

Glimpses
of
Sadguru Sri Nanna Garu



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Over the years, I found the validity of some distinction or difference between the English word “seeing” and the richly suggestive word “**darshan**”. We go and see a friend, a relative or see a picture. But when we **happen** to go and see a sage, a saint or a mahatma, we generally say we had “**darshan**”. “I had **darshan** of Swami.....” we say. We don’t say “were you able to see well — **Baga choosara?**” in Telugu. “**Darshanam baga jariginda?**” we ask. We don’t say “**Choodatam baga jariginda?**”

Perhaps, the clue lies in the fact that the Hindu systems of philosophy are called “**darshanas**”. They are not just intellectually designed and linguistically communicated systems of thought. **Darshanas** are

direct perceptions of reality. We have direct exposure, not indirect apprehension through some mediation. That direct, unmediated perception—realization—of the Truth is generally described as **aparokshanubhuti**. We realize not through the lenses of the senses but what lies behind all these senses. **Darshana** is, therefore, not seeing with the physical eye alone but seeing **with the basis behind seeing**. Though that **Darshana** can be reduced to a system of philosophy so that we have various ways of “seeing” the Reality. We have, thus **Yoga darshana, Patanjala darshana, Advaita darshana**, etc.

You may wonder “why all these technicalities?” I also do. But, then, is seeing Nanna Garu the same as just seeing? That it is not, is clear when you see his devotees, disciples or admirers listening to him. What do they see in him to remain for hours together—often—without, I am sure, respite? What do their eyes register? Thousands of eyes focused on those serene, unblinking eyes radiating love and affection? Do they remember everything that he speaks? I have no idea. But I do know that all those who attend don’t just listen. They respond to his Presence. Yes, his words are vibrant; his voice reflects the softness of being. His eyes sparkle! But something beyond all these enters the consciousness of the listeners.

Same thing happened to me when I had my first **darshan** of Nanna Garu. This is a brief account of what that continues to mean — to me.

Some details as a preliminary. I was born into a family which, by God's grace, was deeply steeped in spiritual traditions. My father was an initiated disciple of Rev. Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj —a direct disciple of Swami Vivekananda. From him I inherited a taste for inner life. Though I cannot say that I have done intense **tapasya** or some such thing, my **taste** for inner things continues without any break. (I was myself initiated by Rev. Swami Yatiswaranandaji —a direct disciple of Rev. Swami Brhamanandaji, regarded as the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna).

I give these details not out of vanity (I **know** I am not a worthy disciple), but because I want to underline the fact that I have some **jijnasa** to know about, if not the insistent urge to experience, what I happen to know — about spiritual matters. This brought me the **darshan** of many saints and sages.

To go back in time. Before I moved to Hyderabad in 1964, I had no knowledge of Nanna Garu. Though, surprisingly, I was close to his **leelasthala**: Jinnuru. I was a native of Bhimavaram. We **had** close relatives in Palakole and came there quite often. But no visit to Jinnuru came through. Perhaps, I had heard about

“Jinnuru Nanna Garu” but I cannot vouch for it. But it is equally possible that even if I heard I may not have gone to Jinnuru.

Ramana Maharshi said: “What is not destined to happen will not –however much we try. What is to happen will surely happen, whatever you may do to stop it.” “Everything happens” said Gurdjieff the great thinker of this century. Obviously, in my case, this came true. So close, so distant! How shall we explain this? Perhaps, as my mentor ‘Sri Ram’ puts it: Everything—literally everything—is not only predetermined but also **well** – determined.

I would now think about it in this way: “had I met him [Nanna Garu] earlier” is a thought. I met him when I truly met him is a fact. So choice is ruled out. There is also no chance for chance. The fact is: **I had darshan of Nanna Garu exactly when I ought to have.** And that was absolutely **natural**.

Even in Hyderabad, the question of having his **darshana** earlier never came through. For instance, I knew Dr. Shanta Subbarao, an ardent, experienced spiritual person, former Head , English Dept., Vanitha Mahavidyala, Hyderabad. I don’t recall her mentioning Nanna Garu to me. She took me to see another distinguished person: U.G.Krishnamurthi. The visit is distinct in mind. Moreover, it was she, who gave me

some books about Jillellamudi Amma. But, I am almost sure, that she didn't mention Nanna Garu as far as I remember.

You may think that I am giving unnecessary details. Perhaps, I can claim that while my **darshan** came at the time it had to, my writing about this account also is designed. Therefore, every word here appears by a predesigned plan. Like music from a prerecorded cassette or a film from a spool. For one reason at least I am inclined to think that when it came earlier, I would have been unaware of many things. Not that I am much more aware now. But I am aware now that I should be much more aware. Even now I have yet to "see" Nanna Garu against the physical and environmental backdrop of "his own" village. Jinnuru is close enough to a town—Palakole. Yet, I imagine, Jinnuru retains its own rural ambience! The link is Nanna Garu. The imperishable innocence of the rural folk and the worldly wisdom of town folk. I know this is a kind of romantic picture. But it hardly matters. Because the relation between a Sage and a **sishya** is itself a divine romance! Indeed, in **St. John**, it is said "I can of mine own self do nothing." And Nanna Garu said in a recent talk: "In what manner, how and when, something is to be done, happens exactly in that way. One should not be in a hurry. When that time comes, without will or wish that thing gets done."

This is the truth. I learnt a few more things from this: in matters that matter—that is, spiritual matters—nature chooses its own time, context and place. When the time is ripe and right, the context is congenial and the place is appropriate, the blending of these creates its own event to happen. Similarly, perhaps, a person is spiritual to the extent s/he neither regrets the past nor is anxious about the future. Only the present counts. There is no need for retrospective regrets. And now how I had my first **darshan**—

How events took shape to make me get my first glimpse of Nanna Garu is in itself a fascinating story. It involves not only Nanna Garu but another great sage of our area: Swami Jnananandaji, generally described as the “Saint and the Scientist.” He was born near Bhimavaram, in a small village called “Goraganamudi.” His life itself blended the rigour of scientific research and the radiance of spiritual truths which include but go beyond science.

It was my unique privilege to have **darshan** of Jnananandaji in Visakhapatnam. He was then the Founder and Chairman of the Nuclear Physics department of Andhra University. My father took me to see him on some personal work of his. Swamiji was closely known to my father and thus I had the privilege of seeing Swamiji. (I have recorded my impressions in **Saints and Sages**).

But I never thought that I would have further connection with Jnananandaji. Thanks to my esteemed friend and gifted Telugu literary figure, Sri Akkiraju Ramapathi Rao, I wrote many articles on Rev. Jnananandaji for a journal devoted to Swamiji: **Jnana Darshini**. Sri Padmanabha Raju who was looking after the Trust, decided to celebrate the Birth Centenary of Swamiji at Goraganamudi, and I was accorded the privilege of being one of the speakers.

Of course, I was delighted to participate in such a historic occasion. Moreover, it was after 15 years I was visiting my native place, Bhimavaram. I was a student of D.N.R.College (in those days it was called W.G.B.College)and was glad to see it again. I recalled my association as a Tutor in the History department for a decade.

But I never could guess that I would have the inestimable opportunity of seeing Nanna Garu! It was in the afternoon on the first day of the Centenary celebrations. Perhaps, it could be three o'clock. There was a huge gathering of admirers and devotees of Swamiji as well as his former students. There was an air of festivity. We were expected to participate in the meeting—though there was no proposal that we should speak.

By that time—in fact much earlier—the place was milling with people. If I am right, most of the audience came to listen to Nanna Garu. Of course, this is as it should be. By that time, he was a “Star attraction”—if I can put it that way. I am sure that the audience consisted of various levels of expectations. The women’s section particularly intrigued me.

Let me explain: after Nanna Garu was respectfully invited on to the dais—tastefully and elegantly decorated as proper to the occasion—we who came from outside were also invited to come and sit on the dais. Thus I shared the platform with Nanna Garu. As far as I can remember, there were no chairs on the dais. We sat on the comfortable beds—covered with colorful sheets—spread on the floor. I sat next to Nanna Garu.

I do not recall anything about the **preliminaries**. But, I was amazed even by a cursory glance at the audience. It was something one rarely sees—specially in urban centres. The women were sitting in the front. Looking at them—a single glance at them—made me transfixed. Even today after so many years I can vividly, clearly visualize the intense devotion in the eyes of those women—with eyes sparkling with expectation and ears keen to catch every word—they were an incredible reminder to me that this is, Eternal India, India with

its continuity of world's richest spiritual traditions and forms and structures through which those traditions are communicated. This is, in fact, a parallel tradition of 'real' India where culture is not equated with literacy. Culture has little to do with formal education—it is something that flows in the stream of the imperishable, perennial consciousness of the race. Those women **showed** this fact to me.

How did this miracle happen, I wondered. I wonder even now. The devotees sat so close that they could, even by a little stretching of their hands, easily touch the speaker! Another striking thing that I clearly noticed was—how can I put it? — the sheer unbelievable **innocence** of those devotees! The slightest breath of scepticism of modernity was totally absent in those faces.

I used to feel that you require a certain amount of education to appreciate the spiritual truths. How can one follow unless there is some background, some **samskaras**? This is a foolish kind of thinking. When I turned my attention to Nanna Garu sitting on the dais, I felt something strange: he appears so simple, so natural, so artless—without any air of a guru. Or, an aura of a Master. What is it that tunes the entire audience? What unique quality keeps them totally engrossed?

I now realize that the very name of this remarkable person, strikes a serene note of spontaneous affection. I don't know how Sri B.V.L.N.Raju garu came to be addressed as Nanna Garu. Perhaps, there is a story, also a mystery. But that is immaterial. The word has magically overcome the boundaries of family associations to become a symbol of the Upanishadic affirmations: "Thou art my Father, Thou art my Mother!" and other things. Don't we find this larger significance as the clue to the miracle of Nanna Garu's Presence inspiring spontaneous love and affection in whoever is lucky and fortunate to even see him? "Baba", "Pithaji"...are equivalents yes. But, for us, "Nanna" sounds closer, dismantling all that prevents intimacy, creating a sense of togetherness.

In the Bhakti tradition, the easiest way to relate to God is to humanize our relations. **Dasya, sakhya, madhurya**, etc., are regarded as modes of adoring the Divine Beloved. In fact, I found an extension of this view just now. I turned the pages of **Ramana Bhaskara** for November, 2007. And what do I see? The following passage:

Leaving the **subject**, why should you go on saying 'that God is great', 'this God is great', 'that Guru is great', this Guru is great'? **Energy waste**. When we are ourselves scorched by the fire of restlessness or peacelessness, what do we

gain by saying somebody is great? Find out the way to better yourself.

Explaining Bhakti, Nanna Garu says further:

All sin gets destroyed when you develop Bhakti When you go on increasing Bhakti day by day, there may be any number of weaknesses, indeed, there may be a dung heap; but ... the spark of Bhakti burns all sin and reduces it to ashes. (p 20).

Bhakti nurtures, nourishes and transforms human emotions into their higher levels. And what can be more spontaneous than the emotion of being a child surrendering to the parent? It creates a wealth of freedom in the secure lap of the parents and one has least worry about anything. In other words, we are all children—both psychologically and spiritually. Biologically we cease to be children. That is natural and inevitable. But, Nanna Garu ensures that in spite of ceasing to be children—which is natural and necessary—we can retain our sense of wonder, of innocence and faith.

I don't think, I remember what Nanna Garu spoke to that adoring audience. But, I was bowled over by his language, his grasp of what he was speaking about, and above all his simplicity and transparency. Everything that he said was free from scholastic

emptiness and sterility. It had that directness which, I felt, could only come from experience of what he was explaining. What remained in my mind was also the softness, the lilt and rhythm—almost the musical melody—of his exquisitely modulated voice. It had none of that strident, oratorical flourishes that we generally find in speakers in the area of spirituality. Perhaps, it may not be far from the truth when we find the voice having the feeling of a child being caressed, tenderly, coaxed almost, into accepting and absorbing the simple alphabet of spirituality he was explaining.

Those guileless people listening attentively to him made me feel a bit awkward, if not ashamed, of my own temperament to complicate simple things. Perhaps, my academic background made me like that—though I was fascinated and greatly influenced by Sri Ramakrishna's naturalness and simplicity. I found in Nanna Garu, what I imagined can only be literary strategy: a **sahitya prakriya**. But it is something else. This is the rare ability, the rare gift, of communicating by his PRESENCE what he wants to say by words! This is very rare. But it is not like the charisma one finds in public figures. This quality in Nanna Garu arises only from what we call **holiness**. Matching words with what they suggest, without any ambiguity or confusion, these words are mirrors to Reality.

To resume: the next day's programme was in the Ramakrishna Sabha Bhavan, in DNR College campus. The large auditorium was filled to capacity with many people standing in the aisles. The elite of the town was there as also Nanna Garu's remarkable number of devotees and admirers. (Incidentally, in the construction of the Sabha Bhavan, my father played a crucial role since it was he who, along with a band of devotees, used to bring many Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order to Bhimavaram right from the 1950s or even earlier).

We arrived a bit late for the meeting and by that time Nanna Garu, Rev. Swatmanandaji of R.K.Math, Rajahmundry and other speakers were already on the stage. I don't know how it happened, but I had to address the audience before Nanna Garu. Of course, the best is always, almost at the end, the last! Even now, I recall that as a preliminary to what I planned to speak about Rev. Jnananandaji, I spoke about Nanna Garu.

"After I spoke, if I am right in my memory, it was Nanna Garu who spoke. As usual he enchanted the audience. I don't remember now what he spoke. But how much eagerness and exclusive attachment to Nanna Garu most of the audience had, was clear from something odd but understandable. Immediately after

his speech was over, they left quietly—I mean those who came only to hear him. It was quite odd.

After I returned to Hyderabad, I cherished—continued to cherish—my glimpses of Nanna Garu. But I don't recall any further meeting—until, perhaps, the 80's. But the link continued—in a sense: I received **Ramana Bhaskara** issues regularly. I read them. I must confess not with the concentration it should be read. But I notice one paradox. This is not just a paradox which delights us, but something which should be a caution. Nanna Garu's discourses are so crystal clear that one can follow them (understand I mean) without much effort. This instant comprehension itself is—if I can say it in this way—a danger. For, what is understood easily runs the risk of being forgotten equally easily.

For instance, we read the **Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**. No explanation by a pandit is needed. Everything that the Great Master speaks explains itself (at least **my** feeling is that). And **we equate understanding with absorption**. It is like taking food. We eat with relish. But does it get digested and give strength to the body? Our physical system throws out things which do not agree with it. And in digesting spiritual matters our mental and psychic systems easily eject many things. In short, Nanna Garu instantly arrests our understanding by his simplicity. But, do we meditate on what we understood?

This struck me as the reason why Nanna Garu is fond of homely examples for explaining highest truths. In fact, in my recent reading, I was startled and highly amused by an unusual example. He said: "Read the book '**Who am I**' everyday—whether you like it, or not. It looks like a dried up cake of a palmyra fruit. [**Thatichettu rotte**, in Telugu]. In it, you don't have **chutney, sambar** or ghee. When you read the book "**Who am I?**" it appears as if you are eating palmyra-fruit bread. Yet, read with a little bit of taste for it." (Ramana Bhaskara 5-6-2007, Pp 11-12).

The example is familiar and the dislike (for that kind of bread!) is also common experience. How come Nanna Garu yokes the profound truth of Ramana Bhagavan's "**Who am I?**" with such an example? One feels first of all, Sadguru Nanna Garu is reminding and illustrating the truth of the Avadhuta way of learning: the common thing is uncommon, the uncommon thing is common. As Swami Ramatirtha said: "The art of religion consists in making **every little bit of experience** an occasion for a leap into the Infinite!"

The example is familiar, we see it and it registers. That is enough. The seed is sown. The angler has placed the bait. And we need not worry whether we understood the idea which we **have** to experience. For, even thinking of the example is itself meditation. For

instance, I cannot see the palmyra fruit without sight. Is seeing such a small thing? Is the eye a common trivial thing? As my mentor 'Sri Ram' has said: "The eyes which see the light are created in the darkness of the glorious temple of the mother's womb!" "వెలుతురు చూసే శిశువు నయనాలు మాతృగర్భాలయపు చీకటిలో తయారవుతాయి, సృష్టించబడతాయి." Is there anything more wonderful than this?

There is also another subtlety in the way Nanna Garu uses "ordinary" objects and experiences to explain his insights. All scriptures declare firmly that all that is in creation is the **amsa**, aspect, of the Creator. "Everything is Brahman" say the Upanishads. In Potana's Bhagavatam, there is a verse: "Do not say that He is in this and not in that; the Supreme is Omnipresent; in whatever you search and see, there, in that itself He is!" Therefore, search and behind everything is the same energy. Whether it appears as "negative" or "positive", it hardly matters. As 'Sri Ram' said: "When you pour water at the root of a rose tree, you are nourishing not only the charming rose flower, but also the thorns that grow along with it."

Look at another example from this perspective: "When food is served", says Nanna Garu, "rice is placed in the centre and curries, chutneys, etc., are kept on the sides. They are useful to eat the rice. Instead of that

one who eats keeping chutney in the centre and rice on the side, cannot become strong. Similarly, in your life also, you should keep all the things necessary for your physical living on the sides and your spiritual life at the centre.” (**Amrita Vahini**, p.216).

This linking of the physical dimension with the psychological, spiritual dimensions is so fascinating that we are struck with wonder at the unique ways of looking at all things as interconnected and interdependent. We also, if we carefully observe, another fact which we find in the Upanishads but rarely practiced or explained. This is the Upanishadic chart of various Kosas (Sheaths) in the human body. We begin with Annamaya Kosa which is followed by Prana, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya, and finally Anandamaya Kosas. We generally also think that they are vertical, with Annamaya at the base of the Kosa ladder and Anandamaya at the pinnacle. But, in fact, they are to be seen horizontally. For, function-wise every Kosa is as indispensable as any other. The same text which declares Brahman as the Supreme Reality, says that food itself is the manifest form of Parabrahma- “Annam Parabrahma Swarupam.” By using the analogy of topsy turvy, upside down, example of curries and chutneys at the centre, Nanna Garu upholds both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of understanding our ordinary ways of life as

containing the very spiritual truths we realize through elaborate sadhana.

What it suggests we can put it in another way: Nanna Garu's way of explaining is startlingly homely and at the same time, it is holistic. Nothing in Nature, no act, no experience is free from the Eternal Truth which we call God. Therefore, take anything you like and that liking will surely lead you to the One who gave you that liking. Call it Nature or God: it hardly matters. This is an energy which is pulsing in everything. As a **Jilebi**, a sweet dish: eat it at any point, it is sweet. In fact, scientists are now saying that spirituality is not only needed but is indispensable for life. Max Planck the great scientist, put it simply: "We need science for knowledge, religion for our actions in daily life." (Quoted Klaus K. Klostermeir, **The Nature of Nature**, Theosophical Publishing House, 2004; p.142).

To resume my story, I said that I couldn't have darshan of Nanna Garu, again, until the 80s. But another darshan I had anonymously. One day Dr. Shanta Subbarao rang me up to say that Nanna Garu was here in Hyderabad on a visit. If possible, I could go and see him. She gave me the address and the way to reach it. I had to turn left at the Sarathi Studios in Ammerpet and walk along a road with a nalla on the side. The area is called Madhura Nagar, and she also gave me

the name of the person at whose place Nanna Garu was to speak.

With some difficulty I reached the place in the afternoon. I found a big hall, filled to capacity. Nanna Garu was facing the street at the other end of the room, with the wall behind him. I caught a glimpse but didn't draw attention to myself. Very self-conscious by nature, I sat anonymously on a pyol or **Arugu**, and listened to the discourse. Once it ended, I left the place unnoticed. I felt miserable but I couldn't help. I continued getting **Ramana Bhaskara**—a link which continues to this day.

Now that I think of this darshan, it appears to be a renewal of my contact with him. Nature arranged this only to see that the flower of my acquaintance is not allowed to wither away, for my own inner growth. The spark has to the seed has to be nurtured. In short, even "simple" darshan in which the personal angle does not play a role is enough to strengthen the relationship between the seeker and the guru.

In the meantime, my interest in Ramana Bhagavan deepened. I read a few books, felt fascinated and saw a likeness to Sri Ramakrishna, strikingly. Not that there were no contrasts. But incarnations are not of the same mould. They have their own individual stamp. And different cosmic functions that Nature programmes.

Whether I understood everything or not, I cannot say. But, then, I understood enough to continue my interest in these areas.

The next phase began with my association with Ramana Kendra. It was quite near to our place. Not that I didn't make an attempt to absorb the essence of Nanna Garu's "teachings". As a student of literature one thing which struck me was his casual-looking but beautifully imbedded insights of many great minds into his discourses—like diamonds in a necklace. Right from Kalidasa's **Raghuvamsa** to Buddha, Ramana, Ramakrishna and others. Nanna Garu has a remarkable gift for weaving their teachings into the thread of his own experience. He cites simple yet profound insights or parables to highlight a point he wants to make.

But the magic does not lie in the story which perhaps may be familiar. The magic lies in Nanna Garu's way of telling. He does not make an elaborate facade or scaffolding for the story. He peels off the decorative skin and gives us the essence. For instance, take the story from the life of Buddha which Nanna Garu tells under the heading "Society and Religion." (Amritha Vahini, p.64.) Buddha asks a low caste person to give some water to drink. That person tells: "we are low caste people." Then Buddha says: "I haven't asked your caste. I asked for some water to drink. If you have, please give some."

Direct, instantly communicative way of highlighting profound-looking, but simple truths. "Brevity, thy soul is wit" said, Shakespeare. Nanna Garu is always to the point. What does this tell? It tells that Nanna Garu's method is telling to show or showing to tell. The one enriches the other. Similarly, he takes objects which are everyday seen and used by rural folk and lifts them into a context in which spiritual truths emerge spontaneously. For instance, in one context he said, "Look at endrine but don't drink it! Drinking it is fatal. But are we not drinking everyday sights and sounds much more dangerous than the endrine? But are we conscious of it? The point is to make his listeners—mainly from rural background—see objects, with which they are related in life, as windows to the highest truths.

If we want some idea about how skillfully but naturally and spontaneously this great sage yokes the apparently simple objects with "myths," you have an example in the same paragraph/ context wherein Buddha figures. Speaking about the inferiority complex in society, Nanna Garu says: "This inferiority is firmly rooted in society. The same ease with which a good person does a good job, a bad person can do a bad job. For instance, Sakuni in **Mahabharata** is like that. These role players are there in both the past and the present." (p.64)

Lest we may think that it is not clear why in a world created by God there should be evil, Nanna Garu assures us: "This creation does not exist like a kite the thread of which is broken. Everything happens according to Ishwara's will." Nanna Garu now quotes Einstein: "I am deriving some benefit from society. But I am unable to give back to society all that it gives." (p. 64). In the very next section Nanna Garu quotes Shankaracharya on wealth. (The verse is in original Sanskrit. p. 65).

One is delighted at the pearls on the string: From Buddha through Sakuni to Einstein. All held and created by Ishwara! This is what literature people are fond of calling "Unified sensibility." But the point is: this is not an example of just a literary text. It is an example of the way in which great sages provide continuities between tradition and contemporaneity. While Buddha is a spiritual scientist, Enstein is a scientific spiritualist. Both are creations of Nature, of Ishwara, but with various functions. In short, Nanna Garu suggests to us that Ishwara creates both Buddha and Einstein. But the most vital thing to accept is: Ishwara also creates Sakuni! If Buddha preaches peace, Sakuni through his evil counsel brings about, by encouraging the rivalry between the two families, the Mahabharata war. But without Kurukshetra war, can humanity have the priceless crest-jewel of wisdom: the **Bhagavad Gita**?

That is the way in which Nanna Garu gives us an extremely suggestive garland of practical hints for sadhana. At least this is the way I try to absorb.

It is in this manner that my contact with Nanna Garu continued through **Ramana Bhaskara** and news, which I used to get off and on. At this stage, a turning point came about—with the initiative taken by one of the members of Ramana Kendra. And it resulted in something I never imagined.

It came about in this way. In the Kendra, I had the pleasure of the company of new friends. I also learnt about the way Nanna Garu had darshan of Ramana Bhagavan. The story excited me much — and I recalled an extraordinary dream I had of Ramana Bhagavan in Chittoor. (This is too personal to be put on paper.) I felt, at one stage, that I should request Nanna Garu himself to tell me (if he felt it is not something that should be kept for oneself—the rarest of Bhagavan's graces).

It was in the Kendra that I heard of Nanna Garu's book **Amrita Vahini**. I contacted Sri K.S.N. Raju and asked where I could get a copy. He was gracious enough to send me a copy by courier. Even as I looked at it, I felt delighted—at last we have a volume of the collected discourses of Nanna Garu. I dipped into it off and on.... Then another development took place.

In Sri Tadimeti Satyanarayana, I found a friend with whom I very surprisingly and quickly developed an intimacy, as if we were friends for a long, long time. It was he, who one day, suggested that I should translate **Amrita Vahini** into English. I felt a bit uneasy, initially. Will I be able to manage it? I had also to look at the time constraint. I had some projects on my hand. But, something told me, some inner voice, as it were., but a force beyond us decided it. Nanna Garu could meet me, if it was convenient. On....(I do not recall the date or month in 2005).

My going to have darshan of the sage this time was itself something miraculous. He was staying, I think, somewhere in Sanjeevareddynagar area of Hyderabad. I stay in New Nallakunta, near Osmania University. It was quite a distance. Nanna Garu gave me time around 2 'o clock. Sri K.S.N. Raju told me the route to reach the place. I was not familiar with the area and Sri Raju's directions I forgot. I recalled one or two landmarks but they also were vague in my mind.

While I was caught in a fix, a very close friend of mine called me. Mr. Ramaprasad, director of a software company-Ramways-in the U.S.A.He wanted to see me and asked whether he could come. I told him about my appointment with Nanna Garu. He said he would come and take me there. That's the manner in which I managed to reach that area.

But, then, I was confused about the directions. We tried desperately to locate the place. We asked many people. We went round and round, this way and that way, but every attempt failed. One or two landmarks I recalled, but they were of no use. All our enquiries drew a blank. Out of despair and disappointment, we thought of going back.

Just then, when we were driving back on that nearly lonely road, I saw a lady. Somehow I felt she may be able to tell us. This was a sheer impulse. But then it proved the right move. We stopped the car and asked her whether she knew the name of Nanna Garu. She not only knew him and told us the correct address and how to reach it but also informed us that Nanna Garu was waiting for somebody. "He hasn't come yet," it seems he told the devotees who gathered there. I was surprised beyond measure. Some cosmic force, I felt, must have interfered. (How did I get the hunch that I should ask that lady? One reason was: she appeared as someone from the Godavari districts to which I myself belong.)

We drove back, reached the place and went in a lift to the fourth floor Nanna Garu was sitting in a room adjacent to a hall. The group of devotees was quite big. They were all waiting for his darshan. We did pranams to him. After so many years I was seeing him.

He appeared exquisitely graceful; his eyes sparkled and scintillated with the light of love and affection. Dressed in flawless white, he was a picture of purity and an amazing simplicity. The latter quality reminded me of a song Sri Ramakrishna was fond of: “Unless you are simple, you cannot know God, the Simple One!” The word simple: its original is “Sahaja”, which can also be translated as “natural” “Sahaja sthithi” is generally translated as “Be as you are”. But another and more effective translation, I suppose, would be “in tune with nature” and its extension which is “human nature.”

Nanna Garu, totally immersed in the consciousness of Ramana Bhagavan is, if anything, natural—in his language, his ideas and insights and in his concern for all those who come in touch with him. There are no airs of the guru about him: he is approachable, accessible and as far as I know, not a very ritualistic guru. (I have an incident in this regard which will appear latter in this narrative.)

Nanna Garu graciously took out a copy of **Amrita Vahini** and gave it to me. He was somewhat reluctant to sign the book: but, I was insistent and he put his signature as “శ్రీ నాన్నగారు” – “Sri Nanna Garu”. Then he told me that I should do the translation at my convenience. There was no need to be rigid about it,

as to date of completion, etc., Giving the copy of his book to me, he said: "I still keep the letter you wrote to me earlier. It is a very appreciative letter and I felt happy to receive it!" He talked to my friend Ramaprasad also, affectionately, as if he had met him many times.

The devotees who assembled in the adjacent hall, I knew, were eager to listen to Nanna Garu. I know, I was late in coming to see him. Therefore, I got up, did pranams to him and prepared to leave. I sought his blessing in the sacred task I was given. He kept his hand on my head; in fact, I gently pulled it and placed it on my head!

Once again what amazed me was the incredible devotion of the disciples and admirers who were waiting outside. They show no impatience; I felt that they may not even expect him to speak. Often, I imagine, they sit in silence before him, enjoying the vibrations (**spandana**) he creates wherever he goes. The Power of Presence, with him, is simply the Presence of Power! Even a few minutes in his company would certainly tell you, what radiant Presence he has. One simply floats in that luminosity and manifest Power of the sage.

In a recent discourse Nanna Garu said: "We require three energies if we want to do anything. To get a good,

auspicious thought or strong wish is itself the manifest form of Laksmidevi. To get a good thought is not enough. To know, to learn how to do it, is Saraswatidevi. But knowing is not enough. Unless we have proper energy we cannot do it. Goddess Durga is the deity who gives you energy to do. Therefore, all the three energies are needed by everyone.” (**Ramana Bhaskara**, December,2007; P.9).

Perhaps, my darshan of Nanna Garu at this juncture activated these energies and made me launch into the difficult job of translation of **Amrita Vahini**. I am certain about this; only for those, who love Nanna Garu but may not be strictly religious, I use the word “perhaps”.

It took me some time to begin the translation. I read a few pages of **Amrita Vahini** and what struck me, again, was its simplicity and directness of both content and expression. I also felt happy that it had a very suggestive title. A title which is enormously revelatory: full of what Indian aestheticians call dhvani. Amrita, nectar, can only come from—or as “Amrithamathana” story shows—the creative struggle between good and evil forces in nature, the Daivi and Asuri complex of Gunas. “The web of our life is of mingled yarn, good and ill together,” said Shakespeare. Good and ill are intertwined. They cannot be fragmented. Fragmenting them is the beginning of psychological illness. In the

cosmic scheme, good and evil are perennially flowing streams—vahini.

I felt it was a beautiful and highly revealing title and one should be grateful to Nanna Garu in this respect. But, how to churn the ocean of samsara and distil the amrita and be careful in not getting infected by the poison of sorrow and suffering? By listening and meditating on Nanna Garu's words. He himself makes this clear: "Some people ask: 'What do we gain by simply reading and listening? And even after reading and listening, we are not deriving any benefit. So, what do we lose even when we do not read or listen?' All these are ridiculous words. But God himself says "listen and studying are necessary." When you "listen and then reflect on that, [God] will see to it that all the poison is thrown out." (**Ramana Bhaskara**, Dec. 2007; p.28). One should be grateful to Nanna Garu for allowing some of his discourses to be collected into this volume.

I began translating the work. Almost everyday I set apart time for this work. Sometimes I felt, I was not adequate to this job for one reason: Nanna Garu's language is transparently simple. Can I bring that spontaneity and naturalness into the translation? But then I used to assure myself: Why should this doubting 'I' deny me the pleasure of reading Nanna Garu's words? I have to read and grasp the meaning to translate. That itself is a blessing. Moreover, if 'I' am

chosen for the predesigned work, who am I to interfere with that design? As I write these words, I realize how unconsciously we cling to this 'I' as the sole reason for all that happens. Can anything happen without divine will? "There's a divinity that shapes our ends rough hew them" in whatever way you like, said sage-like Shakespeare.

In the meantime, I had the opportunity for the darshan of Nanna Garu again. Ramana Kendra invited him to speak at its centre, in Hyderabad (Bathakamma Kunta area). The Kendra people told me about this. It was at 2 'o clock, in the afternoon. I went promptly and in advance to get a seat: Nanna Garu draws a huge group of devotees, friends and admirers. Sri Jayakumar, a close friend of mine, came with me.

The hall was full much earlier than the scheduled hour of Nanna Garu's talk. This time I observed something unusual—for me. I was sitting inside the hall when Nanna Garu entered—after the formal welcome outside. Surprisingly, he didn't go straight to the dais. He stopped at the entrance door and greeted the people there and paused quite a bit of time, keenly gazing into the eyes of the audience at that corner of the building. He looked with affection writ large in his eyes. I don't think he spoke to anyone, but gazed into the eyes of almost everyone. This was the first time I saw such a thing.

There is what is called “Nayana deeksha”—initiation through the eye. Is this some form of that? I wondered. I tried to catch his eye, but obviously he didn’t see me. He was to visit our place after the discourse. I was all excited about this privilege. But I couldn’t talk to him now—although he was very close to my seat in the hall—as he was passing by. He paused at almost every row of the audience, looking with—as I said—palpable affection.

It was a marvelous talk—for three hours. Not a single member of the audience felt restive. If one can put it that way –they heard with almost bated breath. This time I noticed one more aspect: his subtle sense of humour. He understates and there is sometimes a little bit—just a little bit of edge in the humour. The response of the audience is extremely fascinating. They enjoy, smile not boisterously but well-enough to be noticed. In his discourse, Nanna Garu spoke mainly about the various aspect of sadhana citing, I think, Ramana Bhagavan. He drew from Ramana Bhagavan and linked them to the common aspects of Sadhana.

Let me pause and take a diversion. A few minutes ago, I happened to talk to Smt. Lakshmi who is one of the most ardent disciples of Nanna Garu. She told me, among other things, the significance of Nanna Garu’s gaze into the eyes. She said that the gaze cleanses the psyche. Indeed, she added, the spiritual function Nanna

Garu has, is suggested by his original name: Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Raju. Narasimha, one of the Avatars of Vishnu, protects the child devotee Prahlada and destroys demons. Nanna Garu destroys the ego of the devotees. Ego is the centre of all being. Sadhana is not so much about erasing but domesticating it.

From Ramana Kendra, Nanna Garu came to our place, accompanied by a few devotees. Dr. Santa Subbarao was also there. He spent some time with us. We again reviewed the progress of the translation of **Amrita Vahini**. He gave some suggestions. Surprisingly, he had no rigidity about schedules of release of the translated book, when and where, etc., He left it, mainly, to those who were looking after the “job”. At close quarters, I could see that he was the same serene self that he always is.

But in retrospect, when I heard him, later, speak about the release etc., of the book, I saw how meticulous he is in everything. He is in this respect also, a remarkable example of what the **Gita** says, “Skill in action is Yoga.” **“Sukaushala Karma”**. Even the “smallest” detail never escapes his attention. Indeed, there is nothing like a small or a big job. Everything is horizontal, equal in importance.

I also noticed that the way he takes a decision is really enviable. No dilly dallying, no hesitation, no

postponement. In a few minutes he decides and what he decides is unerring, irrevocable. For example: The Chief Guest for the function to release **Words of Nectar**; Similarly, the venue, the bringing of guests to the venue.... Everything he decided without any delay or doubt.

Why am I mentioning these, what look like, small things? There is nothing small or big. Everything has its own functional logic, given by nature. Didn't Vivekananda say that, "One should know how to pay attention to small things first." "There is nothing big or small / Nature created them all," they say. This is the secret of work. From the art of making complex inner matters simple to the apparently small details: this is the spectrum that Nanna Garu shows in the rhythms of his own life. An example of the perfect balancing of what he says and what he does. In organizational matters, I suppose, management experts can take many a frame from him for both leaders and followers.

In spite of meticulous planning, things may go wrong. What are we to do? Blame others, blame ourselves? Or be filled with despair and blame everything? Nanna Garu gave some clue. He expanded this problem and suggested what we should do. In a recent discourse, Nanna Garu said:

“Vivekananda’s father was an advocate in Kolkata. A year before he died, Vivekananda asked him whether he could tell something which they could learn from him. His father said: ‘Don’t be surprised at whatever happens in the world. Nothing should surprise or shock you. Don’t get upset, thinking why this thing should happen in this way. Your **mind should not be upset** [original English words Nanna Garu spoke]. Don’t get angryNothing happens without God’s knowledge.” [Ramana Bhaskara, 5-3-2007 issue; p.12.]

In the Telugu **Bhagavatham** by Pothana,—one of the perennially popular devotional scriptures in Telugu—the author coins an exquisitely beautiful idiom: **“Bhakta paalana kala”**. It means, “The art of looking after devotees.” In what way, what manner does God protect the “Yogakshema” of his devotees? This made me curious to know how Nanna Garu looks after his devotees or admirers. What is his art?

I wondered: does he give **mantra deeksha** or “initiation” as it is called? Does he give, in short, **upadesa**? Are his disciples given initiation? Otherwise, how can one be the disciple of a guru? In Hindu tradition initiation is the first step in entering the spiritual life. The guru is supposed to know whether the seeker is qualified to receive a **mantra**, whether a

mantra should be given, assuming that even if you forget the **mantra**, the **mantra** will not forget you? In other words, the antecedents, the **samskaras** of the devotee determine the choice of the **mantra**; not only the name — **nama** — of the Deity but also the **bijakshara** is important in initiation. This is what I guess from my initiation.

The answer came in an unexpected but startlingly simple incident. I was (on the eve of the release of **Words of Nectar**) sitting with Nanna Garu in his room in a Sanjeevareddynagar apartment.. The details I wanted Nanna Garu gave. I was to leave. Just then a young devotee came and asked him to give her initiation. Nanna Garu smiled disarmingly and asked her “who is your **Ishta Daivam**?” [Chosen Deity]. She told him. Nanna Garu asked her to repeat the holy name both morning and evening. To the holy name—as far as I recalled —Nanna Garu added “Om” in the beginning and “Namaha” at the end. The initiation was over. The devotee, with obvious joy, did **pranams** to her guru. She took leave—only to leave **me** in a state of utter wonder.

The first thing that struck me was: the devotee’s incredible faith. The name of the deity is a well-known one. Nanna Garu added a prefix and a suffix. That’s all. No whispering in the ear. Nothing by way of meditation or **japa** or what have you! I don’t think Nanna Garu

gives any instructions. Simply do **japa** in the morning and evening. Whether to use a rosary, how many times the name should be repeatednothing was told.

The other thing which now strikes me: if the name of the Holy Being (**Avatara**) is familiar and chanted openly and the same name forms part of the mantra, where is the need for any secrecy or making a mystique of initiation? One is reminded of Ramanujacharya, the great prophet and exponent of the path of devotion. He went to the top of a temple and shouted the mantra from there to the assembly of devotees below. In spite of his guru's instruction about keeping the mantra, a secret.

Nanna Garu's way is, in this respect, enchantingly comparable. No rituals, no injunctions, no prohibitions. "Take the name of the Lord!" That's enough. And there's Nanna Garu to look after everything. He "rules" over their hearts allow him: this is the only rule **he** practises. This is Nanna Garu's art of ensuring the welfare and well-being of those who come to him seeking guidance. The seed is sown; the **kshetra**, the field, is fit. The seed will fructify. Nothing to worry about.

Indeed,—to add one more aspect—there is no need for any instruction after giving the **mantra**. Nanna Garu comprehensive discourses are there to clarify any

doubt. So why not dispense with instruction given personally at the time of **mantra deeksha** which itself is free from the usual formalities? As all saints assert, the name is more powerful than the deity who is named after it. So why any need for codes? {This is not a generalization please! This is something that is contextually relevant to Nanna Garu.] As Nanna Garu himself said: “If we are true devotees, we ask for only one thing from the guru: ‘give me the alms [**bhiksha**] of Bhakti. Nothing else is there to be asked’.” [**Ramana Bhaskara**, 5-9-2007; p.11.]

I do not have much to tell about the release of **Words of Nectar**. (A title suggested by Mr. K.S.N.Raju for the translated volume). The release function was meticulously arranged and marvelously executed. Sri T. Satynarayana is a born management expert and Smt. Swarajya Lakshmi is an organizer, par **excellence**. Both of them together made it the most memorable occasion.

It was Nanna Garu’s Birthday. For the devotees and admirers who came from all over, it was a veritable feast to the eye and a treat to the ear. The exemplar of Divine Love, sitting on the tastefully decorated chair, gave a discourse that will certainly remain unerased in the mind. He was not just scintillating; he was also at the zenith, combining profound but simple wisdom, delighting the audience—which jam-packed the Thyagaraja Gana Sabha building in Hyderabad—with also his characteristic wit and humour.

But what impressed me and some of my friends most was also the artless simplicity with which he sat, with infinite patience, talking informally to the admirers who thronged about him, after the function. I wondered whether all sages could be like this- with this informality added to easy accessibility laced with unconditional love!

Nanna Garu also taught me the most needed detachment in everything. In one context he wanted to give me something which I felt, later, was not proper for me to take. But he gave it. Later I was racked with remorse and met him, again, to return it. He was the very picture of courtesy and politeness. He simply said: "You forget I gave. I have already forgotten that I gave." We will both forget it, is what he meant. His courtesy and softness in saying this disarmed me. "Things come and go. Why should we cling to them? We should forget them." This is the substance of what he implied.

I shall also note one more point in all honesty. It is entirely possible that the work of translation I did, falls short of perfection. But I would like to affirm one thing. I did it as a sacred work assigned to me by Nanna Garu. If I fell of short many things, I take this opportunity to tender my deep apologies to all the devotees, with all the sincerity I can command. As they say, all blemishes are mine, and all beauties are Nanna Garu's..

This is no conclusion. I continue to enjoy every bit of both the memories I have stored up and the radiant Presence of Nanna Garu which can never be an absence.

May I cite a poem by my SIKSHA GURU as Sri RAM SIR which expresses my feelings, too, towards my relation with Nanna Garu:

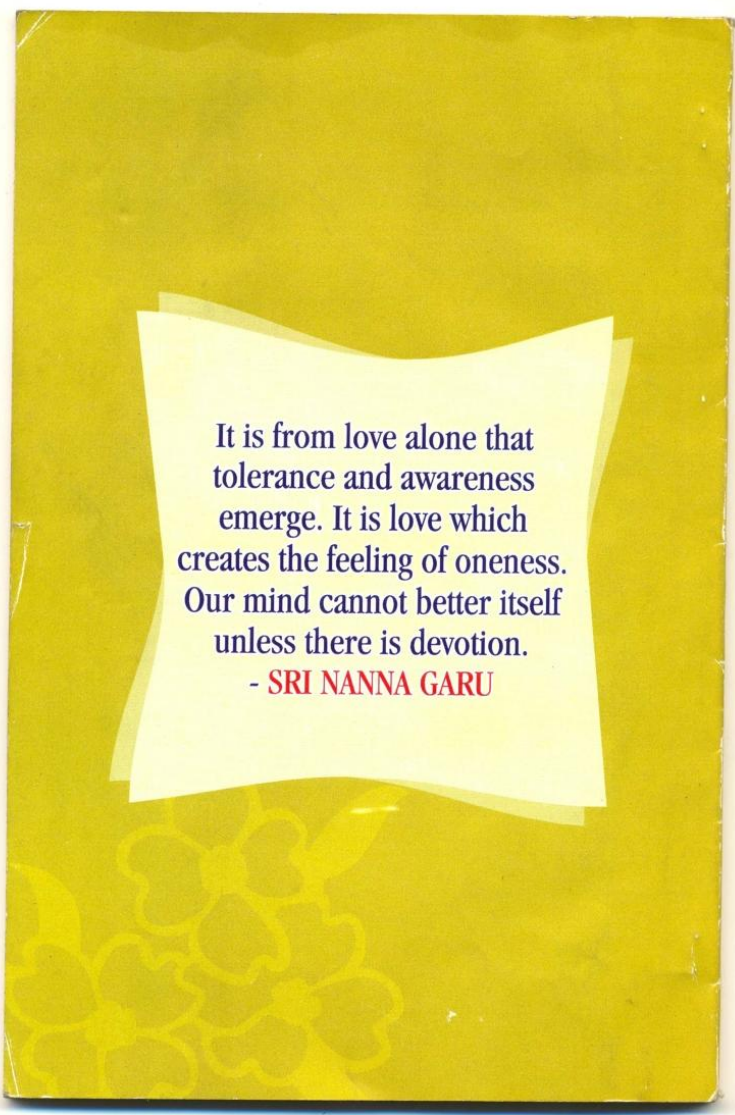
Does your omnipotence
which has given an eyelid
to protect involuntarily the pretty pupil
drench my eyes with the
deluge of tears
unless there is a reason?

.....

I know
It is only to wake up
The drowsy heart fast asleep
in the embrace of cosmic illusion
and to allow the sweet smile of your love
waft into it.

Nanna Garu's smile which so softly and tenderly enchants, makes us realize that all tears we seem to shed are in fact radiant smiles. They are, in 'Sri Ram's', memorable words, SMILING TEARS! And who minds shedding them for the likes of Nanna Garu! Tears of burning love, mind you!



A yellow book cover with a white paper insert. The insert has a wavy top and bottom edge. The text on the insert is in a serif font. The background of the book cover has a faint, repeating pattern of stylized flowers or leaves at the bottom.

It is from love alone that
tolerance and awareness
emerge. It is love which
creates the feeling of oneness.
Our mind cannot better itself
unless there is devotion.

- SRI NANNA GARU