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Kailash Parikrama, Part 3

by Ranjani Ramanan

Parikrama Day 3

It was June 13th, and after a light breakfast at the hostel, we started the trek at 9.30 a.m. to cover the remaining seven miles. We were blessed to have perfect weather that day with mild temperatures and bright sunshine. The path was mainly along level ground with a river flowing gently to our left. Around noon, as we neared the end of the trek, we offered prayers at a small stupa next to the path, adorned with prayer flags and incense, to give thanks for the successful completion of the Parikrama. After another half hour of walking, we reached a teahouse where our van was waiting to take us back to the hotel in Darchen. We said our goodbyes to Adune and with full hearts and tired feet climbed into the van.

Lake Mansarovar

BACK in the hotel, after a much-needed hot shower, we had lunch and left to see Lake Mansarovar, which was an hour's drive south of Darchen. Buddhists and Jains also revere this sacred lake, believed to have been created by Lord Brahma. Huge mountain ranges surround the enormous waterbody, and the topography seems almost otherworldly. Before walking down to the shores of the lake, we visited the ancient Chiu Monastery on top of a small hillock close by.

The monastery offers an amazing view of the magnificent Lake Mansarovar, and we could also see Mount Kailash to the north. Chiu in Tibetan means sparrow, and it is believed that Guru Rinpoche, also known as Padmasambhava, was guided to this place by

a sparrow. Padmasambhava is credited with bringing Buddhism from India to Tibet, and he also played a role in founding the first monastery in Tibet, the Samye monastery. He was guided to a cave near Lake





Tashi (our guide), Swaminathan and Sangeetha, Ranjani, Lavanya, Nimmi and Sridhar

Mansarovar and spent time meditating there. This cave is still preserved inside the Chiu Monastery. Our group was privileged to sit in that small cave, chant, and meditate for a while. There is a small altar behind a railing for Padmasambhava in the cave. Getting ready to leave the cave, I got up to offer my pranams at the altar. As I bent down and my forehead touched the railing, I had a thrilling vision. The railing had turned into the wooden barricade around the sofa in Bhagavan's Old Hall, and there beyond it was Bhagavan reclining on the couch. Where my head touched the railing were his lotus feet, so close I could almost feel them. Trembling, I prayed for his blessings, with Bhagavan looking at me with a most compassionate glance. Opening my eyes, I was again in the Padmasambhava cave. Overwhelmed with emotion I shared my vision with my sister-in-law Nimmi, and later with the others in our group. We left the monastery, thus touched by its divinity, and proceeded to the shores of the lake.

What I remember about the vast Lake Mansarovar is the silence of the place. A heavy silence that seemed to suppress the mind and still thoughts. There was that rare peace that you feel in the most sacred of places. It was truly a heavenly experience.

Again, we made video calls to our families to share the darshan of the holy lake. We collected some sacred water and pebbles from the shore for our puja shrines back home and returned to Darchen.

The next morning, we started our return drive back to Lhasa. It would take us 3 days by road, similar to our onward journey. But this time the hours spent in

the van were fun filled, playing our favorite songs and sharing personal stories. Our hearts were light and happy, having fulfilled our mission, and it was time to rejoice, laugh and get to know each other better. Those hours spent together in the van strengthened our bonds further, and we know these are going to be lifetime memories. We got back to Lhasa on June 16th and flew back home the next day. Before leaving, we took turns thanking our guide, Tashi, who was instrumental in making the trip so fulfilling.

Conclusion

I came back from this trip both inspired and encouraged to undertake more such pilgrimages. The sadhana and discipline we practice before and during a pilgrimage certainly intensifies the experience of *Darshan*. One-pointed focus and effort towards such a spiritual goal has a purifying effect on the mind. If we can translate the same practices to our sadhana, with constant attentiveness to the Self, as Bhagavan promises, we will one day definitely reach our supreme goal.

146 Jayanti of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi



Arunachala Ashrama
8606 Edgerton Blvd.
Jamaica, Queens, NY
Saturday 3 January 2026

11 to 1:00 p.m.
followed with prasad

Sri Krishna Prem's Visit to Sri Ramana Maharshi

Part V

by S. Chakravarti

S. Chakravarti's description of Sri Krishna Prem's visit to the Maharshi in 1948 was published in the May/June 2019 through Nov/Dec 2019 issues. After these six intervening years, the conclusion of these reminiscences is recorded below. Anyone interested in Krishna Prem's visit to Sri Bhagavan can reread this story from the beginning to better appreciate the progression of the events. The Maharshi took great interest when told of the following incidents which took place after Krishna Prem's visit to Sri Ramanasramam.

ASHER Bhai took leave of Gopalda (Sri Krishna Prem). A few of his compatriots stood by the window of the compartment and were conversing with Gopalda. Suddenly Gopalda again referred to his desire to have Sri Ranganathar Swami's darshan at the Sri Rangam Temple and how that desire could not be translated into action. Those persons looked at their watches, consulted amongst themselves, and then informed Gopalda that, perhaps, all was not lost — yet. They told us that only recently a new train service had been introduced which would leave Trichy at about 2 a.m., and they would take us to Sri Rangam in their car and bring us back again in time to catch this new train. But they wondered if Gopalda could reach the temple before it was closed.

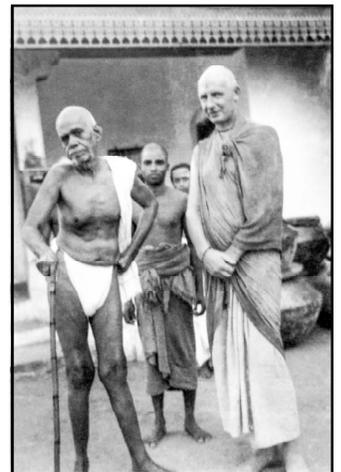
As soon as Gopalda heard this, he jumped out of the compartment, dumped the *jhola* which contained his clothes on the platform and told us to do the same. I tried to draw his attention to the inadvisability of abandoning our *jholas*, but he cut me short and said, "Oh for God's sake do what I say, and run." Before we could get our wits back, he was disappearing down the platform with his giant strides.

I had to run, literally, to catch up with Gopalda. My heart, however, was heavy with the thought that I was probably going to lose the rug I bought in England, in which I was carrying my few clothes. I admit I attached — still attach — sentimental value to this rug which kept me company ever since 1935-36.

We jumped into the car and were driven to Sri Rangam. There we descended on our previous hosts who appeared to be happy to see Gopalda again so unexpectedly. Gopalda requested them not to put themselves out on our account. They must not cook food for us. Any left-over would do. As for himself, he would take only some butter-milk.

Gopalda had to go to the lavatory, and he had a hurried bath. Then he started to run for the temple, lest the doors should be closed before he could get there. Upadhyaya and I tried our best to keep up with him. As we came in sight of the main entrance door of the temple, we saw that one panel of the door was already closed and the gate man was on the point of closing the other one.

Gopalda gave the man no chance to complete his duty. Before he could realise what Gopalda was up to, Gopalda slipped through the half-closed door. The man started shouting something in a loud voice (in Tamil, I suppose) but Gopalda was out of sight and hearing before he could get his breath back. That gave us also the chance to slip through. That was a close shave, indeed!



Those who are acquainted with South Indian temples are aware of the distance between the main entrance door and the actual shrine. This distance is again divided into two or three walled off enclaves. Gopalda, followed closely by Upadhyaya and me, kept running until he arrived before the shrine. The fateful moment had arrived. What did we see? The door of the shrine was closed.

Gopalda dropped down on the floor and bent his head. I cannot speak for Upadhyaya, but I was torn between two warring emotions. One part of my mind was elated! It kept saying, "It serves you right. We warned you. But you would not listen to any of us. You put all of us to this pointless and endless trouble by your whimsy. Now see! You realise what a fool you have made of yourself. Pooh! You and your Thakur!" But the other part of my mind could not but feel sorry for that bent figure in front of my eyes — a figure dejected with his head hidden between two drawn up knees.

Some moments passed. Not a soul was in sight. My concern was how to get out of the temple. The front door was closed. Was there any other egress? Must we spend the whole night inside this temple? I summoned up enough courage to whisper to Gopalda, imploring him to come away. He looked up at me and beseeched me to give him a little more time and he again bent his head.

Seconds, minutes ticked away. What was going to happen? What can I do? A figure emerged from the semi-dark interior with a long stick with a sort of cap at the end in his hand.

With that stick he kept extinguishing one candle after another in the huge candelabra hanging from the high ceiling. The man looked at us in surprise and said something. Evidently he wanted to convey that we should not wait any longer. I tried to get some idea of a back exit from him, but he knew no English. Gopalda said piteously something like "Must we go without Thakur's *darshan*? I suppose so. Please give me just a few more seconds...."

We two stood there like a couple of fools. Another figure appeared from the now-darkened precinct. He was making sure that the temple door was closed properly, the lights were out, and so on. He saw us, came up to Gopalda and looked at him closely. He then said something and gestured with his right hand. He beckoned us to follow him.

This person appeared to be a priest who was not used to having his orders disobeyed. Gopalda looked at him silently and then stood up. I heaved a sigh of relief, but, alas, I was soon singing another tune.

We three followed this person. I was certain that he was going to lead us to a back door. We passed the back of the shrine and soon found that we were treading a stone-covered passage.

I admit I started having doubts about the motives of our guide. My misgivings were boundless when I found that the tortuous pathway we were treading narrowed down to a sort of aisle, hardly three feet broad. The roof sloped down. Even a short man like me had to bend his head. Gopalda was almost crawling. I thought we were being abducted by this person but drew solace from the fact that we had no money on us.

Gradually the alleyway straightened out and we could stand again. And then... that unbelievable and unforgettable moment... the impossible thing had happened. We were ushered into a room by this person. I looked around and could not believe my eyes. I was speechless with amazement. We were standing in front of that huge reclining figure or *murti* of Vishnu, commonly called *ananta-shayana*.

I could not blame anyone who came to read this account and dismissed it as a figment of my imagination. As I said before, I myself wonder if I did not dream the whole thing.

This person took up one of those large brass lamps found in all South Indian temples, and brought it near the *vigraha* so that Gopalda could see distinctly. Oh! What a sight indeed.

I cannot give a detailed description because my mind was numb with shock and surprise. Besides, I was watching Gopalda all the time.

Gopalda flung himself on this enormous, reclining figure. He was crying profusely. He would be hugging the breast one moment, and at the next he was washing the feet of the image with his tears. The guide sort of encouraged Gopalda who was half mad by then.

I cannot say how long this went on, for I had lost count of time. The guide replaced the brass lamp and motioned us to follow him. When we came out of the *garbha-griha* Gopalda needed some time to recover his normal composure. At last this person showed us

out of the temple building by a back door and indicated the way that would lead us to the main road. We walked back silently to our host's house.

There we had a hurried meal and were driven back to Trichy. Our friends left us in the waiting room and took leave of Gopalda. So that was that. But how about the *jholas* we had left on the platform? And how about my rug? All along I had been telling myself to accept the loss of that rug. I could get another rug, couldn't I? Well, yes. But it wouldn't be the same rug. Then, as we took our seats in the waiting room, the man in charge appeared with the three *jholas*. He told us that someone had left them with instructions to hand them over to the European Mahatma who would come later with two other persons. Who was it? It must have been either Asher Bhai himself or one of his friends.

We spread blankets on the floor of the waiting room and laid down to rest, telling the caretaker to let us know when the train arrived. Gopalda was not complaining about his diarrhoea, so we took it for granted that he was feeling better.

The train was a bit crowded when it arrived, but we boarded it and found a vacant lower berth for Gopalda who was looking very tired indeed. He laid down to rest, while we two sat on our bundles in the corridor. Fool that I am, I thought we had left the last of our troubles behind us. I appear never to learn from experience.

As I sat there, past events kept unfolding themselves in my mind. I thought I was in a cinema hall, watching a picture. The question that exercised my mind most was: 'can one dismiss this incredible series of happenings as mere coincidence, or is there really some other explanation?' My attention was suddenly drawn to a person who kept looking through the windows of every compartment. I could see he was in a great hurry, evidently looking for someone, and he looked worried. As soon as he saw us, he enquired if we were not disciples of the European mahatma. Then he implored me to take him to Gopalda. He was in great distress and said it was a 'must' with him. I hesitated, as Gopalda was having a badly needed rest, but I had to give in when he assured me that it was a question of life and death. He succeeded in arousing my curiosity too, for no one would care to come to the station at that unearthly hour unless he was under a pressing need.

I found Gopalda lying with his eyes closed, and I had to do the unkind duty of waking him. When he heard my account, he came out of the compartment. This person was then joined by another person who was no other than our erstwhile temple guide.

The first gentleman introduced himself as one of the Trustees of the Sri Rangam temple administration board and his companion as the head *purohit*. The *purohit* was standing with bowed head, crying.

The following is more or less what the Trustee told Gopalda. He said that he was suddenly woken up by the *purohit* half an hour or so ago, who told him that he had committed the gravest possible sin for which there was no possible *prayaschitta* (atonement), so he had decided to commit suicide by drowning himself in the Kaveri river in the morning. The *purohit* had related to the Trustee how he had not only admitted a *Yavana* (foreigner) into the *garbha-griha* of the temple, but had also helped him to touch the sacred *murti*. (I must explain to those who are not acquainted with the strict rules observed in South India that, except for those Brahmans who are actually engaged in and entrusted with the performance of the daily *puja*, no one else — I repeat, no one else — is allowed to cross the threshold from where all devotees, irrespective of their caste and creed, must have their *darshan*.) In reply to a further question from the Trustee, the *purohit* assured him that he did not know how he came to do such a sacrilegious act. In fact, he initially did not remember anything about it.

When he got home from the temple, he had his bath, took his meal, and retired as usual. Then he suddenly woke up, and the appalling gravity of what he had done dawned on him with a shattering blow. The Trustee then called on our local host to find out our whereabouts, and rushed to the station. He implored Gopalda to save him, the *purohit*, and the unblemished history of the temple.

"What can or will Gopalda do now?" I kept asking myself. I saw the same facial change in Gopalda once again: his eyes turned to slits, and he drew himself up to his full height. Then he embraced the *purohit* and said: "No. You have not committed any sin. All this was Thakur's *lila*. If you still have doubts, contact Ramana Maharshi and then act according to his advice."

I don't remember whether or not the Trustee translated Gopalda's words to the *purohit*. All that I do remember is that the *purohit's* face lit up with a smile through his tears and then dropped at Gopalda's feet. The Trustee? He was overjoyed and was laughing. They stood there until the train left.

I cannot and do not speak for Upadhyaya. My mind found that it could hardly bear the increasing load of miracles. I was restless, as I could find no easy answer to the riddle that kept pressing on my intellect. Gopalda was not physically well. He looked tired and worn out. But he kept refusing all medical attention. At last we reached Pondicherry. When we arrived at Dilip's flat, Gopalda was not at all well. He laid himself down on the mattress in the front hall and told Dilip frankly that he was sorry but he would not be able to attend Dilip's show.

Dilip was furious with me for not consulting a doctor, and I explained to him how adamant Gopalda had been in this regard. Dilip sent some of the ashramites in search of a doctor but due to the function, the normal routine of the ashram was disrupted and no doctor was readily available. Gopalda kept reassuring Dilip that he need not worry on his account, and that he would be quite all right with a little rest and sleep. He also told Dilip that Upadhyaya and I would act as his representatives.

Dilip left soon afterwards. Gopalda was sleeping, and we two just sat there with our thoughts and worries. What next? Obviously, we appeared to be stuck in Pondicherry. Probably Gopalda would not be able to leave Madras even on the scheduled date. Upadhyaya went to Dilip's show and was back after a very short stay. So did I. We just sat there as the night grew older.

Once a gentleman looked in to see how Gopalda was. He said he was a homoeopath, and he left some medicine. He said that sleep was the best medicine, and that Gopalda's sleep should not be disturbed. If, after he got up, his stomach still caused him trouble, he was to take the medicine he left with us.

After another interval, Dilip rushed back home with a few others. Gopalda also woke up. And then he dropped the bomb. He told Dilip that he intended to leave Pondicherry by the next available train. No one could have been more astonished and angry than Dilip. He did eventually manage to give expression

to his chagrin: "Krishna Prem, you are — must surely be — mad. Even if you want to leave, I cannot agree to it. Do you want your blood to be on my head? I have already sent a message to Sri Aurobindo. A doctor will soon come. You cannot and must not move. Besides, I must arrange for your meals...." Gopalda stuck to his guns and said that he was well again and that his stomach was all right. He concluded saying forcefully that he was leaving. As for food, he said he needed nothing and that a scrappy meal would do for the two of us.

I mentally tossed a coin — and found that I won the toss. We were soon rolling down to the station. Dilip got our tickets. He really was perplexed and sorry. We boarded the train, and Gopalda got a lower berth. A rather crestfallen Dilip stood on the platform. As the train left, Gopalda sat up on the berth, grinning like a mischievous brat and wagging his thumbs. (In Bengali it is called *kala dekhano*, 'to show bananas' — a form of cocking a snook.) I was shocked by this puckish humour. Gopalda said, "*holo na, holo na*. I couldn't attend Dilip's show. No wonder! Didn't I beg the Maharshi's blessings only for the three pilgrimages I had in mind? Dilip kept pressing me to return to Pondicherry, in spite of my repeated warnings. Well. What do you see now?" Then he added. "My tummy, too, is normal. I told you I was taking my own medicine." And he showed me some dried tulasi leaves.

Gopalda had some shopping to do in Madras, so he stayed for a couple of days. When he was leaving by train, two amusing incidents occurred at the station. A young South Indian lady treated him to a long, leftist harangue, to which Gopalda listened smilingly. Then an English lady, who was in the same compartment as Gopalda, made some unkind remarks about Gopalda's religious beliefs. "Madam", he replied, "I at least have this," and he opened the case in which he was carrying the images of Radha and Krishna. "But what have you?"

At last the mail train started for Calcutta and bore Gopalda out of sight, and I wended my way to the bus terminus for my return to Tiruvanmalai. The money I had borrowed from Jivarajani was almost untouched. And I still have that rug — a little more thread-bare, a little more time-worn.

On reaching Ramanashram, I placed before the Maharshi the three separate lots of prasad collected from the three temples Gopalda had visited. The Maharshi instructed they be placed separately on a big *thali* he had called for. Then he took a pinch of

prasad from all three lots, and he applied sandalwood paste, vermilion and ash (*bhasma*) on his forehead, and told the attendant to distribute to everyone in the ashram and to tell them the *prasad* was sent by Sri Krishna Prem. (Concluded)

If this is not Bhakti, what else is it?

IN Bhagavan's own case, as in that of his famous forerunner Sankara, we can see how *Jnana* and *Bhakti* were inextricably blended. Once Krishna Prem (a learned and devout Englishman who has become an ascetic and is now living in an *asramam* of his own near Almora in the Himalayas) visited Bhagavan, and when I had a chat with him subsequently at Madras, he said: "Many people had told me Bhagavan was a pure *Jnani*. But I consider him a very great *Bhakta*. When I showed him my image of Lord Krishna, which I worship and carry about with me, tears came into his eyes as he handled it and gave it back to me. If this is not *Bhakti*, what else is it?"

– From *My Recollections of Bhagavan*, by Devaraj Mudaliar

The Turning Point

By Natanananda

I WAS twenty years old in 1917-18 and a schoolmaster. Being naturally of a pious disposition I used to go about from place to place frequently to have darshan of the deities installed in temples. A noble soul who saw this brought to me of his own accord the two books (in Tamil), *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam* and *Sri Vivekananda Vijayam*, and asked me to read them. As soon as I had read them, I was seized with an intense longing for obtaining the vision of God and for finding out the guru who would show the way to it. While I was engaged in this search, I heard about the extraordinary greatness of Bhagavan Sri Ramana through a holy person whom I happened to meet at Sriperumbudur.

On 2nd May, 1918 I saw Sri Ramana for the first time at Skandasramam on Arunachala. I beseeched him fervently thus: "It is my great desire that I should actually experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfill my desire." In those days Sri Ramana was not speaking much. Still, he spoke kindly as follows: "Is it the body in front of me which desires to obtain my grace? Or is it the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not now looking upon itself as the body and making this request?"

If so, let the awareness first of all know its real nature. It will then automatically know God and my grace. The truth of this can be realised even now and here."

Besides speaking thus, he also explained it as follows, through my own experience. "It is not the body which desires to obtain the grace. Therefore, it is clear that it is awareness which shines here as 'you'. To you who are of the nature of awareness there is no connection during sleep with the body, the senses, the vital airs and the mind. On waking up you identify yourself with them, even without your knowledge. This is your experience. All that you have to do hereafter is to see that you do not identify yourself with them in the states of waking and dream also and to try to remain yourself as in the state of deep sleep – as you are by nature unattached, you have to convert the state of ignorant deep sleep, in which you were formless and unattached, into conscious deep sleep. It is only by doing this that you can remain established in your real nature. You should never forget that this experience will come only through long practice. This experience will make it clear that your real nature is not different from the nature of God." – *The Mountain Path*, April 1969