

Saranagathi



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In this Issue

By Publisher

Dear Devotees,

Navarathri celebrations have begun at Sri Ramanasramam in a grand manner. The Ashram website will have regular updates of the festivities.

In this issue we conclude the article on Sri Muruganar's biography and devotion to Sri Bhagavan which we started serializing from the August issue of Saranagathi.

Sri Mastan swami's samadhi at Desur was renovated by Sri Ramanasramam recently and the consecration ceremony was held on September 14th. We present a short biographical sketch of Sri Mastan Swami along with a report on the function.

Since 1996, every year a very earnest group of devotees retrace Sri Bhagavan's journey in 1896 from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, on the same

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dates as Sri Bhagavan did. The report from Ramana Kendaram Madurai describes their inspiring voyage this year.

Our earnest request to all devotees, satsangh groups and centers is to share with us their events, stories and experiences. Please email them to saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

Ever Truly In Sri Bhagavan,

President

Sri Ramanansramam.

The Essence of Instruction

*This is certain:
Worship, praise and meditation,
Being work of body, speech and mind,
Are steps for orderly ascent.*

- Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 4).

Sri Muruganar

Extract from Arunachala's Ramana – Boundless Ocean of Grace. Volume-2 (Continued from last two issues)

Of all Bhagavan's devotees, Muruganar and Pudukkottai K. Lakshmana Sarma were privileged to learn Vedanta directly from Bhagavan.

Natesa Swami, the Head of the Eesanya mutt, had heard about Muruganar's capabilities as a teacher. He therefore requested Muruganar to stay in the mutt and teach him Manickavachakar's Tiruchitrambala Kovai. Accordingly, Muruganar went to stay in the Eesanya mutt. Every morning, he would take class for Natesa Swami and, in the afternoon, he would come to Ramanasramam.

In those days, Sadhu Natanananda was staying in the Guhai Namasivaya mutt on the Hill. Natanananda would time his own visit to Ramanasramam in such a way that he would meet Muruganar near the western tower of Arunachaleswara Temple, every afternoon. From this spot, both of them would walk to Ramanasramam together. Muruganar used to compose some verses and bring them along every day. During their walk, the two friends would discuss Muruganar's latest composition. One day, it so happened that Muruganar was able to compose only the first four lines of a verse. Try as he might, he could not complete the verse. Natanananda read the four lines, and wrote another four lines, thus completing the verse.

When they reached the Asramam, they showed the poem to Bhagavan, and told him the story behind it. Bhagavan smiled at Natanananda and said, "Tomorrow, you should write the first four lines of a poem, and get Muruganar to complete the verse for you." Natanananda did just that, and the second poem was also shown to Bhagavan. After reading the poem, Bhagavan said, "Good! It looks like we have twin poets here! You should name the first poem 'Muruga Natana' and the second one 'Natana

Muruga'!" Everyone present was very much entertained by this incident.

In addition to practicing Self-enquiry prescribed by Bhagavan, his devotees also gave a lot of importance to giripradakshinam. Giripradakshinam is a potent way of attaining Self-Realization. Muruganar performed giripradakshinam for 48 consecutive days.

Once during the pradakshina, between the Nirudhi Lingam and Adi Annamalai, he had no body-consciousness.

Now let us recall some incidents connected with Muruganar.

One of the advantages that the devotees enjoyed was that they could benefit from Bhagavan's conversations with various people. Someone or the other would ask a question. Bhagavan's answers were always short and to the point. Yet Bhagavan's words seemed to be addressed directly and personally to every member in the gathering. Sometimes, a devotee would have a doubt or a problem which he was reluctant to discuss in the presence of strangers. In such situations, somebody else would ask Bhagavan a question, and Bhagavan's reply would answer the reticent devotee's unasked question too! This is indeed the greatest miracle of all.

A disciple of a reputed Swami of South India, Vilakshananda, came to Bhagavan to have his darshan. With some hesitation he started telling Bhagavan about his guru's strict injunction that each one of his devotees should do so many thousands of japa daily and surrender the phala to the guru as their offering and that they were following it without fail.

Bhagavan smiled and observed: "Is it so? It is to be appreciated. So much gain for the guru with no strain on his part!" While Bhagavan was saying this, Muruganar entered the Old Hall. Turning to him Bhagavan said: "Do you know? His guru commands each one of his disciples to perform so many thousands of nama-japa and surrender the phala (merit) to him, as guru kanikkai (offering). After that will there be any balance for the disciples? It looks like one keeping the principal and surrendering the interest to the guru as offering. How do you appreciate this?"

Muruganar with tears in his eyes replied: "Bhagavan! Their guru is far better. He at least leaves the principal and demands only the interest. But this guru here (pointing to Bhagavan) is worse. He takes away the principal itself; then where is room for interest? He demands the devotees' mulam (principal) and vaddi (interest) all at once!" Bhagavan gave a benign smile enjoying the poet's joke with deep meaning!

What Muruganar meant was that Bhagavan wipes out the mind and the ego of his devotees.

An incident occurred a few days later. A new visitor to the Asramam was telling Bhagavan that he had been worshipping Lord Subrahmanya with great devotion for ten years, but the Lord had not chosen to appear before him. The devotee was obviously in anguish, and might have expected Bhagavan to give him some advice. But Bhagavan merely nodded his head and said, "Is that so?" Muruganar who was sitting in the hall became emotional and said to the devotee, "Sir! Your prayers have been effective indeed! Look before you! Who is this, in front of your eyes?" The devotee opened his eyes wide and gazed at Bhagavan. Within moments, his eyes filled with tears of ecstasy and he exulted, "Yes! My prayers have been granted! My Subrahmanya is right here! I am fortunate indeed!"

Later in the evening, this devotee went to Muruganar

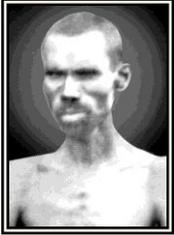
and told him, "Thank you, Sir, for directing me. I looked at Bhagavan and saw Lord Subrahmanya with His two Consorts. Bhagavan Sri Ramana is none other than Lord Subrahmanya!"

Bhagavan was particular that no visitor to the Asramam should go away hungry. At meal times, be it breakfast, lunch or dinner, Bhagavan always insisted that everybody should take food. If, for some reason, someone happened to miss a meal, Bhagavan used to feel bad about it. If he noticed that someone was absent at meal time, he would personally check up on that person and see to it that he had something to eat.

Once Muruganar entered the Old Hall. Prostrating to Bhagavan he noticed that worship had been offered to some books decoratively heaped, garlanded and placed in front of Bhagavan, near the sofa. He realised that it was the Saraswathi Puja day. As he glanced at the garlanded books and then at the serenely seated Master, his face broke into an amused smile. Noticing this, Bhagavan gestured enquiringly. Muruganar's relationship with Bhagavan was unique. He knew he was in the presence of the Reality clothed in human form, available to all as the spiritual guide. Containing his amusement with great effort, he said: "Bhagavan! To have offered puja to the sacred books in your presence amuses me. Imagine that a bunch of the best variety of sugar-cane was squeezed; crystal sugar of the purest quality made out of the juice and a human form was made with it. Now, picture the superb human form made of this best sugar on one hand and the sugar-cane-waste on the other! Bhagavan, you are the essence of Truth. These books, however sacred they may be, are just like the sugar-cane-waste. They have offered puja to the juiceless canes while the most beautiful sugar-form, YOU are seated just here!"

Saying this Muruganar laughed. Bhagavan too had a hearty laugh.

Sri Mastan Swami



While it is true that every devotee who came to Sri Bhagavan was unique, one may perhaps rightly say that Mastan Swami was especially unique. Bhagavan Himself once said of Mastan Swami that, “the most advanced are ripe fruits, just waiting to fall. They only have to come into the presence of a *jnani* in order to plunge into a deep experience of the Self. One such devotee was Mastan. Mastan was in an entirely different category to most of the people who came. He was highly spiritual, although outwardly he looked like an ordinary man.”

When Mastan, the weaver, first came to Sri Bhagavan, along with Desur Akhilandathammal (Desur Ammal), another ardent devotee, all his earlier sadhana came close to their fruition. He was already conversant with advaitic texts, was imbued with intense dispassion and was prone to fall into trance-like states even as he worked on the family loom. Born a Muslim, he was utterly devoid of any caste, class or communal feeling. In fact, he said that liberation was his goal and it was not through any formal religion but through non-dual experience. And Mastan came to Ramana, the pure non-dual essence. The moment he had the darshan of Bhagavan, the supreme jnani, Mastan stood transfixed for several hours in deep samadhi. The word Mastan in Urdu means ‘(God) intoxicated’ and our Mastan, true to his name, became inebriate with divine ecstasy by the grace of his Master. However, Mastan was not content even with the samadhi experience and sought and obtained from Bhagavan initiation into Nirguna upasana (Worship of the Formless, Attributeless Supreme). That put an end to all his doubts once and for all.

It was Desur Ammal who brought Mastan to Bhagavan. They would come all the way from Desur, which is about 70 kms away from Arunachala, carrying provisions for Sri Bhagavan and His devotees. Mastan would stay with Bhagavan till the provisions lasted and then go back to Desur. Mastan and Desur Ammal founded in 1914 Sri Ramanananda Matalayam, at Desur, the first ever centre in the world to be started in the name of Sri Bhagavan. Bhagavan’s devotees, like Kunju Swami, Viswanatha Swami and Ramanatha Brahmachari, used to go there for rest and convalescence after illness. This Centre continues to serve Ramana devotees till today. Mastan wove towels and loin-cloth for Bhagavan on his loom. Bhagavan once said, “Mastan’s craft, though it did not give food either to him or his parents, gave me clothes.”

Mastan Swami was absorbed in Sri Bhagavan on 8th November, 1931. His body was taken in procession in the local Siva temple’s chariot (chaprām) and given a burial worthy of a great sadhu. At Bhagavan’s biddance, Kunju Swami went to Matam and participated in the Samadhi ceremonies. A Samadhi (tomb) was built where Mastan was laid to rest. Over the years, it has come to be treated as a shrine by the villagers.

Mastan’s Samadhi, built over 70 years ago, needed renovation. Re-building was started on behalf of Sri Ramanasramam, on 6.12.2006 and donations came from devotees of Sri Bhagavan. Kumbhabhishekam (Consecration) of the renovated Samadhi was performed in a befitting manner on 14th September 2008. Devotees came in large numbers from Sri Ramanasramam including President V.S.Ramanan and Susila Ramanan, Desur, Matam, Salem and Coimbatore. After a sumptuous breakfast at the Ramanananda Matalayam, Desur, the devotees proceeded to Matam. Arunachala Akshara Manamalai and Ramana Stuti Panchakam were sung and the Priest of Sri Atulyanatheswarar Temple of Arakandanallur (where young

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Venkataraman had a brief halt on his way from Madurai to Arunachala in August 1896) performed Ganapati, Navagraha and Chatur Rudra homams as arranged by Sri Ramanasramam. A song specially composed for the occasion was sung, which was well received.

Sri Ramanasramam distributed Bhagavan's Prasadam and food and gave away prizes to the boys and girls who sang Arunachala Akshara Manamalai.



Consecration function of Sri Mastan Swami's Samadhi

Sri Bhagavan's 'Arunai' Arrival Day on September 1st

A Report from Ramana Kendaram, Madurai.

30th August – 1st September, 2008.

Tracing Bhagavan's footsteps from Madurai

Bhagavan, after attaining enlightenment on 17th July 1896 at the age of 16 at Madurai, proceeded to Tiruvannamalai on 29th August 1896 in accordance to the divine call of his Ordainer *Sri Arunachala*.

Bhagavan's devotees of Madurai Sri Ramana Manthiram carry out a *Yathirai* from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai tracing the footpath of Bhagavan every year on the same day, since 1996 with lot of reverence and devotion.

This year nearly 54 devotees took part in this *Yathirai*. They started from Sri Ramana Manthiram on 30 August night 9 O'clock. They had hired a bus for all the three days for conveyance. After a brief stay at Vilipuram on the next day morning, they reached *Mambazha pattu* Railway station at 7.30 am. Bhagavan

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actually started walking from there along the railway track upto *Thirukovilur*. Devotees too crossed this distance by walk. On their way, they constantly chanted Bhagavan's works like *Acharamana malai* and *Arunachala* Sthuthi Panchagam and works on Bhagavan too. Sweets were distributed to children and others as Prasatham whom they met on their way. The devotees reached Arankantanallur Rock-Temple at 12 noon, from where Bhagavan got His first Dharshan of the great Thiruvannamalai, the 'Mountain of Light'. Acharamanamalai chanting was carried out there with lot of reverence by all including few local people.

Then they moved to Muthukrishna Bhagavathar's house, where Bhagavan had stayed for a while. Acharamana malai parayanam and Pooja were carried out there. They started from there and reached Thiruvannamalai Sri Ramanashram at 7 O'clock in the evening. On 1st September, at the early morning hours, the devotees gathered in the New Hall, in front of Bhagavan's Maha Samadhi, expressed their respect and devotion, sung holy songs and took part in Poojas. Then they were taken to Sri Arunachaleswarar Temple for Swami Annamalaiyar Dharshanam. After that, the devotees assembled in a place inside the Temple and facing and gazing at the great 'Hill of Arunachala' sung Sri Arunachala Sthuthi Panchagam and Acharamanamalai.

In the evening, places, where Bhagavan stayed at different point of time, like Patchaiamman Temple and Guru murtham were visited. At night 8.30 pm, the devotees undertook Girivalam singing Bhagavan's songs all through their path. On 2nd September morning, a small group of devotees visited *Sri Kanthashram* and *Virupacha Cave*, where too Bhagavan used to stay for years together.

At 12.30 pm, the Thiru Arunai Yathirai arranged by Madurai Ramana Kendram came to the concluding part. The President and other Ashramites of Sri Ramanashram gave a heartfelt hospitality in all the three days. With hearts filled with peace, gratification, blessings and grace of Bhagavan, devotees reached Madurai at 10 O'clock night.

It is sure that this Yathirai has helped the devotees a lot in the pursuit of realization of the Self and attainment of the True Nature through Bhagavan's Upathesas.



Devotees at Mambalapattu Station



The group reaches Sri Ramanasramam