

SRI SRINIVASA
LORD OF SEVEN HILLS
(Glory of Lord Balaji Sri Venkateswara)

VISWAPATHI
(Timmaraju Viswapathi Rama Krishna Murthy)



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For copies
"Viswapathi"
T.V.R.K. MURTHY, M.Tech
Flat No.204, 'Vijaya Towers'
Kalyan Nagar Phase-III,
Near Motinagar 'X' Roads,
HYDERABAD - 500 018, A.P., India.

Email:viswapathi@yahoo.com &
tvrkmurthy@yahoo.com
Ph : 040-65885750,
Mobile : 98494 43752

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NIVEDANA

Thirumala is the most sacred place in this universe. Lord Srinivasa, the supreme lord of Seven Hills is the most famous & most powerful deity of the world. Everyday, thousands of devotees visit Thirumala to have Lord's darsan. They come from across the country and abroad too.

By the grace of Lord Srinivasa, I wrote three books so far, all of which are in Telugu, my, mother tongue. I wrote the first one '*Sri Srinivasa Mahatmyam*' in 2002 following a divine order. In 2005, I wrote '*Sri Venkateswara Vratha Kalpam*'- a vratha kadha book of Lord Sri Venkateswara. It is very simple and any one can perform it easily. We have translated this into Hindi too. In 2007 I wrote '*Sri Venkateswara Darsanam*' which explains the glory of Sri Venkateswara through 24 *kesava namams*. All these three books have become very popular with the devotees. It is only with my poorva janma punyam that I could write these three books. I was only holding the pen and it is He who wrote them. But for His enormous grace, I would not scribbled even word about Him.

I did my M.Tech. in Electrical Engineering from Regional Engineering college, Warangal in 1983. I worked in industry and teaching till 1998. I have also drawn cartoons for Indian Express between 1984-90. I started designing logos for business organization in 1993 by applying vedic principles under the name "SHRI DESIGNS". It is absolutely by the grace of LORD SRI VENKATESWARA that all the companies for which I have designed logos are doing very well today. I have so far selected Company names, Brand names, and designed Logos based on birth particulars of promoters for more than 2,500 organisations worldwide.

Thirumala is the most sacred place in this universe. Every stone on Tirumala has got a story to tell. In fact ,each stone is nothing but saligrama sila, image of Lord Vishnu. One requires several thousand janmas' punya, even to step on this sacred hill and several crores janmas' punya to have lord's darsan. Every second, a miracle occurs on Thirumala hills. Many devotees experience great miracles of Lord Srinivasa while on the hill. For those who have great faith in Him, they can experience His miracles and feel His presence in their day to day life too, wherever they are in this world.

Many books have already been published on Lord Srinivasa. But each one's experiences with Him are unique to themselves. I have been thinking of writing a book in English for the last couple of years. I am able

to write it finally now with His benovelence. This book, *Sri Srinivasa - Lord of Seven Hills* is written in simple free flowing English. I just wrote the way the flow has appeared in my mind. You may find several grammatical mistakes. I request you to kindly excuse me as I gave more importance to bhava (expression) rather than grammatical language.

I have experienced several miracles while writing these books. It is my strong belief and experience too that if we have strong *sankalp*, He will take care of everything and make our work easier. In fact, HE Himself will be behind us every moment. Lord Srinivasa, is the kindest of all. The easiest way to get His blessings is by abject surrender at His lotus feet.

Whatever I could write is only far less than even Trillionth of his glory. When even the thousand tongued Adishesha, cannot describe His glory fully, need we say anything more about ordinary mortals like me? I pray Lord Srinivasa to pardon me if I have committed any mistakes while writing this book.

I express my sincere thanks to authors of several books which were of great help while writing this book. I have taken the writing of this book as an yagna and several people helped me in this yagna. I am very thankful to my wife Smt. Venkata Rukmini Vydehi, daughters Anandi and Amuktha and son Aditya Srinivas. I am greatly indebted to Sri Ramana Murthy, Sri A.K.Goyal, Sri Y.B.S.Murthy, Sri Madhu, Sri Ravi

Namburu and many others without whose noble support I would not have completed it. I also thank Jagadeesh of Sri Vasavi Graphics for his excellent designing work.

There are great scholars and devotees among you. I request you to kindly inform me through e-mail or letter any suggestions you want to give. You are most welcome to write to me your opinions so that they can be incorporated in the next editions.

What can I offer in return to my Lord for showering such enormous blessings on me? What can I offer to the Parama Purusha to whom everything in this creation owes it's origin. I promise my Lord that spreading Sri Venkata Tatwam is the only goal of my life and pray Him to bless me with strength and confidence to carry it out forever Om *Namo Venkatesaya...Om Namo Srinivasaya...Om Namo Narayanaya...*

I pray Lord Sri Venkateswara and Sridevi Bhoodevi to shower their blessings on all of you.

I will be very glad to receive your feedback.

VISWAPATHI
(T.V.R.K.Murthy)

*Dedicated to the Sacred feet of Lord
Sri Venkateswara in memory of my late parents
Sri Timmaraju Lakshmi Narasimha Rao
&
Smt. Timmaraju Naga Ratnamba.*

Chapter-1

VENKATADRI

sacred hill of thousand names

Venkatadri, the abode of Lord Srinivasa is the most sacred place in this universe. It is said in several puranas that it is only with *punya* of several thousands births one will be able to step on this sacred mountain. Srinivasa, the Supreme Lord is affectionately called by devotees as *lord of seven hills*. The seven hills are Seshadri, Neeladri, Garudadri, Anjanadri, Vrishabhadri, Narayanadri and Venkatadri. Venkatadri, the most serene place in this universe has several names... kanakadri, theerdadri, srisailam, chintamani, srigiri, seshachalam, venkatachalam, etc.

A devotee is filled with infinite joy walking through these mountains and reaching the top of the hills. Once you go by walk, you feel like going by walk every time... such is the power of these hills...

the most picturesque surroundings take you to unknown worlds.... nature in it's splendor...

Venkatadri is very dear to Lord Srimannarayana. The syllable 'vem' indicates *amritha (nectar)* and 'kata' denotes *aiswarya* or prosperity. Thus venkatadri bestows a devotee with bliss, prosperity and ultimate happiness.

Venkatadri is the first place in this universe. Lord Srimannarayana kills the demon *Hiranyaksha*, saves this world in *varaha avatar (white boar)*. Lord brings up the world on his tusk. Venkatadri is the first place to come out of water and it is from this sacred hill that Lord Brahma started the whole creation at the behest of Lord Srimannarayana. Every devotee should visit Sri Varaha Swamy temple near the main temple in Thirumala.

Lord Srimannarayana decided to descend on this hill from *sri vaikuntham* to save the people from miseries of kaliyug. As by then Sri Varaha Swamy is already on the hill, Lord requests him for some place on the hill. Varaha Swamy accepts this request and grants Lord 100 feet place on the hill on the condition that first *puja* and *naivedyam* should be accorded to him and only then to Lord Srimannarayana... Lord Srinivasa happily accepts this and this custom is followed till today. It is the tradition of Thirumala that a devotee should first visit Lord Varaha Swamy's temple

before going into the main temple to visit Lord Balaji. It is only then that Lord Balaji is pleased.

To strengthen the fact that it was all under water once upon a time, we can still see many plants on these hills which normally grow only under water elsewhere. We will not find them growing on the land anywhere else in this world except on Venkatadri. Similarly many trees on these hills are brought by gods to this hill when all of them descended from celestial worlds to pray Lord Srimannarayana staying on the hill in the form of Srinivasa ... It is because of the presence of these divine trees that the weather is very pleasant all through the year on these hills.

Venkatadri is called by several names... seshadri because adishesha, the serpent king took the form of a hill... adishesha is the most ardent devotee of lord... garudadri because it is garuda (the eagle lord) who brought this hill from sri vaikuntham... as this hill happens to be the abode of Sri Mahalakshmi too, it called *srisailam*... 'sri' meaning Maha Lakshmi and 'saila' meaning hill... It is also called Narayanadri because once a Brahmin by name Narayana did *tapas* of Srimannarayana on this hill... vrishabhadri because a demon by name Vrishasura used to live on this hill troubling saints... Lord Srimannarayana kills him on this hill in a fierce war... the battle went on for several days and finally the demon lost all his energies and

recognizes him as none other than supreme Lord Srimannarayana himself... He then requests Supreme Lord that the hill be called by his name Vrishabhadri after his death... Lord, the most benevolent ,grants his request... Thus the hill is also called vrishabhadri.

The stillness of the beautiful forest reverberates with chantings of *govinda, govinda* by devotees trekking the sacred hills by walk with great faith in Lord of seven hills Sri Venkateswara, the supreme power.

Venkatadri is nothing but Lord Srimannarayana's *kreedadri (sporting place)* of *sri vaikuntha* brought to this earth by garuda. It is resplendent with wonderful trees, plants and shrubs of wonderful scented flowers... Ever resounding with melody of singing birds... filled with delightful streamlets...

Venkatadri is also called *chintamani* as it grants all desires of devotees... gnanadri because of it's power of conferring enormous knowledge... kanakadri as the hill is nothing but kanaka (gold) itself... To ordinary mortals like us it is looking like a rocky mountain... But it is actually splendid gold...It is also known as *simhachala* as it is believed Lord Srimannarayana killed the demon *Hiranyakasipa* on this hill...*anjanadri* as Anjana Devi, mother of Lord Hanuman gave birth to him on this hill after doing *tapas* for several years...As we all know Lord Hanuman is of Siva *amsa*...observe this unique aspect...Anjana Devi did *tapas* on Srimannarayana's Venkatadri and is blessed with a boy

of Siva amsa...Vishnu and Siva are same...*sivaya vishnuroopaya siva roopaya vishnave*...Both are different tatwams of same supreme force...In fact another point worth mentioning here is none other than Lord MahaSiva Himself is the *kshetra palaka* of thirumala hills...Kshetra Palaka is the ruler or protector of the place. In the earlier days there used to be a big sphere shaped rock in the temple. It is believed to be Siva amsa. After closing the hills the temple *archakas* (priests) used to keep the keys on this rock. The rock used to go round the sanctum sanctorum protecting it. One day a small boy happens to come under spherical rock and gets wounded...then the archakas and temple officials shifted the rock to a far off place on the hill. Special prayers are offered at this place even today on every Maha Sivarathri festival day...

It is also called *neeladri* because once a demon by the name 'neela' was staying on the hills troubling the saints doing tapas. He was ultimately killed by lord Srimannarayana and the hill thereafter is called neeladri at the request of the demon.one more story states that a monkey king by name 'neela' was staying on this hill and hence the name neeladri. According to another story, a female devotee by name '*neelambari*' was the first one to offer hair to Lord on this hill. So the name Neeladri. Perhaps it is due to this reason that tonsure ceremony is called *talaneelalu* in telugu. Tonsuring of head is an important custom in thirumala. Everyday an estimated 5,000 devotees offer hair in Thirumala. It

symbolizes the surrendering our ego before the Supreme Lord.

Venkatadri's glory can not be described fully by four faced Brahma or thousand eyed Indra or thousand hooded adishesha....such is the power of this hill that any good deed done on this hills bestows a person with thousand times more blessings. Lord Srinivasa is the *antaryami* of all of us and it is by serving him one gets eternal bliss...*om namo venkatesaya...om namo srinivasaya...om namo narayanaya*...

Chapter-2

SRIVARI SUPRABHATHAM

Lord Srinivasa wakes up every morning to the chanting of '*Suprabhatham*'. Temple archakas stand in front of *bangaru vakili* of ananda nilayam at about 2.30 A.M. and recite *suprabhatham* consisting of 29 slokas, *Sri Venkateswara Stotra* consisting of 11 stanzas, *Sri Venkateswara prapatti* of sixteen slokas and *Sri Venkateswara Mangala Sasanam* consisting of 14 slokas. It is believed Sri Prathivada Bhayankar Annan, an ardent devotee of Lord Srinivasa composed the *suprabhatham*.

A devotee experiences magnificent divine joy while listening to these recitations. One may not even understand the language or meaning. but the vibrations of the flow are simply superb...we are taken to unknown worlds hearing *suprabhatham*...even if we listen once our whole body vibrates with the divine rhythm of *Suprabhatham* forever.

Suprabhatham of Lord consists of 29 slokas reflecting deep devotion to Lord Srimannarayana. The first sloka starts like '*kousalya supraja rama...*'the *suprabhatham* starts with prasing Lord Srinivasa and then there is an invocation to Sri Maha Lakshmi which goes like '*mathah samastha jagatham...*'

Sri Venkateswara stotra comprising of 11 slokas wonderfully describes the glory of lord srinivasa ...most of us familiar with one of the slokas which goes like this....

Vina venkatesam na nadho na nadhaha

Sada venkatesam smarami smarami

Hare venkatesam presida presida

Priyam venkatesa prayascha prayascha

Only venkateswara is our lord...no one else...no other refuge for us...only your namam reverberates in our hearts always... oh! swamy! venkatesa!... shower your divine blessings on us always... grant me all my wants... kindly bestow your blessings on me always....

Sri Venkateswara prapatti consisting of sixteen stanzas is an exquisite piece of poetry starting with an invocation to Supreme Mother Sri Maha Lakshmi. Lord's *mangala sasanam* consisting of thirteen slokas takes a devotee to mystic divine experiences.

Every morning Lord of Seven Hills wakes up to the recitation of these slokas with a magnificent smile

on his lips...the smile that is the supreme protection for this universe...the smile that overpowers everything else in this universe with it's magnificent divinity and charm...the smile that engulfs the whole universe with ultimate bliss...the smile that fills us all with a sense of fulfillment and joy...the smile that relieves us all of our sorrows...

Oh! Srinivasa!...You are Supreme...You are everything to me and everything around me is none other than You...*Om Namo Venkatesaya...Om Namo Srinivasaya...Om Namo Narayanaya...*

Chapter-3

ANANDANILAYAM

According to legends the Thirumala temple was first built by King Thondaman at the order of Lord Srinivasa. It is believed lord was standing in open with sky as umbrella for a long time. Thondaman built the basic temple. no one knows the exact timing of this construction of sactum sanctorum. Reference to this temple can be found in Tamil literature as early as 2 A.D. So temple must have been in existence far earlier. According to some devotees it is far earlier than 250 millions years.

Thondaman built the *garbhalayam* (*sanctum sanctorum*) of the temple. All additional structures came much later. Garbhalaya is called as *ananda nilayam*...the one that gives enormous joy to devotees...it is the place which gives a devotee infinite happiness.

Lord Sri Venkateswara is *swayambhu*, *self*-manifest. Lord's image is not carved by either humans or gods. Lord Srimannarayana Himself took the form of a *sila murthi* to bless us all in this Kaliyug.

The Supreme Lord Srimannarayana manifests in five aspects. They are *para* (*the* transcendent), *vyuha* (*the* emanating), *vibhava* (*the* immanent), *antaryami* and lastly the *archavathara* (*the* form of consecrated image). The first one *para rupa* is Lord Srimannarayana in vaikuntha seated on Adishesha. In this form He is available only for free souls such as ananta, garuda, sudarsana etc.called *nitya-suris*. No one else, even devathas can not approach him in *para roopa*.

The second aspect of Srimannarayana is *vyuha avatar*. This again has four aspects namely *vasudeva*, *sankarshana*, *pradyumna* and *anirudha*. Even these four aspects of *vyuha* avatar of lord are in reach of only very greatly blessed souls.

The third one is called *vibhava avatar*. In this avatar Lord Srimannarayana is available to all of us. In fact he moves among us as one of us. Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Vamana etc. are *vibhava* avatars of Srimannarayana.

In The fourth aspect Lord Srimannarayana lives in the hearts of yogis as *antaryami* and is meditated up on by them.

And the fifth aspect is *archavathara*. It is in this form He is available to all of us. Lord Srimannarayana takes the form of an idol so that it is easy for all of us to worship him. Archavathara again has many aspects such as *divya*, *manusha*, *siddha*, *swayam vyaktha*...if the idol of the lord is consecrated by gods it is *divya*...if it is installed by humans it is called *manusha*...*swayam vyaktha* is the supreme among all these as it is the form in which Lord Himself manifests...He is consecrated by neither humans nor devathas...Lord himself takes the form He wishes to bless His devotees. Thirumala and Srirangam come under this aspect of archavatar. In Thirumala thus Lord Srimannarayana Himself is manifest to redeem all of us from miseries of Kaliyug.

Lord Srimannarayana is present in ananda nilayam as *srinivasa* to bless us all...eventhough He is appearing like *silaroop* (*idol*) Lord is present Himself in His *viswa roop* in ananda nilayam...to ordinary mortals like us He appears to be a statue... it is because of Lord's presence whole area is filled with an air of divinity. We are all taken to world of unbounded joy as long as we are in the vicinity of ananda nilayam because of presence of *parama purusha*, *the* supreme lord.

While doing floral *alankar* to Lord, it is said, that if archakas come in touch with lord's image they feel as if it is human touch..hands are very tender like human beings...some devotees at times observed lord's lips moving with a majestic smile...Lord Srimannarayana

Himself is in front of all of us to bless us!...Oh! How blessed all of us are!...always remember that He is the kindest of all...He and He alone knows all our limitations...our weaknesses...our problems...everything about us...your brother, your sister, your spouse, or even your parents many not understand you fully...but he knows everything about you...and always remember He is the most affectionate...no one else is more affectionate to you than him ...just think of Him with sincerity...you do not have to do big yagnas or yagas...*smaran* alone is enough...he will instantly answer your prayers...all your problems will vanish into thin air...

When a devotee stands in front of the Lord, he forgets everything... you are dumbstruck with his majestic, magnificent and most beautiful and ever charming *murthi*...such is the power of Lord that you can not stare at the *moorthi* continuously for a few seconds...unknowingly one closes his eyes...we go to Him with so many desires...but the moment you are in front of Him you are speechless...an *aura* of ultimate happiness sweeps across you that you forget everything else in this world...all your desires, all your problems...everything you wanted to seek from Him...all these will not come into your mind at all...you are engulfed by the supreme, divine aura...Oh! Swamy! what a divine *darsan*?...kindly grant us one more *darsan*...this is what every devotee feels before leaving Thirumala...

Lord's image is about nine feet in height...His eyes are dark and long...He is looking at all of us in what is called '*sama drishti*' the looks are absolutely horizontal...He is looking with a grand smile of extraordinary tranquility...the smile that envelopes all His creation with benevolence...Oh! Swamy!... when you are taking care of us with such an affectionate smile why should we worry at all?...

Lord is richly adorned with flowing locks of hair with some of them resting on his shoulders...the shoulders have marks resembling scars made by constant wearing of bow and a pack of arrows... Lord's image has four arms and the upper two hold *sankha* and *chakra*...*sankha* and *chakra* are not an integral part of the idol. They were later adorned by Sri Ramanujacharya... the lower right hand is the *varadahastha* pose...the lower left hand is in *katyavalambitha* pose...it is to convey us all that for those who seek me, ocean of life is only knee-deep...in the image the fingers of left hand actually rest on left thigh with the thumb almost parallel to waist line...

Another interesting feature is Lord is not exactly standing in the *tribhanga* posture. The *murthi* has taken a tilt slightly to the left...knees themselves are bent and open slightly outwards... Goddess Sri Mahalakshmi is on the right chest in sitting posture and forms an integral part of Moola *Murthi*...Lord has an *yagnopaveetham* (*sacred thread*) too...we can observe a set of four necklaces and ornaments on the neck

too...Oh! Swamy! How charming You are !...how magnificent you are!... Murthi has armlets too.....Lord's murthi is depicted wearing a dhoti below waist downwards while upper portion is not covered with any garment...the nipples in the chest are prominent... *srivaru*, as Lord Srinivasa is affectionately called by many devotees, also has a *katibandham*... Oh! Swamy! when Adishesha with his thousand tongues could not describe even thousandth of your glory what can an ordinary fellow like me?... when even great saints like *Bharadwaja* could not describe your divya mangala roopa completely what can an ordinary mortal like me?...it is only my poorva janma punya that I am able to write a few lines about you...Oh! Swamy! how merciful you are!

Srivari's feet are magnificent. Annamacharya, the great composer and ardent devotee of Lord Srinivasa describes them in one of his keerthanas as '*Brahma kadigina padamu*'...the feet that are served by none other than Lord Brahma himself...it is believed that viraja river, which flows in lord's vaikuntam flows in the sacred mountains as *antarvahini*. It flows under lord's feet in the temple. In the olden days water used to ooze out from the lord's feet...

Except temple archakas no one goes inside the sanctum sanctorum...no devotee, even of the highest authority of land, is allowed inside...we all have to stop at '*kulasekhara padi*'...*Kulasekhara*, one of the Tamil Alwars, praises Lord and says he want to be the

'*gadapa*' (wooden step) of ananda nilayam so that he can have Lord's magnificent darsan forever...hence it is called '*kulasekhara padi*'

Lord Srinivasa stands on a *padmapeeth*, a pedestal of lotus flowers. It is believed that Sri Adi Sankaracharya when he visited Thirumala placed '*Sri Chakram*' below Lord's moorthi and *Dhana Akarshna Yantra*' below Lord's *Hundi*...some say this is one of the reasons for the temple attracting thousands of devotees and large amounts of donations...

Every devotee's experience of Lord's darsan is unique to himself...some say they feel as If Lord is smiling at them...some say they have seen bright tejas, so bright that they could not withstand it's power and had to close their eyes...some say they had ultimate joy at that instant, a joy which can not be described in words...some say they heard *pranava*, the omkara at the time of darsan...every one's experiences are exclusive to themselves...every second a miracle occurs in Thirumala...if one has absolute faith he can experience Lord Balaji's miracles in day to day life too everyday...the easiest way to get His blessings is by following *saranagathi*, the doctrine of self-surrender. It is the easiest of all means to get His infinite mercy.

Lord Srinivasa is omniscient and omnipotent. He knows everything what we have done in the past, what we are doing at present and what we intend to do in future. We can not conceal anything from Him. With

the recommendation from supreme mother goddess Sri Maha Lakshmi he forgives all our faults and bestows his blessings.

Narayana anuvaka of *taittiriya Upanishad* states explicitly that Srimannarayana, our Balaji, our Srinivasa, our Venkateswara, is the cause of this world, the *paratatawa*, the *parama purusha*, the supreme soul of all.

Narayana anuvaka goes like this...*He is the thousand headed god. He sees all things and He is the source of welfare of all the creation. Narayana is the world. He is the unchanging master. He is eternal and auspicious. Narayana is the supreme light. Narayana pervades everything in the world. He is the paratatwa, param jyothy and paramatma.*

It is believed all devathas visit Lord in the night after the temple is closed. Everyday before closing the temple in the night temple archakas keep sacred water in a golden vessel for the devathas to offer prayers to lord srinivasa. It is believed that many times the vessel will be half empty by morning. Priests and temple officials take this sacred water as theertham.

We can not see lord's sacred feet except on Friday morning during '*nija pada darsanam*'. At all other times Lord's feet are covered by sacred *tulasi* leaves. Tulasi is very dear to Lord Srimannarayana. Lord is very pleased if anyone offers prayers to Him with tulasi leaves. Tulasi is the most sacred plant in this universe... any flower which is used once in puja of

any Lord cannot be re-used... but tulasi can be re-used in puja...while staying on the sacred Thirumala hills, by just thinking of tulasi which Lord beloves most, one is relieved of all miseries.

Lord Srinivasa is the supreme...most affectionate... by praying Him we can easily get rid of sins committed in thousands of previous births...Oh! Swamy! bless us with your infinite mercy...*Om Namo Venkatesaya...Om Namo Srinivasaya...Om Namo Narayanaya...*

Chapter-4

FRIDAY ABHISHEKAM

The Friday abhishekam of Lord Srinivasa is a glorious spectacle. Devotees can have a close look at Lord's *moola murthi* only during this *abhisheka seva* as many ornaments are removed for abhishekam.

Lord is given a full bath on every Friday, which is called *pooraabhishekam*. Among all sevas this particular seva has got the longest waiting. If one buys a ticket for this seva, he gets his turn only after 20 years (at the time of writing this book)...the ticket costs Rs.750 and only one person is allowed. This seva has got greatest demand as we can sit in front of lord for almost an hour watching abhisheka seva. One more seva is added to this in the recent times, called *vastra seva*, in which one can offer a *vastram* to Lord Srinivasa. This seva costs Rs.12,500 as of now. Only about 15-20 tickets are issued for this sevas every Friday. Those who take this seva tickets can sit in the front rows. Even this seva has got a waiting time of several years.

Perhaps nowhere else in the world a temple seva has such a long waiting time as that of Abhisheka Seva of Lord Srinivasa.

It is believed Samavai, a queen of Pallava dynasty has initiated this abhishekam of lord in 614 A.D. It is she who presented *bhoga srinivasa* idol, a replica of Lord Srinivasa to the temple during one of her visits. As it happened to be a Friday the queen performed abhishekam to Lord's main moorthi and this practice is continued till today. It is believed that in the initial days abhishekam was done everyday to moola murthi. Later Sri Ramanujacharya has changed it to a weekly seva.

Elaborate preparations are under taken for the abhishekam of Lord Sri Balaji. Many *sugandh dravyas* are used in the abhisheka water. Lord's abhishekam is done to the chanting of *purusha suktham*, *sri suktham*, *narayana suktham* and *divya prabandhas* etc. Abhisheka of lord starts with *suddhodakam* (pure water) and alternates with milk and chandana (sandalwood) water.

An unique feature is application of civet oil before abhishekam. It is believed that this is done perhaps as a preservative.

As the lord is very tall, of about nine feet, the priest performing the abhisheka stands on stool. He also covers his head and mouth with a turban going round his head and chin.

All major ornaments of Lord are removed and Lord is draped in a white dhoti. Sankha and Chakra not removed. These two are never removed on any occasion...*namam* is thinned...We can see Lord in His *nija roopa* as he has manifested in ananda nilayam, sanctum sanctorum. Goddess Sri Maha Lakshmi is also clearly visible on Lord's right chest...Lord is given bath first with *akasa ganga* theertham brought by archakas in golden vessels...this is followed by *ksheerabhishekam* in which lord is given sacred bath with pure milk...the milk is little warm...archakas carefully collect milk flowing from lord's two hands i.e. *kati hastham* and *varada hastham* and distribute it to the devotees after the seva is completed. After this Lord is given bath with sacred water mixed with many sugandh dravyas. This sacred water flowing from Lord's murthi is collected in golden vessels and is called *sripada theertham* in temple traditions. It is given to archakas, temple officials and devotees after the seva is over...how blessed are the ones who get this theertham...what can be more sacred than this in the world with which Lord Srimannarayana himself is given a bath!...It is only with punya of thousands of janmas one can get this sripada theertham. Even if we take a tiny droplet of this theertham we are cured of all illnesses...and are relieved of all sins done in several thousand janmas. The moment it touches one's tongue whole body gets reverberated with narayana namam...

Annamacharya, the legendary composer describes this sacred Sripada Theertham in many of his keerthanas. He says at one place...*sreepada theertham be chedani mandu...moha pasalu gosi mokshamicche mandu*...meaning it is the medicine which cures all diseases and it is the only one which gives moksha easily. Let's pray Lord Srinivasa to bless us with this theertham in our next trip to Thirumala...

Devotees can have divine darsan of His sacred feet only on this day...Lord Srinivasa's feet are covered with golden covering at all other times...let's pray His divine feet...it is the only saviour to all of us...it is this feet which is prayed always by 33 crores gods...it is the darshan of this feet that many yogis, sadhus, kinneras and kimpurushas are doing tapas for millions of years...just close your eyes for a while...Lord will bless you with a darsan of His divine feet...we are all blessed by Lord Balaji...

Devotees having darsan on Friday morning can have blessings of having darsan of Lord's divine feet.

After abhishekam is done with sacred waters of *bangaru bavi*, Lord is given another bath with holy water from *akasa ganga* theertham...after this archakas use a sacred cloth to dry Sri Swamy vari's Moola Murthi from crown to feet...it is believed that while doing so some archakas observe small droplets of sweat on Lord's Murthi as if a human being is standing...as lukewarm water is used for abhishekam Lord too sweats

a bit like all of us...Oh! how blessed the archakas to have such divine experiences...

Lord's namam is now thickened and made broader too...refined camphor is pressed on the chin of Lord... Katuka (collyrium) is applied to Lord's eyes.

We can see Lord's namam now in full splendor...the namam that is savior of mankind...the namam that grants us everything we seek...the namam that saves us from all miseries...that namam that ultimately gives us moksha...

Abhishekam of Lord Sri Mahalakshmi on Lord's chest is performed and harathi is given...then Lord is dressed in *pattu vastram* bedecked fully with magnificent jewellery...

What a magnificent darsan...Oh! Swamy save us all from all these worldly miseries and bless us ever with your divine smile...*Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya... Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-5

BHOGA SRINIVASA MURTHY

Many interesting practices are followed in the Thirumala temple. one such interesting practice is the *pradhama darsan*, the first darsan of Lord Srinivasa in Ananda Nilayam...everyday Lord gives pradhama darsan to an yadava boy!...yes, not an archaka...nor a temple official...it is a person of Yadava hereditary who gets first darsan of lord when the temple is opened around 2.30 A.M. everyday...it is because when Lord stayed on Thirumala Hills as Srinivasa it is person of Yadava sect who first sees him...Lord blessed him and told him that He would grant pradhama darsan to his descendants forever...this custom is followed till today and a descendant of that yadava family is given first darsan till today. He is called *sannidhi golla* in temple practices. When the temple doors are opened in the morning, it is this person who goes inside to have

Lord's darsan...this darsan is called *viswaroopa darsan*...

Another interesting aspect is no prasadam like *pulihora*, *daddhojanam* or even famous *laddu* is offered to Sri Swamy Varu in the sanctum sanctorum...all these are offered by keeping them out side only...only a typical rice prasadam goes inside that too in a piece of an earthen pot!...not a silver vessel nor a golden vessel...the only Prasad that is offered to lord inside garbhalayam is in small earthen pot piece...Lord gave word to an ardent *kummari* (potter) devotee '*kuruvarathi nambi*' that only the prasadam in earthen pot piece is to be offered to Him always...see Lord's benovelence... He has thousands of kilograms of gold at His disposal. He has wonderful and most valuable golden utensils donated to Him by rich and the mighty...but He chose to accept only the prasadam in an earthen pot piece...Oh! Swamy! How merciful you are!...it is because of this gesture of Lord Srinivasa, Annamacharya calls lord as *thomani pallala vadu*, meaning a person who does not use any washed plates.

We find four murthis of Lord in the garbhalayam apart from Lord's Dhruva Murthi. One of them is called *bhoga srinivasa murthi*, which is also called '*kouthuka bera*' or '*purusha bera*' in vaikhanasa tradition. this idol is consecrated by Samavai, a pallava queen in 966 A.D. It is for this Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi's idol that the Ekantha Seva is performed every night. During this seva Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi's idol is placed in a silver

cradle in *sayana mantapa* and milk etc. are offered to Lord to the accompaniment of music and songs composed by *tallapaka poets*. Sanadal paste is applied to feet of lord's main murthi, and to Sri Maha Lakshmi's image in Lord's chest and to Sri Bhoga Srinivasa murthi. A part of this paste is kept in a golden plate for the use of Lord Brahma and other devathas visiting lord in the nights. It is believed all devathas descend on Thirumala in *divya roopas* in the nights and offer prayers to Lord Srimannarayana in Ananda Nilayam. On many occasions devotees sleeping in temple *mantapams* heard temple bells ringing on their own!...it is nothing but devathas offering arathi to lord.

As all gods are present on the Thirumala Hills in the nights the atmosphere is electrifying. If we take stroll anywhere on the hills between 2.30 A.M.-4.30 A.M. we can feel a pleasant, divine and magnificent air sweepings across us...we forget all our miseries and your body becomes very light...*omkara* reverberates in your body...

The idol of Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi is a true copy of *dhruva murthi* (*moola murthi*) except that Sankha and Chakra are permanently fixed in the case of this idol where as they are not an integral part of the mula murthi...we can also find an Yantra placed below Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi's idol...it is believed such a similar yantra is present below Lord's murthi in garbhalaya also...

Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi's idol is kept very close to main murthi in the sanctum sanctorum. Abhisekham is performed to Bhoga Srinivasa Murthy everyday while it is done to the Moola Murthy only on Fridays. *Sahasra kalasabhishekam* is done to Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi every Wednesday at 6.00 A.M. During this seva this idol is kept connected to lord's main murthi with a golden thread...the inner meaning of it is that it is as if the abhishekam is performed to lord's main murti itself...let's all pray Bhoga Srinivasa Murthy to bless us all with His darsan too in our next trip to Thirumala...*Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya...Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-6

UGRA SRINIVASA MURTHI

Apart from the main idol in the sanctum sanctorum, it is this idol of the Lord which is the oldest. It is believed that this idol of Lord was participating in all the temple festivals in the olden days. This practice was discontinued in 1330 when many calamities occurred while Ugra Srinivasa Murthi's idol was going on in procession during a festival. Since then the murthi is never brought outside Ananda Nilayam.

Every year only on two occasions the idol is brought outside. One on *dwadasa thiruvardhana* day and second time on *karthika dwadasi* also called *kaisika dwadasi* or *ksheerabdi dwadasi*. on the day of *dwadasa thiruvardhana* Ugra Srinivasa Murthi's idol is brought to *ghanta mantapam* at 10.00 P.M. and again kept back in ananda nilayam after the completion of puja rituals.

On karthika dwadasi day this murthi is taken in a procession in '*maha pradakshina marg*'. Extreme care is taken to ensure puja rituals are over well before 3.00A.M.itself. It is strongly believed that sun rays should not fall on this idol at any cost as it would bring ugra roopa to the idol resulting in calamities and catastrophes for the world...so the archakas and temple official see to it that the idol is kept back in Ananda Nilayam well before sunrise.

Oh! Swamy! you are the most benevolent !why should we worry when you are there to take care of us...*Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya...Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-7

KOLUVU SRINIVASA MURTHI

In whatever roop we see him, He is simply beauty personified...ultimate divine beauty...*koluvu srinivasa murthi* too is one such idol of Lord which is simply glorious. He is like a guardian deity of the temple.

It is this idol of lord which is placed on golden throne everyday after *thomala seva* (adorning swamy with flowers). Everyday a *darbar* called *koluvu* is held in *snapana mandapam* when the deity is brought and seated on a golden throne under a golden umbrella. Everyday *panchangam* (*the* thithi of the day, the star of the day, the lunar month etc.) of that particular day are read by the *asthana siddhanthi* of the temple. The previous day's income to the temple is also read out before Koluvu Srinivasa Murthi's idol. All of us can listen to this recitation through mikes arranged by the Devasthanam at all places in the hills.

We also find a beautiful image of Lord Sri Krishna in the sanctum sanctorum. It is in *navanitha nritya* pose with his Queen Rukmini. Lord Krishna is in the pose of a dancing child standing on a lotus pedestal. The right leg is lifted and bent at the knee. The right hand holds a ball of *navneetha, butter*. The left hand is stretched out gracefully in a dancing pose. It is this idol which receives *ekantha seva* during *dhanurmasam* month instead of Bhoga Srinivasa Murthy. Bhoga Srinivasa participates in the *ekantha seva* for the rest of the year. Temple inscriptions of 1100 A.D. make a mention of this idol. So the idol must have been donated much earlier by some devotee. We also find *chakrattalvar*, Lord's Sudarsan chakra in the sanctum sanctorum.

Four copper idols Sri Rama, Lakshmana, Sitha and Sugreeva are also found in the garbhalayam. These idols are believed to have been installed during 12 A.D. by Sri Ramanujacharya. We also find beautiful images of Angada and Hanuman in the *Ramar Medai* platform outside garbhalaya in the Antarala Mantapam.

It is a great divine happiness to listen to all morning recitations sitting on anywhere in the hills the atmosphere is most serene...all the hills are engulfed by a divine aura in the morning hours...listening of suprabhatham through mikes during these hours can be a life time experience for a devotee...as Lord Srimannarayana himself is present on the hill the

atmosphere is simply electrifying... brahamananda can be experienced only on these hills in the entire universe...Oh! Swamy! bestow us your blessings...*om namo venaktesaya...om namo srinivasaya...om namo narayanaya...*

Chapter-8

SRIVARI BRAHMOTSAVAMS

Several festivals take place on the Thirumala Hills throughout the year. Infact, every day is a festive day in Thirumala. Among them, *Brahmotsavams* are the most important festival. They are celebrated every year during the Navarathri festival days.

It is believed that until the tenth century, Brahmotsavams were celebrated only once in an year. Then a Pallava queen by name *Samavai* introduced brahmotsavams one in *Peratasi* month of Tamil calendar and another during *Mukkoti Ekadasi*. It is she who presented Bhoga Srinivasa Murthy idol to the temple. In the early days Brahmotsavams were held four times a year, first one in *Peratasi* month, the second one on the *Rathasaptami* Day, the third one on *Kaushika Ekadasi* and the fourth and the last one on *Vaikhuntha Ekadasi*

day. From the late sixties Brahmotsavams are being celebrated only once in an year.

As these festivals are initiated by Lord Brahma, they are called Brahmotsavams. It is believed that all 33 crores *devathas* are present on the seven hills during Brahmotsavams. The whole of Thirumala is splendidly decorated with arhes and lighting. The devathas too enjoy the festive atmosphere on the Hills like all of us. They mingle among us like any other devotee and enjoy the daily processions on all the days. It gives them great pleasure to see Lord Sreemannarayana's Brahmotsavams festivals attended by lakhs of devotees. It is because of the presence of so many gods that an air of heightened Cosmic energy pervades the whole mountain ranges through the festival days.

The present Brahmotsavams start with *Ankuraropanam*, the customary sowing of *dhanyas*, The *Dhwaja Arohanam* takes place the next morning, Garuda flag tied to a rope is hauled up on the flagstaff and the flag is flown on the *Dhwaja sthambham*. This signals the commencement of Brahmotsavams. Garuda, the Eagle God is the first servant of the Lord. We can see Garuda facing Lord Srinivasa in the main temple

In the evening Lord's Utsavamurthi, called *Malayappa Swamy*, accompanied by his consorts *Sridevi* and *Bhoodevi* is taken in procession in four mada streets. Malayappa swamy, processional diety of Lord Srinivasa is an exact replica of mula murthi. This image

is about three feet high and stands on a lotus pedestal. Sridevi is to the left with her left hand in '*kataka hastha*' pose, a pose holding a lotus in the hand. But actually there is no lotus in the hand. We can observe that fingers in right hand are in '*gaja karna*' mudra. Bhudevi is seen to the left of the Lord. Her right hand is in '*kataka hastha*' pose similar to Sridevi with fingers in gaja karma mudra. Her hand is seen dangling gracefully.

It is these three murthi's of Lord with His consorts that participate in all temple festivals. If for any reason one can not have darsan of lord in the main temple, one is equally blessed by praying these murthis.

On the first day of Brahmotsavams lord goes around four mada streets of Thirumala in '*pedda seshavahanam*'. The four streets around the temple are called *mada streets* in temple traditions. It is a feast to the eyes of devotees to see Lord Srinivasa going in this *vahanam* (vehicle) with an image of '*adiseshha*' (*snake god*) ...Adishesha is the couch of Lord Sri Maha Vishnu. He is the most ardent devotee of Lord and follows Him in all His incarnations like Sri Rama, Sri Krishna etc.

Lord Srinivasa has innumerable golden ornaments donated by several kings of yesteryears and many devotees in the later times. Even now many devotees donate wonderful ornaments to lord. Lord's ornaments are very valuable running into several thousand crores of rupees. During Brahmotsavam festival days, Lord and His consorts are decorated with these ornaments. The

'*alankar*' (decoration) varies each day of the festival. these wonderful ornaments look more dazzling by decorating the Supreme Lord.

Lord wears '*maha meru paccha*', the big green emerald during the *pedda seshavahanam* procession. We can also see him wearing a crown of *navarathnas*. On this day devotees can see *koustubham*, a unique ornament of Lord Mahavishnu in his chest. The two queens of lord Sridevi and Bhoodevi too are decorated beautifully with several ornaments and flower garlands.

No words can describe the majesty and glory of Lord going in procession with His queens. We get rid of sins committed in 64 crore previous births by having darsan of Lord along with His consorts going in procession during these festival days. As it is Lord Brahma who has initiated this festival '*brahma ratham*', chariot of Brahma precedes the Lord's vahanam. As Brahma is not worshipped in *archa roop*, the chariot is empty but has a golden *kalas* at the top. It is followed by a cow, an elephant and a horse followed by Brahmin scholars chanting Vedic scriptures. and then follow musical bands of temple musicians.

We can not describe the whole electrifying atmosphere on the hills during Brahmotsavams. One has to see it personally and get the blessing of Lord. It is a divine, mystic experience to be a part of the crowd watching Lord in procession with much grandeur. *Arathi* is given to Lord at various places in the mada streets.

Second day starts with *chinna seshavahanam*. It is also a sesha vahan except for it is silver throne today while it was golden previous day. A wonderful golden crown can be seen on Lord's head. The vahan of the evening of second day is '*hamsa vahan*', swan vehicle. Lord goes through four mada streets decorated as goddess *Saraswathi*. We can see veena on left hand with right hand fingers playing the strings. An important feature is decoration of *navarathana mangalyam* with a thick gold tubular necklace around Lord's neck.

Third day starts with *simha vahan* in the morning- a vehicle of lion king. as we all know lord as *Sri Narasimha* killed hiranya kasipa, the demon. He can see yoga Narasimha 's idol too in the temple. We can also observe lions on all the four corner tops of the temple. Lord is believed to be Sakthi swaroopa also in the evening of that day, Lord gives us darsan in *mutyala pandiri vahanam*, a canopy made of pearls. Lord Srinivasa sits majestically in this pearl canopy and goes round mada streets...simply beauty personified...the alankar in the seva is done in *balakrishna roopa* i.e. lord Krishna as a boy. Lord and his queens are decorated with wonderful ornaments and garlands.

The fourth-day starts with *kalpa vriksha vahan* in the morning. Kalpa vriksha is the celestial boon-bestowing tree of heaven. All our wishes are fulfilled instantly by having darsan of Lord, the supreme boon-giver in this vahanam. In the night we see Lord in 'sarva bhoopala vahanam'. Lord's alankaram is done as

'kaliya mardana Sri Krishna'-Lord Sri Krishna dancing on the hoods of *kaliya*, the fiery serpent.

On the fifth day morning, Lord goes around four mada streets decorated in '*mohini avathar*'. Lord takes the form of mohini, the divine damsel who distributes *amrith (nectar)*. In this vahana Lord is embodiment of eternal beauty. Lord is specially decorated on this day with garlands sent by *Andal* from *villiputtur*. Andal is an ardent devotee of Lord Srimannarayana. She takes a vow that she will not marry anyone except Lord himself. She wrote *thiruppavai*, a highly acclaimed work which is recited during *dhanurmasam* in all vaishnavite temples. In Thirumala temple too, it is recited in place of suprabhatam all through dhanurmasam days. A unique feature of this day is another procession too of lord passes along side with lord decorated as *navaneetha Krishna* (Krishna holding butter). This Krishna palanquin moves along side Mohini procession.

The most important vahana seva of the brahmotsavam festival takes place on fifth day. It is the Lord's *garudotsavam*. Lord goes around mada streets riding garuda, the eagle god. Lakhs of devotees attend the festival on this day. On this day Lord Malayappa Swamy is adorned with many special ornaments such as *makara kanti*, the *sahasra nama mala*, the *chathurbhuj lakshmi haram* etc. These ornaments are always on moola murthi's image in the *garbhalaya* and only on this day they are brought out of the temple especially for this seva.

Another unique aspect of garudotsavam is umbrella festival. Two very big umbrellas are specially made ecstastically and brought from Chennai. Many devotees accompany these umbrellas on foot from Chennai singing bhajans accompanied by nadaswaram band. After reaching thirumala the 'godugulu' (umbrella) are received by temple officials and offered to Lord Srinivasa with vedic chantings by temple priests. Thirumala hills are sea of humanity on the day of garudotsavam. An estimated 3-5 lakhs devotees throng the hill on this day chanting govinda, govinda, govinda...whole Thirumala hills reverberate with chanting of Lord's namams...

Sixth day starts with *Hanumantha vahanam* in the morning. Hanuman is ardent devotee of Lord Sri Rama in *Tretha yuga*, who is none other than Lord Srimannarayana himself. On the night of that day, Lord goes around four mada streets in *gaja vahanam*, elephant vehicle. Lord is adorned with wonderful pearl gaalands. Elephant symbolizes *aiswaraya*. Lord Srinivasa who is the supreme bestower of *aiswaraya* (prosperity) rides of elephant vahana on this night.

Seventh day morning, the Lord is seen on *surya prabha vahanam*. Surya prabha means light from sun. As we all know sun in none other than Lord Srimannarayana himself. Sun worship is as old as life itself. Sun is visual embodiment of

Lord Sri Maha Vishnu himself. The vahanam is a chariot of sun god with seven horses representing seven rays of *aditya*, the sun god.

On the night lord goes around mada streets in procession in '*chandra prabha vahanam*', vahanam of moon lord. During this vahan decoration '*ganda bherunda pathakam*', a special ornament adores Lord's chest. Lord's idol is also decorated with a very big white garland, the emeralds on the chest adding to the majesty.

Eight day is a very important day in Brahmotsavams as on this day, Lord's *Rathotsavam*, chariot festival is held. It is believed that a devotee gets *moksha* by having darsan of Lord Srinivasa riding on the chariot. We will be relieved from the cycle of births and re-births by having Lord's darsan in this rathotsavam. The chariot is wonderfully decorated with beautiful flower garlands. in the night lord rides on '*aswa vahanamam*', horse vehicle.

Avabrutha snanam, the bathing ceremony takes place on the 9th day of the festival. The ten day long festival comes to an end with '*Dhwaja Avarohanam*' on the tenth day. Lord's *Utsava Moorthi* along with his queens are highly decorated and brought near dwaja stambham. The garuda flag is brought down with vedic chanting of priests. *Mangala arathi* is given to Lord and his consorts.

It requires *punya phalam* of several births to see Brahmotsavams. No words can describe one's joy watching Lord Srinivasa going around the mada streets with His Queens on these festival days. Oh ! Swamy!, bless us with Your darsan on these Brahmotsavams days...*Om Namō Venkatesaya... Om Namō Srinivasaya... Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-9

LORD SRI VARAHA SWAMY

The sacred Thirumala hill is originally known as '*adi varaha kshetra*', a sacred place of *sri varaha swamy*. According to *bhavishya purana*, when Srinivasa is roaming on the hill in search of Sri Maha Lakshmi, he encounters a *swetha varaha* (a white boar). They both wonder who the other is and realize soon that they both are of same *amsa* that of Lord Maha Vishnu.

Lord Srinivasa then requests Sri Varaha Swamy to give Him place on the hill. Sri Varaha Swamy happily accepts the request and grants him 100 feet on the sacred hill and request Srinivasa that in return for this he should get first darsan and first *naivedyam*. Lord Srinivasa readily agrees to this and the custom is followed even today. Even today Prasad is offered to Sri Varaha Swamy first and only then Lord Srinivasa in the temple is offered *naivedyam*. Every devotee should

make it a point to have darsan of Sri Varaha Swamy near the pushkarini and only then enter the temple to have Lord Balaji's darsan. Infact every devotee visiting Thirumala should also visit Goddess Sri Padmavathi at Tiruchanur. Only then the pilgrimage is deemed to be complete.

Sri Varaha Swamy is also known as '*gnanappiran*' giver of knowledge. A darsan of swamy will bestow us of wisdom.

Let's visit Sri Varaha Swamy first during our next trip and get the blessings of Lord sri Varaha Swamy and Lord Srinivasa....*Om Namo Venkatesaya...Om Namo Srinivasaya... Om Namo Narayanamaya...*

Chapter-10

SARVAROOPA SRINIVASA

Lord Srinivasa is none other than Lord Srimannarayana Himself who descended on this earth from *Srivaikhuntam* to redeem us all from the miseries of kaliyug. Call Him by any name...*balaji... venkateswara... govinda... gopala... srinivasa... venkatachalapathi... venkatanadha...* He will answer your prayers instantly...in Thirumala He is blessing us all in *swayam vyaktha roopa*...He is self-manifest...not carved by any sculptor human or divine...Lord Himself chose this most sacred place in the universe to be nearer to all of us...

Many devotees strongly believe that the murthi in thirumala is *trimurthi swaroopa*. In fact in the olden days Lord Srinivasa was being worshipped by some as Lord Siva, by some others as Lord Maha Vishnu and some others were worshipping as Sri Durga Matha and

some others as Lord Sri Subrahmanyeswara... during certain periods same murthi used to be prayed as Siva in the morning by *Saivites* and as Vishnu in the afternoons by *Vaishnavites* and as Sakthi in the evenings by *Saktheyas*.

Everyone had their own reasoning...Lord's Moola Murthi has flowing locks of hair like *jatajut* of Lord Maha Siva with curly hair resting on His shoulders...the arms have armllets which looks like *nagabharanam* and a serpent is depicted as coiled around Lord's right arm. We find bilva leaves used in the temple prayers . All these are normally associated with Lord Siva. Another interesting aspect is Lord is in the middle of *garbhagruha (sanctum sanctorum)* which is the case with any temples of Lord Siva. We find the Siva Linga in the middle of any Lord Maha Siva's temple whereas Lord Vishnu's idol in any temple is always nearer to the inner wall and not at the center as is the case with Thirumala temple. Those who were praying as Lord Siva used to cite all these reasons...but some argue that we can not say the Murthi is Maha Siva just because of these reasons alone. They say that bilva being one of the sacred leaves, it can be used in the worship of any deity...similarly they argue as Adishesha (the serpent god) is an ardent devotee of Mord Maha Vishnu, there is nothing unusual about nagabharanam adorning lord's murthi.

Those who were praying as Goddess Durga Maa had their own reasons...they say that devotees call lord

as Sri Balaji, Bala being Durga Maa's name...on the top of the temple we can see lions on all four sides..a lion is Durga Maatha's vahan... sandal paste is used in lord's worship which strengthens the argument that lord is *Sakthi Swaroop*... in Thirumala temple Lord's abhishekam is done on Friday which happens to be *mangal snan (holy bath)* day of woman ...normally woman in India take full bath on Fridays...but Vaishnavaites used to brush aside all these arguments...they say calling lord balaji is a very recent...we do not find any such name in any temple inscriptions...regarding Friday abhishekam, it is pointed out that the abhishekam is mainly to Sri Maha Lakshmi who is on the chest of lord...as Maha Lakshmi's image is an integral part of lord's Moola Murthi one has to essentially perform abhisheka to whole idol...

In fact there used to be frequent tussles among devotees and sometimes no puja was performed to Lord's Murthi at all...

All these arguments were finally put at rest by *Sri Ramanujacharya* who declares the Murthi as none other than lord Sri Maha Vishnu himself...in those days a yadava king was ruling Chandragiri under which Thirumala's jurisdiction was falling. Like many others the king too is upset over the tussles among devotees...he approaches Sri Ramanujacharya and request him to solve this confusion putting an end to all these doubts. Ramanuja agrees for his request and decided to put an end to all this confusion.

One day Sri Ramanujacharya calls all the devotees on the hill and tell them 'oh! dear loved ones! it is unfortunate that all of you are arguing about Moola Murthi...as all of us are aware whoever He may be He is very powerful...isn't it?...should we continue to argue like this and deprive such a powerful god from any prayer at all? Are we not doing big sin by doing so?... So let's all put an end to those arguments...I have an idea...and let's all abide by the result taking it as God's decision itself...ok..is it fine?...dear loved ones, when we close the temple tonight we shall place *trishul, dhamaruk, sankha* and *chakra* before the lord...and then close the temple doors...when we open the temple if we find sankha chakra on Lord's upper hands we should from now onwards pray him as Lord Maha Vishnu...if on the other hand He takes trishul and dhamaruk leaving sankah chakra, He is none other than lord siva...none of you should fight among yourselves there after...we will abide by Lord's decision...'

Everyone present there accepted this proposal. After offering prayers they close the temple...on the next morning temple was opened in the presence of Yadava King, Sri Ramanuja acharya, archakas, temple officials and devotees....

Everyone is anxious to see what the Murthi has accepted. Is it Lord Siva or Lord Vishnu... As the temple doors are opened to the playing of nadaswaram by the *asthana vidwans* everyone finds to their joy Lord wearing sankh and chakra...all the doubts are

dispelled...the Murthi is none other than the supreme power Lord Srimannarayana himself!...their joy knew no bounds...now that all doubts are dispelled every one was very, very happy...they have all celebrated a big festival for a week decorating Lord with wonderful flowers and reciting daily Vedic scriptures and many divya Prabhandhas...

Sriramanujacharya stayed on the hill for sometime and initiated many pujas of Lord. It is He who has set temple traditions & puja practices which are flowed till today.

Akaasaat patitam toyamyathaa gacchati saagaram

Sarvadeva namaskaraaha kesavam prathi gacchati

Whichever deity one worships, that worship ultimately reaches only Kesava, like the water that falls from the sky reaches the oceans ultimately!

Lord Srinivasa is *Parabrahma Murthi*. All of us feel His divine presence on the hill. You call Him by any name Govinda... Gopala... Balaji... Srinivasa... sridhara... sripathi... venkatanadha... any name...He will answer your prayers instantly. In fact the names of all gods are His names only... and all the gods are nothing but different rupas of Lord Srimannarayana himself... Oh! Swamy you are the embodiment of all auspiciousness... betow us all your divine grace... Om *Namo Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya...Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-11

SRI MALAYAPPA SWAMY

Malayappa swamy is *Utsava Murthi* of Lord Srinivasa. it is this idol of lord which we see in all temple festivals. This idol is an exact replica of lord in Ananda Nilayam.

In the earlier days another idol '*Ugra Srinivasa Murthi*' used to be taken out in all temple festivals. As the name indicates Lord is Ugra Swaroopa in this idol. Once during some festival days, as Ugra Srinivasa Murthi's idol was going round the mada streets in some festival procession, suddenly a fire broke out and many festival pandals and houses got burnt. All archakas, temple officials and devotees were shell shocked not knowing what went wrong in the temple rituals. All of them started praying Lord Srinivasa as to why such a calamity happened... then Lord spoke through a devotee that from then onwards His processional idol of

Ugra Srinivasa Murthi should never be taken out of the temple premises at any cost. As everyone present there were worried Lord again states that they can find another idol in the glades of the mountain which should be used in all temple festivals in the place of Ugra Srinivasa Murthi from then onwards... He even signals the location of the idols..then all those present thank lord for His benovelence and sang bhajans in praise of Him...

Then all archakas, temple officials and devotees go to the place indicated by Lord accompanied by nadaswara band and other musicians. When they reach the glades of the mountain they were all very happy to find Lord's idol with His two consorts Sridevi and Bhoodevi.. As the hill is bowed very low at that place Lord is affectionately called '*malai kuniya ninra perumal*'... from then onwards These idols are participating in all temple festivals... the idol came to be known as '*malayappa swamy*' and the place it is found '*malayappa kona*'.

It is these Murthis of lord which we see in all temple festivals like Brahmotsavams etc. Malayappa Swamy has a special place in all our hearts after Moola Murthi. it is for these murthis that *kalyanotsavam* is performed everyday. Abhishekam is done to these murthis on the day of *sravana* star (birth star of lord Sri Maha Vishnu). It is done in *ekantham*, meaning no devotee is allowed to witness it.

Many devotees from time immemorial gifted precious jewellery to Malayappa swamy and His two Queens. Malayappa Swamy alone has many invaluable ornaments such as *vajrakavacham*, *mutyala kavacham*, *bangaru kavacham* etc.

It is a feast to the eyes of devotees seeing Sri Malayappa Swamy going around in procession in four mada streets with His consorts in Brahmotsavam festival with unique vahan decoration every day...Oh! Swamy! bless us all with your divine grace!... Om *Namo Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya...Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-12

SURYANARAYANA IN THIRUMALA

Lord Surya, the Sun god is given an important place in Hindu mythology. He is none other than Lord Srimannarayana himself. By doing *surya namaskar* while in Thirumala one is relieved of sins committed in several thousand births. We are blessed with perfect health by praying Sri Suryanarayana while on the hill.

Among all stotras, the famous *aditya hridaya* bestows one with success in all matters, prosperity and victory over enemies. Lord Srinivasa in Suryanarayana roop shadows all other *tejas* with his effluence.

Aditya is the cause of all six seasons. He is the soul of all celestials. He is the lord of the sky. He is the Supreme lord who bestows us with wisdom dispelling darkness. He is the *lok sakshi*, the witness to entire world of beings.

Lord Srimannarayana is called Vishnu because he is all pervading. He is *sarva vyapaka*... He is everywhere in this world... He enters everything and controls everything... the main doctrine of *visistadvaita* of Sri Ramanuja Acharya is that Vishnu has the whole universe as His body i.e. sarira. If you worship any god, it is as if worshipping Vishnu Himself, as all gods are a part of Him. *Narayana Anuvaka* also says that Narayana pervades everything both within and without. This brings out the immanence and transcendence of Lord Srimannarayana.

By praying Lord Sri Venkateswara as Sun god atleast once during the stay on thirumala we are greatly blessed... Om *Namo Venkatesaya*...Om *Namo Srinivasaya*... Om *Namonarayanaya*...

Chapter-13

PULANGI SEVA

The worship in Thirumala temple is done strictly according to *vaikhanasa agama*, initiated by Vikhanasa Mahamuni. It is believed Lord Mahavishnu himself taught *vaikhansa agama* to Vikahansa who later taught it to his four disciples Atri, Brighu, Marichi and Kasyap.

The puja of any god is of three types... manasa puja, homa puja and bera pooja...manasa puja is praying in one's mind...homa puja is praying with agni...bera puja is puja of an image or idol of Lord. Among these three the last one is possible for all whereas the first two are possible only for great souls.

The day in Thirumala temple starts with Suprabhata seva. Many sevas are performed through the day. Each seva to lord is unique by itself and is a feast to the eyes of devotee. Some sevas are performed in *ekantham* (with out allowing any devotee).

Pulangi darsanam of Srinivasa is devotee's delight. Every Friday after the *abhishekam* is performed Lord is draped in a long sari like garment called *ulchattu* in Tamil. It is believed such a long garment is necessary because lord has many heavy golden garments on his person all through the year. In one way such long thick padded sari like garment serves as a protection to lord's idol from the heavily weighing ornaments.

This long garment is removed after Thursday afternoon puja and Swami is draped only in a white dhoti and an upper cloth. Many ornaments too are removed from *moola murthi* as abhishekam is scheduled next morning. Even *namam* of Lord Sri Balaji is thinned, which is called *sadalimpu* in temple traditions. As the namam is very thin devotees will have a wonderful darsan of Lord's magnificent and charming eyes. This *netra darsan* of lord continues from Thursday afternoon to Friday morning... Next time when you visit thirumala try to have darsan in this period. You will be greatly blessed by Lord's charming looks. The majestic and mesmerizing looks take you to unknown worlds. You will be dumbstruck and spellbound...

Lord Srinivasa murthi is adorned with beautiful flowers with wonderful fragrance on Thursday evening. It is called *pulangi darsanam*. Devotees can not deviate their eyes from *divya manohar murthi* majestically decorated with flowers and flower garlands.

Lord Srinivasa is para brahma, param jyothy and para tatwa... Srimannarayana is everything and everything in this universe is nothing but Himself... He is in the air... but air does not know His existence within it... He is in the oceans.. but oceans do not know it He is in sound... but sound does not know it He is sarva vyapthi... all pervading... He is everywhere in the universe... in fact the whole universe is His rupa...

Sahasra seersha purushaha

Sahasraksha sahasra path

Narayana is the *parama purusha* with innumerable heads, innumerable eyes, infinite hands, infinite feet...it is *Viswa roopam*... Lord Srinivasa is always present on Thirumala in this viswa roopa. As we are all ordinary mortals we are seeing Him as *sila murthi (statue form)*... but He is actually present there in Viswa Roopam. It is said many devotees while having his darsan feel as if He is smiling at them.. sometimes some blessed devotees observed twinkling of eyes... and lips magnificently smiling... Oh! how blessed those ones!... Those of the archakas who are fortunate enough to be nearer to Lord have many divine experiences with Him... If they accidentally come in contact with Him during changing of flowers they feel the touch of human being... very, very tender as if someone really is standing and not a Sila murthi (statue) at all...

Lord Sri Venkateswara is kindest of all in this world He and He alone is our saviour... He is the bestower of all auspiciousness... with abject surrender to His divine feet one is rid of all problems... all miseries will vanish instantly...

Once Narada asks Lord Brahma 'Oh! Father! who is the greatest of all?... who is HE who can give ultimate happiness to people by praying up on?... By praying whom one is relieved from this birth-death cycles and attain *moksha*?'. Then Lord Brahma replies 'Oh! Narada, my dear son... you have asked a very good question... even great souls are unable to know answer to this... Now I am telling you this great secret... the supreme force is Srimannarayana and no one else... by chanting '*Om Namō Narayanaya*' everyone gets infinitely blessed... chanting of this namam even once a day relieves one from the sins committed in thousand births... all prosperous things and auspicious things come in search of the one who chants this namam at least once everyday... Lord Yama will not dare to come anywhere near a person who chants this namam eleven times a day...this namam is the only saviour to this whole universe...'after hearing all this from Brahma ,Narada felt very happy...Oh! Srinivasa!... Oh ! Balaji!... Oh ! Seshachalapathi!...why should we worry when you are so near to us!...*Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya... Om Namō Narayanaya*...

Chapter-14

THIRU NAMAM

The moment we think of Lord Balaji, it is His namam that comes to our mind immediately. Oh! what a sacred *namam*!...a pleasant and serene feeling sweeps us the moment the namam flashes in our mind...we are all engulfed by the aura of supreme lord's thiru namam...it is this namam which is protector for this whole universe...the saviour to all of us ordinary mortals.

Every Friday namam is applied to Lord's forehead with *paccha karpooram*. 16 tulas of karpooram is used for the namam and one and half tulas of *kasturi* (musk) for the inner mark. But on the Fridays coming during Brahmotsavams, double the amount are used. 32 tulas of paccha karpooram and 3 tulas of kasturi are used on the Friday in the week preceding Brahmotsavams, on the Fridays during Brahmotsavams and on the Friday of

succeeding week of Brahmotsams. These Fridays are specifically called '*rettimpu sukravaram*' in temple traditions, rettimpu meaning double in Telugu.

In the earlier days the namam used to be of white earth during the first three days of the week i.e. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. But it appears that this custom is not being followed today and only paccha karpooram is used for the namam on all the days. Even the namam itself was not thick as it is now. we can clearly observe this in the older paintings of lord.

Another unique feature is putting up of a dab of paccha karpooram on the lord's chin too. This has an interesting background. In the earlier days an ardent devotee of lord by name Anantacharya settled down on the hill for service of Lord srinivasa. He thought of having a flower garden specifically for lord's puja and started leveling the ground with the help of his wife who was in advanced stage of pregnancy. He was using a crow bar to dig the land and leveling it. His wife carried the mud away in a basket on her head.

It was hot summer days and the couple were toiling a lot. They are not allowing anyone else to help them. lord is observing the couple and thought it is high time He helps them... He came running to the wife as a brahmin boy and requested her to handover the basket. She resisted saying her husband would get angry. But the boy did not listen. He forcibly took the basket and ran way and came back after emptying it.

He did so several times... after a while Anantacharya realized that his wife is coming faster than earlier emptying the basket... how could it be she is returning faster everytime... as he lifted his face up to see how it was possible he noticed that an young boy was helping his wife.. he got angry that someone else is sharing his service of Lord Srinivasa... he shouted at the boy... the boy started running... Anantacharya became more infuriated... holding the crow bar in his hand he too started running after him... after a while he got tired and in a fit of anger he threw the crow-bar on the boy... it hit the boy's chin and the boy started bleeding... the boy ran more faster and disappeared soon.

Anantacharya came back feeling sorry that he hit the boy in a fit of anger...in the evening he went to temple to have Lord's darsan...he noticed a commotion in the sanctum sanctorum...all archakas were discussing something seriously with worry quite visible on their faces... Oh! what happened?... why such commotion?... he ran into the garbhalaya and was shocked to see Lord's chin hurt and bleeding... instantly he realized what has happened... the boy whom he had hit was none other than Lord Srinivasa himself!... he immediately started applying *paccha karpooram* on the chin as tears rolled down his eyes... oh! Lord! forgive me! what a sin I committed!... there is no succor to me... I committed gravest mistake... Anantacharya started thinking thus when everyone

present there heard a divine voice... it is Lord Himself speaking... Lord consoled Anantacharya and tells everyone present there that *paccha karpooram* should be applied on His chin forever to remind devotees of great bhakthi of Anantacharya...and the crow-bar should be preserved in the temple ...

In accordance with Lord's wish *paccha karpooram* is applied on lord's chin and we can find the crow-bar used by Anantacharya even today in the temple...see Lord's benovelence... He will do anything and everything to come to the rescue of HIS devotees...Oh! Srinivasa! You are the Supreme Lord...Oh! Venkateswara, the Parama Purusha...Oh! Govinda, You are the Para Tatwa... ...Oh! Swamy... Oh! Narayana...Oh! Seshachalavasa, bless us all with Your majestic smile...take us all in Your lap of infinite joy...*Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya...Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-15

ALVARS

Alvars are twelve ardent devotees of Lord who devoted their life to service of the Supreme Lord. *Alvar* means he who is deeply immersed in devotion and love towards God. The four thousand songs in Tamil composed by these twelve Alvars are known as '*Naalayira Divya Prabhandham*'.

An important factor about these alvars is that they come from various strata of society and belong to varied castes. The place or caste of birth is never a hindrance to Lord Srimannarayana's bhakthi. Bhakthi or devotion alone is important and not one's caste or community.

Alvars verses portray *paratatwa*, *atmatatwa* and *madhurabhakthi* aspects. All the alvars are believed to

be the manifestations of one or other *amsa* (*incarnation*) of Lord Sri Maha Vishnu Himself. Poigayalvar is believed to be the manifestation of *panchajanya*, Lord's conch. Thirumalasai Alvar is born of the *amsa* of *sudarsana chakra* of Lord, Nammalvar of *vishvaksena*, commander of Lord's forces, Bhoodatalvar of *kaumodakee* (*mace/club*), Madhura kavi alvar of *vainatheya* (*garuda*), Kulasekhar Alvar of *kausthubha*, necklace of gems. Periyalvar is believed to be the manifestation of *srivatsa*, a mole of Lord's chest. Andal, only woman among twelve alvars, is believed to be of Bhodevi's *amsa*. Thondaradippodi alvar is of *amsa* of Lord's garland. Peyalvar is the *amsa* of Lord's sword *nandaka* and Thirumagai ais of *saranga*, Lord's bow.

Alvars verses are very simple and written in very easy to understand language by one and all. In their verse all alvars praised various qualities of Lord Srimannarayana. One of the alvars *goda devi* (*andal*) wrote wonderful *thiruppavai*. As a child she was discovered by father *Vishnuchitta* (*periyalvar*) in a tulasi garden. She grows to be an ardent devotee of Lord and takes a vow that she will not marry anyone except Sri Maha Vishnu himself.

All the Alvars are great devotees of Lord. They are all blessed ones. Once, Bhakthisara, one of the alvars happens to pass by a group of brahmins reciting Vedas. As he nears them they stop the recitation

thinking that Vedas should not be heard by a person of lower caste... Oh! how foolish they were?... Does caste has anything to do with devotion?... bhakthi and bhakthi alone is enough to get His blessings...on seeing the brahmins' action bhakthisara's face glows with a benign smile...the Brahmin group tries to re-start the recitation after Bhakthisara has crossed them and went a few yards further...to their surprise none of them could recollect where they stopped the recitation...their minds were simply blank...their minds were confused...not even one of them could recollect even a word of the sequence... oh! what happened?... why we are not getting a single word?... they were all astonished... when they looked at the alvar who was a few yards away, they were curious to see him doing a peculiar act... he was holding black grain in his hand... he split the grain into two with his nail and threw it on the ground before the Brahmins... a spark crosses their mind seeing this action of Bhakthisara... the sequence of their vedic recitation flashed in their minds... it goes like this... '*krishananaam vrihinaam nakha nirbhinanaam*'... meaning grains which are black in colour and are split in to two by nails...this verse from *yajurveda* says that rice to be used in an *yagna* should be dark in colour and should be split by fingers only and not by any machines...

In fact it is at this sloka that the Brahmins have stopped the recitation... the alvar has shown the meaning of that sloka to them by his mime action... the Brahmins were speechless and felt very sorry for insulting Bhakthisara and requested him to forgive them... there were many such instances in lives of all alvars reflecting their enormous depth of knowledge of Vedas, Ithihasas and Puranas.

The examples and glorification of Lord's benevolence by alvars in their *pasurams* is extraordinary. In one of his pasurams Vishnuchitta uses a wonderful simlie while seeking God's forgiveness. He says if a spotted deer has one more additional spot than is necessary, it will not change the fact that it is a deer. It will not make any difference to it at all. Similarly, he tells lord ' Oh! Swamy! you are forgiving sins of so many devotees.. one more additional fellow like me is not a burden to you...'what a wonderful way to seek His mercy...

Vishnuchitta's '*pallaandu*' is a very famous bunch of *mangalasangana* verses which are invariably rendered in all Vaishnavite temples. Andal's famous '*thiruppavai*' is read during whole of *dhanurmasa* in thirumala temple during morning suprabhatha seva. In fact thiruppavai is recited in all vaishnavite temples during this month.

The conceptual presentation of Lord Srimannarayana as a spiritual doctor par excellence is adopted in some of the verses of alvars, especially Kulasekhara alvar. In one of the verses he says 'the medicine in the form of divine name of Sri Krishna cures ignorance. It is the medicine which kills the demons of minds (bad thoughts). It is the only medicine which can destroy one's fear and leads to attainment of supreme bliss.

All the alvars works reflect only one thing... with abject surrender to Lord Srimannarayana one gets rid of all worldly miseries and attains mukthi... we should all follow the ways shown by them and get the blessing of Lord of Seven Hills, Srimannarayana... *Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya...Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-16

SRI ANNAMACHARYA

Many devotees have served in several ways Lord of Seven hills through times immemorial. They have all devoted their whole life to Lord's service. Many kings and queens of many dynasties such as Chola, Pallava, Vijayanagara were His ardent devotees. They donated innumerable villages to the temple as well as invaluable jewellery running in to several hundred crores of rupees. Many devotees like Sri Ramanujacharya, Thirumala nambi, Anantacharya, Kuruvarathi nambi, Annamacharya etc. did enormous service to Lord in the form of composing keerthanas on Lord ,spreading Sri Venkata Tatwam etc.. In fact they were all chosen ones by Lord Srimannarayana himself. They took birth on this earth only to complete tasks assigned by the Supreme Lord. As it will run into hundreds and thousands of pages to write about all of them in detail, let's read about one such devotee, *Sri Annamacharya*.

Annamacharya belongs to 15th century. He is born in *tallapaka*, A tiny village in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. He is the earliest musician to have composed songs on Lord Sri Venkateswara. His '*keerthanas*' are very simple in style and can be understood by one and all. Annamayya, as he is fondly called by one and all, is known to be born as *amsa* (incarnation) of *nandaka*, Lord's sword. He devoted whole of his life to the composing and singing kirthans praising Lord Sri Venkateswara and has composed 32,000 songs during his life time. Unfortunately half of them are lost over the years and remaining are preserved carefully by Thirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams.

Born to Narayana Suri and Lakkamamba couple, Annamayya spent all his life in and around Thirupathi. At a tender age of eight he left home and joined a pilgrim party to go to Thirumala. Joining the group and chanting *govinda, govinda* he reached Alipiri after several days, as the terrain was very steep and difficult to climb, he fell unconscious after climbing a few steps. He was thoroughly exhausted. All the others in the pilgrim party continued their journey forward forgetting Annamayya. Anamayya lay down on a rock with thirst and hunger.

The divine mother watched all this... can She allow Her child in such misery?... no, absolutely not... she rushed to annamayya taking the form of an old lady... Supreme Mother Maha Lakshmi woke him up

and gave him food and water. She gave him lord's prasada too and showed him the way to reach Thirumala. After eating the prasada annamayya felt rejuvenated. Everything around him was looking very bright and glowing with greater *tejas*. By the time he knew what was happening, the old lady disappeared... Annamayya realized she is none other than Supreme Mother *Alarmel Manga*, Sri Maha Lakshmi Herself. His joy knew no bounds. He instantly composed a *satakam* (a book of hundred songs) on *Alarmel Manga*.

After a few days Annamayya reached the top of the hill blessed by divine mother. After taking sacred bath in *swamy pushkarini* and praying Lord Sri Varaha Swamy he entered the main temple. He was awestruck by the charming Sri Venkateswara. Instantly he sang a *satakam* on lord.

One day he went around the four mada streets of Thirumala praying Lord Sri Venkateswara and rested on a pial. In those days a Vaishnavite saint by name *Ghana Vishnu* was staying on the hill doing service to Lord. Lord Srinivasa appeared in his dream one night and told him about Annamayya. Lord gave his Sankha and Chakra *mudrikas* to Ghana Vishnu and instructed him to do *mudra dharana* to annamayya. Lord indicated to him the place where Annamayya was staying on hill. Saint Ghana Vishnu wakes up in the morning and goes in search of Annamayya as instructed by Lord in his dream. He finds Annamayya resting on a pial singing *keerthanas* on Lord. He approaches Annamayya and

narrated to him the previous night's dream. Annamayya felt very happy and saluted Ghana Vishnu, the saint. By getting 'pancha sanskaras' from the saint, Annamayya has become *Annamacharya*. Thus Annamacharya got initiated to *Sri Vaishnavism* on the sacred hill itself!

Annamayya stayed for some years on the hill itself serving Lord and singing sankeerthans on Lord everyday. Even today this custom is continued and every day in the morning during suprabhatha seva to Lord, a descendent of tallapaka family sings suprabhatha keerthanas.

After reaching home Annamayya was reluctant to marry thinking it as a hindrance to serving Lord. Then Lord Himself appears in the dream and tells him to marry. Obeying Lord's order Annamayya marries two girls. He went back to Thirumala after marriage and continued his *sankeerthana yagna*. His songs are of 'adhyatmika' and 'sringara' type. His songs on divine love between Lord and his consorts Sridevi and Bhoodevi are simply superb.

In the course of time Annamayya's fame spread to several places. *Salva narasimharaya*, the then ruler of *tanguturu* invites him to his court after hearing about his greatness. Acceding to his request Annamayya reaches his kingdom and sings Lord's keerthanas in the king's *darbar*. The king is moved by his songs and requests him to stay in his kingdom for sometime. Annamayya though initially resistant later agrees to stay.

During his stay he sang wonderful keerthanas on Lord of seven hills. The king too became a staunch devotee of Lord Sri Venkateswara.

One day during *darbar* Annamayya sang a wonderful keerthana glorifying the love of divine couple Srinivasa and Sri Mahalakshmi. Moved by the *madhura bhakthi* in that song, the king requested Annamayya to sing one such song on him too! Annamayya gets infuriated at king's thoughts and tells him that he will sing only on lord and never on ordinary mortals. The king becomes angry and orders that Annamayya be punished severely for disobeying his orders.

Annamayya was hand-cuffed and sent to jail. He was beaten mercilessly in the jail. Annamayya sings a keerthana praising Lord of Seven hills saying he is the only succour for him...the cuffs broke instantly on their own and fell down...the king *salva* knowing this miracle realizes the greatness of Annamayya and request him to pardon him. He bows down and request Annamayya to forgive him and stay in his kingdom forever. Annamayya refuses and says it is time he goes back to Thirumala.

Returning to Thirumala, Annamayya sang melodious keerthanas on Lord. He sang several songs on all the festivals of Thirumala temple. He also wrote a work '*Srinagara Manjari*' on Lord Venkateswara. It reflects the *viraha avastha* of a damsel in love with the Lord and how she finally attains Lord.

Nothing can be more apt than description of Annamacharya's grandson Sri China Thirumala acharya about Annamayya's keerthanas ...'sruthulai, saastramulai, purana kathalai, sugnana saramulai, athi lokagama vidhulai, vidha mantrarthambulai, neethulai, kruthulai, venkatasaila vallabha rathi kreeda rahasyambulai ...'.....meaning 'annamacharya's compositions are scriptural statements, saastras, puranic episodes, consummation of agama statements, repository of meanings of many mantras, glorification of divine love of Lord Sri Venkateswara and his consorts...'

Annamacharya attained mukthi in 1503, leaving behind a remarkable treasure of sankeerthanas of lord of seven hills....his keerthanas reverberate in the hearts of lakhs of lord's devotees everyday...*Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya...Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-17

A DAY IN THIRUMALA TEMPLE

It is said '*nitya kalyanam pachha thoranam*' in telugu meaning daily utsavams and decorations everyday... everyday is a festival day in Thirumala. It is estimated that about 450 festivals take place in an year on thirumala. So how is a day like in the temple? What are the various sevas that go through the day at various times? It will interesting to know such details of Supreme Lord's sevas, which are feast to the eyes devotees.

The temple is usually opened at 2.30 A.M. The first seva of the day is Suprabhatha Seva of Lord. The temple is opened in the presence of temple officials, archakas and *sannidhi golla*. Sannidhi golla is the descendant of a yadava family. When Lord came on to the Thirumala hills it is a yadava boy who saw him first. Lord tells him that the first darsan will always be

to descendant of his family. In keeping with that tradition a yadava devotee goes inside the Ananda Nilayam and has the *pradhama darsan* of Lord Srinivasa. Then archakas enter the sanctum sanctorum and offer arthi to Lord waking Him up. Suprabhatham is sung by archakas standing in the ghanta mandapam. Members of Tallapaka family also sing '*melu kolupu*' songs. After the completion of suprabhatham followed by *mangala saasanam* and *prapatthi*, Lord is again given arathi. Devotees purchasing a ticket of '*suprabhattha seva*' are then allowed to have darsan of Lord. The darsan at this time is called '*Viswa Roopa Darsanam*' of Lord. Any devotee can attend this seva by taking tickets well in advance. The atmosphere in the temple is electrifying during early hours. An aura of divinity sweeps across the temple in those '*brahma muhurtham*' hours of the day.

After the suprabhataha seva, the temple is cleaned which is called '*suddhi*' in temple tradition. The previous days '*nirmalyam*' (*flowers on Lord*) are removed and thrown in to the well called '*pula bavi*' situated in '*Sampangi Pradakshina*' marg of the temple. Preparations for later pujas go on simultaneously with sacred water from *akasa ganga* theertha brought by archakas.

Suprabhatham is followed by abhishekam of *Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi's* idol. This idol of Lord is always kept in the sanctum sanctorum near to *moola moorthi* and is connected to moola murthi with a golden thread. it is

believed that Supreme Lord's divine power passes to Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi's idol through this golden string. Daily abhishekam is performed to this idol whereas only on Friday Mula Murthi in the garbhaalaya is given abhishekam.

Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi's idol is kept back in the sanctum sanctorum after performing abhishekam followed by *naivedyam* and *arathi*. Now '*thomala seva*' of Lord takes place. In this seva, Lord is decorated with fresh flowers brought by archakas. All those colourful flowers look more beautiful by decorating the supreme lord... what is the *punya* of those flowers adoring lord Srimannarayana... million of flowers abound the world... but it is only a select few that go inside *ananda nilayam* to adorn Lord Srinivasa... Oh! How blessed are those flowers!...

Thomala seva is followed by '*koluvu*' in *thiruma mani mantapam* in which previous days hundi offerings are read before Koluvu Srinivasa Murthi's idol. The *panchangam* for that particular day is also read by archakas. Now it is the time for Lord Srinivasa's *sahasranama archana*. Temple archakas recite Lord's sahasranama from *Brahmanda purana*. Archakas offer prayers to His Queens Sridevi and Bhoodevi with tulasi leaves and flowers picked up from lord's sacred feet.

Now it is the time for first bell, the first naivedyam to Lord Srinivasa. Many South Indian Prasad specialities like pulihora, dadhojanam, pongali, appalu,

dodas, sweet pongali etc. are offered to Lord. All these prasads are kept outside *kulasekhara padi*, the golden step of Lord's sanctum sanctorum. The 'nivedana' is done to the recital of Vishnu Gayathri and 'ahamasmi' manthras of *anna suktham*.

Kalyanotsavam takes place everyday around 12.00 noon. It goes on for about one and half hours. Gruhastha can participate in Lord's Kalyanotsavam by paying Rs.1,000. Lord is given another naivedyam in the afternoon, called second bell in the temple tradition.

On every Monday morning 'visesha puja' takes place at about 7.30 A.M. Every Tuesday 'ashta dala pada padmaradhana' is performed in which Lord is worshipped with 108 golden lotus flowers. These golden flowers are gifted to the Lord Srinivasa by a Muslim devotee of Hyderabad in 1984. 'Sahasra kalasibhishekam' is performed to Lord's Utsava Murthis on every Wednesday at about 7.30 A.M. *Thiruppavada seva* takes place on Thursday and abhishekam of Lord's moola murthi is done on Friday. All these are called weekly sevas.

Ekantha seva is the last seva of the day in the night usually at 10.30 P.M. It is performed by keeping Bhoga Srinivasa Murthi's idol in *mukha mantapam*. Descendants of Annamacharya's family sing *keerthanas* while prasadam is offered.

The temple is usually closed at 1.30 A.M. In the early days it used to be closed by 12.30 itself. But with

number of pilgrims increasing year by year nowadays it is being closed around 1.30 and again is opened at 2.30 A.M.

Oh! Swamy, it is our *punya* of several thousand births that we are able to know about all your sevas... all your utsavams... all your pujas... what else gives us more happiness than this?... Oh! Swamy bless us all with your majestic darshan during all these sevas...
Om *Namo Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya... Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-18

SRIVARI PADALU

(Lord's sacred feet)

The easiest way to get Lord Srinivasa's blessings is by praying at His feet. Every devotee visiting Thirumala should visit a place called '*srivari padalu*' (*lord's sacred feet*). It is situated about 2 k.m. from the main temple on ghat section in Narayanagiri. It is the highest tip in Thirumala Hills. One gets a bird's eye view of temple and cottages complexes standing at this place. The wind blows very pleasantly all through the year and the atmosphere is very serene. One should visit Silathoranam, a natural arch of 250 million years old on way to 'Srivaripadalu'. It is believed that Lord stepped first at 'Srivaripadalu' after descending from Sri Vaikuntham and walked through this arch to Ananda Nilayam... oh! what majestic feet?... the feet that relieved the curse of Ahalya...the feet whose *padarakshas* are requested by Bhurtha in *tretayug*...

Let's all pray Lord to grant us the darsan of His sacred feet...*Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya... Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-19

SACRED STEPS

It is believed that this creation started from Thirumala Hills. After the cosmic deluge (pralaya), Vishnu lay supine floating on a banyan leaf as small boy, *vata patra sai*. the waters did not recede for several maha yugas. Then Lord Srimannarayana thought of a new creation with a majestic smile on his lips. At the instance of Srimannarayana Lord Brahma then started creation from this sacred hill.

Everyday thousands of pilgrims climb the hill on foot chanting *edukondala vada govinda ...anadha rakshaka govinda... apathbhandhava govinda... vaddikasulavada govinda...apada mokkalavada govinda...jai balaji...* trekking the hills by barefoot is a great divine experience indeed. some walk to fulfil a vow... Some for the sheer pleasure of walking through nature's most beautiful mountain ranges... nature in it's splendour... it is stated in many puranas that it is only with *punya* of many janmas one gets a thought of

visiting Thirumala... if we are not destined to put our feet on this sacred hill, however best we try, we will not be able to make the trip... when all our previous karmas are over Lord will clear all hurdles and make our journey pleasant giving us His divine darsan... you may be the richest, you may be king, you may be president or a prime minister... but unless you have His permission you can not have His darsan... some hurdle other will make you to postpone the journey in the last minute...

Remember, in Thirumala *it is not the darsan you get... it is the darsan He gives...*

You do not have to be a millionaire or majestic king to get his darsan... a sincere prayer is enough... one should have unshakable faith of Srimannarayana as the only saviour and protector... that only He is sarvarakshaka and salvation for this creation...with an abject surrender to him, you will get instantly blessed and all your miseries will vanish...

It takes about 4-6 hours to reach top of the hills. the distance is about nine miles. The first structure we see on our way is *gali gopuram*. It was constructed by Matli Kumara Ananta Raja of Matli family of Chiefs of Cuddapah district. It is believed that it is he who laid out the steps for the first time till this gali gopuram. The ascent of the first hill is a bit difficult as it has a steep gradient... but you will not feel tired at all while walking up... in fact if you walk once you feel like

walking every time you visit Thirumala... such is the power of attraction the hill...one enjoys every bit of trekking... one forgets all their miseries, all their problems while walking up the hill...the steps are very convenient to climb and you have roof above the walking path all through.

We see several mantapams on our way up the hills. One such mantapam is *ghanta mantapam*, which has an interesting story associated with it. In the olden days there used to be a *ghanta*, a big bell, at this place. The Yadavaraya King who was ruling Chandragiri was an ardent devotee of Lord. He used to take food only after lord's naivedyam. This bell on ghanta mantam used to be rung after Lord's maha naivedyam. Yadavaraya used to take his food only after hearing this bell.

Many medicinal plants grow on the hills... it is believed some of them are brought from *devalokas* (*celestial worlds*)... we find some rare plants on these hills which we do not find anywhere else in this universeas we inhale the pure air sweeping across these trees, we are cured af all illnesses... our body gets rejuvenated with the cosmic energy in the hills...

Many of the trees we find on either sides while trekking are nothing but great sages and saints doing *tapas* for millions of years...they appear as trees for ordinary mortals like us...it is believed that Lord Himself walks along with us in the form of an unknown devotee...it is the experience of many devotees

that once they are tired and sit fully exhausted, an unknown devotee smiles at us ,sitting along side and initiates some discussion... in the course of the discussion our exhaustion disappears and we feel rejuvenated with lot of energy... we start walking again... the unknown devotee simply disappears after walking a few steps with us... He is none other than Lord Srinivasa himself!...

It is believed many gods too take human form and walk the nine mile stretch to have Lord's darsan...they believe that this is the easiest way to please Lord Srinivasa...

Centuries ago Thirumala mountains are full of thick forests...devotees used walk through these forests braving chill and wild animals...it was a difficult terrain with no proper road or steps...it was only as recent as 1940 that concrete steps were constructed and only in 70s that whole path was covered with roof...

When you visit Thirumala next time, try to go by walk and experience the devine joy that reverberates forever... *Om Namō Venkatesaya...Om Namō Srinivasaya... Om Namō Narayanaya...*

Chapter-20

THIRUMALA IN OLDEN DAYS

Everyday about 30-50,000 pilgrims visit Thirumala to have Lord's darsan. On weekends this number goes up to 70,000 and on festival days it is as much as a lakh. For some of the sevas in the temple one has to wait as long as 15 years to get his turn... till a few years ago, the waiting time for most of these sevas is a mere 2-3 weeks... till early 60's about 500-1000 people used to visit thirumala...how the times changed?...none of us can hardly believe that devotees used to walk straight through *mahadwaram*, *main* entrance to have Lord Balaji's darsan in those days.

So how was Thirumala in those days?... it will be very interesting to know how thirumala used to be in those good olden days.... come., let's take a trip to Thirumala about hundred years ago...

Thirumala was a very serene place in those days. All these cottages, shops, canteens etc were not to be seen at all... Thirumala was blooming with wonderful flower gardens around the temple... the temple and *Hathiram Math* were the only structures on the hills. Even temple archakas used stay in kothur village down the hill. They used to climb the hill everyday and offer suprabhatham to lord at 7.00 A.M. and get down the hill by 4.00 P.M. itself as it was very chilly on the hills throught the year. It was very difficult to stay in the nights...added to the cold winds was the fear of wild animals...thirumala was surrounded by thich forests and tigers, lions, bear etc.used to wander the Thirumala streets in the nights...

There was no ghat road and proper steps...pilgrims used to trek the nine miles through difficult terrains reaching the top of the hill after a couple of days.. They used to rest in between at wayside water ponds in the nights...they used to make bon fire to scare the animals...devotees often used to hear roaring of lions in the nights...but by the grace of Lord Sri Balaji, they never harmed the piligrims...British Government built the steps for the first time in 1870...they were laid out with stones and were not symmetrical...but far better than earlier rough terrain...pilgrims were finally happy ...

By 1940 the number of pilgrims went up to 200-300 a day...as there were no canteens, prasadam was their lunch...in fact very tasty prasadams were given in

large quantities in the early years to devotees...children used to play in the temple premises while elders are engrossed in discussions...

It was thought that unless Thirumala develops as a village it will be difficult to provide amenities for the pilgrims. Hathiram Math leased some lands to some locals of Thirupathi and invited them to stay on the hill with their families...slowly couple of families started settling on the hill and the number went up to 200-300 by mid forties... pilgrims used to stay with these people and were given warm reception.

Our famous *laddu* was not heard on those days at all!...only *pulihora*, *vada* and *daddhojanam* used to be given as prasdaam...vada prasadam was costing mere *four annas* (about 25 paise)...the then Madras Government introduced sweet *boondi* in the prasadams which in the later years turned to become LADDU...in the initial days only about 10-20 laddus used to be prepared which went up to 500 over the years...today about one and half lakh laddus are prepared everyday using 4,500 kilograms of basan, 9,000 k.g.s of sugar, 1,080 k.g. of cashew nut,120 kg of elachi, 500 kg of kismis and 5,000 kg of pure ghee!

In the early sixties one could attend lord's *karpoora harathi* by just paying one rupee!...*thomala seva ananthara darsanam* was mere four rupees!...in those days kalyanotsavam was not a daily utsav as it is now... kalyanotsavam of lord used to be performed only

when any visiting v.i.p. specifically asks for it...prasadam in large numbers used to sent to the cottages of *gruhasthas* performing the kalyanotsavam... temple nadaswara musicians used to accompany the prasadam...

The hundi collection used to be between rupees 1,000-2,000 in the early days... today it is between 1-1.5 cr.a day!

The first ghat road was constructed by GANNON & DUNKERLY in 1944 and was opened to public by SIR ARTHUR HOPE, the then Governor of Madras State. Slowly bullock carts and horse carts started moving on this road... all the materials required for making prasadam were transported by these bullock carts... motorized transport was first introduced in early 50s by way of small buses which look like today's matador vans... they were called '*budda bassu*' by locals...initially only one bus with just one trip was running between Thirupathi and Thirumala...slowly the number of trips increased to thrice a day...today the state owned transport runs one bus every ten minutes ...during Brahmotsavams the frequency is much higher with one bus every minute...

The first cottages on the hill were in the form of asbestos roofed sheds...they were called N.M.SHEDS...north mada sheds...thirty sheds were initially constructed in early 50s with the donations from pilgrims...later concrete blocks were constructed for

V.I.P.s...they were called N.M.R.C.C. sheds...the cottages have increased over the years...today we have cottages with most modern facilities...

Oh! Srinivasa!... times have changed... people too have changed a lot... but you are '*nitya*'... *never* changing... ocean of ever flowing charm... whether it is millions of years back or today, you are blessing your devotees with the same benovelence... with the same magnificent grace... Oh! Swamy!.. bless us all... relieve us all from these worldly miseries and take us all in your lap... Om *Namo Venkatesaya*...*Om Namo Srinivasaya*...*Om Namo Narayanaya*...

