

Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The last week of May saw some respite from the grueling summer heat with a series of brief rains as *agni nakshatra* came to an end on the 28th. After Chitra Poornima (26th April) with some 15 lakhs of visitors, warm May weather kept visitors to a minimum, lending a quiet contemplative atmosphere to the Ashram.

The *Saranagati Song* of Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer is among devotees' all-time favourite songs of devotion to Bhagavan. This issue of *Saranagati* looks at saranagati as Bhagavan discussed it and as it was experienced and sung by this early devotee. *In Profile* this month features G.G. Welling who photographed Bhagavan in 1946 and Venuammal who spent long years in Bhagavan's presence on the Hill. *Sri Ramanasramam Heritage Sites* recounts the history of the Veda Patasala.

For further news and 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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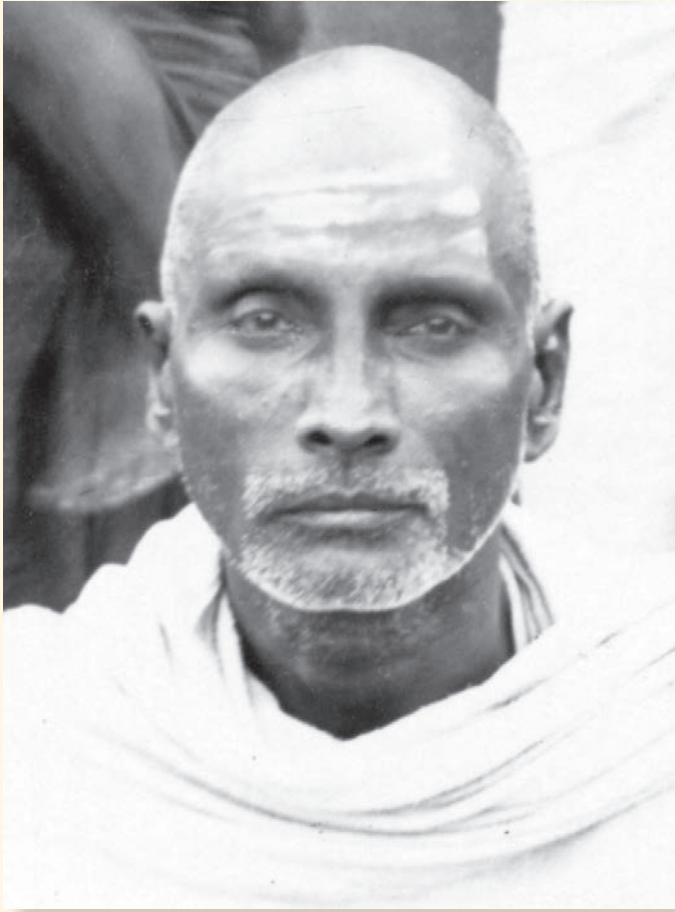
Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Surrender

Mr. Raghaviah: Men of the world that we are, we have some kind of grief or another and do not know how to get over it. We pray to God and still are not satisfied. What can we do?

M.: If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you. Things may turn out differently from what they look apparently. Distress often leads men to faith in God. With the devotee's surrender, God shows His mercy by manifesting as the Guru. The Guru, otherwise God, guides the devotee, saying that God is in you and He is the Self. This leads to introversion of the mind and finally to realisation.

— Talks §43, §78





The Making of the Saranagati Song: The Life of Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer

Native to Manavasi Village of Trichy Dist, in 1907 Saranagati Ramaswami Iyer was transferred to Villupuram just 60 kms from Tiruvannamalai. Now that he was near Bhagavan, he set off for Tiruvannamalai one day during the Kartigai Deepam Festival with a view to meet Bhagavan for the first time.

Having for a long time suffered sleepless nights caused by chronic dyspepsia and unable to digest normal food, Ramaswami Iyer's life had been 'hell on earth with no peace of mind'. So when at last he found Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave, the poor man cried out in desperation: "I am suffering from a number of ills and diseases. Pray, have mercy on me!" Bhagavan simply said, "I am neither a doctor nor a magician. What can I do?" Then waving

his hand in a casual manner, Bhagavan said, "Go home with the courage that nothing will affect you".

Ramaswami Iyer saw in this gesture a ray of hope and took Bhagavan's words to heart. Deeply impressed by Arunachala, he made up his mind to shift to Tiruvannamalai. For the time being, however, he would have to make short journeys from Villupuram to Tiruvannamalai by train.

Beggar at Station

One day as he approached Tiruvannamalai Station, he decided to seek out Seshadri Swami whom he had only heard about. As he got down from the train, a feisty, brawny beggar approached him for a coin but the visitor angrily refused him saying that he could not encourage lazy, able-bodied men who were perfectly capable of work to take up a life of begging. He then set about the town searching for Seshadri Swami. When somebody pointed him out, Ramaswami Iyer was bewildered and dismayed to see that Seshadri Swami was none other than the very beggar on whom he had hurled abuses just an hour earlier. Demurely, he approached the Swami with apologies but could immediately see the Swami was not bothered by such things. After settling down in Tiruvannamalai, Seshadri showed Ramaswami Iyer great kindness and regularly took him to visit Bhagavan.

Hope in Bhagavan

Once settled in Tiruvannamalai, Ramaswami Iyer visited Bhagavan as often as possible. His physical ailments continued unabated and Bhagavan, it seemed, was his only hope of deliverance.

One day Ramaswami Iyer found Bhagavan sitting alone in front of Virupaksha Cave: "Swami! Jesus and other great souls have come down to earth to save sinners. Have I any hope?" When Bhagavan heard this cry of distress coming forth from the depths of the heart, it appeared as though he too was shaken. Bhagavan moved close to the man and said tenderly, "There is hope. Yes. There is hope."

First Song

After this incident, though still in despair, Ramaswami Iyer found himself composing a song, the first in his life. It came of its own. Never having been a poet, when





he sang the song to Bhagavan, Bhagavan gave him tips in prosody. And thus began Ramaswami's song-writing which would last up till Bhagavan's Mahanirvana.

In the Dewy Grass

One festival day Echammal brought tiffin up to Virupaksha. Ramaswami Iyer sat dejectedly as Bhagavan and the others made ready to eat the special food befitting a feast day. He excused himself saying that the rich food would not suit his weak stomach. But when he turned in Bhagavan's direction, the latter beckoned him to join them and Ramaswami Iyer felt an irresistible pull. When he was served like the others, Bhagavan ordered him, saying "Eat!" At that moment Ramaswami Iyer lost all fear and ate his fill. He did not neglect any of the dishes, even the richest. For one who theretofore would have had no hope of sleeping after violating his strict dietary regimen, it was nothing short of a miracle when he discovered that he slept soundly that whole night at Virupaksha Cave. When he awoke at day-break, he felt 'fresh like a flower in the dewy grass'. It was then that he knew, beyond any doubt, that his disease had left him once for all.

Promotions from Bhagavan

Meanwhile Ramaswami Iyer's supervisor at work continually ridiculed him about his monthly salary of Rs. 150 per month. "Why so much?" the superior would probe tauntingly. When Bhagavan heard about it, he said, "How would he feel if you got Rs. 200?" The

next Government gazette brought news of Ramaswami Iyer's promotion and salary increase to Rs. 200.

Departing from Bhagavan

Later when Ramaswami Iyer was transferred to Shiyali, he left Tiruvannamalai weeping at the thought of being separated from Bhagavan. The distance was intolerable and Ramaswami Iyer made up his mind to leave his family and take sannyasa in order to be with Bhagavan. But Bhagavan would hear nothing of it.

Dowries and Such

Ramaswami Iyer continued his trips to Tiruvannamalai to see Bhagavan. Once at Skandasramam with his eldest daughter, Bhagavan asked why he had not yet gotten her married. "I would like to but I don't have the money for a dowry, nor even enough for the marriage ceremony. Echammal happened to be there and hearing the discussion, suggested one Nilakantha, a school teacher known to her. Bhagavan endorsed the idea. When Ramaswami Iyer went down the hill to catch the evening train, he passed Echammal's house en route and found Nilakantha's father there. Even before Ramaswami Iyer could make his proposal, the boy's father volunteered to take the girl as his daughter-in-law.

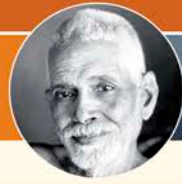
Once back in Shiyali, as Ramaswami Iyer worried about how to raise money for the ceremony, a neighbour just opposite him came over. "I hear your daughter's marriage is to take place. But where will you find the money?" When Ramaswami Iyer could give no

Wordwise: Saranagati शरणागति

Saranagati: complete self-surrender; *sarana*: 'house', 'protection', 'refuge', 'means to a goal'; + *agati*: 'to approach', 'to reach': hence 'approaching the Lord who is the sole means or refuge'. (Also *prapatti* or 'complete, absolute surrender').

Bhagavan says, "As we are not able to help ourselves, so we have to surrender ourselves to the Supreme completely. Then He will take care of us as well as the world. Learn what surrender is. It is to merge in the source of the ego. The ego is surrendered to the Self. Everything is dear to us because of love of the Self. The Self is that to which we surrender our ego. The ego is already the Self's. We have no rights over the ego, even as it is. However, supposing we had, we must surrender them". (*Talks* §204)





satisfactory answer, the neighbour admonished him, “Could you not have asked me? Would I not have given it cheerfully?” He then gave Ramaswami Iyer a thousand rupees and the marriage was duly performed.

Messengers from Bhagavan

One day years later after Ramaswami Iyer had been transferred to Berhampore, Orissa, several boils appeared on his leg. Besieged with pain, he could hardly walk but only meditated on Arunachala. No treatment whatsoever proved of any use. But then came a knock at the door. “Who’s there?” he asked. “Arunachalam!” was the reply. With great surprise, Ramaswami Iyer found two Brahmins standing at the door. Forthwith he fell at their feet. “We are coming from Arunachala on pilgrimage to Kasi.

Bhagavan asked us to get down here and meet you.”

When the two ‘messengers of Bhagavan’ saw his state, they rifled through their bags and took out herbs of tamarind and fragrant gum powders. Once applied to the affected areas, within twenty hours the boils were gone. It was then that Ramaswami Iyer understood the fullness of Bhagavan’s grace; it was then that he found words and notes pouring forth from within him, forming themselves into a hymn of devotion that would later be sung by devotees everywhere; it was then that he understood true surrender to Bhagavan, and so he sang “Saranagati, Saranagati!”*

* Freely adapted from the Ashram literature. See “Bhagavan on the Hill: Experiences of Sri Ramaswami Iyer”, *The Call Divine*, vol. 14, 1st July, 1966, pp. 595-601.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Ashram Vedic Student First at Kanchipuram



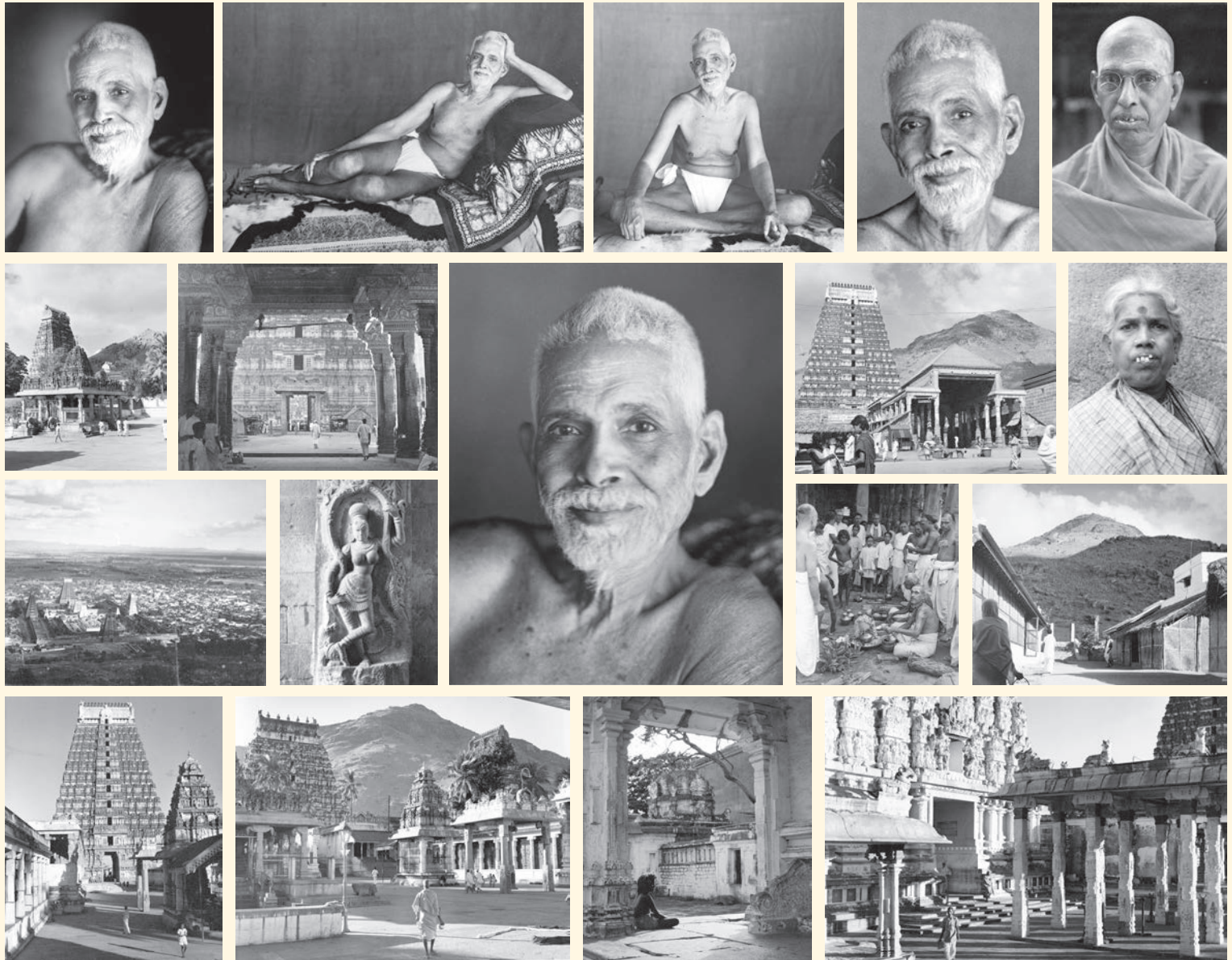
During the annual examinations on 26th April at the Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam in Kanchipuram, twenty-one year old Shadaksharan Sharma (affectionately known in the Ashram as ‘Sabari’), placed first among 70 examinees. Of the 20 students that went up for examinations in ghanamparayana (*‘ghanapariksha’*), Sabari scored highest at an outstanding 98.5%.

Ghanam is the most advanced of the Vedic chanting modes and proficiency in its knotty sequences is deemed a rare attainment among Vedic scholars. After learning *padam* and *moolam*, a Vedic student takes up the more advanced *kramam*, which only the best students learn. Among *kramapats*, a few will go on to study *jattai* and *ghanam* which are mastered by very few indeed. In *ghanam* three words are joined together and each word is repeated thirteen times. Having crossed each of these hurdles, Sabari, the youngest brother of Ashram Vedapatsala teacher Sri Sentilnatha Ganapatigal, proves yet another of the many remarkable successes at the Ashram Veda Patasala.

Announcement: Ramanasramam Kumbhabhishekam Scheduled for 25th August

Over the course of the next 8 weeks, repairs will be made to the gopuram and vimanam above the Matrubhuteswara and vimanam above Sri Bhagavan’s Samadhi in keeping with agamic requirements. The work headed up by Selvanatha Stapathi, grandson of Vaidyanatha Stapathi, (the chief architect of the Mother’s Shrine constructed from 1939-1949), will begin with the Balalayam of the Mother’s Shrine in early June, followed by that of Bhagavan’s shrine. Kumbhabhishekam will be conducted by Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal commencing on the evening of the 23rd of August, 2013 with two days of yagasala pujas, and culminating in final rites on the morning of the 25th of August.





In Profile: Mr. G.G. Welling



Mr. G.G. Welling

The Welling Busts are the most revered of all photographic images of Sri Bhagavan. Amazingly the author of these photos, G.G. Welling, came only one time to Tiruvannamalai (in 1946) for a duration of three days. When he was readying to take Bhagavan's photo, Bhagavan asked if there was sufficient light: "Bhagavan, you are the light!", Mr. Welling said. Later, the photographer presented Bhagavan with a photo album containing the portraits of Bhagavan, Chinna-swami and their sister, Alamelu, as well as the images of the Big Temple and the Hill.

Descended from a line of photographers going back to the 1850s when his grandfather, Srinivas Mahadeo Welling, took up professional photography, G.G. Welling made great use of the experience inherited from his ancestors, winning awards as a portraitist (which would come as no surprise to devotees of Bhagavan). His photos regularly featured in *The Royal Photographic Society Journal* and by 1945, when he founded the Mysore Photographic Society, he was well-established as a photographer. When his family was asked what model camera he used for the Welling Busts, it was learned that the apparatus was his own creation, a 'box camera', made by Mr. Welling himself.





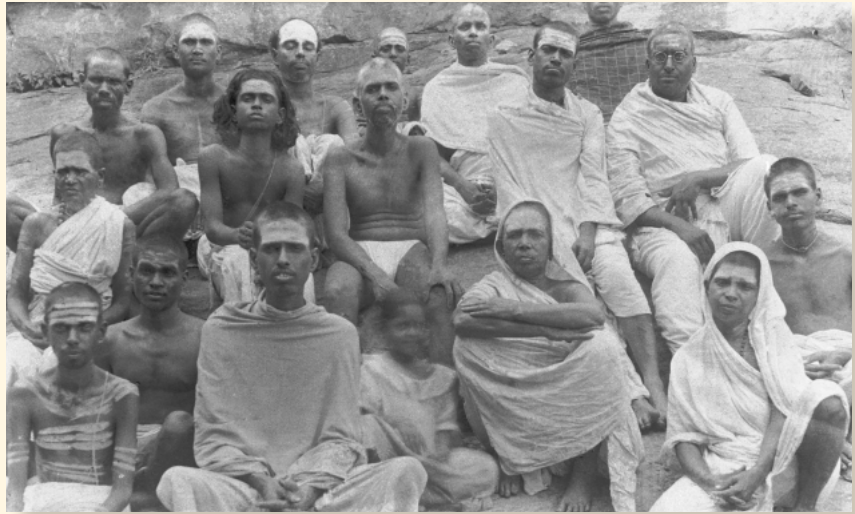
Major Chadwick and the Veda Patasala students ca. 1953

Sri Ramanasramam Heritage Sites: The Ashram Veda Patasala (1934)

The Ashram Vedic School was established in 1934 for the regular instruction in the Krishna Yajur Veda with students performing daily recitation of the Vedas in the hall. Prior to this, pundits from town had come each day for morning and evening recitations and would chant before Bhagavan who, it is said, would sit bolt upright each time they began. Among the group from the school in town was a senior student, Sri Krishna Ghanapatigal, who was selected in the presence of Sri Bhagavan as the first Ashram Veda Patasala teacher, and who in time proved instrumental for the steady growth of the newly formed Ashram school. After Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, the school closed temporarily for lack of funds and it seemed that the chanting of the Vedas, which had become such a regular part of Ashram life, might come to an end simply because there was no one to carry it on. In 1953 the Ashram Managing Committee authorized Major Chadwick to solicit funds to revive the school and to initiate the Sri Chakra puja in the Mother's Shrine. Under Chadwick's stewardship, funds were raised and, five days after the Sri Chakra puja was inaugurated in March, 1953, the Ashram school was reopened.

In the 1970s the school again suffered from lack of funds and students, and appeals were made for support. Finally thanks to Sri Vaidyanatha Ganapatigal of Mysore, the school was revitalised. In 1980, after 40 years of service, Sri Krishna Ganapatigal retired and was succeeded by Sri T.S. Ramaswamy Ghanapatigal. Today, under the guidance of Sri Sentilnatha Ghanapatigal, the school enjoys a vitality, enthusiasm and regular influx of students unknown since the Patasala's inception nearly 80 years ago.





Venuammal with Bhagavan at Skandasramam around 1920

In Profile: Venuammal and Bhagavan's Hand-Painted Sri Chakra



For decades Bhagavan's Sri Chakra has been the centre of family worship among Venuammal's descendants.

Venuammal, Echammal's younger sister, was a committed devotee and did service in the days at Virupaksha. She came to Bhagavan at an early age, having been widowed shortly after becoming a mother. Raising her daughter on her own, she found time to assist Bhagavan's mother in the kitchen at Skandasramam and cared for her in the final hours of her life in May 1922. When Venuammal's daughter died, she took refuge in Bhagavan. She was once again saddled with the responsibility of raising a child on her own, this time her two-and-half year old granddaughter, Rajalakshmi. One day Bhagavan painted a Sri Chakra and gave it to her.

In 1950 when Venuammal took leave of Bhagavan to go on pilgrimage to Kasi, Bhagavan asked her to bathe in the Ganges on his behalf. In Kasi she had a dip one night in the river while meditating on the name 'Ramana'. At that very moment, she saw a huge shooting star trailing the sky. The next morning she learnt that Bhagavan had shed his body.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: The Ashram Well and Summer Drought

In mid-May the Ashram Well suffered a minor mishap with the loss of a number of its marine inhabitants. Hot summer conditions, low water levels, overfeeding and accumulated bottom sediment were factors that may have caused an increase in algae and bacteria content, thus depleting oxygen levels and spelling doom for some 300 members of the well's fish population. Fortunately four fish survived and were safely evacuated to the large well in front of the Ashram office. Once having drained the well, work crews set themselves to dredging silt and floor residues. Finally, in the absence of water and needed equipment, the Tiruvannamalai Fire Department offered assistance and brought in fire hoses to help in washing. Meanwhile, awaiting a good rain, efforts are being made to determine measures to protect the fish population in the future.





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's 63rd Aradhana

Sri Bhagavan's 63rd Aradhana began in the early morning hours of 7th May. *Agni nakshatra* in full swing, Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall was decorated with natural vetiver (*khus*) fibers which gave a cool soothing fragrance for what might have otherwise seemed like a very warm summer day. Devotees filled the Hall at 5.30 am for Tamil Parayana as purohiths gathered in the Mother's Shrine for Mahanyasa mantra. Abhishekam followed at 8.30am and final arati at 10.30am when the Hall brimmed with fervour. Some 2,000 guests joined for Bhagavan's prasadam served in repeated batches in the pandal and dining hall while poor feeding took place in the Korangu compound. That evening the New Granathalaya auditorium hosted Ramana music by Dr. Ambika Kameshwar. On the following day, 8th May, RMCL hosted the annual *Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam*, with selected verses of Siva Prakasham Pillai set to the ghana ragas of Thyagaraja and arranged by Smt. Sulochana Natarajan.

