

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

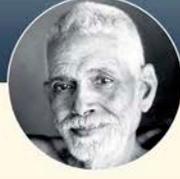
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Dev Gogoi



Saranagati



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ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

As we begin the New Year, early morning Dhanurmasa pujas are underway each day in the Ashram.

Unfortunately, this year's monsoon never really made it to Tiruvannamalai though other parts of Tamil Nadu got significant rain. Pali Tirtham remains dangerously low as the South Indian spring rapidly approaches.

In this issue, we take a look at the life stories of Janaki Mata and her daughter, Padma Sitapati (see p. 3ff and p.5ff.).

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

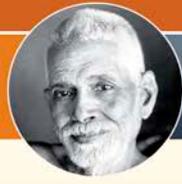
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

15th January (Tues) Pongal
20th Jan (Sun) Punarvasu/Full Moon/Chinnaswami Day
17th February (Sun) Punarvasu
19th February (Tues) Full Moon
23rd February (Sat) Sundaram Iyer Day
4th March (Mon) Mahasivaratri

15th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Havan
16th March (Sat) Punarvasu
20 March (Weds) Full Moon
6th April (Sat) Telugu New Year
12th April (Fri) Punarvasu
13th April (Sat) Sri Rama Navami





In Search of Bhagavan: The Life of Janaki Mata (pt. I)

[Even though Janaki Mata became a spiritual teacher in her own right, she never ceased being an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. In this sequence, we will take a look at the life of this remarkable devotee.]

Janaki Mata was born to an orthodox Brahmin family at Palghat in July 1906. As a young girl she offered food to an elderly sadhu who had come to the house even though she had been forbidden by her mother to feed guests before the *naivedyam*. By stealth, she fed the sadhu some sweets. The sadhu blessed her, tracing out the letters of a mantra for her. Following this incident, the girl was disinclined to play with other children and instead put her attention on God. As she grew older and reached the age of marriage, her parents were afraid to wait in getting her married as she showed an increasing leaning toward religious life. Suitable candidates were found but she resisted each one. Finally, when a friend of the family lost his wife

and was left alone with two children, Janaki Mata's parents suggested the widower—though twice her age—as a potential spouse. Janaki agreed, declaring that she liked the two children.

Janaki Mata's husband, Dr. Ganapathi LMS, soon discovered the spiritual greatness of his new wife, treating her with respect. His medical work carried him to various locations in the Andhra and Tamil Districts, and even all the way to Austria, journeys on which she willingly accompanied him.

Meanwhile Janaki kept up her devotions, worshipping Venkataramana of Tirupati. But when she met Venkataraman of Tiruvannamalai, i.e. Bhagavan Sri Ramana, she knew that this was her true God.

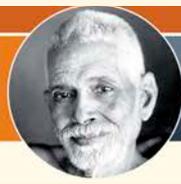
In time her customary worship began to yield to an altogether different type of veneration and Janaki started to see the divine as Formless. If she had worshipped Krishna one day and Siva the next, she ultimately began to see God as beyond name and form, the Supreme Self. She turned inward in meditation: "There is only one thing worth achieving," she remarked "the root cause of the universe, the One without a second. I must attain it, realize it and experience it with Bhagavan's Grace."

Sri Ramana eventually gave her *Upadesasaram* (in Malayalam) and read it out to her to follow. When Dr. Ganapathi was promoted to the position of DMO of Cuddalore, the family was more proximate to Tiruvannamalai and thus in a position to come more frequently for Bhagavan's darshan.

Multiple powerful experiences and divine visitations transformed Janaki Mata's outlook and she wondered about her life as wife and householder. Her husband gave his support: "Though you are still in the family, you may live as though in an Ashram."

But as the intensity of her contemplation increased, she began to experience pain in the body, fragility of mind and she feared what the future might bring. Finally, when she had become physically and mentally exhausted from these involuntary spiritual episodes, she begged Dr. Ganapathi to take her to Sri Bhagavan. Though concerned about traveling while she was so weak and frail, he knew that Bhagavan could save her. The trip proved propitious in every way and once in





Bhagavan's presence, her condition normalised. But on her last night as she sat among devotees in the hall, she lamented having to leave Bhagavan to return home the following day. As she sat quietly, she felt that without Bhagavan's ongoing supervision, she might meet with serious trouble. As she sat and mused quietly to herself, she became anxious recalling something someone had heard Bhagavan say, namely, that he was not a guru and had no disciples. Just at that moment Bhagavan got up from the couch and went out of the hall. Janaki took this as an opportune moment to unburden her heart before Bhagavan in private, so she got up and went out after him while everyone else remained seated. She waited outside and when Bhagavan returned

from the gosala, she rushed over with tears in her eyes and prostrated before him. The attendant brusquely ordered her aside but Bhagavan motioned him to stand down. Thus Mata got the long-awaited opportunity. She narrated for Bhagavan her vulnerability, prayed for his protection and expressed her fear of becoming mentally deranged under the influence of the *kundalini*. Remembering what Bhagavan had reportedly said about not having disciples, she expressed her intense grief and disappointment in not having a guru.

Bhagavan replied, "Who told you that. I am here. Nothing will upset your mind. Do not worry." —

(to be continued)

Your Best Shot



Dev Gogoi

The Kartikai Deepam cattle fair is a down-to-earth and charming feature of the annual 10-day Kartikai Deepam festival, a gentle counterpoint to the elaborate processions of the gods through the streets of Tiruvannamalai. Formerly spread over several acres of open ground on either side of Chengam Road along the southern flank of Arunachala, it has since shrunk drastically, barely occupying the field adjacent to the Government Arts College.

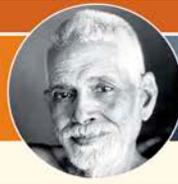
Roadside shops offer a wide variety of accessories and accoutrements for cows and bulls, heaps of straw lie scattered about, tea shops and snack stalls abound, and the air is redolent with the aromas of the farmyard.

Both buyer and seller aspire for divine blessings upon their transactions, while arcane rituals are not uncommon. Bargains

and prices are sealed not verbally but by the language of fingers and hands 'speaking' to each other under the cover of a piece of cloth, in plain view of curious onlookers. For discerning pilgrims, a leisurely wander through the grounds is not to be missed, even if only for half an hour. One needs to remain alert for the occasional bareback rider upon a galloping horse, or the odd bull who suddenly feels a little restless.

As I set up my tripod for this shot, a young boy strolled over and watched curiously. "Is this for TV?" he asked. It was flattering. "No. For the Internet," I replied, hoping my prestige remained intact. His name was Shaukat, from a village near Chengam, some 30 km away. His family had brought four bulls to sell at this market and all of them were sold. Mission accomplished. —





Smt. Padma Sitapati

I am Janaki Mata's daughter, a great fortune for me. My mother, Janaki Mata, was a *devi upasika*. In her 32nd year, Janaki Mata's penance reached a pinnacle and she had the yogic experience of *shadadbara granthi bedam* (cutting the knot of the sixth chakra). Her body could not bear that experience, and she immediately went to Tiruvannamalai to have Bhagavan's darshan. She explained to Bhagavan what had happened and the suffering of the body. Owing to the power of the *kundalini*, she began to stand on her toes in front of Bhagavan, and go round and round in an ecstatic condition, as if dancing. People were afraid she might fall. I was also present and went to brace my mother. But Bhagavan smiled at me and said: "Are you afraid your mother may fall? Not to worry, she won't."

I already had two sons, Ramana Subramanyam and Janakiraman, and during my third confinement, I

went to Tanjore to stay with my mother. Within a few hours of reaching Tanjore, my son Janakiraman began to suffer pain in his eyes. My father, Dr. Ganapati Iyer, was an ENT specialist and a surgeon, and he examined my son's eyes. Soon enough he determined that the condition was serious and diagnosed it as a deep corneal ulcer. Before long my son was completely blind. We were greatly worried as there was every chance of him permanently losing his eyesight. My mother, Janaki Mata, immediately sent a telegram to Bhagavan Sri Ramana with the intention of obtaining his grace. Soon enough we received a reply with *prasadam*. It read: "By the Grace of Sri Bhagavan, child Janakiraman's eyesight will be fully restored."

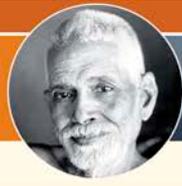
The condition lasted 45 days and my father tried every possible treatment medically available but without success. On the 48th day which was Kartigai Deepam, the day when Brahma and Vishnu were given the effulgent darshan of the Lord, I went to the puja room before Bhagavan's image, fell at his feet and begged him to heal my son's eyes. In short order, the boy came running to me and told me that he was able to see Bhagavan's photo and that he could see me as well. At the Tanjore temple, the boy could now make out the deities in the temple. Following this miracle, my mother, Janaki Mata wrote a song in praise of Bhagavan which had the line:

O Ramana, who restored my grandson's eyesight in the light of Karitgai Deepam Day!"

Though I was far along in my pregnancy, my mother seems to have felt that a long-pending and unfulfilled commitment to bring the two boys to visit Tirupathi might have been the cause for the incident. She said, "Even though you are in full pregnancy, go to Bhagavan and express your gratitude, and then go to Tirupathi and fulfil the vow".

Janaki Mata felt I should start immediately for Tiruvannamalai and then carry on to Tirupathi. All were in disbelief at the undertaking, a pregnant woman with two young children making such a long and arduous journey in those days before modern transportation. But my mother insisted that Bhagavan would protect us.





Thus, the following day we came to Ramanasramam and fell at the feet of Bhagavan. Bhagavan said to those around him, “She is saying that I have given the grace to heal the boy.” And indeed he had.

The very same night I was to travel further to Tirupathi. Bhagavan assured me that I could make the journey. It was evening time when we came to take leave of Bhagavan. But my son, Janakiraman, though seeing normally by day, still had lingering symptoms of the condition and could not see Bhagavan’s head in the night light. When the boy made a quiet remark to me, Bhagavan wanted to know what he had said. I told Bhagavan that he was unable to see Sri Bhagavan’s head and face. Bhagavan then gazed steadily at the boy and said, “Look intently here! Now, are you not able to see Bhagavan’s head? Look, look!” The boy stared at Bhagavan and then was able to make out Bhagavan’s face and eyes. From that moment on, his night blindness never occurred again.

When we returned to Tanjore, my mother insisted that I should take up regular recitation of *Lalithasahasranama*. Thus when the child that I had been carrying during these arduous months was born a baby girl, she got the name Lalitha.

All during these years, my mother was a regular visitor to Ramanasramam. Whenever she went to the Ashram, she insisted the whole family come along with her.

One day she indicated to my husband that since he was an electrical engineer in charge of a power plant facility in Vellore, he should arrange for the installation of electricity in Sri Ramanasramam which had no power up till then. This was in the early 1940s when my husband did the needful. At the inauguration ceremony, Bhagavan was so inquisitive about the new electrical service that my husband, though an expert, was hard-pressed to adequately answer Bhagavan’s many questions.

Another time when Janaki Mata had prepared fried beaten rice to offer Bhagavan, I took the vessel and offered it to Bhagavan on the stone sofa in the New Hall. Being so near him, I felt myself lose body-consciousness in his presence. As I distributed the *prasadam* to devotees, I was beside myself and just when I finished offering the last of it to Bhagavan’s devotees, Bhagavan asked if I had kept any for myself. Hearing his words sent my mind deeper into the heart and I felt tremendous joy and peace. This experience was one of the greatest graces of my life. —

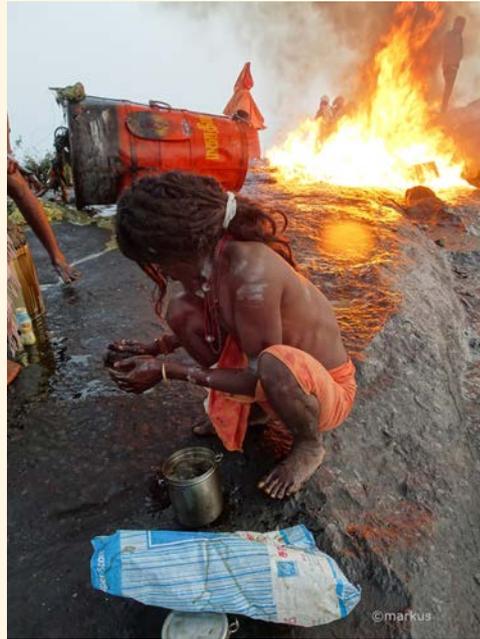
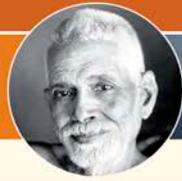
Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Dhanumasa Puja Chanting

Dhanurmasa (*margali masam* in Tamil) is marked by the Sun’s entry into Dhanur Rasi (Sagittarius), beginning on or about 16th December and extending up to Pongal. This is the final period of *dakshinayana*, i.e. the southern transit of the Sun and marks the longest nights of the year. Considered the Brahma *muburtha* of the annual cycle and thus being auspicious for worship, during this month, pujas are performed each morning in the Ashram starting at 4.15 am followed by *Vishnu Sabasranamam* starting at 5.15 and concluding with the distribution of prasad at 5.40. After the first arati and *mantra pushpam* in the shrine of Bhagavan each day, verses of three saints are recited by devotees:

- 1) Manickavachakar’s twenty verses called *Tiruvembavai* (one verse per day for twenty days), then *Tirupalliezhuchi*, ten verses for the remaining ten days.
- 2) Andal’s thirty verses called *Tiruppavai* (one verse per day for thirty days); and finally,
- 3) Muruganar’s thirty-three verses, *Ramana Tiruvembavai* (one verse per day for twenty-nine days with four verses recited on the 30th day).

Each day, the three verses are sung in *bhoopala ragam* or in *pannpuranirmai*. For copies of texts, see <<https://goo.gl/xmtUNd>> (Tamil) and <<https://goo.gl/aRrM1V>> (English).





Markus Horlacher

Events in Tiruvannamalai: The Kartigai Deepam Cauldron

The Karthigai Deepam cauldron is the centre of festivities for the eleven days of the burning of the hilltop flame. Each year the large vessel is cleaned, refurbished, repainted and venerated in the temple before being taken out of the Ammani Amman Gopuram and up the Hill, strapped to its numerous metal rings by long palanquin poles. At 1.6 metres in height and 90 cm in diameter (70 cm at its bottom) and made of copper, this is no small feat. Burning brightly each night for eleven nights and smouldering each following day, the vessel suffers significant strain

and is in need of restoration. At the conclusion of the eleven days, it is tipped over suspended by ropes so that the burning remains spill out onto the hilltop granite and burn off under the open sky. Once having cooled, the cauldron is strapped again to palanquin poles and transported down the Hill to the Thousand-Pillared mandapam where priests perform puja before the great vessel. Every few years a new cauldron is forged by Tiruvannamalai metal workers. See the carrying of the cauldron at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUwS1JRyg1c>. —



Tipped over in order to empty its fiery contents, the cauldron is taken down the Hill after cooling.





Events in Tiruvannamalai: The Kartigai Deepam Cauldron (cont.)



Inaugurating the cauldron (2016)



Ghee for loading the cauldron



Preparation of the wicks



Placing the camphor

<http://arunachalagrace.blogspot.com>

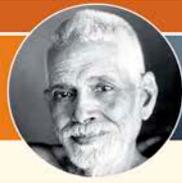
On the day of Kartigai Deepam, the ghee that has been offered and carried up the Hill is laid out and prepared for pouring into the cauldron. Very large wicks are soaked in ghee and loaded into the cauldron. Large pieces of camphor are then placed atop the wicks as those attending await the signal from Arunachaleswarar priests at the auspicious hour. —

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Inauguration of Ashram Dispensary Lab



Physicians at Sri Ramansramam's dispensary treat at least one hundred and twenty patients per day, consisting of nearby villagers, local residents, devotees, both visiting and resident. But with the introduction of a new blood lab, the treatment they offer will become more effective, granting them rapid access to key diagnostic information. Staffed by Mr. Sharathkumar, a qualified laboratory technician, and equipped with a cell counter (for hematological analyses) and a semi-auto analyser (for biochemistry analyses), the lab will run renal function, liver function and glucose. The new lab was inaugurated on 14th December with Ashram President V.S. Ramanan, his daughter Dr. Aruna Ramanan, Dr. Lakshmi, Dr. Vijay Kumar and Ashram devotees in attendance. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Ramanananda Swami Day



Swami Ramanananda (Venkato) was a key figure in transitioning the Ashram from the difficult times following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana in 1950 and the subsequent demise of the Ashram Sarvadhikari, Chinnaswami, in 1953. Venkato's tenacity was instrumental in making the Ashram what it is today. His Samadhi Day was observed on the morning of 25th December. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nochur Sri Venkataraman Discourses



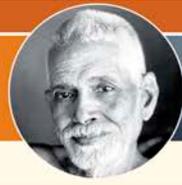
Following Bhagavan's 139th Jayanti celebrations, seven days of discourses on *Aksaramanamalai* were offered by Nochur Sri Venkataraman in English at the Grantalaya Auditorium before about 700 eager devotees. This year's series led up to v. 45 and is scheduled to continue next year. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Lucyma Day



On Monday, 31 December, devotees gathered at Lucy Cornelsen's samadhi for puja and prasadam on this her annual day. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's 139th Jayanti

Sri Bhagavan's 139th birthday, Ramana Jayanti, was celebrated on 24th December, 2018 at the Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam. Chanting, song and puja graced the morning which began in the early hours with Dhanurmasa puja, with verses from Manikkavachakar's *Tiruvembavai*, Andal's *Tiruppavai* and Muruganar's *Ramana Tiruvembavai*. *Vishnu Sahasranamam* was chanted after the early morning puja followed by Bhagavan's works. Devotees from near and far appeared in record numbers for the Mahanyas puja and more than ten thousand partook of meals throughout the day.

Preliminary celebrations commenced 21st December with music programmes in the library auditorium with "Tiruppugazh Music" by Smt. Bhavya Hari, Chennai; 22nd December, "Ramana Music" by Amritavarshini led by Smt. Sakkubai Srinivasan of Bangalore; and 23 December: 3pm "Ramana Music" by Ramananjali led by Ms. Sarada Natarajan, Smt. Ambika Kameshwar and RMCL Bangalore, and 8pm, renowned artiste Sri Ahhishek Raghuram, Chennai. —

