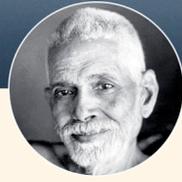
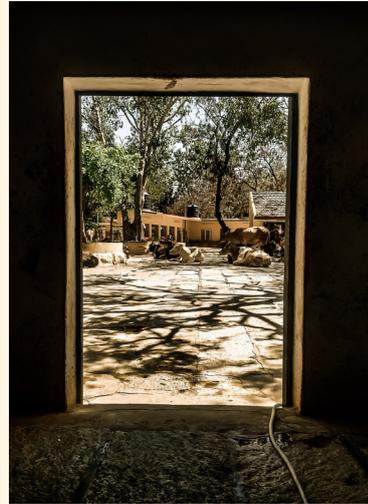


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

SPECIAL EXTENDED EDITION
AUGUST 2020, VOL. 14, NO. 8



D. Thiyagarajan and J. Jayaraman



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear All,

After calling for stories on the life of V.S. Ramanan, we have been deluged with lovely anecdotes about devotees' experiences with Sundaranna over the years. While *Saranagati's* page length is usually 9-10 pages, we were in a quandary about whether to split up these tributes over two issues. In the end, it seemed right to keep them together in one issue, even if it meant overstepping page length limits. We hope no one will be inconvenienced by this.

Giving family members time to mourn their loss, we have asked those still wishing to share to prepare something for the September issue.

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

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

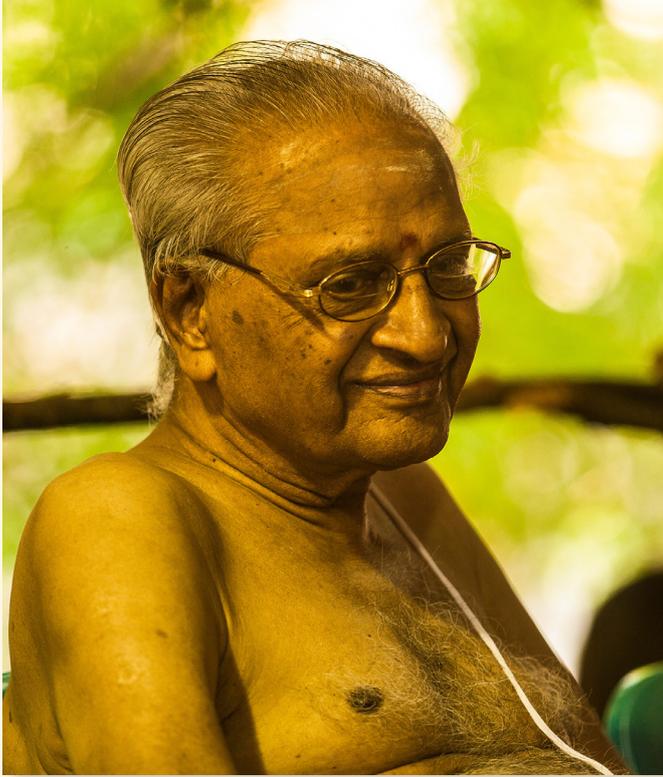
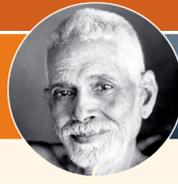
<i>The Life of V.S. Ramanan Through the Eyes of Devotees</i>	3
<i>Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Guru Poornima</i>	7
<i>Sri Muruganar's Irai Pani Nitral, §6</i>	8
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Krimi Nashini Mantra</i>	9
<i>Events in Sri Ramanasramam: GVS' Peacock Ashtakam</i>	10
<i>Events in Tiruvannamalai: Local Coronavirus Update</i>	21
<i>Quote from In Days of Great Peace</i>	21
<i>Obituary: Sri Margabandhu Sastrigal</i>	21
<i>Obituary: Sri V.S. Ramanan</i>	22

Calendar of Events Celebrated at Home (for the time being)

2nd-3rd August (Sun) Full Moon
16th August (Sun) Punarvasu
1st September (Tues) Advent
2nd September (Weds) Full Moon
13th September (Sun) Punarvasu
2nd October (Fri) Full Moon

10th October (Tues) Punarvasu
17th October (Sat) Navaratri Commences
25th October (Sun) Saraswati Puja
26th October (Mon) Vijayadasami
31st October (Fri) Full Moon
14th November (Sat) Deepavali





The Life of V.S. Ramanan Seen Through the Eyes of Bhagavan's Devotees

[If stories are what bind and sustain an entire civilization, they are likewise the staple of a small spiritual community.]

After Sundaranna's demise last week at the age of 86, family members and devotees have been reminiscing about their experiences with our former President over the years and decades.

In the following pages we are reproducing some of the many vignettes and memories that devotees, friends and family members were moved to write. We are sorry not to be able to include all the stories that came to us but here is a good sample. Since no particular order suggested itself, the following is a random sequence of clips and glimpses into Sundaranna's life.]

The memory of Sundaram Anna that stands out the most is the warm and welcoming smile he would bestow whenever I saw him. It went straight to

the heart. I remember him daily participating in the early morning milk offering and then standing outside the dining room, exchanging special greetings with each of the devotees in a light and cheerful manner as we went in for breakfast. He would often greet the German devotees in German since he spoke the language having lived there.

— Marye Tonnaire

From 1992 for more than two decades, during morning and evening puja at Bhagavan's Shrine, one could notice that Sundaram Anna, the President, never stood prominently. He would stand behind somebody or near the wall on the gent's side. In 1994, when he became the President, he told the Ashram workers that there was no difference between him and Muttamma the lady who cleaned the premises. "I am sitting in the chair just to sign the papers, that's all", he would often assert.

— T.V. Chandramouli, publications

Sundaram moved with devotees as one of them, never as one with authority, nor even as a first among equals. Like his siblings and children, he had a fine intellect. He had an engineering degree, retired as a high official in Government with a clean record of service.

At the times when he was loath to reverse a decision, he was most often found to be right. This was because he had surrendered to Bhagavan subjecting his judgment to Bhagavan's Will.

— K.V. Subrahmonyan, publications

Sundaranna was steadfast in his daily routine and made it his principal duty to serve devotees. My wife used to sit in the Mother's Shrine in the late morning and do her parayana there. Everyday about the same time Sundaranna would pass by and switch on the fan for her. It was a small gesture of course but it showed a consistent and abiding concern for the welfare of others which he demonstrated over and again in so many ways.

—Vishnu Sabhahit

It is not surprising that I regard my father as my role model in worldly life and in sadhana. Most daughters





would. What touched me as I received messages of solace and commiseration from devotees, college friends and ex-colleagues of Appa's, my high school friends and high school friends of my brothers, was that Appa had played a significant role in their lives as well. What tribute can one pay to a father who shaped her, mentored her, and continues to do so?

Since Appa would shy away from anything complimentary, I will say something briefly about one of Appa's role models.

Sri Alagappa Chettiar: Appa used to quote Alagappa Chettiar who is the founder of the engineering college that Appa and Mani chitappa attended, as an epitome of generosity, He would often say that Sri Alagappa Chettiar used to say that "It is well and fine to give away money when one has it, but better to borrow and donate when one does not".

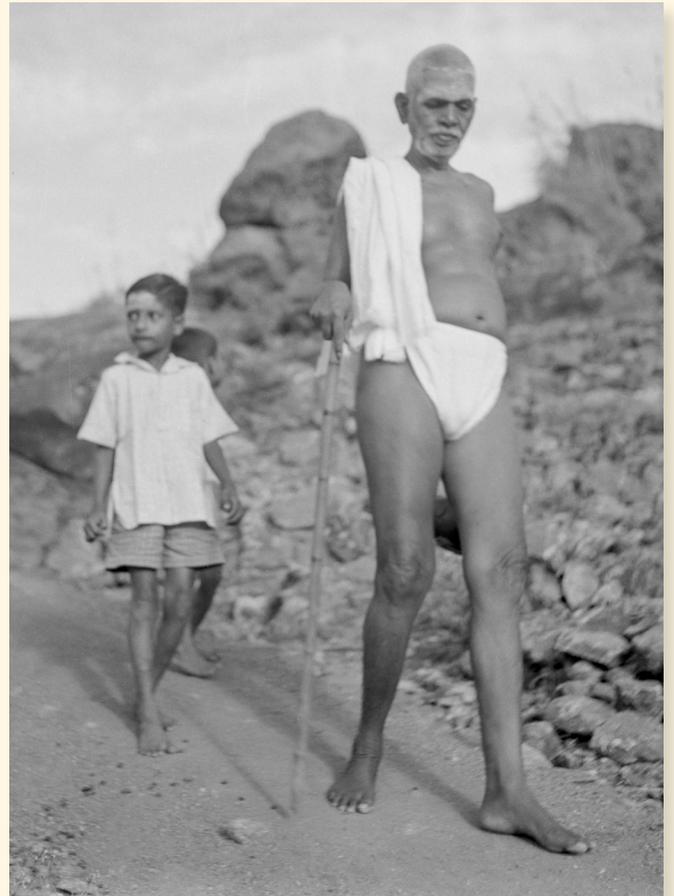
— Aruna Ramanan

Bhagavan's Grace compelled me to join the Ashram as a full-time sadhak in 2009 and I took voluntary retirement from the bank. Well before that in one of my visits, Anna had told me smilingly, "If you have any plans for early retirement, you have to report to me the next day". Such was the intuitive skill he possessed in identifying the earnest seeker. Holding the office of the President had a special meaning for him. He always said only Bhagavan is the President of the Ashram and that he was meant to be a servant of visiting devotees, to wash their feet, to give them the opportunity to plunge in sadhana during their visit and to sign papers for smooth administration. He was sincere in this statement and kept this vocation to the end.

— Sivasdas Krishnan, administration

[The following testimony is from someone who first met Sundaram in 1941 when she came with her parents and siblings to live in Tiruvannamalai. Known for her bold straightforward manner as well as an abiding humour and wit, she was sized up by Sundaram already when the two, about the same age, met that year and became life-long friends:]

Irecall a very earnest young boy who once told me that he assumed I must be the oldest of us children because I was so bossy! Apparently I used to boss him



Young Sundaram with Bhagavan on the Hill, ca. 1945

around, something which I deny categorically...what me?...bossy? unimaginable!

How old memories come back as time goes by.

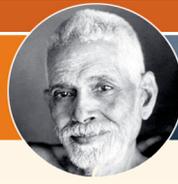
Once many years later in our adulthood, we fell out over something...after all this time I cannot even remember what it was...but we were both quite upset. Sundaram rang me up about it and I said, "Sundaram, please don't shout at me." He replied, "You are my sister. If I can't shout at you, then who can I shout at?" I started to laugh, and he won his point.

I will always remember him as my playmate from days gone by. He was a good friend then and remained so even when we had all grown up.

— Kitty Osborne

Ihave known my father-in-law since 1986 and am blessed to have known him. I have always admired his love and devotion to both his immediate family as well as his extended Ramana family of devotees of Sri Bhagavan. He was always present to greet and





President V.S. Ramanan at his desk in the late 1990s

help devotees who visited Ramanasramam. He always had a beautiful smile and kind words for anyone who had a question or doubt. He was also very loving and attentive to his immediate family and I immediately felt that I was part of this family. I am also thankful to him for introducing me to Bhagavan.

The other quality of his that I admire and try to emulate was his scrupulous honesty. He would not bend the rules for anyone including his family. To him, everyone was equal, regardless whether they were family or not. This quality is what made him the ideal President of Ramanasramam. Bhagavan put him in this place to maintain the sanctity of Ramanasramam.

— Dr. Ramkumar Sankaran

Just after Swami Ramanananda (Venkato) passed away in December 2007 immediately after Jayanti, we were asked to do a souvenir. We had only thirteen days to get it prepared and printed for the 13th day puja, so the window was tight. In order not to lose time by sending material by courier, we planned to deliver the disc to the printer in person. This meant we had to set off by Ashram car around 5 am. As

we got ready to leave, Sundaranna said, “You must take food packets with you so that you won’t have to eat on the roadside”. He then walked us up to the kitchen where he gave instructions to the cook to prepare packets of iddies for the trip.

This happened at various times such as at the time of the Arunachaleswarar/Arakandanallur Temple Kumbhabhishekam Souvenirs or whenever there was urgent work in Chennai. Sundaranna was always like this with us, going the extra mile. He looked after our every need, very often at his own expense in terms of time, energy and effort.

— D. Thiyagarajan, publications

After I settled in Tiruvannamalai in the year 2000, I was spending a lot of time at the Ashram. Just after a month or two, the Ashram President Sundaranna came to me while I was sitting in meditation in the Samadhi Hall. He told me, “Swami, you can have prasada at the Ashram every day in the morning or evening. You don’t have to ask any one’s permission. You can just come in.”

I was overwhelmed. Every afternoon, I was having prasada at Sri Yogi Ramasurat Kumar’s Ashram along with other sadhus but needed a meal at night. However, the timing was an issue. I wanted to meditate until 9 pm but the Ashram’s evening prasada was at 7.30 pm. So, I did not go for the meal. The President again enquired through a devotee. I conveyed my issue. I was then told, prasada will be kept in an Ashram food carrier and I can collect it at 9 pm. Could I ask for more? I felt as if Bhagavan himself invited me. It was an experience of incredible blessing. Bhagavan acted through the kindness of Sundaranna. I took advantage of this rare privilege he had so graciously offered me for the following five years.

— Madhurananda

In earlier years, very sweetly, Sundaram Anna would sometimes call me ‘Saradamma’ and sometimes ‘Saradamba’ as Ganesan Anna had once christened me. There were some personal moments that Anna shared with me and some deep spiritual insights as well. He had great love for his family, for his wife, whom we call Mani, and for the children. He once told me:





Before meeting Susila and getting married I had first been taken to 'see' another 'girl' as the custom is called in Tamil. As you know, in those days, eligible bachelors were taken to meet their prospective bride-to-be. A large retinue from the boy's house would go to the girl's place. The girl would be 'shown' to us for a few minutes when she came out and placed some eats before us and prostrated to the elders.

What can one discern about a girl in that amount of time? But I 'rejected' that first proposal and said I didn't want to marry that girl. I don't know why I did so. I am sure there was nothing wrong with her or dislikeable about her, but somehow at that moment I did not feel that I liked her. However, after saying 'no' I was filled with great remorse. I thought my action had been cruel and would have caused hurt and suffering to that young girl. Then and there I made up my mind that no matter who the next girl I was taken to see, no matter how she looked or how she behaved, I would say yes. I would agree to marry her.

At this point in the narration, Anna stopped and said with an affectionate smile, looking at Susila Mani who was somewhere across the room, 'The next girl I was shown was Sushila'.

Through this incident Anna showed me how soft-hearted he was, that he would melt easily at the thought of someone's sorrow and at the same time how surrendered he was as well. He had chosen for himself the path of total acceptance and Bhagavan brought him a gem of a wife who would not only be deeply devoted to him but also absolutely surrendered to Bhagavan and to the service of his devotees.

— Dr. Sarada, editor of *The Ramana Way*

In 1998, only a few years after Sundaranna had been installed as the new Ashram President, the dining hall expansion became necessary. There was concern that some might oppose the project. It had not even

been clear whether or not his own father would be in favour of the venture, and whether or not, based on his father's seniority, based on the fact that he had been the former President, he might try and influence the decision. But on the bhoomi puja day, his father arrived and said, "You are the Ashram President now. I have to respect your decision, so here I am".

It was a small gesture, but it showed that Venkatoo, by then Sw. Ramananda, would not try and insert himself in the administrative decision-making process but would uphold and honour the office his son now held.

— T.V. Chandramouli, publications

Besides his mother tongue Tamil, Sundaram Anna was fond of English. He always spoke 'English-English' with matching diction. He enjoyed 'Know Your English' in *The Hindu* and liked to share the humour in them with others. He would even phone the writer Sri Upendran and compliment him if a particular piece was outstanding.

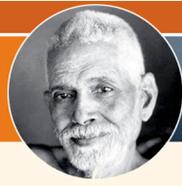
He was proficient in German as well, which was quite useful with some of our correspondence and visitors.

He had excellent handwriting and never tired of making copies of Sanskrit verses in his neat handwriting and presenting them to others. He could also recite Sanskrit works of Bhagavan 'Sat Darshan' and 'Ramana Gita' from memory, besides 'Upadesa Saram', which he also encouraged others to do.

— V. Subramanian

I knew him as a quiet dynamo, shy of the camera. He was focused on Arunachala Ramana, 24x7. In his early years as the President, he would go on





Giripradakshina every single day in the wee hours of the morning. This was truly awe inspiring. In the evenings, every single day, we could see him sitting at Parayanam, chanting the sacred works of Bhagavan. During lunch time, we would see him serving 'ghee' to one and all in the dining hall. Externally he seemed like a rock of Arunachala. But one could sense the furnace of Bhagavan burning inside him. He was a man of few words, the words being, 'Bhagavan Sri Ramana'.

— G. Kameshwar

The first time I saw Sundaram Anna was from a distance at a Chennai Ramana Kendra function around 1998. I was attracted by his charismatic smile and humility. Even though I regularly visited the Ashram during full moons from 1997 to 2009, I was shy to speak to anyone. In 2004, when I was introduced by a fellow devotee from Salem, Sundaram Anna gently caressed my head as though I had been known to him for a long time. In 2010 introduced a second time, this time by Sri. T.V. Chandramouli, Sundaram Anna provided me with the golden opportunity to serve in the Ashram and I began straightaway.

What I found very soon after beginning my service in the Ashram office is that Sundaram Anna never acted as one above others but was down to earth in dealing with staff and devotees. In dealing with us, he was fatherly and familiar with us. He would share articles with us or tell jokes even though we were nowhere near to him in stature.

He was fond of Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai's works and would advise us to memorize them. He regularly advised me not to be blunt in answering devotees'

requests, but to reply in a gentle way. At the same time, he would not let us off the hook when a complaint was made against us. He would readily share the complaint with us, saying, "You have a compliment message."

One time, he made a decision which the rest of the office staff were quietly not in favour of. When he came to know that we differed from his view, he asked "Why didn't you inform me?". We said we could not go against his decision. He said, "Why should you not correct me if I'm wrong?" Such was his humility.

— Kannan Sundaresan, office staff

I have had contact with Sri Ramanasramam for the past eighty years. I came to the Ashram in 1940 with my father, mother and two younger sisters. I was about 15 years old then. As Sri V.S. Ramanan was younger to me, he always politely called me 'Akka'.

After being installed as President, he proved himself an able administrator, but with gentle manners. He was soft-spoken, humble, considerate and helpful to fellow devotees. Many visitors did not know that he was the President of the Ashram until they saw him sitting in his chair and attending his office work. He was loved and respected by one and all from the workers to distinguished visitors from all over India and abroad.

Though his physical presence is no longer there in the Ashram now, he will always be remembered as an efficient and faithful head of the Ashram, an ardent devotee of Bhagavan and a lovable human being.

— Mahalakshmi Suryanandam

The first time I met Sundaram Anna was in 1984. I had come to the Ashram on a visit with my son,

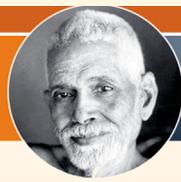
Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Guru Pournima



and *ru*, which means 'remover', thus the guru is the one who leads us out of darkness. —

On 5th July, a handful of devotees gathered in Bhagavan's Shrine for Guru Purnima. The day is devoted to recognising and honouring spiritual teachers and the Guru principle is said to be 1000 times more potent on this day than on any other. This Sanskrit word comes from *gu* which means 'darkness'





and Sundaram had not yet come there to settle. At that time the Ashram was hosting the marriage of Sundaram Anna's niece, his sister Azhagammal's elder daughter. It was quite an occasion. In the middle of all the festivities my son, who was twelve years old then and new to India, started to feel a bit queasy in the stomach. When Sundaram Anna came to learn of it, he immediately sought us out and after asking a few questions, straight away sent someone to fetch some bread. He encouraged my son to take the bread and stayed close to us until he knew that the boy was feeling better.

— Marye Tonnaire

In July 2008, I was cutting vegetables in the Ashram kitchen. Someone from the office came and told me, "The president is calling you. Come quickly." "What! Did I do something wrong?" I slowly prepared myself and made my way to the office. When Sundaranna saw me, he said with a big smiling face, "Come, come". He said, "We just received a new publication. This is for you." He gave me a copy. I was surprised. Why for me first? I opened the cover and saw his handwriting. It read, "Praying for Sri Bhagavan's blessings — V.S. Ramanan, 15-7-08". You know, July 15th is my birthday. So I was delighted. I immediately prostrated, showing my gratitude. I hadn't even remembered that it was my birthday. How did he know? It was a miracle to me. He looked at me with a gracious smile as tears welled up in my eyes.

— Shunya Sakiyama, kitchen

Another of Appa's role models was Cow Lakshmi. Amongst devotees of Bhagavan, Appa used to talk about her the most. He would choke up when narrating Bhagavan's explanation for not staying with Lakshmi until she breathed her last while he stayed until the end with his mother, Alagammal. "Lakshmi only knew Bhagavan".

— Aruna Ramanan

Once in the years after the Ashram had become very busy with growing crowds, those of us on staff felt the pinch of the demands made on us, especially during the high season. Sometimes I would come to my room completely exhausted from the day of service. Following one such night after sleeping late, I inquired where Sundaranna was that morning and was told that he had left at 3 am to go to a wedding in Chennai. I felt ashamed how I had complained to myself about the demands made on my time, whereas Sundaranna would do as much, or more service than the rest of us and on top of it all, go and attend weddings, *grihapravesams*, *bhoomi* pujas, inaugurations and functions for devotees, not only locally but in distant places as far away as Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bombay and Delhi. He continued this even beyond the years when his health had begun to fail. I knew how demanding such activities were for him, but he just took it as his duty and did it unrelentingly.

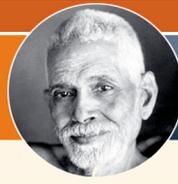
— Michael Highburger, publications

Sri Muruganar's Irai Pani Nitral, §6

ஆக்கும் தொழிலும் அளித்து அழிக்கும்
தொழிலும் அவற்றோடு ஏனையவும்
ஊக்கும் முதலாம் உரவோனே
உய்யும் உபாயம் உரைக்கென்றேன்
வாக்கு(ம்) மனமும் அறிந்து உள்ளே
மலர்மேல் உறையும் இறைவன் அருள்
போக்கும் படிக்கே போகென்றான்
போத ரமணப் புண்ணியனே

I cried: 'Mighty Master of Works,
Creating, preserving, destroying,
Tell me the means of salvation!'
Ramana, wise and virtuous, said:
'Watching word and thought
Walk as you are guided
By the grace of the Lord who dwells
In the lotus of your Heart'.





My father-in-law was not only an affectionate father figure to me but to others who visited the Ashram. I loved his beatific smile, his simplicity and his always being “in the moment”. What I learnt from him was complete unquestioning Guru Bhakti.

He used to say that he never asked Bhagavan for anything but if something was bothering him, he would go to the Shrine and ponder the matter and the matter would be resolved in due course.

Several devotees have told me that in their first few visits to the Ashram, they never knew he was the President; they thought he was just another devotee. He believed that one comes to the Ashram to be with Bhagavan and soak in the atmosphere and that one should not get distracted by other things; so he did not expect praise or even acknowledgement.

For me, he will always be the true devotee who did his work joyously with absolute sincerity, integrity and humility, knowing full well that it is Bhagavan and only Bhagavan who makes things happen.

— Dr. Nitya Ramanan

Based in Puducherry, for successive generations our family has been coming to Bhagavan ever since my dad’s middle years in the 1940s. When my second daughter’s wedding came up in 2000, I came as usual to submit the first invitation card at Bhagavan’s shrine. The soon-to-be bride and groom accompanied me.

We headed for the President’s office and offered an invitation card to Sri V.S. Ramanan. I introduced my soon-to-be son-in-law to him. (My daughter needed no introduction.)

Receiving the invitation, Sundaranna gave them both a most genial smile. With that twinkle in his eyes that conveys so much warmth and a benevolent smile, he asked them, “Who is the luckier of the two?”

The expression on his face unmistakably implied that the question had no answer. This rhetorical question was his hearty blessing of the young ones, who are today parents of two sons, aged 15 and 11.

What a uniquely affable manner of blessing!

— P. Ramasamy, archives

His own surrender to Bhagavan was deep and his faith unshakeable. He told me, ‘Saradamma, you know, when I was in service I did not really have any clear concept about money’. And he smilingly added, ‘I do not think even now I have any thought or knowledge about money’. He continued:

In those days I did not have the faintest idea as to what it takes to run a household or to celebrate a major event in the family. I would simply give my entire salary to Susila and she would run the household month by month and probably set aside the money required for our travel and other needs as well. For her part, she never asked for anything more than what I gave her. When Anand was to get married, Susila told me that we would need forty thousand rupees towards expenses for the wedding. I was flabbergasted. I had no savings and no source from which I could raise that kind of money. I left it to Bhagavan to show me the way. The very next day while I was at work I was asked to prepare to leave in the next couple of days on an overseas assignment. When I returned after the assignment I was paid a special remuneration of forty one thousand rupees and some change after deducting taxes. Can you believe this? Bhagavan gave me the exact amount that Susila had needed from me for the event. I brought home the money and handed it over to

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Krimi Nashini Mantra



[[4-36-1]]

अत्रिणा त्वा क्रिमे हन्मि ।
कण्ठेन जुमर्दिना ।
विश्वसोर्ब्रह्मणा हतः ।
क्रिमीणां राजा ।
अप्येषां स्थपतिर्हतः ।
अथो माताऽथो पिता ।
अथो स्थूरा अथो क्षुद्राः ।
अथो कृष्णा अथो श्वेताः ।
अथो आशातिका हताः ।
श्वेताभिस्सह सर्वे हताः ॥

atrinā tvā krimē hanmi | kaṅṭhēna jamadāgninā |
viśvasorbrahmaṇā hataḥ | krimiṇāṅgṇā rājā |
apyeṣāṅs thapatirhataḥ | atho mātāṣtho pitā |
atho sthūrā atho ksudrāḥ | atho kṛṣṇā atho śvetāḥ ||
atho āśātikā hataḥ | śvetābhissaha sarvē hataḥ |
āharāvādya | śṛtasya haviṣo yatha | tatsatyam |
yadamuṃ yamasya jambhāyoḥ | ādadhāmi tathā hi tat |
khanphaṇ mraṣi |

Daily recitation of the Krimi Nashini mantra from the Taittiriya Aranyaka of the Krishna Yajur Veda started on 9th July. Krimi Nashini mantra is designed to destroy (*nasha* means to ‘destroy’) germs (*kerimi*) and viruses. Ashram Veda Patasala teacher, Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal is committed to maintaining the recitation for the duration of the pandemic. —





Susila for the marriage expenses. Right then I knew that Bhagavan takes complete care of all our needs.

— Dr. Sarada, editor of *The Ramana Way*

In the old days, Sundaram Anna walked very fast on his pradakshinas and seemed to be flying, his steps were so light. He was said to have once been clocked at just two hours and fifteen minutes for a hill-rounding.

Sometimes in those days, when there was practically no traffic on the main road, devotees would take walks in the evening in front of the Ashram, and I marveled when I would see Sundaram Anna and Susila Manni come whizzing by me.

— Marye Tonnaire

Before setting forth on every motorcycle pilgrimage I'd go to see Sundaram for his blessing; he'd always say, "Oh, you know, I don't like you going on these trips. Please be safe, it's dangerous out there on

the Indian roads, I might never see you again." Then we'd laugh, and I'd promise to be safe and return in a few weeks, and he'd heartily wave me off.

— John Maynard, archives

There were occasions when I would consult with Sundaranna about an Ashram project and he would make a decision that I was sure was the wrong decision. He was the President, so what could I say? But here's the thing, each time this happened, I would later discover that he had made the right decision after all. I marvelled over this because these decisions, as best I could tell, were not borne of the intellect or rationality. How was he doing it? I never asked him, but I began to suspect that he simply made some, if not all, of his decisions based on intuition. He simply let what came to mind in the moment be the final word, trusting that it was coming from Bhagavan.

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Setting the Peacock Ashtakam to Music



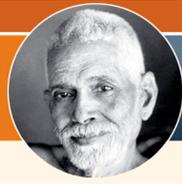
Balachandra Ramanan set GVS' Ashtakam in the peacock metre to music and performed it in Bhagavan's Sannidhi on 4th July

metre) and presented them to Bhagavan in the Jubilee pandal. Bhagavan appeared greatly pleased with them and, handing them to Lalita Venkataraman, suggested that she sing them with her vina. Within half an hour she brought her vina and got ready to sing. Just then the white peacock was absent. Bhagavan said, "But the hero must be present to hear his praises sung! Where are you, Madhava? Come." Lo! At once the white peacock jumped down from the roof of the pandal; and while Lalita sang, he spread out his tail feather and danced as Bhagavan sat and watched him with beaming eyes. When the singing concluded, the peacock walked to the vina and pecked at its strings with his beak. Thereupon Bhagavan told the singer, "Madhava wants you to repeat the song." So she sang once more and the peacock danced again. It was a sight for the gods. —

A white peacock presented by the Maharani of Baroda, became the darling of Bhagavan. He had a cage just beside his couch and was watched by it day and night. It would get up on Bhagavan's book-rack and gently peck at the books with his beak. The peacock would daily visit the work of temple-construction that was then going on in the Ashram and would also enter the dining hall and walk between the rows of people seated at meals, and so he earned from Bhagavan the title Assistant Sarvadhikari. Bhagavan said that some people believed that the white peacock was the reincarnation of Madhavaswami and ever afterwards, Bhagavan used to address him as 'Madhava'.

On June 20, 1947, G.V. Subburamayya composed eight Telugu verses on the white peacock in Mayura Vrittam (peacock-





I reflected at length on his gift, if we might call it that, and tried to imitate him but found that such intuitive trust is not something one can acquire all at once by a force of will. Rather, it would seem to come about over long years and decades, perhaps by virtue of steady prayer and devotion to Bhagavan. And perhaps too, by an abiding commitment to living by Ramana standards as much as one is able, a sort of ongoing 'sadhana of daily life', which would express itself in how one treats others, how one speaks to and about others, and so forth.

Witnessing again and again Sundaranna's 'gift' at work in the practical sphere of Ashram projects, I came to trust his intuition as much as he did.

— Michael Highburger, publications

Whenever I would walk into his office he would immediately smile and give me his full attention. Sometimes he would share a letter from a devotee or show me a publication he thought I should read. He was very happy that I took interest in the Sanskrit works, and in singing Tamil songs. One day he personally gave me two, beautiful, restored photos of Bhagavan; the famous one of Bhagavan as a youth and another of Bhagavan sitting outside of Skandasramam which is less well known. He used to marvel at how things would always seem to get accomplished in the Ashram just as they should, and he would sometimes cite examples.

— Marye Tonnaire

There were times of fun too that we shared. Some sweet little memories about the family, he would recount how as a baby, Aruna, when she first became familiar with words would become very alert every time the refrain of *Aksharamanamalai* was sung because the word 'Aruna' would come again and again in it.

While talking of Ravi his heart would swell with fatherly pride. He once said, 'Ravi seemed to be an average student in his school days, probably in relation to Anand who was absolutely brilliant. But the moment Ravi finished his MBA he came into his own and in his job his contributions were supremely valued. His inputs were unique and literally had a stroke of genius.' Then he remembered a sweet incident about Ravi. He said with a joyous smile:

We went for a movie in Baroda to a theatre in our colony, Sushila, I and Ravi who was a child of around five. In those days it was common in Hindi and Tamil movies in the song sequence for the hero to sweep the heroine off her feet and carry her in his arms to swirl her around. When such a sequence in the movie came, Ravi exclaimed loudly, 'Hai! Appa panra maadri!' 'Just as Appa does'. What he meant was that I would lift him up and swirl him around in that way as soon as I returned from work. But to our friends in the colony who were watching the movie with us, it probably seemed as if I would romance with Susila in like fashion. Surely an embarrassing moment for Susila and me.

So saying, Anna laughed heartily.

— Dr. Sarada, editor of *The Ramana Way*

Another of my father's great influences was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji's commitment to truth made Appa fall in love with the concept that what one thinks, says and does should be in total alignment. Following Gandhiji's lead, he constantly watched whether he was wavering from truth. Honesty when practiced truly keeps one humble as one can see how insignificant one is in the larger scheme of things. One has to be courageous to practice truth for everything you say or do may be anything but popular or pleasant. Honesty and humility also mean that ideas can be revised, and that revising them is not diluting leadership, but coming closer to it. I am truly thankful to my father in bearing witness to this and for his role models in shaping my life.

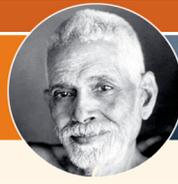
— Aruna Ramanan

In 2011, after a book I had translated about Gandhi was released in the Ashram by Gandhi's grandson, Sri Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Sundaranna suggested it be made available for sale in the Ashram bookstall. I lightly countered, "Sundaranna, there is not a single reference to Bhagavan in this book." He said, "So what. It is a book about Gandhi translated by you. And Bhagavan loved Gandhi." All 60 copies sold.

— K.V. Subrahmonyan, publications

There are moments when I am overcome with sadness that I cannot express my love for my grandfather in person, but I try to remember all of the memories we shared that unequivocally demonstrated our bond. Thatha was one of the few people I





felt comfortable asking philosophical or religious questions, like “Why is Vishnu’s skin blue”? He allowed me to question, and never shied away from these deeper discussions. Moreover, I will always be filled with a feeling of warmth when I think of his disarming smile, his firm and loving hugs, and the way he peddled chocolates and Starbursts to me as if it was our little secret. I will miss his presence in my life but am thankful to have shared these moments with someone so extraordinary.

— Swaroopa Ramkumar

He enjoyed spending time with his grandkids as did they. He also enjoyed any food that was sweet! He also loved the outdoors and loved to go for walks admiring nature. He also loved animals and treated them as family. Our dog, Leela, who used to sleep in our bedroom, preferred to sleep in our guest bedroom with him when he visited us in the US. This was surprising as Leela was very particular where she slept! I always admired his love for life. He lived life according to Ramana’s teaching as if it were a play and he was an actor and he played the part fully.

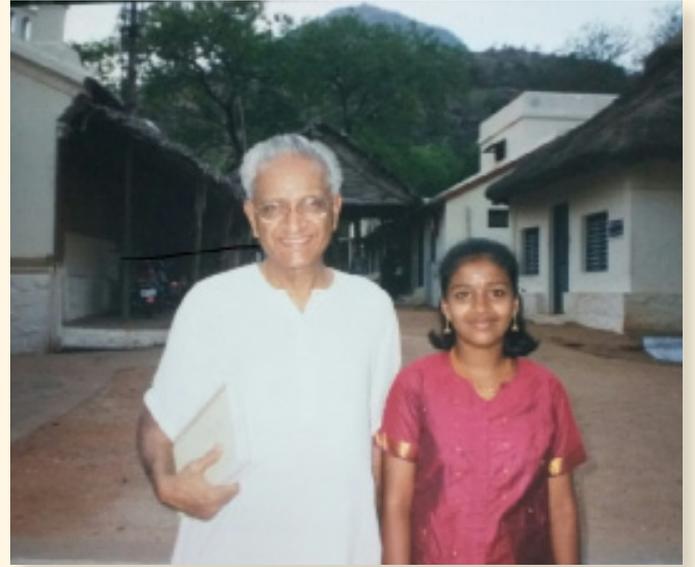
— Dr. Ramkumar Sankaran

Once about 20 years back I got to see Sundaranna’s leadership skills at work. When he got wind that there was some impropriety in the bookstall management, he astutely called two people working in the bookstall and asked them to bring their bank books to the office. Sundaranna began to peruse the bank records and inquired of regular large deposits made to their accounts. When he asked them the source of the large deposits, the two were unable to give a convincing account and the whole thing came to light. They had been pilfering funds from the bookstall accounts and moving them to their own personal accounts.

— Shrinivasa Murthi, accommodations

Ever smiling, Thatha is the one all we kids remember. We used to love our summer holiday morning ritual of saying good morning to him in the office before running off to the shrine.

— Sandhya



President V.S. Ramanan with his grand-niece, Sandhya

Everybody called Sundaramji ‘good’ because natural goodness was his most striking character trait. He knew that all human beings, including himself, were fallible. He thus let Bhagavan, the infallible One, run the Ashram while Sundaranna was keen to merely be his instrument. To him, Bhagavan was not just a granduncle whom he knew as a youth and whose affection he had received but a Guru who is *saakshaat Parabrahma*. Nothing short of undivided devotion to him would do for Sundaramji.

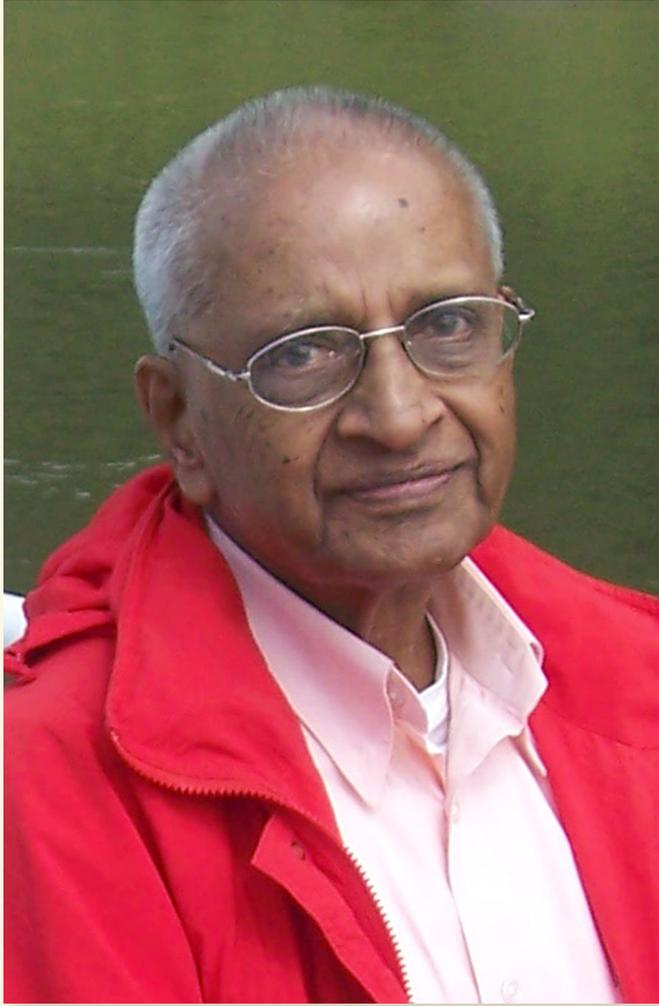
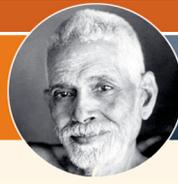
Still waters run deep. Sundaramji’s bhakti rarely took a verbal form. It was seen in every moment of his life. He never belittled other masters but, like Swami Niranjanananda, Mastan Saheb, Muruganar Swami and others, he knew only Bhagavan.

— K.V. Subrahmonyan, publications

Sundaranna used to lovingly reminisce that his mother was always goading him to read ‘Noothi ettu’, her way of referring to *Nool Therattu*—“The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi”. His love of the Divine Tongue, namely, Sanskrit, which he studied as a student, endured and he would religiously go through the *Ramana Gita*. He undertook to teach newly joined priests certain Sanskrit slokas on Bhagavan. Every devotee was dear to him and he was keen that they be taken care of.

— ASK and Aparna





When he heard ‘Upadesa Saram’ being chanted in the old hall, he would drop everything and run there, to be in the presence of Bhagavan and prostrate to Him, when they chanted ‘Na karmana’

— G. Kameshwar

When I asked him in one of my walks if he ever felt proud being the President of a world-renowned spiritual organisation, he quipped that Bhagavan is the President of the Ashram and he is only a tool to perform administrative actions, so where is the question of feeling proud?

— Sivadas Krishnan, administration

We were always so inspired by Sundaranna because of his one-pointed devotion to Bhagavan. He used to follow Bhagavan’s recommendation as concerns Brahma Muhurtha and would go for his morning walk

at 3 am. He came to the Ashram by 5 am and would routinely sit alone in Bhagavan’s Shrine and prayerfully read six chapters of the *Ramana Gita*. After that, he would sit in the President’s room and copy out verses of Bhagavan in Sanskrit or Tamil until about 6.45 am at which time he would go back to the Shrine for the chanting of the *Forty Verses in Praise of Bhagavan*. This was followed by milk puja and by greeting devotees for breakfast. He was very punctual and never missed Bhagavan’s morning and evening pujas. He was also keen to chant *Upadesa Saram* following the evening Vedaparayana. He would do his office work with diligence but when parayana or puja time came, he would rush to the hall. Any other spare moment was devoted to reading Bhagavan’s books.

—Sabhaht Family

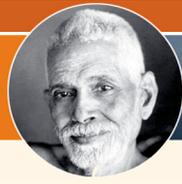
Ganesan Anna would affectionately tease Sundaram Anna for his simplicity. Ganesan once said:

Let me tell you Saradamba, when we were children our aunts and grandmothers used to mix the rice and rasam or rice and curd on a plate and sit with us and feed us with their own hands telling us stories. Sundaram would often object saying that the quantity of rice on the plate was too much. Then the aunt would ask, ‘Which part is too much? This part?’ and she would show some part segregating it from the rest of the mixed rice. ‘Yes’, he would say. Then she would say, ‘Let us do one thing. You finish this extra part first and then you can eat what is just right for you.’ And Sundaram would innocently be convinced about this argument and accept it. He was very trusting and would surrender to those he loved.

— Dr. Sarada, editor of *The Ramana Way*

Sundaranna was gentle to the core and never saw anything small in others. Simple in attire and outlook, he became a child when he met and interacted with children. Very often, he used to innocently recall events of the past during the blessed days of Sri Bhagavan’s physical presence. In those days, the road between the Temple and the Ashram was lined with lots of trees and was quite deserted. Afraid of lurking ghosts he walked that stretch with eyes closed and would often run through the entire distance while returning from school. Daily he would go straight to the Old Hall and mechanically prostrate before the sofa of Bhagavan and then rush out to play. One time





when he performed this routine, he was surprised by the outburst of sudden laughter in the Hall. He was amazed to hear laughter in the august presence of Bhagavan. But when he looked up, he saw that the sofa was empty and Bhagavan was not in the Hall at all.

— ASK and Aparna

One morning, by sheer happenstance as is common in Ramanasramam, Sundar Anna and I found ourselves momentarily at the back entrance to the kitchen, soon after breakfast. It was another one of those Bhagavan instances that pop up seemingly out of nowhere. A memory was triggered in Sundar Anna's mind, fresh as the day it happened to him, and his face was alight as he recounted it to me. He pointed to the large mortars embedded into the floor of the kitchen's eastern veranda and said to me:

"You know, Bhagavan used to sit there, grinding all the leftover bits and pieces cast aside by the cooks while preparing the food. That morning Bhagavan had just finished making his chutney and we all eagerly lined up to receive our share. I was towards the front of the queue as Bhagavan himself gave a spoonful equally to each person. When my turn came, he put a small amount in the palm of my hand. It was so delicious! I wanted more, so I promptly re-joined the back of the queue. When I stood before Bhagavan again, he chided me kindly, as he waved me aside: 'Haven't you had your share already?'"

— Dev Gogoi

Another memory in a lighter vein concerned a foreign devotee, a non-native English speaker, who was starting to go a little mad after some time. I remember how patient Sundaram Anna was with her.

One afternoon this lady stood in the samadhi hall, right up front with her back to Bhagavan's shrine and started to deliver a speech. I was standing just outside the front entrance to the hall wondering whether I should do something to stop her. Sundaram Anna came by just at that moment, stopped for a while to look at the lady, and said to me, "She speaks very good English, doesn't she?" Then he just walked away. I had my instructions. It was evident that I was just to let her be.

— Marye Tonnaire

When he had something to convey, it was always in a straightforward manner. He never had the habit of beating around the bush. He could make quick intuitive decisions born out of total surrender to Bhagavan. The various building projects undertaken and the purchases of land of large extents in his tenure as President bear testimony to this.

— Sivadas Krishnan, administration

It was the year 2003. After dinner, I went to my desk in the Ashram office to pick up my bag and go to my room. Just then the phone rang. I answered it and a woman spoke in an excited voice saying that she was calling from somewhere in Tamil Nadu. She said, "Someone here has gone crazy and is shouting and screaming like a possessed woman. May we bring her to your Ashram and leave her with you?" I hastened to respond saying that we do not admit people in such a condition in the Ashram. When we hung up, Sundaranna who was sitting there the whole time, asked what had happened. When I told him, he laughed and said, "There are plenty of such people here. One more case will hardly matter."

We both laughed, switched off the lights and went home.

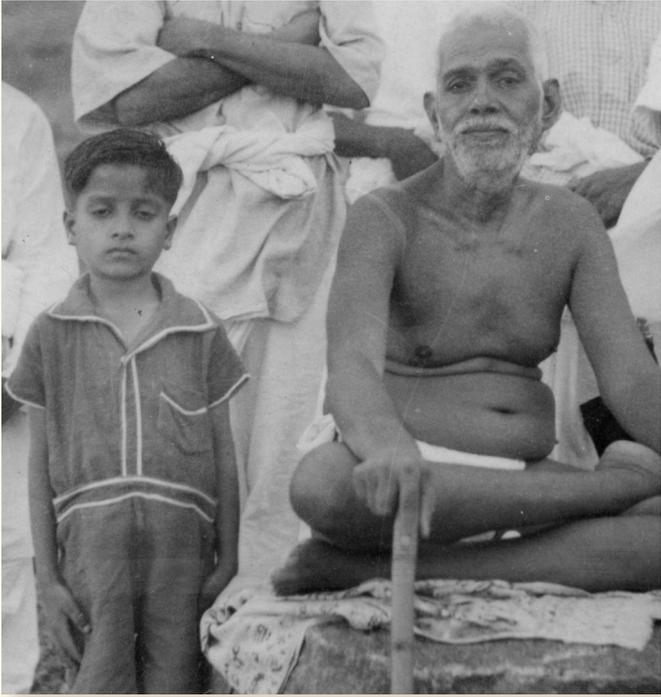
— Sivakumar, office staff

Sundaranna was one of the few beings I personally sknew who lived with and touched Bhagavan. When one day I had the opportunity to touch Sundaranna's feet, it was for me as though I were touching Bhagavan's feet. At that moment tears welled up in my eyes.

— Filomela

Sundaranna was least bothered about money and was very generous when the need arose. Once after my father was operated on in Coimbatore, Sundaranna wanted to give us a large sum of money to help fund the surgery. But I felt bad that Sundaranna should have to give us money when my father had his retirement money and his small savings. So, when I refused the offer that day in the Ashram office, Sundaranna felt hurt and reacted sharply. I began to weep in his presence. Ganapati Raman was there





and consoled me, saying, “Don’t weep, just accept Bhagavan’s prasad.”

A couple of days later, Sundaranna came to the house to see my father and apologised profusely for getting upset. He showed me such fatherly affection, how could any hurt feelings remain? He was like a loving father to me.

—Sri Lakshmi Sabhahit

Once when I informed the President that I would be leaving the next morning to attend the wedding of a devotee in Chennai, he asked, “How are you getting there?” When I said I would be travelling by bus, he said, “No, no, we will also be attending the wedding. You can come with us. Be at my house tomorrow at 4 am. We have room in the car.”

The following morning, I arrived at the President’s compound and was prepared to wait outside, but he insisted that I come in and have coffee before departing. As it was being served, he reached for the sugar and asked if I wanted one or two teaspoons. He then added the sugar, stirred the coffee and handed it to me. I felt humbled and mused to myself, where in all of India would an employer, serve his employee like a waiter?

— D. Thiyagarajan, publications

When I was at Uttarkashi in 1996-2005, Sundaramji once wrote to me in anguish that an article had recently appeared in *The Mountain Path*, laughing at people who had *ekabbakti* for Ramana, who wanted Only Ramana. That was the title of that piece of writing. I wrote back saying that I had read that article and I too wanted Only Ramana because only Ramana was teaching me to see only Ramana in everything. However, *ekabbakti* is not so easy. Bhagavan himself said total surrender is not easy. I may say Bhagavan is the ultimate Guru but I am yet far from the ideal of *ekabbakti*. Sundaramji was much closer to it.

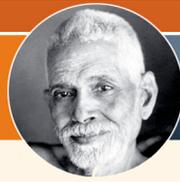
— K.V. Subrahmonyan, publications

Once in 2006, I brought the President the final draft of the first edition of *Parayana: The Poetic Works of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi*, including the production cost estimates sent by T.V. Venkataraman and the Ashram printer. With the transliteration and English translation plus the appendix that included other Ashram songs, hymns and chants, the book came to about 300 pages. Since it was intended as a daily chanting book, the President agreed that it should not be too bulky as it would likely be carried regularly by devotees. At the same time, it needed to be durable since it would be used often. So we decided to publish it on lightweight offset paper, i.e. a thin grade of paper that contains cotton and linen fibres to give it strength. Of course this special paper is more costly. Sundaranna was eager that the Ashram should bear any extra cost. When I told him the total production cost per book was Rs 85, I thought he might suggest a sales price of, say, Rs 120. But no, he said, “Let us set it at Rs 80”. I protested, “Sundaranna, we will lose money with every book sold”. He replied confidently, “A greater sin would be to earn a profit from Bhagavan’s written works.”

When put like that, the beauty of his position came into clearer focus. For Sundaranna, publishing Bhagavan’s works had nothing to do with earning revenue for the Ashram but rather making Bhagavan’s teachings available to devotees.

— Michael Highburger, publications





Once when Susila Manni had expressed an interest in going on pilgrimage to Gokarna, Sundaranna inquired about how to get there and where to stay. We naturally wanted to be there to receive them and so went ahead of them and prepared everything. We were blessed to have them both with us in our native place. As we walked down our Car Street, he noticed the Vedic recitation that went on there on a daily basis. Later when back in Tiruvannamalai, he remarked to a devotee, “The Sabhahits hail from a Vedic realm where everyone is a pundit. If you close your eyes and throw a stone in any direction, it is bound to land on someone reciting Veda.”

—Sabhahit Family

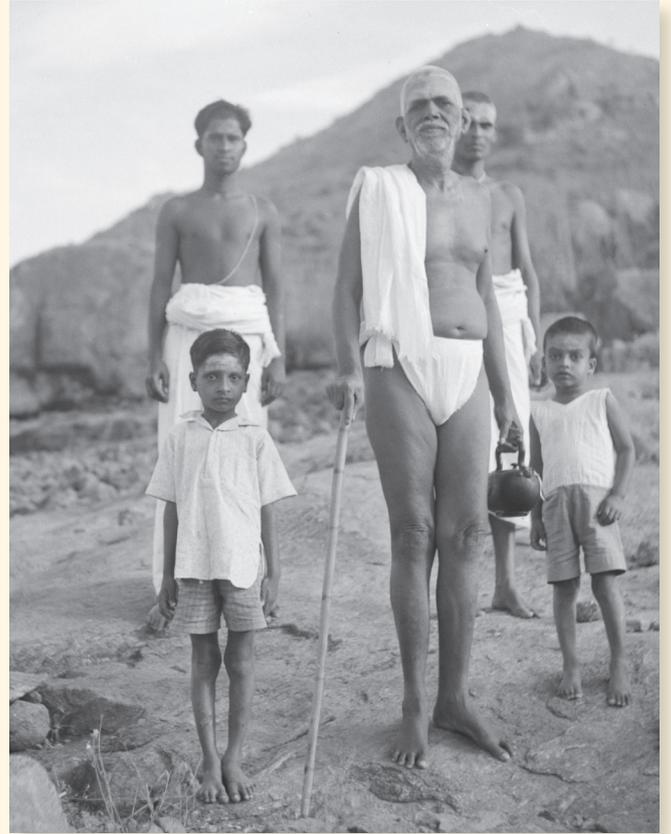
When requesting help in identifying old devotees appearing in archival photos, Sundaram would always have a tale ready, about the person or people in the photos, talking about what Bhagavan said, or did. It was timeless when he spoke on such things.

— John Maynard, archives

During the 1995 Ashram Kumbhabhishekam, because of lack of space, visiting devotees were accommodated at lodges in town. One devotee who was put up in town was upset as he felt that he deserved priority in getting an Ashram room. He filed a written complaint with the President stating that the servant at the Ashram accommodation table was collecting bribes for room allotments, and that he himself was eyewitness to it. The President came to the table of that very servant, gave him the letter and told him, “See how much appreciation there is for your services here!”

— T.V. Chandramouli, publications

Bhagavan’s Ashram is the freest place I know and Sundaramji saw to it that it remained so. If his father whom he succeeded as President often said “Bhagavan is always sixty feet around me,” Sundaram seemed to say, “Only Bhagavan is there.” Both followed Bhagavan’s upadesa to the hilt, not to aspire for guruhood in which case people would expect much from you, and you would soon enough have to playact. Sundaram was completely bereft of vainglory and braggadocio. He was unflamboyant, non-aggressive, non-assertive but politely



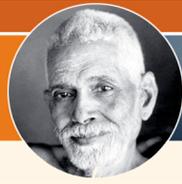
firm, never swerving from his principles. He never cared for praise. Once when I pointed out a minor foible of his, he graciously said that he would correct himself. It is a trait rarely found even among great spiritual aspirants.

— K.V. Subrahmonyan, publications

When I first became editor of the *Mountain Path*, there was some doubt as to whether I was capable of the job. One evening just before Tamil Parayana, when everyone was seated in front of Bhagavan’s Samadhi waiting for the starting time at 6.30pm, I was standing near the stone railings round the Samadhi where the bell hangs for the pujas. Sundaram got up from his place for the chanting and walked over to where I was standing. For the next three minutes or so we engaged in a general conversation about nothing in particular. He then walked back to his place and the Parayana began. Everyone in the hall was aware of what happened and its significance. This was typical of Sundaram who did things in a low-key way. He showed his support for me without uttering a word.

— Chris Quilkey, *The Mountain Path*





Part from ensuring that I take part in Ashram activities, Sundaram Anna gave me freedom to establish the Ashram Archives and expand the gosala which he so loved, introducing select Indian breed cows like Gir, Tarparkar and Kangeyam and in carrying out eco-friendly works and developing flora and fauna 'projects'. We have now in place effective 'micro and macro water-harvesting' arrangements, a totally organic farm, bee-keeping and gardens embellished with more than 150 varieties of trees, plants and herbs to the joy of increasing numbers of butterflies and birds including the peacocks.

— V. Subramanian

When I think of Sri Ramanasramam's president Sundaram Anna my mind goes back to January of 2011. I was coming to the end of a wonderful stay in the ashram that only intensified the longing to spend

more time immersed in Bhagavan and Arunachala. As I was saying teary goodbyes, I thanked Sundaram Anna for his kindness and told him I was going back to the USA. We were standing near the well outside of the dining hall under the stars. He motioned at the samadhi and said, "Come back soon, this is your home." It was a simple and brief statement, but the words moved me deeply. At that time I still had questions about whether Bhagavan had 'accepted me' and a great yearning to spend more time at the Ashram. Every time I left, I was afraid that I might never be able to come back. Somehow with those words I felt that a door swung open inside of me. Since that visit I have come to Sri Ramanasramam yearly for longer and longer periods of time. Externally and internally, Arunachala and Sri Ramanasramam are my home and Sundaram Anna's words were some of the first that invited me to believe that I could belong here.

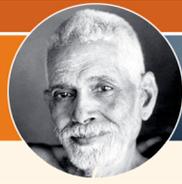
— Katy Blackman

Besides an overwhelming feeling of welcoming and inexpressible gratitude as I entered the Ashram and prostrated to Arunachala, the very first time I saw and pranamed to Sundaranna, in December of 1999, was just like the last time I saw his mortal form (i.e. asking permission to leave just before returning to the US for work at the end of February). I touched his feet and looked silently into his eyes ... everything and nothing and beyond... a depthless Ocean of Bliss.

— Dr. Carlos Lopez

Once in 2004, I accommodated a not-so-well-to-do couple who came to the Ashram for the first time. They brought with them their son who was very ill and were en route to Chennai from South India to get him treated. They stayed for four or five days and on the day they were to leave they came to the office to express their gratitude and asked if they could get the President's blessings. I brought them into Sundaranna's office. In those days he was working in the inner office just down the steps. I introduced the family to him, and he invited them to sit. I observed from a distance that they were having a long conversation and the





mother was weeping profusely. After their meeting, we all went to lunch. When Sundaranna came back at 2 pm as was his usual timing then, he asked me to call the family back. They were still in Morvi Guest House and were only departing in the evening. When they came to the office, Sundaranna handed over a large sum of money which he had taken out of his personal account during the lunch break. The gesture took them completely by surprise. He said this was to aid them in getting proper medical attention for their child. They were overwhelmed and expressed deep gratitude. That evening they departed for Chennai. I never found out what became of their son, but I pondered Sundaranna's compassion for these complete strangers.

— Shrinivasa Murthi, accommodations

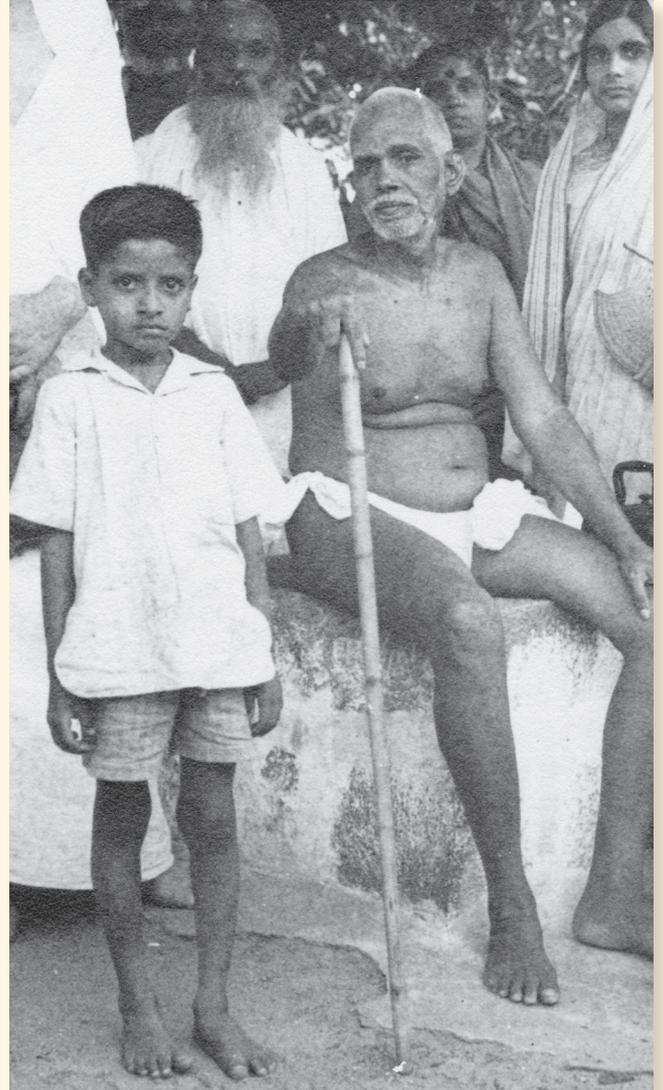
Sundaranna's whole life was saturated with spirituality. He was always immersed in the teachings of Ramana. He would always quote from *Aksharamanamalai*, *Upadesa Saram* and *Ulladu Narpadu* when problems were brought to him about our daily life. This has taught me to try and live life according to the teachings of Bhagawan. He was more immersed in silence in the last few years and did not talk unless he was asked a question. We could see that he was in total mental peace.

— Dr. Ramkumar Sankaran

Sundaramji was unostentatious in devotion which was very deep. He was ever conscious that Bhagawan was total impersonality and tried to be as impersonal as possible.

— K.V. Subrahmonyan, publications

It was our first visit as a family and our daughter, Kayla was about two years old. We were in the Mother's Shrine when Kayla climbed on one of the little peacocks in front of one of the deities (in the north-western corner). When we realized it, we immediately wanted to take her down but the president Sundaranna who just witnessed the scene immediately came close to us and said: 'No, no just let her play' and then he added, 'What is the difference between this child and God?'

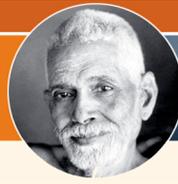


This touched us deeply and we felt so welcome in the Ashram. This is one of many episodes that warm the heart whenever my thoughts go to the Ashram. In the midst of this deep spiritual atmosphere, children also have their place and are taken in the heart of Bhagawan. Feeling so welcomed by Sundaranna played a big role in this for us, as he always greeted us with his beautiful smile as we entered the lunch hall, all the while making little jokes with Kayla.

— Dr. Marc Loewer

His own surrender to Bhagawan was deep and his faith unshakeable. He told me, 'Saradamma, you know, when I was in service I did not really have any clear concept about money'. And he smilingly added,





'I do not think even now I have any thought or knowledge about money'. He continued:

In those days I did not have the faintest idea as to what it takes to run a household or to celebrate a major event in the family. I would simply give my entire salary to Susila and she would run the household month by month and probably set aside the money required for our travel and other needs as well. For her part, she never asked for anything more than what I gave her. When Anand was to get married, Susila told me that we would need forty thousand rupees towards expenses for the wedding. I was flabbergasted. I had no savings and no source from which I could raise that kind of money. I left it to Bhagavan to show me the way. The very next day while I was at work I was asked to prepare to leave in the next couple of days on an overseas assignment. When I returned after the assignment I was paid a special remuneration of forty one thousand rupees and some change after deducting taxes. Can you believe this? Bhagavan gave me the exact amount that Susila had needed from me for the event. I brought home the money and handed it over to Susila for the marriage expenses. Right then I knew that Bhagavan takes complete care of all our needs.

— Dr. Sarada, editor of The Ramana Way

I believe that Sundaram Anna was also sensitive to devotees who loved to meditate in the silence of old hall and who suffered a bit from crowds during the “season”. The ashram renovated two rooms attached to the samadhi hall. I think one of the rooms had been the old office when Bhagavan was still in the body (please check). When the renovation was completed Sundaram Anna came over to me one day and showed me both of the rooms saying, “Now you have two other places to sit when the old hall gets very crowded. I had never mentioned anything to him about the old hall getting crowded at times, and that it would be appreciate to have an additional place to meditate near the samadhi.

— Marye Tonnaire

Once after dinner around the time of Venkato's Centenary celebration, Sundaranna and I were standing near his father's samadhi. He commented that no one had lived longer in Ramanasramam than

had his father, who came in 1937 and resided in the Ashram up until his death at the end of 2007. Of course, it was mutually acknowledged that Kunjuswami would win this title by a little if the years spent at Skandasramam were counted.

Sundaram then made a very interesting comment. He said with firm conviction that Swamiji's would be the last interment, that is, the last samadhi in Ramanasramam. He said that he had made this decision already at the time of his father's death in 2007. He made no reference to himself, but what he was saying in effect was, “I shall not allow that I be given the burial rites of a saint and be venerated down through the ages”.

I came away from the encounter musing over the implications of his words and his boundless humility.

— Michael Highburger, publications

At one point in those early years I wrote a personal letter to him saying ‘Anna, I am not able to manage. I am unable to take care of the running of RMCL in a suitable manner. Please let Ramanasramam take over the Centre.’ When I wrote this I did not consider the legal possibilities or the appropriateness of such a move. I was simply expressing my own acute sense of diffidence at that moment. In his prompt reply in his own beautiful hand Anna too did not make any reference to these aspects. His reply was most emphatic and a great spiritual lesson for me. ‘Saradamma, neither am I running Sri Ramanasramam nor do you run Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning. Bhagavan alone runs both the institutions.

Where is room for us to worry about anything? Let us serve as guided by Him.’

About his attitude towards service he once told me in confidence:

Let me share a secret with you Saradamba. While at Baroda I sometimes used to wonder why Bhagavan had given a special place to our family. Why had He willed that His brother's progeny should have sole administrative powers in the running of the Asram? Had He been partial to us? I must admit that I had such thoughts a couple of times. But





do you know Saradamba? Soon as I came to the Asram permanently Bhagavan revealed to me clear as daylight that He had given us no powers at all, not even the powers that every any visitor to the Asram may have. On the other hand it was His command to His family to serve the devotees in every breath. To be a dedicated servant to every devotee was Bhagavan's order to us as it were.

— Dr. Sarada, editor of The Ramana Way

Sundaranna lived his life according to the dictum that the less one speaks of oneself, the more one abides in Bhagavan and the greater the impact one will have on others in getting them to live up to the high standards that Bhagavan set for us all. Such is the silent, veiled glory of Sundaram Anna, the impact of whom makes us aspire to get some of what he had.

— Sivadas Krishnan, administration

Anna is ever with us in our memories as a very simple, gentle and loving human being. We could always see the reflection of Bhagavan's teachings in his interactions. Many incidents happened during his tenure which revealed how he worked like an instrument and was guided by Bhagavan.

He was fond of writing from Bhagavan's works and was ever willing to share what he wrote. Whenever he wrote something it always started with 'Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya'. You could see that the repetition of Bhagavan's name was constantly going on inside him.

One day he told Susila Manni and I, "The best thing that could have happened to us is to have come to Bhagavan and Sri Ramanasramam." The best way to pay respect to Anna is by remembering and being what he said: "Surrender to Bhagavan and he will take care".

— Veena Sudhir

Sundaram Anna would often tell me in his natural, affectionate manner that the very first time he saw me was when I was a toddler, probably less than three feet tall, wearing a small 'long skirt' and blouse – 'pavadai chattai'. He said that whenever he saw me thereafter it was only that 'kutti Sarada' he saw and related to. Such was his love. Indeed



Moksha Deepam lamp burning on Bhagavan's Samadhi, 21st July

everyone remembers him as being most loving and affectionate. That is the first thought to rise in the mind when one refers to Sundaram Anna, the next is his warm smile and the third is his absolute simplicity and surrender to Bhagavan.

— Dr. Sarada, editor of The Ramana Way

A sense of poignancy and personal loss fills the heart in remembering the smile of warm recognition and affection one met in Sundaranna each day, which did not abate even when he was physically afflicted.

— ASK and Aparna

Though my wife and I met Sundaranna only a few times, he shared many incidents from Bhagavan's life. My wife would listen to him with rapt attention and be filled with deep love for Bhagavan after meeting him. Sundaranna whose heart was soaked in devotion with unwavering faith in Bhagavan, infused the same in others. His unassuming simplicity was impossible not to notice. With the disappearance of his physical form, devotees have lost wonderful soul but not the abiding impression that he has left in our hearts

— Madhurananda and Sangeetha





Events in Tiruvannamalai: Local Coronavirus Update



With nearly 15 lakhs reported Covid-19 cases and with 50,000 new cases each day, India ranks third in the world in the number of documented cases. Tamil Nadu has had 7,000 new cases each day for many consecutive days now. New antigen testing kits are being put into use which provide results within half

an hour and Prime Minister Modi said recently that the country as a whole would soon be testing more than 10 lakh samples per day across the nation. One would imagine that in scaling up the rate of testing the rate of positivity would be reduced. But the opposite is the case. The proportion of people who turn out positive has been increasing steadily, from about 3.75 per cent at the start of May to 8.56 per cent now. This would seem to suggest that the rate of spread is outpacing the capacity to test. Tamil Nadu leads the country in testing, having tested more than 24 lakh samples.

About 4.5 crore reusable masks are being distributed at no cost to 70 lakh families around the country and mask-use is widespread locally. A few days ago 79 Covid-19 deaths were recorded in Tamil Nadu, a state that is reporting 2.2 lakhs of total cases and 3,500 total deaths. In Tiruvannamalai with 5,300 active cases, containment measures remain largely in place but every effort is being made to allow basic services and essential activities to continue. —

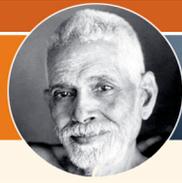
Aim high, aim at the highest, and all lower aims are thereby achieved. It is looking below on the stormy sea of differences that makes you sink. Look up, beyond these and see the One Glorious Real, and you are saved. ~ Sri Bhagavan, In Days of Great Peace, p. 94.

Obituary: Sri Margabandhu Sastrigal



Sri Margabandhu Sastrigal attained the lotus feet of Arunachala on 18th July, 2020, in Chennai. Born in Tiruvannamalai District, he attended the Maha Nirvana of Bhagavan Ramana on 14th April, 1950. Sattvic by nature, he was respected by all for his humility, faith, silence and unassuming nature. He regularly participated in the Sri Chakra Puja, Sri Vidya Havan, Navaratri and Ashram Kumbhabhishekams over the last fifty years. He recited along with other pundits the liturgy for the 2019 Sri Vidya Havan. —





Obituary: Sri V.S. Ramanan



Sri Venkataraman Sundara Ramanan was born to T. N. Venkataraman and Nagalakshmi on 29th May, 1934 (*jyestha nakshatra*). He came to live in Tiruvannamalai at the age of three when his father started service in the Ashram. He thus got to spend his formative years in Bhagavan's presence. At that time, the family was living in town but by July 1949, they moved to their newly constructed house in Ramana Nagar. Early photos with Bhagavan reveal the rich lives the children had in the presence of Bhagavan.

Sundaram studied engineering and obtained a B.E., (Electrical Engineering) from Madras University, in 1957. He married Susila in 1960 and went to Germany in 1965 where he got a diploma in power engineering with special reference to chemical plants and worked for Siemens. He later served as 13.5 years in M/s Neyveli Lignite Corporation Neyveli (1957-71 and 21 years (1971-92) in M/s Indian Petrochemicals Corporation, Baroda as General Manager. In 1992, he took an early retirement and came to settle in Tiruvannamalai to assist his father in managing the Ashram. In 1994, President T. N. Venkataraman, already 80 years old, decided to take sannyas and turned the leadership of the Ashram over to Sundaranna who was installed as the Ashram's third president.

The Ashram prospered under his guidance and he oversaw the digitisation of the bookstall and publications departments, as well as the establishment of the Ashram Archives, built to house and preserve the 1,500 photographic negatives of Bhagavan, among other precious items. Over time, the demand for more accommodation led Sundaranna to construct the Post Office quarters and the accommodation just opposite, as well as Achalam just a few doors down from the President's compound. By the mid-1990s, the old Dining Hall was no longer able to serve the growing number of visitors on ordinary weekends except by multiple sittings and so the decision was taken to make an extension. Abutting the old Dining Hall on its northern side, the new annex was completed in the middle of 1998. Sundaranna also oversaw the renovation and expansion of Morvi Compound in 2010. By 2009 he established a modern dispensary in the Ashram proper as well as the new library and auditorium. Meanwhile, construction projects and renovations in various locations included Bhagavan's birth house in Tiruchuli as well as the Tirukoilur and Tiruchuzhi Temple renovations and Mahakumbhabhishekams.

Sundaram's first order of business was service to devotees and the Ashram. He took it to heart and sought to carry out this sacred duty with utmost sincerity. The following personal note that he dictated to his assistant-in-charge in 2012 testifies to this:

I have committed myself to the conviction that everything within the Ashram is performed by Sri Bhagavan including the so-called inmate's functions which is also ordained by him. He is the only one within the precincts of the Ashram. Nobody can treat anyone else well or ill here, for Bhagavan is the only doer here. Since March 2009, I have begun to practice living in the NOW as Bhagavan has declared things to be ordained. Such a practice, I feel, will keep me ever at His Feet.

Sundaram surrendered to Bhagavan and wiped clean the slate in order to live only in Bhagavan. He was absorbed in Bhagavan as gently as he lived his life, at 9.21 am on the 21st July, wearing his characteristic sweet smile. He is survived by his wife Sushila, his son Anand, his daughter Aruna, his son-in-law, Ramkumar, his two daughters-in-law, Ranjani and Nitya, six grandchildren and two brothers, Ganesan and Mani. —

