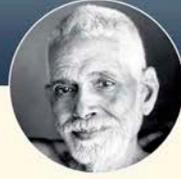


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

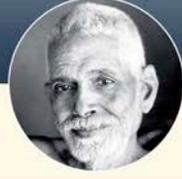
EXTENDED NAVRATRI EDITION
VOL. 9, NO. 11



D. Thyagarajan & S. Gopalakrishnan



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The final days of October brought needed rains with the arrival of the northeast monsoon on the heels of the nightly celebrations of Navratri from the 13th-22nd. The dry days early in the month enabled a thorough cleaning and painting in the Samadhi Hall, Mother's Shrine and other Ashram buildings in the run-up to the 'Nine Nights'.

In this issue of *Saranagati*, we pick up with the story of Mother's final days on the Hill on pages 2-5. Continuation of the unpublished reminiscences of Madhavi Ammal can be found on pages 6-7. And for music and arts events in the New Auditorium during Navratri, see page 9.

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. X: End of an Era</i>	2
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navratri</i>	5
<i>Madhavi Ammal: Unpublished Reminiscences (pt. III)</i>	6
<i>Wordwise: Sakti</i>	7
<i>Favourite Stories of Bhagavan: Mirabai</i>	8
<i>Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi (§288): Sakti</i>	8
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bharatanatyam</i>	8
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navratri Music & Dance</i>	9
<i>Saranagati's Suggestion Box</i>	9

Calendar of Upcoming Events

2nd November (Mon) Punarvasu
8th November (Sun) Mastan Swami Day
9th November (Mon) Annamalai Swami Day
10th November (Tues) Deepavali
16th November (Mon) Karthigai Festival Begins
25th November (Weds) Karthigai Deepam Day

29th November (Sun) Punarvasu Day
24th December (Thurs) Full Moon Day
27th December (Sun) Bhagavan's 136th Jayanti
31st December (Thurs) Lucy Ma Day
15th January (Fri) Makara Sankranti
16th January (Sat) Mattu Pongal





Mother's room at Skandasramam

In the Kitchen with Bhagavan Part X: End of an Era

Dispassion and Generosity

Mother took to the renunciate life at Skandasramam and its simplicity worked important changes in her character. In time all fear left her and she lived and moved as one who stood square on the earth, no longer complaining that things should be other than they were. In general she became more dispassionate, and in the breach of her former attachment, a keen generosity emerged.

One time Vallimalai Murugan who had visited Bhagavan at Virupaksha came up to Skandasramam. Whenever he wanted something, he knew that if he found the right words, it would often do the trick. So he sought to ignite Mother's generosity by praising her, in this case, for having given birth to a 'diamond

of a son, unparalleled'. He then proceeded to ask her for one of the Ashram's large kamandalus for his pilgrimage to the north, promising to bring water in it from the sacred Ganges and do abhishekam. She relented and gave him the desired item. (As it would turn out, Vallimalai Murugan was not able to return to Tiruvannamalai for long years but he did keep his promise. In 1937 he came to Ramanasramam and performed abhishekam over the lingam in Mother's Shrine with Ganges water he had brought in the very kamandalu Mother had given him.¹)

Another time, Sabhapathiswami for whom Mother had great love and respect approached her asking for a dhoti. Sabhapathiswami, known for sharing with others whatever he had available, had given away his only dhoti. When she remarked that she did not have a dhoti to give him, he requested that she tear off two yards of her sari. Moved by his love and self-sacrifice, Mother cut off two yards from the sari she was wearing and gave it to him.² Such was the detachment she had gained in only a few years living in the presence of her sage son and his devotees.

In due course of time she expressed a firm determination to spend the remainder of her earthly days with Bhagavan on the slopes of Arunachala. "Even if you throw my dead body in these thorny bushes, I want to die in your arms", she implored.³ This was precisely the resolve and surrender Bhagavan had counted on seeing in his mother.

Mother Falls Ill

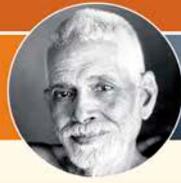
In 1922 Mother Alagammal suffered from an unrelenting fever and diarrhea that lasted more than a month. Easwaraswami gave her medicine each day but without any noticeable benefit. Bedridden and unable to carry out her daily chores, Chinnaswami and Kunjuswami washed her clothes for her. Accepting with calm detachment what lay ahead, she called Bhagavan to her side and placing Chinnaswami's hand in his, told him: "Look, my dear, this boy does not know what is

¹ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 14th Feb, 1949.

² *Living with the Master*, pp. 46-47.

³ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 3rd April, 1947.





right and what is wrong. Don't let him go away from you. Keep a watchful eye on him. This is my last wish".⁴

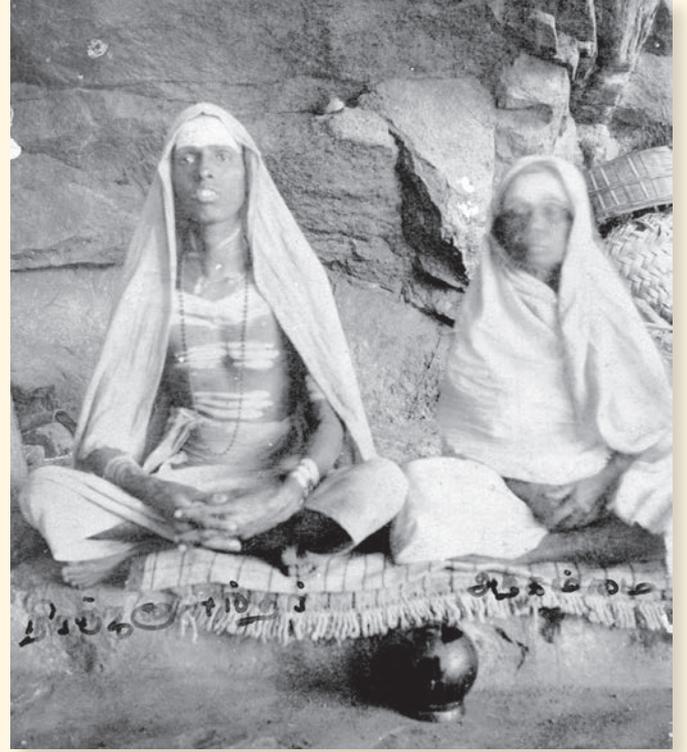
By the morning of 19th May 1922, her condition was critical. A telegram was sent to Sri Bhagavan's sister, Alamelu Ammal, alerting her to the prospect of her mother's imminent passing from this earth. That morning Bhagavan went into Mother's room and sat with her, not leaving her side, even taking his lunch there. Whenever she gasped for air excitedly, he would put his right hand on her chest until she became calm again. By 6pm when dinner was served, Chinnaswami, Ramakrishnaswami and Kunjuswami stayed with Bhagavan at Mother's side while others took their food. Raju Sastri, Vaidyanatha Sastri, Sundaresa Iyer and others recited the Veda while Saranagathi Ramaswamy Iyer and others did Ramajapa. Those sitting near Bhagavan recited *Aksharamanamalai*. Meanwhile devotees in town, having gotten the news, began climbing the Hill in order to pay their final respects, among them Nayana and his wife who came up to join the vigil.

By evening her breath had slowed considerably and was laboured. Bhagavan soothed her by placing one palm on her head and the other on her chest. Just before 8pm while devotees outside the room chanted and while Bhagavan maintained his holy hands firmly placed, Mother's breath became evermore shallow. In the midst of the activity outside, the sounds of prayers, recitations and mourning, Bhagavan maintained deep concentration not wavering from the task at hand. As his mother's breath gradually subsided, he held his right hand on her heart and his left on her forehead and maintained this position for some time after the breath had stopped completely. By this means, he later said, her soul merged with the Self and every last vasana was purified and extinguished.

When vibhuti had been applied to her forehead and her body was covered with a new sari, devotees moved the sacred form onto the front verandah of the Ashram. Once garlanded with flower malas and rudraksha beads, Bhagavan announced, "Now we can eat; there is no pollution (*theettu*)!"⁵

⁴ *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, Chapter 1.

⁵ Viswanatha Swami in *Boundless Ocean of Grace*, p. 579.



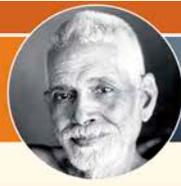
Chinnaswami with Mother on the Hill

Establishing a Samadhi

After dinner, devotional singing continued into the night and Bhagavan joined in the chanting of *Thiruvachakam* which lasted until 4am. As questions arose about cremation, it was quickly decided that cremation was not an option. Since the body of a fully realised soul is a temple itself, it should not be altered in any way. The question was simply where the samadhi should be established. Some had suggested a place near Skandasramam but this was also decided against on the grounds that not only would it be in violation of traditional temple rules regarding burial on the Hill but it would preclude the possibility of ever erecting a shrine over the samadhi. By sastric tradition, Arunachala as *lingeswarupa* obviates the establishment of any shrines upon the Hill-lingam itself.

When it was decided that Mother's remains would be interred at the foot of the Hill in an area reserved for sadhus, devotees started fashioning a bamboo palanquin with which to carry the body down to the foot of the Hill. Meanwhile Perumalswami, Ramakrishnaswami and others went to town to





Palakothu Tirtham

procure the required supplies for performing funeral rites. When they returned at the end of the recitation, all was made ready. At 5am Perumalswami, Ramakrishnaswami and others carried her body down the Hill to Pali Tirtham and everyone moved out except Kunjuswami who stayed behind to await the arrival of Bhagavan's sister Alamelu and her husband Picchu Iyer. The samadhi site initially chosen was next to the road but Ramakrishna Iyer presciently interjected that the samadhi should lay some distance from the road so that in the event it were ever decided to construct a temple over it, there would be sufficient space for such an endeavour. Once the site was established, a large pit was dug according to the instructions of Tirumular in his *Tirumandiram* for enshrining a jnani. While work was underway, Mother's body was placed beneath a large old pipal tree on the bank of Palakothu Tirtham around which Sri Bhagavan and devotees were seated. Alamelu and Pichu Iyer had arrived. By dawn,

scrub brush had been cleared away from a large area in order to accommodate the hundreds of devotees who had arrived from town. As music and devotional songs echoed in the early morning air, work on the samadhi continued at a steady pace. Abhishekam with milk, curd and coconut water took place at 10am after which the body was taken to the samadhi pit. Sacred ash and *darbha* grass were placed inside the pit and Mother Alagammal's body was lowered into it seated in the lotus posture. Sri Bhagavan and others each tossed a handful of sacred ash and camphor into the pit. The burial chamber was then sealed with a stone slab upon which a Sivalingam was installed. Puja and appropriate rites then followed. By 12 noon all was completed and the party started to make its way back to Palakothu. Kunjuswami describes the sight:

“Sri Bhagavan walked slowly to the accompaniment of Nadaswaram music. The procession took over one hour to cover a distance of 150 metres between Mother's Samadhi and Palakothu. The slow walk of Sri Bhagavan and the enchanting music of Nadaswaram were indescribably beautiful.”

For the next ten days, pujas were performed each day at the shrine by Chinnaswami and Ramanatha Brahmachari who came down from Skandasramam for this purpose. On the important tenth day a special puja was performed and no less than a thousand people turned up for the lighting of the *moksha deepam* ('light of liberation') at Mother's Shrine. On this day it was decided that the pujas should continue for a period of one mandala or forty-eight days.⁶

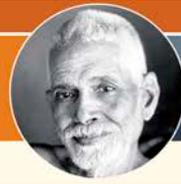
(to be continued)

⁶ This section adapted from Kunjuswami's *Living with the Master*, pp. 63-67 and *The Mountain Path*, 1981, "The Evolution of the Mother's Temple", pp. 183-188.

Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

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

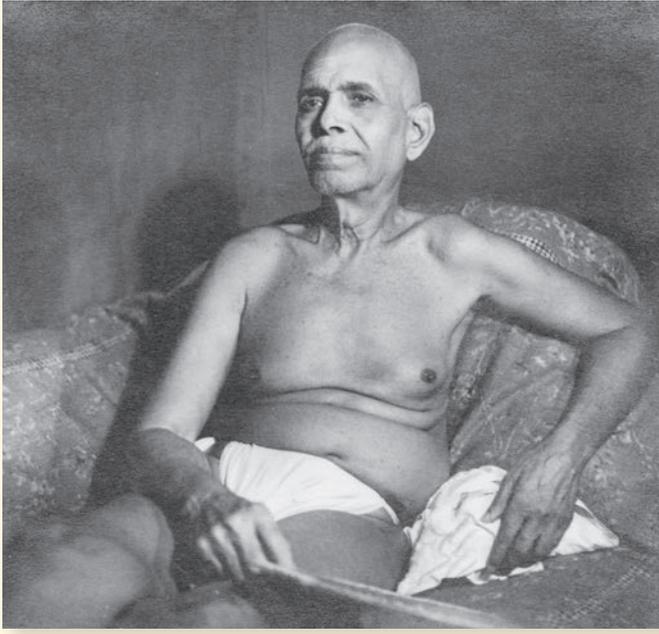
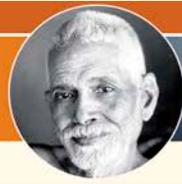




Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navratri 13th-22nd October

This year's alankaram themes of the 'nine nights' began with Goddess Meenakshi, followed by Gaja Lakshmi, Tapas, Linga Puja, Rishabha Vahanam, Seshha Sayanam, Venuganam, Saraswati and lastly Mahishasura Mardini, celebrating Durga's victory over the buffalo-demon. Saraswati Pujas took place in the tool-shed and bookstall on the afternoon of the ninth day. For video footage, please see <<https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>>.





K.K. Madhavi Ammal's Unpublished Reminiscences (Pt. III)

Thoothuvalai Leaves

Sadhus and sannyasis use *thoothuvalai* (*solnum trilobatum*) leaves as an aid in *dhyanam*. One day in a discussion with Rajushastri, he mentioned that Sri Bhagavan liked this leaf. This incident happened just after Bhagavan had given me upadesa and *dhyanasloka*. Instead of focusing on Bhagavan's advice I was more interested in finding ways to please my guru. So when I came to know that he liked *thoothuvalai* leaves, I asked where they could be found. Rajushastri said they are available in the forests of Arunachala and that if I asked one of the employees from the hospital, he would go and find them for me. I followed Rajushastri's suggestion and with the help of hospital staff, procured the plant. I roasted the leaves in ghee and offered them to Bhagavan. Bhagavan was surprised, "Where did you get these leaves. They are very difficult to find". I said that some hospital staff found them for me. With a smile he ate them and told the story of Sundaramurthi Nayanaar who got moksha after offering these leaves. Hearing the story of Sundaramurthi's liberation from Bhagavan's lips strengthened my desire to offer more *thoothuvalai* leaves. So the next day I acquired more by the same means. I fried them and took them to Bhagavan. I was very enthusiastic because the previous day I had heard

Bhagavan tell the story of Sundaramurthi. Today I felt sure I would get moksha. When we reached the Ashram Bhagavan had gone out. I kept the dish on the offering stool next to Bhagavan's sofa and sat down. When Bhagavan returned he saw the leaves and asked, "What's this"? Madhavaswami said "Ammal got *thoothuvalai* leaves". In a loud voice Bhagavan said, "Why all this? In big forests one has to search for ever to find these. Why should people be put to so much trouble just to please me? What a waste of effort". I was dumbstruck seeing Bhagavan so stern. But that state of being dumbstruck was the beginning of a small moksha for me. For my husband who was sitting next to me told Bhagavan mockingly, "She offered them in order to get moksha easily". Bhagavan looked at me with a look of deep compassion and said in a tender voice, "Oh, is that so?"

That was the beginning of a new stage in my interaction with Bhagavan. From that day onwards, every time I prostrated before Bhagavan, he used to look at me with the same *jnanadrishiti*. He would gaze at me for about five or ten minutes. From then on I only departed his presence when he had given permission with a nod of his head.

One day my husband had a lot of work in the hospital, hence my standing there like this caused him to be delayed. He got angry and told me, "Everybody just prostrates and leaves. You keep standing there indefinitely as if I have no work to do?" I replied, "I can only leave after getting Bhagavan's permission". He said, "What hysteria! Tomorrow I'll check".

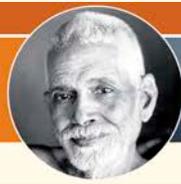
The next day when I prostrated before Bhagavan, my husband stood firm beside me to verify what I had told him. But on this occasion, Bhagavan did not gaze at me in the usual way. Impatiently my husband went out of the hall. Then with a great deal of compassion Bhagavan gazed at me for about two minutes smilingly and said, "Nambiar is waiting. Go!"

When I came out my husband said, "I did not see Bhagavan gazing at you". Fortunately my niece Padmavathi was with us and she intervened: "When uncle went out, Bhagavan gazed upon auntie". He had to accept what she had witnessed.

Gosala Grihapravesham

The next day was the *grihapravesham* of the gosala. In those days, the Ashram was not in the habit of purchasing things but whatever devotees brought were





utilised. That morning on the way to the Ashram my husband bought a few flowers and fruits, something he had never done before. Getting out of the car he himself carried them to offer to Bhagavan. Just when the house-warming ceremony was about to begin with only a lamp, my husband walked in with the offerings. Bhagavan smiled at the others gathered in the gosala and said, “You were saying there’s nothing for the house-warming. See, Nambiar has brought all that is needed”.

Wheat Puri

In 1943 or 1944, I stayed in the Ashram for one week. One Monday at lunch time I heard the attendant telling Bhagavan, “Tonight we are all having *puri*”. Bhagavan said calmly, “Okay, but there should only be rice on my leaf”.

Generally ladies cannot be in the ashram after dark. At 6pm I go to my residence. That day, however, Chinnaswami said “Amma, today we are making *puri*. Stay for that”.

We all sat for dinner at 7.30pm. I sat next to Bhagavan. There’s a rule in the ashram. Bhagavan should be served only after all are served. That day Bhagavan was uncommonly serious. After serving everyone the server came to Bhagavan. Bhagavan said in a loud voice “put rice”. The server was standing there trembling. Chinnaswamy was standing far away with a pained countenance.

“Doesn’t Bhagavan eat *puri*?”, I asked. “Um, the doctor said wheat is not good for this body”, he said. “Doctor Nambiar used to say that wheat is good for Bhagavan’s body”, I added. “Which doctor said this?”

Sri Bhagavan said with sorrow, “Hear this, one day last

year they made *puri*. They served lots of *puri* for everyone. In this person’s leaf alone there was rice. I quietly ate that and went. Then I wondered, so much was given to so many people. Why was it not possible that there was not sufficient to give to one more person? When I enquired, I came to know that one sack of wheat flour had gone bad. That bad flour was given to all the people except this one. Could it not have been given to the cows? From that day I decided not to eat *puri* again.” Saying this Bhagavan became very sad.

The server was standing like a statue. It seemed to me that the Sarvadhikari was praying deep in his heart for Bhagavan’s forgiveness. I said, “Was that not done because of devotion, love and respect for Bhagavan?”

Bhagavan sat up straight and looked at me. “Yes. Yes. There’s no use of having devotion, love and respect for this person alone without having it for others as well”, Bhagavan said. Bhagavan complimented me for trying to speak nicely. But I did not know what to say next and felt confused. I thought somehow or other there should be a release for the *puri* and said, “O Bhagavan! You suffered because so many people were given bad food. Today *puri* is cooked in ghee and if Bhagavan will not eat it, how much we will suffer eating it without Bhagavan?” “Oh, okay, serve then! Ammal is recommending *puri* for all”, said Bhagavan. With that the server put *puri* on Bhagavan’s leaf. Thus the *puri* which had been renounced by Bhagavan for an entire year was released that day and all ate happily. Greatly relieved, Chinnaswami went away smiling.

(to be continued)

Wordwise: Sakti

शक्ति

Sakti (from the root *sak* meaning ‘to be capable of’): power, capacity; force, energy, dynamism; potency; *mayasakti*: projecting power of creation which sustains and dissolves it.

Though sometimes seen as Ganga, the water dripping from Siva’s hair, more often Sakti is another name for Parvati. While Siva is the static unmoving principle of creation, Sakti is the dynamic, kinetic aspect which brings all things into being, thus encompassing the cycle of birth and death and circumscribing movement, change and the flow of consciousness. From the advaitic perspective such divisions are however only manners of speaking. Bhagavan comments: “There’s no difference between matter and spirit. Modern science admits that all matter is energy. Energy is power or force (*sakti*). Therefore all is resolved in Siva and Sakti i.e., the Self and the Mind” (*Talks* §268).





Favourite Stories of Bhagavan: Mirabai and the Sage

[In the course of a conversation, Bhagavan narrated an episode related to the famed singer-saint Mirabai visiting a Mahatma: Sri Ramanasmaranamrutam, p. 128. The 1945 (Tamil) film 'Meera' with M.S. Subbhalakshmi as Meera was shown to Bhagavan in November, 1946. See Day by Day, 5.11.46]

Mirabai was a Rajput princess of the Mewar kingdom in Rajasthan. She was a supreme devotee who surrendered herself to Lord Krishna from her early childhood. Having achieved complete identification with the Lord in a spirit of sublime love, she was not able to reconcile herself to the stifling regulations that accompanied life in the court and broke free from her royal shackles to travel with the abandon of a free soul. Objections by family members were met with devoted outpourings of song in praise of the Lord. In-laws launched a severe opposition, more than once even trying to kill her. But all such attempts proved in vain, protected as she was by her faith. She sang her lyrical *padas* wherever she went and enchanted all hearers with her bhakti.

Once when her pilgrimage brought her to the hermitage of the Sage Jiva Goswami of Mathura, she was denied admittance by his disciples on the grounds that he did not permit females in his presence. Mirabai expressed her puzzlement exclaiming that in her understanding the only Purusha (male) in the universe was the Lord and that all the rest were females. The disciples went in and reported her remarks to the sage. Immediately recognising her depth of realisation, the sage himself came out and conducted her inside with all courtesies, extending due hospitality.

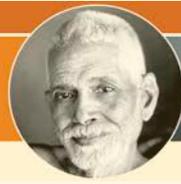
All those who identify themselves with the small 'I' are manifestations of nature and represent the female principle. Those who realise their true self go beyond the small 'I' and the concomitant male and female principles, and reach the ultimate state. —

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Sakti

M.: The Vedantins say that Maya is the *sakti* of illusion premised in Siva. Maya has no independent existence. Having brought out the illusion of the world as real, she continues to play upon the ignorance of the victims. When the reality of her not being is found, she disappears. 'Recognition' says that *Sakti* (power) is coeval with Siva. The one does not exist without the other. Siva is unmanifest, whereas *Sakti* is manifest on account of Her independent will (*swatantra*). Her manifestation is the display of the cosmos on pure consciousness, like images in a mirror. The images cannot remain in the absence of a mirror. So also the world cannot have an independent existence.

— Talks §288





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bharatanatyam by Kumari Aryamba Sriram 17th Oct



Aryamba started classical dance fifteen years ago at the tender age of 6. Her adventure into the classical arts began when Swami Shantananda Saraswathi instructed Smt. Shivapriya Vishwanathan (Amba's first dance director) to initiate her into dancing. She was also fortunate to be nurtured by Smt. Kamakshi Jayaraman at TFA Coimbatore and Kumari Suryakala at TFA Chennai. Amba joined the reputed Kalakshetra, Chennai in 2012 and since then has represented the institution at festivals including several cultural exchange programmes under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India globally. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Music and Dance in the Library Auditorium

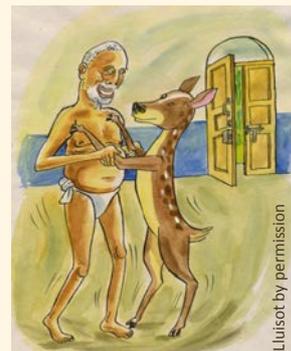


During Navratri the Ashram's New Auditorium provided the venue for afternoon dancing and evening music programmes. Tuesday evening, 13th October featured Carnatic Music with vocalist Sri Ramesh of Trichy, followed by a violin trio on Wednesday, 14th October. The Chinmaya Sisters (Smt. Uma and Smt. Radhika) performed Thursday, 15th October and Ramanan Balachandran of Bangalore gave a veena concert on Friday evening the 16th. —

Saranagati's Suggestion Box

Please send your comments and suggestions for *Saranagati Magazine*, Sri Ramanasramam's official e-monthly, to the following address:

<saranagati.suggestionbox@gmail.com>



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