

Saranagati



COVER
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SRI RAMANASRAMAM
JULY 2014



Photos this page from V. Karthik and Suresh Menon



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This year, the centenary year of TNV's birth and the composition of *Aksharamanamalai*, marks yet another centenary, that of the founding of the *Sri Ramanananda Matalayam* at Desur (est. June 1914 by Desur Akhilandammal and Mastan Swami). The first Ashram built in Bhagavan's name, Desur Ashram celebrated Mahakumbhabhishekam this month preceded by weeks of renovation work. (see p. 8)

This July issue continues with the life story of T.N. Venkataraman. *In the Frame with Bhagavan* this month features archival listing GRO 44 from 15th August, 1947.

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

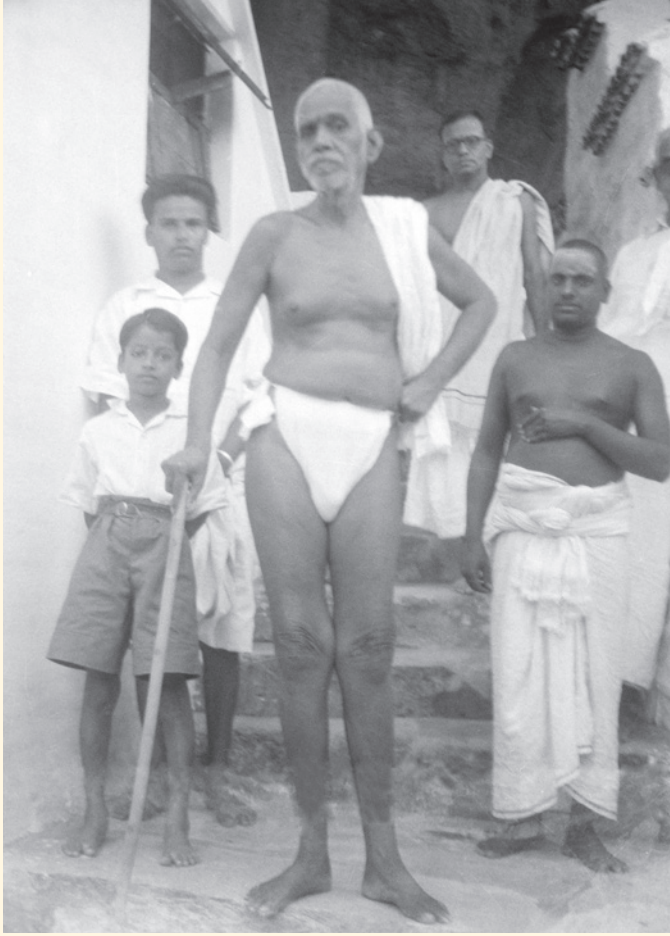
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

9th July (Wed) Cow Lakshmi Day
12th July (Sat) Guru Purnima
23rd July (Wed) H.C. Khanna Day
25th July (Fri) Kavya Kantha Ganapatti Muni Day
26th July (Sat) Punarvasu Day
7th August (Thurs) Kunjswami Samadhi Day

10th August (Sun) Full Moon
22nd August (Fri) Punarvasu Day
1st September (Mon) Bhagavan's Advent
5th September (Fri) Muruganar's Samadhi Day
18th September (Thurs) Punarvasu Day
25th September (Thurs) Navaratri Begins





The Life of T. N. Venkataraman: 1914-2007 (part three)

Experiences with Bhagavan

By the time he settled in the Ashram, TNV already had numerous memorable experiences in Bhagavan's presence. During his boyhood, he had a unique vantage point through his Athai who, as Bhagavan's sister, had been around Bhagavan from early on. It was Athai who told TNV the following story from Bhagavan's early years: One hot summer day when the two were walking from Tiruchuli to another village, a distance of about 15-20kms, Alemelu was struggling with the hot road beneath her bare feet. Already the embodiment

of compassion even as a young boy, Venkataraman set himself to the task of aiding his sister. By taking the sheath-bark of a banana tree stem and fashioning makeshift slippers, he tied them to her feet and thus shielded them from the scorching earth.

Bhagavan's Support

Another first-hand experience of Bhagavan occurred to TNV just after his coming to stay permanently in the Ashram when he was trying to find his place in the Ashram community. As a householder, he was apprehensive in the presence of his sannyasin-father, Chinnaswami, who was openly critical about the inclusion of a householder family among the sadhu band. But Bhagavan stood by Venkatoo.

One day while sitting under a neem tree a devotee asked: "Bhagavan! Who is higher and who is lower?" Bhagavan raised his head, looked up to the treetop and raising a hand, said, "He is higher and we are lower." The devotee, evidently assuming Bhagavan meant the Divine in Devaloka, pressed further: "Bhagavan seems to emphasise the truth that the omnipotent Lord alone is higher and we are all lower. But my humble doubt is *who among mortals* is higher and who lower." Bhagavan said, "I've already told you" and pointing high up the tree, he said, "That one sitting high in the tree, he's higher and I and all of you sitting here below, are lower". All laughed when Bhagavan directed their attention to a monkey perched in the treetop. As if in answer to TNV's doubt about his own right to belong to the Ashram, he later reflected: "Bhagavan, in these simple words, was driving home the truth that there is no higher or lower among people".

Settling in Tiruvannamalai

The changes at the Ashram that had brought Venkatoo to Tiruvannamalai began when the Ashram office and book depot were completed in May 1937. Other construction projects were underway in the Ashram and plans had been laid for a large new dining hall. As someone was needed to look after the office work, handle cash and maintain accounts, and as TNV had acquired good accountancy training while working in Chettinad under Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar, the





noted financier of South India, it was decided that TNV would be the man for the job. Hence Yogi Ramaiah and Sambasiva Rao wrote to Venkatoos asking him to quit his bank job and to come and serve in the Ashram.

Thus in the late winter of 1938 the entire family came. Yogi Ramaiah and Sambasiva Rao jointly took a house on lease in town where TNV accommodated his family including his aunt and uncle.

TNV went to the Ashram in the morning and returned at dusk but gradually Ashram work required more and more of his time and he found little opportunity to be at leisure with his family at home. In addition to office work, he was often called on to perform liturgical rites in view of his father's sannyassin status which precluded his participation in Vedic rites and ceremonies.

Serving Devotees

Nagu, famed for her hospitality and service spirit, took up service to devotees. As there were few facilities in the Ashram in those days, devotees often found no accommodation in the Ashram proper and would go to TNV's house to stay. Invariably it fell to Nagu to look after their needs. On cold winter mornings, she would be up at 3 am while others slept in order to build a fire in the wood-burning stove and heat water for hot baths. When guests finished their baths, she would have coffee ready. Athai who had so faithfully served as a surrogate mother to TNV in his youth, now was able to assist Nagu in looking after the children, like a second mother, in this growing family.

Within the first year at the Ashram, Venkatoos and Nagu had their third son. As it fell to Bhagavan to name



the children, when presented with the newborn, he merely commented, "O, Ganesa's younger brother!" All knew what the words meant: this third son was to be named Subramanian, which in time, as with many of that name, was shortened to 'Mani'.

Mother's Shrine Project

That same year, the Matrubhuteswarar Temple project was initiated and ground-breaking ceremonies and other rites were led by Venkatoos. As the temple neared completion in 1948, it was Venkatoos who stood at Bhagavan's side within the sanctum sanctorum. After Bhagavan blessed the Sri

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Maya

Mr. Prakasa Rao: What is the root-cause of *maya*?

M.: What is *maya*?

D.: *Maya* is wrong knowledge, illusion.

M.: For whom is the illusion? There must be one to be deluded. Illusion is ignorance. The ignorant Self sees the objects according to you. When the objects are not themselves present how can *maya* exist? *Maya* is *ya ma* ('what is not'). [That which] remains is the true Self.

— Talks §144





Chakra, TNV installed it as he subsequently did with the Matrubbhuteswara Lingam. The following spring, when Matrubbhuteswarar Mahakumbhabhishekam was celebrated, Venkatoos had the responsibility of looking after many of the rites and ceremonies.

Gandhiji and Indian Independence

Meanwhile, as if the number of his duties in the Ashram was not enough, Venkatoos felt called to do his part in serving the country in its time of need, for indeed, India was all this while in the grip of a struggle for freedom. TNV had been an active supporter of the Congress and regularly participated in its activities, though not always with the enthusiastic support of Chinnaaswami who felt that managing the Ashram should be his sole interest. Yet Bhagavan stood by Venkatoos.

Thus in January 1946, when Gandhiji came to Madras and spent five days at the Hindi Prachar Sabha, Bhagavan supported TNV in taking his eldest son, Sundaram, to see him. When TNV presented Gandhiji with a photo of Bhagavan, the Mahatma gazed at it for some time and then exclaimed in Hindi: *Kitne mahaan sant hain!* ("What a great saint!")

Gandhi's high regard for Bhagavan was evidenced in other ways, not least of all in his sending key



Mahatma Gandhi arriving at the Hindi Prachar Sabha in Madras (Jan 1946)

Congress leaders to the Ashram to see Bhagavan.

TNV befriended O. P. Ramaswamy Reddiar, the Tamil Congress leader, who had been a devotee of Bhagavan since the 1920s. When self-rule finally became a reality, TNV was present at the hoisting of the national flag at Raja Gopuram in the Big Temple on Independence Day (August 15th, 1947). Afterwards he invited O.P.R. and other officials to the Ashram where the Tri-colour flag was hoisted with Bhagavan's blessing.

(to be continued)

Wordwise: Maya माया

Maya: illusion, delusion, unreality, phantom, apparition, deception, fraud, trick, sorcery, magic; the principle of appearance; *in early Vedic literature*: the power of creation; Shakti; supernatural or divine power, mystery, wisdom.

S. Radhakrishnan says that in early Vedic texts, *maya* signified 'might' or 'power' and its signification as 'illusion' or 'ignorance' never appeared in the Vedas but was a later development. In the *Devi Mahatmyam*, *maya* is a form of the Goddess Lakshmi who is called *Mahamaya* or 'the One of great power'. In Samkya philosophy, *maya* came to mean 'source of the visible universe', *prakriti*. Later in Advaita Vedanta and in Sankara, it came to be seen as that which causes one to take the unreal as real, the power of illusion where the impermanent and contingent is confused with the absolute and eternal. Bhagavan sums up the soul's entanglement, readily identifying the culprit: "The mind is *maya*. Reality lies beyond the mind. So long as mind functions, there is duality, *maya*. Once it is transcended, Reality shines forth [of its own]. (*Talks* §433)





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sathabhishekam of Ashram President V. S. Ramanan

On 13th June Ashram President V. S. Ramanan celebrated *Sathabhishekam* (completion of 80 years), almost twenty years to the day since TNV's *sathabhishekam* on 10th June, 1994. Dr. Anand Ramanan and other family members gathered with devotees for homa in the New Hall followed by purnahurthi at 9.30. All moved out in front of the New Hall for abhishekam, followed by puja at Bhagavan's Shrine. Well-wishers approached the President and Sushilamma to present gifts and do namaskaram after which birthday cake was cut and distributed. On this great occasion, devotees and family members joined in praying to Bhagavan to bless Sri Ramanasramam's President with many more years of healthy life and dedicated service to Bhagavan.





In Profile: Desur Akhilandammal



Born around 1860, Akhilandammaiyar was widowed in her childhood and took up a life serving sadhus and saints including Seshadri Swami and Swami Vithoba of Polur. When at Arunachaleswarar Temple in 1896, she witnessed a priest pouring milk-prasadam into the mouth of a God-intoxicated youth whose eyes remained closed and whose form seemed as though lifeless. She returned to her native Desur (70 km from Tiruvannamalai) without having been seen by the boy but returned seven years later in 1903 to hear that he was on the Hill. "Would Brahmana Swami eat at all, and that too, food from my hands?", she wondered. She had this to say of her first meeting with Bhagavan: "Even though he was unwashed and covered with dust, his body had a golden glow. On seeing this ascetic with his bodily frame so lean that it exposed his bones, my heart melted and tears welled up within me. The young Lord then opened his eyes and graciously directed them toward me. Instantaneously, I surrendered myself totally, and took a vow to serve food to the jnani all my life." Back in Desur in 1914, she and Mastan Swami founded *Sri Ramanananda Matalayam*. When Bhagavan came down to Ramanasramam, Desurammal continued to bring him food, always intent on eating from the leaf Bhagavan had used. She came to see Bhagavan in 1950. Now in her nineties, no one recognized her when she tried to enter the Nirvana Room. But Kunjuswami spotting her, told Bhagavan who said, "Desurammal! Bring her here, bring her inside". She entered and wept seeing Bhagavan's wasted frame. But Bhagavan said, "Why do you feel sorry for this mortal body? I am always your shelter".

Call Divine Vol. 10, p. 380, (book review by T.M.P. Mahadevan of *Sri Ramananubhavam* from Akhilandammaiyar); and <arunachalamaharshi.blogspot.com>

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Discourses by Nochur Sri Venkataraman



A seven-day discourse by Nochur Sri Venkataraman on *Ulladu Narpadu* commenced on the 21st June and concluded the series of discourses on the *Forty Verses* that have taken place off and on over the last six years. These June talks in Tamil were the first by Nochur at the Ashram since the discourses on *Aksharamanamalai* in English last January. (A sequel series to *Aksharamanamalai* in English is tentatively scheduled to begin immediately after Jayanthi on 6th January, 2015.)

Reality in Forty Verses

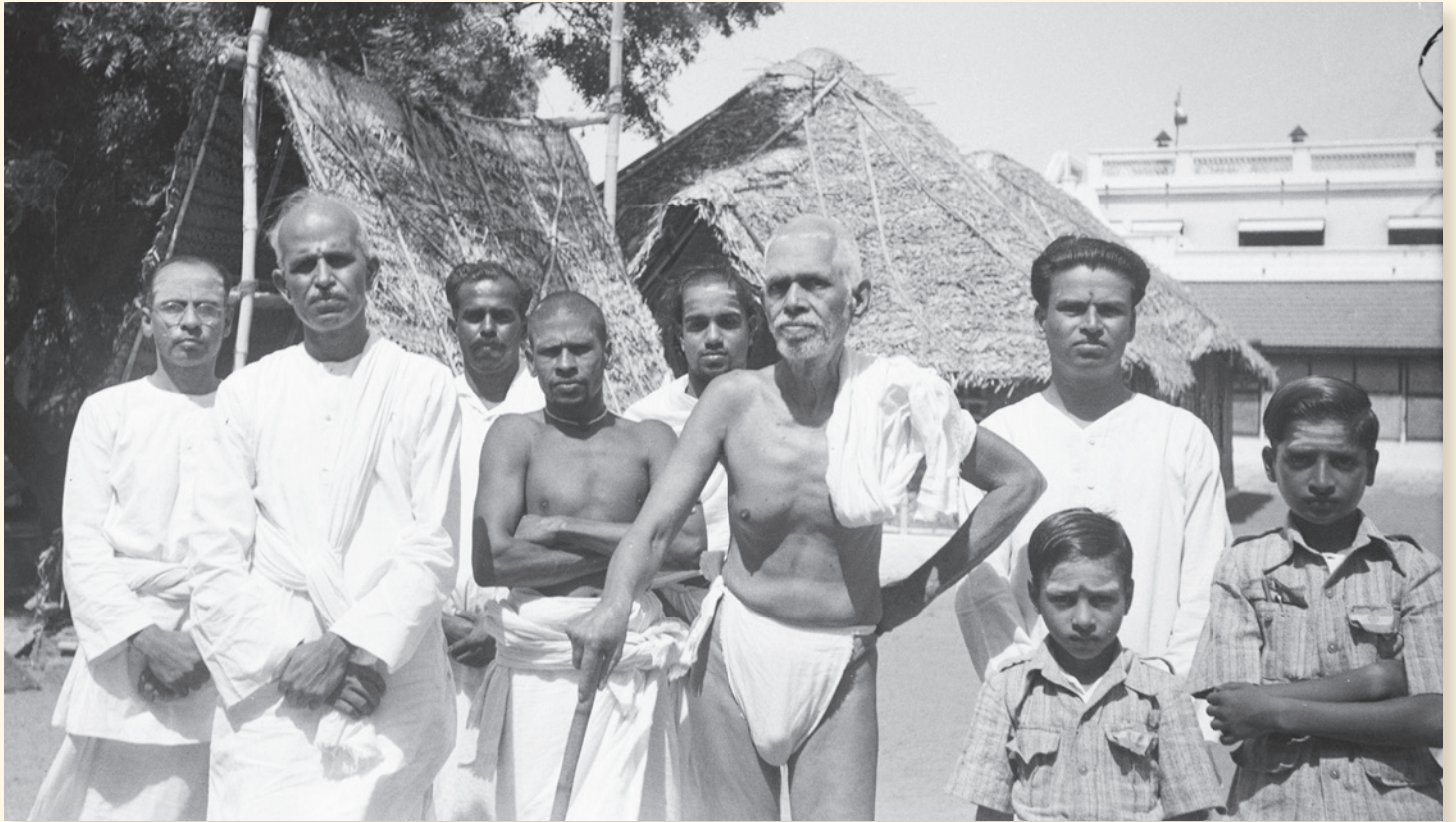
35. To discern and abide in the ever-present Reality is true attainment. All other attainments are like powers enjoyed in a dream. When the sleeper wakes, are they (still) real? Those who stay in the state of truth, having cast off the unreal — will they ever be deluded?

— Sri Bhagavan



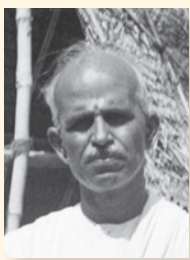


In the Frame with Bhagavan



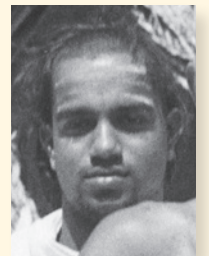
To Bhagavan's left, TNV, Sundaram and Mani; to his right, attendant Sivanandaswami and behind, T.V. Devaraja Mudaliar (bus owner)

(Archival listing GRO 44 was taken on the day of Independence, 15 August, 1947. TNV had spent the previous night decorating the Ashram, having arranged for Congress leaders to come to officiate at the Ashram flag-raising ceremony.)



O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar (1895-1970) from Tindivanam was a freedom-fighter and member of the Indian National Congress and went on to serve as the Premier of Madras Presidency (1947-1949). A staunch devotee of Bhagavan, he came to the Ashram to seek Bhagavan's blessings for the Satyagraha of October 1940 for which he was subsequently jailed. O.P.R. later served at key junctures during the construction of the Mother's Shrine and the subsequent Mahakumbhabhishekam in 1949. He also offered protection to the Ashram at TNV's behest during the confused hours amidst the crowds following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana in 1950.

K. Krishnamurthy, affectionately known as "Kittu" or "Kittu Mama", was chief priest from 1950 till his death in October 1995. He joined the Ashram Veda Patasala at the age of 11 in 1938 and stayed put for the next 57 years. Prior to Bhagavan's Maha Nirvana, Kittu Mama had the rare privilege of bringing *naivedyam* to Bhagavan in the Nirvana Room. Once, as prasadam was given, Bhagavan said, "As you make the offering to my Mother's shrine, so do it to me. She is unable to eat it. Now I am also unable to eat it."



T. S. Rajagopala Iyer served as attendant to Bhagavan and Ashram librarian as well as being one of six witnessing signatories of Bhagavan's Will in March 1938. In his later years when family members jovially complained to him of his persistent habit of talking, he declared, "I shall stop talking only when my Bhagavan bids me." As it would happen, T.S.R. had a dream in which Bhagavan struck him with his stick and said "Keep quiet!" From that time onwards until his death, he maintained strict silence.





Events near Sri Ramanasramam: Ramanananda Matalayam Centenary

Sri Ramanananda Matalayam—Desur celebrated its hundredth year this month with Kumbhabhishekam sponsored by Dr. Ravi (a physician-devotee who lives in the area) with Sri Ramanasramam supporting. Sri Ramanananda Matalayam is the first Ashram established in Bhagavan's name. It was inaugurated by Desur Akhilandamma and Mastan Swami in June (Vaikasi) 1914. On Sunday 8th June, 2014 the centenary event took place after several months of renovation work. Sri Ramanasramam devotees were in attendance during the kala puja in the yagasala after which the sanctified kalasas were taken in procession and Kumbhabhishekam performed above, followed by Mahabhishekam within, Akhilandamma's Samadhi.

Ashram Heritage Sites: Ashram Veda Patasala Renovation



Ashram Veda Patasala renovation work led by architectural conservationist Shakti Murugan of Thanjavur concluded this month. The 3-month project involved wall-scraping, carpentry work, refurbishing fixtures and painting.

