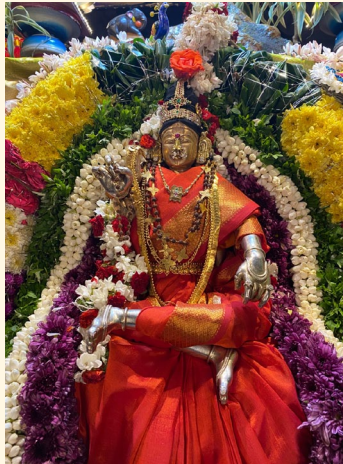


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D. Thiyagarajan



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IN THIS
ISSUE



Dear Devotees,

The month of October was very colourful with the nine nights of Navaratri, celebrated this year from the evening of the opening procession on 14th October to the final procession on Vijayadasami, 24th October. We begin this November issue with the first part of the life story of Sadhu Natanananda, the poet and philosopher who came to Bhagavan in 1918 as a young man.

Also in this issue is the first segment of a series looking at how devotees may best face the changes we are seeing across the globe, arising the influence of AI and very powerful new machine technology.

For videos, photos and other news of events, go to <<https://sriramanamaharshi.org>> or write to us at <saranagati@gururamana.org>. For the web version: <http://sriramana.org/saranagati/November_2023/> or <<https://saranagati.arunachala.org/issues/>>.

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Saranagati

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Calendar of Ashram Events

4th Nov (Fri) Punarvasu	1st Dec (Fri) Punarvasu
8th Nov (Wed) Mastan Day	10th Dec (Sun) Pradosham
9th Nov (Thu) Annamalai Swami Day	17th Dec (Sun) Dhanurmasa Commences
10th Nov (Fri) Pradosham	24th Dec (Sun) Pradosham
12th Nov (Sun) Deepavali 24th Nov (Fri) Pradosham	26th Dec (Tues) Pournami
17th Nov (Fri) Kartigai Festival Begins	28th Dec (Thu) Sri Bhagavan's Jayanthi Day
26th Nov (Sun) Kartigai Deepam	29th Dec (Fri) Sw Ramanananda Day
27th Nov (Mon) Pournami	31st Dec (Sun) Lucy Ma Day



IN PROFILE

Sadhu Natanananda

One of the striking features of Sadhu Natanananda's life is how little known he is to devotees. Since the early 1930s, books and articles he edited or wrote were being published by the Ashram. Bhagavan perused his verses and gave his approval on various occasions.

Sadhu Natanananda's obscurity may in part be explained by his private nature and the way he kept to himself. For years on end devotees did not even know that he was living in Tiruvannamalai. He was not someone to seek favour from others and lived

a moderately reclusive life in the latter years of his life. His uncompromising manner sometimes felt threatening. If there was truth in a person's words in respect of Bhagavan's teaching, he would say so. But if not, he would call them out. This no nonsense approach was his way of showing respect to Bhagavan and his teaching. For Natanananda, devotion to Bhagavan was not something to be taken casually but came with serious responsibilities, not least of all, putting into practice the teaching Bhagavan imparted. To illustrate this point, we recall an account V. Ganesan once told when he went to see Natanananda after learning from Dorab Framji in the early 1960s that the elder was alive and well, living quietly in Tiruvannamalai. Ganesan remembers the Sadhu's first question:

*What are you doing? Are you practicing Self Enquiry?" I replied, "I am not capable of doing Self Enquiry. I only chant Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva." His face clouded over with rage. I was taken aback because this was my very first meeting with him and I was accustomed to people indulging me whenever they met me. Not Natanananda. He was a stern and serious man. He raged, "What a fool you are! Why do you think you have come to Bhagavan? For what function has he chosen you? It is only to make you as he is. Read his Forty Verses on Reality, practice Self Enquiry, and be the truth. That is why you have been chosen."*¹

Sadhu Natanananda met Bhagavan up on the Hill at Skandasramam as a young man at the very beginning of his spiritual search. He recalls:

*In 1917-18 I was twenty years old and a schoolmaster. Being naturally of a pious disposition I used to go about from place to place to have darshan of the deities installed in temples. A noble soul who saw this brought to me of his own accord two books (in Tamil), Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam and Sri Vivekananda Vijayam, and asked me to read them. As soon as I had read them, I was seized with an intense longing for obtaining the vision of God and for finding the guru who would show the way to it... While I was engaged in this search, I heard about the extraordinary greatness of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. On May 2nd, 1918, I saw Sri Ramana for the first time at Skandasramam.*²

Kunjuswami recalls how Natanananda recounted the scene. Natanananda stood before Bhagavan, not daring

¹ *The Maharshi*, Nov/Dec 2020.

² *Ibid.*





to say anything as he was intimidated by Bhagavan's silent presence. He did not at that time understand Bhagavan's manner of interacting with visitors nor that Bhagavan's instruction came mostly through silence. Natanananda went back home but returned again and again to see Bhagavan, each time tongue-tied in the Master's presence. He then made the decision to go on *padayatra* to Varanasi. However, once reaching Sriperumpudur, he chanced to meet a Vaishnavite saint who, hearing of his plans, said to him, "What a stupid decision! The only person who can save you is Sri Ramana Maharshi. You must go back to him. I will not let you take even a single step beyond here."³

The Vaishnavite had spoken with such conviction that Natanananda found himself completely bewildered. His plans for Varanasi now in tatters, he was at a loss as what to do next. He wrote a long letter to Bhagavan, making use of the legendary 18th-century Tamil poet-philosopher, Thayumanavar who had once written, *See, crows are selfless and share the grub with their kind*. In other words, mightn't you do the same and share your grace with me? Natanananda requested Bhagavan not to be indifferent to the fate of longing souls. He added that his previous visit had been fruitless since there had been no contact between himself and the Master, and that if Maharshi gave his written permission, he would at once come to sit at his feet.

A month passed with no reply. Natanananda then penned a second letter and sent it by registered post, requesting Bhagavan to 'shower on him his grace'.

³ Kunjswami's *Reminiscences*.

He said, perhaps with the bravado that comes with youth, that he was determined to get upadesa from Bhagavan alone⁴:

*Whatever the number of rebirths I have to endure, still I am resolved to get my upadesa from you and you alone. So, for this purpose you must be reborn if you give me up in this birth as immature to receive your instruction. I swear to this.*⁵

A few days later Bhagavan appeared in a dream:

*Do not constantly think of me. You must first secure the favour of Maheswara. Meditate on Him and secure His grace. My help will follow as a matter of course.*⁶

Young Natanananda took the dream to heart and began to pray and meditate on Maheswara riding on a bull as depicted in the iconography of the family puja room. A few days later, Natanananda received a letter from Vasudeva Sastri saying, "Your two letters received. Maharshi does not reply to letters. You can come and see him in person."⁷

Natanananda set off for Tiruvannamalai. Following the direction of the dream, he spent the first night at the Big Temple to have Maheswara's darsan. That same night one of the temple priests, learning Natanananda's intention, tried to dissuade him from going to Bhagavan. The priest said:

I have known the Maharshi for several years. I used to go to his place for darshan frequently. He is stone-hearted. Even if you broke your head in his presence, he would be indifferent. To my

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Sri Ramana Darsanam*, p. 112.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Sadhu Natanananda's Upadesa Ratnavali §6

Iswara's Grace

When Divine Grace is only the reality which shines in the heart of every jiva as 'I am', disregarding or being ungracious towards reality will be fitting only for the jivas who do not think of it melting inwardly with love. Can the blame of not bestowing sweet Grace be fitting to that reality?

— Guru Vachaka Kovai, § 966

It is the nature of Iswara to bestow grace always. The jiva's lack of understanding of the nature of Iswara is the cause of the complaint that Iswara is not bestowing His grace. The Being called Sat remaining in the heart of all jivas always shines as I-I without any cause. Jiva, without understanding this Divine Grace, finds fault with Iswara saying "Alas, I have yet to know you! You have not bestowed your Grace on me!!" Finding fault with Iswara in this way is only due to the jiva's ignorance. —





*knowledge, he has not given upadesa to anyone. Why do you think you will get anything from him?*⁸

But Natanananda was not dissuaded. He thought that the priest was deluded and asked him not to talk like that. When the priest realised that nothing would deter the youngster from seeing Bhagavan, he made the following recommendation. “There is a saint called Seshadri Swami. It is not easy to get his darshan. Even if you see him, he may not even look at you or speak to you. Like a mad man, he talks to himself looking up and down. If you can meet him and get some instruction, you can take it as an auspicious sign.”

Natanananda, having heard of Seshadri Swami, perceived this as sound advice and the following day he went in search of him. He sat at the mutt for four hours, feeling increasingly hopeless about getting the chance to meet him. But just then a sadhu nearby said, “The Swami you are seeking is coming towards you.”⁹ Before the sadhu had finished his sentence, Seshadri Swami stood before Natanananda. Natanananda fell at his feet. Seshadri Swami lifted him up with both his hands and said: “Alas, child! Why are you heart-sore and anxious?”¹⁰

When it was clear to Seshadri that the youngster was in search of jnana, he said:

*What is jnana? After rejecting all objects one after the other as transient and unreal, that which remains is jnana. That is God. Everything is that and that alone. It is madness to run here and there under the illusion that jnana can be attained only by going to a hill or a cave. Get on with it without fear.*¹¹

Seshadri then just walked away and that was the end of the exchange. Brief though it was, Natanananda took the meeting as a positive sign. He went up the hill to Skandasramam, bowed and sat before Bhagvan. For five or six hours, no words were spoken. When the Maharshi was about to leave for his meal, J. V. Subrahmanya Iyer said to Bhagavan, “He is the one who wrote you the two letters.” Maharshi carefully looked at him and went away.

8 Kunjuswami’s *Reminiscences*.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 *Self-Realisation*, Chap XXVI. Kunjuswami narrates this in almost the same words.



Though Natananada did not speak to the Maharshi, he was determined that Bhagavan was his master and visited Skandsramam each month. After a year, he finally mustered the courage and said:

*I wish to learn and experience what your anugraham (grace) is, as people differ in their accounts of it.*¹²

Bhagavan replied:

*I am always giving my anugraham. If you cannot apprehend it, what am I to do?*¹³

Natanananda was puzzled. If Bhagavan’s grace was ever-flowing, then how was he missing it? Then he understood that Bhagavan’s silent samadhi was itself *anugraham* which all should aspire to. Nevertheless, the state of *mounam* was not clear to him, and he was troubled by it. He then said:

*It is my great desire that I should experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfill my desire.*¹⁴

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid. This exchange and the following one could be different versions of the same exchange. And the order also varies. This is just a plausible guess.

14 This is the lead-in to the second account of this exchange.





Bhagavan responded:

*Is it the body in front of me which desires to obtain my grace? Or is it the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not now looking upon itself as the body and making this request? If so, let the awareness first know its real nature. It will then automatically know God and my grace. The truth of this can be realised even here and now.*¹⁵

Natanananda remembered how Thayumanavar instructed in one of his songs that attributes and symbols should be transcended in meditation. Some days later Maharshi appeared to him in a dream:

*Let your vision be unified and withdrawn from objects external and internal. Meditate with your outlook equiposed.*¹⁶

Natanananda doubted the advice. But then Bhagavan in the dream affirmed that it was the true course, and added:

*Though your doubt is not wrong, try this for a short while and you will attain the Self-state.*¹⁷

Natanananda followed this ‘dream-upadesa’. But then another dream which included Natanananda’s father came:

Maharshi asked me, pointing to my father, ‘Who is this?’ With some hesitation about the philosophical accuracy of the answer, I said: ‘This is my father.’ Maharshi smiled at me significantly, and I added: ‘My answer is in accordance with common parlance and not with philosophy, because I am not the body.’ Maharshi drew me nearby and placed his palm first on my head and next

*on my right breast, pressing his finger over the nipple. It caused some pain, but as it was his anugraham I endured it quietly. I did not know then why he pressed the right breast and not the left. I awoke at once.”*¹⁸

Natanananda gathered from the above that the question about his father was with a view to make him give up completely his *debatmabuddhi* (I-am-the-body-idea) and that the touch on the head and breast was *bastha diksha*, the transmission of grace by the touch of the Guru’s palm on the disciple’s Heart.

Bhagavan also ‘explained it’ through Natanananda’s own subsequent experience. In his dream, Natanananda hears Bhagavan telling him the following:

*It is not the body which desires to obtain the grace. Therefore, it is awareness which shines here as ‘you’. To you who are of the nature of awareness there is no connection with the body, the senses, the vital airs, and the mind during sleep. On waking up you identify yourself with them, even without your knowledge. This is your experience. All that you have to do hereafter is to see that you do not identify yourself with them in the states of waking and dream and to remain yourself, as in the state of deep sleep. As you are by nature unattached, you must convert the state of ignorant deep sleep, in which you were formless and unattached, into conscious deep sleep. It is only by doing this that you can remain established in your real nature. You should never forget that this experience will come only through long practice. This experience will make it clear that your real nature is not different from the nature of God.”*¹⁹

(to be continued)

15 *Ramana-Pictorial Souvenir*, ‘The Turning Point’, Natanananda.

16 *Self-Realisation*, Chap XXVI.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 ‘The Turning Point’, Natanananda.

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Saraswati Puja in the Ashram Carpentry Shop



shop, the Ashram gosala, the Ashram gardens, and the Ashram grounds received Devi Saraswati’s and Sri Bhagavan’s blessing in a short arati. Afterward, Ashram vehicles were blessed with puja as well. —

On the morning of Saraswati day, Tuesday 23rd October, Saraswati puja was held in the Ashram carpentry shop. Various tools from the carpentry





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navaratri 2023

In the *Ramayana*, Lord Rama sought Durga's blessings before going into battle with Ravana and in the *Mahabharata*, Lord Krishna instructed Arjuna to worship Goddess Durga to assure a favourable outcome in the battle of Kurukshetra. Various scriptures and epics tell of the fierce encounter between Durga and Mahishasura, the demon who went about the world menacing Devas and humans. Durga was called in to help and succeeded in vanquishing the demon on the



ninth day of the battle. On the tenth day, her victory over evil was celebrated all around and is observed by tradition on the tenth *tithi* of *shukla paksha* as 'Vijayadasami'.

Ashram celebrations of Navaratri ('Nine Nights') this year commenced on Saturday 14th October when Goddess Yogambika was ceremoniously taken out in procession and installed in the Mantapam. The festival



began in earnest on the evening of the 15th with the *alankaram* of 1) *Meenakshi*, avatar of Parvati, consort of Lord Siva, considered the form of Goddess Mathangi; 2) the second night was *Gaja Lakshmi* seated on a lotus, flanked by two elephants anointing her in *abhishekam* with water from their trunks; 3) the third night, *Tapas*, the Goddess performing penance, 4) the fourth night, *Linga Puja*, depicted



Parvati in worship of the linga of the Lord, like the day she fashioned a linga of sand at the waterside in Kanchipuram. Lord Siva's voice could be heard from above, "Let this linga made by you remain here for the welfare of all humankind"; 5) the fifth night was *Rishabha Vahanam*, the great bull-devotee of Lord Siva, whose legs are the four Vedas; 6) the sixth night, *Sesha Sayanam*, the "Lord who sleeps on Sesha", the serpent-king of the Nagas. Devi (Parashakti), who



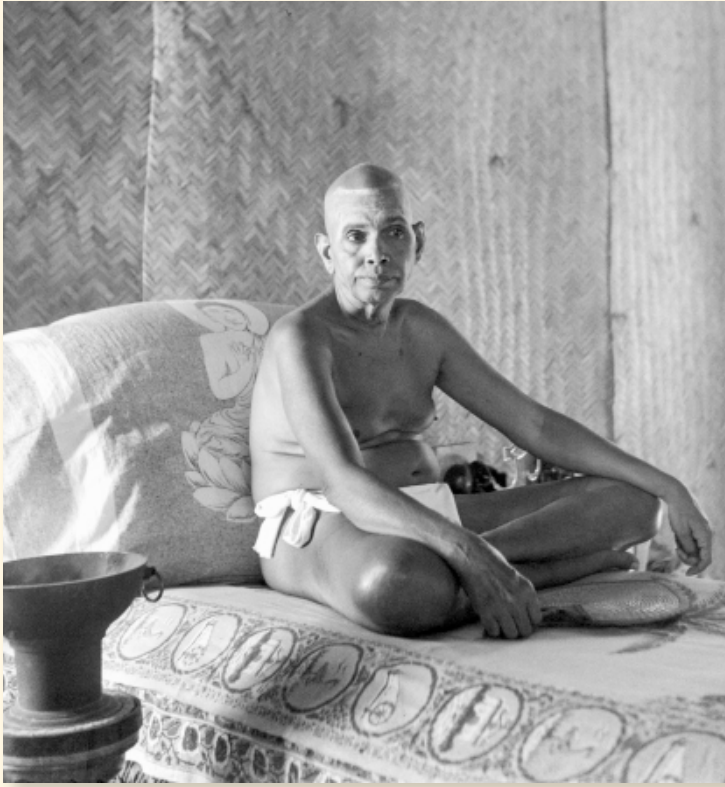


Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navaratri 2023 (cont.)

indwells Lord Vishnu, rests on the serpent, the archetypal symbol of wisdom and immortality; 7) the seventh night, *Venuganam*, “the song of the flute”, hints at the fact that even Lord Krishna’s power has its origins in Parashakti; 8) the eighth night, *Saraswati*, goddess of knowledge, music, arts and science, the consort of Brahma by whose wisdom Brahma was able to create the universe; 9) the ninth and final night, was *Mabishasura Mardini*, the “slayer of the buffalo-demon”. Mahishasura was born to a father, Rambha, king of the asuras,

and a buffalo (Princess Shyamala, cursed to be a buffalo). Mahishasura invaded heaven and defeated Indra. Since he was invincible to all male forms, the devas created Durga, who possessed the combined strength of all the devas. Durga and her army fiercely fought the demon and his forces for nine days until she finally killed Mahishasura on *dasami shukla paksha*, the ninth day of the waxing moon. On Vijayadasami, Tuesday the 24th, Goddess Yogambika was taken around in procession and reinstalled in the Garbhagriham. —





RAMANA REFLECTIONS

Ramana Devotion Amid the AI Revolution

It's a fool's errand to recount a story that has yet to unfold. Imagine penning the biography of a saint or some other historical figure yet to be born. Imagine writing an adventure story where the characters, setting and plot are in a state of drift, fundamentally shifting moment to moment as the drama unfolds. Like the ground moving beneath our feet, attempting to narrate the story of artificial intelligence is made difficult not only because it has yet to fully reveal itself, but it is a story so vast and replete with asymmetries and surprises born of unprecedented innovation and change that it may well supersede all earlier human tales.

One of the problems in discussing AI is that it looks like the *theory of everything*. If we understand intelligence truly, then we would seem to understand almost everything human. The endeavour to delineate intelligence is like trying to crack the door to peek at what cannot be contained in thought because intelligence is itself that which does the containing. This is the hall of mirrors that AI sets up before us.

AI, what Oxford University professor Nick Bostrom¹ calls 'the last human invention,' is racing ahead and surpassing what science fiction writers, in all their imaginative vigour, envisioned just a few decades ago. AI in 2023 is surpassing even what AI developers themselves envisioned just a few years ago.

When engineers at Google beheld their conversational AI, 'Bard', beginning to teach itself at high speed, they were baffled and could not understand what their chatbot² was doing. Over the previous months, Bard's intelligence had grown steadily but then suddenly graphs measuring self-learning went near-vertical. Part of the mystery was born of an incomplete understanding of the nature of intelligence. What was catching them off-guard was the strangeness of the emergent properties of intelligence. In humans, we would be referring to the complex traits and behaviours that arise when various elements of intelligence such as reasoning, memory, and problem-solving interact and combine. In machines, algorithms and data sets are the elements that enable machine learning and foster the conditions for emergence to arise.

But what *is* emergence? Emergence is a kind of synergy where the *whole is more than the sum of its parts*, i.e. the interplay between individual cognitive components brings unanticipated results. A key component of any true intelligence is the ability to adapt to conditions in the environment, to learn from mistakes and apply such knowledge to altogether new situations, in other words, to generalize existing knowledge so that it applies in unforeseen conditions.³

1 The founding director of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford known for his work on existential risk, the anthropic principle, human enhancement ethics, whole brain emulation and superintelligence risks.

2 A software application or web interface that mimics human conversation through text or voice.

3 This, it could be said, is the capacity for prediction, which all





It is the emergent properties in machine intelligence that allow it to go beyond simple information processing toward a multi-layered intelligence. Witnessing machines exhibiting characteristics and abilities that were formerly thought of as uniquely human impels us to ponder deeply the nature of (human) intelligence. Might features of human intelligence such as intuitive wisdom, subtle knowledge, instinct, prediction, feeling and sensing, all just be emergent properties of the basic processing constituents of the human mind? And where do these fit-in in relation to Bhagavan's Self and the Heart?

Getting our heads around 21st-century AI's emergent properties begins by taking stock of the enormity of the data sets involved and the high speed with which massive processors sift through them. Generative AI learns patterns by analysing a wide variety of data such as images, videos, audio, text, and 3D models, and then takes advantage of such knowledge to generate unique original data.

Open AI's development of the large-scale language model GPT-4⁴ involved a computing infrastructure the size of a warehouse, not to mention the substantial electrical power grid and hefty processors to push colossal volumes of data. Developed with 100 trillion parameters⁵ (about five hundred times the size of GPT-3)⁶, GPT-4's data sets consist of a vast swath of accumulated human knowledge. But here is the truly remarkable thing: experts tell us that by the end of 2024, GPT-4 will be on our cell phones, indeed, on virtually every cell phone without the need for internet connection.⁷ How is that possible? Well, it's not merely a question of file compression—and here

humans and animals possess to one or another extent, and now machines, too.

4 GPT-4 means Generative Pre-trained Transformer (version 4).

5 Parameters refer to the variables within a machine learning model that are adjusted during the machine's training. They allow for the learning of patterns, features, and relationships. Models with a significant number of parameters such as GPT-4 exhibit an extensive capacity for learning complex patterns and generating highly nuanced and contextually relevant outputs, making them particularly effective for tasks like natural language processing and image generation. (GPT-4)

6 Open AI's CEO, Sam Altman has suggested that GPT 5 will be coming out late in 2024 or early 2025.

7 From Emad Mostaque.

we would be talking about 'unheard of compression', i.e. getting hundreds of thousands of gigabytes of data down to two gigabytes.⁸ But as a highly efficient neural network that learns by analysing data, GPT-4 has succeeded in establishing a 'set of principles for creative understanding'. What are we talking about here?⁹ We are talking about intelligence.

Britisher Emad Mostaque, the CEO and Co-Founder of *Stability AI*, had this to say: 'GPT-4 is not a programme; it is intelligence. It can get accepted into Stanford Law and pass the California bar exam.'¹⁰

The AI revolution is often spoken of as something far off in the future. But the future seems to have arrived earlier than expected, and AI is already transforming the world. Indeed, we are in the early stages of something tremendous, if not simultaneously daunting. The fact that Elon Musk, Sam Altman, Demis Hassabis, Yoshua Bengio and one thousand other tech leaders¹¹, researchers, and AI developers signed an open letter urging a moratorium on further development of AI is a testament to potential perils it poses over the long term. The letter states:

*We are locked in an out-of-control race to develop and deploy ever more powerful digital minds that no one—not even their creators—can understand, predict or reliably control.*¹²

Establishing a regulatory framework for guiding AI development would have been a good idea some time back, but AI is moving so quickly that, alas, the window of opportunity seems to have passed and many experts, among them, Geoffrey Hinton¹³, now agree it's too late. While policy makers would do well to educate themselves about AI¹⁴ and its potential dangers, pulling the plug on

8 Ibid.

9 That machines can do this is not surprising given the volume of data, all retained with perfect recall, available instantaneously all at once at every moment in time.

10 Ibid.

11 Elon Musk founder, chairman, CEO and chief technology officer of SpaceX and Tesla; Sam Altman is the CEO of OpenAI who created GPT-4; Demis Hassabis, CEO of Google DeepMind and Yoshua Bengio, French computer scientist noted for his work on artificial neural networks and deep learning.

12 *New York Times*, 29 March 2023, Technology Section.

13 Geoffrey Hinton, often referred to as the Godfather of AI, signed the letter too, but admitted its futility given, among other things, the advanced state of existing AI.

14 On Monday October 30th 2023, US President Biden issued





AI development, even if that were still possible, won't change anything at this late stage. AI is here and there's no getting the genie back into the bottle.

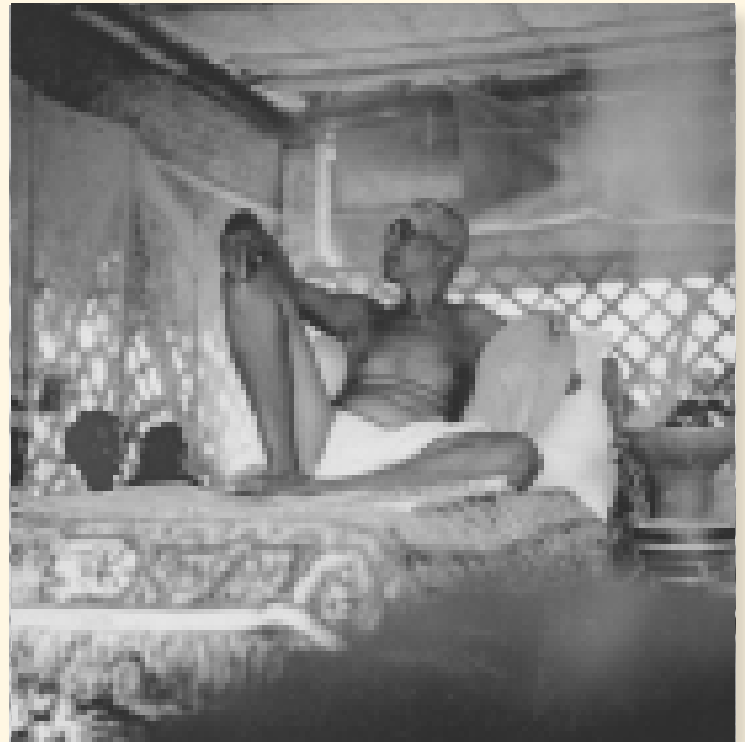
Change abounds in this age of change and the pace of change is about to accelerate appreciably. If change is stressful, even anxiety provoking, stress and anxiety are sure to ramp up in the coming months and years. Innovation will be the name of the game for corporations and nations struggling to compete, ever modifying their AI-assisted business models to keep pace. But innovation probably has an upper limit and hyper innovation may find itself without adequate soil, i.e. stable social ecosystems within which to thrive. Some fear that rapid large-scale changes may prove to be at odds with basic human social, cultural, psychological, and ethical interests as the rules and customs for human relationality begin to shift rapidly and substantially.

In examining the flurry of responses and divergence of views over the last six months, it seems that AI in this initial phase will impact some regions of the world positively and others less so. Some are looking at so-called 'narrow AI' and its impact in the near term, while others are looking at 'general AI' and superintelligence ten years out.

On the positive side in the near term, regions of the world with simple economies based on agriculture and small industry are likely to expand. A general trend for AI in 2023 and for the coming few years is what might be called *the migration of expertise*. Select tech knowledge which, till now, has been the preserve of elite universities, defense departments, well-funded research institutions, government-sponsored or privately funded research think-tanks and big tech¹⁵, is now migrating out to the world at large, to so-called underdeveloped economies. This contrasts with widely held assumptions about government and big tech monopolization of AI, a key feature till now. But AI is becoming widely available as demonstrated above in respect of the projected circulation of GPT-4 in

the first AI executive order, requiring safety assessments: see <http://www.cnn.com>.

¹⁵ The Big Seven are Microsoft, Google, Apple, Amazon, Meta, Nvidia, and Tesla.



2024. Professional know-how and specialized skills are becoming widely available. With the proliferation of AI-powered software tools and platforms, individuals and organizations are increasingly in a position to leverage expert-level insights and guidance at next to no cost. If one points out that one-third of the world's population is not on the internet and that billions of people do not have the reading skills to interface with the internet much less to take advantage of AI-powered tools, it should be mentioned that digital saturation is an eventual outcome for current trends, among them, the trend for education to be likewise revolutionised. Teenagers in Africa who do not even know how to read or write, nor have any school to go to, are gaining access to AI-driven language-learning systems tailored to their needs.¹⁶ This is a natural unfolding having nothing to do with UN-sponsored humanitarian outreach but proceeding by its own momentum and bringing about the transmission of high impact software accessible on simple low-cost devices. We recall how micro-banking spread across rural Africa in recent years, even among illiterate agrarian populations, simply owing to the ubiquity of cell phones.

¹⁶ Emad Mostaque makes a strong case for this in various places.





Parents in middling economies around the world who can ill-afford to send their kids to university in Europe or America will have alternatives as new higher learning systems evolve digitally. If this sounds like an idealised vision, the fact is, AI is already revolutionizing access to elite knowledge. From 2023 onward, expertise will gradually cease to be the unique privilege of select institutions and nations as virtual assistants and chatbots provide problem-solving strategies and comprehensive information across various domains. Through AI-driven knowledge-sharing, remote areas and under-performing communities and micro-economies are gaining access to educational resources and professional guidance, levelling the playing field in what can only be called *the democratization of expertise*.

Now if this picture is benign, some argue that the outlook elsewhere may not be as bright. Consider that portions of every economy, and many of the so-called developed economies, may not do as well. Why? It stands to reason that businesses and economies tied to expertise, i.e. those who preserve and augment expertise as a key feature of their economic vitality, stability and growth, will suddenly find themselves, so to say, peddling water at the riverside. If they are the only ones with access to the river, then the value of their commodities remains stable. But if virtually everyone everywhere has access to the river, all can drink to their heart's content, gratis.

The prospect that expertise might be distributed and made available everywhere has to be tempered by the consideration that big tech has amassed huge infrastructures to augment their resilience in the coming storm. The storage and management of vast amounts of data would seem to give them an immense advantage and ensure their ongoing global reach and tech dominance, especially in the long term. Still, it is anyone's guess how this is all going to play out.

India, known for the ingenuity of her young skilled labour force and the diverse sectors of her large economy consisting of services, IT, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, the automotive industry, agriculture, and manufacturing should thrive

under the influence of widely available AI expertise. Why? The elite-level training formerly required for, say, start-ups in Silicon Valley are now being outsourced to AI and thus available to youth all over the subcontinent. The unlimited infusion of elite tools and software resources can only inspire innovation and dynamize economic activity in a wide variety of sectors in India, making her ever more competitive in the international arena.¹⁷ But again, there's no crystal ball in all of this. Even AI itself cannot adequately model this unprecedented phase in human history. And yet, some general principles may be identified.

Most experts agree that occupations and professions interfaced with computers could be disrupted in the near term. Even computer programmers could be out of a job since GPT-5, set to arrive in 15-18 months, will code more efficiently and cost-effectively than human coders. Why would any company pay humans to code when GPT-5 can do it cheaper and more effectively? One expert argues, however, that the number of coders will not decrease with GPT-5 but will substantially increase. In fact, he says, in the future there will be a 'billion coders'. How can that be? It is simply that all users and anyone with a smart phone will be AI-assisted and will in effect become a coder, interfacing with a chatbot and causing 'the barriers to creating programs to disappear altogether.'¹⁸

AI is already impacting occupations such as data entry, graphic design, accounting, assembly lines, customer service work, journalism and videography. White collar jobs are likely to be hit. As AI-powered algorithms are increasingly used to make complex financial decisions and predict stock market trends, financial analysts will be less in demand. AI-driven legal research and document analysis will reduce the need for large staffs in law firms. Medical professionals will be positively impacted by AI assistance such as by Google's Med-PaLM 2, a file of just a few hundred gigabytes that is matching or outperforming human

¹⁷ Recent job loss in India's tech sector born of the influence of GPT-4 is no doubt temporary and a natural redistribution of human and machine resources is sure to follow.

¹⁸ Emad Mostaque.





clinicians.¹⁹ Med-PaLM 2 responds to complex medical queries by sifting through hundreds of thousands of medical file histories and journal articles. If thousands of medical findings are published around the world each day²⁰, no human clinician can be expected to keep pace. But Med-PaLM 2 can. It is projected that economic incentives related to lower premiums for medical insurance co-pay will demand that health care professionals be AI assisted.²¹ In the long term, AI will help collate mass volumes of research information to assist in discovering better treatments for cancer and other untreatable conditions.

The increasing speed of AI's influence is astonishing. *Synthetic media* is likely to transform the public sphere. Even a single photo and a few minutes of voice sample are enough for AI to mimic living persons. Sam Harris²² and others worry that within 18 months the internet could be disrupted simply owing to the proliferation of counterfeit articles, videos, photos

19 Ibid.

20 Peter Diamandis in his interview with Emad: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WOjjgyZPj8&t=2423s>

21 Ibid.

22 <https://youtube.com/watch?v=GmlrEgLGozw&t=3565s>

and news. Others feel that such disruptions will only be temporary as software systems are developed and implemented to filter out forged material.

GPT-5 will enable anyone to produce their own videos and films with members of the family appearing as real-life characters in a drama written by family members themselves or, if preferred, scripted by GPT-5. Synthetic media is a real thing and we know this simply by the recent four-month strike staged by the *Screen Actors Guild* of Hollywood in part because human actors are being replaced by digital ones. To stay competitive, film industries around the world are moving away from costly on-location filmmaking toward digitally generated sets, chatbot-authored screenplays, and digital facsimiles of living film personalities.

Ramana Devotion in the AI Era

Now why should Ramana devotees concern themselves with all this? Should we not rather occupy ourselves with Bhagavan's teaching and get on with the work of self-inquiry and surrender? Should we not avoid the distractions posed by the world, no matter how erratic and changeful they might appear?



Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Saraswati Puja in the Ashram Bookstall

In the early afternoon of Saraswati day, Tuesday 23rd October, Saraswati puja was held in the Ashram bookstall. Samples of Ashram books were laid on the altar as well as instruments from the Ashram Archives and the Ashram Dispensary, all to receive Saraswati's and Sri Bhagavan's blessing in the brief *arati* rite. The various stations of the Ashram bookstall as well as the Ashram offices were blessed with puja on this auspicious day. —





We should. At the same time, we often consult the weatherman when a thunderhead or a cyclone is moving in. In this case, we are not sure what kind of storm is coming at us or when. But something is coming.

Sages from Upanishadic times advised seekers to take stock of social and environmental conditions—floods, famine, drought, bandits, war, and other forms of social upheaval—and adjust their sadhanas accordingly.

The takeaway in all this is that the AI revolution in the short term is a mixed bag of enhancement and disruption.²³ Gauging the pace of change down the stretch will be key in assessing society's ability to adjust to it. Traditional customs and collective conduct are sure to be altered as we enter this peculiar new world. Large-scale shifts may at first be imperceptible precisely because they are so large in scale. Down through history paradigm shifts have generally been gradual and geographically non-synchronous, but the present transition is evenly distributed across the globe with every nation and culture being impacted simultaneously.

If intelligence is something we cling to as a part of our identity, something that we imagine elevates us above the rest of creation, we should remind ourselves that Bhagavan never said intelligence belonged to the Self.

²³ Emad's words.

For Bhagavan, intelligence and all *manasic* functions of the mind come and go with the body. True knowledge by contrast is the ability to distinguish the true from the false and the Real from the unreal. While not wholly *other* from intelligence, true knowledge is born of the purity that arises once free of past-life *samskaras*. If Bhagavan tells us that the Self does not lie outside the five *kosas*,²⁴ then machine intelligence, sourced from data sets, even if vast and commanding, cannot be the Self. As has been said, the art in this Ramana path is remembering that *nothing is to be adhered to as I or mine*.²⁵ All we cling to and call *myself*, such as body, body-consciousness, and the gifts of the personality are wholly otherwise. Bhagavan says:

*Let there be no confusion with the body. The body is the result of thoughts. Thoughts will occur as usual, but you will not be affected... And actions form no bondage. Bondage is only the false notion, "I am the doer." Leave off such thoughts and let the body and senses play their role, unimpeded by your interference.*²⁶

Ramana devotees may have a contribution to make in the upcoming decade. Bhagavan's teachings will become ever more valuable to a world in flux and serve as a counterpoint to the fluidity and dislocation born of rapid change.

²⁴ *Who Am I?* §23.

²⁵ Anatta-lakkhana Sutta.

²⁶ *Talks*, §46.

Bhagavan's Ayurvedic Verses: Sori Sirangu Arippu Marundu

Sori Sirangu Arippu Marundu

Karuñjīra kamvasambu kaḍukkāyp pūvuñ
kāṭṭātip pūvuḍaṇē karpū ratti;
ṇaruñ cūrṇan tēṅgāyney yadaṇō ḍiṭṭā
laripperippu raṇaṅgaḷelā maganḍru pōmē.

Karuñ-jīrakam vasambu kaḍukkāyp pūvum
kāṭṭātip pūvuḍaṇē karpūrattin
aruñ cūrṇam tēṅgāy-ney adaṇōḍu iṭṭāl
arippu-erippu raṇaṅgaḷ-ellām aganḍru pōmē.

Ingredients: black cumin seeds, sweet flag or calamus, myrobalan flower, yellow bell orchid flower, camphor, coconut oil

Preparation: Finely grind the above herbs and dip in coconut oil.

Benefits: For getting rid of itches, rashes, and sores.





Ramana devotees have never been ones to put their heads in the sand. And Bhagavan never recoiled from circumstances, no matter how challenging. While none of us will be able to sidestep what is sure to be one of the greatest transitions in human history, our job as devotees is to remain composed and clear-headed. If the pace of life born of growing digital intensification in the workplace and in the world at large continues to accelerate, we simply note the fact and strive evermore diligently to keep Bhagavan's teaching at the centre of our lives. We practice ever-renewing patience, with ourselves and with others, in the face of the uncertainty circulating through the collective. We recall the resilience of the human heart and the intractableness of the collective will and remember that ordinary people around the globe all have the same longings, all have a stake in keeping the world livable.

As for the sand, we may have to keep our heads a little *in* it, i.e. in the 'Heart-sand', as one devotee called it. What does it mean to *keep our heads in the Heart-sand*? It means staying close to Bhagavan's teaching and turning ever toward Bhagavan's understanding of the ultimate nature of things. Bhagavan says, *what IS alone is*. Calling such words to mind better enables us to maintain a sound perspective.

In the upcoming issue, we will look at some of these themes and see if we might try and build a bridge between the experience of a rapidly changing world and the eternal vision Bhagavan bequeathed to us.²⁷ —

(to be continued)

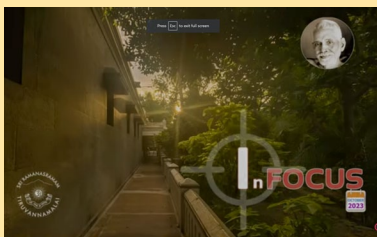
²⁷ Much of the content of this article leans on the work of Emad Mostaque, a masterful and compassionate voice in the AI world. For interviews with Emad, see the following:
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WOjigyZPj8&t=2423s>>
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Se91Pn3xxSs>>.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Viswanatha Swami Day



Viswanatha Swami was the son of Bhagavan's first maternal cousin who, in his youth, had been a sympathiser of Gandhi's freedom movement. Once coming to Bhagavan, he lived out his life in Ramanasramam and later served as *Mountain Path* editor until his demise in 1979.

On the morning of Monday, 23rd October as the final days of the 2023 Navaratri celebrations were underway, a handful of devotees gathered at Viswanatha Swami's samadhi for the chanting of *Aksaramanamalai* followed by arati and the distribution of prasad. —



Announcement: The Latest *In Focus*

For live streaming of the Tamil Parayana and Vedaparayana each day, Mon-Sat, 5-6.45 pm IST, go to: <<https://youtube.com/@SriRamanasramam/videos>>.
For the October *In Focus*, see: <<https://youtu.be/hgej4OgKHt4>>

