

HEART TO HEART
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Between You and Us

Dear Reader,

At the outset, we wish you a Happy, Holy and Prosperous New Year. Time flies, doesn't it? It seemed as if 2004 had just started and here it is over, before we realised it. The question to be asked, as Baba puts it, is: "Was the year spent in a worthy manner? Have we taken at least a few steps more in our journey towards God?" This, of course, is something that each individual has to analyse for himself. Let us use these man made calendars as milestones to evaluate our spiritual progress.

January is a special month in the calendar at Prashanti Nilayam. The New Year brings new vigour to Swami's students. They busy themselves preparing for the Annual Sports and Cultural Meet of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning to be held on the 11th of January. Last year in January, we carried an article on the Sports Meet. This time the Cover Feature is on a very crucial, but probably inconspicuous, aspect of the Sports Meet: ***The Brass Band***.

The Brass Band is an institution of Swami's students that has played an important role in all the major festivals at Prashanti Nilayam for the past 20 years. One cannot miss the Band, especially during functions like the Convocation and Christmas. It has received much praise and applause from the audience over the years. But behind the growth of the Band to this stature lies Swami's nurturing love and attention. The Cover Story brings you two articles on Baba's Brass Band.

The first one is by a student who has been in the Band from the inception in 1985, till 1991. The second article is by a student, who has been the Bandleader in the later years, that is in the late 1990s. This is to give you an idea of how Swami has personally built up the Band to this level of proficiency and continues to be its sole inspiration.

This Issue also carries another important article -on the Chennai Water Project. This is a sequel to the story we carried in Vol 2 Issue 3, on how Swami rebuilt a canal to bring water to the city of Chennai. On November 23^d of this year, water flowed through this canal and finally quenched the thirst of Chennai people. Yet another milestone achieved in the Lord's mission! Catch the story '***Sai Ganga Reaches Chennai***' in the section Feature Articles.

The New Year also brings a new look to this magazine of yours. Let us know how you like it. Once again, we wish you a Holy and Happy New Year.

Sairam,
SGH Team.

THE GAME OF LIFE

The games you play may be compared to the Mahabharata war. On one side were ranged the forces of evil—the Kauravas—and on the other the powers of good—the Pandavas. They played the game of Life with an empire as the football. Till the end of the battle, Lord Krishna was the sole chief for the righteous Pandavas.

The wicked Kauravas lost their commanders one after the other in the battle. The Pandavas, who had completely surrendered to Krishna, achieved ultimate victory. The contest could be described as one between the evil qualities of Desire, Hatred, Envy, Pride, etc. on the one side and good qualities like Truth, *Dharma*, Tranquility, Non-violence and Love on the other.

The body is the battlefield. The captain of one team is the embodiment of good qualities. The captain of the other is the embodiment of mundane desires. There can only be defeat for those who adhere to ever-changing, worldly desires. Only those who attach themselves to the unchanging, eternal Divine can hope for enduring success in life.

Gandhari, the wife of Dhritarashtra and mother of the Kauravas, and Sakuni, were children of the same mother. Gandhari was like a vessel of nectar. Sakuni was a very clever man, but full of poison. Acting on the advice of Sakuni, the Kauravas lost their kingdom and everything else.

No one should feel proud about his cleverness or intelligence, or about his ability to win laurels in studies. Good character and right thinking are more valuable than scholastic achievements or intellectual abilities. Utilize your intelligence and thoughts for achieving that bliss which comes from leading a life of righteousness and goodness. Enter on a life dedicated to ideals.

-BABA

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI BABA - 4

(Continued from the previous issue)

SAI: No man's heart is really dry. At least men have sense love. At least you have worldly love for children, family and others. It is the same love, but given to some only. You only have to take it all and give it to God.

A Visitor: If his heart were completely dry, he would not want to come to Prashanti Nilayam.

SAI: Even in coming to Prashanti Nilayam, you could love your wife and family. Love is God. Live in love. Love itself is God. He is nothing else but Love. There are different forms of love; love for family and love for money; but love for God is devotion. There is a glass of water. An Englishman will call it water, an Andhra man will call it by another name and in Tamil still another name is given. But the water is the same. We just call it by different names. The names of love for wife, children, and objects differ; and love for God is called devotion - but the love is one. The most important thing you have to develop is love. If you develop love you don't have to develop anything else.

H: But love is not something made by man. Love is not something created by man; how can I develop love?

SAI: You have love for the tape recorder. How is it that you have that love? When the tape recorder was in the shop, did you love it? But because you have got it now and it is yours, 'my' tape recorder. You did not love it in the shop; you love it now because you feel it is 'mine'. So, when you think God is 'mine', you love Him.

A Visitor: I make an effort to strengthen love, but I know it does not happen.

SAI: It is a question of practice. Intellectually you understand. Say, you have a temperature, a 105 degree fever. If you keep on chanting 100 times, 'I want penicillin injection', it won't cure you. You have to have the injection. You don't have to chant that you want penicillin; you just have to have one shot and you are all right. Instead of thinking of ten different things to do, if you do one thing correctly, that is enough. When you are thirsty, you don't want all the water from the well. One glass will suffice. You don't have to take all and try to practise everything. Take one. Here is a match box with some 60 matches; if you want to light a fire you need to strike one match, not the entire box of matches.

H: Swami, in the hospital, each patient has a principal disease; is the doctor able to know that principal disease?

SAI: If he is a good doctor, yes. If he just has a degree, no. In present day India in the political field, people have studied very little; but because of politics they get a doctors degree.

H: Then let the Supreme Doctor tell me what my chief disease is - not physical.

SAI: You do have this desire to go towards God. But you are just at the point, 'How to go to it', you are wanting to know. This, Swami cannot say before the others. He will say to you separately. Such problems are separate. Like the doctor, each patient he examines separately, not while everyone is in the room.

A Visitor: Swami, do I continue teaching with the same meditation? It is not always the same people there.

SAI: You must have the same group. Then if new people come, you must give them a separate time and do not mix them with the others.

Visitor: Yesterday there were a number of new people.

SAI: There is not much difference within the group. Even the people who come to you do not know much. If the child wants to learn ABC's, he must continue to say ABCD and so on.

A Visitor: When should I leave?

SAI: Whatever your decision is. If you want to leave on the 19th morning, Swami will see you tomorrow. But if you have other plans, it will be adjusted accordingly. Swami is not limited by space. Wherever you are, here or in Bombay or wherever, He is with you. You have to be happy. That is what Swami wants. So it should depend on your decision.

Visitor: But I am a person for whom decisions are a great difficulty.

SAI: Deciding good and bad all the time is a human problem. You can leave on the 19th morning.

A Second Visitor: Swami, I have been away from business and I want to talk with Swami, but if I stay another month, then there will be only one final talk with Swami. I want to talk with Swami now, and then stay a month.

SAI: Tomorrow is Thursday. Swami will see each of you individually, then you can make your plans when you want to leave, or stay. With you, it is like this; you have a few doubts, now you want to clear these doubts immediately so as to leave room for new doubts, (much merriment from the interview group). That is your plan.

SAI: (to a visitor): You have some plan for poor people. What are the details?

Visitor: The old *Mandir*. We should make a number of new homes for the poor people. Then those who are now staying in the old *Mandir* can move to the new houses and then the old temple can be made like new. It is Swami's first *Mandir* and

it should be saved for history. If people continue to live there, it will tumble down in no time at all. To just use it for living looks like a lack of respect from the people who are in Puttaparthi.

SAI: That can be discussed further at a later time. Now, Swami is troubled that all of you have come from so far spending so much. Your love is so touching. There is no price for that love even if measured in crores and crores. Swami wants your happiness. Swami will teach as quickly as may be.

Visitor: But now is the time because there is the World Conference in May and Swami's devotees will come here and it does not matter whose plan it is to save the old *Mandir*, it should be as though it is everyone's idea and all should work together to accomplish it.

SAI: You draw up a plan and show it to Swami. How to do it.

Visitor: And one other thing I must ask Swami because people say Swami must be asked. I want a little plot of land. On the opposite hill if I have a little place and then put up a big shed, for which I have the plan, so that there is a big place where they can come and gather and do yoga or whatever it is. But then when I am so close, that is closer than from here to the old *Mandir*, but not just outside the gate so that people will be saying this or that about me, then I am outside, and then you know....

A Visitor interrupts:so that no control.....

A second Visitor: No control....

SAI: A faithless garden, (much merriment from the interview group).

Visitor: Well, you know, nobody can come and say no cooking, and so on.

SAI: It might be all right to start, but then you will have many more problems than you wish for. All the dogs from the villagers and other problems.

Visitor: The thing is that I have said at home that I would like to have a little house outside the compound.

SAI: With all the dogs together, you are going to have a great problem. Ten puppies each.

Visitor: But, anyway, you....

SAI: We will discuss it. You may start enthusiastically, but then the problems that will be coming in the future will not be good.

(Swami now moves His hand, and a large mass of sugar candy appears in His hand and is distributed. The group exclaims how sweet and delightful it tastes.)

SAI: Complete sugar.

Visitor: Not only sugar. It is flavoured.

SAI: Everyday should be sweet like this that Swami would again make the sugar.

Visitor: Someone told me that I should not let anybody touch these earrings that you gave me, because they are sacred. But I don't like to tell people not to touch.

SAI: Nothing like that, about touching. Was everyone angry because Swami did not come this morning?

Visitor: No, no, Baba. We were singing *Bhajans* and talking about the *Gopis*.

SAI: *Gopi* means sense control, one who has controlled the senses. It is not a lady's name.

End of Interview

(To be continued...)

THE DONKEY DIED

You must take every step in *Sadhana* or in *Samsara*, only after deep deliberation and satisfying yourself that it will be for your good. Otherwise, it will be like the story of the weeping city. One day, a close female attendant of the Queen came to the Palace weeping in great sorrow, and so the Queen began to shed tears. Seeing the Queen in tears, the entire *zenana* wept and the weeping spread to the male attendants too. The King, finding the queen inconsolably sad, also wept profusely in sympathy, and the sight made the entire city weep loud and non-stop.

At last, one sensible fellow set in motion an inquiry, which passed through person after person until the Queen herself was accosted. She said that her attendant was in sore grief. When she, a washerwoman by caste, was interrogated, she confessed that it was all due to the sudden demise of her favourite donkey! When the news spread the weeping ceased and there was widespread laughter and shame. Reason out, discriminate. Do not rush to conclusions or be led away by mere hearsay.

-BABA

BABA'S BRASS BAND

The Story of how Swami Nurtured the Present Day Institute Band

by Ravi M.

It was the month of May in the year 1985...After a gap of many years, Swami stayed back during the summer months in Puttaparthi. That was the year of the 60th Birthday and He wanted us to go to the villages to do social work. Soon we were in the thick of the excitement of village work. Clad in the special brown clothes that Bhagavan had given us, we were working hard in village after village doing manual labour, laying roads and cleaning the streets.

One cannot even imagine what it was like to be Swami's student in those days. For one thing, Bhagavan would walk through the verandah several times during each session, whether in the morning *Darshan* or in the evenings. There would be long sessions, during which He would stand amongst us and inspire us with incidents about Mira, the *Gopikas* and Radha, Hanuman, Swami's younger days or examples of Faith and Love for God. Often, He would punctuate the session with a materialization and there would be exclamations of wonder! He would go into the hall for *Bhajan* but would suddenly walk out and make a full *Darshan* round again, collecting letters or walk slowly on the sands, gesticulating in the air and thrilling each devotee with His beautiful form...

So it was natural that during these days of social work, there was a tinge of sadness in us that we were missing those inspiring and delightful sessions. But Swami was even more concerned. Generally, we would return from village work to the *Mandir* when evening *Bhajans* were going on. We remember clearly how Swami would come out from the *Bhajan* hall to greet and gift each group of boys with mangoes that He threw to each boy, Himself. On many occasions He came out and went back to the hall as many as five times! What concern and love! This pure and unconditional love and concern is indelibly etched in our memory.

On one Sunday during that beautiful summer, some of us were ushered into the interview room. Swami spoke to us, and we discovered to our pleasant surprise that we had been chosen to be part of *The Institute Band*. We returned to the Hostel to be introduced to our teachers from the Military Band from Bangalore, and were told that our training would begin immediately to ensure we were ready for the Birthday celebrations. There was little time considering college, exams and the rest of the activities. Thus, we were blessed to be the first members of Swami's Brass Band! What an honour! What a privilege and a blessing!

Little did we know then, how much we were to receive from Bhagavan in terms of His personal interest, His time and the number of interviews. Not only that.

We never could have imagined how many times we would play before Bhagavan.

No one could guess that this simple beginning would grow into a mini institution where students would learn music, and enjoy Swami's proximity for years to come. Only much later we found out that the Warden had in fact shown Swami a list of several names and that Swami had individually selected each one, Himself.

At the Hostel some were given clarinets, others bugles, trumpets, saxophones, kettle-drums and cymbals. Of course, there were the tubas and the trombones. All wind (i.e. blowing) instruments.

During most of May and part of June we were at the practice sessions from 8 am to 12:30 pm, when we would go for lunch. Then we would practise again from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and again after dinner from 7:30p.m. to 9:30 p.m. It was a strenuous practice schedule! Most of us had very little background in music and could barely communicate with the instructors, who knew only Hindi. One of them was a bandmaster; another taught the trumpet, but could also play other wind instruments. They taught us marching in true military style and also the more difficult but elegant slow march. So, first we would practise marching for a while, then play the scale individually, then in a group and then all together. Marching with the instruments was the next step. It was only later that we tried and slowly learned to march, while playing.

One of the seniors from Canada had learnt to play the trumpet in school, and was a keyboard player in music programmes at the Institute. During the 3-4 practice sessions thus far, while we struggled to learn how to correctly blow into the instruments and produce the correct sound, this boy was enjoying himself playing simple *Bhajan* songs, especially *Ganesha Sharanam Sharanam Ganesha*.

A Humble Beginning

Less than 24 hours later, Swami drove over to the Hostel to see how we were doing. In fact it was only to grant us His Grace, so we could do well.

We fell into rows as we had been taught. Then we proudly marched to show Him how well we could march. He who had seen so many army men march for Him, been to many garrisons to bless Generals and their troops, showed eagerness and appreciated our tired marching and only said it needed a faster beat. Then we assembled in formation to await His next command as if there was much we knew! He spoke with the teachers and they told Him we had learned the scale. He seemed pleased and said that was good progress. So He asked each to play and show Him all that we had learned.

So each of us had our first opportunity to display our newly learnt music to Bhagavan. The bugles were also part of the band then and had the first chance. There

was utter chaos and not a note emerged. Then it was the turn of the trumpets and they were nervous but each could muster only a note or two at the most. The same fate awaited the clarinets, which squeaked with shrill notes. More than anyone else, even our learned senior who knew music and had trained on the trumpet earlier could hardly play a couple of clear notes! The secret of the learning-journey we were embarking on was humility and here we were learning our first lesson!

We all stood there feeling embarrassed. But more than that, we felt that we had let Bhagavan down. Probably, there was no need to feel that way at all. Bhagavan is the *Pranava Swarupa*, 'the source of all sound'. He loves music and is the greatest Teacher of Soul music. It was not just the band teachers who had to teach us the notes of a song. Our real teacher would be Swami Himself. Here He was, in the middle of His busy schedule, in the midst of His many tasks, *Darshans*, *Bhajans* and interviews, evaluating our level of knowledge in music before bestowing the blessing and grace to master our instruments. There was no dishonour in our performance, in the presence of our beloved Sai, our mother. Now, She would fill us with musical skill and knowledge.

The First Performance

After a few months of diligent practice, interrupted by college, exams and assignments, we were somewhat ready to perform. Our very first performance was like a mini-trial before the main 60th Birthday procession. As part of His mission, on almost every Birthday, Bhagavan had made it a point to start some large-scale Service Project with a long-term benefit for the poor and the needy. That year, He gifted and inaugurated 60 independent houses for needy families, in a colony named Subbamma Nagar, near Gokulam, at Puttaparthi. We played on this occasion but were a little nervous. Swami quickly put us at ease with a reassuring smile and by keeping time with the music. Swami is always so calm and tranquil and has a way of comforting and calming all around Him. After a tour of the houses, He came and listened to a tune we played. Just before leaving, He assured us that the whole performance would be better when we wore the ornate Band Dress.

The Birthday Procession

The big day had arrived. Bhagavan sent word to the Band leader that we were to report to the *Mandir* by 5 a.m. We were ready at 4:45 a.m., had a short prayer and then a brief practice at the Hostel. It was cold as we rushed towards the *Mandir*. As soon as we entered the *Bhajan* Hall, Swami graciously came down from His room and arranged a sumptuous breakfast and hot tea for the entire band group and other members of the procession. Imagine the teeming thousands clamouring for His *Darshan*, rushing to find a place in the Shanti Vedika while Bhagavan, on His Birthday, was spending so much time to make us comfortable! After supervising the breakfast session, He left saying that He would dress up and come back to begin the Procession. Little did we know that a big disappointment awaited us.

When we began to line up, we were instructed to bring up the rear of the long procession. This meant, the *Vedam* boys would precede Bhagavan, who would be followed by the *Bhangra* (Punjabi) dance boys and the band would be the last group! After all that practice, this was hard to accept. We would not be near Swami, so He would not hear us play during the procession at all. As this news spread through the Band, all were downcast. There were all kinds of feelings of hurt in our hearts. However, we knew that there was little that could be changed at this stage when the proceedings were about to begin. The senior boys counseled the others, but everyone was praying to Swami to alter the arrangement.

Swami came down from His room looking radiant and beautiful. We completely forgot our misery when we saw Him. All we wanted to do was gaze on His Divine Form. But Swami had heard our prayers. With one look, He took stock of the situation. No one had to tell Him anything. He beckoned to our Band leader to lead the entire group forward. We rushed forward, delighted with the promotion. By the new arrangement we were now positioned right in front of Bhagavan! We were in ecstasy and played wholeheartedly and Swami seemed pleased.

That then, was the first time the Institute band played at a major function. The procession started from the *Mandir*, with Sai Geetha in the lead. Swami rode majestically in a beautiful horse driven chariot. The pageant of colours and music, along with the dance and *Vedam*, made it a memorable and joyous event. After we arrived at the overcrowded stadium, Bhagavan mounted the stage. He immediately sent instructions that we were to be seated on chairs. We marveled at Swami's attention to detail even on a day like this, even when He was the focus of the worship of so many thousands!

The 60th Birthday thus saw the birth of the Institute Brass band. We were fortunate to be the first members of this core group. This is significant especially in the context of this year being the 80th Birthday year of Bhagavan. A humble beginning nearly 20 years ago, with Bhagavan's Grace, has resulted in the highly rated, vastly improved Institute Brass Band of today.

Some of us who have been here for a while notice a beautiful pattern in each task or project Swami undertakes. He generally forms a handpicked core group. Then He showers a lot of His time and attention on the group, encourages them, and builds them up. The probable reason is that they have made and may make in due course more sacrifices of their time and individual ambitions to achieve the group objective of pleasing Bhagavan by wholeheartedly dedicating themselves to the work allotted. Not only that, this also motivates the other students to aspire for selection to such extracurricular roles that present an opportunity to interact with Swami and experience first hand, the greatness, the depth and the **Love** of His Divine Personality.

The Later Years

Starting from the 60th birthday, it became a customary for Bhagavan to call us to play at various functions. During Christmas we played “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” with the famous Maynard Ferguson himself. Swami blessed the group with photographs at the end of the function. Of course, in those days we enjoyed the privilege of having *Padanamaskar* too!

The other major event for us was the Sports Meet or the Intercampus Meet. We had to play when students of all three campuses were practising marching and it was quite strenuous. But we were richly rewarded when before each final (on Jan 11th), Bhagavan subjected Himself to a “rehearsal” and would walk behind us while we welcomed Him in, while playing and marching to a slow march tune. Those were wonderful days and the memories are sweet. Probably, He gave us that chance and privilege because He knew that on the final day, we would not be able to enjoy the proximity of the Lord. That is how Gracious and thoughtful our Sai is.

Gradually, as we improved our abilities, some members were called upon to participate in music programmes held on festival mornings in the *Mandir*. Some of the trumpet and saxophone players were quite proficient and had other good chances in addition.

The full Band had the opportunity to perform on several occasions on the Poornachandra stage, in the College auditorium and several other places. The main Band occasions, of course, remained the Convocation, the Birthday and the Sports Meet.

The Lost Stick

During those days of strenuous practice, we would never know when Swami would suddenly drop in to see us. One such day, Swami arrived unannounced at the Hostel. We had practised a lot and some of us were relaxing in the quadrangle. One of the (kettle) drummers had gone to receive an outstation telephone call. He had just dropped his drumsticks near his drum and one stick had rolled onto the sand. As Bhagavan walked into the quadrangle, He casually picked up this stick. All of us were happy to have Him amongst us. Taking up our instruments, we lined up before Him and waited eagerly to play some tune for Him. A small drama unfolded when the drummer rushed back after hearing that Bhagavan had come. He could find only one stick. He searched frantically all over for the other stick. Only some of us had noticed Swami pick up the stick. But Swami gestured to us with a smile to keep mum.

Swami held the stick behind His back and asked us to begin playing. Band marches usually begin with a crisp drum roll, so we were waiting for the drummer and the poor chap could not begin simply because he could not find the second stick! He was embarrassed and feared that Swami and us boys would be upset with him for the

delay. In fact, he thought that Swami, who was so busy, would leave and we would lose this chance to perform before Him. Just when he was at his wit's end, Swami innocently He turned to this student, pulled the stick from behind His back, and asked, "Hey, is this what you are searching for?" We all burst out laughing! The drummer was relieved. He took the stick sanctified by the Divine touch and gave us the drum roll so we could play our tunes for the Lord.

At this point the reader should realize that while we practised for the big public performances, it was really these small occasions that we secretly cherished. We were happy playing for our Swami in such an informal setting in the Hostel where we had the Lord entirely to our selves.

The New Band Dress

We must share an incident that brings out the love that Bhagavan showers on His college students. A few years after the Band was constituted, Swami called us into the Interview room and suggested that we needed new Band uniforms because He felt these were old and because the 65th Birthday celebrations were fast approaching.

Bhagavan has this unique way of getting involved in a manner that gets everyone excited about the task ahead. We must remember that He is God. He is beyond this world and completely detached. But while He is actually so completely detached, He appears so very involved and present. That is the personal aspect of God. This is purely out of compassion towards us, His students. This also helps us understand how genuine and pure His Love is, and how totally He gives, though He has nothing to gain.

A week later, tailors were called to take measurements .The tailors began the job in the Poornachandra Auditorium. Bhagavan resided in the Prashanti Mandir in those days. But He kept inquiring about the progress of the work nearly **everyday**. Not only that, when the dresses were ready and we were called to try them on, Swami Himself came to the auditorium. We really could not believe that the Lord Himself would come to see the new uniforms. But of course, we were thrilled. As soon as we had put the uniforms on, we rushed down the stage, not to look in the mirror, but to show our dear Lord how we looked in the shining new apparel. Oh, what a stampede there was. You wouldn't believe it! We swarmed around Swami trying to attract His attention and draw a comment towards us! What proximity! What joy! And our Swami never disappointed us.

Humour flew from His lips. To one boy He said, "When you walk with this dress, it is so loose it looks like an elephant flapping its ears." Another boy's pants were really tight and short. He said he looked like a "dancer" and a "monkey". To one He said, "The sleeves are as big as the trouser legs should have been". About one whose clothes were too loose, He said, "Half of all the material has been used to make only your dress". When to another He said, "You look too good...you should

go out and give *Darshan*”, there was a roar of laughter. We were holding our stomachs and had the time of our lives.

As usual, before He left (after giving tailors suggestions on altering the clothes), we asked for *Padanamaskar*. He would not generally refuse if He was pleased with us. So we were surprised when He refused. We pleaded with Him to grant our wish. He said that He wanted to grant our wish but the only reason He was refusing was that our new clothes would get spoilt with all the dust there and that there wasn't enough time to have them washed before the Birthday. We marveled at Bhagavan's ability to think of even such a minor matter. It was true that the clothes would get dusty and stained if we took a full *Namaskar*. Now, here was a problem for the Benign Lord and His students. Neither would relent.

Finally it is God who gives in and finds a way out when there is love and yearning. Indeed He did, in His inimitable way. He pointed to the stage and asked us to let Him go up the steps. We moaned, for we thought He was about to escape without granting our prayer...But once the Lord gives His word, He keeps it and finds a way to satisfy His devotees' wishes. He went up the stage, stood at the edge of the stage and asked us all to take full *Namaskar* without bending at all! Here was the Lord of Lords, the object of adoration of the sages and the saints, concerned about our clothes getting dusty!

Maynard Ferguson

Maynard Ferguson is an old devotee of Swami who took great pains to help the Band grow. Soon after the band began, he visited Parthi and Swami asked him to teach us. He spent many useful hours with us. Apart from being a well-known Jazz trumpet player in the USA and Canada, he has played with several Indian musicians too and greatly appreciates Indian classical music and its exponents. He can probably play any wind instrument with ease and he often demonstrated this during the sessions. Bhagavan brought him to the Hostel in His car and introduced him to the boys in glowing terms as one of the world's greatest trumpet players.

He taught us the very basic skill of listening to the scale, or *shruti* as we call it, and to hit the note perfectly, clearly. With wind instruments one can really be off the note, either sharp or flat and this can be jarring or unpleasant to hear, more because you have both melody and counters being played together, for effect.

He also emphasized the importance of learning music notation. In India we are so used to “picking up” a song “by ear” that it was initially hard to play by reading especially while marching. But he explained that notation defined not just the note in the scale but also its length, the rhythm and how it was to be played in harmony. Then we would not make any mistakes as we would not be playing from memory. This is especially essential for players of harmony parts.

He also came up with a brilliant idea to get an entire set of gold plated wind instruments for the Brass Band from the USA. This worked out perfectly and in July 1987 the Instruments arrived. These were from such prestigious companies such as Leblanc Corporation, Remo Incomp., Yamaha International, Avedis Zildjian Wagner Corp etc. Swami visited the Administrative building to see and bless the Instruments. That is how we have a beautiful photo of Him, holding the drumsticks of the Jazz drums.

Mr. Ferguson told us inspiring stories of great musicians he knew and about how much they practised. He was humble, friendly, always willing to teach, but more than anything else we remember with great admiration how when He spoke of Swami, his eyes would light up. Swami was his hero, and friend and he loved to speak about how Swami jokingly called him “*Pakoda*”. Bhagavan would give him at least one interview each visit before he left and would bless him with detailed guidance in matters regarding his family, his work and his health.

We have one memorable recollection of what a great musician Mr. Ferguson was. When one day Bhagavan drove to the Institute auditorium where we were practising with Mr. Ferguson, we found we were totally unprepared to present any particular piece to Him. Bhagavan came in and asked us to play, as if He were expecting something good. Now everyone knows that Bhagavan often asks for new songs and Mr. Ferguson sensed this. So he quickly went round the group and instructed us to play a short combination of notes that was fairly simple.

Then he did *Pranams* to Swami and began to play. And how he played that day! With the combination of notes we played repeatedly as support, he improvised and came up with such amazing displays of tunes and medleys that the stage was alive and the air was electrifying. He started to weave an intricate pattern with his trumpet, now with the muzzle on, now without it. The high notes were terrific and overall, the music was just great. We felt that he likes a good challenge and that Bhagavan’s presence and our being somewhat unprepared made him take control and produce a peak performance!

As Swami’s students we have always been taught by the best in the field whether it be academics, sports, or music. It is some wonder that these eminent persons worked with us so patiently, considering that though we were keen to learn, the fact remained that most of us were novices. We also saw how much they wanted to do for Swami and we were aware that in normal circumstances we would probably never even get near them, leave alone having their personal attention and guidance.

Answered Prayers

One day we were practising in the hot sun. After a long march, some of us took shelter under a huge banyan tree behind the Eswamma High school. Probably the heat made us feel Swami’s absence all the more. Many of us sat down to have some cool refreshments and while we rested, somehow the topic of discussion was that

Swami had not been coming to see us for quite a while now and that we should write letters to Him seeking His blessings. No sooner had these ideas been floated than to our utter surprise, (because it was one o'clock in the afternoon), we saw a red Benz car slowly drive into the stadium! We shouted 'Swami' and sprang to our feet. There was a cry of joy from many. We readied ourselves and got into a semicircle so we could most effectively surround Swami. No one wanted to let this opportunity escape.

Bhagavan drove straight to us. He got down gracefully and said lovingly that He had wanted to come over and see us but had been busy with a number of projects. Thinking that another day would pass away thus, and that we would be disappointed, He had foregone the little rest He took in the afternoon to come and spend some time with us! We were nearly in tears. Indeed He had heard our call!

That afternoon He spent over forty-five minutes with us. He made us play all the tunes we knew. Slow marches, fast marches, *Bhajans* which we had recently learnt, carols and what not. Then He asked us to play individually while He listened with attention. He made us feel as if we were great musicians. Then He said that He would like to see us march. He suggested that we march on the cemented portion of the stands because it was tough to march on soft ground. So we ran over there while He drove there to watch us march. This incident especially satisfied us, as we were all witnesses to how Swami responds even to the smallest prayer.

Dear Reader, we enjoyed our stay in the Hostel, because Swami created many opportunities for us to interact with Him. The Brass Band was one such extracurricular activity that not only helped us to develop a worthwhile skill but also, and more importantly, brought us into frequent contact with Swami. The impressions, the narrated incidents and interactions written here are etched in our memories for life. They are sweeter than the sweetest honey because they are personal glimpses into Swami's Life. As students, we were so completely attached to being with Him that we deeply cherish the memories we have of those precious moments that He chose to spend with us.

Now, with the Sports and Cultural Meet in January fast approaching, it is only appropriate to reopen these safely stored precious memories for the sake of all Swami's devotees and to share that which we were so fortunate to experience.

(Ravi was a student in Swami's college from 1982 to 1991. He was in the band from its inception till 1991. Currently, he is a Senior Technical Officer in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, at Puttaparthi.)

Bandmaster Divine

The recollections of a Band Leader on how Swami shaped their Lives through the Brass Band,

by DJ.

“Music is God's gift to man, the only art of Heaven given to earth, the only art of earth we take to Heaven.”

– Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864).

Miracles reaffirm the human spirit's faith in the Divine and most importantly in itself! Yet many a times miracles come disguised in forms that are so easy to overlook...

One wonders why, tucked away in the interior of arid southern India, a college needs to have a Marching Brass Band more appropriate probably to orchestrate international sporting events!! The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning Brass Band is one of Bhagavan's unique and subtle anvils that shape the lives of youngsters.

The Miracle

It is probably after years of practice and innate talent that a musician finally decides to perform in public. Hours spent trying to master the basics, then months on preliminary music lessons and finally years exploring the nuances of the instrument of one's choice. But in Bhagavan's Band, things do not exactly happen this way!! Each year, about a third of the Band members graduate, having finished their studies at the college. Their place is taken by new members mostly from the first year undergraduate classes. A majority of these boys have never had any prior formal music training or played any musical instrument. Having joined the Band in mid August with Bhagavan's Blessings, they have time till November when the Institute Convocation on 22nd November marks their debut. As the Band marches into Sai Kulwant Hall, leading the procession consisting of the members of the Academic council, members of the Governing body and most importantly the Divine Chancellor, it is hardly obvious that they have had to juggle time between the busy Institute and the Hostel schedules to find time for practice.

Indeed each performance of the Band is a miracle of sorts!! One year, after the annual Sports Day celebrations at the Hill View Stadium, all the students had assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall attired in their colourful costumes praying that they get an opportunity to have a photograph with Bhagavan. While Bhagavan graciously

mingled with the various groups the Band broke into “Tempest”, a fiery and lively piece they had recently picked up. Halfway into the piece, things began to get a bit stormy!! With the clarinets and flutes lagging behind the trumpets by over a bar!!!

Each member of the Band became aware of this, but there was nothing that anyone could do. The situation was like that of a huge freight train gone out control, derailed and hurtling down the tracks till it is reduced to a pile of smoke and debris! Finally the music stopped ...the Band boys put their instruments down, the gloom of public humiliation hovering large over their faces. Swami was at the far end of Sai Kulwant Hall slowly proceeding towards Poornachandra to retire for the morning. The deafening silence and anxious moments of suspense ...when suddenly the entire Hall burst into a frenzy of applause!! The irony was that later many people expressed that they had never heard the Band play a peppy tune like Tempest before!

It will indeed be presumptuous to think that a group of thirty boys with no exposure to the nuances of western music can render to the satisfaction and approval of an international audience. Yet, every time they have prepared and performed with the sole goal of pleasing Bhagavan, hoping to see a smile on His face, everything else has been taken care of. If the Lord looks happy then all the multitudes gathered are happy, If He is dissatisfied then even a technically perfect performance cannot move any audience.

The Crucible

Hard work, tiring practice and emotional ups and downs ...Bhagavan is a tough task master. Behind every performance lies an untold story of uncertainty and at times, tears...

One of the flute players narrates an incident wherein at one point of time he was so frustrated with his instrument that he wanted to quit. While all new members moved onto playing music he was having trouble playing the scale. Extra practice before and after college hours yielded no fruit. So complete was his disgust that one evening in the *Mandir* when Swami called all the new Band boys he did not even feel like facing Him...

Once, Bhagavan drove in while the boys were practising. One of the trumpet players not really knowing the piece being played well pretended to be blowing to his heart's content. Before returning, Swami gestured with His fingers and made a comment to one of the elders, “*Kuch log bas eisa eisa karte hain*, no sound”!! (“Some people simply move their fingers and blow but no sound”). Though the elder did not understand the import of the statement, much later, the concerned trumpeter shared this experience, having learned his lesson!

At times, circumstances have been favorable and the Band has gone to *Mandir* very well prepared with the music. This over-confidence can prove to be dangerous giving that heady feeling that it's going to be a wonderful concert where the hearts

of the audience will be easily won over! But of course these are the times when Swami decides to bring everybody back to earth. The notes are ready on the stands, everybody is warmed up and rearing to go. While the heart waits with anticipation to begin the performance, Swami decides otherwise. The music is put away, the stands wound up and the boys return with a heavy heart.

Be it as simple as learning an instrument or being blessed with an opportunity to play in the Divine presence, Bhagavan waits till the moment when one is pushed to the brink. Then just when all hope seems to be lost and one just surrenders saying, “God this is the end I cannot take it anymore ...I give up ...”, out of nowhere comes His loving hand picking each up and making them soar much higher than can be imagined.

The Mother’s Lap

To the mother, the child is all. Faults and good qualities all rolled into one bundle of love. One wonders how time and again even when renowned musicians are present, Swami is so happy to see His students perform their little bit. What more can be sweeter for the child than to lap up all the love being showered by the doting mother? Maybe it really does not matter if there are wrong notes, false starts and train wrecks during a performance as long as the forgiving eye of the Divine Mother sees the purity of intention and sincerity of purpose.

As Sports Day approaches, most of the students spend more and more time in the ground preparing for the grand event. The Band is no exception, putting final touches to the marches. One morning, before *Bhajans*, Swami came to the ground while the Band boys were practising. He heard the marches for a few minutes and then appeared to be returning when the car stopped. The driver got down, opened the boot and took out two crates of apples. Swami sent word that He had distributed apples to all the students in the *Mandir* and knowing that the Band would be practising He had Himself got the apples for them. These are those rare moments when one is dumbfounded and all one can do is to surrender to the warmth of Divine Love and soak it all in.

On another occasion, Bhagavan graciously hosted a lunch for all students and teachers involved in the Lion Dance and Slow March procession. This marked the culmination of almost a month of practice and many hours spent in Poornachandra Auditorium where Swami Himself looked into every minute detail. As the hundred or so boys sat on the Poornachandra stage Bhagavan Himself distributed food items to each individually! Most of the students present on that day have graduated and are spread all over the globe. Yet, that afternoon remains etched in their hearts with indelible fondness and gratitude.

Yes, there are bruises and heartaches. Moments of disillusionment and utter loneliness. But the Lord is benign witness to it all. Stepping in when all around seems to be only dead ends. A fleeting glance, a gentle smile or just a “Where are

you from?” washes over like the cool spring and soothes like a gentle balm. One is ready to take on music (and life) with renewed vigour.

The Royal King

“Swami, we want to play the new *Slow March*”, the Band leader prays to Bhagavan.
“*Vaayinchandi* (play)...” He nods assent.

Within the first few measures there is a gentle frown on the Divine countenance,
“*No not this one ...too fast ...where is Slow March?*”

There is a murmur all around, a hint of confusion before finally the Band launches into “**Music from the Royal Fireworks**”.

Bhagavan is beaming as He gently sways to the strains of Handel’s centuries old composition. Yes, He is the King and nothing but the very best meets His approval.

As the fanfares burst forth, music and celebration alert all the devotees gathered who strain to catch a glimpse of the distant chariot. The *Slow March* and flag bearers herald the Lord’s arrival. He stands tall as befitting the Monarch of the Universe, calm, looking at the multitudes, showering His blessings. Everyone is transfixed by the amount of compassion and love pouring from His eyes.

The Laughter

With all the hard work and serious moments can the lighter times be far away?

During the International cricket match hosted in the Hill View Stadium, Swami spent many hours each day making sure everything was perfect. One morning, He wanted to hear the Band boys individually. When it was the turn of the flute player, he played the first few measures from “The Theme from the Star Wars Saga” which has a few bars of trilling. Seeing the player’s fingers doing the trill, the all knowing-but-mischievous Swami looked around with mock incredulity and asked, “Why is he so nervous? Look how he is shivering ...” All around people burst into laughter.

As the Band graduated from playing tunes from memory to playing sheet music, it was decided that they would use music stands during the March Past. During one of the evening practice sessions Swami sat down and all the students gathered around Him. He beckoned the Band boys who were still lined up in front of their stands to the centre of the field. After a few moments, He instructed them to play. This caught them totally off guard and one of the senior boys took courage and said, “Swami we left the notes in the ground...” Smiling He replied, “Yes I know, look they are flying all over the ground!!!” That was the last time music stands were ever used in the ground.

The Story Continues...

The Band is just an excuse. One of the countless ways that Bhagavan is touching the lives of people. With the best musicians from all over the world ready to play at the slightest indication, does He really need students to learn music?

Music is but a pretext; one of the many ways He instills among His boys the appreciation of responsibility and hones group dynamic skills. The many hurdles and apparent setbacks in the path just aid in building one's self confidence.

Yes, it is all an excuse, an excuse for Him to spend time with us ...

(DJ has been a student of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning from 1994 to 1999. He has also been the Band leader for several years. Currently, he is teaching in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science at the Institute.)

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SAI GANGA REACHES CHENNAI

After what seemed like an eternity, at last water has started flowing towards Chennai. The scriptures say that *Bhagiratha*, an ancient Indian sage, prayed for hundreds of years to bring Ganges down from Heaven to Earth. With God Incarnate, things are different. When man is in distress, He rushes to his aid without waiting for prayers. And that is precisely what has happened in the case of the Chennai Water Project.

Readers might recollect the Cover Story on the Chennai Water Project, in Vol 2 Issue 3 of *Heart to Heart*. Click on the Archives to go that Issue. However for the new readers, here is a recap:

Since Baba's Trust had already executed various water projects in Andhra Pradesh [AP] bringing drinking water to over two million people, the Chief Minister of AP was ready and eager to co-operate with Baba and do all that was necessary so that Baba's promise to Chennai became a reality. After technical examination, it was found that water flow to Chennai was minimal because the original Telugu Ganga Canal linking Kandaleru [in AP] to Poondi [in Tamil Nadu] had become dilapidated.

*So, it was decided to literally **rebuild** the canal all the way [about 150 km] and Baba's Trust took upon itself the responsibility of funding the entire project. In practice this meant a) making improvements to the reservoir in Kandaleru so that it could hold enough water to serve even during dry seasons, b) deepening and widening the canal as required, and c) lining the canal with the **latest** technology to totally eliminate seepage.*

Actually, the Project itself was completed in thirteen months flat from the time work commenced. However, for reasons we would never know, Swami as the Controller of Destiny delayed the arrival of the Rain Gods. Finally, by early November 2004, there was enough water for discharge to Chennai. And the shutters were opened on 23rd November 2004, - that was Swami's *Prasadam* to the people of Chennai on the occasion of His 79th Birthday!

After discharge, water took six days to reach the zero point [just before the Poondi reservoir]. The date was 29th November. The day was Monday and according to the Telugu Calendar, this was actually Swami's Birthday. So the discharge started on the Birthday according to one calendar, and water reached the zero point on the Birthday according to another calendar!

A few days after the release of water, a few devotees from Chennai came to express gratitude to Swami. Swami went straight to them and asked eagerly like a mother, "Did the water reach Chennai?" The devotees replied in the affirmative and thanked

Swami profusely. Swami face radiated the joy and satisfaction of a thousand mothers.

Later, when one of the H2H members asked Swami if there was going to be some function to celebrate this grand event, Swami said,

“I am happy that water has reached My thirsty children. That is enough for Me!”

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The Queen of Bhakti Music

A Tribute to Smt M S Subbulakshmi

By Dr G. Venkataraman

A few weeks ago, on the 11th of December 2004, Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi passed away at the ripe old age of 88, after ailing for some time. In this article I wish to offer a tribute to this great and remarkable lady.

M.S., who became a legend in her own time, has often been hailed as the Queen of Carnatic Music. That she indeed was, but she was much more; she was, to put it simply, a wonderfully good human being, representing the best of Indian womanhood. People talk of saints who sang their way into the Heart of God. If ever there were such persons, then M.S. would surely be in their ranks.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with this extraordinary lady and the exquisite manner in which she rendered songs breathing *Bhakti* into every syllable and note, let me offer a brief profile.

M.S. was born in the temple city of Madurai, and received her first training in music from her mother. Her training was in the strict tradition of Carnatic music. Blessed with a good voice, as a young girl M.S. sang in temples. Soon people began to take notice of her, and she made her first recording at the early age of 13 or thereabouts. We used to have that record in our house. In those days, Tamil films were almost entirely mythological with a generous quota of songs rendered in good classical style, and inevitably, most singers ended up in films. No wonder M.S. too acted in a few films. Of these, the most famous was unquestionably Meera, shot in the mid-forties and released just as the Second World War ended. If I am not mistaken, that film as indeed many films in which M.S. acted, was directed by an American named Eliis R Duncan. Meera was made first in Tamil and then remade in Hindi. Indeed, it was the Hindi version of Meera that made M.S. into an all-India figure as early as 1948.

Meera might not be a great film in technical terms or acting, but it was **THE** film to portray *Bhakti*, and it seemed as if God had created M.S. to play that part – of that there cannot be any doubt. It was M.S. all the way in that film; all the other characters were purely incidental and mere excuses for the narration of the story – by the way, there was no hero!

I should not forget to mention that songs of the film Meera became instant hits and were hummed by one and all in South India. I am told that Swami had a set of Meera records and also incidentally the only gramophone in Puttaparthi in those days. He apparently used to occasionally play these records in the Old Mandir. I cannot

entirely vouch for this story but this much I can confirm – Swami knew the Meera songs and in fact, He even quotes a particular line in some of His Discourses.

In a Discourse given on 19th July, 1996, Swami said:

Bhakti often finds expression in singing. There are four kinds of devotional songs. In the first category, the attributes of God are extolled (Gunaganamu). In the second type, the Glory of the Lord, as revealed in His miracles, is praised (Leelaganamu). One can also sing with feeling (Bhavaganamu). In the last type, the song revolves around the various names of the Lord (Namaganamu).

Music is melodious and pleasing to the ears. This is the reason that during Nagarsankeertan in the morning, even people who do not know music join in the singing. Whether one is an atheist or a theist, one forgets oneself the moment one hears melodious music. Music is not only a vehicle for the description of God's Glory and Leelas, but also elevates and produces a feeling of ecstasy. Music always enthral, and many are the Bhaktas who have attained Liberation through music. Music is the grand road to Mukthi (Liberation). Music makes the devotee forget himself and get totally immersed in Divinity.

Please note the last sentence of the quote. I shall repeat it: Music makes the devotee forget himself or herself and get totally immersed in God. That applied 100 % to MS.

Gandhi heard M.S. sing and instantly became captivated by her music. Again and again he would ask M.S. to sing some of his favourite *Bhajans*, which she did with immense pleasure. Blessing her, Gandhi advised her to dedicate her music entirely to God and not participate in concerts for money.

That marked a major turning point in her life. She quit films – anyway, the films were slowly taking a different turn, totally unsuited to her traditional upbringing. Not only that, she immediately discontinued singing in the standard concerts where she received a remuneration, and instead concentrated on concerts that were intended to raise funds for a charitable cause. Starting from the early fifties, she sang for many years to raise funds for the Kasturibai Gandhi Memorial Fund, and thanks to her talent and reputation, she raised a huge amount.

From then on, she never looked back. Barring special-occasion concerts, like when she was elected the President of the Music Academy one year, a sign of high recognition by hardboiled musicians and critics, M.S. sang almost exclusively to spread the glory of God and to raise funds for temples and charitable organisations. For example, she recorded the Venkateswara Suprabhatham, and all the royalty due to her on it go in perpetuity to the Tirupathi Devasthanam. And so on it goes.

M.S. was the uncrowned monarch of Carnatic Music. There might have been others better in certain aspects of technical virtuosity, but when it came to voice, depth of

rendering and packing the song with *Bhava* or heartfelt feeling, M.S. was unquestionably in a class by herself. This was tacitly accepted in the music world. And everyone, including the sternest of critics, agreed that where voice was concerned she was unique, like Shakespeare is in literature.

While one can go into raptures about the musical excellence of M.S., I would prefer to focus on something which only receives passing mention by others - her simplicity and nobility. She was not merely simple and absolutely humble, but she was also childlike and innocent. I can assure you this was not a put on. She led a full family life as enjoined in the *Shastras*, representing the best of Indian womanhood. To put it differently, she personified all that Swami says about Indian womanhood in *Dharma Vahini* – there cannot be any dispute about that.

There is an important spiritual point here about the life of M.S. that almost everyone seems to have missed. You see, she provided a brilliant example of *Karma Yoga* in action. Let us for a moment go back to the *Gita*. What did Krishna tell Arjuna? In essence what the Blessed Lord said was: “Arjuna, Destiny made you take birth as a warrior, and that is the duty you have to perform. Right now, when *Dharma* has to be defended, instead of fighting on the side of *Dharma*, you are trying to talk like a *Sannyasi*, in order to avoid fighting. This is wrong.” Swami says the same thing: “Like what you are doing instead of trying to do what you like.” Quite naturally and spontaneously, and I am sure also unconsciously, M.S., led the full life of a married woman, serving her husband. Did she become a nonentity as a result of that? Far from it. Quietly and without any fuss, she used her music to reach out to the masses and evoke feelings of *Bhakti* in them in various ways. Not only that, throughout her life, she taught an object lesson on humility. Few won as many honours as she did but how lightly she wore them!

Sadly, even the world of classical music has more than its share of politics, but M.S. kept scrupulously away from it. She had no friends or foes and to her, all were alike; she saw only good in all. In fact, she went out of the way to invite all great *Vidwans* to her residence and honoured them sumptuously. No wonder all the prominent musicians attended her funeral. In fact, the President, Dr. Kalam, known to be a great admirer of M.S. for years, came specially to attend the state funeral. I should here mention that M.S. received all the honours one could think of including the Magsaysay Award and the highest honour India confers, the *Bharatha Ratna*, meaning literally, Gem of India. While many such conferments have been criticised, in the case of M.S. there was absolutely no murmur, and no surprise in that. By the way, Dr. Kalam called on M.S. when she was ailing, and when he came for the funeral, he dedicated to her a special poem he had composed in her honour.

M.S. took her music seriously and never ceased to practise. She was very good at veena but this was hardly known to the public because she never played the veena in public, except perhaps once many years ago.

I must now say something about M.S. and *Bhakti* because that really was what her music was all about. Reduced to essentials, *Bhakti* is an expression of Love for God.

There are of course many ways of showing *Bhakti*, and Swami often draws our attention to the nine paths available. But He has also told us that one sweet way is to pour our Heart to Him in song. Unfortunately, not all of us are blessed with a good voice but then, those who are would do well to dedicate that voice to God and His service rather than sell it in the marketplace. In ancient times, musical saints simply ignored everything around them and immersed themselves in music. In the process, they actually created music.

The greatest example of that where Carnatic Music is concerned is of course Saint Tyagaraja, who lived roughly two hundred years ago. Swami often makes a reference to Tyagaraja and his music, and has told us many times how Tyagaraja spent almost all his time singing about and for Rama, his favourite deity. In the process, he created extraordinary and pioneering musical compositions. It is to the great credit of M.S. that she used her Divine voice to make Tyagaraja's compositions alive in the 20th century. When others sang Tyagaraja's compositions, one admired the musical genius of the composer but when M.S. sang those very same songs, one listened, wept or exulted as did Tyagaraja when he sang for Rama. M.S. alone could evoke those feelings because once she started singing she would just close her eyes and transport herself into an altogether different world, that of *Bhakti*. That was what really drew even ordinary people to her music. One does not have to know Carnatic Music but everyone can respond to the song of the Heart – and that is precisely what she offered.

It is no surprise then that many years ago, she was invited to sing at the Edinburgh Music Festival. This was a revolutionary move on the part of the Organisers of the Festival. M.S. went there and swept the audience off its feet. They did not know a thing about Carnatic Music but they could not fail to see musical excellence in her. It was the same when she sang before the UN in New York. There they were, delegates and representatives from over a hundred countries in the world. The huge hall was jam packed.

It was a very special concert, and M.S. had two special songs, one in English composed specially by Rajaji at the instance of Field Marshal K.M. Cariappa, the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. The song was set to music by Handel Manuel of Madras – very well known locally, especially on account of his connection with All India Radio Madras.

HYMN

May the Lord forgive our sins

And gather all the nations

Here under this Uniting Roof.

To give up hate and fear

**And learn to understand
Here under this Uniting Roof.**

**They took the risks of war
and dieing, wished us take
the better risks of peace
Here under this Uniting Roof.**

**The good in every man
is an atom of measureless potential.**

**Let us learn to find it
And explode it into lasting peace
Here under this Uniting Roof.**

**May the Lord forgive our sins
Inspiring us to peace on Earth
Here under this Uniting Roof.**

The other song was one specially composed by the Paramacharya of Kanchi and it was in Sanskrit.

BENEDICTION

Cultivate friendship which will conquer all hearts.

Look upon others as thyself.

Renounce war; forswear competition.

Give up aggression on others which is wrong.

Wide mother Earth, our Mother is here ready to give us all our desires.

We have the Lord, our Father, compassionate to all.

Ye peoples of the World! Restrain yourselves, Give, Be kind.

May all people be happy and prosperous.

Both songs reflected Indian ethos, the message of oneness of God, the need for a ceiling on desires, a salutation to Mother Earth who provides us with everything, and a prayer for peace and goodwill in humanity. At the end of the concert, M.S. got a standing ovation that seemed to go on and on. She was just not used to that sort of thing!

In later years, M.S. did a lot to record famous *Slokas* etc., and it is no exaggeration to say that it is these recordings that have made many people, young and old, take to the recitation of *Venkateswara Suprabhatham*, *Vishnusahasranamam*, *Hanuman Chalisa*, and so on. By the way, her recording of *Vishnusahasranamam* is the most sold record in human history. Other recordings might have temporarily made it to the top of the charts, but the *Vishnusahasranamam* being Divine, enjoys continued and undiminished popularity. Bhishma might have given that treasure but it was M.S. who distributed it to humanity.

And now a few words about M.S. and Swami. For decades, M.S. and her husband were, like many in Madras, devout followers of the Paramacharya of Kanchi. One fine day, and I have this on good authority, Paramacharya asked M.S. to go Puttaparthi. M.S. was apparently puzzled by this command and wanted to know why she should go to Puttaparthi when she already had a *Guru*. The Paramacharya simply said: “Go and you will find the reason.” Incidentally, it is interesting that Ramana Maharishi also once sent some of his disciples to Puttaparthi in this same way. So, M.S. came and she instantly knew why she had been asked to come here. Thereafter she was a regular visitor, and sang many times in the Divine presence. Swami even visited her home in Chennai on many occasions.

I remember one such. It was the occasion of the 70th Birthday of Swami, and a concert by M.S. was arranged in the Poornachandra Auditorium. I just could not get in. So I withdrew into the Sai Kulwant Hall, where, fortunately, one could hear the concert via the PA system. I still recall her song “O Ranga Sai” composed by Tyagarajan in honour of Lord Ranganatham, the deity in Sri Rangam. It is a wonderful song in the great Carnatic *Raga Kambodhi* and M.S. sang it with feeling as only she could. And in a most touching move, she at one point made Ranga Sai into Sathya Sai. And what an electrifying effect that had!

Swami invariably showed much love to M.S. One year during Ladies Day, Swami asked her to speak. She said, “Swami I do not know how to speak. I could sing, but now, even that I am not able to do. How can I speak Swami?” But Swami would not take no for an answer. He went down to where she was sitting, and helped her to walk up a few steps to the porch in Sai Kulwant Hall and took her to the podium. M.S. then said, “Swami, as I just said, I do not know how to make speeches. But if they ask me are you father, I will say you certainly are father. If they ask me are you mother, I will assert that you are indeed mother.” And in this manner she spoke just a few sentences, straight from the Heart. Later a few other ladies made speeches. That evening, when Swami was going round and giving *Darshan* in Poornachandra Hall before a cultural programme, he told a group of ladies, “Today, so many people

made speeches, but the speech of M.S. alone stood out. It came from the heart; all the others were artificial!” That says everything, does it not?

I had the good fortune to come into personal contact with M.S. on two occasions. The first was in 1968 and the second was around 1994, here in Puttaparthi. In those days, M.S. used to come here for every birthday celebration. On account of her diet restrictions, Mrs. Srinivasan, the wife of our Physics Professor at that time, used to specially cook food for M.S. and her family and have it sent over throughout their stay. And just before leaving, M.S. would invariably pay a visit to Prof. Srinivasan’s flat in the staff quarters on Samadhi Road. That year, my wife and I were invited to join for lunch. We went and the experience I had was a revelation. M.S. moved just like a simple lady of any ordinary middle-class household. She was requested to sing, and she turned to her husband asking him, what she should sing. She then asked the Professor’s daughters to sing, and as they did, she corrected them many times. In the end she said, “My dears, when you sing, the sound must come from the *Naabhi* and not from the throat.” This is an important remark and I wish to say a few words about it.

Naabhi means navel, and according to Hindu Mythology, Brahma the Creator resides in a Lotus that emerges from the navel of Lord Vishnu. Brahma is not only to be looked upon as the agency for the creation of the material objects in the physical Universe but he is also associated with sound. In practical terms, when someone says the sound must come from the *Naabhi*, it means that the diaphragm which is below the lungs must push the air out forcefully in producing the sound. Then alone would the sound be rich in tonal quality, besides being loud. To put it differently, both musicians and those who chant the *Vedas* are always urged to produce sound with full force for achieving grandeur and sonorous quality. This empirical formula has been independently discovered the world over, and it is not surprise that opera singers in the West also do precisely this, though not in obedience to a spiritual injunction.

One last M.S. story that would appeal to devotees. Warden Narasimha Murthy is busy preparing the next volume of *Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram*, meant to be released next year. In this connection, he has been talking to many old-timers, and one of them was M.S. Apparently, at the end of the conversation, Narasimha Murthy asked, “Do you have any special prayer for Bhagavan?” M.S. smiled and replied, “Where is the question of prayer? Before we even start to pray, Swami is giving all that we want and even more!” What a wonderful reply!

It is really not possible to praise M.S. enough. However, there is no need to. Her work does it all for her and it does not require people like me who do not know even the A,B,C of music to offer encomiums. What I am trying to do, perhaps most feebly, is express Radio Sai’s humble tribute. I take this opportunity to inform listeners that with the help of devotees in Chennai, formerly Madras, Radio Sai has been able to obtain nearly 50 CD’s, representing hours and hours of the music of M.S. covering many decades. Our collection includes recording of the famous UN

concert. We have sought permission to broadcast these precious recordings from time to time and the clearance is awaited. I am told it would be coming soon.

Now that this noble soul has merged into Swami, I am sure that she would be singing for Him always.

Jai Sai Ram.
G Venkataraman

The Divine Story of
SHIRDI SAI PARTHI
SAI

The Sai *Avatar* is a trilogy of three successive appearances of the Lord in three different human forms. The first appearance was as Shirdi Sai Baba. Shirdi Baba, as He is better known, was born in the nineteenth century and lived till the early part of the twentieth century. Currently, we are witness to the second Sai Incarnation which is as Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, more endearingly known as Swami. The finale would be the Lord coming as Prema Sai.

Till our Swami disclosed some of the details, very little was known about the early years of the Shirdi *Avatar*. (**PIC 01**) Whatever was known was from the recordings of devotees, most of whom came to Shirdi Baba relatively late. However, with the missing details being most kindly provided by Swami, one now has a better picture of the earlier Incarnation.

Swami has also disclosed that while the Shirdi *Avatar* was the preamble, the current *Avatar* is the pinnacle, since the Lord is now here as a *Poorna Avatar*, as an Incarnation with the FULL complement of Divine Power, Divine Attributes, and Divine Qualities.

Like in the case of the Shirdi *Avatar*, a few attempts have been made by old-time devotees of Swami to record His Life Story. However, no attempt was made, till recently, to present the two histories in proper juxtaposition. The first such attempt was the TV serial, inspired by our Swami of course, entitled, *The Divine Story of Shirdi Sai and Parthi Sai*, produced by the noted film actress of South India, Anjali Devi, who is also a great devotee of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. (**PIC 02**)

Presented here is that same story, the Divine Story of Shirdi Baba and Sri Sathya Sai Baba, in the form of a play. The script is based on the television serial.

For years, Anjali Devi wanted to produce a film on Swami but she did not get the clearance. After a long wait, she almost gave up the idea. Then suddenly one day, Bhagavan gave Anjali Devi the go-ahead for producing the film. For practical reasons, the film was produced as a TV serial. Swami did not stop with just the green signal. Most compassionately, He also gave all the story inputs [in numerous interviews], besides extending full facilities in Prashanti Nilayam for the shooting. On *Gurupoornima* Day, 1998, He personally inaugurated the filming and blessed the effort; exactly one year later, He blessed the release of serial. On that occasion, Swami materialised a gold chain for Anjali Devi, as a further sign of His Grace.

The original serial was produced in Telugu. The story as presented here is based on the English translation of the script. Mild editing has been done, and certain

explanatory comments have been added for the benefit of the reader. Illustrations taken from the TV serial are also included to enhance the appeal. It is hoped that this volume would enable the reader to get a vibrant feeling of the story of Shirdi Sai and the early years of the current Sai *Avatar*.

More details concerning the later portion of Shirdi Baba's *Avatar* may be obtained from the popular book *Sai Satcharita*. Likewise, a highly readable biography of Bhagavan Sathya Sai Baba entitled *Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram*, has been written by N.Kasturi. It is in four volumes, and brings the reader up to about 1980.

THE STORY OF SHIRDI SAI

ACT - I

Many years ago in the village of Pathri in Maharashtra, there lived an ideal couple. Ganga Bhavadyulu was the name of the man and the lady was known as Devagiri Amma. They ardently worshipped Lord Siva [also called Ishwara, Parameshwara, etc] and Goddess Parvathi for the gift of children. One day,

SCENE 1

House of Ganga Bhavadyulu

GANGA BHAVADYULU: Devagiri Amma ...Devagiri Amma!

DEVAGIRI AMMA: Yes ...coming!

G.B: The water level in the river is rising fast. Our merchandise is being rushed across, and I have to supervise. By tomorrow morning the work will be over. I have to go now. **(PIC 03)**

DEVAGIRI AMMA: Yes, please do, and come back safely.

Devagiri Amma bolts the door after her husband leaves. After some time, she hears a knock on the door. It is late at night, and Devagiri Amma is a bit worried as to who the caller is. Hesitantly, she opens the door.

SCENE 2

An old man knocks on the door

OLD MAN: O lady!

DEVAGIRI AMMA: [from inside] Who is that?

OLD MAN: I am a traveller. It has become dark. I am old and cannot see well. Besides, I am tired. Lady, if you permit, I would like to rest here outside on the porch for the night. I will leave in the morning.

Devagiri Amma opens the door and takes a look at the caller.

D. AMMA: You are an elderly person. To offer hospitality is our duty. My husband is away on work and therefore not able to receive you. Sir, in his place, I welcome you. Please take rest.

OLD MAN: Thank you lady, I shall do so.

Goes inside and brings some water.

D.AMMA: Have some water please.CanI get you something to eat? **(PIC 04)**

OLD MAN: No thank you, I don't want food now. I have only one meal a day. At night, I just have some fruits – that's all.One has to be careful and eat according to one's age!

D. AMMA: Please rest.

OLD MAN: I shall.

Devagiri Amma goes inside and fetches some fruits.

D.AMMA: Here are some bananas.I shall get you a mattress and a pillow.

OLD MAN: There is no better mattress than the floor, and no better pillow than the arm! You go inside and lock the door securely.

D.AMMA: I shall.

Devagiri Amma bolts the door and goes inside. After some time, she hears a knock on the door. Hesitantly she opens and peers outside. (PIC 05)

OLD MAN: I have walked a long distance and my legs are aching. Can you oblige this old man by pressing my legs? Please can you do this service?

D.AMMA: Kindly wait. I will be back in a minute. (PIC 06)

Devagiri Amma is embarrassed by the request of the old man. How could she press the legs of a stranger when her husband was away? At the same time, how could she neglect the guest who came asking for help? Knowing not what to do, she prays to Lord Siva intensely. (PIC 07)

At that time, she hears a knock on the door. She opens the door slightly and peeps out. She sees a young lady there. (PIC 08)

D.AMMA: Lady, who are you?

YOUNG LADY: I am on my way to the neighbouring village. It has become dark. If you kindly permit, I will rest here for the night and leave in the morning.

D.AMMA: It is night time now, and it is my duty to help. Please come inside.

Once they both are inside, Devagiri Amma tells the young lady about the arrival of the old man who is resting in the front porch, and his request. She explains her dilemma....

D.AMMA: [after completing the narration] This is what happened.

YOUNG LADY: Is that all? Certainly I shall help. It is one's duty to help others, and this body is meant just for that. Has it not been said that in times of distress, one need not distinguish between a man and a woman? Don't worry!

The young lady goes to the front porch and speaks to the old man. (PIC 09)

YOUNG LADY to OLD MAN: Sir, please come inside.

OLD MAN: Yes I will.

Once the old man and the young lady enter the house, they change their forms and appear before Devagiri Amma as Siva and Parvathi. (PIC 10)

SIVA & PARVATHI: Devagiri Amma! We are pleased with your devotion and constant worship. Your compassion, kindness, firm commitment to righteousness, and sense of duty to guests give us both much happiness. We bless you with a son and a daughter. (PIC 11)

SIVA: In addition, for the welfare of the world, I shall Myself be born to you as your third child. Later, this Son of yours will become famous and be worshipped in all the three worlds as the very Embodiment of Divinity.

D.AMMA: Ishwara! Ishwara!.....My Lord!!

Devagiri Amma is overwhelmed by the vision of the Lord and His Consort and faints. (PIC 12)

TO BE CONTINUED.....

Gita for Children Part 3

Continued from the Previous Issue...

34. ‘Let us examine your problem a bit deeper. You say that Bhishma is your grandfather. That is true but don’t forget that the relationship is purely one of the body. Next, even though Bhishma is your grandfather, he has lined up with the forces of evil. In fact, he is the Commander-in-Chief of the wicked Kauravas. Now tell Me; what should be your duty? Can you walk away claiming that Bhishma is your grandpa or should you stand up to the forces of evil and defeat them in battle?’

35. ‘The answer is clear, is it not? Arjuna, in life duty must **always** be performed, **without** any trace whatsoever of attachment or selfishness. In practical terms, you must discharge your duty without a) being bothered about the outcome, and b) expecting a reward. That really is what *Atma Dharma* is all about. Only a selfish person would worry about success, rewards, etc. That attitude is not correct. Duty for duty’s sake is the proper attitude.’

36. ‘Arjuna, there are two words that people often use – rights and responsibility. In the olden days, people always worried about responsibility and duty but these days people mostly talk about their rights. They constantly say, “I have a right to do this, I have a right to do that,” and so on. Let Me make one thing very clear. Man has a right only to duty and nothing else!’

37. Arjuna asks, ‘Krishna, you make *Atma Dharma* sound so simple. If it is as simple as all that how come in this wide world there is hardly anyone who is truly following *Atma Dharma*?’

38. Krishna answers, ‘That is because people get easily deluded by the senses and the Mind. These two in unholy collusion prevent a person from looking deep within himself and communing with the Heart.’

39. ‘Once a person gets cutoff from the Indweller, his outlook and vision become purely external. The outside world is full of what is called the pair of opposites like joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, success and failure, and so on.’

40. ‘A person immersed in the external world is easily overwhelmed by six terrible enemies that are deadlier than the deadliest serpents. These enemies are: *Kama* meaning desires, *Krodha* meaning anger, *Lobha* meaning greed, *Moha* meaning attachment, *Mada* meaning pride, and *Matsarya* meaning jealousy. To these you

may add to more namely, *Ahamkara* meaning ego and *Mamakara* meaning the “mine” feeling.’

41. ‘Arjuna, take it from Me, unless you keep out these enemies and have full control of yourself, you **cannot** fight your external enemies, as you have to do shortly.’

42. ‘Do you want to know why these internal enemies have to be vanquished first? Simple; you would agree that when you have to deal with a crisis, you have to remain cool, wouldn’t you?’

43. ‘Now what exactly does remaining cool mean? It means that you should not be disturbed or be bothered by what is happening around you. It is only when you are cool that you can think clearly. And unless you can think clearly you cannot really handle a crisis properly. Agree?’

44. ‘A good leader must not lose his cool. This characteristic does not come easily, unless one makes a conscious effort to practice detachment. One who is detached is automatically unaffected by success and failure, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. There is one word that describes such an attitude – equanimity.’

45. ‘Arjuna, equanimity is necessary not only for a so-called leader but for everyone. In a family, the father is a leader. So, equanimity is needed for the father. What about the children? They had better start copying their father and learn to get into that groove from an early age! Above all, equanimity it is that helps the seeker to rise above the world, rise above the pairs of opposites, and go towards God.’

46. ‘In life, you don’t see much of equanimity. Why? Because the internal enemies make sure that you are not strong enough to practice equanimity – that is why! Take your own case; you want to run away from duty. Why? Because of attachment. Arjuna, the feeling of “mine” and “thine” is one of the many weaknesses that one must overcome.’

47. ‘Never forget that perfection in duty is possible only when there is equanimity. And duty performed with perfection would please God very much. You too would feel very happy about having pleased God. This kind of happiness is unique, and it is called Bliss.’

48. ‘Arjuna, what people normally call pleasure, joy, happiness, etc., are all connected with experiences of the sense organs and the Mind. This joy can never be re-experienced through recall. Such happiness is always transient. By contrast, the happiness that you get by pleasing God is an experience of the Heart; it goes beyond the senses and the Mind. That is why the joy of this experience can be recalled and relived any number of times. Every time you recall, you will experience Bliss in all its freshness.’

49. 'Equanimity does not come easily, and requires a lot of practice in regulating the senses and the Mind. It may not be easy but with determination, it can be achieved. Patience and perseverance alone lead to Purity!'

50. 'Arjuna, you must be brave and courageous not only in the worldly sense but also in a spiritual sense. A spiritually brave man is one who is ready to give up even his life for being true to his Conscience. He is not afraid of anything or anybody, including death. Internal enemies that I mentioned earlier shudder to come near such a man. What I mean is that you must be strong and courageous inside before starting to fight battles outside.'

51. 'If the internal enemies gain the upper hand and begin to dominate you, then there will be nothing but pure disaster. Take anger for example. Anger can blind reason. You may be the smartest man on earth, but when blind fury gets hold of you, you can become dumber than the greatest fool. Fury blunts discrimination, and when that happens, judgement falters badly; next step, total ruin. This has happened time and again, innumerable number of times. But people don't want to learn from the bitter experience of others. Don't you make that mistake.'

52. 'To put it all briefly, follow your Conscience for your Conscience is your true Master. Then you can easily face the devil, fight him, and finish him off!'

(To be continued)

LIGHTING UP LIVES

Dear Reader,

Do you remember the Cover Story that we ran a few issues back (Vol 2 Issue 11) on the *Sathya Sai Deena-janodddharana* scheme where our compassionate Swami adopted sixty destitute boys and gave them a home for living and education for life? This act of love has inspired several others to take up similar works, though on a smaller scale. Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi, Visakhapatnam has followed Bhagavan's example and started a home for boys from distressed families. This is what a member of the Samithi says....

DEENA JANODDHARANA PADHAKAM

(HOME FOR BOYS)

"My Life is My Message" says Bhagavan, and on the same guidelines as is done at Puttaparthi, 11 boys, aged between 5 and 7 drawn from different villages, in poor, distressed families, were selected under this scheme, and brought to Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar for total care by our organisation. The screening for selection of these boys was done on the criteria of their health, family and general intelligence. Some of these boys have no parents, some have lost their father or both parents and a few have been neglected by their families. All these 11 children were drawn from different villages in the district, within a radius of 40 to 50 kms from Visakhapatnam.

In our Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar, two spacious rooms are allotted for them to stay. They are provided with beds and cots, and a small cupboard to keep belongings and a trunk for clothes. There is a caretaker and an *ayah* (matron) to look after them. Food prepared under hygienic conditions in our kitchen is served to them. To acclimatize them to the new environment, these boys are given traditional food in the morning as breakfast - cooked rice stored in salt water - (*Chaldanam*), followed at intervals by tiffin, lunch, afternoon snacks, supper and milk at night. Their daily schedule starts with *Om*karam, *Suprabhatham* and *Dhyana* (silent sitting) in the morning, followed by the regular normal routine of their studies. In the evening they are given coaching in sports and games by our school PT Master.

As we have taken the total responsibility for the children, we have enrolled them in our Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar in different classes. Further, these children are put under the special care of our School teachers who look after their academic progress. One of our *Balavikas* teachers takes *Balavikas* classes for them and teaches moral values and *Veda* chanting.

What a change in them! They now chant *Omkaram* and *Sai Gayatri*, sing *Bhajan* songs, and play games along with school children. They are like singing birds in a well-provided nest, and have totally forgotten their homes. No homesickness at all! Quite healthy and active, they fill the atmosphere of our *Mandir* complex with an aura of their own

There is another group of boys, taken care of by our *Samithi*, numbering 16, studying 10th class, Intermediate, Degree and Engineering Courses. They are given food in the nights and they spend their study hours from 4-30 pm to 10-00 pm in the *Mandir* complex where special tutorial classes in different subjects are taken by our devotee teachers. All these boys passed their previous examinations in the 1st division. Some of them are studying B.Sc.(Computers), and B.Com., and one boy is studying Engineering. In the nights after meals and studies, they return home and come again in the early morning for their regular study schedule. The tuition fees, books, expenditure etc., are met by Sai devotees.

It is our wish and prayer to Bhagavan to settle them in good positions in life, so that they will be useful to themselves and to the society.

Let us all join our brothers from Visakhapatnam in this prayer!

Prashanti Diary
A Chronicle of Heaven on Earth

**NOV 15th: THE RAMAZAN STORY, DRAMA BY THE
PUTTAPARTHI CAMPUS**

On this holy day of Ramazan, the second year graduate students of the Prashanti Nilayam campus presented the story of Islam. This year, Muslim devotees from different parts of the world who were in Prashanti Nilayam as well as the local Muslim devotees were seated in front in Sai Kulwant Hall and joined in during the drama in performing *namaz* to Swami.

The presentation began with a chant from the Koran and a welcome address in Urdu. Defining Islam as 'absolute surrender to God', the students expressed through the drama that Islam teaches an individual how to lead an ideal life.

The play very nicely brought out and explained the basic tenets of Islam, through the mode of answering the everyday questions that people have regarding that religion. Answers to questions like why we should pray 5 times a day (To express our gratitude to God); why go to Mecca for a pilgrimage (a sacred event reflecting the power in united worship), were very elucidating to the crowd. The play also explained the significance of Ramazan (the day when the Angel Gabriel revealed the Koran to Prophet Mohammed). Ramazan is the last day of the month long fast during this holy time for the Muslims. The play concluded with a Hindu and Christian entering the scene. Parallels were drawn between the religions to show that the essence is the same, with all leading to the same goal.

All the Muslim devotees in Sai Kulwant Hall (from Puttaparthi as well as abroad) then did *namaz* to Swami. It was a unique sight with Sai Kulwant Hall getting transformed into a Masjid, and the *namaz* normally done to a formless God now being received by the divine incarnation Himself.

The play concluded with a young six year old boy from Iran reciting from the Koran as well as from the Vedas. This really brought the house down. His father then movingly shared his experience of how Swami had restored and deepened their family's faith in Islam. Swami then posed for photographs with all the actors as well as distributed sweets to every individual to show His appreciation and deep pleasure.

**NOV 16th: PURANDAROPANISHAD, A DRAMA BY THE
BRINDAVAN CAMPUS**

On the evening of the 16th of November, the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Brindavan Campus, presented a drama entitled, 'Purandaropanishad'. This drama was based on the life of Purandara Dasa, the singer saint of Karnataka and brought out his devotion towards the Lord. The episodes depicted were the transformation of Purandara from a miserly merchant, a money crazy man into a God intoxicated human being; the testing of the renunciation of Purandara by Sri Krishnadevaraya, the King of Vijaynagara by dropping jewels in his begging bowl; and finally the total dedication of all his work and devotional verses to his guru. The drama was interspersed with soulful Purandara compositions. The dialogues were in Telugu and the songs were in Kannada. The whole presentation was professionally done, enriched by excellent sets, good acting and elaborate period costumes. At the conclusion of the drama, Swami came down the steps and blessed the boys by posing for a group photograph with them.

NOV 18th: RATHOTHSAVAM OR CHARIOT FESTIVAL

On the morning of November 18th, the annual Rathotsavam festival was celebrated. Here the deities of Sri Venugopala Swami and Sri Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman were carried in palanquins in a procession to the Old Mandir and then returned back to Sai Kulwant Hall.

The procession was led by Sai Geeta, Swami's pet elephant decked out in all her finery for the occasion. She was followed by Vedam chanting and Bhajan chanting students and then by two palanquins bearing the deities. While waiting for the procession to come back Swami distributed saris to all the primary school teachers.

NOV 19th: LADIES' DAY CELEBRATION

THE MORNING PROGRAM

The celebration of this year's Ladies' Day was very special as it marked the 10th anniversary of the celebration of Ladies' Day. Sai Kulwant Hall was appropriately decked out for the occasion in a floral tribute of primarily roses of all hues. The dais also had a decorated picture of Mother Easwaramma tastefully done in bright coloured flowers.

Early in the morning Swami entered Sai Kulwant Hall escorted by a long procession consisting of the Primary School band, the Vedam chanting girl students, the Anantapur College Band, and the Naadaswaram group. This motley blend of different sounds harmoniously blending together set the right tone for the Ladies' Day celebration. After Swami lit the candle, He was regaled by the School girls playing on their bagpipes.

Smt. Chetana gave the welcome address and prayed to Swami to inaugurate a new project for the welfare of the economically backward women called the

‘Easwaramma Women's Welfare Project’. Swami pressed a button to part the curtains and reveal a beautiful plaque to inaugurate this welcome project.

The first speaker for the morning was Dr. Geeta Reddy, Minister for Tourism, Andhra Pradesh and also a medical doctor by profession. She gave a very inspirational talk and described how Swami's name is spreading everywhere across the globe as witnessed by her in her travels around the world in her capacity as the Minister for Tourism. After profusely praising Mother Easwaramma, she called Swami as the champion of women. Representing the Government, she also thanked Swami for all his social service projects.

The second speaker was Mrs. Helen, a doctor from Greece, who is part of a team that rushes to the aid of people suffering from natural and man-made disasters. Her poignant talk, straight from the heart and the recounting of her astounding experiences left everyone very moved. She related her experience when she went to Bosnia to distribute food to the war-ravaged victims and she couldn't believe her ears when she heard that Swami had already been there in His physical form (orange robe and all) to distribute food and provide succor. Her experience in Darfur (Sudan) when the bags of wheat she was carrying were transformed into bags of milk (as that is what the people there were entreating her for) left everyone spellbound, and the story of *how Swami protected her in all her trips to war ravaged Baghdad* left everyone in awe of Swami's silent work and ever present protection to people who go about His work.

The next item was a dance by the Primary School sisters. It was a short but very well choreographed dance that was actually a combination of different type of dance forms all artfully blended together! The coordinated costumes and make-up along with their dainty movements made the primary school girls win the hearts of one and all.

Continuing on with this full slate of programs for the morning, it was the turn of two professional women artistes to play on their violins. As they produced soul stirring music on this instrument in the background, Swami sitting on the sofa coordinated the distribution of many gifts to the lady devotees - starting with red silk saris, chocolates, and gift bags one after the other. Then began the main *prasadam* distribution of a sweet to all the devotees present in Sai Kulwant Hall. This was followed by the distribution of innumerable vessels of apples. The loving mother in Sai was definitely at Her giving best that day!

All the while, the violin duo continued to strum away reverberating Sai Kulwant Hall with devotional songs and soulful keertanas. While they provided the background music that kept the devotional fervor high and the crowd swaying and clapping in tune to their music, the *prasadam* distribution went peacefully and was finished fast. Swami then personally gave clothes to all the artistes. He then also got down and posed for photographs with the little girls who had danced for Him.

When Bhagavan came out for *darshan* in the afternoon all the Ladies were

wearing the saris given to them by Bhagavan in the morning! It made quite a sight to see all of them dressed alike on the wonderful occasion of Ladies' Day.

The first item in the afternoon was a short musical rendering by the sisters from U.K. They sang two English songs and a Hindi one. They were followed by Smt. Anuradha Paudwal, a well known devotional singer, and her group. Swami seated them beside Him on the stage and as she began singing in her mellifluous voice, the entire Hall was totally silent.

The final item for the afternoon was an unforgettable dance drama by children from Secunderabad. One of the children was dressed as Krishna, while the other children surrounded Him as His Gopikas. They took their art to a new height holding various dance forms on plates as well as standing and bending on upturned pots with burning lamps in their hands and on their head, all set to melodious music. Swami watched their dance standing up and then distributed silver glasses to all the little dancers.

This brought a very memorable Ladies Day Program to a close. Everyone went home charged and rejuvenated, inspired with devotional fervor by the scintillating programs presented by the tiny tots.

NOV 20th: ALIKE SCHOOL PROGRAM 'SRI RAMA DARSHANAM'

The students of the Sri Sathya Sai Loka Seva Institutions, Alike, reenacted the drama they had presented earlier in Sai Kulwant Hall on September 30th. They presented several scenes from the Ramayana through the medium of *Yakshagana*, a combination of musical narration, dance and drama. *Yakshagana* is a unique folk art form of coastal Karnataka. The novelty of this form of drama is that the characters do not speak but give expression to their thoughts and feelings through their dance and actions. The actors enact the songs sung by the *Bhagavatha* (the singer-storyteller).

They narrated so many episodes -it seemed the entire Ramayana came to life- from the story of Vishwamitra taking Rama and Lakshmana from Ayodhya to the forest to protect the Yagnas and depict the killing of Thataka and driving away of Mareecha; the redemption of Ahalya, and the Sita *Swayamvara*; the defeat of Parashurama; and the sending of Sri Rama to the forest by Kaike. The *Yakshagana* goes on to further depict - the meeting with the boatman devotee Guha while on the way to exile in the forest; Bharata taking Sri Rama's *padukas*, the cutting of the nose of Shurpanakhi, Mareechi appearing as the golden deer, salvation of Jatayu, freeing Kabanda from the curse, and Sabari's hospitality. Continuing, it tells the story of Hanuman meeting Rama and all the episodes including Vali's salvation and Vibhisana's surrender till the death of Ravana. With Sri Rama's *Pattabhisheka* (coronation), the drama came to an end.

The well presented songs, the elaborate costumes, the smooth rendition of the dances and the fast pace made everyone give these small boys a thunderous ovation at the

conclusion of the play. Swami manifested a ring for the boy who played the role of Sri Rama and also for the *Bhagavathar* (the singer narrator).

NOV 21st: TWO MUSIC PROGRAMS IN SAI KULWANT HALL

The afternoon's program started with a speech by two devotees from UK. The first speaker, the chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, UK gave an account of the service rendered in the past four days by the UK Group in villages around Puttaparthi. The second speaker, an actor in the UK by profession, spoke movingly from his heart about how his life was transformed after coming to Swami.

Following these speeches, there was a *bhajan* session by the Devotees from Brazil. The group consisted of 8 men and 4 women from the Brazilian cities of Sao Paulo and Belo Horizonte. Starting with a Ganesha invocation, they sang well known *bhajans* like *Guru Brahmane*, *Murali Krishna*, *Rama Rahim*, *Manasa Bhajore*, *Shiva Shambo* and so on. Familiar, yet different! They sang these *bhajans* with a distinct Brazilian flavour with a lot of rhythm and beat that had the crowd tapping and clapping in appreciation. They finally sang the George Harrison number 'My Sweet Lord' and ended their program with the Asatoma Prayer.

This was followed by a Hindustani Music Clarinet recital by Pandit Narasimha Vadivati from Raichur, India. A clarinet of international renown, Pt. Vadivati was trained in the Gwalior and Jaipur *gharana parampara*. Swami was so pleased with the recital, that he first called the *pandit* at the end of a song and materialised a ring for him. At the end of the next song, He called him again and put a silk dhoti around his shoulders in appreciation. Swami gave clothes to all the members of the vidwan's group and next gave clothes to the members of the Brazilian group also.

NOV 22nd: SSSIHL CONVOCATION AND DRAMA

November 22nd is always a red letter day in the events connected with the Institute as it is the day of the annual convocation. Sai Kulwant Hall is always decorated with an abundance of flowers and a lot of formal paraphernalia. Swami officiates over this formal function in His capacity as the Chancellor of the Institute.

Promptly at 2:55 pm the procession of the Chancellor and the Chief Guest (Sri Rasgotra, Retired Foreign Secretary of Government of India) followed by members of the Academic Council entered Sai Kulwant Hall. The procession is lead by the Institute band with Swami and the Chief Guest, standing in an open car, right behind them. Behind Swami's car came the Academic Council members dressed in the convocation robe of either a purple or red colour.

The program started at 3:00 pm sharp with the chanting of Vedas by a group of students. Then, Sri S.V. Giri (the Vice Chancellor of the Institute) welcomed the Chancellor, the Chief Guest and the other members of the gathering and then read out the pledge for the students. Prof. U.S.Rao, Principal, Prashanti Nilayam Campus, called out the students who were awarded gold medals for their performance to come

and receive it from the hands of the Chancellor Himself. The overall performance gold medal was awarded to Kumari Deepti Bhagia of the Anantapur Campus. Swami materialised a golden chain and put it around her neck, apart from the gold medal which was awarded to her.

In Sri Rasgotra's convocation address he recalled that he had presided over this function earlier many years ago and this was his second time as the chief guest at the convocation. He praised the Institute and the students and outlined the changes that have taken place over the years. Following the convocation address, Swami gave His divine benediction. Speaking about love, Swami said that it was the surest path to reach God. Swami closed His discourse by praising Kum. Deepti Bhagia who had obtained the overall gold medal. Stating that though she was a diabetic from birth, still she made light of her physical discomforts and followed all of Swami's teachings bravely, having full faith in Him. The convocation concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.

The annual convocation drama is always much anticipated as Swami gets involved in its preparation. This year was no exception as Swami guided the boys acting in the drama through numerous practise sessions in the Interview room, and even visited a full practise session in the Institute auditorium on the 14th of November.

This year's convocation drama, "Chal Re Man Apne Dhaam", revolved around Kaushik, a student of English Literature from Pragathi Viswavidyalaya. Kaushik is in search of a real life story for a contest, a story that highlights the hidden goodness in man. Kaushik comes across a talented and devoted idealist - Avinash, who had saved the life of the son of a poor father by giving the money, entrusted to him by his company to arrange a business function, for the son's immediate surgery. Being fired by his employer for 'dereliction of duty', Avinash decides to devote his life to social service and starts 'Karunalayam' a residential school for orphans. Kaushik calls such idealism impractical; but finds out in a touching finale scene that the son that Avinash saved earlier was no-one else other than himself. The lease of life that was given to Kaushik by Avinash providing the money for the surgery (though he was fired from his job for that action), enabled Kaushik to study in Swami's institution and come up in life! The drama moved at a very vigorous pace and was punctuated by vigorous dances by the students that had the audience engaged. The elaborate costumes and makeup along with the very realistic acting made one feel that this was a professionally rendered play rather than one being put up by students with approximately 3 weeks of preparation!

Swami walked up to the stage and gave watches to all the boys involved in the drama and also posed for photographs with all the participants.

NOV 23rd: THE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Sai Kulwant Hall was full to overflowing on the Birthday morning. Swami, in a white robe, entered Sai Kulwant Hall in a procession. Leading the procession was the

Anantapur Campus Band, the School Girls Band from the PSN Campus, the primary school band and finally the Senior Boys' Band from the Prashanti Nilayam campus. Fittingly, the entire Sai Kulwant hall was elaborately decorated. Even the front steps of the verandah were laid out with lawn patches and flowering plants to make it look like we were in the Garden of the Lord!

The morning program started with speeches by Dr. Michael Goldstein and Prof. G.Venkataraman of the Prashanti Council. Following their speeches, Swami gave His Birthday message. The main thrust of Swami's discourse was that one should know where he came from, where he currently is and where he is going. To illustrate the point, Swami narrated a story about a person crossing the Godavari in a boat. He asks the boatman questions (like can you tell me the time, can you read the newspaper, do you know the price of gold in the bullion market etc) and when the boatman signifies a lack of knowledge, he continues to tell him that a part of his life has been wasted. There is turbulence in the river and the boatman asks this person whether he knows swimming and on getting a negative reply, the boatman says that his entire life is going to be wasted by drowning! Swami also narrated how He saved the lives of Dr. Goldstein and his wife after the plane in which they were travelling was hijacked. Swami concluded the discourse by exhorting people not to pay too much attention to the body and mentioned that He had the hip fracture accident to illustrate how to get over the body consciousness. After that *prasadam* was distributed to all. Swami also cut the birthday cakes that were specially baked for Him by the different organizations.

In the afternoon there was a one hour music performance by Smt. Parveen Sultana, who gave a Hindustani music program.

DEC 9: SINGAPORE BALA VIKAS DRAMA ON SRI ADISANKARACHARYA

The small *bala vikas* children from Singapore gave a laudable performance in depicting the major incidents from the life of Sri Adi Sankara, an incarnation of Lord Shiva in the state of Kerala about 1500 years ago. Starting from His birth, they depicted how as a little boy, He offered milk to the deity of Goddess Rajeshwari and She accepts it. Going on, they show how He mastered the Vedas in 2 years, and took *sanyas*, after getting permission from His mother, at a very early age. His meeting with His guru Sri Govindapadacharya, His controlling the floods in the river Narmada, and the incident of His disciple Padmapada walking over the flooding Ganga were also shown. Further incidents depicted were: The miracle of Adi Sankara enabling a mute boy to chant the Hastamalaka Stotram, Lord Shiva Himself teaching Adi Shankara the oneness of the Atma, engaging Veda Vyasa in a debate, and also how His half-witted disciple Anandagiri transforms into a scholar Thotaka and of course the teaching of the famous Bhaja Govindam for which perhaps He is the most well known. The play concludes after Sankaracharya revives a dead boy, and defeats the proud scholar Madana Mishra by showing how He established the four Maths (Holy places) at Sringeri, Badri, Dwaraka and Puri.

DEC 12th: DEVOTEES FROM CHENNAI THANK SWAMI FOR PROVIDING WATER

On December 12th, about 4000 devotees from Chennai came to Prashanti Nilayam to express their gratitude to Swami for His kindness in providing water to the city that has seen an acute shortage of drinking water. In a public function arranged in Sai Kulwant Hall in the morning, the crowd was addressed by two speakers. Dr. G. Venkataraman, former Vice-Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, spoke to the crowd in Tamil and Dr Mohana Krishnan, Retired Chief Engineer, Public Works Department, Chennai (who was associated with the project) addressed the gathering in English. See feature articles for In the afternoon, the Sundaram Bhajan Group from Chennai regaled Swami with a violin and vocal concert to more fittingly express their love and deep-felt feeling for Him.

Slowly the Christmas spirit is now descending to the Ashram and devotees from all parts of the world are coming to Prashanti Nilayam to celebrate the season of good cheer in the divine presence. We will, of course, bring you a full report on these celebrations along with exclusive pictures next month. Traditionally January 1 is a day of making New Year resolutions, generally based on the body, like losing weight or developing public speaking skills etc. Perhaps, this year, you might consider adopting a New Year resolution that picks one of Swami's teachings (that is closest to your heart) and practicing it assiduously for the whole year.

Till we meet again, Sai Ram.

ARE YOU GOD?

One cold evening a little boy of about six was standing in front of a store window. The little boy had no shoes and his clothes were mere rags. A young woman passing by saw the little boy and took the child by the hand and led him into the store.

There she bought him a pair of new shoes and a complete suit of warm clothes. They came back outside on to the street and the woman said to the child: "Now you can go home and have a very happy holiday."

The little boy asked, "Are you God, Madam?"

She smiled at him and replied, "No son, I am just one of His children"

The little boy then said, "I knew you had to be some relation!"

- from the Internet

EXPERIENCING SWAMI FROM WITHIN

Ted Henry

Dr. Wayne Dyer is a prominent American best-selling author and internationally recognized lecturer. Recently he was interviewed for a television news programme in Cleveland, Ohio. In the course of that interview Swami's name came up, and at the first mention of Sai Baba tears appeared in his eyes. He has never seen Swami in person but said that he was well acquainted with Baba because He appeared often in his dreams.

How come Swami is blessing Dyer by regularly appearing in his dreams? That is because Dyer is an intensely spiritual person. He is regularly featured on Public Television in America and he is considered one of the foremost inspirational speakers in the field of spiritual growth and personal development. He has written 25 books over the last 30 years, many of which have been bestsellers throughout the world.

For the first decade of his life, Dyer lived in an orphanage and foster homes. He now looks back on those years as being some of the most formative years of his life, a time during which he learnt the important lesson of self-reliance. He sees himself as the Eternal Soul who is disguised as an author, lecturer, father, husband and a thousand other things – he obviously takes his *Advaitam* seriously.

Part of Dyer's popularity is due to the inclusion of many quotes from Swami in his books and presentations. One of his observations demonstrates his closeness to the Teachings of Sai Baba: "Send out love and harmony, put your mind and body in a peaceful place, and then allow the universe to work in the perfect way it knows how".

In public lectures around the world, Dyer invariably brings up the name of Sai Baba. "I am not sure why He comes to me," he says, "it just started happening several years ago. This is a Being who lives at God Consciousness who has, as Jesus had, the ability to manifest at will (like Jesus manifested fish and loaves). All of us have the ability to manifest, but there is the timeline between what we think and what we do."

In a recent TV interview Dyer exclaimed, "Even as you speak (about Sai Baba), I get very emotional. I could almost break down and cry right now. It's not a tear of sadness; it's not a feeling that I am hurt in any way. It's just the most blissful, peaceful (feeling). Do you know what it feels like to be in a warm shower when you have been out in the cold? It's like having a warm shower running inside of you."

This is how Dyer describes Baba's appearances in his dreams:

"It's an energy that moves up and down your spine and gives you goose flesh; only, it's internal goose flesh. It's just bliss. That's the way it is and that's how I feel."

When asked why others don't have such access to the many qualities of Sai Baba, Dyer replied that everyone has access but they do not want it. He adds, "It's just that they believe they don't. It's like your question itself (about this) has resistance built in to it. You know the idea is that if you believe you don't have something, then you don't have it."

Dyer says this is how people create resistance to what they want. "If you use phrases like 'the worst-case scenario' then you just can't have 'the best-case scenario'. You know, 'as a man thinks, so he is'. It's based on simple metaphysics. Change the way you look at things, and the things you look at change."

Often in his talks and frequently in his writings, Dyer teaches about non-attachment. About meeting Sai Baba in India one day he says, "I am not attached to it at all. Honestly, I am not. I don't have any illusion that if He were to walk into this room right now, that it would be any different from this very experience (of talking about Him) right now". Dyer adds, "It's because I already feel Baba's presence in this room right now. It's just that strong."

Dyer says, "I have a very, very strong internal knowing about my connection to Source (God) and Sai Baba is someone who lives at this level of God Consciousness. In David Hawkins book *Power v/s Force*, he speaks of a handful of people who live at this God-Realized level. He says they are steadfast in their abstention of thoughts of harm, that they don't exclude anyone and that they include all, and Baba is one of those beings that calibrates at one of those exceptionally high spiritual levels that is commensurate with Source. He is Source Energy. He lives at Source Energy. He is God. We are all pieces of God, and He is there all the time."

The latest book written by Dyer, *The Power of Intention*, describes the force brought to an individual's life by ego and how it interacts with fear. "When you get ego out of the way," he says, "when you just allow (life to be) and if you knew who it was who was walking beside you at all times on this path, then you would have no fear". Dyer continues: "One of the quotes I like from Swami Paramananda is that when you reach God realization, nothing can go wrong, nothing can go wrong. All you have to do is live at the level I am speaking about and you don't have to go around practising or worrying about it, you just have to reach for higher vibrational energy at any moment, which means staying connected to Source. One of the great questions to ask is, "Would God have this thought?", and then to remind yourself that you are God, that you are a piece of God."

Dyer says that by definition, anything that excludes cannot be spiritual. And he says that nearly all religions exclude. It's one of the thoughts that makes this famous author so popular among those who know him. His life is dedicated to inclusiveness. It's one of the reasons he speaks so forcefully about Sai Baba. He knows Sai Baba is all about inclusion. If Wayne Dyer is against anything for anyone, it is exclusion.

Wherever My Glory is Sung...

“Wherever My devotees sing My glory, I install Myself there”, Lord Krishna declared in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The devotees of New Zealand experienced the truth of this statement on *Akhand Bhajan* Day this year held on the 13th and 14th of November at Auckland.

The *Bhajan* began at 6.00pm on Saturday evening, the 13th of November, and went through until 6.00pm Sunday, the 14th. Nine centres from the Auckland area took part with another 3 smaller groups joining in as well, and each centre/group had a time slot for singing.

The singing was excellent throughout the whole period, as there seemed to be a special energy on this occasion – so much so that devotees stayed much longer, even after their given singing slot, and the quiet period that normally seems to happen during the early hours of Sunday morning did not eventuate. The majority of the crowd of 400 plus devotees stayed for the total 24 hours.

Many singers and musicians stayed on and helped the smaller centres when it was their turn, which resulted in continuous, high quality singing throughout the period. There was also a wonderful feeling of unity and love which certainly helped in maintaining the quality of the singing and the choice of *Bhajans*.

The session that took up the final hour between 5pm and 6 pm on the Sunday evening, was performed by the Youth Group, and during this hour all of the songs were sung in either English or Maori with at least half sung as unison.

During this final session a devotee was praying hard, throughout, for Swami to somehow show that He was present even though we could not see His physical form.

The session finished with *Aarathi* and the *Vibhutti* song, after which people sat quietly in peaceful meditation for a few minutes before cleaning up began. Suddenly, there was a loud cry as a devotee who had begun to pack up the altar, noticed that one of the large candles which had been burning throughout the 24 hour period had dropped wax onto a orange cloth which had been placed beside Swami’s chair.

The wax had formed an almost perfect “AUM” sign which showed to all the devotees present there that even though they may not see Swami in His physical form, He definitely is always with them whatever they may be doing and here was the proof for all to see!

Glory be to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba!

DEFINING BLISS

Harini Narasimhan
SSBC of Encinitas

Come, my child, come visit me,” my dream beckoned “See Me in person at Parthi.”
A simple invitation,
A sudden unexpected business trip to Bangalore,
A long flight,
Heightened expectations,
Stories of fascinating interviews flashing through my mind;
Hot, humid Parthi , long lines, *Sevadals*.
“Lord I have come to see you”, I announce from the last row in the hall.
An orange speck appears, *Bhajans* waft faintly, and then He is gone.
Tears roll uncontrollably,
One precious day gone by with no warm greeting;
Two more to go.

Despondent, I buy a book.
“You have to take the plough of self-enquiry to the field of the human heart.”
So what did I do that was wrong? I thought all evening at dinner;
“The human heart has to be tilled and watered with love.”
I always thought that I was a loving person;
“Bad qualities are the weeds to be removed.”
I have a few bad qualities, but nothing compared to my neighbour, I mused.
“You have to raise the fence of discipline.”
I am soooooo disciplined in my daily life;
“Then you can cultivate the crop of bliss.”
So what was I missing?

A restless night, a cold shower at 4am.
No *Darshan* today, a *Sevadal* announces.
A long empty day stretches ahead.
A flurry of saris rush to the canteen, an old lady stumbles;
Does anyone care here? I thought.

“Aunty, can you help us please?”
A young voice breaks my train of despondent thoughts.
Students attempting to serve lunch and dinner to the villagers;
A sick cook, ambitious young adults, Indian meals!
Stirring huge pots of *dhal*, missing afternoon *Darshan* token lines.
Crawling, absolutely exhausted into bed at 7pm!

My last morning-
What did Swami have in mind when He invited me?
No special *Darshans*, token row number 12!
Dragging my feet into *Darshan*, I sat far away from everyone.
Despair, another 20 hour trip back to the USA to get home!

Darshan music starts, an orange speck appears.
Clutching my childrens' pictures, I pray feverishly;
A shower of yellow rice grains falls on my head,
My lap, my pictures, my hair, covered in it.
The orange speck disappears into the interview room.
Scooping the grains of rice, the nearest lady gets up to help me.

Thrilled at the unexpected blessing,
Triumphantly packing the precious grains of rice
I look up to see the Lord Himself grinning impishly
At my simple joy with the grains of rice.
Marveling at the creation - rather than the Creator
Who stood inches away -
"Thank you Swami" I blurt out.
"Welcome" he smiles and blesses me.
"Very happy" "Very happy", He beams.
Eyes lock, time stands still, waves of bliss
Wash the doubts and fears away.
For within those compassionate eyes
An unexplainable depth, a sudden glimpse
Into an unknown world
Of pure bliss.
Unspoken, unimaginable, immeasurable
Pure bliss.....

Years later, older and greyer,
Am still unable to explain that feeling
Of pure bliss.

THE STORY OF ARSHAD ALI

Young Arshad Ali is the son of a small-time shopkeeper who sells footwear in his native town in Maharashtra. Arshad had a problem right from birth – his skin would often turn blue. He also had a problem in walking and his growth was far from normal. The child was receiving treatment in a local hospital, but it did not help. The problem was serious and the child needed major heart surgery. Where was the poor shopkeeper to go for that kind of money?

In desperation, the parents turned to the only source of comfort they knew – Allah; and Allah responded too! One day, one of the residents of that town who had been treated for a heart ailment in Swami's Hospital in Bangalore, recommended that Arshad be taken there.

Arshad was taken there and the gates of Compassion opened wide. First, a thorough checkup was performed, then a date for the surgery was set; after that came the operation itself - everything absolutely free. Does the outcome have to be described? Does not Arshad's photo taken after the surgery say it all?

We hail Swami by all the Divine Names known, including Allah. And Bhagavan says: "Call Me by any Name but do so with Pure Love." When we do, He does respond, as happened in Arshad's case.

BANGALORE SUPERSPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 19th January 2001 to 30th November 2004.

Cardiac Surgeries: 4,892

Cardiac Catheterisation: 8,908 [4,348-Diagnostic; 4,560-Interventional]

Neuro Surgeries:4,308

CT Scans: 14,101

MRI Exams: 16,270

PUTTAPARTHI SUPERSPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 22nd November 1991 to 30th November 2004.

Heart Surgeries: 14459

Cath Procedures: 14859

Urology Surgeries: 24964

Ophthalmology Surgeries: 24704

CT Scans: 3929