

Vedapatasala

This article is part of the series covering the various functions at Sri Ramanasramam and the teams behind them. We have tried to cover the growth of the ashram Vedapatasala from 1934 till today.

History

The recitation of the Vedas, morning and evening, at Sri Bhagavan's shrine started under very interesting circumstances.

Initially, some Pundits began coming from the town and reciting the vedas before Sri Bhagavan, thinking, perhaps, that it was edifying for them to do this in the august presence of the Maharshi. Although everyone liked this, it wasn't performed with any consistency, depending mostly on the whim of the priests. The Sarvadhikari thought that the Ashram should have regular daily parayanas. With this in mind, a Vedapatasala was established in the Ashram around 1934/35. Krishna Ghanapatigal was the teacher at the Ashram Vedapatasala almost since its inception. The students, much like today, would come twice a day to recite before the Maharshi. Sri Bhagavan often commented on the value of listening to Vedic chants. He would sit alert and absorbed throughout the duration of these recitations.

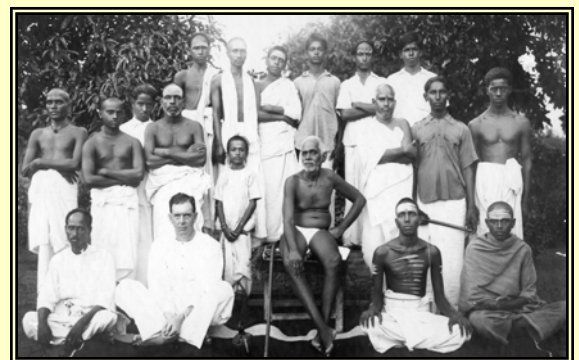
The years, 1936-37 saw a spurt of building activity in the Ashram. A new dining hall and an adjoining large kitchen were constructed to the north of the old dining hall. These were declared open by Sri Bhagavan Himself on 1st September 1938. A large store room was also constructed just to the east of the new dining hall. The Vedapatasala which was situated in a thatched shed west of the old hall, where the present dispensary is situated, was shifted in 1938 to a pucca single storied building well to the east of Bhagavan's hall.



Ashram Vedapatasala

Krishna Ghanapatigal was the teacher for almost forty years till his retirement in 1980. After attending the morning Vedic chanting along with the boys he would teach the boys till eleven. The teaching would resume at about 2 p.m. and continue till about 4 p.m. After Vedaparayana at 5 p.m. in front of Bhagavan he used to retire to his home for the night.

He was very orthodox in his ways. In the dining hall, the practice was that only after serving the Brahmans, the non-Brahmins and Sri Bhagavan were served. During the second serving, as the food had already once been served to non-Brahmins, it was considered polluted. Krishna Ghanapatigal felt unhappy and gently made this known to Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan immediately instructed that Ghanapatigal should be served food separately inside the kitchen, before food was served in the dining hall. He did not stop at that. Thereafter for some days before entering the dining hall for lunch, He would enquire whether food had been served to the Vedic teacher!



Major Chadwick (seated - 2nd from left)

After Bhagavan's Nirvana in 1950, the patasala was temporarily suspended, due to paucity of funds. In 1953, due to great efforts taken by Major Chadwick (Sadhu Arunachala), an ardent Western devotee of Bhagavan, the Ashram Vedapatasala and Sri Chakra Puja at Mother's Shrine were revived.

Early Students

Seshadri Sastrigal and Padi Agraharam Ramu were the first to join Ashram Vedapatasala when it was started around 1934/35. Later on Krishnamurthi (kittu) and Subramanian (Appichi), who went on to become the Ashram chief priests, became its students. When Seshadri once handed over a mug of water to Sri Bhagavan to wash His feet after returning from the Hill, Sri Bhagavan said, "Never do anything without being told. Attend to the work for which you have come."

In those days Patasala boys had to help the cooks serve food to devotees. Whenever Seshadri halted before Bhagavan a little more than he did for others Bhagavan chided him, "Don't play, go to the next leaf." Once Sri Bhagavan asked for some more buttermilk, which was unusual with him. Seshadri went inside the kitchen and brought a bucket of buttermilk, which was kept separately. Bhagavan after tasting it found it sour and asked for the reason. One of the cooks reported that it was buttermilk meant for the servants. Bhagavan asked, "We have so many cows. Isn't the milk which we get enough for all of us, why can't we serve the servants the same buttermilk too?"

It was customary for the Patasala boys to take turns and perform puja at the Mother's Shrine. One Karthigai Deepam Day, while Seshadri was showing the arati somehow the curtain in front of the Mother's Shrine caught on fire. After quickly dousing the fire he took the arati to Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan took the vibhuti with great devotion and applying it on his forehead asked in jest, "What? Has the *chokkapanai* been lit in the morning itself?" (*Chokkapanai* is a sort of bonfire lit atop a pole at every Siva temple in the evening of Deepam Day) How Bhagavan came to know about the fire was a wonder!

Today

The present teacher of the Ashram Vedapatasala, Brahmashri Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal has been teaching since 2002. Since then, 12 students have completed kramam after a period of 8 years. At present 17 students at various levels and ages are being tutored by him.

Generally the patasala boys get up around 4.30 a.m. and practice by reciting several times the lessons taught previously till they commit them to memory and can chant them verbatim with the correct intonation, rhythm and pronunciation. The early morning recital is called Brahma Yajna. After completion of the Brahma Yajna students have their bath and observe the morning rituals of sandhyavandhanam and samithadhanam before having their breakfast.

After breakfast they chant the first three pranas of Taittiriyanopanishad at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine from 8.00 to 8.40 a.m. Between 9.00 a.m. and 11.00 a.m. Vedic lessons (Krishna Yajur Veda) are taught. From 11.00 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. they perform afternoon rituals called madhyanikam.

Lunch is served at 11.30 a.m. and afternoon lessons commence at 1.00 p.m. and continue till 4.00 p.m.

The evening schedule begins with a recital of Vedas (Sri Rudram, Chamakam, Purusha Shuktam, Sri Shuktam, Durga Shuktam, Upadesasaram etc.,) at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine from 5.00 p.m. to 5.45 p.m.

Evening rituals from 5.45 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. are followed by an hour of Vedic lessons. After dinner at 7.30 p.m. the boys are taught English and Mathematics from 8.00 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. At 9.30 p.m. the boys retire for the night, thus concluding their daily rigorous schedule.



Sri Senthilnatha Ghanapadigal with his students