

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The Ashram has been very quiet this month owing to the absence of guests. Out-of-town devotees have been kindly requested not to come to the Ashram during this time of drought and severe water-shortage.

Temperatures continue to rise in Tiruvannamalai with the summer season in progress and no signs of rain in sight. For details of the Ashram's water crisis, see page 6.

Major Chadwick Day fell on Monday the 17th April and was observed with the chanting of *Aksharamanamalai* at his samadhi.

In this issue, we take a brief look at the women who cooked for Bhagavan over the years. See *Daily Life in the Dining Hall* starting on page 3.

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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Calendar of Upcoming Events

2nd May (Tues) Punarvasu Day
10th May (Weds) Full Moon
20th May (Sat) Mahapuja
29th May (Mon) Punarvasu Day
8th June (Thurs) Full Moon
25th June (Sun) Punarvasu Day
5th July (Weds) Cow Lakshmi Day

8th July (Sat) Full Moon Day/Guru Poornima
23rd July (Sun) Punarvasu Day
25th July (Tues) 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





Daily Life in the Dining Hall (pt. VII): Cooking for Bhagavan

Over the decades since Bhagavan's coming to Arunachala, there were numerous women devotees who felt the irresistible urge to cook for him. When considered closely, it seems only natural that women devotees might show Bhagavan the same love they have for an only son, the maternal instinct almost compelling them to provide for his sustenance.

Already in the days of the Big Temple under the *iluppai* tree, Dasi Rajambal took a vow that she would not eat before feeding Bhagavan. She came and gave him food each day till he left for Gurumurtham.

In 1903, Desurammal took up the task of feeding Bhagavan at Virupaksha, when Bhagavan and his sadhus were still going for regular bhiksha rounds. Meanwhile, Echammal one night had a dream,

wherein a young ascetic clad in loincloth spoke words she didn't understand. Within a few days following the dream, she lost her husband, her son, and one of her two daughters. Finally, her second daughter died as well and Echammal was left alone in the world. When she met Bhagavan the first time, she recognized the boy who had tried to warn her in her dream and made a vow to serve him every day. This was 1906.

Of course, not all devotees that came forward with the intention of feeding Bhagavan were so pure in their motivations. Bhagavan narrated with some humor the story of Meenakshi Ammal, who was 'like a *rakshasi*'. Bhagavan says, "She would daily go around the hill and then cook and bring me food. After some time, she began assuming control over everybody. If others brought food, she would give some to me and whatever remained she used to take away herself."

Some used the privilege of serving Bhagavan to gain ascendancy. Bhagavan recalled Gurumurtham days and commented on the downside of serving devotees by allowing them to serve you: "You don't know what trouble all such regular supply involves. Those who make food expect some control over you. It also creates some *aham* in them. They expect you to take something and the quantity is ever increasing. Any number of people will bring any number of items, at any time of day, and you are expected to consume it all. Swamihood is very difficult. You cannot realise it. I am speaking from fifty years of experience."¹

But the sincere devotion of others, like Mudaliar Paatti, seemed to tip the scale in the other direction. With her very first glimpse of Bhagavan at Virupaksha in 1910, she said to herself, "I will bring him food until my last day." It was a promise she would steadfastly keep for 40 years. To honour the vow, she collected money and provisions from her village and was eventually obliged to sell her property in order to procure food supplies. When the proceeds were exhausted, she started buying sesame seeds in the market and extracting the oil to sell in the market. With the little profit she made, she would cook for Bhagavan.

As for Echammal, when devotees complained of her cooking saying that it did not contain vegetables and

¹ *Day by Day*, 28-12-45 morning.





spices in proper proportions, Bhagavan made it clear that her devotion was tastier than her preparations.

One day while cutting vegetables in the kitchen and hearing their complaints, Bhagavan said, “I don’t know. If you do not like her food, you need not eat it. I find it quite good and I shall continue to eat it.” The respect and love Bhagavan felt for Echammal is demonstrated in the following story.

One day Echammal sent food through someone else. The cooks, however, forgot to serve it. When all the other items of food cooked in the Ashram had been served, Bhagavan, who usually signaled with a nod of his head to start eating, just sat motionless. People began to look at each another and the kitchen staff began whispering to one another. Suddenly they remembered that the food sent by Echammal had not been served.²

Bose’s Mother

Aravind Bose, an engineer-industrialist from Bengal, and his wife, the daughter of a German Admiral were long-standing devotees who lived just opposite Palakothu where Bose had built some cottages for Ashram visitors. His mother lived with them and in spite of her advancing years and feeble health, she made it a point to come to the Ashram each day. Seeing Echammal and Mudaliar Patti regularly bring food for Bhagavan, the elderly lady got the strong desire to cook for Bhagavan as well. As her determination grew, one day she mustered up the courage to make her proposal known to Bhagavan. Bhagavan made every effort to dissuade her: “There is no need for all that. There are people to take care of these details. You are older than I am. Why should you strain yourself unnecessarily? It is enough that you come each day and spend your time with us.”³

But the old lady was steadfast in her determination and no amount of argument could soften her resolve.

She went to the Ashram Office and got permission to bring food for Bhagavan and all his devotees, since Bhagavan will not take anything unless there is enough for all. Bhagavan heard of her hard labour and told family members, “Let her cook and eat her food at home, dedicating some of it to me, saying ‘this is for Bhagavan’. People think I have a special liking for

² *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 21st January 1946.

³ *Cherished Memories*, pp. 173-175.



Bhagavan with Bose family

one thing or another, but really, I have not. All food is the same to me. I would gladly mix up all the different things served and take them all together, but those who have prepared the food and think, ‘Bhagavan will like this’ or ‘Bhagavan will like that’ will be disappointed. Time was when I took pleasure in variety, but after realizing unity all that disappeared.”⁴

Bose’s mother prepared a number of dishes and, with the help of a servant, brought the food to the Ashram kitchen to serve Bhagavan herself. Bhagavan entered the hall and sat in his usual place. As the elder lady served each item, she explained to Bhagavan its special health benefits. After she had served each item to Bhagavan, the kitchen staff served the others in the dining hall. Once the serving was over, Bhagavan gave the signal to commence at which point he stirred all the items on his plate into a single heap. Bhagavan observed how the old lady had brought a variety of dishes, and how carefully she had served each item separately on his leaf-plate. Bhagavan turned to a devotee sitting nearby and said, “You know Hindi, do you not? Please tell this lady that there is no

⁴ *Day by Day*, 14-5-46.





need for her to take so much trouble. At her age, it must have been a strain making so many different dishes. Poor thing! She might have expected me to appreciate each dish. But I never taste items separately. I do not require variety. My taste is singular. All I need is the One! Please tell her not to put herself to so much trouble in future.”

Mrs. Syed's Dinner Invitation

Once Dr. Syed's wife got the strong urge to have Bhagavan come to their house for dinner. She prayed about it and pleaded with her husband to approach Bhagavan on the subject but the latter never found the courage. Finally, one day as Bhagavan started for his walk up the Hill, the couple came before him and made their appeal. Bhagavan only laughed and continued on his walk. Once home, each blamed the other for their failure and finally Dr. Syed told her, “The truth of the matter is that your devotion is deficient. That is the reason why Bhagavan refused.”

This stung her deeply and the woman sat up late in the night with the determination to pray all night or as long as it took in order to win Bhagavan's assent. Somewhere in the early morning she inadvertently dropped off and had a dream wherein Bhagavan came to her and explained why he could not accept the invitation. He asked her: “How can I leave the Ashram and come to your house for food? I must dine along with others, or they won't eat. Besides, as you know, people are coming from distant places, facing a lot of trouble to see me and to have food with me. How can I leave all these guests and come to your place? Feed three devotees of mine and it will be the same as feeding me. I shall be fully satisfied.”

In the dream, she saw who the three were: Dr. Melkote, Swami Prabuddhananda and Voruganti Krishnaya. When Dr. Syed heard his wife's dream, he invited all three to his house for dinner. It was only with some reservation

that the three accepted. They privately conferred with one another and openly confessed their hesitation, not least of all being the fact that it was contrary to social convention for Brahmins to eat in a Muslim household. But Dr. Melkote treated the words spoken by Bhagavan in Mrs. Syed's dream as coming directly from Bhagavan's own lips. Even if Bhagavan had not detailed in the dream who the three devotees should be, the goodly doctor accepted on faith that it was Bhagavan who had set it upon her heart who the three should be. Thus, he argued, they could not refuse the invitation. The others conceded but were nevertheless afraid of letting the plan be known to devotees, unsure of their reaction.

The next day when the dinner bell rang, the three went before Bhagavan and made their pranams. Strangely Bhagavan did not ask them why they were taking leave. Equally strange was the fact that on their way out just before the Ashram dinner was to be served they saw Chinna-swami who made no inquiry about their leave-taking. Upon arrival at the Syed's home, their final fear was placated when they saw how clean the house was and how excellent Mrs. Syed's food, all prepared in pure devotion to Bhagavan.

At the conclusion of the meal, Mrs. Syed offered each of them betel leaves, an honour that a Muslim housewife would normally only confer on her husband or a *fakir*. The three then understood that they were *fakirs* in her eyes, namely, stand-ins for the Maharshi.

When they returned to the Ashram, they were again amazed that no one seemed to notice their absence nor inquired why they were not at dinner. Reflecting on it, Krishnaya commented, “How wonderfully does Bhagavan protect those who obey him!”⁵ —

(to be continued)

⁵ *Ramana Smriti*, pp. 184-185.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Isvara Aradhana

D.: When *dukha* (misery) overpowers me, enquiry is impossible.

M.: Because the mind is too weak. Make it strong.

D.: By what means?

M.: *Sat-sanga*, *Isvara Aradhana*, *pranayama* —association with the wise, worship of God, breath control. [By these,] misery is removed; our aim is removal of misery. You do not acquire happiness. Your very nature is happiness. Bliss is not newly earned. All that is done is to remove unhappiness. These methods do it.

— Talks §290





Dev Gogoi

In danger of desiccation, the Ashram's *iluppai* tree was trenched so that garden water might better reach its roots.

Ashram Water

With the failed North-East monsoon at the end of 2016, Ramansramam as well as Tiruvannamalai and indeed much of Tamil Nadu is without water. The Ashram has sent out mails to devotees asking them to kindly defer from coming to the Ashram until July or August or until the Ashram gets rain. The situation is critical and the Ashram is having to truck water in each day. Even the Ashram's timeless *iluppai* tree began to show signs of water-stress with withering leaves. Plant- and root-boosting organic supplements were given and an underground watering system with perforated tubing was installed to better ensure ongoing hydration as the drought persists.

The Ashram kitchen made the difficult decision to discontinue water-filtering by reverse osmosis and

now relies on standard carbon filters for the Ashram drinking water. The decision speaks to the extreme nature of the crisis. Reverse osmosis generates 'waste water' which the Ashram can ill-afford just now. Of course, no Ashram 'waste water' ever goes to waste even in the best of times but is always made use of for plants and other gardening purposes. But plant-watering is now being kept to a minimum.

Recorded Rainfall

The *Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology* reported last year's rainfall at 166 mm, making it the second worst year since recording began in 1871. Records show that only the year 1876 had less rainfall (163 mm) which means 2016 has the severest rainfall shortage in 140 years. Consequently, vast swaths of Tamil farmland has been left fallow as tanks and water-wells all over the state have run dry, thus precluding irrigation. The areas of Tamil Nadu that



Tree-watering storage tank with watering troughs for wildlife





do not get the South-West monsoon (June-July) such as Tiruvannamalai are more seriously affected and villages and farms in the rural areas of the region are replete with bare fields and inhabitants who appear thin, dejected and forlorn. In January, the Tamil Nadu government declared a drought following a wave of farmer deaths. Local water conditions can be judged by recent efforts of an Ashram devotee who bored a well down to 750 ft. and didn't get a single drop.

Arunachala Saplings

The water crisis likewise puts in question the survival of vast numbers of newly-planted Ashram trees along the path up to Skandasramam, 300 banyan saplings among them. Under normal conditions most would survive the hot season. But without rain for the last 18 months, the Ashram management felt certain that unless vigorous water intervention measures were taken, most of the saplings would die. So, the Ashram petitioned the Forestry Department and got

permission to build a 6,000-litre storage tank on the hill itself. Small underground pipelines distribute water in various locations and Ashram staff uses pitchers to water each of the saplings. Great care is being taken to utilise the limited resources which means making use of recycled water. A powerful pump installed at the foot of the mountain next to the new library complex pumps water up to the storage tank as needed.

Arunachala Wildlife

Wildlife populations on the Hill which have only rebounded in recent years with tree-planting initiatives are also at risk and it was believed that unless they were given some source of water, many would not survive the drought. So, the new tree-watering system proved to have a great unintended additional benefit, namely, of supplying spotted deer, palm civets, grey mongooses, jungle cats, rabbits, porcupines and other hill species, with drinking water made available from water troughs at four separate locations. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Pali Thirtham Cleaning



With Pali Thirtham bone-dry, the Ashram took the opportunity to dredge, deepen out and clean the ancient tank which in recent years has been afflicted with almost continuous algae blooms. Workers bore the hot summer sun to heave out thousands of pounds of sludge from the tank floor, the residue of prolific algae growth in recent years, all of which can be put to good use as fertiliser for Ashram gardens. Efforts are being made to prevent future algae outbreaks. —

Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events including Bhagavan's 67th Aradhana celebrations. Please visit the channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's 67th Aradhana

Sri Bhagavan's 67th Aradhana began in the early morning hours of 24th April with nadaswaran music in Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall. Elaborately decorated with vetiver fibers and flower, the Hall filled at 5.30am for Tamil Parayana as purohits gathered in the Mother's Shrine for Mahanyasa mantra. Abhishekam followed at 8.30 am and final arati at 10.45 am. Some 2,000 guests joined for Bhagavan's prasadam simultaneously offered at five serving stations. The evening of the 24th, the New Granathalaya auditorium hosted Ramana music by Dr. Ambika Kameshwar in a programme entitled, "Ramana Sangeetham". The following day, 25th April, RMCL hosted the annual *Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam* with selected verses of Siva Prakasham Pillai set to the five ghana ragas of Thyagaraja. Aradhana music programmes extended over a period of several days starting on the night of the 21st with "Thevaram Isai" by Kum. J.B. Keerthana and flute by Sri. J.B. Sruthisagar. with violin and *mridangam*. A flute recital was offered on Sunday the 23rd by S. Rajaram accompanied on violin by Sri. Duran Srinivasan, *mridangam* by Sri Tanjore Kumar and *kanjira* by Sri Sivaramakrishnan. Aradhana celebrations closed out on the evening of the 25th with a special "Bharatanatyam" dance programme by Aparna & Aryamba (see cover insert). Bhagavan's Mahanirvana according to the Gregorian calendar was celebrated on the evening of April 14th. Devotees gathered outside Bhagavan's Nirvana Room to chant Sri Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*. —

Aradhana Day Book Release

தங்கக்கை
The Golden Hand



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.)





Obituary: Sri S.V. Gowri Shankar



Sri S.V. Gowri Shankar was born in Thennampattu on 15th October, 1940 to Venkatesa Subramaniam and Apitha Kuchamba. His mother, a native of Tiruvannamalai and a long-time devotee of Bhagavan Ramana, insisted that until such time as the boy received a name from Bhagavan, he should be called 'Ramana'. In December 1940, he was brought before Bhagavan who gave him the name 'Gowri Shankar'.

Gowri Shankar studied in the local Ramakrishna school until the age of fifteen when he shifted to Kolkotta to complete 10th through 12th standards. He did his B.comm in corporate law. In July 1970 he was married in Tamil Nadu and brought his spouse to Sri Ramansramam for their 'honeymoon'. He then set up house in Kolkotta where he raised five children and earned the necessities of life serving as a legal counsellor in the corporate setting. All the while having in mind an eventual return to Arunachala upon his retirement, when he suffered a heart attack in 2002, he knew that Bhagavan was calling him back and thus he shifted to Tiruvannamalai and lived his retirement years in peace near the Ashram.

In the third week of March this year he went to visit his two younger sons in Sri Rangam where they are serving in the Vedapatasala. On the 27th March, he reported to family members that Lord Subramaniam, Kanchipuram Mahaswami, Seshadri Swami and Bhagavan Ramana were coming for him. 'All were calling' him home, he said. Medical reports revealed no discernible health condition and vital signs were normal. But the feeling of imminent departure from this world persisted. Family members gathered round him on the evening of the 27th March when he asked to go back to Arunachala as soon as possible. The next morning at 4 am, the party set off for Tiruvannamalai. Upon arrival at 7.30 am on the 28th March, the family brought Gowri Shakar to Rangammal Hospital where again tests showed that vital signs were normal. He was even able to move about under his own power. He remained conscious and perfectly lucid up until 9.35 am and quietly merged at the Feet of Holy Arunachala at 9.45 am.

Known for his generosity, kindness and acceptance of all people, as one who never imposed on anyone, Gowri Shankar will be missed. He is survived by his wife, Geetha Gowri Shankar, his three sons, Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal, Tattvamasi Ghanapatigal, Sabari Ghanapatigal, and his two daughters, Nivedita Jambunathan and Aparna Janardan. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Terra Guitar Quartet



On 30th March, *Terra Guitar Quartet* performed at the Ashram. A Western classical guitar ensemble consisting of Pedro Rocha (Brazil), Madhavan Somanathan (India/USA), Jihyung Park (S. Korea) and Xavier Jara (USA), the four met in the class of the maestro Judicael Perroy in Paris. In this their first concert tour, they performed at the Bangalore School of Music, Alliance Francaise du Bengal (Kolkata), Ashoka University (Haryana) and the India International Centre (Delhi), offering a programme consisting of transcriptions of Western classical masterpieces such as Vivaldi's Concerto in G major and Rimsky-Korsakov's Capriccio Espagnol as well as contemporary

composition with worldwide influences. Madhuvan Somanathan, leading the group in their tour of India comes from a family of Bhagavan devotee.—

