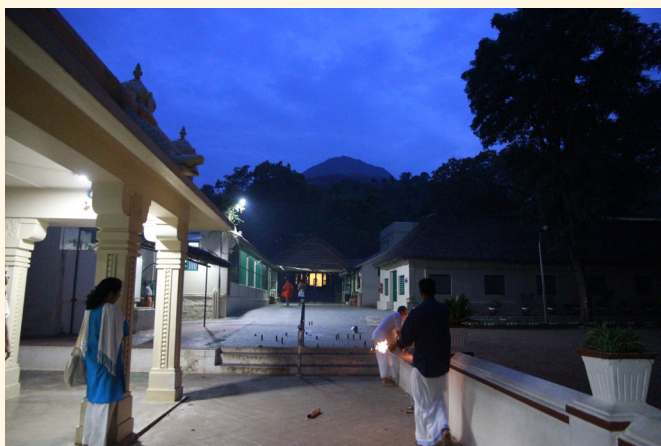


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

NOVEMBER 2017
VOL. 11, NO. 11



D. Thiagarajan



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ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

When asked to explain Deepavali's significance, Bhagavan offered the following verse: *To search for and slay the sinner—the naraḥa ego—which is corrupted by the thought that one is the naraḥa form—the false body 'tenement'—and to shine as the true Self, this is Deepavali!* Deepavali was celebrated this year on the morning of 18th October in Bhagavan's Shrine.

This issue of *Saranagati* takes up the life of Mudaliar Paatti who came to Bhagavan in 1909 just on the heels of Echammal. Like Echammal, she too took a vow never to eat until she had first fed Bhagavan and kept the vow for 40 years until her death in 1949. A model of devotion, read a life story of dedicated service, beginning 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

3rd November (Fri) Full Moon
8th November (Weds) Mastan Swami Day
9th November (Thur) Punarvasu/Annamalai Swami Day
23rd November (Thur) Kartigai Deepam Flag-raising
2nd December (Sat) Kartigai Deepam
3rd December (Sun) Full Moon Day

6th December (Weds) Punarvasu Day
31st December (Sun) Lucy-ma Day
1st January (Mon) Full Moon Day
3rd January (Weds) Bhagavan's Jayanti Day
30th January (Tues) Punarvasu Day
30th January (Tues Evening) Full Moon





Serving at the Feet of Bhagavan: The Life of Mudaliar Paatti

Mudaliar Paatti, like Echammal, took a vow to serve Bhagavan each day. Paatti (meaning ‘granny’) is the name she got in her elder years at the Ashram but originally, she was called Alankarathanni and belonged to a Saivaite family from the village of Thillayadi in Karaikal, the coastal district east of Kumbakonam and Tanjavure.

In 1908 when the saint that she and her son were serving was nearing death, Mudaliar Paatti asked him, “So far we have had the good fortune of serving you and deriving great peace of mind. Where can we hope to find such peace after you have left us?” The guru assured her saying, “A much greater fortune is awaiting you. You will get the darshan of a *jnani* who is in a much higher

state than I, and you will also get the opportunity of serving him”. When they asked where they could hope to find such a one, he told them of Brahmana Swami in Tiruvannamalai. The saint died a few days later.¹

Two months after this, Mudaliar Paatti’s son, Subbiah Mudaliar made the trip to Tiruvannamalai and sought out the Brahmana Swami. When he got up after prostrating before him, he experienced peace and bliss unlike ever before. He silently expressed his gratitude to the departed saint of Karaikal who had led him to the young sage.

Subbiah Mudaliar returned to Karaikal, entrusted his lands to caretakers, and in 1909, left with his mother and wife for Tiruvannamalai. Upon arrival, they rented a house in North Gopuram Street² and from that day on started giving food to Sri Bhagavan. Subbiah Mudaliar went to the big temple each day and stayed till the noon puja was over. Returning home, he would bring two or three sadhus and feed them. Meanwhile his mother and wife, Kamakshi carried food to Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave, where they had Bhagavan’s darshan and offered food each day.

In the early years on the Hill most of the food Bhagavan received was supplied by Mudaliar Paatti, Echammal, Desurammal and other such women. In due course, with the assistance of her son and daughter-in-law, Mudaliar Paatti began giving food to Bhagavan’s devotees.

In those days female visitors were not allowed to stay in the Ashram from six in the evening to six in the morning, so Brahmin women would go to Echammal’s house to spend the night. But other women had nowhere to go, so Mudaliar Paatti converted her house into a sort of choultry for non-Brahmin women devotees of Bhagavan³.

She made offerings to the young swami each day and would not allow anything to interfere with her sacred duty. Even during the plague outbreak⁴ when Tiruvannamalai was evacuated, she stayed on and managed to find food to offer Bhagavan.

1 *Reminiscences of Kunju Swami*, p. 174.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

3 *Reminiscences of Kunju Swami*, p. 134; N.R. Krishnamurthi Iyer’s *Reminiscences, Ocean of Grace*, vol 2, p. 72.

4 *Mountain Path*, January 1982, p. 47.





As the three became engrossed in their service to Bhagavan, her son Subbiah Mudaliar failed to give sufficient attention to their agricultural lands at Karaikal. The caretakers of the family estate neglected their task and soon the family income dwindled. Finding it difficult to support his wife and mother, Subbiah Mudaliar left for Tirupanandal Mutt and took *sannyasa*⁵. From then onward, he was called Thambiranswami and began the peripatetic life of a *tamburan* ('a wandering minstrel')⁶. Meanwhile Mudaliar Paatti and Kamakshi looked after themselves, earning their keep by extracting sesame oil and making *appalams*. They earned just enough to feed themselves and to make daily food offerings to Bhagavan⁷.

Worshipping Bhagavan

In the early days, Mudaliar Paatti, or Alankarathanni as she was known then, tried to worship the Brahmana Swami with flowers and waving the puja flame before his hallowed form. But soon enough she learned that Bhagavan did not like being singled out that way and so she installed an image of Bhagavan in her house and garlanded it each day. Later, when Bhagavan moved to Skandashram, a photo taken during his stay at Pachaianman Kovil was kept near the spot where Bhagavan regularly sat. Mudaliar Paatti would collect *thumbai* flowers from the Arunachaleswara Temple flower garden, make finely-woven garlands and take them up to Skandashram. Adorning the portrait with her *alankaras*, she would light camphor and prostrate before the image⁸.

⁵ *Reminiscences of Kunju Swami*, p. 175.

⁶ *Letters*, 24th September 1949.

⁷ *Reminiscences of Kunju Swami*, p. 175.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 98

Serving Bhagavan Wherever He Was

As a rule, Mudaliar Paatti prepared food in her house and brought it to Virupaksha Cave. She was unflinching in her resolve and even in her old age followed Bhagavan wherever he might be found to make her food offerings.

Bhagavan was not always enthusiastic about receiving the constant attention. In speaking of her and Echammal, he once said, "They would not listen to me. Even if I went away somewhere just to avoid them, they would find me somehow".

One hot summer day when Bhagavan was perspiring, Mudaliar Paatti occupied herself with fanning him. He had already asked her a few minutes earlier not to fan him but she continued to do so anyway, albeit unobtrusively. Finally, Bhagavan plucked the fan out of her hands with the following words: "Sweating freely is good for the body. Why are you trying to stop it by fanning me?"

Perseverance

Devotees marvelled at Mudaliar Paatti's perseverance. They noticed how much they suffered soreness in the legs from a single trip up to Skandasramam while Mudaliar Paatti made the trip each day "with a bundle on her head"⁹.

During the years when Bhagavan was going for regular pradakshina, Mudaliar Paatti would find out where Bhagavan was on his hill-rounding and knowing his usual resting places, would appear at the roadside with food for him. Once in her later years she scaled the Mountain to overtake Bhagavan and company near the summit, finally catching up with them at Seven Springs, having carried two large containers and a basket full of food.

⁹ *Letters*, 30th September 1948.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Devotion

M.: A wandering mind is on the wrong way; only a devotional mind is on the right way. Long for it intensely so that the mind melts in devotion. After the camphor burns away no residue is left. The mind is the camphor; when it has resolved itself into the Self without leaving even the slightest trace behind, this is Realisation of the Self.

— *Talks* §138, §152





Tricks

Mudaliar Paatti was exemplary in her devotion and amply demonstrated what true devotion to the guru looked like. Bhagavan is said to have once commented, “I’m afraid of two people — Ramanatha Brahmachari and Mudaliar Paatti.” So completely devoted were these two that Bhagavan was powerless in the face of their perfect surrender.

It is said that whenever Bhagavan saw Mudaliar Paatti coming, his face would light up with a smile. When she served him, he sometimes asked her for more, which is something he almost never did as he had to face the constant problem of devotees giving him too much food.

At Ramanasramam mealtimes, Mudaliar Paatti and Echammal would bring offerings and personally serve Bhagavan and devotees. Bhagavan would always wait for their food to arrive before commencing the meal. Normally, since Mudaliar Paatti belonged to the Thondaimandala Mudaliar caste and thus was not a Brahmin, she would only serve on the non-Brahmin side of the dining-hall partition¹⁰. But sometimes, Brahmin devotees taken by her devotion and in awe of Bhagavan’s affection for her, made a point of sitting in the non-Brahmin section to avail themselves of her small offering. They also got to witness occasional humorous exchanges between the two.

An example of this is when Mudaliar Paatti once tried to serve more cooked rice to Bhagavan, making it into a hard-packed ball by pressing it into a certain shape. Bhagavan commented, “She is clever. She imagines she can feed me more food by making it appear less. But I know her trick!” Bhagavan made gestures of her pressing the rice with her hands. Taking the cue, Mudaliar Paatti did not miss a beat and in her familiar manner born of years in Bhagavan’s presence, she countered his jest: “Bhagavan! What is more and what is less? There is nothing that is either big or small. Everything is only our *bhavana* (thinking), is it not?” She then mimicked gestures regularly made by Bhagavan. Bhagavan laughed heartily and said, “See, she is paying me back in my own coin!”¹¹

¹⁰ *Power of the Presence*, vol. 3., p. 61.

¹¹ *Letters*, 24th September 1949.



Mudaliar Paatti and her daughter-in-law, Kamakshi in the dining hall next to Bhagavan’s place

Kamakshi’s Death

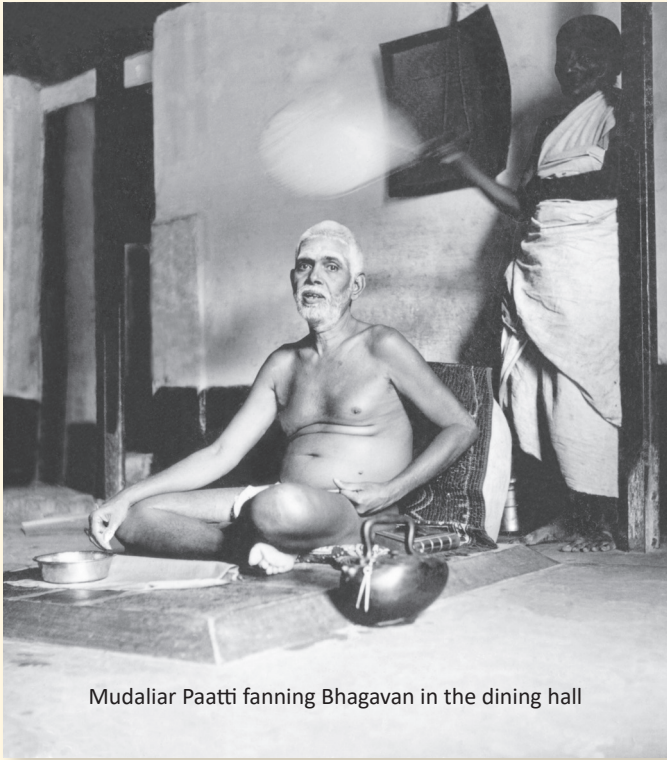
In 1938 Mudaliar Paatti’s daughter-in-law Kamakshi died. Seeing Mudaliar Paatti’s plight, Chinna Swami, Kunjuswami and others told her, “Please don’t exert yourself in your old age. You are welcome to dine at the Ashram, have darshan of Bhagavan every day and live a life of retirement.”

She burst out, “My service to Bhagavan will not cease until my last breath. Even if it means going about begging to obtain the food items, I shall carry on till I breathe my last.”¹²

Such determination and depth of devotion countenanced no rebuttal. But Rangaswami Gounder of Pollachi, who had made and donated Bhagavan’s sofa, was overwhelmed by her devotion and moved by her need. He suggested that she shift into his large compound and offered to look after her

¹² *Reminiscences of Kunju Swami*, p. 175; *Letters*, 24th September 1949.





Mudaliar Paatti fanning Bhagavan in the dining hall

monetary needs. She accepted the offer and moved to the Gounder's compound. In the meantime, her son Tambiran Swami returned to Tiruvannamalai and took up residence at Palakotthu¹³. There he took up the life in the sadhu's colony and collected flowers each day to perform puja at the tank. Bhagavan observed how protracted and drawn out these pujas were and once joked, "Poor God! He has to wait so long for *naivedya* since the puja takes so much time to complete!"¹⁴ But Tambiran Swami lived a simple devout life and now that he was at Palakotthu, was in a position to regularly visit his aging mother.

Later Years

In the years when the Ashram started to cook its own food, Mudaliar Paatti continued to bring food offerings every day, her usual amount which was enough food for about four people. Bhagavan tried to dissuade her but like Echammal, she was unwilling to abandon her vow of serving Bhagavan each day.

In the early 1940s when Bhagavan suffered from jaundice and completely lost his appetite, he was

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁴ *Moments Remembered*, p. 40.

mostly subsisting on popcorn, which was the only thing he felt like eating. Since he knew that Echammal and Mudaliar Paatti had both taken vows not to eat until he had taken some of their offering, he obliged them by taking one or two grains of rice from them each day and mixing them with his popcorn¹⁵.

Having become blind now, Mudaliar Paatti was unable to come and serve Bhagavan directly but sent food through others. Following the period of jaundice, someone seems to have told her that Bhagavan had become emaciated. 'Granny' felt that it must have been due to her failure to serve him directly. So, one day she came to see Bhagavan and with a great feeling of sorrow, said, "Oh, how reduced you have become!" "Who told you that, Granny? I am all right. What you have heard is not true," Bhagavan said. But Mudaliar Paatti insisted on inspecting him with her very limited eyesight and so waited till the end of the session and stood by the door as Bhagavan passed by. "Granny, have I become reduced? See how well I am"¹⁶.

When Mudaliar Paatti became weak and infirm, Parvati, the daughter of a devotee, Yoganatha, assisted her as did two Brahmin sisters from Cuddalore, Pattammal and Parvati Ammal. Mudaliar Paatti would often accompany those who took food to Bhagavan. Because of her poor eyesight, however, she once inadvertently stepped on a leaf-plate in the Ashram dining hall. Ramakrishna Swami and Chinna Swami said, "Amma, your vision is poor, so you cannot see Bhagavan. Why not dispatch the food and remain at home?"

In her usual no-nonsense manner, Paatti shot back, "What does it matter if I can't see Bhagavan; it is enough if he sees me!"

Bhagavan smiled and asked them, "What do you have to say to that?"¹⁷

After the Pattammal sisters left, Sivadoss and others helped her to continue her bhiksha to Bhagavan. Even on grand feast days or when the Ashram's lunch guests included royalty, Mudaliar Paatti's humble

¹⁵ *Power of the Presence*, vol. 3., p. 62.

¹⁶ *Letters*, 24th September 1949.

¹⁷ *Reminiscences of Kunju Swami*, p. 177.





cooked rice offering was always served along with the other dishes¹⁸. Even after she lost her eyesight, she continued sending food to Bhagavan with the help of Pattammal and Sivadosswami.

Last Days

Mudaliar Paatti's health gave way and for the last two or three years of her life, she was unable to come to Bhagavan directly. Finally, Mudaliar Paatti gave up her body around midnight on the 23rd September 1949. Like Echammal, it had been exactly forty years since she served her first meal to Bhagavan. As soon as the news of her demise reached Bhagavan, he began to narrate her life story and went on the whole day telling how she had come in 1909 just a short time after Echammal. He spoke of how she had stuck by him all those years with unflagging devotion in wholehearted service.

He enquired about the place of her burial and when

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

he was told that she was to be buried in the Hindu general burial ground, he objected and said that she should be buried in the place where she died.

A pit was dug within her compound and her body was wrapped in ochre robes and placed in the cross-legged *padmasana* posture, as is customary with the bodies of sannyasis. This is noteworthy given the fact that Mudaliar Paatti had been a householder and speaks for the high regard Bhagavan had for her. Her form was then garlanded with flowers, sprinkled with sacred ash and camphor, and laid to rest¹⁹.

T. N. Venkataraman collected funds from devotees and arranged for a proper samadhi to be constructed over her grave. The final samadhi included a small stone likeness of Mudaliar Paatti, bearing a basket of food to offer to Bhagavan²⁰. —

¹⁹ *Guru Ramana: Memories and Notes*, S. S. Cohen, pp. 144-45.

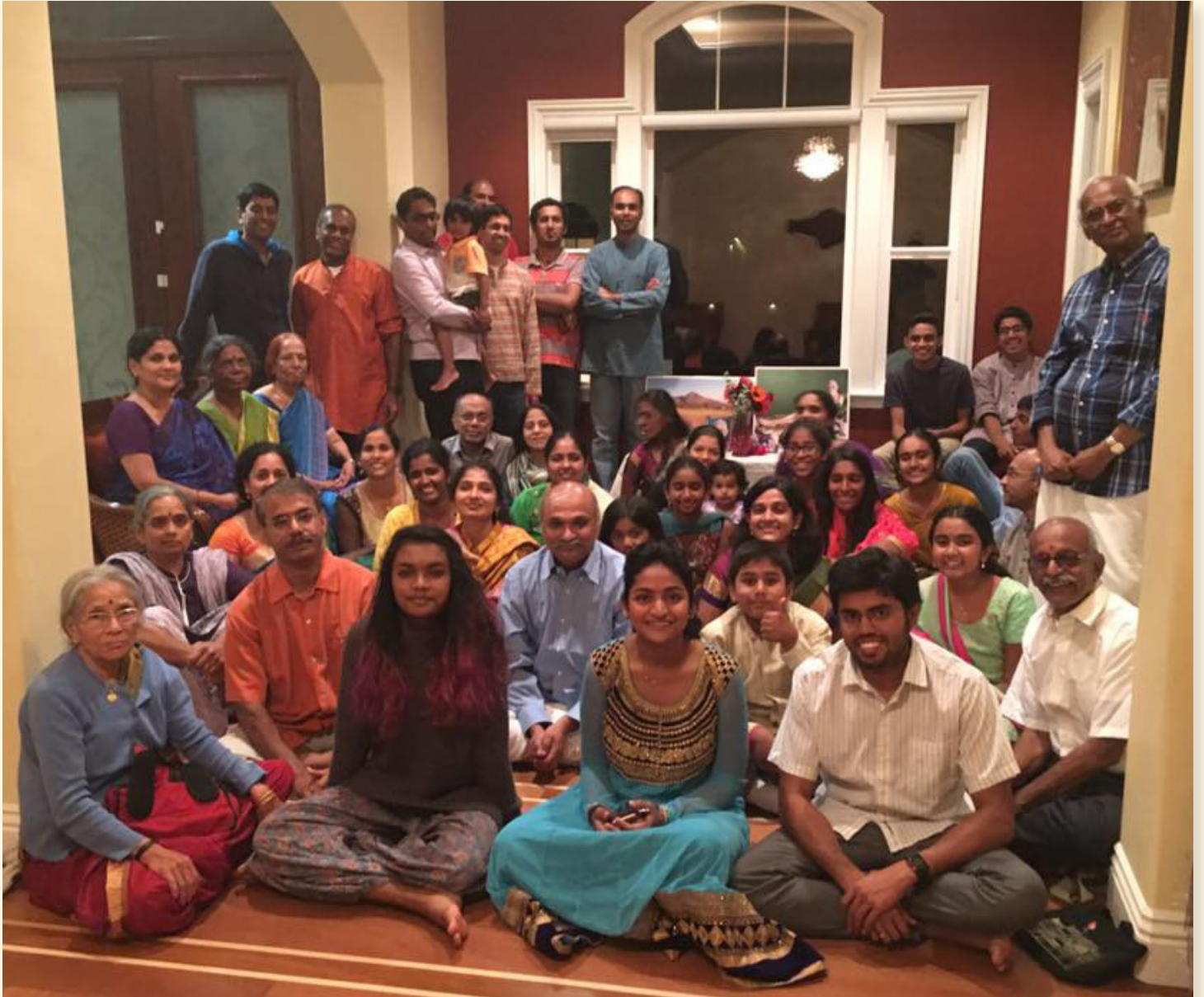
²⁰ Her son, Tambiran Swami died in 1953.



Events at Tiruvannamalai: Pavala Kuhru Samvatsara Abhishekam

Samvatsara (Annual) Abhishekam at Pavala Kunru (Coral Hill) Temple took place on Saturday morning of the 28th October 2017, the one-year anniversary of Ashram-supported Mahakumbhabhishekam celebrated atop the temple vimanam on 7th November 2016. V.S. Mani was in attendance along with devotees atop the hillock where this beautifully renovated and well-maintained ancient temple is situated, whose magnificent history leads all the way back to the legendary years when Parvati came to Tiruvannamalai to do her penance. —





San Francisco Bay Area Ramana Satsang

For the last 15 years, ardent devotees of Bhagavan in the San Francisco Bay Area have been meeting for weekly satsang. Satsangs are held at the homes of devotees every Saturday from 6-8 in the evening, followed by pot-luck dinner. There are six core families who are completely dedicated and take turns

hosting satsang. Other families volunteer to host whenever they can. Thirty to forty devotees attend these satsangs. The first 45 minutes are dedicated to chanting. We start with *Aksharamanamalai* and continue with *Upadesa Saram* in Sanskrit, a hymn from *Ramana Stuti Pancharagam* and conclude with *Arunachala Pancharatnam* in Tamil. We then listen to a talk on Bhagavan's teachings for the next 30 minutes, by playing the audio recording of a relevant discourse, such as those delivered by Sri Nochur Venkataraman. Following that, we read for 20-25 minutes from books





such as *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* or *Day by Day* with Bhagavan, and conclude with silent meditation for the last 20 minutes. Children participate in the chanting and then leave to play before returning for dinner at 8pm.

We cherish this satsang so much, that it is the highlight of our week. Each satsang is charged with devotion and we feel Bhagavan's presence clearly. It is as if He washes us down with a hose; clearing our minds and refreshing our hearts. Without fail, we feel recharged, ready for the next week. Over the years, these weekly satsangs have been key in giving us the necessary enthusiasm to stick with the practice despite the trials and tribulations of our lives as householders.

Inspired by Arunachala Ashrama, New York, we have

also been observing Bhagavan's Jayanthi, Aradhana and Advent at Arunachala, each year, for the last 15 years. We rent a hall for these events and invite a speaker. Dennis Hartel, Sri V. S. Mani, Sri V. Ganesan, several Acharyas from Chinmaya Mission, Swami Prabuddhananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Pandit Vamadeva Shastri and Professor John Grimes have all given inspiring talks. Children sing, dance and perform plays. We always conclude the program with Veda Parayanam, Saranagathi and Arati. Devotees enjoy a sumptuous lunch of home-made dishes at the end of the function.

Bhagavan has become the core of our lives and we can say with complete conviction, just as Sri T.K. Sundaresa Iyer did, that we go to Him not for profit, but because, away from Him, there is no life for us. —



Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Viswanatha Swami Day

When Viswanatha Swami's father, Ramaswami, first cousin of Bhagavan, lost his mother in childhood, he came to live with Bhagavan's parents in Tiruchuzhi. Viswanatha Swami was born in 1904, the third of five children. During his college years he was a sympathiser of Mahatma Gandhi's freedom movement. He met Bhagavan in January 1921, when his train was delayed in Villupuram station and he came to Tiruvannamalai. As he stood before Bhagavan at Skandasramam, Bhagavan's presence was so powerful that he resolved to stay on the rest of the week. Within two years, he made up his mind to come and stay permanently. Viswanatha Swami's Day was observed at the Ashram on Sunday 22nd October with Ashram President's son, Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan in attendance. —

Announcements: YouTube Channel and Facebook Page

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events. Please see Navaratri video footage on the channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>. Also follow Ashram activities in various languages on Facebook @ <https://www.facebook.com/SriRamanaMaharshi>, <https://www.facebook.com/SriRamanaTamil>, <https://www.facebook.com/SriRamanaTelugu>, <https://www.facebook.com/Sriramanaspanish/>, <https://www.facebook.com/Ramanamaharshirussian/> <https://www.facebook.com/ramanamaharshifrench/>

