

Saranagati



COVER
INSERT

SRI RAMANASRAMAM
APRIL 2014



Photos this page from V. Karthik and Suresh Menon



Saranagati



APRIL 2014
VOL. 8, NO. 4

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The brief Arunachala springtime is underway in Tiruvannamalai with sunny days and cool nights. The busy guest season at the Ashram winds down as summer is poised to make its appearance any day now.

This issue of *Saranagati* features the fifth in a series of articles on the *Origins of Pradakshina* with this segment taking a look at the years after Bhagavan's Advent and the restoration of Arunachala pradakshina under his influence.

Ashram President T. N. Venkataraman (1914-2007) turns 100 this May and centenary celebrations are scheduled for the 26th May (p. 60). *Events* this issue features Sri Vidya Homa on the 21st March and Maharudram at the beginning 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

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

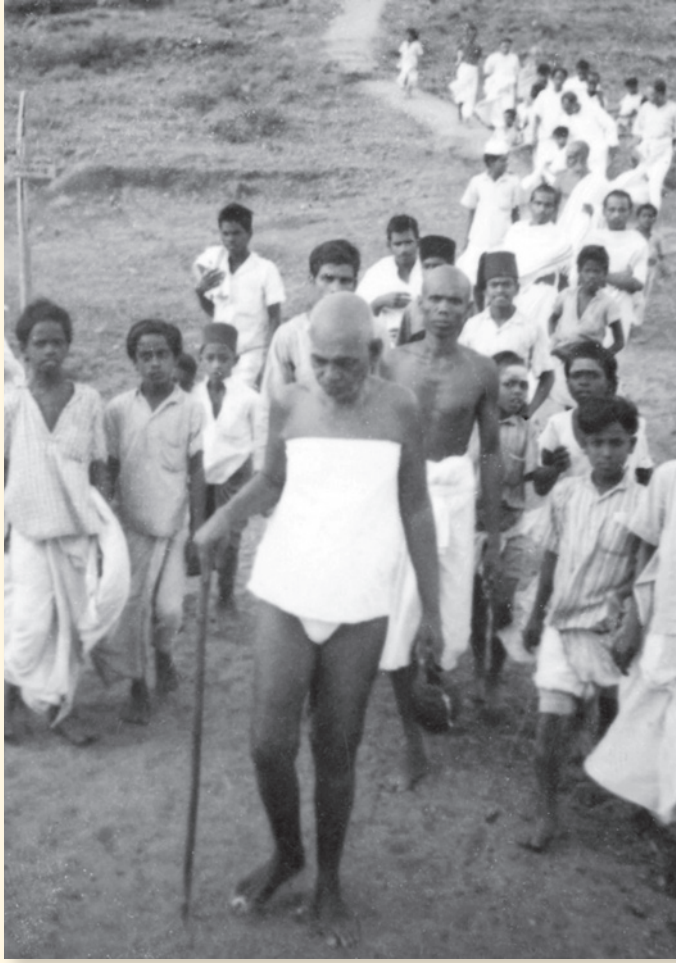
<i>Cover Insert: April 2014</i>	-
<i>Calendar of Upcoming Events</i>	1
<i>The Origins of Pradakshina (part five)</i>	2
<i>Events from the Kendras: Delhi Ramana Kendra Golden Jubilee</i>	3
<i>Angapradakshina Annamalaiswami</i>	4
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Vidya Homa</i>	5
<i>Announcements T. N. Venkataraman Centenary</i>	6
<i>From Periapuranam: Naminandi Adigal Naayanaar</i>	7
<i>Reality in Forty Verses (v. 33)</i>	7
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Maharudram & Ghanapanayana</i>	8
<i>Announcements: Internet Radio: Voice of Arunachala</i>	8

Calendar of Upcoming Events

31st March (Mon) Ugadi/Telugu New Year
8th April (Tues) Punarvasu/Sri Rama Navami
14th April (Mon) Tamil New Year/Full Moon/Nirvana
17th April (Thurs) 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
26th May (Mon) T. N. Venkataraman Centenary
1st June (Sun) Punarvasu
12th June (Thurs) Full Moon
28th June (Sat) Punarvasu





The Origins of Pradakshina (part five)

"Whatever a great soul does is followed by others"
– Gita

The young sage's love for Arunachala was infectious and those who gathered round him in the early years took to the Hill like ducks to water, following the master's every move on or about the Hill. Young Ramana modeled for them the manner in which they should pay reverence to Arunachala and sparked in them a keen interest for the bygone tradition of Arunachala pradakshina. He went for regular circumambulation, setting out in the morning and returning in the evening to Virupaksha, the cave

on the eastern slopes of the Hill where he took up residence in 1900. On some days he might start for pradakshina in the evening and return at daybreak. On other occasions his roundings would last two or three days, involving long halts. He would walk slowly, stopping to contemplate the surroundings or just to sit in silence. On the occasions when Arunachala's holy presence engulfed him, the young adept would fall into a deep samadhi.

For devotees, such excursions were precious beyond description. To be in the sage's intimate presence, to walk with him, to hear his voice, to drink in his stillness, was an untold delight. On such trips they got to witness the gracious manner with which he responded to the locals who came forth at shrines and mantapams, offering food and water, vying with one another to extend their hospitality. Bhagavan was ever gracious in obliging them, boundless and untiring in his generosity and not allowing anyone's kindness to go unnoticed.

As the small band from Virupaksha made its way round the hill, members sang verses from the Veda, Gita, Bhagavatam, Thevarum and other Saivite hymns and verses. On other occasions they shared the stories of the Puranas and other ancient lore. Sometimes they gave discourses, elaborating on sacred texts.

Once, devotees persuaded Bhagavan to explain the meaning of his *appalam* song. Citing texts for each image in the song, Bhagavan's commentary was not finished before they had completed the circuit. While going another time they sang a song from *Thirupugazh*, whose lines ended with *ḱavalanae*, a word which in Tamil means 'king' or 'master' but in Telugu signifies, 'I want'. Whenever the singer uttered *ḱavalanae*, a Telugu member of the party named Kambli Swami made a lighthearted pun on the word, chuckling as he sang, '*vadai ḱavalanae*' or '*dosai ḱavalanae*' or '*idli ḱavalanae*', etc. But as unexplainable things could happen in Bhagavan's presence, the party was met at various junctures by devotees offering the very food items Kambli Swami had jokingly said he 'wanted'.

On another pradakshina, it was suggested that one among them should act as chairman and that the others take turns as speakers, alternately delivering





one-hour lectures on spiritual themes. The first speaker was Ramanatha Brahmachari, known for his meek, soft-spoken manner. Devoted to Bhagavan but lacking formal education, he was not known to be skilful with words. Yet once he started his exuberant discourse, replete with quotations, imagery, poetry and allusions to the sastras and scriptures, there was no stopping him. After having repeatedly appealed to the ‘chairman’ for time extensions, he could only be brought to conclude his charged performance after three hours had elapsed¹. Devotees agreed that it was only his devotion to Bhagavan and Bhagavan’s ‘reciprocal grace’ that could have inspired such a rare presentation.²

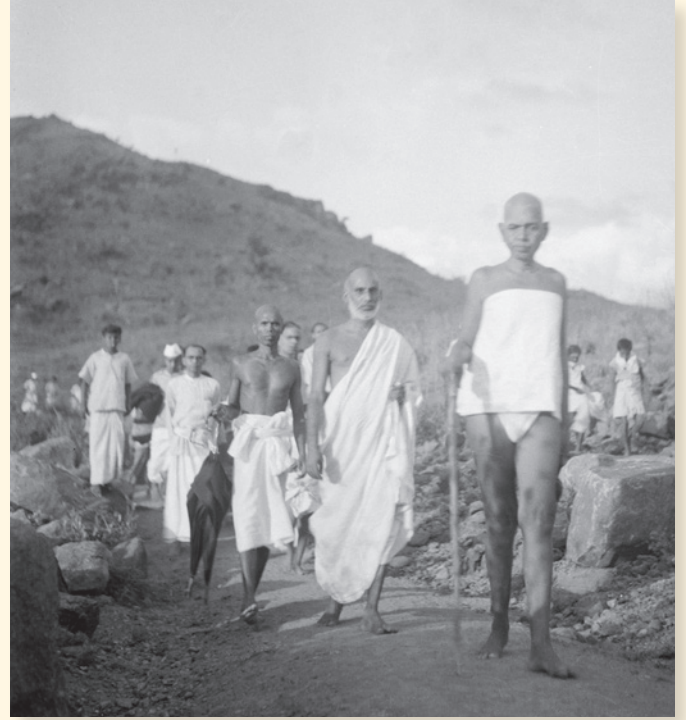
Penning Aksharamanamalai

On other pradakshinas, members of the party traded verses or goaded each other to invent their own. Eventually they prevailed upon Bhagavan to compose hymns they could sing on the pradakshina path. It was nowhere else but on the rough-hewn hill-round road that couplets in praise of Arunachala began to pour forth from the sage’s lips³. At devotees’ prompting, Bhagavan scribbled but a single word, “Arunachalam”, with a pencil and paper one of the devotees had carried along with him. This was enough to initiate a spontaneous, tear-filled outpouring of devotion that became a lyrical garland of 108 couplets. Like Manikavachakar centuries

¹ Later Ramanatha Brahmachari penned a song (appended to his *Stotra Anubhuti*) summarizing his pradakshina discourse. (see Devaraja Mudaliar’s *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, ch 3.)

² The foregoing from Devaraja Mudaliar, *Call Divine* vol 6, 1957, pp. 85-91.

³ *Aksharamanamalai* was composed, Bhagavan says, “partly at Virupakshi and partly on my walks round the Hill.” (*Day by Day*, 7-12-45)



earlier, Arunachala pradakshina drew forth the ecstasy of devotion in an effulgence of uncontrollable verse, fueled by the vicarious longing of the seeker after truth or of a forlorn maiden seeking her beloved. Bhagavan halted along the route to jot down the cascade of lines flowing forth from his heart.

Aksharamanamalai would become the paradigmatic hymn of pradakshina (and too, the begging song used by Bhagavan’s sadhu-devotees during their *bhiksha* rounds). The signature song of Ramana devotees, it went on to become the pre-eminent canticle of praise to Arunachala.

Later when asked to explain the meaning of the text, Bhagavan replied, “Why don’t you explain

Events at the Kendras: Golden Jubilee, Ramana Kendra Delhi



From its humble beginnings in March 1963, Delhi Ramana Kendra completed fifty years this month, celebrating their Golden Jubilee on the 29th-30th of March 2014. Attended by Sri Ramanasramam President V. S. Ramanan and Sushilamma, talks included Sri V. Ganesan and Nochur Sri Venkataraman. A jubilee souvenir containing the Kendra’s history is forthcoming. For more photos, see their website at <http://ramanakendradelhi.wordpress.com/>





its meaning yourself? Like you, I would also have to ponder over it in order to explain it. Had I premeditated on it in advance, I would be in a position to explain its meaning. But [as it was], the verses came forth of their own accord. Reciting [them] repeatedly is [their] meaning.”⁴

And so, devotees understood that Lord Arunachala sang through his human form, Sri Ramana, in the 108 couplets of *Aksharamanamalai*.

Night Pradakshinas

On the occasions when the group went for nighttime pradakshinas, they would only reach the Ashram at sunrise, and being tired, would all take naps—all except for Bhagavan. Bhagavan did not have the luxury of sleep as visitors would be ever seeking his darshan. If a visitor came and asked him to go round the Mountain that same evening, Bhagavan would not refuse lest he cause disappointment. So it happened that Bhagavan sometimes did not sleep for two or three days at a stretch.

⁴ *Commentary on Arunachala Stuti Pañchakam*, T. R. Kanakammal, p. 27. It has been said that the only fitting commentary for *Aksharamanamalai* is the Hill Itself (Nochur Venkataraman, in a talk at Sri Ramanasramam, Jan 2014). If this is so, then the only fitting manner to ‘read’ the commentary is Arunachala pradakshina, so why not, devotees might argue, chant the 108 verses while going?

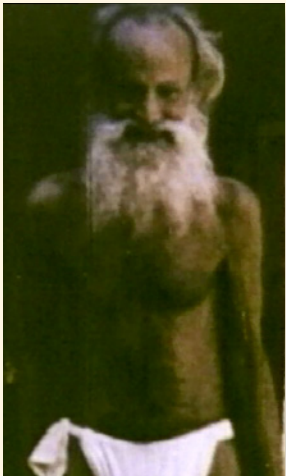
Moving Down from the Hill

In 1922 Bhagavan’s mother left the body and he shifted down from Skandasramam to take up residence near her shrine, the site that was to become Sri Ramanasramam. Now more accessible, devotees from town and the surrounding areas, Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu, arrived in ever increasing numbers. With the growing need for a gathering place, the Old Hall was established in 1926. Soon it became more difficult for Bhagavan to go for pradakshina as his presence was required in the Hall. Finally that same year, when a dispute erupted between those who got to go with Bhagavan on pradakshina and those who were required to stay behind to look after Ashram work, Bhagavan made up his mind not to go for pradakshina anymore, ever keen to avoid causing inconvenience to others. In lieu of going round the Hill, he thus commenced daily walks to Palakotthu and up the Hill, all the while avidly encouraging others to go for pradakshina.

Exhorting Devotees

Bhagavan pressed even those who doubted the efficacy of pradakshina, even those who were weak or infirm or otherwise seemed ill-fit for it. If someone returned from pradakshina with bodily pain, Bhagavan would encourage them to go again the following day.

Angapradakshina Annamalaiswami



Angapradakshina Annamalaiswami (1939) and his samadhi next to Durga Ammal Kovil

Angapradakshina Annamalaiswami got his name because he worshipped Arunachala continually by going round the Hill in angapradakshina (rolling prostration on the ground in a clockwise direction). He had great love for the sixty-three saints (*nayanmars*) and built a mutt dedicated to them. Following his leaving the body on 16th August, 1941, a samadhi was constructed in his honour at the mutt next to Durga Ammal Temple. When the icons of the sixty-three saints are taken in procession on the sixth day of the Karthikai Deepam festival, they make their way to this mutt in honour of the sadhak who expressed his homage to Lord Arunachala by doing pradakshina with his whole body. —





Once a physician named Sadhu Bramaniam returned from pradakshina with blistered feet. When he entered the hall limping, Bhagavan suggested he bathe his feet in warm water and go for pradakshina the following day. He advised him to go yet a third time the day after that. After the third pradakshina, the kindly doctor reported that his feet were healthy again. From that time onward, his feet gave him no more trouble.

Another time Muruganar asked Bhagavan to tell of the benefits of going round the hill. Bhagavan suggested that he first go round the hill and then inquire of its benefits. The poet dutifully followed the advice and the next day reported to Bhagavan something quite remarkable: shortly after starting off on the hill-round path, he completely lost body consciousness (*dehatma buddhi*), only regaining it after reaching Adi Annamalai. Sri Bhagavan smiled and asked, “Now do you understand?”

Countless other devotees heard Sri Bhagavan esteem pradakshina above all other forms of worship. G. V.

Subbaramayya records Bhagavan’s words in the Hall: “Other sacred hills are described as the abodes of some Deity. But Arunachala is God Himself in the shape of the Hill. So special sanctity attaches to going round it. It has been said that the one who has completed the round once in the proper way remains as *brahmakara* i.e. the ‘Absolute embodied’. The red sores on the feet caused by pricking stones along the way, it is said, will become diamonds in the crowns of Gods.”⁵ And to Devaraja Mudaliar, who initially expressed skepticism regarding the merit of *girivalam*, “It does not matter whether one has faith in pradakshina or not; just as fire will burn all who touch it whether they believe it will or not, so the Hill will do good to all those who go round it. Go round the Hill once. You will see that it will attract you.”⁶—

(to be continued)

⁵ Sri Ramana Reminiscences, G. V. Subbaramayya, p. 38

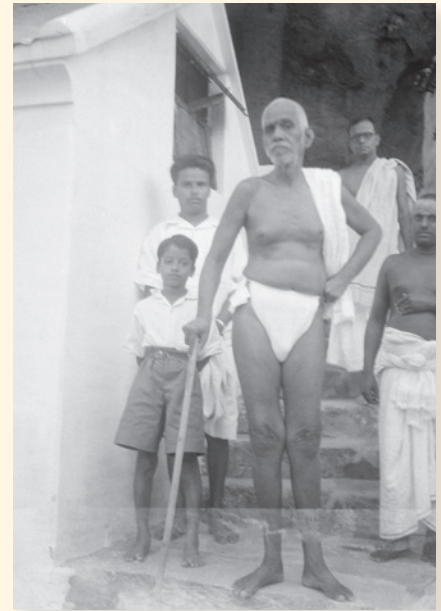
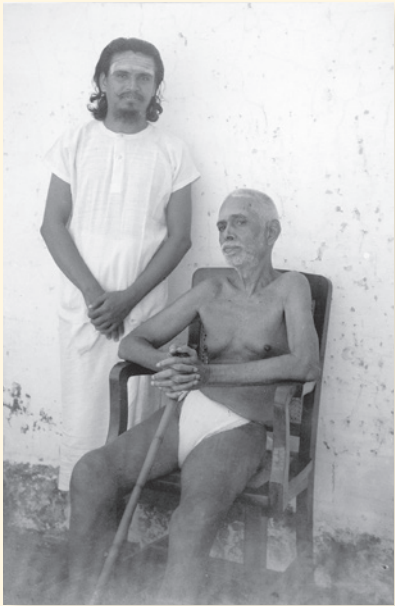
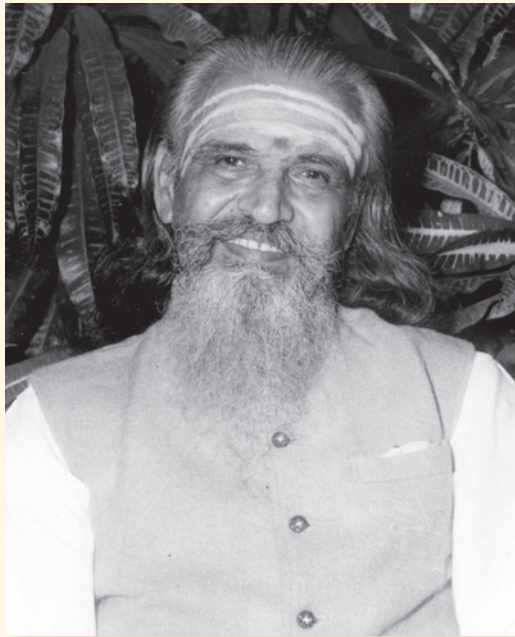
⁶ Devaraja Mudaliar, *The Call Divine* vol. 6, Nov. 1957, p. 86



Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Vidya Homa

Sixty-one years ago in March 1953, Major Chadwick helped initiate regular performance of the Sri Chakra Puja, the weekly Devi puja performed at the Mother’s Shrine. One year later, an elaborate day-long fire-ceremony was performed to commemorate the event and to rededicate the inner sanctum of the Mother’s Shrine. Since then the Sri Vidya Havan has been an annual event and takes place on a Friday in the month of March. This year’s Sri Vidya Homa was performed Friday, the 21st March, beginning with Kalasasthapana at 8 am. Various recitations ensued including Lalita Sahasranamam and Trisathi as the homa flames glowed brightly. A grand poornahuti took place at 3.15 pm followed by procession with consecrated kalasam into the Mother’s Shrine. Abhishekam, alankaram and deeparadhana concluded at 4.15pm. The customary Friday night Sri Chakra puja in the Mother’s Shrine was performed the following morning. —





Announcement: T. N. Venkataraman Birth Centenary Celebrations

This year marks the birth centenary of T. N. Venkataraman, the nephew-devotee of Sri Bhagavan. Having come to the Ashram in 1938 to remain for the next 70 years (till his death in 2007), "Venkatoo", as he was affectionately called, is the longest standing resident in Ashram history. Born 26th May, 1914 (*Mrigasirsha*), the centenary of his birth will be observed on the 26th May, 2014. Upcoming issues of *Saranagati* will feature a brief life history of this remarkable figure who, as a youngster, Bhagavan dubbed the 'Little Sarvadhikari', and who went on to serve more than forty years as Sri Ramanasramam President. —





From *Periapuranam*: Naminandi Adigal Naayanaar



Illustration courtesy of Ramalingar Pani Mandram

Near the Kaveri was a Brahmin clan famed for its righteousness and devotion to the Vedas. Among them lived one Naminandi Adigal who was deeply devoted to the blue-throated Lord. Once on full-moon day he went to the nearby Kamalalayam to celebrate the Phalguna festival and to offer 100,000 ghee lamps to Tyagesvara. In need of a large quantity of ghee, he went to the nearby market and encountered a shopkeeper who was an unbeliever. The latter asked him why he should need so much ghee. "To offer the Lord 100,000 ghee lamps." "And to what purpose?" queried the atheist. "To obtain the grace of Shambhu, the Lord and creator of all the elements and all the manifest world", said the devotee. "If He is Lord of all the elements, then how can water and fire, being mutually repulsive, fit into His form?" pressed the merchant condescendingly. "By the Lord's grace, all is possible", said the devotee emphatically. "If that is so then you won't need any ghee but can just light your lamps with water, is it not?".

Indignant at the merchant's disrespect of the Lord, Naminandi took leave empty-handed and pain-hearted. Once at the shrine of the Lord with no ghee to offer Him, he fell prostrate before Mahadeva. Just then a voice boomed from above, "Leave your cares and fetch water from the tank. With it you shall light the lamps". Hardly believing his ears, Naminandi at once began to follow the instruction. But as he prepared a wick for each of the

water-filled lamps, he realised he was short on wicks. Rather than return to the shop and subject the Lord to further abuse, he made up his mind to journey home to fetch more. Taking short-cuts to save time, he was compelled to pass through the crowded sections of town, through villages of rustics and peasants, and thus came into contact with people of the lower classes. Once home, he felt uneasy, worrying that his caste purity had been compromised by contact with non-worshippers. He immediately set about to bathe himself after which he quietly dozed off. During the moments of slumber, the Lord appeared in a dream and showed him a vision of all the simple people whose contact he had disparaged of during his walk home. In the vision, each

Reality in Forty Verses

33. To say 'I do not know myself' or 'I have known myself' is cause for laughter. What? Are there two selves, one to be known by the other? There is but One (Self), the truth of the experience of all.

— Sri Bhagavan





From *Periapuranam*: Naminandi Adigal Naayanaar (cont.)

of them now appeared in their true form i.e. with matted hair and the crescent moon. Naminandi then understood that they and indeed, all people, whether low or high-born, were Lord Siva and thus should be respected in all circumstances. When he awoke, he begged pardon for the irreverence he had shown the Lord in His form of simple people and outcastes. Recalling his urgent task, with wicks in hand, he rushed back to the temple. Once there, he motioned to all gathered round, irrespective of caste or class, to join him lighting the lamps in this most spectacular offering. Onlookers were apprehensive about lighting water-filled lamps. But Naminandi cried out to the Lord: "O Tyagesvara, Ocean of compassion, bless me with your grace!" He then struck a match and the first lamp immediately blazed up and burned brightly. He lit a second lamp with the same result. Seeing this, the crowd knew it was the grace of the Lord and hastened to assist him.

By Mahadeva's mercy, pure knowledge dawned on Naminandi and he discovered that devotion to the Lord was the one infallible means for securing anything worth having in this earthly life. He also learned that all people carried the divinity within them and were thus deserving of kindness and respect. By virtue of a more complete devotion, Naminandi attained to absolute everlasting union with the Lord. (*Naminandi Adigal Naayanaar's aradhana day falls on the 2nd June.*)

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Maharudram and Ghanaparayana



In the aftermath of Mahasivaratri, 65 pundits and Vedic students gathered in the library auditorium for two days of Rudram, culminating with yagnam in the New Hall (3rd March), followed by procession of the sacred kalasas, and finally, abhishekam of Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam and Sri Matrubhuteswara. The following morning began three days of ghanaparayana. —

Announcement: Internet Radio: 'Voice of Arunachala'

Voice of Arunachala radio station is now registered with a free App known as Tune-In which works with Android, iPhone, Apple and other platforms. Devotees can freely download the app Tune-In and use the following address to listen to *Voice of Arunachala*. The Tune-In station page is: <http://tunein.com/radio/Voice-of-Arunachala-s219020/>. It is also available from the website www.sriramanamaharshi.org.

