

Saranagathi

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ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

With the rush of the season now coming to a close, devotees are contented to have Ashram life return to normal after the unprecedented crowds of visitors during the months of January and February.

This issue of *Saranagathi* carries the concluding part of the testimony of Lokamma and an account of Hazaria in *How I Came to Bhagavan*. *Events from Sri Ramanasramam* includes Chinnaswami's Samadhi Day and the Mahasivaratri celebrations.

For further news on Mahasivaratri and other 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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Reality in Forty Verses

13. The Self that is awareness, that alone is true. The knowledge which is various is ignorance. And even ignorance, which is false, cannot exist apart from the Self. False are the many jewels, for apart from gold, which alone is true, they cannot exist.

— Reality in Forty Verses by Sri Bhagavan





Women Devotees Series: Lokamma (part two)

Lokamma of Pattakurichi is most remembered for her cooking and singing. The published chronicles of Ashram life during Bhagavan's time are replete with reports of Bhagavan asking Lokamma to sing particular hymns to suit the occasion. Much of what follows is taken from the 1980 Souvenir entitled Ramana Smriti, p. 152-55.

I happened to meet Thenamma who had been coming to Ramanasramam for some time and who helped in the kitchen when there. Her accounts of Sri Bhagavan's life and teachings sparked in me a deep longing to visit him. But my family members were dead against my going and, in time, this began to affect my health. At last, the long-denied consent was given and I went to the Ashram with a group of pilgrims who were going

to Tirupati. By a mere look, Bhagavan transmitted his power. I could feel it coursing through my veins. Forgetting to offer him the fruits I had brought with me, eyes brimming with tears of happiness, I kept looking at Bhagavan, who asked Muruganar, "Is she the one about whom Thenamma was talking?"

After a week's stay, while taking leave, I said, "Bhagavan, I have none to call my own except you. Please bless me so that I may always remain in your proximity." Just then Muruganar came in and Bhagavan asked him to read to me from *Upadesa Saram*. He gave him his copy of *Upadesa Saram* and Muruganar read out some points for me. Before leaving I asked Bhagavan to give me the book. Bhagavan said if this copy were given away the Ashram would be without a copy. Just then Somasundaram Pillai told Bhagavan that he had a copy which he would give to the Ashram and requested Bhagavan to give me his.

After this first visit I started coming to the Ashram regularly to stay for a month or two each time. One morning I was singing a Tevaram song in front of Bhagavan and sang a verse incorrectly. Bhagavan noticed it and asked, "Is it written like that? You better read it again". I read it wrong several times. Finally Bhagavan said sternly, "Find out where you made the mistake. I will not help you. If I do, you will not learn to see where you are wrong and will simply go on repeating the same mistake over and again".

I went on reading the passage trying to find out where the mistake was, but lunch time was approaching. As I was supposed to serve, I started to get up to go to the kitchen. But Bhagavan said, "No, you cannot go. Find your mistake first. You can't just run away." The bell rang for lunch and Bhagavan got up from his sofa and went to the dining hall.

After lunch I went to Somasundaram Pillai who helped me. Then I went to Bhagavan and recited it correctly. "Who pointed it out to you"? he asked. "Only when you yourself have found out where you were wrong, will it remain fixed in your mind and you will have the knowledge and the capacity not to go wrong again." I took this as his upadesa.

At this time in India, we often found ourselves caught in the trap of outmoded customs that discriminated against the less fortunate, especially women and lower castes.





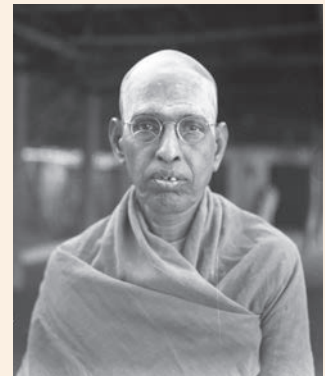
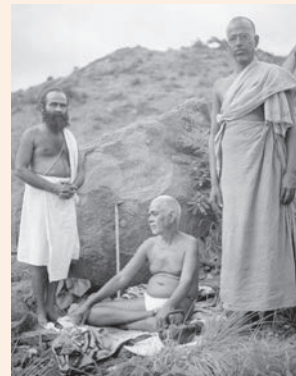
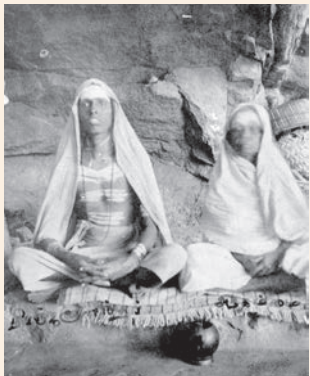
One day I was to cook some dhal and curry. I came early in the morning so as to have some more time. But Bhagavan was quicker than me. He told me that the dhal was ready and that I should only prepare the curry. Bhagavan asked Thenamma what she was doing, and finding that she was preparing special food for a lady having her menses, he got annoyed and said, "Why should she eat food cooked separately? Make no differences, serve her the food you have prepared for all." After the evening meal, Bhagavan asked me whether the lady was given the common food. As I was assuring him about it, Chinnaswami came near and told me in whispers that in case someone else asked me what food was served to ladies during their period, I should say that separate food is prepared for them. Bhagavan overheard the manager and scolded him, "Why do you ask her to tell lies? The Ashram gives food to all and makes no difference. There are no untouchables here. Those who do not like it may eat elsewhere." He went on to add, "There used to be the same trouble with Mother at Skandasram. Here we have menses and there

we had pariahs. She would not give food to the man who brought us firewood because she was afraid of pollution. She insisted that I must eat first, then she would eat and then the woodcutter could have the remnants left on the ground outside the Ashram. I refused to eat until the man had been decently fed. At first she would not yield but would weep and even go without food. But I was adamant; and she had to reconcile to my standpoint. What is the difference between man and man? Am I a Brahmin and he a pariah? Is it not correct to see God in all?"

We were all astounded. The rebuke struck deep into our hearts. We asked Bhagavan to make our minds clear and our hearts pure so that we would sin no more against God in man.

For the final decades of her life, Lokamma lived in a small house in Ramana Nagar near the Ashram, ever considering herself blessed to have had the privilege of living in daily contact with Bhagavan. Lokamma passed away peacefully in 1984 at the age of 90.

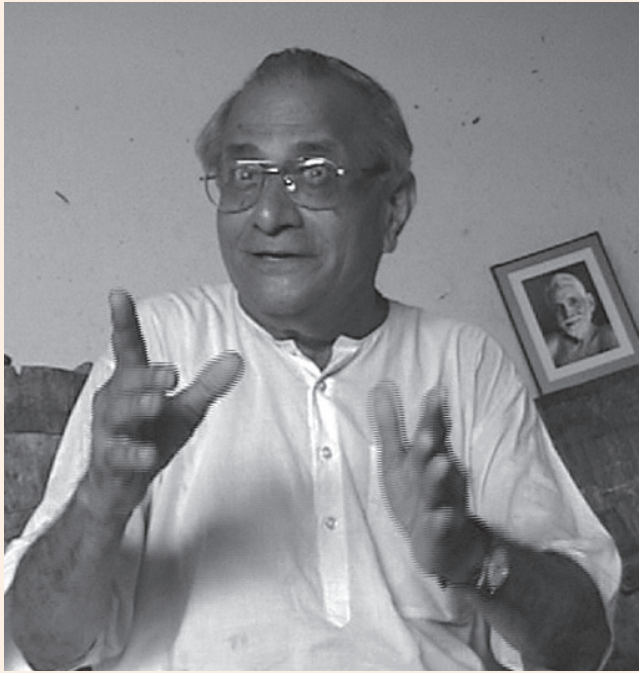
Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Chinnaswami Samadhi Day



Chinnaswami, born Nagasundaram in 1886, was 30 years old, when in August, 1917, he arrived in Tiruvannamalai with the intention of surrendering to Bhagavan. A year later, he took *sannyasa diksha*, taking the name Niranjanandaswami. For the next thirty-five years he served Bhagavan and devotees unceasingly. After Bhagavan's mahanimirvana, many left the Ashram with only a few such as Muruganar staying on to keep the flame of Bhagavan's teaching alive. Swami Niranjanananda laboured to keep the ashram functioning during hard times and financial crises, the strain of which finally broke his health. In late 1952, suffering an intestinal disease and heart pain, he called close relatives and devotees to hear his last instructions: "I am going away with stainless hands and a fulfilled heart. I have never touched a paisa of the Ashram for my personal possession. Everything here, every stick and stone, belongs to Bhagavan. You have to treat them with devotion. You must give your heart and mind to Bhagavan. He will shower your heart with grace. Be truthful and honest. In doing your Ashram duties, you must uphold the virtue of your lineage." This great karma yogi left the body on a full moon day, the 29th January, 1953. Interred in front of the Mother's temple for which he had laboured so hard and long, a lingam was consecrated and pujas performed daily. This year, his samadhi day was observed on the 6th February.

See *Mountain Path*, Oct. 2009, p. 81ff.





How I Came to Bhagavan: Hazaria

It was about 1943 when, through a friend and teacher, I came across Paul Brunton's *Maharshi and His Message*. In reading the book a current of awareness was ignited in me and I had the strong desire to see Bhagavan face to face.

A few years later in 1948, I was in college. One day suddenly, in my economics class, I was unable to determine whether or not the lecture was still underway. After a few minutes the sound of the lecture disappeared altogether. Somebody seemed to speak to me from behind but when I turned to look there was no one there speaking but everyone was simply listening to the lecture. The voice continued, "Are you not coming? Are you not coming?" I looked behind me again but no one was speaking. Again, "Are you not coming to Tiruvannamalai?" I immediately left the classroom.

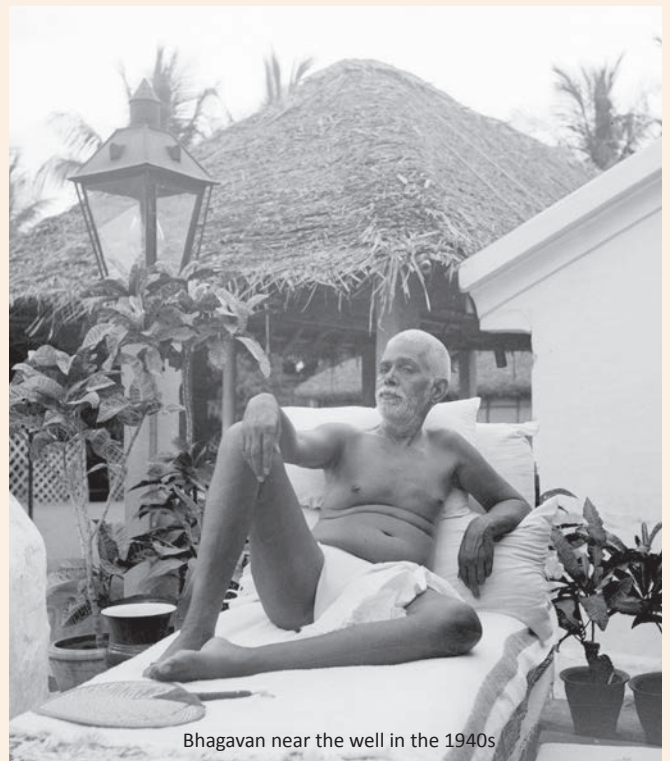
I went home and asked my father's permission to go to Tiruvannamalai. My father was perplexed, wondering how I could make the journey to such a far away, unfamiliar place, for in those days the journey from Bombay to Tiruvannamalai was like travelling

to a foreign country. However, when I explained what had happened, he gave me permission to go. I was only 24 years old at the time.

I bought a railway ticket. But in the uncertainty and haste at the railway station, I stepped into a small crack in the walkway and sprained my ankle. The food carefully prepared for the long journey was overturned and spilt out onto the ground. But I resolutely carried on with my plans and boarded the train to Madras.

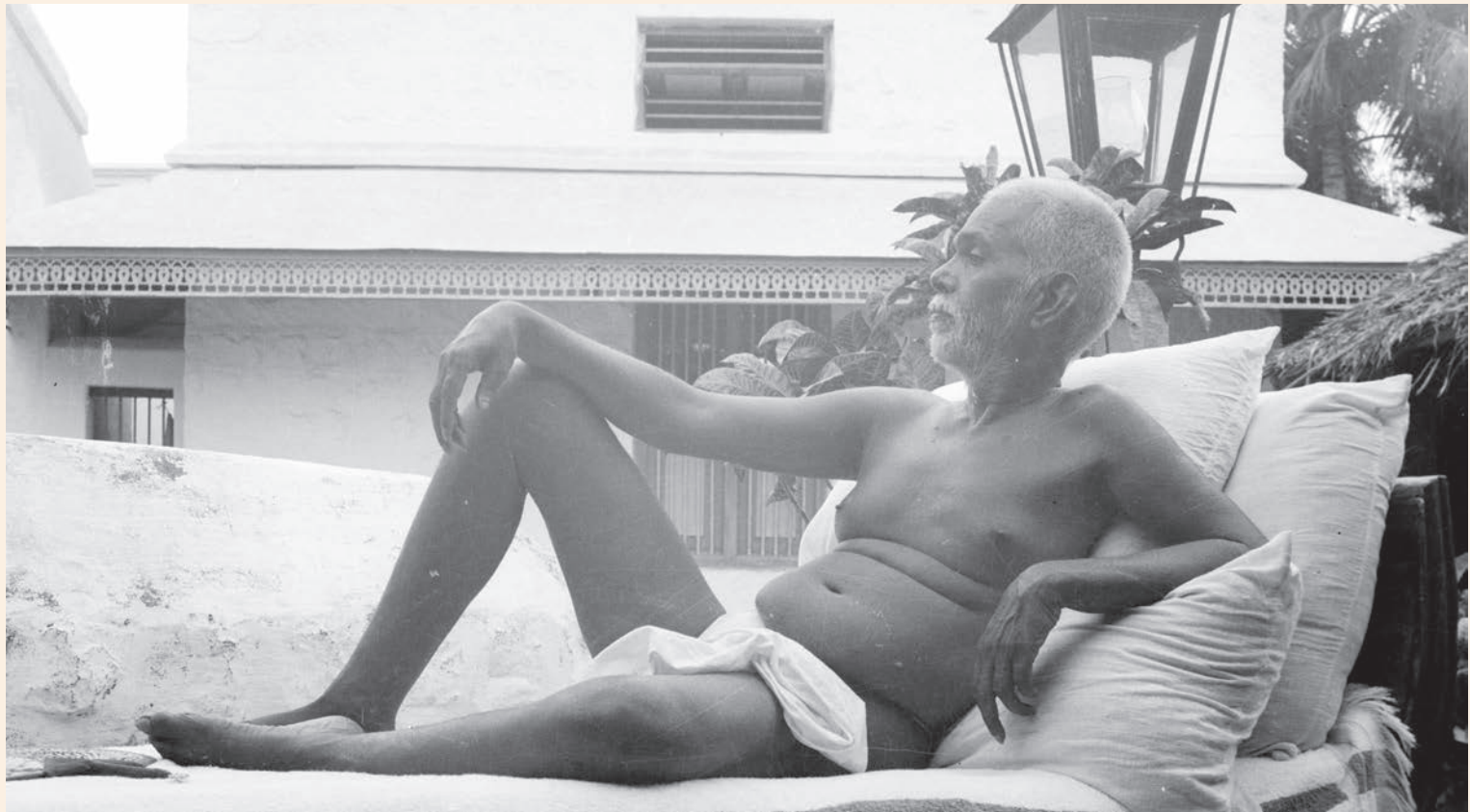
On the trip there was a gentleman sitting opposite of me, who, during the course of our conversation, told me that he was also going to Tiruvannamalai to see Bhagavan and that he would help me. As I was injured and could not properly walk, he took me by hand to support me when we stopped to change trains.

Once having arrived at the Ashram, he took me to see Bhagavan and led me past the crowd, bringing me straight up before Bhagavan. He told Bhagavan about my injury while Bhagavan looked at me directly. Bhagavan was sitting on his devan outside by the well surrounded by devotees. The gentleman I had befriended, Mr. Dutta, soon enough disappeared and I never saw him again. But it was with his help that I had come into the divine clutches of Bhagavan.



Bhagavan near the well in the 1940s





I took some treatment for the sprained ankle and soon enough was completely healed. When the time came, I returned to Bombay. But from that day onwards till now Bhagavan has been with me.

To be sure it was Bhagavan who brought me to him and it was Bhagavan who refined my mind by making me study his teaching, carrying me a significant step forward in my life. As I was Bhagavan's student, I had no visions, dreams or miracles of any sort, nor did I have the desire for any. Instead I gained a love for Bhagavan and lost the taste for other desires.

Among the many things I learned from Bhagavan, I

came to see that seeking to understand *atma* is to follow Bhagavan and his teachings. For Bhagavan, that is the true devotion. Problems would invariably continue in my life but I began to take refuge in Bhagavan and rest in him. I came to accept the events of life as ordained by him. Bhagavan showed me a way of living and how to respond to and accept life as it presents itself to us.

For my part I don't want anything else except to be with Bhagavan. Thanks to Bhagavan no one is any longer a stranger to my heart. I feel that I and others are one, that their feelings are mine and my happiness is their happiness.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

The Self Alone is the Reality

For a realised being the Self alone is the Reality, and actions are only phenomenal, not affecting the Self. Even when he acts, he has no sense of being an agent. His actions are only involuntary and he remains a witness to them without any attachment. Realisation of the Self is the greatest help that can be rendered to humanity. Therefore, saints are said to be helpful, though they remain in forests. But it should not be forgotten that solitude is not in forests only. It can be had even in towns, in the thick of worldly occupations. — Talks §17





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahasivaratri



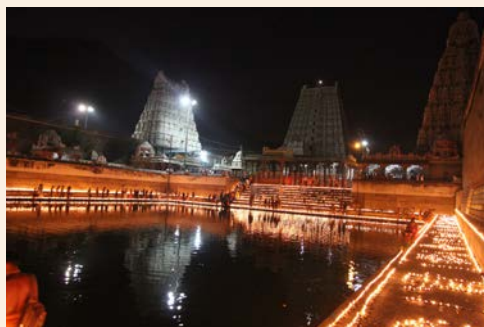
Mahasivaratri was celebrated on the 20th February. Odhuvars chanted *Thevarum* in the New Hall in the afternoon. Devotees participated in pujas performed every two hours throughout the night in Bhagavan's Shrine. Vedic pundits offered *Ekadasa Rudram* from midnight until 2 am and devotees went for *giri valam* in between. Many devotees maintained a fast throughout the day and the all-night vigil. Celebrations at the Big Temple began with the lighting of 100,000 clay deepam lamps and the unveiling of giant sand yantras in bright colours, depicting themes from the *Puranas*. Pilgrims there could also hear the *Thevaram* and other sacred music performed throughout the night.



Origins of Sivaratri

The Siva Purana tells the story how Lord Siva manifested as a column of fire to resolve a dispute between Vishnu and Brahma. The two, realising their mistake, begged Lord Siva to cool his brightness and take form as a mountain in order that Devas and mortals might worship him and receive his blessing. This occurred on the fourteenth day (*chaturdasi*) of the dark-foirnight in the month of *Masi* (mid-February to mid-March). Lord Siva said: "By doing puja to me on this holiest day, one gets the same results as puja done for a whole year."

Parvati named the night Maha-Sivaratri, "The Great Night of Siva". Women commonly pray for their husbands and sons to ward off any evil that may befall them on the moonless night. The festival occurs every year on the the night before the new moon and is attended by offerings of bilva leaves to the adi guru, Lord Siva.





From the *Periapuranam*: Kannappa Nayanar



Courtesy of Ramalingar Pami Mandram

Thinnan, the ‘steadfast one’, had come into the world purely by the intercession of his parents’ ardent prayers to Lord Subramanya. So when as a youngster out hunting, he and his companion came across the linga of the Lord, he was immediately transformed in the Lord’s presence. Eager to learn how to worship the Lord, his hunter–friend explained what little he knew of Siva worship and Thinnan took it up immediately, offering the yield from his hunting expeditions as oblations. The priest Sivakosariaar was less enthusiastic about the unknown devotee and when he came to do rites to Lord Neelakantha, he was aghast to find bone and meat scattered about the shrine. Who could have committed such desecration, he wondered? He shed copious tears and fell to the ground, his mind all awlirl. Then he brushed aside the ‘unclean’ things, bathed in the river, chanted the hallowed names of the Lord and did all the purificatory rites. Next he bathed the Lord with pure water and offered worship in the prescribed way. His mind now somewhat appeased, he took leave of the Lord.

Meanwhile Thinnan hunted boar and deer, conferring a blessing on them as they were to be offered to the Lord. He kindled a fire and roasted the flesh to the proper tenderness, savouring them on his tongue. Then he mixed the flesh with honey and hurried back to the Lord. He removed the priest’s wreaths and began his tried way of adoration, offering meat and addressing the Lord: “This is much nicer than yesterday’s. I can vouch for it, having tasted it myself”.

For many days, the adoration of the hunter Thinnan and that of the priest alternated thus, much to the consternation of the latter. The priest cried to the Lord: ‘How long are you going to tolerate this daily desecration? Be pleased to get rid of the offender!’

That night, the Lord came to the priest in a dream: “Do not think badly of my devotee. His form is all love for me; all his thoughts are about me alone; know his true state”. The Lord continued: “The touch of his sandalled foot when it lovingly removes the flowers placed by you on my crown is sweeter to me than the touch of the tender foot of a little babe! Hide yourself behind me and keep watch tomorrow, and I will show you the measure of his devotion.” The vision faded and the priest awoke in wonder; he could sleep no more.

Meanwhile, just before dawn, Thinnan left for his hunt as usual. The Lord now set out to disclose to the sage–priest Thinnan’s true nature. Blood streamed from the Lord’s right eye. What a shock it was to the hunter–devotee when he arrived and saw this. The strong bowman rushed towards his Lord in distress. He saw the blood dripping and his mind whirled in confusion. He tried to wipe the blood away from the Lord’s eye but alas it continued to flow. Ah, the sinful wretch that I am! What mischief have I permitted to come to my dear one, the immaculate Lord? In great trepidation, he plucked some herbs, made a concoction and poured the juice on the Lord’s eye, but to no effect. Suddenly it flashed in his mind: “It is said that flesh is the cure for diseased flesh. I will pluck out my own eye with my arrow and fasten it on the Lord’s eye”. With great joy, he did so, and lo, the blood ceased to flow! He rejoiced exceedingly, leaping high and dancing like a madman. But just as suddenly, his joy turned to sorrow, for now the Lord’s other eye began to stream with blood. “And yet, why should I grieve? I know the well–tried remedy.” Before plucking out his remaining eye, he placed his left foot on the Lord’s eye, so he would be able to find his way, and set about to remove his eye with his arrow. But the Lord in his compassion, stretched out his arm and stayed Thinnan’s hand: “Wait, wait, Kannappa!”

Meanwhile the priest hiding nearby beheld all this and realised the truth. The celestials rained flowers from on high and the Vedas echoed from above. Could there be anything more glorious? The Lord then blessed his devotee and said, ‘Oh Thou blameless, steadfast one, come and abide with me for ever’.

(*Kannappa’s Aradhana was observed 3 February.*)

