

# Saranagati



COVER  
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MAHASIVARATRI  
MARCH 2014



Photos this page from Rohit Sabharwal



## Saranagati



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ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

On the heels of the Mahasivaratri celebrations at the end of February, March began with a three-day Maharudram programme in the Grantalaya Library Auditorium on Saturday morning, the first.

Radhasaptami, the traditional way of celebrating *uttarayana* (the Sun's crossing to its northern course) is marked according to *tithi* (the seventh) and was observed on the 5th of February with a special puja to Surya in the Mother's Shrine. Sundaram Iyer's Aradhana Day was observed on the 19th February with special puja.

The new Ashram godown, situated near the Ashram Archives, to be utilised for storing Ashram book stock, was inaugurated at the end of the month.

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)

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The Editorial Team

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## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: The Imperishable

D.: "Has the discrimination between Reality and Unreality (Sat asat vicharana) the efficacy in itself to lead us to the realisation of the one Imperishable?"

M.: As propounded by all and realised by all true seekers, fixity in the Supreme Spirit (Brahma nishta) alone can make us know and realise it. It being of us and in us, any amount of discrimination (vivechana) can lead us only one step forward, by making us renouncers, by goading us to discard the seeming (abhasa) as transitory and to hold fast to the eternal truth and presence alone.

— Talks §29







Photo from Paul Brunton

## The Origins of Pradakshina (part four)

**P**radakshina is the natural way of things and delineates a primordial order in the universe. The earth and the other planets in their orbit do pradakshina around the Sun, while all created beings, faintly cognisant of their formless origins, seek the source of light hidden at their centre.

The first form of worship, pradakshina is circumambulation of the Self, which, though immaterial, is our true, original form. It expresses in bodily action a deep longing to return to the Unmoving Source of Being. Pradakshina is 'right-facing' because it is the right side of the body that represents the inward Formless Self while the left expresses outward bodily manifestation. In India, whether walking or

traveling by conveyance, people instinctively pass one another on the left side in a 'right-facing' manner, thereby intuitively venerating the divinity that dwells as the Self within the heart of the other.

But what is done habitually is often unconscious, and though a fervent yearning to transcend the impermanence of the world undergirds many human actions, the veil of ignorance often causes people to lose sight of their deeper aspirations and the singular purpose of their lives.

### Lord Arunachala's Plan

Such a veil had settled over the generations of the modern world including those inhabiting the regions of Holy Arunachala in the late 1800s. Intimate devotion to the Lord of Sona Hill had dissipated and Arunachala's former glory had receded from collective memory. Even though traditional rites during Kartigai Deepam, Mahasivaratri and other feasts were faithfully maintained, many failed to grasp their deeper significance. The former fervor for *girivalam* had disappeared as a paucity of understanding caused people to search outwardly for what lay overlooked within them.

The Unmoving One set about to remedy this state of affairs and devised a simple plan. It hinged on a young Tamil boy who lived a few hundred kilometres south of Arunachala in the town of Madurai. The son of a court pleader, the boy was ordinary in every respect. He played like other children of the time, attended the mission school and was being prepared for the householder's life to be a breadwinner for the family. Though born into an upright orthodox family, economic necessity had come to supersede adherence to traditional ways and young Venkataraman failed to receive the training of his forefathers. Vedic recitation, Sanskrit grammar, memorising the hallowed verses of the Puranas, performing yagna and puja, singing hymns and stotras dedicated to Iswara and going on pilgrimage to the great temples and shrines of the region were not part of the secular curriculum at the local school. Yet this proved no setback for Lord Arunachala. He planted His seed of fatherly affection within the boy's heart. In it lay the promise of restoration, not only for the child's kith and kin, but for all in the Tamil land and beyond.



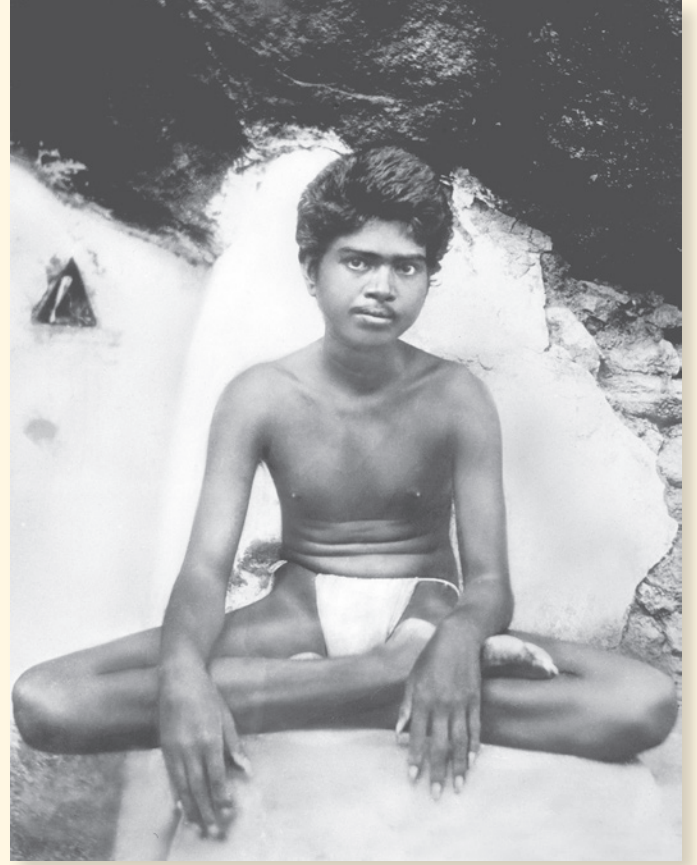


Unknown to young Venkataraman a great power was quietly at work within him. One day he chanced upon a copy of *Periapuranam* and when he opened the book and discovered the stories of the 63 nayanmars—the devotee-saints of Lord Siva—he found he was unable to put it down and went on reading its tales over and again with great enthusiasm. Gradually he lost interest in the boyhood games he and his companions were wont to play on the grounds of the nearby Meenakshi temple but instead found himself at the temple’s inner sanctum prostrate before the nayanmar *murthis*, weeping tears of devotion. This was Lord Arunachala’s plan beginning to unfold.

An uncle came to visit the family in Chokkappa Nayakar Street, Madurai. When Venkataraman learned that his relative was coming from *Arunachala*, he was struck with wonder: “How could anyone”, he thought, “visit Arunachala—that fabled, otherworldly realm, host to gods, devas, vidyadharas and celestial beings—and return to this world?” The relative explained that Arunachala was a physical place and lay in his native Tamil Nadu at Tiruvannamalai. Filled with excitement, Venkataraman pondered this revelation and quietly repeated the name that had pulsed deep within him from his early boyhood and now awakened in him such a ferment of introspection.

## Arunachala’s Summoning

The following year Lord Arunachala delivered His *coup de grace*, the definitive visitation that would alter the lad’s life forever and indeed shape the course of human history. As the sixteen-year old sat alone in the upstairs room one Sunday, he had intimations of death. As the feeling grew more intense, he realised that he was passing away from this world and would soon be no more. He lay prostrate and felt his form stiffen as the life force drained out of his



body. He then heard himself softly uttering the following words: “Now, death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.” He extended his limbs rigid like a corpse and held his breath: “This body is dead. It will be carried to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am ‘I’ dead? Am ‘I’ this body? The material body dies, but the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am therefore deathless spirit.”

Such was the sequence of reflections that attended a great discovery. But instead of meeting with physical death, he found he had transcended death in a profound

## Reality in Forty Verses

32. When the Vedas have declared ‘Thou art That’ (*tattvamasī*), not to seek and find the nature of the Self and abide in It, but to think ‘I am That, not This’ — is want of strength; That abides forever as the Self.

— Sri Bhagavan





realisation that left him with the clear understanding that he was not his body but rather the Imperishable Self, the Eternal Witness dwelling within. From that time on, he found himself in a continual state of absorption, indifferent to the events of ordinary life.

Arunachala's plan now fully in place, it was only some six weeks before the boy made up his mind to leave home forever. And so at the end of August 1896, he set off in secret for Arunachala, the great Mountain of whose location he had only just learned.

### Catching Hold of Young Ramana

Upon arriving in Tiruvannamalai, the Lord of Arunachala drew young Ramana yet nearer and he entered Arunachala temple and embraced the holy linga there. He took his place in the Patala Linga where, by becoming himself unmoving, he melded with the One Unmoving Akshara that is Arunachala. For others at the temple, the mere sight of the boy engendered hope,

rekindling a dormant flame within them. Citizens of the town saw in his radiant young face and clear penetrating eyes the flame of wisdom whose light had been for them up till then only a faint memory. In him they rediscovered the mystery of Arunachala's true form: the pillar of stone is in reality the very Light of Consciousness Itself.

Dispossessed, living as a sadhu, young Bhagavan began to explore the Mountain who had 'stolen into his heart'<sup>1</sup> and drawn him like a magnet to Tiruvannamalai. He ranged Its slopes, meditated on Its sublime form, hymned Its ageless past and savoured Its infinitely varying aspects. In time, followers gathered round him and the burgeoning young sage led them in the ancient, forgotten rite—circumambulating Holy Annamalai, singing the timeless glory of Siva's own form.

(to be continued)

<sup>1</sup> *From my home Thou didst entice me, then stealing into my heart didst draw me gently into Thine, (such is) Thy Grace, O Arunachala! (Aksharamanamalai, v. 97).*

## Wordwise: Akshara

अक्षर

**Akshara** (a: 'not'+kshar: 'to melt away', 'to perish'): imperishable, indestructible, immutable, immovable, that which is present everywhere; a single syllable or sound, the sacred 'om'; **bijaakshara** (e.g. *aum*, *hrim*, *klim*): 'seed syllable' which is the root form of divinity; **avyakto akshara**: the Unmanifest Imperishable; **akshara purusha**: the Self; **aksharamanamalai**: Self/letter+ fragrance/marital + garland, which could mean 'Garland of Imperishable Fragrance' or 'Fragrant/Marital Garland Offered to Arunachala/Brahma/the Self.'

**Akshara** as 'indelible' or 'that which cannot be erased' probably originates with the (sacred) letters of stone inscriptions in ancient times (Max Mueller). The Vedas emerged from scripts or letters, **akshara**, or 'that which pleases the eye' (*akshi*=eye + *ram*=to please), and from the syllables that emerged from the mouth of the 'Imperishable Absolute'. **Akshara** is the immutable root sound, **ekakshara**, meaning 'the one imperishable thing', i.e. Brahman, who is said to have arisen from **akshara** (*Gita* ch3, v15). This 'single syllable or sound' is elemental, like the Greek *Logos* ('the Word'), the root and source of Unmanifest Being, and the Greek *atomos* ('indivisible', 'not capable of being cut'), the minutest particle of material creation. One of the 96 names of Arunachala is **aksharaakrtih** or 'He whose form is **akshara**'. When devotees asked Bhagavan to tell them how one might know **akshara**, he quoted the *Gita*: **aksharam brahma paramam**: 'that which is supreme and permanent is the form of **akshara**'. Then he added, "As for the question how one can know it, [...] such a question should arise only if **Akshara** were different from the Self. But the two are not different, they are one. The proper thing to do is to enquire who the Self is and to remain in That. (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 24th January, 1947)







## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahasivaratri



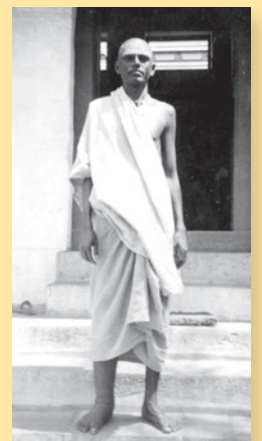
When Parvati once asked the Lord which of the special days was his favourite, Mahadeva said the 14th night (*tiithi*) of the dark fortnight (*krishnapaksha*) during the month of *magha*, (mid-Feb to mid-March). When she shared this with friends, the word spread and the night came to be known as Mahasivaratri, 'the Great Night of Lord Siva'. Sri Bhagavan later quoting the Puranas gave the original cause for celebrating the occasion: "Arudra in month of Margazhi is the first day on which Lord Siva Himself took the form of the Mountain-Linga called Lord Arunachala, and Mahasivaratri was the day when Lord Vishnu and the devas worshipped Him from out of the effulgence". The Great Night celebrations this year at the Ashram began with the first kala puja at 6pm on Thursday, the 27th February.

## A Single Aksharam

Once in September 1937, one devotee named Somasundara Swami handed a pencil and a new notebook to Bhagavan and implored him to write but a 'single letter' (*aksharam*). Bhagavan took the notebook and wrote the following couplet:

*Akshara is but a single, imperishable letter. You earnestly desired that I should write that letter in this book. Since it shines forever of its own accord as the Self in the Heart, who could ever hope to write it?*

— Sri Bhagavan, *Collected Works*, p. 149



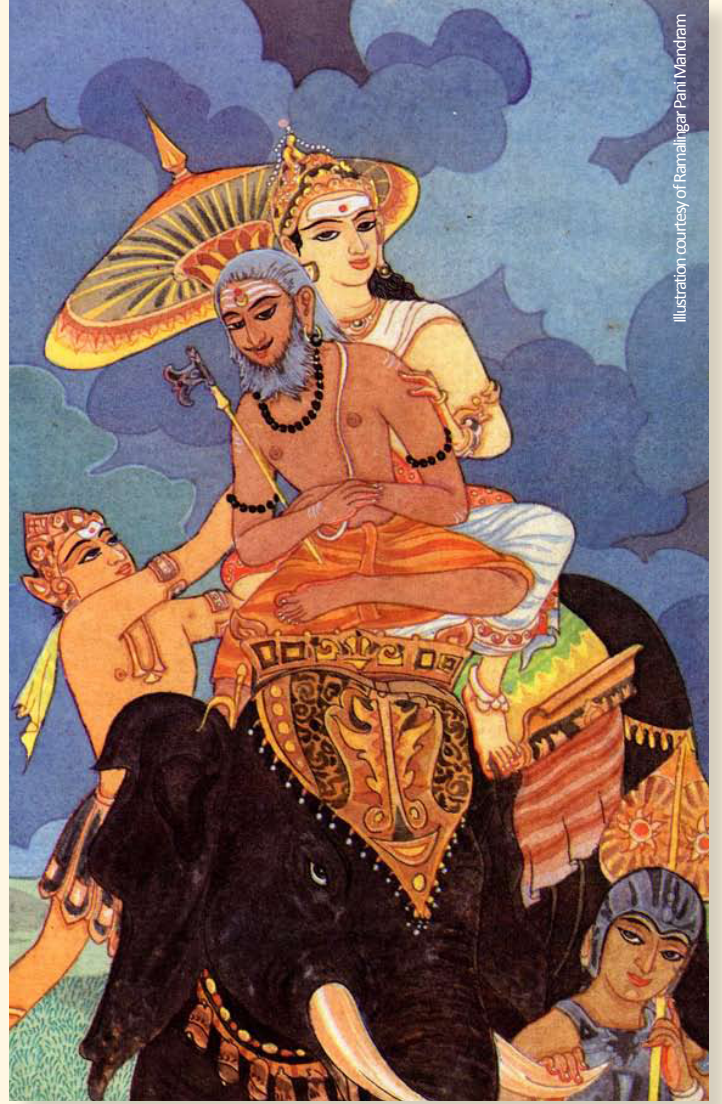


## From *Periapuranam*: Eripattha Naayanaar

Eripatthar was a combative saint. Mighty in battle and invincible with his axe, he could not endure any slight to the Lord or his devotees. If ever the sanctity of Lord's temple or his devotees was disrespected in any way, Eripatthar would leap like a lion from its lair and cut off the unseemly obstacle with his axe.

Once on the morning of the Navami festival, a Brahmin sage named Sivakaami Aandaar made his way to the temple carrying a basket of flowers to offer the Lord. Just as he reached the temple, the royal elephant, Pattavardhana, prized by the king for his numerous triumphs in battle, majestically bestrode the town streets, full of pride, and, passing Sivakaami Aandaar, snatched the flower basket from his hands and strewn its contents along the street and gutters. The sage raged at the indignity done to the Lord and chastised the unruly beast with his staff, crying out to the Lord: "Oh, Bestower of blessings! Support of the weak! Is it seemly for this proud beast to trample underfoot the offerings that should adorn the tresses holding the Ganga and the crescent? What other refuge have I but Thee? Please intervene!"

Just then, Eripatthar, hearing the disturbance from a distance, rushed to the scene and quickly sized up the sequence of events. He pursued the raging elephant, challenging him with taunts. When the fighting beast turned and made ready to rush upon him, Eripatthar drew his trusty axe and unflinchingly stood at the ready. Just when the tusker was about to charge over him, the saint swung his axe and struck its front legs, causing them to buckle. With a great crash, the beast tumbled to the ground. A second strike relieved the angry pachyderm of its strong trunk, leaving him bleeding in the lane. Royal mahouts



## Calendar of Upcoming Events

11th March (Tues) Punarvasu  
15-16th March (Sat) Full Moon  
21st March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa  
31st March (Mon) Ugadi/Telugu New Year  
8th April (Tues) Punarvasu  
8th April (Tues) Sri Rama Navami

14th April (Mon) Nirvana Day/Tamil New Year/Full Moon  
17th April Major Chadwick Samadhi Day  
27th April (Sun) Bhagavan's 64th Aradhana  
5th May (Mon) Punarvasu  
14th May (Wed) Full Moon  
22nd May (Thurs) Maha Puja







## From Periapuranam: Eripattha Naayanaar (cont.)



and trainers drew their swords to defend the king's cherished property but soon they too lay bleeding on the ground. Word was sent to the palace and the king dispatched his army. But when the king arrived and saw that it was Eripatthar who was the cause of the disturbance, his anger subsided, for the king, himself devoted to the Lord, knew of Eripatthar's devotion and humbly understood that the fault had been his own. By letting his excessively prideful fighting elephant roam the streets of the city, he had inadvertently disrespected the Lord and the Lord's devotees. Immediately the king prostrated before Eripatthar and bore the blame, saying that such an injustice could only be expiated by offering his own life. He stretched out his neck before Eripatthar's great ax. When Eripatthar refused to carry out the sentence, the king snatched the axe from his hands and attempted to take his own life. But Eripatthar intervened. Having secured the axe and seeing what great devotion lay in the heart of this beneficent ruler, he said, "No, great King, rather it is I who should give up his life, having caused such bloodshed here". Eripatthar then put the axe's sharp blade to his throat. Just then

a celestial voice boomed and the three-eyed Lord emerged. The two devotees fell at His feet and the latter spoke, "Oh pure ones, may neither of you need feel guilty. All the injured will now be restored. No harm done. Eripatthar, henceforth lay down your arms, once for all, and serve devotees henceforth in a peaceful manner without causing any harm. King, from now on, let your brave elephant remain within the palace compound. As ordained, the elephant and attendants returned to life and stood up as though having awoken from a deep sleep. Eripatthar helped the King mount his elephant who was now placid as a lamb. Sivakaami Andaar's basket was miraculously refilled as torrents of flowers rained down from heaven. Seeing that this was all Mahadeva's play, the sage took his basket and made offerings right there where the Lord had appeared while the townspeople's cries, 'Hara Hara', resounded from the rooftops. (Eripattha Naayanaar's aradhana day fell on the 18th January.)

## Obituary: Sri P.V. Somasundaram of Bombay



Fondly known as 'Somu Mama', Sri P.V. Somasundaram had a seventy-five year old association with Bhagavan. In 1939 having set out on foot from his native Manamadurai in search of employment, PVS found himself at a temple in Trichy where he met Vishwanatha Swami who coaxed him to go to Ramanasramam. Distantly related to Bhagavan (PVS's father's sister was married to Chinnaswami), PVS enlisted for a brief period in the Indian Army and after the war, took up employment in Glaxo Laboratories. After Bhagavan's Mahanirvana when Ramanasramam faced dwindling resources, Chinnaswami appealed to PVS to garner as much financial support as possible from the residents of Bombay. Slowly and steadily funds trickled in. Soon what was a trickle became substantial. In later years, he conducted Satsangs, celebrated Jayanthis and Aradhanas, organised visits to the Ashram for devotees and was instrumental in bringing many to Bhagavan. A loving husband, affectionate father and cherished friend, PVS's kindness and compassion touched many lives. Calling Arunachala's name in his final days, Sri P.V. Somasundaram, merged with Holy Annamalai on 4th February 2014 at the age of 95.

## Announcement: Internet Radio: 'Voice of Arunachala'

Please visit our Internet Radio 'Voice of Arunachala' <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/radio-station/>

