OM NAMO BHAGAVATE SRI RAMANAYA Saranagati

SARANAGATI SRI RAMANASRAMAM **NOVEMBER 2016** VOL. 10, NO.11













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Dear Devotees,

October ended with Deepavali celebrations. As November begins, the unseasonably warm weather shows signs of moderating with every prospect and hope that the monsoon will bring ample precipitation this year.

The current issue of Saranagati looks at work in the Ashram kitchen and dining hall and Bhagavan's remarkable facility in meeting the practical demands of daily life in community. (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

Daily Life in the Dining Hall: At Work in the Kitchen	3
Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Veda Patasala Graduation	6
Events in Tirwannamalai: Pavala Kunru Panthakkal Muhurthan	n 7
Favourite Stories of Sri Bhagavan: Jnana Sambandar	8
Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navaratri Celebrations	9
Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Samvatsara Abhishekam	10
Obituary: Ms. Hô Thi Tuyết Mai	10
Amouncement New Andro on the Achym Webcite	10

Calendar of Upcoming Events

7th November (Mon) Pavala Kunru Kumbhabhishekam 9th November (Weds) Annamalai Swami Day 14th November (Mon) Full Moon

19th November (Mon) Punarvasu Day

3rd December (Sat) Flag-raising for Kartigai Festival

12th December (Mon) Kartigai Deepam

13th December (Tues) Full Moon

16th December (Fri) Punarvasu Day

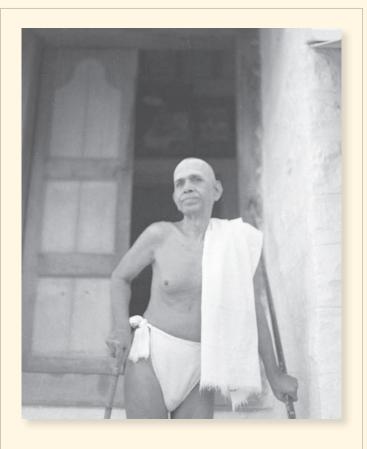
31st December Lucy Cornelsen Day

11th January (Weds) Full Moon

12th January (Thurs) Bhagavan's 137th Jayanthi

31st January (Tues) Swami Rajeswarananda Day





Daily Life in the Dining Hall (pt. II): At Work in the Kitchen

n general, Bhagavan did everything with total Lattention. For him, the outcome of every effort in daily life was a testament to the inner workings of the mind and the quality of one's abidance in the Self. He demanded excellence from those around him, not least of all those who served in the Ashram kitchen. As a way of aiding them in their spiritual progress, he pressed them to strive for quality in all their work. For their part, they aimed to meet such expectations and proved their earnestness in following Bhagavan implicitly, trusting that he knew best. Every meal-leaf was stitched proportionately, vegetables cut the right size, spices carefully ground, and good will exercised at each step of every process. The staff did their best to heed Bhagavan's insistence on frugality and to follow his scrupulous care in utilizing every part of the vegetable—skin, stem, roots and leaves. Bhagavan never cut corners but would exert great effort grinding even the toughest root just to extract a tiny amount of juice that would give the rasam that inimitable Ashram flavour. Like artwork, Bhagavan's way of cooking required the senses to be alive and awake. He had an uncanny sense of time and divined the precise moment when a dish needed removing from the fire. Once when the sambar was being boiled, he advised, "It must be thoroughly boiled so that all the effervescence completely subsides. Only then will it mature and acquire the right flavour."

But while Bhagavan urged each person to give their full attention to the work at hand, he was not overbearing in his demands but made life in the kitchen enjoyable. He offered opportunities to discuss the day's menu or sample the dishes as they came off the fire or grinding stone. One early morning after adding salt, chillies and other ingredients to enhance the chutney, he distributed the finished product to those gathered around the kitchen grinding stone and then dropped a bit of it into his own mouth. As the devotees tasted the flavourful chutney, Bhagavan smiled and said, "Is the chutney asking for iddlies?"²

Everyone enjoyed his light-hearted manner. And even when crisis struck, it was never a crisis for Bhagavan. He had every imaginable contingency plan at his disposal and just when it seemed that a meal might not be ready in time, or that a dish might be spoiled due to some oversight, he stepped in at the last minute and gave the perfect remedy.

Bhagavan's Salt Secrets

During his years on the Mountain, Bhagavan picked up a lot of cooking secrets, most of which were unfamiliar to devotees, even those who had lots of cooking experience. Once when the cooks fretted over the dhal which remained firm and hard as serving time approached, Bhagavan appeared at the kitchen door as if he had intuited he was needed. Hearing their concerns, he said, "Not to worry. Just add some salt". The head cook was hesitant citing traditional wisdom that dhal "becomes harder if salt is added to it before it is fully cooked." But Bhagavan lost no time and simply scooped out a handful of salt from the container and sprinkled it over the boiling dhal. Within no time the dhal was soft and ready to be mashed and mixed in

¹ *The Call Divine*, 1st February 1968, pp. 354-355; 2 *The Mountain Path*, Oct 2009, p. 26.





with the other ingredients.³ All heaved a sigh of relief as what seemed like an inevitable calamity had been avoided by Bhagavan's casual intervention.

On another occasion, the sambar had too much salt in it, so Bhagavan instructed the cook to shape some cooked rice into a big ball, flatten it a little and drop it into the boiling hot sambhar. Bhagavan told the kitchen staff that the rice would absorb the excess salt.⁴ And indeed, the tip was just what was needed. The sambar that day was exceptional.

Another time a devotee struggled at the grinder. No matter how hard he tried, he was unable to grind the pulses. In frustration, he gave up and refused to carry on with any longer. Just then Bhagavan appeared and advised a little salt be added. When this was done, the grinding became easy and the devotee's dislike for it departed him once for all.⁵

A Handful of Rice

Sometimes Bhagavan's trick was just the simple faith that all would work out. One morning in the early years when there was little food in the Ashram, Bhagavan began preparing breakfast as if the food store were filled to the brim whereas in fact he only had a handful of broken rice. He winnowed the rice, washed it and set it on the fire to cook. How were all these people going to be fed by this tiny little bit of food, onlookers wondered. But just as the rice came to a boil, a devotee appeared with two litres of milk. When the rice was cooked, Bhagavan moved the contents to a larger vessel and began cooking the rice and milk together. About that time another devotee arrived with raisins and sugar candy which were added in. Around 6.30 just as breakfast was to be served, a group arrived from Kumbakonam with iddlies, vadai, chutney, special hill bananas and banana-leaf bowls. The bowls were perfect to serve Bhagavan's unconventional but delicious payasam which made for a tasty breakfast where all ate to their heart's content.6

Feeding with His Gaze

On other occasions the deficit arose at the last-minute with no time remaining for any kind of miracle to occur. But one day a number of people came to the Ashram unexpectedly. The head cook went to Bhagavan and said, 'We are worried

- 3 Cherished Memories, pp.184-185.
- 4 Ibid. p. 185.
- 5 Raja Iyer in Ramana Smriti, pp. 155-58.
- 6 Freely adapted from Living by the Words of Bhagavan, p. 70-71.

because there's not enough food.' Bhagavan said, 'Don't worry. There'll be enough.'

Before initiating the serving, Bhagavan gazed at each of the devotees gathered for the meal in what turned out to be a brief darshan in the dining hall. Before starting to eat their food, most devotees already felt satiated, filled to satisfaction, merely by virtue of Bhagavan's loving glance. Like the legendary multiplication of the loaves, the little food available in Bhagavan's kitchen that day proved more than enough for all."

Last Minute Jayanti Food Supplies

Sometimes the only trick needed was good old-fashioned work. Once when Bhagavan's birthday was to be celebrated the following morning, there was no stock in the Ashram store. Hundreds of devotees had already arrived and Chinnaswami was sick with worry. At this late hour there was neither money nor time nor food supplies.

Bhagavan sat unperturbed in the hall with devotees. But at midnight, a big bullock cart arrived and unloaded rice, lentils, oil and vegetables and drove away. All the residents were asleep which meant there was no one to cut the vegetables. Bhagavan gently prodded the sleeping residents with his wooden staff, saying, "Chinnaswami is struggling there like a cat that has put its mouth into boiling milk. Let us get up and help cut the vegetables." Bhagavan and residents cut the vegetables and cooked the food and the next day, the birthday celebration went off without a hitch.⁸

Looking after Bhagavan

It wasn't always only Bhagavan that came to the rescue. There were occasions when devotees innocently tried to come to Bhagavan's aid when they perceived he needed their help. In the early years of the Ashram, Dandapani Swami was the Ashram in-charge and supervised the kitchen. Each morning he collected leaves which needed grinding, and Bhagavan, who was more like an assistant to Dandapani, would grind them as requested. But grinding them sometimes gave Bhagavan blisters. While Bhagavan himself was not the least bothered by that, Kunjuswami was, and he requested Dandapani not to give grinding work to Bhagavan, citing lesions on Bhagavan's finger. "I am the cook. Do not interfere with my job," Dandapani said boldly. Kunjuswami then made a heartfelt appeal to



⁷ Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi, p. 68.

⁸ Ramana Periya Puranam, p. 142.



Bhagavan but to no avail. The next day when Dandapani took a basketful of tamarind leaves, fried them with chillies and gave the lot to Bhagavan for grinding the chutney, Kunjuswami rebelled and told Bhagavan, "Please don't do anymore grinding. If you do, I will not eat the chutney." Bhagavan did the needful and completed the grinding. But when the chutney was served, Kunjuswami declined to take any. Noticing it, Bhagavan took the opportunity to taunt his him. Whenever anyone came to see him, he sent for Kunjuswami and asked him, "May I talk to this person?" "May I take food now?" On one occasion, he lightheartedly jested, "May I read this book? If I read it without your permission, you may decline to eat altogether."

Viswanatha Swami and Bhagavan's Blisters

A similar situation arose years later when Bhagavan again got blisters from too much grinding. Like Kunjuswami, Viswanatha Swami asked Bhagavan to stop grinding the chutney. But Bhagavan said that the blisters were no trouble to him and he continued his work as usual. Early the next morning, Viswanatha Swami slipped quietly into the kitchen and did all the grinding. When Bhagavan came to find that his work had been done, he learned of Viswanatha Swami's early kitchen visit. The whole day, Viswanatha avoided Bhagavan, not even entering the darshan hall. He took different routes in and around the Ashram to avoid a chance encounter with Bhagavan. But Bhagavan did not take his normal routes either and Viswanatha Swami soon found himself face to face with the Master. Bhagavan said, "In the early years I used to go for bhiksha but now I am getting free food in the Ashram. That's why I work in the kitchen. Today you have done my work for me and I have not done anything. Please, give me your dhoti so I can wash it for you."

Viswanatha Swami was moved to tears and from then on, never interfered with Bhagavan's daily routine.¹⁰

More Grinding Work

Over the years, grinding became an issue because devotees could not bear to see Bhagavan exert himself at the heavy grinding-stone. One morning, when Bhagavan was getting ready to grind coconut chutney for the breakfast idlies, Muruganar lunged forward and took hold of the pestle and started rotating it.

Bhagavan sat opposite him and fed coconut pieces and other ingredients into the gap. As the work went on, Bhagavan talked of early days on the Hill. Muruganar could never avoid falling into a deep state of absorption in the presence of Bhagavan's mesmerizing speech and though he continued with the task at hand, he was lost in a state of bliss and did not even notice that the chutney was ready but just continued rotating the stone. Bhagavan splashed a little water onto his face, as if by mistake, as if only intending to sprinkle water over the chutney. But Muruganar did not recognise the cue and just kept on grinding, casually wiping his face with his towel. Finally, Bhagavan said, "Hey, what's this? Can't you see that the work is over? The chutney is ready". Only then did Muruganar come to his senses and take notice of what was happening.¹¹

On another occasion when Muruganar and Bhagavan were chopping spinach, Bhagavan took care to separate the leaves from the stems because the two were to be cooked separately. Bhagavan began talking of Keerai Paati in the early years on the Hill, how knowledgeable she was about every herb on the Hill, knowing its name, content and benefit.

As Muruganar listened to Bhagavan's melodious voice, he fell into a trance and became oblivious to everything around him. After a time Bhagavan fell silent and noticing Muruganar's state, humourously commented, "Your skill in chopping spinach is as striking as your success in running a household."

The reader will remember that Muruganar had run away from family life much to the chagrin of his wife Meenakshi and so the comment struck deep.

Muruganar promptly wrote a verse for Bhagavan who laughed out loud as he read it. All those gathered were eager to know the source of Bhagavan's amusement. Bhagavan then read the lines out loud:

Oh Ramana! You are an extraordinarily efficient person. Yes! Why don't you then marry an equally efficient young maiden and set up a household? Why wander around as a mendicant in a loin cloth begging food when you could easily have an ideal household?

Bhagavan laughed heartily and the others joined in his mirth.¹²



⁹ Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam, pp. 158-159; Ramana Periya Puranam, p. 124.

¹⁰ Dr. K. Subrahmanian (1928-1998) A Tribute, pp. 40-41.

¹¹ Cherished Memories, pp.184-185.

¹² Ramana Periya Puranam, p. 191.



Brinjal Stalks and Aviyal

Bhagavan's dislike for wasting food was known to all who set foot in the kitchen. For him, all food was sacred and to waste even a little was disrespectful, if not spiritually unwholesome. Bhagavan taught the kitchen staff how to use a ladle so as not to spill even a drop. He was adept at starting the morning fire with just a few drops of kerosene. He was keen on making use of fresh available herbs and spices in season, rather than relying on previously prepared items. On one occasion when Bhagavan taught the cooks how to make aviyal, the spicy dish of mixed vegetable, coconut and curd, he insisted that the chillies and other spices be ground into a paste before being added. Since grinding the paste was demanding and time-consuming, the cooks once resorted to powdered spices instead of going to the trouble of making the paste. This did not escape Bhagavan's notice and the next time aviyal was prepared, Bhagavan went to the kitchen and ground the spices himself.¹³

Bhagavan's teaching about respecting food sometimes confused the kitchen staff for they often had a different idea about what was deemed as food. Once, after making a variety of tasty dishes from a sack of donated brinjals, the remaining brinjals were sun-dried and preserved for later use. However, when Bhagavan saw discarded stalks piled up in a corner of the kitchen, he said, "Why have these stalks been thrown away? They can be cooked and served." "For whom is Bhagavan saving all this?", the

13 Freely adapted from Living by the Words of Bhagavan, p. 69.

staff queried. "All things are created by God," Bhagavan answered. "We should not waste even small things. If a thing is useful, it is best to make use of it". A kitchen attendant exclaimed, "Bhagavan! How can anybody eat brinjal stalks? Brinjal stalks are not edible." Bhagavan made no reply but took a knife and started cutting up the stalks. Removing the outer fibrous skins revealed tender portions within which he proceeded to chop into tiny pieces. The kitchen attendants followed suit. Soon, they had a basket full of finely chopped brinjal stalks.

Early the next morning, Bhagavan entered the kitchen and showed the cook how to cook the brinjal stalks. Bhagavan directed the cook to put a large frying pan on the stove and to fry the chopped pieces in hot oil. The fried brinjal stalks were then mixed with the broken rice boiling in a large vessel. When the mixture of brinjal stalk and broken rice had been well-cooked, seasoning was added and the *uppuma* for that day's breakfast was ready. Everyone found the breakfast meal that morning sumptuous. ¹⁴

Cooking Plantain Flower-Skins

One time kitchen cooks asked Bhagavan about cooking plantain flower-skins and, as it would happen, within a few days, a devotee donated a large quantity of plantain flowers to the Ashram. Bhagavan gave the instructions:

Soak some red gram (thoor dhal) in water. Clean the skins and chop them finely. Grind the soaked gram, along with salt, red chillies and asafoetida. Add the chopped skin to

14 Cherished Memories, pp.196-197.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Veda Patasala Graduation





Patasala students having completed their curriculum in Krishna Yajur Veda graduated on Vijayadasami night, Tuesday 11th October 2016 and were awarded certificates and honorarium by Ashram President, V. S. Ramanan.





this paste, and steam the mixture for a few minutes. When the mixture is cooked, remove it from the fire and allow it to cool. Then crumble it and roast the crumbled mixture in hot oil. Season it with mustard seeds, and the dish is ready and can be served as a side dish with rice.

The cooks prepared everything according to Bhagavan's instructions and it was a complete success. But the next time plantain flowers were donated, the cooks dug a hole in the ground out back and buried them, wanting to avoid the tedious work that preparing them entailed. The following day when Bhagavan returned from his walk he saw a wounded dog and stopped to console the creature. Noticing a rise in the ground, he poked at it with his walking stick and exposed the discarded plantain flower skins. The kitchen staff were on pins and needles when they heard of it but Bhagavan only mildly reprimanded them:

"If you felt that the preparation of these skins would be too difficult, you could have fed them to the cows. Why bury them in the mud? What a waste of good stuff! Alright, do what you like, why should I bother?" ¹⁵

15 Ibid, pp. 198-99.

The Woodcutter's Leaves

Other times the kitchen staff appeared more justified in its protestations. Once, a woodcutter passed through the Ashram with a load of fresh leaves he had collected on the Hill with which to feed his goats. He stopped at the Ashram in the hopes of seeing Bhagavan and left his harvest outside the hall while he went to wash at Pali Tirtham. Bhagavan came out and seeing the leaves laying there, innocently assumed they were donations for the Ashram's use and ordered them sent to the kitchen. The cooks were amazed when Bhagavan began to instruct them on how to cook them. It should be borne in mind that in his years on the Hill, Bhagavan had come to know every plant and every variety of green, their medicinal and nutritional properties and the methods for cooking them. No doubt, these greens were nutritional and could have been made palatable under Bhagavan's direction. But to the cooks they were only tree leaves and so to avoid having to cook them, they quietly urged the wood-cutter to make off with his harvest as soon as possible. 16 —

(to be continued)

16 Life Sketch, M.S. Kamath, p. 3 (of pdf text version).

Events at Tiruvannamalai: Panthakkal Muhurtham











Panthakkal Muhurtham involves the sanctification of the corner pole of a 'pandal' (a word of Dravidian origin which means 'shed', 'festival hall' or 'arbour'). Like laying the foundation stone, panthakkal puja is performed to ensure the auspicious and smooth functioning of an upcoming event, in this case, Pavala Kunru's Mahakumbhabhishekam scheduled to take place on the morning of 7th November. Pavala Kunru is the temple where Bhagavan stayed for 6 months beginning in summer of 1898 and where he gave his famous upadesa to mother, "Whatever is destined to happen, will happen no matter how much we try to prevent it...". And it was here that Parvati came to do her penance in the hoary past.

Renovation of the temple has been completed and construction work on the *yagasala* has begun where five *kundas* (homa pits) are being dug for the sacrificial fires of the three-days of *yagasala* pujas (4-6 November). All are invited to attend.







Favourite Stories of Bhagavan: Jnana Sambandhar and the Milk of Wisdom

[A devotee asked Bhagavan one day, "Sambandha's original name was Aludaya Pillayar wasn't it? When did he get the other name of 'Inana Sambandhamurthi?' and why?" Bhagavan replied, "As soon as he drank the milk given by the Goddess, wisdom was established in him, and he got the name Inana Sambandhamurthy Nayanar. That means, he became a Inani without the usual relationship of Guru and disciple. Hence, people all over the neighbourhood began to call him by that name from that day onwards. That is the reason." I said, "Bhagavan too acquired knowledge without the aid of a Guru in human form?" "Yes! yes! That is why Krishnayya brought out so many points of similarities between Sambandha and myself," said Bhagavan. Letters, 1st February, 1947]

hen Aludaya Pillayar was three years old his father Sivapaadar set out for the Thirutoni Appar temple. The young boy followed after him but was sent back by his father. When the child persisted in his desire to accompany his father, the latter gave in and brought him along. took him to Thirutoni Appar Koil. Before entering the temple, Sivapaadar went to the temple tank for his ritual bath and while in the tank, began to recite aghamarshanamantram.

The young boy could not see his father down in the tank and became frightened that he had been swallowed up by the tank's deep waters. In fear he cried out and the Lord appeared before him with Umadevi, the two seated on their sacred bull. As instructed by the Lord, the Goddess gave the child a golden cup full of milk from her breast – the sacred milk containing Siva Jnana (divine wisdom). Fully satisfied and at peace, all fear having fled him by Mother's blessing, the divine pair departed and left the child there to sing his songs of praise. Meanwhile his father got out of the tank and seeing the child with fresh milk running down his cheeks, became angry and threatened him: "You know it is forbidden to take food from strangers. Who gave you milk to drink?" the irate father demanded. The child only smiled and pointed heavenward. The father not understanding his gestures demanded an answer, waving his stick menacingly: "Who gave you milk to drink?" The youngster responded with heartfelt song, chanting the following lines:

"The one with kundalas (sacred earrings), the one who rides the sacred bull, the one who has the pure white moon on his head, the one whose body is smeared with the ashes of the burning ghat, the Thief who has stolen my heart. He came to bless Brahma, the Creator, when Brahma, with the Vedas in his hand did penance. He who occupies the sacred seat of Brahmapuri, He, my Father, is there!"

Thus describing Siva who gave him the milk and hearing the child's beautiful verse, Sivapaadar began to suspect divine intervention and his wrath dissipated. From that time as the child only sang the most beautiful and loving verses in praise of the Lord, it became clear that he was the Lord's chosen and everyone began to call him Thiru Jnana Sambandhar: he who is conjoined with the wisdom of the Lord.—



























Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navaratri Celebrations

Avaratri is the annual festival dedicated to Devi and begins on the first tithi of the bright half (sukla paksha) in the month from mid-September to mid-October and concludes on the tenth tithi with Vijayadasami. While Navaratri means 'nine nights', the number can vary from eight to ten nights depending on the way the tithis fall. This year is a case in point where there were actually ten nights of pujas. On Friday the 30th September, 2016 around 6pm Goddess Yogambikai was taken out in procession around the Shrine and installed in the Mantapam. The festival commenced the following day on Saturday the 1st October, 2016. Music programmes took place in the New Library Auditorium the first four nights.



Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Samvatsara Abhishekam

The third anniversary of the Mahakumbhabhishekam of Sri Ramaneswara and Matrubhuteswara Shrines was observed with homa on Punarvasu Day, Saturday the 22nd October, in the New Hall. Sankalpa and Mahanyasa japa began around 5.30am followed by homa at 8am. Purnahuti at 10am was followed by procession and abhishekam in Mother's and Bhagavan's Shrines.





Obituary: Ms. Hô Thi Tuyết Mai



o Thi Tuyêt Mai, familiarly known among Ashram devotees as 'Mai,' came to India in the mid-1970s after reading Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*. In November 1978 while en route to Nasik to have darshan of Sri Anandamayi Ma, a friend persuaded her to come to Bombay and meet Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. The experience so affected her that after Ma's darshan the next day, she left Nasik and immediately returned to Bombay. The next three years were occupied sitting at the feet of Nisargadatta Maharaj. While in his sickbed in the months before his departure in September 1981, Mai attended on Maharaj with great affection.

Mai took up semi-permanent residence in Tiruvannamalai from 1981 and settled here permanently in early 1993. She spent her days painting, meditating, reading, circumambulating Bhagavan's Shrine and doing volunteer work at the adjacent Agastya Ganapathi Library. She always wanted to live in a house where she could have a good view of Arunachala and soon enough, she found it.

Born August 19th, 1949 in Biênhòa of Dong Nai Province, Vietnam, (suburb of Ho Chí Minh City), at the height of the war, Mai and her family emigrated to France when Mai was just 17. Becoming a French citizen, she continued her studies in French schools and later trained in Belgium to become a fully qualified nurse.

In September 2016, Mai fell and broke her leg and a few weeks later took another bad fall. While otherwise healthy, on the 9th October she remarked to a close friend who had cooked for her: "Now this body is eating these vegetables and plants but soon the vegetables and plants will be eating this body". A few days later, on the morning of the 13th of October 2016 while peacefully asleep, Mai merged at the feet of Holy Arunachala. All remarked how blissful she looked in her silent repose. Loved by all in Tiruvannamalai, Mai was known for her kindness, humility, sincerity and acceptance of all people. She is survived by her two sisters, Mrs. Lam Quang Vinh (born Tuyêt Nhung) and Ms. Hô Thi Anh Nguyet; and four brothers, Mr. Hô Quoc Tuan, Mr. Hô Quoc Buu, Mr. Hô Quoc Khanh and Mr. Hô Quoc Hai; and will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

Announcement: New Audio on the Ashram Website

Fresh recordings of *Arunachala Puranam*, Ramana Padamalai and *Geeta Saara Taalaattu* are available for free downloading from the Ashram's website: http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/resource_centre/audio-2

