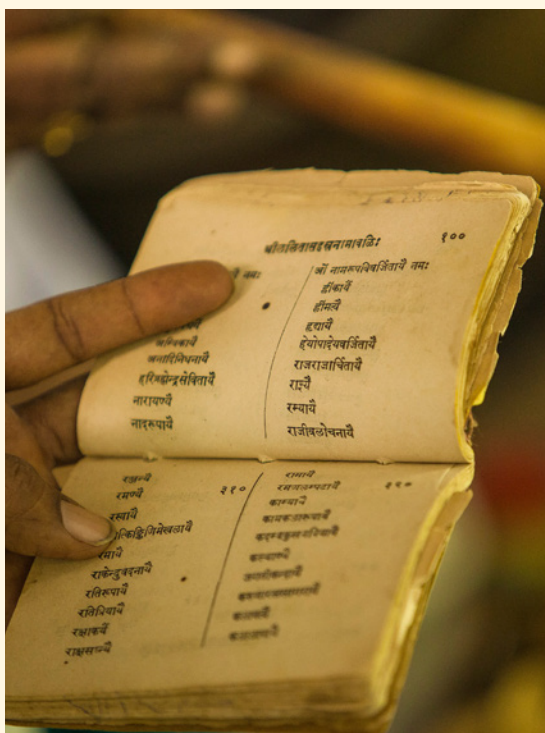


Saranagati



COVER
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SRI RAMANASRAMAM
MAY 2014



Photos this page from V. Karthik and Suresh Menon



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The Ashram—and indeed most of India—is in the midst of the summer season, with the warmest days yet to come. Elections were held in Tamil Nadu in late April as examinations concluded and school vacations began. Sri Bhagavan's 64th Aradhana fell on the 27th April while Rama Navami took place on the 8th.

This issue concludes the six-part series on pradakshina and begins another on the life of T.N. Venkataraman, whose centenary will be celebrated next month.

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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Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Samskaras

D.: Why does not one remain content?

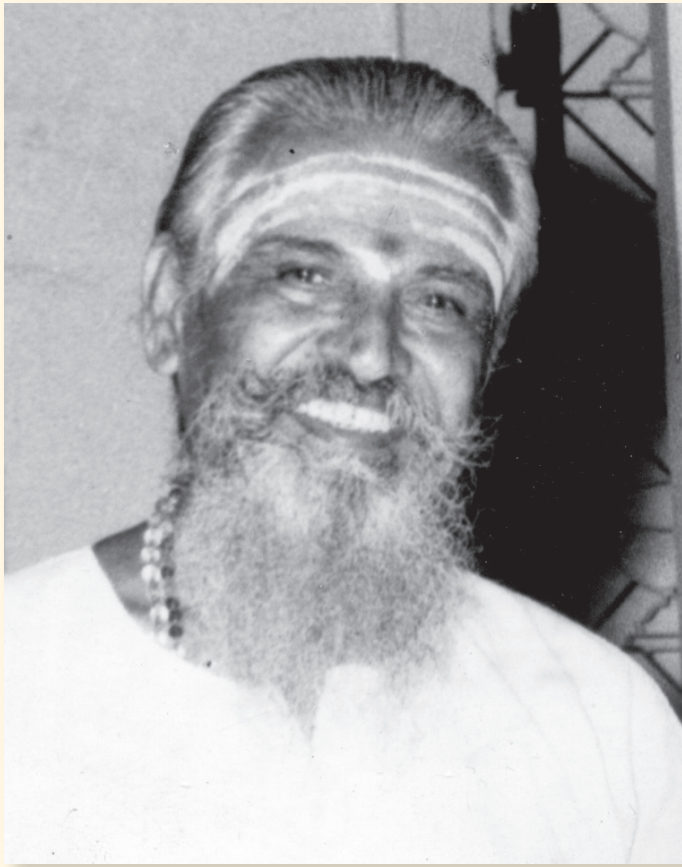
M.: Because the samskaras have not been destroyed. Unless samskaras cease to exist, there will always be doubt and confusion. All efforts are directed to destroying doubt and confusion. [But] their roots must be cut. Their roots are the samskaras. People ask: "How did ignorance (avidya) arise at all?" We have to say to them: "Ignorance never arose. It has no real being. That which is, is only vidya (knowledge)."

D.: Why then do I not realise it?

M.: Because of the samskaras. However, find out who does not realise and what he does not realise. Then it will be clear that there is no avidya (ignorance).

— Talks §289





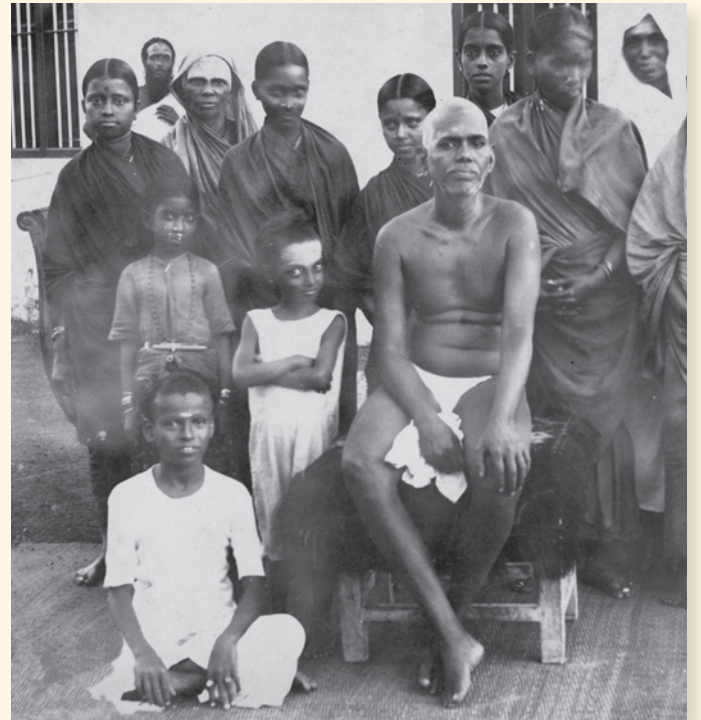
The Life of T. N. Venkataraman: 1914-2007 (part one)

This year marks the birth centenary of T. N. Venkataraman, the nephew-devotee of Bhagavan, who became Sri Ramanasramam President in 1953. If devotees today are grateful to have the privilege of experiencing Bhagavan through Sri Ramasramam, their gratitude should be directed in great measure to this second Ashram President, whose courage, tenacity of spirit and unflinching faith in Bhagavan combined to protect and preserve the Ashram through its greatest trials in the aftermath of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana and Chinna-swami's demise three years later. Firm in his resolve and socially gifted, he made the contacts that would prove instrumental in seeing Ramanasramam through the numerous economic and legal hurdles that threatened its very continuance. By his own admission, he was a 'simple man', not known for scholarship nor well-

versed with Bhagavan's teachings. As one family member put it, "Bhagavan kept him from Himself in order that his resources and skills might be funneled into the one task of building up and maintaining the Ashram".

Born 26th May, 1914, Venkatoo was blessed to be cared for by Bhagavan at Skandasramam, to spend much of his early life in Bhagavan's presence and to reside for seventy continuous years in the Ashram until his death in December 2007. The following pages are an effort to capture some of the story and spirit of this unique figure.

In 1913, two travel-weary ladies, a mother and daughter-in-law, climbed Arunachala Hill with a specific petition. The younger of the two ladies had recently lost her two children, one after the other, and had no surviving issues. The elder lady had not only lost two grandchildren but her eldest son who, at the time of his death, had only been married a short time, leaving his widow childless. The deceased's younger brother was none other than Bhagavan himself, who had taken up the sadhu's life and would never marry. The elder of the two, Bhagavan's mother, Alagammal, came to plead with Bhagavan on behalf of the family who was



Fourteen year-old Venkatoo seated at Bhagavan's right
(Jayanthi Day, 28th Dec, 1928)





‘threatened with extinction’ if her now childless daughter-in-law, Mangalam, did not conceive and bear a child. The following morning, the two left in the confidence that they had obtained Bhagavan’s blessing for a male child.

At long last, a son

Indeed, within a year, Mangalam gave birth to a baby boy. Born in Manamadurai not far from Bhagavan’s native Tiruchuli, the boy was named Venkataraman in honour of the sage who had blessed his birth. The following year, the boy’s father, Bhagavan’s brother Nagasundaram, and his mother Mangalam, together with Bhagavan’s mother Alagammal and Janaki, the wife of Bhagavan’s uncle Nelliappiar, went to Tirupati for the child’s *mundan* (first head shaving). On the return trip, they stopped to visit Bhagavan. Alagammal, fatigued and feeling her work was done, declared, “I’m not going back. I will stay here.”

Bhagavan’s younger brother Nagasundaram returned to Tiruvenkadu with his family and resumed his clerical work at the temple. But in the wake of recent good fortune, disaster was to strike the family once again when just two years after Venkataraman’s birth, his ailing mother, Mangalam, suddenly passed away. Grieved at the loss and now saddled with caring for the child alone and, to boot, plagued with personal debt, Nagasundaram received a timely message from his mother at Arunachala urging him to come to Tiruvannamalai. Seeing it as a call from Arunachala, Nagasundaram left Tiruvenkadu, entrusting Venkataraman to the care of Nelliappiar’s family and came to the feet of Bhagavan at Skandasramam. There he remained and in 1918



Jayanthi Day, 28th Dec 1928, Venkatoo standing at Bhagavan’s right

received sannyasa diksha, taking the name Swami Niranjanananda. Meanwhile young Venkataraman was adopted by Bhagavan’s younger sister, Alamelu and her husband Pichu Iyer, who never having had children of their own, were happy to take up the role as foster parents. Thus, though orphaned at a young age, Venkatoo was fortunate to find a mother and father in his aunt Alamelu (*Athai*) and uncle Pichu.

Visiting Bhagavan

The family moved to Karaikudi where Picchu Iyer owned a small bus company. Each year they traveled to Arunachala to visit Bhagavan, who was by then living at Skandasramam. With the exception of Venkatoo’s grandmother, Alagammal, who like her youngest son now wore ochre robes, no woman was allowed to stay overnight at Skandashram. So Athai and Pichu Iyer

Calendar of Upcoming Events

5th May (Mon) Punarvasu
14th May (Wed) Full Moon
22nd May (Thurs) Maha Puja
26th May (Mon) T. N. Venkataraman Centenary
1st June (Sun) Punarvasu
12th June (Thurs) Full Moon

28th June (Sat) Punarvasu
9th July (Wed) Cow Lakshmi Day
12th July (Sat) Guru Purnima
23rd July (Wed) H.C. Khanna Day
25th July (Fri) Kavya Kantha Ganapati Muni Day
26th July (Sat) Punarvasu





Athai (at the Big Temple)

stayed with family friends in town while young Venkatoo stayed up at the Ashram. Very few indeed have ever had the grace to be looked after by Sri Bhagavan firsthand. But early in the morning, Bhagavan would take the five-year old to the spring, clean his teeth with *umikari* (burnt rice husk powder) and wash his face. He would see to it that he ate well. Athai would rush up to fetch him in the morning ever concerned for the safety of the much-loved child.

As soon as she came, Bhagavan

would say, "Take your boy. See, he's safe and sound."

But loving though Bhagavan was with Venkatoo, he was also not hesitant to sternly intervene in the youngster's moral education when circumstances called for it.

Once when Bhagavan's lame monkey-friend Nondi came to collect the sweet that had been set aside for him, the monkey found young Venkatoo with his fingers in the monkey's share. Nondi duly gave the boy a slap. The latter cried out and sought refuge in his grandmother's lap as Bhagavan entered and scolded the boy, "You asked for it. Why did you want Nondi's share? You already had enough. You ought to have been content with that. Never take what is not yours."

(to be continued)

Wordwise: Samskara संस्कार

Samskara (*sam+kri* = to 'put together well' as in the word 'Sanskrit' ['well-formed', 'perfected', 'refined', polished']): 1. mental impressions, mental formations, impressions on the mind from deeds of previous existences; predispositions; imprints, innate tendencies. 2. consecration; sacrament; preparing, cleansing, polishing; ritual ceremonies marking key life events.

Samskaras form a person's character. They are imprints left on the unconscious mind (*chitta*) by experiences, desires and actions in this or former lives, forming one's mental disposition. Memory is said to be nothing other than *samskaras* seeping up from the unconscious. Bhagavan said, "Every person is born with the *samskaras* of past lives. The more desires are fulfilled, the deeper grow the *samskaras*...They must become weaker before they cease to assert themselves. *Samskaras* sink into the heart at death and do not perish. They will in [due] time sprout forth from the heart. That is how jivas are reborn." (*Talks* §580, §195, §108.)

Announcement: Venkatoo Video Biography



Devotees recently compiled photos and film footage to make a video biography of Sri T.N. Venkataraman to be viewed on the 25th May evening, the eve of the centenary celebrations in the Ashram. Included is the life story of Venkatoo's father, Sri Ramanasramam's first President Swami Niranjanananda (Chinnaswami). Two other recently produced videos will be shown, the 1995 Sri Ramanasramam Mahakumbhabhishekam on the evening of the 24th and the 1996 Advent Centenary on evening of the 26th. DVDs of the new productions will be made available from the Ashram bookstall for INR.50.





From Periapuranam: Viranminda Naayanaar

Born to a working-class family of Vellalas, Viranminda hailed from the fertile *Parasuramakshetra* at Sonacalam, Kerala. Uncompromising in his service to Sivabhaktas, Viranminda saw the Lord's devotees as equal to the Lord Himself and would stop at nothing to protect them, even resorting to his battle-axe when necessary. Once while standing before an assembly of devotees at prayer, he announced, "My life's purpose will come to fruition if you permit me to be your slave and guard." Thus, with their approval, he spent the next twelve years in diligent, one-pointed service. Later, when visiting Tiruvaroor, Viranminda chanced to encounter Sundara who, in his fine regalia, looked to Viranminda more a dandy than a devotee, appearing very standoffish, even arrogant, in the company of Sivabhaktas. Indignant, Viranminda lifted his weapon, but Sundara hastened to the inner sanctum, bolted its hefty doors and took refuge in the Lord. Threatening the saint from without, Viranminda heard the Lord's voice, "Sundara is under my protection. Your anger is baseless." But Viranminda only became more obstinate and demanded the Lord hand over the offender. When Sundara escaped through another door, Viranminda departed Tiruvaroor, swearing never to return. He continued his service to pilgrims and devotees, washing their feet and ministering to their needs each day. Meanwhile Mahadeva bade Sundara set things right. Sundara thus traveled to Viraminda and stood outside his house singing songs of devotion. Just when Viraminda heard Sundara sing the line, *Wearing on my head the dust from the feet of the Lord's devotees, I shall cross over the sea of dark ignorance*, Sivabhaktas approached Viranminda and pleaded moderation, testifying to Sundara's piety and his dedication to devotees. Finally convinced, Viranminda sought pardon of the saint and swore eternal friendship. Mahesvara appeared in all His glory and spoke to him, "Your steadfastness of devotion is remarkable". When the Lord embraced him, His divine touch burned away the remaining excesses in Viranminda's feisty personality and he was granted lasting liberation. (*Viranminda Naayanaar's aradhana day falls on the 4th May*)

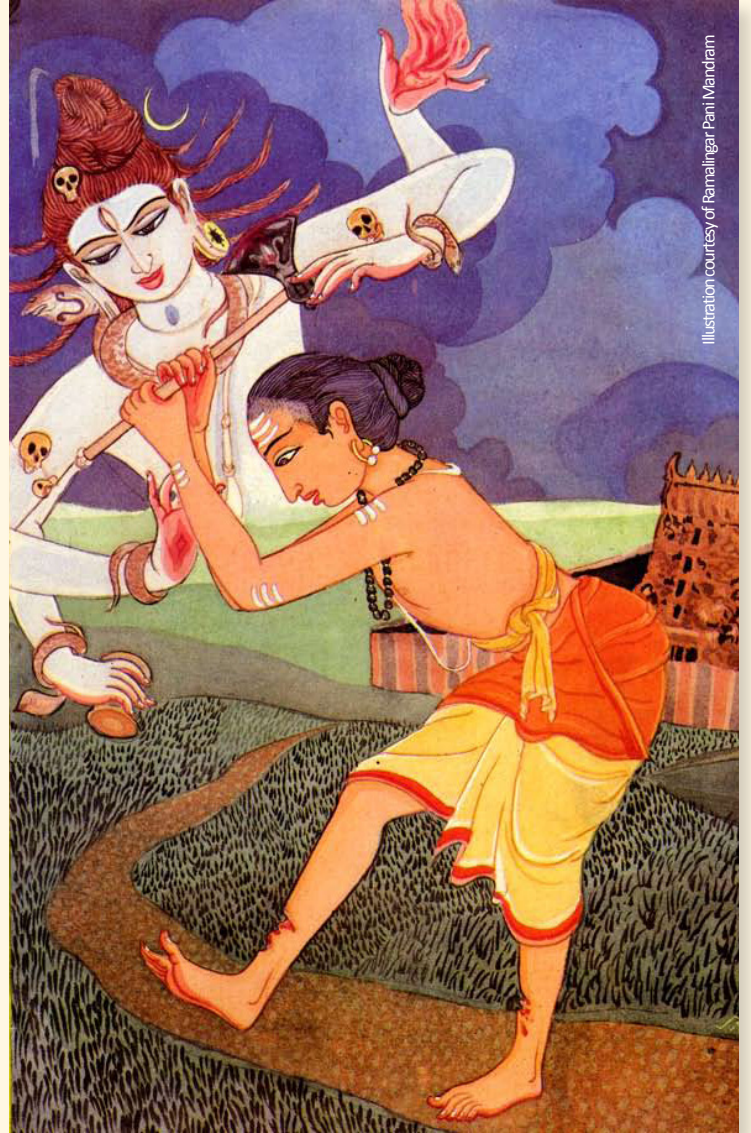


Illustration courtesy of Ramaningar Pani Mandam

Announcement: Ramananjali Awards 2014



Entries for the *Ramananjali Global Online* contest, some 200 in total, may be viewed at events.ramanacentre.com by scrolling to the bottom of the page. Please vote for them and otherwise send your feedback by May 15th to ujwal@ramanacentre.com as final decisions will be made for the Awards Event on 7th June.





The Origins of Pradakshina (final part)

Atmapradakshina

It has been said that a thing is made perfect not when there is nothing left to add but when there is nothing left to take away. Such is the journey toward the Self—removing the extraneous so that only the essential remains. Since there is nothing other than the Self, even if the world seems to tilt out of kilter, Arunachala remains unmoving within. Yet when we abide in That, the tilted world rights itself and is made new again. “Let the tempest rage, let the oceans rise up, let the earth quake”, wrote one of Bhagavan’s devotees, “the Tree of Knowledge rooted on Arunachala stands immutable. Pilgrims on life’s journey repose in its shade and countless devotees like birds pour forth their songs from its branches.”¹

There is only Arunachala, and He dwells within each person. To the physical eye, the pradakshina path around Arunachala seems to trace a circle, the

¹ *Fragrant Petals*, p. 11.

circumference of the base of the Linga-Hill. But spiritually, it is not a circle at all but an inwardly-directed spiral, ever-decreasing in circumference, leading the devotee in a continual diminution until he disappears into his source.

Bhagavan once said that “going round Arunachala is [...] as effective as circuit round the world.” He then added, “Self-circuit (i.e., pivoting round oneself) is [equal to it, for] all are contained in the Self.”² “After all”, he said, “proper pradakshina is going round the Self, or, more accurately, to realise that we *are* the Self and that within us all the countless spheres revolve.”³

Doing pradakshina pivoting in place in a circular manner before the deity or the guru is worshipping the divine, an unconscious acknowledgement that the ‘I’ within is the very same Reality as the divinity before whom we prostrate. The benefit of ‘outer’ pradakshina is augmented when we understand its ‘inner’ analogue.

Bhringi, the Bee-Sage

Sage Bhringi was a great devotee of the Lord and would acknowledge no other, not even Goddess Parvathi. Whenever the Sage went in pradakshina around Lord Siva, he was particular to avoid circumambulating Parvathi. But when Uma merged with Lord Siva in the form of *ardhanariswara*, Bhringi was faced with a problem. How to circumambulate the Lord alone? Taking the form of a bee⁴, he gnawed a hole through *ardhanariswara*’s divine form and was thus seemingly able to restrict himself to doing pradakshina around Lord Siva’s half. Shakthi became angry and withdrew all Bhringi’s power, leaving him so weak that he could scarcely stand. Yet, in spite of his debility, the Sage’s devotion continued unimpaired. When Siva made up his mind to grant him liberation, Parvathi was indignant and refused to accompany Mahadeva to Bhringi’s hermitage. The Lord was in a tight spot. His compassion for the devotee who prayed unceasingly for liberation was so great that He could not refuse him. Yet to grant his desire would bring consequences. Hence a quarrel⁵ between

² S.S. Cohen, 19th June, 1936;

³ *Day by Day*, 15-4-46 Morning

⁴ Bhringi is Sanskrit for ‘bee’.

⁵ This quarrel is ritually enacted each year at Pongal on Tiruvoodal Street (or ‘Holy Quarrel Street’), Tiruvannamalai.





the Lord and Uma ensued. With much effort, however, Lord Siva succeeded in winning Uma's appeasement.

Ekabhakta Bhringi was not mistaken in his intention, pure and good as it was. But ignoring the inner, he was deluded in thinking that Siva and Shakthi can in reality be parted. To be sure, the division caused by the Lord's and Uma's dispute and the ultimate reconciliation is nothing other than divine play, mythically expressing the truism that opposites finally resolve in unity when egoic desires are overcome. To go in pradakshina around Lord Siva is forever and always automatically to go around Parvathi as well. The Self is *akshara*, ultimate and elemental, the imperishable root of Being which is non-dual and thus cannot be divided.

Conclusion

It is said that originally Arunachalesvarar Temple had no Mother's Shrine because it was assumed that Uma was contained in the linga of the Lord. Finally this is why Bhagavan says that "*atmapradakshina* is the highest form of worship" because *akshara* or *atma* is



the only thing real, the indivisible source, where no distinction can be made between Siva and Shakthi, inner and outer, or self and other.

Once in the Hall, Bhagavan took out the *Ribhu Gita* and read the following line: "Real pradakshina is the meditation that thousands of universes are revolving around me, the unmoving centre of all forms." "I remain fixed, whereas innumerable universes, becoming concepts within my mind, rotate within me." He later said, "The ego which goes round like a whirlwind must get destroyed and must get absorbed in *atma*. That is *atmapradakshina*"⁶. —

⁶ Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, 15th April 1946 & 19th August, 1946.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Ashram Beekeeping



Devotees may not know it but the Ashram is keeping bees. When the Ashram gardens began to be developed in the mid-1980s, flowering trees and plants were introduced in abundance. Recognising that the overall health of Ashram botanical efforts could benefit from the pollination of bees, hives were placed in the Ashram flower garden and gosala in 2001. With Bhagavan's love of the natural world as a model and inspiration, honey-harvesting was not given priority but was only performed when there was an excess of honey. And unlike commercial apiculture which cultivates hybrid or foreign bees, the Ashram bees are local and wild. Going back at least 4,500 years, beekeeping represents a long-standing symbiotic relationship: bees have come to thrive on cultivated plants since human agriculture was introduced some 10,000 years ago while human consumption of honey may be done without adversely affecting populations.

A professional beekeeper-devotee is on hand at the Ashram much of the year to oversee and assist in maintaining the health and vitality of the Ashram colonies while a young Ashram priest, born into a beekeeping family, offers his support and expertise. When plentiful, honey from Ashram hives is used in Bhagavan's pujas and offered to devotees as prasad.





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Bhagavan's 64th Aradhana

The 64th anniversary of the Bhagavan's Brahma Nirvana was observed at his shrine Sunday morning the 27th April. At 5.30 am to the resonant sounds of Nadhaswaram of Sri T. R. Pichandi & party, devotees filled Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall, elaborately decorated with natural vettiver (khus) fibers, to sing Tamil Parayana as purohiths gathered in the Mother's Shrine for Mahanyasa Japam. Abhishekam started around 8am and final arati took place at 10.30am. More than 2,000 devotees joined for Bhagavan's prasadam served from five separate buffet stations, two in the special pandal behind the dining hall, two in a tent erected behind the dormitories and a fifth in the Korangu Thottam compound for Narayana Seva.

In the evening Smt. Ambika Kameshwar offered "Ramana Sangeetham" (Carnatic) at the New Granathalaya Auditorium. On the following day, 28th April, RMCL hosted the resounding *Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam* with selected verses of Siva Prakasham Pillai set to the ghana ragas of St. Thyagaraja's *Pancha Ratna Kritis* arranged by Smt. Sulochana Natarajan. Preceding days included Bharatanatyam by Ms. Shruthi Lakshmi & Ms. Raagini and Carnatic music by Sri Narayanan Namboodri. Two weeks earlier on the evening of April 14th in observance of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana according to the Gregorian calendar, devotees gathered outside Bhagavan's Nirvana Room to chant a longer version of Sri Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*, with two refrains after each verse.

