

# Saranagati



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INSERT

SRI RAMANASRAMAM  
NOVEMBER 2014



Photos this page from D. Thiyagarajan



## Saranagati



NOVEMBER 2014  
VOL. 8, NO. 11

IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The month of October began with Navaratri still underway. Vijaya Dasami with Yogambika's final procession back into the shrine took place on Friday 3rd October.

This November issue looks at the history of Mango Tree Cave, the grotto where Sri Bhagavan spent the summer months during his 17-year stay at Virupaksha Cave. *In the Frame with Bhagavan* this month features archival listing GRO 43 from the G.H. Mees Collection, taken in 1935.

For videos, photos and further news of 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

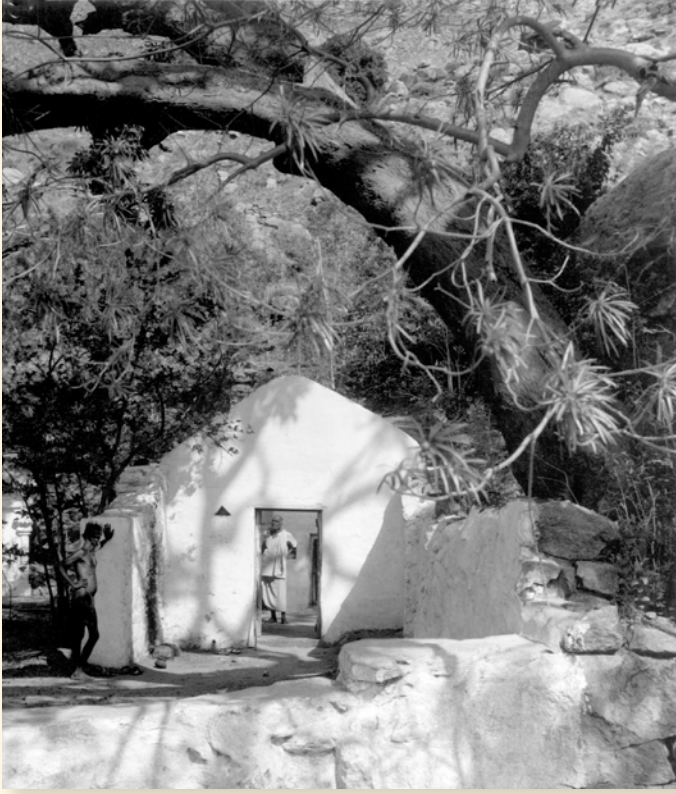
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

6th November (Thurs) Full Moon  
8th November (Sat) Mastan Swami Day  
9th November (Sun) Annamalai Swami Day  
12th November (Wed) Punarvasu Day  
27th November (Thurs) Kartigai Festival Commences  
5th December (Fri) Maha Deepam/Full Moon  
9th December (Tues) Punarvasu Day

31st December (Wed) Lucyma Day  
4th January (Sun) Full Moon  
6th January (Tues) Bhagavan's 135th Jayanti Day  
7-13th January (Weds) Nachur Venkataraman Discourses  
12th January (Mon) Sivaprakasam Pillai Day  
14th January (Wed) Ramaswamy Pillai Day  
15th January (Thurs) Chinnaswami Day





## Mango Tree Cave (part one)

*Dubbed Chuta-guha or Mango Tree Cave by Ganapathi Muni, this little residence next to Mulaipal Tirtham served as Sri Bhagavan's summer retreat for some 17 years, hosting important early guests and playing a key role in making Bhagavan known to the outside world. The following pages take a brief look at this hermitage of the 'milk spring'.*

### Venkataraman's Advent to Arunachala

Having renounced earthly possessions upon his arrival at Tiruvannamalai in 1896, young Venkataraman took up residence within the precincts of Arunachaleswara Temple. Ever seeking out-of-the-way places where he might be free from outside interference and thus repose in the silent bliss of Arunachala, the young sadhu moved from the temple tree down into the subterranean grotto called Pathala Lingam. Before long, however, Seshadriswami would have to rescue the young swami

from the insect infestation he suffered unawares during protracted periods of samadhi-induced absorption in the underground shrine. Once healed of his wounds and made strong again with food, young Bhagavan was led to Gurumurtam near the Vettavalam Road where he stayed for the next 18 months. In September 1898, after a month at Arunagirinathar Temple and in one of Arunachaleswara Temple's gopurams, he shifted up onto the spur of the Hill to stay at Pavalakunru. Finally, in February 1899, he and Palaniswami departed the foothills altogether to take up residence on the Mountain itself.

### Shifting up to the Hill

At Mulaipal Thirtam just up from the main temple, young Ramana found a primitive cave beneath a mango tree but deemed it unfit for human habitation. He thus took shelter at various sites, among them, Satguru Swami Cave (Alamarathu Guhai), Guha Namah-sivaya Temple and finally, Virupaksha Cave, where he settled permanently. Named after the 15th century Kannadiga saint Virupaksha Deva, the cave was suitable in every way as a hermitage. But though it offered easy access to the town for daily bhiksha rounds, during the summer months its nearby streamlet dried up and left its residents without water.

Around this time, one Rangacharya, an enthusiast of alchemy and natural medicine, and his enterprising brother, Ramanujacharya, set about to modify the mango-tree shaded grotto just north of Virupaksha Cave. They arranged to have the rock overhanging the cave demolished and when the rubble was scooped out, they constructed a small front wall with a door and a tiny aperture to serve as a window. When the work was completed, the two brothers, having since become devoted to young Brahmana Swami, invited him to come and live there. So in the summer months, when Virupaksha was dry, Mulaipal Tirtham with its perennial supply of sweet, potable water drew Bhagavan to it. While the water at Guha Namah-sivaya Temple is said to have sprung from the big toe of Siva, the spring of Mulaipal is said to have flowed forth from the breast of Ambika. So as it was, the Divine Mother looked after Brahmana Swami even from his earliest days on the Holy Hill.





## At Mango Tree Cave

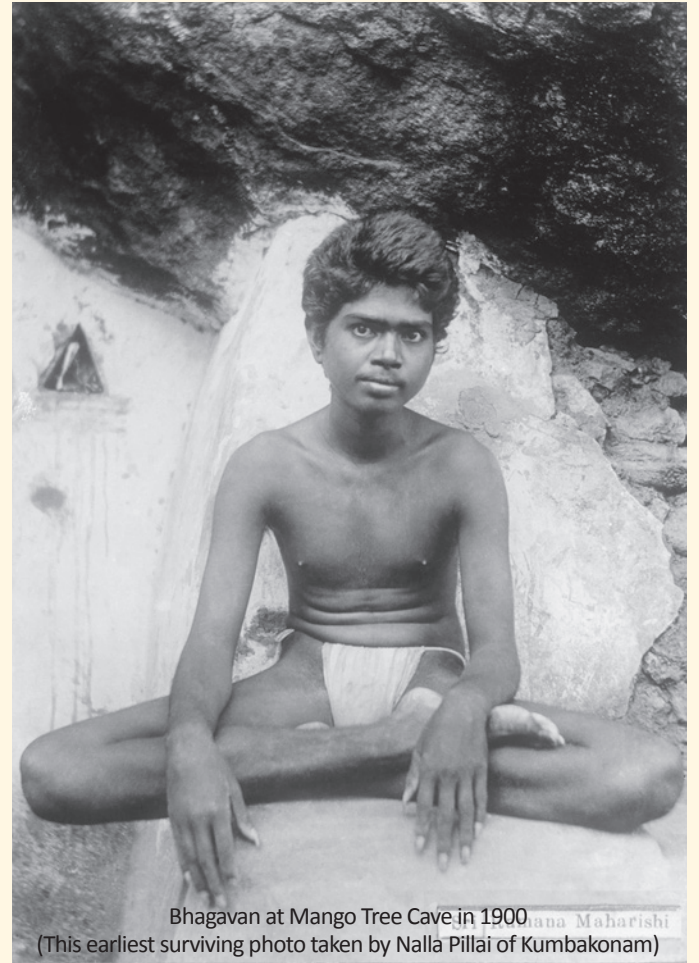
While at Mango Tree Cave Bhagavan used to string garlands for the icons of the temple with lotuses, *sarakonnai* flowers and vilva leaves. These were glory days on the Hill when Brahmana Swami was hardly known and those blessed to know him, had the opportunity to spend time with him in most intimate settings, in quiet meditations, softly-voiced ruminations on the teachings and scriptures, simple pujas and recitations, quiet meals together, on begging rounds or on strolls about the forests and groves of the Hill.

The young sadhu's influence spread by word of mouth among the local population and visitors came up the hill now and again to find him. Seshadriswami already knew him from his temple days and came up regularly.

## Vasishtha Ganapati Muni

Vasishtha Ganapati Muni, having come to Arunachala to do austerities, got word of him from locals and one day went up to see him. However, not finding him at his habitation, he paid a visit to Padmanabha Swami instead. As it would turn out, Brahmana Swami was sitting in the latter's Ashram all the while. When Padmanabha Swami asked the Muni to explain the famous *Suklambaradharam vishnum* verse on Lord Ganesa<sup>1</sup>, the latter gave a standard interpretation, though with his characteristic brilliance, relating the verse to Lord Vishnu. But as he gazed at Brahmana Swam beside him in this their first meeting, he beheld one who was bright and effulgent with the fire of tapas burning within and a serenity born of long months of silence and interior recollection. Praising the sadhu, he

<sup>1</sup> Recited before any undertaking to remove obstacles.



Bhagavan at Mango Tree Cave in 1900. (This earliest surviving photo taken by Nalla Pillai of Kumbakonam)

extended his commentary of the verse: "Brahmana Swami wears only a white loin cloth, so he is *suklambaradhara*, he is in consciousness vast, all-pervading *vishnu*, his complexion is pleasing like the glow of the moon *sasivarna* and he is *chaturbhuk* – as he has eaten up the 'four', i.e. mind, chitta, the memory stuff, intellect and ego, and

## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Pranava

D.: I have received a mantra. People frighten me saying that it may have unforeseen results if repeated. It is only Pranava. So I seek advice. May I repeat it? I have considerable faith in it.

M.: Certainly, it should be repeated with faith.

D.: Will it do by itself? Or can you kindly give me any further instructions?

M.: The object of mantra japa is to realise that the same japa is already going on in oneself even without effort. The oral japa becomes mental and the mental japa finally reveals itself as being eternal. That mantra is the person's real nature. That is also the state of realisation.

— Talks §527





Vasishtha Ganapati Muni

remains as the Self all the time.”<sup>2</sup>

Brahmana Swami said nothing but smiled affectionately.

2 *Shukla-Ambara-Dharam Vissnum Shashi-Varnnam Catur-Bhujam...* See *Bhagavan and Nayana*, pp. 4-6.

## Accepting the Master

On a subsequent visit the Muni ascended the Hill to Virupaksha Cave. It was the afternoon of the eighth day of the Kartigai Deepam Festival, an auspicious occasion indeed. Amazingly, with the crowds below worshipping and praying at the Big Temple and along the pradakshina path around the Hill, no one was to be found with Bhagavan and the young adept sat quietly alone. Here Ganapati Muni, master of word and sastra but not yet master of his own soul had the opportunity he had long awaited. After years of struggle and endless endeavor to make progress in the spiritual quest, he had now found one who could help him, one who possessed the mastery he lacked. The Muni silently approached Brahmana Swami, fell at his feet and, grasping them tightly in his hands, poured out his petition:

“I have read all the sastras, performed japa of the most revered mantras, observed hundreds of penances and austerities, yet I have had no realisation. Is my tapas tainted? Is there some shortcoming in my method? I am said to be a learned man, yet I do not know. I take refuge in thee. Please help me!”

(to be continued)

## Wordwise: Pranava प्रणव

*Pranava* ('infuser of praana' or 'giver of life') is the primordial word/sound, 'Om', which is the root and source of the universe, revered throughout the ages for its great power as a mantra.

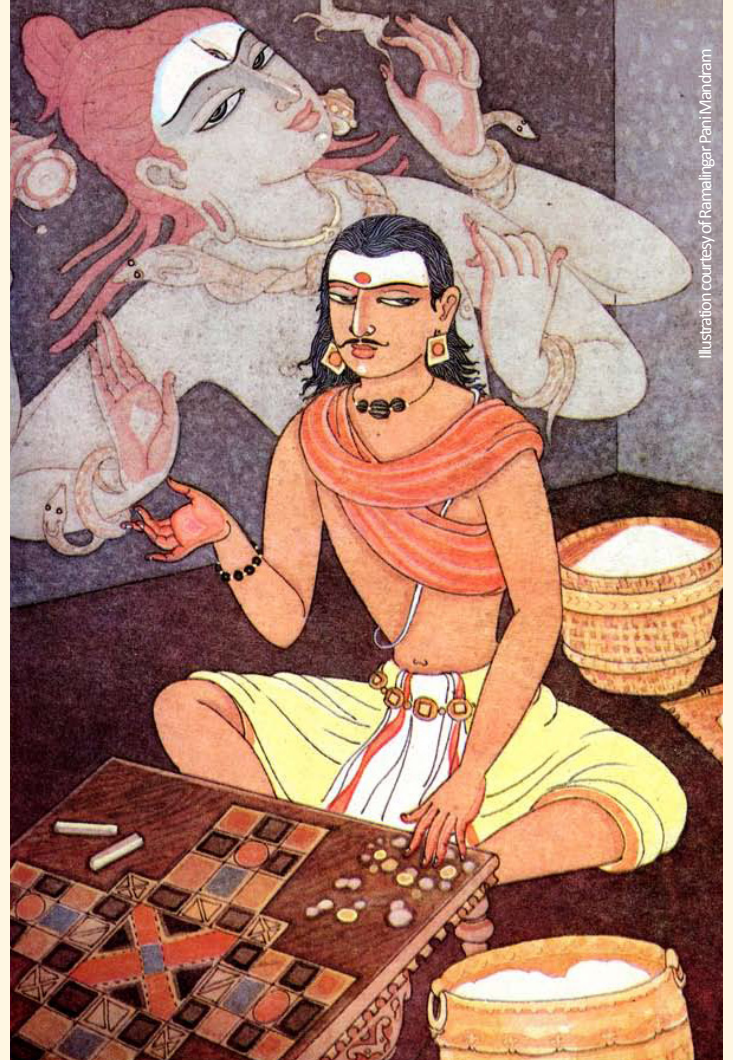
Lord Krishna declares 'I am Pranava in all the Vedas' (Bh. Gita VII-8). Om is 'God as Sound' (*shabda Brahman*) and thus the vehicle leading back to the source. The *Mundakya Upanishad* tells us that Om is the bow, one's self, the arrow, and Brahman, the target. One becomes united with Brahman as the arrow meets its target. Bhagavan says: "Pranava is Omkara" and meditation [on] it is "the nature of devotion consisting in reflection on the truth of the Self. The fruition of this process is samadhi which yields release [and] is the state of unsurpassed bliss." CW p.23.





## From *Periapuranam*: Moorkha Naayanaar

It is said that those who serve the Lord's devotees, by whatever means, attain salvation. Once a well-to-do devotee who made it his life's work to serve the Lord's devotees was tested by the Lord. Fire was sent down to consume his house and the soil in his fields dried up and cracked, spoiling his crops. Even his cattle died, smitten by disease. Now penniless, the devotee received an unusual guest at his palm leaf hut, built in the ruins of his former estate. Perceiving that this was no ordinary pilgrim, the devotee nevertheless failed to recognise the Lord in disguise. When the visitor asked for food and clothing, the devotee panicked and sought the advice of his wife who encouraged him to fulfil the wishes of the guest at any cost. In the meantime the guest, feigning impatience, shouted, "What, you leave me here unattended and go inside for a leisurely chat with your wife? I have devotees in Kumbhakonam eager to surrender their lives to me. Enough of your hospitality." And therewith rushed out of the house. The devotee chased after him but found he had vanished. He then made ready to go to Kumbhakonam in hopes of finding the disgruntled guest and make amends. Once there, however, no sign of him was to be found. He went to the Lord's shrine and fasted for seven days. One night Mahadeva appeared to him in a dream and said: "Remain here always and revel in serving my devotees who are supreme." The devotee woke up and immediately went in search of a job. Not finding any, he wandered into a less respectable part of town and found himself entering a gambling hall. With the few coins he had left from his former wealth he ventured at the gaming board. When the wager proved successful, he again ventured



his winnings and continued to meet with success, becoming wealthy overnight. But what he would now do with his newfound fortune was the test. The following day, he arranged a feast for devotees of the Lord and all who hungered came and partook of the abundance. His family joined him and worked ceaselessly in humbly serving the Lord's devotees. Food continued to be served until none but a few coins remained. With these he again wagered on behalf of the Lord's devotees, again meeting with success. While this means of livelihood earned him the title *Moorkha* (foolish), the purity of heart with which he conducted his otherwise unworthy profession earned him a permanent place in Siva's abode. (*Moorkha Naayanaar's aradhana day falls on the 25th November*)

### Reality in Forty Verses

38. If we are the doers of deeds, we should reap the fruits they yield. But when we question, 'Who am I, the doer of this deed?' and realize the Self, the sense of agency is lost and the three karmas slip away. And Eternal is this Liberation.

— Sri Bhagavan





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Deepavali

Deepavali comes from *deepa* ('light') and *avali* ('row' or 'string'), hence, 'row of lights'. Also known as *Naraka Chaturdasi*, this festival of lights commemorates the slaying of Narakasura by Sri Krishna on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the Tamil month of *Aippasi*.

Thinking that no mother would ever slay her son, the asura Naraka had at an early age secured the boon of near immortality: he could not die except at the hand of his mother. The gods were in turmoil as none could chasten Narakasura who prowled about the world wreaking havoc and causing destruction of the innocent. His mother, Bhumidevi (Goddess of the Earth), was Krishna's wife but she did not recognise her son when Krishna implored her to fire the Omkara-astam that would put an end to his reign of terror (Naraka means 'hell'). As he lay dying he saw his delusion and repented of his wrongdoings, confessing that he had been possessed by pride. When he cried out for his mother, she at last recognised her son and pleaded with Lord Krishna on his behalf. Krishna then granted the remorseful Narakasura full liberation just before he died. Deepavali exemplifies victory of light (awakened consciousness) over darkness (the ignorance of egoic delusion).

At the Ashram, Deepavali was celebrated in the early morning hours of the 22nd October with puja and fireworks. Later the same morning Viswanatha Swami Day was observed at his shrine with chanting of *Aksharamanamalai*, puja and prasadam.





## In the Frame with Bhagavan

Archival Listing GRO 43 from Mees' collection is taken in front of the Old Hall around 1935: (First row, sitting L to R): 1. Unidentified; 2. Chadwick; 3. Niranjana Swami; 4. Bhagavan; 5. Paul Brunton; 6. Ganapathy Sastry; 7. Kalyanasundaram Iyer; 8. Unidentified. (Second row, standing L to R): 1. Unidentified; 2. Unidentified, (sitting): 1. Seshu Iyer; 2. Unidentified; 3. Dr. Mees; 4. Ella Maillart; 5. Unidentified; 6. Unidentified; 7. Dandapani; 8. Bangalore Ramachandra Rao; 9. A.R. Doraiswamy Iyer. (Last row, standing L to R): 1. Sadasiva Swami; 2. Madhava Swamy; 3. Annamalai Swamy; 4. Ramaswamy Pillai; 5. Subramania Swamy; 6. Raja Iyer; 7. Madhava Rao; 8. Rangaswamy; 9. Kumaraswamy; 10. Tamarapakkam Gopalan.



**Ramaswamy Pillai:** Came to Bhagavan in 1917 having just completed his final examination. His diligence made him an asset when construction projects began in Ramanasramam after 1922. Untiring in his labours, he shopped for the Ashram, collected post at the post office and parcels from the railway station. His gift as a singer made him a special presence at Tamil parayana. When Bhagavan slipped on the Hill and injured his leg, Pillai initiated leveling work on the path up to Skandasramam, efforts for which devotees have been grateful ever since.

**Dr. Gualtheurs Hendrik Mees (Sadhu Ekarasa) M.A., Cambridge, LL.D.:** Prof. of Economics whose 1935 *Dharma and Society* won him international acclaim. Born to Dutch nobility, Mees was offered professorates in Ceylon and Mysore where the Maharaja of Mysore urged him to visit Bhagavan. Known for his scholarship and staunch devotion, Bhagavan referred to him as 'Mees Sastri' as he would wear his dhoti in the traditional style. On the subject of photographing Bhagavan, Mees expressed surprise that Bhagavan's image actually appeared on the film negative. Another time he said, "One really needs courage to aim at the Guru through a viewfinder."





## In the Frame with Bhagavan (cont.)



**Paul Brunton** (b. Raphael Hurst, 1898): A British journalist/writer sent by Kanchi Paramacharya to Bhagavan in 1931. The meeting "changed him forever" and he wrote *A Search in Secret India* which sold 3 lakh books in its first 20 years, bringing news of the Maharshi to the international community. Numerous foreign devotees appeared in the wake of the 1934 publication, among them Major Chadwick, Maurice Frydman and Dr. G.H. Mees.

**Bangalore Ramachandra Rao**: An ayurvedic physician who once brought a list of items for preparing Ayurvedic medicines and showed it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan went through the list and spoke well of each item. Ramachandra Rao asked, "Do I have Bhagavan's permission to go ahead with the preparation of the medicines?" Bhagavan said, "Medicines? For whom?" Rao: "For Bhagavan". Bhagavan smiled, "Why for me? I am alright. You appear to be weaker than me, you had better take the medicine yourself."



## Obituary: Swami Shantananda Puri



Born on 6th May, 1928, Swami Shantananda Puri hailed from Tiruvaiyaru. A disciple of Swami Purushottamananda Puri of Vashishta Guha, (a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna's disciple, Swami Brahmananda), Swamiji took sannyasa diksha in Uttar Kashi in 1992. Versed in *Gita*, *Bhagavatam*, *Yoga Vashishta* and *Ashtavakra Gita*, together with his vast knowledge of Sankskrit, Swamiji was known for his deftness in answering listener's doubts. Authoring two dozen books just in the last 15 years, Swamiji's writing was unpretentious and lighthearted, replete with humour as well as philosophical depth. Fond of story-telling, he often illustrated the subtler aspects of advaitic teaching with anecdotes and stories. His commentaries covered works dear to Ramana devotees as well as the great classics: *Kenopanishad*, *Kaivalyopanishad*, *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, *Lalita Sahasranamam*, *Linga Puranam*, *Uddhava Gita*, *Vivekachudamani*, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, *Ribhu Gita*, *Devi Kalottara*, the *Tripura Rahasyam* and finally, *Sadhanas in Upadesa Saram*, released on the last day of his life. He divided his time between Vashishta Guha and Sri Ramanasramam. At the end of September this year, after having been in critical condition in ICU for some weeks in Pondicherry Hospital, he requested adherents to help him go to Ramanasramam one last time. Deemed to

be in imminent danger, he was rushed back to the hospital the same evening and he survived two more weeks till 14th October, when he left his body with solemn admirers at his bedside. The following day (October 15th), his mortal remains were interred in the lotus posture facing the Holy Hill at his Samadhi in Perambakkam Road, Tiruvannamalai, about 7 kms from Sri Ramanasramam on land belonging to a close disciple. *Shodasi*, the sixteenth-day puja, fell on Skanda Sasthi (29th Oct) and sixteen sadhus were honoured with gifts, of sixteen items each in a simple service in K-18, the Ashram room last occupied by Swamiji.



"Learn to chant Aksharamanamalai" is a new android app available here <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ramana.learn-to-chant-aksharamanamalai>. Now iphone app is also available for "Voice of Arunachala" here <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/voice-of-arunachala/id908681555?ls=1&mt=8>

