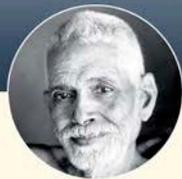


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

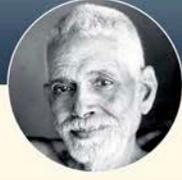
EXTENDED KARTHIKAI DEEPAM EDITION
DECEMBER 2017 VOL. 11, NO. 12



Dev Gogoi, by permission



Saranagati



DECEMBER 2017
VOL. 11, NO. 12

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The early days of the festival were dry but then a cyclone descended on the Bay of Bengal bringing unceasing showers. However, on the final day the weather cleared to make for a spectacular view of the Hill at the special moment of lighting the hilltop flame.

During the ten days, devotees attended Nochur Sri Venkataraman's discourses each morning at the Sankara Matt while Veda programmes took place in the Ashram.

This special Deepam edition carries recollections of Karthikai events during Bhagavan's time (see p. 2ff.) as well as a look into the deeper significance of the Deepam flame (see p. 5ff.). And read the childhood remembrances of the late Smt. Rajalakshmi (p.9ff) who passed away at the age of 97 earlier this month. Photos appearing in the cover insert and on pp. 5 & 7 are from Dev Gogoi.

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

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

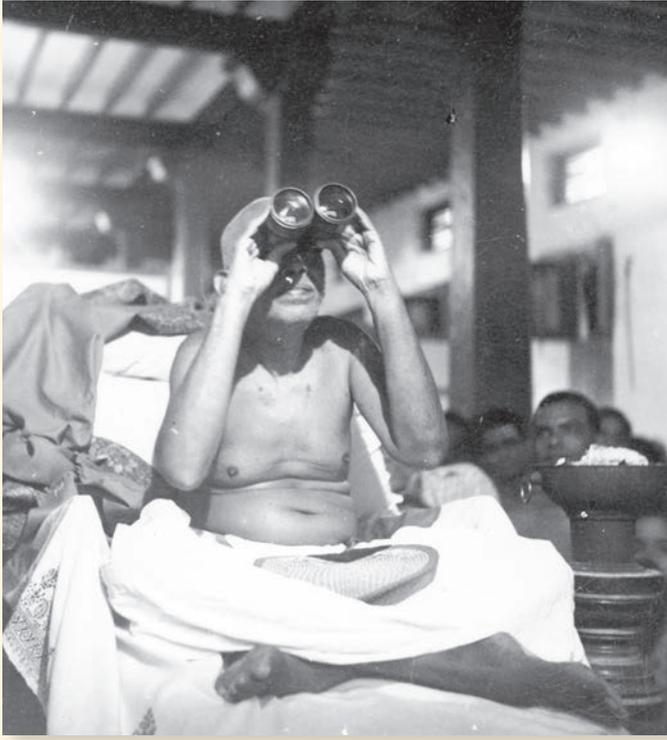
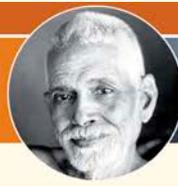
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

2nd December (Sat) Karthikai Deepam
3rd December (Sun) Full Moon Day
6th December (Weds) Punarvasu Day
31st December (Sun) Lucy-ma Day
1st January (Mon) Full Moon Day
3rd January (Weds) Bhagavan's 138th Jayanthi Day
14th January (Sun) Pongal

30th January (Tues) Punarvasu Day
30th January (Tues) Evening) Full Moon
31st January (Weds) Chinnaswamigal Aradhana
13th February (Tues) Mahasivaratri
26th February (Mon) Punarvasu Day
1st March (Thurs) Full Moon
6th March (Tues) Sundaram Iyer Day





Back in the Day: Celebrating Deepam with Sri Bhagavan

Each year on Deepam day in the Ashram, attendants would place Bhagavan's chair in the open space facing the summit of the Hill, spread covers on it and place on a stool the things that Bhagavan was accustomed to having at his disposal. Directly in front of him would sit a large brass vessel filled with ghee with a wick at its centre. Flowers and garlands would decorate the surroundings and baskets of fruit and dishes of sweetmeats would be brought by devotees. Those gathered would sit in rows just down from the steps leading up to the Hill, the men on Bhagavan's right, the women on his left. Plumes of smoke from the incense would lend an air of sanctity as Bhagavan sat in his consummate stillness, giving occasional glances, and sometimes in a soft voice, he would narrate the significance of the Holy Beacon. He would periodically take his binoculars and gaze up at the top of the Hill, but his attention otherwise never left the spot where the sacred Deepam flame was to appear. When Vedaparayana was concluded, the sun would

have just gone down and small lamps would be lit. All kept their attention riveted on the Hilltop, waiting in expectation for the hallowed moment.

At 6pm, with the sound of firecrackers in the distance, the light on the hill would appear and palms would be joined in solemn veneration as crowds on the Hill-round road would shout "Arohara! Arohara!" The Ashram Deepam light (*akhandajyoti*) would be lit and Vedacharyas would intone *Na karmana* as the arati flame was passed around. Bhagavan would then sample some of the offerings and the rest were distributed among devotees. *Aksharamanamalai* would be sung followed by *Arunachala Pancharatnam* in Sanskrit and then in Tamil.¹

The Son is in the Father

Each year's Deepam had its own special character and Bhagavan was ever the expert in highlighting the spirit of the occasion. On the second day after the Deepam flame had been lit one year, as per established tradition, Arunachaleswarar and Apithakuchambal were in procession round the Hill. When the deities reached the Ashram, devotees offered garlands, coconut and camphor, and then took the flame to Bhagavan in the Old Hall. When they waved the flame before Bhagavan, he exclaimed, "Why all this? Is not the Son included in the Father?"²

Deepam Night 1947

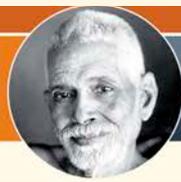
During another Karthikai festival, it was Deepam day, the 27 November 1947 and the skies were perfectly clear. The Jubilee Hall floor was decorated with *rangoli* while mango-leaf festoons hung above. The crowds that had come to the Ashram that morning were now on their way around the Hill and this Deepam evening the devotees had the Ashram mostly to themselves.

Around 6:45 pm as the flame atop the Holy Hill blazed in full glory and the Tamil chanting resounded in full voice, Bhagavan sat resting his cheek on his hand. Nagamma described the scene in detail: "His face appeared as though mirroring his Self-illumination, with his silence and profound thought reflected on it. The moon rose in the east and cast its light on him as though seeking its light from him. I sat there, facing east,

¹ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 29th November 1947.

² *At the Feet of Bhagavan: Leaves from the Diary of T. K. Sundaresa Iyer*, p. 29.





with my back against the almond tree. If I looked north, I had the light of the Arunachala Hill; if I looked ahead I had the brilliant light of the moon; and if I looked to the right, I had the glowing light emanating from Bhagavan's face. What a sight it was, and how lucky I felt that I had the three-faced light around me that night! I felt an inexplicable bliss and involuntarily closed my eyes. On hearing the sound of the dinner bell, I opened my eyes. Bhagavan was looking steadily at me, and that look was more than I could stand; involuntarily I looked down. Bhagavan smiled and entered the dining room with devotees following behind him."³

The Unintended Deepam Flame

Another Deepam day at the Ashram was memorable for an altogether different reason. The tradition of lighting bonfires (*chokkapanai*) before the temple on Deepam night originates with Arunachala's spectacular Deepam flame, large and bright so that its blaze can be seen at great distances and thereby bless the thousands who behold it.

During Mother's temple construction (1939-1949), a temporary shrine had been erected near the Old Hall. One Karthikai Deepam morning, while performing arati, the curtain in front of Mother's shrine caught fire. With no one noticing it, young Seshadri Sastrigal doused the fire and went nonchalantly with the arati to Bhagavan who was out of view at some distance from the place of conflagration. With great devotion, Bhagavan took the vibhuti and applying it to his forehead, queried in jest, "What? Has the *chokkapanai* been lit in the morning itself?" The boy was embarrassed and marvelled that Bhagavan could have known what had happened.⁴

Kavyakantha's Tapas: Deepam 1907

Another special Karthikai festival moment took place in the days at Virupaksha Cave. It was the evening of 17th November 1907, the eighth day of the Karthikai festival (*Pichandavar*). Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni climbed the Hill to see Bhagavan, though he knew little about him and did not even know his name. The Muni had mastered the scriptures and had had profound meditation experiences, but he felt that his

³ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 29th November 1947.

⁴ *Boundless Ocean of Grace*, vol 3, p. 732.

life was futile. He fell before Bhagavan in despair and pleaded for help, saying that having undergone every imaginable *tapas*, he had still not found lasting peace.

Brahmanaswami, as Bhagavan was called in those days, simply sat motionless and remained silent. As he sat observing the prostrate figure before him, the following words of counsel flowed forth from his lips: "Find out wherefrom this 'I' springs forth and merge at its source—that is *tapas*. Find out wherefrom the sound of the mantra in *japa* rises up and merge there—that is *tapas*."

Elated at this *upadesa*, the Muni propped himself up, took a meditative posture and sat in stillness, registering the spiritual currents that flowed through his body and the ecstasy born of this fresh encounter with the swami. As waves of joy washed over him, he understood that his long search was finally at an end, that he had found someone who could help him.

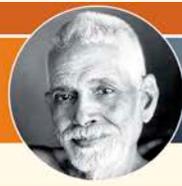
Later that evening, he learned from Palani Swami that the swami's name was Venkataraman. The Muni duly abbreviated Venkataraman to 'Ramana' and replaced Brahmanaswami with the epithet 'Maharshi' or 'Great Seer'. Thus, on this Karthikai festival day in 1907, the young sage got the name by which the whole world would come to know him⁵.

Overcoming Barriers

By this time, Bhagavan had seen many Karthikai festivals. And even from his earliest years in Tiruvannamalai, Deepam days brought throngs of visitors and pilgrims. During his first Karthikai festival in 1896, many sadhus came to the temple and one of them, Uddandi Nayanar, took up the responsibility of protecting young Ramana from the throngs of curious onlookers. As the Karthikai Deepam flame was lit on the 20th November 1896, pilgrims were drawn to the youth in samadhi bliss and as the decades passed, increasingly there was the problem of insulating Bhagavan from the multitudes that came on Deepam day. Everyone wanted to make contact with him and touch his feet. The problem became worse still in the years at Sri Ramanasramam. Bhagavan's devotees one day sat and discussed what could be done. The proposal to put up a barrier between Bhagavan and devotees met with mixed response, many feeling like

⁵ *Bhagavan and Nayana*, pp. 6-8; *Saranagati*, December 2014, p. 2.





a barrier would cut them off from Bhagavan. But one year, someone came with a broken coconut and wanted to venerate Bhagavan by pouring the milk over his head. The decision was then taken to craft a wooden partition to shield Bhagavan during the heavy rush at Deepam and other feast days. Bhagavan was not particularly in favour of the idea but as was his custom, he did not openly object to decisions made by those around him. Whether a railing or no railing, Bhagavan sat unaffected and gave no importance to what went on around him. This is not to say he was not aware of what went on around him but even in the midst of the large Deepam crowd, he gave the occasional affectionate glance to a familiar devotee.

One Deepam festival, when the railing was put in place, a little boy scrambled through the bars and ran up to Bhagavan to show him his new toy. Bhagavan laughed and turned to the attendant and said, “See how useful your railing is!”⁶

GVS narrated another humorous account about how, in the mid-1940s, when there was Mahapuja in the Mother’s Shrine, the wooden railing was

⁶ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 161.

installed. After taking his seat, Bhagavan whispered across the rail to Alagammal: ‘See, mother, how they have bound your son and put him here in jail!’⁷

During one Karthikai festival in the 1940s, the management decided to move the railing out some distance from Bhagavan’s couch to prevent the visiting villagers from reaching over it to touch Bhagavan. Bhagavan did not speak out against the change but after lunch, when he was alone with the attendant in the Hall, he complained about the vast distance that now separated him from the place where pilgrims would be passing by. The attendant echoed the concerns of the management and was of the position that the railing’s new placement was ideal. Bhagavan said, “We don’t need to move the railing; let us just move the sofa a little way out from the wall towards it.” The attendant said, “Bhagavan, those villagers who will not even have properly bathed will come and reach over the railing to touch you.” Bhagavan paused and solemnly looked his attendant in the eyes, “Do you know who these people are? They are the very embodiment (*swarupa*) of Lord Arunachaleswara Himself”. —

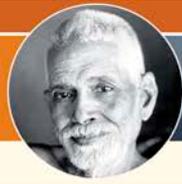
⁷ *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, G. V. Subbaramayya, p. 148.



Events: Rangammal Memorial Rehabilitation Society IETC Inauguration

On 18th November, Rangammal Memorial Rehabilitation Society inaugurated the *Integral Education Therapy Centre*, a new spacious facility adjacent to SKP Engineering College on the Chennai highway on the outskirts of Tiruvannamalai. The facility supports innovative therapies and education for special needs children. District Collector Thiru K.S. Kandasamy was on hand to light the lamp, open the buildings and honour the many professionals and fund-raisers who volunteered their services. Funds for the project were raised in USA, England, Europe, Hong Kong, and Singapore and many Ramana devotees contributed to the implementation of this unique venture. For more information go to: <www.fundly.com/arayofhope>





The Hidden Radiance: Probing the Inner Meaning of Karthikai Deepam

Bhagavan respected the importance of sacramental life and was never averse to honouring the customs and traditions celebrated in his midst. Bhagavan was a devotee of the Holy Hill and wept tears of devotion when pouring out his verses in praise of Arunachala. At times, even the very mention of Arunachala's name produced noticeable changes in his countenance as sentiments of reverence overcame him. So when Bhagavan pointed devotees beyond the surface features of rites and festivals regarding the Holy Hill, it is not that he was questioning the value of such traditions. Rather, he wanted to lead devotees to a fuller devotion and understanding beyond mere participation. Honouring the tradition wasn't just a matter of faithfully performing oblations and liturgical duties. Bhagavan wanted his devotees to be transformed, to pierce the barrier of self-identity and to uncover the deeper understanding that such conventions were intended to elicit.

Readers may recall a scene in 1912 at Virupaksha when devotees appealed to Bhagavan about celebrating his birthday. Bhagavan resisted the idea and asked them to consider the meaning of the word 'birthday'. After all, he said, 'What is birth and who is born?' Among the verses he penned on the occasion was the following:

You who wish to celebrate a birthday, enquire first who was born. One's true birthday is when one enters into the Eternal Being which shines forever without birth or death¹.

Similarly, in response to Muruganar's request that Bhagavan elucidate the *tattva* of Karthikai Deepam, Bhagavan wrote a verse. In it, he drew devotees' attention from the *spectacle* of the beacon to its deeper mystery, so that they might be alive to the essence of Karthikai Deepam. He wrote:

Getting rid of the I-am-the-body idea and merging the mind into the Heart to realize the Self as non-dual being and the light of all is the real significance of darshan of the beacon of light on Annamalai, the centre of the universe.²

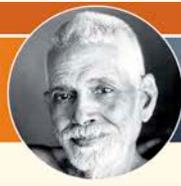
One year, on the fifth day of the festival, Bhagavan's attendant Venkataratnam went to the temple to see the famous Rishabha *vahanam*. The attendant was overpowered by the sheer grandeur and scale of the celebration—the *nagaswara* players, the stunning fireworks display, the huge garlands, the coloured bulbs strung around Rishabha's head, blinking lights, glittering ornaments and the swelling crowd of animated pilgrims. After Venkataratnam narrated his impassioned account, Bhagavan quietly asked, "You have said a lot about the crowd and the decorations and everything else. But you have not said anything about Arunachaleswara Himself." Venkataratnam replied, "All the elaborate preparations and the spectacular arrangements were for Him, were they not?" Bhagavan said, "You said that the garland was huge, you said so much about the intricate patterns on the umbrella, you said the carriage was drawn by bulls and you even described the garlands around the bulls' necks. But you have not talked about Arunachaleswara at all!"³

¹ *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 136.

² *Ibid*, p. 79.

³ *Boundless Ocean of Grace*, vol. 6, p. 30.





Bhagavan's line of questioning was not intended as criticism. He saw in this devotee what he had seen in so many others: getting tricked by the external, looking ever-outward for the one thing that is going to grant them peace, all the while forgetting where the hidden sought-for gem actually resides. The answer for Venkataratnam, as well as for the reader who wishes to better understand Bhagavan's verse, is found in the legend of Arunachala.

The reader will recall how Vishnu and Brahma faced off with each other in a dispute over who was the greater. Angry words flew back and forth as the two Gods tossed each other about. The surrounding mountains were ground to dust and the entire cosmos was shaken to the core. To rouse them from the bewitching spell of their pride, Lord Siva decided to reveal to them something greater than they. The Lord thus appeared before them as a giant column of light and challenged them to a contest: "The one who discovers the extent of this column of light, either its top or bottom, will be deemed the greater!"

Lord Vishnu took the form of a boar (*varaha*) and dug down into the earth to seek the column's nethermost extreme; Lord Brahma took the form of a swan (*hamsa*) and flew into the uppermost heavens to find the pillar's apex. Long years, even decades passed but their respective searches brought no results. Finally, after one hundred years digging down into the Earth, Vishnu ceased his labours, humbled himself and began to sit in meditation. Soon he realised that the extent of the column of fire could never be discovered because the pillar of light was the light of consciousness itself. It could never be beheld because it was *itself* the source of all beholding. Vishnu now began to see how things stood and went in humility before the Lord. Meanwhile, Brahma was high in the sky, far away from the Earth. Lost in his pride, he sought to deceive Vishnu and Lord Siva by presenting a screw-pine flower and trying to convince them that he had retrieved it from the summit of the pillar. In the end, both Vishnu and Brahma had

to acknowledge their defeat and reverently bowed down before the Lord.

Now we have all heard this story. But grasping its subtler meaning is key and hinges on a single point: *the pillar of fire is the Self*. The source or 'extent' of the pillar of light cannot be seen because it is the seer himself: *Not that which the eye can see, but that whereby the eye can see*, reads the *Kenopanishad*.

The column of light is a metaphor for pure awareness, the witnessing presence. It is a pillar because it spans heaven and earth, all that is seen or known, from the tiniest particle to the vastest realms of the cosmos, the intersection between matter and spirit, *purusha* and *prakruti*, form and the formless. Bhagavan questions Venkataratnam to remind us that the mountain of stone is but a 'sign' for that which cannot be seen. Bhagavan wants us to discover what Vishnu discovered deep down in the earth. Entering the mystery of the pillar of light hangs on freeing oneself of the delusion of a separate self, a self that assumes that it is equivalent to the body, whereas the reverse is the case. The body, one's immediate surroundings and the whole universe are contained within this cognising presence Bhagavan calls 'the Self': "It is only when we realise that it is we who clothe the formless Arunachala with form—because we view it with the eyes of the body—that we shall begin to search within our hearts for the formless Reality which that form veils."⁴

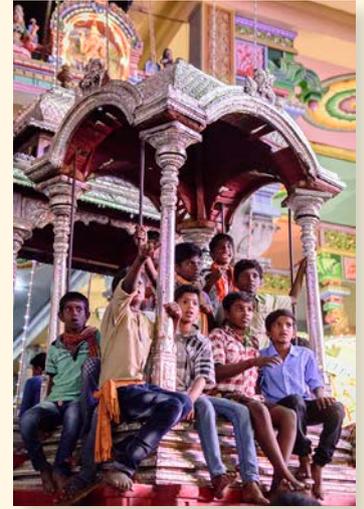
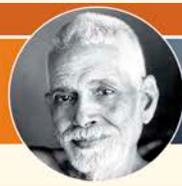
Beholding the beacon flame atop Holy Arunachala and offering obeisance to it is a ceremonial re-enactment of awakening from *dehatmabudhi*. Vishnu and Brahma's argument is the mythical representation of all worldly struggle where each of us is lost in our self-partiality, each of us seeking to be *better* than the next, striving to *have* more, to *know* more, to *be* more in the eyes of our peers, while tragically and ironically failing to recognise that the entire universe—even eternity itself—dwells within our own heart. —

⁴ *The Call Divine*, vol. 1, p. 510.

Announcements

Video footage of the 2nd Dec. celebrations available on the Ashram YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>





Karthikai Deepam 2017

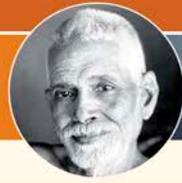
The Karthikai Deepam festival takes place when the moon is in *kr̥ittika nakshatra* (the constellation of the six stars of the Pleiades) and the Sun is in *vrichika* (the 8th *rasi*) in the Tamil month of *Karthikai* (mid-November to mid-December). The moon on Deepam day is usually full or nearly full. While the name Karthikai is associated with Murugan, the festival has its origins in the event that is told in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*. Uma had come to do penance at Tiruvannamalai. After she slayed the demon Mahishasura, the Lord appears before her as a column of light and offers her a boon. She said, “My only wish is to be merged forever with you, O Lord.” Thus on this day, Ardhanareswara, ‘the God who is half-Goddess’ became Arunachala. Lord Siva then proclaimed, “In the month of Karthikai, when the moon is in the constellation of *kr̥ittika*, I shall mount

a bright beacon upon the summit of this Mountain. They who see that most excellent Light will endure and prosper upon the earth, free of disease and hunger [and] the boon of liberation [shall be granted] to their kin down to the twenty-first generation” (*Arunachala Purana* §159).

Because of her victory over the demon, Devi was designated Guardian of Arunachala and thus the preliminary celebrations of the Deepam Festival always begin at the Durgambal Temple.

This year, preliminary rites of the 17-day festival began on the 20th November at the Durgambal Temple followed a few days later with flagraising (*dwajaaaranam*) at the Big Temple on the 23rd. The main ten days culminated with the Karthikai Deepam flame on the evening of the 2nd December to be followed by ten additional days of the nightly beacon light. The weather this year has mostly been good for the day and night processions and for other related functions. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: 2nd December, Mahadeepam at the Ashram

After several days of relentless rain that brought the Samudram lake to overflowing, on the morning of the tenth day of the Karthikai Deepam festival, the cyclone broke and the rain subsided. By late afternoon, the skies were all but clear as devotees gathered in front of Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall to await the culminating moment. Meanwhile abhishekam, followed by an elaborate *alankaram*, was underway in Bhagavan's shrine amidst the refrains of the Krishna Yajur Veda in ghanam mode. After arati, priests and purohits went

in procession, bearing the Ramana Mahalingam puja flame outside to join devotees gathered round the image of Bhagavan. As monsoon cumulus swirled about the summit, devotees waited in rapt attention when at 5:57pm the first flames of the hilltop cauldron could be seen. Cheers broke out in praise of Lord Arunachala as all raised their palms in pranams to the Holy Hill. At 6:05, as per Ashram tradition, the assembly chanted Bhagavan's *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* while receiving the blessing of Arunchala's beacon light. —





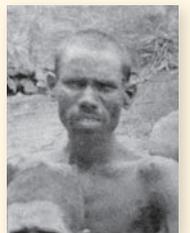
In the Frame with Bhagavan: GRO 71

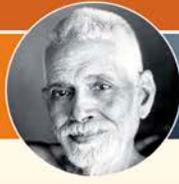
Archival Listing GRO 71 on rock near Virupaksha Cave ca. 1920: Front: 1. Ramanatha Brahmachari; 2. Sabapati Swami; 3. Niranjanda Swami; 4. Unknown; 5. Alagammal (Bhagavan's Mother); 6. Venu Ammal; 7. Unknown. Centre: 1. Thesur Ammal, Akhilandamma; 2. Chinna Ramanathan; 3. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi; 4. -5. Unidentified. Back: 1. Mastan Sahib; 2. Ramakrishna Swami; 3.-6. Unidentified.



Venu Ammal: Echammal's younger sister was widowed at an early age and raised her daughter at Skandasramam. Assisting Bhagavan's mother in the kitchen, Venu Ammal cared for her in the final hours of her life. When Venu Ammal's daughter died, she was again saddled with the responsibility of raising a child on her own, this time her two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter, Rajalakshmi. In 1950 while on pilgrimage to Kasi, she had a dip in the Holy Ganga on Bhagavan's behalf. At that very moment, she saw a huge shooting star trailing the sky. The next morning, she learnt that Bhagavan had shed his body. —

Mastan Swami: A simple weaver born of a poor Muslim family from Desur, he came to Tiruvannamalai with Akhilandamma in 1914. During his first meeting with Bhagavan at Mango Tree Cave, Bhagavan's gaze fell on him and he stood transfixed: "After giving me [his] look, the gate of my Heart [opened...]. I stood [near him] for eight hours, absolutely without fatigue, filled with total absorption and peace." Years later reflecting on Mastan, Bhagavan said: "All sorts of beings gravitate towards the presence of a jnani — devas, rishis, Brahmanishtas, siddhas and yogis.[...] The most advanced are ripe fruits, just waiting to fall. One such devotee was Mastan." —





Memoirs of a Young Devotee: Rajalakshmi

Rajalakshmi's grandmother, Venu Ammal was a great devotee of Bhagavan. Like her sister Echammal, Venu Ammal had suffered tragedy early in life. Having been married at a young age, when only 15 years old, she gave birth to her daughter. Not long afterward, her husband died leaving her to care for the child on her own.

Her older sister, Echammal, had come to Bhagavan as a widow in 1906 and Venu Ammal followed suit a few years later. Venu Ammal helped Bhagavan's mother with the cooking at Skandasramam and the two became very close. Mother Alagammal once said that Venu Ammal was like her own daughter. When Mother Alagammal fell sick at Skandasramam, it was Venu Ammal who with great care attended on her until her final hours in May 1922.

Though Venu Ammal was poor, she managed to get her daughter married off at the age of 17. On 20th October 1920, Balakuchambal gave birth to a baby girl who was named Rajalakshmi. Venu Ammal was overjoyed.

But like Echammal, Venu Ammal's happiness would be pierced through once again when tragedy struck with the sudden death of her daughter in 1923. Inconsolable, Venu Ammal came from town late in the night and poured out her sorrow before Bhagavan. Bhagavan shared her grief and consoled her by telling her that the purpose for which her daughter had been born in this world was over and of necessity she had to leave it. Moreover, he said, the body dies whereas the *atman* is deathless. Consoled by his words, she returned home.

Venu Ammal's grand-daughter was now displaced as the girl's father was employed and could not look after her. So it was decided that the motherless child, not yet three years old, should come and live with Venu Ammal. Thus in 1923, Rajalakshmi came to the Ashram.

By then, Bhagavan had already come down from the Hill and had settled near his mother's samadhi on the plot of ground that would come to be called Sri Ramanasramam. Venu Ammal was serving at the ashram but her house was in town. So, each morning, she took her grand-daughter along with her to the Ashram.

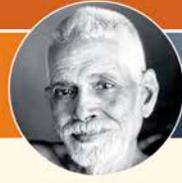
Rajalakshmi and Bhagavan got along famously. She called Bhagavan *Thatha* or 'grandpa' and Bhagavan happily played the part.

In the first months at her new home, Rajalakshmi sometimes cried for her mother who was no more. Bhagavan used to tell her that both he and she were in the same boat since he too had recently lost his mother.

The Cooking Game

In those years, Bhagavan would sometimes sit near Pali Tirtham on a raised platform under a tree and Rajalakshmi would come and play near him. Once, when she was playing the 'cooking game', she offered small stones as cooked rice to Bhagavan and asked him to eat them. Bhagavan readily complied and put the stones into his mouth, pretending to eat them. On seeing this, Venu Ammal asked Bhagavan why he was putting stones in his mouth. Bhagavan replied that he and Rajalakshmi were playing the 'cooking game'





and she was happily offering stones to him as food. If he did not put them in his mouth, it would spoil the game.

On another occasion, Rajalakshmi was seated next to Bhagavan in the dining hall and Venu Ammal was serving. When she served her grand-daughter some brinjal (aubergine), the girl asked for more. Venu Ammal recited a Sanskrit proverb, *Aasaa aasaa parama dukham, Niraasa parama sukham* ('Desire is the supreme suffering and contentment is the supreme happiness') and refused to give her more. When she was about to serve more to Bhagavan, he asked her to stop and repeated the same proverb. Venu Ammal told Bhagavan that the proverb was meant for the child, not for him. Bhagavan replied that what was applicable to the child was also applicable to him; if she could not serve more curry to the young child then neither should he be served more.

Her First School Teacher

Bhagavan gave Rajalakshmi instruction in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit and taught her a Sanskrit sloka from *Upadesa Saram*. Bhagavan wrote in a notebook all thirty verses of *Upadesa Saram* in Sanskrit and gave it to Rajalakshmi which she dutifully learned by rote. He urged her to write out her slokas in the same language they were written in and said that writing a sacred text one time is equivalent to reading it ten times.

After learning Sanskrit from Bhagavan, Rajalakshmi started attending Sanskrit classes at Arunachaleswara



Rajalakshmi (age 8) with Bhagavan, Alamelu Ammal and Echammal (Dec. 1928)

Temple. One day, after having read the chapter of *Ramana Vijayam* which told the story of Bhagavan's stay at Pathala lingam, she was curious to see it for herself. So, the next day when returning from class, she entered the Pathala lingam. But the dank moist air and bats flying around compelled her hasty retreat. When she saw Bhagavan she asked him how he had been able to stay inside such a place for so long. Bhagavan told her that he was not aware of his stay there and that he only came to know of it from others. This was an indication for her that Bhagavan must have been completely oblivious to time and space in those early days.¹ —

¹ Adapted from articles by Rajalakshmi's son, A. Viswanathan for *The Mountain Path*, 2008, Aradhana pp. 38-39 and Advent pp. 28-33.

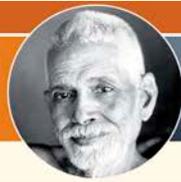
Obituary: Smt. Rajalakshmi



Smt. Rajalakshmi was born on 30th October 1920 and was blessed with the rare opportunity of spending her childhood in Bhagavan's presence. At 97, she was among the oldest living devotees of Sri Bhagavan. In early childhood, Bhagavan taught her slokas in Tamil, Sanskrit and Telugu, often writing in his own hand for her to study and memorise. She spent most of her time outside school hours in the Ashram. In later years after marriage to Sri C.S. Arunachalam, who served in the Army, she visited Sri Ramanashram regularly with her children to receive Sri Bhagavan's blessings.

Her second son Sri. A. Viswanathan passed away suddenly in Chennai on 6th November 2017. Though Rajalakshmi bore the grief with mental fortitude, the shock took its toll and she passed away five days later on 11th November 2017 in Chennai. —





Obituary: Sri A. Viswanathan



Sri A. Viswanathan, born 26th December, 1944 belonged to a great lineage of Bhagavan devotees. His mother, Rajalakshmi, spent her childhood in Ramanasramam and his mother's grandmother Venu Ammal, younger sister of Echammal, served Maharshi in the early days.

Sri Viswanathan was a mechanical engineer by profession and worked in reputed foundries like *Best & Co* and *Ennore Foundries* and also served in Indonesia. He contributed to the indigenous development of automobile engine castings, visiting customers in Europe and Japan. On completion of his professional career, he focused on the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, was a regular visitor to Sri Ramanasramam and wrote articles for *The Mountain Path* and *The Maharshi* and was instrumental in bringing to light the Sri Chakra drawn by Sri Bhagavan in great detail for Venu Ammal.

Healthy throughout, he mingled with one and all and was popular with children. He frequently visited USA where his daughters reside and was a regular visitor to the Ashram at New York. On 31st October, 2017 while in Chennai, he suffered a mild heart attack. After an angiogram, the medical team opted for bypass surgery. Throughout his stay in the hospital, he was cheerful chanting 'Arunachala'. On 6th November, just a day before the surgery, he suffered a massive cardiac arrest in front of the medical team visiting him on routine call. In spite of their best efforts, with the chant of 'Arunachala' on his lips, he reached the feet of Sri Bhagavan at 8-16P.M. on 6th November 2017. His mother passed away five days later. Viswanathan is survived by his wife Sumathi and two daughters Radhika and Ramya and grand-children. —

Obituary: Sri Murugesan



Born 26 November 1937 near Chidambaram, Sri Murugesan came to the Ashram in 1992 with a recommendation letter from a Saiva Siddhanta Mutt. After serving a few years in the Ashram dining hall and the Old Hall, he was put in charge of the gosala where he served tirelessly for next 25 years—even till the last day of his life. Known for his hard work, he was up early each day and reached the gosala by 4am for morning milking. Though healthy till the end and taking his evening meal as usual the night before, at approximately 3 am of 29th November 2017, during Brahma Muhurtha (Kaisika Ekadasi) of the 7th day of the Karthikai Deepam festival, Murugesan passed away quietly in his sleep in his Ashram room, absorbed at the Feet of Holy Arunachala. —

O Nothing and Nowhere God

Some say you are the triune
Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, or
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Others, that your eternal
Falling into division
And resurrection to Unity
Are the Wheel of Life and Death.

Others still
That you are this or that;
Or this but not that ...

But who and what and where are you?
Are you everyone, everything and everywhere?

Yes, I AM!

Alasdair Black, by permission

