



Divine Games
of
Bala Sai

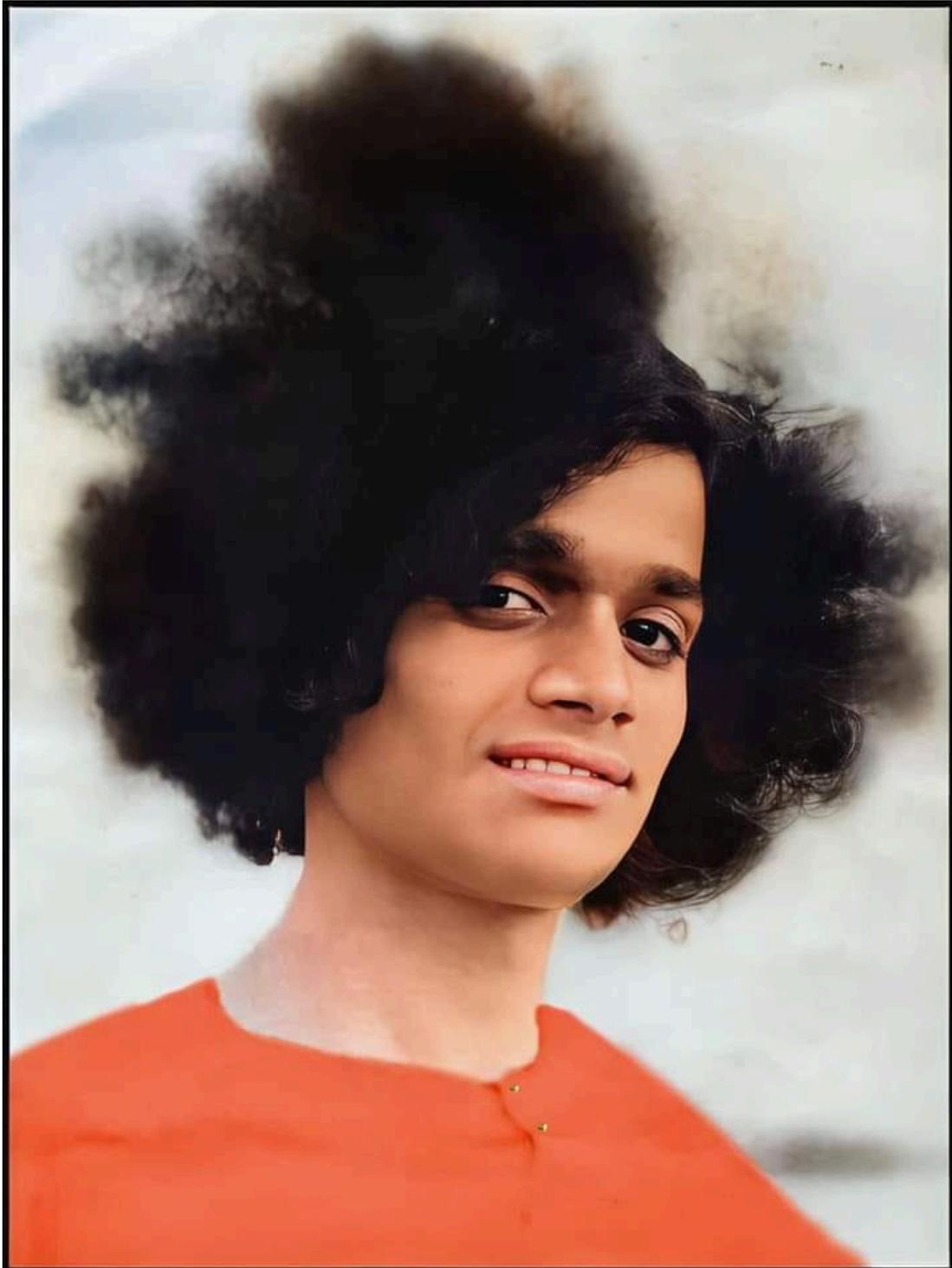
By

V. R. Krishna Kumar.

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“Divine Games of Bala Sai – Young Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba”

by V.K. Krishna Kumar (Murthy of Kuppam family)



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Our Family with Swami

1. Murthy. 2. Amba. 3. Sarala. 4. Radharna. 5. Ramesh. 6. Murali. 7. Kumaramma. 8. Prema.

Premanjali

AN OFFERING OF LOVE

Our humble family hails from a remote village called Vasanadu, near a town called Kuppam, not much known to the world. Though this village comes under the state of Andhra Pradesh, it is flanked on each side by the states of Tamilnadu and Karnataka. Thus Tamil and Kannada, the languages of the adjoining states, influenced our mother tongue Telugu.

My father Vasanadu Radhakrishnayya was born in Vasanadu village. Though Vasanadu was a small village, people of that village were viewed with much respect due to their devotion and dedication. My mother, Radhamma, gave birth to four sons and three daughters. Though I, the eldest son, was named as Krishna Kumar, Swami I would call me as 'Murthy'. The names of the other family members also underwent a change: my sisters Vijaya Kumari as 'Kumaramma', Sarala Kumari as 'Sarala', Prema Kumari as 'Prema', and my brothers, Amarendra Kumar as 'Amba', Ramesh Kumar as 'Ramesh', and Muralidhar as 'Murali'. Maybe by calling us like this from the very beginning Swami made us feel close to Him.

My father shifted from Vasanadu to Kuppam to set up business. Though Kuppam was a small town, there were lot of cottage industries. My father was the first to install a factory for the extraction of sandalwood oil by way of distillation for export. Not only this, he was the first to manufacture polished granite stones for export to England. In those days, my father was the most educated person in these areas and spoke fluent-English. During that time, the country was under the British rule. Whenever big officials, government servants, noted personalities, big business magnates, visited Kuppam, they would surely call upon my father. Without consulting him they would not start any venture, because he was so knowledgeable and dynamic. He was a great lover of Mahatma Gandhi, and would prefer to serve man, rather than spend time in the worship of the Lord. We cannot say he did not have devotion, as he used to participate in all religious functions and ceremonies. He did not have much belief in Sadhus and Saints. His most important goal was to serve for the welfare of the people, especially the poor and the lower caste.

My mother, Radhamma, was an ideal wife, as she was also keen to serve the people, and the villagers looked upon my parents as an ideal couple. We were very fortunate to be born to such an ideal couple. Though my father did not believe in Saints, we do not understand with what courage my mother conveyed to him about the call she got from Sai Baba in her dream to come to Puttaparthi! How she

could persuade him to go to Puttaparthi must have been the divine will only. She played a brave pivotal roll for our journey to Puttaparthi, and it was all due to Swami's grace. Otherwise, we would have missed the opportunity to see the God of this Kali era. Wholeheartedly, in any birth, I shall ever remain grateful for the love showered on our family by the Lord of Puttaparthi. I humbly pray to Swami that we shall ever remain as 'Sai Family' and continue to receive His grace.

I have a small request for the readers of this book. Without Sai's will nothing can happen and take shape. Only after Sai Prabhu's command, my sister, Kumaramma wrote the book, "*Anyatha Saranam Nasthi*", translated into English as "*Other than You refuge there is none*". Similarly, only with Swami's grace was I able to write this book. To execute His command was my duty. Readers of this book may have different opinions, likes and dislikes for the various descriptions and events mentioned in this book. Please do not take them seriously as each one's views, assumptions, may vastly vary, but the sweetness of Sai and the essence of His Leelas, divine games, are one and the same. Understanding this, that everyone should happily immerse in Ananda would be my humble prayer.

One day Swami said, "***Dear ones! To hide something is man's nature. Each one's wealth is his own. These they can safely hide, and keep it to themselves. But to hide spiritual wealth granted by God would be a big sin. When God had blessed you with something to be shared with others, it becomes your duty to make good use of it by propagating. If the great saints in those days had not preserved the sacred texts, great epics, the Vedas, the Puranas, these treasures would not have reached us. To share and preserve these was the duty of the realised ones***". These words of Swami boiled in my heart, and took the shape of this book, only due to His grace. TQ start with, I wondered if at all I could accomplish this task in this birth, but He paved the way for its release, taming my doubting mind.

Once, when I was deeply thinking of those wonderful days with Swami, His heart melted and commanded me to start this book. Though He did not do this in person, He manifested in my dream. It must have been around midnight, Swami woke me up and questioned as to why I am not doing some good work? This shook me up, and I suddenly got up. I could not understand, immediately, what He meant by this. Though I was not capable of writing a book, or to be an author, but still, if He had made me complete this book, it is all His miracles, and there is nothing in this book worth mentioning as my effort. Only when He commanded me to

reveal the divine experiences witnessed by me to the world, I could start writing. When I thought about if my limited mind could accomplish this task, I became totally numb. During such a period He once again appeared in my dream and ridiculed, "***Without efforts how could there be results?***" and disappeared. This was again at midnight. I hurried into my studies and without my knowledge, started writing something. When I came back to my senses, I observed that it was already four in the morning. I wondered what I did for nearly four hours! After sometime, when I made an ardent effort to observe my writhing, it took me by surprise! When I went through the matter, I was convinced that it was not my language. No! Impossible! I was never used to diarizing my experiences or note down some points. When I never had such a habit, how was I able to write so many pages? The very incarnation of Mother Saraswathi, Sai Maa, made this possible and nothing else. To make someone write like this for the first time, in this old age, was known only to Swami! Such miracles are possible by Him alone!

In this way, regularly, without any time schedule, by day or by night, I started writing. I could write only when Swami prompted from within. All that is written in this book are my personal experiences seen by me while serving His Lotus Feet, mostly in the Old Mandir days, and what was heard from Swami and His close associates of those days. I have not covered what was heard from the devotees or their personal experience. Though I have held these in my heart for over fifty years, I was unable to hold it back any more. Obeying Swami's command with much anxiety to share with the devotees, I place this before you all. It is my absolute delight and privilege to share the nectarine sweetness of His Divine Leelas.

Dear devotees, if you find any mistakes, please forgive me. This is mx. humble request. When Bhagawan Sai, Who made me write this book, could excuse me for the lapses, you surely can. He was fully aware of my limited abilities. If a mother gets angry with her children and slaps them, it is only due to her love for them. If the children hate her for this, the loss would be for the children only and not for the mother. When the same mother fondles them and plays with them, the love between them reveals openly. But the children who do not take this in the right spirit, they shall never realise or relish this sweet relation. I firmly believe that all those who go through these Nectarine Leelas of Bala Sai shall assimilate the essence of His Divine Plays and hold on to His Divine Feet.

Kruthagnutlia

GRATITUDE

Era after era, God has been incarnating. That was His duty and the devotee's luck. To establish righteousness and destroy the evil, was the goal of the Avatars, divine incarnations. In the bygone eras, the incarnation in the form of a great human hero fought many wars and made wars to be fought. But in this Kali era, God has incarnated, just like an ordinary human being, to be one among us. Salutations to the most blessed couple Sri. Venkappa and Smt. Eeshwaramma, the parents of the form of the divine incarnation of Sai Bhagawan.

My first gratitude would be to my cousin sister Mrs. Ananthamma, for explaining to our family about Sai Prabhu, way back in 1945. It was only through her we first heard about Swami. If it were not for her pestering, my father might not have agreed to go to Puttaparthi. Due to father's ill health, and his aversion for saints, it would have been very difficult for us to make him accept this proposition. He staunchly believed in the service to humanity and had the least interest to visit or serve saints. It was a Hindu belief that Lord Venkateshwara takes good care of money and shall recover what is due to Him, correctly, in due course, without fail. He shall never forget what is due to Him, and when the time comes, He shall surely grant boons also. In the form of Sai Prabhu, He came in my mother's dream, during 1945, and beckoned our family to Puttaparthi. When my mother revealed this to my non-believer father and he agreed for the trip to Puttaparthi, it was a great surprise to all of us. It was nothing but His divine play! Does not the Trikalaguani, the knower of the past, present and future, know when and how shake-up and wake-up His people? We all felt some type of happiness, but we did not understand the reason behind it. We decided to travel and started our journey.

I also cannot forget my cousin sister Susheelamma and her husband Mr. Venkatamuni for having helped me to remain close to Swami. On one side, if Sai Bhagawan was my strong support, on the other side it was this couple who helped me to visit Puttaparthi regularly. I learnt a lot of important lessons from this wise devoted couple, and they were very close to Swami.

Avatara Rahasyam

THE SECRETS OF THE AVATAR

Already many people have written all about the Avatar and you may feel as to why I should repeat. There are still many who are not aware of this! It is but natural to have sweet items for any big feast. In the same way, the inner aspect of the Avatar is equally important for all to know.

The Avatar descended as Bala Sai, young Sai in the remote village of 'Puttaparthi. In those days, there were hardly 20 to 30 houses in that village situated in Ananthapur district of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Reaching that place was quite difficult. The nearest big towns were Penugonda on one side and Ananthapur on the other side. The Avatar's parents, Sri. Venkappa and Smt. Eeshwaramma, were very ordinary village people. For this blessed couple, the descent of the Avatar was a valueless gift, beyond any estimate. At the most appropriate time, the Avatar revealed the divine secrets, to prove that He was really God. Such divine gems I shall



place before you, appropriately. Today, 'Emperor' Sai's fame is raging across the world and can never be described by any.

Born in the brave Kshatriya¹ clan called 'Ratnakara', they were regarded as Kings. Sai Baba was first named as 'Sathyanarayana' by His parents. One of the reasons for this was their family deity 'Sathyamma²'.

¹ **Kshatriya** refers to one of the four main castes (varnas) in traditional Indian society. The word derives from the Sanskrit kṣatra, meaning "dominion" or "power." Historically, Kshatriyas were: Warriors: Responsible for defending society against invaders. Rulers (Rajas): Governing, administering justice, and protecting dharma (moral order). Landowners: Managing territories. Their duty (dharma) was courage, physical strength, nobility, and the protection of the weak. In the caste hierarchy, they were second only to the Brahmins (priests).

² **Sathyamma** – in the great Indian epics such as the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana, she is the second most important consort of Lord Krishna. Unlike the gentle and devoted Rukmini (Krishna's first wife), Sathyamma is described as strong-willed, proud, independent, and courageous. It was she who helped Krishna defeat the demon Narakasura.

Even to this day, the temple of Sathyamma stands in the centre of the village. This village Deity continues to stand guard over the village. People continue to worship her with reverence. In those days, our Sathayanarayana displayed so many miracles near this temple. At a tender age of 7 or 8 He would sit near this temple and resolve conflicts of the village, to uphold righteousness. As His fame spread, even the surrounding villagers came to Him for justice and treated His words as the Vedas, without any refute. In those days itself, the Old Mandir of young Sai, now called Sri Peddavankammaraju Kalyana Mandapam, was built in front of this temple of Sathyamma. Slowly it grew from there to stand as a huge tree, reaching the sky. The reason behind this was Sathyam's love. He never would hurt anyone's heart. Just with smiles He could convert foolish and adamant people, to great leaders and send them out in the service of humanity. This continues from that day to this day. Actually, the divine plays of the Avatar can never be described fully. The great experiences of mankind in the *Treta era*, incarnated by Lord Rama, are not forgotten even to this day, though man had taken hundreds of births. Today's Sai Baba was our beloved Sathyam, our young Raju, and our revered Lord Narayana. That Lord Narayana of the people is really our Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the divine Lord of the devotees.

Pusfipanjali

OFFERING OF FLOWERS

The descent of the Sai Avatar in the form of a human exhibiting divine play is for the sake of the devotees. It is entirely for the delight of the people that the divine play is enacted and displayed by the Avatar. This is the divine will of the Avatar. Those who experienced such Leelas are mentioned in the Puranas and many sacred texts. It is because of this we are able to read and come to know of the divine games and derive bliss. In those days, the people who witnessed the Leelas of young Sai were very few in number. Most of such lucky ones have merged into the divine feet of the Lord. I am one of the few still living. To diarize the memories of those days did not strike to me then, but these are something that can never be forgotten. So long as I live, these are my most cherished treasures that are above all the other worldly treasures. It is only due to Sai Prabhu's provocation I could put these in word form, and the divine Lord of Kali enabled me to write.

Once Sai Prabhu mentioned like this, ***"The Lords call is equal to everyone. When such calls come to pour the nectar to all, some of them do not reap the benefit by thinking that a specific intimation had not been given to them. This is not a***

mistake on the part of the caller. All should be alert for such calls of the Lord. There is no question for individual ego to rise, because all are equal to Him, and to reach the divine feet should be everyone's aim and desire. There are so many paths to reach the source. Though the paths are many, the main source is one. Singing the Lord's glory, doing Bhajans, listening to discourses, spiritual studies, service to the people, etc., as and when granted by the Lord, one should not fail to participate in them without any second thoughts. This is like a relation between the mother and her children with no difference. So whatever opportunities are granted, they should be grabbed and never should be forgotten. Actually, there is no difference between service to humanity and service to the Lord".

The Lord also equally waits for the love of the devotees. When the thoughts of the divine increase in you, the Lord comes closer and closer to you. In the by-gone eras, to reach God, people would perform many types of arduous penance, conduct. Yagas and Yagnas to invoke the Lord and win over His grace. In this period of the *Kali era*, when the Lord in human form declares that He is the Almighty, and He is right there among us, there are few takers. This open and loud call is not being heard. In the *Treta Yuga*, Lord Rama established Dharma, righteousness. In the *Dwapara Yuga*, He, in the form of Lord Krishna, became the master of Leelas. But in this period of Kali, there are many great divine personalities, and to declare all of them as God is not possible. But if you do not realise the incarnation of Sai Bhagawan as the absolute truth, the loss is all yours. His preaching's are so simple and clear that even children could understand. He is engulfing all with His love and bringing them into service activity. Weather we really hold on to this service activity or loose it, we are witness to both of this.



Ati Pavitra Ksietram

THE MOST SACRED PLACE

There are many holy and sacred places in the world, and, most these are in India and nowhere else. Most of the incarnations have descended in the sacred country of Bharath. Bharath is like the eyes for the world. The importance of a sacred place lies in temples, holy rivers, sacred trees and heritage. Puttaparthi does not lag behind any sacred place in the world. By temple, I mean the small cave on the hillock near the liver. By the holy river I mean the River Chitravathi. By sacred tree, I mean the tamarind tree on top of the hillock near the river. Among all these is our Lord 'Sathya Sai Baba'. What is inside the temple is an immobile idol of the Lord, but the One moving there at Puttaparthi, in the centre, is Lord Narayana in human form. If it were not for Him, would Puttaparthi have become so famous, and grown into such a huge empire? Shall we now see the reality behind all this?



CAVE TEMPLE

Swami would suddenly disappear sometimes. It was said that Swami would stay in the cave near Chitravathi River. None other than Swami's mother Smt. Eeshwaramma, and His sister Smt. Venkamma many a time revealed this to me. Swami had many such secrets not known to the world. Due to my good fortune, as I was at His service in the Old Mandir, I had the opportunity to listen to such secrets from Swami's mouth itself. My nature was to be ever busy to get to know as much as possible. This inquisitive nature of mine was gifted with rare incidents from Swami and also sent me on some rare errands for Him. To get to know of such secrets from the very source was due to His grace only. Otherwise which divinity would have conferred on a nave person like me so much time and patience?

Sometimes I would catch Swami in a very happy and enthusiastic mood. Only at such times I would summon all my courage and ask Him for some details that my mind could think of. During one such occasion I asked Him about the cave, He would disappear into. Smiling happily He said, "***Dunnapotha³! This is a very big secret. In that cave many great saints have done penance. That is why it is very sacred. For the welfare of the world, to discuss the future plans, Saints, Siddapurushw⁴, Devangas⁵, and great souls would unite in the cave regularly. I used to remain in the cave to help them in such matters for a day or two. During such times no one could see My form at Puttaparthi and they used to get perturbed. When I did return, My answer to all their questions would just be one smile! The great powers in that cave cannot be home by ordinary people. The very glimpse of the cave is equal to the Darshan of one million sacred Lingams⁶***". Suddenly stopping here He hit me on my back, lovingly and disappeared. Such great opportunities of listening to divine secrets from the divinity itself were granted to me on a few occasions. Otherwise, I would also have received just one smile from Swami.

There is one big story behind this, and I shall tell you in the latter part of the book. There was one rough path to this cave, but now it is fully covered and cannot be seen. My humble prayers to Swami would be, He should kindly get the path cleared and enable the mass of devotees to have a glimpse of this holy cave temple.

³ *Dunnapotha*: He buffalo. Swami would have pleasure in calling us like this.

⁴ *Siddapurushas*: saints having great powers.

⁵ *Devangas*: the attendants of God.

⁶ *Lingams*: the sacred form of Lord Shiva.

HOLY RIVER

In those days from 1945 onwards, the banks of river Chitravathi was like a great spiritual institution for us few. From the womb of this great mother many valuable things like gem-studded pendants, idols of Gods, *rudraksha malas*⁷ *sacred prasad*⁸, holy water, nectar, etc., were created by Swami. On this great stage, Swami would happily sit for hours and relax. If Lord Vishnu reclined on *Adi Sesa*⁹, the banks of river Chitravathi was our Swami's bed. This was a bed for both the divine and human. Suddenly, at any time, we would reach this place with Swami. With the divine touch of Swami's hand, anything would become perennial and plentiful like the *Akshayapatra*¹⁰. Whenever we went there it was a great feast for us, as Swami would oblige us with many types of food that would fill our stomachs up to the brim. That taste still makes our mouths water, even to this day.



Sathya Sai Baba with V.R. Krishna Kumar (Murthy of Kuppam Family) and M.L. Venkatamrasimham, Chitravathi River bank, 1945

SACRED TREE

The sacred tamarind tree that stands above the cave was verily the most plentiful tree in the whole world. It would give anything by mere holding of its tender leaves, as willed by Swami. It was verily our '*Kalpavriksha*', the wish-fulfilling tree.

⁷ ***Rudraksha malas***: chain of holy beads of a sacred tree.

⁸ Sacred prasad: sacred eatables offered to God.

⁹ ***Adi Sesa***: the thousand headed serpent bed of Lord Vishnu.

¹⁰ ***Akshayapatra***: the divine vessel that served food without any limit.

It was a must for us to visit this place in those days on our way to Chitravathi, and collect whatever was destined for us by Swami. There is so much more revealed about this great tree as you go through this book.

OLD MANDIR

In those days, the Old Mandir looked like an evergreen bride, always bubbling with activity as if there was some wedding function taking place there! The reason for this was our 'Sai Rama' in the form of 'Kalyana Rama'¹¹. Our Sai Prabhu was not only a bridegroom but also bestowed Himself as 'Sai Annapoorneshhwari'¹², the ever-plentiful Goddess! Though our Swami was always a 'Brahmachari'¹³, He plunged into the service of the mankind, and His family began to swell! His devotees were His life! As the Telugu saying goes, "For those who have He was the One, and for those who did not have, He was numerous". Slowly those who came there became His family and now everyone in the world belongs to His family. There was never a day without His pranks and marvels! At such a young age He was very naughty, always playful, a master of music, an ace of all arts, a great dramatist, and an actor! If it were not for all this, that tender age would have passed by, pale and tasteless. This same play of the youth would not have looked good at an advanced age and would have failed to bring delight to all. A mother would love to see the naughty play of her young ones. If her baby crawls over her, dances on her heart, stands on her tummy, and jumps on her, only then it becomes a naughty child. These games are not gifted to all to experience.



¹¹ *Kalyana Rama*: Lord Rama in form of a majestic bridegroom.

¹² *Sai Annapoorneshhwari*: the divine plentiful mother.

¹³ *Brahmachari*: devout bachelor.

The foster mother Yashoda was likewise engulfed the delight of Krishna's play, and not the true parents, who were in jail. Even the Gopikas were blessed to witness all His games and were made to believe that He was the son of Yashoda, though He was born to Devaki. As children, we few were very fortunate to witness the divine play of Bala Sai! In the Dwapara Yuga, the era of Krishna, such games were called as '*Rasakrida*', and we were no less than them! The same play was enacted by Bala Sai in this Kali era, in the form of playing 'Hide and seek', 'Running race', 'Swinging competition', 'Fun and frolic', 'Song and music', and a never ending list of all you can ever think of! But one thing was for sure! Bala Sai was really very adamant! He would never accept defeat! He would never accept His mistakes! If ladies were considered as great fighters, they were nothing before Him! In those days, we would eagerly wait to see such adamant acts of His, as we had never ever witnessed such an adamant person before! This sight was a mysterious delight for us! At times, we wondered if God could be so naughty and adamant! People like me would become a target for His anger, but at any cost, such targets need not be in sorrow! Because, such delight! Such closeness! Such affection! Could be felt only by those who became His targets! This could be understood only by those who became His targets and not by the on-lookers, who presumed to be very close to Swami! At such times, targets like us alone could feel the effects of such closeness and then the vast distance from Swami! Such were our Old Mandir days!

Guha Rahasyam

THE CAVE SECRET PLACE

People may call it a cave, but it was not just a cave. That was Kailash¹⁴, more sacred than Brahmalo¹⁵. One can surely say that when compared to this, all the three worlds were nothing. In this Kali era a place like this was very rare. The cave was like a small room, maybe about 6 feet height, 5 feet width and 6 feet length. A hole-like entrance towards the East was not so easy to enter. As this hole walk at a higher level to the ground, it was not easily visible, and to climb up to it was difficult. As this was situated on a small hill, there were lots of thorny plants and sharp edged stones all around that place, making it difficult to cross. The floor was even. Towards the South there was a rock-like natural formation suitable for one to sit on it in comfort. and this was a rare beauty of nature. Towards the East there was some open space, suitable for one person to rest. This wonder of nature. when

¹⁴ ***Kailash***: the heaven of Lord Shiva.

¹⁵ ***Brahmalok***: the heaven of Lord Brahma.

observed carefully, it looked like some divine architect had carved out a meditation temple. Towards the top left side there was a small hole from where light entered the cave, and also some cool air came through. Let it be anyone; once they entered the cave, they would never feel like coming out of it. How I came to know about all this, I shall inform.

Once, at the Old Mandir, Swami talked about this cave and warned that no one should go near it. He threatened that there was a lion in the cave. Hearing to this, my heart let out a big shout from within. Whenever something was forbidden, my nature was to get to know that secret, without any further delay. From the childhood, my sister Kumaramma was my right hand. I proposed to her that we should see this place secretly, but she was frightened and declined my offer. She also observed that we should not overrule Swami's words. It was afternoon time, and Swami was writing some letters in His room. I coaxed my sister that before anyone would come to know, we should see the cave and come back. She yielded to this idea of mine with much difficulty. We started running towards Chitravathi River, so that we could return back, before Swami came out of His room.



Straight away we started climbing the hill on which there was the *Kalpavriksha*¹⁶. Some land marks mentioned by Swami was firmly rooted in my heart, and

¹⁶ ***Kalpavriksha***: In the sacred land of Puttaparthi, standing on the slopes of the Obuladevara Gutta hill, there is a tree that holds the whispers of a thousand prayers. This is the *Kalpavriksha*, or the "Wish-Fulfilling Tree." **The Story of the**

this helped us reach the hole-like entrance of the cave. I felt that some power was leading me onto this path to reach the cave. When we peeped into the hole, it was so dark, and we could not see anything. We could not observe any type of structure to lead us into the cave. Without any further thoughts, I jumped into the hole, pulling my sister with me. That was that; we started sliding downwards in total darkness. Our clothes tore in the process, and blood started oozing out of many bruises. In this scuffle, fear took the back seat. After we reached the bottom, without eating for anything, we went little further into the darkness. As already mentioned, due to some light coming from a small hole, we could see something. Everything was there, as described by Swami earlier. In the mean time my sister felt that she could see two eyes and hear something moving. She started trembling badly, and as warned by Swami, she had the Darshan of a lion. This made us cut our plans, and we started our return journey putting in all our remaining energy. It was quite easy to slide down the slope, but very difficult to retrace. We went head over heels to reach the top. We had the satisfaction of having gained at least this much.

Once on top, we started running towards the Old Mandir and decided to inform people who would enquire about our disappearance that we had gone to Chitravathi. We wanted to enter the Old Mandir from the rear entrance, to ensure that Swami did not spot us. Our first task would be to discard the torn clothes and get into fresh ones. But nothing went as planned by us. What was our plan in front of His plan! Ours was not worth a dime! The lion that feared us was not in the cave, but it was there, right in front of us at the Old Mandir gate, in the form of

Kalpavriksha: In the early days of the Avatar's life, when Sathya Sai Baba was still a young boy, he would often lead his devotees and childhood friends up the rocky hills overlooking the Chitravathi River. Even then, his play was filled with divine mystery. He would take them to a specific, ancient tamarind tree. Though it was a common tree by nature, under his touch, it became **transcendental**. To show his devotees that the Divine can manifest anything out of nothing, he would ask them: "*What fruit do you desire?*" One devotee would ask for a mango in the middle of winter; another would ask for a ripening apple, a cluster of grapes, or even out-of-season figs. Sai Baba would simply reach into the branches of the tamarind tree, and **the exact fruit requested would appear**, hanging from the tamarind twigs as if it had grown there naturally.

Narasimha Avatar¹⁷. To see Swami like a ferocious lion with glowing red eyes made us shiver. Now, to escape from this situation, I planned to send my sister first, with some pretext, and then somehow jump into the Mandir. But who can escape from the sight of Swami? Can anyone hoodwink Him? Slowly we saw our mother Radhamma, Seshagiri tata¹⁸, and a few others waiting to receive us in a suitable manner. Being a bad monkey and destroy the garden was all right with me, but I felt bad for pulling my sister into all this mess against her wishes.

Swami started off with me by landing a few slaps on my cheeks that became red like fire. But my sister was more fortunate, being a girl, and did receive this treatment. She got away with a nice hard pinch on her ear by Swami. Those were no ordinary slaps! Just imagine how would one feel when slapped by the Avatar of Narasimha? The whole world would spin like a steam turbine. Fearing what more would come if I breakdown, I boosted my courage and kept a smile on my face. Before we could open our mouth to explain, Swami told everyone there about our heroic acts. Was there anything not known to Him? Not only Swami's hands, but after hearing to this episode, my mother also used her hands feely and let go on our cheeks. *"You! Dunnapotha! Are you not ashamed of yourself!"* Swami scolded us and went inside. Fearing what would happen if I go into Swami's room, I stood outside near the door. After the lion cooled down, I heard Him say, *"What are you doing?"* Hearing this, I also cooled down and entered the room quietly. I was relieved to see a smile on His face and more relieved to hear Him say, ***"You went to the cave; it is alright! But why did you drag Kumaramma with you? What you saw there?"*** Listening to this, my heart leapt with joy, wondering what more secrets are to be known. What I actually felt at this stage was that someone was waking me up from deep slumber and advising me to sleep nicely! It was like raking me up to do something more and not allowing me to stop here. So as expected, the story did not stop here, and please note what happened latter. After a few days Swami left for Bangalore leaving me behind at Puttaparthi. I presumed this as a nice opportunity granted to me and started off at about 10 AM towards the cave without any fear of being observed. I had no difficulty in entering the cave and had a lot of time at my disposal. I was struck by wonder. It was very peaceful inside. The fragrance there shattered my nose. This surely must have

¹⁷ Narasimha Avatar: the fearful lion-headed incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

¹⁸ Seshagiri tata: he was the first poojari. priest in the Old Mandir and we used to lovingly call him tata-grandfather.

been Parijatha¹⁹ from heaven I thought. I peacefully sat down and leisurely started observing what was there. I saw one Kamandalam²⁰, one Dandakam²¹, one Rudrakshamala²², one pair of Padukas²³, one bunch of palm leaves with some writings (the old form of holy texts), one old type pen in the form of a feather, and one ink bottle. The way these were neatly arranged made me believe that someone was taking good care to keep them in place. I sat there silently, unable to move out from there. When I did decide to return. I felt some thing was nudging my mind, and I suddenly collected all these items and returned back to the Old Mandir. Without anyone's knowledge, I safely kept all these items in the small store-room. I never revealed this to anyone. Even my family members came to know about this, only when I started writing this book. Swami returned from Bangalore shortly and everything went on as usual.

After some days Swami asked me, "***Have you kept everything safely?***" My heart skipped a beat, wondering what wrong I had done? I might have forgotten what I brought from the cave, but would Swami ever forget anything? He was the arouser of the intentions that originated in me, and He was the One Who made me do all this. I slowly realised that Swami was asking about this only, but did give Him any reply. Swami mentioned, "*I caused the feelings, he will not come again!*" Though I could not understand what He meant, I shook my head I pretending to have understood everything. Swami instructed, "*Hand it over to Me whenever I ask for!*"



Murthy on the left, Amba on the right with Swami

¹⁹ **Parijatha:** a heavenly flower with a divine fragrance.

²⁰ **Kamandalam:** a holy water pot that saints would carry.

²¹ **Dandakam:** a staff that saints would hold and rest their hand.

²² **Rudrakshamala:** a chain of beads.

²³ **Padukas:** wooden sandals with only one toe grip worn by saints.

Kalavipavriksha Mahima

MARVELLOUS KALPAVRIKSHA

If the magnificence of the cave was so great, then how magnificent should be the tamarind tree that stood majestically on top of the cave? This was beyond any human perception! As far as we know, a huge tree required a firm ground as its base. Its roots should penetrate deep into the earth to give it a firm grip. But this tree stood on a rocky hill and had firmly held the cave below in its womb. This is not something very simple. For tamarind tree in Telugu we would say, '*Chmta Chettu*'²⁴. Thus we would say that it was no simple *Chinta Chettu*. The other meaning of '*Chinta*' in Telugu would be reflections, thoughts, wishes, sorrow, pity, and grief. Thus we felt that it stood there to resolve our thoughts, etc., and thus it was no simple tamarind tree. We had climbed many hills and hillocks with Swami, but we had never come across such a magnificent tree. Whenever we came close to this tree we had felt some kind of bliss and mysterious delight. It was a great big mother that quenched the thirst of her children, as commanded by Sai Prabhu.

Swami used to pluck some of its tender leaves and place one each on our palms. Then Swami would tell us to close our palms and ask us to wish for something. Depending upon each one's wish, the leaves would turn into sweets, candy, and many other items. Again Swami would tell us to close our palms, and we would obediently follow His command, only to repent. Because when we opened our hands, we would end-up with the same tender leaf. We may wonder as to why this great mother did not bestow what we wished? Well, this was a big lesson for those who were engulfed in worldly thoughts. Let us now have a look at the game play of our mischievous Bala Sai! The next step would be that we had to pluck one leaf by ourselves and close our palms. Till now, we got what we wished for, and it disappeared. But now, when we opened our palms as commanded by Swami, the leaves would turn into what was required by us, and what was suitable for us as per His will. Now we would realise that we had desired for something that was unnecessary, driven by our worldly thoughts. But the all pervading Lord, the knower of the past, present and future, had granted us, as He was aware of everything. This would happen only after He had thoroughly enjoyed our earlier predicament. Well, can anyone remain empty-handed in the presence of Bala Sai-especially while under the Kalpavriksha, the wish full filling tree - a rare mother on this earth!

²⁴ *Chinta Chettu*: *Chinta* for tamarind and *Chettu* for tree.

Under that tree was a big rock that looked like a platform. It was flat and so big that nearly 200 people could sit on it in comfort. On the Eastern side, it was higher and looked like a stage. Swami would take His seat there, so that everyone could have a good look at Him. To climb onto it, there was a steep path, and all could not ascend easily. For young people like us, it was not difficult. Surprisingly, when Swami started climbing and the mass of devotees followed Him, whether young or old, all of them would keep pace with Him. There was no age-bar or age limits for His love, play and song. The old and the young, male and female, all were attracted by the divine magnet and would follow Him with the same swiftness. The cool breeze that swept over this place was delightful. At such a hot place-that, too, on the scorching rocks-for such an atmosphere to prevail was nothing but His divine play.

When all the devotees were settled under that tree young Sai would talk lovingly, sing sweetly, and dip everyone in happiness. Not only this, sometimes He would arrange for moonlight dinner. Suddenly, one big hailstorm, a big lightning struck the rock and made a huge gap in it. Even when we seriously contemplate on certain issues, we shall never unearth its secrets. Only when explained by Swami are we surprised beyond all limits. About this incident, I personally felt that a huge power had gone out of the cave under that rock. For anything to happen, there should be an appropriate period and suitable time. I presumed that by the striking of the lightning Bala Sai must have granted redemption to some thing, by His divine will, or released some power for the welfare of the world. After this incident, om: trips to *Kalpavriksha* started decreasing. All this was my perception, and Swami said nothing about this.

Bala Sai's mischief reigned supreme, and there was no end to His play and song. The ritual of daily visits from the Old Mandir to the banks of Chitravathi continued. On one side of the path there were huge trees, and I failed to understand which great beings were in that form. Sai Bhagawan must have granted this gift to them, to be in that form, I imagined. Shall we try to go deeper into this? One day, Swami showed us such a skill that was never before witnessed by anyone of us.

SWINGING SAI

One day Swami asked us to bring long ropes and made us tie them to a huge tree. He started swinging, holding the ropes, and on this occasion there was a reason behind it. What I once heard from Swami flashed in my mind. In that groove where Swami arranged for the swing, the villagers believed that some Brahma Raksha²⁵ and demonic spirits possessed it. They would not go near this groove after dark. But for the King of the universe, Sai Maharaj, what were these!



When Swami started swinging with the help of the people over there, He was not at all satisfied. Even if four or five well built people pushed Him with all their might, He was not pleased, as the swing went up to a certain height only. After sometime, Swami told everyone to stand aside, at a distance, and ridiculed that all their combined strength was not of much use. All by His effort, He started swinging and swinging, and went higher and higher. In a short time, He seemed to reach the sky. The people were totally confused and went out of their senses. The swing that

²⁵ Brahma Raksha: a very powerful demon.

could not go above certain point with combined efforts, suddenly was flying like a rocket. All of us started shouting loudly, but how could our 'Rocket Sai' hear our calls? As we were looking, the big branch onto which we had tied the ropes, started breaking, but Swami continued to swing. With a loud crackling sound, the branch shattered to pieces and fell. Swami was nowhere in sight! I imagined that Swami must have been flying in the sky, taking the form of an eagle. How He disappeared into the sky we could not see, and many were worried that something must have happened to Him. I once again imagined that Swami would be coming down, holding an invisible parachute! Yes! He appeared from behind and enquired, "**You all got afraid**"? Looking at Him, we came back to life. We could not believe our eyes and with surprise shouted, 'Swami!' Pretending that nothing had happened, He said, "**The time for the spirit had expired, and thus it is given redemption**". When we observed the broken branch lying on the ground, it appeared bigger than the tree from which it fell. All the people surrounded the branch and looked at it with astonishment. More people were pouring in to see what had happened. We had observed few such Leelas of His, but how many such Leelas He had performed is known only to our Leela Sai!

We had heard about such *Leelas* of Lord Krishna from the 'Bhagawatham', but now we had the fortune of seeing these with our own eyes. Once, mother Yashoda, unable to bear the mischief of naughty Krishna, tied Him to a big grinding stone in the garden, and went inside, thinking that He had been made immobile. But this mischievous boy pulled that big stone along with Him and went in between two huge trees. The stone got stuck between the trees and by mere force of the rope tied on to His tiny tummy, He brought down the trees with a crackling noise. From the fallen trees emerged two celestial beings, as they were redeemed of their curse. They reverently bowed to young Krishna with gratitude and disappeared. That same thing had been done by Bala Sai, and He drowned everyone in surprise. That is why, whenever I saw the huge trees, I wondered who were in that form.

The devotees breathed a sigh of relief and reached the Old Mandir from the groove. Those who did not come there to witness this felt depressed. Only when Prashanthi Nilayam was under completion, during the 1950's there came a change in His divine plays. Now His Leelas have changed with the times, suitable for the present. As the tender rays of the Sun rise, slowly the heat increases. Similarly, even God throws light that suits the devotees. Now it is not necessary for Him to

do such acts in person because, just by His will, anything can happen. How many more miracles He shall perform, no one can ever estimate. That small village Puttaparthi has become a city, and it shall keep expanding. This shall become the centre stage for marvellous deeds. To be bestowed with the fortune of seeing all these, we require His immense grace.

During that period Swami would frequently make us tie the ropes to some trees and swing beautifully and gracefully. As my sister Kumaramma, in her book 'An-yatha Saranam Nasthi' has already covered this, I do not wish to repeat it here.

Pata Manairam

OLD MANDIR

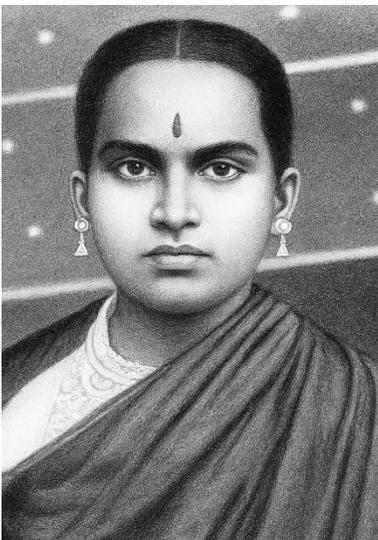
Though the Old Mandir looked very small in those days of 1945 's, it was very great. There was one hall just about 40 feet by 15 feet. On each side it was flanked by open veranda that was approximately 40 feet by 10 feet. On the four corners there were four small rooms. Swami occupied one of the rooms on the Eastern edge. That room had one single cot and one dressing table with a mirror. Swami used the room in the opposite corner as a storeroom. The rooms towards the South were allotted to the devotees. In between these rooms there was lots of empty space. On one side, in this open space, there were two small rooms. One was used for Swami's bathing purpose, and the other as kitchen. This does not end here, as there was one surprise. Lots of people would come to this small Old Mandir, but all would remain comfortable in such a small space. This would remind me of 'Pushpakavimanam', the airplane of the demon King Ravana in the Ramayana. Though it looked small, it could accommodate any number of people, but this Old Mandir was something above it. That airplane could carry people from one place to another, but this Old Mandir took the devotees who occupied it onto the path of their life. This was really His divine play. Whoever landed there, were comfortable and felt that they belonged to one family. In this play, on this stage, our Bala Sai would engulf all by His mischief, and became the main director of His 'Bala Leelas'.

To be very frank with you, Bala Sai did not look much like any God to me, but He was very much my close friend. The way He moved around with everyone who came there, the way He played with the young and the old, made me see in Him a friend, to Whom I could even give my life. Our expert Bala Sai would console the most perturbed ones with small moral stories, and convey them into small siblings, however big they were. The enticing way He would talk to them, His posture,

and His approach would make them forget themselves. They would never feel that these were His teachings. Without being aware of what was happening, with small stories, small parables, small jokes, child-like talk, He would shower on them the very essence of the Vedas. For those who were sick, these would act as the right pills to cure them.



The main person who gave shape to the Old Mandir was Smt. Subbamma, who belonged to the big Karnam family of wealth and power in the village. By the time we could go there, we could see only Smt. Kamalamma of that family, and we were not fortunate to see Smt. Subamma. When the crowd started flowing in, there was no sufficient place for accommodation in the village. Many were seated near the village Deity Sathyamma's temple for Swami's Darshan. Thus, right in front of that temple Smt. Subbamma built the Old Mandir. Once this was complete, Swami started living there only, and some devotees started rendering their service. In those days, Bala Sai was the most beloved child of the village, yet He would not take any advantage of any household unnecessarily. He would visit many houses in the village frequently, but we could never guess to whose house He went. Where He went He alone knew!



In those days food for Bala Sai was taken care of by Smt. Sakamma to start with, and then by His sister Smt. Venkamm-akka²⁶, with great care. Thereafter He accepted some of the devotee's offerings, also. During festival days, all were given an opportunity to place their preparations before Him. All the devotees would join together in the Old Mandir to prepare food on a large scale, in order to cope with the festival crowd. On such occasions, Smt. Sakamma, Smt. Konamma, and others would take the lead and render much help. Because the Old Mandir was small, we had the privilege of seeing Swami moving around, supervising the preparations all the while.

Before we could enter the Old Mandir, many great heads of spiritual instructions had already visited Puttaparthi. That was the main reason for me to comment that all though the Old Mandir was small, it was really great! Many great heads, of famous institutions that were much larger than the Old Mandir, had already visited young Sai with many of their followers. Their huge follower-ship was entirely centred for the welfare of their institution. But the modality of the Old Mandir was entirely different, because it was centred on everyone's welfare. There was no need for the inmates to guard their own welfare, with any selfish interest! It was one single family for the welfare of the whole world that brought many families together.

Residents of the Old Mandir had their own freedom, though they came from different traditions. Such an abode that was self-emulating, and self-sufficient, without any outside support, would not be found anywhere. The other great thing about this was that Swami was everyone's favourite, and young Sai was considered as their own child. In the *Dwapara era*, the residents of Brindavan, never recognised young Krishna as the Almighty. They treated Him as their friend Who would save their life, and they were ready to surrender their life for Him. We also experienced the same feeling with our Sai Krishna. The Gopikas had many sweet thoughts about Bala Gopala and we also had several sweet feelings for our Sai Gopala. The Govinda of Brinda van protected the people there, as the hen would guard its chicks, and like the eyelids for the eyes. If their dark-hued Krishna was not to be seen even for a while, they would restlessly go in search of Him. We also faced the same plight at Puttaparthi, as our only goal was to keep an eye on Bala Sai and never to miss Him, even for a while. We can surely conclude that the

²⁶ Venkamm-akka: her name was Venkamma and we used to lovingly add the suffix 'akka' -elder sister.

naughty Bala Krishna of those days was our Bala Sai of Puttaparthi, beyond any repute and beyond any doubt. We had the great pleasure of keeping Bala Sai in our view for all the twenty-four hours of the day. But one thing is for sure, even this day; though His family has grown in leaps and bounds, we could hardly see any change in Him! That Bala Sai of those days remains to be the same Sai Maharaj of these days! Though He has been keeping pace with time, we are stuck with our own convictions. Though our Sai Prabhu looked small, His capacity was beyond imagination since those days. The small One we saw in the Old Mandir days was verily the all-pervading Lord. Though He is like the Sun, He shall never bum us, because the magnificence of His love is beyond human perception. He shines in all directions like the Sunrays and penetrates everything.

Subba Yatra

HOLY PILGRIMAGE

Without devotion, no God's grace.

Without God's grace, no happiness.

But the extent of God's thoughts in you,

Can bestow that much merit in you.

The most auspicious day in this birth, for us, was in the month of October 1945. We got ready for the holy pilgrimage to Puttaparthi for the first time, without knowing what was in store for us. As already mentioned, it was a wonder of wonders that our non-believer father agreed for the trip, but for just three days' stay. He had to come back to take care of the business schedules and manage other social works. The required items for the journey were ready. We thought reaching Puttaparthi would be easy. From Kuppam we had to go by train to Bangalore City Station and board Ananthapur bound passenger train to alight at Penugonda, and from there reach Puttaparthi. These three stops to reach our destination did not seem to be difficult. As the Telugu saying goes, "Only when you jump into River Ganga you will know how deep it is!" This came to our minds only during the latter part of the journey.

We left Kuppam in the morning and reached Bangalore City Station by noon. After a long wait we boarded the slow Ananthapur passenger train, which did not have even dim lamps. Only people like us carried torch-lights in those days, and it was considered a luxury. The other passengers would look at us with esteem because we held torch-lights. We could not use the torches freely, because it was difficult to get the dry batteries easily. In all this darkness, it was difficult to spot the

station or the platform. There were no big name boards with big letters mentioning the name of the station. As the train approached the station, railway employees would come near the bogies and loudly shout the name of the station. Listening to this call, the passengers would scramble to get down. Our plight was beyond any description. We had lot of luggage and we had much difficulty jumping of the train on to the murky ground below. It was such a small station, without any platform. We bundled out of the train with our entire luggage. Like this we reached Penugonda station at midnight. The Station Master was kind enough to stop the train as we rolled out of the bogie. There were no more trains that would cross this station until the next day, so the whole place was deserted, without any activity or on-going crowd. Stations like these did not have many travelers, except for people like us. A forest surrounded this place, and it was dark all over, without any lamps. In those days, there was much danger of robbery, especially at such deserted places. At last we saw the Station Master and his aid come towards us, carrying a small lamp with kerosene as its fuel. We had to arrange our luggage by the dim light of the lamp they held.

My father's health was not so good. We had to be always ready with his important medicines, hot water, and suitable food. The Station Master observed my father's condition and kindly opened the lock of one small room for us to spend the night there. It was quite cold, due to the vast open area. We were informed that we could get our bus only on the next day, for our onward journey. The sympathetic Station Master left behind his lamp for our use. We had no more stock of hot water for our father. In the middle of the night, we did not know what to do and whom to approach. We presumed that our family Deity Lord Venkateshwara was our only refuge. Suddenly, the Station Master appeared and informed us that his house was situated nearby and we were welcome to ask for any help required and left. I followed him with a request for hot water, and he arranged for the same in his house. He was a kind-hearted man and told me not to hesitate for any further requirements. I felt sorry to observe that he had no children. Caught like this in the middle of the chilly night, I cursed this journey as poison. I also got angry with the Sun God for his delayed appearance! Anyhow, he did appear taking his own time.

Once again, hot water was required. Praising the Station Master as the most compassionate person, I reached his house once again. His wife was getting ready to heat water, and just by looking at me she understood that I had come for that

only. Wondering about the divine will, I waited for her to boil the water. They made me sit and offered something to drink. By chance, I mentioned that we were from Kuppam and they jumped in joy. Long ago they had visited their friends at Kuppam. Suddenly their mood changed, and invited all of us to their house. To get such affection at such an unknown place made me feel that God was very close to us.

People going for their work started appearing. Some of them were converging towards a big tree and returning after a while. When I enquired I found out that an old woman was selling Iddlies²⁷. This was welcome news for my empty stomach. Without loosing time, I had some and carried some for the hungry family from the limited .stocks she had. We had to bear with the shortage, as she was not running any permanent hotel. The most fascinating thing was, while I was having Iddlies, a boy approached me and enquired about my welfare. Before I could speak, he asked me if I was going to Puttaparthi, which took me by surprise. When I enquired how he knew about my destination, he sweetly replied that all those who go there face much adversity. He also told me that it would be difficult to board the bus due to the crowd, but he would deal with the conductor, known to him, and ensure our journey to the next point.

In the mean time, as informed to us the horse-drawn cart did arrive. The sight of the so-called cart and the horse dried up like hay, made my heart scream. Just by its looks, whatever life was left in me evaporated. I started wondering as to who would pull the cart, and who would carry the horse! Looking at our bewilderment, the cart owner assured us that he would take care of everything and tried his best to infuse courage. Letting out ardent prayers to the Lord, we climbed into the so-called cart. That was that! The harness gave way, and the cart tilted backward, pushing us down. As we had no other alternative, we used the cart to carry our luggage and walked behind it, without any risk of life.

We were dropped near the bus stand on the roadside. As if the pangs of hunger are not enough, we were confronted by a band of naughty monkeys. How we saved our luggage from their onslaught, we never understood. When the bus arrived, the local people pounced into it in such a way we did not stand any chance. When the monkeys were no match for them, what were we? Within no time the bus was full, and we helplessly remained on the roadside. All the efforts of father to get the tickets failed, and the conductor never even respected his age. In those

²⁷ *Iddlies*: a boiled mixture of rice and black gram dhal suitable for breakfast.

days, this was the plight for all those visiting Puttaparthi, as the local people did not have any belief in Swami. In the meantime, the conductor poked fun at our inability to jump into the bus. After some time, when everything settled and cooled down, I thought that we shall be stranded till the next day, as there was only one bus. Suddenly, the conductor beckoned me and said that we can board the bus and adjust on the front seat, as the boy had explained to him about us. Hearing this, I was wonder-struck, as I had forgotten about the boy who assured our onward journey. He did keep his promise, though I could not see him anywhere near the bus. Somehow we squeezed ourselves onto the front seat, among sneers and jeers of the villagers.

The buses of those days were most suitable for the roads of those days. No one could understand what was not rattling as it crawled in and out of the deep pot-holes. If it reached the destination, it was our fortune, and we had to thank our stars for it. Throughout the journey, we had to listen to all the insults meted out at Sai Baba by the locals. Under these circumstances and at remote places, it was necessary to bear all this silently. We were in a helpless position to do anything to stop them. We somehow rattled into the small village called Bukkapatnam, with all our bones screaming for mercy. Though I was very dejected with what was happening, it was only later I realized that God might put us into numerous difficulties, but ultimately rewards were bound to follow. Without patience, results could never be seen.

At this small village there lived a family by name 'Yadalam'. They would lovingly receive Sai devotees. It was our fortune to meet such a family among the crowds of ill speaking uncouth people. As soon as we got down, they received us nicely and arranged for bullock cart for our forward journey. Though the looks of the so-called cart brought us fear, we could do nothing about it. We placed our luggage on the cart, and some of us preferred to walk behind it. We thought that we would reach Puttaparthi straight away, but at 'Kottacheravu' we were due for a surprise. We came to know that we had to cross the River Chitravathi, and due to heavy rains, it was in full spate. Instead of waiting for the water level to subside, father preferred to cross the river slowly. Somehow, holding the cart tightly, we crossed the river.

We saw some people standing together, and this brought us some relief-expecting some help. There was no chance for anyone there to know about our arrival or even who we were! Due to the tiredness caused by the strenuous journey, our

minds were not fully functional, and we did not think much about them. The sight of a young boy made me feel that he was like a lotus rising out of a muddy pool with his white top as white as white as jasmine flowers, white dothi²⁸ around the waist, shining mass of hair like a basket, and face shining like the moon. If this boy was so beautiful, how radiant his Guru should be, we thought? Full details are in my sisters book '*Anyatha Saranam Nasthi*', so I do wish to repeat.

Divya Dararashinam

DIVINE VISION

Due to exertion, we all slept soundly. To our relief, father was looking gay after the much-required rest. Just like the others there, we also went to the banks of Chitravathi for bathing, washing, and other things, as there were no bathrooms, and toilets at the Ashram. In those days, from the Old Mandir, there were two routes to reach Chitravathi. There were huge trees and bushy shrubs on both sides, and it was a delight to the heart. The power of nature was mighty. At one place, where there were so many big tamarind trees, it looked like a mini forest. This place was so beautiful my feet refused to move from there. Walking about half a mile further we would tread onto a fine sand belt, as soft as a cotton bed, and then the holy river Chitravathi. In those days there would be flowers throughout the year, but little during summer. The river was not very deep, and it was perfect for bathing after sunrise. Anyone would be fully relaxed after a bath there. As we were not used to bathing in the river, thus we had difficulty in the beginning but got used to it. We became fresh and returned back to the Old Mandir.

My heart was still in anguish, unable to digest the fact that the small boy we met on the river side was the Guru of the Ashram! The head of a religious institution! How could one be capable of holding this position at such a young age? All these questions boiled in me. The main reason for all this was that we were used to seeing only learned, elderly people with a lot of experience in such position. Suddenly, when Bala Sai appeared, my sister Kumaramma bowed to Him with respect, but my heart was still wondering if He was really Sai Baba! I thought that women were ineffectual and would believe in such things easily, but not men. At that time, I considered my sister as mad, as it was not possible for anyone so young to become a Baba or a Guru! Observing all this with a smile, Bala Sai disappeared.

²⁸ Dothi: cloth tied around the waist running up to the feet.

FIRST TOUCH

The whole Mandir was very quite. Everyone were going about their duties and moving around peacefully. In those days, we used to wear shorts, in the form of knickers, and half sleeved shirts. I continued to stand there, lost in my own thoughts. Someone put a hand on my shoulder and stood next to me. Lost in my contemplation, I did not try to look around. I was eagerly waiting for Bala Sai to appear. Everyone was looking at me strangely. My mother, who came there, had an enquiring look on her face. Without my knowledge, my feelings boiled out from within. Looking at my mother, I asked her the whereabouts of Bala Sai? She observed me even more strangely and signalled with due respect that He was right there. I considered that my mother was also like Kumaramma, and without an iota of doubt fully believed in Bala Sai, very easily. Due to this turmoil inside, my condition remained to be hopeless. Without knowing what to do, I turned around to find Bala Sai standing right next to me. Now I realised as to why everyone was looking at me in a strange manner. I became the most stupid one out there. The naughty smile on His face and the affectionate touch of His hand, made me melt. That was that! Looking at the young form, I forgot myself! No words came out of my mouth. All this while His hand remained on my shoulder, and I continued to stand like a stupid one. No words came out of my mouth. All the while He had kept His hand on my shoulder and I had continued to stand there stupidly searching for Him. Everyone there had a hearty laugh at my stultified looks, but I stood there forgetting the whole world around me. Some sort of feeling made me numb, and I could not think of anything. Bala Sai, with a smile, told me to have Padanamaskar²⁹, and I simply collapsed at His feet. The very touch of His feet made me cry uncontrollably. Torrents of tears continued to flow, and with such tears I did Padabishekam³⁰. Though minutes passed by, He did not withdraw His feet and stood there with leisure, enjoying the show with the others. Not everyone would understand the magnificence of the divine touch. Even those who had experienced this would not be in position to explain! All the people might have had a good laugh at my madness; the whole world might have thought anything about me, but I was in on position to bother about them or even think of anything. All this was because the feet I had touched were verily the feet of Lord Brahma. They were the feet that bestowed salvation to Ahalya, the feet crowned by Bharatha,

²⁹ ***Padanamaskar***: touching, bowing to the feet of a Guru, Saints, elders, etc.

³⁰ ***Padabishekam***: washing the feet with humility and devotion.

the feet worshipped by Hanuman, the feet served by chaste Seetha, the feet that granted redemption to King Bali. What would happen when such divine feet are touched? The whole body shivered; all the strength seemed to have disappeared; all the energy seemed to have flowed away, and I just could not get up. The most compassionate Sai, the most considerate Baba, and the most knowledgeable Sathyanarayana, sat next to worm-like me! I melted into His warm lap, and He consoled me like a baby. I continued to cry like a hungry baby, and His touch made me gasp for breath. Except for His shoulders, my watery eyes could not focus on anything. Swami made me get up and took me into His room for more consolation. I was gifted to feel the compassion of Bala Sai and to believe in His fully, thereafter. Can anyone forget such moments!

I do not remember what happened in the room, but both of us came out after some time. With shy looks I now saw the world around me. I was stultified by the way I had behaved and managed to keep a smile on my face. Swami told my mother, "**Here is your son**", as if handing over her property back to her. That whole day I seemed to be floating somewhere and was not my normal self. All of us joined for singing and afterwards retired for the night. When Swami Vivekananda saw Ramakrishna Paramahansa for the first time, he looked quite ordinary for him. With just one touch, that divinity was felt, and the blissful flow surged into him, said the wise, The divine vision of the great souls, their divine talk and their divine touch are due to their inexplicable grace, the wise stated. Succeeding to get any of this, by force or by chance, shall not bestow any such experience without their grace.

The next day, all of us joined together in the main hall of the Old Mandir. I stood at a distance, near my family members. Bala Sai beckoned my brother Amba and me, and made us sit close to Him. From that day, it became our permanent place. Patting on my head, He placed His feet on my thigh and from then on the service of pressing His feet was awarded to me. I felt some sort of feeling surge in me, and at that young age of 14, I could not understand the turmoil that bubbled within me. But I had fully realised that. this 19 year old Bala Sai was the embodiment of knowledge, and there was nothing He did not know. My whole body was shivering, due to some current that stirred within! Swami kept looking at my plight, but did not speak anything. Those sacred days could never be forgotten, as this very birth was blessed. We started. listening to His lovely small stories crammed with morals up to the brim, and it played an important role in my life.

FIRST WORDS

I could never forget these words of Swami, **"No one can ever imagine the depth of great souls. Their divine vision, talk and touch are granted to you, due to the merit of many past births. When the right time approaches, I shall bring them to Me from wherever they were. There are many who had seen the divine form in its full glory, and they alone know the truth"**.

Bala Sai continued with a small story, **"Some devotees started in search of God. They did not have any idea how He looked or where He could be found? In this regard, it is worth remembering what Prahalada³¹ said, 'Do not have the doubt that He is here and not there! Wherever you search for Him, He shall be found!' God is all pervading. Among the animals, dog is the most faithful, and it can adapt itself with everyone, easily. One dog followed this group of devotees. With a lot of soul-searching, they continued their journey to find God. They faced a lot of difficulties on the way, but they were determined. They met a noble being in a deep forest and sought his help. He said that he was also in search of God and had been doing penance for many years, but God had not showered His compassion! As he was saying this, the dog came and sat in front of him. He suddenly got up and bowed to the dog and said, 'Now you have granted me vision', with tears. The dog disappeared and he felt blessed"**. Which divinity he saw in the dog, no one could guess. If the divine grace was there, results, were sure to follow. The way Bala Sai narrated this story, that sweet flow, I can never express in any number of words. Thus, without much detail, I shall place before you only some important features and extracts. Though these were small stories, it was like a great discourse for me at that young age. From that time, I thought of no other Guru or worshipped any other form:

I believed, with devotion, You as divine Lord.

By Your grace, gained knowledge.

Grant Your service, like shining stars.

Though Swami was close to me, He never talked much with me. Once He asked my name, as if He was not aware of it. I said 'Krishna Kumar'. With laughter, He said, **"Oh! Such a big name, when My name has only two alphabets 'Ba Ba'! I shall just call you Murthy"**. This was how Swami and all the inmates of the Ashram

³¹ **Prahalada**: the son of demon Hiranyakashayapa, being a great devotee of Lord Vishnu, the Lord granted him protection by descending as Narasimha Avatar.

called me from then on. Bala Sai's humour and naughty deeds were never small in number. But He never did anything without some reason behind it.

Deivanqrafam

DIVINE GRACE

Nothing can happen in this 'life without His divine grace. Whenever something good happens, we appreciate our past merits, and when difficulties confront us, we blame it on our fate. Both these aspects rise from us alone. I shall mention a few incidents of Swami's divine grace.

In those days, when there were very few people, on many occasions I would be the only person remaining close to Swami. If my family members could stay at Puttaparthi for about three months, I had the fortune of staying there for nine months in service of Swami. As per His command, I used to visit Puttaparthi regularly. He was my very life, and everything else in this world was only secondary. There was no question of over-ruling His command or have any second thoughts. Once, Swami's parents, grandfather, sister Smt. Venkammakka, and few other family members visited Him. I was ever anxious to some 'unheard before' old events. On that day, Swami was talking about Shiridi Sai Baba. In those days, travel to far of places was not very easy for an ordinary person. So, people who returned from the long treacherous journey to Kashi (Varanasi) far away in the North, they were treated as sacred for their great accomplishment. They would be welcome by washing their feet, to derive some of their sacredness. But I was fortunate and had no need to face so many hardships to *visit* such a sacred place. Puttaparthi was as holy as Kashi for me. The nectar of words that flowed out of Swami was my sacred Ganges, and the events witnessed by me were verily the vision Of Kashi Viswanatha.

Swami's grandfather had a good sense of humour and could sing very well in a loud voice, even at his advanced age. He was reputed for his roles in many village dramas. I was gifted to listen to his songs and also about a few incidents. On one occasion, it seems he broke a coconut during worship. As usual, it broke into two halves; but on that occasion, Swami said that there were three and not two. People started laughing, but when they had a closer look, of course they saw three halves, instead of two! Swami would give many such surprises regularly, said His grandfather.

When young Sathyam declared that He was the incarnation of Shiridi Sai Baba many people looked at Him with fear, Swami's grandfather revealed. They thought that He was talking out of His mind and did not take His words seriously. Though

Swami's grandfather fully believed in Him, he asked Him to prove His declaration. It seems young Sathyam said with a smile, ***'That is all you want! Look at that wall'!*** Just like a movie or a cinema, they could actually see Shiridi, scene by scene. Some also saw Swami at Shiridi. In minutes, they had the delight to have had glimpses of Shiridi, right from where they were at Puttaparthi. This happened when young Sathyam was just about seven years old! How any one so young could perform such a miracle at such a young age became their big issue, and they could not digest this. I had the pleasure of listening about this Shiridi Sai Darshan, while having Parthi Sai Darshan. In this way, at times, God Himself makes an effort to show His glory and prove that He is God. Such incidents made the village people revere Him and respect His words, but many people still remained sceptical.

MISSING BABY

To be blessed with divine grace, specific timing or some auspicious day does not play any important role. If God wills to give, He just gives. The small village Puttaparthi was surrounded by hills, hillocks, small grove-like forests, and tiny hamlets. There were many tribes and other groups making their livelihood by using the forest wealth. One such tribe was called '*Sugali*'. They had certain specific skills. They were hard working and never knew what was cheating. They would go into the forests, collect wood, take it to the villages and exchange it for grain and other requirements. They were comfortable with this age-old barter system. They would also rear cattle and supply milk, and milk products to the villages and the devotees who visited Puttaparthi. They would also arrange for supply of some items when ordered. Their services were very essential for such remote villages, especially for milk and curds. They were very disciplined in their own way and had a helpful nature. They had a great liking for Bala Sai. Many people came to Puttaparthi pretending to be devotees, but there were no pretenders among the tribes. They would do their best to supply good items to the devotees. I could very well remember one woman of the Sugali tribe who came to Puttaparthi on Thursdays. She would bow to Swami, speak of something, and return after the singing session and worship.

When people of so many tribes came to the Old Mandir and serve Swami, I observed that He gave particular care to her. This aroused in me my usual inquisitive nature. I wondered what special incident could have taken place and when? Sometimes Swami would arrange for her food. Even when she insisted that she had food, He would force her into the Ashram and feed her with something. On one

occasion while serving food to her, I thought I could start some conversation with her. Once, I directly asked Swami in this regard and with a smile He said, "**You Dunnapotha! Why ask Me; ask her!**" That put me on to the race, and with all my efforts, there were no results. Swami did permit me, but the right occasion evaded. Without accepting defeat, I was always on the prowl for the right time. Well, finally on one day she came to the Old Mandir when Swami was not there, and I accosted her. While waiting for the singing session to start, with freedom given by Swami, I started asking her simple questions. She smiled, to inform me that it was a long story and she was prepared to talk about it, because I was close to Swami. This was good news to my eager ears. It seems that she used to collect wood *from* the forest, and supply to the nearby villages. After one such errand, she crossed Chitravathi to return back to her home and found one small baby. She was carried away by its looks beyond limits. She wondered who could desert such a baby. One was visible, and her heart melted. As she had no children, she presumed this as God's gift, picked up the baby and reached her home. She was really happy and arranged everything for the baby's needs secretly, without revealing this to anyone. She continued with her daily routine and reached Puttaparthi, as usual. She saw a big commotion, which was unusual for this village, and came to know that they were in search of a missing baby. Their description suited the baby picked up by her. She wasted no time in going back to her home, picked-up the baby and returned to Parthi, to place it on the lap of the rightful owner. Looking at their happiness her joy knew no bounds, and it submersed the sorrow of loosing the presumed God given gift.

The disappointment of loosing the baby was short lived, she explained. Though she had not conceived for years, and had decided that she was a barren, she did conceive and delivered a chubby baby, in due course. From then on, she could not stop from coming to the Old Mandir, in gratitude for the unexpected child of her own. I was little confused, wondering what Swami had to do with an this. When asked, she told me that Baba Sai was the missing baby!! I was shocked, as this hit me like a rod from the blue! In spite of my long stay there, I had never got an inkling of such an incident. At last, my anxiousness did subside, for having come to know of such a rare incident not known to many or revealed to many. When I asked Swami's family members about His disappearances, they shrugged helplessly, as they had lost count. I realised that Swami's affection was so strong, so deep and beyond the perception of any ordinary human being. It was known that

Swami had disappeared many a time, but very little was known for whose sake, for what reason, for what reason, to which destination, how far away, for the fulfilment of which purpose, etc; the reasons were only known to Him! Such a Compassionate Lord was He, right from those days to this day. As she was concluding Swami entered from nowhere and said, **"Why for all these useless words?"** To fulfill our desires what-all dramas He would enact is every one's guess. This was something difficult to be understood by all! In those days, singing session at the Old Mandir was not like the Bhajan session of these days, for half hour or one hour.

Once everyone was seated, each session would continue for three to four hours, non-stop. Each day there might have been two to three such sessions. Once seated, it would be very difficult for you to get up for any reason. Sometimes Swami would signal to a few to go and complete the unfinished tasks. My task was to keep a continuous supply of betel leaves, lime, betel-nuts all the while to Swami. I also had to keep the storeroom properly arranged, and handover all the essential items for cooking, and take care of other small tasks as commanded by Swami. With all this everyone should be vigilant for Swami's call and listen to His command.

Once Swami explained, ***"Praptham, the merit of past births, and Deivanugraham, the divine grace, are entirely different; but ordinary people may not realise this. Praptham is all your un-fulfilled desires in the previous birth that takes shape in the present birth, due to accrued merit. To really get this benefit, divine grace is essential, and without this it cannot be encashed. The great demon-king Ravana could make Lord Shiva grant him the Atma Linga, by ardent penance. When the very embodiment of Atma, became the property of Ravana, the crores of Deities decided that Lord Shiva would be lost forever. The ever-compassionate Lord Shiva could never say NO to His true devotee. Such great devotees do exist! When such imbalances occur in any of the three worlds or in any heaven, Saint Narada would play the most important role for stabilisation. He had the courage to warn Ravana, 'at any cost or due to any reason, till you reach your capital Lanka, do not keep this Lingam on the ground. If this happens, there shall be a big danger'. To resolve this issue, Lord Ganapathy also participated. Very efficiently, with all His skills, He succeeded to stop Ravana from taking the Lingam with him to Lanka. The way He succeeded in this task, the acts of His, and the play enacted by Him, are known to the whole world through the Indian culture. In a similar fashion, the great demon Basamaswara was destroyed by Lord***

Vishnu in the form of the damsel Mohini, making him put his own hand on his head". That great dance, those beautiful movements, those enticing looks, and that captivating form, as explained by Swami, could never be forgotten. Till this day my eyes would pop out, recollecting those vivid descriptions. ***"This looks like simple divine play for all! This is enough for today"***, Swami concluded. Having won over the Lord's grace fully, what was the point in asking Him for something that was beyond our capacity?

What other better work I had the next day? I slowly started the supply of pan to Swami and prompted Him to bless us the remaining part of the story, thinking that His most cherished pan should work wonders! He lovingly knuckled on my head and said, ***"You do not seem to have any work"***? My hopes sustained when some new devotees made their entry. At least, for their sake, Bala Sai had to talk about something?

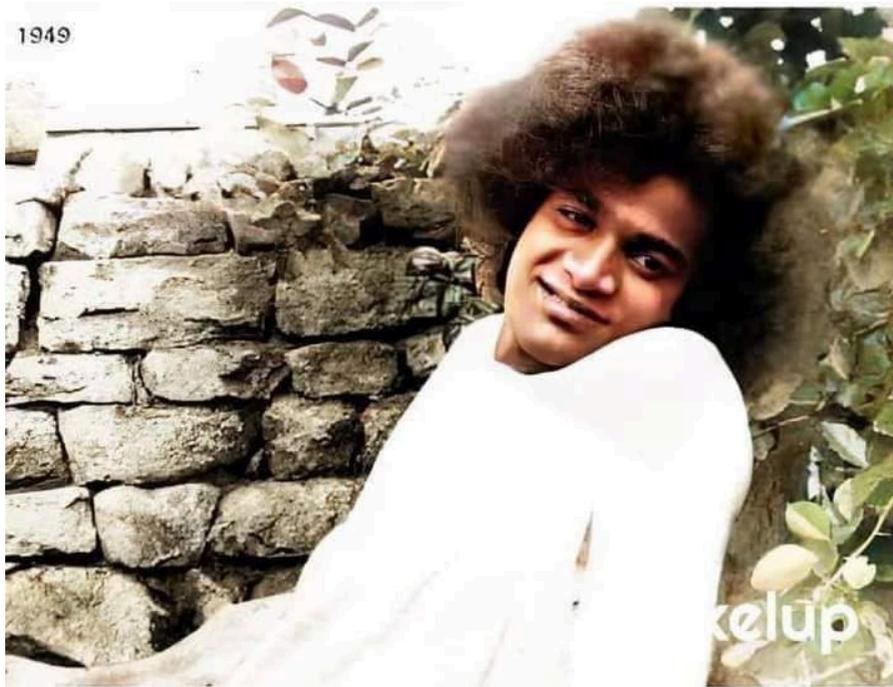
To our pleasure Swami continued, ***"When people succeed in something that was beyond their reach, they consider it as divine grace. After having accomplished such a great thing, they presume that there would be no barriers to accomplish much more. Affection is a link among people, but God alone can bestow grace. This is the link between God and devotee. The highest form of affection is the love between the mother and her children, the love that is born out of the blood relation. The mother pours out her affection, and her children enjoy it. The child need not ask the mother for everything, and the mother need not tell what she is going to do for them. Thus, the bound of love between them is very strong and of the highest order. Those who enjoy this relation are the gifted ones. But for the Lord's love, there are no reasons, and is not bound by any blood relation"***. We should completely surrender to His love, because it is pure, sacred, and selfless. Such love could never be found anywhere else in the world. Sometimes He just might not talk to you, not even a few words. *Padanamaskar* may become really scarce, even if you were close to Him. Even His glance towards you may disappear. Even during such times, His love for you shall remain ever fresh, but difficult to perceive. I have no capacity to describe this in depth; how can I ever succeed? In this way, I drifted into the stream of Bala Sai's nectarine Leelas and stories.

PRINCE IN DANGER

The next day, Swami started with a story, *"There lived devoted royal couple in a kingdom. They had sufficient wealth, pomp and power, but did not have the opportunity to fondle their own children, as they were childless. Due to the grace of divine souls, after many years they were blessed with a child. Their happiness knew no bounds. When the Pundits went through the Prince's horoscope they were perturbed. The reason was that the Prince did not have a long life. As he started . growing up, their worries also grew immensely. Many rituals and worships were conducted, praying for his long life. They did not have any more methods to follow for his survival and depended on the divine grace of the Lord. When they came to know about one renowned Siddapurusha, they approached him for some possible advice. He studied the horoscope deeply and mentioned that the calamity was inevitable for the Prince, only. He stopped his observation there and would not talk any further. Whenever they forced him to elaborate, he repeated the same thing"*.

"Unable to think of any other means, they continued to pray. In the mean time the Prince reached the marriageable age. Because of the flaw in his horoscope, no royal brides came forward to marry him. This caused. much pain to his parents. One ordinary girl, belonging to a simple family, came to know of this and opted to marry him. They admired her courage to marry the Prince, who. may die shortly, but still wished to know all about her intentions The Ministers who reviewed her confirmed that though she came from a simple family, she was virtuous and fully believed in destiny. Their marriage was performed, and they had anxious moments, wondering when the inevitable would happen. The Prince went into the forest with his friends and by chance stepped over a poisonous thorn and fainted. All the doctors of the King's court, failed to revive him. The whole kingdom was in gloom. During that time, a great Saint entered the kingdom, after a long journey to many other kingdoms. Coming to know of what had happened, he accepted to cure the Prince, if he was given the whole kingdom as alms. He gave them very little time to think it over. They took a fast decision and donated the kingdom to the Saint, as they did not have any better alternative. As promised by him, the Prince was cured, and all were delighted. Claiming that he had to go on an important pilgrimage, he left the kingdom in safe hands and left. He returned back after sometime and observed that all was well with the kingdom. Then, he cleverly mentioned that he was getting old and, in the interest

of the kingdom, he would accept the Prince as his son. In this manner he cleverly saved the life of the Prince because he understood that his life was in danger, only if he remained as a Prince. Latter, he gave back the kingdom to the Prince and left. This is the knowledge of the wise. The divine will, enabled an ordinary girl to marry the Prince and live happily. The divine timing brought this Saint there at the right time, and the divine grace saved the Prince. To receive all this, determination and devotion were necessary”. This was one of the first stories I heard from Swami. The vivid description that flowed out of His mouth fell like pearls, but full justice could not be done by me to put it in the same way.



BETEL LEAVES GRANNY

From the young days Bala Sai had a great liking for chewing pan and would forget about thirst and hunger. To arrange for these tender betel leaves was Smt. Konamma's pleasure. One day, for some unknown reason, she ran out of stock, and further stock was not expected to reach Puttaparthi till the next day. I was assigned the job of going to Bukkapatnam, approach an old lady near the bus-stand there and collect the tender leaves immediately. Once I inform her that those are for the Ashram, she would do the needful, I was told. I took the short-cut to reach there, in about half an hour, found her in a hurry and asked for the leaves. I declined her offer of the over-ripe leaves given by her, saying that the Ashram people would get angry. Once she came to know that it was meant for Bala Sai, she grabbed the leaves from my hand and disappeared, asking me to wait. To start with, I thought that she had no affection for Bala Sai, like many others, but I was

proved wrong. She returned back to give such tender leaves that she had carefully preserved for Him. She proudly revealed that she always kept such good leaves for Swami I referred to her as 'Avva, granny and asked her how much I should pay? This form of address impressed her very much and she delightfully said that young Raju (Swami) used to call her Like this! Well, in those days, if our Bala Sai called her granny, there should be a long relationship! My inquisitive mind became hungry to explore the facts. Due to lack of time, I turned back without any further talk. Swami was waiting for my return and, with anger said, "*Why cannot you return soon after the work is over? Stories can get you stuck anywhere*"! Was there anything not known to the all-pervading, omnipresent Lord? After a good serving of pan, He enquired, "*What did the granny say*"? I expressed that He was always *in* her thoughts and she was anxious to see Him. Swami said, "***It is alright, tell her to come***". Like this, a big story was waiting round the corner, I thought, with delight. Suddenly, Swami left to Bangalore on a short visit, leaving me behind at Puttaparthi. Taking advantage of this situation, I completed all my tasks as fast as possible, ran to Bakkapatnam and addressed her as granny. Delighted by such a call she expressed, "Who is there to call me like this now? Is Swami comfortable?" She thought that I had come for more leaves, but she was not aware that I had landed there for the long-awaited story. Observing that I was in no hurry, she started talking, "I knew Raju's family for many years. I was the chief supplier of tender betel-leaves. Raju was also called as 'Sathyam' then and now; 'Baba'. He would go to Bukkapatnam from Puttaparthi to attend school. On His return, He would carry some small requirements for the family and would never cross, without seeing me; Once, He called on me in the very early hour, as I was getting ready to sit for my business. When He picked up two betel leaves, I got angry, because no sale had taken place. In spite of this, He remained calm, and as a matter of fact, I had never seen Him get angry. He patted me cheerfully and said that His very arrival was roaring business for me. To sell one basket of betel leaves, it took two to three days for me, but on that day some marriage party bought all my stocks. Besides these, they ordered for more and did pick it up latter. I never had such sales before, and this made me go haywire. As usual, that evening I waited for Raju, but He did not appear. Unable to thank Him for this grand sale, I was in despair."

"On the next day, though Raju was crossing over, He *did* not look at me, but I used all my force and brought Him to my shop. I offered Him two tender leaves, as usual and He left". Is this not the proof of His saying, 'You take one step towards

me and I shall take ten towards you!' Now, anyone may wonder as to why He would accept two leaves only? Even I took a long time to come to know that He had one leaf and offered one to His friend. We may forget something at times, but will He ever forget anything, at anytime? Without any doubt, that friend of His must have been the fortunate one, in those days. After that, she started giving Him two leaves, some lime, few betel-nut pieces, for Him and His friend. In this way, Swami was used to pan from His young days. How would have one leaf per day, could have satisfied Him in all those years, she repented with tears? But the truth behind this was that even a small offering to Him, with love, was a great feast to Him. Needless to say, she always had sufficient-business to sustain herself happily.

For quite some time I was engrossed in this story, but was not blessed to witness the affection between them. One day, she responded to Swami's call and visited the Old Mandir. The way He looked at her with love, she instantly melted away like butter. She held both His hands with equal love, *looking* at His divine grown-up form. The pure-hearted granny touched His cheeks, as if He was still a child. Her gratitude for having been granted with such a smooth-flowing life was clearly visible. Then, it was His turn to console her like a child and bid farewell. I can never describe the way He loved the old devotees. It was not necessary for Him to open His mouth or even talk to them! The magnet-like eyes could communicate so much, beyond any imagination. Though there are so many devotees now, to witness such an incident is very rare. Very few are destined to receive such divine love. Yes! Really very few! If these were not instances of His divine grace, what else could these be? He nominates and uses only a selected few to propagate His glory and love to the whole world. Even the great saints could not have been so fortunate. This is what I meant when I stated that if the Lord wills to shower His divine grace, He would not wait for any auspicious time. He shall even snatch something from you against your will, and shower you with His boons! Such rare events that touched my heart shall be placed before you.

SWAMI'S SCHOOL TEACHER

Young Raju (Swami), after studying at Bukkapatnam, joined another school at the nearby village Uravakonda. There was one teacher by name Sri Thammaraju. Sometimes he would visit the Old Mandir and stay there for a few days. Such stay of his was fully utilized by us. Once, when all of us assembled in the hall, as usual I was at Swami's feet supplying pan. As already mentioned, the presence of old devotees made His love flow in a special way. Who can we keep away from knowing about the Leelas of His school days that were little known to the world then! When I saw Swami smiling happily, I summoned courage to ask Sri Thammaraju to speak about Swami's boyhood days, as witnessed by him. Swami, the thief of our heart, was equally interested in recollecting old memories, for the pleasure of the devotees. When some delighted incidents came out, He would laugh happily and fully enjoy it One should have hundreds of eyes to enjoy this sight!



Elementary school at Bukkapatnam

Sri Thammaraju started like this, "In those days, our Swami would not easily mingle with anyone closely. At such a young age, He was very compassionate. If any of the students, though not close to Him, needed pencils or rubbers, He would give these to them from His bag. When we asked Him from where these came, He would humbly say, 'From My store'".

"Once, for no fault of Raju, his teacher made Him stand on the bench. Though the class was Overt the teacher could not get up from his chair, as he was struck to it Without knowing what to do, he remained, helpless. The next teacher was surprised to see Raju standing on the bench and realized what was happening. He made the other teacher request Raju to sit, and, instantly he was relieved from the chair. Like this, He would conduct many strange things that were difficult to understand. God's *Leelas* cannot be understood easily. How true! Only much later do we understand the true meaning of His deeds. Though many knew about this, it

was a pleasure to hear it from the one who had actually seen this, especially when Swami was seated there! We just forgot ourselves in those Moments. This was nothing but, divine grace - to select him from many others, to sit there among us, and talk about His boyhood *Leelas* - right in front of Him.

In those days, many a time I did not see Bala-Sai as God, because of His naughty acts, child-like play, singing and jumping all the time, just like one among us. He was more a family member to us. In the beginning, He never stressed that He was God. All that He did was pour out His affection, shower His love, exhibit plenty of mischief, etc. Much more was in store for us was realised only at a later stage.

MIDNIGHT DOSAS

If I narrate what happened on one night, you would not believe it. The divine director was suddenly hungry. He woke me up and expressed His desire to eat, at the dead of the night. What could I do but obey, His command? Could we ever advise or guide, Him? As commanded, by Him, I woke up, my mother Radhamma and sister Kumaramma, and all of us entered the kitchen. There was only dough to make dosa³² unlike many other days. Swami said that dosas should be made, but it should not make any sizzling noise on the pan, otherwise people there would come to know, of this midnight meal. My mother expressed that she shall obey His orders, and all other issues, He should take care of. She spread the dough on the hot pan; surprisingly it made no sizzling noise, and Swami ate well. This may have looked strange and exciting, but how much music we had to face later; please, note!

The next morning when all were seated for breakfast, Swami held His stomach and looked at us with a naughty smile. He announced that He would not have breakfast! It came like a rod from the blue sky. Hearing this Smt Sakamma started Shivering, as she just could not bear Swami in any type of discomfort. She tried to coax Him, "Swami, how can You forget breakfast?" Swami, holding His stomach said, "Sakamma, last night, though I declined, this 'Kuppum family' forced Me to eat dosas". All hell broke loose, and now she was shivering with anger, joined, by others. "This Kuppam family is always like this. Every time, they come, they create some problem or the other for Sami," she fumed loudly. She targeted my mother, "We've you out of your mind? Do not you have a sense of timing? Your games may look good to you, but cannot you see how much suffering you have

³² *Dosa* – a South Indian pancake made out of wet dough of boiled rice and black-gram dhal.

caused to Swami". Little did she know that we were the ones with a problem and nor the naughty Lord? How could she ever understand this or how could we explain this to her? In fact, not only her, but also the whole world would never understand this! Even the old devotees started scorning us. We did not know where to hide ourselves from onslaught. We could never tell them that all this was His play, and even if we did, would they believe? Why would He indulge in such mischief was not known to us also. His Leelas are known to Him alone! We lost count of how many times we were put into such tight corners. We were like rats caught in a trap and this seemed to be a great pleasure for Him. Thus, Bala Sai's nectarine plays are very exciting. This is also divine grace that comes crashing into you at any time and make you participate in His divine game.

SERVING FOOD TO SWAMI

During our visits to the Old Mandir, it was Smt. Sakamma who took charge of Swami's food and Swami's sister, Smt. Venkamma³³, would also join. It was nothing but His divine grace that she was granted this opportunity for so many years. Now you know what would happen if we prepared something for Him once in a while! For some months, the devotees were demanding that they should also be granted with the opportunity to cook something for Swami. This small demand grew into a storm. Swami's play, at such times, and the way he would take up the sides, was a delight to observe. One evening, Smt. Sakamma and Swami's sister Smt. Venkamma discussed about this issue, and concluded they alone shall manage Swami's food. If all were allowed, it would surely affect Swami's health, they decided. Swami always liked my mother Radhamma's cooking, and this new development hurt her and the other old devotees. I tried my best to console her by telling that it was all His game, but she remained off-colour. That night when I was serving Swami, ***"How is this play? Would these women listen to anyone? Whichever side I may take, if I agree or disagree, there would be disheartened people. At such times you have to remain silent and watch the game"***. He not only escaped, but also did not hurt anyone on both the sides. Slowly, this storm subsided, due to some joint decisions. Later, many were allowed to place their items and it was left to Swami to choose from these.

³³ **Venkamma** (1918-1993), Sathya's doting elder sister who was among the few to recognize His divinity and thus maintain a diary about the daily happenings of His life.

You may think that Swami would be getting tons of such offerings from the devotees. Will He ever accept all that is offered to Him? Who could ever offer anything to the Universal Master, Who feeds the whole world? Even if He was forced to accept, will He yield to pressure? For that very form of love, Loving Sai, love was the most important thing for Him. He would select only a few items, and the remaining would be taken away. He would eat only a part of it, and what was left in His plate would be mixed together and distributed as Prasad, holy food. For most of the days, this was our breakfast and lunch. We never felt the pangs of hunger though we had very little food. This was His grace only, otherwise we would have fainted in a few days. This was how He embroiled us in his games, drowned us in Maya, illusion, and pricked us at the right place. *to* give us the right wisdom. All such acts of His were par excellence! In the beginning, my brother Amba also stayed there in service of Swami.

BANANA DELIGHT

One day, the offerings of banana fruits by a devotee were kept in Swami's room, instead of the storeroom, as ordered by Swami. Though this was a surprise to us, as nothing was kept in His room, we obeyed His command, and we did not know what was in store for us. As informed above, we never had a full meal on many a day, but only little Prasad from what was left in Swami's plate. Usually, we did not feel the pangs of hunger, by His grace, but the monkey mind did play its role that night. When Amba and I entered the room, the pleasant fragrance of the ripe bananas pierced through our nostrils and made our stomachs dance to their tunes. Right then, Swami entered the room, and, with a compassionate smile, asked us *to* eat the bananas. We never had felt so much hunger before. When we had Swami's permission, why should we feel shy? We ate nicely to our heart's content and doused the fire of hunger. As we were about to discard the peels, Swami intervened, "***Not now! Someone may see; discard it in the morning***". So we safely put these under Swami's cot, and had a good sleep, with stomachs full up to the brim. How silently. Swami crossed where we were sleeping and went out of the room the next morning, we just did not know.

The first visitor was Smt. Konnamma. Her angry looks burnt us alive, because we' were. Still sleeping, though Swami had already gone out of the room. We sprang on our feet and jumped out of the room, to observe the grand reception that awaited us. We had the Darshan of Swami, and behind Him were my mother Radhamma, Smt. Sakamma my sister, Kumaramma, and many other inmates of

the Ashram. They invited us with angry looks. Only now did we realise that a big calamity had fallen on our heads. Swami started the show, "Dunnapothulu! How can you both sleep like this? Don't you both have work to do?" The sharp eyes of Smt Konamma fell on the banana peels under the cot, and she brought the whole thing out for everyone to have a good look at, it Swam said., as if not knowing anything, "If such crap accumulates in the room, even snakes would. come to reside"! His sly, chiding looks towards us, no one could observe. Everyone's imagination sped fast to assess the dozens of banana fruits we should have consumed? How could they realise the truth? How could they understand His drama and mischief? My mother, unable to tolerate it anymore, blessed us with a few slaps. Swami dragged Smt. Sakamma into tire ring, "You should have observed all this and stopped them. Poor children what do they know? If the room were to be cleaned daily, such. wrong things would not have happened!" After such a sound play, could we ever succeed in making any of them realise the truth? After some time naughty Sai Krishna summoned my fuming mother. "I made them eat all these; why you get angry"? Now it was her turn to get shocked! Within moments, the whole atmosphere ,changed completely, immersing everyone in laughter.

As already said, Swami would not do anything without a reason. He started the day with shock treatment on us and ensured that we never slept heavily like this thereafter. He followed it with humour, and even after sixty years, our children, their children, and we, have a hearty laugh, whenever this incident is thought of. Besides us, the readers can enjoy and get to know the other side of His charm. One important thing I have to tell you. From that day, as soon as we came out of Swami's room, a cleaning brigade would take charge. Not just simple sweeping as was done by us, but scrubbing and washing with clean water was done. Every effort was made to make the tiny room sparkle. If it were not for this play of His, who would have cleaned the room with scented solution? Without His direct command, everything neatly fell in place. Then the most important lesson: anyone may offer something heart-fully, but how could one gulp it up without any limit? For this lapse on our part, we had to get punished. We were debarred from entering His room for four days, in full view of all the inmates. He alone could impart discipline in such a strange manner. With the culmination of four days of insult, we ended up with forty years of wisdom. Such punishment was for the welfare of the devotees only and for their own good. Having been gifted with such teachings of discipline, we learned a lot and surrendered all our faults to Swami.

CAMPHOUR CLOUDS

There was no scarcity or limits for Swami's grace. His grace was much more than all our feelings put together. After lunch, Swami would retire into His room for some time. On one such occasion, one devotee of Madras, and me were resting outside. Though it was evening, Swami did not come out, so I took His evening coffee into His room. He happily informed, *"Today I shall show a great event. Tell everyone to get ready to reach Kalpavriksha. Tell them also to carry camphor and other Harathi³⁴ items"*. With much excitement, we all reached under the tree by 6 PM and started singing. After one hour of singing, Swami said, *"Today's Prasad is not for the tongue, but for the eyes!"* No one could understand, because whatever He did was a feast for the eyes. Swami stood up and asked everyone to light the camphor. As all of them were ready, within no time all were lit, and it looked wonderful. Some people started wondering if this was the great event that was assured by Swami? Their disappointment was short-lived. The flames started becoming blackish. There was so much smoke we could not see Swami standing right in front of us. In this thick cloud-like smoke, not only Swami, we could not see those standing next to us. Few seconds back we had the pleasure of seeing Jyothies, and now we were engulfed by some strange fear.

Though Swami could not be seen, from somewhere in the thick clouds we could hear the sound of 'Omkar'. As the sound of Omkar started increasing, the dark clouds started turning into white. It became whiter and whiter, to snow-white. It looked as if it had spread all over the place and reached the sky. In a few moments, the white clouds started converging to take the form of Swami. A huge form, that was so big, it could not be explained by me in any number of words. In that huge form, His mass of hair looked so huge, beyond any imagination. The whole place was a cloud of whiteness, and Swami's face could be seen clearly. I could see a radiant moon-like smile on His face. Except for this, I could not assimilate anything else. This huge form made me imagine that His feet must have been deep into the earth. We were fortunate to have such a divine vision, such a 'Viswaroopa Darshan', that was not seen even by the Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara. Though all this happened in a short while, it seemed much longer, and no one could guess the correct length of time, immersed in wonder. The huge silver-like white clouds disappeared in the same way they were, formed. That was

³⁴ Harathi: lighted camphor offered to Deities (to remove the evil eye).

Ammavasya, dark moon night. Though the whole place was in darkness, Swami created silvery white clouds and dipped all of us in Maya, illusion. Such wonderful vision was gifted to only a few devotees of those days. Maybe in the Bhagawatham, only Arjuna was granted such a vision by Lord Krishna! But in this era of Kali, Lord Sai showed this to all of us and we were as fortunate as Arjuna. Bala Sai's nectarine Leelas were unbelievably wonderful. This is how divine grace could be granted to all without exception.

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT

"It would not be necessary to be a devotee to become the recipient of the Divine Grace. Just by visiting temples and giving alms shall not grant this grace. My dear ones, even if you could not do any good, it does not matter, but just do not do any harm. To harm someone who believes in you shall be the biggest sin".

These teachings of Bala Sai were entrenched in me, due to certain incidents directly experienced by me, at such a young age.

On one occasion, a family from Bombay visited Puttaparthi. The eldest member of the family seemed to be very perturbed. Though they had stayed for three days, Swami had not talked to them, and they lost all hopes of an interview. They were told that Swami would part with lots of money to save those in real trouble. This was the reason that made them land at Puttaparthi. Would it be easy to accomplish what one thought? Because they could not succeed in talking to Swami, even after three days, they sought His permission to return to Bombay. With a smile, our greatest thief pocketed them; *"Let us go to Chitravathi in the evening. I shall solve your problems"*. As usual all were assembled on the banks of Chitravathi. Swami started to speak, *"This day everyone shall resolve their own issues. Just think of your desire and close your palm"*, He instructed, and everyone followed His command, The head of the Bombay family did not believe in what Swami said; he picked up one stone that was there near him and held it in his closed fist. As assured by Swami, everyone got what they wished for, including the head. The stone in his palm had turned into a precious gem. All our eyes got glued onto the gem in his hand. He expressed that he was a diamond merchant and an expert in gems. What he had in his hand was mind-boggling and beyond estimate.

The next day, when all were seated in the hall, Swami asked the head to bring that most precious gem, and he obediently gave it to Swami. To his surprise, it had become the same stone he had picked up the previous evening. What surprised all of us, was that he was not least perturbed about the change and the lost

opportunity. His wife begged Swami to resolve their miseries, and He asked her to reveal the reason for their worries, as if He knew nothing.

She consoled herself and said, “My husband, with his friend, started diamond business. My husband was an expert in valuation of precious gems. The business was good, and both the families lived happily till such time one big deal was struck. They purchased a fortune for a small amount, and my husband cleverly cheated his partner and kept all the huge profit for himself. Unable to bear this deceit from his good friend, he died, leaving his family in deep trouble. Unable to survive in Bombay; the family shifted to an undisclosed destination. After this, my husband suffered losses and had to sell away all our properties. We ended up with difficulty to even fill our stomachs”. The great devotee of Lord Rama, Sri Ramadas made so many ornaments for his Lord with public money that was in his custody. Though his intentions were good, he had to suffer the wrath of the King, for he was not authorised to use that money. Ultimately Rama and Lakshmana saved him by clearing his debt, because he was pure hearted. God's ruling was also bound by Dharma, and so was the case with our Bala Sai. In this case, He gave a simple solution, ***“Because your husband cheated his partner, that family was facing great trouble. Now to resolve this issue, find them and offer them some protection. If you fail, your family shall face even more dire consequences”***.

This is the divine play that made the Bombay family come to Him for advice, and by the divine grace, the partner's family that did not come to Him was benefited. The one who cheated came, to this source in search of a solution to this source, and the one who got cheated, and thought that there was no possible support, was gifted by this source. That, too, through the same family that cheated them! For those who do not have any support and lost all means of support, God becomes the greatest form of support, even without any specific request. If our services are not compensated with money, it is all right, but when the same had been done with a pure heart, the results are bound to follow, without even asking for it.

BLIND BELIEFS

Let us now see how Swami would set right someone who assumes to be very clever and knowledgeable. Once, an elderly man came to the Old Mandir, and he observed the rituals of worship, decorations, and arrangements. Elderly widows Smt. Savitramma and Smt. Konamma were lighting lamps, arranging all items for Pooja, worship, and singing sessions. He softly told Smt. Savitramma that it would have been nice if some young ladies carried out these tasks? The pure-hearted lady thought that he was concerned about the work she had been doing at such an age, and she did not give him any reply. What he actually meant was that such auspicious tasks should not be done by widows. Certain customs were strictly followed in those days, blindly. Widows were not even allowed to participate in auspicious ceremonies and young unmarried women or Sumangalies, married women with living husbands, only were allowed to participate in such tasks. How and when Swami took note of this. would be anyone's guess! Though He would be moving round the Mandir casually, no one could guess what He was up to. There was nothing that would go unobserved by His sharp eyes, and there would be nothing not known to Him.

That evening, Swami narrated the story of a wealthy family. They had a son who was brought up with much love and good discipline. They admitted him to a Gurukul, headed by learned Guru. After he succeeded in all his studies and was about to leave, his Guru advised him to speak the truth always. He adhered to his Guru's words strictly. His marriage was fixed, and everyone got busy with the arrangements. Many rituals had to- be followed during the marriage. One such ritual was the invocation of the Aranduthi star. The pundits, after reciting the relevant Mantras, asked the groom to have a vision of that star. Then they chanted more mantras and asked him if he had understood. Then the pundits asked him to get the blessings of Mutaidulu, married women with living husbands, which was considered as auspicious. Surprisingly, he broke down and started crying. Parents thought that he was disappointed with the way the marriage was being conducted. The in-laws thought that he was not satisfied with what was offered to him. The bride thought that he might have been forced into the marriage against his will. Each one who had come there had different conclusions. At last, one elderly man was able to make him talk, "From my young days I always spoke the truth. The pundits here forced me to speak lies for every small thing, They forced me to see Aranduti star in the brought daylight. Though I do not understand the

Mantras, they forced me to agree that I had understood them. Now they are forcing me to get blessed by inexperienced young women when there are so many prudent wise widows present in the function. For such small silly things, how can I end up with lies?", the groom wept. The gentleman had a good laugh, but with all his efforts could not console the bridegroom with proper answers. In his final effort, the gentleman said, "These are all old customs that are being followed for ages. When we had not understood, why should you worry"?

Suddenly Swami turned towards the elderly man who had advised Smt. Savitramma and said, ***"Do you agree that these are our customs that are being followed blindly"?*** Poor man, with all his profound knowledge put together, he could not come out with any answer. Swami with compassion explained, ***In the night you can see the stars, but when they are not visible in the daylight, can you conclude that stars are not there? For God, all women are equally blessed, thus none of them, including the widows, have any faults in them to be considered as inauspicious"***. This opened the eyes of the elderly man, who considered himself very wise. He begged for Swami's pardon and accepted that his knowledge of the Shastras was futile, without the realisation of the inner meaning.

Smt. Savitramma, after observing all this, beckoned me and enquired what was this all about? She must have thought that Swami may have said something to me. Even after all this, she was not aware that all this started, due to the comments of, the elderly man. She was under the canopy of divine grace and was least bothered about any adverse comments! When I explained to her, she was surprised. Swami's ways can pierce a person without the others coming to know of it Without hurting anyone's feelings, in the right manner, Bala Sai would have taught good lessons. Even by mistake, He had not insulted the elderly man in front of everyone or alone! This was His greatness.

ROWDY MENACE

It is already mentioned that our Kuppam family went to Puttaparthi during 1945 to stay' for three days, but it turned out to be three months. This was the case with our other visits also. My case was different, because after the family returned to Kuppam, within a few days I used to receive Swami's can to come back to Puttaparthi. I used to dash back to Puttaparthi, and on every such trip, some items were compulsory. A flower garland, made by my mother, then the most important handpicked custard apples from the nearby forests, and few other items packed in a separate basket. Swami would happily accept all these, as soon as I reached

Puttaparthi. On one such journey, carrying all these items, I reached Penugonda in the morning. As usual, there would be a long wait for the bus, which never came on time. I sat in a nearby teashop, which was my usual waiting room, waiting for the bus. This place was infested with trouble-some rowdies. Especially, people travelling to Puttaparthi became their targets, They took much delight in irritating these travelers. Some rowdies surrounded me and started poking fun at me. Usually, no outsider would confront them. They demanded that I should offer tea, and I silently obliged. Usually, I do not lose my cool, but when something went beyond limits, I would not mind getting into any big fight and even risk my life. When all their efforts failed to provoke me, one of them tried to tamper with the basket meant for Swami. This irritated me, and I got into a fight with the leader of the gang. Having succeeded in getting free tea from me, they had taken me for granted. I picked up one kitchen knife that was there, and both of us started rolling on the ground. By the time the police came to separate us, my clothes were torn at many places and blood marks could be seen.

The people there informed the inspector that I was a regular traveler to Puttaparthi and belonging to a good family; I never caused trouble. This made him arrest the gang leader and allow me to proceed with my journey. As he was being taken away, I expressed that I was least interested in fighting and always interested to make friends and love all. In the meantime, the bus arrived and I boarded. This news spread like fire and reached Puttaparthi before me. But it was badly twisted in the process, saying, 'Murthy killed a rowdy!' As I was moving towards the Old Mandir, with torn clothes and blood stains, everyone started questioning me. When I saw Swami near the entrance I dashed forward and fell at His feet with a lot of tears. He lovingly enquired if I was all right. The way He poured out His love made me cry even more. That was the effect of Divine Mother's love! I had the pleasure of opening the basket and garland Swami as usual and keep the custard apples before Him. As mentioned earlier, He always accepted my mother's offerings. Swami took me into His room and enquired about the episode, as if He knew nothing about it. The divine actor played His part to console me.

The next day, in the morning we saw the Police Inspector, with a few of his men, coming towards the Old Mandir with the gang leader. As soon as he saw me, he dashed towards me and the onlookers thought he would harm me. But he held my hands in humility and apologised for confronting me unnecessarily. This surprised everyone over there. As we walked into the Mandir, Swami jokingly asked

him, if he was still a harmful person? He fell at Swami's feet and assured, "It was my entire fault! From now on, I shall not trouble your devotees. This is my promise"! The compassionate Lord, Sai Prabhu, gave them some snacks and treated them at par with the devotees. Ultimately, the gang leader became a very helpful person, served the devotees and would visit Puttaparthi once in a while.

God does not accomplish all tasks directly. He shall involve and engage someone to accomplish His task. For that purpose, he would have chosen the right person, before the approach of the right time. But why do we not understand His divine will? That firm belief gets decimated by the lack of patience, would be the main reason for this. But our Trikalagyani, the knower of the past, present, and future, knows everything. Lord Krishna would have stopped the great war of Mahabharath in no time, but it was essential for Him to establish His divine glory, preach Geetha, and establish Dharrna for the welfare of the world. Without that war, this great Epic would not have materialised. Every Avatar faced opposition and disbelief in some way or the other. It was for the sake of these people the Avatar descended. All this was nothing but His divine play.

RICH FOUR-CAR FAMILY

I wish to narrate one more incident. One rich family arrived at Puttaparthi in four cars. When the sight of one car was rare, four cars was a sight for the people! They were aware of the lack of facilities and had brought their own tents, etc. Does not Swami know about their arrival and timing'? He had His coffee and for some odd reason retired into His room. The visitors got ready and waited for Swami in the Mandir, but He did not come out for the most part of *the* day. After a long wait, our cunning Lord suddenly appeared and looked at them in surprise. They immediately placed fruits and other offerings in the Mandir. Swami started the singing session and all joined. If Swami did not wish to speak, the way He would avoid them was really unimaginable. He concluded the session before the usual time, distributed what-all they had kept there as Prasad, and disappeared. Again the visitors waited for a long time and collapsed in one corner of the Mandir. Where Swami went to, no one knew! At about 10 PM He majestically entered His room, without speaking to anyone.

The next day started as usual. The visitors tried to talk to Swami, but He made them sit down and started like this, ***"People who are bound by principles shall not have difficulty to discriminate between the good and the bad. Even if they were sitting over heaps of losses, they would do the right thing. Thinking about what***

fools shall comment, worrying about what others would say, should not be a hindrance to reach the goal and to take the right decisions. Giving full weight age to the Dharma of nature, using wisdom fully, you should tread the right path with confidence. Choosing between the right and the wrong, you should fully rely on what transpires out of your deep contemplation. You should not be influenced by others' thoughts, opinions, and wishes. But if you were caught in the clutches of the greedy mind, ruled by the senses, and the 'blind beliefs, you should make all efforts to turn down your mind'".

"Mind and discriminate mind are two different things. Mind is carried away by the desires and emotions, whereas the discriminate mind leads you to the truth. Usually, based on the way you are brought up, the atmosphere that prevailed around you, the way you were taught, makes you frame some conclusions, and slowly you presume that these are correct and adhere to them. The good deeds of the wise may face many hurdles, but they would face these courageously, stick firmly to their ground, use their discrimination to give the tight answers to' all the questions, and make their side win by crushing the evil successfully. You should not blindly conclude that what was all done by you as correct. You should be able to analyse your actions, weather great or small, with an open mind. If a big task had been. achieved, due to the play of the wicked mind, on the surface it may look great, but it would be nothing in the long run. Your life and your strength are impermanent, so all by yourself you cannot accomplish all tasks. You should try to accomplish the task that is within your reach. Instead of building a huge strong body, it is much better to build a good heart. Keeping all these firmly in your mind, you should proceed with your work. If people who possess wise knowledge do not impart this to the needy, they shall be at par with demons", Swami concluded. Now you would know that Swami would not have touched this topic without any specific reason.

After hearing to all these, the eldest of the family fell on Swami's feet and said, "Swami! I was wondering how my problems could be solved? I never even dreamt that You would resolve it in such an easy and nice manner!" Swami said with a smile, "There is nothing I have done. What I felt I told you". Pretending that He had not done anything for them, He blessed them and said, "**The one who takes decisions in a big family, should have full confidence in himself. Instead of this, if he was influenced by others' directions and thoughts, let alone victory, only misunderstandings, and dishearted people shall remain. This world is not permanent,**

and one should know how to go about it, changing with times”. This was not true only for them but to the whole world. However huge the problem might have been, however big the leader, Swami was an expert in settling things right away. This was difficult for all to realise.

During the great war, of Mahabharath, Bhagawan Krishna accomplished many tasks by playing tricks. People, who did not go deep, blindly commented that it was against Dharma. But every act of Krishna was bound by Dharma. Without having God with you, no Dharma could ever be won. Whatever was said must have been heard with patience. To become great people, patience would be very essential, besides prudent identification of one's own faults. The great conclusion of the Mahabharatha war was the realisation of one's own power. Both Arjuna and Duryodhana sought Krishna's help. The divine director Krishna was fully aware of their arrival and pretended to sleep. When He got up, He first saw Dharma in the form of Arjuna, only thereafter He saw, the Adharma in the form of Duryodhana. 'That' Krishna is 'this' SaiPrabhu and He is in no way less than Lord Krishna! Only people who had experienced His Leelas would know this. People had to realize that Bala Krishna of Brindavan was in the form of Bala Sai of Puttaparthi. People who came to Puttaparthi with good hearts realised this, and those bound by their own adamant views were not fortunate. To unwind the knotted thread, it should be flexible. If it was hard and rigid, no one would succeed. In the same way, it is very essential in life to be flexible, give and take with an open mind.

FAR SIGHTED

Usually the preachings of the great Saint Vashista were very much respected by everyone. His blessings were considered as, most auspicious as he would very rarely bless anyone-by pronouncing something out of his mouth. If the words of that great saint, were considered very rare, then what should be the value of the words spoken by our Bala Sai, the Almighty, verily God! Though our proximity towards that great Saint Vashista was not felt, we were fortunate to be close to our Lord, Sai Bhagawan. Yet our God, whenever He spoke, ordinary people around Him, would not take it seriously, would also ridicule. Though His words were 'Great Pointers' for us to tread the right path in this world, such great preaching of His were realised by only a handful of people. Let me now tell you one incident of my life that would authenticate the above statement of mine.

That remote village of Puttaparthi was surrounded by hills and hillocks. There was no dearth of small stones that would pierce your feet when you walked. Let

alone good roads, we were confronted with big black scorpions that crept across our path. We had never in our life seen such big scorpions, and they were so poisonous. If bitten, life would be in danger. On one occasion, one person bitten by a king scorpion came to the Old Mandir. Though he was in acute pain, Swami pretended to be very busy and was talking to some people. After some time, Swami signaled to me to make a paste out of the Tulasi and lime, kept on a plate in the Mandir and tied it around the place was bitten by the scorpion. I obeyed His command only to this extent and in no time the person was relieved of pain, and was fully cured. He bowed in gratitude to Swami and left the Old Mandir.

I was very surprised to hear Swami comment that an ignorant, illiterate fool like me would become a doctor in future. The people, who heard this, thought that Swami was joking, and had hearty laugh. Even I could not understand what Swami meant by this. The truth of His words and its magnitude could never be understood by anyone easily. His words were as true as the words of Brahma and could never fail. Though Swami, had made *me* do *this* during 1945, it was only during only 1999 that I could take note of its value. His words should be taken seriously to the core, and if ignored there would be much to Jose. Though this *life* of ours is not within our hold, we should make every effort to put it to proper use as long as we live. Such prophecies of Swami did have immediate effect on many who could perceive, but was fortunate to realise what he meant only after many decades when I started my practice as a doctor.

THE FORTUNE OF SERVICE

As 'the days passed by, the grace of Bala Sai continued to shower on me. Due to this, I had many opportunities to serve His lotus feet There was no dearth for His affection. In the beginning, I never realised the greatness of His love and affection, and I had never experienced such magnitude of love. It was only due to the discipline taught to me by my parents that I could learn to swim in the ocean of this life. Discipline can be considered as most essential for life, but, the great discipline that was taught to me by Bala Sai was much more than what was imparted to the by my parents. It was not an easy task to put me in the path of discipline, but our Bala Sai could put anyone on the right path.

Even if millionaires and billionaires would come forward to serve the Lord with all their wealth, it would be difficult for them to succeed. If Lord Shiva Himself would ask for arms and verily that dweller of Kailasha stood 'before us in the form of humble Bala Sai, serving the people, then what were we? In spite of all this, I

was fortunate to serve such a divine Lord at the Old Mandir and stay with Him in His room. This opportunity granted to me made me serve His feet and also rest His feet. The magnificence of such divine proximity can never be explained by me! If many great beings, in the form of fragrant colourful flowers in a garland offered to the Lord, were sanctified, I, like the thread that held the flowers, also got sanctified. I was also swept up in the same bliss that swept those great beings and remained in that ocean of bliss, and, I am sure that this bliss would last forever. It was only His grace of being in such close proximity to Bala Sai that made me learn a lot of things in this life.

Even to this day, right in front of the Old Mandir stands the temple of Sathyamma, the ruling deity of Puttaparthi. Swami had said, due to her grace, all would be well for the people there. During His younger days, He had spent a lot of time in this temple. He had conducted many courts and given His ruling. At such a young age, how did He get this expertise? Who can ever answer this question with confidence? During those days, Smt. Subbamma of the Karam family was so found of Swami that she can be considered as His second mother. He was also having so much love for her. She was bestowed with this rare fortune by His blessings. By the time our Kuppam family went to Puttaparthi, she was no more. Though we had not witnessed this link of love between them, we had the pleasure of hearing about this from Swami himself, and we felt as if we had witnessed it with our own eyes. It was due to her efforts, the Old Mandir was built, and many devotees benefited a lot. We also had the benefit of seeing this Old Mandir. Though the Old Mandir was quite small, the happenings that took place were fabulous. Only a handful of people had the pleasure of witnessing the divine Leelas and we were among them.

We had heard that Swami, during His younger days, was very attractive and beautiful. People who had witnessed His effulgence, like that of a silvery cool moon, were really fortunate, beyond any doubt. We were also fortunate, because when we saw Him, He was shining like pure white pearls lit by cool moon rays. Now, He is shining like the splendour of a million gems.

FIRST SERVICE OPPURTUNITY

Swami was very found of chewing pan made of tender beetle leaves, small pieces of areca nuts and some lime. This would please Him to a great extent, and we could not imagine Him spending time without pan. The devotees of those days would have always seen Him with red lips, due to chewing of pan. • I was very

fortunate, because I had the pleasure of supplying Him with His most cherished pan. This was the first service opportunity gifted to me by Swami that kept me close to Him foremost of the time. At such a hot place like Puttaparthi, it was very difficult to get tender beetle leaves. The devotees, who knew about this liking of His, would bring tender leaves with them, and I used to take much care to wrap them up with moist cloth, in an effort to preserve. There was no electricity or a fridge in those days. It was my duty to fill up a small silver box with this tender leaves, and other items, once in a while. The number of times I would fill this box with the ingredients of pan, was beyond all count. It was due to this constant chewing, His lips were always red like a Biona fruit or like a lady with much lipstick. It looked as if, to test the redness of His lips, He would always use pure white handkerchiefs. Within on time the handkerchiefs would bear red marks all over. Any negligence to keep up with the supply of pan or the handkerchiefs would bring down His wrath, beyond any imagination; and, in short, all hell would fall apart. You may feel that this should have been a simple task, but to be ever ready with the supplies, at any point of time, was never too easy!

During this period, I was stuck to Swami like Hanuman was stuck to Lord Rama. At one point of time Hanuman was blessed with the service of snapping his fingers whenever Rama would yawn. This may have looked very simple, at the outset. But to accomplish it, was really mind-boggling. When such a task was gifted to Hanuman, all those who were there had a hearty laugh, ridiculing this as a very simple task. That night, when Rama retired into His room, Seetha, who returned back from her work, was surprised to see the presence of Hanuman in their private chamber. She assured Him that she shall take charge and that he can leave the room. But this monkey servant did not move from there. When she questioned him, he explained that he can never deride His duty, having accepted it. How could he know when Rama would yawn? So, how could he leave from that place? All those who had the laugh at the acceptance of this simple task by Hanuman, were shocked to hear about this. Seetha had the liberty to distance herself from Rama for a while, but Hanuman could never! This great opportunity of service was only due to the grace of Rama. The all-knowing Lord should be kind enough to grant such a service.

When Swami gifted this opportunity of serving pan to me, He joked by knuckling on my head, ***“Now this fellow has become like a tail to Me”***. Swami would grant the desires of His devotees, and He granted my desire to stay close to His

feet, way back in those days. As the days passed by, many changes took place. When the number of devotees started swelling, the distance increased and the closeness slowly decreased. I do not know in which other birth I shall get such a fortune again! But I am sure that such fortune can never culminate, that at any cost, He would make me, to come close to Him, birth after birth.

SILVER BOX

There was a story behind the small silver box that was used to store the pan. When I was busy in sorting the items in the store room, and found one small blackish box. Actually it was the silver box that had become black over the years. When I showed this box to Smt. Sakamma, she told me to clean it up nicely. Once cleaned, the box shined beautifully and looked very cute. Though it was not known who had done the intricate design on the box, it was simply wonderful. When I showed this box to Swami the next day, He was very much delighted, and He literally grabbed that box from my hand. He seemed to be very happy, like having recovered a long lost treasure. When He asked me where I found this box, Smt. Sakamma replied, "Murthi found it in the store room when he was sorting the items there". Listening to this, Swami joked at me, "***Did you take anything more from the store?***" This made my inquisitive mind to explore for more in the store room. I decided to start the search when the right opportunity approached. While serving Swami in the night, I asked Him about the silver box, and he casually enquired why I was in such a hurry. I realised that the story behind it would unfold shortly.

After a few days, one devotee landed at the Old Mandir, and Swami had gone to Bangalore for a day or two. He decided to stay there, till Swami returned from Bangalore. With leisure, he started talking about Swami's school days, and I was very excited to know that he had studied with Swami. In the school days, they were used to calling Him as 'Sathyam' or 'Sathya'. After so many years he had come to see Swami, and it was my pleasure to receive him. He expressed that he belonged to a poor family and had to go far away leaving *his* studies, to earn something. He could never forget his friend Sathyam, though he had to sacrifice his studies, due to poverty. He worked with much love and dedication, so the family he was working for too much care of him. He could not see Sathyam for a long time, when he was working in a faraway place. Due to some occasion in the family, they had arranged to exchange their old silverware, by some new items. For this, a jeweler was summoned, and all the old silverware was placed before him. His eyes fell on a small silver box, and he was very much impressed by its cute look and the

fine workmanship. The lady of the house observed this and asked him if he was interested in that item? Unable to constrain his thought, he revealed that he wanted to gift that box to his friend Sathyam. She was very impressed by his thoughts and agreed to gift it to Him. But when he insisted that he would pay for it from his earnings, she got very angry with him, "Are you so big to pay for it"? He humbly expressed to her that a gift to such a special friend of his, should come out of his earnings and thus his ardent request was accepted by her. His love for the old friend of his, impressed the family very much.

He came to see Sathyam at Puttaparthi after many years, the then Sathyam, had become Sai Baba, and His residence had shifted from the thatched house to the Old Mandir. He was sceptical wondering if Sathyam would recognise him after so many years, but he was proved wrong. When Swami saw him, He called him in the same way as He used to call him in the bygone school days. That same call took him by surprise! Though he had brought the small silver box with him, he did not present it to Him, thinking that it was far too small a gift. Well, would the Lord leave anything that was meant for Him? Somehow He made him talk about this box and got the secret out of him. Once the cat was out of the bag, there was no need for hesitation. The small silver box landing on Swami's lap, he expressed.

Like this, when he talked about a small box, I went into Swami's room and brought the silver box, used for his pan. The sight of the box made him turn inside out, as it was the same box that was gifted by him. Touching it to his eyes, he was in tears of delight. Such a small gift was still retained by Swami, would make anybody become dumb. Whenever I had asked Swami about that box He had told me that the right time would come for *it*. Then, I did not realise His words, but now the riddle had been solved. When Swami returned from Bangalore, He talked so lovingly to his friend and bid him farewell. On that evening, when I was serving Bala Sai, He said, "***Are your doubts cleared? Patience is very important***". Such divine revelations get permanently moulded in the heart, *in* concrete form. Besides seeing these divine games, He also made me taste of that divine love of His.

Anubhandam

AFFECTIONATE RELATIONSHIP

BABA TO SWAMI

This was an incident that happened in the Old Mandir, when we first met Bala Sai during 1945. Then, Bhayammagaru and some other devotees were there. Though the inmates believed in Bala Sai as God, they addressed Him as 'Baba'.

Agitated about this, our family discussed this topic, and my mother, Radhamma, gave a serious thought to this. It did not look good for a devotee to call the cherished Lord by His name, and it was not respectful. Our whole family was lost in these thoughts and decided that great beings should not be called by their name. It would be suitable, to call Him as 'Swami', instead of 'Baba', we decided. As this was our first visit, we were hesitant to introduce anything new like this. But, summoning enough courage, we decided to address Him as 'Swami'! Though we liked this form of addressing Him, we were not sure if the other inmates of the Old Mandir would like it! Without much thought, we came to a conclusion not to hurt anyone's feelings. All these fears of ours were proved unnecessary and false. When Bala Sai heard us call Him as Swami, I cannot tell you how happy He was. Not only Him, but the other inmates were also happy about this. This was very suitable, they expressed and immediately adapted it, to our relief and pleasure.

On that night, while at His service, He ridiculed, ***“Do you people think that I am so old, with a big beard, to be called as Swami? How did you get these thoughts?”*** When we expressed that our hearts did not permit to call Him by name, He was very impressed and happily accepted our request. It our great fortune and we should fully understand that these thoughts were provoked by Him only, and it was He Who made us call Him as 'Swami'. Such fortune would be granted only to those who understood this inner aspect and never would feel proud of having done such a thing. When this was His divine will, who can ever escape from it. It was our fortune that He had selected us to play such a role for Him, many a time. In those days, only a few people were there at the Old Mandir, and even the old devotees who would regularly visit Him, were less. Only a handful of these were selected to take care of His needs and other services. He took much interest to guide, them in the right path and make them to become the right examples to the others. He would take care of them like a shadow, and we were also the recipients of His love and affection. The way He cared for these few could never be described in words!

TREATMENT FOR POISON

My ailing father, Radhakrishnayya, could not be correctly diagnosed by the best of the doctors, and they did not know what medicines to prescribe, even. Once, Swami revealed to my father that he was not having any decease, but was poisoned by his own relatives. He assured him that it was due to this that he was suffering. He took my father into His room and started pressing him hard, with His

fingers, from the bottom and moved towards the head. The pressure was so hard, my father wriggled in pain. Ultimately, some white paste-like stuff came from the top of his head. He came back to normal, only after some time. Swami arranged for some hot coffee and mixed some *Vibhuthi* into it. He Himself made my father drink this coffee. From that day, his ailments reduced substantially, as the poison was removed. Though Swami was so young, His Leelas were very great. The Nectarine Leelas of Bala Sai were most delightful!

DAILY MISCHIEF

No one could ever decline that the more the love, the closer the relation. To get away from this web of relation would be difficult. But having been caught in this web, it would be necessary to undergo His 'Test' that would make you weep. Swami was an expert in this art, and we had read with much interest the way Lord Krishna made the Gopikas cry for Him. Our Swami, the Master of Leelas, was no less than the dark-hued Krishna! Smt. Naganimma was one of the old devotees of that period, and there was no end for her humour. Smt. Konamma was a humble and innocent lady. Smt. Savitamma was very able and efficient. Smt. Sakamma was authoritative and very possessive of Swami. Seshagri tata was completely immersed in the service to Swami. In spite of so many elderly devotees around Him, He allowed me to serve Him in those days. Though I was very much younger than all of them, it was only due to Swami that I got along well with them. So many different people at one place, under one shade, were well managed by Swami, the Master of this Kali era. It was customary for Swami, the lover of mischief, to create misunderstandings among these people. This was not some sort of punishment imposed by Him, but in fact the right lesson, for the right person, that stood like a moral for everyone. This had nothing to do with hatred, but was done out of love. These few people were really fortunate. Though the door keepers of Lord Vishnu, Jaya and Vijaya were born as demons hating the Lord, much love was showered on them by Vishnu. This was the secret of the divine. Shall we now taste some of Bala Sai's mysterious games and Leelas?

When all were seated in the hall of the Old Mandir, Swami asked me to call Naganimma in a hurry. I went in to call her and addressed her as 'Mother'. She got very irritated, yelled at me, and dragged me into Swami's presence. She complained to Swami that how dare I call her 'Mother', and what right I had to address her like this? This made everyone burst into laughter. When Swami asked her in which way I should have addressed her, she said 'Atta', (Aunty, but in Telugu it

would also mean mother-in-law). This made everyone laugh even more. Now it was Swami's turn to inform her that I had no authority to call 'Atta' as I was not her son-in-law. When she fell silent, Swami also had a good laugh. Like this there were numerous occasions every day that brought laughter to everyone. In this way Bala Sai's Nectarine Leelas flowed like honey.

FORTUNATE COUPLE

An elderly 'Brahmin couple came to the Old Mandir. They had come after visiting many hermitages and spiritual institutions. They were highly impressed by the functioning of the Mandir. They had always imagined a great saint, with a big beard and a lot of followers, in orange robes. But nothing like this was seen by them here. The way the place was filled with love and the synchronization flabbergasted them. In those days, though Swami was 19 years old, He looked like a boy of 12 years. He would usually wear clothes that were as white as jasmine flowers that flowed down to His feet, like a cascade of foaming water, a basket of curly hair, moon-like face having an imposing nose, and naughty eyes. In short, He looked like Mohini, the enchanting damsel of the heavens. That captivating walk, penetrating look, never made them believe that He was the Guru and the leader! They were immersed in His beauty and wondered, which mother had delivered such an enchanting boy? Swami came towards them and threw one of His smiles. That was that! They were swept away in its force and became numb with this dose of aesthesia. The elderly man asked Him when the Guru would come into the Ashram. Swami said, with a smile, that they had to wait for some time and went into the village. Little did they know that He was the Lord of Parthi! Such childish play was common for us, and not known to them. After some time, when Swami returned and enquired about their welfare, only then they realised that this young boy was the head of the Ashram, and they were in absolute surprise. Before they could come out of this, our great dramatist enacted His drama and solved all their issues. When at play He was a simple boy like us, and when He had to handle important issues, He looked like a mighty Lord, beyond imagination. I can definitely say that they were very fortunate to experience all this, in such a short time. But all were not bestowed with such fortune. Love does not distinguish between the old and the new! But, many a time, even the old devotees would wait for days to have a word with Him. Though the reason for this could never be evaluated by any, it was evident that anyone would become slaves to His love! If you imagine that He does not love you, just because He had not talked to you, it would only

prove your ignorance. Our Bala Sai, the embodiment of love, was the tastiest of all the things on the earth.



BALA YOGI

From my boyhood days, I was adventurous and mischievous. I was so much different when compared to my calm and enduring parents. To keep me on hold they decided to put me in a hostel My father had good contacts with the Annie Besant Society of Madras and they, were running a boarding school. My parents joined me in that school, so that I could learn some discipline. That did bring about much change in me. My Principal was a foreigner and, surprisingly, he was a great devotee of Lord Rama. He always used to sing the glory of Rama, very nicely. In the very early stages itself. I could get into his good books.

A boy by name Bala Yogi visited Madras. He was hardly 16 years old, and by God's grace he was so through with Shiva Puranam, the Holy Text of Lord Shiva. He had a simple of a dothi and one upper doth, bald head, and Rudraksha beads around his neck. One day his speech was arranged at the Anne Besant Society which was very congenial for such purposes. It had a beautiful big ground that could accommodate nearly 5000 people at a time, with a huge Banyan tree in the centre. The atmosphere was very calm and delightful. Preparations were made to accommodate Bala Yogi in our school premises. I was entrusted with the task of taking care of all his needs. This was. my real fortune, due to the accumulation of merit in many past births, no doubt. The school also declared holiday for the students to participate in the functions.

Bala Yogi used to get up by 4 AM, have cold water bath sit in meditation for more than an hour. I was at his service for five days. He blessed me for the service and left. Maybe it was due to such blessings, I had more opportunities to serve great beings.

DIVINE VISION OF LINGAM

After many years, that same Bala Yogi came to Puttaparthi. At that time, I was serving Bala Bai at the Old Mandir. I could recognise him, even after so many years, but he did not recognise me. As soon as Swami appeared, he fell at His feet, uttering the name of Shiva repeatedly. Compassionate Sai Prabhu lifted him and blessed him with *Vibhuthi*. I could not realise the mystery behind this. The favourite saint of my younger days, had now been blessed, I thought. He suddenly recognised me and gave me a big hug, saying that I was very fortunate to stay close to God Himself. Looking at this, Swami chided me by saying, "*Is he your friend?*", and went off into the village.

Taking this as a hint, and as I had no work on hand I started a conversation with Bala Yogi, who had impressed me very much by his daily routine when at the Anne Besant School. I was very happy to know that he had been granted the vision of Lord Shiva in the form of a Lingam, within moments of his arrival at Puttaparthi. He left the place engulfed in bliss. I assumed that for having served him at Madras, I was rewarded to be with Swami at such a young age. If such divine beings were great, then how are we to praise the Supreme Being, Bala Sai? Within no time, Swami granted him the divine vision of Shiva in Linga form and made him very fortunate to receive such grace! How could I express about such great souls? Compassionate Lord Sai had blessed me to be at His service night and day. In how many ways He taught me was beyond description. The number of divine incidents and miracles showed by Him are beyond count. I fully drank the nectar of Bala Sai's Leelas! If He was not the divine Avatar in the human form, what else He could be? What else we can say? Though this fortune was granted to me, only for a few years, it became my greatest treasure, and did not repent for not having received more. The more we surrender in His service and please Him, the more affection He would shower on us, and, protect us at all times.

THE FORM OF LOVE

In the Puranas they mentioned that in the- ten Avatars of the Lord, love of Lord Krishna was the greatest. But now, in this period of Kali, we are able to witness with our own eyes that there is nothing bigger than the 'Love of Lord Sai'! It can be

said, Sai is Love, Baba is Purnavatar, that which is complete, and Sathyam is Everything. Thus Sathya Sai Baba is the 'Whole Complete Avatar of Love'. This is beyond any doubt and Swami proves that every word is true.

Now many things have changed when compared to the Kingdom of Bala Sai of the Old Mandir days. That Old Ashram, a small Guru, Who was mischievous, and that tiny group of humble devotees, could not be found any more. In those days, there was no specific Divine Discourse from a platform, or specific speeches, but it was fun and frolic most of the time. With just simple play and song. Swami built a Spiritual Family with a variety of people. Everyone was immersed in love. With love, Swami narrated simple stories to inculcate virtue in everyone, big and small. Those stories were no ordinary stories to pass time, and there should be a specific reason for this. Though it seemed simple, it was filled with the essence of the Puranas, the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Holy Texts. The beauty of all this was of a different category. You may hear about all these for days together, without any limits, never get bored. Especially during the arrival of new devotees, pundits, and renowned people, Swami would reciprocate, depending on their feelings and levels of ego. Without any definite reason Swami would not hurt anyone's feelings and emotions. He never spoke rudely and only one in a million would have witnessed all this. Though some of them could not clear all their doubts with the right answers, they surely did benefit from their visit to the Old Mandir. If great souls like Bala Yogi could visit such a remote place and have the vision of the Lord, then how can anyone have even an iota of doubt about His divinity?

In those days there were no specific interviews in private, and everything happened in the open view of the public. It was due to this that we could see so many divine incidents that could never be described fully. There was no need to say anything to the all-knowing Omnipresent Lord. Once we start the journey in the name of Bhagawan Sai, He shall take charge and be with us like a shadow, to protect us at all times. The love for His devotees was beyond imagination. The people who saw the way Swami welcomed us when we first visited Puttaparthi in 1945, were dazzled and astonished. This was the love He poured on this simple 'Kuppam Family', as named by Him. Nobody knew about our arrival and at what time we would reach Puttaparthi, as letters or even telegrams would not reach on time. Under such circumstances, as we were crossing the Chitravathi River in spate, Swami was already waving His white handkerchief at us. Surely this astonished everyone over there. It was a divine boon to the old devotees of those days, to receive such

divine love of Prema Sai. What we heard on one day from Swami was never repeated and could never be forgotten. What He said would suit everyone, and I shall write about a few things only. I hope you shall derive the same pleasure and wait for more! Every day, all of us used to assemble in the hall of the Old Mandir. We would not know much about the newcomers, *as* we never used *to* talk too much. If at all we talked to them, without Bala Sai's permission, we would only ask for His fury. All details would be known to Swami. He would not talk the same way he started, but would include some proverbs, stories, humour, and in between converse with the devotees and make them also participate. There was no question of monotony at any point of time. Sometimes He would stop somewhere in-between, when there was some urgent work to be done. We used to make a note of where He had stopped and on the very next occasion, coax Him to start from there.

LADDU COUNT

One day some devotees brought some laddus, sweets that looked like small balls. After distributing some of these, He made me keep the remaining in the storeroom. Usually, He never used to keep anything aside for the next day. Our usual assumption was that He would not take notice of small things! The laddus were so good, I preserved these in a container and forgot about it. Suddenly on a Sunday, many school children came to the Mandir. I was told to distribute the laddus to them when they were about to leave. This reminded me of the laddus I had forgotten about. I laughed to myself, thinking that the few laddus in the small container would not be sufficient for so many children. This thought entered my head, in spite of all my experience, close to Swami. But why should I worry about this! I obeyed His command and started distributing laddus. The laddus just kept coming out, and in the end, some were left. The story does not end here. The remaining was kept back in the store room. When he could make five into fifty and fifty into five hundred, why would He keep count of anything, I thought! This was my first experience.

That night, when I was serving Him, He enquired, ***“Was it sufficient for all?”*** I nodded my head. When He asked how many were left in the container, my heart skipped a beat. My mind stopped functioning, and no words came out of the mouth. I wondered why He should worry about the laddu count. ***“Six laddus must be there”***, Swami said. Healing this I fell at His feet and begged for pardon. I had not told you about one thing that happened in the storeroom. As stated by Swami,

six laddus were there and when I was about to close the lid, the sweet aroma took over my senses, and I had swallowed one, leaving behind five. When he can make fifty into five hundred, why would He bother about one?, I had thought. He scolded me that I should have informed Him about this earlier. I repented very much for what I had done, and tears of shame kept pouring out. For an ignorant fool who thought, "What is just one for Him?", a big lesson had been taught. Like this, He made me open my eyes fully. My humble prayer to Him was that I should never make such a mistake in my life again. When I begged Him not to distance me from Him, His mother-like heart melted. It was natural to make such mistakes, at a young age, but not for me. This remained as a big lesson for life. This was how He made the doer come out with his mistake, all by himself! If you boast of having become a good disciple, He would immediately slice you up and prove that there was much more to be learnt. One should be always bound by the truth. For those who loved Sathya Sai, He was the life-giver and sustainer. Immersed in His service I got into His heart, and safely retained Him in my heart. Where ever you may be, when you think of Him, He shall always protect you. This was also proved in my case. This was His principle, and He would not break it, at all times. Is it not true that Bala Sai's Leelas are really great!?

If Lord Rama ate the same fruit that was first tasted by His devotee Shabari, it was all due to her love and devotion towards Rama. Our Bala Sai was an ideal example for this, because without love there would be no devotion. In the same way, the Gopikas were caught in the web of love towards Lord Krishna, and they had caught Him also in their web of love. When a Gopika served Krishna with banana peels, instead of the fruit, that thief of hearts forgot what was being served and ate the peels with delight! We people may get angry with her, for what she had done! But will the Lord agree to this as a mistake? Never! Whatever she did out of love He had accepted by Him fully! There was no question of mistake from any side! Because the whole thing was based on love, the Lord wholly accepted it, Swami had explained. The love of Bala Sai was no less than the love of Krishna! It was due to this love that He pardoned me, and this was proof for me that He was like Krishna in so many ways. He was also equally mischievous, like Krishna, and dipped us in Anandain every play of His!

Whenever there were a Jot of devotees; He would be so busy that He never felt hunger or thirst. All the efforts of the inmates to make Him eat something would fail. At such times Sakammagaru, Nagamaniamma, Savitramma, Seshagritata, and

others would try their best to corner Him or attract His attention, but Swami had His own style of looking through them. On such occasions, I used to take courage and draw Him towards some food and also be prepared to receive His slaps. If He was adamant at such times, I would also become adamant and try to draw His attention by intervening with some pretext or the other. I did succeed, many a time; otherwise none of us would also eat.

If anyone would engage Him in some small talk while He was eating; He would eat well! But this was no easy task! On such occasions, Nagamaniamma was good in pulling Him into some witty conversation. Some of His Leelas were so different and difficult to understand, but it was equally auspicious and also delightful to be a part of it.

Jeevitfodfaramu

SANCTITY OF LIFE

If the opportunity of divine vision can be considered as past merit, the divine dialogue with the Lord can be considered as His grace, and the divine touch can be considered as salvation, the wise said. All the three were granted to our family, in this era of Kali, by our compassionate Lord Sai. He became 'our-everything', from the moment we saw Him. If we begged for food He fed us nectar, but this magnificence was realised by us only latter. Bhagawan always knew what had to be done, and when it had to be done! For this we had to fully surrender to Him.

While involved in the service to the Lord, we may forget about thirst and hunger. In the same way, when Lakshmana was in the service of lord Rama during His exile, he never felt thirst, hunger or sleep. Mother Seetha observed this and took care of his needs. At the same time, it was not easy to become a recluse and ask for nothing. Those who had left their families and settled at Puttaparthi, never felt the separation from the family, because the atmosphere at the Old Mandir was electrified by Bala Sai's love. When we stayed there for months, we totally forgot about homes, and never felt separated, but in fact drifted in bliss. From day one, we received such a golden gift from Swami. This was the magnificence of His enormous love and the strength of His divine will.

DISTURBED COUPLE

Once a small family arrived at the Old Mandir and a newly married couple was among them. Did not Swami know about their arrival? Before they could set foot, His plans were ready! The strange aspect was, though the plan was set, He would not talk to them immediately. The arrows He would shoot would slyly pierce them, unnoticed and unobserved, by any. The sharp arrows of His sight were stronger than the mighty arrows of Lord Rama! The family members were so engrossed in Swami's talk, they forgot about the purpose of their visit. It was usual for anyone to forget about themselves, in His divine company. We reached the Chitravathi sands, as usual, in the evening. Swami started about the principle of Sathya, the truth. Unless people fully surrendered to Bhagawan, they would not fully understand His principles. He gave Vibhuthi to everyone, but the boy of that group got a talisman. He was confused and did not know what to do. Swami had noticed the couple crying as He was talking. He told the boy to tie the talisman on his wife's left arm, but he was afraid to even look at her. If this was the case, how would he tie the talisman? So, his mother was asked to do it, but she was also hesitant! After this, the boy fell at Swami's feet and said, "I had committed a great sin. My pathetic condition was all due to the way I treated my first wife". Swami sympathetically said, "At least now you have realised your fault This is good! So, your mother and you both together tie the talisman on her!" Looking at his wife Swami commanded her to come forward and lift her left hand. She obeyed His order, like an obedient child. Swami blessed them and sent them away. Though we did not understand what spirit He had driven away-if it was the spirit of the first who had died due to torture they did return back as a happy family.

There are many reasons for the Lord to descend on the earth. To uplift the people He may even use His devotees to play an important role. Many a time He may not do anything in person, directly involving Himself. He may select someone to accomplish a task, and that person may not be aware of it, also. Many great beings like Kabir, Ramdas, Tulasidas, Thayagaraju, Jayagovinda, Jayadeva, etc, were entrusted with a particular task to accomplish. It would not be possible to consider one as great and the other as less. All these tasks were done for the Welfare of the people. But at certain time, the Lord Himself shoulders the responsibility. Whenever the Lord tested His devotees, many felt this as His play. The secret of His play was to mould them in a better manner. He put me to tests many a time

and even made me face the danger of losing my life. But He did save me, at the right time. The One Who tests, also saves. I shall tell you about this later.

SNAKE DANCE

In those days, journey to Puttaparthi was as difficult as journey to Kashi. Sometimes after much difficulty, we used to return back to our village Kuppam. Guess what would come the next day? It would be Swami's letter, asking me to come back, for reasons only known to Him. There was no question of declining His order. I would get ready in no time and start the tedious journey back to Puttaparthi. As usual; a garland for Swami, made by the family, with the famous Marigold flowers grown in these areas, mixed with Dhavanam, Margadam, Jasmin, etc, would enter the basket. People would be 'sent to collect good custard-apples, mangos, jack-fruits, and I- would carry as much as I could lift.

The next day, I was stranded at Penugonda, as there was no bus service to Puttaparthi, due to some disturbance. Instead of wasting time, I piled up the luggage on my back and started walking towards Puttaparthi, a trek of about 30 KMs. Due to the heat, the progress was slow, and I continued the journey, with the belief that Swami would take care of everything. When I saw some farmer drawing water from the well my thirst took over me, and I went towards the well. Suddenly, I stepped on something soft and suddenly stopped. The farmer saw my bewilderment and came running towards me. When he asked me if I had stepped over a snake, I literally made a snake dance, saw something moving away underneath! I did understand if this was auspicious or not, but I was shocked, and my heart was pounding away. He explained that I must have stepped over a snake that had not been seen by them for years, though they had been working on the same field.

At last, somehow, I reached Puttaparthi late in the evening. Compassionate Bala Sai received me at the gate and granted me *Padanamaskar*. He immediately opened the basket and wore the garland, right in front of everyone there. He moved around, showing of His grandeur with stylish steps and commented that I had danced on a snake! ***"If something would have happened to Murthy, I He would have been held responsible by his parents"***, Swami commented. People did not understand anything, until I explained to them later about the snake I had stepped up on. He arranged for food, as I had walked all the distance without having anything to eat. Was there anything that was not known to Him? Like this, I had travelled to Puttaparthi many times. If you think that He had given me all the

trouble, it would be necessary to note that He had taken care of everything, stood as a guide and guarded me all along, like a Guru saving His disciple.

It was in the same way that Shankaracharya saved his disciple, who tried to recover the clothes of his Guru that were being washed away in the river in spite. Every dangerous step he put forward, landed on a Padma, a lotus that appeared from on where. He did retrieve his Guru's clothes, and the Guru named him Padmapada, the one with a lotus foot. If you tread towards the Lord with firm determination, He shall surely take care of your safety. In the same way, Swami had ensured the safety of the people who came to Puttaparthi, beyond any count.

SIDDA PURUSHAS

Swami once started talking about Sidda Purushas, great beings with immense powers. How did they achieve so much power? Why cannot any human being acquire such powers? Swami said that the main reason for this was that they were not yet ready, or Siddam. The evaluation of a Sidda Purusha was based on Sadhana and experience. The so-called Pundits or heads of institutions, thriving to take leadership, may not be even aware of this. But some of them, having competence, may wonder if this was possible in the real sense. The Puranas describe about 18 Sidda Purushas and conferred upon them this rare title, Going a little further, Siddi would also mean accomplishment or achievement. With all the attributes, they cannot be considered as gods. Even many demon kings acquired many such powers, but they perished. Though Ravana, Narakasura, Kamsa, Basmasura, etc., were great demons, at par with the Sidda Purushas, due to abuse of power, they diminished. It was not enough to acquire great powers, but it was very essential to make good use, of it, in tune with the changing times. Only those who cross all these hurdles may be treated at par with God. Though Lord Rama was God incarnate, to prove His might to Sugreeva, He had to bring down many trees with one arrow that returned back to Him. Lord Krishna proved His might (Siddi) by lifting the Mount Govardhan on His little finger. Such things had happened and are happening, even in this period of Kali, Swami confirmed. Rockets are being launched; with modern machines, many unimaginable things are being achieved, in the passage of time, In those days, these were achieved with Mantras and now by Yantras, machines. Day by day, the use of science has increased, Swami said.

WALKING ON WATER

In a similar manner, our Bala Sai had also revealed His powers by doing so many great things, way back in those days. It was our fortune to have witnessed these, due to our proximity to Him. One night, I woke up while sleeping in His room, due to some sound. Swami was going out of the room and I followed Him. He moved fast towards the Sathyamma temple, and crossed the pond that was there behind the temple, in those days. He walked on the water as if it was firm ground. I got confused and started following Him. If I had taken one more step I would have plunged into the water. Swami dashed back with much speed and pushed me back. He had stopped me at the edge of the pond. Only then did I become fully conscience and realised where I was. After this, we both returned back to the room. All this happened in no time, in a mystic manner.

The next day, Swami got angry with me for having followed Him at such an odd time. I humbly expressed that it was my usual habit. At that time, Seshagiritata came there and Swami commented, ***“Wherever there are Angels it was customary to have demons also. For quite sometime one evil spirit was going around, but its fate came to an end yesterday!”*** Latter I came to know that the water calamity that endangered my life was averted that night.

FLOATING IN AIR

Now you have to hear about the water episode, and you yet to hear about the air episode. If the Old Mandir was adjoined by Puttapathi village on one side, there was visit open space on the other site towards the hills. Once, in the dead of the night, Swami went out of His room, and I followed Him. He moved towards the open area with such speed that I remained behind Him, in spite of all my efforts. I observed that He was conversing loudly, with someone, who was not visible. His voice become louder with anger, and He started floating in thin air and moved far away from my vision. By the time I could think of some way to follow Him or even what to do, He came back speedily and landed before me. I felt that He must have chased away some evil spirit. Previously, it was on the other side of the Old Mandir, by running over water, and now it was on the opposite side, by flying in thin air. How ever I pestered Him to know more about this, I never got a reply. After some years, in the same open space, Prashanthi Nilayam took shape. During that time I thought that he had done everything necessary, before it could come up. His Leelas are surely beyond human comprehension.

TRANCE

Trance, leaving the body behind to accomplish something, could be considered as a mystic power. If the body was left behind and the spirit entered some other body, with a purpose, it was defined as '*Parakaya Pravesham*'. This was possible only to a few, having certain powers. It was stated that Adi Shankaracharya left his body and entered the body of a king, to get to know the facts that could not be experienced by a devout bachelor like himself. But this was not necessary for Swami, for He was the all-knowing Lord, the embodiment of the Atma. Whenever He went in trance, it was only to save someone in danger, but not for experiencing anything. There was nothing not known to Him. This was the vast difference between Sidda Purusha and the Almighty, Swami explained.

Swami would go in trance without any showing any signs. Once, while standing on the stairs and talking to some devotees, He just collapsed. Fortunately, I was standing near Him, and I held Him, avoiding a bad fall. It was necessary to be vigilant always. The devotees started shuddering, as He was not speaking, and the body had become cold. We slowly carried Him to His room and made Him lie on the cot. The news spread like fire, and many people arrived. I did not move out of His room and constantly looked at His lame body. As He was breathing, I did not get perturbed. Swami's parents arrived and informed that many times, He had fainted like this. Many people did not know that this was Trance. There was no hint of time, place, or anything for this to occur. My father also would faint suddenly, due to weakness and sometimes due to fits. Our doctor had advised us that medical care was very essential at such times, and at any cost, breathing should not stop. If necessary, artificial breathing had to be given, to save the life.

But trance was entirely different, and I had some knowledge of it. After some time, a great power seemed to have returned back to the body, and Swami started sweating. His body became warm, and He started stretching His body. I had started fanning Him with a hand fan, to make Him comfortable. To leave behind the body and go about on some purpose was possible only to great beings. There were so many who pretended to have such powers. People with experience would spot such false saints, easily. I am mentioning only a few such incidents, because Swami went in trance frequently, during one period. In case of death, the soul leaves the body and does not return back, but not so in case of trance. Swami may have gone to save someone, but on this occasion, He did not explain anything, and this was my first experience.

AFRICA VISIT

Swami went in trance on one other occasion and did not move for nearly two hours. It was rare to be in trance for such a long time. At such times, we never moved away from Him for water, food or sleep, and such thoughts never occur. We used to keep fanning Him by hand fan, continuously, as there was no electricity or table fans in those days. Swami had clearly ordered that outsiders should never be allowed close to Him. Even people like Sakammagaru, Seshagiritata, and the other inmates would stand outside His room and peep through the window, to observe what was happening. The much-required patience, for us to remain cool, was also His gift only, and there was nothing much we could do. If we were overcome by panic and torment, we may have ended up doing some nonsensical things. After two long hours, He opened His eyes slowly, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. He became normal within the next one hour, had some coffee and went to sleep. As He seemed to have body pains, I slowly pressed His body, as He slept. Many hours passed off like this, but once in a while He and His eyes informed us not to worry. The compassionate Lord, even during such times, would think of His devotees and shower His love.

The next day, He had lot of hot water for His bath and looked very relaxed. He expressed that He had been to Africa, ***“One good man was in great danger and He required My protection. He was seriously injured in a car accident and was stuck in a forest without any help anywhere nearby. The military camp he was attached to was far away. So I had to go there, to rescue him. Due to much loss of blood, his life was in danger. Even in such a bad condition; he was thinking of God. The whole place was dominated by Christians, but Bhagawan never bothers about race or religion. I entered a hospital in this same form and put them on alert, by speaking their language. I ensured that he was brought to the hospital, and when the doctors were attending on him, I made sure that his wife and children also were close to him. He regained consciousness only after two hours, and there was no danger of life. I blessed him with Vibhuthi and told him to come to Sai Baba of Puttaparthi, in India.”***

Thus, when he regained consciousness, he was blathering 'India, Sai Baba.....!' This was observed carefully by one doctor, and he happened to be a Sai devotee. He clearly understood what must have happened and explained to him about Sai Baba. The doctor also showed him a locket with Swami's picture that was worn by him. Looking at this, he got excited and shed tears of gratitude. He did not forget

Swami's call to come to India, and to his surprise, he got an official assignment, to work in India. For a layman this would have looked like an unbelievable fairy tale of a fox reaching Heaven. Even the people in the military camp were in great confusion and ended up with many unanswered questions like, how did the curly haired man enter the restricted area? How did he speak their language?

When Swami explained like this, about His mission to Africa, some of the people may not have believed Him! They were surely in for a surprise! There were also a few who questioned the necessity of Swami going there in person, to save someone who was not His devotee. The eyes of all these people opened when the person who was saved by Swami came to Puttaparthi, with the doctor devotee. Looking at Swami, he shouted in excitement that He was the One Who had saved him in Africa! He shed tears of gratitude and fell at Swami's feet. We had to have a thousand eyes to see how Swami looked at him lovingly and enquired about his welfare. Swami blessed them with *Vibhuthi* and bid farewell. From then on, many such incidents happened in far-away Africa and many people started coming from there.

WORLD TOUR

Usually, if the body remained lifeless for more than 24 hours, they would be declared as dead. This would be the worldly way. Once, Swami went in trance for more than a day and only on the third day, He became normal. I had the opportunity to remain close to Him, and no one had intervened with my presence, by His bed side. People would get depressed and helplessly watch Him through the window, without moving from there, for hours. Water had to be served, whenever He asked for it. Seshagirata would be ready with coffee, at the right time. All this was taught to me, by Swami. Swami explained later, that He had visited many foreign countries and had spoken to people in English. As they were in great danger, He had to remain there for so long and protect them. He had invited them to Puttaparthi, but they were not having any type of support to come to India. Two of them did come to Puttaparthi and shed tears of gratitude. Usually, newcomers would not fan at His feet, but though they were foreigners, not used to this custom, they prostrated before Him. They held His feet tightly and narrated their experience. As usual, our naughty Lord pretended as if He had not done anything! Now the whole world has started coming to Puttaparthi, and without going in trance He could do anything.

GANGOTRI WATER

Once, some foreigners visited Puttaparthi. They had travelled all over the world, examining various rivers, springs, holy ponds, etc. They had also conducted much underwater research under deep seas, lakes and rivers. They had come to visit Swami, out of curiosity. Will our Man of Miracles ever keep quiet? For some reason, He asked Seshagiritata to serve everyone with Holy Water on that day. The foreigners were wonder-struck, because they had tasted this water at Gangotri. Swami joked, saying that Gangotri was nowhere near Puttaparthi! But they were fully convinced that it was water from Gangotri only. He made them confirm once again, and the same water in the vessel was served to them by Seshagiritata. This time, they in for a bigger surprise. They confirmed that this fragrant water was available only at a remote places not easily accessible to humans! They had taken years of pain and trouble to taste such rare water, and now, only, they could taste it again. Swami had shown such unbelievable Leelas at the Old Mandir, way back in those days. People who could not digest these facts were the most unfortunate.

DUSHARA FLOODS

During one Dushara festival there was so much rain and floods all over. The River Chitravathi was in spate and flowed above the danger level. It was very necessary for us to cross the river, to bring some important items. Though it was Swami's work, we could not succeed, and the same was informed to Him. He *just* smiled and said, "***Start early in the morning and return as soon as possible!***" In the morning, when we went there, the river was flowing in a normal spate, and we could cross. As commanded by Him, we reached *back* without any delay, after completing the work. We were surprised to note that in no time the river was in such a spate again, and the water was swirling with such a force, it seemed to flow in the opposite direction! The speed of its flow was such! Was there anything in the world beyond His control?

The power of great Saints, Siddha Purushas, and the Divine can never be understood by ordinary human beings. They could win over and control the five elements and use them as they willed. They fully knew how to use these, without creating any imbalance in nature. Adi Shankaracharya was described as a great being with many powers, but not as God. He had travelled a lot to spread his message and won many arguments. It was not necessary for our Sai Bhagawan to travel, as He would draw heaps of people to where He resided, and they were free

to assess His greatness. No one can ever miss to take note of His control over many things in the world!

IRON GIRDERS

Do you know what would happen, if we did not listen to Swami's command? This happened when Prashanthi Nilayam was being built. Huge iron girders had to be lifted to the terrace level. Everything was being done under His supervision. We lifted two girders using some pulleys, ropes and manpower, and it just moved into the right place. Due to some reason, Swami to go the Bangalore, and He told us not to do any work that would cause danger. Instead of wasting time the next day, during His absence, we tried to lift the third girder to the top. With an our efforts, it would just hang on dangerously and refused to pass through the girders already placed. By chance, if it would have slipped, so many would have been crushed under it. A great calamity was averted, as we aborted our heroic attempts. When Swami came back from Bangalore, we were worried how angry He would become, for not listening to His command.

The next day, Swami came there and pretended not to have observed our previous adventure. We were spared from His wrath, and we started our work in His presence. What we could not achieve in two days, was done in two hours. The remaining girders floated in air and soared into place, just like paper kites. When, as Krishna, He had lifted the Govardhanagiri on His little finger, what was this for our Sai Krishna? When we explained about our previous efforts, Swami just joked, ***"Oh! The girders must have felt shy to go up!"*** I was sure that none of us would ever forget that naughty smile of His!

UNREAL TO REAL

There was so much craze for paper flowers and paper buntings of various colours, in those days. We used to make flowers of various colours and sizes. It was our pleasure to decorate the whole place with these, and Swami would also join us. On such an occasion, one Head of an organisation arrived with his disciples. They were not accustomed to paper decorations, as it was not common in those days. They had a good laugh and commented that in this place of Truth, there was Untruth! Such learned people should not have ridiculed like this, even for the fun of it. Would this have gone unobserved by our ever-watchful Bala Sai? In the evening, when all were getting seated, there was a sudden breeze, and the paper flowers caught fire! Within no 'time it spread all over, as we had decked the whole place nicely. The devotees cried 'Sai Ram!' and wondered what would happen

next! Swami saw all this with a smile and just raised His *Abhaya Hastam* (blessing), the hand of protection. The fire just disappeared, and there was not much damage done. People were surprised to see that only some paper flowers were burnt. In spite of witnessing such a great event, the newcomers were still in a joking mood. Swami spoke loudly, ***“Where there is Truth, Truth alone shall remain!”*** When they had a close look they saw many real flowers that were fresh and fragrant. They wondered from where did these come, in place of paper flowers seen by them earlier! This was not only a lesson for them, but for us also.

The next day, when we all were seated in the Mandir, the head person, instead of listening to Swami, was boasting about his spiritual knowledge. Swami, with all humility expressed that He did' not have much knowledge about spirituality, but He was not sure if they could understand what little he would say. He drew their attention in this manner and started speaking. They started nodding their heads, as if they knew everything. Suddenly, Swami questioned the head person, ***“Will you bear with untruth? Do you know, what is the secret of life?”*** This hit the head person by surprise and he could not come out with answers. He did not even lift his head for a long time. Swami started speaking with a Telugu proverb, ***“No one knows what was written by Brahma! But some people claim to know everything! How could anyone believe them? The person who heard did not express anything, and the person who said had not seen anything. If the listener was deaf and the one who said was blind, how can they claim to have the knowledge of the secret of life?”*** The way Swami looked intensely at the head person, he froze like a statue. He must have realised that our Trikalagyani, the knower of the past, present and future, must clearly know the untruth in him and also the secret of his life! Instead of asking for trouble, he preferred to keep silent.

108 WICK-HARATHI

No one could take Bala Sai for granted, due to His innocent looks and humble behaviour. Swami clearly knew when to have a go at someone and make him realise that he was facing the tower of knowledge. Whether a pundit or sadhu, once hit by such a blow, they had no other alternative but to keep their mouths shut. A bird may look small, but its shrill call would be very loud. Our Bala Sai may have looked very simple, but when confronted, the right blow was sure to descend. In spite of this, they did not seem to have learned the right lesson. Will our Bala Sai let go of anything like this, easily? Unless such religious heads were moulded, how could they do anything good for the world? It was customary to give Harathi to

Swami after every session in the morning, afternoon, and evening, after returning from the Chitravathi and also late in the night. But this was not the case with other religious institutions and temples. They were used to Maha Mangalarathi, one grand Harathi at a specific time, composed of many types of Harathis; starting with one wick, then three, and ending up with 108 or more. The Harathies of soaked ghee wicks, oil lamps, butter wicks, camphor, etc, were placed on plates of various shapes and sizes or on jaggery moulds, or lemons, depending on their likings. It was necessary for them to get ready with all these items before-hand, and many disciples were required for such a task. But this was not the case in the Old Mandir, as each time, only a few pieces of camphor were being lit. That evening, Swami told us to perform Harathi of 108 wicks. Though we were not used to this, we had to obey His command.

We had much difficulty to light all the wicks, and we were struggling. The head person had observed our plight and sent his disciples to help us. As those stalwarts took charge, we, the inexperienced ones, backed out. When they were used to performing so many types of Harathi, the lighting of 108 lamps was nothing for them. The best part of it was, with so many of them on to this simple task, they could not keep everything lighted. When they would almost complete the task of lighting, one or two would go out. Swami entered and commented, ***“What! Still you people are struggling! When you people could not light these small lamps, how could you the Jyothi within you?”*** He told them to move away and just lifted His hand. All the wicks lighted up and started burning majestically! They were wonder-struck and looked at this in disbelief. Swami had done such things on many occasions, as already mentioned, Young or old, our mischievous Bala Guru would teach everyone suitable lessons, like this.

Was there, anything in the world Swami could not control? If we recollect what was read till now, we can surely conclude that He was the Master of all elements! **EARTH:** Winning over the earth would be to get what was willed from it. From beneath the sands of River Chitravathi, Swami had taken had taken so many things from within that were beyond any count. No one could ever estimate the value of these items. This was how He won over the earth, as seen by me.

WATER: Winning over water would be to keep it control, as willed. Even Mother Ganga had descended in Puttaparthi for the Darshan of Swami, as described by my sister Kumaramma. Swami had blessed many people with some rare Holy Waters of different tastes and a variety of fragrance, from the same vessel placed in the

Mandir. He had walked on the pond behind Sathyamma temple in the dead of the night. Just by His will, He could control floods and bring down a shower of rain from the blue sky above (Full details in ASN). This I would call as winning over water.

AIR: The flying of girders to the top of the terrace of Prashanthi Nilayam building could never be forgotten by me. Prior to this, I had seen Swami float in thin air to chase away something that was never explained by Him later. The Vibuthi and the items that materialised out of thin air, as willed by Him, could be considered as winning over air.

FIRE: Swami had shown us the burning Sun, even after sunset. He had showed us the magnificent Third Eye of Lord Shiva, the brilliant sparks that made many faint. The lighting of lamps or dousing the burning paper buntings, just by snapping His fingers had been witnessed by us many times. These I would consider as winning over fire.

SKY: By sky, I would mean the open space. We had witnessed Swami leave the body, reaching faraway places in no time. The Atma does not have any form, but Swami had appeared in His form elsewhere, far away. He would also take any form He willed, to protect people in need. Had He not conquered vast space, in no time? He was the Master of all the five elements.

RARE WHITE SNAKE

Some foreigners did come to the Old Mandir, during those days. One such group that had gone around the world observing animal behaviour had conducted much research on rare animals. They arrived during the festival of Deepavali, the festival of lights. Abundant flower garlands had arrived from various places. After the Pooja was over, the garlands were stacked away in one corner of the open space, outside the Old Mandir. During that evening session Swami commented why those discarded garlands were still kept there? When some sound came from that direction, we thought it must be due to some rats! After some time, when some dear hissing sound was heard, fear took over. Shortly, a snake peeped out of the heap of garlands. The surprising thing was that it had shiny milky white body, and this was, really, a very rare sight! Its red eyes were shining like burning balls of fire, and its hood was nearly one foot wide. Though it was a poisonous animal, it was beautiful and majestic. As it started moving towards Swami, people started moving away. When Swami sprinkled some water towards that direction, it just stayed at that place. The foreigners were- completely dazed, looking at its beauty,

and started clicking their cameras. When the snake seemed" to get irritated at the bright flash-bulbs, flashing in its direction, Swami stopped them from clicking more pictures. The crowd started swelling, after this news spread around, and they were ready to: kill the poisonous snake. For about half an hour, it granted its majestic appearance at that very place. Swami arranged for Harathi and seemed to bid farewell. It cooled down, and slowly moved out of the gate towards the old temple of Sathyamma. Besides its majesty, its length also surprised everyone.

The foreigners expressed that they had wished to see a snake like this, which was hardly seen by the humans. They also expressed that they would have even risked their life and gone to any extent to see such a spectacle. It was only then that Swami said it was not an ordinary earthly animal and that its poison could spread to a great distance. Even other animals and birds would not come, close to such a poisonous snake, and it was only for their sake He had brought it here. He also surprised them by saying that it would not appear in any of the pictures clicked by them. As, they were very depressed at this news, He excited them by materialising one picture of the snake and gave it to them. Out compassionate Bala Sai would not disappoint anyone, after having done so much for them. The foreigners fully believed that He could show any wonder on this earth, staying right here at Puttaparthi! If they had been so excited seeing this white snake, what would have happen to them, if they were shown the rarest?

RAREST SNAKE

Once on our way to Chitravathi, Swami asked me to look behind a bush. Did He not know what was there? But it must have been a test for me, I thought. I slowly crept in to find the shred skin of a snake. It looked as if the skin was shred only a while ago. Swami told me to pick it up carefully, and my childhood experience seemed to have come in handy. As already mentioned, some of my favourite games were to climb hills, enter caves, nm into forests, and do all that. was forbidden. Sometimes I used to pull my sister Kumaramma also with me, and I never used to fear such adventure sport and enter into unknown territories. I used to frequently sneak onto Chetrayiswami hill, surrounded by forests, near Kuppam. It was there I had seen shred snake skins, in plenty. The. skins were so thin and fragile they used to break into pieces when lifted. If someone went there for hunting, I used to accompany them. There were bears, and some people believed even tigers were there, but I was not fortunate to have any of these. On the top of the hill there was one natural spring that was very tare for us in South India. The local

people believed that the water in that spring came from Kashi, and I loved to drink that water. I never used to mention about such adventures to my family members and even my friends, for the fear of getting some nice thrashing.

As commanded by Swami, I brought the snake skin carefully, without breaking it. Swami played with it like a plastic toy and filled it with fine sand. He enjoyed its snake-like looks, and it seemed to have come alive, after being filled with fine sand! Was there any art not known to Him? When I had a close look at its hood, I was shocked to see not one but five hoods. Once, Swami had shown a live five-headed snake inside the snake pit in the Old Mandir. We were never allowed to go near that pit, without His presence. Full details are there in my sister's book³⁵. When Swami showed this to the foreigners, their eyes just popped out, and they wanted to keep this in a famous museum. Swami declined their offer, saying, *“This is a divine secret that should not be seen by everyone. It shall disappear in due course, as the eyes of sinners should not fall on it.”* He got the snake buried under the sands. If they would have seen the live five-headed snake, you could imagine what would have happened to them! Such five-headed snakes were seen by us in temples in the form of carvings on stones. Many a time we used to wonder if this was true, or was it myth? After having seen this, we had enough proof of its existence somewhere.

THREE IN ONE

Many a time, Bala Sai created rare fruits that had two or three different fruits-in-one. We also had the pleasure of eating such fruits. Sometimes Swami would materialise fruits as desired by us, though they were not to be found anywhere near Puttaparthi, and even rare fruits that were never seen by us. This was the secret of life that could not be assessed by anyone! Swami said, ***“Bhagawan can grant anything that is wished!”*** Once, Swami had given such a rare fruit to my sister Sarala and told her that her wish would be granted. His strange deeds could not be perceived by anyone. When her wish was for a boy baby, she had one daughter followed by another. He again created a rare fruit and assured her that she would conceive a boy baby. But when she ended up with a third girl baby, she decided not to have any more. But Swami had His own way of coaxing her. He created one more rare fruit, and gave all His assurance for a boy baby. She could not

³⁵ „Anyatha Saranam Nasthi – Other than You refuge there is none” by Smt. Vijayakumari

overrule His command. Surprisingly, she ended up with the fourth daughter. Really, who could ever understand His Leelas?

Swami would also grant us various fruits plucked from one single tree that never would yield such fruits. What was there in the world that He could not do? Bala Sai's Leelas were unforgettable!

Boothanatfadu

THE MASTER OF DEMONS

Our Bala Sai was the most compassionate Lord towards everyone and also the Lord of the Ganas, the army of Lord Shiva. Thus, being the master of demons, and His purpose was to ensure the welfare of all the people, by establishing Dharma. Nothing could come His way! Though demons could be harmful, but if we take shelter under Sai Natha, the Protector, nothing could harm us. The present generation may not have any problems with demons and may not be even aware of such forces present in nature. But this phenomenon was very much predominant during the Old Mandir days.

DURGAMMA OF BHEEMAVARAM

The demons and demonesses were of many varieties. Once, a big group of people came from Bheemavaram in the state of Andhra Pradesh. They used to sing the glory of the Lord by moving from place to place with much devotion and love. They used to go around singing devotional songs by the beating of sticks in tune with the Telugu folk art called 'Gobbillu' that was very much liked by the villagers. They used to make a beautiful presentation that attracted large crowds, and even Swami was impressed by their performance. Hearing their at the Old Mandir, Swami clapped the *Chitikelu*³⁶ - two wooden pieces fixed with small bells and thin steel plates-with beauty and speed. The beauty with which the *Chitikelu* clamoured with the right beat and danced around His tender fingers were never

³⁶ ***Chitikelu*** are a traditional percussion instrument made of two rectangular blocks of wood. They are designed to be held in one hand and clapped together to create a sharp, rhythmic clicking sound. Each block usually has small metal jingles (like those on a tambourine) embedded in slots. They produce a high-pitched, metallic "clink" combined with the hollow "thud" of the wood. You place your fingers through the holes or loops on the back of the wood and use a snapping motion of the hand to bring the two pieces together.

witnessed by them. It would be needless to mention that the newcomers were carried away by His unlimited ability. Surprisingly) on that day, even the old devotees were amazed by the way Swami played the *Chitikelu*, and they had never seen Him play with such speed. Instead of the usual one pair in each hand, Swami had held two pairs in each hand, and doubled the speed. This troop of singers was well managed by a lady called Durgamma and her husband.



Photo of *Chitikelu* that was played by Swami.

The next day, when the troop started singing and dance around beating their sticks, Swami suddenly questioned Durgamma if they could do the devil dance also? Though we did not understand what Swami meant, we were sure there was a specific purpose behind it. These words made the couple shiver, as they were aware that something was wrong with Durgamma, for a long time. We were informed later that she was suffering from some unknown illness, and no treatment had brought any improvement in her. Actually, one spirit, motivated by her singing and dancing, had possessed her. So, whenever she started singing, this spirit got excited and started troubling her. This made her restless and uncomfortable. It was clearly for this reason, Swami asked her that question. When they asked Swami about this, He ridiculed, ***"Poor thing! What can the devil do? It also has so much devotion!"*** They stayed for nearly one week, and the day before their departure, Swami looked at Durgamma in a peculiar manner. Though she was short, she was quite fat and heavy. Even three people put together, would not have lifted her easily. Whenever I think of this incident, it runs like a movie before me. Because it was the first time I had witnessed anything like that. Durgamma gave out a big shout, and our hearts literally stopped. But Swami remained calm, with a smile dancing on His face.

Swami told me to bring some water, mixed with some turmeric powder in it. When I was on the way to bring it, Durgamma just missed pulling my foot. Swami scolded me for not being alert, and warned me to be careful at such times. Swami sprinkled some turmeric water, and she seemed to cool down. She said, "In that birth I did not have such fortune. Now that I have this fortune, why should You trouble me"? This was being said by the devil in her. The way Swami replied to this, I could never explain. He consoled her as if she was a small baby, in such a sweet manner and soft words. She gave her full identity and history to Swami. She confessed that she possessed Durgamma, as she liked her singing and dancing. As this was not known to her husband, he had spent a lot of money for her treatment, of some unknown illness. Swami's words still ring in my ears like a big bell, *"The time for your redemption has come, so you have to leave now!* Unwilling to leave Durgamma's body, she challenged Swami and adamantly remained.

The soft expression of Bala Sai's face, the Master of Demons, changed. The anger on His face reminded me of Rudra Shiva! He turned red in the face like Kumkum. Maybe He had taken the form of Kalimatha, I thought. Everyone was asked to leave the hall, but I was allowed to remain- there, holding the bowl of turmeric water. When the water was being sprinkled on her by Swami, her screams became louder and louder. Swami suddenly got up, caught hold of her hair, and literally lifted her up from the ground. He made her body to go round thrice, and bounced her on to the floor with a harsh thud. Then He pulled out three strands of hair from the centre of her head and gave it to me. He told me to make three knots of it and keep it safely. Leaving her there, we went into the room for rest, as it was late in the night.

Early morning, as I got up Swami told me to tie that knotted hair onto a tree, near Sathyamma temple, and I obeyed. Because of the adamant devil, she had to face such torture for years and take this beating. After this treatment Durgamma looked very much relaxed. Sai Deva blessed the whole group and they happily left happily. It would be needless to say that she remained normal thereafter. Though Swami was so thin, He had lifted that fat lady with one hand. Where from did He get strength? This was the clear revelation of His divinity and His powers! Driving away demons or devils was a very tough and tedious task. At such times, we could clearly see Swami as the Avatar of Lord Narasimha, a huge body with a ferocious lion's face!

Photo of Chitikelu that was played by Swami.

MUSLIM GIRL

A small family came from Hyderabad. Though they were Muslims, they looked like Hindus. They had come to Penugonda, and after hearing about Swami, came to Puttaparthi. They expressed that they started on this journey for peace of mind, and the atmosphere in the Old Mandir was just ideal for them. When they requested Swami if they could stay for two days, with a compassionate smile He said, ***“This is your house, be comfortable”***. They were deeply impressed by Swami's simplicity, as they did not find Him an imposing leader, insisting a lot of restrictions. There was no question of any vain display or arrogance, but everyone was affectionate and loving. There was no one to poke fun at them as they were new to these customs. After two days, when they asked for Swami's permission to leave, He joked, ***“What! You people do not like this place? Are you being troubled by some devil here?”*** His comment surprised them, and they looked at each other with astonishment. The father of the family spoke, "We had visited so many places, without finding any solution to our problems. Now You have opened our eyes, and there is no need for us to hide anything. Though we had a beautiful daughter-in-law, we put her into a lot of trouble as she did not come from a rich family and thus did not bring a big dowry. Unable to keep-up with our demands and bear the torture, she committed suicide. Due to our sins, a devil has entered my daughter. Whenever we get ready to get her married, she acts strangely, and all our efforts fail. Due to our fault, my daughter is suffering. In spite of spending much money, we have failed". They fell at Swami's feet praying for a solution and begged for His pardon. They also assured Him that they shall never repeat such a mistake. Swami said, ***“When you were committing sins you did not think in this manner because you people were influenced by Maya. Repenting for sins committed, is one solution. Your deceased daughter-in-law's sister is still unmarried and facing a lot of hardships. If you get your son married to her and solve their family problems that shall cleanse your sins. Respect her and do not repeat such acts, ever again. Your daughter's marriage I shall take care of and see to it that she shall be happy.”*** Saying this, He blessed the girl with a talisman. In this way, He had different solutions for different people, in a variety of ways. Thus, Bala Sai had various remedies that were most uncommon. We had never heard of any other Avatar driving away demons like this. It was no easy task to solve such family problems and also solve the issues of people who had not come to Him, that too without their knowledge.

Swami never waited for any personal requests, and His aim was to solve issues, without bothering about His troubles and efforts.

We would have nothing to fear in this world, if we followed His principles. Divinity shall always be with you, if you had the right mind-set and good heart. Though the heart always guides you in the correct path, the ego would be the culprit that makes you deviate, into its path. Swami advised that one should have firm determination to make the right decisions, and never to hurt anyone in the process. The tears you shall bring to others, shall multiply your sins, Swami had warned. These were the simple lessons taught by Bala Sai in those days.

KERALA GIRL

Some devotees from Kerala, a state in South India arrived. It was quite rare for people of this state to come to Puttaparthi, in those days. Their language was little known to the local people here. As usual, Swami occupied His chair and started having pan. When He cast some naughty smiles, we were sure that something important was going to come up. Slowly, Swami started, ***"Belief is something important. The base for this is love. It is necessary to be on guard with unknown people. But there is nothing wrong in loving them. Only after being fully satisfied, they may be believed upon"***. Swami, while talking, was observing one particular girl in that group of Kerala people. The girl's parents started talking in their language to Swami with tears of sorrow. The local people, hearing their strange language, started smiling. Observing this, they started talking in broken English and tried their best to convey their thoughts to Swami. Was it necessary to explain anything to Swami? But how would the newcomers realise this?

Swami suddenly moved towards the girl, and she tried to get up. Just with His eyes, He conveyed to her to remain seated, and she obeyed like a small child. Her parents were taken aback to see their unruly daughter obey Swami's order. Our divine director pretended to speak to her. She got annoyed at this and tried to do something foolish, but when she opened her mouth, saliva fell on her clothes. She started shouting in their language and complained that her body was burning. Swami continued to stare at her, as she wriggled in pain. After some time she begged for His pardon and assured to leave. Now we could understand that the girl was possessed and that the spirit in her was talking to Swami. Swami moved His eyes sharply, as if conveying something, and she seemed to beg for something. Suddenly, Swami became compassionate and blessed her with *Vibhuthi*. Without knowing what was happening, she fell unconscious. From the next day, she

behaved in a normal manner and started moving around freely. Without any torture, Swami got rid of the devil in her. This was one of His methods.

Swami explained, in this regard, ***“Devil does not have a body, and move around as spirit till such time the accrued Karma exists. It tries to enter someone's body that it likes. For the Lord, both are same, as He knows everything completely”***.

Though the spirit maybe adamant, He tries to console it with affection, treating it like a child, with sweet talk. But, if it does yield to His command in a good way, beating would surely follow. Maybe, only when the time came, they would come to His fold. There would be nothing in the world that does not yield to love, but patience was very essential. Without patience, there would be no peace. Though the process looked rough and difficult, the end result was always good. Without difficulties, no happiness could be felt, and those who sought His help, were really fortunate to be suitably rewarded.

OUR FAMILY

In spite of all these experiences, the worldly thoughts, do play their role. Though I was at Swami's feet in His room, that was so worthy beyond imagination, I had drifted into my own thoughts. As there was nothing not known to Him, shot came His reply, ***“You fellow, why rake your brains about your parents.”*** He was very true, and I was thinking about my parents, as I had not seen them for a long time. ***“All of them are coming this evening”***, Swami informed in a casual manner. That evening we reached Chitravathi, and after sometime, though it was so late in the evening, my parents and family members were crossing the river. As soon as they saw Swami, they came running like calves that had not seen the cow, and Swami with equal speed, ran towards them like a cow that had not seen its calves for a long time. They fell at His feet, and He engulfed them in His love, as if they were His little children. That moving sight was beyond any description.

We all reached the Old Mandir with Bala Sai. He came to our room and started enquiring about everything, our family affairs, our schooling, our business, etc. Mother started crying, because was not well on the home front, and Swami was constantly assuring her that she had nothing to fear, as was with them. While we were there at Puttaparthi, Swami would talk to us constantly, cut jokes, and make us laugh most of the time. Though everyone there stayed like 'one family', human beings were human beings. Some of them did envy our presence and closeness to Swami. My brother Amba and I would spend most of the time in His room, and He would sometimes call us '*Jaya Vijayalu*', the gatekeepers of lord Vishnu. My.

mother would be absolutely delighted as Swami would relish all her preparations. When we went to Chitravathi in the evening; we would carry Swami's requirements, and hand them over, whenever asked for. Thus, we stayed close to Him all the while. We would compose many songs, before going to Puttaparthi, and He would ask us to sing some specific songs. Thus, we dominated in the singing sessions, also. With all this, the usual grievance of others was, "If the Kuppam people come, Swami will not look at us. He will also go behind them, and entrust all important tasks to them!" Swami, the very form of love, would never bother about such things.

My sister Sarala was always busy with her innovations: Paper cuttings, art clips, or garlands-she would always come out with something novel. Even Swami's favourite pan would be offered to Him in various shapes, and Swami would take great pleasure to show it to the people around. Many a clay, He would call us aside and help us improve our compositions, and also teach us how to sing better. All this would cause envy and jealousy to some and they would literally wait for our departure. But Sakammgaru would boost our enthusiasm, because Swami's happiness was her happiness. My last sister, Prema was plump and chubby. Swami would love to make her put some dance steps. When she moved her body lightly, without much bending motions, He would heartily laugh with the others. Within no time, months would have passed by. When the time came for us to leave, there was no dearth for crying. It was customary for Swami to make us sing certain songs as we left, and that make us cry even more. On that day, He would Himself perform Harathi and bless us with Prasad. I was more fortunate, as I would stay back for some more time. Many people would come with Swami up to Chitravathi, to bid farewell and He would once again grant Padanamaskar to each one of us, wipe our tears and bid farewell. He would waive His handkerchief till we went out of sight. There was no limit for His grace and love. Now when we sit back and think of those days, it looks like a dream. Those sweet moments shall never come back, but those sweet memories can never be forgotten and shall remain ever-green.

HEART BREAKING DEPARTURE

When I was happily spending my time in the divine presence of Bala Sai, without any fear, or any kind of worry, suddenly my parents came to my mind. I started wondering how they were, as I had not received any letters from them for a while. I wanted to ask Swami about this, and bang came the reply, before I could open my mouth, "***It shall come tomorrow!***" The next day, I waited for the expected

letter, and it did arrive. It was disheartening to note that all was not well on the home front, and I was asked to come back. Swami casually looked at the letter and asked me to leave for Kuppam the next day and went off into the village. Though this was a simple statement, it pierced me like heart like a sword and shattered my head like a hammer. I could not stop the tears that flowed out. There was one small veranda behind the Old Mandir, where you could get a lot of privacy. I reached that place and sat down, crying. The more I thought about my departure, the more I cried. I banged my head, wondering how I could live without my Swami. After some time, I felt one hand over my shoulder, and it was Swami, standing like a mother who had given birth to me! My cool Mother! I just grabbed His feet, and He consoled me like a baby, as I washed His feet with my tears. When He was running His loving fingers over my head and back, I continued to weep, resting in His warm lap. ***"Hey! Murthy, why do you cry? One day or the other you had to leave. For how long can you stay here? Don't you have the duty to look after your parents? You have a life to lead!"*** When Swami was talking in such a simple way, it made me angry, and I said, "Swami! You really want me to go? Can I live without You"? You may not believe this, but it was the truth. Swami's face became small, and His eyes were moist.

At that moment seeing the compassion on His face, His concern, His love, His care, I preferred to lay down my life, tight there and then. ***"Do you think I like to send you? How can I stay without you people?"*** Hearing Swami say this, like a child holding its mother, I held Hirn tight and drowned fully in the ocean of grief. How long this went on, I just cannot recall. When I opened my eyes, Swami was looking at me with pity. Wiping away my tears, He said, ***"I shall write a letter to your mother. Swami's grace is there in plenty and they need not fear. I shall also tell them that you shall come after some time"***. Hearing this, I laughed like a mad man and concluded that I had a place in His heart. As assured by Him, He did write such a letter to my mother.

Oh my god! A big calamity had been evaded and I realised that Swami's love was as huge as the sky. This can never be described to anyone, but those who had gone through this phase in life, would surely understand. He is the Mother of the whole world, loving-hearted Sai Mother, and anyone leaving such a Mother, was sure to break-drown in grief. Thinking of Him as God, we presume that He would never lament. But this was not the truth, as He would not like to see His loved ones in tears. Human beings express their feelings easily, but the Universal Mother

would keep it to Herself. How much ever you partake His love, you would ask for more and never get satiated. Such is the love of Mother Sai! Surely I cannot deny that I was fortunate to have won a place in Her heart. Like this, I stayed for more days, and had the opportunity to serve Him. Now I have to tell you about the letters He assured to write regularly.

SWAMI'S LETTERS

Swami's letter dated 09/08/1946:

The same Telugu letter written by Swami has been shown here. Most of the letters written by Swami would reach us on Thursdays and we used to eagerly wait for the postman on those days. Swami may have selected Thursdays because it was considered as the most auspicious day, by His devotees. The letters would contain each of our names and blessings to each one of us in our family. His handwriting was like beautiful pearls, His description like sweet porridge, His assurances instilled mighty courage, and while reading tears were sure to flow. So much love and affection could never be shown by anyone in the world. He would hug us with His beautiful words, as if we were small babies. For us, He was a mountain-like God, with a small sweet form. All of us loved Him with devotion and complete belief. Maybe, this was what the wise considered as totality. Actually, He would not bear the grief of His devotees and would be hurt even more than them. Sometimes we would forget His divinity and treat him like our friend. There must have been many connections, in many past births, and accumulation of past merit, to have been so fortunate! The contents of Swami's letter, received from Puttaparthi, I place before you, and after reading it, you would know, as why I share this with you.

“To the loving devotee Krishna Kumar (my full name), Kchi Kumar (tickling Kumar), Pichi Kumar (mad Kumar), respected Baba writes this with blessings. (Can you imagine by how many names He would call me).

Dear one, are you still at Kuppam? When did you come? Are you all right? Do you remember me? I am Sai Baba of Puttaparthi. Now you would remember me. Poor fellow! I am just joking with you. What are your memories? What are you looking at? At all times, filled in Atma, taking birth in Atma and residing in Atma, so, will I not know my devotees? When this letter is read by Kumari (my unmarried sister), Amba (my brother Amrendra Kumar), and the mother of the family they may get angry with me! Till this date, for not having written such a letter to them, they should be in envy. But everyone has a hand with five fingers, and

wherever it goes, all the five fingers shall follow, but not just one finger. In the same way, when all the members of that house are my devotees, even when I shower my grace on one devotee, it does belong to the whole family. Let this all go by. When are you going to come? As there are no cars coming, I did not want to trouble you, as they all decided to come from Mysore. Having come to know that I shall visit your village on 22nd, they cancelled their trip and decided to come for Shivarathri. Thus, no cars came here. In the meantime, if someone comes by car, I shall come there in that car. Otherwise, whenever you people come, I shall accompany you all. I am ready to come. Nagamani shall also come. My blessings to Nagamuni (my brother-in-law Venkatamuni), Susheelamma (my cousin sister), and their children, please convey.

Tell them I shall see them in person. Without forgetting them also, I am dancing in the heart.

This is for now.

With blessings. Baba.

Shortly inform your arrival.”

Can you see how jovial Swami could be? When I was so keen to have His Darshan, straining my eyes, waiting with a heavy heart, He coolly writes, if I had forgotten Him? This letter was written to me when He had decided to visit our village Kuppam. When the Lord was ready to come to our place, would we wait for someone else to bring Him by their car? Immediately, Amba and I went to Puttaparthi to fetch Him to Kuppam. Swami came to Kuppam as willed by Him. This was His second visit to Kuppam. I am yet to tell you about His first visit to Kuppam.

KUPPAM VISIT

After our first visit to Puttaparthi, we force Swami to come to our village Kuppam, and the Loving Lord agreed. My eldest cousin sister Susheelamma was also there. As she had seen Swami before us, she put a condition that *Swami* should visit her house first, and we agreed to *this*. The dates were also fixed, and we had to pick up Swami from Sakammaguru's house at Bangalore, but He insisted that He would come by Himself. One family member, of Susheelamma's family, and I waited at the junction, nearly two kilometers away from Kuppam, to guide them to our village. Even at 10 o'clock in the night, Swami's car did not arrive, and the *family* member of Susheelamma returned back to the village. I remained alone in the forest junction, and after 8 PM not a soul would be seen in these areas, due to fear of wild animals. At about 11 PM, a car came in that direction and took the wrong turn going into the forest. I could somehow stop the car by flashing my torch, and I was in absolute joy to see Swami wave out to me. He had brought Sakammaguru, and Subbarajuguru with Him. They were surprised to see me standing alone, in such an isolated spot. I got into the car, and we reached our house, instead of going to Susheelamm's house, as planned earlier. We welcomed Him with many garlands and Harathi. With all smiles, He enquired each one of us.

There was a huge vacant place next to our house, so we arranged for His Darshan there. Many villagers, our school teachers, schoolmates, had a good Darshan of Swami. All these years they had been joking about Him and our frequent visits to Puttaparthi, but now after seeing Him, they appreciated His divine form. This brought us much joy. That evening, when Swami sang like a Nightingale, they were completely bowled over. There was no end to our family members visiting Swami. Three days passed by like three minutes. With a lot of tears, we bid farewell to Sai Prabhu, and He consoled us by promising to come again soon and left for Bangalore. Once, when Swami was talking, to our family at the Old Mandir, we had requested of Him that we should ever remain close to Him. Swami joked with us, saying we had too much desires. But, from then on, to this day, we remain as His children. This was due to His grace, and, without His blessings, we would not have enjoyed His proximity. In the era of Dwapara, if Lord Krishna granted close proximity to His friends, we in this period of Kali, had the fortune to sing and dance with Sai Krishna. I would firmly conclude that in any era, such love of Bala Sai had never been felt.

FIGHT WITH SWAMI

Sometimes, Swami would be so busy, you would wonder if His love had disappeared. He would be busy with the newcomers, their arrangements, and their interviews. All we would get, at such times, were His strict orders and sharp commands, in a stern voice would make us believe that He would discard us. In those days, when you did not get His love and attention, you were sure to get frantic. As He had not talked to me for the whole of that day, I picked up a fight with Him when He was writing some letters: "Swami! You are not giving me enough affection!" Without looking at me, He told me to pour water into the tumbler, on His table. As I started pouring, He said, more and more! Ultimately the tumbler was full, and the water spilled out onto the table. Seeing this, He shouted, ***"Don't you have sense? You buffalo! How could you pour more water, when the tumbler was full?"*** I speedily wiped the place clean, without understanding what He meant. Fearing that He would impose some punishment, I fell at His feet and begged for pardon. ***"What? Did you not understand, what I meant? I am fully in your heart, and you are fully in My heart! Is this not affection? If I give more, it would be wasted like the water that flowed out. What has been received should be perceived, without wastage. This is how the wise would think"***, Swami fumed. Hearing this, the tears of Ananda made me go out of control. He lifted me, wiped my tears and knuckled on my head, saying, ***"At least now do you understand?"*** This was how He dwelt with ignorant people.

SPEECHLESS SADHU

Once, while talking, Swami seemed to be in a happy mood and was continuously having pan. This was a clear sign for us that something important was going to happen. Swami informed us that something funny would happen the next day. Unable to understand divine secrets, we waited for that moment. The next day, two newcomers, one sadhu and his disciple, landed at the Old Mandir. They were staunch followers of Mother Kali. The sadhu had a huge beard, turmeric paste marks all over the face, red *Kukkum* marks on the forehead, many garlands of *Rudrakshas*, mixed with strange beads, round the neck, and all this made him look like a magician fakir. They had a good bath at Chitravathi, before reaching the Mandir. The disciple praised the sadhu for having built a temple and his powers to perform so many miracles. But, none of us took any interest in his propaganda. Little did they know that our little master could make people cry and console them, as if they were small children. As they came towards Swami, He gave a strange

smile! When the sadhu offered a lemon to Swami, He just gestured to him to retain it and started speaking in general.

“Powers does not have any form. Things that cannot be seen can be felt. When air is pumped into a balloon, it takes the shape of the balloon, though it is invisible and shapeless. Though air is invisible, it may be fragrant or foul smelling. Similarly, the powers within the form remain invisible. Those who do not perceive this, could be considered ignorant. Whatever is born, has to perish, but the Atma is imperishable and permanent, residing in various forms, from time to time. This is the cycle of birth and death of the body. The divine great souls are covered by Maya, and those who see them, by winning over Maya, could be considered as Yogis! To succeed in this, divine grace is important. Divine grace could be achieved by remaining in constant thoughts of the divine.” Suddenly the sadhu wanted to ask something but no words came out of his mouth. When all his efforts to speak failed, fear took over him. Unable to tolerate disgrace, he kept this to himself.

The next day, when all were seated, Swami asked the sadhu what he wanted to express. With tears, flowing, he fell at Swami's feet. Swami consoled him and asked him if he was in some trouble? Suddenly he could speak, and this was known only to both of them. He started, saying, "Please pardon me, as I have committed many mistakes, listening to someone. My speech disappeared yesterday, and only when I fell at Your feet, it has been regained. I was very proud of myself, and You have crushed it with Your feet. Because of my ego, I lost my speech, and by Your touch, it has come back! You really taught the right lessons for my ego. Now I can understand the divine play of great beings. Please bless me"! I felt that he may have tried to use his magic on Swami by offering Him a lemon, but he was caught in the divine web. There were so many instances not known to the world, and I am pleased to place before you what I had witnessed. Even when I try to put forth only the essence of it, it has become a book of this size. Swami's grace and love could never be evaluated, but those who experienced it were fortunate.

Dharma Paripalakudu

THE PROTECTOR OF DHARMA

Though gossip was very interesting to everyone, misunderstanding cannot yield happiness. It would not be easy for everyone to create misunderstanding. Any mistake on the part of the player, he would surely be in trouble and end up with a lot of beating. The master of this art was none other than Saint Narada, the son of

Brahma. Many people, in this period of Kali, may have played this role, but, unsuccessfully: they would have fallen in their own pit. It may have been easy to start, but very difficult to complete it successfully. It may be very delightful for those who witness it, but the people involved could never be at ease. The one who planned it would surely be pinned down.

Great Saints like Narada, had played such games in plenty, for the welfare of the world. Our Bala Sai was a Master in this Art and had enacted many divine games for the welfare of the people. We may have heard of many great thieves, but our sweet Lord could be considered as the biggest thief! All those who have not heard about this shall come to know about this, now! The play would depend on what role Swami would play, and whom He would involve and enroll in His play. Having taken the human form, He would behave like an ordinary human. What the humans enjoyed, He would also fully enjoy with them. Some people may have thought that the outcome of great mischief would always end up with something bad, but, here, the outcome was really great. If Swami wanted to teach a lesson to someone, He would not aim at them directly, that, too, in the full view of the public. He would select some old devotees to participate in His game and keep them ready. For some big tasks, He would select Sakammagaru to play the role, and for lesser things, Savitramma, Konamma, Seshagiritata, and people like me, at random. He would select those He liked most, but would ensure that they were taken to bearable levels, only. Just like a cool breeze after a huge storm, laughter was assured, after the climax of His game.

We had read in the Bhagawatham, that Lord Krishna's mischief was immense and without any limits. Well, can we call this a mere mischief? No! These were His Leelas, divine play that came out of His heart full of love and did not harm anyone. Lord Krishna displayed so much to the Gopikas, as they were the very forms of love. When they came to Yashoda and complained about young Krishna, they took delight in watching her trying to control naughty Krishna. Actually, they wanted His mischief to continue all the while, so that they could derive more delight. It was not without some reason they went to Yashoda with their baseless complaints. It was a pretext for them to see their bundle of mischief, Krishna. They seemed to be in fury, due to His deeds; but once they saw that delightful, lovely face, they melted like ice. In the same way, though Swami would get angry with us, in front of so many people, the way He would console us later was beyond description. Even if you would explain about this, no one would believe it. Sometimes we

would not understand for whom He had played the game-how He would change within moments; taking sides, depending on the situation, can never be imagined. When Swami spoke about Leelas, hours would pass by like minutes, immersing all in bliss. Many of these have been mentioned by my sister Kumaramma.

There would be a certain age limit for doing mischief, and it would look only till that age, say up to 16 or 20. After that age, it would look like something strange. Without mischief, that period would be pale and tasteless. Sometimes, when Swami was in good moods, He would answer to any number of doubts, beautifully. What He spoke in those days was the very essence of life! Once, I summoned all my courage to ask Him why He would get so angry at times. Swami said, "**You buffalo! This is not anger; this is My excess love. This is All fun, play, and divine deeds**". By seeing all this, people who came there would forget about their troubles, and derive happiness. Many a time, people came to the Old Mandir with sorrow and misery up to the brim; at such times, it would not be appropriate to impart knowledge in a serious manner. Instead, the right mixture of some play and mischief worked like a wonder medicine on them, and they would get some peace of mind. Thus humour played an important role then and granted relief to thousands of people. Besides humour, every act of His imparted many morals. All these would replace sorrow with peace of *mind*, efficiently; and even after six decades when think of these incidents, we derive the same pleasure, to this day.

The people at the Old Mandir were like one big family. There would be no family without some misunderstanding in the whole world. Just like tasty foods, sweet and hot, life should be a mixture of worries and happiness. In this small Kingdom, Swami was like the King and also like the farmer who would plough. When dive into the ocean of life, you would get pearls, and also face some poisonous animals. I was taught by Swami to hold onto the pearls, and avoid the animals. To accomplish anything in life, some hurdles had to be crossed, and with Swami as the Guru, you would surely win the game. Shall we now enter the arena of Swami's games?

MISSING BUTTER

In those days, Sakammagaru was fully involved in the service to Swami and had permanently settled at Puttaparthi. She was the rich owner of coffee estates in Coorg, in the state of Karnataka. She had good manners and had much respect for the elders. Besides worldly knowledge, she was treading in the path of spirituality, with devotion and determination. She was fluent in Kannada and English, but knew very little Telugu. Swami was her life. She was very particular about

discipline and cleanliness. She was gentle and would hardly lose her temper. Though she was very rich, she was humble. She used to treat servants and workers, as her own family members.

Once, she had mixed butter and sugar for Swami. In the Dwapara era this was most cherished by Lord Krishna, the delight of the Gopikas. Seeing this, I imagined that our Bala Krishna would remember His earlier Avatar and run away to His old abode Repalle! The followers of Lord Vishnu would call this mixture as 'Navaneetham', and believed that it was very much liked by Him. Thus, when He descended as Lord Krishna naturally it became His delicacy. Sakammagaru requested Nagamianamma to preserve this safely, and she did the needful.

After we had our meals she asked Nagamainamm to bring the small bowl of butter. Though it was kept safely, she could not find it at that place and started crying. Swami pretended not to know anything and chided her that she should have done something great. Seeing Sakammagaru approach, she started crying even more, with the fear of her wrath. When she did ask for the bowl, Nagamianamma's crying reached a high pitch, and said, "Alas! I had kept it safely, but it is missing now! This, must be Swami's work. He must have hidden it somewhere"! Like this, she pulled naughty Bala Sai into the ring. Sakammagaru fumed, "Today is Gokulastami, so I had prepared it with much dedication to offer it to Swami, and you have spoilt all my good efforts, on this auspicious occasion". When Sakammagaru's temper raged like fire, our cool Swami intervened, "**Oh that bowl! It must be there, only; how can it be missing?**" When He signalled to me, I realised that it was only His game, and it was my chance to play a role. I went in and brought the same bowl from the same place where it had gone missing. Seeing the bowl in my hand, Nagamianamma lost her temper and caught hold of my ear, "All are thieves, but why should I become the target"? Like this I was blamed for the missing bowl. She would not let go of my ear, in spite of me pleading innocent. Before everything went out of control, Swami grabbed the bowl and finished the butter and said that He liked it very much. Swami enjoyed such cat and mouse games and had the great pleasure of making the devotees cry and get embroiled in a tussle. Though He provoked and made some weep, everything ended up with laughter. We would enjoy talking about His divine play of His, for days and months. These were simple games of His, and we would eagerly wait for the next one to start. Just wait and see how this game continued.

A sea change took place after this. She let go of my ear, grabbed the empty bowl from Swami's hand and targeted Him, "What, Swami! You have not left anything for us, as Prasad"? Can you imagine how things change in moments? Swami grabbed the empty bowl and showed it to Sakammagaru, **"You see for yourself! This lady is in the habit of always blaming Me!"** When we peeped, there was still some butter in the bowl, and all were rendered speechless. During such times, what one can do but fall at His feet and pray like this, "O great dramatist! O great actor! Your play is par excellence and can never be understood by any"! He removed a small portion of the butter and fed it to Sakammagaru and asked her distribute the balance to the others. Seeing so many people over there, she was in a dilemma, wondering how it could suffice! Looking at her being hesitant, Swami said, **"What do you think? Is it your property? Give it to everyone, nicely!** She obeyed His command and everyone was served. This was how, our Sai Krishna celebrated Gokulastami that was unforgettable. We had the opportunity to see so many such miracles. Anything touched by Him became nectarine and beyond limits. We were blessed with such things, from morning to night. In those days, He fed us with a small bowl, and now from huge vessels, food rises like mountains and reaches the doorsteps, of thousands of families. Our Sai Annapoorneshwari, the embodiment of plentiful food, had hardly changed. How can there be any scarcity in His presence?

Similar things happened at the Chitravathi sands, and the things that came out, could never be assessed. Besides beads, pendants, idols, Geetha books, rudrakshas, and rare items, eatables also came out. Even a small sweet that came out of the sands, as it was being distributed, would just multiply and satiate all without any shortage. There was no necessity for cooking vessels or plates. Whenever we asked Swami from where it came, His answer was just 'Sai Stores'. Whenever He did such things, He would immerse everyone in astonishment. When He is the Creator, what is there in this world He cannot do? Though He looked like a small boy, the things He did were so great and mind-boggling! It was indispensable for anyone to wonder if this was a dream or the truth. Really, what we saw can never be assessed, and our births were sanctified beyond any refute. During the era of Dwapara, the Gopikas and the Gopas, went to the banks of River Yamuna, to play and dance with Bala Krishna. For us, the banks of the Chitrawathi were no less than the banks of the Yamuna, as we also played, sang, swam and danced. When Chitravathi was in calm, gents would have a good swim with Swami, in the flowing

tranquil waters. Sometimes, Swami would not come out of the waters for a long time. When we got agitated and shouted for Him, He would appear from behind and surprise us. Such mystic and unimaginable play was in plenty. All such incidents were sung, in song form, and Swami had taught us how to compose and sing. We have recorded some of these songs and the CDs, and these can be obtained from my sister Kumaramma. Well, wherever we went; that small box of pan had to be ready, in my hands, Any delay or shortage in serving Swami, I just had it!



SUGARLESS BUT SWEET

In the world, it would be hard to find anyone without some jealousy. One day, Konnamma came to Swami with a complaint. It was very uncommon for anyone to approach Swami with an open complaint. Thus, this put everyone in anguish. Whenever anyone fell at His feet with the feeling of full surrender, for His refuge, compassionate Bala Sai would patiently understand their plight, bear with the silliest of things, and forgive them. She complained, “Swami! I am unable to bear with Savitramma. She has been blocking all efforts to serve You with coffee, even once in a while”. Swami said, ***“Oh! Only this! Why should you cry! You have been staying here for so long and what have you learnt? For Swami, all are one. Now I have to drink the coffee prepared by you, so why delay! Bring some coffee for Me right now!”*** The lover of the devotees would never say no to them, but at the same time, He would tolerate their jealousy. Overwhelmed with His immediate response, she hurried inside and came out with a tumbler of coffee. Swami had a sip and kept it aside, saying that it was too hot. All this was nothing but a drama, and the reason would surface shortly. To educate people, He would play any role in the drama. He commented that He alone should drink the coffee, and I was asked to serve some of it to all the people seated there, as Prasad. What was left in it was

offered to Konamrna. She just tasted it and started crying, taking everyone by surprise. We all wondered about her strange behaviour. She started with a complaint that was not give her chance to serve coffee to Swami, and though. it was granted, she was not satisfied. Swami said with ct smile, ***“Now, what's your problem? If I say no, you would cry! Even if I accept, you cry. Give me the reason? In a choked voice, she replied”***, Swami! How did You drink this coffee? I had forgotten to add sugar into it"! Swami looked surprised and asked to taste it once again. This time, instead of crying, she was confused, and no words came out. The reason was, the first sip was sugarless and the second sip had enough sugar! She fell at Swami's feet, for pardon. Swami advised, "Jealousy is no good, and patience is important for everyone. This is the difference between you and Savitramma", and appraised her, lovingly. This was a good opportunity to teach a lesson to all of us over there, through her. He would utilise any of us, over there, in His dramas to teach the whole world.

I have already mentioned how Amba and I were tempted with bananas and how He made my mother make Dosas for Him, in the dead of the night. Like this, there was no end to His play in those days.

VANTSHED MILK

Some important visitors were expected, and Swami asked Sakammguru to be ready with more milk than usual. As she was entrusting this job to Nagamaniaamma, she heard Swami's call. Heming His call, anyone would forget the world itself. Sakammagaru thought that Nagamaniaamma would arrange for more milk, but she totally forgot about this, in her eagerness to attend Swami's call. Let alone excess milk, some dog got into the kitchen and gulped away all the milk that was there. Though Swami had observed all this, He did not warn anyone. Maybe, He was more interested to watch the fun. After some time, when He asked for coffee, Nagamaniaamma suddenly remembered that she had to get more milk. When she went into the kitchen, she also observed that there was no milk at all. She started crying and came to Swami, ***“Swami do You know my predicament? Why do You make me cry? I heard You call me and I forgot all about milk. Now, there is not a drop of milk.”*** Swami laughed at her, ***“My dear! My golden dear! If you forget something, would this be my fault?”*** At such times He would not get angry, because he was the director of the play. By playing such games, He would entertain everyone over there and also open their eyes. As everyone looked at each other, wondering about the disappeared milk, Swami intervened, ***“Actually, I drank the***

milk!” Though this was not something to be believed, we had to accept His words. Going a little further, was it not true that all forms were His? Even the expected visitors did not arrive, or was this also His game? Who could guess?

FEAST TO SHIRIDI SAI

“On some occasions Bhagawan would not expose Himself, but He would seem to hide behind a screen and satisfy His devotee” - Swami started like this and talked about Shiridi Sai Baba. Shiridi Sai Baba was invited for a feast, by a devotee and He had accepted the invitation. He wanted to teach a lesson and did not go for the feast. They waited for a long time for Him and started eating. The devotee had kept one fully served leaf, expecting that Baba may join them later. A dog occupied that place and started eating what was served on that leaf meant for Baba. People got irritated and chased the dog away, by beating it.

The devotee and his friends were very disappointed about His absence and went to see Him, carrying some food. He was down with fever, and when they observed closely, they also saw some marks on His body. When they enquired, He explained that having accepted the invitation, He had come for the feast, but some ignorant fools beat Him up and chased Him away! The devotee was very hurt and fell at His feet, begging for pardon. With all compassion, He smiled at the devotee and said that He had used Him, to open the eyes of the others. Even our Bala Sai, in the same way used us, to give some wisdom to the others, and we were most fortunate to have been chosen to play such a role.

Pandifuta Raka

ARRIVAL OF THE PUNDITS

A few famous pundits arrived from Andhra Pradesh. They looked majestic, in their orange robes. As they were renowned, they expected a grand welcome at the *Old Mandir*. We already knew about Swami, and had realised that He would not differentiate between the big and small, but look at everyone with love. When they arrived, Swami had gone into the village, and His whereabouts were not known. There was no question of searching for Him to inform about the arrival of such great Pundits or to make recommendations. Swami returned to the Mandir only in the evening, and without talking to anyone, entered into His room. He casually appeared during the evening singing session.

The Pundits expected that He would come straight towards them and give them a warm welcome. But nothing like that happened. They preferred to remain in the veranda outside, and did not come into the prayer hall. One of them came to

Swami as announced that they had come from Andhra, without even a simple salutation. Without showing any enthusiasm, Swami said "**Good**", and continued to talk to us. Slowly, one by one, they came into the hall and sat with us. Even here, Swami did not look at them, and after some time, He went off into the village.

The next morning, they sat in one group, in one corner of the hall. As soon as Swami came, one of the Pundits started talking about Saint Viswamitra and proceeded to reveal his vast knowledge. After a while, Swami seemed to impart some better knowledge and started speaking, "**Viswamitra rose to such high levels of Brahma, with such great deeds, but in spite of all his ability, did not become Brahma Rishi, the greatest among Rishies! Poor Saint! How much ever he tried, something or the other blocked his way! In the whole world this country of Bharat is the most auspicious. It was like that and shall remain. like that**". Casually chewing pan, He talked about the various visits of foreigners, and interest they took to realise the values of Indian culture. How so many people were impressed by this small Old Mandir! He explained that this was not a Mutt or an Ashram, but a place where everyone could take shelter and obtain peace of mind. God was not somewhere else far away, but in all the forms, as love. Here, the ruling divinity was love, He expressed. In-between He was joking, and as usual, used me for this purpose. Suddenly, He tapped on my head, pretended to say something to me, and disappeared into the village. This was how He escaped, once again.

When Swami did not return in the afternoon, we had some lunch and sat in the hall. Having observed that Swami was close to me, one Pundit asked me why Swami had not talked to them? I expressed that what He had said was meant for all of us over there, and they were also part of it, and escaped from there. They had surely heard what Swami had said and had also discussed it among themselves. They were fully aware how the ego of Saint Viswamitra put him into lots of troubles. They must have realised how the same ego was hindering them from the divine. When Swami appeared as the embodiment of Brahma, they should have kept their ego under check and should have known how to appear before Him. When Swami returned for the evening session; they bowed to Him and begged for His pardon. Once they surrendered to Him, crushing their ego, He sweetly spoke some words of wisdom, in the interest of their benefit. He made them realise that their power was nothing before the power of this place.

DIVINE RAGA

Right from the Old Mandir days, many pundits, saints, sadhus, were humbled by Bala Sai, and put them in the right path, to serve humanity. Some Pundits came from Mysore, and they were renowned musicians. It would be needless to say how egoistic they had been about their ability and their fame. How would they have known that they were mere sheep, in front of the embodiment of Saraswathi, the Master of Music? They were soon to realise that they were nothing before our divine singer, Bala Sai. That evening, Swami surprised them by singing a difficult Sloka, in a beautiful tune. A layman would have considered this as something simple. Though there was not a single flaw in the Ragam, Talam, and Pallavi sung by Swami, the egoistic Pundits thought they could do it better.

Would our Swami spare anyone? He gave an opportunity to one of the Pundits to prove his ability. He sang with majesty, and it was melodious to our ears. He assumed that no one could find any fault with his singing. Suddenly, Swami stopped him to correct the wrong Talam he had put. He was very much aware of the mistake made by him; he got confused and was not able to rectify the mistake. But at the same time, his ego stopped from accepting his fault. Would *Swami* let him go scot-free easily? Swami sang one tune and asked him to name the Raga. In absolute bewilderment, he said, "Swami! In my 50 years of experience I had not heard such a Raga, before"! When he was taken aback with one Raga sung by Swami, how fortunate we must have been to have heard our master of Music sing for hours, daily? Swami explained, ***"This is Devatha Ragam, a divine tune that was sung by Ramdas, Narada, Anjaneya, and other ardent devotees. Only when immersed in great devotion, such tunes could be sung, by the devotees! Without devotion, such tunes shall never even surface. But today, you all were fortunate to hear this Raga. It would be difficult to understand such divine secrets, as the ego would not allow you. While this rules, no one could go forward!"*** This was how He set them right, humbled them in no time and put them onto the correct track.

Anyone in this life would love to be flattered. It seems, even Godheads loved to be flattered, as mentioned in the Vedas. Lord Vishnu, Alankarapriya, loved the praise of His attire! Lord Shiva, Abishekapriya, loved to be washed with sacred waters, etc! Lord Brahma, Stotrapriya, loved the chanting of His various names! But just by praising, nothing fructifies! Depending on their status, we should win over the grace of divine beings. The Trinity may have granted boons for having been

praised, but there was no need to praise Bala Sai, for He shall yield only to love. You could catch Him only in the web of your love.

BIG LOTUS FLOWER

Once, Swami asked some pundits who had assumed themselves as very knowledgeable, ***“What is the greatest?”*** None of them could come out with a reply. Swami said with a smile, ***“Dear ones, could you not get an answer for such a simple question? Emptiness is the greatest, due to its purity. There is nothing in it but there is everything in it! Unless you contemplate deeply, you shall never realise. That is why great beings remain silent, in front of ignorant people.”*** No one could understand the deep-rooted meaning and remained dumb. He suddenly materialised a lotus flower, and it was big with beautiful colours and mind-boggling fragrance. Seeing this, they lost all their senses. ***“Such flowers are available at Manasarovar only, but not easily visible”***, Swami said. Still unable to understand the reason for materialising this flower, they continued to brood over it. ***“There is a definite reason for every deed”***, Swami explained, ***“My hand was empty; that is, there was nothing in it. But actually, the whole nature is here, within!”*** We knew that Swami could create anything, but with such revelations and examples, He taught us so many things that could never be forgotten in this life. After some time He surprised them with one more miracle, showing the *vibhuthi* marks smeared on their faces. ***“Is it not true, that cow dung is considered as sacred by many communities?”***, Swami said. As they looked at Him with confused looks, He converted some cow dung into *vibhuthi* and blessed them with it! At least now, they should have realised that He could convert sky to earth and earth to sky. Though He had proved that He was verily the Almighty, the Lord of the Universe, many unfortunate people still did not believe Him. One spoon of curds would be sufficient to convert a huge quantity of milk to tasty curds. But, a pinch of salt could spoil the whole lot of milk. Thus, the end result of all great things would upon the impurities in one's mind.

One pundit summoned all his courage to ask Swami, "Everyone thinks of You as God, how is that possible"? Swami obliged him with a reply, ***“I alone am not God! All of you are Gods! Just because you do not believe in this, you search for Him elsewhere and make a big issue of this. If you fully believe that you are God, and tread the right path, everything shall fall into place.”*** This was the very essence that evaded almost everyone.

THE KNOT OF BRAHMA

Once, a small family landed at the Old Mandir. They had approached Swami when He was at Ananthapur with regard to their son's marriage, and Swami had asked them to come to Puttaparthi. Such an answer from Swami would be a boon, for anyone. But, if anyone derided such a call of His, it would be a grave mistake. The all-knowing Lord knew everything about everybody! They arrived at Puttaparthi, as advised by Swami, but did not have enough patience. They expected Swami would talk to them immediately. The days passed like years for them, and Swami would not do anything without reason. We were used to His ways of seasoning people, but the newcomers would take time or lose the opportunity. It was true that ladies had more determination than men. Whenever the boy's mother cornered Swami, He just said '*patience*' and she waited, but her husband went back.

After some days, an elderly couple came there with their daughter. They had visited the Old Mandir many times before. They immediately fell and wept at His feet. Swami assured them that everything shall be set right. As they were not rich, due to dowry issue, their daughter's marriage was getting through. Incidentally, the Ananthapur family already staying had seen this girl, but the alliance had broken up, due to the dowry issue.

Swami smiled at them and asked if they could come to terms, at least now? They were surprised how Swami knew about this issue and became pale. Was it not true that without patience, nothing much could be achieved? The next day, Swami called both the families. The Ananthapur family had already repented for cancelling the alliance and informed Swami that they were ashamed at their greed for a big dowry. Swami just spoke two words, "*Brahmamudi Thappadu*", the knot of Brahma could never be broken! When they were ordained to get married, who could ever stop them! Many issues were solved in many ways. Besides efforts, time plays an important role.

BUKKAPATNAM PLAYMATES

Four playmates of Swami, of Bukkapatnam days, arrived, and one of them were blind. They had not seen Swami since those days, and the sea change that had taken place was not known to them. They went into Puttaparthi village, in search of their boyhood friend 'Sathyam'. The villagers *told* them that it was not proper on their part to call Him Sathyam, but to address Him as Sathya Sai Babagaru, now at the Old Mandir. They came to the Ashram, thinking that they would not be

recognised, but it happened the other way round. They could not recognise their playmate Sathyam, but He enquired about each one of them, and the way He received them was an unforgettable sight. They were wonderstruck at such a reception and arrangements.

When they Swami majestically seated during the prayer session, with young and old people all around *Him*, ready to obey His command with reverence, they could not believe their eyes. That Sathyam, of a poor family, now a great Guru, was something beyond their imagination. Thinking that something was wrong here, they decided to leave. Was there anything not known to Swami? He called the blind boy, as He used to call him before. He recognised the call of his Sathyam and scrambled so fast towards Swami, it surprised everyone. Once he was satisfied, the others also fell in line. The way they surrounded Him, everyone watched with delight. The eyes that could see were deprived, and the sightless could perceive! We may wonder why He put them in spot, but it was a lesson to all of us. He discussed with them about those boyhood days with so much affection. It was like Krishna receiving His friend Kuchela. Swami was the ocean of love, and they just dived into it. Though Bhagawan's Leelas could never be assessed by us, we should always try to understand it! Swami gave them some covers and asked the blind boy to come with his parents. He did come back with them, but his impatient father went back to his place, when Swami did not talk to him. As already mentioned, ladies had more patience than men. Her patience was rewarded, when some devotees came from Bangalore. She could not understand what Swami had talked to them. The next day, they took her and the blind boy in their car. *It* seems the blind boy was gainfully employed by them, and his whole *family* settled in Bangalore, without any difficulties.

A DIVINE FEAST

In those days also, during festivals, Swami used to arrange for a grand feast. In spite of all this, there were always some jealous critics, especially the local people. During one such festival, a group of people arrived and volunteered to be of some help. Usually, all tasks were handled by the devotees and the inmates. Due to their persistence, we somehow got Swami's consent, and they started helping us. Many items were prepared, and especially the sweet porridge was making our noses dance in delight. Actually, that group had an ulterior motive and wanted to cause misery to the people. Not that Swami was not aware of it, yet He had allowed them to help, though they were determined to defame Him and cause trouble.

Little did they know that our Bala Sai was the most' powerful, among all powers! Without our knowledge, they mixed some powerful poison *in* the sweet porridge and disappeared from the scene. Swami arrived at the make-shift kitchen and started enquiring about the preparations. He wanted to taste the porridge, and one devotee poured some of it in a tumbler. When Swami instructed us that it should be mixed properly, we were taken aback, but obeyed His command. Soon we saw one big lizard appear from the bottom of the vessel. All our enthusiasm cooled off seeing this and got rebuked by angry Bala Sai for the reluctance of the people in charge of this. We dug a big hole, poured the porridge into it and covered it nicely, so that even the dogs *would* not get at it. Within no time, fresh porridge was prepared, and a grand feast was served to all the people.

That culprit group reached Penugonda and for some reason started fighting with each other. They were also feeling some burning sensation, all over their body. One of them, unable to hold back their mischief, reported to the police how they had poisoned the porridge. Immediately, they were taken into custody and were brought to Puttaparthi. Unable to bear the burning pain, they fell at Swami's feet and wriggled in pain. Looking at them with compassion, Swami informed the police that it was not their fault, but that a lizard had fallen into the porridge. Like this, He saved them from the police and told them to be good in future. On one side, He saved the devotees, and on the other side He taught a big lesson to everyone. He would never impose any punishment directly. This was due to *His* enormous love for all and very purpose of His incarnation.

Pandaal

FESTIVALS

AUSPICIOUS THURSDAY

Bharath may be considered as the birthplace of festivals. Especially, the Old Mandir, with our Bala Sai moving around, always had a festive look, a cheerful elegance and a delightful bliss all over. Every festival had its own glory. The auspicious Guruvaram, Thursdays, was an important day of the week to worship the Guru of the Gurus, Lord Sai Guru. He was our Satguru and also the Lord of the Yogis, Yogeshwara! His devotees offered special worship on this auspicious day. We used to give Him a head bath on this day, and He would wear the best of *His* clothes and look majestic. Unlike these days, He used to wear jubbas of many colours. Before coming out, He would try one dress and ask some of us for our opinion. The number of times He would change, before deciding on the final colour of His dress, was

a beauty by itself. That swan-like walk, movements like Mohini, the most beautiful damsel, that naughty looks, that mischievous smiles, and everything in Him was a rare beauty that can never be described, in any number of words. By the time he dressed and took Harathi in the Mandir, the inmates would have been bugged out. They would feel so tired, as if having travelled all the worlds! My mother was the one who introduced the jubbas³⁷ of various colours, to start with. If it was His pleasure to try so many of these before choosing one, we had the contentment of folding the mass of jubbas lying on His bed.

Savitramma was our leader, and we used to stand like a fort around Swami, to abort His attempts to run away from there. Only when she gave the green signal, we used to guide Him directly into the hall. Every suggestion of Sakammagaru was respected by all of us, and her word was final. She was the only who had the authority to ask Swami to stop His naughty play and make Him go to the Mandir, for Harathi; and He would listen to her, like an obedient child. There was no end to His mischief in those days. Besides deciding about the colour of His jubba from the others, He would also, ask if His curly hair was fine, if the garland He wore was suitable, if the colour combination of the veil was appropriate, and there seemed to be no end to all these. With all these on one side, He would be concerned about the welfare of the people seated in the Mandir and enquire about them lovingly. Whether they had coffee? Whether they were comfortably seated? Whether they had proper rest? It was a pleasure to see this, as He would enquire about them, as if they were small children, waiting for milk! Sometimes, He would slap my back and say if He had to ask me for everything? This was a clear indication that He wanted something, and Sakammagaru would understand and fetch some coffee for Him.

Dressed beautifully, His face would be so effulgent, like the face of Brahma as described in the sacred texts. Our hearts would be flooded with showers of Ananda. It was a great sight for everyone, and it was difficult to decide if we were in an Ashram or a Mutt or a Temple or just one big family? No one would have ever witnessed such happiness, flowing all over, anywhere else in the world. Such were those wonderful days, in the Old Mandir!

³⁷ **Jubba** (also spelled *Jubbah*) is a traditional, long, loose-fitting outer garment or robe, primarily worn by men. It is a staple of traditional dress in many parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia.

GURUPOURNIMA

During Gurupournima festival, we asked Swami about this festival at a time when a few religious heads were also there. Swami started like this:

Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu

(Guru is Brahma, Guru is Vishnu)

Gururdevo Maheshwara

(Guru is the Almighty Supreme Lord-Shiva)

Gurusakshat Parabrahma

(Guru is verily Supreme Brahma)

Tasmi Sri Guruve Namaha

(Salutations to such auspicious Guru)

“If the Trinity were the heads of their Heavens, in the world, a Guru would be the One with all these three powers. Such a powerful Guru may be treated at par with the Almighty. Such a Master of the Yogis could not be found easily by ordinary mortals. The disciples, who fully believe in the Guru, should have some high standards. The Guru may test his disciples, but would it be right for the disciples to test Him? Once having accepted the Guru, any sort of doubts raised in the mind would be bad, and to leave the Guru would be worst, because this would lead to 'Gurudroham', cheating the Guru. The result of this, shall be serious, just like what happened to Karna (Though he was very powerful, he perished in the Mahabharat war).” The way everyone's eyes were glued to Swami and the silence that prevailed was beyond description. To get the Almighty Sai Prabhu, as our

Guru was only due to our past merits of numerous births, all put together! All this was being deeply assessed by the religious heads. One of them got up to ask Swami something. Swami informed him, ***"My child! This is not a classroom for you to stand up, and we are not Gurus and disciples. This is one family without discrimination. The one with a pure heart would be the greatest. Be seated!*** Usually, religious heads of fame would command a lot of respect and expect the disciples to bow to them, for everything. But here, it was entirely different, and this gesture made tears flow from his eyes. He submitted that people considered him as a religious head, but now he clearly understood what he actually was. He repented that he always considered his position in high esteem and had never ventured to think of the Atmic values. He was very happy to have realised this and bowed, in respect, to Swami. He assured that he would tread the path of Dharma with humility and a sacrificial heart.

As soon as he finished, Swami laughed, and no one could understand the reason for it. The religious head lost colour, thinking that he must have made some mistake. He was unaware that Swami never liked to be praised or appreciated. He would pour out all His love on all those who came there, without regarding them as big or small, rich or poor, high or low! His aim was to put them in the right path, for the welfare of humanity and never do anything for praise. He blessed him and sent him off, as a realised religious head.

I have a small request for the readers, *to consider themselves as being in my position and thus to enjoy the same Ananda experienced by me in these pages.* You may feel that many pranks of His are already known to you, but such divine Leelas of Bala Sai, that cleansed so many great people, would surely bring about better realisation. If we ask Him for one thing, He gets ready to give us ten. The Leelas of young Sai of those days were rare and could be relished any number of times. It would not be repeating such again, as that period of young age has passed.

DASARA

Dasara was a grand festival of ten days, at Puttaparthi. In the beginning, it was referred to as 'Uragimpu Pandaga', as Swami would be taken around the village on a palanquin. Each year, it became grander and grander with the increase in the number of devotees. Each day, a different palanquin was arranged, and Swami wore different coloured jubbas, each day. On one such occasion some rowdies planned to cause trouble, eye. That day, He selected only a few ladies to lead the palanquin procession, and the men surrounded them, from all the sides. They started singing, as the procession moved forward towards Puttaparthi village. After some time the rowdies started pelting stones from different directions. The stones turned into flowers and landed at Swami's feet, without hurting anyone. Everyone was surprised at this rare miracle, and the rowdies got tired of pelting stones, and soon disappeared. Besides teaching them a lesson, He showed us the way He would protect the devotees with love and without using of force.

For all the ten days, different palanquins, beautifully decorated with flowers, were made. Each day He would grant Darshan, depending upon the way the palanquin was decorated. On the last day, He would shoot the dummy arrows, kept in the palanquin, at the Juvi tree inside the village. As the arrows reached the tree, they would manifest into beautiful garlands. When He stood there shooting arrows, He verily looked like Lord Rama, with so much effulgence. To witness this, not just one birth, even many births would not suffice!

Ladies would wear new clothes after bath and start Kumkum Poojas, (worship by sprinkling of red vermicelli powder). Swami, looking like Goddess Lakshmi, would be seated before them and bless them with Padanamaskar, after the worship. On the last day, called Vijayadasami, He would gift them with bowls vermicelli, jacket pieces, and bangles, and bless them. Full details are covered in my sister's first book.

There was no end to singing during such festival days. Everyone in our family used to sing well, due to His grace, and the trouble my mother Radhammagaru took to force us into singing. As already mentioned, Bala Sai was the embodiment of Saraswathi, and when He sang, the melody flowed like the nonstop dancing Ganges River. We would forget ourselves, for hours, when He sang classical songs with Chitta Swaras. The songs of Purandaradasa, Meera, and others were sung in such a way that tears of joy would engulf everyone. Besides His wonderful compositions, He would also make us sing our compositions. To ensure that the world should not forget these, we have recorded some of those songs, as sung by Swami in those days. Though these are very old compositions and tunes, anyone would dance in delight hearing them.

THE MONTH OF KARTIKA

Way back in those days, festivals like Shivaratri, Shankaranthi, Deepavali, etc., were being celebrated in the Old Mandir. Maybe, because Swami was born during Kartika, that month, as per the Hindu calendar, was treated as most auspicious by the devotees. It was during the month of Kartika that the Gopikas had performed special worship - not to lose Krishna forever. During that period, one famous sanyasi came to the Old Mandir. He was gigantic and a great devotee of Shakti. That evening, Swami told us to get ready for Harathi of 108 wicks and camphor. As usual, we failed to light the wicks, and just by showing His Abhaya Hasta, Swami lighted all the wicks in a flash. As the grand Harathi was being performed, He appeared in the form of divine light, to the sanyasi. Engulfed by this divine vision, he just bundled himself at Swami's feet, in total surrender. When, how and why He would perform such miracles, no one could guess! This was how He proved that he was the embodiment of all the forms.

The next day, when the sanyasi wanted to leave and asked for Swami's permission, Swami asked him to stay back, as it was a more auspicious day. In the evening, Swami told us to assemble near the hillock where a lot of Tulasi (Basil) trees grew naturally, like a forest. During festivals, we used to pluck a lot of Tulasi, for

worship from that hillock. The villagers would also collect Tulasi from there and supply it to various temples. Swami told us to be attentive, and in a flash He was on top of the hill.

SUN DARSHAN

Though the Sun had set, Swami told us He would show us the Sun. Soothing white rays started appearing from behind and within no time, it became redder, and redder! When we were engulfed by scorching heat all over, we started shouting to Swami for help. Within no time, it cooled down, and everything became normal.

MOON DARSHAN

Swami did not stop with this, and He said that He would show us the Moon. Silvery rays started appearing from behind. As its intensity increased, the whole background became whiter, and whiter. At the same time, the place became so cool we felt as if we were getting frozen. As before, we shouted to Swami, and everything became normal.

TRINETRA DARSHAN

This time, Swami told us that He would show us the Third Eye of Lord Shiva. Again, tender rays started appearing, and Swami's face became very big. His face appeared like dazzling stars, and for a few moments, fantastic sparks came out from His forehead. As it cooled off, the whole place became dark again. We did not know when Swami came down and joined us. We were relieved to see Him appear, in His usual form, and were happy to note that all was well with Him. All this happened within moments. We staggered back to the Mandir, trying to sing songs, but we only succeeded in mumbling something. We did not know what had happened to us.

The next day, Swami whispered something to the sanyasi, in his ear, and we presumed that it must have been a Mantra. He also advised him to be in seclusion and do meditation, to attain salvation. We presumed that Swami would show many more miracles, to the delight of the whole world.

One famous Guru, by name Kartika Swami, came to see our Bala Sai, with his disciples. They bowed to Swami with respect, and Kartika Swami came out with his story. It seems he was born in a poor family and opted to become a sadhu. As he remained silent, without speaking, in the month of Kartika, as per the Hindu calendar, and did many types of worship during that period, he came to be called Kartika Swami, by his disciples. Slowly, he had started an Ashram and started his

livelihood by receiving something from the people who came there. He had come to see Bala Sai, after having heard so much about Him. Our Master could read anyone's mind, and, if necessary, give them some proper treatment. After three days, during one prayer session, he saw Swami in the form of a Jyothi, divine light. He stood there like a statue with folded hands and seemed to float in bliss. After some time, he fell on Swami's feet and exclaimed that the effulgence that emanated from His form was like tender Sunrays. Swami just smiled, as if He knew nothing. Before he left, Swami seemed to him some tips on running the Ashram and on the importance of internal reforms. He did leave the Old Mandir with much more wisdom.

Swami fully knew how to deal with anyone, and the people who surrendered to Him got the best out of Him, more easily. People who were proud, had to wait for a long time, so that their ego was burnt, and then receive whatever they were ordained to receive. Though He looked small, there was nothing He did not know. It was difficult for the newcomers to realize Him as the Almighty Lord and the Creator of the universe. In spite of seeing all this with their own eyes, many remained ignorant, due to the veil of Maya, illusion.

ROYAL FAMILY OF MYSORE

In those days, the royal family of the Maharaja of Mysore used to visit Puttaparthi. Mysore Raja's mother was called as Rajamatha, the royal mother. They would seek Swami's permission to come there, and tents were put up, before their arrival. We, had never seen such tents before. These had all the facilities inside, with lots of privacy, as were 'in Gosha', not to be seen by the public. They came with their own cooks, and helpers, and these were also provided with separate tents. They were very devoted, and their family deity was 'Chamundeshwari', a form of Shakthi. Everyday rituals and worship was a must. They would also do Pada Pooja (washing the feet with rosewater, etc.) to Swami, and He had granted the divine vision of Chamundeshwari to the Rajamatha, impressed by her devotion. They would stay for a few days and leave with Swami's consent.

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GROWING GARLANDS

Lots of flowers were being sent by the royal family, from Mysore during festivals. On one such occasion, there was a huge mass of flowers that looked like a small hill, and the devotees started making garlands out of it. Swami was no less than any, in this art, either. He would sit among us and make garlands of various

types. He would also draw men into this arena. Though the process continued till late in the night, still half the hill of flowers remained untouched. We wondered what Swami would do with so many loose flowers and the garlands already made by us. Satisfied with our job, He made us convert the garlands into round balls. As we started rolling the garlands, into tight balls, it continued to grow like the tail of Hanuman.

We were surprised to see that the hill of loose flowers, become smaller, and smaller and flowed into the garlands that were being made into balls. Ultimately, not a single loose flower was left. If Lord Krishna had saved Draupadhi from the shame of being stripped. of her saree, by making it grow longer and longer, what was this for our Sai Krishna? If naughty Krishna had saved Sakkubai, by grinding heaps of rice into rice flour in one night, what was this for Him, now as Bala Krishna? That was another simple miracle, to reveal His powers and to open our eyes.

RACE DRIVER

During one festival, the Rajamatha of Mysore had sent some items to Puttaparthi in a jeep. Though Chitravathi was flowing, it was not a big hurdle for a jeep to cross over. Surprisingly, half the way into the river, it got stuck and would not budge. All the efforts of the driver failed, as the wheel had gone deep into the loose sand below. The efforts of the villagers to pull the jeep, using their bullocks, also failed. As it was already dark, they lifted the items to the Old Mandir. Even the next day, when they failed to move the jeep, they informed this matter to Swami. Our tiny Lord would not move, unless asked for! He had observed all this labour, with a smile. When all our efforts fail and when we surrender to Him, He would surely swing into action.

We reached the spot with Swami and wondered how the jeep would move, since the wheels had disappeared into the sand below. The driver was not able to start the jeep, as much water had flowed under the bonnet. Swami took over the driver's seat, and the jeep not only started, but also moved like a feather through water. Was this Mantra or Magic, we wondered? But, it was His mysterious Leela! In no time, it went through the village and stopped in front of the Ashram. Swami dived out of the jeep and went in. The driver, who had failed to start the jeep, and a few others who got down, looked pale, and seemed to shiver. When we enquired as to why they were looking aghast, they said that Swami drove the jeep so fast into the narrow lanes of the village, no 'Race Driver' in the world would have

ever beaten Him. They wondered who had taught Him to drive. When did He learn driving? Like this, He taught that divinity need not be taught anything! The villagers were dazed, to see such a young driver! Well, we knew, that for the charioteer of the Mahabharath war, this was nothing! He had exhibited many such great acts and continues to do such strange things. Our births were indeed sanctified to see such divine acts of Bala Sai.

ROYAL FAMILY OF CHINCHOLI

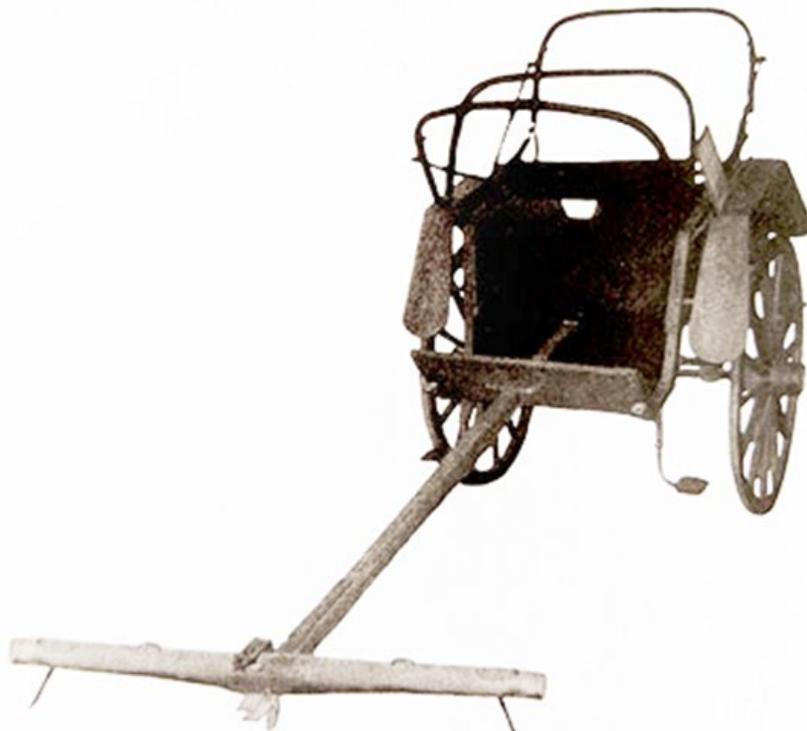
In those days, the royal family of Chincholi also visited Puttaparthi. The sacred place of Shiridi came under Chincholi province. Shiridi Sai Baba had visited their palace, many a time. Being the Avatar of Shiridi Sai, our Bala Sai had revealed many past incidents of His previous Avatar. But, many people had not believed His revelations, and many people had no knowledge of Shiridi Sai, as they were living in such remote areas. Once, when challenged for proof, Swami had shown the picture of Shiridi Sai which appeared on His left palm and His own picture, on the right palm.



1949 - Sathya Sai with members of Chincholi Royal family. Rani Lakshmi Bai is seated to Swami's left.

The Rajamatha of Chincholi was aged and was an ardent devotee of Shiridi Sai. Later she and her family firmly believed in Bala Sai as the Avatar of Shiridi Sai. Thus, when she invited Swami to Chincholi, He had kindly accepted her invitation. The horse-drawn tongas, or coaches, of their family were beautiful and very comfortable, with royal splendour. The coach in which Shiridi Sai had travelled, in those days, was very well preserved and maintained by them. They had not used that coach for their personal use. It was kept aside, exclusively for Bala Sai. Such was their devotion. As far as I know, this same tonga was used by Swami when he had visited Chincholi, accompanied by Rajamatha. There was a big secret associated with this tonga.

When Shiridi Sai had travelled in this tonga, He had kept something in it, but the same was forgotten by the royal family. After so many years, when Swami travelled in the same tonga, with Rajamatha, He had revealed this to her. She was surprised beyond any limits. How could He forget what He had done in the form of Shiridi Sai? Due to her deep devotion, He had proved to her that He was verily the form of Shiridi Sai. In spite of many such incidents, if some people still doubted what He said, it was their misfortune. The same tonga was gifted to Swami, and I was fortunate to see it.



**The Tonga which Shirdi Baba used to move around in the Chincholi kingdom.
It is currently on display at the Chaitanya Jyoti Museum at Puttaparthi.**

MISSING COMPASS

Once, a small aeroplane, with some technical snag, force-landed near Kottcheravu. The excited villagers came from all over, to have a close look at it; but the inmates of the Old Mandir did not venture, as Swami said, "*What is so great about it!*"! While He said this, He gave me a strange look. From my young age, I had a great fascination for modern inventions, and I could not resist having a look at it. Swami saw my frustration and allowed me to see the plane, secretly, before leaving on a short trip to Bangalore. As there was no means to lift the plane to Bangalore, it was still lying there. Without telling anyone, I went to see the plane, equipped with one screwdriver and cutting player. The person who was on guard had seen me at the Old Mandir, and allowed me to get into the plane, for a closer look. My eyes fell on a lovely compass that was fixed to the panel. To my luck, that guard requested me to take charge of the plane, till he returned after his lunch, and told me not to allow anyone near it. Considering this as my great luck, I neatly removed the compass and pocketed it. I slipped away from there, as soon as the guard returned, and hid the compass in the storeroom.

The owner of the plane observed the missing compass and came to know through the guard that I was only person allowed to enter the plane. Soon they came to the Old Mandir, in search of me. Swami smiled at them, instantly, and informed them that there was an engineer in the Ashram and called for me. When I arrived on the scene, He introduced them to me as police personnel, in search of a missing compass. Well, what was not known to our Great Thief? Helplessly, I stood there like a statue. Swami told them to take me into custody and teach me a nice lesson and disappeared into His room. I revealed to them what I had done and told them that I was very fascinated at the compass which was something never seen by me before. I accepted that I had always wished to possess one compass and handed it back to them. I do not know what they thought, they did not get angry with me and instead presented the compass to me. Though Swami literally told them to take me into custody, His heart was soft like butter, and He saved me from shame. This was why He was called Thief of the Hearts!

HIGH SCHOOL EXAMS

As already said, I had spent most of my time at Puttaparthi, missing school and would come to Kuppam, just before the exams. This was the case with my sister, also. Sitting in front of the books, we would wonder where and how to start. As the final High School was very crucial for us, we started praying to Swami, and

suddenly the lizard on the wall called 'Tick Tick'. It was a belief. that whenever the lizard called, the work at hand or the thoughts in our mind at that time, would come true. Whenever it called, we marked the chapter in front of us as important and studied only a few such portions. Well, only those portions appeared on the question papers, and so we could answer such questions. Sometimes, when we were confused which answer to write, we were guided by the lizard in the examination hall also. This way, Swami helped us with our exams, and this was sufficient for us to pass out of school, with respect. Not only in school exams, but Swami, had guided me, in many ways in the tests of my life, also. Even to this day, He remains like an invisible shadow, guiding our family in many ways, beyond description.

BLISSFUL DAYS

Once, Swami started talking about women. He had a high regard for women and considered them as an integral part for the development of any nation. Men may get angry easily, but not women! The way the compassionate Lord was so concerned about their welfare and regarded them in high esteem, made our hearts melt. Swami praised women for playing so many roles with selfless service. Swami asseverated that every child should respect the parents, especially the mother, for having granted this birth. Well in my case, if it were not for my parents, I would not have landed at His feet. It was due to their blessings that I had this opportunity of service to Swami, at such a young age.

In this way, days passed by, and the crowd started increasing. The lover of devotees willed to build .a bigger Mandir, to accommodate the swelling crowds. The construction of the present Prashanthi Nilayam, was started during 1948. Without anyone's knowledge as Krishna He had built Dwaraka overnight, this was nothing for Him, and during 1950, it was inaugurated. During this time, the devotees made a strong request. During the Avatar of Rama, the help of the monkey army was accepted, and during Krishna Avatar the help of the people of Gokul was accepted! So during this age of Kali, we forced Him to accept something from His devotees. Swami said, with a smile, that a lot of work shall be granted to the devotees, without wages. When we were bestowed with His enormous grace, where was the need for wages? The devotees stood as help to lift bricks, water, beams, stone boulders, etc. They were also given the opportunity to sieve sand, mix lime, cure the structures, etc. In the evening Swami would sit on a heap of sand as His throne and arrange for coffee, or fruits to be served to all of the devotees there. Those

were our happy days, because Swami moved around us, constantly giving instructions. Even the God of Time forgot Himself, and days passed by slowly. We forgot the dates, weeks, and months-looking at Bala Sai, the embodiment of time! Blissful days cannot pass on like this forever, and Swami handed me the letter written by my mother, asking me to take charge of the business and family affairs. Swami informed me to pack-up and get ready to go to Kuppam the next day. Thinking of my return journey, uncontrollable tears started flowing, and looking at my plight, the inmates also started crying with me. Swami did not seem to take note of all this, but I was sure He was also deeply moved. I started moving around, like a cat with burnt paws, and no one was in a position to console me. That night, I just held Swami and wept so much that His jubba became wet. The way He consoled me, I just cannot explain to you. My agony could have melted even a hard rock.

The next day, I started my journey, and Swami came with some devotees up to the Chitravathi. Though Swami was saying something, I could not hear anything, except my own heart beat. My legs became heavy and refused to move, but the time had come for me to leave. I wondered how would I withstand this situation? How? Just, how? Swami materialized some Vibhuthi and said, ***"Go with courage! Shortly I shall call you back. Convey My blessings to your father, mother, and children. Write a letter, as soon as you reach"***. Saying this, He let go of my hand and started to return. I remained there like a stone, but Swami did not look back. I forced my heavy feet to move and walked all the way to Bukkapatanam. I decided to dash back to Puttaparthi, but the thoughts of my mother and family responsibilities reminded me of my duties. Making my heart like a stone, I boarded the bus and reached Kuppam the next day.

Instead of being happy about my return, my ghastly looks made my family gasp. I held my mother and cried. The agony of separation was not something new for them, because they had also gone through such a phase. Trying to console me, they also shed tears. Well, Swami's love was so powerful, so great and so sweet! After three days, I received a letter from Seshagiritata, informing me that Swami had not come out of His room on the day I left Puttaparthi and did not have *His* meals, either. Reading this, our hearts broke! What affection! What affinity! We prayed that birth after birth, it should remain like this. This made us remember how the Gopikas and the Gopas yearned for Krishna, as written in the Bhagawatham. We

had the fortune to feel like them and taste divine love. I proceeded in my life, thinking of all these incidents, laughing and crying.

Bhaktha Rakshakudu

SAVIOUR OF THE DEVOTEES

KUMARAMMA'S MARRIAGE - 1948

We had reached Bala Sai when we were quite young. Our original plan to stay at Puttaparthi for a few days, had turned into weeks, and months. We had grown up like this. It was our fortune to have spent our youth, that golden age, with Bala Sai as His playmates, shouting excitedly, making a lot of noise, jumping over walls, climbing hills, doing mischief, and running behind Bala Sai, all the while. How could we ever forget those days? Those golden moments were suitable; only for that age. Could we ever play like that after we were grownups? Sing and dance like that now? O Lord! We shall ever remain thankful to You, with humility! Kumaramma had reached her marriageable age, and we could never succeed to fathom Swami's care and love towards our family on this occasion. You would understand why I say this, after you get to know how my sister's marriage was performed. Maybe, it was all due to our past merits! Many matches had come for Kumaramma, and we did nothing without consulting Swami. Swami had frequently said that He would conduct her marriage in His divine presence. Due to our meagre resources, we wondered how we would conduct her marriage. Swami selected Hem Chand of Madras, as her bridegroom, and his family was known to our father.

Our factory manager was like our family member, and he accepted to take charge of all the marriage arrangements, at Kuppam. He was a good devotee of Swami, and we had full confidence in him. We also had the great support of Sushelamma, my cousin sister, and her husband, Venkatamuni. The date for Kumaramma's marriage was fixed by Swami as 22/02/1948, and we had about one month's time, on hand for the arrangements. Though the bridegroom's family was known to us, there was no question of compromise with customs and marriage rituals. Thus, the bride's side had to be careful and make all necessary arrangements. Though our house was big, it was not suitable for a marriage to take place there, and we had no marriage halls at Kuppam, in those days. Unable to think of any suitable place, I called on Swami, "***Why are you in doubt? Try to keep calm and leave everything to Me***", He had assured. For helpless people like us, He was the only refuge. I tried my best to keep calm.

The Jamindar, the biggest land lord of Kuppam, had a huge three-storied building called as '*Thimma Jamma Palace*', and it was small kingdom, by itself. Besides agriculture, He was also a business magnet and was constantly on the move. During that time, he was at Kuppam, and my father was known to him, as he was the Village Panchayat President. They would meet on many occasions, to discuss about many issues. During one such meeting, my father spoke about Kumaramma's marriage. To our surprise, he expressed that his family would be on tour at that time, and we could use his palace, for the marriage. He was very happy that Swami was going to perform the marriage in person. We never thought that Swami would solve this issue so easily and so fast. We should never forget what He assures, 'Why fear when I am here'! This boosted our spirits and gave us much strength. All the villagers were surprised, because this would be the first time the conservative Jamindir of Kuppam had agreed to give his palace to an outsider, and this would be their first opportunity for the villagers to see the palace. This must have been due to the divine will, was the final conclusion!

Besides all other things, money played an important role. Though my father was running a factory to extract oil from sandal wood shavings, which was the first of its kind in Asia, some people had siphoned out all the profits, taking advantage of his ill health. So, we had no surplus funds, but we faced the situation boldly. It was not an easy task to decorate such a big palace. The good deeds of my father to all the communities in the village, paid rich dividends. We had so much support from the villagers, as they stood with us, like our family members. It was not without reason the wise had said that with God's grace, crops would grow in the deserts, also. Things started moving fast, and everything happened, beyond our expectation.

On 20 February, the bridegroom's party arrived from Madras, and they were impressed with all our arrangements. They occupied the third floor of the palace, and we had kept the second floor for Swami and ourselves. The marriage had to take place on the ground floor. Swami arrived one day earlier and was happy with the arrangements that were willed by Him. He took charge of all the marriage rituals, and conducted everything better than any marriage purohit. After the bridegroom tied the Mangalasutram, the auspicious yellow thread with one gold pendant, Swami materialised one more and made the bridegroom do the needful. That evening, for the reception ceremony, He took the role of one-man-orchestra and sang for nearly two hours, immersing everyone in Ananda. All this made the

marriage a very emorable event for everyone, as never before seen. Before leaving to Puttaparthi, He called each and everyone there, including the workers and servants, and blessed them, as if He knew them for years. As willed by Swami everything went off very well, without any hindrance, and only later did we come to know of the mystery behind all this. Venkatamuni and my cousin sister were fuming at me, for having spent money so lavishly and questioned me as to how the final bills would be settled? We sat down to settle the final payments for the supplies and wages to the workers. To our great surprise, they said that all their accounts were settled, and there was no need to pay anything more! When we had hardly paid them a little advance, how could they leave without any final payments? Who could have settled their bills? We were in great confusion! As we went through the accounts, we got into more confusion! We had only Rs 20,000- to start with for all the marriage expenses, and, as per our records, we had spent more than Rs 30,000/-; that would be Rs 10,000 - more than our budget. Instead of having to pay this excess amount of Rs 10,000/-, our manager said he still had Rs 5,000/- cash left with him, and there was similar amount of cash left with me, also. All this looked like some 'Midas Touch'; everything had become gold.

When we talk about Swami and His divine sport, there would be no end to it. There were so many things about this marriage that came to light, little by little! The fears of Venkatamuni and my cousin sister, for having spent heavily, were baseless. They thought that I would be forced to raise a loan to clear the bills, however, we still had money left with us. Talking about the kitchen and the number of items served, the stocks we actually had should have been finished, by day one. The number of friends and relatives were much more than expected. When we enquired about this with the cooks and the helpers, expressed that could manage with what was there, on day one. Nothing more was ordered by them, and they were equally surprised as to how there was no shortage of any item! They eventually decided that the rations must have multiplied, and there was no other way to conclude. If this was not Swami's divine play, whose work could it have be? There was no question of breaking His promise. He proved His words: that He would conduct Kumaramma's marriage, and He did it.

We all went to Puttaparthi after the marriage, to offer our gratitude and fell at His feet, as if we had found a long-lost treasure. Can we ever pay back His compassion? Can we ever pay Him anything, when He had borne all the excess expenses of the marriage? Reading our minds, Swami told us to drop our thoughts and

changed the topic. He behaved as if He had done nothing, and His plays were beyond human comprehension.



Swami with Kuppam's family

HEAVENLY FEAST

Sometimes, when Swami affirmed that He would arrange for a feast, no one would cook food in the Old Mandir, even the close devotees. How would He plan the feast? Who would prepare? Who would bring? It could never be guessed, by anyone of us. On such occasions, Swami would serve us with His own hands, and everyone was welcomed without any discrimination. I shall narrate one such strange incident. Once, Swami announced that He shall arrange for a feast and went away into the village. It was around 10 AM, and I informed everyone about the feast in the Mandir. All were happy and did not cook anything. They went about doing some other work. Till 12 noon, Swami did not return, and everyone was waiting for His feast. Suddenly, at 1 PM, He came back in style and straight-away went into His room. When we curiously peeped in, He was busy writing something, and there was no indication of any food coming. Savitamma forced me to remind Him about the feast, but I declined to intervene. Then, she herself summoned courage and asked Swami about the feast! He pretended that He was not aware of any such thing and put me into trouble. She came out like a tigress,

caught my ear and pulled me into. His room. Without even looking at us, Swami said, ***“This fellow Murthy is always like this, he creates some problem or the other!”*** When I started wondering who had created this problem, He gave a sly smile. Immediately, I understood His game, and preparing to escape from this situation, I started crying. It was already about 2 PM, and all were hungry and very angry.

Swami came out of His room and called me loudly, ***“Where is that buffalo, Murthy?”*** I slowly came out and stood before Him. ***“You are becoming a big trouble-maker, day by day! Now, it is so late to start cooking. Cannot you people teach this fellow a good lesson?”*** This way, he made me cry and made all the inmates pounce on me with anger. Such games could be played by Him alone. Though it was late, it was necessary to cook food. ***“It is alright, I shall take over. Murthy is a good fellow but sometimes brought trouble”***, Swami declared. He made us clean the hall and get ready with the vessels used for cooking. As we were arranging the vessels, Swami said that Annpoorneshwari (Goddess of excellent food, incarnation of Parwathi) had come, and there was fragrance all over the place! To start with, we could not see anything, but when we opened the lids placed on the vessels, all were full with different varieties of delicious foods-and that, too, boiling hot. The fragrance enhanced our hunger to the limits. Everyone there wondered if this was a dream or the truth? No one can ever describe the taste of the food that had materialised, and they can never imagine anything like this. Swami said, ***“My work is over, and you people can start your work.”*** That was that! We attacked the food and ate up to our necks, till we were unable to breathe. Such wonderful food could never be prepared by anyone in this world. We emptied the vessels, and the fragrance vanished into our stomachs. We had read in the Puranas that from one small Akshaya vessel, many things had come out. Now, Swami would send heaps of food, lorry loads of food, to so many places all over and fill so many stomachs. Who could be at par with Him, except Himself! He may make anyone cry to any extent, but a suitable reward was sure to follow. A little while ago, angry tigers and tigresses had pounced on me, but now, with their bellies full, they were not only tamed, but thanked me also for the divine feast.

That evening, the people seated in the Mandir were talking among themselves, even after Swami had arrived. Observing this, Swami said, ***“There is no point in such wasted talk. Even if you think of something and it does not come through, it would be alright; but unnecessary discussions are an absolute waste. Whenever***

you are in leisure, think of the divine, otherwise you will end up with evil thoughts. The time wasted shall never come back, and that auspicious time, only when utilised properly, shall bestow satisfaction. God is the embodiment of Time, so every moment should be utilised in a good manner.” Sometimes, Swami would be very stern, and it was only for our benefit.

SECOND LIFE

My father Radhakrishnayya's ill health made me take the responsibility of the house affairs and the family business at Kuppam. Thus, my trips to Puttaparthi reduced steeply. During 1953, at Puttaparthi, my father was very ill and remained lifeless for two days. I did not go to Puttaparthi, at that time, and I did not even try to go there, because it was professed by an astrologer that my presence would cause harm to my father! But our compassionate Lord brought my father back to life for the second time, in the presence of the Raja of Venkatagiri, and this incident has been described in many books. So I do not wish to repeat it here.

When I went to see my father latter, I had no words to speak, but only tears flowed down. That day, once again, Swami consoled me like a baby and gave me the much needed encouragement. The heart-broken Kuppam family of His was back to normal, by His grace. The Raja of Venkatagiri and Seshagiritata explained to me about the gift of life to my father. They had much praise for the firm belief my mother, Radhamma, had in Swami! If it were not for her, his lifeless body would have been moved out of Puttaparthi. I felt sanctified for having been born as her, as a son, We had read in the Puranas about how Sathi Savithri rescued her husband Sathyavantha from the jaws of death. Now our mother had the fortune to get back her husband-and our father! This was a definite proof that Bala Sai would not let down His believers. Like this, He had saved many people all over the world and proved that He was the Protector!

THIRD LIFE

For some years, my father's life passed off peacefully. Once, my father had a bad stomach-ache and had become weak, due to excessive vomiting. Due to much pain, he was given one sleeping pill, and he was not aware of what he was doing. Though my mother had kept a constant vigil over him, he was not to be found in his bed, in the dead of the night. Perturbed about this, she woke us up, and we started searching for him. Besides a big house at Kuppam, we had a huge compound and a granite stone factory, adjacent to it. As he was not found in the house, we went into the compound, in search of him. When we heard him call

'Amma', the way he addressed my mother, our hearts stopped beating! We did not know from where the call was coming, and it was dark all around. When my mother called out to him, loudly, he casually replied that he was in the well. That was an old-fashioned dug-well with a parapet wall around it. With the torch lights, we found him in the well, and fear took over us. He did not know swimming, and the well was at least 30 feet deep. It was not easy to approach the well that far away in the compound, with a lot of granite stones, sand, bricks, etc., all over the path. It was also not easy to fall into the well, either, without being hit by the two stone projections inside, built to hold the pump set. We wondered how he fell into the well, but that was not important at this stage. I found some long iron rods, and put one inside the well, but it just disappeared into the water. Unable to think of anything, I went into the well, uttering, 'Sai Ram'. Even I did not know swimming.

My father was well-built and heavy, so it was not easy to lift him. Though he was looking very weak, he was conscious. Like a God-sent gift, one police inspector came to our help. It seems he was on night patrol at some other place, and someone had informed him about my father's fall into the well. You may guess whose work this must have been! By this time, a lot of people had come there and it was a downpour of questions from every quarter! "How did he fall"? "Why did he fall"? "Who found him"? "How did I enter"? "How is he floating"? "What held him from sinking"? Anyhow, they tied ropes to one chair and let down slowly into the well. Though my father was heavy, just with one push, he seemed to bounce like a rubber ball and landed on the chair. As I held him in position, the people on the top pulled him up slowly.

By the time we brought him inside the house, it was about 3 AM. This news had spread into the village like wildfire, and our family doctor had also arrived in a hurry, having come to know of this. He checked my father, and said that he was all right. There was no big injury, except for one scratch on his finger. When we asked our father about this, he did not seem to remember anything, right from getting up from his bed, and falling into the well. He remembered having uttered, 'Baba Baba', unable to tolerate the pain and opened his eyes, only after hitting the water in the well. He had felt that someone was holding him from sinking, and he himself was surprised as to how he could stand in the water for so long!

Our family doctor, who was also a Sai devotee, knew the right medicine for my father, and advised us to visit Puttaparthi, for having come out of such a big calamity. The very next day, we left for Puttaparthi. As we entered Prashanthi Nilayam,

we found Swami waving to us from the balcony. When we went right up to His room, He said, ***“What can I do when your father uttered 'Baba, Baba', before falling into the well? I had to enter the well, before he fell into it, and hold Radhakrishnaya on My shoulders!”*** How grateful we should be to such a compassionate Lord? Before we could reach Puttaparthi, Swami had informed Kasturigaru, the Editor of ***Sanathana Sarathi***, all about this! He had also informed him to keep one blank page in the forth coming ***Sanathana Sarathi***, to cover this issue! Raja Reddy, a close aid of Swami, had to massage His back and shoulders for a long time, to give Him some relief. The affection He showered on our family, and the way He cared for us, could never be described by anyone. Was there any other proof required to believe that He is Bhagawan? He was verily Mrutunjaya, the One Who could shun death and extend life-span. Like this, He had given one more life to my father.

ONE WITH YOU

Swami had shifted into Prashanthi Nilayam to facilitate the expanding crowd. The old devotees were aggrieved by the distance and separation. In this regard, Swami explained, ***“All the love you people had enjoyed cannot go on forever, in the future. If you people think that I am going far away, it would be at the body level and no more. All these years, you people had served Me, and now you shall serve the devotees. What you people did to Me, all these years, shall be done to Me alone, but indirectly. I am always there I your hearts, and I shall appear, whenever I am called upon, in times of need. For this, you people should not drown in agony, because I am 'one with you' always!”*** .

SWAMI'S LETTER

I would like to place before you one other Swami's letter written to me in 01/02/1948. I am not placing this before you with the pride of having received letters from Him way back in those days. The purpose behind this is only to enlighten His great love and immense affection, equivalent to the love of a thousand mothers.

Contents of Swami's Telugu letter:

Muddu Krishna, not knowing your father's address, I write this letter to you. Read this, and send it to the family. (See, if my name is Krishna Kumar, He would call me as Murthy, but in this letter He calls me as Muddu Krishna). ***My loving devotees, Radhakrishnaya, Radhamma, Krishna Murthy, Kumari, Amba, Prema,***

Sarala, to all of you, I write this letter with My whole-hearted blessings. (As already mentioned to you, Swami would address each family member by name.) Oh folks! The letters written by you people with immense love have been received by Me. I was very happy. You may have expected My reply for these letters, but you already know how much work I have here! You people may wonder why I do not have time to write even two words? Actually, I do not have time even to go to My room, then how could I write? Oh folks! Whatever I may say in this regard, the devotees would not believe. Here, Sakamma's children, their in-laws-all together nearly fifty of them-have arrived. The Rani of Bobbli, the Princess of Mysore, the Rani of Sandur and their helpers, about fifty of them, are here. Besides all these Princesses, Ranis, etc., there are more than five to six hundred people. (See, how He would cover all aspects in detail, in His letters.) This shed is not sufficient. For Me, the day and the night seem to be the same. There is no question of sleep and food. There is no time for Me to even sit for a while. Is not all this for the sake of the devotees? Whatever small work I do, is it not for the sake of the devotees? Actually, there is no work of Myself? To look after the welfare of the devotees and to do good to them, is my work! Actually, what work I do is all for you people. If it were not for this, to move around day and night, taking all this trouble, not worrying about it, to do so much going all around-would I require anything for Myself? My main aim is to ensure your happiness, nullify the Karma; it is for this that I take all this trouble. Even then, whatever troubles I may take, if all you people become happy and derive good, I shall never feel all this as any trouble at all. (Not only our matters, but even Swami's matters He would keep us informed). But, oh folks! I am happy to learn about your marriage. I am very anxiously waiting as to when it would happen! I also eagerly await when this ocean of happiness shall engulf Me! Do not delay; make it as early as possible; it would be for the better. What for Me, whenever I will, I shall come! This is the truth. I very much like to see My loving Krishna (i.e., me, Murthy). I am unable to express this desire of Mine. If time permits, will the family send you? They may be angry with Me, for I had not sent letters in time. Actually, I dwell in your hearts. What more can there be than this? My blessings to Murali and all other children. Baba

(This letter was written by Swami when my marriage was fixed. There is nothing He does not know of! Yet, He would pretend that He was not aware of many things. Is there any need to teach Him this art! We can clearly see in this letter that

there is no limit for His love. Hope all your readers would realise this aspect. Can anyone abstain from crying while reading such letters of His?).

WOODEN PADUKAS

When I was in sorrow, thinking about this separation, Swami looked right into my eyes and said that duty was more important. He asked me if I had any specific wish. I washed His feet with my tears, for having given me so much affection and grace. All that He had given me, in all these years, can never be compensated with anything in the world. So, I begged Him to give me what was suitable for me, as willed by Him. He blessed me with the Padukas (wooden chappals, with only one grip in front), used by Him in those days. Somehow, I felt that these wooden sandals did not belong to this period, at all. From wherever they came, there should be some big history behind them. I knew that He loved to wear them and seen Him even run wearing them, as they made crackling sounds. P- 11: Photo of the Padukas.



Padukas from Swami

CHITIKALU

Besides the Padukas, Swami gave me one pair of *Chitikalu* (two wooden pieces, with bells and small circular plates, with brass grips attached to them), that was used, by Him, in the singing sessions. In spite of many other instruments in front of Him, He would love to use this pair of *Chitikalu*, while singing. As the tempo of the song increased, these would literally fly in thin air and dance to the beat. I can

never justify this description, in any number of words. I was fully satisfied with these rare gifts.

As the time passed by, it was not congenial for me to worship these, so I handed them over to my sister Kumaramma, to perform daily worship. This was all His divine will and grace. As she would sing for hours, without any time schedule, the Chitikalalu has landed at the right place.

The wise had stated that life was a difficult ocean to cross. Though man could swim and cross channels, this ocean of life would be very difficult. Day by day, the family issues became a problem and went beyond control. As the family multiplied, expenses had its toll. At such difficult times, our only consolation was Swami's letters of encouragement, which made us sustain and live. Though the great devotees of Lord Krishna, the Pandavas had to face a lot of difficulties, with His grace, they could be happy wherever they were and whatever they did. This was also true in our case.

MY MARRIAGE

Once, Swami surprised me with my marriage issue, which struck me like a rod out of the blue. When I asked Him He was joking, He asked me if I had not come of age. Without any savings, without proper income, unable to stand on my own feet, how I could ever think of marriage? I begged Swami not to dump me in such mess. I expressed that if my would-be wife does not understand our situation, what would happen to the unity of our family? Once Swami decides something, it had to happen! I spent sleepless nights, thinking of some means to escape. My parents were also keen to get me married, and Swami also joined them. Ultimately, I got engaged to a girl from Coimbatore. I fell at His divine feet for blessings, got married and reached Kuppam.



Instead of solutions to the already existing troubles, more troubles cropped up. A lot of misunderstandings erupted among brothers, and it went to such an extent that I had to leave my home at Kuppam. This was very difficult for me, as I did not have any other place to stay, and the thought that I could not succeed, in simple things in life, bugged me. Before leaving the house, I went to Puttaparthi and washed Swami's feet with warm tears. He consoled me with all His compassion, ***"I shall be with you always, never forget you and never leave you. Just do your duties properly, and your goodness shall become your protector!"*** From then on, not only service to Swami, but service to my parents also disappeared.

I was not in a position to visit Puttaparthi freely, as before, and even Swami did not write to me, like before, asking me to come there. He was fully aware of my plight and did not want me to escape from it. The showers of His love could be felt by me, in many ways. A mother shall never desert her children and even if she wished, she would not be able to succeed. Unable to decide what to do, I kept moving and landed in Podanur, a small town near Coimbatore. When I went through untold misery at the new place, I remembered the plight of the Pandavas, during their exile. If they felt the presence of Krishna with them always, I felt the presence of Sai Krishna, protecting me, always, as promised by Him. But the close affection of those days was lost. Every moment, with moist eyes, I silently complained as to why He forced me into marriage. As the old saying goes, 'What is the use of applying medicine after the hands are burnt, when you could have avoided getting burnt'! Even with all the mumbling and grumbling, I remained in safe hands, and He continued to grant protection silently. That was His greatness.

DACOIT TERROR

During 1983, the state of Tamilnadu was swept by the menace of a gang of dacoits. It was said that they were backed by a strong group from the state of Punjab. One night targeted my house at Podanur. Without knowing what was happening outside, I opened the front door and came out. Two of them held me captive, and the three others started beating me, like a dog. With the first blow on my head, I shouted 'Baba', and prayed for His help. He was the only refuge! My head was broken, and blood started oozing out. I observed that they were conversing in Hindi. With the little Hindi I knew, I begged them to spare my life. The language worked like magic, and they seemed to halt. Their leader told them to leave me alone, and all of them went away, with whatever little we had.

After some time, listening to our shouts, the police arrived and took me to the hospital. The doctor shivered, looking at my condition. With the broken head and so much bleeding, an ordinary person would have been dead, but I was alive, conscious and able to talk. He treated me and put bandages all over. The first thing I did after this was to send a telegram to Swami, regarding this incident. Not that Swami was not aware of this, but it was my habit to keep Him informed of such things. He was the One Who would pinch and also console! This must have been a punishment, due to some fault of mine. Yet, I was His devotee and He had saved me! Incidentally, my cousin sister Susheelamma was there at Puttaparthi during that time, and Swami had showed her and a few other devotees, the blood marks on His hands. They said that were horrified to see His hands soaked in blood. ***"All this was due to that buffalo Murthy. Last night some dacoits entered his house and beat him up nicely. Instead of keeping quiet he called Me, so I had to go. He had already received one vital blow, and because he could not withstand any more, I received the rest of it. He shall come here shortly"***, Swami had explained to them. On the very second day, somehow I reached Puttaparthi, with all the pain, and fell at His feet. He scolded me nicely, ***"Your pride has not yet come down! After receiving such a beating, why have you come so soon? What was the hurry?"*** Saying like this, He made everyone laugh. That naughty laugh and that mighty affection made me forget all my pains. After so many years, I had the opportunity to enter His room, and the very next day bid farewell. Like this, He had saved our family many-a-time. For those with firm belief, He shall always remain in their hearts. Please do perceive this great Lord of our Kali era, Who has saved millions of people, and safely keep Him in our hearts!

MUMBAI TRIP

For the first time, I landed in Mumbai on a business trip. As I was warned about cheaters there, I was very cautious. Though I reached at early morning 5 o'clock, I was surprised to see such a crowd, so many trains and busy people, all over the station. I was flabbergasted to see thousands of people and just stood in a corner. After some time, some plain-clothed policemen questioned me, and I explained that I was new to this place and was waiting for a friend. In the meantime, a Telugu speaking porter volunteered to help me out. Though he looked like a good person and spoke my language, I remained cautious. As the policemen started chasing a thief, he stress me out of the railway station. Somehow the policemen came back towards us and took us to the nearby police station, on some

suspicious grounds. The way some people were being beaten up there, made me shudder. The sub-inspector arrived and put many of them into lockup. When my turn came, he spoke to me in Hindi, and I could not understand anything. When I offered to speak in English, he obliged and treated me with respect. Strangely, one higher officer arrived and asked me, in English, when I had arrived. When I obediently replied, he spoke something to the sub-inspector and left. When the sub-inspector asked me for how long I knew the higher officer, I just shook my head like a dumb person. He ordered the porter to lead me to the correct place, and at last we came out. I could not understand immediately what had happened, but after some time it flashed to me who the higher officer must have been! Those with firm faith would understand His divine play. Divine could be fully believed, but not so all men. This made me realise that there could be no better friend than Swami. To get such firm belief, by itself would be a great blessing, and I was fortunate to have this. That was not due to my past merit alone, but also the blessings of my parents.

DIVINE SURGEON

In those days, Swami had removed poison that was fed to my father and revived him. Hearing about this, many of our relations started coming to Puttaparthi. One among them was my cousin sister Adilakshmi's family, from Karur. Her husband was suffering from some illness. Swami identified his illness as Hernia. It was decided that he should be operated upon immediately, but there was no facility at Puttaparthi. They decided to reach Bangalore, as soon as possible. As I was there at Puttaparthi, I explained to them about Swami's curing skills. Unable to tolerate pain, he approached Swami for help and He joked asking if was having labour pains? All these days, Radhakrishnayya had such pain, and now you are taking his place, Swami said with a smile. Materialising vibuthi and applying it, He said everything shall be alright. For the next four days, he was perfectly all right and did not have any pain.

But, after some time, he developed the same complaint and started wriggling in pain. If he was not operated upon immediately, his life would be in danger. His family members became pale with fear, and they were not in a position to take him to Bangalore, in this condition. When they were deeply engrossed in their thoughts to solve this issue, Swami asked me to bring the patient to His room and we made him lie on Swami's cot. His family members were not aware of this as they were not there. As advised by Swami I brought one bowl of hot water, a knife

and bandage cloth. As soon as Swami gave him some *Vibhuthi* in water, it worked like anaesthesia, and he lost consciousness. Within no time Swami cut a small portion under his naval and slowly removed something like the intestines and kept it in an empty bowl. He sprinkled some *Vibhuthi* on the cut, which may have worked like antibiotic, and told me to tie a bandage on that place nicely. The First Aid course I had undergone in school many years back, came in handy. Satisfied *with* what had been done, Swami left the room with a smile. After the evening prayer session, his family people came to know that the operation was already over, and they ran to Swami's room. When I told them that the operation was successful they could not believe what I said. Their eyes popped out when Swami showed them the blood-stained pieces in the bowl. After some time, he was shifted to the hall below, as if he was being shifted from the ICU to the general ward. Needless to say, for many years he was in good health.

OPERATION WITHOUT KNIFE

Once, an old devotee, by name Tirumala Rao, came from Bangalore. There was some growth on his back that had become big and painful. In Telugu, people would call it 'Raja Kurupu', a malicious growth that was deemed to be dangerous. Though many doctors had recommended an operation to remove it, he was afraid to get the operation done. Hearing to this, Swami joked with him, saying if all his efforts had failed and what He could do for him? As he was in much pain Swami took him into His room immediately. The growth had matured, and it was so red, I thought that it may burst at any time. Swami confirmed that there should be no further delay, so I got ready with hot water and other things, as usual. His room became the operation theatre, once again. Before the operation would start, *Vibuthi* and water worked like anaesthesia, as before. He made him lie facing down, and instead of a knife, Swami used His nimble fingers. As He pressed on the growth, pus and blood started flowing out in all directions. For nearly one hour, this process continued, slowly, and steadily. All the while I was wiping away the liquid with cotton dipped in hot water. Finally, Swami sprinkled some more *Vibuthi*, that may have acted like an antibiotic, and went out. Devotees were eagerly waiting outside, and the Divine Doctor announced that Tirumal Rao's operation was successful. The old devotees were amazed, and the new devotees watched in surprise and doubt. After some time, when they entered the room, they were surprised to see so much blood, pus, and pieces of flesh in the bowl. Swami advised him rest for three days, and on the third day, he boarded the bus like a normal

person and left to Bangalore with his friends and relatives who had come to see him. On reaching Bangalore, even his family doctor was surprised at his fast recovery and agreed that it was a major operation, as the cut was quite deep. What was so great about this, for the Creator! Would He require instruments or assistants? This was all child's play for Him and wonders for us! He had just played this game to open our eyes and prove to us He was the Almighty! Without such revelations, many people would not believe, as they were immersed in heaps of doubts; otherwise, with just one touch or just one glance He could have cured him fully! Having done all this, He would go around as if He had not done anything. Bala Sai's decent was for the protection of many such people, and who can ever describe His greatness!

Dear readers, to write all about our Bala Sai, the Young Saviour, one's lifetime would not be sufficient, or even many births! So, only a few such nectarine Leelas actually seen by me, I place before you.

SPINAL INJURY

A rich married couple landed at Puttaparthi, but Swami had gone to Bangalore on some visit. They were received like any other people, by the inmates of the Old Mandir. They observed that the husband looked after his wife like his very life. More than wealth, the heart plays as important role. Some years back, she had a fall, and her spine was partially damaged. From then on, in spite of all possible treatments, she could not walk without help and stand straight, without support. Her husband looked after all her needs. They had even travelled abroad for proper treatment, without success. Having heard about Bala Sai's miracle curing, they had come here. After two days, Swami returned from Bangalore. Without self-experience, it would not be easy to believe in anyone! Swami moved around as usual, and the rich couple were disappointed, as He did not give them any special attention. Little did they know about our compassionate Lord's ways! His compassion was not openly visible to all, and only when in action, many would come to know of it. Though Swami did not talk to them, they waited, patiently. When they got the opportunity, they narrated their misery, and Swami wittingly asked them as to why they had kept quiet all these days. The lover of surrender does not yield, till we surrender, and without as application, He would not take notice. The right example for the world would be Draupadhi, though Krishna was ready to save her from shame of being stripped of her sari, He swung into action only when she

sought His help. Similarly, Swami swung into action when they came out with ardent prayers.

“Dear ones! With all the medical care, nothing could be achieved. Then, why come here for help? There are no great doctors here, and there is no question of magic! Poor things, what can be done?” This comment made by Swami, disheartened them so much, they got ready to leave and asked for His permission. ***“What! Ready to leave! For anything, the right time should come. For having come so far, you may stay for a couple of days more”***, Swami replied. As usual, we reached Chitravathi that evening. After the daily routine of song and entertainment, we started our return journey, after it was quite dark. The couple took a lot of time to follow us. I hinted to Swami that they were lagging behind and got a rebuff that they did not require my compassion. We reached the Old Mandir and started our singing session. Shortly thereafter, the husband came running into the Mandir and informed us that a herd of cattle had come towards them, and his wife was trampled by a cow. The devotees rushed to help her and brought the wounded lady into the Mandir. She looked fearful, with so many injuries. Swami gave her Vibuthi and told her to rest.

After two days of complete rest, she got up, before her husband was awake, had her bath and sat in the Mandir. Though she had not moved without help all these years, that day it was a different story all-together. Her husband got totally confused, looking at her. This change was not noticed by her, but all the people there looked at her with astonishment. When she did realise this change, she fell at Swami's feet and cried like a child. But our great Master of Maya, pretended not to know anything! Then it was her husband's turn to cry, in gratitude.

Unless such games of Swami are witnessed, it would be difficult to understand His ways. When they cooled down, Swami explained, that in her previous birth she had tortured a cow for not yielding enough milk. That cow had suffered a spinal injury due to her beating, and for that sin, she had to suffer in this life, and she had been revived by the kick of a cow. All this was possible, because she had repented badly. It was necessary for all to undergo punishment for the past mistakes committed, and repenting for this, would always yield results. This was an eye-opener for all of us.

HOT VIBUTHI

A poor Muslim family, having heard of Bala Sai, landed at Puttaparthi from a far off place. Unexpectedly, they had lost a baggage holding all their money, and a small boy had guided them to reach Puttaparthi and had assured them that they would get shelter. Though they could get shelter at the Old Mandir, their minds were bugged about the lost baggage. After a few days, that same boy returned the lost baggage to them, intact, informing them that the thief was caught, and disappeared from there, before they could react. This happy development made them comfortable, and they decided to stay for a longer period, at the Old Mandir. A beautiful girl, in this group had lost her voice, due to an attack of acute smallpox. Bala Sai had His own way of treating any disease and that could never be described or understood by any medical experts. With a smile, He gave her some Vibuthi which was not objected to by the Muslim family. With just a pinch of that Vibuthi, she wriggled in pain and shouted that it was too hot! At first, they were perturbed, but noticing that she had regained her voice, they were delighted. The devotees had never observed that Vibuthi materialised by Swami could be so strong and pungent! When the family members fell at Swami's feet, for giving her the long-lost speech, Swami sprinkled some water on her, and she started talking in a normal way. How many would have seen such a rare treatment, anywhere else in this world?

Swami explained that bad deeds of the past births would take many shapes and have their toll. The people who confront divine values and insult others, maybe born as deaf or dumb, and those who had been crueller, may be born blind. Swami narrated one small story, in this regard. When Shiva and Parvathi were going around the earth, they saw some people enjoying the cool waters, in a pond. One blind boy, sitting on the bank, was enjoying their play, just by listening to their excited shouts. The universal Mother, Parvathi, felt pity for the blind boy and asked Shiva to grant him vision. The all-knowing Lord said that this could be done by her and the compassionate Mother restored him vision. That boy jumped in joy and danced in delight. After some days, when Shiva and Parvathi were crossing over the same place, they saw a crowd in distress near the same pool! The water in the pool had turned red with blood, because, the people who had jumped into the pool had got stuck on lethal arrows. The reason for all this was the boy, who had regained his sight, by the divine grace of Mother Parvathi. With cruelty, and just for the fun of it, he had planted sharp arrows at the bottom of the pool, pointing

upwards. Hurt by this, Parvathi cursed that boy to become blind again and asked Shiva to pardon her. The definite reason for the boy to have lost sight was known to Shiva, and when the divine grace of Mother Parvathi was not respected and utilised in a good manner, the worst had to follow. Because Parvathi had asked Shiva to grant sight to that blind boy out of compassion, Shiva had not declined Her request! But, the effect of Her request was realized only later. Thus, without divine grace of the Almighty, nothing could be achieved, but when granted, it should be utilized properly.

The next day, when the Muslim family asked for Swami's permission, to leave, He did not reply, and they stayed back. In the meantime, an orphan Muslim teacher arrived from Anathapur. He was a devotee and a regular visitor to the Ashram. When Swami saw him, He addressed him as 'Bridegroom', and his eyes popped out Swami introduced him to the Muslim family and told them that he was a good match for the girl. They were even more pleased at this new development, and the marriage was fixed in Swami's presence. Bala Sai could accomplish many tasks in one shot and in moments, everything would change. Restoring the girl's voice, getting her engaged, relieving her family from misery of her marriage, and rewarding the orphan teacher with a suitable bride, made everyone happy! Bala Sai's nectarine divine games were very strange and deep, also.

DIVINE DIRECTIONS

A famous sadhu of Mysore visited the Old Mandir with a group of his devotees. They could converse in Kannada and did not know any other language. As Swami usually spoke in Telugu, they thought that He did not know Kannada. That evening, when we were seated at Chitravathi, Swami looked at me and joked, ***“Why has your grandfather not come?”*** As I was dumbfounded, everyone started laughing. Swami said, ***“You buffalo, instead of sitting down, you could help him!”*** Now, I understood that He was referring to the aged sadhu, who was lagging behind. I ran up to him, to help him, and told him in broken Kannada that Swami had sent me to guide him to the place where all were seated. We were surprised to note that his own devotees were afraid to even touch him. Swami made him sit close to Him. Every move of Swami had some reason! Swami engaged us with jokes, and when all were laughing, He asked if the sadhu had donated all his clothes to his followers? Someone in the crowd translated this into Kannada. Hearing this, the sadhu, with tears flowing down, held Swami's hand and said, “I thought You were just a small boy! When You were in the womb itself, You knew, You would be the ruler of

this earth, and You made it known. But, my case is very different. Even my followers do not know about me; but because of You, they shall come to know about me today. I do not know about my birthday. Without mother and father, no one can take birth, but I do not know my parentage! Till I could identify myself, I was clothless, and a great woman covered me with one loincloth. She also fed me, for several years, and entrusted me to a recluse. After that recluse attained Samadhi, I took over his place, and now, that has become a small Ashram. One by one, many followers started joining me, and I have become a Guru. But, from now on, You have to guide me.” When he begged Swami like this, He said, **“At this small age, what do I know? Actually, you are greater than Me!”** Hearing this, the joy of his followers knew no bounds. Sakammagaru was also helping in translation into Kannada.

Swami asked me to distribute holy water to everyone, from the vessel that was there, and I obeyed. The sadhu and his devotees had never tasted such water ever before. When the sadhu asked for more, I gave him some more from the same vessel with Swami's consent. This time, it had a different taste, and he looked at Swami, with a puzzled look on his face. Swami explained that the first serving was Ganga water and the second serving was Chitravathi water. This took them by surprise! They were in more illusion and ultimately drowned in illusion. We reached back to the Mandir. The next day, when they wanted to leave, Swami held them back. As they were Shivites, followers of Lord Shiva, they were not interested in any other God, except for their cherished Lord Shiva. Was this not known to Swami, our Sai Brahma, the very embodiment of knowledge? Swami started talking like this, **“Who is Bhagvan? Where is He? How is He? Why does He descend? Answers to all these questions are important. Shiridi Sai Baba was the Avatar of Lord Shiva, and now I am His Avatar. I am one among you all, and we are all part of Lord Shiva. Then what would be the difference? I always do good to everyone, and all My deeds are for the welfare of the whole of humanity. I am the self-fulgent divine light and dwell in the infinitesimal. Bhagawan stands for auspiciousness, goodness, happiness, knowledge, and all the virtues. Then, what is the difference between you and Me? Just like you, I also feel happiness, pleasure, sorrow, affection, etc. What is all this for, and for whose sake? Only for the sake of the devotees!”** They were already happy when Swami had praised the sadhu, and now, when Swami concluded like this, they were happier to know that they were part of their Lord Shiva.

HOT AND COLD LINGAM

We reached the Chitravathi as usual, in the evening. After all of were seated, Swami asked the sadhu to remove some sand in front of him and take what was there. The sadhu assumed that this was a joke and kept quiet. But, when Swami insisted, he obeyed and removed some sand. When he tried to remove something from within, he screamed, 'Shiva Shiva', in shock and said there was something very hot in there. When we looked in, there was something glowing red hot. Swami sprinkled some water on it and told the sadhu to try again. He started shivering in disbelief, and when he tried again, his body became so cold and frozen like ice. Swami took out a Lingam from there and no one could describe its beauty. Swami handed the Lingam to the sadhu and told him to keep it on a plate. Everyone was allowed to do Abishekam to the Lingam. Later, Swami explained that what was seen first was Atma Lingam, that was why it was very hot, and the second was Kilasha Lingam, which was cold, like Mount Kailash. He said that there were many such Lingams, in holy places, especially down South.

When all this was happening, one madman was looking from a distance. When we thought that the madman must be waiting for something to eat, Swami looked at us, as if we were mad. When Swami signalled something to him, he rushed so fast towards Him, we all got worried. But, he stood before Swami with reverence, and when Swami nodded, he also did Abishekam to the Lingam, in a way that no one had done before. He held the water to be poured on the Lingam in his hand and went around Swami. Then he poured that water on Swami's feet, prostrated before the Lingam, lifted it and held it on his head. He started dancing in delight, holding the Lingam with great reverence. Such delight was not felt by us. After sometime, he kept the Lingam at Swami's feet and literally did Abishekam to it, not with holy water, but with his warm tears, and left from there. The best part of it was that he just disappeared, as he walked away from there. When the devotees asked Swami about this strange thing, He said, ***“He was a Gandharva, a heavenly being, caught in the earthen sphere, for nearly 30 years, due to some curse. On this day, by doing this Abishekam, he has been redeemed”***. Surely, this was the day of surprises for everyone there, old devotees and newcomers.

Seeing all this, the sadhu and his disciples left behind the idea of leaving Puttaparthi and were shedding tears of joy all the time. As it was quite late, by the time we reached the Old Mandir, instead of the usual long singing session, Swami Himself performed Harathi. As soon as He turned towards the people the sadhu

shouted 'Lingaraja', 'Nagalingaraja', and fainted. Swami sprinkled some holy water on him and told him to rest. We had not known that it was the auspicious day of 'Masa Shivaratri', the auspicious month of Lord Shiva, until Swami informed us. Even the group of ardent Shivites who had come there, were not aware of this auspicious month. Having come to know of this, we all started singing together:

Atma Lingam Bhajore, AthiAdbutha Lingam Bhajore.

aga Lingam Navamani Lingam, NaabhiKamala Udbhava Lingam.

Beshara Lingam Bhajore, Saieshara Lingam Bhajore.

Eeshwara Lingam Bhajore, Parthieslwara Lingam Bhajore.

The next day, the sadhu and his disciples had to leave, and you would understand how they must have felt, to leave such a divine place! Swami spoke to each one of them separately, in the hall, and bid farewell. Their joy, no one could ever describe! With sweets memories of all these incidents, with tears of joy, half-heartedly, they left Puttaparthi. In those days, we had seen many sadhus, sanyasis, pundits, heads of religious institutions, Shivites, Vishavites, great singers, etc., but *all* of them had to bow down to our universal Lord, Bala Sai, in total surrender, and, for sure be humbled. Any ego that reigned supreme was trampled by Bala Sai in such a way and with so much love, that transformation that took place was not even felt, and without any trace of disgrace to anyone. All His efforts were to put them on the right path, for the welfare of humanity.

KOTIARCHANA SWAMI

A sadhu, by name Kotiarchana Swami, and his disciples came from Andhra. They were experts in chanting the million names of the Almighty, singing His glory, performing homas, archanas, and conducting various forms of worship. Though they were more famous than Bala Sai, in Andhra, they had come to see Him, hearing about His miracles. They had expected a great welcome, but Swami was not in the Mandir at that time, and we were not in the habit of talking to the newcomers. When they asked for more facilities, Seshagiritata expressed his inability to accept their demand and somehow they spent the night in the Mandir.

The next day, when all were seated in the Mandir, one disciple announced the arrival of a great Guru, Kotiarchana Swami, and our Swami causally told them to be seated. When the anticipated red carpet welcome did not take place, the sadhu went out. Though there was lack of facilities as expected by them, they stayed back in the Mandir, to observe the ways of Bala Sai, closely. It was uncommon for any newcomers to approach the inmates or enter our area of work, but one

disciple approached Konamma for something, and she shouted at him. Our lover of discipline intervened and cajoled her for having been rude to him. When she expressed that he should not have come like this, Swami told her that she should put some sense in his head in a suitable manner, but not by shouting. Swami would not bear anything like this and would not spare even the old devotees. Swami also appraised the intruder to be satisfied with what they had and not to wander around.

In the evening session, when a disciple approached Swami and asked Him if his Guru could come, Swami explained that all were welcome, and there was no need for any specific invitation. At that juncture one villager fell at Swami's feet and pleaded Him to save a child's life in danger. Swami gave him some Vibhuthi to be fed to the child and told him to bring the child, the next day. The newcomers did not understand what was happening and what would be the outcome. Needless to say, the child became well and the newcomers witnessed the magnificence of His *Vibhuthi* for the first time.

The next day, the egoistic sadhu pestered Swami to grant him permission to perform a grand Archana in the Old Mandir, in His presence. Swami would not give His consent without any purpose, and He had His own way of dealing with such issues. He summoned Sakammagaru and Seshagiritata and asked them if they would like this Archana to be performed here. Having been drawn into the game, the experienced devotees preferred to maintain silence. Though Swami explained to the sadhu that such Archanas were not performed here, the sadhu remained adamant. He was also aware that there would be no help from the inmates. This was how Swami protected the devotees from getting involved into some unnecessary things and end up in some controversies. When Swami granted him the consent for Archana, he asked for two days time, to get ready with it.

The sadhu's disciples swung in to action; one group went to Bangalore, to get all the necessary items; one group started spreading the message to the villages, and one group started arranging everything in the Mandir. As they were famous in Andhra, many surrounding villagers started coming to participate in such an auspicious worship. Due to some disturbances and non-availability of transport, the group from Bangalore did not arrive on time. Somehow, the Archana started in a big way, and the whole place was full with people. Every action was being observed by Swami, and the onlookers were excited at the way the worship was being performed by this famous group. The sadhu was very happy with the

meticulous way of organising things. When the time came for Poorahuthi, the vital sacrifice to the Fire God, everything went hay-wire. The most important items required for offering the holy flames were not to be found. The anger of the sadhu made his disciples shed tears of blood. In spite of all the care and caution, his reputation was at stake. As this was the most important aspect

of worship, anything that went wrong would be considered as being most inauspicious and would bring down the wrath of the Gods invoked and also the on-looking crowd. But our compassionate Bala Sai pardoned all their mistakes, came to their rescue and pointed to one small basket that was lying there. When they opened it, all the items necessary for the Poornahuti ritual were in it. His disciples clearly recalled that this basket was not brought by them, and the sadhu bowed to Swami in gratitude, for having saved him from disgrace. They also gave Harathi for Swami, in absolute humility, for His compassion. Even though the sadhu had escaped from such a calamity, his ego was still reigning supreme, and this could be considered as the power of Maya.

The sadhu and his disciples felt that they had accomplished some great task and got ready to leave the next day. Would the divine director of this Kali era ever let them go so easily? He would go to any extent to bring about total transformation, of all beings! With a smile Swami praised their efforts, and He had already arranged for flowers, betel-nuts, betel leaves, shawls, etc., to honour them. Seshagiritata was given the task to distribute these items, neatly arranged on plates. When the Sadhu touched the plate offered to him, he behaved in a strange manner. Swami, with a smile, told him to wear the shawl over his shoulder. As soon as he did this, tears flowed from his eyes; with folded hands, he fell at Swami's feet, saying that He was the all-knowing Lord! No one could understand the sudden change in him. He *also* declared that such an auspicious moment shall never come again, in his life, and he wanted to stay back, for one more day. Compassionate Bala Sai expressed that this was his house, and how He could say no to such a request! When compared to all the great heads who had visited, our Bala Sai might have looked like a fly to start with but, our hearts were proud of Him and His achievements and the way He made them become humble flies. Bala Sai might have been short, like, Vamana in looks, but if Vamana had pushed Emperor Bali deep into the earth, our small Lord could hold many beings in His fist, crush their ego, and squeeze the pride out. This process was not rough, but filled with love. He would make them realise their mistakes and enable them to move on the right

path. Those, who came like a mighty elephant, became goats at His feet. Those, who had imagined Him as a fly, would respect Him, like a mighty lion. No one could ever fathom His deeds and His foresight. Just because many such people kept coming and going, we could witness the showers of His preaching in different ways. All those who witnessed this were really fortunate, and it was not so easy to get such opportunities. Such sequences have been mentioned in plenty, in the Puranas and the Holy Texts, and suitable lessons were being taught for ages. If such great realised souls had to face all this, then what were we? Swami clearly proved how harmful the ego could be!

If any of these people felt that they had come to know everything, Swami would continue to give them the right medicine. Swami' started talking about worship and rituals, ***“Though worship is sacred, if you perform this for many hours daily, considering it as a ritual, it would be of no value. It is essential to know the inner aspect of worship. Karma can be considered as doing some work, and if it is done without proper concentration, it would be of no use. Here, concentration would mean, what is done with dedication and full-heartedly. Thus, there can be no Sadhana without determination and dedication. Just being satisfied for having done something for hours, does not yield fruit. Worship is considered as offering of some flowers, fruits, water, and Prasad to God; but what belongs to Him is being offered back to Him. Such rituals were prescribed by the wise, to imbibe belief to the non-believers and as something to start with. There is nothing in the world that can be considered as ours. It is ego that makes you think otherwise. What God likes is only pure devotion, but ego covers this fact and makes you offer what is His, back to Him.”*** Could we ever forget the value of His teachings, even after 60 years has passed by?

Swami explained further, ***“No-a-days, worship is being done out of competition. Though man is fully aware of this, he starts spending lots of money for worship. Looking at the extravagance of the rich, the poor, who could not afford, resort to raising of loans to perform such unwanted worship. This is really wrong! Whatever worship is done, even in a small way, it should be done with satisfaction, but you should not put yourself to misery. Man also differentiates Deities, like Vishnu for this, Shiva for that, and Brahma for something else, but all the powers are one. How many really understand these facts?”*** Swami followed this up with a small story.

“In the old days there were some priests bound by strict discipline and spiritual knowledge. In one village there was one such priest, offering worship to Devi. He would take care of all the requirements for the worship, in person. One day, rice porridge was prepared as Prasad and was distributed after worship. Except for one person, all others had left to their homes. When he enquired, that person informed that he had no one at home, as he was an orphan, and would eat the Prasad, only after offering it to Devi. The priest smiled at his ignorance and asked him again as to who would come to share with him? The orphan insisted that Devi would surely come. The priest decided to stay back and watch him. At about midnight, he watched the orphan clean the place before him, offer the Prasad and question someone, 'Mother why are you so late, you must really be hungry'? He started using his towel, as if to fan someone in front of him, but the priest could not see anyone! After some time, when he approached the orphan, he informed that Devi had her share and what was left was her Prasad. The priest did not understand anything, but when he tasted the rice porridge, it was so delicious that it should have come from Heaven. The priest fell at the orphan's feet for his absolute belief that could draw Devi to have some of his offerings. Thus, a pure heart is always important.” Such small stories instilled determination, faith, and love. People who were proud of doing some great rituals had something more to think about.

HARIDASU

One Haridasu, a singer of the Lord's glory, came with some of his followers. His short hair, three vertical stripes on the forehead. like Lord Venkateshwara, informed us that he was a follower of Lord Vishnu. His smiling face, cloth neatly running from the waist to the feet and nice behaviour, looked good to everyone. He mingled with everyone, freely, but, we remained tight lipped and reserved, as usual. Taking Swami for granted, he talked about his skills, though in absolute humility. Commenting that too much humility was not good, Swami went into His room. When Haridasu tried to follow Swami, the devotees cautioned him to remain in the hall. Not liking this, he spoke something loudly, and Swami said, from inside His room, ***“Silence is golden!”***

The next day, Haridasu asked Swami if he could give a performance in the Mandir, Swami chided him by saying that there were enough number of stories in here, and why would people be interested in his stories? Little did he know that Swami knew everything! Actually he was expecting that Swami would reward him

profusely for his skills, but he was not given a chance to exhibit his talent! Though he had not performed anything Swami gave him a cover containing Rs108/-, through me, and the Haridasu was depressed to see this small amount. At that very moment, Swami appeared and bid him farewell. When Swami looked at me, I nodded in confirmation that the cover was handed over to him. With a compassionate smile, Swami said, ***“Poor things! You people have spent so much money to come so far, and this shall be sufficient!”*** When Swami went into the village, the depressed Haridasu thought, as to how this meagre amount would cover their expenses, and once again, he opened the cover. He could not believe his eyes when he found Rs1018/- in it. How lessons should be taught how people could be satisfied, how to make them go mad – was an art well known to Bala Sai. Though I had experienced so many things, this incident caught me by surprise, as Swami exactly knew the purpose of his visit. We can fathom a big ocean, but can we fathom the heart?

After the Haridasu and his troop left, Swami said, ***“To help others, maybe it would be an important task, but to go out of “the way to give alms, was never preached by anyone. You may give alms to anyone, in the form of wealth, or knowledge, or service. Whatever hard work you do for the others, you shall be suitably rewarded by the Lord, whether you ask for it or not, but the reward may not be visualised by you. It is only by experience that you shall get to know of this. Money stacked away for the self is not of much value, but when it is utilized for others, it removes sins. At the same time, it is very important to realise what is essential for you, in this world: wealth, knowledge or power? It is necessary to apply the principle of the Atma and keep your body fit, to maintain it. Thus, to maintain your body, some amount of wealth, knowledge and power are necessary, to a certain extent. But if all these are considered as important, how could you arrive at the balance? You should contemplate on the importance and necessities of each of these, to arrive at the right balance.”***

“There is no use of giving a beautiful garland to a monkey, as it would just pull it apart into pieces. It is also usually believed that intelligence descends with the clan, but at the same time, you cannot consider mighty Hanuman for a simple monkey. Can anyone underestimate his level of intelligence, though having descended as a monkey? During Rama's coronation, Seetha gifted a pearl necklace to Hanuman. When Hanuman looked at it this way and that way, looking at it from different angles, people thought, 'how can a monkey know its value'? To

their surprise, he went further, broke the necklace and started biting the pearls, one by one. Looking at the way he discarded the pearls, Seetha repented for having given him such a valuable necklace of pearls! Rama knew exactly what Hanuman was up to, but preferred to remain silent, so that the world should come to know about the depth of his act. When Hanuman was asked to explain about this act of his, he explained, 'Lord Rama, there is nothing You are not aware of! Every cell of my body utters Thy name, so, I was verifying if the same was the case with each of these pearls. When I did not find this I started discarding them, one by one. I do not require anything in this world, however valuable it may be that does not utter Thy name'. Compassionately, when Rama confirmed to Hanuman that He was always in his heart, he tore it open, and Rama was clearly visible. This was how Rama proved to the world that Hanuman was His great devotee. Having heard of this, if you tear open your heart, you are bound to die", Swami joked. "For a good pancake, the quality of flour used, is important. We should undertake certain tasks that are within our reach. There are too many who would go beyond their, capacity and get into unwanted trouble", Swami concluded. Though Haridasu was a good person, he had a big troop that was beyond his capacity to maintain, so he was expecting more and more funds to manage the large group.

The Old Mandir of Sai Prabhu could never be compared to any other Ashram. It was like a small bundle of love, and the various types of people living there were bound by love, like one single family, Caste, creed, religion, or education did not interfere in their unity and many had sacrificed all their worldly life to serve here. They had adapted themselves in their own way, without being forced into some particular norms and conditions. Though there were meagre amenities, they were all happy. Now. this small family has grown into a huge banyan tree, living with all amenities, never ever dreamt before. However big it may grow, the values would remain unchanged.

HINDI SADHU

Once, a sadhu arrived from North India, and he did not know any other language, except Hindi. He was friendly with everyone, and, as this was his first visit, he did not know anything about Swami. Like any other Ashram, he expected that some administrators would be running the Ashram. He was yet to realise that in this kingdom, Swami was the King and the Ministers. When he asked some devotees to introduce him to Swami, he was surprised to note there was no such

practice. When Swami gave him a smile, he seemed to cool down and become ice. The way Bala Sai looked at the sadhu, that bundle of love, that mountain of affection, hit him so badly that he broke down in tears and fell at His feet. Well, you already know how Swami would console and handle the ones who surrender. The sadhu slowly recovered from this web of Maya and started talking about himself, with the help of a translator.

Though he was born in a rich family, he had left his home with one sadhu, at a young age, with no interest in worldly things. He had not thought of his family members for the past twenty years and was in search of God. He was guided by his Guru to go down South, to find an Avatar, Who could speak English. Thus, he had started the journey to South India. Swami interrupted him and asked him in fluent English, why he would not tell his story, in English? Hearing this, the sadhu became even more numb, and the gathering was also surprised, as many of them had not heard Swami speak in English! Little did they know that He would speak in one language and by His will, convert it into many languages at the same time! Some of us had experienced this already, but never could explain.

Smt. Sakamma intervened and said that Swami had spoken just like an Englishman. Swami smiled and confirmed that He had spoken in Telugu, only. Who could understand the divine? The sadhu had visited many Ashrams down South, but was not satisfied. Disappointed for not having succeeded in his journey to find the Avatar, he had reached Bangalore for his return journey. There, he had seen someone holding Swami's picture and putting forth his problems, As soon as his eyes fell on that picture, he was attracted by Swami's form and felt that He was calling him from the picture. Fortunately, he could travel with them to Puttaparthi, instead of going back up North. As the sadhu was speaking, Swami gestured to me to bring the 'Kamandalam', the holy water pot. Immediately, it flashed to me what He meant, and I brought it from the storeroom. This was the same Kamandalam that was brought by me from the cave. He told me to give it to the sadhu, and for some silly reason not known to me, I gave it to Swami.

This was not my first mistake, and I had already done many such mistakes, for which I repent even to this day. I have to tell you about these mistakes, before I continue with this sadhu episode. Great beings, may not shower their blessings directly, but indirectly, without giving any hint whatsoever. When a person had come to the Old Mandir with a snake bite, Swami had asked me to squeeze the juice of Tulasi, Basil leaves, lying on the altar of the Deities and apply it on the

place of the snake bite. I did the first part faithfully and let Swami do the second part of applying the juice. While I was tying it in place, Swami said, ***“Even if grace is granted, some people do not know how to take it!”*** Only later in life did I come to realize how many such opportunities I had lost. Though He had not got angry at me, He had given me some clear advice to obey His command, without any hesitation or second thoughts.

I would like to mention, one such similar occasion. When someone came to the Old Mandir, stung by a scorpion, Swami had told me to do the same thing. I obeyed, crushed the Basil leaves, and applied the juice on the bitten spot; and the poison disappeared. From that day, whenever I repeated this treatment, even at my native place, Kuppam, it worked, and many such cases were treated by me. It would be necessary for me to think of Swami, while doing it. Just by obeying His command, a great skill was bestowed on me. In the same way, if I would have obeyed Him, to treat that snake bite or given that Kamandalam to the sadhu, some good things may have happened, but there was no use of repenting about it later. Now we shall get back to the sadhu episode. When I had brought the Kamandalam from the storeroom, it was empty, but when Swami handed it over to the sadhu, nectar had materialised, in it. He was told to have some of it, and he was wonder-struck, as he had tasted nothing like it before. Swami said that it was nectar and not some spring water. Well, I wondered what would have happened if I had obeyed. His command and handed it over to him myself! This was some long loss in my life, and I had lost the fortune that was given to me. When the sadhu asked for some nectar for his Guru, Swami told him that nectar would appear in the Kamandalam whenever they would pray for it, with a good heart, but what was there in the it right now was for him alone.

FRENCH LADY

Once, a lady by name Mamita, arrived from France for the first time. She, may have been about 50 years old and was attached to the Anne Bezant Institution. She had gone round the world speaking about religion. As she had come from a cold country, the hot climate of Puttaparthi made her uncomfortable, and there were no fans at the Old Mandir. On that day, when Swami finished the singing session quite early, no one could guess the reason behind it. Only when she arrived, could we understand that Swami already knew about her trip, and He had also arranged a room for her to stay. As she was very tired, He asked her to take rest right away.

Next day, when all were seated in the Mandir, Swami had arranged a chair for Mamita, as she would not be comfortable to sit cross-legged on the floor, like all others. When she sat, Swami started talking in Telugu, as usual. We thought, she could not understand anything, as per our perception, but, she kept looking at Swami, in deep concentration. We did not know what she saw in Bala Sai; what she heard, or what she understood, she started crying, shedding tears of joy. Such Ananda had no relevance to caste, creed, religion, nationality or anything. It must have been deep Atmic relation! She did not even try to understand what Swami was saying; did not insist for any translation, but Swami very well knew what was happening in her. Suddenly, Swami looked at her with such compassion and how many expressions were there in that one look of His, no one can ever guess. She burst out, saying, "This secret is known to my Jesus and me alone! Now that You know about it You must be my Jesus! You also spoke, in my language"! Everyone was surprised at her deep yearning and devotion for the Lord. People having stayed close to Swami for so long, may not have observed, His divinity, but the people who came from far off places, could realise this, with His grace, in no time. She continued to be immersed in Ananda and drifted into a world of her own.

The next day, when she was ready to leave, she was in so much tears, and Swami took a lot of time to console her. She was repeatedly saying, how she could ever go away from her Jesus and cried even more. To make people cry, laugh and console was an art known to Him only. The lover of devotees would make them come from any part of the vast world. For those who believed in Him, and for those who always thought of Him, He would remain close to them, love them like His own children, protect them at all times and dip them in Ananda. For people who witnessed these things, it was like lessons of devotion, given to them, to reach higher levels. Having declared that all Gods are one, He would appear in any form, as wished by the devotee, talk in any language suitable to them, and make them really fortunate.

ASHTAWADHANI

A famous Ashtawadhani of Andhra Pradesh arrived with his disciples. He was a great scholar with good knowledge of the Vedas, so this title of Ashtawadhani was inferred on him. Looking at the small Old Mandir, they were not impressed with its looks or the small group of devotees there. How could they know that the devotees here were well versed in all the fields, as trained by Bala Sai? As usual, we maintained our distance, and we were aware of their pride. They arranged their

own tents and settled down. Swami returned from the village and went into His room, without noticing them. This went on like this, till the next day. When one disciple tried to say something to Swami, He was asked to be seated.

A proper time and reason had to come, to teach them a lesson! As usual, I was handing over pan to Swami, but for some unknown cause, drifted into some thoughts and was distracted. Observing this, Swami said, ***“For any work, concentration is a must. Why enter into unnecessary thoughts? You may be doing work, but all the time you should think if you are doing the right thing. When such is not the case, animals would be better than man. Animals would hunt only when they are hungry, and once they were full, they would not disturb any. But man, overcome by pride, would do so many brainless things. In spite of having good brains, he would stoop low to do something useless. In spite of being here for so long, it has not yielded any results. What is learnt by you, whether big or small, it is necessary to understand the essence of it. Knowledge is a divine gift; thus, bad use of it would be harmful. Even though Bhagawan is having so much power, He would not unnecessarily talk to unwanted people. Even a large insect could be caught by tiny ants. ‘Sumathi Satakam’, written by the wise, way back in those days, could be easily understood, even by children. But, the present-day man does not seem to care for simple basic values! A man’s mind is moulded by the way he has been brought up. But, with the passage of time, things have to be viewed in a different way, and only the wise would realise this. Just because you are close to Swami, if you swell in pride, it would cause danger!”*** If Swami had plagued me like this, in front of so many people, could you understand the reason for it? He would not ridicule anyone, especially in front of so many people, or hurt their feelings unnecessarily. He would target some old devotee, with some specific purpose, or narrate some stories to highlight some issues of virtue. Like this, a stage would be set for the subject of discussion and the future course of action. Once again, that evening, the same disciple informed Swami about the arrival of Ashtawadhani and that he wished to be introduced to Swami. Swami said, ***“Who is there at par with scholars like you here? Why are you so anxious to meet some innocent people? What shall you gain by it”?*** Listening to such praise, he was dumbfounded. After the singing session, Swami, with compassion, distributed Prasada to all the devotees, equally.

They observed the impartial love of Bala Sai.

During the next session, Swami continued, ***“Life is a Sadhana that can be divided into four parts: wisdom, freedom from desire (expecting the fruits of action), firm determination and love. These are the most important and can be deployed in a variety of ways. People of various religions, great beings, great scholars, describe these in many ways, but the goal is one. Sun or Moon may be called by different names, in different languages, but they do not change. Human efforts can make man learn many arts like sculpture, poetry, science, yoga, etc., to help him to make money and become great. There is nothing wrong in declaring someone as great in some skill of his, but he should never decide that there would be no one greater than him. That was why the wise said that there was no meaning for the word 'I'. That is why a man, however learned he may be, in spite of all his experience, should remain as a humble servant of the Lord. Thayagaraja would be a perfect example for this.”***

When all this was being intently heard by the newcomers, Swami continued, ***“Is there anyone who can excel Lakshmi and Saraswathi, the embodiments of wealth and knowledge? The plight of the mighty elephant Gagendra, caught by the crocodile, explains the danger of pride. If the elephant is a king on the ground, the crocodile can be considered as the king in water. But the struggle continued on the river side, and both were on half ground and half water. Thus, their might became futile, and the fight continued for long. As Bhagawan is impartial, both were granted salvation. People who had read this small verse, should understand this aspect clearly.”*** The way Swami recited that verse, in a rare tune, I can never describe.

In spite of listening to all this, Ashtawadhani did not seem to understand and realise the depth of Bala Sai's preaching. But he was surely stunned at the way Swami had recited the verse, at such a young age. With all their experience, they would not have succeeded to match Him. This made them feel His divinity, and slowly their attitude changed, and for the first time, they revered Him, with folded hands. Swami with compassion, made Ashtawadhani sit close to Him, and when he wished to say something, Swami obliged. With tears flooding his eyes, he expressed that he has now surrendered to Bala Sai, the embodiment of knowledge, and the people here were really fortunate to stay close to Him. He accepted that he was proud with his studies of Vedas, Puranas, and Shastras, and the way he had vanquished many pundits in arguments. He accepted that all those awards won by him were without realisation of essence or its importance. After seeing the divinity

in Bala Sai, his life seemed to have changed suddenly, and he fell at Swami's feet, with humility. We could not understand what struck him when he touched Swami's feet; he just refused to let go and get up. Swami, as usual, like a mother, consoled him, patting lovingly on his head, and new chapter in life had been granted to him. Swami gifted him with silk clothes and a sealed cover. There was no way of escape from the compassionate Lord of Puttaparthi, and He would go to any extent, to bring about the right change.

KABUL FAKIR

Once, a fakir of Kabul, after travelling all over the world, came to visit the holy places in India. He had met many great people, saints, and sadhus, and at Varanasi he was informed by his Guru, about an Avatar in South India. He was under the impression that such a great Avatar would be heading a huge Ashram and must be quite old, to have gained so much wisdom. In spite of travelling all over the South, he could not find the Avatar, as described by his Guru. Divine Leelas could be quite strange! With disappointment he settled in a depleted structure and went into deep contemplation. He came across one lady from Utter Pradesh, who had settled in a nearby village, many years ago. She had been leading her life, by performing Homas to the Fire God, daily, and lived on the food offered to her by the villagers. The villagers regarded her as a doctor, as she could cure many ailments, by giving the ash from the holy fire-pit. When the fakir told her about the purpose of his visit, she had remained silent, with a strange smile on her face. This made him even more disheartened.

Due to years of Sadhana, the fakir could invoke certain powers, and wherever he went, he could get some followers to serve him. People were impressed by his powers and informed him about the miracles of Bala Sai. Without knowing that this was his destination, he reached Puttaparthi and settled near Sathyamma temple. Our mischievous Lord very well knew about his arrival, but went about giving him causal glances and smiles, on His way into the village. The fakir had a huge build, and though he looked like a demon, he had an attractive face, and people of Puttaparthi evinced much interest in him. By using his powers, he started giving them Kumkum, turmeric, flowers, fruits, holy-water, etc., but the inmates of the Old Mandir kept their distance. It was not without reason that Swami had guided him into this place, but preferred to play His divine game, in His own style! When I was passing by, the fakir asked me how to talk to Swami, but I escaped from there, with a smile. Our all knowing Lord, with a thousand eyes, would have

taken note of this! As soon as I entered His room, without scolding me, He asked me what was wrong with the fakir. When I muttered that he wanted to speak to Swami, He asked me to bring him for the evening prayer meeting. When I mentioned this to the fakir, he got excited and lifted me towards him. I felt like a doll, in his mighty hands. It would not be necessary for me to mention how interesting that evening session came to be.

Swami started singing in a high pitch, making the *Chitikalu* dance on His fingers with high speed. After some time He asked the fakir if he could sing. Without wasting time he started singing some Hindi tunes, and his voice reached the skies. He played the Patties (steel strips holding many types of bells, and small circular plates) very well, and Swami closet! His eyes, listening to his singing. After the session when the fakir kneeled before Swami, He created Vibuthi, and put some in his mouth and the remaining was rubbed on to his forehead, All this while he was saying Ananda, and now he seemed to float in absolute Bliss. His fate seemed to have transformed completely, statue, even though Swami had left! Slowly, he recovered and went back to his place, near Sathyamma temple.

The next day, he humbly touched Swami's feet, for His blessings and asked for His permission to leave. Swami looked at me and told me to bring that 'Mala', the chain of Rudraksha beads that was brought by me, from the cave. As soon as I heard His command, it flashed to me I had safely kept it in the store room and brought *it* to Him. When Swami put it on the fakir he started shouting 'Mere Badri-nath', (My Lord of Badri), with all excitement. He fell at Swami's feet, for granting *him* the divine vision of Badri Narayan of the Himalayas and announced that he did not require anything more in this *life*, shedding tears of Ananda, Swami lovingly lifted him and said, ***“In future you need not roam around the world, serve your Guru with dedication and you shall achieve salvation.”***

In all things whether big or small, you can observe the greatness of Bala Sai. Is it not true that He had incarnated, in this era of Kali, to bring about a change in everyone? All the clever people who had witnessed such incidents, in spite of having realised His principles and having heard His preaching. some questions *would always* arise in them. Such questions take birth because of Him as He makes these take shape, and He also ends up giving the answers that are interpreted in different ways by different people. We *should* never loose the opportunity to grasp and fully understand enunciates. what He demonstrates and With regard to the above incident, many questions did flash in the minds of the people who witnessed it:

Though *his* Guru told him that God had incarnated in South India, why could he not reach Puttaparthi directly? How did the Guru in North India know about the incarnation Down South?

Why did he take such a long time to find the incarnation? Why did the fakir shout loudly when the Mala was put on to him?

Why did Swami present that 'Mala' to the fakir? Why was the Mala not given to some other greater being? Why do people not understand many things, though Swami clearly shows and explains? Swami had a specific purpose to reveal such things in front of everyone, in such a special manner. All the answers to these questions should come from within, with a broad mind and full faith.

Whenever we saw such incidents, one thing was sure, the way Swami poured out His compassion swept us in tears of Ananda; looking at such a loving Lord Sai, more and more, Ananda flooded our hearts. Divine decisions are like bold carvings on the rocks, and not like something written on the sands, that could be changed or wiped away easily. It cannot retract, and it is as good as God's command. It is like a sharp arrow that pierces into the heart perfectly! The great fortune of being hit by these arrows can never be described. We should pray for such fortune to continue, life after life, to remain at His divine feet, and to have the fortune of serving Him, with body and soul.

THE ESSENCE OF GEETHA

The way Swami describes anything in such a simple manner, can never be described by anyone. Even parents may get angry and lose patience, but our Mother Sai is the great Mother of Mothers. Seeing His cool approach, affection, care, tender heart, full of love, anyone would conclude that in this era of Kali, there could be no Avatar like this! We would wonder how our golden Lord could accomplish so many tasks! He would put the devotees into service and watch them in delight. In the beginning, we were not used to service. We learnt what service was by seeing our Bala Sai in action, serving one and all. Service is not bound by any particular field of action.

Whatever we do for the others, should make them happy. Even if we guide someone to the right place, this could be considered as service, Swami had mentioned. To listen to His words and put it into action, can also be considered as service. He proves to us, in every action of His, that making others happy would bring the best satisfaction. Swami placed the very essence of Geetha, in such a simple manner.

Swami said that listening to the preaching of great people would yield wisdom. Lord Krishna may have preached Geetha to only Arjuna, but Swami preaches the same to millions of people, all over the world. If Krishna had preached Geetha on the battlefield, Swami preaches the same, in every field on this earth. If Krishna had granted Vishwaroopa Darshan to Arjuna, Swami grants His divine vision, everyday, to everyone, for which we should consider ourselves as fortunate. If readers derive some happiness by reading this book, it would be due to His grace. I can never forget this Telugu poem of Swami that highlights the importance of the Sadguru:

***Be alert to Sad guru's words, hear about His divine play,
Perceive the divine light within, with patience as the best companion in life.
Pray for Guru's command and put it into action.***

Learn to live among the masses and observe every minute action of His.

He stands as a mighty example; join His band of music.

Listen to His nectarine words, with deep concentration.

There would be no end to praise the loving form of Sai Bhagawan. He has been calling everyone with love, ***'Come! Come!'*** This is the clear proof of His immense love, but we should be fortunate to hear this call. Though the divinity dwells in everything, everywhere, it is necessary to know what lies within, through Him. He makes His presence felt in many ways: like appearance of Vibuthi, Kumkum, turmeric, holy-water, honey, nectar, etc., on the photos of Deities, in many places all over the world. There is no discrimination of caste, creed or religion, and this is divine grace for all. There is no need specifically to be His devotee for this, for only a pure heart would be sufficient. Sai Gopala would be bound by such love. Is it not true that the Gopikas ran madly after Krishna, due to His love? That selfless love could make everyone go round like a top, without any discrimination of male, female, recluse, young, or old! In the same way we also ran after Sai Krishna, at such a young age. Why did we shout, like small children? It was all due to the attraction of His love that was so powerful, making us forget about everything!

Saint Thayagaraja sang. ***"Who can praise You! Great One! The lotus-eyed Lord with form and the formless Almighty!"*** No one ever imagined that such a Lord would incarnate at Puttaparthi, in this era of Kali. When someone asked Krishna about His caste, He said 'Gokulam', the place where He was born! Going a step further, if anyone would ask to which caste Bala Sai belonged, the answer would be clear: 'The caste of love'! If Rama was considered as the sustainer of Dharma,

Krishna, as the Lord of Love, Christ, as the forgiver of sins, our Lord incarnate Bala Sai had proved all these aspects, in every action of His! It is our fortune to experience this with our own eyes, in this birth. Now, it would our duty to share these experiences and spread His message to the whole world. You may listen to whatever is being said.

Without proper understanding, decisions should not follow!

Whatever has been seen and observed as truth, Man would be the ultimate decider.

Those who digest such sayings of Swami, shall cross the ocean of life, however difficult it might be, provided he is bound by the Truth. Love has been described in two ways: the selfless love at the Atmic level that paves the way for salvation. Then, the love at the body level, in the worldly way is bound by illusion.

Pure love at the Atmic level can converge as service and sacrifice, but the worldly love is always engulfed by illusion, and no one can escape from it easily. Just to enact His divine play, Bhagawan had created us and enjoys this game of His. We are puppets in His hands, and for this, we should consider ourselves as most fortunate.

There can be no one on this earth without action. No one can exist without action. Man is bound by Karma, action, and cannot escape from it. Even if the body may remain without action for some time, mind can never rest. Similarly, there can be no one, without desires. If a worldly man asks for luxury, a recluse would pray for salvation. There is only one with no desires, and that is Bhagawan. Though He is so unattached, He does listen to the call of those who desire Him! I sincerely hope that everyone would usurp the love of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, without any delay, and be in Ananda.

MY PRAYER

I did not ask for wealth.

I did not ask for salvation.

I did not ask for anything in particular.

I did ask for the service of Thy feet.

I did ask for this relation in every birth.

I shall never let go the divine feet, washed by Brahma.

I shall never forget Thy loving affection.

Always protect, Oh embodiment of love.

Om Tat Sat. Salutations to Thy feet.

Humble servant of Thy sacred feet, Murthy (Krishna Kumar)