

## Saranagathi

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ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

In this issue of Saranagathi we continue our series on inspiring women devotees of Sri Bhagavan with the first part of Shantammal's story followed by glimpses in the life of Ratnammal. V. Ramanchandran is featured in *How I came to Bhagavan*.

Mahapuja of Sri Matrubhuteswara was observed in the Mother's shrine on Thursday 26th May, 2011. The evening of the 25th brought Bharatanatyam by Kum. Revathi Sankar of RMCL in the New Hall, and a dance ballet by artists of RMCL led by Dr. Ambika Kameshwar in the Old Dining Hall on the evening of the 26th. For full reportage see the following link <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/mahapuja2011.html>

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The Editorial Team

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## Reality in Forty Verses

4. If we have form, the world and God likewise have form. If we have no form, by whom and how can form (of world and God) be seen? Without the eye, can there be sight or spectacle? The Self, the real eye, is infinite.

*Ulladu Narpadu by Sri Bhagavan*





## Shantammal (part one)



Shantammal was blessed to work in Bhagavan's company on a daily basis in the kitchen. She had gotten the job when Chinnaswami, acting as head cook, had fallen sick and needed someone to replace him as he was leaving for Chennai to seek treatment.

Ten years earlier, having already lost her husband, her three sons, her daughter and grand-daughter, Shantammal decided to take up the spiritual life and seek the truth and consolation for the hurt she felt at her many losses. In the course of the years that followed, she was eventually guided to Bhagavan and so came to the Ashram in 1927 with three ladies from her native town. "As soon as I saw him" she said, "I knew that he was God in human form."

Muruganar, who hailed from her native Ramanathapuram, was sitting there at Bhagavan's side when Shantammal got up the courage to utter her first words to Bhagavan: "Today I am blessed," the newly arrived guest exclaimed, "Please grant that my

mind does not trouble me anymore". Bhagavan turned to Muruganar and said, "Ask her to find out whether there is such a thing as mind. If there is, ask her to describe it". Perplexed, not knowing how to respond, Shantammal was relieved when Muruganar came to her rescue: "Don't you see? You have been initiated in the search for the Self."

During this her first visit of forty days Shantammal and her companions cooked food and brought it to the Ashram each day. When the time came for her departure, Bhagavan asked her to wait a day longer as the newly printed *Upadesa Saram* would be arriving from the printers. The next day he gave her a copy with his own hands and she wept bitterly as she reluctantly took leave of Bhagavan. Bhagavan assured her saying, "You are going to Ramnad, but you are not leaving Arunachala. Go and come soon".

A year later, as if by miracle, a donation from someone in her community provided her the means to purchase a train ticket and so come for Jayanthi. When she arrived at the Ashram, she found Bhagavan reading to devotees from *Ulladu Narpadu*. He looked up and seeing her asked, "Have you a copy of this book? I asked them to post one to you." Imagine what merit she must have accumulated to have Sri Bhagavan sending his upadesa directly to her by postal mail! On this visit Shantammal stayed glued to the Ashram and found chores to perform each day throughout the day.

When other guests began leaving after the celebrations she felt a familiar pang in her heart: she too would have to go, she thought. She told Bhagavan of her longing to stay. "As long as I am with you Bhagavan, my mind is at peace. Away from you, I am restless. What am I to do"? He said, "Stay here until your mind gets settled. After that you can go anywhere and nothing will disturb you".

But how could she possibly stay, she thought. She had no money and no means of supporting herself. How





could she ask the Ashram which also felt the pinch of limited resources to provide for her? Within minutes, however, she got an answer: she happened to be passing near Chinnaswami who was in conversation with an Ashram inmate and just at that moment, not aware that she was there, he wondered out loud if “Shantammal might be willing to cook for the two months” that he would be away for treatment in Madras. “Of course I will” she thought to herself!

Her prayers answered, she need not leave after all and her misery abated. But as it turned out, she said, she would stay in the Ashram, “not just two months, but forever!”

(to be continued...)

## Ratnammal

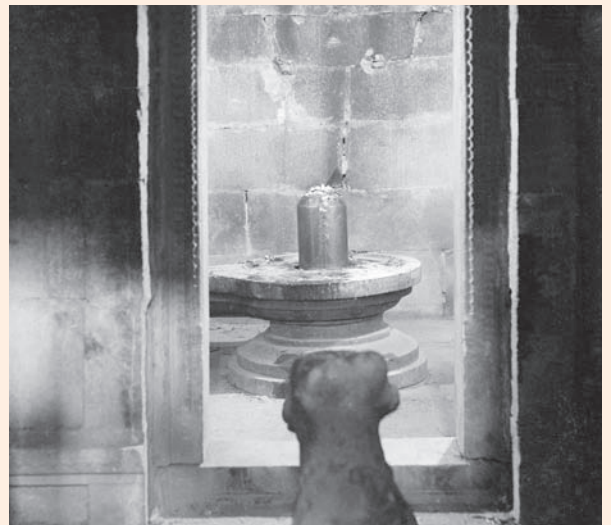
After Sri Ramana came from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, he continued to be in the state of unbroken natural samadhi. While he was thus absorbed in the Self in Pathala linga, a dark, dank, underground niche in the Arunachaleswara temple, his thighs were feasted on by insects and vermin while he himself remained without food or care.

The Divine Mother sent Ratnammal, a young dancer from the Devadasi Community, who was looked down upon by society. One day, she saw some urchins throwing stones into the cave. She went inside and saw a dim figure with a faint halo sitting like a statue. She brought food and fresh clothes and left them at the entrance of the cave. Needless to say, her offerings remained untouched.

Later, Seshadri Swami discovered Ramana and for his own protection, carried the corpse-like young swami in samadhi out to safer grounds. Seshadri Swami instructed the temple priest to give the youngster milk. Milk was brought, not from the Arunachaleswara shrine, but from Mother Apitakuchambal’s shrine in the Arunachaleswara temple. This milk which

had been poured on Mother’s idol, with turmeric, soap nut powder and ghee mixed in was the first prasad Mother gave Bhagavan. But as he was in deep samadhi, the priest was compelled to open his mouth for him and pour in the ‘Mother’s milk’ -- the first food that sustains a child. When Bhagavan resumed bodily consciousness, he stayed under an illuppai tree (*madhuca indica*) in the Temple premises and continued to sit in samadhi.

Once, when Ratnammal was getting ready for a dance performance, she noticed the young Swami seated there. Turning to her mother she said, “I will not eat until we have served this ascetic some food.” They tried in vain to rouse him. So they opened his mouth and placed the food there. Sometimes he would swallow it, other times, the food simply remained there till they came the next day.



Years later, in recollecting the temple dancer, Bhagavan said, “This is the Universal Mother represented by Ratnammal.” He affirmed her again in a conversation with Suri Nagamma in a way that he never did with any devotee, saying, “Ratnammal was pure.” He explained that this was not a moral or physical purity he referred to, but the fact that even in those days, she had the capacity to recognize the divine before her.





## Maharshi's Gospel

### Bhakti and Jnana

D. Sri Bhagavata outlines a way to find Krishna in the heart by prostrating to all and looking on all as the Lord Himself. Is this the right path leading to Self-realization? Is it not easier thus to adore Bhagavan in whatever meets the 'mind', than to seek the supra-mental through the mental enquiry, Who am I?

M. Yes, when you see God in all, do you think of God or do you not? You must certainly think of God for seeing God all round you. Keeping God in your mind becomes *dhyana* and *dhyana* is the stage before Realization. Realization can only be in and of the Self. It can never be apart from the Self: and *dhyana* must precede it. Whether you make *dhyana* on God or on the Self, it is immaterial; for the goal is the same. You cannot, by any means, escape the Self. You want to see God in all, but not in yourself? If all is God, are you not included in that all? Being God yourself, is it a wonder that all is God? This is the method advised in Sri Bhagavata, and elsewhere by others. But even for this practice there must be the seer or thinker. Who is he?

## Reports from Sri Ramanasramam (part one)

### Adi Sankara Jayanthi

Shankara or Shankaracharya the founder of the Advaita school of Vedanta was born in 788 to a Nambudiri Brahmin family in Kaladi, Kerala. Legend has it that when he was eight years old he wanted to become a renunciant, but his widowed mother would not give her assent. One day while swimming he was attacked by a crocodile and cried out to his mother to grant him permission to renounce now that his death was imminent so that he could be freed from further births. His mother consented, but Shankara was miraculously released from the mouth of the crocodile. In time he founded an order of sannyasins and wrote exhaustive commentaries on the Upanishads and Vedantic texts. Adi Sankara Jayanthi was celebrated in the Mother's Shrine on Sunday 8th May together with the monthly Punarvasu Mahanyasa Abhishekam (Bhagavan's birth star day).





## How I Came to Bhagavan

by V. Ramachandran

—*The Mountain Path*, July 1982



I had the great privilege of being born in a family which was deeply devoted to Bhagavan Ramana. My grandparents, Sri M. Ramu Setty and Smt. Muniammal, would take me for Sri Bhagavan's darshan. Thus I started visiting the Maharshi right from my childhood. Being a native of Tiruvannamalai, it was my great good fortune that I was able to have Bhagavan's darshan till His Mahasamadhi in 1950. The continued presence of Sri Maharshi draws me even today to Sri Ramanasramam wherein at His Sacred Shrine the Grace of the Great Master is powerfully felt.

Soon after Bhagavan came to Tiruvannamalai, He was sitting for a period at the illuppai tree near the Vinayaka shrine at Sivagangai Tank inside Arunachaleswara temple. It was there that my grandmother first saw Bhagavan. Seeing the Maharshi seated oblivious to the world, she used to thrust food offerings into his mouth with a little water and it would take five

minutes for Bhagavan to swallow it. My grandmother told me this and Bhagavan also confirmed it.

When Bhagavan was staying at Virupaksha Cave, devotees would come to town singing Aksharamanamalai. We would eagerly wait for their arrival to offer them cooked food. Only after such offering would we eat. This continued without a day's break till Bhagavan's mother started cooking at Skandashram. Our house was open to devotees of Bhagavan at all times. Even while Bhagavan was at Virupaksha Cave, occasionally we used to go there and offer *biksha*. On one such occasion the leaf-plates we had brought were just enough for the devotees present and there was none for me. Being young, I started crying. Bhagavan called me and coming to know the reason, consoled me by providing me with a leaf. Bhagavan understood a child's feelings, and He has been gracious to me throughout my life!

It was Bhagavan who introduced me into religious texts. Once Bhagavan wrote the first verse of *Dakshinamurti Stotra* on a slip of paper and told me to learn it by heart and repeat it on my next visit. Thus I learnt the *Dakshinamurti Stotra*. I would often forget the first word of a verse and Bhagavan would help me. Then writing down the first word of each verse of *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, Bhagavan gave me the slip of paper to help remember the sequence.

On the first of each Tamil month I would go round the Hill along with my mother, and on the way we would walk into the Ashram to pay homage to Bhagavan who would receive us with a smile and sometimes ask us to take breakfast. Once, when as usual two iddies were served on my plate, I asked for one more. Bhagavan turned to me and said that I could have one more after eating the two. When I had finished eating them, Bhagavan asked whether I would like to have more, and I replied "No". Bhagavan, said with a smile: "Why did you ask for more even before starting





to eat?" Thus Bhagavan taught the lesson that one should not be greedy.

In summer, occasionally we used to bring sherbet and *sundal* for distribution and would leave them at the dining hall. When we entered the Hall, Bhagavan, with a smile, would tell me in advance what I had brought with me and that would thrill me. He knew how to amuse a young lad like me.

In 1922, when Bhagavan came down from the hill to stay at the present Ashram there were only a few devotees. I was studying in the High School. The lessons which had started with *Dakshinamurti Stotra* at Skandashram continued at Sri Ramanasramam. Each day I would visit Bhagavan and learn a verse and recite it the following day. Thus I learnt *Upadesa Undiyar*, *Ulladu Narpadu*, *Appala Pattu* and *Anma Viddai*.

Bhagavan explained *Upadesa Undiyar* and *Ulladu Narpadu* to my mother while I silently listened on. Bhagavan would turn to me and say, 'Um, Um', enquiring whether I was able to follow. I confessed that I was not. Bhagavan consoled me saying that the meaning would be clear to me in course of time. And so it was by the Grace of Bhagavan.

Bhagavan took personal care in our family affairs. My uncle, Sri Varadan, once left home and came to the Ashram for good without informing anybody in the house. Bhagavan knew what had happened and sent word that Varadan was at the Ashram and thus relieved the anxiety of the family. Later, our uncle returned home. After my lower education was completed, I very much wanted to study in a college at Madras. My mother somehow did not like the idea. When we visited the Ashram the proposal was put before Bhagavan and it was decided that I stay at home. I soon got an appointment in the local municipality.

When my mother passed away, I went to the Ashram to convey the news to Bhagavan. Bhagavan graciously looked at me and relieved me of my intense grief. Bhagavan smilingly told me that my mother was as old as his stay at Arunachala. With folded hands I prayed to Bhagavan to protect our family, and He graciously nodded His head by way of approval.

Bhagavan was not merely a spiritual Master of the highest order, but our mother, our father and our all!





## Reports from Sri Ramanasramam (part two)

### Morvi Guesthouse Bhumi Puja

*Bhumi puja* (worship of Mother Earth) is regularly done for the commencement of construction of a new building. *Bhumi puja* was performed for the new Morvi Guesthouse compound on 2 May, 2011. On the same day, a bore well was dug in the compound and second one five days later in order to meet the water demands for the project as well as ongoing use in the compound once the project is completed. The new guesthouse is slated for completion at the end of 2012 and will have two floors and consist of 60 rooms of single and double-occupancy as well as facilities for families.



### Ramana Library

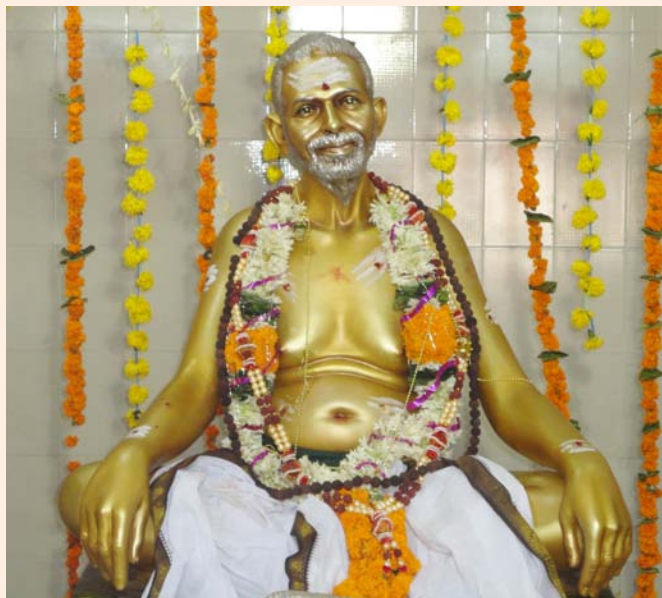


*Bhumi puja* for the Ramana Grantalaya took place on 18th November, 2010, on the site just north of the Ashram dining hall to the chanting of the *Bhumisuktam*. Now six months later on May 2nd, according to tradition, puja was performed for the pouring of concrete for the ceiling of the new building. The project's adjusted target completion date: April 2012.





## Installation of Bhagavan's Panchaloha Vighraha



Bhimavaram in the West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh is a town comparable in size to Tiruvannamalai. For an inexplicable reason, it has been endowed with the gracious glance of Bhagavan. It is not only rich in culture and wealth, but also in the numbers of people dedicated to Sri Ramana. In such a setup Bhagavan Ramana gives darsan in a dream to a lady devotee. Pointing His walking stick to an old house, (which happens to be her paternal aunt's), he commands her, "Build a temple for me ". This led to frequent discussions as to how it should be accomplished. There were neither funds nor fund-raising. To the devotees who were thinking what to do another message came: Sri Bhagavan appeared again and said that he had already completed the construction.

These words fortified their conviction that a temple should come somehow, perhaps through the help of others. However, it was not for several months that the construction would begin — a shrine for Ramaneswara Mahalingam, Matrubhuteswara lingam and a Sri Chakra Meru — and another six years before completing it. Two Siva lingas as per the Agamic tradition were installed and inaugurated on the 30th April, 2008, by Sri Ramanasramam President V. S. Ramanan. On Sunday, 22nd May, 2011 the President came again and inaugurated the newly installed bronze statue of Sri Bhagavan with Sri Nanagaru of Jinnur and other spiritual dignitaries in attendance. One lakh *rudraksha* beads procured from Kasi were consecrated during the puja and distributed as prasada to the more than a thousand visitors gathered. Following the function the Ashram president and his party visited the nearby Ramana Kendra Centre, Sri Ramana Nilayasram, of Velpur, which is doing service in a silent way by printing and distributing Telugu books of Sri Ramanasramam in the thousands free of cost.

The in-charge, known as Sri Ramana Swami, is witnessing the life and teaching of Bhagavan in day to day activities, practising for long years silence, daily meditation, and long hours of demanding work such as construction, farming and printing preparation.

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