

14. Periya Doctor... (The Great Doctor)

My memory is that it was the year 1957. Kanchi Maha SwamigaL and Sri Jayendra Saraswathi SwamigaL were camping in a house in Rameswaram Road, T. Nagar (Chennai). I was living with my parents in the northern end of the same street. My age then was twenty-two. I was studying in a Secondary Grade Teachers Training School.

Sometimes Maha PeriyavargaL used to pass through my house, either during the morning or the evening hours. I had often seen Sri SwamigaL cross my house on the street. My mother at those times would be waiting at the entrance with a camphor plate, after having drawn a kolam in front of our house. It became her custom to show the lighted camphor before Sri Maha PeriyavargaL when he came in front of our house, and prostrate to him.

The progressive thoughts in my mind, a sense of defiance, the nerve of youth, the lack of maturity to distinguish between good and bad--all these came together when I chided my mother, "This man is some sanyasi. Why do you prostrate to him? What do you gain by that act? You are thus prostrating to him in an uncivilized way continually, is he going to save you? Don't do such wrong things hereafter." Hearing my indecent words my mother said, "Podaa, po!" ("Mind your business!") And went inside.

Years rolled by. I started working as a teacher in the P.S. High School, Mylapore, Chennai in the year 1959.

A few years later, my mother started suffering from a severe setback in her health, her B.P. shooting up. The V.H.S. hospital at Taramani, Chennai had just then been established. I admitted my mother there for treatment. At that time I was taking tuition at their home for the two sons of Mani Ayer, proprietor of Kalyani Hotel (the hotel is no longer there now) near Mylapore Kapali temple. His family was very devoted and loyal to Sri Maha SwamigaL. They would often go to Kanchipuram and have darshan. They would consider doing service to his holy feet as their most enduring happiness.

Mani Ayer was residing in a house in Mandavalli near Mylapore. In the small puja room opposite the hall of their house, an adorned holy picture of Sri Maha PeriyavaaL was kept. A lamp would always be burning by the side of the picture. I would be sitting on the swing in the hall and taking class for the two boys. Since the puja room was always kept open, when Sri PeriyavaaL's picture came under

my glance, a prickling sensation would arise in me. I would get down, go and close the puja room doors and then continue my teaching. It has happened several times this way.

As I mentioned earlier, I was worrying over my mother's health condition and was teaching the lessons somewhat for the name of it. Tears would fill my eyes. The worry and fear that my mother would pass away leaving me alone would surge through my mind.

One day when the teaching was going on, Tiru. Mani Ayer who was just back home asked me, "What Sir! You are worried; your eyes have turned red! What is the matter?" Wiping my eyes I said, "Nothing of that sort Mani Ayer! My mother's health is not alright. Hypertension. I have admitted her in the V.H.S. That is the cause of my worry."

Mani Ayer: You showed him to a good doctor?

Myself: I told you already that I have admitted her in the V.H.S.

Mani Ayer: What did they say?

Myself: They said that she will be alright, no cause to worry. But I am not satisfied with their words.

Mani Ayer: Sir! Let your worries go. I shall take you to a big doctor. Your mother will become alright if she just looks at him.

Myself: Is that so? Who is that doctor, my mother would be cured if she is shown to him? Where does that big doctor reside? When can I see him? Shall I bring my mother right now?

There was anxiety in my reply; also haste and enthusiasm; much anticipation; because my mother should get well completely soon.

Mani Ayer: Your mother need not come. It is enough if only you come.

Myself: Mani Ayer! The disease is not for me, but my mother! If I come, how can my mother become alright? Should not that big doctor test my mother?

Mani Aiyer: Not necessary. If that big doctor just looks at you, your mother will become alright.

Myself: (with some distrust) If I am seen my mother would become alright? Such a kind of doctor? Alright. If that is the case I shall come right now. Come on, let us go and see him.

Mani Aiyer: You cannot see him just like that. He is not here. He is in Kanchipuram.

Myself: In Kanchipuram? Why should such a big doctor reside in that place? Who is he? M.B.B.S. or M.D.?

Mani Aiyer: He is beyond those degrees. He is the doctor of the doctors. (Pointing to Periyavar's picture in the puja room) He is the doctor I referred to.

Myself: (laughing loudly without being aware of it) What Mani Aiyer! This man, doctor? He is the doctor of doctors? What do you babble? How can a sanyasi become a doctor? If it is a question of some puja or rituals I can believe it. But then you talk of this man as a big doctor! Hmm... would it be possible for this sanyasi to cure my mother? This is just your imagination... (The words came out of the edge of my sorrow).

Mani Aiyer: What, MeenakshiSundaram! You who are born in the Brahmin community talk this way?

Myself: What then Sir! After saying that you would take me to a big doctor, you now say that you would take me to a sanyasi! How can it be possible, this kind of an action?

Mani Aiyer: MeenakshiSundaram, your mother should become alright for you. Only that, right? I am responsible for it. We go to Kanchipuram tomorrow itself, alright?

Myself: (with klesha) Mani Aiyer, if we go to him, will my mother really get well?

Mani Aiyer: Certainly. Enough if you have darshan of him and just speak about your mother. Your mother will certainly get well. You can also remain in peace.

Myself: In that case I shall come to Kanchipuram. But when we are there you should not compel me to remove my shirt, take bath, wear vibhUti-kunkumam, or do namaskAram. I shall come; see him; tell him about my mother; that's all. (The torsion of the young blood was not gone yet).

Mani Aiyer: What ayyaa, would you not take bath daily? Would you not remove your shirt occasionally? Not wear vibhUti-kunkumam even rarely? Do those things just once tomorrow! What, will that drown your lineage?

Without knowing why, I did not object but agreed to those words of him. On the next day, the three of us--Mani Aiyer, myself and Tiru. Venkataraman who worked with me--started and reached Kanchipuram in the morning hours. Taking bath in the Sarva Tirta KuLam and wearing vibhUti and dhoti, I reached the gates of Kanchi SriMaTham for the first time in my life. And yes! There was a feeling of something like an electric vibration in my body.

We enter the MaTham. Kanchi MahaSwamigaL in the front hall! Yes, the big doctor! He was sitting, leaning on a rice bag. Fruit plates and garlands of flowers are seen before him. Also a queue for his darshan. We too tucked ourselves in that queue.

A bamboo plate in my hand. In the plate are fruits, spinach and some vegetables. My glance falls on the ascetic king seated there. Without any efforts, tears start to flow from my eyes. Yes, I weep without my knowing it. I don't understand the reason. Why should I weep?

His keen look that has divine light falls on me. Raising his head, that god gestures me to come to him. He might have known my sorrow with his prevision.

Again that talking god beckons me with a raised hand. I walked slowly and peacefully to him, placed the bamboo plate in my hand before him and prostrated to him unknowingly.

"You are ashtasahasram (a sub sect)?"

"Yes."

"What relationship do Seshadri, Kunju in Karukudi have with you?" (Karukudi is a hamlet near Tiruvaiyaru).

"They are relatives of my aunt."

"Your grandfather was the Palace Receiver in Thanjavur! Was he before or after Sundaram Aiyer?"

I nodded head that I did not know it. Silence prevailed for some time.

Raising his head, "You have admitted your mother in the hospital? How is she now?"

What! That god asks me the same question that I came to him with, seeking remedy. For this too, I just stand sobbing, with no reply from me.

"Don't worry! Your mother will get well and return home."

Yes, that big doctor had given a new lease of life to my mother! That mahaan looked sharply at me for some time. Then, giving me prasAdam, he blessed, "Give this to your mother. She will get back home well."

To this date, I heartily bow and adore that "great doctor" who vanquished the demon of ignorance in my mind and put me on the right path.

As foretold by that "great doctor", my mother got well and arrived home safely. The big doctor has saved my mother's life. He is taking care of us till this day.

Author: V. MeenakshiSundaram, Secretary, Hindu Dharma Manram, Chennai-33

Compiler: T.S. Kothandarama Sarma

Book: Maha PeriyavaL - Darisana AnubhavangaL vol. 1, pages 197-205

Publisher: Vanathi Padhippaham (Aug 2006 Edition)