

Saranagati



COVER
INSERT

SRI RAMANASRAMAM
JANUARY 2015



Photos this page from D. Thiagarajan



Saranagati



JANUARY 2015
VOL. 9, NO. 1

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

January dawns with devotees waiting in eager anticipation of Bhagavan's 135th Jayanti celebrations, commencing with music in the New Library Auditorium on the evening of the 5th Jaunary.

Early morning Dhannurmasa pujas are underway each day, contributing to an atmosphere of renewed devotion and an intimate encounter with Bhagavan in his Shrine.

This issue of *Saranagati* concludes the story of Mango Tree Cave, with anecdotes about great devotees who came to see Bhagavan in the early years. It also looks at some of the other interesting figures who inhabited the Hill in those days.

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

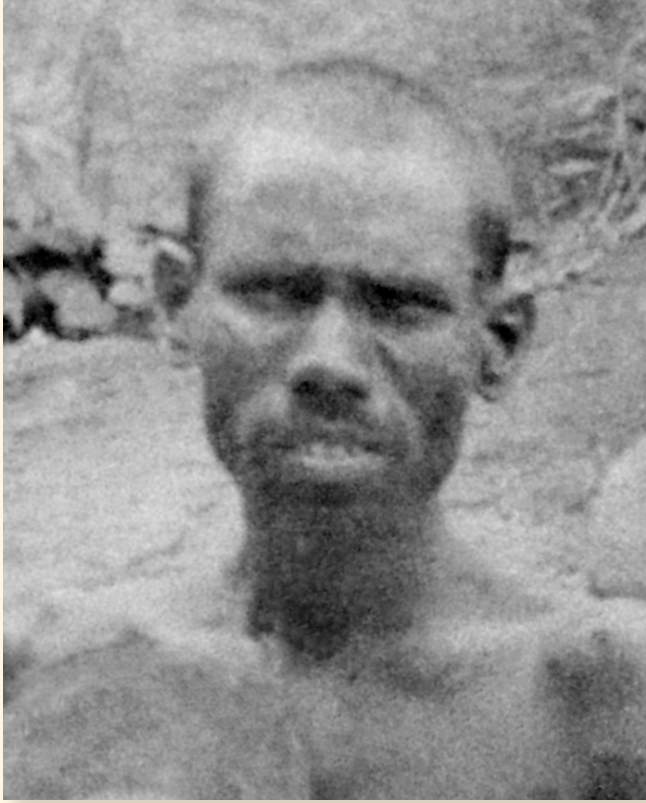
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

4th January (Sun) Full Moon Sri Chakra Puja
6th January (Tues) Bhagavan's 135th Jayanti Day
7-13th Jan (Weds) Nochur Sri Venkataraman Discourses (English)
12th January (Mon) Sivaprakasam Pillai Day
14th January (Wed) Ramaswamy Pillai Day
15th January (Thurs) Pongal
16th January (Fri) Mattu Pongal/Tiruoodal Festival
17th January (Sat) Arunachaleswara's Pradakshina
2nd February (Mon) Punarvasu Day

3rd February (Tues) Full Moon/Chinnaswami Aradhana
17th February (Tues) Mahasivaratri
1st March (Sun) Punarvasu Day
5th March (Weds) Full Moon Sri Chakra Puja
10th March (Tues) Sundaram Iyer Day
20th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Havan
21st March (Sat) Telugu New Year
28th March (Sat) Sri Rama Navami/Punarvasu Day
16th April (Tues) Bhagavan's 65th Aradhana





Mango Tree Cave (part three)

Following Ganapati Muni's stay, other great souls came to meet Bhagavan at Mango Tree Cave. Mastan Swami, a simple weaver born of a poor Muslim family from Desur, came to Tiruvannamalai with Akhilandamma in 1914. During his first meeting with Bhagavan at Mango Tree Cave, Bhagavan's gaze, "filled with grace, compassion and steady wisdom", fell on him and he stood transfixed: "After giving me [his] look, the gate of my Heart [opened...]. I stood [near him] for eight hours, absolutely without fatigue, filled with total absorption and peace."¹ Years later reflecting on Mastan, Bhagavan said: "All sorts of beings gravitate towards the presence of a jnani — devas, rishis, Brahmanishtas, siddhas and yogis.[...] Some of these great beings show up in the guise of beggars or madmen, and some of them even manage to appear in the forms

¹ Kunjuswami, *Mountain Path*, 1979, p. 154. See *Power of the Presence*, vol III, pp. 23-24.

of birds and animals. Among those who show up in a normal human body, and who subsequently stay on and become devotees, there is a huge range: complete beginners to highly advanced souls. The most advanced are ripe fruits, just waiting to fall. One such devotee was Mastan. As soon as he touched the railings of the gate, he would have a paralysing experience of the Self. He would stand rooted to the spot, unable to move for six or seven hours. This happened several times.[...] He was highly spiritual, though outwardly he looked like an ordinary man. He was a kind generous man who always looked for an opportunity to help others. He never showed any self-importance [but] liked to stay in the background, unnoticed."²

Seshadri Swamigal

Another notable figure who came to see Bhagavan at Mango Tree Cave was Seshadri Swami, known from his boyhood as the "saint with a golden hand". His family having given up on ever arranging a marriage for the God-child who, since his earliest youth, only occupied himself with puja and prayer. Born to a family of Devi bhaktas in Kanchipuram, the Kamakoti Vamsa were charged with propagating Sri Vidya worship. Having come to Tiruvannamalai in 1887 when just 17 years old, Seshadri was nine years senior to Bhagavan and 'adopted' the young Venkataraman to his care in the Patala Linga days (1896) at Arunachala Temple. But though senior in age and revered by locals for his great devotion and prodigious spiritual gifts, from the beginning Seshadri never doubted the spiritual supremacy of the boy from Tiruchuli.

In 1910 at a time when Seshadri was residing on the Hill just below Bhagavan, a certain Subramania Mudali came to him for help. Seshadri advised him to take up sadhana. When the latter protested that he was too busy with his work, Seshadri said, "You see, my younger brother has a 'salary' of Rs.10,000 and I have a salary of Rs.1,000; why shouldn't you at least try for Rs 100?" By 'younger brother' he was referring to young Ramana and by 'salary' he meant spiritual advancement. Mudali continuing to show his disinclination, said, "I have no time, Swami". Seshadri warned him in the sternest terms saying that he would be

² Viswanatha Swami, *Power of the Presence*, vol III, p. 24-25,





guilty of *Brahma hatya*, i.e. the sin of 'slaying a Brahmana', if he neglected his own spiritual development. Disturbed by the strong counsel, Mudali went to Bhagavan to find out if it could be true. Bhagavan concurred, "Yes, you can be said to commit murder of Brahman by not realizing that you are Brahman."

At Mango Tree Cave a couple of years earlier, Vasudeva Sastri witnessed an interesting encounter between Bhagavan and Seshadri. The latter known for his ability to read minds, found that when gazing at Bhagavan, he was unable to discern his thoughts: "It is not clear what this person is thinking." Bhagavan gave no reply. After a pause Seshadri added, "If one worships Lord Arunachala, He will grant salvation." Bhagavan asked, "Who is it that worships and who is the worshipped?" Seshadri laughed boisterously, saying, "That is just what is not clear."³

Other early residents and guests

But while there were remarkable guests at Mango Tree Cave, not all were spiritually advanced and some could in fact be quite a nuisance. There was a certain established economy on the Hill, where swamis would earn their living by dispensing 'spiritual knowledge' to visitors and extracting a fee for their services. There was also a hierarchy of prestige according to assumed levels of spiritual attainment. But with the arrival of one who was concerned with neither wealth nor reputation, the pecking order—to the chagrin of some of the residents—was invariably overturned.

³ See *Self-Realisation*, Ch XX; and *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, pp. 58-9.



M. Balanandam, a prominent character familiar with the Vedas, Gita, Brahma Sutras and versed in numerous languages, was hard-pressed to maintain his elevated status on the Hill once Brahmanaswami took up residence there. Similarly, just adjacent to Mango Tree Cave, was Jada Swami, who had been living on the Hill before Bhagavan's arrival. Known for his long matted locks, he held elaborate pujas attended by the residents on the Hill. When young Brahmanaswami joined the daily ceremonies, visitors and residents gradually began to take notice of the gracious and illuminating presence of the youngster and did namaskaram before him. Initially this made Jadaswami jealous. But in time, the latter would see how things really stood and came to respect the young sage.

Wordwise: Anubhava

अनुभव

Anubhava: (*anu* = 'with', 'along with', 'toward something'; + *bhava*: 'becoming, real being' [Grimes]); perception; direct presentation; knowledge; experience. Going towards or after real being and being That (*bhava*), *anubhava* is thus non-dual.

Swami Madhavatirtha quotes Bhagavan saying, "Just as the sun has never seen darkness, similarly, the Self has never seen ignorance. The Self is unknowable, but it can be experienced by *aparoksha anubhava* (knowledge of the Self by direct perception). This is called *swaprakasatva* or Self-illumination." (*Power of the Presence*, vol. I, p. 254)





Bhagavathar Swami

Others assumed their ascendancy over Bhagavan and endeavoured to 'help' the young swami. Next door to Jada Swami lived Bhagavathar Swami. One day upon returning from the Himalayas, the swami told Bhagavan that he had had a dream in which the Lord commanded him to initiate his 'child Ramana who was there wasting his time'. When Bhagavathar Swami came to commence the initiation ceremony, Bhagavan said, "You have been told by the Lord in your dream to give mantra initiation to me. Let the same Lord appear to me in my dream and bid me take mantra initiation from you and then we will see." Bhagavathar Swami realised he had underestimated the young sage and bashfully withdrew.

Chili Swami

Other curious figures on the Hill include *Milakai Siddhar* or Chili Swami who had the daily habit of smearing green chili paste over his body. One day one of the swami's disciples came with the intention of administering the treatment to Bhagavan. Taking Bhagavan's silence for consent, Chili Swami's disciple quickly painted the peppery paste on Bhagavan's body. "What to do?" Bhagavan later commented, "He went on smearing the green chili paste over my body. For the first few minutes my body felt a severe burning sensation, but after a while the whole system felt very cool. I actually liked it."

The Bairagis

Another curious incident narrated by Kunjuswami occurred when Palaniswami and Perumalswami were away in town. A group of wandering sadhus (*bairagis*) came to see Bhagavan at Virupaksha. saying: "We are coming from the Vindhya Hills. We had darshan of the great siddha there and he has commanded us to take you to him." Bhagavan as usual remained silent and unmoved.

Some woodcutters who overheard the conversation

saw Perumalswami on their way down and apprised him of the situation. Perumalswami came and took one look, then went back to the town, brought tins of oil together with a large cooking vessel and put them down before the band. He then gathered fire-wood. Both the *bairagis* and Bhagavan were bewildered by the unusual behaviour, the former not knowing who Perumalswami was. Perumalswami put the big vessel on the fire and said: "I belong to the next village. I had a vision last night of the great siddha of the Vindhyas, who commanded me to go to Virupakshi Cave. 'You will find some bairagis there,' he said. 'They are siddhas too, having great powers. Pour boiling oil on them and see how they remain untouched by it.'"

To my surprise when I came, you were all here, just as the siddha predicted. What a fool I was to doubt the holy words of the siddha. Immediately, I rushed to town for the vessel and tins of oil. Would I not incur a curse if I disobeyed the siddha?" Not surprisingly, when Perumal Swami went indoors, the *bairagis*, took to their heels.⁴

Devotees at Mango Tree Cave

But true devotees of Bhagavan, from the time of Ganapati Muni, each in their turn, also came and stayed at Mango Tree Cave. T.K. Sundaresa Iyer took up residence there with the Muni in order to study the Rig Veda Sutras and follow the Mantra-Homa Marga until the latter left for Belgaum in 1926. Later on, Yogi Ramaiah occupied the little hermitage below the mango tree. In 1949 Ramani Ammal inhabited the *kutir* there together with another lady-devotee. Finally, Bhagavan's attendant, Satyananda Swami, stayed there for a time as well. Each was fortunate to absorb the blessedness imbued by Bhagavan during his stays there in the warmer seasons of those glorious early years on the Hill. —

⁴ Adapted from Kunju Swami in *Moments Remembered* pp. 69-70.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Direct Experience

M.: Turn your mind inward and spend the time usefully. In the union of the individual with the Supreme, the Supreme is hearsay and the individual directly experienced. You can make use only of direct experience; therefore look [and find out] who you are.

— Talks §332





In the Frame with Bhagavan

Archival Listing GRO 41 (1930s). First row, sitting, LEFT TO RIGHT: 1. P.D. Mannar Chettiar (Kalkandu Chettiar); 2. Sama Tatha; 3. Niranjananda Swami; 4. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi; 5. Sambasiva Rao; 6. Unidentified; 7. T.K. Sundaresa Iyer. (Second row, standing) LEFT TO RIGHT: 1. Ramanatha Brahmachari; 2. T.P. Ramachandra Iyer; 3. Unidentified; 4. Shantamma Pattii; 5. Seshu Iyer; 6. Sub Registrar Narayana Iyer; 7. Unidentified; 8. Tippirajapuram Krishnaswamy Iyer; 9. Unknown. (Third row, standing) LEFT TO RIGHT: 1. Madhava Swami; 2. Annamalai Swamy; 3. Unidentified; 4. Rangaswamy; 5. Ramakrishna Swamy; 6. Subramania Swamy; 7. - 8. Unidentified.



T.K. Sundaresa Iyer: Born into an orthodox Brahmin family, when TKS first visited Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave in 1908 at the age of 10, he did so very reluctantly, thinking that Bhagavan was opposed to orthodoxy. However, compelled by his cousin to come, once having seen Bhagavan, he became a devotee. "If you had seen Him in those days, you would hardly have taken Him for a mere human being. His figure was a statue of burnished gold!" With Bhagavan's approval, TKS lived at Mango Tree Cave for a number of years in order to study with Ganapathi Muni after which he made Ramanasramam his permanent home.

If you have information regarding the identities of those unnamed in the above photo, please write the editor at ashram@sriramanamaharshi.org.



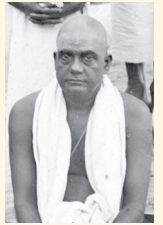


In the Frame with Bhagavan (cont.)



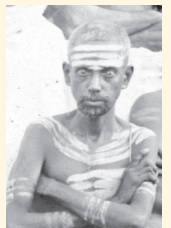
Sub-Registrar Narayana Iyer: As a skeptic of religion and all sannyasins and sadhus, Narayana Iyer came to the Ashram from Chetpet with the intention to scoff. But when he found himself before Bhagavan who was explaining the meaning of the *Ulladu Narpadu*, Narayana noticed that "a solemn stillness pervaded the air. There was absolute silence. The Maharshi read the first stanza, the mere reading of which made the meaning as clear as clarity itself. Stanza by stanza he read and explained in a voice so sweet and melodious that it seemed to come from a transcendent being. The climax came when explaining a verse, he said 'God cannot be seen with our eyes and known by our senses.'" Of this first meeting, Narayana mused, "I came, I saw, he conquered." Though a householder, Narayana Iyer and his wife lived as sadhaks. In time the Sub-Registrar was posted to Tiruvannamalai and was thus blessed to be in the company of Sri Bhagavan on a daily basis, chanting *Ulladu Narpadu* throughout the morning and day each day as his principle sadhana.

Sambasiva Rao: reputed lawyer of Nellore whose entire family for generations since have been devout devotees of Bhagavan. Rao served the Ashram in a legal capacity and in other ways until his death in 1962. After Bhagavan's will was drafted, devotees gathered for the signing. Bhagavan signed only with a simple line and asked Sambasiva Rao to sign on his behalf. To the document was appended the following declaration: "In token of my execution of this document, I affix my mark and authorise G. Sambasiva Rao to sign for me in my presence as I have not been in the habit of affixing my signature."



T.P. Ramachandra Iyer: a native of Tiruvannamalai came in his boyhood to Bhagavan on the Hill. His pious grandfather used to visit young Ramana each day in the temple in 1896 and once led him to his house for a full formal meal, the only time since leaving Madurai that Bhagavan entered a house to take biksha in the traditional way. TPR later became a lawyer and pleaded for the Ashram. Having lost his wife while still quite young, he devoted himself fully to Bhagavan. N.N. Rajan narrates a humorous incident. Bhagavan was sharing a herbal purgative with devotees in the Hall and T.P.R. was not present. But as was his weekly custom, TPR came from Madras Friday night, having skipped lunch and dinner, and on Saturday morning was ravenously hungry. When he entered the Hall, Bhagavan "welcomed him with a beaming smile and told him to go straight to the kitchen. But what awaited him there was only this herbal decoction. Finding it, he promptly swallowed it since Bhagavan had directed him. When he returned to the Hall laughing, narrating his plight, Bhagavan joined in the humour. Those were golden days and one knew nothing but joy." (*Moments Remembered*, p. 84)

Ramanatha Brahmachari: or Ramanatha Dikshitar came to Bhagavan at Virupakshi Cave in 1912 while a student in the town Veda Patasala. Though he was provided meals at the school, he chose to go 'begging' in town for food. In reality, however, he used this free time to go and be with Bhagavan on the Hill. His *Ramana Anubhuti* verses and *Tiruchuzinathanai kandene* were composed by him in the aftermath of the famous discourse-pradakshina where the usually timid, soft-spoken Ramanatha spoke with great vigour on the topic, "The Similarity between the Paramatma dwelling in the cave of the human heart, Lord Nataraja in Chidambaram and Sri Ramana in Virupakshi Cave." The impassioned pradakshina speech, with Bhagavan and devotees as his rapt audience, lasted no less than three hours. "You should have seen the enthusiasm with which he spoke that day", Bhagavan later remarked.





From Periapuranam: Kaari Naayanaar

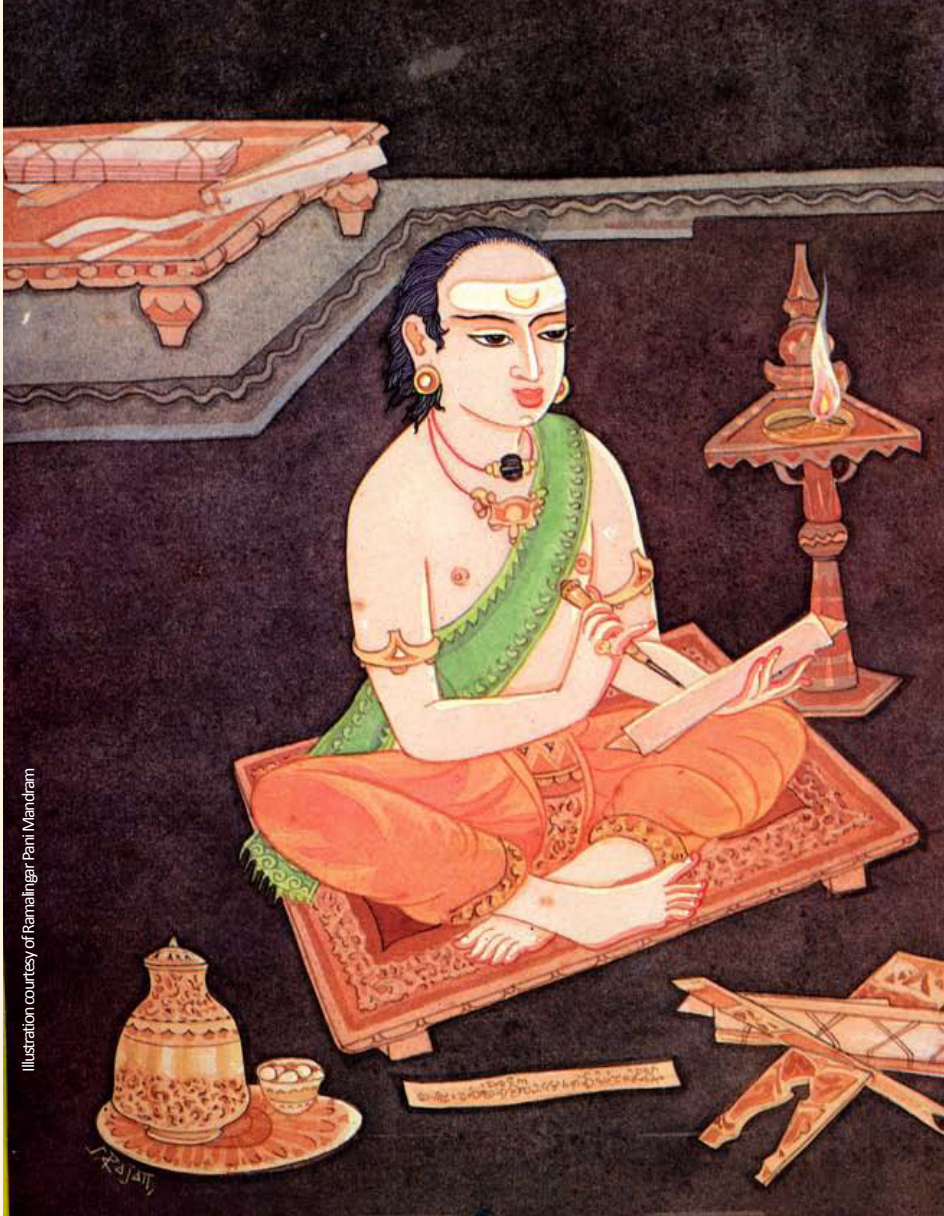


Illustration courtesy of Ramalingar Pani Mandram

In Thirukkadavoor was a learned Brahmin named 'Kaari', who composed the Tamil anthology, *Kaarikovai* in order to expound the Vedic truths clearly, simply and concisely. He presented the work to the rulers of Tamil Nadu and gave discourses on its contents. By virtue of his poetic skills, he won the favour of the kings of his own and of neighbouring countries, all who rewarded him with cattle, land, grain, gold and royal servants. Though he became wealthy, he never became corrupted by his wealth and gave generously to those in need. He served the Lord by renovating temples, erecting compound walls, gopurams, mantapams, making chariots and carriages for the deities on festival days and forging the gold ornaments that would adorn them on their processions through the city. He financed the making of saris of silk and jewels of pearls and other gems which would adorn Uma's murthi. He also donated generously for temple services as well as for special feast days. Though renowned for his wealth, he spent it all in service of the Lord, ultimately winning the Lord's grace. (Kaari Naayanaar's aradhana day falls on the 14th March, 2015)

Reality in Forty Verses

40. If asked, 'which of these three is final liberation: with form, without form, or with and without form?' I say, "Liberation is the extinction of the ego which enquires 'with form, without form, or with and without-form'"

— Sri Bhagavan





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Aksharamanamalai Centenary



Aksharamanamalai's Centenary was celebrated with an all-day recitation in the New Hall from 6am to 6pm, on Sunday the 14th December, culminating in a final recitation of Bhagavan's work outdoor as the flame atop the Hill was being lit at sundown. One-hundred years ago Bhagavan heeded the requests of his sadhu-devotees for a chant they could use on their begging rounds and began composing the 108 couplets while on the pradakshina path.

Announcements: Nochur Sri Venkataraman Discourses: 7th-13th January 2015

Nochur Sri Venkataraman will give seven discourses in English in a continuation of the series begun last January on Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*. The programme will be hosted in the New Library Auditorium starting 7th January at 9.30am. For out-of-town devotees, audio recordings will be made available for free downloading from the Ashram website.



Obituary: Pankajakshi Ammal



Murugayya Pankajakshi Ammal, daughter of C. Somasundaram Pillai, was devoted to Lord Murugan in her youth. At the age of 13, her grand-uncle presented her with a photo of Sri Bhagavan and a copy of the *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi (Ramana Noolthirattu)* graciously touched by Bhagavan. Seeing that Sri Bhagavan was none other than Murugan Himself, she immediately became a devotee and first sat in Bhagavan's presence in 1939. Married the following year, she came twice annually with her husband and children up till 1945 when the family came to live near the Ashram. During these years she spent many hours every day in Bhagavan's presence. She inherited her mother Umayammal's gift for devotional poetry and like her, wrote numerous songs in praise of Bhagavan, many of which are still sung today. Her *Sendhil Sannidhi Murai* was published in Tamil as were her recordings of the stories told about devotees by Kunjuswami (published in Tamil and later translated as Kunjuswami's *Reminiscences*). Born in Cuddalore the 22nd May, 1922, Pankajakshi Ammal lived in Ramana Nagars till the ripe old age of 92 merging at the Feet of her Master at 1am, 26th December.

