

Saranagathi



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In this Issue

Dear Devotee,

As we offer this issue of Saranagathi at Sri Bhagavan's Lotus Feet we pray that it may lead to 'satsang' and help in one's 'inner quest'.

We are starting a new 'series' and want to introduce various 'teams' within Sri Ramanasramam that enable the proper functioning of the ashram. We have tried to give a historical-to-current-day perspective.

First in this series is the 'Ashram Kitchen'.

The 'ashram kitchen' was started by Mother Alagammal at Skandasramam. Sri Bhagavan Himself led, guided and participated in the preparation and serving of food. Devotees have experienced His grace in this way and continue to do so.

This issue of Saranagathi also features two other reports from Sri Ramanasramam: 'Annamalai Swami Day' and 'Bookstall Expansion'.

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Please lookout for recent 'updates' to our website: [old devotees' interviews](#) of their experiences of His Presence and the [Bookstall](#) page.

We look forward to hearing from you, about your satsangs and experiences. Please send your emails to saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org.

Yours in Sri Bhagavan,

Editorial Team.

The Essence of Instruction

*Better than singing hymns of praise
is repeating the (Lord's) name;
better than (repetition of the name)
out loud is to do so softly;
but best of all is mental repetition or
dhyana (meditation).*

- Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 6).

Ashram Kitchen

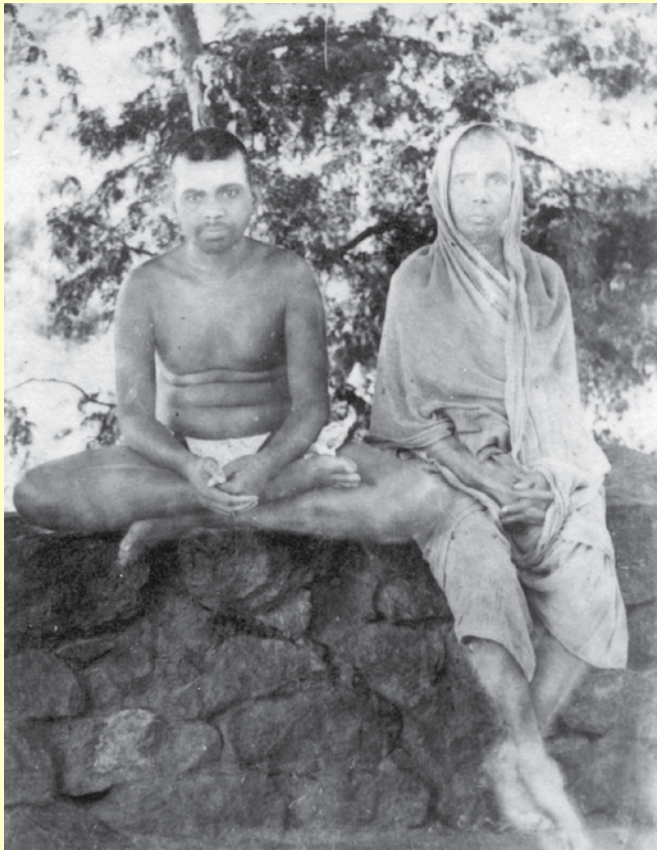
Sri Bhagavan once reading from a newspaper article in the Old Hall said, "It is written here that in Ramanasramam there are two fires burning." The first being Sri Bhagavan and His Teachings and the other, 'the fire' in the kitchen which feeds devotees. Here's a write-up on the history and development of the Ashram Kitchen.

The Background

Right from the time that Sri Bhagavan came out of Patala Linga, food was being offered to him, perhaps scantily, but on a regular basis. Sometime later, the sacred duty of offering food to him daily was taken up voluntarily and willingly by devout lady devotees like Keerai Patti, Desur Amma, Echamma and Mudaliar Patti. For Echamma and Mudaliar Patti not a day passed by without their sending food to Sri Bhagavan. Even on the last day of their earthly life, they closed their eyes only after hearing others announce: "Food has been sent to Sri Bhagavan."

Early Beginning

When Sri Bhagavan moved to Skandasramam in 1917, his Mother Alagammal too came with him. In spite of Sri Bhagavan's remonstrations she daily cooked



Sri Bhagavan and His Mother at Skandasramam

food for herself, her sons and visitors. The practice of cooking food at the Ashram which began then continues up to this day.

After Mother attained salvation her samadhi was set up at the foot hills of Arunachala, near Pali Thirtham. It was found difficult to return every day to Skandasramam soon after the noon puja to the samadhi. Rice, dhal, etc., were carried downhill so that those who did the puja could cook and eat there itself and return to Skandasramam in the evening. A small thatched hut was also put up near the samadhi to be used as a kitchen. Dhandapaniswami and Chinnaswami started staying there permanently. Chinnaswami and Dhandapaniswami used to invite devotees from Skandasramam to partake of their cooking. Bhagavan would daily visit Mother's samadhi either in the morning or in the evening. One day Chinnaswami said to Kunjuswami, "Please come down in the evening itself. I will prepare some dosas tomorrow and you can take them to Bhagavan and others." He agreed. Kunjuswami asked Ramakrishnaswami to look after Bhagavan and came down to Mother's samadhi. Early in the morning, when Kunjuswami was washing the dishes in the stream near Mother's samadhi, he suddenly heard a voice: "Any food for an athithi (a guest)?" Startled, he looked up and was thrilled to see Sri Bhagavan standing with a towel wrapped round his head, a shawl round his torso and a stick in his hand. It was a rare darshan.

In the meantime, Chinnaswami and Dhandapaniswami came and were overjoyed to see Bhagavan there. They requested him to eat dosas but he refused at first. At their repeated requests, he agreed. He brushed his teeth with a neem twig which Kunjuswami gave him and washed his face in the stream. They had with them the usual goat's milk also and so Sri Bhagavan ate some dosas and drank coffee. Looking at Kunjuswami, Bhagavan said, "Everyone comes over here because of the tasty food they get here,"



Old Dining Hall Construction

and laughed heartily. This was the beginning of the present Sri Ramanasramam which grew around Mother's samadhi. Only a very few devotees stayed at the Ashram on a permanent basis. During the early days several lady devotees started serving in the Ashram kitchen one after another. Santhammal of Ramanathapuram, Tenamma from Thirumangalam, Lokammal from Pattankuruchi, Sampoonammal from Vathirairuppu, Subbulakshamma from Nellore and Sankaramma from Sivagangai were a few who had

thus surrendered completely to Sri Bhagavan and dedicatedly served in the Ashram kitchen. Lakshmi Ammal of Tiruchuzhi was also of great help in the kitchen whenever she visited the Ashram.

During their tenure, these lady-cooks were ably assisted by Polur Srinivasa Iyer, Kadalur Madhava Rao, Natesa Iyer and a few other male devotees.

Before the present huge dining hall and kitchen were built, all the above, during different periods, served in the kitchen and attended to food being served to Sri Bhagavan and the devotees. After the completion of the present "Pakasalai" (kitchen) in 1938, Ranga Rao an efficient cook, knowledgeable in traditional Indian medicine and in general an all-rounder, managed the kitchen till Sri Bhagavan's Maha Samadhi in 1950. His services were much appreciated by all, including Sri Bhagavan. Like the rest of the cooks, he too did this service as a labour of love and with total dedication to Sri Bhagavan. All of them experienced the presence and grace of the Guru, during every moment of their service!

In 1938, a Branch Post Office was installed inside the Ashram premises. From its inception Raja Subramania



Bhagavan Sitting on parapet wall with Alamelu Athai standing to His right.

Iyer was its Post Master. He was very popular among the devotees who addressed him with fond affection as 'Raja Iyer'. In addition to serving as the Post Master he was actively assisting in the kitchen, every day, by making 'iddlis' for breakfast. He would get ready very early in the morning and complete making iddlis, whatever quantity was required for that day, before 6 a.m. The taste, texture and tenderness of the iddlis made by Raja Iyer received the appreciation of one and all! They were adored as 'Ramanasramam iddlis'! When the Ashram activities expanded, as more and more devotees started flocking to the Ashram to bask in the Supreme Spiritual Presence of Sri Bhagavan, it became necessary to construct a Store Room to preserve the food ingredients. Kumara Swami served as the Store Keeper with great diligence, efficiency and thrift. He was also well known for making excellent flower garlands.

Today

At present, Sri Rajamani, is in charge of the Ashram Store Room. He is being ably assisted in that arduous task by Duraiswami, Selvaraj, Jayendra Baba and others. Daily hundreds of visiting devotees are being sumptuously fed at the Dining Hall.

The volume of work involved in gathering various ingredients for food preparation, their preservation and diligent distribution is enormous. In addition, Sri Rajamani does the onerous service of disbursing the wages for daily labourers. Daily requirement of vegetables and fruits are purchased from the market every morning and bulk quantities of rice, pulses, grain and provisions are purchased from the wholesale market at Chennai or Vellore.

Matching the increasing demands of serving food for more and more Ramana-bhaktas, an extension of the existing "Pakasalai" was constructed in 1997.

This spacious additional Dining Hall is an essential necessity.

In the Ashram kitchen, the important work of cooking is entrusted to Head cook Gopal and his dedicated team consisting of Balasubramanian, Sundaram, Sridhar, Ravi and Shankar. It should be recorded here



Store Staff

Left to right: Jayachandra Baba, Duraiswami, Selvaraj

with joy that the visiting guest-devotees as well as some residents of Ramana Nagar daily assist in the kitchen by cutting vegetables and other essential activities like cleaning vessels etc.

The daily activities of the Ashram commences at 4.30 in the morning. Preparation of iddlis and coffee for breakfast is the first activity. By 7 a.m. the milk offering puja is performed and after that breakfast is served. Thereafter the kitchen becomes very active in their efforts to prepare lunch which would be served at 11.30. This involves the Head cook paying his best attention on preparing different types of vegetable sauces, sambar, rasam, sweets, pappad and rice.



New Dining Hall



Kitchen Staff

Left to right: Sridhar, Gopal, Ravi, Sundaram, Balasubramanian

When some devotee pays the required amount for Biksha then on that day an extra dish along with sweet pudding (payasam) are served. On Sundays and other important days pappads are served.

Generally meals are served in two batches every day. Usually the second batch is for the staff and the labourers. But on crowded days like Punarvasu, Jayanti, Deepam, Aradhana, Maha Puja, Sri Vidya Havan, etc., three or more batches of devotees partake of the prasadam. Along with the cooks, members of the staff and some devotees take part in serving the food.

Before serving lunch to the visiting guests and inmates of the Ashram, at 10.30 regular 'Narayana Seva' is attended to with reverence and a surrendered attitude of service, to the sadhus, sannyasins, destitutes, physically disabled and utterly poor people. Between 1 and 2.30 p.m. the kitchen is closed.

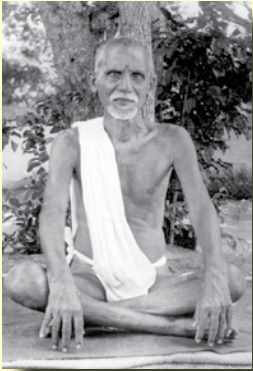
The 'Pakasalai' is reopened at 3.00 and tea is served to all at 4 p.m. Simultaneously, preparation of dinner for the night would commence. Dinner is served at 7.30 p.m. in the night. At 9 p.m. the kitchen is closed.

This is the gist of daily activities at Sri Ramanasramam Kitchen today!



'Annamalai Swami' Day

A report from Sri Ramanasramam



On 9th November 2008 the 13th Samadhi Day of Annamalai Swami was solemnly observed at Palakothu where the Swamiji lived. Bhagavan's Aksharamana Malai and Manikkavachagar's Sivapuranam were sung by Bhagavan's devotees, including Sri V. Ganesan, and Pooja was offered at Swamiji's Samadhi. At the end prasadam was distributed.

Swamiji's dedicated life is proof that distance can never separate a true devotee from his Sadguru.

Bookstall Expansion

A report from Sri Ramanasramam



The new extension building of the Ashram Bookstall was inaugurated by performing puja on Monday, 17th November (Punarvasu day) at 9.10 a.m. A built-in area of 10000 Sq. Ft. has been added to the existing bookstall. The function was well attended by devotees.