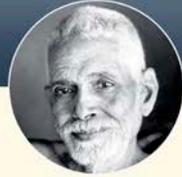


# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

NOVEMBER 2018  
VOL. 12, NO. 11



D. Thiyagarajan



## Saranagati



NOVEMBER 2018  
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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This Navaratri issue presents a photographic reproduction of some of the great moments of this year's celebrations in honour of the Goddess. Festivities began on 9th October with music and dance programmes the first few nights.

Also below is a brief look at Isanya Mutt and the association three of its heads had with Bhagavan (see p. 3ff).

On 22nd October, Viswanathaswami's Day was observed with devotees in attendance and the chanting of *Aksharamanamalai*.

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

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team

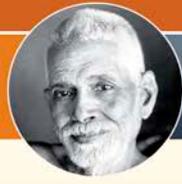
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

6th November (Tues) Deepavali  
14th November (Weds) Kartigai Festival Flag-hoisting  
22nd November (Thurs) Full Moon  
23rd November (Fri) Kartigai Deepam  
27th November (Tues) Punarvasu Day  
22nd December (Sat) Full Moon

24th December (Mon) Bhagavan's 139th Jayanti  
26th Dec (Weds) Nochur Venkataraman 7-day Discourse  
31st December (Mon) Lucy Ma Day  
15th January (Tues) Pongal  
20th Jan (Sun) Punarvasu/Full Moon/Chinnaswami Day  
4th March (Mon) Mahasivaratri





## Isanya Mutt

Given its grand history, Isanya Mutt is respected among the denizens of Tiruvannamalai. When the 18th-century saint, Isanya Jnana Desikar, made his appearance in Tiruvannamalai, it was on this site near Isanya lingam that he settled.

Already as a youth in his small village of Rayavelur (near the River Palar in Northern Tamil Nadu), Kandappa possessed a keen intellect. In his late teens he went on pilgrimage and settled in a cave near Vettavalam to practice sadhana. All was ideal in his cave-hermitage until he accidentally came across a cache of gold coins. After handing them over to the authorities, rumours spread that the young sage could manifest gold at will. Not surprisingly, the peace of his retreat was destroyed as he was besieged by the village population with pleas for gold coins. He thus took leave and walked until he ended up in Tiruvannamalai. He set up a kuti on the western side of the Hill but Lord Arunachala appeared to him and told him, “Dear son, I have asked a devotee to come to the north-eastern part of Arunachala to see you. Go there and meet him.”

The sage made his way to Isanya lingam where he took up sadhana in a dug-out cave. He sat in samadhi and in

time, befriended the animals of the forest. Two tigers became his close companions, always sitting one to each side of him. Legends rose up about their true identity and the one was said to be Lord Arunachala. When his fame grew and devotees came to have his darshan, he bade his tiger companions go into the forest lest they cause his guests fright. His devotees chose a site for his samadhi under a vilva tree where he had been fond of standing and gazing upon the Holy Hill. In time the Mutt rose up over his cave.<sup>1</sup>

\*\*\*

Later, Isanya Mutt would come to play a significant role in Bhagavan’s life as well. Readers may recall how Isanya lingam was a regular stop on the pradakshina round and how Bhagavan had a long-standing relationship with Isanya Mutt heads.

Many incidents involving the Isanya Mutt come to mind. One example is a day just five or six years after Bhagavan arrived in Tiruvannamalai when he was on his way into the forest near Pachaiamman Kovil. Vasudeva Sastri, a young boy at the time, was unwilling to leave ‘Brahmana Swami’ (as Bhagavan was known in those days) but wept, sensing his guru’s intention. Vasudeva relates:

*When we arrived to Isanya Mutt about 8.30am, Bhagavan sat on a rock and said with tears in his eyes that he would never again come to the Ashram but would go where he pleased and live in forests and caves away from men. But I would not leave him. It became very late. We arrived about 8am but even at 1pm we were still in this deadlock. Bhagavan asked me to go into town, eat my food and come back if I wanted. But I was afraid that if I left him, Bhagavan would disappear.<sup>2</sup>*

Finally, as it would turn out, in the midst of this deadlock, Swami Sathappa, the head of Isanya Mutt, was returning from a visit to the Mutt’s farm when he saw Bhagavan and asked the cart driver to stop:

*Swami! I never expected to see you here. It is my good fortune to have your darshan. It has been a long-cherished wish of mine to welcome you to my Mutt. But I did not ask, knowing you don’t go visiting anywhere. Now I have got my chance.<sup>3</sup>*

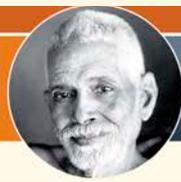
Young Bhagavan was in silence and besides never went anywhere with anyone, nor did he allow himself

1 *The Mountain Path* December, 1990, pp. 128.

2 *Day by Day*, p. 275.

3 *Reminiscences of Kunju Swami*, trans. P. Ramasamy.





to be transported by a conveyance in keeping with his sadhu vocation. But the Mutt head would not have any of his fervent silent gestures and simply lifted the young swami, thin from his tapas, and placed him in his cart. Unable to resist the Mutt head's good intentions, Bhagavan went along with him to the Mutt. But rising early one morning, Bhagavan slipped out and made his way up to Pavala Kunru.

Though disappointed to learn of the young sage's departure, Sathappa Swami was delighted to hear that the young swami was at Pavala Kunru, the spur-top temple affiliated with his own Isanya Mutt. He made arrangements for food to be sent to Bhagavan each day. Devotees later commented that it was this Isanya Mathadhipati that had prevented Bhagavan from escaping into obscurity. Later, when Bhagavan confessed this escape attempt, he mentioned two others:

*Another time I wanted to run away from all this crowd and live somewhere unknown, freely as I liked. But on that occasion my plans were frustrated by Yogananda Swami. I tried to get free on a third occasion. That was after mother's passing away. I did not want to have even an ashram like Skandasramam.*

*But the result has been this Ashram [Ramanasramam] and all the crowd here. Thus all three attempts failed.<sup>4</sup>*

Not long before the meeting with Swami Sathappa, Bhagavan had been at Gurusurtham. It was there that his uncle Nelliappa Iyer first discovered the runaway child who had been missing for two years. After his nephew's continuous refusals to accompany him home, Nelliappa left the place with pangs of conscience concerning the boy's education. On his way out, he encountered a pundit nearby giving a discourse and inquired about his nephew. The pundit's comment aggravated Nelliappa's worst fears: "That boy is sitting there without any education and with a crude philosophy besides". Nelliappa would not take leave of the pundit before the latter had promised that he would teach his nephew when the occasion permitted. In the months that followed, the

4 Ibid., p. 276. When someone remarked that Sri Ramana could leave the Ashram when he liked, he replied, "What can I do? If I go off to the forest and try to hide, what will happen? They will soon find me. Then someone will put up a hut in front of me and another person one at the back, and it will not be long before huts will have sprung up on either side. Where can I go? I shall always be a prisoner."

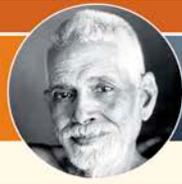
## Wordwise: Isana

## ईशान

**I**sana (Skt.), Ishanya (Tam.) means "guardian of the northeast". North is the direction of wealth (home of Kubera) while east is the place of knowledge (home of Indra). North-east is thus home to knowledge and wealth. *Isana* has its roots in the word *ish* or *Isvara* which means 'the Lord' or *the invisible power that governs the universe*, attributed to Lord Siva. More specifically, *Isana* indicates the internal aspect, the subtle and ethereal form of Siva, namely, the Self, and represents transcendental wisdom that leads to Self-knowledge. Since the north-east is the direction of Gods and deities, the puja room of any household is kept in the north-eastern portion of the house. It is no accident that Bhagavan was situated in the northeast corner of the darshan hall, the place of the guru, throughout his long teaching years in Ramanasramam.

Of the *astha linga*, Bhagavan seems to have had a predilection for the Isanya lingam. While all the directional lingas are associated with a god, Isanya is ruled by Guru and is the direction of the Divine Itself. If Arunachala is the pole connecting earth and heaven (*axis mundi*) then all the created order revolves around it. Arunachala as axis is very telling; *dbruva* is the unmoving stillpoint whose apex (zenith) is ruled by Brahma and whose foot (nadir) is ruled by Vishnu. The eight cardinal directions plus the two vertical directions all point inward to the centre of the cosmos that is Arunachala.





pundit made every effort to fulfil this promise but to no avail. The pundit's initiatives were steadfastly resisted by the young swami. Years later, however, when Bhagavan was passing the Isanya Mutt, he was corralled by the Mathadhipati, Sathappa Swami's successor Mahadevaswami, into continuing the lecture underway on the *Gita Sara Thalattu*. It so happened that this same pundit was present at the Mutt and on hearing the youngster's speech, discovered his vast learning, and said, "Oho! You are such a great man! I thought you were illiterate!" So saying, the pundit duly prostrated before Bhagavan.<sup>5</sup>

Isanya Mutt Head Mahadevaswami proved no less devoted to Bhagavan than his predecessor and insisted on helping finance the construction then underway at the site that was to become Skandasramam. When faced with objections about supporting enterprises not connected with the Mutt, Mahadevaswami said:

*We and our mutts are subject to certain restrictions and control. But Bhagavan and his state are supreme and beyond any human control. We should consider it our good fortune to serve such a sage. If [they] don't approve of my giving money from Mutt funds, I will give my personal money.*<sup>6</sup>

Kunjuswami narrates occasions going around the Hill and taking refuge at the Mutt during rain storms. Those accompanying Bhagavan would scramble for shelter while Bhagavan never hurried but walked on in measured steps, irrespective of the intensity of the storm:

*One time it began to rain very heavily; we all ran to the Isanya Mutt but Bhagavan walked as usual and was drenched by the time he reached the Mutt. As a rule, he did not go to the Mutt because they would detain him there; he would go alongside the Hill to the Municipal bungalow and sit on its narrow veranda. Except for one or two of his attendants, the rest of the party continued the walk after prostrating to him. This was because, had they all gone together as a crowd, the people of the town would come to know about our circumambulation and would gather round. So, after sending all the others off, he would cover himself with a shawl and walk to the Ashram by unseen by-ways.*<sup>7</sup>

In the early days, even though Bhagavan took pains to guard his mounam, he sometimes availed himself

5 *Saranagati*, May 2015, pp. 3-4.

6 *Saranagati*, August 2013, pp. 7-8

7 *Letters*, 30th November, 1947

of the graciousness of the Mutt when going for pradakshina. When the head of the Mutt saw him coming, he would say something to the cook and a meal would be laid out on a big leaf for Bhagavan. To avoid such a big to do, Bhagavan stopped eating from leaf-plates and merely held out his cupped hands into which offerings were placed. Bhagavan says:

*Whenever I felt like eating in the Mutt, I used to stay in Pachaiamman Koil or somewhere nearby, go to the Mutt soon after the naivedya bell was rung, stay near the main entrance and ask for the nivedana. They used to bring it, and put it into my hands. Salt is not put into that nivedana, as it is a Siva temple. Even so, I didn't mind. All that I wanted was to satisfy my hunger. As the head of the Mutt was staying upstairs, he knew nothing about it for some time. One day he saw it by chance. 'Who is it that is giving the Swami food without salt?' he enquired.*<sup>8</sup>

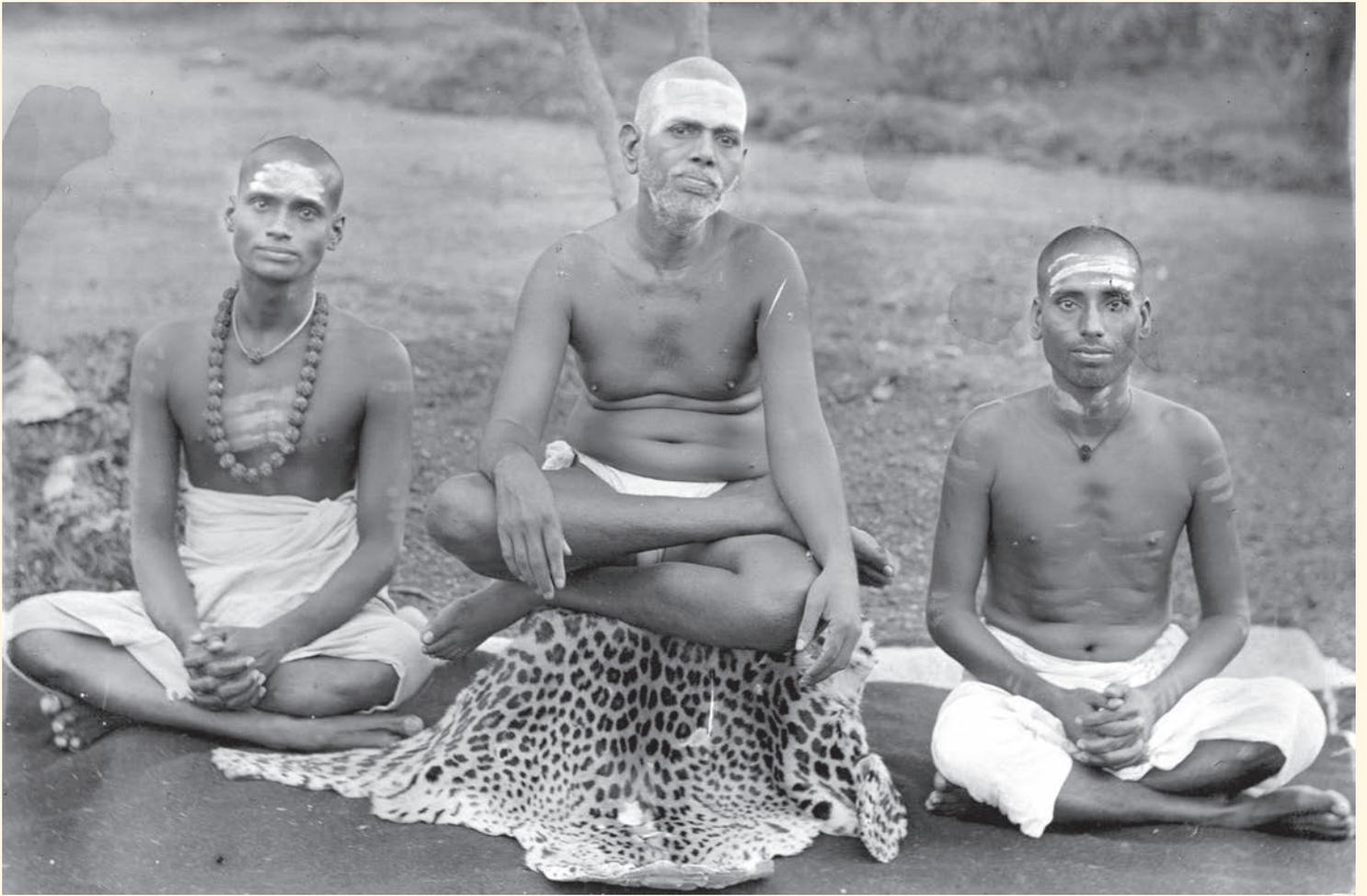
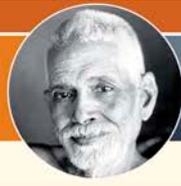
Bhagavan's association with the Mutt continued right up till the Ramanasramam years. A curious event took place in 1927, the year that Natesa Swami took charge of Isanya Mutt. One year earlier Muruganar left his wife in the care of family members and took up the sadhu's life. His grieving wife Meenakshi came before Bhagavan and wept at her misfortune, saying she didn't even have a nice sari to wear. Bhagavan, feeling sorry for her, encouraged her and said, "Meenakshi, I assure you that you will never suffer for want of clothes or food." Bhagavan did not stop with this verbal assurance but sent Kunju Swami to the head of the Isanya Mutt in town to request a sari, which the Mutt freely granted. As earlier commentators have reasonably pointed out, it is worth pausing to appreciate the irony of a sage in a loin cloth sending a sannyasi to another sannyasi to beg a sari for another man's wife.<sup>9</sup>

It was this same Mutt Head, Natesa Swami, who came to visit Bhagavan regularly and who requested Muruganar to come and stay in the Mutt to teach him Manickavachakar's *Tiruchitrambala Kovai*, an invitation the poet honoured. When Natesa Swami passed away in 1947, Bhagavan described him as a "very peaceful and easy going man" who used to sit by Bhagavan's side during meals to assure that Bhagavan was correctly served. —

8 *Ocean of Grace* vol. 1, p. 172.

9 Freely adapted from *Ramana Periya Puranam*, p. 191.





## In the Frame with Bhagavan: GRO 87

*GRO 87 (late 1930s): Sri Bhagavan with Kariyanur Sri Natesa Swamigal of Isanya Mutt to his right.*

Each Saturday from 1927 onwards, Natesa Swami of Isanya Mutt went to Sri Ramanasramam to visit Bhagavan. He recalled how Bhagavan used to sit on the tiger-skin on a bench east of Mother's Shrine, a thatched shed in those days.

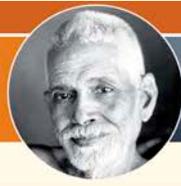
Natesa Swami would be given a seat and the two would confer with each another for about an hour. Natesa Swami had inherited this tradition from his preceptor, Mahadevaswami, who used

to send Bhagavan a bottle of oil, soapnut powder and a new kaupinam each year on Deepavali Day.

In later years, when Natesa Swami heard about Muruganar's capabilities as a teacher, he requested the poet to come and stay in the Mutt to teach him Manickavachakar's *Tiruchitrambala Kovai*. Accordingly, Muruganar went to stay in the Isanya Mutt each morning, when he would offer a class to Natesa Swami and, in the afternoon, would return to Ramanasramam.

At the time of Natesa Swami's demise in 1947, Bhagavan described him as a "very peaceful and easy going man" and ascribed his selection for Mutt leadership to his being a great sadhak. —





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navaratri 2018, 9th-18th October 2019

While Navaratri means ‘nine nights’, the number of nightly pujas can vary from eight to ten depending on the way the tithis fall. This year’s Navaratri consisted of ten nights of pujas. On 8th October (Amavasya), Goddess Yogambika was taken in procession. The night of the following day began the first of ten successive nightly *alankarams*. The *alankaram* on the first night was *Meenakshi*, avatar of Parvati, consort of Lord Siva, considered the form of



Goddess Mathangi; the second night was *Gaja Lakshmi* seated on a lotus, flanked by two elephants anointing her in abhishekam with water from their trunks; the third, *Rajalarajeswari*, a form of Goddess Parvati also called Tripura Sundari; the fourth night, *Linga Puja*, depicts Parvati in worship of the linga of the Lord, like the day she fashioned a linga of sand at the waterside in Kanchipuram. Lord Siva’s voice could be heard from

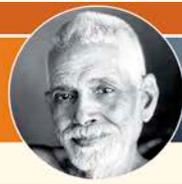


above, “Let this linga made by you remain here for the welfare of all humankind”. The fifth night was *Rishabha Vahanam*, the great bull-devotee of Lord Siva, whose legs are the four Vedas; the sixth night Tapas, a tribute to Mother’s great austerities, especially those she practised at the foot of Arunachala; the seventh night, *Sesha Sayanam*, the “Lord who sleeps on Sesha”, the serpent-king of the Nagas. Devi (Parashakti),



who indwells Lord Vishnu, rests on the serpent, the archetypal symbol of wisdom and immortality; the eighth night, *Venuganam*, “the song of the flute”, hints at the fact that even Lord Krishna’s powers have their origins in Parashakti; the ninth night, *Saraswati*, goddess of knowledge, music, arts and science, the consort of Brahma by whose wisdom Brahma was able to create the universe; and the last night, *Mahishasura Mardini*, the “slayer of the buffalo-demon”. Mahishasura was





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Navaratri 2018

born to a father, Rambha, king of the asuras, and a water buffalo mother (Princess Shyamala, cursed to be a buffalo). Mahishasura invaded heaven and defeated Indra. Since he was invincible to all male forms, the devas created Durga, who possessed the combined strength of all the Devas. Durga and her army fiercely fought the demon and his forces for

nine days until she finally killed Mahishasura on *dasami shukla paksha*, the tenth day of the waxing moon. So the last night is Mahishasura Mardini. Vijaya Dasami has no major puja but is a holiday for all in India. That night Goddess Yogambika was again taken in procession followed by arati, cheers and celebration. —



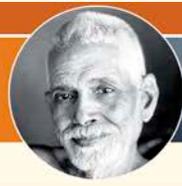
## Obituary: Smt. Padma Venkatakrishnan



Born in 1927, Padma was brought up by her aunt Yogambal who had settled in Tiruvannamalai with her husband to be closer to Bhagavan. Padma attended Municipal High School, Tiruvannamalai, and visited Bhagavan each evening with her aunt. She studied music with Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer who composed the famous 'Saranagati' song among other worthy songs on Bhagavan and Padma was blessed to be able to sing regularly before Bhagavan. Subsequently she married Sri R. Venkatakrishnan, the only son of Manavasi Ramasamy Iyer, who later became the President of Ramana Kendra, Mylapore, and thus maintained a life of devotion to Bhagavan till the end. She visited Sri Ramanasramam during Navaratri where she participated in Sumangali puja.

Padma Venkatakrishnan attained the feet of Sri Bhagavan on the third day of Navaratri, 11 Oct, 2018 at the age of 91. She is survived by her husband, son and daughter. —





## Obituary: Dr. Serge Emile Demetrian (Narayana)



Born in Bucharest, 29th April 1923, Serge Demetrian taught anatomy at the Faculty of Medicine and worked as a practising doctor. He simultaneously published articles on Indian subjects in the area of comparative literature, followed by a *Sanskrit Anthology* in 1966 and *The Ramayana of Valmiki* in 1968. Prior to leaving Romania, he translated S. Radhakrishnan's *The Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* (900 pp.) from English and Sanskrit into Romanian. He came to the University of Madras in December 1967 where he worked as a senior research fellow at the Centre of Advanced Study in philosophy (1968-1971) under Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan and completed his Ph.D thesis on P. Teilhard de Chardin and Vedanta (Madras, 1971). His Sanskrit study proceeded in a traditional manner under the guidance of pandits P. H. Subrahmaniam, V. S. Venkatasubrahmaniam and Lakshminarasimha Sastri. He travelled with T.M.P. Mahadevan under the auspices of UNESCO for conferences on culture and religion. It was in August 1968

that he was introduced to the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, and subsequently obtained permission from the Paramacharya to accompany him on many of his *padayatras*. His daily reflections and experiences in the presence of the Mahaswami yielded some 12,000 pages of notes.

Demetrian sought French citizenship in the 1970s when he taught anatomy at the Sorbonne in Paris and wrote, in his own words, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. During this time he returned to India every year to be in the presence of the Paramacharya. His knowledge of Romanian, French, English, German, Latin, Sanskrit and Tamil aided his scholarly pursuits and yielded publications on Vedantic thought in various languages. Two years after the Paramacharya's earthly departure in 1994, Demetrian started travelling between France and Kanchipuram, and finally took up residence in the vicinity of Sri Ramanasramam. On his regular visits to the Ashram for evening Tamil parayana, he won the hearts of Ramana devotees with his warm, affectionate greeting, 'Narayana, Narayana', earning him his nickname. A Ramana devotee/physician attending on Narayana said that when "crossing the threshold of Narayana's humble abode", one immediately sensed "unfathomable silence, immense gratitude, spiritual inspiration, profound devotion and a total surrender" in his presence. Recently following an infection, Narayana was feeble but alert, and firmly rejected any medical intervention, intent on placing his fate solely in the hands of the Divine. At the age of 95, he was peacefully absorbed at the feet of Holy Arunachala on Pushyami/Dasami, 7pm Thursday, 4th October, 2018. —

## Obituary: Smt. Vanajakshi



Smt. Vanajakshi passed away on 22nd October 2018 at the ripe old age of 103. She was the sister of the wife of Krishna Ghanapatigal who was our Vedapatasala Teacher for several decades including in Bhagavan's time. Her late husband Ramaswamy Iyer, hailing from nearby Perumanam, had helped in making special items in our kitchen during festivities.

Smt. Vanajakshi was residing in Ashram quarters in Ramana Nagar with her son, the Ashram's Chandrasekhar, popularly known as 'Madapalli' Sekhar, who has been in Ashram for 50 years first as a Patasala student and now in Puja section. —

## 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>>

