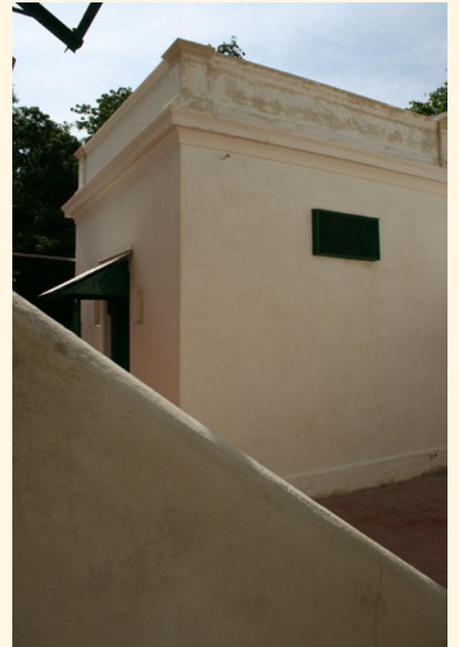
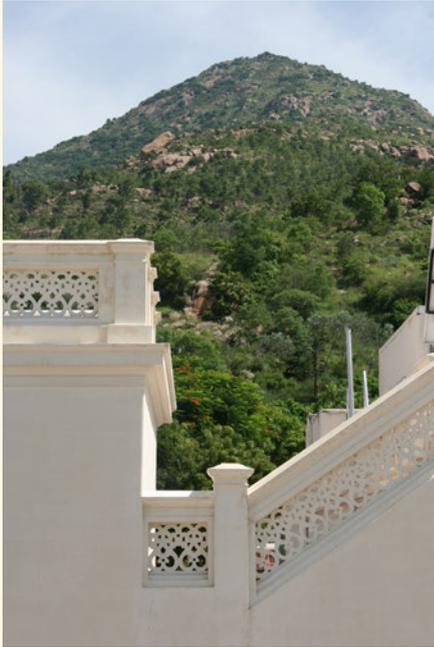


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

SEPTEMBER 2015
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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

For this year's Advent, the days of the week coincided with those of the year 1896 when the 29th fell on a Saturday and 1st September on a Tuesday. In the run-up to 1st September this year, devotees chanted parayana at the various sites that Bhagavan visited en route to Tiruvannamalai 119 years ago including Arunachaleswara on Advent Day.

This issue of *Saranagati* carries the continuation of the years at Virupaksha Cave and the arrival of Bhagavan's mother in the feature series, *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan*. Also in this issue is a report on a large-scale banyan tree-planting project on Arunachala (see pp. 7-8).

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, pt. VIII: Mother Comes to Stay</i>	2
<i>Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi (§395): Shunya</i>	3
<i>Wordwise: Shunyata</i>	4
<i>Coming to Bhagavan: Reminiscences of Madhavi Ammal II</i>	5
<i>Banyan Tree-Planting on Arunachala</i>	7
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Kunjuswami Day</i>	8
<i>Saranagati's Suggestion Box</i>	8

Calendar of Upcoming Events

1st September (Tues) Bhagavan's Advent Day
2nd September (Fri) Samvatsara Abhishekam
8th September (Tues) Punarvasu Day
12th September (Sat) Muruganar Day
27th September (Sun) Full Moon Day
6th October (Tues) Punarvasu Day
13th October (Tues) Navaratri Commences
21st October (Weds) Saraswati Puja

22nd October (Thurs) Vijaya Dasami
26th October (Mon) Full Moon
2nd November (Mon) Punarvasu
9th November (Mon) Annamalai Swami Day
10th November (Weds) Deepavali
16th November (Mon) Karthigai Festival Begins
25th November (Weds) Karthigai Deepam Day
27th December (Sun) Bhagavan's 136th Jayanti





In the Kitchen with Bhagavan Part VIII: Mother Comes to Stay

In the years since her visit in December 1898 to young Ramana at Pavala Kunru, Alagammal suffered numerous setbacks. Her eldest son, Nagaswami, Bhagavan's elder brother, passed away in 1900. Her brother-in-law, Bhagavan's uncle Nelliappa Iyer, also passed away, leaving Alagammal with little financial support. The family house at Tiruchuzhi had been sold in order to pay off debts and the weight of the family responsibility fell to her youngest son, Nagasundaram. Now married, Nagasundaram and his wife Mangalam had given birth to two children. But in a short time, both children passed away one after the other. In the aftermath of these losses which threatened the continuation of the family line, the family made a pilgrimage to Tirupati in 1913. On the return journey, Alagammal brought her daughter-in-law to see Bhagavan in order to obtain his blessing for a grandson, confident that he would help.

Indeed within a year, a baby boy was born. The following year in April 1915, when the family went to Venkataramana Swami Shrine at Tirupati for the child's *mundan* (first head shaving), they stopped at Tiruvannamalai on the return trip to visit Bhagavan. Alagammal, fatigued and feeling her work was done, declared, "I'm not going back. I shall stay here."¹ Having failed to bring her swami-son home all those years before, she made up her mind to bring the family home to her son, even if it meant giving up the comforts of home. This was her first lengthy stay with the sage since his departure from Madurai twenty years earlier. However, during this stay at Virupaksha, she fell sick with typhoid and was close to death. It was only by Bhagavan's direct intervention and fervent prayers that her life was spared. Following her recovery, she returned to Manamadurai but soon came back to Arunachala to stay permanently with Bhagavan.

The Kitchen on the Hill

As she settled into a new life, her heart melted at discovering the conditions regarding food and she expressed her desire to receive as alms raw provisions—rather than prepared food—so that she could do the cooking and provide Sri Ramana and his companions genuine sustenance. Living conditions at Virupaksha were primitive and water was especially a problem as the spring lay some distance uphill above Skandasramam which was then under construction. Unable to carry the water herself, Bhagavan climbed the Hill each day and filled two large *kamandalus*. For her morning bath, she sat wrapped in a small cloth as Bhagavan poured water over her in the style of *abhishekam*².

Meanwhile Bhagavan's younger brother grieved the loss of his wife Mangalam who died in 1916. In the aftermath of the loss, Nagasundaram received a timely message from Mother Alagammal urging him to come and join her at Tiruvannamalai. Seeing it as a call from Lord Arunachala, Nagasundaram left Tiruvenkadu, entrusting his young son to the care of Bhagavan's sister, Alamelu. Thus in August 1917, he came and took refuge at the feet of his sage-brother. At first Nagasundaram stayed in town and came up the Hill for visits. But in time he came to settle in at the Ashram, though he continued his *bhiksha* rounds in town. Devotees protested still

¹ *In the Service of Bhagavan*, pp. 1-3.

² *Ocean of Grace*, vol 1, p. 395.



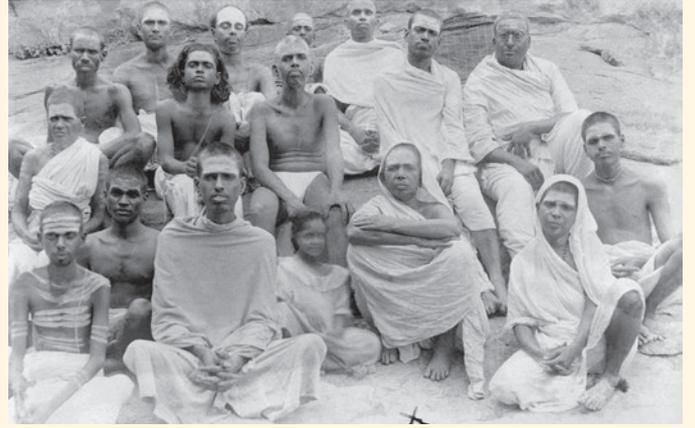


saying that since there was plenty of food, Bhagavan's brother, the 'little Swami', should eat with them. From that time on, he was a permanent member of the Ashram and devoted his life to Bhagavan.³

Getting Things Unasked

A quern was installed at Virupaksha for grinding and preparing iddly flour. Once the kitchen was established, devotees began bringing uncooked provisions. When work at Skandasramam was finally finished, Mother Alagammal found she had a full kitchen to work in and water in plentiful supply. Bhagavan was keen on maintaining the discipline of not soliciting, namely, accepting and being content with what was given without asking. But somehow, Mother's every wishes were granted without Bhagavan or anyone else openly expressing them. For example, one day when she was in need of a ladle, she appealed to Bhagavan. "Let's see," came the casual reply. But he made no petitions or requests to anyone. Yet within a couple of days, a devotee of his own accord brought half a dozen ladles and placed them at Mother's feet. Similarly, cooking vessels were needed and when informed, Bhagavan gave his usual reply, "We'll see." But though he never mentioned a word, somehow the needed things made their way to the Ashram. Bhagavan later commented on this regularly occurring phenomenon. Another example of these small miracles typical of life with Bhagavan was a time when Sri Bhagavan suffered from an insistent cough. When the stock of *kadukḱai* (small *myrobalam*) used as a remedy, was exhausted, Bhagavan suffered a violent relapse. Palaniswami requested that Bhagavan allow him to go to town to get ripe *myrobalam* which Bhagavan had deemed better than tender *myrobalam* for treating cough. Just when Bhagavan had desisted, a devotee entered the cave with a small bag of ripe *myrobalam* in his hand. In this way,

³ In 1918 he took *sannyasa* and received the name Swami Niranjanananda. See *In the Service of Bhagavan*, pp. 1-3; also, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, pp. 77-78.



Bhagavan, Mother and Chinnaswami with devotees near Virupaksha Cave (ca. 1920)

without making requests, the small community always got what was needed and the kitchen began to thrive.⁴

Pappadam Song

Once when Bhagavan's mother wanted to make something special for him and knowing he was fond of twin *appalams*, she set about making the necessary preparations. Without informing Bhagavan, she asked Mudaliar Patti, Echammal and others to get everything ready. Bhagavan sensed a plan afoot and when she left saying she was going to the town, he waited silently under the tree outside in order to observe her. She went to several houses, collected all the required things in a big vessel and returned.

Bhagavan continued: "I closed my eyes and feigned ignorance. After nightfall, acting like I was asleep, she leisurely took out the wooden roller, wooden seat, loose flour and balls of paste and commenced making *appalams*. There were about two to three hundred to be made. She could not prepare them all single-handedly, so she quietly began pleading with me, 'My boy, please help me'. I got the opportunity I was waiting for. If I were lenient in this, she would

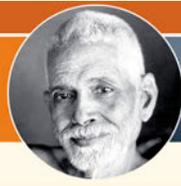
⁴ *Fragrant Petals*, pp. 115-116.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Shunya

M.: Shunya (void), ati shunya (beyond shunya) and mahashunya (immense void), all mean the same, i.e., the Real Being only.

— Talks §395





start something else and there would be no end of it. I wanted to put a timely stop to it, so I said, 'You have renounced everything and have come here, haven't you? Why all this? You should rest content with what is available. I won't help you and I won't eat them if you prepare them. Make them and eat them yourself.'

"She was silent for a while and again started saying, 'What, my dear son, please help me a little.' I was adamant. She called me again and again. Feeling it was no use arguing any more, I said, 'All right! You make these *appalams*. I will make another kind of *appalam*. I then started singing. She used to sing a rice song, a soup song and other such songs, all with Vedantic meanings. No one appears to have written an *appalam* song. So I felt I should compose one. By the time the preparation of the *appalams* was over, my song was also finished. 'I will eat this *appalam* (sing the song) and you eat those that you have made.'" Bhagavan sang the following verses:

Pallavi (Refrain): *Try and make some pappadams. Eat them and your longing satisfy.*

Anu Pallavi (Doxology): *Don't roam the world disconsolate. Heed the word, unique, unspoken, taught by the teacher true*

who teaches the truth of Being-Awareness-Bliss. (Refrain)

1) *Take the black gram, ego-self, growing in the five-fold body field and grind it in the quern, the wisdom quest of 'Who am I?', reducing it to finest flour. (Refrain)*

2) *Mix it with pirandai⁵ juice, which is holy company, add mind-control, the cummin seed, the pepper of self-restraint, the salt of non-attachment and asafoetida, the aroma of virtuous inclination. (Refrain)*

3) *In the heart mortar place the dough. And with mind pestle inward turned, pound it hard with strokes of 'I-I', then flatten it with the rolling pin of stillness on the level slab (of Being). Work away, untiring, steady and cheerful. (Refrain)*

4) *Put the pappadam in the ghee of Brahman held in the pan of infinite silence and fry it over the fire of knowledge. Now as 'I' transmutes into That, eat and taste the Self as Self, abiding as the Self alone. (Refrain)⁶*

(to be continued)

⁵ *Cissus Quadrangularis* or Veldt grape.

⁶ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 3rd April, 1947. Bhagavan said: "All the essence of the Vedanta is incorporated in [this] one song. If properly commented upon, it would make a big volume by itself."

Wordwise: Shunyata शून्यता

Shunyata: emptiness, void, vacuity, from *shunya* meaning 'empty', 'zero', 'nothing' 'still', 'lonely' based on the root stem *svi* meaning 'hollow'.

Shunyata appears in the Upanishads as one of the attributes of the Supreme, namely, attributelessness or formlessness. In the *Shunya Samhita* it is described this way: *It has no shape, no colour, It is invisible and without name; This Brahman is called Shunya Brahman. Atma Brahman is the space in the heart of the lotus out of which the whole of the phenomenal world is born. But since Brahman is unchanging, the changing world cannot be Brahman and thus must be unreal (Mandukya Karika).*

The *Shunyavada* of the 2nd century South Indian philosopher, Nagarjuna, came to be criticised as nihilistic though his original emphasis on the void was meant to argue the insubstantiality of phenomena. Among various advaitic schools, *shunyata* came to be seen as one of the (meditation) states attendant on the path to Self-realisation, namely, of emptying the mind of *vasanas* and *samskaras* through deep *samadhi*. *Devikalottara* v.14 says, "The Void (*chunyam*, Tam. or *mahashunya*, Skt.) is the effulgence of pure wisdom completely devoid of visible phenomena. Consisting of the aspect 'I', it is the seed of liberation, the experience of which impels one to start on the path of union with the Supreme". Bhagavan says elsewhere, "Emptiness (*shunya*) is the pure 'nirvanic' state of the Self or *Turiya*, where no object is observed [but] where there is only the subject aware of nothing but Itself" (*Guru Ramana*, p. 181).





Madhavi Ammal before Sri Bhagavan (1949)

Coming to Bhagavan: Unpublished Reminiscences of Madhavi Ammal (Part II)

On March 12, 1934, a Monday, I went to Bhagavan's Mother's Samadhi with flowers and fruit and prayed silently: "O Mother of this great saint, you were also a *samsari* in your earlier days. By the grace of your jnani son, you also became a jnani. In the end you attained *kaivalya-mukti* because of your rishi son and hence today all are worshipping you as a goddess. O Mother! Even though I am a *samsari*, please bless me that I may escape the struggles of the world and be worthy of the grace of Sri Bhagavan. Let me gain contentment being a disciple of Bhagavan".

As I made this prayer, two ladies at some distance were tying garlands for puja, chit-chatting. I heard

the voice of one of them, Annapurnammal, say, "Ask Bhagavan!". As I had only prayed mentally, when I turned to look, I was surprised to find Annapurnammal sitting as before, absorbed in the work of tying garlands.

But I took this as a sign and went to Bhagavan's hall. Except Madhavaswami, the Malayali attendant, no one was there with Bhagavan. I felt an extraordinary freshness and courage and spoke freely: "O Bhagavan! I have been coming for the past one year." Bhagavan asked "What happened, are you being transferred?" "No, not yet but some day we will have to leave. Please give me some *upadesa* so that I will not forget Bhagavan."

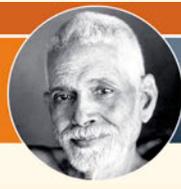
Bhagavan was reading a letter. I was afraid he might say what he often said, 'What is there to advise?' But instead, he gave no reply to my query but sat in padmasana. After some time, I began singing with full devotion a Telugu translation of Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*. When I had sung all the verses, Bhagavan looked at Madhavaswami and said smilingly, "Ammal has finished praising Arunachaleswara". Realising that Bhagavan had been listening, enthusiastically I started telling him about my life. But he showed no indication that he was listening. Disappointed, I asked again, "O Bhagavan! Am I asking for something for which I have no qualification? If I have no qualification, then please say so. Even then, how can I remove the desire that spontaneously emerged in me to have you as my guru when I heard there was a rishi at the Mountain. Before having seen you, how could that thought come?"

Just then Bhagavan turned to me with a smile and suddenly a brilliant light filled the hall. By its glare and splendour, I could see neither Bhagavan nor my surroundings. This vision lasted only a brief moment but it was a moment that made a world of difference, for the unceasing craving for *upadesa* left me.

I stood up, prostrated to Bhagavan and stood with folded hands. Bhagavan slowly turned and looked at me as though asking, 'Are you done with the craving for *upadesa* now?'

Bhagavan then took out a pen and paper from the writing table next to him and wrote a sloka. Handing it to me, he said, "Use this for *dhyana*". Receiving the sloka I prostrated in full devotion and departed the hall in astonishment, hardly believing what had just occurred. The sloka read:





I adore Guha, the dweller in the Cave of the Heart, the son of the protector of the universe, the pure light of awareness beyond thought, the wielder of the weapon of jnana sakti and the remover of ignorance of blemishless devotees.

My life was different from then on. And my relationship with Bhagavan deepened.

Nursing Bhagavan

One week later, I came to know that Bhagavan had swelling in the leg and needed the assistance of a doctor. My husband, Dr. P. C. Nambiar, had gone home to Kerala on leave. So I went home, picked up the stove and medicines and came to the hall. Though at first he refused, yet because of my repeated and sincere requests, Bhagavan allowed the attendants to apply the medicine to his leg. But not knowing the proper method and thus applying too much heat in one place and too little in another, the attendants were inadvertently making things worse. I was pained at the thought of causing Bhagavan greater suffering. "May I do it?" I asked. Bhagavan was reading something and so did not reply.

Without thinking that as a lady I should not touch Bhagavan as per the accepted norms of the world, I applied medicine on Bhagavan's leg and began giving heat to it. It gave Bhagavan great relief and gave me unspeakable satisfaction. However, being a lady, my action was disliked by many in the hall. But Bhagavan came to my rescue and replied to their complaints, "Whoever is destined to perform whatever actions, they are performing them".

Naivedyam

Another time I went with my husband to Bhagavan's *sannidhi* with a few rose flowers and snacks. Bhagavan was looking up as though to welcome us. When the servers came to serve food, Bhagavan said, "Wait!" And then to others in the dining hall, he said, "Puttu is a special snack of Malayala rajyam". He then looked at me, "Sari, sari. Please put only a little for me as there should be enough for everyone." I then served Bhagavan and placed a rose on his leaf and made a prostration. "Ammalu's naivedyam," Bhagavan said lightheartedly.

In those days the Ashram consisted of Bhagavan's Hall, the Mother's samadhi, a thatched shed that served as a kitchen and a make-shift shed for a library. Only later, buildings for the Vedapatasala, library, dining hall, office,

hospital and guest rooms were built. Finally, a large temple was built for Mother's samadhi. In March 1949 kumbhabhishekam was performed after the completion of the Mother's Shrine. Then Bhagavan took on a serious disease as a mode to leave the physical body.

Mahasamadhi

The last time I had Bhagavan's darshan was in September 1949. All were happy under the impression that Bhagavan had become better following the recent surgery. Devotees even came and went as if the threat to Bhagavan's life were something of the past. This was just prior to our transfer to Assam. I was sitting outside the hall when I saw Bhagavan looking at me. I went inside and prostrated. Bhagavan looked at me steadily, so I remained still without moving. It was against the rules and the attendant said, "Amma, go amma!" But Bhagavan stopped him, saying, "Ammal is going away to a distant place. How far is Assam from here?" Then he gazed at me for a full ten minutes, transmitting radiance. I felt it was not right to stand there so long breaking the Ashram discipline. But as I did not want to take my eyes off Bhagavan, I walked backwards and came out of the hall. Till I was out of sight, Bhagavan remained looking at me. That scene has been embedded in my mind all these years since for after that day, except in dreams, I never again saw Bhagavan's physical form.

On 14th April, 1950 at 8.47 pm, Bhagavan attained mahasamadhi. For Bhagavan who has no beginning or end, what kind of an end was this? A divine being in human form giving comfort to me and countless other *samsaris* has become a great invisible light not only in Bharatam but in the entire world. That purest of bodies was absorbed into the Parasakti which protects the world.

The form of Bhagavan I saw on 12th March 1934, and the *upadesa* he gave me, are even now vivid in my memory as if carved in stone. The experience of sixteen years in his presence remains in the fore of my memory. I pray that always and everywhere Bhagavan may be with me, my family and all his devotees.*

(to be continued)

*The foregoing is adapted from a recent manuscript translation by Savitha of Madhavi Ammal's *Sri Ramana Tiruwaimeozhi Lekhavalai*, originally published in Malayalam in September 1961.





Banyan Tree-Planting on Arunachala

Aadi is the month dedicated to the Mother Goddess, especially in relation to water and fecundity, making it a time for planting. During the Tamil festival called *Aadiperukku* on the 18th day of *Aadi* (3rd August), planting took place at the Ashram Farm (*Nallavan Paalayam*). Two weeks later, toward the end of *Aadi*, a large rainstorm struck Tiruvannamalai. This was seen as the auspicious moment, and indeed the agriculturally appropriate opportunity, to commence a completely different and very large-scale planting-project on Arunachala, one that had been long in the planning. On 17th August, initiated with a small ceremony on the hillside just above the Ashram, staff from Sri Ramanasramam began planting two hundred eight-foot banyan saplings on the Hill. Coordinated by Skandasramam caretaker Swami Brahmananda with

Ramanasramam providing labour and Arunachala Reforestation Society supporting, the saplings which had been given at a concession by Swami Nursery in Hosur were planted at the rate of about 20 trees per day. Of course this was not the first time that devotees of Sri Ramana planted banyan trees on the Holy Hill. As early as 1905, Kandaswami—founder and builder of Skandasramam—planted banyan trees at Sadguruswami Cave, which later got the name Alamarathu Guhai or Banyan Tree Cave.

Devotees have long appreciated the banyan trees at the back of the main Ashram compound planted in the 1930s by Manavasi Ramanasami Iyer to adorn the walking path Bhagavan daily trod going to Palakotthu and up the Hill.

Though it is commonly believed that the *magizha* tree is Arunachala's *sthala vriksha*, many have argued that this





Banyan Tree Planting on Arunachala (cont.)

is a mistaken notion and that in fact Tiruvannamalai's actual *sthala vriksha* is the banyan tree. All who have read *Arunachala Mahatmyam* know the legendary status of the tree: it was the banyan that stood on the northern slopes of Arunachala and provided shade for Arunagiri Yogi sitting deeply absorbed in *virasana* posture. Devotees may recall the story Bhagavan told about his search for a banyan tree when walking on that side of the Hill after finding a large banyan leaf. Climbing up the Hill, just when he finally spotted the tree, he inadvertently struck a hornet's nest. As the aggravated creatures took revenge on him, fiercely attacking his leg, Bhagavan understood that he was not to proceed further. For Ramana devotees the importance of the banyan can hardly be exaggerated: don't they regard Sri

Ramana as the one who sat as Dakshinamurthi beneath its shade instructing the four sons of Brahma?

The national tree of India, *Ficus bengalensis* has always been a symbol of eternal renewal as it regenerates itself by sending down fresh aerial roots from its branches. The banyan can live up to 500 years and a single tree can occupy vast areas, even several acres of land. The matrix of its branches and roots have always evoked a sense of the sacred, the intimate relationship between multiplicity and Unity, between the created and the Uncreated. If the Ashram's current efforts prove successful, then in the decades and centuries to come, Arunagiri Yogi and other *Siddha Purushas* will have various spots to choose from to sit in Self-Absorption. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Kunjuswami Day

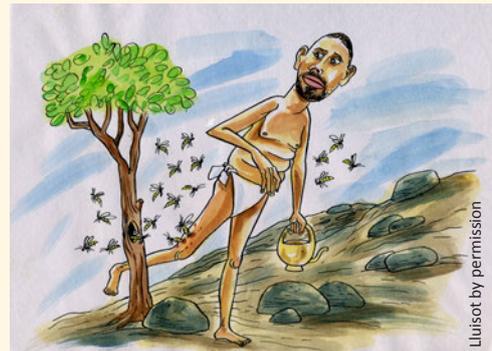


On 7th August, Ashram devotees gathered at the samadhi of Sri Kunjuswami who turned 119 this year. Devotees' recitations in Malayalam were followed by Aksharamanamalai abhishekam, puja and distribution of prasad.

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>](mailto:saranagati.suggestionbox@gmail.com)



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