

Saranagati

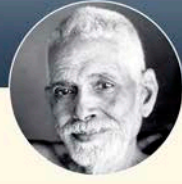


SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

JULY 2017
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Saranagati



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ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This summer has been quiet at Ramanasramam. With the seasonal drought continuing unabated, the Ashram awaits badly needed rain to replenish wells before allowing guests to return. But towards the end of the month, tantalizing showers gave hope that the drought may be ending.

In this July issue of *Saranagati* we hear news from the recent Connecticut Ramana Kendra celebrations as well as an update on the final decision related to expansion of the Giri Valam road.

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

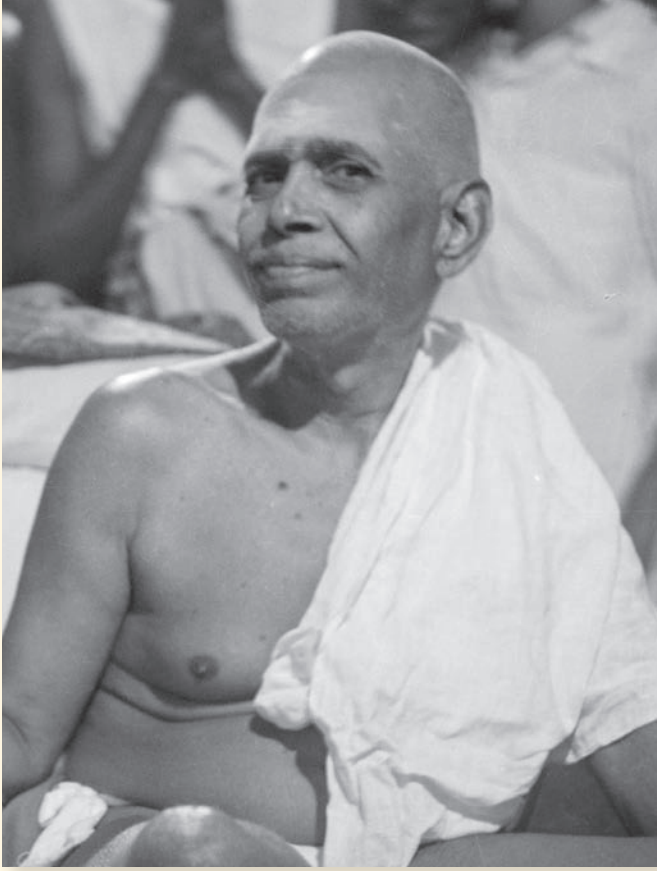
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

5th July (Weds) Cow Lakshmi Day
8th July (Sat) Full Moon/Guru Poornima
23rd July (Sun) Punarvasu Day
25th July (Tues) Kavya Kanta Ganapati Muni Day
6-7th August (Sun-Mon) Full Moon
19th August (Sat) Punarvasu Day
21st August (Mon) Muruganar's Day

1st September (Fri) Bhagavan's Advent Day
5th September (Tues) Full Moon
15th September (Fri) Punarvasu Day
21st September (Thu) Navaratri commences
29th September (Fri) Saraswati Puja
30th September (Sat) Vijayadasami Day
13th October (Fri) Punarvasu Day





Daily Life in the Dining Hall (pt. IX): Special Offerings

We have seen in forgoing issues the many ways Bhagavan sought to downplay his special role in the Ashram. We have seen how he always made sure that offerings made to him were shared equally with all. And we saw in the last issue how he was strongly resistant to Raja Iyer's attempts to give him more than his share at meals.

Bhagavan's every action was an *upadesa*. It was as though Bhagavan was trying to teach devotees on a daily basis that what is worshipped in the guru is the Self and the Self exists in equal measure in each and every person. So, when offerings are made to the guru, they should be offered equally to the divine atman in each being including the animals in his presence.

He called nothing his own and never requested special treatment, but if luxurious offerings were made, he was happy to be given only a little and would never

allow that such items be given to him alone. He likewise would not permit himself to enjoy other luxuries if all could not benefit from them. For example, when an electric fan was placed before him in the hall, he refused to have it turned on since the others in the hall were not situated in a way that they could feel its currents.¹

Not surprisingly, many devotees out of their affection and devotion to Bhagavan sought ways to circumvent these restrictions. Once when an attendant in the dining hall was placing a quarter mango on devotees' leaves, he slipped a half mango onto Bhagavan's leaf. Bhagavan noticed it immediately and promptly put it back, taking a small piece instead.

The special consideration devotees tried to show Bhagavan was not premeditated but spontaneous, born out of devotion and the enthusiasm of being in his presence. Once while pouring buttermilk slowly into Bhagavan's hand, one of the cooks happened to linger too long and Bhagavan brought it to her attention: "Are you stopping equally long before every leaf? If not, why this distinction to me?" To avoid this in the future, Bhagavan avoided holding out his palm to receive anything during a meal.²

Devotees were slow to catch on and sometimes went to great efforts to smuggle in special items for Bhagavan without his knowing it. But Bhagavan's keen eye never failed to catch them out in their little devices and the strategies they employed to get him to accept special food items.

Once when Lakshmi made puris fried in oil, she fried a few extra ones in ghee. She was careful to place the special ones on top in order that these might be unobtrusively served to Bhagavan. When the meal was over, Bhagavan called her and said: 'Lakshmi, don't do this again. If you try to differentiate, I will never again touch your preparations'.

Lakshmi later commented that "Bhagavan's words were so powerful that one's entire being got changed with a single word of his. He is not only the Fountain of Compassion, but the Lord of Power as well".³

¹ *For Those with Little Dust: Selected Writings of Arthur Osborne*, "The Man Called Ramana".

² *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, Prof. G.V. Subbaramayya, p. 90.

³ Lakshmi Ranganadham in *Moments Remembered*, p. 7.





Subbalakshmi's Poison

A similar case involved Subbalakshmi. When Bhagavan was advised by doctors to take curd rather than buttermilk, Subbalakshmi wanted to see to it that he got the required curd. But knowing there was not enough for all, she devised a clever means of getting Bhagavan to take some anyway. While buttermilk was being served, she secretly concealed a ladle filled with curd in the bucket of buttermilk and served Bhagavan from that. After the deed was done, Bhagavan painfully implored her, "Subbalakshmi! Do you know what you have done? You have served me poison! Showing any kind of discrimination between me and devotees is sheer poison."

Subbalakshmi was so frightened by her guru's words that she fell sick with a fever. On the third day, Shantammal came before Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, you are angry with Subbalakshmi. The poor lady has had a high fever for several days now. Will you please pardon her?"

Bhagavan smilingly asked, "Did I get angry with her? I got angry only with her behaviour."

The fever subsided immediately.⁴

Counting the Pieces of Fruit

We have seen in earlier issues how Bhagavan used great care to ensure that fairness in serving was applied to all and if he saw a guest receive less of a special item, he would point it out. As always, Bhagavan took great care to ensure that the amount of a special item served on his own leaf-plate did not exceed that of others.

Once when at breakfast, banana, orange and apple slices were served along with the idlis, Bhagavan broke his silence to question one of the cooks doing the serving. He asked about the amount of fruit served on his own leaf which he thought was more than that served on the leaf-plates of others in the hall. The cook rushed over and begged the pardon of Mouni Sadhu and asked if he might take his leaf with its content for a moment to show to Bhagavan. The devotee was perplexed but soon saw that the server was trying to vindicate himself by showing Bhagavan the fruit on Mouni Sadhu's leaf-plate, proof that he had served the same number of fruit pieces to Bhagavan.

When Bhagavan had counted the fruit pieces on

⁴ Unpublished Manuscript, (*Ramana Peria Puranam*), p. 292.

the leaf, the attendant returned the leaf and its content to Mouni Sadhu and breakfast proceeded as normal.⁵

The reader may appreciate that Bhagavan's meticulousness regarding equality was not about food per se but hinged on a deep feature of his teaching and the effort to cut through a common illusion, that divinity is located only in some people, i.e. gurus, saints and sages. By forcing devotees to treat him as one among the many, he was invariably raising up all people. And this would include those of humble origins which Bhagavan was quick to defend as the following scene demonstrates.

Once when young Seshadri served Bhagavan buttermilk a second time, Bhagavan noticed that the second glass of buttermilk tasted different from the first. He inquired why that should be so. Seshadri went to the kitchen and asked the cooks and they explained that the buttermilk that was served in the second round had been intended for the servants. Bhagavan asked, 'Why this difference?' In other words, Bhagavan was asking why the servants should be served inferior buttermilk. From that day onwards, everyone was served the same buttermilk from a common supply.⁶

Invoking Issues of Health

But by hook or crook devotees were determined to breach Bhagavan's defences and sneak in special food items for Bhagavan at all costs. Indeed, a whole new level of strategy was implemented and even issues of health were raised.

Once during a period of rationing, boiled wheat was served instead of rice at the evening meals each night. On one night, however, Bhagavan was served rice while everyone else got wheat. When confronted about it, Chinna-swami simply said, "wheat is not good for Bhagavan's health." Bhagavan retorted, "Oh! Are you a doctor? Serve [me] what is served to the others. Make no discrimination."⁷

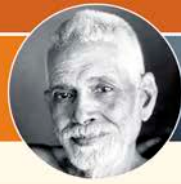
Finally, devotees raised the ante yet again and began to bring in real doctors who would determine what Bhagavan's diet should be.

⁵ *In Days of Great Peace*, p 110.

⁶ *Moments Remembered*, p. 106-107.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106-107.





Tonics for All Alike

Once Dr. Ramachandra Rao, an Ayurvedic physician, made out a long list of herbs and ingredients and showed it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan carefully perused it and commented on the value of each of the herbs, and obediently asked, “For whom is this medicine, my dear man?” The kindly doctor said, “For Sri Bhagavan himself.” On hearing that, Bhagavan said, “No doubt you have given me a long list of items but where am I to get the money to pay for them? It could cost Rs. 10/- and whom am I to approach for it?”

Someone quietly said, looking around at the Ashram property, “Whose is all this, Swamiji?”

“Yes, but what have I? If I want a quarter anna, I must go and ask the Sarvadhikari. How should I go and ask him? He gives me a little food, if I go there as soon as the bell rings.”

The physician humbly volunteered to pay for the medicines himself. Bhagavan said, “Oh yes? You will get them? But if that medicine is good for me, it must necessarily be good for all the others here. Can you give it to them as well?”

Others in the hall quickly picked up on Bhagavan’s line of argument and made soft protests: “Why do we want it, Swamiji?” Bhagavan replied, “If people who do physical work don’t need a body-building tonic, how is that I who merely sits here and eats should need one? That can’t be!”

The doctor said, “Bhagavan always declines everything that is offered, but if he agrees to take something, won’t it be forthcoming? Or if not medicines, why not take some nutritious food such as milk, fruit and almonds?”

Bhagavan replied, “I am a *daridranarayana* (God in the form of the poor and the destitute). How can I

afford it? Besides, mine is a large family. How can all of them have milk, fruit and almonds?”⁸

Two Hundred Tumblers of Juice

Another time doctors recommended that Bhagavan take more nourishing food. Devotees joined in the appeal, some recommending thickly buttered bread, others recommending milk and others that Bhagavan be given fresh orange juice. Bhagavan responded by saying, “How can we afford to have such a luxurious diet? For us there can only be the poor man’s ration.” A devotee made an impassioned appeal, “But what is the harm in changing the diet for the sake of health? Even Mahatma Gandhi takes a special diet, as does Aurobindo, to keep up the health. Please, therefore, do take at least a tumblerful of sweet orange juice for our sake.”

“Do you know the cost of a tumbler of juice?” asked Bhagavan. “But not one alone, we will require about 200 tumblers of juice. Or do you want me alone to gulp down the sweet drink with all of you looking on? Moreover, how can we poor folk provide 200 tumblers of juice worth Rs. 50/ a day?” Bhagavan added smilingly.⁹

Seven Bottles of an American Tonic

On another occasion devotees’ concerns were more well-founded as Bhagavan was suffering from jaundice. His diet had been limited to buttermilk and rice and the Ashram dispensary doctor, Dr. Shiva Rao, wanted some protein foods and vitamins to be taken as supplement. However, Bhagavan declined. Finally, after repeated appeals, Bhagavan agreed to take a protein supplement as long as others

⁸ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 29th November, 1945

⁹ *Surpassing Love and Grace*, p. 84.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Fruit Offerings

Q.: You do not touch money nor other offerings, I trust.

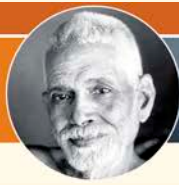
M.: People sometimes place fruits in my hands. I touch them.

Q.: If you receive one kind of offering, why should you not receive money also?

M.: I cannot eat money. What shall I do with it? Why should I take that with which I [have no use]?

— Talks §281





were served the same. So seven bottles of a special American preparation made out of milk protein and chocolate were brought from Chennai. One spoonful was given to each devotee in the hall and then one to Bhagavan. But a few days later, an eager devotee upset the balance by increasing the dosage to two spoonfuls placed on Bhagavan's leaf alone. Thus, Bhagavan refused to take the supplement any longer.¹⁰

Exceptions to the Rule

It should be added that Bhagavan was not a stickler for rules and on rare occasions he made exceptions to the rule of accepting gifts. In general, it was not the letter of the law he aimed at but basic principles he sought to instil in his followers. And when some loftier principle entered the equation, he weighed it against the rule.

An example of this followed a 1938 decision not to allow distribution of fruit in the hall. All offerings were thus collected and distributed in the dining hall at meal times.¹¹ Additionally, there came an order that devotees could not make offerings to Bhagavan directly.

Knowing how much Bhagavan liked figs, when Nagamma's sister sent a consignment of figs, Nagamma washed them, sun-dried them and stored them in a jar until she found the right opportunity to give them to Bhagavan. Some weeks passed until one day, when Bhagavan had come out onto the verandah and sat before 500 devotees. Letters were being read out and one of them was from Nagamma's brother. In it, mention was made of the figs that had been sent to the Ashram, at which point Bhagavan turned and looked towards Nagamma. Nagamma explained her position and the sadness she felt about not being allowed to give the figs to Bhagavan. Looking at her compassionately, Bhagavan said, "Is it so? They are in your house now?" With that, Nagamma had the opportunity she had been waiting for and rushed home to fetch them. When she returned, Bhagavan said, "There, Nagamma is bringing the jar of fruit. Go and receive it." Rangaswami moved to the edge

¹⁰ *Mountain Path*, April 1979, p. 94.

¹¹ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, p. 13.



Suri Nagamma

of the verandah and stretched out his hands to accept Nagamma's gift. Bhagavan removed the lid and immediately took out some of the fruit and began to eat it. All looked on in surprise. Handing back the jar to Rangaswami, Bhagavan asked him to preserve it carefully.

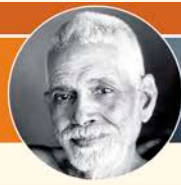
Nagamma writes: "My joy knew no bounds at the graciousness extended towards me. My eyes were filled with tears. Bhagavan looked at me as if to say, "Is your desire fulfilled now?"

It is no exaggeration to say that his eyes were shining bright like emeralds. It was a great surprise to those who were present that Bhagavan who does not eat anything given to him by devotees without sharing the same with all did not do so on this occasion. As this is most unusual, my happiness was without bounds."¹² —

(to be continued)

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.144-45.





Courtesy of Dev Gogoi

Final Renovations to the Girivalam Path

As devotees and *Saranagati* readers expressed concern regarding changes to the Girivalam road, especially the planned removal of large trees to make room for the Highway Department expansion plans, *Saranagati* has been tracking the progress of the National Green Tribunal and is pleased to announce the favourable decision of the NGT's final order from May 30th, 2017. In brief, not a single tree along the Girivalam road is to be removed. The Sonagiri Forest is to remain intact and no temple, shrine, historical marker or *paadam* is to be moved or disturbed in any

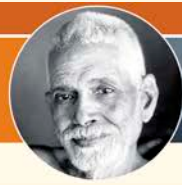
way. All tirthams, kulams and water channels are protected, and the pedestrian-only walkway along the pradakshina path is to be narrower at 2 metres wide, instead of 12 metres, which means trees and shrines along the path can be maintained. In short, every point raised by the petitioners has been favourably addressed. Justice P. Jyothimani even took the trouble to explicitly observe: "We must realise that there is no substitute to the trees which provide invaluable ecological services to the human beings. Therefore, it is our sacred duty not only to grow more number of trees but also to maintain the same."

To view the order in detail, please go to the following link: <http://www.greentribunal.gov.in/south_jud.aspx>. Click on "Bench Judgment", enter verification code and then click "Display". —



Courtesy of Dev Gogoi





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Pandava Tirtham Renovations



On 28th June, with permission from local authorities, the Ashram initiated the renovation of Pandava Tirtham, situated just a few hundred metres northeast uphill from Ramanasramam. Flanked by Arjuna and Bhima Tirthas, Pandava Tirtha will be cleaned, excavated and restored over the next two months. *Arunachala Mahatmyam* tells us the Pandavas once bathed here and speaks of the tirtham's auspicious power to fulfil desires and bestow liberation. In the old days, Bhagavan and Nayana used to swim in the Pandava Tank and Yogi Ranganathan narrates how Bhagavan once led devotees there each day in the early morning hours for swimming and floating in *padmasana*. In his boyhood, Bhagavan was known for his swimming ability and devotees would later vouch for it when they raced Bhagavan at Pandava Tirtham. Bhagavan, however, once told of a close call swimming at another tirtha (just opposite Pachiamman Kovil). Nayana's son, Mahadeva, was riding on Bhagavan's back across the tank. "When we were halfway across, Mahadeva began pressing me down, greatly elated, shouting 'Aha, Hai!' as cart drivers do to their bullocks. I was tired and it seemed as though both of us would drown. I was of course very anxious that the boy be saved from such a catastrophe, so I managed to reach the other side." —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nochur Sri Venkataraman Discourses



On June 19th, Nochur Sri Venkataraman began seven days of discourses on *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*. This year's series picked up at verse 12 and each day's discourse covered about one verse. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Amit Shah's Visit to the Ashram



Amitbhai Anilchandra Shah, President of Bharatiya Janata Party (since 2014), is closely associated with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Born to a Jain Gujarati family in Mumbai, the BJP President trained in biochemistry and then pursued a career as a stockbroker before entering politics. On Tues. 27th June, Amit Shah visited the Ashram amidst high-level security. —





Connecticut Ramana Kendra: 2017 Saranagati Programme

The Connecticut Ramana Maharshi Satsang Group's annual programme called *Saranagati* usually takes place over Memorial Day weekend. This year's program was held on Sunday, May 28th at the home of Dr. Aruna Ramanan and Dr. Ramkumar Sankaran in Farmington with nearly fifty devotees from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Florida, Tennessee and India in attendance.

The theme for this 10th-anniversary programme was Bhagavan's uniqueness and how his grace manifested in the lives of devotees when they accepted him as guru. The programme commenced with chanting of *Kaalai Pattu* and *Sri Ramana Chatvarimsat* and a reading from V. Ganesan's *Moments Remembered*. The reading describes the sweet pudding known in Tamil as *Thiru-Adirai-Kali* and the accompanying savoury side-dish called

Yezhu-thaan-koottu that are customarily offered to Lord Natarajan on Ardra Darshan, the annual celebration which was in progress the night Bhagavan was born. The text tells us, that Ramana is "the special 'Ardra-Pudding' gifted to the suffering world by Lord Matrubhuteswara-Siva Himself, whose human embodiment was Mother Alagammal."

The breakfast that followed the programme's early morning session included *Thiru-Adirai-Kali* and *Yezhu-thaan-koottu*. Afterward, devotees immersed themselves in chanting *Aksharamanamalai*, *Ramana Satguru*, *Upadesa Saram*, and *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, interspersed with readings and accounts from devotees past and present.

A common thread that recurred throughout the programme was how devotees related to Bhagavan with utter simplicity and humility. Attendees heard in a reading from Professor K. Swaminathan how "the simple humility and devotion of a peasant had evoked a far greater response from the Master than any amount of learning." Attendees also heard the account of how, in his very first visit, Mastan, a simple weaver, was transformed





by a single glance from Bhagavan into a state filled with “total absorption and peace” that lasted eight hours.

This attitude of relating to Bhagavan with a simple mind was reinforced in a reading from a western devotee, Mouni Sadhu, who observed that “All theories, all acquired knowledge fall into dust when standing face to face with the Maharshi. One gets peace that passeth all human understanding.”

The readings included the story of how Manavasi V. Ramaswami Iyer composed the famous *Saranagati* song of surrender to Bhagavan when he received relief from very painful sores on his legs only after two sadhus, who visited him at Bhagavan’s request, “prescribed some simple home remedies.” Appropriately, the program concluded with the singing of *Saranagati* followed by a sumptuous lunch. —



Obituary: Dr. Manjunath Devappa Naik



Born in Kumtha, Karnataka in March 1935, Dr. Manjunath Devappa Naik excelled as a young student and went on to stand second in SSLC, board of Bombay, where he completed his medical studies (MBBS). A devotee of Bhagavan since his youth, the medical facility he established in Kumtha was named ‘Ramana Clinic’. A community leader who earned the respect of all around him, Dr. Naik built up the Ramana Satsanga at Kumtha where he was often invited to give discourses on Bhagavan. Under his leadership, Ramana satsang was conducted each Sunday as well as on important days such as Ramana Jayanthi and Aradhana. Dr. Naik visited Ramanasramam every year for 45 years and often brought Ramana devotees with him from Kumtha, leading them in pradakshina around the Holy Hill. He translated Arthur Osbourne’s *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge* into Kannada and founded the Kannada magazine *Ramana Sandesa*. Some 12-14 years back, he bought land in Kumtha and constructed the Ramana Mandiram. His last visit to Ramanasramam was Deepam Day last December and his last celebration at the Mandiram in Kumtha was April 4th this year after which he fell sick. On 7th May 2017, Dr. Naik merged at the Feet of Bhagavan. He is survived by his wife, Kusuma, his two sons, Prabhakar and Prakasha, and his two daughters, Vijaya and Ranjani, and is fondly remembered by all who had the honour of knowing him. —

Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events. Please visit the channel at: <<https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>>. Also follow Ashram activities in various languages on Facebook @ <https://www.facebook.com/SriRamanaMaharshi>, <https://www.facebook.com/SriRamanaTamil>, <https://www.facebook.com/SriRamanaTelugu>, <https://www.facebook.com/Sriramanaspanish/>, <https://www.facebook.com/Ramanamaharshirussian/>, <https://www.facebook.com/ramanamaharshifrench/>

