

# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

DECEMBER 2018  
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D. Thiagarajan



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Dear Devotees,

As we go to print, the nightly hilltop Deepam flame still burns in full splendor.”

In this issue, we take a look at the history of Patala Linga where Bhagavan spent some of his early days in Tiruvannamalai (see p. 3ff).

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

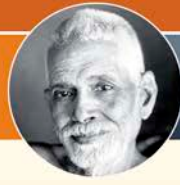
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

22nd December (Sat) Full Moon  
24th December (Mon) Bhagavan's 139th Jayanti  
26th Dec (Weds) Nochur Venkataraman 7-day Discourse  
31st December (Mon) Lucy Ma Day  
15th January (Tues) Pongal  
20th Jan (Sun) Punarvasu/Full Moon/Chinnaswami Day

17th February (Sun) Punarvasu  
19th February (Tues) Full Moon  
23rd February (Sat) Sundaram Iyer Day  
4th March (Mon) Mahasivaratri  
15th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Havan  
16th March (Sat) Punarvasu





## Patala Lingam

Devotees may remember that Bhagavan's first six months in Tiruvannamalai were spent in the Big Temple compound. Absorbed in meditation, he sat in various places on the temple grounds: inside the Thousand-Pillared mantapam, underneath the *iluppai* tree, in the *vahana* mantapam where the temple vehicles were stored, in the banana grove, the flower garden, among other sacred sites, and later, an extended period at Gurumurtam Shrine on the Vettavalam Road. In those early days he was so completely absorbed (*brahma-varishtan*) that he was quite unaware of his surroundings.

The milk used for the daily abhishekam to the idol of Apita Kuchambal, the divine spouse of the Lord, was poured into his mouth by Muniswami, who was in charge of the milk offering at Mother's temple. This was the only food Bhagavan took.

For the first three months, he sat with closed eyes in plain sight until after his first Deepam which fell that year in the third week of November (the 20th). The

move was a response to young kids who harassed the swami by throwing rocks and broken pots. He took refuge in the south-east corner of the Patala Lingam. In those days the lingam was in a state of ruin. Situated in a deep pit underneath the Thousand-Pillared hall, it was the darkness that was his great protector because the boys could not see him and even though they knew he was there, they dared not trace the broken steps down into the pit for fear of falling. Ratnammal, wife of Vellore Velayuda Chettiyar, however, risked the trip down into the darkness and brought food into the Patala Lingam. One day she brought a clean dhoti and placed it before the young swami but when she came the next day and found the dhoti unused, she took it back saying, "Why are you sitting here in mud and water? You can sleep and eat in my house." But the young swami, safely ensconced behind the lingam, was established in oneness beyond the body, beyond the feeling of pain or discomfort.

The dark dank recesses of the underground linga was a breeding ground for ants, termites, mosquitoes, flies, mites, fleas and centipedes which began to feed on the flesh of the undersides of his thighs. When visitors came, they lamented the condition of his body, full of sores with blood and pus oozing out. But for his part, he knew nothing of it. It was Seshadri Swami who addressed the plight of the motionless form in Patala Lingam by telling one of his devotees, Venkatachala Mudaliar, "There is a small swami inside. Go and see".

Making his way down the fragile steps, Venkatachalam could make out nothing at first, coming as he was from the daylight into the blackness of the pit. But when his eyes adjusted, he could discern the figure of the young sage locked in concentration. He retraced his steps, went to the nearby flower-garden and sought the help of acquaintances. He persuaded them to come with him. This time Venkatachala Mudaliar took a lantern along and with the others, they lifted the Swami up from the pit and carefully and gently brought him to a stone mandapa in the nearby Gopuram Subramania temple. Even then the young adept did not regain body-consciousness. Not knowing if what they had done was a service or sin,



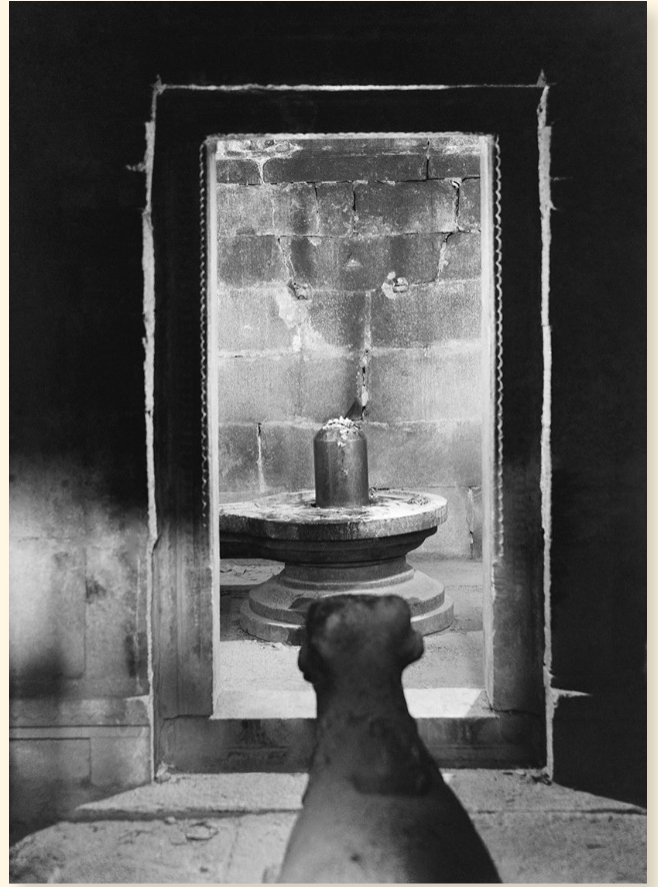


an intrusion, they bowed in respect and went away.

Bhagavan's memory of all that happened in the days at Patala Lingam are sketchy since he was lost to ordinary consciousness. But when later asked if he had been compelled to go without food while living at the underground linga, he said, "Food was forthcoming — milk and fruits — but whoever thought of food."

Later devotees asked how it was that there came to be a lingam beneath the Arunchaleswara's Thousand-Pillared hall since there is no known custom for such a feature in traditional temple architecture. Bhagavan replied, "No, they are usually not in existence anywhere. The reason for it here is because the body of a saint was buried there and a linga was installed over it. As the linga was there much before the construction of the Thousand-Pillared mandapam, it was not disturbed but was left as it was."

Bhagavan described the inscriptions on the walls dating from the time of its establishment by the Hoysala Emperor, Krishnadevaraya. He said that the Patala Lingam was ancient and had originally been at ground level like any other lingam, but as the centuries passed, it had slowly sunk. Bhagavan continued: "The remaining portion of the ground was raised and the mandapam was erected. That is why the linga is underneath the mandapam which remains like a cave. Later on, steps leading to the place were constructed. When I was staying there it was full of dust. Excepting the elephant on the mandapam and



Patala Lingam interior

myself in the cellar, no one else was around."

## Scars on Bhagavan's Legs

In later years, when a devotee asked about the scars on Bhagavan's legs, Bhagavan said they were the legacy

## Wordwise: Patala

## पाताल

**P**atala, lit. 'that which is below the feet', indicates the nethermost realm of *bhuloka*, i.e. the subterranean realms of the universe. The three worlds are Svarga, the heavenly realm, Prithvi, the earthly realm, and Patala, the underworld. Patala is made up of seven regions, the lowest of which is also called Patala where the Nagas reside.

In his search for the foot of the pillar of fire, Lord Vishnu penetrated the seven nether worlds: Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Talatala, Rasatala, Mahatala and Patala, which are said to lie 70,000 yojanas below the Earth. Sage Narada describes the seven realms of Patala as more beautiful than Svarga, filled with sweet fragrance, splendid jewels, beautiful groves and lakes.





Periya Nandi (centre), Thousand-Pillared hall (right) and Vallala Gopuram (left)

of the days spent at Patala Linga. After listening to his experience at Patala Linga, devotees were inspired to go and to see the linga for themselves. But when they reached it, they found it in a state of utter neglect, having been made use of as a public lavatory. The news was disheartening for Bhagavan who gently remarked, “Oh, they have no other place but this for

that purpose. Do you know the place is a very sacred one and is the samadhi of a very great saint?”

Hearing Bhagavan’s lament about the state of Patala Linga, some devotees felt that there must be a reason for Bhagavan having chosen that spot for his tapas in the early days and volunteered right then and there to do something about its dilapidated condition.

Not long after this discussion, a devotee approached Ramnath Goenka who offered Rs. 10,000 for the construction and architectural plans for the renovation were designed by Vaidyanatha Staphathi who had just then finished up the Mother’s Shrine in Ramanasramam and was preparing for Mahakumbhabhishekam. When the plans were handed over to Mr. Tarapore, an architect and builder, the latter agreed to provide whatever additional funds might be needed.

Omandur P. Ramaswami Reddiar, the ardent devotee of Bhagavan and Chief Minister, attended the ground-breaking ceremony. While the Patala Linga reconstruction work was completed in the early spring of 1949, the inauguration was postponed

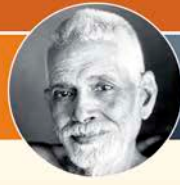
## Patala Lingam & the Thousand-Pillared Hall: Topography & Early History

**T**he Patala Lingam is situated in the south-west corner of the Thousand-Pillared Hall. Very near it lies the Periya Nandi built by the Hoysala king, King Vallala III. Nandi is traditionally fashioned with the left side of his body facing the Siva Lingam and his head turned to the left, but the head of Periya Nandi is appropriately facing right ward in the direction of the summit of the Holy Hill.

Adjacent to the Patala Lingam is the storage facility for the temple vehicles and just beyond that is the gopuram of Subramanya Swami, the place where the penitent Arunagirinathar jumped from the top of the gopuram in an suicide attempt which was fortunately thwarted at the last moment by Lord Subramanya. A temple commemorating the event was constructed adjacent to Sivaganga Tirtham near the Sarvasiddhi Vinayaka temple. On the southern side of the Vallala gopuram is the Kalyana Sundarar sannidhi.

The Thousand-Pillared Hall was built in the 16th-century by Krishnadevaraya of the late Vijayanagara period, who purchased the land for 500 sovereigns. He dug a tank opposite to it. The pillars in the hall are carved with images of *yali*—the body of a lion with the head of an elephant—as well as figures depicting sages and gods, all in the Nayaka style. Measuring 275 ft. east to west and 395 ft. north to south, covering about one acre, the hall served in former times, not only as a place of worship, such as when Nataraja is brought there in the month of July, but also as refuge for townspeople in time of floods, fires or other natural disasters. —





until after the Mother's Shrine Kumbhabhishekam was performed. The opening ceremony of the Patala Linga Temple was thus fixed for 4th May.

As several visitors including the Governor General of India and the Governor Maharaja of Bhavnagar were expected at the Ashram following the ceremony, a pandal was erected near Bhagavan's sofa in the Jubilee Hall. In preparation for the arrival of the Governor-General, Sri C. Rajagopalachari at the Big Temple at 8.30 am on the 4th May, large consignments of Reserve Police made security rounds at the Ashram and the Temple environs. Roads were repaired and decorated with national flags and the immediate area of the Patala Lingam and the Thousand-Pillared mandapam were cleaned and white-washed. On the day of the ceremony, the Governor General went directly to the temple from the railway station, performed the opening ceremony and praised Sri Bhagavan in his public address. But instead of visiting Bhagavan at the Ashram after the event as planned he was called away on urgent business and so did not get to see Bhagavan. The other main participants which included the Bhavanagar royal couple came before Bhagavan at about 10.30 am, prostrated before him, spoke to him with great reverence and received prasadam before taking leave.



Patala Lingam Inauguration, May 1949 with Vaidyanatha Stapathi overseeing

As the small vimanam had been erected above the Patala Lingam in 1949 without any Kumbhabhishekam, a ceremonial consecration was performed on 3rd November, 1969 in the presence of Sardar Ujjal Singh, the Governor of Madras. It was on this occasion that arrangements were made to offer daily pujas at the shrine. —

## Obituary: Smt. Suvarna R. Nathani



Born in Pune 8th November 1963, Suvarna R. Nathani (née Suvarna Divekar) was schooled at a BARC school in Mumbai (Bhabha Atomic Research Centre) where her parents had joined. Suvarna did her medical education in pathology at Grant Medical College, Mumbai and was married in 1990 to Dr. Ranjan R. Nathani. Mr. Sharad Hazareji, who had met Bhagavan in 1948, introduced them to Bhagavan and his teachings. Suvarna visited Ramanasramam along with her family in the year 2000 where she found peace and contentment. Thereafter, she visited the Ashram at least twice a year. A turning point came when she met Ganesan, the grandnephew of Ramana Maharshi in the year 2004. With his guidance and regular spiritual sharing via email, she slowly but steadily started absorbing Bhagavan's teaching. In the final two years of her life, there was a marked shift in her routine toward inner silence. She was always smiling and was happy and peaceful especially in her last few days. Other than asthma, she had no health complaints. She passed away in her sleep early morning of the 23rd of October, 2018. She is survived by her husband and two children, Ruchi and Ajinkya. —







## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Kartigai Deepam 2018

Karthigai Deepam is the festival of light where darkness and evil are banished by lighting the lamp at sundown when sun is in *vrishika* and moon is in *krittika nakshatra* in the Tamil month falling between mid-November and mid-December. Such an alignment always occurs either on, or just prior to or just following, the full moon. The Maha Deepam flame is lit at 6 pm atop Arunachala in a giant cauldron containing 3500kg of ghee.



The Kartigai festival memorializes Lord Siva's appearance before Brahma and Vishnu in the form of a giant column of fire on Kartigai night. Karthigai is the Pleiades, a group of six stars considered to be the six celestial nymphs who reared the six babies in the Saravana tank which later were joined together to form the six-faced Muruga. For this reason, Muruga is also known as Karthikeya.

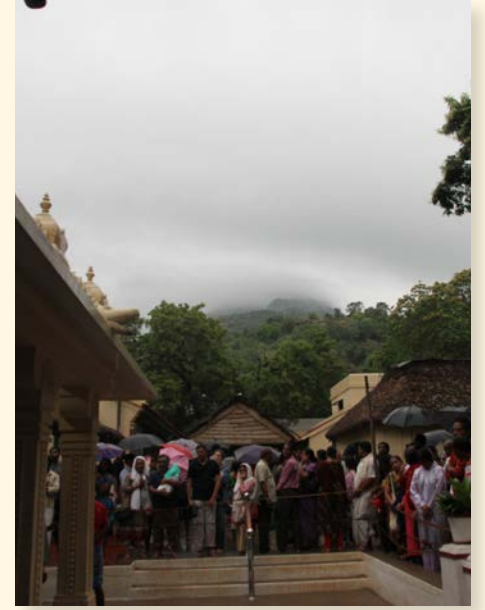
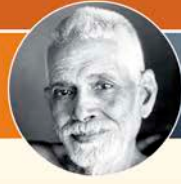


This year's festival got underway with the flag-hoisting ceremony at the Main Shrine of the Big Temple, Wednesday morning, 14th November when thousands gathered under a colourful morning sky, and when, at 6 am, the temple processional deities made their way out of the shrine and stood near the flagpole. The festival commenced with the raising of the temple flag to



the accompaniment of cannon blasts. Later that morning, crowds gathered in the Four Streets to have darshan of the Lord when the festival's first procession around the temple started at 10.30 am with nadaswaram companies, drums, tambourines, trumpets and conches sounding as the deities made their way around the Four Streets, stopping every few paces for arati.





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Kartigai Deepam 2018 (cont.)

The tenth day, the culminating moment, fell this year on 23 November. At the Ashram, devotees gathered under a rainy sky with an obstructed view of the hill, as in Bhagavan's time, and awaited the lighting of the flame atop Arunachala. Meanwhile abhishekam followed by an elaborate alankaram was underway in Bhagavan's shrine amidst the refrains of the Krishna Yajur Veda in ghanam mode. After arati, priests and purohits went in procession, bearing the Ramana Mahalingam puja

flame outdoors to join devotees gathered round the image of Bhagavan. As monsoon cumulus swirled about the summit, only a faint halo of golden light could be discerned, but this merely served to heighten devotees' enthusiasm as they waited in rapt attention, reciting Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*. Twenty minutes after the lighting of the flame, the crowd roared with excitement as the clouds broke momentarily, offering a brief glimpse of effulgence at the summit, through the mist. —

