

# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

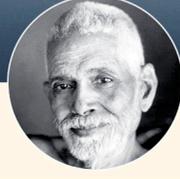
APRIL 2019  
VOL. 13, NO.4



D. Thiyagarajan



## Saranagati



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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

Devotees celebrated Mahasivaratri throughout the night of the 4th March. From 14-16th March, were three days of Maha Rudram, culminating with homa in the New Hall followed by *kalasabbishekam*.

In this April issue, we take up the last segment of Janaki Matha's life story. We also look at the life of the son of one of Janaki Matha's devotees who became a devout follower of Bhagavan and passed away at the age of ninety-six in December 2018.

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

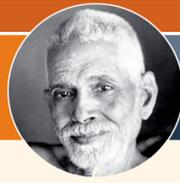
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

6th April (Sat) Telugu New Year  
12th April (Fri) Punarvasu  
13th April (Sat) Sri Rama Navami  
14th April (Sun) Tamil New Year/Nirvana Room  
18th April (Thurs) Full Moon  
2nd May (Thurs) Sri Bhagavan's 69th Aradhana

10th May (Fri) Punarvasu  
18th May (Sat) Full Moon  
28th May (Tues) Maha Puja  
6th June (Thurs) Punarvasu  
16th June (Sun) Full Moon  
3rd July (Weds) Punarvasu





## At the Feet of Sri Bhagavan The Life of Janaki Matha (pt. IV)

If Janaki Matha's spiritual condition was delicate in late 1937, it was also full of promise, and she sometimes fell into samadhi for hours at a stretch in Bhagavan's presence. When she interacted with him, she expressed the desire to come free of worldly duties in order to devote herself to religious life.

Once on a visit to Bhagavan in December 1937, she spoke of her husband's virtuous qualities and expressed gratitude for how he had helped her in fulfilling her spiritual aspirations. Not wanting to lead a family life forever, she promised Bhagavan that she would keep her family obligations for five more years until the marriage of her daughter, Sarada. Bhagavan told her: "It is rare to find one whose heart is so pure as that of Doctor. Don't forsake him."

Not long after returning home on 10th December 1937, Matha went to Coimbatore to pick up her daughter Padmavathy and on the way back stopped

at Kumbakonam at the request of Ponnammal's mother-in-law. During her stay, she had a number of deep spiritual experiences which peaked that night while everyone was asleep.

Janaki Matha felt a tremendous change come over her with a 'powerful explosion in the back of the head'. Startled, she jumped out of bed. The energy coursing through her body felt as though it were trying to break through the top of her skull. Convinced that the body could not bear the strain, she climbed the stairs to the roof-top terrace, not wanting to cause her host inconvenience by ending her life in the guest room. In the course of the night, she prayed in earnest to Bhagavan Ramana as mysterious scenes of figures of gods flashed before her mind's eye. She found that she could neither lie down nor sit up but reclined against a pile of cushions.

The next day, she was taken home to Cuddalore and remained bedridden, fraught with an endless display of inner visions. Her bowels regularly purged themselves and it seemed they were ridding her of the defilements of former births. But unable to eat normally—she could only take an ounce or two of liquid food per day—her body began to become depleted.

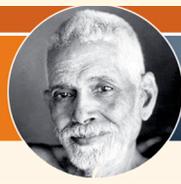
The condition continued for the following three weeks. She recalled something she had heard that Sri Ramakrishna had said, that if such a state continued for more than four weeks, the body would perish. She begged her husband to take her to Bhagavan but he was reluctant owing to her severe weakness. However, since her condition was beyond any treatment protocol he knew of from his own training, he allowed himself to be persuaded, believing that only the greatest of all physicians, Sri Bhagavan, could offer relief.

Even before Matha could inform Bhagavan of the events of recent days, Bhagavan looked upon her and said: "Look here, don't be frightened. One day while I was lying in bed I felt as if I was bombed from inside at the back of my head."

By his mere presence, Bhagavan seemed to transmit a current of divine strength to her and the next day, her condition greatly improved, she was able to return to Cuddalore.

Once back home, however, the energy in her body





resumed its efforts to break through the top of the skull. She addressed it as if it were a spirit or devil: “What are you trying to do? I and Bhagavan Sri Ramana are inseparable. Against the downpour of the guru’s grace, you can do me no harm.”

At this, the upheaval within began to moderate.

### Matha’s Decision to Renounce Worldly Life

By mid-January Sri Matha was back at Ramanasramam. Dr. Ganapati could only join her when he got free from his duties three days later. By the time he reached the Ashram on the evening of the 18th, he found Janaki Matha completely changed. She was utterly detached, ‘free like a bird that had escaped its cage’. When his wife expressed in so many words her unwillingness to be entangled any longer in worldly life, Dr. Ganapati spent a sleepless night at the Ashram.

He suffered the loss of his first wife and now his second wife seemed lost to him as well. He quietly complained: “Have I not given her all my love and affection? Have I not sacrificed my personal desires for her? Have I not given her all the comforts of a happy life?”

Matha told her husband that an inner voice had commanded her to become a *sanyasini* and that she would remain in the Ashram for the rest of her days. The tears of the children seemed to have no effect on her. Doctor wrote a letter of lament to relatives apprising them of the situation and made up his mind to take the kids and return home, leaving Sri Matha in the care of an aunt.

But the following morning while sitting before Bhagavan, Matha remembered the promise she had made to Bhagavan only a month earlier. She, therefore, made up her mind to go back home with the family.

Bhagavan gazed at her and said: “Did I ask you to take *sannyas*? Look at me: I have not taken *sannyas* and do not wear the ochre robe. You have only one family, but I have to shoulder the burden of all these devotees, and their families to boot.”

It dawned on her that renunciation must be in the heart and that inner purity is greater than any outward renunciation. She enquired of Bhagavan why she should have all these experiences and yet not be free from the *samsaric* round. Bhagavan disabused her of such a notion: “Can one get this for the mere asking of it? It seeks after the heart where it wants to shine.

This is a sequel to your last birth’s attainment.”

The Doctor had made up his mind to leave his wife in Bhagavan’s care for a month in order to give her time to return to her normal state. But he and the children were ecstatic when Sri Matha said she would accompany them. The Doctor was thrilled and at the same time worried about taking her away from Bhagavan when she was in such a delicate state. But Bhagavan called him near and gave him the necessary assurances:

“Doctor, take hold of her hand and go slowly. Her lungs and heart are weak. You doctors say that the heart is on the left side of the chest. But for *jnanis*, the whole body is the heart. They have their hearts both within and without.”

Bhagavan then gave an affectionate glance to Matha as they parted, assuring her, “I am always with you.”

### Drawing Devotees

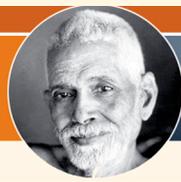
In the months that followed, Matha’s conditioned normalised. But the radiance of her form was unmistakably magnetic, and the world pressed near her. Everyone wanted a little of her and she was called on to serve in various capacities, even taking public office. She was elected President of the Child Welfare Centre and Vice President of the Ladies’ Club.

Following Bhagavan’s advice, she performed all her daily duties for God’s sake alone. Seekers gathered around her, eager for spiritual assistance. She wrote to Bhagavan concerning her ignorance of mantras and such. Bhagavan replied: “When you are the source from where all mantras have sprung up, where is the need for mantras?”

She went to Sri Ramanasramam, taking some of her followers with her. As she entered the Ashram, she saw Bhagavan coming from his walk. On seeing her, Bhagavan said: “Here she is! Just now I was talking about you.”

Matha asked Bhagavan, “All these people seek me as their Guru. But I cannot be indifferent to pleasure and pain, distress and delight like Bhagavan. I can rest contented only if those around me are happy and well. I shudder to think of their sufferings, as my heart starts sweltering under their heat. Moreover, I have never wished to be a guru. I request Bhagavan, in all humility, to kindly accept these devotees as Bhagavan’s disciples.”





Bhagavan said in reply, “When you are above likes and dislikes, desires and aversions, let things take their own shape. To the extent they believe in you, they will reap. I will protect those who, with full faith, trust in you.”

Thus unable to shirk her responsibility as a teacher and guide, she returned home.

### Offerings to Bhagavan

Janaki regularly sent gifts to the Ashram and one time sent through her disciple Natarajan (later known as Sadhu Om) a special cane with a silver handle and a pair of wooden sandals with silver fittings. Bhagavan received them and blessed them. “We have feet given to us by God and will not be able to make use of these ornaments. Give them back and let Janaki Matha keep them in her puja room. Tell her, ‘Swami has touched them and that is enough.’” Janaki Matha worshipped the articles in her daily puja.

### Building the Nirvana Room

Matha found herself in the role of mediator between Sri Bhagavan and those gathered around her in Tanjavore. To the householders in her midst, she said: “Lead righteous lives and discharge your duties to family; conduct family worship; practise charity; have an abundant life and learn to gradually still the waves of passion.” Just as Sri Bhagavan had counselled her, so she counselled others.

When she came to Tiruvannamalai, she brought family members, friends and those who called themselves her devotees. As many were women, she pleaded for a bathroom facility for women in the Ashram. She thus arranged a changing room

for ladies near the Mother’s Shrine that also served as a linen storage room with the restroom for ladies alongside it, and paid for it herself.

### Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana

One day in 1949, Matha started quivering violently and as a result, fell down in her bathroom. Later that day, a letter arrived informing her that the tumour on Bhagavan’s left arm had been diagnosed as sarcoma and that the treatment had not brought the desirable results. Janaki Matha rushed to Tiruvannamali and stayed there for ten days. During this time, she noticed that the ladies’ bathroom had been reconstructed and had been converted into a living space.

In February 1950, when she got the news of Bhagavan’s declining condition, she rushed again to Tiruvannamalai, this time accompanied by ten or twelve followers. Since ladies were not allowed to stay in the Ashram proper, she rented a house nearby where they could all stay.

Janaki Matha provided food for devotees who were now starting to appear in great numbers, concerned as they were for Bhagavan’s health, but who were inadvertently straining the Ashram’s limited dining room facility. Doctor remained at home, but paid regular visits. Since Navaratri of 1949, Bhagavan had been living in what is now known as the Nirvana Room.

Matha maintained a regular presence in the Ashram and as devotees waited in the queue to have a final darshan, she led them in *Aksharamanamalai*.

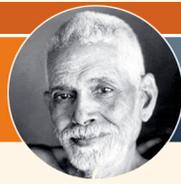
When the dreaded day came to pass, Janaki Matha stopped taking food altogether. It was as though she

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mrs. President’s 80th Birthday Celebration



Mrs. President, Sushila Ramanan, celebrated her 80th birthday on Wednesday, 27 March in the President’s office. Her son, Anand and daughter-in-law, Nitya and granddaughter, Akshara visiting from the US sang in jubilation as friends and well-wishers looked on. —





had decided that if Bhagavan could not eat, she likewise could not eat. Family and friends feared that she might not eat again, so distraught she was following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana. It was only after persistent persuasion by family and friends that she discontinued her fast.

### Doctor Ganapati's Earthly Departure

By the mid-1950s, Doctor Ganapati's health began to fail and Janaki Matha suffered poor digestion, eating only gruel. When Dr. Ganapati became bedridden, he communicated to her his last wish: "There is only one thing I wish for, to have another reincarnation and for you to accompany me there."

Sri Matha made it clear to him that there was nothing more impossible for her to agree to. Having been freed from the clutches of samsara, how could she think of another birth? The Doctor accepted this and said that only her way seemed straight and clear and that he dared not take another birth: "Bless me so that I may also attain liberation. I have studied you for the last thirty-six years of my life. Your compassion is unparalleled. When this body perishes, let my soul abide in you. I want to breathe my last in your arms."

Two days later, when she bent down to adjust his head, she noticed a change of colour in his face and made him lie with his head on her lap. Immediately, Doctor opened his eyes and smiled with satisfaction. A glint came into his eyes and with a face wreathed in smiles, his breath peacefully ceased.

### Janaki Matha's Sannyasin Life

Following her husband's funeral, Janaki Matha felt she had fulfilled the promise she made to Bhagavan. She took her husband's ashes to Kashi and made the decision to live a

life of renunciation in solitude on the banks of the Ganga. But when followers started to appear there, it became clear that family and friends would be coming in great numbers and she thus understood she could not escape her duties to the Tanjavore Ashram and so returned.

### Consecrating Bhagavan's Samadhi

In 1967 when Bhagavan's Samadhi shrine was being consecrated, the Ramanasramam Board of Trustees requested Janaki Matha to consecrate the Lingam. As she touched the Lingam, she became ecstatic and called out aloud, *Jai Ramanesa! Ramana Guru! Guru Ramana! Ramana appa! Ramana deva!* The gathering of several hundred devotees too became ecstatic.

Janaki Matha's earthly departure took place less than two years later in April 1969 on a Sunday morning. At 6.43 am, as she sat facing southward in the meditation posture just like saints are wont to do, she left this world. She had instructed family members to burn her body since she was a householder but gave them permission to build a samadhi over the ashes of her earthly form.

A shrine was constructed over her samadhi with the blessings of Sringeri Sankaracharya and, Kumbhabhishekam was performed in 1972.

Additional Kumbhabhishekams took place in 1987, 1999 and 2012. In 2006, the centenary of Janaki Matha's birth was celebrated. As per her instructions, Sri Bhagavan Ramana Jayanti and Aradhana are still regularly celebrated at her Tanjavore Ashram. \* —

(Concluded)

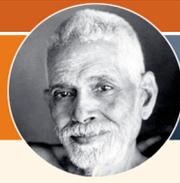
\* This article is freely adapted from *The Mountain Path*, Jan 1966, pp. 105-9; and the *Biography of Guru Devi Sri Janakya Matha*, written by her son, Dr. G. Swaminathan.

## Events at Tiruvannamalai: Nallavan Paalayam Ashram Farm



Thanks to water management, the Ashram farm at Nallavan Paalayam (4.5 kms from the Ashram) continues to thrive in spite of the failed monsoon. On the 6-acre organic farm are grown fruit trees like mango, sapota, acid limes and coconut palm as well as seasonal yams, sweet potato, peanuts, squash, snake gourd (pictured left) and importantly, special Cattle Feed grass for Ashram cows. Recently, active beekeeping boxes were installed at two locations. —





## Sri Vidya Havan

In the Sri Vidya tradition, Goddess Lalita Tripurasundari is supreme, the physical universe being her manifestation. She is worshipped through the two-dimensional Sri Chakra yantra and through the three-dimensional Meru Chakra.

Each year, the Sri Chakra and the Meru Chakra are rededicated in yagna called Sri Vidya Havan.

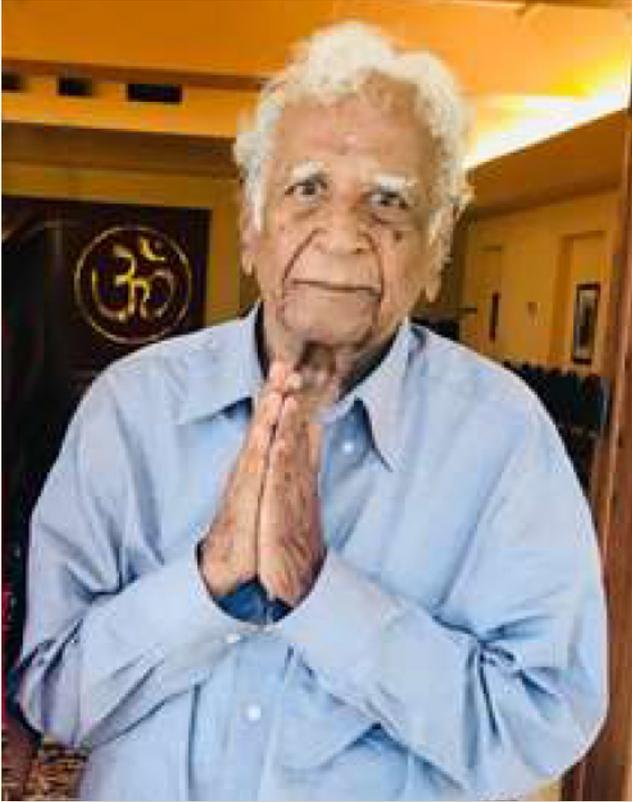
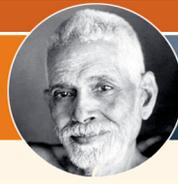
This year's Sri Vidya Homa took place on Friday, the 22nd March beginning with Kalasasthapanam and procession of the flame from Bhagavan's Shrine at 7 am. A *kalasa* is a vessel made out of copper, and *sthapanam* means 'installation', hence, *installing the vessels at*

*the place of the havan*, which, according to tradition, is in the north-east in a manner that those performing the rites have no view of the southern direction.

Navavarana Puja (Navavarana=nine enclosures) took place from 8-11 am followed by *Lalita Sabhasranamam*, *Trisathi* and other recitations, ending with *poornabuti* and *arati* at 2.30 pm. The procession into the Mother's Shrine with the consecrated kalasa was followed by *abbishekam*, *alankaram* and *deepaaradhana* at 3 pm.

Sri Chakra puja was performed in the Mother's Shrine the following morning. —





## Coming to Bhagavan: Comal Venkata Subramaniam (1922-2018)

At the age of eighteen while studying aircraft engineering, Comal Subramaniam came to see Bhagavan along with his mother. Just a week before, he had informed her of his intention to join the army as an aviation engineer during the Second World War. But she feared for his life and would only permit his joining if Bhagavan gave his permission.

His mother, Srimati Rajammal Venkataraman, had long been an ardent devotee of Bhagavan and had come to Bhagavan through Janaki Matha. When Comal got a week-long leave, they made the trip to Ramanasramam in what would be his first darshan. He recalls:

*We reached Tiruvannamalai at dawn on January 14th, 1940, Makara Sankranti, and took a bullock cart ride to the Ashram. During this ride, my mother was utterly absorbed in thoughts of Bhagavan and she consistently chanted his name while I was repeating "Om Namo Bhagavathe Sri Ramanaya."*

They found Bhagavan sitting in the hall with about ten devotees, including Devaraja Mudaliar and Muruganar, names not yet known to Comal then:

*The instant I saw him, all thoughts vanished from my mind and I was sucked into his ocean of grace. We stood and offered our pranams.*

The two sat before Bhagavan to meditate but found they could not close their eyes owing to the captivating pull of Bhagavan's physical form. Whenever Bhagavan glanced at them, Comal felt a ray of light from Bhagavan's eyes passing through him. For the first few hours, Comal was disoriented by the influence of Bhagavan's presence and it was as though he did not know where he was. Each time a question quietly presented itself within him, that very moment it would be answered by responses to other devotees. He felt as if he had become lost in Bhagavan's abiding presence and only when the bell rang for lunch did he know that so much time had passed.

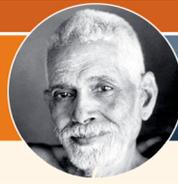
Bhagavan instructed everyone to proceed to the dining hall and Comal was blessed to be seated near Bhagavan. Observing Bhagavan mixing together all the food items served on his leaf, Comal thought to himself, "Everyone is equal under this roof."

On the second day, Comal's mother came forward with the intention of posing her question. But before she said anything, Bhagavan who was reading the newspaper, looked up and said, "You look weary. Don't think now. Go and take rest." They promptly obeyed his words. On the third day, when they came forward a second time, Bhagavan said: *poi giripradakshinam pannittu vaangolen* ("Why don't you go for pradakshina of the Hill?"). They immediately left on *girivalam*. On the fourth and final day, they approached him to take leave:

*When we went and stood before Bhagavan, he enquired of us with great affection. We sought his blessings before leaving and added a note about my participation in the war. Bhagavan, gave an effervescent smile, and said besha pannungo ("Of course, certainly do!"), an unreserved go-ahead. Bhagavan's smile continued to transmit grace on us. I felt as if I was having the darshan of the Sun-God, Lord Surya, Himself.*

Serving in the army, one night, Comal was put on guard duty in the jungles of the Rawalpindi area near what is now Islamabad, armed with a rifle. The ordeal of a lonely cool night became scarier when he heard the howling of jackals. The young Comal contrasted this experience with that of Bhagavan's darshan:





*I recalled sitting before Bhagavan, accumulating his grace, visualizing his smile. I imagined asking him, “When will you take me out of this place? When will you grant me your darshan again? I am so fortunate to have been in your presence but why do I have to suffer in this wild jungle?”” Saying this I glanced at the full moon. In the moon, smiling down on me Bhagavan gave me his darshan, re-energizing and sustaining me. From that moment, whenever I saw the moon on the full moon day, I remember Bhagavan’s face and tell my friends that I see Bhagavan smiling in the full moon.*

Further assurances of Bhagavan’s grace became apparent in 1942, when nearly the whole city of Madras was evacuated and Comal was posted to serve with the British in the areas of Lahore, Ambala, and Karachi. Getting leave was nearly impossible. His colleagues were mercilessly denied permission for leave even in cases of family tragedy. But Comal was desperate to have Bhagavan’s darshan. He thus petitioned for a one-week leave:

*Before entering my commander’s office, I meditated on Bhagavan. On seeing my petition, the commander, Mr. Small, put on a chirpy smile and immediately approved it without saying a word. I was jubilant and attributed the happening to Bhagavan’s recurrent grace.*

At Ramanasramam, Comal sat in the hall and hearing an announcement that sadhus would be fed outside after the main meal. Bhagavan quietly slipped out of the hall. When the lunch bell rang, everyone was waiting for Bhagavan. But when asked about the delay, Bhagavan said, “I am also a sadhu, so I went out”. From that time onwards, sadhus were fed first.

One Karthigai Deepam, when devotees were assembled outside the hall in front of the Holy Hill awaiting the lighting of the Deepam flame, Bhagavan was facing the devotees with his back towards the mountain. Comal recalls:

*Sitting in absolute stillness with his eyes closed, right at the moment when the Deepam flame was about to be lit, Bhagavan opened his eyes and turned round to see it. At that moment, I could see Bhagavan radiating intense luminosity as powerful as the Deepam Flame Itself. I immediately prostrated before him for granting me such a darshan and such blessings.*

On another occasion, having dropped his belongings in the room, Comal waited to receive Bhagavan’s darshan. Just as Bhagavan was returning from the Hill, Comal went up and prostrated at his feet. Bhagavan usually never allowed anybody to touch his feet but in this instance,



Comal with his mother, Rajammal, ca. 1942

Bhagavan only said, “These physical feet are perishable. Keep permanently within your Heart my true feet.” Comal commented on the event: “By his grace, tears of joy and immense bhakti started trickling down my chin.”

In 1996, Comal’s mother, Rajammal attained Bhagavan’s lotus feet at the age of 97, having chanted Bhagavan’s name throughout most of her life. By her example Comal had been led to the greatest resource of his lifetime and by the grace of Bhagavan, since the day she brought him for his first visit, Comal continued to be blessed by visits to the Ashram four times per year.<sup>1</sup>

*[Editor’s note: In Milwaukee, Wisconsin on 4th December, 2018, Comal Subramaniam passed away peacefully at the age of 96.]*

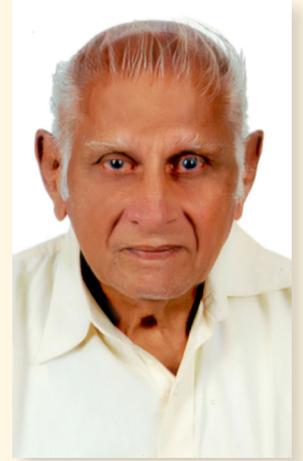
<sup>1</sup> Freely adapted from a 2002 interview with Comal (archival listing: VC.69 DV.65) as well as from “Bhagavan’s Ubiquitous Grace” in *The Mountain Path*, Oct. 2004, pp. 15-21, and the obituary published in *The Maharshi*, January 2019, p. 5.





## Obituary: Sri M. Venkataraman (1930-2019)

Born in 1930, Sri M. Venkataraman is fondly remembered as “Ashram Mappillai” owing to the fact that he was the son-in-law of the first family, i.e. husband of Lakshmi, first daughter of the late Ashram President, T. N. Venkataraman. M. Venkataraman’s grandfather, N. R. Narayana Iyer wrote *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, published by the Ashram, and used to stay at Holy Arunachala, meditating in the presence of Bhagavan. At eight years old, Venkataraman accompanying his grandfather had Bhagavan’s darshan, or as he later stated it, ‘was blessed to be seen by Bhagavan’. Venkataraman regularly visited the Ashram along with his grandfather and went on to marry the one Bhagavan designated “Our Lakshmi.” The marriage took place in the Ashram. Venkataraman subsequently held positions of authority in the Government Transport Department. After retirement, he took a keen interest in religious observances, regularly visiting temples, and not long before his earthly departure expressed his gratitude to have seen three spiritual giants in his life time—Bhagavan, Puttappathi Saibaba and Periyava. His devotion to Bhagavan was deep till the end and Bhagavan blessed him by having him attain to his Lotus Feet on 9th March, 2019 at the ripe old age of 90. Sri M. Venkataraman is survived by his wife, Lakshmi, a totally surrendered soul, and their two sons. —



## Obituary: Sri Sitapati Ganesh (1948-2019)



Sri Sitapati Ganesh passed away from a heart condition on 17th February 2019. He was born in 1948 in Tanjavore at the ashram of his grandmother, Janakimatha, who was herself a disciple of Sri Ramana. In 1972, he married Kamala Ramanathan at Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai. Theirs was among the last marriages to be conducted inside the ashram premises. Ganesh was not conventionally religious, but he was influenced by Sri Ramana’s philosophy of self-inquiry. His treatment of fellow human beings with equality and empathy was the way he put his advaita into practice. Through his long professional career—first as an engineer, then finance expert, then management consultant, entrepreneur and recently as a farmer in rural Maharashtra growing and processing pure *baladi* powder—Ganesh was motivated not by material rewards, but a belief in hard-work and integrity as ends in themselves. He touched the lives of many people with moral and material support, though rarely talked about it and never expected anything in return. He refused to bend his principles, even when he had to pay a price. He will be missed by his family and a large circle of friends and admirers. —

## Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai: Desika Padikam §2

இருவராம் தெய்வப் பெரியாரால் அறியா  
இவ்வுரு எதற்கெனத் தள்ளிப்  
பருகலா மனித்தப் படிவம் மேற்கொண்டு  
பணிந்தெழும் அடியவர் தமக்குக்  
கருவணாது அருளக் கங்கணம் பூண்டு  
கச்சையும் அதற்கெனக் கட்டித்  
திருவணாமலையில் சிறக்க வீற்றிருந்தாய்  
தேசிக ரமண மா தேவே.

Guru Ramana, Siva, rejecting that exalted  
state  
That even Brahma and Vishnu failed to see,  
You have assumed a humble human form.  
You majestically wear a band on the wrist  
and girdle around the waist,  
And, vowing to save your devotees from birth  
and death,  
You are now seated in glory in Arunachala. —

