

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The month of May brought Sri Bhagavan's 66th Aradhana celebrations with large numbers of devotees coming to share in the grace-filled atmosphere. At the end of the month, all gathered in Mother's Shrine for Mahapuja celebrations.

Featured in this issue is life in the new Dining Hall inaugurated in September 1938 (see *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan, part XVI*, starting on page 3).

Satya Narayan Tandon's testimony about how he narrowly escaped death on a train track by Bhagavan's grace and protection can be found on pages 7-8.

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

8th June (Weds) Punarvasu Day
17th June (Fri) Cow Lakshmi Day
19th June (Sun) Full Moon
5th July (Tues) Punarvasu Day
19th July (Tues) Full Moon
23rd July (Sat) H.C. Khanna Day
25th July (Mon) Kavya Kanta Ganapati Muni Day

1st August (Mon) Punarvasu Day
7th August (Sun) Kunju Swami Day
17th August (Weds) Full Moon
29th August (Mon) Punarvasu Day
1st September (Thurs) Advent and Muruganar Day
16th September (Fri) Full Moon
25th September (Sun) Punarvasu Day





In the Kitchen with Bhagavan (Part XVI): The New Dining Hall

In Bhagavan's Ashram no visitor was allowed to go without food. Thus in time, as the number of visitors to the Ashram increased, the required output of the kitchen grew proportionately. Eventually, Chinnaswami began to see the urgent need for a new kitchen facility and in 1937, commenced work on a spacious, fully-serviceable kitchen and dining hall. Inaugurated in September 1938, the new granite-stone building was large enough to cook for the many hundreds that invariably came for Bhagavan's Jayanthi celebrations and other special events.

Increasingly, cooking became one of the Ashram's more time-consuming undertakings. It came to have a special significance in the life of the Ashram, all the more because of the care and attention Bhagavan gave to it.

It is said that Bhagavan used to work in the kitchen as a background for spiritual training and that he only ever regularly sat at two places in the Ashram—the Old Hall and the Kitchen/Dining Hall—and thus it is these two that have acquired special importance.

One can immediately discern the pre-eminence of the kitchen and dining hall simply by considering Bhagavan's daily schedule. Every morning when Bhagavan awoke at 3am, he got up from his sofa, made a brief trip to the bathroom and then went straight to the kitchen. He would light the fire and start cutting vegetables or grinding ingredients for the day's meal.

Those blessed to work in the kitchen, joined him in the intimate circumstances of the early morning quiet where opportunities to learn directly from the Master invariably presented themselves. His every action had power and often the greatest lessons came in moments executing ordinary tasks. As his life was seamless, his every move like poetry, even when just cutting vegetables or stirring a pot, he appeared to perform such tasks without the least strain or stress. In his work, basic principles for harmonious living revealed themselves.

When something was being prepared, Bhagavan would give those assisting him in the kitchen a pinch to taste and all would take it with closed eyes, considering it prasada from the hand of the divine¹.

Usually the early morning cooking was over by 6am and Bhagavan would return to the Old Hall. He would then have his bath and come for breakfast after which he would take a half-hour walk. Just before breakfast each day, Bhagavan entered the kitchen and lifted the lids to the vessels, inspecting each item: "Yes, coffee. Idlies. Here is sambar." The kitchen staff saw this daily ritual like a sacrament, wherein the food was blessed and consecrated by Bhagavan before being served to guests and inmates².

Indeed, for Bhagavan, food was prasadam and was deserving of respect not only in its power to sustain bodily life but as the gift and bounty of the Lord which sustains and nourishes the soul. Thus in his kitchen, nothing was ever wasted. Bhagavan was firm on this point. Every particle of food should be utilised in one of the dishes being prepared and nothing should be wasted. Leftover fruit and vegetable rinds, orange and apple peels and even the skin of brinjal (egg-plant) were ground up and made into chutney.

Devotees in the kitchen marveled seeing Bhagavan go to great trouble to rescue a single orphaned mustard seed, ensconced in a crack in the floor, hidden from view for all but for Bhagavan who, invariably would notice it, dig it out, dust it off and carefully place it back in the mustard seed jar in the Ashram store³.

1 From the life of Sadhu Trivenigiri Swami (Sundaram), *The Mountain Path*, Jan 1971; and from *Boundless Ocean of Grace*, p. 314.

2 *Ibid*, p. 316.

3 *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 188.





Traditional Customs

Since nothing could be wasted, leftover food was kept till the next day. Traditional customs and orthodox restrictions forbade it but for Bhagavan such restrictions were overruled by the injunction to cherish food as God's gift. Of course it would have been convenient if leftover food could have simply been given to servants. But this would have violated another of Bhagavan's principles, namely, that all were equal. Indeed, Bhagavan insisted that the servants and workers be given the same food as everyone else. So evening leftovers were used as stock for the next day's breakfast. Great care had to be taken in this regard, first of all, in order not to generate extra food. Thus accurately estimating amounts needed for each meal was paramount. Also, great attention was given to ways of conserving leftover food in the night so as to maintain freshness.

Bhagavan would come to the kitchen in the early morning, warm the leftovers and add ingredients for the breakfast sambar. One might imagine that such practices would cause indigestion. But in fact, Bhagavan's concoctions were delicious and always stimulated a healthy appetite.

The no-wastage rule likewise extended even to Bhagavan's leaf-plate where he consumed every morsel of food. While Bhagavan knew every detail of taste and good food, in eating he never gave personal importance to taste but simply mixed everything together and ate it, not to satisfy craving but simply to nourish the body and appease hunger.⁴

Equal Treatment for All

Another feature of the practice of equality could be seen in Bhagavan's insistence that he not be treated in a special way in the dining hall. He would only accept food items that had been given to all. He also expected that his portions should not be more liberal than those given to others. He insisted on being treated just as any other devotee.

Once when Subbulaksmamma was serving buttermilk into Bhagavan's palm, she lingered before his leaf. Bhagavan noticing it, said, "Are you stopping equally long before every leaf? If not, why this distinction to me?" Thereafter, in spite of her entreaties, Bhagavan never again held out his hand to receive food during meals⁵.

⁴ *The Mountain Path*, January 1971, pp. 38-39.

⁵ G.V. Subbaramayya's *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, p. 90.

Auspicious Items

As it was auspicious to handle anything touched by the guru, devotees would sometimes wait outside the bathroom to sip the water running out from Bhagavan's bath or take the water on the ground left after he had washed his feet on returning from a walk. Especially auspicious was eating from the leaf that Bhagavan had used at meal. But Bhagavan was against such practices as it reinforced the idea of distinction whereas he wanted to communicate to devotees that all beings are equally endowed with the Supreme Self and that there are no ajnanis. So he resisted such customs.

In the dining hall Bhagavan usually washed his hands over a plate provided for the purpose. Sometimes devotees pined after this water to drink as prasad. When Somasundaram Pillai was staying for 6 months in the Ashram, his third daughter Pankajakshi came and stayed with her father at the ashram. She was unwell and in the hall one day, she fainted. Later she started having fits. Devotees suggested as a tonic that she take the water Bhagavan used for washing his hands after the meal. At their suggestion, Pillai brought her the water each night. When Pillai was called away for two weeks, he had his seven-year old grand-daughter, Ramana Sundari, collect the water and bring it to her aunt Pankajakshi. One night towards the end of this period, the girl came into the dining hall and sat in the corner. Bhagavan, assuming she wanted to eat, asked someone to get her a leaf. She protested saying she had not come to eat but to collect the water. Bhagavan thought she meant water for abhishekam and instructed her to take it. But she insisted that the water she wanted could only be taken after Bhagavan had washed his hands. Bhagavan then understood her intentions. After the meal Bhagavan carried away his leaf with him and washed his hands outside. Devotees were pained to see Bhagavan carrying his used leaf in one hand and struggling with his rheumatism to walk with a cane in the other. Somasundaram Pillai returned the next day and was saddened by what had happened. Devotees blamed his family for putting Bhagavan to all this trouble. That day after breakfast, Pillai's wife Uma, sang a song composed for the occasion and her daughters pleaded with Bhagavan for his forgiveness. Bhagavan sat quietly. Around 9.30am on his return from the gosala, he told Viswanathaswami:





“Uma came and requested me through several songs to forgive her. What have they done? I am not angry with them. I know there has been a controversy for some time over the leaf I eat from and the water I wash my hands with. I wanted to put an end to it and I was looking for an opportune moment. I used it as an excuse. That’s all.”

Pillai and family were greatly relieved to hear this. That same day after lunch when Bhagavan tried to remove his leaf, Prabhavati Devi insisted that she would do it thenceforward. But Bhagavan protested in the interest of equality, “Why should I not remove my leaf when others are removing theirs?” Chinnaswami hearing this, came up with an ideal solution: from then on, no one would remove their leaves after meals, “Thus Bhagavan need not remove his.” Bhagavan agreed to this proposal and from that day onward, even up till the present day, devotees are enjoined to leave their banana leaf in its place at the conclusion of the meal⁶.

The Essence of Vadai and Bonda

The principle of equivalence was at work in all Bhagavan did and taught. He knew when to make a distinction and when not to. Once during the month of Margali (mid-December to mid-January) when pongal was offered at the time of the *ushat kaala puja*, Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer arranged to offer *sarkarai pongal* and *vadai*⁷ for the whole month. During this month considered Brahma muhurtha of the year, as per custom everyone got up early and attended early morning puja.

M.S. Nagarajan, who was in charge of the Mother’s Shrine, got up at 3.30am, had his bath in Pali Tirtham, swept the Mother’s Shrine, decorated the deities and made two fires in the kitchen. The first morning, he placed the pot of rice for pongal over one fire and on the other, a

⁶ Kunjuswami’s *Reminiscences*, “The Great Devotion of the Family of Somasundaram Pillai”.

⁷ Small round cake of ground black gram fried in oil.

pan of oil to cook *vadai*. Ramaswami Iyer requested *vadai* because it was one of the ancestors’ day, a day on which, by tradition, *vadai* is offered at lunch. So Nagarajan ground the black gram which had been soaked overnight. Never having prepared *vadai* before, when he tried to shape the dough into neat round flattish shapes, they did not come out right. Repeated attempts ended in failure. Finally, he threw the dough back into the vessel in a fit of frustration. Just then he heard something behind him. When he turned to look, he found Bhagavan standing there. Bhagavan gently consoled him, “It doesn’t matter. You have added too much water while grinding the black gram. Now make round balls of the dough and fry them. They will then be *bondas*!” Nagarajan did accordingly.

When the *bondas* were served to devotees at breakfast, Ramaswami Iyer complained, “Look here, did I not ask you to prepare *vadai*? Then why have you made *bondas*?”

Nagarajan, afraid to say anything, merely glanced at Bhagavan who immediately came to his aid. Bhagavan said to Ramaswami Iyer, “What does it matter? If the cakes are flat and circular they are *vadais*, if spherical, *bondas*. The stuff is the same; the taste is the same. Only names and forms are different. Eat the prasadam and don’t make a fuss.”

Everyone was astonished. Ramaswami Iyer could not contain his joy, “Wonderful, Wonderful!” Later that day, when Ramaswami saw Nagarajan, he said, “You are a lucky fellow. Bhagavan himself is supporting you.”

Nagarajan later reflecting on the incident said, “The world consists of names and forms. These are naturally many but what lies behind them is one and the same. Names and forms are not real although we think they are. Brahman which underlies them is real but we forget it. What wisdom lay in Bhagavan’s words”.⁸ —

(to be continued)

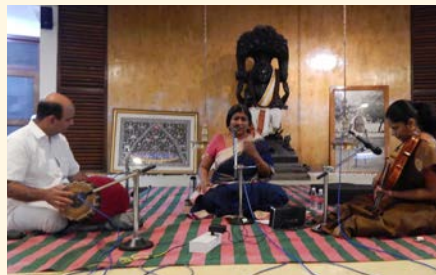
⁸ *Boundless Ocean of Grace*, pp. 344-45, ‘

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Sleep and Wakefulness

M.: Sleep is not ignorance; it is your pure state. Wakefulness is not knowledge; it is ignorance. There is full awareness in sleep; there is total ignorance in waking. Your real nature covers both, and extends beyond. The Self is beyond knowledge and ignorance.

— Talks §313





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's 66th Aradhana

Bhagavan's 66th Mahanirvana was observed on Wednesday morning the 4th May with Tamil parayana in Bhagavan's Hall starting around 5.30am and abhishekam starting around 8am with final arati at 10.30am. 1,500 devotees received Bhagavan's prasadam at breakfast, lunch and dinner from various buffet stations: two in the pandal behind the dining hall, two in a tent erected behind the dormitories, one in the large dining hall and one (for lunch Narayana Seva) in the Korangu Thottam compound. Music over the three days included Smt. Ambika Kameshwar, who offered a music programme the evening of Aradhana and the following day, RMCL who hosted the *Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam* with verses from Sivaprakasam Pillai set to five ghana ragas of St. Thyagaraja's famous *Pancharatna Kritis*. The night of the 3rd, Sri Sangeeta Sivakumar and on the 2nd May, Sri Vijay Siva offered concerts. For video coverage go to: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>





Saved by Bhagavan: Satya Narayan Tandon

It was at the end of 1944 that I first heard about Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. I was sitting with a religious teacher when a visitor said: “Maharshi is Mount Everest and others mere hillocks.” Since then I had a persistent urge to have darshan of Bhagavan.

In the summer of 1946, when I was sitting in the presence of Paramsant Mahatma Raghuber Dayal, a Sufi saint, a fellow devotee who had been to Tiruvannamalai began to speak about Bhagavan, the Ashram and his experiences during his stay there. Chachaji, (as we used to call the saint) who had listened attentively to his devotee’s narration, spoke very highly about Bhagavan. This only strengthened my desire to have Bhagavan’s darshan. But I did not get the opportunity for it – one hindrance or another always came in my way.

Early in April 1950, when I was planning to go to Arunachala, my younger brother, Jagatnarayan, told me that he and a friend were to leave for Tiruvannamalai the same evening. To me this was

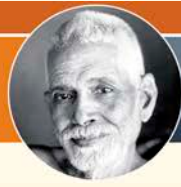
a bolt from the blue, as we both could not leave the station simultaneously. I could not speak out my mind, and he left for Tiruvannamalai. He was fortunate to have Bhagavan’s darshan—standing in a queue at the Nirvana Room. He stayed there for a few days and on the return journey somewhere near Nagpur, got the information that Bhagavan had shed the body. My younger brother again went to Ramanasramam in 1956. On hearing from him about the Ashram and his experiences there, the longing to visit the Shrine was aroused afresh. It was late in 1957 at the insistence of my wife, that my longing to visit the shrine of Ramana Maharshi was fulfilled. Since 1957, Bhagavan has been graciously pleased to call us to his Shrine of Grace practically every year.

Bhagavan’s Protection

An accident that occurred at Allahabad Railway station on the morning of January 23, 1972 is worth recording. With my younger son, his wife and one of my grandsons, I was coming back to Kanpur from Allahabad by Howrah Kalka Mail. After locating our berths, I was walking on the platform with people who had come to see us off. I could not hear the whistle of the electric engine, and the train began to move. I caught hold of the handle of the compartment to get into it. But I lost the grip and fell on the track. In the meantime the train had gathered momentum. When my son, who was at the other door of the compartment, enquired about me, a fellow passenger told him that he saw an old man falling down while trying to get into the compartment. My son immediately pulled the chain, but the train stopped only two furlongs away. As soon as I fell on the track, I saw the face of Bhagavan repeating like a mantra, “Don’t lift the head.” Where I was on the track I cannot say. But I saw the wheels moving faster and faster. When the entire train had moved beyond the place where I was, I got up though my head and left eye brow were badly wounded, so much so that my woollen coat had become completely red. The guard who was in charge of the train said that eight bogeys had passed over me and that it was a miracle that I had escaped death.

It was all his benign Grace that he saved this body,





for what purpose is known to him only. For the first few days after the wounds had been stitched and I was in great agony and pain, I was kept under sedation but I felt Bhagavan sitting by my side and at times moving his hands over the wounds that had been stitched.

My cap and spectacles that had fallen on the track were all received by my people without any damage whatsoever. The same glasses and the same frame I used for years thereafter. May this head remain at his Lotus feet for the rest of my days on earth. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Medical Camp, 29th April-1st May

A 3-day free medical camp for patients suffering from allergy and asthma-related conditions was held in the Ashram under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Pendakur Anand, MBBS DLO FCAI, an immunologist from Bangalore with free medicines and personnel from *Cipla*.

The percentage of people affected by asthma and allergic rhinitis has climbed sharply in recent years, owing to the adverse conditions of modern life such as air pollution and chemical contaminants in food. —



Obituary: Ida Pedanda Gede Gunung



Ida Pedanda Gede Gunung, the High Priest of Bali, passed away on 18th May, after a stroke. He was 63. Although occupying such a high position, 'Ratu' as he was affectionately called, was a simple man with simple tastes. Although being worshiped as a God-King, by the Balinese who walked on their knees in front of him, he considered himself a simple devotee of Bhagavan Ramana and Arunachala. When it came time for him to make his first visit to Arunachala, he wanted from the very beginning to stay at Ramanasramam but was unable to do so. After making his first visit to Ramanasramam, he declared that in the future he would only stay there. Despite his many duties he was able to come to the Ashram again in February 2016.

The purification of the body, according to Balinese Hindu customs, will be on June 5th. The cremation will be on July 21st. There will be millions attending, and the President of Indonesia, and members of Parliament are scheduled to attend.





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahapuja Celebrations 30 May

Mahapuja festivities commenced on the evening of the 29th May and main day celebrations started in the early morning hours of the 30th with flower decorating in the Mother's Shrine and New Hall to the sounds of Mahanyasa Japa. Abhishekam began around 9am and was followed by arati and songs from Susilamma and other lady devotees. — For Mahapuja arati video: <<https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>>

