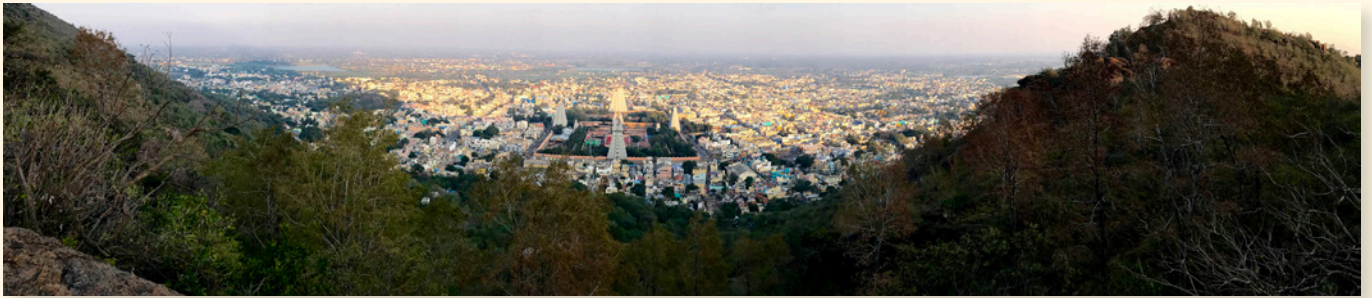


# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

JUNE 2017  
VOL. 11, NO. 6



Dr. Carlos Lopez



## Saranagati



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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

May was a quiet, if hot, month with few guests staying at the Ashram owing to the local water crisis.

In this issue, we meet Raja Iyer and the many challenges he met in his training to serve in the kitchen and elsewhere in the Ashram (see *Daily Life in the Dining Hall*, p. 3ff.). Photos on the insert page are from Dr. Carlos Lopez.

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org)

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team

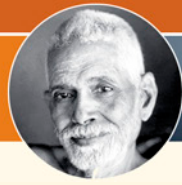
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

8th June (Thurs) Full Moon  
25th June (Sun) Punarvasu Day  
5th July (Wed) Cow Lakshmi Day  
8th July (Sat) Full Moon/Guru Poornima  
23rd July (Sun) Punarvasu Day  
25th July (Tue) 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 (Tue) 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. VIII): Training Raja Iyer

If there were self-willed devotees whom Bhagavan treated with a light touch, there were also devotees for whom Bhagavan felt a deep affinity and yet sometimes handled with stern directness. There were devotees with whom he felt such familiarity that he dispensed with ordinary politenesses and spoke plainly like one might speak to a close family member. One such devotee was V. Raja Iyer.

Raja Iyer had come to Bhagavan in 1911 at the age of fifteen in the days when Bhagavan was still at Virupaksha Guha. Raja Iyer used to carry food items up the Hill on behalf of Echammal and Mudaliar granny and offer them to Bhagavan. In those days, he says he was more motivated by the sweets and other food items he got from Bhagavan than any spiritual sustenance he hoped to attain. But Bhagavan didn't seem to mind and shared everything offered him equally with all.

At high school in Chidambaram, Raja Iyer was in the same class with Ramaswamy Pillai.<sup>1</sup> But he

<sup>1</sup> *The Mountain Path*, "Reminiscences", V. Mallikarjunan (Raja

discontinued his studies in order to look after sadhus and sing bhajans. Later he got married but when his wife died suddenly, he took up the life of a wandering pilgrim, wandering about visiting temples, singing bhajans and dancing to sankirtan with the joy of the Lord. When he came to Tiruvannamalai, he would pass his time on the Hill with Bhagavan and later told stories of the early days on the Hill.

Raja Iyer told of a time during the days at Skandasramam. Bhagavan used to involve himself in simple construction projects. One day when Bhagavan was plastering a wall, he was dressed in workman's clothes with a rag tied round his head. Covered with mud, Bhagavan looked like an ordinary labourer. About this time some first-time visitors climbed the Hill in search of Bhagavan. One shouted, "Hey coolie, where is the swami who lives here"? Bhagavan looked round and shrugged his shoulders. Another in the party protested that they were told that he could be found in the Ashram at that hour. Bhagavan shrugged his shoulders and said, "I can't help it". When the disappointed visitors made their way back down the Hill, Echammal and Raja Iyer passed them on the way up and heard their complaints. She offered to show them the swami. In the meantime, Bhagavan had taken a bath, smeared his body with sacred ash, and was sitting in the classic yogic padmasana posture.

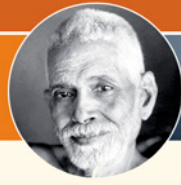
The visitors arrived a second time and greeted him very reverently but all the while were looking around for the coolie. After they left, Echammal asked Bhagavan why he had played a trick on them. Bhagavan said, "What else could I do? Do you want me to go around proclaiming, 'I am the swami' or wear a placard saying, 'This is Sri Ramana Maharshi'?"<sup>2</sup>

Years later in his pilgrimage days, Raja Iyer had a dream of Bhagavan. The year was 1927 and he was wandering in a distant city. In the dream Bhagavan asked him to come and pull the *punkha*, an improvised fan made from a long cloth attached to a light board suspended from the ceiling. A few days later, Raja Iyer went to Tiruvannamalai and when he entered Bhagavan's Old Hall, he saw the same *punkha* from

Iyer's brother), October 1982, pp. 272-73.

<sup>2</sup> *Ramana Smrti*, "Glimpses of Sri Ramana Maharshi", p. 156.





his dream. He prostrated before Bhagavan. Bhagavan said, “Raja, please pull the *punkha*.” Raja Iyer did as requested. But within five minutes, Bhagavan said, “Raja, that’s enough!”

Raja Iyer felt a great sense of responsibility and took this exchange as a sign that Bhagavan wanted him to come and serve in the Ashram. What gave this impression special force was that fact that Bhagavan rarely asked anyone to do anything for him. So, for the first time in long years, Raja Iyer gave up his aimless wandering and settled down in the Ashram.<sup>3</sup>

### Singing for Bhagavan

Being a gifted singer, Iyer was often called upon to sing. One Sri Rama Navami when invited to participate in a bhajan ceremony, he came before Bhagavan saying, “Bhagavan, they have invited me to come and sing. I will have to go there.” But Bhagavan gave neither words of assent nor his customary nod of approval, but just sat motionless. Just then, Chinnaswami came into the hall and said, “Somebody has sent money with the specific request that Sri Rama’s birthday be celebrated in Ramanasramam in the same manner in which it is celebrated in his village.” Bhagavan turned to Raja Iyer and said, “See, you have to stay and sing the bhajans here.”

The bhajans went on into the night for six or seven hours and Raja Iyer became ecstatic. Bhagavan commented how all the participants were mad with devotion and said, “How I wish everyone was mad in the same way!”<sup>4</sup>

### Initiation into Ashram Cooking

But for Chinnaswami, it was not enough that Raja Iyer

<sup>3</sup> *Ramana Periya Puranam*, (Unpublished manuscript), V. Ganesan, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

sang on occasion. One day he told Iyer, “You can neither stay inside the ashram nor eat here unless you do some kind of service.” Raja Iyer panicked and hurried to Bhagavan for advice. Bhagavan said, “Raja, why don’t you make idlies each morning? I will teach you how.” That very evening Bhagavan took him to the kitchen and taught him how to grind the rice and lentils and how to steam the idlies. He also taught him how to handle cooked dishes so as not to waste food, and how to start the fire with just a few drops of kerosene.<sup>5</sup>

The next day, however, to his great disappointment, Iyer found that all the idlies he had made just crumbled. He ran to the hall in a fright. Bhagavan asked him, “Did you make the customary offering to the fire (Agni)”. Raja Iyer admitted, “Bhagavan, I forgot to do it.” Bhagavan said, “Go and do that. Tell the Fire that the first batch of idlies will be offered to it.” From that day on, Iyer became the regular idli cook. He eventually became so good at making idlies that the Ashram earned a reputation for its idlies and Iyer came to be known as ‘the Idli-Master’!<sup>6</sup>

Thus, Iyer got an introduction into cooking and the proper way to serve in the Ashram from Bhagavan himself.

### Serving Bhagavan

But Raja Iyer’s care-free approach to life sometimes got him in trouble, especially if he was lax with certain rules. When serving Bhagavan in the dining hall, Iyer was slow to catch on to the idea of treating Bhagavan as just another devotee but instead gave him preference with the quantity or quality of food items he served him.

Once when a devotee offered a feast with delectables, Bhagavan had a bad cold. It was Bhagavan’s habit not

<sup>5</sup> *Ramana Smrti*, “Glimpses of Sri Ramana Maharshi”, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> *The Mountain Path*, Obituary, January 1983, p. 67.

## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

M.: A sleeping child is fed by its mother. The child eats food without being wide awake and then denies having taken food in sleep. However, the mother knows what happened. Similarly, the Jnani acts unawares. Others see him act, but he does not know it himself. Owing to fear of Him wind blows, etc. That is the order of things. He ordains everything and the universe acts accordingly, yet He does not know. Therefore, He is called the great Doer. Every embodied being (*ahankari*) is bound by *niyama*. Even Brahma cannot transgress it.

— Talks §467





to take rich food when he had a cold, so the kitchen staff was disappointed not to be able to share the good stuff with Bhagavan which included sweet dosai and almond milk. Chinnaswami assured the servers that Bhagavan would relent and partake of the special food. So, when Raja Iyer started serving Bhagavan pancakes, Bhagavan asked, “Are they sweet?” “No,” Iyer said. “Then put a little rasam.” But they were in fact sweet and Raja Iyer mischievously poured what he had in hand — almond milk — over the dosai. Bhagavan reacted, “I ask for is rasam and you serve me milk? Go and get some rasam.” So, Raja Iyer served another dosai and Bhagavan mixed the sweet dosai with the savoury rasam and almond milk. After the meal, Bhagavan complained to Iyer, “I ask for plain dosai and get sweet ones; I ask for *rasam* and get almond milk. You seem to know what is best for your swami.”<sup>7</sup>

By this time, Raja Iyer wore many hats in the Ashram, served in multiple ways and was willing to do whatever odd task Chinnaswami asked of him. He collected flowers for worship, drew water from the well, ground sandalwood paste and sometimes performed puja in the Mother’s shrine. He fetched the Ashram correspondence, received guests, helped them to their rooms and acted as guide for newcomers, often as an interpreter to new Western devotees pointing out the significance of every detail of the Ashram.

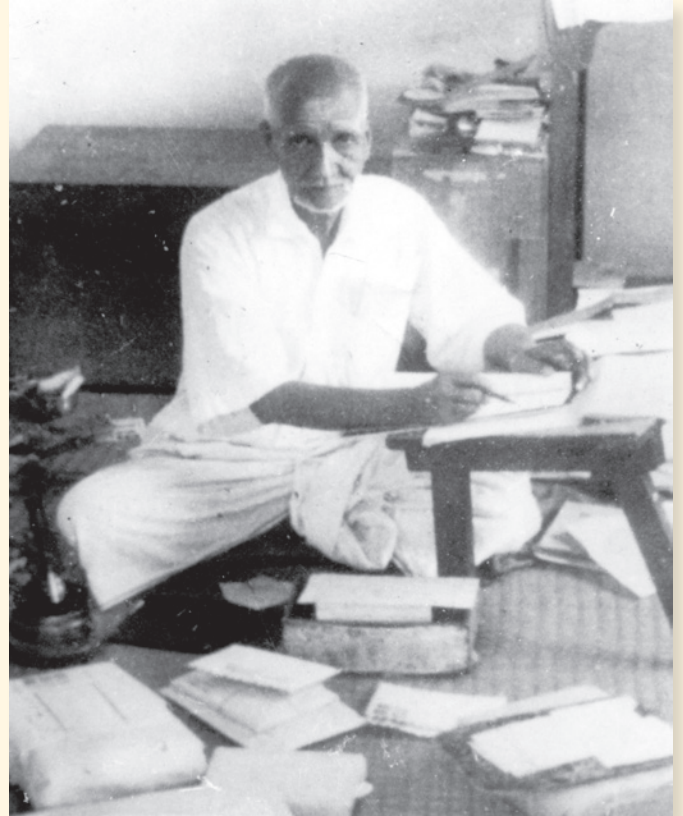
In 1937, a post office was opened in the Ashram and Raja Iyer was made the Postmaster. On the first day of the new Ashram post office, Bhagavan came and fixed the postal cancellation seal. Up till then, Raja Iyer had been the one who collected the post and brought it to Bhagavan. So Bhagavan teased him that day, saying, “Oh, the postman has been made the Postmaster!”<sup>8</sup>

But even if now in a position of responsibility, Raja Iyer still got up at 3 o’clock in the morning to make idlies for breakfast by 6 am before attending the post office work. And he still served at meals and heard from Bhagavan when he bent the rules.

One evening, milk-sweet was being served. As already mentioned, Raja Iyer had been chastened for his habit of trying to give Bhagavan a little extra

<sup>7</sup> *Power of the Presence*, vol. III p. 253.

<sup>8</sup> *Ramana Smrti*, “Glimpses of Sri Ramana Maharshi”, p. 158.



The Postmaster at work in the Ashram Post Office

of certain foods. But Chinnaswami, who was fond of the evening’s payasam, seems to have hinted to Raja Iyer that he should give Bhagavan a healthy portion. Thus, Iyer served a little more to Bhagavan than to the others. Bhagavan took notice of it and called out, “There! Again, the same monkey tricks. Why do you serve me more than you serve others? When it comes to serving Bhagavan, the ladle is immersed fully while it is immersed only half when it is served to others. How often have I told you not to do so? No one listens to my words. When the ladle is in his hands, the server thinks he is as powerful as the District Collector and can do anything without fear. He is the one who serves and we are the people to eat whatever he serves. His hand is above and ours below. We must act as he pleases and eat as he decides and then lie low.”<sup>9</sup>

A few days after this incident, was a culminating lesson in obedience and humility for Iyer. A parcel arrived at the post office containing some medicine for Bhagavan. But

<sup>9</sup> *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, “He is a Raja, isn’t he?”, p. 175.





as it was addressed to Dr. Srinivasa Rao and since the doctor was out of station, Raja Iyer retained the package. Iyer had no prior knowledge of the package's content or its ultimate destination, so when Bhagavan's personal attendants came on behalf of Bhagavan and requested Raja Iyer to hand over the package, Iyer followed post office protocol and declined to do so since it was addressed to Dr. Rao. Bhagavan heard about it and when Raja Iyer went to the Asramam that afternoon, Bhagavan taunted him: "He is himself a raja, besides this, a postmaster. People must be obliged to him, must move around him with due respect and regard. That being so, we have perhaps to go and tell him that the medicine is meant for us and request him to deliver the parcel to us. Who will do all that now? Don't worry about it. Let us forget it."

Evidently, the attendants had not adequately explained things to Raja Iyer nor had they sufficiently recounted to Bhagavan the interaction in the post office, hence the misunderstanding. Raja Iyer was confused by Bhagavan's words and asked Krishnaswami what it was all about. On hearing the matter from the attendant, Iyer came with the parcel and offered it with profuse apologies. But it was declined. Only when Dr. Rao returned and the two came to Bhagavan with the parcel and prostrated before Bhagavan, pleading to be excused, did Bhagavan then graciously accept the package.<sup>10</sup>

### Raja Iyer's Uncontrollable Eating

But if Bhagavan was sometimes curt with Raja Iyer, all the while he loved Iyer's child-like simplicity and more than once quietly defended him. Bhagavan

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

sometimes used discipline and rules in reverse, when a deeper, spiritual lesson might be gained, as the following case demonstrates.

Raja Iyer was said to have loved eating and would regularly go into the Ashram kitchen and eat anything, whether cooked or raw. One day, a devotee complained to Bhagavan saying, "Bhagavan, the man is uncontrollable; he eats whatever he wants!" Bhagavan smilingly said, "You are complaining about Raja." The devotee said, "Yes, Bhagavan. It is not in keeping with the rules of the Ashram." Bhagavan questioned, "Are you sure that it is a mistake on the part of Raja Iyer?" The devotee said, "Yes, Bhagavan." Bhagavan continued, "Can you be clearer? Why do you also not go into the kitchen and eat like he does?" The devotee answered, "No, Bhagavan, I cannot do that; I just cannot." Bhagavan told the devotee, "It is not his constant eating that is bothering you but the fact that you are not able to go inside and eat as often as he does." Bhagavan then was able to discern that the devotee was unable to eat as much as he wanted because he was afraid of Chinnaswami and therefore he was complaining. But Raja Iyer was not afraid of Chinnaswami and in fact had received many a berating from him, but it did not deter him from going into the kitchen and eating. Bhagavan then advised the devotee, "There are no others; whatever you see outside is your own reflection. Your mind is creating all this."<sup>11</sup> —

(to be continued)

<sup>11</sup> *Ramana Periya Puranam*, (Unpublished manuscript), p. 104.

## New Ashram Book



On Aradhana Day morning at Pal Puja, *Thangakkai: The Golden Hand*, a compilation of Bhagavan's handwriting in Tamil, Sanskrit and English was released in Bhagavan's Hall. The volume presents samples of Bhagavan's handwriting each with a synopsis in Tamil and English. (500 pgs., Rs. 150.)





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahapuja



One day in 1916, Mother Alagammal went up the Hill to visit her son but had no intention of coming down again. What started as motherly longing developed into a deep spiritual thirst and initiated an inner journey toward selfhood that culminated in her full release under her son's active supervision on 19th May, 1922. The first Mahapuja took place the following day at the foot of the Mountain at the site of her samadhi which was, as it turned out, the first construction at Sri Ramanasramam. Mahapuja celebrations have taken place every year since then. This year's celebrations commenced early morning of the 20th May with mahanyasa japa in the Mother's Shrine as flower festoons were hung. Live online streaming allowed devotees around the globe to view the event, which culminated in Deeparadhana around 10.30 am. —

## Inaugurating a New Library in Tiruchuzhi

On the 2nd May, Ramanasramam inaugurated and opened a new 2800 sq ft. branch library building in Bhagavan's birth place of Tiruchuzhi. The 41 lakh project was sponsored by Ramanasramam and attended by Trustees Sri. A. Janakiraman, Dr. K. Narayanan and Sri. V. R. Kamalanathan, presided by District Collector Sri.A. Sivagnanam. Maestro Ilaiyaraaja attended the function and inaugurated the library. The facility is for public use and makes needed resources such as computers and internet facilities available for local students and youth. —





## Stories from Sri Bhagavan: Dattatreya's Guru of Many Forms

*[Bhagavan could recognise spiritual greatness even in animals and once spoke of a dog that was always immersed in nirvikalpa samadhi. When she delivered pups some distance up the hill, she would suckle them there and then come and lie in samadhi before*

*Bhagavan. Around this time, Bhagavan's childhood friend Sri Rangan came with a friend to see Bhagavan. As they sat to eat one of the puppies came along and sniffed at the food placed on the friend's leaf plate. At that the friend lost the desire to eat his food, imagining that it was now contaminated. Bhagavan laughed and eased his hesitation by narrating the following story.]*

**D**attatreya is said to have had twenty-four gurus which included all the elements. But the truth is the whole world was his guru. He said in the *Bhagvatam*, "How can I bow to Him, who is Formless, Undifferentiated and Indestructible, who is the essence of Bliss, and who has through Himself by Himself and in Himself filled up everything?"

One day when accompanied by one of his disciples, they set out to visit his Guru. He cautioned his disciple, "My Guru can come in any form. Be alert."

That morning, the Guru came in the form of a Muslim *fakir*. After offering their respects, all three sat down for food. The fakir took a bowl and milked a she-dog sitting beside them. He then took out a piece of stale bread from his satchel, dipped the bread in the milk, took a piece himself and gave the rest to Dattatreya. Dattatreya in turn ate and gave a piece to his disciple. The disciple was secretly scandalised by what he saw and when no one was looking, threw the piece of bread away. Soon after Dattatreya inquired, "Did you take the prasad?" The disciple replied in a contemptuous tone, "Prasad? No, I threw it away." Dattatreya immediately took out a portion of the bread chewed by his Guru and thrust it in his disciple's mouth and made him swallow it. —

*[After narrating the story, Bhagavan asked Rangan's friend to go ahead and eat. The latter, recognising that he was in the company of the guru, joyfully complied.]*

## Discourse by Sri S.V. Gowri Shankar

In the April issue of *Saranagati* we read about the life of Sri S.V. Gowri Shankar who passed away peacefully at the end of March 2017 at the age of 78. For those who would like to see and hear him tell his experience of Kanchi Paramacharya (in Tamil), please click the following link: [https://youtu.be/hPf\\_Hcq2HkU](https://youtu.be/hPf_Hcq2HkU)







## Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Sofa Repair



Somewhere in the late 1920s or early 1930s when Bhagavan was clarifying devotees' doubts from the hard bench in the newly-constructed Old Hall, he mentioned having body pain. Ramaswami Gounder of Pollachi happened to be sitting in the Hall that day and overheard Bhagavan's complaints. The next day, he went to town and bought country rosewood (*eetti maram*) and ordered a sofa to be made locally. A few days later when it was ready, he brought it to Ramanasramam and requested Bhagavan to accept it. But Bhagavan who never asked anyone for anything, politely refused it. The single-minded Ramaswami took to fasting and praying till Bhagavan would accept his gift. After three days, Bhagavan, unable to bear seeing his devotee suffer so, graciously got up and sat on the sofa, thus making it his permanent seat for the next 20 years. That was nearly 90 years ago and the sofa still sits in the same place as it did that day. In later years, this ardent devotee was popularly known as "Sofa Gounder".

Recently, restoration experts (senior museum curators) made minor repairs to the sofa and fabricated an independent stainless steel frame brace to support the original wooden-framed image of Sri Bhagavan. Otherwise the sofa required no major repairs. In future, devotees are kindly requested to refrain from offering flowers at Bhagavan's sofa as restorationists want to avoid attracting ants and other insects. —

## Events in the Kendras: Bhagavan's First Aradhana in Paris



Bhagavan's first Aradhana in Paris was celebrated on the 24th April, 2017 with more than 80 devotees in attendance. The celebration began by reading the death experience and sharing about Bhagavan Ramana's teachings. Swami Veetamohananda evoked the memory of Swami Siddeshwarananda, (senior Monk of Sri Ramakrishna Math and also devotee of Bhagavan Ramana who established the nucleus of the Ramakrishna movement in France). And Swami Umananda, President of the Chinmaya Mission, France, also actively participated. The two led all in *Aksharamanamalai* and the evening ended with the film "Abide as the Self". —

## Obituary: Sri T. V. Manian



Born in 1925, Sri T. V. Manian began his career at the age of sixteen as a junior clerk in Tata Iron and Steel Co., earning 40 Rupees per month. He rose to the position of senior administrative officer by earning the degrees of M. A. (Economics) and B. E. Mechanical Engineering. He was devoted to Tirupati Venkateswara, practiced the yoga taught by Swami Sivananda, and regularly recited the Vishnu Sahasranamam. His son, Sri T. S. Vaidyanathan, currently serving in the Ashram, slowly revealed to him the power and grace of his Guru, Bhagavan Ramana. Ultimately, Sri T. V. Manian experienced Bhagavan's grace and surrendered to Him wholeheartedly. He experienced the joy of Arunachala pradakshina till the age of 88. Up until February this year, he walked to the Ashram and circumambulated the shrines thrice with tottering steps. On April 12, 2017, he sensed that the end of life was imminent. Devotees from Ramanasramam came to his residence in Sri Ramana Nagar and chanted *Aksharamanamalai*. He joined in the chanting, shedding tears of joy and thanked the devotees, declaring, "I won't die today". He then telephoned the Ashram cashier Prem Kumar and donated for Bhagavan's Aradhana. On April 30, 2017 at the age of 91, this devout, creative and confident man merged at the Feet of Bhagavan. He is survived by his daughter Rajalakshmi Shivaji and son Vaidyanathan as well as five grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. —

