

Saranagathi



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This Issue

Dear Sri Bhagavan Devotees,

With Sri Bhagavan's Blessings we are pleased to publish the June 2008 Saranagathi issue.

The month of May was one of intense activity at Sri Ramanasramam. We celebrated both Sri Bhagavan and Mother Alagamma's Aradhana.

We got many reports of His Aradhana celebrations, from around the world. The Ashram and Tiruvannamalai received few 'welcome' showers followed by long periods of hot weather, like the rest of South India.

The focus of the June issue of Saranagathi is on Sri Bhagavan's mother, Alagamma. Her faith and devotion to Sri Bhagavan was immense. She stayed with Sri Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave and later at Skandashram. Sri Ramanasramam, in its

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current form has grown primarily around her samadhi. In this issue we publish a short biography of Mother Alagamma, Vijay Krishnasamy's moving and inspiring email from Australia and a report on 'Linga Pratishta' at Swami Ramanananda's samadhi.

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

Ever Truly In Sri Bhagavan,

Editorial Team.

Destiny & Free Will

*The Ordainer controls the fate of souls
in accordance with their prarabdhakarma.
Whatever is destined not to happen will not
happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined
to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it.
This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.*

– Sri Bhagavan's written answer to His Mother.

The Mother

An extract from *Ramana Maharshi & The Path of Self-Knowledge* by Sri Arthur Osborne

Shortly after Sri Bhagavan's mother returned from her unsuccessful attempt to win him back to her in 1900, she lost her eldest son. Two years later the youngest son, Nagasundaram, still only a lad of seventeen, went to Tiruvannamalai for the first time to see his Swami brother. So overcome was he that he embraced him and wept aloud; Sri Bhagavan sat silent, unmoved. The mother came once for a brief visit on her return from a pilgrimage to Benares.

In 1914 she went on a pilgrimage to Venkataramanaswami Shrine at Tirupati and again stayed at Tiruvannamalai on her way back. This time she fell ill there and suffered severely for several weeks with symptoms of typhoid. Sri Bhagavan tended her with great solicitude. The verses he composed during her sickness are the only instance known of any prayer of his to influence the course of events.

Oh Lord! Hill of my refuge, who curest the ills of recurrent births, it is for Thee to cure my mother's fever. Oh God who slayest death! Reveal Thy feet in the Heart-Lotus of her who bore me to take refuge at Thy Lotus-Feet, and shield her from death. What is death if scrutinised? Arunachala, Thou blazing fire of Knowledge! Enfold my mother in Thy Light and make her one with Thee. What need then for cremation? Arunachala, Dispeller of illusion! Why dost Thou delay to dispel my mother's delirium? Is there any but Thee to watch as a Mother over one who has sought refuge in Thee and to rescue from the tyranny of karma?

Ostensibly a prayer for the mother to be saved from her fever, this was in reality a prayer to save her also from the vaster fever of illusion and gather her back into Oneness with the Self

in Liberation from the delirium of life. Needless to say, Alagammal recovered. She returned to Manamadura, but after this prayer circumstances conspired to draw her back from the life of the world to that of the Ashram. The family house at Tiruchuzhi had been sold to meet debts and pay necessary expenses. Her brother-in-law, Nelliappier, had died, leaving the family in none too easy circumstances. In 1915 the wife of her youngest son, Nagasundaram, died, leaving a young son who was adopted by his aunt Alamelu, now married. Alagammal began to feel that the only place left for her in her old age was with her Swami son. Early in 1916 she went to Tiruvannamalai.

At first she stayed for a few days with Echammal. Some of the devotees were against her staying with Sri Bhagavan, fearing that he might leave his abode in silent protest, as he had left home in 1896. However, there was a great difference, for now it was she who had renounced home, not he who was detained there. The majesty of Sri Bhagavan was so awe-inspiring that, despite his gracious manner, when a question like this arose as to what he would wish none presumed to ask him directly. Even if any did he might sit unmoved, not replying, for he had no wishes. The wish for the mother's recovery expressed in his verses is something quite exceptional. Soon after his mother came to stay with him, Sri Bhagavan moved from Virupaksha to Skandashram, a little higher up the hill and directly above Virupaksha. This is a much more spacious cave and was constructed for him to occupy. Finding a damp patch of rock there he rightly guessed that there must be a concealed spring. This was released by digging and yielded a perennial flow of water, enough for all Ashram needs, even for a small garden that was made in front of the Cave. The mother began to prepare meals, and so began a new epoch in Ashram life. Wishing to draw her younger son also to the Ashram, Alagammal sent a devotee to summon

him there. He gave up the job he had at Tiruvengadu and went to live at Tiruvannamalai. At first he stayed in town, taking food at the house of some friend or other and daily visiting the Ashram. Before long he took the vow of renunciation and donned the ochre robe under the name of Niranjanananda Swami, although he was more often known familiarly as 'Chinnaswami', the 'Little Swami', through being the brother of the Swami. For a while he still went daily to beg his food in town, but then it seemed incongruous to the devotees that the Swami's own brother should go and beg when there was food for all at the Ashram and he was prevailed upon so settle there.

To return to the mother: it was a severe training that she received. Often enough Sri Bhagavan would ignore her, not answering when she spoke, although he took notice of others. If she complained he would say, "All women are my mothers, not you only." One is reminded of Christ's saying when he was told that his mother and brothers were standing at the edge of the crowd, waiting to speak to him, "Whoever does the will of my Father Who is in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." At first Sri Bhagavan's mother would often weep with vexation but gradually understanding developed in her. The feeling of superiority in being the mother of the Swami fell away, the sense of ego was weakened and she devoted herself to the service of the devotees.

Even now, he would still make fun of her orthodox scruples. If her sari happened to touch a non-Brahmin he would exclaim in mock consternation: "Look! Purity is gone! Religion is gone!" The Ashram food was strictly vegetarian, but Alagammal, like some very devout Brahmins, went still further and considered some vegetables also unsattvic (impure), and Sri Bhagavan would say mockingly: "Mind that onion! It is a great obstacle to Moksha (Deliverance)!" It should be said here that Sri Bhagavan did not disapprove of orthodoxy in general. In this case there was excessive attachment to the forms of orthodoxy and that

was what he attacked. In general he laid stress on the importance of sattvic (pure) food. He did not often give any injunctions at all concerning outer activity; his usual method was to sow the spiritual seed in the heart and leave it to shape the outer life as it grew. The injunctions came from within. One Western devotee was an out-and-out meat-eater when he arrived, looking upon meat as the real substance of a meal as well as the most tasty part, and, with no word spoken on the subject, the time came when he felt an aversion to the very idea of eating meat.

There were other ways also in which the mother was made to realize that he who had been born her son was a Divine Incarnation. Once as she sat before him he disappeared and she saw instead a lingam (column) of pure light. Thinking this to mean that he had discarded his human form, she burst into tears, but soon the lingam vanished and he reappeared as before. On another occasion she saw him garlanded and surrounded with serpents like the conventional representations of Siva. She cried to him: "Send them away! I am frightened of them!" After this she begged him to appear to her henceforth only in his human form. The purpose of the visions had been served; she had realized that the form she knew and loved as her son was as illusory as any other he might assume.

In 1920 the health of the mother began to fail. She was able to work less in the service of the Ashram and was obliged to rest more. During her illness Sri Bhagavan attended on her constantly, often sitting up at night with her. In silence and meditation her understanding matured. The end came in 1922 on the festival of Bahula Navami, which fell that year on May 19th. Sri Bhagavan and a few others waited on her the whole day without eating. About sunset a meal was prepared and Sri Bhagavan asked the others to go and eat, but he himself did not. In the evening a group of devotees sat chanting the Vedas beside her while others invoked the name of Ram. For more than two hours she lay there, her chest heaving and her breath coming in loud gasps, and all this while Sri Bhagavan sat beside

her, his right hand on her heart and his left on her head. This time there was no question of prolonging life but only of quieting the mind so that death could be Mahasamadhi, absorption in the Self.

At eight o'clock in the evening she was finally released from the body. Sri Bhagavan immediately rose, quite cheerful. "Now we can eat," he said; "come along, there is no pollution." There was deep meaning in this. A Hindu death entails ritualistic pollution calling for purificatory rites, but this had not been a death but a reabsorption. There was no disembodied soul but perfect Union with the Self and therefore no purificatory rites were needed. Some days later Sri Bhagavan confirmed this: when someone referred to the passing away of the mother he corrected him curtly, "She did not pass away, she was absorbed." Describing the process afterwards, he said: "Innate tendencies and the subtle memory of past experiences leading to future possibilities became very active. Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness, the outer senses having already gone. The soul was passing through a series of experiences, thus avoiding the need for rebirth and making possible Union with the Spirit. The soul was at last disrobed of the subtle sheaths before it reached the final Destination, the Supreme Peace of Liberation from which there is no return to ignorance." Potent as was the aid given by Sri Bhagavan, it was the saintliness of Alagammal, her previous renunciation of pride and attachment, that enabled her to benefit by it.

Often when devotees suffered bereavement Sri Bhagavan reminded them that it is only the body that dies and only the I-am-the-body illusion that makes death seem a tragedy. Now, at the time of his own bereavement, he showed no grief whatever. The whole night he and the devotees sat up singing devotional songs. This indifference to his mother's physical death is the real commentary on his prayer at the time of her previous sickness. The question arose of the disposal of the body. There was the testimony of Bhagavan himself that

she had been absorbed into the Self and not remained to be reborn to the illusion of ego, but some doubt was felt whether the body of a woman Saint should be given burial instead of being cremated. Then it was recalled that in 1917 this very point had formed part of a series of questions put to Sri Bhagavan by Ganapati Sastri and his party and that he had answered affirmatively. "Since *Jnana* (Knowledge) and *Mukti* (Deliverance) do not differ with the difference of sex, the body of a woman Saint also need not be burnt. Her body also is the abode of God."



Sri Bhagavan with His Mother

Sri Bhagavan stood silently looking on without participating. The body of the mother was interred at the foot of the hill at the southern point, between the Palitirtham Tank and the Dakshinamurti Mantapam (shrine). Relatives and friends arrived for the ceremony and large crowds came from the town. Sacred ashes, camphor, incense, were thrown into the pit around the body before it was filled up. A stone tomb was constructed and on it was installed a sacred lingam brought from Benares.

Later a temple was raised on the spot, finally completed in 1949 and known as Matrubhuteswara Temple, the Temple of God Manifested as the Mother. As the coming of the mother had marked an epoch in Ashram life, so also did her departure. Instead of being checked, the development increased. There were devotees who felt that, as Shakti or Creative Energy, her presence was more potent now than before. On one occasion Sri Bhagavan said: "Where has she gone? She is here."

Vijay Krishnasamy's email from Sydney, Australia.

I have been living in Sydney for over a decade now. I have a loving family with two beautiful little children by Bhagavan's blessings. I have been contemplating for a while on writing my thoughts and experiences on Bhagavan in the Ashram Newsletter. Although I love reading spiritual literature, I haven't written such articles before. What inspired me today is an article in one of the newsletters about Sri Niranjanananda Swami (better known as 'Sarvadhikari', the task master, to many of us) and Sri Muruganar's writing from the Garland of Guru's sayings, which reads, "Those on whom the Guru's Glance of Grace Has Fallen Are Like the Deer Caught in a Tiger's Jaw..". I know there are so many religious scholars and sincere Bhagavan devotees, who are better qualified than me to write about Bhagavan as a 'Jnani'. Many can explain better that he is 'Antharyami', 'Ati ashrami' or a 'Jivan-Muktha' who lived in mortal coil. To be honest, I have done little bhakti or yoga so far, even though I respect and admire such sadhakas. In spite of my materialistic desires, shortcomings and vasanas in this birth, I dare to call Bhagavan, 'Appa', from the bottom of my heart. May be that is the only merit I had and have.

People may laugh at me or call me 'dushta', if I tell them that as a young lad I used to walk around our colony in Madras, with a long stick (silambu) in one hand. I used to call myself 'Lakshmana', who is here to protect my father, family and friends, from anyone who comes to harm them in any way (even though love and friendship has been my basic nature). As an adult I have always considered myself a strong person and I worked hard to reach where I am, until August 2005. What happened to me then in terms of my personal experiences, associated mental turbulence and emotions for the next one year, were too much for me to bear. It was proved to me that one of my most trusted and intimate friend had been betraying me badly for 4 continuous years. I shared quite a lot of this with my wife, but still couldn't tell everything. During this time I have stood in front of Bhagavan's photo alone and cried many times. I spoke to Him and asked Him many questions while driving, walking in the streets and around my office building in Sydney, as if He was coming next to me (don't know how many took me for a lunatic). I even fought with Bhagavan in my mind, got angry few times and refused to see His face in any of His photos in my house for a week until one day I came to pick up the phone hearing it ring. My eyes fell on a book about Bhagavan, kept next to the phone by my wife. She didn't know about the hard 'viradham' I was keeping for the last one week by not looking at Bhagavan's photo. That book's cover had my favourite photo of Bhagavan. There He was, looking at me with His most compassionate, radiant and loving look, which I can never get in any life time from any earthly father. I broke down, took his book and locked myself in my room kissing His forehead in the photo. Next thing I heard was my wife shouting that I don't even pick up a phone call at home. My stress level was high by then.

After a month or so, one night I was feeling exhausted. It was around 11:30 pm on a week day. I was sitting alone in my lounge room on my couch in the dark. My wife and children were asleep. It was raining heavily outside and I could hear the thunder and see the lightning in the sky through my house's French doors. I got up, went forward and stood in front of Bhagavan's photo kept in the pelmet of my lounge room (which I couldn't see clearly in the dark). I closed my eyes and stood there with folded hands for some time (maybe I went into a micro sleep or something, I don't know). Suddenly I felt as if a cloud of mist or something similar crawling through my back from my leg to the shoulder.

My body started to tremble. I think I half opened my eyes and saw (a kind of) snow white light or rays filling a portion of my lounge room. My mind took it for the light of lightning spreading through the gaps of my home's entrance doors into my lounge room. All I remember after that was that I went straight to bed and slept peacefully until next morning. Honestly, I don't know what exactly happened that night, but the cloud of disturbances started to clear slowly from then on. After that I got many answers and memories as thoughts and picture patterns in my mind. Deep inside me I felt that what I had thought of as my achievements so far in life were all because of Bhagavan's grace and blessing. All the turmoil I went through by then were because of my prarabdha and it was Bhagavan's grace all through which reduced the heat of the consequences. It could have been worse for me, for instance many years ago when I met with a head-on collision, instead of dying, I walked out with a couple of bruises because of Him. I understood how many times in the past from my childhood till today His saving Grace has protected me. All my problems got resolved one by one sometime after that. Bhagavan didn't perform any explicit miracles while in His body, but His love and compassion for His devotees is so intense, that the Divine Will comes into play automatically and protects us or rewards us at the right time. This happens and will happen beyond time and space for those who take solace in Him irrespective of their merits.

I took my wife and children to Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, at the end of 2006. I stayed in the ashram accommodation given to me for a week or so. While I was in the Ashram I felt as if I had come back home. My energy levels were very high. I felt like a 20 year old. I went and kissed the big ashram tree next to the present ashram parking lot, which is standing as a witness to many epics that happened and are happening in the ashram by Bhagavan's grace. I went around every nook and corner of the ashram, as if I was looking for Bhagavan who went around the ashram grounds for His daily stroll. Suddenly a thought flashed in my mind as to how fortunate were the people who had lived with Bhagavan, who saw His loving and radiant face every day and spoke to Him like talking to one's father, even though He was God himself. Then I went to the goshala looking for Lakshmi. I went to the kitchen looking for Santhamma, Lokamma, Sampuranamma, Subbulakshmiamma, Gowriamma, Ramaswami Pillai, Krishnaswami and other devotees. I was looking for Kavyakantha Muni, Muruganar, Viswanatha Brahmachari, Bose and others in the old hall. I found the courage to stand outside the old office building to see whether Chinna swami, the Saravadhikari was sitting there, writing dutifully. I was looking for Annamalai swami, Rangaswami, Sivananda and other sincere attendants of Bhagavan as I walked up to Skandasramam. I was looking for Madhava Swami, Devaraja Mudaliar, Subbaramayya, Balaram Reddiar, Major Chadwick and many other sincere devotees in the darshan hall. I looked for the present ashram president, Mr. V. S. Ramanan, playing there as a small boy, but later found him walking in front of me as an older man. I did this until Bhagavan told me in my mind, "To look for the one, who is looking for him and all others there". Then I sat quietly inside the old hall for some time. As disobedient as I am to my Appa's divine words, I went out again and sat next to the Mahanirvana room and cried for some time. After the few wonderful days I spent in the ashram, I thanked Dr. Srinivasamurthy and other ashram authorities with my whole heart for having me there. I then left the sacred shrine and grounds of my divine father's ashram with a sad heart. I know he said, "Where have I gone, I am here, I am with you all". But I felt weak within my heart. I now think that I am not as mature or mentally strong as many other Bhagavan devotees may be. Appa, "please give me the courage to go through the ups and downs of this and any other life I have, to fulfil my prarabdha karma, until I reach Your abode by Your Grace".

'Linga Pratishtha' at Swami Ramanananda's Samadhi

A report from Sri Ramanasramam.

The Samadhi of Swami Ramanananda who was Absorbed in Arunachala on 26th December 2007, which is situated adjacent to the Samadhi-Shrine of Niranjanananda Swami, received its final touches on the 20th May 2008. Installation (Pratishtha) of the Sivalinga was done by Sri Madhu Stapati, the architect of the Shrine, on 22nd May and consecration was done on Friday, 23rd May 2008 with due rituals such as Sri Ganapati Homam, Sri Rudra Homan, Mahanyasa Rudrabhishekam and Maha Mangala arati, lasting about two hours.

A large number of Bhagavan's devotees were present and partook of the Prasadam at the end of the solemn event. A book entitled "In the Service of Bhagavan" recognizing Sri Niranjanananda Swami and Swami Ramanananda's service was earlier released at Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine.



Homam Rituals Being Observed.



Preparing for Linga Pratishtha.



Aarti at the Samadhi of Swami Ramanananda.



Lingam, Nandi and Bali Peedam.