

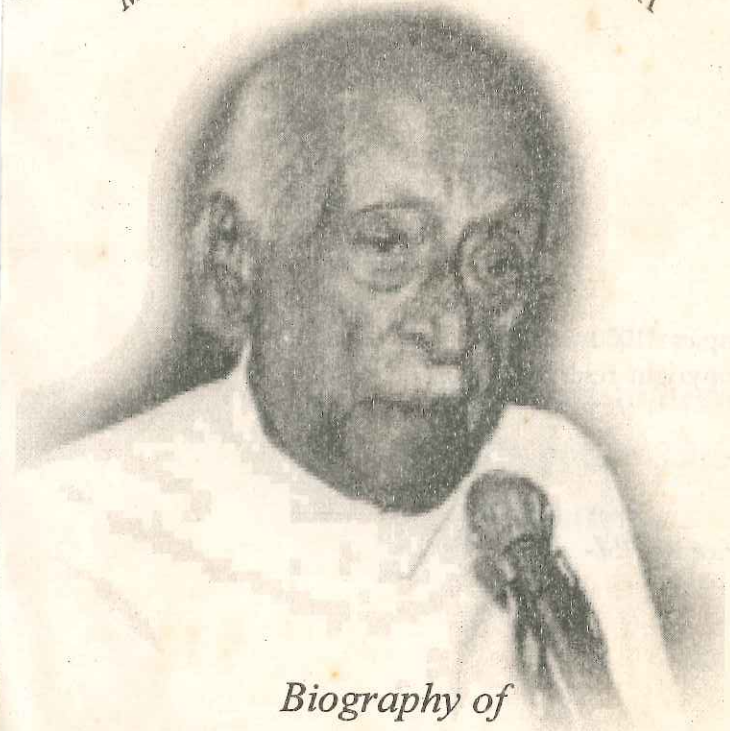
MAMA Dr G.RAMACHANDREN'S STORY



*Biography of*  
**DESIKOTTAMA**  
**Dr G. RAMACHANDRAN**

*Compiled By*  
BASI-SISTER MYTHILI

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*Dedicated to:*  
**My dear Children**  
**Dr GR Public School**  
**Neyyattinkara**

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*My dear children, brothers and sisters,*

Let me tell you, the story of our beloved Mama  
Desikottama Dr G. Ramachandran.

Like the full moon shining on the sky belongs to each one of  
you as "CHANDA MAMA", Dr. GR also a MAMA to everyone  
- to me, to you and to all.

His life was a golden string binding together two generations:

One generation that won our Independence and the next  
generation that enjoyed its fruits.

In both these periods, GR MAMA had played important roles.  
He had never missed a chance to do his best at any moment of  
his life. So, let me start telling his story from my perspective.

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BASI  
Sister MYTHILI

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## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL DAYS

Dr G.Ramachandran's father was Sri K.Govinda Pillai and his mother, Smt G. Madhavi Tankachi.

GR was born in the Malayalam Era 1080, in the month of Kanni, on the Choti star.

That was the 7th October of 1904, in the Parakkad House, West Fort, Trivandrum. The house is still existing.

His uncle was Sri Marthandan Tampi. He was the founder of the Central Native School in Trivandrum. He was also called 'Pula -Tampi'. Being a Nair himself Marthandan Tampi kept a pulaya as his Butler. This was something very revolutionary in Travancore, ninety years ago. Anyone who was his guest had to drink and eat what was touched and cooked by an untouchable!

That was a hammer blow at caste and untouchability long before Mahatma Gandhi came on the scene.

GR's great grand uncle was Sri Thiruvikraman Tampi. He held the post of the Superintendent of 'I

Police in Trivandrum. He was the person who arrested Raja Kerala Varma Valiakoil Tampuran.

GR's father Sri K.Govinda Pillai was a stern disciplinarian and a very upright person. As an Excise Commissioner he got transfer once in every two years.

Ramachandran's education began with learning English language by a tutor. When they were shifted to Trivandrum, Ramachandran was admitted to the Model School, Trivandrum.

Some other schools in which he studied were Government High School, Paravoor; Kayamkulam Middle school, CMS High School Kottayam. He was a very good student of English and won Medals for his oration. He became a voracious reader of English Novel of adventure.

Ramachandran was wrapped by Christian teachings in CMS High School, Kottayam. At that time two mighty figures came into his widening horizon.

O new as *VIVEKANANDA* - a religious leader, The other was *MAHATMA GANDHI* - a political leader. The remarkable qualities of utter realism, courage and selflessness in Gandhi's speeches had a blend of both religious depth and political knowledge. That attracted the boy Appu-Ramachandran.

Then he became the student of Scot Christian High School in Nagarcoil. Here started the mental and spiritual changes in the boy Ramachandran.

Deeply attracted by the magnetic personality of the Freedom Fighter, Doctor M E Naidu, Ramachandran started spinning, weaving and wearing Khadi.

Initiated by the Doctor, as a student he collected Rs.350/- for the Tilak Swaraj fund during those days.

The poem "Where the mind is without fear" recited by his Headmaster Kulandaisami was listened by the student Ramachandran with high shock of wonder and joy.

He learnt that the Poet Rabindranath Tagore himself was coming on a visit to Trivandrum. He without missing the opportunity went to the railway station.

At the Railway station itself the Poet Rabindranath Tagore read a paper on "The Religion of the forest". Let me express the opinion in young Ramachandran's words,

"What a voice, what a language and what profound thoughts!"

G. Ramachandran wanted to join Viswabharati for his higher studies after school. When his father

had disapproved that idea, he began a fast in the front room of the Thycaud House. Appu-the young Ramachandran would not yield to anything but, the permission to join Viswabharati. The father had many other expectations for his son. One of them was to make him a Lawyer.

At the end the father had to yield. Ramachandran joined Viswabharati—miles and miles far away from the very dear parents, brothers, sister, his home and all the so called luxuries of an aristocratic family life.

The sacrifice he had made for this love of Poetry and Beauty changed the pattern of his life completely. He became independent to take care of his own life and studies in his teen age itself.

**Thus one curtain fell and another rose on the stage of his life.**

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## IT WAS A NEW WORLD ALTOGETHER

The life under the mentor Ravindranath Tagore was really great. Ramachandran became the Secretary of the Students' Association in Santhiniketan.

When there was an article in the 'Modern Review' entitled, "The call of Truth" by Tagore warning Gandhi "not to establish a moral dictatorship over the conscience of India" there came a reply in 'Young India' under the caption "The Great Sentinel" by Mahatma Gandhi.

Ramachandran called for the meeting of Students' Association and moved a resolution against Gurudev Tagore himself. In the end of a debate his resolution won.

The next day Ravindranath Tagore called Ramachandran and appreciated his freedom of thinking and courage with which he said Gurudev was wrong. Thus G.Ramachandran's life's motto "Free-Frank-Fearless" was born on that day and got deep rooted in him, at Santhiniketan.

Ramachandran was twenty then and he set up himself as an intellectual and loved nothing better to challenge every kind of ideology. He held the view that the very idea of GOD was against all reasons.

This was natural in all young persons. We are going to see how that view was broken into pieces and Ramachandran had become a *believer*.

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## THE FAMOUS 21 DAYS FAST OF MAHATMA

When he was in this third year in Viswabharati, his Professor C.F. Andrews was summoned by Maulana Mohammed Ali to take care of Gandhi during the famous 21 days fast at Dilkush in Delhi. At his call Ramachandran went to assist his Professor in Delhi.

The young Ramachandran saw for the first time, the Roman figure of Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal, Rajaji, Chitaranjandas, Sarojini Naidu, Ali brothers and many other leaders. He did not have a dharsan of Mahatma till then.

On the 13th day of the fast he accompanied his Professor C.F. Andrews to attend the evening prayer. In that room every one and everything was silent. A frail thin figure of Gandhi was surrounded by Muslim, Christian, Sikh and Hindu leaders. The prayer started and ended with every one in complete silence.

Ramachandran started watching the scene and heard the prayers with all his critical and intellectual awareness. In that young mind something came like a flash of light and illuminating Ramachandran's inner world and changing it forever.

Let us hear that beautiful experience in his own words:

“This truth came to me in a flash that God existed and ruled the conscience of mankind. The intellect might not reach God and reason might also fail to know God.

### But, God, did exist.

No Myth could hold and rule the hearts of millions of men and women. God was truth and love in one. He who lay on the bed fasting, so that Hindus and Muslims might come together in good will, peace and understanding, was the symbol of that truth and love.

“The spirit of God appeared to hover close with in that room. This MAN had brought GOD into the room. I felt it unmistakably within my mind.

“I said to myself, I may never see God, nor know God, but this human symbol proved the truth of Godhood. I would follow the man who had brought God into the room.”

Ramachandran kept the pledge till his last breath.

Before returning Ramachandran had an interview with Mahatma.

Let me give some excerpts of that experience from GR's writing itself as recorded by Sri Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji's Secretary.

‘How is it’, asked Ramachandran, ‘that many

intelligent and eminent men, who love and admire you, hold that you consciously or unconsciously have ruled out of the scheme of national regeneration ? all considerations of Art?’

‘I am sorry’ replied Gandhiji, ‘that in this matter I have been generally misunderstood. There are two aspects of things—the outward and the inward. It is purely a matter of emphasis with me. The outward has no meaning except in so far as it helps the inward. All true Art is thus the expression of the soul.

The outward forms have value only in so far as they are the expression of the inner spirit of man.

Ramachandran hesitatingly suggested: ‘The great artists themselves have declared that Art is the translation of the urge and unrest in the soul of artists into words, colours, shapes etc.’

‘Yes’ said Gandhiji, ‘Art of that nature has the greatest possible appeal for me. But, I know that many call themselves as artists, and are recognised as such, and yet in their works there is absolutely no trace of the soul’s upward urge and unrest.’

‘Have you any instance in mind?’

‘Yes’, said Gandhiji, ‘Take Oscar Wilde. I can speak of him, as I was in England at the time that he was being much discussed and talked about.’

have been told’, put in Ramachandran, that Oscar Wilde was one of the great literary artists of modern times.’

‘Yes, that is just my trouble. Wilde saw the highest Art simply in outward forms and therefore succeeded in beautifying immorality. All true Art must help the soul to realise its inner self.

In my own case, I find that I can do entirely without external forms in my soul’s realisation. I can claim, therefore, that there is truly sufficient Art in my life, though you might not see what you call works of Art about me. My room may have blank walls; and I may even dispense with the roof, so that I may gaze out upon the starry heavens overhead that stretch in an unending expanse of beauty. What conscious art of man can give me the panoramic scenes that open out before me, when I look up at the sky above with all its shining stars?

This, however, does not mean that I refuse to accept the value of productions of Art, generally accepted as such, but only that I personally feel how inadequate these are compared with the eternal symbols of beauty in Nature. The productions of man’s Art have their value only so far as they help the soul onward towards self-realisation’

“But the artists claim to see and to find Truth through outward beauty” said Ramachandran, “Is it possibly to see and find Truth in that way?”

"I would reverse the order" Gandhiji immediately answered. "I see and find beauty in Truth or through Truth. All Truths, not merely true ideas, but truthful faces, truthful pictures, or songs are highly beautiful. People generally fail to see Beauty in Truth the ordinary man runs away from and becomes blind to the beauty in it. Whenever men begin to see Beauty in Truth, then true Art will arise".

Ramachandran then asked, "But cannot Beauty, be separated from Truth, and Truth from Beauty?"

"I want to know exactly what is Beauty", Gandhiji replied. "If it is what people generally understand by that word then they are wide apart. Is a woman with fair features necessarily beautiful?"

"Yes", replied Ramachandran without thinking.

"Even", asked Bapu, continuing his question, "If she may be of an ugly character?"

Ramachandran hesitated. Then he said, "But her face in that case cannot be beautiful. It will always be the index of the soul within. The true artist with the genius of perception will produce the right expression".

"But here you are begging the whole question", Gandhiji replied. "You now admit that mere outward form may not make a thing beautiful. To a true artist

only that face is beautiful which, quite apart from its exterior, shines with the Truth within the soul. There is then, as I have said, no Beauty apart from Truth.

On the other hand, Truth may manifest itself in forms, which may not be outwardly beautiful at all. Socrates, we are told, was the most truthful man of his time and yet his features are said to have ugly. To my mind he was beautiful, because all his life was a striving after Truth, and you may remember that his outward form did not prevent Phidias from appreciating the beauty of Truth in him, though as an artist he was accustomed to see beauty in outward forms also!"

"That", said Gandhiji, "only means that Truth and Untruth often co-exist; good and evil are often found together. In an artist also seldom the right perception of things and the wrong co-exist. Truly beautiful creations come when right perception is at work. If these moments are rare in life they are also rare in Art".

**All these set Ramachandran thinking hard.**

"If only truthful or good things can be beautiful, how can things, without a moral quality be beautiful?" he said half to himself and half aloud.

Then he asked the question, "Is there truth, Bapuji, in things that are neither moral nor immoral

in themselves? For instance, is there truth in a sunset or a crescent moon that shines amid the stars at night?"

"Indeed" replied Gandhiji, these beauties are truthful, in as much as they make me think of the Creator at the back of them. How else could these be beautiful, but for the truth that is in the centre of creation? When I admire the wonder of a sunset or the beauty of the moon my soul expands in worship of the Creator. I try to see Him and His mercies in all these creations. But even the sunsets and sunrises would be mere hindrances, if they did not help me to think of him. Anything, which is a hindrance to the flight of the soul, is a delusion and a snare; even like the body, which often does hinder you in the path of salvation.'

'I am grateful', exclaimed Ramachandran 'to hear your views on Art, and I understand them'.

The next question by Ramachandran was "Are you against all machinery, Bapuji?"

'How can I be,' he answered, smiling at Ramachandran's naïve question, 'when I know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning wheel itself is a machine; a little toothpick is a machine. What I object to, is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go

on 'saving labour,' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all. I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but its just dispersal in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the back of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might.'

Then, Bapuji,' said Ramachandran with eagerness, 'you are fighting not against machinery as such, but against its abuses which are so much in evidence to day?'

'I would unhesitatingly say 'yes'; but I would add that scientific truths and discoveries should first of all cease to be the mere instruments of greed. Then labourers will not be overworked and machinery instead of becoming a hindrance will be a help...Take the case of the Singer Sewing machine. It is one of the very useful things ever invented, and there is a romance about the device itself. Singer saw his wife labouring over the tedious process of sewing and seaming with her own hands, and simply out of his love for her he devised the sewing machine, in order to save her from unnecessary labour. He, however, saved not only her labour but also the labour of everyone who could get a sewing machine,' explained

Gandhiji. The next question was about the institution of marriage and celibacy.

After the long conversation, Ramachandran started on his way back to Santiniketan rich with Bapu's blessings, wondering how far the teaching of his Gurudev Tagore, would harmonise with that which he had just heard and how far there was fundamental difference.

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## FROM SANTINIKETAN TO SABARMATHI

After passing with first class in M.A. English, Philosophy and Sociology, Ramachandran went to Satyagraha Asram at Sabarmathi with Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's letter.

He stayed in Mahadev Desai's house. Step by step Ramachandran learnt Sanitation work and became a good Scavenger to start with. Children you should remember that there is no distinction between any work. That is called dignity of labour. That was the first lesson given to GR Mama.

We also should learn that in our lives. Then he learned to spin and weave. He organized Adult Education as per Gandhi's Instruction.

His view about Adult Education was very clear: "Adult Education does not begin or end with literacy. It should mean all round-education with special stress on sanitation, nutrition, geography, history and certainly also literacy."

He became the Secretary of All India Spinners Association. That is, in Gandhi's words "M.A." in Constructive Work.

Ramachandran had thus the privilege of having education both in Santiniketan and Sabarmathi.

Santiniketan gave more intellectual and cultural experiences and Sabarmati trained him in heart searching and purifying experiences.

Ramachandran was a good helper and pet to Kasturba Gandhi at Sabarmathi. Even when Mahatma was afraid to disturb Kasturba's Kitchen without her permission Ramachandran had the freedom & courage to do anything there.

Let me narrate an interesting story. One day after the meals was over and Kasturba had gone for her nap, some guests arrived and Gandhi wanted to provide food for them. Nobody dared to enter the Kitchen.

So Ramachandran, the pet of Ba bravely entered the kitchen and prepared Chapattis. After all the work and cleaning, somebody dropped a plate. The noise woke up Ba.

Everyone except Ramachandran was waiting for a severe admonishing. To their surprise, Ramachandran could explain matters to Kasturba and she affectionately petted Ramachandran and told him that he should not have troubled himself alone.

During the events Dr Zakir Hussain visited Sabarmathi. He watched Ramachandran in organizing the Khadi work. He requested Gandhi to send Ramachandran to Jamia Millia Islamia

to organise Khadi work and to take up any learning and teaching he could. Thus, Ramachandran took up his first assignment among Muslims.

As Ramachandran took leave of Gandhiji to go to Delhi, he received Gandhiji's advice concerned Hindu-Muslim unity. He said it was the dream of his life and without realising it there could never be free India. Gandhiji added, "You must make use of the present opportunity to learn all you could about Islam and Muslims. Every Hindu should learn something of Islam and every Muslim should learn something of Hinduism. This would apply to followers of all the great religions".

Here was the foundation of Gandhiji's teaching of Sarva Dharma Samanathva. With this message locked up in his heart, Young Ramachandran left for Delhi.

By the time Ramachandran arrived in the Jamia, Dr Zakir Husain, Prof. Mujib, Dr Abid Husain and a band of devoted Muslim teachers were steadily building up the new institution.

Ramachandran was one of the few Hindus to become a teacher in the Jamia Millia. He was given the special work of organising Khadi production. He found the work and the whole atmosphere exhilarating. It was a new experience altogether to be living among Muslims for Young Ramachandran.

Teachers and students were very good company to him. There was a good library and good community life. Ramachandran kept his eyes and ears open, and even more than that, his mind. For the first time in his life Ramachandran was looking at the cohesion of Muslim community life. In his words:

“The culture of an educated Muslim with all his fine courtesies is something worth knowing. Neither in Santiniketan nor in the Sabarmati Ashram had I experienced such graces of culture.”

Along with his lecture classes in Indian Philosophy, he began also taking classes in English literature. Ramachandran started spinning classes for the boys in the school and for the teachers in the college. That was really a hard work as no one had any experience in spinning and allied process of khadi. Within six months he was able to collect a hundred hanks of fairly well spun yarn. Gandhiji sent a line of congratulation to the students and teachers and asked them not to give up.

In the mean time Ramachandran took up seriously some guided study of the history of Islam and the growth of Arab civilization. As he went on with that study, Dr Zakir Husain and Prof. Mujib helped him considerably. He had long talks with the Muslim teachers and asked plenty of questions and got many answers.

The usual story was that Islam was forced upon people. But, Ramachandran discovered on the contrary that Islam was a powerful liberalising influence bringing to the common people the message of the equality and freedom of man before God.

By this study and research Ramachandran understood something of Gandhiji's faith in his Muslim comrades.

A very pleasant memory was the celebration of Ramzan. Ramachandran took no time in deciding that since he was living within a Muslim community of fellow teachers and students, he should also join the fast and prayers. Prof. Mujib welcomed the idea. It was a wonderful experience to keep the fast and to break it at the proper time.

Ramachandran joined the prayers. He had the same sense of elation as in the prayers in Sabarmati. Ramachandran used to remember this experience again and again. He clearly said with conviction:

“The outward forms were different but the inner core was the same, devotion to the one and only almighty God and the determination to live according to HIS will.”

He never bothered about the stir among the Hindus outside the Jamia. With the Santiniketan and the Sabarmati traditions in his mind

Ramachandran was convinced that he was doing the right thing. He was very happy to share in the religious devotions of Ramzan.

Within the Jamia itself teachers and students of all communities lived together in peace and good will as brothers. The Jamia was thus like an oasis of communal amity in the desert of communal differences and strife outside even at that time. That was in the true Gandhian tradition of which Ramachandran had come as a humble representative to the Jamia Millia Islamia.

But his life in the Jamia ended within less than two years, when Gandhiji wrote to Dr Zakir Husain to relieve him to enable him to join Sri C.Rajagopalachariar in his Gandhi Ashram in Tamilnadu. The parting with his Muslim friends moved him deeply. But he was strengthened in his mind as he carried with him their love and blessings. It was a far cry from Delhi to Salem district in Tamilnadu.

Another door thus opened before Ramachandran. He had no idea where that door would lead him. But it was Gandhiji's call and he responded to it without a moment's hesitation.

\* \* \* \*

## GANDHI ASRAM: THIRUCHENGODE

Within two years Gandhiji called Ramachandran to join Sri C.Rajagopalachari in his Gandhi Ashram, Tamilnadu. He was sent to Thirupur. He was in charge of Khadi Production Centre in Uttukuzhi.

Till then Ramachandran had not witnessed the real poverty stricken rural India. In Uttukuzhi, Ramachandran saw the depth of poverty in the villages and how Rs.2/- or Rs.3/- a week could make a difference in the life of a spinner. He wrote about that to his Guru and Master Gandhiji. Gandhiji asked Ramachandran to go deeper into the problem of village poverty and employment to understand the meaning and challenge of his Khadi programme.

Ramachandran was convinced more than ever before that the khadi programme had certainly a part to play in bringing work and wages into the villages. The wages were of course poor. And yet hundreds and thousands of women came to earn even these low wages. Perhaps without the khadi movement many of these poor and old women would have died of penury.

He started training in Khadi sales in Karaikudi. Karaikudi was a dry place and in the summer one used to get very thirsty. Clean drinking water was



not available and so Ramachandran would take in a few bottles of aerated water and he charged that to his office account. At the end of the month a letter came from Tiruppur disallowing that expenditure!

That incident certainly taught Ramachandran a lesson and showed how the khadi movement was being run throughout the country with rigorous honesty under the eagle eyes of Gandhiji sitting in the Sabarmati ashram. Then he returned to Tiruchengode as Manager in Gandhi Ashram.

Gandhi Ashram was a small edition of Gandhiji's "Sabarmathi" for him and moulded him into a perfectionist in simple living and organised work. He developed a full-fledged Adult Education programme to the poor villagers.

It was a veritable picture to see Rajaji working in the Ashram. That a great intellect and political genius like CR could bury himself in a distant village was an astonishing thing.

Ramachandran, who worshipped his Mother, took his mother Smt Madhavi Pillai Tankachi to this Ashram. She lived there for some months with its minimum comforts for sake of his son Appu.

The next assignment was battle against untouchability through Harijan Sevak Sangh. He served as a Secretary of Harijan Sevak Sangh in Trichy and Madurai.

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## THE FIRST TASTE OF PRISON

When Mahatma started the second Non-violent Revolution "SALT-SATYAGRAHA", at Dandi, here in Tamilnadu under the leadership of the warrior Rajaji. Ramachandran was among the 100 volunteers who participated in the Salt satyagraha. The march started from Dr TSS Rajan's Garden. When they reached Vedaranyam, Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai welcomed Rajaji. The next morning Rajaji broke the Salt law and was immediately arrested and taken away to an unknown destination.

It was indeed a veritable battle between violence and non-violence. Ramachandran had the rare fortune of being appointed the fourth camp leader. Less than thirty years of age at the time, he was somewhat unnerved to begin with. But since he had participated in the struggle for a number of days already, he carried on bravely.

He was the leader of the camp at Vedaranyam on the Third day. He was arrested and sentenced one year and three months rigorous imprisonment in Cuddalore. Then he was sent to Vellore jail. Here in the prison he learnt tailoring.

He lost weight and got ill health. The prison life gave him lessons, how to live under these conditions also. When they were released after that

term, again Ramachandran was sent to prison for Gandhiji's call for Civil disobedience. He was sent to Thiruchirapalli jail. By these experiences Ramachandran learnt that Non-Violence was the better solvent and the only solvent for most of the life problems.

He said that he became fearless and more determined in lining up behind his great leader.

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## WEDDING BELLS

When Ramachandran was the Secretary of Harijan Sevak Sangh, he met Dr Soundram at Sevagram Asram playing Veena. She played the song once again for GR.

After returning to Madurai also they met many times and decided to get married. Friends from Trivandrum went to Madurai on his behalf to meet T.V. Sundaram Iyengar.

Ramachandran earlier had took a vow that he would marry only after 35 years and till then he would be a Brahmachari. Mahatma Gandhi had signed on one side of the written vow. So, the couple waited till time ripe.

Even after Gandhi's persuasion Soundram's father denied. All the efforts of Rajaji and other leaders went in vain.

At last wedding bells rang at Sevagram Asram itself. Mahatma Gandhi had decided to get them married in the presence of Indian Congress Leaders.

Gandhi gave the bridegroom a dothi which was spun and woven by his own hands and Kastur Ba gave the bride a saree spun by her own hand.

It was also a revolutionary type of marriage, INTERCASTE-WIDOW RE-MARRIAGE.

After marriage, they stayed in Thycaud, Trivandrum doing both medical and political work along with Harijan Sevak Sangh work.

Ramachandran was again put in jail, became ill and was admitted in the General Hospital, Trivandrum. He was released by the graceful act of Maharaja, who visited GR at the General Hospital. After seeing GR and Soundram, Maharaja gave orders to release all the political prisoners.

In the mean time, Dr (Mrs) Soundram was banished from the then Travancore State by Sir CP, by leaving her in Aralvai Mozhi.

Then, the couple started their work at Adayar, Madras; the wife as a doctor and the husband as a Journalist.

He became the editor of "INDIAN EXPRESS". Sri Goyenka, had to protect him for his sharp articles against the Viceroy when Ba passed away in the prison.

Later G.Ramachandran became a Minister in the Pattom Thanu Pillai's Cabinet in Travancore.

There was a very touching story told by Mama. He always respected the greatness of our Late Maharaja Sri Chithirai Tirunal. GR never wanted to wear the usual formal dress during the Ministers meet

ing with the Maharaja at his Palace. Understanding his hesitation to wear the embroidered head-dress etc. Maharaja, allowed him to go to the Palace with his own white Khadi Pyjama and Jubha.

Even while he was the Minister, GR Mama led a very simple life.

Do you Know my children!! The last file he signed was the sanction of the Medical College, at Trivandrum. Otherwise, it would have been sanctioned at some other place in Kerala.

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## BIRTH OF GANDHIGRAM

Mahatma Gandhi made Mrs Soundram Ramachandran as the Secretary of Kasturba National Memorial Trust as per the request of his Chela Ramachandran. As part of their work, Ramachandran and Soundram, with the Blessings of Mahatma selected Chinnalapatti for their Constructive Work.

In 1947, October 7th, with a handful of workers, GR Mama and Soundram Amma started their venture. With the open land given by a generous landlord of Chinnalapatti, a place cradled by Kodai hills and Sirumalai hills, a small orphanage, school, and a medical centre were started. It grew under the careful nurturing care of GR Mama with his Artistic skill, and Soundram Amma's motherliness.

Now it has matured into a big banyan tree Gandhigram Trust having more than 25 units and departments; There is a Rural University, an Institute of Family planning centre and a big Hospital named after Kasturba. The golden string, which connected all these beads into a beautiful chain, was the love and affection of GR mama showered on all the workers. The responsibility of the educational side was undertaken by Ramachandran, the health wing by Dr Soundram. Every inmate considered them as their own Amma and Mama.

No one was a 'MASTER' and another a 'SERVANT' in *that* Gandhigram.

GR Mama, was the Director of Gandhigram for thirty long years. During these years he travelled all over the world giving lectures spreading Gandhi's messages and raising funds for his precious child GANDHIGRAM.

His ringing voice echoed throughout the world countries; foreign magazines wondered about his English Oration - GR's spoken English was superb than a British man.

That was one of the brightest periods in GR's life.

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## GANDHIGRAM RURAL UNIVERSITY

It was a dream to make the experiment of Higher education in the villages i.e. Gandhigram Rural Institute to take shape of a Rural University.

When GR Mama came back from the Chairmanship of Kadhi and Village Industries Commission, Dr (Mrs) Soundram Ramachandran was the Director of the Gandhigram. Hence he took up the challenge of making the Rural Institute into a Rural University.

I remember vividly the day when the Gandhigram Rural (Deemed to be university) started. With every honour peculiar to Tamilnadu, GR mama was given respects. With elephant, drums and dances he was taken in a procession. The whole community rejoiced that Mama was made into the first Vice-Chancellor and the Founder Vice-Chancellor.

He did his best. Toiled day and night to frame the rules and regulations; organising the Senate, Syndicate and all paraphernalia of an University inside that tiny institution.

One thing I remember with gratitude as the Life Trustee of the Gandhigram Trust. It was he with all his attachment and dedication gave power to our Gandhigram Trust Board to nominate 5 Senate members, 3 Syndicate members and one Finance Committee member for the Rural University.

I came to know about this from the previous Managing Trustee Sri V. Padmanabhan whom Mama always used to call affectionately, "My dear Pad,".

Many things happened. Mama visited Hawaii during his Vice-Chancellorship. He was invited to various Universities. His beloved mother Smt Madhavi Tankachi passed away during this period.

The Rural University with its wealth and large salary to its staff began to separate itself slowly from the other sections of Gandhigram. Unfortunately a big gap began to appear between the employees of the University and other employees of Gandhigram because of the UGC pay scale.

Yet GR the Vice Chancellor accepted only one thousand rupees as the salary where as Rs.7000/- was the real salary. He did not buy any vehicle for his use. He travelled only in his old black fiat. He used his own thached house as the VC's residence. As usual he used to visit all the houses of the employees shared their happiness and worries as a parent. With all the ups and downs the three year period ended.

He who insisted to implement every right for others and the mother institution, did not lay down any rule to protect his own future.

Any way Dr GR Mama left Tamilnadu and came back to his hometown Neyyattinkara, where

he bequeathed his mother's house Madhavimandiram and her landed properties by her will.

I had made up my mind to be with him and serve him. Thus started my pilgrimage along his life. I accepted him as my Guru. I had informed Dr (Mrs) Soundram Ramachandran my decision to serve him as my Guru. She gave her blessings and guidance in my new venture at Neyyattinkara.

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## THE VARIOUS PHASES OF SERVICE TO NATION

My dear children how can I tell you in brief the life story of Dr GR—90 long years of a person who had not wasted even one minute without helping others?

Let me just point out:

After Independence——

- He became the Secretary of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi;
- He founded the Gandhi Peace Foundation.
- He was the General Secretary of the all India Village Industries, Maganwadi at Wardha.
- Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sent him to Russia on a Peace Mission, to get a promise from Kurushav, not to start using the nuclear weapons from Russia's side.
- He attended the famous PARIS SEMINAR.
- He was a Rajya Sabha Member for 6 years.
- Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made him the **CHAIRMAN** of ALL INDIA KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION.

During this Chairmanship, GR had travelled throughout India, up and down, meeting from poor Khadi spinners to various types of Khadi and Village Industries workers. He was the originator of the FAMILY CARD of Khadi, for the benefit of poor Khadi workers. He was interested mainly on the "People's Education Programme".

Thus he was an ideal example of a person who rose from a position of an ordinary Khadi worker to the Chairmanship of All India Khadi Commission.

- He returned to Gandhigram and started his mission of making his Rural Institute into a Rural University. He succeeded in his venture. The Dream of the first Village University had come true.
- He became the First & Founder Vice-Chancellor of GR University.

[This was the period I came to serve our Mama. I *am a living witness* for the ups and downs in his life for these last fourteen years.

From this point the story telling will include my personal impressions also.

After such 76 long years of service, this grand old "young man" returned to his hometown in Kerala-Neyyattinkara.

Schumacher's famous words "Small is Beautiful" inspired him in starting a new venture, at this place in the name of his beloved mother Smt Madhavi Tankachi donating all his landed properties.

The Madhavimandiraṁ Loka Seva Trust was born as a registered Society on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1980 to serve women and children.

*"Only my body has become old and weak.  
My mind is still young"*

was the declaration he gave in his inaugurating speech.

Yes, his ideal here was educating the women to be self-supporting and giving them opportunities to know in detail about their society and social norms. Thereby spreading the light of peaceful co-existence from home to the society was the job-oriented education, which he had devised. Prayer meetings, inspiring talks and lectures on living standards, training camps for voluntary organisers were held to give the villagers chances to interact with others.

The first work we undertook was the training of Shanti sainiks.

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## SHANTI SENA:

The activities of the Trust began with the work of Shanti Sena. Mahatma Gandhi Vidyapeedom aimed at giving training to peace volunteers to take up the leadership in building up a society based on Non-Violence.

A Shanti Sainik should neither retaliate nor surrender. He or She values the art of solving problems in a non-violent manner. The first 30 trainees were sponsored by various organisations. They lived here inside Madhavimandiram campus. Even the day to day activities were monitored by Mama G.Ramachandran himself.

The morning prayer, breakfast, classes from 10am to 5pm, lunch, evening exercise and games, recreational activities, supper and prayer before night were done with the full participation of our beloved GR Mama. Various eminent persons took classes. It was really an education for life. The message of peace was spread in the neighbourhood and 12,000 people signed the peace pledge.

We should remember the age of that vibrant man at that time was 77.

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## DR GR LIBRARY

GR Mama was a voracious reader till his end. He would go to sleep only with a book in his hand. He loved the presents only in the forms of books. You can watch the joy bubbling in his face while getting a new book. He visited regularly the Trivandrum Public Library and the British council Library.

His only wealth in life in my opinion was the books and his writings. Those books were organised as Dr GR library in Dr GR Public School and in Madhavimandiram House. He was very proud of his collection of his books. The Library has in its stock more than 2500 books.

Many of the books have his writings and markings. He had even preserved the first book he bought "The Light of Asia".

Mama loved all sorts of books. He used to say that his first love was English Literature.

Was it not a strange fact that this man fought against British tooth and nail loved their language and literature and their culture so much?

The major number of books is thus English Literature - Prose, Poetry, Drama and Fiction. We also have books on Spirituality, religion, Culture, Arts and crafts, Economics, History, Sociology,



Biographies and Autobiographies of eminent persons-writers, poets and leaders.

We have a special section - Gandhiana (mama's own word) Books On Gandhi, About Gandhi and By Gandhi. He was very much proud of certain rare books. He was an authority in Bhagavad Geetha, Bible and Quran.

Mr T.K Mahadevan and Dr R. Vajreswari had donated their own personal collections of books.

We have got a good number of Malayalam books from Rajaram Mohan Roy's library fund.

There is a desire and a longing to have a very big library in the name of this grand old man who always considered books as his wealth.

God willing in a near future we have to make this dream come true.

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## THE MADHAVIMANDIRAM LOKA SEVA TRUST

From Mama's personal diary written in 1987 as the guidelines, I am giving certain portions hereunder:

In Mama's own handwriting...

..... May the grace of God guide me as I write these pages, little by little and day by day

First of all let me make clear the major aims of the Madhavi Mandiram Loka Seva Trust.

1. To preserve, maintain and keep in good condition Madhavimandiram (House) as a memorial to my beloved mother, who gave the house to me with the treasures of all the photographs and library books etc.
2. To utilize to the best advantage the lands attaching to Madhavi Mandiram by improving the soil and by suitable cultivation, so that the income will have to maintain the memorial to some extent.
3. To undertake appropriate cottage industries, and small scale industries to give some employment to women and girls in our rural area (Ooroottukala specially) as we are doing now.
4. To run Anganwadis or Creches for the care of children in our area.
5. And to teach Sanitation and nutrition to the mothers.

6. To actively work for Prohibition in our area, enlisting the support of women to keep their homes free of drunken troubles.
7. To enlighten mothers and women to understand Gandhiji's Constructive Program and to participate in it wherever possible.
8. To continue the People's Education Program (PEP) through study classes and popular talks.
9. To propagate "Sarva Dharma Samanatva" in the Gandhian spirit and thus destroy the poison of communalism.
10. To do whatever other things are needed to create a "SARVODAYA" Social Order in our rural area.

All this in our small way, in consistent with our limited strength and resources and in the true spirit of

**"THE SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL"**

15-7-87

(sig) GR

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## SOUNDRAM FARM

GR Mama had named our farm as "SOUNDRAM FARM". We started the work as planting various types of seedlings for Social Forestry.

When that project was over, we tried banana cultivation, which was destroyed by hailstorm during that year. I was totally broken down seeing the devastation. GR's words of consolation were even now ringing in my years. He always used to point out one particular verse of Bhagavad Geetha.

"It is your duty to go on performing the work. Do not expect any particular return from your performance. At the same time do not work with the motive for that return. Never be idle without doing any work."

He loved that way of life. He comforted me that I had done my duty of planting and bringing up the whole garden. After that, my longing and expectation to see the results in all that I do, reduced a lot. Step by step he tried to mould my life in this path, making me also to adapt the same way of life.

We used to walk round the campus morning and evening. The wisdom and knowledge he had gathered in his bald head and the compassion in his heart made me revere him every minute. I know

that old age and death are natural and a must in everyone's life. But, this person appeared to me like a great saint and rishi of Sanadana days. He had cultivated himself to that highest state of mind by diligent practice.

I made up my mind to be with him and keep him without any tension or worry of life and help him in his old age and its natural physical ailments and inhibitions.

Soundram Amma - Mrs Ramachandran had instructed me well in advance what were to be taken care of in Mama's health. With her advice and guidance I could monitor Mama's old age without much problems.

People think wrongly that Amma and Mama were not cordial to each other in their last days. No - it was not a truthful statement. They loved and respected each other till their last breath.

It is Amma who had written several letters how to take care of him when we were in the Vellore Hospital. I have preserved the letter from her in her own handwriting that I could do my Tapasya in Neyyattinkara, considering Mama as My Guru.

Yes-She had shown me a new relationship with Mama.

That Mama was my Guru.

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## HE WAS MY MENTOR

I was longing to become a Sanyasin from my 13<sup>th</sup> year, after hearing a talk of Swami Chithbhavananda. I used to tell Mama that being a mathematics student, I wanted to practice spiritual sadana in a scientific manner.

He not only gave me the book "*The Autobiography of a Yogi*", but also made me join the "Yogoda Satsanga Society of India". He participated in all our meetings and shared all his knowledge with us - the Yogodans whenever occasions arose.

In fact no one knows this *SIDE* of Dr G.Ramachandran as the Spiritual Sadhak. He had taught us to be far away from the religious rituals. He also practised diligently only Spiritual sadhana, which had no outward rituals of any type. His faith in the Cosmic Power and the way he loved that Cosmic Energy could not be explained in words.

In later years he got many siddhis, which he never showed to anyone outside. He acted his life only as an instrument in the hands of his Cosmic Energy.

It appears to me that he might be one of the persons who had received Kriya Diksha from Swami Yogoananda at Sevagram, when Mahatma Gandhi received the same.

He did this breathing exercise till his last day. His prayers were unique. I have his prayers in his own voice in an audio cassettee.

“Deivame Jagadeesane, Karuyna Roopane Karunakarane, Ninra Karunyam onnu kondu mathram jeevikkunna Nangale Rakshikenum”

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## TRUST'S GROWTH STEP BY STEP

In the Education field we started the work from Anganwadi Program, Day care centres, KG Classes and an English medium (Private Unaided) School in the name of Dr G.Ramachandran under Mahatma Gandhi Vidya Peedom. Every detail was thought out and planned by GR.

[Today this Dr GR Public School has got its affiliation with CBSE after crossing all possible teething problems. We are ready with our first batch of Standard X to the public examination in 2002.

The Board members are from various walks of life. Every one is a dedicated person in his or her own way and attached to Mama and his Mission totally.

## Khadi and Village Industries

Slowly, this organization which was started as a cute little child grew into various production units in Khadi and village industries winning good name for its products-GR Sarees and GR Fibre fancy articles throughout India.

When we had our banana garden we planned side by side to start a Fibre Fancy Article Industry.

Even when the Banana garden project went to pieces, we continued to carry on the plan. It was a beautiful and artistic programme. It went on for some time with the help of Kerala Khadi and Village Industries Board. We have trained about 250 girls for this work. Because of various reasons we have stopped this work at present.

Since we found after a detailed survey done around Madhavi Mandiram campus, there are plenty of weavers idling their time. GR wanted to give employment to them.

So we planned in such a way that we produce only beautiful sarees that might have no marketing problem and the wages would be enough for the workers. GR gave us various designs and ideas, which made us wonder how he had observed and attained these skills. Many of the girls - artisans, weavers & spinners stayed in the campus itself. We had about 350 women in our production units at one time.

He used to meet the working girls regularly in the morning assembly. He would never miss even single day if he were available in the campus. He told stories and the day today happenings. In total he spent his time as a mother to these girls and their children.

No apt word - he was the embodiment of love - compassion. He used to say "All these are our own daughters-daughters of Madhavimandiram".

## PEOPLE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Being the founder of PEP at the Khadi Commission he made it a point to conduct People's Education Programme in all possible ways in Madhavimandiram. We had youth clubs to begin with. Young men and women between the age group 15 to 25 attended his talks on Sundays in our Adhi Kudir.

With their help we arranged many functions in Neyyattinkara. It was a dream coming true. It was also a wonder since with no money in hand, only confidence and courage we had organised all these.

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## 80<sup>TH</sup> BIRTH DAY OF GR

The 80th birthday of GR was celebrated in a grand scale. It was a three days' function. First day at Gandhi Bhavan, Trivandrum with all friends and songs of Tagore it was a memorable function.

The Second day was filled with prayers from eminent spriritual leaders from various religions. Every one explained in his own way how a person should live- and how Mama was a model to the youth of younger generations.

The Public of Trivandrum gave a big felicitation & honour in the VJT Town hall. The then Governor, Mr P.Ramachandrn, and many other political, social leaders and workers, well wishers and admirers participated in this meeting. I had never seen such an well attended meeting after this. He, after thanking the public for its affectionate bessings, revealed an important Truth backing his life and work. I have to quote that here without forgetting.

"There are three women in my life;

The first is my mother Smt Madhavi Tankachi, who gave me my body and moulded my life;

The second is my wife Dr (Mrs) Soundram Ramachandran who helped me to achieve the dreams of my Gandhigram;

The third is my grand-daughter and nurse Sister Mythilli who assists me in my old age and takes care of my Institution at Neyyattinkara.. I thank God immensely for giving me these three women."

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## AGAIN IN HIS ALMANAC

At his 85th year, he received the highest honour of the Viswabharati University. I could never forget how he was thrilled to hear this news. In that ripe old age he bravely got himself ready to travel all the way from Neyyattinkara to Santiniketan.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi-the Chancellor of Viswabharati gave him the "*DESIKOTTAMA*" award, which he considered as the most valuable gift. His lectures to Sreeniketan and Santiniketan are extremely priceless.

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Though old, Dr GR was alert and very particular in meeting youth in various walks of life and gave his advice to be always FREE-FRANK-FEARLESS.

He took classes for the Trainees of Shantisena, Khadi and other schemes personally.

He made it a beautiful routine to have prayers every Friday morning with inter-religious readings.

He used to give speeches regularly about the news of India and world in his fluent Malayalam.

He loved to tell stories to the children. Every Friday would be a bright day in Madhavimandiram. We could hear Mama's speeches.

His hand-writing was steady and fine even at this age. He was always filled with humour and happiness.

We celebrated all festivals and functions in our institution the way he wanted.

We travelled a lot in and out side Kerala. We visited various places and friends. He attended public meetings whenever it was possible. He used to visit relatives' and friends' house often during these days.

I had recorded almost all speeches of Mama, after I came to serve him. In the same way we kept his writings and letters and rare photographs safe.

He had written enough guidelines for me to abide in my life. They are given in a book called Mama's diary.

He had always guided me in proper times. Let me give some of the important advices here.

"BASI-You are perhaps sometimes reckless. This needs correction. You must be calm in any crisis and act discretely. Basi, please never forget this word of caution from me. All these relate to physical courage.

But, there is moral courage above physical courage. You have plenty of moral courage, which you bring into play when a moral challenge confronts you.

This is God's gift to you strengthened by your study of Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. And yet, occasionally I have known you to lack all the moral courage needed.

This is so with most of us, our moral courage fails sometimes and we become afraid.

The only remedy is prayer to GOD. Prayer is not a mechanical process. When prayer comes from the depth of our spirit then it never fails to give us the moral strength from which we might slip. You have enough foundational moral courage to build upon. Do so consciously in your prayer and meditation.

There is really nothing to be afraid of except "fear" itself. I myself do not claim to be absolutely fearless, because my faith in God is not absolute.

But, normally have you not known me to be fearless, physically and morally?"

This was a question asked in between the lines.

Of course you are fearless both physically spiritually and morally my beloved Maman— your Basi]

Mama wrote more:

"You know that priceless quotation from Mahatma Gandhi:-

"Fearlessness is the first condition of Spirituality.

The coward can have no morals"

The coward, who is always afraid, can have no morals. Only the brave can be moral. Fearlessness and morality are blood relations.

Basi, Be fearless in thought,  
Basi, Be fearless in words,  
Basi, Be fearless in action.

This opens the road to true freedom.

May you achieve that freedom. When you have achieved this freedom, men and women will listen to you. Your life will then become effective in terms of "The good, the beautiful and the true". You would then be a great woman.

May God bless you to be a great and noble woman.

I must at this point write a word of caution:

Anger is not fearlessness. Shouting in anger is not fearlessness. Lions and tigers become angry and roar when they are afraid, not when they are fearless.

A calm and strong mind, Quiet but intelligent actions are among the out signs of true courage. I have several instances of this in my experience.

Rajaji has such courage and more than any one else. Gandhiji was the supreme example of it. We cannot all be a Rajaji or a Mahatmaji. But each one of us must approximate as far as we can to them."

My dear Children, I have received many such lessons from my mentor GR.

Let me add one more important advice also

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"The effort, effort matters most:



Effort with most of us is Sporadic. We attempt something good with a bang and after a while the effort evaporates. Our intention is good but our effort is not sustained. Sustained effort alone can give us any Victory worth the name. Do we not see around us everyday how the lack of sustained effort snatches away achievement after achievement? This is particularly evident in present day students and youth. They have enthusiasm but without sustained effort.

It is not enough to have good intentions and a good start. Persevere, persevere in what you do. Cultivate sustaining power. Do not give up midway, but go on till the goal is reached. Victory or defeats are ends but the way to one or the other is effort. All our qualities come into play in our effort.

If we are morally weak our effort too becomes weak. If we have no sustaining power we break down half way. If we are cowards we turn away from risks and thus miss the road. If we have no adequate knowledge we grope in darkness and beat about the bush, and our efforts go in vain.

It is effort that counts and that it is the touchstone. Therefore, begin "effort" and bring all your high qualities to bear on it.

Prove in your effort all that you are capable of.

You can then leave the rest to God and feel confident that you will win through."

Regarding how to conduct our work he had given clear cut ways:-

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"The following lines are written to help you. Please learn to co-ordinate your work. Treat the whole as one, under a properly made annual budget, under common supervisory eye, under a common inspection month by month or better week by week.

This is not to say you should not give separate attention to different items of work like agriculture, small industries, creches etc. Separate attention and co-ordination are not contradictory but complimentary.

When you understand this relationship, in it you will find one of the keys to efficient management."

My dear children - Even regarding health he had given certain guidelines. It suits every one.

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### Mythili You must take care of your health

This is most important. Health of course is physical health even if that health is inextricably mixed with mental health. That only proves how the body and the mind are intimately linked together. Even so physical health must be taken care of by itself. There are innumerable conditions governing physical health like pure air, clean environment, nutrition, exercise, cleanliness of the body, recreation etc.

Basi take the utmost care never to trip or fall. Every time you fall down (because of your polio leg) it is like a blow on my heart—please remember that.

You must have plenty of mental recreations, music, T.V, and painting.

Buy a good water colour box and start painting. Read good story books besides your serious readings.

Write your diary regularly—noting new ideas and thoughts and not merely recording important daily events. Avoid writing things that may hurt someone or other. Self study and self criticism will help your growth. Your diary may well be a reflection of your personality.

Do not get easily excited.

Raise your mind above daily trifles.

Small matters must not excite you.

Try to hold your young and vigorous mind under control, so that you will grow into a great woman.

Do not be satisfied with good intentions and ideas. These are utterly useless unless you practise them.

Truth, Beauty, Goodness, these must be practised—otherwise you betray them. I have told this to you again and again.

After giving guidance like these he wanted me to become a great personality as per his dream.

He had presented me that dream as a beautiful poem.

What is my dream of you, and for you

A noble, gracious, inspiring personality.

A character at once firm and gentle.

A mind clear without cob-webs.

A will to work and achieve results.

A deep sympathy and understanding of people.

A capacity to attract real friendship and loyalty

Ability to converse clearly and convincingly.

A big mind to understand others difficulties.

A keen intellect to plan and organise,

A woman of few words at proper times of emergency

But, words of wisdom and sympathy.

A good writer and speaker.

(These are important in public work)

A woman equal of men in courage, capacity and sacrifice

This, my beloved Basi is my

dream of you and for you.

May God in His mercy grant me, my dream.

BASA GR.

Do you know my children Dr GR Mama was a poet who had written so many poems? There are so many poems which are published as Poems by GR Mama.

In the same way he was a very good artist, painter. There are so many paintings and pencil drawings of Dr GR in his Jail diary and other notebooks.

He was a lover of beauty and Nature.

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## PLANNING HIS LAST RITES

On one Friday, he after concluding his speech, pointed out a place to all of us.

We waited to hear some story. But, he announced that particular place should be the cremation spot of his body. Every one was shocked, but kept quiet wondering what was going to happen.

We cleared the spot made it a level ground as he wished. We converted the place into a beautiful Rose Garden. Just for his joy we had planted several varieties of Rose plants. Every day we use to arrange the flower vase with plenty of roses on his working table, near his bed and on the dining table.

On his last birthday i.e. on the 7th October 1994, we had brought all the rose plants with the pots before the front yard for him to enjoy the sight.

For more than two years, he received from this rose garden excellent roses for his flower vases in all rooms of Madhavimandiram, of which he was very proud.

He was verymuch interested in the low cost shell construction guided by our Engineer friend. To his satisfaction, we had started the Daya building in

that model and finished the ground and first floor. When we were about the start the second floor as per the plan he changed his mind. Abruptly stopping the construction of Daya Building, he wanted me to build Kalabhavan as it stands now immediately.

This Adhibhavan as he was calling the thatched shed, was given a new name; the plan was drawn by him. He wanted a sit out in front. That also in an English model with tall cylindrical double pillars.

Every day he watched over the construction. He was very happy like a child when this was finished. I never imagined that he was preparing the place where he wanted to give the Last Dharsan to the public.

On all fridays and all the days of celebration he used to give his thoughts and advices in this Kalabhavan to the workers and school children.

The last function he participated was the Christmas Day Celebration on 21-12-94.

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## IN THE EVENING OF HIS LIFE

He slowly reduced his going outside the campus, for giving lectures etc. That change happened in the late 1994 after his birthday on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 94. Only writing diary was going on. In December he attended with great difficulty Vinobaniketan's Jubilee at Tagore Theatre.

Mr K.R. Narayanan, the then Vice President also participated.

He visited Arch bishop Benedict Mar Gregorios in his sick bed. He cracked jokes seeing the Bishop in ordinary dhoti and shirt and made everyone burst with laughter.

His daily routine was kept as usual—Getting up at 3-30 am saying prayers & doing Meditation in his own way.

He used to hear Subhashitam without fail over his radio at 6 am.

He always loved to hear the news read by Mrs Sukanya Balakrishnan on the Television.

He participated in the Christmas Day Celebrations held on the 21st Dec 1994, at Kalabavan, by the children of our school.

As usual we could not understand the implication of his commands even at that time.

That was the last function he attended.

## THE LAST 17 DAYS OF MAMA

On the first of January, 95, when I wished "Good morning Mama, Happy New year", Dr GR blessed me heartily, with various blessings for long life, health, happiness, prosperity, peace and above all my life aim, self-realisation.

But, I felt the voice was not that much vibrant. My suspicion was right. At 3 p m when he woke up from his noon nap he had slight fever. We gave him medicines and he slept again.

His usual daily routine of evening walk, watching the TV news, prayer was disturbed. Something was wrong with his physique, I could understand. Doctors were called and he as usual made fun of them, but took the medicines prescribed.

On the 7th, again from the early morning he had slight fever. He asked Ravi Shankar not to leave Madhavimandiram without his permission. He wanted Ravi to take lunch at his table that day. But, Mama refused to eat anything. After so much compulsion he drank a cup of Kanchi water.

Again before lying down, we found the temperature was shooting up. The local doctor thought it was not wise to keep him here at home, since he was very weak.

At 4 p m, though I was holding him, he was going on calling me, 'where are you my child?' He was appeared to be in delirium, local doctors said. All arrangements were made to admit him in the Medical College Hospital. Our Doctor also accompanied us.

We literally carried him to the car. The Traffic police delayed us. They diverted us from Kaimanam via Kovalam. Even after pleading to the stupid policeman that we had to rush our mama to Medical College, he refused bluntly. So, instead of wasting time, we proceeded in the round about way.

Since GR mama was having his head on my shoulder, I could feel that the temperature was shooting up madly. When we reached the causality, he refused to get down. Ravi and me somehow carried him into the hospital.

Dr S.K . Ramachandran, who was the Medical Superintendent, took charge of the situation.

They gave him drips and Medicines through veins. All the tests were done without wasting a second and at last the Doctor in charge declared that GR Maman was suffering from Bronchial pneumonia. We admitted him in the special pay ward room arranged by Dr S.K.Ramachandran.

After the heavy dose of medicine, mama got some strength and began to talk and uttered jokes.

He slept, but in between asked where he was and why we were not sleeping etc. etc.

Throughout the night I was sitting, praying and planning when to take him back home. He never wanted to be admitted in a hospital. But, in the morning after a detailed examination, the doctors made a decision to keep him at the hospital for a week's time at least.

I was shocked; expect praying to GOD there was no other way out. Plenty of medicines were bought and administered via the veins. His body was so sensitive that he could not bear the pricks of the needles.

Every time the nurse searched for a vein he would resist. Seeing my sad face, "Just only once for your sake", he would say and accept the prick.

Ravi went back home in the morning, and returned in the evening everyday diligently as per Mama's instructions.

Mama did not allow anyone to touch him or lift him up, except me or Ravi. We had to explain this to the nurses and they co-operated very well.

Throughout the day he was awake telling me plenty of advice. He took very little food; his throat was giving much trouble.

The Newspapers published that GR Maman was admitted in the Medical College. That created anxiety in public and there was a heavy rush of visitors, besides the relatives. He insisted meeting them all. We had also informed the relatives and friends outside Trivandrum.

Mama refused to go to the VIP room allotted for VIP patients saying ordinary workers and well wishers would not be allowed there. His greatness accepted the lesser comforts for the sake of others.

Dr S.K Ramachandran was with mama all the days, talking, reciting prayers or receiving answers for anything and everything.

This picture reminded me of the Bishmacharya on the bed of arrows with Yuthishtra clarifying many of his doubts-Mama on the hospital bed with needles all over and SKR receiving answers from him.

Mama's dear and near were with him. Among the visitors, Governor Rachaiah's was a memorable. Both talked for 15 minutes. When he took leave, GR told him clearly "We are parting our ways. So let me bid farewell to you. And God bless you".

I was totally shaken hearing these words. When he saw my suffering, he gave me a promise that he would not leave his child Mythili alone, but be with her till the end.

That comforted me a lot, since he had never uttered any breakable promise. [Even now I feel his presence with me always].

All his friends from Gandhigram arrived to see him. Even in that condition, he urged us to take care of the guests and arrange for their stay and food. Sri Tampanoor Ravi, took charge of that situation.

On Wednesday, as a miracle, the concerned Doctor declared that Mama's chest was clear and we could go home within 3 days.

Even the hospital room was decorated with beautiful flowers, brought by friends.

On the 13th January, Friday SK and Mama were discussing about Death. I was immersed in my own prayer for mama's health and so could not remember the exact words.

But at the end, I heard Dr SK asking, "Mama, are you afraid of death?" Laughing like a child, mama answered clearly, that he was never afraid of Death. Even during the freedom struggle, he almost met death for 4 times. He added that it was only the anxiety of leaving Mythili alone to carry on his work.

To that, Doctor told that "his Mythili" was a brave woman, could manage any situation, and would shoulder all the responsibilities. Moreover all friends of mama were there to help her and God will always there to protect her etc.

Mama hearing all these stayed in silence for some minutes.

[Now I could understand that, during those minutes he might have made some decision.]

On the 14th Jan, the Pongal day, we returned back home. Mama was very weak even to sit up. But, boldly declared, "I am going to walk up to the car". The wheel chair also was kept ready. He got down from his cot, took two or three steps, and sat on the Wheel chair. His voice thanking the Doctors and nurses was very clear and back to normalcy.

Dr SK drove mama in his car to Neyyattinkara. I noticed even that comfortable slow driving was too much for him. His body had become so tender and soft like that of a newborn baby.

How much he rejoiced entering Madhavi mandiram, no one could word it. He openly thanked God, his parents, Dr SK, Ravi and all of us. Fortunately the Alpha bed arrived at the same time. He slept peacefully that night. Even in this state, he gave instructions how to fix the captions for the photographs in our house.

On Sunday, he took his bath in his own bathroom, enjoyed the same, though we hurried through the process.

Nurse Kamalam Sunderasan who was with us for the past four days did her full share of helping mama. Though everything looked peaceful & fine,

I burst out for the first time unable to watch his struggle to swallow even liquid food. He put up a brave face and came to see TV News that night, read by his favourite News Reader Sukanya Balakrishnan.

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## THE END OF AN ERA

Dr SKR came in the noon. Suddenly, mama remembered his personal diary and wanted me to bring the same at once. By God's grace it was available immediately. He gave the diary to Dr SKR and said that all the details were written in that. He asked him to take copies and returned the diary the next day.

Doctor SK took me away to the dining hall and told that something may happen on or before 26th January.

I made up my mind, that I should not allow my BASA-mama to slip away just like that. I surrendered everything at the feet of God. I appeared to be brave but I know I was not brave enough.

Seeing my restlessness, mama asked me to read my Yogoda lessons. An unusual peace and calmness covered me.

Something dawned inside me regarding Mama's promise that he would never leave me alone. Whatever happens He would be with me. With that faith, Monday started.

When Ravi and I were sitting on his bed holding him in the sitting posture, Dr SKR arrived. Mama turned and looked at his face. SK kneeled before him and asked, "Have you noticed my face



Mama?" In the same tone GR replied, "Yes, even as you entered the room". "How do I look?," was his next question. The curt reply made everyone laugh and laugh. That was our Mama, alert and clear even before few hours of his departure from the physical body.

He asked Dr SK to return the diary and made me replace it safely. I heard mama, asking Doctor to be the leader in implementing the details given in the notebook.

I hurriedly opened the diary and went through the contents. To my shock, I could realise that my beloved Mama was preparing himself consciously for the last journey.

Here are the details written in GR's Diary, he showed to the Dr SKR:-

"Let me leave clear instructions to guide her. I should be cremated in the Kerala manner. But, there will be no usual rituals.

The body would be carried straight to the funeral pyre on a cot and placed in position with plenty of white flowers and burnt.

The site of the grave will be near mother's tomb or at the place shown to Mythili by me.

The fire must burn strong with coconut shells. Sarvodaya Bhajans must go on while this is being done.

When the mud plaster of the grave has shrunk, people attending the funeral may disperse. Mythili and no one else will light the funeral pyre. I shall have discussed further details with Mythili. She will have my detailed instructions.

That means she will be in charge of the funeral and everything should be done as she directs.

I shall appoint a small group of persons in time to help Mythili to carry out my instructions. Relations and friends should kindly know Mythili is simply fulfilling my personal wishes.

There will be no formal sanchayanam, but only Sarva Dharma prayers as the one I arranged after my brother's funeral. Invitations to the prayer meeting should be sent to relations and friends.

Sweet Prasadam will be distributed to all those who attend the meeting. This prayer meeting will be in the place of sanchayanam.

Further details, if any I shall tell Mythili in time.

The atmosphere should be one of sanctified prayers.

[One detail omitted is as follows:-

My eyes may be taken out by Dr SK Ramachandran and given to the Medical College Hospital. Any other organ of the body may also be removed in time before the funeral as decided by Dr.S.K.Ramachandran.]

Ashes may be collected in an "urn" if so desired by relations and friends and part of it cast into the Indian Ocean at Cape Kanyakumari near Gandhi Mandap.

These Instructions are written mainly to help Mythili, who, is both GRAND-DAUGHTER and GRAND-SON to ME."

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I was totally taken aback.

I wondered about Death, how it can come to a person, especially to my dearest Maman?

So I did not move an inch from him.

He wanted to see the children of Dr GR Public School.

They all came and bowed before him. He told me these children would be my assets.

Before, going to bed on Jan 16th, while he was getting up from the wheel chair, he asked Ravi, "Is it not your birthday?"

We all got stunned at his memory. He asked Ravi to kneel before him saying he was going to bless him. He put his shivering hands three times on Ravi's head and prayed. Then he went to bed.

He could not sleep at all. Doctor SK remained there. At 11pm Mama asked me "My child, lie down for some time now, otherwise you cannot sleep afterwards."

After 10 full days and nights, I slept for three hours and got up suddenly. I rushed to mama, asked him why he made me sleep when he could not sleep? He smiled and kept quiet.

Till 5 am we were praying together.

At 5.45 a m he wanted to get up. When Ravi helped him he jokingly said, 'I am going to get up myself and do everything'. We were holding him in the sitting posture.

After saying his morning prayer, he took 3 teaspoons of Tea. He put his head on my shoulder as he always does.

But Ravi said,

"Mama was gone".

Kamalam chechi said, "yes" after taking his pulse. Doctor confirmed it checking his eyes. I could not weep at all. But was frozen like a stone.

He used to go on saying, "I should not lie down and die. I should not die in sleep. I should die on your shoulders. I have missed that promise to my mother. But you must keep up that promise".

So, he had really left his body. His face looked perfect. Even the wrinkles on the face were gone. The peace and calmness in the face were beyond words. He looked astonishingly beautiful. The

sunlight from the lotus opening was falling on his face.

The eyes were donated to the eye hospital, as he wanted.

We gave him the last bath ourselves.  
Like in a dream everything happened.

All the instructions were carried on as per his writings in the diary.

His body was laid in Kalabhavan for the last Dharsan to the public. People poured in.

Relatives, friends, co-workers, well-wishers and admirers gathered to pay homage.

Wreaths from President and Vice president were placed on him.

The next day with State honour his body was cremated at the spot he selected.

The fire was lit by me the Granddaughter and Nurse of BASA, as he wished.

With the District Collector supervising the arrangements everything was taking place as if pre-planned.

Till the whole body was burnt to ashes, we were reciting Ram Bhajan as per his wish.

## THE MAN OF FIRE MERGED INTO FIRE

He showed me strange sights even at that time.

After lighting the fire, I returned to the burning ghat after a bath sitting near the fire reciting Ram Dhun Bajan.

The right hand bone was thrown out on my lap, as if he said

“I am with you my child.”

Within one hour we saw the bald-head red as the morning sun and became ashes within seconds.

In three hours everything was burnt and we saw the burning of the lungs portion for ten full seconds. Then appeared the yellowish heart, like a lotus; with a “tup” sound it opened into four petals and we saw that burning and becoming ashes.

Thus we had a detailed dharsan of how GR's body was gulped by “AGNI” the Fire GOD.

On Jan 26<sup>th</sup>, his ashes were collected. A huge prayer meeting was held with representatives from all religions. The Urn was carried in a decorated vehicle followed by many. When we immersed the pot with his ashes, at Cape Comerin, a big wave came up, bathed everyone who participated. Everything looked like a miracle.

Though his body machine was gone since it became worn out beyond repair, Desikottama Dr We

G.Ramachandran, our beloved mama is living with us even now. When he was inside the body cage, it seemed he was limited to that.

But, now he is everywhere protecting us and guiding us. It is not only my experience. Anyone who comes to this place can feel his presence.

Thus ends the story of his physical body, his unending spiritual strength is still received by his friends and co-workers.

Let us live up to his ideals and fulfil his dreams.

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always remember his words:

*"My body shall pass but  
my work shall go on  
And my spirit shall live on.*

*Even when I am taken away  
I shall work with you all for the  
Deliverance of the world*

*With the message of peace and  
non-violence*

*Charge yourselves with the flame of  
dedication".*

—G. RAMACHANDRAN

# THE WATCH WORDS FOR YOUTH ARE:



- Learn to keep your body strong and healthy;
- Learn to cultivate and regulate your diet;
- Be fearless, without being aggressive;
- Be good to all- both the good and the bad ;
- Let your visions of your work expand and grow, but understand your limitations;
- Trust in yourself ;
- Trust in GOD.

Dr GR