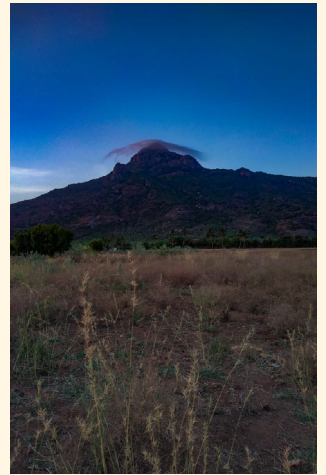
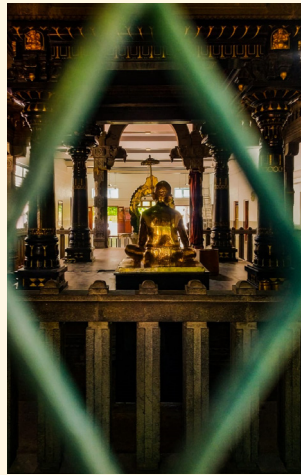


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

AUGUST 2021
VOL. 15, NO. 8



D. Thiyagarajan



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The month of July comes to an end with the Ashram mostly still in lockdown. Since 5th July, the Ashram is open for three hours each day (from 8am-11am). The delta variant is ubiquitous, and the government is keen to maintain current restrictions at least till the end of August. The state government recently disallowed congregating in major 'Amman' and 'Murugan' temples from 1-3 August for Aadi Krithigai in view of rising case counts. Such measures are a skilful strategy designed to target group risk behaviours while allowing the economy to reboot after extended lock downs.

In this issue, we continue the life story of Dr T.N. Krishnaswami whose photos of Bhagavan are among the best anywhere (p. 3). Related themes appear in the obituary of Dr TNK's nephew, T.S. Nagarajan who passed away in May (p. 11).

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 Ashram Events

7th August (Fri) Punarvasu/Kunju Swami Day
21st August (Sat) Full Moon
1st September (Weds) Bhagavan's Advent Day
3rd September (Fri) Punarvasu
20th September (Mon) Full Moon
30th September (Thur) Punarvasu

7th October (Thurs) Navaratri Commences
14th October (Tues) Sarasvati Puja
15th October (Fri) Vijayadasami
19th October (Tues) Full Moon
28th October (Weds) Punarvasu
4th November (Thurs) Deepavalli





IN PROFILE

Dr T. N. Krishnaswami (Part II)

In the early years, TNK's approach to Bhagavan had been quite different from that of other devotees as he was mainly concerned with taking photographs of Bhagavan. During his visits, his attention was rivetted on Bhagavan's form rather than his words or teachings. If Bhagavan had not been concerned about his body, TNK studied the master's physical form with great interest and looked for every detail and nuance in Bhagavan's behaviour, endeavouring to capture it all on film.

Until then, TNK had not been focused on God or spirituality, and yet, he was not an atheist either rather only neutral with respect to religious life¹.

¹ TNK's eldest son, T.K. Natarajan, in video interview, VC.91/DV.78.

Something kept drawing him back. Overtly, the short trips from Madras were made purely out of photographic interest but, over time, mornings up on the Hill or at other sites around the Ashram became dear to him:

In the few hours I spent with the Maharshi, I felt charged with an inexplicable peace and contentment and I always returned home elated. My short walks with him gave me the rare opportunity of listening and taking part in the conversations. His person was seen and felt by me and I felt drawn and attracted to him. It gave me immense pleasure to take his pictures. He was more important to me than his teaching—every little movement, every one of his acts and gestures, was highly valued by me and they always carried some divine fragrance. Simply to watch him, no matter what he was doing, was gratifying. I was drawn to him like a baby to its mother.²

Dr TNK was always behind the camera and therefore rarely appeared in any of his frames. But one time he asked Bhagavan's attendant to snap the photo.

For his photos, he kept the 'medium format 2.25x2.25-inch negatives'³ shot with his Rolleiflex double-reflex camera⁴. When early on he came at the request of the Ashram management to take a group photo, he also staged a photo of Bhagavan alone:

I arranged the group, erected my camera and took a few pictures. Then Bhagavan posed for me in the conventional padmasana, sitting almost statue-like, with a clean-shaven head.⁵

² 'How I Came to the Maharshi', *The Mountain Path*, July 1968.

³ See John Maynard's, 'The Archives of Sri Ramanasramam' *The Mountain Path*, April 2010, p. 92.

⁴ The family of Dr T. N. Krishnaswami presented the Ashram archives with his Rolleiflex camera to preserve for posterity.

⁵ 'How I Came to the Maharshi', *The Mountain Path*, July 1968.



Dr TNK kneeling with Bhagavan's attendant behind the camera (WP 08)





Dr TNK stealthily trained his lens on Bhagavan's feet (OOH 005)

TNK sometimes enlarged his photos and printed them on canvas in order to paint over them in oils or in water colour.⁶ One example of this is the iconic painting that sits on Bhagavan's sofa in the Old Hall. Though TNK was an avid painter and water-colourist, it was another painter, Raju & Sons, who produced this famous painting.

Bhagavan's Lotus Feet

Before taking a photo of Bhagavan, TNK always asked Bhagavan's permission. Or at least, almost always. There was one series of photos for which he confessed to have quietly and stealthily photographed without first raising the issue with Bhagavan. These are images taken outside of the Old Hall next to the well where Bhagavan is reclining on his sofa. Some appear to be out of focus until one realises that the photographer had not trained his lens on Bhagavan's face but on his feet. TNK had requested Bhagavan's attendant to put a few flowers at His feet and as if prostrating before Bhagavan, he arranged the camera so that he could take the photo. Nonetheless, TNK's efforts at concealing his true intentions were not lost on Bhagavan who seemed to have intuited what he had in mind from the beginning. However, he made no objection. The best of the shots became important for TNK. He printed

⁶ 'Introducing', *The Mountain Path*, January 1965, p. 63.

it, cut out the image of Bhagavan's feet and painted a lotus blossom underneath them, a print which adorned Dr TNK's office during the entirety of his medical career. Beyond that, the image served as the Ashram logo for many years and was included on the title pages of early Ashram publications⁷.

Visits to the Ashram

Unlike other devotees, TNK never went for *giri pradakshina*, nor did he go for darshan to Arunachaleswar Temple in town. He neither took much interest in chanting, recitation, or study of the teaching, but instead occupied himself with Bhagavan alone:

*Sometimes I used to wonder if it was not ridiculous of me to pay so much attention to photography when Bhagavan's [principal] teaching was 'I am not the body.' Was I not chasing the shadow and even trying to perpetuate it? Somehow so long as I was [in the presence of] the Maharshi, his teaching did not assume any importance to me.*⁸

Although it was photographing Bhagavan that had drawn him to the Master, he slowly became part of life in the Ashram and witnessed the many visitors, some of whom came in great distress.

Once a lady devotee who had strong faith in Bhagavan brought the corpse of her only child right into the darshan hall. Crying and lamenting, she said, "My son is dead. I pray and beseech you to grant him life."

The Maharshi sat silent for a while, as was his custom,

⁷ Raghu Toppur, DR TNK's eldest grand son, in talk at the Bay Area Satsang, 19th May 2018.

⁸ 'How I Came to the Maharshi', *The Mountain Path*, July 1968.



The Ashram logo for many years came from Dr TNK's cut-out of Bhagavan's feet (OOH 005 above left) which he then set in a painting with a lotus flower





and then gently said, 'Please remove [your son] to a nearby cottage and let us see what happens in the morning.'

Nothing happened, and the following morning the boy remained inert. But in the meantime, something had transpired in the hearts of the relatives, and the mother finally acceded to family wishes that the corpse be cremated. The Maharshi subsequently commented: 'Even an incarnate God cannot raise all the dead. He has no individual will so he cannot decide to perform a miracle. If miracles happened in his ambience, he witnessed them; that was all.'⁹

Another Visit

On one visit in the 1930's Dr TNK asked a friend to accompany him to Tiruvannamalai. The invitation was accepted spontaneously, so much so that the friend did not even go home to put on his shirt but set off immediately with Dr TNK in his dhoti and upper cloth with no more than three rupees in his purse. They travelled up to Katpadi by train and took a bus to Vellore where they got a bus for Tiruvannamalai. In Vellore, the friend wanted to take something to Bhagavan. On the roadside they saw a woman selling *kovai kai*. He bought the lot for a few annas. Since he had no luggage with him, he tied the vegetables up in one end of his upper cloth.

The two reached Tiruvannamalai that evening and the vegetable bundle was placed before Bhagavan as they paid their respects. When the bundle was opened, Sri Bhagavan saw the vegetables and said that if the *kovai kai* was cooked with brinjals, they would be very tasty. The next morning a devotee arriving from Madras via Villupuram brought brinjals, as if commanded by Bhagavan himself. The curry was cooked that morning and everyone relished the dish.¹⁰

The Boy and the Stick

TNK often brought one or both of his sons with him. In the New Hall TNK's youngest son would recite rhymes before Bhagavan. Once, the boy noticed a devotee who brought a basket full of mangoes to Bhagavan. Bhagavan immediately began to distribute them to the monkeys.

⁹ 'T.N. Krishnaswami', *Face to Face*, p. 257.

¹⁰ 'Incidents Connected with the Life of Sri Bhagavan', M. V. Krishnan, *The Mountain Path*, Oct 1979, p. 223.

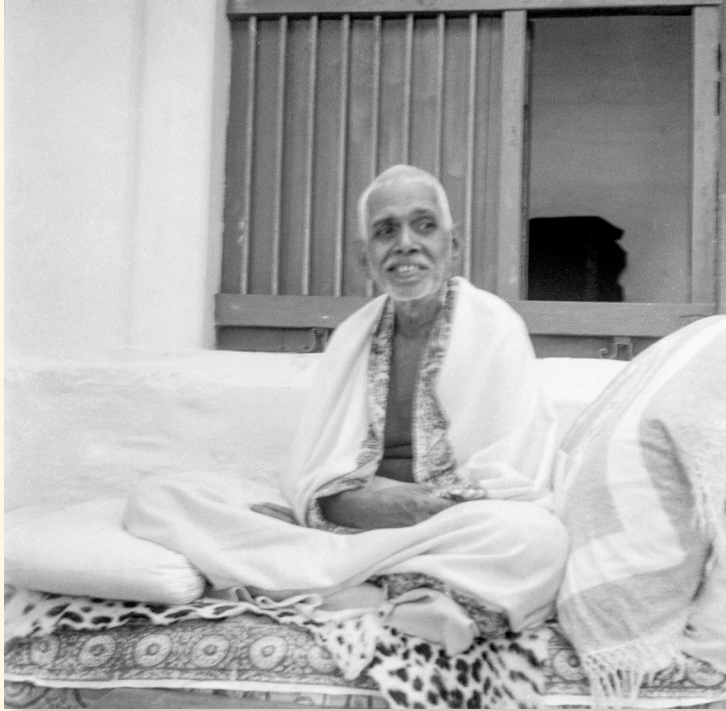
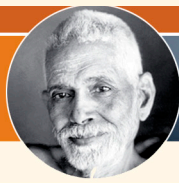


TNK's first photo of Bhagavan (ASR 36) taken in early 1930s while still a medical student

The devotee felt bad because Bhagavan did not even take one of the mangoes for himself. Bhagavan told him that once a gift is made, the receiver should be free to do with it as he wishes. Bhagavan assured the donor that his gift had been well-received and that he need not feel sorry.

Another time, this same boy awaited his father. It was a time following one of Bhagavan's surgeries and Dr TNK was dressing the wound inside the dispensary. Meanwhile the boy was playing outside near the dining hall. When Bhagavan and Dr TNK emerged from the dispensary, Bhagavan jokingly said, '*Kutti* [little] Doctor is waiting.' At that time, the boy paid no attention, but later, when he completed his studies in medicine and became a doctor himself, the words of Bhagavan hailing him as a doctor in the making seemed to have been a blessing for him to one day fulfil his call to the medical profession.





Feast at Skandasramam

TNK carefully observed Bhagavan in various situations within and around the Ashram and took photographs to record these events. He knew Bhagavan was fond of children and took a photograph of his son carrying Bhagavan's walking stick.

In November 1945, Bhagavan and devotees spent a memorable day at Skandasramam. Nagamma eloquently describes the scene:

Sadhakas and sannyasins, lawyers and doctors, engineers and artists, newspaper correspondents and poets, songsters and a good many others arrived from Madras, Pondicherry and Villupuram. The young and old, the men and women and all without distinction of high and low, squatted on the ground around Bhagavan looking at him with a fixed gaze. While Arunagiri abounding in mineral wealth served as the precious jewelled throne, the clouds adorning the sky served the purpose of Sveta Chatram (the white umbrella) and the tree grove with innumerable branches acted as vensamarams (fans used in deity worship). Sri Bhagavan shone in his glory as an emperor crowned, while Prakritikanta (Nature personified) waved lights to him with its agreeable rays of the sun.¹¹

TNK took about 35 photos at Skandasramam that day.

¹¹ Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, 26 November 1945.

Photographic Non-duality

Following his surgeries, Bhagavan had the habit of entertaining his medical attendants with jokes alternating with profound spiritual commentary. Dr TNK's friend, Dr Shankar Rao, had been attending on Bhagavan from the start of his illness.





Bhagavan and Dr TNK on the Hill (GRO 003)



Bhagavan and Dr TNK's youngest son, Ramanakumar (WP 039)

On various occasions, he and Dr TNK marvelled at Bhagavan's capacity to endure physical pain, not least of all, having undergone major surgery without general anaesthesia. One evening, the two doctors went to attend on Bhagavan and while Dr Rao was dressing the wound, Bhagavan commented on TNK's photographs and gave a profound spiritual discourse using photographic processing and development as a teaching metaphor:

When taking a picture, the silver salts are coated over a film in the dark. And when the film is exposed in the camera, you get an impression caused by light outside. But if the film is exposed to light before you put it in the camera, there can be no impression on it. So is it with our jiva. When it is still in darkness, an impression can be made on it by the little light that streaks in. But when the light of knowledge has already flooded it, there is no impression of external objects to be obtained. ¹² —

(to be continued)

12 *Call Divine*, vol 9, Sept. 1960, p.19, Dr Shankar Rao, D.M.O.

Covid Vaccines



A recent ICMR study found that two-thirds of India's population has Covid antibodies. If these results prove accurate, India may be inching toward herd immunity. The government is, however, not taking any chances in this era of the delta variant and is extending present Covid guidelines up until 31st August. With current vaccination rates at around 40 lakhs persons each day, India hopes to reach 90 lakhs jabs per day to fully vaccinate 94 crore citizens by the end of 2021. Thus far, 45 crore doses have been given. The seven-day average of new doses per day reached an all-time high of 63.9 lakhs on 26th June. The health ministry says that the supply for July was 13.5 crore doses per month or a daily average of 45 lakhs per day, a production ceiling for the time being. Ramanasramam continues to provide vaccines for devotees while most staff members who want the vaccine have been vaccinated.

[For vaccine inquiries, contact the Ashram dispensary at: <srmdispensary@gmail.com> or phone: 91-9600325724]. —





From Our Archives (EA 030)

This image of Mother's Shrine, and to its left, Pali Tirtham, is from the early 1920s. The Ashram *iluppai* is in the foreground (far left). Moving from left to right we see first the mandapam across the road (still standing today) and just to the right of it, Manakkula Vinayaka Kovil. To its right, we find the Pali Bodhi as a young tree. Midpoint between Mother's Shrine and the Pali Bodhi Tree is a bullock cart passing westward on the front road.

Someone can be seen entering the thatched shrine but it is not Bhagavan. T.N. Venkataraman declared with great certainty (perhaps having been present that day as a youngster) that the person squatting beneath the *iluppai* in the foreground is Bhagavan, with his attendant standing nearby. Such notation as appears at the bottom of this photo appears on all three photos we have from this source. —

Announcement: Ashram YouTube Channel

To access Ashram videos, go to: <<https://www.youtube.com/c/SriRamanasramam/videos>>

To subscribe, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam?sub_confirmation=1>





The Life of Manikkavachakar

In the Pandiya Kingdom ruled by Arimardhana Pandya, near the capital Madurai, is the town of Tiruvadhavur where Manikkavachakar was born. He was commonly called 'Vadhavurar' after the town of his birth. By the age of sixteen, he had mastered the scriptures and stood out by virtue of his devotion to the Lord. The Pandiya King Arimardhanan saw his talent and made him the chief minister of his court, giving him the title *Thennavan Birumarayan*. As chief minister, he guided the governance in the righteous path to the prosperity of the land, people, and their minds. Nevertheless, he was seeking a guide who could show him the path to the Truth.

Meeting the Guru

When the King heard that thoroughbred horses were for sale on the coast of the Choza Kingdom, he sent the chief minister Vadhavurar with a large sum of money to purchase them for the King's cavalry. On the way Vadhavurar reached Tirupperunthurai where he heard in a grove the sweet chanting, 'Hara, Hara'. He forgot himself in spiritual bliss and then glimpsed the Lord sitting in the form of a Saivite sage under the *kurunda* tree teaching his pupils. Vadhavur was overwhelmed at the sight of the guru, the very guru he had been yearning for. He surrendered himself at the guru's feet and pleaded with him to accept him as a disciple. In response, Vadhavurar got the immense wealth of supreme knowledge and burst into song,

singing the first verse of *Tiruvachakam*. When the guru heard the verses, he blessed Vadhavurar with the name 'Manikkavachakar' (*vachakar* = 'verses composed of'; *manikkam* = 'a red ruby-like gem', hence, 'verses as beautiful as precious rubies'). The guru instructed Manikkavachakar to renovate the temple. When Manikkavachakar awoke from his trance, he saw that the guru and disciples had all vanished.

With the money to be used for purchasing horses destined to fight, kill, and die in battle, he renovated a temple that would soothe the minds of the seekers. Days passed and the King sent soldiers to find out what happened. Getting the news, the King ordered Vadhavurar, now called Manikkavachakar, to bring the horses immediately. Manikkavachakar prayed to the Lord who assured him that He would bring the horses on *avani mulam* day. The prime minister told the King about the arrival of the horses and the King was relieved.

Persevering in Faith

However, the Lord wanted to cultivate patience and perseverance in his disciple and did not provide the horses. The King was furious and arrested the chief minister. Manikkavachakar appealed to the Lord singing verses. Lord Somasundara Murthi caused the jackals of the forest to turn into horses, and Somasundara Murthi took the form of the head horseman and brought the horses to the King. When He took leave, He said that He had done his duty and would not be responsible for what might happen next. That same night, the horses reverted into their former jackal forms and wreaked havoc in the King's stables, killing a number of the royal steeds. The King ordered his men to torture Manikkavachakar



Manikkavachakar Mutt where the saint expounded the verses of *Tiruvachakam*





by making him stand on the hot sand of the Vaigai riverbed under the weight of a large stone.

The Play of the Lord

Then the Lord responded by flooding the River Vaigai to relieve his beloved devotee. When the floodwaters entered the streets of the capital, the King ordered the citizens to pitch in and help restrain the floodwaters by barricading the river banks with sandbags and stones. The Lord appeared in the form of a labourer to assist a poor elderly lady named Vandhi to save her from punishment for not undertaking the mandatory work order. But would the Lord's play end here? Instead of assisting in fortifying the banks of the river, he spoiled work already done and then laid down to take a nap. The King appeared and beat the labourer with a stick. But with each blow, terrific pain was felt by all creation, human and animal, including the King himself. Simultaneously, the flooding stopped, and the Lord vanished. The King then understood he had been tricked by the Lord and released Manikkavachakar from prison, begging the Saint's forgiveness. The guileless Vadhavurar forgave the King and resigned as chief minister.

On Pilgrimage

Manikkavachakar then left on pilgrimage for Tirupperunthurai, Uththara, Kosamangai, Tiruvarur, Tiruvidaimarudhur and Tiruvannamalai. Finally, he reached Chidambaram and sang hymns to the Lord there.

Meanwhile, a Sri Lankan Buddhist King and his daughter, who was unable to speak, arrived with scholars from Sri Lanka to challenge the Dikshitar in debate. The Dikshitar were worried about defending the Lord. At that time, Lord Siva appeared in Manikkavachakar's dream and asked him to debate the Buddhists. The head priest of the temple also had a dream about Manikkavachakar defending the Lord in debate. Through Manikkavachakar's intercession, the Lord decreed that the mute girl be able to speak, and she sang the Greatness the Lord while the opposing debaters were struck dumb, completely unable to utter a single word. Thus, the victory was Manikkavachakar's.

The Ceylon King was satisfied and thus converted to Saivism again and Manikkavachakar was greatly renowned.



Manikkavachakar Mutt, Chidambaram

Manikkavachakar retired to his dwelling. The Lord who wanted Manikkavachakar's precious verses to be available to the whole world took the form of an old Brahmin and came to see him. He politely beseeched the Saint to sing his verses so that he could note down the complete *Tiruvachakam* (as well as the *Tirukkavaiyar*). The Brahmin noted them all in clear handwriting on palm leaves and affixed his seal: "As Manikkavachakar told it, the Lord of Chidambaram wrote it". He then left the script on the Panchakshara steps of the temple.

Merging with Lord Siva

The following day, the priests of Tillai were surprised to discover the verses on the temple steps with the Lord's signature. They rushed to Manikkavachakar, saluted him and asked about the meaning of the compositions. Manikkavachakar took them to the golden hall of the Lord and gesturing to Lord Nataraja, said, 'He is the meaning of these verses!'

He then immersed himself in the Supreme Luminance and became One in Lord Siva. —

According to Bhagavan, when Manikkavachakar attained *mukthi*, his body dissolved in blinding light without leaving a corpse behind: 'Approaching and approaching, getting worn into an atom, and finally merging with Him.'

[On the 12th of July 2021, a handful of devotees gathered in the Ashram's New Hall to sing Tiruvachakam, memorialising its transcription on this day. The following day, the 13th, marked Manikkavachakar's merging with the Lord. Some days later, a few devotees made a pilgrimage to the Manikkavachakar Mutt, Chidambaram, and took the photos of the Mutt seen above.]





Obituary: Sri T.S. Nagarajan (1927 - 2021)



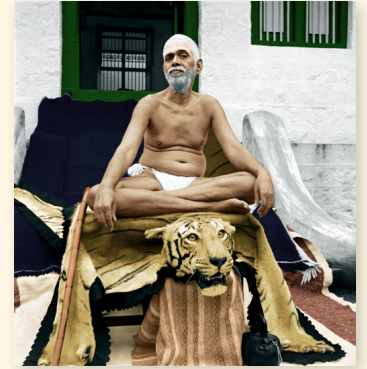
Born 4th August 1927, Sri T.S. Nagarajan first came to the Ashram in 1938 with his uncle, TNK. He recalls the journey to attend Bhagavan's Jayanti: 'With some difficulty I got myself included in the group. For me it was a great excursion. We travelled overnight by 3rd class in great comfort. The next morning, travelling by *jutka* to the Ashram, we had a full and magnificent view of Arunachala, resplendent in the background. The whole atmosphere reminded me very much of a previous visit to Tirupati. In the meditation hall there was quite a crowd and Bhagavan occupied centre stage, reclining on his couch. I noticed his head was always shaking and was told that it was due to the hardships to his body in the underground cellar of the Tiruvannamalai temple. The whole place was bristling with activity silently presided over by Bhagavan. He always seemed to have a faraway look.'

On another visit, while in the kitchen, Nagarajan sampled food freshly ground in the idly grinder given directly from Bhagavan's hand. In recalling his boyhood visits, he remembered TNK's photography: 'My uncle had already acquired a reputation as a good photographer, more or less acknowledged as the official photographer at Ramanasramam. Armed with a Rolleiflex camera he would click away at the Ashram. Bhagavan enjoyed these sessions and graciously cooperated. On one visit, my uncle brought with him an enlarged colour photo of Bhagavan in the *padmasana* pose and put it up. This is a popular photo next only to the Welling Bust of Bhagavan. The portrait fascinated me. I would stare at it for hours, particularly at the tiger head. Its snarl and ferocious teeth had me transfixed.'

Nagarajan went on to become one of India's top corporate leaders as Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Brooke Bond India Limited and authored books on marketing. He was also known as the one who introduced instant coffee to India. He developed ready-made mixes for South Indian delicacies like Rasam and Bisi Bele Bath. Though he was on the advisory board of several companies following retirement, his later life centred on spiritual matters.

In the late 1970s, Nagarajan volunteered to raise funds for the publication of Bhagavan's Centenary Souvenir. M.C. Subramanian gave him a number of unpublished manuscripts of Maurice Frydman's English translations of Challam's interviews with the Ashram's widow cooks which were subsequently released.

Sri Nagarajan passed away peacefully in Bengaluru on Friday, 14th May at the age of 94. His wife of more than 70 years, Sussheela, passed away six days later. The couple is survived by their two daughters, Rupa and Rita. —



Events in Sri Ramanasramam: H. C. Khanna Day



Family members normally come each year for their father's aradhana day observed at his tomb in Sri Ramanasramam next to Major Chadwick's cottage. Owing to COVID restrictions this year, however, they were unable to be present. Ashram devotees gathered at the site on Friday morning the 23rd July and chanted *Aksharamanamalai*, followed by puja and the distribution of prasad. —

