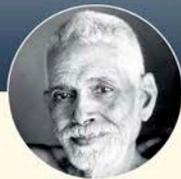


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

FEBRUARY 2019
VOL. 13, NO.2



Dev Gogoi



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This month we observed the samadhi days of Sivaprakasam Pillai on 12th January and Ramaswami Pillai on the 14th. In this issue, we continue the life story of Janaki Mata and take up the life stories of her son-in-law, Dr. R. Padmanabhan and her daughter, Annapourani (see p. 3, p. 6 and p. 9, respectively).

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

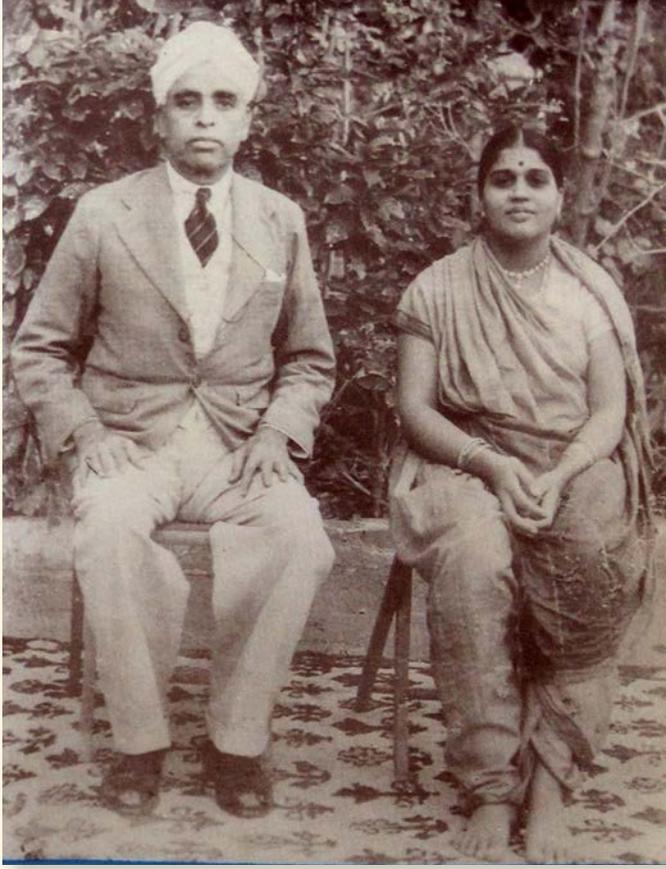
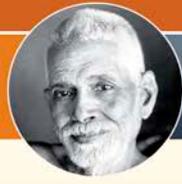
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

17th February (Sun) Punarvasu
19th February (Tues) Full Moon
23rd February (Sat) Sundaram Iyer Day
4th March (Mon) Mahasivaratri
22nd March (Fri) Sri Vidya Havan
16th March (Sat) Punarvasu

20th March (Wed) Full Moon
6th April (Sat) Telugu New Year
12th April (Fri) Punarvasu
13th April (Sat) Sri Rama Navami
14th April (Sun) Tamil New Year/Nirvana Room
18/19th April (Thurs) Full Moon





At the Feet of Sri Bhagavan The Life of Janaki Mata (pt. II)

In 1922, a palm reader made the prediction that Janaki Mata's husband, Dr. Ganapathi would be sent abroad by the government of India. This forecast came true when a government offer came in 1930, calling for Dr. Ganapathi to do advanced medical studies in Vienna, Austria.

Janaki Mata, in her mid-twenties at the time, requested that she be allowed to accompany him. She had no longings to go otherwise but felt it was her duty as a Hindu wife to be at her husband's side wherever he went and to provide for his needs, not least by preparing sattvic food. The food concern was especially palpable with the prospect of the doctor taking up residence in a culture whose eating customs diverged significantly

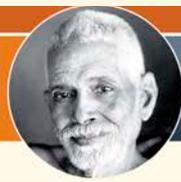
from those of India. Dr. Ganapathi refused her request simply on the grounds that there was no provision in the official proposal for family members. Moreover, if his wife came, the children would have to come as they could not be left without their mother. Finally, all this would be at the doctor's personal expense. The steamer passage alone was costly, not to mention living expenses in Europe. Janaki Mata took the matter to Devi and began praying intensely. Finally, her prayers were answered and the doctor had a change of heart. He thus booked for July 1931 second-class return tickets by sea for himself, his wife and their two youngest children, six-year-old Srinivasan and three-year-old Sarada. The two older children, Ponnammal and Annapoorani, were left in the care of their aunt.

The southwest monsoon was in full force and as soon as they departed, they were caught in a gale. After some days of rough seas, they found their way clear to smooth sailing and safely reached Venice and then Trieste after thirteen days at sea. Besides inclement weather, their days at sea had met with another challenge. While the ship's canteen served vegetarian food which the doctor ate, Janaki Mata was concerned about rice prepared in a non-vegetarian kitchen. When she made up her mind not to eat it, her children followed suit, and the three of them subsisted on dried fruits, bread and cocoa during the two-week passage.

Disembarking at Venice, the locals were enamoured by the striking appearance of this woman dressed in the traditional Indian-style sari, replete with necklaces, bangles, earrings, nose-rings and *kumkum tilak* at the centre of her forehead. She became the centre of attraction and crowds flocked to have a look at her. For them, she appeared to be royalty, a queen from some exotic distant land. Janaki Mata's reception at Vienna was no less spectacular.

The family took up residence in a rented apartment. Janaki Mata began arranging the apartment and having brought her deities and puja implements along, she created a puja room which was the delight of the many Indian friends of Dr. Ganapathi who came to visit. After so long away from India, they were ecstatic to have a true Indian household in Vienna where they





might hear songs of devotion and participate in puja, chanting and other forms of traditional worship.

Janaki Mata engaged an Austrian maidservant, Midsy, to look after the household while she took charge of the cooking and home-schooled Srinivasan. Midsy became part of the family and used to stay even after her work-period was over. She became so devoted to Janaki Mata that she made up her mind to join the family and come with them to India to live. It was only because the necessary papers from the Austrian government could not be obtained that these plans were dropped.

But while the doctor's studies and their stay in Vienna in general were going well, not everything would remain so ideal. The cost of living proved exceedingly high and the doctor struggled to make ends meet in supporting his wife and family. He had to rely on personal funds to finance their stay since his studies earned him no income. To make matters worse, news came from India that debtors at home, who had borrowed thousands of rupees from the doctor, had gone bankrupt and were no longer in a position to repay him. Thus his

already strained income was further limited. The doctor was badly shaken. Janaki Mata dismissed his concerns as worldly and enjoined him to trust in the Divine. But when her appeals went unheeded, she began to worry about her husband's faith in God. She began to introspect:

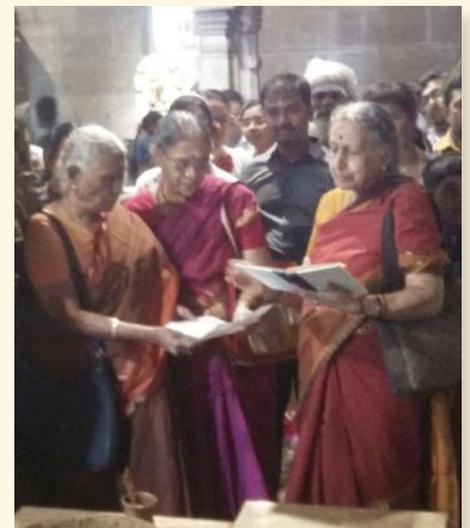
Had I but given one tenth of the love, devotion, care, concern and shradha that I had bestowed on this family to God, He would have endeared me to Him, and showered His immense Grace on all of us. To none but Him true love should be directed. To turn to the Divine is the only truth in life."

From this time onwards, Janaki Mata began to see it as her duty not merely to care for the children and foster a warm home but to be surrendered to God in faith on behalf of the entire family.

Dr. Ganapathi having completed his studies in July 1932, the family made their way back to India. —

(to be continued)

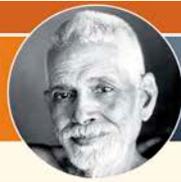
— This article adapted from sections of Biography of Guru Devi Sri Janaky Matha by Dr. G. Swaminathan



Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Makara Sankranti

At the Ashram, *uttarayana* puja to the Sun took place in the Mother's Shrine on Tuesday, 15th January. Makara Sankranti marks the day when the Sun 'crosses over' (*sankramana*) into Capricorn as the dark days of Margazhi month end and Thai, the tenth month in the Tamil calendar, begins. This is when the Sun begins His northern journey with the days growing longer. This harvest festival is dedicated to Lord Surya, the bringer of agricultural bounty, and is full of cheer, paving the way for new opportunities. —



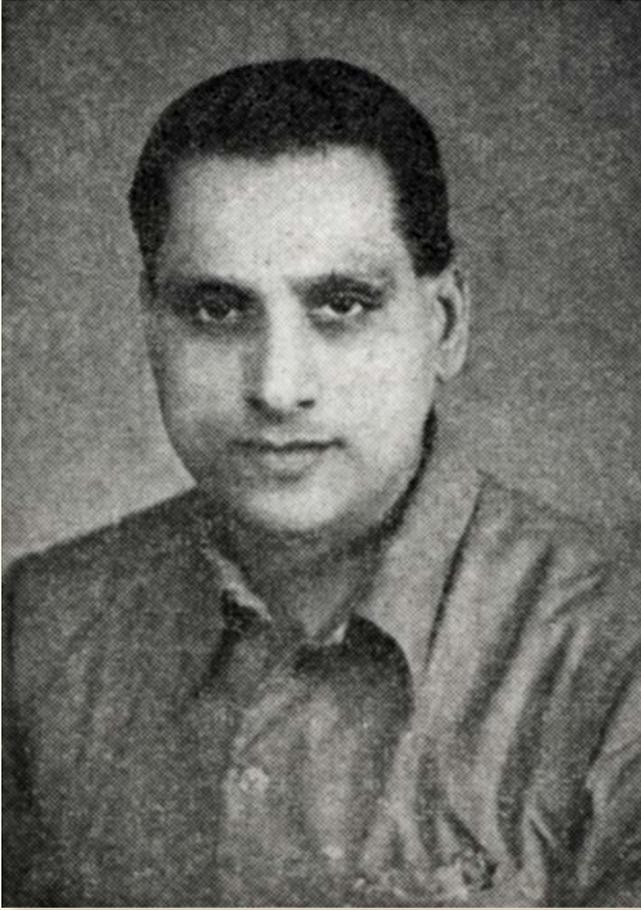
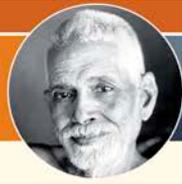


Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mattu Pongal

Mattu Pongal is dedicated to cattle in appreciation of their service, to cows for giving their milk and to bulls for ploughing the fields and in providing transportation as the engine of the bullock cart. At the beginning of time, Lord Siva instructed his bull-devotee Nandi to go to Earth and tell everyone that they should have an oil bath every day and eat once a month. But Nandi confused the message and mistakenly instructed everyone to eat daily and have an oil bath once a month. Lord Siva complained that now there would not be enough food for everyone and that the bull would have to go and help people in cultivating the land. Thus cows and bulls fell into perpetual service.

On 16th January, Nandi puja followed by Cow Lakshmi puja and gosala Mattu Pongal were celebrated. —





Dr. R. Padmanabhan and the Prem Sangh

Dr. R. Padmanabhan of Palghat was Janaki Mata's son-in-law (husband of Janaki Mata's daughter, Annapoorani). Though spiritually inclined as a youth, he did not pursue his faith in God until his student years when he became conscious of his spiritual urge and began to seek the company of sadhus and religiously-minded people. By the time of graduation from medical college in 1939, he came into contact with various evolved souls and with the Sri Ramakrishna Math. His ardour for the spiritual search became so intense that even while on duty at the hospital, he made use of every spare moment for meditation and reflection.

Around this time, his mother-in-law Janaki Mata came to visit him and told him that Bhagavan was the embodiment of grace and wisdom and that there was

no greater guide to the goal than he. Dr. Padmanabhan had already heard much about Bhagavan Sri Ramana and had read many books from the Ashram but had also had various visions and dreams of the Maharshi. This together with the ardour of his mother-in-law's praise made it clear to him that he must go with her. She was leaving for Tiruvannamalai and invited him to join her. Taking the invitation as coming from Bhagavan directly, he and his wife set off with her. On approaching Tiruvannamalai, a sense of excitement mixed with fear and trepidation overtook him. He worried that in the presence of one so great as the Maharshi, he might be found wanting, and might be seen as unfit to become a devotee of Sri Ramana. He worried about his spiritual deficiencies and whether or not the guru would accept him. When the holy hill came into view, his excitement and fear increased and he found himself composing the following song:

O Sadguru, who abides in Annamalai!

*1. Thou great master who confers boundless Bliss,
And Teacher of the Truth that all beings are but one Self,*

O Sadguru, who abides in Annamalai!

*2. Thy silent instruction is the cool shower which quenches the
fire in my heart. What worldly desire can arise in the Bliss
of Thy Presence?*

O Sadguru, who abides in Annamalai!

*3. O World Master ! Thou art the Tree whose benign shade
gives refreshing coolness. Thou feedest Thy children with the
milk of Love and the fruit of Grace!*

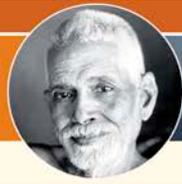
O Sadguru, who abides in Annamalai!

The doctor narrates his first encounter with Bhagavan:

*Entering the Ashram I found the whole atmosphere flooded
with peace and quiet. The coconut trees that swayed in the
gentle breeze with their broad leaves also added to the peaceful
scene. Bhagavan was in the dining hall, taking food along
with the devotees. I was moved by seeing him face to face in a
manner which defies description. Tears in profusion coursed
down my face as I lay prostrate before him. Thereupon
Bhagavan commanded me to take food. "Eat," he said.
That was all I wanted. It symbolised that the spiritual hunger
would be satisfied and it made a lasting impression on me.*

On his first meeting with Bhagavan in the darshan hall, the doctor was asked to sing for Bhagavan.





From this day onward he began to compose songs dedicated to Bhagavan, songs that eventually would be sung by others. Bhagavan enjoyed the doctor's compositions and whenever Dr. Padmanabhan came to the Ashram, Bhagavan would ask him to sing. He would also make suggestions and corrections if there were grammatical or spelling errors in the songs.¹

One time, Dr. Padmanabhan showed Bhagavan a verse and Bhagavan changed only two Tamil letters, so that a line that had read, 'I and He are only one' became 'In Him I am mingled'.

Dr Padmanabhan became so devoted to Bhagavan that he got the nickname *Ramanadas*. He went preaching in the nearby villages and is said to have spread the teachings of Bhagavan in Kerala.

In July 1947, he formed the first Ramana Satsang in Palghat called *Prem Sangh*, composed of numerous families from Palghat and other cities around India, i.e. Calcutta, Bombay, Hyderabad, Madras, Trivandrum, and Coimbatore. Bhagavan gave his blessing to the institution when he was informed about it in 1949.

It was this same year, at the end of May, that devotees learned of Bhagavan's medical condition. One evening devotees found out that the growth on Bhagavan's arm was cancer, and Dr. Padmanabhan, being a physician, perceived it to be an aggressive sarcoma, and knew the danger facing Bhagavan's devotees. Dr. Padmanabhan and T. P. Ramachandran went behind the stone sofa in the New Hall on which Sri Bhagavan was seated and began to weep.

¹ *The Mountain Path*, July 1972, p. 184.

Sri Bhagavan for his part called out to them in a jocular manner and asked them why they were weeping. When they responded, Bhagavan simply said, "Where can I go? Where is it possible for me to go?"²

Dr. Padmanabhan took this *upadesa* to heart and both before and after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, set out to disseminate Bhagavan's message wherever he went. Prem Sangh flourished under Dr. Padmanabhan's guidance as he continually urged members to strictly follow Bhagavan's teaching and to do so by practice rather than by precept. He held firm in the conviction that it is possible to follow the spiritual path while leading a life in the world in accordance with Bhagavan's teaching. He conducted annual camps at various locations such as Palani, Chidambaram, Tirupati, Tiruchendur, Cape Comorin, Palghat and Kolkata where members undertook a strict discipline of spiritual practice. The camps included programmes such as morning bhajan, suryanamaskar, puja to Bhagavan, chanting, discourses and discussions, with one day dedicated to silent meditation practice. Even just to gain admittance to the camps, members had to consider themselves the children of Sri Bhagavan and hence must have mutual regard and respect, must practice twice daily meditation, must be in regular correspondence with each other and in general, must avoid unnecessary discussions on non-spiritual matters.³ —

² *The Mountain Path*, April 1973, p. 80.

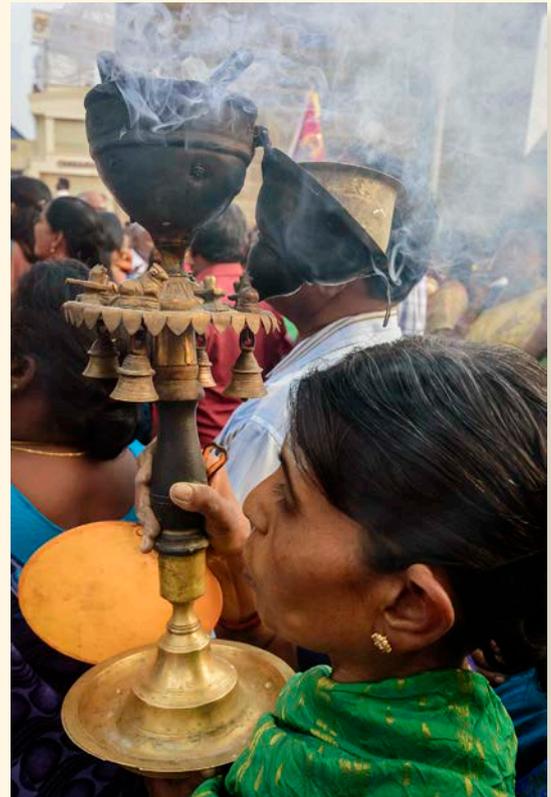
³ *The Mountain Path*, July 1964, p. 189.

Events at Tiruvannamalai: Mahanandi Shrine Renovation



The Ashram's renovation of the Mahanandi Shrine was completed just in time for Mattu Pongal. Adjacent to the recently restored Mahanandi Tirtham (see *Saranagati*, June 2018), this shrine lies just west of Yama linga on the hill-round road. The shrine's *balipeetam* was raised as it had sunk over the years due to successive road repairs. Additionally, the platform beneath Mahanandi was reconstructed while repairs were made to the mantapam above and the mantapam's pillars were cleaned, roof repaired and the shrine painted. —



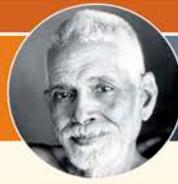


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Events at Tiruvannamalai: Mattu Pongal

Mattu Pongal was celebrated at the Arunachala Temple and at Adiannamalai Temple. The evening of that day, Swami and Uma had their tiff in Tiruvoodal Street as thousands looked on. The following day, Arunachaleswarar went in procession around the Hill, granting His blessings to all along the way. —





Annapoorani, daughter of Janaki Mata

— This previously unpublished text is taken from her video interview

My name is Annapoorani. I am the wife of Dr. Padmanabhan. My husband was a very religious man and was interested in Vivekananda and Ramakrishna.

T. M. Krishnaswami Iyer, who was famous for his chanting of *Tirupugal* of Arunagirinathar, used to take my husband to Vadapallani to the Subramanya temple in Chennai every Friday. It was such habits that led my husband into an ever-deepening spiritual search. But it was my mother, Janaki Mata, who got my husband interested in Bhagavan. On one of her many visits, she convinced my husband to join.

When we arrived at the Ashram, it was around midday and Bhagavan was taking his food. When we first encountered Bhagavan, my husband fell straight to the floor in prostration and remained with his head on the floor for a long time. After some time, Bhagavan invited my husband to get up and eat. From that moment itself he had been captured by Bhagavan and when we finished our food, he said, “We shall worship Sri Ramana”. And this he did until his dying day.

My husband’s devotion was so great that he earned the name *Ramanadasa*. He used to go to every house and village neighbouring our native Palghat and he celebrated Bhagavan’s Jayanti each year for more than twenty years.

With the help of Iswaran, a family member and fellow devotee, my husband started a Ramana Satsang group called *Prem Sangh* which took up the task of spreading Bhagavan’s message everywhere. Bhagavan even presented to us a medallion with the seal of *Prem Sangh* to the sangha in Palghat.

I had the darshan of Bhagavan many times. My mother used to sing in front of Bhagavan and I used to join in. Once one of our songs was embroidered onto a cloth bag and we sent it to Bhagavan. The next time we came, Bhagavan showed us the bag, and showed us how he was using it to keep vibhuti in.

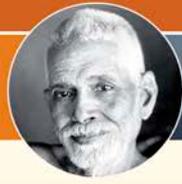
Once in my early years, when I had Bhagavan’s darshan, I had the experience of light passing from Bhagavan’s hand to me. When I explained this to Bhagavan, Bhagavan advised me to keep such experiences private.

During the last months of Bhagavan’s life, we came to the Ashram and did namaskaram and by that time, Bhagavan’s legs had become quite swollen. We took his darshan, hoping for the best, and left for Rishikesh. One day while at Rishikesh, a sudden power cut made us worry that it was an ill omen in respect of Bhagavan’s health. Upon reaching Tamil Nadu, we learned that Bhagavan had left the body and a light had traversed the nighttime sky. As it turned out, it had been the same night of our power cut in Rishikesh. —

Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

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





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Niranjanananda Swami Day



Niranjanananda Swami (Chinnaswami), Bhagavan's younger brother, was the first Sarvadhikari of the Ashram and devoted his life to building up the Ashram and propagating Bhagavan's message. On 20th January, Ashram President V.S. Ramanan and devotees gathered at his samadhi to mark the anniversary of his earthly departure in early 1953. —

Events in Tiruvannamalai: Samudram Gosala Pongal



On the evening of Mattu Pongal, Wednesday 16th January, at Samudram Gosala near the lake, puja was celebrated and sweet pongal given to the cows. The Ashram's facility for aging cows houses about eleven animals who enjoy extended grounds for grazing and a covered shed for sleeping in sight of the Holy Hill. —

