

Saranagati



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SRI RAMANASRAMAM
MARCH 2015



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Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The month of February came to a close with the inauguration of Swami Shantananda Puri's Samadhi in Perumbakam Road on Friday-Saturday the 27th-28th. The current issue segment of *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan* traces Deepam 1896 and the early days at Gurumurtham. We also introduce a new column *Spiritual Stories as Told by Bhagavan*. This draws on a Telugu volume, *Ramanulu Cheppina Kathalu*, a compilation of stories referred to or narrated by Bhagavan, now being translated into English at the recommendation of Smt. Kanakammal before her demise in 2010.

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

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>In the Kitchen with Bhagavan, pt II: Feeding the Brahmana Swami</i> | 2 |
| <i>Wordwise: Bhavana</i> | 4 |
| <i>Spiritual Stories as Told by Bhagavan: Rama and Sita</i> | 5 |
| <i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Maha Rudram & Mahasivaratri</i> | 6 |
| <i>Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi (§385): Bhakti & Jnana</i> | 6 |
| <i>In the Frame</i> | 7 |
| <i>Sri Ramanasramam Gardens: The Primavera Tree</i> | 8 |
| <i>Obituary: Mr. Rolf Skarmitzl</i> | 8 |

Calendar of Upcoming Events

1st March (Sun) Punarvasu Day
5th March (Thurs) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
10th March (Tues) Sundaram Iyer Day
20th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Havan
21st March (Sat) Telugu New Year
28th March (Sat) Sri Rama Navami/Punarvasu Day
2nd April (Thur) Jagadish Swami Day
3rd April (Fri) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja

14th April (Tues) Tamil New Year
14th April (Tues) Western Calendar Aradhana: Nirvana Room
16th April (Thurs) Bhagavan's 65th Aradhana
17th April (Fri) Major Chadwick Day
25th April (Sat) Punarvasu Day
3rd May (Sun) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
22nd May (Fri) Punarvasu Day
10th June (Weds) Mahapuja Day





Gurumurtham Shrine, southeast of the Hill

In the Kitchen with Bhagavan Part II: Feeding the Brahmana Swami

First Deepam

Little did devotees realise in those early days at Arunachala Temple that they were stoking the flames of a great fire when they put offerings into the mouth of a young lad sitting in deep meditation in Arunachala Temple. Neither were they aware that the forthcoming Kartigai Deepam, commemorating that moment from the ancient past when the cosmic shell was rent in two and ‘the Pillar of Fire exploded’¹ to rise upwards toward the heavens, was at that moment recurring in the spiritual heart of this nameless young swami.

Festival pilgrims sensed the vigour in the youth’s god-intoxicated state and saw in the stable upright bearing of his meditation posture the embodiment of

¹ *Arunachala Purana* §108, 142.

Arunachala’s great legacy. But they didn’t yet know what all this would come to mean.

The Upanishads say that Agni, Lord of the Yagna, has his abode in the mouth. This being so, the offerings of these pilgrims were fittingly placed, for in the heart of young Ramana the inner Atmic fire burned with ever-increasing lustre and intensity. If hearth is home, as the saying goes, then the fire of the Self is the centre of the cosmos and the alms these visitors gave him were fuel for a growing light that would one day help in ridding the world of the darkness of ignorance.

So people came to the Temple and immediately sensed that this swami was not of the common ilk. And yet it was only years later that they recognised in him Kartikeya, son of Krittika, i.e. Lord Subramanyam². The Kartigai Deepam flame about to be lit in a few days in *krittika nakshatra* on the 20th November, 1896 was the same Effulgence given by Lord Siva to Agni. But what an irony that they didn’t see that the boy who sat before them was his very own form.

² Subramanyam, ‘God of the Tamils’, is also known as *Agnibhu*, the ‘form of Agni’. Devotees would later identify Ramana as Subramanyam.





Quiet Corners

And yet, the boy from Tiruchuli only longed to be in the blessed presence of Arunachala and thus found the many onlookers and adherents, well-intended though they may have been, an interruption to the important work at hand. As Deepam Day approached, the crowds increased and the youth sought quieter, less-frequented corners of the temple. He took refuge in the 1000-pillar mantapam, Vazhai Thottam, Gopura Subramanya Shrine, and finally, at the Illupai Tree adjacent to the Sivaganga Tank. There he passed chilled winter nights under the open sky and overcame his remaining resistances to changing external conditions such as heat and cold, rain and shine.

A young temple dancing girl named Rajammal came and fed him under the tree and though being alone there with the girl was 'delicate', young Ramana did not refuse her innocent intentions: as she placed food offerings in his palms, he readily consumed them. Gradually, as attention to bodily needs diminished, his unwashed form with its accumulated layer of grime set him apart from polite society. By the end of December while at Patala Lingam, when even social conventions such as clothing had been unwittingly dispensed with and the boy was without any covering whatever, friends and devotees intervened and procured for him a new loin-cloth.

At Gurumurtham

In February 1897, just when it seemed impossible to escape the public view³, a Tevaram singer named Annamalai Tambiran came upon the Swami at the Illupai Tree. Impressed by his state, he soon became aware of the intrusiveness of passers-by. In charge of a shrine just east of the Temple, he invited the Brahmana Swami to come and stay there in order to continue his sadhana in solitude. When the latter agreed, the Tambiran led him there forthwith.

³ See *Mountain Path*, April 1981, p. 75: 'Autobiographical Reminiscences of Ramana' where Bhagavan says: "At the Karthigai Festival when innumerable pilgrims flocked here, just a few came to know me [but] after that the number of those who came to see me steadily increased."



Palaniswami

For the first couple of months at this shrine known as Gurumurtham, the Tambiran gave the Brahmana Swami *naivedyam* from daily pujas. But soon he departed Tiruvannamalai, leaving no one to look after the young swami. Meanwhile, however, in Ayyankulam Street, a Keralite named Palaniswami performed daily pujas at the Vinayaka Temple. A friend noticing his dedicated devotions to Ganapathi confronted him saying, "What's the use in spending your life with this stone Swami? There's a young Swami of flesh and blood at Gurumurtham. He is steeped in austerities like the youthful Dhruva mentioned in the Puranas. If you go and serve him and adhere to him, your life will serve its purpose."⁴

Palaniswami, having already heard stories about the young sage, took the words to heart. He then learned that the young Swami had no attendant and no one to support his vulnerable states during 'moods' of deep absorption. Thus he went to Gurumurtham and upon first setting eyes on the Brahmana Swami, at once recognised his guru. He took up service immediately and began to provide for the Swami's dietary needs utilising *naivedya* of the Vinayaka Temple. Soon, however, he

⁴ *Self-Realisation*, Chapter X.





realised that Vinayaka had granted him the fullness of grace by sending him to a living guru and that his fate now lay with the Swami alone. So Palaniswami turned over supervision of the temple to someone else and began going on bhiksha rounds instead. In time, however, with the increasing fame of the young Swami, bhiksha rounds no longer needed to be carried out on a daily basis.

Further Challenges

By now the Brahmana Swami's unkempt hair had become clotted and his fingernails grew so long that his hands were rendered useless. He sat for weeks on end on a floor infested with ants and, despite their persistent bites and stings, he remained absolutely motionless. Though Palaniswami made efforts to solve the problem, spreading ash all around Gurumurtham, the critters continued their migrations. Finally, a wooden bench was procured and installed with legs

submerged in plates of water. But whether ants or no, the daily routine of the young tapasvin continued uninterrupted. As for the problem of crowds, this was resolved for the time being. Palaniswami constructed a bamboo barricade to keep stray visitors at a distance. As for nourishment, the Brahmana Swami had said to Palaniswami, "At 12 noon I will open my eyes and take food. At other times I do not want any food. When you are going out, lock me inside and go"⁵.

And so it was only the daily noon bell, i.e. rapping on the dinner cup, that roused the sadhak from his absorption, signaling the one meal he took each day. With this arrangement his bodily frame gradually shrank and he became thin owing to the limited food intake. As physical vigour diminished, he had just enough strength to maintain his sitting posture. "If he tried to get up, he was [often] unsuccessful. He would lift himself up a few inches, but feeling giddy, would sink back into his seat again. He would try again but with no better result. Only after repeated efforts could he get up and go out."⁶

One day when the Brahmana Swami came to normal consciousness, he found Palaniswami holding him with both arms. "Why are you holding me?" the young sage asked. The latter replied, "Swami was about to fall, so I caught hold of him in order to prevent the fall."

(to be continued)

⁵ *Self-Realisation*, Chapter X.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Wordwise: Bhavana

भावना

Bhavana (from *bhava* or *bhu* meaning 'to become'): causing to be, calling into being, effecting, producing, cultivating; imagination, imagery; meditation, mind development, mental discipline.

In *Upadesa Saram* (Skt.) Bhagavan uses *bhavana* (instead of the Tamil *bhava* as in *Upadesa Undiyar*) to mean 'meditation'. In another place Bhagavan uses the word *bhavana* in the sense of 'imagination' such as when imagining oneself as 'witness of the thoughts', which, he says, is only an idea. While perhaps useful in stilling the mind, Bhagavan adds, one should not confuse this latter practice with the Reality of pure and simple abidance in the Self. (See *Talks* §137)





Spiritual Stories as Told by Bhagavan: Sri Rama, Upholder of Tradition

[Sri Bhagavan praised the greatness of Rama, narrating the following story. See Talks §218, 182.]

At the behest of his second wife, Kaikeyi, King Dasaratha requested his son Rama to renounce his rightful claim to the Ayodhya throne and to take leave of the royal palace. Ever loyal and obedient to his father, the young prince departed with his chaste wife, Sita, and his loyal brother, Lakshmana. Crossing sacred rivers and mountainous terrain, the venerable trio entered the vast Dandaka forest. While sanctified by the presence of sages and ascetics, the Dandaka forest had also been exposed to marauding hordes of evil demons. Ravana, the ten-headed demon-king of Lanka caught sight of Rama and cast an evil eye on Sita. In revenge for the defeat of his siblings, Surpanakha and Khara, at the hands of

Rama and Lakshmana, he devised a way to trick Sita. Disguised as a sage in need of alms, he abducted her when she was alone and carried her away to Lanka.

Meanwhile, upon discovering the crime, alas, too late, Rama clad himself in tree bark, covered himself with dust and wandered in search of her, with only tears for food.

One day as he made his way, he encountered Siva and Parvati walking in the woods. When Siva saluted Rama in complete humility, Mother Parvati was taken aback and wondered how the Lord Supreme could show such devotion to a mere mortal, and indeed, one so lost as Rama. She queried the Lord, “Is it becoming of the Ruler of the Universe to stoop to the level of a man consumed by his own delusion?”

Siva asked, “Do you not know who Rama is? He is the very incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Creator of the Universe. He assumed human form for the protection of the virtuous and the destruction of evil. And Sita is none other than Maha Lakshmi, chastity incarnate, a royal queen destined for the life of the palace but one who, instead, forsook the life of comfort in order to accompany her consort into the forest. Why are you surprised by Rama’s anguish? In the course of time, people from all walks of life and for all time will hail him as the Lord who weathered every storm but unflinchingly upheld tradition. Your assumptions are mistaken.”

Unconvinced, Parvati decided to test Rama and assumed Sita’s form. But when she approached him, he merely enquired, “Why, Mother Parvati, what brings you here? Where is Sankara? And why have you come in the form of Sita?”

Stunned by Rama’s powers of discrimination, Uma was compelled to confess that she had doubted him and told him of all that had occurred. Rama responded, “Since the Lord views me as Vishnu, he only followed formal etiquette in greeting me. In reality, however, we are all devotees of Lord Siva and merely aspects of Him. Whenever we see him, we worship him. When we don’t see him, we think of him all the same.”

Parvati, surprised by his humble, reverent manner, folded her hands in salutation. She realized that Rama fully deserved being called the *best of men in upholding tradition*. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Maha Rudram and Mahasivaratri

Mahasivaratri celebrations began on Monday morning the 16th February with Maha Rudram chanting in the New Library Auditorium followed by homa on the morning of the 17th. First Kala Puja for the 'Night of Siva' began at 6pm that evening followed by pujas every four hours throughout the night and interspersed with Rudram chanting and kirtan.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Bhakti and Jnana

D.: What is the relation between bhakti and jnana?

M.: Eternal, unbroken, natural state is jnana. Does it not imply love of Self? Is it not bhakti?

D.: Idol worship does not seem good. They worship the formless God in Islam.

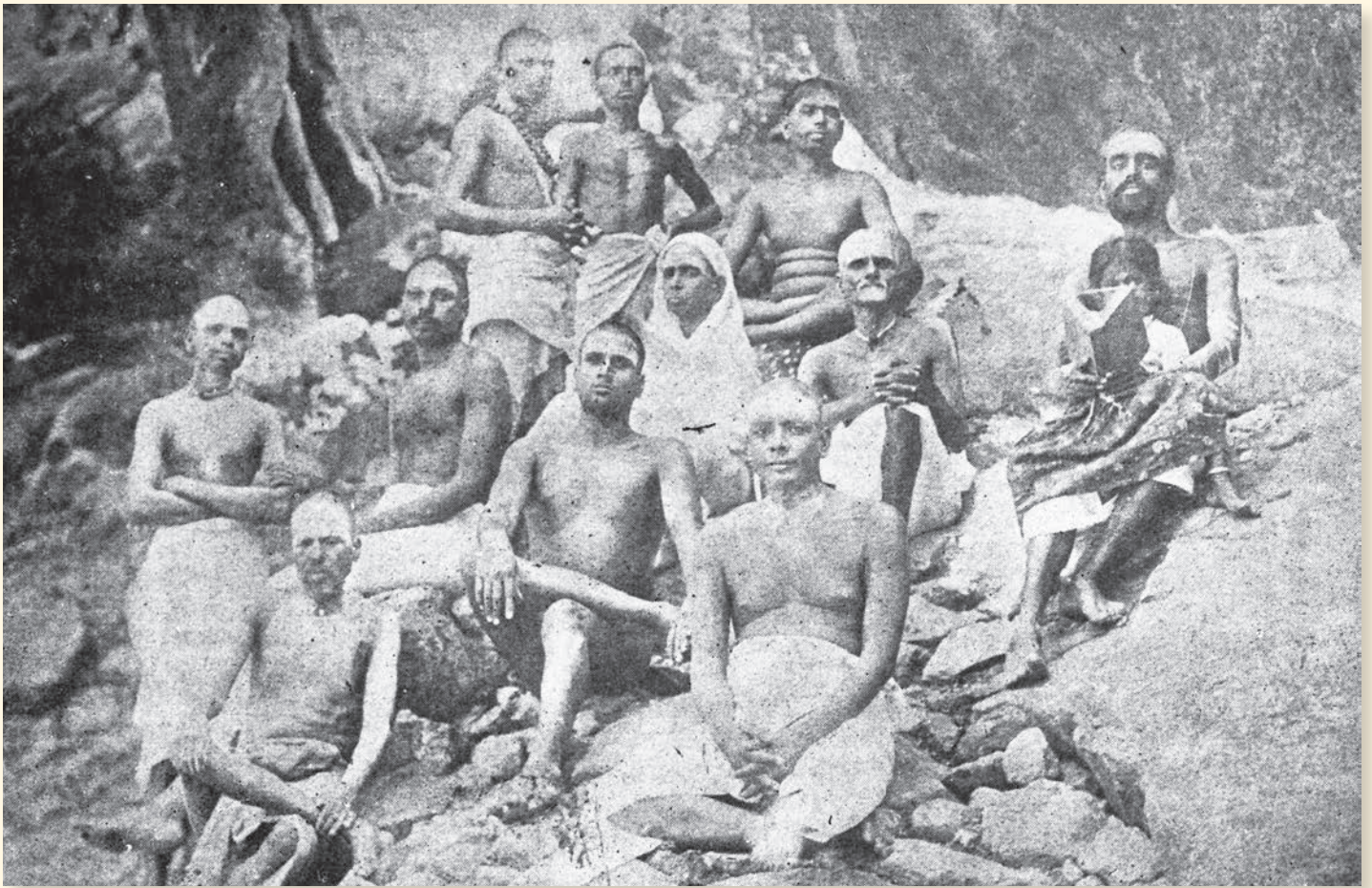
M.: What is their conception of God?

D.: As Immanence, etc.

M.: Is not God even then endowed with attributes? Form is only one kind of attribute. One cannot worship God without some notions. Any bhavana premises a God with attributes (saguna). Moreover, where is the use of discussing the form or formlessness of God? Find out if you have a form. You can then understand God.

— Talks §385





In the Frame

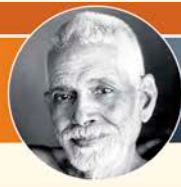
Archival Listing GRO 114 (1916), on the rock above Virupaksha Cave: LEFT TO RIGHT: (4th row) Perumalswami, Kandaswami, Ramana Maharshi (seated), 3rd row Alagammal, Palaniswami, C.K. Subramania Sastri, (2nd row) Ayyaswami, Narayana Reddiar, Eswaraswami, M. Sivaprakasam Pillai; (1st row) seated at front, not identified.



Palaniswami: Bhagavan's first devotee found Sri Bhagavan at Gurumurtham in February 1897 and took up loyal service to him as his principle sadhana for the next 21 years. A Keralite, Palaniswami was living in Ayyankulam St. when he first met Bhagavan and fed the two of them from bhiksha rounds. He attended on Sri Bhagavan faithfully and followed him to the adjacent mango grove. When Bhagavan thought it best to move out on his own, the attendant protested, "Where shall I go? You have the words of life". The two then went to Arunagiri temple, Pavalakunru and finally up to Virupaksha Cave where he remained until his final moments when he passed away in Bhagavan's arms in 1918.

Ayyaswami: came in 1911 at the age of 25. A skillful craftsman, resourceful and industrious, he made Bhagavan's kamandalu and cane which now sit in the Nirvana Room. Bhagavan marveled at his uncanny habit of bringing from town the very articles he and others were simultaneously talking about on the Hill. This happened repeatedly. When questioned about it, Ayyaswami simply said, 'Swami, how should I know? It merely occurred to me that I should take a particular article. I brought it and that is all. Swami alone should know about such strange happenings. Bhagavan added, "Really, he used to keep his mind pure, and so whatever we thought about here used to mirror itself in his mind."



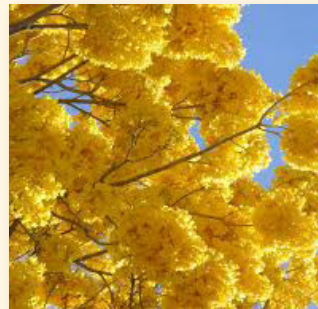


Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Vittal Bhajan: Jaya Krishna Dikshitar



On Thursday evening, the 5th February, devotees gathered in the New Library Auditorium to sing with Jaya Krishna Dikshitar in a night of kirtan. At one point during the performance, the Dikshitar stood and invited all in the hall to dance along with him, saying that when one "sings the names of the Lord", one must move — and devotees happily complied.

Sri Ramanasramam Gardens: The Primavera Tree



The Primavera Tree (*Tabebuia donnell-smithii*) whose bright yellow blossoms have earned it the nickname, 'Gold Tree', only blooms for a few days each year. This year the Ashram's Primavera situated just behind the

Ashram archives building burst into full bloom on Mahasivaratri morning, announcing, as it were, the coming of the great 'Night of Siva'. *Tabebuia donnell-smithii* can reach heights of 13 metres. Its 2.5 centimetres blossoms form clusters at branch ends and usually emerge in the springtime during dry weather when the tree is less foliated.

Obituary: Rolf Skarnitzl



Born 11th November 1925, Mr. Rolf Skarnitzl did his formal training in pharmacology. He later founded a research institute devoted to the development of new drugs which still maintains a full-time staff of twenty employees. Born Catholic, Mr. Skarnitzl was drawn to the spiritual life from his earliest boyhood but later became disenchanted with the Church. He subsequently came to Bhagavan and began a small Ramana satsang group in his native Prague, members of which still regularly visit the Ashram. On his first visit to the Ashram, he met Annamalai Swami who impressed him very much. He later translated some of Bhagavan's works into Czech. Mr. Skarnitzl merged peacefully at the Feet of Sri Ramana on 11th February, 2015 at the age of 89. —

