

Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This issue of *Saranagati* carries the second part of the life story of Prof. K. Swaminathan, who in 1940 would have the change of a lifetime when he first came to Tiruvannamalai and set eyes on Bhagavan Ramana. Of that fateful day he wrote, “Such happiness [only] a child enjoys as it sits securely in its mother’s lap!” For the next ten years, the professor carried on his busy life as teacher, writer, editor and social activist but was adamant about spending every available weekend and holiday at the Ashram in Bhagavan’s presence.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam includes coverage of the 2013 Pongal celebrations. *Wordwise* this month looks at *aparoksha* and *aparoksha jnana*, or direct knowledge.

For further news and 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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Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

D.: In practice, thoughts are found to manifest and subside alternately. Is this jnana?

M.: Some people think that there are different stages in jnana. The Self is *nitya aparoksha*, i.e., ever-realised, knowingly or unknowingly. *Sravana* (hearing or study), they argue, should therefore be *aparoksha jnana* (directly experienced) and not *paroksha jnana* (indirect knowledge). But jnana should result in *duhkha nivriti* (loss of misery) whereas *sravana* alone does not bring it about. Therefore they say, though *aparoksha*, it is not unshaken; the rising of *vasanas* is the cause of its being weak (not unchanging); when the *vasanas* are removed, jnana becomes unshaken and bears fruit. —*Talks §57*





Coming to Bhagavan: The Life of Prof. K. Swaminathan (part two)

Not long after learning of Arunachala through the verses of Guhai Namasivaya, the professor heard about Bhagavan Sri Ramana in a conversation with one of his students (M.G. Shanmukham) who spoke enthusiastically of the sage. Kavyakantha Ganapathi Muni had come and spoken at the college about Bhagavan. Others had written to KS about Sri Bhagavan but KS, soaked in the spirit of Gandhian activism, was not persuaded to go to Tiruvannamalai. He later said of his obstinacy: “I was a fool then and did not listen”.... “[At that time] I was not interested in someone sitting still and doing nothing when so much needed to be done to change this mad, bad world and Mahatma Gandhi strode the land doing so many things ‘socially relevant’.”

A decade passed, and he continued his teaching and service in the movement for social and political equity in India. But later, in the 1939, when he came across *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, the devotional work of the great Tamil devotee-poet, Muruganar, KS said, “Good heavens, the man who inspired this kind of poetry is Divine!”

A year later in Chennai he met the scholar Grant Duff Douglas Ainslie, the Scots critic, poet and diplomat who came to Bhagavan in 1935. Duff had translated the works of Benedetto Croce, a favourite of KS, into English. When the Englishman asked if the professor had ever gone to see Ramana Maharshi, KS felt ‘ashamed’, being so near to Tiruvannamalai and not having availed himself of the opportunity.

Swami Siddheswarananda¹ also praised Bhagavan and his teachings in conversations with the professor.

¹ Swami Siddheshwarananda, the Ramakrishna monk ordained by Swami Brahmananda, had been a prince in the House of Cochin in his pre-monastic days. He spent the last years of his life as head of the Gretz Vedanta Center near Paris, where, among other things, he translated works of Bhagavan into French.





Sir P. S. Sivaswami



Grant Duff



Swami Siddheshwarananda



KS and Visalakshii, 1940, the year of coming to Bhagavan

In April of that year when KS was on vacation in Bangalore, he took up study with a renowned pandit in the *Brahma Sutras* and began to understand that there was more to life than what could be seen with the naked eye or written down with a pen. During their interactions, the pandit spoke of Bhagavan: “This is not mere theory. You go to Tiruvannamalai and see this man.”

These four encounters and the anguish of a family crisis regarding a beloved niece coalesced to dissolve KS’s resistance and convinced him that ‘an actual person in the Brahmic state was present in Tiruvannamalai, offering rest and shade to tired travellers in the desert of samsara’.

KS made up his mind to make the journey but first he took permission from Sir P. S. Sivaswami Iyer², the guardian and guide appointed by his late father. The permission was forthcoming but with this proviso: “You are a young man with many responsibilities. When I look down at the abyss from the edge of Dodabetta (the 8,000 ft precipice in the Nilgiri Hills, near Ooty), in order not to become giddy and risk falling, I have four strong men hold me with a rope round my hip. By all means, go to the Ashram. But don’t go alone. When you go before Bhagavan, you will be swept off your feet and fall headlong into the abyss. So be bound by some

² P.S. Sivaswami Iyer (1864-1946), considered one of the greatest legal minds of S. India, served as Advocate-general of the Madras Presidency from 1907 to 1911 and as member of the executive council of the Governor of Madras.

attachment to people. Take some friends with you.”

On September 29, 1940, KS took with him ‘three ropes’, his wife and two students, K. Subrahmanyam and M. M. Ismail³, and travelled to Tiruvannamalai. When the group came before Bhagavan, KS experienced ‘the most memorable event’ of his life. K. Subrahmanyam described the darshan as follows: “The mind was stilled before it could even feebly affirm its existence. In its place was Bhagavan’s silence-awareness with only peace for its content. What we had hitherto called ‘silence’ had been very different: a respite from speech, perhaps to replenish the exhausted energy for the sake of speech yet to come, or a manner of inward chatter, a succession of jerky thoughts whose utterance was only inaudible to others...The moment vanished, but [our] being had been fertilised. Silence and seclusion could not fill [us] with dread thereafter. Nirvana, Sunyata were now terms to be received with reverent attention, not with frightened bewilderment.”

KS himself later wrote, “So many things had compelled me to [come] and [now] all my problems were solved in five minutes. In his presence, I felt like a baby in its mother’s lap. How to explain this?”

And again, “Bhagavan was a perfect Impersonality, like the sun in the sky or like unnoticed daylight in an inner chamber. [At the Ashram] people spoke to one

³ K. Subrahmanyam was professor of English at Loyola College and wrote for the *Mountain Path*. M. M. Ismail went on to become Chief Justice of the Madras High Court and acting Governor of Tamil Nadu.





another freely and frankly in his presence, as if the figure on the couch were a statue, not a listener. It was natural to refer to him as “It,” instead of You or He. Thus, every conversation in the Old Hall turned out to be a truly Socratic dialogue; every statement was tentative and therefore poetic; no statement was dogmatic, eristic or polemical. This impersonal Being would suddenly become a Person full of sattvic power, highly human, charming, mother-like, who could communicate with sharp precision his own Awareness-Bliss to other persons according to their needs and moods.”

From that day onward, KS came regularly from Chennai to spend weekends and vacations with Bhagavan, bringing with him students, family members, friends, colleagues and indeed anyone that could be persuaded to join him, and among

them too, some notable figures like D. S. Sarma, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, S. Duraiswami Iyer, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Dilip Kumar Roy, O.P. Ramaswami Reddiar and others. KS began reading Bhagavan’s books and visited as often as possible, avoiding festivals or crowded times, so that he might be with Bhagavan in the tranquility of ordinary days.

(to be continued)

* Freely adapted from the following sources: *Prof. K. Swaminathan (1896-1994): Tributes to Commemorate His Birth Centenary; KS Remembered: Prof. K. Swaminathan (1896-1994); Ramana Maharshi, the National Book Trust, New Delhi; Sri Ramana, The Self Supreme; Five Hymns to Arunachala, Sri Ramanasramam; various articles in The Mountain Path; and recorded interviews with Prof. K. Swaminathan and family.*

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Niranjanananda Swami Samadhi Day, 27th Jan



Niranjanananda Swami (Chinnaswami), Bhagavan’s younger brother, was the first Sarvadhikari of the Ashram and devoted his life to building up the Ashram and propagating Bhagavan’s message. As he lay on his deathbed in late 1952, he uttered a paternal benediction and testament for the benefit of his direct descendents and, indeed, a code of honour for any future devotee who would serve in the Ashram: “I am going away with stainless hands and a fulfilled heart. I have never touched a paisa of the Ashram for my personal possession. Everything here, every stick and stone, belongs to Bhagavan. You have to treat them with devotion. You must give your heart and mind to Bhagavan. He will shower your heart with grace. Be truthful and honest. In doing your Ashram duties, you must uphold the virtue of your lineage.”

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Swami Ramanananda Samadhi Day, 31st Dec



Swami Ramanananda (Venkato) was a key figure in transitioning the Ashram from the difficult times following the passing away of his father, the Ashram Sarvadhikari, Chinnawami, in 1953 which came on the heels of Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana in 1950. Venkato’s tenacity of spirit was instrumental in making the Ashram what it is today.

Venkato’s Samadhi Day was observed on the morning of the 31st December, two days after Bhagavan’s 133rd Jayanti, attended by Ashram President, V.S. Ramanan, and other devotees.





The Old Days on the Hill: Keeraipaati



The Ganesha image at Guhai Namasivaya where Keeraipaatti used to make her food offerings.

Keeraipaatti, the 'spinach-granny', Bhagavan tells us, was from Gudiyatham and was already living on the Hill when Bhagavan came to Arunachala Temple in 1896. She regularly visited him there, but when he moved up to Virupaksha Cave, she came more frequently. Bhagavan says she never took anything for herself but even when advanced in age, would roam the hill searching for plants and herbs to cook for Bhagavan at her hermitage in Guhai Namasivaya mantapam. Bhagavan tells us that she was very devoted and used to worship the image of Namasivaya and other images carved in walls and pillars of Guhai Namasivaya temple. She was 'not afraid of anything', and lived simply, owning only one personal possession—a simple cooking pot. Bhagavan says, "Sometimes I used to help her in cooking by going to her place and cutting the vegetables. She had great confidence in me."

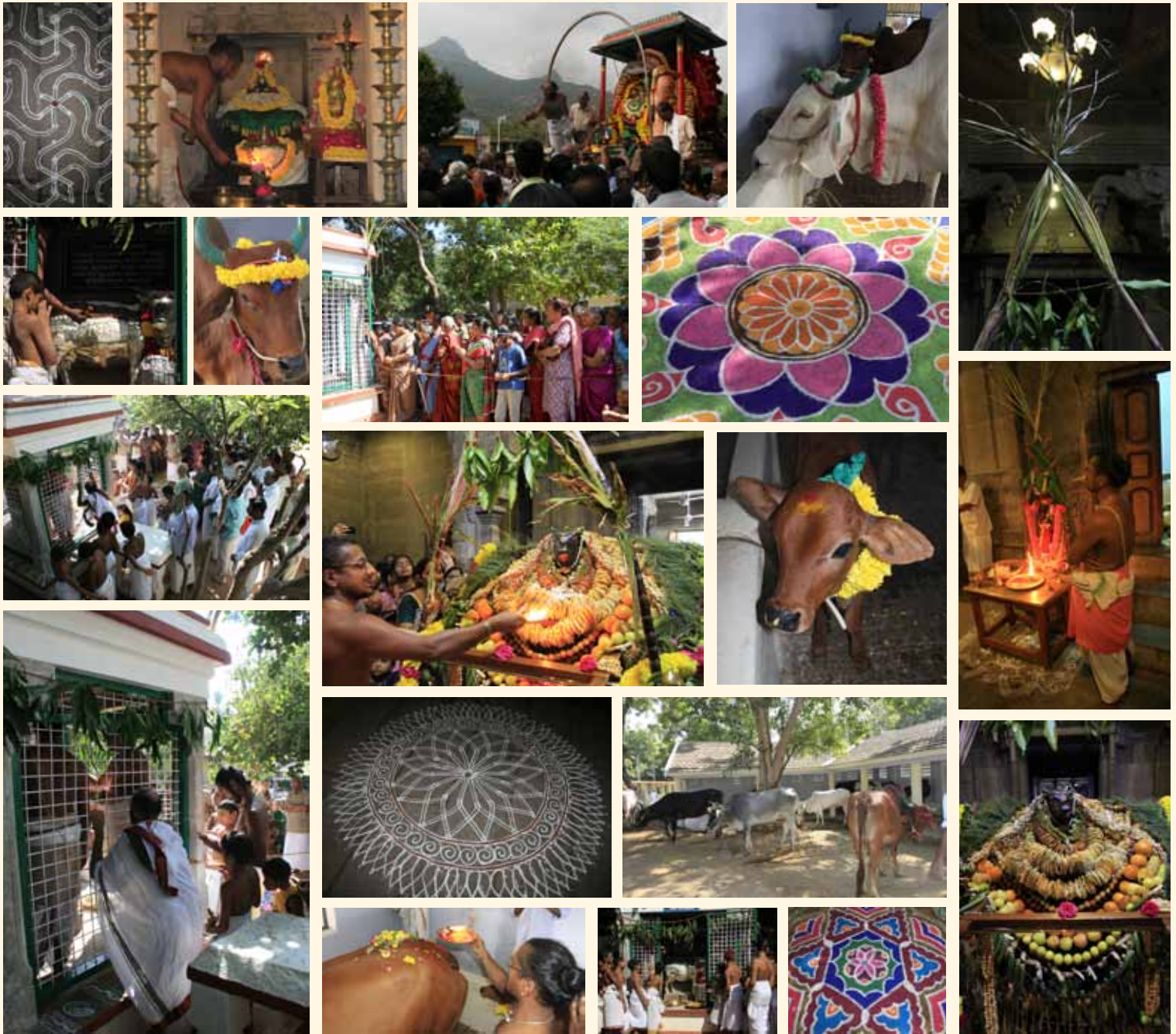
Keeraipaatti died in 1921 and was buried under a tamarind tree, opposite the Dakshinamurti Shrine, near the present day Ashram. In later years it was conjectured that Cow Lakshmi (born in 1922), was the reincarnation of Keeraipaatti, who like the latter, showed unparalleled affection for Bhagavan. The devotion of the elderly lady, it was supposed, had caused her to return in this humble guise to work out her remaining karma at the feet of Bhagavan. Whenever devotees asked Bhagavan to confirm or deny this, he simply kept quiet. But once in September 1946, when Rani Mazumdar raised the issue yet again, Bhagavan gave a curious reply: "It is not true that birth as a man is necessarily the highest, and that one must attain realisation only from being a man. Even an animal can attain Self-realisation". Bhagavan then went on to praise Lakshmi: "Even as a young calf, Lakshmi behaved in an extraordinary way...". (Day by Day 2-9-1946)]

Wordwise: Aparoksha अपरोक्ष

Aparoksha: immediate; 'para' (beyond)+ 'aksha' (eye, sight)= 'beyond direct seeing' or indirect+the negator 'a' (not)=non-indirect or direct; *aparoksha-jnana*: direct knowledge; *aparoksha-anubhuti*: direct experience; *nitya aparoksha*: ever-realised.

Knowledge transmitted through written or spoken words 'helps the intellectual understanding of the Truth' and can prepare one for direct seeing but can never be a substitute for it. Knowledge of the Self gained through shastra study, for example, gives *paroksha-jnana* but is only 'hearsay knowledge', Bhagavan tells us, as it is taken on faith and is not firmly established, whereas that learned from direct experience, 'born of one's own realisation (*aparoksha*) is immediate and irrefutable, clear and intimate as a gooseberry in the hollow of one's palm'. (Talks §21)





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Pongal Celebrations 14-16th January

Makara Sankranti Pongal (14th January) falls on the first of Thai, the tenth month in the Tamil calendar, and is traditionally said to coincide with the winter solstice. The entry of the sun into Capricorn (Makara) on the day of the winter solstice is the most important sankranti ('entry', 'traversing') because it marks the beginning of the bright half of the year. According to the Tamil calendar, from Pongal onwards, the days grow longer and thus it is not surprising that this harvest festival is dedicated to Lord Surya, the bringer of agricultural bounty. This transition day is bright and full of cheer as it is believed to pave the way for new opportunities.

The day before Sankranti Pongal was Bhogi. The Ashram was washed and decorated with banana and mango leaves. Kollam patterns were drawn using rice flour to decorate the floors and sidewalks in and around the New Hall, Mother's Shrine, before Bhagavan's shrine and at the gosala. Mattu Pongal, the festival dedicated to cattle, followed on the 15th with special pujas to Nandi, Cow Lakshmi and the cows in the Ashram gosala. Early on the third day, Lord Arunachaleswarar stopped at the Ashram on his circuit of the Hill.





From the *Periapuranam*: Saakkiya Naayanaar

Saakkiya went to the great temple city of Kaanchipuram to train himself in various disciplines. First, he studied the Buddhist tenets and took the robes of a monk and the name referring to the Buddha. In due course, however, he realised that this and other heterodox systems did not contain the last word on the ultimate truth. By the grace of the Lord, he concluded that the Siva path was the one he was called to. Not bothering about his vesture, however, he continued to dress as a Buddhist, but adored Lord Siva in his heart and worshipped the lingam as the highest expression of the formless Absolute. He beheld the lingam at public places of worship and took a vow that he would not take his food until he had paid obeisance to the Lord at the lingam each day. In his ecstasy, without being conscious of what he was doing, he flung stones at the image as a holy offering, reciting the Lord's name silently under his breath. The Lord relished this worship. Still clad in the robes of a Buddhist monk, other Buddhists imagined he was merely flinging stones. But to the Lord, it was no less than a flower offering.

One day, the weather became dark and stormy and rain flooded the area, making outdoor movement difficult. As the devotee waited for the storm to subside, pangs of hunger tormented him. Loath to break his vow, he braved the weather and found his way to the river for a bath. Aided by the frequent lightning flashes, he then made his way to the temple with great effort. But however much he tried, he could not find any offerings. Not even a single pebble was to be seen in the ankle-deep mud and knee-high floodwater. He could not bear the thought of breaking his vow and saw that the only offering he had was the crown of his own head. No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than he rushed inside the temple to offer his head on the great pillar. But the Lord's saving hand stopped him. In a trice, the devotee merged with the benign form leaving no trace of his body as the celestials above looked on in wonder (*Saakkiya Naayanaar's Aradhana Day was 11th January*)

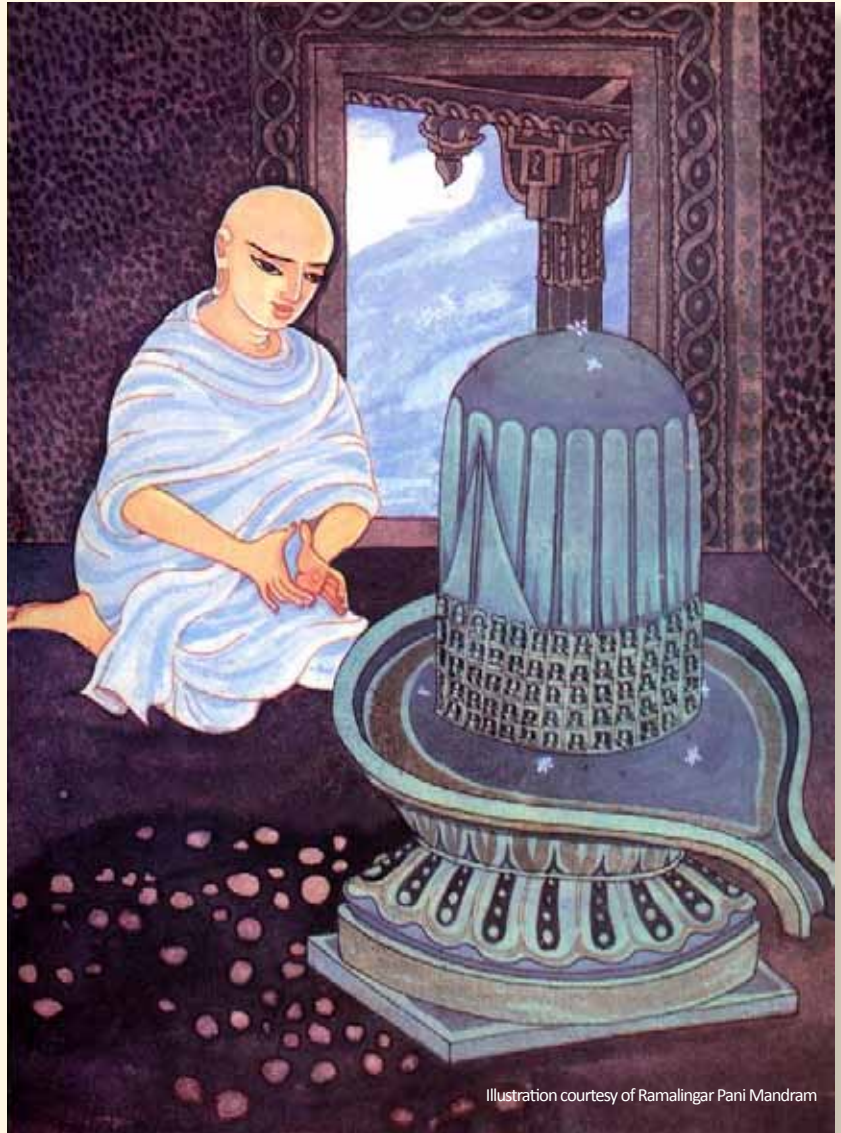


Illustration courtesy of Ramalingar Pani Mandram

Reality in Forty Verses

21. When scriptures speak of 'seeing the Self' and 'seeing God', what is the truth they have in mind? How to see the Self? As the Self is one without a second, it is impossible to see it. How to see God? To see Him is to be consumed by Him.

— Sri Bhagavan





Events at Sri Ramanasramam



Recitation of Sivaprakasam Pillai's Verses



Sivaprakasam Pillai



Ramaswami Pillai



Lucy Ma

On the 12th of Jan, devotees gathered in the New Hall for the chanting of Sivaprakasam Pillai's works in observation of the anniversary of his death. Two days later, puja was performed in memory of Ramaswami Pillai at his samadhi at the rear of the Ashram near the back gate leading up the hill. Two weeks earlier, on the 31st of Dec, devotees gathered at the samadhi of Lucy Cornelsen near Chadwick's old cottage in the Ashram.

Obituary: Ramasubramanyan 1932-2013



Ramasubramanyan, affectionately known to devotees as 'Ramamani', peacefully attained the Lotus Feet of Sri Bhagavan while seated before Bhagavan's photo at 9:25 pm on 5th Jan, 2013. Survived by his brother, Ramana Vijayan, Ramamani was son of the staunch devotee, Sri N. Natarajan.

Born in March 1932, he and his siblings had their upbringing variably in or near the Ashram, and thus had the good fortune to be in Bhagavan's presence on a regular basis. As a boy he was blessed to recite Sanskrit slokas before Bhagavan and had more than once been corrected by Bhagavan. He also received the instruction from Bhagavan to chant selected verses from Adi Sankara's *Vivekachudamani* on a daily basis. Later, he served in the Central Government Postal Audit Department, lived as a bachelor, and after retirement, took up editorship of *The Mountain Path* (from the early 1990s up till 2003). Known for his remarkable memory and familiarity with Bhagavan's works, he quoted freely from the Ashram literature. His voice would often choke with emotion when speaking about Bhagavan. In his final days, he was mostly silent, sitting throughout the day with folded hands and bowed head before the photo of Sri Bhagavan.



Announcements: Change of Address for Accommodation

Email requests for accommodation should now be sent to stay@sriamanamaharshi.org. All reservations should be made at least a month in advance. The new system acknowledges emails instantly and a final decision can be expected within a week's time. Owing to the shortage of accommodation space, Ramanasramam does not provide accommodation to casual visitors or travelers but rather only for devotees and those interested in the life and teaching of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

