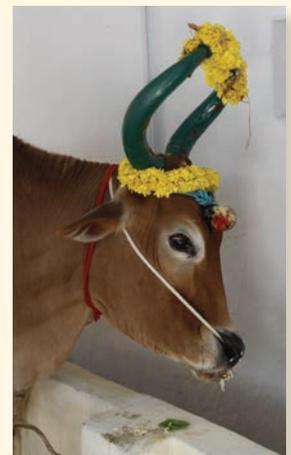


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

MATTU PONGAL
VOL. 10, NO. 2



D. Thiagarajan



Saranagati



FEBRUARY 2016
VOL. 10, NO. 2

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

New Year at the Ashram got off to a fine start with the continuation of talks by Sri Nochur Venkataraman followed by the lively Pongal celebrations with special music programmes. On the 12th Sivaprakasam Pillai Day was observed in the New Hall with the singing of his works while on the morning of the 14th, Ramaswami Pillai Day was celebrated at his samadhi near the gate leading up to Skandasramam.

Featured in this issue is a segment on the life of Bhagavan in the early years, when visitors came to the burgeoning Ashram unawares, and found themselves compelled to give up everything in order to attain life's goal. This meant in part availing themselves of the grace to sit at the feet of the Master. (See *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan*, pt. XIII, p. 2.)

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org. See our YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>.

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

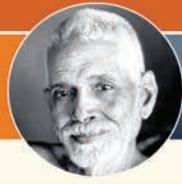
<i>In the Kitchen with Bhagavan, pt. XIII: Ensnared by the Divine</i>	2
<i>Wordwise: Ananda</i>	4
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sankranthi and Mattu Pongal</i>	5
<i>Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi (§28): Ananda</i>	5
<i>Bhagavan's Favourite Stories: Tiff between Uma and Iswara</i>	6
<i>Events in Tiruvannamalai: Tiruwoodal & Swami's Pradakshina</i>	7
<i>Announcements: Ramanasramam's YouTube Channel</i>	7
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Krishna Das in Concert</i>	8
<i>Obituary: Kum. Dolly Kolah</i>	9
<i>Obituary: Dr. Narayana Reddy</i>	9
<i>Announcements: Book Release</i>	9

Calendar of Upcoming Events

12th February (Fri) Munagala Venkataramiah Day
19th February (Fri) Punarvasu
21-22 February (Sun-Mon) Full Moon
27 February (Sat) Sundaram Iyer Day
7th March (Mon) Mahasivaratri
18th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa/Punarvasu

22nd March (Tues) Full Moon
8th April (Fri) Telugu New Year
14th April (Thurs) Tamil New Year/Punarvasu
15th April (Fri) Rama Navami
17th April (Sun) Major Chadwick Day
21st April (Thurs) Full Moon





In the Kitchen with Bhagavan Part XIII: Ensnared by the Divine

Over the centuries pilgrims came to Lord Arunachala with some trepidation, sensing the danger of His Divine presence. In fact many journeyed only as far as Tirukoillur, which while close enough to be within the prescribed three yojanas (ca. 30 kms) for gaining the boon of liberation, was far enough away to be protected from the Lord of Light taking hold of one forever and bringing one's family life to ruin. Others less cautious drew near but found that once in His grip, they were unable to come out of it again. But if the peril was great in earlier times, how much more so in the day when the son of Lord Arunachala, the human embodiment of Lord Siva Himself, descended the Holy Hill in order to receive guests. Visitors came unsuspectingly to take advantage of the Sage's more convenient location at the foot of the Hill, unaware of the risk they were running.

Take the case of Narayana Iyer who in 1928 agreed to accompany his friend Dr. Ramakrishna to Tiruvannamalai. He told the doctor frankly that he was not interested in meeting the swami but if by chance he did see him, he would in no wise bow down before him, believing such acts to be an indignity. He added that he was only joining Dr. Ramakrishna as a courtesy and had no real interest in swamis. The initiated will intuit already how things would unfold.

Their arrival in Tiruvannamalai coincided with the Karthigai Deepam festival and Narayana Iyer's planned place of residence in town proved overcrowded. So he

accepted the doctor's invitation to stay at the Ashram instead. Immediately upon reaching Ramanasramam, he and Dr. Ramakrishna encountered a figure in a white loincloth with a towel on his shoulder, a *kamandalu* in one hand and a walking stick in the other. Narayana Iyer dared not look at him but averted his gaze. However, when the dictates of etiquette finally compelled him to cast a reluctant glance in the direction of the Swami, to his great surprise he found himself almost immediately with his nose in the gravel where he remained for some time in utter reverence for the being who loomed like an ivory pillar above him. As he lay there, he found himself recalling how he had only ever met two great souls in his entire life, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. But here, he thought to himself, was one far greater than these.

From that instant his life would be transformed, and suffice it to add that it was the Sub-Registrar from Chetpet that pressed his friend, the kindly doctor, to extend their stay at the Ashram. On this his first visit to Ramanasramam, Sub-Registrar Narayana Iyer had become hopelessly ensnared, and became a devotee for the remainder of his days.¹

Others suffered similar fates when once they encountered the sage-magnet. Earlier the same year, in January 1928, Ramanapadananda first saw Bhagavan and found himself so overcome by a 'feeling of joy and devotion' that he burst into tears and was unable to stop them for a long time. Forthwith Ramanapadananda resigned his post as a broker with the respected firm, the *Bombay Co.* at Madurai, and set off to travel about the world distributing Bhagavan's books and photos, and celebrating Bhagavan's Jayanti.²

But the poet Muruganar's is a classic illustration of the peril of wandering too close to the Arunachala-Ramana vortex. In 1923, after only the second day of his visit, Muruganar began to have 'strange experiences' in the presence of the Maharshi, feeling as though he were losing his individual consciousness. He despaired of ever being able to leave the Ashram again, thereby failing in his filial duties to his ailing mother. In a fright he mused, "There's a large crowd of thieves here led by the Maharshi. Their sole intention is to ensnare the unwary visitor and make him one of their own. It will soon become impossible either for my mother or anyone else to release me from this

¹ Freely adapted from *Mountain Path*, April 1968, pp. 142-43.

² *Mountain Path*, January 1969, pp. 46-48.





manacle. Hence I should immediately leave this place.”

He rushed out of the Ashram in a panic, frightened that the rush of emotion engulfing him would be more than he could bear. He made up his mind to leave Tiruvannamalai straightaway, but unable to actually do so, he roamed around on Chengam Road until 3 am in the morning. Finding he did not have the requisite strength to tear himself away, he eventually reentered the Ashram and remained two more days. But his fate had been sealed.

In his subsequent visits, whenever it came time to leave, Muruganar just couldn't get himself on the train, so Bhagavan resorted to having him escorted to the station. One time when devotee-escorts delivered him to the platform and came away before the train had actually arrived, Muruganar, lost in his devotion, simply failed to board the train when it came. After the station had cleared some time later, he woke from his reverie and discovering what had happened, made his way back to the Ashram. From then on, Bhagavan made sure that escorting devotees properly 'deported Muruganar' by seeing him onto the departing train before returning to the Ashram³.

The poet lived this way for three years, coming and going from Chennai, maintaining his teaching position and fulfilling his obligations to his dying mother. But when his mother passed away in 1926, he gave up his job, made arrangements for his wife's maintenance and came to Bhagavan for good. The arrangements, however, were evidently not mutually satisfactory as Muruganar's wife Meenakshi turned up regularly at the Ashram in search of her husband, imploring him to return home and resume married life. Upon her arrival, the mere thought of leaving Bhagavan in order to take up life in the world again sent Muruganar running up the Hill where he would hide for days on end. It fell to Bhagavan to settle matters equitably and so he would invariably send a few devotees up the Hill in search of Muruganar while Meenakshi sat weeping in the Hall below. Sometimes it would take two days just to locate the absconding bard. And when they finally succeeded in bringing him down, the mere sight of his wife, with whom he otherwise had no quarrel, caused him to flee again and the whole drama repeated itself.

One day, as Muruganar's wife sat in the Hall teary-

³ Freely adapted from *Mountain Path*, April, 1981, pp. 83-88, as well as the Oct. 1973 edition; and *Ocean of Grace*, vol. 2, pp. 83-86.

eyed, Bhagavan tenderly inquired, “Meenakshi what can I do for you?” Meenakshi pointing to her torn sari, said, “Bhagavan, look at my sari. I want clothes and food to eat, which have been denied me because my husband is not taking care of me.” Bhagavan was deeply moved and said, “Meenakshi, I assure you that you will never suffer a shortage of clothes or food.” But Bhagavan did not stop with this verbal assurance but sent Kunju Swami to the head of the Isanya Mutt in town to request a sari. Remembering what Bhagavan once said about the challenges of 'Swamihood', one might just pause here to appreciate the beautiful irony of a sage in a loincloth who seldom asked anything for himself, sending a sannyasi to another sannyasi to beg a sari for another man's wife. Such was the solicitude Bhagavan had for his devotees.⁴

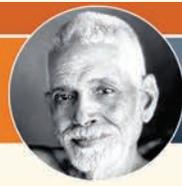
Bhiksu-Dharma vs. Orthodoxy

But being caught in the sage's snare carried with it hidden graces that often only revealed themselves over time. Besides, if devotees were caught in his net, Bhagavan in his own way had snares to negotiate. For example, Bhagavan had to juggle between the habits and cultures of people of varied backgrounds who came with widely divergent expectations. If he mediated between the very different worlds of sadhus and grihastas, he also had to perform a balancing act between those who, on the one hand, had been with him on the Hill living the renunciate life and following the rules for begging-monks, and on the other, those who were now coming in increasing numbers and had all along maintained orthodox restrictions with respect to basic living, not least of all with respect to food. Invariably Bhagavan rubbed up against the rules dictated by tradition and it is instructive to see how he negotiated the tensions that sometimes arose between these two contrasting realms.

One of the rules on the Hill had been that all donated food items should be made use of. So if for example, onions were given, they would be added to the meal. But of course onions were not considered sattvic and generally were not taken by orthodox people. So when the Ashram kitchen had cooked with lots of onions one day and the discarded onion peels were flying about in the morning breeze, Bhagavan pointed them out during his

⁴ Freely adapted from *Ramana Periya Puranam*, p. 191. See also *Mountain Path*, April, 1981, pp. 85-88 for Meenakshi's testimony.





walk and said to devotees, “Better collect them and bury them, otherwise the orthodox will be unable to stand the thought of onions being eaten in Swami’s Ashram!”⁵

Another rule from the days on the Hill was that Bhagavan would only allow himself to be served food last. This was a means of ensuring that all were fed properly and equally. Similarly was a rule that whatever was brought to Bhagavan should be shared by all and if there was not enough for all, the donated item would be returned. According to tradition, however, Bhagavan should eat before anyone else and those from other communities eat afterwards, the reverse constituting pollution. But whether on ordinary days or on festival days when large crowds came, Bhagavan only permitted himself to be served after everyone else.

There were other occasions when Bhagavan defended those wishing to observe traditional customs. When Vedapatasala teacher Krishna Ghanapatigal, for example, complained about having to eat at the general serving, Bhagavan arranged for him to take his food in the kitchen before anyone else had entered the dining hall. Another time Viswanatha Swami’s brother arrived in the dining hall and refused to sit with Brahmins saying all were equal in Bhagavan’s presence. But he was surprised to be chastened by none other than Bhagavan, who perhaps sensed a little pride in this demonstration of fair-mindedness: “Why this proclamation of equality

⁵ *Moments Remembered*, p. 117.

only here? One should behave as one would at home. To be natural is the best form of discipline,” Bhagavan said.⁶

The Prince

There were other contrasts in the burgeoning young Ashram as seekers from all corners of the sub-continent took the chance and appeared before the Swami for his darshan. In 1924 before there was any proper hall to receive guests but only the thatched shed over Mother’s Samadhi, an unexpected visitor appeared before Bhagavan. Having heard of Bhagavan’s greatness, the son of a maharaj came dressed in his royal robes and paid respects to Bhagavan. A person of great bearing, highly versed in Tamil scripture, he stood in dignity in the presence of Bhagavan for over half an hour, motionless like a statue. No one spoke and Bhagavan was likewise unmoving. After the half hour, the prince prostrated before Bhagavan and departed. Later Bhagavan pointed out how implausible it was that a royal personage endowed with an entire kingdom should come in search of peace ‘from a *kaupina-dhari*’, one clad in a loincloth.⁷

Others were drawn, each in their turn, and found the same solace in the Swami’s presence and left the Ashram knowing that they had to find a way to be near him even if it meant giving up the form their lives had taken up till that point.

(to be continued)

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 117-118.

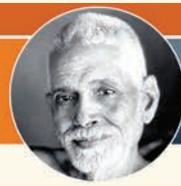
⁷ Freely adapted from *At the Feet of Bhagavan*, pp.46-47.

Wordwise: Ananda आनन्द

Ananda (from the root *nand*, to rejoice); bliss, happiness, joy, enjoyment, pleasure; *anandakanda*: the root of joy, *anandata*: joyfulness, *anandajala*: tears of joy; *anandamaya/anandarupa*: permeated by joy and happiness; *anandatman*: one whose very essence is joy; *Sat-Chit-Ananda*: being-consciousness-bliss; when appended to a name, “one who has realized divine bliss,”

Ananda or ‘pure happiness’, is one of the three attributes of Atman or Brahman and often indicates the highest state of spiritual attainment where all desires and attachments are released and permanent happiness remains. Bhagavan says, “Bliss is coeval with Being - Consciousness. All the arguments relating to the eternal Being of that Bliss apply to Bliss also. Your nature is Bliss. Ignorance is now hiding that Bliss. Remove the ignorance for Bliss to be freed [because] the inherent nature of the Self is Bliss.” (*Talks* §197, 204).





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sankranthi and Mattu Pongal

Devotees gathered in the Mother's Shrine on the morning of the 15th for Uttararayana puja to Aditi marking the transit of the Sun from his southern course back northward and bringing longer days. On the morning of the 16th, Nandi was decorated with *murrukku*, sweetmeats and fruit where an elaborate puja was attended by an animated crowd of devotees. All then moved to Cow Lakshmi's Shrine for arati and finally gathered in the gosala where the Ashram cows with painted horns and flower garlands were venerated and fed sweet pongal, *agatti keerai* and bananas. — See video footage at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mil3CVjUGY>

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Ananda

M.: Perfect Bliss is Brahman. Perfect Peace is of the Self. That alone exists and is conscious. We pray to God for Bliss and receive it by Grace. The bestower of bliss must be Bliss itself and also Infinite. Therefore, Iswara is the Personal God of infinite power and bliss. Brahman is Bliss, impersonal and absolute. The finite egos, deriving their source from Brahman and then Iswara, are in their spiritual nature bliss only... Our nature is primarily one, whole, blissful. Take this as a probable hypothesis. —

— Talks §28





Favourite Stories of Bhagavan: Tiff between Uma and Iswara

[Suri Nagamma wrote: *Once, even Parvati and Parameswara succumbed to the quarrel-mongering of Narada. "Lakshmi and Vishnu play dice, so why not you?" said Narada, who egged them on. Parvati was ecstatic at the idea and persuaded Siva to play dice with her. In the game, Siva lost and Parvati was puffed up with pride and spoke slightly of him. That is the legend.*

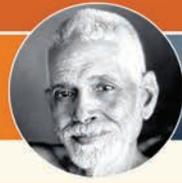
After reading it, Bhagavan, his heart full of bhakti, asked me, "Have you read this story before?" When I said, "Yes, Bhagavan," he said with a voice choked with feeling, "The holy festival which is annually performed here at Pongal, deals mainly with this quarrel between Uma and Maheswara." (See Letters, 23rd November 1945.)]

In the early days after the marriage of Parvati and Parameswara, the two were relaxing on Meru, when the Divine Mother wanted to play a joke on the Three-Eyed One. She crept up from behind and covered the

Lord's eyes with her lotus-like palms while he sat in meditation. The whole world suddenly became dark. The Lord whose abode is Kailasa has the Sun and the Moon as His eyes. So when covered, the world became lost in darkness. Uma removed Her palms when the Lord gently admonished Her and the universe was bathed in light again. But the darkness which had enveloped the world solidified and took the form of a boy. Siva handed the child over to Hiranyaksha. Being born in darkness, he became blind to dharma, and growing up in indolence became the demon, Andhakasura. Though an asura, he performed severe penance and obtained great boons from the Creator. However, becoming swollen with pride, the asura roamed about the world, wreaking havoc. At one point when his arrogance was at its height, he beheld the Mother of the Universe relaxing on the Mandara Mountain, and desired her. He sent word to Siva conducting the Pasupata ritual, demanding that He surrender Her to him. Andhakasura attempted to approach Srimata in the guise of Lord Siva. But Mother, who is the primordial power, realised that if she killed the asura, the ritual in which Siva was engaged would be disturbed. Instead she hid Herself in the *swethrka* flower. Unable to find Her, Andhakasura declared war on Siva. All the Gods stood behind the Lord who was absorbed in his rite and stalled the progress of Andhakasura. Eventually the battle was decided when Sankara pierced the demon's heart with His trident. When all the blood had drained out of him, he was cleansed of his defilements, became humble and sought the Lord's pardon. Siva, the ocean of compassion and all-powerful, had the wherewithal to purify him, and did so, and made him head of His followers, the ganas. Now no longer Andhakasura, he became Bhringi, known for his devotion to Lord Siva. However, because of Bhringi's former error, he would not permit himself to show his devotion to Mother but only ever openly worshipped the Lord. So when the Universal Mother and Father sat side by side, Bhringi would circumambulate and reverence the Lord, not realising the hurt he was causing Mother. Sivani tolerated this for a time but finally made her complaints known to Maheswara.

One day when Bhringi was about to perform pradakshina, as was his wont, around Siva, the Lord





took the form of Ardhanarisvara ('the Lord who is half-God and half-Goddess'), thinking that at least that way the devotee would have to venerate Mother as well. But the devotee outsmarted the Lord and by taking the form of a bee (Bhringi means 'bee'), performed pradakshina by piercing the Lord's heart. Mother, thus excluded from the devotee's worship, was incensed and cursed Bhringi so that he would not be able to take food any longer. Thus Bhringi became weak, incapable of even standing much less performing his circumambulations. But finally, feeling there was no other solution for the poor devotee, the Lord took pity on him and gave him complete liberation, allowing him to merge forever with the Lord's Glorious Form. When Mother got wind of it, however, she was furious and directed her anger against the Lord. She locked Him out of the house and no amount of cajoling on His part proved the least bit effective.

According to the legend associated with Arunachala, the Lord now spurned by Uma, went for pradakshina all alone. When He reached Unnamulai Spring, He

was detained by the forces empowered by Mother who stripped Him of all he had. Now naked and weak He could not go on but hid Himself in a niche. Mulling over His condition, He recalled how He once served as mediator for His devotee Sundaramurti when he likewise suffered marital strife. He thus summoned Sundaramurti and apprised him of the situation. The devotee assured Him all would be well.

Sundaramurti thus entered the temple invoking the poetic skills the Lord had bestowed on him and began to extol the Divine Mother in exquisite Tamil verse. Mother, thrilled by such fervent outpourings, blessed him with her darshan. In her presence, the poet continued to drench Her feet with the nectar of his verse and Mother, having simply melted in the face of such selfless devotion, offered him boons. The tactful Sundaramurti made only one request, that he might have darshan of the Divine Couple together. Since Mother's anger had evaporated like camphor on a windy day, she joined Her Lord right there and then, and peace reigned once again in the Lord's house. —

Events at Tiruvannamalai: Tiruvoodal Festival & Arunachaleswarar's Pradakshina



According to local tradition, after three Rounds of the Four Streets, Lord Siva had a lover's quarrel (Tiruvoodal) with Parvati in the evening. This was re-enacted in Tiruvoodal St. on 16th evening. The following morning, the 17th, the Lord made a circuit of the Mountain, stopping at the Ashram where devotees eagerly received Him with dhotis, saris and garlands. —

Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events including the recent Jayanti Celebrations for free download. Please visit the channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Krishna Das in Concert

Krishna Das is a household name in much of the world. He came to India more than 45 years ago and under the direction of his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, took up kirtan chanting, and has pretty much done nothing else ever since. Chanting tours have led him around the globe and last year he played repeated nights to packed concert halls in Bombay. He has given, and continues to give, benefit concerts in India and elsewhere. A number of his 15 recorded CDs have climbed the music charts and his 2012 album, *Live Ananda*, was nominated for the 2013 Grammy Award for *Best New Age Album*. On 14th January, 2016, in this his first visit to Tiruvannamalai since 1971, Krishna Das (along with Nina Rao, backing vocals, and Ti on tabla) sang for the 1,200-plus crowd gathered in the library auditorium (and before two giant outdoor video monitors) in this his first-ever performance at Arunachala. Having made known to a world audience the sacred names revered in Mother India, all gathered felt deep gratitude for what Krishna Das has done for world music and in disseminating the glory of India to the four corners of the globe. As Arunachala and Bhagavan Ramana have a way of getting into the blood, it is hoped that KD will be duly infected and not wait forty-four years till his next visit, but return to Sri Ramanasramam again soon. —

**Footage of the event by a professional video team from Chennai is in the editing process and will soon be made available for free download. For now, Ashram coverage is can be found at: <https://youtu.be/omvY28oyXY>*





Obituary: Kum. Dolly Kolah



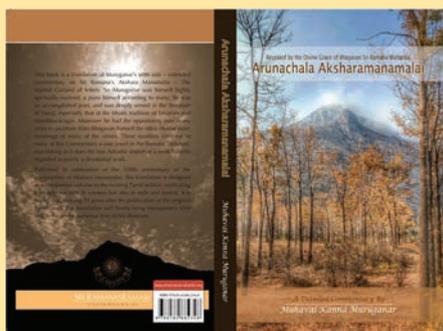
Dolly Kolah (b.04.02.1928) had been a busy executive in Poona when she first came to Sri Ramanasramam in 1967 in what was a case of love at first sight. She became an early life-subscriber to the *Mountain Path* and visited the Ashram each August. When she came in August 1973, she attended on Muruganar and was blessed to be at his side as he was absorbed in Bhagavan. Bhagavan and Arunachala became Dolly Ma's life-long focus and in the 1980s she took the plunge, left her career with Eagle Engineers (Poona) and made Tiruvannamalai her permanent home. Her vibrant personality made her popular among devotees and all savoured the warm hospitality of tea invitations to her home opposite the Ashram. She took special interest in the Ashram gardens and assisted in planting trees within the Ashram premises. Her bhajans at evening puja at Bhagavan's Shrine and at Sri Chakra pujas on Friday nights were loved by all. In April 2011, failing health forced Dolly Ma to return to her Mumbai home where, on 3rd January this year, she peacefully passed away. Although physically Dolly Ma was in Mumbai when she breathed her last, her spirit remains with Arunachala and Bhagavan. She will be remembered with great affection by devotees everywhere. —

Obituary: Dr. Narayana Reddy

Dr. R. Narayana Reddy, the veterinary doctor who treated Cow Lakshmi in 1946-48 merged with Arunachala on 13th December 2015 in his native village Tanapalli near Tirupati, at the age 107. In 1946 while serving as Government Touring Veterinary Assistant Surgeon in the veterinary hospital at Tiruvannamalai, Dr. Reddy made several visits to the Ashram and treated Cow Lakshmi and other cattle. He said Cow Lakshmi's digestive condition had been caused in part by devotee's indiscriminate, if well-intended, feeding of her with all sorts of delicacies. Though Chinnaswami had offered the good doctor payment for his services in the gosala, he refused any compensation. Dr. Reddy visited the Ashram whenever he was free in the mornings or evenings, usually at Vedaparayana time, and made a point of going for pradakshina whenever possible. In 1931, he participated in the Salt Satyagraha as part of Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience movement. After retiring in 1966, he continued to make regular visits to the Ashram and as a gifted orator, remained an active speaker. He wrote and published a book in his native Telugu on Bhagavan's teachings entitled, *Atmavicharamu: Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Born in 1908, Dr. Reddy attributed his longevity to clean habits and a vegetarian diet. He is survived by two sons, two daughters and numerous grand-children. —



Announcements: Book Release



A new Ashram publication entitled *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* is a faithful English translation by Robert Butler of the original Tamil commentary by Sri Muruganar on *Aksharamanamalai*, a devotional classic revealed by the grace of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

