

## Saranagati



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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The months of June and July saw a few light showers, but drought conditions still persist in Tiruvannamalai with many bore wells dry at 350 ft. The Ashram Well's aeration system was reinstalled to circulate its depleted water supply. Rains are patiently awaited.

Work continues on the vimanams and gopurams above both shrines while the Samadhi Hall is being painted within and without in preparation for Kumbhabhishekam 23-25th August.

Guru Poornima was celebrated on the 22nd July. H. C. Khanna's samadhi day was observed the following day, with that of Ganapathi Muni on the 25th July.

In this issue of *Saranagati* continues the history of Palakotthu, the sadhu colony that sprang up near Ramanasramam in the late 1920s. *Ashram Heritage Sites* begins a two-part story of Skandasramam, Bhagavan's home from the fall of 1915 through late 1922. *Introducing the Kendras* introduces the Paris Ramana Kendra.

For further news and events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org)

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team

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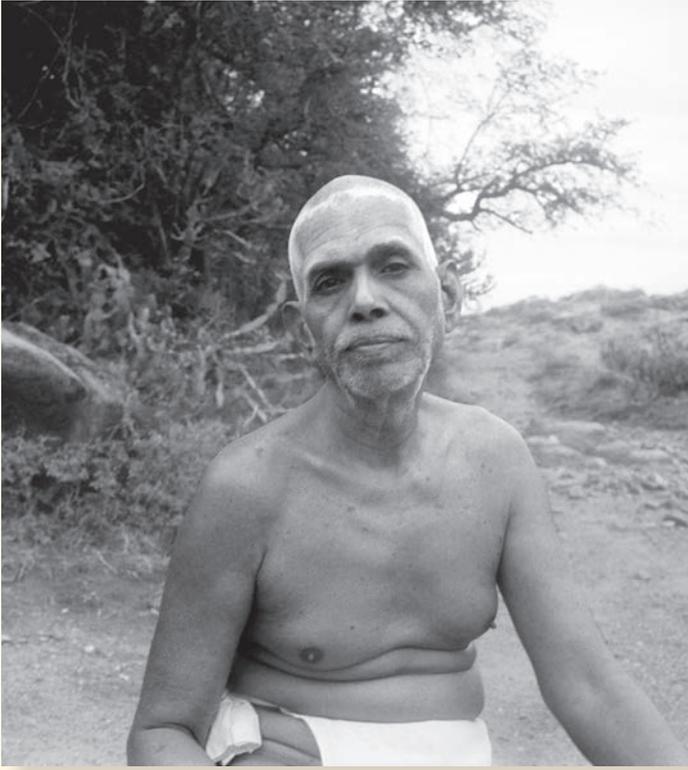
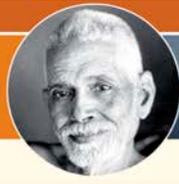
## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: The Witness

D.: Is not the Self the witness only (*sakshimatra*)?

M.: 'Witness' is applicable when there is an object to be seen. Then it is duality. The Truth lies beyond both. In the mantra, *sakshi cheta kevalo nirgunascha*, the word *sakshi* must be understood as *sannidhi* (presence), without which there could be nothing. See how the sun is necessary for daily activities. He does not however form part of the world actions; yet they cannot take place without [him]. He is the witness of [actions]. So it is with the Self.

— Talks §466





## Palakotthu (part two)

*In the mid-19th century a large tract of land was given to the Vira-Shaivite community for the purposes of cultivating flowers for use in pujas at Arunachaleswara Temple. With grand old trees overhanging its thirtam and the adjacent Vinayaka temple, this ten-acre garden just west of the present-day Ashram has been home to numerous great devotees, among them Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, B.V. Narasimhaswami, Ramanatha Brahmachari, Kunju Swami, Muruganar, Viswanatha Swami, Munagala Venkataramiah, Paul Brunton, S.S. Cohen and Balarama Reddy. As Bhagavan stopped going for giri pradakshina in 1926, he would take short walks about three times a day, one of which would be to Palakottu. The following pages are a continuation of the story of this unique plot of ground and its place in Ashram history.*

**B**y the late 1930s there was an influx of permanent residents at the Ashram. The Ashram proper was small and did not have the space for large numbers of cottages, especially for families requiring more

spacious residences with kitchen, bathroom and such. After Major Chadwick built his own dwelling, there was a flood of demands for sites. By 1941 the overflow was great and when the Sofa Gounder granted a large parcel of land for devotees, they divided it into plots and built small cottages. This colony came to be known as 'Ramananagar'. Meanwhile the sadhu community at Palakotthu flourished and served as an extension of the Ashram. Traffic between the two was frequent. For example, though a small spring had been discovered near Mother's Shrine, water needs for the growing Ashram outgrew its capacity to provide sufficient water and Bhagavan's devotees relied on the Palakotthu tank to supply the Ashram with water, a daily chore involving numerous trips with buckets to and from Palakotthu.

### Residents at Palakotthu

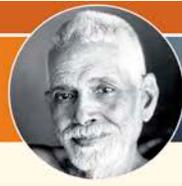
When Lakshmana Sharma (Who) of Pudukkottai, the author of *Maha Yoga*, visited the Ashram, his family members would invariably stay at the Ashram while Sharma himself would always stay with Muruganar at Palakottu. The two developed a close friendship and together explored their respective understanding of Bhagavan's teachings. Sharma also sought Muruganar's instruction in classical Tamil in the interest of better understanding Bhagavan's verses and he had found in Muruganar a most apt teacher.

In 1932 Munagala Venkataramiah, the compiler of *Talks*, came to the Ashram to stay and took up residence at Palakotthu. Around the same time Paul Brunton built a small cottage on the north side of Palakotthu Thirtam. His experiences with Bhagavan brought international attention with the publication of the book, *A Search in Secret India*, which initiated a migration from distant lands by such as Major Chadwick and Maurice Frydman (who came in 1935), and S.S. Cohen (who came in February 1936). Cohen built a mud hut on the north-west side of the tank, near the shaded footpath by which Bhagavan took his midday walk, where he would remain for the following three years.

### Ganapathi Muni and Viswanatha Swami

Ganapati Muni lived for a time at Mango Tree Cave and sometimes at Palakotthu. In 1929 he lived for four months in the small tiled room facing the Ganapati





Ganapathi Temple at Palakotthu

Temple on the south side of Palakotthu tank. Viswanatha Swami shared this room with him, serving Nayana in any way he could. In these early days, when Bhagavan came to Palakotthu on his short afternoon stroll, he would often drop in on Nayana and spend a few minutes with him. Viswanatha Swami said of these visits: “The familiarity with which Bhagavan moved with his intimate devotees was heart-warming. But, ultimately, it was neither what he did nor what he said that mattered. It was his glorious presence, shining all around, that attracted us all to him.”

Speaking of another visit to Palakotthu, Viswanatha Swami said: “Bhagavan was opposed to any sort of waste or extravagance. ‘How do you light the fire in your charcoal stove?’ he asked me one day. I told him that I used a bit of old rag rolled up and dipped into kerosene. Smilingly, he scolded me for wasting kerosene when the fire could easily be lit with some of the dry twigs and leaves lying around, or with bits of waste paper.”

Viswanatha Swami had come to Bhagavan at Skandasramam in 1921 at the tender age of seventeen. His father, having been orphaned, was reared by Bhagavan’s parents in Tiruchuli. Viswanatha Swami had been a Gandhian but with the visit to Skandaramam and his subsequent reading of Ganapathi Muni’s *Ramana Gita*, a copy of which had been given him by Bhagavan as a gift to his father, Viswanatha Swami’s ‘fate was sealed’. In early 1923 he left home without the permission of his parents and took refuge in Bhagavan. When father and mother came to Tiruvannamalai to take their son back home, they were impressed by what they saw, not only their son’s earnestness and evident joy but the great rishi that Venkataraman had become since their last seeing him in Tiruchuli twenty-five years earlier. Thus they gave up the idea of forcing their son’s return. And stay he did, even till his passing away in 1979 at Ramanasramam where he is interred.

#### Lesser Known Devotees

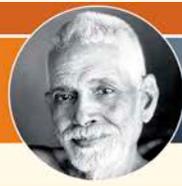
Other sadhus, some quite unknown, came and spent time in Bhagavan’s presence, taking up residence in Palakotthu. Bhatt Swami was a tapasvin known for his commitment to sadhana. He only appeared in public at morning and evening Vedaparayana and maintained a simple make-shift hut next to Muruganar. He never went for begging rounds but accepted only what providence granted him unasked. He kept a Glaxo can hanging in the doorway of his hut in which a would-be donor could leave food. Lakshmi Amma and others would place food in it but these benefactors increasingly feared that the monkeys were making the most of the humble proprietor’s casual attitude toward food and worldly possessions.

## Reality in Forty Verses

25. Holding a form it arises; holding a form it stays; holding and feeding on a form it thrives. Leaving one form, it takes hold of another. When sought, it takes flight. Such is the ego ghost with no form of its own.

— Sri Bhagavan





Another sadhu at Palakotthu was Jagadeesan, admired by all for his absorption in meditation and his self-abandon regarding bodily concerns. It was said that no worldly care could take precedence over his meditation. Once when he had spread edible nuts in the sun to dry, the monkeys came and plundered them right under his nose. But the swami just kept sitting quietly without disturbing them in the least. When Kunjuswami asked why he had not chased them away, he said that though he had been aware of them, he felt no urge to drive them away since he was in a 'meditative mood'.

### Palakotthu Today

Today Palakotthu Thirtam contains clear pristine waters and never seems to go dry, even in drought. Palakotthu's Ganapathi temple was renovated in the early 1980s and again in 2012. Portions of Brunton's original cottage remain, incorporated into a larger structure, which was inhabited until recently by Helga Kalldorf, who passed away just last year<sup>1</sup>.

Annamalai Swami's long decades in Palakotthu (1938 to 1995) gave rise to the construction of a number of buildings that comprise his Ashram, the perimeter wall of which abuts Palakotthu Thirtam's southern bank.

Eastern portions of the original colony are happily included in the Korangu section of Ramanasramam proper, among them, B.V.Narasimhaswami's 'rock cave'.

<sup>1</sup> On Saraswati Puja day (23rd Oct). Helga left as her legacy the *Agasthya Ganapathi Library* in Palakotthu, just behind the Ganapathi temple.



### In Retrospect

Over the decades untold numbers of devotees felt the pull of the great magnet that was Bhagavan and came like moths drawn to a flame to die and be reborn. They were willing to live a life of simplicity in spartan conditions at Palakotthu in order to pass their days and nights in proximity with the source. When one's heart is full, the body seems to require very little and what might have looked to outsiders and onlookers as privation, to those living in the bliss of Bhagavan at Palakotthu, free of the distracting complexities that come with worldly comforts, was nothing but sheer joy.\*

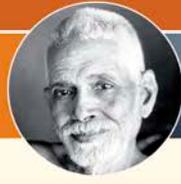
\* Content for this article freely adapted from *The Call Divine*, *The Mountain Path* and various other Ashram sources.

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nochur Sri Venkataraman



On the 1st of July devotees gathered in the Grantalaya Auditorium for one week of talks given by Nochur Sri Venkataraman on Bhagavan's *Ulladu Narpadu*. Continuing from last year's discourses, the week-long series began with v. 26 and reached v. 32 when the discourses concluded on the 7th July.





## From the *Periapuranam*: Kurumba Naayanaar

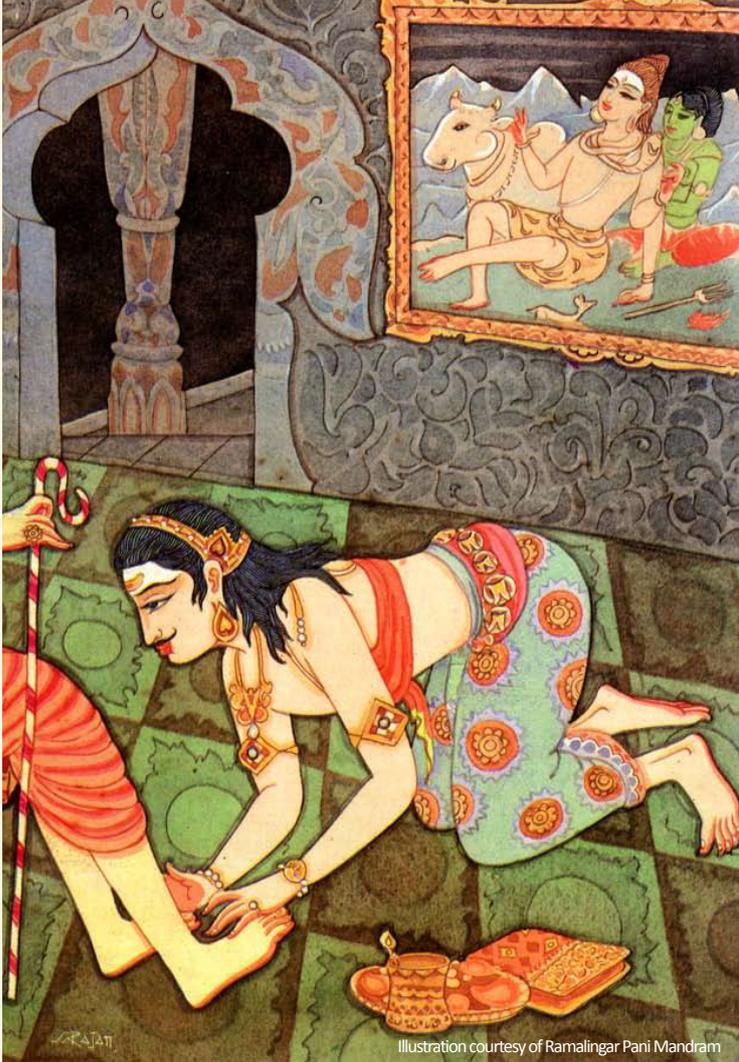


Illustration courtesy of Ramalingar Pani Mandram

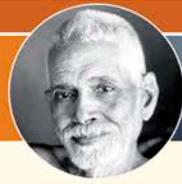
The chief of the Kurumbas devoted himself to the service of the Lord's devotees. Though filled with blessings, he longed for a guru and chanted the *Panchakshari* each day, praying that the Lord would lead him to a guru. One night Mahesvara came in a dream, "Your guru is coming tonight. His name is Sundarar." Kurumba leapt up, performed his 'morning' ablutions and rushed to the Tyagesvara temple. Around midnight a brahmana arrived and Kurumba, convinced that this must be Sundarar, fell at his feet. Sundarar did not answer the devotee's many pleas but proceeded to the house of his consort, the dark-eyed Paravai. While Sundarar was within, Kurumba called from outside and declared his fidelity to the Master. When the lady opened the window and saw him, she laughed and mocked at Sundarar for having a shudra disciple. Sundarar told her, "You should know that my disciple and I will have no rebirth. But those who mock us shall suffer." He then departed her house and initiated Kurumba into the secrets of the *Panchakshari*, explaining its transcendent meaning. With his mind always contemplating Sundarar's name, Kurumba repeated the *Panchakshari* twelve thousand times each day. Becoming cleansed of all impurities, he attained *jivanmukti*. But when through his divine sight he discovered Sundarar's departure for Kailasa at the Lord's behest, he was beside himself with grief and resolved to 'overtake' him in order not to be separated from him. Through yogic powers, he merged his being in the Lord, well ahead of his Guru. A remarkable feat for a simple tribal chieftain! (*Perumizhalai Kurumba Naayanaar's Aradhana Day this year will be observed on the 12th August*).

### Wordwise: Sakshi साक्षि

*Sakshi* (sa: 'with' + akshu: 'eye(s)'): seeing with the eyes, observing, witnessing; evidence, testimony; intuition, witnessing-self; *sakshi-caitanya*: witness-consciousness; *atmasakshatkara*: self-realization; (English) *witness*: to know or understand.

Bhagavan says that sattvic mind is Absolute consciousness. "The object to be witnessed and the witness finally merge and Absolute consciousness alone reigns supreme". (*Talks* §68) He continues: "The Self is ever the witness, whether so imagined or not. There is no need to so imagine except for that purpose. But it is best to remain as one's Self." (*Talks* §137)



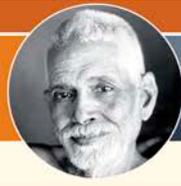


## Ashram Heritage Sites: Skandasramam

Virupaksha Cave in the summertime suffered water shortages, so Bhagavan often shifted to the Mango Tree Cave during the hot season. The availability of water near Virupaksha was an ongoing problem, even in other seasons. Once near a large black rock a little higher up the hill from Virupaksha, Bhagavan noticed dampness in the soil and suggested to Jadaswami that there might be a spring there. Jadaswami dug into the ground and found water. As the spring was further excavated, Bhagavan's devotees worked to redirect the water, and a small cavity below it was dug out. Bhagavan would now climb this short distance from Virupaksha and collect the spring's pristine water in his *kamandalu*.

Later on, as the number of residents at Virupaksha grew and Bhagavan's mother began to cook meals for inmates and visitors, all felt the need for a more ample accommodation. A resident-devotee named Kandaswami from Kongunadu (Coimbatore district) had formerly built a thatched hut for Bhagavan near Bhagavan's bathing place and seeing Bhagavan making many trips up and down the hill to fetch water, felt something should be done. He made up his mind to build an Ashram for Bhagavan and scouring the hillside for a suitable site, he suggested a place downhill from the spring on which to begin. Bhagavan said it was a prodigious task owing to the rugged terrain: "You cannot imagine the state the site was in originally. Kandaswami worked with almost superhuman effort, achieved by his own hands what even four people together could not have done. He removed all the prickly pear, reduced stone and boulder to level ground, created a garden and





Taken from the first edition of Self-Realisation



Above Virupaksha, Bhagavan at top right, with Kandaswami standing to his immediate right. Bhagavan's mother is next to Palaniswami and Sivaprakasham Pillai below her (1915)

## Ashram Heritage Sites: Skandasramam (cont.)

raised the Ashram. We got four coconut trees for planting. To plant them properly Kandaswami dug huge square pits about ten feet deep. That would give you an idea of the amount of labour he put into the work he took on hand."<sup>1</sup>

Observing the steep pitch of the hill and the height of the front perimeter container wall of the Ashram, it is easy to see how much leveling and filling-in of excavated rock would have been required. It had been Kandaswami who planted and regularly watered both the banyan tree near Alamarattu Guhai as well as all the trees on both sides of the path up to Virupaksha Cave. Considering the deficit of water in those days, even this was no small feat. But to plant at the new rocky site, soil had to be brought in by hand. Once done Kandaswami planted fruit-bearing trees such as mango, jackfruit and coconut and made a flower garden.

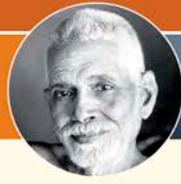
By 1915 the Ashram was mostly completed and Kandaswami enjoined Bhagavan to come and live there. The shift from Virupaksha was gradual and took place in the fall of 1915 over a period of months.<sup>2</sup> Palaniswami moved up to the new Ashram but as his health worsened, he asked to move back down to Virupaksha for convalescence. There he remained and was blessed to have daily visits from Bhagavan. Though he grew steadily weaker, he hung on for three years until he died in Bhagavan's hands in June, 1918.

In the latter stages of the construction, Kandaswami had help from Perumal Swami and workers. Mahadevaswami, head of Kovilur Mutt and former head of the Esanya Mutt, donated money. When faced with objections about supporting enterprises not connected with the mutt, Mahadevaswami said, "We and our mutts are subject to certain restrictions and control. But

<sup>1</sup> See *Day by Day*, (9-12-45 Morning). See also the deposition to the commission in 1938, where Bhagavan says that preliminary work on the site began as early as 1902. The bulk of the hard labour was probably done between 1906-1915. (MP Jan 1988, p. 51.)

<sup>2</sup> Devotees report having had Bhagavan's darshan variously at the new site and at Virupaksha Cave up through October, 1915.





## Ashram Heritage Sites: Skandasramam (cont.)



Bhagavan and his state are supreme and beyond any human control. We should consider it our good fortune to serve such a sage. If [they] don't approve of my giving money from mutt funds, I will give my personal money."

After living with Bhagavan for a short time in the new Ashram he had labored so hard to construct, Kandaswami returned to his native place and was not seen again. Bhagavan named the new tree-shaded hermitage in the builder's honour, calling it by the Sanskritised version of his name, 'Skandasramam'. Thus, among the many sites Bhagavan inhabited in the years since his advent to Arunachala, this was his first Ashram.

(to be continued next issue)

## Introducing the Kendras: Paris Ramana Kendram

In a crypt chapel of Marists priests, we have a large photo of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, where we chant, read a short text from *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His own Words or Talks*, etc., then listen to recorded chanting, and finally, just sit together in silence. The total duration of our meetings is around one and a half hours.

Once each year, we view "Abide as the Self", then we chant "Arunachala Siva" and read verses of "Arunachala Aksharamanamalai". Afterward we have snacks in the Indian style. The name of our association is 'Forum104'. ([www.forum104.org](http://www.forum104.org))



## Obituary: Sri K. V. Narayanan



Professor K.V. Narayanan (76), popularly called KVN, was peacefully Absorbed in Bhagavan Ramana on 11th July 2013. In and out of the hospital for the past 7 years, he received very good medical care and kept his good cheer throughout but finally his frail frame gave way. He was totally free from *abhinivesa*, the clinging to life which causes fear of death, but this was not amazing to those who knew the depth of his devotion to Bhagavan. They called him a *dheera* (brave one). As a student, KVN was hailed as a born teacher by his Principal and KVN proved him right by becoming one of the most beloved and revered professors of the Madras Institute of Technology, Chromepet. KVN became a devotee of Bhagavan in the 1970's and attended programmes at the Chennai Ramana Kendra, occasionally visiting Sri Ramanasramam. After retirement in 1999, he came frequently and in 2003 settled down near the Ashram. In 2007 he lived in the Ashram for several months. Old students kept visiting him from India and abroad and found themselves being drawn to Bhagavan. Wise, astute, self-effacing, witty and caring, KVN lived a pure, exemplary life completely devoted to Bhagavan.

