

## Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem: A Brief History from Inception

### The Ashrama

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem, is one of the oldest centres of the Ramakrishna Order which was founded in 1919, formally opened in 1928, and affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission, P.O. Belur Math, Dt. Howrah, West Bengal, in the year 1941.

The setting up of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem, was initiated through the generous kindness of the late Sri B. V. Namagiri Iyer who with the aid of other friends and philanthropists constructed the Ashrama Building. Sri N. S. Lakshminarasimha Chetty made a gift of a small piece of land in the back portion of the Ashrama premises. Inspired by the guiding motto of the Ramakrishna Order, namely, "Emancipation of the Self and the well-being of the world", Swami Nirmalananda, credited with opening as many as eighteen centres, laid the foundation stone of the building on 13 June 1919, and later, on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1928, consecrated the shrine of the Ashrama. Thus was laid the seed for the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama in Salem.

Swami Nirmalananda had visited the Salem Ashrama in early 1920 on his way to Travancore. He again visited the centre during the Ramakrishna Centenary Celebrations. The citizens presented him with a welcome address which was read by Rao Bahadur C.S. Bhaskar, M.A., Bar-at-Law. The Swami thanked the Barrister for the welcome address and delivered the centenary address.

In the earliest available report (1933-34), the institution, a charitable dispensary situated at Kanakkar Street, was called "Sri Ramakrishna Seva Mandir" and it had its own managing committee with M.R. Ry. Rao Sahib D.P. Chennakrishna Chettiar Avl as the President and Swami Sreekantananda as the Secretary. Sri N.V. Krishnaiah Chettiar Avl was the Treasurer. Swami Deshikananda succeeded Swami Sreekantananda in the year 1943-44, and the institution, since then called Sri Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, came to be situated at Sivasamipuram, Salem. Swami Deshikananda was permitted by the Headquarter to go for recouping his health and in his place Swami Samprajnananda took charge on 27 March 1963. Belur Math also sent Swami Nandananda to assist in the activities of the Ashrama. In 1982 Swami Vijnananda took over charge of the ashrama. He passed away at Belur Math on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1991. Swami Raghevashananda succeeded him as the Secretary for a brief period. Swami Somananda succeeded him in 1992. He was succeeded by Swami Sukhatmananda in 1998. On 17<sup>th</sup> April 2006, Swami Kamalananda succeeded him. On health grounds, Swami Kamalananda had to retire from active life and, on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Swami Satyapriyananda succeeded him.

Besides puja and bhajans, weekly classes on the classical spiritual literature such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, the Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda, and other Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, were held. Harikathas and lectures by learned persons on puranic and spiritual subjects were also a feature of the Ashrama. Sri Ramanavami, Sri Krishna Jayanthi, Sri Sankara Jayanthi, Mahasivarathri and other occasions were observed. A large number of youth benefitted from the classes on the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. The report of 1944 remembers Sri K. Venkatasubbiah for his weekly classes on the Srimad Bhagavad Gita which concluded in early 1946. The report of 1946 mentions the Sunday lectures given by Sri T.K. Sundara Iyer on Srimad Ramayana after the conclusion of the lectures on the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. Sri T.K.

Sundara Iyer started classes on the Srimad Bhagavatam from the year 1951. It continued in the year 1952 to 1959 also.

In some years the celebration of the birthday of the Holy Trinity was conducted in an elaborate manner. Particularly, in the year 1950, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated in the Salem Ashrama, Kishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Rasipuram, Aaththur, Tiruchengodu, Omalur, Belur, Ayodhyapattinam, Mettur, and other places with the help of devotees like Sri K. Venkatachalam, Sri S. Sivaram Iyer, Sri M.N. Rangachari and others, and senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order like Swamis Paramananda, and Sarvajnananda. In the year 1951, Swami Sarvajnanandaji, Sri R. Ramakrishnan, M.A.L.T., Sri V. Subramaniam, B.A.L.T., Sri S. Sivaraman, M.A.B.L., Sri L.Subramanya Iyer, Sri A. Krishnan, Sri O.S.G. Siddha Chettiar, Sri S.N. Narayanan and others spoke in the festivals. In the years that followed several speakers of eminence came forward to give discourses and performances on the days of festivities. As it was a regular feature we do not give the details. However, it is worthy of mention that only 550 devotees participated on the birthtithi of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna as stated in the report of 2005-06. On Holy Mother's birthtithi, there was a greater gathering because nearly 1600 students from Sarada Samithi Institutions came in procession and joined a group of 550 devotees for bhajans in the ashrama's shrine.

The Ashrama is grateful to Sri N. K. V. Chettiar for providing the Ashrama with a kitchen. Later, the thatched roof of the kitchen was converted into a tiled one through public charity. Two side rooms and a semicircular porch were also added to the main structure of the original premises. A bed room for Guru Maharaj was constructed during the year 1943. Further, the compound wall in front of the Ashrama was put up through the benevolent contribution of Sri C. S. Krishna Chetty of Bangalore. Sri P. N. O. Ramaswami Chettiar of Gogai was responsible for the electrification of the Ashrama premises.

A new temple with an adjoining prayer hall were constructed in 1967 and this has been described later under the sections: "Proposal for the renovation/reconstruction of the Temple" and "The present shrine and prayer hall: Construction and consecration".

A Monks' Quarters was inaugurated on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1987 and additional rooms were added in 2004-05. This has been narrated under the section on "Centenary of the Ramakrishna Order: A multipurpose hall".

Computer and e-mail facilities were installed, says the report of 2001-02, during the year.

A generator was installed in June 2008 to tackle the menace of power cuts. Further, roll-able mats were provided in the back of the shrine and in the front of the ground and first floors of the Monks' Quarters to cut heat radiation during the summer months and to protect against cold breeze, as also to provide privacy. The shrine was a habitat for mosquitoes which caused great disturbance to inmates and devotees desiring to spend some time in silent contemplation. Nets and glass doors were provided which effectively cut down the mosquito menace. Several pictures in the shrine needed touch up as they had been spoilt by insects. A few fruit and flower trees were planted.

### The Ramakrishna Centenary Memorial Library

In this library housed in the then main premises of the Ashrama itself, free service was given to a number of readers evincing keen interest in spiritual values. Started in the Ramakrishna Centenary year, the library needed augmentation of the books in its stacks. Over time several donors gave books for the benefit of the readers. The Ashrama also purchased the journals of the Ramakrishna Order in English, Tamil and Telugu from 1951. The list included

Prabuddha Bharata, Vedanta Kesari, Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Ramakrishna Vijayam, Dharmachakram, Ramakrishna Prabha and Vision published by Kanchankadu Ananda Ashrama. Other reading materials were either subscribed to or received as donation in later years.

In 1954, 309 members used the facilities of the Library. Only 154 readers used the facility in the year 1955. Varying interest was shown by the readers in subsequent years.

Tulasi Mandir: Guest House and Library Building  
- Later, Office, Cash & Accounts, and Book Sales

The Ramakrishna Centenary Memorial Library mentioned above was housed within the then main premises of the Ashrama itself. To get over the inconvenience of lack of privacy caused thereby and for giving adequate facilities for the guests who arrive at the Ashrama, a separate building, to serve as the Library and Guest House, fitted with electrical lights was put up through the philanthropic and liberal donation received from Srimathi Thimakka Ammal, wife of late Sri T. C. Rangasamy Chettiar, yarn merchant, Shevapet, Salem, and the active help of her son Sri Tulasidas Chettiar, Jayalakshmi Mills, Singanallur, at a cost of Rs. 8000/-. The building was named Tulasi Mandir in recognition of the help provided by Sri Tulasidas Chettiar and his mother. This is the building in which the Office of the Secretary, the Cash and Accounts section and the book sales section are presently located. There is also a room which was earlier used as the residence of the Secretary but it was later merged with the Secretary's office. The report of 2000-2001 states that during the year the book-sales section was renovated and extended for providing better services to the public.

Charitable Dispensary

The monks of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Salem, besides attending to the aforesaid spiritual education of the devotees by conducting religious classes, performing pujas and annual feeding of the poor on the birthdays of the Holy Trinity, took upon themselves the task of alleviating the misery of the sick people in the Salem town. The result was the birth of Sri Ramakrishna Ayurvedic Free Dispensary, whose first annual report was for the period 1933-34. The free dispensary was started on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1933 in a rented house at Kanakkar Street, Salem, with a generous donation of Rs. 300/- given by the Local Urban Co-operative Society. It was formally opened by the venerable oldest citizen Sri C. Vijayaraghavachariar. Other institutions like the Salem Municipality, the Salem Bank, and the District Urban Bank also contributed to the working of the dispensary. The dispensary has been running smoothly ever since with the kind help and patronage of the munificent public.

The dispensary opened with just three patients on its rolls. The dispensary gradually grew in popularity and the first year of its functioning saw 5123 patients (3232 male and 1891 female) receiving medical aid from grave and complicated diseases like Urticaria, Rheumatism, Asthma, Gout, Ascities, Dropsy, Dysentery, Gonorrhoea, Leucorrhoea, due mainly to the skilful free service rendered by Sri K. Balakrishnan Nair, an "Ayurveda Visarada", who had worked earlier for over eight years under his master, the famous Ayurvedic Physician Sri V.N. Nair of Palghat. Patients from far away places like Panamarathupatti, Suramangalam, Dadagapatti and others have resorted to this dispensary for relief. The dispensary worked between 8:30 am and 11 am. One of the Swamis helped the physician in compounding, dispensing and dressing everyday. Even during the first year it was felt that a larger range of medicines needed to be

purchased and that a site should be purchased which would be centrally located so as to be accessible to all.

The growing popularity of the dispensary is indicated by the impressive number of patients over the initial few years as follows: 5123 in the year 1934 as stated earlier; 12007 in 1935; 16492 in 1936; 22188 in 1937; 22550 in 1938; 26754 in 1939; 28231 in 1940; 32839 in 1941; 35274 in 1942; 38225 in 1943; 32999 (17959 males, 15040 females) in 1944; 31468 in 1945; 22418 in 1946; 23152 in 1947; 30192 in 1948; 23992 in 1949; 33678 in 1950; 37001 in 1951; 28156 in 1952; 38390 in 1953; 29648 (should be doubled since medicines were given for two days at a time) in 1954; 32413 in 1955; 37540 in 1956; 43404 in 1957. There were 67152 patients in 1960!

In 1935 the dispensary served the people of the neighbouring Alagapuram village where fever broke out in an epidemic form. Regular medical aid was given to them three days a week. A number of cases of Guinea worm disease due to the contaminated source of drinking water was reported and with the munificent donation of Rs. 500/- from Justice K. Sundaram Chettiar the step-well was converted into a draw-well with numerous pulleys and a big platform. The disease was thereby completely eradicated.

At the request of several poor patients from Komarasamipatti and adjacent villages where a dispensary was not available, the venue of medical service was shifted from Salem Town to Komarasamipatti two years earlier, says the report of 1939-40. This report also states that the dispensary served not patients only from the Salem City but also from places like Panamarathumpatti, Reddiyur, Suramangalam, Dedakapatti, Kollapatti, and Kannankuruchi. Owing to the rise in the cost of Ayurvedic medicines, Homeopathic medication started in 1945. Sri N. Ananthkrishnan and Dr. A. Bhagyasmi M.B.H. conducted the Homeopathy treatment. From 8 September 1946, Allopathic treatment also commenced with Dr. K.V. Dhanakoti Naidu, Retd. Civil Asst. Surgeon and Dr. Sri R.N. Sujir, M.B.B.S., E.N.T. specialist as doctors and Sri N. Hariharan Iyer as the compounder.

The reports of 1948 and 1949 state that Sri Rajasekar Iyer (honorarium) as the allopathic doctor and Sri Bhagyalakshmi (honorarium) and Sri N. Ananthkrishnan continued as homeopathic doctors. Aforesaid Dr. K.V. Dhanakoti Naidu, Retd. Civil Asst. Surgeon and Dr. Sri R.N. Sujir, M.B.B.S., E.N.T. specialist served the dispensary as allopathic doctors in any emergency. The succeeding years witnessed other doctors rendering allopathic treatment.

From September 1956 the Allopathic treatment was rendered both in the morning and the evening. Dr. A.V. Chandirasekharan who treated patients in the evening gave his service free. In 1957, Dr. G.S. Maniyan, MBBS, was appointed a full-time doctor.

The housing of the dispensary has been a serious problem since its start. To remedy this and attendant difficulties, Sri V. Natesa Pandaram, an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and one of the most distinguished philanthropist in the Salem City generously built and gave possession of a decent building free of rent, in the heart of the city on Chery Road opposite to the New College buildings in fond memory of his beloved deceased daughter Srimathi Veeralakshmy. The building was named Veeralakshmi Hall in her memory.

The report of 1945 mentions the name of Sri S. Rangaraju Naidu who came forward to build, in the memory of his father, late Rao Sahib G. Srinivasalu Naidu, a building for the dispensary. Salem Nakara Paripalana Sabha (Salem Municipality) came forward eagerly to offer a piece of land for the construction of this building. The work started in 1946 with the laying of the foundation. The report of 1947 states that Sri Rangaraju Naidu had donated Rs. 7000/- for the construction of the building and also given another Rs. 1500/-. This amount of Rs. 8500/- was

treated as a donation from his father for the conduct of the dispensary activities, made possible by the earnest efforts of Sri Divan Bahadur K. Sundaram Chettiar. Sri K.P.A.R. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, Jewellers, Salem, came forward to complete the construction work of the building at a cost of approximately Rs. 40,000/.

The Charitable Dispensary was shifted from Veeralakshmi Hall, Komarasamipatty Chery Road, to buildings situated near the Ashrama in August 1948. Revered Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math, inaugurated this building on 31 August 1948. From September 1948, being urged by devotees of the Ashrama, Sri V. Natesa Pandaram contributed the rent collected from the Veeralakshmi Hall, erstwhile used free from rent for the conduct of the dispensary activities. In 1951 the rent collected was used for the repairs to the Veeralakshmi Hall itself and was therefore not given to the Dispensary for its daily functioning. However, in 1952 the rent collected was given to the dispensary for its activities by Sri N. Ramalingam, son of Sri V. Natesa Pandaram.

The Honourable Collector, Salem Municipality, states the report of 1948, also gave 4880 square feet of land to the west of the Dispensary, being erstwhile porampoku land used for cremation purposes, for the purposes of constructing a well, kitchen for the dispensary, and watchman's quarters. The aforesaid construction, again, was made possible by the generosity of Sri K.P.A.R. Ramaswami Mudaliar.

The report for the year 1944 records the distribution of cow's milk to 22 poor children with financial help from Sri S. P. Rajamanikka Pandaram and Divan Bahadur Sri K. Sundaram Chettiar during the past several years. In 1945, the number of beneficiaries reduced to 15 owing to the rise in the cost of cow's milk. There were 20 recipients in 1947. Sri K. Narasimhamurthy also contributed for this programme of milk distribution. The report of 1950 mentions the names of Devan Bahadur K. Sundaram Chettiar, Smt Nagaraththinam wife of the late Aro Bahadur S.P. Rajamanika Pandaram, and Sri P. Ranganatha Iyer of Sevvaypettai in connection with the arranging for the distribution of milk. In 1951 as few as 8 poor children were given milk on a daily basis. In 1954 there were 7 recipients for milk.

Salem District Government Health Care Department and Salem Municipality came forward to donate some medicines in 1951. Six bags of date fruits were received from the Government through Barrister S.V. Ramaswami. Such donations of medicines, multi-vitamin tablets and food items continued to flow through the years since then. Of special mention is CARE who supplied milk and ghee in 1956 which was partly used in the dispensary and partly in the night school.

In 1953, in the second building of the dispensary, an Emergency Indoor Ward was opened by Swami Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj. Related details are described under a later section. However, from a letter of Swami Vijnanandaji Maharaj, it is learnt that the Indoor Ward was closed even before his arrival to Salem in 1982.

A few minor operations were also performed during the year 1955 and thereafter for several years. The report of 1960 and thereafter also mention surgical operations performed in the ward attached to the charitable dispensary.

The Delhi Central Social Welfare Department came up with a liberal donation of Rs. 10,000/- to meet the financial deficit of the dispensary in 1956.

The 1962-63 and 1963-64 reports mention that an Operation Theatre with an attached ward, equipment, a new well and overhead tank. The inauguration of this newly constructed

“Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Operation Theatre” was held on 17 October 1963. The details are presented later. However, from a letter of Swami Vijnanandaji Maharaj, it is learnt that the Operation Theatre was closed even before his arrival to Salem in 1982.

The report of 1995-96 states that Dr. V. Ramanujam, qualified in the field of acupuncture, began to treat patients, numbering on an average 15 per day. Dr M Valli, MBBS, and Dr. V. Sugandhi, MBBS, attended to child care and pre- and post-natal care. The Homeopathy unit started functioning in February 1996 and 15 patients were treated daily by Dr. Karthikeyan, BHMS, and free medicines were given to the patients.

Dr. Antonisamy, Dr. Chako, Dr. Ramanujam and Dr. Chandrasekaran served in the dispensary as per report of 1996-97. Dr. M. Valli continued to handle child care and pre- and post-natal cases. The dental section was handled by Dr Jayaraj, BDS, (Sundays) and Dr K Devarajan, BDS, (other than Sundays). An average of 15 patients were treated per day.

The report of 1999-2000 states that for TB patients, free treatment (including X-ray) and medicines were supplied through the kind help of Sri R N Bhargava of Chandausi, UP 202 412 and Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. About 80 people including expectant mothers and children were provided milk mixed with nutrients on a daily basis from the supply of milk powder by the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission at concessional rates. Milk for expectant mothers and young children continue to be provided by the Ramakrishna Mission at concessional rates even up to the presentation of this history (2009).

The report of 2001-02 states that the following equipment were added to facilitate better diagnosis and treatment: (1) Nebulizer (Philips Infraphil), courtesy Lodge Montfort, Yercaud, (2) Ultrasound Scaling Machine, courtesy Dr. P K Bhaskar of Viveka Dental Clinic, Chennai, (3) Computerised Auto Analyser with screen, printer, courtesy Rotary Club of Salem, Mid Town RT 2980.

Siddha Medical treatment under a qualified Siddha Doctor started during 2003-04. Milk mixed with nutritious powder sponsored by M/s Sri Ramakrishna Electricals and Sri Subhash was given daily to 75 poor and sickly patients. Also Siddha (herbal) concoction was given to 80 patients. This is being continued even to the day when this history is being compiled (2009).

The report of 2004-05 states that the renovation of the dispensary buildings, doctors' quarters and staff quarters were taken up and completed.

The reports of 2001-02 onwards state that Sri Vakrathunda (Subhash) and members of the Lodge Montford, Yercaud No 249, supplied the required disposable needles for the dispensary (earlier the entry was under the caption “a friend”). They have been supplying these needles since then. In 2008-09 they started supplying disposal syringes (not just needles); a needle burner and syringe cutter was purchased in 2008-09 for disposing the used syringes.

A new upgraded version of Semi Auto-analyser (Humalyzer 2000) costing Rs. 1,50,000/- was purchased with munificent donation from Sri Palanivel@Babu, Proprietor, M/s True Sai Works, Salem, reads the report of 2005-06. Cardiac and Diabetic cases were treated by Dr. P Pachiyappan, MD, Government Hospital, once a week (total number of cases 680). Dr. R Subramaniam, DMRD, President, Medical Ultrasound Society, Salem, arranged for free scanning of needy patients at M/s Sreenivasa Ultrasound Scan Centre. Number of cases treated were 55.

The report of 2005-06 also states that Dr G Nagarajan was the optometrist. He examined 865 cases during the year and spectacles at very low price was provided to 258 cases. The State Bank of India donated a SLIT-lamp for the eye department.

The report of 2007-08 states that the renovation of the Dispensary Building was complete and it was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Sureshanandaji Maharaj in the presence of eleven monks of the Order on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2007.

An X-Ray unit funded by Infosys Foundation, Bangalore, was commissioned during 2007-08. The inauguration was done on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2007 by Dr. Mayya, Director, Multi-Specialty Hospital, Bangalore.

The period 2008-09 witnessed enhancement of the diagnostic tools available in the Dispensary. These include: (1) Auto-analyser; (2) Cell Counter; (3) Eco-Cardiogram, Siemens (donation of Rs. 2 lakhs each from Neyvelli Lignites, Dr Nalli Kuppuswamy Chettiar, and Peerless General Insurance and Finance, and Rs. 50,000/- from Sri S Perumal, Vice-President on the committee, as also lesser amounts from a few other well-wishers); (4) ECG machine replacing the old model on exchange offer; (5) Eye refractometer provided by Sri Arul Mudi, an ex-student of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College, Chennai, at a cost of Rs. 3,10,000/-; (6) Audiometer; (7) Short wave diathermy unit for the Physiotherapy; (8) Three phase generator provided by Sri Rajendra Prasad of Vysya college. Incidental to the purchase of costly equipment is the purchase of several on line Uninterrupted Power Supply systems from Numeric Power Systems. Items 6 and 7 were purchased out of a donation of Rs. 1 lac made by Central Bank of India.

With permission from the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission, a free mobile medical camp was started on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2008 (being the birthtithi of Swami Premananda) on a regular basis. The camps held once in two weeks in and around Salem are a great success and evoke great admiration and support. Several departments were represented in each camp and well-wishers came forward to help in managing a part of the expenses incurred. The camps are supported by generous donors.

#### Emergency Indoor Ward

In 1953, in the second building of the dispensary, an Emergency Indoor Ward was opened by Swami Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj. Those poor patients who could not go back to their homes after treatment were allowed to stay in this ward and receive treatment. Religiously minded people came forward and presented cots and beds for the ward. There were 34 patients in the year 1954; 65 in 1955. The financial help of Rs. 300/- in 1955 from Sriman Bitta V Ramaswamy Iyer enabled the Indoor Ward to tide over water shortage by the installation of a water connection to bring the water from the river Cauvery.

A few minor operations were also performed during the year 1955 and thereafter for several years. The report of 1960 and thereafter also mention surgical operations performed in the ward attached to the charitable dispensary.

#### Harijan Pathasala — Free Night School

Under the guidance of Swami Viswambarananda (later President of Sarada Ashrama, Ponnampet), a Harijan Patasala with 18 boys was started in the year 1935 in Puthur Kallanguthu Chery, the classes of which were since held in the village Chavadi side by side with classes for adults. After the transfer of Swami Viswambarananda in 1941, Br Tatwa Chaitanya with assistance from two paid teachers conducted the classes. Later, in 1942, a pucca building was erected through the kindness of the generous public. Elementary education was combined with moral classes and special hygiene classes for the benefit of the pupils. For drinking water,

a well was sunk within the school premises through the generous help of Sri V. Natesa Pandaram.

The number of students rose to a total of 47 (41 boys and 6 girls) studying in standards I to IV, in the year 1944. Needy students were given banians, dhoti, books, slates, slate pencils. In 1945 there were 33 boys and 15 girls. The student strength of the Pathasala in 1946 was 53. College teachers came forward to provide education for adults who had missed schooling. In 1947 there were 46 students. In 1950 there were 38 students. There were 45 students in 1951 and 40 in the years 1952 and 1953. There were 50 students in 1954; 60 in 1955, 43 in 1956. Subsequent years witnessed similar participation in this academic programme, though there is no specific mention from 1957. However students used to come on Sundays and participate in bhajans, games etc under the guidance of learned teachers. Whether these activities included classes on topics of study is not very clear.

Free coaching classes were held for boys and girls of backward classes studying in X standard says the report of 1989-90. These coaching classes continued in 1990-91.

The report of 1998-1999 mentions that moral lesson classes were given by Sri N.S.Nellaippan on Sunday mornings. He continued to take these classes week after week for several years even up to the year of compiling this report (2009).

A free coaching centre at Pudur Kallanguthur was inaugurated on 20th August 2001 in our own premises in a hall constructed at a cost of Rs. 3.5 lakhs. This was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, President of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. Students from class I to class X are taught here for two hours during the evening under the guidance and supervision of qualified teachers. This appears to be the beginning of a regular coaching centre.

The free coaching centre at Pudur Kallangkuthur, provided during 2002-03 and 2003-04, free coaching to 120 students all through the year under the guidance of 4 qualified teachers. Bhajans were conducted on all Saturdays. The coaching classes have been continuing since then.

During 2007-08 five computers were provided, courtesy Infosys Foundation, Bangalore and this provided an opportunity for twenty +2 students to learn Office (Word, Excel and PowerPoint). During 2008-09 the computer coaching classes were continued and permission was obtained for this activity from the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. Due to frequent power cuts in the state, an inverter facility was set up in the coaching centre in 2008-09. Also, rains made it necessary to extend the roof so that rain water does not affect the classes and further as this created more room to hold classes conveniently. Food used to be supplied to the students of the coaching centre initially in the ashrama campus and for a time in the coaching centre itself. The venue of distribution of food was shifted again to the ashrama to enable the students to develop a link with the ashrama.

#### Buttermilk distribution

During the summer months of May/June, buttermilk was distributed to wayfarers numbering about 200 to 250, says the report of 2004-05. This activity continues even today (2009).

#### Vivekananda Book Bank

The report of 1992-93 mentions the setting up of a Vivekananda Book Bank in the previous year for use by poor students of schools and colleges in Salem. The books were issued at the beginning of the year and got back at the end of the year. About 30 students availed of this facility in 1992-93. There is no subsequent mention of the Book Bank.

### Weekly Bhajana Mandir and Bala Sangha for Harijans

The report of 1935 mentions the setting up of a Bhajana Mandir for the welfare of the Harijans in Alagapuram Chery where the Harijans of the locality congregated every Saturday for singing bhajans.

The report of 1954 mentions 35 school going students who visited the Ashrama on Sundays and participated in Bhajans, games, etc. This provided a means for implanting good conduct in the young minds. In 1955 there were 40 young students. The report of 1955 mentions Sriman S. Hariharan, B.A., and Pandit Sriman M.R. Kuppuswamy Dikshitar as conducting the classes. Every year since then about 30 to 50 students participated in the Sunday bhajan, games, etc. For brevity of the report we desist from giving the year by year details.

Gradually, food was supplied to the students on a daily basis in the evenings, as also on Sunday mornings when the students came to the ashrama for singing bhajans and performing other activities like campus maintenance. The report of 1989-90 mentions that evening tiffin was being given to about 100 poor children. Evening tiffin was given in succeeding years also.

### Scholarships, Free Food and Clothing for the poor children

Distribution of food and clothing to the poor on a regular basis in the form of school uniforms or Deepavali gift was also a feature in some years. This is in addition to the welfare activity performed in the Leprosy Homes. Scholarships to help the poor to pursue education were given to poor boys and girls says some of the reports. In some years, study materials such as free textbooks, notebooks, uniforms, and also cash were given to poor students. Some of these are mentioned below:

The reports of 1945 and 1948 mention distribution of food and clothing on important festive occasions with the help of devotees, to mention a few, Smt. R Seethalakshmi Ammal, Dr. A.P.K. Nair, and Smt. Lakshmi A.P.K. Nair. This service activity continued thereafter. Smt Pushpam Natarajan wife of Salem District Judge Sri S. Natarajan donated clothes on the occasion of Deepavali in 1951. Similar donations to meet the expenses on food and clothing continued in the years that followed.

Free uniforms were distributed to 70 children of the school for visually handicapped. Charts, pictures, games articles, drums, etc. were distributed freely to the government school for the deaf and dumb during 1992-93.

During 1993-94, on Deepavali day, free uniforms were distributed to 105 children of the school for the visually handicapped in Salem. Free clothes were distributed to 280 children who live in the neighbourhood of the ashrama, in connection with the Vivekananda Jayanti Celebrations. On 6<sup>th</sup> February 1994, children of the Government Orphanage were given free clothes and tiffin.

In 1993-94, as many as 339 students derived the benefit of this scheme. In 2003-04, one set of uniform to 77 students (Rs. 13,008/-), scholarship to the tune of Rs. 12,630/- to 117 students, stationery articles and notebooks (Rs. 8890/-) to 115 students and pecuniary help (Rs. 4360/-) to 45 deserving cases were given. The scholarships are being given even to the year 2009 when this history was being

compiled, the items, the number of beneficiaries, and the amount spent varying from year to year.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1995, free school uniforms and sweets were distributed to 123 students, boys and girls, of the Government School for the Blind.

The Report of 2000-2001 states that in addition to feeding about 200 school-going children, free uniform, notebooks, stationery articles and scholarship were extended to about 60 poor students costing Rs. 13,000/-. Scholarship amounting to Rs. 8377/- was also given to 95 students. Pecuniary help was extended to 17 persons amounting to Rs. 5125/-. Imported garments received from Headquarters and from a devotee were distributed to refugees and poor people of 108 families of Sentharpatty (North and South), Thamapatty of Attur Taluk, Government Orphanage at Attur, Kallarayan Hills, Muttal Village School (Home of Tribals) at Attur, Anbu Illam Oldage Home at Yercaud, and Alagapuram Pudur Village, Salem.

The report of 2001-02 mentions that about 175 school-going students from the economically backward areas were given food every evening. Milk was distributed to 15 infants and expectant mothers in the evening through the courtesy of Smt Uma Palaniappan. Milk was also distributed in the morning through the dispensary, adds the report. This activity continued since then.

The report of 2001-02 also mentions that school uniform worth Rs. 13,000/- were given to 75 school children, scholarship amounting to Rs. 8330/- to 70 students, notebooks and stationery articles worth Rs. 7500/-, and pecuniary help of Rs. 5185/- to deserving cases. Imported garments received through the Ramakrishna Mission were distributed to Sri Lankan refugees (106 families, 353 members) on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2001, and clothes and garments were given to Kallarayan Hills Muttal Village Schools (15<sup>th</sup> November 2001), Anbu Illam Old Age Home (8<sup>th</sup> December 2001), Alagapuram Pudur Kallangthur and Government Blind School. The report of 2002-03 also mentions free distribution of school uniforms, notebooks, stationery articles, scholarships to students and pecuniary help to the needy. This was a regular feature.

In 2007-08, one set of school uniform was given for 102 students (Rs. 18,520/-); scholarship to the tune of Rs. 16,926/- to 143 students, stationery articles and notebooks valued at Rs. 18,624/- to 150 students, pecuniary help to 55 needy persons (Rs. 5431/-); milk distribution to 15 to 20 children and expectant mothers in the evening with help from the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission and Smt Uma Palaniappan; buttermilk distribution during summer to 13,500 wayfarers.

During 2008-09 clothes and fireworks were distributed to these students on the occasion of Deepavali and there was great rejoicing in the campus. This was in addition to the school uniforms which was a regular feature.

#### Sanskrit Classes

Free Sanskrit classes were conducted in the Ashrama since 1986 with about 50 students on an average. Free Sanskrit classes continued up to 1992-93 and then discontinued.

#### Bhajans for and by devotees

The report of 1955 also mentions that on Saturdays between 5:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Sriman R. Subrahmanya Mudaliar B.A.B.L., and his daughter Srimati S. Jayalakshmi conducted Thevara Thiruppukazh Bhajans. This was followed by reading from Sri Ramakrishna Amudamozhigal. Many lady devotees participated in this. The Bhajans continued in 1956 with

Srimati Ranganatha Ramaswamy and other devotees also in the group. There was reading from Sri Ramakrishna Mozhiamirtham after the Bhajans. The bhajans continued in 1957 with Srimati Jayalakshmi, Srimati Ranganayaki and other devotees. That year there was reading from Sri Ramakrishna's Upadesa Mozhigal. In some years the bhajans were on Mondays.

### Relief Work

Conducting relief activities has been a part of the activities of the Ashrama over the years. In 1942 and 1943, when there developed a crisis in the lives of the weavers of the Salem City, helpless and unemployed weavers numbering on an average 150, were fed continuously for four months.

The report of 1944 records with gratitude the financial help provided by Sri K. V. Sambasivam Chettiar and Sri M. Subbarayan (Manager, General Trading Co., Salem) for West Bengal Relief Works and Harijan Seva.

The report of 1971-72 mentions collection of money and material valuing Rs. 18,309.65 for helping the East Bengal Refugees coming to India following the political upheaval in East Bengal (since Bangladesh).

The cyclone of December 1972, says the report of 1972-73, passed through Tamilnadu hitting Salem and causing unprecedented floods in the river (Cauvery) passing through the town. Many house and huts standing on its bank were washed away and many thousands of people lost their shelter and belongings. A sum of Rupees 2131.50 in cash and 5000 pieces of garment, old and new, were collected for the purpose. The ashrama also participated in the praiseworthy relief activity organised by Sri Sarada College and Vidyalaya, by distributing the relief materials. The relief operations addressed 10,000 persons during 8<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> December 1972.

The report of 1977-78 mentions a terrific devastation caused by unprecedented gale and flood in October 1977 in the districts of Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavoor, Madurai and adjoining areas. The loss of life and damage to property were immense. Thousands were rendered homeless. The slum dwellers were the worst affected and required immediate help and rehabilitation. Distribution of food, vessels, clothes and other articles of daily use was made at Trichy and Pudukottai area. Plans were made for building model villages with pucca hutments, including a community hall, school, children's playground, etc. In response to an appeal issued by the Madras Branch of the Mission, this ashrama raised contributions in cash (Rs. 22,109 as. 14) and 6000 pieces of clothes, new and old. The ashrama Bala Sangha children did door to door collection.

The report of 1999-2000 mentions several relief activities: (1) Varieties of used imported garments from USA and local collections of bed-sheets, pillow cover and towels, all received from Headquarters, Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, were distributed under Distress Relief to the refugees from Ceylon settled in Tamilnadu in the villages of Aththikaattanoor, Karukappatti, Pavalaththaanoor and Siddar Koil refugee colony. The distribution covered 560 families numbering 2200 persons. (2) Through the devotees the ashrama collected Rs. 20,250/- towards Kargil Relief Fund and remitted it to "Indian Express Kargil Victims Relief Fund" during August 1999.

The Report of 2000-2001 states that a sum of Rs. 1,39,756/- was collected through the admirers, devotees, sympathisers and friends of the Ashrama towards the Gujarat Earthquake Relief and Rehabilitation Works of the Ramakrishna Mission and remitted to the Headquarters

of the Ramakrishna Mission. Medicines and garments worth Rs. 22,000/- were sent to the Rajkot Ashrama direct for the relief operations.

On 21<sup>st</sup> September 2003, the victims of fire havoc at the Panchenthangam Yeri Colony, Salem 6, were provided primary relief of stainless steel household vessels (one set), and rice (5 kgs) per family. Milk powder and garments (Rs. 21,200/-) were given to 149 families.

Used, imported garments received from the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission were distributed among 150 Sri Lankan refugee families at Kallankuthur Pudur village during 2003-04.

During 2003-04, a sum of Rs. 1,86,736/- contributed by the local devotees, public, Sindhi High School, Members of Lodge, Montfort, Salem Electronic Dealers' Association, and Indian Dental Association (SDNK Branch) were remitted to the Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters towards Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation work. Tamilnadu was badly hit by the Tsunami.

During 2008-09 a sum of Rs. 3,74,054/- was collected from admirers and devotees through Sri S. Subhash and sent to Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission to provide relief to the victims of Bihar and UP floods.

#### Service to Lepers

Since one year, reads the report of 1985-86, some service was being rendered to the Lepers' Rehabilitation Home near Talaivasal. Once a month a Swami of the Ashrama visited the Home, conducted bhajans, and gave religious talk to the lepers. Then refreshments were served to the lepers. Books and magazines were supplied to set up a library. During winter blankets were distributed to 350 lepers.

The report of 1989-90 mentions that "since six years" some service was being rendered to the lepers of the Lepers' Rehabilitation Home near Talaivasal. Once a month a swami of the ashrama visits the Home, conducts bhajan, and gives religious talks. Some refreshments were also given to them. In addition to setting up a library for them, some play materials like football, carom board and coins, volleyball, badminton, and free dhotis, sarees, blankets, bath towels and bed-sheets were also distributed.

The visit to the Rehabilitation Home for Lepers and the service to the lepers continued in the year 1990-91 and thereafter even to the day of this writing of the history of the Salem Mission Centre.

In 1996-97 report we find mention of the distribution of clothes, sweets and fruits to 235 inmates of the Government Leprosy Home near Dharmapuri. Spectacles were distributed free to 15 inmates of the Leprosy Home who had defective vision.

In 1999-2000 garments and cut pieces were distributed to two government Rehabilitation Homes situated in Thalaivasal, Deviakkurichi, Attur Taluk on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1999 (187 male, 57 female, 7 children) and at Seliampatty Government Rehabilitation Home on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1999 (14 male, 15 female, 5 children). Sweets were also distributed to the inmates at both these places.

The report of 2001-02 mentions that 215 and 265 inmates of the Government Rehabilitation Leprosy Homes at Thalaivassal (Attur) and Seliampatty (Dharmapuri) were given clothing on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2001 worth about Rs. 50,000/-, as in previous years.

The report of 2002-03 mentions that on the occasion of Deepavali, 400 inmates of the Government Rehabilitation Leprosy Home at Thalaivassal and Seliampatty were given new sarees, blouse pieces, lungis, banians and sweets worth Rs. 40,000/-. Spectacles were provided for 19 inmates of Seliampatty Home.

The inmates of the Government Rehabilitation Homes at

Thalaivassal (Attur Taluk) and Selliampaty (Dharmapuri) were provided new sarees and blouse pieces (161 sets) and Lungis and Banians (240 sets) as also sweets and snacks to about 450 inmates including children, on Deepavali (2003) day through the courtesy of Masonic Mont Fort Lodge, Yercaud, at a cost of Rs. 70,000/-

The reports of 2004-05 and 2005-06 also state that Sri Vakrathunda (Subhash) and members of the Lodge Montford, Yercaud No 249, arranged for the distribution of clothes to two Government Rehabilitation Leprosy Homes at Thalaivassal and Selliampaty.

The report of 2005-06 states that 8 inmates of the Government Rehabilitation Leprosy Home at Selliampaty were provided with spectacles and crutches.

This continued in 2007-08 and 2008-09 with distribution of clothes, sweet and snacks. In 2007-08, the inmates of Government Rehabilitation Leprosy Homes at Thalaivassal and Selliampaty were provided before Deepavali 128 sets of sarees and blouse pieces, 170 sets of lungis and banians, and 21 frocks for children through the courtesy of Masonic Mont Fort Lodge, Yercaud, worth Rs. 60,000/-.

#### The Golden Jubilee of the Parliament of Religions held in 1893 in Chicago

To commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the epoch-making addresses of Swami Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, a three-day celebration was held in 1943 at the Ashrama under the presidency of Swami Saswathananda, President of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Madras. The function began with prayers according to the Hindu, Islamic and Christian beliefs. Swamis from other centres and leading people participated in the function in large number. Numerous lectures on various religious belief systems were delivered by learned scholars.

#### Centenary of the Birth of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

The Centenary of the birth of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated between 27 December 1953 and the end of December 1954 at the Ashrama, Gogai, Women's Society (Mathar Sangha), Ayodhyapattinam, Belur, Rasipuram, Tiruchengodu, Dharmapuri, and other places. The occasion called for the dissemination of the details of the extra-ordinary life of the Holy Mother as wife, mother, and a nun. For long 34 years after the Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna she carried on the spiritual ministrations and guided the growth and development of the Ramakrishna Order. She was an exemplifier of the ideal of India's womanhood. Swamis Sarvajnanandaji of Coimbatore and Swami Turiyatmananda of Madras Math participated in the deliberations in addition to several devotees of repute (see Report of 1954 for a list).

#### Annual Competitions as a part of annual public celebrations

The report of 1976-77 states that "as in the previous years", different competitions were held on the occasion of Swami Vivekananda Jayanthi with a view to spreading the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Ideology among the student community. These competitions continue till date (year 2009) with variations in the classes covered, the type of the competitions, and the topics. In 1977, there were nursery rhymes, recitation in Tamil and English, Oratorical competition in Tamil and English, Essay Competitions in Tamil and English, Gita Recitation, Devotional music, dramatization (group event) and debate. It is difficult to

trace from the reports when these competitions actually started. However, in the report of 1973-74, we find the earliest mention of devotional music and recitation as part of the annual competition (see appendix to the report). These competitions continued in succeeding years as well. Smt. G Maragatavalli, Principal, Sri Vidyamandir, Shivajinagar, and her colleagues conducted the annual Vivekananda Jayanthi Competitions for several years.

#### Moral Instruction for Jail Inmates

The 1954 report states for the first time that lessons on good conduct were given to the inmates of the Salem Central Jail. This moral instruction class was given to the jail inmates twice every month in the year 1955.

#### Some Early Endowments

For perpetuating the service activities of the dispensary, Suramangalam Sri S. Rangaraju Naidu started in 1945 an endowment with Rs. 1500/-.

Sri Saradamani Devi Endowment was started by some ladies, importantly Srimathi R. Seethalakshmi Ammal, K. Rukmani Ammal, and P. S. B. Saraswathi Ammal, with a donation of Rs. 4000/- in the year 1945.

The 1948 report mentions setting up of an endowment by religiously minded people for Rs. 26,000/- towards payment of honorarium for the doctors of the dispensary.

The report of 1948 states that Sri P. Ranganatha Iyer contributed Rs. 1000/- for setting up an endowment whereby milk could be given to poor children numbering 16.

Such endowments were created from time to time, far too numerous to mention. Though the amounts were very small in those early days, the money value was much greater and so these have been fondly remembered in this history of the Ashrama. However, with the passage of time, the interest earned from these endowments were far too little to meet the cost of goods for which the endowments were intended. Soon others came in and offered to create endowments and these have enabled the Ashrama and the dispensary to function and serve the local people in a spirit of worship.

#### Special Gifts and Concessions

Smt. Ayoddhi Hamsammal, Sevvaypettai, donated Rs. 500/- worth of silver vessels for puja in the year 1947 and added Rs. 250/- worth of silver vessels in the year 1948 states the report of 1948.

Bus owners arranged for the free travel by bus for the Swamis, Brahmacharins and devotees to different places during times of festivities. Free tickets were issued by N.S. motor service, T.M.S. motor service, Swarnambika motor service, Ranga Vilas motor service, K.R.M.S. motor service, N.T. motor service, and Salem Service for the inmates to travel by town buses.

The Salem Municipality and the District Welfare Board helped the functioning of the Charitable Dispensary by giving financial help in some years (for example, Rs. 500/- and Rs. 300/- respectively in the year 1950). With the passing of years this help increased. In 1955, the Salem Municipality gave Rs. 850/- and the Salem District Welfare Board gave medicines worth Rs. 1500/-.

### Vivekananda Hall

The need for a hall for the conduct of lectures by eminent persons was keenly felt and, in 1948, Smt. R. Seethalakshmi Ammal, in the joint name of herself and her husband Barristor Ramaswamy, built, next to the Ashrama building, a beautiful hall, called the Vivekananda Hall, at a cost of Rs. 7000/- and adorned the hall with the beautiful pictures of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi at a price of Rs. 500/-. The Hall and the portraits were inaugurated in the year 1949 under the presidentship of Devan Bahadur Sri K. Sundaram Chettiar (Retd. High Court Judge) with speech given by Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. This was the precursor to the Vivekananda Prayer Hall in the new shrine.

### Temple for Sri Krishna

To protect the image of Sri Krishna within the Ashrama premises from sun's rays and rain, a mandapam was constructed at a cost of Rs. 1200/- given by Smt. Saundammal, mother of Smt. R. Seethalakshmi and wife of Sri Rao Bahadur Chikkanna Chettiar of Thiruppur. The mandapam was inaugurated by Devan Bahadur Sri K. Sundaram Chettiar (Retd. High Court Judge) in the year 1949 at the same time the Vivekananda Hall was also inaugurated.

A new granite statue of Sri Krishna, donated by Sri S.E. Narayanamoorthy of Devi Minerals, Chennai, was installed on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2004, replacing the old Plaster of Paris statue.

### Selected events since 1961

As most of the events mentioned above are a repetition to every year, we reproduce only special events and development since 1960 in the following paragraphs.

The 1962-63 and 1963-64 reports mention that an Operation Theatre with an attached ward, equipment, a new well and overhead tank, was constructed at a cost of Rs. 32,000/- for which the Ministry of Health, Government of India, contributed Rs. 25,000/- towards the purchase of equipment and construction of the theatre. The inauguration of this newly constructed "Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Operation Theatre" was held on 17 October 1963. Hon'ble Dr. D.S. Raju, Deputy Minister of Health, Government of India, declared the building open and the Hon'ble Srimati Jothi Venkatachalam, the Health Minister of Madras State, presided over the function.

The report of 1963-64 mentions an ophthalmic unit specifically, though treatment of eye diseases and minor operations were in vogue even earlier. Dr. K. Mahadevan, MBBS, DO, attended all eye cases and operations. The cases after operation were admitted in the ward as in-patients and discharged when cured.

The report of 1969-70 mentions that the operation theatre was provided with a good up-to-date operation table. Shadow-less light, suction apparatus, surgical instruments, and ENT equipments were added. Thus the surgical department became equipped for all major operations.

A dental unit was opened "during the last year" reads the report of 1971-72, and a clinical laboratory was also in the offing. The report of 1972-73 mentions in addition a proposal to start the ENT department and other departments in the "near future" as and when funds are available.

The report of 1973-74 outlines the need for a R.C. roof for the outdoor dispensary to replace the dilapidated, leaking roof of the construction which had become old, as well as other repairs.

In response to the appeal from the Ashrama, the Salem Municipal Council agreed to assign their landed property contiguous to the Charitable Dispensary for the construction of a Library and Reading Room. Another plot of peramboke land adjacent to it was also under the final stages of acquisition, says the report of 1973-74. The need for residential quarters for lay and monastic workers was also emphasized in that report.

The 1976-77 report mentions that children were given prophylactic Triple Antigen, Polio Vaccination, etc. To prevent blindness, Vitamin A injection was given to weak babies. Protein Food, Vitamin tonics, etc were given to children with malnutrition. Milk was also distributed to a few babies. Subsequent reports also mention this as a special activity.

The report of 1977-78 mentions that a Bala Sangha (Ashrama Bala Sangha) was "recently" started to impart cultural, social and spiritual values through informal education to young children in the age group 7 to 16 years coming from different strata of society. They are taught chanting of scriptures, singing of devotional music, bhajans, etc and they join daily prayers in the ashrama. Tending the garden, keeping the premises clean, sweeping and washing the prayer hall, library and reading room are some of the tasks assigned to them. These children serve as volunteers in festivals and celebrations, and attend Sunday classes held for them as also films of educational value screened for them. There is also a nucleus of Children's Library with periodicals and books exclusively meant for them. Subsequent reports also mention this Ashrama Bala Sangha and its activities. During 2008-09 arrangements were made for students of this Ashrama Bala Sangha to learn Key Board, gymnastics (mats were procured for this purpose), dancing, computer usage, spoken English, and Yoga, in addition to chanting and bhajans.

The report of 1980-81 mentions the difficulty in housing the Library and Reading Room in the Administrative Block of the Ashrama and the need for a space to conduct the activities of the Ashrama Bala Sangha. Hence there arose a need to construct a spacious hall measuring about 1000 sq ft at an estimated cost of Rs. 85000/-, which work was taken up during that year. The report of 1981-83 mentions that the "ashrama library is now housed in the new building". It is not clear when actually the library occupied the new location.

The report of 1981-83 mentions that antaryoga began to be held periodically. However, the strength was usually less if the antaryoga were held in the evenings than in the mornings. An antaryoga in the morning would end with a lunch for all while an antaryoga in the evening would mean just a tiffin for all. While there was no custom of collecting a fixed donation for the antaryoga, the Headquarters of the Mission approved in 2009, when this sensitive matter was contested by men of wisdom, the collection of a nominal amount for this purpose as is done in other centres of the Order to meet the expenses. In 2008-2009, antaryoga was held for bus conductors and drivers for several days.

This report of 1981-83 also mentions that the students of the Ashrama Bala Sangha sang bhajans on Sunday mornings and attended moral instruction classes in addition to the other facilities given for them to grow like the children's library, occasional screening of films of educational value and occasional excursions to places of interest.

The report of 1981-83 also mentions the setting up of a dental unit with a dental chair in June 1982 with the kind help given by the Rotary Club North Salem. A dental camp was also

organized on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1982 with cooperation from several dental surgeons under the leadership of Dr. P K Bhaskar of Madras in which 700 patients benefited. Since then Dr V Rajendran, a dental surgeon, is attending the dental department thrice a week. A dental camp was conducted in May 1995 for four days attended by Dr. Anand and Dr. Anilkumar in which 350 patients were screened and advised about the treatment they needed. A free dental and eye care camp was organized from 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> January 2006. Free treatment and medicine were provided to 266 patients. Another dental camp was arranged at Pudur Kallanguthur village on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2001 through the courtesy of Inner Wheel, DT 298, wherein 100 patients were treated.

The construction of a doctor's quarters on the upstairs of the library was finished during September 1982. Dr Ganapathy Subramaniam, the Medical Officer, occupied the quarters in October 1982. A milk centre for distribution of milk to slum children was opened with the help and cooperation of Indian Red Cross, Madras Branch, and the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action, New Delhi.

The report of 1984-85 mentions a seminar on comprehensive study of Ramakrishna & Vivekananda Movement held at the Salem Ashrama on Sunday, the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1984. Sri T.S. Avinashilingam (founder Director of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore) presided and Dr. M Aram, Vice-Chancellor of the Gandhigram Rural Institute, inaugurated the day-long seminar held from 9:30 am to 6 pm. Several men and women of eminence spoke on this occasion.

The report of 1985-86 mentions the formation of a Vivekananda Seva Sangha under the auspices of the ashrama, consisting of devotees of the ashrama, with the aim: (1) to participate in all the functions of the ashrama, (2) to help the ashrama in the conduct of its activities, (3) to serve the poor in all possible ways, and (4) to organize bi-monthly classes and lectures on the message of the Holy Trio. The members of the association fed during that year about 200 very poor children. This Sangha continued to exist on paper for some more years but there is no record of its activities or achievements.

#### Swami Vivekananda

##### Birth Centenary Celebration 1963-1964

The Swami Vivekananda Birth Centenary Celebration 1963-1964 was inaugurated on January 17, 1963, in the Ashrama. Early in the morning, a procession, carrying a neatly decorated picture of Swami Vivekananda, wended through the streets of the town with Bhajans and religious songs, and arrived at the Ashrama to join the Nama-sankirtana that was in progress at the Ashrama prayer hall. The local Head of the Ashrama read out at 6:49 am, being the exact time of the Swamiji's birth, the message of the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Srimat Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj. This message was circulated widely. Special puja and homa were performed, followed by the distribution of prasada to a large number of devotees and friends.

On the following Sunday, January 20, 1963, there was a Harikatha followed by a public meeting in the Ashrama campus. Bhagavatar Harikathakeshari Srirangam Sri V.S. Venkataramana Rao from Madras presented the Harikatha and Sri D Ramaswami Ayyengar spoke on the life and teachings of Swamiji with special emphasis on "Viveka" and "ananda".

In some of the schools and colleges, the Centenary Celebrations were observed and a Swami of the Ashrama among others spoke. Later, in the month of March 1963, Prof. K. Panchapagesa Iyer, M.A., delivered a lecture on Swami Vivekananda at the Vasavi Hall,

Salem Town, which was attended by a good number of devotees and friends. Due to the emergency in the country the elaborate part of the programme was dropped.

The concluding celebrations were held at the Ashrama and the Justice Sundaram Chettiar Hall, Salem Town, on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 1963 respectively. At the ashrama there was a special puja, homa, bhajans and distribution of Prasad. In the afternoon there was a bhajana recital by Srimati Vedammal followed by a public meeting. The Hon'ble Chief Minister of the State of Madras, Sri M. Bhaktavatsalam presided over the meeting. Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, M.A., Ph.D., Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of Madras, and Sri N. Subramaniam (Anna), B.A., L.T., Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, spoke on the occasion.

At the Justice Sundaram Chettiar Hall on the 16<sup>th</sup>, Sri T. Sankaranarayana Menon, B.A., B.L., District and Sessions Judge, Salem, presided, and Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan and Sri N. Subramaniam spoke here too.

#### International Youth Day and Vivekananda Youth Convention

The International Youth Day was observed in the Ashrama on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1985, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda. Many boys and girls from different schools and colleges participated. Swami Vijnananda, Secretary, spoke on "Swami Vivekananda's Message to the Youth of India".

International Youth Day was celebrated in Sri Sarada College and Sri Sarada College of Education on 23<sup>rd</sup> January and 13<sup>th</sup> February respectively. Swami Vijnananda spoke to the students of both these colleges on the same topic: "Swami Vivekananda's Message to the Youth".

Swami Vijnananda also took part in the Vivekananda Youth Convention held in Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya and addressed the students there on "Vivekananda" on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1984.

The International Youth Day / Vivekananda Youth Convention was also observed in some of the succeeding years with speeches.

A youth convention especially for Scouts and Guides was held in the ashrama on Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1989 from 9 am to 4:30 pm. The aim of the convention was to acquaint the participants with Swami Vivekananda's message of character-building and man-making education, his ideals of manliness, patriotism, self-sacrifice, and service, his ideas on women's education with ideals of Indian womanhood. Swami Vijnananda gave the inaugural speech. This was followed by many illuminating speeches and performances (knots & lashes, mono-acting, painting, quiz, handicrafts, etc) by the Scouts. About 330 Scouts participated.

A youth convention for girls was held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1989 from 8:45 am to 4:30 pm to acquaint the girls with Swami Vivekananda's ideas on education of girls, uplift of women, and ideals of Indian womanhood. Besides speeches by eminent persons, the girls also gave short speeches, sang bhajans, played on the veena, did mono-acting, set up an exhibition of paintings, participated in quiz, and gave their impressions about the convention.

The National Youth Day with Youth Festival was held on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January 1990 from 8:45 am to 4:30 pm. In addition to acquainting the youth with the message of Swami Vivekananda as a part of the National Youth Day aims, the Youth Festival aimed at giving the youth an opportunity to exhibit their special skills.

The National Youth Day was celebrated on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1991 as in the earlier years. The National Youth Day was suitably observed in the succeeding years as well.

A Youth Convention for girls was observed on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1991 for girls from colleges, polytechnics, and Higher Secondary Schools.

Similar youth day celebration and youth conventions were held in some of the succeeding years also.

#### Personality Development Workshops

Personality development workshops were held as during 2006-07. In that year the talks were on: "How to get the most out of yourself", "Communication skills", "How to face the future with confidence" and "Leadership excellence". About 100-150 students studying in Class XI and above, and some executives participated in the programme.

During 2007-08 three lectures were delivered as part of the Personality development workshops: "How to get time", "Achieving happiness", and "Study-skills for students" were the topics discussed. About 100 students participated in these programmes.

#### The 125<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda: Devotees' Convention

A Devotees' Convention was held on Sunday, the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1988 from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm as part of the 125<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. The theme of the convention was: (1) Greater participation of devotees, friends, and well-wishers in the activities and programmes of the ashrama and propagation of the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and (2) Swami Vivekananda's concern for the backward and depressed classes and his plans for bringing them into the main stream of our society. The convention was inaugurated by Swami Vijnananda, Secretary of the ashrama. There were several speakers and about 300 devotees attended the convention.

#### Centenary of the Ramakrishna Order: A Multipurpose Hall

The celebrations of the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Order were held in Salem and in some other towns. In commemoration of the Centenary, a multipurpose hall was built in the ashrama. This hall was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1987. The hall is now being used as the Monks' Quarters. The report of 2004-05 states that additional rooms were added to the Monks' Quarters.

#### Centenary of the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893

To commemorate the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 where overnight Swami Vivekananda became the world-conquering spiritual hero, a miniature Parliament of

Religions was held on Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1992 at the ashrama. The meeting was presided over by Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, and after his presidential speech, speeches on various religions were given by Dr. H Viswvesvaran (Hinduism), Fr. K Maria Joseph (Christianity), Sri Vijayendra Kumar (Jainism), Sri S. S. Hussain Mian (Islam), and Dr. K. Kulandaivel (Universality of religions as preached by Sri Ramakrishna).

Again, on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1993, Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, presided over a special programme to commemorate the centenary of the Parliament of Religions; Srimat Swami Tanmayanandaji Maharaj, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, gave the inaugural address, and Dr. K. Kulandaivel and Dr. S. Lakshmi gave special addresses.

### 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

On the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother's Ratha, on its itinerary, arrived at Salem in the evening of 5<sup>th</sup> December 2003 and it was received with due éclat and sanctity at the entrance to the Salem City and taken to the Sarada Samiti premises where programmes had been arranged. Later, the Ratha arrived at the Ashrama campus and halted for the night as also the next day, the 6<sup>th</sup> December. Programmes were arranged in a few places in Salem and thousands of devotees and public participated with great enthusiasm and devotion in all the celebrations. As a part of the celebrations, 150 sarees were distributed free to old and destitute ladies.

### Proposal for the renovation/reconstruction of the Temple

In 1963, the Managing Committee of the Ashrama considered putting up a new temple of Sri Ramakrishna in the Ashrama premises, which would enshrine a marble image of the Master. Sri E.S. Rathnam of Vaikuntam village, Dt. Salem, kindly consented to meet the entire cost of the image and paid Rs. 3000/- as advance amount. A suitable plan was also drawn in consultation with architects. Sri S.V. Ramaswamy of Salem, Deputy Minister, Railways, Government of India, and Dr. R.N. Sujir, MBBS, Salem, each contributed Rs. 505/- towards the first instalment for the construction of temple.

The report of 1964 reiterates this by stating that the Ashrama building, which was constructed in 1919 and subsequently added with anterooms, has been found to be in a precarious condition. The shrine of the Ashrama and the library were also housed in the same dilapidated building. It was therefore necessary to locate the shrine in a more stable and spacious building. The Ashrama building also housing the library also badly needed renovation and all that depended on funds.

This scheme for the construction of a new temple was dropped, says the report of 1965-66, as advised by the Headquarters. However, there was a proposal to carry out certain major repairs in 1966-67 which required funds.

The report of 1966-67 states that the shrine was shifted to an adjacent small building and the old structure of the shrine was completely razed to the ground as it was in a very

dilapidated condition. The reconstruction work at an estimated cost of Rs. 1,25,000/- depended on public support and munificence. The shifting meant great hardship for conducting the normal religious activities of the Ashrama, and hence the urgency to raise funds.

The present shrine and prayer hall:  
Construction and consecration

The reconstruction work of the present shrine and prayer hall was inaugurated on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1967, the auspicious birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, by performing special puja, vastu homa, Ganapati homa, and Santis. Srimat Swami Deshikanandaji, the then Secretary of the Ashrama, removed ceremoniously the first clod of earth in the presence of numerous devotees, friends and general public. The puja room was shifted to the Tulasi Mandira, an adjacent building, on the auspicious Sri Ramanavami day (17 April 1967). The demolition of the old building began in June 1967 and the foundation for the new building was dug in August 1967. The stone masonry upto the plinth and the brick-in-cement super-structure progressed steadily and satisfactorily. However, the pucca Vivekananda Hall which was added in 1949 as an adjunct to the old building (which had since been demolished), posed a problem to the architects and engineers as it could not be properly aligned and matched with the new construction under progress.

Coming to know of this, Srimati R.Seethalakshmi Ammal, wife of late S.V. Ramaswamy, the Central Deputy Minister, who had constructed this Hall, consented to demolishing this structure and also offered to reconstruct it in an enlarged form so as to fit in with the new shrine. To this end she offered Rs. 1 lakh, Rupees 70,000/- for the reconstruction and Rs. 30,000/- to create a fund for its maintenance.

Encouraged by the flow of funds from devotees, well-wishers and friends, the Management decided to build the shrine and prayer hall on a larger scale, revising the original estimate of Rs. 75,000/- to Rs. 2,00,000/-. A larger prayer hall, a gopuram over the shrine, ornamental sunshade all around, parapet in traditional style on the top, and embellishments in wood to the entrance of shrine were some of the major improvements to the original plan and design. The building was almost ready by 29<sup>th</sup> November 1968, the day fixed for its opening.

A few words about the structure: The new building is of stone masonry foundation up to the plinth level and brick-in-cement super-structure with reinforced concrete top. It consists of two parts: (a) the shrine and its appurtenances, and (b) the Vivekananda Hall. The main shrine, the sanctum sanctorum with two rooms on either side used as the bed room of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and the puja stores, has passage all around for pradakshinam. At the time of writing this history (2009) however, devotees circum-ambulate the entire shrine and the Vivekananda Hall several times absorbed in the thought of God. On either side of this passage which was earlier used for pradakshinam, and in line with the shrine, are two more big rooms. Right above this sanctum sanctorum stands the pagoda — the ornamental gopuram, in reinforced concrete with Moghul-Polish finish. The traditional copper kalasam crowns this gopuram. There are four more miniature gopurams on the four corners.

In the centre of the sanctum sanctorum, a beautiful big size photograph of Sri Ramakrishna flanked by those of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda on either side occupy the beautiful altar made of polished granite stone and surrounded by a prabhavali of fine wood-work.

In front of this shrine lies the spacious prayer hall, the Vivekananda Hall, (60' x 30'), the walls of which are adorned by big size photos of the apostles of Sri Ramakrishna, among which that of Swami Vivekananda in Chicago pose facing the shrine from the opposite end is prominent. Inside this hall, and direct to the shrine, a beautiful canopy adorns the shrine entrance. It consists of the base, two pillars on the two sides, and a carved top with nine kalasams on it, all worked in fine teak. The shrine frame embedded in it has fine embellishments.

The whole building is mosaic floored, and well ventilated by large windows and ventilators. The suggestive symbols Om, Vajra, Lotus, and Swastika are in the grill work. The hall is well furnished with electric lights and fans. Besides the main entrance from the east, there are entrances from the south and north. A short flight of steps with a decorative cantilever canopy held by two round mosaic pillars and with swan-snake symbol of the Mission in colours on its top give the front an imposing appearance. The whole setting gives a pleasing and impressive sight to the visitors as they enter the ashrama.

In connection with the consecration of this shrine, a week-long celebration was held from Sunday the 24<sup>th</sup> November 1968. On that day the celebration commenced with the observance of vastu puja, Ganapati Homa, Navagraha Homa, Kalasa Puja and other connected ceremonies in a traditional way. There were Vedic Chanting, Thevaram and Prabandam recitals, Suryanamaskaram and Nagaswaram every morning. In the evenings, there were programmes of discourses, katha-kalakshepams, bhajans and devotional music conducted by eminent men in the field. Sri Sethu Madhava Rao and party, Srirangam, conducted bhajans on the evening of Sunday the 24<sup>th</sup>. On Monday the 25<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday the 26<sup>th</sup>, Sri T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal of Madras gave a musical discourse on Saint Tyagaraja. The next day, 27<sup>th</sup>, Sri K.V. Santhana Gopalachariar of Hyderabad spoke on Veda Mahimai and also played Vedic chanting on the Veena. On Thursday the 28<sup>th</sup>, Srimati Sivananda Vijayalakshmi expounded Shakti Mahimai through devotional songs with special reference to Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, Friday, Brahma Sri Sengalipuram Ananta Rama Dikshitar gave a discourse on Sri Prahlada Charitam.

The actual consecration took place early in the morning on Friday the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1968. On the previous night, Adhivasa Puja and other connected preliminary ceremonies were gone through. The shrine was consecrated by installing the portraits of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda, ceremonially at the auspicious moment. This holy act was solemnised by Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, who had been invited specially for this purpose, to the joy of many monks, devotees and friends who had gathered to witness this inspiring event. There was special puja throughout the day with elaborate ceremonies according to the Sastraic injunctions, Veda Parayan, Prabandam Recital, devotional music, bhajans, and Homa culminating in purna-ahuti. About 4,000 devotees and visitors were fed with the consecrated food. In the evening, after the discourse on Sri Prahlada Charitam, there was special puja and homa of Sri Sri Kali, the Divine Mother, accompanied by Kali Kirtan and Bhajans, which went up to the small hours of the next morning. The next day, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1968, being Ekadasi, Ramanama Bhajan was conducted by the guest swamis and devotees in the forenoon.

The same evening at 5 pm, a public meeting was held to declare open the Vivekananda (Prayer) Hall. After an hour's orchestra performance by Sri Sarada College staff, Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj declared open the Vivekananda Hall due to the unavoidable absence of His Excellency Sardar Ujjal Singh, the Governor of Madras. On this occasion the four

guest swamis Tapasyanandaji, Hiranmayanandaji, Nishkamanandaji, heads of centres at Trivandrum Bombay and Ooty, and Swami Somananda (warden of the Vidyalaya, Perianaickenpalayam) spoke on the Ramakrishna Mission and its ideals. From the lives of the Holy Trio, selected scenes were depicted by the students of Sri Sarada Balamandir (in Tamil) and Sri Sarada Vidyalaya (in English) in a very impressive way. With this meeting the celebration came to a close. It is estimated that about ten to twelve thousand persons attended the kumbhabhishekam celebrations. During the days of the celebrations, the shrine and its gopuram were tastefully decorated with flowers, festoons and colour lights as well as by flood lights. Two big pandals had been erected to accommodate the audience and visitors.

#### Inauguration of Sri Sarada Devi Hall

On Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1985, Srimat Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the Sri Sarada Devi Hall (Lecture Hall cum Children's Library). The function was well attended by a number of devotees and friends. On the next day, about 40 aspirants were graciously initiated by Revered Maharaj.

#### Visit of Senior Monks and dignitaries other than mentioned in the report

The year 1950 witnessed the visit of Revered Swami Madhavanandaji, Gambhiranandaji, and Sambuddhanandaji. The Governor of Chennai Maharaja and Maharani of Bhava Nagar also visited in the year 1950. In 1951, Swami Vireswaranandaji from Belur Math, Swami Chidbhananda of Tiruppaithurai Tapovanam, and Swami Sambhavananda of Mysore Math visited the Ashrama.

In 1953, Swami Yatiswarananda visited the Ashrama and gave lectures at the Ashrama, Gogai, Samarasa Sanmarga Sangam, Theosophical Society, Dr. C. Vijayaraghavachariar Hall, Rotary Club and other places. Many resolved their doubts on spiritual matters by discussing with him. Swami Vireswaranandaji, assistant General Secretary, Belur Math, Swami Chidbhananda, Head of the Tiruppaithurai Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam, and Swami Ranganathanandaji, Head of the Delhi Ramakrishna Mission, also visited the Ashrama that year and gave discourses. A few swamis from Mysore and other places also visited the Ashrama.

In the year 1955, the Governor Sri Sri Prakasa visited the Ashrama and spoke highly glorifying the selfless service rendered by the Mission and urged the public to participate in it. The well known Sri C. Subrahmaniam also visited the Ashrama with the Collector and other dignitaries.

Swami Sarvajnanandaji Maharaj (report 1967-69), President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Nattarampalli, is fondly remembered for his screening, on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, the full length film Yugavatar Sri Ramakrishna with a running commentary in Tamil in which he was an adept.

During 1967-69 several senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order, devotees and friends visited the Ashrama. Special mention was made in the report of this period of the visits of: Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission (29<sup>th</sup> December 1967), Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park (20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> April 1967 filled with a busy schedule of lectures), Srimat Swami Adidevanandaji, Treasurer of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission (ten days in November 1967), Hon'ble Dr. Karan Singh, Central Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, Hon'ble Sri V.V. Giri, Vice-President of India, Sri V.H.R. Naidu,

Chief Architect to the Government of Mysore, Sri Rame Gowda, Chief Town Planning Officer, State of Mysore, and Hon'ble Justice Ramakrishnan of the Madras High Court.

Revered Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, consecrated the new shrine on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1968 and declared open the Vivekananda Hall on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1968. Together with all the guest Swamis, he visited the local Sri Sarada College on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1968. Later in the evening he presided over their College Day Celebrations which was held in their campus.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, President of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, presided over the evening session of the youth convention held on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1993 and spoke on Swami Vivekananda's Bharat Parikrama.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, stayed at the ashrama during 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> February 2001 and gave darshan as well as blessed about 60 spiritual aspirants with mantra-diksha. He also addressed the devotees one evening.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited Salem ashrama again and stayed between 24<sup>th</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003. During his stay he blessed the devotees daily and initiated 78 earnest seekers with mantra diksha.

Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, stayed at the ashrama between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2004. During his stay he blessed the devotees and initiated 62 earnest aspirants with mantra diksha.

Srimat Swami Srikaranandaji, Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited the centre on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2005 and saw the activities of the institution.

Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited the Salem Mission Centre again during 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> September 2005. During his stay he blessed the devotees daily and initiated 28 earnest seekers with mantra diksha.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited the Salem Mission Centre and stayed during 21<sup>st</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2007. He came from Coimbatore on the 21<sup>st</sup>. He inaugurated the Tamilnadu Manila Manadu at Sona College of Engineering, Salem. He went to Nattarampalli on 23<sup>rd</sup> and returned to Salem on the 25<sup>th</sup>. He blessed devotees and initiated earnest aspirants into spiritual life by giving mantra diksha on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2007.

#### Visits of Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj,

Revered President Maharaj reached the Salem Mission Centre from Perianaicken Palayam Centre on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 1966 at 7:30 p.m. He was received with due ceremonies by the members of the Managing Committee, devotees and friends. He stayed at the Ashrama for two days and left on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> for Madras via our ashrama at Nattarampalli. This visit was filled with darshan for devotees and friends from in and around Salem, special bhajans, devotional music in the evenings which Revered Maharaj graced by his presence. On the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Revered Maharaj held a question and answer class. The next evening, i.e., on the 8<sup>th</sup>, after devotional singing by Sri D. Chellam Iyengar, Revered Maharaj gave his

reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. During this stay Revered Maharaj blessed and initiated a number of spiritual aspirants and devotees. This was the first visit to the centre of any of our President Maharaj from Belur Math and hence worthy of special mention. In this connection it may also be added that the temple of Sri Ramakrishna is also sanctified by the picture of Revered Maharaj who consecrated the shrine and Vivekananda Hall on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1968. This visit of Revered Maharaj in 1966 and the subsequent visit in 1968 for the consecration left an indelible impression on the Ashrama, its devotees and friends. We have given earlier an account of Revered Maharaj's visit to the Ashrama in 1968 for consecration of the newly constructed temple elsewhere in this report and so we desist from repeating it.

Revered President Maharaj visited the Salem Ashrama for a third time on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1972 from the Vidyalaya at Perianaikenpalayam and left Bangalore on 24<sup>th</sup> August. During his stay of five days here, a large number of devotees and friends from in and around Salem came and sought his darshan and blessings. Students of Sri Sarada Vidyalaya and Sri Sarada Bala Mandira presented devotional songs every evening. Revered Maharaj graced these occasions and appreciated their performance. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> evening he addressed a satsang after the prayer. He formally opened the Vivekananda Veena Nilayam and inaugurated the Students' Union of the Sri Sarada College on the 24<sup>th</sup> evening at a delightful function. As a remedy for the allround decline in moral standards, he prescribed as a remedy the man-making and character-building teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and the simple, lofty and inspiring life of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

Revered Maharaj came again to the ashrama on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1977 on his tour from Bangalore and left for Madras on 14<sup>th</sup> September. The ashrama wore a festive appearance. A large number of devotees and friends from in and around Salem thronged and sought his darshan and blessings. He met the devotees of a satsang on the 12<sup>th</sup> noon and addressed them the same evening. He also presided over the Students' Union of Sri Sarada College and attended their cultural programme on the 13<sup>th</sup> evening.

#### Our Thanks

Right from the inception, many philanthropists, devotees and well wishers as well as governmental and non-governmental organisations have come forward to help the Ashrama and the Dispensary in the conduct of the activities. We are thankful to all of them. We make our request to all benevolent people to help us to take the next step forward.

#### Tax Exemption

The report of 1955 mentions for the first time that donations to the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama and the Charitable Dispensary are exempt from Income Tax under section 15-B of the Income Tax Act. At present all donations to the Ramakrishna Mission and its branches in India are exempt from Income Tax under section 80-G (5) (vi) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Purchase of medicines, injections, vials, bandages, instruments, equipment and other materials required for running the Ramakrishna Mission Charitable Dispensary are exempt from Sales Tax under Government Order No. 436 dated 25 April 1979. Vide LR VAT CELL/22855/07 (VCC No. 568) dated 25.5.2007, exemption already granted under the TNGST Act 1959 continues to be in force as per section 88(3) of the TNVAT Act 2006 with effect from 1.1.2007.