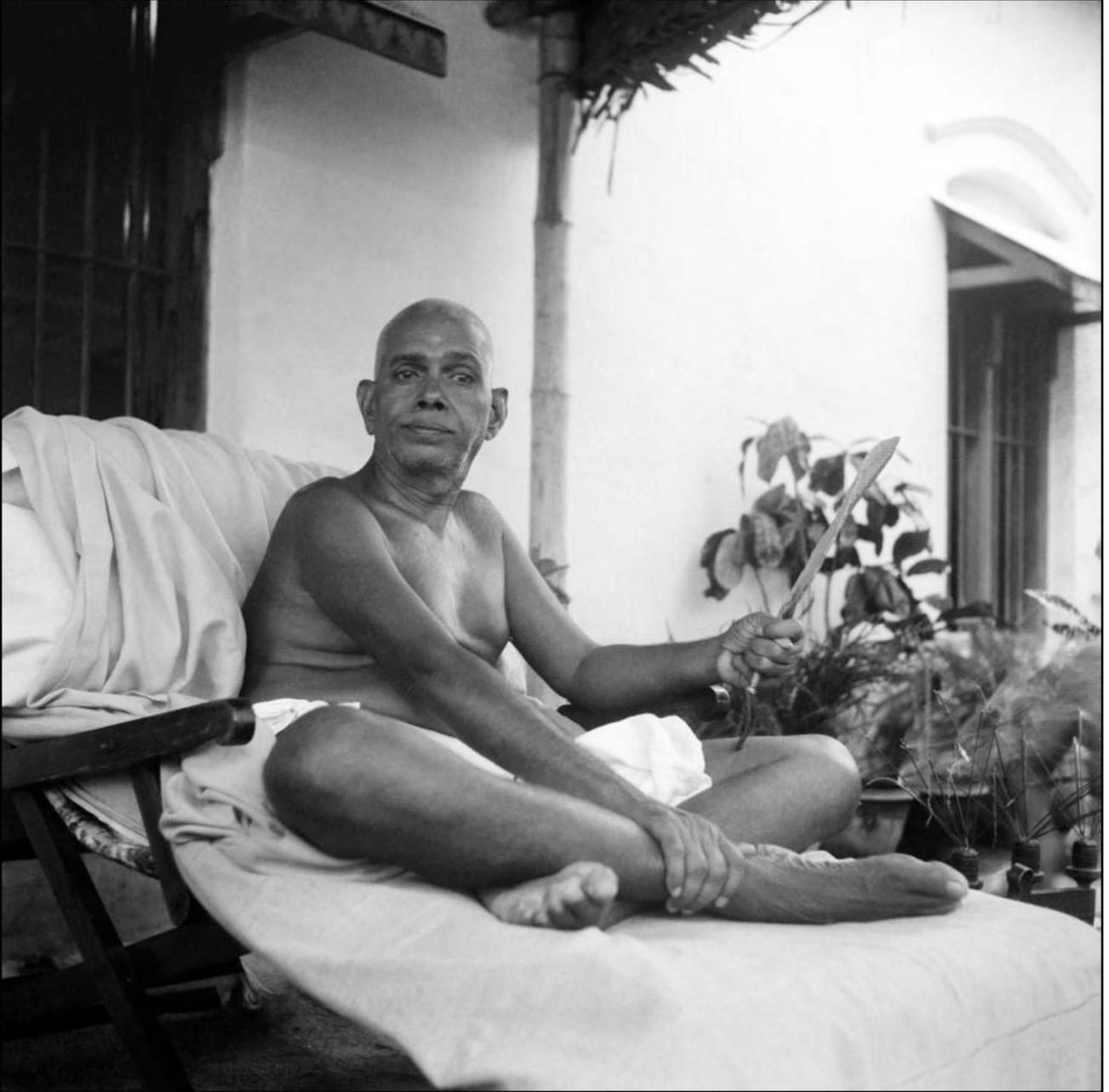
*Sri Bhagavan on the hill, Dr T N Krishnaswami is offering his obeisance*



*Tribute to Dr. T.N.K's 'photo service' to Sri Bhagavan ( Mountain Path, July 1975 issue) - 1*



*Tribute to Dr. T.N.K's 'photo service' to Sri Bhagavan ( Mountain Path, July 1975 issue) - 2*



*Sri Bhagavan seated outside 'Old Hall'*

## Framji Dorabji



Framji Dorabji was a Zoroastrian, or Parsee, who owned a movie theatre in Chennai. From childhood, Framji was so devoted to sages and saints that wherever there were *sadhus* and *sannyasins*, he would go fall at their feet. Knowing of his 'madness', his family friends often played pranks on him saying, "Framji, there is a great sage at such and such a place on the outskirts of Bombay." He would go there immediately with offerings of fruits, only to find no one like that there. Though he knew that they had played a prank on him, he never resented it. As he later recounted, "I was never hurt or angry - those moments were very precious to me as I was thinking of meeting a saint."

Once, he was actually cheated by a *sadhu* who he thought was genuine. The *sadhu* was a psychic and an expert in thought reading. The first time he went to meet this *sadhu*, Framji was still in the car while his friends went on ahead. To their utter amazement, the *sadhu* asked them, "Why have you left your friend Framji Dorabji in the car? Bring him here." When Framji met him, the *sadhu* did some psychic reading of his thoughts. Framji was very impressed and thinking that he was a great saint, started going to him regularly. Soon, the *sadhu* started extracting money from him. Once, he asked for a huge amount that Framji could never even hope to get. On being told that, the *sadhu* threatened him, "If you do not come with that money, I will curse you. Your whole family will be destroyed." When he returned home, he found his elder daughter had fallen ill. As the days went by, seeing her condition getting worse, he rushed back to the *sadhu* and pleaded, "Please reverse your curse. My daughter is dying." The *sadhu* was unmoved, "Unless you give me the money I will not reverse the curse." When he went home, he found his daughter dead and his wife very ill. He was overtaken by grief and fear. Taking pity on him, his elder brother Dadiba who had just read a review of *A Search in Secret India* said, "Brother! I have just read about a great sage in South India. Why don't you go to him for protection?"

Thus, in 1937, Framji Dorabji came to Bhagavan. No private interviews with Bhagavan were allowed, but one could go up the hill alone with Bhagavan. Framji followed Bhagavan up the hill and poured out all his woes, "Bhagavan, this is my plight. In fact, I do not even know whether my wife is now alive or not." Bhagavan stopped, turned and looked at Framji for some time and then said, "Only that far can they go. There is nothing to fear. There is protection always. Go back peacefully." Framji felt his fear dropping off like a cloak off the body. A word surged from his heart, "Master!" He was the first person to call Ramana Maharshi 'master'. From then on, he started repeating, "My master, my master," often. When Framji returned to his family, they were surprised because what had happened to him was undoubtedly a real miracle. His wife became all right and Framji started coming to his master from far off Mumbai.

In 1942, his business fortunately shifted to Chennai. He became the owner of a movie theatre. This gave him the freedom to go to Bhagavan any time he chose. In Bhagavan's presence, he had no doubts or questions. He felt in his presence, divinity in the here and now. The moment he went to Bhagavan, whatever doubt he had was cleared by one look from Bhagavan. At other times, somebody else would raise the same doubt he had and Bhagavan would answer it. So, there was never a need for him to put any intellectual question to Bhagavan. He understood that his path was the path of surrender.

He used to go to Bhagavan wearing a black cap which was part of his traditional Zoroastrian attire and prostrate before him. In India, perhaps due to the influence of the British, one would remove one's hat while in the presence of an elder or person of higher standing. The other devotees therefore told Framji that it was not proper for him to prostrate and sit before Bhagavan with his cap on. When Bhagavan heard this, he said, "The Parsee custom is that when one wants to show respect to a holy personage, he must wear his cap. Framji is only doing the right thing." Framji was surprised, "How did Bhagavan know that? Though a few Zoroastrian devotees were already coming to Bhagavan, none of them had ever discussed their habits and customs with him."

When Framji started to settle down in Chennai, a friend offered to sell a large piece of land with

buildings on it for a throw away price. It belonged to a widow and was a distress sale. Framji wanted to buy it as it would make him extremely wealthy. However, he wanted Bhagavan's approval. He went to the ashram and sat in Bhagavan's presence, mentally appealing for guidance. After some time, a devotee asked Bhagavan a question. In the course of his long answer, Bhagavan gave a look at Framji and smilingly added, "One is already burdened with past acquisitions. Why add more? It will only increase one's bondage." Framji dropped the idea of buying the property. Years later, he came to know that the person who bought it had to face endless litigations.

While K. K. Nambiar brought a movie camera with which he filmed Bhagavan, it was Framji who brought popular spiritual movies on saints like Tukaram, Mira, and Nandanar for Bhagavan's viewing. With the help of another devotee who had a movie projector and screen, Framji succeeded in showing Bhagavan such movies in the ashram dining hall at night. I was fortunate to sit next to Bhagavan when he was seeing these movies. I remember, as if it happened just yesterday, Bhagavan laughing and thoroughly enjoying the humorous scenes and shedding ecstatic tears during those scenes where the saints were moved by spiritual bliss. But afterwards, when the movie was over, there was not a ripple of reaction in him. It was ample proof that Bhagavan was the perfect mirror. He reflected whatever happened in front of him fully. When at this distance of time I reflect over it, I feel this helped me grasp the true state of a *jnani*. And how in that perfect inner state, the *jnani* is untouched by events happening around him!

During the last days of Bhagavan, Framji like everyone else was standing in the queue to have the *darshan* of Bhagavan. When he stood in front of Bhagavan, he was chanting verses from *Zend Avesta*, the Zoroastrian scripture. Bhagavan turned to him, smiled and said, "Framji, it is not the rising sun, it is the setting sun!" Framji was surprised as the holy verses he was chanting, in Avestan language, were addressed to the rising sun!

I once asked him, "Didn't you feel any contradiction in following Bhagavan since you come from a very different tradition?" He said, "There is absolutely no contradiction. In fact, the essential teachings of my religion are the same as Bhagavan's. An incident from *Day by Day with Bhagavan* illustrates this: 'This evening, after the *parayana*, Munagala Venkataramiah came and told Bhagavan, "It seems that Mrs. Taleyarkhan and a friend of Sir Mirza Ismail of Mysore were sitting on the hill talking about Bhagavan and about the hill. Mrs. Taleyarkhan told him, 'Bhagavan is a walking God and all our prayers are answered. That is my experience. Bhagavan says that this hill is God himself. I cannot understand it but since Bhagavan says so I believe it.' Thereupon her Parsee friend replied, 'I would take it as a sign if in accordance with our Parsee beliefs it rains.' For them, a light rain is a good omen. Almost immediately, there was a shower and they came down from the hill fully drenched and told me about it.'"

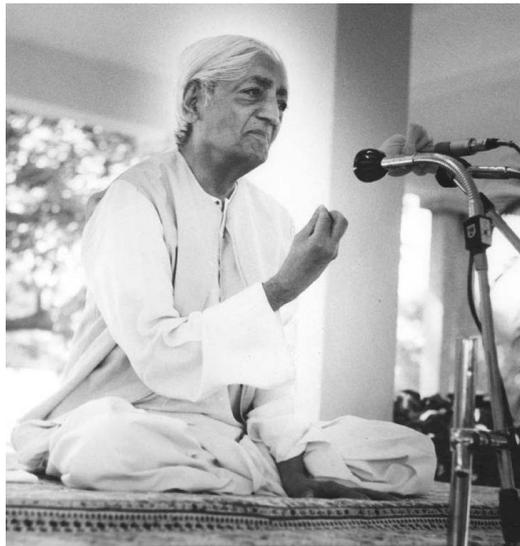


Soona with Mrs. Taleyarkhan walking behind Bhagavan

Framji Dorabji always used to tell me about the greatness of sages and saints. His heart was filled with devotion to saints like Meerabai, Tukaram, Tulsidas and Surdas. Mention any one of them and he would chant their verses and then translate them for me. He often advised me, "Follow the footsteps of saints and sages. Worship them." Perhaps, this was why I became a more than a little 'mad' about going after sages and saints!



One day, in 1965, Framji's son Dorab Framji (see, recent photo on the left ) came to the ashram and asked me to get into his car. He took me along with him to Chennai. After a wash and some tea, he again asked me to get into his car. On the way, he queried me, "At the ashram, when I asked you to get into the car, you did not ask where I was taking you. Here too, you got into the car without asking me where I was taking you." I replied, "Dorab, I know you will only take me to a place that will elevate me!" He was happy with my reply and revealed, "Yes, I am taking you to Vasant Vihar in Adyar for a talk by a great sage called J. Krishnamurti." On hearing this, I laughed to myself. I thought that sages and saints were always addressed as Bhagavan, Swami, Maharaj or Baba. I had never heard of a saint having an initial before his name! But when I saw Krishnaji seated on a platform under a huge tree to give his talk, I felt deep within my heart, "Here is a man of truth!" This feeling caused an explosion of ecstasy in me. Later, the very first sentence that Krishnaji spoke caused a second explosion: "If there is no truth within you sir, take it for certain that there is no truth outside of you!" Contemplating over this single sentence, I felt, in its essence, depth and intensity, it completely conformed with Bhagavan's own teaching that 'I AM' is the truth.



J. Krishnamurti

Just as Dorab took me to J. Krishnamurti, Framji's daughter, Soona Nicholson ( see, recent photo on the right, with Sadashiv Shenoy ), who still lives in Mumbai, took me to Nisargadatta Maharaj for the first time. On one of my usual visits to pay my respects to Soona, also an old devotee of Sri Bhagavan, she commanded me to get into her car - just as her brother did ten years back in Chennai. While driving, she announced that she was taking me to meet a saint named Nisargadatta Maharaj. I was delighted. I was very eager to see him as I had heard glowing tributes showered on his inimitable book, *I am That*. Now, an opportunity had come up by itself. I felt that the saint himself was calling me. We climbed the stairs to the first floor of his residence. He was seated alone. I prostrated to him. The immense silence of the saint's spiritual presence was unmistakably palpable. He raised his right hand up in blessing. I noticed that there was a large portrait of Sri Bhagavan on the wall behind his head. Maharaj himself broke the silence with his stentorian voice: "Just as an orthodox Brahmin looks down upon a non-vegetarian dish, a seeker should look down upon *dehatma buddhi* (the 'I-am-the-body' idea)." He repeated it three times. Soona



and I were enveloped in ecstasy! After that, for many years, I had the good fortune of regular personal contact with Maharaj.



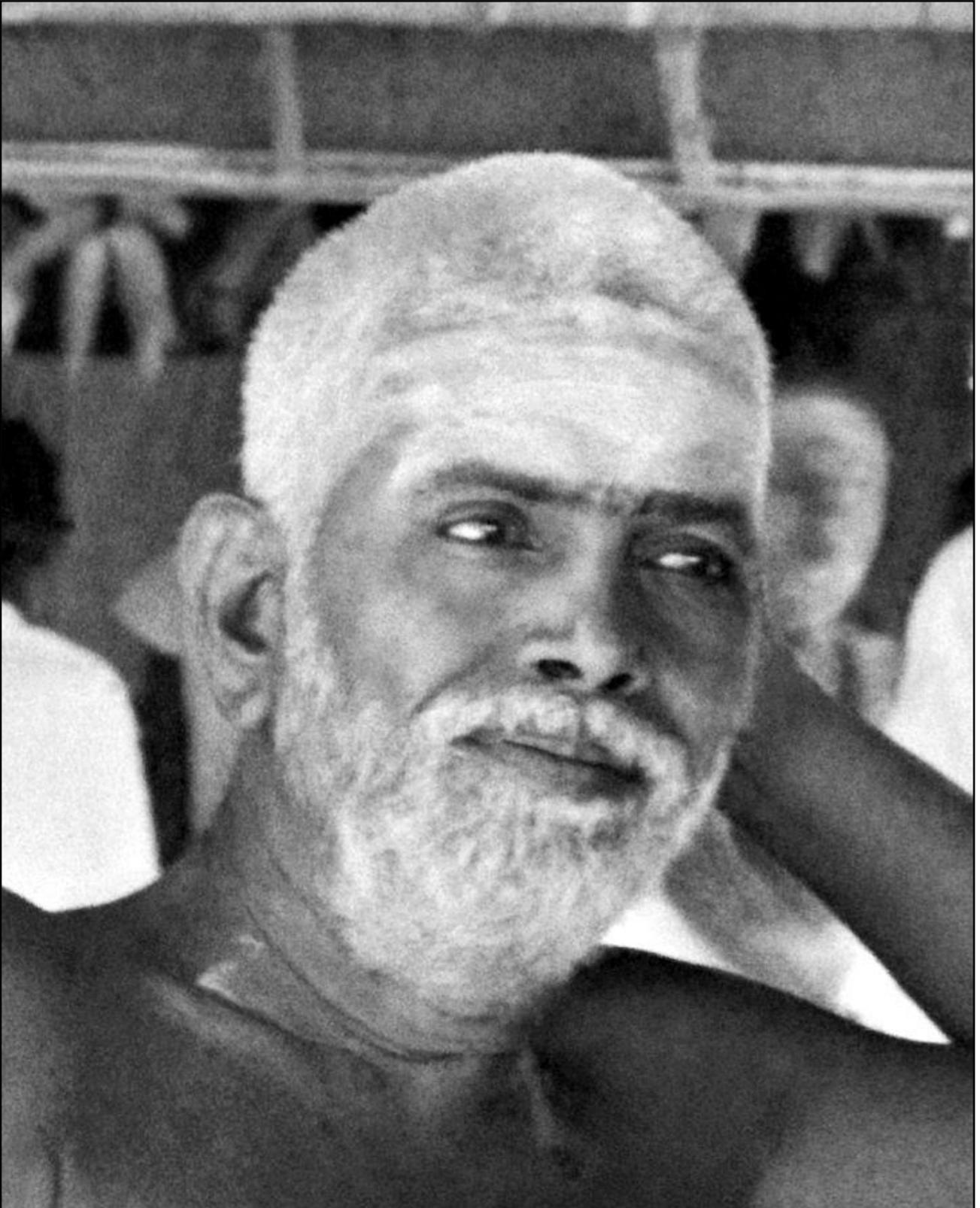
Nisargadatta Maharaj

As if following a family tradition of introducing me to sages, Framji's son Dorab introduced me to the teachings of Huang Po, Hui Neng and other Zen masters, by giving me books on their teachings. There are a couple of interesting incidents about Dorab's early contacts with Bhagavan. Dorab was a teenager when Framji brought him first to Bhagavan. While having breakfast in the ashram dining hall, Dorab discovered the *idlis* that he was eating for the first time in his life was not to his taste at all. The next day, Dorab quite naturally refused to go in for breakfast. But his father insisted. With great reluctance, he sat next to his father. Surprisingly, when the dish was served, Dorab ate it with relish. The secret was that Bhagavan had observed Dorab's intense dislike of *idlis* the previous morning. So, he instructed the cooks to specially coat the *idlis* with ghee and a thick layer of sugar. With this 'special treatment' the once despised *idlis*, now looked and tasted like a famous Parsee delicacy! How Bhagavan knew about such a Parsee delicacy was a wonder to both Framji and Dorab.

On another occasion, young Dorab was sleeping outside the hall one night. Bhagavan was passing by. With the intention of waking him, so that he could have the *darshan* and the blessings of Bhagavan, Framji rushed towards the sleeping Dorab. Bhagavan the great Awakener, stopped him by gesture and said in a soft voice, "Do not wake him up. Let him wake up himself." Is this not a great revelation for each of us too? No one can awaken another to the truth. Each one of us has to awaken to the truth by diving within oneself.



Photos (l to r) : (1) Mrs. Framji (2) Major Chadwick with Soona (3) Framji with Soona



*“ The outer Guru is saying that the Guru is within ! ”*

## H. C. Khanna



Hari Chand Khanna or H. C. Khanna, a remarkable devotee of Bhagavan, came from a very large family in Kanpur. The tenth child of his parents, he was a keen observer of life even when he was very young. His father looked after the children very well. Khanna was a happy and contented child. However, he noticed that there were a lot of people in the world who were very unhappy. His limited experience told him that those with money were happy. Because of this, he made up his mind to earn a lot of money. He became an extraordinarily successful insurance agent, earning a great deal of money. Soon, he got married to Premavathy, a very pious lady. Khanna was convinced that he was happy because he was leading a comfortable life, eating well, drinking well.

His job required him to travel extensively. There were hardly any hotels in those days; the only places one could stay in were the government guest houses, which were meant almost solely for the British. Indians were rarely entertained there. Khanna, being a worldly wise man, knew how to make money talk. He would bribe the manager or the attendant of the guesthouse in order to stay there. One day, after collecting a great deal of money from his customers, he returned to his guesthouse in a jubilant mood because his money box was overflowing. On arriving at the guesthouse, its watchman said, "Every time you give me thirty rupees. My wife is about to deliver a baby. The doctor says that the situation is grave and I have to give him ninety rupees if I want to save her life. Please give me the money, sir. I will not take any money from you the next three times." This was an enormous amount of money in those days because the watchman's salary itself would have been just around fifteen rupees. Khanna, however, was in a different frame of mind. He flung three hundred rupees at the watchman and ordered, "Go get me my drinks and the best non-vegetarian food available. We will look into your pleas later." When the watchman obeyed, Khanna opened his money box, flaunted it at the watchman and boasted, "See how much money I have collected today!" He was so intoxicated by his own success that he forgot to close the box. Not only that, he even forgot to lock his room from inside.

In those days, government guest houses were always on the outskirts of the town. They were often located in a very desolate area. When after a night of heavy drinking, Khanna woke up in the morning, he found his door closed. The watchman was seated outside as always. Khanna asked the watchman, "You said that your wife is about to deliver a baby. How come you are here?" The watchman replied, "How could I possibly leave you in the condition that you were in? Had I left, thieves would have robbed your money." "But what about your wife?" asked a surprised Khanna. "I will go now and see about that sir," replied the watchman. Khanna was astounded at the reply. All along, he had thought that happiness lay in satisfying one's own needs and desires. But here was a man to whom he had refused money although he knew that the man's wife was in a critical condition. It had not even occurred to the man to rob his money while he lay in an intoxicated state. Therefore, there was something in life beyond personal gratification. He wondered what that could be and thus his search began.

He read the *Bhagavad Gita*. This convinced him that it was necessary to have a guru in order to experience the highest spiritual truth. It was Khanna's practice to lock all the doors and windows of his house at night. He would even lock his own bedroom door. One night, around midnight, he woke up with a strange sensation. He had a feeling that someone was in the room. He opened his eyes to find a *sadhu* he knew about sitting before him. The *sadhu*'s legs were deformed. The *sadhu* spoke to him and said, "Come to me at four in the morning." Khanna woke up his wife and told her what had happened. He told her that they would visit the *sadhu* in the morning. Meanwhile, the *sadhu* informed his disciple that a great *mahatma* was coming, and in order to receive him, he would have to be lifted up and placed outside the gate. When Khanna saw the *sadhu*, he was thrilled and thought that this was his guru. However, the lame *sadhu* said, "I am not your guru. Ramana Maharshi is your guru." Khanna was dumbstruck because he had never heard of Ramana Maharshi before. He had come prepared to surrender himself to this *sadhu* who had appeared mysteriously in his room the previous night, but now the man was saying that he was not his guru. Khanna was curious to have some information about the Maharshi. Professor Bhatnagar, a disciple of the *sadhu* said, "I know something about the Maharshi." Saying this, he presented Khanna a copy of *Upadesa Saram*. The book also had the address of

Ramanasramam. Khanna's father offered, "I will look after your children. I have read a review of Paul Brunton's book. Ramana Maharshi seems like a genuine sage. Go!"



*Khanna got the upadesa: "The Guru is within" at this Sacred 'Old Hall'*

So, in 1941, Premavathy and Khanna came to Bhagavan. As with the rest of the devotees, Bhagavan looked at him in such a way that Khanna felt Bhagavan was asking him, "Did it take you so long to come to me?" Khanna at once knew that this was his guru. He began frequenting the ashram, but he also wanted Bhagavan to state in a matter of fact way that he was his guru. He told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I need an outward guru. Please tell me that you are my guru." In his customary fashion, Bhagavan replied, "The guru is within." Khanna pursued him relentlessly and pleaded, "No, Bhagavan; you have to tell me that you are my guru." Just look at the beauty of the situation! When the disciple is very intelligent, the guru becomes all the more intelligent! Bhagavan continued, "The outer guru is saying that the guru is within!" This was not just a clever answer; when Bhagavan told him this, Khanna experienced it. He felt throbbing vibrations within himself. Bhagavan's intense, piercing look penetrated deep into his being, leaving Khanna with a feeling of spiritual awakening. True, Bhagavan was looking at him from the outside, but the experience was taking place within, proving that the guru within was giving him the experience of the 'I'. Such was the power of Bhagavan's look.

I was deeply attached to him. I have mentioned earlier that one of my tasks at the ashram was to collect money for its maintenance. Khanna, being a wealthy man, helped me whenever I approached him for funds. But all the while he would also caution me, "Wake up, Ganesan! This is not the only work you have to do! This is only part of your work. Attaining Self realisation is our paramount duty." I owe a great deal to this noble man whom I affectionately called Pitaji, which means father in Hindi. Since I was very close to Pitaji, I ventured to ask him, "How often were you coming? After receiving this initiation, where was the need for you to come to Bhagavan?" He replied, "The truth revealed by the guru is so supreme, it takes time to soak in and become totally one's own. Proximity to the outer guru is essential.

Hence, I came as often as possible. All my doubts were being erased and there was a deepening inner peace - proof that doubts were indeed being erased.”

I then asked Pitaji, “Will you please share some of the dialogues that you had with Bhagavan?” He answered, “It is already in the book *Day by Day with Bhagavan*.” After a pause, he said, “I handed Bhagavan a piece of paper on which I had written my anguish. After reading it, Bhagavan commented, ‘It is a complaint. He says, ‘I have been coming to you, and this time I have remained nearly a month at your feet. I find no improvement at all in my condition. My *vasanas* are as strong as ever. When I go back, my friends will laugh at me and ask what good my stay has done me.’” Turning to Khanna, Bhagavan compassionately said, “Why distress your mind by thinking that *jnana* has not come? Or that *vasanas* have not disappeared? Do not give room for thoughts. In one of his verses, saint Thayumanavar says much the same as is written in this paper.” Bhagavan then asked Devaraja Mudaliar to read the verse and translate it into English for the benefit of those who did not understand Tamil. This is the translation of the verse: ‘The mind mocks me. Though I tell you one thousand times, you are indifferent. So how am I to attain peace and bliss?’ Devaraja Mudaliar told Khanna, “You are not the only one who complains to Bhagavan like this. I have complained in the same way more than once and I still do. Yet, I find no improvement in myself.” To this, Khanna said, “It is not only that I find no improvement but I think I have grown worse. The *vasanas* are stronger now. I cannot understand it.”

Khanna then asked, “The illumination plus mind is *jivatma*, the individual, and the illumination alone is *Paramatma*, the ultimate Truth. Is that right Bhagavan?” Bhagavan gave a nod of assent. He pointed to his white towel and stated, “We call this a white cloth. But the cloth and its whiteness cannot be separated. It is the same with the illumination and the mind that unite to form the ego.” Then, he added, “The following illustration that is often given in books will also help you. The lamp in the theatre is the *Paramatma* or the illumination, as you put it. It illuminates itself, the stage and the actors. We see the stage and the actors by its light, but its light still continues when there is no play. Another illustration is an iron rod that is compared to the mind. Fire joins it and it becomes red hot. It glows and can burn things like fire, but still it has a definite shape, unlike fire. If we hammer it, it is the rod that receives the blows, not the fire. The rod is the *jivatma* and the fire is the Self or *Paramatma*.”



Sri Bhagavan to Premavathy Khanna: “Continue saying ‘I, I’ - all the time.”

Bhagavan helped not only Khanna, but also his wife Premavathy. One afternoon, while in the hall, Premavathy appealed to Bhagavan in writing, “I am not learned in the scriptures and I find the method

of Self Enquiry too hard. I am a woman with seven children and a lot of household cares and it leaves little time for meditation. I request Bhagavan to give me some simpler and easier method.” Bhagavan looked at Premavathy with great compassion and said, “No learning or knowledge of scriptures is necessary to know the Self, even as no man requires a mirror to see himself. All knowledge is to be given up eventually as not Self. Nor is household work or taking care of children necessarily an obstacle. If you can do nothing more, at least continue saying ‘I’, ‘I’, to yourself mentally all the time, as advised in *Who am I?* Whatever you may be doing and whether you are sitting, standing or walking. ‘I’ is the name of God. It is the first and greatest of all mantras. Even ‘Om’ is second to it.”

Pitaji was a person of conviction and persistence. Once, while he was having lunch in the dining hall in the presence of Bhagavan, he had a very strong urge that he should carry with him Bhagavan’s *prasad* for all the members of his family. He thought the best way for that would be to carry the leaf on which Bhagavan had eaten food. (Some Hindus believed that if one eats the leftovers of what the guru ate, it will spiritually elevate the soul.) That particular day, the banana leaf on which Bhagavan ate was very tender. He prayed to Bhagavan in his heart that he should bless him that there would be no one in the dining hall to watch him steal Bhagavan’s empty leaf. He closed his eyes in prayer and when he opened them, to his surprise and relief, there was no one else in the dining hall. He jumped from his seat, took the empty leaf of Bhagavan, wrapped it inside his upper cloth and rushed towards the hill. Hiding behind a big rock, he took a small piece of the tender leaf and ate it as sacred *prasad*. The balance of the long leaf he kept to be carried back to Kanpur. He returned to the common guest house where he was staying and hid it at the bottom of his suitcase after carefully packing it well. He made sure that no one saw him. To overcome the tension that was building up in him, he went away to the town.

When he returned to the ashram in the evening, there was an enquiry awaiting him. The *sarvadhikari* was informed of the missing leaf and he was making extensive enquiries as to who was responsible for its disappearance. The post master Raja Iyer, who had served lunch, had already informed Chinna Swami that it was Khanna who left the dining hall last. Khanna was summoned to the office. He started quarrelling in his mind with Bhagavan, “Oh, Bhagavan, you graciously granted my prayer to lift the leaf unnoticed by others; now, are you going to expose me? Is this your grace? Please help me carry my act to its successful completion, by not exposing me to Chinna Swami.” Chinna Swami welcomed Khanna and narrated to him about the audacity of the leaf thief. Khanna concurred with him, saying that the culprit should be found out and well punished - all the while praying to Bhagavan that this should not happen. He ran to Bhagavan’s hall and prostrated. Bhagavan gave him a mischievous smile, which clearly indicated to Khanna the assurance of Bhagavan’s grace on him, “Don’t have any fear. Everything is all right.” Pitaji narrated this incident to me in the 1970’s with great reverence and concluded, “I left for Kanpur the same day, taking that sacred *prasad* with me. I gave a share of it to each and every member of my family. My children, who are as deeply devoted to Bhagavan, know well that each one of us owe a deep sense of gratitude to Bhagavan for enabling me to steal that *prasad*. It is all the grace of Sri Bhagavan!”

“One day in Kanpur, during the last days of Bhagavan’s illness - the month of March 1950 - I suddenly woke up with the feeling that Bhagavan was calling me. I took my wife with our baby daughter and reached Arunachala. When I stood in front of Bhagavan, he gave me a welcome smile and gave a strange look to his attendant. Later, I asked the attendant about it. He said, ‘This morning, Bhagavan asked me whether Kanpur Khanna is here! And, you are here!’ What I am today is entirely due to Bhagavan’s pointed attention on me, Bhagavan pouring his grace on me,” said Pitaji, with tears in his eyes.

I asked him whether he was at the ashram when Bhagavan dropped the body. “Yes! Bhagavan blessed me to be near him. On that fateful night, after the event had taken place, Bhagavan’s body was placed in the new hall for devotees to have *darshan* of it. I ran to the town to get a big garland to be put around my master’s body. All my life, I had the habit of insisting that my offering to be the first and primary one. In that light, I rushed the garland from town and under the advice of the attendant I reverentially placed it at the corner pointed out to me. The attendant assured me that when the next morning garlands were offered, mine would be the first one. When I came to the new hall the next morning, I was shocked. My garland was at the bottom most, over which piles of similar large garlands were heaped. I intently prayed to Bhagavan, ‘Bhagavan! You have always fulfilled my inner prayers to my fullest satisfaction when you glowed lustrously in the body. Now I pray, please fulfill this simple prayer of mine - my garland should be the first to adorn your body!’” After a pause, he added, “At the

appropriate time, an attendant carried them all. Lo, what grace! When he put them down near the body of Bhagavan, he turned the heap of garlands upside down, making my garland come up first on the top! Bhagavan had fulfilled my childish prayer as well. Bhagavan, who is the universal truth, always fulfilled, and always will, fulfill prayers offered to him! Bhagavan is an ocean of grace indeed!”

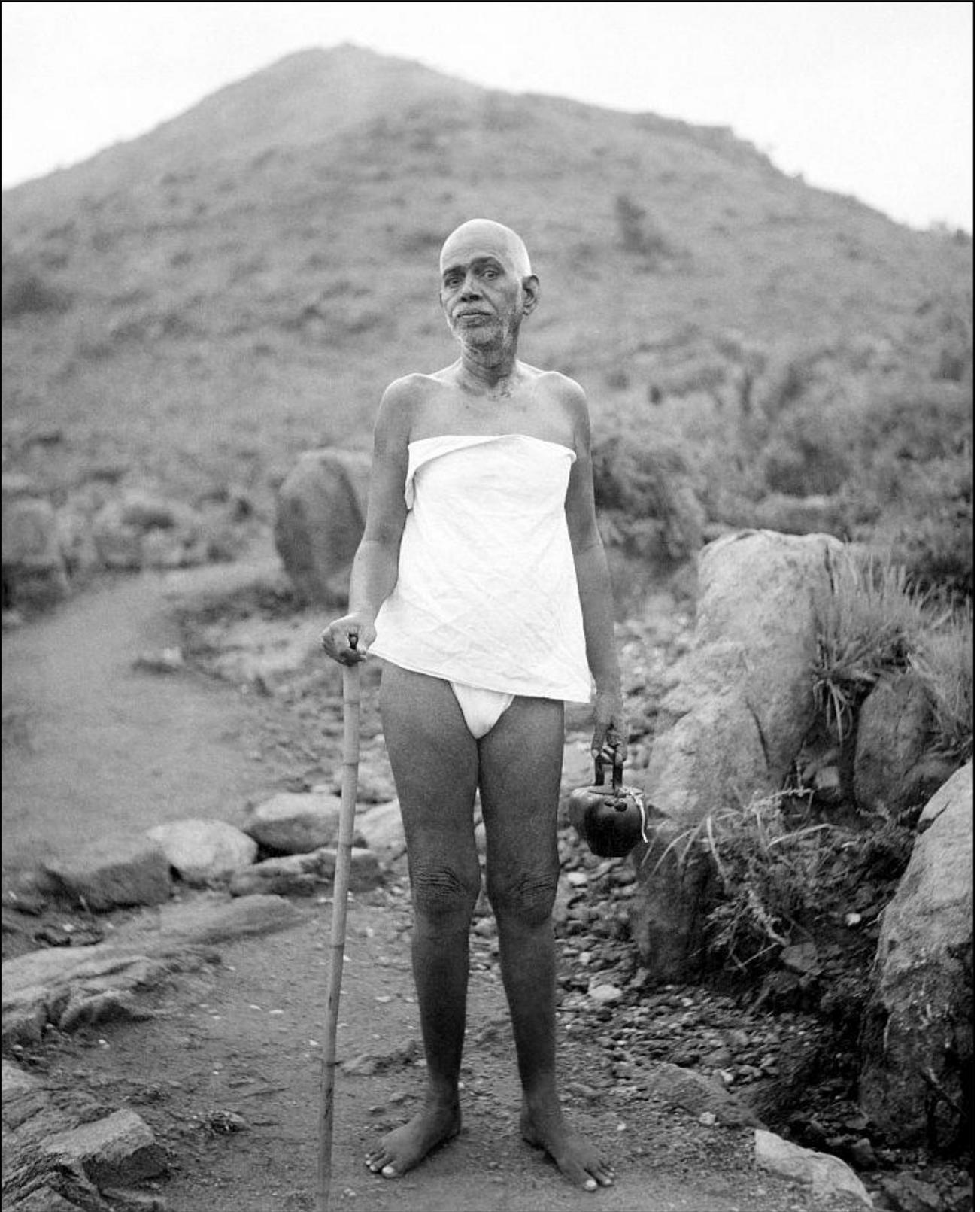
Khanna had many commitments. He once wanted to go to Delhi because of some property dispute that involved millions of rupees. He used to consult me since we had become good friends. One day, he said, “I want to go to Delhi, but I want to die in Arunachala.” I told him, “Pitaji, if you go away from Arunachala, perhaps, by chance, you may die there.” The next morning, he embraced me and said, “I have cancelled my trip. I will stay here. I do not want to take any risks. Let the case and the money go to the dogs. I will continue to stay here. I want to drop my body only at Arunachala.” Next, he posed a question to me. “You were by your mother’s side when she died, right? Please tell me, how did your mother die?” I told him, “My mother died most magnificently in a state of full consciousness and happiness. During her last moments, though her eyes remained closed, there was a sign of recognition and she responded with expressions of devotion when we all sang Bhagavan’s *Aksharamanamalai*.” After listening to it intently, Pitaji said, “I too will die like that.”

One day, towards the end of July, 1984, he suddenly felt that he was going to die. He called out to his wife, “Premavathy, call Ganesan. Ask him to come immediately.” Khanna then took a chair and placed it in front of a large picture of Bhagavan. He sat in the chair and breathed his last, consciously! By the time I arrived, he was no more. The doctor’s verdict that his death was instantaneous was proof enough to me that when he died, Pitaji was fully conscious. For me, personally, Pitaji was a hero. He refused to succumb to the demands of his body, but conquered its travails by turning his full attention to Bhagavan. He had such implicit faith in Bhagavan that the master absorbed him in full consciousness! I strongly felt that though he was a family man, Pitaji’s body had every right to be interred within the ashram grounds. I managed to convince those who were opposed to this. Pitaji’s body was interred next to Chadwick’s and Cohen’s *samadhis* – devotees even today pay homage to it. He is the only *grihastha* among the saints and *sannyasins* interred in Ramanasramam.

Truth is not just a concept meant to be run after. You yourself are the real truth. Bhagavan used to refer to Vedantic scriptures that talk about the scent of the musk deer. The deer is unaware that the scent comes from its own body and therefore runs in search of this wonderful fragrance. Some of these deer, it is said, run themselves to death in search of this wonderful fragrance. Why should we, like the musk deer, run after the truth? We are the truth. Why move out? Let us remain as the truth within the Heart. With Bhagavan’s grace, Arunachala will absorb us. Remaining in the truth is being absorbed in Arunachala.

Once Bhagavan was asked who was a *dhira*. Bhagavan replied, “One who knows who he is.” *Dhira* literally means courageous. To remain as the truth is the highest form of valour and courage. All of Bhagavan’s old devotees had this quality. We have to share the lives of these devotees to remind ourselves that we are also always, only *dhiras*. This state of absorption takes place all the time - in the now.

We have come to Arunachala in order to merge with Arunachala. Bhagavan referred to this as ‘*aikkiyam aakkikkol*’. Bhagavan was not praying just for his mother when he said, “Absorb her into your Self.” He was praying for each one of us. We have to wake up. This is our wake up call. Let us not run in vain after the truth like the musk deer. Let us understand that truth is within us. That state of realization is absorption; it is also Arunachala. Bhagavan said of Arunachala, “Heart, thy name is Arunachala.” This Heart, the core of our being, is Arunachala. Plunging within and staying in one’s Self is being absorbed in Arunachala. This state does not take place in space or time. It is in the eternal now, the now which we are eternally in.



*The Holy Hill and the Master*

## Sivarama Reddiar



A flame needs no other light to make it visible. It has a presence and those who have eyes can see it. The flame keeps glowing brilliantly, unconcerned whether it is seen or not. Sivarama Reddiar was one such flame. He was in charge of the book depot that operated from a small room in the ashram. When I came in 1960 to Ramanasramam, my father told me, “You do not have any knowledge of worldly matters, especially money. So, go and work under Sivarama Reddiar.” Though I was just a spiritual novice, I was captivated by his aura of steady serenity and peace within just a few hours of working with him. And the beauty of this was that I wasn’t even trying to understand or gauge his spiritual stature. It happened as naturally and spontaneously as the blossoming of a flower.

Sivarama Reddiar hailed from Acharapakkam, a small town between Chennai and Tiruvannamalai. His parents were land owners and Sivarama Reddiar himself owned a rice mill. Their entire family was devoted to a *sadhu* called Achyuta Swami. A saint and a poet, his songs based on *Advaita* were very popular. Achyuta Swami’s first *darshan* of Bhagavan took place in the Arunachaleswara temple. On entering the temple with some of his devotees, he was drawn towards Bhagavan, then just a boy, sitting in deep *samadhi* under an *illupai* tree. An elderly *sadhu*, Achyuta Swami could see that though the body sitting under the tree was that of a boy, it was in timeless bliss. The very next year, he came again - this time with around two hundred of his devotees. Not finding Bhagavan under the *illupai* tree, they searched the entire temple but to no avail. On making enquiries, they found out that Bhagavan had been so immersed in *samadhi* that he had not even been sporting a loin cloth. Being the Karthikai Deepam festival, some kind souls had tied a loin cloth around his waist and taken him to Gurumurtam, a small shrine on the outskirts of the town, so that he could remain untroubled by the milling crowds that came for the festival.

Though Bhagavan was virtually unknown at that time, Achyuta Swami (better known as Achyuta Dasar) went there to see him along with his devotees. Achyuta Swami was the second person to recognize Bhagavan’s greatness, Seshadri Swami being the first. On reaching Gurumurtam, Achyuta Swami asked his devotees to stay outside while he went into the shrine. Seeing Bhagavan seated on a stool, fully immersed in the Self, Achyuta Swami held Bhagavan’s feet and prayed, “I have written poems on the *Advaitic* state of oneness. But I have not yet experienced it. Please bless me with that state.” When he came out, the words that he spoke to his devotees proved that he was blessed with that state: “What is seated there is a raging fire. Prostrate from a distance and pray for its blessings.”

Influenced by Achyuta Swami’s songs, Sivarama Reddiar was interested in *Advaitic* philosophy from his childhood. He used to regularly read *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and *Yoga Vashista* - two of the standard Tamil texts on *Advaita* which Bhagavan also used to refer to quite often. One of the disciples of Achyuta Swami initiated Sivarama Reddiar into the *taraka* mantra of Lord Rama and taught him how to chant it according to the *shanmuki upasana* tradition. Sivarama Reddiar practiced this rigorously for ten years at his home in Acharapakkam and also in a small forest nearby. As he progressed, he saw the brilliant light described in the *shanmuki upasana*. It filled him with exhilaration and excitement. However, in his heart of hearts he felt that what he had achieved was not the final goal. Consequently, he had no sense of fulfillment. Around this time, his twenty year old wife whom he loved very deeply, passed away. He told me, “When God took her away from me the world became a bleak and joyless place.” For Reddiar, this was not just the common kind of grief which fades away after some time. He just couldn’t get over it. According to certain traditions, one’s sorrow gets reduced and eventually disappears when one goes on pilgrimage. Believing this, he went walking around India and visiting holy places for three years. His sorrow didn’t abate even a little bit.

Then he remembered his uncle, a direct disciple of Achyuta Swami, who was staying in Tiruvannamalai in a place called Ramanasramam. So he came to Tiruvannamalai. Staying in the Arunachaleswara temple, he started going around the hill every morning. While going around the hill, he used to pass through Ramanasramam, which in 1931 was not big. There, along with his uncle Krishna Reddiar who had raised a flower garden behind the Old Hall, he plucked flowers. One day, taking pity on Sivarama

Reddiar, his uncle took him to Bhagavan and told him, "Bhagavan, this is my nephew. He is in deep sorrow ever since his wife died over three years ago." Bhagavan focused his attention on him. Many devotees who have had *darshan* of Bhagavan have told me about his look piercing and soothing every atom of their body, mind and heart. Within a few moments of Bhagavan looking at him, Sivarama Reddiar's sorrow disappeared. He still loved his wife. But the sorrow over her death faded away. He felt a great happiness in his heart and left to attend to his business at Acharapakkam. In 1934, he got a call from Ramanasramam, "Your uncle has passed away. Please come." As Tiruvannamalai was just ninety kilometres from his village, he reached there that same night. On arrival, he was given all the details of his uncle's demise by Kunju Swami. Sivarama Reddiar then performed his uncle's last rites as per the instructions of Bhagavan. He now felt that he should serve Bhagavan all his life.



*White peacock dancing in Ashram's flower garden*

I asked Sivarama Reddiar to tell me about his uncle. He replied that his uncle was one of those devotees who had come with Achyuta Swami and had *darshan* of Bhagavan in 1896. He used to serve Achyuta Swami. A few years later, when Achyuta Swami was going to drop his body, Krishna Reddiar held his guru's feet and asked for guidance. Achyuta Swami told him, "Go to Ramanasramam and serve Ramana Maharshi. All that I have received spiritually, I have given you. You need more. So go to Ramana Maharshi." That was how Sivarama Reddiar's uncle came to Bhagavan. He had a sturdy body and was a very hard worker. He raised the ashram's flower garden and ran errands for the ashram management. One day, his uncle told them, "I am going to my village and I will be back soon." On reaching his village, he called all his relatives and told them, "Within a week, I will be giving up my body in Ramanasramam at the feet of my master. I have come to take leave of you." Krishna Reddiar knew astrology well and knew when he was going to die. When he came back to Tiruvannamalai, he was still healthy - there was nothing wrong with him. But on the seventh day, he got a slight fever. By evening, this became so severe that he could not even stand up. Ramakrishna Swami and Kunju Swami advised him to stay in a cottage. At that time the ashram had a few thatched cottages. As he lay in a cottage, Ramakrishna Swami and Kunju Swami went and told Bhagavan about Krishna Reddiar. Bhagavan replied that Krishna Reddiar knew astrology and had gone home to take leave of his family and then come back to merge with Arunachala.

In 1914, when Bhagavan's mother was seriously ill, Bhagavan wrote four verses to Arunachala, praying that she be absorbed. In the third verse he prays: "Arunachala, thou blazing fire of wisdom! Deign to wrap my mother in thy light and make her one with thee." When the Mother dropped her body in 1922 at Skandashram, this is exactly what happened. With Sivarama Reddiar's uncle too, Bhagavan was confirming the same thing when he declared, "He has come here to merge with Arunachala." Later in the evening, after their dinner at seven, Bhagavan, B. V. Narasimha Swami and a few others went straight to Krishna Reddiar's cottage. Bhagavan sat next to him touching him on his head. B. V. Narasimha Swami started doing *bhajans* while Ramakrishna Swami and Kunju Swami began

meditating. Sometime later, Ramakrishna Swami and Kunju Swami begged Bhagavan and B. V. Narasimha Swami to leave as it was late. Bhagavan looked steadily at Krishna Reddiar and left. At four in the morning, Ramakrishna Swami and Kunju Swami informed Bhagavan of his death. Bhagavan's specific directions as to how and where he should be buried were followed to the letter. Recounting all this, Sivarama Reddiar concluded, "It is because of the blessings of my uncle that I could stay permanently at Ramanasramam and serve Bhagavan."

I asked Sivarama Reddiar, "You seem to be so poised in silence and so calm that I feel like sitting next to you all the time. But, at the same time, you look like a very ordinary person. What happened to you? Tell me." He replied, "There is nothing. I am just as ordinary as anyone else." I did not leave him. Day after day I pestered him, "There is something special in you. Please tell me what it is?" Since he did not relent, I altered the pattern of my questioning: "Have you never had any doubt in spiritual matters?" That worked. He disclosed, "Till 1931, I was studiously following the *taraka* mantra for twenty years and the *shanmuki upasana* for ten years. As a result, I experienced a light all around me and also a sense of exhilaration. Yet, deep within, I had a doubt about the reality of that state. In 1934, I reverentially placed this doubt of mine before Bhagavan. Bhagavan was gracious enough to reply, "Yes, that is the state of *nididhyasana*. You heard the guru instruct you, which is *sravana*. You assimilated his teaching, which is *manana* and now you experience it, which is *nididhyasana*. But, this is still on the level of *triputi*, the threefold illusion of seer, seen and sight. You have to go beyond that and find out who is the 'I' that experiences the light and exhilaration. Light and exhilaration exist to someone. Find out who that is." Sivarama Reddiar continued, "Even before Bhagavan explained this to me, I knew about *triputi* and the need to transcend it. Only in the presence of the *satguru* did I grasp it as a practical reality, as a true, living experience. Lo! The experience of 'I' transcending the *triputi* descended on me and that supreme state of powerful silence enveloped me. That was my final initiation. That state of bliss continues without a gap." For thirty years from 1934, he worked in the book depot as a manager with the limited work of packing and selling which he used to do himself. No ordinary candle, he lived in that inner state of light all the time. I assisted him for four happy years. For me, it was a deep and profound experience to work closely with a person who was living the ultimate reality, consciously, all the time. In that presence, I felt an even greater sense of reverence towards Sivarama Reddiar who was so profusely blessed by Bhagavan.

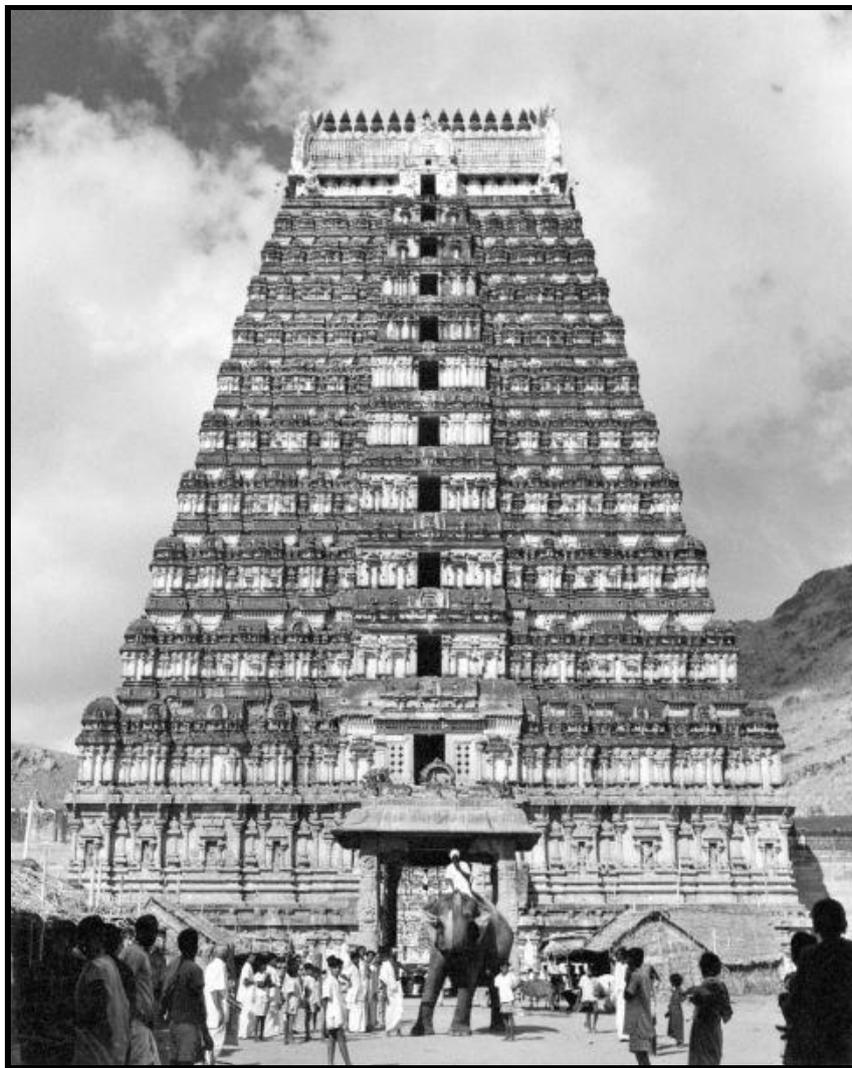
When I came to the ashram in 1960, I had taken three vows of my own accord. I thought they were essential for leading a spiritual life: "I will not touch money, I will not sign my name and I will not look at women." Though, visitors used to come very rarely, if a woman or a family came to buy books, I would get up and go away. To close the accounts in the evening, I would assist Reddiar in writing the accounts, but he had to count the cash as I wouldn't touch it. Moreover, when it came to signing invoices or receipts, I would fill in the details but give them to him to sign. What I didn't know was that he was noticing all this. Realized people do not jump to conclusions and do not judge others - he observed me quietly for three or four months. I used to sleep in the open, in front of Bhagavan's *samadhi* shrine and he used to sleep under a thatched shed in front of the book store. He used to address me affectionately as 'Ganesu'. One night, around nine o'clock, he called me, "Ganesu, come here." He used to have terrible asthma attacks. Whenever he had one, he would call me and I would rush to him to help him in any small way I could. I thought he was having another such attack and hurried to his side. "Sit down next to me," he told me. "I have been observing you all these months. You do not touch money, you do not sign in any invoice and whenever a woman of any age comes in to the book depot, you run away. What is the matter with you?"

I told him about the three vows I had taken to help me stay on the spiritual path. "Oh, that is good," he replied, "But you have practiced it enough. Now, ponder over your actions. What is wrong with money? Touching money is not a sin, attachment to money is." He didn't say it as an argument or as an instruction - it was a sharing from the Heart and it naturally went straight into mine. He continued, "What is wrong in signing a name? Were you born with the name? Your parents gave you the name. You should not be attached to the body. By giving up the name you have not given up your attachment to the body. Give up the idea 'I-am-the-body'. For you Ganesu, Bhagavan himself gave you the name. See, how holy that name is." From that moment onwards, I stuck to my name. Regarding my third vow, Reddiar said, "Are you aware that when you ignore women, you are insulting the creator? It is the higher power that has created the dual appearances of male and female aspects - in animals, birds, creatures, trees, plants and even rocks. By not giving the importance due to the female aspect, you are denying one entire half of the principle of creation. Is this right? Is this necessary? To transcend this

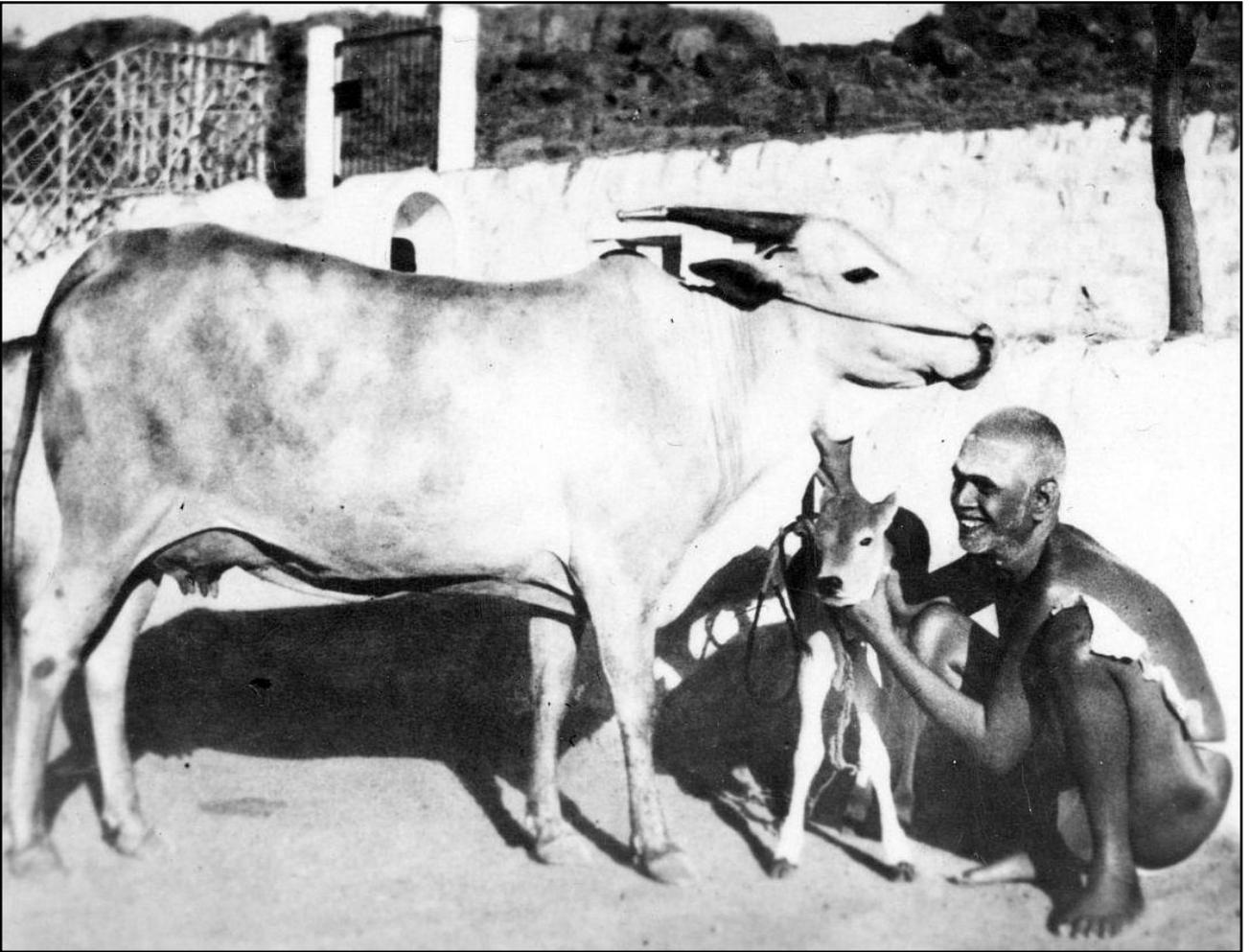
obstacle, love all women unconditionally as mothers. The more deeply you love them, the greater will be the devotion that wells up in you for the creator. Ignoring one half of the work of the creator will by itself become a very great impediment in your spiritual practice and progress.” Since then, I started truly loving all women as my own mothers, as my own sisters.

Sivarama Reddiar became very ill in 1965. Since he did not want to be a burden to the ashram, he decided to leave and called for his daughter. She came and took him to Uttaramerur, her native village. Before he left the ashram, I held his feet and appealed to him, “You are going away Reddiar, leaving me.” He smiled and said, “Arunachala is the truth. Truth alone is. Stay at Arunachala! All blessings will accrue to you.”

Blessings and grace are not personal properties. They are the only real things that one can share with everyone unequivocally. Everything outside has its limitations - a house can be given to one person; money can be given to a hundred people; but, blessings, grace, and love can always be shared with everyone, at any place and at all times.



*Eastern entrance to Sri Arunachaleswara Temple*



*Sri Bhagavan with Cow Lakshmi and her calf*

## Janaki Mata



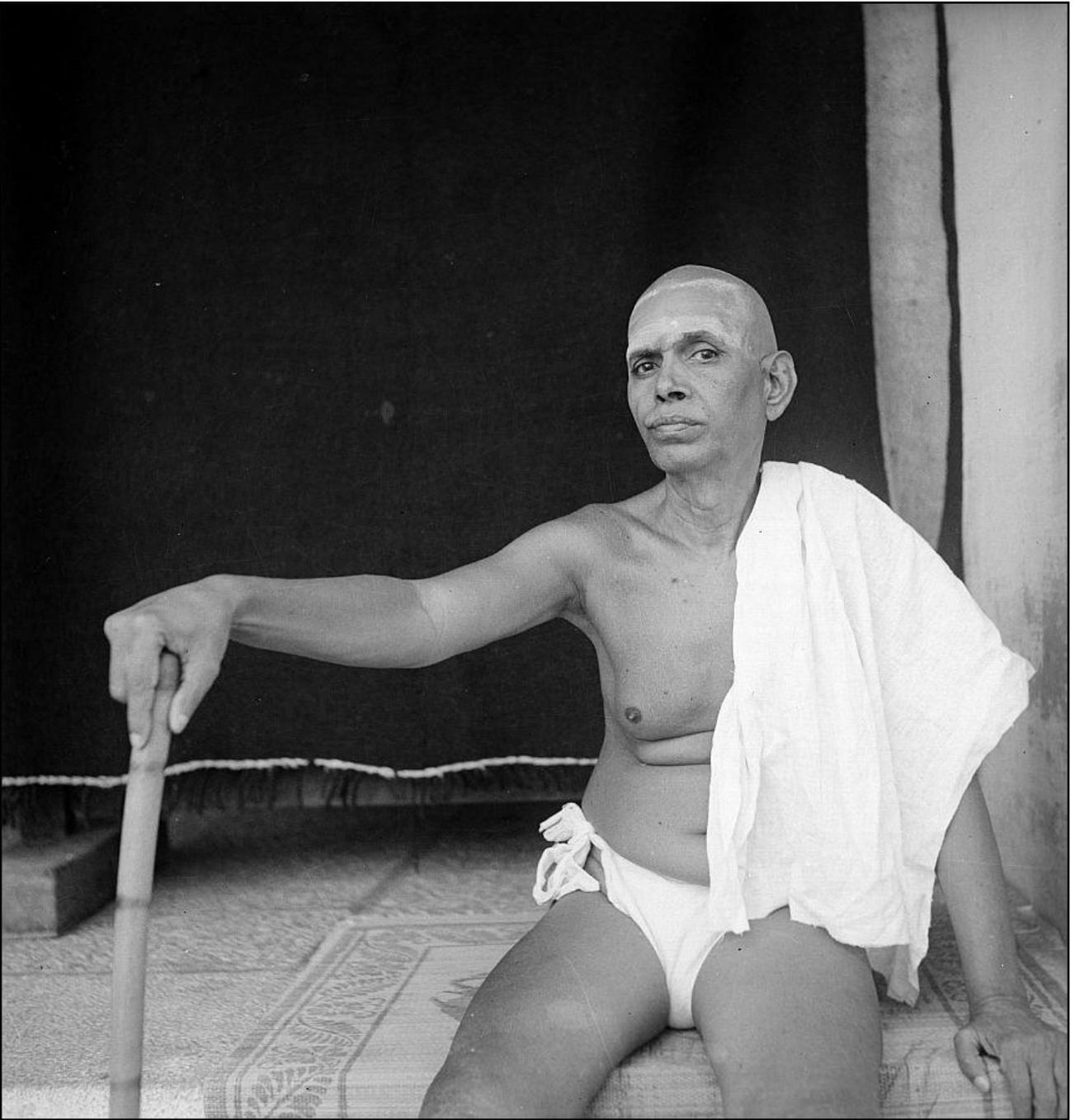
Once, a staunch Christian from the west stood before Bhagavan, and in all earnestness entreated, "I want a living guru. Can you show me a living guru?" Bhagavan posed a counter question, "Is Jesus Christ dead? Is the Buddha dead?" He did not elaborate further because true masters merely hint at the answer. A true master does not get involved in complex answers because it is the questioner who has to be more involved in the process, since he himself is the answer. Moreover, the questioner has to experience the answer to the question rather than have it revealed by the scriptures or answered by someone else. In other words, if Ramana Maharshi is the truth, then the questioner too has to become the truth. Bhagavan's counter-questioning, thus, is a perfect answer to the question.

Simply put, at first, Jesus Christ or the Buddha is merely a thought, a remembrance. Now, the inner quest must start. But, is any of the messiahs just a thought? Bhagavan Ramana once explicitly stated, "Everything else is a thought, but the guru is not a thought." The relationship can be compared to the love a person has for his mother. If a person loves his mother very deeply, then is the mother just a thought? Can this love be compared to all the fleeting, short lived thoughts that one has in the course of a day? Similarly, when you think of your child, who may not be physically present at that moment, is it not a loving thought? Does the thought not take on another dimension of reality? This is the same dimension we are transported to when we think of our sages, saints and other spiritual luminaries. They continue to live in our midst, even though they have shed their physical presence. They are the incarnation of the deepest principles of love, eternally guiding us whenever we turn our attention to them. Bhagavan Ramana repeatedly said that there is only one guru and that guru dwells in one's Heart.

What does the word saint mean? The dictionary defines a saint as 'a very virtuous person of great holiness and one of God's chosen people'. In the spiritual realm, we understand a saint to be a person who has no sense of 'me' or 'mine'. They are also those who aid in destroying this sense in those with whom they come in contact. How do they do this? They do it with just a single look or *darshan*, which is also termed as 'God seeing God'.

During my earlier days in Ramanasramam, I interviewed nearly four hundred devotees who had had the *darshan* of Bhagavan. My first question to these devotees invariably was, "How did you come to know of Ramana Maharshi?" This was followed by, "What happened to you when you first met the Maharshi?" The answers to the first question naturally varied from individual to individual. However, the answer to the second question was always the same - irrespective of their gender, creed, religion, the country they belonged to, education and social status. The response was always, "When I stood in the presence of the Maharshi for the first time, he looked at me and there was a peace which I had never experienced before." Some devotees may have used words like repose, bliss, joy, quietude or happiness instead of peace, but they all meant the same thing. They also said, "I had never experienced it before." 'Never experienced' means that there was no 'me' recalling such an experience. The 'me' is the recorder of experiences. In such a 'God seeing God' *darshan*, the 'me' of the person is totally erased. This obliteration can happen on account of a touch, a word or even a look from a saint. And, it is immediate.

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, a well known Indian saint who received blessings from Bhagavan, extols Janaki Mata of Tanjore in his book *Women Saints from India*: "Janaki Mata is one ever living in the remembrance of her *satguru*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi." Such was the glorious tribute that this great saint paid to this great Ramana devotee. Janaki Mata was already a majestic mystic by the time she came to Ramana Maharshi. She was a saint with many psychic experiences.

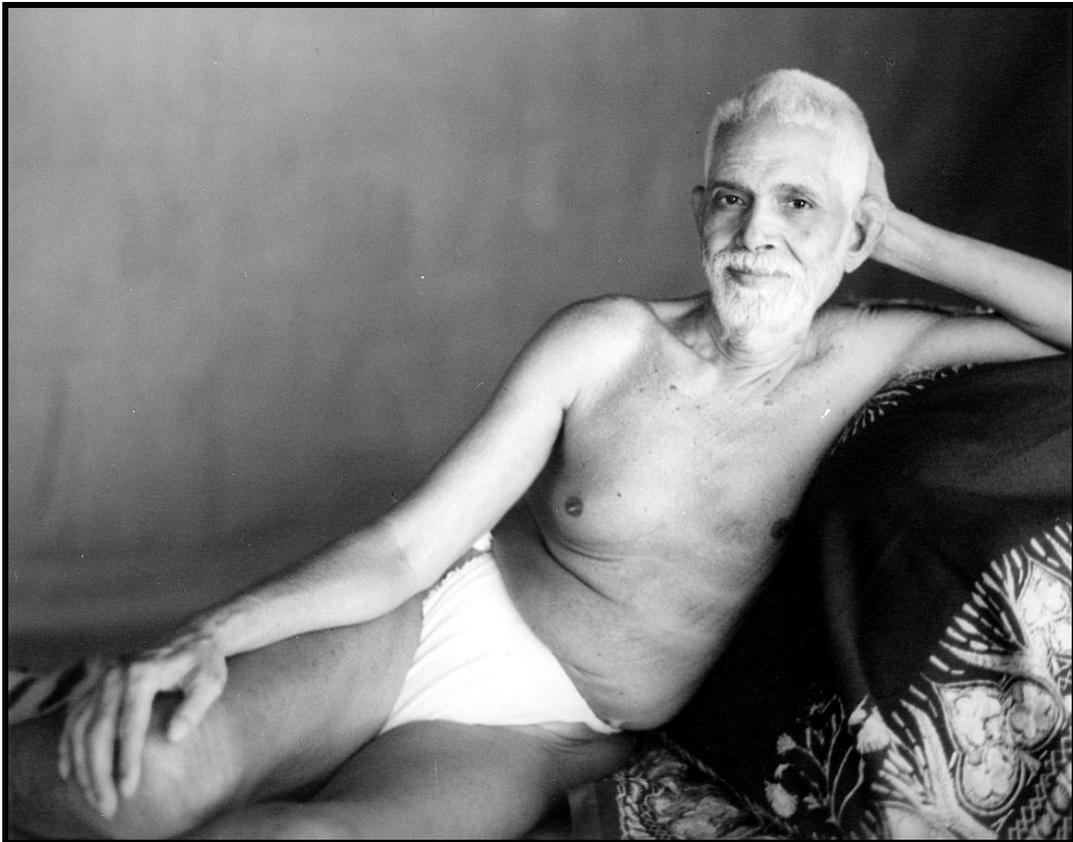


*Sri Bhagavan seated at the entrance to the Goshala*

Who was this remarkable woman? Janaki Mata came from an affluent family; she was the darling of the family. One day, as she was playing on the verandah of her father's palatial house, she saw an emaciated old *sadhu* outside the house, crying, "Child! I am very hungry. Will you please give me some food?" Janaki Mata was such a generous child that she would give away whatever anyone asked for. However, her mother had once told her that she must never offer food until after the daily *pooja* was performed. At that moment, *pooja* was not yet over. Undeterred, the little girl went inside and brought out several plates of delicacies that had been prepared as offerings to God during the *pooja*. She was overjoyed to see the hungry *sadhu* eat it with relish. After he had eaten, the *sadhu* asked her to put out her tongue. Using his finger, he then wrote some sacred letters on her tongue. It instantly sent Janaki into a state of sheer joy and ecstasy. This experience impacted her in two different ways. On the one hand she became psychic, and on the other she became more spiritually inclined. While the former bestowed her with miraculous powers, the latter left the playful child a more withdrawn and introspective girl. No longer was the young girl interested in playing with other children. Instead, she longed to turn towards God.

Very soon, her generous outlook and saintly mystical qualities started attracting people around her. Janaki belonged to a typical Hindu family where the priority of the parents was to get their daughter married at an early age. Much to their concern and displeasure, they found that their daughter was moving more and more towards the spiritual realm, rebuffing any kind of physical relationship, and rejecting outright, all marriage proposals. At this juncture, the wife of a doctor with two children that the family knew, suddenly passed away. When Janaki was approached for an alliance with the widower, she had no hesitation in saying yes. When later asked what caused her to yield, she replied, "I loved the two children." Isn't this an instance of a spiritual woman soaked in motherhood?

Dr. Ganapathi Iyer, Janaki's husband, was a doctor by profession and much older than her. He was frequently transferred from one town to another. By providence, he was transferred in 1935 to Tiruvannamalai. Janaki was by now yearning for the physical presence of a guru because she no longer found any fulfillment in the visions of gods and goddesses she was having. She recalled a verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* wherein Lord Krishna declares to Arjuna, "To him who worships me with loving devotion, and whose action is without desire or motive and is in tune with his *swadharma* (allotted position and duty in life), I reveal myself through the grace of a guru."



"I am always with you "

Her husband's transfer to Tiruvannamalai brought to an end Janaki's turmoil. With the *darshan* of Bhagavan Ramana, Janaki understood that she had found what she had been searching for. One morning, when Bhagavan was going for his routine morning walk, she followed him and spoke to him behind the cowshed at Ramanasramam. Here, she expressed her great inner anguish. Bhagavan looked at her with profound compassion and said, "You are a *grihastha*, a housewife. Fulfill all your obligations as a wife, especially those towards your husband. Leave the task of your spiritual fulfillment to me. There is nothing wrong with the body; it is only the *dehatma buddhi*, the 'I-am-the-body' notion, that has to be given up. You are ever the limitless Self. I am always with you." She now felt the reassurance of receiving Bhagavan's spiritual guidance. She knew that she had been blessed by him. Feeling immensely gratified, she plunged fervently into a life of spiritual *sadhana*. She started delving deep into the Heart all the time. After that life transforming experience, worldly life became a child's play for her. Alas, soon the time came for Janaki Mata's husband to be transferred again. She was

loathe to part from Bhagavan and cried bitterly. Bhagavan looked at her compassionately and tenderly assured her, "I am always with you."

Janaki Mata told me that worldly life and the fact she had many children, did not distract her in any way. She continued to lead a perfectly harmonious life, with peace within and without. Soon, she came to be known as Janaki Mata. Even before she came to Bhagavan, Janaki Mata used to have *kundalini* experiences; she also had other mystical powers. However, once Bhagavan told her, "You are the Self," she shunned these and instead turned within. The thought of Bhagavan made her abide in the Heart and focused her on the Self. By this kind of focus, she overcame obstacles of every kind. She became a spiritual lighthouse for many seekers who had lost their moorings. She taught them how to surrender, how to make Self Enquiry their focus and eventually become the light themselves. There are many instances to substantiate that Bhagavan was forever with her. Bhagavan was totally supportive of those who were thus rooted in the Self. Even after his *mahanirvana*, his guiding presence steered spiritual seekers to recognize and adore those established in the Self. Janaki Mata is an example of such a person.

Repeated visits to Bhagavan hastened and perfected Janaki Mata's progress. Janaki Mata herself shares why she always wanted to be in contact with Bhagavan: "Bhagavan's presence made me experience the super conscious state wherein all the dualities welled up in the mind only to be absorbed in the great silence. The external world appeared to be a myth and an empty dream, the only reality being the silence within the all pervading Self. The successive waves of latent tendencies accrued in the chain of prior births were totally erased, and at last, all the diverse manifestations of the ONE sank into the void, and the transcendental Self alone shone." It was this inner silence that she was established in. She would be immersed in *samadhi* for three or four hours in the presence of Bhagavan. She maintained constant contact with her guru. On one occasion, she sent a special walking stick with a silver handle; next she sent a pair of wooden sandals dressed in silver through her disciple Natarajan, who later became Sadhu Om. Bhagavan received both the articles. He held them, inspected them, and then said, "Give them back. Let Janaki Mata keep them in her *pooja*." Janaki Mata worshipped the two articles daily with limitless devotion. The sacred feet of the guru were forever embedded in her Heart, the inner guru.

In 1966, which was the third year of the publication of *The Mountain Path*, Osborne wanted to bring out a special *Jayanthi* issue. He decided this issue would not carry articles on other saints, mystics and gurus. Instead, it would be dedicated entirely to Bhagavan. Being its managing editor, I was consulted and I agreed. However, it soon became obvious that Bhagavan had other plans - he wanted to confer recognition on Janaki Mata. One day, Osborne called me and insisted that we include an article on Janaki Mata in that particular issue. I was taken aback because I was not even aware that he knew her at all. I was pleasantly surprised when he wrote an apt and revealing introduction to the article. Osborne wrote: "It has become our custom to publish in each issue an article about some saint, mystic or guru. We had decided that in an issue entirely dedicated to Bhagavan this would not be quite appropriate, but just before it was time for the issue to go to the press, we received chapters of a still unpublished life history of the ecstatic woman mystic, Janaki Mata, who has a considerable following, and at the same time is a whole heartedly surrendered *bhakta* of Sri Bhagavan. So we decided to construct an article by stringing together extracts from it."

The second incident, wherein Bhagavan apparently gave full recognition to Janaki Mata, took place in 1967 when Bhagavan's shrine was consecrated. According to Hindu tradition, on such an occasion, a saint is invited to the ceremony in order to touch the shrine and sanctify it. The ashram had a committee of trustees to manage its affairs. My father was the president. The committee called me and instructed me to request Janaki Mata to consecrate the *lingam* on Bhagavan's shrine. As Janaki Mata touched the *lingam*, she became ecstatic. She called out aloud, "Jai Ramanesa! Ramana Guru! Guru Ramana! Ramana *appa*! Ramana *deva*!" The entire audience of several hundred devotees and guests became ecstatic, being transported to a totally different realm! When I met her during the consecration celebrations, I placed my head on her feet praying, "Oh Mata! Please bless me; please guide me." Her words of guidance are sacred to me. She advised, "Hold on to the holy twin feet of *satguru* Ramana, the saviour of all suffering souls, and put his teaching into practice. Putting his teaching into daily practice is truly his two sacred feet. They should forever be embedded in your Heart, your *hridaya*. Heart is Ramana."



*" The atmosphere was filled with Sri Bhagavan's purity and blessedness "*

## Eleanor Pauline Noye



One day, when I was three years old, I went and prostrated to Bhagavan. When I got up, Bhagavan said, "Ganesa, go, your Noye is seated there. Go sit on her lap." I ran joyfully towards the elderly American lady and promptly clambered on to her lap. She was Eleanor Pauline Noye. This was not the only incident where Bhagavan's grace linked me to her. The same year, I went one day into the dining hall when Bhagavan and the devotees were seated for lunch. Heading straight for Eleanor Pauline Noye, I insisted on eating from her leaf plate. The cooks and some of the seated devotees were horrified - steeped as they were in orthodoxy. For them, even the thought of a Brahmin child sharing food from the plate of a westerner was abhorrent. They came running to save me from this unthinkable act of pollution! Adamant on having my way, I started throwing a tantrum and

creating a scene. Bhagavan's attention was drawn to the whole drama. With a single look, he took in what was taking place. Unperturbed, he advised the cooks, "Bring a plate of food with a spoon in it and show it to the child. He will come along with you. His insistence is not to eat from her plate. Since Ganesan has never seen anybody eat with a spoon, he too wants to eat with one!" The cooks did as Bhagavan suggested and I followed them like a happy puppy. Bhagavan looked at me and remarked, "See, your wish is fulfilled!" Bhagavan then turned to the cooks and the others and said, "And your problem too is solved!"

Bhagavan drew all kinds of seekers from across the world. To almost all of them whom I met, I would pose the same question, "What made you come to Arunachala and to Bhagavan?" They would generally reply, "Somebody gave me an article about Bhagavan and Arunachala. That's how I came here." I would persist, "You must have read of many places. Do you go to all the places that you read about?" On reflection, and sometimes, I confess, with a little prodding from me, it would dawn on them that it was not the printed word but a higher power, call it Bhagavan or whatever else, that drew them to Arunachala. Every devotee who has been attracted to Bhagavan has been brought here by the same higher power that in 1896 drew Bhagavan himself to Arunachala!

In 1939, Mrs. Noye was living in California with her twin sister when she went through a major crisis. It caused such mental anguish that she couldn't even sleep. Her suffering was so intense that though she was not well to do, she decided to travel around the world to find solace. Due to her very poor health, her doctor advised her not to travel. "Why do you want to travel in this condition?" the doctor asked. She answered, "I want to know myself." Quite prophetic, considering that the cardinal teaching of the master she was to meet was, "Find out who you are."

Though her planned destination was Calcutta, when her ship reached Chennai she felt impelled to disembark. She took a room in a hotel but did not feel like staying there because of the heat. The hotel staff advised her to go to Kodaikanal, a hill station. The next day, she reached Kodaikanal in a taxi that was arranged for her. In the course of a pleasant stay in a hotel there, she asked some of its workers if there was any living seer or saint they knew about. One of them immediately replied, "Yes, there is a sage called Ramana Maharshi in Arunachala! He is the greatest seer in India!" The surprising thing was that the answer came from an ordinary worker in the hotel, not from a seeker or a scholar. In 1939, the Maharshi was not that well known, yet, he was described as the greatest seer in India.

Mrs. Noye left at once for Arunachala. When she arrived at the ashram, Niranjanananda Swami, the *sarvadhikari*, welcomed her and took her directly to Bhagavan. This is what she wrote: "I felt the atmosphere was filled with Bhagavan's purity and blessedness. One feels the breath of the divine in the sage's presence. When he smiled, it felt as though the gates of the divine were thrown open. I have never seen eyes more alight with divine illumination. He greeted me very tenderly and made some enquiries about me which put me at ease and his look of love and compassion made a benediction that went straight to my Heart. He knew how much I needed him. I was immediately drawn to him. His greatness and kindness was all embracing.



*Mrs. Noye seated behind Sri Bhagavan on the Hill  
(Lakshman Joo is to the left of Sri Bhagavan)*

His silent influence of love and light was more potent than words can ever be. Everyone who comes to him is blessed. The inner peace which is his is felt by all."

From that moment, till her taking leave of Bhagavan after a year, her eyes rarely stopped shedding tears. Bhagavan's attention on her was continuous and without a gap. The moment she came into his presence, he would turn his attention on her. Unbelievable, but true, such a wonderful relationship is unique in the pages of the book of Bhagavan's life. Her pure, simple ways and her melting tears endeared her to all the old devotees as well. In the beginning, her tears were due to anguish, sorrow and suffering. Later on, her tears were a spontaneous expression of inexplicable joy and spiritual fulfillment. After she met Bhagavan, she slept soundly for the first time in many years. From then on, the sleeping pills she had been taking were given up for good. She attributed it to the direct blessings of Bhagavan. When asked how she managed to do it, she replied, "I received the medicine of all medicines - the unflinching grace of Bhagavan." Her answer echoes one of Bhagavan's poems in which he addresses Arunachala as 'the medicine of all medicines'.

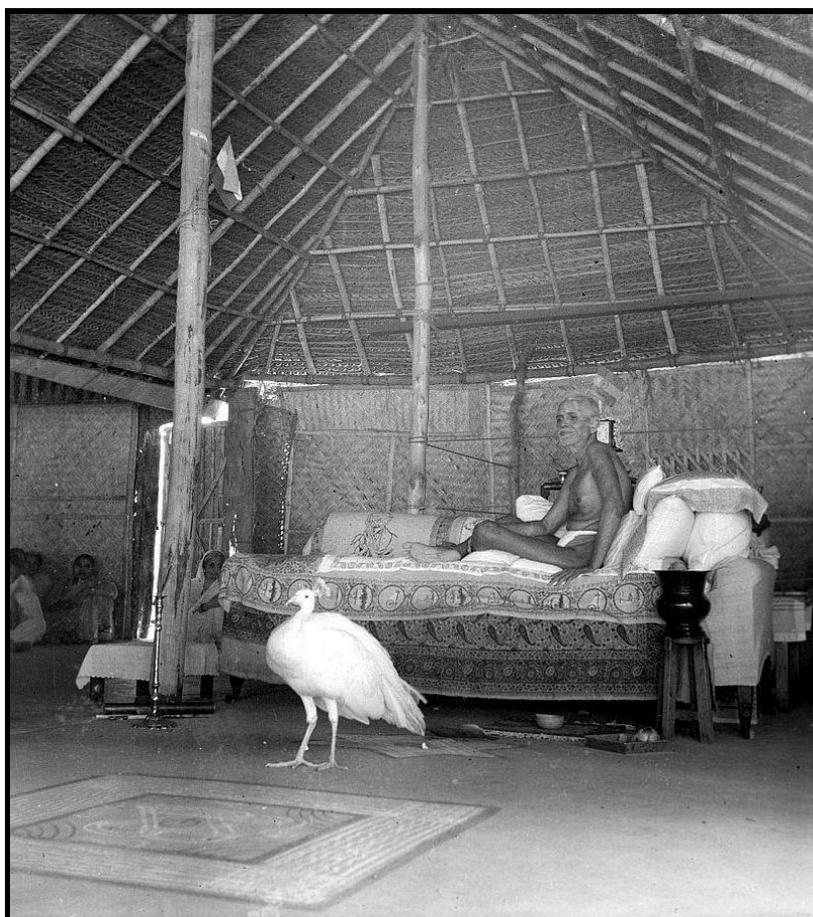
After some months, she wanted to travel and see India before leaving for home. After a long tour of India, when she reached Calcutta, her port of departure, she suddenly felt the powerful pull of Bhagavan and Arunachala. Without a second thought, she returned. Bhagavan welcomed her with a glorious smile. Mrs. Noye describes her experience of her second sojourn, "My love blossomed into deep devotion and I was filled with ineffaceable peace. The things which seemed so vital before were

no longer of any importance. I could see things in their correct perspective. The heartaches of yesterday and thoughts of tomorrow faded into insignificance and finally into complete oblivion.”

One day, seeing her with a beautiful rose, a devotee asked her about it. Mrs. Noye answered that it was for Bhagavan. But when she entered the hall she had no courage to offer it directly to Bhagavan. So she placed the rose on a foot stool that was usually kept before Bhagavan. Bhagavan looked at her and asked her, “What is that?” “It is only a rose, Bhagavan.” “Will you give it to me?” She picked it up and gave it to Bhagavan who took it from her and touched it to his eyes, his head and his Heart. On seeing that simple, beautiful gesture, filled with emotion, a silent prayer burst forth from her heart, “Oh Bhagavan! May you always be my father! May you always be my mother! May you always be my God! May I always be your child!”

After a stay of eight months, the day came for her to leave for California. Standing in front of Bhagavan to take leave, she cried profusely. Bhagavan assured her, “I am always with you.” When she went back to her home in America, she used to stay in touch with Bhagavan through letters. Whenever she wrote, Mrs. Noye would write four letters - one addressed to Bhagavan, one to Niranjanananda Swami, one to Bhagavan’s attendant Krishnaswami who was very kind to her, and a fourth one to me. Every time he read a letter from Mrs. Noye, Bhagavan would, believe me, be moved to tears as she would have written in her letter, “Bhagavan! I am writing you this letter with tears rolling down my cheeks.” In those days, Indians travelled very rarely to America. But whenever a devotee informed Bhagavan about such a trip, he would instruct them, “Go and meet Noye.”

After Bhagavan dropped his body, she wrote a letter in which she stated, “Bhagavan! You have taken me to your Heart. I am in your Heart.” This remarkable lady, who came to Bhagavan full of anguish, suffering and sorrow, successfully completed her spiritual journey through the enfoldment of Bhagavan’s loving and compassionate grace.





*Sri Bhagavan seated near the Ashram well*

## Suri Nagamma



There is a day that falls in the middle of January, when people across India offer their worship and thanksgiving to bulls and cows by resting them, washing them, and adorning them with beads and bells. On that day, every year, I visit the shrine of cow Lakshmi situated between the hill and the Old Hall of Bhagavan. Invariably, my mind goes to Lakshmi's last day. The year was 1948 and I was witness to the event. Bhagavan sat next to Lakshmi with his hands on her, calming her and blessing her with peace. When Bhagavan left the place, Lakshmi remained motionless with her eyes closed. She remained in this position for more than half an hour. Suri Nagamma then lovingly took Lakshmi's head in her hands and placed it on her lap. After Lakshmi breathed her last, Suri Nagamma reported it to Bhagavan.

Some days before the first anniversary of Lakshmi's *samadhi* in 1949, Suri Nagamma had to go back to her village. On the day prior to Lakshmi's anniversary, Bhagavan repeatedly asked his attendants, "Has Nagamma come? Has she been informed that tomorrow is Lakshmi's *samadhi* day?" The next day too, he persisted with his enquiries. Nagamma did arrive, but a little late. She headed straight to Lakshmi's shrine and only then did she come to see Bhagavan. As soon as Bhagavan saw Suri Nagamma, he asked, "Did you go to Lakshmi's shrine?" The triangle of Bhagavan, Lakshmi and Suri Nagamma is inscribed forever in my heart.

About a hundred years ago, child marriages were prevalent in India. If a married girl died, the boy got married again. However, if the boy died the girl was doomed to lead the austere life of a widow for the rest of her life. The girl's head was often shaved and her attire from then on very plain. She was almost boycotted by society as she could neither go out of the house nor participate in any of the social functions even within the household. So, it became easier for widows who had spiritual aspirations to pursue the spiritual path without succumbing to the temptations of the world. That is why Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa said, "I would like to be born in my next birth as a child widow." When you were a child widow, you were saved from all forms of temptations. There were no attractions and distractions to take one's time and mind away from spiritual *sadhana*.

Such was the life of Suri Nagamma. Born into an affluent family, she lost her parents at a tender age. She was married when she was very young and lost her husband within twelve years of age. Nagamma had always envisioned herself along the lines of Sita, the dutiful wife of Lord Rama. This tragedy therefore proved to be too heartbreaking to be reconciled to. She often locked herself up in her room, refusing to see anyone or eat anything. Consequently, she became weak and malnourished. Yet, in the midst of this misfortune, she found immense relief in listening to people sing or talk about saints and sages. This encouraged her to read about saints; it also increased her longing to be associated with them. This spiritual seed that was sown soon blossomed into not just a tree but a garden of beautiful flowers.

Unable to attend school, Nagamma learned her mother tongue, Telugu, on her own. She studied Indian epics like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Srimad Bhagavatam*. She was especially drawn to a particular chapter in the *Bhagavatam* where the Lord appears as the child Kapila and gives instructions to his mother, Devahuti, on how to attain Self realization. This was the turning point in Nagamma's life. She began to thirst for all kinds of spiritual texts and nursed the desire of meeting and serving a great sage. One night, Nagamma had a beautiful dream in which a *siddha purusha* resembling Dakshinamurthy appeared. Brilliant light surrounded the *siddha purusha*. Nagamma wanted to rise and prostrate before him but she woke up abruptly from her dream. She was terribly disappointed and her yearning to meet and serve a holy sage became more intense.



A rare photo of Sri Bhagavan looking at the Hill through binoculars

Nagamma had three brothers. One was a lawyer, another worked in a bank and the youngest brother was an invalid. It fell on Nagamma's shoulders to take care of this brother. She did this until this brother's death in 1923, when she was 21 years. During these years, she longed to grow spiritually but her responsibilities tied her down. With the death of her brother, she had to move out of her village into the city of Vijayawada with her lawyer brother because the family did not want her to live alone. This move was a blessing in disguise because she not only came into contact with *sadhakas* but also had more access to spiritual books in Telugu. In 1939, Nagamma's other brother, D. S. Shastri, wrote a letter to her describing his visit to Arunachala during one of his business travels. He described the experience of meeting the great sage Ramana Maharshi and how his entire life seemed to have been transformed since then. He urged her to visit Ramana Maharshi and spend some time in Arunachala. He offered her his moral and financial support in this. (It was this brother who later translated Nagamma's Telugu books into English.)

Nagamma viewed this 'strange *sadhu*' rather skeptically. However, since she did not want to displease her brother, she went to Ramanasramam in July, 1941. One look at Bhagavan and she was both wonderstruck and spellbound. As Bhagavan looked at her intently, she experienced an inexplicable feeling of peace and wonder of wonders, she realized that the *siddha purusha* she saw in her dream nearly thirty years ago was Ramana Maharshi! Sensing her wonder, Bhagavan smiled at her. Nagamma was certain that she was face to face with God and decided to stay in Tiruvannamalai for good. Since Nagamma had not come prepared to be a permanent resident of Tiruvannamalai, she had to return home to bring back what she needed. She cried when she took leave of Bhagavan since she did not want to be away from him. Bhagavan replied, "I am always with you. Wherever you go,

whatever you do, I am always with you.” Nagamma became ecstatic and from then onwards saw Bhagavan in everything. She was filled with joy! Even her relatives realized that the sorrow stricken Nagamma of all these years had finally found her happiness and bliss.

Namma returned to Arunachala within three months as she could not bear to be separated from Bhagavan any longer. She had to stay in town since there were no residential places near the ashram and ladies weren't allowed to stay in the ashram after sunset. Fortunately, she was able to rent a house next to Echammal who used to eat only after serving Bhagavan first. Living next to this saintly woman proved to be a great *satsang* for Nagamma who was encouraged by Echammal to speak without restraint with Bhagavan. In fact, Echammal specifically told her that when she spoke to Bhagavan she should ask for nothing less than Self realization. One day after she prostrated before Bhagavan she prayed with a trembling voice, “Bhagavan, please help me attain *mukti*.” Bhagavan, the embodiment of compassion, turned to her and nodded his head in agreement. This reaction of Bhagavan's was very strange as his usual response to this question would be a counter question like, “Who wants *mukti*? Who is asking this question?” or else mere silence. When Nagamma told Echammal about this, Echammal commented, “What a fortunate lady you are! Bhagavan has already given you *abhayam*, protection!” Nagamma asked her what she meant by that and Echammal explained that from then on there would be no more births or deaths for Nagamma. “Bhagavan has taken over you. You have nothing to fear and that is liberation.”

Bhagavan focused all of his attention on Nagamma and like a good student she plunged into Bhagavan's teaching of Self Enquiry. She was occasionally able to go deep into meditation but she was also distracted by thoughts. She said, “Particularly when seated in front of Bhagavan with closed eyes and meditating, these thoughts would cloud me and when I opened my eyes Bhagavan would be focusing his attention on me.” She said, “Bhagavan scared all my thoughts away from me.” Nagamma was a gifted poet and a talented writer. In those days, women did not approach Bhagavan and converse freely with him though Bhagavan himself did not impose any such restrictions. Things became more difficult on crowded days. On such days, Nagamma would send a note to Bhagavan seeking clarification about her occasional doubts regarding meditation. Bhagavan would admonish her, “Why do you take notice of these doubts? By noticing them, you strengthen them. Plunge within!” In her poetic language Nagamma would say, “Every time Bhagavan looked at me and enriched my inner striving, he steadied it without any frills. It was like water flowing into dry land, making it flower and blossom. My spiritual life was like that.”



Sri Ramanasramam (in the 1940s)

Suri Nagamma herself narrated the following incident relating to the *amrita nadi* or the immortal nerve - the nerve that has been extolled by yogic texts and the Hindu scriptures as being similar to the *kundalini*. In 1942, a Tamil scholar had a lengthy and detailed discussion with Bhagavan on the *amrita*

*nadi*, believed to be the nerve associated with Self realization. Bhagavan showed interest in the discussion and answered all the pundit's questions, giving a detailed description of the functions of the *amrita nadi*. Nagamma felt out of place as she did not know anything of the subject matter. After the pundit left, she approached Bhagavan and began to ask him about what was discussed. Before she could complete her sentence, Bhagavan asked, "Why do you worry about all this?" Nagamma replied, "Bhagavan, you have been discussing this for four days; so I thought I should also learn something about it from you." Bhagavan answered, "The pundit was asking me what is written in the scriptures and I was giving him suitable replies. Why do you bother about all that? It is enough if you look into yourself as to who you are." Saying this, Bhagavan smiled compassionately at her. After another two days or so, there was once again another dialogue on the same subject. This time Bhagavan said that it was only a notion, a mere concept. Nagamma intervened to ask whether all matters relating to the *amrita nadi* were also only concepts. Bhagavan replied emphatically, "Yes, what else is it? Is it not a mere notion? If the body itself is a notion, will that not be a notion as well?" Bhagavan then looked at Nagamma with great kindness. All her doubts were laid to rest. In narrating this incident, Nagamma wanted to make known how important it is to go back to the source when spiritual doubts arise.

Bhagavan understood that each devotee had his or her own inborn gift and took this into consideration when nurturing a seeker. The inborn nature of the individual is not an obstacle to spiritual *sadhana* - only the countless thoughts are. Suri Nagamma's gift was that of a poet and a writer. So, Bhagavan offered her spiritual guidance based on this fact. When Suri Nagamma realized that Bhagavan was her guru, verses and songs and poems flowed spontaneously. Initially, she felt rather shy to present her writings before Bhagavan. However, when another Telugu lady began singing these verses to Bhagavan, he appreciated them immensely. Hearing from an attendant that Bhagavan had received the verses positively, Nagamma felt free to place a few more verses before Bhagavan. Bhagavan gave a welcoming smile and said, "There are four verses written in the form of a prayer to me. The second verse is amusing. After I left Skandashram and settled down here, I had no monkeys to serve me. Nagamma pleads with me saying, 'Why don't you accept my mind that is like a monkey to serve you? Tie it down or chasten it, but see to it that it does service to you.' That is the idea behind the verse. In *Sivananda Lahari*, Adi Shankara says something similar. He says, 'Oh Siva ! You are a *bhikshu*, a beggar. Why not tie down my monkey mind to a stick and go about begging? You will get alms in abundance.'" Bhagavan then talked about a great Telugu scholar who had visited the ashram and told Bhagavan that he had read several spiritual articles by Nagamma in various Telugu journals. Bhagavan told the scholar that Nagamma was imparting spiritual knowledge to the public in the form of articles to magazines, journals and newspapers. What wonderful support he gave Nagamma! One day, when Bhagavan was in the hall, he heard someone observe that there was no one to take care of the Telugu manuscripts. Bhagavan at once suggested that Nagamma who was proficient in the language would be able to write down the material. A large bound notebook arrived and Bhagavan himself gave it to Nagamma. From that day on, she became the official writer, copier and custodian of all the writings in Telugu.

With the passing of time, Nagamma's relatives,- especially her elder brother, D.S.Sastri - and friends, suggested that she record her conversations with Bhagavan since she had the good fortune of being in Bhagavan's close proximity. To begin with she was rather reluctant, but she ultimately yielded. When Nagamma's brother, D. S. Shastri, came to the ashram, he presented her with a big notebook, requesting her to write him detailed letters about the happenings around Bhagavan. Nagamma fell for this 'trap' and so the letters started. When she had completed writing four letters, she felt tempted to read them out to Bhagavan. Bhagavan appreciated them a great deal. She went on to write a steady stream of 'Letters' and carefully preserved them in that notebook. These letters were later brought out in the form of a book titled *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*. The book is a must read for devotees since it portrays Bhagavan as a human being and dwells on his greatness as a master. When Nagamma finished the first volume of *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* (in Telugu) and began to write for a second volume, some members of the office staff told her to discontinue writing. In addition to this, they also handed over to the management what she had already written. Nagamma was crestfallen, but was compelled to obey. Before handing over the manuscripts, she placed them before Bhagavan. Eyes welling with tears she told Bhagavan to do whatever he pleased with them. Bhagavan called out to Rajagopal Iyer and asked him to hand it over to the office. Devotees like Muruganar, Kunju Swami and Viswanatha Swami were distressed that Nagamma would not be continuing her work. They exhorted her to continue but she refused to comply. One day, Kunju Swami explained to Nagamma the reason behind what appeared to be the management's harsh stance.





Sri Bhagavan reading Suri Nagamma's Telugu article

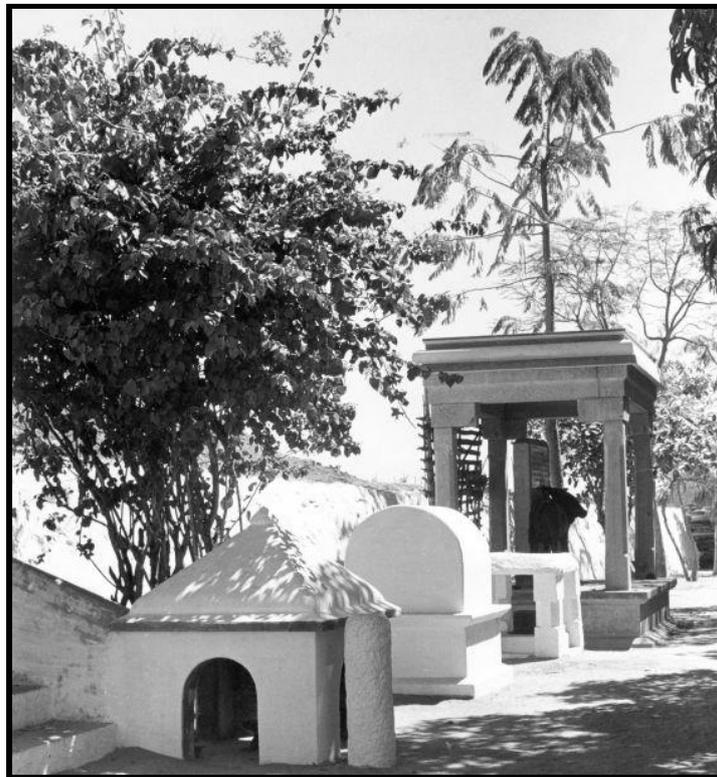
He said, "You must understand, Nagamma, that there are sufficient reasons for the ashram authorities to ask you to stop writing. Some time ago, when Paul Brunton, Munagala Venkataramiah and others wrote, some people copied their work, published them as their own writing and made money. But you have no mercenary intentions, do you? In that case, why do you hesitate? Even if it is being temporarily banned, these letters will eventually be of immense value to future generations. It is not an uncommon experience for obstacles to be encountered when doing any good work, isn't it? You should not stop writing just because of these obstacles."

Nagamma remained unconvinced. She consulted two reputed Telugu scholars, Chinta Dikshatulu and Sitarama Shastri. Like Kunju Swami, they too were very encouraging. As a matter of fact, Sitarama Shastri pointed out to Nagamma that she had a natural and innate ability to understand the inner meaning behind Bhagavan's words - something that not all devotees were capable of - and hence it was her duty to share this knowledge with the rest of the spiritual world. Nagamma felt reassured and encouraged by these words and resumed her writing. Every now and then, when the management enquired whether she was still writing, she would deny it. However, this weighed heavily on her and one day her pangs of guilt compelled her to go to Bhagavan to confess everything. As Nagamma entered the hall, she found Bhagavan in the midst of some devotees. He was narrating a childhood episode to them that had occurred in Madurai. He was referring to the incident when he lied to his aunt as he was leaving home. At this point, Bhagavan spotted Nagamma and focusing his attention on her said, "It is not that we speak the lie; some force makes us to do so. Even Adi Shankara was able to take *sannyas* only after lying to his mother." Nagamma's reluctance to continue her work vanished and the outcome is the subsequent volumes of *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* (in Telugu). [These volumes in Telugu were translated into English by her elder brother, D.S.Sastri, and brought out as a single volume.]

During the last years of Bhagavan, Nagamma had the custom to offer to Bhagavan a new loin cloth the evening before Ugadi, Telugu New Year's day. In March 1950, which was to be the last Ugadi for Bhagavan, when Nagamma went to offer the customary loin cloth, she was unsure whether Bhagavan would accept her offering since his body was already very weak and suffering tremendously. Bhagavan

accepted the offering and requested his attendant to keep it aside so that he could wear it the following morning. The next morning when Nagamma went to see Bhagavan, he asked her whether it was Ugadi and also if it was Vikriti (the name of the year). This happened to be the last conversation that Nagamma had with Bhagavan. On the day Bhagavan departed, April 14, 1950, Nagamma stood in line like all the other devotees to have her last *darshan* of him. When her turn finally came, she found that he had his eyes closed. She wept uncontrollably for she wanted him to bless her. Bhagavan opened his eyes, which seemed to be pleading, "Please allow me to go. This body is suffering." Weeping inconsolably, and with a heavy heart, Nagamma consented. Bhagavan smiled at her benevolently. After Bhagavan attained *samadhi*, Nagamma returned to her village.

I was fortunate enough to bring her back to the ashram in 1980 so that she could stay on and write her reminiscences. It was originally written in Telugu by her and later on translated by her brother into English under the title *My Life at Ramanasramam*. When Nagamma fell ill, her relatives took her back and then moved her to a hospital in Bangalore. I could not physically go to Bangalore to take care of this gem of a devotee. I requested my good friend A. R. Natarajan to attend on her. Needless to say, he did his job to perfection. When Nagamma passed away in Bangalore, I requested A. R. Natarajan to attend the last rites as a representative of Ramanasramam which he did. He was also one of those who carried the body of the wonderful devotee to the cremation ground.



*Cow Lakshmi's samadhi*

Seekers all over the world will forever be indebted to Nagamma for her writings. Personally, I am eternally grateful to Nagamma for taking care of cow Lakshmi during her final moments. Lakshmi was the pet animal of Bhagavan, as perhaps Nagamma was his pet human. So, I cannot but say a few words about Lakshmi while talking about Nagamma. Bhagavan treated all forms of animal bodies with the same love, gentleness and grace. Yet, it would be no exaggeration if I said that Lakshmi, a non-human, received his grace in the fullest sense and got liberated, attaining a state of perfect inner equilibrium. There is no doubt that cow Lakshmi was the most fortunate saintly being, because Bhagavan felt one with her and gave her liberation by constantly touching her during her final moments.

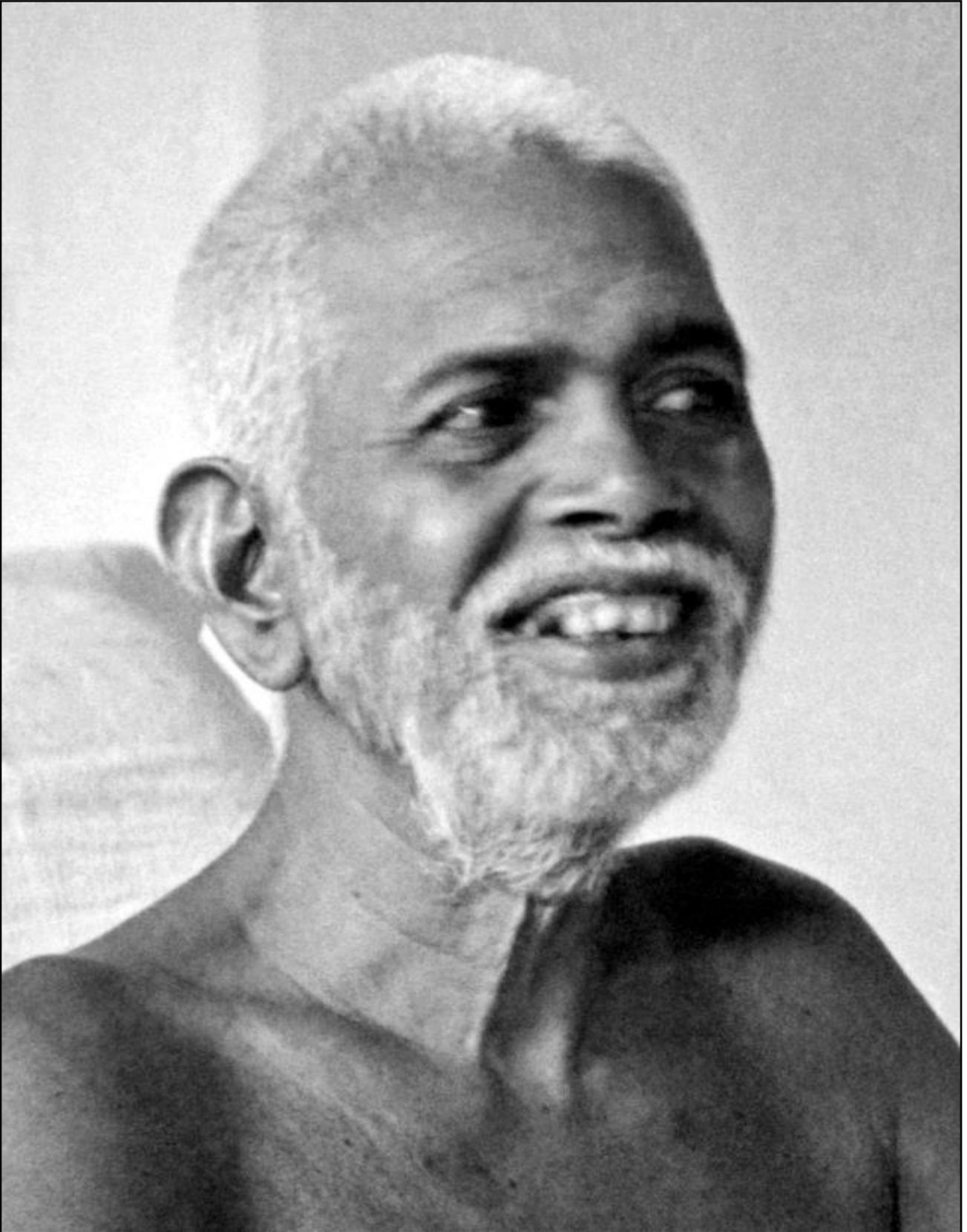


An early photo when Suri Nagamma surrendered to Sri Bhagavan

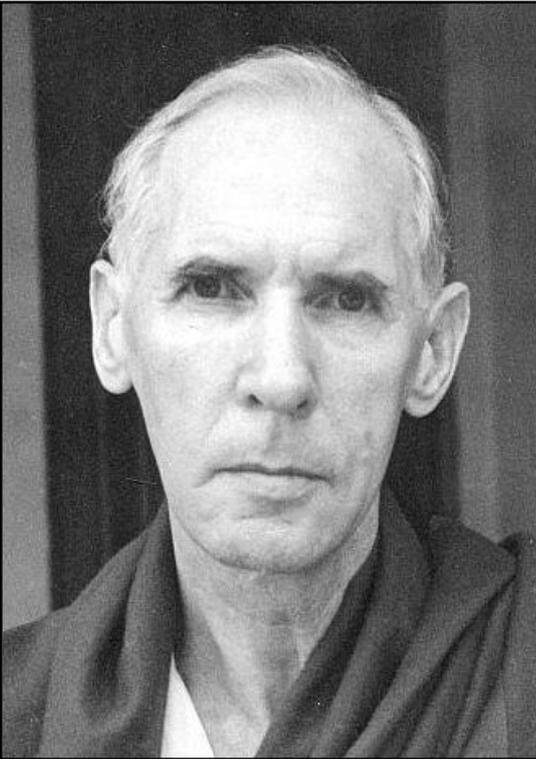
The last time he had done this was a few decades ago at Skandashram - for his mother, Azhagammal.

Suri Nagamma gives an account of the incident with Lakshmi: "When Bhagavan came to the cowshed of Lakshmi on the final day, he went straight to her and sat by her side on the hay. He then tenderly lifted her head with both hands and placed it on his thighs. He gently and lovingly passed one hand over her face and then her throat. Next, he placed his left hand on the head and with the fingers of his right hand began pressing from her throat down to her heart. Lakshmi remained calm, free from the ties of the world and free from pain, as though she were in a state of *samadhi*." When Nagamma informed Bhagavan that Lakshmi was no more, Bhagavan came to the cowshed, lifted her head with both his hands and said, "Lakshmi, Lakshmi!" He turned to the devotees gathered there and said, "It is because of her that our family has grown to this extent." Bhagavan said this because Lakshmi came to Bhagavan in 1926 as a calf. Bhagavan named her Lakshmi. She became very attached to Bhagavan. After her arrival, the cowshed was built; the ashram too, flourished after this. On the last day, looking at Lakshmi, Bhagavan, choked with emotion, enquired, "Do you notice that the right ear is raised?" He pointed this out because it is said that when people die in Kashi, Lord Siva whispers into their right ear and liberates them. What Bhagavan meant was that Lakshmi was indeed liberated. The tomb that was constructed for Lakshmi was raised under Bhagavan's personal supervision and guidance in accordance with the injunctions laid down in the ancient text, *Thirumandiram*. The text gives details on how the body of a realized being should be interred. Bhagavan personally wrote a verse in Tamil confirming that Lakshmi had attained *mukti*. When Devaraja Mudaliar queried whether Bhagavan had used the word to signify her death, he stated firmly that it signified her final spiritual emancipation.

Cow Lakshmi and Suri Nagamma are now absorbed in Bhagavan Ramana. Once, someone asked, "Bhagavan! I want your grace." Bhagavan replied, "What is, is only grace."



## Arthur Osborne



My father used to say about me, “Whoever Ganesan meets he will immediately call him a saint, a sage or a *Siddha Purusha*.” This was an exaggeration. If we are *Jnanis* like Bhagavan, we will see everyone as *Jnani* or rather as *Jnana*. As we are not, we should see good in everyone. Many of us are not even able to do that. But, ought we not to recognize saintliness when it is unmistakably present in someone? I saw saintliness in devotees like Arthur Osborne, Muruganar, Munagala Venkataramiah, Chadwick, Suri Nagamma and a host of others; and, I realized that they brought me closer to Bhagavan. Having said this, I should add that my father was courteous to all and feared none in his life. He said that he sensed Bhagavan being always with him and around him – protecting him.

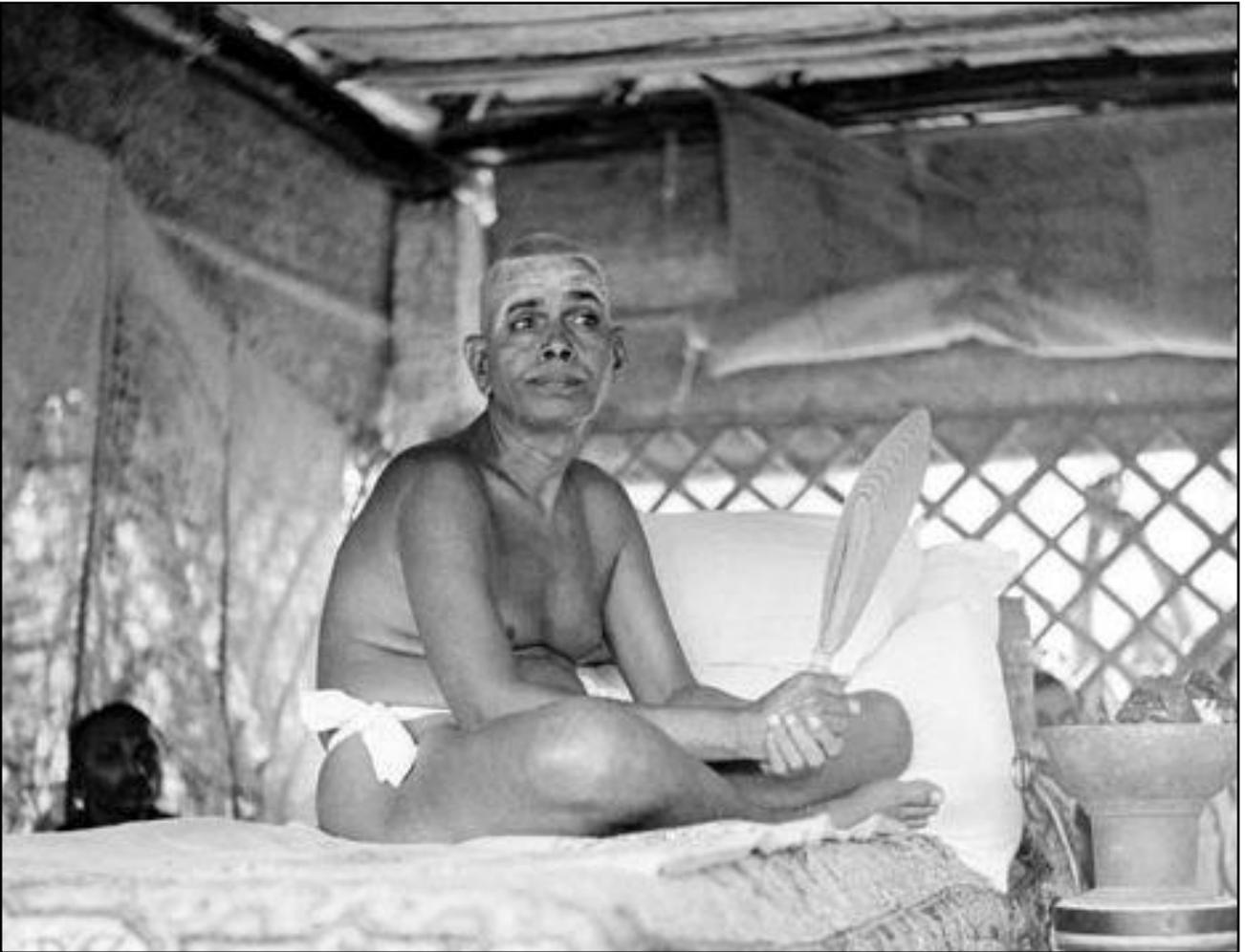
Arthur Osborne came to Ramana Maharshi only in 1945. He stayed with the master for only five years, with brief gaps.. But they were years packed with his devotion and the Master’s grace. I feel that Osborne was to Bhagavan what Swami Vivekananda was to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Though Bhagavan’s spiritual message was meant for the whole world, Arthur Osborne was the English voice, the western voice - you may even call him

the modern voice - to carry and spread Bhagavan’s direct teaching of *Atma Vichara* (Self-Enquiry) all over the world. Arthur Osborne played a most important role in this. We are going to share how Bhagavan chose him and pointedly matured him in the direct teaching of Self-Enquiry.

While in the body, Bhagavan ripened Osborne spiritually through his look, presence and various other ways. After Bhagavan dropped the body, he made Osborne carry on this mission through appearance in dreams. From the beginning, Bhagavan, in his own mysterious, mystical, but simple and natural way, drew Arthur Osborne to himself, for the sole purpose of spreading his direct teaching. It was my good fortune to work closely with Osborne for six years. What a lot did I learn from him !

Arthur Osborne ably shouldered the responsibility of upholding the direct teaching of Bhagavan through his life and his brilliant writing. He had the rare combination of intellectual clarity, intuition and poetical ability to articulate his experiences. Those who read Osborne’s books, especially *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, will know what a lucid writer he was and how he could find effortless expression where others would fumble or be at a loss for words. Many have written wonderfully about Bhagavan’s teachings but among those who wrote in English, Osborne stands out, surpassing even Paul Brunton. Arthur Osborne’s devotion to Bhagavan was complete and he gave to Bhagavan his whole life together with his many and varied talents. All these he gave without any reserve and without any thought of himself.

It was in 1960 that I came to Arunachala to stay permanently. After an illness of three months I completely recovered and decided to dedicate myself totally to Ramanasramam. In the 1960s, there were only ten people or so living in the ashram. When I arrived, Osborne was standing with open arms under the *illupai* tree at the entrance of the ashram. I felt as if Bhagavan himself was receiving me with a smile of appreciation and acceptance of my decision. That one look, that one smile of Arthur Osborne, made my life flower into total dedication to spiritual life. He said “Welcome, Ganesan! We all knew that you will return here to your home. Arunachala is our home and Bhagavan is our mother. Ask Arunachala, ask Bhagavan, only one boon, ‘Give me Self-realization.’ Do not ask for mundane things because he will certainly give whatever you ask for. He is a great giver. If you ask for a wife, house, property, power and position he will most assuredly give it to you, in greater measure as well. But then, he will send you away from Arunachala.



If you ask for Self-realization and nothing else, he will retain you here and give himself to you. Arunachala is Self-realization, the pinnacle of *jnana*. Welcome home, Ganesan! Be happy.” Who uttered these words? Not just an ordinary person, a westerner and an intellectual, but one who had stayed unmoved from Arunachala, keeping Arunachala in his Heart. Of course, all these are true! These are glorious words and we must preserve them in our Heart. Great men’s words are true all the time, to all, under all conditions.

Who was Arthur Osborne? He was born in London in 1906. His father was a school head master and his mother was a simple, pious lady interested in poetry and gardening. Osborne inherited these two traits from his mother. He wanted to be a gardener, a farmer, all his life. But his father put him in Oxford and he came out brilliantly with ten gold medals. He fulfilled his parent’s desires. But all his life he remained a lover of poetry and gardening. All his spiritual experiences, apart from those that happened in the presence of Bhagavan, took place in his garden. From his childhood, he sought the deeper and higher purpose, the meaning of life. He told me that even as a small child playing in the grounds, he felt worldly living was meaningless. He could not share this feeling with anybody. The words of Jesus Christ were his only support: “He who seeks shall find.” He told me this made him a seeker after truth all his life. At a particular stage, he came across the writings of the French philosopher Rene Guenon and he was thrilled because Rene Guenon’s teaching was, “Being is one.” He immediately felt that this teaching was the truth. His restlessness and discontent over the futility of worldly living dropped off with the realization that life has, after all, a meaning. This is what he shared, “If being is one and there is no other, then I cannot be any other than that one being. Therefore, to realize one’s true being is to realize the identity with that absolute one being. It was the beginning of my quest, a quest from which I never swerved or turned aside.” This was even before he knew anything about Bhagavan.

Then he met Lucia, fell in love with her and married her. Both of them had similar aspirations in life as she was also searching for the truth. They were guided by Rene Guenon to another guru who gave them a very rigorous *sadhana* of chanting incantations which they followed meticulously. During that time, being a keen intellectual in addition to being a seeker, Osborne studied and even practiced simultaneously, the tenets of Sufism, Buddhism, Christianity and Vedanta, gaining mystical erudition in all of them. And look at the beauty - all this prepared him for the finale. He then got a job in the University of Bangkok in Thailand and took his wife and three children there. Wherever he went, he was always in contact with members of Rene Guenon's group. One of the members, David McIver, sent them a photograph of Ramana Maharshi and two of Bhagavan's books. He also cautioned them that Ramana Maharshi was not a guru as he did not give initiations or accept anyone as a disciple. But Arthur and Lucia Osborne were captivated by the picture of Bhagavan and desired to go to India and meet Ramana Maharshi.

Being a very hot summer, they first went to Kashmir where they were met by David McIver who also owned a cottage opposite to Ramanasramam. After spending a few weeks, Osborne had to go back to Bangkok. Fortunately, David invited Mrs. Osborne and the three children and took them to Tiruvannamalai. When Osborne went to Bangkok, the Second World War broke out and the Japanese arrested him and put him in jail. For three and a half years he was in jail. Arthur Osborne's only solace was Bhagavan's picture and the two books. When the Japanese came to arrest him from the university campus, some urge prompted him to take these three things. While in the prison camp, he created and tended to a very nice garden. His personality, and his talks there, drew many people to him. One among them was Louis Hurst, who came to Bhagavan after the Second World War.

Far away in Tiruvannamalai, Mrs. Osborne had by then already got Bhagavan's *darshan*. The moment she saw Bhagavan's eyes - Bhagavan gave her a pointed look - she felt absolutely transformed. Bhagavan took special care of Mrs. Osborne and the children. To her husband in prison, Mrs. Osborne wrote about how Bhagavan's eyes had the innocence of a small child together with the unfathomable wisdom and immense love of a sage. Meanwhile, the children prayed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, we are writing letters to our father but we do not know whether he is alive or not. Please keep him alive and bring him back soon."

Osborne told me that when he was in the prison, prominent British prisoners were sometimes taken away and executed. When the special force came to take Osborne, everyone was sure that he was going to be shot. Osborne told me, "The last thing I looked at was Bhagavan's picture and the two books. When I was taken in front of the firing squad, I closed my eyes. I did not pray to Bhagavan but Bhagavan's picture came to my mind and for some unknown reason they released me and put me in a concentration camp."

While he was suffering, his children back in Tiruvannamalai went on praying to Bhagavan for their father's safe return. Bhagavan never gave an answer until the war ended. The day when Osborne was released along with the first batch of forty prisoners, his son Adam's prayers were answered by Bhagavan: "Yes, Adam's father is coming back." When he came to Arunachala, Osborne was in a debilitated mental state because of the torture in the concentration camp. Intellectuals were tortured to brainwash them. When Bhagavan was told about Osborne's imminent return by train, his attendant, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, on seeing Bhagavan's concern, asked, "May I also go?" Bhagavan replied, "Yes, you also go." So, Bhagavan's representative was also there when Osborne was brought back. The only person he could recognize in his poor mental condition was his wife. She came crying to Bhagavan. Bhagavan told her, "Please bring Osborne here morning and evening and make him sit where I can see him." This happened till he became completely alright and continued even afterwards. Osborne told me, "Bhagavan saw to it that I sat where he could see me. One day, when two or three people came and sat between me and Bhagavan, he even asked those people to sit elsewhere so that he could see me, which was very, very unusual for him."

However, Bhagavan did not reveal himself to Osborne on the very first day. Some days later, on a festive occasion, Bhagavan concentrated his attention on Osborne and the change came with all its immensity. This is how Osborne describes it: "Bhagavan sat up facing me and his luminous eyes pierced into me, penetrating intimately with an intensity which I cannot describe. Then arose from within, a quietness, a depth of peace and an indescribable lightness and happiness." This is what is written in the book. What

Arthur Osborne himself told me was, "Two search lights came into my body and then divinized every cell in it and that was the first initiation and the first realization".

After this, Osborne began to understand what the grace and blessings of a guru could be. It was this initiation by look that vitalized him and made him follow Sri Bhagavan's teaching of Self Enquiry, a quest for which his intellectual bent of mind was perfectly suited. Bhagavan poured his love and attention continuously on him. Osborne was very meticulous and regular, coming every morning and evening as he went deeper and deeper within. He fully understood what Bhagavan meant by saying that the only purpose of the outer guru was to invoke the inner guru. When he came to Bhagavan, he was again told by McIver that Bhagavan was not a guru and he never gave initiation or accepted disciples. Osborne now felt that if Bhagavan was not a guru, then the word 'guru' had no meaning. Bhagavan had given him initiation by look which transformed him and made him a disciple. So, there was no question about Bhagavan not having disciples.

The constant practice of Self Enquiry began to awaken an awareness of the Self as Bhagavan guided outwardly and also as the Self within. Osborne understood, and said, that the specious theory that Bhagavan was not a guru simply evaporated in the full radiance of his grace. This initiation and its consequences changed the course of his spiritual life. He could no more practice his earlier methods of *sadhana*. He was a little disturbed about this and sought Bhagavan's permission to drop them. Bhagavan gave it immediately saying, "Yes, all other methods only lead to Self Enquiry."

The moment for the final decision came. He was staying with Bhagavan when the British government announced that all the released British prisoners of war in India would be accommodated in Britain with all comforts. The British High Commission sent letter after letter to the Osbornes about this. They did not even show these letters to Bhagavan to ask him his opinion. They were certain that they did not want to leave Bhagavan and go anywhere else. When the last ship was to leave India for Britain, the British High Commissioner sent a telegram to alert them. Mrs. Osborne told me that she did not even feel like taking this telegram to Bhagavan because it was already confirmed for them that Bhagavan was their sole refuge and that there was no other worldly life than staying with Bhagavan.

But, Osborne was a family man and had to earn a little money. So he got a job in Chennai as an editor in a reputed daily newspaper. Though he did not want to go, he had to. Before he left for Chennai, one of his friends gave him an oil portrait of Bhagavan. He took it to Bhagavan who holding it in his hands said, "Osborne is taking *swami* with him." That portrait, Osborne told me, looked at him with the love and compassion of a guru and spoke more profoundly than all the other pictures of Bhagavan. This adorned his room and whenever he wanted to make any decision, he would first look at that portrait and only then decide.

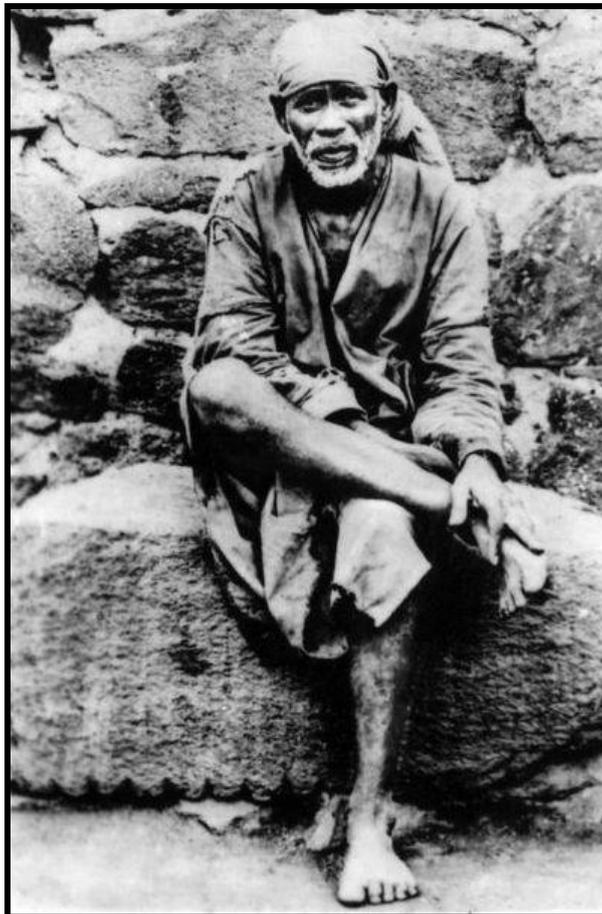
Every holiday and free day, he would rush back to Tiruvannamalai - to Bhagavan and his family. When he came, Bhagavan used to pay special attention to him. Once, after Bhagavan's second operation on his arm, Osborne came unexpectedly in some friend's car. Bhagavan was taking rest in the dispensary verandah. Usually, Bhagavan was discreet in showing outward signs of his grace. But this time, surprised by Osborne's unannounced visit, Bhagavan gave himself away. His face lit up with pleasure and love on seeing Osborne. He looked at him for quite a while with indescribable tenderness and grace. Mrs. Osborne and Arvind Bose, standing immediately behind Osborne, felt that they had never seen Bhagavan look at anyone in such a way. Osborne himself felt transformed. The graciousness of Bhagavan's reception melted Osborne's heart and awoke a feeling of guilt and gratitude as to how great was the reward for such little effort made. It strengthened even further, the bond between this wonderful disciple and his divine Master.

Bhagavan continued to bless Osborne to be deeply and steadily rooted within the Heart. The purpose of the outer guru is to awaken the inner guru. The fateful day when Bhagavan left his body, Osborne was there. It did not fill him with sorrow. Instead, it only made him plunge within. He felt Bhagavan's grace more abundantly and his support more powerfully. Some days after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, Bhagavan appeared to him in his dream. In the dream, Osborne was in the Old Hall and Bhagavan asked him to come near the couch. Osborne went and knelt before Bhagavan and Bhagavan put his hands on Osborne's head in blessing. When Bhagavan put his hand on his head, he had a feeling that Bhagavan was asking him to write about his direct teaching. He then wrote seven articles. They were brought out later as a book titled *Ramana Arunachala*. Every one of us, every seeker should read this

book. That was the beginning. Soon, a cascade of books started coming from Osborne: *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, *The Teachings of the Maharshi in His Own Words*, *The Incredible Sai Baba*, *Rhythm of History*, *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism*, *Gautama the Buddha*, *The Question of Progress* and a few more.

After working in Chennai for some time, Osborne had to take a job in Calcutta in 1952. During the holidays, he would come rushing from Calcutta to stay in Arunachala and be at Bhagavan's shrine. Osborne had his second awakening in Calcutta. This is how he described it: "I was alone in my Calcutta room when I woke up and sat up in bed and I just was my Self, the beginningless immutable Self, and I thought that nothing has changed. There was no excitement, no joy or ecstasy. In the wholeness of simple being, there was the thought that it was impossible ever to be bored. The mind seemed like a dark screen that had shut over consciousness and was now rolled up and pushed away. It is the mind that craves activity and feels bored when it does not get it. The Self is untouched by activity and abides in its pristine state of simple happiness. I do not know how long the experience lasted, and in any case, while it lasted it was timeless and therefore eternal. Imperceptibly, the mind closed over again but less opaque, for a radiant happiness continued. The afterglow continued for several weeks only gradually fading out."

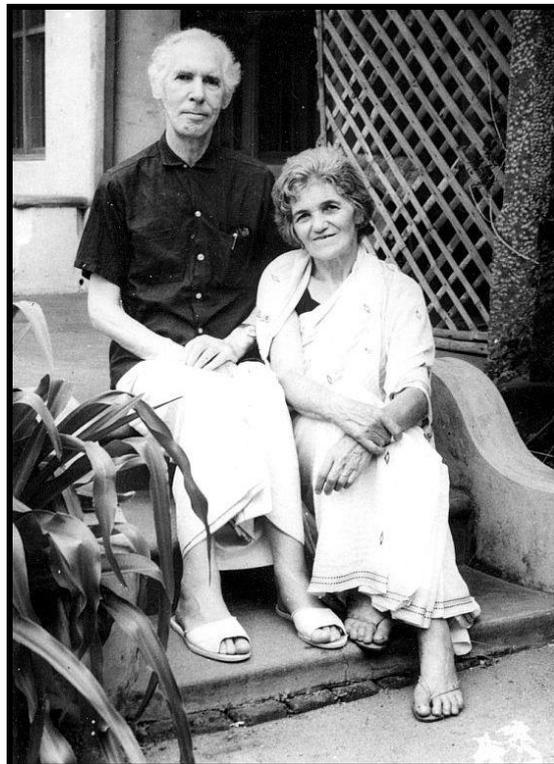
When he was in Calcutta, his friends were all talking about the Sai Baba of Shirdi. He had read one or two articles about him. Some of his friends wanted him to write an article on Sai Baba, but he was reluctant to do so. That night, Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to write on Shirdi Sai Baba. When in the dream Osborne confessed that he did not know much about him, Bhagavan instructed him to go to the shrine and that Sai Baba would himself tell him what to write. Bhagavan specifically said, "Sai Baba should be known to the western world so you have to write." This was the inspiration for him to go to Shirdi and write the book, *The Incredible Sai Baba*.



*"The Incredible Shirdi Sai Baba"*

In 1958, he came back to Tiruvannamalai and never left again. From 1960, I had the unique privilege to be with Osborne almost constantly. It was purely Bhagavan's doing that we both came together. Osborne was always very affectionate towards me. In 1950, when he wrote *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, there was a committee of seventeen members in the ashram at that time who said that they would publish it. At the last moment, they had to back out and he was therefore very disappointed. T. K. Sunderesa Iyer and I were there when he came out after a meeting with the committee. We told Osborne that maybe Bhagavan wanted him to publish it outside of India so that it could reach a wider circle. Subsequently, he sent the manuscript to Rider and Co. in London and they published it.

In 1963, there was crisis in the ashram as there were not enough funds. The ashram was struggling. I was handling the ashram correspondence along with T. K. Sunderesa Iyer and many letters used to come enquiring if the ashram was still running and if Bhagavan's teaching was maintained there. When I was working earlier in Mumbai, I came to know that by bringing out a journal one could raise funds by collecting advertisements from companies. I felt that if we started a yearly bulletin from the ashram, it would serve the manifold purpose of giving information about the ashram, spreading the teachings and raising funds through collecting advertisements. Since Osborne was a brilliant writer and a friend, I could ask him to correct the language and help produce the journal. With that thought, I went to Osborne's house and explained to him about this idea of a yearly bulletin and how it could bring the ashram financial benefit while it kept devotees informed about the present working of the ashram. I sought his blessings and active cooperation. He listened with keen attention and at the end, held my hands and shed tears of joy. It was very surprising as I had never seen him so deeply moved. He said, "Ganesan, you do not know what a blessing you have brought me today. A few weeks back, I had a dream in which Bhagavan appeared. When I knelt before him, he handed a few copies of a magazine to me and asked me to take it. I understood that he wanted me to be an editor and I had to obey my master's commandment. But, which Indian magazine would I fit in? My elder brother was a reputed editor of the British magazine, *The Economist*. Was I to seek employment under him? I was pained at the thought of leaving Arunachala. But if that was how Bhagavan would have it, I was prepared to even leave Arunachala. Now I know what Bhagavan meant. What a joy!"



*Arthur Osborne, Lucia Osborne*

He continued with great enthusiasm, "You know, Ganesan, during the lifetime of Bhagavan and afterwards, I was asked by many to run a journal for the ashram. I repeatedly refused and said that Bhagavan's teaching was only meant for practice. It is also so precise and concise, one cannot write about it continuously in a journal month on month. I knew I disappointed many devotees, but I stood firm. Now, Bhagavan has commanded me to spread his teaching of *atma vichara* through this magazine. So Ganesan, we are going to start it." I was thrilled by his enthusiasm. Osborne himself decided the name of the journal: *The Mountain Path*. 'The Mountain' he said represented Arunachala and the 'Path' represented Bhagavan's direct path of Self Enquiry. Then came the task of fixing the subscription fee - we were completely at sea about it. Incredibly, the next day we received a money order of five rupees from a stranger, H. R. Chadda of Calcutta. There it was written, "The annual subscription for the ashram journal. More details follow in my letter." Yes, Bhagavan had decided what the annual subscription should be and we were happy that though the format of the magazine had not been yet decided, the subscription had already been fixed! A few days later, Chadda's letter arrived: "I had lost touch with the ashram. Bhagavan, whom I met in the late thirties, is my guru and he still is my all. The other day he appeared to me in a dream and showed me a journal and I saw very clearly 'Rs.5' written on the cover. I take it that there is an ashram journal. Please enroll me as a subscriber." Next, another devotee, T. N. Krishnaswami, handed over a cheque for one hundred rupees for the first life subscription. This is how *The Mountain Path* started. Osborne and I became very close while collaborating on it. He worked very hard to collect articles and he himself wrote many of them. And my efforts to raise funds for the ashram, by collecting advertisements, were crowned with success.

The *satsang* I had with Arthur Osborne is filled with fond memories. He guided me more through his silent presence than through words. One day, I went to him with a personal problem. I was harassed by a dream in which a black apparition descended and sat on my chest and throttled my throat. I was alone, I could not breathe and I did not know what to do. I was neither afraid nor curious to know what it was. Its strangulating grip was tightening, tightening. I felt I could not breathe and that I was going to die when suddenly, the mantra '*Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*' started sounding repeatedly by itself from within my Heart. To be honest, I never believed in *japa* or mantras in those days. This came of its own accord, '*Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*' - obeisance to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The black apparition disappeared and I woke up. I could not make out whether it was a dream, my imagination or reality. I ran to Osborne and described the whole experience to him with the minutest detail. After listening carefully, he patted me on my back with a smile and said, "Ganesan, this is a genuine spiritual experience. You are fortunate. You have been given the mantra, '*Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*'. This is what they call *ajapa japa*. I shall tell you about my own experience."

"When Bhagavan was in the body, we who belonged to the circle of Rene Guenon were drawn to Sri Bhagavan like iron filings to a strong magnet. From among this group, David McIver was fortunate to stay with Bhagavan under his guidance and translate into English the works of Sri Bhagavan and also works like *Tripura Rahasya*, *Advaita Bodha Deepika* and other books recommended by Sri Bhagavan. Then, attracted by a yogi in Kerala, he took him as a guru and settled down there. David, who was very fond of me and my wife, felt very strongly that we should also become disciples of his guru. His contention was that for spiritual fulfillment a spiritual guru was absolutely essential. Since Bhagavan never claimed himself to be a guru, we should leave him and accept a guru who was prepared to accept us as disciples. There was a spate of correspondence between us in this regard and all these letters from and to David were shown to Bhagavan without fail. My replies claiming Bhagavan as my only guru, and that if Bhagavan is not a guru then the term guru has no meaning at all, were all approved by Bhagavan with a nod of his head."

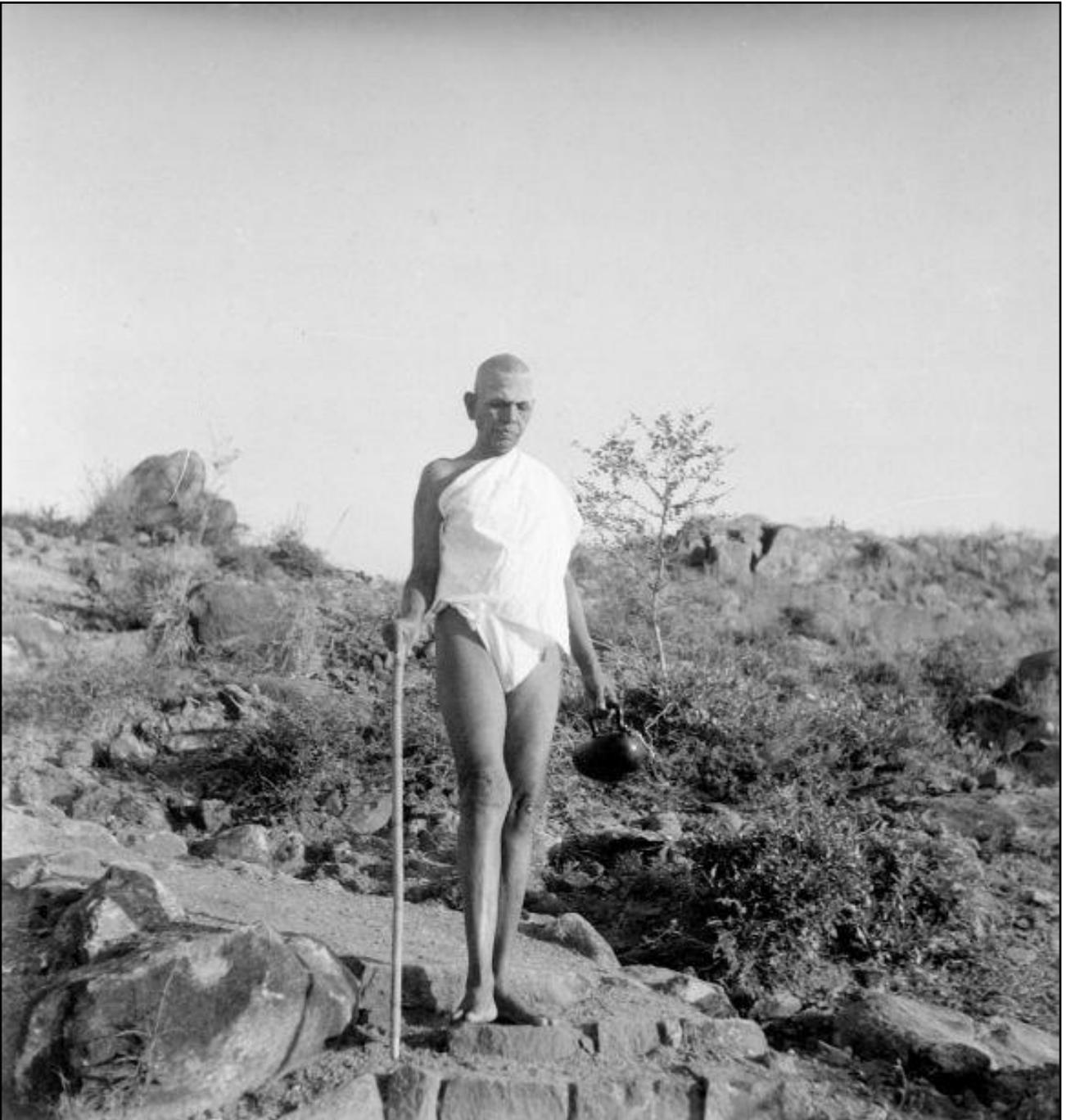
"One day, I received a nasty letter warning me of dire consequences if I did not immediately leave Ramana and go over to his guru. I did not show this letter to Bhagavan, but I was terribly upset over it. I thought I might show it to him that evening. That afternoon, I was doing some weeding work in my garden when I suddenly heard a thudding sound behind me. Some animal like presence jumped down from a tree and approached me from behind. In no time, it got on my back and sat down. It felt like a bear as it had a lot of hair. It was holding onto me with its hind legs and gripping me around my chest with its hands from behind. For me then Ganesan, there was neither any curiosity to know what it was, nor any fear. There was just a calm detachment. Undisturbed, I continued with the weeding. Noticing my indifference, the animal started increasing its size and weight. Soon, I had to bend forward owing to the burden on my back. The weight became unbearable. Still I was undisturbed and felt no fear. Suddenly, it gripped my throat with its hairy hands and started throttling me. I was becoming breathless as its grip

tightened more and more. Even this did not produce in me a tinge of fear. I remained fully alert and undisturbed. I felt I could breathe no more, the grip continued to tighten and without any trace of fear I felt I was going to die. Then the miracle took place. At the thought of death, I heard within me the sound 'Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva'. Although I was not making the sound, something else within me was doing it. The intensity, volume and speed of the *japa* increased and it was a delightful experience to hear within you a *japa* pronouncing itself, while at the same time you were being aware of the grip of death. As the *ajapa japa* continued, the grip on my neck started loosening and the size and weight of the animal grew less and less. Suddenly, it jumped off from my back and started running back towards the tree. I could hear its steps rushing back and it climbed the tree and disappeared. Immediately, I got back to my normal senses while the *ajapa japa* continued uninterruptedly."

"The next day, when Bhagavan was returning from his stroll up on the hill, I met him and showed him the letter and narrated to him what had happened the previous evening, not omitting a single detail. Bhagavan listened to me and when I stopped, said with his benign smile, 'That is all they can do. Everything is alright.' By 'they' he must have meant the guru who was a past master in black magic and who made David write me that threatening letter. Bhagavan is a *purna jnani*, a complete and perfect sage. When you come under the protection of a perfect *satguru*, even a bad experience caused by black magic is a blessing in disguise. I had thus the good fortune of being initiated into the *ajapa japa* of 'Arunachala Siva' and you got the fortune of being initiated into the *ajapa japa* of 'Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya'."

The closeness between Osborne and me was remarkable and we continued with collaborating on *The Mountain Path* successfully. It was fast becoming a reputed spiritual journal and it brought erudite seekers like Douglas Harding, Robert Linssen, Joel Goldsmith, Wei Wu Wei, Thomas Merton and many reputed writers from all over the world to be in touch with Ramanasramam and in contact with Bhagavan's teaching. Osborne's remarkable ability in presenting Bhagavan's teaching of Self Enquiry is clearly seen in his brilliant editorials and the numerous articles he wrote under his various pseudonyms - Sagittarius, Abdullah Kutbuddin, Sebastian Qubbins, Boddhicitta, Saidas and A. Rao. He contributed articles on Christianity, Buddhism and Islam in each issue of the journal. When accused of using *The Mountain Path* for preaching Christianity and Islam, he explained calmly, "Ganesan, I am a staunch Christian and I still remain so. For some time, I was in love with Islam and went to the mosque along with other Muslims after getting converted to Islam. I have studied Buddhism and stayed in Buddhaviharas and known Buddhism thoroughly. I therefore know the difficulties that Christians, Buddhists and Muslims have in practicing the teachings of Bhagavan's *atma vichara*. By such articles, I am only building a bridge through which all can reach our beloved master and gain his guidance on his direct path of Self Enquiry." *The Mountain Path* was now well established and commanded respect and plaudits from all over the world. The main aim of starting an ashram journal was more than fulfilled and a steady flow of new visitors, mostly young seekers, came to the ashram. Many projects like the completion of Sri Bhagavan's *samadhi* shrine, the meditation hall, the centenary celebrations and a number of guest houses became a reality, thanks in no small measure to the good news spread through the pages of *The Mountain Path*.

In 1968, I was introduced to a new dimension of Osborne's spirituality. I was going to Osborne's house at all times of the day. However, for one week I had to be away. After I returned, when I went to his house, I found him stretched on his bed, reduced to skin and bones - all in just one week's time. Then, I noticed the change and the transformation in his face and I was wonderstruck. It glowed with a bright and beautiful aura. My inner voice told me, "Osborne has realized." This was his final realization. He opened his eyes and gave me a warm welcome with a lustrous look. He said, "Ganesan, I am saved. *The Mountain Path* will go on, do not worry." I sat next to him overwhelmed with joy. I held his hand and sat gazing at his radiant face. I spent half an hour with him, then went home and announced to my mother, "Amma, Osborne is realized. Please go and see him. His face shines with light." She went to Osborne's house in the evening and confirmed what I had told her. Although after a few days, Osborne's physical condition improved, he spoke to no one. His attention was totally drawn inwards and he showed signs of interest only when Bhagavan or Arunachala was mentioned. Even *The Mountain Path*, his pet child, did not seem to interest him. It was like what St. John of the Cross has said, "There comes a time in the life of a spiritual seeker when activity is taken away from him so that he can wholly go inwards." I started telling all my friends about Osborne's change and urged them to go and see him. Some were skeptical and some were delighted. I took T. P. Ramachandra Iyer and a few others and they



confirmed, “Ganesan, thank you! You have proved to me beyond doubt that Arthur Osborne is realized. It only shows that if one is sincere, Sri Bhagavan’s grace will transform one here and now.” When I went and told Mrs. Osborne about it, she said, “Oh! He has only had a heat stroke.” She did not know that what he had was deep and complete Self realization. Before it happened, Osborne had called me and handed over articles for nine full issues of *The Mountain Path* to last up to July, 1970. Perhaps, knowing that he was to drop his body in May, 1970, he edited all the nine journals before he had his Self realization. He was a jnani who fully accepted his karma. He had completed his karma and now was established in jnana.

I used to be like a delighted child in the proximity of Osborne. My friends used to pull my leg, “Do not carry it too far, this hero worship of Osborne.” This did not matter to me because they did not know how I enjoyed his *brahmic* state. I remembered what Osborne used to say, “At last, life has a meaning and a purpose. It is tremendously exhilarating to realize the truth of the one Self.” His words had come true in his life and it was given to me to see that every word uttered by Bhagavan, and by every one of these old devotees, is absolutely true.

Just before he dropped his body, Bhagavan told his attendants, “Santosham”, which means ‘thank you’. When Osborne was in Bangalore and his end was near, he could not speak at all. As a ritual farewell, Mrs. Osborne went around the prostrate body of her husband. Suddenly, she heard Osborne’s voice saying clearly, “Thank you.” Osborne’s body was brought to Tiruvannamalai and interred in his house. I was there all the time and I was heartbroken. The July 1970 issue was the first issue that I brought out without Osborne. He would place every issue that was brought out in Bhagavan’s shrine and only then would he himself go through it, or give it to me and others. When I placed the July 1970 issue in front of Bhagavan’s shrine I was weeping. That day, Osborne appeared to me in my dream. He said, “Ganesan, give me my journal.” He then took the issue, went through every page and patted me in appreciation. That was the closeness with which Osborne and I worked together. Osborne lived the master’s teaching and attained the ultimate truth of *atma sakshatkar*. His very first words to me when I returned to the ashram in 1960 were, “Ask, but ask only for Self realization and that will retain you in the Arunachala. Arunachala is not only physical but also in the Heart.”

He wrote: “It is tremendously exhilarating to learn for the first time, the truth of the one Self and the possibility of Self realization. At last, life has a meaning and a purpose. It is not a question of whether there is a God apart from you but whether there is a ‘you’ apart from God. We ask, ‘Who am I?’ But is there one? First, we presume that there is an ‘I’ and then we ask who or what it is. There just IS. Not I, he, it or anything, but just IS. We try to divide up this simple IS by pronouns I, he, you, and by this and that, but is it really divisible? I feel being, and use the word ‘I’ for it, but that does not mean that there is any separateness about it, because you also feel being and you also use the same word ‘I’ for it, because it is the same being. Why should the quest be necessary? Why should a man not grow into his true, natural state like a horse or an oak tree? Why should man alone of all creatures, be tempted to misuse his faculties and have to curb his desires in order to grow to his true breadth and stature? This involves the question, what differentiates man from other creatures? Many creatures have many abilities greater than man, in one direction or another. What distinguishes man is his Self consciousness that he is not only a man but knows that he is a man. He is conscious to being a man. It sometimes happens that a person has an experience of a pure being. He just IS and feels the fact of being. Also he appreciates later that this is pure consciousness. Thoughts can be suspended, but even when they occur they do not interrupt the flow of consciousness. But, he feels sometimes no bliss about it. This occurs to him as a sort of grievance. He feels that something must be wrong either with the teaching or himself. The explanation is that it is the case of the mind eavesdropping. Who feels no bliss? I. But, that ‘I’ has no business to be there at all. He is a mortal spying on God. Being not only feels bliss but is bliss. Only, the absence of the reporter ‘I’ is a necessary condition for it. Even a life of disinterested activity is not enough to dissolve the ego sense. It usually needs to be reinforced by a stronger and more forceful campaign. This can be either surrender or enquiry. Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita enjoins surrender. Sage Vashista in Yoga Vashista enjoins Self Enquiry. Sri Bhagavan said when he was asked, ‘There are two ways. Ask yourself, ‘Who am I?’ Or submit.’ The mind acts as though it is the ruler or owner of all the faculties. It has to abdicate and surrender them and itself to the pure being or Self - or has to look inward to see what is true Self or being.”

In following Bhagavan’s path of enquiry, Osborne combined with it true devotion and selfless service - *jnana* went hand in hand with *bhakti* and *nishkama karma*. He was very regular in attending the chanting of the Vedas in front of Sri Bhagavan’s shrine both in the mornings and in the evenings. He affirmed that listening to it helped in meditation. He was a towering example of an ascetic living a family life. In all those years, I never saw him getting angry at any time, under any circumstance. It was unbelievable. He never demanded anything or any extra privileges for himself as editor. When I handed him a new, printed edition of the journal, he would always have the manuscripts of the next issue ready and hand it over to me forthwith. He took out three subscriptions for his family even before the journal was published and insisted on paying for them, rejecting my plea that he was the editor and hence there was no need to pay.

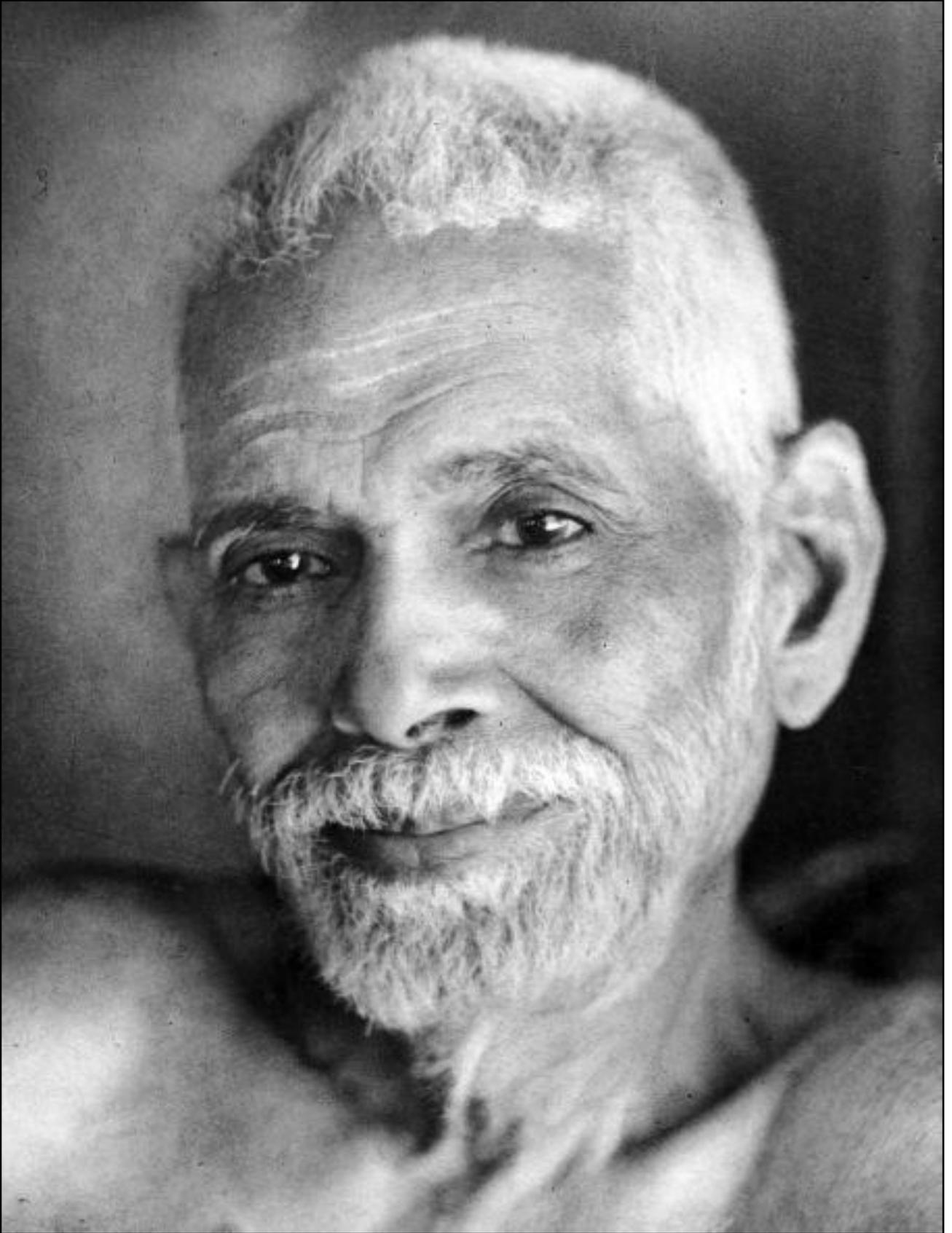
He faced a lot of opposition. It was not as if it was a bed of roses for him. He was a westerner. He did not know Sanskrit and the Hindu traditions. And in the ashram, the whole atmosphere was filled with that. Many did not accept him editing the journal. It was Bhagavan who guided me and made my father agree to that. My father was harassed to ensure that Osborne did not become the editor. At every stage, Osborne and I had a lot of problems. Once, I wrote to him that I wanted to resign and this was his reply: “Dear Sri Ganesan, I am glad to hear that the printing work is going on well in Chennai. We must not be too upset with people’s criticism but at the same time we must examine it to see if anything is justified

in it and if so, try to correct ourselves. So long as the work is done as a service to our Bhagavan, it can go on whether people are helpful or not. Perhaps, people who criticize do not realize how much work has to be done. After all, you know that in the ashram there are people who criticize my work on the journal. In fact, you hold the three posts of office manager, advertisement editor and chief sub-editor in page making. I cannot think of anybody else who could combine them with such enthusiasm and ability. So, you will have to continue doing Bhagavan's work whether people criticize or not. For us, what is necessary is a constant examination of motive. Do I want to dominate or do I want to serve Bhagavan? Do I want to impress X, Y, Z or do I want to serve Bhagavan? Do I want to win praise or to serve Bhagavan? Best wishes for the work you are doing." In a reply to another letter, he wrote, "As for some people being jealous, I expected that. Human nature is such that nothing can succeed without provoking jealousy. They may even try to create animosity between us. Our best policy is not to take notice and just concentrate on doing Bhagavan's work to the best of our ability and maintain a high standard in every way, so that people have nothing to criticize. With all best wishes, may the grace of Bhagavan support you in your effort."

I have never come across anyone else in Ramanasramam who had such physical, mental, psychical and spiritual experiences, all of which were blessed by Bhagavan. Whenever I praised him he would reply, "Long live Bhagavan. It is all due to Bhagavan." He would show an article he had written and then say it is all due to Bhagavan: "I did not write. I only held the pen and it was Bhagavan who wrote it." He was an outstanding spiritual personality, who not only strove wholeheartedly to get Self-realization, but also got it by the Grace of the Master. By his life and action, he demonstrated to me and other devotees that he was totally established in that state - which is a great encouragement for us that it is possible. When I told another old devotee in the ashram that Osborne's life confirms that it is possible, he rebutted my statement saying, "Your usage, 'It is possible' is a very weak term. Self realization is a certainty." Yes, Self realization is a certainty!



*V. Ganesan with Arthur Osborne*



## Papaji



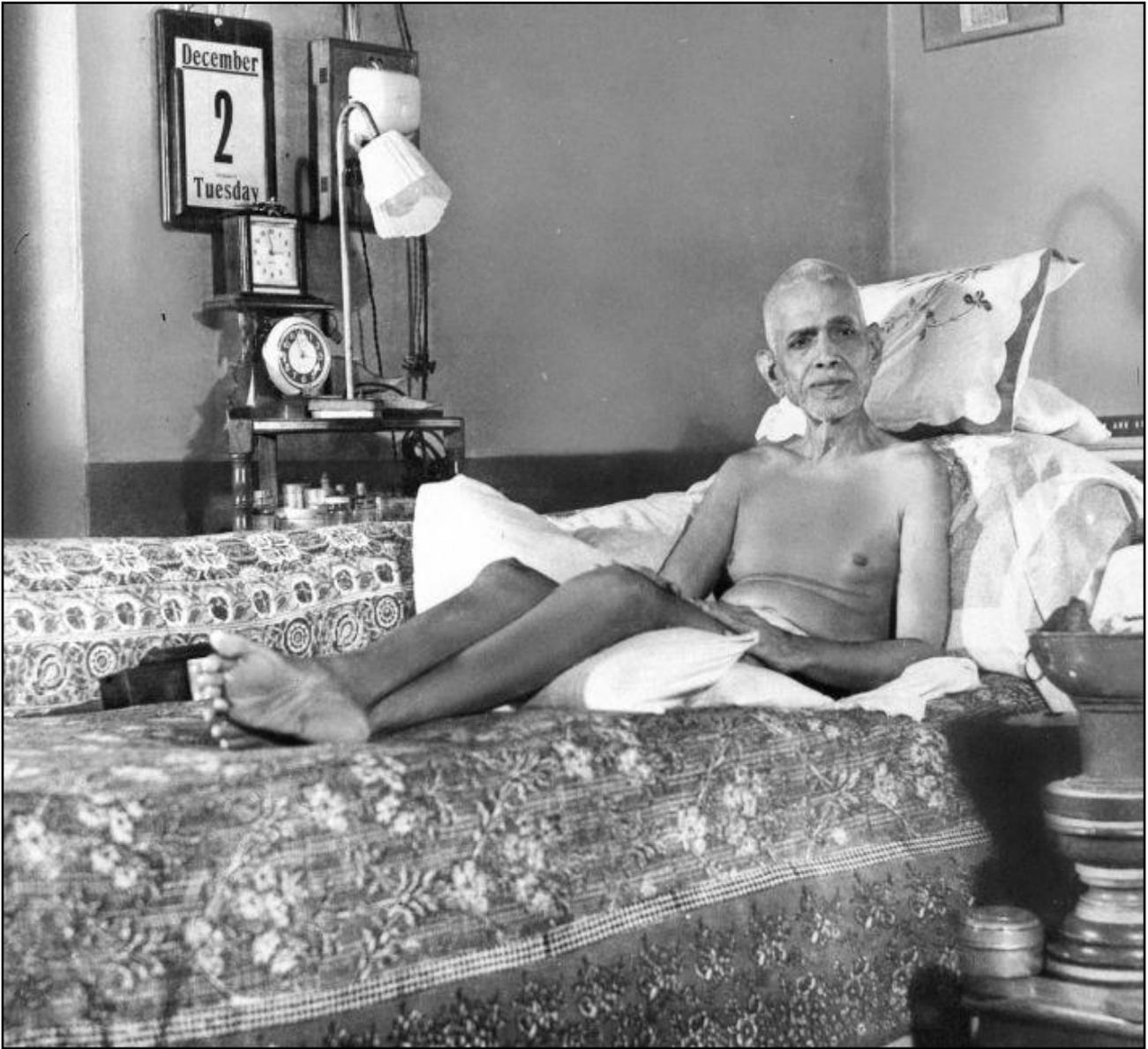
Everyone knows what a rose is. One doesn't have to give an elaborate description of the rose in order to appreciate it. The rose is valued for its fragrance and freshness. In the same way, everyone knows about Papaji and what I am going to say about him is not anything new. Just as a rose never loses its freshness no matter how many times you look at it, similarly you can read about Papaji umpteen times without losing interest.

The truth about Arunachala and the truth of 'I AM' had to reach and spread all over the world. This was the commandment given by the father Arunachala to the son, Ramana Maharshi. Arunachala bound the son securely to his bosom from the very moment he arrived there on September 1, 1896. Bhagavan understood that the spiritual instruction given by Arunachala to him was to remain silent and not stir from his abode. So he remained there for fifty four years till he left his body on April 14, 1950. When this was the case, how could he spread the message all over the world?

The world came to him and his devotees took up the mission of spreading the truth of 'I AM' all over the world through their writings or through their physical presence. When Bhagavan dropped the body, three eminent devotees undertook this mission of sharing the truth with the entire world. With his scintillating articles, Arthur Osborne spread the truth about Self realization through Self Enquiry. Robert Adams and Papaji were two other devotees who spread the teachings of Bhagavan through their *satsangs*. These devotees imparted not just theoretical knowledge; they enabled others to practically experience the teachings of Bhagavan. Countless devotees have experienced the truth of 'I AM', the fact that they are the truth, in the presence of Papaji, Robert Adams and others.

Man is groping in the dark and needs a link to reach God, who is light itself. That link is the guru who takes the form of a sage or a saint and whose sole purpose is to help humanity taste divinity. God's messiahs have come in many forms such as Jesus Christ, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Bhagavan Ramana, to name a few. They in turn had other messengers so that man reaches God more easily and forges a stronger link. Jesus Christ had, among others, St. Peter and St. John. Likewise, Bhagavan had many devotees who helped disseminate the truth of 'I AM' and established the fact that Bhagavan is the son of Arunachala. The *Kathopanishad* says, "He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. To him, this *atman* reveals its true nature." The Self has to select a person and reveal itself in him. Devotees such as Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, Suri Nagamma and Arthur Osborne were all the chosen ones from a very early age.

One such person whom the Self chose and revealed itself to was H. W. L. Poonja. Also known as Papaji, he had a mystical experience at the age of eight. Here is what Papaji has to say about the experience: "One evening, I was sitting in the company of my mother and some relatives. I suddenly experienced something that made me supremely happy and peaceful. My eyes closed and the body became immobile. I was aware of what was going on around me and could hear everything that was taking place around me. People around me made attempts to bring me back to my normal state. It was such an overwhelming experience that I remained in a state of bliss for two days. I was totally conscious of my surroundings but was unable to communicate. There was total inward happiness." Papaji's mother realized the state her son was in and wanted to help him. She gave him a picture of Lord Krishna when he came out of that state of bliss. He fell in love with the picture of Lord Krishna at once. His mother encouraged him to worship Krishna and soon he became a devotee. His devotion was so ardent that he had visions of Krishna. He would often find himself playing with Krishna.



*Sri Bhagavan in the Old Hall*

Whenever Papaji desired, Krishna appeared in the same form as in the picture. The people of the house were a witness to his playing, but were never able to see who he was playing with.

At school, the picture of the Buddha held his fascination. It was a picture of a very emaciated Buddha after he had just attained Self realization. Papaji made a detailed study of the life of the Buddha. During his teens, he went on to have spiritual experiences because when the *atma* chooses, it knows exactly what to do. He had visions of gods which made him ecstatic. Yet, all the while, he yearned for the tranquility and peace that he had experienced when he was eight years old.

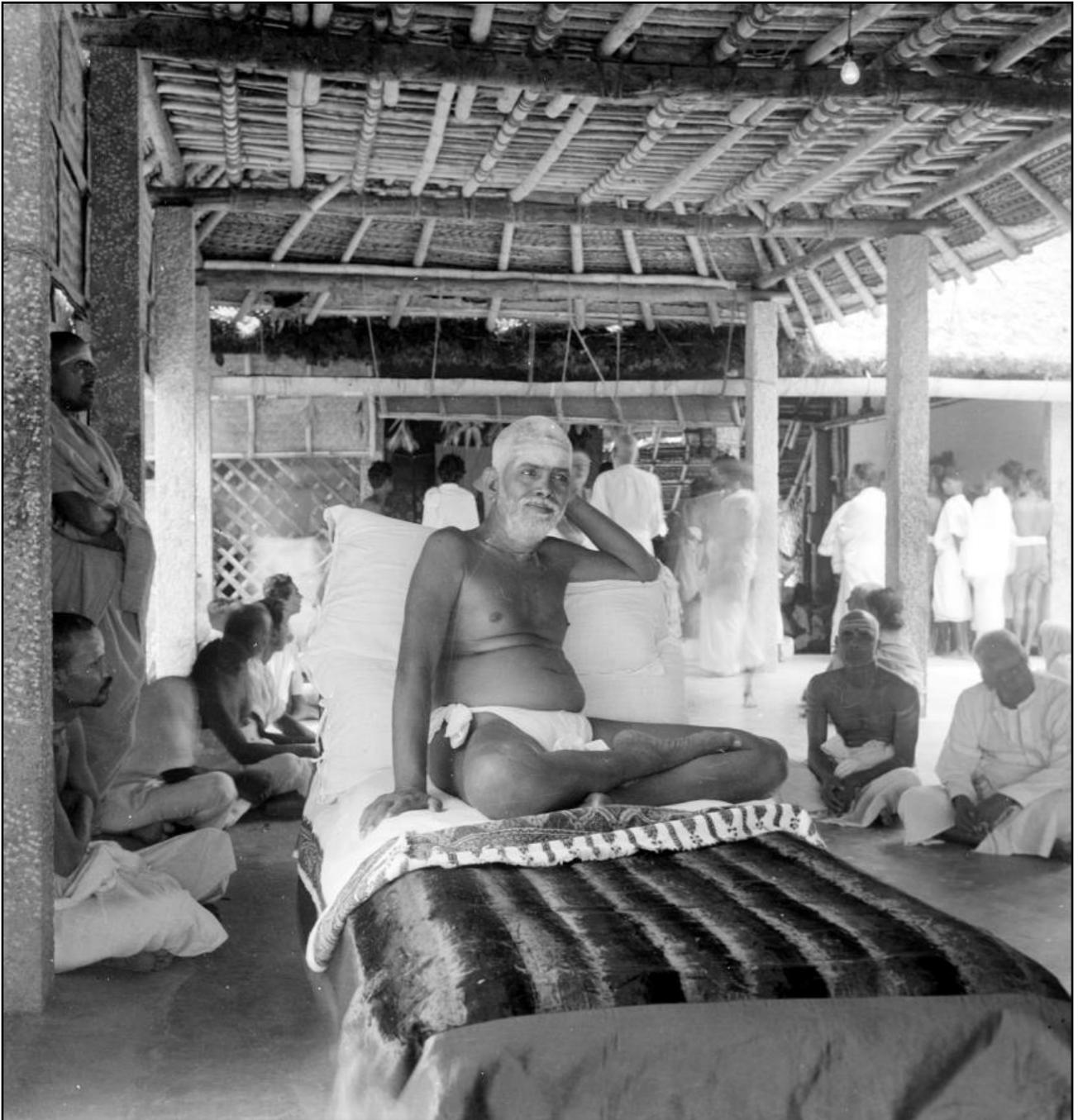
According to the practice then common in Hindu households, Papaji's parents got him married when he was sixteen. With marriage came the responsibility of taking care of his family. Urged by his father to start earning, Papaji joined the military academy to be trained as an officer. However, he was many a time distracted from his studies by visions of Lord Krishna who charmed him to play with him and worship him. Papaji was not satisfied with this momentary happiness and wanted to be permanently one with God and always in bliss. This steady urge to be eternally with God became so compelling that he left his family with his father and went in search of someone who could show him the way to dwell with God permanently. He toured all over India, meeting *sadhus* and *swamis* in ashrams. His constant question was, "Have you seen God? Can you show me God?" The replies that he received hardly satisfied him.

Feeling disheartened, he returned home. But the fire within him was still burning. He fed *sadhus* who came home and posed to them these burning questions. One day, a *sadhu* knocked on his door. The *sadhu* was received with respect by Papaji and fed well. When asked the usual question, the *sadhu* smilingly replied, "I can show you a *swami* who can answer your questions." Papaji immediately asked, "Where is he? What is his name?" The *sadhu* answered, "His name is Ramana Maharshi and he is in Arunachala in an ashram called Ramanasramam." The *sadhu* gave him directions on how to reach the ashram. Papaji was elated that he was at last going to meet a *swami* who would show him the way to God. At that time, Papaji was very poor. One day, while scanning the newspaper, he saw an advertisement for the post of a manager in a military canteen in Chennai. Papaji was the right person for the post. When he went for the interview he was told, "You do not have to join immediately. We will pay you your travel expenses now. You can join after a month." Just see how when the Self chooses, it makes way for everything!

Papaji was already thirty four years old when he reached Chennai in 1944. He was excited and eager to see the *swami* who would answer his burning questions and show him God. At Ramanasramam, he left his baggage in the dormitory and went to the Old Hall where they said the *swami* was seated. He peeped through the window and was totally disappointed and embittered by what he saw. He told himself, "The same *sadhu* who came to Punjab is seated here! He gave me his own name and address and is now seated on the sofa. He is a cheat; I will not stay here even for a minute." Such was his anger! Fuming and frustrated, Papaji ran back to the dormitory and picked up his baggage hurriedly in order to leave. However, an old devotee, Framji Dorabji, told him, "You have not stayed even for an hour. Why are you going back when you have come from such a distance?" Papaji narrated what he had seen and concluded, "This *swami* is a cheat. He gave me his own name and address and said that he would show me God. I know he is a cheat. I know it!" Framji said in a troubled voice, "There is some mistake here. Bhagavan has not left Arunachala for forty eight years." Papaji continued to fume, but Framji Dorabji induced him to have lunch in the ashram and partake of Bhagavan's *prasad*. After having his lunch, Bhagavan used to retire to the Old Hall. People were told not to disturb the Maharshi between twelve and two. Papaji attempted to follow the Maharshi, but Krishnaswami, the attendant, stopped him. Bhagavan, who was already in the hall, told Krishnaswami, "Allow him to come inside."

Papaji recounts what happened next: "I approached the *swami* in a belligerent manner. I asked him, 'Aren't you the man that came to see me in my house in Punjab?' The Maharshi remained silent. I repeated, 'Did you not come to my house and tell me to come here?' Again the Maharshi made no answer. Since he was most unwilling to answer, I moved on to the main purpose of my visit. I asked him the questions that I had come to ask. 'Have you seen God, and if you have, can you help me see God? I am willing to pay any price for the answer, even give my life. But your part of the bargain is that you must show me God.' The *swami* answered, 'No, I cannot show you God. I cannot help you see God because God is not an object that can be seen. God is the subject. He is the seer. Do not concern yourself with the objects that can be seen. Find out who the seer is.' He then added, 'You alone are God.' He then told me to find out more about this 'I' that is so desirous of seeing God. After he concluded, he looked deep into my eyes in such a way that my entire body began to tremble. I felt a shiver running through every inch of my body. My hair stood on end, such was the intensity. Believe me, I became aware of the spiritual Heart. What I am referring to is not the physical heart, but the Heart that is the source and support of all that exists. This Heart opened up and blossomed in the Maharshi's presence. I have never had such an extraordinary experience before. I had not come in looking for any kind of experience, so when it happened, it completely took me by surprise."

However, even this experience did not convince Papaji for long. He still yearned to see God physically despite this spiritual experience. In his own words, "I did not want to be honey; I wanted to taste honey." So he left Ramanasramam and went to Adi Annamalai on the other side of the hill. There, he played with Lord Krishna till he had to go back to Chennai to join duty. Out of respect for an elderly man, he went to Ramanasramam to take leave. Now, look at the beauty of the relationship between master and disciple. When Papaji went before Bhagavan, he was asked, "Where have you been? Where have you been staying?" It was very unusual for Bhagavan to ask such questions. Papaji replied, "On the other side of the mountain." "And what were you doing there?" continued Bhagavan. "I was playing with my God, Krishna," replied Papaji smugly. Papaji replied confidently, in a proud and superior manner because he was convinced that the man he was talking to, would never have had such an experience. "Is that so?" Bhagavan asked, looking both surprised and interested. "Very good," he commented. "Do you see him now?" he questioned. "No sir, I do not," replied Papaji. "I see him only when I have visions."



*"I am with you wherever you are"*

Papaji was still feeling pleased with himself because he was certain that the Maharshi would never have had such visions. "So, Sri Krishna comes and plays with you and then disappears," observed the Maharshi. Then came the profound statement: "What is the use of a God who appears and disappears? If he is a real God, he should be with you all the time!" Even the profundity of this statement did not convince Papaji.

He returned to Chennai and joined duty. He was still attracted to an external God and continued playing with his Krishna. After his return from work, he would sit all alone every day and chant the name of Krishna twenty five thousand times. He then doubled this. Early in the morning one day, there was a knock on the door. Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman appeared and gave him *darshan*. Soon afterwards, they disappeared. He now found that he could not concentrate on the *japa* that he used to do every day. In fact, he could not even read his usual religious books because his mind had become free of thoughts. This thought free state puzzled him. A smiling Ramana Maharshi then appeared in his *pooja* room. He then remembered that this was exactly the state of quietude that he had experienced in

the Maharshi's presence. He told himself, "I will go and ask him what has happened to me. Everything has stopped; I cannot perform any of the religious practices that I was doing."

He went to Arunachala and the same thing happened. After lunch, he tried to follow the Maharshi into the Old Hall. Krishnaswami stopped him again. Bhagavan told him to let Papaji in. This is what happened when he sat before Bhagavan: "I sat before the Maharshi and began to tell him the story of my life. 'For twenty five years I have been doing *sadhana*. I have repeated the name of Lord Krishna up to fifty thousand times a day. I have been reading a lot of spiritual literature also. After Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman blessed me with their *darshan* I have not been able to carry on this practice. I can no longer meditate or even read books. I do feel calm deep inside; however there is no desire to seek God anymore. My mind refuses to engage itself in the thought of God. What has happened to me? What should I do?' The Maharshi looked at me and asked, 'How did you come here from Chennai?' I saw no reason why he should ask me that question, but I answered politely, 'By train.' 'What happened when you came to the station at Tiruvannamalai?' he continued. 'When I got off the train, I handed over my ticket and engaged a bullock cart to bring me to the ashram.' 'When you reached the ashram and paid the driver of the cart, what happened to the cart?' asked the Maharshi. 'I suppose it went back to town,' I replied, still wondering where all these questions were leading. The Maharshi then explained what he was leading to. 'The train brought you to your destination. You got off because you did not need it anymore. Likewise, with the bullock cart, you got off when it brought you to the ashram. You now need neither the train nor the cart since you are here. They were the means of bringing you here. That is what has happened to your *sadhana*, meditation and *japa*. You do not need them anymore. You yourself did not give them up. They have left you of their own accord because they have served their purpose. You have arrived.'"

"He looked at me very intently. I could feel that my entire body and mind were being washed and made pure. I could feel him looking intently into my Heart. I felt every atom of my body being purified by his spell-binding gaze. A transformation was taking place in the body. The old body was dying atom by atom and a new body was being created in its place. I then understood that this man who had spoken to me was in reality, what I already was and what I had always been. There was a sudden impact of recognition as I became aware of my Self. I use the word recognition intentionally, because as soon as the experience was revealed to me, I also knew that this was the same state of peace and happiness that I had been immersed in as an eight year old boy in Lahore, even though it may have occurred only by default. The silent waves sent out by the Maharshi re-established me in that primal state, but this time it was permanent."

"The 'I' which had till now been looking for a God outside of itself because it wanted to go back to that original childhood state, perished in the direct knowledge and experience of the Self which the Maharshi had revealed to me. I cannot describe the precise experience, for as all books on the subject matter rightly say, no words can convey the experience. I can only talk about peripheral things. I can only say that every cell, every atom in my body, leapt to attention as they all recognized and experienced the Self that alleviated and supported them. I was aware that my spiritual quest had come to an end. However, the source of that knowledge will always remain indescribable." This was the real and final awakening of Papaji. The Maharshi advised him in that experience to ignore the appearance of God, and to enquire instead into the nature and source of the one who had this desire to see God. This desire to hold on to an external God dropped off on its own accord.

Papaji has been kind enough to share with us seekers this experience. He observed, "With hindsight, I could now see that the question 'Who am I?' was the one question that I should have asked myself years before. I had had the direct experience of the Self when I was eight years old, and then spent the rest of my life trying to return to that state. My mother thought that my devotion to Lord Krishna would help bring back that experience, but it somehow brainwashed me into undertaking a quest for an external God whom she believed would give that one experience that I longed for so much. In the course of my spiritual quest, I have met hundreds of *sadhus*, *swamis* and *gurus*, but none of them revealed to me the simple truth in the way the Maharshi did. Not one of them had said, 'God is within you. He is not separate from you. You alone are God. If you find the source of the mind by asking yourself, 'Who am I?' you will experience him in your Heart as the Self.' If I had met the Maharshi earlier in my life, listened to his teachings and put them into practice, I could have probably saved myself years of fruitless external searching." This applies to all of us.



*"...some of the dust from beneath his feet and put it in my pocket to keep as a sacred memento."*

We have to plunge right away into the quest of the Self within ourselves by asking the question, 'Who am I?'

The Maharshi became Papaji's *satguru*. Papaji continued working in Chennai and other places. During holidays, he would come to the ashram and reap the benefits of Bhagavan's presence and proximity. He followed Bhagavan everywhere, to the cowshed and up the hill, because he now understood the significance of the *satguru's* presence. Papaji narrated to me, how by listening to a dialogue that a devotee had with the Maharshi, he comprehended the importance of the *satguru's* presence: "A devotee asked Bhagavan, 'What are the different aids that one can turn to, for Self realization?' Bhagavan replied, 'The teachings of the scriptures and the teachings of realized souls.' The devotee further asked, 'Can such teachings be in the form of discussions, lectures and meditation?' The Maharshi answered, 'All these are only secondary aids; the essential aid is the master's grace.' I understood this fully and so I made full use of the Maharshi's presence," concluded Papaji.

In 1947, India became independent and the partition between India and Pakistan took place. A month before the partition, Papaji met his friend Devaraja Mudaliar at the ashram. He told Papaji that if the partition did take place as anticipated, the place where Papaji's family was staying in Punjab would become a part of Pakistan and their lives could be in danger. He advised Papaji to bring back his family. Papaji replied, "My attachment to my family is like a dream. I will not go back and I will not go away from the Maharshi's presence." Devaraja Mudaliar, a lawyer by profession, was a persistent man and informed Bhagavan. Bhagavan called Papaji and spoke to him.

According to Papaji's account: "In 1947, a month before the Indian Independence, Devaraja Mudaliar told me that the Punjab where my family was would soon become a part of Pakistan. 'Why do you not go and fetch them?' he asked me. 'I am not going,' I replied. 'I cannot leave the company of the Maharshi, my *satguru*.' Devaraja Mudaliar then told Bhagavan. The Maharshi called me and said, 'There will be a lot of trouble in the area that you come from. Why do you not go there at once and bring your family?' I replied with great confidence, 'My old life was only a dream, Bhagavan. I dreamt that I had a wife and a family and when I met you, you ended my dream. I don't have a family anymore. I only have you.' The Maharshi opposed me by saying, 'But if you know that your family is a dream, what difference does it make if you remain in that dream and do your duty? Why are you afraid of going if it is only a dream?' I explained the real reason behind my reluctance to go. 'Bhagavan, I am far too attached to your physical form; I cannot leave you. I love you so much that I cannot take my eyes off you. How can I leave you?' The Maharshi gazed at me and then said, 'I am with you wherever you are.' From the way he spoke to me, I could see that he was determined that I should leave. This last statement was the blessing that I received for the trip I was going to make and also for my future in general. The 'I', which was my master's real nature, was also my own inner reality. How could I ever be away from that 'I'? I accepted my master's decision and prostrated before him. For the first and the only time in my life, I touched my *satguru*'s holy feet as an act of veneration, love and respect. He did not normally allow anyone to touch his feet but this was a special occasion and he did not object. Before rising, I collected some of the dust from beneath his feet and put it in my pocket to keep as a sacred memento."

Papaji went back to Peshawar. It was a miraculous journey. He told me, "The *prasad* which was close to my heart saved me and gave me guidance at every instance." Unrest and trouble were already brewing in Pakistan. The trains were full. Hindus and Muslims were segregated and packed into different carriages. Papaji sat in the carriage for Hindus. Bhagavan prompted him to sit in the carriage for Muslims. There were not many people in this particular carriage. On arrival at another station, all the people in the carriage for Hindus were butchered mercilessly. Papaji was safe; he reached his destination and brought back his family, thirty five of them women. Again another miracle took place and this he again attributed to the *prasad*. When he and his family members reached the Indian border, they learned that this would be the last train to leave Pakistan because the train tracks had been destroyed. Papaji went with his family to Lucknow. With the help of a friend, he found a house there, and worked hard till 1966 to support his family. He was firmly established in the Self, but outwardly he continued working day and night to support his family. The Hindu scriptures state that only a *purna jnani*, a fully realized man, can be a true *karma yogi*. Papaji felt that being in the Self was the only reality; everything else was a mere dream.

Papaji went on spiritual retreats to the Ganges; when at home, he had *satsang*. What started as a small group soon became a large circle. The Vedas say it is not through knowledge, austerities or spiritual practice that you can taste the Self. It can happen only through direct experience. Fortunate enough to gain this experience from Bhagavan, Papaji started imparting it to all those who came in contact with him. In other words, he gave to others what his master had given him. That is why he is a great master, even though he never declared himself to be one. He had no institution and never collected money. Instead, with his hard earned money, he fed poor people.

When I was the editor of *The Mountain Path* in 1993, I was eager to collect articles from those who had received realization directly from Bhagavan. Swami Ekatmananda of Ramakrishna Mission also encouraged me to collect articles and serialize them for the magazine. However, some people in the ashram were not too enthusiastic about the idea, especially in the case of an article on Papaji. In fact, even my friend Anuradha questioned me on my move. At that time, David Godman and Nadia Sutara were helping me with the work. Anuradha raised a question, "You can write about Kunju Swami and Annamalai Swami with whom you have had direct experience. Have you had any kind of experience with Papaji? Are you going to publish the article in the face of so much misgiving?"



*Papaji approvingly appreciates Ganesan's talk*

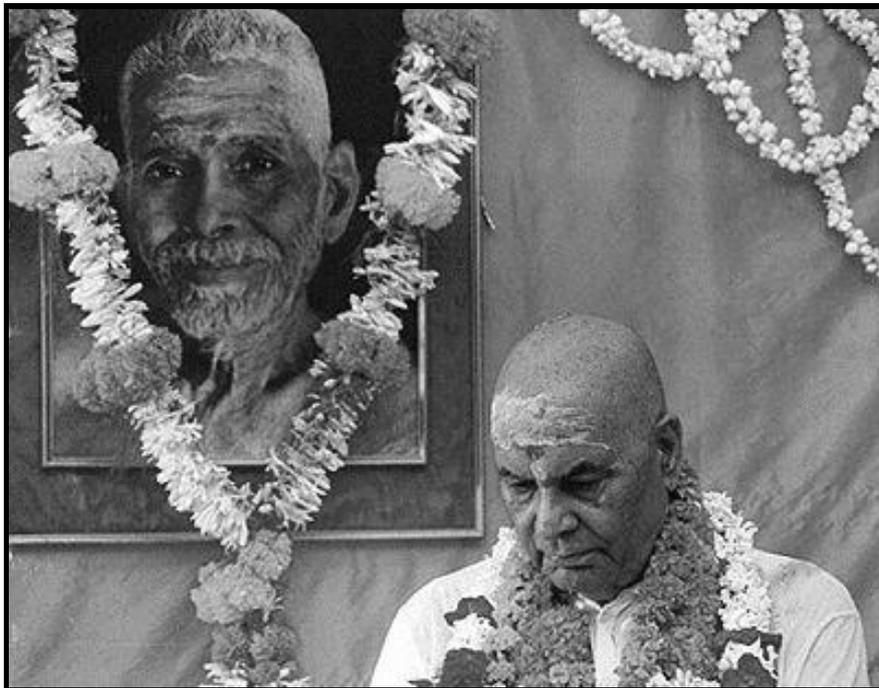
I replied, "Why don't you yourself go and find out?" Anuradha, being a bold woman, went straight to Papaji. Planning to stay there for seven days, she booked her return ticket too. Although she enjoyed the dancing, the singing and the *bhajans*, she felt no connection with Papaji. The day of her departure dawned and yet she felt nothing. Before leaving, Anuradha met Almirah, Papaji's Meera. Almirah was very affectionate towards Anuradha. When she heard what Anuradha had to say about Papaji, she said, "Unless you spend twenty one days with a sage you cannot understand him. Why don't you stay longer?"

Anuradha left for the station. But look at the way the Lord works: The guard of the train refused to let her board the train even though she had a confirmed ticket! On her return to Papaji's *satsang* house, she found that *satsang* was going on. She heard Papaji taking his singers to task: "Anuradha has been singing *Ramana Satguru* every day. I am very fond of it. Why has no one learnt it from her?" After singing *Ramana Satguru*, she prostrated before Papaji. Papaji then asked Anuradha to stay in the guest room. Later, Papaji and Dr. Yamuna came to her room. Papaji sat on the bed while Anuradha and Yamuna sat on the floor. Papaji looked at her compassionately and said, "Anuradha, what did Ramana Maharshi say about his dreams?" She answered, "Papaji, Bhagavan very rarely had dreams. It was in the form of going into some temple or entering Arunachala." Papaji bent in her direction and patted her cheek, "Did he not say that everything you see and indulge in outside of you is a dream?" This drove her mind inwards into a state of quietude with absolutely no thoughts. Even after Papaji and Yamuna left, she continued to be in that state for three hours. When she returned to Ramanasramam later, she happily agreed with my decision to publish the article on Papaji.

1995 was a period of turmoil and restlessness. There was a lot of criticism and opposition. I decided to leave the ashram management and sought the advice of one old devotee after another. Every one of them - Annamalai Swami, Yogi Ramsuratkumar, Lakshmana Swami and others - encouraged me to leave my work at the ashram and take the inward spiritual journey. I wanted to consult Papaji too. I went to Lucknow which had by then become a haven for spiritual seekers. Papaji always exuded compassion. I must mention that this compassion also included reprimands and criticism because it was meant to awaken seekers. I prostrated to Papaji and exclaimed, "There is so much opposition." Papaji looked at me very affectionately, but firmly, and said, "Even if the whole world opposes you, Ganesan, go ahead. You have been guided into this spiritual step. We are all with you." He embraced me saying, "Dive deep within. Plunge into that state of silence and stay in that state of 'I AM'." At that

very moment, the only great attachment that I had, the one to Ramanasramam management dropped like a cloak from the body. Now, I feel Arunachala wherever I go. No matter what country I am in, whatever state I am in - whether happy or unhappy - that state of inner silence is ever present. No kind of qualification or maturity is necessary for you to turn within. Go within and ask yourself, 'Who am I?' Then Arunachala will take you over completely.

When I started touring the world from 1990 onwards, I met and stayed with devotees whom I had never met at the ashram. In many of their homes, they had three pictures prominently displayed - that of Arunachala, Bhagavan and Papaji. Many of these devotees stated that Papaji had given them the experience of the inner 'I AM'. Remember the commandment of Arunachala that his truth of 'I AM' should spread all over the world? Ramana Maharshi was the guru, the link between divinity and humanity. The link needed an extension and the extension appeared in the form of Papaji. He performed the role also played by Arthur Osborne and others - the link with divinity. It is an undeniable fact.



*Papaji celebrating Sri Bhagavan's Jayanthi*

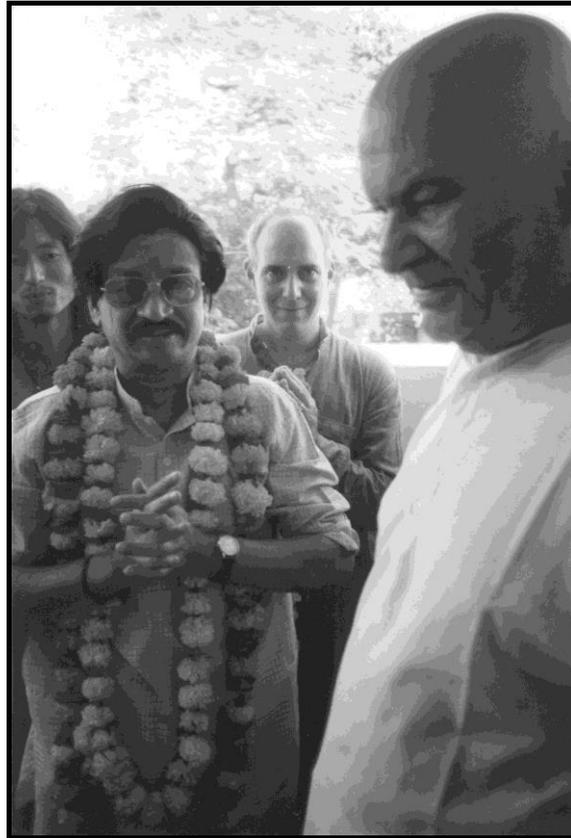
I would also like to share a few things about my friend, Lataji, who came to Papaji because her father's friend influenced her to go to him. She had a tiff with her father because he wanted her to take up the medical profession against her will. She wrote a long letter to Papaji seeking his advice. In the *satsang* at Papaji's house that day, Lataji's letter was picked up by him. It was customary for the person whose letter has been chosen to sit in front of Papaji. Papaji's *satsang* hall had many posters with sayings like 'Be Still,' because that is the essence of the teaching he wanted to impart. Lataji looked at Papaji expectantly assuming he would ask her about the matter. However, he put aside the letter and looked at her, saying, "Ask me something." She felt cornered and was undecided. She looked around and the 'Be Still' poster caught her eye. Therefore, she asked, "How to be still?" She had not intended to ask the question, but Papaji's look compelled her to ask it. Looking at her, Papaji replied "Drop the 'how to'." Lataji later said that this statement of Papaji's, put her and many others in the audience into that state of stillness and inner silence, that too when they least expected it!

A very wealthy man once wanted to give Papaji a donation of one million dollars. With all sincerity, he approached Papaji and said, "I would like to give you a gift. Please accept it and bless me." Papaji said, "Yes, I accept it." Everyone laughed, because it was such an enormous amount. Papaji gleamed as he took the cheque and then tore it to pieces. He told the man, "This is my blessing."

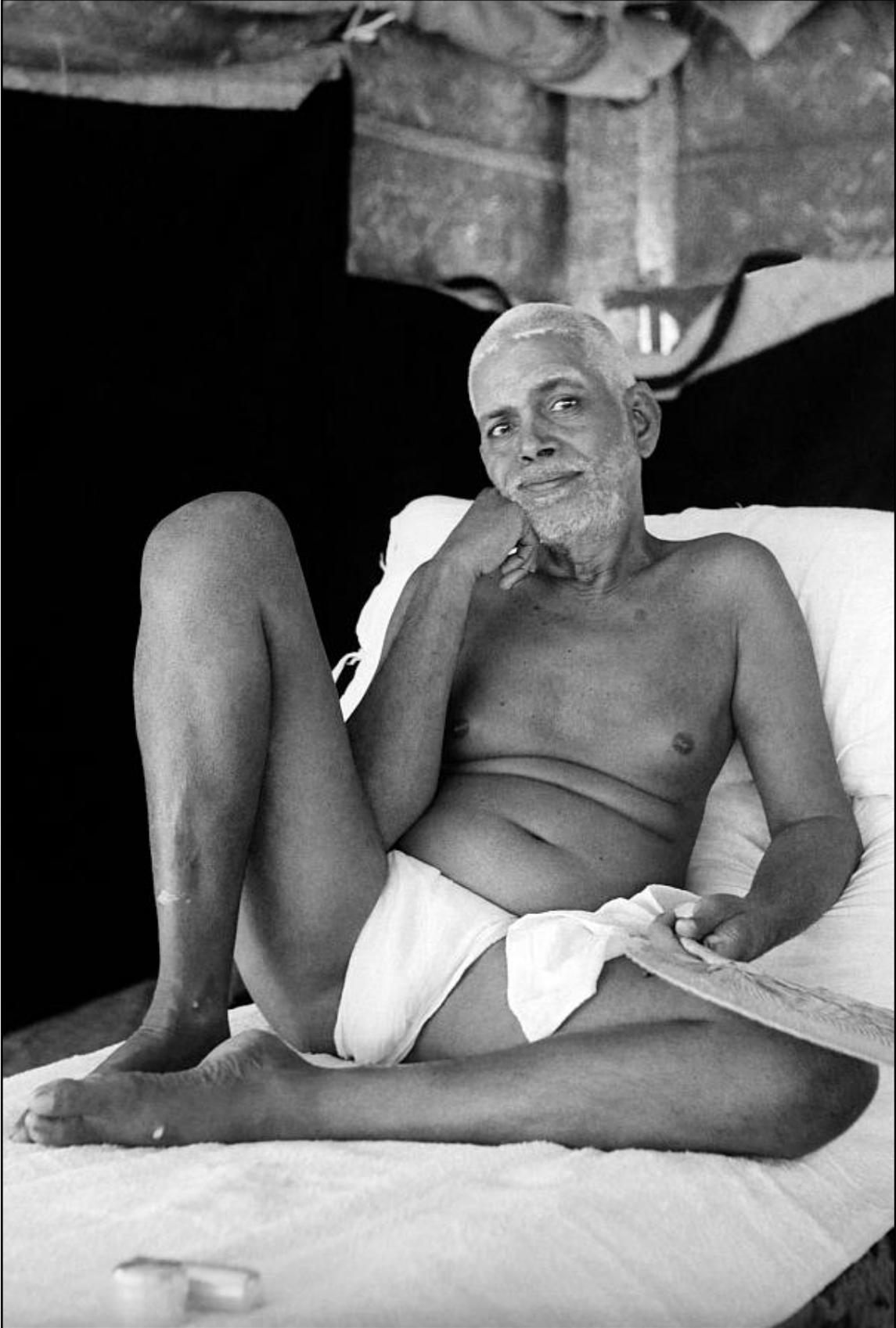
Papaji loved Chinna Swami and my father because they were Bhagavan's descendents. Once, when my father was travelling and was at the Central Station in Chennai, Papaji ran into him. He prostrated before my father and put down at his feet an offering of two hundred rupees. He was such a humble man! When I went to Lucknow, he received me with much warmth. At the *satsang*, he said, "Now, Ganesan will speak." Papaji was the personification of compassion and affection.

A poem written and published in the book titled *Be Still*, describes this big Heart of Arunachala well:

*"In this play of Kali Yuga,  
Sri Ramana established Silence and Self Enquiry  
in the sattvic realm.  
For this, he is called the Maharshi.  
Sri Poonjaji tossed the flame of silence  
into the market place.  
He set the secret burning of non-abidance,  
loose in the land of activity.  
And the world is catching fire now.  
For this, he is called Papaji,  
Beloved father of all."*

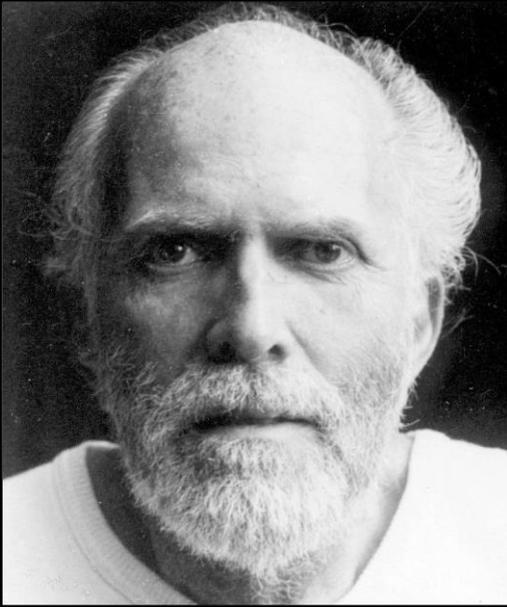


*Papaji welcoming Ganesan with garlands*



“ Has it taken you so long to come to me? ”

## Robert Adams



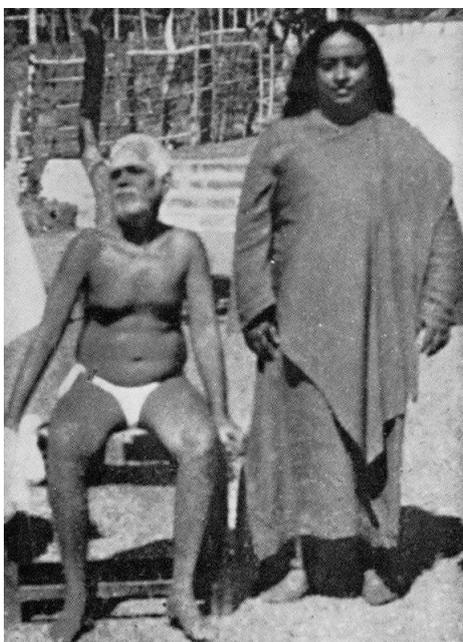
The year was 1992, and I was travelling from San Diego to Phoenix via Los Angeles. At the crowded transit airport in Los Angeles, an elderly American lady approached me and asked, "Are you from India?" When I said, "Yes", she very affectionately added, "This evening, a very pious man is giving a talk on Hindu spirituality in a friend's house. I am going and I would like to take you there." I asked, "What is the name of this pious person?" and she answered, "Robert Adams." I said, "This evening, I am giving a talk at Phoenix. So I cannot come. Please accept my apologies." She was disappointed, but not being one who would easily give up, she said, "I am sorry that you will not be able to come. Will you permit me to give you the transcripts of some of his talks? Could you go through them?" She handed over a bunch of print outs which I started reading on my flight to Phoenix. The very first page caught my rapt attention. Glued to the transcripts, I completed reading them in a state of ecstasy.

I was the editor of *The Mountain Path*. The editorial team at that time was keenly interested in focusing on those blessed devotees who had realized the Self in Sri Bhagavan's presence. We were planning to devote all the issues of 1993 and 1994 to them. The entire team had worked hard to this end and we had collected quite a few articles on the subject, albeit with stiff opposition from certain quarters. I felt that young and new seekers who pursued Self Enquiry would be highly motivated if they read such accounts, as most people feel that the path of wisdom, *jnana marga*, is very difficult and suited only for a chosen few. Whereas the truth is that it is a simple, direct and natural path meant for all. Finding the address of Robert Adams in the transcript, I wrote to him requesting the details of how he attained Self realization in the presence of Bhagavan. I received a long letter: "I am Robert Adams. I was born in New York in 1928. As far back as I can remember, even when I was in the crib, I recollect that a man about two feet tall, with white hair and a grey beard would always appear at the foot of the crib and speak gibberish to me. Being a child, I could not understand anything that he said. When I was about five or six years old, I told my parents about it, but they thought I was playing games. I told my friends. They also laughed at me. I stopped talking about it. These visits by the small man stopped when I was around seven."

Robert Adams also added that he did not know what to do. He could not share what happened with anyone. Then, something strange took place. Whenever he wanted anything, whether it was a pencil, a chocolate or a violin, it would appear through someone when he uttered the word 'God' three times. If he found that someone needed a pencil in class, he would utter 'God' three times and the pencil would be there and he would hand over the pencil to the person who needed it. It happened during his exams too. He was not interested in studying. During his exams, he would utter 'God' three times, and the answers would appear before him and he would write them down. This is how he passed the exams.

When writing a mathematics paper for which he was not prepared, he did the same thing. He held before him the question paper and uttered 'God' three times. He expected the answers to appear as always, but what happened was something entirely different: "The whole room was filled with a light a thousand times more brilliant than the sun. It was a beautiful, warm and shining glow. Everything and everyone in the room was immersed in the light. All the children seemed to be mere particles of light, and I found myself melting into a radiant being of consciousness. I then merged into consciousness. It was not an out of the body experience. This was a completely different experience. I realized that I was not my body. What appeared to be my body was not real. I went beyond the light into pure radiant consciousness. I became consciousness and my individuality merged into pure and absolute bliss. I expanded and became the universe. The feeling was indescribable. It was total bliss and total joy."

After this experience, Robert Adams could no longer carry on his activities as usual. Being a teenager, he wanted someone to guide him. At that time, Joel Goldsmith was regarded as a true Christian mystic. Many people suggested that he approach Joel Goldsmith and therefore he went there. (Years later, Joel Goldsmith kept constant contact with Arthur Osborne and me. He contributed some original and brilliant articles to almost every issue of *The Mountain Path*.) Joel Goldsmith listened to Robert Adams and suggested, "Go to Paramahansa Yogananda in Encinitas. He will guide you." Robert Adams went to Encinitas in a state of excitement and ecstasy. A strange thing happened. There were many people in the presence of Paramahansa Yogananda. Robert, however, was standing outside. Paramahansa told his secretary, "There is a boy outside. Call him in." Robert Adams prostrated before the great man and said, "You are my guru." Paramahansa answered, "No, I am not your guru. Your guru is Sri Ramana Maharshi. The Maharshi is not well, go to him immediately." After coming out, Robert felt the need to read a book in the library. He was browsing through the philosophy section, when the book, *Who am I?*, caught his attention. When he saw the picture of Ramana Maharshi on the book, his hair stood on end, because this was the very person who used to appear before his crib and speak to him. So, with the strong recommendation of Paramahansa Yogananda, he reached Arunachala in 1947.



*Paramahansa Yogananda with Sri Bhagavan*

Here is an account of what happened in the presence of Ramana Maharshi: "I arrived in Arunachala at the age of eighteen. I took with me some flowers and a bag full of fruits and offered them at the feet of the Maharshi. He looked at me and smiled; I returned the smile. The very first look of the Maharshi engulfed me in a flood of light, peace, quietude and bliss and it opened my inner eye and I instantly recognized the meaning and purpose of all my experiences - that I was never the body and that I was ever the unborn Self, the eternal silence. The Maharshi exuded compassion, love and bliss on the very first day. He looked at me and asked whether I had eaten breakfast, and when I said, 'No', he asked the attendant to bring fruits and porridge and told me to eat. I lay down and went to sleep in the Old Hall itself, and when I woke up, the Maharshi guided me to a shack and asked me to take rest. In the evening too, he sent me food. I ate and again went to sleep. The Maharshi himself paid great attention to what was needed for my body to rest and relax."

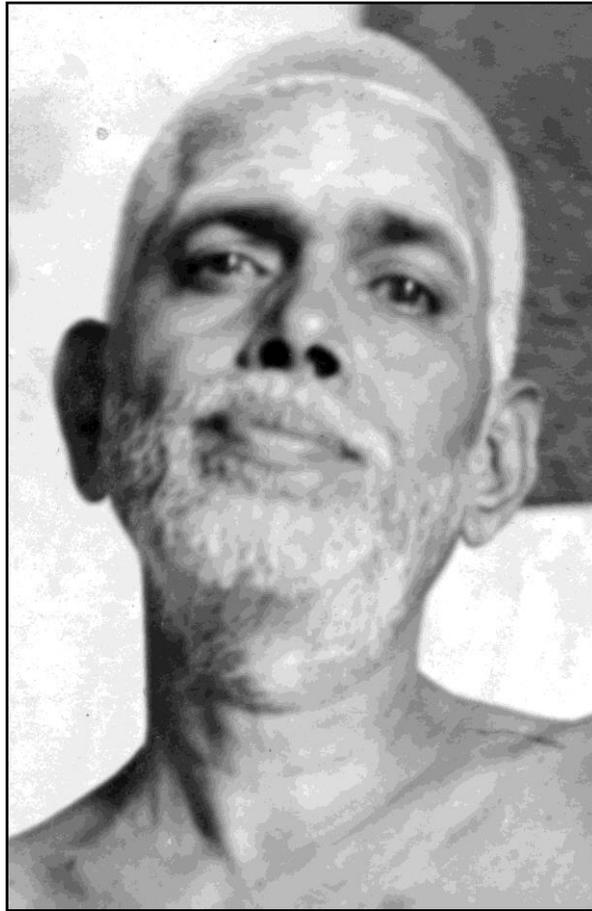
The next morning, Robert went to the Old Hall to meet Bhagavan. What happened in the presence of the Maharshi guided him deep within, while the silence and quietude of Bhagavan engulfed him. When he entered the hall, he saw Bhagavan's attendant, Krishnaswami, approaching Bhagavan again and again to complain about some people. After some time, Bhagavan looked sternly at Krishnaswami and



"The Maharshi guided me to a shack..."

said, "Remember the purpose for which you have come here. Attend to it. Keep quiet!" Robert took this as his very first *upadesa*, or instruction, from Bhagavan to himself rather than to Krishnaswami. From then on, every moment of the three years he stayed there was precious. He dived within, and remained in a state of silence; he neither interfered in anyone's personal affairs, nor in the ashram management. Inwardly, he was established in truth and outwardly he was a recluse. There was no need for him to talk to anyone, not even to Bhagavan. This is why nobody knew Robert Adams, even though he stayed for three years in Arunachala. Later, when I went to verify, one or two old devotees said that there was a young fellow who was possibly mad. His name was, perhaps, Robert Adams. They also said that he always kept to himself and did not have anything to do with others. He never spoke, for all the time he was doing *sadhana*. Robert told me that when Bhagavan dropped his body, it did not affect him because he saw Bhagavan only as the Self. Even when Bhagavan was present physically, he experienced Bhagavan only as the Self. So, he felt no sorrow or loss now as he plunged deeper and deeper into the Self.

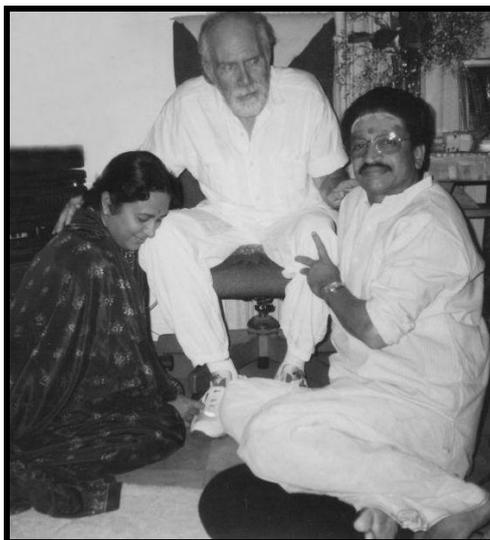
Once, Bhagavan appeared in Robert Adam's dream and said, "Go to Benares. There is an old *swami* there. Stay with him." The *swami* was ninety years old. Robert went to Benares and sat in his presence every day. No conversation was necessary. One day, the *swami* informed people who had gathered before him, "I know my end is approaching in three days. I have not completed my mission. The moment I drop my body, a youth on the road will also die for no reason whatsoever. I will reside in his body and continue my mission." On the third day, just after the *swami* dropped his body, a young boy around fourteen or fifteen years of age was crossing the road. He suddenly had fits and collapsed. After around twenty minutes, the still body rose and disappeared into the forest. This gave further meaning to Robert's belief in the Self. The appearance or the disappearance of the body did not in any way concern him.



*"The very first look of the Maharshi engulfed me in a flood of light, peace, quietude and bliss..."*

Robert wandered around India, meeting with sages and saints. He did this for a few years. Then, Bhagavan appeared once again in his dream and said, "Go back to your country and spread the teaching of Self Enquiry, how to attain Self realization and how to stay in the state of 'I AM' to seekers in America." Bhagavan very specifically stated, "Do not start an institution. Do not be a guru. No publicity! If more than fifteen people gather around you, go away from that town and continue to spread the teaching elsewhere." Robert Adams travelled, but there were no articles about him and no publicity. None except a select few knew about him. On reaching Hollywood, he was afflicted by Parkinson's disease and was forced to remain there. A beautiful woman named Mary, along with her friends, attended on him. They also helped him disseminate the teachings of Bhagavan's Self Enquiry. He conducted *satsangs* and had small gatherings. His presence was very powerful. He would sit in the hall in silence for twenty minutes and everyone around him would become absolutely silent. It did not matter how many people were gathered there, or who was there. Ultimately, after the period of silence, Robert would speak for a few minutes.

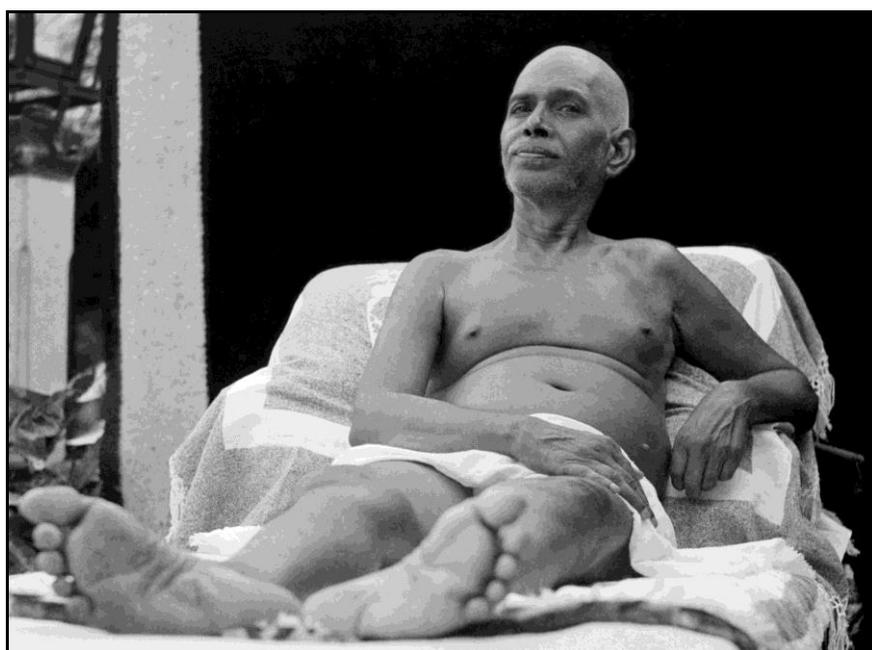
When I wrote to Robert Adams asking for permission to meet him, he replied, "You can meet me in Los Angeles." At the time, the president of the Course of Miracles, Dr. Tara Singh, was at Ramanasramam and he invited Anuradha and me to stay in their headquarters in Los Angeles. "I will arrange for you to meet Robert Adams," he said. He arranged the meeting with Robert in a restaurant. We met there because the master had no institution, not even a house to call his own. I was thrilled, because he had called us for a lunch meeting. It reminded me of Bhagavan, who not only imparted wisdom but saw to it that anyone visiting the ashram partook of its food. As we approached the table we could only see Robert's back, but that was more than enough. The spiritual aura, the peace, the friendliness and the vibrations were palpable even from a distance. Robert had a great sense of humour. I requested him again and again to tell us about Bhagavan for I wanted to hear it from his own lips. He recounted all the incidents that he had earlier written to me - of how he saw Bhagavan at the foot of his crib and the other incidents - and concluded by saying, "In the evening, we are having a *satsang* in Mary's house. Please do come."



*Anuradha and Ganesan with Robert Adams*

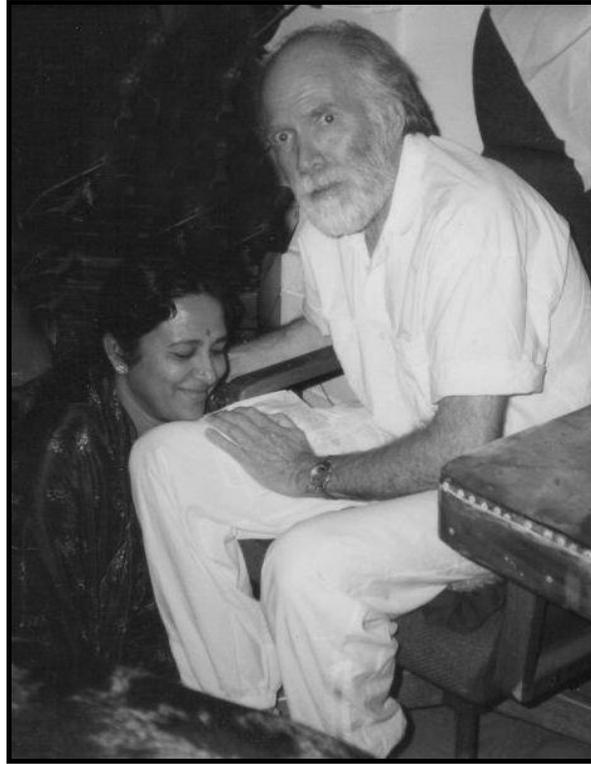
Seventy people had already gathered when I reached there. There was such a profound and serene silence! A special seat had been arranged for Robert since he had Parkinson's. Behind him was a picture of Bhagavan. I too was given a special chair. After Robert sat down, he looked at everyone for about twenty minutes and in those twenty minutes he silenced everyone's minds and put them in a complete state of inwardness. Afterwards, he took the mike and spoke. He announced, "I welcome my master Ramana Maharshi's grand nephew, Ganesan, and his secretary, Anuradha. I would like Ganesan to speak." I spoke for nearly half an hour, at the end of which he happily said, "I entirely agree with every word that Ganesan has spoken today."

I would like to share an incident of great significance that took place when I was there. After the speeches, I sat at Robert's feet. Another person was also there, a John Wilkins, I think, who had been Robert's friend for more than twenty years. Out of the blue, John suddenly asked, "Robert, I want you to tell me: what is the truth and what is untruth? What is reality and unreality? I do not want you to quote from the scriptures or use any philosophical jargon. You must make me experience these right now at your feet."



*"The Maharshi exuded compassion, love..."*

I was thrilled because I wanted to know how Robert was going to answer these difficult questions. Robert looked happy for some time and then became very serious. He looked at John and asked, "Who are you?" John thought that Robert had forgotten him because of the disease he had. He replied, "I am John Wilkins." Robert gave him the most gracious smile that I have ever seen and said, "I AM is the truth and John Wilkins is the untruth. I AM is the reality and John Wilkins is the unreality." Everyone went into a state of inner stillness. This was not a mere answer; it was a statement that transported everyone into a state of deep silence of the mind.



*Anuradha: "Robert, please tell me what service I can render."*

Robert Adams invited me to come again the next year, but said that he might shift to Sedona since Bhagavan had selected the place. He invited me over saying that everything had been arranged. Accommodation was given to Anuradha and me in a couple's house. I attended his *satsangs* and he always made me speak. He used to listen to my sharings with great appreciation. One day, Anuradha felt so grateful that she held Robert's hands and said, "I want to do something for you. Please tell me what service I can render." He replied, "Yes, you can give me Ramanasramam food. I am very fond of the food there and I will eat it with joy if you make it for me." Anuradha happily agreed. There were not enough vessels to make South Indian food, so we had to look for these vessels. When someone lent us a vessel, they also said, "We too will come for the lunch." Robert had said that only six people were invited. Then, every two hours Robert would send word that six more people would be coming for lunch. It ultimately added up to sixty people! Anuradha and a few others started preparing the food from very early in the morning, since Ramanasramam food meant *sambar*, *rasam*, vegetables, yogurt, *pappad* and *payasam*. Some people told us that it was enough if Robert was served the lunch; the others could take the food as *prasad*. However, Anuradha was firm that everyone be fed because she remembered that Bhagavan in his lifetime wanted himself to be served last, so that everyone else could be fed. The next day, a sumptuous and delicious lunch was served. Anuradha herself served Robert. Others helped themselves. He had three or four helpings of each dish and was delighted. We were all very happy that Robert ate the food with so much relish. After lunch, Anuradha in all her innocence asked Robert, "Robert, was it like the ashram food or was something missing?" Robert answered, "Yes, it was perfectly delicious. Only one thing was missing - the banana leaf on which the food is served there!"

Everyone wanted a *satsang* after lunch. Robert said, "I am not going to talk today. Only Ganesan will talk and he should talk on the topic chosen by me. Your topic, Ganesan, is Bhagavan and the

monkeys.” I must have spoken for about twenty minutes. Everyone laughed a lot and enjoyed the talk. Then, someone from the audience told Anuradha, “We have heard about Bhagavan from Ganesan. We would like to hear about Ganesan from you.” Robert intervened and said, “Anuradha, I will give you a topic. Talk about Bhagavan and Ganesan.” Anuradha gave an account of my childhood, my relationship with Bhagavan, how Bhagavan taught me to serve salt, and a few other incidents. She said, “Bhagavan was known for his ‘*thanga kai*’ or ‘golden hand’. Whatever Bhagavan touched, thrived and prospered. In Ramana Nagar, Ganesan is called ‘the funeral hand’ because he lights the funeral pyre of those old devotees who die in Ramana Nagar and in Ramanasramam.” There was a burst of laughter from the audience when they heard this. Robert pretended to become very serious and said, “All those who are afraid of death, run away from here because the funeral hands are here.” I was at his feet at the time. He bent towards me and said, “Ganesan, extend your hands. I am ready.” At that time, we all thought that he was just joking. When it was time for Robert to leave, Sharmila, who was a good singer and a great devotee, began to sing. Everyone joined in the singing; Robert got up and danced to the tune of ‘Hit the road, Jack. Don’t come back no more, no more, no more’. He was always dressed informally and he was wearing a T-shirt, jeans and a cap turned backwards. He was a simple man, natural, humorous and constantly joking - most of the jokes were at his own expense. We enjoyed ourselves thoroughly.

I want to share an important feature that repeatedly took place in the presence of Robert Adams. The moment I met him – whether it was at Hollywood or at Sedona – he would extend his hand. I always carried in my pocket two small packets of *vibhuti* and *kumkum*, taken from Sri Bhagavan’s shrine as his *Prasad* - even now I do so.

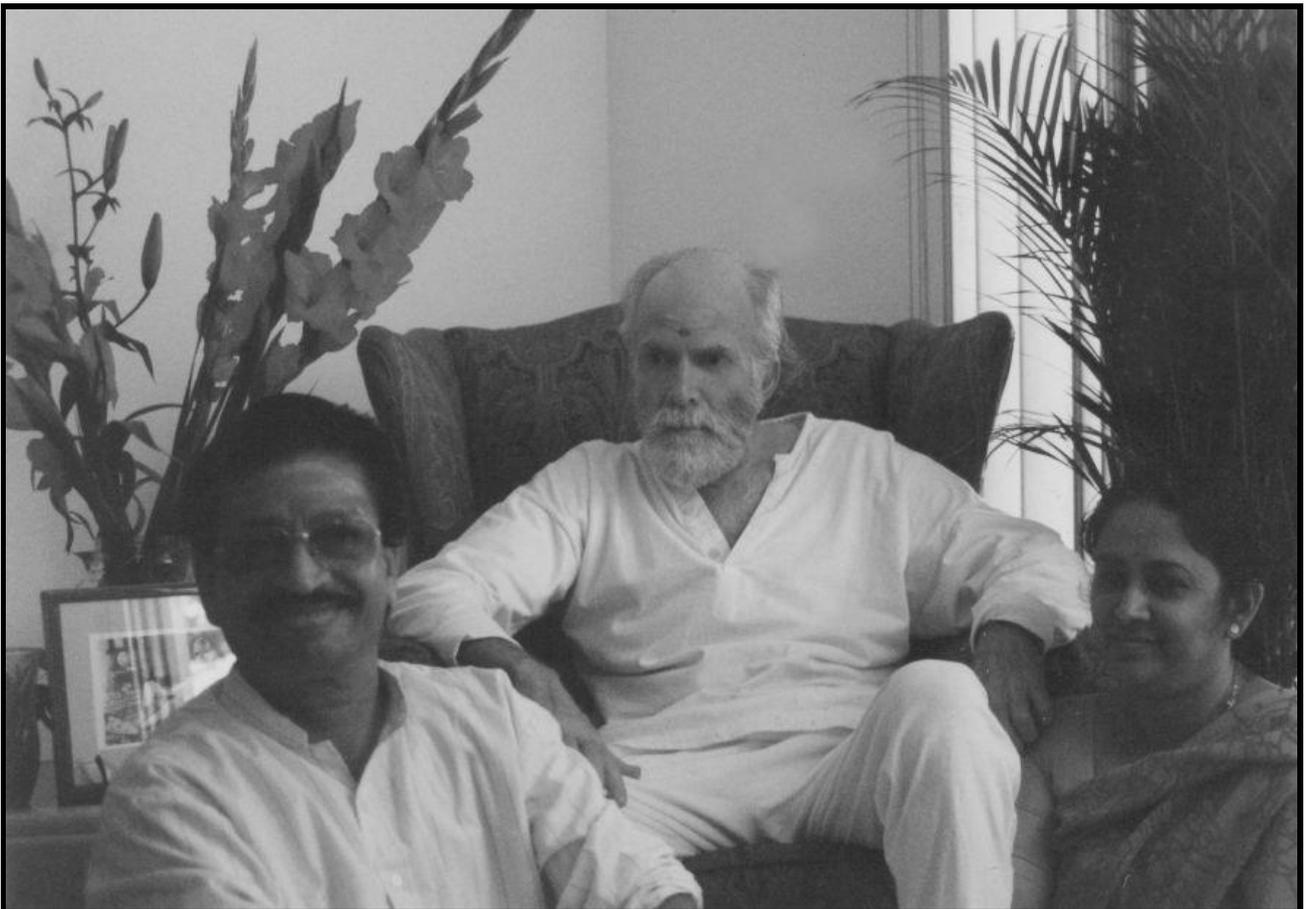
When I first met Robert Adams at Hollywood, he asked me why I was wearing the religious marks of *vibhuti* and *kumkum* on my forehead. I told him that Viswanatha Swami once told a dear friend and fellow devotee, “You have a very broad forehead. It would look appropriate if you adorn it with *vibhuti* and *kumkum* !” After some time, when this devotee met Viswanatha Swami at the ashram, he noticed that this devotee was not wearing *vibhuti* and *kumkum*. Viswanatha Swami did not say anything to him. Instead, he turned to me immediately and in my friend’s presence itself commanded me, “Start wearing them on your forehead – for my sake!” I was never a ritualist and Swami knew that very well. Yet, since such a powerful command had come from him, from that day onwards, I started wearing them - not only as *prasad* from Sri Bhagavan but also as a blessing from Viswanatha Swami. Instantly, Robert Adams said, “Whenever you meet me, please put Sri Bhagavan’s *prasad* on my forehead too!”. I did it and received the added blessings of the “*American Siddha Purusha*”, Robert Adams!

Soon, we were back in India and stayed at the Krishnamurti Foundation at Rajghat, Benares. One day, I was told that there was an international call for me. It was Robert Adams. He addressed me by my name, but he could continue no further. His assistant, Richard, spoke to me. He said, “Robert invites you to come to Sedona and spend three months in spring with him. He is very insistent. He would like Anuradha also to come with you since he understands that you cannot travel alone. He will make all the arrangements. Sharmila will pick you up. The other devotees will take care of your needs. Please come for the spring.” Back at the ashram there was a letter for me in Robert’s own handwriting, “Ganesan, please come and spend the whole of spring with me.” I was very moved by the invitation. Anuradha and I landed in San Francisco - exactly at the time that Robert dropped his body in Sedona. Was it one of his practical jokes? I recalled the time when he said, “Take me in your funeral hands!” It was literally true now. There was something that Robert definitely wanted to convey to me. Anuradha and I continued our journey to Sedona where we met Sharmila, a wonderful and beautiful lady. She did not have a house of her own. We stayed with her in three or four different places as she was ‘house-sitting’. The old devotees of Robert wanted me to participate in their *satsangs*. I talked about Self Enquiry, and how by practising this we can attain that state of quietude and silence - the silence that Bhagavan had given Robert and the silence that Robert had given to all the devotees. This was to be carried on. This is why Robert had asked me to come there for three months. I too learnt a lesson from Robert. I understood that one has to look on all the happenings outside of oneself to be a mere dream. This was the knowledge that Robert directly and indirectly imparted to me.

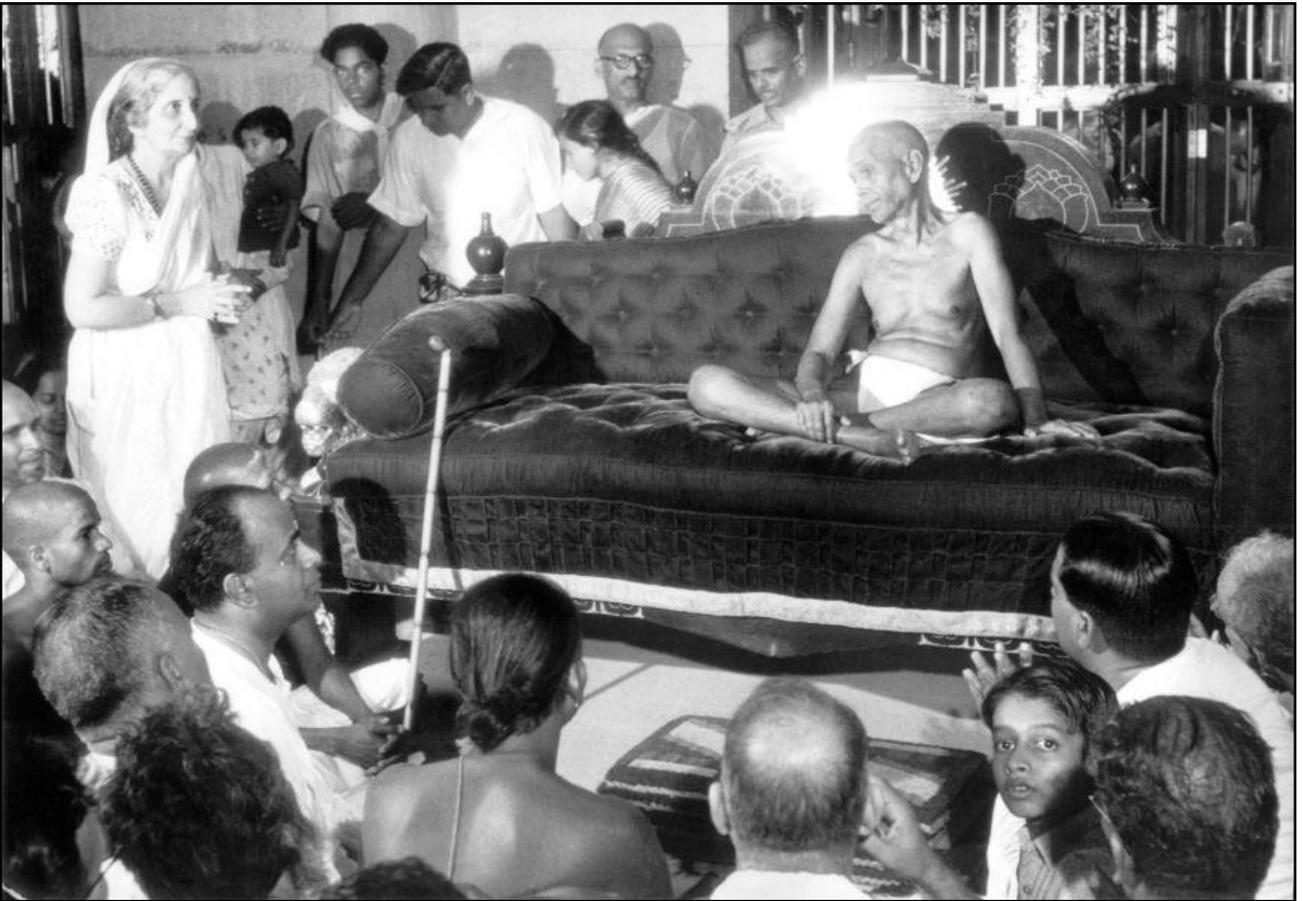
Even during his last days, Robert retained his sense of humour. When he was bedridden, a young man named John attended on him. John knew that he was serving a realized soul. Robert’s wife was not happy with the situation of John serving her husband. She was constantly sending him away; but John had to attend on Robert since Robert was bedridden. One day, Robert wanted hot water and John had to go into the kitchen to get it. Robert’s wife was frying something in a big pan at the time. She became

so angry that she was ready to hurl the pan at John. John became so alarmed that he shouted for help, "Robert! Robert! She is trying to hit me with a big pan. What should I do? Please help me." Robert, who was lying down, said, "Duck!" It was typical of Robert - ever half serious and half humorous.

By way of paying homage to Robert, I quote a few passages from Robert's teachings: "The highest teaching in the world is silence - there is nothing higher than this. A devotee who sits in the company of the sage purifies his mind just by being with him. The mind automatically becomes quieter. No words are necessary. Silence is the ultimate reality and everything in this world exists through silence. This means, literally, going deep inside yourself to the dwelling where nothing is happening; this place transcends time and space. This is a brand new dimension of nothingness. That is our real home and the place to which we actually belong. In this state, there is only deep silence - there is no good, no bad and no state of trying to achieve anything. It is a state of pure being. The ultimate freedom is to reach this state of deep silence in which you transcend your body, your affairs and the universe. The other lesson to be learnt is that you are real. What you appear to be is false. Identify yourself with the real you and not the false you. Do not accept everything that you see as reality. The only freedom that you have is to turn within. One day, you will awaken from this dream, for this is also a dream, and you will be free, liberated. There is no such thing as birth or death. Nobody is born, nobody dies and nobody prevails in between. Nothing that appears exists. Only the Self exists. All this is the Self and I am that. You are the absolute reality. You are consciousness, emptiness, and *sat-chit-ananda* - existence, consciousness, bliss - that is your true nature. Why not abide in it and be free? Empty your mind and become still; everything will happen of its own accord. There is really nothing that you have to do - just be still. Be still and know that 'I AM', God. 'I AM' is the Self. Accept that and be free." Salutations to Robert Adams, the great blissful, surrendered devotee of Bhagavan!



*"Ganesan, extend your hands. I am ready."  
(Notice the vibhuti and kumkum on Robert's forehead)*



*Sri Bhagavan giving darshan in the 'New Hall'  
(Ganesan can be seen in the foreground, right)*

## Lakshmana Swami



Lakshmana Swami is another saintly person who attained realization directly from Bhagavan. Of the devotees that we have talked about, Lakshmana Swami is the only person who is still in the body (2013) and living in Arunachala. Even as a teenager, Lakshmana Swami strongly felt he must attain Self realization. He studied spiritual and religious books; he also did intense *pranayama*. One day when he was still in college, he had a beautiful spiritual experience similar to that of Robert Adams. He was alone in a field when all of a sudden: "There was light everywhere, and suddenly the mind became one pointed and still. There was a sudden flash of light within and the divine light showed its full magnificence. The light encircled and engulfed me. I lost all consciousness of the body. Apart from the strange quietness, there was total inner stillness. The effulgence drove home the veritable fact that the Self is God himself in the temple of the physical body. My joy knew no bounds as I realized that the Self had become my guru."

However, the spiritual experience started fading. Lakshmana Swami recognized the need to have a guru in the human form in order to steadily abide in that state. While still in college, his lecturer mentioned Ramana Maharshi's name one day. The very name delighted him. On another occasion, when he was passing through the main college lecture hall, he saw his English professor Prof. G. V. Subaramayya giving a talk on Ramana Maharshi. He also saw a huge picture of Ramana Maharshi in the hall. He could not follow the lecture because it was not audible from where he was and the hall was jam packed. However, every time the professor uttered the name Ramana Maharshi, he was able to hear it. The name and form of Bhagavan gave him the certainty: "Here is someone I can go to for clarification and get further established in the state of the immaculate Self."

Lakshmana Swami came to Tiruvannamalai in 1949. The consecration, of the Mother's temple was taking place. The place was teeming with people and he could catch only a fleeting glimpse of Ramana Maharshi. He never got an audience with him. He stayed for a few days during which time he bought the book *Who am I?* in Telugu, his mother tongue. As he read the book, he found his mind going deeper and deeper inside until he reached a state of no thought. However, he still was not very keen about Self Enquiry. Out of the blue, even though Bhagavan was physically very far away, the mantra '*Hare Ramana*' came to him as a *japa*. The sound or name came from within, and so he kept repeating it. After a few days, he went back to his village. He felt that seclusion, silence and meditation along with *pranayama* would establish him in the Self.

From his village, he went towards the seaside. He stayed in a hut and practiced his *sadhana* intensely and continuously for five months. However, he fell ill and had to be brought back to his village. Even with all the special medical attention that was given to him, he never recovered fully. During this time, he had a picture of Bhagavan that seemed to be smiling at him all the time. While looking at the picture one day, he received a message from Bhagavan, "This body can be saved with the help of medicines. But what about the ego which is like the tiger's jaws, eating you up?" Lakshmana Swami felt that it was imperative to go back to his guru - Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

He returned to Ramanasramam in September, 1949. The ashram was again very crowded as the Navaratri festival was being celebrated. Bhagavan was already very ill by this time. He would be brought from the Nirvana Room to the New Hall in front of the Mother's temple and was available for only two or three hours from three in the afternoon. It was the last day of Navaratri. The chanting of the mantras was going on and the bells were ringing. Bhagavan came from the Nirvana Room to the new hall. At that time, Lakshmana Swami was standing outside. Bhagavan, who was walking with extreme difficulty, lifted his head and looked at Lakshmana Swami who went into a state of ecstasy. He sat down and closed his eyes. As he did so, the beautiful, final, spiritual realization came to him. This is how he describes it: "Unexpectedly I found that all my thoughts had disappeared except for the primal 'I' thought. Then, 'Who am I?' spontaneously appeared within me, as did the gracious, smiling face of Bhagavan. There was a flash of light on the right side of the chest, and a flood of divine light shone both

within and without. Bhagavan's face was smiling more radiantly than innumerable flashes of lightning fused together. In that state of continued bliss, tears of joy welled up in unending succession, and they could not be resisted." Lakshmana Swami could not move from outside the hall for nearly six hours. The deity from Mother's temple was being taken in a procession and there was hustle and bustle everywhere. However, he was unmoved and rooted in that state of quietude. That night, he remained immersed in silence. The next day, he went to the new hall and wrote a note in Telugu to Bhagavan. The note read, "In your presence and by my quest of 'Who am I?' I have realized my Self. I need your blessings." Bhagavan took the note, looked at him, smiled and nodded his head. He spoke only two sentences. "Where are you coming from?" he asked. "From Gudur," said Lakshmana Swami. "Is it not in Nellore district?" questioned Bhagavan. Lakshmana Swami nodded in agreement. He was already in the state of the Self; the master had spoken to him and established him further in that state. After this conversation with Bhagavan, he did not speak for the next thirteen years. He stayed in a hut in Palaakothu. Bhagavan gave that note to his attendant Venkataratnam and bade him keep it safe.

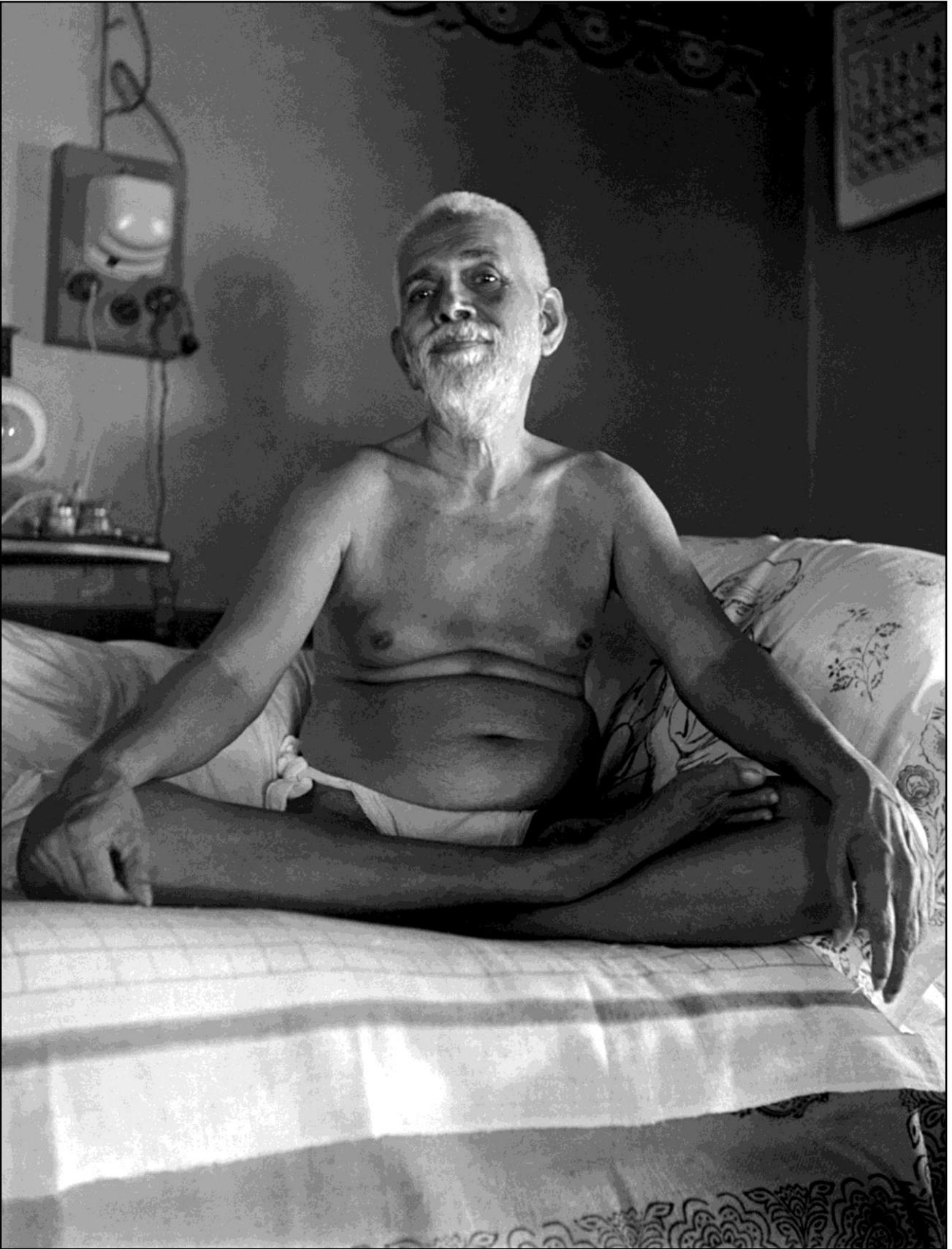
On the day Bhagavan gave up his body, Lakshmana Swami was cleaning his room, not far from the Ashram. The picture of Bhagavan fell down. He picked it up, cleaned it and put it back in its place with great reverence. Again it fell. He instantly understood that something had happened to Bhagavan's body. He went into a state of *samadhi*. He lost total body consciousness and remained in the state of the Self for nearly three hours. When he got up from his state of *samadhi*, he went to Ramanasramam. By this time, Bhagavan had already given up his body in the Nirvana Room. The body was then kept in the hall for people to pay homage. There was sadness in his heart that Bhagavan was not physically present, but there was no pain. He did not shed tears because he was filled with the presence of the Self. Just as Robert Adams felt that Bhagavan was the Self and not the body, even when Bhagavan was in the body, it did not matter to Lakshmana Swami that the body had been dropped. He went back to his village. He immersed himself in silence, seclusion, meditation and *pranayama*. He was plunged in the Self and did not talk to anyone.

In 1970, he felt that the Master's teaching had to spread. He established his own ashram at Gudur and taught Self Enquiry, benefiting many sincere seekers like Sarada. Since 1990, he has been staying in his ashram in Arunachala where he abides in seclusion and silence - not meeting people. Lakshmana Swami's life and teachings have been brought out well by David Godman in his book entitled *No Mind, I Am the Self*.

Ramana Maharshi said, "The only purpose of life is to realize the Self, and all other activities are a waste of time." Let us become one pointed, dive within and re-cognise the Self. As Lakshmana Swami says, "Just keep quiet, and Bhagavan will take care of everything."



'Karthikai Deepam day'



*"...look from Bhagavan plunged me into deep meditation."*

## Yogi Ramsuratkumar



For all Hindus interested in ending the cycle of birth and death and attaining emancipation, the most important and sacred pilgrimage centre is Varanasi or Kashi. At Kashi, the holy river Ganges, having originated in the peaks of the Himalayas and forcefully moving down the plains, makes a turn towards the north, towards its source. From time immemorial, Hindus have been drawn to this vibrant and powerful city, and it is here that the story of an important mystic, saint, and devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi begins.

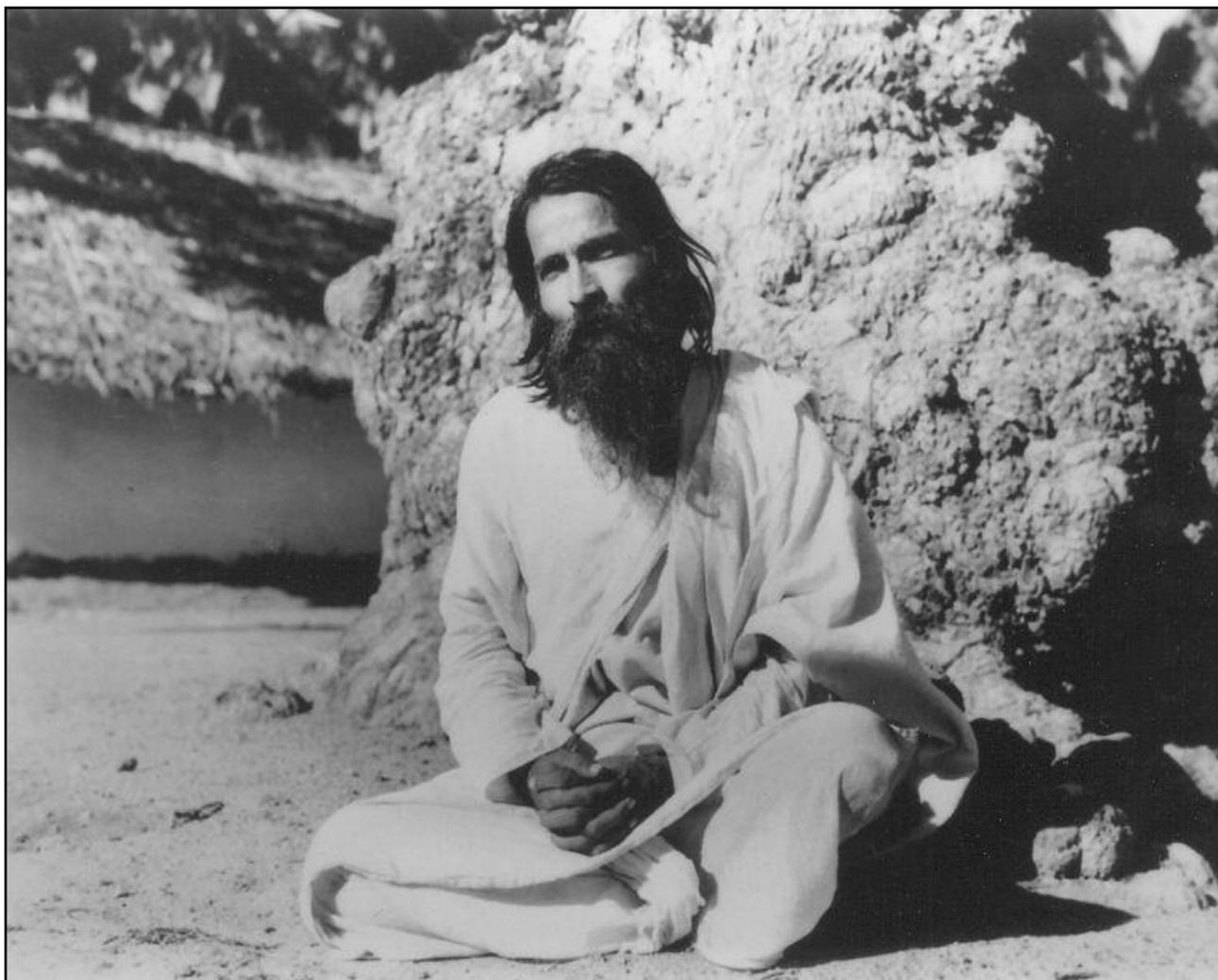
Near the town of Kashi is a small village called Nardara. Many pilgrims who aim to complete a circumambulation of Mother Ganges often rest in the small villages that lie on the banks of the river. The local villagers pay special attention to these *sadhus*, *sannyasins* and pilgrims and this was especially the case with Yogi

Ramsuratkumar and his family. Growing up in this environment, alongside the banks of the holy river and in regular contact with pilgrims and *sadhus*, had a deep impact on the young boy. He would sit along with them around the fire at night and listen with rapt attention to stories of saints and sages and epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Maharabharata*.

A *sadhu* called Kapadia Baba had a special role in young Ramsuratkumar's life and influenced the turn of events. Kapadia Baba was a tall and imposing figure, who before taking *sannyas* was an erudite and scholarly judge. As a judge, he had to oversee a case where his only son-in-law had committed a murder. Without any hesitation, he issued the death sentence on his son-in-law after finding him guilty. Realizing the futility of worldly existence, he took *sannyas* and started circumambulations of the Ganges. During these journeys, he would spend a day or so in the company of young Ramsuratkumar in Nardara.

An incident that dramatically shaped Ramsuratkumar's life occurred in his teenage years. One of the household chores he happily did was to help his mother by drawing water from a well using a long rope. One day, while he was drawing water, he noticed a small, beautiful sparrow looking intently at him from the other side of the well. He playfully threw one end of the rope at it. The bird was hit and it fell. Deeply shocked, Ramsuratkumar ran and took the bird in his hands, crying, "Please, do not die! Please, do not die!" He then took it to the Ganges and poured its sacred water on the bird in an attempt to revive it. That too failed. This traumatic event led him to contemplate and enquire deeply on life and death: "Where has the beauty of the bird gone? Where has its power to fly gone? The wings are there but it has lost the power to fly. What is the force behind the bird's now lifeless body that allowed it to be active and fly just a minute ago?" Enquiring thus, he sat weeping on the banks of the Ganges. The death of the bird was the first shock he received from life and it sharpened his awareness about creation, life and death.

Carrying this sorrow and guilt, he searched for Kapadia Baba to get some consolation. When he met Baba again he cried, "I am unable to bear this guilt." Kapadia Baba told the sixteen year old teenager to go to Kashi. There, as he stood in front of Lord Vishwanath, he experienced a flash of brilliant light and felt for the first time a divine ecstasy that made him forget everything - his depression, his body, the world, time and space. The divine energy had engulfed him. He wandered the cremation *ghats* on the banks of the Ganges and had the experience of his dead body being brought there and burnt to ashes and the ashes being immersed in the sacred river. He experienced the reality that he was not the body. In this state, he went to Kapadia Baba who turned the young lad's attention to mastering the *Tulsi Ramayana* and *Bhagavad Gita*.



*Yogi Ramsuratkumar seated under the 'Illupai Tree' at the Ashram entrance*

All his life, Yogi Ramsuratkumar used to quote freely from the *Tulsi Ramayana* and *Bhagavad Gita*. He became indifferent to life. His parents and relatives noticed this and in an effort to rekindle his interest in life, got young Ramsuratkumar married. He settled initially into a life of a householder and though he was working as a headmaster in a school to earn money to support his family, his inner quest to find God and the true reality of what life actually is, remained undimmed.

Kapadia Baba returned at this crucial stage in his life and instructed him to seek a guru. Ramsuratkumar was surprised as he had always assumed that Kapadia Baba was his guru. But Kapadia Baba told him to travel to South India and specifically mentioned Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramana Maharshi. Following this directive, Ramsuratkumar went to Pondicherry first. Unable to meet Sri Aurobindo, he arrived in Arunachala. The first welcoming sight of the holy hill filled him with happiness. Brimming with nameless joy, he went to Ramanasramam. Bhagavan was seated on a platform and the whole atmosphere was filled with silence and peace. He went and sat in front of Bhagavan. A direct look from Bhagavan plunged him into deep meditation. After a long time, when he opened his eyes, he saw Bhagavan focusing his compassionate and love filled glance of grace on him continuously with a joyful smile.

He plunged into Ramana Maharshi's path of Self Enquiry. This repeatedly led to states of *samadhi*. When he had to return to his village, he prostrated and silently prayed, "Bhagavan, please pour grace on me so that I attain your holy feet. Make me your own and keep me ever at your feet." This was not expressed verbally. However, Bhagavan heard the silent prayer and nodded his head and said, "*Shari*," which means 'yes' in Tamil. Later, Yogi Ramsuratkumar told me that this was the first Tamil word that he learnt. From then on, he used this word often in his life. Ordinarily, '*shari*' is translated as 'yes'. On this occasion, when Ramsuratkumar surrendered to his master, it meant, "Yes, I have accepted you."

During the summer of 1949, he came back and saw that Bhagavan was afflicted with cancer and was available only for a few hours every day. This pained him greatly and he was affected until he heard a devotee ask in his presence, "Bhagavan, I am pained to see you suffer." Bhagavan laughed and said, "The questioner has been listening to the teaching for many years which emphasizes 'I am not the body' and still he says I have got pain. Is this the way to grasp the teaching? Am I the body?" This answer struck a deep chord in Ramsuratkumar's heart and it solidified his earlier experience in Varanasi.



*Yogi Ramsuratkumar's 'Spiritual Haven' ARUNACHALA : Hill and Temple*

In order to be established in this state, Ramsuratkumar went back to his village. Soon afterwards, he left for the Himalayas. In the course of time he felt the clarity he had experienced in Bhagavan's physical presence dimming, just like when the farther one is away from a light, one feels it becoming dimmer. So, he decided to return to South India. It was then that he came to know that both his gurus, Bhagavan and Aurobindo, had dropped their bodies.

On reaching the ashram, he found that he sorely missed the physical frame of Bhagavan. Seeing this, T. K. Sunderasa Iyer guided him to another saint - Swami Ramdas of Kanhangad in Kerala. However, disappointed on his initial visit, Ramsuratkumar went back to his village. He read Swami Ramdas's book, *In Quest of God* and was deeply moved. Slowly, but surely, he was drawn back to Swami Ramdas and returned to Anandashram. On his third visit, Swami Ramdas welcomed him with a big smile and the two shared a heart to heart laugh. He continued pursuing Swami Ramdas, till one day the Swami turned to him intently and asked, "What do you want from me?" Ramsuratkumar asked for initiation and Swami Ramdas agreed on the condition that he should chant the mantra continuously for twenty four hours without cessation. He asked him to be seated and uttered the sacred mantra, 'Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram' three times. This sent Ramsuratkumar into ecstasy and a divine power poured into his being. The *japa* went on continuously for the next three days without a pause. He got attuned to the mantra and this established him in the final state of absolute quietude where the limitations of body

and mind were transcended once and for all. Whenever he recalled this he would state, "This beggar died at the holy feet of Swami Ramdas in 1952 and from that point only God exists for this beggar."

He continued in Anandashram for some time after this. But the divine ecstasy that he was experiencing became a distraction to other ashram residents. They complained to Swami Ramdas who asked him to leave. Ramsurat Kumar prayed, "Where will I go? I do not know how to live in this world, am I to beg?" Pat came the response, "Yes, be a beggar!" Swami Ramdas, with all compassion, added, "Under the shade of a banyan tree only bushes and thorns can grow - another big tree has no room. So, go. But, where will you go?" "To Arunachala," said Ramsurat Kumar. Swami Ramdas was immensely pleased! The Swami gave him the woollen shawl he was wearing. From then on, this woollen shawl became a trademark of Ramsurat Kumar's attire - even in Tiruvannamalai's hottest summer months.

Before he came permanently to Tiruvannamalai, Ramsurat Kumar travelled in ecstasy across India from 1952 to 1959. He spent these seven years visiting shrines of realized saints, all along remaining in an unbroken state of *samadhi*. When he touched the sacred soil of Arunachala, he fully regained his normal consciousness. It was in that normal state that he returned to Ramanasramam in 1959, and this was when I first met him. I was spending time with my teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, when I noticed this dishevelled, unkempt 'madman' in front of me. As the thought flashed across my mind, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer turned to me and said "He is not a madman, he is a yogi. Ganesa, he is a *Siddha Purusha*. He is hungry, so go inside, get some food and give it to him." Food was scarce in the ashram during those days. Despite this, I made it a point to try and feed Ramsurat Kumar whenever possible. Later, he told me that it was T. K. Sundaresa Iyer who named him 'Yogi Ramsurat Kumar' and that from that point on, the name stuck. He lived in a small hut in a neighborhood of the ashram called Ramana Nagar and went walking all over the hill, much like his master Ramana Maharshi. While walking around the hill, I would often chance to see him in the burial grounds, jumping from one tomb to another, chanting, "Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram." During those years, I had many an occasion to have contact with Yogi Ramsurat Kumar. I did not know that there was a spiritual cord that was binding Yogi Ramsurat Kumar and me. Later in 1962, he started living in the temple, and also under a *punnai* tree near the railway station.

I lost contact with him after that point as I was immersed in ashram work - being actively involved with *The Mountain Path*. Still, I sometimes caught sight of him near the bus terminus during my trips to Chennai. He would suddenly appear, hand me a flower and then demand, "Ganesa, please give me a rupee." It was only in 1980, after a gap of several years, that I came into contact with him again. The centenary of Bhagavan's *jayanthi* was being organized at the ashram on a grand scale with lots of celebrations and *poojas*.



Kunju Swami teaching Tamil parayanam - 'Nool Thirattu' - to Anuradha

A group even toured all over the world singing Bhagavan's songs. One day, Yogi Ramsuratkumar met me and said, "Ganesa, the local people of Tiruvannamalai are not in favour of what is happening at Ramanasramam. They are saying that it is a Brahmin institution and only Sanskrit is chanted there. During Bhagavan's lifetime, Tamil *parayanam* from the *Collected Works of Bhagavan* was being sung. Start that again." I tried, but except for two or three old devotees there was nobody who knew the entire *Collected Works*. I avoided meeting him again as he was very persistent with this demand.

He solved this dilemma of starting the Tamil *parayanam* in his own inimitable style. My friend Anuradha had settled in Arunachala in 1983. My brother Mani had also resigned his job and moved permanently to Tiruvannamalai to help with ashram work. Together, they were helping me manage the ashram as its activities had grown significantly. During the Karthikai festival in 1983, Anuradha, Kanakammal (an old devotee of Bhagavan) and I were near the temple witnessing the procession of the huge wooden car. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Yogi Ramsuratkumar came and caught my hand and said, "Ganesa, this beggar has been sending word to you to meet you and ask you to start the Tamil *parayanam*. But you have been avoiding me." He was in his garb of several shawls, carrying a coconut shell bowl, sticks and a large fan. Anuradha was quite frightened with this vision of a 'madman' suddenly accosting me - this was her first *darshan* of Yogi Ramsuratkumar! I admitted that I was avoiding him as I was unable to find someone to take on the heavy task of learning all the *Collected Works of Bhagavan* in Tamil and teaching these to others to do *parayanam*. He instantaneously turned towards Anuradha and said, "She will take up this task!" He then disappeared into the crowd as abruptly as he had appeared. Anuradha, still quite stunned by his dishevelled appearance and the familiarity with which he addressed me, asked, "Who is this madman who accosts you and gives orders to you? What is this Tamil *parayanam* he is referring to?"

Some power must have been transferred from Yogi to Anuradha because she started learning the *Collected Works of Bhagavan* from Kanakammal and Kunju Swami and started singing whatever she had learnt, in Bhagavan's shrine. Many ladies were attracted to her singing because they had never heard Bhagavan's *Collected Works* being sung in the recent past. Whenever Kunju Swami taught Anuradha, he used to say, "You have to learn it by heart otherwise I will not teach you." She soon learned every poem in the *Collected Works* by heart and taught all the ladies who were interested. Ramani, my brother's wife, was especially keen on learning them. Yogi Ramsuratkumar kept himself informed of the progress of the *parayanam*. A few years later, when Anuradha had completed and prepared six days of *parayanam*, Yogi asked her, "How many days of *parayanam* are ready?" When she replied that six days of it were ready, Yogi asked her, "What about Sunday?" Anuradha, who is very bold and quick witted, retorted, "Sunday is Sabbath!" Yogi Ramsuratkumar burst into peals of laughter and said, "Oh, then Sunday will be a rest day." Even to this day, there is no Tamil *parayanam* in Ramanasramam on Sundays!



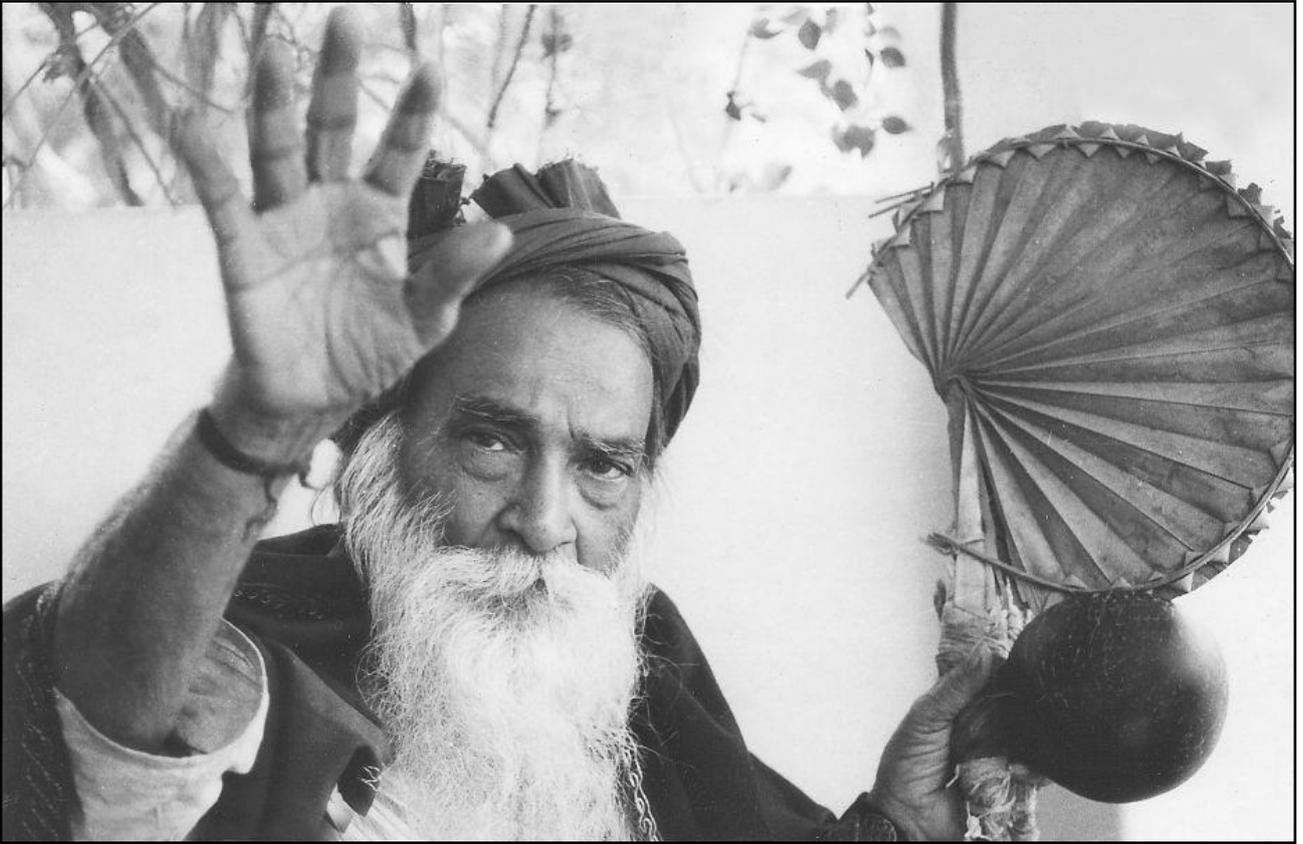
Justice Arunachalam, Ganesan, Anuradha with Yogi Ramsuratkumar

After that meeting, our next interaction was in 1986. I was collecting articles of the reminiscences of devotees of Ramana Maharshi for publication in *The Mountain Path*. Anuradha, J. Jayaraman (the ashram librarian) and I set out to meet Yogi in this regard. Since we were not planning on taking notes, we had decided on recording the meeting surreptitiously. Jayaraman tested the recorder outside Yogi Ramsuratkumar's residence and made sure it was working properly. However, when he tried to operate the recorder in the room it wouldn't work! Yogi Ramsuratkumar started angrily narrating an earlier incident in the day where he was photographed without permission and said, "Ganesa, people have no courtesy these days. They try to photograph or record this beggar without asking him." Jayaraman and I exchanged a look and I mentally apologized for this indiscretion. Immediately, his mood changed and he ecstatically started recounting his experiences with Bhagavan.

"Once, when I was seated in the presence of Sri Bhagavan, he vividly narrated a fascinating story which is also highly significant. There lived a pair of birds by the side of the ocean. Leaving their eggs in their nest, they would fly to far off places in search of food. One day, on their return, they were aghast to find that their nest along with the eggs had been devoured by the waves of the sea. They became very angry with the ocean and in all seriousness vowed that they would empty it, if necessary, in order to retrieve their eggs. They immediately started the operation of emptying the ocean by taking the sea water in their beaks, mouthful by mouthful, and dropping it at a far off place. They did this endlessly without rest and with all earnestness and alertness. Days passed and they were still one-pointedly dipping their beaks into the ocean and flying away to dispose off the water. One day, a great being happened to pass by. Observing the tireless efforts of the two birds, he asked them what they were up to. The birds explained that their eggs had been washed into the ocean and that they were determined to empty it in order to retrieve them. Surprised, the great being exclaimed, 'What! This is impossible! Can you two tiny birds ever hope to empty the ocean, however relentless your efforts may be?' 'What doubt can there be?' replied the birds. 'We are absolutely certain that we shall eventually succeed and retrieve our precious eggs!' Moved by their tremendous faith and devotion, the great being compassionately put his hands into the ocean, found the eggs, and returned them to the overjoyed birds. Sri Bhagavan then said: 'Emptying the ocean is analogous to knowing God. Alone, without grace, it is impossible. But if one has the unshakeable faith and earnestness of the two birds in the story, the guru will appear without fail and fulfill one's spiritual aspirations.'"

"On another occasion, I was thrilled to witness the compassion of Sri Bhagavan. A devotee, Eknath Rao, brought into the hall a bowl filled with fruits cut into pieces and placed it before Sri Bhagavan. Within the large bowl was a smaller bowl with pieces cut specially for Sri Bhagavan. Bhagavan's sense of equality was total and although his tolerance towards devotees was immense, he would never permit anything special for himself. When Bhagavan noticed a separate bowl for himself, he was annoyed and pushed the big bowl aside roughly. A few pieces of fruit spilled on to the floor and were left there. The devotee then began to distribute the pieces to all in the hall. Everyone sat with a few pieces in their hands, not wanting to eat since Bhagavan himself did not have any. Out of compassion for the devotees, Sri Ramana reached down, picked up the pieces that had fallen on the floor and began to eat them. The rest of the devotees were then able to eat too."

Yogi Ramsuratkumar continued, with his narration: "Once, a devotee asked Bhagavan whether a disciple who has not realized can take to another guru after his guru drops the body. Bhagavan replied, 'No, there is no need because the guru's grace and blessings will continue even when the body is dropped.'" Anuradha promptly interrupted and asked Yogi Ramsuratkumar, "If that is the case, why did you go to Swami Ramdas after Bhagavan's *mahasamadhi*?" Yogi Ramsuratkumar looked at her with a benign smile and explained, "The divine fervour that I experienced in Bhagavan's presence began to wane when I left him and went to stay in the Himalayas. Nevertheless, I had begun to see that a higher power was expressing itself, using me as an instrument. Bhagavan Ramana was a principal influence in shaping this beggar to this state. After his passing away, this beggar needed a guru in the body. I did not see any conflict in going to Swami Ramdas. It was Swami Ramdas who initiated this beggar and gave him this madness. The inner life of saints like Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo, J. Krishnamurti and Swami Ramdas is far, far removed from what we can externally perceive of them. They operate rooted in the eternal infinite, which can never be known. There is no individual there to report differences!"



At Ganesan's residence 'Ananda Ramana': "Father's Blessings on you, Ganesa."

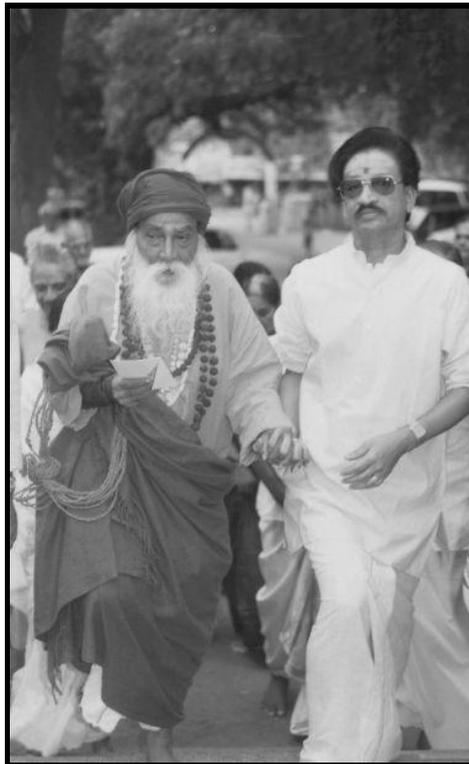
I had the good fortune of interacting with Yogi Ramsuratkumar on several occasions after this. It is no exaggeration to say that he played a pivotal role in my life. The following is an example where he specifically stepped in and resolved a crisis. In 1987, I was caught up in a problem involving a printing press. I was trying to print the ashram publications locally at a lower cost so that we could sell them in our bookstore at reduced prices. A local printer offered to take this responsibility of printing our books if I could help him purchase a printing press. The bank gave him a loan on the condition that I was the guarantor. I agreed without fully understanding the consequences of this. Unfortunately, he defaulted on the payment and the bank manager held me liable to repay the loan. I was bewildered about the situation. As the pressure mounted, I even contemplated suicide. Seeing my increasing desperation and depression, Anuradha suggested that we take this problem to Yogi Ramsuratkumar as many of his devotees were in the printing business.

We met him at his house and Anuradha told him about the problem, "Ganesan is going through a lot of stress with a printing press issue and he wants to commit suicide". Pat came the response: "Ganesa, what did our master Ramana Maharshi teach us? You have to enquire into the source of thoughts and kill the mind and not the body. The body has served you well all these years. Why take it out on the body?" I felt cornered and blurted out, "Let me then run away from Arunachala." With a spark of inquisitiveness in his eyes, Yogi asked me, "Where will you go if you leave Arunachala?" I spontaneously said, "Kashi, swami!" Seeing an opportunity, he asked me with intense enthusiasm, "Will you promise to go to Kashi if the problem is solved?" I expressed my full consent. He then turned to Anuradha and asked her, "Will you be able to do the magazine work in the absence of Ganesa?" She readily agreed. He turned to me and asked, "Tell me what the problem is." Anuradha explained the issue in detail.

One of the traits of Yogi Ramsuratkumar was his intense and complete involvement in any problem that he took up. He went into all the details and after a thorough understanding of the issue, remained silent for a moment, then took out his cigarette packet and wrote 'Om' and gave it to me. He then said, "The name of the person who will help you is one of my devotees, S. P. Janarthanan, and this is his address." He directed me to write down the address on the plain side of the cigarette wrapper. When I contacted him, he came to Tiruvannamalai and without so much as looking at the printing press said, "My master

Yogi Ramsuratkumar has asked me to take this press off your hands and I will pay the entire amount of this press.” I felt instantly relieved. But my relief was short lived as his partners refused to endorse this idea. It took another seven months for him to finally take the press and clear the loan. I felt completely harassed during this time. Yogi continued to be my only support and solace. Finally, the ‘press problem’ was solved. I was ready to fulfill my part of the ‘deal’! With Yogi Ramsuratkumar’s blessings and the help of J. Krishnamurti’s nephew G. Narayan, I retreated to Varanasi for an entire year. Even there, I could feel Yogi’s mystic hand helping me with the staying arrangements. I had a cottage right on the banks of the Ganges and spent a year there with a sense of quietude and dispassion. I felt he was guiding me by freeing me from the continuous involvement in the ashram. It was for the first time after nearly thirty years that I felt a new sense of spiritual independence. I actually felt that I was being weaned away from the *karma* of service to the ashram.

When I came back to Tiruvannamalai, he said, “Mother Krishnabai is on her death bed. Go and see her.” In 1960, it was Mother Krishnabai who had initially guided me to bring back all the old devotees of Bhagavan to the ashram and attend on them. After twenty seven years of doing this ‘work’ I returned to her to report the progress that I had made. I stayed with her for two months. During this time, building on my experiences in Varanasi, I asked her that I be released from life’s further duties. Mother asked me how many old devotees were still remaining in the ashram. I said I had brought back almost fifty or more old devotees, attended on them, completed their funeral services and only two more, Kunju Swami and Ramaswami Pillai, were left. On hearing this, she said, “Ganesa, you have some more work to complete. But, I assure you that I will fulfill your prayer to be a ‘nobody’ and establish you in that state of quietude.”



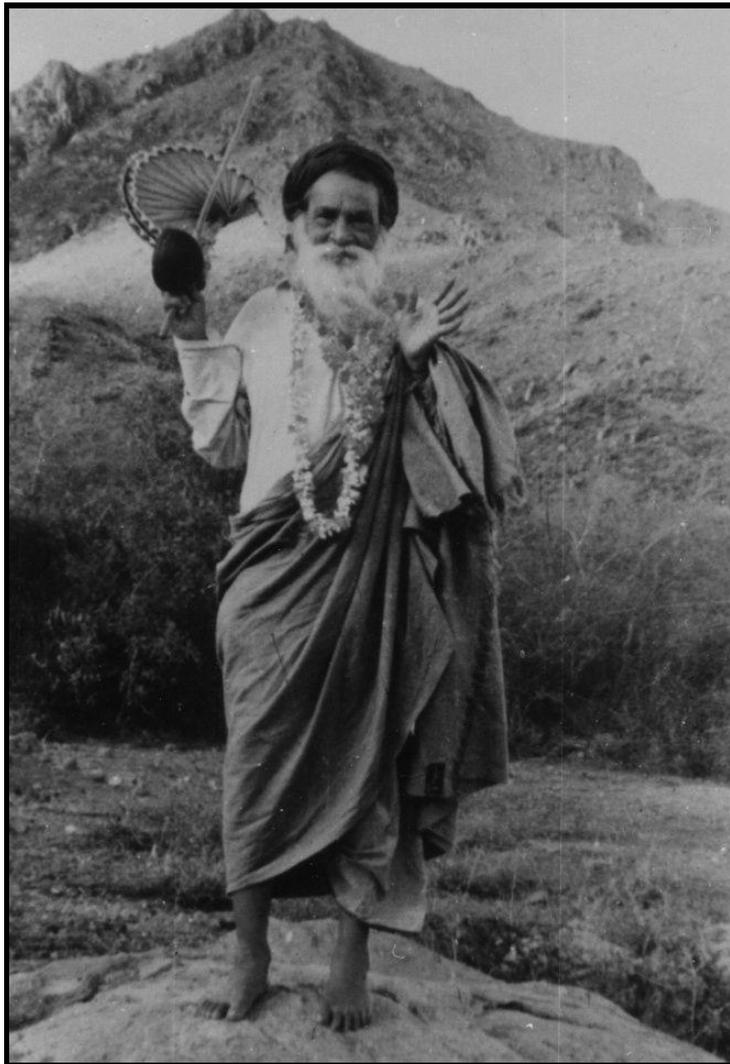
*Ganesan welcoming Yogiji*

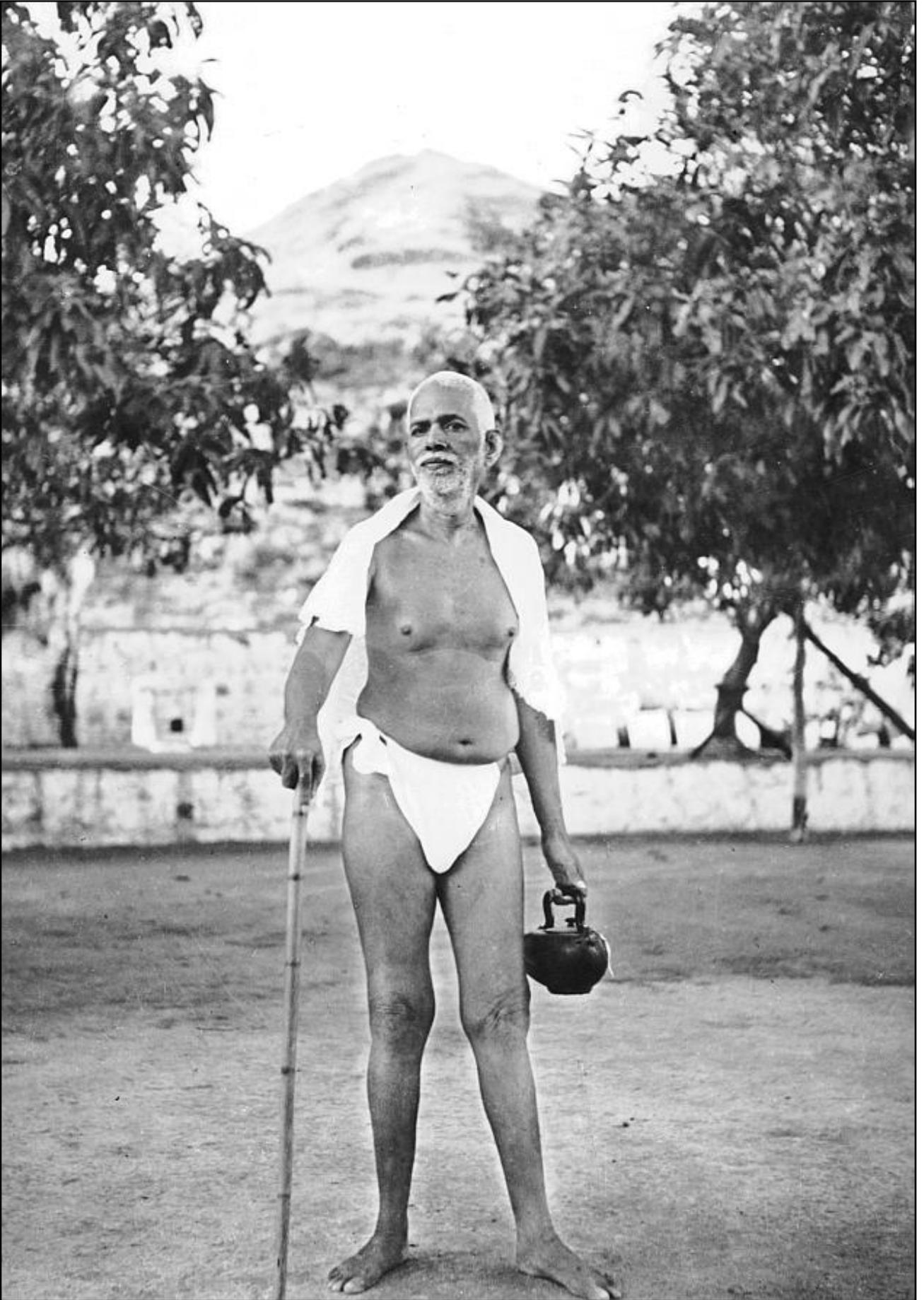
In 1989, I returned to Ramanasramam. Three years later, Kunju Swami passed away. Towards the end of 1994, Ramaswami Pillai also passed away. The very next day I got released from ashram duties. I had already written in *The Mountain Path* about relinquishing all responsibilities in the ashram. I took that issue to Yogi Ramsuratkumar. He read it and then said, “Ganesa, do me a favour.” He held my hand and took me to Ramanasramam to meet my elder brother Sundaram who had already become the president of the ashram. He told Sundaram, “Do not be worried. Bhagavan is managing this ashram. Everyone will help you. Be bold, because the ashram activities will go on uninterruptedly.” He encouraged Sundaram and allowed me to leave.

Soon after, Yogi started building his own ashram. As was his wont, he was intensely involved. Whenever I went and stood in front of him after this, he would say, “Ganesa, we have spent a lot of time together. Go back to your home Ananda Ramana and put Bhagavan’s teaching into practice all the time.” He served as a constant reminder to me of the ultimate goal of one’s spiritual quest. It was his constant prodding to share the teaching and put it into continuous practice that reshaped my spiritual life. There was always the grace of Sri Bhagavan and the blessings of his old devotees, but it was Yogi Ramsuratkumar who moulded my life in many ways. All the travelling and the sharing I have done of Sri Bhagavan’s teachings in the U.S. and elsewhere, was done on his instruction.

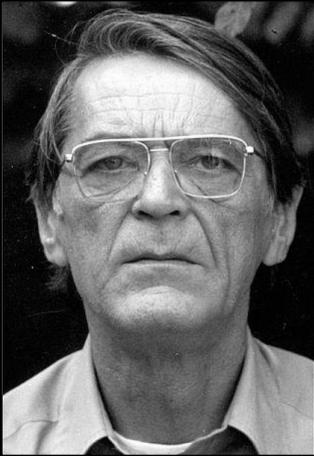
I was with him during his last days in 2001 before he dropped the body. I mentally prayed to him from a distance and he immediately raised his hands and blessed me. After he dropped the body, I carried his body along with the others. When his body was to be interred, I prayed that I get an opportunity to make a final offering to him. Almost immediately, his close devotee, Ma Devaki, requested me to inter his coconut shell bowl, fan and sticks. Yogi Ramsuratkumar continued to fulfill my desires even after he dropped the body!

I want to end this chapter with a recollection that still brings tears to my eyes. It was a Thursday, which in Hindi is called Guruvar. I went and prostrated to him and said, “Today is Guruvar.” He lifted me up and then said, “Ganesa, your guru is Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.” Then, with tears of ecstasy flowing from his eyes, he said, “This beggar’s guru is also Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, Ganesa!” Yogi Ramsuratkumar, ever established in the ‘I AM’, is one of the greatest devotees of Sri Bhagavan and therefore, one of the biggest boulders of Arunachala. Obeisance to Yogi Ramsuratkumar!





## Wolter Keers



Wolter Keers was an admirable devotee of Sri Bhagavan from Holland. Though he had been telling his friends that his death was imminent, he passed away very suddenly on 7th January 1985 in a manner which would be the envy and dream of all devotees of Sri Bhagavan. His friend Menno Blazer was with him during his last days, later joined by another friend. Blazer made some photographs of the snow in the forest as promised to Wolter. It was the coldest winter in 25 years ! Wolter drove Blazer to the railway station on the morning of 7th January as he had to leave for work. A couple of hours later, Blazer received a call from the friend who was with Wolter asking him to return as Wolter was no more ! It seems that on his return from the railway station, Wolter cancelled an appointment on phone, then placed a cushion in front of the photo of Bhagavan Ramana in his living room and stretched himself on the floor before it and he was gone, with a hand placed on his right chest. At his cremation, his favorite composition of Schubert, 'Die Winterreise ', was played.

Wolter was certainly a zealous person because he gave up his body just as a *videha mukta* would do. The Hindu scriptures make a distinction between two kinds of Self realization - *jivan mukti* and *videha mukti*. When a person is in the state of *jivan mukti*, he is in a liberated state of oneness even while he is alive. People who look at him can intuitively understand that here is a realized soul. A *videha mukta* is one who is completely established in a blissful state at the time he leaves the body.

As the managing editor of *The Mountain Path*, I was in close correspondence with Wolter. After its editor, Arthur Osborne passed away in 1970, the editorship was taken up by other scholar devotees and I took on the responsibility of collecting articles for the issues. This is how my association with Wolter developed. He always obliged me by being prompt. Every article was soaked in his individual and personal experience of being immersed in the Self. Whatever we have about Wolter Keers has been obtained from these articles. We are indebted to David Godman for editing and compiling them.

According to Bhagavan, God, the Self and the guru are synonymous and identical. God or the Self chooses a vessel and fills it with divine wisdom. This is done right from the devotee's childhood days. This is something that you must have observed in the previous chapters. Almost all the people mentioned there have been attracted in some form or the other to the truth or to God, or have had an experience of transcending body and mind. Wolter Keers was undoubtedly one such person who was chosen by the Self.

Wolter Keers was born in Holland in a clergyman's family. They were devout Christians. Wolter himself said that such families were rarely found. At the age of five, Wolter had a remarkable experience, which at a later age he realized was a spiritual one. A family friend was visiting and was conversing with them. Being a child, Wolter was not interested in any of the conversation. However, his ears perked up when he heard the words 'British India'. The child was thrilled for some inexplicable reason because he realized that there was something mysterious about it. Though the child had no comprehension of the word, it was a spiritual experience of some kind.

When he was still the same age, Wolter was playing one day outside in the field with mounds of sand. He chanced to see a hedge that had pink flowers with fluffy balls. Suddenly, everything, including the hedge, the flowers, even his body, disappeared into a light. Everything around him was brilliant light. True, he belonged to a family of theologians, but he couldn't bring himself to discuss this experience with any member of his family and ask for an explanation. Until he was twenty one years old, Wolter did not understand that these were spiritual experiences. One day, he was seated next to an elderly man on a bench. The man was reading a book, when suddenly for no reason at all he read out a passage. Wolter did not pay attention to the words, but again everything merged into the same kind of light, just like it had happened when he was five.

In the Hindu scriptures, such a state of transcending the world and everything else is called *nirvikalpa samadhi*. Wolter had experienced this state thrice by the time he was twenty one years old. This time he

was brave enough to ask his family for an explanation. He told them, "This has been happening to me repeatedly." His family brushed his queries aside, saying, "These are bizarre experiences. Do not pay any attention to them." Wolter was disappointed at their response to his genuine queries. He then asked his friends. None of them could understand or even share his thirst to know more about his experiences. He started reading widely to find out more. No book gave him an acceptable answer. Wolter had a strong feeling that there was some reality in the experiences; he also felt that the experiences were actually the source of one's existence and one's body. He understood that this was the substratum on which all existence, the world and everything else in it, was based. And that force was the light of silence.

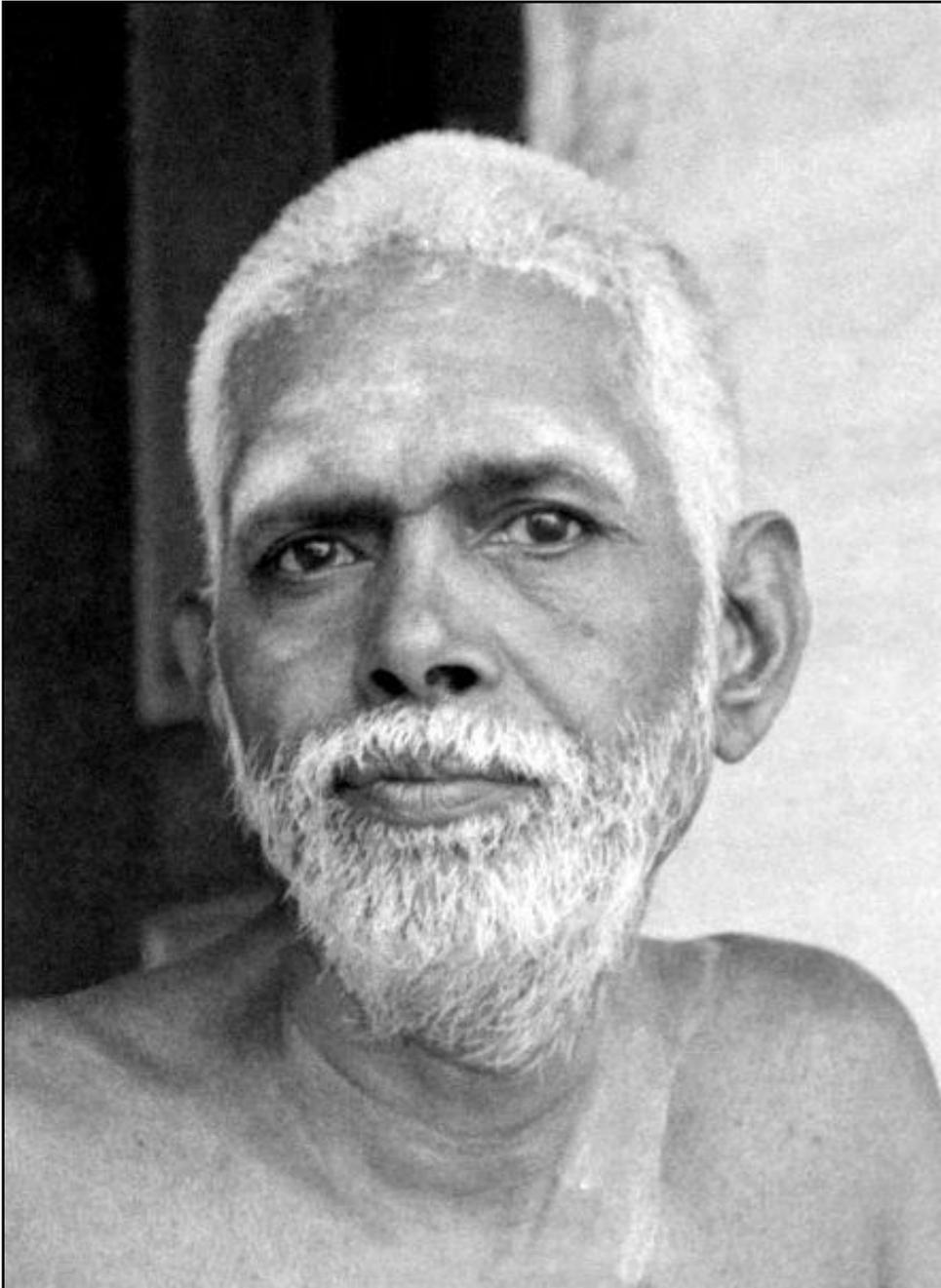
His efforts to find an answer met with no success. Then, a voice inside him whispered, "Perhaps, you have to seek a master who will be able to help you," and the guru also started playing an active role. Within a few days of this feeling, an elderly lady came to his house and lent him two books. She said, "Wolter, read these books." Well, we know Wolter's attitude towards books; he was always disappointed with books. But his respect for the woman compelled him to pick up the books - *Jnana Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda and *The Secret Path* by Paul Brunton. As he read the first book, he was in a state of ecstasy because for the first time the truth of his spiritual experience had been confirmed, though by a Hindu monk. He plunged into the book with great vigour because he found that the book was not only certifying that his experience was a spiritual one, but was confirming it. This was something that neither his relatives nor his friends had been able to do. The book also revealed that it was a common phenomenon for real seekers to have this kind of spiritual thirst right from childhood. The book had the best news for Wolter when he found Swami Vivekananda confirming that the tradition of sages and saints still continued in India. Wolter immediately felt, "I now know that my master is in India. I need not search anywhere else."

With this exultant feeling, he started reading the second book, *The Secret Path*. In this he found a picture of Bhagavan. After the first few pages, he knew that Bhagavan Ramana was his guru, his *satguru*. He took this picture and placed it where he could see it and practised in front of it the various kinds of meditation which he was already following. He felt grace and power flowing from the picture. The book stated that the right side of the chest in the human body is the spiritual centre, the spiritual heart, and that one should concentrate on that. Wolter did this and received good waves and vibrations, confirming the fact that Ramana Maharshi was his guru. However, he was anxious about one thing. The book was many years old. He wondered whether his guru 'would be available in the body'. This was the only craving that he had - to see Bhagavan physically. When he meditated on this heart centre, it seemed to him that the photograph of Bhagavan responded in a mystical way, assuring him, "I am here. You will come to me. Do not worry."

Wolter couldn't go immediately for innumerable reasons - there was World War II, the German occupation, and he had no money. He could leave for India only in the beginning of 1950. The moment he set foot on Indian soil, he left for Arunachala. Roda McIver was his host. It was she who took him to Bhagavan. He entered the ashram with a feeling of awe, respect and intense longing to meet the divine. He was thrilled when he stood in Bhagavan's presence and was also filled with gratitude. He went before Bhagavan and said, 'Thank you, Bhagavan. You have answered all my prayers. I wanted to see you in your physical form.'

Later, he described his first *darshan* of Bhagavan: "I saw Bhagavan sitting on a chair in the small passage that connected his room with the hall. This is where he met visitors and devotees. The mere sight of him made me tremble all over. It was not because of nervousness or uneasiness. It was because I had come face to face with the divine. The recognition affected me so much that my body shook involuntarily. I looked at this being who had been the focus of all my dreams, hopes and expectations for so many years. There could have been a let-down, a disappointing realization that I had come so far just to see an ordinary man sitting in a chair, but this was not so. As I gazed at Bhagavan, I felt I saw God himself sitting there. I felt I was seeing that early morning, a blazing light that had taken human form. It was more radiant than anything I had ever seen before."

Bhagavan turned his attention on Wolter and smiled at him. Wolter felt that the smile meant, "So, finally you have arrived," affirming that Bhagavan had been guiding him from that picture back home in Holland. "Waves of ecstasy inundated me. I feasted my eyes on his form. I looked and looked, soaking up every emanation of this radiance."



Long, long ago, when I was very young, I had believed that God was a magnificent being who had a human form that radiated light and goodness. I had long since abandoned this childhood belief, believing it to be a fairy tale told only to credulous children. Yet, now this childhood belief turned out to be true because here before me was a human form that seemed to be made of light itself. How do I describe what I experienced on that first morning? God became manifest before my eyes, announcing his presence to me by radiating a blazing penetrating light - a light that went right through me like an X-ray."

The beauty of this description is that Wolter was talking about this light and this experience before even knowing that the sacred mountain Arunachala is the hill of the holy fire. Tradition says that Arunachala is wisdom itself. Bhagavan confirms it, "It is the Self." It is the 'I AM' and it is in the form of fire. Jesus talks about fire; Moses talks about fire because it is pure wisdom, the inner wisdom. Arunachala too is the hill of fire, of wisdom. Since humanity had forgotten this wisdom, Arunachala took the human form of Bhagavan in order to spread the truth about Arunachala, the wisdom of 'I AM' across the world.

At that time, Wolter did not know that he was one of the messengers to assist in spreading this wisdom of fire. Western Europe eventually came to know of Bhagavan through Wolter. This was his destiny and

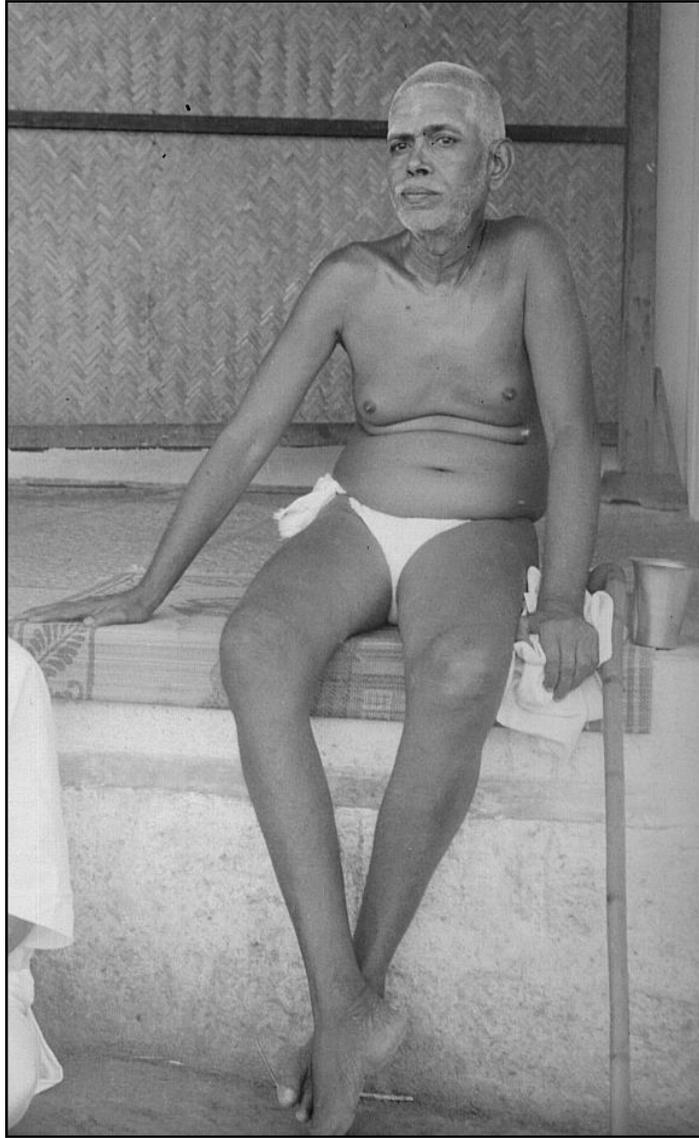
he talked about it without even knowing about it. Any writer or editor has the ability to write flowery language about the master. Wolter said, "Every word I utter is my true spiritual experience. Nothing that comes from my brain can write poetry. It is all horse language." Only Wolter could write like this.

Wolter remained in the presence of Bhagavan, knowing fully well that he was in the presence of divinity. He says about the experience, "Those first few days were the fulfillment of everything I had ever hoped to find. In fact, I can say it was much more than that. I had had lucid, radiant moments in my years of practice, but nothing had prepared me for the possibility of coming into contact with even a portion of this blazing presence of light. No part of my imagination had even conceived that such an experience was possible. There was a radiant power and energy in Bhagavan's presence that effortlessly swept through my mind and matter. His grace silenced my mind, filled my heart and took me to realms that were way beyond the phenomenal. In his radiant presence, it was so evident that I was not the body and not the ego and no such analysis was needed. The light radiating from Bhagavan filled my being, sweeping away all the darkness from me in a stroke." For weeks on end he sat in the presence of Bhagavan, experiencing these waves of ecstasy. He felt the radiance of this light when he was in the presence of Bhagavan, but it seemed to wear off when he went back to his cottage. He strongly felt, "I must ask Bhagavan to make this radiance or ecstasy permanently rooted in me. Bhagavan himself should end the waxing and waning of this experience."

So, one day, he sat away from Bhagavan but from where he could still see him. He then started bombarding Bhagavan with thoughts: "What is the use Bhagavan, of your radiance if it is available to me only in your presence and leaves me the minute I leave your presence? Tell me!" Bhagavan however did not easily give in to these demands. Wolter waged, not a war of words, but a war of hearts. Wolter persevered with the intensity that was characteristic of him even as a child. (This is something that we have to learn from Wolter. Perseverance is a must for us all. It is not enough to have the experience just for a few days.) After some time, Bhagavan slowly turned his attention towards him and smiled, meaning, "What do you want?" Wolter was almost in tears because his prayer to Bhagavan had been genuine, sincere. After some time, Bhagavan looked at him again and focused his gaze, his blessings and his grace so powerfully that it touched his heart. Bhagavan seemed to be saying to him, "Wolter! You are looking for your glasses and they are right on your nose!" He was thrilled by the experience and felt waves on waves of ecstasy. He surmised, "This permanency can never be obtained from outside. Anything that is outside is impermanent; it will come and go. Bhagavan, your guru, confirms that the permanent thing you are seeking is like an everyday experience by saying, 'Your glasses which you are searching for are right on your nose!'" He felt that the answer had come from Bhagavan, the inner guru, but Bhagavan, the external guru was also looking at him intently.

This is how Wolter felt: "Suddenly, Bhagavan's eyes emitted light and fire at me. I can think of no other way of describing that immense explosion in his gaze. His powerful look went straight into me, burning away everything that made me think that I was different and separate from him. I felt the right side heart centre begin to get warm. The heart centre got warmer and warmer as he continued to gaze at me until I felt it to be a hot, fiery ball glowing inside me. It felt as if Bhagavan was charging it with some immensely powerful spiritual electricity because as he continued to look at me, I had the unmistakable feeling that this heart centre was some kind of spiritual dynamo that was emitting sparks of light and energy. I felt as if some enormously potent electric apparatus had been suddenly transplanted into my chest. I sat rigid and straight. My eyes were glued to his. Fire flowed from his glowing eyes into the core of my being. How long this transmission lasted I cannot say. This was beautiful. I had received what I had come for. There was a complete transformation inside out, and it all happened without a word being spoken. That consummation through silence was clearer and more direct than any explanation that could have been given in words. Bhagavan had taken me to the limit of my readiness. I felt that the infusion of grace that Bhagavan had blessed me with on that day would do its own work in its own time. I had received my parting gift from him and I could have asked for nothing more valuable."

Wolter went back to his country even though he was aware that Bhagavan was to drop his body. He did not stay because he knew that Bhagavan was not the body. Bhagavan was the light from the Heart at all times. Later, he returned to India and went to a master in Kerala with whom he spent some years. But, all the time, it was Bhagavan who was his stay, his prop, the centre around which every activity gravitated.



In the 1970's and 1980's, he visited Nisargadatta Maharaj regularly and listened to his *Advaitic* teaching. Yet, he held on to Bhagavan, his *satguru*, in his Heart, feeling his presence in the form of light. He toured Europe widely, delivering numerous lectures. He edited and published many spiritual magazines, showing the practical side of spiritual teaching. Wolter Keers was an outstanding example of the truth that external activities are in no way a hindrance for us to plunge within and be the Self that we always are.

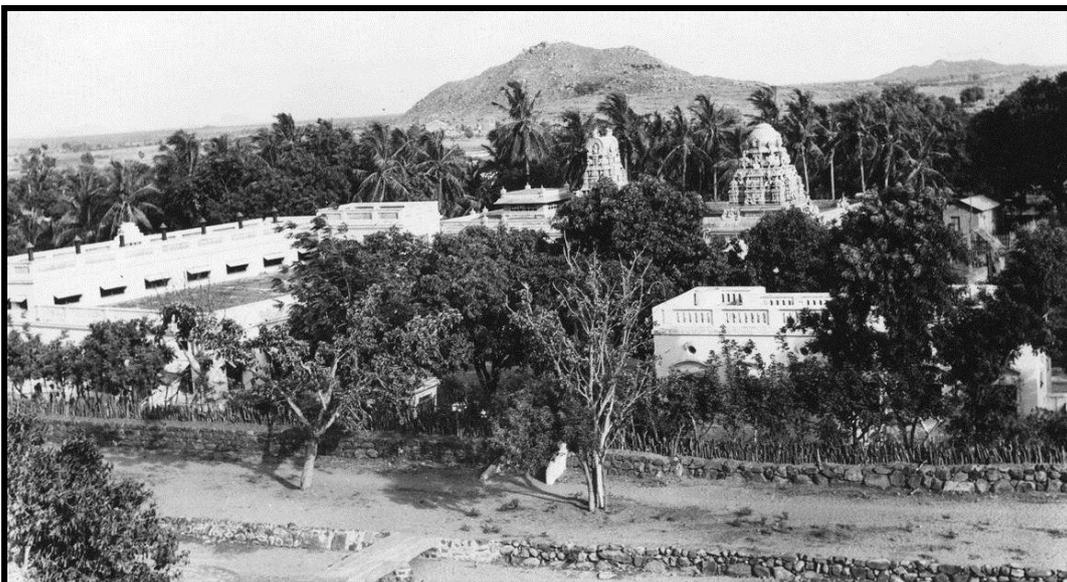
I was fortunate to be in correspondence with such a beautiful devotee. I once asked him, "Wolter, what did Bhagavan mean to you?" This is what he wrote: "What does Bhagavan mean to me? I am asking myself that. What has Bhagavan meant to me and what does he still mean to me? I find that it is impossible to give a neat answer to this question. Well, this is just it. Sri Ramana Maharshi was, and is, the unimaginable and therefore the indescribable. Bhagavan was not the frail, old dying body that I saw reclining on the sofa, but the unimaginable; he was egoless and pure radiance; and the body, however much we loved its appearance, was merely like a glittering diamond reflecting the light that really was. I did not understand all this when I first arrived. To me, he was something like a divine person and I was inclined to compare him with Jesus Christ or the Buddha. But Jesus Christ or the Buddha were images in my head formed on the basis of the beliefs I had been brought up on, and all the stories heard and read later on. But Ramana Maharshi, from the first moment I saw him, was anything but an image. He was a bomb exploding the myth of my life within a few minutes and without a word. His famous question, 'Who am I?' immediately got a totally new colour. It was only three or four years later that the full impact of what his silence had revealed to me became clear. Perhaps these two words 'my own' and their inverted commas indicate the problem. Bhagavan never gave anyone the possibility to believe

that you as a person could realize the truth. The axis, the central point in the *sadhana* that he proposed to most of us, was the invitation to examine *who* put forth the questions? *Who* came to see him? *Who* wanted to realize?"

"Once Bhagavan asked someone, 'How do you know that you are not realized?' This was a counter question to what the person had said: 'I am not realized.' Bhagavan asked, 'How do you know you are not realized?' If you ponder over it, you will find that this question is like an earthquake. *Who* says so indeed? So, pondering deeply over this question, one cannot but come to the conclusion that Sri Bhagavan told us the plain and naked truth when he said, 'The Self is always realized.' When it is seen that every perception, sensorial or mental, is nothing but a movement in consciousness, a movement in light, then from that moment on, every perception chants the glory of this clarity just as one can see a wave, any wave, as a song of the sea. Whatever I understand now, is entirely my good fortune in meeting the right person, the embodiment of truth, at the right time at several points in my life. I received all of it free. I never had to pay a penny. Authentic teaching is always free except in one way. You pay for it with the depth of your personality. This implies that you must be prepared to give up everything that you have ever considered as yourself."

"Bhagavan has never given me anything. When I arrived, regarding myself as a poor man in need of help, he revealed to me that I was more than a millionaire and the source of all beings. Bhagavan has never asked anything from me, not even my love or respect. It was his mere presence that uncovered or unleashed in me what cannot be described by words such as love or respect. It went deeper than the deepest feeling. My meeting with him was in no way a matter of giving and receiving. Even though for a long time I had thought that he had given me his love, and that I had given him my heart, it was the naked confrontation of illusion and truth in which illusion could not stand up. It was wiped away, but not because he wanted it. He wanted nothing and accepted me as I was. He did not wish to change me. He saw me as a whirlpool of light in an ocean of light. Perhaps it was the radiant certainty that he was, that broke through my fears and desires and enabled me to let go of the desire to enrich an imaginary me. Bhagavan was what he was, and Bhagavan is what he is and because of that I can say certainly now I AM what I AM. Does it not mean to say that just being who he was, Bhagavan enabled me to realize the timeless, unthinkable unimaginable 'I AM'? Bhagavan is the stillness; Bhagavan is the silence. These two last sentences should become each one's life. Every moment we have to remember that the light is within each one of us."

The greatness of this *mukta purusha* is that he lived from his childhood for the truth. He strove for it, and when he sought it, the guru came as the sentence in *The Secret Path* says, "When the disciple is ripe, the guru will appear." Let us turn within as Wolter did. On the right side of one's chest is the light within. Close your eyes and see the brightness there. That is the glimmer from the Self!



Sri Ramanasramam viewed from the Hill



*Nagalakshmi and family with Sri Bhagavan*

## Nagalakshmi



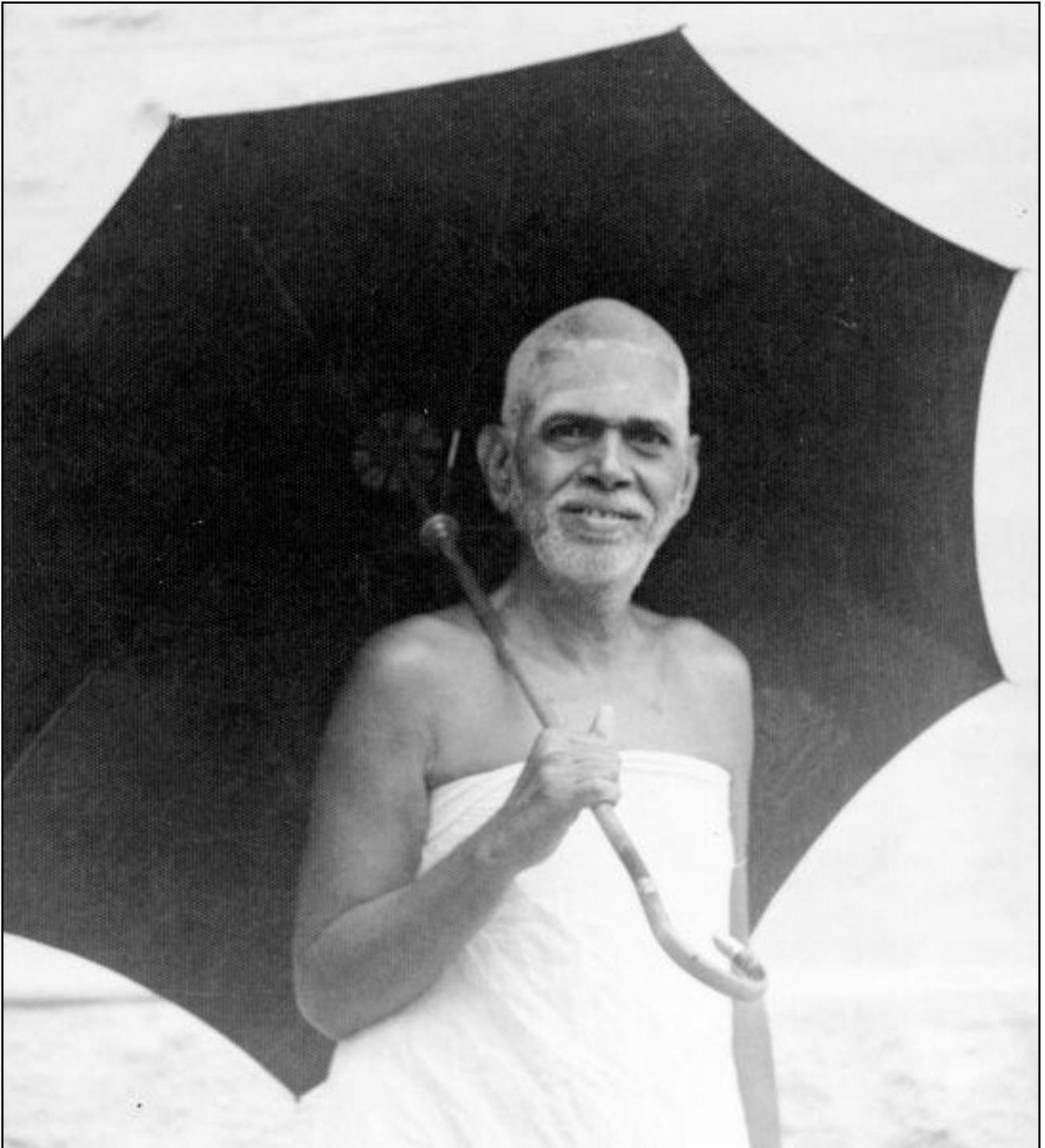
My mother Nagalakshmi was a simple village girl who lived far away from Arunachala. She was a playful child who probably studied only till the third or fourth grade. She was married to my father T. N. Venkataraman at the age of thirteen. My father was Bhagavan's nephew. My mother too was related to Bhagavan. However, she was unaware of it at that point of time. (My maternal grandfather was Bhagavan's maternal uncle.) It was Alamelu Ammal, Bhagavan's sister and also my father's foster mother, who revealed the greatness of Bhagavan to her. During her wedding, Nagalakshmi told Alamelu Ammal that she wanted to see Bhagavan. Alamelu Ammal gave her the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* in Tamil, which at that time was an abridged version, and said, "When you memorize all the verses in this book, I will take you to Arunachala to see Bhagavan."

Taking this to heart, my mother completed the task of memorizing the verses within a few weeks. Although she did not comprehend its philosophical content, it struck a spiritual chord. In 1930, one year after her marriage, at the age of fourteen, she got the opportunity of having Bhagavan's *darshan*. Bhagavan gave her a long look. Later on, she told me that the look conveyed the message, "Did it take you so long to come to me?" Other chosen devotees of Bhagavan have also had the same experience when they first stood in front of Bhagavan - a sure indication that they belonged to his orbit. Yet, he treated all alike - everyone was his kith and kin. The uniqueness of Bhagavan lay not only in his spiritual status, but also in the warmth of his interpersonal relationships. He had the deepest fraternal affection for his sister and great reverence for his mother. As far as us grandchildren were concerned, he was not like Bhagavan or a teacher, but like a natural grandfather gently commanding us and telling us what to do. He would frequently call out to us, "Come here. Sit down!" In those days though, it was customary for the daughter-in-law to be rather reserved with the father-in-law and vice versa. That was the reserve that Bhagavan also maintained with my mother. However, just by his look and presence he bestowed spiritual bliss on my mother. She was firmly in the net of his Grace.

My father got a job that took him further south and naturally my mother also accompanied him. My mother prayed to Bhagavan for his continued spiritual presence. Bhagavan's blessings are of course a token of his spiritual presence. When a son, the first of her seven children, was born in 1934, he was taken to Bhagavan, who named him Sundaram. Sundaram is the present president of Ramanasramam. The next child was me. I was born in 1936. When I was taken before Bhagavan, he said, "He has not given me the problem of naming him because he has been born with a name." This was indeed true because I was born on Ganesh Chaturthi, Lord Ganesa's birthday! I was thus named Ganesan. Similarly, Bhagavan also named all my other siblings. My younger brother was named Subramanian (which is the name of Lord Ganesa's younger brother), and my four sisters were named Lakshmi, Azhagammal, Mangalam and Saraswati.

In 1938, when I was two years old, our entire family shifted to Arunachala. We lived in the town. Though my mother was caught in the whirlwind of household work and looking after our family, she still somehow made time for spiritual *sadhana*. She taught us to look at Bhagavan as God and also taught us to imbibe whatever we could of his powerful spiritual presence. Of course, at that time we were unable to understand the full implication of what she meant. When seated in the hall, Bhagavan would be rather reserved and stern with my mother.

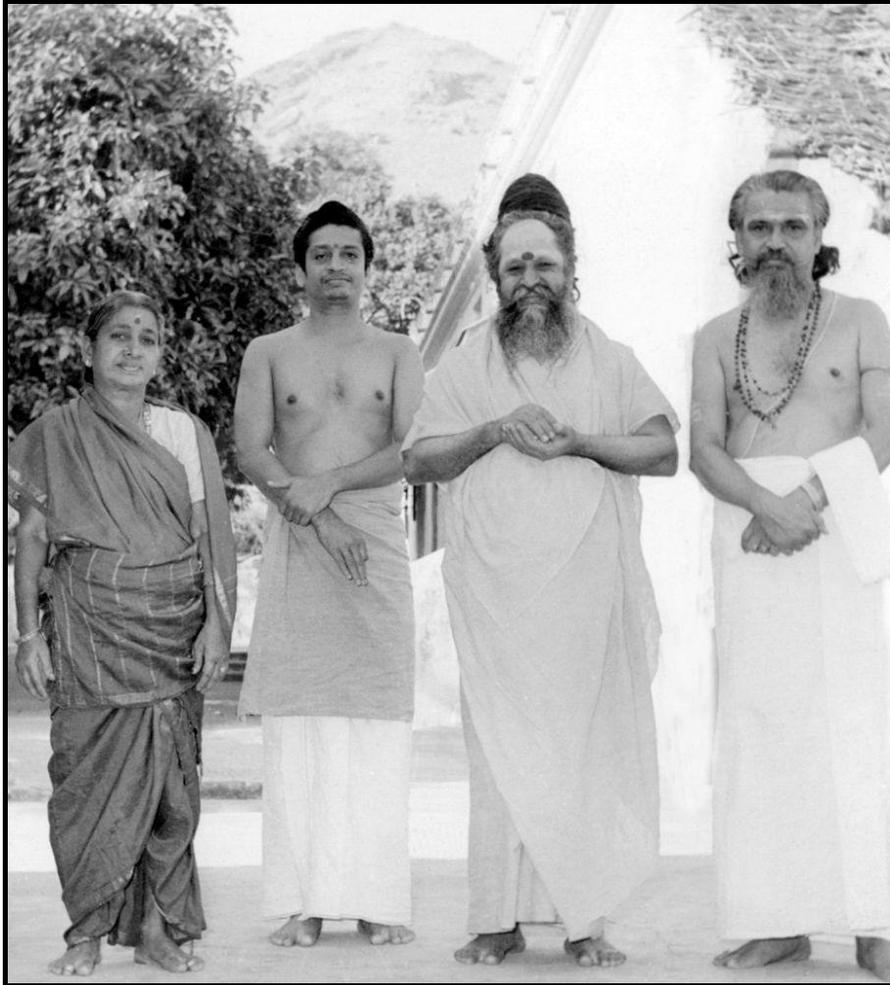
The women who cooked in the kitchen were eager to have Bhagavan's blessings. They would come to the ashram from town by five in the morning. By the time they finished the day's work, it would be six in the evening. This would leave them no time to seek out Bhagavan in the hall and listen to his words of wisdom. So, Bhagavan would come to the kitchen some time between twelve and two in the afternoon, in the guise of giving them advice on what to cook for the night, but in reality to share spiritual



teachings with them. Since these women wanted my mother also to receive these, they would ask my mother to stay on. As soon as Bhagavan entered the kitchen, the women would immediately ask her to prostrate before Bhagavan. Many years later, my mother shared with me three pieces of pragmatic advice that were given by Bhagavan to her.

When families came to Ramanasramam, the ladies and children would spend the night at our house since they were not allowed to stay on in the ashram after nightfall. My mother would look after them. (Some women devotees stayed at Echammal's house too.) On one occasion, when my mother herself was very young, a young woman and her parents came to our house. This woman was nineteen - around the same age as my mother. She had tragically lost her husband at that tender age. My mother and she became good friends. One day, both of them went to the ashram pool for a bath. After bathing, the young woman wore what my mother thought was a beautiful sari. My mother said appreciatively, "Your sari is very beautiful." It was just a spontaneous and genuine compliment.

However, when the young woman went back, she sent a parcel addressed to my mother. The parcel had two such saris. In those days, everything that came by post, even if addressed to individual devotees, was handed over to Bhagavan. Bhagavan in turn would distribute them to the devotees who would accept them gratefully as *prasad*. That afternoon, when Bhagavan walked into the kitchen he looked very stern. When my mother prostrated before him, he said, “We have come to live in the ashram. We should be content with what we have. Many wealthy people will visit the ashram wearing expensive clothes and jewellery. We should not be taken in by such glamour. When we see them wearing these things, we should get the feeling that we ourselves are wearing them. Leading a state of no desire is the best way to live here. Then, one can live without being disturbed by external additions, subtractions, attractions and distractions. Be content! Never aspire for that which is not yours!” Heartbroken, my mother started crying. The women cooks sided with her and pleaded with Bhagavan, “Nagu is not at fault; she did not ask for the saris. They sent them of their own accord. Bhagavan, she is crying!” Bhagavan then turned to my mother and said, “It is all right. It has been said for your own good.” All her life my mother remembered this teaching and imparted it to us too. Such were the directives given in the kitchen by Bhagavan. My mother was attending to her husband, bringing up her children and also looking after people who came home. Yet, she was attuned to Bhagavan’s teachings. Although her body and mind were attending to her worldly duties, her heart was always tuned to Bhagavan. This was the attitude of my mother; and, senior devotees like Kanakammal and Kunju Swami vouchsafed this.



*(l to r) Nagalakshmi, Ganesan, Swami Santananda, T N Venkataraman*

One day, Bhagavan told my mother, “Great ascetics, saints and sages often visit Arunachala to go round the hill. Their spiritual lustre always attracts people towards them. In order to avoid this and go round the hill undisturbed, they take on the form of madmen or beggars. So, whenever someone stands in front of the house and claps his hands for food, give whatever you have without hesitation or delay. Do not judge them.” My mother followed this teaching of Bhagavan most ardently. Beggars and *sadhus* were never turned away from our house.

The third *upadesa* was even more significant because it was directed exclusively at my mother. One day, Bhagavan entered the kitchen in a rather pensive mood. Old devotees have said that it was very difficult to go anywhere near him when he was in such a contemplative mood. The cooks hesitated to go before him. Just as the child Prahlada was pushed in front to stand before Lord Vishnu when he appeared in the fierce form of Narasimha - half lion, half man - the cooks pushed my mother before Bhagavan. She prostrated as usual. Bhagavan began saying, "If one dies unconsciously, then it is a sure sign of the soul entering another body. If one dies consciously, then there is a possibility that there is no birth for that soul. This does not mean that all those who die consciously will not be reborn. While actively alive, one should remember to die consciously. In order for that to happen, one should relentlessly pursue a life of surrender. The guru will never forsake one who has fully surrendered."

Of the three *upadesas* that my mother got from Bhagavan, the first one was on how to live. The second was on how to apply oneself to life; and the third was how to depart from the world. All these three are precious and invaluable for all seekers in general. The cooks were delighted with the knowledge they had gained and told my mother, "Because of you, we have also got this special teaching. Bhagavan has never spoken about this to anyone else before. It has been done exclusively for you. Preserve it in your heart." My mother adhered to these teachings of Bhagavan till the last moments of her earthly life. My mother understood Bhagavan's teachings on two dimensions. One was on the level of learning by heart all the verses of the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. She was aware of the power of the holy words of the master and so she encouraged us to study the *Collected Works*. On the second level, she understood the importance of *giri pradakshina* or going round the hill. Until the day she became seriously ill and bedridden, she practiced this diligently.



*With grandchildren*

After I came away to the ashram in 1960, I would work there till eight at night, go home to have dinner served by my mother and then go round the hill. For several years I did it alone. My mother is my *upaguru* for she showed me Bhagavan even while I was in the crib by singing the following Ramana lullaby (the third song in *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*) to me:

“Of bright gold form, full blown lotus faced one! Personification of rare realization, spreading fragrance all over the earth! Having heard of your fame, poor as I am, I looked for you throughout the world and reached you here, my gracious Lord! Wise Ramana, hill of light. (1)

“Oh Brahmin who dwells in Virupaksha Cave on the sacred hill of light called Sonagiri! Oh primordial, eternal treasure, oh Ramana, the pure! Make me your own without testing me. You are indeed the Supreme Being!” (2)

“Let me place your soft, holy feet on my head, at this very moment, to gain the life free from pain and be cured of the disease of recurring births! Ramana, reborn in Self, living silent in Arunachala, unknown even to the Gods, tell me when I shall attain you, oh pupil of my eyes!” (4)

“Lord Ramana! I sought your holy feet. You are knowledge untiring, silence and the supreme thing beyond thought. Your heart is the centre that unifies the individual and the supreme. You are the ultimate reality that endures beyond birth and death.” (9)



*With Sri Bhagavan's sister Alamelu*

At that time I did not understand Bhagavan, the guru or the Self. But it was this lovely lullaby extolling Bhagavan that sowed the seed of awareness of him in me, and finally guided me to remain at the lotus feet of my master.

When I was around one and a half years old, my mother often had me in her lap when we were in Bhagavan's hall. Then, she would slowly push me in the direction of Bhagavan's sofa so that I could crawl towards him. I would try and climb up the sofa but the attendant would pick me up and place me back on my mother's lap. This was a daily occurrence. One day, I moved towards the sofa and just climbed up. Bhagavan, who had been watching all this, supported me with his left leg lest I tumble down. He pressed his right foot on my head, remarking, “He has been making an effort every day to achieve this. Today, there have been no hurdles. He has succeeded.” I was able to get this *prasad* of Bhagavan's holy feet on my head because of my mother. My mother, who showed me the real Bhagavan, would always declare, “I only gave birth to your body. Bhagavan is your true mother.” In this manner she trained me to have true Bhagavan consciousness.

My father had a light stroke in 1965, leaving his right side slightly paralyzed. Dr.T.N. Krishnaswami who came down from Madras and attended on him called me aside and said, “Ganesan, this is his second attack. I did not inform anyone of the first attack he had. A third attack may prove fatal. Please take good care of him.” Feeling as if a bolt of lightning had struck me, I ran to my mother and informed her. Totally unperturbed, she very calmly said, “Go to Bhagavan’s shrine and pray there.” I did as she advised and also told Bhagavan what had happened. In those days, the shrine of Bhagavan was just a thatched shed in the midst of a lot of open space. I would sleep outside the shrine on a plain mat with neither pillows nor sheets. I used to enjoy the experience. Bhagavan appeared in my dreams three or four times and each time it was crystal clear - almost like I was in the waking state. This time too, it was a lucid dream. Bhagavan enquired, “Ganesa! Why are you crying?” I told Bhagavan that perhaps my father would die and to me that would be unbearable. Bhagavan answered, “There is nothing to worry.” Then, Bhagavan put out his hand in which there were three wood apples (*Feronia Limonia*) - a fruit found in India. Handing over a wood apple to me, he said, “Give it to Venkato (my father’s pet name). Ask him to eat it.” He then gave the second one to me and said, “Give this to Nagu (my mother’s pet name) and ask her to eat it.” Handing over the third wood apple, he said, “You eat this yourself. Everything will be all right.” I woke up from my dream. It was two in the morning, but I ran home to my mother and told her about the dream. We tried to get wood apples the next morning but we were not successful. When we were able to buy them after a few days, we followed Bhagavan’s instructions precisely. Needless to say, my father fully recovered and never had a third attack. In fact, he lived in good health up to the ripe old age of ninety three and passed away in 2007 . When I told Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami about the dream, he started prescribing wood apples to his patients with similar ailments, along with their other medicines. My mother’s unshakeable faith in Bhagavan and her advice to me were without doubt instrumental in my having this life saving dream.



My mother got cardiac asthma in 1980. She was suffering severe pain and was admitted to the local government general hospital. However, there was no suitable treatment for her condition. Even oxygen cylinders were not available in the hospital. During that time, instead of going around the hill at night as I usually did, I used to sleep in the hospital at night and return around four in the morning to the ashram. On one such night, the chief doctor called me aside and warned me, “Your mother’s condition is critical. She will die. Take her to a bigger hospital in Chennai.” Although he spoke in a low voice, my mother had an idea of what the doctor told me. She called me and asked, “What did the doctor say?” I had no choice but to tell her. She said, “Give me your word on two things.” I nodded. She continued, “First promise me that under no circumstances will you take me away from Arunachala. My guru, Bhagavan, came to Arunachala and never left this place until he dropped his body. Likewise, do not allow anybody to take me away from here, no matter what the circumstances are. Secondly, I must die when I am in a state of full consciousness. Please allow that to happen because if I die in that state,

then I may not have any rebirth. Even if I scream in sheer agony, do not allow the doctors to give me morphine or any other sedative. Let my body suffer outwardly. Inwardly, I will have merged in silence.” I kept my promises even though the doctors chided me, “You are an educated fool. You claim to love your mother, but you are a *rakshasa*, a demon. Just look at her plight!” I bore it all without uttering a word.

Before she left us, I prostrated before her and entreated, “Mother, are you going to leave me? What will I do?” I wept uncontrollably. She tried to soothe me, saying, “Do not cry. Be happy! The body has to die one day. Do not give such significance to this body. Shift your focus from my body to my state of being. Inwardly, I am immersed in peace. The being transcends both the body and the mind. Cling to the ever free being and allow the body and the mind to fade away as they should. By not pampering them, they remain your servant. You become the master when you start paying sole attention to your inner being. My blessings are with you.” My mother further blessed me by adding, “Bhagavan will bless you. I gave you only your body. Bhagavan is your true mother.” With her third blessing she said, “Serve Bhagavan faithfully by practicing his teaching. His grace is his teaching.” When I sobbed uncontrollably, she comforted me by saying, “I constantly feel Bhagavan’s holy presence, Ganesa - that is enough for me.” She passed away fully conscious in the midst of all her kith and kin at the foot of Arunachala. I helped carry my mother’s body and we performed the final rites. My mother was a devotee who was a truly realized soul.

Kunju Swami, an ardent old devotee of Bhagavan told me about her, “All the residents at the ashram, irrespective of age looked on her as their mother. As a matter of fact, the material prosperity of the ashram increased with the coming of Nagalakshmi to the ashram in 1938. Therefore, she is our Mahalakshmi (the goddess of prosperity and wealth).” A mystic French lady, Mrs. Theresa Regos, who at the time was living up on the hill, later told me, “On the day your mother departed, I was on the hill. I saw a ray of light passing over the temple in broad daylight ! I suddenly thought of your mother Nagalakshmi. I felt that she must have realized oneness with Arunachala. Nagalakshmi has merged with Arunachala, the eternal Self.”



*A special occasion of the fortunate couple*

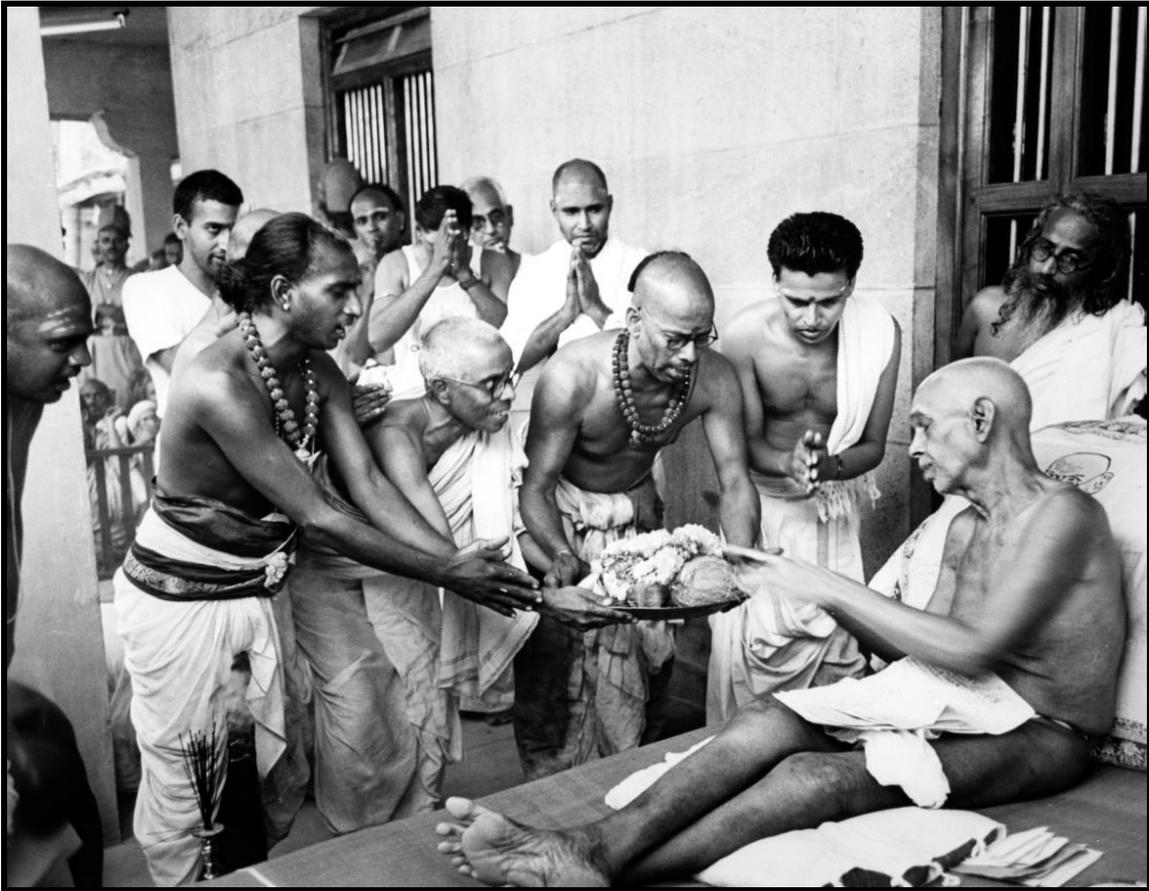
## In Gratitude

The Heart is filled with gratitude for the more than seventy old devotees, who still throb alive within the deepest core of my being. Though they also spoke to me about themselves, the main stream was about their devotion, dedication and total surrender to *satguru* Bhagavan Ramana. I feel blessed that I could successfully share with you, dear reader, such face-to-face conversations through these pages. My Heart continues to express a deep sense of gratitude to these remarkable gems of devotees who flocked to the sacred feet of the great master, and with most of whom I had close contacts. Equally, my gratitude goes to those old devotees I have not written about in these pages. Indeed, they are in no way less significant than those that I have written about. The list of these 'unwritten' devotees is probably longer: Grant Duff, David McIver, Dr. Mees, Duncan Greenlees, Miss Merston, Mrs. Roda McIver, Mrs. F. Taleyarkhan, Rani Prabhavati Raje, Rani Padmavati Devi, Sujata Sen, Arvind Bose, Dilip Kumar Roy, Harindranath Chhattopadhyaya, , Kumbakonam Rengaswami Iyengar, Vasudeva Sastri, Raju Sastri, Kapali Sastri, Ramanapadananda, Madhava Swami, Krishnaswami, Kumara Swami, Rengaswamy, Vadivudayar Swami, Santhanam Iyengar, 'Hall' Natesa Iyer, 'Barber' Natesan, 'Paraiyan' Veeran, Polur Ranga Rao, Gopala Rao, Seshu Iyer, N.N. Rajan, Girdhalur Subba Rao, Girdhalur Sathyanarayana Rao, Girdhalur Sambasiva Rao, G.L.Narsimha Rao, Swami Rajeswarananda, Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, Prof. K. Swaminathan, P.V. Somasundaram, Sadhu Om, Dr. S. Nath, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Dr. S. Srinivasa Rao, Gudipati Venkata Chalam, Souris, Dr. K. Subramaniam and others.

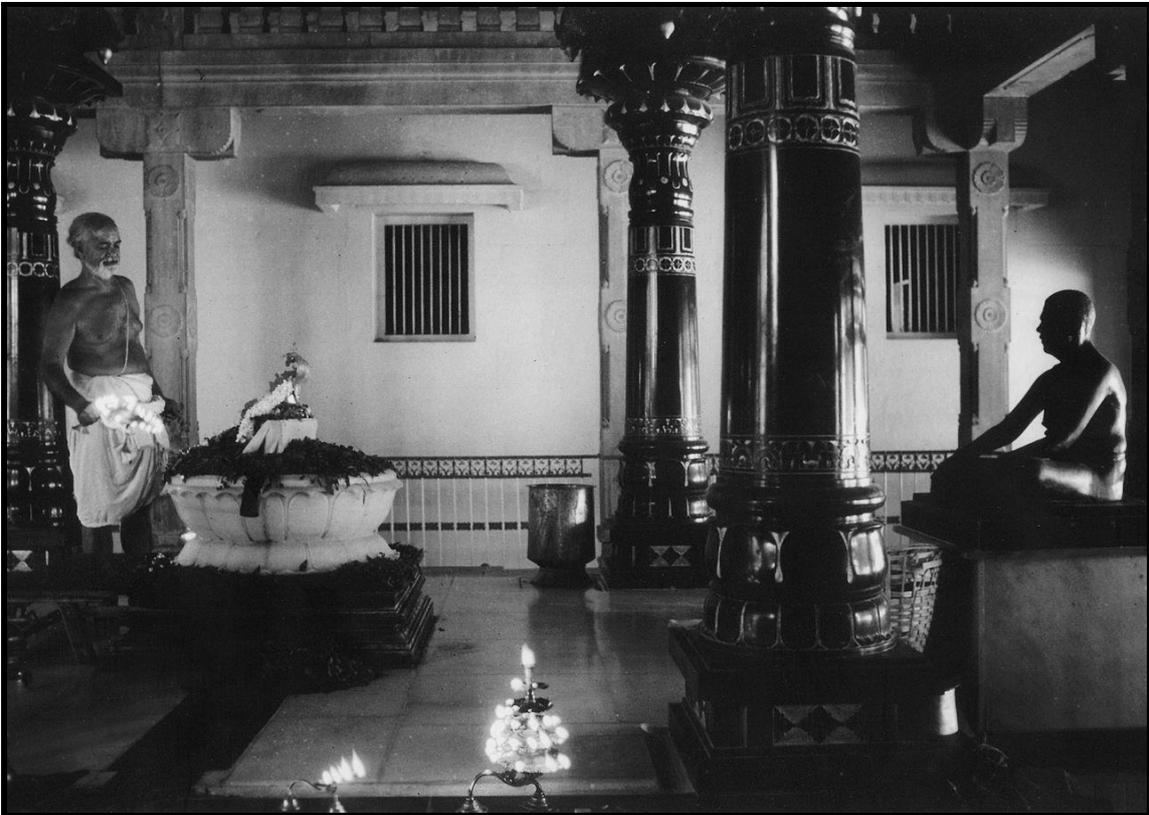
Latest, but not the least in importance, is Kanakammal who dropped her body on January 1, 2010, in Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall, soon after entering it by the northern door, on Sri Bhagavan's Jayanthi Day! To my knowledge, no one else had that unique, blessed privilege of getting absorbed in Arunachala near the Bhagavan's shrine of grace itself!

My Heart expresses very deep gratitude to all of them, for blessing me, yet not enabling me to write about them in this volume. Perhaps, they will bless me to write about them in a later volume – by Bhagavan's grace.

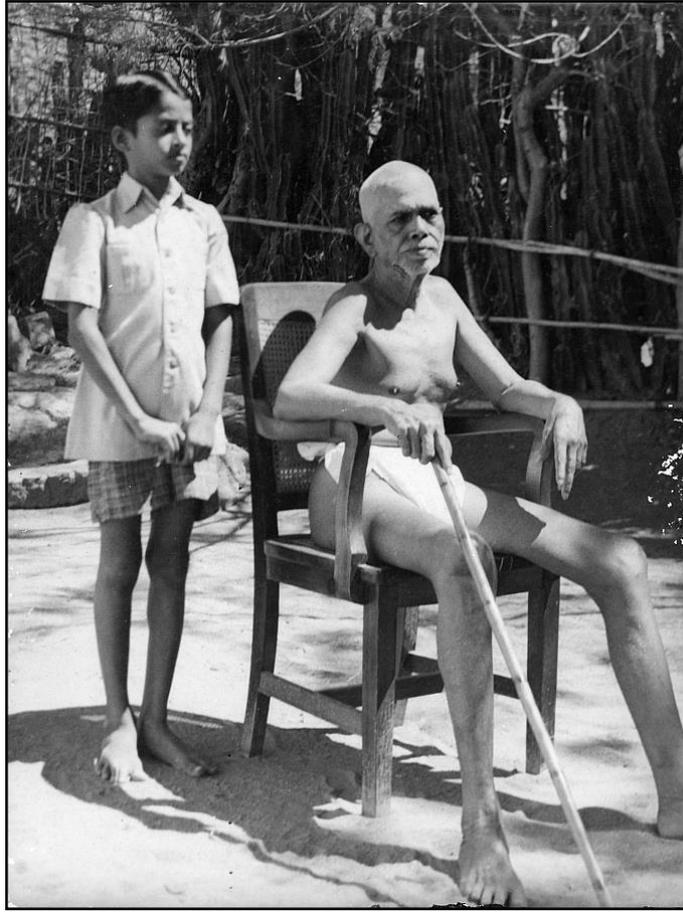
*Ramanarpanamastu*



*Blessings from Sri Bhagavan*



*Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's Samadhi (Sacred Shrine of Silent Grace)*



*Ganesan and Ramana Maharshi*

Born in 1936, upto the age of 14, Ganesan grew up in the presence and proximity of his grand uncle, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. His sacred memory of the Master is rich in its content; and, even at that tender age he could see Sri Ramana as the greatest compassionate human being. On April 14, 1950, the day the Master chose to leave the body, the adolescent Ganesan stood near the entrance to the room where Sri Ramana was lying and was fortunate to see the brilliant flash of Light, which later moved towards the top of the Holy Hill, Arunachala.

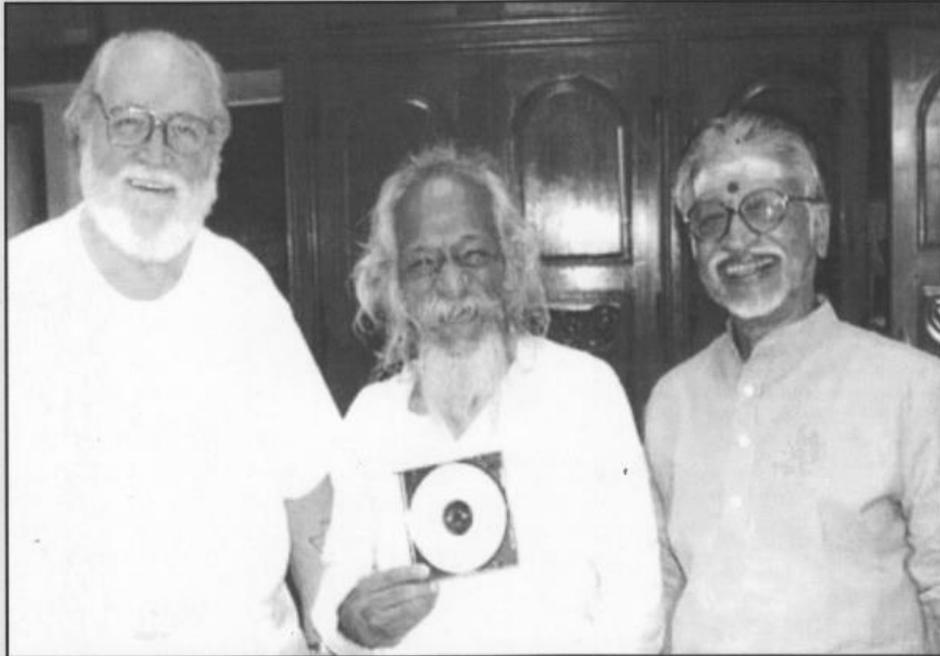
Ganesan obtained a Master's Degree in Philosophy; and, then came to Sri Ramanasramam for good, looking after the old devotees of Sri Ramana, as his *sadhana* (spiritual practice). In this way, he collected reminiscences of Sri Maharshi never before recorded.

His close contacts with sages and saints, including J. Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta Maharaj and Yogi Ramsuratkumar, he says, has deepened and widened his understanding of the essence and true message of the Maharshi. He, however, feels himself to be an insignificant dust at the Holy Feet of Bhagavan Ramana.

For thirty five years, Ganesan was the Manager of Sri Ramanasramam and the Managing Editor of *The Mountain Path*, the ashram's journal. For six years (upto 1994), he was its Chief Editor, as well. All these unique experiences have blessed him with an incredible ability to present the relationship old devotees had with Bhagavan in this latest book, *Ramana Periya Puranam*. V. Ganesan has previously authored *Be the Self, Moments Remembered, Purushottama Ramana, The Direct Teaching of Bhagavan Ramana* and *Drops from the Ocean*.



*Sri Bhagavan's Lotus Feet*



*(Left to right) A. Ramana (AHAM's founder), KVS and Ganesan at AHAM's India Ashram (Releasing the CD of the talk on Maurice Frydman)*

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