

NANNAGARU

(By V. Ganesan Garu)



Life

B. V. L. N. RAJU was born on September 23, 1934, at Kommara -- his maternal grandfather's village in West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh -- though his native place is JINNURU. His ancestors, who were peasants, were by nature devotional, magnanimous, humane and venerable. He lost his father at an early age and his mother and grandmother brought him up.

As a child he was gentle, humble, and compassionate by nature. While still in school, he strove to look after those who were less fortunate by helping with meals and even organizing and extending financial help. While he felt that social service done in the right spirit is instrumental in freeing one from the bonds of ego, he was not fully satisfied. Hence, at the age of twenty, he went to North India on a pilgrimage, along with his grandmother. That long religious travel -- both to the Himalayas and to Varanasi -- inculcated in him spiritual aspirations. He got the blessings of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh; and, one Swami Atmananda induced in him serious study of the Sankara Bhashya (commentary) on The Bhagavad Gita and other scriptural texts. Abiding by such powerful guidance, he started living the teaching, in his daily living.

While the young Nannagaru was deeply rooted in acquiring scriptural knowledge, a significant event brought about a total change in his life. Let us listen to Nannagaru's own narration :

"In 1957, I had a dream one night. An old man with a staff in his hand, raised me from the bed and kissed me hard on my cheeks. I was perplexed. I pleaded with him to leave me alone. The stranger paid no heed to my words. I had a feeling that he was invading my life. I was seized with fear and tried hard to wriggle out of his grip. While he was holding me in his embrace, my pillow fell on to the floor. He lifted it off the ground, adjusted it on my bed and gently laid me back on the cot. He looked at me compassionately and left me -- as a Doctor would leave a patient.

"For six months, I was struggling to know who this 'stranger' could be. One day while reading the daily newspaper, The Hindu, in our village library, I saw an advertisement about a book 'The Great Men of India' by Madras Book Publishing House. Going through the arranged list of these great men, I felt a thrill when I read the seventh name : " Sri Ramana Maharshi ". I felt here was a man who would draw me to the cave of my Heart. I got the book on Sri Ramana Maharshi through a post from the Madras company. The book contained his portrait also; and, I recognized the person who had appeared before me in my dream six months earlier.

"The divine person -- Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi -- lived in 'Arunachala' in Tamil Nadu and was revered all over the World. His physical life ended on April 14, 1950, in his seventieth year.

"He had no personal life of His own. His life was but the Splendour of the 'Self'. Equality was His life-breath. Many blessed people achieved fulfillment in their lives by the mere darshan of the Maharshi. He was like a blazing Sun in the spiritual firmament of India. The chanting of His Name is itself auspicious. He is the Mahatma of all Mahatmas ('The Sage among all Sages')."

After reading the first book on Sri Bhagavan: 'Self-Realisation' by B.V.Narasimha Swamy, he had a very deep connection with Sri Ramana Maharshi. Nannagaru paid his first visit to Sri Ramanasramam in January, 1959. From then on, he dedicated his life to the service of Sri Bhagavan. He said: "Bhagavan Ramana's name, form and teaching helped me powerfully in my spiritual progress". He would often say: "It was not my choice that Sri Bhagavan came into my life. He took me into His fold, thus blessing me, profusely! "

During one such dedicated visit to Arunachala, in 1982, while lying down in the Ashram Guest Room, Sri Bhagavan blessed Nannagaru. In his own words : "Sri Bhagavan opened the track between the 'Spiritual Heart' and the 'Sahasrara '. I felt the awakening of 'Amruta Nadi '. From then on, 'Bliss' is being experienced". It was the new beginning. The blissful peace that became his nature was also transmitted to those around him, providing solace to many suffering souls. He started to speak on Sri Bhagavan, gathering thousands of new devotees who had never heard of Arunachala or Sri Ramana Maharshi and allowed them to experience the power of Sri Bhagavan's Grace. In addition to his widely attended talks, he wrote, translated and published many books on the Direct Teaching of Sri Bhagavan thereby drawing an even wider audience in rural Andhra Pradesh.

Having been established in that state, Nannagaru has become a beacon of hope for those yearning for true spiritual solace. His speeches and books are powerful but his silence is even more awe-inspiring. Many come with worldly troubles and their tortured minds are quietened by his silence and gentle words. He always turns them towards Sri Bhagavan's immortal teaching, and like a miracle, their problems get dissolved!

Always clad in white, Nannagaru is easily accessible to all. Seekers from various corners of the world have sought him out and on their sincere requests, he has visited several countries including the Middle East and England. He energizes and lifts the crowds up so much so that he

has been named “Crowd Puller” and far more aptly, ‘The child of Bhagavan’. He once said, spreading the Direct Teaching of the Maharshi is not a part of my life, but it is my ‘life’ itself.” It is interesting to read the poem they wrote on his visit, emphasizing his Love and Compassion.

Closing Ceremony Reflection

How quickly the time has passed by us
Since we first met on Friday’s eve!
Our hearts are full now, with wonder
At the loving that we receive.

The mind’s like the noise of the traffic
Or bleating of goats in the field.
Bhagavan whispered that we should surrender
But we were too stubborn to yield.

As we sit here together in silence
With only the singing of birds,
We know that the wisdom at stillness
Takes us deeper than ever can words.

We feel Bhagavan’s grace washing o’er us
And filling the room with His peace.
He tells us “Let go of all wanting
and your hearts will find a perfect release.”

The guru may be in the body
Or that may have vanished to dust,
But what is supremely important
Is giving him all of our trust.

Of Sadhana, spiritual practice,
There’s no higher than this, be you sure:
Patiently bear every insult
And injuries humbly endure

Oh Lord, what can we do to please you,
In gratitude for all of this?
“Let go of the mind, and drop the small self —
One with me in Peace, Love and Bliss!”

Oh Dearest Sri Nanna Garu!
Please give us your blessing and grace,
That our hearts may be filled with your sweetness
As mirrors of Bhagavan’s face!

True to this cause, he constructed at Jinnur in 1984, the “Ramana Kshetram” – a nucleus spiritual centre! He dedicated it exclusively for spreading Bhagavan Ramana’s direct teaching of ‘spiritual awakening’ in the hearts of the devotees visiting it. He also arranged to build two ashrams at Tiruvannamalai for devotees to visit and also stay and pursue ‘spiritual sadhana’. Thirty years ago, he started a monthly magazine in Telugu: ‘Ramana Bhaskara’ benefiting fifty thousand readers and spiritual aspirants as well as a website (www.srinannagaru.com) which has further spread the teaching all over the world.

From the time Nannagaru first visited Sri Ramanasramam, he devoted his life to propagating the message of Sat-Guru Ramana. According to him, helping devotees in worldly matters is equally spiritual. He never wanted to become popular, maintained a very low profile and thus made himself available to all, at all times, throughout the year. His love and compassion being boundless, he speaks to everyone that comes for his darshan with the same empathy and passion. He is truly eager to find out about their welfare, their family and their problems. He joyously participates in important life events of his devotees. He shares his childlike, infectious compassion to all those who come within his realm and asserts: “The more you give, the more you receive. Your very living becomes true meditation” .

Ultimately though, he focuses his devotees’ attention on the direct, vital, nonsectarian approach of Bhagavan Ramana for attaining the Truth. With his own example and life, he exemplifies the nuances of ‘Atma Vichara’ but gives equal importance to total surrender to Sat-Guru Ramana – the ever-existing ‘Inner Guru’. He thus draws one’s attention on how to curb latent tendencies, how to overcome ‘I-am-the-body idea’, how to cut the roots of the ego. He equips them with ‘practical spiritual tools’ which enables them to maintain self-confidence, mental equanimity and the ability to deal with the challenges of the world. Ultimately, he reminds them that ‘The true spiritual treasure’ is embedded within one’s Heart and the constant practice of diving deep within one’s own Heart is true spiritual practice.”



V.Ganesan, Nannagaru and Anuradha

NANNAGARU on SRI BHAGAVAN

During Nannagaru's recent visit to Arunachala, in September 2016, Anuradha and I went to his ashram and spent a very useful time with him. We requested him to summarise Sri Bhagavan's teachings and its uniqueness. The following is what Nannagaru said in brief about the uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan's teaching:

"Sri Bhagavan's teachings were completely subjective. Though there were many masters who have realized the Truth, no one's teaching was completely subjective or without reference to suffering."

"Bhagavan Ramana's teaching was direct and never relative. Even the Buddha and Sri Rama and Sri Krishna though towering Godmen in spiritual history, had suffered in their life as well as in their teachings. They spoke about cleansing and purification of the mind. For example, when a patient comes with a particular disease to a doctor, he examines the patient, identifies the disease, finds the remedy and then, affects the elimination of the disease. Similarly, other saints confirmed that it is the mind which is the root cause of all suffering, through various methods, techniques, and yogic practices.



Nannagaru on 'Gurupurnima' Day

Whereas, Sri Bhagavan told sadhakas to question if the mind really existed. He put forward the Truth as it IS, without any form of division, separation, and duality."

"Sri Bhagavan did not see the world as a separate entity. For him, there was no world apart from him. Hence, there was no speck of duality. His core teaching is that there is no cause for any form of sorrow outside of oneself - one only needs to drop the false sense of doer-ship."

"Sri Bhagavan repeatedly affirmed that the sense of the feeling of the 'me' and 'mine' are merely the play of thoughts - they are the cause of all suffering. He guided us to enquire if the one who sees the world is real in the first place! Check if there really exists any cause for the disease (suffering) at all! If the world does appear apart from oneself, it is merely due to one's ignorance."

“Sri Bhagavan was Brahman and saw the whole creation as Brahman too. Sri Bhagavan was once asked by a devotee what he saw while watching the Mountain. Sri Bhagavan replied: ‘I am seeing myself!’ ”

“World is an illusion created in Brahman. All bodies and appearances are shadows in IT. We cry over the loss of body as we think we are the body. What is not true appears as true due to maya (illusion). One must wake up from this illusion through Self-Enquiry by raising the question: “Who am I?”. Such steadfast abidance in the Self -- in Brahman -- is termed as Self-Realisation.”



“.... He would hold both my cheeks in his two hands”

NANNAGARU AND ME

Even during Sri Bhagavan's lifetime, a stranger visiting Sri Ramanasramam, might have mistaken Sri Bhagavan to be a Telugu Saint from Andhra Pradesh. This was because the Ashram usually crowded with many pilgrims, aspirants, and devotees from Andhra Pradesh. The Andhra devotees financially supported in running the Ashram, as well. Their sincere devotion to Sri Bhagavan was very deep.

After the Mahanirvana of Sri Bhagavan, the Ashram became almost deserted overnight. With the volume of visiting pilgrims declining drastically, the Ashram was in financial straits. In 1964, the Ashram journal, 'The Mountain Path', was started with Arthur Osborne as its sole editor and me serving it as its managing editor. Thanks to it, devotees and sadhaks, especially from Andhra Pradesh, started visiting the Ashram, as in the olden days!

In due course, as matters turned out, the Ashram management started discouraging devotees from visiting in groups, due to dearth of staff to attend on them. There was, thus, a period when devotees, especially from Andhra Pradesh, who were making their regular visits to the Ashram, had to be denied permission to stay in the Ashram guest houses. Obviously, the devotees in Andhra Pradesh felt sad.

Sri Bhagavan gave me the inner urge to take over the duty of attending on the visiting pilgrims and their needs, and helping them acquaint themselves with the sacred places inside the big temple, around the town, up on the holy hill and round the sacred Mountain hallowed by the stay of Sri Bhagavan. This was in addition to the various other duties entrusted to me. Coming to know of the deep distress of the Andhra devotees, I started taking steps to amend the damage done. I started attending to the Andhra devotees with a special touch of hospitality and kindness, and further removed curbs on the length of their stay, etc. It took almost two decades to bring back the confidence of the Andhra devotees!

It was at that period that I came to know of a great Andhra Ramana bhakta -- B.V.L.N. Raju. Honestly, my first reaction on hearing his name was a wonder over a person having an equal number of alphabets in his initials and name! Apart from this, my first meeting with Nannagaru is evergreen in my Heart! If I remember right, he was introduced to me by another Andhra devotee whom I knew. B.V.L.N. Raju was unknown to me and the other devotee was known to me! Yet, my whole attention was riveted on the 'unknown' devotee. I felt a deep spiritual attraction to him, which I truly consider as a guidance from within prompted by Sri Bhagavan. From then on, I began showering special attention not only on him, but also on all Andhra devotees who accompanied him. Also, I started giving importance in the columns of 'The Mountain Path' to the 'Ramana-activities' of B.V.L.N. Raju at Jinnuru and other places in Andhra Pradesh, along with photos of the functions sent to me.

Soon, B.V.L.N. Raju flowered into the most affectionate 'Nannagaru' (respected father)! His public meetings were sometimes attended by as many as some thirty thousand devotees avidly listening to his talk on the teachings of the Maharshi.

The personal relationship between Nannagaru and me also became closer, stronger, and deeply spiritual. In my private and exclusive meetings with Nannagaru, I started experiencing that I was in the presence of a true Saint! It is obvious that Nannagaru himself revealed to me this spiritual dimension of his - what a great blessing!



Procession



Reception

Once, Nannagaru invited me to Jinnuru. When I reached Bheemavaram, I was received at the railway station by the devotees and admirers of Nannagaru and taken to a reputed lawyer's residence where my accommodation had been arranged. The next morning, to my surprise, I was received with the playing of nadhaswaram and thavil, seated in an open car and taken round Jinnuru's main streets like a bridegroom in a marriage function!

When the procession reached his ashram at Jinnuru, Nannagaru received me with immense love, affection and joy. He said, "Ganesan! You are the 'bride'. Sri Bhagavan is your 'bridegroom'! Today, we are performing the marriage - the spiritual marriage - by giving you away as the beloved bride to the divine bridegroom, our supreme Satguru Ramana!" Every detail of a marriage ceremony was observed on that day, including Sri Bhagavan tying a mangalsutra around my neck, after his putting a ring on one of my fingers! It took me days to come out of that pleasant marriage 'reality'!

Nannagaru thus dislodged me from my arrogance of being a bachelor (brahmachari) and transported me to the exalted state of a grihastha - married person - by making me the 'wife' (grihini) of the one and only Purna Purusha - Bhagavan Ramana!

“Oh Ramana! My Loving Lord! Throw Thy garland (about my shoulders) wearing Thyself this one (strung) by me, Ramana ! ”



Marriage



Nannagaru honouring the 'bride'

'Sri Ramana Kshetram', Jinnuru (on 26-12-1994)

Every year, Nannagaru visited Arunachala at least four times with a large number of devotees accompanying him. When I quit the responsibility of the management of the Ashram, and took residence at 'Ananda Ramana', 1km away from the Ashram, Nannagaru would visit me there, Ever one to be with you through thick and thin, Nannagaru - like an Annagaru - elder brother - would bring a lot of sweets, fruits and above all, his melting love! He would hold both my cheeks in his two hands, lift my face, lovingly look into my eyes and pour his grace into them, saying, "Ganesan! I remember your kind services to Ramanadevotees - old and new - everyday of your life at the Ashram. How much you have gathered and published the precious teachings of Sri Bhagavan in book-form! You have a special place in my Heart!"



Nannagaru on 'Deepam' Day

Even if the whole world forgets me, these Sages and Saints gave me a little space in their Heart
- that is more than enough for me! What a great blessing!



Velpur 'Mouna' Swami, V.Ganesan and Nannagaru

References : <https://www.aham.com/SagesAndSaints/index.html>

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