

Saranagati



COVER
INSERT

SPECIAL MAHANIRVANA ISSUE
MAY 2015



Photos this page from D. Thiagarajan



Saranagati



MAY 2015
VOL. 9, NO. 5

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The month of April brought necessary, if not unseasonal, rains to Tiruvannamalai and still now, with Agni Nakshatra fast approaching, the climate remains moderate with cool nights.

This month at the Ashram the Tamil New Year was celebrated on the 14th with special puja and the reading out of the 2015 panchangam (Hindu almanac) in Bhagavan's Shrine. That evening, devotees gathered at the Nirvana Room after Sri Chakra puja to recite *Aksharamanamalai* and to pass in procession before Bhagavan's final earthly dwelling.

Bhagavan's 65th Aradhana Celebrations took place on the 16th (see p. 5) and Major Chadwick Day on the 17th.

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

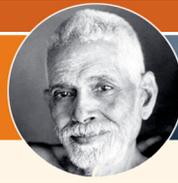
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

3rd May (Sun) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
22nd May (Fri) Punarvasu Day
1st - 2nd June (Mon-Tues) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
10th June (Weds) Mahapuja Day
18th June (Thurs) Punarvasu Day
28th June (Sun) Cow Lakshmi Day
1st July (Weds) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja

16th July (Thurs) Punarvasu Day
23rd July (Thurs) H.C. Khanna Day
30th July (Thurs) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
31st July (Fri) Guru Poonima
7th August (Fri) Kunjuswami Day
12th August (Weds) Punarvasu Day
29th August (Sat) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja





In the Kitchen with Bhagavan Part IV: Discovered

After Bhagavan's mother had come to Virupaksha Cave and started the Ashram kitchen, Seshadri Swami, having admired young Bhagavan since his first arrival, made affectionate jests about the 'grihasta living on the Hill'. Indeed the fact that Bhagavan's mother and brother had taken up residence at Virupaksha and regular food was being cooked and served confronted traditional assumptions about renunciation, where all links to family and household were normally dispensed with. But knowing Sri Ramana, Seshadri knew that Bhagavan had transcended all ashramas and that traditional typologies no longer applied to him.

So when Sri Bhagavan revealed his identity at Gurumurtham, it was because it did not matter anymore that he remain anonymous. He had cleaved the egoic knot once for all, had transcended the personality of the

boy from Tiruchuzhi and demolished all attraction to the world. He could have remained a silent, nameless yogi as yogis are wont to do. But where was the need to do so? Rather, like Lord Buddha under the Bodhi tree who realised that the suffering world might be benefited in knowing what he had discovered, the idea that the young Swami of Gurumurtham would keep for himself the substantial spiritual wealth he had earned was not even a consideration, for now compassion begun to spring forth from within him and would soon overflow in abundance. In time he would freely share his awakening with all who came to him in sincerity. And so, his identity known to the locals of Tiruvannamalai, it was just a matter of time before his family would find him.

The Family's Search

In the twenty months since his departure from Madurai, the Swami's mother Alagammal had made numerous efforts to locate him. She persuaded her brothers-in-law Subba Iyer and Nelliappa Iyer to take her to Trivandrum to follow-up on a rumour that her son had joined a drama troupe there. Various other reports came but every lead proved false. On 1st May 1898, however, when Bhagavan's uncle Subba Iyer passed away in Madurai and all were gathered for the funeral, a young friend of the family from Tiruchuzhi appeared on the scene saying, "Venkataraman is a revered saint in Tiruvannamalai." When questioned, he told them he had been on business to Madurai and while at a discourse in the Jnanasambandhar Mutt, he had sat next to one Annamalai Tambiran (the caretaker of Gurumurtham) and overheard him describing the holiness of a young saint living at Tiruvannamalai named Venkataraman thought to hail from Tiruchuzhi. The boy made further inquiries of the Tambiran until he was sure that the person in question was Venkataraman¹.

Immediately following the funeral functions Nelliappa Iyer and Narayanaswami Iyer set out for Tiruvannamalai. Once reaching Arunachala and locating the Mango Grove, they encountered the watchman of the garden, Venkatarama Naickar who

¹ *Self-Realisation*, Chap XI, "Traced at Last".





duly refused them entrance: “He is a mouni, a silent saint. Why trouble him?” All pleas proved in vain, so Nelliappa Iyer who had neither pen nor pencil broke off a neem twig and sharpened its end. He then plucked a ripe prickly pear and cutting it open, dipped the twig into the red juice of the pear by which means he wrote a chit on the back of a used piece of paper—“Nelliappa Iyer, pleader of Manamadurai wishes to see you.” Handing it to the gardener, he said, “Show him this letter. If your Swami allows our entry, you may then take us in.”²

The Mango Grove Swami at once recognised his uncle’s handwriting and also saw the name of his elder brother Nagaswami which appeared on the back of the chit, revealing that the latter had recently joined the Madurai Registration Department. As the two were being shown in by the gardener, Nelliappa Iyer was in doubt about the whole enterprise. “Might this be yet another wild goose chase?” he queried himself silently. When Nelliappa Iyer beheld the dirt-laden youth in question he did not at first recognize him. But once noticing the red mole on the sole of his right foot, he determined beyond any doubt that this was the missing boy. He was stunned to see how changed he was, not just in physical appearance, with matted hair and curly nails, but by the bright, luminous firelight in his eyes and the deep penetrating silence that pervaded his lodging. Seeing him thus absorbed, Nelliappa Iyer addressed Palaniswami and Rama Naickar, “I am happy that a boy of our family has reached such an exalted state”.³

The two relatives began to press their point, their reason for coming. In the interest of the youth’s health and well-being and for the sake of his grieving mother, the two appealed to the boy to return home with them. The Swami could continue his tapas under the care and guardianship of his family. But the Swami remained unmoving during all this discussion and appeared not even to register their words at all. After a time, Nelliappa Iyer gave in and made ready to leave. But Narayanaswami Iyer, who had been a schoolmate and friend of Venkataraman in their boyhood, stepped forward with the intention of forcing

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ramana Leela*, p.64.



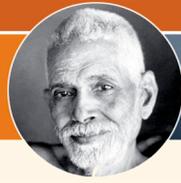
Bhagavan’s uncles Nelliappa Iyer and Subba Iyer

Venkataraman to accompany them. Yet when he started to reach for the Swami, ‘a burning sensation gripped him and spread over his whole body’ and he gave up the idea on the spot.⁴

As they left the place, Nelliappa Iyer felt pangs of conscience. With his brother Sundara Iyer, the boy’s father, deceased and now, with Subba Iyer, the boy’s guardian uncle also deceased, it fell to Nelliappa Iyer, the only remaining uncle, to look after the child’s education. On their way out, he encountered a pundit nearby giving a discourse and inquired about his nephew. The pundit said the boy was lost in Hatha Yoga and had no knowledge, aggravating Nelliappa’s deepest fears. He could only take leave after extracting a promise from the pundit that he would teach his nephew when the occasion permitted. In the months that followed, the latter made every effort to fulfill this promise but to no avail. The pundit’s initiatives were steadfastly resisted by the young Swami. Years later, however, when the Swami was giving a discourse on the *Gita Sara Thalattu* in the Esanya Mutt, the pundit discovered he had been mistaken and seeing the youth’s vast learning, prostrated before him. Likewise Nelliappa Iyer’s doubts were relieved during his third visit to Tiruvannamalai when he arrived unobserved at Virupaksha and overheard his nephew deftly explaining the Dakshinamurthi Stotra to devotees

⁴ *Ibid.*; also *Self-Realisation*, Chap XI, “Traced at Last”.





Arunagirinathar Temple

gathered there. From that moment forward, seeing his formidable spiritual insight, Nelliappa Iyer's fears about his nephew's education left him once for all.⁵

During this first visit, however, after five days at Tiruvannamalai, Nelliappa Iyer and Narayanaswami Iyer left for Madurai and imparted to Alagammal the good news that her son had been found at last and was still alive. But her joy was incomplete. Learning that her son had no desire to return home, she made up her mind to go to Tiruvannamalai and make an appeal in person, for surely Venkataraman would not refuse his own mother. Her eldest son Nagaswami who would accompany her, however, had no leave from his job at the Registration Department until Christmas. So six months would pass before the family would again come in contact with their missing boy.

Arunagiri Temple

Meanwhile after more than one and a half years at Gurumurtham and the adjacent Mango Grove, in September 1898 the Swami left the grove. He wanted to live alone and beg alms on his own and so sent Palaniswami away saying that he should carry on without him. But already by the evening of the first day

⁵ *Ramana Maharshi*, Prof. K Swaminathan, Chap. 3.

Palaniswami returned to his guru declaring that he could not be away from him. Thus the two took up residence at the Arunagirinathar Temple next to Ayyankulam tank.

On bhiksha rounds the Swami would clap his hands in front of a house and if food was offered, he would receive it with outstretched hands, eat it standing on the road and wipe his hands on his head. He later said, "You cannot conceive of the majesty and dignity I felt while so begging. The first day, when I begged, I felt bashful about it as a result of habits of upbringing, but after that there was absolutely no feeling of abasement. I felt like a king and more than a king. I sometimes received stale gruel at a house, took it without salt or spices in the open street [...] and passed on supremely happy in a state of mind in which even emperors were mere straw in my sight. It is because there is such a path that we find tales in the history of kings giving up their thrones and taking to begging."⁶

But the period at Arunagiri Shrine was short-lived. As the protection provided by the remoteness of Gurumurtham and the Mango Grove had been left behind and they were now situated near the *agraharam* (the Brahmin quarter), intrigued visitors crowded around this Brahmin boy of some repute, inadvertently depriving him of the bliss of anonymity and seclusion. So after a month at Arunagirinathar Temple, the Swami and Palaniswami moved to the gopuram of Arunachala Temple before retreating to the Temple's *alari* garden. Finally they made their way up onto the Hill's eastern spur and took refuge in a place famed by its legend and history. It is also the site of a significant encounter that would soon take place, one that will occupy the next segment of our story.

(to be continued)

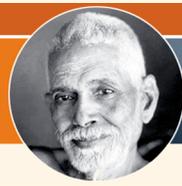
⁶ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 30 5-46.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Vairagya

D.: How is restlessness removed from the mind?

M.: Contact with objects other than itself make the mind restless. Loss of interest in non-Self, (*vairagya*) is the first step. Then the habits of introspection and concentration follow. They are characterised by control of external senses, internal faculties, etc. (*sama, dama, etc.*) ending in samadhi. — *Talks* §26





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Bhagavan's 65th Aradhana



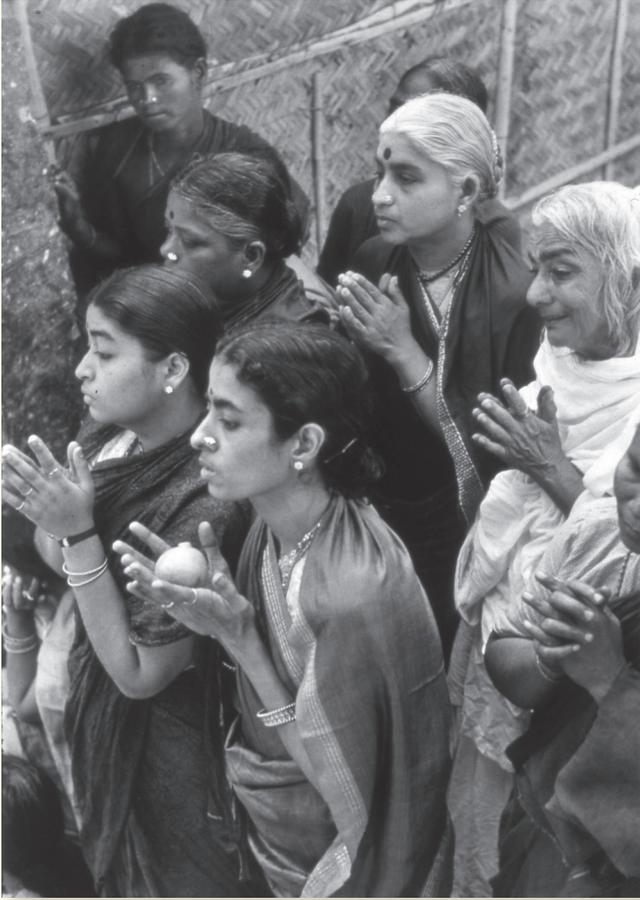
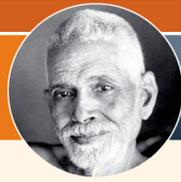
Bhagavan's 65th Mahanirvana was observed Thursday morning the 16th April with abhishekam starting around 8am with final arati at 10.30am. More than 1500 devotees received Bhagavan's prasada from six buffet stations, two in the pandal behind the dining hall, two in a tent erected behind the dormitories, one in the large dining hall and a sixth in the Korangu Thottam compound for Narayana Seva. Smt. Ambika Kameshwar offered a musical feature on Bhagavan in the evening. The following day, RMCL hosted the *Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam* with verses from Sivaprakasam Pillai set to five the ghana ragas of St. Thyagaraja's famous *Pancharatna Kritis*.

Wordwise: Vairagya

वैराग्य

Vairagya from *viraga* or *vi*, 'without' + *raga*, 'passion'; *raga* (cognate with the English 'rage') is also related to *rang* meaning 'colour' and *ranj* meaning 'sorrow', thus 'without colouring': 'dispassion' or 'detachment'. *Viragya* can also mean 'renunciation' though not necessarily in a formal sense but rather as *freedom from attachment*. The Buddha is reported to have said "*Vairagya* is enlightenment because it negates appearances". Our colouring of the world through attachment creates illusion and its consequent suffering. Bhagavan in a similar vein said: "An examination of the ephemeral nature of external phenomena leads to *vairagya*. Hence *vichara* is the first and foremost step to be taken. When *vichara* continues automatically, it results in a contempt for wealth, fame, ease, pleasure, etc. [thus making] the 'I' thought clearer for inspection. The source of 'I' is the Heart, the final goal." (*Talks* §68)





The Mahanirvana Viewed Jyotishically

Excerpt of a letter from Gayatri Devi Vasudev

On 14 April, 1950 at 8.47 pm as the Maharshi departed this earth, a great meteor traversed the sky and disappeared behind Arunachala Mountain. Hundreds

of thousands in distant parts of India witnessed the bright light trailing the heavens and many intuited that it boded a significant event.

In anticipation of Bhagavan's 65th Aradhana celebrations, the Ashram management approached Ramana devotee Gayatri Devi Vasudev—Editor, Modern Astrology magazine and former Editor The Astrological Magazine (1936-2007), the publication founded by her renowned father, author and jyotish scholar B. V. Raman—to hear her opinion of the Mahanirvana according to the principles of Vedic Astrology. In commenting on the main divisional chart (navamsha) for this event, among other things she said in her 43 years studying Jyotish she had “not come across such a configuration.” The following is taken from her reply:

On April 14, 1950, a brilliant column of light rose from the humble environs of Sri Ramanasramam in the holy town of Tiruvannamalai blazing into the night sky even as countless devotees across the country watched in awe and trepidation. The time was exactly 8-47 pm IST when the deeply spiritual sign Scorpio was ascending on the eastern horizon with its ruler Mars in Virgo with *kaivalyakaraka* Ketu (natural signifier of the Ultimate) aspected by the 9th lord *dharmastandhipati* Moon from the 5th house, the house of spirituality (see Chart 1). Atmakaraka Sun, symbolizing the Self or the Soul of the Universe, had just entered his sign of exaltation Aries and was in a state of great dignity and strength being vargottama (i.e. in the same sign in the navamsa) in his state of highest abundance.

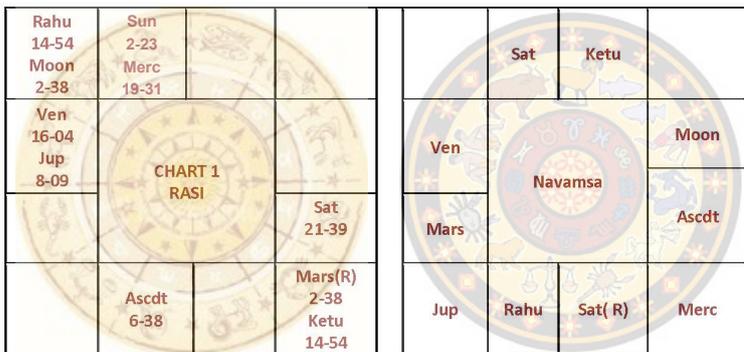


Chart 1: Mahanirvana: April 14, 1950 20h. 47m. at 12 N 12, 79 E 06

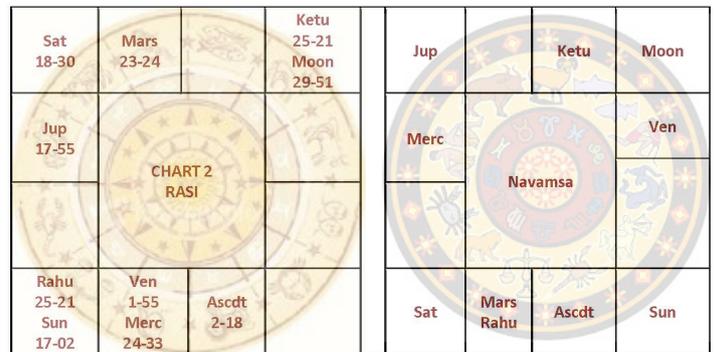
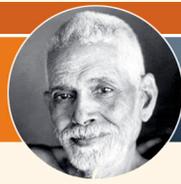


Chart 2: Birth chart: Dec 30, 1879 at 1am 9 N 50, 77 E 50.





This planetary pattern provided the perfect celestial foil for Bhagavan to give up the physical body that had shackled the Supreme Consciousness for over seven decades. The weekday was Friday whose lord, Venus, was also vargottama in Aquarius, the sign of the pitcher symbolizing the quenching of the spiritual thirst of humanity. Very appropriately, Venus was with *gnanakaraka* Jupiter (natural significator of Supreme Knowledge).

The interesting feature here is the Moon in Pisces, the last sign of the Zodiac which stands for moksha or final liberation, and situated in Purvabhadrapada nakshatra which is ruled by Jupiter. This nakshatra, it is to be noted, is the *Trijanma Tara* or the trinal nakshatra of Punarvasu, the Maharishi's janma nakshatra (see Chart 2), both ruled by Jupiter. Punarvasu lies in the airy sign of Gemini which very appropriately shows the path of gnana which is what Bhagavan gave the world through the path of enquiry or Who am I? This subtle connection between the birth and release nakshatras leaves little doubt of the divinity that took the shape of Bhagavan in answer to the cries of devotees around the world for spiritual succour.

In the navamsa, the most important of the sixteen divisional charts, the planetary arrangement is simply staggering. Every planet obtains unusual dignity and strength reflecting the core of the event occurring

under this planetary design. The Sun is exalted in Aries, the Moon occupies the deeply spiritual sign Cancer, which is also his own sign, Mars is in his sign of exaltation in Capricorn, Mercury is in his exaltation sign, Jupiter occupies his moolatrikona in Sagittarius, Venus is vargottama in friendly Aquarius, Saturn is in Libra in his sign of exaltation and both Rahu in Scorpio and Ketu in Taurus become extraordinarily strong by virtue of obtaining *neechabhanga* from multiple strong sources. This unusual pattern can mean nothing but a supreme spiritual event occurring under it.

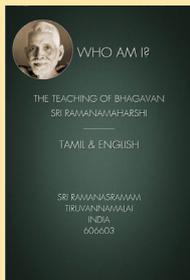
All said and done, no astrological or any other rational explanation can do justice to Bhagavan's life and transition for he is beyond words, beyond the grasp of the intellect and the mind. The Supreme Being we know as Bhagavan is beyond the pale of the human intellect .

This analysis is a simple act of devotion at Bhagavan's feet. *

Gayatri Devi Vasudev
April 15, 2015

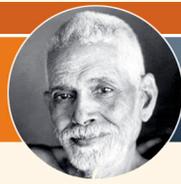
* [Editor's note: It may be worth mentioning that Sri Bhagavan consulted the panchangam (astrological almanac) just a few days before his final departure.]

Announcements: Online Audio Teaching Apps



Sri Ramanasramam has developed an application which plays the 'Who am I Teachings' in audio format in Tamil and English. The free app can be downloaded at: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ramana.whoamiteaching> or at <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/edit/a.284973671626976.1073742039.129262133864798/> Please listen whenever you wish to be inspired by the gracious words of Bhagavan.—





At the Feet of Bhagavan: The Shroff Family

Peston D. Shroff was raised and educated in Vienna where his father, who had been a successful realtor in India, had come to settle. Peston, the youngest child, having learned German and excelled in academics, taught English as his first job and otherwise indulged a youthful passion for equestrian sports. On returning to India, he succeeded in various careers, first teaching zoology at St. Xavier's College Bombay as an assistant professor and later, during the war, rising to the position of Lt. Commander in the Royal Indian Navy. In his younger years, however, in exploring his many talents, he found he had a knack for stock trading and ventured into Bombay's share market. The endeavour proved lucrative and almost overnight the young Shroff was wealthy beyond his wildest dreams. Favoured with success and good fortune, he married Dhun Dubash, the artistically-inclined daughter of a well-to-do family and began raising a family. But just as quickly as fortune had found him, disaster struck with the global financial crisis of the early 1930's and the Shroffs were suddenly penniless. So severe was the economic hardship that he began selling off family possessions and he and Dhun soon found they were unable even to properly feed their three children.

But it was during this period that small miracles began to visit the family. One day, a neighbourhood beggar-lady named Vhima came to the house and emptied the contents of her alms bowl on the doorstep of the Shroff

home. With these coins, the family was able to buy food. It was also during these years that the Shroffs turned to spirituality. Inspired by Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*, Peston and Dhun traveled to Tiruvannamalai. Arriving by the Madras Mail during the Jayanti celebrations of 1939, their first darshan of Bhagavan proved life-changing. Their affection for Bhagavan deepened in subsequent visits and by January 1945 they took the plunge and came to live at Ramanasramam.

With the war on, Peston, now an Indian Naval Officer, was compelled to come and go. But Mrs Shroff and the three children stayed permanently to enjoy the simplicity of Ashram life. Hilda, age 15, Rhoda, 13, and Daddy, 12 having been used to urban life, at first found the simple rural lifestyle challenging, yet the privations they faced served to teach them surrender. In time, all were enveloped in the calm loving presence of Sri Bhagavan which, they later said, "acted as a balm for every anguished soul".

Renting Raju Chettiar's small thatched-roof cottage on Chengam Road, the family came to delight in the simplicity of their lodgings, its rustic surroundings and the majestic view of the Holy Hill. The kids took up schooling with Nilakantha Sastri, a retired inspector of schools in town, and they came to see Bhagavan morning and evening during Vedaparayana times.

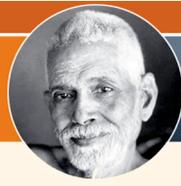
Meetings with Bhagavan

Dhun who found solace in letting Bhagavan know of family illness occasionally sent her children to Bhagavan to deliver such news. One day the kids ran to the rear gate of the Ashram to await Bhagavan on his return from his daily walk on the Hill. "Bhagavan," they stammered, "so-and-so is very ill". Bhagavan listened patiently to learn of the condition of the stricken relative and by a simple nod, gave the assurances they sought.

Crying out to Bhagavan

On other occasions, meetings with Bhagavan were much more intimate. Once when young Rhoda was playing at Palakotthu together with Narayana Iyer's daughter, Kalyani, she slipped on a large moss-covered rock and fell into the water. In an effort to come to her aid, Kalyani also fell in. In danger of drowning, the two screamed at the tops of their lungs. Rhoda began calling out in great desperation, "Bhagavan, help us! Bhagavan, help us!" The





sadhus who occupied the huts at Palakotthu were away at the time but one disabled sadhu heard them and though unable to render direct assistance, joined in sounding the alarm. Annamalai Swami whose hut was nearby heard the commotion and rushed to the scene. By casting forth his shoulder dhoti into the water, Kalyani was able to take hold of it while Rhoda clung fast to her arm. By this means both emerged from the waters unscathed, in spite of swallowing mouthfuls of Palakotthu's tirtha. But in the panicked confusion that ensued, Professor Venkataram Iyer got the jumbled message that the Shroff girls had drowned in Palakotthu! He ran with all speed to the Hall to inform Bhagavan and his excited shouts through the window in Tamil raised a huge cry in the Hall. Dhun, Rhoda's mother, was seated before Bhagavan just next to Lucia Osborne. Not conversant in Tamil, she was uncertain what had been said, but knew it concerned her children and sensed that it was serious. Bhagavan, however, consoled her and told her not to worry, that everything would be all right. Meanwhile Rhoda and Kalyani, not aware of the false alarm, had taken the decision to go home and change into dry clothes before coming to the Hall. But when sighted on the road, it was insisted they go directly to Bhagavan without delay. Presenting themselves dripping-wet before Bhagavan, they began to weep. In a voice choked with emotion, Rhoda made her petition, "Bhagavan, you heard my cries didn't you, you heard me calling out to you from the water?" and then broke down in uncontrollable sobs. Bhagavan eased their distress by making light of the whole incident. Inquiring cheerily of Kalyani in Tamil, he said, "What? You thought

you would measure the depth of Palakotthu Tirtham?" Finally Bhagavan's loving smile soothed the panic in the Hall—the panic in the hearts of the two young girls—and soon all was made well again.

Winds of Change

By such experiences with Bhagavan over the years, total faith unfolded in the hearts of the Shroff family and the cataclysm that had racked the family all those years earlier was all but forgotten. Yet the glory days with Bhagavan were not to last forever. One day the children's father returned to Tiruvannamalai to inform them that he had a transfer to Delhi where the family would have to move. "Pack up, we are going to Delhi". The kids were devastated. Having grown accustomed to being in Bhagavan's presence, they despaired—as did the Lt. Commander himself—of ever being apart from him. The children wept openly before Bhagavan in the Hall, praying that he might bring about a miracle. Their father chastened them for being childish but they continued to pray. The next day, as if by divine intervention, a telegram arrived from the Naval Office in Delhi, describing the urgency created by the upcoming partition and summoning Lt. Commander Shroff to Delhi at once. In this way the children's prayers were answered and they were able to stay on with Bhagavan a little longer.

Eventually the whole family resettled in Bombay, but years later, even after their parents had departed this world and the three had grown up to have children of their own, they all continued their devotion to Bhagavan and came for regular visits to the Ashram.—

Obituary: Smt. Rhoda Tata



Born Rhoda Shroff in Solapur, Maharashtra in 1932, Rhoda came to Bhagavan at the young age of thirteen when the family moved to Tiruvannamalai and stayed for twenty months in the mid-1940s. In 1959 she married Feroze Tata and moved to England where they raised three children and where she also enjoyed work as a secretary for charitable organisations. Rhodamma continued to visit the Ashram regularly, even in recent years when her health began to decline, and remained an active member of the London-based Ramana foundation. Merging peacefully at the feet of her Master on 11th February 2015, she held close a precious photo of Sri Bhagavan. Survived by her husband, sister Hilda and three children, Rhoda Tata will be remembered as one who exuded compassion, generosity, charm, sociability and, above all, kindness.—

