



IN PROFILE

Swami Satyananda

[It had been Narayana Rao, living at Kalaiyar Koil mutt (near Mana Madurai), who directed Satyananda Swami to visit Bhagavan during Satyananda's pilgrimage to Kalaiyar Koil. Satyananda came to Tiruvannamalai at the age of 22 and lived on Arunachala for his first eight years. In 1946 he moved down to Palakotthu where he got the unique opportunity of his life, serving Bhagavan as personal attendant. In this role, he had nearly continuous darshan of the Master from 1946-April 1950, spending long hours through the day and many a night with Sri Bhagavan. Kunjuswami once spoke at length about the unique experience and great honour of being continuously in Bhagavan's presence. He writes:

"Bhagavan used to sleep on the sofa in the hall while I and a few other attendants used to sleep on the floor near it. Regularly at half past three in the morning Bhagavan got up and go out for his ablutions. As soon as he got up from the sofa one of us would give him the torch which was kept for his use. But not once was it necessary for Bhagavan to call us by name or wake us up and ask for the torch. The moment he got up, we also used to wake up without any special effort on our part. Bhagavan's look in our direction produced a sense of brilliant light in us and we used to wake up at once. Bhagavan never ordered his servants about. He preferred to do everything for himself, but the attendants would always anticipate his wishes and do what was necessary."

In the 1940s Madhava Swami took up the job of attending on Bhagavan, and when Bhagavan's health showed a decline, Krishnaswami, Rangaswami and Sivanandam joined him, taking turns. Satyananda Swami followed Madhava Swami in serving Bhagavan. During the later years when a tumour appeared on Sri Bhagavan's left arm, it was Satyananda, Dr. Srinivasa Rao, Dr. Ananta Narayana Rao, T.P. Ramachandra Iyer and Venkataratnam who took care of Bhagavan. The following is an account from Swami Satyananda given after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana.]

I was born in 1916 in a village named Mavelikara in South Kerala. My mother was of a pious disposition and used to serve sadhus and was happy to help them in various ways. Her piety made me turn to the spiritual path when I was only eighteen. I ran a small school for children on the veranda of our house. After four years I went on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram in the company of some sadhus. In the course of my pilgrimage, I halted at an abode of sadhus called Pandikkan Mazhi Matham situated between Madurai and Manamadurai. This matham was managed by one Narayanaswami who had stayed at Sri Ramanasramam for some time. He was the first person who spoke to me about Sri Bhagavan and his greatness. He wrote out the full address of Sri Ramanasramam on a piece of paper and gave it to me.

From Rameswaram I came directly to Tiruvannamalai. This was in 1938. I was overcome with joy when I saw Arunachala. After spending a

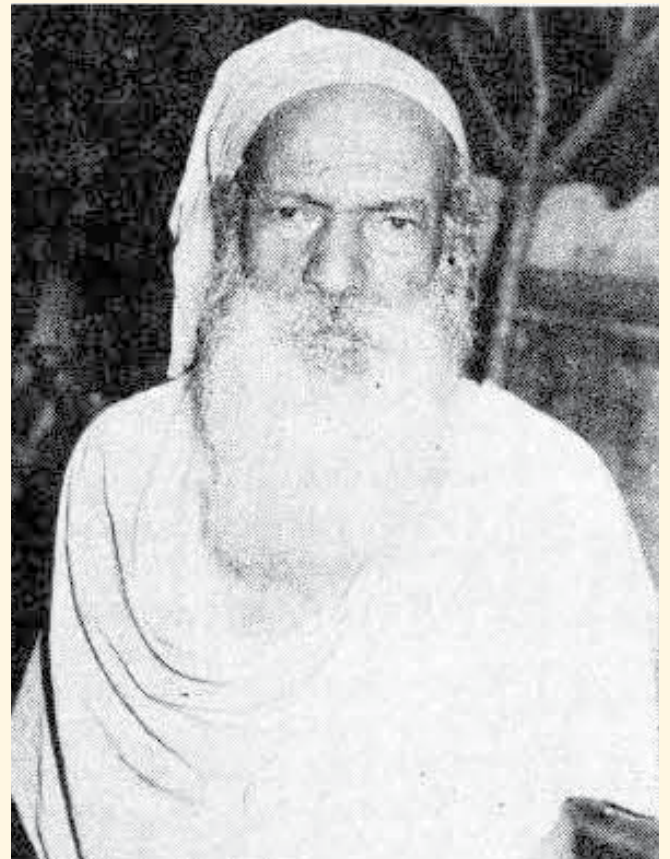




few days at Virupaksha Cave I came down to Sri Ramanasramam in the company of a sadhu. When we arrived, Sri Bhagavan had just returned from his afternoon walk and was sitting in the hall alone. He looked at us and smiled. I could never forget that smile. After sitting in his presence for some time I returned to the cave. Thereafter I used to visit the Ashram daily and have Bhagavan's darshan. I changed my abode from Virupaksha Cave to Mango Tree Cave, Skandaramam, etc., from time to time and spent seven years in this manner, begging my food in the town. I then obtained, by Sri Bhagavan's Grace, the good fortune of serving him as his personal attendant from 1946 till his final Nirvana on 14th April 1950. One day Sri Bhagavan described to me how one Sadguru Swami from Kerala, under the influence of some intoxicating drug, kept on embracing him tightly saying, "You are a good boy. It is a pleasure

to see you." Sri Bhagavan acted the part of the sadhu in his inimitable way while narrating the incident. I was alone with him at the time and still remember the scene with joy.

I was present when the tumour on Sri Bhagavan's arm was operated upon in 1949. Although I cannot stand the sight of blood, I managed somehow to control myself. On the evening of the 14th of April 1950, we were massaging Sri Bhagavan's body. At about 5 o'clock He asked us to help him sit up. Precisely at that moment devotees started singing Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva. When Sri Bhagavan heard this his face lit up with radiant joy. Tears began to flow from his eyes and continued to flow for a long time. I was wiping them from time to time. I was also giving him spoonfuls of water boiled with ginger. The doctor wanted to administer artificial respiration, but Sri Bhagavan waved it away. He also wanted to give some fruit juice so I begged Sri Bhagavan to agree to this and when He graciously consented the doctor gave it to him. Sri Bhagavan's breathing became





gradually slower and slower and exactly at 8:47 p.m. subsided quietly. The most dramatic moment was the physical demise of Bhagavan. There was no physical movement of any kind, no visible change, not even a flutter. It was as if the human frame in which Bhagavan was, turned into a statue instantaneously. At that very moment, as is well known, devotees who were outside saw a big, bright meteor in the sky. I observed silence from 1950 to 1963. I have all these years been feeding the peacocks, monkeys and squirrels, a job which was always pleasing to Sri Bhagavan. I also look after the room in which Sri Bhagavan attained Nirvana. I wish to end my life doing this service. —

[Postscript: When Satyananda returned to Palakotthu

from the interment ceremony on April 15th, 1950, a fellow resident described the moment: “Swami Satyananda, one of my neighbours in Palakottu, assisted in the burial. I saw him returning to Palakottu at about 8.30 that evening, his whole body covered in vibhuti. I naturally asked him how he had got into such a state.

‘I put Bhagavan’s body in the samadhi pit,’ he said. ‘Since devotees had put a lot of vibhuti there, I inevitably got covered with it. Can you give me some water for a bath?’

Before I gave him the water, I embraced him tightly in an attempt to cover my own body with this vibhuti. Since it had touched Bhagavan’s body, I regarded it as his final prasad.”

Swami Satyananda lived out his days in Palakotthu, taking care of the Nirvana Room and the Ashram library. He died in 1989.]

