

Saranagathi

IN THIS
ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

This issue of *Saranagathi* carries the story of Vaidyanatha Sthapati and the building of the Mother's Shrine. It is said that Vaidyanatha Sthapati could trace his lineage to the celebrated Sthapati Kunjaramallan Rajaraja Perunthachan of the 11th century, responsible for the construction of the Brihadeeshwara Temple of Tanjore in 1010 CE. Sthapati became the architect and supervisor for the Mother's Shrine project in the late 1930s and subsequently constructed the New Hall, sculpted the statue of Bhagavan there and after the Mahanirvana in 1950, laid the foundation stones for the samadhi, and eventually erecting the mantapa over it. (See pp. 5-6.)

Also in this issue, the continuation of the reminiscences of Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal who left home at an early age in order to come and be in Bhagavan's presence.

Chadwick's Samadhi Day was observed on the 17th April, the 26th (*panchami*) was *Sankara Jayanti*. *Events from Sri Ramanasramam* includes Bhagavan's 62nd Aradhana on the 18th April and discourses by Nochur Venkataraman, 2nd-11th April.

For further glimpses of Aradhana and other events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/aradhana2012.html> Also feel free to write us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team



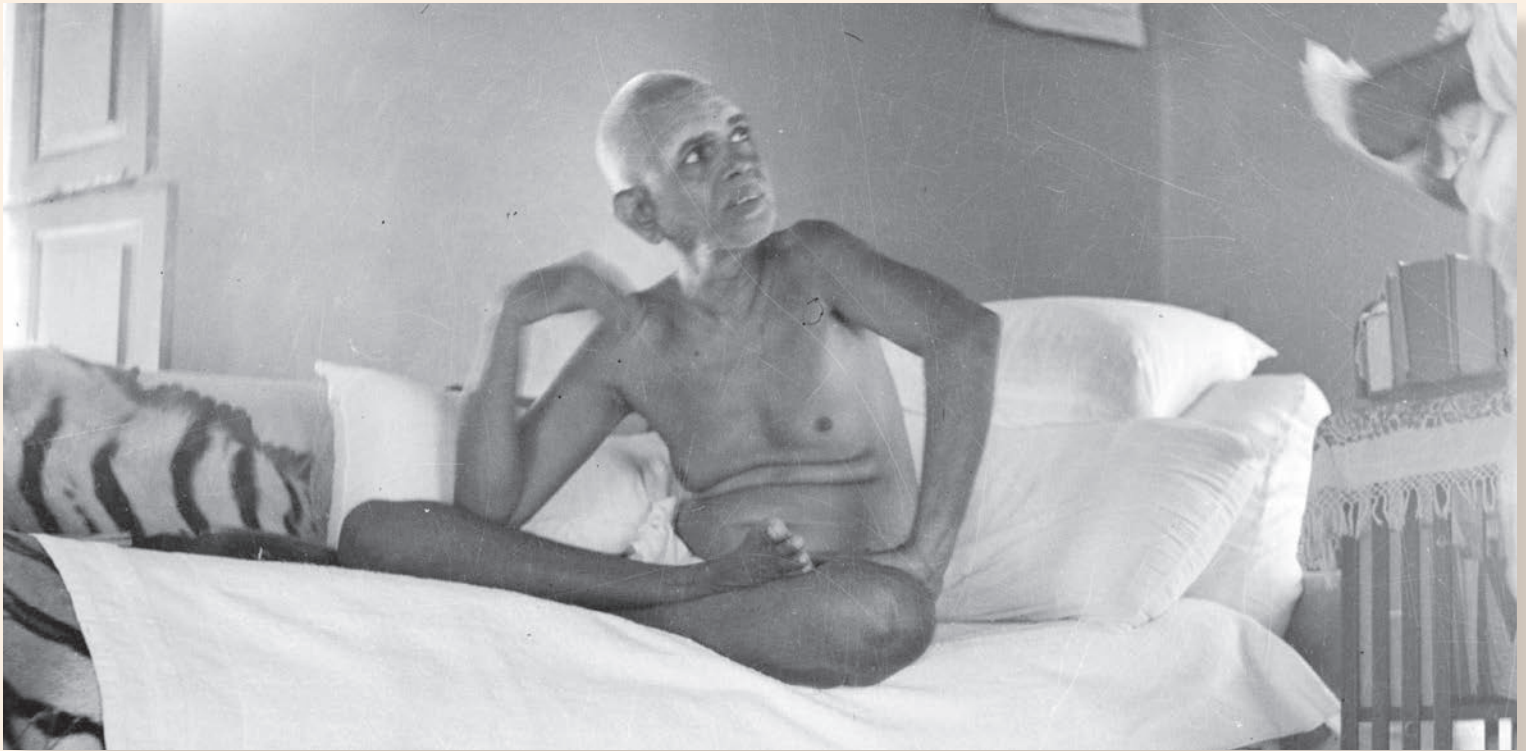
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Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

Realise your pure Being

The Self is the only Reality. If the false identity vanishes, the persistence of Reality becomes apparent. It does not mean that Reality is not here and now. It is always and eternally the same. It is also in everyone's experience. For everyone knows that he is. The scriptures say that the Self is *nityasiddha*, ever present, and yet speak of the removal of *ajnana*. If Self is (*nitya*) always and (*siddha*) present, how can there be *ajnana*? For whom is the *ajnana*? Enquire for whom is ignorance. Realise your pure Being. Let there be no confusion with the body for the body is the result of thoughts. —Talks §46





Women Devotees Series: Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal (part two)

Everyone in the hall used to have the strange sensation that Bhagavan was looking directly at them. This was the experience of each one of us. In his inimitable way Bhagavan was giving his glance of grace simultaneously to each and every one in the hall.

His look used to take us deep into samadhi. Just by looking into his eyes, we came to know what meditation was. This was the common experience of every devotee. Just ask anyone who met Bhagavan and you will get the same reply.

And so it was by Bhagavan's grace-filled presence and penetrating gaze that my transformation began. His look was magical. You could not do anything but just look into his eyes, which would put you into samadhi. Once he gave me such a glance; for a very long time I was absorbed and transported. Meanwhile normal activity was going on—Bhagavan read the newspaper, letters were brought in—but all the while I was oblivious to what was going on, in fact, not even aware of my own body.

Doubts vanished in Bhagavan's presence. When doubts came into the mind, they were dissolved before the question could be vocalised, even before it could be formulated. So, the opportunity of putting a question verbally to Bhagavan never arose at all! I used to fast a lot in those days—almost fifteen days a month. It helped in my sadhana. One day, with the permission of Chinnaśwami, I stayed in the Ashram till suppertime. Bhagavan turned to me and said, "Aren't you coming for supper?" Then he said, "Sattvic food should be eaten. There is no meaning in mere fasting." From that moment on I stopped fasting. Even if I wanted to fast, for some reason or other it would be broken. That is a real wonder to me.

I was not aware of the caste separation in the dining hall. One day I entered the dining hall and saw the screen dividing the seating area. Many people were already seated. I was in a fix as to where I should sit. Bhagavan saw my plight and asked me to sit next to him. He said to an attendant, "She doesn't know anything, so put her leaf here." Then he said to me, "Don't worry." That is how Bhagavan in his kindness used to take care of me, for I was all alone and ignorant of the customs and ways of





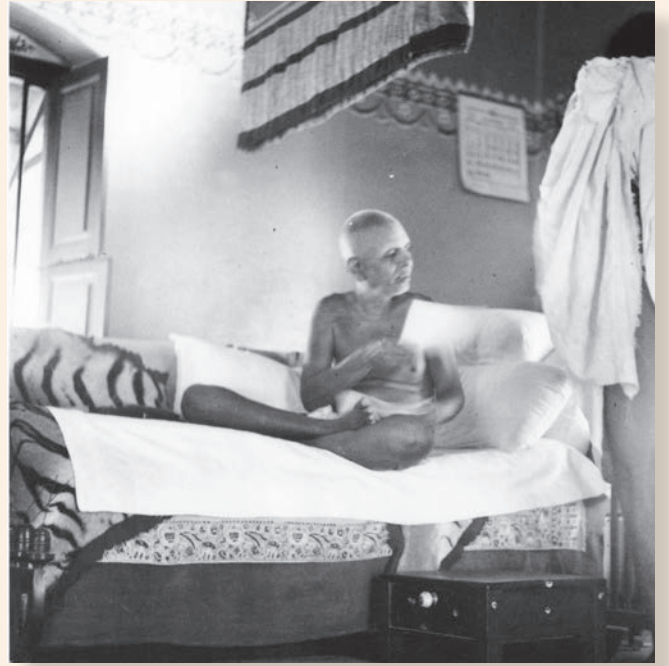
the world. Since Bhagavan was showering all this personal attention on me, Chinnaswami also took an interest in my welfare. As Muruganar was away, Chinnaswami offered me his residence, and also offered to send someone to guard me. I told him that I was not afraid and would lock the house from the inside and needed no one to guard me. Bhagavan overheard this and said, “She is a young girl and does not know the consequences. Let her sleep indoors, behind closed doors, but you send a servant to sleep outside on the veranda.”

* * *

I was not accustomed to walking but whenever people came to tell Bhagavan that they were going on Giripradakshina, I longed to go along with them. One day Venkataramayya and others were going round the Hill. In the group were two devotees over eighty years old. I did not say anything to Bhagavan, but I was all the while praying that I might be included in the party.

Immediately Bhagavan said to Venkataramayya, “Take this girl—the one seated there—with you.” Bhagavan didn’t stop there, he continued, “She will walk very slowly. Will that be all right?” Then Bhagavan turned towards me and said, “These are our own people. Are you prepared to go with them?” Then he just ordered, “Go!”

The pradakshina took almost six hours. At Adi Annamalai, I could move no more. I requested the group to proceed without me, and told them I would come to the Ashram later. But they said, “How can we leave you when Bhagavan entrusted you to us? Even if it takes you another day to complete the pradakshina, we will stay with you. Only with you can we re-enter the Ashram.” I was again feeling very guilty when we finally arrived. I was thinking that others take three to



four hours to complete pradakshina and I have taken six hours, wasting their time. They were all older than me, and a younger person like me had caused them so much inconvenience. When I entered the Ashram, my heart was heavy with this feeling of shame. With great difficulty we entered into the presence of Bhagavan and as soon as I sat down, Bhagavan started narrating how pradakshina should be done by walking as slow as a royal queen in her ninth month of pregnancy. “So there is nothing wrong in what she did,” he concluded. And so once again I was saved from my inner turmoil by Bhagavan’s simple, soothing words.

(to be continued)

The present article is freely adapted from the videotaped interview of December 1989 (published in THE MAHARSHI, Jul/Aug 1993) and short articles appearing in the Mountain Path (Jayanti 1989, pp. 109-10) and Moments Remembered (pp. 118-19).

Reality in Forty Verses

15. The past and future depend for their existence upon the present which is experienced daily. Whilst they are occurring, these too are the present. The present alone exists. To attempt to understand the past and future without having ascertained the truth of the Now is like trying to count without the number one.

— Reality in Forty Verses by Sri Bhagavan





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's 62nd Aradhana Day



The 62nd anniversary of Bhagavan's Brahma Nirvana was observed in his shrine on Wednesday, 18th April, 2012. The early morning began with Mangala Isai by Sri T. R. Pichandi & Party (Nadhaswaram) followed by recitation of *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, *Upadesa Undiyar* and *Ulladu Narpadu* simultaneous with Mahanyasa japa in the Mother's Shrine. Elaborate flower decorations set a new precedent for the event and kalasa abhishekam and the aratis that followed were thrilling. All guests were invited for meals throughout the day.

Mahanirvana: 14 April, 1950



Devotees gathered in the New Hall, 15th April, 1950.



Devotions at the site of the Samadhi, 15th April, 1950

Late in 1949 Bhagavan expounded a verse from Yoga-Vasishtam: "The jnani who has found himself as formless, pure Awareness is unaffected though his body be cleft with a sword. Sugar-candy does not lose its sweetness though broken or crushed." On another occasion he said that the *jnani* rejoices to be relieved of the body by death just as a servant rejoices to lay down his load at the place of delivery. With a look of compassion he consoled a devotee, saying: "They take this body for Bhagavan and attribute suffering to him. What a pity! They are despondent that Bhagavan is going to leave them and go away but where can he go, and how?"

Even during the last days, when Bhagavan was unable to leave his room, he continued to give darshan to hundreds of devotees, morning and evening, reclining on his bed, majestic like Bhishma on his bed of arrows. Bhagavan would not consent to have the darshan cancelled even on days when his condition was critical, so darshan went on right up to the last evening. When news of the rapid decline in his physical condition spread, hundreds of devotees came to Tiruvannamalai to have a last darshan. In the queue that filed past his room there were men and women, rich and poor, learned and simple, from all parts of India and from abroad, all united in their devotion to this Divine Personification.

For more on Bhagavan's final moments, see Osbourne's *Last Days and Maha-Nirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*.





Vaidyanatha Sthapati and Building the Mother's Shrine

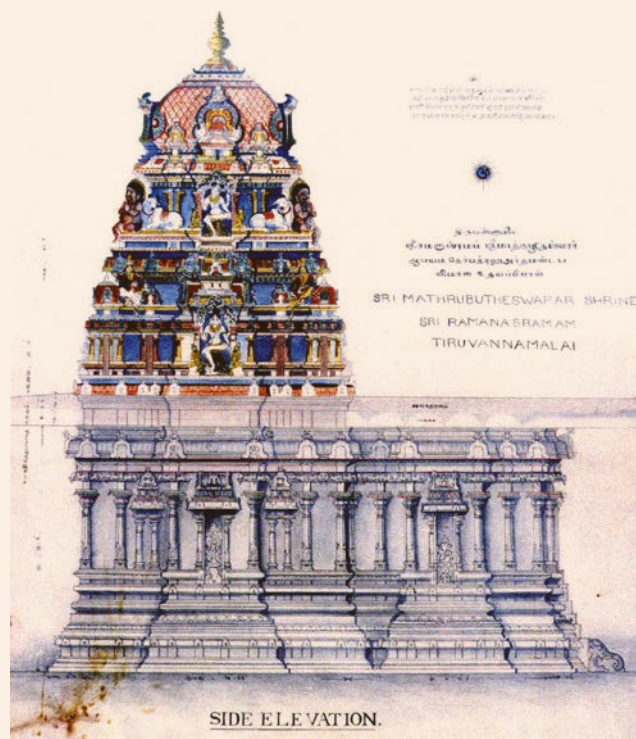
In the first years after 1922, Bhagavan lived in front of the Mother's shrine which was no more than a thatched hut. He used to sit there night and day on a small elevated seat of cement. In 1926 a more substantial enclosure for the Mother's Samadhi was erected—together with the Old Hall—utilizing some poorly-fired bricks that had been abandoned at a nearby furnace. Devotees from town were summoned and a line was formed between the Ashram and the deserted kiln, and the bricks were passed one by one, each man to the next—among them, Bhagavan himself—and deposited at the building site. Using mud for mortar, and with Bhagavan as one of the masons, brick walls were erected around the Samadhi and a thatched roof constructed on top.

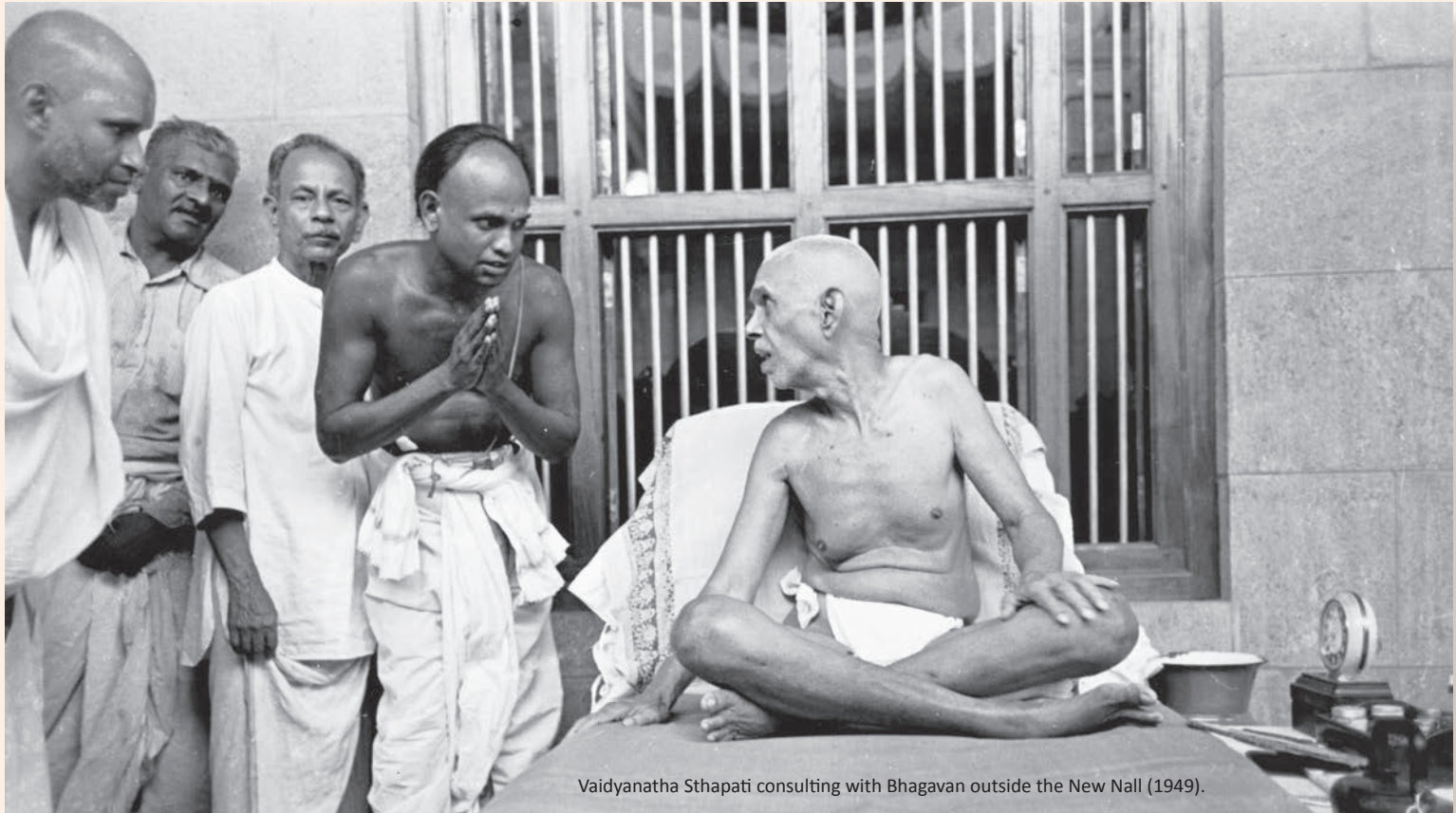
In 1930 building work in the Ashram gained momentum with the construction of an elaborate gosala containing beams of Burmese teak, walls of cut granite, contoured balusters and a sculpted façade. This marked the beginning of a series of successful construction projects that included the Ashram office, bookstore, storeroom, patasala and finally in 1938, the dining hall and kitchen.

But the dream of a proper stone edifice above Mother's samadhi remained unfulfilled. When consulted as to what type of structure the Mother's Shrine should be, Bhagavan said, "It will be good if it is constructed well, and on a large scale."

Chinnaswami was thrilled but worried how funds could ever be obtained, especially since Bhagavan had flatly refused any formal fundraising initiatives, saying Arunachala would provide 'in His own time'.

Relying on unsolicited donations, in 1936 Chinnaswami went to Burma to purchase teak wood to be used as doors, windows and other wooden furnishings for the new shrine. But construction could not begin in earnest given the Ashram lacked not only funds, but the architectural know-how and the skilled labour that would bring to fruition any eventual architectural plan.





Vaidyanatha Sthapati consulting with Bhagavan outside the New Nall (1949).

The auspicious beginning for the Matrubhuteswara Shrine—which would at one stroke solve all of the initial obstacles—came in an unexpected way. Chinnaswami was en route by train to Madurai and found himself sitting opposite an elderly gentleman, a temple architect by the name of Mahizhivana Sthapati. As the two introduced themselves, both perceived that this chance meeting would prove providential—and indeed it did. No doubt Bhagavan's hand was in it, for even before reaching Madurai, Chinnaswami and the Sthapati had fixed a date for the stone-laying ceremony and commencement of work on the Mother's Shrine. Mahizhivana Sthapati was the father of Vaidyanatha Sthapati who, as it turned out, would head up the project. Being of the 36th generation in a long line of temple architects whose forbearers had to their credit—no less—the designing and construction of the Brihadeeshwara Temple of Tanjore in the 11th century, Vaidyanatha's architectural know-how was not in doubt. But he was not merely knowledgeable in vastu, silpa and the agamas, but adept in sculpture, astronomy, astrology, Vedas, Upanishads and mantra

sastra. As for skilled labourers, Vaidyanatha Sthapati's team of granite stone craftsmen, fifty in all, was the most formidable and highly-skilled band of temple stone masons operating in South India at the time. More importantly still, because of Vaidyanatha Sthapati's great reverence for Bhagavan, the architect did not view the Mother's Shrine as a commercial venture but rather as a spiritual assignment, and was thus willing to work with Chinnaswami in helping to solve the Ashram's most pressing concern, namely, meeting the project's financial requirements. Rather than large sums of money being paid in advance—the norm for such large-scale undertakings—it was agreed that the work would be remunerated on a monthly basis. This gave Chinnaswami the chance to wait for funds to come incrementally as the work progressed. As it turned out, there would be weeks when Chinnaswami didn't even have enough money to pay weekly worker wages and had to ask monthly donors to make their monthly donations in advance.

(to be continued)





From the *Peria Puranam*: Punitavathi Ammaiyaar



Courtesy of Ramalingar Pant Mandram

When a devotee of the Lord, the fragrant-tressed Punitavathi, was missing a mango, she meditated on the Lord, and lo, by his grace, a fruit appeared in the palm of her hand. With glad heart she served it to her waiting husband who, finding it too sweet to be found in this world, enquired as to where she had got it. She felt it improper to divulge the special grace of the Lord but neither was she given to false speech. She decided it was best simply to recount what happened. Doubting her, Paramadatta said, "If this is due to the grace of the Lord, then procure another by the same means". To prevent her word from proving untrue, she prayed to the Lord again; forthwith, she found another fruit in the palm of her hand. Her husband received it with great amazement. But an unappeasable fear gripped his heart: "This lady who I call my wife is no ordinary mortal!" From that moment he resolved never to treat her as a wife but as a divine being and so he began to live apart from her. He made excuses to his kinsmen about doing business in a foreign land and sailed from the nearby port. Years passed and though Punitavathi faithfully awaited him, when he returned he dared not to enter her house but secretly took up residence in a distant city. Time passed and eventually he took another wife with whom he had a daughter. He named the baby girl Punitavathi.

In time it was learned by family members that Paramadatta was in the country. They persuaded Punitavathi to accompany them to see him. They bore Punitavathi in a palanquin but en route, having learned of her approach, Paramadatta intercepted her together with his second wife and daughter. When the kinsmen and palanquin bearing Punitavathi met Paramadatta, the latter prostrated before her. All who witnessed it were perplexed. In the presence of the assembly he told her: "By Thy grace alone do I live; the child bears Thy name!" But their perplexity grew even more as he explained that Punitavathi was no mortal but a celestial being. He then prevailed on them to kneel and pay homage before her. Meanwhile Punitavathi prayed to the Lord: "Let this flesh which I bore for the sake of a husband now wither away and let my form become like a skeleton-ghost!" At once her beauty faded and she appeared as a skeleton! Flowers rained from the sky; celestial drums beat; sages and celestials gathered on high; the hosts of the Lord set up a welcoming roar. The kinsmen revered the unusual form and went away in fear while Punitavathi set off towards Kailas. When Uma and the Lord greeted her, he said to his consort: "This is our mother 'Ammal', extremely devoted to us. She prayed for this form!" "Ammal, what boons would you like?" The devotee replied in humility: "First, let my devotion to Thee never fade! Let me be free from re-birth! If, perchance, I must be born again, let me never forget Thee! Further, let me sing Thy praise resting under Thy feet as thou dancest in joy, Oh! righteous one!" The Lord said: "May it be according to your wish!" (*Punitavathi Ammaiyaar's Aradhana Day this year falls on 8th April*)

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Nochur Venkataraman Tamil Discourses



This year's programme of ten days (2-11 April) focused on the *Brihat Yoga Vasishta*, a work of 32,000 Sanskrit verses attributed to Valmiki in which the dialogue between Sage Vasishta and Sri Rama centres on advaitic teaching. Bhagavan often quoted *Yoga Vasishta* and included 12 of its verses in his *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* (see v2-3, 21-30). Nochur Venkataraman also gave talks on the pre-eminent Valmiki classic, *The Ramayana*, each evening at the Kanchi Kamekoti Peetam Mutt in Chengam Rd.



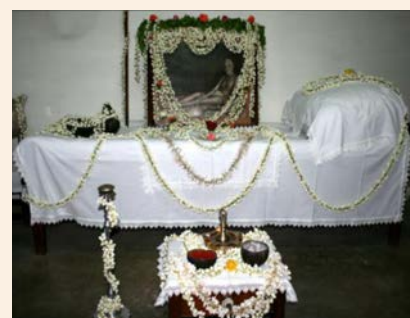


Introducing the Kendras: Salem Ramana Maiyam



Following the Ratha Yatra of 2004, numerous kendras sprung up in Tamil Nadu, among them Salem Ramana Maiyam. After the centre began celebrating Jayanti and Aradhana and conducting daily meditation and chanting, the number of devotees attending grew year by year and available space became inadequate. Members decided to expand the facility and construct a Ramana Mandiram at Salem Ponnammampet. The President of the Salem Ramana Maiyam purchased land and donated it to the Maiyam. Bhoomi puja was performed on Punarvasu Day, 14 July, 2007. Two years later the Salem Ramana Thirukovil was completed and on 8th March, 2009, *kumbhabhishekam* was performed. Today, by Bhagavan's grace, Salem Ramana Maiyam continues to thrive.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Saturday, 14th April, 2012



Sri Bhagavan's Brahma Nirvana is also observed according to the Gregorian calendar on the evening of 14th April each year when devotees gather at 8pm for silent sitting in front of the Nirvana room. Sushila Ramanan joined by devotees intones Aksharamanamalai around 8.15 which is timed to conclude at the moment of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana at 8.47. Afterward all rise and queue up to file past and pay their respects at the entrance to the Nirvana room.



Obituary

Sri M.R. Venkataraman, aged 86, passed away peacefully and was absorbed in the Feet of Arunachala on 27 January, 2012 while visiting his son in Ahmedabad. He had been hospitalised ten days earlier, having suffered a stroke, but whenever Bhagavan's name was chanted in his presence, he would make every effort to open his eyes and raise his hands in adoration.

In his professional years Sri Venkataraman had been employed in the central government during which time he was a follower of J. Krishnamurthi and a frequent visitor to a Vimala Thakar's Ashram at Mt Abu. But in the 1970s he came to Sri Ramanasramam and met Muruganar, after which he began regular visits. In 2002 he came once for all and settled permanently near the Ashram. He is survived by his wife, children, grandchildren and great-grand children.

