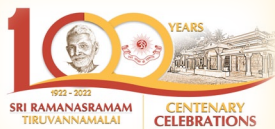


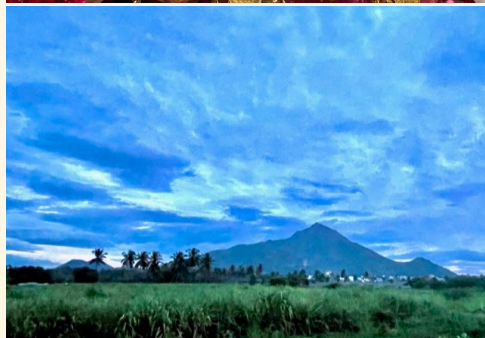
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SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM



EXTENDED NAVARATRI EDITION
OCTOBER 2022 VOL. 16, NO.10



Photos: D. Thiagarajan and Dr. Carlos Lopez



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EXTENDED NAVARATRI EDITION
OCTOBER 2022 VOL. 16, NO. 10

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

As we go to press, Navaratri is underway in a grand manner and the Ashram is beautifully decorated as Mother bestows her abundant grace on all in her presence.

In this October issue we look at scenes from Navaratri celebrations of the past (see p. 6) and take up a personal account of the District Court Judge, T.S. Anantha Murthy who spent ten days with Bhagavan in April of 1937. Thirty years later he recounted his experiences in a book published under the title, *The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi* (see p. 3). Finally, we look at the question of how best to make use of Bhagavan's inquiry in sifting through the abundance of information in the digital era (see p. 9).

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <https://sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org.

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Saranagati

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Calendar of Ashram Events

4th Oct (Tues) Saraswati Puja
5th Oct (Wed) Vijayadasami
7th Oct (Fri) Pradosham
8th Oct (Sat) Natarajar Abhishekam
9th Oct (Sun) Full Moon
17th Oct (Mon) Punarvasu
22nd Oct (Sat) Sani Pradosham/Viswanathaswami Day

24th Oct (Mon) Deepavali
30th Oct (Sun) Skanda Sashti Soora Samharam
5th Nov (Sat) Sani Pradosham
7th Nov (Mon) Fullmoon Annabhishekam
8th Nov (Tues) Mastan Day
9th Nov (Wed) Annamalai Swami Day
14th Nov (Mon) Punarvasu





IN PROFILE

T.S. Anantha Murthy

T. S. Anantha Murthy was a District Court Judge in Mysore suffering ill-health when he chanced upon some articles in the newspaper about Bhagavan Ramana. When he heard stories from pilgrims who had been to Ramanasramam, he made up his mind to go see the master himself. At the end of March 1937, the judge and his wife travelled to Ramanasramam during which time he got help from Bhagavan:

With bare feet, my wife and I and a companion entered the hall of Ramanasramam. It was filled with devout men and women, who were all squatting on the floor. The hall had two entrance doors and half a dozen large windows. We entered through the door which was just opposite the sofa on which Sri Ramana Maharshi was found seated. He was quite naked except for the white cotton kuppina. His sofa was in the north-eastern corner of the hall and heavy pillows covered with white cotton covers were perched at the eastern end of the sofa and the sage was reclining on them with his two legs fully stretched towards the western wall. His large head was held erect, and his large eyes were beautiful to look at. The eyeballs were milk white in colour. His eyes appeared

to be looking at some spot on the opposite wall and his eye lids were not blinking at all. Incense was burning in his vicinity and there was a pleasing perfume in the air. My wife and I felt awe as we stood and looked at the great sage. It was a memorable experience to behold a mahatma of his eminence. We humbly conveyed our reverence and then sat down. Women devotees were found seated separately and so my wife sat in their group. I sat down among the men.

Coinciding with their arrival, Vedapatasala students began their daily recitation from *Taittiriya Upanishad*. As Bhagavan sat perfectly still, the visitors could discern no movement whatsoever in his limbs as he seemed to be listening intently:

Though he appeared to be looking at the wall, he was not seeing anything in particular. His mind was, as we could easily realise, absorbed within. I was astonished to see the sage keeping his eyes wide open without blinking for a long period of time. Men and women who sat in the hall belonged to all castes and nationalities. Two or three devotees who sat near me were foreigners, sitting uncomfortably with their trousers. However, all were listening to the recitation with rapt attention.

The Vedapatasala students stood up and prostrated to Bhagavan and went out of the hall:

I was familiar with the verses of Taittiriya Upanishad. The chanting was in the right style and I was thrilled while listening to it. I further felt that Sri Ramana, who sat in front of me in such an engrossed manner, was Brahman in human form and that spiritual illumination was enshrined in him. He was not only august to look at but also an inspiring figure. His ascetic garb and his well-chiselled features commanded awe and devotion. When such feelings were passing through my mind, Sri Ramana moved his head and looked around, and while doing so, he looked at me. There was benignity writ large on his broad forehead. There was simplicity and innocence in his movements. He picked up his walking stick and slowly moved out of the hall. I too came out and watched him walking slowly towards the hill on the northern side. A half-naked, young attendant, carrying water in a kamandalam, followed the sage a few yards behind. Sri Ramana was tall and his arms long. His legs had lost their normal strength and so he carried his heavy body with some effort. His neck wobbled now and then, indicating that the muscles were weak. His age was just fifty-six years and three months and the hair on his head had turned grey. He and his attendant disappeared behind a boulder of the hill.

Chinnaswami approached Anantha Murthy and informed him that ladies were not allowed to stay





in the Ashram after sundown and that his wife would have to join the other ladies in making a trip by bullock cart to a house in town where they were accommodated. There they would be served a night meal. The ashram cart was on hand to take them all to their quarters and bring them back the following morning:

My wife and some other ladies sat in the ashram cart and in a few minutes left the premises. By that time, it had become dark. Kerosene lamps were lighted here and there in the courtyard. After they had gone away to town, I was taken into the dining room. It was a small, tiled building in those distant days. It was situated a few yards to the south of the hall, and it was lighted with some kerosene lamps.

Entering the dining room, Anantha Murthy saw visitors sitting in front of plantain leaves spread on the floor along the walls of the room. Indeed, no women were among those gathered for the night meal. A slightly raised brick platform was situated on one side of the room. On it a plantain leaf had been laid out. Within a few minutes Bhagavan walked into the dining room. He sat in *padmasanam* on the platform to eat his supper along with the visitors:

There was complete informality among the guests assembled there, though everyone of us looked at Sri Ramana with profound reverence. Devotees of the sage were serving as voluntary cooks and attendants. Some of them were young and some old. I was delighted to sit and take food sitting about five feet from Sri Ramana on that memorable night. It was his grace that had enabled me and my wife to undertake the pilgrimage. The meal served to everyone was quite simple. It consisted of rice, one vegetable curry, pickle, dabl and buttermilk. Sri Ramana ate his meal slowly. He did not leave any remnants of food on his plantain leaf. He did not speak with any one of the guests, though he looked at them. He was wearing only his usual koupina, while the visitors sitting that night before him were wearing shirts and dhotis. The servers were wearing only dhotis and they had no covering on the upper part of their bodies. Dim kerosene oil lamps were found burning in both the small kitchen and in the dining room. The supper was finished within fifteen minutes. It was about 7:30 in the night.

After the meal was finished, Bhagavan stood up and walked out into the courtyard to wash his hands and feet:

I followed his example and washed my hands with water taken in a mug from the same big vessel. The other visitors too helped themselves in the same manner and dispersed. Sri Ramana then picked up his stick



Vedapatasala boys in the hall with Bhagavan, ca. 1937

and slowly walked into the hall. I was eager to talk to him. So, I went behind him and entered the hall through the same door which I had used about two hours previously. Sri Ramana sat down on the sofa. A bright petromax lamp was then burning about twenty feet away from him. It illuminated the hall with sufficient brightness. I stood about three feet from him. There was no one else in the hall. In fact, I longed to talk to him when there was nobody with us. The kind of opportunity which I was longing for was thus available to me without any special effort on my part. There was no need to draw his attention towards me. The merciful sage lifted up his face and smiled slightly. He did not utter even one word. He did not make any other gesture. However, his gentle smile gave me sufficient courage to address him.

With folded hands, I said to him as follows: 'Sir, I have come from Bangalore. I do not know Tamil. Please permit me to talk in English. I have not been in good health for some months. Dyspeptic troubles are the cause of my physical suffering. Doctors have not been able to cure me. My eyes are always burning, and I feel giddy now and then. I have come here to obtain your blessings.' Sri Ramana heard these words patiently. He immediately lifted his serene face once again and replied as follows: 'All your troubles will disappear of their own accord.'

These were the nine English words uttered by him in his mellow voice. I was filled with delight and gratitude on hearing the words of benediction so readily vouchsafed by the great sage. I prostrated to him and left the hall with a heart filled with joy and relief. I entered the guest room and slept by the side of another gentleman who had also come to the ashram to obtain darshan of the sage. It was a memorable occasion. My long-cherished desire to obtain darshan of Sri Ramana had thus been fulfilled. In addition, about two hours after I had set foot in Ramanasramam all my bodily troubles ceased to torment me as the result of the great blessing which I so readily received from the sage.





The Old Hall, ca. 1937

The following morning, the women who had been sent into town arrived in the same bullock cart:

My wife also came with them and reported that arrangements at the women's lodge were satisfactory and that she had slept with five or six other ladies who had come from distant places. She and I entered the hall and sat down on the floor after prostrating to Sri Ramana, who was seated on the sofa in a state of samadhi.

The hall was filled with devotees:

Some of them were meditating with closed eyes. By then I had read the small book 'Who Am I?' and understood the method

of vicara described in it. I closed my eyes and started Self-enquiry within my own mind. The hall, though filled with men and women, was free from noise, and peace reigned in the surroundings. I drove away my thoughts as and when they crossed my mind, saying to myself, 'I am not this,' and 'this thought is not I,' and so on. This is the kind of instruction found in that small book. My wife sat among the ladies and meditated in her own way and I engaged myself for a long time in the kind of meditation described above. More than one hour passed. I then experienced a sense of total blankness.

At 10 am Bhagavan folded his legs and sat up on the sofa. Taking advantage of that opportunity:

I approached the sofa and addressed Sri Ramana in English thus: 'Bhagavan, I have till now been conducting self-enquiry as taught in Who Am I? I do not see anything. I see a blank. May I know if Atman is seen as a light, or is it a blank?' Sri Ramana heard this question put by me. He sat up smartly on his seat and with a serious countenance replied thus: 'What? Is THAT a blank?' He laid emphasis on the demonstrative pronoun THAT, which he had used in his reply. He did not say anything more. He sat as serenely as before and closed his eyes. I did not have the courage to put any more questions to clear my doubt.¹ —

(to be continued)

¹ *The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, T.S. Anantha Murthy, Chapter Sixteen.

Matrubhutesvara 100: Jagadisha Sastri's Matrubhutesvara Ashtakam (verses 7-8)

गंगाचन्द्रकलाधरोसिशिरसि
श्रीमातृभूतेशते
वामार्धैकरुणारसार्द्रहृदया
योगेश्वरीराजते ।
शीतांगाश्चभुजंगमाःकरपदोः
किञ्चाग्निशं
सौख्यमिदं कथं यदि वसे
श्रित्नेन तपे मम ॥७॥

माताभूद्रमणस्वयाभगवत-
स्सौन्दर्यनाम्नीसती
पश्चात्सैवसमस्तलोकजननी-
त्वेनापिसंपूजिता ।
अद्यत्वेतुविहायसापरिणता
स्तीत्वंपुमाकारतः
किं गतिं क्रमरूपतश्चकसति
श्रीमातृभूतेश्वरः ॥८॥

7. Ganga chandrakalaadharosi sirasi Sri Matrubhutesha tae
Vaamaardhe karunaa rasaardhra hridayaa yogeswari raajatae
Sritaangaascha bhujangamaaha karapado kinchaabhisheko nisam
Sahyam saityamitham katham yadi vaseschitte na tapte mama

7. You adorned River Ganga and have the crescent moon
adorning your head. One half of your body is Mother
Yogeswari whose heart is moist by flowing compassion. In
your hands and around your legs curl cool-bodied snakes. You
perform oblations three times per day. How can you bear all

this coolness if you are not residing in my mind burning because of the three kinds of worries?

8. Maataabhudh ramanasya yaa bhagavatas soundarya naamni sathi/Paschaat saiva samastaloka janani thvenaaphi sampoojitaa
Adyatvetu vihaaya saa parinataa stritvam pumaakaaratho/Lingaati kramaropatascha lasati Sri Matrubhutesvara

8. The one who first manifested as the mother of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, named Alagammal, was later worshipped as Mother of the World. However, leaving behind identification with the body of a woman and beyond the three types of bodies, this same one shines as Matrubhutesvara. —





Snapshots from Navaratri in Days Gone By

That Navaratri has a deep history in Tiruvannamalai goes without saying. Navaratri goes back to pre-history when Goddess Durga killed the demon Mahishasura. While performing her tapas at Arunachala, Parvati had to fight the demon. When the demon tried to fight Her within the precincts of Arunachala, she told him:

This is a sacred place where only sages and devotees of Arunachala can reside, therefore do not incur the wrath of my Lord and be burnt by Him. It is ordained that I should fight you and kill you.

Hence, she led him out to the perimeter of Tiruvannamalai. After a nine-day battle, she slayed him and returned to the town proper where she continued her tapas. In killing the demon Mahishasura, Goddess Parvati got the name *Mahishasura Mardini*.

Kalyana Mantapa

Devotees will remember an account from the days of Bhagavan's early life on the Hill. It was at the time of the construction of the Kalyana Mantapa in the Big Temple during Navaratri, when Bhagavan put on

the *Panganamam* i.e., the distinctive forehead markings worn by Vishnavaites, and join some Vaishnavites at the temple to hear a Navaratri bhajan troupe. Bhagavan narrates:

As I was afraid that somebody might recognise me and start doing all sort of worship, I put on a dhoti of Palaniswami and covered my body with another cloth, put on the namam as to give the appearance of a Vaishnavait. The administrators of the temple knew me well. I wanted to avoid them. They however, recognised me at the gate and came after me saying, 'Swami! Swami! You also have come here to see the Swami? You yourself are a Swami, aren't you?' What to do? I felt I was deceiving myself. I managed to evade them and get inside but I felt that everyone was looking at me. I did not see the Mandapam, nor could I see anything else. I turned back intending to return home unnoticed but the chief amongst the archakas caught me again at the gate. 'Swami! Swami! You have come in this dress? Aba! How nice it is, Swami! Please wait.' So saying, he stopped me; and addressing his assistants, he said, 'You fellow! Bring a garland of flowers. Bring sandal paste. Bring prasadam. Our Brahmanaswami has come here putting on the dress of Lord Krishna. It is our great luck.' So saying, they began to shower temple honours on me. I somehow managed to escape their attentions and went away.

Later, I tried several times to hoodwink them and somehow go to the temple but invariably they recognised me and gave me all the temple honours. Thereupon I gave up all further attempts and stopped going to the temple altogether. ¹

¹ Letters, 8-12-1949: Bhagavan goes on to say: *It is the same with everything. You can stay anywhere without fear if you are in your real form. If you put on a dress to deceive others, you will be afraid every minute that someone might catch you at your deception and so your mind becomes your own enemy and troubles you.*

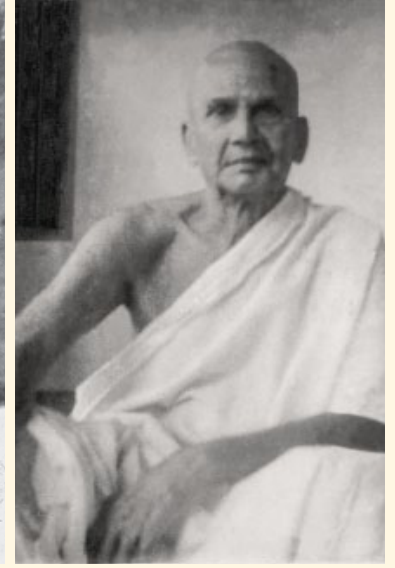




Hara Sahasranamam and Saraswati Puja

We may also recall how just a few years later, Ganapati Muni concluded his thousand verses dedicated to Maheswara on Vijayadasami Day. The Muni was deeply devoted to the Divine Mother and when residents of the town came to the temple during the days of Navaratri to hear him recite the newly composed verses, they would invariably invite him to their homes for meals. Ganapati Muni composed new *slokas* each day and recited them before a gathering of scholars, poets, devotees, yogis, and ascetics from Arunachala Hill, among them, Seshadri Swami. On the tenth day of Navaratri, Ganapati Muni offered Lord Arunachaleswara with his freshly concluded *Hara Sahasranamam*, one thousand verses in praise of Lord Siva. The elite of the town heard the recitation and offered the Muni a teaching post in the principal Sanskrit school of Tiruvannamalai. This masterful composition was unfortunately lost to posterity when the British came to arrest the Muni for his freedom activities. In his haste, he hid the work in a cleft in the rocks at the foot of a dry riverbed. When rain fell unexpectedly, the manuscript was washed away and lost forever.

Since the early days at Ramanasramam, Navaratri has been celebrated with great devotion. On the eighth-day veneration of Goddess Saraswati, books are worshipped. Readers may remember how one Navaratri when books from the Ashram book depot had been placed near Bhagavan in preparation for the Saraswati puja,



Muruganar entered the hall and was quite amused. He gave Bhagavan a quizzical look and received an enigmatic smile in reply. Muruganar could not understand the need for sacraments in the Hall when God Himself was seated with them. Worship of books in Bhagavan's presence struck him as superfluous as they were in the presence of the Repository of all Knowledge, i.e., Bhagavan Sri Ramana. Muruganar penned the following lines which he handed to Bhagavan:

These books are like the crushed sugarcane from which all the juice has been extracted. Of what value is the crushed sugarcane when one has the beautiful sugar-figurine in one's possession? You are the personification of the essence of all the knowledge contained in all the scriptures. When you

Sri Ramanasramam Navaratri Alankara: A Retrospective



In 1942, *Laksharchana* (reciting the *Lalitha Sahasranamam* one hundred times) was performed for the first time during Navaratri and this became an Ashram tradition. At that time, drawing master Narayanaswami was doing the alankaras. Later Kittu Mama who had come to the Ashram as a Vedapatasala student in 1935, carried out this honourable duty right up till his dying day on the steps of the Ashram office in October 1995, just four days after he decorated the deity at Navaratri for the last time. Following his departure, the Navaratri alankara decorations fell to the assistant priest, Appichi Mama who took up this responsibility until his passing away in July 2007. Appichi's son, Ramanan did the Navaratri alankaras for two years followed by Manikantan who had this honour from 2009 until his tragic death in February 2016. From 2016 onwards, Manikantan's childhood friend and colleague, the Ashram accountant T.K. Arunachalam, is blessed to be carrying on this noble task. —





*are here with us, what value can these books have? Of course, they have a place and are kept here to announce: 'Here it is, what we describe.'*²

Navarati 2022

Navaratri is the period of nine days after the new moon in the month of *Purattasi* dedicated to veneration of the Mother in her three aspects, Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Each of these are worshipped on three successive periods of three nights when one of the various aspects is put on display.

This year's alankaram themes at the Ashram began with Goddess Meenakshi followed by Gaja Lakshmi, Tapas, Linga Puja, Rishabha Vahanam,

2 Cherished Memories, p. 137.

Sesha Sayanam, Venuganam, Saraswati and lastly, Mahishasura Mardini, culminating on the tenth day with Vijayadasami which celebrates her victory over the buffalo-demon. Women are following the tradition of wearing nine colours in the course of the celebrations and daily honour young girls and ladies of the community, by worshipping them as Devi Herself. Saraswati Pujas take place on the afternoon of the ninth day in the book stall, office, library and computer room while the festival's first two evenings included Carnatic music programmes in the Library Auditorium. This year's Navaratri celebrations began on 26th September and go till 4th October. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navaratri



On Sunday evening, 25th September, Yogambika was taken in procession around the temple and installed in the Mantapam in Mother's Shrine. The following evening, women devotees sang Mother's praises as the first of the 'nine-nights' of Navaratri was celebrated in honour of Goddess Meenakshi, followed by Gajalakshmi, Tapas, Linga Puja, Rishibha Vahanam, Sesha Sayanam, Venuganam, Saraswati and lastly, Mahishasura Mardini. Each in their turn would colour the themes of successive nights. Tuesday 4th October Saraswati puja will be celebrated and Vijayadasami the following day. —





RAMANA REFLECTIONS

Bhagavan's Inquiry:

Distinguishing the True from the False in the Age of Information

Very often efforts at refining our understanding of Bhagavan's teachings bring only moderate results. This may be because we want to cut corners. We want to get to what Bhagavan was talking about without necessarily taking the steps he advised us to take in order to get there. We place great hopes that the longed-for might be found in the thinking mind and then extend that hope to the vast expanse of information available to us in the digital era. If Bhagavan tells us that the thinking mind cannot lead us there, then at least, we imagine the

internet would provide a database large enough to aid us in uncovering the missing pieces. If ordinary thought is insufficient to take us to the Self, then perhaps online digital searches powered by algorithms that seem to know us in advance, would hold some hope. If we took literally the injunction, *know the truth and the truth will set you free*, then we imagine there is some formulation out there somewhere that had escaped our notice which, once in our possession, would at last set us free. We remain ever hopeful that the next Google search or YouTube video will yield just the thing we are missing. A line from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* reads:

Can you hear the universe resounding with His presence? He is sound and echo, intangible vibration, and the infinitesimal substance of every particle of dust and foam. His presence is immanent in verdant trees and the soft green grass. He is in the rustling withered leaves and the silent dead. He has each and everyone's face. Everything human is in him, for he is in every person.¹

He is in every person, and yet, we do not know what to call Him. If we call Him Rudra, Paramatman, the indwelling Divinity, the Spiritual Heart, or the Transcendental Self-God; if we call Him Consciousness, Pure Awareness, Original Nature, the Witness, the Formless, Mahasunyam or Vast Emptiness; if we call Him the Unconditioned, the Changeless, the Deathless, the Knower of Births, the Possessor of Divine Wisdom, the Immortal in Mortals, the Brahmic Fire of Self-knowledge or Mother of the Universe, still, we ask, who is He/She? An ancient poem begins:

The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The unnameable is the eternally real. The named is the mother of myriad things.²

What does this mean? It means that if we look for the ultimate in the realm of words and thoughts, even at the monumental scales of the internet driven by terahertz of processing power and quintillions of bits of information³ and algorithms that track our online behaviour, still whatever names we come up with will only be of the myriad things and not the one True Name. Labels and conceptualisation, thoughts and words, names and

¹ See *The Mountain Path*, July 1982, p. 204.

² *Tao-te-Ching*.

³ IBM says that 2.5 quintillion bytes, i.e. 20 quintillion bits of data (called an exabyte) are processed each day.





forms are valid in the conventional realm but cannot help us in the pursuit of the Self. Grasping at ideas, satisfying though it is, is just a form of attachment, and attachment can never be transformative, Bhagavan tells us, can never lead us out from the delusion that separates us from the Self. If we seek essences without doing the purification work beforehand, our names will not be true names. The poem goes on:

When caught in desire, you see only manifestations; when free from desire, you see the mystery. Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the same source.⁴

Desire to come up with a name is already a disqualifier. If it has always been easy to fall into *maya*, now the stakes seem ever higher. The current generation of spiritual seeker must contend with the digital reality of our world, with search engines and social media algorithms that cater to our every need and keep us gravitating to our devices. Amid their astonishing efficiency we begin to suspect that we are being manipulated. Algorithms built to select for increased search use have the side-effect of eliciting addictive behaviours in the user, taking advantage of built-in vulnerabilities in the human psyche. Lots of room for *vichara* here.

Machine culture asserts itself and the simple aim of increasing website activity can have drastic consequences. Consider, for example, recent studies at MIT that show that false narratives have a six times greater chance at proliferation, i.e., ‘going viral’, than truthful ones. This means that the otherwise ethically neutral algorithms at work in social media platforms promote untruths because such themes increase click rate and user activity. It was not the original intention to engender misinformation. It’s just that in the

4 Ibid.

interest of generating the success of the start-up, its creator writes algorithms that inadvertently result in misinformation. From the algorithm’s ‘point of view’, any story or video is just data, just 0’s and 1’s.

Sorting through vast troves of new information which have been tailor-selected to conform to our basic view of the world, the seeker has great difficulty in deciding what is true and what is not. The process is quite simple: social media’s algorithms are designed to glean information from each of our online activities where, with each click of the mouse and each swipe of the smart phone, we teach the search engine’s data base something new about our personal tastes, preferences, and habits. It learns who we are by tracking our movements using GPS and keeps a perfect record of our activities. It remembers things we have long forgotten. Tracking our behaviour over many years, algorithms selectively guess what links, videos, news stories, and websites will be of interest to us. Algorithms seem to validate our hunches about the way the world is made whereas, in fact, what we are experiencing is a sophisticated ultra-high-speed feed-back loop. If we find such loops attractive, it is because they seem to confirm us. But in them, we are being remade in a kind of reverse-engineering.⁵ Algorithms make guesses at what we will be interested in and tests them on us by prompting us with files, links, personalised news, and videos. As we respond, they adjust their estimate of who we are. We imagine that it is we who are doing the searching but in fact, it is we who are being *searched*, and being *remade* by the online content we engage in. Engaging with each new online digital item influences us in ways that we are unable to predict. We unvaryingly re-create ourselves and reinforce the assumptions we have about who we are through this

5 From the documentary-drama, *The Social Dilemma* (2020).



Announcement: Sri Ramanasramam’s Centenary Year (September 2022 - December 2023)

Sri Ramanasramam’s Centenary celebrations called, *Ramanasramam: The Next One Hundred Years*, which began 1st Sept 2022 and will continue over a 16-month period until Jayanti, 28th Dec 2023. It is recorded in one place that Bhagavan came down the Hill to stay permanently ‘about one week’ before Jayanti which fell that year on 3rd January 1923. If so, this means the Ashram would have been established with Bhagavan’s arrival around the 28th of Dec 1922. Ashram President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan invites devotees to send their suggestions for this Centenary Year to him directly at <posrm@gururamana.org>. —





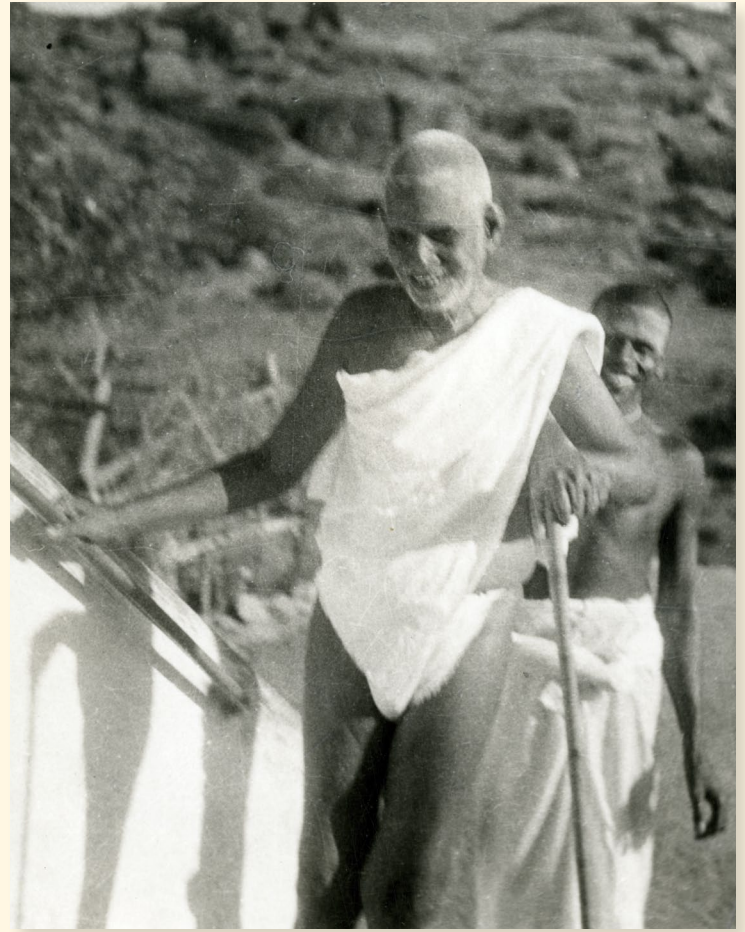
algorithm driven personalisation loop, growing our sense of separation from millions of other individuals, each in his or her own personalised information bubble.

If we find ourselves under the sway of a digitally contrived hyper-narcissism wherein algorithmically driven self-validation becomes a way of life, we wonder how we strayed so far from Bhagavan's path. If face-time interactions with family, friends, and fellow devotees gives way to digital isolation, we see that they don't get the same news we get nor do they have the data base and algorithms that Google, YouTube, and WhatsApp have regarding our personal interests. If we notice that the core need for belonging to a community is fulfilled in the next link, article, or video clip, then we wonder if this can really be healthy. If algorithm-driven positive reinforcement feels like looking into a mirror that alters our appearance according to unconscious wishes about how we think *we should look*, we worry about the danger such mechanisms pose to our children and grandchildren who may be more vulnerable to such influences.

If we had set ourselves the task of diminishing egoic identification and overcoming the allure of *samsara* to pass beyond the veil of *maya* once for all, alas, we find ego at the centre and wonder to what extent we have become addicted to the instant culture of the internet.

Samsara in the age of algorithmically contrived worldviews incubated in our respective information silos becomes increasingly confusing for the contemporary seeker. Invariably, we find ourselves sympathetic to those with whom we share filter bubbles, and correspondingly, polarised from those with whom we do not. This is built into the system of preferences. But is machine intelligence creating our preferences? Not exactly. It is only mining them, though too, magnifying them. The filter bubbles we inhabit are born of unconscious impulses expressed through our click behaviour. AI merely assesses preferences based on our online activities and mirrors them back to us. But the degree of egoistic reinforcement provoked by AI's unfathomable processing power and immense caches of stored information is indeed unprecedented.

Information silos fold back on themselves in ways that cut off their inhabitants to competing views. Machine intelligence's selective guessing causes one to get a reverberation of the dominant views within one's own silo,



squelching dissonant views in what can only be seen as a kind of self-promoting echo chamber. Here we imagine ourselves having a unique angle on the world and being set apart from those not privy to the information in our silo.

If we bring *vichara* to bear on the mechanisms at work in this process, we avoid being easily fooled by the pleasurable sense of belonging to one silo or the other, neither creating an identity *from* it nor fortifying our sense of self *through* it. We remember that opinions and views are the province of the ego and are, as much as possible, to be minimised.

When someone tells us that their recent online research has led them to conclude that the Earth is flat and that all who imagine it as round are victims of a government conspiracy, we watch the intensity of our push-back. Even if the roundness of the Earth is not really a subject for intelligent debate in the 21st century, we remember that the Earth does not care what we think about its shape. Clinging to opinions, either way, can cause harm as egoic vibrations ripple out and surcharge the collective. We try





and disabuse our interlocutor of such notions, all the while unwittingly clinging to the outcomes of our efforts. If we notice that we are overly attached to getting them to see things our way, which is just another form of grasping, we inquire into it and, as much as possible, avoid indulging it. Faithful in our inquiry, we hold things lightly and try to remain aware of our responses while taking care not to minimise the perils of misinformation. Having said that, how do such views become so prevalent?

Neurologists tell us we are hard-wired to isolate danger and threat from benign environmental conditions as a means to better ensure survival. We intuitively cling to messages that are negatively focused because we are evolutionarily biased toward eliminating threats. This means that to survive generation after generation over hundreds of thousands of years, natural selection favoured our ancestors who were skilled at reducing threats. While evolution has also given us the ability to overrule *false* threats, this overriding function seems increasingly to be getting short-circuited in the internet age. Why?

Social species such as human beings depend on members in the group to determine the safety and well-being of the tribe at any given time. When an individual senses danger, he or she will check in with other members. If a threshold number of members senses danger, then the tribe will take steps to protect itself. Here is where the trouble begins in respect of social media algorithms.

Throughout evolutionary history, tribe size typically numbered 30-40 members, whereas the digital tribe numbers in the billions. When an internet user goes online to check if the government is seeking to dupe them about the shape of the earth, algorithms link them with members of the global tribe that share similar concerns. This cohort could number ten thousand or more, which

sounds like a lot, but as a sample taken from billions of users, it is actually less than one-thousandth of one per cent. From the point of view of evolutionary biology, just ten geographically dispersed flat-earthers face to face online is enough to form a virtual community and reinforce an otherwise outlandish stance, a theme which hadn't really been a burning issue for them before meeting up online.

This is how the displacement of dharmic culture begins. Traditional culture is time-tested, and its truths are consensual, i.e., arrived at through shared views passed down through generations. Digital micro communities, by contrast, neither have geographical borders nor anchors in time. The glue that binds them is algorithmically driven narratives formed from a pool of unconscious wishes, doubts, and concerns gleaned from trillions of previous clicks and searches.

The True Name

If the world appears to be upside down as filter bubbles mimic and displace traditional culture, it is because we have taken filter bubbles as reality. Of course, it is only natural since throughout evolutionary history, shared views have constituted truth as we know it. If our confusion is great, still, it is not so great that it cannot be fathomed. Bhagavan left us tools for greeting these challenges.

Inquiry's ability to train discriminative powers gives us the means to unmask algorithmically constituted storylines and avoid their allure. Sticking closely to Bhagavan's recommendations for *vichara* practice, we make sense of what might otherwise be disorienting. Borrowing insights from neuropsychology, evolutionary biology, social anthropology, narcissistic defence theory and combining that with a basic understanding of how social media algorithms work, the polarisation and division we are seeing around the globe appears lawful, even if highly undesirable.

Announcement: Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage



Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage (SRMH) is a newly created 501 (c) (3), registered non-profit in the United States. The organization's purpose is to preserve Sri Ramana Maharshi's heritage and to serve devotees who are drawn to the life and teachings of Bhagavan. The new entity's objectives are aligned with those of Sri Ramanasramam in India. Devotees in the United States who wish to donate towards and participate in Sri Ramanasramam's charitable initiatives in India can learn more by visiting the website: <https://www.srmh.org/> or by sending an email to: sriramanamaharshiheritage@gmail.com. —





Our work is to watch our attachment to views, remembering that as we insulate ourselves within our filter bubble, tolerance for contrasting views diminishes and with it, our capacity for meaningful face-time interactions. If Covid lock downs resulted in increased internet use and a corresponding intensification of filter bubble identification, we recognise that this is not a permanent condition and can be adjusted. If we find ourselves encapsulated in opinions, we put forth the effort to give more time to non-digital interactions and reduce our internet activities, remembering the unintended negative effects of algorithms.

As for seeking the True Name, i.e. the Self and the work Bhagavan gave us, all this is of a piece. Everything life dishes out presents us with the opportunity to discriminate between the false and the true. The quality of our investigation born of faith and non-judgemental observation helps us hold lightly algorithmically driven stories and focus on purifying the heart which, after all, is the principal work of the devotee of Bhagavan.

If purifying the heart begins with the study of the Self, we start by seeing *what the Self is not*. We understand that the Self is not anything that can be pointed to in the vast

reaches of cyberspace. We see that compulsive thinking, or, for that matter, any transactional activity designed for short-term benefit which includes gratuitous internet browsing, keeps the wheels of *samsara* turning.

Seeking to *name* the Self and make it into something *graspable*, we make it into something *else*. But how can we grasp and possess what we already are, Bhagavan asks?

There is no greater mystery than this: Being Reality ourselves, we seek to gain Reality ... Our real nature is liberation. But we imagine we are bound. We thus make strenuous efforts to become free while all the while we ARE free. We will be surprised that we were frantically trying to attain something which we have always been and are. ⁶

With inquiry and Bhagavan's guidance, we can penetrate the veils of illusion and make sense of a new world dawning on us suddenly and unexpectedly. If we feel overwhelmed by a world that appears very different, we remember our refuge is not in this world. In the face of ever-changing conditions, we greet our bewilderment with ever more sincere inquiry, trusting that Bhagavan will not fail to come to our assistance in our time of need. —

(to be continued)

6 Talks, §146; Day by Day, 5-1-46.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Samvatsara Abhishekam



The ninth anniversary of the Mahakumbhabhishekam of Sri Ramaneswara and Matrubhutesvara Shrines was observed on Tuesday, 13th September in the New Hall. Sankalpa and Mahanyasa japa began around 6 am followed by homa at 8 am. Purnahuti at 10 am was followed by procession and abhishekam in Mother's and Bhagavan's Shrines. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Global Online Advent Celebration



On Sunday, 11th September 2022 from 6 am-8 pm EST, devotees from satsang groups in the USA, Canada, Australia, France and United Kingdom celebrated the 126th anniversary of Bhagavan's Advent to Arunachala. The event culminated with an inspiring message from Sri Ramanasramam President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan who outlined the Ashram's recommendations for devotees in following Bhagavan in the 21st century. The President emphasised Bhagavan's ongoing presence in the Ashram and in the world and recapitulated basic teachings Bhagavan gave us. If Bhagavan left no successors, his teaching is his legacy, and it is up to us to faithfully preserve what Bhagavan and his devotees have passed down to us. Hear Dr. Anand's entire talk at: <<https://youtu.be/yjkKzWpCk4w>> and the rest of the program at: <<https://youtu.be/rwCcArLuqIE>>. —

Events in Tamil Nadu: Sri Ramana Maharshi Sevashram's Silver Jubilee



Established by Dr. Jayakumar and his wife in 1992, the facility which in the beginning was just a few rooms for housing destitute elderly women has grown to 24 cottages, providing food, accommodation, and medical assistance free of cost. On Sunday 11th September, Sri Ramanasramam President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan and Ashram Manager Sivadas Krishnan travelled to Hosur to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of *Sri Ramana Maharshi Sevashram*. The facility's foundation stone had been laid by the Ashram President T.N. Venkataraman in 1992 and upon completion, was inaugurated by President V.S. Ramanan in 1995, with his father in attendance. In September 2022, it would be TNV's grandson, Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan who was the chief guest in marking the facility's 25th anniversary. —

Obituary: Smt. Prema Srinivasan



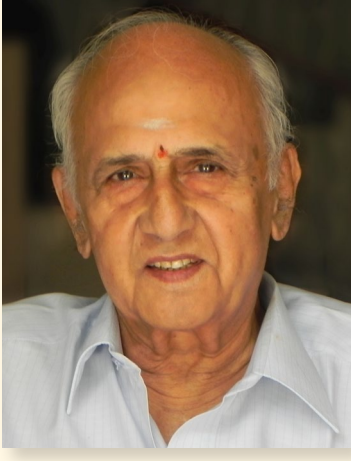
Born in 1932, Prema was the daughter of former customs official K. Rangaswamy. She married T.S. Srinivasan, the youngest son of the TVS Group founder, T. V. Sundaram Iyengar. She studied Vaishnava ritual, earned a Ph.D. in children's literature and later took an advanced degree in Anthropology at Columbia University. She wrote and published numerous books, among them, a novel for children entitled *Treasure Hunters*, as well as *Idiyosai* (2001)—a Tamil translation of the Australian author Libby Hathorn's *Thunderwith*, and a travelogue called *Footloose and Fancy-Free* (2009). While she established herself as a writer, environmentalist, and philanthropist, she pursued her irrepressible spiritual longings and came regularly to Sri Ramanasramam. In 1988, with some effort, she persuaded Ashram President T.N. Venkataram to accept her assistance in upgrading the Ashram kitchen which until then was only equipped with wood-

burning stoves. Prema brought in industrial gas cookers, industrial scale appliances and other utensils appropriate to the cooking demands of the Ashram kitchen at that time. She introduced machine milking into the Ashram gosala according to the increasing demand born of steadily rising numbers of visitors. As founder of the *Madras Environmental Society*, Prema worked closely with Bhagavan's grand-nephew, V.S. Mani on the reforestation of Arunachala which she actively supported. She and her son annually donated the latest model of TVS scooter to the Ashram. Prema passed away very suddenly on Sunday the 25th of September. She will be missed by all devotees who had the pleasure of knowing her. She is survived by two sons, two daughters and her grandchildren. —





Obituary: Sri V. Dwaraknath Reddy



Born to a rural agricultural family in 1924, Sri Dwaraknath Reddy spent his early years in Pulicherla Village, Chittoor District. In 1948, he became a batch post-graduate in chemical engineering at Louisiana State University (USA), and afterwards, got practical experience on the factory floor of a candy company in Chicago. With these hard earned first earnings, he and his father founded *Nutrine Confectionery Company, Pvt. Ltd.*, Chittoor. The company thrived under his care, but at the age of thirty-five, a tragic event led him to the basic existential questions about creation and creator, about order and chance and about the ultimate purpose of life, questions which sparked an irresistible call to the spiritual search. Though at the height of a successful career, he handed over the family company to the next generation and dispersed personal assets to charitable causes to relieve the village poor. His spiritual enquiry led him to the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and soon Dwaraknath found himself strengthened

by a deep inner conviction that Bhagavan Sri Ramana was the epitome of all the scriptures. In 1983, he came and settled near Sri Ramanasramam and took up the life of a seeker. For the following 40 years, he proved a great support to seekers who not only benefitted from his numerous books but also from direct support he provided them when a financial or medical crisis struck. In general, no one ever left his house empty-handed. For all these decades, Dwaraknath led a simple life and served mahatmas and ordinary devotees equally with the utmost humility.

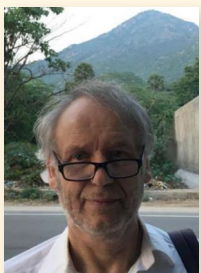
Beginning in 2021, he suffered age-related issues, but remained lucid throughout. His presence exuded inner peace and he bore his ailments quietly with fortitude. Up till the very end, he was overflowing with affection and compassion for all who came into contact with him. At 11 pm, on the 28th September, Sri Dwaraknath merged into Arunachala. He will be missed by family members and Ramana devotees alike. He is survived by his son, three daughters and his grandchildren. —

Obituary: Dr. P.V. Rao

Dr P.V. Rao, senior consultant cardiac surgeon, was chief of the Heart and Lung Transplantation Programme at the Narayana Hrudayalaya Hospital, Bangalore. He retired two years ago following a highly successful career as a cardiac surgeon specialising in DORs procedure along with Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting (CABG). Following his retirement during the Covid lockdowns, Dr. Rao came to the Ashram as often as possible. He passed away peacefully in June of this year. —



Obituary: Sri Wolfgang Heidinger



Born 17th August, 1953 in Stuttgart, Germany, Wolfgang Heidinger began practicing yoga at the age of 17 when he first learned of Bhagavan. In 1976 he came to India for studies and was able to come to Sri Ramanasramam and stay for a few months during which time he studied Sanskrit with Viswanatha Swami. Wolfgang worked as a philosophy professor and a lecturer for German language at the adult education centre in Berlin. He gave meditation courses and visited India and the Ashram several times with his student groups. After retirement in 2014, he taught philosophy and world religion and continued to visit the Ashram almost every year, his last visit being in January of 2020. Despite his desire to return again, he was unable to as his health deteriorated. Wolfgang Heidinger passed away peacefully on the 22nd of July 2022 surrounded by his loving family. —

