

1. *The Matter of a Will*  
2. *Ramana Leela*  
3. *Sri Kunju Swami, part 4*  
4. *A New Catalogue*  
5. *Films from Sri Ramanasramam, part 11*

One of the lesser-known documents that has been indispensable to the steady growth and stability of Sri Ramanasramam is the Will of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In our first article, *The Matter of a Will*, its genesis and contents are described. *Ramana Leela* is the Telugu biography of the Maharshi. There are many authentic incidents and conversations narrated in it that are not found in English publications. Dr. Lingeswara Rao translates some of the interesting passages for us. Following that is the concluding story of Sri Kunju Swami's early life, as he describes his first meetings with the Sage of Arunachala in 1922. And in *Films From Sri Ramanasramam* we are taken to the December 1948 Jayanti celebrations, the Maharshi's sixty-ninth birthday.

## The Matter of a Will

MP3

"Born at Tiruchuzi, a village in the present Ramnad Dt., on the 30th of December, 1879, I left my native home for good in my 17th year under Divine inspiration in quest of Arunachala and reached Tiruvannamalai in the year 1896." Thus reads the first sentence of the Will of Sri Ramana Maharshi, dated April 6, 1938.

How did one who never touched money from his seventeenth year, never openly claimed ownership of any object, land or buildings, come to sign a document which listed numerous pieces of property, movable and immovable, and even bank accounts as his very own possessions. Did he really desire to do this, or was he duped into it by a management who feared loss of executive powers after his demise. How did this all come about?

Shortly before the Maharshi signed his Last Will and Testament a legal case that had been stuck in the courts for almost two decades was finally resolved. An old devotee of the Maharshi claimed the Ashrama property as his own and declared himself to be the only legal manager. This protracted litigation caused considerable worry, and when it was finally settled, a group of senior disciples approached the Sage for help and advice. They explained that, even with him there, they had been badgered in this way, and there was no knowing what might happen when he was no longer there to protect them. What would he advise? "What did they suggest?" He asked them. That the Ashrama should be controlled by a board of Trustees appointed by him, might be a good idea, they thought. But Bhagavan disagreed. "Trustees would take no real interest in running the Ashrama, which they will only use for a milch-cow for their own ends. It would be better that those who are tied to it permanently by blood and sentiment be given the permanent management." The matter was discussed and it was decided that, in that case, the best thing to do was to make a Will. Bhagavan agreed to this suggestion.'

Now the question arises, can a world-renowned renunciate, such as the Maharshi, established a legal claim to property and assets, which he never had previously acknowledged as his? Will the courts accept such a claim. We discover that a precedent in this matter had already occurred on two occasions. First, in 1933, when the Maharshi executed and registered a *General Power of Attorney* in favor of Niranjanananda Swami, his brother and manager of Sri Ramanasramam. And again these same issues were raised on November 15th, 1936 when the Sage was examined on commission for the local District Munsiff's Court, relating to the protracted litigation mentioned above:

"Question: You left home at an early age because you had no attachment for home and property. But here there is property in the Ashrama. How is it?  
Maharshi: I do not seek it. Property is thrust on me. I neither love nor hate it.

Question: Are they given to you?  
Maharshi: They are given to the Swami, whoever he may be. But the body is considered the Swami in the world. That body is this. It reduces itself to myself. . . .

Question: How did you approve the building of Skandasramam on the Hill which was temple land, without previously obtaining permission from the authorities ?  
Maharshi: Guided by the same Power which made me come here and reside on the Hill. . .

Question: You do not touch money nor other offerings. I trust.  
Maharshi: People sometimes place fruits in my hands. I touch them.

Question: If you receive one kind of offering, why should you not receive money also?  
Maharshi: I cannot eat money. What shall I do to it? Why should I take that with which I do not know what to do?"

During this commission he is also recorded to have said: "Properties came and I accepted them. I agree that owning properties relates to worldly affairs, but I do not hate worldly affairs . . . I used to accept anything if given to me. Moneys were given only on my behalf . . . ." He further declared that persons who were looking after the activities of the Ashrama were only doing his will.

So it seems, for the sake of maintaining general order and continuity in the affairs of Sri Ramanasramam, he choose to imply ownership of the properties to himself. And knowing full well a time would come when his physical presence would be withdrawn, he favored a hereditary form of management to be established. It was believed that there was no other means of ensuring this but through a Will. So a Will was drafted in 1938.

K. Sundaram Chetty, a retired high court judge from Salem, was entrusted with the work. When the draft was ready, the Maharshi was led to the present 'Stores' building where a half dozen senior devotees of social distinction were waiting. Clause by clause the Will was read out, discussed and a few alterations were made. Then the Maharshi was asked if he clearly understood and agreed with each clause. Only when his consent was given did they go on to the next clause. Bhagavan, who was not in the practice of signing his name, affixed a mark (X) on every page of the Will, indicating his approval, and as a final authorisation he made a line (:) in lieu of a signature. The line followed this declaration: 'In token of my execution of this document I affix my mark and also authorise G. Sambasiva Rao to sign for me in my presence as I have not been in the habit of affixing my signature.'

The final document was signed by witnesses and the Maharshi then officially filed the Will for registration by handing it over to the *Sub-Registrar of Tiruvannamalai*. He actually told this Sub-Registrar that he has executed this Will and then requested him to register it.

It appears that the learned devotees took great pains to insure that no loopholes regarding the Will's authenticity and powers could arise. But several years later the Ashrama authorities decided that there were some apparent loopholes in the document. Another Will was drawn up and the manager, along with his supporters, approached Bhagavan and explained the situation. The Sage was then lying in the New Hall already stricken with his final illness. When he was requested to certify and sign the new Will he flatly refused. "Is there not a Will already?" he asked. And there the matter ended.

The prudence of having such a Will executed was soon realized after the Maharshi's *Maharivana*. Several cases have already gone before the courts regarding ownership and management. This Will has done more to insure the stability and growth of Sri Ramanasramam than any other writ.

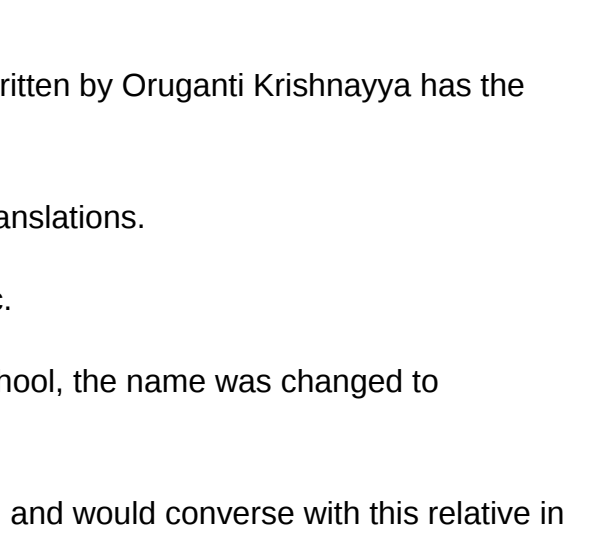
With Niranjanananda Swami's son, *T.N.Venkataraman*, and all his three sons, now fully engaged in managing the affairs of Sri Ramanasramam, the benefits of the Sage's decision in having a hereditary management is fully being realized. And who could actually doubt that the Maharshi's decision would not turn out to be the best decision.

The 1,500 word text of the actual Will has two parts. First, a 700 word biographical declaration, and then a nine item *Schedule of Properties*.

'I did not belong to any order of *Sannyasis*, but if a name has to be given for my status, I am an *Atyasramite*. In course of time several contributions in the shape of moneys came to be made as gifts to me, and with those moneys, halls, store-rooms and other buildings were built, and also wells and ponds and other amenities came into existence. All the properties hereunder described and comprised in what is called 'Sri Ramanasramam' (and the accretions thereto) are dedicated by me to the Idol already installed and consecrated therein, viz., Sri Mathrubhuteswara Swami and also to the Idol or Statue as my symbol to be installed and consecrated after my demise on my Samadhi at a suitable place in the Asramam itself. I appoint my brother, Niranjanananda Swamy, as the sole manager. After him his son, *T.N.Venkatarama Iyer*, will be the sole manager. This right of management or trusteeship will be as a hereditary right in the latter's family so as to devolve successively on his lineal male descendants from generation to generation. As far as possible, make 'Sri Ramanasramam' a centre for the diffusion of spiritual knowledge and a place of sanctity by affording scope for the fulfillment of objects germane to the advancement of spirituality. After meeting the necessary expenses of the Asramam viz., the *Pooja*, *Naivedyam*, etc., of the Idols, the Manager will take out of the surplus income what is necessary for the maintenance of himself and his family.'

Today, Sri Ramanasramam covers an area of fourteen acres. The sanctified Mathrubhuteswara Temple and the spacious Samadhi Hall are surrounded by guest houses containing about fifty units. Also, there are two dormitories, a dispensary, a Vedic school for boys, a gosala for cows, offices, a book store, a large kitchen and dining hall, the famed Old Hall where the Maharshi lived for over twenty years, wells, gardens, a coconut grove and other structures and facilities all aesthetically arranged and studiously maintained. Another guest-house compound across the street contains two dormitories, guest houses with twenty units, and a three story structure housing Sri Ramana Centenary Library. On the Hill Sri Ramanasramam has custody of Skandasramam and has recently acquired the Virupaksha Cave, where the Maharshi lived for about fifteen years.

The renown of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Ramanasramam has been steadily growing since the demise of the Sage. This growth will certainly continue, as greater numbers of seekers from around the world experience the efficacy of the Maharshi's teachings, supported by his continued guidance and grace. The Will of the Sage is an important document that will insure the smooth transmission of *Atma Jnana*, Self Knowledge, to a weary world, suffering under the illusion that the Self is limited to this empirical body.



Sri Ramanasramam  
click to see a large image

## Ramana Leela

MP3

*B.V.Narasimha Swami* wrote the first detailed English biography of the Maharshi in 1931, and Sudhananda Bharati wrote the Tamil biography, *Ramana Leela* The Telugu Biography written by Oruganti Krishnayya has the distinction of being corrected twice by the Maharshi prior to it being reprinted. It is not only the most objectively-correct biography, it is also the most extensive.

Dr. Lingeswara Rao of Andhra Pradesh, carefully read through *Ramana Leela* and noted down passages not found in English publications. Below, we reproduce some of his English translations.

The Maharshi's Father's elder brother, Venkateswaram Ayyar, renounced at the age of eighteen. He lived at the Chidambaram Temple and worked clearing the premises of thorns, etc.

At birth, Bhagavan was given the name Venkateswaram Ayyar, which corresponded with the name of their family deity, Sri Venkateswara of Tirumala. Later, when he registered for school, the name was changed to Venkataraman.

Bhagavan was called Ramana, or sometimes even Ramani by an elderly relative named Lakshaman Ayyar, who was well-versed in Telugu. Bhagavan, as a boy, learned some Telugu and would converse with this relative in that language. Consequently, he began to call his father Nayana, the Telugu equivalent for 'Daddy'.

The young Venkataraman and his brother Nagaswami were sent to their Uncle's home in Dindigul so they could receive an education in English. When their Uncle was transferred to Madurai the two boys followed.

When Bhagavan first arrived at the Arunachala Temple in Tiruvannamalai in 1896 it was 6 a.m. The Temple was then being renovated and was not open to visitors until 8 a.m. But when Bhagavan arrived all the doors were open and he walked straight to the Inner sanctum without seeing anyone.

Bhagavan was initially called Brahmana Paradesi. Mendicant *sadhus* were then normally called *Paradesis*. When he was carried from the *Patala Lingam* to the *Subrahmanya Temple* and was under the care of *Mouna Swami*, his greatness was then realized. Then his name was changed to *Brahmana Swami*.

*Nelliapa Ayyar* (Bhagavan's Uncle) failed to persuade Bhagavan to return to Madurai. One Narayana Swami Ayyar [Sri P.V.Somasundaram's Father], who accompanied Nelliapa Ayyar, became annoyed and approached the young Swami with the intention of taking him by force. Suddenly he felt a burning sensation all over his body and, because of it, gave up the idea.

One night in the year 1934 someone asked Bhagavan: "Do you have dreams?"  
Bhagavan: "Doesn't one dream in sleep?"

Questioner: "Did you ever have seminal discharges during sleep, or in dreams." Everyone present felt disgusted at the question, but Bhagavan without the slightest sign of annoyance, calmly replied: "Yes. What of that ? It may happen even if one eats hot foods. How does it matter? You are thinking I am this body. Hence the wrong understanding that if one loses the essential fluid of the body, one shall fall from brahmacharya and tapas. It occurs to me that I am living simultaneously in twenty different worlds with diverse bodies. How can I worry over such losses or biological changes in all these body parts. The essence is not the body and its various metamorphosis but *Atma Gnana Nishta*, the abidance in Self-Knowledge. We are the Ever-Changeless.

## Kunju Swami

Part 4, continued from the *Mar/Apr* issue

MP3

This concludes the story of Sri Kunju Swami's early life and how he came to settle in Tiruvannamalai with Sri Bhagavan.

SRI BHAGAVAN was sitting alone. I thought it was a great opportunity for me to talk to him freely. I told him about my interest in giving religious discourses, doing *japa*, and studying *Vedanta*. I told him that I had not been getting any peace, but the moment I heard about him, I was filled with peace. I also told Sri Bhagavan in Malayalam about how the Swamiji who had taught me *Vedanta* tried to attain *samadhi* (conscious death).

Sri Bhagavan listened to everything with a smile. I asked him what I should do to get mental peace. Sri Bhagavan replied, "You have read *Kaivalyam*. It is clearly stated that if you realize yourself, you will be freed from the cycle of birth and death and be freed from all trouble."

When asked how I could find out who I am, he said, "Find out where thoughts start from." When asked how I should do it, he said, "Turn inward and merge the mind in the heart." After saying this, he fell into his natural silence. Sri Bhagavan's gracious looks were on me. My mental agitation vanished that very moment and I attained a peace and joy that I had not experienced earlier.

As long as I was in the presence of Sri Bhagavan, I enjoyed a blissful experience. Thus I spent the first eighteen days. Because of the gracious presence of Sri Bhagavan, I was able to meditate and attain peace. Suddenly I felt, as I had got the experience, I could now meditate at home without any interruption. I also felt that it was wrong to eat at the Ashrama without doing any service to the Guru. I expressed my desire to return home to Ramakrishna Swami and he agreed to my proposal.

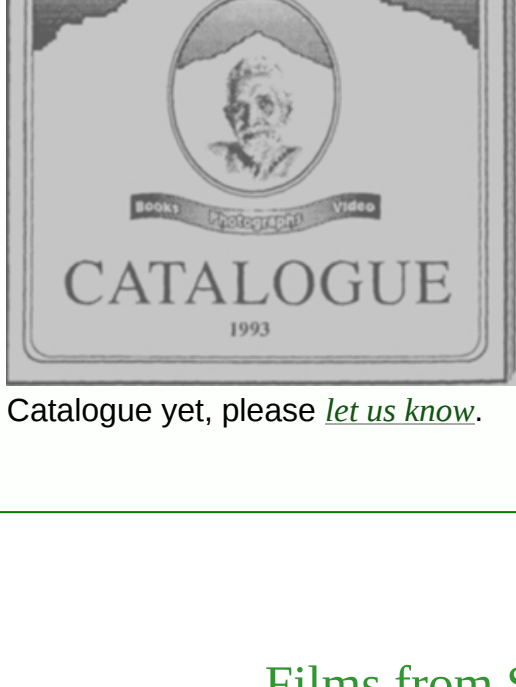
After taking leave of Sri Bhagavan, Ramakrishna Swami and I returned home. We decided to meditate in our homes without talking to others, and we also decided not to see each other. My parents, who were still in the dark about my whereabouts, were delighted to see me. Ramakrishna Swami and I observed silence in our respective homes. My parents were happy that I had come back and did not mind my strange ways.

After a few days, I found it difficult to meditate in the same way I had done before Sri Bhagavan and gradually I became my old restless self. I no longer had peace. I realized my folly of leaving Sri Bhagavan. When I was thus utterly depressed one night Ramakrishna Swami came to my house. What a strange coincidence! His experience was just like mine. We thought for a long time. What a shame! We thought we had reached in a few days that stage which people in the past attained only after great efforts made in the immediate presence of realized souls. We realized our foolishness and the greatness of the presence of Sri Bhagavan. We felt it was pointless to remain at home any longer and decided to leave for Tiruvannamalai on a particular day. I informed my parents of my decision. They were taken aback by this. Despite all their efforts to make me stay at home, they could not change my mind. I told them that it was good for them as one of their four children would be following the line of *sadhus*. I could not leave without telling them, "I will be in Tiruvannamalai with Sri Bhagavan. You can come and see me at any time. I will also visit you occasionally." I tried to console them in several ways.

After a couple of days, Ramakrishna Swami and I left our place and arrived in Tiruvannamalai. When Sri Bhagavan saw us, he welcomed us with a smile. We felt happy. When I came the first time, I felt uncomfortable at eating without doing any service to the Guru. Through Bhagavan's grace, this time I was able to serve him in a unique way. Perumal Swami, who used to prepare hot water for Sri Bhagavan's bath, wash his towel and massage his feet, had to go somewhere two days after my arrival. He asked me to do what he had been doing as he considered me a fit person to do service to Sri Bhagavan. He thought that I would do everything properly as I had moved with *sadhus* since my early childhood. If I had come two days later, I would have lost this golden opportunity. I realized then the significance of what Sri Bhagavan had said when I visited him for the first time. He had pointed to me and said to his mother, who was lamenting over the death of *Annammalai Swami*, that I had come in his place. I was deeply touched by the solicitude and graciousness of Sri Bhagavan who made use of my services.

Once I asked Sri Bhagavan why I lost the experience I had gained earlier in his presence when I went back home. He said that the answer to the question is given in eleven verses of *Kaivalyam*. He picked up the book and read them out and then explained to me at great length the purport of these verses. They relate to the doubt raised by the disciple about the need to continue spiritual practices even after one has had the supreme experience. The disciple wonders whether the spiritual experience once gained could be lost. The Guru says that it would be until he took care to practice *sravana, manana, and nididhyasana*, that is, "hearing" from the Guru the Truth, "reflecting" over it and "assimilating" it. The experience would occur in the presence of the Guru, but it would not last. Doubts would arise again and again and in order to clear them the disciple should continue to study, think and practise. This should be done until the distinction of knower, the object of knowledge and the act of knowing no longer arise. I decided to stay always by Bhagavan's side and to practice *sravana, manana* and *nididhyasana*.

I can never forget the wonderful experience of being drawn to Tiruvannamalai by Sri Bhagavan.



## A New Catalogue

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## Films from Sri Ramanasramam

Part 11

(continued from *Mar-Apr* issue)

MP3

BETWEEN the years 1947 and 1950, *K.K.Nambiar* of Madras visited Sri Ramanasramam regularly. As a high-placed and respected engineer for the State of Madras the Ashrama authorities wisely utilized his skills during construction projects. At this time he was very active in the construction of the Jubilee Hall, which is attached to the *Mathrubhuteswara Temple*. And it was during one of Mr. Nambiar's visits in December of 1948 that he brought along with him his 16 mm movie camera. This visit coincided with the sixty-ninth birthday celebration of the Maharshi.

In this film we first see the Sage surrounded by devotees and a number of police officers in beige uniforms. During those years the crowds of devotees and poor people that came for *biksha* (food offerings) during the celebrations were large and it was routine to have a number of uniformed policeman to control the crowds and to secure order, if necessary. Even now this practice is continued.

With his typical white towel thrown over his left shoulder, loin cloth and cane, the Maharshi walks, flanking a long line of enthusiastic Boy Scouts standing at attention - yes, Boy Scouts. This organization is of English origin and established branches in India much earlier than in North America. As we will see later, the Scouts took an active role as volunteers during the day's festivities. One gets the impression that these Scouts, standing straight and proud in their neat uniforms, look upon the Maharshi like a visiting dignitary inspecting an elite regiment of honour guards. Though Bhagavan never looks up at the boys, or even at the camera, he remains the central figure, like the Commander and Chief, so to speak.

Viewing the chronology of films, beginning in 1935, there is one new feature relating to the Maharshi's appearance that immediately becomes apparent in this present film: it is his infirmity. We must remember that the same month that this film was shot, Dr. Shankar Rao first noticed a small nodule under the skin behind the left elbow. It was this nodule that developed into the fatal sarcoma cancer that eventually brought down the curtain on a unique life of purity and peace.

We see in this December, 1948 film, how the Maharshi, stricken by many years of rheumatism, struggles with each step. His feeble knee joints gravitate inward to the extent he must consciously swing one leg out and around the other before placing it down. By planting his left hand firmly on the back side of his hip, leaning heavily on his walking stick with his right hand, and his head bent down and inclining to the right, he somehow manages to propel himself forward in a steady rhythm. The effort he exerts to walk is painfully evident. I remember an elderly parent of a friend once commenting on this scene: "Why don't they just let that old man sit down." That sums it up perfectly.

The Maharshi is then seen walking through different quarters of the Ashrama, surrounded, again, by devotees and relatives. When he arrives in front of the thatched building with the printed sign "Guest House for Gentlemen," he sends his attendant into the building to fetch something. The attendant immediately comes out scooping his hand into a small can and placing some grains on the ground in front of the white peacock. There is an almost imperceptible cut in the film, noticed only if you keep your eyes on the white peacock. It is now eating out of the can itself as Bhagavan stands directly in front of it and talks to it. Then Bhagavan moves away, everyone following.

Now we see vast numbers of local residents, indigent or otherwise, moving about the northern side of the Ashrama. Then rows of them are seen sitting, as eager Boy Scouts carry large thatched boxes of food, scooping out healthy portions for each person. The gruel is placed in towels, tied and then carried away by the recipients. In another place a large gathering is seen. Then rows of devotees taking their meals under a thatched roof. Police and Boy Scouts are moving about busily. It is *biksha* time and hundreds, perhaps thousands, are being fed.

— continued in the *Jul-Aug* issue

## Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please see the *Sri Ramana Satsang* online pages.

"The Maharshi" is a free bimonthly newsletter distributed in North America by *Arunachala Ashrama*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. You can subscribe to this newsletter's announcements by email. All back issues are available as *html pages* and in *Acrobat PDF* format from 2000 to the present. *Books, images, videos* and *audio CDs* on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found in the *eLibrary*, the *On-line Bookstore* pages and the Ashrama's *YouTube* channel.

*Mar / Apr 1993* Choose *Web-page Issue* *Jul / Aug 1993*  
top of page