

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

**RAMALINGAR**

BY

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## PREFACE

The writing of this Monograph has been a very rewarding experience. After writing a magnum opus for Ramalinga Mandram of Madras, a work of 760 pages containing translation of no less than 1210 stanzas out of 5818 stanzas which were the poetical output of Ramalingar, I did not imagine that I would be called upon quite soon to deal with the same subject again. But this happened, and I had to prepare three lectures in English to be delivered under the auspices of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Madras. These lectures were delivered in February 1977, within four and a half months of the publication of the major work. These lectures have been published with the permission of the University. Nobody does a hat trick thrice, at least very few do. I am one of those lucky persons. Towards the end of 1977, I was commanded by the Sahitya Akademi to produce this Monograph. I undertook the work with great misgivings, for, after having worked on a wider canvas, I did not feel confident of executing a miniature within the confines of less than eighty pages. Moreover, this work had to avoid the error of repetition of what had been said in the former two works, and yet had to be a thing worthy of being approved by the Akademi. No easy task! For a book from the Akademi reaches the hands of tens of thousands of people, and in many languages. Therefore, I felt that a grievously heavy burden had been placed on my frail shoulders of 79 years. With faith in God and reliance on the grace of my Guru, I undertook the work and now here it is before you. I will take you into my confidence that I may be worthy of your indulgence. For the one word with which this book starts off, I had to spend four sleepless nights and days.

Now, the book is in your hands, and I am in the dock. Please temper justice with mercy.

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## I. THE MAN!

### i. The Psyche of Ramalingar

SEISMOGRAPH, a walking seismograph was Ramalingar, a saint who lived in Tamilnadu in the middle half of the nineteenth century. A seismograph which registered every unharmonious thought, word, and deed, anything devoid of love which happened around it. However, he was a seismograph with a difference. The one which registers the tremors set up by the earthquakes does it without emotional involvement. But in the case of our seismograph which was Ramalingar, every tremor caused by an unloving or unharmonious thought, word or deed left a bruise, a wound, a scar on the heart of this human seismograph.

Cries of lamentation on the occasion of death of people, the harsh cry of the kestrel, the howls of packs of dogs, the reverberation of earth-shaking steps of people leaving a cloud of dust behind them, disputations in a loud voice, thunderous knockings at doors, to all these harsh and hostile vibrations, Ramalingar's heart responded even as a highly sensitive seismograph does to the slightest tremor of an earthquake.

It is no wonder that such a highly sensitive person had a unique empathy with all creatures.

He quaked with distress at the sight of disease or hunger even of strangers.

His heart broke on witnessing the poverty of people.

The fibres of his heart were wrung on even mere seeing the weariness of people.

Compassion was the life-breath of Ramalingar. He avers to this thus:

Assuredly my life and compassion are one,  
not two.  
If compassion departs from my heart,

My life too departs.<sup>1</sup>

That his life and compassion were one was not a notion of Ramalingar but the design of God is revealed in an address by him to God in these words:

You are the merciful, magnanimous One  
Who, condescending to let me and compassion  
be together,  
brought me down to stay  
and lead my life in this world.<sup>2</sup>

Just as 'compassion' is a synonym of the word, 'charity' or *Arul* as it is called in Tamil, the word 'ascetic' is a synonym for a compassionate person. Thiruvalluvar lays down:

The ascetics alone are the compassionate,  
since to every living being they are compassionate.<sup>3</sup>

Compassion, among other components, includes non-killing and not eating of flesh. A householder may be able to abstain from eating flesh, but he cannot abstain from killing of creatures, from man to mosquito. He cannot be compassionate to every living being.

So Ramalingar had perforce to be an ascetic. When God, as we heard Ramalingar declare, condescended to let him and compassion be together, and brought him down to stay and lead his life in this world, He decreed by that very condescension that Ramalingar should be an ascetic. It was not an accident but the design of God that Ramalingar should enter the nuptial chamber as a celebrant and leave it the next morning a celebrant still. For he had to be an ascetic. This was as much a design of God as His intervention in the marriage of St. Sundharar.<sup>4</sup>

This compassion took its concrete form in an aversion to killing of creatures and to eating of flesh, an aversion so deeply seated and so strong that it extended to the person of the killer and the eater of flesh, and made Ramalingar pronounce an excommunication on such a person. He exhorts the world thus:

All those who take a life and eat flesh  
are not our near and dear kin;

they are outcastes to us.  
Help them in assuaging their despicable hunger,  
Otherwise, do not speak to them with ardor,  
even words of courtesy?<sup>5</sup>

Ramalingar summed up all his tenets and beliefs regarding compassion into a *Credo*, and sang:

Whoever, feeling not the least difference,  
consider every life as their own life,  
and as having equal rights,  
and delight therefor in their minds,  
I realize that their heart  
is, indeed, the place  
where our great Lord,  
in the form of pure gnosis,  
performs His dance.<sup>6</sup>

To do menial service  
to the feet of those amazing persons,  
my mind is greatly desirous.<sup>7</sup>

Ramalingar had therefore to be an ascetic that compassion and he be together and lead his life in this world, that compassion and his life be one and that if compassion departs, his life too departs. Love of God is the fountainhead of compassion towards all creatures. Ramalingar said, "If compassion departs from my heart, My life too departs." We could change the words and say with as much truth that if love of God departs from a person's heart, compassion towards creatures on earth also departs. Those who do not love God cannot love His creatures.

The term 'ascetic' is interchangeable with the word 'mystic'. An ascetic has two orientations; world-oriented with compassion and his life as one; God-oriented with Love, *anbu*, or *bhakti*, which is the obverse of the coin "compassion". When the ascetic is God-oriented, when he wants to directly and immediately apprehend the One-Reality, he has to fulfil certain conditions, making himself

loving,  
pure in heart,  
and poor in spirit.

When the ascetic is God-oriented, he is a mystic. A mystic has been defined<sup>8</sup> as one who "surrenders to a power of love that is greater than human, and advances toward God in a darkness that goes beyond the light of reason and of human conceptual knowledge". This power of love that is greater than human, this power of love which is compassion when world-oriented, this alone is not sufficient when the ascetic is God-oriented. Besides being loving, he has to be pure in heart and poor in spirit. Which Ramalingar was.

He declares his purity of heart in no uncertain terms in several songs. He sings:

O my Father,  
You know also how,  
whenever women wilfully came to me,  
I trembled in my mind  
thinking that if, bewitched by their charms,  
I embraced them and delighted in my mind,  
harm will come to them who sported with me,  
and that it will be injurious to me  
to witness the misery of those left behind,  
and that I cannot bear to witness that misery,  
and that the whole thing would be a shameful deed.<sup>9</sup>

In one another song, he declares:

When comely women of the city I lived in  
took hold of my hands and forcibly pulled me,  
made gestures,  
met me in privacy,  
and got acquainted with me through alluring talk,  
swore false oaths and leaned on me,  
and tried to seduce me  
by making gifts of many things,  
I never embraced them,  
I trembled,  
yet I never chided them!  
You know this, O my Lord!<sup>10</sup>

Such was his purity of heart.

Ramalingar's very personality cried out in clarion tones how poor in spirit, that is, how humble he was.

"Humble for ever will be the great" said Thiruvalluvar.<sup>11</sup>

Ramalingar was humble from the greatest of strength, the strength of apprehension of the Real. His humility manifested itself in every aspect of his life. He sings:

Shy of walking with my arms swinging,  
I walked about  
with my arms crossed on the chest.  
Hating to show my bare body,  
I hid it entirely with white cloth.<sup>12</sup>

His garments consisted only of two pieces of cloth. One of them was worn round the waist, the lower hem of the cloth not reaching below the calf muscles of his legs. He relates in a song how he wore his cloth:

Fearing to walk in the muddy street  
swinging (like a dandy) one end of my cloth  
held in my hand,  
I pulled up the lower hem,  
and tied it round my waist.<sup>13</sup>

The other piece of cloth was wrapped round his body hiding all but his face from the gaze of people.

He was very unassuming. He confesses:

I feared to sit on a high seat  
which will expose me to the gaze of people;  
I feared to cross my leg;  
I feared to sing in such a manner  
that the song will be heard far away.  
While seated on a pial  
built high above the ground,  
I feared to hang my legs  
down the side of the pial.  
And, talking while so seated,



I feared to think of,  
O my Father!<sup>14</sup>

He shunned the limelight. On this subject he sings:

Even though those who had ripened  
(in spiritual life)  
in that manner  
did not know the least (about the Godhead),  
I had come to know a little  
by the grace of my *guru*.  
And, after having had a vision  
of the unique Form  
ripened in my mind in the perfect manner,  
I had planned to remain unknown to anyone.  
I do not know  
whether it was God's natural act of grace  
or an act of the great *maayai*  
that I,  
who had decided to remain incognito  
in this manner,  
was dragged into the street for all to know.<sup>15</sup>

Such was Ramalingar, loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. Such was the psyche of Ramalingar.

## ii. The Physique of Ramalingar

Sri Velayutha Muthaliyar of Thozhuvoor, a disciple of Ramalingar, has left an account of the personal appearance of Ramalingar. He writes

"In personal appearance, Ramalingar was a moderately tall, spare man--so spare, indeed, as to virtually appear a skeleton--yet withal a strong man, erect in stature, and walking very rapidly, with a face of a clear brown complexion, a straight thin nose, very large fiery eyes, and with a look of constant sorrow on his face. Towards the end, he let his hair grow long; and, what is rather unusual with Yogis, he wore shoes. His habits were extremely abstemious. He was hardly known ever to take any rest. A strict vegetarian, he ate but once in two or three days, and was then satisfied with a few mouthfuls of rice. But when fasting for a period

of two or three months at a time he literally ate nothing, living merely on warm water with a little sugar dissolved in it."

"With a look of constant sorrow on his face", records the Muthaliyar. Nine words sum up the psyche of Ramalingar. The sorrow was not for himself. Ramalingar avers this in a song:

Even though it is not for myself,  
yet, O Father,  
the fear and the mishaps I endure  
on account of compassion for others  
eat me up alive.

Alas, if these mishaps and fears continue still,  
My life will not last any longer.<sup>16</sup>

Sad, but true, for he lived for not more than fifty years.

### iii. His Traits of Character

'Voluntary poverty' is the term to sum up his way of life. He was abstemious in food to the point of starving himself. He himself has left us an account of his food habits. He sings:

O Lord,  
You, Who have inseparably mingled in me,  
know the hatred I have  
from my early years  
of discriminatory knowledge  
towards eating.  
What shall I say today?<sup>17</sup>

In another place, he says:

Whenever I indulge in food  
to assuage my hunger,  
I still eat it with aversion.

He reverts to this point again and again. In one more poem, he sings:

Whenever I ate appetising food,  
my mind trembled with fear  
wondering what suffering would come  
out of this joy.

Ramalingar slept but little, three hours, then two. Ultimately, in precepts preached in the dusk of his life, he prescribed only one hour of sleep.

Ten disciplines, virtues, are laid down by Thiruvalluvar for an ascetic. They are

Eschewing eating of flesh,  
*Thavam,*

Avoiding Unbecoming Conduct,

Not Stealing,

Truthfulness,

Not Getting Angry,

Not Harming Anyone,

Not Killing,

Realizing Impermanence of Life,

Renunciation.

Ramalingar fulfilled each one of them.

He eschewed eating of flesh as a matter of course. He who prayed,

O Father!  
You should listen to what I pray for,  
and graciously bestow it on me.  
To all Your dear creatures,  
I should show love,

must of necessity eschew eating of flesh.

In the chapter on *koodaa-ozhukkam*. (Unbecoming Conduct), Thiruvalluvar observes:

There are people in the world  
who outwardly appear  
like the exposed crimson side of a crab's eye,  
but are in their hearts like its hidden black tip.<sup>18</sup>

Ramalingar abhorred such men so much that he prayed:

Association with those  
who have in mind something,  
and speak something else outside,  
I want not.

He had a horror of thieving. Whenever it fell on his ears that a gang of thieves had robbed during the night all the possessions some people had with them, he felt hot all over as if a fire had been kindled inside his body.

Defining truth, Thiruvalluvar said:

A lie too ranks as truth  
if it produces unalloyed good.<sup>19</sup>

Ramalingar, in his regard for truth, said in a converse manner,

I speak innumerable lies,  
but if there is in any one of them any harm to others,  
even as much as the tip of a blade of grass,  
I do not utter that lie.

Lies, white lies, he may have spoken, but his prayer was:

Your renowned praises I should speak,  
lies I should not speak.

One of the very earliest prayers of Ramalingar, perhaps as a child of nine, was

O Divine Gem of six faces!  
Graciously grant that I may not be seized by Anger,  
the cruel wicked fellow.

It was also his prayer in his last days:

Sire!  
You know how I drooped in my spirits,  
fearfully wondering when Anger will assail me.

It needs no mention that Ramalingar, who confessed:

Whenever I saw wicked people  
begin to kill other creatures impulsively,  
I was terrified,

and to whom God had said:

All those who take a life and eat flesh  
are not our near and dear kin,  
they are outcastes to us,

could ever harm, much less kill a creature.

Ramalingar not only realized fully the impermanence of life and things, but also exhorted others to realize it and be saved. Addressing the people, he admonished:

Your enjoyments are not worth while,  
all of them are illusory,.....  
where is the need for me to say this?<sup>20</sup>

Ramalingar was the very personification of renunciation. Numerous songs of his bear testimony to the fact that he experienced in full in his life the truth of the two maxims in the chapter on *Renunciation* by Thiruvalluvar who tells us:

From whichsoever, whichsoever a thing a man detaches himself,  
from suffering therefrom, therefrom, he is free.<sup>21</sup>

and that

By renunciation many joys can be had right here;  
if you want them, renounce in time.<sup>22</sup>

Ramalingar never desired money. He despised money. He hated money. We have his own words to testify to this:

I, with a mind free of pride,  
never desired money.  
Even in my early years,  
when I did not know what is what,  
I flung back on those very persons  
the money given by those near and dear to me,  
or I flung it on the rubbish heap.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have no attachment to money,  
O my Father!  
The money which I had,  
often I threw it in wells,  
I threw it sometimes in ponds.

\* \* \* \* \*

Your sacred heart knows  
how I threw away those deluding monies  
into the gutter.

*Thavam* is an untranslatable word. It is an amalgam of charity (that is, compassion, the highest and noblest divine form of love), austerities, self-mortification, non-attachment, meditation and contemplation. By his unparalleled charity (compassion), by his austerities and self-mortification in the matter of food, clothing, and sleep, by his other qualities of non-stealing etc., by his meditation and contemplation to which his *Thiruvartupaa* is one long testimony, Ramalingar was a *thapasvi*, a person who performs *thapas*, i. e., *thavam*.

Such were the traits of character of Ramalingar.

We have seen Ramalingar The Man in his fullness--his psyche, his physique, and his traits of character.

## II. LINEAGE

### i. Secular

Ramalingar was born on 5th of October 1823 as the fifth child of Chinnammai, the sixth wife of Ramiah, in Maruthur, a village five kilometres to the south of Vadaloor in the District of South Arcot in Tamilnadu, India. Ramiah belonged to the Karuneeakar caste, or, rather, hereditary profession of village accountant. Hoary legend says that Chitragupta, the celestial accountant of Yama, the god of death, was the first patriarch of the caste of karuneeakars. Of Ramalingar's two elder brothers and two elder sisters, Sabhapathi, the eldest of the five children, was the guardian of Ramalingar, when his father died when Ramalingar was an infant of six months only. Ramalingar's mother lived under the tutelage of Sabhapathi who along with his wife brought up infant Ramalingar. One sister, Unnaamulai, became the mother-in-law of Ramalingar. We do not know anything about the other brother and sister. Sabhapathi and Unnaamulai too did not play any great part in the life of Ramalingar. One sentence can dispose of the marital life of Ramalingar. Ramalingar entered the nuptial chamber on the night of the day of the marriage, carrying in his hand a copy of the *Thiruvachakam* which he read, studied and meditated on throughout the night, and departed in the morning as much a celibate as he was before, leaving his wife as much a virgin as she was before. We do not hear of the wife anymore. Nobody knows what became of her. We do not hear anymore of his mother either. It was as if the family of Ramalingar came into existence to endow the world with just this one Super soul and then sank into utter oblivion.

### ii. Spiritual Lineage

O Lord!  
Am I not one of the long line  
of the holy galaxy of devotees  
come down the ages  
like banana shoot from banana stem?<sup>23</sup>

This long line of the holy galaxy of devotees is more easy for us to trace than the none-too-long line of the secular ancestors of Ramalingar. For it has to be admitted that our knowledge of the secular ancestors of Ramalingar does not go beyond his parents. We do not know who the grandparents, paternal or maternal of Ramalingar were!

His spiritual genealogy goes as far back as Kannappar the hunter, who transplanted his eye in place of one eye of the *moorthi* on the hill in Kalahasti, when he saw blood spurting out of that eye and whom we may place even in the first or second century B.C. The last in that line before Ramalingar would be Thaayumaanavar of the eighteenth century A. C. In between lie Thiruvalluvar, Manikkavachakar, Thirumoolar, Thirugnanasambandar, Thirunavukkarasar Sundharamoorthi Swamikal, the Alwars, Pattinaththar, Meikandar, and Arunagirinathar. These are only a few names which one can recall to memory on the spur of the moment. But we may add scores to this list, we may add all the other names in *Periya-puranam*, the hagiography of the saints of Tamilnadu, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> century B. C. to the 9<sup>th</sup> century A. C., and still the list would not be complete. Such is the spiritual ancestry of Ramalingar.

Not only this. For Ramalingar, this was not the first time he had been a member of the long line of the holy galaxy of devotees. He had been in that list very often. We have his own declaration.

I am not a new-comer;  
note that I am one  
who, from ancient times,  
have cherished love to Your blossomy feet!<sup>24</sup>

Though You may say that  
I am not Your devotee,  
I have remained Your devotee  
in the past and in the present too?<sup>25</sup>

What were his names in those past lives? "We do not know", would have to be the answer but for a surmise, a fanciful surmise, a wild surmises at a name of one of those lives. And what could be that name? Manikkavachakar.

Ramakrishna Paramahamsar speaks of a class of beings whom he calls Eeswara-kotis. He defines them thus:



"An incarnation of God or one born with some of the characteristics of an Incarnation is called an Eeswarakoti. An ordinary man is called a jiva or jivakoti. By dint of sadhana a jivakoti can realize God; but after samadhi he cannot come back to the plane of relative consciousness. The Eeswarakoti is like the king's son. He has the keys to all the rooms of the seven-story palace; he can climb to all the seven floors and come down at will. A jivakoti is like a petty officer. He can enter some of the rooms of the palace; that is his limit?"<sup>26</sup>

"An Eeswarakoti, after attaining the Great Cause, can come down again to the lower planes. Incarnations of God and others like them belong to the class of Eeswarakotis. They climb up and they can also come down. They climb to the roof, and they can come down again by the stairs and move about on a lower floor"<sup>27</sup>

It is very tempting to think that such an Eeswarakoti was Manikkavachakar who chose to come down on earth in the nineteenth century, and sojourn here for five decades under the name of Ramalingar.

For Ramalingar, who sang four decads on Thirugnanasambandhar, Thirurnavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthi Swamikal, and Manikkavachakar respectively reserved the highest homage for Manikkavachakar. He sang:

O Manikkavachaka who have merged in Brahman!<sup>28</sup>  
When I sing your utterances  
deeply blended therewith,  
they taste sweet,  
without causing any satiety,  
like good sugarcane juice  
blended with honey,  
milk,  
the rich flavor of fruit,  
my flesh and my life.<sup>29</sup>

Earnest students of *The Thiruvartpaa*, the magnum opus of Ramalingar, a masterpiece of 5818 stanzas, would agree that it breathes in every stanza the fragrance of *The Thiruvachakam*, and that the above song can with equal truth be applied to the *Thiruvartpaa*.

Such were the spiritual ancestors of Ramalingar.

Once out of curiosity, I counted the occasions when the words *appaa, aththaa, annaa*, all synonyms for the word 'father', occurred in the *Thiruvachakam*. Soon I gave up the attempt, as such words occurred in almost every alternate stanza, and often more than once in the same stanza. To Manikkavachakar, God was his father. So it was with Ramalingar too. He asks God,

Son to you am I not ?  
And legitimate father to me are you not ?

and challenges Him to deny it. The spiritual lineage of Ramalingar can be summed up with this assertion of Ramalingar. Sons of men can be orphaned, but the Son of God never.

We cannot dismiss this claim of Ramalingar as a poetic fancy or a symbolic claim. God was in reality mother and father to Ramalingar. He was never an orphan. For he had lord Civan, Ammai-appan, as his father and mother. More solicitous than an earthly mother, Lord Civan looked after Ramalingar. He sings:

O Mother mine, sweet to my soul,  
Who, when I was lying weary with hunger on a pial,  
came with a shining basin containing delicious food  
in one of Your sacred arms, and woke me up, asking  
"Did you go to Otri and suffer hunger?"  
and graciously served me the food with pleasure.<sup>30</sup>

God was not only a mother to Ramalingar, but a stern father too. A father, who dealt condign punishment when the necessity arose Ramalingar bears testimony to this in an entire decad of ten stanzas. He sings:

O Gem of a Ruby  
Who bestow grace on those free of ill repute!  
O Munificent One!  
I, a sinner,  
with a mind that is similar to a granite slab  
devoid of any moisture,  
a fellow with a heart

which is treachery incarnate,  
forgetting to worship you,  
had taken my meals  
even like the evil dog  
which runs about eating  
the unappetizing filth.  
that very day,  
I was punished in Otri  
till I trembled in every fiber of my body.<sup>31</sup>

God was not only father and mother to Ramalingar, but was also Guru supreme. And, in this role, God gave Ramalingar the *Thiruvadi deeksha*, the guru placing his lotus feet on the head of his disciple in token of having taken him as a slave whose future worldly and spiritual welfare was no longer the concern of the disciple but that of the guru--God Himself in the case of Ramalingar. Ramalingar has left a record of this unique event in his life in the following song.

O my Guru who enslaved me saying:  
"We have come to know  
all the good deeds you have planned to do;  
We came to see you in person",  
And lay down on the floor  
with an intent to graciously place  
Your flowery feet on my head,  
and, Who, when, I, haughtily look hold of the feet  
and placed them elsewhere,  
laughed and asked:  
"What did you think, O my son,  
have I not this much right?"<sup>32</sup>

Such were the spiritual Parents of Ramalingar, the two-in-one Civan whose most beloved form is the indivisible one of Ammai-appan, Father-mother, translated by the ignorant as Arda-naareeswarar, the half-woman God, raising in the hearer's mind a picture of a freak instead of an image of the age-old Tamil concept of an ideal balance of Justice and Mercy, Discipline and Love.

### iii. Ramalingar's Place in the National Milieu of His Days

1823 to 1874, the five decades of the life-span of Ramalingar, formed a unique half a century in the history of India. When, in course of time, the abortive Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 and the Proclamation of Queen Victoria in 1858 are forgotten, this half a century will ever be remembered for the deep religious ferment which simultaneously churned the placid seas of supine indifference in the west, the east, and the south of Bharatavarsha. Even as the *Thirupparkadal*, the Holy Sea of Milk, when it was churned by the *asuras* and the *devas*, produced the amrit, the Elixir of Life, similarly, the ferment in the placid sea of Indian life produced Dayananda Saraswathi in the west, Ramakrishna Paramahansa in the east, and Ramalingar in the south of India, men who brought the Elixir of Life to the corpus of the Hindu Religion. One made it militant, another made it evangelical, and Ramalingar made it ecumenical, universal. It is not without significance that Dayananda Saraswathi lived between 1824 and 1883, Ramakrishna Paramahansa between 1836 and 1886, and Ramalingar between 1823 and 1874.

### III. HIS MISSION

Between the seventh century and the nineteenth century lie not merely twelve hundred years, not merely the explosive growth in population, not merely the revolutionary and kaleidoscopic changes in the economic and social life of the people; these are but the normal aspects of rapid evolution of the world. The greatest difference is in the concept of and approach to religions.

In, the seventh century, Civa-paadha-hirudhayar (he in whose heart reposed the feet of Lord Civan) prayed for a son. Sekkizhaar <sup>34</sup> tells us:

In the world,  
the heretical falsehoods  
of the Samankaiyars and Saakkiyars<sup>34</sup>  
have swelled;  
the ancient sacred Vedic observances  
have become obsolete;  
the sacred-ash has ceased to be cherished  
and to be worn ostensibly;  
seeing these changes,  
Civapaadahirudhayar of unstained repute  
floundered in despair.<sup>35</sup>

He desired to have a son  
to delight his life of a house-holder.  
He performed praiseworthy *thavam*<sup>36</sup>  
to get a darling son  
who, besides fulfilling that objective,  
would repulse the alien religions,  
and reestablish the sway of the sacred ash.<sup>37</sup>

Twelve centuries later, Ramalingar proclaimed:

That I may bring under the fold  
of The Society of the True Path to the Godhead  
all the people of the world,  
who are black at heart

but white exteriorly,  
by reforming them in this world  
that they may here on earth itself  
gain the hereafter (mukti)  
and rejoice,  
for this sole purpose  
God brought me down in this age,  
and I arrived here and gained grace.<sup>38</sup>

In many more songs we are informed by Ramalingar that this mission was preplanned by God. One of them is this:

You bestowed grace on me in particular  
with the intent that  
all the blind superstitious practices  
pure fabrications of the books on religion  
observed as eternal truths  
may be covered over by a rain of dust,  
that delusion-free true creed alone  
may established be,  
that the world of truth may flourish.<sup>39</sup>

Were these the only evidence of his mission being God ordained, we could dismiss the idea, saying, in the words of one scholar who said in another context that "Ramalingar did not clearly distinguish between what his imagination conceived and what he experienced in reality". But there is more evidence. We cannot brush aside repeated declarations contained in songs such as:

O my King Who told me,  
"Go, and, rescuing them from the vile path,  
direct them into the goodly way  
that is the Pure True Path,  
also called The Universal Path<sup>40</sup> or *this*,  
O unique Nataraja, my Gem of a Guru!  
You told me,  
"The religious faiths  
which the world has adopted are many many;  
they have existed devoid of good.  
Some have disappeared.  
People of other worlds do not know this.

They are miserable for a long time.  
That they may be no longer miserable,  
Try to instruct them  
that this virtue-laden sacred Religion of *Grace*  
is, indeed, the Universal Religion.<sup>41</sup> or *this*  
You told me:  
"Fear not the least, Our Son,  
We have given the Great Effulgence of *Grace*  
All to yourself.  
Wake up the people of the world  
who are asleep;  
direct them into the True Path  
which is enveloped by good alone."<sup>42</sup>

It was against the background of the memory of this command of God Himself that Ramalingar sang:

It is my desire, O my Father,  
that I should found  
The Society of Universal True Path of *Gnosis*  
consisting of men who are really like gold,  
and rejoice thereat,  
that I should raise a sacred temple  
pertaining to that Society,  
and that the purity-invested Society  
should flourish eternally.<sup>43</sup>

"Son to You am I not?" and "Legitimate Father to me are You not?" asked Ramalingar, challenging God to deny this. And God acknowledged the relationship and addressed Ramalingar as "Our Son" in these verses when He expounded to Ramalingar his mission on earth.

Out of this mission of establishing the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God was born Ramalingar's hatred of castes and creeds that set man against man, and of worship of petty deities which denies the Fatherhood of the One God. It is therefore that he addresses men in words born out of great compassion:

O men of the world  
who wander about  
attached to castes, creeds, religious doctrines,

the hubbub of theology,  
quarrels about lineage and the rest!  
It is not proper  
that you should wander about in vain  
and be ruined.  
There is One Who is a unique Leader,  
and Who dances in order to establish the world  
in the Just Way and the Pure Path.  
This is the time for Him to come  
to play in the streets  
the Game of the Effulgence of Grace.  
I am inviting you to join Him in the game.<sup>44</sup>

Moved by compassion, he prays to God:

Those who think that they are many many gods,  
those who speak of many many ways  
of reaching God,  
those who talk of several scriptures  
spawned by falsehood,  
they are people without enlightenment  
by the holy grace springing from Truth;  
they do not know the consequences,  
they waste their lives.  
O Lord Who woke me up from sleep  
and bestowed on me true bliss!  
Please rid them of the suffering  
that will accrue to them,  
and graciously bestow wisdom on them.<sup>45</sup>



## IV. APPRENTICESHIP

They failed not  
in the traditional twice-three duties,  
the Brahmins descended from  
two totally different ancient gothras<sup>46</sup>  
each pointing to its own first rishi<sup>47</sup>  
who had spent a youth of double six by four years  
in apprenticeship .....<sup>48</sup>

Thus the *Thirumurukaattruppada*i describes the brahmins who worshipped Lord Murukan at Erakam, one of His six places of encampment in Tamilnadu. These double six by four years were years of celibacy.

Ramalingar, whose first love was Murukan the Hand some, the youthful aspect of Lord Civan,<sup>49</sup> spent very nearly the same number of years out of his totally celebrate life in apprenticeship for his mission.

An apprenticeship normally calls for a master or *guru*, and years of study mulling over the Vedas, the Thirumurais, twelve in number, the Caiva-Siddhaanthaa Sastras, fourteen in number, not to speak of grammar, prosody, logic, and the scriptures of other religions as well in order to confound the pundits of those religions in polemical parleys.

But Ramalingar had no guru born of a woman. We may concede that his elder brother's wife taught Ramalingar the alphabet, guiding his tender finger as it traced the alphabet erratically on the sanded floor of the backyard of the house. Sabapathi, his elder brother, and his wife were the guardians of the young Ramalingam whose mother had moved to Madras with her whole family within a year or two of her husband's death in the sixth month of the infancy of Ramalingar. Here Sabapathi soon became the breadwinner for the whole family. Sabapathi easily lost his battle with his truant brother and gladly surrendered the task of educating his brother to his wife. She was no more successful in her attempts. But her sorrowful tears made Ramalingam offer a compromise. He agreed to study but not under a human teacher. He asked for a picture of Lord Murukan, a standard oil lamp, a mirror and a undisturbed use of a room on the first floor of the house. She readily provided them.

He took the articles to the room, and, moreover, carried there a miscellany of books. Coming to think of it, I am not so sure of the picture of Murukan. He entered the room and closed the door behind him. Nobody knows what happened there. He probably lit the lamp, perhaps seated himself before the mirror, and may be turned over the leaves of some of the books, which he was hardly equipped to read, much less understand. He sat, records his biographer, before the mirror and spent his time engaged in meditation on Murukan, the presiding deity in the shrine at Thiruthanikai Hill. And to this child, thus engaged in meditation came a vision. Ramalingar relates this in a song:

The beauty endowed divine faces six,  
The illustrious shoulders twelve  
Encircled by a garland of katappam flowers,  
The lotus feet,  
A spear with a sharp blade,  
The peacock,  
The rooster emblazoned banner,  
And the famous Thanikai Hill  
With a canopy of a cloud of grace,  
These my eyes beheld.<sup>50</sup>

Ramalingar became a hyperlexic. Hyperlexics are persons who instantly assimilate whatever they read. They may be of any age. Children of no more than three years have been known to have read and comprehended most abstruse books. Ramalingar did not have a human teacher. God Himself was his teacher. We have his own songs, which relate this extraordinary fact. He sings:

All Your servitors learn  
without considering the fact  
that their way of learning is round-about  
and greatly deceitful.  
Therefore, then and now too  
they do not realize You.  
O my Master  
Who dance a dance of bliss  
in the light-radiating Hall of Gems!  
By Your grace,  
it is from You I learnt,  
it is from You I heard, (my lessons).

In another song he declares:

O Great Effulgence of Grace  
Who, in the past without educating me in a school,  
instructed me in everything,  
and, removing all the foibles of the body,  
roused me from the sleep (of ignorance)!<sup>52</sup>

Again he affirms in another song that he was not instructed by a teacher. He sings:

O Justice Incarnate  
Who, making me informed  
without being instructed (by a teacher),  
stood established in any mind  
and imparted esoteric truths to me!<sup>53</sup>

Yet again,

O Pure Transcendent Being  
Who dwelt within me,  
And Who, after giving Your breast to this infant  
who dwelt in the darkness of nescience  
of every thing,  
made a little wisdom accrue in me,  
then, indwelling my consciousness,  
made me cognizant of the Vedas  
ordinarily the subject of laborious study  
and the arts without any study whatsoever!<sup>54</sup>

A last item of documentation:

O my rightful Spouse  
Who with delight wrote in my mind  
all the Vedas never before inscribed on palm leaves!<sup>55</sup>

Ramalingar was not merely a hyperlexic, but a rarer person, one whose tutor was God Himself. No wonder he was composing and singing songs at an age when his mother should have been singing lullabys to him.

What was the trade to which Ramalingar was apprenticed? He was learning to be LOVING, PURE IN HEART & POOR IN SPIRIT. He was learning to earn the Diploma of A Lover Of His Fellowmen. Towards this end he bound himself as an apprentice for life to Lord Civan, the greatest of craftsmen in the Art of Love, the incarnation, the very embodiment of Love, of Whom Thirumoolar was moved to say "Civam is Love indeed, the ignorant only will say love and Civam are different entities".<sup>56</sup> When you don't call him Civam, He is called Love.

As a journeyman of this Master Craftsman, Ramalingar trod The Pathway to Thiruththanikai Hill and Thiruvotriyoor many weary years, no less than two and a half decades, from about his ninth year to his thirty-fifth year before he was admitted to a period of probation of ten years to his calling, at the end of which he began his Mission of founding The Society of Universal True Path of Gnosis and of raising a sacred temple pertaining to that Society, and of waking up the people of the world who were asleep and directing them into the True Path.

He entered his Ministry in about his forty-fifth year, with less than five years left for him to dwell on this earth.

What a remarkable apprenticeship, what a glorious probationship, what a unique Ministry!

## V. THE GOD OF RAMALINGAR

Hinduism, or, to give it its correct name, Sanathana Dharma, is the most maligned religion in the world, and, at one time, its adherent were also the most persecuted people in the world. According to the principle that if enough mud is thrown at even the most polished surface, whether it be that of a laminated sheet or the surface of a 'NIRLEP' utensil, something will cling to that surface, two such clods of mud have clung to the fair mantle of Sanathana Dharma. They are 'polytheism' and 'idolatory'.

It does not matter that a Bernard Shaw most discerningly discovers and says:

"The apparent multiplication of gods is bewildering at the first glance; but you soon discover that they are all the same God in different aspects and functions and even sexes. There is always one uttermost God who defies personification. This makes Hinduism the most tolerant religion in the world, because its one transcendent God includes all possible gods, from elephant gods, bird gods, and snake gods, right to the great Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, which makes room for the Virgin Mary and modern Feminism by making Siva a woman as well as a man.<sup>57</sup>

It does not matter that a Justin E. Abbot, after profound study of practised Hinduism, writes:

"Another fruitful source of misunderstanding is the Westener's misconception of Hindu idolatory and polytheism. Vishnu, Krishna, Ram and Vithoba, for example, seem so many separate, independent gods, and the stone images which represent them in their temples seem but little removed from the fetishism of savage people. And yet India's best thinkers, her deeply philosophical minds, and her noblest saints, like Eknath, Tukaram and Ramdas, have been enthusiastic idolators without a suspicion in their minds that such worship could be called a sign of mental weakness, or moral degeneracy.....

"To understand the Theology of Tukaram or any of the Maratha Saints, one should not begin with idolatrous worship and work backward, but should begin with that philosophy that for centuries has dominated Hindu thought. Its basis is an absolute Monism. This whole universe, everything included, consists of one substance. For convenience of talking about it, it may be called Brahma, or otherwise named, but no human words can be used in describing it, for nothing is known of it. But on this monistic basis Hindu Theology begins. God, a personal Being, omniscient, omnipotent, and good, is a form in which the one Substance exists. God is the creator of the forms in which the one Substance exists. Thus the strictest Monotheism stands as the basis of Hindu Theology. But God being one of the various forms in which this universe consists, it is assumed that He can be described, and He has been described by philosophers, and poets, and teachers. In the descriptions of Him, the most important is that He manifests himself in many different forms, and hence comes such manifestations of His personality, as Brahmadev, God functioning as Creator; Vishnu, God functioning as the life of all things; and Siva, God in the decay and death of all things. But these manifestations have also appeared in diverse times, and in diverse manners as *avatars* are thus of God Supreme. Hinduism stands, therefore, for the strictest monotheism, but admitting many manifestations and *avatars*, with their special characteristics to suit the occasion for their appearance.<sup>58</sup>

It does not matter that Rev. Fr. M. Amaldoss, S.J., a Professor of Theology for Catholic Seminarians, says:

"The role of images in Hindu worship is a difficult question. On the one hand, there is a deep sense of the transcendence of God in any relation to any symbols and images in worship to represent Him, and the whole process of worship is thought as symbolic..... The image is not a mere symbol either. It is a kind of a sacrament. It is not God; but His presence is localised there. The image is not merely the conveyance of presence, it concretises it in some way. The presence is no mere blessing. The God invoked comes there."<sup>59</sup>

With an intuitive perception which is difficult to come by for many Hindus, Swami Abhishikthananda (formerly Henri Le Sanx), a French Catholic Priest and later a Christian Sannyasi in the best Indian tradition, describing a Hindu temple in Thirukoviloor, writes:

"In proportion as a man penetrates into the symbolic sanctuary of stone so he is continually taken into the mystery of his own being. There is in the deep darkness, the mystery of God Himself and with Him the original and ultimate secret of all that is, is revealed to the most intimate part of his own mystery.

"It is most surely the mystery of God the Creator and of God Who is love, of God as He appears to man in his marvellous epiphany in the cosmos and in the history of salvation, but, more than that, beyond all that man can say, know or feel about God, even beyond all 'memory' of self, it is precisely the very mystery of God in Himself, in His divinity, in His self-origination, in His supreme ineffability. No word proceeding from the intellect can explain this, no sound that reaches the ear of man can express it, no form visible to human eye can reveal it.

"In the realm of hearing, the sign of this ineffability is the *pranava*, the unarticled vowel 'O' (AU), the muffling of the primordial A, the expression at the same time of holy fear and ecstasy of joy, which enables one to penetrate the mystery and which ends in the indefinite nasal resonance 'M'. The OM is the last sound through which man still tries to say something about God when he has once and for all abandoned all words and all concepts conceived by men and before he has entered into definite silence, that silence in which nothing is uttered except the eternal OM which no creature left to himself will ever know how to hear.

"In the realm of the visible and the tangible, it is Civalinga which is similarly the final sign of Him Whose every form is powerless to portray, much less contain. The linga is at the same time "with and without form", as the Tamilian Caivite Catechisms teach. It stands at the border between the manifest and non-manifest, the ultimate of what man apprehends by touch, or by sight of the One who is essentially Beyond, Parama-Civa—as it was revealed in the appearance of the linga of fire on the summit of Arunachala."<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding such thoughtful pronouncements, Hinduism is to the unthinking Westerner a religion of many many gods and more idols. But Civan and Vishnu are not names of two separate and antagonistic gods, but are names of one and the same God, Civan, when God is conceived as the personification of bliss, Vishnu, when God is conceived as the All-pervasive, the Omni-present. Civan, sometimes sung by poets as a god with five faces and another one looking downward, and Murukan

represented with six faces and twelve arms are not monstrosities, but noble poetic conceptions of the one God who rules over all the universe to the east, to the south, to the west, and to the north, also up above and down below. Raavana is not a monstrosity with ten heads and twenty arms, but a mighty ruler who was a suzerain of all the universe which lay to the east, south-east, south, south-west, west, north-west, north, and north-east, and up above and down below.

From his earliest years Ramalingar was a single-minded monotheist. His God was Civan, the Embodiment of Bliss, the Personification and the Bestower of well-being *mangalam*. In physical concept, He was Natarajar, the Cosmic Dancer. The esoteric significance of God as the Cosmic Dancer could have been difficult to understand in the past, but today, when the concept of the eternally moving electrons is a piece of commonplace knowledge, it should not be difficult to understand that if Nataraja ceased to dance, the world would cease to exist. He is the source of all movement, of all progress, of all evolution, of all life. Ramalingar, describing what the sacred feet of Nataraja are, sings:

Innumerable are the large galaxies  
of undying worlds  
wherein are contained  
millions and millions of worlds;  
all of them put together  
are as a millionth part of an atom  
in the presence of the heavenly sacred feet  
at the moment of their dance  
on the resplendent Golden Hall;  
So say those who know.<sup>61</sup>

The usual representation of Civan in stone is the *Lingam*, the amorphous image, the formless and yet with form image. St. Manikkavachakar, paying obeisance to Lord Civan, sings:

Obeisance to You Who pervade the earth as all the five elements!  
Obeisance to You Who appear in water as four!  
Obeisance to You Who shine in fire as three!  
Obeisance to You Who delight in wind as two!  
Obeisance to You Who happen in ether as only one!



Tamilnadu has five *thalams* or shrines, one for each of the above five aspects of Civan. Canchipuram for earth (*prithvi*), Thiruaanaikka for water (*appu*), Thiruvannaamalai for fire (*theyu*), Thirukkaalaththi for wind (*vaayu*), and Chidambaram for ether. (*aakaasam*). The lingams in these shrines are called *prithvi lingam*, *appu lingam*, *theya lingam*, *vaayu lingam*, and *aakaasa lingam*. The word '*aakaasd*', while having a general meaning of ether or space, has a special meaning of Brahman in certain contexts. We would not be wrong in assuming that the phrase '*aakaasa lingam*', in addition to standing for a *lingam* with the qualities of *aakaasa* that is pervasiveness, also means a *lingam* possessing the qualities of Brahman Himself. For Chidambaram has the highest place among the two hundred and seventy-five shrines of Civan in Tamilnadu. If the word 'Koil' (temple) is used without prefixing the name of a place, it means the temple at Chidambaram. Just as the *lingam* at Chidambaram is the amorphous image of Brahman, similarly, the Natarajar in Chidambaram is the morphotic representation of Brahman. The moorthi image, of Natarajar in Chidambaram is more than an idol. It is the nearest possible concrete symbol of Brahman. Zimmer interprets Natarajar thus:

"Civan as Natarajan, the King of Dancers, is, in His manifestation as Natiya-murthi, the cosmic dancer. He is here the embodiment and manifestation of the eternal energy in five activities.

1. "Creation, pouring forth, unfolding (srsti),
2. Maintenance or duration (sthati)
3. Destruction or taking back (samhara)
4. Concealing, venting, hiding, the transcendental essence behind the garb of apparitions (thirobhavaa).
5. Favoring, bestowing grace through a manifestation that accepts the devotee (anugrahaa).

The *Nirguna-Brahman*, the *Sabda-Brahman*, as it is sometimes called, the Godhead, as Eckhart calls it, cannot be man's object of meditation or worship. It has to be God. For as Eckhart puts it, the Godhead gave up all things to God. Describing the Godhead, Eckhart goes on to say, "The Godhead is Poor, naked, and empty as though it were not, it has not, will not, wants not, works not, gets not. It is God who has the treasure and the bride in him, the Godhead is as void as though it were not." Ramalingar, therefore, worshipped the Godhead in the form of Nataraja, the nearest approximation to the Godhead.

It is amusing to think that we give a child a name, Suresh, Mahesh, Naresh, or what not; it is amusing that we say that the person with such a name is two years old, ten years old, eighty years old. Who is that Suresh? Who is eighty years old? The body that provides a home--albeit a very temporary one--to the soul within, or the soul that inhabits the body? Certainly not the soul. Eckhart conceives the soul as saying, "I am that which I was and shall remain, now and for ever more."

If it is amusing to give a name and assign an age to the soul, how much more amusing it is to give a name and assign an age to God. And a sex too. But man, in his exuberant love of God, cannot but give Him names, conceive Him as an infant, as a man, as a woman, as a father, as a mother, as neither man or woman but as *ammai-appan*, mother-father-inseparably coalesced in one body. It was, therefore, that Manikkavachakar sang:

To Him Who has neither a name nor a form,  
let us give a thousand names  
and proclaim our conviction,

(that, whatever name He goes by,  
or whatever form He assumes,  
He is ever and always Civan).

At Thanikai Ramalingar worshipped Murukan, at Thiruvotriyoor he worshipped Thiyagesar, on the way from Madras to Vadaloore, he worshipped Ganesan, at another shrine en route, he sang a song in praise of Vishnu. At Thiruvotriyoor, he sang a song of no less than one hundred and one stanzas in praise of *Vadivudai-maanikkam*, The Ruby of Lovely Shape, the name given to the *ammai*, the mother-aspect of Civan. Nevertheless, Ramalingar did not worship many Gods or goddesses, he worshipped the One God, and not a god of the Hindus or a god of some other religion, but the supreme God, the one God of the entire universe. He was ever and always a monotheist, a worshipper of the One God whom all the world worships. He worshipped Him in the form of Natarajar the nearest possible approach in form to the formless and nameless Godhead.

## VI. HIS LIFE AND WORK (God Oriented)

Ramalingar's span of life which stretched from the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1823 to 30<sup>th</sup> January 1874, a matter of fifty years and one hundred and eighteen days, falls into three distinct periods, the first from the date of birth to his thirty-third year in 1855, the second from 1856 to 1868, and the third from 1869 to the end of his life on earth—the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1874. In other words, the period of his stay in Madras to end of his thirty-third year is the first part, the period of his stay of nine years in Karunkuzhi and of four years in Vadaloor is the second part, and lastly, the period of his stay of four years in Mettukuppam is the third part.

There is strangely enough a correspondence between these periods and the stages of his spiritual journey on the Pathway to God. During the first period, he travelled on the toilsome Purgative Way, during the second period, he travelled up the not so arduous Illuminative Way, and during the last period, he travelled on the joyous Unitive Way.

There is, moreover, a correspondence between the periods of his age and the stages of his spiritual journey on the one hand and the songs The (Thiruarutpa) on the other hand. The entire work is divided into six books, or *thirumarai's* as they are called. Between them, they contain no less than 5818 stanzas. We are indebted to Sri Ooran Atikal for a chronological edition of this work. A study of this edition reveals to us a very remarkable record of Ramalingar's journey on the Pathway to God. The First Book and 74 decads of the Second Book, a massive total of 1384 stanzas (out of the total of 5818 stanzas) are a record of the journey on the Purgative Way. The rest of the Second Book and the whole of the Third Book, a total of 1186 stanzas, record for us the journey on the Illuminative Way. The last three Books, a total of 3248 stanzas, form an exultant record of the journey on the Unitive Way.<sup>62</sup>

Before we proceed further, we should have a clear idea of what these several ways are:

The Purgative Way, as the name implies, is that part of the long path which, one treads towards the Godhead and in which one purges oneself of all desires and attachments, of all imperfections, of all acts of

commission and omission of shortcomings in renunciation, of shortcomings in the total love of God in the passion for the apprehension of the Godhead.

The Illuminative Way is that part of the path, which comes after the Purgative Way, and in which one gain illumination, knowledge, and gnosis. There is an intellectual aspect and an emotional aspect to this way. There is a strong outpouring of the grace of God on the pilgrim treading this part of the long road to the Godhead.

Last is the Unitive Way, that part of the Pathway in which the pilgrim marches on with buoyant and joyous steps, filled with hope and freed from doubt or misconception. The journey is characterized by a sense of urgency. The pilgrim, in this part of his journey, begins to walk fast, then breaks into a loping trot, and finally, gallops on with increasing tempo towards the beckoning smile and the outstretched arms, and is soon locked in an eternal embrace with the Beloved, the Eternal Being, the Godhead, the Ground of all being.

Of these three sections of the Pathway, the first is painful and dolorous, the second a strange mixture of sorrow and joy, the joy increasing in intensity as ignorance is slowly replaced by illumination, and the last a section of sheer delight, of mounting bliss.

These ways are not separate ways, three divergent ways. When I think of these ways, I am reminded of a road in Tennur where I live. Though it is less than a mile in length, it has three names. The western section is called Bishop's Road, the middle section is called Keezhchatram Road, and the eastern section is called the Tennur Highway. Even such a road is this Pathway.

If by these explanations I have given the impression that this pathway is one in space, like the highways in our country, I request you to give up that impression. Though I will be saying that the journey of Ramalingar on this Pathway began when he was an infant in arms of five months and that it ended with his disappearance from the ken of mankind when he was a few months older than fifty years, yet he did not travel anywhere in the sense of covering any distance in a period of time. The journey is not to be reckoned in terms of kilometres covered, or in days spent in covering the distance. The journey on these three ways is a spiritual journey performed in the innermost region of the heart. Of

course, there was a concurrent physical pilgrimage as well which began at Chidambaram and ended at Chidambaram. But the crux of the thing is not time and distance.

Yet, it is a paradox that the three major periods of the life of Ramalingar may well be designated respectively as the period of the Purgative Way, the period of the Illuminative Way, and as the period of the Unitive Way.

It was said that these are not ways in space and time, but ways in the mind. Being so, an important feature of these ways is that they are not clear-cut ways, each standing by itself. We are all familiar with the three gunas—qualities, temperaments—the thaamasic, the raajasic, and the satwic. We may translate the terms as the inert or slothful, the active or passionate, and the pure or harmonious. These qualities are never found in any person as entirely or purely slothful, as entirely and purely active, or as entirely pure or harmonious. They are usually found mixed, and depending on the vast predominance of anyone of these qualities, a person is characterized as being thaamasic, or raajasic, or satwic. Similarly, in the case of these ways as well, a man is said to be travelling on the Purgative Way, or the Illuminative Way or the Unitive Way depending, on the preponderance of the type of spiritual experience he is passing through. We will not be far wrong if we call the Purgative Way as the Thaamasic Way, the Illuminative Way as the Raajasic Way, and the Unitive Way as the Satwic Way. Moreover, when we say, that a person is travelling for instance, on the Unitive Way, we must remember that occasionally that person may slip down to the illuminative Way, or even the Purgative Way. For, till the last moment of eternal union with the Godhead, no mystic is ever confident of his worthiness for that crowning act of grace. So he weeps and laments, wails and worries again and again. He declares again and again his unworthiness for the undeservedly conferred grace of God. Thus slipping back and recovering again, he makes headway towards union with his Beloved.

Happold expresses the same idea in very clear terms in his book, *'Mysticism'*. "The Mystic Way", he says, "is usually divided into three stages, the Way of Purgation, the Way of Illumination, and the Way of Union. This classification should, however, be regarded as a rough diagram only, useful as a general guide, but not to be thought of as a description of clearly defined and recognizable stages, which have been universally followed by mystics. There is actually a good deal of variety in

the experience of different mystics, and, moreover, as one reads the description of their experience, it is often difficult to decide what stage is being described or at what stage of the Mystic Way a particular contemplative is. The Mystic Way is more like a slope than a staircase and it is sometimes a slippery slope, with constant slippings back."

Romain Rolland, writing in his *Life of Ramakrishna*, says:

"The three great orders of metaphysical thought, Dualism, Qualified Monism, and the Absolute Monism, are the states on the way to supreme truth. They are not contradictory, but rather, complementary, the one to the other. Each is the perspective offered to the mental standpoint of one order of individuals. For the masses, who are attracted through the senses, a dualistic form of religion with ceremonies, music, images and symbols is useful. The pure intellect can arrive at Qualified Monism; it knows that there is a beyond, but it cannot realize it. Realization belongs to another order, the Advaita, the inexplicable, the formless Absolute.....It surpasses the logical means of word and spirit. It is the last word of realization. It is identity with the one Reality."

Finally, in Upanishadic language, these three Ways are defined in the world famous prayer,

From the unreal lead me to the Real,  
From darkness lead me to Light,  
From death lead me to Immortality.

Discrimination of the Real from the unreal is the keynote of the journey on the Purgative Way; the travel from darkness to Light is the journey on the Illuminative Way; the resurrection from death to a life of deathlessness, to *amritvam*, is the journey on the Unitive Way.

Though Ramalingar's journey on the Pathway to God along the Purgative Way cannot be said to begin before he was eight or nine years old, yet his reacquaintance with his Beloved was very much earlier, as early as he was a child of just five months. Relating this incident, he sings:

O Being! O my true Kin  
Who showed to me everything  
as the space and time-transcending ether

instead of the usual ceiling  
when I, in my infancy,  
along with my mother and others,  
witnessed the Mystery of mysteries  
in the sacred town of Thillai  
when the veiling curtain was lifted!<sup>63</sup>

The biographers of Ramalingar say that the child laughed when it saw the Mystery of mysteries. For this was the renewal of an aeon-old acquaintance.

The journey on the Purgative Way begins with a prayer, a prayer which each one of us can intone every morning, a prayer which all the world could intone every morning, all at the same hour and minute, sending up a most passionate plea which the most loving God could not fail to pay heed to. Let us pray:

Association with the noble ones  
who contemplate with one-pointed mind  
Your holy blossom feet,  
I want.  
Association with those  
who have in mind something  
and speak something else outside,  
I want not.  
Your renowned praises I should speak;  
lies, I should never speak.  
Lofty ideals I should hold  
and live up to them;  
the devil called pride should not possess me.  
Forget I should desire for ensnaring women;  
forget You I should not.  
Wisdom I want,  
the wealth of your mercy I want,  
disease-free life I should lead.  
Grant me this prayer,  
O Kandavel Who abide in Kandakottam.<sup>64</sup>

There cannot be a more fitting prayer than this one with which the journey on the Purgative Way could be commenced.

Nevertheless, the journey on the Purgative Way was a miserable one. Looking back late in life, Ramalingar recalls poignantly his sufferings during this journey and sings:

If the tale of the agitation and affliction  
which I suffered here  
from the day I gained knowledge  
of the nature of the world  
to this day  
will not diminish by the telling,  
though men of, no matter, howsomuch ability relate it,  
what can I say?<sup>65</sup>

Of all this long tale of suffering I can but give you a sample, a very small one. The 39th decad of the Second Book, *Nedu mozhi-vanji*, 'The Long Imprecation' may fill the role. Man's greatest obstacle to his apprehension of the Real are the six passions of the mind—lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride, and envy. If these are destroyed, the battle is won. Therefore, Ramalingar turns with fury on these six fiery dragons and threatens to cut them down with the Sword of Grace of Lord Civan.

He Sings:

O Witless Kaamaa,  
perfidious slave for sale,  
you caught hold of me  
and, throwing me weeping into the deep cavern  
of foolish women,  
made me suffer tortures.  
I am rising out of it  
by the aid of devotees  
who graciously have rid me of my misery.  
If you will drag me again,  
I will fell you down  
with the sword of Grace of Lord Civan  
of Veda's chanting Ottriyoor!<sup>66</sup>  
Note this for a fact!"

Addressing Anger, he declaims



O Cruel Fellow called Anger,  
the prime cause of base murder, etc.,  
by the iniquitous force  
of your association with me,  
mercilessly I set upon living things  
moved by hatred  
and lost the fruits of taking this birth.  
If you do not want to perish  
leave me alone.  
If you would persist in your evil ways,  
by the gracious Sword  
of Eternal Civan of Ottriyoor,  
I will cut you down.  
Know this for a fact!<sup>67</sup>

Thus he addresses in turn ruthless Covetousness, ally of anger, Infatuation, chief among fools, Pride, the stuck-up one, Ignorance who knows no peace, and Unenlightened Arrogance, the monkey. He addresses the last of these six enemies thus:

O Ignorance-tainted Arrogance the Wastrel!  
Leave me, leave me:  
You do not know what is good for you.  
Without any compassion,  
you have thought fit to subvert me,  
planning counter-step for each step.  
Don't stand near me.  
Take yourself far away,  
and be damned!  
If, on the other hand, you stay here,  
I will fell you with the Sword of Grace  
of everlasting Ottriyoor Civan  
Whom Hari and others adore!<sup>68</sup>

In these 174 decade comprising 1384 stanzas, Ramalingar confesses to a multitude of foibles, faults, sins of omission and commission, many venial, and many more cardinal, and above all to unprecedented lust. It is impossible to think that any man could ever have committed all these sins in a life-span of fifty years, much less is it possible to believe that Ramalingar could be that man, Ramalingar whose life was an open book, open day and night. Rev. Fr. Bede Griffiths, a

scholar and a sannyasi, has an acceptable interpretation to offer in respect of these shameless confessions of a shameful life. He says:

"The theory I suggested about Ramalinga Swamikal was that human nature as a whole is present in some way in every man, and a poet is one who is especially sensitive to the different feelings which belong to all humanity. Thus, Shakespeare could experience in himself the jealousy of Othello, the despair of King Lear, the mental uncertainty of Hamlet, the savage feelings of Lady Macbeth. All these feelings are latent in human nature, and the poet can experience them in himself without undergoing the actual experience he describes. So I suggest that Ramalingar, who was essentially a poet, could actually experience in himself the sins of humanity, lust, pride, etc., which are latent in every human being, and so could identify himself without actually sinning."

Two special features characterize this journey on the Purgative Way. One is the war with the mind, another is the numerous petitions to God. This war with the mind begins right at the very start of the journey on this Way. He sings:

Not content with leading a life  
of not worshipping the King  
mounted on the peacock  
with encircling fan-tail,  
the Thanikai-hill-abiding Honey  
who bestows grace on us  
that we may fare well,  
you entertained thoughts  
which no one but evil ones  
who go to ruin entertain,  
and, today, you have so tormented me that I am laid low;  
O rickety mind, won't you die?"

\* \* \* \*

O my Heart!  
Thinking that you are the most suitable companion for me,  
I deliberately made friends with you!  
But when I scooped up the Ambrosia of the cloud-capped  
Thanikai Hill and was about to gulp it,  
you distilled poison inside me;  
good indeed is your company!  
In future, only if I part company

with your friendship  
I will be redeemed;  
if not, I will fall into cruel hell,  
and will not gain anything.<sup>70</sup>

There are three petitions in the First Book, and as many as eighteen in the Second Book. All these are pleas for mercy and divine guidance. He sings:

I desire the sensual life only,  
I do not pay obeisance,  
to Your sacred fragrant blossomy feet;  
how will this base cur gain Your holy mercy  
and be redeemed?<sup>71</sup>

\* \* \* \*

All Your devotees  
sing the fame of Your grace  
with songs set to music,  
and bow down to You;.....  
O my Father,  
I alone, a sinner, wander about  
on account of my perfidious mind;  
alas, alas, what shall I do?<sup>72</sup>

Later, when he was on the Unitive Way, he recalls all the sufferings experienced by him during the journey on the Purgative Way, and relieves us of a great load of grief as well as misunderstanding by one song in the *pillai-p-peru-vinnappam*.

He sings:

All the cruel fears, mishaps and grief  
which I encountered so far,  
O Being arisen on the Hall in Thillai,  
is only for the sake of others,  
and not for the sake of this mean fellow;  
I have made this statement  
that Your honey-dripping blossom-like golden feet  
may know.  
To this slave himself,  
on not a single thing not the least desire there is,

nor there is fear;  
mishaps and the rest too are not,  
are not, I repeat, O my Father!<sup>73</sup>

In this battle between evil and good, between the pull of the world and the pull of God, God won slowly and steadily. In the conflict of the unreal and the Real, the Real won. This journey ends on an exulting note.

It is unborn.  
It is ineffable.  
If It were to be described,  
It is of a never dying form.  
If accepted, It will come into the heart.  
It is Something  
which those who have left ignorance behind  
possess unforgettingly.  
It has a Dame on one side;  
It is a Kin to those who praise It.  
Such a One with three eyes  
dwells in my mind.<sup>74</sup>

The journey on the Purgative Way ends on a note of victory, over that self same mind which even less than ten decads earlier was obstinate, obstreperous, obstructive, obdurate. Ramalingar has received God's grace in full measure and has come out victorious over his arch-enemy, the mind. God has taken His abode therein.

In the last song in the journal of his journey on the Purgative Way, Ramalingar, describing THAT which has taken dwelling in his mind, said: "It has a Dame on one side". Ramalingar steps on to the Illuminative Way with a paeon of praise of this Dame, the Mother of the Universe who went by the name of *Vadivu-udai-maanikkam* in the shrine at Thiruvottriyoor. In terms of decads and stanzas, the journey on the Illuminative Way comprises 26 decads of the Second Book excluding the last three, and 6 of the Third Book, 1218 stanzas. 24 of the 26 decads from the Second Book, 445 stanzas are cast in language of bridal mysticism.

Addressing the Mother in *vadivu-udai-manikka-maalai*, Ramalingar uses for the first time phrases such as "O Lamp of Gnosis!", "O Wealth of True Gnosis!", "O Tendril of the Flame of True Gnosis", "O Luminous

Pillar of Pure Gnosis!". All these terms of address are significant pointers to show that Ramalingar has begun his journey on the Illuminative Way.

On this journey Ramalingar gained knowledge, gnosis, gnaanam. What is this gnaanam that Ramalingar gained? He learnt that God is love. He experienced through every fibre of his being the truth of the unique pronouncement of Thirumoolar who sang:

The ignorant say  
that love and Civan are two different things;  
no one knows love turning itself into Civan;  
after coming to know  
how love itself turns into Civan,  
through their love they will turn into Civan  
Himself.

This is the illumination Ramalingar gained on this pathway. This was not a knowledge gained from external sources, received by the four *anthakkaranams*, instruments of knowing, and recorded in the mind. You will recall that a few minutes ago we heard Ramalingar declare, "Such a One with three eyes dwells in my mind". Ramalingar gained this illumination from this Dweller in the mind, from this One who does not desert one's heart for even as long as it takes to wink, from this *ullam-kavar-kalvan* the Stealer of one's heart. To this Stealer Ramalingar lost his heart and became his bride. It is this love-drama which is enacted in 24 decads in the language of bridal mysticism.

At the end of his journey on the Illuminative Way, or, as we may put it, with his foot on the threshold of the Unitive Way, Ramalingar gives us in concrete terms a picture of the Illumination he gained in the deepest part of his heart through a profound mystical experience. For himself and for us too He sings:

Besides being the three qualities  
(of thamas, rajas and satwa)  
like Rudran, Vishnu and Brahma,  
He is the Creator  
Who ever and always wields sway  
over those three qualities;  
therefore, He is God with qualities;  
but, as He is not subject

to the changes wrought by those qualities,  
call him the God without qualities.

\* \* \* \*

As He transcends those qualities  
which stigmatize a person,  
He is beyond qualities;  
As He stands pervading  
all the teeming world  
He is immanent;  
as He rules over that world  
and causes undying good,  
He is the Creator of the Universe.

\* \* \* \*

Since, as the cruel One,  
He destroys the world,  
He is the Destroyer of the Universe;  
since He is superior  
to all things that are called superior,  
He is the transcendently transcendent One;  
O Immortals,  
there is One thus described,  
and He is the rosy Lord Civan.

.....

.....

Who is the crowning glory  
of Caiva Siddhaanthaa  
and other similar creeds  
and the Vedas as well,  
and Who indestructibly stands  
as each and every thing in the world?<sup>75</sup>

Before we join Ramalingar on his journey on the Unitive Way, we should pause to ponder on a special aspect of the journey to the Godhead. This is the Bridal Mysticism which is a unique characteristic of the manner in which the saints of Tamilnadu apprehended the Godhead. Ramalingar plays the role of the bride and, of course, God is the bridegroom.

The role of the bride of the Lord begins for Ramalingar as early as the 21st stanza of the 3rd decad of the First Book when he was hardly eight or nine years old. Till the last word of that stanza, there is not even

the slightest hint in the rest of the stanza to prepare us for the emergence of Ramalingar in this role. He sings:

Apart from saying that I am Your slave,  
I do not quiver with eager excitement  
on seeing those  
who have arrived at Your feet.  
I do not read Your grace-imbued fame  
which Arunagiri sings,  
I do not melt with throbbing heart,  
I do not bow down at Your feet,  
I do not eschew all the attachments of the mind,  
I do not visit Thanikai,  
what shall I do; O our Lover?<sup>76</sup>

And here bursts upon us the almost incongruous phrase, incongruous from the mouth of a child of eight or less—"What shall I do, O our Lover?", *en seiven em kaathalane!* In the phrase, "*em kaathalane*", Ramalingar speaks not for himself alone, but for the devotees of his time, for all the devotees who will come after him, nay, for all the devotees who had gone before him.

In spite of this very early, shall I say premature, reference to the Lover, the 52 decads of the First Book and the first 74 of the Second Book which comprise that section of the Thiruvartupaa which records the journey on the Purgative Way, are singularly free from any evidence of this relationship. This is as it should be, for these 126 decads deal with the rebellious soul, the fallen soul, the soul which tries to pull away from the Godhead.

The journey on the Illuminative Way which comprises the last 25, i.e., all but two decads of the Second Book and the first six of the Third Book, a total of 31 decads, has 23 decads in language of bridal mysticism. Of these none are found in the Third Book, which, except for the first 6 decads, is one of several miscellanies, relevant yet not relevant to the journey on the Pathway to God.

The journal of the journey on the Unitive Way comprises the Fourth Book of 41 decads, the Fifth Book of 12 decads, and the Sixth Book of 144 decads, a grand total of 197 decads for a period of 16 years as against 182 decads for a journey on the Purgative Way and the

Illuminative Way in 26 years, that is, excluding the first nine years of the life of Ramalingar. Out of these 197 decads, 37 out of 41 of the Fourth Book, and decads 58 to 80, and 138 to 144 of the Sixth Book, a total of 67 decads are couched in language of bridal mysticism. The Fifth Book has no such decads.

In all, the decads cast in language of bridal mysticism are 95 out of a total of 379 decads of the Thiruvavurtpaa, that is one fourth of the whole work.

This bride and bridegroom, relationship, this *NaayakiNaayaka-bhaavam* begins, again, at the very outset of his journey on the Pathway to God. He sings:

Lord with one side of golden hue,  
 .....

Lord Civan--  
 His Son, my Spouse,  
 dear to me as my very life,  
 He of the great peacock,  
 The Lord of the heavenly ones  
 He of Thanikkaachalam,  
 Came when I was alone  
 And caused me to fall in love with him.<sup>77</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The Lord at the foot of the Banyan tree,  
 .....

Lord Civan—  
 His dear sacred son Who possesses everything,  
 the Lord of Thanikkaachalam.  
 My Spouse,  
 The Lord with the spear,  
 He robbed me of my bangle  
 when I was in the midst of my friends;  
 later, He never came;  
 He went away on the peacock.<sup>78</sup>

This love grows and grows till she is the butt of jokes of her companions and the reprimand of her mother. Her mother remonstrates with her daughter, and tells her:



He has no town of His own.  
 He has mortgaged it<sup>79</sup>  
 relations He has none,  
 enemies He has not,  
 He has never been born,  
 nor has died anywhere,  
 speech He has not,<sup>80</sup>  
 equals He has not,  
 mother, father, friends, or persons born with Him,  
 none has He;  
 O daughter mine,  
 why do you love Him?<sup>81</sup>

But the love-lorn maiden is deaf to all objections. She firmly declares that she

will not sleep,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not talk to her mother,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not lie down on the mat,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not tie her loosened dresses,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not drink even a sip of water,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not deck her hair with flowers,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not cease weeping,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not take even a grain of food,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not sing or dance,  
           \*                  \*  
 will not desire anything in the world  
 unless she is united in mystic wedlock with Him.

Her mother who, not long ago, was opposed to her daughter's love for the Lord of Otri, is amazed at the good fortune of her daughter in gaining the love of the Lord of Otriyoor, and congratulates her in the ten stanzas of decad 85 one of which is:

O daughter mine  
 with lisping speech sweet as honey!  
 What kind of a thavam  
 is the thavam performed by you  
 that you had union,  
 to the cool delight of your body,  
 with Him.....  
 Who is the Lord of all creatures,  
 is of the color of coral,  
 has on his many plaited locks  
 the cow-horn-shaped crescent moon?<sup>82</sup>

The journey on the Illuminative Way ends with the sixth decad of the Third Book. But, for our purposes, we can conclude this account of the journey with Ramalingar's description of his personal apprehension of the attributesless Brahman and the Brahman with attributes. He sings:

*Description of the attributesless Brahman*

He Who is the unique Prime Being  
 Who pervades all the world,  
 He Who is eternal, attributesless,  
 unmoving, immaculate, true,  
 He Who is Is-ness incarnate,  
 He Who is the (36) elements,  
 He Who is the Law,  
 arrogance-extirpating a, u, m, and Om  
 and their content,  
 He Who is big, small,  
 neither big nor small,  
 rarity of rarities!  
 He is He Who, as the transcendent Dancer,  
 stands as unsurpassed bliss  
 in the state of utter silence which prevails  
 when  
 the assault of the taints has ceased to be,  
 the body, the storehouse of the *thatthwas*  
 has ceased to be,  
 speech and mighty mind have ceased to be,  
 joy which causes remorse later on

has ceased to be,  
earth and the heavens have ceased to be,  
fleeing day and night have ceased to be,  
the knower, knowledge, and the known  
have ceased to be.

*Description of Brahman with Attributes*

He Who hurries into the loving minds of devotees,  
He Who is devoid of cruel evil,  
He Who is the Lord of everyone,  
He Who is omnipotent,  
He Who is the color of the sunset,  
He Who is the superbly clever One  
    Who disappears when the four Vedas,  
    Brahma and Vishnu seek Him,  
He Who seeps into one's vitals,  
He Who seeps into the sentiency of those vitals,  
He Who seeps into the epicentre of that sentiency,  
He Who abiding therein, seeps forth as ambrosia,  
He Who,  
    spreading like the clouds,  
    which pour down clear water,  
    and becoming cool like the moon,  
tastes sweet like honey if a person  
    abandons the base false (path),  
    cherishes the true path,  
    give up egotism,  
holds fast to true experience,  
catches hold of the raft  
which is the rosy lotus flower-like feet  
of the Lord  
that arrogance, which is blazing like a fire  
on which ghee has been poured,  
may extirpated be,  
wears the white ash, bathes in a stream  
of tears  
while the body trembles and hair prickles on end,  
melts in his bones,  
melts in his vitals,  
melts in his joy-filled life,

melts with love,  
becomes an embodiment of love,  
abandons all hardness of heart, and  
pays obeisance daily to Him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, such a One, indeed, is our God  
Who, taking us under His service,  
will Bestow on us the perfect state  
which cannot be gained by even Vishnu!  
He is the Lord Who owns us  
without ever forsaking us  
wherever we may be on this earth  
or wherever we may be in heaven  
and other places,

\* \* \* \* \*

If we but behold the beauty  
of His famed red coral-like form,  
our hunger will disappear  
If we but keep seeing daily the splendor  
of the golden form of Him  
who has as His abode  
the minds of those who are like water,<sup>83</sup>  
all misery will be extirpated;

\* \* \* \* \*

If we but stand near those  
Who sing His fame in poems,  
all karma will take leave of us.<sup>84</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus Ramalingar steps on to the Unitive Way. He begins his journey thereon with a homage to the foot of his Beloved, the uplifted foot of which he sang elsewhere:

The foot of the misery-free Lord of the Etherial Shrine--

you say that he lifted it in order to dance;  
I say that He lifted it in order to place it on my head;  
To whom shall we go  
and get the dispute settled?<sup>85</sup>

This journey on the Unitive Way is the longest of the three sections of the journey on the Pathway to God. It is a journey of no less than 16 years. Three Books, 197 decads, and 3248 stanzas of the Thiruvartupaa. We can but condense everything into no more than two or three pages. This journey is full of joy, ecstasy, bliss. If anyone single decad could ever be said to summarize all this in itself, it is the *aani-p-ponnambalaththe kanda kaatchikal*, the visions I saw on the magnificent golden hall, the 109th decad of the VIth Book. He sings in 32 stanzas of jubilant verse, all of which end with the refrain:

The sights I saw in the Hall of Prime Gold  
are wonderful sights, O mother,  
wonderful sights are they!

He goes on to describe in detail the sights he saw. I omit the repetitions and refrains and give, in his own words of course, the details of the sights which met his eyes. The refrains are evidence of the irrepressible joy bubbling in his heart.

He says:

There appeared a mountain of effulgence  
and on that was a street.  
I went along that street  
and in its centre there was a platform.  
I climbed on to that platform  
and on that platform there was a hall.  
When I approached the hall,  
on top of that hall I saw a seven-storeyed tower.  
What shall I say of the wonders  
that were on the seven storeys?  
On top of the seven storeys  
there was a golden pillar.  
When I beheld the pillar and climbed on it,  
what shall I say of the novelties I saw!  
It is not within my capacity to describe  
what met me as I climbed on.  
At the several stages,  
Sakthi-s, in thousands and thousands, came,  
They came and tried to bewitch me,  
but, that I may not be bewitched,

I gained a power of grace.  
By that power I climbed up that pillar  
and spied the jewelled crest.  
On top of the crest there stood a dome,  
that I saw.  
On top of that dome there was a temple  
of one thousand and eight carat gold.  
On seeing the temple,  
I went unhesitatingly inside the portal  
in the tower.  
At the portal in the tower,  
there were Sakthis- and Saakthaa-s in crores.  
Their hues were white, red, and scarlet.  
There, all of them asked, "Who is this man?",  
but I went past them.  
I went past them,  
and there, at a sacred doorway,  
were five persons.  
With them showing me the way,  
I went to a jewelled doorway farther up.  
At that doorway, which I remember well,  
there stood two, a man and a woman.  
With them pointing it out to me,  
I beheld with love welling up in me  
the private sacred entrance  
(which leads to the sacred presence of Lord Civan).  
At that sacred door,  
stood Aanandhavalli, my Mother.  
I beheld the Mother, Her grace I received,  
and ambrosia I partook of.  
By Her Grace which held me up,  
I saw the presence of Natarajar,  
O mother, I saw the presence of Natarajar!  
The boon I received  
on going into His presence,  
God knows it,  
O mother, God knows it.<sup>86</sup>  
In the Hall of prime gold,  
the sights I saw,  
wonderful sights they are,  
O mother, wonderful sights they are.<sup>87</sup>

Mystical and incomprehensible as these experiences are to the common man, they are surpassed by the final experience which Ramalingar had on the last day of his sojourn on earth. I was late at night on the 30th of January 1874, full—moon night when the astrerism Pushya was in the ascendent. He sang his last decad, he sang it to an imaginary companion, he sang in the role of the bride waiting on the first night in the bridal chamber for her bridegroom to consummate the marriage with her. He sang these stanzas verily in the last minutes of his sojourn on this earth. He concludes this long decad thus:

The moment when my Husband  
 had external union with me  
 is the moment when I partook of the fresh ambrosia  
 and exulted.

About the joy of the moment  
 when, transforming me into remarkable  
 EXPERIENCE,  
 He had internal union with me,  
 how can I relate it?  
 This is not a matter like other unions.  
 (A flood of) great enjoyment, great Bliss  
 swelled up and filled everywhere.  
 It is the state where,  
 without any feeling of obstruction,  
 I become IT,  
 IT becomes me,  
 We became embodiment of gnosis,  
 And IT BECAME IT!<sup>88</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

He Who has more compassion than a mother,  
 the unique Chief who blended with my soul,  
 I gained Him by the great thavam I performed,  
 He dances on the Hall of the Fourth State,  
 the glory of which cannot be assessed  
 or measured  
 by word or mind or great intelligence,  
 or by any other means.  
 Nevertheless, as far as I am concerned,  
 He, as an easily accessible person,

United with me internally,  
 united with me, externally!  
 At the moment  
 when He had external union with me,  
 I received a pure light  
 and was transformed  
 into an undying superb form.  
 How can I say anything  
 about the esoteric union.  
 which is the embodiment of bliss?  
 \*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*  
 In the days of my nescience itself  
 He called me peremptorily  
 And bade me compose songs  
 To the dancing holy feet.  
 All the offences committed by this mean fellow  
 of a mind unfocused on Him  
 He took as mere delightful frolics  
 and donned my garland.  
 Who, inseparably mingling in me, tastes sweet,  
 United with me in marriage.  
 How can I express here the degree of intensity  
 of that esoteric union  
 which the Wise One Who is grace incarnate  
 graciously bestowed on me  
 that I may thrive  
 without attachments foreign to this union  
 destroying, me?<sup>89</sup>

These are not the ravings of a fevered brain or a fantasy arising from self-delusion or the influence of drugs. These are matter of fact records of actual experience in the innermost region of the heart. So far as I know, Ramalingar is the only saint who has placed on record this most unique and deeply personal experience.

Our Swamikal has not described this highly esoteric experience out of any pride or vanity. It is at the express command of Lord Nataraja Himself that he has related this experience of experience, this experience in which the experiencer becomes EXPERIENCE itself. And God ordered him to do so out of His unbounded mercy that mankind may



profit by this. Our Swamikal places this fact on record in the following song. He sings:

I have related all this  
by the sacred command of Him  
Who, becoming an Illustration to the name  
'Civam' 'Bliss',  
performs the unique dance of bliss  
on the great gem-set Hall of Gnosis  
while plenty of devoted great gods  
discharge all His functions (at His command),  
and people whose thavam has borne fulfillment  
pay obeisance to Him.<sup>90</sup>

Incarnation of compassion as Ramalingar was, the disclosure of this most intimate and esoteric experience in his life is his crowning act of compassion to humanity.

## VII. HIS LIFE AND WORK (man-oriented)

O Father!  
You should listen to what I pray for,  
And bestow grace on me.  
I should show love to all Your dear creatures.  
To whatever worlds there are,  
I should go,  
and in whatever languages there are,  
O Father,  
I should speak of the fame of Your grace<sup>91</sup>

Such was the prayer of Ramalingar when he was within ten years of the last date of his stay on this earth.

I dare say that the three, Institutions he founded in the last decade of his life was God's response to this fervent prayer. They are:

1. The Samarasa Suddha Sanmaarga Saththiya Sangam, i.e., The Pure (Original or Genuine) Society of the Universal Pure True Path (or Creed).
2. The Saththiya Dharumachchaalai—The True (Original or Genuine) Free Feeding House.
3. The Saththiya Gnaana Sabhai-The True (Original or Genuine) Hall of Gnosis.

In these three institutions are embodied all the teachings and spiritual experiences of our Swamikal so lavishly poured out in song in the *Thiruvartupaa's* 5818 stanzas. These institutions were founded in the order they are listed above.

The Samarasa Suddha Saamaarga Saththiya Sangam was the first to be established. It was founded in 1865, just seven years after our Swami's arrival in Karunkuzhi and two years before he left Karunkuzhi for Vadaloor. Before we proceed further, it would profit us very much, to dwell on the significance of each of the words which constitute the name of the Society. The word 'Samarasa', 'Universal', proclaims that the

Society will be open to everyone irrespective of race, religion, language, caste, creed or color.

Ramalinga Swamikal wanted to establish in our land a religion shorn of all stifling accretions of castes and sects, of petty gods and propitiatory sacrifices, of the mumbo-jumbo of rituals which had lost their meaning and purpose, and rid of soul killing superstitions. And for this purpose he established the Samarasa Suddha Sanmaarga Saththiya Sangam. The word 'Suddha' 'pure,' stands for this ideal.

It is 'san-maargam' we should understand next. Maargam means, primarily, path. Creed is another meaning. What is san-maargam? Are there other maargam-s? Yes, there are Caiva-Sidhaantha, and, for that matter, Vedanta too state them as four, namely, san-maargam, saha-margam, satputhra-maargam, and dhaasa-maargam. A poem in Civa-gnaana-siddhiyaar, the second most important scripture of Caiva Siddhaantha defines these thus:

San-maargam, saha-maargam, satputhra-maargam,  
dhaasa-maargam, to gain Sankaran, good paths  
four are these;

gnaana, yoga, kriyai, sariyai, thus also these are  
called. The mukthi-s gained, by these paths  
are of four kinds.

saalokiya, saameepiya, saaroppiya, and saayujya;  
the mukthi gained by the aforesaid gnaana,  
the learned say, is the final one;  
the other three, they call padha-mukthi.

The mukthi-s gained by the respective paths have been given in the above poem in the reverse order. The line should be recast to read 'saaujya, saaroppiya, saameepiya and saalokiya. Sanmaargam means the best or true path, saha-maargam means the path of companionship, sat-puthra maargam means the path of the good son, and dhaasa-maargam means the path of a servant. A table will help to clarify the subject.

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<i>Paths</i>	<i>Mukthi</i>
Sariyai or dhaasa-maargam	Saalokam
Kiriyai or satputhra-maargam	Saameepam

---

Yogam or saha-maargam  
Gnaanam or san-maargam

Saaroopam  
Saaujyam

---

Saaujyam means union with the Godhead, saaroopam means a pada-mukthi or a graded mukthi where the devotee gains for a period of time a similarity of form with God. Saameepam means that the devotee gains the privilege of being close to God in His Audience Chamber for a period. Saalokam means gaining a darsan of God, having a vision of Him for a certain period or being in the same world as God, just as a servant lives in a King's Palace. The last three are also called krama-mukthi, mukthi by stages, or graded mukthi. Such mukthis are not final. It is saaujya mukthi only which is eternal deliverance. And this is gained by sanmaargam.

Let us have a close look at the various maargams. Of the Dhaasa-maargam or sariyai, the Caiva-gnaana-siddhiyaar says:

Were I to define dhaasa-maargam,  
it is sweeping the floor of Sankaran's temple,  
scrubbing it with cow-dung water,  
plucking flowers and preparing  
many garlands and chaplets for the Lord,  
singing his praises,  
lighting lamps in the temple,  
maintaining a flower-garden.  
(for supplying flower's for the Lord's worship),  
and when coming across a person  
In the holy garb of devotee of Civan,  
enquiring of him,  
"What is the service I can do for you,  
please command me", and doing such services.

About the Sat-puthra maargam or kriyai, the Path of the good son, Civa-gnaana-siddhiyaar says:

New fragrant flowers, incense, lamp,  
materials for the bath, offerings,  
with these in hand, go to a suitable place,  
clean the place by the five processes,  
place a seat (for the God),  
install the image of God thereon,  
meditate on the form of God

and the Light that is God,  
invoke Him to descend and occupy the image,  
worship Him with great devotion  
with flower-offerings and songs and obeisance,  
perform with ardor the religious acts  
associated with the sacrificial fire.  
Those who do these acts daily  
will abide by the side of the Lord.

Of the Sahamaargam, the Civa-gnaana-siddhiyaar says thus:

Saha-maargam is:  
Being engaged in the contemplation  
of the whole Effulgence  
by the process of controlling the (five) senses,  
obstructing the flow of the breaths  
and bringing it to a state of stirlessness,  
gaining knowledge of the six centres (plexes)  
(in the body)  
and understanding their deep significances,  
passing through them to the top,  
partaking of the ambrosia  
from the region, of the moon (within the human body)  
and storing it upto the fullest extent in the body,  
and other acts;  
In short, going through all the eight phases of yoga.

The Caiva-gnaana-siddhiyaar says of the San-maarga thus:

San-margam is:  
Learning all the arts,  
the Puraana-s, the Veda-s,  
the Saastra-s, the philosophies, creeds, etcetera,  
learning the concepts of several religions  
from top to bottom,  
knowing what is God, what are creatures,  
what the malam-s  
seeking the good path which discloses  
the transcendent Civam  
and gaining the privilege  
of becoming one with Civam

without any trace of the sense of separateness of Gnosis (Knowledge), the Thing to be known, (i. e., The Godhead), and the Knower, (i. e., the Contemplative).

Our Swamikal claims in the 93<sup>rd</sup> stanza of the 'Anubhava-maalai' that he went through all these four maargam-s and, gained knowledge of The Universal True Path for the propagation of which he founded the Society we are now considering. The traditional significance of the four maargam-s are:

1. Dhaasamaargam—becoming a slave unto God.
2. Satputhra-maargam—becoming a son of God.
3. Saha-maargam—becoming a companion of God.
4. San-maargam—becoming verily God Himself.

Our Swamikal saw something different, something, which he only can see, something unique as the significance of these maargam-s. To him,

1. Dhaasamaargam meant becoming a servant, a slave to all creatures.
2. Satputhramaargam meant becoming a son to all living creatures.
3. Sahamaargam meant looking upon all creatures as his friend and looking upon himself as the friend of all creatures.
4. Sanmaargam meant looking upon the lives of all creatures as his own life.

These four paths do not exist solely as such; each has an admixture of the other three but is called, however, by the name of the path which has a predominant proportion in the mixture. Another name of the san-maargam is the Bhakthi-maargam or the Gnanaa-bhakthi maargam as some people like to call it. Gnaana-maargam, gnaana-gnaana maargam, san-maargam and bhakti-maargam are inter-changeable terms. The mukthi gained by this maargam is saayujyam, or union with the Godhead, eternal deliverance. The Society which our Swamikal established was, then, the Society of the Universal Pure (or Original) Gnaana alias Bhakthi True Path (or Creed) for the apprehension of the Godhead, for gaining saaujya mukthi, eternal deliverance from the bonds of birth and death.

The Credo of the Universal Sanmaargam is:

1. There is only one God.
2. He should be worshipped in the form of an Effulgence of Light by true love (devotion, bhakthi).
3. Petty gods and deities should not be worshipped.
4. Sacrifices of living creatures should not be performed in the name of those gods.
5. Flesh of creatures should not be eaten.
6. No difference of castes, religions, sects, etc. should be observed.
7. Every life should be held in as much regard as one's own life on the basis of the principle of Universal Brotherhood, on the principle that all lives are equal in the eyes of God. Unlike the Universal Brotherhood of other societies which sprang up in India and abroad, the Universal Brotherhood of this Society extends to animals and even plants.
8. Assuaging the hunger of the poor is the key to the Kingdom of Heaven.
9. The dead should not be cremated, but should be buried.
10. All superstitious beliefs, customs, and practices should be given up.

Our Swamikal himself has on one occasion explained what is meant by "The Society of the Universal Pure True Path or Creed". He said: "Understand that it is a Society of the people who follow the fourth maargam which is the quintessence of the teachings of the Book of Wisdom universal to people of all religions. The aforementioned four maargam-s are dhaasa-maargam, satputra-maargam, sahamaargam and sanmaargam."

This Sangam, however, was a loose-knit organization and had its headquarters in what became later on the Dharumachchalai. If the Swamikal had deigned to stay in the world a few years longer, it is possible that he would have established it on a footing that would have ensured its unbroken continuity. But this was not to be.

The principal item in the Credo of the Sanmaarga Sangam is "Assuaging the hunger of the poor is the key to the Kingdom of Heaven". That he might become possessed of that unique Key, our Swamikal established the Satthiya Dharumachchalai on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1867.

Steps were taken by the Swamikal very early in the year 1867 to make arrangements for the opening of the Dharumachchaalai on 23<sup>rd</sup> of May in the same year. Forty people, of whom only seventeen could sign their names, donated the land for the purpose, a total of eighty kaanee-s of land, i.e., an area of 133 acres or 55.33 hecta-square meters. The document which was duly registered in the office of the Sub-Registrar is available for inspection even today. A most generous donation for that day and for this day too, but, nevertheless, in a sense, a widow's mite; for the donors, apparently, were not rich men. It is the poor who gave their generous support to the Dharumachchaalai that day and it is the poor who support it today. It speaks very gloriously for the people of Vadaloor and its environs that the fire that was started in the kitchen that day has never gone out and that no one has been turned away hungry from the food queue.

The third institution established by our Swamikal is the Saththiya Gnaana Sabhai. The full name of this institution as conferred by Swamikal in July 1872 is 'Samarasa Suddha Sanmaarga Saththiya Gnaana Sabhai'. The concept of the Godhead as the Great Effulgence of Grace has been taking shape in our Swamikal's mind since a long time and it gained its fruition in the construction of the Saththiya Gnaana Sabhai and its inauguration on the 25th of January 1872 on the, full moon day in the Tamil month of Thai (January-February), exactly two years according to the Tamil Calendar, before the *anthardhaan* of our Swamikal on the 30th January 1874, the full moon day in the month of Thai (January-February). The coincidence of dates could not have been an accident. Thrikaalagnaani, a knower of the past, present and the future, as our Swamikal was, he must have foreseen the second event and must have fixed the inauguration of the Light of the Great Effulgence of Grace in the Saththiya Gnaana Sabhai on the full-moon day in the month of Thai in January-February 1872. He renamed Vadaloor as Uttharagnaana - Chidambaram. This Sabhai was founded not as the fulfillment of a desire of the Swamikal but at the express command of God Himself. The Swamikal makes references to this fact in a Vinnappam, a prose one this time, made to God in 1872. Even while The Great Effulgence of Grace was taking abode in our Swamikal's heart and the Arut-perum-Jothi-akaval was taking shape in his mind, the Sabhai of the Great Effulgence Of Grace had taken shape in brick and mortar. All the three events were synchronous in occurrence.



Dr. C. Srinivasan of Annamalai University, the author of "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Ramalinga Swami" describes the structure in his book thus:

"The Swami desired that the construction should be completed in six months. His disciples undertook the task and meticulously carried it out....."

This is not a temple similar to those that abound in the Tamil country. It signifies the real nature of the human soul and its relative position to God. There is no sectarianism of any kind; nor has any code of religious fanaticism crept in. This is an eternal symbol of what a perfected soul of a human individual, actually realizes within.

"There are seven curtains which conceal the light within. When all these curtains are unveiled, there is found a thick glass slab of about five feet in height inside which there is a bright lamp."

Dr. Sp. Annamalai in his "Life and Teachings of Saint Ramalingar" gives a table explaining the seven curtains which hide the Light, which is the Great Effulgence of Grace in the Saththiya Gnaana Sabhai at Vadaloor. This is the table.

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Color of curtain</i>	<i>The power represented</i>	<i>English Equivalent for the power</i>	<i>Function of the power</i>
1	Black	Maayaa Sakthi	Primordial Energy	To veil the kingdom of the 'Self'
2	Blue	Kriyaa Sakthi	Power of Action	To veil the 'Self'
3	Green	Paraa Sakthi	Divine Energy	To veil the Divine 'Space'
4	Red	Ichchaa Sakthi	Power of Desire	To veil the knowing faculty of the 'Self'
5	Yellow	Gnaana Sakthi	Power of Knowledge	To veil the Truth
6	White	Aathi Sakthi	Original Energy	To veil the

				'Space of the Lord'
7	Mixed	Chit Sakthi	Power of Pure Intellect	To veil the higher experiences

Sri A. Balakrishna Pillai has an item in the 4<sup>th</sup> volume of his edition of the Thiruvartupaa on the meaning of the curtains. It is said to be one of those gems of utterances which fell from the lips of our Swamikal when he had converse with his disciples. He says:

"If you ask me 'Who are you who are in this material body?', 'I am the soul, I am of the shape of a tiny atom. This (tiny) atom has the brilliance of a crore of suns. Its seat is the forehead in the body. Its color is three-quarter golden and one quarter whitish. In order to hide this kind of a brilliance of the soul there are seven maayaa-sakthi-s. They are: the black curtain which is maayaa-sakthi, the blue curtain which is the kriyaa-sakthi, the green curtain which is paraa-sakthi, the red curtain which is ichchaa-sakthi, the golden curtain which is gnaana-sakthi, the white curtain which is aathi-sakthi, and the curtain of mixed colors which is chit-sakthi."

Dr. Sp. Annamalai has taken his table from his authentic source. One fact emerges from all this interpretation. It is this. The Godhead is abiding in the heart of man ever since the creation of man. There was not a time when He had not been there. But it does not mean that man was aware of it ever and always. On the contrary, for all of the time in most people's lives, for most of the time in some people's lives, and for a short time in the lives of a very few people, He has not been realized as abiding in their hearts. It is only one or two like our Swamikal who, in the course of a century, are aware of the Inhabitant in their hearts from the very moment of their dropping on to this earth from the wombs of their mothers. These are called, '*karuvile thiruvudaiyaar*' people who have received the grace of God even when they are in the embryonic state in the womb.

The method of worship in Gnaana-sabhai as laid down by the Swamikal is entirely novel. All those who assemble for worship should congregate outside the Sabhai and softly chant praises of the Lord. Meat eaters should stay on the outskirts of the sabhai and worship. They should not enter even into the area where the Chitsabhai and the

Porchsabhais are. This is the manner of worship in the Sabhai. No other method should be observed. A person who has foregone the eating of flesh and the killing of animals and who has, moreover, given up the three desires of lass, lucre, and land may enter the Sabhai to renew the wick in the cauldron of the light and for cleaning the inner precincts. There is no distinction of caste for such entry or for worship from outside the Sabhai. Musical instruments like the drum, etc., offerings like cooked rice, coconuts, plantains, etc., worship by lamp and incense, distribution of prasaad like the sacred ash, none of these, which are common to other temples, should intrude into the Sabhai.

On the 18th of July 1872, our Swamikal laid down further rules for observation in the worship conducted in the Sabhai. He says: "From this day onwards..... a lamp with a glass container and a tin reflector should be set in the Gnaana Sabhai. Brass Standard Lamps are not necessary, nor globe-shaped hanging lamps. When the tin lamp is put in, suitable persons of physical and mental purity should light the lamp from outside the portals of the Sabhai and send it in through a lad of less than twelve years of age or a man over seventy-two years of age, instructing him to set it down close to the inside of the doorway. Once in four days the inner precincts should be got cleaned by one of the aforesaid type of people. When going in to do so, they should take a bath, and, wrapping up a piece of cloth round the feet, should enter in and clean the floor, kneeling on the knees to do so. The same procedure should be observed when setting the lamp also. When the lamp is set or the place is cleaned, our people should stand outside and chant praises of the Lord softly. No one else should enter the precincts at anytime and on any pretext whatsoever. The key of the Gnaana-sabhai should not be kept openly in anyone's hand. It should be kept in a box and that box should be locked and deposited in the Golden Hall and its key should be handed over to the responsible watchman of the establishment."

Such were the punctilious instructions of our Swamikal in regard to the Saththiya gnaana-sabhai.

Such is the third institution founded by our Swamikal. The Saththiya Dharmasaalai and the Saththiya-gaana-sabhai are functioning right up to this day, but the first one, the Samarasa Suddha Sanmaarga Saththiya Sangam, without which the outer two are like bodies bereft of their souls, has split up into quarelling sects and are scattered throughout the length and breadth of Tamilnadu without unity and

leadership, engaged more in disputing about tenets and dogmas than in propagating the Religion of Love, the Religion of Enlightenment, the Religion of Compassion, the Religion of Grace, the Religion of Universal Brotherhood preached and lived by our Swamikal.

But there is a silver lining to this dismal dark cloud. In the year of the centenary of the *anhardhaan* of our Swamikal, we find the birth of a Renaissance which promises to grow steadily and fulfill the aspiration of our Swamikal in a manner never so far done.

## VIII. RAMALINGAR THE MYSTIC

Mysticism, Mystic, these are words which one often comes across, which one often uses in the course of talking about spiritual matters. There are many words which we come across and which we use occasionally or often but do not know the precise meaning thereof.

Then, let me make clear to myself what mysticism is.

Let me call to my help Geoffery Parrinder and his latest book *Mysticism in the World's Religions*, which he acknowledges is an expansion of the Westcott Lectures for 1973 under the Teape Foundation delivered in Delhi and Madras. Referring to the Oxford English Dictionary, which gives several definitions of mysticism, he says that it "notes that, from the hostile point of view, mysticism implies self-delusion or dreamy confusion of thought; hence the term is often applied to any religious belief to which those evil qualities are imputed". This "hostile" point of view, as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it, helps us to state what mysticism is not.

In the positive way, Parrinder makes available to us seven propositions which the philosopher W.T. Stace arrived at through a search he made for a "universal core" of mystical expression. The propositions are:

1. There is a unifying vision, in which the One is perceived by the senses in and through many objects, so that 'All is One'.
2. The One is apprehended as an inner life, or presence in all things, so that 'nothing is really dead'.
3. This brings a sense of reality which is objective and true.
4. There is a feeling of satisfaction, joy and bliss.
5. There is a feeling of the holy and sacred, which is the specifically religious element of the experience.

6. There is a feeling that is paradoxical.
7. There is a feeling that is inexpressible in words.

Manikkavachakar called mysticism *patthi-neri* in the very last decad of his Thiruvachakam. This word, '*patthi-neri*', is not merely a synonym for mysticism, it is the word for mysticism in Tamil. And the *thiruthondan* is the mystic. Everyone of the sixty *thiruthondar-s* Sundarar sang about is a mystic, a mystic par excellence. This is not my statement. Lord Civan said so when He bade Sundharar go and pay homage to them assembled in the Devaasiriyan at Thiruvaroor.

In their glory themselves they equal.  
 By devotion they appropriate Me.  
 By union with Me they conquer the world.  
 Karma they have none any longer.  
 Established in unique state they are.  
 Through their love they enjoy bliss.  
 Duality they have transcended.  
 Go unto them.

It will be helpful to have further light thrown on mysticism. Evenly Underhill's book, '*Mysticism*' is a major work of great authority on this subject. Prefacing an attempt to define the characteristics of mysticism with this pronouncement of Saint Martin, that is: "All mystics speak the same language, for they come from the same country", the author lays down:

1. True mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life process, a something which the whole self does; not something as to which its intellect holds an opinion.
2. Its aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual. It is in no way concerned with adding to, exploring, rearranging, or improving anything in the visible universe. The mystic brushes aside that universe, even in its super-normal manifestations. Though he does not, as his enemies declare, neglect his duty to the many, his heart is always set upon the changeless One.

3. The One is for the mystic, not merely the Reality of all that is, but also a living and personal Object of Love; never an object of exploration. It draws his whole being homeward, but always under the guidance of the heart.
4. Living union with this One—which is the term of his adventure—is a definite state or form of enhanced life. It is obtained neither from an intellectual realization of its delights, nor from the most acute emotional longings.

“Though these must be present, they are not enough. His arrived at by an arduous psychological and spiritual process—the so-called *Mystic Way*—entailing the complete remaking of character and the liberation of a new, or rather latent, form of consciousness, which imposes on the self the condition which is sometimes inaccurately called “ecstasy”, but is better named the *Unitive State*.

“Mysticism, then, is not an opinion: it is not a philosophy.

“It has nothing in common with the pursuit of occult knowledge. On the one hand it is not merely the power of contemplating Eternity; on the other, it is not to be identified with any religious queerness. It is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love God; the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man. Or, if you like it better—for this means exactly the same thing—it is the art of establishing his conscious relation with the Absolute”.

“The business and method of *Mysticism* is Love.

“Here is one of the distinctive notes of true mysticism; marking it off from every kind of transcendental theory and practice.....It is the eager, outgoing activity whose driving power is generous love, not the absorbent, in drawing activity, which strives only for new knowledge, that is fruitful in the spiritual as well as in the physical world.

“Having said this, however, we must add..... that the word Love as applied to the mystics is to be understood in its deepest, fullest sense; as the ultimate expression of the self's most vital tendencies, not as the superficial affection or emotion often

dignified by this name. Mystic Love is a total dedication of the will; the deep-seated desire and tendency of the soul towards its Source. It is a condition of humble access, a life movement of the self: more direct in its methods more valid in its results—even in the hands of the least lettered of its adepts—than the most piercing intellectual vision of the greatest philosophic mind. Again and again the mystics insist upon this. 'For silence is not God; nor speaking is God; fasting is not God nor eating is God; onliness is not God nor company is God nor yet any of the other two such qualities. He is hid between them, and may not be found by any work of thy soul, but all only by love of thine heart: He may not be known by reason. He may not be gotten by thought, nor concluded by understanding; but He may be loved and chosen with the true lovely will of thine heart.... Such a blind shot with the sharp dart of longing love may never fail of the prick, the which is God".

We have seen what mysticism is. In the circumstances it would seem unnecessary to raise a question as to who a mystic is, for it can be answered by the mere statement that he is one who treads the Mystic Way. That, however, will not be enough. So, let me add one more quotation to the several which I have already given and supply a comprehensive and authoritative answer. I have already referred to this quotation. It had some relevancy there. Here it has a greater relevancy.

Then, in the words of Thomas Merton, "a Mystic is one who surrenders to a power of love that is greater than human and advances towards God in a darkness that goes beyond the light of reason or of human conceptual knowledge. In other words, when we speak of Mysticism, we speak of an area in which man is no longer completely in command of his own life, his own mind, and of his own will. Yet at the same time, his surrender is to a God who is more 'intimate to him than his own self' , and, therefore, mysticism precludes real alienation. In mystical union, God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally 'one spirit'".

In a few words, 'the astrolabe (that is, the altimeter) of the mysteries of God is love'.

Therefore, we will discover, or shall I say, uncover, Ramalingar the Mystic in those decads of the Thiruvirutpaa in which he plays the role of the bride, and Lord Nataraja is the Bridegroom. If, we analyse them, we



will find therein every stage, every aspect of the journey on the Mystic Way. We will find therein the awakening of the self, the purification of the self, the illumination of the self, phonic and photic phenomena, recollection and quiet, contemplation, ecstasy and rapture, the dark night of the soul, and the unitive life. The awakening of the self, etc., are stages on the Mystic Way, and are also chapter headings of Part Two of Evelyn Underhill's book, *Mysticism*.

Ramalingar's role of a bride begins, in terms of the Thiruvarutpaa, with the 21st stanza of the 3rd decad of the First Book, that is, as early as the 62nd stanza of the Thiruvarutpaa of 5818 stanzas. I must confess that I am wrong. He was a bride of the Lord from his very birth, nay, from his very conception. In any case, he was indisputably a bride from the day the parents took him as a child of five months to the temple of Nataraja, in Chidambaram. Resting in the crook of the arm of its mother, the child of five months gurgled with laughter when the curtain veiling the Mystery of Mysteries, the Chidambara-rahasyam, was lifted. What did the child laugh at?

Manikkavachakar, addressing the Lord, sang in threatening tones:

"Enter shall I into Your presence!  
Mine alone are Your feet!  
Standing in the midst of devotees who adore You,  
laugh shall I,  
staring at Your since-long familiar shoulders,  
shameless cur that I am."

He threatened to laugh, Ramalingar actually laughed in the presence of his Beloved, revealing for all the world to know his intimacy with Lord Natarajar, an intimacy not of today or yesterday but of several past births. He has declared this in several songs.

We are concerned, however, with this ancient soul's last birth on earth, birth as the son of Ramaiah and Chinnammai, the soul which sojourned on this earth for half-a-century as Ramalingar. The soul which claimed its ancient and time long intimacy with its Beloved, the soul which re-established that intimacy within five months of its life in the new body.

Even though, as in the case of Ramalingar, a soul may have taken its last birth, to fulfil some *vitta-kurai*, *thotta-kurai*, some shortfall in renunciation, and shortfall in the apprehension of the Godhead, yet, on account of the workings of the power of *thirodhaanam*--the Sakti of Lethe--a soul has to awaken to its self. This is the first step on the Mystic Way.

The purpose of a seed growing into a tree is to give fruit, Kahlil Gibran poetically expresses this when he sings:

"You often say: I would give, but only to the deserving'.

"The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture.

"They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish".

The purpose of the earthworm, the lowly earthworm is to nitrogenise the earth. And the purpose of being born as man is to travel towards his Creator and unite with Him. To realize this is the awakening of one's soul. Ramalingar--when I say Ramalingar, I refer to the soul in the frame of the human being who went by the name of Ramalingar in the world--that Ramalingar awoke to his self in his, very early childhood, even when he was barely eight or nine years old, the age at which he sang the *Theivamani maalai*. Of this awakening he sings:

"The vow I have taken is that apart from Your feet, I shall not seek others".

Once the awakening of the soul has set in, there is but one thing to do, that is, set out on the quest of the feet of the Lord. The first step, a sine qua non step, an indispensable step is the soul-searching, soul-searing one of purification of the self, the purgation of the self.

To realize one's faults, foibles, shortcomings, to confess to them is the purification of the self.

From the unreal, Ramalingar has traveled to the Real, and in his heart the thought of God has been born. And through agonising searching of the heart he has painstakingly found every tare and thorny shrub, bramble and briar, weed and vine, which, threatened to kill the young seedling of a thought of God, and has uprooted them all. He has purged himself of all his foibles and faults.

He is now ready to travel up the Mystic Way, from Darkness to Light, from ignorance to Knowledge. This is not the place for an elaborate thesis on the journey on the Mystic Way. I can only show a landmark here and there. Decads 77 to 103 of the Second Book of the Thiruvavutpaa chronicle, as I said earlier, step by joyous step the journey on, this section of the Mystic Way in language of bridal mysticism. He sings:

(When, in the past), the rare to be sought-out One,  
the City of Otri's Lord, Thiyagesan,  
used to come on a state drive,  
I used to go in the company  
of girls of flower-adorned shoulders  
shapely and smooth like a bamboo,  
and behold him and rejoice.  
But I never knew myself smitten  
with languishing love for Him.

But now, the moment I beheld Him,  
My saree has slipped down  
and my bangles have slid down my wrists!  
O friend with flower-bedecked tresses,  
tell me why I stand rooted here,  
a very embodiment of desire?<sup>92</sup>

Most appropriately, on the soul gaining illumination, it breaks out in a paean of praise of the feet of the Lord. This is followed by the *vinnappa-kali-venpaa*, which ends with a petition reminiscent of the petition Manickavachakar made on a similar stage of his journey on the Mystic Way.

He prayed:

Rid me of this cycle of births  
and induct me into the fold of your devotees.

Our bride makes the same petition:

Do please encircle me with Your protective grace,  
admit me too into Your band of devotees;  
hallowed be Your blossomy feet.

Almost all mystics have experience of visions and voices at one stage or the other of their spiritual journey. Ramalingar had a plethora of them. He had also phonic and photic experiences. Describing a unique experience during his journey on the Unitive Way, Ramalingar records:

Your sacred mind knows  
the exhilaration of spirit  
I experienced that day  
when I heard the tinkling sound of the sacred anklet  
which Your ineffable sacred twin feet  
deeming me a thing of worth,  
and moved by compassion to relieve the  
dejection  
of this despondent youngster  
and to mitigate the power of maayai  
and the rest over me—  
raised as they danced on the Hall in Thillai.<sup>93</sup>

Ramalingar records a greater vision than this later in the day on his journey on the Unitive Way in the 109<sup>th</sup> decad of the Sixth Book, called, *aani-ponnambala-k-kaatchi*. Substantial extracts from this decad has been reproduced at pages 66 to 68. He concludes:

At that sacred door,  
stood Aanandhavalli, my Mother,  
I beheld the Mother, Her grace I received,  
and ambrosia I partook of.  
By Her grace which held me up,  
I saw the presence of Natarajar;  
O mother, I saw the presence of Natarajar!  
The boon I received on going into His presence,  
God knows it,  
O mother, God knows it!

The Presence Ramalingar saw in the Hall was Natarajar, the Godhead, the Brahman. He who knew the boon, which Ramalingar received, was God in time. God who becomes and disbecomes.

The journey on the Unitive Way is composed of several factors of experience. Recollection and Quiet, Contemplation, Ecstasy and Rapture,

Dark Night of the Soul, and Unitive Life. If I were to venture into an exposition of this part of Ramalingar's journey to union with the Godhead, I shall have to traverse up and down the last three books of the Thiruvartupaa, the Fourth, the Fifth, and the Sixth, a total of 197 decads and 3248 stanzas. Moreover, there are no lines of definite demarcation between three various factors. They all go to form one process, the process of union with the Godhead. In the terms of the science of Yoga the factors can be regrouped under two headings, namely, *dhyaanam*, and *samadhi*, meditation and contemplation.

Setting apart other factors, let us see what contemplation is.

What is contemplation? A few excerpts from Evelyn Underhill's book, *Mysticism*, will help us to have a clear understanding of what contemplation is. "Contemplation is the mystic's medium. It is an extreme form of that withdrawal of attention from the external world..... It is a supreme manifestation of that indivisible "power of knowing" which lies at the root of all, our artistic and spiritual satisfactions. In it, man's made 'Trinity' of thought, love, and will, becomes a Unity: and feeling and perception are fused. It is an act, not out of Reason, but of the whole personality working under the stimulus of mystic love..... It becomes necessary to adopt some.....rule by which to distinguish true contemplation from other introversive states. Such a basis is not easy to find. However, there are two marks of the real condition. (A) The totality and Givenness of the Object: (B) Self-Mergence of the Subject. These we may safely use in our attempt to determine its character".

Expanding these two marks of the real condition which we may use in our attempt to determine the character of contemplation, Evelyn Underhill goes on to say:

- (A) "Whatever terms he may employ to describe it, and however faint or confused his perceptions may be, the mystic's experience in Contemplation is the experience of the All, and this experience seems to him to be given rather than attained. It is indeed the Absolute which is revealed to him; not, as in meditation or vision, some partial symbol or aspect thereof."
- (B) "This revealed Reality is apprehended by way of participation, not by way of observation. The passive

receptivity of the Quiet here develops into an active, outgoing self-donation, which is the self's response to the Divine initiative. By a free act, independent of man's effort, God is self-disclosed to the soul; and that soul rushes out willingly to lose itself in Him. Thus a "give and take"—a divine osmosis—is set up between the finite and infinite life. That dreadful, consciousness of a narrow limiting I-hood which dogs our search for freedom and full life, is done away with..... The contemplative is merged in it;.....loses to find and dies to live."

Such is contemplation. It is essentially an experience to the innermost of one's being, an experience in the seclusion of silence, individual, intimate, ineffable. Ineffable, perhaps to most mystics, but Ramalinganar, like Manikkavachakar, has left a record of this experience, this 'Osmosis' as Underhill puts it.

The 142<sup>nd</sup> decad of the Sixth Book, a decad of one hundred stanzas, is, in its entirety, a record of union with the Godhead.

The 98<sup>th</sup> stanza of that decad is a precis of the entire decad. It has been quoted before but will bear repetition.

The Bride, the human maid, addressing her bosom companion, relates her unique experience of the mystical marriage. She sings:

The moment when my Husband  
Had external union with me  
Is the moment when I partook of the fresh ambrosia  
And exulted.  
About the joy of the moment  
When, transforming me into remarkable EXPERIENCE,  
He had internal union with me,  
How can I relate it?  
This is not a matter like other unions.  
A flood of great enjoyment, great bliss,  
Swelled up and filled everywhere.  
It is the state where,  
Without any feeling of obstruction,  
I became IT.  
IT became me,

We became embodiment of gnosis,  
And IT became IT.

When Ramalinga sings:

I became IT.  
IT became me,

he does nothing but bear incontrovertible testimony to the 'osmosis' which takes place between the mystic and the Godhead.

Six centuries before Ramalingar, a mystic who lived in the near-west, in Iran said:

"I am God' is an expression of great humility. The man who says, 'I am the slave of God' affirms two existences, his own and God's, but he that says, 'I am God' had made himself non-existent and has given himself up and says 'I am God' i.e., 'I am naught, He is all: there is no being but God's,' This is the extreme of humility and self-abasement".

While mystics, of all lands and of all times "have", as Dr. Ranade has stated, "the same teachings about the name of God, the fire of devotion, the nature of Self realization, and there is no difference between the quality of God realization of some as apart from the God realization of others", yet, all the mystics do not conform to a single type. What Parrinder and Underhill have done is to make a search for a 'universal core' of mystical expression and experiences and frame a certain set of propositions which I have quoted early in this chapter. What is of interest to us here in that Ramalingar emerges from this short analysis I have made of his mystical experiences and utterances as a text book mystic, as a mystic who fills all the propositions made by the two authors.

ARUT PERUM JOTHI,  
ARUT PERUM JOTHI,  
THANI-P-PERUM KARUNAI,  
ARUT PERUM JOTHI.

### Appendix:

1. 3506. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 97.
2. 3509. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 100.
3. Thirukkural 30.
4. St. Sundarar, one of the four great saints of Tamilnadu, was on the point of entering into wedlock when Lord Sivan came in the guise of an old brahmin and forbade the marriage on the grounds of Sundharar being his bonded-slave. The Lord did not want him to get into the bondage of karma by entering into the bonds of matrimony.
5. 4160. VI. 57. Arul vilakka maalai 71.
6. Such a heart indeed, did Manickavachakar have in his mind when he sang,  

O mighty River of abundant mercy,  
Who, exercising amiable grace,  
Stand unmovingly in my heart.
7. 5297. VI. 125. thani-th-thiru-alangal 2.
8. By Aldous Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy*.
9. 3436. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 27.
10. 3462. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 53.
11. Thirukkural 978.
12. 3461. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 52.
13. 3460. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 51.
14. 3476. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 67.



15. 3710. VI. 24. Tharbodha izhappu 1.
16. 3537. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 128.
17. 3393. VI. 12. Pillai-ch-chiru-vinnappam 8.
18. Thirukkural 277.
19. Thirukkural 292.
20. 5598. VI. 134. Maranamilla-peru-vaazhvu 23.
21. Thirukkural 341.
22. Thirukkural 342.
23. 3803. VI. 32. Piriya endral 4.
24. 661. II. 9. aruliya vinaaval 9.
25. 1026. II. 40. Avalatthul alunkal 10.
26. From the "Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna", page 727.
27. From page 524 of the same.
28. 'merged in Brahman'-the word 'waan' in the original normally means 'ether' or 'space'. But in certain contexts it means 'Brahman'.
29. 3263. V. 12. Aaludiya atikal arulmaalai 7.
30. 4132. VI. 57. Arul villakkamaalai 43.
31. 1047. II. 43.prasaatha vinnappam.
32. 4140. V. 56 arul villakkamaalai 51.
33. Sekkizhaar-the hagiographer of the Saints of Tamilnadu.
34. Samankaiyars and Saakkiyars-Jains and Buddhists

35. Stanza 18 of the Chronicle of Thirugnanasambandar by Sekkizhaar.
36. *Thavam*-austerities
37. Stanza 19 of the Chronicle of Thirugnanasambandar by Sekkizhaar.
38. 5485. VI. 128. Uttrathu uriaththal 9.
39. 3768. VI. 28. Thiru-arut-pukazhchi 9.
40. 3696. VI. 23. Sargurumanimalai 12.
41. 3698. VI. 23. Sargurumanimalai 14.
42. 3699. VI. 23. Sargurumanimalai 15.
43. 3406. VI. 12. Pillai-ch-chiru-vinnappam 21.
44. 3803. VI. 12. Piriye endral 4.
45. 5566. VI. 133. Punitha kulam perumaaru pukalal 1.
46. 4726. VI. 92. Mei-inba-p-peru 11.
47. *Gothra*-clan
48. Rishi-legendary first progenitor of each clan of the Brahmins.
49. These years were spent in celibacy.
50. See the next chapter, "The God of Ramalingar"
51. 42. I. 3. Praarthanaimalai 1.
52. 3044. V. 1. Anbu maalai 16.
53. VI. 106. Thiru-p-palli-ezhuchi 7.
54. 2775. VI. 15. Thani-th-thiru-viruththam 49.
55. V. 1. Anbu maalai 25.

56. 4642. VI. 84. Peraa-p-peru 8.

57. The 'Thirumanthiram', the 10<sup>th</sup> *Thirumurai*

58. From "Everybody's Political What is What", Chapter XXV, page 227.

59. In *Tukaram*, in the series "The Poet Saints of Maharashtra".

60. In a paper read at a Seminar on PRAYER held at Bangalore in April 1973.

61. 3924. VI. 43. Thiruvadinalai.

62. The contents of the respective Books are:

Book No.	No. of Decads	No. of Stanzas
I	100	570
II	215	1388
III	159	612
IV	41	458
V	12	238
VI	144	2552

63. 4133. VI. 57. Arul vilakkamaalai 44.

65. I. 1. Deiva-mani-maalai 8.

66. 3478. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 69.

67. 1009. II. 39. Nedu-mozhi-vanji 3.

69. 243. I. 17. Nenjodu pulatthal 3.

70. 243. I. 17. Nenjodu pulatthal 9.

71. 142. I. 9. Irandha vinnappam 2.

72. 601. II. 4. Ciru vinnappam 1.

73. 3536. VI. 13. Pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 127.

74. 1384. II. 74. Ulla-p-panchakam 5.

75. 62. I. 3. Praarthanai maalai 21.

76. 2813 to 2816. IV. 24. Civa-param porul 1 to 4.

77. 403. I. 37. Koodal vizhaithal 4.

78. 404. I. 37. Koodal Vizhaithal 5.

79. Otriyoor-Otri-mortgaged;oor-city.

80. refers to Lord Civan as Dhakshinamoorthi instructing the four rishis in absolute silence through a pose of the fingers of the hand only, i.e., through the chinmaya mudhra, the pose of gnosis. In this pose, the thumb and the index finger of the right hand touch each other at the tips and the other three fingers are stretched out.

81. 1580. II. 83. Inba-p-pukazhi 7.

82. 1598. II. 85. Viyappu mozhi 5.

83. "men who are like water"—Lao Tse, the Chinese Philosopher says: "The best of men is like water; water benefits all things and does not complete with them. It dwell in the lowly places that all disdain—wherein it comes near the Tao".

84. extracts from vinnappa kalivenppa. (Book III, decad 2.)

85. 1384. II. 74. Ulla-p-panchakam 5.

86. Note the subtle distinction introduced here by the words "God knows it". By this phrase, God is distinguished from the Godhead, who here, is Natarajar.

87. extracts from decad 109 of Book VI.

88. IT BECAME IT—what is meant by this statement is very lucidly stated by Thomas Merton. He says: "And here, when contemplation becomes what it is really meant to be, it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God, and

identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but *God living in God.*"

89. Stanzas 98,99 and 100 of decad 142 of Book Six-Anubhava maalai, the *Garland of Experience*.

90. 5814. VI. 143 saththiya vaarthai 1.

91. 4079. VI. 56 suddha sanmarga vendukol 1.

92. 1501. II. 77 thiru-ulla-p-peru 9.

93. 3530. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 211.