

## Saranagati



JULY 2013  
VOL. 7, NO. 7

IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

Work has been completed on the renovation of the Ashram Well which is now nearly half full and awaiting a good summer rain. Four large fish have been reintroduced and seem happy to be back home.

The feature article of this issue of *Saranagati* looks at Palakotthu, the sadhu colony that sprang up in the early days of the foundation of the Ashram.

*Ashram Heritage Sites* gives a brief history of the Ashram gosala and *Introducing the Kendras* greets Pollachi Ramana Kendra.

*Events at Ramanasramam* include Lakshmi Samadhi Day (the 20th June) and Mahapuja (the 2nd June).

For further news and events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org)

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team

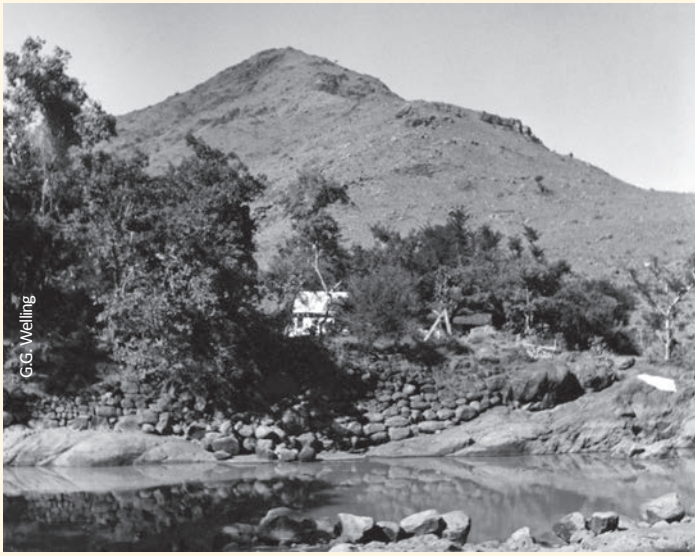
<i>Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Devotion &amp; Surrender</i>	1
<i>Palakotthu</i>	2
<i>Sri Ramanasramam Heritage Sites: The Ashram Gosala</i>	4
<i>In Profile: Daily Workings of the Ashram Gosala</i>	5
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Lakshmi Samadhi Day</i>	5
<i>From the Periapuranam: Amarneethi Naayanaar</i>	6
<i>Introducing the Kendras: Pollachi Ramana Kendram</i>	7
<i>Announcement: Kumbhabhishekam: 23rd-25th August</i>	7
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahapuja</i>	8

## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Devotion and Surrender

*M.: In the effort to overcome birth and death, man looks up to the Supreme Being to save him. Thus are born faith and devotion to the Lord. How to worship Him? The creature is powerless and the Creator is All-powerful. How to approach Him? To entrust oneself to His care is the only thing left for him; total surrender is the only way. Therefore he surrenders himself to God. Surrender consists in giving up oneself and one's possessions to the Lord of Mercy. Then what is left over for the man? Nothing — neither himself nor his possessions. The body liable to be born and to die having been made over to the Lord, the man need no longer worry about it. Then birth and death cannot strike terror. The cause of fear was the body; it is no longer his; why should he fear now?*

— Talks §567





## Palakotthu

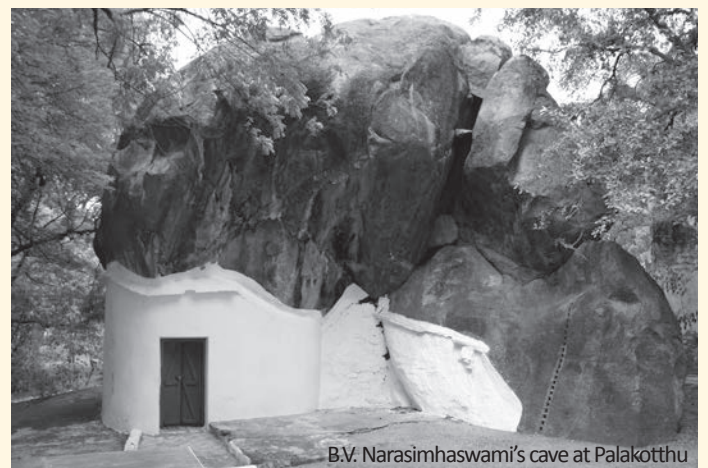
*In the mid-19th century a large tract of land was given to the Vira-Shaivite community for the purposes of cultivating flowers for use in pujas at Arunachaleswara Temple. With grand old trees overhanging its thirtam and the adjacent Vinayaka temple, this ten-acre garden just west of the present-day Ashram has been home to numerous great devotees, among them Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, B.V. Narasimhaswami, Ramanatha Brahmachari, Kunju Swami, Muruganar, Viswanatha Swami, Munagala Venkataramiah, Paul Brunton, S.S. Cohen, Balarama Reddy, Mastan Swami, Yogi Ramaiah and others. Palakotthu (Pala: 'jackfruit' + kotthu: 'bunch', 'orchard') was visited by Bhagavan on his daily noontime walks. The following pages take a brief look at the story of this unique plot of ground and its place in Ashram history.*

After the death of Bhagavan's mother in May 1922, devotees carried her mortal remains down from Skandasramam to be interred just 100 metres east of Palakotthu Tank. On the day of the funeral all gathered in procession to Palakotthu walking in step to the sound of the Nadaswaram musicians. It was decided that daily puja should be done at Mother's Samadhi for one mandala (for 48 days). Dandapani Swami and Chinna Swami made daily trips down the mountain bringing *naivedya* to the samadhi from Skandasramam and to perform the daily rites. In time they found it easier simply to remain near the samadhi for the designated period in order to

avoid daily trips up and down. At that time, excepting the Ganapati temple in Palakotthu, there was no place one could stay. They built a grass hut over Mother's Samadhi and a hut nearby for lodging. In preparation for the tenth day puja Bhagavan and devotees came down the previous evening and slept in the Vinayaka temple.

Bhagavan joined the daily rites on most days and pujas continued even after the 48-day mandala was completed. Six months later, one day in November 1922, Bhagavan descended the hill to visit the Shrine but did not go back up. Devotees at Skandasramam followed suit and Ramanasramam was thus established in and around the Samadhi of Bhagavan's mother.

The Ashram in these early days had neither habitation nor finances and living space was limited. This became a growing problem as the number of residents and visitors increased. Bhagavan slept in the hut in front of Mother's Samadhi and devotees made do with little huts scattered here and there. In time, the Ashram began to be established as devotees from town and elsewhere came to have Bhagavan's darshan. The sadhus who had been with Bhagavan on the hill fabricated small kutirs in the shade of the large trees at Palakotthu. Kavyankanta stayed in one of the two small rooms opposite the Ganapathi temple while one Sabhapathi Pillai, who used to come and do puja at the temple, stayed in the other. After Kavyankanta left, Suddhananda Bharati stayed in his room. Early on B. V. Narasimhaswami rebuilt the small low-lying cave cottage with the monolithic stone overhang situated in the present-day Korongu compound. He also built a small cottage nearby. He wrote *Self-Realisation* while staying here. Published in 1931, the book would draw others from near and far, including Paul





Brunton and Bhikshu Prajnananda. They built a small cottage on the north side of Palakotthu Thirtham.<sup>1</sup>

### Ramanatha Brahmachari

In 1912, while still a Vedapatasala student in town, Ramanatha Brahmachari came to Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave. Though dwarfish in stature with a wiry frame, Ramanatha was a giant in devotion to Bhagavan. Each day he would go on begging rounds and bring whatever food he received as alms to Virupaksha Cave, serve it to Bhagavan and only afterwards would eat something himself. One day, bringing food to Bhagavan, he encountered his father on the hill. His father asked for some of the food but Ramanatha thought it improper to feed anyone before serving Bhagavan and so invited his father to join him at Virupaksha where they could share food with Bhagavan. His father refused to join but asked a second time for food. Ramanatha Brahmachari denied him outright. Such was his unswerving loyalty. Having observed all this from a distance, Bhagavan sent Ramanatha back to first give food to his father.

Bhagavan had once said: 'I am only afraid of two devotees, Ramanatha Brahmachari and Mudaliar Patti'.<sup>2</sup> What could such a remark have meant? Surely it was a reference to the power of the boundless devotion these devotees evidenced. And such devotion was returned in like kind. Once when Tiruvannamalai suffered an outbreak of the plague in the early 1920s, Ramanatha Brahmachari was stricken. But while the others were keen on taking refuge at Pachaiamman Kovil, Bhagavan insisted on remaining behind to nurse him back to health. It was only Bhagavan's healing presence that saved Ramanatha Brahmachari's life.

1 In his *Reminiscences*, Kunjuswami gives the following brief history of cottage construction at Palakotthu: "Later Musiri Krishnananda put up a thatched shed to the north of B. V. Narasimhaswami's cottage. To the south of the tank, Mudaliar Patti's son, Thambiranswami, put up a tiled house. Prabuddhananda and Bhumananda built a small house next to Thambiranswami's. Next to that, Somasundaraswami built a cottage. After B. V. Narasimhaswami left, his 'cave' was occupied by Yogi Ramaiah and after him, by Mouni Srinivasa Rao. Viswanathaswami moved into another of B. V. Narasimhaswami's cottages. Muruganar moved into Krishnananda's cottage and Munagala Venkataramiah moved into Thamma Reddiar's cottage", p. 187.

2 See *Power of the Presence*, vol. 3, pp. 5-6.



Ramanatha Brahmachari in the early 1920s

### The Sarvadhikari of Palakotthu

Once Sri Ramanasramam had been established, Ramanatha Brahmachari served Ashram residents and guests untiringly. A dedicated Gandhian, he extolled Gandhian principles. He thus exercised a strong desire to serve, spun cotton and even joined the South Indian Salt March led by Rajaji in 1930.

Upon returning from the march with salt for Bhagavan, he built a tiny hut in Palakotthu. Within a short time he had earned the title 'Sarvadhikari of Palakotthu',<sup>3</sup> a humorous designation for this most humble of devotees. It seems that Ramanatha, in his characteristic spirit of selfless service, took it upon himself to perform duties for the sadhu-devotees of Bhagavan living at Palakotthu. When someone inquired in a letter about the 'Sarvadhikari of Palakotthu', Bhagavan asked, "Who is this?" Kunju Swami stood up and sheepishly pointing in the direction of Ramanatha Brahmachari, said, "Bhagavan, we call him Sarvadhikari of Palakotthu. He buys our things, cleans our lamps and sweeps our floors. So we call him Palakotthu Sarvadhikari." Bhagavan remarked affectionately: "Why didn't you tell me? With a Sarvadhikari like this, everyone should be happy!" Ramanatha Brahmachari got up rather shyly and said, "I don't know, Bhagavan. They call me like that for fun." Bhagavan said, "What is funny in it? It is good!"

3. *Sarvadhikari* is Sanskrit for 'Supreme ruler'. (See *Reminiscences*, p. 188).





### Muruganar Swami

Already in 1926 Muruganar had left his wife in the care of family members in Chennai in order to take up the sadhu's life and be with Bhagavan. He settled at Palakotthu. Though known for his scholarship and creative genius, Muruganar's renunciation was no less remarkable. He owned but one set of clothes and slept in the open beneath the shade of the trees at Palakotthu and went for begging rounds in town each morning. Muruganar's renunciation was so complete that he even had no sense of proprietorship for the few items he could call his own as the following account illustrates.

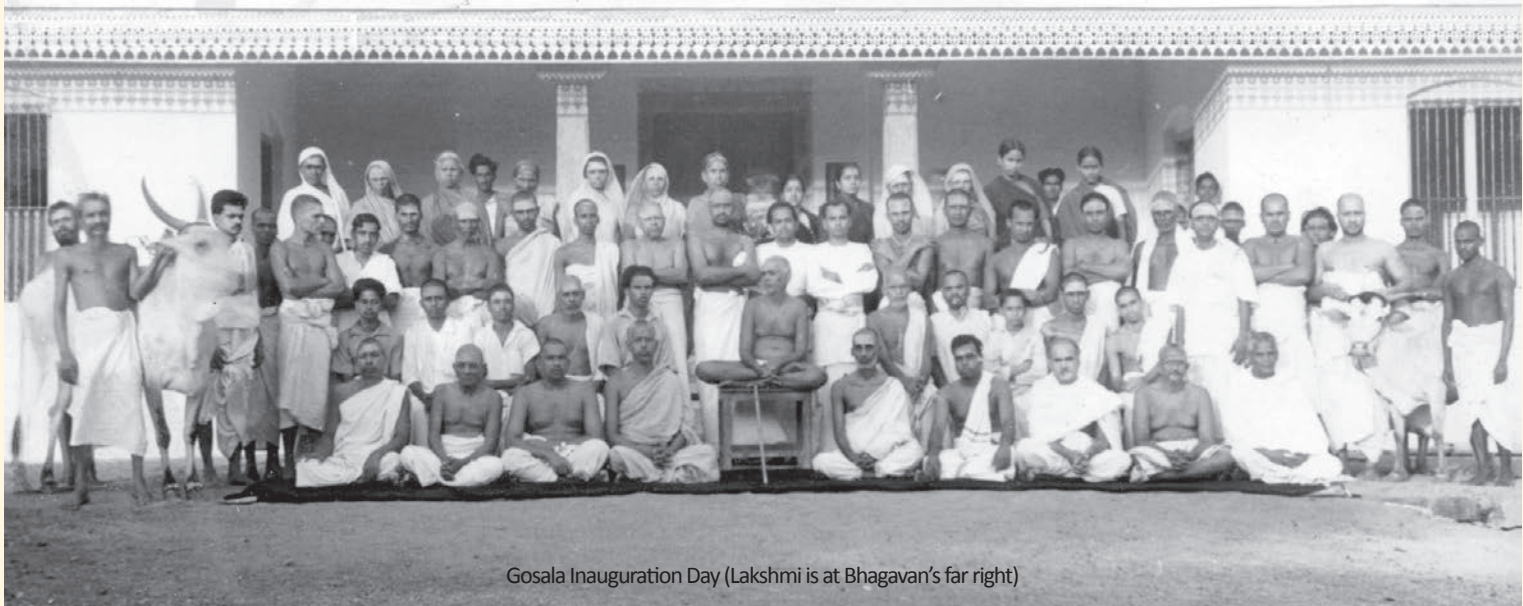
One day the gardener at Palakotthu observed Muruganar returning from his morning begging rounds. The poet entered the bathing tank to bathe as it was his custom to

wash meticulously before taking food. He left his alms unguarded on the bank of the thirtam, a positioning which had not gone unnoticed by the monkey tribe perched in the trees at Palakotthu. As Muruganar prayerfully washed his feet, unconcerned for his food, they crept up silently behind the kavi and ate everything. Without the least grumble or complaint, the bhikshu accepted the reality of having to go the whole day without food, taking it as Bhagavan's will. But the gardener, moved by the scene, took it upon himself to vacate his small room and move into the Ganapathi temple in order to be able to offer Muruganar his habitation. Muruganar graciously accepted this kindness.\*

*(to be continued)*

\* This article is freely adapted from various Ashram sources.

## Sri Ramanasramam Heritage Sites: The Ashram Gosala (1930)



Gosala Inauguration Day (Lakshmi is at Bhagavan's far right)

After Cow Lakshmi's arrival in 1926, devotees began donating cows to the Ashram even though the Ashram had no facilities to house them. The problem was made more acute by the threat of leopards that lived on and around the hill and who were in the habit of preying on domestic animals. Bhagavan forecasted the arrival of more cows in the coming years and said that because of Lakshmi's "golden touch", if the Ashram built a large gosala for Lakshmi, it would in turn get all the "necessary punya to build a bookstore, a dining room and a shrine for mother". In 1930 the only buildings in the Ashram were Bhagavan's Old Hall, the thatched dining hall and a simple structure over Mother's Samadhi. The Ashram had no financial reserves to speak of and so Chinna Swami was understandably concerned when Bhagavan launched plans to build a large cowshed. Finally, thanks to donations from a magistrate, Salem Sundaram Chetty (later Madras High Court Judge) and from the Sofa Gounder, Rangaswami, plans for construction of a gosala were drafted and construction began. Upon completion, the Ashram gosala was the largest and most substantial building in the Ashram with beams of Burmese teak, walls of granite stone, contoured balusters and a sculpted façade. In the years that followed Bhagavan's prediction proved true.





## In Profile: Daily Workings of the Ashram Gosala



As Ashram dairy needs increased over the decades, the number of cattle grew and grew. At present there are some 126 animals of different varieties including Dharparkar, Sindhi, Kir and hybrid bulls. Some 36 cows are producing rich wholesome milk on a daily basis. Their feeding consists of fifteen to twenty kilos of Kenya grass and dried husks per animal given an hour before morning and evening milking times and four bunches of *agathikeerai* (a variety of green) each evening. Night feeding consists of eight to ten kilos of hay per animal.

With the help of veterinarians, artificial insemination is employed at the time of natural breeding. Expectant cows are kept separately and they usually deliver within 285 to 295 days. Newborn calves are vaccinated against worms up until their third month and all the animals receive annual vaccinations against cow pox. Calves between two to six months are kept in separate enclosures while adults are left to roam freely within their respective pens. During the summer months bathing is performed once per week and when possible, daily baths are given. Receiving such good treatment, the cows mature within 15 months.

Hybrid cows yield up to fifteen litres of milk per day. With the aid of machines, milking is made very efficient and the 36 cows at present yield an average of 240 litres of milk per day. All milk goes to supply the needs of Ashram guests and inmates, i.e. tea, coffee, buttermilk, curd, ghee, etc. The Ashram kitchen also takes advantage of the bio-gas produced by the gosala cow-dung and its by-products are used as fertiliser for the farm and gardens. In short, nothing goes to waste.

While the gosala is supported by the donations from devotees, it nevertheless operates at a surplus when one takes into account the price of milk today and the fuel savings from the bio-gas. But these are minor concerns in comparison with the happiness of knowing that what started with a single cow in 1926 has flourished and is still able to meet devotees' needs for clean, safe, sattvic milk products for these 85 years since.

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Cow Lakshmi Samadhi Day



When Cow Lakshmi left the body on 18th June, 1948, Bhagavan penned the following lines: "In the year of *Sarvadhari*, fifth of *Ani*, a Friday, in the waxing phase, twelfth lunar day, under *visakam*, Cow Lakshmi attained *vimukti*."

Cow Lakshmi's 65th Aradhana Day was observed on Thursday, 20th June at her Samadhi. After the first arati, the ladies sang Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer's *Life of Lakshmi*, followed by KVS's *Gomata Lakshamma*. Following final arati, prasadam was distributed.





## From the *Periapuranam*: Amarneethi Naayanaar

Amarneethi of Pazhayaari, a merchant of gold, pearls, rubies and other precious stones, was a great devotee of Lord Siva. He built a Math at Tirunallloor in order to serve the pilgrims who came to visit the Lord's shrine, offering food, fresh clothes and new loincloths as required by them after their long journeys.

One day, the Lord took up the guise of a young Brahmachari. With sacred ash on his forehead, he carried a staff with a bundle of sacred darbha grass, a small pouch of holy ash, and two loincloths tied to it. Amarneethi prostrated before the visitor who addressed him, "We have heard that you host devotees, offering food, clothing and fresh loincloths". The humble host replied, "May it please thee to take food in this Math today. It has been prepared in the prescribed way".

The Brahmachari agreed but said, "First I must bathe in the Holy Kaveri. Please keep this loincloth safe and dry in case it rains. Guard it with your life for its glory cannot be told". The devotee received the cloth piece reverently, bidding the guest return with all speed. He then put the loincloth in a safe place. When the Brahmachari returned dripping wet from his bath, he asked for the codpiece but lo, it had mysteriously vanished. Amarneethi took a fresh loincloth from his store and pleaded with the Brahmachari to accept it instead. "Your deceit is now apparent", said the Brahmachari. Amarneethi's face turned pale. He protested his innocence and pleaded mercy, offering to make fair restitution for the lost clothing.

The Lord, the owner of the Universe, dressed as the Brahmachari, graciously agreed. He untied the other codpiece from his staff and said: "This piece is a match in all respects to the lost one. Place it in the balance and put your cloth in the other pan so that the weight may be judged equal". The host was much relieved by this suggestion and put a fresh codpiece from his store into the balance. But finding it was not enough, he piled up other codpieces, though to little effect. Bewildered, he added bundles of clothing and then finally pieces of silver, gold and gems, but all proved of too little weight. (The Lord was out to prove that His grace would outweigh all His devotees' offerings). The devotee proposed that he, his wife and his son stand in the balance to make good the shortfall. He bent low and touched the feet of the mysterious guest, went around the balance with his wife and son and chanted the Panchakshara. When he and his family stepped into the pan, he called out in supplication to the Lord above: "Lord, may these scales now stand even!" And so, it happened. The spectators of the miracle praised Amarneethi for his devotion and the celestials showered flowers down from on high. In the midst of this downpour, the young Brahmachari disappeared. The Lord with His consort now appeared and gave darshan to all assembled. Amarneethi, his wife and son stood in the scales and adored the Lord. The balance climbed up into the sky like a vimana, carrying them up to the Lord's abode. (*Naayanaar's Aradhana Day this year will be observed on the 13th July.*)



Illustration courtesy of Pannalinger Panni Mandiram





## Introducing the Kendras: Pollachi Ramana Kendram



In May this year, sixty members of Pollachi Ramana Kendram gathered for the two-day Ramana Sannidhi Murai Mutrothal.

Famous for its coconut groves, Pollachi is located in the foothills of the Western Ghats. Since the Ratha Yatra in June 2004, each Sunday in the heart of the town, the Sri Subramanya temple is busy with Ramana devotees at Satsang. In former times Sri Rangasami, the 'sofa gounder' who bequeathed to the Ashram the sofa on which Bhagavan always sat, regularly visited Ramanasramam to have Bhagavan's darshan. Supporting the sadhus in Palakothu in the 1930s and instrumental in developing the housing sites in 'Ramana Nagar' in the early 1940s, he was an inspiration to his neighbours in Pollachi. His great-grandson, Sri Ramana Kumar, together with his wife, Srimathi Damayanthi, the granddaughter of another Ramana devotee, are the pillars

of the local community and are responsible for organising the Ramana satsangs in Pollachi. Around sixty members of this 'Ramana family', as they call themselves, attend Sunday satsang where they chant *Akshara Mana Malai*, *Vivekachudamani* and other verses, and do readings from Bhagavan's life and teaching. In addition to these weekly gatherings, the kendra makes regular trips to Tiruchuli to conduct 'Somavara pooja' at Bhuminathar Kovil.

## Announcement: Ramanasramam Mahakumbhabhishekam 23rd- 25th August



Repairs to the gopuram and vimanam above the Matrubhuteswara and Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi are underway. Stapathis and masons are chipping away the stucco surfaces of the vimanam which will be resurfaced and repainted. Since work begins each morning at 9am, morning pujas in Mother's and Bhagavan's Shrines are taking place earlier than usual during the months of June and July. Ramanasramam Mahakumbhabhishekam is scheduled to commence Friday morning the 23rd of August, 2013 with Ganapathi homa, Navagraha homa and other preliminary rites. Yagasala Pravesham is scheduled for 5pm that evening. Yagasala pujas will thus begin and continue up through Sunday morning, the 25th August, with Poornahuti at 7.30am and Mahadeeparadhanai at 8am. Mahakumbhabhishekam is set to take place between 8.45-9.20am followed by Mahabhishekam to Bhagavan and Matrubhuteswar, with final arati at 11am.





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahapuja, 2nd June

Devotees have always likened Bhagavan to Lord Subramanyam, (for example, in verse 16 of *Forty Verses in Praise of Bhagavan Ganapathi Muni* writes, "Though young, Oh Subrahmanya! Thou hast, by Thy merits, outstripped all Thy elders!"). And whereas Subrahmanya has the peacock for his mount, this year Bhagavan was present for the Mahapuja celebrations on Sunday, 2nd June in a unique and tangible way. Around 8am a large peacock entered the hall as kalasa abhishikam was commencing and perched on the railing surrounding Bhagavan's Samadhi. Ever-facing the Mother's Shrine, he gave darshan for four hours as crowds filed past him. Striking was his lack of fear when encountering such large numbers of visitors. Meanwhile devotees were gathered in the Mother's Shrine where the puja was underway.

The night before on the evening of the 1st June in the Granathalaya Auditorium, RMCL sponsored a devotional music programme entitled "Mother Alagammal" followed by a dance presentation, "Prani Mitra Ramana". On the evening of the 2nd June, RMCL hosted a ballet "Ananya Ramana" scripted by Dr. Rajkumar, directed by Dr. Sarada and led by Dr. Ambika Kameshwar.

