

Saranagathi

IN THIS
ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

This issue of *Saranagathi* carries the continuation of the story of Vaidyanatha Sthapati and the building of the Mother's Shrine as well as the final portion of the reminiscences of Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal who left home as a young girl to come to Bhagavan.

Chitra Pournima fell on the 5th May. Three days later fires broke out on the Hill and burned for 12 hours before diligent efforts by a team of volunteer firefighters succeeded in extinguishing it. (See p.6)

The 23rd of April was the launch date of Sri Ramanasramam's official page on Facebook. To be a part of the global Ashram community and receive photos and announcements from devotees all over the world, please go to <http://www.facebook.com/SriRamanasramam> or simply click at the bottom of this page.

For further glimpses of Ashram events this month, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/.html> Also feel free to write us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team



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Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal

Once while I was seated in front of Bhagavan in the old hall, slices of fruit were brought by a devotee and placed before Bhagavan. A monkey walked in. Though the attendant was not keen on obliging the monkey, at Bhagavan's behest he gave him a piece. Receiving it the monkey bounded away. But soon enough another came in, evidently informed by the former. A piece was given to him, and he soon went away. A third one came for his share. Bhagavan gave him a piece, saying: "All right! Now don't go and inform anyone else, otherwise these people will be angry with me!" This fellow left with his share and evidently followed Bhagavan's command as there were no further claimants.

A very poor, 75-year old woman came one day with a mere rag for a covering and a small vessel in hand. Approaching Bhagavan shading her eyes with her hands for better vision, she broke into terms of great endearment, repeatedly prostrating and expressing her uncontrollable joy. It seems she had been trying for 26

years to visit her "dear one", but could realise it only then. Bhagavan asked her with great affection, "What have you brought for me, Patti?" She gave him the honey she had brought. He then remarked: "If she is given a meal it would be good". Chinnaswami executed such a 'suggestion' as an order. Later Bhagavan said: "Perhaps someone would like to give her a sari." When the attendant nearby sprang to action, Bhagavan whispered to him: "These people are not used to expensive things; so get something simple". He later told the old woman: "Patti, some rich people wish to give this gift for you. Please accept it."

As the old woman had no money, she had of necessity walked a great distance to come to see Bhagavan. Bhagavan knowing this, said in an impersonal way, "Would anyone be interested in getting her a bus ticket?" Krishnaswami Reddi came forward and said, "We will provide her with a bus ticket and see her off." When this lady returned from the dining hall, she was touching the ground, and then touching her eyes. That is a way of prostration and thanksgiving. It is noteworthy that whenever the poor came, Bhagavan took a very personal interest in them, which was a moving sight to see.

One day, I returned to the Ashram after visiting Patala Linga at the main temple and having Arunachaleswara's darshan. I wonder still now at my courage in standing before Bhagavan and, upon his prodding, relating to him the dilapidated condition of the Patala Linga shrine. Bhagavan enquired about the elephant tied nearby and then asked whether I had received prasad at the main shrine. I realised that I was carrying the vibhuti all the while in my palm without even offering it to him and now respectfully held it out to him. Like a child, he took a tiny amount and applied it to his forehead.

At the time of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana I was at Rajapalayam. That night, when I saw a beautiful blue light traveling across the sky, I knew Bhagavan had left the body. I did not want to live after that and so I started fasting, hoping to drop the body. For five or six days I did not touch food. During that time, I had several visions, and in one of them, I was taken inside a cave on the Hill and saw Rishis performing yagnas. Sri Bhagavan was seated there near a tank and Kamadhenu (the celestial cow) was near him. Rishis and Munis were serving him





and Bhagavan looked ever so splendid, like Lord Siva Himself. Bhagavan said to me, “Why are you crying? You say that I have gone away, but where have I gone? I am here.” Meanwhile Rishis brought Bhagavan prasad. Sri Bhagavan took some and then handed it to me. (I did not remember in the dream that I was fasting.)

For five days afterward, the smell of that prasad was with me. Now, was that a dream or reality? I consider it to be Bhagavan’s grace. The aroma of prasad even spread throughout my house. My brother wondered what I had eaten. That aroma was simply out-of-this-world.

The morning after the dream, I started taking food and coffee again. My brother and sister who had been fasting with me, deciding that if I were giving up my body, they should do likewise, started eating again too. But this divine vision remained with me.

How can I take it to be a dream?

From that day onwards I no longer had any thought that Bhagavan had left us—he is all-pervading. Neither did I any longer feel sorrow in my heart—he is here with us. What have we done to deserve all this?—

Just prior to her death in 1994, Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal had a dream in which Ashram devotees were being fed puri for breakfast. When hearing of it, the management decided to make the dream reality, and, once only, served devotees puri at the Ashram breakfast. Amma passed away peacefully some weeks later in her home in Ramana Nagar.

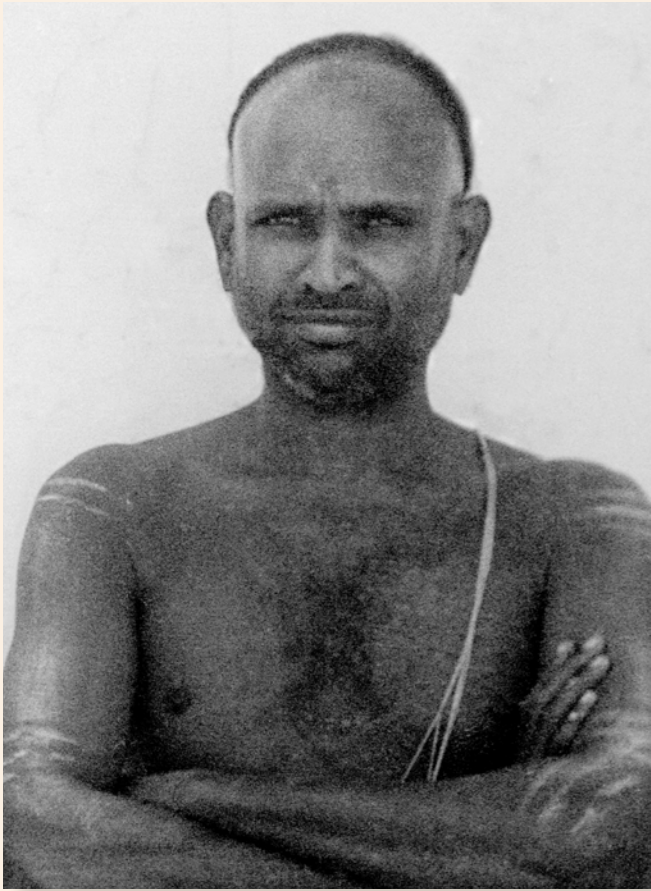
(The present article is freely adapted from the interview of December 1989 included in the video collection entitled Guru Ramana: His Living Presence and published in THE MAHARSHI, Jul/Aug 1993; May/Jun 2000; and from short articles appearing in the Mountain Path [Jayanti 1989, pp. 109-10] and Moments Remembered [pp. 118-19].)

Reality in Forty Verses

16. Without us there is neither time nor space. If we are only bodies, we are caught up in time and space. But are we bodies? Now, then and always, — here, now and everywhere — we are the same. We exist, timeless and beyond space.

— Reality in Forty Verses by Sri Bhagavan





Vaidyanatha Sthapati and Building Matrubhuteswara Temple

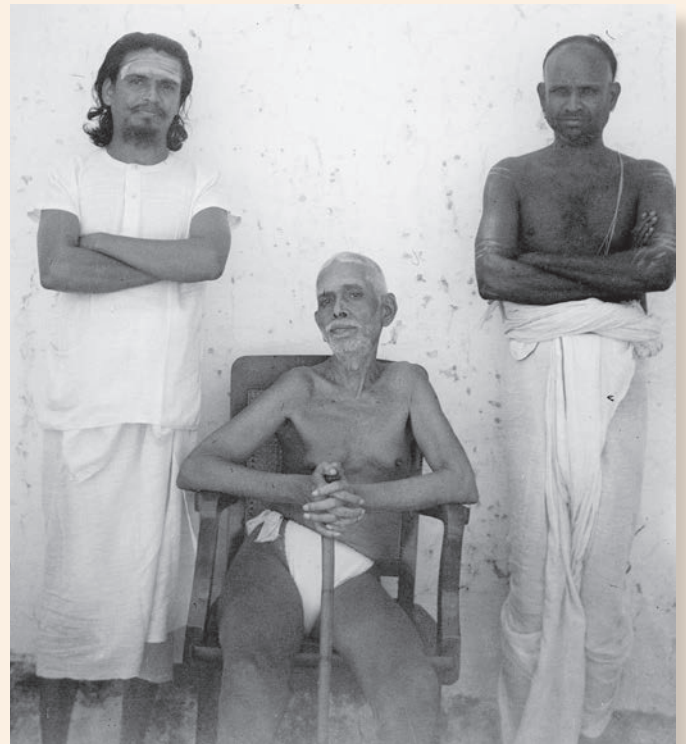
The foundation stone for the Mother's Shrine was laid on Friday, 1st September, 1939, Bhagavan's Advent Day. It was then that Vaidyanatha Sthapati took up residence in Tiruvannamalai in order to be on hand to start the work of cutting and shaping stones for the Mother's Shrine. Belonging to the Visvakarmas (the sculptor community), the Sthapati was very orthodox. He would not bring his family to eat in the Ashram as he felt that since he was being paid for his work that it would be taking unfair advantage to accept food from the Ashram as well. But Chinnaswami who had great affection for Sthapati would often send food to the family without the latter's knowledge.

In time, Chinnaswami and Vaidyanatha Sthapati became quite close. Bhagavan showed interest in every detail of the work and all major decisions were taken to him for his approval in advance. Vaidyanatha Sthapati

felt privileged to have the opportunity to be in close proximity with Bhagavan, divulging the particulars of the construction work each day. Bhagavan gave him the needed insights and confidence for each stage of the operation as work progressed.

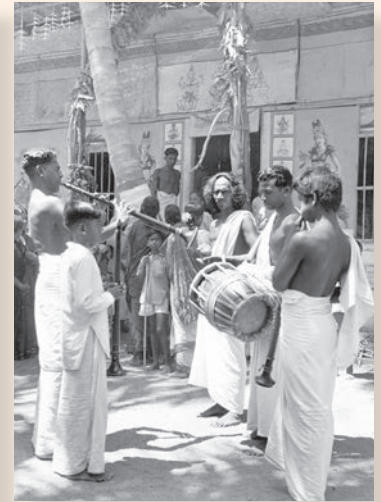
Bhagavan continued to forbid Chinnaswami and other devotees to seek funding through active solicitation, saying that the necessary endowments would come in their own time: "What is to happen will happen. If you now go and ask for money, will not the donors ask you whether you have my agreement or not, and whether I gave you permission? What do you intend to tell them? Did the construction of all these buildings take place because of my begging?"

Indeed funds did come of their own accord and gradually the work gained momentum. Large granite stones were cut to size on site at Vaira Kunru, a small hillock about one kilometer from the Ashram, and then transported by Ashram bullock carts back to the Ashram, where they were hewn and fashioned under Sthapati's close scrutiny. K. K. Nambiar, an engineer by profession, worked alongside Sthapati and was able to be of service in spite of his lack of experience in traditional temple architecture. Seeing them both working together and noting the Western-style training



Bhagavan with T.N. Venkataraman and Vaidyanatha Sthapati (late 1940s)





Mother's Shrine Kumbhabhishekam, 14-17 March, 1949

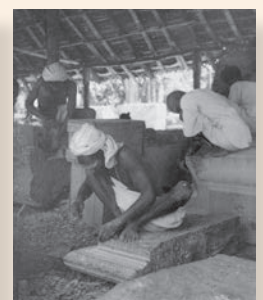
Nambiar had received, Bhagavan affectionately named him the "English Sthapati".

Ten years passed, years of hard work and trying moments, especially for ChinnaSwami, who struggled to surmount the ever-present financial challenge. Bhagavan attended all functions related to the project and could sometimes be seen at night, when few were around, walking around the site, inspecting it and, on at least a couple of occasions, blessing various icons and deities. Once, at the time of the final dedication, Bhagavan stood for some five minutes with both his hands upon the Sri Chakra in a gesture of blessing.

On 1st January 1949, the foundation stone for Sri Chakra was laid. By March 1949 final preparations were made for kumbhabhishekam. On 14th March the climactic four-day event began. Tens of thousands arrived, so many that extra trains from Madras and Madurai had to be scheduled and a special bus service arranged from the local railway station. The Shankaracharya of Puri oversaw the rites and supervised more than 200 priests in the yagasala where the four Vedas were chanted in the presence of *kalasam*

filled with holy water from the Ganga and the other great rivers of India. Thus the crowning moment of 27 years since Sri Ramanasramam's founding had at long last arrived. Remembering the Ashram's inception at the time of his mother's passing away at Skandasramam in May 1922, Bhagavan remarked, "I suggested that the body be buried silently before dawn [at the foot of the Hill]. But things happened the way they had to happen. See how many buildings have now come up on the site where a body was silently buried!"—

After Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, Vaidyanatha Sthapati supervised the construction of the samadhi pit and later the mantapam over it. Subsequently, he built a stone mantapam for the Paramacharya of Kanchi, designed and constructed the famous Mahatma Gandhi memorial mantapam in Chennai and received the National Award for Master Craftsmen. Around this time, because of complications from a stroke, he retired as principal of the school established in his honour by Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari, the School of Sculpture and Architecture in Mahabalipuram. A second attack left him unable to speak and, in 1963, he died. In 1965 Kanchi Paramacharya conducted the Veda Agama Shilpa Vidvat Sadas inspired by Vaidyanatha Sthapati's life.



Mother's Shrine Stone Carvers behind the Ashram Gosala in the 1940s



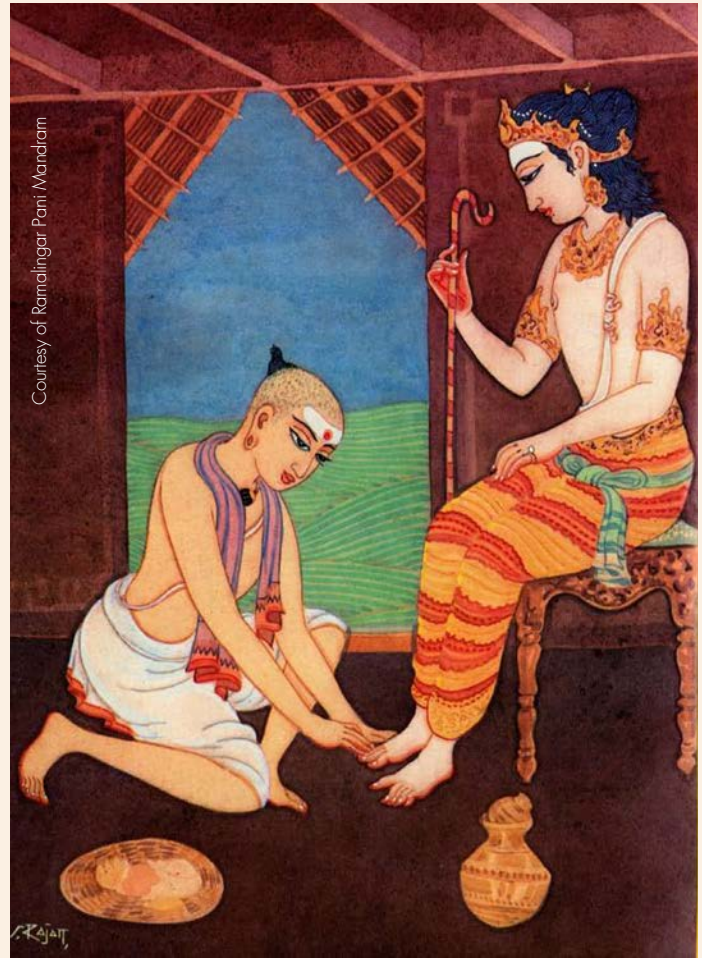


From the *Peria Puranam*: Somaasi Maara Nayanaar

Somaasi worshipped the Lord with great fervour during his daily yagnas. But for a long years he yearned to have darshan of the Lord and to offer him *havis* at his yagna. Knowing that Sri Sundara was a great devotee of the Lord and had been granted the grace of the Lord's presence on numerous occasions, Somaasi sought to win his favour, hoping that Sundaramurti might petition the Lord on his behalf. Knowing that Sundara loved preparations from the *alarka* plant, the *somyaji* searched high and low till he found it. Each day he went and collected it and secretly left it with the saint's cook, who willingly prepared delicious dishes from it each day for his master. One day, however, there was a terrible downpour and the river flooded, preventing Somaasi from crossing to reach the meadow where the herb grew. He waited in the pouring rain for three days before he was able to cross. Meanwhile Sundara missed his favourite dish and inquired about it. The cook reluctantly confessed everything, telling about the secret admirer who had been supplying the herb. When Somaasi next came to deliver the plant, Sundara questioned him and then learned of his longing to have darshan of the Lord. Moved to compassion, Sundara promised to arrange it.

Sundara went to the temple and prayed in his usual way but when he told the Lord of his promise to the *somyaji*, the Lord became angry and said: "How could you make such a promise without asking me? Even lesser gods will not just casually accept *havis* at a yagna!" But Sundara continued to plead with great solicitude until finally the Lord's anger dissipated and he agreed to appear to Somaasi at his next homa. But he would do so on one condition: Somaasi would have to recognise Him. This would be difficult as the Lord would appear to him in an unexpected way.

When the day of the yagna arrived and the priests undertook their sacred prayers and rites, a chandala arrived carrying a dead calf on his shoulders, dripping with blood, and beside him, his wife with foul drink in a clay pot on her head. Both were wretched in appearance and smelled of alcohol. All the priests were aghast and rushed to the river to wash themselves. But Sundara stood by and alerted Somaasi who promptly saw through the Lord's lila. Somaasi immediately did prostrations before the One disguised as a chandala and made offerings to Him and Mother Parvati. The Lord in turn revealed Himself in his true glory and blessed Somaasi, granting the *somyaji* and his wife supreme realisation. (*Somaasi Maara Nayanaar's Aradhana Day is 27th May*)



Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Fire on the Mountain



In the past, fires were set on the Mountain by locals wanting to stimulate regrowth of the Hill's lemongrass, which is sold as roofing material. Thanks to efforts by *Forest Way*, *Annamalai Reforestation Society* and the *Tiruvannamalai District Forest Dept.*, these annual blazes have all but ended. But on Tues., 8th May, grasses and brush, parched by the summer heat, became tinder and caught flame for the second time in two weeks, this time, on the Hill's western flank. Fueled by southerly winds, the blaze spread to the southern spur before being brought under control by volunteers.





Introducing the Kendras: Boston Area Sri Ramana Maharshi Satsang



The Boston area Sri Ramana Maharshi Satsang began in 1999 and meets once a month on a Saturday at 5:00 p.m. in the home of Anna and David Klegon in Newton, Massachusetts (294 Highland Avenue, Newton, MA 02465; annaklegon@gmail.com). The Satsang includes meditation, listening to the Veda Parayana, reading from the teachings of Sri Bhagavan and a potluck supper. Sometimes a video is shown or there is slide show related to Bhagavan's life. There is no charge for attending and all are welcome for worship and practice in Bhagavan's presence.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Chitra Poornima, 5th May



Chitra Poornima is devoted to Chitragupta, the keeper of accounts. The younger brother of Yamaraj, Chitragupta (meaning, 'hidden picture') was created by Lord Brahma to share in the duty of recording the actions of human beings on earth. Chitra Poornima occurs when the sun is exalted in Aries and the moon is conjunct with the *nakshatra* (star) Chitra. This is first full moon of the Tamil year and is considered among the most important as it provides the opportunity to wipe clean this register containing the list of our negative karma.

In November 2011, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister declared Chitra Pournami a religious festival in Tiruvannamalai District and the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department was empowered with providing financial support for the event. Chitra Poornima this year fell on Saturday, 5th May, when Tiruvannamalai hosted 10 lakhs or one million pilgrims who came for *giri valam*.





Introducing the Kendras: Boston Area Sri Ramana Maharshi Satsang



Sri V. Gopalsamy Rao, attained Sri Bhagavan's feet on Wednesday, 30th May 2012 at 07.15 a.m. at the age of 84 after a brief illness. As a senior advocate, Sri.V. G. Rao donated legal services to the Ashram for several decades and always a labour of love. His straight-forward, simple manner and invaluable counsel were always highly valued by the Ashram. Sri V. Gopalsamy Rao is survived by his sons Ravichandran and Murali who continue in generous service to the Ashram.

