



MAR/APR 2015

VOL. 25, NO. 2

Maud A. Piggott Part II

Maud A. Piggott was born in England, traveled to India several times, but ultimately settled down in Hollywood, California where she passed away on August 19th, 1974 at eighty-seven. She was the first Western woman to visit the Maharshi and, by the grace of the Master, had a profound experience in His presence.

WHEN first introduced in the *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* on January 6th, 1935 her name was given as Mrs. M. A. Piggott, which indicates that she was married. But from her prior and subsequent travels, and other facts we have discovered, we can infer that her relationship with her husband, for whatever reason, at that time must have been tenuous at best. She was then about 48 years old, living in Madras. Soon afterwards she moved to New Zealand. In 1937 she sailed for Los Angeles, California where she lived till her death 37 years later.

The 1940 U. S. Federal Census indicates that her marital status was "Divorced", the number of weeks worked in 1939 were "0", her residence was "Rented" and her source of income was "Other". In 1943 she became a Naturalized Citizen of the United States. All of this points to a woman past middle age, freed from a perhaps unhappy marriage who was in search of a meaningful purpose in life. From the contents of her 1968 letters to Arthur Osborne and the inspired article she wrote for the *Mountain Path*, it certainly looks as if Maud Piggott did find the direction and safe harbor she sought many years earlier at the feet of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Her story is the story of numerous Western, spiritually-hungry

souls of her time and our time, and perhaps all time.

Maud Piggott's residence in California was only a short walk away from the Vedanta Center of Southern California in Hollywood. She gave her article on Bhagavan to the Center for publication in their journal after it was published in the *Mountain Path* in 1970. Swami Prabhavananda, a respected and dynamic monk of the Ramakrishna Order, was the founder and President of the Vedanta Center when Maud Piggott arrived in California in 1937, and he remained so till he passed away in 1976, two years after Maud Piggott's demise. In 1938, a beautiful temple at the Center was erected. Under the guidance of Swami Prabhavananda the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda attracted many notable intellectual and literary personalities in the 1930s and 40s, while the Center experienced steady growth in both facilities and membership. There is little doubt that Maud Piggott was one of those attracted then, and perhaps even chose her residence in Hollywood to be near the Center. Therefore, we can be confident that the spiritual spark that lit up her awareness in the holy presence of the Sage of Arunachala early in 1935 continued to be nourished in the rolling hills of Hollywood, California.

In her 1968 *Mountain Path* article, Maud Piggott writes about what she saw and experienced on her first day at Sri Ramanasramam in January of 1935. Apparently, the rules prohibiting women in the Ashram after dark had not yet been imposed. After she was shown around the Ashram she returned to the Old Hall in the evening before leaving for the night. The atmosphere that pervaded the hall must have permanently imbedded itself in her memory, for three decades later she writes:

“It was dark when we returned for the evening meditation, and most of the people not living permanently in the ashram had left. The hall was compellingly still. The eyes of the holy one blazed no more. They were serene and introverted. All my troubles seemed smoothed out and difficulties melted away. Nothing that we of the world called important mattered. Time was forgotten. Life in its many aspects was one.”

On January 6, 1935, the day of her arrival, Swami Ramanananda made the following entry in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*:

“Mrs. M. A. Piggott, an English lady who had read *A Search in Secret India*, came to see the Maharshi. The services of a disciple as interpreter were provided. There were many visitors at the time in the hall, including some ladies with their infants. The place resounded with noise. At length silence prevailed. Suddenly Maharshi, who seemed to be looking at infinite space, was heard to say softly, ‘Monkey’! A little baby was then discovered in the doorway (unobserved by the mother who was seated on the other side of the door) with a large monkey standing on his hind legs, who with both hands was fondling the child, not hurting it in the slightest, both being at peace with each other in Maharshi’s presence. When Maharshi’s voice was heard the monkey jumped away adroitly and disappeared. The incident greatly impressed the lady.”

All the questions she asked and answers the Maharshi graciously supplied have a universal quality that we all can relate to and benefit from. For instance, “What are the obstacles which hinder realization of the Self?” The answers to this and other questions were recorded in *Talks*. But in her 1968 article she consolidates her version of the conversations, bundling

them together and giving their essence. Her memory of the these conversations appears to be clear even after thirty-five years, which makes one inclined to believe that her memory must have been aided by notes she herself kept.

After Maud A. Piggott was told by Bhagavan that realization was more the result of the Master’s grace than anything else, she went on to ask about practical details for attaining realization:

“Is a Master necessary for realization?” Mrs. Piggott asked first.

M.: The realization is the result of the Master’s grace more than teachings, lectures, meditation, etc. They are only secondary aids, whereas the former is the primary and the essential cause.

M. Piggott: What are the obstacles which hinder realization of the Self?

M.: They are habits of mind (*vasanas*).

M. Piggott: How to overcome the mental habits (*vasanas*)?

M.: By realising the Self.

M. Piggott: That is a vicious circle.

M.: It is the ego which raises such difficulties, creating obstacles and then suffers from the perplexity of apparent paradoxes. Find out who makes the enquiries and the Self will be found.

M. Piggott: What are the aids for realization?

M.: The teachings of the Scriptures and of realised souls.

M. Piggott: Can such teachings be discussions, lectures and meditations?

M.: Yes, all these are only secondary aids, whereas the essential is the Master’s grace.

M. Piggott: How long will it take for one to get that?

M.: Why do you desire to know?

M. Piggott: To give me hope.

M.: Even such a desire is an obstacle. The Self is ever there, there is nothing without it. Be the Self and the desires and doubts will disappear. Such Self is the witness in sleep, dream and waking states of existence. These states belong to the ego. The Self transcends even the ego. Did you not exist in sleep? Did you know then that you were asleep or unaware of the world? It is only in the waking state that you describe the experience of sleep as being unawareness; therefore

the consciousness when asleep is the same as that when awake. If you know what this waking consciousness is, you will know the consciousness that witnesses all the three states. Such consciousness could be found by seeking the consciousness as it was in sleep.

M. Piggott: In that case, I fall asleep.

M.: No harm!

M. Piggott: It is a blank.

M.: For whom is the blank? Find out. You cannot deny yourself at any time. The Self is ever there and continues in all states.

M. Piggott: Should I remain as if in sleep and be watchful at the same time?

M.: Yes. Watchfulness is the waking state. Therefore the state will not be one of sleep, but sleepless sleep. If you go the way of your thoughts you will be carried away by them and you will find yourself in an endless maze.

M. Piggott: So, then, I must go back tracing the source of thoughts.

M.: Quite so; in that way the thoughts will disappear and the Self alone will remain. In fact there is no inside or outside for the Self. They are also projections of the ego. The Self is pure and absolute.

M. Piggott: It is understood intellectually only. Is not intellect a help for realization?

M.: Yes, up to a certain stage. Even so, realise that the Self transcends the intellect - the latter must itself vanish to reach the Self.

M. Piggott: Does my realization help others?

M.: Yes, certainly. It is the best help possible, but there are no others to be helped, for a realised being sees the Self, just like a goldsmith estimating the gold in various jewels. When you identify yourself with the body then only the forms and shapes are there. But when you transcend your body the others disappear along with your body-consciousness.

M. Piggott: Is it so with plants, trees, etc.?

M.: Do they exist at all apart from the Self? Find it out. You think that you see them. The thought is projected out from your Self. Find out wherefrom it rises. Thoughts will cease to rise and the Self alone will remain.

M. Piggott: I understand theoretically. But they are still there.

M.: Yes. It is like a cinema-show. There is the light on the screen and the shadows flitting across impress the audience as the enactment of some piece. It will be similar also if in the same play an audience also is shown. The seer, the seen, will then only be the screen. Apply it to yourself. You are the screen, the Self has created the ego, the ego has its accretions of thoughts which are displayed as the world, the trees, plants, etc., of which you are asking. In reality, all these are nothing but the Self. If you see the Self, the same will be found to be all, everywhere and always. Nothing but the Self exists.

M. Piggott: Yes, I still understand only theoretically. Yet the answers are simple and beautiful and convincing.

M.: Even the thought, "I do not realise" is a hindrance. In fact, the Self alone is. (*Talk No. 13*)

These were the first recorded dialogues she had with the Maharshi on her first visit in 1935. In her 1968 article she writes about this particular series of questions and answers. It differs from the above in some ways but, nevertheless, rings true:

"I had been in despair of ever getting the Maharshi alone. It is hard to unburden the soul before a crowd. But early one morning I came into the hall and found him there unattended, emanating a wonderful stillness and peace. I asked quietly if I might talk with him. He nodded, smiling, and sent for someone to translate. On the arrival of a devotee I put my first question.

"What are the hindrances to the realization of the true Self?"

"Memory chiefly, habits of thought, accumulated tendencies."

"How does one get rid of these hindrances?"

"Seek for the Self through meditation in this manner: Trace every thought back to its origin, which is only the mind. Never allow thought to run on. If you do, it will be unending. Take it back to its starting place – the mind – again and again, and it and the mind will both die of inaction. The mind only exists by reason of thought. Stop that and there is no mind. As each doubt and depression arises, ask yourself, 'Who is it that doubts? What is it that is depressed? Go back constantly to the question, 'Who is the I? Where is it?' Tear everything away until there is nothing but the Source of all left. And then live always

in the present and only in it. There is no past or future, save in the mind.”

“How can I help another with his or her problems and troubles?”

“What is this talk of another? There is only the One. Try and realize there is no ‘I’ no ‘he’ no ‘you’, only the One Self which is all. If you believe in the problem of another, you are believing in something outside the Self. You will help him better by realizing the oneness of everything than by any outward activity. The ego pertains to all the waking activities—the emotions and intellect. In deep sleep the body is still, and yet the Self is there. It is the distracting, active mind that veils the real Self.”

“What meditation will help me?”

“No meditation on any kind of object is helpful. You must learn to realize the subject and object as one. In meditating on an object, whether concrete or abstract, you are destroying the sense of oneness and creating duality. Meditate on what you are in Reality. Try to realize that the body is not you, the emotions

are not you, and the intellect is not you. When all these are still you will find—.”

“What?”

“You will discover it yourself. It is not for me to say what any individual experience will be. It will reveal itself. Hold to that.”

“But in trying to still the mind, I am likely to fall asleep.”

“It does not matter. Put yourself into the condition as in deep sleep. Then watch. Be asleep consciously, instead of unconsciously. There will be then only one consciousness.”

More questions were asked on her second, extended visit later in January, 1935. It is clear from all that we have learned of Maud A. Piggott thus far, that she arrived at Ramanasramam at a period of her life in which Bhagavan and his teachings were most needed, and that she was now prepared to take them to heart.

Is that not the usual way Divine Grace works?

(To be continued)

Sri Ramana Jayanti Tampa Retreat

The second annual Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat was once again marvelously organized and executed by the dedication and devotion of the Florida devotees, lead by Rohit Vaidya. All were inspired by the event. Evelyn Kaselow Saphier provided the following report.

FROM January 2nd through the 4th, 2015, about 60 devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi from as far away as Arizona, California, Canada, England and India gathered at the banks of the Hillsboro River in Tampa, Florida for the Sri Ramana Maharshi 135th Jayanti Retreat. Once again the retreat was held at the Franciscan Center, and many commented on the appropriateness of the setting due to its simplicity and serenity, its lovely river-flanked campus and, of course, the fact that both Sri Bhagavan and Saint Francis were renowned for the inclusion of animals in the large, spiritual families united by their all-embracing love.

“Lead us from darkness to light, from death to immortality.” Thus proclaim the Vedas, and so it was during the blessed time we shared, immersed in the thought of Bhagavan as we strove to imbibe and practice his teaching in the company of those of like mind. It was, indeed, a time of divine illumination in which the

cares of the world receded before the immense grace of the luminous presence of Bhagavan!

There were times of chanting Sri Bhagavan’s hymns and hymns in his praise, times of seemingly endless silence, times for reminiscences and readings, joyous times of sharing one another’s company in walks by the river and during mealtimes or serendipitous encounters.

On the first evening of our retreat, devotees travelled to the Hindu Temple of Tampa. On a property just a few hundred yards down the road from the temple, Dennis Hartel shared with us all the plan of a devout votary of Bhagavan to create a precise replica of Sri Bhagavan’s Old Hall, a place intended for silent meditation and immersion in the Self!

We walked on the hallowed land destined to become a place of pilgrimage and saw the plans drawn up by Jim Hartel. That evening a very beautiful puja was performed at the Temple to commemorate Sri Ramana Maharshi’s 135th Jayanti.¹

Sri Bhagavan's presence was especially manifest in the recollections of his devotees:

Early in the morning hours of January 3rd, Aruna Ramanan Ramkumar read the heart-melting reminiscences of Dutch devotee, Wolter Keers, who wrote of Bhagavan: "He smiled at me. How can that smile ever be described? ... I felt I was being bathed in a glow of love and light."

Our keynote speaker was Louis Buss who travelled to join us from London, England. In two slide-talks on successive mornings, Louis shared his extensive research on the life and spiritual quest of Major Chadwick, later known as Sadhu Arunachala. The first presentation focused on Chadwick's life before coming to Bhagavan the parental, societal and historical influences that formed and predisposed him to a life of devotion and surrender. The second presentation paid tribute to Chadwick's unquestioning loyalty and devotion and to the extraordinary grace he enjoyed at the feet of Bhagavan.²

To me, it felt as if Chadwick was among us! The story of his life and aspirations moves the heart and incites us to also 'march on' in the service of the divine one who has, in his infinite compassion, taken us under his wings. Chadwick's submission and Sri Bhagavan's solicitude for him are clearly manifest in the words of Bhagavan when he said: "*He left his country and travelled thousands of miles, staying with us and making us his own. Should we not take care of him and look to his needs?*"

Another most memorable presentation was that of Dr. Shanta Ramachandran who shared with us her personal recollections of times in the presence of Bhagavan. Dr. Shanta's father had visited Sri Bhagavan and Sri Ramanasramam every summer during the hottest months of the year to the mystification of his friends. One of Dr. Shanta's vivid girlhood memories is that of the unspeakably beautiful sight of the white peacock as it danced in joy before Bhagavan. Another indelible memory was of the day she was allowed to view a changing of the dressing of the sarcoma that had spread over Bhagavan's arm from the shoulder to the elbow prior to his Maha Nirvana. She was a pre-med student at the time and came away totally convinced that only a divine being utterly free from identification with the body could have passed through such an experience with no evidence of suffering!³

Our final evening found us all gathered by the river when, beneath the full moon, we united in mind and in heart, singing songs by and on Sri Bhagavan.

Reluctantly the next morning we took our leave, but carrying within the awareness of the extraordinary blessing we have received to be in the care of Bhagavan and to have bathed in his light the light of our own inner being during these days of fellowship at the river's edge.

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1. **Video of puja:** http://youtu.be/Uxuqn75jL_U
 2. **Video of both days:** *Part 1:* <http://youtu.be/pGpY-miLXoM>
Part 2: <http://youtu.be/xDIpPd060Vg>
 3. **Video of Shantamma's talk:** <http://youtu.be/tGhaImD9Ptg>



Letters

The Spark that was Ignited

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the lead article in the November issue of *The Maharshi*. * Part of the article was just like a delightful trip down my memory lane. Evelyn talks of the dwindling ranks of devotees in the New York Ashram when, with the Grace of Bhagavan, some of you came to live in the Bridgetown, Nova Scotia Ashram. For me, and for quite a few of us, those were glorious days of spending time in the Ashram with other devotees, chanting Bhagavan's name, listening to Bhagwatji recite "Lalita Sahasranama", etc.

The spark that was ignited in the inner being of this poor soul has blossomed over these years in many ways. Off and on I have had the vision of Sri Bhagavan as the embodiment of the holy Arunachal Hill. The Virupaksha Cave, Skanda Ashram, and the Giri Pradakshina route are eternally embedded in my inner being, imparting to me a unique inner bliss.

All this was possible because the Lord, Bhagavan Ramana, guided the steps of His devotees to this Province. But, as they say, time moves in circles, ranks dwindled in Bridgetown and I felt sort of orphaned.

However, over the years, His presence within the heart has grown stronger and ever-present. It was Bhagavan's Grace that brought you all here to Nova Scotia for *our* good. I fail to find adequate words to express my gratitude to Bhagwatji and all of you for your love and kindness in a hundred and one ways.

Please tell Evelyn that her article has brought a lot of joy to my heart and I thank her too.

In loving regards and deepest love.

—Yashwant Rai, Halifax, Nova Scotia

* "Confirmed in the Purpose of Existence", by Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

The Quiet of Sattvic Places

Yesterday I went to the Geeta Temple in Corona to chant at the Maharudram that the New York Rudram Group was sponsoring. As I think you understand, Rudram chanting is a pretty energetic undertaking – eleven Rudrams is always a challenge for this body (although the fine energy returned for the coarse energy 'invested' is certainly 'a good deal'). As it turned out, by the way it was structured, we chanted probably fifteen or sixteen Rudrams; I lost count. I got there around 8 AM and left around 2:30 PM (after a good prasad meal).

As you know, we had also scheduled a Veda Parayana at the New York Ashram that day, so after I arrived at the Ashram I went to rest for about an hour and then met with Brian to work on chanting "Sat Darshanam" before the evening chanting started.

To rest, I took the room on the left at the top of the stairs. The room was flooded with the afternoon sun, though the middle bed was in shade. I picked that one for my rest. I was struck by that flood of quiet sunlight filling the room and so I took a picture with my minimal cell-phone camera. I hope it gives a little taste of what I encountered. [*did not print well for inclusion*]

Though my real point of this email is that when I lay down, I was struck by the quiet. Granted, there were no children romping at that time and the neighborhood was also quiet. But there was something more all-pervasive, a deep quiet that was beyond the physical. It is the quiet of sattvic places, a place where spiritual practice is done. I was lying on the bed, with the intent to sleep for a little while, but instead found myself engaged in Self-enquiry! Am I this exhausted physical body? Who sees all this? And so I lay there for a good while, receiving rest for the soul and then also a brief (dare I say) efficient rest for the physical body as well.

—Martin Wolff, New Jersey

WE are happy in deep sleep. We remain then as the pure Self. The same we are just now too. In such sleep there was neither the wife nor others nor even 'I'. Now they become apparent and give rise to pleasure or pain. Why should not the Self, which was blissful in deep sleep, continue its blissful nature even now? **The sole obstruction to such continuity is the wrong identification of the Self with the body.**

—Sri Ramana Maharshi

65th Aradhana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

You, your family and friends are invited to join us in observing his
65th Mahanirvana Anniversary

at

11 a.m., Saturday 18 April 2015

Arunachala Ashrama

86-06 Edgerton Boulevard, Jamaica Estates, NY 11432 / 718.560.3196 / www.arunachala.org

Ramana Satsangs in the USA and Canada

Regular satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in or near large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-546-0378 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Ann Arbor, MI — Nirupama & Ramesh (574-514-4766 / neeru_2@hotmail.com)

Birmingham, AL — Sai Kand (205-441-6859 / kandsai@yahoo.com)

Boston, MA — David & Anna (617-928-1487 / annaklegon@gmail.com)

Chicago Area — Jean-Luc & Rita (719-480-3530 / blueskyvalley@mac.com)

Connecticut Area — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)

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