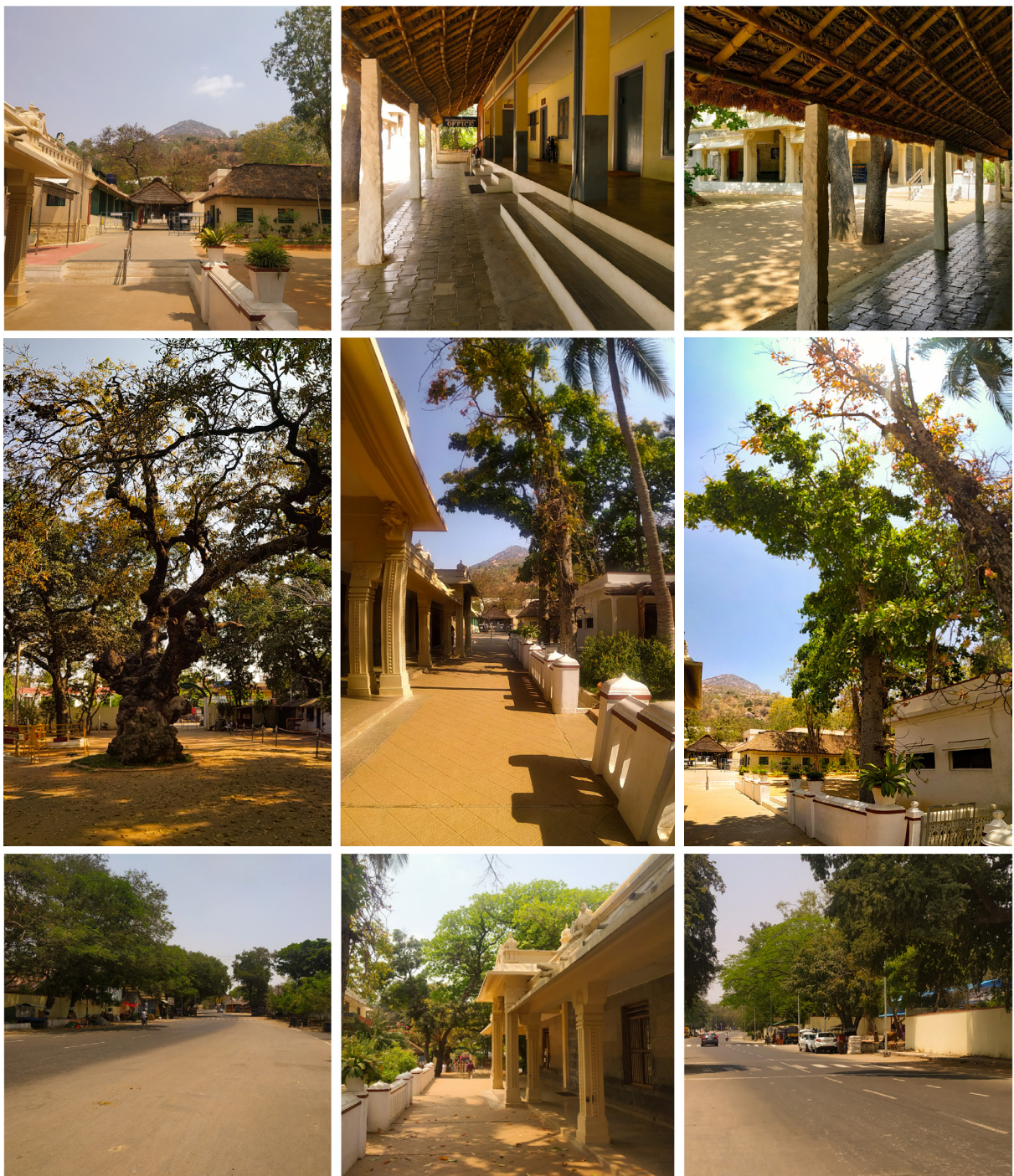


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

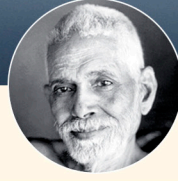
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D. Thiagarajan



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

As we go to press, people all over the world find themselves in extreme circumstances with the outlook uncertain. Even experts can be seen to wobble on occasion under the weight of the consequential decisions they are being forced to make in respect of the global pandemic. With a nationwide lockdown in place all over India, only a skeleton crew of staff remains at the Ashram to keep the fires burning and to maintain basic functions.

In this issue we read about Bhagavan and his devotees coping with their own epidemics and quarantines. Also in this issue, we continue with the life story of Dr. Sujata Sen.

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 Events to be Celebrated at Home (for the time being)

2nd April (Thurs) Sri Rama Navami/Punarvasu
7th April (Tues) Full Moon
14th April (Tues) Tamil New Year/Nirvana Room
20th April (Mon) Sri Bhagavan's 70th Aradhana
29th April (Weds) Punarvasu
6th May (Weds) Full Moon

16th May (Sat) Maha Puja
26th May (Tues) Punarvasu
5th June (Fri) Full Moon
23rd June (Tues) Punarvasu
2nd July (Thurs) Cow Lakshmi Day
5th July (Sun) Guru Poornima





Bhagavan's Life in the Face of Public Health Crises

While devotees everywhere, like billions of people around the globe, face the present worldwide epidemic, readers may recall that this is not the first time that Bhagavan's devotees have been impacted by a public health crisis. In his boyhood, Bhagavan had heard about various plagues and cholera epidemics that had ravaged his ancestors in former generations. Already as a boy of ten, a flu pandemic broke out and lasted two years, spreading throughout India and across the globe in 1889 and 1890, causing ten lakhs of casualties. By the time Bhagavan had come to Tiruvannamalai and settled at Virupaksha Cave, a cholera pandemic broke out and eventually spread throughout the country

resulting in the tragic loss of 800,000 lives. Another cholera epidemic broke out in 1903 though it did not adversely affect the residents at Virupaksha. However, the bubonic plague epidemic of 1905 engendered a mass exodus from Tiruvannamalai and left Bhagavan nearly alone at Virupaksha. Dr. Narayana Iyer, the chief medical officer of Tiruvannamalai District in charge of the evacuation intervened on Bhagavan's behalf. A devotee of Sri Bhagavan, he arranged for Bhagavan and the few sadhus that remained with him, to take refuge at Pachaiaimman Kovil, the sacred Devi temple situated in the north-east quarter of Arunachala, a few hundred metres north of the town.

This would be a six-month quarantine that Bhagavan would look back on and recall with fondness. In a well-shaded grove of tamarind trees with two spring-fed bathing tanks, Pachaiaimman Kovil was guarded by the towering figures of the Goddess Pachaiaimman, her consort Mannarswami and other deities who stood





majestically at the temple entrance, with the mighty Arunachala Hill as their backdrop. “Pachai means emerald-coloured,” Bhagavan once explained. “When Parvati came to Sage Gautama’s Ashram, her form was of emerald colour and she performed austerities in this grove. It is said that she went around the Hill, continuing her austerities, and finally merged into Siva as half of His body and came to be known as ‘Apita Kuchamba’.”

Miracles of Nature

In the quiet of the evacuated town, in quarantine in these serene surroundings, the effects of the epidemic that had eviscerated the local population were all but unknown to the newly arrived residents of Pachaiaimman Temple. There was nothing for Bhagavan and his devotees to do except follow the government’s orders, stay away from the town and take measures to avoid getting infected. What this boiled down to essentially was making use of their days in quiet recollection at the temple. Of course, for Bhagavan, his whole renunciant life had been a quarantine of sorts, a natural retreat from the life of samsara, which to him was only illusion. Such was not a retreat from anything in the world per se but was born of the joyful desire to remain in the repose of Arunachala’s abiding stillness and peace.

Bhagavan was quick to appreciate his new surroundings and ever being the keen observer of all that took place around him, did not neglect to take notice of the creatures in his midst, including small insects. For example, when he noticed a red wasp constructing a hive on a pillar of the temple, he studied it with intense interest. One day it departed and did not return. After about two weeks, Bhagavan became curious to see what had become of the grubs inside and so, opened one of the cells of the hive. Inadvertently, one of the creatures within dropped to the ground. Though shaken by the fall, it was unharmed and after a few minutes began to crawl about. In no time at all, the two black specks on each of its sides revealed themselves to be wings, and duly opened for the first time. What had been a tiny white grub had now transformed into a full-grown wasp. As it crawled about getting its bearings, it suddenly stopped, leapt from the ground and flew away. Bhagavan marvelled at the transformative power of nature.



The Towel with A Thousand Eyes

As the weeks passed, life at Pachaiaimman Kovil normalised and a daily routine got established. Bhagavan had a towel that had become old and frayed and seemed to have a thousand little holes in it as its fabric was very flimsy. Bhagavan used it for drying himself after bathing and, owing to its frayed condition, when laying it out to dry, would place it as inconspicuously as possible between two rocks hidden from view. He rightly guessed that his devotees would be horrified by the state of his towel and would immediately seek to replace it.

One day a mischievous youngster observed Bhagavan laying out his towel to dry in its secret drying place. To tease Bhagavan, the boy called out, ‘Swami, Swami, this towel is required by the Governor. He has asked me to get it from you. Please give it to me.’ So saying, the urchin playfully stretched out his hand to receive it. Bhagavan in turn, playfully replied, ‘Oh, dear! This towel! No, I couldn’t possibly part with it. Now go away!’

This incident was later lyrically anthologised by Sri Muruganar in his *Sri Ramana Sannadhi Murai*, where the towel becomes Indra with his thousand eyes.

Leopards and Tigers

While Bhagavan and his devotees lived in peace at Pachaiaimman Temple, the denizens of the town had fled for safety to outlying villages. The town was so deserted that tigers and leopards came down from their mountain haunts while some journeyed from the surrounding jungle to move about unabashedly through the streets, in search of food. They did not overlook visiting the sadhus living at Pachaiaimman Kovil.





Bhagavan tells a wonderful story involving Rangaswami Iyengar, an agent for Best & Co., who used to come to visit Bhagavan at Pachaiaimman:

One day, when Rangaswami Iyengar went to answer the call of nature, it seems he saw a tiger in a bush. When he tried to drive her away with a shout, she replied with a mild roar. His body shook with terror and getting up involuntarily from where he sat, he began running towards me gasping for breath, shouting at the top of his voice, 'Oh, Bhagavan!' I happened to come out for some work and

so met him. When I asked him what all the fright was about, he said imploringly, 'Ayyo, tiger, tiger! Come, Swami, we must go into the temple and close all the doors, otherwise, she will come in. Why don't you come?' I said, laughing, 'Let us wait and see. Where is the tiger? It is nowhere.' Pointing towards the bush he said, 'It's there in that bush.' I said, 'You wait here. I'll go and see.' When I went, I found no tiger. Still, he could not get over his fear.

I assured him that it was a harmless animal and there was no need to be afraid, but he would not believe me. Another day, while I was sitting on the edge of the tank opposite the temple, the same tiger came to drink water, and without any fear, roamed about for a while looking at me and went its way. Iyengar, however, observed all this, hiding himself in the temple. He was afraid of what might happen to me.

After the tiger left, I went into the temple and relieved him of his fear saying, 'Look! What a mild animal it is! If we threaten it, it will attack us. Not otherwise.' I thus dispelled his fears.

Jack the Dog

There were many victims of the evacuation of 1905, among them, Bhagavan's favourite dog, Jack. Jack did not succumb to the disease, however, as dogs in

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Narayana Seva with Social Distancing



Devotees around India and the world have written to the Ashram expressing their concern for the well-being of the local sadhus who depend on the daily Ashram Narayana Seva ('poor feeding') for their sustenance. When the lockdown began, the Ashram was in doubt about whether local authorities would allow the service to continue. With their permission obtained, however, the Ashram is serving meals to about 200 sadhus per day. Simultaneously, at the request of the Municipality, the Ashram is providing meals for 200 poor in the town for distribution at Amma canteens.

Strict social distancing measures are in effect and spacing in the Narayana Seva queue is about three metres between those in the queue. This means that the queue stretches all the way back along the path next to the Archives toward the Ashram go-down. Attending staff are equipped with face masks and rubber gloves to minimise exposure. For the protection of those coming to collect food, Ashram staff is providing home-made makeshift masks since commercially produced masks are out of stock in Tiruvannamalai. In this connection, it should be noted that leading epidemiologists around the world are now calling for universal mask use as studies reveal that countries with widespread mask use, such as Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea have overcome vertical growth curves for the spread of COVID-19. —





general are immune to the viruses and bacteria that affect humans. Jack's end came another way.

Jack had escaped the jaws of leopards that lived on the Hill. But when Bhagavan was evacuated to Pachaiaimman, Jack had missed the group evacuation and was left on the Hill, because Bhagavan did not know where he was. As it turned out, Jack then took refuge with the priest of the Guhanamasivaya Temple. During the months of the quarantine, leopards were moving in from the surrounding forests and in the absence of human activity and the rodent life that they invariably supported, these beasts of prey were now desperately searching for food. Jack apparently fell victim to a hungry leopard.

The Police at Pachaiaimman

There were four or five policemen posted at Pachaiaimman Temple during the epidemic and they were evidently afraid of the leopards roaming about. They sometimes relied on Bhagavan to escort them back to the temple.

Bhagavan and his sadhus also cooked for them on occasion and ate with them. Where the raw food supplies came from is not clear though it is certain Bhagavan and his cohort were unable to go on begging rounds since no one remained in the town. Perhaps Dr. Narayana Iyer arranged food drops for Bhagavan. Another possibility is that the head of the nearby Eshanya Mutt who had great regard for Bhagavan sent provisions.

The End of the 1905 Epidemic

When the epidemic was over, an army of public health workers and police officials came to sanitize the town. They went about the town and sprayed disinfectants and sought to rid the town of any remaining rodents such as rats, which had been the chief cause of the epidemic. As their work neared completion, they arranged a bhajan



and kirtan celebration. They were established in tents near Pachaiaimman Temple and since some of the prominent members among them had been coming to visit Bhagavan during their stay, they requested Bhagavan to attend the bhajans. When Bhagavan expressed his disinclination to join them, they continued to press him. Nagamma records Bhagavan's narration of the event:

There was a tank opposite Pachaiaimman temple. They erected several tents adjacent to the tank and arranged for the bhajan there. The bhajan, however, was not of the ordinary type. In the big tent they left the required open space in the centre and arranged chairs and benches around it as in a circus tent. They brought edibles as for a tea-party and arranged them all systematically as in an exhibition. There was no limit to the flower garlands they brought. Collectors, Tahsildars and police were all there. They arranged a special platform for me. As soon as I arrived, they all got up, bowed before me, and requested me to sit on the dais. I felt embarrassed. But what to do? I never knew they would make such



Announcements: Book Release

Who Am I, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, 1879-1950, a book in five parts in five parts published by *The Hindu Group of Publications*, was launched at Sri Ramanasramam on Friday, March 20th, just two days before the curfew. V. S. Ramanan, President, Susila Ramanan and Mr. T. S. Subramanian, author, were presented with the copies of the book, along with V. S. Mani, Sivadas Krishnan, K.S. Kannan and Dev Gogoi. —





a fuss about it. Having gone there, I had no alternative but to sit on the platform. They tried to garland me, but I declined saying that they should garland their own dignitaries. They did accordingly. Till that was done, they did not begin the bhajan. After I had sat down, they asked for permission to start the bhajan. After one party had finished, another started, while the others took refreshments, soda and other drinks. Till early morning there was thus continued eating and continuous bhajan, by turns. I was the only one who did not touch or do anything. I merely sat there. I felt satisfied and contented

that they did not press me to do anything. By daybreak all was over and there was not a single soul, all had left along with the tents. Oh, they were all very enthusiastic and exhilarated!

With this all-night celebration, the epidemic of 1905 had been resolved and shortly thereafter, Bhagavan and his sadhu-devotees were permitted to return to Virupaksha Cave. But other epidemics and evacuations would follow as we shall see in the next issue. —

(to be continued)

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's Ashram Under Lockdown



As readers may know, on 14th of March, the Ashram was requested to stop accepting overnight guests. On 17th, no vehicles were allowed into the Ashram and rules for congregating in the Ashram were imposed. Two days later, the ASI closed Skandasramam and Virupaksha Cave. All visas to India were then cancelled and even OCI cardholders were not allowed to enter the country. On 21st March, the Ashram limited visits to two one-hour segments, one in the morning and the other in the evening. On 22nd March, the Ashram was closed completely the whole day in keeping with the Janata Curfew Day around the country. The curfew was then extended for ten days but by the evening of 24th, all airports around the country were closed, all trains cancelled and all national, state and district borders closed. Later that night, a nationwide lockdown of 21 days was initiated.

The suddenness and severity of the containment measures caught the nation off guard. Nevertheless, such an action seems warranted given the gravity of the threat.

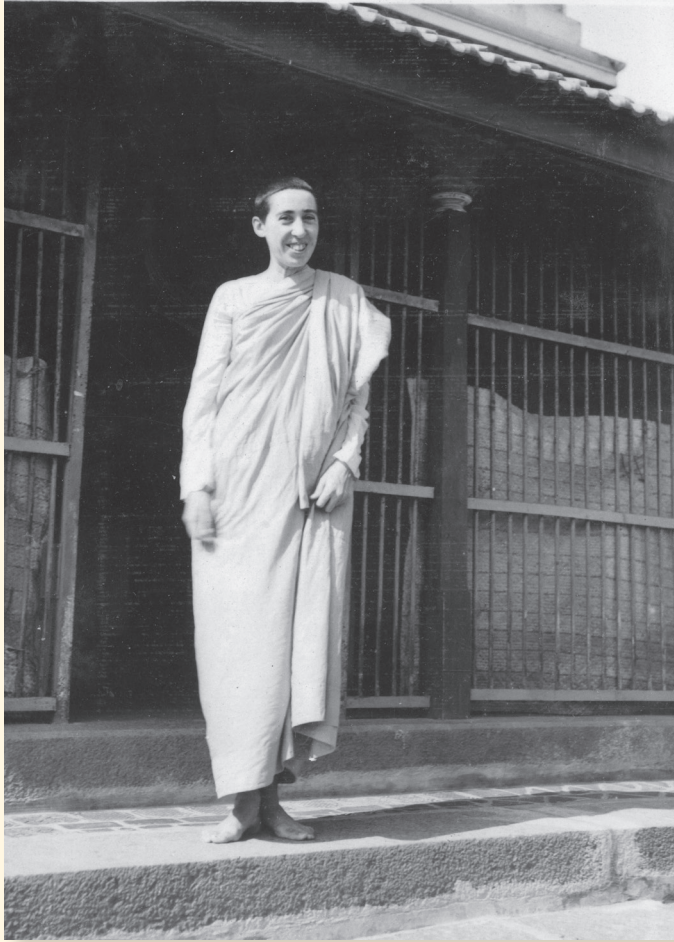
The three-year Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 cost five to ten crores of lives around the world during which 6% of India's population is believed to have perished.

The 21-day lockdown is an indication that the nation's leaders are not taking chances with a virus that may prove to have a mortality profile like that of the 1918 virus. No doubt hundreds of thousands, especially the poor, will experience hardship during the lockdown, but the alternative would be to put the lives of crores at risk.

The Ashram is now totally closed. A deep silence pervades the entire place, perhaps reminiscent of the early days of Bhagavan's life here. For the few that remain, the mood and morale is buoyant, given the extraordinary circumstances, and these inmates are unified in the face of the many challenges. All are showing maximum cooperation in adhering to public health guidelines including social distancing in the dining hall. The Ashram office is closed as is the computer room, the archives building, the dispensary and the library. Only essential activities continue such as taking care of the many cows in the gosala and preparing food in the kitchen while a handful of priests maintain austere pujas in the temple. The kitchen is presently well-stocked and supported by the Ashram's own nearby 7-acre farm (Nallavan Paalayam).

Those who remain within the Ashram continue to pray for the country and the world, not least of all for the many who are suffering hunger, illness, anxiety, loss of livelihood or loss of loved ones during this unprecedented national and worldwide crisis. —





IN PROFILE

Sujata Sen (part II)

Suzanne and her two friends came to Tiruvannamalai on the same train as Devaraj Mudaliar. When they first entered Bhagavan's darshan hall, they found Bhagavan peacefully seated on his sofa. They found the hall simply decorated—a frieze of blue flowers along the walls, a grandfather clock hung on the wall behind the Maharshi and below it, stood a shelf with a few containers. Next to the couch was a revolving bookcase and further down stood two plain wooden cupboards of books and stationery. They were struck by how ordinary and down to earth the setting was. No grand paraphernalia of any kind but utter simplicity and stillness. The furniture was

plain, the surroundings ordinary. Nor did any pomp and circumstance surround their first encounter with the Maharshi. Instead there was an abiding humility and simplicity, which only accented the grandeur of the figure on the sofa.

The Maharshi was, in their view, exceptional "in just being himself." They observed his actions which struck them as perfectly natural, free of any trace of pretence. How rare, they thought, to meet someone so rooted in his own identity that he had no need for inflated images or attempts to engineer the impressions he made on others.

The following morning, the Maharshi turned and looked directly at Suzanne. She was transfixed: "His wonderful gaze, his brilliant eyes shone like stars." With this glance, she was sure that she had found her Master.

At eleven o'clock, the lunch bell rang, and the Maharshi and his devotees rose to go out of the hall. Suzanne and the two ladies were invited to join:

The meal was served in the communal dining hall where rows of freshly washed plantain leaves had been laid out on the spotlessly clean stone floor. The Maharshi took his place among the devotees. The Brahmins sat on one side of him and the non-Brahmins on the other, thus respecting established religious custom. The Maharshi, however, did not wear the Brahmin thread, and it was remembered that on his arrival in Tiruvannamalai, he had thrown away the thread worn by the sacerdotal caste that indicated their community. They were served rice, vegetables, pepper-water and milk-curd. The Maharshi ate frugally. He asked Suzanne whether the food was not too pungent for them. These words of solicitude were the first words he spoke to her.

In the afternoon, Suzanne returned with the others to the darshan hall and learned that one might come there to sit in the Maharshi's presence, as early as four o'clock in the morning. The encounters in the hall were informal, and she was surprised to learn that he gave no lectures or discourses but only sat in silence, sometimes responding to the questions put to him by seekers, but only in a terse way. She learned that the Maharshi was not given to uttering lots of words and rather than any content conveyed in a conventional way, he maintained a silence which



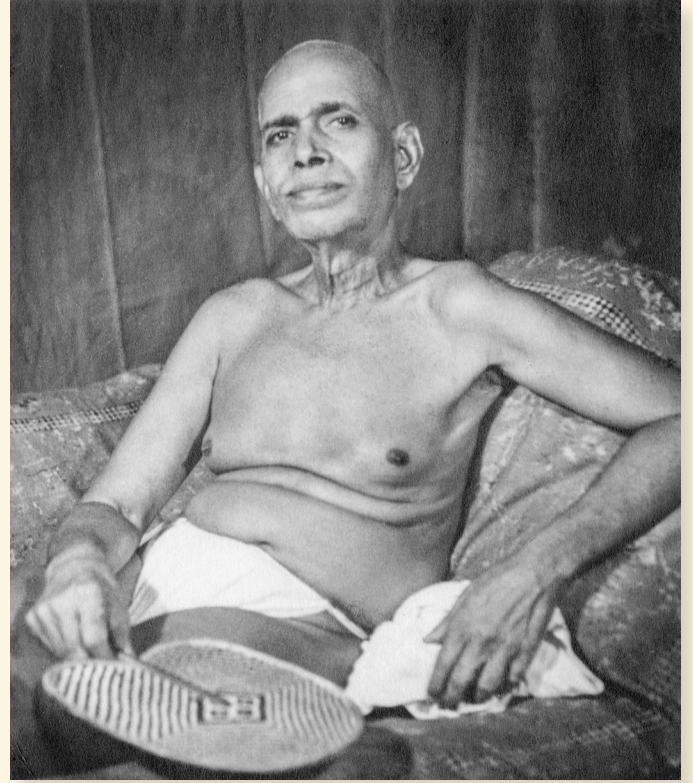


had a profound effect on those around him, causing subtle shifts in awareness in them.

Suzanne was surprised to see how quiet the hall was and how his teaching seemed to be transmitted very powerfully within that abiding silence. This suited her well, accustomed as she was to meditation practice in her years as a Buddhist nun.

This first afternoon session ended with a twenty-minute break. They reconvened at five o'clock when the Vedas were chanted daily by the Ashram Vedapatasala students. Suzanne observed that the Maharshi's appearance "underwent a remarkable change" during the recitation and that he fell into a deep state of concentrated silence. His face appeared "translucent, as if lit by an inner illumination". And, though apparently so withdrawn, Bhagavan seemed, even at these times, to be aware of what was happening around him. "He is an Adept of the highest order", she wrote, "a king of yogis. The splendour of his Realization radiates like a sun. Robed in ether, his yogic powers are unique, subtle and rare. He lifts you far above the world."

Following the Vedic recitation, the devotees recited *Aksharamanamalai* after which they sat in deep silence,



resonating with the stillness emanating from Sri Bhagavan, "a force so strong as to be almost tangible". —

(to be continued)

Introducing the Kendras: Sri Ramana Maharshi Society of Kuala Lumpur



Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Society, Malaysia was formed on 14th December 2018 under the Malaysian Society Act and is a national spiritual movement. Its aim is to provide a quiet environment for introspection and for the contemplation of Sri Bhagavan's teachings and for the practice of Self-Enquiry. It also conducts spiritual programmes and retreats centred on Bhagavan. One such event was held on 15-16th February, before COVID-19 became widespread. It had as its main speakers, Dr. Ram Mohan of Chennai and Sri J. Jayaraman of Sri Ramanasramam. Thanks to the efforts of Sri Thevendran, the founder and president of Sri Ramana Saranalayam, Malaysia, the symposium went off well. The centre is open on Saturdays for satsang and events are conducted and celebrated based on Sri Ramanasramam's yearly calendar. Sri Ramana Saranalayam is located at No 24, Lorong 12/16A, Section 12, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia. All are welcome.—





Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Travel Permits for Visitors Leaving the Country



Tiruvannamalai Police have set up a help desk at the Ashram's front gate for the benefit of tourists and non-Indians stranded by the nationwide lockdown. As some European countries are arranging voluntary evacuations for their citizens, evacuees are required to have an interstate travel permit in order to travel to Chennai Airport. For this, a health permit should be obtained. This can be arranged following a free routine check-up just inside the Ashram's front gate. —

Obituary: Smt. Soona Dara Nicholson



Smt. Soona Dara Nicholson came from a family of Bhagavan devotees. Her father, Sri Framji Dorabji, founder of the *Wellington Talkies*, was an orthodox Parsi businessman from Bombay who had heard of Sri Bhagavan from his brother, Sri Dadiba, and came for his first visit in 1937. Though the distance from Bombay was great, Framji could not stay away and came each year. But within a few years, he found the opportunity to shift his business to Madras and from 1942, was able to make monthly visits to the Ashram. Now the whole family was near the Ashram and Soona got to meet Bhagavan in the early part of July 1943. She was so taken by Bhagavan that she changed the plans for her trip in order to spend more time at the Ashram. As her mother and brother also became devotees, all would have likely been present during the Golden Jubilee celebrations in September 1946, when Soona's father brought cinema films for viewing on three consecutive nights in the dining hall after dinner. That same year, Soona appears in Mr.

Reddy's archival film of Bhagavan ascending the Hill. Soona and Mrs. Taleyarkhan dressed in white saris can be seen graciously kneeling to clear the path of stones in anticipation of Bhagavan's return.

On the night of the final day, 14th of April 1950, the whole family was present. At about 8.15pm, Soona rushed home to change clothes. As she was returning along with her mother and Mrs. Taleyarkhan, she saw the light streaking across the sky and knew that Bhagavan had left his body.

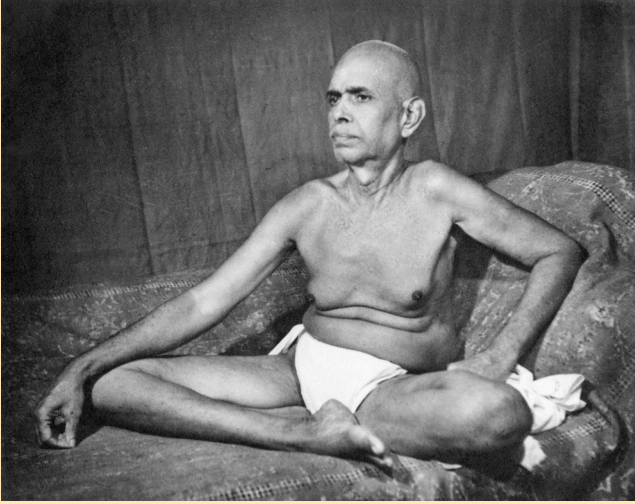
Soona married in 1953 and settled in Mumbai. But in the decades of her family life, she never failed to make regular visits to the Ashram. Her last visit to Sri Ramanasramam took place in April 2010, after which her health would not permit further travel. In her final years, she lost her vision and her hearing became feeble. On 7th March 2020, while sleeping peacefully at home in Mumbai, she merged at the Feet of Bhagavan. —

[Readers will want to look for the upcoming July issue of the *Mountain Path* where Soona's life with Bhagavan is given fuller treatment, including moving accounts with Bhagavan in the darshan hall.]





Curfews, Containment and Sheltering in Place with Bhagavan



Devotees all over the world are seeking strategies to cope with the anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant alterations to daily life brought about by containment measures. Cultivating a sense of calm within so that we may be a pacifying force for others is a worthwhile aim. But we may find ourselves in the difficult position of being asked to give comfort to family and friends before we have found it in ourselves. When facing such challenges, we may have to remind ourselves what Bhagavan once said about inevitability:

The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their prarabdhakarma. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.

Of course, we will want to be socially responsible in the era of COVID-19 and practice physical distancing, handwashing, mask-use and isolation, and as much as possible, take steps to protect the elderly and those with underlying conditions. In the effort to maintain connections with family and friends by phone and internet, as well as consult the latest COVID-19 reports, we will want to temper our digital connectivity with the deep peace pervading Bhagavan's words above, words that, if heeded, can soothe fears and arouse fortitude in what may turn out to be a lengthy ordeal. Bhagavan's teaching and demeanor suggest that silence and relinquishment are the antidotes to any crisis. As we go forth to face the uncertainty each new day brings, we will not want to lose sight of the greatest of all resources available to us, namely, our faith in Bhagavan. No less essential than food and water is knowing that we have Bhagavan on board with us in this dramatic, newly unfolding chapter in our lives and in our world. —

Obituary: Sri V. V. Ramana Rao



Sri V.V. Ramana Rao, an ardent devotee of Bhagavan was a popular speaker at Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad and was widely appreciated for his insightful and inspiring speeches.

As a 7 year-old boy on the night of April 14th, 1950, at the moment of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, he was blessed to witness the meteor and its splendour while sitting on the first floor terrace of his home in Machilipatnam, Andhra Pradesh. Later Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream and guided him in his career. He regularly visited Sri Ramanasramam over the last forty years. Sri V. V. Ramana Rao merged in Arunachala during early hours of 18th January, 2020 at Hyderabad. He was 77. He is survived by his wife and two sons. —

Since the supreme power of God makes all things move, why should we, without submitting ourselves to it, constantly worry ourselves with thoughts as to what should be done and how, and what should not be done and how not? We know that the train carries all loads, so after getting on it why carry our small luggage on our head to our discomfort? ~ Who am I? §18

