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My Life with Sri Bhagavan

by Sampooramma

Sampooramma, who was widowed as a young girl, took refuge at the feet of Sri Bhagavan and found solace in his gracious presence. Born in Tiruchuzhi, she arrived in Tiruvannamalai in 1928 and imbibed the grace that flowed continually from her guru. In 1989, she shared her reminiscences in a video recorded by Dennis and James Hartel in which she speaks to J. Jayaraman. She describes her initial meeting and the glorious time spent with Sri Bhagavan while involved in kitchen duties, as well as the kindness that was showered upon her by Bhagavan. This entire video in Tamil, in which we see Sampooramma's radiant smile, can be viewed on Arunachala Ashrama's [YouTube Channel](#).

I was born in Tiruchuzhi, where my father-in-law was an inspector. Bhagavan's father, being a lawyer, used to come to him quite often. I lived in Tiruchuzhi for 3 to 4 years. Though I lived in the same town, I had not seen Maharshi. I was 13 yrs old when I was married. I lived in my father-in-law's house only for 2 years.

When I was 15, my husband passed away. It was at the age of 28 that I came to Bhagavan. My sister was married to a doctor, son of Tiruchuzhi's Laxmiammal. In those days my brother-in-law and my sister's mother-in-law used to say that the boy who used to live in Tiruchuzhi had become a great saint and now lived in Tiruvannamalai.

Though I was repeatedly persuaded to go and see the saint at Tiruvannamalai, I came here only in 1928. I was born in 1900 and I remember coming here when I was 28 yrs old; so it was in 1928 that I came here. By then the Old Hall was already built and Dandapani Swami was in charge. Seeing me, he introduced me to Bhagavan as a relative (*sambandhi*), a close relative of our Tiruchuzhi Laxmiammal. This is how I was first introduced to Sri Bhagavan.

As soon as I was introduced Bhagavan gave a happy smile and said 'varatoom, varatoom.' (She is welcome, she is welcome.) I had come with a return ticket, which was valid for 15 days. I stayed for 15 days. While I was here, I had my menstrual period, so I had to be away for 3 days. Tennamma, who was working in the kitchen, was preparing special food for me. She was grinding the chutney when Bhagavan came into the Dining Hall. Seeing that, he asked Tennamma what she was doing. When she informed Bhagavan that due to the pollution of my period, the kitchen was serving me Echamma's rice and the chutney outdoors, Bhagavan was annoyed and said, "There is no pollution. Give her ashram food. Why do you segregate her like this?"

My next visit was only after a year, and that also happened in a beautiful way. It seems, here at the Ashram they were contemplating writing and asking me to come and help in the kitchen. At that time, Sri Seshaiar, from my village, was coming to Tiruvannamalai and asked me to accompany him, as he had many children. The moment I entered the Hall, Bhagavan remarked, "See, you wanted to write

to her, she has already arrived.” Bhagavan asked me to stay on, and entrusted me to Tennamma and said that I should be properly looked after. Bhagavan took charge of my safety and it was a great boon for me. I had to go back, as I had some land and the revenue from it was my livelihood. I also had my old mother, who needed looking after. Often, I would go back to my village to collect the revenue from the land and buy supplies that my sister and mother would need while I was away. Whenever I would receive a letter from my mother, I would go back to purchase the supplies for them. Bhagavan used to tease me saying, “Where is the letter? Where is the letter for me?” This was Bhagavan's affection for me.

Bhagavan and I used to cut vegetables, make paste and make other preparations for cooking. Even for dosa, we used to grind together. It was a great joy to work with Bhagavan. (She says all this with great joy, and laughter.) Bhagavan also was always in a joyful mood. Even a few words spoken by Bhagavan, or a stay of few seconds with him used to take away whatever sorrowful or dejected mood we were in. That was a great gift of Bhagavan.

In those days, there was water scarcity for 6 months. So it was difficult to do cooking during this time. Bhagavan then had a well dug, after which there was no water scarcity.

I stayed on for 5 years. It was delightful to work with Bhagavan. Early in the morning, Bhagavan would come with other sadhus to cut all the vegetables. At 5 o'clock or so when I arrived, he would give me instructions for the day. Tennamma and I and later on Subbalaxmi prepared all the three meals of the day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The food was all prepared by us, and I also had to serve Bhagavan. He liked it very much and insisted that I should serve him. Bhagavan's way of cooking was also very delightful. One time he asked me to cook the skin of the *brinjal* (eggplant). I argued that it was too thick, and wouldn't cook properly. He convinced me that I should cook it, and it would turn out alright. When it did not cook, I went to the hall once or twice to tell him it was still not cooked. He came, started stirring it, and surprisingly it was cooked nicely.

In those days, everything was fun. We would be half way through cooking, and some devotee would come

and bring fresh vegetables. Bhagavan would insist that they be cut immediately and added to already cooking dishes. I used to protest, saying that it would not mix well with the other vegetables. Bhagavan however would make me add it to the half cooked dish and it would all cook evenly and blend nicely! I have seen this wonder taking place. Bhagavan made a pregnant statement that should be remembered. He said that it should not be cooked in this fire, meaning the stomach, but in that fire, meaning the actual outside fire.

In those days the *goshala* (cow-shed) was at the place where the present day gentlemen's guest house is. It was only a thatched shed. Dandapani Swami, the father-in-law of Muruganar, was afraid of tigers coming and taking the cattle. He built a wall, and later the *goshala* was built. Next came the *Veda Pathasala*. Slowly, more buildings started coming up. The cooking used to be completed in two hours unlike now when it takes ten hours. I would come in the early morning. At times we were preparing idlis also. Then Sama Tatha came, and he was given the job of making idlies. So we could come to the kitchen later, at 7:00 a.m., and finish the work of cooking in the next two hours. I would serve breakfast and lunch, and then in the evening at 7 p.m, serve supper to Bhagavan. I would then go back to town as women were not allowed to stay in the ashram at night.

Bhagavan used to be seated on a sofa and I used to sit on the western side of the Hall. In those days, there were two entrances, one of which is now closed with a window. I had a fixed seat in the Hall. One day Seshayya, the advocate from the town of Kakinada had come. He used to help in the management and for some time was the *sarvadhikari*. He came and sat in my place. So when I entered the Hall, I stood on the side. Seeing this, Bhagavan sent a word through the attendant to Seshayya to move so I could sit down. Seshayya however did not vacate the seat, and said that I should find another seat. Bhagavan was vexed and shouted at him, “Get up and give her the seat. Go and show your lawyership and officialdom in your office!” Bhagavan took such personal care of me. He always saw to my convenience, safety and joy.

Even in my childhood, I had come to know about the *Ribhu Gita*, and always carried a copy of it. Once I

was reading it in the kitchen. Bhagavan, on noticing what I was reading said, “What will you understand if you read it here (i.e. in the kitchen), you should read it there (i.e. the Hall)”, as Bhagavan was always seated there. My other women friends who worked in the kitchen with me were overjoyed and said, “Bhagavan himself is asking you to come to the Hall and read there. Go and read there.” I was reluctant, thinking that how could I come and read in the presence of Bhagavan?

When I went to the Hall, Bhagavan took the book from me to put a new cover on it. Noticing that Chapter 38 had only two verses printed instead of the entire fifty, Bhagavan wrote them down himself. Then he bound the book, put on a new cover, and returned it to me, saying “Don't throw it away, guard it and preserve it.”

Bhagavan was particular that we should assemble in the evening to do the parayana of *Aksharamanamalai*, *The Pappadam Song*, *Upadesha Saram*, and *Ulladu Narpadu*. He wouldn't sing with us, but if we made a mistake, he would not hesitate to correct it and teach us the right pronunciation. Oh what's the use of my discussing it all now? It was so joyous then!

I used to read the *Ribhu Gita* in Tamil. I can read Tamil well, but I don't know English. Once I read *Sutamuni* as *Sutakmuni*. Bhagavan corrected me and said *Sutak* means blood, and that would then mean the Saint of Blood. So then I corrected myself and read it as *Sutamuni*.

The forty-eight handwritten verses of *Ribhu Gita* by Bhagavan are now in my family's shrine room and are preserved and worshipped by them.

I came to Tiruvannamalai four years after the passing of Seshadri Swami, but all my relatives knew him. In appearance he looked like a madman. The town shopkeepers used to take him to their shops, and it brought prosperity to them. He would go into town and eat anywhere he liked, or refuse to eat anything. His behavior was abnormal, but almost everyone knew that he was a saint. Bhagavan himself went to his samadhi after he passed away. At the time of the internment of his body, though all his relatives were there, there was some commotion, so Bhagavan went and stood there to supervise the internment ceremony.



Sampooramma

Every day on some pretext or other Bhagavan used to talk to me, and it gave me a lot of joy. Bhagavan used to say that ‘Sampoorna’ means fullness every where and it was good that I had been given that name. Since I did a lot of cooking and serving, Bhagavan said jokingly, “It's good that your name is Sampoorna or fullness.” Lokamma, who worked in the kitchen with me, also asked Bhagavan for the meaning of her name. Bhagavan said, “Loka means ‘that which appears’, Sampoorna means ‘that which is full’”. Sometimes, Bhagavan used to give me specific instructions about cooking, and on the rare occasion I would forget, Bhagavan would send an attendant to remind me.

Bhagavan's mother was an excellent cook. I know he learned cooking from his mother, because if I made some dish very well, while testing it, he would say, “Ha, you have made this dish just like my mother used to make it.” Bhagavan wanted everything to be cooked to the maximum: spinach, eggplants, everything. Bhagavan did not use much tamarind, and he also did not like sweets. He liked savories and mildly hot dishes, like Mysore rasam and Veppam poo (Neem flower) rasam. These are all well-known dishes of our Ashram. Bhagavan made the Mysore rasam so tasty that you would feel satisfied, just by looking at it!

He did not like bitter gourd mixed with jaggery.

Now, they usually mix the two so the gourd won't be so bitter. Bhagavan wanted the bitter taste to remain.

A dog used to sleep next to Bhagavan, and there were two sparrows at Bhagavan's side in the Hall. Even when people tried to drive them away, they would come back. Once he noticed that the dog had been chased away. He remarked, "Just because you are in the body of a human, you think you are human and you think he is a dog, just because he is in the body of a dog. Why don't you think of him as a Mahatma, and treat him as a great person? Why do you treat him like a dog?"

I never had any fear in talking to Bhagavan. Just as now I talk with everyone, I used to talk to Bhagavan. Those were golden days. Things have changed now. Bhagavan was very affectionate towards me, very kind, understanding, sympathetic

and always cooperative, blessing me with his kindness and graciousness.

I don't know how to repay Bhagavan for the grace he showered on me. I'll tell you one incident showing how he took care of me. Once I went for Giri Pradakshina, and did not return till 12 o'clock. At Adi Annamalai, I had met someone and stayed on to have food with them. At 12 o'clock, when I returned, Bhagavan was standing at the gate and said, "I did not know if you took the right route or had gone towards Vellore. I was anxious."

So glorious, it's 60 years, I think, since I came. The days I spent with Bhagavan are memorable days indeed. Somehow, in my my old age, I am pulling on, with Bhagavan in my heart and his Name on my tongue.

Nova Scotia Ashrama 125th Advent Celebrations

by Darlene Delisi Karamanos

Devotees gathered at Arunachala Ashrama in Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada on Sept. 5th to celebrate Sri Bhagavan's advent at Arunachala.

Even with our many COVID restrictions still in place, we had a joyous and inspiring celebration of Bhagavan Ramana's arrival at the Feet of Arunachala. Vidhya and Krishna Subramanian and their two teenaged children stepped up to help with all the preparations. The program started with prayers to Ganesha, the Divine Mother and Nataraja. An introduction to Bhagavan's death experience and journey to Arunachala was read by Darlene. Heartfelt bhajans and hymns were offered by various devotees, so many it seemed, were to the Divine Mother aspect of God. The Marital Garland of Letters, *Aksharamanamalai*, was chanted by all. The temple hall seemed to reverberate with Love. A meal was served in the main house across the road. The masked 26 devotees came into the kitchen to get a plate full of delicious food, prepared in the new cottage kitchen for the first time. Then they went out the side door to the porch and blankets or chairs on



the lawn to eat their meal and socialize. People lingered as it was a beautiful, warm day. To top off the day, a caravan of cars went to our neighbours' house to feed the vegetable peelings to their 3 new goats, as seen in this photo. We know Bhagavan would have approved!

 Excerpts from “A Devotee's Diary”

by Dennis Hartel

In this entry from Dennis' diary, he asks Sri Bhagawat, the founder of Arunachala Ashrama, about the mantra “Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya” and about the relationship between Bhagawat himself and Sri Bhagavan.

November 2, 1977

Arunachala Ashrama Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada

6:40 P.M. It is now all still and quiet both within and without the house. Bhagawat seems to be immersed in sleep, and I have just returned from milking the cows. I am sitting in the kitchen trying to recollect all I have heard today.

Bhagawat and I went out this afternoon to the back orchard to gather some apples. I climbed the trees, shook the branches, causing a storm of apples to fall to the ground. The large, old trees have not been attended to in many years. The apples have some slight flaws, so we prefer to use them for making applesauce. I thought we would collect seventy pounds of the best ones, leaving the remainder for the cows to eat. But Bhagawat found they were all good. “I am from the village, what do I know? They all look good!” he exclaimed. He even found the taste superior to any he had ever tasted. But in the end he finally consented to leave some for the cows, and we satisfied ourselves with only one large bag-full.

While in the orchard picking apples I asked him: “In your writings you always refer to the unceasing repetition of *Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*. When did you first hear this mantra?” He couldn't recall any specific date, but told me that he must have first begun repeating it after seeing it written in the publications from Sri Ramanasramam, around 1955 or so. Then I said: “Sadhakas take up repetition of mantras first orally and then mentally, and afterwards it is said it sinks into the heart. And also I have read that the means, in the end, becomes the goal; that is, the unceasing repetition in the heart. Did you ever repeat this mantra orally as a form of sadhana or practice?”

He replied: “No. I could never do it orally.” Then I asked, “When did you first start feeling Sri Bhagavan's presence in your heart?” With great enthusiasm he began explaining: “It was in that vision of Sri Bhagavan in 1954. Before that I was getting up early, bathing, doing *sirshasana* (headstand) for twenty or thirty minutes and reading books. After that vision I would practice this self-awareness mostly while walking. I would walk very much in those days and all the while, although I might seem to be looking outwards, the repetition of *Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya* would be going on within me. I would take a book with me, sit in the park, but I could never open it, for this practice would go on.” Then after a reflective pause, he went on: “Since my early childhood this fire has been burning within me.”

I then asked him: “In 1954 when Sri Bhagavan came to you in the dream were you reading His teachings at that time?” “No,” he replied, “it was only after that. In 1955, I started getting Sri Bhagavan's books. But in 1941, while teaching in Darjeeling, I first saw Sri Bhagavan's name and form and right then I knew my relationship with him.”

“What do you mean?” I asked. He continued: “The veils were lifted and I knew I have had a relationship with him birth after birth. I always said that he will be my guru of whom I need not ask a single question!”

Bhagawat has told me of this experience of Sri Bhagavan in 1941 at other times also. It seems he wanted to fly to Sri Ramanasramam that very minute and later tried to arrange to go, but he never succeeded. He has also said that after this particular incident in 1941, his interest in Sri Bhagavan receded. But thirteen years later, in 1954, Sri Bhagavan all of a sudden began to dramatically change his life. It wasn't until 1960 that he finally went to Sri Ramanasramam for the first time. Today he related to me how he felt at that time: “It was like Bhagavan was holding me by the hand and I, like a child first learning to walk, would fall; but Bhagavan would lift me. Again I would fall, but Bhagavan was holding me by the hand and He would always lift me.”

The Necklet of Nine Gems (Srī Aruṇāchala Navamaṇimālai)

by Sri Ramana Maharshi

These nine beautiful stanzas were composed by Sri Bhagavan at various times. Each is a gem and these nine “gems” form a necklace befitting the Lord, Arunachala. The meaning of “Arunachala” is given by Sri Bhagavan in verse 2. That Annamalai is beyond male, female, neuter and indeed all forms is seen in verse 4. Later, when Sri Bhagavan was asked by a certain Swami what Bhagavan had attained by the worship of Sri Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan replied unequivocally that Lord Arunachala had raised him to his own state! What greater grace could be shown by the Lord to his devotee?

For those readers who are interested in hearing Sri Bhagavan's composition in the original Tamil and who would like to follow the English transliteration, Sri J. Jayaraman has recorded a stirring rendition in a video which may be heard [here](#).

1. Although (Siva) is motionless (by nature), He dances before the Mother (Shakti) who stands still in the court (of Chidambaram). But know that in Arunachala he stands in his towering grandeur and she withdraws there into his unmoving Self.

2. When one enquires into the meaning of Arunachala, which is lustrous like red gold and bestows liberation, one finds that the word ‘Aruna’ means Sat, Chit and Ananda, the identity of the individual self and the supreme Self (according to the Mahavakya ‘That thou art’) and that the word ‘Achala’ means perfection.

3. Those whose minds are free from attachment to riches, land, relatives, caste and the like and who, having become pure, seek benign grace at the red lotus feet of the Lord of compassion presiding over Arunachala, will rid themselves of their ignorance and attain the grace which shines like the rays of the rising sun. They will always abide in happiness, sunk in the ocean of bliss.

4. Annamalai! Delight of my eyes! Lord who art consciousness itself, beyond differences of male,

female and neuter! Do not think of letting me pine away in despair as one unmindful of thee. Is it not unbecoming thy grace that I should be reduced to dust mistaking the vile body for the Self? Do not therefore deceive me in any manner, but turn thy full and refreshing glance upon me. Abide in my heart.

5. Lord who art consciousness itself, reigning over the famous Sonagiri, forgive all the grievous faults of this poor self and by thy merciful glance, benign as the rain clouds, save me from being lost once more in the dreary waste, or else I cannot cross the terrible ocean of birth and death. What can match a mother’s care for her child? Deal with me then (like a loving mother).

6. ‘Killer of Kama’ Thou art always called by Thy votaries. Yes, that is true. But Lord of Arunachala, I doubt whether this (name) fits Thee. If it is fitting, how can the mighty invisible one (Kama), brave and valiant though he be, dare to creep into a mind sheltering under thy feet, who art his killer?

7. Annamalai! As soon as Thou didst claim me, my body and soul were thine. Can I then lack anything? I can think only of thee (hereafter), not of merit and demerit, O my Life. Do as Thou wilt with me, then, my Beloved, but grant me only ever-increasing love for thy (dear) feet!

8. I was born in holy Tiruchuzhi, the seat of Bhoominatheswara, renowned throughout the world, to the virtuous Sundara and his faithful wife Sundari. In order that Siva, the absolute consciousness, might shine forth and the Self flourish and that I might be rescued from the misery of the world and the snares of the despicable senses, the Lord of the Red Hill (Arunachala) raised me to his state.

9. Bearing and tending me in the world in the shape of my father and mother, thou didst enter my heart and before I fell into the deep sea called mahamaya and was drowned, thou didst draw me to thee and keep me at thy feet. How shall I describe thy wonderful Grace, O Arunachala, who art consciousness itself?

Self-Realization

The state we call realization is simply being oneself, not knowing anything or becoming anything. If one has realized, he is That which alone is, and which alone has always been. He cannot describe that state. He can only be That. Of course, we loosely talk of Self-realization for want of a better term.

That which is, is peace. All that we need do is to keep quiet. Peace is our real nature. We spoil it. What is required is that we cease to spoil it. For instance, there is space in a hall (room). We are not going to create space anew. We fill up the place with various articles. If we want space, all that we need do is to remove all those articles and we get space. Similarly, if we remove all the rubbish from the mind the peace will become manifest. That which is obstructing the peace must be removed. Peace is the only Reality.

We call this world *sakshat* or *pratyaksha* (directly present). What is changing, what appears and disappears, what is not *sakshat*, we regard as *sakshat*. We are always, and nothing can be more directly present than we, and about that we say we have to attain *sakshatkaram* after all these sadhanas.

Nothing can be more strange than this. The Self is not attained by doing anything other than remaining still and being as we are.

You may go on reading any number of books on Vedanta. They can only tell you ‘Realize the Self.’ The Self cannot be found in books. You have to find it for yourself in yourself.

The whole of Vedanta is contained in the two Biblical statements ‘I am that I am’ and ‘Be still and know that I am God.’

– From Gems from Bhagavan

29. Cease all talk of ‘I’ and search with inward-diving mind whence the thought of ‘I’ springs up. This is the way of wisdom. To think instead, ‘I am not this, but I am That’ is helpful in the search, but it is not the search itself.

30. When the mind turns inward seeking ‘Who am I?’ and merges in the Heart, then the ‘I’ hangs down its head in shame and the one ‘I’ appears as Itself. Though it appears as ‘I-I’, it is not the ego. It is reality, perfection, the substance of the Self.

– *Forty Verses on Reality (Ulladu Narpadu)*

Updates

Due to continuing health restrictions, Arunachala Ashrama, New York remains closed to visitors until further notice. Please visit our [home page](#) for the latest information. The Ashrama has been having regular satsangs online which can be found on our [upcoming virtual events](#) page

The Nova Scotia Ashrama (see our [home page](#)) will be open to those living in Canada only, beginning July 10, 2021. Our overnight guests will need to show proof of full COVID19 vaccination completed a minimum of 2 weeks prior to their date of visit at the Ashrama. Kindly request accommodations at novascotia@ashrama.org. Please allocate two hours on the last day of your stay for cleaning your accommodations prior to departure. As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. We ask that groups call ahead of time to avoid exceeding our limit based on NS COVID19 restrictions. Tel: 902-824-2297

For a listing of other centers that are offering virtual satsangs at this time, please see our [online satsangs](#).

For Ramana Satsang locations in the USA and Canada, please see [this listing](#).

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