

# Saranagati

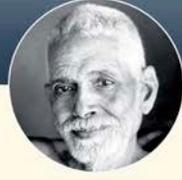


SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

EXTENDED JAYANTI PUJA EDITION  
FEBRUARY 2017, VOL. 11, NO. 2



## Saranagati



FEBRUARY 2017  
VOL. 11, NO. 2

IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

As we go to print, celebrations are underway in the Big Temple in preparation for Mahakumbhabhishekam on the morning of the 6th February. For complete scheduling, see p. 10.

In our series called *Daily Life in the Dining Hall*, we look at the gracious care Bhagavan showed for his devotees and all people (see p. 3).

Also in this issue are photos from the new Old Hall inauguration in Tampa Florida (see p. 9).

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

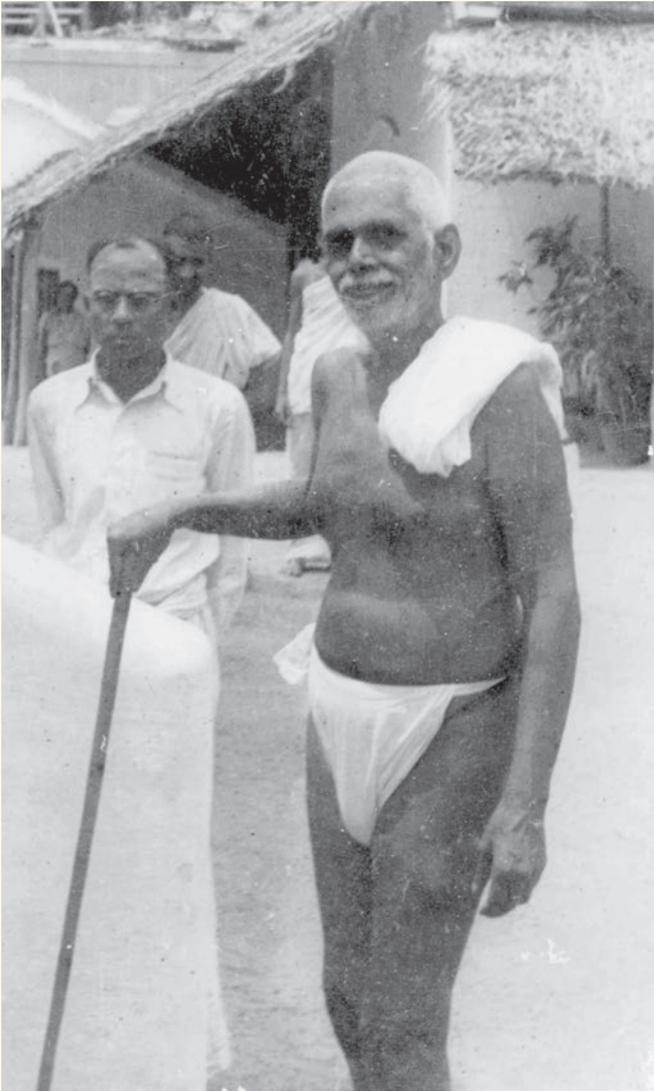
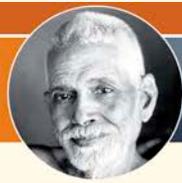
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

9th February (Thurs) Punarvasu Day  
10th February (Fri) Chinnaswami Day/Full Moon  
12th February (Sun) Munagala Venkataramiah Day  
15th February (Weds) Sundara Iyer Day  
24th February (Fri) Mahasivaratri  
8th March (Weds) Punarvasu Day  
12th March (Sun) Full Moon Day

17th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa  
29th March (Tues) Telugu New Year  
2nd April (Sun) Jagadisa Swami Day  
4th April (Tues) Punarvasu Day  
5th April (Weds) Rama Navami  
10th April (Mon) Full Moon  
14th April (Fri) Tamil New Year/Nirvana Room Chanting





## Daily Life in the Dining Hall (part V) Graciousness and Hospitality

If, as the saying goes, *good manners are second only to God*, the etiquette the Supreme in human form exhibits surpasses all else. In the life of Bhagavan Ramana we have abundant examples of his graciousness towards those around him. There may not have been any conscious intention on his part but kindness flowed forth in his every action as the very substance of his being. If it was in the small things that his teaching was revealed, his solicitude for all regardless of caste, creed or social status, it is because it was in his very nature to relieve any suffering, large or small, and what was required in

any given moment spontaneously flowed from him. He tended little details in devotees' lives and offered small politenesses and gestures of kindness that no one would have expected. He would invite strangers for food and sometimes take a late-arriving devotee to the kitchen and serve him with his own hands. He would receive and eat with obvious delight the simple offerings of a poor villager, appreciating the humility and sincerity behind their gesture of generosity, and yet remain completely impassive when offered expensive delicacies. He might refuse medical treatment but when a well-intending devotee appeared before him with this or that remedy, he would swallow it without the least reservation. Even when he was ill-disposed, his concern seemed to be more for those around him than for his own condition. After a carcinomatous growth appeared on his left arm in the late 1940s, he became aware of the grief his illness caused devotees, and when undergoing a series of surgeries, he downplayed the pain caused by the procedures and even indulged onlookers in light-hearted humour.

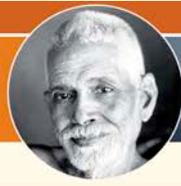
In the darshan hall, he insisted on prompt attention to arriving post and saw to it that replies were sent out the same day. When devotees notified the Ashram of their upcoming arrival, he never failed to inform concerned parties. And he sometimes went extra distance to fulfil this obligation. Once, a devotee from Ceylon wrote that he was starting out from Colombo on a particular day, but neglected to mention the time of his arrival in Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan thus had station-master devotee N.N. Rajan consult timetables to see which time the steamer would leave Ceylon, dock in Tamil Nadu and when the passenger should be expected to arrive at the Ashram.<sup>1</sup>

Even going back to the days at Skandasramam, we see the same consideration.

An elderly woman Saubhagyathammal, who had made it a daily practice not to take food until she had Bhagavan's darshan, used to come up to Skandashram every day. But once when she did not come, Bhagavan inquired about her absence. She replied, "No, I was not here yesterday but I had Sri Bhagavan's darshan nevertheless". She explained that as her house lay at the

<sup>1</sup> "Ramana as I know Him", N.N. Rajan, in *Moments Remembered*, p. 85.





foot of the Hill, she had taken pains to be on the look-out for Bhagavan from below and when he was sitting on the stone and cleaning his teeth, she caught sight of him. Bhagavan understood that she had become too feeble to climb the Hill and so he made a habit of sitting on the stone for nearly half an hour each day for her benefit.

It was out of the same consideration, one might surmise, that Ramanasramam came into being.

In the days when devotees were making daily trips down the Hill from Skandasramam to perform pujas at mother's samadhi, Bhagavan sometimes joined them and was moved by the appeals of the elderly who came to the samadhi for his darshan, unable as they were to climb the Hill. When they begged him to remain below so that they might have the opportunity to see him regularly, he took up permanent residence at the foot of the Hill.<sup>2</sup>

#### Ministering to the Poor

As the Ashram at the foot of the Hill became established, increasingly the poor from nearby villagers came to see him on festival days, hoping to avail themselves of his abundance—spiritual and material. Bhagavan asked the kitchen to give food to the poor before inmates and visitors were served.<sup>3</sup> One time, when food which included delectable sweets had been served up for Bhagavan, Bhagavan would not heed pleas to take it but instead came out and found several destitute

<sup>2</sup> *The Mountain Path*, April 1973, pp. 87-88.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 87-88.

villagers and cripples crying out for a little food from the Ashram gate. Seeing how they were being urged to go away on the pretext that the Ashram could not feed them, Bhagavan said, "How can I take the food you say you have served for me when so many needy are crying out for just a mouthful. The *payasam* you have kept for me would turn to poison in my stomach if I should take it when these people go unfed and remain starving. Take what you have served up for me and give it to them. Today I have no need of food".<sup>4</sup>

#### Almond Delight

This was a regular theme in Bhagavan's life and all who came to the Ashram should be fed. Even if a devotee arrived late in the evening after everyone had taken their meal and gone to bed, the late-arriver was not allowed to go hungry. Bhagavan saw to it that food was set aside for late-comers. Just a simple glance from Bhagavan was usually enough for inmates to do the necessary and arrange something for the new arrival.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes, however, when devotees were not on hand, the task fell to Bhagavan himself.

Once, Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer, who rarely missed being present on Bhagavan's Jayanti day, travelled some sixty miles, one lorry after another, until he reached the Ashram at 1 am in the morning. He had to leave again

<sup>4</sup> *The Call Divine*, vol. 14, May 1966 p. 465: "Serve Them First", K. Padmanabhan.

<sup>5</sup> *The Mountain Path*, April 1973, pp. 87-88.

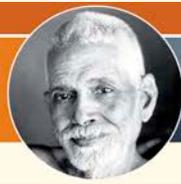
## Wordwise: Puja

## पूजा

*Puja* meaning 'venerate' or 'honour' (from the Tamil *poosei*: *poo*= 'flower'; *sei*= 'to do', hence "to do with flowers"; also Skt. *puj*=*araadhane*) is the sacrament of worship in most Hindu traditions and has its roots in Vedic fire sacrifice, still evident in *arati*, the ceremonial waving of the flame before the deity. The elements of *puja* include invoking the presence of the divine (*avahana*), offering water in ceremonial bathing (*abhishekam*), flower decoration (*alankara*), food offering (*naivedya*), waving the flame (*arati*), prostrating before the deity (*namaskaram*), distribution of consecrated gifts (*prasad*) and circumambulation of the deity (*parikrama*).

*Puja* is a means of quietening the mind, invoking the divine presence and making ample space within. When once asked about repeating the divine name, Bhagavan said that doing so helps you to "know what *puja* really is, [namely,] the losing of one's individuality in that which is worshipped." (*Talks* §31)





at 5 am in order to report for work at 9. While taking leave, he prostrated before Bhagavan. But Bhagavan wouldn't allow him to go but said, "Come, Narayana, you must have something to eat."

Bhagavan took him to the kitchen where he peeped into all the vessels. He went into the small storage room in the kitchen and searched all the pots and pans. Finally, he found a handful of almonds and noticing some coals still aglow in the kitchen fire, he put on a little firewood and stoked the flames. He then pulled out a frying pan, poured in a little ghee and began roasting the almonds, adding salt and chili powder. He placed the almonds on a leaf-plate and gave them to Narayana Iyer to eat, saying, "How can you go without eating?" Bhagavan then wrapped up the remainder and packed it in a parcel for Narayana Iyer: "When you get home, Lalitha and your children will ask, 'What have you brought us from Bhagavan?'" Take this and give it to them."<sup>6</sup>

#### Puris for the Road

Kunjuswami shared a similar account when he once had to go to Kerala to look after Ramakrishna Swami's brother. He had enough money to buy a train ticket but not to buy food as well. That afternoon a devotee unexpectedly brought a lot of *puris* and served them to Bhagavan and others in the Ashram. All of them were surprised to see Bhagavan readily accept six *puris* from the devotee as he normally would not take more than two. When the serving was over, he ate just one of the six and neatly packed and tied the remaining five for Kunjuswami, saying, "He has no money for food on the way." Everyone was deeply touched.<sup>7</sup>

#### Missing the Train

Bhagavan's graciousness worked in less visible ways as well. Once when Kunjuswami imagined that Bhagavan was annoyed with him, he decided to leave for Tirupati and got Bhagavan's permission to do so. When Bhagavan unexpectedly started for pradakshina that day, Ramakrishna Swami asked Kunju to go with them. Kunju took what he needed for the trip but found Bhagavan walking unusually slowly along the pradakshina path. As Kunjuswami would not walk ahead of him, he found

<sup>6</sup> *Ramana Peria Puranam*, (unpublished manuscript), p. 361.

<sup>7</sup> *The Mountain Path*, July 1982, p. 206.



Bhagavan and devotees in this previously unpublished photo from late 1949

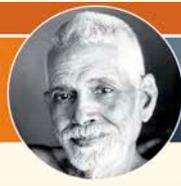
himself still quite a way from the station at the appointed hour of departure. When they saw the distant train leaving the station, Bhagavan laughed and said, to Kunjuswami, "There goes your train!" Later Bhagavan told Dandapani Swami, "He thinks I was annoyed with him and thus decided to go to Tirupati. What a wonderful fellow! But what would he get outside? How would he eat?"<sup>8</sup>

#### How Far Have You Gone Away from Me?

Bhagavan sometimes rendered care in mysterious and inexplicable ways. One of the kitchen staff, Natesa Iyer, having renounced the world, left his wife and never again touched money, came to serve in Ramanasramam. His job in the kitchen brought him under the tutelage of a bunch of widows there who made him work very hard. Once he commented jokingly that he had 'run away from one bossy woman and ended up working under five'. At one point, however, hurt by the way he was being treated in the kitchen, he made up his mind to leave the Ashram by stealth. On the way, he stopped in Villupuram, took his bath, and as he was placing *vibhuti* on his forehead, he closed his eyes and said a prayer to Bhagavan. Suddenly he felt Bhagavan standing in front of him: "How far have you gone away from

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.





me?” the figure asked. Iyer, with tears in his eyes, was unable to reply. When the figure of Bhagavan began to walk towards Tiruvannamalai, Iyer followed him. The figure eventually disappeared but Iyer carried on until he reached the Ashram. When he entered the hall and prostrated before Bhagavan, the guru on his sofa in real-time asked the very same question: “How far have you gone away from me?” Iyer broke down and cried. He went back to the kitchen and resumed his work.<sup>9</sup>

### Bhagavan’s Touch at the Pestle

The kitchen hearth was a place for personal encounters with Bhagavan, removed as it was from the multitudes in the hall, and provided an intimate setting in which Bhagavan’s gracious heart revealed itself palpably.

One day when G.V. Subbaramayya saw Bhagavan perspiring near the oven, he tried to fan him but Bhagavan stopped him, not wanting any special attention. But when Bhagavan became concentrated again on the work, Subbaramayya resumed his efforts. Bhagavan turned to him and said, “You want to do it on the sly, eh? But you do not even know how to do it. Let me teach you.” So saying, he held GVS by the hand and taught him the proper way of fanning. GVS ‘thanked’ his ignorance at having this opportunity to be in close contact with the Master.

Another time when, for lack of experience, GVS was struggling at the mortar and pestle, Bhagavan placed his hand upon GVS’s hand and instructed him by turning the pestle in the correct manner. Again, GVS thanked his ignorance.

After the work was over, Bhagavan took a bit from the dish, tasted a little of it and gave the others a little to taste. On some occasions, if their hands were unwashed, he would toss the sample directly into

<sup>9</sup> *Face to Face with Sri Bhagavan*, p.184.

their mouths from his very own hand. Such were the blessings that graced the kitchen staff in those days.”<sup>10</sup>

### Looking after Muruganar

But Bhagavan didn’t just look after those who were in his immediate presence. Even those that were absent for one reason or another never escaped his mind.

Once in the dining hall Bhagavan, recalling Muruganar’s fondness for *avial*, said to Shanthammal, “See, you have prepared *avial* today. Has anyone thought of giving a portion to Muruganar?” Shanthammal was touched by Bhagavan’s solicitude for her childhood friend and hurried to the kitchen, scooped up some *avial* in a coconut shell and set off for Palakothu. But by the time she got there, Muruganar had already left on his begging rounds. When he was in front of the Dakshinamurthi temple, Shanthammal caught up with him, calling out, “Sambamoorthi! Sambamoorthi!”, the affectionate name she had used in their youth at Ramanathapuram. “A fine person you are, wandering around like a madman, while Bhagavan is so concerned about you! Why don’t you come to the Ashram and have your meals with the rest of us?” she said. She then related the incident in the dining hall. Muruganar was stunned. Overcome by emotion upon hearing about Bhagavan’s concern for his welfare, he kept repeating, “Did Bhagavan say that? Was he worried about me? Did he say, ‘Who will take care of Muruganar?’ Such concern for me. How fortunate I am!”

His voice grew raspy and his eyes filled with tears. His face became flushed with emotion. Unable to support his frame, he simply sat on the steps of the temple, raised the coconut shell to his eyes and reverently poured the *avial* into his cupped palms and ate it as Bhagavan’s *Mahaprasad*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Ramana Reminiscences*, Prof. G.V. Subbaramayya, pp.71-72.

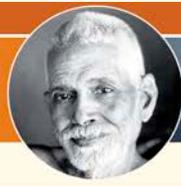
<sup>11</sup> *Cherished Memories*, pp. 133-34.

## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Puja

M.: Daily puja as prescribed in the Dharma sastras is always good. It is for the purification of the mind. Even if one feels oneself too advanced to need such puja, still it must be performed for the sake of others. Such action will be an example to one’s children and other dependents.

— Talks §564





### The Grapefruit Miracle

On other occasions, Bhagavan's gracious solicitude came in the form of what seemed like small miracles.

One evening in the Hall after the night meal, Bhagavan and the kitchen staff were talking of the day's work and the following day's cooking programme when the conversation turned to the subject of fruit offerings and the Tamil name of a certain citrus fruit. Major Chadwick and S.S. Cohen had no idea what the fruit could be until Bhagavan supplied the English translation: 'grapefruit'. The three of them discussed it and Bhagavan remarked that the season for the grapefruit was still two or three months away. The subject was then closed and devotees started discussing spiritual matters.

The next day, however, on his pradakshina, Cohen reflected on the previous night's discussion and was gripped with the thought that he should not be surprised if a devotee brought the very fruit in question as offering to Bhagavan. After pradakshina and following his lunch, Cohen got ready to lay down for afternoon rest when Bhagavan approached on his after-lunch walk, the circuit of which led right past Cohen's hut in Palakothu. Cohen came out on the veranda just as Bhagavan turned to the attendant behind him, took out a large sweet lime and stretched it out toward Cohen. Bhagavan said, "This is a grapefruit. A visitor came in the morning with three of them—one for Chadwick, one for me (that is, for Bhagavan and for distribution among the devotees as prasadam) and this one for you."

Cohen was struck by the number of coincidences which had occurred since the previous night's discussion. The coincidence of timing, the coincidence of number—just the three of them who had discussed the subject—and the coincidence of the almost prophetic anticipation he had during his morning pradakshina. Bhagavan was not surprised by Cohen's premonition but said matter-of-factly: "These things happen".

Later Cohen reflected on something Bhagavan had said to GVS regarding a small miracle calling it "the Chintamani of Prajna", that is, the wish-fulfilling jewel of consciousness—the mind free from vasanas, and saying that it was this that was responsible for such occurrences.

However, the real miracle, Cohen mused, "was the natural beneficence which spontaneously emanated from Bhagavan's spiritual greatness without an iota of conscious effort or volition on his part, which at once distinguished him from the little Ishwaras, those whose 'high stage in evolution' earned for them clairvoyance, clairaudience and the power to perform all sorts of psychic manifestations at will."

Cohen went on: "In those days, 'miraculous' incidents occurred frequently at the Ashram, so frequently that no one used to take any notice of them. But now, as we retrospect and dwell on Sri Bhagavan's hallowed memory for inspiration and worship, every incident, even the smallest, conveys to us the charm and fragrance of his personality".<sup>12</sup>

(to be continued)

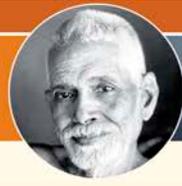
<sup>12</sup> *Days of Surpassing Grace*, S.S. Cohen, p. 227.

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Discourses by Nochur Sri Venkataraman



On 2nd January 2017, Nochur Sri Venkataraman continued from last year the series of discourses on Bhagavan's oft-recited *Aksharamanamalai* in English. The Granthalaya Auditorium was filled to capacity for the eight days of reflections on this garland of 108 verses and were filled with stories and anecdotes from Bhagavan's life as well as the lives of the great saints from *Srimad Bhagavatam* and other Puranas. The final discourse concluded with verse 34. —





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mattu Pongal

Once when Lord Siva asked his bull Basava, to go to the earth and tell everyone that they should have an oil bath every day and to eat once a month, Basava confused the message and mistakenly instructed everyone to eat daily and have an oil bath once a month. Siva cursed Basava, banishing him to life on the earth where he would be compelled to plough the fields in order to help people produce more food. Mattu Pongal honours his service and the service provided by all cattle.

The first day of Pongal begins on the last day of *Margazhi*, called *Bhogi*, when old clothes and household items are discarded to symbolise beginning again. *Makara Sankranti* marks the beginning of the auspicious *Uttarayana* when the Sun starts its northern movement. Fresh milk is boiled early on this morning and allowed to boil over (*pongol* means to 'boil over'). The third day is Mattu Pongal when cows are adorned with beads, bells, *murukku*, dried fruit, flower garlands and are fed with the sweet rice dish called pongal. —





Participants in the 2017 Tampa Retreat inside the newly inaugurated Old Hall



Newly inaugurated Old Hall replica in Tampa

Photos by Dave Rubinson

## The New 'Old Hall' in Tampa, Florida

On 29th December, 2016, at the commencement of the annual Tampa Ramana Jayanti retreat, some eighty devotees gathered to participate in the *griha pravesham* (inauguration) of the new Old Hall in Tampa, Florida. Seeing it the first time, all were astounded at the mirror-likeness and attention to detail in this replica of the darshan hall Bhagavan inhabited for some 20 years.

Careful measurements and photographic recording of the Ramanasramam Old Hall aided architects, designers, craftsmen and construction workers in creating a faithful replica, duplicating the floor plan and interior design as well as the Old Hall furnishings such as sofa, wood railing, sofa covering and photo.

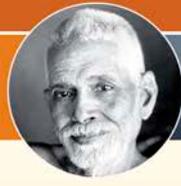
During his last trip to the US, V.S. Mani hand-carried an original floor-tile recovered in the wake of the 1986 Ramanasramam Old Hall reconstruction and this was incorporated into the floor of the new building.

This amazing project began as a long-time dream of Srimati Kalyanamathy Rathinasamy who wanted to 'bring Bhagavan to Florida'. It was long in the realising with multiple obstacles along the way, but, by Bhagavan's grace, came to fruition this year.

On hand for the occasion were Dr. Venkat Ramanan, President V. S. Ramanan's son, who expressed his appreciation to the Tampa Ramana satsang group and Dennis Hartel of Arunachala Ashrama, who acknowledged those who worked so hard to produce this 'living monument that will serve to transmit Sri Bhagavan's grace to seekers in North America'. —

— Adapted from *The Maharshi*, Jan/Feb, 2017





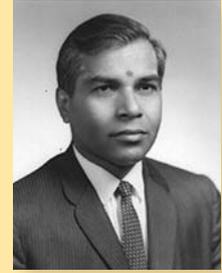
## Events in Tiruvannamalai: Arunachaleswarar Mahakumbhabhishekam



On 26 January, 2017, preliminary rites for the Arunachaleswarar Mahakumbhabhishekam began with Mangala music and Sridurgai Amman Utsavam at 6.15 pm. Various homas and rites each day led up to the Yagasalai Pravesham and first Kala Yaga puja on the evening of the 31st. Yagasala pujas continue till the morning of the 6th February when the 12th Kala Yaga puja takes place at 3 am with Mahapurnahurti at 6.30 am, Yatra Dharnam at 7.15 am, culminating in Mahakumbhabhishekam of Raja Gopuram and other vimanas at 9.15 am and Mulasthanam Mahakumbhabhishekam at 10.05 am. Mahabhishekam is scheduled for 4.30 pm. —

## Announcements: Arunachala Ashrama's 50th Anniversary

In addition to the inauguration of the new Old Hall in Tampa this last month, Arunachala Ashrama, New York is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. On December 8th, 1966, by the initiative of Bhagawat Prasad Singh and his family and, in an effort to bring Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center to New York City, Arunachala Ashrama was incorporated in the State of New York. The Ashrama continues to thrive under the care and supervision of Sri Dennis Hartel and other resident devotees. Happy Birthday, Arunachala Ashrama! —



## Obituary: Smt. Hamsa Ramaiah

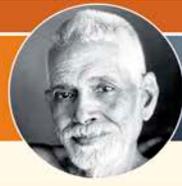


Smt. Hamsa, grand-daughter of Manavasi Ramasami Iyer, attained the lotus feet of Bhagavan on 14th January, 2017 at the age of 92. Hamsa was married to Mr. Ramaiah, grandson of Dr. Narayana Iyer—the ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan who helped finance the construction of the Old Hall in 1926.

In her youth, Hamsa was fortunate to assist in the Ashram kitchen chores along with Bhagavan and regularly had free access to him. Her family had been long-associated with Bhagavan and when her mother Rajam was a young girl, Bhagavan sometimes used to plait her hair. Like her mother, Hamsa was a good painter and also had a sweet singing voice. She used to sing *Kummi Paattu* in Bhagavan's presence in the early 1930s and went on to play the veena, even giving a concert in *All India Radio*.

On her marriage day in 1943, the newlyweds came to the Ashram. As they entered the Hall, Bhagavan and devotees were just then discussing the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundareswara of Madurai Temple. As the couple entered, Bhagavan turned toward them and spontaneously announced, "Here are Meenakshi and Sundareswara in their marriage attire." These words from the Master's lips on that special day greeted the young couple as a divine blessing, one that remained with them all their lives. —





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: 137th Ramana Jayanthi Celebrations

Sri Bhagavan's 137th Jayanti Celebrations started with preliminary music programmes on 10th Jan, 2017 with "Ramana Music" by Amritavarshini led by Smt. Sakkubai Srinivasan of Bangalore and an evening Veena concert by bright young Ramanan Balachandran. Music on the 11th included a vocal concert by the gifted vocalist Sri Sriram Parthasarathy.

Principal Jayanti celebrations like every year commenced on the morning of the 12th with *Mangala Isai* on Nadaswaram by Sri T. R. Pichandi and party. Dhanurmasa Puja and Vishnu Sahasranama parayana took place in the early morning, followed by a special Tamil parayana and Mahanyasam Rudrajapam. Puja and abhishekam to Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam culminating in Deeparadhana at 10.30 am. The afternoon programme on the 12th included a special abhishekam and puja in Sri Bhagavan's Shrine with "Ramana Music" by Ramananjali led by Dr. Sarada Natarajan of RMCL Bangalore at 3 pm in the library auditorium. The Ashram kitchen served bhiksha to some 10,000 over the two days of celebration. —

## Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

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

