

Saranagathi

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ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

October began with Navaratri in full swing and approached its end with Deepavali on the 26th. The rainy season in Tiruvannamalai started with a small cyclone in the Bay of Bengal that began to deliver its payload on the 24th.

This issue of *Saranagathi* carries the story of Sampurnamma, the great devotee who spent many years in Bhagavan's presence cooking in the Ashram kitchen. Also in this issue is the first part of a retrospective on the amazing life of Maurice Frydman.

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam, includes among other things, the Ramanalayam inauguration in Chromepet (Chennai), Visvanathaswami Samadhi Day, the status of the work on the Old Dining Hall and glimpses of the Deepavali celebrations at the Ashram. For further reportage on Deepavali go to: <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/deepavali2011.html>. For details on events and other news, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team



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Reality in Forty Verses

9. 'Twos' and 'threes' depend upon one thing, the ego. If one asks in one's Heart, 'What is this ego?' and finds out, (twos and threes) slip away. Only those who have found this know the truth, and they will never be perplexed.

Ulladu Narpadu by Sri Bhagavan





Women Devotees Series: Sampurnamma (part one)

(Those blessed to serve in the kitchen were not only in a position to profit from Bhagavan's skill in the culinary arts but enjoyed endless opportunities for spiritual growth, not only by virtue of Bhagavan's teaching stories in this intimate setting but also by his transformative presence in the kitchen in the quiet early pre-dawn hours.

Sampurnamma of Vathirairuppu was one such blessed soul who spent two decades with Bhagavan each morning in the kitchen. She had come as a childless widow, having recently lost her husband and still groping to find a way to go on with her life. When she first met Bhagavan in 1932, she found that she had to return to the Ashram. Soon she came to live in the Ashram where by Bhagavan's grace she would transmute her sorrow into the joy of serving her guru and his devotees.

It was Bhagavan who taught her how to cook as well as—she once remarked humourously—“how to BE cooked!” It was her honoured function to personally serve Bhagavan his food and she was often the one to bring

samples of sambar or vegetables to Bhagavan for tasting. She was supremely devoted to her Master all her days. For her Bhagavan was the only deity, “a yuga purusha”.

Though in later years her physical condition years should have warranted she return to her native village and be in the care of family members, she was intent on breathing her last at the feet of Arunachala, which in fact she did, stout-heartedly, in 1993 at the age of 94, at the auspicious moment of evening pradosha puja on Bhagavan's Aradhana Day.

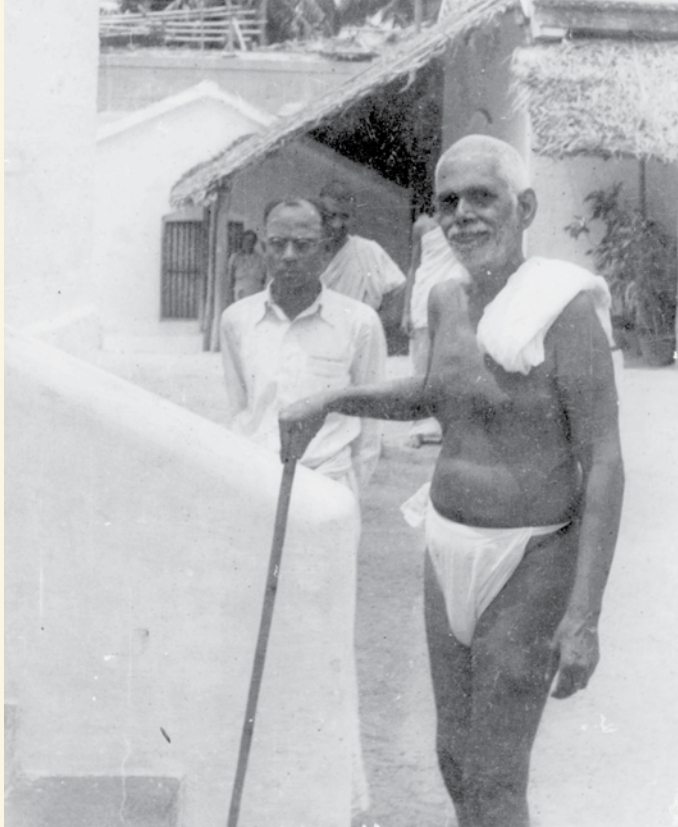
The following story is adapted from Sampurnamma's testimony published in the 1980 souvenir, Ramana Smriti and from a video interview taken a decade later. Both were compiled and reproduced in The Maharshi, Sep/Oct 1992, Vol.2 No.5 and again in Arunachala Ramana, 2008.)

Bhagavan was born in the village next to ours and my people knew him from his earliest childhood. My relatives used to go to Ramanasramam but I was busy with the household and not interested in going with them. When my husband died, I was in despair and thought life was not worth living. Everyone urged me to go to Ramanasramam to get guidance from Bhagavan but I was not in the mood to go anywhere.

In 1932 my sister and her husband, Narayanan, were going to see Bhagavan and I agreed to go with them. We found Bhagavan in the palm leaf hut built over his mother's samadhi. Some devotees and visitors were with him and all were having their morning coffee. Dandapani Swami introduced me to Bhagavan, saying: “This is Dr. Narayanan's wife's sister.” As soon as I was introduced, Bhagavan gave a happy smile and said, “Varatum, varatum. (She is welcome, she is welcome.)”

When I sat for long hours in Bhagavan's presence my mind would just stop thinking and I would not notice the time passing. I was not taught to meditate and surely did not know how to stop the mind from thinking. It would happen quite by itself, by his grace. I would sit, immersed in a strange state in which the mind would not have a single thought and yet would be completely clear. Those were days of deep calm happiness. From that time my devotion to Bhagavan took firm roots and never left me.





I stayed for twenty days that visit. When I was leaving, Bhagavan gave me from his own hands a copy of *Who am I?* When I returned to my village I found myself restless. I had all kinds of dreams. I would dream that a pious lady came to take me to the Ashram, or that Bhagavan was enquiring after me and calling me. I longed to go back.

Soon enough my uncle was leaving for Arunachala and I eagerly accepted his offer to take me with him. On my arrival I was asked to help in the kitchen because the lady in charge of cooking was going away. I gladly agreed, for it gave me a chance to stay at the Ashram and be near Bhagavan.

In the beginning I was not good at cooking. But Bhagavan was always by my side and gave me detailed instructions. His firm principle was that health depended on food and could be set right and kept well by a proper diet. He also believed that fine grinding and careful cooking would make any food easily digestible. So we used to spend hours grinding and stewing

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam

The Ashram Dining Hall and Kitchen

In the early years of Ramana Ashram till the mid-1920s, the Ashram dining hall was nothing more than the shed in front of Mother's shrine where Bhagavan lived. Plans were laid for construction of a kitchen and dining hall but before the new building was completed, it was decided there was a more urgent need: a hall for Bhagavan to receive the growing number of devotees and visitors who came to see him. So the new kitchen, constructed in 1926, complete with smokestack, became Bhagavan's Hall instead (later called, 'the Old Hall'). A thatched shed was then built adjacent to the new building in the area of the present-day Samadhi Hall and served as the dining hall/kitchen for the next twelve years.

As no visitor was allowed to go without food, the kitchen and dining hall grew in size. Eventually a spacious kitchen and dining hall were constructed (1937-38). In 1938 the new granite stone building complex was inaugurated, large enough to accommodate the many who invariably came for Bhagavan's Jayanthi celebrations.

By the mid-1990s, the Dining Hall was no longer able to serve the growing number of visitors on weekends, except by multiple sittings, and so an annex abutting the Old Dining Hall on its northern side was constructed and inaugurated in 1998.

Current work on the Old Dining Hall includes the removal of a later structure added on to the roof which engineers feel threatens the overall structural integrity of the building. This has the added benefit of bringing the building back to its original design. Plans for an eventual full restoration of the entire building are being drafted.





ingredients. Bhagavan would sit in the middle of the kitchen, watching and making suggestions. I would give him food to taste while it was cooking, to be sure that the seasoning was just right and he was always willing to leave the Old Hall to give advice in the kitchen.

Amidst pots and pans he was relaxed and would teach us numberless ways of cooking grains, pulses and vegetables—the staples of our South Indian diet. He would tell us stories from his childhood, or about his mother. He would tell me: “Your cooking reminds me of Mother’s cooking. No wonder, our villages were so near.” I think Bhagavan must have learned cooking from his mother, for if I made some dish very well, he would say, “Ha, you have made it just like mother used to.”

In the kitchen he was the Master Cook, aiming at perfection in taste and appearance. One would therefore think that he liked good food and enjoyed a hearty meal. Not at all. At dinner time he would mix up the little food he would allow to be put on his leaf—the sweet, the sour and the savory, everything together—and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in his mouth. When we would tell him that it was not right to mix such nicely made dishes, he would say: “Enough of multiplicity. Let us have some unity.”



When I think of it now, I can see clearly that he used the work in the kitchen as a background for spiritual training. He taught us to listen to every word of his and to carry it out faithfully. He taught us that work is love for others. By his very presence he taught us that we are always in the presence of God and that all work is His.

(continued in the December issue)

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam (cont.)



On the 18th October, just as the final arati of Sri Chakra Puja (first day of the Tamil month *Aippasi*) was underway, a dinosaur-like creature, never before seen by those who witnessed it, made its appearance in the Ashram garden. The Ashram youngsters were thrilled as were many of the adults as this imposing yet gentle creature made its way around Chinnaswami’s Samadhi and in front of the Nirvana room. Not sighted in the area for more than a decade, the Indian Pangolin or Scaly Anteater (*manis crassicaudata*) is an endangered species and gets its name from its ability to curl up into a ball when attacked. Just a month earlier, an Indian Chameleon (*chamaeleo zeylanicus*) appeared in the Ashram gardens as well. This reptile which once thrived in South India is a rare sight today. It has been speculated that the Ashram’s decision not to use chemical pesticides or chemical fertilisers together with the reforestation efforts on the mountain have allowed these creatures to rebound, and to come for Bhagavan’s darshan!



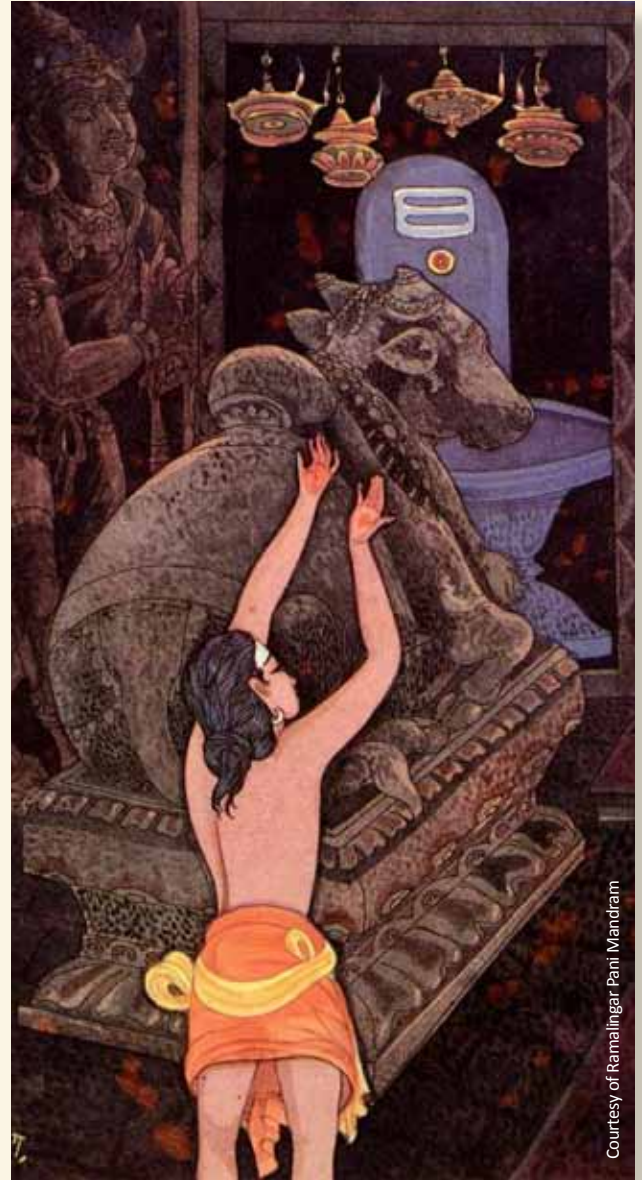


The Naayanmars: Nandanar of Adhanur

The story of Nandanar was known to Bhagavan not only from the *Periapuranam* but by Manik Lal Tandon's 1935 film version of the great saint of Adhanur, which Bhagavan saw in the Ashram in September 1946.

It was said that Nandanar had his mind ever fixed on the Lord. But as a 'low-born', he was unable to enter the temple for darshan and remained outside the temple gates, where he would sing and dance with great devotion. Once Nandanar went to Thiruppungoor in hopes of glimpsing the Lord, only to be disappointed when he found the statue of Nandi obstructing his view. So great was his soul-stirring song of longing that Lord Siva had Nandi step aside so that Nandanar could have darshan. Later, eager for darshan of the dancing Lord at Chidambaram, Nandanar lamented in this vein: "How can I, a low-born, ever dare to enter these sacred precincts?" Circumambulating the walls of the temple night and day, despairing of ever seeing the Lord, Nandanar fell asleep from weariness. In a dream, Nataraja appeared to him and said: "To get rid of this birth, you may enter a flaming fire and emerge hallowed in the company of those wearing the sacred thread".

Meanwhile, the Lord commanded the temple priests to arrange a great fire. The temple priests approached Nandanar and said, "Oh, Master, we have come here into your gracious presence at the Lord's behest to prepare the 'fire-bath' for you". A large fire was lit outside the southern wall of the temple. Nandanar went round it, lifted his hands in adoration, and meditating on the dancing feet of the Lord, plunged into its flames. Straightaway, he relinquished the 'illusory' body and emerged from the flames like a hallowed sage with matted tresses. The temple priests folded their hands in reverence and led the effulgent devotee into the Lord's presence. Once having entered the inner sanctum and beholding Nataraja, Nandanar merged, the account tells us, "into his Divine form to delight forever in the bliss of His Lotus feet". (*Nandanar's Aradhana Day is the 16th October.*)



Courtesy of Ramalingar Pani Mandram

Maharshi's Gospel

Self-Realization

D. How can I attain Self-realization?

M. Realization is nothing to be gained afresh, it is already there. All that is necessary is to get rid of the thought 'I have not realised'.

Stillness or peace is Realization. There is no moment when the Self is not. So long as there is doubt or the feeling of non-realization, the attempt should be made to rid oneself of these thoughts. They are due to the identification of the Self with the not-Self. When the not-Self disappears, the Self alone remains. To make room, it is enough that the cramping be removed; room is not brought in from elsewhere.





Maurice Frydman: A Retrospective (part one)

Most devotees know Maurice Frydman as the editor of *Maharshi's Gospel*, the small collection of conversations held between Bhagavan and visitors during the late 1930s. But not all devotees may be aware of how extraordinary this modest and humble man actually was, nor of his place in Indian history. A polymath, Frydman's interests and talents were so diverse that, even his close acquaintances and colleagues in any given field were often unaware of his achievements in other disciplines.

Born a Polish Jew in Warsaw in 1901, Frydman learned Russian, German, Polish and Hebrew in school until he migrated to Paris to take up study at the Sorbonne, where he learned French and English in order to complete his degree in electrical engineering. After graduation he took up a position as a research engineer in a large Paris manufacturing firm. It was during this period that a fateful encounter took place between Frydman and Sir Mirza Ismail, the Dewan of Mysore. When Frydman began enthusiastically questioning the

Dewan about India, Sir Mirza proposed that Frydman come to live in India to organise and manage the State Government Electrical Factory in Bangalore. Frydman accepted this offer immediately and soon was in India as head the Mysore Electrical Industries, Ltd.

It was during this period of the early thirties that he met Gandhi-ji and began to visit Wardha. Frydman made use of his engineering genius to help the Mahatma create several new types of *charkha* (spinning wheel), in hopes of finding the most efficient and economical spinning wheel for India. It was Gandhi who gave Frydman the name Bharatananda (after Frydman took *sannyas*), the name by which he was known in Gandhian circles.

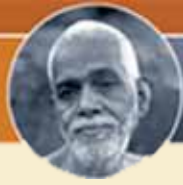
In September 1935, Frydman came to Tiruvannamalai to meet Bhagavan for the first time. Immediately taken with Bhagavan, he became a regular visitor and even took up residence in the Ashram for three years. Many of the questions published in *Maharshi's Gospel* (some of which also appear in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*) were posed by Frydman directly, and Bhagavan seems to have delighted in Frydman's queries born of a penetrating insight into the teaching.

It was also during this period that a number of the younger Ashram inmates such as T. K. Sundaresa Iyer's son, joined Frydman to work in his firm at Bangalore. On Saturdays Frydman would come to the Ashram and go back to Bangalore the following day in his jeep along with the Ashram youngsters who were working with him. When once asked why he spent so much money on weekly (instead of monthly) visits, he replied: "What to do? My battery can only last a week, then it dries up. I have to come to Bhagavan to get it recharged!"

In 1937, after meeting the son of the Maharaja of Aundh, Apa Pant, and bringing him to Bhagavan, Frydman was invited to visit Pant's princely home and meet his father the Maharaja. Once there, in the spirit of the Gandhian revolution underway in India, the three decided that the Maharaja would hand his kingdom over to the people, with Frydman acting as provisional administrator. In 1938 Frydman drafted a declaration which the Maharaja and his son presented to Gandhi in Wardha. Based on this, the Mahatma drew up a new constitution for Aundh, effectively handing over rule of the state to its residents in 1939.

(continued in the December issue)





Reports from Sri Ramanasramam (cont.)

Deepavali Celebrations: 26th October

The term Deepavali comes from *deepa* ('light') and *avali* ('row' or 'string'), hence, 'row of lights'. Also known as *Naraka Chaturdasi Snaanam*, this festival of lights commemorates the slaying of the demon Naraka by Sri Krishna on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the Tamil month of *Aippasi*. When her demon-son lay dying, Naraka's mother prayed, "Let the happiness of



every creature in the world be the compensation for the grief caused me by the death of my son." Meanwhile the dying son made a similar prayer in repentance for his former wickedness. Naraka, meaning 'hell', symbolises our lower self-centred nature which should be sacrificed for the higher good and the welfare of humanity. It is said that anyone who thinks of Krishna on this day will



receive His joy and grace. Traditionally, people take an oil-bath in the early morning hours before dawn and put on new clothes. All over India, Deepavali is celebrated with gifts, fireworks and the lighting of oil lamps, and is also connected with offerings to the Goddess Lakshmi or Bhuvaneshwari as she presides over wealth. And so it is that in many parts of India people commence their financial



year on the first day after Deepavali. Undertakings on this day are said to be sure to succeed. When asked to explain Deepavali's significance, Bhagavan offered the following verse: *To search for and slay the sinner—the naraka ego—which is corrupted by the thought that one is the naraka form—the false body 'tenement'—and to shine as the true Self, this is Deepavali!*





Reports from Sri Ramanasramam (cont.)

Ramanalayam Ramana Centre Inauguration



Land donated by the family of Anandavalliammal has provided for the new Ramana Centre in Chromepet, Chennai, (Rajendra Prasad Salai, Nehru Nagar, 600 044) with a large hall to accommodate nearly a hundred for meditation and prayer, a small library, four rooms for guests in transit to and from Tiruvannamalai and one room for free medical consultation on a voluntary basis. The centre is near to the railway station, bus station and the international airport (five minutes away). The inauguration took place on Saturday, 22nd October, starting at 8.30am with Vedaparayana, followed by the chanting of *Aksharamanamalai*, Ramanastottara puja and lunch.



Viswanathaswami Samadhi Day

When Viswanathaswami's father, Ramaswami, first cousin of Bhagavan, lost his mother in childhood, he came to live with Bhagavan's parents in Tiruchuzhi. Viswanathaswami was born in 1904, the third of five children. During his college years he was a sympathiser of Mahatma Gandhi's freedom movement. He met Bhagavan in January 1921, when, his train was delayed in Villupuram station, he came to Tiruvannamalai. As he stood before Bhagavan at Skandasramam, Bhagavan's presence was so powerful that he not only resolved to stay on the rest of the week but within two years, would come to stay permanently. Viswanathaswami's writings in Tamil, English and Sanskrit include a translation of Mahatma Gandhi's *Arogya Digdarsan* as well as Tamil translations of numerous Ashram books such as *Ashtavakra Gita*, *Talks*, *Upadesa Sara Bhashya*, *Forty Verses in Praise of Bhagavan* and *Sad-Darsana-Bhashya*. He also wrote *Sri Ramana Ashtottara Sata Namavali* in Sanskrit. During his last years, he was called upon to take up the editorship of *The Mountain Path*, a position he held until his death in 1979. His Samadhi Day was observed at the Ashram on Saturday 22 October.

