

**Autobiography of Sri. Gurugovinda Vittala Dasaru (1894-1983)**  
**(Sri. M R Govinda Rao of Mysore)**

**Prologue to the Translation**

The *aatmacharitre* manuscript in Kannada was retrieved by Sri. M. G. Madhava Rao (third son of Dasaru) among the mountain of manuscripts and books belonging to Sri Gurugovinda Vittala Dasaru. These were in the form of hand written full length free standing sheets amounting to about 20 pages. Several pages were torn and there were margin notes and edits at many places. A few of his grandchildren have worked together to first transcribe these sheets into an editable google sheets document and then to translate it to English. The result is this booklet. Among those who contributed to this effort are Sri. M G Madhava Rao for having carefully preserved the original manuscript all these years, Sri. M G Mohan for his guidance, and Dasaru's grandchildren and family members who helped scan, transcribe, review and edit the Kannada version - Smt. Radhika Vadiraj, Smt. Anuradha Venkatesh, Smt. Brinda Mahesh, and Sri. M G Sameer. Thanks to Sri. Anil Mohan for taking the responsibility for printing this lovely booklet.

The autobiography gives some highlights of dasaru's busy and eventful life from the time he was a young lad of four to the time he was about 50 years of age. He was about 89 years old when he passed away in 1983. It appears from his notings on the asthma episode that he wrote most of this manuscript after 1976. Being the meticulous and disciplined man that he was, he must have kept a fairly detailed journal of dates and events. Those journal entries must have been the basis for his *aatmacharitre*.

His life's story sounds like a letter written to himself, with all its joys and sorrows, its trials and tribulations, and reiterates his firm belief in God. Many of his sentences are cryptic and conversation-like. In this translation, an attempt has been made to rephrase them into full English sentences. We request the reader to be aware of this.

The basic purpose of this English booklet is to record the life history of Dasaru for future generations of the family who are increasingly more

comfortable with English. Hopefully, reading this will provide them a connection to their roots. In addition, it is hoped that the descriptions of events provide a peek into the way people lived their life during the early twentieth century.

Where it is felt that additional notes are needed in order to understand the events better, the same has been provided in smaller font within square brackets [like this].

Those who are interested in getting the original Kannada version can please contact [vedavyasmg@gmail.com](mailto:vedavyasmg@gmail.com).

You can find more information about Dasaru on the following links.

<https://madhwayati.blogspot.com/2019/04/govinda-vittala-dasaru-1983.html>

<http://dasa-sahitya.blogspot.com/2017/05/guru-govinda-vittala-dasaru-great-torch.html>

Please send your feedback to [vedavyasmg@gmail.com](mailto:vedavyasmg@gmail.com)

We hope you will enjoy reading this.

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## The Autobiography

When my father passed away (at Maarikanive, near Maarikaalu [Now known as Vani Vilasa Sagar in Chitradurga District]), I was four years old. We were in Devanuru. I was crying aloud '*anna, anna*' [daddy,daddy]. My paternal uncle Shyama Rao would carry me to the train station, saying he would show me my *anna*.

A friend of my father packed a large box full of brass vessels and couriered it by rail from Maarikanive. And he had apparently placed Rs. 300 in one of the vessels. The package reached Devanuru. My mother used to recollect that my uncle's son broke open the lock and took the money; a family newly setup and a need for vessels. Therefore, a lot of vessels had been bought. Everything now became someone else's property!

From Devanuru, my mother and I came to my younger (father's other brother) uncle's house in Malleshwaram, Bengaluru. That was the beginning of my cousin's jealousy. I was not tended to as a child should be. My grandmother Thulasamma was alive then. Though she was an old woman of eighty, all the cooking was her responsibility. She showered a lot of love as I was a fatherless child. She would take me out in the morning on the pretext of fetching *sagani* (cow dung). Before that, she would mix *aralu flour* and enough ghee without attracting anyone's attention, and feed it to me all along the way. I still remember it. I grew up to be six or seven years old. I remember my mother breast feeding me till I was five. That was stopped in my sixth year and my mother began being a traditional widow [with her head shaved]. In my uncle's house, my mother had to do all the bits and pieces work, starting from giving an oil bath to everyone in the family.

When I was six or seven, my maternal grandfather, Kadapa Subba Rao, came to Bangalore and took us to Tumkur. We lived there for two to three years. My maternal grandmother had passed away many years earlier and my grandfather had remarried. My mother was the only offspring from the first marriage. From the second marriage, there were two sons and two

daughters. One of the sons had died. It was a large family. My grandfather was an accountant in DC's office earning a meagre Rs. 30 per month. At this juncture, my grandfather tried to procure his portion of the hereditary land that was in Naguvanahalli near Srirangapatna. It was then that another elderly man - we used to call him *thatha* - he was related to my grandfather - he advised us to file a case in the court at Mysore. My mother was disappointed; because my uncle Sri. M Raghavendra Rao was a good natured man. She did not want him to be anguished. But she succumbed to pressure. We had no money to fight in court. The jewels that were gifted to my mother at the time of her marriage came in handy at this juncture. She sold all of them. I remember her saying she got Rs. 800 to Rs. 900 from the sale. Next thing was to travel to Mysore, visit the lawyer, frequent the court at Srirangapatna etc.

I recall an incident then. We went to the river Kaveri for a dip. I had just stepped into the river, when I should have been washed away by the flood. *Thatha* held me by my shoulder and pulled me out of the water. That is how a watery grave was averted!

I was attending primary school at Tumkur. I remember I was in third standard. We returned to Tumkur from Srirangapatna. By that time almost all the money from the sale of jewellery had been spent. Besides, I have seen my grandfather sighing heavily, sitting at home with his hands on his head, unable to bear the harassment from his creditors. He would say "Sheshee [Her birth name was Sheshamma], give me some money" and take the money from my mother. Thus, only a few hundred Rupees were remaining. My great-grandmother was alive then. That is, my maternal grandfather's mother. She deposited the remaining money with one Sri. Shettihalli Venkataramanachar and arranged for receiving some paddy annually in return. It helped in preparing puffed rice (*avalakki*).

Raghavendra Rao, my elder uncle, came to Tumkur and took us back to Bangalore. By then, I was eight years old.

At that time [circa 1901], there was no government school in Malleshwaram. There was a *kooliwaada* [something akin to the present day Anganwadi] into which I was admitted. I remember writing alphabets on sand. The fee was eight annas [16 annas to a Rupee and 6 kasu to one anna]. Within a few months, a government school was started. I joined that school. Even in studies, there was jealousy. Padmavati, my uncle's eldest daughter, could not bear me studying. She would torture me by hiding my books and such other acts. This habit spread to others also at home. Besides, I was made to do household chores. Because of all this, my studies hardly progressed.

Another incident during this period. Sri. Bheemasena Rao from Pavagada town of Chitradurga came home. He was a close relation of my grandmother. Seeing my plight, he gave me a nice soft woollen blanket of a well-known brand to cover myself with. And a book of many *stotra pathas* (devotional chants). He then went away to his town. One day, my uncle's horse fell ill. The doctor arrived, administered medicine, and asked to fetch a woollen blanket for rubbing the horse's skin. My uncle's eyes fell on the woollen blanket I had been given. He picked it up and offered it to the doctor. After being used in this way on the horse for a couple of days, it was returned to us.

My uncle was an overseer in the Engineering Department. He was transferred from Bangalore to Heggadadevanakote subdivision. All of us travelled to that place. At that time, my brother-in-law (ಫಾವೆ), that is, Padmavati Bai's [Padmavati Bai was a cousin, daughter of Raghavendra Rao] husband was studying at the engineering school. There was nobody at Mysore to cook for him. My mother was relocated to Mysore and a house rented for this purpose. Heggadadevanakote is quite near to Mysore.

At Heggadadevanakote, I and my uncle's son Krishnamurthy were studying in the same class. My situation was strange. Mother was in Mysore, and I was in this place. No head bath for me, but it was my task to draw the water from the well, because my uncle was practising Sitz Bath of Dr. Khona's natural treatment [A sitz bath is a warm, shallow bath that cleanses the perineum]. For this, I used to fill a tub with water. I used to draw the water from the well for

this purpose. In the mornings, it was my fate to eat leftovers of the previous night and drink residual coffee left over in the tumblers by others. I remember very well my aunt (*doddamma*) collecting the coffee left over in the cups, adding some more to it and offering that to me. In this situation, my scalp was full of nit and louse (ಸೀರು ಮತ್ತು ಹೇನು). There was no one to remove the tangles from my tuft (ಜುಟ್ಟು) and clean it. The office peon Veerabhadrappe, noticing my plight, would take me along in the evening to his home and get my hair cleaned by his wife. After many such days, my hair became normal.

And that is where my *Upanayana* event took place. Krishnamurthy's upanayana got fixed. My upanayana was also arranged to be held simultaneously [probably to save money]. My mother and brother-in-law arrived from Mysore. But my mother was going through her monthly periods. She ended up watching from afar, outside, with tears rolling down her cheeks. The person who conducted the *Gayatri Upadesha* [the sacred Samskrit chant 'whispered' into the ears of the boy whose *Upanayana* it is, by the guru, usually the father] to me was a cashier from my uncle's office, one Sri. Panduranga Rao. He was a pious and a ritualistic man, of advanced age. He did the *Upadesha* very lovingly. Krishnamurthy's parents presided over his *Upadesha*. After the *Nagavalli* event, there was the traditional procession. Each of us rode on a pony. Many onlookers looked at me and were appreciating something about me. That's all I remember.

Another incident here. My elder uncle was down with wheezing once. In two or three days, it became worse. One day, I did not like to eat the rice I was served, which was cooked the previous day. It had gone stale. I informed my aunt (ದೊಡ್ಡಮ್ಮ). In reply, I was given some choice scolding. She added "You get out of the house". I was a young boy. Foolish. I immediately walked off. I had a lot of friends. I always had an upper hand in studying as well as in games. So, my friends were very affectionate towards me. I stayed in a friend's house, probably Gopalakrishna or Balakrishna. I could eat fresh, hot and sumptuous food twice a day. I would go to school from there and then play. I spent two days there. I spent the third day at Panduranga Rao's house. Another friend Lakshmana Rao invited me. I went to his house. Sumptuous food there too. By then, my uncle had recouped a bit. He enquired "where is

Govinda?”. The reply “he has gone out playing with his friends” was given. Panduranaga Rao informed him about my staying with him and took me home. My uncle asked me “Hey Govinda, where have you been?”. My immediate answer was “*Kakki* [Kakki is a respectful address to father’s brother’s wife, common among brahmins hailing from Maharashtra] told me to get out and so I went”. Then he advised me saying “Just because an elder said that, does it mean you should go? You should not”. I left it at that.

Another incident when I stayed there. There was a jungle near the town. Since it was summer, it was the season of *belada hannu* (ಬೇಲದ ಹಣ್ಣು) [fruit of the wood apple tree] and *muthugada ele* (ಮುತ್ತುಗದ ಎಲೆ) [leaf of *Butea frondosa*]. All the friends started off together. We plucked lots of *belada hannu* and *muthugada ele*. Just when we were about to start back, a hyena (ಕಾಡು ಕಿರುಬ) stood in our path. Everyone shouted and screamed and somehow managed to reach home safely. Venkatasubbu, one of the friends in the group, informed his father about the event. He immediately took a few crystals of stone and four to five grains of pepper, chanted some *mantra* and tied the mixture in a piece of cloth. The belief was that the hyena would not be able to open its mouth until that cloth is untied. It was a ritual in those areas to stop cattle being killed. The next day, some of us went to the jungle and fetched the stack of *muthugada ele* that we had dumped there. Later the cloth knot was untied and cast away.

Once, there was a function in Heggadadevanakote in the presence of the Conservator of Forests. Games and competitions were organised for the children - 1. Running race, 2. Skipping, 3. Sack race etc. I won first place in all of them. The prize distribution was in the evening. Rama Rao, the Conservator, praised me a lot. Everyone clapped. I was supremely happy.

My uncle Raghavendra Rao was transferred from Heggadadevanakote to Chikkamagalur. By that time, my brother-in-law who was studying Engineering Diploma in Mysore, had completed his studies. Because of this, my mother had joined us at Heggadadevanakote. All of us reached Chikkamagalur. My uncle’s own house in the Fort area was not vacant. It took another four or five months to get vacated. Until then, we all lived in the

outhouse attached to Executive Engineer Navaratna Rama Rao's bungalow. That was when people in Navaratna Rama Rao's family understood our family circumstances. They used to show a lot of compassion. They used to invite me often and offer food and drink. Meanwhile, the house in the Fort area was vacated. We all shifted to that house.

I was admitted into a school. A couple of months went by. My clothes had worn out. I did not own a cap, and without a cap, I could not be allowed into school [It was compulsory during those days to wear a cap to school]. So, I came back home and informed my mother. My mother asked me to talk to my *doddamma*. I did as I was told. Its reward - snapping and yelling. Finally, she said, "no cap or *shap*, if you really want it, you are free to go where you can get it". I went back to my mother and told her what happened. With tears in her eyes, she said, "just try once more dear, we will decide afterwards". Again, I did as I was told. Again, I got the same reaction. Then, my mother decided - "alright, we cannot stay here any more, you won't get your education either, it is better we leave this place." It was around ten in the morning. She placed one saree under her armpit and picked up a goglet (ತೆಂಬಿಗಿ) in her hand - those were her total belongings. I was wearing a pyjama and a jacket. With just these, we moved out. After walking a few steps, my mother, with eyes filled with tears, said "what now son, we are facing the same fate as Dhruva [Dhruva, in ancient Indian mythology, is the sensitive and self-respecting son of the King Uttanapada. He is abused by his stepmother, whereupon he goes to his own mother and narrates his anguish. She says this is due to past karma and advises that the only route to absolve oneself of evil effects of past karma is to completely surrender to the Supreme]; only God can save us now". Moaning thus and chanting God's multitude names, we set out on the streets. The town's main avenue passed in front of Navaratna Rama Rao's bungalow. Since we had stayed in their outhouse earlier and therefore knew them well, we were thinking of going to their house requesting shelter. Fortunately for us, Rama Rao's wife was moving around outside the house. Observing our approach, the boys there informed Gangabai, Rama Rao's wife. She stepped outside and invited us in. Hearing all that we had been through, she spoke to us with a lot of pity. In the end, it was they that gave us complete shelter. Addressing my mother, she said "please don't worry about anything. We will take care of

everything - clothes for your son, sarees for you, education for your son etc. Please live with us like my own sister". With these reassuring words, we bathed and ate lunch. There were several boys, girls as well as students in the house. I was immediately provided with dhoti (ಪಂಚೆ), cap and other items. I started attending classes the next day. The school was abutting the boundary wall of the bungalow. I would leave for the school as soon as I heard the school bell. Everything turned out to be convenient, thanks to the grace and blessings of Sri *Hari-Vaayu-Gurugalu*. Even Rama Rao, though a man in a prominent job, was very supportive of people in need. He used to shower affection on us. And Ganga Bai - oh, no words are sufficient to praise her kindness!. I was one more boy, in addition to the other three - Jaya Rao, who was Rama Rao's elder son, Ayachita Sheshagiri and Karikenahalli Rujusimha who were relatives of Rama Rao. Gangabai, the Lady of the house, used to give us all an oil massage followed by a bath every Saturday. And even though her daughters were waiting for coffee, we four would be served coffee first. The reason was, we boys had to go to the market in the morning and fetch vegetables and other daily needs. Hence, first go at coffee for us. Snacks usually meant upma or some fried item like *chakkuli*, *khara sev*, *thengalu* etc. She would never differentiate in giving us coffee or snacks. She would serve us the same way she was serving her own children - probably a little larger portion to us.

Sheshagiri was Gangabai's brother. Rujusimha was a relative. He was studying in high school. The other three of us were in middle school. Meanwhile, my mother's nature was one of extreme civility. For this reason, she would take up and complete tasks assigned to others. So, over time, it became her lot to launder the sarees, wash vessels, clean up after dinner etc. There were two cooks at home. One for the circuit and one for the home. ['Circuit' meant official travel]. For each task like washing men's clothes, cleaning the portico etc, there were separate assistants. There was no dearth for anything.

Normally, the task for the boys was to go to the market and bring provisions - usually once, for the whole month. Ghee, made by heating butter, was coming from Venka Dharapur in the form of large tin boxes. We

used to bring home one tin of ghee, of the size of a kerosene tin [This would be quite a lot, probably 25 kilos]. Ghee was used in generous doses. There was no partiality whatsoever. There was no boundary such as the rich and the poor. In matters of food and snacks, everyone was equal. Generally, after dinner, whenever Rama Rao was in town, he would get his legs massaged. This task would fall on me or on Sheshagiri. Hence, it was usually difficult to find time for studies after dinner. Immediately after dinner, I used to assist my mother in her tasks - tasks like cleaning the floor after dinner, mopping it with cow dung, washing plates, and mopping the whole house. My mind would not let me study while she was doing all the work. Due to this, both my mother and I used to finish up all the work by around 9 or 9.30 pm and get ready to sleep. Sometimes, just then, I would be asked to massage Rama Rao's legs. After this work, by 10 or 10.30 pm, I used to feel drowsy and go to sleep. It was not possible to study.

After coffee in the mornings, we used to settle down studying till nine. Afterwards, it was bathing, the morning *sandhyavandanam* rituals, shopping etc., till ten. Since the school was next door, we used to come home for lunch during the break. After lunch, we used to have coffee too. On returning from school in the evening, we would get some snacks. Afterwards, we used to play games - a ball game, cricket, *chinni kolu*, marbles, kho-kho, or a game called *ol chipalu*. We used to come back home by around seven in the evening. I used to perform the evening *sandhyavandanam* and start studying. Dinner was at eight. Jahagirdar Krishnamurthy, son-in-law of Rama Rao, used to teach us English sometimes. He was a clerk in the Engineering office in the same town.

Many years passed like a breeze with this arrangement. In due course, I applied for the Lower Secondary examination. That happened to be the *paryaya* year in Udupi. [*Paryaya* is the two-yearly function that marks the change of pontiff in Udupi, where pontiffs of the eight *mutts* take turns in performing puja to the idol of Lord Krishna, the main deity installed by Madhvacharya, the founder of the Madhva Brahmin community, in the 13th Century AD]. My mother was prepared and ready to attend the festival. There were no buses yet in those days. One had to travel by bullock cart beyond Shivamogga. It was the period when Sri Sri 108

Satyajnaanaru was the pontiff. Hundreds of bullock carts were readied for transporting people. It took us 15 to 20 days to complete the up and down journey. On return, it was my turn to perform many tasks at home. Hence, I could not prepare for the exam. I flunked the exams that year!

The next year, I passed the exam and joined High School. A small incident then. This illustrates the stupidity of youth. I chose Sanskrit as my second language. After a few days, the teacher punished me for the reason that I had not done my copy homework. I was unable to bear it and in my anger, went and changed my subject to Kannada. This was stupidity. Aprameya Ayyangar was the Kannada teacher. He was an expert in two languages. He attempted to teach us to stage the play '*Veni Samhara*' in Sanskrit. [*Veni Samhara* is a Samskrit play in six acts by Bhavabhuti written around 7th Century AD and is based on a story from Mahabharata]. My role in the play was that of *Ashwatthama*. I used to act well and say my dialogues. The teacher was appreciative.

I moved to 5th Form [Equivalent to the present 9th Standard]. During that year, we played the English play 'Merchant of Venice'. I played the role of Shylock. Here too, I received much appreciation. Then, at Chikkamagalur I was in 6th Form or Matriculation. That year, for the first time, exams called SSLC were held. I could not pass the exam. Meanwhile, Navaratna Rama Rao was transferred to Chitradurga. We all moved to that place.

There too, we lived in a sprawling bungalow. There were cooks and peons and other facilities. I joined a High School for SSLC. Unfortunately, that year, instead of announcing 'pass' or 'fail', they only published the marks. So, joining a college hinged on my luck. In a college in Bangalore, an Englishman by name Mr. Twite was a Professor. One more person by name Madhvesh, a relative of Rama Rao, was also studying with me, living in Rama Rao's house. We both scored around the same marks in the exam. On enquiring, both of us were told that college admission is possible. We both went and met Mr. Twite. 'I will think about this and notify on the notice board', he said. Ultimately, we could not get admission. Such was God's will!

In this situation, Sri. Rama Rao availed leave for a few months prior to retirement and moved to his own bungalow on 3rd Main Road, Chamarajpet in Bangalore. There I got to know his relative, Sri. Devanahalli Shyama Rao, who was an advocate. By that time, I had applied at Pachaiyyappa's College in Madras. I procured the seat. But who will finance? In this situation, Sri. Shyama Rao committed to give Rs. 10 per month. Some arrangement was possible for food and dining. Rama Rao's eldest son-in-law was a stationery merchant in Madras. His shelter was available. During those days, there were not too many expenses. And, there was one more avenue. There was an opportunity to join the 'Upper Subordinate' course in Madras. Even then, there was a major obstacle. My mother said she cannot live without me even for a moment. Since she meant everything to me, my mind did not allow me to go against her wishes. I had to give up going to Madras and consider one of the diploma courses. Just then, several courses, with scholarship, were begun - (1) Forestry course (2) Veterinary course (3) LMP course (4) Police Inspector's course etc. It is natural however, for well mannered people to be oriented towards performing *dharmic* customs. Joining a course like LMP entails opening up corpses; joining the Police department would make practicing rituals difficult; in this way, many debates flooded the mind and finally it was decided that I will study the Engineering diploma course. By that time, the Engineering diploma course at Cantonment's Arcot Narayanaswami college had been running for a long time. The superintendent there was close to my uncle. Hence, we went to the Superintendent's house, provided all the information and I was offered a seat. I joined that college.

By this time, the paddy fields near Srirangapatna that were our inherited property came under our control. It came about in the following manner - My uncle's widowed wife, Kashi Venkoobai, applied for sustenance and had put obstacles so that the land could not be partitioned. Finally, as per the court's judgment, a sustenance amount of Rs. 900 was given to her and the lands possessed, about three to four years earlier. At that time, the market rate of paddy was Rs. 6 per *palla*. [*Palla* is a volume measure used in agriculture. One *palla* is equal to 100 *seru*. One *seru* is approximately two litres]. The money from the sale of paddy had been accumulated. It was apportioned into three parts and I received Rs. 300. My uncle had handed over the amount

while we were in Chikkamagalur itself. That amount was given as loan to Rama Rao's wife and the interest received was used for fees and other sundry expenses. That amount was now useful. I was now studying in the Engineering school. This was during 1914-15. After the first year exams, we went on a school tour. We went to a place called Vaniyambadi, did a 'compass survey' and then proceeded to Srirangam. Our tour ended there. But myself and another person by name Narasimhaiah visited Rameshwaram, completed the *pithr karya* and returned. [*Pithr karya* is the act of paying homage to ancestors through offerings of food and is considered the sacred duty of a son]. We completed the *sethusnana* too. [*Sethusnana* means bathing under the famous bridge at Rameshwaram, considered a pious act. *Sethu* is bridge and *snana* is to bathe].

By this time, my teeth had decayed and my health was down. On showing the teeth to the ophthalmologist Sri. B K Narayana Rao, he said "Your decayed teeth are poisoning the food you eat. Get them extracted immediately". The tooth ache had become unbearable. So, I went to a dentist in Cantonment and got my teeth extracted - one line a day (14 on the first day and 14 on the second!). The bed was wet with blood for a week. Scared that my mother would scold me, I had not informed her. Thank God, everything turned out alright. I got a set of new teeth. My health improved greatly.

Meanwhile, I started getting many marriage proposals. My mother wished to see me married as soon as possible. But I did not want to get married without a job on hand. So, I used to refuse to proceed any further.

In this situation, a gentleman popularly known as Society Rama Rao visited us. He was in search of a groom for the daughter of Sri. C N Yadavamurthy Rao of Mysore. This Rama Rao was known to my mother for a long time. Because of this familiarity, he used to address my mother as 'Sheshi'. 'Sheshamma' was my mother's maiden name. He asked for my horoscope. My mother replied "I don't have the horoscope, but I know his date, time and place of birth". Taking this information, he got a horoscope made and said "the horoscopes of the girl and the boy match very well". It was my mother's nature to believe everybody. Hence, she agreed to the match.

At that time, we got a wire message that my paternal uncle at Devanur was critical. I immediately went there. He passed away the day after I reached there. There were very few Brahmins in that town. It had hardly any corpse carriers either. So, it was the only son Appu Rao on one side and me on the other. In this way, we became the corpse carriers, performed all the final rites and returned home. Since I had to attend school, I stayed there for three days and returned to Bangalore. After 11 days, I had the purification ritual also.

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Society Rama Rao came home again from Mysore and said to my mother “Sheshi, I have set the *Muhurtham*, get ready to leave”. [*Muhurtham* is the auspicious moment for the wedding usually lasting a few minutes on a specific day as decided by the astrologer after comparing the horoscopes of the bride and the groom]. The day fixed for the wedding happened to be the *Vaikunta Samaradhane* of my departed paternal uncle. [*Vaikunta Samaradhane* is the 12th day after the death and the day that the departed soul is believed to reach *Vaikunta* or heaven. Normally, no auspicious functions like marriages are conducted until after the 27th day]. In spite of our reservations to this wedding day, Rama Rao said “I have enquired with the acharya and the astrologer. They have approved”. He pressured us into accepting the set *muhurtham*. The motive for this pressure was that Sri. Yadavamurthy Rao’s brother-in-law Sri. Bapu Subba Rao’s daughter was also getting married the same day. Rama Rao’s idea was that the occasion and the wedding hall can be used to conduct both the weddings simultaneously. So, I immediately proceeded to meet my uncle Raghavendra Rao in Malleshwaram and updated him with the facts. He too agreed for the wedding. We ended up proceeding to Mysore.

We needed a *kalashagitti* for the wedding. [*Kalashagitti* in a wedding is a girl who is in charge of the *kalasha*, the sacred pot. It is traditionally a role given to the groom’s/bride’s younger sister]. Just then, Gangabai’s great niece had come to Mysore. She accompanied us as *kalashagitti* to the wedding. The wedding took place, of course. But my mother was not too happy. It was her desire

that I wear a *jarathari panche*. [It is usually a traditional silk dhoti with fine gold or silver thread lacing. In a wedding, it is gifted to the groom by the bride's parents]. She was expecting it to be gifted during the wedding, but that did not happen. Moreover, due to paucity of time, the marriage 'suit' did not fit me. How would a suit tailored without measurements fit? On the whole, it was all not so satisfactory. God's will!

We all came to Bangalore after the wedding. The bride had still not matured. She was only 12 and I was 22. I was still studying. I passed the first year, but had to wait six months to find a job. Finally the job order arrived. I had been posted to *Kannambadi katte* [This is the dam on the Krishnaraja Sagar reservoir across the river Kaveri near Mysore].

There was no limit to my mother's delight. She was glad that finally we can be independent. When we departed, Gangabai gifted us some vessels, a 'Primus Stove' and showered her blessings.

I started from Bangalore, reached Krishnaraja Sagar and I reported for duty on December 6, 1916. I had two friends Narasimhaiah and Krishnayyengar. All of us joined the service together. We all lived together. We had no idea how to cook. We used to prepare upma in a large pot.

After finding a house, I came to Bangalore, fetched my mother and set up a family. My mother's joy was boundless. By this time, I received a letter that my wife had matured. But within a short time, she fell extremely ill resulting in *sannivāta* (delirium). To recover and come back to normalcy it took a whole year. After that, I brought my wife home.

From 1917 to 1921, my job was at Krishnarajasagar. A few incidents while we were there - My mother used to perform vows like '*akhandā*' *masopavasa*, *pakshopavasa* etc. [these are different types of fasting for different durations performed for self-discipline and for propitiating the Gods]. Apart from the three of us at home, my mother's step mother also lived with us. She was a traditional widow who had shaved her head. With my salary being inadequate, I had to take a loan to perform every one of these functions. Another speciality was that every year

during the rainy season, friends and relatives used to flock to *Kannambadi Katte* from other places for sightseeing. My mother loved entertaining guests. During those days one *seru* measure of milk cost only two *annas*. Without fail, she would prepare milk-based sweets and pudding. This took place all through our stay there.

In 1919, my wife became pregnant, appropriate rituals were held, and she gave birth to our first daughter on 2-1-1920 at her mother's house. We named her Padmavati. Our second daughter Kamala was born on 29-8-1921.

During this time, I suffered from Malaria and my health deteriorated. The Medical Officer there examined me and gave his written opinion that unless I am transferred, my life is in danger. On an application based on this, I was transferred to Kolar.

I was suffering from asthma quite a lot. In Kolar, there was a well known ayurvedic doctor by name 'Muchukundappa'. He had a heap of some ancient tablets and by changing their proportions, he used to treat several diseases. He was an expert in checking the pulse and diagnosing diseases. He began treating by giving gold dust. Its diet required me to consume rasam and lots of ghee. This went on for two months. By then, I had digested a whole tin of ghee!

We lived in Kolar only for six months. Another incident there was regarding the cycle allowance. In Krishnarajasagar, I was getting a 'Cycle Allowance'. It had to be converted to 'Horse Allowance'. That would increase the allowance by seven and a half Rupees. That was the desire, and I applied for the same. Executive Engineer Sri. R Puttaswamaiah asked me to fetch a horse. So, I borrowed a friend's horse as well as its attendant and tied the horse within the office compound. The Engineer saw the horse and ordered me to ride it on the road the next day itself. Luckily for me, I had some practice with horse riding. So, I had no trouble. I rode on the horse trailing the boss's car for a short distance. The horse allowance was approved. I received this allowance until I retired.

In 1922, I was transferred from Kolar to Chikkaballapur. Inside the town is a Hanuman temple. There we rented the house owned by Achyutappa. The rent was Rs. 4 only. One 'Uravani Narasimhacharya' also lived there. An incident within a few months of going there - an old brahmin gentleman came and said his only son's upanayanam had to be performed. I was empty-handed. So, I requisitioned some friends. Some of them helped out. Afterwards I went to the famous lawyer Suryanarayana Rao and informed him. His reaction was favourable. He said "Govinda Rao, I am anyway conducting my son's *upanayanam*. Please request that brahmin to come and conduct his son's *upanayanam* also at the same time'. The function took place as planned. As if triggered by fate, that old brahmin died shortly. The mother and son survived. Since the son's *upanayanam* was completed, he could perform all the last rites.

Another incident in 1923. During the harvest season, I had to go to Srirangapatna to bring paddy. At that time, rats were dying of plague in Chikkaballapur. Vaccination against plague was being given to everyone in the town. I got everyone at home vaccinated. However, I did not get vaccinated due to my haughty attitude. I proceeded to Bangalore and went to my paternal uncle's house in Malleshwaram. I saw the newspapers [probably about the plague]. He said "Govinda, you sleep separately in the room". I did as told. Next day, I went to Mysore, then onward to Nagoor village, made arrangements for the paddy to be transported to Chikkaballapur, and then returned home. By the time I returned, I was feeling tired and sick. As soon as I got off the train, I rushed to a hospital and showed the aching nodule under my right armpit. The doctor applied wet tincture iodine, but somehow my mind was not at rest. I went home and asked for an ayurvedic doctor to visit me. He examined and confirmed that it was due to plague and assured treatment. He gave some oral medicine and tied the core of aloe vera onto the nodule to dissolve it. Over time, my fever subsided and the nodule also dissolved.

I recall another incident during this time. Generally, no matter where I was, I used to gather all the Madhva brahmins at one place and perform the annual ceremony of Sri Raghavendra Swamy and the Madhva Navami festival.

Before leaving for Srirangapatna, I went to all the Madhva brahmins, collected donations and arranged for the functions to be held in the Hanuman temple in the town. I had also arranged for lunch for brahmin widows. Unfortunately I was down with plague on that day. The Madhva Navami festival procession commenced. The procession could not enter our lane as it was too small for the festival car. So they brought the car to the entrance of the lane and halted it there. I received this news. I crawled to the car and had darshan of the deity. All the folks in the town said I had done a very commendable work and therefore I was cured. Many devotees came home to express their sympathy.

Retrenchment had started in our department in 1921. Many people had lost jobs, though it had still not affected us. But its heat hit us now, in 1924. I and Krishnayyengar - both of us lost our jobs. At that time, my father-in-law was working as a Revenue Inspector at Frenchrock, now known as Pandavapura. I went there and was planning to withdraw money from my provident fund, buy some oxen and start farming. Just then, within a month, I got my job back and was posted to Nagamangala.

I can recollect another incident here. As already mentioned, I had taken treatment for my asthma at Kolar. It did not bother me for a year. It now started giving me trouble again. I felt the medicines and the money were all a waste. The only course left was to surrender to the Supreme. I thought 'Sri Raghavendra Swami, the fulfiller of one's wishes is in Mantralayam. Let me go there and serve him.' However, I had no money to go, but only a determination in my mind. I had stored paddy in a granary at home, a full year's supply. I sold the whole lot. The plan was to use the money for travel and other expenses. I took the whole household and left for Mantralayam. We reached the train station and even before I had bought tickets, I noticed my elder child had measles. The fever had reached 105°F. My mother suggested 'We have not bought the tickets yet, why not just return home straight?' Some godly inspiration made me take a brave stand. Addressing my mother, I said 'Mother, we have commenced our journey trusting *Rayaru* [Raghavendra Swami]. Let us not take a backward step. Let us put all our trust in him and continue.'" She did not react and remained silent. The train started. There is a

rule that people starting off on a pilgrimage should commence their journey on an empty stomach. So, we had not eaten anything. On the way, at Yelahanka station, there was a break of one hour. We decided to get down there and prepare food. By the time we got off the train at Yelahanka, even the other child had measles and fever. Again, the same decision [of continuing the journey]. Rice and tamarind rasam were quickly cooked. All of us ate and got into the train. The journey started.

We reached Guntakal in the evening. We had carried our own rice and had picked up some coconuts at Chikkaballapur as they were inexpensive. When we began the journey, we had not paid the luggage charges on this extra luggage due to paucity of time. So, I got these weighed here [at Guntakal] and paid the excess charge of Four Rupees. We then took another train finally reaching Anu Manchali [the train station nearest to Mantralayam] the following evening at 10.30 in the night.

My suffering from asthma was now intense. While disembarking, my aged mother had to assist me. We all got off, carried our luggage and camped at the local Rayara Mutt [at Anu Manchali]. We were cared for extremely well. When I was just about to leave for a bath, my mother enquired, “dear, will your body be able to withstand a cold water bath, with all this cough?”. I said “When we have *rayara anugraha* [Raghavendra Swami’s blessings], why will it not withstand?”. I completed my bath and then the rituals. We partook of the prasadam [lunch]. We then engaged an ox-driven cart to transport us to Mantralayam, which we could reach before sunset. During those days, unlike now, there were no conveniences. There was a huge zinc sheet covering and under that, a number of small cabins. We were given one of these small cabins. From the next day, I vowed to perform the *seva* and began. It was a scorching summer. I had to bathe three times a day. And while eating, I had to be in wet clothes, without which I was not supposed to eat [probably one of the restrictions of the vow]. I was supposed to eat just one meal a day, even in that burning heat. In the night I would eat some puffed rice or *aralu*. This became a daily routine. All three of us did this *seva* for 20 days.

I have no idea how the asthma disappeared. Even though I was too weak to complete one *namaskara* [*pradakshine namaskara* - or perambulation of the main temple premises, probably about 150 steps in circumference], gradually I gained strength. Later, I used to perform twenty to thirty *namaskaras*. By this time, both my daughters were rid of measles, the fever subsided and they were back to normal. On the night of the penultimate day of our stay, my mother had a dream with a good omen. On informing this to the priest there, he said I will become the father of a boy and that we would visit Mantralayam again. This was also my mother's desire since I already had two daughters. She longed for a male child for me. My wish was for an asthma cure. Anyway, it was like two birds with one stone. The asthma that got cured then, in 1923, never bothered me again, until 1976. Recently it has been bothering me a bit. But thanks to *rayaru*, it is not troubling me much. After all this, we returned to Chikkamagalur.

From there, I was transferred to Nagamangala. On this occasion, my mother said "You keep getting transferred. Why don't you see someone higher up and requisition [for staying in one place]? I replied "Mother, the government bears travel expenses. Wherever we go we get an opportunity to visit nearby holy places and visit shrines".

My wife was pregnant when we moved to Nagamangala. On 9-2-1924, she became the mother of a son. Since he was born from the blessings of *rayaru*, we named him 'Gururaja'. My mother's joy knew no bounds. The naming ceremony was a grand function.

An incident in Nagamangala. There was a gentleman by name Sri. Ramanna who had retired from the Police department - a very virtuous family man. I used to invite him over to my house now and then for snacks and meals. I don't know what came over him - he brought his whole collection of *sarvamoola Grantha* [a collection of 38 works - treatises, commentaries, expositions and shlokas - authored by Sri. Madhvacharya, the founder of the Madhva sect and a proponent of the Dvaita philosophy] handed them over to me, along with some *dakshine*. I said "Mr. Ramanna, I have no knowledge of Sanskrit. So, how will I even get the authority to study *Sarvamoola Granthas*? Please

donate them to someone else". He replied "If not now, you will gain authority in the future. That is the reason I have handed them over to you". As the Sanskrit saying goes, '*vipra vakyo janardanaha*' [The words of a brahmin are the words of God], his words turned out to be true.

In 1925, I was transferred from Nagamangala to Mullur in Nanjangud taluk. This place felt more like the Malnad region. The only brahmin's house there was that of a *Smartha* brahmin [a Shaivite, different from a *Madhva* brahmin who is Vaishnavite]. There were no Vaishnavites. Many belonged to a community called *kevala markata*. We were going to the town in a bullock cart along with all our household items. One of the items was a large stone hoe. The path was uneven with pits and potholes. The cart toppled at one point. I was worried about what could have happened to the kids. Thanks to the grace of God, everyone was safe and there was no mishap. We repaired the cart and reached Mullur.

A strange situation arose here. There were no vacant houses. I had reached the place with my family. I informed the local contractor. He suggested as follows - "Sir, there is a house; however, a week back another contractor from Gujarat who lived there committed suicide by hanging. I have cleaned it up now with a fresh coat of paint. If you want, that house is available". I gave it a deep thought and concluded that in a house where Gods are propitiated, *rayara stotras* are chanted and holy scriptures are read, what harm can possibly come?. With this logic, I decided to rent that house. I gave strict orders that the womenfolk should never learn of this. The goods were then offloaded. I called for a purohit to perform *punyahavachanam* [purifying ritual], conducted a puja and started our Mullur family life. We spent six months this way.

[some manuscript missing here]

The children were down with fatigue but no other trouble. God's grace. For important rituals, I used to get the purohit from Nanjangud. Since I had a horse with me, I would send it along with an assistant to fetch the purohit. By this time, my father-in-law was working as the Peshwa [administrative head] of

the temple [at Nanjangud]. Sante Saragur is 10 miles from Mullur. There was a vaishnavite house in that town. I went there once to perform the yearly ceremony for the ancestors. With no one who could chant the mantras, I myself recited them from a book, invited a family gentleman as the guest and somehow managed such rituals.

On that occasion, all of us were travelling by cart to Mullur. Around five in the evening, as we were passing through the forest, we saw a large tiger walking about a furlong away. The tiger was fearless, glanced back at us several times and was treading the path. The cart driver reassured us and all of us moved forward shouting at the top of our voices. Finally, the tiger turned into a narrow path leading into the forest. We reached the town unscathed.

There is a tiny rivulet called 'Bhrigu river' that flows through the town. A small bund is built nearby and a canal dug for water to be provided for farming. A lot more aqueducts, siphons and buildings had to be built. I was transferred to Mullur for executing these tasks.

A common scene in the town was this - two tiny rafts with metal pots tied to a small ox going to the river for fetching water. Following this, we also bought an ox. One of us would fill the pots with water at the river and the servant would walk the ox home. Someone at home would empty the pots and send them back for refill.

While we lived in Mullur, my father-in-law retired. His whole family came to Mullur and stayed with us for a few months. During the stay, unfortunately, the young Govinda [brother-in-law] suffered from delirium. The doctor had to come from Sante Saragur. As usual I had to send the horse with the servant.

[some manuscript missing here]

So, he stayed back with us. All of us walked ahead and began crossing the river. The child was being carried by a knapper. While we were crossing

the deepest part, we saw a gush of new water suddenly rushing towards us. Within minutes the flood waters rose and we saw a bullock cart and a few bullocks getting washed away. I started wondering what would happen to us and appealed to the almighty. By the time we neared the other bank, the water was chest high. On the bank were a few boatmen. They jumped into the river, pulled us out and saved us. We were travelling with all the necessary items for my daughter's marriage. Thanks to the grace of god, we escaped unhurt. There were no vacant houses there and we had to stay at the marriage hall itself. My daughter's wedding also took place in the same hall. This was the only marriage I conducted without taking a loan. Since all the guests were also relatives, they all stayed back for a month at the same choultry and then left for Mysore. [Note - The reference here is to the marriage of his eldest daughter Padmavati who married her maternal uncle Balakrishna Rao].

While we were staying in Hosadurga, my fourth son [Nagaraja Rao] was born on 7-12-1934. My work in Hosadurga was only for a year, laying a new road. Ten miles away, at Gavi Rangapura, was a temple dedicated to *Kurma*, Vishnu's second avatar. We visited the temple which has the idol in the form of *Kurma* [Tortoise]. Pujas are performed everyday.

From Hosadurga, I was transferred to Chitradurga municipality. We rented a house near *Uttaradi mutt*. After a few months, I was transferred locally to Engineer No. 1 sub-division in the Public Works Department. My second daughter was then of marriageable age. Her birth star was *moola*, which meant she had to be married into a household that had no father-in-law. So, the groom needed to be from such a household. I spent a lot of money in the process of looking for a suitable groom, all in vain. I had invested some money in an insurance company to help me at the time of this daughter's marriage and I received that Rs. 1000 now. I happened to be in Mysore then. 1935 was *Paryaya* time at Udupi. We all went to Udupi, bathed at '*Madhva Sarovara*', and had an excellent darshan of Lord Krishna. We went around to pilgrimage spots like Pajaka [birthplace of Sri. Madhvacharya] and then returned to Mysore. By the time I returned, I had received a notice from the municipality to the effect that sites left vacant without constructing a house would be repossessed by the municipality. About three to four years

earlier, I had purchased two sites in Weaver's Lane, what is now called Krishnamurthypuram. I now decided to build a small house. I had Rs. 1000 with me, of which I had spent Rs. 60 for the Udupi pilgrimage. I prepared a house plan and applied to the municipality for approval. I obtained the approval, extended my leave and decided to personally supervise the construction of the house.

The out-house at my father-in-law's house was vacant and that too was in Krishnamurthypuram, just round the corner from the site. I moved there with my wife, an infant and a grown up daughter ready for marriage. The labour rate at that time was anywhere from four *annas* to eight *annas* per day for a male worker and two to four *annas* for a female worker. And for a mason, 12 *annas* to one Rupee four *annas*. After a shower in the morning and light breakfast, I used to be at the site by 7 AM, take out the workers attendance register and commence the construction work. My wife used to bring me snacks and coffee to the site. This went on for two months. Just then, the concept of RCC roofing had started. But it was still creating a few problems and was not fully reliable. Because of this reason, I had to go for what was called 'Madras roofing'. [This is a traditional roofing technique that was practiced in South India. It involves the use of wood and "aachikal" (a local material which is a small brick) and lime plaster. Commonly used for small spans. Wooden beams are used to cover the span. Over this, wooden beams are laid at intervals of less than 45 cms from each other. The gaps between are filled with bricks on edge with lime plaster.] The construction was completed. We performed the 'Grihapravesha' function, rented it out for Rs. 12 per month and returned to Chitradurga. My leave period had been completed. Meanwhile, I had applied for a loan from the society by mortgaging the house, to arrange funds for my daughter's marriage.

Holalkere is enroute Chitradurga. I was already in correspondence with Sri. Nanjunda Rao, Holalkere's Forest Ranger regarding his brother who was a potential groom. The boy was in Calcutta studying for a veterinary degree. Since summer vacation was on, he had come home to Holalkere. We went to Holalkere, visited the groom's family and fixed up the marriage. A suitable wedding date was also fixed. Within a few days after returning to

Chitradurga, I went back to Mysore, got the loan sanctioned and returned with the money.

My second daughter Chi. Kamalu's wedding took place in Chitradurga's *Uttaradi mutt*. Sri. Subbannacharya, the head of the mutt was the purohit who conducted the ceremony. I had invited many government employees for lunch. They all had to be in the office by 10 AM. I had assured them that lunch would be served by 9.30 AM. If that were to happen, efficient supervision was needed - from washing vessels to getting the food ready. My wife and I were awake all through the night getting things ready. Everything was ready, puja was completed, banana leaves for lunch were laid out, first round of items were also served, but the Purohit was nowhere to be seen. I could not make the invitees wait any longer. So, I went ahead and served the holy water (*theertha*), and requested the people to start eating. The purohit came later and we served him lunch in the kitchen. Everything went off smoothly.

[Note - From this point onwards, the entries resemble a dated journal rather than a descriptive autobiography. Some of the highlights are given below]

October 30, 1937 - *Kartheeka shuddha saptami*. Last day of '*Shanti Patha*'. I was transferred from Chitradurga to Molakalmur.

September 2, 1937 - *Shraavana-bahula-dvaadashi* - my birthday. Camped at Hampi with my family. Bathed at Chakratheertha. Went to Anegundi on the 3rd, then to Ballari and onward to Rampur - the border of my jurisdiction.

February 11, 1938 - Handed over charge at Molakalmuru availed leave and proceeded to Mysore; 12th to 17th - Arranged for loan by mortgaging the land; 18th - Obtained Rs. 800 as loan, Started building the boundary wall for the house

March 21, 1938 - Reported for work at Challakere

December 29, 1938 - *Bhagavata Saroddhara mangala*

---- My sister-in-law Ahalya Bai's marriage at Mysore; 16th, 17th - Went to Bangalore to get my eyes tested; ordered for eyeglasses

20th March, 1939 - To Challakere

3rd April, 1939 - Transfer orders to Hassan

5th May, 1939 - Reported for duty at Hassan

26, 27 September, 1939 - Visited Mysore and returned along with Chi. Padmavati

19th November, 1939 - Second daughter Kamalu and her husband left for Bangalore

22nd March, 1940 - Commenced my journey to Tumkur. Met Sri. R Ramachandra Rao on the way at Arasikere

23rd March, 1940 - Reached Deverayanadurga. Walked the last nine miles. Climbed the mountain at 9.30 AM.

24th March, 1940 - Sunday. *Ankitopadesha* [Formal induction into the *daasa pantha* by his guru *Thande Muddumohana Vittala Dasaru*]

25th March, 1940 - Walked down the mountain, took a train to Hassan

16th April, 1940 - Learnt that Guruji cast off his earthly body on the 16th at 1 PM

5th January, 1941 - To Channapatna. From there to Abbur and then to Closepet. Met Sri. Anantha Krishnamurthy. He had also received his *ankitha* and had a thamboori made by Rangappa, another Madhva, also a shishya of our guru. My guru had ordered one for me too. And that was the last one. I took the thamboori from Anantha Krishnamurthy and returned to Mysore on the 6th.

26th January 1941 - To Bangalore with RR. 27th - Purandaradasa's *punya dina*. Sri. *Urugadrivasa vittala dasaru* was performing it at Vasanthapura.

-----The End-----