

PHILOSOPHY OF SAINT RAMALINGAM

by

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Foreword

This monograph is the first of the series in the Studies in Shri Ramalinga Vallalar's Philosophy. The author of this monograph Dr. M. Shanmugam is a keen student of Philosophy. He has researched into certain aspects of the life and teachings of Vallalar for his doctoral work. Here he presents, besides stating broadly the Religion and Philosophy of Saint Ramalingam, the place of love and concept of grace in the Philosophy of the Saint. These are corroborated by the institutions that were built and the action programs initiated by the Saint. The author has indicated these in the last two chapters of this monograph.

Saint Ramalingam was a contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Both the saints had to face the same social and political climate, one in the northeastern region and the other southern region of Mother India. The fame of Shri Ramakrishna has spread throughout the world mainly through the Ramakrishna order founded by one of his disciples Swami Vivekananda. But Ramalinga Swamigal remains practically unknown even though his experiences and realizations are highly relevant to perplexed modern world.

Philosophy is concerned with a systematic view of relevant facts with their interpretations and implications for knowledge. Saint Ramalingam's concern did not stop with discovery of new facts and reasoned out the point of view on fundamental questions like the nature of Reality, the nature of man, his origin and destiny and the goal of his strivings, but with realization of the concepts through personal experience. Saint Ramalingam was not merely a philosopher but an ardent practitioner of religion. His message of "deathlessness" and "Suddha Sanmarga" has a special relevance to the modern world. His is a religion of universal brotherhood embracing not only all men but all living beings and the ultimate state of man and the universe is seen not as a liberation from matter and body, but as their transfiguration by which they are merged in the transcendent life and light of the Godhead.

The subsequent monographs to be brought out by this department I am sure will deal with these contributions of Saint Ramalingam. I have great pleasure in commending the present effort of Dr. M. Shanmugam to

the eager public interested in the unity and harmonious development of our modern society particularly in India.

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Preface

This monograph on 'The Philosophy of St. Ramalingam' is the result of my studies in Indian Philosophy. 'Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam' of St. Ramalingam is a turning point in the history of South Indian philosophy. In the life and works of St. Ramalingam, philosophy became man-centered. His influence upon the 20th century socio-religious movements is remarkable.

After my post-graduate studies in Indian philosophy (1970-72), at the Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, I had the privilege of working under the supervision of Dr. V.A. Devasenapathy, M.A. Ph.D., for the doctorate degree on 'Saiva Siddhanta and the Social Philosophy of St. Ramalingam'. I wish to place on record my profound sense of gratitude to my revered Professor Dr. V. A. Devasenapathy. I am deeply grateful also to my teacher Dr. R. Balasubramanian, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., for the kind encouragement he gave me.

The department of Gandhian Studies and Ramalinga Philosophy, Madurai Kamaraj University, specializes in the area of Peace Science. As an emerging and unique discipline, it includes arts, science and philosophy from the point of view of peace. This department under the guidance of Prof. K. Arunachalam, M.L.C., the Chairman of Gandhi Memorial Fund, explores the relevance of all disciplines for a life of peace-personal and global. He shaped me as a teacher and now introduces me to the scholarly world. The present work became possible only because of his continuous encouragement. I am thankful to him for the 'Foreword', which he has given to this book.

I am thankful to Dr. S. Jeyapragasam, Reader, Department of Gandhian Studies and Ramalinga Philosophy, Madurai Kamaraj University, for his valuable suggestions and positive criticism. I am thankful to Prof. R. Gopinatharao of the Evening College, Madurai Kamaraj University, for his help on the language of this work. Miss. M. Mallammal, research

scholar of our department, Thiru R. Velu Thambi and Thiru N. Rajagopal helped me to see this book through the Press. I am thankful to them. My thanks are due to Vaigai Achagam, Madurai, for the neat get up.

Madurai
24-12-1982

M. Shanmugam

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1. Introduction

Life Sketch

Saint Ramalingam was born on 5th October, 1823 at Marudur, a small village near Chidambaram, the famous religious centre of Saivaites, in South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. His parents were Ramaiyya Pillai and Chinnamai. Chinnamai was Ramaiyya Pillai's sixth wife. He was a village administrative officer. St. Ramalingam was their fifth child. His parents gave him the name Ramalingam. Later in his life he came to be known by various names such as "Ramalingapperuman", "Ramalingaswamy", "Thiru Arutpragasa Vallalar", "Arutperumjothimahan" etc. Many considered him a prophet. But he disclaimed all such honors. He preferred to call himself "Chidambaram Ramalingam".

Chidambaram temple has close connections with his life. His birthplace Marudur is near Chidambaram. He was exposed to a spiritual experience at Chidambaram Nataraja temple, when he was barely five months old. The parents took the baby boy to the sacred shrine of Nataraja for worshipping the deity. When St. Ramalingam was in his mother's hands, the officiating dikshidar—the priest drew aside the screen of the formless aspect of God. God was represented as formless at Chidambaram. The later songs of St. Ramalingam show that it was here that he underwent his first spiritual experience and that his spiritual life began here, later to culminate in continuous spiritual enquiry. When he constructed a temple at Vadaloor, he constructed the Gnanasabai with Chidambaram temple as his model. This is due to his first early experience at Chidambaram.

Philosopher's development

St. Ramalingam passed through a period of turmoil. The 19th century Tamilnadu was full of religious and social problems and was groaning under foreigner's yoke. Indians had lost their spiritual moorings and heritage. Even to day Indians are imitating the western way of life. The present day sufferings of Indians are due to the loss of their own heritage. The songs and prose writings of St. Ramalingam indicate that he was preoccupied in his task of revival of Indian spiritual values. All his philosophical developments are in line with ancient Tamil culture, which proclaims that the whole world is man's clime and all human beings are kin.

Fortunately for him, he was not educated in the western system of Indian education, which makes a man more of a machine than a man. He escaped the influence of western style teachers and educational institutions. This helped him in studying Tamil culture in particular and Indian culture in general. He was a self-educated man and later on in his life he became a very good teacher who taught many people. He learned all the sources of Tamil culture, Philosophy and Religion through his own effort. More than every thing, he learned from and depended upon his own authentic experience.

Even though he was a born mystic, the songs of St. Ramalingam show that he experienced all the sufferings of normal human being. He sought solutions through religious and spiritual methods. He proclaimed that only love can save the human being from sufferings and that all religions and philosophies are based upon love. Solicitude, prayer, meditation are some of the important disciplines in the religious philosophy of St. Ramalingam. In the last phase of his life, he recommended Yoga and meditation as the best means for realizing the goal of life.

In India, Philosophy and Religion are considered the two sides of the same coin. Following the traditional way St. Ramalingam also searched for the meaning and goal of life through a religious and spiritual life. The life of St. Ramalingam shows that there is a gradual development in his ideas from the accepted tenets of religion into transcendental and universal ideas. His chief concern was the individual's development. At the higher levels, it is the duty of souls that have realized to help other souls.

St. Ramalingam's way began in religion (Saivism) and culminated in the realisation of the truths of all religions (samarsam). He began with the individual soul's suffering and search and ended with the soul's search for the realisation of the unity of all living beings. In between these two there are so many stages through which he passed and hurdles he crossed.

Early boyhood

When he was a very young boy St. Ramalingam lost his parents and was looked after by his brother and brother's wife. He spent his boyhood in the city of Madras. He spent his time in the temples of Madras city. He

composed his first song at the celebrated Kandakottam temple—small Muruga shrine. During this period he sought Godly experience through prayers. Another temple, which St. Ramalingam used to visit, was the Thiruvotriyur temple, which is situated near Madras City. Thiruvotriyur temple is one of the most famous Saivite temples in Tamilnadu. It is said that St. Pattinathar worshipped at this shrine and disappeared with his physical body. St. Ramalingam also visited Lord Muruga's temple at Thiruthani and composed some songs on Lord Muruga. Songs sung at these temples reveal his sufferings and his yearning for a spiritual life. At one stage young Ramalingam and one of his friends decided to take to the wandering life of a Sanyasin. But the motherly love of his brother's wife dissuaded him from it. Renouncing the responsibilities of life in the name of Sanyas is not prescribed in Tamil tradition. As a staunch follower of the Tamil tradition St. Ramalingam decided to stay with society and live a life according to Tamil tradition. In his later songs he says that his sufferings from the age of twelve was on behalf of others and not on his own. Some of the prayer songs show that he suffered much in spirit for realization.

Parentage

St. Ramalingam's parents were staunch saivites. They believed that Ramalingam was born to them by the grace of Lord Siva. Following the Saiva traditional practice St. Ramalingam's parents went to Chidambaram Nataraja temple when the boy was five months old. On account of this visit St. Ramalingam experienced the extraordinary mystical vision of the dancing Nataraja. This first experience had left an indelible mark in the personality and life of St. Ramalingam.

St. Ramalingam's father was a village administrative officer besides he also held the office of a village school master. St. Ramalingam's mother was a religious lady who followed the traditional Saiva practices like visiting temples regularly, fasting on auspicious days and feeding the wandering sages. His parents attained heaven, when he was very young. When he was five months old, his father died and within a few years his mother followed her husband leaving St. Ramalingam under the care of her elder son Sabapathi Pillai. In the collection of songs, "Pillai peru vinnappam", St. Ramalingam says that God saved him from the childish pranks and showed the good path for a glorious life. Even in early life he was never interested in delicious food. When friends compelled him to eat some sweets, he ate them to satisfy his friends rather than his own

appetite. He was always free from desire for material wealth. When somebody gave him money, he threw it in wells and ponds. He was also not interested in following the false worldly traditions like caste differences and religious differences.

His Brother

When St. Ramalingam's parents died, his elder brother Sabapathi Pillai took him under his care. His brother was a good traditional Tamil scholar who used to give public religious discourses. He lived upon the income from these. He wished his younger brother to learn Tamil deeply. St. Ramalingam's brother tried to teach him Tamil, but his attempts failed. So he sent St. Ramalingam to a good Tamil scholar, Kancheepuram Mahavidwan Sabapathi Mudaliar. The teacher observed the student for a few days and realized that the boy knew everything by birth. So he sent the student back to Sabapathi Pillai.

St. Ramalingam's brother was not pleased with the way of St. Ramalingam. So he became angry and forbade St. Ramalingam to enter the house or expect any help from him. But the lady of the house was like a mother to St. Ramalingam. He had lost his mother at a tender age and had not enjoyed mother's love. When his brother's wife showered motherly love on him, he regarded her as his very mother. Only because of this love he stayed in the house without running away from his brothers' wrath. On many days he got his food and other help from that good-hearted lady. It was on her suggestion that he stayed in the house and studied religious literature and philosophy. At this stage of life the Saint had three important formative experiences besides that which he had had at Chidambaram. One was contact with the existing religio-philosophical systems. When people discussed these with his brother, he used to listen to these discourses. In order to find out the truth he prayed at the temples of Madras. The second was the motherly love of his brother's wife. It showed him the place of love in human life and relationship. He escaped from identifying himself with any other religio-philosophical schools because of his Chidambaram experience. The food for the enquiry came from the discussions of his brother. The need for love in life was demonstrated to him by his sister-in-law's love towards him.

Self-Education

St. Ramalingam never went to any guru for his education. His brother's wife gave him a neat room and the other necessary things for learning. In the upstairs room of the house, St. Ramalingam learned everything through his own efforts. When he refers to this in "Aruperunjothi ahaval" he says that he learned everything with the help of God himself.

Even though he never went to any teacher for education he was not against traditional preceptor—pupil residential method of education. In his late life at Vadaloor he taught many including great scholars like Tholuvloor Velayuda Mudaliar who later became a mahavidvan. He was not only interested in teaching youngsters but also stressed the life long education, and the education of adults—old people and women. In this respect he was the first thinker of South India to think about adult education, informal education and women's education. In his adult education programs he instructed his disciples to teach ethical literatures to the old people. He taught Thirukkural to the old people. He said that for spiritual reasons women should be taught Yoga and other spiritual exercises.

St. Ramalingam followed the ancient traditional Indian system of education. For spreading this system he setup a school at Vadaloor. The songs of St. Ramalingam show that sometimes he was dissatisfied with the lack of discipline among young students. On many occasions he advised his followers and parents to teach the students with love without using the cane etc. His system of education is moral-based and religious oriented, life-long education.

Sadhana

Traditionally Indian religious thinkers follow three paths. They are Bhakthi, Gnana and Karma, that is to say the paths of devotion, of supreme knowledge and of service. In the first stage of his life, St. Ramalingam followed the path of devotion. In the path of devotion complete surrender to God is possible only through the shedding of ego. The early songs of St. Ramalingam show how he was troubled with the ego and how he got rid of egoism through the help of God. Only in the egoless state, God's presence will be felt. In the last part of his life he set up

religio-social institutions in order to serve suffering human beings. In that state of God realization he referred service to human beings as service to God. He advised his followers also to serve human society in all possible ways, especially through the feeding of the hungry and the poor and abstaining from the killing of any life. He told his followers that Jeevakarunya Olukkam—Reverence for life is the best and only possible means to realize the aim and purpose of human life. At the opening ceremony of the poor feeding centre (Satya Dharma Salai) he delivered a long speech regarding the Jeevakarunya Olukkam and emphasized that it is the Sadhana for the family man to realize God. His knowledge in the religio—philosophical systems is clearly known to us through his songs. His studies in this area and his experience in these systems show that he used the Gnana marga also. Besides using all these paths, he invented a new path also. He had recourse to Yogic practices and followed the Siddha system of medicine for preparing the material and subtle body for attaining deathlessness.

Religious developments

Religion in India is a way of life. The "good-life" is practice of philosophical truths in the day to day life. In the life and teaching of St. Ramalingam religion is the bedrock on which all his activities are built. Owing to his family background of Saivism his enquiry was in the direction of Saivaite philosophy. As a young boy, St. Ramalingam supplicated at the feet of Lord Muruga of Kandakottam for enlightenment. The songs in Deivamanimalai show that the religious developments of St. Ramalingam were in the line of theism. In these songs he criticized the non-believers and those who believe that they are the Brahman—the Absolute. In these songs St. Ramalingam praises the true devotees. His religious understanding is characterized by a social commitment. So when he prays for something, he asks for the benefit of others and not for his own self. In the sixth thirumurai the Saint's songs are completely for the people. He exhorted people to live a happy life in the world. There is a transformation in his religious life from the Individual seeking for salvation into consciousness of universal brotherhood. As for himself he attained everything but his desire is that each and every individual in the world must attain to what he himself had attained. The religious experience of St. Ramalingam began with the 'form-aspect' of God—Lord Muruga and Vadivudayamman and religious path ended in the realization of Divine Light. He designated his religious philosophy "Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam". This is the enquiring path, which is based on truth and takes

all the aspects of all religions and has no hatred towards any religion or philosophy. His path tried to transcend all religious differences. That is why he used the word Suddha Sanmargam. "Suddha Sanmargam" is the integral, pure, transcendental path, which is different from the religious integration like Vedanta Siddhanta Samarasam of St. Thayumanavar. St. Ramalingam says that he has passed through the different religious and philosophical systems, before establishing his own philosophy of samarasa suddha sanmargam.

Chidambaram

Among the various temples of Tamilnadu, Chidambaram temple is unique in very many ways. For the Saivites this temple is an important temple. They used the word "Koil" (temple) only to Chidambaram. The formless aspect of God is represented only in this temple. The deities of Saivites and Vaishnavites are simultaneously worshipped here. This clearly shows that this temple is a very ancient temple, which originated before the sectarian divisions like Saivism, Vaishnavism came into being. Secondly, the temple stands for the integration of these two Schools of Hinduism. This temple is constructed in accordance with the rules of Agamas and not based on the rules of Vedas.

Like so many saints of past, St. Ramalingam derived spiritual experience and worshipped Lord Nataraja in this temple. Unlike other saints, he tried his very best to bring the methods of worship in this temple in conformity with agamic rules. But he failed in his attempt. So he built a new temple according to agamic rules. When giving a name for the new temple he chose the term Uttara Gnana Chidambaram. Whenever he mentioned Chidambaram temple he referred to it as Purna—Gnana Chidambaram. So the philosophical basis of Chidambaram temple had a great influence on the ideas and ideals of St. Ramalingam.

Kandakottam and Thiruvotriyur

Kandakottam is a temple in Madras dedicated to Lord Muruga. When he lived in Madras St. Ramalingam spent most of his time at this temple, and it became famous owing to St. Ramalingam's visit. He renamed this temple as Kandakottam, its previous name being "Kandaswamy Koil". The songs, which St. Ramalingam sang at this temple, are his earliest. Even today these songs are famous among the Tamil people. Another

temple, which St. Ramalingam regularly visited, was the temple of Vadivudaiyamman at Thiruvotriyur.

Thiruvotriyur temple situated near Madras is considered to be a sacred place for Saivites. Here St. Pattinathar attained God realization. St. Ramalingam used to visit this temple daily for his worship. When he was in Madras city he led a life of a strict saivite. He meticulously followed the rules and regulations of worshipping at the temple. Thiruvotriyur is reputed for its Sakti worship (mother worship). St. Ramalingam followed this method of worship when he visited Thiruvotriyur.

From his 12th year onwards St. Ramalingam worshipped Thyagaraja, Vadivudaiyamman and Muruga at Thiruvotriyur. Upto his leaving Madras in his thirty fifth year, he regularly visited this temple for 23 years. In these 23 years of his life, St. Ramalingam underwent many spiritual and mystical experiences. The songs of St. Ramalingam showed that he decided to leave Thiruvotriyur after having thought about it for a considerable period.

Karunkuli

St. Ramalingam lived for nine years (1858-1867) at a small village known as Karunkuli. He left Madras city because he thought that the city was not conducive for a spiritual life. After leaving Madras he visited very many Saivite and Vaisnavite temples on the way to Chidambaram. When he was in Chidambaram, the Munisif of Karunkuli, Vengada Reddiar, requested him to come and stay at Karunkuli. For nine years he lived under Vengada Reddiar's roof. It was on account of his inner spiritual development, St. Ramalingam moved away from the city. In one of his songs he said that city life made man's heart shrink.

The details about the Karunkuli phase of St. Ramalingam's life are not ascertainable. This nine year period at Karunkuli is an important phase in the life of St. Ramalingam. During this period he lived in isolation. He spent most of his time in meditation and in worship. Some of the letters which he wrote to his friends in Madras show that he lived in the fields and meditated for many days. This period reveals a great change in his ideas and ideals. His thoughts while in Madras were about religion whereas while he was in Karunkuli it was in the stage of transition from religion to transcendentalism.

After spending nine years in solitude and meditation, he became a Sanmargi - one who realized the underlying truth of all religions. He did not stop with that. He wished to establish a new society on the basis of his realization. His constructive works originated in Vadaloor. The life at Vadaloor is only an extension of his experiments and experiences at Karunkuli.

Chidambaram

In its original practice, Chidambaram temple was an agamic temple. But today the temple follows the vedic way of conducting prayers, etc. In this temple God is represented in the form of linga—which is the form of form and formless's. St. Ramalingam tried to change the method of worship at Chidambaram temple from Vedic to agamic. His songs show his keen desire to change the ritual of the temple. But it did not succeed. In one of his letters to a friend Rathina Mudaliar, St. Ramalingam wrote that Chidambaram had become an unsuitable place for living. In that letter, he says that he visited the temple to worship Lord Nataraja.

When he constructed a temple at Vadaloor he named it as Uttara Gnana Chidambaram. The temple at Vadaloor is based upon the experiences of St. Ramalingam and was constructed on the basis of the original Chidambaram temple.

Vadaloor

St. Ramalingam selected Vadaloor as the place to formulate and extend his plan for a society based upon love and honesty. All his constructive programs to build a new society were established at Vadaloor. This small village Vadaloor is situated near Chidambaram at the Road Junction of two high ways (Madras-Kumbakonam, Manakkuppam-Virudachalam). The old name of Vadaloor is Parvathipuram. After settling there St. Ramalingam named it Vadaloor, because this place is situated in the northern side of Chidambaram.

It was with the view of building a new society based on love and spirituality that St. Ramalingam had come and settled in Vadaloor. Even though he stayed here for a period of four years only (from 1867-1870), this is an important period in his life. He established social institutions like the temple, the poor feeding Centre, the meditation Centre, the

medical Centre, the School etc. The people of that Village offered St. Ramalingam some land for the construction of his religio-social institutions. An important social institution is the Centre for feeding the poor. The physical life—the maintenance of this body is important for the realization of the purpose of life. St. Ramalingam never opened this Centre for the lazy who did not want to work. He opened this for those honest, hardworking poor people whom he did not like to go hungry for want of means. This institution is known as Satya-dharmasalai. Satya Gnana Sabai is the temple which is designed by the Saint. This temple belongs to the people of all religions. This is open to all, irrespective of caste, religion, race and other distinctions.

After staying for four years at Vadaloor, St. Ramalingam withdrew to Mettukuppam. Those who surrounded the saint never followed his philosophy. Sometimes, they misbehaved in the absence of the Saint. The repeated warnings of the Saint and the notices clearly show the inability of the followers to follow the philosophy of St. Ramalingam.

Even today the institutions of St. Ramalingam are there at Vadaloor without any further expansion. The follow up work was not done by the followers. So the reformative message and the revolutionary activities of St. Ramalingam have not spread even within Tamil Nadu.

Mettukkuppam

Mettukkuppam is a small village near Vadaloor. St. Ramalingam spent the last part of his worldly life in a small hut known as "Chitti Valaham". 'Chitti Valaham' means "place of attainment or realization". Here St. Ramalingam practiced the life of a Yogi and lived in isolation. Till 1874 he lived in that hut. On 30-1-1874 he disappeared from that hut.

During this stage of his life he restricted all his activities and prepared for his disappearance from this world. When he lived in Mettukuppam, occasionally he appeared before those who surrounded the hut and spoke to them on deathless life and universal brotherhood. In Mettukuppam he practiced the ancient Indian mystical practice of the art of disappearing with the material body. St. Ramalingam took pity upon the worldly people who never cared about themselves. Like the Zarathustra of Nietzsche, he despaired at the thought of common man and cried in frustration, "Lo, I opened my shop to give, but none came to receive". But ideas never die and the philosophy of St. Ramalingam has

already started to mould the minds of people, who are suffering from what Swami Vivekananda called, "Crystallized Superstitions". Radical change of society through his philosophy is possible. The Saint's assurance that he will come again to set the people on the right path is a message of optimism and encouragement.

2. Religion of Saint Ramalingam

Saivism

Saivism is one of the oldest schools of Hinduism, which believes that "Siva" is the supreme Reality. It is a theistic, realistic and pluralistic philosophy, which originated in India. Theism in Saivism holds that God Siva is the supreme Being who controls the world and directs the souls towards perfection. The philosophy of Saivism is realistic in the sense that it believes that the world, the souls and God are realities. God is an independent reality whereas the souls and the world are dependant realities. It is pluralistic because it believes in the independent existence of God, souls, and the world. This world affirming philosophy of Saivism was accepted and developed by St. Ramalingam in his philosophy, Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam.

Love is the fundamental philosophy of Saivism. Thirumoolar equates love with God. St. Ramalingam's understanding of Saivism showed that love is the fundamental philosophy of Saivism. In his 'Mahaperupadesam' which is considered to be the manifesto of St. Ramalingam, he says, all the religious practices are meaningless if they are not based upon love. He clearly says that in the beginning he followed Saivism but only love saved him and lifted him to a supreme height. The integrating philosophy of Saint Ramalingam is not based upon any particular religion but it takes all the good aspects of various religions of South India.

Other religious experiments

Even though St. Ramalingam was born in a Saiva family he was not an orthodox Saivite. His early spiritual experience at Chidambaram temple has revealed to him that God is formless and this experience had a great influence on his understanding of religions. His brother was a religious propagandist and he used to discuss about the various religions. This is also an important event in the religious development of St. Ramalingam.

In the course of his enquiries into religions, he studied many religions. The major religious schools of Hinduism are Saivism and

Vaishnavism. In their religious practices they differ from each other. Each emphasizes a different aspect of the same reality. Philosophically they are theistic, realistic and pluralistic. Both schools emphasize the path of devotion and realization of God. Religion is a major force in St. Ramalingam's life. As a true seeker after truth, he searched for truth in different religions. Before announcing the philosophy of Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam he studied the various philosophies and religions of South India. So Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam is an integrated philosophy which accepts the truth of various religions and philosophies. His biographers say that he was a born-mystic—"Samu Suddha"—who came to this world to lead the people towards a good life. So he neither opposed any religion nor identified himself with any. On the other hand, he accepted all the religions and philosophies and laid bare the fundamental unity of all religions and philosophies. During his enquiry, he came across the village deities, the Vaishnava and Saiva pantheon.

Vaishnava influence

The orthodox followers of Saivism and Vaishnavism seldom show mutual respect. The history of Saivism as well as Vaishnavism clearly shows that the orthodox people of each wasted much time and energy in condemning the other. Even great Saints used to identify themselves with one particular sect and condemned the other sects. St. Ramalingam is the only exception in the history of South Indian religion and philosophy who respected all religions alike. Even though he came from a Saiva family he never disrespected the other religions. He visited the Vaishnava temples, worshipped there, and composed some songs of devotion to the deities. In the collected works of St. Ramalingam we have the songs on the Vaishnava deity Lord Rama. His Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam is the culmination of various religious facts. His mantra 'Arutperunjothi' clearly shows that he included all pervasive aspects of reality in his philosophy.

Village Deities and St. Ramalingam's view on them

Apart from the major Gods like Siva, Vishnu and Muruga the village deities like Mariamman, Kali, etc., have been accepted into Hinduism. The worship of these minor deities frequently involve such practices as killing animals in sacrifice and offering intoxicating drinks. St. Ramalingam abjured worship of these minor deities and inhuman practices carried with them. He was not a religious man who rejected this worldly life. His religion is the religion of humanism, love and grace. His love includes all

living beings and he experienced the oneness of his life and self in all the living beings. So whenever there was a tree dried up for want of water he shed tears. When there was an animal sacrifice, (at which some are prepared to give the animal for sacrifice) he used to rush immediately to the spot and stop it. He lived mostly with uneducated villagers and they are famous for their minor deity worship. So he sang many songs on the evils of this inhuman practice. He advised many people to stop the killing of animals in the name of God, because God is love and God is there in all living-beings. One important temple in which he stopped the animal sacrifice was Thulukkanathu Mariammal Koil. The song, which he sang on the occasion of the stopping of animal sacrifice occurs in Thiruarutpa. When the worshippers became confused and said that the deity will become angry if they stopped the practice, St. Ramalingam explained to them the evil involved in the practice and persuaded them to worship God in a gentle way. In the Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga philosophy killing of animals and minor deity worship are prohibited.

Development of Samarasam

"Samarasam" is not one more addition to the existing religious orders. It is a mode of unifying the fundamental principles of all religions and philosophies. The collected songs of St. Ramalingam were divided into six parts. The first five parts were published in his own lifetime. The sixth part of the songs was published only after his disappearance. The saint never gave permission to publish the sixth part of Thiruarutpa in his own time. The songs in the first five parts consist of songs on different deities, different Saiva precepts and other songs connected with religion. In the sixth Thirumurai we have the songs of Samarasam. This is purely for those who come away from the religions like Saivism, Vaishnavism etc. The Saint allowed the Sanmargis-those who came away from the religions to read them. He advised them to live a life according to the teaching of the sixth Thirumarai. If one looks at these songs in a religious context, one would not understand the songs easily. The opposition of the Saivites was due to this. They listened to the songs of the sixth Thirumarai only which were not meant for them.

Samarasam treats all religions and philosophies alike and tries to transcend them. This is not a new invention of St. Ramalingam. The songs of early Tamil thinkers like St. Thirumoolar, St. Manikkavasagar and St. Thayumanavar show that this concept is an old concept in the philosophies of Tamil Saints. But there is a difference between the Samarasam of the

previous thinkers and the Samarasam of St. Ramalingam. Philosophy of St. Ramalingam is known as Samarasa suddha sanmargam. Here the word 'Suddha' means transcending all the philosophies and religions. The sanmarga philosophy of early thinkers enquired into truth from the standing point of particular religion or philosophy. The philosophy of St. Thayumanavar is known as Vedanta - Siddhanta Samarasam which tried to find out the truths of the other religions from the stand point of Saivism. Adi Sankara was famous for his integrative work among the various schools in Hinduism. He is known as Shanmatha Sthapaka, the integrator of six schools of philosophy. But none except St. Ramalingam tried to unite the philosophies and showed a way to transcend them.

In their identification with some religious ideologies religious institutions forget the very purpose of religion which is the good life of human beings. Due to their religious bias they forgot their duties to the social life of mankind. Naturally, the religions were neglected by the common folk and the religious people aligned themselves with separate groups. Hinduism suffered a lot because of the irreligious people, who represented religion. Large number of people became converts to other religions for the sake of getting social justice. Under St. Ramalingam the true spirit of Hinduism-that is Samarasam was revised and developed. By revising Hinduism St. Ramalingam brought eternal values of Hinduism into the daily life of mankind. He explained that his life mission was not to create a new religious sect or a school of philosophy but to show a way to the good life on this earth. In one of his prayers to God he sang that the whole world must enjoy the bliss which he was enjoying.

Opposition from the traditional Saivites

Within a short period of the establishment of his institutions at Vadaloor his fame spread throughout Tamilnadu. People from all directions came to Vadaloor to witness these establishments. Those who came to Vadaloor realized the great reformations brought about by St. Ramalingam. Meanwhile the followers of St. Ramalingam published his songs under the title 'Thiruarutpa' and they referred to St. Ramalingam as "Vallalar". But the saint never liked these. He scolded the followers who published the songs under the title Thiruarutpa and he was very sad when he saw his name as Vallalar. He explained to the followers that he was only a human being and a member of the group of good people. Only God is great and each one must worship God, he added.

The publication of the songs of St. Ramalingam under the title Thiruarutpa and appellation Vallalar, the construction of a temple at Vadaloor created a big strife among the Saivites. The orthodox Saivites objected to these and the objections came in the form of Arumuga Navalar - a famous Saiva preacher of Jaffna. The orthodox followers of Saivism denigrated the "Thiruarutpa" by calling it "marutpa". In the history of Saivism the Arutpa - Marutpa incident is an important event. The followers of modernity and orthodox met at the Court for justice. Arumuga Navalar filed a suit against St. Ramalingam and the suit was adjudged in favor of St. Ramalingam.

St. Ramalingam's reaction to Opposition

St. Ramalingam wished to build a new society which is based upon love and spirituality. In order to build that society he aimed at a fundamental change in the way of living and in society. Instead of superstitious beliefs and traditional practices he introduced love and spirituality. In that process he changed so many religious practices. Instead of worshipping an idol he asked his followers to concentrate upon light and meditate upon that. Instead of traditional caste and religious set-up, he asked his followers to love all the living-beings and help them whenever there was a chance.

As already stated the traditional followers of Saivism opposed St. Ramalingam under the leadership of Arumuga Navalar - a saivite preacher from Jaffna, who dedicated his life for the spread of Saivism. He published many Tamil Saiva classics and used to deliver lectures on Saivism to the public. The traditional mutts of Saivism supported Arumuga Navalar in his profession.

The songs of St. Ramalingam show that he never thought and worked in terms of a particular group of people. The sixth Thirumurai contains the revolutionary ideas of St. Ramalingam. So, the sixth Thirumurai is not a reason for the traditionalist reaction. St. Ramalingam never called himself Vallalar or his songs Thiruarutpa. The followers published it and they named him St. Ramalinga Vallalar. Due to his revolutionary ideas, his practical activities, and his great reverence towards the early teachers, his fame spread and people gathered around him. In some places people sang Thiruarutpa instead of Thevaram and Thiruvachagam. The followers of St. Ramalingam and the followers of traditional Saivism very seriously opposed each other. St. Ramalingam

calmly observed these quarrels. He was very sad about this. On the one hand, the Saivites opposed him because they misunderstood his message. On the other he was sorry for the followers who wasted their time in opposition. (They spread messages of spiritual communism throughout Tamilnadu.) Instead his devotional work spread and people looked upon St. Ramalingam as one among the many great Saiva teachers who spread the message of Saivism. He never regarded any individual as an enemy because he realized his relation with each and every living being. The Saint thought that it was his duty and right to help every living being.

3. Philosophy of Saint Ramalingam

Compared to his precursors St. Ramalingam was unique in very many ways. The earlier thinkers embodied their philosophies in their songs and they lived a life based upon that philosophy. So the common people did not know what philosophy the thinker followed. Only a selected fortunate few who lived with these saints followed their philosophies. But St. Ramalingam clearly explained his philosophy in prose form even though his poems carry much deeper philosophy. Due to the exposition in fine prose style, his philosophy became popular among the common people. He named his philosophy "Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam." Even though the concept Sanmargam is a very old concept in Tamilnadu, Suddha Sanmargam is a specific contribution of St. Ramalingam to the South Indian philosophy. Sanmargam means enquiry into truth, search after truth. The earlier thinkers, St. Thirumoolar, St. Manikkavasagar, St. Thayumanavar spoke about Sanmargam. St. Thayumanavar's philosophy was known as Vedanta-Suddha Samarasam. Samarasam means the middle path which considers all religions and philosophies alike. St. Ramalingam's philosophy aims at transcending all the philosophies and religions.

His Conception of Satya

The concept truth (Satya) gets an important place in the philosophy of St. Ramalingam. He named his philosophy as Sanmargam—which means a path in search for truth. When he constructed a temple for all the religious people, he named it as Satya Gnana Sabai. The temple was constructed on the basis of Agamas and not on Vedas. There was no religious practice in the temple. The devotees are expected to meditate and concentrate on their own heart.

According to St. Ramalingam truth is greater than any religion or philosophy. There are truths in all religious and philosophical systems but one must not restrict himself within the constricting limits of any one religion. So one must pass through the different religious practices, must read the basic classics and know the fundamental truths of every religion. When one realizes that there are truths in each and every religion, it is possible for them to transcend all religions and know the fundamental philosophy which is the basis of all religions. St. Ramalingam himself read

the classics of the different religions, visited the various temples in order to know the truths of the religions and realized the fundamental unity of all religions. He also read the classics of philosophy and realized that love is the basis for human life and all the religions and philosophies are based on love.

As already stated, he visited the Murugan temple at Madras. He also visited the Ottriyoor temple. Later on he stayed at the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram for a short period. He sang so many songs of different Vaishnava deities and the minor village deities. At last he worshipped the formless aspect of Reality. He accepts that there are truths in the Agamas and Vedas but he was sad about those people who quarreled in the name of the Vedas and Agamas without knowing the fundamental truths of either.

According to St. Ramalingam truth is the basis of the individual being and the cosmos. But the individual's real being is covered with so many impurities like anavam, maya, karma, ahamkara, etc. When he designed Satya Gnana Sabai, he designed it with an individual being as the Centre. The different screens are the impurities and ignorances. The divine light in the temple represents the divine being dance in the heart of each and every living being.

Ramalingam's Conception of Reality

St. Ramalingam was a spiritualist with a social commitment. He never lost sight of his social responsibilities in his pursuit of the spirit. His spiritual communism is full of social commitments. He shed tears whenever he witnessed a crop withered up for lack of water. He suffered whenever he witnessed poor honest people begging for food. He felt very sad whenever he saw animals being killed in the name of sacrifice to the Village Deities. His songs clearly show that he identified himself with all living beings. He witnessed the sufferings and sorrows of all the living beings within himself. The visible dualism disappears when one realizes that all living beings are not isolated from each other but are the part and parcel of the one Reality which he conceived as "Arutperunjothi"-- "Thanipperumkarunai". The nature of real being is grace, greatness, light and this conception is similar to the conception of Brahman in Advaita Vedanta.

His conception of reality is different from the conception of Reality in traditional Advaita. From the very beginning in Kandakottam, he rejected the absolutistic conception of Reality and sang songs in the line of pluralistic theism. When some of his followers addressed him as Vallalar, he vehemently rejected that honor, and said only God is great and that all the human beings are the devotees of one God who has neither form nor name. All the names and forms are products of the human mind. In order to realize the nature of Reality one must go beyond names and forms.

Concept of Soul in the Philosophy of St. Ramalingam

Theistic schools of philosophy maintain that in terms of size a soul is an 'anu' whereas God is Vibu. By nature the soul is dependent upon God. St. Ramalingam's early life shows that he was a follower of Saivism and he also respected other religions. He openly declared that he was not an absolutist. Even the songs in the Sixth Thirumurai indicate that he was a devotee of God in the formless mode. The theism of St. Ramalingam evolved throughout his life. But at no place he identified himself with the Reality itself. On the other hand, the songs show that there are some stages in which he prayed for the grace of God. He sang that he got every thing from God himself. The last part of Thiruarutpa shows that he ultimately merged with God Himself.

For people who are too worldly, he sang some songs of advice. He sang that human life is great and if this life is wasted in acquiring material wealth, it is sheer madness. If people do not think about death, which is the one sure event in each individual's life - they are really mad. They do not know what to do now, what they are here for, where they go after this life. His advice to them is to realize God and get away from the dangerous trap 'death'. This life is given in order to help others and to share the sufferings of others with them and to get mastery over death which is the only enemy to life. He invited people to move away from small religions to transcendentalism to experience and to save themselves.

Influence of Thirugnana Sambandar in the Philosophy of St. Ramalingam

St. Ramalingam has sung about the four Samayacharyas of Saivism. He never went to any master for secular or for spiritual education. But he regarded St. Thirugnanasambandar as his spiritual teacher. He sang ten

songs in "Aludaya Pillayar Arulmalai" about his experience with his teacher. These songs clearly show that he grasped the essence of the Thevaram and experienced it in his spiritual life.

"Aludaya Pillaiyar Arulmalai" informs us that St. Thirugnanasambandar showed him the different stages in the spiritual life. St. Ramalingam mentioned three such steps as the experience of soul, experience of grace and the experience of God. These three experiences are like the steps of a ladder. If one climbed and crossed the tathuvass of one's own being, the soul experience will come. The next experience, graceful experience will come to one if he realizes the first stage. In the graceful experience the soul realizes its own nature and the nature of Reality which is beyond words and thoughts. When St. Ramalingam suffered without knowing the beginning and the end of Sivam (Reality), his spiritual teacher Thirugnanasambandar himself showed that both the beginning and end are there within one's own self. St. Ramalingam's deep study of Thevaram revealed to him the different steps in the spiritual life of human beings. St. Thirugnanasambandar not only showed him the different steps in the spiritual life but he revealed them within a very short time. One can get such experience only through hard work through many years. St. Ramalingam hailed this act of his spiritual teacher as a miracle.

Thirumoolar

Thirumoolar's Thirumanthiram defines the essence of Saivism as love. Love is nothing but God. Thirumanthiram is considered to be the basic text of Saivism, it is a book on mysticism. The first two parts of Thirumanthiram deal with the social life of man. In this part Thirumoolar explains the moral basis of spiritual life. The social responsibility of the spiritualists is emphasized in Thirumanthiram.

In St. Ramalingam's Mahaperupadesam which is considered to be his spiritual manifesto, he says that love alone can save the world. The philosophy of St. Ramalingam was influenced by Thirumoolar. The social institutions of St. Ramalingam were established on the basic principles of Thirumanthiram. Thirumoolar regarded the human body itself as a temple of God and equated the service to human beings with service to God. St. Ramalingam put into execution this philosophy by setting up the Satya Dharma Salai and Satya Gnana Sabai. In 'Pillaipperuvinnappam' St. Ramalingam says that God Himself revealed the essence of

Thirumanthiram to him and he is following the teachings of Thirumanthiram.

St. Ramalingam's place in the history of religion in Tamil Nadu is very important. He was a mystic who followed the tradition of Thirumoolar. He was a representative of the Bhakti tradition of South India. He respected the four Samayacharyas and considered St. Thirugnanasambandar as his spiritual teacher. He was a social reformer who gave a new dimension to religion and social service. He followed the mystical teachings of Thirumoolar and emphasized deathlessness as the supreme end of human life.

God Experience

Two kinds of teachings are found in the complete works of St. Ramalingam. The first one is the traditional which is full of the devotional aspect. The first five parts of Thiruarutpa contain this kind of teaching. Here St. Ramalingam praises the deities of various sub sects of Hinduism, prays for his needs, sings the precepts of Saivism, etc. This line of thinking is in tune with the religious tradition of Tamil Nadu. This is the esoteric teaching of St. Ramalingam. His life mission to the whole world was in the building up of a welfare state. In one of his songs he sang that the Kingdom of God is possible here and now and that God had sent him for this purpose.

In the sixth Thirumurai St. Ramalingam explained the esoteric teachings. The Thirumurai begins with the authoritative statement the 'everything is possible if one praises God!' He sang this with authority. In this part of thiruarutpa he emphasizes the formless aspect of God. The 'Arutperunjothi Ahaval' explains the formless aspect of God.

God experience occurred to St. Ramalingam when he was only a five month old child at Chidambaram temple. The experience continued throughout his life. There has been a gradual development in the experience of St. Ramalingam from the personal God at Kandakottam viz. Lord Muruga to the glorious Divine light at his Satya Gnana Sabai. In the course of his religious enquiry he made encounters with atheists and super-theists. In the very early songs he rejected the atheist way of life and super-theist claims.

4. Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam—The Disciplines of Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam

The Ethics of St. Ramalingam is a social ethic. The divisions are named after self-control(ஒழுக்கம்) which Thiruvalluvar emphasizes under the heading 'possession of self-control'. The path of 'Samarasam' consists of (1) Indriya Olukkam, (2) Karma Olukkam, (3) Jiva Olukkam (4) Anma Olukkam. These four are called as "Sanmarga Olukkam". Thiruvalluvar gives a very high place to this virtue. Hence he says self-control confers special merit. Hence it should be guarded more than life. St. Ramalingam also emphasizes the importance of the disciplined life in his Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam.

I. Gnana-Indriya Olukkam

1) Listening to the praise of God, 2) Preventing bad words entering our ears, 3) Avoiding look of Harshness and wickedness, 4) Abstaining from touching evil things, 5) Abstaining from *gluttony*, etc.

Karma-Indriya Olukkam

1) Speaking sweet words, 2) Telling no lies, 3) Resisting by all means from harmful deeds to other living being, 4) Leading a religious life, 5) Associating ourselves with people of Saintly characters, 6) Maintaining a healthy body.

II. Karma Olukkam

1) The mind has to be directed to *Cit Sabhai* by taking it away from other objects. (*Cit Sabai* is the heart in which the Divine abodes). 2) Not to enquire into the faults of others, 3) Not to be wicked.

III. Jiva Olukkam

Jiva Olukkam is the discipline that teaches one to treat all human beings as equal, and feel the presence of oneself in all human beings. One must not be affected by the various distinctions as social, national, linguistic, caste, religion, etc., because the soul belongs to a different sphere in which no such difference exists.

IV. Anma Olukkam

Anma Olukkam is further development of *Jiva Olukkam*. Here the soul looks upon all living beings alike. (not only human but also sub-human beings also). Here the soul feels a great compassion for all the beings, considers 'Anma' as the 'Sabai' and the 'Inner light' as God.

Saint Ramalingam clearly said that *Jiva Olukkam* and *Anma Olukkam* are possible only with the help of Divine Grace. To attain divine grace one must follow the '*Indriya Olukkam*' and '*Karma Olukkam*'. St. Ramalingam explained these disciplines in his discourse at 'Chitti Valaham' to the Sanmargis for attaining the supreme goal of Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam—the deathless life. One who follows these disciplines will attain the *Karma Siddhi*, *Yoga Siddhi* and *Gnana Siddhi*. The body of the follower will change into *Svarna Deha*, *Pranava Deha*, and *Gnana Deha*. Thus the disciplines of St. Ramalingam aims at the deathless life.

The disciplines of Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam were founded on the experiences of St. Ramalingam. He not merely believed that there are truths in all the schools of philosophies and religions but put into practice in his own life. His experience and experiments in different religious traditions of South India resulted in the formation of Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam which is full of diverse disciplines. According to St. Ramalingam, an undisciplined life is not a life at all. His own life showed that he was strict in disciplining himself. When he established a religious institution he emphasized discipline as a fundamental requirement. He clearly gave warning notices to those people who behaved in an undisciplined way. Philosophy and religion in India are not mere theories and beliefs but they are principles guiding to a good life, and must be put into practice. One must enjoy them in one's life. This is emphasized in Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam.

Concept of Justice

St. Ramalingam aimed at a peaceful society based on justice. In the philosophy of St. Ramalingam this is an important concept. In 1854 he wrote a book for school children, entitled '*Manu Murai Kanda Vaasagam*', based on this concept. Tamil prose was a discovery of the 19th century. In this St. Ramalingam contributed some important books. One among them is '*Manu Murai Kanda Vaasagam*'. The story of *Manuneedhi* is found in *Periapuranam*. St. Ramalingam wrote '*Manu Murai Kanda Vaasagam*' based

upon the above mentioned story. St. Ramalingam named it as 'muraikanda' vasagam, because the correct Tamil word for Justice is 'murai'. St. Ramalingam's prose works are not popular as his poems. The songs of St. Ramalingam became very popular among the educated and uneducated, orthodox and modern people. Though the book 'Manu Murai Kanda Vaasagam' was written for school children, it is full of moral and ethical teachings that are essential for the good life of all.

5. The Place of love in the philosophy of St. Ramalingam

In the history of South Indian philosophy no thinker faced such opposition as St. Ramalingam. The history of religion in South India clearly shows the conflicts between the different sects of Hinduism. The followers of the various sects respected their leaders but in the case of St Ramalingam, he was followed by none. As a lonely seeker—after truth he found out that only love can save the world from all its problems. No religion or philosophy can save the world if it is not based upon love. His humanism is incomparable in the South. His humanism made him move towards a new social order based upon love.

All the teachings of Buddha can be interpreted in the light of the basic concept of love. His enlightenment revealed to him that the sufferings and sorrows of human beings can be solved through love. This concept is one of the basic concepts in Indian philosophic traditions. In Saivism, Thirumoolar equates love with God and Saivism is a theo-centric religion. Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam of St. Ramalingam got much inspiration from Saivism. The key concept of love in Saivism became Jeeva Karunya Olukkam in Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam. St. Ramalingam's message is the message of love. He never identified himself with any religion or any school of philosophy. Even though he visited so many temples irrespective of religions, and studied the various philosophical classics of South India, he was not satisfied with any one particular religion or philosophy. His philosophy - Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam is based upon the concept of Jeevakarunya Olukkam.

Jeevakarunya Olukkam means the discipline of the soul. The Tamil word Olukkam means that which is practiced in one's own life. It is not a theoretical conception but an ethical practice. On the basis of this concept St. Ramalingam opened the poor feeding centre at Vadaloor in 1867. When the traditional religious institutions with their huge riches silently watched and neglected the service to the poor people, St. Ramalingam established the poor feeding centre with the help of the poor people of Vadaloor. Even though the Tamil tradition speaks a lot about the hungry and feeding of the poor, it is St. Ramalingam who actually established a poor feeding centre. At the inaugural function of Satya Dharma Salai, St. Ramalingam delivered a speech in which he explained

the need for feeding the hungry people. He clearly said that spiritual life of man begins with the daily activities. If one thinks and acts for the welfare of his neighbor the so called spiritual enlightenment will come automatically. Here St. Ramalingam gives a new direction to spiritual life and the way is based upon the concept of love. The shortest and straight way to spiritual enlightenment is through the loving act of feeding the hungry poor and showing reverence for life—that is non-killing of life.

When the real spirit of religion is forgotten by people, religious revivalists appear in history and renew the original spirit of the religion. All the religions came into being only to unite people. No religion recommends separation in any form. This is also true of Saivism. When the spirit of Saivism - love - was forgotten by the people and people gave importance to all the superficial practices, great revivalists like Thirumoolar, St. Manikkavasagar and St. Thayumanavar appeared and renewed the fundamental life principle of Saivism which is love. The life and work of all the saints and sages of Saivism clearly indicate that they spread the message of love and not dogma. They acted upon the principle of spirituality and love and not upon caste or class. The Saint's life in Periapuranam is a clear indication of this. Vedanta became practical Vedanta because of the works of Swami Vivekananda. The real spirit of Vedanta was revived and renewed according to the demands and needs of the times. In the life of St. Ramalingam we see the revival of Saivism.

The life of Ramalingam clearly shows that he was guided by two principles. They are spirituality and love. The first spiritual experience at Chidambaram Nataraja temple had a great impact upon the development of his thought. At a very young age he lost his parents and searched for the meaning and purpose of life in spiritualism. He never enjoyed parental love. He never turned into a wandering Sanyasin because his brother's wife loved him like her own son. Only because of this love he stayed at home and read all the religious classics. The motherly love of the lady had a great impact upon his life and thought. Had he not enjoyed the love, definitely, he would have become a wandering Sanyasin. St. Ramalingam never believed in the empty meaningless ceremonial religious practices. He advised his followers to follow the principle of love in their lives. He aspired to rebuild humanity on the basis of love. His own life was not based upon any religion or doctrine but love. All the religious practices, ceremonies are meaningful only in the context of love. He followed the practices of the South Indian religions and went through the different philosophical traditions of South India. In his spiritual manifesto which

was his last public speech, he clearly stated that only love made him a mature man and love lifted him to the supreme state. He advised his followers not to give importance to religions and philosophies because they never make one a full man. Only love can save the human being and lead him to a pure, mature life.

Love is not a theoretical concept. One must act upon it. According to St. Ramalingam, love can be expressed by non-killing of lives and abstaining from meat. These do not constitute a negative attitude to life. The Jeevakarunya Olukkam of St. Ramalingam clearly shows that love is positive. Tamil ethics speak about the greatness of love in life. In Tamil tradition love is the ruling principle of life. Tamil classics divide human life into inward and outward. The inner life which is based upon love is important and outer life is meaningful only with reference to the inner nature of man. St. Ramalingam did not contend himself with aspiring for a life based upon love but showed a path which is based upon love. Loving one's neighbor and acting upon that principle is one's own right because life exists in relation with other lives. So it is one's duty to help the suffering. St. Ramalingam explained this by the concept of Anmaneya Orumaippattu Urimai. The life and works of Albert Switzer is based upon the principle of Reverence for life. The life and works of Mahatma Gandhi is based upon the principle of 'ahimsa'. In the life and works of St. Ramalingam, we see that Jeevakarunya Olukkam is the pre-dominant principle.

The ideal society of Mahatma Gandhi is based upon the Sarvodaya principle. The ideal society of St. Ramalingam stems from Anmaneya Orumaippattu Urimai. The way to Sarvodaya Society is through ahimsa. The way to Anmaneya Orumaippadu Ulagu is through Jeevakarunya Olukkam. These two thinkers of contemporary India did not merely imagine and dream for a society which is based upon love and spirituality. They worked by the constructive programs. The quiet selfless work of Albert Switzer, the life and works of Mahatma Gandhi and the spiritual communism of St. Ramalingam are based upon love and spirituality.

When Saivism lost its spirit, which is love—St. Ramalingam revived the spirit of religion love. Even though he studied and learned the various philosophies of the different religious sects, neither the metaphysics nor the mysticism of these schools attracted him. He measured all the teachings of various schools with the concept of love as the measuring rod. In the philosophy of Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam, Jeevakarunya

Olukkam is the key concept. When people misunderstood love as a theoretical concept, St. Ramalingam emphasized that love is not a theoretical concept but something to be practised. It is the essence of life and one must love all living creatures wholeheartedly. He stressed upon active love as a discipline. When people forget their real nature and identify themselves with the other things, St. Ramalingam gave it a new dimension and made it a discipline. He showed it in two ways. They are non-killing of lives and non eating of meat under any circumstance. Thiruvalluvar emphasized these virtues but St. Ramalingam lived a life which is based upon these concepts. He repeatedly said that one need not follow any particular path in any religion if love is actively present. The benefits of different religious paths and philosophical enquiry can be reached with the practicing of lovable act of appeasing the hunger of poor people and refraining from killing. According to St. Ramalingam all the different religious paths lead humanity towards nothing. So he warned his followers not to waste their time in meditation, songs, yoga, etc., This conception is not...peculiar to St. Ramalingam. In the philosophy and life of Buddha we clearly see how Buddha discarded all the traditional beliefs and the practices which are based upon these beliefs. He taught love and spoke emphatically that one must stand upon one's own experience. The philosophies of St. Ramalingam and philosophy of Buddha resemble each other in this fundamental conception of life.

In Saiva tradition, St. Thirumoolar is an important turning point. St. Thirumoolar clearly indicates that love is God and they are not separate from each other. Such philosophical insights are not seen in earliest Tamil literature. As a mystic who experienced the truths in his life St. Thirumoolar emphatically stated that Sivam-God and love are one and the same. This philosophy was an outcome of his experience. St. Ramalingam also stood on his own experience in different religions including Saivism. He not only stated that love is the essence of life but also emphasized that each must live a life of love. St. Ramalingam established institutions on the basis of this concept - Love.

Social institutions need individuals to regulate them towards their specific goals. Social institutions lose their meaning and purpose, if they fail to promote the individual's development. Social institutions are established to make human beings mature and sociable. Each and every individual has duties and responsibilities towards other individuals. All these are meaningful only if they are functioning on the basis of love and understanding. The mere structure and the mechanical functioning of

these institutions never help humanity. In India, religion is an important social institution - which is based upon love and understanding. But the fundamental purpose of these institutions needs renewal or revival and the institutions are alive only if they are renewed according to the demands of time. St. Ramalingam observed that a redirection in the functioning and structure of these institutions is a must and he revived these institutions on the basis of love and understanding.

When St. Ramalingam found out the meaninglessness of these social institutions, he established new social institutions. The difference between the earlier social institutions and St. Ramalingam's is the latter are inspired by love. When human beings are too worldly, they lose their purpose in life which is love. Naturally they change the directions of these social institution. St. Ramalingam wished to be the real human being who is full of love, selflessness, and spirituality and with a purpose in life. He established the association of selfless people who wished to live a life of love, understanding and a desire towards life eternal. This association, Sangam is established on active love in daily life.

St. Ramalingam classified people into two groups on the basis of non-killing and non-eating of meat. These two concepts are the active life which is based on love. Love is not a theoretical concept but a supreme value in human life, which differentiates human beings from the lower beings. Except for this fine nature there is no difference between human beings and animals. The next evolution in being is in the line of love. The supreme beings in human society are full of love. Their love has no limitation. In order to give a pre-dominant place to active love he used two concepts in his philosophy. They are Jeevakarunya Olukkam and Anmaneya Orumaippattu Urimai. Pleasure and pain, good and bad belong to the inner self of human beings. Love and hatred, war and violence belong not to the physical being but to the spirit. Even though they are expressed in the external physical forms they are rooted in the very core of human beings which is the spirit. Realizing, this, St. Ramalingam emphasized the atmic love-love which is the very core of each and every human being and made it a discipline. The Sanmargis must act from their very heart which is full of love. When love is expressed from the roots of men's own being it has the capacity to change the world towards good, because the world is only a manifestation of 'Being' which is non-dual. When beings are acting with this kind of love, they have a right upon each other. There is a right for each and every being to work for the uplift of other beings. This he explained in the concept Anmaneya Orumaippattu

Urimai. The active role of love which is emphasized by St. Ramalingam is unique in the philosophy of South India. The religious philosophers who lived before him talked much about love but none showed a way to practice love in the social life of human beings. None tried to establish a new social order on the basis of love and understanding. Each and every one's philosophy is based upon religious ideologies, but they never try to improve the conditions of human beings as a whole. St. Ramalingam approached every religion and philosophy, with a view to improve the conditions of human beings as a whole. All the controversies are meaningless in the face of love. All the superior and inferior philosophies and religions are worthless for a full life of mankind. So he turned away from the philosophical religions and showed a way to a full life through love. He never opposed any ideologies in establishing a new order. Instead, he wished to form a transcendental being who is full of love and understanding. St. Ramalingam attacked caste and religious differences in many songs. He lived a pure, perfect life, which is beyond these differences and based on love understanding and spirituality. He prays to God to save him from the caste and class differences. The caste differences and class struggles are based upon human ignorance and arrogance. When human beings forget their nature (which is love) and identify themselves with the superficial body, they are suffering both inwardly and outwardly. Individually and collectively people suffer because they are not thinking and acting from their original nature which is love. St. Ramalingam wished to found a society which is based upon love and understanding and unlike the present system which is based upon ignorance and arrogance. If human beings act upon love, all problems can be solved because every problem is a problem of ignorance and misunderstanding. That is why he emphasized love not for the sake of metaphysical or spiritual achievement but social harmony. The two concepts Jeevakarunya Olukkam and Anmaneya Orumaippattu Urimai are not spiritual concepts but social.

The biography of St. Ramalingam shows that he lost his parents when he was a small boy. On so many occasions he wandered in the streets of Madras and spent his time in temples in search of motherly love. When his brother's wife treated him like a mother, it changed the life of St. Ramalingam. It is only at her request, he stopped wandering in the streets and stayed in the house. This important change was brought about in his life through love. The motherly love of the lady had an impact on his life and philosophy. Throughout his life he emphasized love and discarded the religions, philosophies, traditions, texts and the rest. When the other

systems of religions and philosophies gave importance to God and liberation, St. Ramalingam gave importance to love and the life of man.

St. Ramalingam observed the social life of man with its numerous problems. He never shut his eyes away from the social and economic problems of man. The life in this world is the base for a spiritual life. The present life is the stepping stone towards the higher spiritual life. He never considered this worldly life as an illusory one. An individual must live fully with the problems of daily life. No spiritual development is possible with hungry stomachs. So he sang some songs about such people who forgot to help the poor. In one of his songs he refers to those inhuman rich people as poisonous trees in the midst of the village. He criticizes the attitude of those people who would not even give the surplus food in their houses to the poor people. He condemned them as mad and asks them "is there a purpose in living like this?".

The Philosophy of St. Ramalingam is mainly social. He neither emphasized the practice of Yoga nor meditation. His only concern was to save the humanity from suffering. He practiced and preached the path of love. Throughout his religious and social life he changed his basic positions so many times. When he found out that rituals, the Vedas and Agamas are meaningless, he transcended all religions and philosophies. The only central idea he followed throughout his life is love. All his social institutions are based upon love. When he observed that honest people go without a single meal and proper work, he opened a poor-feeding centre at Vadaloor. This centre is not for beggars or for those who wish to be lazy. He emphasized the spiritual love between human beings. For that physical existence is important. When people do not feel concerned for the sufferings of others, he sang some moving songs. In one of his songs he asks those stone-hearted people, "Oh you mad people! you are thinking that you are living in palaces with much wealth. But really the saving banks are the stomachs of the poor, honest, hungry people. You don't know this secret and you are living like poisonous trees".

In the history of South Indian Philosophy very few people thought of and acted for relieving the sufferings and sorrows of the common man. Most of them are spiritualists who gave importance to the supernatural element and religious people whose concern was with ideologies. They never thought and acted in terms of removal of the pains of the ordinary man. None thought about changing social institutions. Almost all of them lived upon the labor of the common man and lived in their own world of

metaphysics and mysticism. In the name of spiritualism, they forgot their duties to the common man. As a humanist, St. Ramalingam established an institution for the poor people and tried to help them. In the history of South Indian Philosophy this is unique. Yet today after the disappearance of St. Ramalingam there is none to follow the way of life as preached and practiced by St. Ramalingam.

6. Concept of grace in the Philosophy of St. Ramalingam

In theistic systems of religions, the doctrine of grace is an important concept. The souls must get divine grace to attain the goal of life. The atheistic systems like Buddhism and Jainism also gave importance to this concept. Grace is the unbounded love towards every living being. When love transcends its limitations it becomes grace. Love is the stem in which grace flowers. So all the religions emphasize the need for love and love becomes grace at the later level.

Human beings suffer from innumerable problems because they forget to cultivate the humanistic way of life. Human beings are ignorant about their nature which is love and they are suffering from alienation. In the process of love one's ego melts away and the real nature of one's own being appears in the individual. When one realizes his own nature, he identifies himself with the world and he faces his own self in all the living beings. But, coming away from illusion and throwing away ego are not such simple tasks. One needs a life-time's constant labor and sometimes we need more lives than one to perfect the process of weaning oneself away from the strong bond of ignorance and egoism. Due to this tremendous task, theistic systems emphasized the need for God. The atheistic systems strongly believe that man can attain salvation and live graceful life by his own moral and spiritual strength. In the ultimate level one loves and lives in all the living being.

In Saivism God's grace is compared to Sunlight. In the presence of Sunlight not all the lotuses flower. A few mature buds of the lotus alone bloom. Like this only mature souls realize and enjoy the presence of God's grace. The souls must work for the eradication of the ego. Only in the egoless individual, God's grace will be reflected. The spiritual perfection of the soul is known as malaparibaka. An individual who lives a life of love, a man who follows the principle of, non-killing realizes the worth of life and, that state of mind is known as malaparibaka. The traditional religions guide people towards the scriptures and gurus for the attainment of this state. Even though St. Ramalingam was born of strongly religious parents and lived in the midst of religious surroundings, he never recommends any human guru or any individual text. As a spiritual humanist and a transcendentalist he accepts only experience as the guiding principle. He

emphatically declares that only love can save the world. Neither the scriptures nor the religion can save the world. According to St. Ramalingam all the religions and philosophies are imperfect and perfection comes to mankind only through their own realization and experience. His own experience showed him that love can remove the sufferings of mankind and lift to a higher state of life.

The path of Saint Ramalingam aims at the state of grace in which an individual identifies his self with all the living beings. In the state of grace one has a duty to help other suffering human-beings. In that ultimate state, the souls enjoy real bliss. St. Ramalingam sang that only that heart which is full of grace can be the seat in which the divine dancer dances. In Arutperum Jothi Ahaval he explains that the nature of reality is grace. All the songs of St. Ramalingam are known as the Psalms of Grace. This is the central theme in the philosophy of St. Ramalingam. According to St. Ramalingam the nature of God is Grace. A life which is full of grace is the only real life. He believes that all human problems can be solved by a life which is based upon love. He is not a theoretician. For each and every statement he gives evidence from his own life and experience. If one attains a state of grace it will lead him to very many new states of being. From his own experience he explains that the material body-the physical body will change into a body of grace. Then the graceful body will change into a golden body and the golden body will change into light which is pure and indestructible. In short, if a man wants to conquer death, the only way is through love and grace. He emphasized these through non-killing and appeasing the hunger of poor people.

In one of his prose books Jeevakarunya Olukkam - he very clearly says that love is the only master key to spirituality. Jeevakarunya Olukkam is a short speech delivered by the Saint at the Opening Ceremony of the Satya Dharma Salai. When all other philosophies show so many difficult paths, texts, temples, etc., St. Ramalingam showed the simple act of love. By showing this simple, straight forward way, St. Ramalingam removed all ups and downs of religions. By emphasizing love St. Ramalingam removed the need for any professional gurus. Any man and woman, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, language, nationality, etc., can practice this simple technique. In his speech at Satya Dharma Salai he requested his followers to practice this act of non-killing and appeasing the hunger of the poor people, even though the whole world stood against it. He said that the practice of love will give all the benefits

of all religious practices. So one must do it without any delay. Human life is a rare chance. So one must gain all the benefits within this birth itself. We don't know what will happen next minute or where we will go in the next birth. He condemns all the religious practices and texts like Vedas, Agamas and Puranas because they do not teach love in a straight forward way. God's nature is love. So only through love human beings can realize the nature of Reality. St. Ramalingam recorded all his experiences in the form of beautiful poems. At the repeated request of those who surrounded him, he allowed the publication of the songs. When they published it, they named the songs as Thiruarutpa which means songs sung through the grace of God. The followers of St. Ramalingam named him Thiruarutprakasavallalar because his very life is based upon love and grace. The sixth canto of Thiruarutpa is the most important part of Thiruarutpa because it is only here that he explains Transcendentalistic philosophy in terms of love and humanism. The earlier songs also indicate that he enjoyed spiritual experience at the very early age of five months. In the sixth canto of Thiruarutpa, he sang that his very life is grace. If one separates love from his own being, he says that he will immediately die. He sang that he suffered a lot because he wished to remove the sufferings of the world. He sang that his life mission is to transform people through love and truth. The biography of St. Ramalingam also shows that he was a born mystic. He appeared in this world not for his own sake but for the benefit of the world. In one of his songs he very clearly sang that all the living beings must enjoy perfect happiness like his own self.

In Mahaperupadesam, St. Ramalingam advised his followers not to follow any closed religion or philosophy. He advised them to meditate, concentrate and carefully observe life, because philosophies and religions never save mankind from suffering. Experience, understanding and love only can save the human beings from their sorrows. So he warned the followers not to waste their time in enquiring into philosophical problems and indulging in religious debates. He insisted on a constant enquiry into one's own self. He also advised those who are not able to do constant enquiry to do it collectively.

St. Ramalingam was inspired by the life affirming philosophy of Thirukkural. With his deep knowledge in the various philosophical systems of India, he evolved his own philosophy which is Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam is similar to Saivism in the

sense that both of them are theistic, pluralistic and realistic. The main difference between Saivism and Samarasam is Saivism centres in God and Samarasam centres in Man. The realistic, pluralistic base of Saivism generates a good social philosophy. Samarasam evolved from the experience of St. Ramalingam. His experience showed him that man is the centre of the universe and his problems are important for philosophy and religion. In the name of spiritualism and transcendentalism, he never ran away from his responsibilities to fellow beings. He repeatedly advised his followers not to run away to philosophies and religions which misguide human beings. Due to so many philosophical and religious conflicts, human beings are making their life miserable. So he recommended transcendentalism.

St. Ramalingam was an activist who established a few social institutions. He was not a theoretical genius but a practical worker. He strongly believed that the social and spiritual life of man are interconnected. When a man is pure and honest in his social relationship, spirituality will come to him automatically. He considered religion as an important method. He uses the word religion in the sense that which promotes brotherhood among human beings and that which makes man as a matured being. He established the association of Sanmargis, Satya Gnana Sabai, Satya Dharma Salai and Chitti Valaham. He planned to establish some new social institutions like medical centre and meditation centre.

Family

In the company of the beloved, human beings enjoy their real nature. Love is a basic need in the human life because it helps them to break the hard cover of the ego. The institution of family begins with marriage and ends when a man realizes the whole world as his house and all the living beings as his relatives. The institution of family is not an end in itself. It is a means to the next stage of life which is Sanyasa. Indian philosophic schools like Buddhism and Jainism hold that a man can go to Sanyasa directly without going through the institution, family. But this view is not popular in south India as Saivism and Vaishnavism speak the glory of family life and the responsibilities of the family man. Thirukkural the ethical code of the Tamils says that the world functions because of the family. It says that the responsibility of the family member is such that he must look after the welfare of his own family members and also the welfare of the members belonging to the other three groups -

students, the mendicants and the people who live in the forest. The third part of Thirukkural beautifully speaks about the love between man and woman. Tamil grammarian Tholkkappiar not merely speaks about the grammar of language but he gave the grammar of a good life also. Life without love is incomplete. Man without family is not a full man. This is the philosophy of the Tamils in respect of family. So nobody is exempt from this rule. The great preceptors of Saivism and Vaishnavism led a family life. Most of the saints of the Periapuranam are married men. Spiritual life and worldly life are not opposed to each other. Family life is a stepping stone to spiritual life of mankind. Following this philosophy in his life, St. Ramalingam married his sister's daughter Dhanamma. He was twenty seven years old at the time of his marriage. His songs clearly show that he agreed to the marriage because of the compulsion of the elders. His songs also indicate that he never lived with the lady. But he was not against the institution of marriage or family, as such. His biography shows that he participated in the marriage of his friends. When some of his friends asked for advice, he advised them that marriage is not a sin, if one concentrates his innerself upon God.

7. Institutions of Saint Ramalingam

St. Ramalingam's aim in life was to lead the heart of man from ignorance to knowledge, from hatred to love. In one of his songs he sang that God Himself sent him to the world to work for the welfare of humanity. He also sang that he is living in the world and performing welfare activities only because of the grace of God. With the great hope of building a new humanity on the basis of love and spirituality, he established some social institutions. According to Saint Ramalingam social life is an important process which makes a man more mature and only a mature man is honest and will be fit for spiritual life. When he set up these socio-spiritual institutions, he was misunderstood by traditional people. His own followers also misunderstood him as a miracle-maker. On the one side, the established religious orders opposed him directly. They opposed him by the publication of books against him. St. Ramalingam faced the opposition of the Caste Hindus because he was not from a higher Caste. The higher Caste Hindus had a wrong idea that spiritual life is possible only to a man who is in a higher caste. On the other side, people surrounded St. Ramalingam for their own selfish benefits. They came to him neither with the purpose of self-purification nor for the purpose of constructing a new humanity on the basis of love and understanding. The reason for this is simple. St. Ramalingam established these socio-religious institutions because of his own experience in religions and philosophies indicated that only love can save the world. He realized that all existing social institutions were functioning without any purpose. So he established the new socio-spiritual institutions on the basis of love and spirituality. Those who surrounded him had no depth in understanding or a keen desire to build a new humanity. In the midst of the orthodox Caste Hindus and the selfish followers he established the socio-spiritual institutions. The institutions which he established are the 'association of people' (Sangam), 'temple' (Satya Gnana Sabai), 'Poor feeding Centre' (Satya Dharma Salai), 'Spiritual Centre' (Chitti Valaham).

The association of the people (Sangam)

In two songs St. Ramalingam expressed his desire to form an association of the Sanmargis. Even though so many people associated with him, very few people understood him. The educated and uneducated

people surrounded him for many reasons. People from various sections of society moved with him. They respected him as a mystic, as a learned man, as a holy man, and a humanist. Each one of them looked at St. Ramalingam from his own standpoint. St. Ramalingam was a great personality who attracted the people from different directions and those who met him were satisfied and got guidance in their own special areas of interest. But none of them came forward to build up a future society based upon love and spirituality. Misunderstanding a great personality is not new to humanity. So many great thinkers, religious leaders and scientists meet this phase of life. In the case of St. Ramalingam, only selfish, spiritually dead people surrounded him for the material benefits. The small petty minds of the normal people lack the vision of a welfare society of the future. He slowly withdrew from the spiritually hallowed people and lived in loneliness. Even in the last stage of life people went to him for getting advice. He advised them to live like brothers and work for a society which is based upon spiritual love and brotherhood. But the people had no mind and no depth in spirituality to materialize the ideals of St. Ramalingam. Not even one individual came forward to live a life which was preached by St. Ramalingam. The first disciple Tholuvor Velayuda Mudaliar who lived closely with St. Ramalingam and learned so many things from him became a theosophical society member. Nobody worked for the propagation of the ideals of St. Ramalingam. Today after the lapse of a hundred years after St. Ramalingam, the association of Sanmargis has emerged and the ideals of St. Ramalingam are spreading in the world.

Temple

South India is said to be the land of temples. The daily activities of the people of South India centre around the temple. The early religions of South India is naturalistic. This is still a living religious tradition in the villages of South India. Later on when the external religions and philosophies entered South India, the native religions and philosophies shaped themselves in the form of Saivism, Vaishnavism etc. Religion in India is a way of life. In Tamil, religion is indicated by the word '*Neri*' which means a way of life. Thirumanthiram speaks about the need for a systematic way of life and the creator who (has) created the path and the rules. In Thirumanthiram God is spoken of as love, and they are one and the same. The early Tamils lived a life which is full of love, and courage. The construction of a temple for God and worshipping God in the temples are later addition to Tamil culture. In the early stages of temple-worship, people worshipped in temples without an agent and without the

caste and class differences. The religious differences and different forms and methods, caste and class differences entered into the temples later on. St. Ramalingam wished to see a new temple which is close to Thirumoolar's conception. Thirumoolar says that God is there in each and every living being. The human body itself is the temple. St. Ramalingam constructed the Satya Gnana Sabai with his own experience. For this he got guidance from Thirumanthiram. He first experienced the presence of Reality within himself in the form of light. In his songs he indicates that reality is in the form of light.

In the spiritual life of St. Ramalingam, he followed so many religious methods and worshipped in various temples, but he never accepted any particular religious method as the final one. He never rejected any philosophy or method of worship. Each and every religious method, each and every school of philosophy is only a step towards the perfection. So he never identified himself with any one of the religion or philosophy. He passed on from form to formlessness through form and formlessness. In the beginning he worshipped God with names and form--Muruga, Vadivudayamman, etc. In the ultimate stage when he became a transcendentalist he experienced the form of Grace and Light. In between these two stages, he stayed a long period at Chidambaram temple and meditated upon the form and formless aspect of Reality which is Sivalinga. In the early stages he accepted the various Gods but when he got experience and knowledge he transcended them. When he was in Chidambaram temple, he wished to change the method of worship but it never happened.

St. Ramalingam settled in Vadalloor, with the intention of constructing a new humanity based upon love and spirituality. He constructed Satya Dharma Salai as a temple for humanity. This temple is different from the rest of the temples. It's function, structure and aims are different from any religious temple. Unlike other temples this temple is open to every human being who believes in God. In this temple he never allowed any kind of religious prayers, offerings, and other religious methods of worship. The only method is worshipping in silence without any music or other instruments. St. Ramalingam never allowed anybody as a priest or any book as scripture, including his own songs. In this temple of humanity, God is in the form of light which is the real representation of one's own inner self. The external representation is only to help the worshipper to meditate upon his own innerself. Without the meditative and concentrative mind the external light is nothing. There were seven

screens in front of the light. They represented the different impurities that cover each and every living being. This kind of temple, this method of worship, the psychological representation of God, have never been attempted before St. Ramalingam. When society was fighting in the name of gods, society was grouping itself in the name of higher and lower castes, St. Ramalingam introduced a new way of worshipping God which united human beings together. By his method of worshipping he tried to unite people through love and spirituality.

Education

St. Ramalingam was not educated formally at schools. He learned all the philosophies and classics by his own effort without any teacher. But he never rejected the institution of education in the human development. He never rejected the need for the teacher and need for texts. As a visionary thinker and activist he was a great educator. He very strongly believed that the future of mankind depends upon the present education. So he emphasized education for both young people and old people. When he was in Madras, he taught Tamil to many people. He taught the religious classics to many who came to him. But he was not a formal teacher. He believed in the informal way of teaching. In Vadaloor, he set-up a school for the young people in 1867. At the same time he set-up an informal adult education school under the leadership of Velayuda Mudaliar. For each group he planned different kind of education. He advised youngsters to learn all the Vedas, Upanishads and Agamas. The elders were advised to learn ethical literature. Tholuvloor Velayuda Mudaliar taught Thirukkural to the old people. In the youngster's school "Sanmarga Bhodini" they learned three languages, Tamil, Sanskrit and English. He repeatedly advised his assistants to teach the students with love and not with hatred. When somebody punished the boys, St. Ramalingam painfully expressed his disapproval of such a method of teaching. He also disapproved of schools based upon caste and class differences. He thought that schools must be free from all nonsensical castes and class considerations.

Meditation Centre

Man is superior to the lower beings not merely because of his erect posture but because of his spiritual development. He is not merely a collection of flesh and bones but a spiritual being. Man is evolving both in the capacity and size of the brain which makes him the superior being.

Except in the spiritual aspect, man is common with his ancestors. The futurologists, say that the physical evolution of the human being has stopped because man has learned the use of artificial substitutes. The next evolution is in the sphere of spirit. The way is meditation.

Man is not merely a conscious being. He is also self-conscious. It is his self-consciousness that helps him to raise his standard from that of lower beings. In meditation man controls the wandering sense organs and channelizes his energy towards the higher spheres of life. In the life of St. Ramalingam meditation played an important part. All his developments and constructive work are based upon his meditation. The Biography of St. Ramalingam shows us that in a certain period of his life he completely moved away from society and lived in seclusion. He selected the forest and fields as the places for his meditation. At Karunkuli and Mettukuppam, he devoted himself completely to meditation. When his followers non-cooperated with him in his plans, he withdrew to Mettukuppam and lived a life of meditation. Through constant meditation upon the inner life he found out very many truths. One such is the concept of deathlessness.

The only prayer which St. Ramalingam allowed in Satya Gnana Sabai was meditation. In this temple of humanity no other religious practices were allowed, because St. Ramalingam thought that human beings can live better through silent prayer and not through any rituals and ceremonies. The temple is only an external representation of one's own inner self. If one meditates he will get self-knowledge which destroys ignorance and liberates. In Satya Gnana Sabai he constructed an underground meditation hall in which he used to meditate. In his spiritual manifesto (Mahaperupadesam) he directed his followers to meditate individually or collectively. He rejected ceremonies and sacrifices as useless. He held that they direct human being nowhere. Self-realization is possible only through meditation.

Social difference according to St. Ramalingam

Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam of St. Ramalingam is not merely a spiritual philosophy but also a social philosophy. The central problem in his philosophy is man. St. Ramalingam lived in a social set up full of social differences. Like the present Hindu society, the society in which St. Ramalingam lived was full of caste distinctions. St. Ramalingam realized the dangers of the caste system. When human beings identify themselves

with the caste system, they forget real love. Caste divides man from the rest of mankind. Love unites human beings. So St. Ramalingam warned his followers against giving importance to caste differences. In the Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga prayer, he prayed to God to save him from caste mentality. Besides, caste, we have many unwanted beliefs and ideas which divide man from man. St. Ramalingam advised his followers to love each other and reject all differences in the name of caste, class, religion, tradition, etc. When human beings fight with each other, it is not possible for them to live in spiritual unity, spirituality will come only when there is a calm, peaceful, cooperative life which is based upon love.

Indian thinkers are mainly spiritualists and religionists. Economic problems are looked from religious and spiritual point of view. St. Ramalingam observed that people were divided into haves and have nots. In the sixth part of Thiruarutpa he sang about the rich people and the suffering poor people. He condemned the rich people who held on to their property, when poor people were dying for food. He said that the real banks are in the stomach of the poor people. Those rich people who do not know this secret are like the poisonous trees in the middle of the village. St. Ramalingam strongly believed in and demonstrated the power of spiritual love in solving human problems.

St. Ramalingam was not recognized by the caste minded people because he belonged to a lower caste. He was opposed by the orthodox people because he was not from a higher caste. But he was pure in mind and heart. So he never reacted against those caste oriented people. His only concern was to show a good life which is above social difference. He aimed at a casteless and classless society. On many occasions he spoke about the foolishness of the caste system. He divided the people into two groups as the inner and outer (aha inam and pura inam). His division is based upon love. He accepted those who followed, the principle of non-killing and non-eating of meat as the people of the inner group. Non-killing and non-eating of meat is the external representation of inward love. Without inner love these two are meaningless. Those who eat meat and kill living beings are not spiritually mature human beings. So they belong to the outer group. Love is the basic concept in the philosophy of St. Ramalingam. So he classified people on the basis of the concept. But he never advised his followers to hate the people of the outer group. As a spiritual humanist, he believed that the people of outer group are also human beings with sufferings and sorrows. Whenever there is a danger to life, it is the duty of the Sanmargis to save life from danger. The

Sanmargis must live in Anmaneya Orumaippattu Urimai. The caste, class etc., must not get into the minds of the people. All social differences are meaningless because life is inter-connected with each other. He lived a life which is beyond all the social differences.

8. Action Programs

Through Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam St. Ramalingam conducted some new experiments in the socio-spiritual life of Tamilnadu. The Philosophy of Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam is a new development in the history of South India. St. Ramalingam himself realized the need for a new philosophy and named it as 'Suddha' Sanmargam. 'Suddha' means independent from others. This philosophy is an action-oriented philosophy. Though so many religious philosophers like St. Manikkavasagar, St. Thirumoolar, St. Thayumanavar, etc. spoke about Samarasam none tried to come away from the established institutionalized religions. All of them were caught up by the structure of established institutions. But St. Ramalingam introduced the new way of life which is not the way of any religion. At the same time, it includes the essence of all the religions.

St. Ramalingam was a spiritual humanist. So, his only interest was in the welfare of mankind as a whole. All theoretical discussions and disputes were meaningless to him. He never established a school of philosophy or a sect of religion. He painfully records the life of people who fight in the name of the Vedas and Agamas. He never thought or lived a life of selfish motives. He strongly believed in and worked for a better world. Other worldly concepts and illusory philosophies are common in India. In the philosophy of St. Ramalingam we see philosophy which affirms life.

The social life and spiritual life are not contradictory to each other. The individual's life and social life are complementary to one another. So St. Ramalingam's philosophy is an integrated philosophy which aims at the perfection of man and perfect social order. St. Ramalingam therefore established socio-spiritual institutions.

St. Ramalingam selected a small village—Parvathipuram in Arcot district—for implementing his action programs. He stopped his wandering life and settled in the village with the hope of bringing his new society into being. His life here is similar to that of Mahatma Gandhiji's life at Wardha. When he settled in Vadaloor people from different parts of the country came to get guidance from him, a few of them settled with him as his followers. The first wish of St. Ramalingam was the creation of

honest, selfless people for the new society. In his songs he described them as Sadhus, pure people, etc. The next establishment was the temple of humanity—Satya Gnana Sabai. This is for man's spiritual development. Man is the combination of matter and spirit. So material life is as important as spiritual life. He established 'Satya Dharma Salai' for the poor people for appeasing their hunger. The last institution which he established was the Meditation Centre—Chitti Valaham. For the establishments and action programs he never approached these leaders of institutionalized religions or rich people. The poor people of Vadaloor and Mettukuppam, helped him. Through these action programs, and socio-spiritual institutions St. Ramalingam expected a new social order to come into being.

The wishes of St. Ramalingam

St. Ramalingam wished a new man and a new social order to emerge. The songs of Thiruarutpa clearly show his wishes. He named the man 'Sanmargi'. Sanmargi is one who is interested in truth and love. The way of the Sanmargi is in search of truth. Even though the word Sanmargam was arrived at the latter part of his life, he searched for that life from the early phase of his life. When man's heart is filled with love there is no place for caste or religion. He wished to see the Sanmarga Ulagu, the world based upon truth and love. St. Ramalingam uses the word truth, he does so with a meaning different from the ordinary usual sense. There are truths in the different schools of philosophies and religious sects but he wished to see the full truth which is pure, and independent. He indicated this by adding 'pure'—'Suddha' Sanmargam. Suddha Sanmargam includes the phenomenal truths and aims at finding out the transcendental truth also. St. Ramalingam wished for an inner revolution in man through Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam. He wished an external revolution in the social institutions through introducing love as the basis of all the social institutions. The socio-spiritual institutions of Ramalingam were named 'Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam'. 'Satya Gnana sabai' and 'Satya Dharma Salai' etc. 'Satya' is important in individual's life and also in social institutions. Social institutions are meant for improving man, so that he realizes the full truth. St. Ramalingam wishes to see an inward and outward revolution. These two are the two sides of the total revolution.

The reactions of Disciples

When St. Ramalingam settled at Vadaloor people from various parts of the country came to him, for many reasons. Some came to him out of respect. Some others came to him for getting advice. But none came to him to build up a new society or to change themselves into pure beings. From the eleventh year onwards, he was surrounded by people in different walks of life. His first speech, which he delivered at the age of eleven, attracted religious people. He spoke on Periyapuram. This speech made him famous as a great scholar in literature and a spiritualist. After this event people surrounded him for listening to his advice. His public life began at this period. So many people learned Tamil from St. Ramalingam. A few people learned the secrets of Indian medical system. All of them respected St. Ramalingam as a great mystic but none understood and followed the vision of St. Ramalingam. When he lived he was more misunderstood than followed. There was a lot of propaganda by the followers of traditional religion against St. Ramalingam. The followers of St. Ramalingam spread his fame as a worker of miracles rather than a socio-spiritual reformer. St. Ramalingam was irritated at the activities and misbehavior of the people at Satya Gnana Sabai. He advised them to behave properly. Later on he openly warned them to behave properly or get away from the complex of the Sabai. The non-cooperation of the people led St. Ramalingam to Chitti Valaham. For months together he lived in silence and isolation. The great socio-spiritual reformer withdrew himself into spirituality and mysticism.

The causes for the indiscipline of the followers

Human life is based upon values. Human life differs from one another on the basis of values. Few individual select the supreme values and lead a life according to them. Love and spirituality are the two values in the life and teachings of St. Ramalingam. He measured all the schools of religion and philosophy in terms of love, truth and spirituality. When he found that religions and philosophies misguide human beings he rejected all the religions, philosophies and institutions. Then he set up his own model of socio-spiritual institutions.

The followers were worldly, selfish people not amenable to discipline. They lived with him but never understood his insights because

of their ignorance and arrogance. They listened to all his advises on so many occasions, but they lacked depth in knowledge and spirituality. The followers misunderstood him and thought that the institutions at Vadaloor were religious institutions of the traditional type. Even today people respect St. Ramalingam because he was a mystic. The real message of St. Ramalingam is hidden in the constructive works and in the songs of Thiruarutpa.

Appendix

Statement of Tholuvor Velayudham Mudaliar

Second Tamil Pandit of the Presidency College, Madras.

To the Author of "Hints on Esoteric Theosophy"

Sir, I beg to inform you that I was a *Chela* of the late "Arutprakasa Vallalar", otherwise known as Chidambaram Ramalinga Pillay Avargal, the celebrated Yogi of Southern India. Having come to know that the English community, as well as some Hindus entertained doubts as to the existence of the *Mahatmas* (adepts), and, as to the fact of the Theosophical Society having been formed under their special orders and having heard, moreover, of your recent work, in which much pains are taken to present the evidence about these *Mahatmas pro* and *con*—I wish to make public certain facts in connection with my late revered *Guru*. My belief is that they ought effectually to remove all such doubts and prove that Theosophy is no empty delusion nor the Society in question founded on an insecure basis.

Let me premise with a brief description of the personality of the doctrines taught by the above mentioned ascetic, Ramalinga Pillay.

He was born at Maruthur, Chidambaram Taluk, South Arcot Dt. Madras Presidency. He came to live at Madras at an early period of his career, and dwelt there for a long time. At the age of nine, without any reading, Ramalingam is certified by eye witnesses to have been able to recite the contents of the works of Agastia and other *Munis* equally respected by Dravidians and Aryans. In 1849, I became his disciple, and, though no one ever knew where he had been initiated, some years after, he gathered a number of disciples around him. He was a great Alchemist. He had a strange faculty about him, witnessed very often, of changing a carnivorous person into a vegetarian; a mere glance from him seemed enough to destroy the desire for animal food. He had also the wonderful faculty of reading other men's minds. In the year 1855, he left Madras for Chidambaram, and thence proceeded to Vadalloor and Karunkuli, where he remained a number of years. Many a time, during his stay there, he

used to leave his followers, disappearing to go no one knew whither, and remaining absent for more or less prolonged periods of time. In personal appearance, Ramalingam was a moderately tall, spare man, so spare, indeed, as to virtually appear a skeleton—yet withal a strong man, erect in stature, and walking very rapidly; with a face of clear brown complexion, a straight thin nose, very large fiery eyes, and with a look of a constant sorrow on his face. Towards the end he let his hair grow long and what is rather unusual with Yogis, he wore shoes. His garments consisted but of two pieces of white cloth. His habits were excessively abstemious. He was known to hardly ever take any rest. A strict vegetarian, he ate but once in two or three days, and was then satisfied with a few mouthfuls of rice. But when fasting for a period of two or three months at a time, he literally ate nothing, living merely on warm water with a little sugar dissolved in it.

As he preached against caste, he was not very popular. But still people of all castes gathered in large numbers around him. They came not so much for his teachings, as in the hope of witnessing and learning phenomena, or "miracles", with the power of producing which he was generally credited; though he himself discredited the idea of anything supernatural, asserting constantly that his was religion based on pure sciences. Among many other things he preached that:

1. Though the Hindu people listened not to him, nor gave ear to his counsels, yet the esoteric meaning of the Vedas and other sacred books of the East would be revealed by the custodians of the secret—the Mahatmas—to foreigners, who would receive it with joy.
2. That the fatal influence of the Kalipurusha Cycle which now rules the world, will be neutralized in about ten years.
3. That the use of animal food would be gradually relinquished.
4. That the distinction between races and castes would eventually cease and the principle of Universal Brotherhood be eventually accepted, and a Universal Brotherhood be established in India.
5. That what men call "God" is, in fact, the principle of Universal Love—which produces and sustains perfect Harmony and Equilibrium throughout all nature.
6. That men, once they have ascertained the divine power latent in them, would acquire such wonderful powers as to be able to change the ordinary operations of the law of gravity, etc., etc.

In the year 1867, he founded a society, under the name of "Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam", which means a society based on the principle of Universal Brotherhood and for the propagation of the true Vedic doctrine. I need hardly remark that these principles are identically those of the Theosophical Society. Our society was in existence but for five or six years, during which time a very large number of poor and infirm persons were fed at the expenses of its members.

When he attained his 50th year (1873), he began to prepare his disciples for his departure from the world. He announced his intention of going to Samadhi. During the first half of 1873, he preached most forcibly his view upon Human Brotherhood. But, during the last quarter of the year, he gave up lecturing entirely and maintained an almost unbroken silence. He resumed speech in the last days of January, 1874, and reiterated his prophecies—hereinafter narrated. On the 30th of that month, at Mettukuppam, we saw our master for the last time. Selecting a small building, he entered its solitary room after taking an affectionate farewell of his Chelas, stretched himself on the carpet, and then, by his orders, the door was locked and the only opening walled up. But when, a year later, the place was opened and examined, there was nothing to be seen but a vacant room. He left us with a promise to reappear some day, but would give us no intimation as to the time, place or circumstances. Until then, however he said that he would be working not in India alone, but also in Europe and America and all other countries, to influence the minds of the right men to assist in preparing for the regeneration of the world.

Such, in short, is the history of this great man. The facts I have referred to above are within the knowledge of thousands of people. His whole occupation was the preaching of the sublime moral doctrines contained in the Hindu Shastras, and instilling into the masses the principles of Universal Brotherhood, benevolence and charity. But to his great disappointment he found among his large congregations but a few who could appreciate his lofty ethics. During the later part of his visible earthly career, he often expressed his bitter sorrow for this sad state of things, and repeatedly exclaimed:

"You are not fit to become members of this society of Universal Brotherhood. The real members of that Brotherhood are living far away, towards the North of India. You do not listen to me. You do not follow the

principles of my teachings. You seem to be determined not to be convinced by me. Yet the time is not far off, when persons from Russia, America (these two countries were always named) and other foreign lands will come to India and preach to you this same doctrine of Universal Brotherhood. Then only, will you know and appreciate the grand truths that I am now vainly trying to ask you accept. You will soon find that the brothers who live in the far north will work a great many wonders in India, and thus confer incalculable benefits upon this our country."

This prophecy has, in my opinion, just been literally fulfilled. The fact, that the Mahatmas in the North exist is no new idea to us. Hindus and the strange fact, that the advent of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott from Russia and America was foretold several years before they came to India, is an incontrovertible proof that my Guru was in communication with those Mahatmas under whose direction the Theosophical society was subsequently founded.

THOLUVOOR VELAYUDHAM
MUDALIAR F.T.S.,

WITNESSES:

Munjakuppam Singaravelu Mudaliar
President of Krishna Theo. Socy.
Kumbakonam Aravamudu Ayanagar
Fellow of the Nellore Theosophical
Socy.

This is one of those cases of previous foretelling of a coming event, which is least of all open to suspicion of bad faith. The honorable character of the witness, the wide publicity of his Guru's announcements and the impossibility that he could have got from public rumor, or the journals of the day, any intimation that the Theosophical Society would operate in India—all these conspire to support the inference that Ramalingam Yogi was verily in the counsels of those who ordered us to found the Society. In March 1873, we were directed to proceed from Russia to Paris. In June, we were told to proceed to the United States where we arrived on July 6th. This was the very time when Ramalingam was most forcibly prefiguring the events which should happen. In October, 1874, we received an intimation to go to Chittenden, Vermont, where, at the famous homestead of the Eddy family, Colonel Olcott was engaged in making his investigations now so celebrated in the annals of spiritualism—of the so-called "materialization of spirits". In November,

1875 the Theosophical Society was founded, and it was not until 1878 that the correspondence began with friends in India, which resulted in the transfer of the Society's head-quarters to Bombay in February, 1879.

Coming Events foretold

When in answer to a direct challenge, the author of *The Occult World* to the *Bombay Gazette* (April 4, 1882), he began his letter with the following profession of a faith: "I was already sure, when I wrote *The Occult World*, that the Theosophical Society was connected, through Madame Blavatsky, with the great Brotherhood of Adepts I described. I now know this to be the case, with such great amplitude of knowledge." Little did our loyal friend fancy, when he was penning these lines, that his assertion would one day be capable of corroboration by the testimony of thousands. But such is now the state of the case. Sceptics and prejudiced or interested witnesses in general may scoff as they like the fact cannot be again said. Our friends and we have some who regard us neither as lunatics nor imposters will at least be glad to read the statement which follows.

While at Madras, we were told that the well-known Tamil scholar, a Pandit in the Presidency College, desired to have a private conversation with us. The interview occurred in the presence of Mr. Singaravelu, President of Krishna Theosophical Society, and of another trustworthy Theosophist, Mr. G. Aravamudu Aiyangar a Sanskritist, of Nellore. We are no more at liberty to repeat here all the questions put to us by the interviewer than we are to divulge certain other facts, which would still more strongly corroborate our repeated assertions that (1) our Society was founded at the direct suggestion of Indian and Tibetan Adepts; and (2) that in coming to this country we must obeyed their wishes. But we shall leave our friends to draw their own inferences from all the facts. We are glad to know that the learned Pandit is now engaged in writing, in the Tamil and Telugu languages, a more amplified step to obtain certificates of respectable witnesses who heard his Guru prefigure the events, which have had so complete fulfillment.--(Ed.)

Extract from page 316-317 of *Madras District Gazetteers—South Arcot District* by W. Francis I.C.S., Published in 1906:

PARVATIPURAM:

A village of 1,189 inhabitants lying 23 miles southwest of Cuddalore on the Virudachalam road. The place is connected with one Ramalinga Paradesi, a somewhat curious example of a latter-day saint who has been almost defied by his followers:

Born in 1823, in the Chidambaram Taluk of Vellala parents in humble circumstances, he developed, while still little more than a boy, an undeniable talent, for versification and his poems brought him into notice. They dealt with religious matters; some of them, like those of the famous Saivite saints of old, were composed in eulogy of the merits of the deities at certain shrines, such as the temples at Thiruttani in North Arcot and Thiruvotriyur near Madras; others took for their subject the beauties of the higher life. It was these that led to his becoming gradually regarded as a spiritual guide and teacher. After visiting many of the well-known sacred places of the South, he finally settled at Karunguli, the next village to Parvatipuram. At its height his influence must have been very real, as his admirers and disciples, who included even level-headed Government officials, are said to have changed their residences and gone to live where they could be constantly near him.

About 1872, the curious octogan-shaped sabha with the domed roof which is to be seen at Vadaloor, a hamlet of Parvatipuram, was erected by him from subscriptions. It is said that the spot was chosen because from it are visible the four great towers of Nataraja's shrine at Chidambaram. It is not an ordinary temple, the details of the worship in it being unusual.

Ramalinga Paradesi seems to have persuaded his disciples that they would rise again from the dead, and then consequently urged that burial was preferable to cremation. Even brahmins are said to have been burdened in this belief, and people who died in other villages were in several cases brought to Vadaloor and interred there. In 1874 he locked himself in a room (still in existence) in Mettukuppam, (hamlet of Karunkuli) which he used for samadhi or mystic meditation, and instructed his disciples not to open it for some time. He had never been seen since, and the room is still locked. It is held by those who still believe in him that he was miraculously made one with his god and that in the fullness of

time he will reappear to the faithful. Whatever may be thought of his claims to be a religious leader, it is generally admitted by those who are judges of such matters that his poems, many of which have been published, stand on a high plane, and his story is worth nothing as an indication of the direction which religious fervor may still take.

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