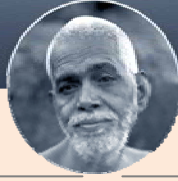


Saranagathi

IN THIS
ISSUE

CONTENTS

Dear Devotees,

Navaratri was celebrated with usual fervor and gaiety at the Ashram. The festivities were covered extensively on our Ashram website. Please visit <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/navaratri2010.html> to view photographs and video footage of each day's puja.

In this issue of Saranagathi we start a new series on inspiring women devotees of Sri Bhagavan beginning with Mother Azhagammal. This is followed by Sri K.K. Nambiar's account of how he was drawn to the Maharshi. The issue concludes with reports on recent happenings at the Ashram.

As always we welcome your feedback and suggestions.

Please send your emails to

saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan

The Editorial Team

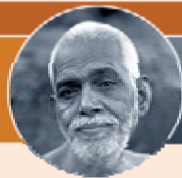
In This Issue	1
The Essence of Instruction	1
Mother Azhagammal	2
Maharshi's Gospel	3
How I came to the Maharshi - K. K. Nambiar	4
Reports from Sri Ramanasramam	6

The Essence Of Instruction

Abiding in this state of bliss
Beyond bondage and release,
Is steadfastness
In service of the Lord.

- Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 29)





Mother Azhagammal



Sri Bhagavan's father Sundaram Iyer married Azhagammal, the daughter of Nagasundaram Iyer who lived in Kizhapasalai village of Tamilnadu, a few miles from Tiruchuzhi. Piety, devotion and charity characterized this ideal couple. Sundaram Iyer was generous even beyond his measure. Azhagammal was an ideal Hindu wife.

Although Azhagammal did not receive formal education she could recite from memory several slokas including Sankara's Dakshinamurty stotra. She had memorized numerous songs pregnant with *Advaitic* truth. Azhagammal would often sing compositions with underlying Vedantic meaning such as the 'Rice song', 'Soup song' and others during her daily chores.

Many of these songs were composed by Avudai Akka of Chengottai. She has composed a great many songs that were very popular in Madurai and other nearby districts. Some of them have been published, but still many remain unpublished. (Now published by Thirukoilur Swami Jnanananda, Tapovan). They have been handed down orally from generation to generation, mostly through women, who learn them by heart, hearing them from others and singing them along with those who already know them. Mother

Azhagammal knew these songs and was very fond of singing them.

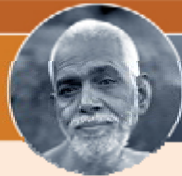
The first son born to the couple, Sundaram Iyer and Azhagammal, was Nagaswami. The second son was Venkataraman (Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi). We could say bright days dawned in Sundaram Iyer's house from the time this second son was conceived. From what Azhagammal said later, it is learnt that she experienced a peculiar burning sensation in the abdomen during this pregnancy. That must have been due to the entry of this brilliant Being into her womb. It seems that Azhagammal developed at that time a wonderful luster which she had never had before. People who witnessed it used to talk much about it.

The day arrived, a day which is celebrated by everyone in South India – the day observed in all Siva temples as Ardra Darshan day. The Saiva religious texts declare that people attain salvation if they have darshan of Lord Nataraja on that day. It falls on the day when the star Tiruvathirai (Ardra) is the ruling star, in the month of Margazhi (from approximately the 15th of December to the 15th of January). On the day of our Maharshi's birth (30th of December 1879), though the ruling star at the time of his birth was Punarvasu, the immediately preceding star was Ardra. It was when the deity was re-entering the temple, people having witnessed the night festival were brimming with joy that the child was born.

"A son, a son", cried out voices from the confinement room. Hearing them, Sundaram Iyer rejoiced and began distributing gifts of coins and sweets.

The mid-wife who was blind is reported to have seen in that room a wondrous light at the time of the child's birth. She told the mother of her wonderful vision and declared, "He who is born today in your house must be a Divine Being." Though this event created much wonderment at the time, its implications were forgotten by the inmates of the house, because the child grew up no different from ordinary children.





This second male child of Sundaram Iyer and Azhagammal was named as Venkataraman (after the family deity Venkatachalapathy or Balaji of Tirupati) on the eleventh day after his birth. According to one of Sri Bhagavan's biographies he was initially named Venkateswara Sarma and subsequently it was changed to Venkataraman when he was enrolled in primary school.

After Venkataraman Mother Azhagammal had another son, Nagasundaram and finally a daughter named Alamelu. Azhagammal not only looked after her four children but also the needs of every guest who came to her house with equal maternal love.

At the time of Sundaram Iyer's untimely death in 1892, he left behind three sons and a daughter: Nagaswamy aged fourteen (b.1878), Venkataraman aged twelve, Nagasundaram aged six (b.1885) and the daughter Alamelu, aged four (b.1888). Sundaram Iyer's death spread gloom over the lives of his disconsolate widow, Azhagammal and her four children. They found protection and help from Subba

Iyer and Nelliappa Iyer, the two younger brothers of the late Sundaram Iyer. At that time Subba Iyer was employed in the sub-registrar's office at Dindigul but was soon transferred to Madurai. Nelliappa Iyer was practicing as a pleader at Manamadurai. In due course, in order to meet the expenses of the family, the house at Tiruchuzhi had to be sold. The house changed hands several times until it was purchased in 1934 by the Nadar community at Tiruchuzhi as trust property for their school.

It was then decided that Nagaswamy and Venkataraman would go to Madurai and pursue their studies there, staying under their uncle, Subba Iyer's protection. So Venkataraman left Tiruchuzhi for good.

This house, which first sheltered the great sage as a baby and later as a young boy has become a temple of worship. It stands adjoining the temple of Sri Bhuminatha in Tiruchuzhi. It was acquired by Sri Ramanasramam in September 1945.

(To be continued)

Maharshi's Gospel: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi

Guru and His Grace

D: What should the devotee do then?

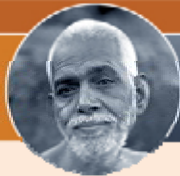
M: He has only to act up to the words of the Master and work within. The Master is both 'within' and 'without', so He creates conditions to drive you inward and at the same time prepares the 'interior' to drag you to the Centre. Thus He gives a push from 'without' and exerts a pull from 'within', so that you may be fixed at the Centre.

You think that the world can be conquered by your own efforts. When you are frustrated externally and are driven inwards, you feel 'Oh! There is a Power higher than man!'

The ego is like a very powerful elephant which cannot be brought under control by any less powerful than a lion, which, in this instance, is not other than the Guru, whose very look makes the elephant-like ego tremble and die.

You will know in due course that your glory lies where you cease to exist. In order to gain that state, you should surrender yourself. Then the Master sees that you are in a fit state to receive guidance, and He guides you.





How I Came to the Maharshi

By K. K. Nambiar (*From The Mountain Path, July 1966*)



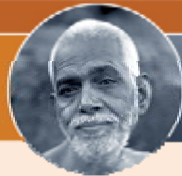
How I came to the Maharshi? I wish I knew the answer! I know I didn't go to the Maharshi to seek any particular boon; nor did I go to him grief-stricken seeking solace; nor to get cured of any bodily afflictions. Perhaps, it was just curiosity - curiosity for anything supernatural. From my childhood, I had felt an urge to meet spiritual men, yogis and sannyasis, some of whom demonstrated extraordinary physical feats and performed so-called miracles. The earliest recollection I have is of an ochre-clad yogi who floated on water and later stood on his head and did quite a number of difficult *asanas*, attracting a large crowd of admirers around him. I remember clinging on to this man late in the evening until all others had left him asking him to teach me some of those feats. I must have been about 10 years old then. He taught me some *pranayams* and did a sort of 'initiation' by exerting some pressure on the lids of my closed eyes by his first and middle fingers which made me see some sparkling lights, on reopening of the eyes! Later, I had opportunities to see yogis and sadhus of several types. One of them 'slept' on a cotton rope tied to two rafters, and another slept on branches of trees, and so on. 'Maharshis' I had only read of in Puranas

- of benevolent Vasishtha and Viswamitra, the hot-tempered Durvasas, and the wandering Narada who delighted in creating some mischief or other. But when I heard of a living Maharshi whom people could go and see and talk to, I must say I was truly sceptical.

My first introduction to Maharshi was through a little green booklet - a Malayalam translation of '*Who am I?*'. It was 32 years ago. I browsed through the booklet and got a general idea of the theme, which at that time did not carry much conviction to me. A few weeks later, the President of the Salem District Board under whom I worked as an Assistant Engineer at that time suggested a trip to Tiruvannamalai to see a Maharshi, who, in outward appearance looked a 'householder', ate, drank, and lived like one. From Salem we did the journey by car. We were shown into the hall where Maharshi reclined on a couch. We prostrated before him and sat down on the floor at some distance. No words passed between us; but I felt an indefinable sense of peace in his presence. My scepticism gave place to a sense of awe and reverence. I might have sat there for about an hour perhaps and wanted to bask in his presence longer; but on a sign given by my boss, I had to get up and prepare to leave the Ashram. Before doing so, I prostrated again before Maharshi and fervently prayed that I might have more opportunities to have his *darshan*. Opportunities I had because my brother-in-law Dr. P. C. Nambiar got posted to Tiruvannamalai as Doctor-in-charge of the Government Hospital. My sister Madhavi amma, a devoted soul, used to visit the Ashram quite often, and I too made a few visits from Dharmapuri to which place I had got transferred by then.

On one of these occasions, I made a small contribution for a *Bhiksha* at the Ashram, which





meant that all those present were to be fed sumptuously when Bhagavan also would share the meal along with them. At about noon, the bell sounded announcing *Bhiksha* time and people started queuing into the dining hall - a large thatched shed at that time. The person leading the queue occupied the last corner seat and the second next to him and so on. When the queue stopped, I found that I was to sit right in front of Sri Bhagavan! This lucky coincidence gave me great satisfaction. Bhagavan seemed to sense this and rewarded me with a gracious smile. Soon people came with rice and other preparations. Bhagavan was to be served first. When rice was brought before his leaf, a small ball of rice rolled into his leaf even before the person had started serving him. Bhagavan looked at me smiling and said: "It falls by itself". This remark from Sri Bhagavan, I must say, gave me supreme delight and I can still recall the ecstasy I felt while partaking of that meal right in front of Sri Bhagavan and face to face with him hardly a yard separating our leaves. I felt that the morsels I ate were all Bhagavan's *prasadam*. That was the happiest meal in my life.

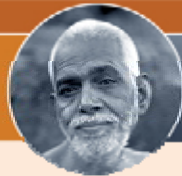
It is needless to say that by now my scepticism about a living Maharshi had all vanished like mist before the rising sun. From Dharmapuri I was transferred to Tirunelveli on promotion. I was now more distant from Tiruvannamalai. I started reading more about Maharshi and accepted the position that he was Lord Subramanya in human form. I prayed to him again and again to give me more opportunities to have his *darshan*.

My prayer was answered miraculously. I got posted to Tiruvannamalai itself. It all came about in a most unexpected manner in February 1936. The then Government of Madras embarked on an experiment of bifurcating the large districts for more efficient

administration. In this process, the District of North Arcot was divided into two, and the headquarters of the southern half was fixed at Tiruvannamalai. The District Officers had to be duplicated. I was chosen as the District Board Engineer for 'Tiruvannamalai District', and asked to start an Office at Tiruvannamalai Town itself. I had not even dreamt of such a thing until I received the posting orders. Was it not Bhagavan's Grace to have actually taken me over to his abode in this unexpected manner? Sceptics might call it just one of those coincidences that happen to everyone some time or other; but to me it was an unmistakable blessing from Sri Bhagavan, who, in answer to my prayers, had in this way given me opportunities to have frequent *darshan* of him, to wash off my sins of omission and commission, and to derive such spiritual benefit, as I was fit to receive in his immediate presence.

I took full advantage of the situation and seldom failed to visit the Ashram on days I was at Headquarters. Needless to say I felt that a gradual change for the good was taking place in me. There was hardly anyone who hadn't sensed the subtle influence of frequent visits to the Ashram and *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan. Here, I might narrate an anecdote concerning a senior colleague of mine. His name was Sri Mallappa Rajugaru. When he came to Tiruvannamalai, I took him to the Ashram with me on three or four consecutive days. The next day when I went to his residence to take him along with me, he excused himself that he would rather stay at home. When questioned further, he stated that frequent visits to the Ashram might bring about a change in him and that he might develop a distaste for worldly things and ultimately renounce his job which he was not prepared to do. I might say, here, that this colleague of mine was well known for his





zest for eating and pleasurable living, but he had certainly misjudged the possible consequences of his contact with the Maharshi and the Ashramites. Bhagavan never insisted upon anybody renouncing his job or changing his walk of life. If anything, it became easier for one to bear the burden of one's own responsibilities in life. I could testify to this from my own experience, and the statements of several other devotees.

By this time, I had picked up courage to talk to Bhagavan now and then. One of the first things I did was to place on record my complete surrender to him, accepting him as my sole refuge in future. I wrote this in Sanskrit verse on a small piece of paper and after prostrating before him as usual placed the slip of paper near his feet. Bhagavan took it up, read it with a smile, and gave it back commenting on the parody I had made in the *sloka*. When I resumed my seat, Sri Bhagavan was steadily

looking at me. The gracious look directed at me set my mind completely at rest.

From that time onwards my faith in Bhagavan grew stronger and stronger day by day. Hardly a week passed without some incident or other to strengthen my faith, and some indications to show that Bhagavan was looking after me. Though Bhagavan did not perform any miracles as such, miracles just happened all the same. One might call them fortuitous coincidences; then they were most extraordinary coincidences - call them what you will. I have seen dozens of them; some involving others, and some experienced by myself. Space permitting in these columns I shall endeavour to narrate some of them at least in future articles to be contributed to this Journal, for the benefit of the readers who might not have had the privilege of seeing such incidents first hand.

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam

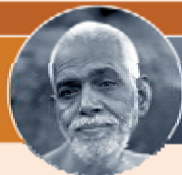
Talk on Brahma Vidyaa on Vijaya Dasami day

On Sunday, the 17th October 2010 the Ashram celebrated Vijaya Dasami. Nochur Sri Venkataraman gave a brief, lucid talk on Brahmavidya, the Science of the Supreme Absolute or the Science of Self-Knowledge, in Tamil, with a sprinkling of Sanskrit sentences, to the students of the Ashram Veda Patasala. The talk was attended also by the President of the Ashram, Sri V.S. Ramanan, the Acharya of the Patasala, Sri Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal and many other devotees of Bhagavan.

The talk was preceded by chanting by the Patasala students of Devi Suktam, Medha Suktam and Sraddha Suktam.

Sri Venkataraman concluded his illuminating talk by exhorting the students to worship, on that day of Vijaya Dasami, Goddess Saraswati who is the very form of Jnaana.





Swarnabandhanam

Swarnabandhanam (gold plating of the base and tip) of Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam in Bhagavan's Samadhi-Shrine was done on Thursday, the 21st of October 2010. Earlier Ashtabandhanam with eight specific herbs was done to the Mahalingam and to all the icons in the Matrubhuteswara Temple. Swarnabandhanam had already been done to the Matrubhuteswara Lingam some years ago.



On Friday, the 22nd October Pujas, homams and Punyahavachanam were done culminating in Purnahuti and Deeparadhana. Later Kalasa Abhishekam was done for the Lingams and other deities.



Viswanatha Swami Day

The Samadhi Day of Sri Viswanatha Swami, the great devotee-scholar was observed at his Samadhi at 10 a.m. on Friday, the 22nd of October 2010. Bhagavan's Arunachala Aksharamanamalai was recited by devotees as puja was offered at the Swami's Shrine and later prasadam was distributed.

Among the most unforgettable works of the Swami is his excellent Tamil version of 'Talks with Ramana Maharshi' often using the very Tamil words which Bhagavan uttered in answering questions.



Publisher: V.S. Ramanan Founding Editor: Ravi Ramanan
 Editorial Team: Ranjani Ramanan, L.Sivasubramanian and D.Thiyagarajan
 Email: saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

