

The Kodaikanal Experience - Part I of III

Rendezvous with Prof. Anil Kumar

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Introduction

It is said that Prasanthi Nilayam is Swami's office, Brindavan is His home and Kodaikanal is His playground. In a manner of speaking, this is so particularly where Kodaikanal is concerned, for it is here, that one gets a glimpse of the Sai of the Forties, especially where Divine Leelas are concerned. It all lasts only a few weeks, but what extraordinary weeks they are, for those blessed to enjoy Divine intimacy then!



Kodaikanal is a hill station in South India about four hundred and odd kilometres south east of Bangalore and near the Temple Cities of Madurai and Palani. In former years, every summer Swami used to take a few selected students with Him to Kodai. To help you to know more about Swami's Kodai sojourn, we reproduce below the transcript of a dialogue between Prof. Anil Kumar and Prof. Venkataraman, broadcast earlier over Radio Sai. Both are from the

SRI SATHYA SAI INSTITUTE OF HIGHER LEARNING.

GV: Anil Kumar Garu, welcome to the Studios of Radio Sai. Normally I begin by asking our visitors or guests to introduce themselves. In your case, however, this is obviously not necessary. I would not say you are next only to GOD, but you certainly stand next to GOD so often [!] that most people know you for sure. Nevertheless I think most of us don't know how you first came to Swami. So may be, you could tell us very briefly how you came to Swami. We want to know how He pulled the string in your case and brought you close to Him.

AK: I am Anil Kumar from the State of Andhra Pradesh and I belong to BRAHMA SAMAJ, founded by Rajaram Mohan Roy. Our families have been following this faith, Brahma Samaj, for the last three generations.

GV: What is special about this Brahma Samaj?

AK: BRAHMOS don't practice idolatry. A follower of this Samaj believes in fellowship of faiths and congregational worship. The Brahma Samaj does not accept class or the caste system. It believes that all religions are equal. It works for women's emancipation.



GV: So, everything that is said in Vedanta is there in this philosophy?

AK: Yes, and that is why the founder Rajaram Mohan Roy is sometimes called the Prophet of Modern India. Both my grandfathers happened to Brahma missionaries who dedicated their entire lives for this cause. I came to Swami for the first time in 1970 because of some problem at home. My wife was sick and I took her round to thirteen doctors, and spent thousands of rupees. But after coming to Swami, she had a total cure. Being interested in philosophy since my childhood, thanks to my grand father, I then started reading SAI

literature and soon I found that Baba explains Brahma Samaj ideals better than the founder Rajaram Mohan Roy himself! As a result, I am a better Brahmo now than ever before.



GV: Yes, that is what Swami always says: Be a good Christian, be a good Muslim, be a good Jew etc. Now, you are a very good teacher and you also know a lot about how Swami as the Supreme Teacher moulds students. So I am going to ask some questions relating to that. In particular I want you to share with all our listeners, the thrilling experience about Kodaikanal. It is said that Kodaikanal is Swami's playground whereas Prasanthi Nilayam is His office and Brindavan is His home. How many times have you have been to this playground?

AK: At least six times.

GV: That is very good and I suppose many more trips are in store for you.

AK: Thank you sir.

GV: The Kodai trip seems to be an extraordinary event and with a special purpose too. Why don't you tell us all about the Kodaikanal trip, starting from the beginning?

AK: Well Sir, Swami selects students for the trip, and the selection is based on all aspects of their performance in the college - academic, conduct, devotion, excellence in sports and games, talent for singing and dramatics as well. All talented students who are also highly devoted are selected by Bhagavan to follow Him. A few teachers are also included in the party. Kodaikanal is such a beautiful place. If I am to say how paradise would be, well, that could not be anything other than Kodaikanal.

GV: When does Swami go to Kodaikanal, typically?

AK: Usually He leaves in early April; and He returns by 5th of May. So roughly speaking, He spends about a month in Kodaikanal. But there have been occasions when He stayed on 6th of May also and celebrated ESWARAAMMA DAY there, in Kodaikanal. It happened twice I believe. Kodaikanal is most interesting because Swami is very, very close to the boys and they can learn many, many things from Swami.

GV: I suppose boys are also very close to Swami.

AK: Very, very intimate.

GV: Typically, how many hours a day is Swami with them?

AK: Sir, immediately after breakfast He spends an hour with them. After that, Bhagavan goes out to give Darshan to the devotees and grants them interviews. During this time, the boys go around the lake a bit and they return by 9:30. From 9:30 to 11 O'clock Swami again talks to the boys, after which lunch follows. Next we have tea around 2 O'clock. Swami talks to boys again from 2:30 to 4 O'clock. From about 4 to 5 P.M there is a public meeting which the boys also attend. After the public meeting, Swami talks to students and some select devotees, which is something like an echo session - the evening meeting is reviewed.

GV: Public meeting means Discourse also?

AK: Yes of course; the Discourse is given in the Bhajan Hall of Sai Sruthi, Swami's Mandir in Kodai.

GV: So, from morning till evening, Swami is talking all the time?

AK: At least five Discourses a day!

GV: My God!

AK: Four of these Discourses are exclusively for students. Besides, it is wonderful to see how Swami treats the boys. He enquires about their family, their brothers and so on.

GV: OK, let us go over the details and start from Bangalore - He always starts from Bangalore, right? It must be pretty exciting to go all the way from Bangalore to Kodaikanal. Tell us everything about the trip from Bangalore to Kodaikanal.

AK: The student party travels in a big air-conditioned van, with cushioned seats that can recline. Swami tells all the boys to get into the van, which is loaded with sweets and eatables of all kinds, apart from fruits in plenty. One can go on eating until one reaches Kodaikanal, neck deep. During the journey to Kodaikanal, Bhagavan halts at not less than fifteen to twenty places. This is because the State of Tamil Nadu in which Kodai is located, is full of Sai devotees all over. Every village in Tamil Nadu has a SAI centre. Along the highway, devotees raise huge pandals and sit there singing Bhajans while waiting for Baba. Swami stops, gets down from His car, blesses all devotees, makes a quick round, receives Aarathi and then gets back into His car.

GV: Letters also?

AK: Yes, He takes letters also, smiles and enquires, "How are you?" And after He gets back into the car, the convoy proceeds.

GV: How long does it take you to go from Bangalore to Kodaikanal with stops for lunch, etc.,?

AK: We start from Bangalore at about 5 O'clock in the morning and reach Kodaikanal by 5:30 or 6 in the evening.

GV: Twelve hours?

AK: Twelve hours at a stretch and there are certain important places like Dindigul, Salem and Coimbatore, where big groups, roughly twenty five thousand people, gather.

GV: Twenty five thousand?

AK: Yes, and waiting for Bhagavan. The other centres will have not less than a thousand or two thousand. But these big towns are where Bhagavan used to address devotees many years back in the early days. They still remember Him and that is why they assemble in very large numbers when Swami is on His way to Kodaikanal. On reaching Kodai, He gives

to every boy a sleeping bag. When they get in and pull the zip, we don't know if it is a gunny bag of rice or a boy sleeping inside!

That is not all. Next morning, Swami distributes a kit containing tooth Brush, tooth paste, shaving cream, after-shave lotion, blades, the razor, and so on. After this come towels, new dresses, cameras and what not. One suit case load of gifts of daily needs and certain monumental presents that we feel like preserving for the posterity.

GV: So you can go without any luggage and accumulate lots of luggage?

AK: Take one suit case and bring back three!

GV: So what happens to the teaching about less luggage?(laughter).

AK: And then the sumptuous meals there. For breakfast we have three items,

Ten items for lunch, four items for afternoon tea, and ten items once more for dinner.

GV: Tell me Anil Kumar, after eating all this, how do you manage to stay awake through the five sessions when Swami speaks? (laughter)

AK: Swami's speech is like an appetiser. Listening more makes us also eat more!

GV: So food for the stomach, food for the head and food for the Heart!

<http://saibaba.ws/articles/kodaikanal/kodaikanal1.htm>