

Saranagati



COVER
INSERT

SRI RAMANASRAMAM
APRIL 2015



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Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The Ramana family was blessed to have the opportunity to celebrate Punarvasu twice in the month of March—on the 1st and then again on the 28th which was also Rama Navami day. Sundaram Iyer Day fell on the 10th March and Telugu New Year, the 21st.

The current issue segment of *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan* traces life at Gurumurtham which laid the trajectory for young Bhagavan's life at Tiruvannamalai and the eventual establishment of a kitchen by his mother at Virupaksha Cave.

Spiritual Stories as Told by Bhagavan draws on the Telugu volume, *Ramanulu Cheppina Kathalu*, and this month looks at the story of Tara Vilasam from the *Ramayana*.

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

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

2nd April (Thur) Jagadish Swami Day
3rd April (Fri) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
14th April (Tues) Tamil New Year
14th April (Tues) Chanting at the Nirvana Room
16th April (Thurs) Sri Bhagavan's 65th Aradhana
17th April (Fri) Major Chadwick Day
25th April (Sat) Punarvasu Day

3rd May (Sun) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
22nd May (Fri) Punarvasu Day
1st - 2nd June (Mon-Tues) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
10th June (Weds) Mahapuja Day
18th June (Thurs) Punarvasu Day
28th June (Mon) Cow Lakshmi Day
31st July (Fri) Guru Poomima





In the Kitchen with Bhagavan Part III: Days at Gurumurtham

The Swami had earned various designations since his arrival at Arunachala but no one had yet learned his birth name. Bala Yogi, Kumara Swami or Brahmana Swami were among the appellations given him. But soon he came to be known by the namesake of the shrine he now inhabited and was thus called Gurumurtham Swami.

The Swami's Predecessor

Long serving as the burial site for a great 13th century saint, Gurumurtham had an illustrious history. A Chola king having heard the fame of a holy man at Tiruvannamalai, Deiva Sikamani Desika Paramacharya, one day made the journey by horseback to see him. Upon arrival, however, his royal steed was bitten by a poisonous snake and died on the spot. Hearing of the king's grief, the Paramacharya appeared on the scene. Seeing the dead animal, he merely tapped the inert form with his cane and the creature sprang to life again. Overjoyed, the king begged a way to express his gratitude. The Paramacharya simply suggested he renovate Lord Arunachala's temple since it was by His power that the king's beloved horse was restored. As the king set about his task, he took the opportunity to inscribe the story of the saint's miracle on the temple's third prakara wall.¹

¹ See *Arunachala Ramana*, Chap 5, p. 58.

A Guardian

After his Mahanirvana, Saint Desika's remains were interred about 3km from Arunachala Temple and a shrine was constructed over them. Gurumurtham, as it was called, lay some distance beyond Ayyan Kulam tank and was thus remote enough to give sanctuary to a young swami 700 years later who sought a quiet refuge far from the crowds in town. Since the young Swami was in a spiritual state — eating very little, observing mounam and submerged in deep contemplative quiescence — he needed protection from casual passersby. With the arrival of Palaniswami, the contemplative sage had a guardian in the secluded garden who gave him relief from the unceasing intrusion of visitors.

Fresh Visitors

Yet in spite of the distance, visitors continued to come each with hopes of gaining an audience with the Swami. One day a singer came with his disciples, sang for the silent Swami and then, massaging the lad's feet, declared with great conviction, "One may be a great scholar, author or composer and everything else in the world. But it is indeed rare to come across any one actually established in the Self Supreme like you."

When the holy man's disciples tried to touch the young Swami's feet as their master had done, the master held them back saying, "This is a great fire, don't touch it or even come near it. Now there is something truly rare at Tiruvannamalai!"

The man took leave very reluctantly. But some days later a book of his songs arrived and Gurumurtham Swami and Palaniswami then realised he had been the famed Vedantic singer-saint Achyuthadasa².

Less Auspicious Visitors

But other visitors were not as endearing, if nevertheless respectful in their own way. As two tamarind trees lay near Gurumurtham, two old thieves came one spring night to steal the fruit. When they discovered the young Swami sitting stone-like within the temple, one of the thieves proposed violence. Though the silent lad could easily overhear their conversation, he sat unmoved.

² Formerly known as Abbot Naidu, the scholar's samadhi is at Kannamangalam, N. Arcot District. (See *Mountain Path*, April 1969, p.101 and the upcoming April 2015 issue, p.71.)





Seeing his detachment, the second thief said, “No brother, we shall do nothing of the sort. We need not fear him at all. He won’t harm us. Let us finish our job.”³

Interventions by Visitors

While in residence at Gurumurtham, the Swami took just one cup of milk mixed with light food each day. This meager diet served his continuous samadhi but left his physical form depleted. Years later, Bhagavan described himself this way:

“I was only skin and bone at Gurumurtham, no flesh anywhere. All the bones were sticking out and no stomach to be seen. Days and nights would pass without my even being aware of [it]. I entertained no idea of bathing or brushing my teeth. The face was begrimed, the hair became one clotted mass like wax and the nails grew long. When [offered] food, I simply stretched out a hand and when something was dropped on it, I would eat it, rub my hand on my head and [return] to my continuous mood.”⁴

Troubled by the Swami’s outward appearance, visitors often responded with gestures of assistance. One day, a lady named Meenakshi who regularly brought food, came with a large pot and began boiling water. Thinking the lady was cooking, Gurumurtham Swami gave her no notice. But all of a sudden, she grabbed him by the arm and pulled him to the side, rubbed oil over his body and then commenced bathing him. She worked for a long time on the tangled hair till it was clean and straight. Such were the good intentions of Gurumurtham’s visitors.

But in the long bathless months that followed, the hair returned to its disheveled matt-like condition, ‘woven like a basket’. Bhagavan later said, “Small stones and dust had settled down in it and the head used to feel heavy. I also had long nails and a frightful appearance”. When visitors made continuous efforts to groom him, he ultimately relented. “When my head was shaven clean, I began to wonder whether I had a head or not, it felt so light. I shook my head this way and that to assure myself that it was there. That showed the amount of burden I had been carrying on my head.”⁵

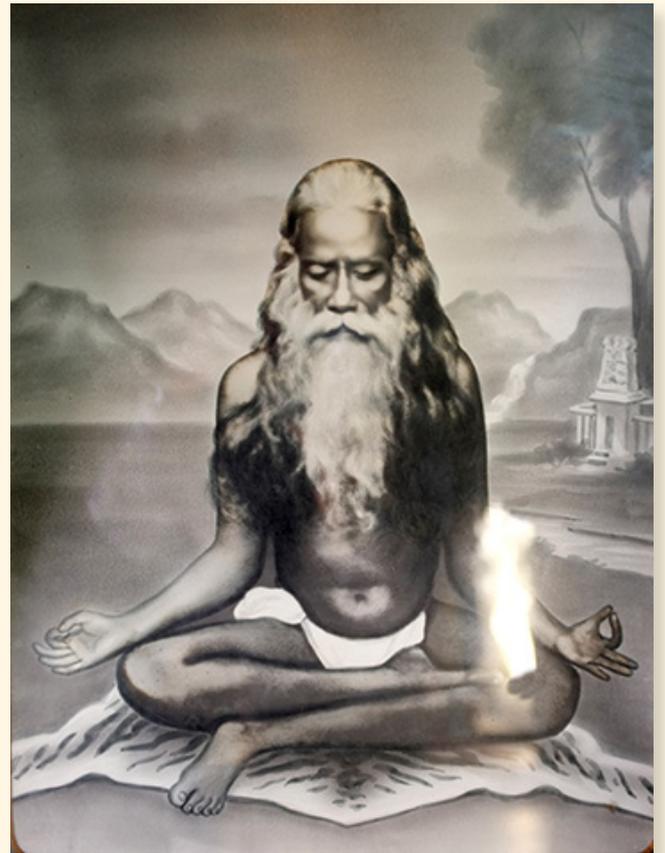
Shifting to the Mango Orchard

By the end of April 1898, disturbances caused by visitors grew beyond all reasonable proportion. At last the

³ Sri Ramana, Embodiment of Silence, *Call Divine*, 1st May, 1958, p. 457.

⁴ Autobiographical Reminiscences, in *Mountain Path*, April 1981, p. 75.

⁵ *Letters*, 12th April, 1948.



The great Vedantic musician-saint Achutadasa

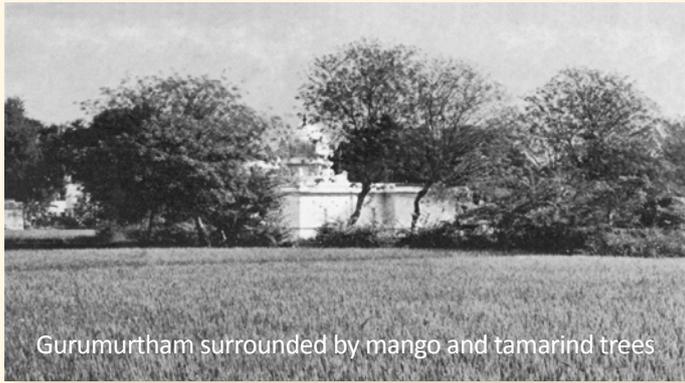
owner of the adjacent Mango Grove, Venkataramana Naicker, invited the two to stay in his garden. Two small thatched watchman’s huts beneath the mango trees were erected on platforms and given to the young tapasvin and Palaniswami. The grove’s gardener was instructed to keep the gates of the orchard locked and not to allow anyone inside except with Palaniswami’s permission. This solved the crowd problem. But since those offering food could no longer enter, Palaniswami was obliged to beg for alms at Kilnathur.

The owner offered free access to the grove’s fruit-laden trees. But the Swami, out of respect for their generous host, refused to touch the trees, taking only what fruit fell of its own. Bhagavan later described how bats came in the night, ate a bit of the ripe mangoes and dropped them to the ground. “The balance fell to our lot,” he said. “That meant we had prasad from the bat. These fully ripe mangoes were delicious. Was that not enough? Those thatched sheds and the beauty of the nature gave us immense joy.”⁶

Further Changes

⁶ *Letters*, 11th April, 1948.





Gurumurtham surrounded by mango and tamarind trees

The shift to the grove marked significant changes in the Brahmana Swami's life where nearly two years of deep interior absorption were now punctuated by periods of gentle activity. Commenting on his having 'performed sadhana' during the two previous years, he later said that he never felt the need. Rather he had simply 'sat with closed eyes in silence' as there had been nothing prompting him to look outward or to speak. "Till I reached the Mango Grove, I remained indifferent [to the world] with my eyes shut. Afterwards I opened my eyes and began functioning actively, but otherwise I remained the same."⁷

Study in the Mango Grove

Another development at the Mango Grove was the presence of books. Palaniswami was given access to the Tamil library of a deceased Swami. But Tamil not being his native tongue, the elder struggled with the language. While our young sage had not read anything since setting aside his school books in Madurai two years earlier, he felt called to help Palaniswami. Thus the young sage found himself reading again. Reading for the first time works of Vedanta and Hindu philosophy, he found he comprehended them with the greatest ease.

Yoga Vasishtam, *Kaivalya Navanitam* and especially *Ribhu Gita* were completely familiar, for in them he discovered 'exact descriptions of his own state'. He knew firsthand the spiritual stages they described and thus could readily explain them to others.

It was also during this period that young Bhagavan got acquainted with other Indian languages. Reviewing Palaniswami's copy of *Adhyatma Ramayana* helped him quickly master the Malayalam script and lexicon. He subsequently grasped Sanskrit and Telugu with similar

⁷ *Mountain Path*, Jan. 1966, p. 103.

ease, developing a language proficiency that would prove providential not only in later guiding the hundreds who would come speaking in other tongues, but more importantly, in bequeathing to future generations the legacy of his own poetic works composed at the behest of the likes of Kavyakutha Ganapathi Muni and Sri Muruganar.

Thus the Mango Grove became the ideal complement to a freshly awakened heart. With his mind clear and bright like a perfect mirror in the aftermath of long months of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, it faithfully reflected all that appeared before it. Reading thus helped him recover dormant powers of speech and granted him a newfound command of the written word by which he would give voice to the experience that had preoccupied him all this time, namely, unqualified abidance in the Self.

Identifying the Brahmana Swami

Such were the developments brought about by the move to the Mango Grove. But one other occurrence demands attention as it set in motion a chain of influential events.

Just prior to the shift to the Mango Grove, Annamalai Tambiran, the caretaker of Gurumurtham, returned after a year away and rejoiced to find the young Swami still there. Inspired to perform abhishekam and puja to him, the Tambiran went out to make preparations. Meanwhile the young Swami having perceived his intention, wrote a message on the wall with a piece of charcoal, expressing his disinclination to be the object of any worship. When the Tambiran returned, the young Swami pointed to the message whereupon the Tambiran immediately dropped his plan. But the message had an unintended effect. Written in perfectly executed Tamil, it made evident that the unwashed, scantily-clad 18-year old Swami was highly literate and from a good family. Seeing this, people were eager to know his origins and pressed him to reveal his name and the place of his birth. When the Swami finally gave in, he wrote just two words in roman script, "Venkataraman, Tiruchuzhi".

This was the first time anyone in Tiruvannamalai knew anything of his identity. But the revelation—doubtless born of destiny—would have far-reaching consequences as the next chapter of our story will show.

(to be continued)





Spiritual Stories as Told by Bhagavan: Tara's Grief

[Suri Nagamma tells that when Bhagavan came across poignant passages in a story, his eyes would sometimes fill with tears. One day she found him reading from the Malayalam Ramayana, a book he had first become acquainted with through Palaniswami when the two were at Gurumurtham. As he narrated the story of Tara Vilasam and the grief of her loss, his voice choked as though the scene were vivid and real before his very eyes. Nagamma said, "It looks as though Sri Bhagavan has been transformed into Tara". Bhagavan composed himself and observed with a smile, "What to do? I identify myself with whosoever is before me. I have no separate identity." Nagamma commented in her account: "What a great truth there is in these words". ('Reservation' in My Life in Ramanasramam.)]

Sri Rama reached Kishkinda in the southern part of India in the course of his search for Sita and forged a friendship with Sugreeva. Upon Rishyamukha Mountain, Sugreeva took refuge from the wrath of his elder brother, Vaali, who sought to kill him. Vaali had been cursed by Rishi Matanga that he would die if he ever ascended the Mountain. Frustrated and enraged, Vaali took away Sugreeva's wife, Ruma. Hanuman requested Sri Rama to help Sugreeva kill Vaali. In return Sugreeva would render all help in searching for Sita.

On Rama's instruction, Sugreeva challenged Vaali in battle. Vaali had received a boon by which he could drain his opponents of all their strength. Knowing this, Sri Rama hid himself behind a tree and from his concealed position, let fly the lethal arrow which brought Vaali down. As he lay in the throes of death, his followers gathered round to mourn his plight, among them, his wife Tara, who was inconsolable. With her vermilion mark in disarray and her hair disheveled, the consort of Vaali wailed piteously as her husband breathed his last, "Oh Lord, my very Life!" In heart-rending grief, she beseeched Raghava who stood nearby, "O son of Raghu, kill me with the same arrow you have used on my husband whom I shall join in heaven. You came all this way in distress from the separation from your wife. How ironic that you would create just such a separation between me and my husband. How can I survive without him? Please hasten my end."

The large-hearted Rama consoled her, "Oh the best among chaste women, you grieve for that which is beyond grief. Who is your husband? Is it the body lying here? Or is it the consciousness that pervades it? Contemplate in peace the following: The body is made of the five elements which are inert. It was not there to begin with and will vanish in the course of time. How can such a fleeting entity be real? But if you claim that your husband is the soul, then the soul is beyond life or death, independent and eternal. So, why do you grieve?"

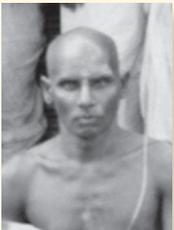
Tara enquired, "Oh Lord! If the body is inert and the soul eternal, what is the source of happiness and grief?" Rama explained, "As long as there is attachment to the body, there is happiness and consequent grief. This is the bondage of the world. Others are not responsible for one's bondage. One's bondage is one's own responsibility. Once the identification with the body is annihilated, the knowledge that 'I am Atman' becomes luminous and self-effulgent. The cycle of birth and death recurs as long as the mind is alive. The moment it is annihilated, bondage vanishes and freedom emerges." Hearing these words of wisdom from him, Tara attained a lasting state of equanimity. —





In the Frame

Archival Listing GRO 72, at Virupaksha Cave (1913). LEFT TO RIGHT: Front Row: Girl seated 4th from left: Chellamma. Row in which Bhagavan is seated: 1. Ramanatha Brahmachari; 2. Gambhiram Seshayya; 3. Unidentified; 4. Ganapati Muni; 5. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi; 6. Vasudeva Shastri; 7. C.K. Ramasamy Gounder (Kallipatti nr. Erode). Standing: 1-9. Unidentified; 10. Jayaram Iyer.



Gambhiram Seshayya: descended from Akkanna and Maadanna, the renowned ministers of the Golkonda Ruler, Seshayya was a Telugu Brahmin of Hyderabad, a Rama bhaktha and municipal overseer at Tiruvannamalai. Finding difficulty reading Vivekananda's lectures and an English translation of *Rama Gita*, he posed questions to Bhagavan at Virupaksha. His copious notes of Bhagavan's responses in meetings between 1900-02 were compiled and published in 1931 as *Vichara Sangraha (Self-Enquiry)*.

Vasudeva Sastri: was with Bhagavan and Palaniswami on the Hill when Bhagavan had his second death experience. The Sastri wept when Bhagavan recovered, having thought the master had left them for good. Bhagavan gave a humorous account of a tiger that approached them at Virupaksha Cave. Vasudeva became so frightened that he bolted himself inside Virupaksha leaving the others on the veranda. From his safe harbour within, Vasudeva set about taunting the wild beast with all kinds of threats in Bhagavan's name. When the trouble passed, Vasudeva emerged looking victorious as the one who had saved them all from the would-be man-eater.





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Vidya Havan

Sri Vidya Homa took place on Friday, 20th March beginning at 7am with Kalasasthapana. Lalita Sahasranamam, Trisathi and other recitations were performed from 12 noon until 2:15 pm ending with poornahuti and arati at 2:45 pm. A procession with consecrated kalasam into the Mother's Shrine was followed by abhishekam, alankaaram and deepaaraadhana at 3.30pm. Sri Chakra puja was performed in the Mother's Shrine the following morning.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Samadhi

D.: Does Maharshi enter the *nirvikalpa samadhi*?

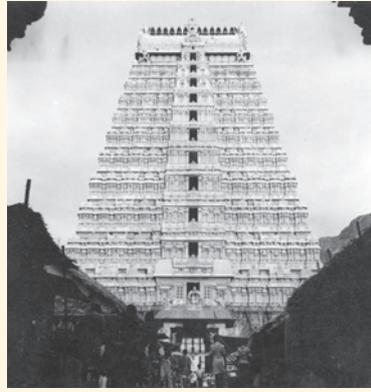
M.: If the eyes are closed, it is *nirvikalpa*; if open, it is (though differentiated, still in absolute repose) *savikalpa*. The ever-present state is the natural state *sahaja*.

— Talks §17





Around Tiruvannamalai: Arunachala Temple Renovation 2015



Renovation is underway at Arunachala Temple where the thousand-pillar hall, temple gopurams, stonework, deities, paintings and ceremonial utensils will be refurbished, culminating in Mahakumbhabhishekam (rededication ceremony). The Ashram has proposed to take up repair of Pathalalingam Shrine and Pavazhakundru Shrine under the supervision of Madhu Sthapati, grandson of Vaidyanatha Sthapati, the temple architect in charge of construction of the Mother's Shrine (1939-1949). The last Mahakumbhabhishekam at the Big Temple took place in June 2002, when hundreds of Sivacharyas and purohiths performed homas at more than one hundred agni kundams in the yaga sala. Prior to 2002, Kumbhabhishekams of Arunachaleswara Temple took place in 1976, 1944 and 1918.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nallavan Paalayam Ashram Farm



The Ashram farm at Nallavan Paalayam (about 4.5kms from Ramanasramam) continues to thrive in spite of a years-long drought. Thanks to careful water management and bunding, reduced water supplies are supporting the 5-acre farm's many organic fruit trees and vegetable crops including squash, snake gourd, olive trees, coconut palm, tamarind, ground nuts and avocado. The ridged gourd now being harvested, once toasted, is the chief ingredient of the Ashram's dinner chutney while jackfruit, banana, chikoo and papaya, once ripe, will be served to devotees along with the evening meal.

Obituary: Patrick Roberts



Born in 1946, Patrick Roberts read English at Cardiff University and subsequently studied computer programming working as a programmer/analyst. He came to Bhagavan in the course of his spiritual search and started visiting the Ashram in the 1970s. In the final days at the hospital after a long battle with esophageal cancer, he expressed his complete acceptance of his condition and took refuge in Bhagavan's teachings. He peacefully merged at the feet of Sri Ramana on 21st January, 2015.—

