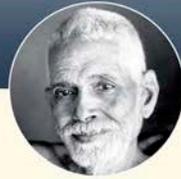


Saranagati

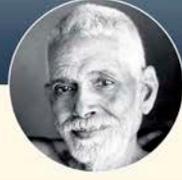


SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

MAY 2016
VOL. 10, NO.5



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

April brought warm weather, reduced crowds and a slower pace befitting the season. Telugu New Year fell on the 8th and Tamil New Year, the 14th. Rama Navami was celebrated the following day and Major Chadwick Day was observed on the 17th April.

On the 25th and 26th, devotees met in Ramanatapuram to celebrate the 12th anniversary of the Muruganar Mandiram with chanting of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and *Pallandu*. The programme concluded with recitation in Tiruchuli and Ramana Mandiram, Madurai.

This month, *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan, part XV: Building an Ashram* features the story of early Ashram construction beginning in the mid-1920s, improvements to Mother's Samadhi in 1925, as well as the building of the Old Hall in 1927 and the Ashram Gosala in 1930 (see pages 3).

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

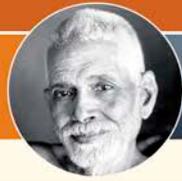
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

4th May (Weds) Sri Bhagavan's 66th Aradhana
11th May (Weds) Punarvasu Day
21st May (Sat) Full Moon
30th May (Mon) Mahapuja
8th June (Weds) Punarvasu Day
17th June (Fri) Cow Lakshmi Day

19th June (Sun) Full Moon
5th July (Tues) Punarvasu Day
19th July (Tues) Full Moon
23rd July (Sat) H.C. Khanna Day
25th July (Mon) Kavya Kanta Ganapati Muni Day
1st August (Mon) Punarvasu Day





The Ashram Dining Hall under construction in the late 1930s

In the Kitchen with Bhagavan (Part XV): Building an Ashram

In the early days of the Ashram, there were no buildings at all and the physical structures were as rustic and simple as could possibly be imagined. Devotees slept under the illuppai tree where a bed simply meant a towel spread out on a large rock and where Bhagavan sometimes provided bricks for those in need of a pillow. The very first construction projects consisted in making uneven rocks level by cementing them with bricks¹. By and by a few palm-leaf huts came up but as funds were limited in those days, there was little chance of taking up major construction. While wanting to build a more substantial edifice over Mother's samadhi, when bricks were discarded at an abandoned kiln opposite the Ashram sometime in 1925, the budding community began moving the bricks and storing them near the samadhi. Bhagavan tried to help out but devotees prevented him. So one moonlit night when devotees were asleep, Bhagavan got up and began carrying bricks to Mother's samadhi. All joined in and in a single night, the entire cache of abandoned bricks were shifted to the samadhi.

Up till then Mother's samadhi had been housed in a simple thatched hut where Bhagavan lived for five years, sitting day and night on a small elevated seat of concrete. But now with new building materials, brick walls around the shrine could be erected. Professional

1 Vilacheri Ranga Iyer's reminiscences, *Ocean of Grace*, vol 3, p. 441.

masons lay bricks on the exterior while Bhagavan did brick-laying on the interior. Together they constructed a simple building of four walls which, once completed, was covered with a palm-thatch roof.²

About a year and a half later, under the supervision of Gopal Rao and with the Rs. 1000 donation given by Dr. Narayana Iyer (chief medical officer of Tiruvannamalai), work began on the Ashram's first proper building made with brick and mud walls and a tiled roof resting on teakwood beams and trusses. A doorway was made on the southern side and big windows on the other three sides. Originally planned as a kitchen and dining hall, by the time the building was completed late in 1927, replete with a small kitchen-chimney on top, it was decided that with increasing guests coming to see Bhagavan, the need for a darshan hall surpassed the need for a new kitchen. Just a few metres south of the new darshan hall, between it and Mother's improved samadhi shrine lay a narrow, tiled building that served as kitchen and dining room and contained a slightly raised brick platform where the Maharshi sat for meals up till 1938.³

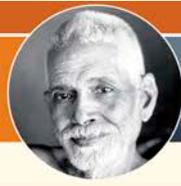
During these groundbreaking years, auxiliary projects included work on the Ashram well, not least of all continued efforts to excavate it in order to meet growing water needs. Called 'Sri Ramana Thirtham' and situated just east of the new darshan hall, the well with parapet wall, lay at the centre of the Ashram.

In the late 1920s a flood barrier at the rear of the Ashram was constructed with two sets of stone steps for crossing over it. Devotees marvelled at the size of the two 100-metre six-foot high stone walls, parallel to each other eight feet apart and filled in with earth. They found it hard to imagine that so great a quantity of water could ever gather at the rear of the Ashram to require such large-scale intervention. But during the monsoon, flash-flood waters from a heavy rain came barreling down the hill and rose up nearly to the embankment's maximum

2 M.V. Krishnan: 'Incidents Connected with the Life of Sri Bhagavan', *Mountain Path*, Oct. 1979, pp. 223-225; 'Evolution of the Mother's Shrine', *Mountain Path* December 2000, pp. 180-83; and *Ramana Jyothi*, December 2012, pp. 56-58.

3 *The Maharshi*, Jan / Feb 1995 Vol.5 No.1, (T.S. Anantha Murthy) "Sri Ramana Bestows His Grace", part II.





capacity. The fast-moving water safely drained off eastward toward *Thamarai Kulam* (Lotus Tank), highlighting the need for a substantial flood barrier.

Store and Gosala

Around this time Rangaswami Gounder, the devotee who had donated the sofa for Bhagavan's darshan hall, made a contribution for construction of a gosala. At the time, Lakshmi was the only cow in the Ashram but Rangaswami promised to provide more cows once the gosala was completed. Plans were laid and a small building erected near the present-day kitchen. Yet once again, even before the project was completed, it was decided that a more pressing need was a store to house and protect donated food items. Thus, the new building with its three masonry arches and limestone relief of Arunachala above the main entrance became the Ashram's first store⁴.

Rangaswami, the gosala's donor, was disappointed and despaired of ever seeing his gosala. But by 1930 work on a gosala began in earnest. A pivotal year when major and long-standing decisions would be made, Bhagavan in his vast wisdom tenderly influenced the many negotiations underway in the young Ashram, not just with respect to leadership but in establishing a standard for the future functioning of the community as a whole. The lack of formalised schedule and the informal organisational style proved that Bhagavan's grace was ever operative. He never asserted his authority but invariably any plan that unwittingly controverted it, by its own design, ended in failure. On the other hand, any undertaking that had Bhagavan's blessing, no matter how great the odds against it, always came to fruition.

Such would describe the new Ashram gosala project which proved extraordinary in multiple ways. First of all,

⁴ This is why rings for tethering cows can still be seen mounted in the walls of the Ashram store.



Ashram gosala constructed in the early 1930s

when initiated in 1930, it was by far the Ashram's most ambitious construction project up till that time, both in physical scale and in the financial obligations it would incur. With beams of Burmese teak, floors of granite stone, contoured balusters, a sculpted façade and walls forty-eight feet long, onlookers might have queried why Ashram inmates sleeping on stone floors in grass huts would elect to build a veritable palace for a single cow. But unfathomable wisdom and grace prevailed in the Ashram that it was understood that consecrating a large building to the embodiment of abundance that was Cow Lakshmi would bring the prosperity to build a bookstore, office, dining hall and shrine for mother.⁵

Thanks to Judge Salem Sundaram Chetty and his donation of Rs. 500, construction work got underway. If, as the saying goes, *architecture is the poetry of bricks and mortar*⁶, Bhagavan was the supreme poet. While Bhagavan had no formal training or experience in building, he had an innate sense of architectural design and the ingenuity of his suggestions astounded engineers and building experts alike. Beyond that, he was the incarnation of divine grace and whatever was undertaken in his presence invariably succeeded.

Yet Bhagavan contributed in other ways, even in

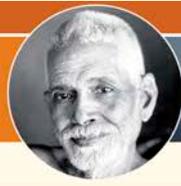
⁵ *The Life of Cow Lakshmi*, p. 43.

⁶ *Call Divine*, vol 6, p. 30.

Ashram YouTube Channel

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





very ordinary ways as well. For example, he was happy to get out of the hall where he spent most of his time and go to the building site to help out by lifting bricks and handing them to the masons.

Once when the large dining hall was under construction, the head mason sitting high upon the wall, sculpting it with stones, wanted an uninterrupted flow of stones and when there was any delay, was in the habit of shouting. One day when the supply of stone was not forthcoming, he shouted in his usual way only to turn around and find Bhagavan meekly standing there on the scaffold with a stone in his hand.⁷

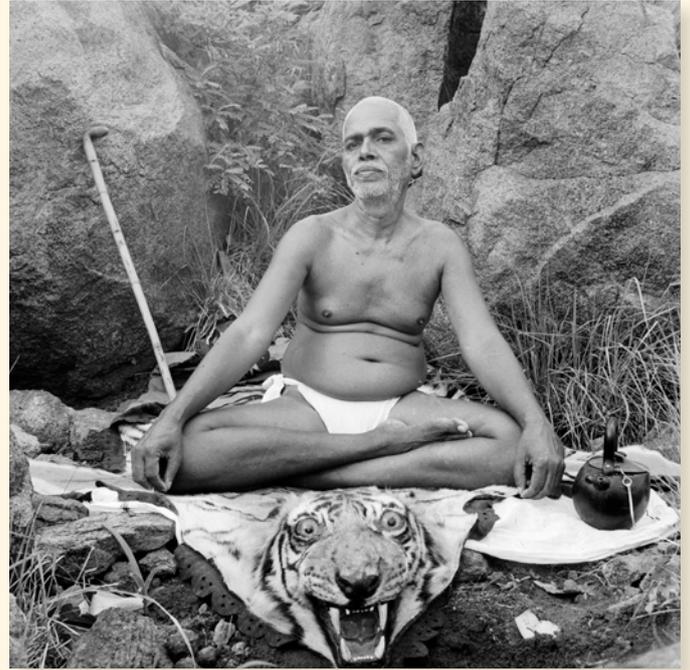
Mere Bricks and Mortar

But the *Brahma Sutra* adage that ‘mere bricks and mortar cannot build a house’ is made all the more rich in the case of the Ashram gosala where what was otherwise an impossible task was brought to fruition by Bhagavan’s grace. As the size and proportion of the gosala far exceeded the Ashram’s means, it seemed imprudent to take up such a massive construction project when so little funding was available. What was more, Bhagavan routinely discouraged devotees from making formal appeals for funds. For example when Chinnaswami was once prompted by devotees to go to North India to raise funds for construction, he went to Bhagavan to obtain his consent but Bhagavan just kept silent for a while and then said, “Everybody is coming here, believing that there is something precious here, why do you want to go there?” Chinnaswami immediately unpacked his bags⁸. Such were the challenges confronting Chinnaswami in the years building the Ashram. Needless to say, with regard to the gosala project, expenses continued to mount with no end in sight, even to the point that, on one occasion, workers could not be paid the day’s wages.

Unknown to devotees, however, elsewhere there was someone who they had never heard of, someone who had never even met Bhagavan, who made the resolve to help the Ashram. As it would happen, just then the prince of Vijayanagaram was on a tiger hunt and found himself in dire circumstances. At the critical moment, he

⁷ T. N. Venkataraman, *Ocean of Grace*, vol. 3, p. 739; *The Life of Cow Lakshmi*, p. 43.

⁸ T. N. Venkataraman, *In the Service of Bhagavan*, “Niranjananda Swami (Chinnaswami)”, p 4.



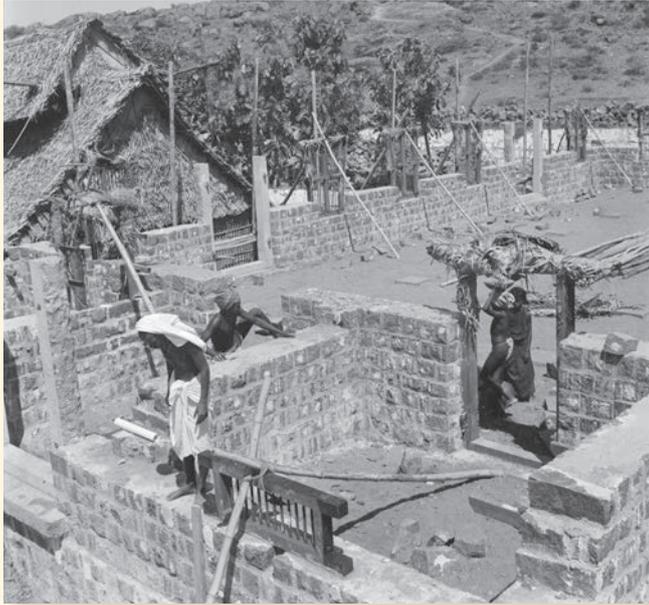
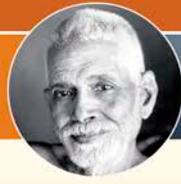
Bhagavan on the skin donated by the Rajah of Vijayanagaram

recalled an article on Bhagavan he had read in *The Sunday Times* not long before and immediately began praying to Bhagavan. He prayed that if Bhagavan assisted him in escaping death and in vanquishing his enemy, he would send a money order for Rs. 1000—plus the head and skin of his opponent—to the Ashram. No sooner had the prayer passed his lips than the danger was averted and the tiger was dispatched with a single shot. True to his word, he sent a cheque for the promised amount (and a month later, the skin). With this money, accounts for construction projects in the Ashram were balanced.⁹

But even this unusual gift did not end the strain indefinitely. Not long afterwards, it became apparent that the resources for teakwood beams required as support for the gosala building were simply not available. When someone came forward with an offer to arrange and send the needed five tonnes of wood from Madras, it was assumed that the offer was intended as a gift. But when the wood arrived by train a few days later, attached to the consignment was an invoice for Rs. 3,000.

⁹ Like Lord Siva who wears a tiger-skin signifying his conquest over *najoguna*, Bhagavan can be seen in numerous photos seated on the skin in question. The reader may remember that the mother of this prince became a Bhagavan devotee and came to see Bhagavan after her son died. (See G.V. Subbaramayya’s *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, p. 55).





The Dining Hall under construction in 1937

None could fathom how such a bill could ever be paid. But when well-to-do devotees got word of the difficulty, they convened a meeting and within a short time, raised the needed amount.

Settling this invoice was the final hurdle and the gosala construction was at long last completed. A letter was sent to Rangaswami Gounder inviting him to the *griha pravesam*. Cow Lakshmi eagerly awaited the opening

ceremony and even came to the darshan hall to bring Bhagavan along with her. But she would not enter the gosala till he entered first¹⁰. All were happy, not least of all, the Gounder. Those keeping accounts rejoiced not only in having the gosala project concluded with all outstanding bills paid, but more than that, found there was a surplus of funds, so much so that plans could be initiated for constructing an office, bookstall and Mother's Shrine, by Lakshmi's golden touch and Sri Bhagavan's beneficence.

Indeed subsequent years saw a burst of building activity including the establishment of a branch post office and the Vedapatasala in 1937. The new Ashram office and book depot were inaugurated in May 1937, the new dining hall and kitchen in September 1938 and, the most ambitious plan yet, a large temple complex over Mother's samadhi, was initiated in 1939.¹¹ In 1942, the dispensary was erected and the same year brought the Ashram's electric supply, all owing to Bhagavan's grace¹². —

(to be continued)

¹⁰ *The Life of Cow Lakshmi*, p. 43-45.

¹¹ T.N. Venkataraman: *In the Service of Bhagavan*, Chapter 16.

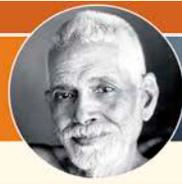
¹² Material for Part XV freely adapted from the Ramana literature.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nirvana Room Aradhana



Bhagavan's Aradhana according to the Gregorian calendar falls each year on the 14th April and this year fell on Punarvasu Day. The day was filled with special rites for the Navagraha deities in the morning together with Punarvasu celebrations. The Tamil New Year Sri Chakra puja was performed a little early in order that all may be ready to gather at 8pm outside Bhagavan's Nirvana Room. After *Aksharamanamalai* chanting, devotees filed one by one past the open door of the Nirvana Room to pay their respects. —

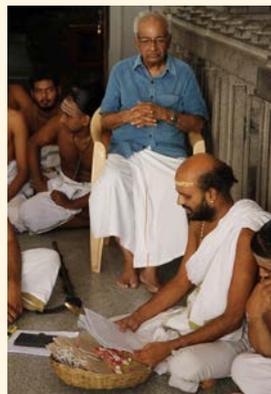




Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navagraha Reconsecration

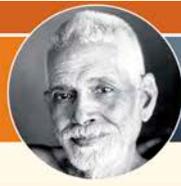
On 11th April during the early morning abhishekam of the Navagraha deities in Matrubhuteswara, Lord Shani became dislodged from his stone mount. It was decided the same day that a full repair was in order and by late afternoon, the divine power was ceremoniously transferred from the Navagrahas to a sacred pot of water in a rite called *kalakshna*. Repair work began the same evening, On New Year's Day, the 14th April, full homa and reconsecration of the nine planets was performed in a series of rites that culminated in a special abhishekam to the Navagrahas. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Panchangam Reading



On the afternoon of New Year's Day (14th April), the panchangam ('liturgical almanac') was read out in Bhagavan's Shrine. The reading serves to confirm key festival dates for the upcoming year. *Panch* or 'five' refers to the limbs (*anga*) or placement of the moon calculated in five ways, namely, *tithi*, *nakshatra*, *rasi*, *yoga*, and *karana* according to which *muhurthas* are determined and festival dates fixed. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Pavala Kunru Renovation Work

Repair work at Pavala Kunru is nearing completion. The much-needed support beam replacements in the mantapam was a lengthy and laborious task but now the shrine roof is stable and strong. Roof tiles above were also replaced as were the main temple doors. Other repairs were made to the temple vimanam, temple water-catchment well, compound walls, kitchen and auxiliary shrines, the back entrance and the addition of a new flight of steps leading up from the rear of the Shrine. All work was conducted under the careful guidance and supervision of Sri Mathu Stapathi, grandson of Sri Vaidyanatha Stapathi who constructed the Mother's Shrine in the years 1939-49. Mahakumbhabhishekam at the Big Temple is tentatively planned for the 23rd June and at Pavala Kunru sometime in late July or early August. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Jagadish Swami Day



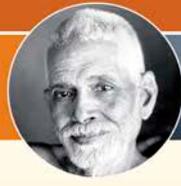
On 2nd April puja was performed at the small shrine behind Chadwick's cottage, the samadhi of Jagadish Swami, the self-effacing and totally surrendered devotee who lived in the Ashram up till his demise in 1986. From Bombay, Sri Jagadish came to Bhagavan with his family in the 1940s at the age of 16. His father, Ishwarbhai Damania, assisted in the acquisition of Bhagavan's birth house at Tiruchuzhi and supplied materials needed for electrification of the Mother's Shrine following its construction. —

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: The Sun of Arunachala

M.: The sun illumines the universe, whereas the Sun of Arunachala is so dazzling that the universe is obscured and an unbroken brilliance remains. But it is not realised in the present state and can be realised only if the lotus of the heart blossoms. The ordinary lotus blossoms in the light of the visible sun, whereas the subtle Heart blossoms only before the Sun of Suns. May Arunachala make my heart blossom so that His unbroken brilliance may shine all alone!

— Talks §442



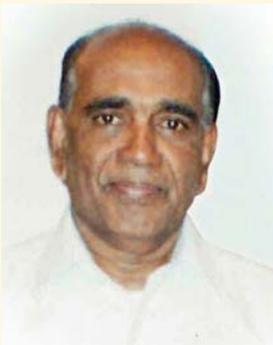


Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Chitra Pournami Annadhanam, 21st April

Full moon in the Tamil month of Chitra (mid-April to mid-May) is particularly auspicious. Not only is it the first full moon of the year when Sun is exalted in the first rasi (Aries), but the moon is in the 7th rasi (Libra) conjunct with *Chitra* (Tam. *Chithirai*; Eng. *Spica* which means "the bright one" and whose symbol is a luminescent jewel). Chitra Purnima is thought to be the birthday of Chitrugupta, the assistant to Lord Yama who keeps records of our faults and good deeds and presents the tally to the Lord of Death on the day of our passing from this world.

Apart from Kartigai Deepam, owing to the auspiciousness of Chitra purnima, the number of pilgrims going for pradakshina is greater than at any other time of the year. This year the ashram did its good turn and offered bhiksha to a record 9,000 pilgrims from serving stations near the illupai tree from 9am-12 and 6-8pm. —

Obituary: Sri Appathurai Seevaratnam



Appathurai Seevaratnam was born to Sri Appathurai and Smt. Rasamma in 1932 at Jaffna, Sri Lanka. He completed his early studies at Ramakrishna Mission and Higher studies at Hindu college. In 1954 he had the darshan and blessings of Papa Ramdas, who initiated him into Rama Mantra, and met Ma Krishnabai and Satchidananda Swamiji during their Sri Lankan visit. He married Smt. Shanmugadevi in 1958 and began regular Navavarna Srichakra Maha Meru Puja after his meeting with Kanchi Sri Shankaracharya in March 1962. In the same year he began coming to Ramanasramam, regularly bringing his family members. He retired as Administrative Secretary in the Lankan Postal Department. Sri Seevaratnam passed away on 27th March 2016 (*Panguni Sankata hara chaturthi tithi*) at the age of 84 amidst Rama Nama chanting by adoring family members. —

