

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

MARCH 2018
VOL. 12, NO. 3



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

February proved a busy month with devotees arriving from all around India and the world to spend time in Bhagavan's presence. As the month progressed, winter gradually disappeared and summer temperatures crept up upon us. The month ended with Maharudram in the Ashram on 27-28 February that climaxed with homa in the New Hall and special abhishekam at Bhagavan's and Mother's Shrines.

Prayers are requested for the family of Sri Ranganathan who was absorbed in Bhagavan on 8th February (obituary on p. 10.) Also devotees will note the passing away of Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal, 69th pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham on 27th February.

This issue of *Saranagati* continues with the discovery of Ella Maillart living at the feet of Bhagavan during the war years from 1940-1945 (p. 3ff).

For videos, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org>.

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

1st March (Thurs) Full Moon
6th March (Tues) Sundaram Iyer Day
16th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa
18th March (Sun) Telugu New Year
25th March (Sun) Sri Rama Navami
26th March (Mon) Punarvasu Day
30th March (Fri) Full Moon Day

2nd April (Mon) Jagadish Swami Day
14th April (Sat) Nirvana Room Aradhana/New Year
17th April (Mon) Major Chadwick Day
22nd April (Sun) Punarvasu Day
29th April (Sun) Full Moon
13th May (Sun) Bhagavan's 68th Aradhana
7th June (Thurs) Mahapuja





The Long Road to Bhagavan Tracing the Pilgrim Life of Ella Maillart (Part III)

In 1944, Ella sat down to write *Ti-Puss*, her first book from an overtly spiritual perspective. Her narrative was interwoven with reflections on the Maharshi, in whose presence she had now been for nearly four years.

That same year, the popular novelist W. Somerset Maugham published *The Razor's Edge*, his most acclaimed work which likewise contained references—though masked—to the Maharshi. Ella's book used as a literary device the life and times of a kitten she had adopted from Sujata Sen at Sri Ramanasramam, alerting the reader from the outset:

Warning: Those who hope to read just another cat-story should not open this book. For three years I lived with an Indian cat: she became my confidante and, as we travelled together, I could not avoid mentioning to her the gist of my preoccupations. This is my apology for the two very different trends of my book.¹

The first line of Maugham's book also contained an unusual disclaimer:

I have never begun a novel with more misgiving. If I call it a novel, it is only because I don't know what else to call it.²

What made Maugham's 'novel' unconventional was not just his insistence that its main character was a real person but his decision to include himself in the story under his own name. Maugham's book would eventually sell five million copies, and within two years of its release, would become a Hollywood blockbuster starring Tyrone Power as the novel's hero, Larry Darrell³. While Maugham was writing in England, Ella was writing at Arunachala where she yearned to live life in the present whilst searching for the meaning of existence in her everyday pursuits:

The teaching says: It is for the sake of the Self that all things are dear, though we usually think it is for the sake of the loved object. This cat, so alive in me that she has become like part of me, opened my heart where love was dormant... Love being the real Self.' When my feeling of love becomes uppermost for an extremely short while, there is neither cat nor any limited individuality. I am lost in love-impersonal, love which is a state where time has no power.⁴

As it would turn out, both Ella's and Maugham's books were published by the same London publisher, William Heinemann, who had also been the publisher of Ella's *Forbidden Journey* (1937), *Gypsy Afloat* (1942) and *The Cruel Way* (1947).

Major Chadwick, in the course of conversations with Ella on the veranda of his hut in Ramanasramam, narrated the account of Somerset Maugham's scandalous visit to Sri Ramanasramam in 1938:

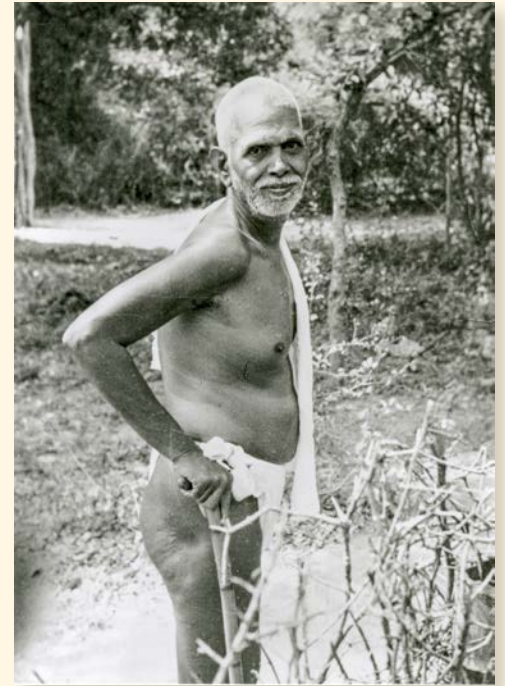
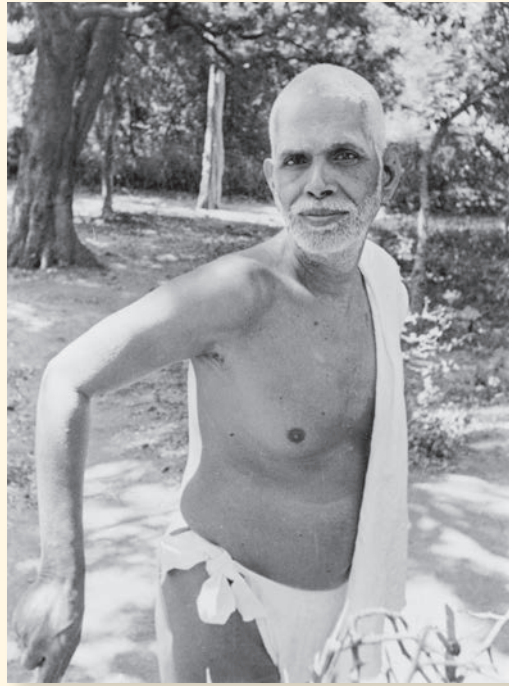
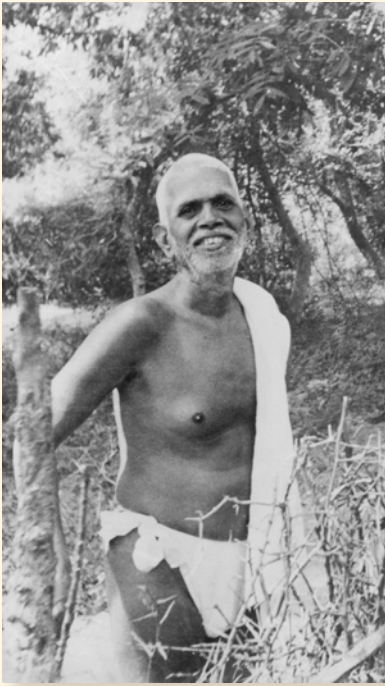
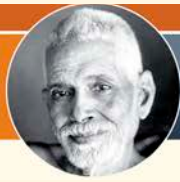
1 Ella Maillart, *Ti-Puss*, London, William Heinemann, 1951, at the foot of the *Table of Contents* page.

2 Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge*, William Heinemann, 1941, p. 1.

3 Bill Murray played Larry Darrell in the 1984 film adaptation from Columbia Pictures.

4 Ella Maillart, *Ti-Puss*, London, William Heinemann, 1951, p. 61.





Bhagavan at Palakotthu ca. 1941 (photos by Ella)

Somerset Maugham ran away from Pondicherry, he hated it so much. He came here with Mrs. Austin, had lunch in front of Olaf's hut with beer and gin—what a horror! Chadwick sent everybody away to avoid a scandal. Then Somerset Maugham asked to lie down. Chadwick sent Grant Duff away from his room and [went to tell] Bhagavan that Somerset Maugham [was not in a position to] come to the Hall. So Bhagavan came [to Chadwick's hut] and sat opposite Somerset Maugham for half an hour. At the end of it Maugham said: "Do I need to say something?" "No, silence is a good thing," Bhagavan said. "I ought to go back [to the Hall]. They will be waiting for me." ⁵

Maugham had not made a great showing and Chadwick was unhappy with him. But Maugham seems to have been awestruck by Chadwick. In a letter to her mother in Switzerland, Ella writes:

He (Chadwick) had impressed Somerset Maugham because he looked so perfectly happy. Do you remember, I must have told you that I had lunch with Somerset Maugham at his daughter's place, just before he left for India; he was certain that Europe had run off the track somehow and he wanted to see something of the ageless wisdom of India. ⁶

Neither Chadwick nor Ella realised that Maugham, despite behaving inappropriately at the time, had in fact been deeply taken by his experience of Bhagavan

⁵ Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

⁶ Letter to her mother, 12th December, 1940.

Ramana. Indeed, when his bestseller was published in 1944, anyone who had been to Sri Ramanasramam would have easily recognised that Sri Ganesha was based on Bhagavan. Few, if any, however, would have been able to identify Major Chadwick as the principal subject on whom Maugham's iconic character Larry Darrell was modelled. Both Larry and Chadwick had been wounded war veterans from good families, both had lost a close friend in battle, and at the end of the war, both gave up a promising career in order to travel to India to seek the transcendental meaning of life. ⁷

Though unimpressive during his visit, Maugham had presciently diagnosed the spirit of the times and landed on the emergent archetype of mid-twentieth century Europe. The trope perfectly matched not only the life of Chadwick but that of Guy Hague, Lewis Thompson, Paul Brunton, S.S. Cohen, Maurice Frydman, Ethel Merston, Grant Duff and countless others who, like Ella, had come to live with Bhagavan long before the appearance of *The Razor's Edge*. Ironically, as Ella and Chadwick joked about Maugham

⁷ Louis Buss, in his *The Life and Times of A. W. Chadwick* (unpublished biography of Chadwick), makes a convincing case for the Major as the principal subject on which the composite of Larry Darrell's character is based, pp. 741-818.





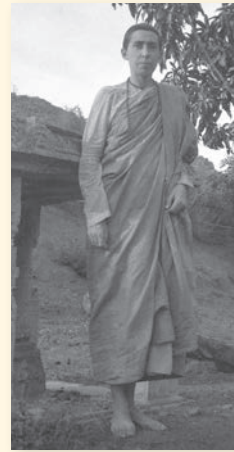
Chadwick on his veranda w/ Bhagavan's tiger skin



W. Somerset Maugham with *The Razor's Edge*



Lewis Thompson with Ella's cat Ti-Puss



Sujata Sen at the rear of the Ashram



Bhagavan on Hill w/ Chadwick & Sujata to his right, Cohen in rear

in Chadwick's hut at Ramanasramam, Maugham was publicly validating their vocation, making them into unwitting heroes through the character of Larry Darrell.

The writer Louis Buss tells how just after the war when the film was released, thousands of servicemen wrote to Maugham⁸ inquiring about the whereabouts of Larry Darrell who, Maugham had insisted at the beginning of the book, was a living person:

*This book consists of my recollections of a man with whom I was thrown into close contact only at long intervals, and I have little knowledge of what happened to him in between. I suppose that by the exercise of invention I could fill the gaps plausibly enough and so make my narrative more coherent; but I have no wish to do that. I only want to set down what I know of my own knowledge ... I have invented nothing.*⁹

The fact that in 1944 neither Ella nor Chadwick had ever heard of Larry Darrell is beside the point. Larry's life, like their own, had been governed by an irresistible pull to take the radical step of dispensing with their home countries and coming to the other side of the world in hopes of finding what-they-knew-not. The opening line in *The Razor's Edge*, taken from the *Katha Upanishad*, reads like a prescription for the era:

*Rise, wake up, seek the wise and realize. The path is difficult to cross like the sharpened edge of the razor, so say the wise.*¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., p. 753.

⁹ Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge*, Heinemann, 1944, p. 1.

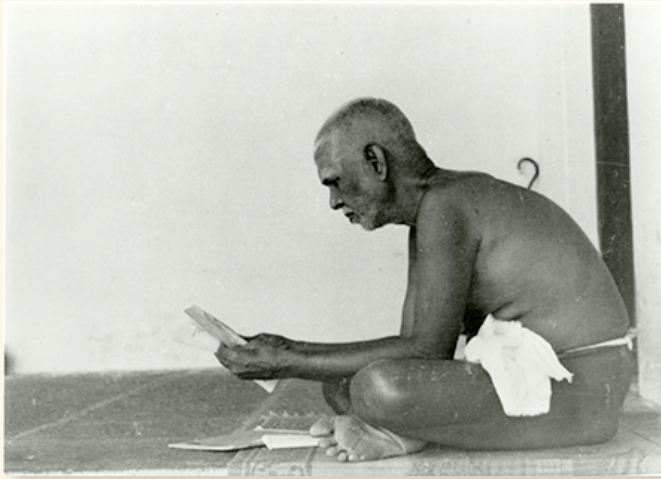
¹⁰ Ibid., book dedication.

But while Maugham had rightly judged the timing for a character like Larry, he fell short in representing what his protagonist would have actually found in Sri Ganesha (Bhagavan Ramana) once in India. He had not spent enough time at Sri Ramanasramam to learn anything of Bhagavan's teaching but instead, being a novelist on a research tour, only jotted down rudimentary facts and observations. In recounting his encounter with Sri Ganesha, Larry could not speak convincingly nor with any real understanding simply because his creator had not conducted the spiritual search himself and in fact had no idea who Ramana Maharshi really was.

Maugham could have benefited greatly had he been able to track the interior lives of Ella Maillart or Major Chadwick in the company of the real-life Sri Ganesha. If he had been privy, for example, to Ella's journaling or been able to see through her eyes what she beheld in the presence of the Maharshi, then Larry would have been a much richer character indeed.

Like Chadwick, Ella's sojourn had been motivated by a longing to penetrate the 'mystery of life' and to know 'why we were on this earth', not as a philosophical victory to be chronicled and sold in one of her popular travelogues, but that by it the value of her life—the 'book' she was constantly writing—might be enhanced. Later, on hearing it said that 'going East' had become cliché, Ella would have been quick to point out that the spiritual search is serious business,





Bhagavan reading letters at the Ashram Post Office (photo by Ella)

even if Hollywood versions of it are at risk of being shallow and unreflective. Going East—the archetype of the soul longing to know itself through interiority, through awakening to a deeper self-understanding—had become the fixation of a generation that had lost its grounding. Indeed, Ella's peers in the West were desperately attempting to build a life on the fleeting things of the world—money, status, mundane knowledge and sense pleasures.

The East, metaphorically speaking, was a piece in the puzzle for an eventual healing and restoration already underway in the previous century. This made its appearance in European culture through, for example, 18th and 19th-century German Idealism, through the advent of Freudian psychology which owed its intellectual ancestry to Eastern understandings of subjectivity and the self¹¹, and through Swami Vivekananda who impressed all attending the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, just to name a few. To Ella, India's was a culture that was still intact, whose elements still cohered, in contrast with the West which had become bifurcated, fragmented, even broken. Ella was emphatic in her final instructions to her caretaker and friend before she died:

You will tell them that I knew the Great Euphoria on earth, that you understood it and that you shared it. You will tell them

¹¹ Freud, among others, had been greatly influenced by Schopenhauer who mastered Sanskrit, was steeped in the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and translated Buddha's teaching in disguised form in *The World as Will and Idea*, 1818.

*to translate into the Western languages the lesson of the Great Sages. Because there are not two wisdoms, one from the West and one from the Orient. There is only one wisdom. But never forget that we would be nothing without Asia.*¹²

In her years at Sri Ramanasramam, Ella came to understand what it was that plagued her native Europe, what had been lost and what was in need of recovery. She learned of the classical Indian teaching on the good life composed of four requisites called the *purusharthas*—*artha*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksha*. *Artha* governs wealth, prosperity and comforts of life; *kama* is love and the sense pleasures; *dharma* is ethical life and moral development; and *moksha* is the transcendent dimension concerned with queries into life beyond this world, i.e. God, spirituality and ultimate freedom. Ella could see how this model applied to the West: the first three had been developed to a significant degree but the fourth had atrophied in the modern age. In short, Europe's materialist ethos had lost touch with any genuine embodiment of divine mystery and its corresponding wisdom relating to life beyond the physical realm. Theirs was a culture in exile whose innocence had been banished centuries earlier when religious authority became conjoined with state power and when the categorical imperative of 'caring for the poor' had degenerated into colonial pillaging of the world's indigenous populations. In this way, the prospect of a vital and healthy religious culture where prophets and sages might readily appear had been inexorably forfeited.

¹² Anne Deriaz, *Chère Ella: Elegie Pour Ella Maillart*, Paris, Actes Sud, 1998, pp. 132-133.



Ella photographing Kunjuswami at the summit ca. 1941





Like modern-day renunciates, Ella and her cohort at Sri Ramanasramam shared features of the sannaysin vocation, the so-called ‘factors of separation,’¹³ i.e. separation from their birthplace, from their country of origin, from family, from married life and from having children. If their quest appeared clumsy it was because they had no way of articulating it, this by virtue of the fact that monasticism was no longer a salient feature in the modern Western psyche. And yet, such a call transcends time and culture, is archetypal, is perennial.

Larry, Ella, Major Chadwick and the expat community at the Ashram were disenfranchised not because their call was invalid but because the Western social fabric could no longer uphold and safeguard the contemplative vocation. If they had been drawn to a life dedicated to the inner search much the way men and women in every generation throughout history had been drawn, their confusion lay in the fact that the collective memory had failed to retain the language for making sense of it. In short, the Larrys of the world were refugees of a civilisation in calamity. Ella writes:

The timelessness of a concept has to be woven into the running warp of dying time; vertical power has to be wedded to the horizontal earth.¹⁴ If I think nations and democracy are hollow words, then God is the only real thing. Serve God? How? I have first to be trained sufficiently to be a ready tool ... to be used by God, if it pleases Him. If others die for a sham democracy, then much more can I die for God. Or be ready to

13 Words of Sri Krishan Mantriji, in private conversation.

14 Ella Maillart <www.inspiringquotes.com>.



Temple chariot wheel during Deepam Festival (photo by Ella)



The cauldron atop the Hill (photo by Ella)

do nothing so grand and heroic, be ready to serve most humbly, if this be His will.¹⁵

By diagnosing her own life, she was in a position to more readily identify what had happened to her native Europe. As she evolved in Ramana’s presence, her commentary matures:

The more I advanced the more I wanted to stay and try to transform myself and find out this truth which was in ourselves. Moreover, in the Gospel Jesus said that the kingdom of God was inside us. Well, if someone would have explained these words of Jesus, ... I would not have needed to [travel] so far. But my destiny wanted that being born in Geneva I should never [find there] a great sage on the spiritual plane. I am sure that there are in Europe [those] who have realized the supreme truth but they are probably in monasteries or they stay inside their homes because most people are not interested in [them].¹⁶

If Ella and her peers stood as a challenge to their tradition, Bhagavan Ramana was the culmination and fulfilment of his. In respect of the latter, the healthy tension that arose with the appearance of the Upanishads three millennia ago with its emphasis on the indwelling Atman, on God as Self, was in contrast with the earlier ritual tradition of the *yagna* that sought to communicate with the divine solely through fire-sacrifice. Ella had some advantage in respect of assimilating Bhagavan’s radical non-duality simply by virtue of her ignorance and by being uncommitted to any former religious protocol:

I suddenly saw Bhagavan on his sofa. Out of my surprise, I laughed while he was laughing at me, in a way which said:

15 Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

16 *La Métaphysique d’Ella Maillart*, RTS–Religion, Babel, 17 September 2017, trans. Savitri Poornima.





Big Temple from Skandasramam (photo by Ella)

‘Look where they put me, is it not fun?’ I had the feeling of being his accomplice and for [several minutes] we enjoyed the joke. It was like a wall falling [away] between us. This is the reaction of ‘limited being’ but, when I think beyond [it,] I know that he is forever in such a joy and bliss. I have a similar joy in me, just as eternal and powerful, if only I could give up my particularistic personality. His joy can be mine as I have it in me. Joy, Joy. The world is alright [just as it is]. The suffering is only within us. There could be no good if there wasn’t evil too. The snake doesn’t suffer from its poisonous fangs.¹⁷

In the company of Sri Ramana, Ella found herself in the ‘unity of the world’ where, she says, “we have come to the end of all our defences and are firmly established in this perception. It allows us to live the present moment in its entirety, and to feel the harmonics that bind beings and things rather than focusing on what separates them.”¹⁸

Her remarks come spontaneously and free of pretention:

Snow, sea, friends, eyes ... so much beauty that it is nearly painful. What shall I do with this intensity in me? God, won’t you use me? No, no, don’t ask, be patient, just [be] ready. Tears fill my eyes. I do not need to be in samadhi to have a vision of God: the world is here, that is His [external form]. As long as we can’t create a tree or a man, I regard it as [from] God. What more proof is needed?¹⁹

She continues:

The Maharishi had written in Tamil verses: “All-embracing Light of Consciousness, in Thee the picture of the universe

17 Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

18 Nicolas Bouvier, *L’Echappée Belle: Eloge de Quelques Pègrins*, Geneva, Metropolis, p. 130.

19 Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

is formed, has its stay and is dissolved; in this enigma lies the miracle of truth. Thou art the inner Self, who dancest in the heart as “I”; Heart is thy name, O Lord!” The state which had shaped that sentence took possession of me, abolishing my isolation; in the fullness that followed I forgot the where and the when. It was deep, unique, most precious; and I do not know words rich enough to be worthy of it. Opening my eyes, I saw the setting sun outlining with gold a majestic cloud, ... a striking symbol of my meditation: do not all forms rise in the light of consciousness? Consciousness, the changeless delight of being conscious!²⁰

Ella extends her stay at Sri Ramanasramam, in the earnest conviction that the wisdom reflected to her each day would one day become her own:

He implants a lasting peace in the centre of every heart. He is a link between the unknowable ultimate and man.²¹ What, to me, was most important, remains unexplainable. Careful counting of the paces needed to cross a garden can never give us the scent of jasmine that overflows a wall. But here and there some of these paces might bear witness by showing how I moved from amused watching to painful bewilderment ... till much later in my deepest moments I could say with joyful honesty: I am rid of myself!²² [In his presence,] my thoughts stopped, and a grateful certitude accompanied by a wave of love flooded my chest. Finally, I was able to love without any restriction ... to love without asking for anything in return ... to love for the joy of loving.²³

(to be continued) —

[Editorial Note: Regarding the photographs taken by Ella that appear in this segment, we reproduce the following lines from the 1996 *Advent Centenary Souvenir* in the article, “Bhagavan’s Photos: Written in Light” by Dev Gogoi, p. 141:

This year, Ella Maillart, the Swiss traveller and photographer who was with Bhagavan Ramana in the 1940s, gifted her photographs of Bhagavan Ramana to the Asramam. “I understand you wish to gather the rare documents on the Sage and I want to help you,” she wrote and, despite her advanced years, she instructed the museum to which she had given all her original negatives to make the prints for Sri Ramanasramam, at her own expense.]

20 Ella Maillart, *Ti-Puss*, William Heinemann, London, 1951, pp. 43-44.

21 “The Sage’s Activity In Inactivity”, Ella Maillart, *Golden Jubilee*, Sri Ramanasramam, 3rd edition, 1995, p. 264.

22 Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. Fr. 7111 B/2-6, Extraits de notes “Five Years in India”.

23 Ella Maillart, *Cruises and Caravans*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1951, p. 229.





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahasivaratri

Mahasivaratri is the favourite night of Lord Siva and takes place on *krishna paksha chaturdasi*, the fourteenth night of the dark half of the lunar cycle during the Tamil month that falls between mid-February and mid-March. The festival this year took place on the evening of 13th February, the earliest day in the year on which the festival can fall, just as the month of Phaguna began. The festival signifies the defeat of darkness and ignorance, and commemorates that 'Great Night of Siva' when the Lord saved the world from the darkness of ignorance by revealing his true form as pure light. Each year after the first *kala puja* around sundown, Ashram priests go in procession with the flame from Bhagavan's Shrine to the gosala. There a heap of dried cow dung cakes and dried rice husks are



ceremoniously lit with camphor, amidst the chanting of the Vedas. Once ablaze, the fire burns and smoulders for about one week until all the rice husks are consumed by the heat, leaving the cooked cakes which have now been transformed into vibhuti. Vibhuti is the sacred ash used for the coming year in all the Ashram pujas to be distributed as prasad. An all-night vigil (*jagaran*) of puja, recitation, meditation and pradakshina ensues. Vedapatasala students chant the Holy Rudram through much of the night, rousing and invigorating devotees' sadhana and prayer. —

Bhagavan Speaking of Mahasivaratri

Sri Bhagavan quoting the Puranas gave the original cause for celebrating Mahasivaratri: "Arudra in month of Margazhi is the first day on which Lord Siva Himself took the form of the Mountain-Linga called Lord Arunachala, and Mahasivaratri was the day when Lord Vishnu and the devas worshipped Him from out of the effulgence".

— Ocean of Grace, vol. 2, p. 516





Obituary: Sri Ranganathan



We deeply regret to announce the demise of Sri S. Ranganathan on 8th February 2018. His devotion to Sri Bhagavan was greatly influenced by that of his wife Smt. Saraswathi, who grew up in the Ashram. While pursuing a successful corporate career in Chennai with TAFE (part of Amalgamations Group), Ranganathan took a keen interest in the Chennai Ramana Kendra activities and co-ordinated the procession of Ramana Gnana Ratham in 2004. Upon retirement, he relocated to Arunachala and involved himself in the Ashram dispensary. He was instrumental in the timely commissioning of the Ashram standby power generator. He was also a regular participant in Ashram functions, discourses, daily parayana and Narayana Seva. Lively, amiable and devout, Sri Ranganathan was absorbed in Arunachala after a long battle with a liver ailment. He will be missed by one and all. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: The Primavera Tree



The Ashram's *Tabebuia Donnsmithii* situated just behind the Ashram archives building, burst into full bloom on Mahasivaratri morning, heralding the onset of spring. Like Tamil Nadu's very brief springtime between the chill of late January and the warm dry summer weather of late February, the Primavera Tree (*primavera* is Spanish for 'springtime'), only blooms a few days each year. The nectar of the *Tabebuia* flowers is a food source for Ashram bees and hummingbirds and the bark of some species is used to make a medicinal tea for treating cold and flu symptoms as well as cough. The *Tabebuia*, a genus of flowering plants in the family *Bignoniaceae*, can reach heights of 13 metres with 2.5 centimetres blossoms forming clusters at branch ends, emerging in the springtime during dry weather when the tree is less foliated. —

Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events. Please visit the channel at:
<https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>

