

# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

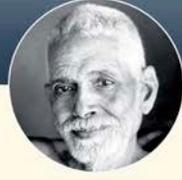
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Courtesy of Dev Gogoi



## Saranagati



AUGUST 2017  
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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

Three days of Varuna Japam took place earlier in the month in hopes that the drought in South India might come to an end. The days afterward did bring some change in the weather with cloudy skies and occasional light rains. But at the end of the month, increasingly larger storms rolled through town. Finally, after three days of repeated nightly rainstorms, a big thunderstorm descended on the city the night of 31st July, bringing substantial precipitation. The following morning the whole of creation was singing, including the long-silent tirtham frogs who chanted their joyful approval. (see p. 7).

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org)

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team

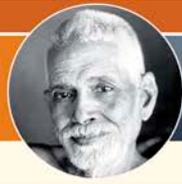
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

6-7th August (Sun-Mon) Full Moon  
19th August (Sat) Punarvasu Day  
21st August (Mon) Muruganar's Day  
1st September (Fri) Bhagavan's Advent Day  
5th September (Tues) Full Moon  
15th September (Fri) Punarvasu Day  
21st September (Thur) Navaratri commences

29th September (Fri) Saraswati Puja  
30th September (Sat) Vijayadasami Day  
5th October (Thur) Full Moon  
13th October (Fri) Punarvasu Day  
18th October (Weds) Deepavali  
3rd November (Fri) Full Moon  
9th November (Thur) Punarvasu Day





## Daily Life in the Dining Hall (pt. IX): Special Offerings (cont.)

Rather than mere nourishment, offerings in the darshan hall were for Bhagavan a divine communion. Distributing offerings in Bhagavan's presence was a ritual ceremony. Intuitively, one might say that the power and efficacy of any gift and the positive karmic effect it had on the giver is greatly enhanced by the stature of the receiver. Even the smallest gift could have great effects if given and received under the right conditions. In the case of Bhagavan's Old Hall, the conditions could be ideal.

One may recall the story of Kubera, the god-king of the Yakshas who was Lord of the world's treasures. The king was proud of his wealth and pleased by the fact that all came to seek his blessing. One day, he decided he should host Lord Ganesa for dinner whereby he would be in a position to impress him with his abundance. Ganesa decided to teach the king a lesson. So when Ganesa sat for the lavish meal, the king found he was unable to

satisfy the Elephant God's appetite. Kubera gave him the food of a thousand guests but Ganesa's hunger was still not appeased. Finally, King Kubera gave him all the food in his kingdom, and still the Elephant God was not satisfied. Now with the royal food stores completely bare, Ganesa began eating the plates and kitchenware. In desperation, the king rushed to Lord Siva for help. Lord Siva calmed him and said not to worry: "Just give him this handful of roasted rice with love and humility and all will be well." The king followed Mahadeva's advice and gave Ganesa the puffed rice with love and humility. After casually eating it, Lord Ganesa's hunger was at last gratified.

Only God can fill us and satisfy our longings. It is not a question of frequency, quantity or culinary skill. The capacity to bring fulfilment is a quality that comes hidden in the sanctification born of the touch of the divine. Only by this means was food truly nourishing — prasadam.

In Bhagavan's hall, offerings were usually distributed immediately upon receiving them. Whether fresh fruit, raisins, dates, or puffed rice, after having first received Bhagavan's touch and then having been tasted by him, those seated in meditation in the hall, upon opening their eyes, might find little treats in their laps.<sup>1</sup>

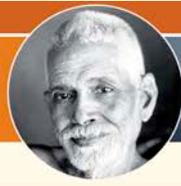
One day, Dr. Anantanarayana Rao brought guava fruit from his garden and presented it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan asked for a knife and plate and began to prepare the snack while all in the hall looked on. He cut the fruit into small pieces so that there would be enough to go around. He then sprinkled a little chili powder on top and took a piece for himself before passing the rest around. While it was only the most meagre portion of fruit, even that small amount gave great satisfaction coming as it did from the golden hands of the Master.<sup>2</sup>

Bhagavan instilled in his devotees the same idea Ganesa sought to teach King Kubera, namely, that having gifts to offer is not necessarily a sign of one's purity or spiritual abundance, nor is offering them necessarily an indication of one's generosity or devotion. In fact, rather than necessarily being a selfless act, the motivation behind making offerings is on occasion born of the egoic desire to be special in the guru's eyes, or to win a place in his heart,

<sup>1</sup> *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Face to Face with Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 335.





or to make an impression and feel elevated in the eyes of others.

Very often it would happen that offerings were brought and placed before Bhagavan and he was simply expected to consume them right then and there as confirmation that the gift had been approved of. Bhagavan would ask, “Will *swamivam* (the role of a Swami) be [utterly] lost unless I eat whenever asked to do so? Why all this, instead of looking to the purpose for which you have come?”<sup>3</sup>

### Sneaking in Cashew Nuts

When the practice of making offerings directly to Bhagavan in the hall was no longer allowed, devotees sought ways to get around the decision and were often caught red-handed by the guru himself.

Once when Nagamma went to the hall in the early afternoon, she found Bhagavan and attendants sitting there while squirrels ran about on the sofa. Bhagavan turned the tin of nuts upside down and told his little friends, “Sorry, nothing in it.” He turned to Nagamma and said, “The cashew nuts are finished. They do not like groundnuts. What can I do?” Nagamma had the strong urge to go to the market right then and get more nuts but feared what Bhagavan might say, especially given the management’s rules regarding offerings. Finally, when a friend went to market later that evening, she arranged the purchase of 1.5 kg of cashew nuts.

The next morning, Nagamma gave them to the attendant, Krishnaswami, careful to pick an occasion when Bhagavan was away from the hall. That evening after Vedaparayana, Krishnaswami opened the tin of cashews and seeing them, Bhagavan asked who had given them. The attendant told him that it was Nagamma. “When?” asked Bhagavan. “At 9:45am, when Bhagavan was out”. “Is that so? Why not give it in my presence? Why this secrecy?”

Then Bhagavan answered his own question: “Because, I suppose, she was afraid [I] would be angry. These pranks have not been given up yet. Why do they indulge in these things instead of confining themselves to the purpose for which they have come? They try to hoodwink Swami [but] they do not know that [they are only hoodwinking themselves]. This weakness has not left them despite years of [being]

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, 28th May, 1947.

here.” said Bhagavan disapprovingly.

Namma sat in the hall with closed eyes, ‘still as a statue’, and did not dare respond to Bhagavan’s sharp words though she took them as an *upadesa* and as a reminder of the ‘purpose for which she had come’.<sup>4</sup>

### Bringing their Devotion to a New Level

Bhagavan sensed something disingenuous in the constant need to adore him with little favours, perhaps sensing a subtle subconscious effort on their part to have him do the work for them. Undue adoration and excessive sentimentality often veiled a hidden intention, namely, to avoid taking responsibility for the hard work of spiritual progress which invariably meant transforming their lives and giving up cherished habits and old ways of thinking and living. Bhagavan taught that what is truly valuable cannot be gained from without, much less purchased with money but resides pristine and pure, ready-made within each person, if nonetheless occluded and covered over in most cases. Indulging in rich foods cannot help in removing the veil. Eating for the sake of taste and coveting lavish dishes as a means of improving health is born of illusion, he contended. Expensive foods do not enhance the value, merit or well-being of a person but in fact, the opposite is the case: a person is dignified according to his or her ability to live in simplicity and only rely on what is required for maintaining the needs of the body.

### Intervening on Bhagavan’s Behalf

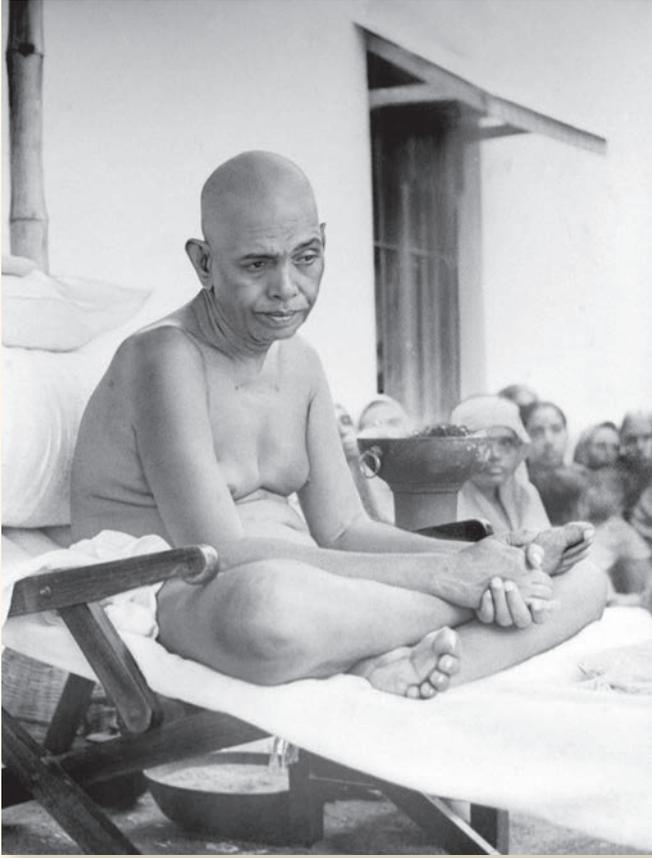
It was only natural that devotees would want to have a role in Bhagavan’s life and affairs and that they would want the best for him. But they failed to see how meddling their interventions could be, even if born of good intentions. Ironically, while they truly felt that their gifts would be an aid to Bhagavan’s health, in fact, the richness and the excessive quantity of their offerings often taxed his digestion.

Once a devotee said, “Bhagavan, you have recently very much reduced the amount of food you take daily. It’s not good.”

“Oho!” said Bhagavan. “Who told you that? I am taking what I require. What good would there be in my taking more food and getting fat? By getting fat, do you know how many ailments one suffers? The

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 23rd May, 1949.





more you eat, the greater the ailment. If you eat just what is necessary, ailments can be avoided.”

“Why have you given up taking buttermilk?” said another devotee. Bhagavan said, “If you observed what is being done when meals are served, you would understand. Buttermilk is brought into the dining hall in big buckets with large ladles. When taking out the buttermilk for serving me, the ladle is full, but when the same is served to the next person, the ladle is only half full.”<sup>5</sup>

### Tormented by Rich Food

Devotees failed to appreciate the burden granting blessings by eating whatever was offered. Instead of offering Bhagavan simple things, visitors often competed with each other to offer the most sumptuous snacks and dishes.

Bhagavan once complained:

“How can I regulate my diet? Whenever I try to have a simple diet of *rasam*, I am told there is a bhiksha that day and I am compelled to eat *vadai* and *payasam*. And I am always served much more than others. No

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 22nd October, 1947.

doubt it is done out of devotion but I am compelled to eat it all. If food is taken in this way, it will result in some ailment or other. How will that ailment be cured by medicine? There is only one way.”

Bhagavan knew that the only remedy available to him was reducing the quantity of food intake and avoiding rich and digestively complex foods.<sup>6</sup>

### A Costly Soup Dish

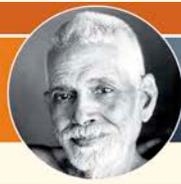
Once a wealthy devotee named Kamala Rani sent a soup made with raisins and very expensive vegetables imported from distant parts of the country. It came just when Bhagavan was starting his meal, so he agreed to have some of the soup. However, when the devotee continued to send the dish each day, Bhagavan protested. But she disobeyed his request and continued to send the soup each day at mealtime. “There!” said Bhagavan, “It has come again. She will not stop sending it. I should have said ‘No’ at the very beginning. It was my mistake to have accepted it.” [...] If, with the amount spent on this preparation, broken rice were brought and rice-gruel (*kanji*) prepared, a hundred people could partake of it. Why this expensive preparation for me alone?”

A devotee interceded saying, “Our concern is only that Bhagavan’s body be healthy.” “That is all right,” Bhagavan replied, “but do you mean to say that health is maintained only if soup prepared with raisins and costly vegetables is taken? If it were so, then rich people should all be enjoying good health. Why is it that they are more unhealthy and sickly than others? The satisfaction poor people get by taking sour rice-gruel cannot be had from anything else. In the olden days, when we were doing the cooking during summer, we used to have a pot into which we put all the leftover rice, fill it up with water, a little buttermilk, a little rice-gruel, dry ginger, and lemon leaves, and set it aside. It would get sour, cool and clear. The liquid used to be drunk with a pinch of salt by all of us by the tumblerful, and we used to feel very happy. No one had any illness whatsoever. Even now, if I were to drink two tumblerfuls of such a mixture, all my ailments would disappear.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 December, 1949.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18th October, 1947.





Another time, Bhagavan took up the same theme: “This is the fate even of Maharajas and other famous people. They must take medical advice for choosing items of food even while they are normal and healthy.

This is the case with me also. I like food made with wheat, but no one here will allow me to take it. Will anyone advise me to eat only rice gruel and pickles and to drink only hot water?” A voice in the Hall said, “No, no,” and T. P. R. added, “No one would like Bhagavan to take this food.” Bhagavan replied: “Anyone who wants to eat delicious food may eat whatever they want, but why should they compel me to take only some specified items. See how it is.”<sup>8</sup>

### A Coolie is Happier than a King

When devotees made appeals to health and argued that they were only endeavouring to do what was best for Bhagavan, Bhagavan said that that may be, but “what is health and what is happiness? Does happiness consist only in eating? Take the case of the Maharaja. Everyday he has rich and delicious food cooked for him. But he is always sick, always suffers from indigestion. He has no taste for food. He cannot digest what he eats and suffers from stomach-ache. He can’t sleep, even though he has a fine cot, nice silk curtains and soft cushioned bedding. [...] A coolie is happier than that king. He eats or drinks whatever he can afford and sleeps soundly without worries. As he works by the sweat of his brow, he gets a first-class appetite, relishes food like nectar even if he takes only gruel. He has nothing to lay by for the morrow and so has no worries about safeguarding his belongings. He lies down comfortably under some tree or other and enjoys sound sleep.”

A devotee aptly responded, “But Bhagavan, he

<sup>8</sup> From the diary of N.N. Rajan in *Mountain Path*, April 1981, p. 93.

does not think that he is a happy man.” Bhagavan said, “That is the trouble with the world. The one who sleeps under the tree looks at the palaces and mansions and regrets that he does not have those pleasures. But he is the truly happy man.”

“Once I saw a coolie here. Till noon he was doing hard labour by digging the earth and throwing it on the road. He was sweating profusely all the time and was tired. When he became hungry, he washed his legs, hands, and face in the tank, sat on a slab and opened the pot containing his food. It was full of cooked rice, with a little soup poured over it. He took out three handfuls of that rice and swallowed it with evident relish. Nothing was left over. He washed the pot, drank some water and dozed away under the tree, with one of his arms serving as a pillow. I then felt that he was truly happy. If one eats just to live, everything one eats gives strength. It is only when you live to eat that you become sick.”

The devotee then said, “What Bhagavan says is true but a Maharaja regrets that he has not become an emperor; an emperor that he has not become a Devendra. They will not have the feeling that a coolie is happier.”

Bhagavan responded, “No. They will not have that feeling; that is the illusion. If they have the true feeling, they become realised souls. As I have experienced both of them, I know the value of that happiness.

To tell you the truth, the happiness I experienced while in Virupaksha Cave when I ate only when somebody brought something and slept on the earthen platform without even a cloth on it, I do not have it now with this luxurious food I now eat. This cot, this bed, and these pillows—all these are bondages.”<sup>9</sup>

(to be continued)

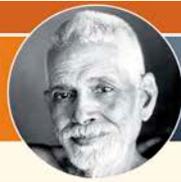
<sup>9</sup> *Letters*, 10th September, 1948.

## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: True Gift-Giving

M. Every gift implies unselfishness. That is the whole content of *nishkama karma* (unselfish action). It means true renunciation. If the giving nature is developed it becomes *tyaga*. If anything is willingly given away it is a delight to the giver and to the receiver. If the same is stolen, it is misery to both. *Dana*, *dharma*, and *nishkama karma* are all *tyaga* only. When ‘mine’ is given up, it is *chitta suddhi* (purified mind). When ‘I’ is given up it is *jnana*. When the nature to give away is developed, it results in *jnana*.

— Talks § 581





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Varuna Japa, 3rd-5th July

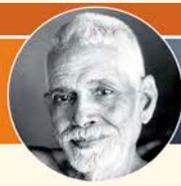


Varuna is the Lord of the sea and the guardian deity of the Western direction, hence the Varuna lingam sits in the Westernmost part of Holy Arunchala's hill-round circuit. Some sources say He is the father of Lord Brahma and Sage Vasishtha, and as the guardian of morality, is the one who dispenses judgment and punishment when dharma is vitiated. Indra is said to have diminished Lord Varuna's power because of His wrathfulness. Varuna whose vehicle is Makara, the fish, is Lord of water, and controls the rain (*vri + una* = "to surround", "to cover" or "to restrain"). When drought strikes, Lord Varuna is appeased through various forms of prayer and liturgy.

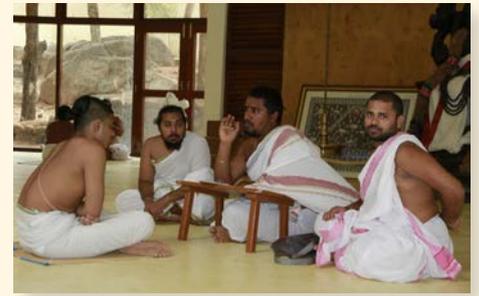
With Tamil Nadu now in its twentieth month of drought and with water tables still dangerously low, Varuna japam and yagyam was performed at the Ashram each morning from the 3rd through 5th of July followed each day by an offering at the Ashram Well. Special abhishekam followed each day at Bhagavan's and Mother's Shrines.

The days following the three days of rites did see some change in the weather with cloudy skys and occasional light rains, which, while not bearing any appreciable volume of water, did arouse hope that the protracted period of drought might be drawing to a close. Finally, however, by the month's end, increasingly larger storms rolled through town. After three days of repeated nightly rainstorms, a big thunderstorm descended on the city the night of 31st July, bringing substantial precipitation. The following morning the whole of creation was singing and the long-silent tirtham frogs chanted their joyful approval. —





## Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Veda Pariksha Student Exam 7th -9th July



Two days after completing the Varuna japa, dozens of students from all over South India came to undergo three days of examinations in Krishna Yajur Veda, Rig Veda and Sama Veda (7 through 9th July). The Rishis of ancient times sought ways to ensure preservation of the sastra and thus devised various *pathas* or modes of recitation to guarantee accurate transmission down through the generations. —

## Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Cow Lakshmi Day

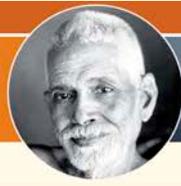


When Cow Lakshmi left the body on 18th June 1948, Bhagavan penned the following lines: "In the year of Sarvadhari, fifth of Ani, a Friday, in the waxing phase, twelfth lunar day, under *visakam*, Cow Lakshmi attained *vimukti*." Lakshmi's 69th Aradhana Day was observed on Wednesday, 5th July at her Samadhi. After the first arati, devotees sang Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer's *Life of Lakshmi*, followed by the more recent Ashram classic, KVS's *Gomata Lakshamma*. —

## Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel and Facebook Page

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





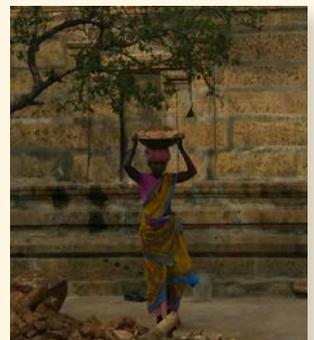
## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Pandava Tirtham Renovations

The Pandavas, the five sons of Pandu, had a scheming uncle, Shakuni who was a master at gambling and owned a pair of trick dice. He lured the eldest brother, Yudhishtira into a game and slyly won the Pandavas' entire kingdom. The five brothers were dispossessed, went into exile and wandered the vast extent of Bharat from north to south with their wife, Draupadi. In the course of their pilgrimage, it is said they came to Tirukoillur and to Tiruvannamalai and stayed on the Hill in the grove next to the temple that bears their name. The two tirthams on either side of Pandava Kovil (just behind Sri Ramanasramam a short distance up the Hill) are called Arjuna, or Pandava Tirtham, and Bhima Tirtham. The *Arunachala Mahatmyam* says that by bathing in Pandava Tirtham, the Pandavas became 'Lords of the world'. It also says that Bhū Devi (Goddess Mother Earth) was blessed with herbs, fruits and abundance as "a result of bathing in Pandava Tirtham along with all the devas".

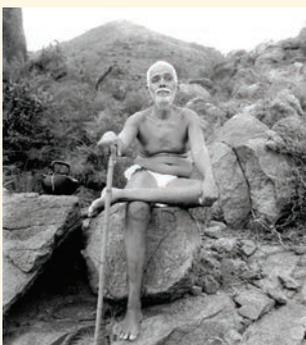


Pandava Kovil and Thirtam in the early 1930s (Paul Brunton)

Earlier this year, donations were made for the repair of Pandava Tirtham. Ashram workers are presently dredging the tank and reconstructing its steps. It looks hopeful that sufficient funds will remain to do repairs on the adjacent Bhima tirtham as well. —



## Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Hill Repair



Due to heavy run-off in the years since this photo was taken of Bhagavan in the early 1940s (far left), much of the earth that held in place the stone Bhagavan was sitting on had washed away. Skandasramam Swami Brahmananda noticed the erosion and took measures to protect the stone's perch on this slope just up from the Ashram's back gate. —

