

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

FEBRUARY 2020
VOL. 14, NO. 2



D. Thiyagarajan



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

January has been very full with momentous events, not least of all, Bhagavan's Jayanti and the Pongal celebrations, with ever-growing numbers of devotees eager to be part of it all.

In this issue, we conclude the life-story of Thelma Rappold who spent more than two years in Bhagavan's presence in the late 1940s (see p. 3). We also introduce Sri Muruganar's *Irai Pani Nittral*, a poem that elaborates Bhagavan's teaching on *just being*. Finally, photos of the colourful events of January adorn the following pages.

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

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

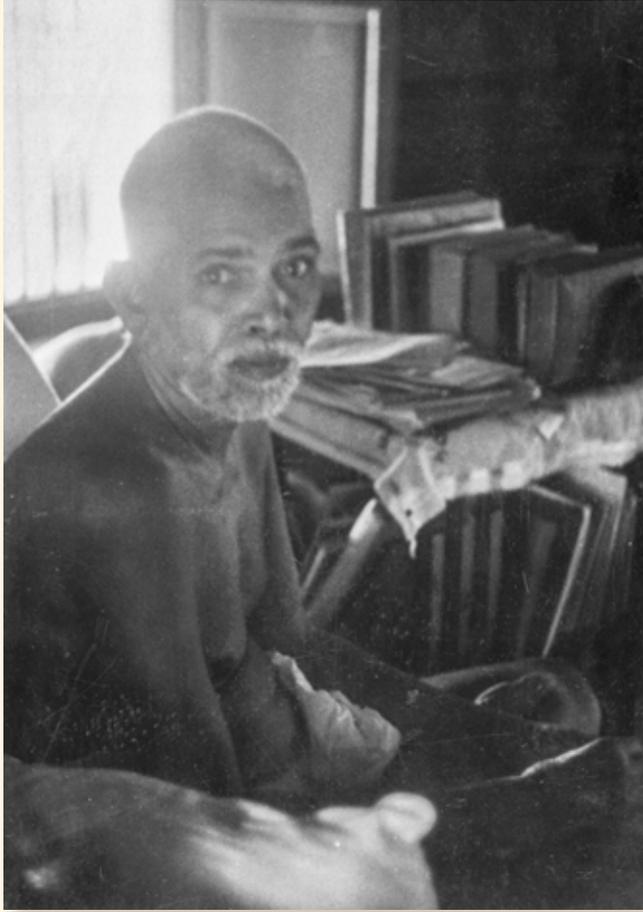
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

7th February (Fri) Punarvasu
8th February (Sat) Full Moon/Chinnaswamigal Aradhana
13th February (Thurs) Sundaram Iyer Day
21st February (Fri) Mahasivaratri
6th March (Fri) Punarvasu
9th March (Mon) Full Moon

20th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa
25th March (Weds) Telugu New Year
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 69th Aradhana





IN PROFILE

Thelma Rappold: In Search of Bhagavan (Conclusion)

Life in the presence of Bhagavan had ordinary moments, too. Time with a friend on the Hill, for example, provided needed intervals to take in and assimilate all that Thelma was undergoing internally during her darshans in the hall:

A few nights ago, Wally (Mrs. Groeger) and I went up on the Hill to spend the night on some of the mammoth rocks. The original plan was to meditate all night rather than sleep. However, that seemed to be a wee bit too much for us for the first time. The moon was so beautiful, there was a lovely breeze and it was almost a pity to close the eyes. We told Bhagavan what we planned to do as it is considered rather risky business normally on account of the many snakes and wild animals

such as cheetahs, panthers and scorpions. By Bhagavan's grace, all went well, and nothing more than the big ants bothered us. We hated to come down from the mountain the next morning, but all good things must come to an end.

Aspiration Abode

Thelma continued living in Dr. and Mrs. Syed's compound and her life in the tropics regularly brought fresh encounters:

At the moment, I am considering changing the name of "Aspiration Abode" to "Aspiration Zoo". As mentioned before "Aspiration Abode" is so tiny another person couldn't possibly stay with me. However, a tailless lizard and his family of little lizards and all their relatives have moved in with me. Papa lizard must have been minding somebody else's business because he got his tail bitten off. I notice however he is starting to grow another. In addition to the lizard family I have Hoppy the frog, Mickey the mouse, Noisy the cricket, Skinny the silverfish and a dozen other varieties of creatures whose names I don't know living with me. I almost forgot to name the flying-roach who loves to eat and make his nest in any kind of paper. So far I haven't found anything that will affect the roaches. They seem to grow fat on DDT. This morning I even found a two-foot snake just outside the door. Anyone interested in moving into my little Zoo with me?

Two Western Visitors

But Thelma began to see herself as a veteran of the tropics when other uninitiated Western visitors came to South India for the first time:

A few days ago, two English women from South Africa arrived in Madras—Gertrude de Kock and Eureka Wessels. Mrs. de Kock is 56 but could easily pass for a woman in her early 40's. Eureka I should say is in her early 30's. De Kock is a "New Thought" teacher in South Africa and has had a very thrilling life which reads like a story book. This was their first trip to India, and they had no idea what they were getting into. The primitive way of life, the hot food and having to sit on the floor cross legged, and to eat food with the fingers from a banana leaf was almost more than they could take all at one time. Someone on the ship coming over told them that was what they would have to do but they thought the man was kidding. They were used to all the modern luxuries of life. On the train coming from Madras, Rappold told them that if the food at the Asbram was too spicy, he would be glad to cook for them provided they were satisfied with the plain food he ate. They decided to take him up on his offer. He told me about it and asked if I would help. The result was that I was cooking





two meals a day for four people and serving the four of us when the weather didn't permit eating outside. How we managed in my tiny 5 x 10-foot abode is more than I know. The walls seemed to expand while they were here and now that they have gone the walls have assumed their normal proportions again. The women were here for ten days. After the first day or two they began to unbend considerably, and we had many good laughs over their experiences and the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Inaugurating the Mother's Shrine

Meanwhile life continued at the Ashram and preparations for inaugurating the temple over the Mother's Shrine were underway. By the middle of March 1949, everything was ready:

The Mahakumbhabhishekam celebration from the 14th to the 17th of March was a big affair. Thousands of people came from all parts of India. Special trains were dispatched from various parts of the country. The crowd is gradually dwindling and we should be able to get our breath once again. During that time, we couldn't sit in the hall without being sat on. About two months ago one of the top editors of Life Magazine, a Mr. Sargant, was here one afternoon. That particular afternoon Mrs. Groeger and I had gone to Major Chadwick's to have Ramon, his servant, read our palms. While there Harindranath, the poet, called me out to meet Mr. Sargant. We talked for a long time about various topics of interest and then he went away. During the big celebration who should appear on the scene but Mr. Elisofon, Life Magazine's no. 1 photographer to "shoot" the place, and so unless something unforeseen happens, Sri Ramanasramam should make Life Magazine sometime during the latter part of May.

Mr. Elisofon stayed in the same room Wally had when she first arrived which meant we were close neighbours. Madan Gopal, his host had me over on occasions to help entertain the American. He was here for four days and when he left, he gave me a few tins of miscellaneous articles from the good old USA. What a treat.

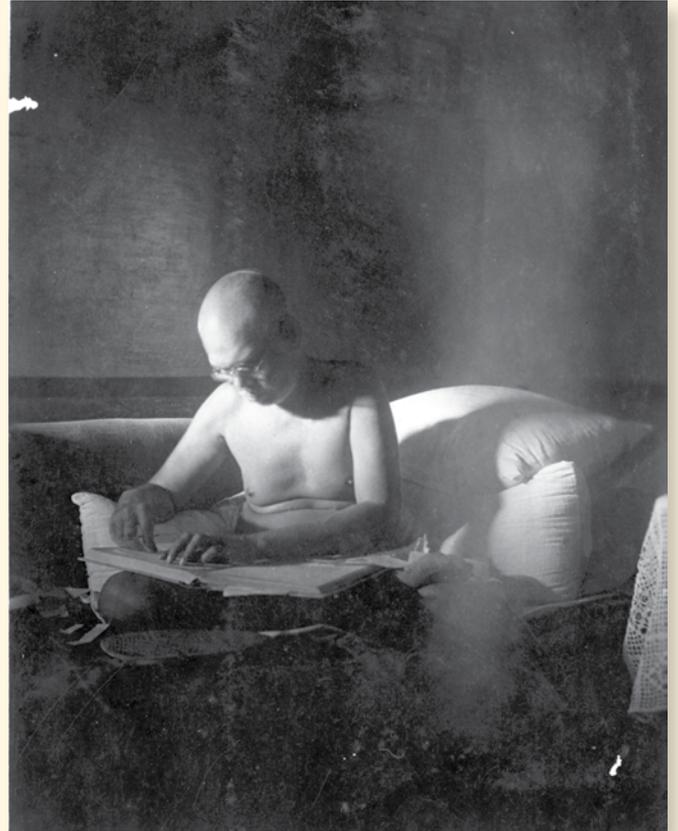
Sam Rappold before Bhagavan in the Hall

Thelma began to note down interactions in the Hall:

Only the birds were on hand at parayana this morning to chant the Vedas. Proceeded to the rocking-chair rock for further meditation. Hurried back to the hall in time to hear Rappold ask Bhagavan a series of questions. Always Bhagavan comes back to the same "Who Am I" and "There is nothing. Just BE".

Sam Rappold asked Bhagavan, what a devotee should do at the time of death. Bhagavan answers:

A devotee never dies, rather he is already dead. (Then Bhagavan stops and waits for a competent translator. Devaraja Mudaliar



enters. Bhagavan completes the answer:;) What should a devotee do at the time of death? What can he do? Whatever a man thinks in his lifetime, so he does in his last moment—the worldly man thinks of his worldly affairs and the devotee of devotion and spiritual matters. But a Jnani having no thoughts of any kind, remains the same. His thoughts, having died long ago, his body also died with them. Therefore, for him there is no such thing as death. Again, people fear death because they fear to lose their possessions. When they go to sleep, they do not have such fear at all. Although sleep resembles death in leaving all possessions behind, it causes no fear in their hearts because of the knowledge that the next morning they will enter into their possessions once again. The Jnani, having no sense of possession, is entirely free from the fear of death. He remains the same after death as before it.

The Whole World Disappeared

Regularly, Thelma would get caught off guard and have to once again catch her breath and reassess the changes that were going on within her under Bhagavan's influence:

It seemed that the so-called problems I thought I had just vanished. I went through a cleansing process. I would think to myself, "What am I so concerned about, it doesn't really matter, nothing matters but who am I, who is this I, what





is this entity?" Ramana's presence made me inquire, not intellectually, but deeper and deeper into Awareness. The whole world disappeared, and I was in this wonderful space—it was up to me to absorb it, open to it, and let it become my being.

Growth on Bhagavan's Arm

In February 1950, Bhagavan had a growth removed from his left elbow and within a month it had grown again to the size of an egg. The doctors insisted it had to be cut away again. Specialists were brought from Madras but the second wound wouldn't heal:

He kept losing about a cup of blood every day and became so weak he could hardly walk. The Doctors held a conference and decided they should apply radium externally eight hours each day in order to stop the bleeding and arrest further growth. Despite all they did the wound wouldn't heal as it should. Seven doctors got together, and the majority said the arm should be amputated.

Other physicians said instead there should be a third operation:

Bhagavan put his foot down and refused to have anything more done. Many of the devotees were weeping and wailing and pleading with Bhagavan not to give up his body. The Doctors also said they had done all they possibly could and now it was time for him to heal himself—for their sakes. Strangely enough, since the first of May 1949 he had been on a steady upgrade, since all the treatments have been discontinued. According to his birth chart, the local astrologers say, he was supposed to go through a very bad period during the months of February, March and April, which he certainly did. Now he is supposed to have a very good period for the next four months. After that, according to his chart he will have another four months period much worse than the one he has gone through. We shall see how things work out.

Mahanirvana Night

The dreaded day arrived and Bhagavan left his body. At 8.47pm on 14th April 1950, a giant meteor moved across the sky and fell behind the Holy Mountain where Bhagavan had spent 55 years of his life:

Even though his Light has now gone from this place, still his presence permeates every atom here and the air is charged with his scintillating presence. By 9.30pm that night his body was removed from the little room where he parted and was taken to the big meditation hall in the new Temple. There it was placed in a sitting position with folded hands and crossed legs as he had sat so often before. His body was garlanded with flowers, sandalwood paste, holy ashes, essences of various scents etc. When his passing was announced the place was in a state of confusion, but soon after [his inert form] was removed to the big hall and we gathered sitting at his feet as before, a great peace and calm spread over us like a warm blanket on a wintry night. All the sniffing, sobbing, weeping and wailing of men, women and children stopped instantly as if by magic. It was nothing short of miraculous in that some had even fainted and passed out in grief. Incense was burned the whole night through, along with the chanting of the Vedas and the hymns Bhagavan had written many years ago to Arunachala. News of his passing spread like wildfire over the town and neighbouring villages. A special police force was called in from Vellore to manage the large crowd which had come to pay their last respects to Bhagavan. The townspeople were allowed to go through single file and often the gate had to be locked to let the crowds disperse before letting more in. We who had been with Bhagavan for a long time were allowed to remain all night. I went home about 5am to get a bite of food and a bath before returning. It was a never to be forgotten experience, a privilege of many many life times, to watch the passing of so great a soul.

Preparing Bhagavan's Samadhi

Puja was offered to Bhagavan Ramana after Abhishekam on the following morning and again in the evening of 15th April before the body was placed in the Samadhi pit:

Amidst moving scenes and in the presence of a vast concourse of weeping men and women the body of Sri Ramana Maharshi was placed in Maha Samadhi a little before seven in the evening. As the flower-decked body which was detached from the pedestal on which it was placed in a sitting posture was lowered into the stone vault, devout cries of "Hara Hara," rent the air. Sands collected from several 'punya thirthams' (sacred





waters) including the Vaigai, the Tamraparni, Cape Comorin, Rameswaram, the Cauveri, the Tapthi, the Ganges, the Jumna, Prayag, Kasi, the Sindhu, the Krishna, the Godavari and the Thungabhadra were strewn inside the vault. Kumkum, vibbuti, powdered camphor, salt and precious stones (navarathnams) were also strewn inside the vault. 'Bana Lingam' brought from the Narmada is to be installed on the Maha Samadhi. The lowering of the Maharshi's remains evoked so much spiritual emotion that many of the bhaktas threw in whatever valuable things they had on their person. Mr. N. Annamalai Pillai M.L.A. threw the gold buttons he was wearing on his shirt, and a number of women flung their gold rings, while others showered coins. From all directions, flowers were showered over the departed sage.

Meditation Comes So Easy

Just prior to Bhagavan's departure, writers for the *Saturday Evening Post* arrived at the Ashram:

Darrel Berrigan of the Saturday Evening Post who had just recently arrived from China with Hi Chu his Chinese interpreter as well as Henri Cartier Bresson with his Indonesian wife were all here at the time. It was a big break for them. Berrigan said the Post would be running a story, although it wouldn't appear for at least six weeks to six months. I have alerted the folks at home to be on the lookout for the article. People have been leaving rather fast since Bhagavan's passing. It seems a pity to leave while the air is so potently charged with Bhagavan's presence. Meditation comes so easy now, that it would be a shame to break the spell so soon. Naturally I am eager to know what the future holds, but patience and Inner Silence is the keynote for the present.

Thelma began to reflect on the gift she had been given, on her precious time with Bhagavan, and on the relevance of his teachings for the broader world:

I think Ramana's teachings are accessible to everyone, but generally people are sound asleep and not ready for them; they can't relax and let go. Until they do that, they can't get much from Ramana's teaching. It's too simple. We Westerners think it has to be complicated and full of mumbo jumbo, but it doesn't work that way. We really have to get to the source of life. Meeting Ramana totally changed my sense of values. My old sense of values simply disappeared because I had come to the realization that none of this really matters. You come into this life and try to do as well as you can, and it is only for a short period. If you don't learn your lesson well, then you come back and you have to repeat it. When I meet someone who is troubled, I try to help that person discover who he really is, to let some of this glorious Presence flow into him.

Postscript

When a door closes, a window opens, goes the saying, and though Bhagavan was no longer present in physical form, his compassionate interventions and guidance continued to bless devotees. In the case of Sam Rappold and Thelma Benn, this took place in a very surprising way. The two commiserated with each other following their loss:

Sam and I have been thrown together under varying circumstances and on many occasions during the past few years. He came to India a confirmed bachelor and hermit. He nearly took the vows and robes of a Buddhist Monk. But it seems Bhagavan had other ideas. I

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Annamalaiyar Pongal Giri Valam



On the early morning of 17th January, devotees gathered at the Ashram's front gate to receive Lord Annamalaiyar in procession around the Holy Hill, on this, his first pradakshina of 2020. After arati, prasad was distributed. —





too have been adamant in my stand against marriage for at least twelve years. Again, it doesn't seem that Bhagavan consulted me on the matter. To summarize, Sam and I have undergone some most unusual experiences together, the kind of which could never have happened in the West, or any other place else in fact, except at the feet of a Great Guru such as Bhagavan.

Initial reluctance gradually gave way to Bhagavan's persistence:

Many of the experiences were sparkling with beauty and the essence of Reality, but not all were of that nature, some were as if born in the deepest night of despair. All however were the guru's way of grinding out those egotistical characteristics in us that block the way to Realization. The harder the knocks, the greater the lessons and with Bhagavan's Grace and guidance we have been able to live many lifetimes in the period of these short years [in his presence]. On several occasions before Sam returned to the States, he had asked me to share a life of sadhana with him. I consistently refused, thinking that was not for me. The vision he had while in California this last time, which impelled him to return to Tiruvannamalai with sky-rocket speed was deeply significant and not to be ignored or taken lightly. At the same time Sam had his vision there, a peculiar transformation

took place in me and I knew intellectually I had absolutely nothing to say in the matter from then on. When Sam returned and revealed his dreams, again the most uncanny phenomenon took place. Bhagavan was also there. So clearly was he manifested that for the time being we forgot he had long since left his physical body. It was then that He in his own mysterious way completed a masterpiece of inscrutable welding, and in His Presence, there was nothing for either of us to do but to accept with a heart full of thanksgiving the rare treasure he had given us. It was then we knew that sometime, somewhere, somehow, we would merge our individual efforts into one, and pursue the great goal of Realization together.

On their way home, these two Americans who had arrived in India independently as Sam Rappold and Miss Thelma Benn, left India as Mr. and Mrs. Rappold, having gotten married in Varanasi. A year later, they had a baby boy whom they named 'Ramana'. —

[Thelma lived in Sri Ramanasramam from February 1948 until summer of 1950. She subsequently settled in California and lived to the ripe old age of 93. After passing away peacefully in late 1998, a friend brought her ashes and scattered them at one of her favourite places near Sri Ramanasramam.]

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Swami Ramanananda Day



On the morning of 13th January, Ashram devotees gathered at Swami Ramanananda's Shrine to celebrate his life and service to the Ashram in the difficult years following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana and Swami Niranjananda's illness for many important decades thereafter. —

Nochur Venkataraman on the Ashram YouTube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events. Please visit the channel to see and hear video recordings of Nochur Sri Venkataraman's recent *Aksharamanamalai* discourses in English, 20-26 January at:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>

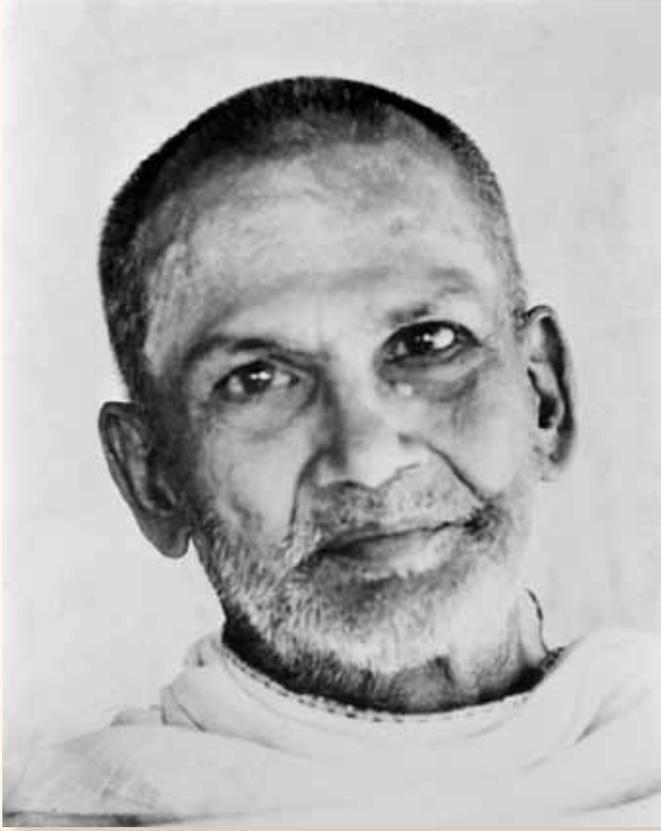




Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Bhagavan's 140th Jayanti Celebrations

On Saturday, 11th January, devotees gathered at Bhagavan's Shrine to celebrate Bhagavan's 140th Jayanti. The day began with Marghazhi puja followed by Tamil parayana, kalasa abhishekam and Jayanti puja. This year's decorations were memorable as devotees decorated all through the night. Various music programmes took place on Jayanti night and the night preceding. —





Sri Muruganar's Irai Pani Nittral

Sri Muruganar's *Irai Pani Nittral* is a masterpiece in Tamil poetry. A decade of poems from *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* (967 to 976), it is soaked with devotion and yearning, and captures the quintessence of Bhagavan's teachings. Professor K. Swaminathan translates *Irai Pani Nittral* as "Steadfastness in Service".

The phrase appears in the concluding verse of *Upadesa Undiyar*, v. 29:

*Banda Vidattra para-sukam uttra-var
Inda nilai-nittral undi-para
Irai-pani nittra-lam undi para*

In this verse, Bhagavan teaches us that firm abidance in the Self is the foremost service to the Supreme Lord. To not slip from the state of bliss that transcends bondage and release is steadfastness in service, true surrender. It is with this ringing note of clarity (the true meaning of Irai Pani Nittral) that Bhagavan blesses devotees and concludes his teaching of *Upadesa Undiyar*. In the Sanskrit *Upadesa Saram*, instead of *irai pani nittral*, Bhagavan simply uses "daivikal" (divine) which means that it is abidance in the Self that makes one a divine individual.

Bhagavan makes another reference to *Irai Pani Nittral* in his response to question 9 in *Spiritual Instruction*:

What is the end of devotion (bhakti) and the path of Siddhanta (i.e., Saiva Siddhanta)?

It is to learn the truth that all one's actions performed with unselfish devotion, with the aid of the three purified instruments (body, speech and mind), in the capacity of the servant of the Lord, become the Lord's actions, and to stand forth free from the sense of 'I' and 'mine'. This is also the truth of what the Saiva Siddhantins call parabhakti (supreme devotion) or living in the service of God (irai-pani-nittral).

In Sri Muruganar's *Irai Pani Nittral*, the devotee pleads with the Guru to show him the way to happiness, surrender and salvation. Bhagavan responds with love and compassion, urging him to be still, to watch word and thought, and to only move as impelled by grace. *Irai Pani Nittral* is in essence a poetic commentary on Bhagavan's famous instruction, *summa iru* (just be). —

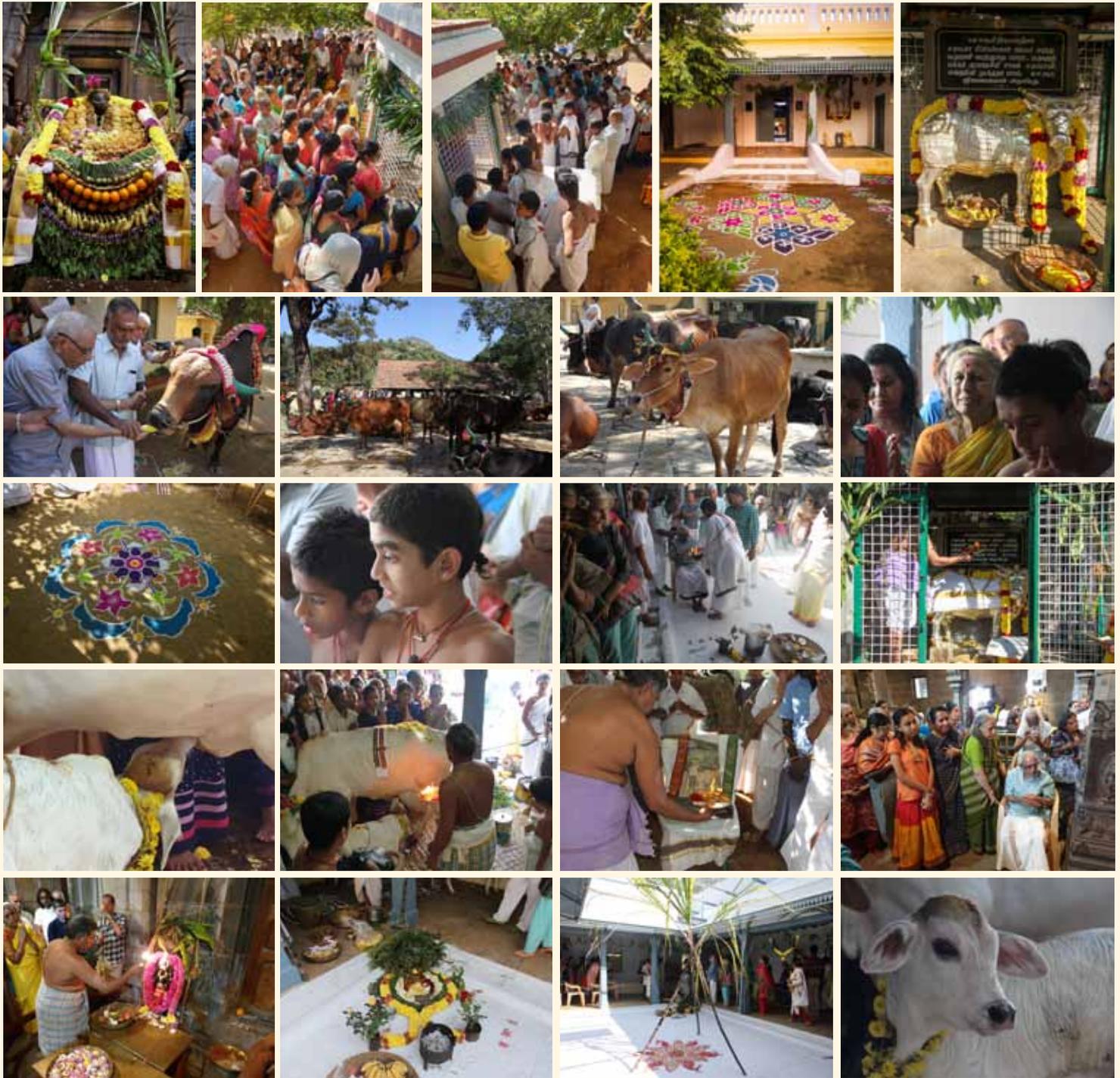
Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Samudram Gosala Celebration



On Thursday, 16th January, devotees gathered at the Nallavan Palayam or Samudram Gosala, the retirement home for the Ashram gosala cows. About a dozen animals live in peace on several acres of land in a pastoral setting out on the banks of the Samudram lake. The animals are honoured each year on Mattu

Pongal Day with special decorations, puja and feeding of pongal, bananas, and other treats. —





Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Pongal Celebrations

Pongal celebrations at the Ashram began with *uttarayana* puja on Wednesday, 15th January, marking 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. The following day was Mattu Pongal dedicated to cattle in appreciation of their long, dedicated service, i.e. to cows for giving their milk and to bulls for ploughing the fields. On Thursday 16th January, Nandi puja was followed by a service at Cow Lakshmi’s samadhi with songs in praise of this favourite devotee of Sri Bhagavan. The morning celebrations culminated with gosala puja and feeding bananas, pongal and *agathi keerai* to the Ashram gosala cows. —





Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Chanting of the Complete Works of Muruganar



There are poets who venerate the Lord with the composition of thousands of poems. But rarely if ever in the history of Tamil literature has a great poet composed 25,000 verses to the Guru. Sri Muruganar's published corpus of verses to Bhagavan Sri Ramana can be divided into three categories: prayer,

teachings and personal experience. The entire corpus was recited for the first time from 21st-30th January at Sri Muruganar's Samadhi Shrine in the Ashram compound. The programme was led by Sri Vilvam Vasudeva Sarma of Mylapore in a programme organised by Choolaimedu Ramana. It consisted of nine hours of recitation from 7-11 am and 3-8 pm each day. —

Sri Muruganar's *Irai Pani Nitral*, §1

சென்ற சென்ற திசையெல்லாம்
செல்வா உனது திருப்புகழ்கேட்டு
உன்தன் அடிக்கே ஒப்படைத்தேன்
உடலும் பொருளும் உயிரும்எலாம்
குன்றம் அனைய குணக்கடலே
குலவு நிலைஎன் கூறென்றேன்
நின்ற நிலைக்கே நில்என்றான்
நீத ரமண நெடியோனே

Whichever way I went,
I heard your praise, O happy one,
And to your feet surrendered
my body, wealth and life.
I cried:
'Ocean of virtue, mountain-high,
Show me the way to happiness!'
Ramana majestic, just said,
'Stand still. Stay where you are.'

Obituary: Sri V.S. Srinivasan



Sri V. S. Srinivasan hailed from Valadi, a small village in Lalgudi Taluk, Tiruchirapalli District. Having lost his parents during his school days, he was reared by his elder brother, a secondary school teacher. After completing SSLC under the guidance of his brother, Srinivasan got married and took employment in Binny Co. Subsequently, he went to Kolkata for work and remained there for some years. His service took him later to Andhra Pradesh and Bangalore. Finally, some 30 years back he took refuge in Sri Ramanasramam and remained for about 17 years where he found peace of mind, working as one of the Ashram accountants. During his retirement he has been living with his sons in Chennai. Born 10th May 1924, V. S. Srinivasan turned 96 last year. Soft-spoken, honest and interested only in leading a simple life with noble intentions, Srinivasan breathed his last on Pradosham evening, Monday 23rd

December 2019 after listening to Sri Ramana's *Aksaramanamalai* recited by family members at his bedside. He is survived by a daughter and three sons. —

