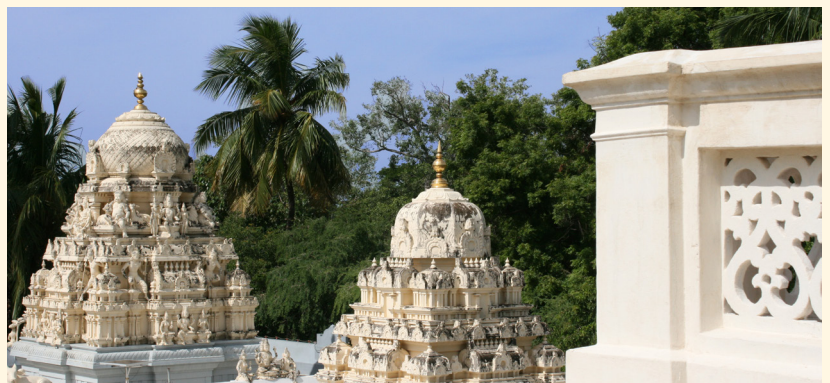


Saranagati

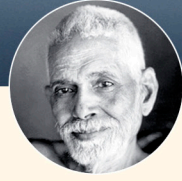


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SRI RAMANASRAMAM
AUGUST 2015



Saranagati



AUGUST 2015
VOL. 9, NO. 8

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

July brought unseasonably warm days making up for the summer that never really came. At the end of the month, however, the Ashram saw a few badly needed rains.

H. C. Khanna's Day was observed on the 23rd, and that of Ganapathi Muni on the 25th July. The month of July closed with Guru Purnima on the 31st.

This issue of *Saranagati* carries the continuation of the years at Virupaksha Cave in the feature series, *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan*. Also in this issue we have the opportunity to hear the reminiscences of Madhavi Ammal, K.K. Nambiar's elder sister, who came to Bhagavan in 1933. Her writing is only now for the first time being translated into English from Malayalam.

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

7th August (Fri) Kunjuswami Day
12th August (Wed) Punarvasu Day
29th August (Sat) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
1st September (Tue) Bhagavan's Advent Day
4th September (Fri) Samvatsara Abhishekam
8th September (Tue) Punarvasu Day
12th September (Sat) Muruganar Day
27th September (Sun) Full Moon Day
6th October (Tue) Punarvasu Day

13th October (Tue) Navaratri Commences
21st October (Wed) Saraswati Puja
22nd October (Thurs) Vijaya Dasami
26th October (Mon) Full Moon
2nd November (Mon) Punarvasu
9th November (Mon) Annamalai Swami Day
11th November (Wed) Deepavali
16th November (Tue) Kartigai Festival Begin
25th November (Thurs) Kartigai Deepam Day





In the Kitchen with Bhagavan

Part VII: Sri Ramana, the Good Cook

In India where *agni* is seen as the link between heaven and earth, the pathway and vehicle that leads from the mundane to the Divine, cooking is regarded as a holy act. Like *yagna*, cooking is sacrificial, transforming raw materiality into prasada and making indigestible food items suitable as life-giving nourishment. The very same *agni* (*paavaka*) in human consciousness transforms mundane knowledge into mystical insights that lead to liberation. The true cook (*paachaka*) is the guru, the one who removes (*ru*) our darkness (*gu*) and leads us to the light of knowledge. Thus the cook, like the *agnihotri* at the *yagna*, is one who mediates two worlds.

When the Brahmana Swami established himself on the Hill, it soon became clear that he was one such mediator. His every action was an offering and the words that began to pour forth from his lips—lips that had long been silent—had the power to compel. Like rays of light, they penetrated every shadow and thrilled the heart of every listener. The knowledge-fire within him glowed so brightly that its effulgence spilt over, at times to an extreme degree, rekindling hopes that samsaric existence could finally be overcome. Was this not what Nayana meant in his *Chatvarimsat* when he dubbed Bhagavan the ‘good cook’?

*Oh! Lord of ascetics, You are like a cook in the services of God. You demolish the egos of human animals, cook them and hand them over to the Supreme Siva as food.*¹

¹ *Chatvarimsat*, v. 31-32. With respect to these verses, Bhagavan once humorously commented: “That means I am a good cook. Nayana has styled me a cook. How strange! Perhaps Arunachaleswara till then was eating human beings uncooked and now he has found in me an expert cook. Nayana means I cook well and tastefully and serve it to the Lord. Good! Now he can eat the food with great relish. A nice cook indeed!” (*Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, Chap 2, “The Good Cook”, p. 130.)





Though these verses of Nayana are allegorical, the truth cannot be doubted: the Brahmana Swami is the very embodiment of the jnamic fire. Did this Swami not appear in the world in order to cook off seekers' defilements and lead them to truth? But more importantly, has not the 'good cook'—fierce and penetrating in word and silent deed—proven to be the fullness of compassion, gentle and tender like a loving mother? See the following.

Feeding the Poor

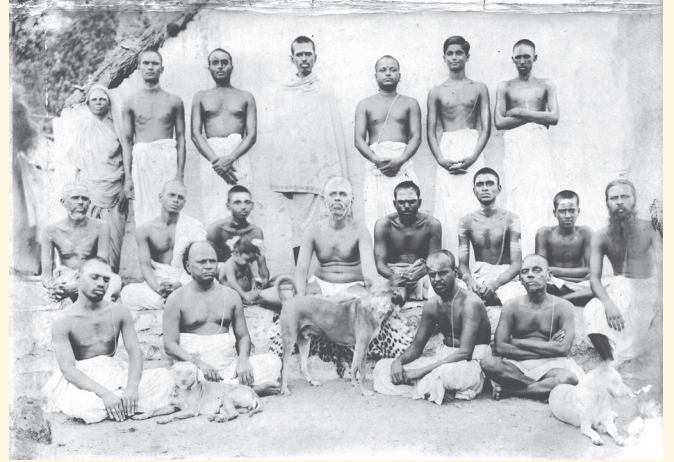
During Virupaksha days hot summers were spent at Mango Tree Cave. In these years before the kitchen was established on the Hill and utensils and cookware were scarce, Bhagavan and inmates sometimes made gruel and shared it with the grass and wood cutters. Women would the Hill to harvest from Arunachala's bounty, labouring with small hand-scythes under an open sky in the full heat of the summer sun. When they came to the cave, the Swami poured out water for them as there was none to be had anywhere else since Mulaipal Thirtham was off-limits to them. "Poor people" he said, "The heat is unbearable. They cannot have food unless they sell their grass cuttings and get some money. They have children at home and must return quickly in order to look after them. What can they do?"

Bhagavan said, "We also gave them food. We would pour water into the rice, take out the gruel, pour it into a pot and add salt. If dry ginger was available I would mix that in also. By the time they came, the gruel would be quite cool. When a tumbler of it was poured into their hands, they drank it like nectar. The taste of that gruel and the happiness of drinking that water, they alone could know."²

The Lost Sheep

But those labouring on the Hill saw the Brahmana Swami's motherly affection extend itself in other ways. Once when Bhagavan and Mudaliar Swami were walking together behind the site of the present-day Skandasramam, they came to a huge rock about fifteen

² *Letters*, 15th June, 1948.



Virupaksha July 1915

feet high which formed a deep crevice. There they found a young girl, a shepherdess, standing above the cleft weeping. "What's wrong, little one?, Bhagavan asked tenderly. "One of my sheep slipped and fell into the crevice and I cannot get him out."

Without the least hesitation, Sri Bhagavan descended the chasm, hoisted the sheep onto his shoulders, scaled the very steep, nearly vertical rock and delivered the animal unharmed into her outstretched arms. Such feats, unthinkable for ordinary persons, were not extraordinary for Bhagavan. He knew what was needed in any situation and with a heart unfettered by fear or doubt, he simply set about doing it.³

The First Jayanti Celebration

But while the good cook took charge of his domain, he didn't feel the need to dictate what went on around him. Rather, like a caring mother, he allowed the children to be themselves as long as there was no harm in their games.

In 1912, Vasudeva Sastri and other devotees at Virupaksha insisted on cooking food and eating it in Bhagavan's presence as a celebration of Bhagavan's Jayanti⁴. Bhagavan tried to dissuade them but they were adamant: 'What harm does it do Swamiji if we cook our food and eat it here? It is for our benefit and so Bhagavan should not object.' Like a devoted mother, the good cook accepted their innocent intentions even if they were not, in his view, optimal for

³ *Ramana Maharshi*, Prof. K. Swaminathan, Chap. IV.

⁴ There were two Jayantis in 1912, according to the lunar calendar, the first on 5th January and the second on 25 December.





spiritual progress. Preparations for the celebration went on as planned and devotees purchased vessels for the event. Afterwards the cooking vessels and utensils were left behind as offerings to Bhagavan, though perhaps to his chagrin. But eventually they would serve in the kitchen at Virupaksha Cave when his mother arrived three years later.

On this first Jayanti, the guru took the opportunity to give a teaching and composed the following two verses:

You who wish to celebrate a birthday, enquire first who was born. One's true birthday is when one enters into the Eternal Being which shines forever without birth or death.

Of all days on one's birthday one should mourn one's fall (into samsara). To celebrate it as a festival is like adorning and glorifying a corpse. To seek one's Self and merge in it is wisdom.⁵

Picnic at Seven Springs

Another day, inmates set out with Bhagavan to climb the Hill, bringing with them all the necessary things for cooking. Palani Swami stayed behind to look after Virupaksha. By the time the party reached Seven Springs, it was quite hot. So they bathed in the springs and then set about to prepare food. But when they took out the rice, dhal, salt, ghee and cooking vessels and arranged a fireplace, they discovered they had omitted to bring the one most important thing of all—the matches. The cave was too far away to go back down to fetch them. Moreover it was very hot by now and everyone was tired and hungry. So they tried to make a fire by striking one piece of flint against

⁵ *Collected Works*, p. 136; *Letters*, 24 Feb, 1947; *Day by Day*, 5-10-46.

another. Others tried to rub pieces of wood together as done in *yagnas* for lighting the sacrificial fire, but to no effect. Bhagavan took the opportunity to recite the second stanza of *Atmabodha*: “Just as you cannot cook unless you have fire, so also you cannot attain liberation unless you have jnana”. He explained its meaning and kept them all in good humour. Meanwhile someone sent word through one of the grass-cutters who was returning home with a head-load of grass. The message reached Palani Swami and he sent up a box of matches through a wood-cutter coming up the Hill to cut wood. They now lit the fire while the good cook took the rice, dhal and vegetables, put them in a single vessel and boiled the whole of it with some salt to make a *kitchadi*, or stew. After food, they took rest before starting for the summit. As they climbed upward, Bhagavan continued to explain the significance of the stanza from *Atmabodha*. On reaching the summit, Bhagavan said:

“You see the amount of trouble we had in getting here. We climbed a little ways, then had to stop in order to place our food items on the fire and transform them into nourishment before climbing further. Preparing food without fire brings no result. Similarly, you may have everything for learning, but without understanding, there cannot be ripening of wisdom. All worldly things must be mixed with the fire of jnana in order for one to attain the highest state.”⁶

(to be continued)

⁶ *Letters*, 30th Sept, 1948.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Purna

D.: How is purna Brahman to be attained? What is the method best suited to a grihasta?

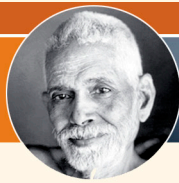
M.: You have already said purna, i.e., perfection. Are you apart from purna? If apart from it, will it be purna? If not apart how does the question arise? The knowledge that Brahman is purna and that you are not apart from the same is the finality. See it and you will find that you are not a grihasta or any limited being.

D.: What are the tattvas?

M.: Knowledge of purna Brahman will elucidate the other matters automatically.

— Talks §395





Favourite Stories of Bhagavan: The Lame Man Who Ascended Arunachala

[These incidents highlight the greatness of Arunachala. When a devotee reading from Arunachala Mahatmyam related the tale of Pangunni, Bhagavan told the story of one cripple named Kuppu Iyer whom he had met during the days at Gurumurtham. One day just a couple of years before Sri Bhagavan had arrived in Tiruvannamalai, Kuppu Swami was moving along the ground on his backside—his customary mode of travel—making his way toward Vettavalam. Suddenly an old man appeared before him and shouted, “Get up and walk. Why do you move about like that on your buttocks?” Kuppu Iyer was beside himself with shock. Involuntarily he rose up and walked about freely. After moving a short distance on his feet, he looked behind him to glimpse the stranger who made him walk but found no one was there. All questioned him as to how he could now walk after a lifetime of being lame. He narrated this same incident. Any inhabitant of the town could bear witness to Kuppu Iyer’s former lameness and

how he regained the use of his legs. (See Talks §464.)

The story from the Arunachala Mahatmyam tells of a similar miracle that occurred to one Pangunni in ancient times.]

Pangunni¹ was both destitute and lame. With legs crippled since birth and no way to provide for his family, he became a burden to his parents. His situation was unbearable as he had to endure humiliation and insult even from his own relatives. One day, unable to endure it any longer, he secretly left home limping away on his crutches. Lacking purpose and direction, he decided to end his life in a remote area on the pradakshina path around Arunachala.

Limping along, his depression and gloom mounted as he searched for a suitable place to make an end of it all. Just then he encountered an ascetic who wore a disinterested and detached look. The hermit passed by without seeming to notice Pangunni. But then suddenly he whirled around, snatched the crutches from Pangunni’s hands and threw them forcefully to the ground, “Why do you need these ornaments?” the sadhu demanded. In this final humiliation, Pangunni lost his temper and lunged at the sadhu. But before he could get his hands on him, the mysterious sadhu vanished from sight. Not willing to let go of the opportunity to vent his frustration, Pangunni ran after him—without crutches! In his anger, Pangunni had forgotten all about his lameness. When he came to his senses, he found himself walking normally, without any aid whatsoever. Delirious with joy, he ran in pradakshina around the Holy Hill, singing the Lord’s praises. Healed in body, mind and spirit, Pangunni returned home where he was received with all affection and reverence by his family.

Pangunni eventually found a place in folklore, a testimony to Lord Arunachala’s boundless compassion.—

¹ Pangu in Sanskrit means ‘lame’.

Announcements: Ashram Youtube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own youtube channel and is regularly posting videos of events including recent discourses for free download. Please visit the channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SriRamanaDevotee>





Coming to Bhagavan: Unpublished Reminiscences of Madhavi Ammal (Part I)

Editor's Introduction

Smt. K. K. Madhavi Amma, elder sister of K. K. Nambiar, came to Bhagavan in 1933 when her husband was posted as Chief Medical Officer at the local government hospital in Tiruvannamalai. Having been religious all her life, when she heard there was a sage in Tiruvannamalai, she knew the circumstances of her arrival had a deeper significance. From her first meeting with Bhagavan, she became a devotee. Her husband, Dr. P. C. Nambiar, however, had never been religiously inclined and even refused to pass through the front gate of the Ashram. As his wife's regular visits were made against his will, he sometimes expressed his disapproval by scattering the fruit, flowers and other offerings she had carefully prepared to take along for Bhagavan. But one day

Bhagavan intervened in a curious way. When Bhagavan suffered an abscessed tooth, the stately doctor was sent for. When the latter arrived, he entered the Hall fully clad in a suit and approached Bhagavan's sofa. Much to the amusement of devotees in the hall, the doctor merely said, "Bhagavan, Vāayai thora". Bhagavan then opened his mouth for the procedure and by this single act, the prodigal doctor's life was forever changed. He now no longer made objections to his wife's visits and even felt that the hand that had touched Bhagavan was now endowed with a special grace to carry out future surgeries. He now visited the Ashram along with his wife, prostrated before Bhagavan and meditated in the hall along with other devotees.

Meanwhile Madhavi's brother, K. K. Nambiar, had also become a devotee. He had Bhagavan's darshan the year prior to his sister. Stationed as Assistant Engineer of roadworks in Salem, from that time on he searched for opportunities to come and see Bhagavan. As destiny would have it, not long after his brother-in-law's posting at Tiruvannamalai, he was transferred to Dharmapuri and his jurisdiction extended to the Chengam frontiers in North Arcot District. These two propitiously coinciding events opened the door to a long life with Bhagavan. Madhavi's brother now found he could regularly come and accompany his sister and brother-in-law to the Ashram.

Madhavi Ammal was born in 1898 of pious parents in Cherukunnu in the present Cannanore District of Kerala. Of a religious and philosophical temperament since her childhood, she later came to author several Malayalam publications on Bhagavan and his teachings as well as translations of Bhagavan's books and her own books of poems and songs. The following reminiscences are culled from the introduction to Sri Ramana Tiruvaimozhi Lekhavali, her Malayalam translation of selections from Suri Nagamma's Letters from Sri Ramanasramam. Published in Sept 1961, this personal account never appeared in English. The following is adapted from a recent manuscript translation by Savitha.

Reminiscences

I still remember that February evening in 1933. My husband had been transferred to Tiruvannamalai General Hospital and I had gone with great anticipation,





like the early dawn before a sunrise, for my first darshan of Arunachala *kshetra*, spreading its sweet fragrance of bhakti over Tiruvannamalai. The lamps were lit in a row in the gopuram, the puja celebrations and chanting of God's name all together produced an inexplicable bliss in me. It was then that I first heard of a Maharshi who, for a long time, had been doing tapas in the caves of Arunachala. I had been longing to get *upadesam* from a satguru. The word 'Maharshi' shot through my heart like lightning. And so I went in search of him.

We parked the car outside the ashram and the driver asked someone, 'We have heard there is a Maharshi here. Where can we find him?' Someone pointed out the hall where he was sitting. Not knowing that when one sees such a great personality one should prostrate before him, I only stood at the door of the hall. Bhagavan sat in padmasana on the sofa, wearing a loin cloth. The moment he saw me, he smiled. The smile came in a way that made it seem as though he was re-establishing an old connection and it produced a divine joy in me. 'May I come in?' I asked politely in Malayalam. 'Oh, yes, come and sit' was the reply in Malayalam. Hearing colloquial Malayalam, so beautifully flowing, from interior Tamil Nadu, surprised me.

I started imagining so many things about Bhagavan and his surroundings. However, after smiling and telling me to come inside, he gave no other sign of recognition but only went back to his earlier state as

though unaware of my arrival. As he had shown such familiarity, I was expecting he would ask some general questions about my background. But his state of intense silence dumbfounded me. After sitting silent for a few minutes, I moved a little closer to him and said, 'My husband is working in the hospital here. He wishes to come and meet Bhagavan'. But Bhagavan only nodded.

Afterwards I started visiting the Ashram regularly. When asking for *upadesa*, Bhagavan used to reply 'Who is the guru? Who is the disciple? Everything is within you. Everything is your creation. There is nothing to be obtained from another. Whatever is gotten from others is of no lasting use. If you want information, there are lots of books available. You may read them.'

I understood from my own direct experience and Bhagavan's past history that except for replies to devotees' questions, Bhagavan never gave mantra *upadesam* or advised anyone to undertake any specific sadhana. Yet the desire to have *upadesam* from him did not leave me. Thus one year passed. An unspeakable sorrow entered my heart. As Bhagavan had said 'camphor catches fire immediately while firewood takes a long time', the daily *upadesa* of Bhagavan's silence alone did not bring me peace. But early in the second year, on March 12, 1934, a Monday, I went to the Ashram as usual, completely unaware of what Bhagavan had in store for me.

(to be continued)

Wordwise: Purna पूर्ण

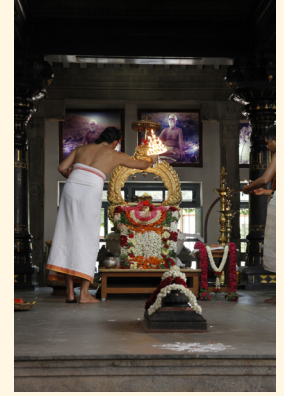
Purna: full, whole, perfect; *purna-jnana*: full Knowledge; *purna-chit*: the fullness of consciousness; *purna-vastu*: vast wholeness, all-Full, the Self. *Purna* is cognate with *plenus* (Lat.) and *pleroma* from *pliris* (Gk.). In v20 of *Upadesa Undhiyar*, Bhagavan Tamilizes *purnam*, rendering it *punram*.

When it was pointed out that the *Isavasyopanishad* says "the world is purna", Bhagavan replied, "To see the world alone and not the *purna* or Self would be something like saying, 'I see the letters, but not the paper,' while it is the existence of the paper that makes the letters possible!" (*Day by Day* 15-3-46) The fullness of Consciousness (*purna-chit*) is none other than the true meaning of the word 'I' [...] It is the all-pervading Reality. (*Devikalottara* v. 28)





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Guru Purnima



Guru Purnima comes with excitement and anticipation, for it is the day when devotees rededicate their lives to Bhagavan's teaching, to remember that we are being called to follow Bhagavan, not merely to adore him. But of course, Guru Purnima is also the day to regard and reverence teachers and guides everywhere. This day, sannyasins begin *chaturmasya*, the annual four-month respite from itinerant life during the rainy months in which they practice solitude. Guru Purnima at Sri Ramanasramam was celebrated the 31st July with mahanyasa puja and guru pada puja at Bhagavan's shrine. Devotees joined the thousands in circumambulating the Hill on this auspicious occasion.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nochor Sri Venkataraman



Nochor Sri Venkataraman's seven days of discourses (in Tamil) in the Library Auditorium began on Sunday morning the 12th July and were devoted to Bhagavan's *Ulladu Naarpadu: Anubandham*. *Ulladu Naarpadu* was completed last year and this year's series was devoted to the first six verses of the *Supplement*. All discourses are available for free download in video format from Ramanasramam's Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SriRamanaDevotee>. [A third set of seven discourses in a series on *Aksharamanamalai* (in English) by Nochor is tentatively scheduled to begin the day after Jayanthi which this year falls on the 27th December.]

Saranagati's Suggestion Box

Please send your comments and suggestions for *Saranagati Magazine*, Sri Ramanasramam's official e-monthly, to:

[<saranagati.suggestionbox@gmail.com>](mailto:saranagati.suggestionbox@gmail.com)

